

Christian Nationalism: A Primer

Overview

- **What is Christian nationalism?**
- **Who supports Christian nationalism?**
- **Why do people support Christian nationalism?**
- Why does Christian nationalism matter?
- How has Christian nationalism mattered for my faith?

What is Christian Nationalism?

- “[A] cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life”
- “[A] set of beliefs that the nation is of, by, and for Christians”
- A fusion of Christian and American identities

- The first European settlers were devout Christians who came to the United States for religious freedom.



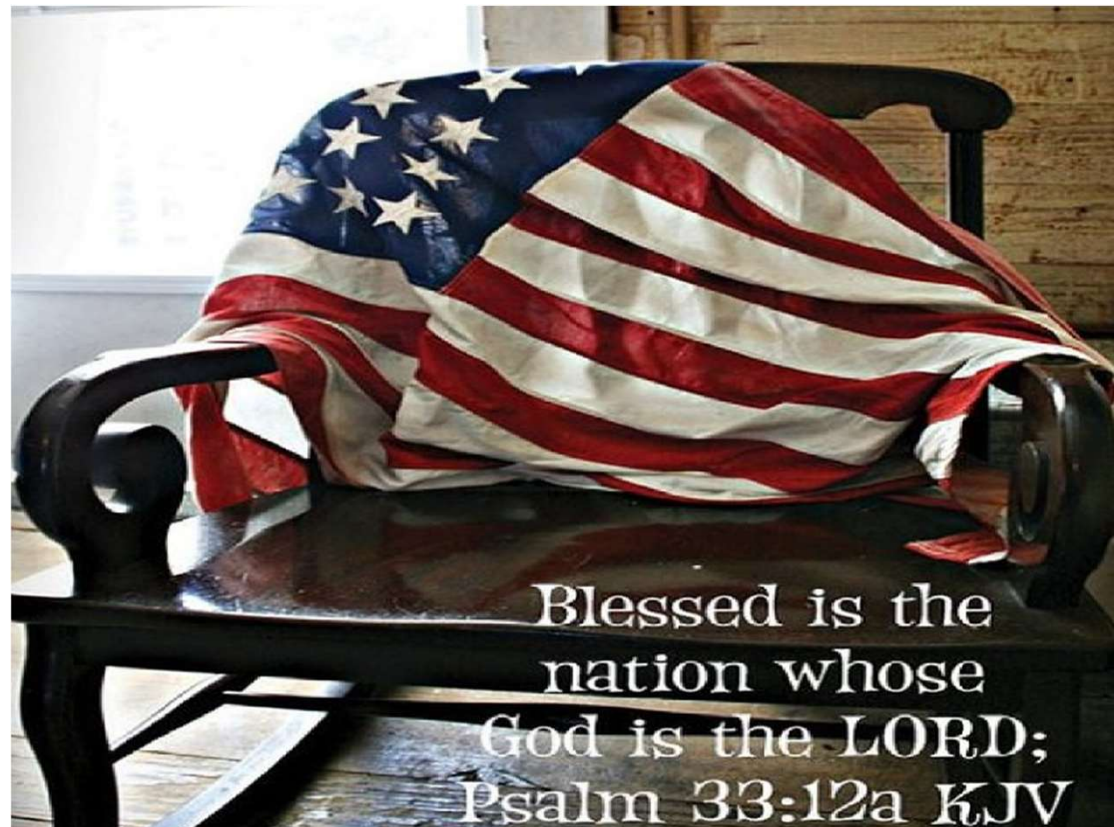
- The Founders were men of deep faith who relied on their Christian principles when establishing the country.



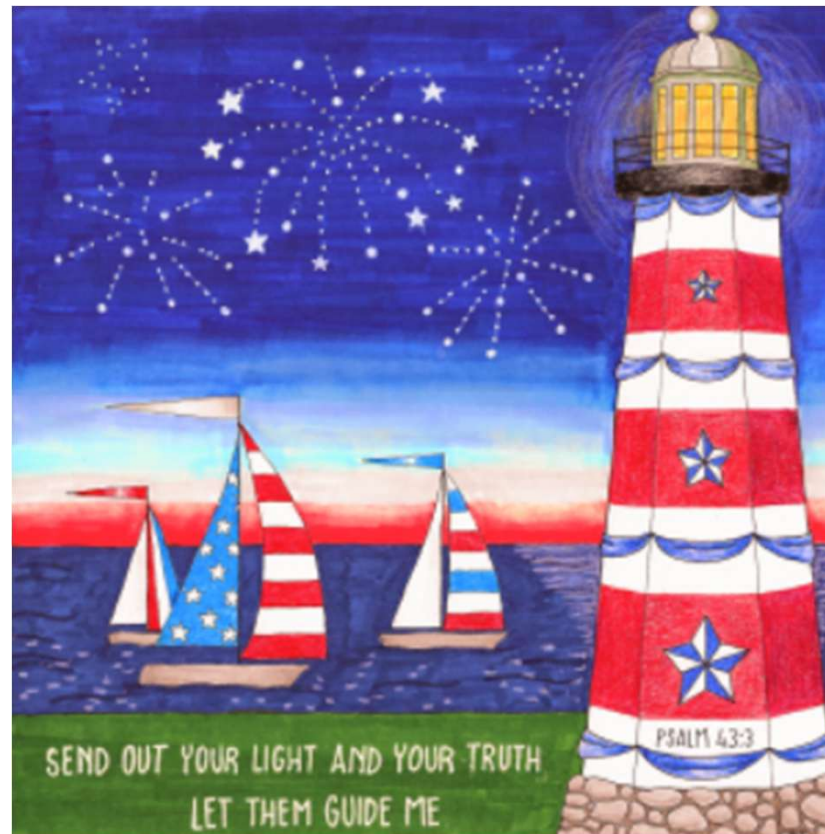
- The expansion of the United States was God's design for spreading Christian values.



- The United States' commitment to its (God-inspired) principles have contributed to the US' wealth and power.



- When it has acted on its Christian principles, the US has been a beacon of freedom and good for the world.



Christian nationalism seeks the fusion of Christianity and the United States

- Governmental institutions and policies should reflect Christianity
- True Americans are Christians

Christian Nationalism

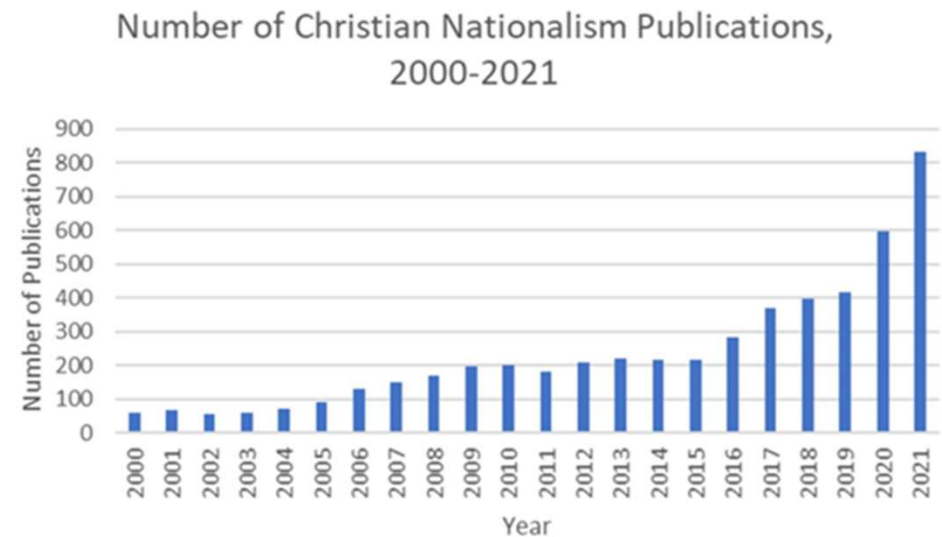
- Christian nationalism isn't a *religious* worldview. It's a *political* worldview.
- Religion is complicated (beliefs, behaviors, belonging)
- Other aspects of religion have different effects
 - Beliefs about religious pluralism
 - Religious service attendance

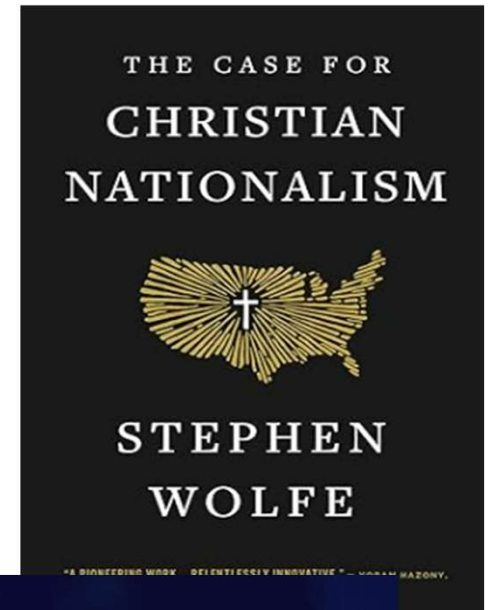
Christian **Nationalism**

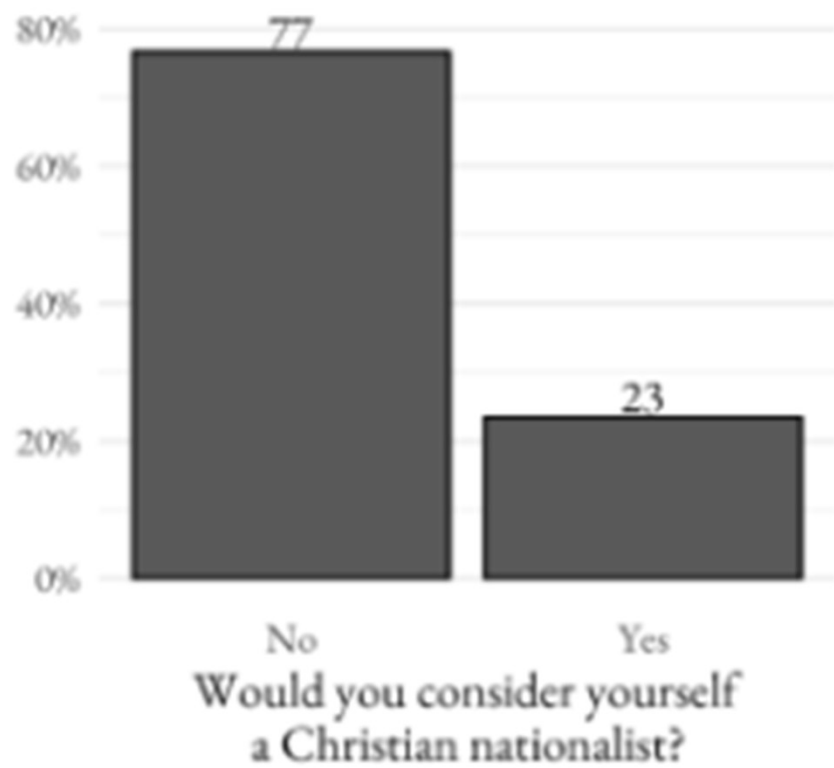
- Nationalism: national superiority and dominance, ethno-religious chauvinism directed at both foreign nationals and internal religious and ethnic minorities
- Patriotism: positive feelings about and a sense of pride in one's country, involves an inclusive sense of national belonging

Christian Nationalism as a Concept

- These ideas are not new; the name *Christian nationalism* is new
- Emerges in 2015 in sociology
- Public press, esp. after 2021
- Initial framing = negative







Christian Nationalism is Both Savior and Smear



Christian nationalism is a term invented by the left to smear Christians

Source: January 2024 Survey of 1500 Christians, weighted.

Who supports Christian nationalism?

Elites

David Barton and
WallBuilders

- Education
- Political advocacy



Tony Perkins and the Family Research Council

- Washington Watch
- State-level organizations
- Pray, Vote, Stand Summit
- Lobbying
- Watchmen on the Wall
- Project 2025



Alliance Defending Freedom

- Religious freedom, free speech, parental rights, abortion, marriage/family
- National network of attorneys
- Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores (2014)
- Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission (2018)
- Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022)
- Project 2025



Mike Johnson, Speaker of the US House of Representatives

- Formerly affiliated with ADF
- Proposed bills to limit discussion of LGBT topics in elementary schools
- Voted for a national abortion ban



- Among the Public
- How do public opinion researchers determine Christian nationalist support?
- Whitehead and Perry (2020)
 - (1) The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation.
 - (2) The federal government should advocate Christian values.
 - (3) The federal government should allow prayer in schools.
 - (4) The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces.
 - (5) The success of the US is part of God's plan.
 - (6) The federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state. (reversed)

PRRI

- (1) The US government should declare America a Christian nation.
- (2) US laws should be based on Christian values.
- (3) If the US moves away from our Christian foundations, we will not have a country anymore.
- (4) Being Christian is an important part of being truly American.
- (5) God has called Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of American society.

- The public is somewhat evenly divided

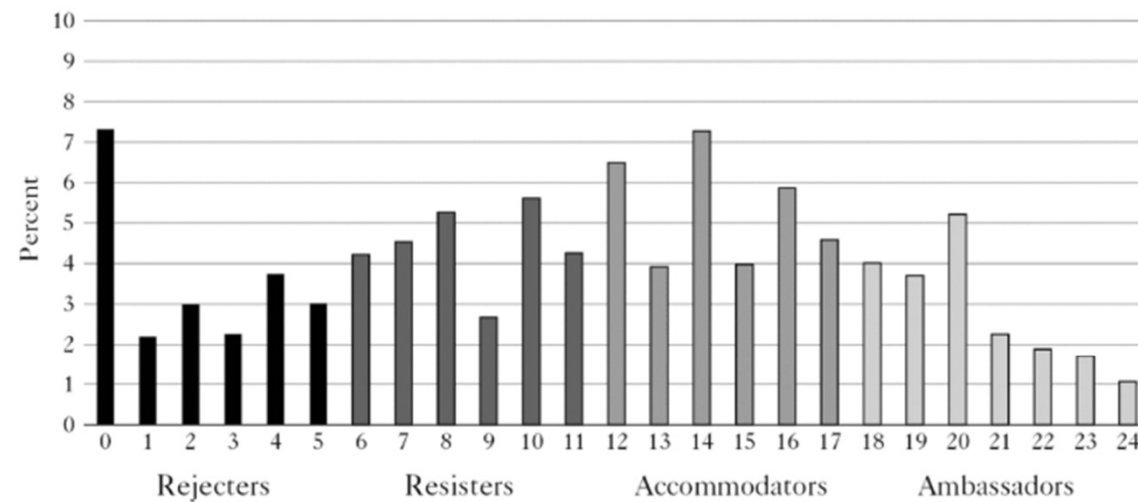


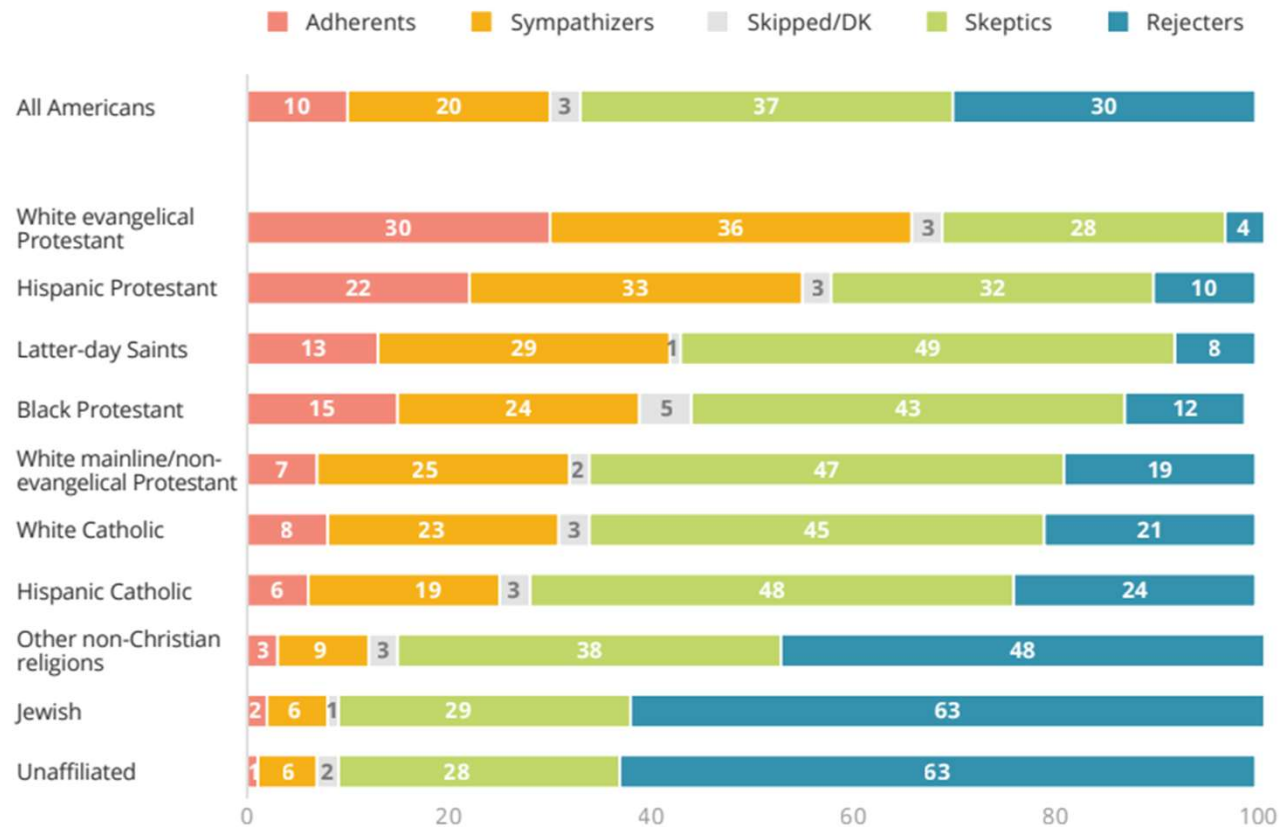
FIGURE I.3.

Distribution of Americans on Christian Nationalism Scale

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

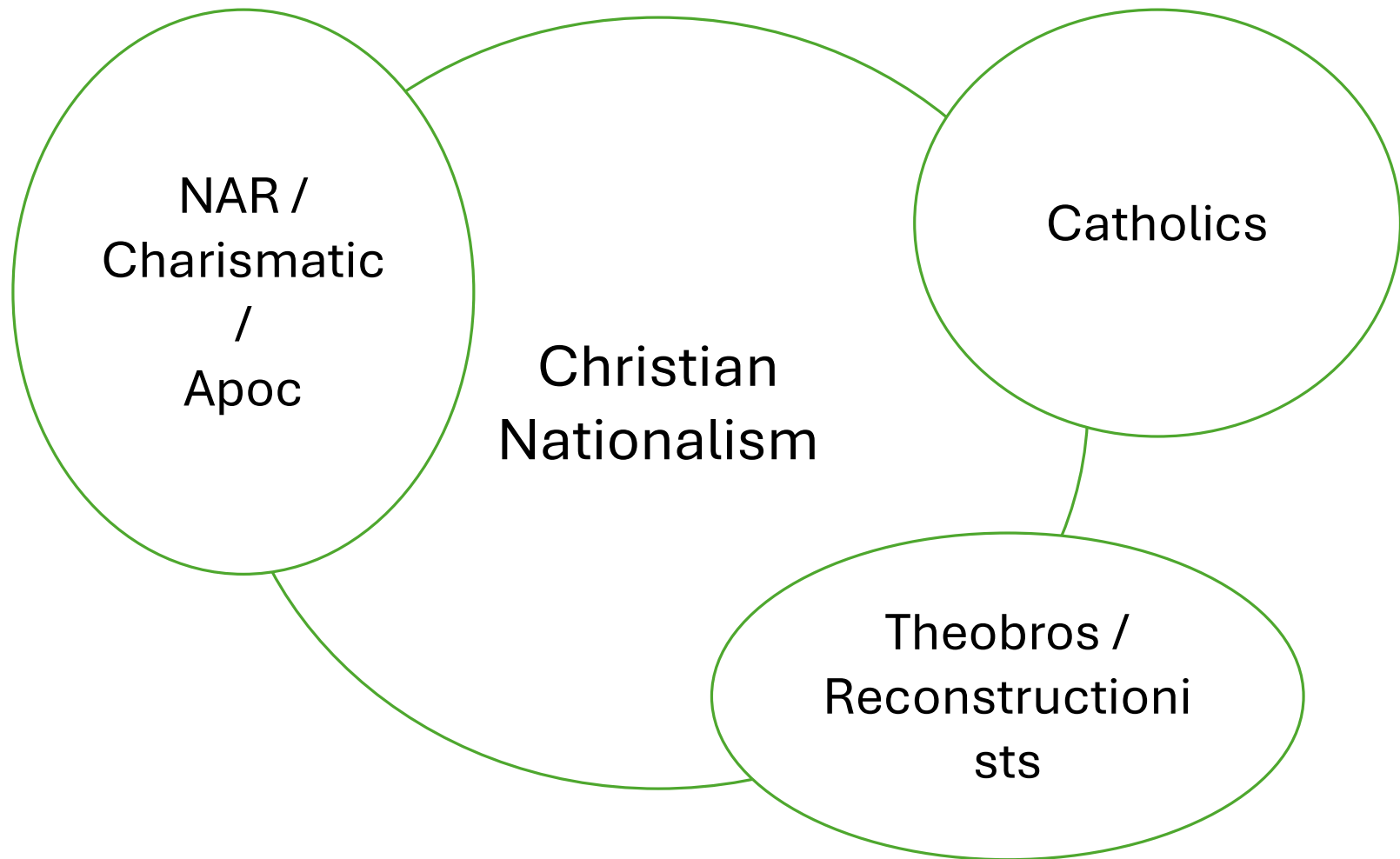
Christian nationalism is linked to religion.

- Christian nationalism is associated with conservative religious traditions.

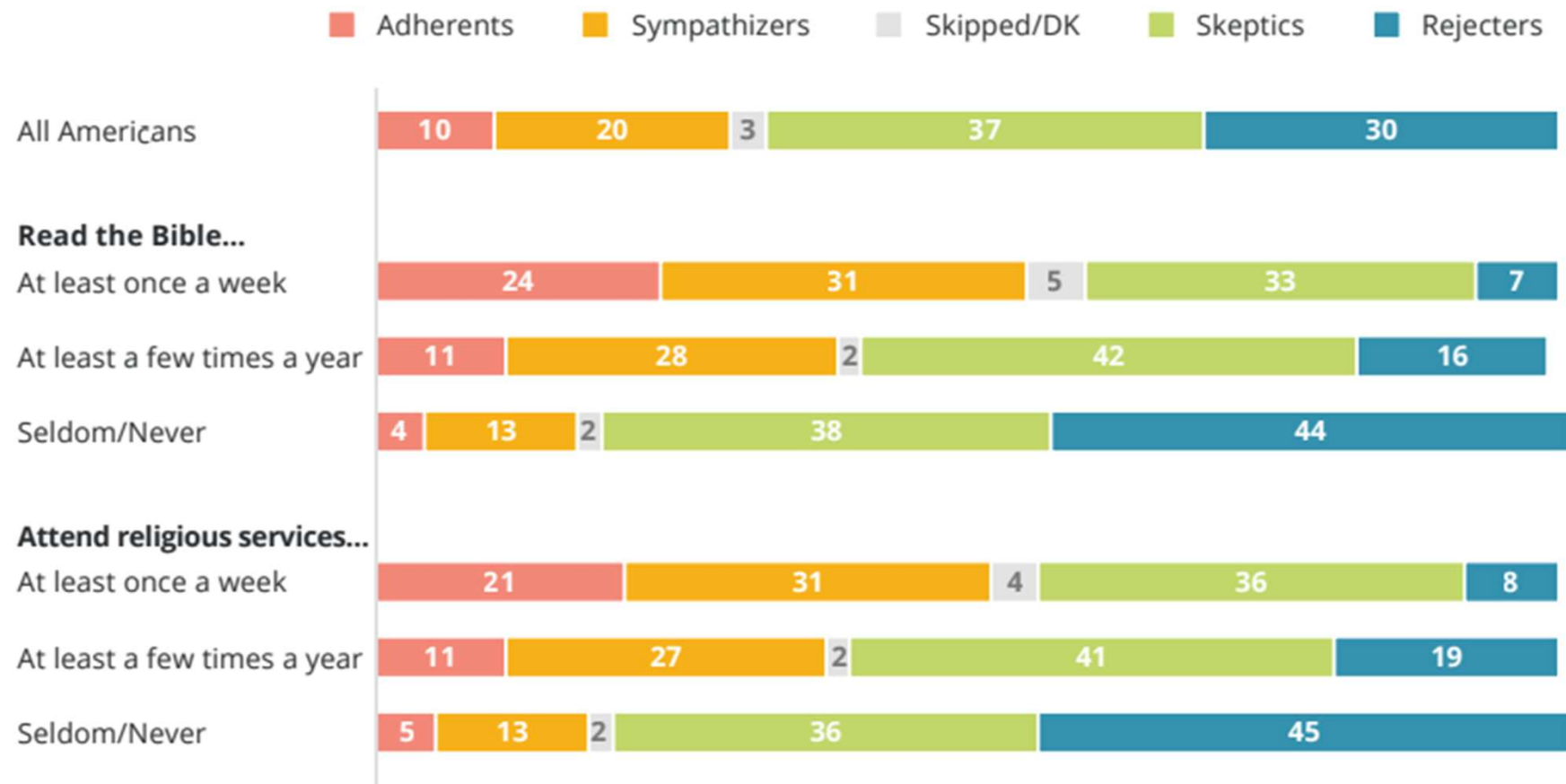


Source: PRRI, American Values Atlas, Mar. 9-Dec. 7, 2023.

- Christian nationalism in the religious landscape



- Christian nationalism is correlated with religious behaviors.

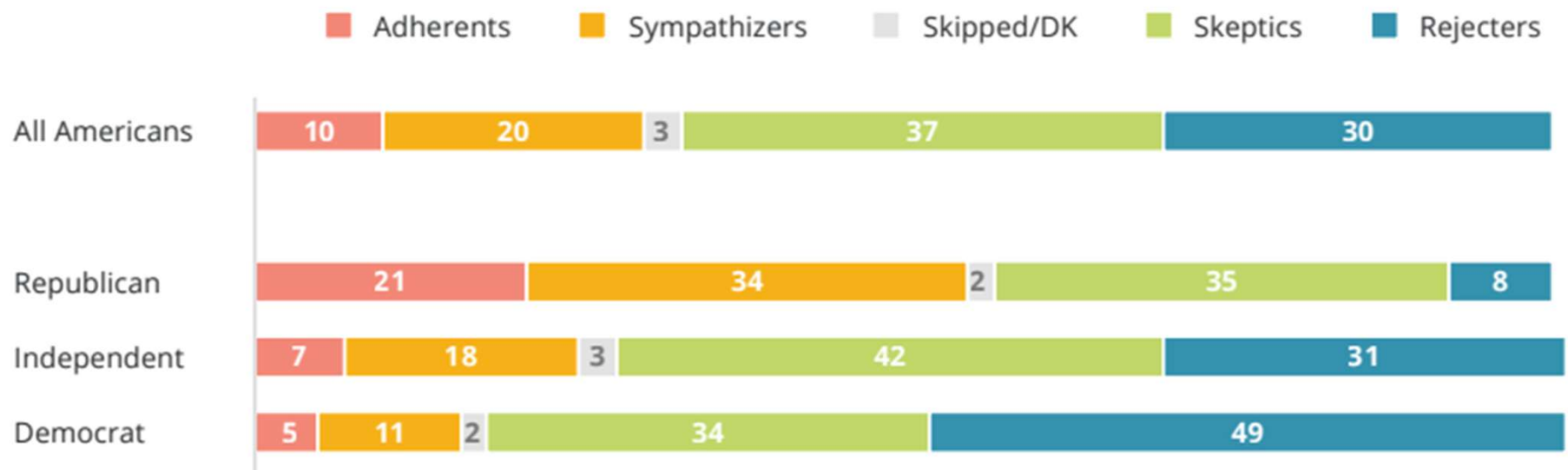


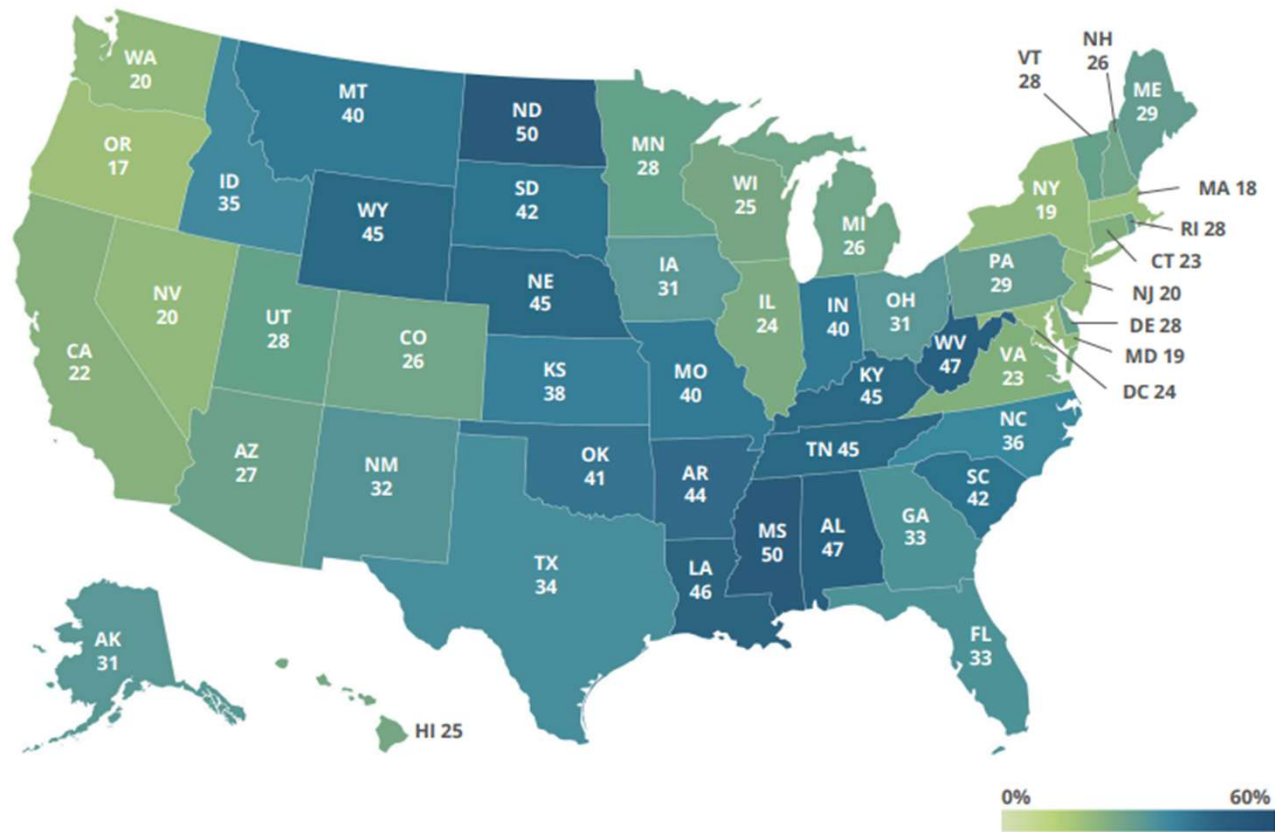
Christian nationalism is also a political project.

- Christian nationalism is strongly correlated with partisanship.

FIGURE 8. Support for Christian Nationalism, by Party Affiliation and Candidate Favorability

Percent who qualify as:





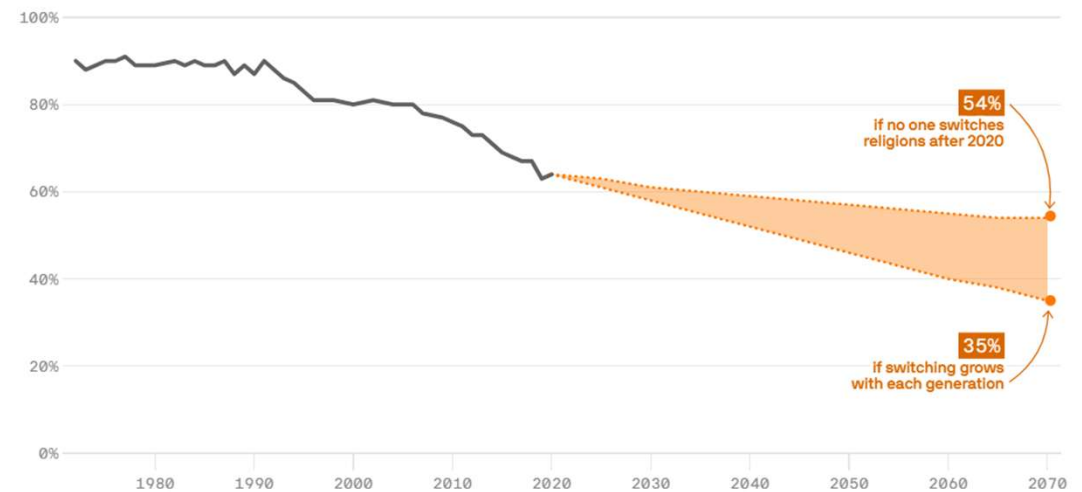
Source: PRRI, American Values Atlas, Mar. 9-Dec. 7, 2023.

Why do people support Christian nationalism?

- Threat: Christian nationalism is a response to demographic change.

Historical and **projected** share of Americans who identify as Christian

Historical data from regular annual surveys of at least 1,300 U.S. adults; Projections every 5 years; 1972–2070



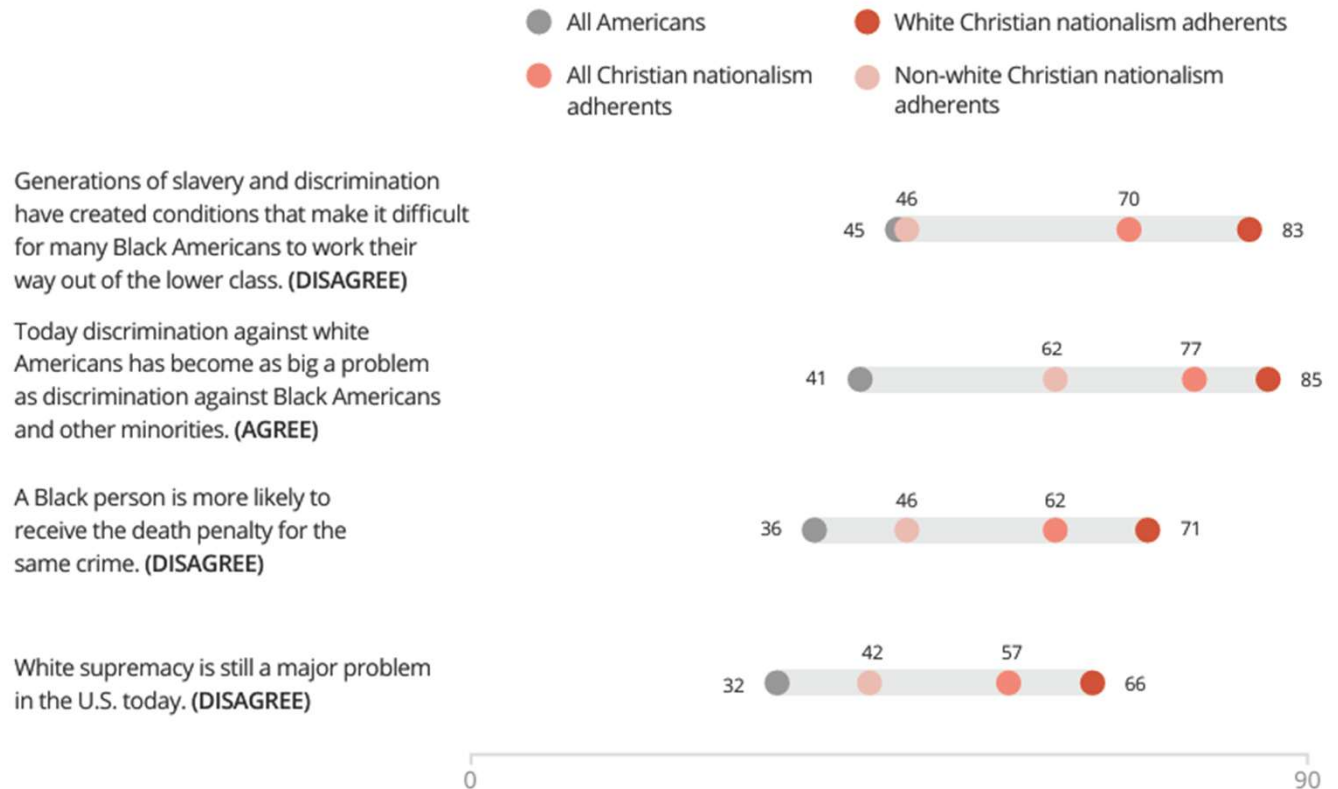
Overview

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- Why do people support Christian nationalism?
- **Why does Christian nationalism matter?**
- **How has Christian nationalism mattered for my faith?**

Why does Christian nationalism matter?

- Systemic racism

FIGURE 12. Anti-Black Racism Attitudes, among Christian Nationalism Adherents by Race
Percent who:



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



The federal government should advocate Christian values.

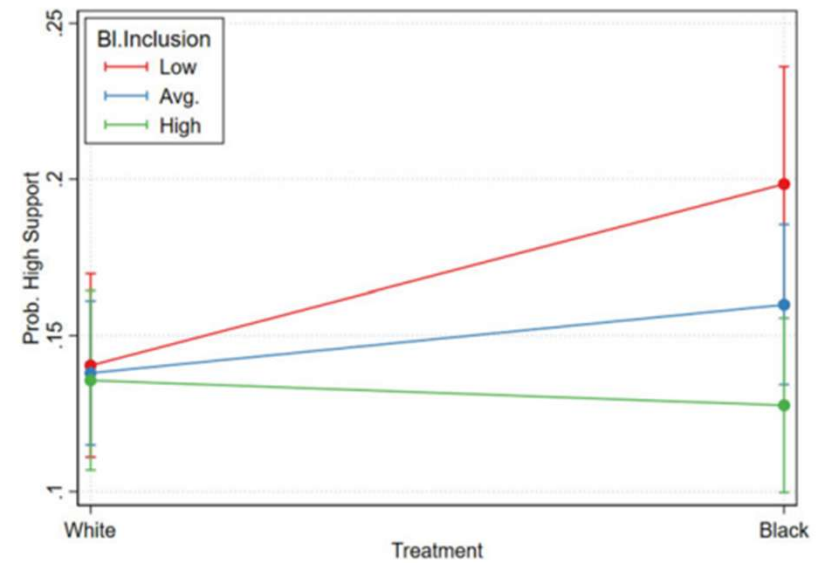


Figure 1. Christian nation support. Figure 1 depicts the probability respondents give the highest level of support for the dependent variable. Levels of Black inclusion are set at the mean (avg.) and at 1 standard deviation above (high) and below (low) the mean.

- Xenophobia

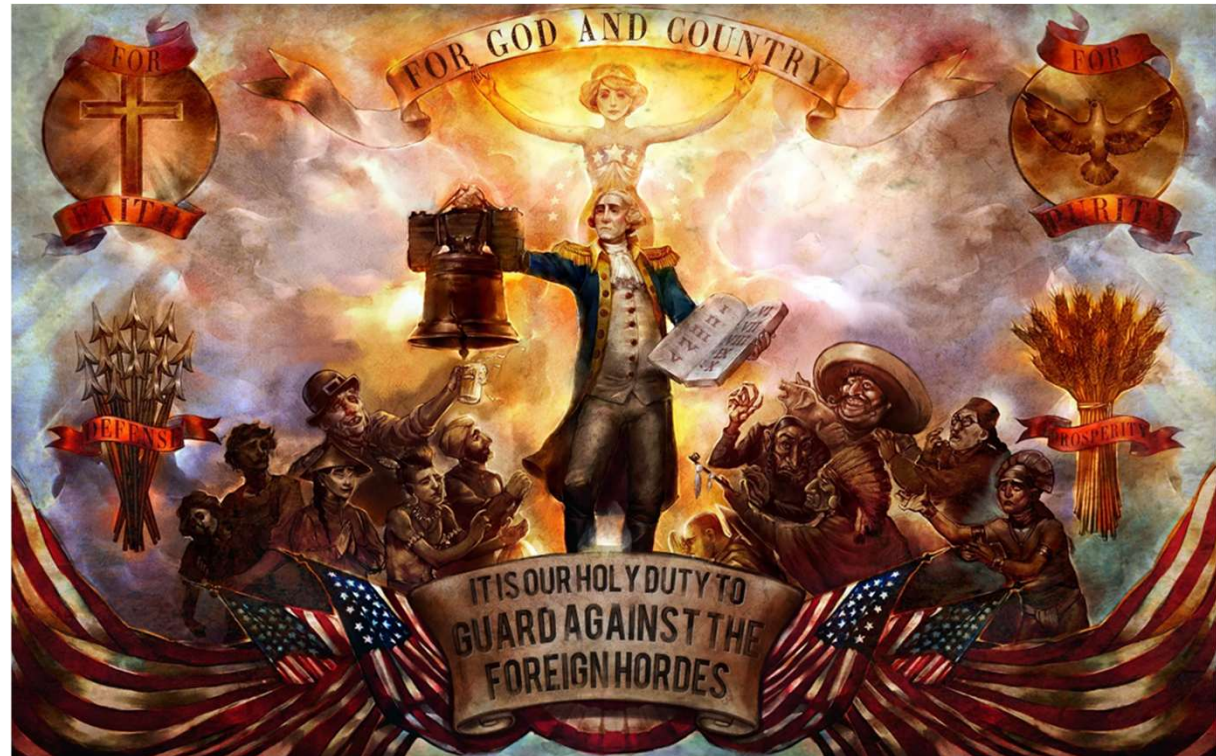
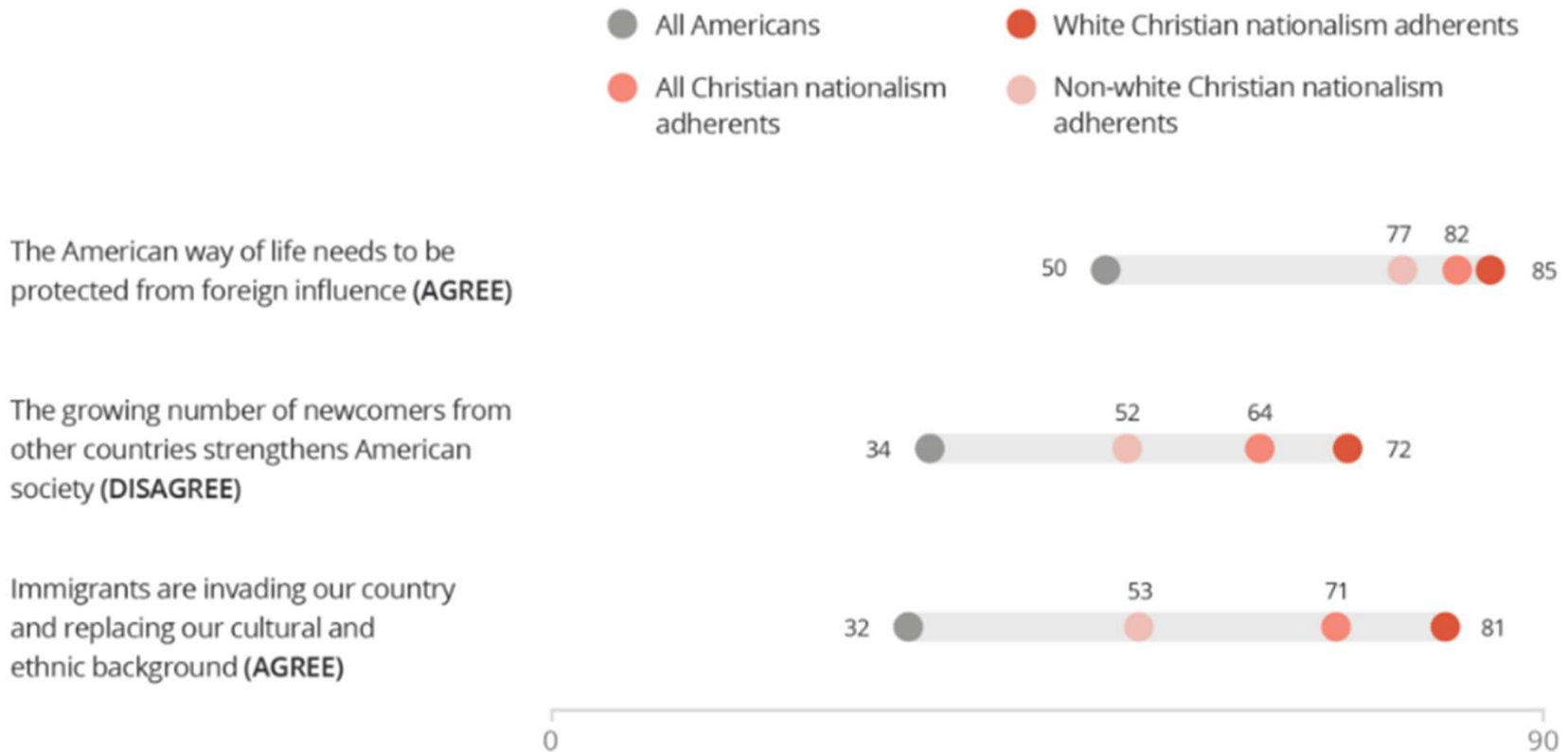


FIGURE 13. Anti-Immigrant Attitudes, among Christian Nationalism Adherents by Race

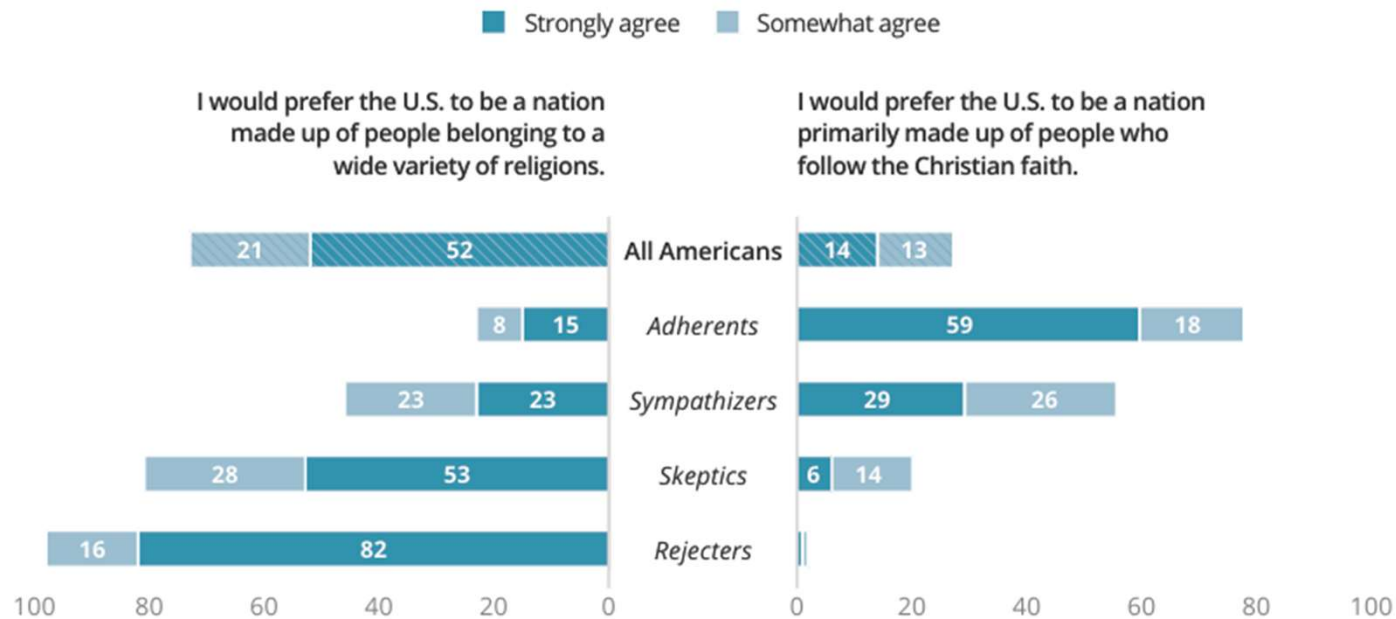
Percent who:



- Religious exclusion

FIGURE 10. Views of Religious Pluralism, by Christian Nationalist Groups

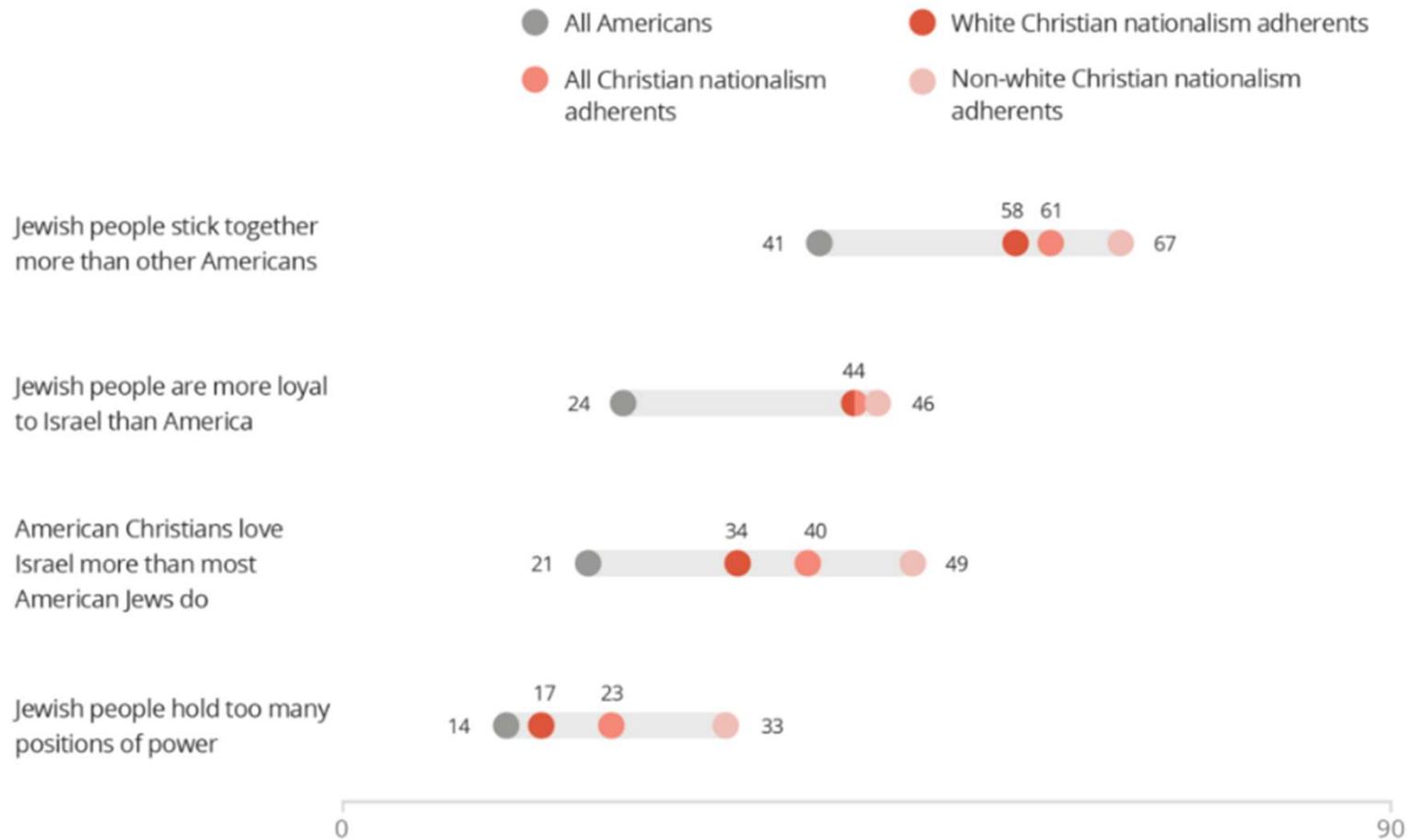
Percent who:



Source: PRRI/Brookings Christian Nationalism Survey, 2023.

FIGURE 14. Antisemitic Attitudes, among Christian Nationalism Adherents by Race

Percent who say the statement describes the state of things in America completely/somewhat well:



- Gender equality



FIGURE 2. Greater Femininity Among Men Predicts Greater Christian Nationalism.
Source: March 2021 survey. See [table A2](#) for model estimates. Controls include demographics, attendance, religious tradition, partisanship, and sexual orientation.

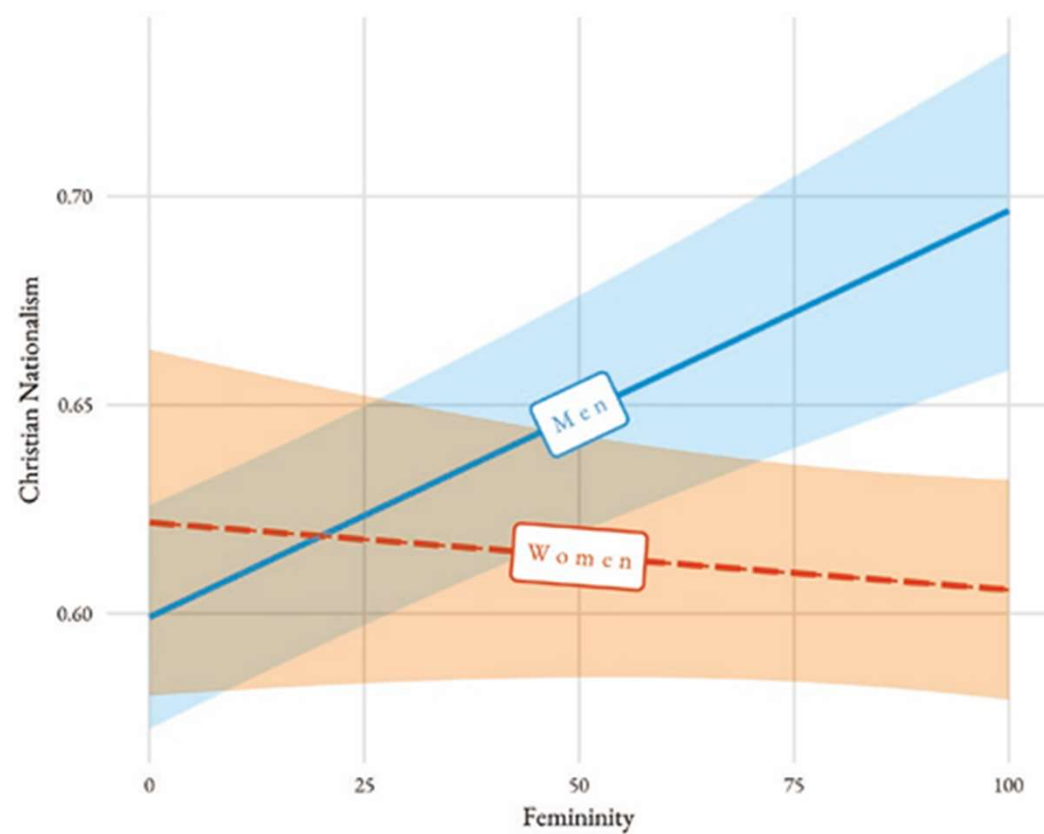
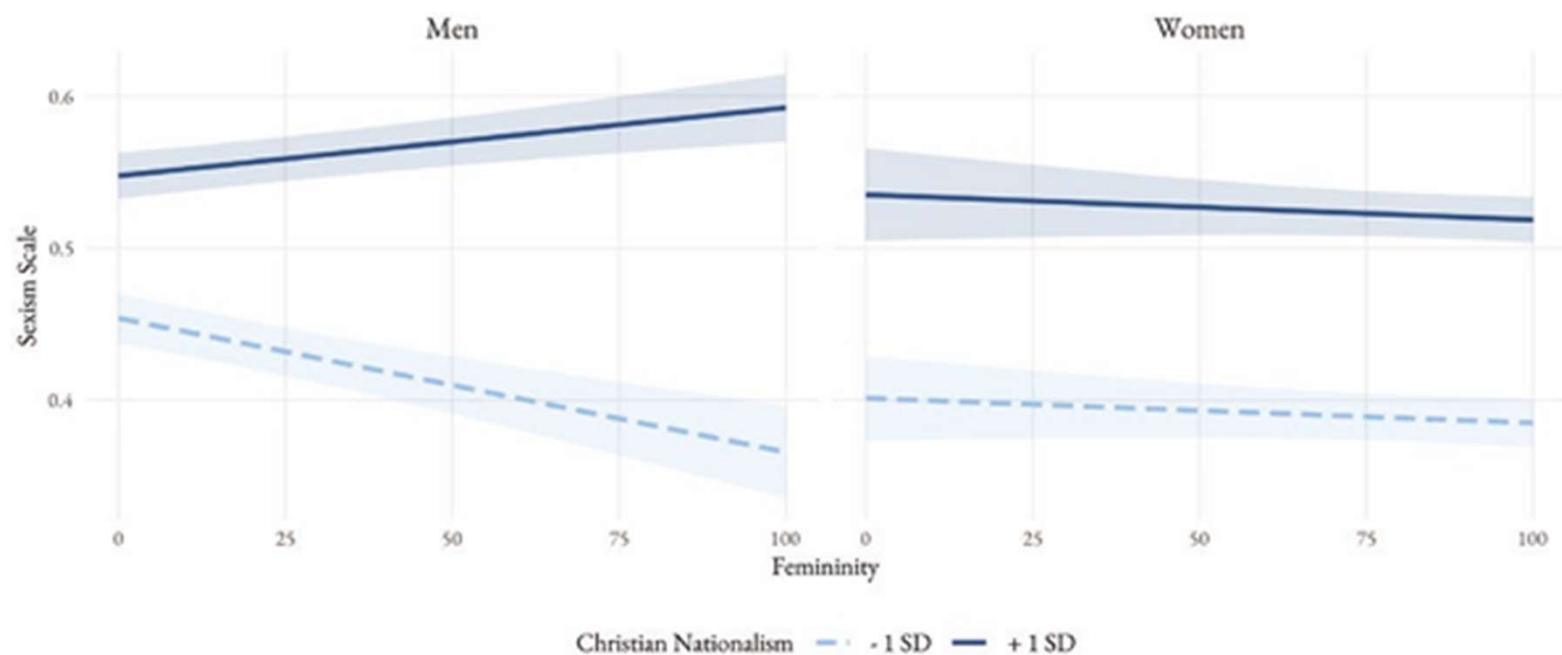


FIGURE 3. Support for Sexism Increases for More Feminine, Christian Nationalist Men.

Source: March 2021 survey; see [table A3](#) for model estimates. Controls include demographics, attendance, religious tradition, partisanship, and sexual orientation.



- LGBT Rights

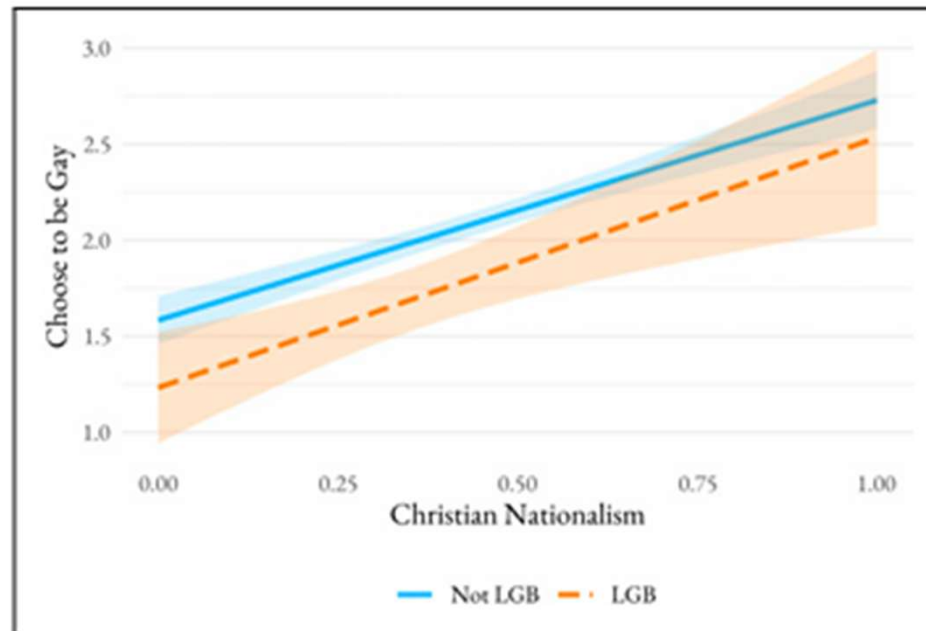


Figure 4. Christian nationalists believe people choose to be gay, by LGBT identity, Baylor 2017. *Note.* This model controls for age, race, education, gender, attendance, and partisanship. See [Table A3](#) for full results.

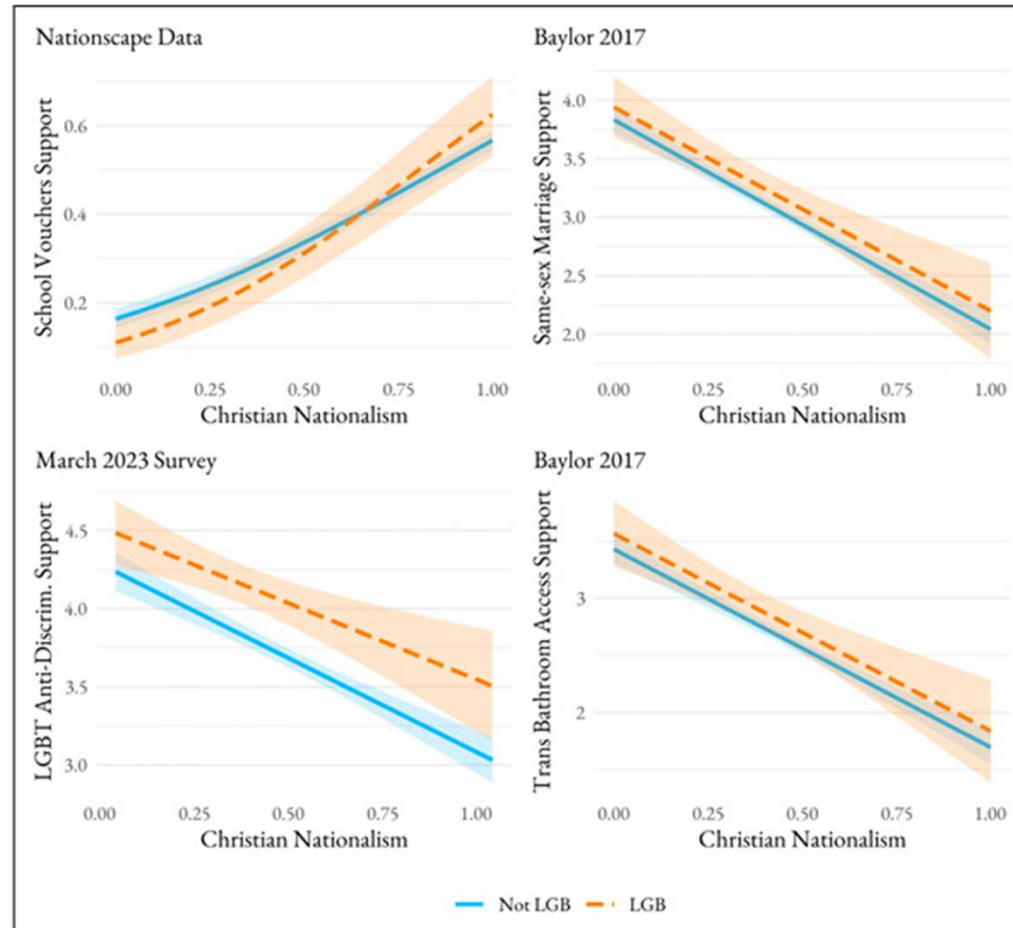


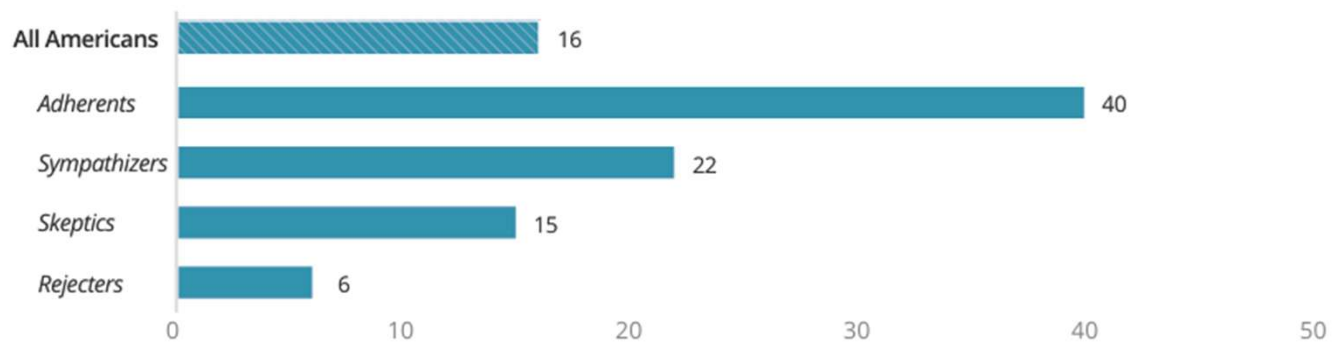
Figure 6. Support for LGBT or adjacent policy proposals, by LGB identity and Christian nationalism. *Note.* These models control for age, race, education, gender, evangelical ID (in the Nationscape and March 2023 data), attendance (in the Baylor 2017 and March 2023 data), and partisanship. See [Table A5](#) for full results.

- Anti-democratic norms
 - Voter suppression
 - Political violence



FIGURE 20. Support for Political Violence, by Christian Nationalism Groups

Because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country. Percent who agree.



Source: PRRI/Brookings Christian Nationalism Survey, 2023.

Processing the Themes of CN

- Stereotypes and Knowing
- Stereotypes are linked to the –isms– racism, sexism, etc.
- Stereotypes
 - CN is often related to holding stereotypes, especially about outgroups
- David Brooks: People are not “a puzzle that can be solved but a mystery that can never be gotten to the bottom of”

- Boundaries and Hierarchies
- CN is linked to social boundaries and hierarchies
- Not all hierarchies are bad
 - But many are rooted in culture, not Christianity
 - Tattoos on the Heart

- Fear and Power
- Christian nationalism is tied to fear and threat
- Fear and threat lead to the outcomes described above

Summing Up

- What is Christian nationalism?
 - A political movement that seeks the fusion of Christianity and the nation
- Who supports Christian nationalism?
 - Elites
 - The public
- Why do people support Christian nationalism?
- **Why does Christian nationalism matter?**
- **How has Christian nationalism mattered for my faith?**