The Rise of Christian Nationalism in the United States: History, Concepts, Contention, and Democratic Implications

Author: Jim Krouse

Quest Club

January 16, 2026

Abstract

This paper examines the presence of Christian nationalism in the United States, a topic that has sparked passionate debate, particularly on social media. By clearly defining Christian nationalism, we can distinguish it from related concepts like evangelical faith, civil religion, and patriotism, paving the way for a broader understanding.

I will explore the history and evolution of Christian nationalism, starting with the Puritan contracts and Manifest Destiny, and moving into how the Cold War shaped American identity. It digs into recent social trends to show how this movement is becoming more common, exploring the shifts in demographics and geography. In addition, it thoughtfully examines the important policy implications of these changes.

I will examine legal developments in church-state relations that shape our current landscape—analyzing the media, including their biases and leanings. Reviewing the broader case study of the events on January 6, 2021, which illustrates the debates surrounding the idea that this incident was partly connected to Christian nationalism.

I will also review discussion points featuring scholars and advocates from both sides of the political spectrum. This paper encourages Questers to engage thoughtfully with the complexities and nuances of Christian nationalism, thereby enriching a dialogue about its role in contemporary society. The paper concludes by considering the implications for democratic norms.

Definition of Christian Nationalism

Christian nationalism is a political and cultural ideology that merges Christian identity with national identity, often asserting that a country—most commonly the United States—should be defined by Christian values and governed by Christian principles (Volle, 2025). In simple terms, A belief that the nation's identity and laws should be explicitly rooted in Christianity, or the focus of our government should be the merging of religious identity with national identity.

Core Beliefs

- America as a Christian nation: Advocates believe the U.S. was founded on Christian principles and should return to or maintain those roots.
- Fusion of church and state: While not always calling for a formal theocracy, Christian nationalists often support policies that reflect conservative Christian values in government, law, and public life.
- Cultural preservation: It often includes a desire to preserve a particular cultural identity tied to Christianity, sometimes excluding or marginalizing other religions or secular viewpoints.
- Opposition to secularism: Christian nationalism tends to resist the separation of church and state, viewing secular governance as a threat to moral order (Saiya, 2025)

Historical Roots of the Concept

We often believe the term fusion of Christianity and political nationalism is a twentieth-century term, but it has existed for hundreds of years. The term **"**Christian nationalism**"** has no single, universally-credited originator—it is a relatively modern academic and political descriptor used to analyze a long-established phenomenon (Smith, 2023).

- The fusion of Christianity and national identity dates back centuries. In medieval Europe, monarchs often claimed to rule by divine right, and the Church held immense political power (Jones, 2024).
- During the Protestant Reformation, national churches like the Church of England emerged, reinforcing the idea that a specific Christian tradition could define a nation.
- 1830s–1840s: Journalist John L. O'Sullivan coined the term Manifest Destiny, a form of Christian nationalism that justified U.S. expansion as divinely ordained. In colonial America, Puritans envisioned where Christian values shaped governance and society. Of course, freedom to express one's own religious beliefs helped found this country.
- 1950s: The Cold War era saw the rise of civil religion, with phrases like "under God" added to the Pledge of Allegiance**.**
- In the early 2000s, scholars began using "Christian nationalism" to describe a worldview that fuses American civic life with Christian identity.
- In 2016-2021, under the first Trump Administration, there was a reemergence of Christian nationalist rhetoric (Jones, 2024).

Between 2022 and 2025, scholars like Nilay Saiya categorized Christian nationalism into distinct theological groups. One of these categories is charismatic dominions, which emphasizes the believers' responsibility to exert spiritual authority over society. Another type is Calvinist nationalism, which is rooted in Reformed (Calvinist) theology, as opposed to the Pentecostal or charismatic traditions.

The term "Christian nationalism" began to appear more frequently in the 20th century, particularly in discussions about the role of religion in American public life.

Today's Leaders in the Movement

In the 1980s, groups like the Moral Majority and leaders such as Jerry Falwell and James Dobson advanced the idea that America was divinely chosen and should reflect Christian morals in its laws and institutions.

Falwell helped unite evangelical Protestants and conservative Catholics, working with figures like Paul Weyrich (Heritage Foundation) and James Dobson (Focus on the Family). This coalition became a dominant force in shaping Republican platforms on issues like abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and education (Blinka, 2019).

End Times Theology

Falwell's beliefs were shaped by dispensationalism, which sees history as a sequence of events planned by God that lead to the end of the world. This view led him to feel a strong urge to engage in politics, believing that changing society could postpone divine judgment.

Cultural and Electoral Impact

The Moral Majority and its successors played a significant role in shifting the perception of Christianity in America from a personal faith to a political identity. This transformation contributed to the rise of Christian nationalism, which continues to influence political rhetoric and policy debates today. We find this was essentially the first time many Americans began to take notice of the emerging emphasis of Christianity and political discourse. Although this ideology has deep historical roots, the term "Christian nationalism" gained significant traction during the 20th century, and there is no single person we can identify as its originator (Smith, 2020). Its recent use has increased, particularly following political events and academic discussions that brought it to prominence. A key turning point was the January 6, 2021, Capitol riots.

Roberts' 1988 presidential campaign used the slogan “For God and Country**,”** injecting overt nationalism into the Christian Right (Boston, 1996).

According to Lerone Martin’s book, *The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover*, J. Edgar Hoover leveraged his position as FBI Director to promote a vision of America as a Christian nation. He collaborated with evangelical leaders such as Billy Graham and influenced public policy from a religious perspective, often characterizing dissenters as threats to God’s will (Martin, 2023).

Recent NYT Article

David French, a New York Times columnist, argues that Christian nationalism poses a significant threat to American constitutional principles and pluralism, as it risks the dominance of a single religion. He distinguishes between Christians engaging in politics

and the ideology of Christian nationalism, which asserts Christian primacy in law and governance. French warns that conflating ordinary faith-based political participation with authoritarian impulses risks alienating millions of believers while obscuring the real danger: efforts to remake America into a theocratic state. His analysis emphasizes that true patriotism and democratic health require rejecting coercive religious dominance and embracing a pluralistic vision where diverse beliefs coexist under equal protection (French, 2025)

Gerald Lyman Kenneth Smith

- 20th-century figure—has been noted by some analysts as central to the emergence of a *modern incarnation* of Christian nationalist ideology in the U.S. His influence included antisemitic and fascistic elements, though this attribution pertains more to ideology than to the coining of the term.

Paul Weyrich

- A Catholic political strategist and co-founder of the Heritage Foundation, Weyrich was instrumental in organizing the religious right.
- He helped build coalitions between conservative Catholics and evangelical Protestants and was a key architect behind the Council for National Policy, which coordinated political strategy among Christian conservatives.

James Dobson

- Founder of Focus on the Family and later the Family Research Council, Dobson emphasized “pro-family” values and was deeply involved in shaping Republican policy on issues like abortion and LGBTQ+ (Stephen, 2019).

The John Birch Society (JBS)

- Though more active in the 1950s and 1960s, the JBS continued to influence Christian nationalist thought in the 1970s by promoting anti-communist and anti-civil rights rhetoric through churches.
- They framed the Cold War as a spiritual battle between Christianity and godlessness (Verhoeven, 2015).

Hal Lindsey

- Author of *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), Lindsey popularized premillennial dispensationalism, a theology that emphasized the imminent return of Christ and moral decline in America.
- His work influenced many evangelicals to see political engagement as part of a divine mission.

These figures and organizations laid the groundwork for the Christian nationalist movement, which gained political traction in the 1980s.

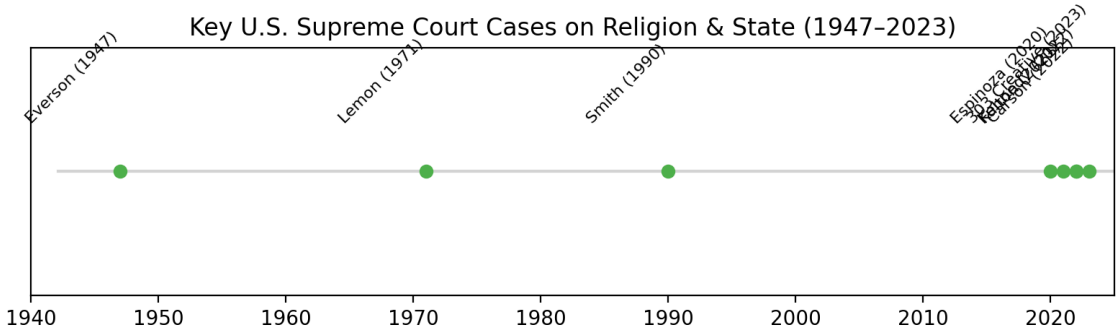

Figure 2. Timeline of Key U.S. Supreme Court Cases on Religion and the State.

Doug Wilson

- Has emerged as a central figure in the modern Christian nationalist movement, associated with Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. His Beliefs:
    - Advocates for a fusion of church and state.
    - Promotes patriarchal governance, suggesting voting should be led by male heads of households.
    - Supports the Seven Mountains Mandate, which calls for Christian control over seven spheres of society: government, education, media, arts, business, family, and religion.

Wilson has spoken at major conservative conferences and expanded his church's reach to Washington, D.C. His teachings have influenced political figures and movements aligned with Christian nationalist ideology.

Why Christian Nationalism, Why Now

"The concept of 'Christian nationalism' is now a big topic in the U.S., especially in relation to democracy, religion, and identity. Recent surveys show that about 30% of U.S. adults support or sympathize with this movement. There is a lot of diversity in beliefs across different states, and these views are often connected to personal issues that people care about. It's an interesting time to see how these opinions influence our society! And opinions on democratic processes (PRRI/Brookings Public Religion Research Institute;

PRRI AVA). Most Americans want a separation of church and state, but many also want the Bible to have some influence on U.S. laws. This indicates confusion about the meaning of the term "Christian nation" in public discourse (PRRI & Brookings, 2023; PRRI, 2024; Pew Research Center, 2024).

What Is (and Is Not) Christian Nationalism

Christian nationalism is a belief that the United States should be strongly based on Christian values and culture. It often suggests that Christianity should have a special place in public life. Some common views among supporters include the idea that the federal government should declare the U.S. a Christian nation, that laws should reflect Christian values, and that Christians have a duty to lead in all areas of American life. (PRRI/Brookings). Believing that government should remain neutral on religious matters and not legislate based on religious doctrine is not Christian nationalism, nor is the common belief that government should remain neutral on religious matters and not legislate.

The Rise of Christian Nationalism in the United States, and Democratic Implications.

The recent research examines the prevalence of this ideology, identifying who holds these beliefs and where they are most concentrated. It also examines how evolving legal interpretations of church-state separation shape the contemporary social landscape.

This discussion presents different viewpoints from scholars and advocates. Some people argue that Christian nationalism can endanger liberal democratic values and multiculturalism. Others offer various interpretations of what a "Christian nation" means.

Introduction: Exploring Christian Nationalism in Today's Context

By unpacking these layers, we open ourselves to richer dialogues about our society's values and the intersections of faith and politics. It's an important time to delve into these complex issues, fostering understanding and perhaps finding common ground in our diverse beliefs.

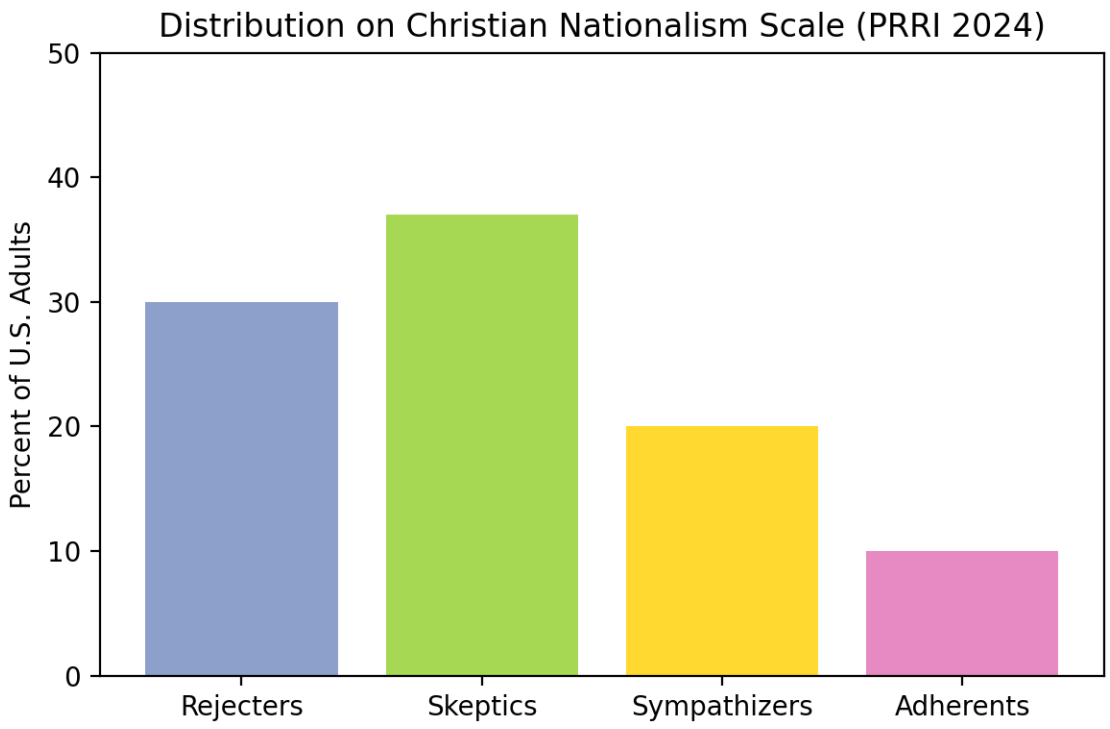

Figure 1. Distribution on PRRI/Brookings Christian Nationalism Scale (PRRI 2024).

Deep Roots: From Covenantal Origins to Manifest Destiny, or that Christians were divinely ordained to have their movement expand across this country, and Civil Religion Colonial covenantal. John Winthrop's 1630 "city upon a hill" sermon cast New England as a covenant community under God, forming a template later invoked in political rhetoric (Wintrop, 1630).

Legal historian Steven K. Green explores how the concept of America as a religious nation was significantly adapted in the nineteenth century to reinforce a sense of national identity. This occurred despite the First Amendment, which established a new principle of separation between church and state..

Christian nationalism has shifted from being a niche topic to a central part of conversations in the U.S. about democracy, religion, and identity. Recent surveys show that about 20% of adults in the U.S sympathize with this ideology, with noticeable differences depending on the state and strong connections to political beliefs and views on democracy. At the same time, Pew Research points out that awareness of the separation of church and state is growing among Americans, though discussions around it are often heated. New research has revealed interesting links between Christian nationalism and support for hierarchical social structures, nativism, and illiberal politics (checks and balances, pluralism, individual rights and freedoms). This highlights the necessity of differentiating these ideas from general religious beliefs or conservative theology, opening the door for important discussions about social values.. (Winthrop, 1630/2013; Green, 2015; Kruse, 2015; Bellah, 1967).

Late 20th–Early 21st Century Mobilization

The Christian Right and its institutional networks have been extensively documented through investigative reporting and scholarly research. These sources reveal a complex array of organizations—including think tanks, legal advocacy groups, and donor networks—that collectively drive a sustained political agenda. This agenda, described by Katherine Stewart and others as a Christian nationalist movement, seeks to exert state power under the guise of "religious liberty."

White evangelical Protestants are the most likely adherents, but support appears in other Protestant families and among some Catholics; associations with party ID (Republican) and older age are strong.

What do Americans mean by “Christian nation”? Pew finds many oppose an official church, but 50% of Americans still want “Christian moral values” promoted by government; half say the Bible should have at least some influence on U.S. laws.

Demographic Comparison of Support

- White Evangelical Protestants
    - Most likely to be adherents of Christian nationalism
    - Strong alignment with Republican Party ID and older age groups
- Other Protestant Groups & Some Catholics
    - Moderate levels of support
    - Not exclusive to evangelicals—appears across denominations

- Geographic Patterns
    - Higher support: South and northern Plains states
    - Lower support: New England and Pacific Coast
- Age & Party Affiliation
    - Older Americans and Republicans show stronger support
    - Younger and more politically liberal Americans show lower support

(PRRI & Brookings, 2023; PRRI, 2024; Pew Research Center, 2024).

Christian nationalism appears in some research to be growing in the United States, according to recent survey data and scholarly analyses cited, although some research indicates the opposite.

- PRRI/Brookings (2023) found that roughly 10% of U.S. adults qualify as either *adherents* of Christian nationalism on validated scales.
- This share remained stable into 2024, suggesting sustained support rather than decline.
- The movement is also becoming more visible and organized, with legal, legislative, and cultural strategies advancing its influence.

Additional data from major research organizations, such as PRRI and the Pew Research Center, show that Christian nationalism is not increasing in the United States—in fact, it's actively stable, not growing. Pew's 2025 global study found that only 6% of Americans

met their stricter definition of "Christian nationalist," which required affirming four specific beliefs and identifying with the country's dominant religion.

Pew also noted that fewer than half of U.S. adults had even heard of Christian nationalism, and only 5% had a favorable view of it. Data shows that the rise has remained either stable or decreasing, depending on the definitions used**.**

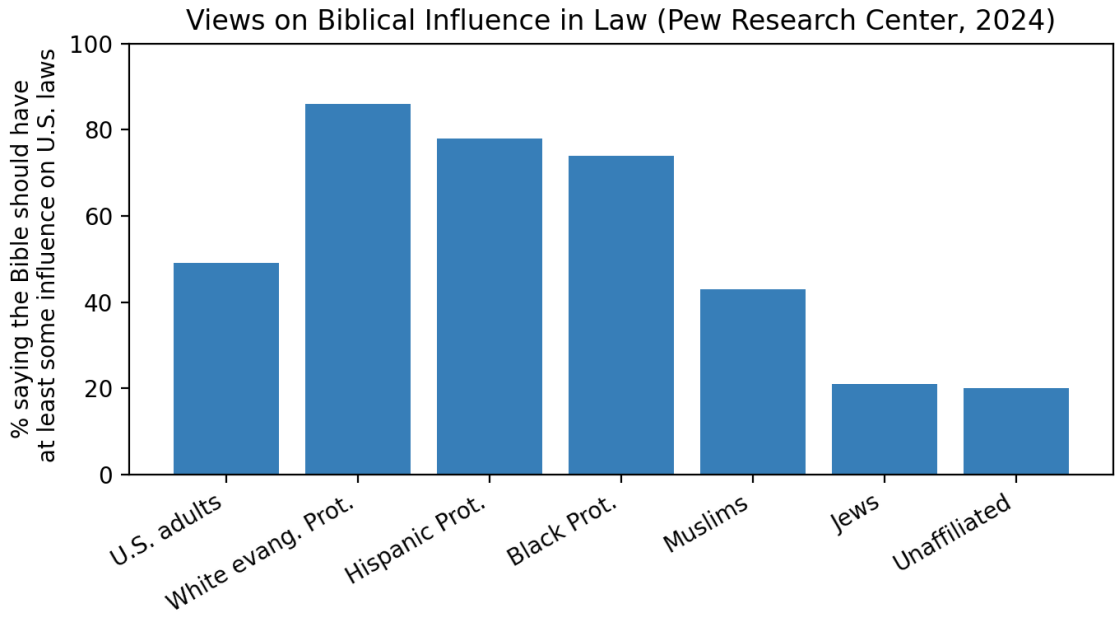

Figure 3. Share saying the Bible should have at least some influence on U.S. laws (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Policy and Attitudinal Correlates

Democratic norms and political violence. PRRI reports that adherents are more likely than rejecters to endorse political violence in extreme scenarios and to express

authoritarian attitudes; similar patterns appear in other national data.

Race and hierarchy. Studies show Christian nationalism correlates with racial resentment scales, anti-immigrant attitudes, and opposition to multicultural policy frameworks.

Issue priorities. PRRI's 2024 state report associates adherence with priorities such as opposition to abortion rights and LGBTQ nondiscrimination.

Education and institutions. Advocacy often targets school curricula, prayer policies, and symbolic displays—consistent with Project Blitz model bills. (PRRI & Brookings, 2023; PRRI, 2024; Whitehead & Perry, 2020/2022; Gorski & Perry, 2022).

Case Study #1: January 6 and the Movement–Violence Interface

Symbols and rituals. The Capitol breach featured crosses, "Jesus Saves" banners, Christian flags, shofar "Jericho March" aesthetics, and sectarian prayers inside the Senate chamber—an intermingling of religious iconography with militant political action. Reports by faith and academic organizations document Christian nationalist themes in pre-event mobilization and on the day itself; congressional expert testimony details links to conspiracism and acceptance of political violence. D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges testified that "it was clear the terrorists perceived themselves to be Christians, although his evidential basis for this was considered strictly an opinion, and journalist Luke Mogelson noted in an opinion piece that the presence of Christian

symbolism was “hugely underestimated.”

Movement size and risk. University of Chicago research reveals a sizable reservoir of Americans holding insurrectionist sentiments, indicating a potentially enduring risk environment. (BJC, 2022; Perry & Whitehead, 2022; Pape & CPOST, 2021).

Case Study #2: Charlottesville Riots-Violence Interface

The Charlottesville riots, specifically the 2017 *Unite the Right* rally, were deeply intertwined with themes of Christian nationalism, though not always overtly religious in nature. The rally brought together white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and alt-right groups who chanted slogans like “Jews will not replace us” and “blood and soil,” echoing Nazi-era rhetoric. In case #2 was there a solid connection?

1. Ideological Fusion: The rally was fueled by a blend of racism, antisemitism**,** and white Christian nationalism. Many participants saw themselves as defenders of a divinely ordained American identity—one that is white, Christian, and patriarchal.
2. Symbolism and Theology: Some marchers carried **crosses**, a reference to the Crusades, which far-right Christian nationalists have adopted to symbolize a holy war against perceived enemies of Western civilization.
3. Narrative of Replacement: The chant “Jews will not replace us” reflects a Christian nationalist fear of cultural and demographic change, often framed as a spiritual battle. This belief system sees secularism, multiculturalism, and liberalism as threats to a Christian America.

4. Legal and Cultural Impact: The civil case of *Sines v. Kessler* held rally organizers financially liable, but the verdict also highlighted how Christian nationalist ideologies can incite violence under the guise of free speech. This is the mantra on both sides we often hear today.
5. Response from Christian Leaders: Some prominent Christian leaders condemned the violence, calling it "rooted in the demonic" and urging churches to confront racism and nationalism within their ranks.

Conservative Response to Charlottesville

Evangelical Leaders' Open Letters

Over 500 faith leaders, including many evangelicals, signed an open letter condemning Christian nationalism as a **"**perversion of the Christian faith**"** and directly linking it to the violence in Charlottesville and the Capitol insurrection. They emphasized that Christian nationalism distorts the Gospel and promotes exclusion, racism, and violence

Amanda Tyler (Baptist Joint Committee)

Amanda Tyler, executive director of the BJC, has been a leading voice against Christian nationalism. She labeled the ideology behind Charlottesville as white Christian nationalism, which she described as a political theology that excludes non-Christians and non-whites from the American identification (Tyler, 2024

Rev. Dr. Rollin Russell

In a USA Today opinion piece, Rev. Russell, a retired United Church of Christ pastor, called Christian nationalism a **heresy** and criticized religious leaders who align with political power at the expense of biblical teaching (Russel, 2025).

Faithful America

This Christian social justice group has organized petitions and campaigns against Christian nationalist events, including the Reawaken America Tour, which they described as promoting **"**antisemitism and political violence" under the guise of faith.

Conservative Leaders' Rebuke of Extremism

While not always directly addressing Christian nationalism**,** Republican leaders like Sen. Mitch McConnell and Rep. Kevin McCarthy have condemned white nationalist affiliations within their party, such as when Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene made recent comment.

A widely held and still misquoted saying by President Donald Trump called neo-Nazis and white supremacists "very fine people" outright. He did no***t*** specifically call neo-Nazis or white supremacists "very fine people. He did say "very fine people on both sides." Multiple reputable fact-checkers (Snopes, USA Today, PolitiFact, PBS, FactCheck.org) have confirmed that his words have been misquoted or taken out of context, thereby creating a misleading impression.

John Lott, writing for *The Hill* in August 2017, argued: "The media could not be more blatant in its distorting Trump's words on Charlottesville (Lott, 2017).

Claiming that Trump clarified he was referring to non-extremist protesters, not white supremacists, yet the media insisted otherwise.

These responses show that not all conservatives or Christians support Christian nationalism, and many are actively working to reclaim faith from political extremism.

Competing Definitions and Contested Meanings

Critical perspectives. Paul D. Miller argues Christian nationalism is an illiberal political theology that confuses the church's mission with state power and endangers pluralistic constitutionalism.

Affirmative perspectives. Stephen Wolfe's *The Case for Christian Nationalism* articulates a robust "magisterial" vision—endorsing a confessional state ordered toward the common good—hotly debated across traditions.

Pew cautions that many who say "Christian nation" mean a values-inflected public culture rather than theocracy, underscoring the need for precise measurement and public pedagogy. (Miller, 2022; Wolfe, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2024).

Legal Context: Evolving Church–State Doctrine

The landscape of jurisprudence has undergone an exciting transformation! We're moving from mid-century separationism, as seen in cases like *Everson* and the *Lemon* test, to a dynamic approach that champions the inclusion of religious voices in public benefits,

with notable rulings such as *Espinoza* and *Carson*. We're also witnessing strong protections for individual religious expression in public employment contexts, exemplified by *Kennedy*, and enhanced free speech rights for those expressing their beliefs through services, highlighted by *303 Creative*. These developments open the door wider for public Christianity and reduce the strict limitations previously enforced by older Establishment-Clause interpretations. It's an encouraging time for religious expression!

Risks, Resiliencies, and Responsible Pluralism

Risks. Democratic backsliding is possible when a mobilized minority endorses illiberal measures; minority rights may erode where a single faith tradition is privileged.

Resiliencies. Large majorities still oppose an official state church and endorse church–state separation; First Amendment jurisprudence continues to protect religious diversity and forbids formal establishments.

Toward responsible pluralism. Leaders can promote civic education, distinguishing civil religion from sectarian establishment; strengthen election administration and nonpartisan norms; invest in cross-faith coalitions; and reduce incentives for incendiary rhetoric in political media ecosystems. (PRRI & Brookings, 2023; Pape & CPOST, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2024).

General Liberal Quotes on Christian Nationalism

- Paul D. Miller:

  "Christian nationalism is an illiberal political theology that confuses the church's mission with state power and endangers pluralistic constitutionalism."

  (Miller, 2022)

- Katherine Stewart:

  "[Christian nationalism] is not about religion. It is about power. It is about the use of religion as a cover for a political agenda that seeks to impose a narrow set of beliefs on everyone."

  (Stewart, 2020)

- Steven K. Green:

  "The idea of a religious founding was substantially retrofitted in the nineteenth century to sanctify national identity, even as the First Amendment created a novel regime of disestablishment."

  (Green, 2015)

- Gorski & Perry:

  "White Christian nationalism is a threat to American democracy because it promotes exclusionary identity politics and undermines democratic norms."

  (Gorski & Perry, 2022)

General Conservative Quotes on Christian Nationalism

- Stephen Wolfe, author of *The Case for Christian Nationalism*:

"Christian nationalism is a commitment to a Christian people governing themselves by Christian principles for Christian ends."

(Wolfe, 2022)

- John Piper, theologian and founder of Desiring God:

"Patriotism is a special love for fatherland... and that love is different from the general love that Christians have for everybody or for the whole earth."

(Desiring God)

- John Piper, on Christian identity and national loyalty:

"Our first identity is with the King of the universe, not with any country or nationality or political party or governmental regime."

(Desiring God)

- Canon Press, publisher of Wolfe's book, argues:

"Christian nationalism is not a threat to democracy—it is a return to ordered liberty rooted in biblical truth."

(Canon Press, paraphrased from promotional materials)

Liberal Criticism

- *Threat to Pluralism*: Christian nationalism is seen as privileging one religion—Christianity—over others, undermining the constitutional commitment to religious freedom and equal treatment.

- *Illiberal Political Tendencies*: Scholars argue it promotes authoritarian attitudes and weakens democratic norms, especially when tied to political violence or anti-democratic rhetoric.
- *Exclusionary Social Hierarchies*: Research links Christian nationalism to racial resentment, anti-immigrant views, and opposition to multicultural policies, which conflict with liberal values of inclusion and equity.
- *Misuse of Religious Liberty*: Critics contend that the movement reframes religious liberty as a tool for advancing sectarian dominance rather than protecting diverse beliefs.
- *Distortion of Founding Ideals*: Legal historians argue that the "Christian nation" narrative retrofits history, ignoring the founders' intent to separate church and state.

Conservative Counterpoints to Liberal Comments

- *Religious diversity among participants*: While Christian symbols were visible, not all participants were motivated by religious ideology. Many were driven by political grievances, conspiracy theories, or loyalty to specific leaders rather than theological convictions.
- *Symbolism ≠ ideology*: Displaying Christian flags or banners does not necessarily indicate adherence to Christian nationalism. Some individuals may use religious symbols culturally or personally without endorsing a political theology.

- *Lack of quantifiable data***:** No definitive study has established what percentage of participants were motivated by Christian nationalism. The presence of religious imagery does not equate to a unified religious agenda.
- *Condemnation from Christian leaders*: Many mainstream Christian organizations—including evangelical and Catholic groups—publicly condemned the violence and rejected the use of faith to justify insurrection

The Impact of the Media

The media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion on Christian nationalism, and its influence can be understood through several key dynamics:

Framing and Terminology

Media outlets often frame Christian nationalism in ways that reflect their ideological leanings. Liberal-leaning media tend to highlight its threats to democracy, pluralism, and civil rights, while conservative outlets may present it as a defense of traditional values or religious freedom. This framing affects how audiences perceive the movement—either as a dangerous ideology or a misunderstood cultural stance.

Selective Exposure and Echo Chambers

Due to increasingly siloed media consumption, individuals tend to engage with outlets that reinforce their existing beliefs. Research shows that awareness of Christian nationalism is higher among educated, liberal, secular audiences who trust liberal news sources. In contrast, conservative audiences—who are more likely to support Christian nationalist ideas—are less exposed to critical discussions of the term.

Media as a Tool of Mobilization

Christian nationalist groups actively use media platforms to promote their ideology. This includes traditional outlets like radio and television, as well as digital platforms and social media. Their strategy often involves controlling media narratives and creating alternative information ecosystems that reject mainstream interpretations and elevate their own worldview.

Influence on Political Discourse

Media coverage of Christian nationalism has influenced political debates, especially around issues like religious freedom, education, and LGBTQ+ rights. Politicians who align with Christian nationalist views often receive coverage that amplifies their message, while critics use media to highlight the risks of merging religion with governance.

Public Awareness and Misunderstanding

Again, despite growing media attention, many Americans remain unfamiliar with the term "Christian nationalism." Pew Research found that fewer than half of U.S. adults have heard of it, and only a small percentage view it favorably. This suggests that media coverage, while increasing, has not yet penetrated the mainstream public consciousness.

Comparative Review of the Media

Fox News

- Tone: Often defensive or skeptical of the term "Christian nationalism."

- Framing: Fox tends to portray the label as a liberal smear against conservative Christians. Coverage emphasizes that many people labeled as Christian nationalists are simply advocating for traditional values or religious freedom.
- Example: A Fox article criticized Politico's Heidi Przybyla for suggesting Christian nationalists believe rights come from God rather than government, framing her comments as part of a broader media overreach.

CNN

- Tone: Generally critical and investigative.
- Framing: CNN often links Christian nationalism to threats to democracy, authoritarianism, and exclusionary politics. Coverage tends to focus on its influence in political movements and figures aligned with far-right ideologies.
- Example: CNN segments have explored the role of Christian nationalism in events like January 6 and its ties to anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-abortion policies.

MSNBC

- Tone: Strongly critical and alarmist.
- Framing: MSNBC frequently presents Christian nationalism as a dangerous ideology that undermines pluralism and civil rights. It highlights its influence in the Republican Party and among Trump-aligned groups.

- Example: MSNBC interviews and commentary often emphasize the rise of Christian nationalist rhetoric in Congress and its implications for minority rights and church-state separation.

NPR

- Tone: Analytical and nuanced.
- Framing: NPR tends to explore Christian nationalism as a complex social phenomenon, often citing academic studies and surveys. It avoids sensationalism and focuses on understanding the beliefs and demographics behind the movement.
- Example: NPR has reported on the PRRI/Brookings survey showing that while many Americans support Christian values in public life, few identify with Christian nationalism explicitly.

Key Differences in Coverage

Outlet	Tone	Typical Framing	Audience Impact
Fox News	Defensive	Label is misused against conservatives	Reinforces skepticism of liberal media
CNN	Investigative	Links to authoritarianism and exclusion	Raises concern among liberal viewers
MSNBC	Alarmist	Threat to democracy and minority rights	Mobilizes progressive activism

Outlet	Tone	Typical Framing	Audience Impact
NPR	Nuanced	Complex sociological and theological roots	Educates and informs across the spectrum

Conclusion

Christian nationalism is an important topic in America that often emerges during times when our national identity is being explored. Current statistics (PEW, Baylor, Public Religion Research Institute-PRRI) show that views on this issue have remained steady, even if media portrayals sometimes suggest otherwise! At the state level, only Maryland experienced a notable rise from 19%-30%; all other states under the time period of 2022-2025 remain stable. This blend of religious beliefs and political influence sparks valuable conversations about our democratic values. While some see it as a reflection of our founding principles, it is essential to embrace the Constitution's principles of religious freedom and the separation of church and state. By clarifying definitions and fostering

open dialogue, we can strengthen legal protections and thoughtfully navigate the complexities of Christian nationalism, engaging insights from both political risk specialists and faith-based communities. Together, we can make progress!

Political Risk Mitigation Frameworks

Adapt general political risk strategies to this context:

- Risk Analysis: Assess the ideological landscape and potential flashpoints (e.g., policy debates, elections, public statements).
- Stakeholder Engagement: Build relationships with diverse community leaders to foster understanding and reduce tension.
- Policy Monitoring: Stay informed about legislation influenced by religious ideologies that may affect your organization or community.
- Insurance and Legal Safeguards: Consider protection against liability or reputational harm stemming from ideological conflicts.

Promote Inclusive Narratives and Belonging

Christian nationalism often thrives in environments of social isolation and distrust. Countermeasures include:

- Fostering diverse social networks: Encourage interfaith and intercultural dialogue.
- Community-building initiatives: Create spaces for shared values and civic engagement that transcend religious identity.

- Empathy and trust-building: Promote skepticism over cynicism—encouraging critical thinking without fostering distrust.

Institutional Safeguards

- Clear governance policies: Ensure separation of religious ideology from institutional decision-making.
- Training and education: Equip staff and leaders with tools to recognize and respond to ideological extremism.
- Transparency and accountability: Maintain open communication about values, policies, and decisions to avoid misinterpretation or manipulation

Strategic Communication

- Avoid inflammatory rhetoric: Frame discussions around shared democratic values rather than opposition to specific beliefs.
- Use data and research: Reference studies like those from PRRI to understand demographic and regional trends.
- Engage media responsibly: Counter misinformation with fact-based narratives and inclusive messaging.

References

Al-Kire, R., Pasek, M., Tsang, J.-A., Leman, J., & Rowatt, W. (2022). Protecting America's borders: Christian nationalism, threat, and attitudes toward immigrants in the United States. *Group* Processes *& Intergroup Relations, 25*(2), 354–378. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430220978291

Armaly, M. T., Buckley, D. T., & Enders**, A. M. (2022).**

Christian nationalism and political violence: Victimhood, racial identity, conspiracy, and

support for the Capitol attacks. *Political Behavior, 44*(2), 937–960. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09758-y

Bellah, R. N. (1967). Civil religion in America. Daedalus, 96(1), 1–21.

Berry, D. T. (2017, October 13). Religious strategies of white nationalism at Charlottesville. *Religion & Culture Forum*. University of Chicago. https://voices.uchicago.edu/religionculture/2017/10/13/religious-strategies-of-white-nationalism-at-charlottesville/.

Blinka, A. (2019). *Fundamentalist-in-Chief: How Jerry Falwell built the Religious Right and became the face of family values in American politics, 1956–1980* (Senior Independent Study Thesis, The College of Wooster). Open Works. https://openworks.wooster.edu/independentstudy/8576

BJC (Baptist Joint Committee). (2022). Christian nationalism and the January 6 insurrection (Report). https://bjconline.org/jan6report/

Boston, R. (1996). *The most dangerous man in America? Pat Robertson and the rise of the Christian Coalition*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Excelsior OWL. (2020, January 9). *Article on a news website | APA references*. Excelsior College. https://owl.excelsior.edu/citation-and-documentation/apa-style/apa-references/webpage-on-a-news-website/

Faithful America. (2023, July 11). *Don't host ReAwaken America on public property*. Faithful America. https://act.faithfulamerica.org/sign/RAT-vegas/

French, D. (2025, March 16). The culture war is no longer just a culture war. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/16/opinion/culture-war-columbia.html

Froese, P. (2021). *Baylor Religion Survey, Wave 6: Christian Nationalism* [Report]. Baylor University, Department of Sociology. https://baylorreligionsurvey.research.baylor.edu/sites/g/files/ecbvkj1931/files/2023-09/wave_6_-_christian_nationalism_2021.pdf

Gorski, P. S., & Perry, S. L. (2022). The flag and the cross: White Christian nationalism and the threat to American democracy. Oxford University Press.

Henderson, A. (2025). Political polarization and Christian nationalism in our pews. *Religions, 16*(4), 507. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040507

Study Thesis, The College of Wooster). Open Works. https://openworks.wooster.edu/independentstudy/8576

Green, S. K. (2015). Inventing a Christian America: The myth of the religious founding. Oxford University Press.

Jones, R. P**.** (2024). The roots of Christian nationalism go back further than you think. *CrossCurrents, 74*(4), 409–415. University of North Carolina Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/963630

Kennedy v. Bremerton School District, 597 U.S. ___ (2022).

Kruse, K. M. (2015). One nation under God: How corporate America invented Christian America. Basic Books.

Lee, T. R. (2022). Political extremism in the wake of Charlottesville: The motivations and ideologies of the White Power Movement. In J. L. Chin, Y. E. Garcia, & A. W. Blume (Eds.), *The psychology of inequity: Motivation and beliefs* (pp. 159–186). Praeger/ABC-CLIO. https://doi.org/10.5040/9798216002758.

Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).

Lott, J. (2017, August 16). *The media couldn't be more blatant in distorting Trump's words on Charlottesville*. *The Hill*. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/media/346878-the-media-couldnt-be-more-blatant-in-distorting-trumps-words-on

Martin, L. A. (2023). *The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover: How the FBI Aided and Abetted the Rise of White Christian Nationalism*. Princeton University Press.

Mikanovich, T. (2024, February 28). *References in APA: Online news sources*. USC Graduate Writing Coach. https://sites.usc.edu/graduate-writing-coach/references-in-apa-online-news-sources/

Miller, P. D. (2022). The religion of American greatness: What's wrong with Christian nationalism. IVP Academic.

Mouser, J. (2021, February 25). *500+ faith leaders sign open letter condemning Christian nationalism*. Church Leaders. https://churchleaders.com/news/391005-open-letter-christian-nationalism.html

Pape, R. A., & CPOST. (2021). Insurrectionist movement... University of Chicago News.

Perry, S. L., & Whitehead, A. L. (2020/2022). Taking America back for God (Updated ed.). Oxford University Press.

Perry, S. L., & Whitehead, A. L. (2022). Written testimony... Just Security archive.https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfaf009

Perry, S. L. (2024). Sociology and its (limited) publics: The case of Christian nationalism. *The American Sociologist*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-024-09627-1

Perry, S. L., Shortle, A. F., McDaniel, E. L., & Grubbs, J. B. (2025). White or woke Christian nationalists? How race moderates the link between Christian nationalism and progressive identities. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 89*(1), 98–124. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfaf009

Pew Research Center. (2024, March 15). Christianity's place in politics, and "Christian nationalism."

Piper, J. (2020, July 3). *How much patriotism is too much patriotism?* Desiring God. https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-much-patriotism-is-too-much-patriotism

Politico Staff. (2017, August 15). *Full text: Trump's comments on white supremacists, 'altleft' in Charlottesville*. Politico. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from https://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/15/full-text-trump-comments-white-supremacists-alt-left-transcript-241662

PRRI & Brookings. (2023, Feb.). A Christian nation? Understanding the threat of Christian nationalism... (Full report).

PRRI. (2024, Feb.). Support for Christian nationalism in all 50 states.

Project Blitz Playbook. (2018–2019). Report and analysis... Americans United (hosted)

Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI**).** (2025, February 4). *Christian Nationalism Across All 50 States: Insights from PRRI's 2024 American Values Atlas* [Press release &

report]. PRRI. https://prri.org/research/christian-nationalism-across-all-50-states-insights-from-prris-2024-american-values-atlas/

Rodriguez, L. (2021). *Ethno-nationalism, Christianity, and the Unite the Right Rally* (Master's thesis, University of Virginia). https://doi.org/10.18130/w9bp-cs78. Saiya, N. (2025). The varieties of American Christian nationalism. Politics and Religion, 18(2), 171–189. *https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048325000069*

Russell, R. (2025, March 30). *Donald Trump's only interest is in money, not the American people*. *USA Today*. https://ftw.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2025/03/30/opinion-donald-trumps-only-interest-is-in-money-not-the-american-people/82519522007/

Saiya, N. (2025). The varieties of American Christian nationalism. Politics and Religion, 18(2), 171–189. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048325000069

Silver, L., Evans, J., Smerkovich, M., Gubbala, S., Corichi, M., & Miner, W. (2025, January 28). *Comparing levels of religious nationalism around the world*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/01/28/comparing-levels-of-religious-nationalism-around-the-

Sharockman, A. (2014, September 16). *Fact-checking Fox, MSNBC and CNN: PunditFact's network scorecards*. PolitiFact. https://www.politifact.com/article/2014/sep/16/fact-checking-fox-msnbc-and-cnn-punditfacts-networ/

Smith, J. (2025, November 10). How Christian nationalism is reshaping American politics. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/10/us/christian-nationalism.html

Stephens, H. L. (2019). *Family matters: James Dobson and Focus on the Family's crusade foSaiya, N. (2025). The varieties of American Christian nationalism. Politics and Religion, 18(2), 171–189. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048325000069r the Christian home*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Stewart, K. (2020). The power worshippers: Inside the dangerous rise of religious nationalism. Bloomsbury.

Tyler, A**.** (2024). *How to end Christian nationalism*. Broadleaf Books. https://bjconline.org/amanda-tyler/

U.S. Supreme Court. (2020). Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue.

U.S. Supreme Court. (2022). Carson v. Makin.

U.S. Supreme Court. (2023). 303 Creative LLC v. Elenis.

Verhoeven, B. (2015). *The rearguard of freedom: The John Birch Society and the development of modern conservatism in the United States, 1958–1968* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham). Retrieved from Nottingham ePrints

Volle, A. (2025, October 25). *Christian nationalism*. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved November 8, 2025, from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christian-nationalism

Wilsey, J. D. (2017). *"Our Country Is Destined to be the Great Nation of Futurity": John L. O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny and Christian Nationalism, 1837–1846*. *Religions, 8*(4), 68. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8040068

Winthrop, J. (1630/2013). A model of Christian charity ("City upon a hill"). Gilder Lehrman Institute transcript.

Wolfe, S. (2022). The case for Christian nationalism. Canon Press.