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### How Religious Priming Affects Attitudes about Immigration

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# The Effect of Religious Priming on Attitudes Toward Immigrants

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## Introduction

Many world religions emphasize the importance of charity and hospitality towards those in need, so one may expect there to be greater levels of helpfulness towards immigrants among the religious. However, several social psychological perspectives, including Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Coalitional Psychology (Navarrete & Fessler, 2005), and Terror Management Theory (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2000), have found that people are more willing to help in-group members than out-of-group members. Religious texts often vary in theme and research has found that biblical passages about a violent God led participants to be more aggressive, (Bushman, Ridge, Das, Key, & Busath, 2007), whereas having participants read peace-based passages from their religious texts reduced negative attitudes toward religious outgroup members (e.g., Christians and Muslims; Rothschild, Abdollahi, & Pyszczynski, 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of priming religious texts on attitudes towards refugees in the United States.

## Hypothesis

We expected that our results will reveal that participants will demonstrate an in-group bias (e.g., Christian participants favoring Christian refugees) unless they are primed with religious inclusion, where they should demonstrate similar attitudes towards both Christian or Muslim refugees.

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## Method

### Participants

Participants (N = 148) were undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a small private liberal arts college in the Midwest, ages 18–22.

127 of the participants were Christian. 10 of the participants did not observe a religion. 4 were agnostic, 1 was Hindu, 1 was Buddhist, and 4 were “other”.

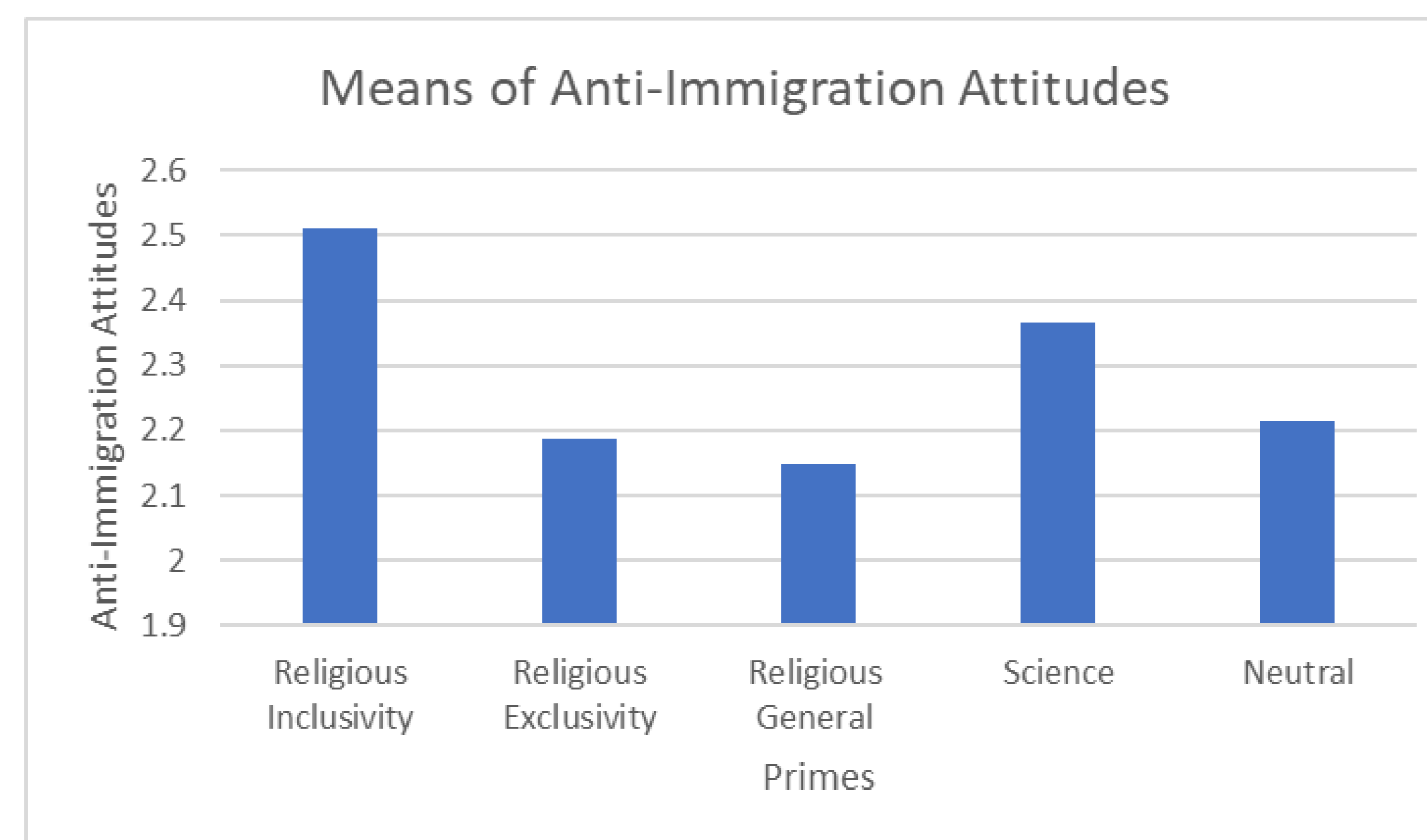
### Procedure

The study employs a 5 (religious prime) x 2 (immigrant religion) design. Undergraduate participants were first randomly assigned to one of five priming conditions.

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of five conditions:

1. Religious Inclusion- ex: story of Good Samaritan
2. Religious Exclusion- ex: Jesus as the only way to Salvation
3. General Religion- ex: passage about temple
4. Secular Inclusion- ex: general advice for tolerance
5. Neutral

Then, they were randomly assigned to rate their attitudes, both the pro- and anti- immigration attitudes, toward Christians or Muslim refugees.

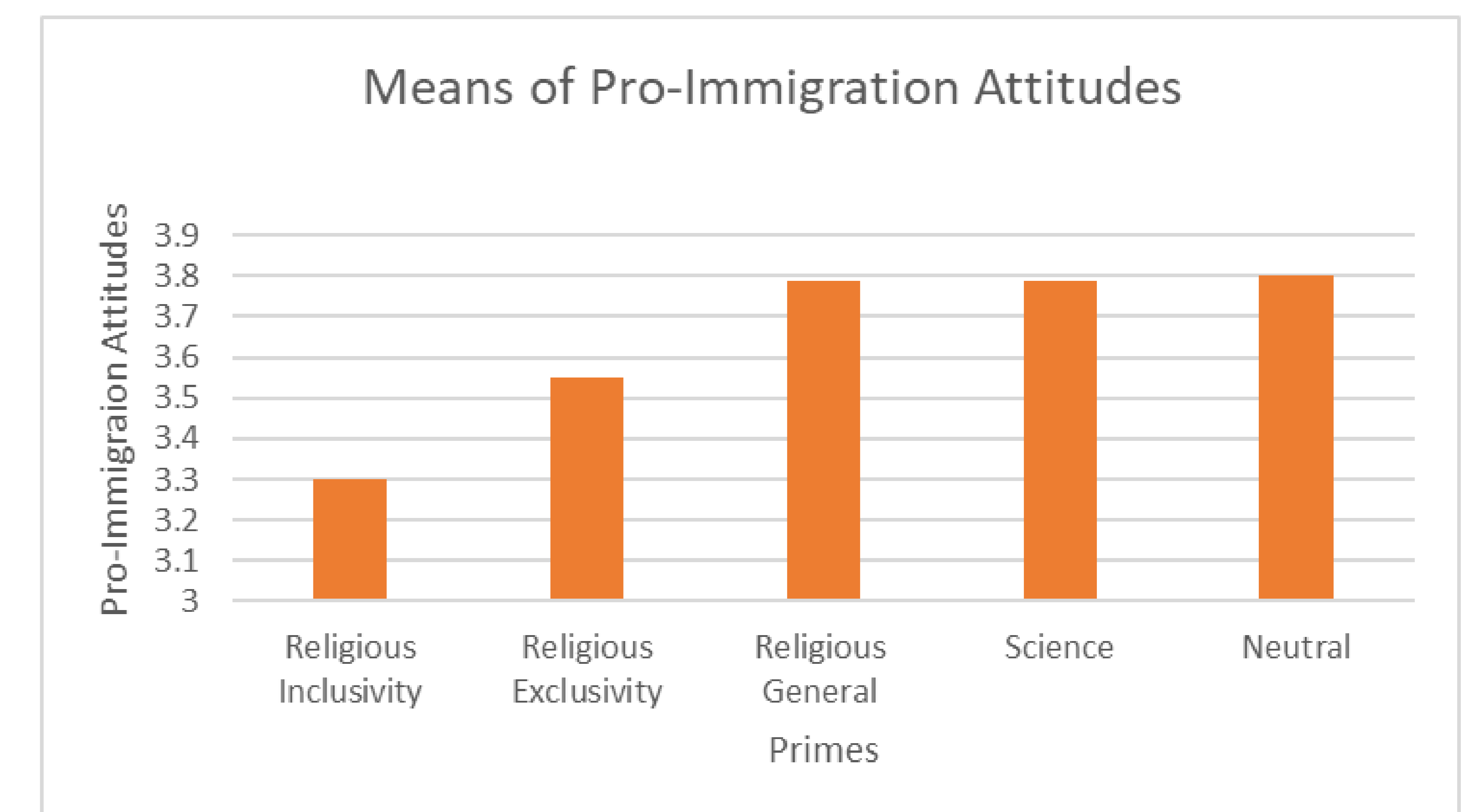


## Results

First, we ran an ANOVA on **pro-immigration attitudes**. There was a significant main effect in the religious condition on pro-immigration attitudes,  $F(4,137) = 2.874, p = .025, \eta^2 = .077$ . Based on what was read, the religious priming made a difference on pro-immigration attitudes. There was not a significant main effect in the immigration condition on pro-immigration attitudes,  $F(1,137) = .366, p = .546, \eta^2 = .003$ . There was no significant interaction effect for the religious and immigration condition on pro-immigration attitudes,  $F(4,137) = .588, p = .672, \eta^2 = .017$ .

Next, an ANOVA was run on **anti-immigration attitudes**. There was no significant main effect for the religion condition on anti-immigration attitudes,  $F(4,138) = 1.041, p = .389, \eta^2 = .029$ . There was no significant main effect for the immigration condition on anti-immigration attitudes,  $F(1,138) = .057, p = .182, \eta^2 = .000$ . There was no significant interaction effect for the religious and immigration condition on anti-immigration attitudes,  $F(4,138) = 1.690, p = .156, \eta^2 = .047$ .

Lastly, a planned contrast was conducted to compare the inclusive condition to all the other conditions,  $t(142) = -2.99, p = .003$ . This prime produced significantly lower pro-immigration attitudes than all the other conditions combined.



## Conclusion

The inclusion prime produced significantly lower pro-immigration attitudes than all the other conditions combined which was surprising. We found the exact opposite of what we predicted. Rather than finding that the religious inclusion prime helped people become more tolerant, they were less tolerant! This could be because of moral licensing. Moral licensing is the idea that those who believe they are moral, then believe that they do not have to follow their own morals because they are moral. In order to be sure, we are doing study 2 in the fall.

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