



# Religion as Parochial Altruism



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# To Understand Religious Conflict, We Need to Understand that...

- ✦ Intergroup competition sig factor in human genetic & cultural evolution (e.g., Bowles, 2006)
- ✦ **Parochial altruism**: sacrifice for ingroup + hostility to outgroup
- ✦ Organized religions → cohesive, cooperative groups
- ✦ Same principle explains why religion unites and divides

# Outline

- ✦ How religion unites
  - ✦ Cooperation & trust
- ✦ How religion divides
  - ✦ Religious prosociality is not universal
  - ✦ Supporting Suicide attacks: organized attendance vs. belief



**How religion unites**

# Problem: Big Groups

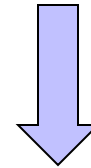
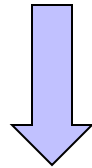


Solution: Big Gods

# Puzzle of Cooperation in Large Groups

Kin Altruism  
(inclusive fitness)

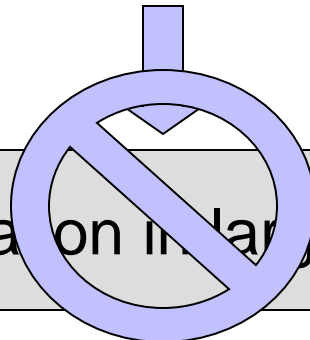
Reciprocal Altruism  
(reputation-driven)



Cooperation  
among Kin

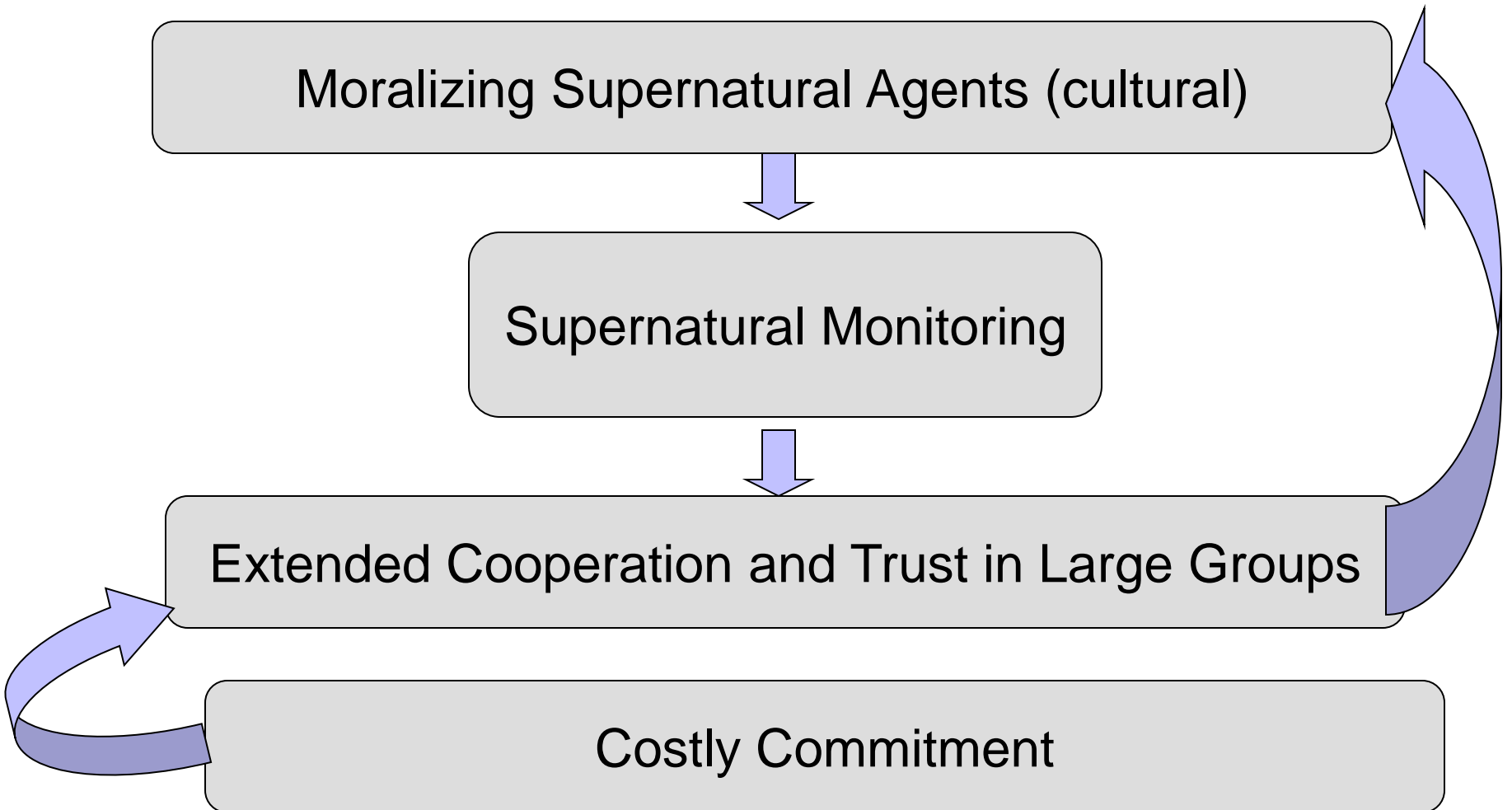
Limited Cooperation  
among Dyads

Cooperation in large groups



# Religious Prosociality

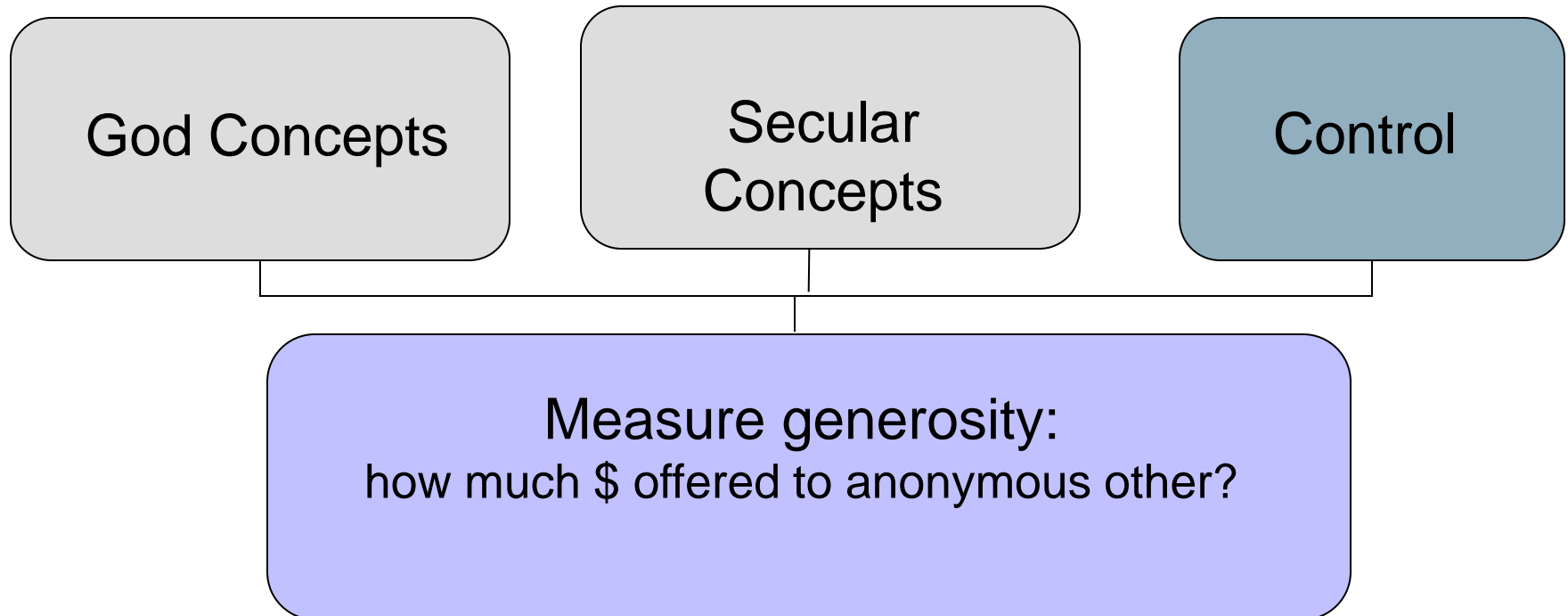
(Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008, *Science*)



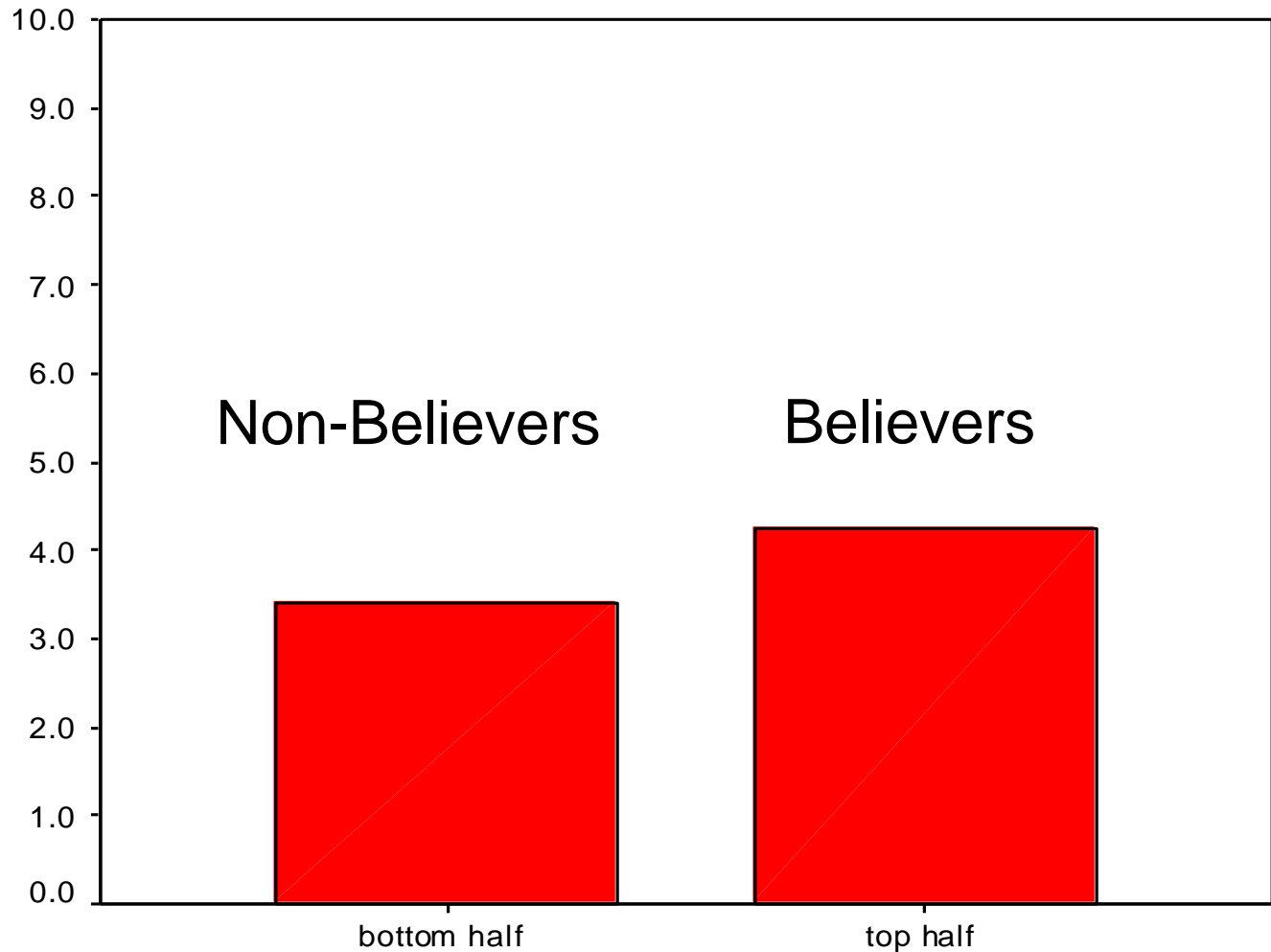


# Pressure From Above

Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008  
see also: Bering et al 2005; Pichon et al, 2007



# Self-reported Belief in God

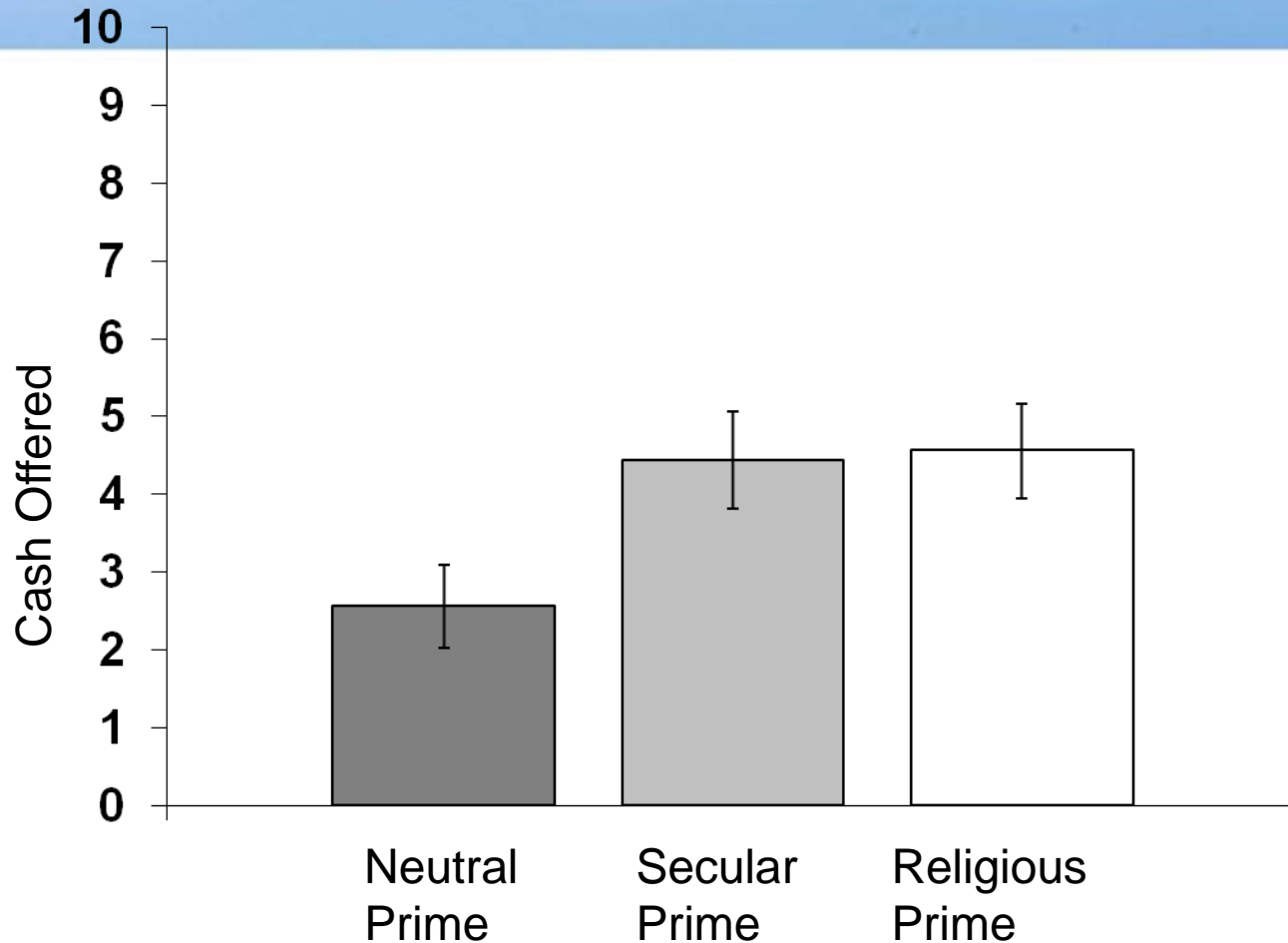


median split by belief in God

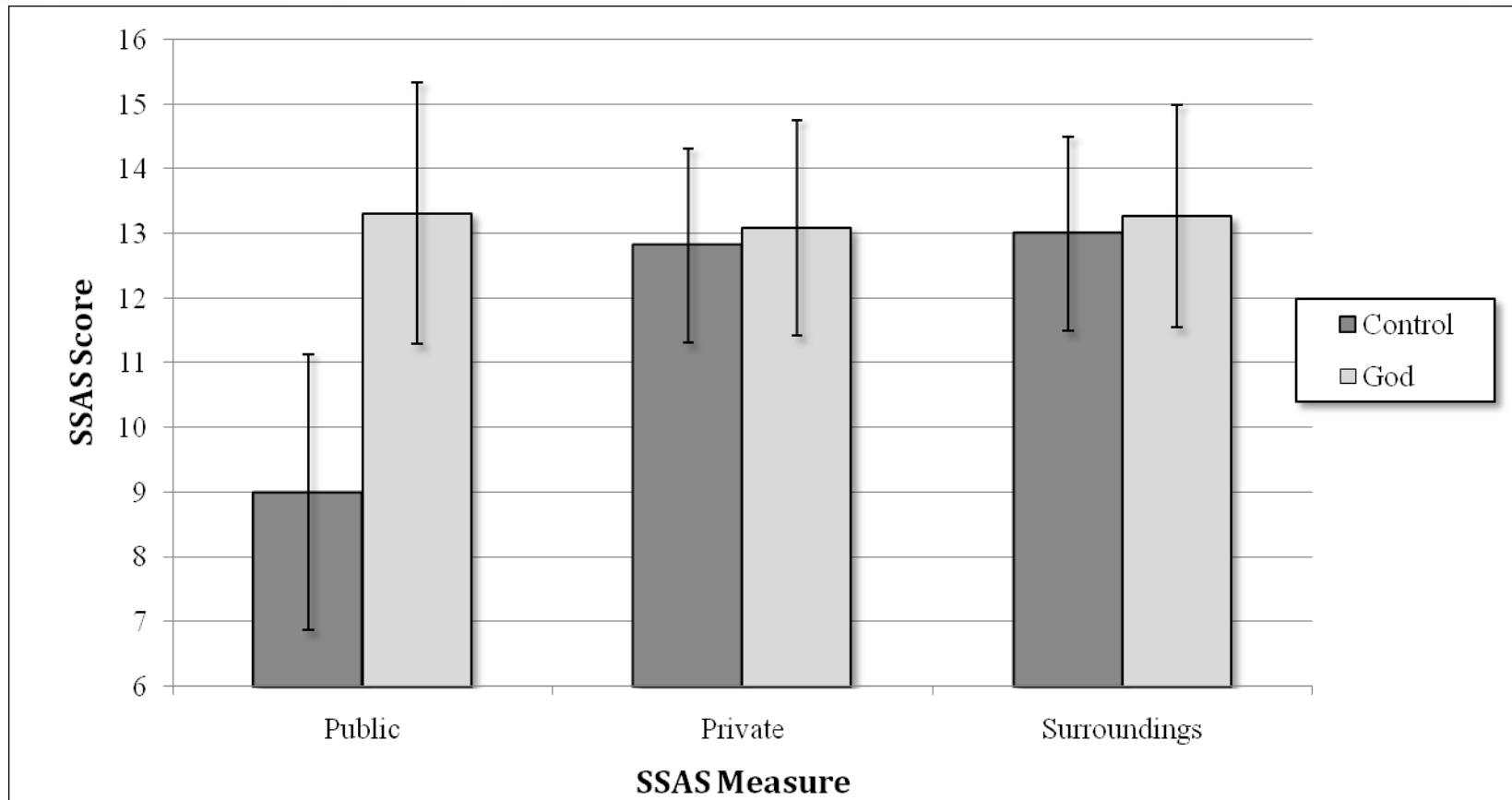
**Difference is *ns* at  $p=.75$ .  $n=50$ .**

# Study 2: Community Sample

Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007, *Psych Sci*



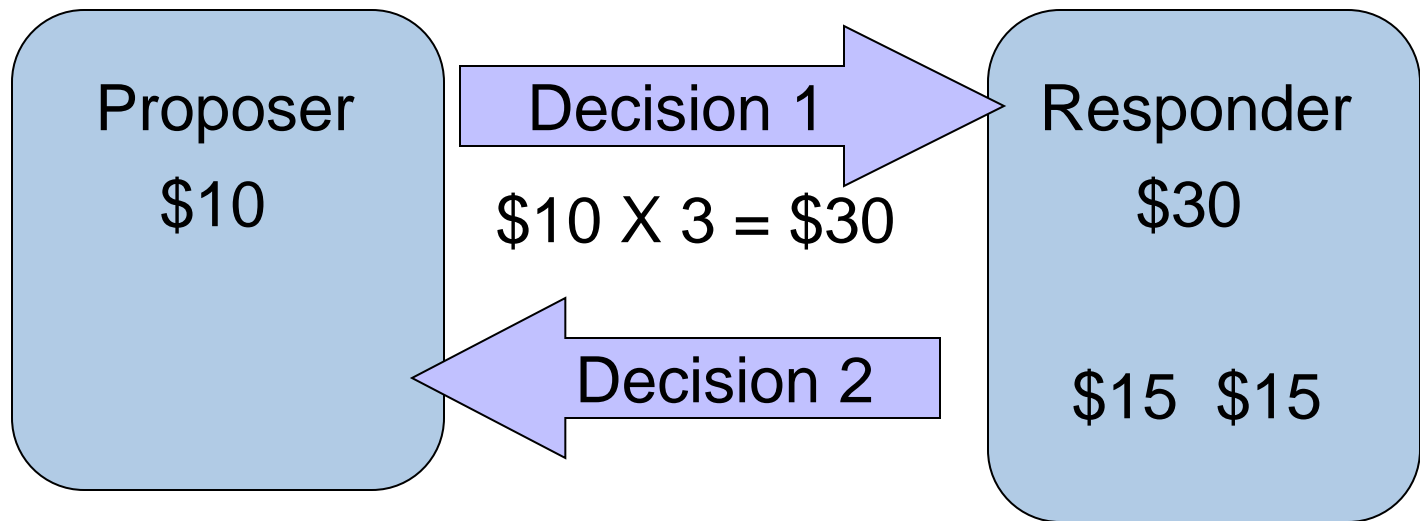
# Religious Primes $\rightarrow$ Feeling Watched?



Public: Right now, I am concerned about what other people think of me

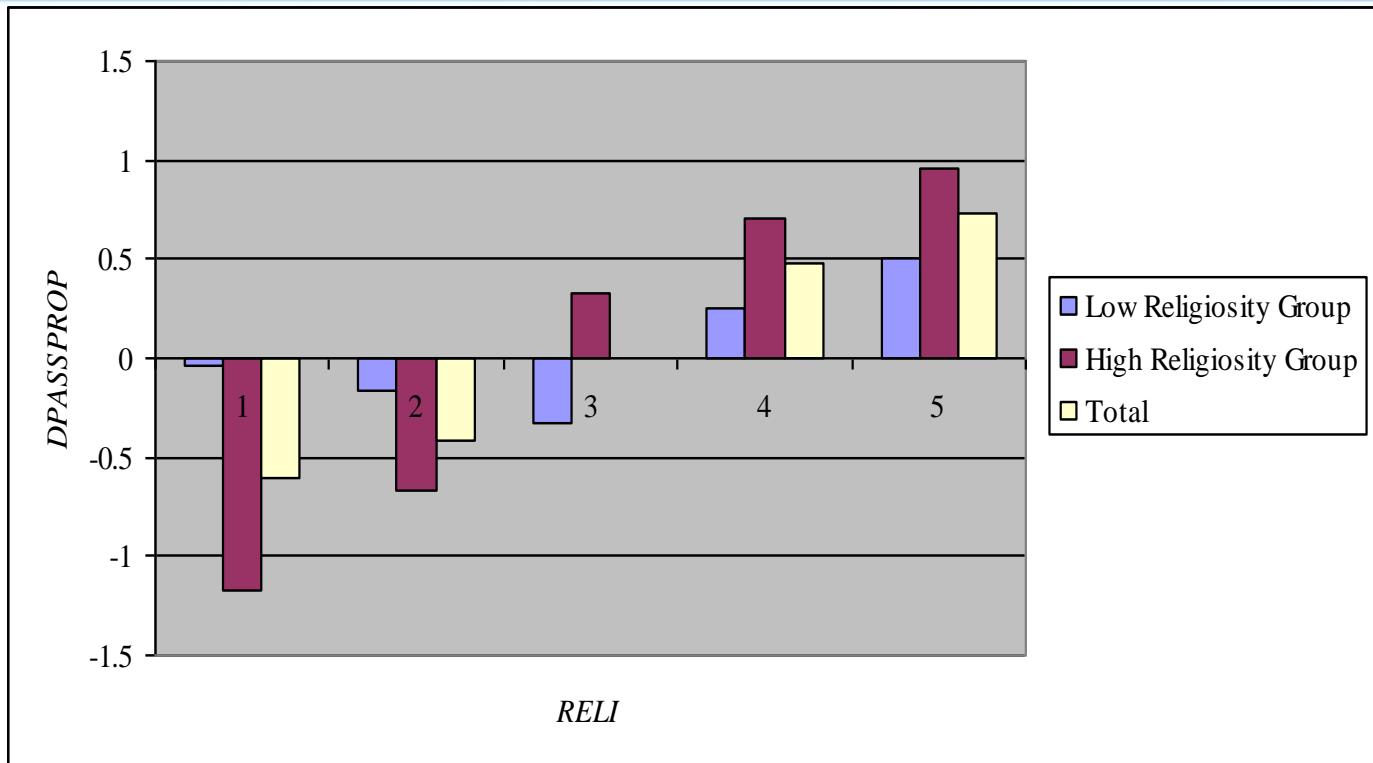
# Religiosity in Trust Games

(Tan & Vogel, *J Econ Psy*, 2009)



# Religion and Trust

(Tan & Vogel, *J Econ Psy*, 2008)



Mean deviation of offer from baseline to Responders of each religiosity level by Proposers of different religiosity



# How religion divides

# Bin Laden vs. Gandhi paradox



VS.





# Religion and Intergroup Conflict

- ✦ "Religious faith deserves a chapter to itself in the annals of war technology, on an even footing with the longbow, the warhorse, the tank, and the hydrogen bomb."

--Richard Dawkins

- ✦ "Religion is a remedy to help reduce the conflict and suffering in the world, not another source of conflict."

--The Dalai Lama

# Universal or discriminate prosociality? (Shariff & Norenzayan, in progress)



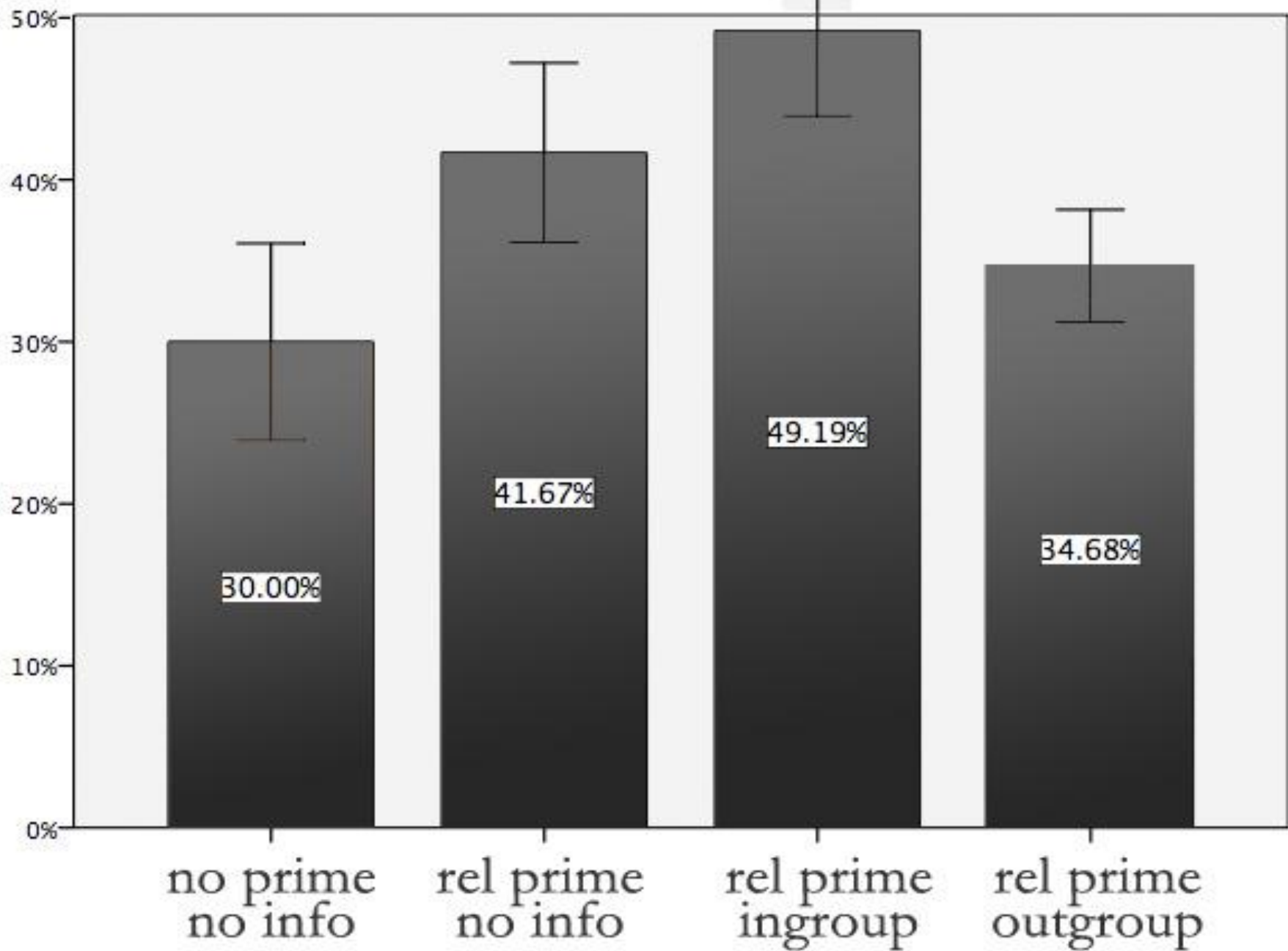
Theological  
correctness

vs

Psychological  
plausibility

Christian ppts. play  
Dictator Game with  
Christian vs Muslim

% of stake given



# Freethinkers as Freeriders?

✦ “Surely you recognize the equal citizenship and patriotism of Americans who are atheists?” -- Rob Sherman



✦ “No, I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God.”-- George H. W. Bush



# Freethinkers as Freeriders?

✦ “...those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all”

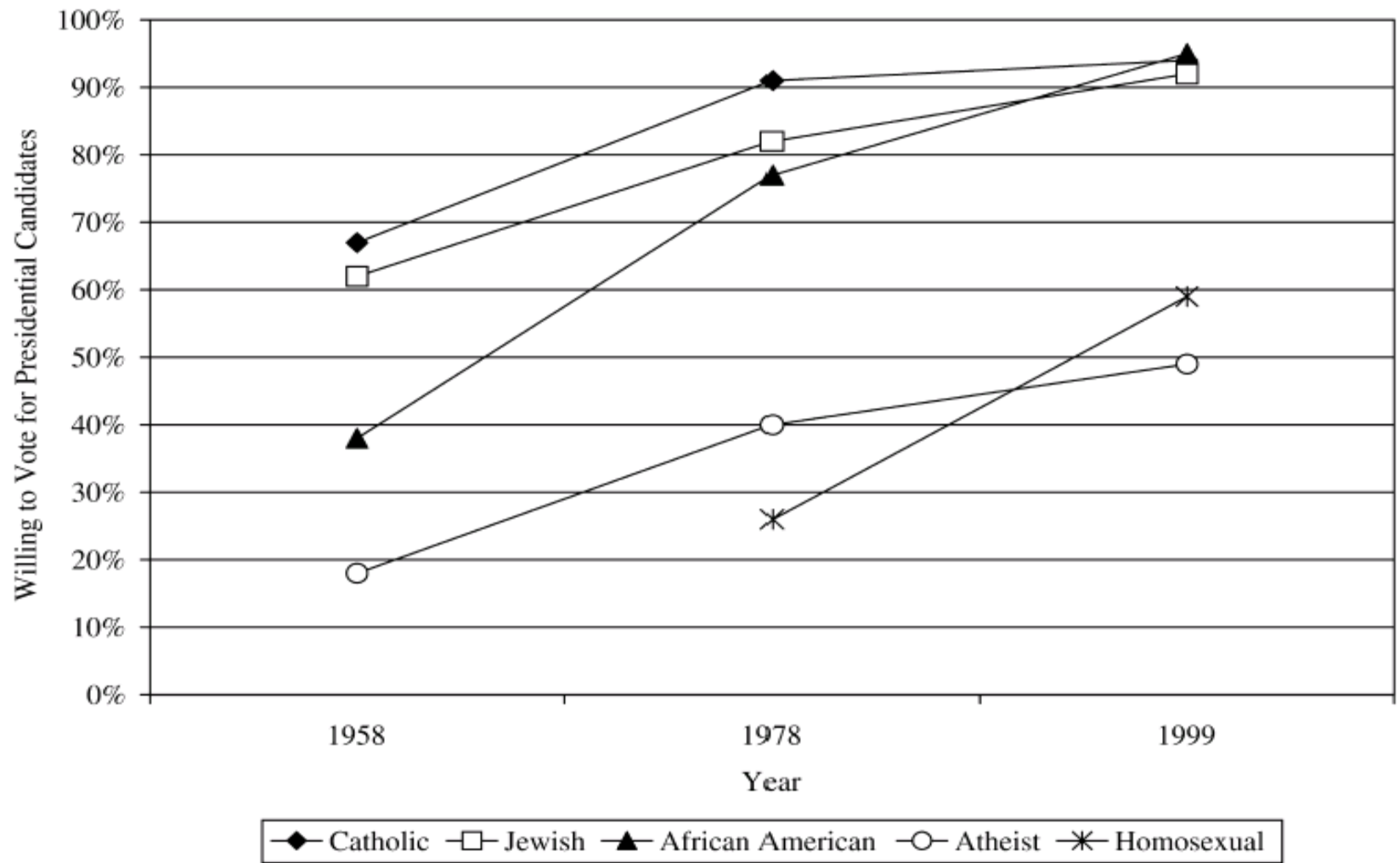
(J. Locke, Letter Concerning Toleration, 1689)

# Atheists Least Liked Group in America

(Edgell, Gerteis & Hartmann, *Am Soc Rev*, 2006)

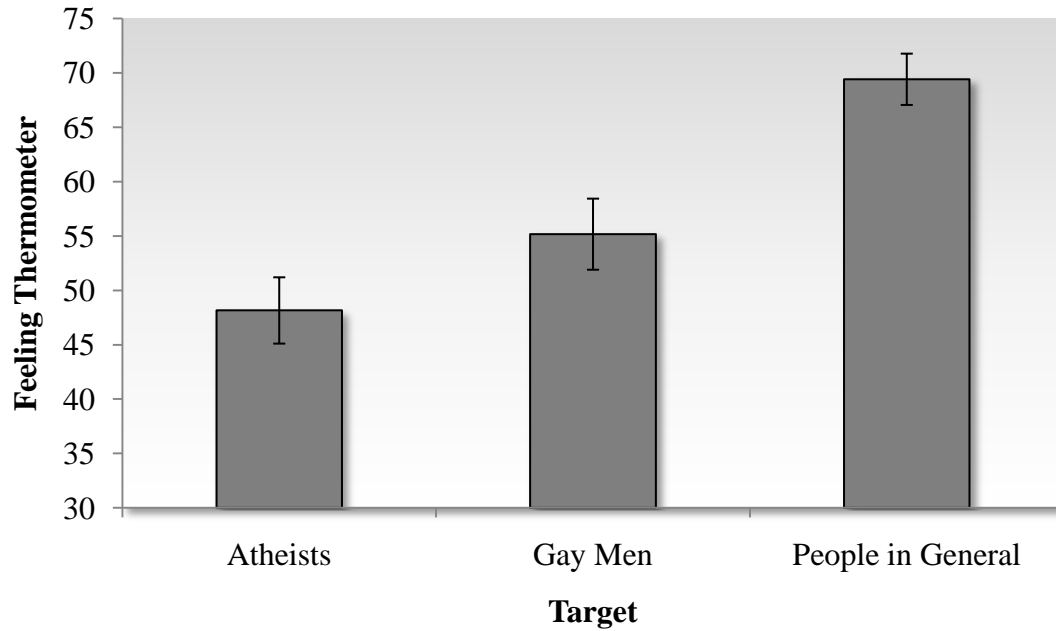
“I would disapprove if my child married a member of this group” (2003)

	%
✦ Atheist	47.3
✦ Muslim	33.5
✦ African-American	27.2
✦ Asian-American	18.5
✦ Hispanic	18.5
✦ Jewish	11.8
✦ White	2.3



**Figure 1.** Gallup Data, Willingness to Vote for Presidential Candidates

Panel A



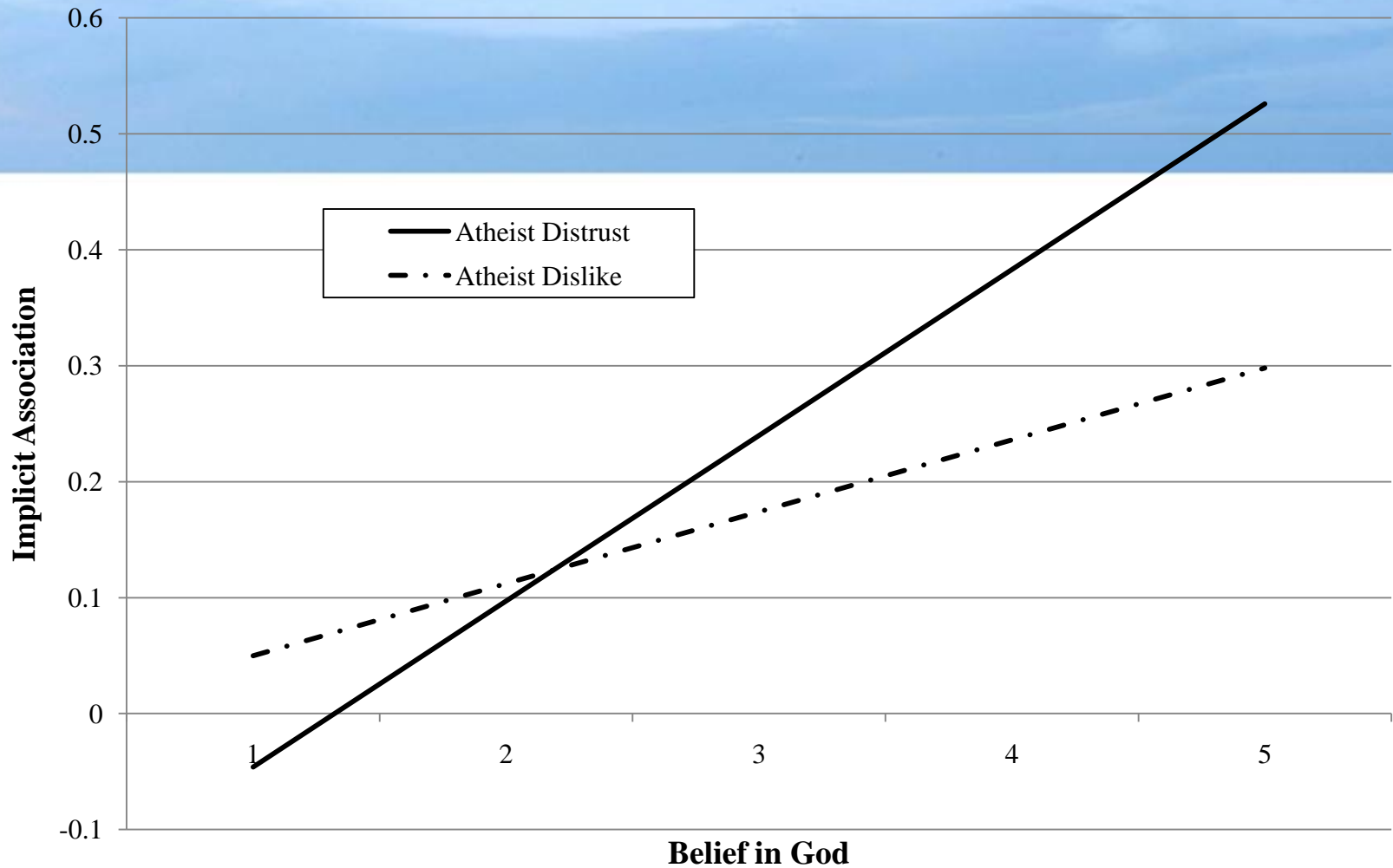
Representative US  
Sample (N=350)

(Gervais, Shariff, &  
Norenzayan, in prep)

Panel B







Dislike: hostile, hate vs. kind, friend

Distrust: lying, dishonest vs. dependable, honest

# Suicide Attacks

- ✦ Suicide attacks (SA): extreme form of “parochial altruism” (Choi & Bowles, 2007)
- ✦ Dramatic worldwide rise of SA since 2000:
  - ✦ 142 between 1983-2000 (Pape, 2005)
  - ✦ 312 between 2000 -2003 (Atran, 2003)
  - ✦ 500 just in 2006
- ✦ Most SA carried out by “religious groups”
- ✦ Groups need active and passive support
- ✦ Does “religion” encourage support for SA?

# The Case of parochial altruism: Support for Suicide Attacks

- ✦ Devotional (belief) -- prayer
- ✦ Coalitional – collective participation
- ✦ Empirical overlap ( $r=.4$ ) but distinct constructs
- ✦ Different components of religion → different consequences?

# Two Hypotheses

- ✦ Religious Belief Hypothesis (e.g. Harris, 2004)
- ✦ Coalitional Commitment Hypothesis

# Support for Suicide Attacks

Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009

- ✦ Study 1: Muslim Palestinians (representative )
  - ✦ Study 2: Muslim Palestinians (student sample)
  - ✦ Study 3: Orthodox Jewish settlers in WB
  - ✦ Study 4: Cross cultural sample
- 
- ✦ Prayer frequency vs. religious attendance
  - ✦ Demographic and attitude controls

ولا تحسبن الذين قتلوا في سبيل الله أمواتا بل أحياء عند ربهم يرزقون  
 صلوات الله العظمى

**نسبي شهيد**

فلسطين - غزة - بكل فخر واعتزاز ينعي والد الشهيد  
 محمد محمود محمد شلدان والعائلة وعموم آل شلدان في  
 الوطن والخارج الى شعبنا الفلسطيني الثرابط والأمين  
 العربية والإسلامية ابن الإسلام وفلسطين رحمه الله

**الشهيد القائد**  
**محمود محمد محمود شلدان**  
 أبو محمد .. فارس ليلة القدر

الذي نحسبه كذلك ولا تزيكي على الله أحداً، الذي استشهد عن عمر يناهز ١٨ عاماً  
 إثر اشتباكه مسلح واقتحام موقع عسكري على الطريق الشرقي لمدينة غزة ما أدى الى  
 مقتل عقيد اسر ائيلي وثلاثة جنود فجر ٢٧ رمضان (ليلة القدر) ١٤٢٣ هـ وفق  
 ٢٠٠٢/١٢/٢. وقد شيع جثمانه الطاهر من منزله في حي الزيتون في مسيرة حاشدة  
 عكست وفاء شعبنا الفلسطيني. تغمد الله الشهيد بواسع رحمته وأسكنه فسيح جناته  
 مع النبيين والصديقين والشهداء والصالحين وحسن أولئك رفيقا.  
 ملاحظة: والده يستقبل المهنتين ان شاء الله بعرس الشهادة لمن لم يحضر في أول الأمر  
 في منزله في حي الزيتون بعد صلاة العشاء بجوار مسجد السمعة.  
 اللهم تقبل منا

A newspaper report of Mahmud Muhamad Shaldan which describes him as a “martyr ... sacrificing himself before the age of 18” while killing three Israeli soldiers in Gaza on the 2nd of December 2002.

# Study 1: Palestinian Representative Sample, 1999 (N=1151)

Support for martyrdom attacks against Israel

Regular attenders 2.11 times more likely to support

*Wald* = 12.11 , 95% CI for OR = 1.16--3.02, *P*=0.01

No independent effect of prayer frequency

Control variables: gender, age, economic satisfaction, education, refugee status, support for Oslo process\*, support for sharia\*

# Study 2: Palestinian University Student Sample 2006 (N=719)

Agreement that “Islam encourages or requires  
martyrdom attacks”

Regular attenders 3.58 times more likely to support

*Wald* = 14.45, 95% CI for OR= 1.45--6.47, *P*=0.004

No independent effect of prayer frequency

Controls: gender, age, economic satisfaction,  
education, refugee status\*, ID with Hamas & PIJ\*,  
dehumanization of Israelis.



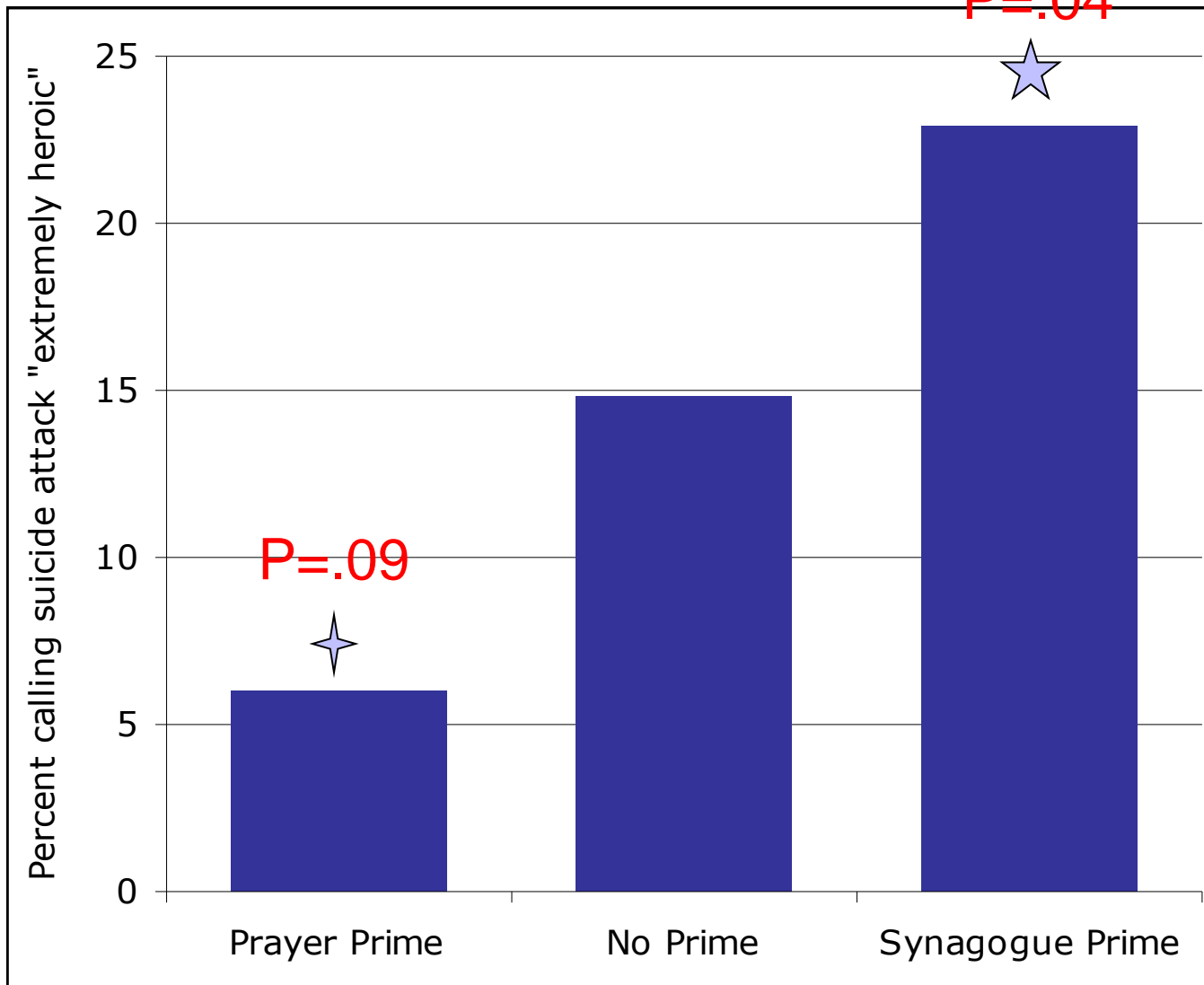
# Study 3: Israeli Orthodox Jewish Sample (N=198)

Agreement that “Goldstein’s act was heroic”

Experimental prime: prayer vs synagogue attendance

The tombstone of Baruch Goldstein which describes him as “murdered as a martyr of God”. On the 25th of February, 1994 Goldstein died while killing 29 Muslims at prayer, and injuring 60 others, in the “Cave of the Patriarchs”, a site holy to both Muslims and Jews located in Hebron, the West Bank





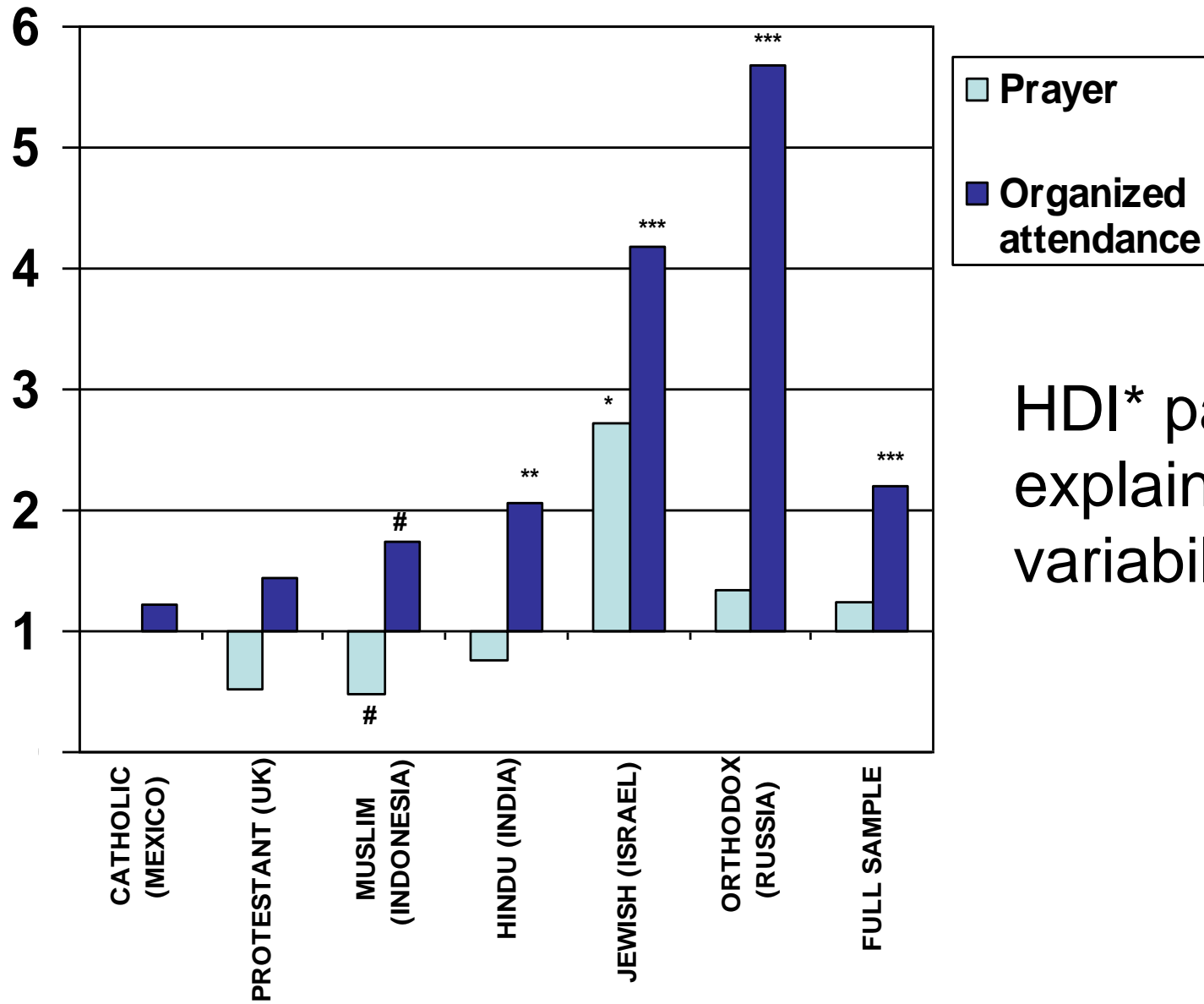
# 10-Nation (BBC) Survey of Religious Beliefs

- Mexico (Catholic) 4704 participants
- Great Britain (Protestant) 52.7% female
- Russia (Orthodox) age 18 to over 55
- India (Hindu) Variation in SES & income
- Indonesia (Muslim)
- Israel (Jewish) Major religious groups

Joint agreement with:

1) “ I am willing to die for my God (beliefs)”

2) “I blame other religions for the problems of the world”



HDI\* partly explains c-c variability

# Alternative Accounts

- ✦ Self-selection of religious attendees; militant imams; recruitment & propaganda in mosques
- ✦ Not a counter-explanation
  - ✦ Controlled for support for political Islam, Hamas / PIJ
  - ✦ Controlled for support for peace process
  - ✦ Causal evidence in experiment with Jewish settlers
  - ✦ Cross cultural replication

# Another Objection

- ✦ Prayer/meditation less predictive of religiosity / belief in God than religious attendance?
  - ✦ “Religion important in my life” (Palestinian sample)  
prayer 6.6 X; attendance null
  - ✦ “I believe in God” (cross cultural sample)  
prayer 7.4 X; attendance 2.6 X

# Things you might have heard that I didn't say...

- ✦ Religious attendance is bad
  - ✦ Many positive benefits (social capital, happiness, health)
- ✦ Political/ historical context unimportant
  - ✦ Religious attendance can mobilize groups acc to the context
- ✦ To be prosocial we need religion
  - ✦ Religion an old social technology; secular institutions are new but can be effective too

# Conclusions & Implications

- ✦ Religious conflict and religious prosociality are two sides of same coin
- ✦ Different features of religion → different outcomes
- ✦ “Reframing” group boundaries



Thank You!

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