

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

Americans are religious individuals, with 85% of people identifying with a major denomination of worship. 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. Voting in churches can serve as reminders to people's faiths and subliminally prime their political stances.

HYPOTHESES

The research uses the following hypotheses:

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

MATERIALS & METHODS

The Participants for the study were as follows:

- 304 of 356 original respondents incorporated in analysis (126 identify as female)
- Recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk
- Participants were paid \$1 for their participation

The tasks each participant completed are:

- **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**

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

Method of Analysis

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

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 ($F(1,299) = 56.22, p = .001, \eta^2 = .16$)

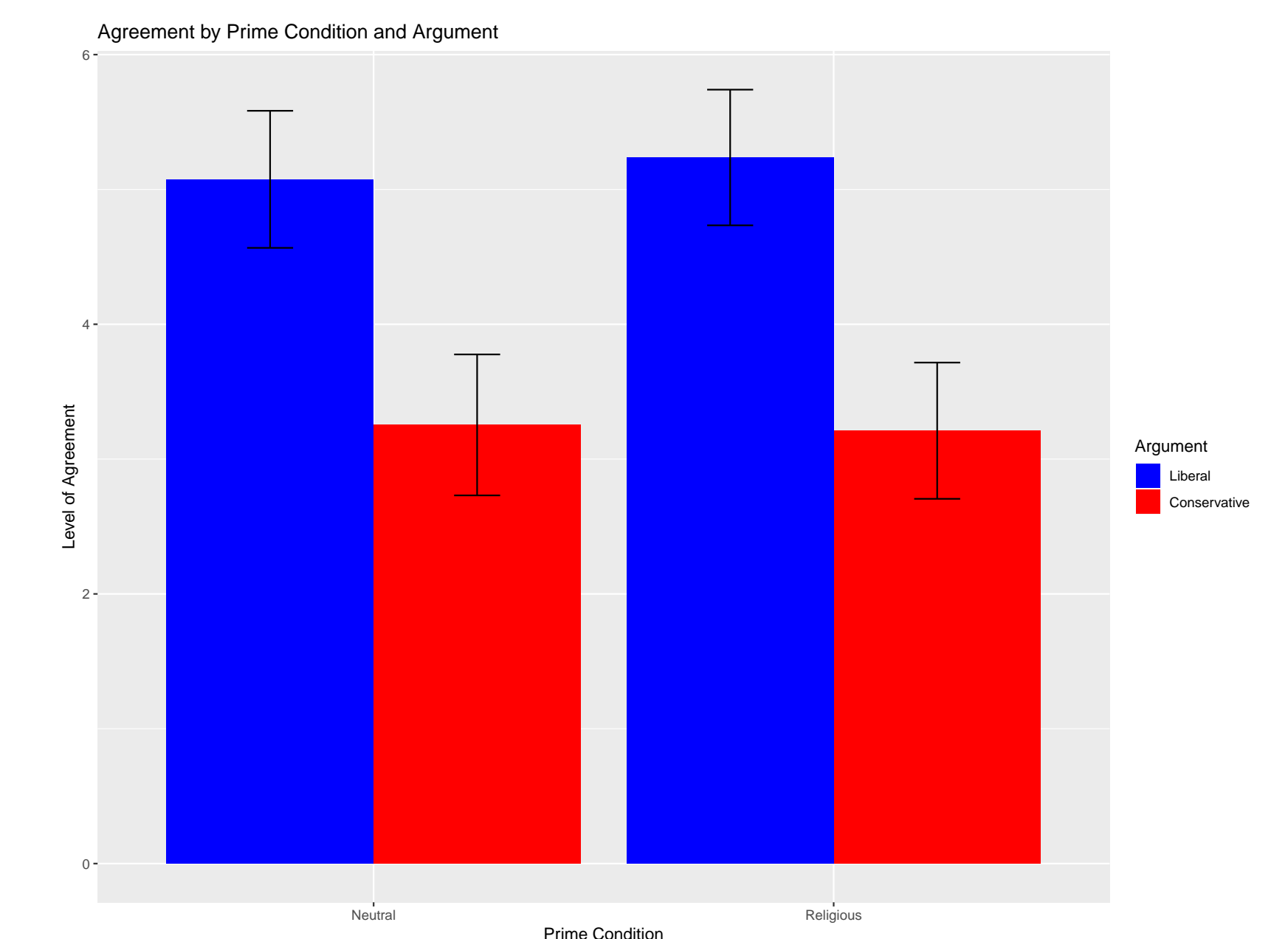


Figure 1: Figure caption

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 subject at hand
- Main effect present on Argument variable - Liberal position leads to greater agreement
- There was no interaction between the prime condition and argument condition on agreement to the subject.

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:** Abortion is a polarizing subject with people having preconceptions on where they stand. Future iterations of the study can analyze how people react to topics that are given less attention in the media, with religious primes added to the experiment.

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.

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

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