

# Christian Nationalism and Violence Against Religious Minorities in the United States: A Quantitative Analysis

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*This study examines the relationship between Christian nationalism—a political theology and cultural framework that seeks to amalgamate the Christian faith and a country’s political life and privilege Christianity in the public square over other faith traditions—and attacks against religious minorities in the United States. Some Christian nationalists believe that it is justifiable to undertake violent actions in order to realize the goals of Christian nationalism. We theorize that the political empowerment of Christian nationalist ideology in the form of politicians expressing Christian nationalist sentiments corresponds to physical attacks on religious minorities carried out by self-professing Christians. We test this theory using a cross-sectional, time-series analysis of antiminority violence in the United States. The results provide robust support for our theory.*

**Keywords:** *Christian nationalism, minorities, violence, United States, religion, terrorism.*

## INTRODUCTION

Christian nationalism is both a political theology and cultural framework that seeks to amalgamate the Christian faith and a country’s political life and calls for the privileging of a certain form of Christianity in the public square (Whitehead and Perry 2020b). This ideology is at once both descriptive and prescriptive: Christian nationalists believe that their countries are defined by Christianity and that their governments and citizens should take steps to keep it that way (Miller 2021). In the United States, Christian nationalism is an important phenomenon. A survey by the Pew Research Center found that about one third of American adults who identify as politically conservative believe that being Christian is very important for being American (Silver 2021). Although the Pew survey finds that more Americans support rather than oppose separation of church and state, it also notes that there remain large reservoirs of support for church-state integration (e.g., Torba and Isker 2022; Wolfe 2022). Another Pew survey revealed that 65 percent of white Evangelicals say, “if they conflict, the Bible should have more influence than the will of the people.” Eighty-one percent of white evangelicals and 45 percent of all Americans believe the United States should be a “Christian nation” (Pew Research Center 2022).

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While the idea of Christian nationalism is not new, only recently have scholars identified it by name and begun studying its effects. The nascent scholarship on the effects of Christian nationalism has linked it to racist, misogynist, authoritarian, homophobic, antivaccine, antiscience, and violent views (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020a; Davis and Perry 2021; Perry, Baker, and Grubbs 2021; Perry et al. 2021; Perry and Whitehead 2015a, 2015b; Perry, Whitehead, and Davis 2019; Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs 2020, 2021a, 2022a; Whitehead and Perry 2015, 2019, 2020a). Whitehead and Perry (2020b) cover a number of these findings in book form.

The literature, by and large, has been survey and interview based, and as a result deals primarily with *attitudes* rather than with *outcomes or actions*. One exception is Whitehead, Perry, and Baker (2018), who found that adherence to Christian nationalist ideology was a robust predictor of voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. Beyond this study, though, we are unaware of any others that have examined the effect of Christian nationalism on actual social or political outcomes. (Subsequent studies again found Christian nationalism to be a strong and robust predictor of the *intention* to vote for Trump in the 2020 presidential election, though these studies, unlike their earlier counterpart, did not consider *actual* voting (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020b; Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs 2022b).)

In this study, we aim to address this lacunae by examining the effect of Christian nationalism on one important societal outcome: physical violence. A few studies suggest that Christian nationalism may be related to violence. Whitehead, Schnabel, and Perry (2018) found Christian nationalist beliefs to be a strong predictor of opposition to gun control in the United States, a country that suffers from one of the highest rates of gun-related fatalities in the world. Thus, it stands to reason that gun violence may increase in places where Christian nationalists are found in greater concentrations. Another study unearthed evidence that Christian nationalist beliefs correspond to popular support for political violence in the United States (Armaly, Buckley, and Enders 2022). This study moves the research agenda forward by examining if Christian nationalism is connected to *actual* physical violence.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Christian nationalist theologies may have a natural violent outgrowth. At the fringes, Christian nationalism has made common cause with far-right groups, such as the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters, and Q-Anon. According to polling by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), white Americans who agree with the statement that “God intended America to be a promised land for European Christians” are more than four times as likely as those who disagree with that statement to believe that “true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country” (Edsall 2022). Christian nationalism’s connection to violence is not just theoretical in nature. The 2021 Capitol insurgency, for example, prominently featured Christian flags, Christian prayers, Christian banners, crosses, and other Christian imagery. Many of the rioters believed that the certification of the 2020 election results would be tantamount to America turning its back on its Christian foundations; they thus hoped to literally—and forcefully—take America back for God.

In this study, we examine if the level of Christian nationalism, operationalized here as the intensity of Christian nationalist sentiments expressed by American politicians, in the American states corresponds to physical violence against religious minorities. To examine this question, we constructed a unique cross-state, time-series data set consisting of politicians’ embrace of Christian nationalism, antiminority violence, and various control variables. Statistical analysis of our data set finds that the political empowerment of Christian nationalism is indeed associated with antiminority violence.

This study proceeds as follows. The following section discusses the social science literature related to the intersection of religious nationalism and violence. It notes that while attention has been paid to this topic in certain religious traditions, few studies have considered the violence of Christian nationalism specifically. In this way, we make an important contribution to the literature. After reviewing the literature, we then discuss why Christian nationalism might theoretically

encourage violence against minorities. The next two sections discuss the data and methods used in the analysis and present the results. The Conclusion summarizes the findings, underscores the paper's contribution to the field, acknowledges limitations, and highlights some avenues for future research.

### **THE VIOLENCE OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM: A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The literature on religious conflict has long noted the relationship between religious nationalism and violence (Fox 2004; Juergensmeyer 1993, 1996, 2008, 2010). The steady and linear increase in violent religious nationalism—the use of violence to achieve a fusion of a particular religion with the identity and culture of a nation or state—since the end of the Cold War has been attributed to a general religious resurgence that has characterized the world beginning in the latter half of the 20th century (Berger 1999; Casanova 1994; Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011; Toft and Shah 2006).

Explanations for the relatively recent surge in violent religious nationalism include the end of the Cold War, trends like modernization and globalization, and the failures of secular nationalism in the developing world (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003; Juergensmeyer 1993; Kepel 1994). Many people of faith have understood the problems plaguing their countries to be the result of their abandonment of religious values. Their solution, accordingly, calls on the faithful to take their countries back for God. Religious nationalists thus seek to identify their countries with a particular religious and righteous tradition.

Religious nationalism would correspond to a new development in global politics following the end of the Cold War, namely increasing levels of religious diversity made possible by globalization processes. The default position of many governments, often with the full backing of historically dominant religious communities, has not been to welcome and protect religious newcomers, but rather to restrict their activities in the name of maintaining national unity (Fox, 2016, 2020; Fox and Akbaba 2015). The animosity between majority and minority religions has frequently turned violent. In some cases, beleaguered religious minorities have fought back against their oppressors (Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vüllers 2016; Finke 2013; Hafez 2003; Henne 2019; Kolbe and Henne 2014; Muchlinksy 2014; O'Hearn 1983). Much more commonly, though, majoritarian religions have sought to violently suppress religious diversity and assert their dominance throughout society at the expense of minority religious communities (Grim and Finke 2011; Henne, Saiya, and Hand 2020; Saiya 2017, 2018, 2019; Saiya and Manchanda 2020; Saiya, Manchanda, and Wadidi 2023).

The vast majority of studies examining the connection between religious nationalism and violence tend to focus on single countries such as India, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. In India, the first decades of the new millennium have witnessed a dramatic rise in attacks perpetrated by Hindus against those of minority faith traditions. At the root of the violence lies "Hindutva," the ideology of the Hindu right, which envisions India as a nation for the majority Hindu population alone to the exclusion of those of other religious traditions (Hansen 1999; Hansen and Jaffrelot 2019; van der veer 1994). Elsewhere in Asia, Buddhist nationalists helped fuel a 26-year war against Sri Lanka's Tamil minority and an ongoing genocide against Muslim Rohingyas in Myanmar (Bartholomeusz and Silva 1998; Deegalle 2006; Dharmadasa 1992).

The extant literature on religious nationalism and violence, though, appears to reflect an Orientalist bias that sees religious nationalism as a problem in the developing world, but one that no longer afflicts the countries of the West. Yet, religious nationalism, in different forms, has also been surging in the ostensibly secular countries of the West, most prominently in countries like Brazil, Hungary, and the United States (Garrard 2020; McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011; Shortle and Gaddie 2015). Many of the countries where Christian nationalism has been growing have also witnessed increasing attacks by self-professing Christians.

Consider the case of the United States, where the politicizing of Christianity has created a fertile breeding ground for a culture of violence to take root. Christian nationalist violence in the United States is nothing new. In the 1990s, violent Christian nationalists carried out the bombings of a government building in Oklahoma City, Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park, and numerous abortion clinics across the country. In recent years, however, Christian nationalist violence has experienced a resurgence. Christian nationalist ideology figured prominently in the violence of the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia; mass shootings at an African American church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015, a Pittsburgh synagogue in 2018, three different spas in the Atlanta area in 2021, a grocery store in Buffalo, New York in 2022; and dozens of instances of "lone-wolf" Christian vigilante violence. And, of course, it was on full display during the 2021 Capitol insurrection (Jenkins 2022).

In Europe, too, we see similar dynamics unfolding. To be sure, the variety of Christian nationalism found in Europe differs from that found in its American counterpart, the European version being more cultural than creedal in nature (Brubaker 2017). Still, the perceived need to defend Christian civilization has bolstered far-right political parties and political leaders with an authoritarian bent. Decrying the threat to Christian civilization stemming from the presence of Islam, these parties and politicians have supported measures such as banning the public wearing of Islamic dress, prohibiting Muslim immigration, and repatriating Muslims to their countries of origin (Behjery 2013; Fox 2020). Accumulating evidence suggests that attacks against Jews, Muslims, and their holy places have been sharply increasing in various European countries, fed by Islamophobic sentiment and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

These cases suggest that religious nationalism and its attendant violence remain important problems in the West. Nevertheless, Christian violence also remains an understudied phenomenon, compared to religious violence in the non-Western world. This study attempts to address this gap. In the following section, we theorize the link between the ideology of Christian nationalism and Christian violence directed against religious minorities.

### **CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AND ANTIMINORITY VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES**

American Christian nationalists believe that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and that Christians, therefore, have a responsibility to maintain the country's Christian identity—an identity they believe is being lost owing to increasing religious diversity and expanding cultural progressivism. For much of its history, the United States stood out among the world's advanced industrial countries for its uniquely high levels of religiosity (Norris and Inglehart 2004). Over the past 30 years, though, the United States has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans, rising from 6 percent in 1991 to 23 percent today (Burge 2021; Pew Research Center 2019). The steep decline in religiosity has been most acute in recent years (Campbell, Layman, and Green 2020). Political scientist Ronald Inglehart noted that "Since 2007, the U.S. has been secularizing more rapidly than any other country for which we have data" (Inglehart 2021:1). The religion most impacted by this decline in faith, of course, is Christianity. A 2021 Gallup poll found that church membership in the United States had fallen below the majority for the first time in nearly a century. The same poll also revealed that the number of people who said religion was very important to them had fallen to 48 percent, a new low point in the polling (Jones 2021). Christianity in the United States is shrinking—and greying. At the same time, the United States has also witnessed the increasingly visible presence of non-Christian religious traditions. Given present trends, Christians will no longer enjoy unquestioned social and political supremacy in the future.

These seismic shifts in the American religious landscape have fed polarization in society and created a sense of angst among some Christian communities that the country is turning its back on its Christian heritage, evoking a sense of perceived victimization (Jones 2016). The young

white nationalist leader and former YouTube personality Nick Fuentes has noted, for instance, that even though America was founded as a “Christian nation,” it will cease to be so “if it loses its white demographic core and if it loses its faith in Jesus Christ” (Jenkins 2022). Similarly, James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, one of the most important conservative Christian organizations in the world, expressed similar concerns regarding the shifting ethnic and religious landscape in the United States:

I can only report that without an overhaul of the law and the allocation of resources, millions of illegal immigrants will continue flooding to this great land from around the world. Many of them have no marketable skills. They are illiterate and unhealthy. Some are violent criminals. Their numbers will soon overwhelm the culture as we have known it, and it could bankrupt the nation. America has been a wonderfully generous and caring country since its founding. That is our Christian nature. But in this instance, we have met a worldwide wave of poverty that will take us down if we don't deal with it. And it won't take long for the inevitable consequences to happen (Dobson 2019)

With respect to research, one study found that highly religious Christians in the United States perceive as much threat to their own identity as to those of religious minorities (Pasek and Cook 2019). Accordingly, Christian nationalist rhetoric is deeply cloaked in threat narratives, prompting efforts to retain Christianity's hegemonic status (Al-Kire et al. 2021). Christian nationalists thus believe they have a divine mandate to take back their country for God. While most Christian nationalists believe that this goal should be accomplished nonviolently—through prayer, voting, and running for political office—a disproportionate number also believe that violence is an acceptable vehicle for saving America's Christian heritage (Public Research on Religion/Brookings 2023).

How do latent proviolence views among Christian nationalists become actualized? We theorize that politicians can play an important role in indirectly encouraging Christian nationalist violence. Examples abound of violent vigilantes taking their cues from politicians they admired (Müller and Schwarz 2023). The manifesto of the 2019 mass shooter in El Paso, Texas, Patrick Wood Crucius, parroted the same anti-immigrant sentiments that had been made by then President Trump and other conservative politicians (Baker and Shear 2019). The president's anti-Muslim comments appear to have helped motivate a bomb plot against a Kansas mosque in 2016 (Levine 2021). Incendiary comments by members of India's ruling BJP have been linked to an increase in attacks by Hindu extremists against minorities (Sharma 2024). On a broader scale, politician hate speech provoked mass antiminority violence during the Balkans wars, the Rwandan genocide, and the Darfur crisis (Piazza 2020). Piazza (2020: 436) argues that

When politicians employ hate speech to demonize political, social, ethnic, cultural or religious groups in society, they prompt members of those groups to increase their affiliation with individuals who are of the same political, social, ethnic, cultural or religious outgroups—ingroup members—and to decrease their tolerance and acceptance of individuals who are members of other rival or disparaged political, social, ethnic, cultural or religious outgroups.

Piazza further notes that “Since 2000, politician hate speech, mostly targeting ethnic, racial, social, or religious minorities...has been a feature of domestic terrorism-afflicted countries such as Iraq, Nepal, Somalia, Bangladesh, Turkey, Colombia, Israel, Egypt, Ukraine, Russia, the Philippines, Italy, Greece, Lebanon, and Sri Lanka” (Piazza 2020: 433).

While hate speech can directly trigger violence against minority groups, more subtle speech that would not necessarily be labeled “hate speech” can have a similar effect. When opportunistic politicians exploit a dominant religion and affirm majoritarianism, even without explicitly denigrating minorities, they help create more salient and hardened religious cleavages in society that fuel social polarization. They can also create and sustain environments of hostility toward outgroups, thus promoting suspicion and distrust toward those groups who in some way depart from the beliefs or identity of the dominant faith tradition. The politicizing of religion in this way

often results in situations where dominant faith traditions believe that their de facto privileged station entitles them to treat religious minorities as second-class citizens (Finke, Martin, and Fox 2017). When politicians affirm the idea that a country belongs to a particular religious group, their beneficiaries may arrive at the reasonable conclusion that the state implicitly approves of discrimination, harassment, and even violence against nonprivileged faiths. Thus, the language politicians use can fuel tribalism, reduce inhibitions, and reduce the perceived costs of engaging in majoritarian violence, even if this is not the intention of the said speech.

The resulting vigilante violence is committed for the purpose of protecting a country's majority faith tradition from the threat posed by religious outsiders. Finke and Harris (2012: 55) explain that "[w]hen a religious group achieves a monopoly and holds access to the temporal power and privileges of the state, the ever-present temptation is to openly persecute religious competitors." In short, there is a powerful symbiotic relationship between politician rhetoric from above and antiminority violent hostility from below.

In the context of the United States, we theorize that the rhetorical empowering of Christianity by American politicians can embolden violent Christian vigilantes, much like has happened around the world in countries dominated by other religious traditions. Minorities, in particular, are especially susceptible to violence carried out by religious nationalists (Henne, Saiya, and Hand 2020). Because violent Christian nationalists see the presence of non-Christian faith traditions as a threat to Christianity's dominant status in society, they are much more likely to target those belonging to minority religious traditions with their violence. Although Christian nationalist violence can theoretically occur anywhere Christian nationalists are found, we argue that it will be more likely in places where the ideology *enjoys political empowerment*. This discussion yields the following hypothesis:

**H 1.** *American states with politicians exhibiting more intense Christian nationalist sentiments will experience more attacks by self-professing Christians against religious minorities than states with politicians exhibiting lower levels of Christian nationalist sentiments.*

## DATA AND METHODS

The aim of this study is to evaluate the relative role of Christian nationalism on the outbreak of Christian-based violence in the United States against religious minorities. In order to test our hypothesis, we constructed an original cross-sectional, time-series data set containing information on Christian nationalism and violence in all 50 American states from 1990 to 2018, a time period corresponding to data availability. The state-year is the unit of analysis. Because the dependent variable, the number of attacks by self-professing Christians in a state in a year, is an event count that does not include negative values and is unevenly distributed across observations, negative binomial regression with robust standard errors clustered on states is the most appropriate statistical technique to gauge the relative impact of the independent and control variables on the dependent variable.

### Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable, the number of physical attacks against minorities carried out by self-professing Christians—is derived and coded from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Housed at the University of Maryland, the GTD is an open-source database that includes information on all terrorist attacks around the world (Global Terrorism Database 2022). From this information, we code the number of attacks by self-professing Christians against non-Christians on a yearly basis in the United States. We also include attacks by white supremacists if they claimed to be acting in the name of the Christian faith. The targets of violence include, but are

not limited to, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, and Hindus. The identities of the perpetrators and victims were ascertained using information found in the description of the attack as recorded by the GTD.

### **Independent Variable**

As noted earlier, we believe that Christian nationalist violence is more likely to occur in contexts where it receives political empowerment. To capture Christian nationalism's political empowerment at the state level, we examine if national-level senators elected from individual states articulate Christian nationalist beliefs. We consider senators instead of congressional representatives, owing to the fact that senators represent entire states, whereas representatives represent only a single district within a state.

Thus, our theoretically central independent variable, *Christian\_Nationalism*, is a measure of the extent to which sitting senators of a U.S. state publicly articulate Christian nationalist beliefs. To determine this, we evaluated if, in their public statements, sitting or aspirational senators who eventually won election to the Senate made public statements supportive of Christian nationalist ideals, using as a guide a set of 10 pro-Christian nationalist statements sourced from McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle (2011), Whitehead, Perry, and Baker (2018), and Stewart, Edgell, and Delehanty (2018). Below are the guiding statements used to ascertain a senator's commitment to Christian nationalist principles.

1. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation."
2. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "The federal government should advocate Christian values."
3. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "There should be no separation of church and state."
4. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces."
5. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "The federal government should allow prayer in public schools."
6. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "America holds a special place in God's plan."
7. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "The United States was founded as a Christian nation."
8. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "Being Christian is important for being a good American."
9. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "A President should have strong religious beliefs."
10. Made public remarks approximating the statement that "Society's rules should be based on God's laws."

It might be argued that some of these indicators do not explicitly denote Christian nationalist sympathies, as only half of the aforementioned statements mention Christianity specifically. However, we would counter that because the majority population in each state is Christian, and all senators who affirmed these positions were Christians, they do in fact serve as effective proxies for Christian nationalism. The authors carefully read the public statements of each politician in its full context to ascertain whether or not they were clearly intended on privileging Christianity in the public square or were made in reference to America's "Christian roots." If not, then the statement was not included in the count of the independent variable.

Figure 1  
Sample coding of independent variable.

Senator	State	Expression of Christian Nationalism	Venue	Coding	Statement Matched
Ted Cruz	Texas	“any president who doesn’t begin every day on his knees isn’t fit to be a commander-in-chief of this country.”	2015 National Religious Liberties Conference	1	9

Systematic internet searches and searches of the Congressional Record matching each senator’s name to numerous keywords were conducted to produce speeches or statements potentially indicative of Christian nationalist sentiments. The keywords included the following: “Christian,” “Christianity,” “God,” “Jesus,” “Bible,” “religion,” “religious,” “church,” and “prayer.” The speeches and comments were then read in their entirety by the authors to assess if they contained attitudes supportive of Christian nationalism. An example of a positive coding of Christian nationalism is given in Figure 1.

The independent variable itself is a tally of the number of Christian nationalist guiding statements implicitly or explicitly expressed by both of a state’s sitting senators. In theory, this number could be as high as 20 (10 statements × 2 senators), though we find that in actuality the highest number in our sample is only five. Still, the range of the independent variable (0–5) is more than sufficient to effectively serve as a proxy for Christian nationalism or lack thereof.

### Control Variables

There are a number of other variables that may affect a state’s level of antiminority violence, which we attempt to control for in our models. First, we include a number of general predictors that past studies have found to be related to the onset of societal violence: a state’s level of per capita wealth logged (*Logged\_GDP\_Capita*), a state’s total population logged (*Logged\_Population*), and its geographic area logged (*Logged\_Area*). The values for these three variables are taken from the U.S. Bureau of Census (2020).

Second, we include political variables that may be related to the onset of societal violence. We control for the political party the state voted for during the most recent presidential election (*Party\_Voted*) to account for the possible effect that political partisanship may have in promoting Christian nationalist violence. This variable is coded “1” if the state voted for a Republican candidate during the most recent presidential election, and “0” if the state voted for a Democrat. The value is applied starting from the last year of the previous president’s term of office to the third year of the current president’s term of office. For example, a state that voted for a Democrat during the 1992 Presidential election would be coded as 0 for 1992, 1993, 1994, and 1995, even though George H. W. Bush was president in 1992 and Bill Clinton would take office only in 1993. In addition, we include a control for *Trump*, a binary variable coded “1” if Donald J. Trump won the presidential race in a state and “0” otherwise. The inclusion of these political control variables helps to alleviate concerns that our Christian nationalism variable is merely a reflection of political conservatism.

In addition to these general predictors and political controls, we also include three demographic controls that might be expected to predict the likelihood of Christian nationalist violence: the percentage of white Americans (*Percentage\_White*) in each state and the percentage of a state’s population that is college educated (*Completed\_College*) (U.S. Bureau of Census

Table 1: Summary statistics

Variables	(1) <i>N</i>	(2) Mean	(3) SD	(4) Min	(5) Max
<i>CN_Attacks</i>	1,450.000	0.057	0.352	0.000	7.000
<i>Christian_Nationalism</i>	1,311.000	1.107	1.217	0.000	5.000
<i>Logged_Population</i>	1,450.000	15.047	1.014	13.025	17.433
<i>Logged_Area</i>	1,450.000	11.703	1.098	8.294	14.360
<i>Logged_GDP_Capita</i>	1,436.000	11.881	1.072	9.597	14.913
<i>Violent_Crime</i>	1,450.000	433.736	213.568	65.400	1,244.300
<i>Percentage_White</i>	1,450.000	70.196	18.980	0.000	95.000
<i>Complete_College_Total</i>	1,450.000	0.249	0.067	0.123	0.445
<i>Party_Voted</i>	1,449.000	0.511	0.500	0.000	1.000
<i>Trump</i>	1,450.000	0.069	0.253	0.000	1.000
<i>Religious_Attendance</i>	1,450.000	3.417	0.330	2.705	4.141

2020). The third demographic variable controls for the influence of state-level violent crime (*Violent\_Crime*) sourced from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Crime Data Explorer (2022), from which we extracted the data for state-level violent crime. The data represent the FBI's estimate of the number of violent crimes committed in a state and year, per every 100,000 people.

Finally, we also included a control variable accounting for the religious differences between states that might be driving Christian nationalist violence. Specifically, we include data from the Pew 2014 Religious Landscape Study (2014)—the latest year in which the study was conducted across all 50 states—for the average attendance at religious services for each state (*Religious\_Attendance*). The inclusion of this variable helps differentiate Christian nationalism from religious devotion.

The summary statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1.

## RESULTS

The results are given in Table 2. We present four different model specifications. The first controls for general characteristics of states believed to be associated with political violence: *Logged\_Population*, *Logged\_GDP\_Capita*, and *Logged\_Area*. The next one additionally controls for demographic variables that could contribute to political violence: *Violent\_Crime*, *Percentage\_White*, and *Complete\_College\_Total*. The third specification additionally controls for political variables including *Party\_Voted* and *Trump*. The last specification controls for all these covariates as well as a measure of personal religiosity, *Religious\_Attendance*. The outcome variable, *CN\_Attacks*, remains the same across models.

The results provide evidence in support of our hypothesis that Christian nationalist sentiments are associated with higher levels of antiminority violence. The main independent variable of interest, *Christian\_Nationalism*, is statistically significant at the 1 percent level in two model specifications, at the 5 percent level in one model specification, and at the 10 percent level in the final specification. In all the cases, the coefficient is signed in the expected positive direction; Christian nationalism is positively associated with antiminority violence. Among the covariates, *Logged\_GDP\_Capita* holds statistical significance in two specifications, *Party\_Voted* in one of the specifications, and *Trump* in both of the specifications in which it is included.

Table 2: Main models

Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4
<i>Christian_Nationalism</i>	0.388*** (0.138)	0.390*** (0.130)	0.439** (0.201)	0.425* (0.220)
<i>Logged_Population</i>	-0.620 (0.885)	-0.405 (1.137)	1.099 (1.336)	1.049 (1.378)
<i>Logged_Area</i>	0.069 (0.168)	0.085 (0.175)	0.146 (0.169)	0.154 (0.168)
<i>Logged_GDP_Capita</i>	1.933** (0.753)	1.713* (1.009)	0.218 (1.214)	0.260 (1.251)
<i>Percentage_White</i>		0.000 (0.009)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.005 (0.007)
<i>Complete_College_Total</i>		1.307 (3.978)	1.279 (4.281)	1.354 (4.231)
<i>Violent_Crime</i>		0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
<i>Party_Voted</i>			-0.619 (0.418)	-0.672* (0.381)
<i>Trump</i>			1.800*** (0.461)	1.786*** (0.460)
<i>Religious_Attendance</i>				-0.203 (0.512)
Constant	-18.765*** (4.119)	-20.010*** (6.729)	-25.156*** (7.139)	-24.280*** (8.089)
Observations	1,301	1,301	1,300	1,300

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \* $p < .1$ .

To interpret the coefficients, we show the incidence rate ratios in Table 3. The model ratios indicate that states where senators articulated support for Christian nationalism recorded between 1.4 and 1.5 times the number of Christian nationalist attacks per one-unit increase in the theoretically central independent variable.

We also ran eight additional robustness checks to test the validity of our results. First, to account for excessive zeros that may arise due to structural reasons, we modeled the data using zero-inflated negative binomial regression instead of negative binomial regression, finding that even with this different methodological test, the results continued to hold statistical significance (Table A1 in the online appendix). Second, to check that events in a given year are not simply correlated to or influenced by those in the previous year, we included the lagged value of the main dependent variable as an additional control and found that the results continued to hold statistical significance in support of our theory (Table A2 in the online appendix). Third, to account for delayed effects, we lagged the main independent variable by a period of 1 year. After doing so, it was found that our results upheld significance (Table A3 in the online appendix). Fourth, we controlled for two additional religious covariates sourced from the Pew Research Center (2014)—*Religious\_Importance* and *Religious\_Membership*—and found that results were upheld (Table A4 in the online appendix). Fifth, it might be argued that religious violence causes senators to affirm their commitment to Christian principles. Hence, we checked for reverse causality by switching the main independent and the dependent variables and running an ordered logit

Table 3: Incidence rate ratios

Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4
<i>Christian_Nationalism</i>	1.474*** (0.203)	1.477*** (0.193)	1.551** (0.312)	1.530* (0.336)
<i>Logged_Population</i>	0.538 (0.476)	0.667 (0.758)	3.000 (4.009)	2.854 (3.934)
<i>Logged_Area</i>	1.072 (0.180)	1.089 (0.190)	1.158 (0.196)	1.167 (0.197)
<i>Logged_GDP_Capita</i>	6.907** (5.198)	5.545* (5.592)	1.244 (1.510)	1.297 (1.622)
<i>Percentage_White</i>		1.000 (0.00889)	0.996 (0.00706)	0.995 (0.00728)
<i>Complete_College_Total</i>		3.693 (14.69)	3.594 (15.39)	3.874 (16.39)
<i>Violent_Crime</i>		1.000 (0.00109)	1.000 (0.000961)	1.000 (0.000961)
<i>Party_Voted</i>			0.539 (0.225)	0.511* (0.195)
<i>Trump</i>			6.049*** (2.788)	5.964*** (2.740)
<i>Religious_Attendance</i>				0.816 (0.418)
Constant	0.000*** 0	0.000*** 0	0.000*** 0	0.000*** 0
Observations	1,301	1,301	1,300	1,300

Note: Robust seeform in parentheses.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \* $p < .1$ .

model on *Christian\_Nationalism* as the outcome variable. The results did not provide any statistical support for reverse causation (Table A5 in the online appendix). Sixth, we reran the analysis using bootstrap regression, a resampling technique that reduces bias in estimates. The results remained unchanged (Table A6 in the online appendix). Seventh, we restricted the analysis to the post-2000 period to check that the results are not being swayed by a shift toward postmodern values and the decline of religion. The results continued to support our main hypothesis that Christian nationalism corresponds to greater levels of antiminority violence (Table A7 in the online appendix). Lastly, we included a control for political partisanship sourced from the Federal Election Commission, namely, the share of votes received by the Democratic (*DemShare*) and Republican (*RepShare*) presidential candidates in the most recent presidential election (Table A8 in the online appendix). Even after controlling for these alternative measures, the results continued to support our hypothesis that greater Christian nationalism is associated with higher levels of violence against minorities.

In summary, all of the results, including the robustness checks, provide ample support for the hypothesis that the public expression of Christian nationalist sentiments on the part of American senators is positively and robustly associated with greater attacks by Christians against non-Christians. In no cases was the Christian nationalism variable found to be statistically insignificant. In every case, it is signed in the expected positive direction, indicating support for our theory. Importantly, that our measure of Christian nationalism emerges as statistically significant and positive across models, despite the inclusion of numerous control variables, indicates that it is not simply capturing political partisanship.

## CONCLUSION

Christian nationalists believe that America presently sits at a critical juncture. A country where Christianity historically provided the dominant political and cultural narrative is now besieged by the forces of pluralism and progressivism. Christian nationalists, therefore, believe that they have a divine mandate to take back America for God. To fail in this mission risks jeopardizing the blessings of God. The gravity of the situation has moved some Christian nationalists to espouse violence as a legitimate tool for restoring the status quo of Christian cultural and political dominance. Indeed, Christian nationalism was on full display during one of the most breath-taking events in modern American history: the 2021 Capitol insurgency.

In this study, we theorized that the political empowerment of Christianity in the form of rhetorical support for Christian nationalist ideals from politicians encourages antiminority violence. Our results provide strong support for our hypothesis. The results were found to be robust to several different model specifications and statistical approaches. Our findings contribute to a burgeoning literature on the causes of antiminority violence.

This study advances the field in three ways. First, it has demonstrated that violent religious nationalism is not just a problem in the developing world. It continues to manifest in the world's oldest experiment in secular democracy, the United States. Second, the paper has connected the ideology of Christian nationalism to a real-world phenomenon of great importance, societal violence. In this way, it has moved the literature on Christian nationalism from the theoretical to the practical. Third, it has offered a unique way for scholars to operationalize Christian nationalism at the level of the state.

Still, our analysis contains some limitations that should be considered. We note three such limitations here and ways that these shortcomings can be remedied in the future. First, the rhetorical support given by politicians to Christian nationalist ideals may not always be indicative of the level of support for Christian nationalism among their constituencies. State-level surveys could greatly expand our understanding of the effects of Christian nationalism on political and social outcomes in the United States by collecting yearly data on questions pertaining to Christian nationalism. Furthermore, more nuanced survey questions could provide greater insights into which particular aspects of Christian nationalist ideology correspond to violence. Second, the study considers only statements of senators. The same exercise could be replicated coding state representatives, thereby gaining greater variation in each state that might be overlooked. Third, we have not directly tested the mechanism we have proposed linking Christian nationalist rhetoric of politicians to antiminority violence. Case studies of individual attackers would help in showing that they took the views of politicians seriously in carrying out their violence.

Future work can build upon this study in three ways. First, it can examine the effect of Christian nationalism on religious violence in contexts outside of the United States. For example, Canada, Europe, Central Africa, and Latin America have all witnessed growing far-right Christian nationalist movements and attendant religious violence. Still, Christian nationalism in these regions has received very little scholarly attention. Second, while we have presented the results of a quantitative analysis, future work can complement this study by using case study methodology to show how Christian nationalism has produced violence in specific states. Third, future work can also look at the effect of Christian nationalism on other outcomes of political and social importance beyond violence.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None of the authors have a conflict of interest to disclose.

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**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix