

Written Testimony of

Dr. Samuel L. Perry, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Sociology
University of Oklahoma

Dr. Andrew L. Whitehead, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Sociology
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

to the

**United States House of Representatives
Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol**

on

**THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM ON JANUARY 6 AND AFTER:
WHAT NATIONAL SURVEY DATA TELL US**

Submitted on March 31st, 2022

INTRODUCTION

On July 27th of 2021, District of Columbia police officer Daniel Hodges sat before a congressional committee investigating the January 6th attacks on the United States Capitol. He recalled how the crowd gathering on the building's West Terrace waved flags saturated with Christian symbolism alongside those with the name of then President Donald J. Trump. Many of us remember those images.

Hodges recalled, “It was clear the terrorists perceived themselves to be Christians. I saw the Christian flag directly to my front. Another read, ‘Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president.’ Another: ‘Jesus is king.’ ... Another had crossed rifles beneath a skull, emblazoned with the pattern of the American flag.”¹

Hodges not only witnessed the Christian symbolism of the rioters that day—he endured their violence. Footage from January 6th showed him being crushed by a door while a rioter punched him in the face and forcibly removed his gas mask. The video shows Hodges bleeding out of his mouth and screaming in agony. He shared how the rioters carried the “thin blue line” flag, but “ignored our commands and continued to assault us.”²

Comfortably intermingled with the Christian symbolism were explicit symbols of white supremacy and the conspiracy theory QAnon. The Confederate battle flag flew in the Capitol building—something the Confederate army was never able to accomplish.

The insurrectionists themselves highlighted the role their Christian faith played in why they were at the Capitol—they were seeking to ensure “their” country abided by what they believed the Christian God wanted: for Trump to remain president.

One rioter who prayed on the floor of the Senate, said: “I just wanted to get inside the building so I could plead the blood of Jesus over it. That was my goal.”³

Jacob Chansley, better known as the “QAnon Shaman,” led a group in prayer on the Senate floor, thanking his Heavenly Father for “filling this chamber with patriots that love you and that love Christ,” and for “being the inspiration needed to these police officers to allow us into the building” and enabling he and his accomplices “to send a message to all the tyrants, the communists, and the globalists that this is our nation not theirs,” and for “allowing the United States of America to be reborn.”⁴

Jenny Cudd, who owns a florist shop in Midland, Texas and who in October of 2021 pleaded guilty to her Capitol riot charge, posted a video during the attack declaring, “To me, God and country are tied—to me they’re one and the same. We were founded as a Christian country. And

¹ <https://religionnews.com/2021/07/27/police-officer-calls-january-6-insurrectionists-terrorists-who-perceived-themselves-to-be-christians/>

² <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/27/1019736664/jan-6-insurrection-hearing-police-nancy-pelosi-committee>

³ <https://religionnews.com/2021/02/25/the-insurrectionists-senate-floor-prayer-highlights-a-curious-trumpian-ecumenism/>

⁴ <https://www.newyorker.com/news/video-dept/a-reporters-footage-from-inside-the-capitol-siege>

we see how far we have come from that. [...] We are a godly country, and we are founded on godly principles. And if we do not have our country, nothing else matters.”⁵

While what happened at the Capitol was shocking, for those of us studying Christian nationalism across the US population over the last decade, it was not surprising. The pervasive display of Christian symbols, language, and rituals among those storming the Capitol is the result of a long history, and one that reverberates in our current cultural and political context.

Though the January 6th attack was extreme in its chaos—being intensified by misinformation, angry rhetoric from political leaders, and the sheer numbers of aggrieved citizens—the ideology that connects Christianity to such a display of anti-democratic and nationalist violence is not fringe. On the contrary, it is far more prevalent than many recognize. In fact, that ideology is driving many Americans to reinterpret the events of January 6th in more positive terms.

In this testimony, we will outline what Christian nationalism is, how prevalent it is, and how it can help us diagnose what we witnessed at the Capitol Insurrection. In particular, we will show how Christian nationalism is intimately intertwined with various motivating forces for the Insurrectionists—specifically, conspiratorial thinking and victimhood metanarratives; support for authoritarian violence, and anti-democratic impulses. These elements are mutually reinforcing and remain prevalent throughout the American adult population.

We will also share what this means for the United States going forward—the ongoing threat Christian nationalism poses to how we collectively remember January 6th, and to the functioning of our democracy.

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM?

In our book *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, we define Christian nationalism as a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a very particular kind of “Christianity.”⁶

The “Christianity” of Christian nationalism does not refer to orthodox theological beliefs or even Christian identity necessarily, but rather **a traditionalist, pro-Christian, ethno-cultural and political orientation.**

We must also be clear that we are not describing what is historically called “American civil religion,” which our political leaders (and particularly Presidents) have referenced to unite Americans and call the nation toward greater stewardship of its vast resources. Nor are we referring to the sort of religious fervor that mobilized Black Civil Rights leaders to call our nation to account for principles it claimed to follow. That force we could better describe as

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXuQ4q-QVWg>

⁶ Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

“Christian patriotism” that labors to fulfill our creedal commitments to full legal equality, natural rights, and sovereignty of the citizenry—something we could all celebrate.⁷

Rather, research on Christian nationalism suggests this particular ideology combines several different elements including 1) moral traditionalism rooted in hierarchical social arrangements (e.g., patriarchy, heterosexism); 2) authoritarian social control that justifies violence and militarism; 3) strict ethno-racial boundaries surrounding national membership, civic participation, and social belonging; and 4) a populist impulse that inclines Americans toward feelings of victimization, conspiratorial thinking, and suspicion toward “elite” leaders and institutions (e.g., mainstream media, academics, universities, scientists, insider politicians).⁸

In our numerous studies on this phenomenon, we measure Christian nationalism using a scale composed of five to seven different questions where respondents indicate their level of agreement with various statements connecting religion or Christianity with the nation. These statements include:

“The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation.”

“The federal government should advocate Christian values.”

“The federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state.” (reverse coded)

“The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces”

“The federal government should allow prayer in public schools.”

“The success of the United States is part of God’s plan.”

“I consider founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to be divinely inspired.”

We then combine the responses to the questions to create a Christian nationalism scale. Statistical analyses using multiple data sets repeatedly demonstrate that this scale shows a high degree of internal reliability (that is, Americans who agree with one statement most often agree with the others as well). Along with our dozens of peer-reviewed articles utilizing these

⁷ On the distinction between these concepts, see: Gorski, Philip S. 2017. *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Pilgrims*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Gorski, Philip S., and Samuel L. Perry. 2022. *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

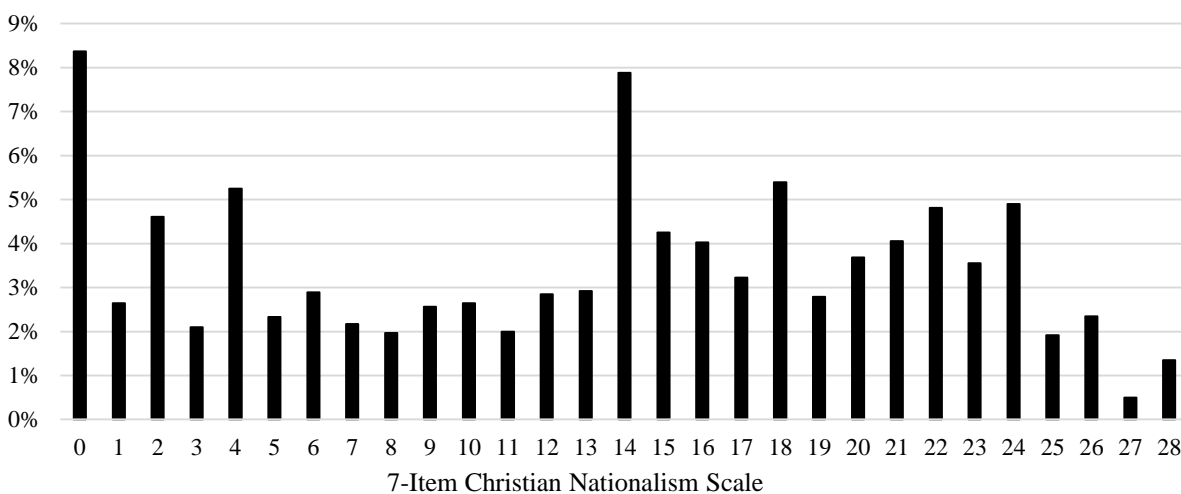
⁸ For some examples in peer-reviewed journals, see: Perry, Samuel L., Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2022. “‘I Don’t Want Everybody to Vote’: Christian Nationalism and Restricting Voter Access in the United States.” *Sociological Forum* 37(1):4-26; Perry, Samuel L., Landon Schnabel, and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2021. “Christian Nationalism, Perceived Anti-Christian Discrimination, and Prioritising ‘Religious Freedom’ in the 2020 Presidential Election.” *Nations and Nationalism* 28(2):714-725.; Perry, Samuel L., Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2021. “Prejudice and Pandemic in the Promised Land: How White Christian Nationalism Shapes Americans’ Racist and Xenophobic Views of COVID-19.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44(5):759-772; Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. “How Culture Wars Delay Herd Immunity: Christian Nationalism and Anti-Vaccine Attitudes.” *Socius*. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2378023120977727>; Whitehead, Andrew L., Landon Schnabel, and Samuel L. Perry. 2018. “Gun Control in the Crosshairs: Christian Nationalism and Opposition to Stricter Gun Laws.” *Socius*. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2378023118790189>.

measures, our Christian nationalism scale has become the default measurement for this construct in emerging political science, social psychology, and mental health research.⁹

In what follows we will present analyses from two primary data sources. The first and primary data set is the Public Discourse and Ethics Survey (PDES), which was a panel survey given to the same Americans from August 2019 to August 2021 in eight waves. A second survey that we will use to supplement the findings of the PDES is Wave 6 of the Baylor Religion Survey, which was fielded in the Spring of 2021. In both surveys, sampling weights are used to bring the sample into alignment with the population of American adults, thus making the findings more representative of the general population.

One vital descriptive reality of Christian nationalist ideology is that it is broadly distributed across the American adult population. As Figure 1 from our representative PDES sample of American adults suggests, millions of Americans find themselves in the middle of our scale and in the upper quartile of our scale (scores 20-28).

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Americans across 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 8 (August 2021); N = 1,053

In more comprehensive analyses of Christian nationalist ideology across social characteristics, we have shown that Christian nationalism is not isolated within any one socio-demographic pocket.¹⁰ Thus, it is neither “fringe,” nor reducible to some prominent social category like race,

⁹ For example, see: Al-Kire, Rosemary L., Michael H. Pasek, Jo-Ann Tsang, and Wade C. Rowatt. 2021. “Christian No More: Christian Americans Are Threatened by Their Impending Minority Status.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104223>; Armaly, Miles T., David T. Buckley, and Adam M. Enders. 2022. “Christian Nationalism and Political Violence: Victimhood, Racial Identity, Conspiracy, and Support for the Capitol Attacks.” *Political Behavior* 44:937-960; Upenieks, Laura. 2022. “Do Beliefs in Christian Nationalism Predict Mental Health Problems? The Role of Religious (Non)Involvement.” *Socius*. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F23780231221081641>.

¹⁰ See Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

partisanship, education level, age, region of the country, or ethno-religious tradition (e.g., white evangelical).

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AND THE INSURRECTION

How is Christian nationalism related to the Capitol Insurrection?

First and perhaps most importantly, Christian nationalism provided theological cover. Certainly, not every American who embraces Christian nationalist ideology at some level would ever go so far as to attack the Capitol. Yet the cultural framework fosters more extreme populist, authoritarian, and anti-democratic attitudes and ideas that can build beneath the surface until circumstances cause an eruption. We believe January 6th was just such an eruption.

Embracing this conservative ethno-cultural political orientation, with its moral traditionalism rooted in hierarchical social arrangements (e.g., patriarchy, heterosexism), authoritarian social control that justifies violence and militarism, and strict ethno-racial boundaries surrounding national membership, civic participation, and social belonging—leads these Americans to believe this country was created *for them*. And populist victimhood and conspiratorial thinking leads them to believe the country is being stolen away by powerful, clandestine forces.

Consider these quotes, one before the 2020 election from Franklin Graham, noted son of Billy Graham and president of two influential evangelical organizations, and the other from an insurrectionist convicted for his participation in the riot:

"I think God brought him here for this season, for these four years. I'm just asking that God would spare this country for another four years to give us a little bit more time to do the work before the storm hits. I believe the storm is coming. You're going to see Christians attacked; you're going to see churches close; you're going to see a real hatred expressed toward people of faith. That's coming. God uses men. He works through men and I believe Donald Trump is the president for a reason. I think God has put him in this position. Western civilization as we have known it, he is defending that."—Franklin Graham

"Trump will be your president four more years in Jesus name." "We're getting ready to live through something of biblical proportions be prayed up and be ready to defend your country and your family."—Michael Sparks

While Franklin Graham was ultimately opposed to the violence on January 6th, we can see that his words and message aligned with those who took part in the violence. Celebrity pastors who traffic in Christian nationalist discourse ultimately end up creating the pipeline of political theology that breeds and blesses those who feel God is calling them to "take back their country."

Christian nationalism not only provided theological cover for the Insurrection, it is also closely associated with several other influential elements that motivated or facilitated participation in the Insurrection. These elements and Christian nationalism are mutually reinforcing. They are:

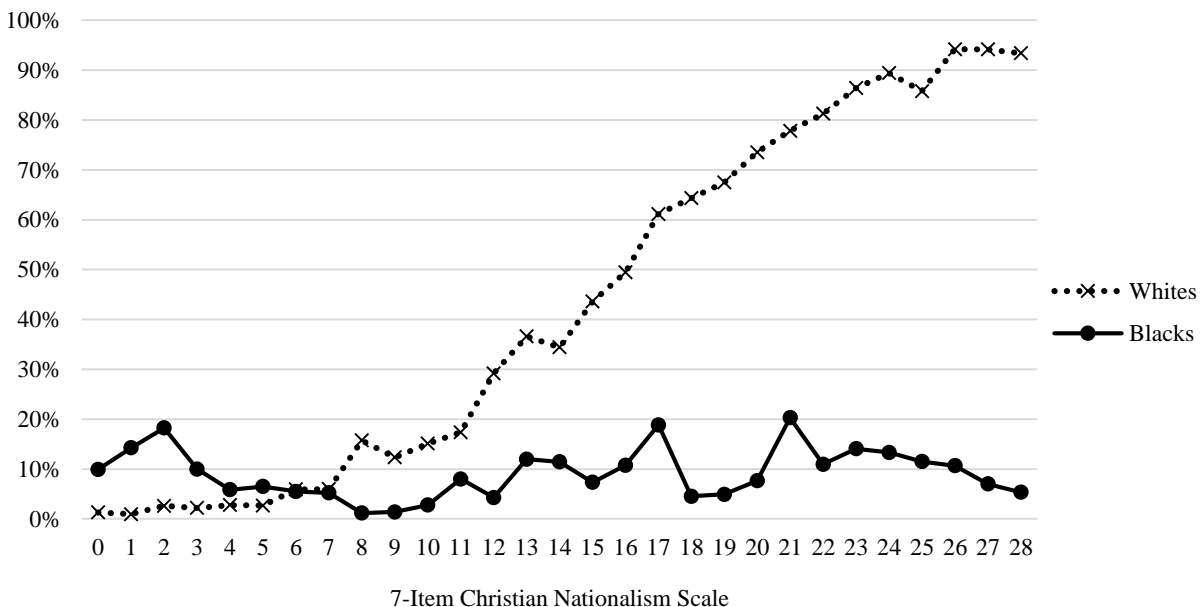
- Element #1: Belief in The Big Lie
- Element #2: Comfort with Political Violence
- Element #3: Conspiratorial thinking – especially QAnon
- Element #4: Fractured media landscape

ELEMENT #1: BELIEF IN THE BIG LIE

The first element is the Big Lie that the election was “stolen” and the outcome was manipulated by widespread fraud. As Figure 2 below shows, among white Americans in particular, Christian nationalism is clearly closely associated with Americans agreeing, “The 2020 Presidential Election was stolen from Donald Trump.” These analyses are from the August 2021 wave of the PDES, and thus Americans were affirming this view nearly 1 year after the election itself.

Our statistical analyses here and throughout the testimony include controls for key demographic, political, and religious characteristics, so we can be more confident that the associations we observe are not due to factors like education, partisanship, political ideology, or traditional religious commitment.

Figure 2: Predicted Percentage of White and Black Americans Who Believe the 2020 Presidential Election was Stolen from Donald Trump across the 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 8 (August 2021); N = 1,053

Note: Percentage scores are taken from a binary logistic regression model predicting agreement that the election was stolen. Controls are included for race, gender, age, education, income, Southern residence, political party identification, political ideology, church attendance, and religious tradition. Examining interaction terms revealed that Black and Hispanic Americans diverge significantly from white Americans on this outcome across Christian nationalism scores.

In Figure 2, we plot the trend lines for Black and White Americans separately to emphasize how Christian nationalism’s connection to “the Big Lie” is also shaped by racial identity. This is why we often prefer to talk about “*white* Christian nationalism,” because the pernicious associations we find with Christian nationalist ideology and various outcomes tend to be stronger among white Americans or in some cases almost exclusive to whites.

Notice that as white Americans increase in their scores on our Christian nationalism scale, their estimated belief in the Big Lie goes from under 10% to over 90%—a nearly perfect linear association, even after accounting for other relevant factors. In contrast, as Black Americans increase in their Christian nationalism scores, their belief in the Big Lie stays low and flat.

In the 2021 Baylor Religion Survey, we see a similar pattern. As Christian nationalism increases, Americans are more likely to agree with the statement, “The 2020 Presidential election was rigged and its outcome did not reflect the will of the people.” And at the upper end of our Christian nationalism scale, nearly 70% of Americans agree with that view.

Several prominent religious leaders with vast networks of followers and listeners sowed seeds of doubt directly after Election Day. Some, like Robert Jeffress—pastor of First Baptist Dallas and frequent Fox News contributor—ended up aligning with the results of the election. Others continue to promote the Big Lie, which we will address below.

ELEMENT #2: COMFORT WITH POLITICAL VIOLENCE

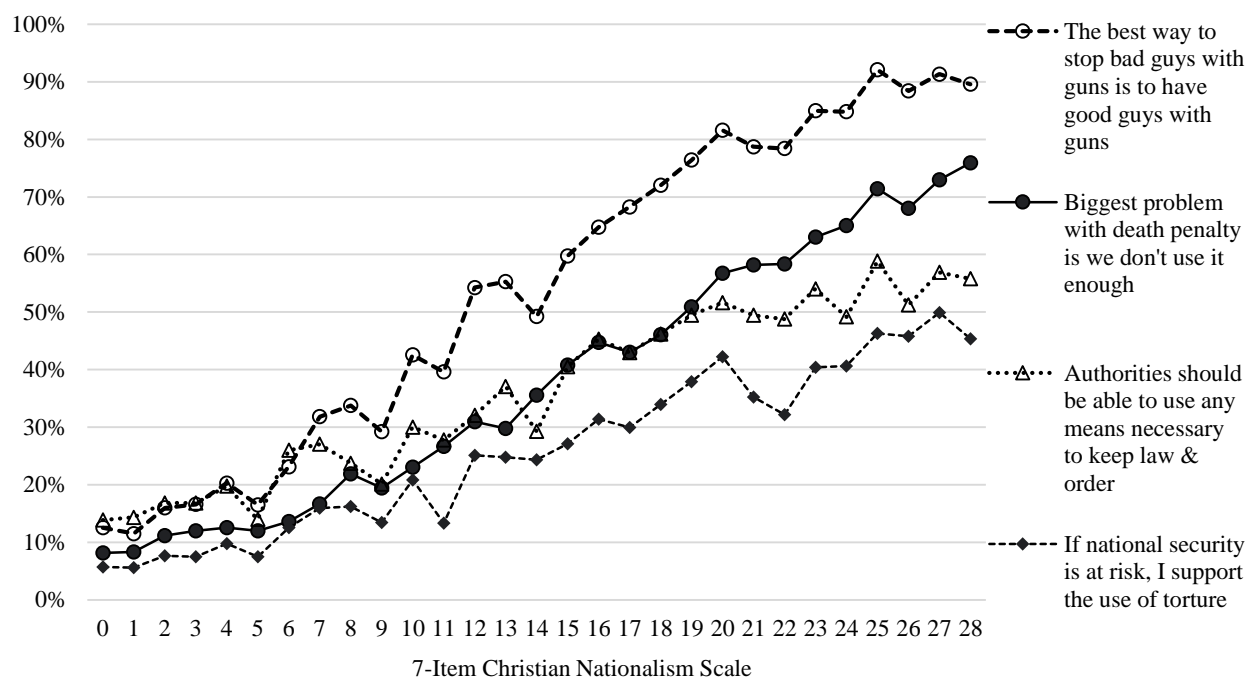
In Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry’s recent book *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* they show that while Christian nationalism is not necessarily associated with white Americans being violent people (who relish violence for its own sake), it is powerfully associated with white Americans supporting authoritarian violence used to control hypothetical threats, criminals, or terrorists.

As Figure 3 below shows, the more white Americans affirm our measures of Christian nationalism the more likely they are to affirm statements like “The best way to stop bad guys with guns is to have good guys with guns,” “The biggest problem with the death penalty is we don’t use it enough,” “Authorities should be able to use any means necessary to keep law and order,” and “If national security is at risk, I support the use of torture.”

To be sure, these statements are not outlandish in their promotion of violence to control various threats. Many of these views, in fact, may be quite common on the right side of the political spectrum. Taken together, however, they paint a picture of Americans far more comfortable with—indeed favorable toward—the application of “righteous violence” whenever they believe the situation calls for it.

And among white Americans who subscribe to Christian nationalism, many believe our current political situation *is* calling for violence.

Figure 3: Predicted Percentage of White Americans Who Affirm Various Questions Related to Situational Violence across the 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 7 (February 2021); N = 939

Note: Percentage scores are taken from a binary logistic regression model predicting agreement with these statements. Controls are included for gender, age, education, income, region of residence, political party identification, political ideology, religious commitment, and religious tradition.

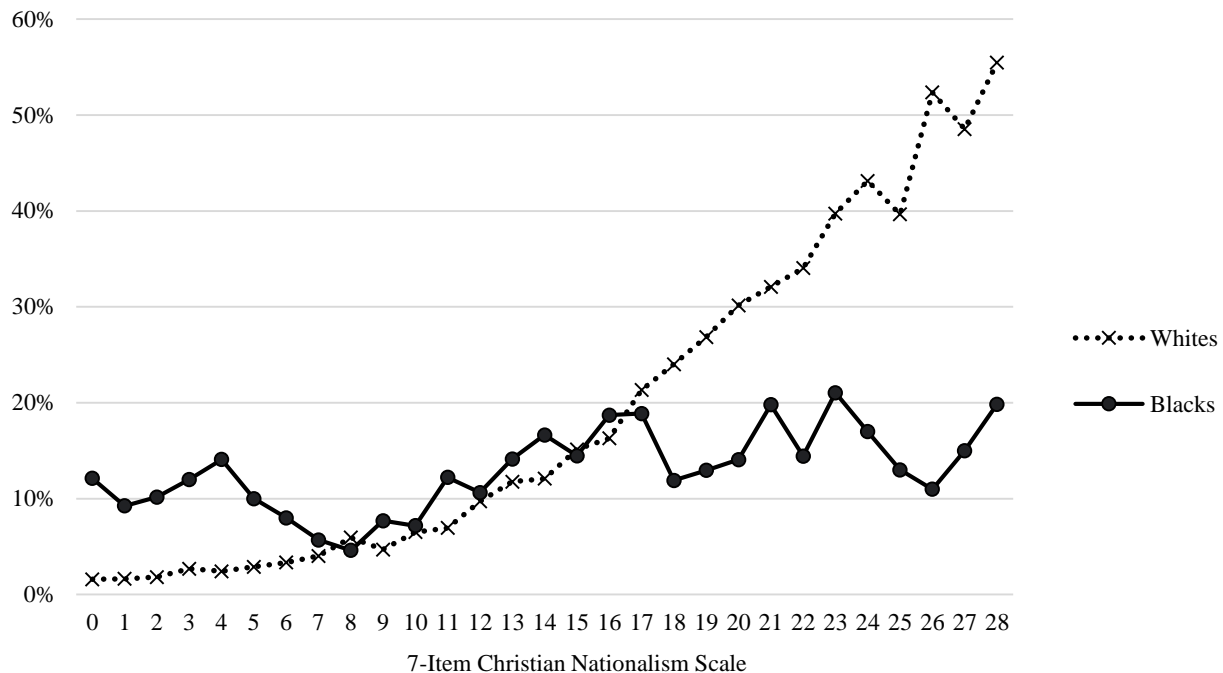
A September 2021 survey from the Public Religion Research Institute found that 27% of Americans who believe “God has granted America a special role in human history” agree that “True American patriots might have to resort to violence in order to save our country.”

Data from the August 2021 wave of our Public Discourse and Ethics Survey mirrors PRRI’s finding and uses our particular Christian nationalism scale. In Figure 4, we again display the findings for white and Black Americans separately because they diverge so clearly in their views across Christian nationalism scores.

Though Black Americans do not seem to increase in their belief that patriotic violence may soon be necessary across Christian nationalist ideology, we find a steady increase among white Americans. In fact, at the highest levels of Christian nationalist ideology, roughly half of white Americans believe that “Because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to physical violence in order to save our country.”

Clearly, when white Americans who score at the higher end of our Christian nationalism measure believe that their desires for the country are in fact God’s desires for the country, neutralizing threats to God’s vision is paramount. Almost anything can be viewed as a threat, even democracy itself. If it takes violence to achieve God’s/their desired goals, then so be it.

Figure 4: Predicted Percentage of White and Black Americans Who Agree True American Patriots May Have to Resort to Physical Violence across the 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 8 (August 2021); N = 1,051

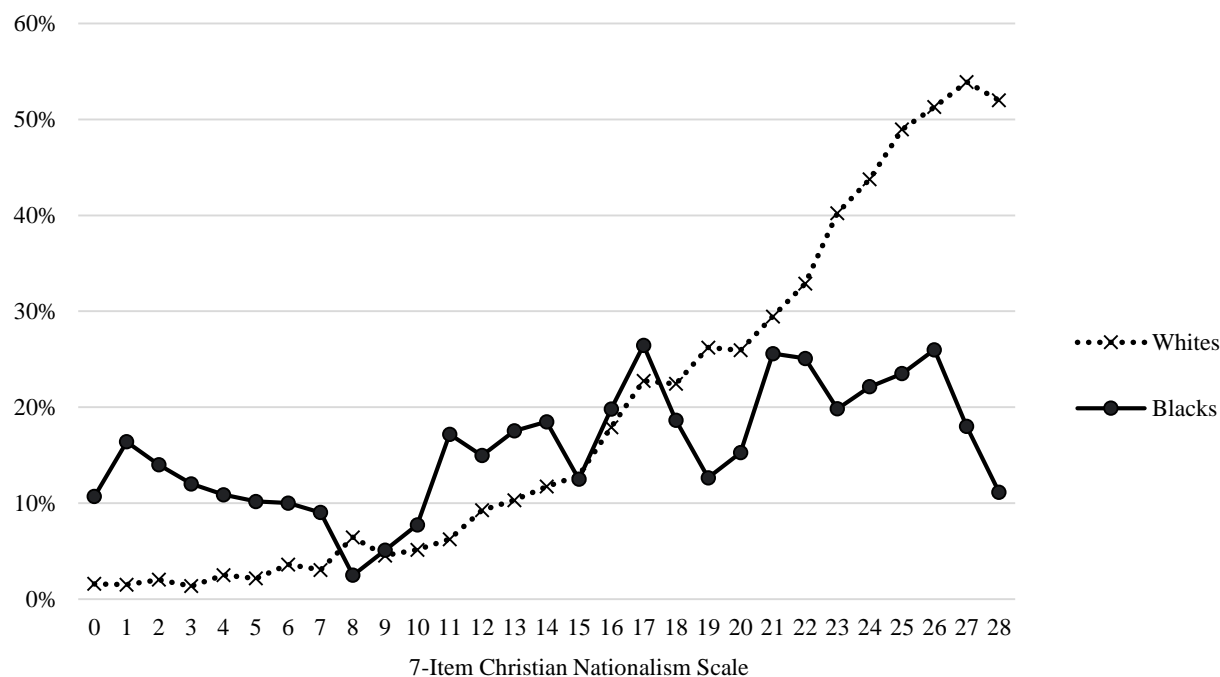
Note: Percentage scores are taken from a binary logistic regression model predicting agreement that violence may be necessary to save the country. Controls are included for race, gender, age, education, income, Southern residence, political party identification, political ideology, church attendance, and religious tradition. Examining interaction terms revealed that Black Americans diverge significantly from white Americans on this outcome across Christian nationalism scores.

Using a slightly different question—but one with suggestive overtones of violence and conspiracy theory—our same August 2021 survey found that roughly 50% of white Americans who score at the higher end of our Christian nationalism measure agree, “There is a storm coming soon that will sweep away elites in power and restore rightful leaders.” And once again, as Figure 5 shows, this association is particularly strong among white Americans and virtually non-existent for Black Americans.

Those of who have read about various QAnon conspiracies will recognize the language in the question above about a “storm” and how it will sweep away elites and restore rightful leaders. This prediction is ultimately born of violence. We saw echoes of this at the insurrection with the gallows, zip ties, and other combat paraphernalia brought and worn by the insurrectionists. We saw it clearly in the note Jacob Chansley—the “QAnon Shaman”—left for Vice President Mike Pence: “It’s only a matter of time, justice is coming!”¹¹

¹¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/01/15/qanon-shaman-trump-kill-pardon/>

Figure 5: Predicted Percentage of White and Black Americans Who Agree a Storm is Coming That Will Sweep Away Elites across the 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 8 (August 2021); N = 1,051

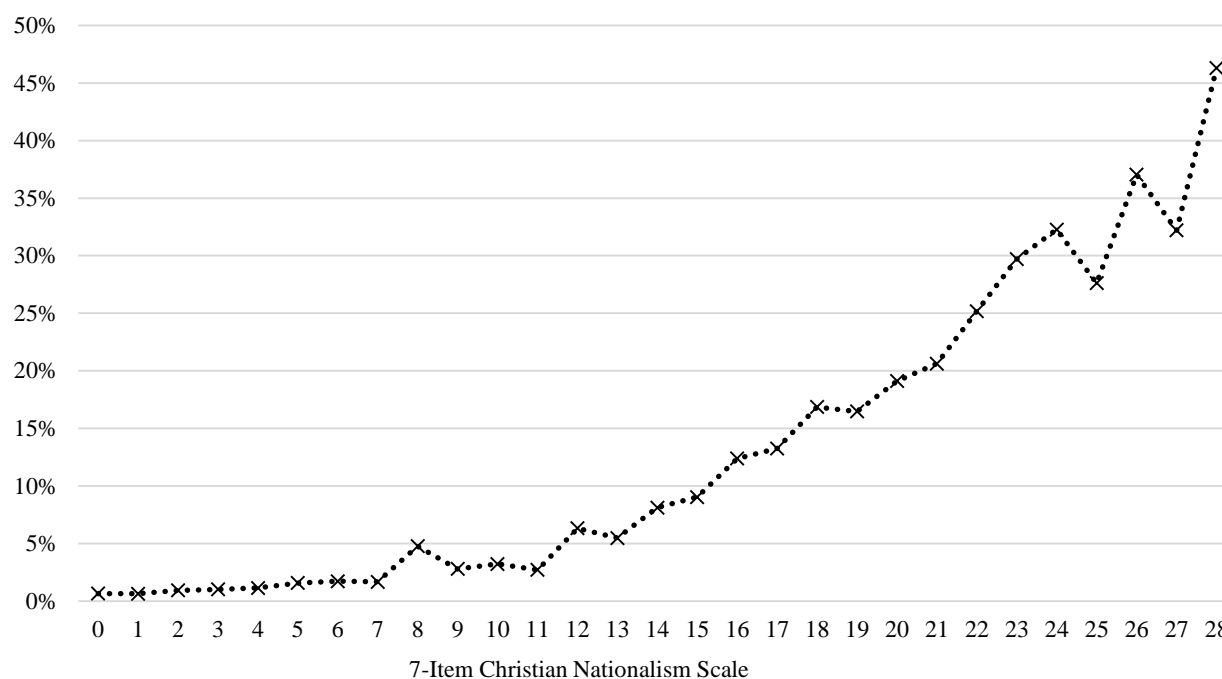
Note: Percentage scores are taken from a binary logistic regression model predicting agreement that a storm is coming to sweep away elites. Controls are included for race, gender, age, education, income, Southern residence, political party identification, political ideology, church attendance, and religious tradition. Examining interaction terms revealed that Black Americans diverge significantly from white Americans on this outcome across Christian nationalism scores.

This leads us to another element related to Christian nationalism besides the “Big Lie” and comfort with political violence that played an influential role in the January 6th attacks: conspiratorial thinking, and in particular, belief in QAnon.

ELEMENT #3: CONSPIRATORIAL THINKING – QANON

In our August 2021 Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, we find that as white Americans score higher on our Christian nationalism measure, they become increasingly more likely to agree with one of the key beliefs of QAnon, that “The government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.”

Figure 6: Predicted Percentage of White Americans Who Believe in the Core Q-Anon Conspiracy Theory across the 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 8 (August 2021); N = 859

Note: Percentage scores are taken from a binary logistic regression model predicting agreement that a storm is coming to sweep away elites. Controls are included for gender, age, education, income, Southern residence, political party identification, political ideology, church attendance, and religious tradition.

Findings in the 2021 Baylor Religion Survey are quite similar: roughly 40 percent of white Americans at the upper end of the Christian nationalism scale agreed with the statement, “Top Democrats are involved in elite child sex-trafficking rings.”

Political scientist Paul Djupe also collected a national survey just before the election in October 2020. He found that of those who score in the highest quartile of our Christian nationalism scale, 73% agreed with the substance of the QAnon conspiracy theory.¹²

In addition to “the Big Lie” (representing perhaps the most serious conspiracy theory) and QAnon (perhaps the most bizarre), in various data sources gathered between 2019 and 2021, we and others find that Christian nationalism is strongly associated with affirming a host of various conspiracy theories and patently false beliefs related to both misinformation and suspicions toward elite cultural and partisan enemies. Some of these are quite serious in their consequences.

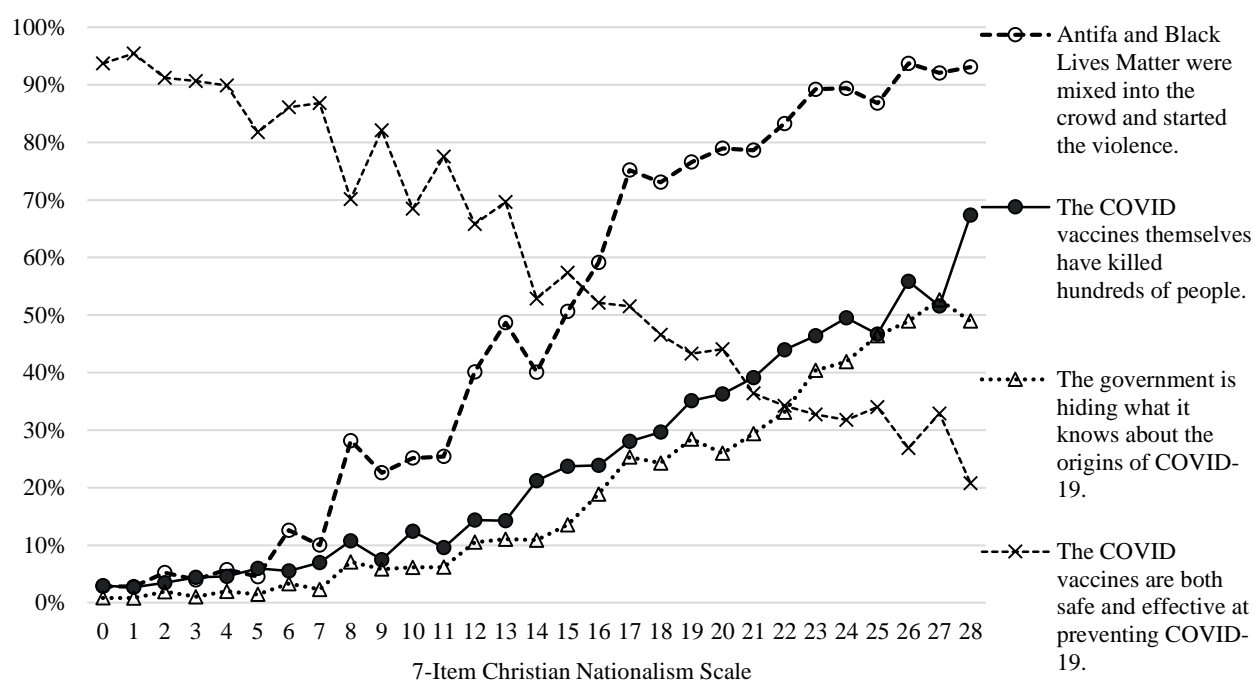
For example, in a recent study, we found that Christian nationalist ideology was strongly associated with Americans believing that “voter fraud is getting rampant these days,” even

¹² Djupe, Paul A., and Jacob Dennen. 2021. “The Anti-Semitism of Christian Nationalists Thanks to QAnon.” Religion in Public. <https://religioninpublic.blog/2021/01/26/the-anti-semitism-of-christian-nationalists-thanks-to-qanon/>.

before the 2020 Presidential election.¹³ This was almost certainly attributable in some measure to then-President Donald Trump's promises of voter fraud throughout the first half of 2020.

More recently, our August 2021 Public Discourse and Ethics Survey wave, we found that Christian nationalist ideology was strongly associated with white Americans believing that outside agitators like Black Lives Matter and Antifa started the violence at the Capitol on January 6th, that the government was hiding what it knows about the origins of COVID-19, and that the COVID-19 vaccines themselves have killed hundreds of people. They are also less likely to believe that the COVID vaccines are both safe and effective at preventing COVID-19.¹⁴

Figure 7: Predicted Percentage of White Americans Who Believe Various Conspiracy Theories across the 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 8 (August 2021); N = 859

Note: Percentage scores are taken from a binary logistic regression model predicting agreement with various beliefs. Controls are included for gender, age, education, income, Southern residence, political party identification, political ideology, church attendance, and religious tradition.

¹³ Perry, Samuel L., Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2022. "I Don't Want Everybody to Vote": Christian Nationalism and Restricting Voter Access in the United States." *Sociological Forum* 37(1):4-26.

¹⁴ In a published study on conspiratorial thinking, we found Christian nationalist ideology strongly predicted that Americans not only rejected vaccination out of hand, but also believed myths about vaccines such as they caused autism or carried common side effects. These myths have also been perpetuated by Donald Trump and could have contributed to the strong relationship between Christian nationalism and greater COVID-19 vaccine resistance in the population. See: Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. 2021. "How Culture Wars Delay Herd Immunity: Christian Nationalism and Anti-Vaccine Attitudes." *Socius*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120977727/>; See also: Corcoran, Katie E., Christopher P. Scheitle, and Bernard D. DiGregorio. 2021. "Christian nationalism and COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and uptake." *Vaccine* 39(45): 6614-6621.

Finally, in another study fielded by colleagues, they found that even when researchers insert a *non-existent* conspiracy theory into the list, respondents who embrace Christian nationalism are more likely to choose it.¹⁵

Thus, there appears to be a close affinity between Christian nationalist ideology and believing outlandish things about one's cultural and political opponents, which potentially influences responses to the 2020 election, COVID-19, and interpretations of the Capitol Insurrection.

Part of this is likely attributable to ethno-cultural tribalism that white Christian nationalism seems to intensify.¹⁶ But another contributing factor is our fractured media landscape that is also associated with Christian nationalist ideology.

ELEMENT #4: FRACTURED MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND INFORMATION SILOS

One of the biggest hurdles historians highlight about our present day is the fracturing of shared sources of information. Today, Americans' spread their attention across numerous news organizations, websites, and social media platforms. Americans who embrace Christian nationalism, we find, do tend to use particular outlets and eschew other news organizations.

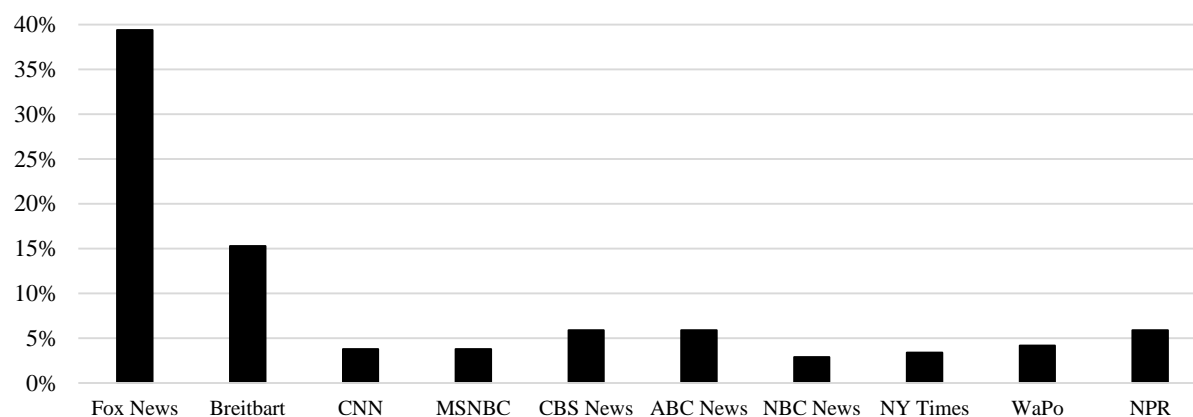
The troubling reality, too, is that many of the more "mainstream" news organizations that exist as publicly available (NBC, CBS, and ABC) are owned by media conglomerates that have a decidedly conservative orientation.

Our surveys of American adults confirm the silo-ing of Americans toward particular news sources. As we show in Figure 8, this holds across the Christian nationalism scale. Though white Americans who score in the top quartile on our Christian nationalism scale report very little trust in the vast majority of news outlets (unsurprising considering their perception that the mainstream media is run by liberal elites), roughly 40% say they have "A Lot" or "A Great Deal" of trust in Fox News. The next most trusted news sources is Breitbart. And even more recently, in the 2021 wave of the Baylor Religion Survey, 64 percent of the top quartile of Americans on our Christian nationalism scale prefer Fox News. News outlets like Fox News and Breitbart have consistently been among those on the Right promoting the Big Lie, supporting the rioters at the Capitol, and entertaining aspects of QAnon.

¹⁵ Analyses of the 2019 Chapman University Survey of American Fears. For more on this survey see Bader, Christopher, Joseph O. Baker, L. Edward Day, and Ann Gordon. 2020. *Fear Itself: The Causes and Consequences of Fear in America*. New York: New York University Press.

¹⁶ See Perry, Samuel L., Ryon J. Cobb, Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2022. "Divided by Faith (in Christian America): Christian Nationalism, Race, and Divergent Perceptions of Racial Injustice." *Social Forces* 101(2): 913-942; Perry, Samuel L., and Andrew L. Whitehead. 2015. "Christian Nationalism and White Racial Boundaries: Examining Whites' Opposition to Interracial Marriage." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(10):1671-1689.

Figure 8: Percentage of White Americans in the Highest Quartile on the Christian Nationalism Scale who Have “A Lot/A Great Deal” of Trust in Various News Sources.



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 3 (April 2020); N = 964

This element of polarized media consumption and siloed information sources serves in some ways to fortify the others.

When making sense of the January 6th attacks, the mutually reinforcing relationships between Christian nationalism, the Big Lie, political violence, conspiratorial thinking, and a fractured media landscape tell much of this story.

These four elements bring with them serious implications, not least of which is how Americans think about the Insurrection.

Therefore, as we continue to try to make sense of January 6th, we can see how Christian nationalism provides theological cover for extremism to flourish and take root. While a small number of Americans who embrace Christian nationalism made their way to the Capitol, they returned to congregations and communities where their views are not too far outside the mainstream.

What should give us pause is that Christian nationalism and the constitutive elements that played such a strong role in the Insurrection are still prevalent throughout US society.

This leads us to two serious implications shaping what we anticipate in the near future. As January 6th fades into the past, events will be revised, scrubbed, and deployed to mobilize Americans toward the same sort of anti-democratic, populist, and authoritarian ends that motivated the attacks.

1. First, we are seeing a real time redefinition happening concerning the Insurrection.
2. Second, political violence is not the only avenue through which Christian nationalism is playing a critical role in centering political power and privilege in the hands of the few. Building on suspicions following “the Big Lie,” Christian nationalism helps provide

theological cover for endorsing voter suppression such that particular electoral outcomes are all but guaranteed.

(MIS)REMEMBERING JANUARY 6TH

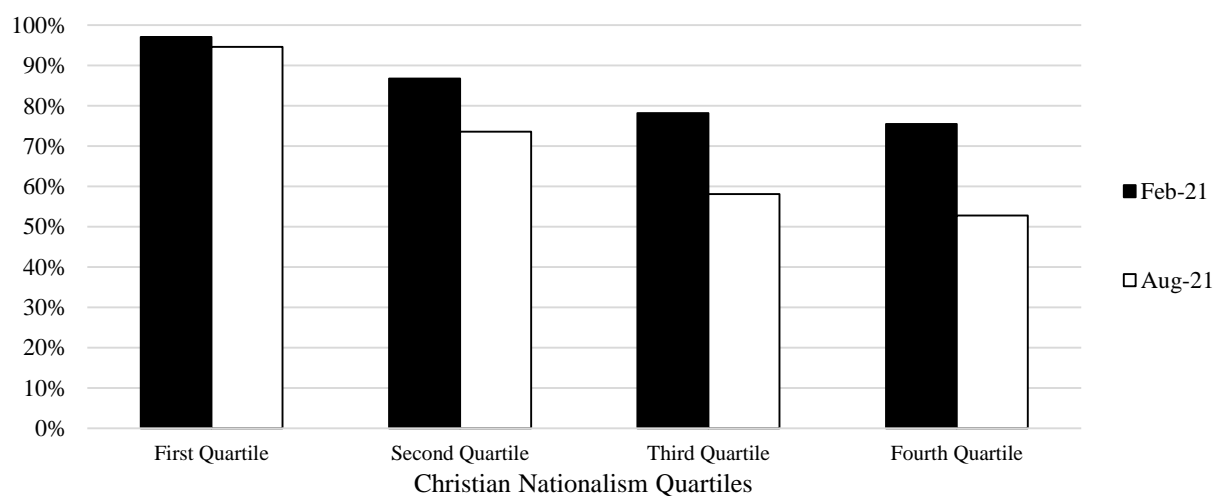
We see a redefinition of what happened on January 6th taking place in real-time across segments of the US adult population.

In February 2021, right after the Insurrection, 76 percent of white Americans in the top quartile of our Christian nationalism measure and 78 percent of white Americans in the second highest quartile thought the “protestors” should be caught and prosecuted. Though this seems high, it should be noted that this was significantly lower than Americans who scored in the lower quartile of our Christian nationalism measure (97 percent), indicating Christian nationalism led white Americans to be more sympathetic to the rioters just after the events took place.

Just 7 months later, we re-interviewed *the same* Americans to see how their attitudes changed.

Christian nationalism was not only influential soon after the insurrection, but its *influence continues to re-shape in real time how Americans are thinking about the insurrection*. By August of 2021, 52 percent of those same white Americans in the top quartile (a 24% drop among *the same* Americans) and 58 percent of those in the second highest quartile (a drop of 20%) now agreed with that the protestors should be arrested. Thus, not only were white Americans who subscribe to Christian nationalism initially more sympathetic toward the rioters, they quickly became more so within roughly half a year.

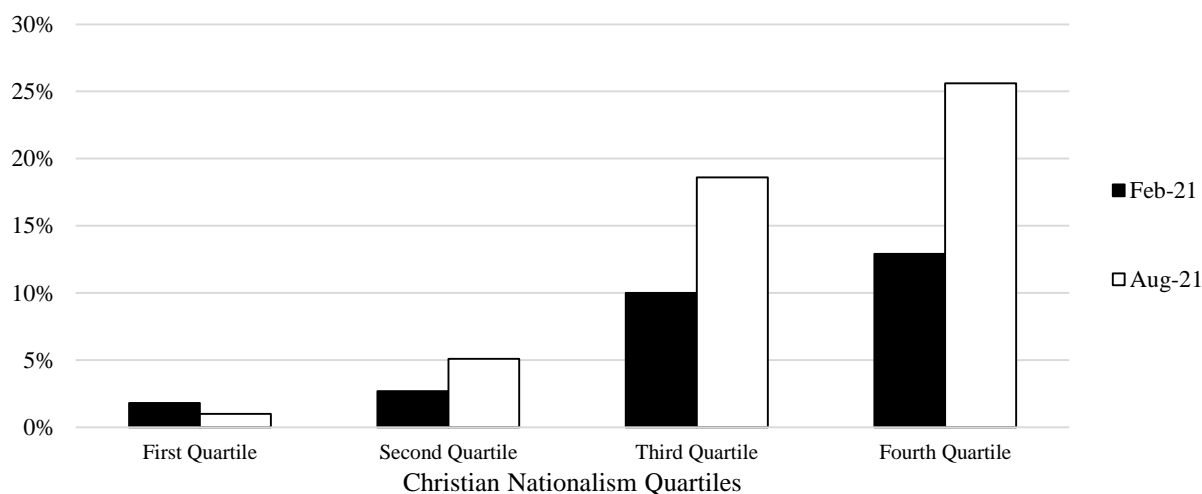
Figure 9: Percentage of White Americans Who Say the Protestors Who Stormed the Capitol Should be Caught and Prosecuted in February 2021 and August 2021 Across Christian Nationalism Quartiles.



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 7 (Feb 2021) & Wave 8 (August 2021)

Alternatively, consider outright support for the “protestors”. In February 2021, just under 13% of white Americans in the top quartile of our Christian nationalism measure agreed that they stand with the protestors who stormed the Capitol. And 7 months later, there is an increase across all groups except the lowest quartile, with those in the top quartile roughly doubling from 12.9 percent to 25.6 percent. The second highest quartile almost doubled in their support as well, and even among those in the third highest quartile we see an increase.

Figure 10: Percentage of White Americans Who Say They Stand on the Side of the Capitol Protestors in February 2021 and August 2021 across Christian Nationalism Quartiles.



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 7 (Feb 2021) & Wave 8 (August 2021)

All of this suggests that Americans who affirm Christian nationalist ideology became considerably *more supportive* of those who stormed the Capitol within less than a year’s time—likely through the mechanisms we have discussed: susceptibility to conspiratorial thinking, including the Big Lie; relative support for political violence; and siloed media sources.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AND VOTER SUPPRESSION

There is a long history in the US of tying together views of a white, Christian nation and limiting who has access to the democratic process.

Christian nationalism is not focused on creating a government for and by the people. It is focused on power—exclusive access to power; power in the “right” hands. Consider these words from the late Rev. Jerry Falwell concerning getting the right men in power. Speaking to fellow pastors, he said: “We have a three-fold primary responsibility: number one, get people saved; number two, get them baptized; number three, get them registered to vote.”

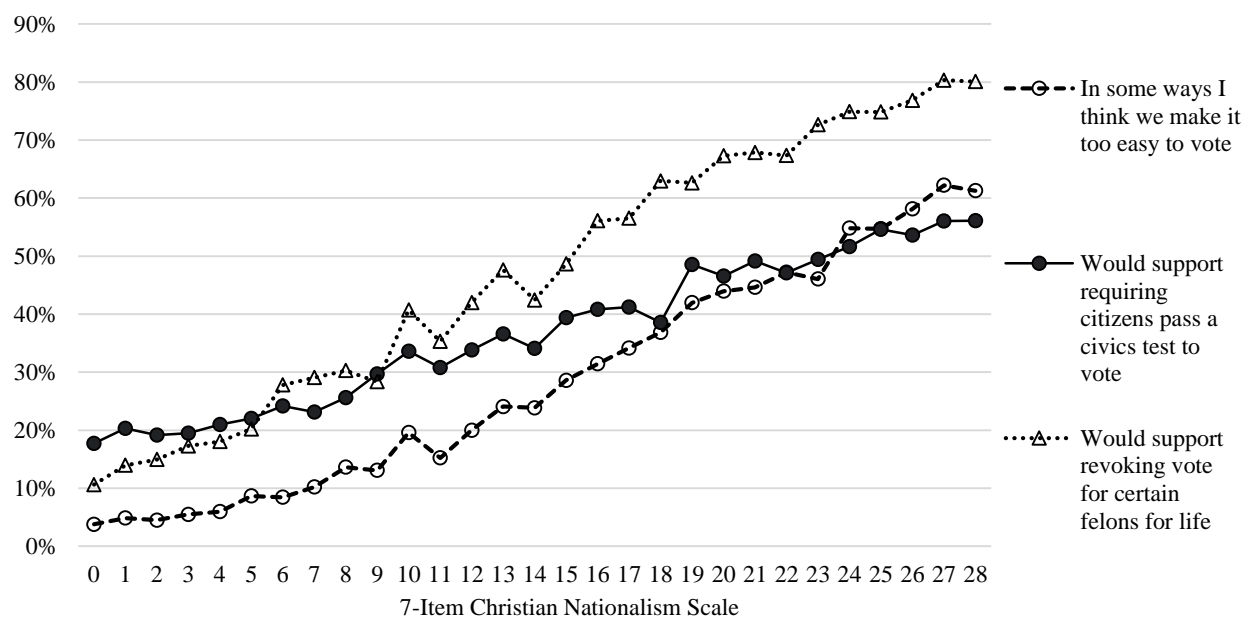
However, it is not just about increasing the ranks of the “right” voters. Speaking to a group of white evangelical pastors and political leaders in Dallas, TX in 1980 (including soon-to-be President Ronald Reagan), co-founder of The Moral Majority and ALEC, Paul Weyrich said:

"Now many of our Christians have what I call the goo-goo syndrome — good government. They want everybody to vote. I don't want everybody to vote. Elections are not won by a majority of people, they never have been from the beginning of our country and they are not now. As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down."

The political violence we saw on January 6th is real. Still, it is not the only way Christian nationalism threatens our democracy, and voter suppression is likely more destructive because it is subtle and has a larger reach.

Consider the percent of white Americans who agree with various statements about voting issues. Before the 2020 election, we gave our panel sample of Americans a survey designed to measure their attitudes toward various aspects of inclusivity and the vote. In October 2020, the more white Americans agree with statements in our Christian nationalism measure, the more likely they are to agree with statements like "We make it too easy to vote," "I would support a law requiring Americans to pass a basic civics test to vote," and "I would support a law revoking the voting rights for certain criminal offenders for life."

Figure 11: Predicted Percentage of White Americans Who Affirm Various Statements about Voting Across the 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale.



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 7 (February 2021); N = 910

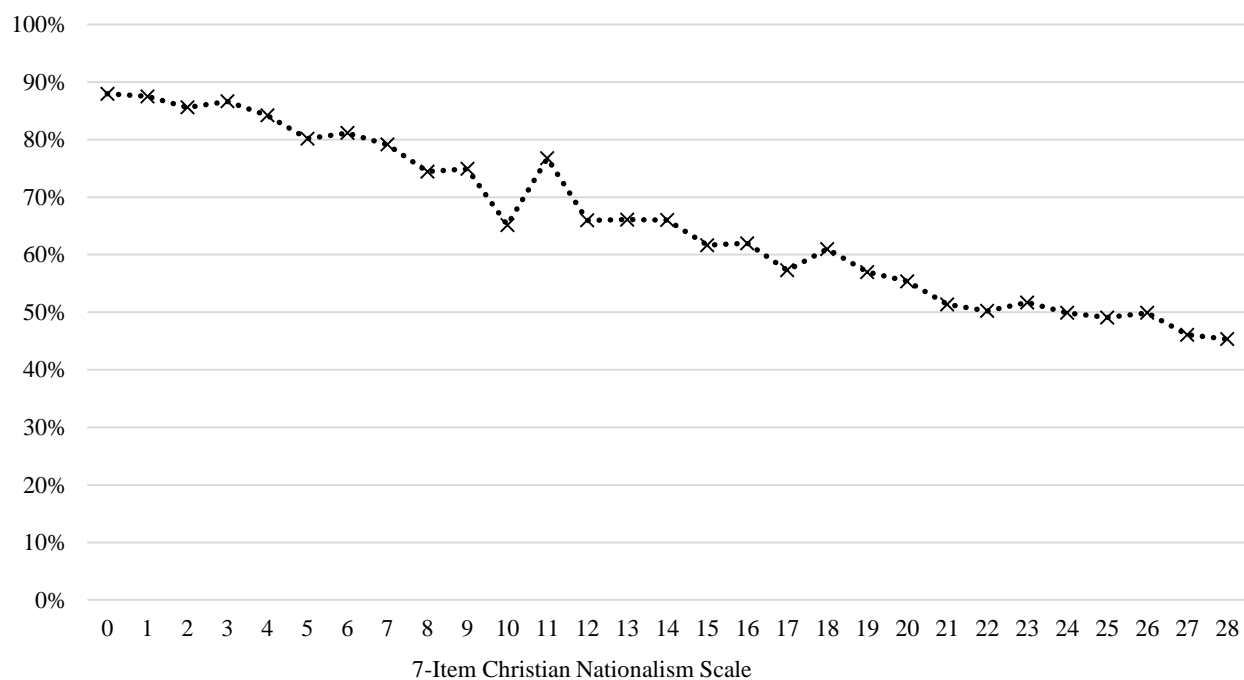
Note: Percentage scores are taken from a binary logistic regression model predicting agreement with these statements. Controls are included for gender, age, education, income, region of residence, political party identification, political ideology, religious commitment, and religious tradition.

Thus, white Christian nationalism seems strongly associated with white Americans wanting voter access to be more restrictive, even before there were accusations of a "stolen election."

Additionally, in Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry’s book, *The Flag and the Cross*, they find that white Americans who embrace Christian nationalism are also much *less* likely to agree that voter suppression is a serious problem or that we should address gerrymandering to ensure fairer congressional elections. Both these trends affirm that white Christian nationalism does not prioritize democratic access but rather the preservation of political victories.

Finally, in our August 2021 wave of the PDES, we asked Americans to indicate simply whether they felt voting was a “right” or a “privilege.” Though the vast majority of Americans indicate that voting is a “right,” the patterns we observe in Figure 12 make clear that as white Americans more strongly affirm Christian nationalist ideology, they are less likely to view voting as a right. In fact, at the extreme ends of our Christian nationalism scale, the majority of white Americans view voting as a privilege—something that can be limited or taken away entirely.¹⁷

Figure 12: Predicted Percentage of White Americans Who Believe Voting is a Right, Not a Privilege across the 7-Item Christian Nationalism Scale



Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 8 (August 2021); N = 859

Note: Percentage scores are taken from a binary logistic regression model predicting the view that voting is a right, rather than a privilege. Controls are included for gender, age, education, income, Southern residence, political party identification, political ideology, church attendance, and religious tradition.

The Brennan Center for Justice reports that between January 1 and December 7, at least **19 states passed 34 laws restricting access to voting**. More than 440 bills with provisions that restrict voting access have been introduced in 49 states in the 2021 legislative sessions. So far, at least

¹⁷ Davis, Joshua T., Samuel L. Perry, and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2023. “Liberty for Us, Limits for Them: Christian Nationalism and Americans’ Views on Citizens’ Rights.” *Sociology of Religion*.

13 bills restricting access to voting have been pre-filed for the 2022 legislative session in four states. In addition, at least 152 restrictive voting bills in 18 states will carry over from 2021.

Christian nationalism provides the ideological cover necessary for the promotion of populist anxiety about national decline that encourages rolling back access to the democratic process.

CONCLUSION

Christian nationalism, among white Americans in particular, presents an existential threat to a pluralistic democratic society in the United States. It is intimately intertwined with and mutually reinforcing various elements that played a significant role in the Capitol Insurrection. Their continued presence in the body politic portend the ongoing possibility of violence in the future.

White Christian nationalism is also intimately intertwined with the ongoing redefinition of what January 6th was, and how we should collectively remember it. Finally, it is strongly associated with Americans' willingness to roll back access to the democratic process in order to achieve particular electoral outcomes.

Americans who hope to see democracy in the United States continue on its path toward the ideals laid out by the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution must recognize and contend with this threat. We ignore white Christian nationalism at our collective peril.

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