

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Elections often happen in public places, including many Houses of Worship. This project aims to understand the relationship between primes of religion and its influence on political attitudes.

1. Do subliminal religious primes influence political decision-making?
2. If yes, in which direction on the left-right scale?

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

- Voting in churches can serve as reminders to people's faiths and subliminally prime their political stances [1].
- Americans are religious individuals, with 85% of people identifying with a major denomination of worship [2].
- As such, religion becomes a part of identity that can influence political decisions. Since religions teach people about living moral lives, this world view can be applied to understanding how politics ought to be.
- Often, politicians incorporate overt or subtle religious messages in their campaigns to attract people of faith to their cause.
- Likewise, preachers often instruct their followers to "go with the Word" before elections [2], which can influence the votes of the parishioners.
- High costs of voting leads voters to be susceptible to primes and heuristics [1].

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Jonah Berger, Marc Meredith, and S. Christian Wheeler. Contextual Priming: Where People Vote Affects How They Vote. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 105(26):8846–8849, 2008.
- [2] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell. *American grace: how religion divides and unites us*. Simon & Schuster, New York, 2010.

HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses for the study were made from information in past research regarding the voting patterns of religious individuals. Since a growing number of religious people lean Republican, the hypotheses reflect this trend.

1. Religious primes influence political decisions
2. People think more conservatively in the religious mindset

MATERIALS & METHODS

Participants and Recruitment:

- 304 of 356 original respondents incorporated in analysis (133 identify as female)
- Recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk
- Participants were paid \$1 for their participation

Experiment Tasks:

- **Sentence Reorganization** – Participants saw 5 word chunks (of religious or neutral content) and had to rearrange them to make logical sentences.
- **Statement and Agreement on Controversial Issue** – Participants read vignettes supporting or countering abortion and were asked to rate the quality of the argument along with the extent they agreed
- **Religiosity Measure** – Survey on religious identity
- **Demographic Questions** – Questions include race, gender, and political affiliation
- **Manipulation Check**

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Analyze voter files and precinct returns to link people who voted in precincts with the percentage of people who vote on down ballot candidates.
- In future experiments, use of a less polar-

izing subject as manipulation so that people would not enter the study with preconceived notions about the topic, which were largely reflected in their qualitative responses

RESULTS 1

Description of Participants

- The majority (n = 172) identified as non-religious
- Most identified with the Democrat party (n = 137)
- 217 participants identified as 40 or younger

Table 1: Results for 2 × 2 ANOVA

Variables	df	SS	MS	F	p-value
Prime	1	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.984
Argument	1	280.00	280.03	56.22	0.001***
Interaction	1	0.8	0.79	0.159	0.690
Residuals	299	1489.00	4.98		

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

- No Interaction for Religious Prime and Argument ($F(1,299) = 0.159, p = .69, \eta^2 = .00$)
- No main effect of Religious Prime ($F(1,299) = 0.00, p = .98, \eta^2 = .00$)
- Main effect of Argument ($F(1,299) = 56.22, p = .001, \eta^2 = .16$)

Method of Analysis

- 2 (Prime Condition: Religious or Neutral) × 2 (Issue Condition: Liberal or Conservative) ANOVA - Between-Subjects design
- $\alpha = .05$

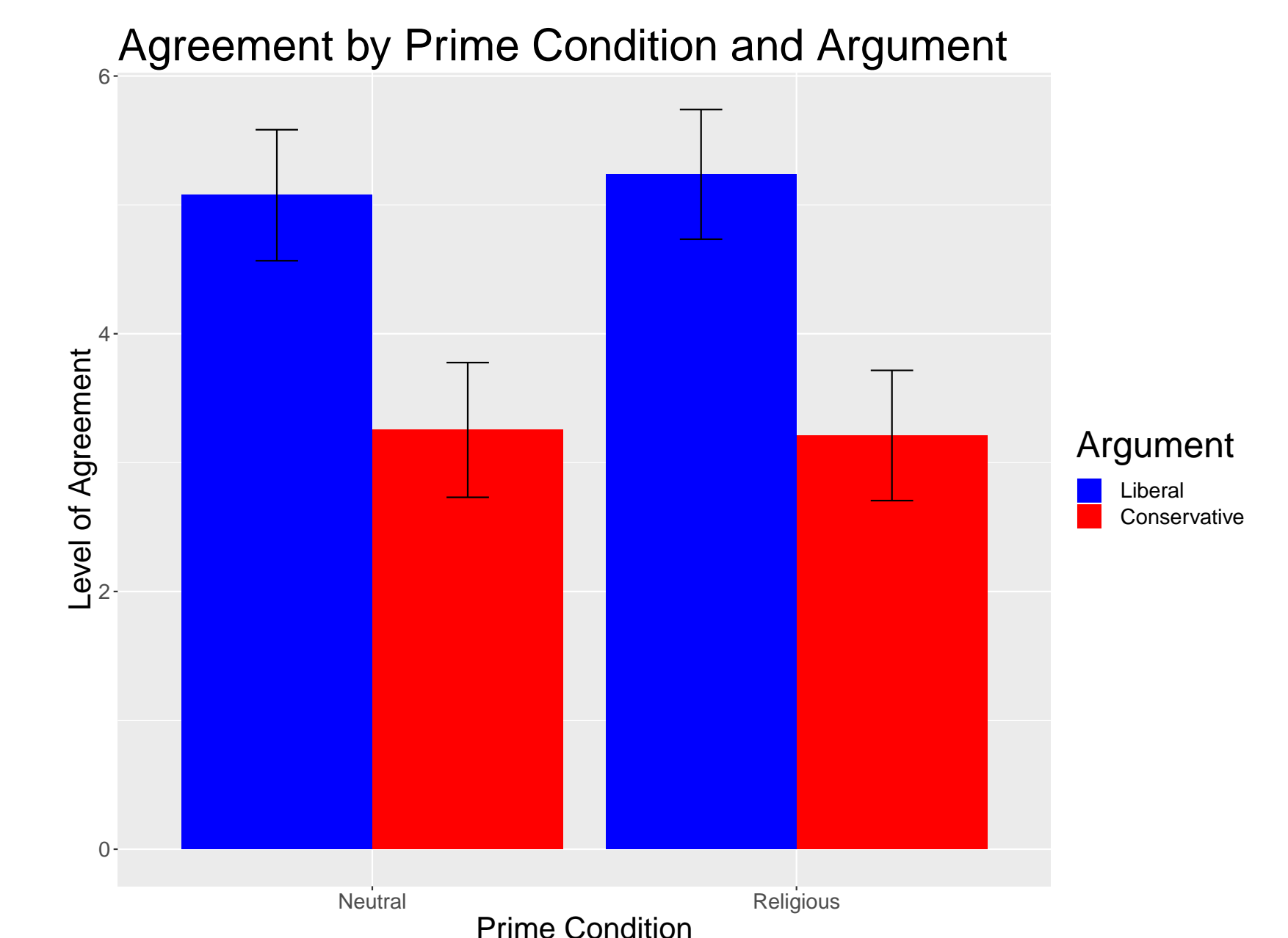


Figure 1: Average Agreement to Argument by Prime Condition

CONCLUSION

Findings from the Study

- Religious primes did not influence vote choice – No matter what priming condition participants were in, they were equally likely to voice support or reject the argument
- Main effect present on Argument variable - Participants seemed to carry preconceptions on the topic based on ideology
- Agreement on the issue did not depend on the prime or argument condition

Limitations of the Study

- **Amazon Mechanical Turk:** The participants were relatively more liberal and secular, leading to a natural tendency to favor the liberal side of the argument.
- **The Topic:** People have relatively robust stances on abortion. Future iterations can analyze how people react to topics that are less debated, with religious primes added to the experiment.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Web www.ncf.edu

Email jennifer.lin16@ncf.edu | sgraham@ncf.edu

Phone +1 (941) 487 5000

Address 5800 Bay Shore Road Sarasota, FL 34243