



# Pushing up Daisies: Mortality Salience and Attitudes Towards Climate Change

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## Background

- Terror Management Theory claims that an awareness of one's inevitable death creates internal conflict, causing the desire for a continued existence (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991).
- Past research has suggested that when people are asked to think about their own death, they will strongly respond to issues that are more important to them (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016).
- Stronger religious beliefs tends to play a protective mechanism against the anxiety that one's awareness of their own death brings about (Norenzayan et al., 2009).
- "Death and disaster" is a prominent narrative in climate change campaigns today, gaining a deeper insight on the relationship between mortality salience and attitudes towards climate change is a crucial step towards understanding why people choose or choose not to engage in environmental behavior (Wolfe & Tubi, 2018).

## Hypotheses

- Individuals who are asked to think about their own death will be more willing to vote for climate change policies and take individual action towards reducing climate change.
- Individuals who make religion a more central part of their life will be less willing to vote for climate change policies and take individual action towards reducing climate change.

## Method

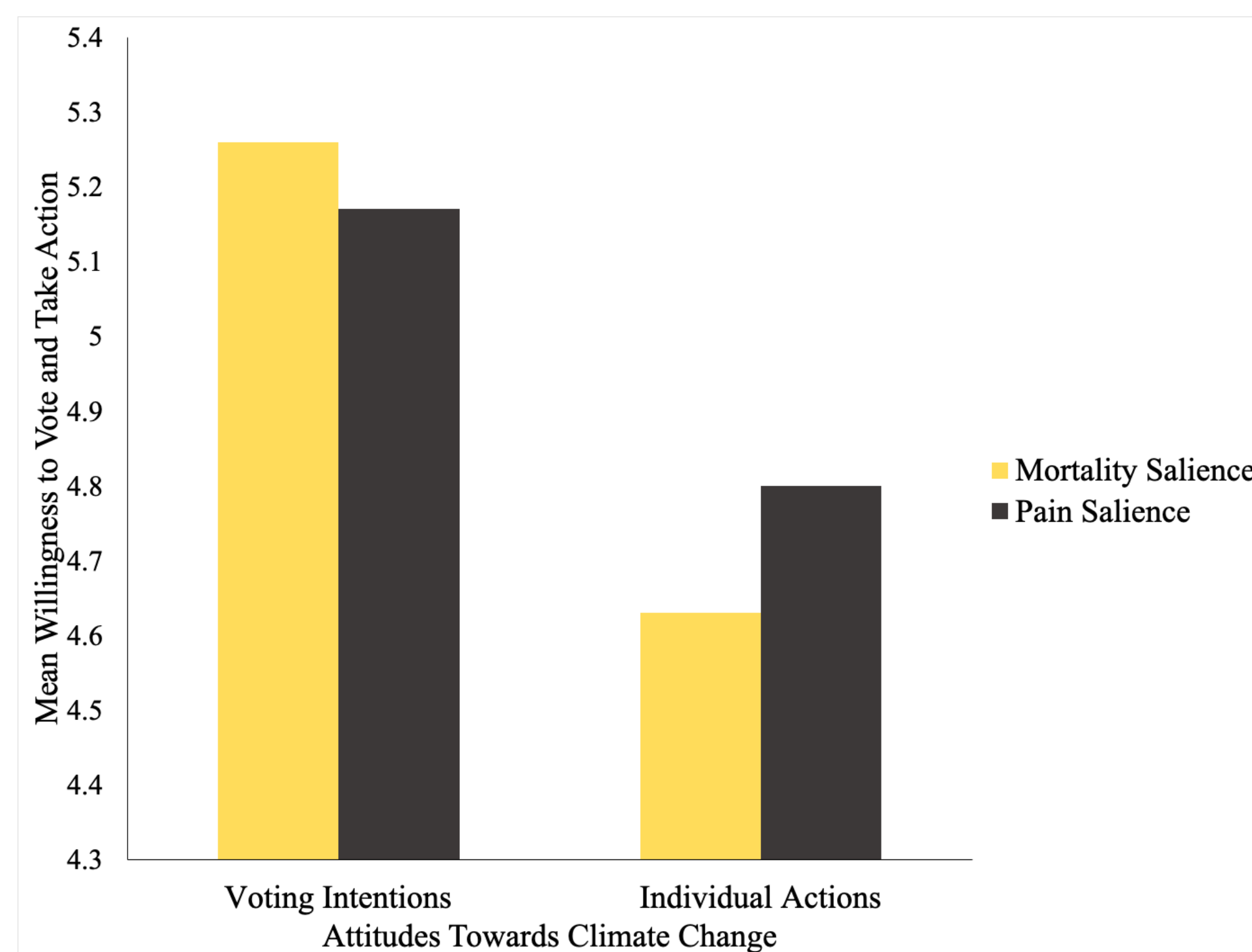
Participants were 19 male, 35 female, and 2 non-binary college students (age range=18-31 years, majority white with a slight majority identifying as having no religious affiliation). 21 were assigned to mortality salience and 35 were assigned to pain salience. Participants completed in order the following scales:

- **The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS)** (Huber & Huber, 2012)
- **The Projective Life Attitudes Assessment** (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991)
- **Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)** (Serafini, Malin-Mayor, Nich, Hunkele & Carroll, 2016)
- **Death-Thought Accessibility word-fragment task\***M (Schimel, Hayes, Williams, & Jahrig, 2007)
- **Voluntary actions\***M and **Voting intentions** (O'Connor, Bord, and Fisher, 1999)

\*M=modified

## Results

Figure 1. Individual Attitudes Toward Climate change Policies and Actions.



Interaction Between Centrality of Religion and Attitudes Towards Climate Change

- Voting Intentions  $F(54) = 2.67, p = .108$
- Voting Actions  $F(54) = .564, p = .456$

Table 1. T-test Results for Comparing Mortality Salience and Pain Salience Conditions

Attitudes Towards Climate Change	N	M(SD)	t	df	p
Voting Intentions	56	5.17(1.07)	.289	54	.773
Voting Actions	56	4.80(1.06)	.504	54	.616

\*Significant at .05 level

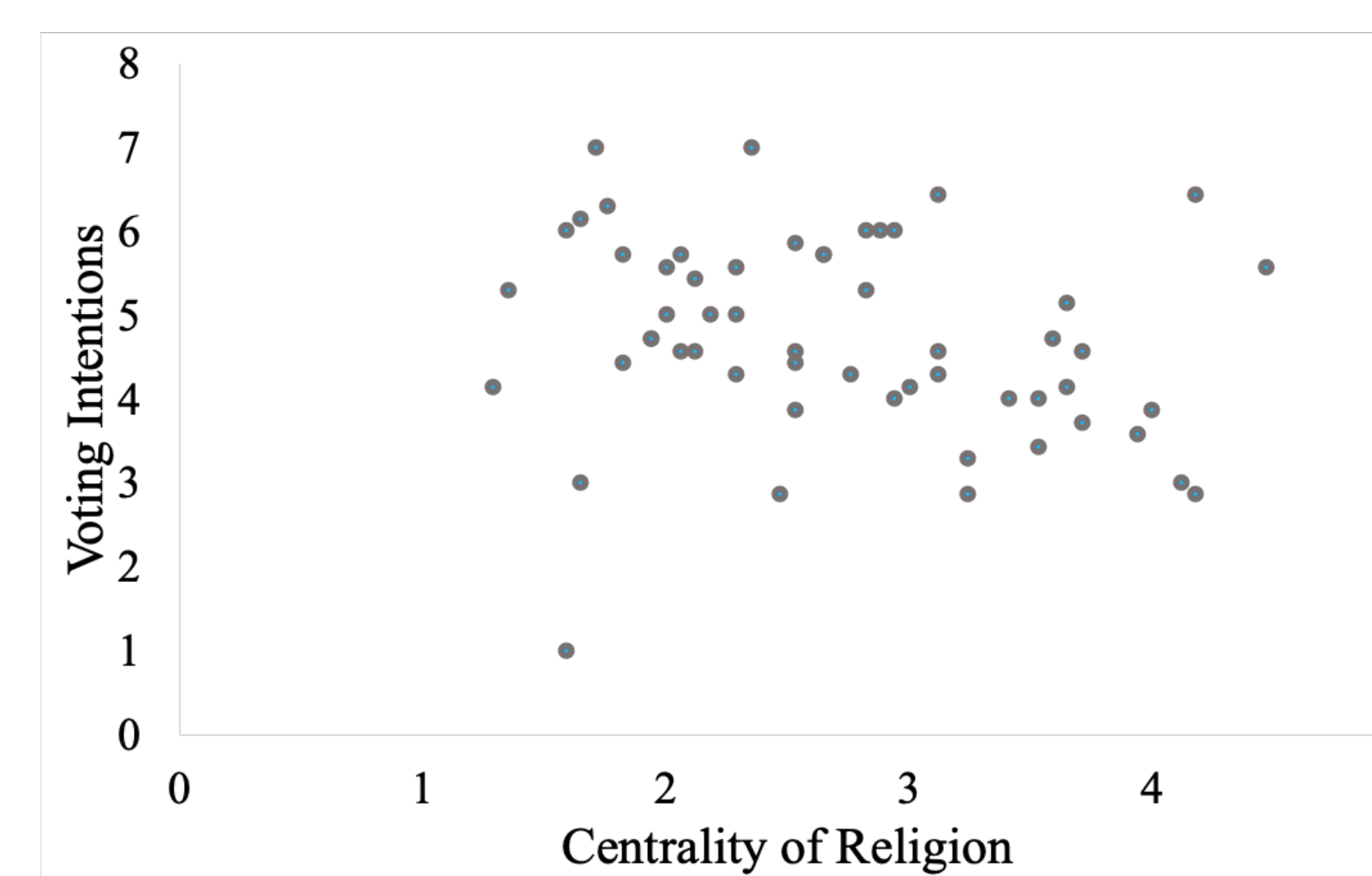


Figure 2. Centrality of religion and willingness to vote for climate change policies were weakly correlated,  $r(56) = .105, p = .443$ .

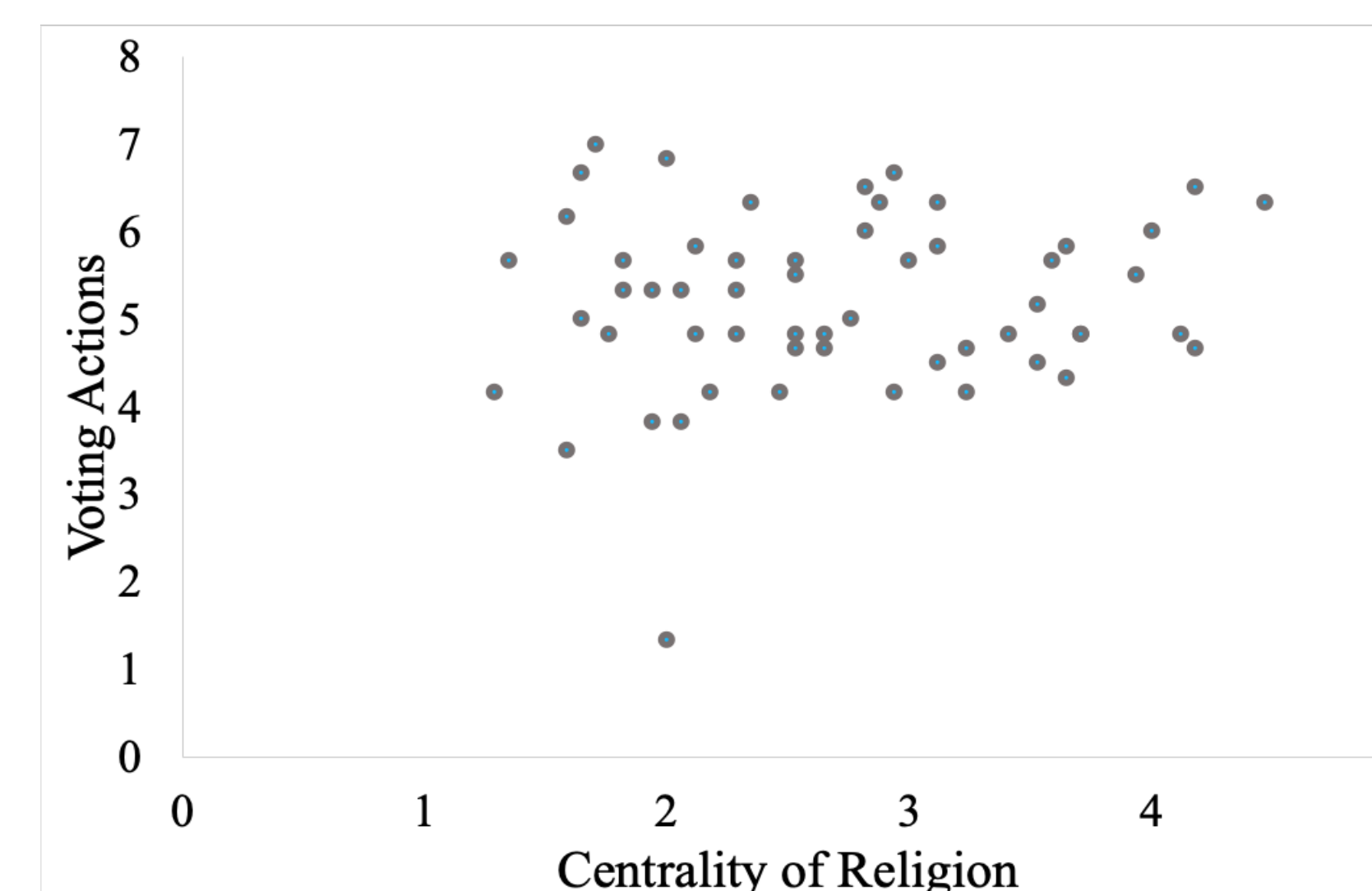


Figure 3. Centrality of religion and willingness to take individual action towards climate change were also weakly correlated,  $r(56) = -.222, p = .100$ .

## Conclusions

- The mortality salience manipulation was not effective in priming participants to think death-related thoughts.
- Individuals who were asked to think about their own death were no more willing to vote for climate change policies or willing to take action towards climate change policies than individuals in the control condition.
- Centrality of religion and willingness to vote for climate change policies were not significantly correlated.
- Centrality of religion and willingness to take action towards climate change were also not significantly correlated.
- We also tested to see if centrality of religion had an interaction with condition and attitudes toward climate change. The interaction was non-significant for voting intentions and voting actions.

## References

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