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**Presidency: 2021 Attack on the Capitol as a Case Study**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture**

#### BOARD OF EXAMINERS

<b>Chairwoman:</b> Mrs.AMIAR Mounira	(MA/A)	University of 8 May 1945-Guelma
<b>Examiner:</b> Mrs.ZIAYA Rima	(MA/A)	University of 8 May 1945-Guelma
<b>Supervisor:</b> Mrs.LAYADA Rhadia	(MA/A)	University of 8 May 1945-Guelma

**Submitted by:**

DAHOUÏ Hadil

KAIZOUR Douaa

**Supervised by:**

MRS.LAYADA Radia

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## **Dedication 1**

To the hearts that loved me unconditionally, to my mother and father. I offer you my success as one would offer a crown to royalty

To the ones who never walked ahead nor behind, but always beside me, steady, loyal, constant, to my siblings: **HAMZA, LINA, JANA, and RAWAN.**

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## **Abstract**

The involvement of religion in American politics has long been a subject of scholarly controversy. This dissertation examines the ideological integration between Christian nationalism and Trumpism and their combined role in legitimizing political violence in the United States, with a particular focus on the January 6, 2021 Capitol attack. The dissertation provides a historical and theoretical foundation of Christian nationalism, exploring its theological roots in Dominionism, its sociopolitical development, and its growing influence on American identity, public policy, and interpretations of the First Amendment. Then, it shows how Trumpism and Christian nationalism became increasingly inseparable, creating a potent ideological alliance that redefined American political identity and laid the groundwork for the Capitol insurrection. The study further centers on the Capitol attack as the clearest manifestation of this ideological merger. It concludes that the fusion of Christian nationalism and Trumpism created a potent narrative of existential crisis that transformed political grievances into moral imperatives. This not only facilitated the January 6 violence but also opened the door to future threats against democratic stability. The dissertation warns of possible future scenarios involving deeper radicalization and religious-political mobilization, emphasizing the need to understand and confront the ideological foundations of political extremism in order to safeguard democratic resilience.

## الملخص

لطالما شكّل تدخل الدين في السياسة الأمريكية موضوعًا خلافياً في الأوساط الأكاديمية. تتناول هذه المذكرة مسألة التكامل الأيديولوجي بين القومية المسيحية والترمبية، ودورهما المشترك في إضفاء الشرعية على العنف السياسي داخل الولايات المتحدة، مع تركيز خاص على الهجوم الذي استهدف مبنى الكابيتول في 6 يناير 2021. وتقدّم الدراسة تأصيلاً نظرياً وتاريخياً للقومية المسيحية، من خلال تتبع جذورها اللاهوتية في فكر السيادة وتحليل تطورها السياسي والاجتماعي، وتأثيرها المتنامي على الهوية الوطنية والسياسات العامة. ثم تبين كيف أصبح من الصعب الفصل بين الترمبية والقومية المسيحية، حيث شكّل هذا الاندماج تحالفاً أيديولوجياً قوياً أعاد تشكيل الهوية السياسية الأمريكية ومهد الطريق لأحداث الكابيتول. تركز الدراسة بشكل خاص على هجوم 6 يناير بوصفه التجلي الأوضح لهذا التداخل الأيديولوجي، حيث تحول الخطاب السياسي إلى أداة تعبئة دينية ذات طابع وجودي وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن هذا الدمج خلق سرديّة تقوم على شعور بأزمة وجودية، أعادت تأطير المظالم السياسية باعتبارها واجبات أخلاقية ودينية، ما ساهم في إضفاء الشرعية على العنف السياسي، وفتح المجال أمام تهديدات مستقبلية لاستقرار الديمقراطية. وتختتم الأطروحة بالتحذير من سيناريوهات مستقبلية محتملة، تشمل تصاعد الراديكالية الدينية والتعبئة السياسية ذات الطابع العقائدي، مشددة على أهمية تفكيك البنى الأيديولوجية للتطرف كمدخل ضروري لتعزيز صمود النظام الديمقراطي.

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### **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

7MM	Seven Mountain Mandate
ATF	Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms
CN	Christian Nationalism
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSS	Catholic Social Services
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GOP	Grand Old Party
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
LCA	Latent Class Analysis
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
MAGA	Make America Great Again
MIDC	The Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGOS	Non-Governmental Organizations
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SKS	Samozaryadny Karabin sistemy Simonova (semi-automatic rifle)
USCP	United States Capitol Police
WCN	White Christian Nationalism

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## **Introduction**

The United States, renowned for its religious diversity and commitment to pluralism, has long balanced the vibrant influence of faith with the principles of democratic governance. Unlike many other advanced democracies, American culture and politics have been profoundly shaped by religion. While the Constitution guarantees religious freedom, the United States has developed a diverse landscape of faith traditions, all within the framework of a formal separation between religion and government.

In recent years, however, this balance has been increasingly strained by the rise of Christian nationalism, an ideology that envisions the nation as divinely ordained to uphold evangelical Christian values. This movement, rooted in historical notions of America as a “city upon a hill,” has gained traction in modern politics, influencing debates on issues like education and reproductive rights. By intertwining religious identity with national purpose, Christian nationalism challenges the pluralistic foundations of American democracy, setting the stage for a broader ideological clash that reverberates through contemporary political movements.

This ideological clash found a potent expression in the early 21st century through the emergence of Trumpism. The latter is a political movement that harnessed Christian nationalist sentiments to reshape the nation’s democratic landscape. Anchored in Donald Trump’s populist rhetoric, Trumpism thrived on distrust of institutions, cultural grievances, and a promise to restore traditional American values, resonating deeply with those who viewed the nation’s moral fabric as under threat. By presenting himself as a defender against elites and secularism, Trump created a coalition that amplified Christian nationalist ideals,

blending them with a broader rejection of democratic norms. This convergence of religion and populism not only deepened societal divisions but also created a volatile environment where inflammatory rhetoric could ignite action, paving the way for a defining moment of crisis that tested the resilience of American democracy.

The crisis erupted on January 6, 2021. At the “Save America” rally, Trump’s false claims of a stolen 2020 election and his call to “fight like hell” galvanized supporters, many driven by a fusion of Christian nationalist zeal and Trumpist loyalty, to storm the Capitol. Clashing with law enforcement, invading legislative chambers, and targeting the vice president for certifying the electoral vote, the rioters paradoxically claimed to defend democracy while undermining its core principle of a peaceful transfer of power. Groups like the Oath Keepers, emboldened by Trump’s refusal to concede and fuelled by conspiracies, saw the attack as an opportunity to reshape governance. This event reveals how democracy’s openness to criticism and participation can be exploited by those invoking its name to justify anti-democratic actions, highlighting a profound internal threat to the nation’s democratic values.

With a focus on the January 6, 2021 Capitol attack, this dissertation explores how Trumpism and Christian nationalism encouraged and justified political violence in the US. In order to show how these belief systems presented the events as morally virtuous defiance of perceived authority, it examines political speeches, media coverage, participant testimony, and symbolic imagery. The goal of the study is to determine how these tales influenced cultural norms and personal motivations, resulting in an unprecedented violation of democratic standards. The study advances our knowledge of how populist politics and faith may turn political disputes into existential battles.

Due to the complicated nature of the topic, this research work focuses primarily on answering the following key questions: How does Christian nationalism frame American identity and political authority in ways that justify or encourage political violence? In what ways has Trumpism merged with Christian nationalist ideology to create a unified political movement that legitimizes confrontational and violent political actions, and what role does Trump's personality play in this process? How the fusion of Christian nationalist did and Trumpist beliefs influence the motivations, rhetoric, and behaviors of participants in the January 6, 2021 Capitol attack? And more broadly, how have the intersecting ideologies of Christian nationalism and Trumpism shaped public attitudes and political actions in ways that threaten democratic norms and legitimize violence in contemporary United States?

To explore the intersection of Christian nationalism and Trumpism, this study draws on a wide range of research and scholarly works that primarily examine the fusion of religious identity and populist politics, the role of ideological narratives in shaping political behavior, and the ways these combined forces influence contemporary American political culture. This study makes extensive use of primary sources, including major news outlets such as The New York Times and The Washington Post, as well as public opinion data from reputable organizations like the Pew Research Center. These sources provide timely, firsthand insights into political events, public sentiment, and media discourse. In addition, the research is supported by a wide array of secondary sources, including works by academic scholars, journalists, authors, and media analysts.

The intersection of religion and politics in the United States has long been a source of debate. In recent years, the rise of Christian nationalism has heightened concerns about the extent to which religious beliefs influence political agendas, undermine democratic values,

and blur the line between church and state. This issue is thoroughly examined in a book titled *Taking America Back for God*. The book, written by Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, explores how Christian nationalism fuses religious identity with political ideology. The authors argue that this movement extends far beyond personal faith, employing Christian symbols and rhetoric to advance a political agenda rooted in authoritarianism, cultural dominance, and social exclusion. Drawing on extensive sociological data, they demonstrate how Christian nationalism seeks to define the United States as inherently Christian, often at the cost of pluralism, inclusion, and democratic principles. The book ultimately reveals how religion is not only a source of spiritual meaning, but also a powerful tool for shaping national identity and political power.

In *The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, Katherine Stewart exposes Christian nationalism as a coordinated political movement, not merely a cultural or religious expression. She reveals how religious rhetoric is strategically used to promote authoritarian policies, undermine democracy, and impose a narrow, theocratic vision on American society. Through investigative reporting, Stewart highlights the alliances between religious leaders, political operatives, and wealthy donors working to reshape the nation's laws and institutions in ways that threaten pluralism and the separation of church and state.

One insightful psychological analysis of Donald Trump's leadership style can be found in Aubrey Immanuel's article "Leadership Style of US President Donald J. Trump." In this study, Immanuel applies Theodore Millon's personality theory to construct a detailed profile of Trump's dominant personality traits, identifying them as Ambitious/Exploitative, Outgoing/Impulsive, and Dominant/Controlling. These traits point to a charismatic yet self-



serving leadership style, marked by a desire for admiration, assertiveness, and a tendency to prioritize personal goals over collective governance. Immelman's profile suggests that Trump's leadership approach challenges democratic norms and contributes to increased political polarization, making it a critical framework for understanding his influence on contemporary American politics.

Riley Martinez's article "A Lineage of White Insurgency: US Capitol Attack and the Lost Cause" examines the January 6 Capitol attack as part of a broader historical pattern of white supremacist insurgency in the United States. By connecting the Capitol riot to a long history of racialized insurgency, Martinez's work helps explain how Christian nationalist symbols and Trumpist rhetoric combine to fuel violent challenges to democratic institutions. This perspective underscores the racial and ideological dimensions that shape the motivations, rhetoric, and actions of those involved in the attack, enriching the broader understanding of how these intertwined ideologies threaten democratic norms in contemporary America.

The importance of the study stems from its ability to clarify the complex and intersecting ideological currents that support political violence and undermine democratic norms in the US. This dissertation explores how Christian Nationalism and Trumpism; two different but frequently overlapping ideologies, combined to produce a powerful narrative of existential struggle and moral obligation by looking at the January 6 Capitol attack. By framing the attack in terms of religion, Christian nationalism transformed the political struggle into a supernatural one to restore the country's Christian identity. At the same time, populist disobedience, devotion to a charismatic leader, and a rejection of constitutional checks and balances were all valued in the political framework provided by Trumpism. When combined,

these beliefs offered a political and moral rationale for using violence to protect what ought to be a scared order.

The results of this research have important ramifications for civic leaders, educators, and legislators who are trying to combat ideological extremism and increase democratic resilience. Furthermore, by offering a complex, multidisciplinary explanation of how these entwined narratives influence views of legitimacy, authority, and civic responsibility, this work contributes to scholarly discussions in the field of political science and religious studies. In the end, this study emphasizes how critical it is to address the ideological causes of political violence in order to promote a more welcoming civic culture.

This dissertation is divided into three substantive chapters, each examining a distinct yet interrelated elements of the research. With the title “Christian Nationalism”, the first chapter provides a thorough exploration of Christian nationalism as a rising socio-political and religious phenomenon. It also traces the historical development of the movement in the US, and how it is measured, and identifies key groups promoting it. The chapter proceeds with an in-depth look at dominionism, a theological current often intertwined with Christian nationalism, breaking it down into three primary streams: Calvinist, Catholic, and Charismatic. The chapter then discuss how these streams fuel the growth of Christian nationalist thinking. Finally, the chapter concludes by identifying how Christian nationalism challenges democracy, emphasizing the role of grassroots efforts in spreading its message.

Chapter Two titled “The Integration of Christian Nationalism and Trumpism” analyzes the increasing overlap between Christian nationalism and Trumpism, focusing on how their alliance has reshaped the political and cultural environment in the United States. The chapter also explores Donald Trump’s leadership style and personality traits, revealing how his

ambition, dominance, and use of media supported his populist image. It further explains how Christian nationalist leaders endorsed Trump, framing his presidency as divinely ordained, and how white Evangelicals overwhelmingly supported him. Finally, it reviews policy actions that aligned closely with Christian nationalist goals, contributing to a broader effort to blend religious identity with national governance.

Chapter Three examines the January 6th, 2021, Capitol attack as a critical manifestation of the convergence between Trumpism, Christian nationalism, and far-right extremism under title “Trumpism at the Capital”. It explores the political and religious rhetoric that fuelled the insurrection, emphasizing Trump’s incitement, the symbolic use of religious imagery, and the strategic mobilization by extremist groups. The chapter outlines the events before, during, and after the attack, including the breach of the Capitol, public prayer rituals, and the response from law enforcement and political institutions. It also analyzes public opinion shifts, highlighting how partisan divisions influence the interpretation of the event, Trump’s responsibility, and broader democratic norms. Ultimately, the chapter presents the Capitol attack as a symbolic and deeply polarizing event that exposed the fragility of American democracy and the enduring impact of ideological extremism.

The historical, qualitative, and analytical methodologies will be used as long as the goal of the study is to examine how Christian nationalism and Trumpism are connected in encouraging political violence, especially during the January 6<sup>th</sup> Capitol incident. By examining their important role in defending violent mobilization and extreme political behaviour, these methods seek to understand the historical development of Christian nationalism and its increasing entanglements with Trump’s populist politics. On one hand, by using the historical research method, which tracks the ideological origins and changes of

Christian nationalism in American political culture, this study is based on a discussion of the historical and current link between religion and politics. The qualitative approach on the other hand, analyses language from political actors, religious leaders, and media sources to offer detailed explanations of how these ideological groups came together to support political violence. Furthermore, the influence of these ideologies on public opinion specifically feedback toward the Capitol attack and the perceived legitimacy of political violence is evaluated using quantitative data from national polls and surveys. These are the analytical frameworks and guiding techniques used to achieve the objectives of this dissertation.

The January 6th Capitol Attack, Trumpism, and Christian nationalism have all interacted dynamically to drastically change the political landscape in the United States. The merging of religious identity and populist enthusiasm has raised widespread concerns about the erosion of democratic norms like as pluralism and the separation of church and state. These movements legitimized political violence and resisted peaceful power transfer by organizing elements of the people using emotionally charged rhetoric and symbolic religious narratives. This dissertation investigates how ideological integration continues to effect public debate and political conduct in the United States. Finally, it raises serious concerns about the sustainability of American democracy in the face of escalating religious and political extremism.

## **Chapter One: Historical Perspectives for Christian Nationalism**

As juxtaposed with other industrialized democratic nations, the United States is noted for its religious diversity and pluralism. Religion has profoundly impacted American culture, history, politics, and social standards. Christianity's historical dominance in many Western nations, fostered a cultural and political environment where Christian values were deeply connected with national identity, ultimately offered a rise to Christian nationalism as a movement seeking to preserve and institutionalize that influence. Today, arguments over Christian nationalism highlight difficulties between religious identity, pluralism, and democracy, highlighting its long-lasting impact on American history.

### **1. Christian Nationalism**

#### **1.1. Defining Christian Nationalism**

The idea that a nation should be rooted in Christian principles has deep historical roots, often linked to the founding narratives of countries like the United States. In recent years, however, this belief has taken on new political significance through the rise of Christian nationalism. Importantly, CN must be carefully defined and distinguished from personal religious faith or general Christian affiliation, as it represents a specific ideological framework with political goals rather than a private or purely spiritual expression of belief.

Dividing Christian nationalism into its two core components, is essential for understanding the complexity of the term and how its religious and political elements interact. . With more than two billion adherents, Christianity is currently the most popular religion in the world. It was founded on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Protestant, eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches are some of the major branches. Christianity is a living tradition that combines faith, culture, and community, it is more than just a collection of religious doctrines. It focuses on Jesus Christ, highlighting the connection between God, people, and the world, both as a historical person and as a contemporary spiritual reality. Christian theology and practice are embodied and acted upon by the church, which is the community of believers (Spencer et al.). A person who follows Jesus Christ's teachings and adopts the principles and customs of Christianity in all facets of their lives is referred to as a "Christian".

Definitions for nationalism vary among scholars. As first definition, nationalism is a modern political and social movement that revolves around the sentiment of devotion and pride in one's nation, culture and tradition. It also preaches the need to build and maintain a single united national identity. Moreover, nationalists believe in a nation's sovereignty and self-governance without outside influence. Nationalism is a very broad approach that according to the Australian philosopher Eugene Kamenka is "threatening to merge into patriotism or national consciousness at one end and fascism and anti-individualism at the other" (3).

Secondly the term nationalism is as a set of beliefs about the origins, nature, and value of a nation. It views humanity as social animals with deep divisions and differences. Nationalism asserts that membership in a nation guides ones choices and actions, promoting partiality and subjugating loyalty to one's own interests. This ideology views the nation as the central form

of community and elevates it to supreme loyalty. Nationalism's aims include national autonomy, national identity, and national unity.

Christianity has a distinct, more politicized meaning when used in the context of Christian nationalism. It becomes a symbol of cultural and political identity more than just spiritual devotion or religious practice. The “Christian” in Christian nationalism carries with it assumptions about nativism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, patriarchy, and militarism and is more about identity than religion. By redefining it, the emphasis is shifted from faith-based life to a socio-political term that promotes undemocratic and exclusive ideas (Camp).

Christian Nationalism has become a contentious ideology that questions the fundamental principles of Christianity and democracy. In an effort to convey the complexity of this phrase, scholars and researchers have provided a variety of definitions. Christian Nationalism according to one definition, is an ideology that combines national identification with religious identity, particularly Christianity. Under the pretence of upholding Christian values, it frequently advocates discriminatory laws and authoritarian discourse, which eventually threatens democracy and the inclusive principles of Christianity (Whitehead and Perry<sup>10</sup>).

The ideology promotes centralized, authoritarian speech against non-Christians and minority groups. Christian nationalism usually runs counter to Christianity’s basic teaching of empathy, tolerance, and love for others even when it professes to support Christian principles. Scholars however maintain that Christian nationalism undermines both inclusive, compassionate ideals of Christianity and democratic norms by encouraging intolerance, exclusion, and oppression in the guise of religion. Furthermore, it undermines democratic values like equality, freedom, and pluralism by associating with political domination. Thus,

Christian nationalism is shown as a perversion of civic and religious principles, with significant ramifications for democratic administration and societal cohesiveness (Kusumawikan 31).

Christian nationalism is viewed as a theological concept by some, while others argue that it is really a political strategy wrapped in religious language. Christian nationalism is a political movement rather than a religious one; its leaders seek to seize power and replace democracy with a theocratic regime, not to save souls. This viewpoint highlights that political dominance, not spiritual renewal, is the real motivation behind Christian nationalism. By emphasizing the movement's principle has shifted toward grabbing power, as opposed to salvaging souls. It is made evident that its leaders place a higher priority on dominance and control than on true moral or religious principles (Stewart 3).

The point of view reveals the dishonesty at the core of Christian nationalism, which frequently passes off authoritarian goals-like the desire to create a theocratic government-as religious defence. Concerns regarding the dangers this movement presents to democratic regimes are also brought up by the term. Christian nationalism runs the risk of undermining secular and non-Christian voices, undermining civil freedoms, and destroying the separation of church and state by promoting a single, inflexible understanding of Christianity. Such standing point urges researchers to identify and oppose the undemocratic tendencies at the heart of Christian nationalism, serving as a sobering warning about the perils of combining religion with political goals (Stewart 5).

Overall, Christian nationalism is a belief system that combines Christianity with national belonging and frequently imagines the nation divinely chosen. It is a political movement that



asserts the United States was founded as a Christian nation and should be governed according to Christian principles. It merges religious and national identity, often promoting conservative white Christians' privileged position in American society. As its core, it challenges the constitutional principles of the separation of church and state, advocating policies favouring Christianity over other religions or secular perspectives (Graves-Fitzsimmons et al.).

## **2.1. Historical Context**

### **2.1.1. The Rise of Christian Nationalism in American Politics**

In American politics, Christian nationalism has become a potent ideological force. Proponents contend that since the US was established as a Christian country, its laws need to be based on biblical principles. The conventional division of church and state is being challenged by this movement for faith-based governance (Jones et al.3). By forming a movement, advocates of this belief argued that the tenets of the bible should manifest in laws on issues such as abortion, and the freedom of religion in public life. Alliteratively, this ideology often advocates for increased religious engagement in public policy, education, and governmental institution, exerting a push against the traditional notion of church states differentiation (14-17).

Supporters of Christian nationalism view their efforts as a defense of American moral and cultural heritage. They believe that reinforcing Christian values within the state is necessary in the face of cultural shifts they perceive as threatening to traditional norms. The movement has been energized by political leaders, religious institutions, and grassroots activism, gaining traction particularly as a reaction to societal changes such as globalization, cultural liberalization, and declining church attendance (23–25). For many followers, Christian

nationalism represents a reaffirmation of national identity and a response to what they perceive as the erosion of America's religious foundations.

Despite its growing influence, Christian nationalism has faced substantial criticism. Detractors argue that it undermines the principles of religious pluralism and democratic governance (Jones et al. 17). While some Christians defend the ideology as a way of restoring America's cultural roots, critics warn that it imposes a narrow religious framework on a diverse population. By excluding non-Christian groups and promoting religious dominance, Christian nationalism challenges the inclusive ideals that underpin American democracy. This ongoing debate highlights the deep divisions within American society and raises essential questions about the role of religion in public life. Ultimately, it reflects the nation's struggle to reconcile its religious and cultural identity with its constitutional commitment to diversity and freedom (25).

## **1.2. Social Identity Theory and Religion Legitimacy in Politics**

Understanding the role of religion in political movements requires a deeper look into how identity functions within group dynamics. Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed primarily by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, provides a framework for understanding how individuals derive a sense of self from their group memberships. Such feeling fosters a sense of connection and belonging among group members. At its core, SIT posits that people define themselves in relation to groups, whether those are based on race, nationality, profession, or religion (Islam 1781). These categorizations lead to the formation of a collective identity that emphasizes in-group favoritism and positive distinctiveness compared to out-groups (Ashforth and Mael 20). In the context of Christian nationalism, SIT helps explain how shared

religious identity, specifically Christianity, creates a powerful sense of linkage among adherents, reinforcing their collective commitment to a national identity intertwined with religious values.

SIT asserts that social identification stems from the perception of oneness with a group, where individuals experience the group's successes and failures as their own. In the context of religion, this means that individuals who share a faith feel personally invested in the triumphs and challenges of their religious community (Ashforth and Mael 21). For example, members of a religious group may celebrate collective achievements, such as the construction of a new place of worship, or feel collective distress when their faith is criticized. The theory highlights that the distinctiveness and prestige of a group enhance identification (24). Religious groups often possess unique rituals, values, and histories that set them apart, making their members feel part of a special and esteemed community. This distinctiveness fosters a positive bias toward the in-group, where members exaggerate the positive qualities of their religious group while perceiving out-groups—those of different faiths or none—as less favourable (Islam 1781).

The presence of out-groups plays a critical role in strengthening the linkage among religious group members. SIT research shows that awareness of out-groups reinforces in-group homogeneity and loyalty. For religious individuals, out-groups might include adherents of other religions or secular individuals who do not share their beliefs. The contrast with these out-groups sharpens the boundaries of the religious identity, making the shared faith more salient. For instance, when a religious group perceives external criticism or competition, such as debates over religious practices in public spaces, identification with the in-group intensifies, as threats to the group are interpreted as threats to the self (Gupta 99). This dynamic creates a tighter bond among members, who rally together to affirm their shared identity.

Moreover, SIT emphasizes that group identification does not require direct interpersonal interaction but can arise from mere categorization into a “psychological group”. This is particularly relevant for religious communities, where individuals may feel connected to co-religionists across vast distances or diverse contexts, united by shared beliefs and symbols. The symbolic management of religious identity—through rituals, sacred texts, or charismatic leadership—further reinforces this linkage. For example, communal prayers or religious festivals can heighten the salience of the religious identity, making members feel part of a unified whole. These symbolic practices create a psychological reality for the group, allowing individuals to identify with the religion itself, beyond personal relationships with other members (Trepte 256).

In American Christian nationalism, Christianity is not merely a private faith. It is construed as the cultural foundation of the nation. This conflation of religious and national identity strengthens the emotional bond among Christian in-group members and imbues their sense of belonging with patriotic significance. It also activates what Turner calls the “competition for positive identity,” where religious-national groups seek to maintain or elevate their status by emphasizing superiority or primacy over other groups (Islam 1781-1782).

However, SIT acknowledges that individuals often hold multiple identities, which can create tensions. For religious individuals, conflicts may arise between their religious identity and other affiliations, such as professional or familial roles. SIT suggests that such conflicts are often resolved by prioritizing the most salient identity, which, in times of religious significance—such as during major holidays or crises—may be the religious one (Ashforth and Mael 29-30). This prioritization strengthens the sense of linkage among group members, as they collectively emphasize their shared faith. Additionally, the theory notes that

identification can persist even in the face of adversity, such as when a religious group faces social stigma, as members defend their identity to maintain self-esteem (34).

Social identity theory provides a robust framework for understanding how shared religious identity fosters a sense of linkage among individuals. Through categorization, in-group favouritism, and the salience of out-groups, religious adherents develop a collective identity that binds them together. Symbolic practices and the management of group distinctiveness further enhance this connection, enabling individuals to feel united with their co-religionists, even across diverse contexts. SIT's insights into group dynamics offer valuable perspectives on the psychological mechanisms that create and sustain religious communities.

### **1.3. Dominionism: The Theology behind the Power**

Religious ideologies have played an increasingly prominent role in shaping political discourse and influencing national identity in the United States. Movements rooted in specific theological interpretations have sought not only to inform personal belief but to guide societal structures and state governance. These efforts reflect a broader trend in which faith is leveraged as a basis for political authority, blurring the boundary between church and state. Within this landscape, various theological currents have emerged that advocate for the integration of religious values into public institutions, revealing the complex ways religious conviction can intersect with political ambition. One of the most theologically driven of these movements is Dominionism.

Dominionism is a theocratic ideology asserting that heterosexual Christian men, regardless of theological or end-times beliefs, are divinely mandated to dominate secular society by seizing control of political and cultural institutions. Often intertwined with

Christian Nationalism, it promotes the idea that the US must reclaim its identity as a Christian nation (DeSantis and Jamestown 6). A core tenet of Christian nationalism over the past three decades, Evangelical movements have successfully reshaped public perceptions of the Founding Fathers, portraying them as divinely inspired Christian leaders rather than Enlightenment-era thinkers influenced by secular philosophies. This revisionist narrative has been instrumental in legitimizing dominionist goals, which extend beyond cultural influence to the explicit political takeover of institutions (6).

While most Evangelicals may neither be fully aware of nor explicitly supportive of dominionism, the movement has evolved into a top-down initiative driven by influential religious leaders who actively promote its agenda (7). Republican presidential candidates such as Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry have shown a willingness to engage with dominionist thinkers and leaders, while Sarah Palin has made public statements that suggest she may be at least partially influenced by dominionist ideology (13). At its core, dominionism promotes a belief in religious supremacy, holding that evangelical Christianity is the ultimate moral and political authority. Proponents often argue that the Ten Commandments should serve as the foundation for US law and regard the Constitution not as a secular framework, but as a vehicle for establishing a theocratic state (7).

In understanding the religious roots of the Christian Nationalism movement, dominionism emerges as one of the most significant theological and ideological foundations that fuel contemporary Christian nationalist discourse. It emerges as a theological belief that Christians are called to exercise authority over all of society's major institutions, aiming to establish God's Kingdom in its fullness on earth before the return of Jesus (Cantor). Dominionism is

not a unified organizational movement, but rather branches into three main currents known as the Streams of Dominionism, which differ in their methods yet coincide in ideals.

Christian Reconstructionism, also known as Theonomy, is a theological and political movement founded by Rousas John Rushdoony. It promotes the idea that Christians are divinely mandated to establish dominion over all areas of society, based on a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:28 (Lutheran Church-Missouri 1). Reconstructionists advocate for replacing secular laws with biblical law across institutions such as government, education, and culture. The movement envisions a theocratic society where Scripture governs civil life, viewing this as a historical and spiritual mission beyond mere personal salvation (North and DeMar 47).

Catholic Integralism is a Catholic political philosophy that argues for aligning civil law and policy with Catholic doctrine in regions with a Catholic majority (Millies). Drawing on papal encyclicals like Pope Pius IX's *Quanta Cura* and Pope Leo XIII's *Immortale Dei*, integralism rejects the idea of a religiously neutral state and asserts that public life must be subordinated to spiritual authority (Schmalz). It opposes liberalism and the emphasis on individual rights, advocating instead for a social order grounded in communal values and Catholic moral teaching (The Liberal Tortoise). Central to this view is the belief that spiritual authority should hold primacy over secular governance ("Understanding Catholic Integralism...").

Charismatic Theology or the Seven Mountains Mandate (7MM) emphasize the continuation of spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing, and divine revelation, as central to both church life and social transformation (Ruthven 217). The 7MM strategy, which emerged

in 1975 and was later popularized by Lance Wallnau, asserts that Christians are called to take dominion over seven societal spheres: government, education, media, arts, religion, family, and business (Bolinger). Rooted in Charismatic thought, this framework views such engagement as preparing the world for the Second Coming. It has gained momentum within Christian nationalist circles, especially through figures like Charlie Kirk who align it with Donald Trump's political agenda (Morgan).

### **1.3.2. How Dominionism Fuels Christian Nationalism**

In recent years, a growing movement within American evangelicalism has sought to reshape the nation's identity by intertwining religious convictions with political ambitions. This movement, often referred to as dominionism, advocates for Christians to assert control over various societal spheres, aiming to align national policies and cultural norms with specific interpretations of biblical principles (Ladner).

Dominionism fuels Christian nationalism by transforming biblical directives into political agendas, asserting that Christians are scripturally obligated to dominate all aspects of society, especially government. Proponents identify that God instructs humanity to “have dominion over the earth,” to justify Christian governance. Yet, this verse pertains to stewardship of creation, not control over civil institutions, which did not exist in the biblical context, deeming such interpretations an “exegetical leap” lacking scriptural support (Drollinger 7). Similarly, dominionists misinterpret the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20, viewing “make disciples of all nations” as a mandate to Christianize governments rather than evangelize individuals. Drollinger clarifies that the Greek term “ethnos” refers to ethnic



groups, not political entities, emphasizing an evangelistic rather than governmental mission (8). He further notes that Jesus, in Matthew 22:21, upheld secular authority by stating, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," thereby rejecting theocratic ambitions (Drollinger 9).

Consequently, dominionism misconstrues biblical teachings to advocate for Christian-led governance, aligning with ideologies like Christian Reconstructionism and Theonomy. It seeks to establish America as a Christian state governed by Old Testament laws. Drollinger rejects these views, arguing they overlook the New Testament's focus on spiritual renewal rather than political dominance and misalign God's moral law with national policy, reviving flawed theological frameworks like postmillennialism that prioritize human political efforts to establish Christ's kingdom (10-11).

Dominionism acts as the theological and strategic foundation of Christian nationalism, offering both scriptural justification and a roadmap for transforming society under Christian leadership. It reinterprets biblical verses like Genesis 1:28, where God tells humanity to "have dominion", as divine approval for Christians to take political control and shape national identity around Christian beliefs. This vision is put into action through initiatives like the Seven Mountains Mandate (7MM), which promotes Christian control over major cultural spheres such as government, education, and media. Dominionism also energizes political movements by motivating leaders and organizations to pursue laws and policies rooted in Christian doctrine, thereby expanding the reach and influence of Christian nationalism in both public and private life. Ultimately, the two ideologies work in tandem to pursue a society guided by biblical values, with dominionism fueling Christian nationalism's goals and tactics.

#### **1.4. Historical Background and Development of Christian Nationalism**

Christian nationalism is one of the most persistent and complex examples of the way that religious belief and national identity have been interwoven throughout history to shape political ideologies, cultural values, and public discourse. Christian nationalism's historical roots reveal a longstanding attempt to frame political power, civic life, and even territorial expansion through the lens of religious mission and Christian morality. To properly comprehend the depth and importance of Christian nationalism, it is necessary to analyze its historical roots, where the alignment of religious purpose with political and territorial ambitions first emerged and established the groundwork for its long-term presence in national ideologies.

Christian Nationalism can be traced back to the age of exploration in the 15th century, following Christopher Columbus's exploration. A defining moment came in 1493, when Pope Alexander issued the papal bull *Inter cætera*, and granting Spain the right to colonize recently founded lands in the Americas. This order essentially blessed the combination of imperial conquest and religious evangelism. The papal bull established a precedent for considering colonization to be a spiritual obligation in addition to providing theological support for European expansion. By presenting Christianity as a political imperative as well as a spiritual guidance, it was utilized to defend dominance (Horsely 43).

This fusion of faith and power would echo through centuries of colonial and national expansion. In 1864, the National Reform Association pushed for an amendment that would acknowledge Jesus Christ as the nation's supreme authority, marking the beginning of Christian nationalism in the United States in the 19th and early 20th century. In addition to

marginalizing religious minorities and nonreligious persons, this movement sought to incorporate Christian principles into American law (Whitehead and Perry 76). Opposition to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs during the middle of the 20th century led to a revival of religious rhetoric, particularly during the Cold War, which associated Christian ideals with American identity. This trend was represented by the 1954 Pledge of Allegiance's use of "under God" and the 1956 adoption of "In God We Trust" as the nation's motto (Miller 103). Christian nationalism still has an impact on discussions about religion in public schools, religious exhibits on government property, and topics like LGBTQ rights and abortion in the twenty first century. It promotes traditional but also brings up issues with pluralism, religious freedom, and the separation of church and state (Whitehead and Perry 129).

Christian nationalism is sometimes misused as an excuse for exclusion, the erosion of democratic values, and the perversion of essential Christian teachings. This ideology's proponents contend that Christianity ought to control political power, keep non-Christians apart, and use the legal system to enforce a rigid moral code. This viewpoint however, runs counter to core Christian principles like justice, love, and compassion for underrepresented people. In reality, Christian nationalism has resulted in discriminatory laws that exclude non-Christians by restricting immigration and reshaping school curricula to reflect Christian values. Additionally, it strengthens authoritarianism by portraying dissent as wicked or evil and associating loyalty to political rulers with submission to God. This ideology ignores the country's religious diverse roots and misrepresents American history by claiming that the country was formed only on Christian ideals. Furthermore, it marginalizes vulnerable groups by portraying their civil rights as assaults on "Christian values." These groups include

immigrants, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and ethnic minorities. Christian nationalism reduces democratic norms to promote divisiveness in the guise of religious protection, undermining Christian teachings on justice and compassion (Whitehead and Perry 10-25)

Christian nationalism's historical progress shows how religious rhetoric has consistently been used to defend social control, cultural exclusion, and political dominance. Christian nationalism has frequently deviated from core Christian values like compassion, equality, and justice, despite having its roots in a tradition that frequently emphasizes morality and collective identity. Rather, it has been used as a means to suppress dissent under the pretense of divine authority, distort democratic ideals, and favor one religious worldview over another. Understanding this ideology's historical foundations as well as its implications for religious pluralism and democratic integrity in the modern era is essential, as it continues to influence discussions on topics ranging from immigration and reproductive freedom to education and civil rights.

### **1.5. Christian Nationalism Measurement**

Although Christian Nationalism (CN) has become a significant political force in the United States, its breadth, complexity, and social impact have not been well-captured in the majority of the studies on the topic. A new, multifaceted method of researching CN has emerged in reaction to these constraints, providing a more accurate and theoretically based comprehension of the ideology. In order to adequately represent CN's fundamental beliefs such as the conviction that America was created for a divine purpose, the hostility to

multiculturalism, and the belief that the government should only support Christian values, the standard six-question measurement scale was first updated and expanded to 14 items.

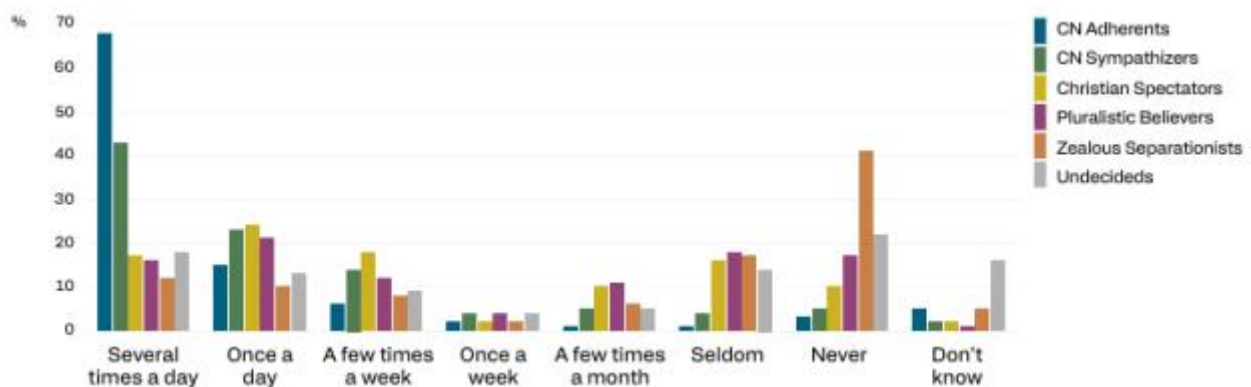
The updated survey exposed the exclusivist and theocratic presumptions that frequently underline CN beliefs by using more precise language rather than ambiguous or broad questions. Second, researchers used Latent Class Analysis (LCA); a semi supervised machine learning technique that uncovers latent patterns in the data, rather than a straightforward additive scale. According to their views on religion in public life, Americans were categorized using this method into six different ideological groups; Christian Nationalist Adherents, CN Sympathizers, Christian spectators, pluralistic believers, Zealous Separationists, and Undecideds. Third, the method specifically assessed the possible dangers that CN might bring, such as animosity towards minorities, a predisposition for authoritarian or theocratic governance, and attempts to normalize CN principles in popular culture. This was accomplished by asking respondents about their opinions on racial and religious pluralism, their support for undemocratic institutions, and their willingness to use demeaning language. Finally, by validating its findings against 25 more metrics, the study improved the credibility of previous research, increased the dependability on CN research, and provided educators and policymakers with important new information (“Who Are Christian...” 12-14).

Researchers have made substantial progress in the study of Christian nationalism by extending conventional measurement instruments and using modern methods of analysis. Americans' differing views on religion and government are made clear by the improved survey and the application of LCA, which enable a more precise identification of ideological subgroups. Furthermore, this methodological development draws attention to the possible dangers CN poses to democratic values and inclusive citizenship by associating it with

particular social and political viewpoints, such as intolerance for minority groups and support for authoritarian governance. In addition to being important from an academic standpoint, these observations offer vital direction for educators, legislators, and civic leaders who wish to address the increasing impact of CN on American society.

### 1.6. America's Civic and Religious Landscape in Six Groups

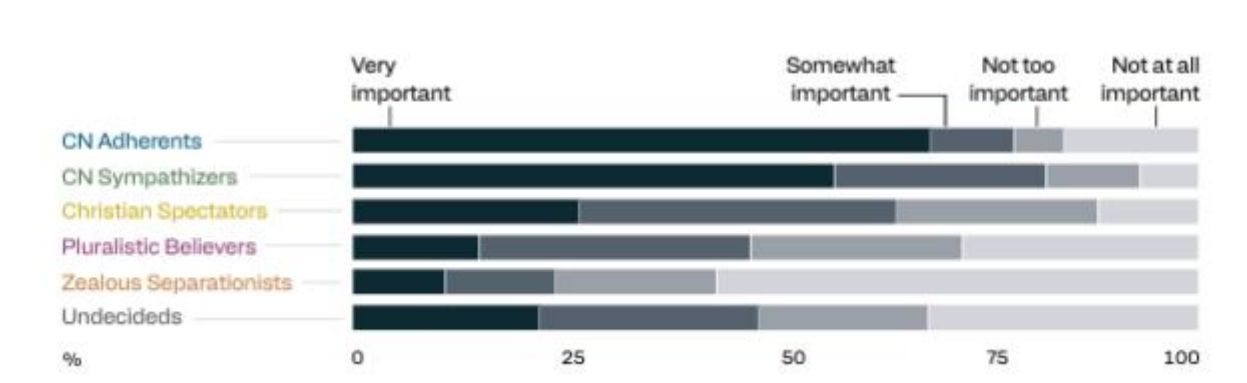
There is much more to the relationship between religion and civic identity in the US than just a dichotomy between the religious and the secular. Researchers have discovered six different groups that reflect Americans' attitudes towards politics, religion, and public life based on data from a large national poll. From those who want to integrate Christianity into national governance to those who oppose any religious influence in state affairs, these groups Christian Nationalist Adherents, Sympathizers, Spectators, Pluralistic Believers, Zealous Separationists, and undecided reflect a broad range of belief systems. Gaining knowledge of these categories is essential to understanding the ideological factors influencing American democracy and the various ways people deal with issues of power, pluralism, and identity. Figure 1 shows the frequency of prayer outside of religious services among different belief groups, reflecting variations in personal religious devotion.



**Fig .1.** Frequency of Prayer Outside of Religious Services among Different Belief Groups.

**Source:** “Who Are Christian Nationalists? A New Approach to Measuring an American Ideology.” *Neighborly Faith & Technites*, 2023. <https://neighborlyfaith.org/research/who-are-christian-nationalists/>.

As the figure identifies, the majority of CN Adherents report praying multiple times a day, which is the highest frequency reported. Although they pray a little less frequently than Adherents, CN Sympathizers still exhibit high levels of prayer. Zealous Separists on the other hand, are the least likely to pray, with the largest number falling into the “never” group. Praying once a day or few times a week is indicative of moderate engagement among Christians Spectators and pluralistic believers. Zealous Separists and Undecideds on the other hand, exhibit a greater propensity for infrequent or absent prayer, with sizable percentages choosing “seldom”, “never”, or “don’t know”. All things considered, the evidence shows a strong correlation between a person’s religious identification and their propensity to pray on daily basis (“Who Are Christian Nationalists?” 18).

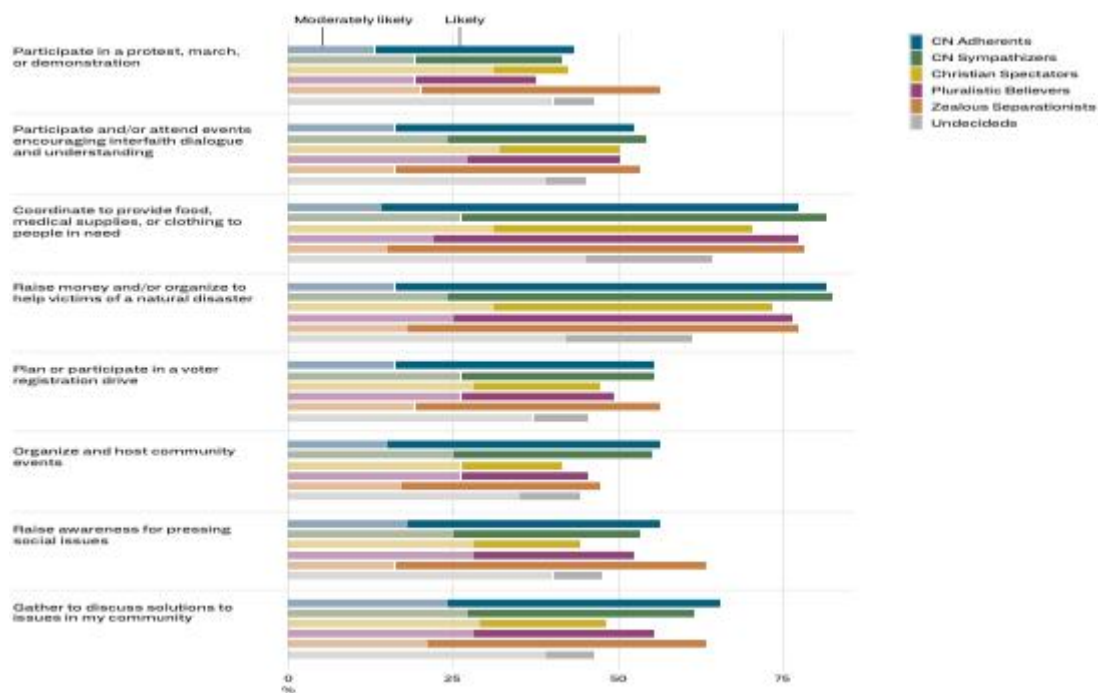


**Fig.2.** Perceived Importance of Religion among Different Belief Groups.

**Source:** “Who Are Christian Nationalists? A New Approach to Measuring an American Ideology.” *Neighborly Faith & Technites*, 2023. <https://neighborlyfaith.org/research/who-are-christian-nationalists/>.

For figure 2, the highest level of religious commitment are found among Christian Nationalist Adherents and Sympathizer: a sizable majority of Adherents rank religion as “very important”, closely followed by Sympathizers, who also have a substantial presence in the “somewhat important” category. Despite being less politically active, Christian Spectators place a comparatively high value on religion, with the majority assessing it as “very” or “somewhat” significant. Pluralistic believers and Undecideds, on the other hand show a wider range of answers; while many choose “somewhat important”, a significant percentage also say that religion is not very essential in their life. The most secular group are fervent Separatists, who categorically distance themselves from religious influence by classifying religion as “not too important” or “not at all important” (“Who Are Christian Nationalists?” 18). This trend continues in Figure 03, which shows levels of willingness to engage in interfaith or non-faith activities vary significantly across belief groups.





**Fig.3.** Willingness to Engage In Interfaith or Non-Faith Activities When Given the Opportunity among Different Belief Groups

**Source:** “Who Are Christian Nationalists? A New Approach to Measuring an American Ideology.” *Neighborly Faith & Technites*, 2023. <https://neighborlyfaith.org/research/who-are-christian-nationalists/>.

Figure 3 shows that despite their exclusionary views, Christian Nationalist Adherents are very inclined to undertake useful, non-political community service projects like charity or disaster relief; more than 70% of them are likely to do so. Similar patterns are followed by CN Sympathizers, albeit with a little less vigour, especially during ecumenical gatherings and issue-based conversations. Christian Spectators, on the other hand, despite being personally religious, exhibit consistently low levels of engagement in almost every type of civic activity

indicating a gap between their personal faith and their public action. Because of their dedication to religious diversity, pluralistic believers stand out as one of the most civically engaged groups, particularly in interfaith discussion, fervent Separists are at the forefront of political activism, including voter registration drives and protests, but they are less interested in working with other religions. The least reliable group is still the Undecideds, who generally disengage elsewhere but participate somewhat in humanitarian endeavors (“Who Are Christian Nationalists?” 21). In the end, these results show that the degree of religious devotion, as shown by prayer patterns and the value placed on faith, influences not just one's own spirituality but also the type and degree of cross-party civic activity.

### **1.7. How White Christian Nationalism Challenges Traditional Interpretations of the First Amendment**

White Christian Nationalism (WCN) represents a significant and controversial movement that intertwines Christian identity with American nationalism, often emphasizing white Christian supremacy. This ideology has profound implications for the First Amendment, particularly its Religion Clauses, the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause, which are designed to protect religious freedom and maintain separation between church and state (Feldman 724)

The First Amendment, ratified in 1791, includes the Establishment Clause (“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”) and the Free Exercise Clause (“or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”). Traditionally, these clauses have been interpreted to promote a separation between church and state, ensuring religious freedom for all and preventing government endorsement of any religion. Early interpretations, as noted by Justice

Joseph Story, saw the US as a de facto Christian nation, but post-World War II, the Supreme Court, in response to growing religious pluralism, began to recognize stronger protections for religious equality and freedom, moving away from Christian-centric views. However, WCN challenges this evolution by advocating for a return to a perceived Christian foundation, which directly conflicts with the traditional separationist interpretation. This shift is particularly evident in recent Supreme Court decisions and state policies (Woodrum)

The Free Exercise Clause has historically been understood to protect individuals from government interference in their religious practices, with the 1990 Supreme Court decision in *Employment Division v. Smith* establishing that neutral laws of general applicability (i.e., laws not specifically targeting religion) could burden religious practices without triggering strict scrutiny, as long as they were rational and applied equally. This approach deferred to democratic processes, limiting judicial intervention (Woodrum).

However, WCN calls for stronger judicial protection specifically for Christian practices, arguing that modern secularism and religious diversity threaten Christianity. This has led to a significant shift in Supreme Court jurisprudence under the Roberts Court, which has moved away from the *Smith* framework as exemplified in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* 2021 case when the Court allowed Catholic Social Services (CSS) to claim exemptions from non-discrimination requirements based on religious beliefs, effectively weakening *Smith* by expanding exceptions for religious entities. This case highlighted a move toward prioritizing these decisions reflect a broader agenda to ensure Christianity, particularly white Christian practices, maintains a hegemonic position, challenging the traditional understanding of the Free Exercise Clause as a neutral protector of all religious practices Christian practices, even

when they conflict with secular laws protecting marginalized groups (Graves-Fitzsimmons and Siddiqi) .

Similarly, the Establishment Clause traditionally prohibits the government from establishing a national religion or favoring one religion over others, interpreted to maintain a strict separation between church and state. This has historically meant that government actions, such as funding religious schools or displaying religious symbols in public spaces, were scrutinized to ensure they did not endorse religion (Woodrum).

WCN, by contrast, advocates for a return to a de facto Christian nation, where Christian symbols and practices are constitutionally permissible and even necessary. This is reflected in recent Supreme Court decisions that uphold Christian practices in public settings such as the case of *Town of Greece v. Galloway* in 2014 when the Court upheld Christian prayers at government meetings, arguing that such practices foster a harmonious society despite religious diversity. This decision suggested that non-Christians must accept Christian dominance as part of American tradition, contradicting the separationist interpretation (Feldman 670, 725) .These rulings indicate a shift toward interpreting the Establishment Clause in a way that accommodates Christian practices, challenging the traditional view that government must remain neutral in matters of religion. This aligns with WCN's broader goal of promoting a Christian nation,

The First Amendment, as part of the broader constitutional framework, supports a pluralistic democracy where all citizens, regardless of religion, have equal participation in governance. WCN, however, distrusts democratic processes that include diverse participation, viewing them as threats to Christian dominance (Woodrum). This is evident in the rejection of

democratic outcomes that do not align with WCN's vision, such as opposition to policies promoting religious pluralism or secular governance. Figures like Rousas John Rushdoony and contemporary conservative Christian leaders argue that democracy itself is incompatible with Christianity, advocating for a theocratic system where only white Christians legitimately participate (Feldman 671). This stance undermines the First Amendment's role in protecting pluralistic democracy, as WCN seeks to prioritize Christian supremacy over the broader public good, potentially leading to exclusionary policies that marginalize non-Christians and secular individuals.

The judiciary has traditionally acted as a neutral arbiter, balancing religious freedom with the separation of church and state. However, the Roberts Court, influenced by WCN, has adopted a more interventionist role, reflecting conservative values that align with Christian nationalism. This is evident in recent decisions that prioritize the Free Exercise Clause over the Establishment Clause while earlier conservative courts emphasized judicial restraint and deference to democratic processes, the current Roberts Court has shifted toward a more activist posture that privilege Christian religious claims under the Free Exercise Clause (Feldman 722, 741).

The shift reflects a broader political and cultural transformation in which Christian nationalist ideologies have entered the mainstream of conservative legal thought. For example, in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, the Court sided with a Catholic agency that refused to work with same-sex couples, a decision that underscores how religious liberty is being interpreted through a lens sympathetic to traditional Christian moral claims. Justice Alito's concurrence in that case reflects White Christian Nationalist priorities by seeking to overturn long-standing precedent that had restrained religious exemptions from generally applicable laws. In doing so,

the Court effectively moves toward a constitutional framework that treats Christian identity and practice as normative, challenging the historical commitment to religious neutrality (“*Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*”).

White Christian Nationalism challenges traditional understandings of the First Amendment by seeking to redefine the role of religion in American public life. Rather than upholding the constitutional principles of religious freedom and government neutrality, it promotes a vision in which Christian beliefs hold a privileged position in law and policy. This interpretation not only distorts the original intent of the First Amendment but also risks excluding non-Christian communities and undermining the pluralistic values at the core of American democracy. As such, the rise of White Christian Nationalism calls for a renewed examination of how constitutional protections are interpreted and applied in a religiously diverse society.

### **1.8. The Role of Grassroots Advocacy in Advancing Christian Nationalism in the US**

For many years, Christian nationalism has played a major role in American politics. Despite not being a new ideology, its impact has significantly increased recently as a result of calculated mobilization inside organizations like churches, think tanks, and grassroots lobbying. The attempt to incorporate Christian values into public policy, which will impact legislative choices and the political environment, is at the core of this movement.

Christian nationalism's proponents say this change is a return to traditional American ideals, while its detractors say it favours one Christian perspective over another and frequently marginalizes non-Christian Americans. Promoting religious expression in public institutions has been one of the movement's main tactics. Laws like the one implemented in August 2023, for instance, requiring "In God We Trust" to be displayed in classrooms from

elementary schools to universities, are viewed as ways to incorporate Christian principles into public life. Additionally, Christian nationalists strive to integrate biblical lessons into school curricula, portraying them as crucial to comprehending the moral and historical underpinnings of America (Pew Research Center). Opponents contend that these policies violate the separation of church and state, especially in secular educational settings, while advocates contend that they offer moral guidance. Christian nationalism mostly depends on political mobilization in addition to legislative initiatives. This tactic consists of enlisting religious groups to support laws that reflect their values, influencing court rulings, and running for office to choose representatives who share those values.

In conclusion, grassroots advocacy continues to be a driving force behind the growth and sustained influence of Christian nationalism in the United States. Far from being a top-down movement led solely by prominent political or religious figures, Christian nationalism draws significant strength from local organizations, church networks, and community-based activists who work diligently to promote its ideals on the ground. These grassroots actors strategically engage religious communities through sermons, faith-based education, and cultural events that reinforce a vision of America as a divinely chosen nation. They also play a critical role in influencing school curricula, supporting political candidates aligned with their beliefs, and mobilizing voters around key moral and cultural issues. By shaping both hearts and minds at the community level, grassroots networks embed Christian nationalist values into the daily lives and identities of citizens. Furthermore, their persistent efforts to introduce and pass legislation that aligns with their biblical worldview—especially on matters such as reproductive rights, religious expression in public institutions, and education—highlight their enduring impact on public policy. As a result, Christian nationalism remains not only a potent

ideological force but also a deeply embedded cultural movement whose future relevance in American politics is likely to persist, and perhaps even expand, in the years to come.

## **Chapter Two: Reinforcing the Integration between Christian Nationalism and Trumpism**



Trumpism and Christian nationalism merge nationalist aims with religious identity, signifying an essential ideological combination in contemporary American politics. The political movement supporting Donald Trump is becoming more and more intertwined with Christian nation whose laws and culture should reflect conservative Christian ideals. According to scholars, many Trump supporters have viewed the movement as a divine mission to restore the nation's purportedly Christian history, which is typified by its populist rhetoric, anti-establishment posture, and emphasis on "America First" policies (Jones).

This combination can be seen in Trump and his followers' rhetoric, which regularly uses religious imagery, frames political conflicts as spiritual conflicts, and promotes policies that are consistent with a conservative Christian worldview, such as immigration reform, LGBTQ+ rights (Whitehead and Perry 45). According to additional research, Trump's attraction to white evangelical is rooted in a larger narrative that portrays him as a divinely appointed leader entrusted with protecting Christian American from liberal and secular dangers, rather than just policy congruence (Burnett). As a result, the coalition of Trumpism and Christian nationalism has changed the political landscape and strengthened the idea that national identity and religion are closely intertwined in America.

## **2.1. Definition of Trumpism**

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines Trumpism as "the policies and political ideas of US. President Donald Trump." ("Trumpism"). More specifically, a political ideology that takes a business-like approach to politics, reflecting Trump's history as an executive and entrepreneur. It emphasizes straightforward, frequently anti-establishment rhetoric, populist appeal, and the reduction of fundamental policy concerns to problem-solving terms. Furthermore, Trumpism entails the purposeful use of language to engage people and present

Trump as a political outsider capable of correcting governmental inefficiencies through executive-style leadership (Beeman 2).

To understand Trumpism, it is essential to examine its defining characteristics, which reveal how Donald Trump's political style and rhetoric reshaped contemporary American conservatism. According to Rachel D. Beeman's analysis of Trump's campaign speeches, the three key elements of Trumpism are an appeal to populism, a business –like approach to politics, and an anti-establishment stance (Beeman 4).

Populism within Trumpism involves a charismatic leader aiming to demolish the authority held by the elite while maintaining a connection to the masses. This involves appealing to the wishes of ordinary citizens, criticizing elite opponents, and simplifying difficult concepts. Trump's populism leverages inclusive rhetoric, utilizing terms like "we," "our," "us," and "you" to create a sense of inclusiveness. Additionally, the business-like strategy requires using effective reasoning to attain goals. Trump frequently articulated broad issues but left solutions ambiguous, depending on his instincts as business executive to set goals as difficulties developed. This method also involves treating opponents as research subjects. For example, Trump repeatedly insulted Hillary Clinton, undermining her credibility and leadership ability. The anti-establishment mindset is defined by resistance to those possessing authority and a desire to challenge the status quo. This including organizing citizens against corruption in politics and portraying elites as out of touch with their constituents. Trump frequently presented himself as an outsider who would "drain the swamp" and disrupt conventional norms (Beeman 5-12).

## **2.2. The Foundation of Trumpism**

Fundamentally, Trumpism stems from a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the perceived disregard for some communities and the swift changes in American society. By appealing to anxieties about population change and economic dislocation, it resurrects themes of protectionism, cultural preservation, and mistrust of elites. Trumpism is more than just a political movement; it represents a larger cultural revolt that questions long-standing institutions and conventions.

Trumpism is strongly rooted in a long history of populist and nativist movements in the United States, influenced by cultural, economic, and political concerns that resonated with a sizable part of the voters, particularly white working-class electors in rural and industrial areas (O'Connor). Trumpism grew into a potent political force by playing on the concerns of working -class Americans, particularly in rural and industrial areas, who felt alienated from the political establishment. Trump was able to create a coalition including not just disillusioned white voters but also a sizable percentage of blue –collar workers who believed globalization, deindustrialization, and the erosion of traditional American values had left them behind. This demographic, traditionally overlooked by both the Democratic and Republican parties, perceived Trump as a political outsider capable of reinstating their economic and cultural stability (Gerston).

Additionally, America's history of populist movements influenced the birth of Trumpism. The nativist views of earlier movements, such as the Know Nothings, which opposed immigration and saw the shifting demographic landscape as a threat to American identity, were repeated in Trump's speech. The populist appeals of individuals like George Wallace in the 1960s, whose segregationist position similarly tapped into racial and cultural worries among Southern whites, might be linked to Trump's appeal to white working-class (O'Brien).

Supporters of Trump who believed that immigration, liberal elites, and political correctness were undermining their cultural values found great resonance in Trump's overt nationalism, which portrayed the US as being under attack from both internal and global enemies. Trumpism emphasizes a return to traditional values and a focus on national sovereignty, combining aspects of nationalism and cultural conservatism. Trump's political strategy has been distinguished by its combination of economic and cultural populism (Glasser).

Essentially, Trumpism is a reflection of long-standing concerns about identity, belonging, and power in America rather than just a political phenomenon. It transforms the nation's political landscape in significant ways and embodies the aspirations of those who feel left behind by social change and globalization. Understanding the tenets of Trumpism is essential to comprehending the divisions that exist today and the direction that American politics will take in the future.

### **2.3. Key Features of Trumpism**

The political philosophy of US. President Donald Trump, known as Trumpism has a number of essential components that have had an enormous effect on American politics. Populist strategy that stresses national sovereignty and puts the interests of native -born people ahead of those of immigrants is what defines Trumpism. This viewpoint frequently entails a critical attitude towards elite political structures and globalization (Yang).

Scholars have recognized Trumpism as a sort of authoritarian populism, as demonstrated by politicians such as Trump and the Italian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. This strategy combines populist rhetoric with authoritative rule, appealing directly to the public while eroding established democratic institutions (Thulin). As it core, Trumpism is concerned with cultural politics, which calls into question shared national ideals and togetherness. This

method frequently entails constructing a "us vs. them" narrative, separating society into groups along ideological, racial, or cultural lines which can lead to further polarization (Giroux).

In the end, the characteristics of Trumpism expose a political philosophy that feeds on division and subverts democratic norms through authoritarian inclinations. It exacerbates social divisions and makes attempts at national unification more difficult by presenting society in an adversarial light. Gaining an understanding of these processes is crucial to understanding how Trumpism continues to shape American politics.

## **2.4. Promoters of Trumpism**

### **2.4.1. Steve Bannon**

Steve Bannon is regarded to be one of the main creators and advocates of Trumpism. In his role as Breitbart News's former executive chairman, Bannon contributed to the organization's transformation into a platform for nationalist and populist ideas and a voice for the alt-right (Posner), which is a far-right political movement that emerged in the United States, known for its white nationalist and racist ideologies. It operates primarily online, using platforms like social media to promote its views, which often oppose multiculturalism and mainstream conservative politics (Meir). Trump's 2016 presidential campaign was heavily influenced by him, emphasizing economic nationalism, anti-immigration rhetoric, and resistance to globalist ideas. His strategic contributions included crafting key slogans like "Drain the Swamp" and advocating for the divisive "Muslim Ban", which became central to Trump's political persona. As Chief Strategist, Bannon influenced several executive actions aligned with Trump's "America First" agenda, including the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and the implementation of a visa ban targeting predominantly Muslim

nations (Bennett). Bannon has engaged in other initiatives to promote Trumpism. He returned to Breitbart News in 2017, using it as a platform to challenge establishment Republicans, such as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, by backing anti-establishment candidates like Roy Moore in Alabama's Senate race (Jazeera).

After leaving the administration, Bannon continued to promote Trumpism globally by supporting far-right movements in Europe and launching the War Room podcast, launched in October 2019, it has become Bannon's primary platform for promoting Trumpism domestically and globally. Recorded in a basement studio near the US Capitol, ranking among the top 10 political podcasts in the United States (TRANSSION: LHX). The podcast serves as a vehicle for Bannon to endorse Trump-aligned politicians and strategies, often focusing on issues central to Trumpism, such as immigration, economic nationalism, and opposition to establishment Republicans. For example, Bannon has called for "MAGA shock troops" to support Trump's policies, including mass deportations, envisioning loyalists embedded within the administration to execute these plans (Thompson). Despite all controversies, the War Room remains a powerful tool for Bannon to shape Republican narratives and maintain his influence within the Trumpist movement. Bannon's studio was described as a hub where he "holds court" to plot Trump's return to power and a broader "American revolution," emphasizing his relentless approach to political activism (Smith). Through his media ventures, political strategizing, and global far-right alliances, Bannon has solidified his reputation as a key architect of Trumpism, a movement that continues to reshape conservative politics in the US and beyond.

#### **2.4.2. Tucker Carlson**

Another prominent Trump supporter is Tucker Carlson, a former Fox News personality who uses his media influence and power to mold and spread the movement's central tenets. Carlson used his prime-time show, which grew to be one of the most popular cable news programs, to further Trumpist themes including cultural nationalism, anti-immigration, and distrust of the media and the establishment (Gabbatt). Carlson frequently mirrored Trump's statements and defended his actions before and after his presidency, which helped to normalize and mainstream divisive viewpoints among conservative audiences. Restructuring conservative media to better reflect populist and nationalist views was one of Carlson's most significant efforts. He regularly questioned US foreign policy choices that did not align with the "America First" narrative, and backed Trump's allegations of election fraud. Trump's following responded favorably to his monologues, which frequently featured alarming interpretations of demographic shifts, critics of progressive social movements, and vehement hostility to COVID-19 regulations (Confessore). Tucker Carlson has emerged as a pivotal amplifier of post-presidency Trumpism, leveraging his media platforms to mainstream its principles, elevate movement leaders, and transform the ideology into a potent cultural force.

Overall, Steve Bannon and Tucker Carlson have been instrumental in advancing and entrenching Trumpism, Bannon through his strategic planning, media operations, and international outreach, and Carlson through his powerful media platform and public commentary, effectively transforming Trumpism into a lasting ideological force within both American conservative politics and global right-wing movements.

## **2.5. The Leadership Style and Personal Traits of Donald Trump**

### **2.5.1. Leadership Style of Donald Trump**

Donald J. Trump's presidency, from 2016 to 2021, introduced a dramatic shift in the norms of American political leadership. Without prior experience in public office or military service, Trump relied on his persona as a celebrity entrepreneur and media figure to cultivate a direct, unconventional connection with voters. His leadership style was marked by a high degree of assertiveness, competitive drive, and a tendency to defy institutional constraints—traits that diverged sharply from those of his predecessors (Immelman). A key feature of Trump's approach was his reliance on social media, particularly Twitter, as a primary tool for political communication and public engagement. This allowed him to bypass traditional media filters and communicate his message in a raw, unmediated form (Fuchsman).

Donald J. Trump's leadership style, shaped in part by his experience as the host of *The Apprentice*, has been widely characterized as transactional, centralized, and unorthodox (FasterCapital). His "America First" agenda—focused on trade protectionism, stricter immigration policies, and deregulation—earned broad support among his base but also sparked considerable national and international controversy (FasterCapital). Scholars and critics have observed that Trump often prioritized personal loyalty, media dominance, and direct communication with the public over adherence to traditional political norms and institutional frameworks (Intrabartola). His presidency offers a compelling case study on the intersection of leadership, media influence, and populist appeal in modern politics. His use of social media, especially Twitter, now X, enabled him to bypass traditional media filters and engage directly with supporters, thereby reshaping political discourse and challenging democratic conventions (FasterCapital). Historians have further analysed how his presidency intensified political polarization and heightened the media's role in shaping public opinion (Pew Research Center).



Whether viewed as a disruptive force or a populist icon, Trump's influence on American politics remains enduring and significant.

In addition to redefining presidential communication, Trump's leadership style increased political divisiveness and questioned democratic norms. He created a political environment characterized by conflict and media spectacle by placing a higher value on direct engagement and personal loyalty than on institutional procedures. His term provides an eye-opening illustration of how contemporary leadership may use populist fervor and media dynamics to change American politics.

### **2.5.2. Trump's Personality Traits**

Experts and analysts have extensively investigated and examined Donald Trump character traits, that commonly correlates with the characteristics listed in The Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC) which is a psychological assessment tool developed by Dr. Theodore Millon to evaluate personality traits and disorders ("Millon Inventories"). It comprises 170 descriptive terms that assess 12 personality scales and 5 attribute domains, providing a comprehensive profile of an individual's personality characteristics. The MIDC is grounded in Millon's evolutionary theory of personality, which emphasizes the interplay between an individual's biological predispositions and environmental influences. This theoretical framework allows clinicians to understand the underlying motivations and behavioral patterns associated with various personality disorders (Immelman). The MIDC is particularly useful in clinical and research contexts for identifying and diagnosing personality disorders, as it emphasizes the interaction between biological predispositions and environmental influences. This nuanced approach allows for a deeper understanding of the motivational dynamics behind personality patterns, distinguishing the MIDC from other

diagnostic tools (Moore). It serves as a valuable tool for mental health professionals in formulating treatment plans and understanding the complexities of personality pathology. The following table outlines the twelve personality styles and five attribute domains measured by the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria, offering a structured framework for assessing individual personality patterns across expressive, cognitive, and interpersonal dimensions.

**Table. 1.** Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria

Scale 1A:	Dominant pattern
	a. Asserting
	b. Controlling
	c. Aggressive (Sadistic; <i>DSM-III-R</i> , Appendix A)
Scale 1B:	Dauntless pattern
	a. Adventurous
	b. Dissenting
	c. Aggrandizing (Antisocial; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.7)
Scale 2:	Ambitious pattern
	a. Confident
	b. Self-serving
	c. Exploitative (Narcissistic; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.81)
Scale 3:	Outgoing pattern
	a. Congenial
	b. Gregarious
	c. Impulsive (Histrionic; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.50)
Scale 4:	Accommodating pattern
	a. Cooperative
	b. Agreeable
	c. Submissive (Dependent; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.6)
Scale 5A:	Aggrieved pattern
	a. Unpresuming
	b. Self-denying
	c. Self-defeating ( <i>DSM-III-R</i> , Appendix A)
Scale 5B:	Contentious pattern
	a. Resolute
	b. Oppositional
	c. Negativistic (Passive-aggressive; <i>DSM-III-R</i> , 301.84)
Scale 6:	Conscientious pattern
	a. Respectful
	b. Dutiful
	c. Compulsive (Obsessive-compulsive; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.4)
Scale 7:	Reticent pattern
	a. Circumspect
	b. Inhibited
	c. Withdrawn (Avoidant; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.82)
Scale 8:	Retiring pattern
	a. Reserved
	b. Aloof
	c. Solitary (Schizoid; <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.20)
Scale 9:	Distrusting pattern
	d. Suspicious
	e. Paranoid ( <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.0)
Scale 0:	Erratic pattern
	d. Unstable
	e. Borderline ( <i>DSM-IV</i> , 301.83)

**Source:** Immelman, Aubrey. *The Leadership Style of U.S. President Donald J. Trump*. Unites States: Saint John's University, 2017. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312771718>

Trump's public persona portrays traits from an array of prominent psychological patterns in his public image, particularly those linked to grandiosity, control, and assertiveness. Aggressiveness (Scale 1A), aggrandizing behavior (Scale 1B), and exploitative tendencies (Scale 2). Reading Table 1 requires additional knowledge about the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC), which organizes its personality patterns by scales and levels of intensity. These traits range from mild (i.e., adaptive or socially desirable) to moderate (i.e., marked or bothersome) to extreme (i.e., pathological, frequently associated with pervasive clinical personality diseases classified in the DSM-IV and DSM-III-R). For example, the Dominant pattern (Scale 1A) moves from Asserting to Controlling and excessive (correlated with clinical personality disorders in the DSM-IV and DSM-III-R).

For example the Dominant (Scale 1A) pattern develops from Asserting to Controlling and at its very high extreme Aggressive (Sadistic) while the Ambitious (Scale 2) pattern progresses from Confident to Self-serving and finally Exploitative (Narcissistic). Cross-comparing these patterns with DSM classifications allows one to distinguish between a customarily diverse human personality and potentially maladaptive patterns of cognition and behavior.

Applied to individuals like Donald Trump, this approach is particularly helpful since with his personality it appears that his ambition (Assured, Acquisitive), adventurousness (Adventurous, Aggrandising) and domineering nature (Assertive, Controlling) are so marked. At the same time, he may have relatively mild degrees of narcissism or an antisocial personality type (hinted by his behaviour as a boss), according to Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria. Used like this paradigm allows for a structured approach to assessing

what is normal and abnormal in personality, while also making distinctions on the basis of environment and responsibility in leadership (Immelman).

**Table. 2.** Trump's score on the MIDC scale

<i>MIDC Scale Scores for Donald Trump</i>			
Scale	Personality pattern	Raw	RT%
1A	Dominant: Asserting–Controlling–Aggressive (Sadistic)	17	21.8
1B	Dauntless: Adventurous–Dissenting–Aggrandizing (Antisocial)	9	11.5
2	Ambitious: Confident–Self-serving–Exploitative (Narcissistic)	24	30.8
3	Outgoing: Congenial–Gregarious–Impulsive (Histrionic)	24	30.8
4	Accommodating: Cooperative–Agreeable–Submissive (Dependent)	0	0.0
5A	Aggrieved: Unpresuming–Self-denying–Self-defeating (Masochistic)	0	0.0
5B	Contentious: Resolute–Oppositional–Negativistic (Passive-aggressive)	4	5.1
6	Conscientious: Respectful–Dutiful–Compulsive (Obsessive-compulsive)	0	0.0
7	Reticent: Circumspect–Inhibited–Withdrawn (Avoidant)	0	0.0
8	Retiring: Reserved–Aloof–Solitary (Schizoid)	0	0.0
	Subtotal for basic personality scales	78	100.0
9	Distrusting: Suspicious–Paranoid (Paranoid)	0	0.0
0	Erratic: Unstable–Borderline (Borderline)	0	0.0
	Full-scale total	78	100.0

*Note.* For Scales 1–8, ratio-transformed (RT%) scores are the scores for each scale expressed as a percentage of the sum of raw scores for the ten basic scales only. For Scales 9 and 0, ratio-transformed scores are scores expressed as a percentage of the sum of raw scores for all twelve MIDC scales (therefore, full-scale RT% totals can exceed 100). Personality patterns are enumerated with scale gradations and equivalent *DSM* terminology (in parentheses).

**Source:** Immelman, Aubrey. *The Leadership Style of U.S. President Donald J. Trump*. United States: Saint John's University, 2017. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312771718>.

Trump's major scale elevations are at Scale 2 (Ambitious) and Scale 3 (Outgoing) both of them at the lower limit of the mildly dysfunctional (24–30) range, with the same score of 24. The secondary Scale 1A (Dominant) scale elevation of 17 is comfortably within the prominent (10–23) range, with it, a Scale 1B (Dauntless) elevation of 9, at the terminal end of

the present (5–9) range. All other scale elevations are unremarkable and of no psychodiagnostic significance, inclusively, accounting for MIDC scale gradation ,criteria complemented by clinical judgment, Trump was categorized as having an Ambitious/exploitative and Outgoing/ impulsive personality with Dominant/controlling and Dauntless/adventurous patterns. He is also Contentious/resolute oriented (Immelman).

Donald Trump's leadership style was deeply shaped by a unique constellation of personality traits, primarily defined by high levels of ambition, dominance, and extroversion. According to Immelman and Griebie, Trump's personality profile showed significant elevations on the Ambitious, Dominant, and Outgoing scales of the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC), categorizing him as “a blend of the self-serving, controlling, and gregarious types” (Immelman and Griebie 19). Ambitious individuals are described as “bold, competitive, and self-assured,” naturally assuming leadership roles and often acting “as though entitled” (19). Dominant individuals, by contrast, are “tough, unsentimental, intimidating,” and “talented in the powers of persuasion,” while Outgoing types are “dramatic attention-getters” who “thrive on being the center of social events” and are often “impulsive and undisciplined” (19). Trump's executive behavior, as observed during his presidency, reflected these psychological tendencies: “bold, competitive, and self-assured (i.e., ambitious); tough and directive (i.e., dominant); impulsive and undisciplined (i.e., outgoing); and disruptively tradition-defying” (10). In sum, Donald Trump's leadership style was a direct reflection of his dominant, ambitious, and outgoing personality traits, which not only fueled his rise to power but also shaped a presidency defined by disruption, boldness, and a rejection of traditional political norms.

## **2.6. Personality-Based Evaluation against Traditional Leadership Theories**

Donald Trump's leadership style presents a compelling case of convergence and conflict with traditional leadership theories. Traits such as high dominance, ambition, and extraversion position him closely within the frameworks of trait theory and the Great Man Theory, which argue that certain innate characteristics predispose individuals to leadership roles. Trump's ambitious personality, marked by self-confidence, competitive drive, and a readiness to assume authority, aligns with Millon's Ambitious (asserting) pattern, which describes leaders as "bold, competitive, and self-assured," and prone to act "as though entitled" (Immelman and Griebie 9). His dominant traits, including a desire to control and direct others, also mirror Simonton's characterization of charismatic presidential leaders, who are "skilled and self-confident negotiators" and "dynamo[s] of energy and determination" (Immelman and Griebie 26). Moreover, Trump's strong extraversion and need for attention are congruent with transformational leadership principles, especially in mobilizing public support through emotional appeal and direct engagement.

However, Trump's style also diverges significantly from leadership models that emphasize deliberation, consensus-building, and ethical reflection. According to James David Barber's typology, Trump lacks the introspective depth and conscientious temperament associated with successful "active-positive" presidencies (Immelman and Griebie 25). His low conscientiousness—evident in impulsive decision-making and limited attention to detail—contradicts behavioral and servant leadership theories, which prioritize thoughtful planning, empathy, and collective input. Furthermore, his managerial style, which is "heavy on self-promotion and persuasion" and less focused on collaboration, challenges participative and democratic leadership ideals (Immelman and Griebie 28). Thus, while Trump exemplifies several traits admired in classical leadership theory—such as charisma and assertiveness—his

impulsiveness, conflict-prone demeanor, and disregard for institutional norms place him in tension with more inclusive, process-oriented frameworks.

In the end, Trump's leadership highlights how difficult it is to apply traditional leadership theories to contemporary political leaders. His impulsiveness and intolerance to consensus highlight serious conflicts with more inclusive and process-driven approaches, even while his charisma and assertiveness align with transformational and trait-based paradigms. This dichotomy draws attention to how leadership is changing in modern politics and challenges us to reconsider what characteristics actually make a leader effective in the modern day.

## **2.7. The Emergence of Trumpism as a Dominant Force in the Republican Party**

The Republican Party saw a dramatic change under Donald Trump's leadership, moving away from its historic conservative tenets and toward a populist, nationalist identity. In order to appeal to people who were uneasy about social and economic changes, this realignment prioritized identity politics and cultural grievances over conservatism based on policy. The Grand Old Party's culture and strategies were drastically changed by Trumpism, which transformed the party into a movement focused on loyalty and opposition to alleged dangers.

The Republican Party under Donald Trump's leadership has taken a blanket turn away from its traditionally free-market, limited government, institutionally conservative positions to more nativist and populist position. His "America first" position appealed to white working-class voters economically and culturally uprooted by immigration, globalization, and the restructuring of society. Instead of policy conservatism, the Trump party grew more concerned with identity politics and cultural grievances such as nationalism, racial resentments, and opposition to liberal social forces. It reshaped GOP politics by placing issues of culture and emotion at the forefront of its agenda. As Trump loyalty became the party

member survival test, moderates got sidelined and ever more hard-line, radical leaders took over. The Republican Party started acting in a bid to preserve political power amidst an increasingly diverse electorate. The party's increasing use of strategies like aggressive gerrymandering, restrictive voting rules, and attempts to undermine democratic processes betrays its rising anxiety that it may soon become irrelevant. Although these actions broadened the Republican base, they have further alienated independent voters, minorities, and young people. The party is now at a turning point: will it learn to adjust to changing social realities and expand its coalition, or will Trump's legacy and politics of grievance and division continue to define it? Between the desires of its Trump-oriented base and the need to appeal to a more diverse, more expansive America, the Republican Party's future hangs in the balance as internal struggles and demographic shifts continue to remake the electorate (Owens 32-35).

Years of ideological development and political opportunism led to the Republican Party's transformation into Donald Trump's party. Many republican officials initially underestimated Trump, believing his power would diminish after the 2016 election. However, in order to stay relevant politically and steer clear of major difficulties, party executives and politicians progressively sided with Trump's speech and ideas as his support among the GOP base increased. Trump did not so much transform the Republican Party as he exposed what it was becoming: a party more characterized by personality loyalty than policy, cultural reaction, and grievance politics. A political and media environment that promoted indignation and penalized dissent hastened this change. In the end the GOP's shift is indicative of a larger political realignment where a populist movement based on identity, loyalty, and resistance to perceived rivals has overpowered classic conservative ideals (Peters). Sure enough, as the



GOP struggles to decide whether to completely embrace the populist, grievance-driven politics that Trumpism has ingrained at its core or restore its historic conservative identity, this significant shift represents a turning point in the party's history.

As the Republican Party struggles to balance its populist base with the need to adjust to a shifting electorate, the emergence of Trumpism within the party comes at a crucial moment. This change reflects a larger political realignment that is motivated more by grievance and identity than by ideology. The future of American conservatism and democracy in general will depend on whether the GOP can bring these conflicting forces together or continues to be characterized by Trump's legacy of divide.

### **2.7.1. Donald Trump Rise of Power**

Donald Trump's political rise marked a watershed moment in American politics, driven by a potent mix of economic discontent, cultural backlash, and mistrust of institutions. His 2016 presidential campaign strategically tapped into the frustrations of white working-class voters, particularly in Rust Belt regions, who felt left behind by globalization and ignored by the political establishment. Through anti-trade rhetoric and bold promises to "bring back jobs," Trump positioned himself as a populist outsider capable of challenging the status quo and restoring lost economic opportunity (MacWilliams).

Trump emerged as a political outsider, capitalizing on widespread dissatisfaction, particularly among the white working class. His populist rhetoric framed politics as a battle between the "common people" and a corrupt elite, resonating with economic anxieties and cultural resentment (Mounk). By appealing to those who felt alienated by progressive values and shifting demographics, the slogan "Make America Great Again" became a powerful symbol of both cultural and economic restoration (Fukuyama). His ability to dominate media

narratives and bypass traditional gatekeepers through social media further accelerated his rise. Beyond securing the presidency, Trump's 2016 campaign reshaped the ideological landscape of American democracy by eroding long-standing political norms and advancing a model of governance rooted in authoritarian appeal and exclusionary nationalism (Levitsky and Ziblatt 104).

Trump's ascent radically changed the political environment by defying established norms and capitalizing on popular dissatisfaction. His accomplishments showed how populist rhetoric, media savvy, and identity appeals might change political processes. In the end, his rise to prominence marked a change toward a more divisive, personality-driven politics that still shapes American government today.

### **2.7.2. The Role of Media in Amplifying Trump's Goal**

Social media and the media as a whole have just magnified Donald Trump's goal, and that has elevated him to power and allowed him to remain influential. Aside from political bias, Trump's profile was increased across the political spectrum in 2016 because of the extensive coverage by the mainstream media of his rallies and provocative statements. It was sensationalist and ratings-driven. Instead of passing through official gatekeepers, Trump cut around social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube to millions of people directly. With engagement disincentive algorithms, his frequently combative messages went viral, creating echo chambers and disseminating disinformation increasingly and rapidly. Post-2020 election, Trump used complaints about censorship in order to get Truth Social which is a social media platform created by Donald Trump through his company Trump Media and Technology Group as a reaction to his exclusion from popular social media platforms such as twitter and Facebook (Matthias). Collectively, this media ecosystem

amplified political polarization, normalized meme driven populism, and created cycles of viral misinformation and delayed fact-checking, fundamentally altering American political discourse (Paul).

Technology and the media have played a key role in fusing Trumpism and Christian Nationalism, influencing religious identity and public opinion. Donald Trump was continuously presented as a champion of Christian principles, establishing himself as a moral and spiritual leader, thanks to conventional conservative media and the emergence of social media influencers. In addition to spreading information, these platforms produced echo chambers that strengthened preexisting opinions, promoting the idea that Trump is a heavenly leader engaged in religious and cultural conflict. Besides maintaining the political-religious alliance, this digital ecosystem improved Trump's reputation among conservative Christian and Evangelic voters, underscoring the significant influence that media has on contemporary political movements (Scott).

### **2.7.3. Conservative Media Outlets**

Conservative media outlets have played a crucial role in blending Christian Nationalism with Trumpism, significantly shaping public perception and reinforcing political allegiance among evangelical and conservative audiences. In order to position Donald Trump as an antagonist to the claimed threat of liberal, secular beliefs, these venues continuously presented him as both a political leader and a fervent supporter of Christian principles. Conservative media directly appealed to evangelical supporters by emphasizing important topics like abortion rights, religious liberty, and much more. They also portrayed Trump's electoral wins as a moral and spiritual achievements. By portraying his political struggles as essential

attempts to defend the country's Christian identity against the spread of secularism, this framing elevated his leadership to a level of spiritual significance.

By means of repetition and emotional appeals, these outlets contributed to the religious legitimization of Trump, constructing a narrative in which his triumphs were interpreted as a component of a divine mission to rebuild the spiritual underpinnings of America. Supporting Trump was portrayed as a moral and spiritual obligation as well as a political act over time, thanks to this narrative. Loyalty to Trump was equated with loyalty to God and to the nation, so strengthening the religious and ideological bonds that characterized Trumpism. In doing so, conservative media helped to merge faith and politics, making Trumpism a movement that was as much as a religion as it was about political ideology (Hibbard).

Conservative media turned supporting Trump into a political and spiritual obligation by frequently attributing his political success to a heavenly mandate. The ideological underpinnings of Trumpism were reinforced by this combination of politics and religion, which made the movement as much a religious as a political one.

#### **2.7.4. The Use of Religious Programming to Reinforce Trump's Message**

By presenting Trump's leadership in blatantly spiritual terms, religious television programming significantly increased his support to Christian Nationalist. These religious broadcasts provided a forum for religion leaders to portray Trump as a divinely appointed individual who was selected to carry out God's purpose, going beyond conventional news coverage. Pastors and Evangelists frequently invoked God's blessings upon Trump and used prophetic language to describe his leadership on shows and networks such as the Christian Broadcasting Network and Trinity Broadcasting Network. Political measures like moving the US embassy to Jerusalem or restricting abortion were often portrayed as biblical prophecies

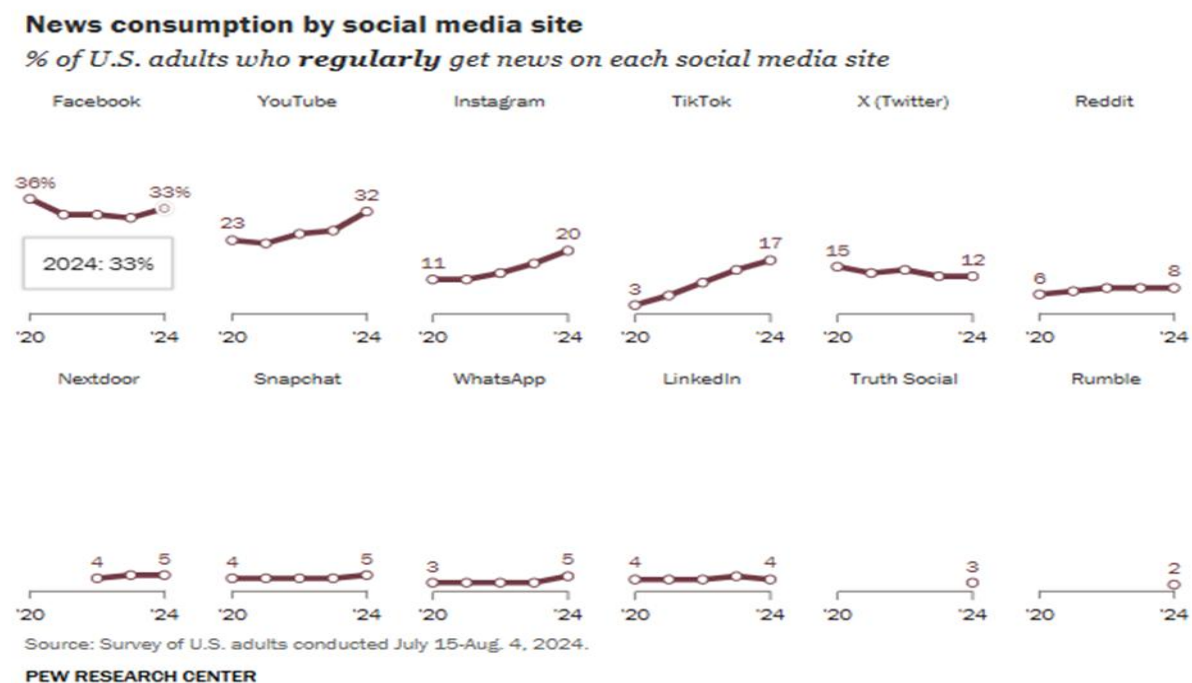
being fulfilled rather than just as policy choices. The idea that Trump's presidency was a part of divine design was strengthened by this theological framing, which turned political events into spiritual turning points. By doing this, religious television programming helped Trump's Christian nationalist audience view him as a spiritual person rather than just a political leader by interpreting current events through a religious perspective (Vox).

Many viewers were able to comprehend political events via a religious lens thanks to this melding of politics and faith, which strengthened the idea that Trump's presidency had a divine purpose. Religious media helped cement steadfast support within Christian nationalist communities by continuously associating Trump's leadership with spiritual destiny, making political loyalty as much a question of faith as ideology.

#### **2.7.5. Social Media**

Social media platforms emerged as powerful tools for amplifying Christian nationalist and pro-Trump messages, fundamentally reshaping how political and religious content reached audiences. Platform like Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube allowed political operators and religious figures to speak directly to millions of followers, skipping editorial filters, in contrast to traditional media. People like Lence Wallnau and Greg Locke were able to disseminate sermons, movies, and posts portraying Trump as a divinely anointed leader fighting evil on a spiritual level because of this direct access. These stories frequently exploit rooted concerns and beliefs by framing political disputes as religious conflicts. Furthermore, sensational, emotionally charged information is given priority by algorithms that drive social media activity, increasing the likelihood that these kinds of messages may become viral. Christian nationalist material consequently flourished quickly and widely, creating a virtual echo chamber that deepened the division between the political and religious spheres. In

addition to spreading these ideas, social media created a virtual space where politics and religion were mutually exclusive (Suciu, Stewart).



**Fig.4.** News Consumption by Social Media Platforms

**Source:** "Social Media and News Fact Sheet." *Pew Research Center*, 17 Sept. 2024

<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/social-media-and-news-fact-sheet/>.

A fragmented media environment that fosters the growth of ideologically motivated communities and provides important context for understanding the connection between

Trumpism and Christian Nationalism was released. Facebook is still the most popular news platform (33%), but the rise in popularity of Youtube (32%), WhatsApp (20%), and Rumble (8%), suggests that media ecosystems are becoming more specialized or alternative. Though they have a limited audience, websites like Truth Social and Rumble act as ideological echo chambers where Christian nationalist narratives are reinforced without opposition from the general public. These platforms promote views that portray Trump's political ambition as a spiritual struggle to uphold Christian civilization by catering to consumers looking for politically and religiously aligned information. The emergence of private or semi-private channels like WhatsApp also makes it easier for conspiracy theories and moral panic associated with apocalyptic themes to proliferate unchecked, which reinforces Trumpism's theological and emotional components.

Social media algorithms played a critical role in reinforcing the fusion of Christian nationalism and Trumpism by creating digital echo chambers that amplified like-minded content. These algorithms which were intended to customize user experiences according to engagement and preferences, continually presented people with data that supported their preexisting opinions while excluding those that contradicted them. This vicious loop made it harder to be exposed to different viewpoints and promoted ideological isolation. Trump was regularly presented in these carefully controlled online environments as both a political leader and a person selected by God to spearhead a spiritual conflict for the country's soul. Digital forums became places where loyalty to Trump was linked with spiritual dedication, blurring the lines between faith and political affiliation (Karsten and West).

In the end, the algorithm-driven settings of social media have created strong echo chambers that strengthen the combination of Trumpism and Christian nationalism, further

polarizing politics and society. By constantly exposing users to information that supports their own opinions and excluding opposing viewpoints, these platforms promote ideological isolation and magnify emotionally charged, frequently conspiratorial ideas. By framing political devotion as a spiritual commitment, digital spaces have evolved beyond simple communication platforms and solidified the fusion of politics and faith that characterizes this movement's distinct personality and impact.

## **2.8. Key Events Reinforcing the Integration between Christian Nationalism and Trumpism**

### **2.8.1. The 2016 Presidential Campaign**

The 2016 United States presidential election, particularly through the candidacy of Donald Trump, marked a revolutionary departure in American political rhetoric and foreign policy. Campaigning as an outsider populist, Trump challenged long-standing bipartisan consensus on key issues such as trade, immigration, and international alliances. His “America First” agenda emphasized nationalism, economic protectionism, and skepticism toward traditional alliances like NATO—an abrupt shift from the liberal internationalist order that had guided U.S. foreign policy since World War II. Trump’s platform resonated with voters disillusioned by globalization, stagnant wages, and what they perceived as a disconnected political elite. He criticized free trade agreements such as NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, advocated for stricter immigration policies including building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, and often expressed admiration for authoritarian leaders. Despite controversies such as the “Access Hollywood” tape and investigations into Russian interference, Trump’s message of disruption and restoration propelled him to an Electoral College victory. His campaign



reshaped Republican Party politics, laying the foundation for a more unilateral and nationalist approach to governance and foreign affairs (Beckwith).

Trump's 2016 campaign also served as a pivotal moment in solidifying the relationship between Trumpism and Christian nationalism (297). By positioning himself as a defender of a Christian America threatened by liberal and secular forces, Trump appealed directly to Christian nationalists, who view national identity and divine favor as inseparable from religious and cultural heritage (300). His messaging resonated deeply with those who believed that the United States has a divinely ordained role and that political loyalty to Trump was a form of spiritual duty. Notably, Christian nationalism became the strongest factor influencing Americans who did not vote for Trump in 2016 but planned to do so in 2020, suggesting that his appeal extended beyond typical religious conservatism to inspire a religious-political identity (309). Among Trump's original supporters, those with strong Christian nationalist beliefs showed a high likelihood of continued loyalty. His campaign helped transform Christian nationalism from a passive worldview into an assertive political force—capable of legitimizing unwavering support and even hostility toward democratic outcomes when those outcomes are perceived to conflict with a divinely sanctioned vision of America (Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs 311-314)

In hindsight, the 2016 campaign solidified a political-religious paradigm that still influences the sociopolitical dynamics of the United States in addition to ensuring Donald Trump's ascent to the presidency. By appealing to Christian nationalist feelings and portraying himself as a defender of a divinely favored America, Trump turned many people's political allegiance into a kind of religious fervor. This convergence has had long-lasting effects, impacting voter behavior as well as the larger conversation about democracy and

national identity in modern-day America, and establishing the foundation for the movement's ongoing blending of politics and faith.

### **2.8.1.1. Trump's Outreach to all Christians**

Donald Trump deliberately tried to win over a wide range of Christian voters in the 2016 US presidential election, including Evangelicals, Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. He formed a faith and cultural advisory committee, which was initially made up mainly of Evangelical leaders but subsequently grew to include representatives from other Christian traditions, to direct his campaign on important moral and religious matters. His intentions to address the cultural and moral issues that cut beyond denominational boundaries was indicated by this action. Trump's fervent support of causes with great religious resonance such as upholding religious freedom, opposing abortion, defending the rights of faith-based groups, and vowing to select conservative, pro-life justices for the U.S Supreme Court was a key component of his appeal. Further solidifying his position among religious conservatives who saw the law as a restriction on free speech and religious expression was his promise to repeal the Johnson amendment, a clause in the US tax code that limits political endorsements by tax-exempt religious groups ("Trump CampaPign Press Release").

Trump was effective in uniting a large Christian coalition behind his campaign by emphasizing important religious issues such as abortion, religious liberty, and conservative court appointments. His reputation as a champion of faith in public life was strengthened by his pledge to lift limits on religious groups' political expression. In the end, these outreach initiatives were crucial in enlisting Christian supporters and fortifying Trump's political base's religious underpinnings.

**Table. 3.** Presidential Voting Preferences by Religious Affiliation and Race.

	2000		2004		2008		2012		2016		Dem change '12-'16
	Gore	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Obama	McCain	Obama	Romney	Clinton	Trump	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Protestant/other Christian	42	56	40	59	45	54	42	57	39	58	-3
Catholic	50	47	47	52	54	45	50	48	45	52	-5
White Catholic	45	52	43	56	47	52	40	59	37	60	-3
Hispanic Catholic	65	33	65	33	72	26	75	21	67	26	-8
Jewish	79	19	74	25	78	21	69	30	71	24	+2
Other faiths	62	28	74	23	73	22	74	23	62	29	-12
Religiously unaffiliated	61	30	67	31	75	23	70	26	68	26	-2
White, born-again/evangelical Christian	n/a	n/a	21	78	24	74	21	78	16	81	-5
Mormon	n/a	n/a	19	80	n/a	n/a	21	78	25	61	+4

Note: "Protestant" refers to people who described themselves as "Protestant," "Mormon" or "other Christian" in exit polls; this categorization most closely approximates the exit poll data reported immediately after the election by media sources. The "white, born-again/evangelical Christian" row includes both Protestants and non-Protestants (e.g., Catholics, Mormons, etc.) who self-identify as born-again or evangelical Christians.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of exit poll data. 2004 Hispanic Catholic estimates come from aggregated state exit polls conducted by the National Election Pool. Other estimates come from Voter News Service/National Election Pool national exit polls. 2012 data come from reports at NBCNews.com and National Public Radio. 2016 data come from reports at NBCNews.com and CNN.com.

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**Source:** Martínez, Jessica, and Gregory A. Smith. "How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis." *Pew Research Center*, 9 Nov. 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>.

Table 3 shows notable changes in Christian voting trends across the 2000-2016 US presidential election cycle, with Donald Trump's 2016 campaign garnering particularly high

support from a range of Christian demographics. Trump's performance among white, born-again\ Evangelical Christians is noteworthy; he received 81% of the vote, which is three percentage points more than Mitt Romney received in 2012 and is among the highest level of support ever recorded for a Republican candidate from this demographic. This group was obviously moved by Trump's outreach initiatives, which included the establishment of the Evangelical Executive Advisory Abroad, pledges to select conservative judges, support religious freedom, and oppose abortion.

Trump gained the support of white Catholics, a historically significant voting demographic, who gave him 60% of the vote, a 6 point increase over Romney's 2012 support. Mormons, meanwhile gave Trump 61% of their support, despite their initial mistrust during the primaries. This suggests a wider agreement with Trump's conservative program and perhaps a grudging unanimity around party identity. He increased his support by 58% even among Protestants and other Christians. Though, Trump's appeal was hardly universal. Although it was marginally higher than Romney's 25% support among Hispanic Catholics was still modest at 26%. He only garnered 26% of the religiously unaffiliated, a 2-point decrease from 2012, indicating a continued partisan and ideological split along religious lines. All things considered, this information demonstrates how Trump's 2016 campaign effectively rallied a sizable coalition of white Christian voters with specific religious rhetoric and policy pledges. His popularity among Mormons, white Catholics, and Evangelicals suggest that he used a well-thought-out strategy that cemented Christian nationalism as a defining feature of modern Republican politics.

#### **2.8.1.2. Key Endorsements from Prominent Christian Leaders**

Donald Trump's ascension has been considerably aided by endorsements from major evangelical Christian leaders. The latter helped legitimate his candidacy among conservative religious voters, and played a crucial role in his victory. Jerry Falwell Jr., the president of Liberty University, endorsed Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign, even though he faced criticism from students and evangelical leaders. His support was grounded not in Trump's moral character but in his perceived leadership strength and capacity to confront the political establishment. Falwell regarded Trump as a vital outsider capable of enacting significant change, safeguarding religious freedom, and appointing conservative judges. This endorsement highlighted a shift in evangelical politics, prioritizing effectiveness and policy impact over personal piety (Hachten 35-37).

Falwell justified his endorsement of Trump by criticizing the Republican establishment and emphasizing the critical need for bold leadership. He asserted that traditional Republican figures had consistently failed to address the needs of Evangelicals, leading to a demand for someone from outside the political mainstream. According to Falwell, Trump's success in the private sector and his straightforward demeanor made him particularly well-suited to tackle the nation's challenges. Even in light of public outrage regarding Trump's conduct, Falwell maintained that all individuals are flawed and urged evangelicals to focus on policies that uphold their religious values rather than fixating on a candidate's personal sins (Dias).

According to Falwell, Trump's private-sector success and straightforward style made him uniquely suited to address the nation's problems. Even in the face of public outrage over Trump's behavior, Falwell emphasized that all people are flawed and that Evangelicals should focus on policies that protect their religious values rather than a candidate's personal sins (Rogers).

Despite public backlash, Falwell defended Trump by stating, “We’re all sinners,” and argued that “the only perfect candidate is Jesus Christ”. He doubled down on his endorsement by framing Trump as a powerful, necessary leader, even calling him “the Churchillian leader we need” (Sherwood). Falwell further blamed “weak establishment Republicans” for political failures in past elections and praised Trump’s break from that mold, saying, “Donald Trump is not another establishment Republican” (Hachten 37). Falwell’s support for Trump stemmed from both personal and professional parallels. He maintained regular communication with Trump and saw similarities between their journeys as young business leaders facing financial adversity. He emphasized that Trump’s entrepreneurial achievements, especially his ability to create jobs and revive businesses, demonstrated the kind of visionary leadership needed in government. These shared experiences helped solidify Falwell’s public endorsement of Trump as someone who could bring pragmatic, results-driven leadership to Washington (“Trump Campaign Press Release”).

Jerry Falwell Jr.’s support for Donald Trump was a blend of political conviction, distrust of establishment Republicans, and admiration for Trump’s perceived strength as a leader. This alignment with Trump is not unique; it is echoed by others like Franklin Graham, who similarly intertwines faith and politics in support of his agenda. William Franklin Graham, the Billy Graham Evangelical Association leader who inherited his father’s popularity has consistently endorsed Trump on his Facebook Page, which has almost nine million followers. Graham Facebook posts have requested the public to sustain their prayers for Trump when he travels abroad, and he has also supported Trump’s stance on various topics, such as his pro-life attitude on abortion and his denigration of athletes who stand during the national anthem. Furthermore, he was recently accused of politicizing prayer after asking for a Special Day of

Prayer for US President Donald Trump. The event, dubbed as "Pray for Trump Day," got worldwide attention after he urged Americans to set aside Sunday, June 2, 2019, to seek divine protection for President Trump from his opponents (Vining 155). He has voiced his full backing for Donald Trump, noting his role as a Christian faith protector. In a 2018 interview, Graham stated that he never said Trump was the best example of the Christian faith but rather he defended the faith (Wise). This viewpoint is consistent with a more comprehensive understanding of why a large number of white evangelicals' support Trump; they believe that he would use the state's authority to uphold their beliefs and safeguard their interests (Martí 3).

Trump's appeal among evangelical voters was strengthened by the support of prominent Christian leaders, who reaffirmed the campaign's integration of politics and religion. These endorsements helped create a compelling narrative that went beyond ordinary political support and transformed it into a kind of religious and cultural loyalty by portraying Trump as an essential figure to uphold Christian values and against the political establishment.

### **2.8.2. The 2016 Election**

The American political history took a turning point after the 2016 presidential election where Donald Trump was seen as both disagreeable and appealing. Donald Trump was the only nominee running for Republican president. In the 2016 US. presidential election, Donald Trump won the presidency by securing 304 Electoral College votes, while his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, received 227 (Abramson).

Trump flipped the American political script and rose to power during the election, redefining the American political landscape and causing countless discussions about nationalism, identity and the impending disaster or boon for democracy in the United States

that was yet to come. This section investigates three critical dimensions of Trump's election. First, the overwhelming support Trump received from White Evangelicals. It will also explain how many considered Trump as a disruptive candidate in the political system. Last, it references how Christian Nationalism has impacted significantly the framing of the election as a conflict with cultural and spiritual roots.

In the end, the 2016 election was a significant occasion that brought politics, religion, and identity together in previously unheard-of ways. Trump changed the political environment and highlighted the growing significance of Christian nationalism by successfully rallying evangelical support and emulating a nationalist mindset. Deep cultural and spiritual difficulties at the core of the country's democratic experiment are revealed by these dynamics, which nevertheless have an impact on American political discourse.

#### **2.8.2.1. White Evangelical Voters Support for Trump**

White Evangelicals have consistently been politically active in the United States, according to the Religious Landscape Survey of 2014. They are the most religious group that supports the Republican Party, with 76 percent identifying as Republican or leaning towards it. An estimated one - third of all Grand Old Party (GOP) voters align with or lean toward the GOP, whereas around one-fifth of all white Evangelical voters belong to this group (Bailey).

White evangelicals were one of Donald Trump's most dependable and important voting blocs in the 2016 presidential election. Historian John Fea notes that an overwhelming 81% of white evangelical voters cast their ballots for Donald Trump in 2016—a significantly higher level of support than previous Republican nominees like George W. Bush, John McCain, or Mitt Romney ever received from this demographic. This support is viewed not merely as political alignment, but also as part of a larger cultural and theological fight, which is



characterized as a “last-ditch attempt... to win the culture wars” .Their alignment with Trump mirrors fears of losing cultural dominance as his population demographics declines. Evangelicals more and more recognize Trump as a strongman protector of their beliefs ready to confront political and social forces they think endanger their way of life (Bieber and Beyers 3, 4).

Gorski further argues that many Evangelicals were lured to Trump’s appeals to white Christian nationalism, which were based on themes of national decline, moral crisis, and nostalgia for America’s past (340). Trump, despite lacking strong personal piety, was viewed as a symbolic defender of evangelical identity and ideals in a secularizing country. His evangelical support reflects a shift away from traditional moral leadership and toward cultural dominance and identity preservation (343).

Christian nationalism was a major factor driving white evangelical support for Trump in 2016, functioning independently from other influences like racism or economic dissatisfaction. Americans who strongly believed that the US should preserve its Christian heritage were far more likely to vote for Trump, regardless of his personal behavior (Whitehead and Perry 165). For many Evangelicals, Trump symbolized resistance against secularism and a champion of Christian political interests. His promises to defend Christianity and restore its cultural prominence aligned closely with the values of Christian nationalists. Even among voters who doubted his moral integrity, Trump’s platform resonated as a way to “Make America Christian Again” (164–165). This connection reveals that many Evangelicals voted not just for a candidate, but for a vision of national religious identity and political protection.

Evangelicals, as Christian nationalists, framed the election of 2016 to a cultural and spiritual battle. This viewpoint is visible at gatherings such as the “Opening the Heavens

“conference in Council Bluffs, Iowa, where evangelical leaders praised Donald Trump as God’s chosen candidate, encouraging attendees to see the election as a battle against demonic influence. Such events emphasize the need to construct a government founded on Christian principles, merging religious faith with conservative politics and proposing that political participation is a form of spiritual warfare (Smith).

Christian nationalist’s blending of religious identity and national allegiance elevates elections to the status of sacred missions. This apocalyptic framing installs a sense of urgency and moral obligation in followers, exacerbating polarization and justifying extreme political measures. By framing political participation as a divine commandment, Christian nationalism transforms the democratic process into a war for spiritual dominance (Timmer).

To sum up White evangelicals' steadfast support for Donald Trump in 2016 demonstrates a deep intersection of politics, identity, and faith that has changed the political landscape in the United States. These voters have shown the persistent influence of religious identity in influencing democratic decisions by portraying the election as a spiritual struggle and supporting Trump's nationalist platform. Given that cultural and religious differences still affect election results and national discussions, this combination of Christian nationalism and political loyalty highlights the difficulties facing American democracy today.

#### **2.8.2.2. The Perception of Trump as a “Chaos Candidate”**

Donald Trump was dubbed a "chaos candidate" during his 2016 presidential campaign because of his aggressive rhetoric, unusual behavior, and persistent rejection of political norms. This image was not merely created by the media; Trump actively embraced it, framing his candidacy as a rebellion against the so-called political establishment. One of the most widely recognized events occurred at the Democratic National Convention, when Trump

asked Russia to locate Hillary Clinton's deleted emails, an exceptional event that sparked outrage and concern across the political spectrum. The Washington Post described Trump's campaign as one driven by disruption, noting how his surprise comments and combative tone frequently redirected attention away from substantive debates and toward media spectacles (Balz). These techniques set him apart from the standard Republican candidates and made him popular among voters tired of regular politics.

The idea continued through Trump's presidency and again got raised at his campaigns of 2020 and 2024. Many analysts argue that Trump governed in a way that echoed his campaign style-favoring confrontation, unpredictability, and personal loyalty over institutional norms. Trump's leadership style spurred early talks about his fitness for office, with officials contemplating whether to use the 25th Amendments due to worries about his erratic behavior (Rucker).

A new scholarly analysis published on ResearchGate highlighted that Trump's success is rooted in his ability to channel anti-establishment sentiment, turning disorder from a political weakness to a defining feature of his populist brand. In this way, Trump's reputation as a "chaos candidate" affected not only his campaigns, but also the Republican Party and its relationship with American democratic institutions (Enders and Uscinski 49).

In essence, Trump's embrace of chaos was not a liability but a strategic asset that fueled his rise and redefined modern political campaigning. His disruptive style became a core component of his leadership and reshaped the Republican Party's identity, leaving a lasting imprint on American political norms and institutional stability.

## **2.9. The Trump Presidency and Christian Nationalist Policy Alignment**

### **2.9.1. Policy Initiatives that Aligned with Christian Nationalist Goals**

Donald Trump's governance was one of the most contentious and talked-about in contemporary American history. He approached politics with an unconventional, business-minded perspective. Trump frequently engaged the public directly through social media. Americans were sharply split by his policies and leadership style, which drew both fervent support and fierce opposition. He continued to be a prominent and powerful player in national and international debates during his time in power (Duignan).

As a comforting figure for Christian conservatives concerned about Trump's past actions and secular persona, Vice President Mike Pence was instrumental in bringing Donald Trump closer to the evangelical community. Pence became the administration's cultural interpreter and moral compass as a devoted Christian with a solid record on topics like abortion, and religious freedom. By presenting Trump as a champion of Christian principles and even implying that God approved of his leadership, he regularly employed religious discourse. White Evangelical voters found enormous resonance in this narrative, and many of them began to view Trump as a flawed but well-chosen leader. Pence contributed to the administration's rhetoric by fusing political allegiance with evangelical identity, thus echoing Christian nationalist ideas. His impact was crucial in influencing legislative choices that supported evangelical ideals (Barrow). Therefore, in the perspective of millions of evangelical Americans, Pence's presence gave Trump's presidency both theological and political legitimacy.

#### **2.9.1.1. Anti-Abortion Policies**

Since Christian nationalism views abortion as a direct threat to the nation's Christian identity, Donald Trump's anti-abortion stance played a central role in aligning his

administration with the movement's objectives. One of his key early actions was reinstating the Mexico City Policy, which blocks US funding to foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide or promote abortion services. These NGOs are often nonprofit entities that deliver essential reproductive healthcare services—including medical procedures, counseling, advocacy, and training—particularly in regions where legal barriers, cultural stigma, or under-resourced public health systems limit access to safe abortions (McGinn and Casey). By cutting financial support for such organizations, Trump advanced what many Christian nationalists considered a global pro-life agenda. The move was widely applauded by these groups, who saw it as a demonstration of moral leadership and a step toward restoring religious values in both domestic and foreign policy.

Trump's alignment with Christian nationalist goals extended beyond executive policy into the judicial realm. Through strategic judicial appointments, most notably that of Justice Amy Coney Barrett, Trump further advanced the long-standing Christian nationalist objective of incorporating biblical morality into American law. Barrett's appointment was instrumental in shifting the ideological balance of the Supreme Court toward conservatism, ultimately paving the way for the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*—a landmark 1973 decision that had protected abortion rights in the United States. The original case, brought by “Jane Roe” (a pseudonym for Norma McCorvey), challenged a Texas law that criminalized most abortions. In a 7–2 ruling, the Court found that the constitutional right to privacy, rooted in the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause, protected a woman's decision to terminate a pregnancy. The Court's decision established a framework restricting states from banning abortion prior to fetal viability, around 24 weeks (Justia). *Roe v. Wade* became a cornerstone of reproductive

rights jurisprudence, and its overturning marked a major victory for Christian nationalists seeking to reassert religious values in federal law (Oyez).

Donald Trump's anti-abortion policies aligned closely with Christian nationalist goals, viewing abortion as a threat to America's Christian identity. His reinstatement of the Mexico City Policy cut US. funding to foreign NGOs that provide abortion services, pleasing pro-life advocates. Additionally, Trump's appointment of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett was part of a strategy to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 ruling that had protected abortion rights by recognizing a woman's constitutional right to privacy. These actions significantly advanced the Christian nationalist agenda and reshaped abortion law in the US.

#### **2.9.1.2. Support for Religious Liberty**

During his administration from 2017 to 2021, Donald Trump's support for religious freedom was characterized by a clear alignment with Christian nationalism. Trump promoted policies that primarily benefited conservative Christian groups, often framing these actions as efforts to defend religious liberty against perceived secular encroachments. One notable example was his issuance of an executive order in 2017 titled *Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty*, which sought to loosen the enforcement of the Johnson Amendment. This amendment, a provision in the US tax code passed in 1954, prohibits tax-exempt organizations, including churches, from endorsing or opposing political candidates, with the goal of keeping nonprofit groups politically neutral to maintain their tax-exempt status. The enforcement of this provision falls under the jurisdiction of the Internal Revenue Service

(IRS), the US federal agency responsible for administering and enforcing federal tax laws, including oversight of nonprofit and tax-exempt entities (Schwartz and Priest). Trump's executive order directed the IRS to exercise "maximum enforcement discretion," effectively reducing the likelihood that religious organizations would face penalties for engaging in political speech (Smith).

At home, Trump solidified a court supportive of broad interpretations of religious liberty by appointing three conservative justices to the Supreme Court: Brett Kavanaugh, Amy Coney Barrett, and Neil Gorsuch (Liptak). Scholars, however, argue that Trump's rhetoric on religious liberty served more as a means of elevating Christian identity in the American public discourse than as an objective defense of plurality. Christian nationalism was given unparalleled legitimacy during Trump's administration. By successfully marginalizing minority faiths and secular voices, blending of religious liberty and national identity called into question fundamental ideas of religious neutrality in governance and raised serious worries about the weakening of church-state separation (Whitehead and Perry 143).

Donald Trump's promotion of religious liberty largely favored conservative Christians and aligned with Christian nationalist ideals. His policies, such as relaxing the Johnson Amendment and appointing sympathetic judges, prioritized Christian identity in public life while marginalizing minority faiths and secular views. This raised concerns about weakening the separation of church and state and challenged the principle of religious neutrality in U.S. governance.

### **2.9.1.3. The Use of Religious Rhetoric in Speeches and Public Appearances**

In order to appeal to Evangelical Christian followers and support a narrative of divine purpose in his leadership, Donald Trump purposefully used religious rhetoric in his speeches

and public appearances throughout his presidency. Trump frequently used biblical language, made references to God's will, and described America as a country "under God" to show support for conservative Christian ideals, despite having no formal religious training. One of the most notable instances was in June 2020, when Trump raised a Bible in front of St. John's Episcopal Church following the dispersal of nonviolent demonstrators. This photo is commonly seen as a sign of his religious authority and support for Christian Nationalism (WhiteHead and Perry, 45). Trump also mirrored Evangelical eschatology and appealed to a moral absolutism prevalent in religious discourse by frequently presenting political issues as conflicts between "good" and "evil" (Du Mez 217). Trump furthered the blending of Christian symbolism with partisan politics by using religious language to characterize his political agenda, obfuscating the distinction between spiritual authority and national identity. According to scholars, this use of religious discourse helped to create the larger cultural framework of Christian nationalism in American politics in addition to mobilizing people who identify as religious (Gorski and Perry 121).

Trump effectively used Christian imagery and language to win evangelical support, despite his lack of religious background. His Bible photo-op and "good vs evil" rhetoric appealed to conservative Christians, helping push a Christian nationalist agenda that mixes religion with politics. This strategy not only boosted his popularity but also strengthened the idea of America as a Christian nation, influencing policies and court decisions

#### **2.9.1.4. Judicial Appointments**

One of the most significant legislative tools used to achieve Christian nationalist objectives has been the strategic nomination of federal judges, particularly to the United States Supreme Court. During his presidency, Donald Trump selected almost 200 federal judges, including



three Supreme Court justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett. These appointments were frequently praised by Christian nationalist leaders and organizations, who saw them as critical in achieving legal rulings that adhere to a “biblical worldview” as well as attempted to gain long-term influence on vital topics such as abortion, religious freedom, and LGBTQ+ rights (Rogers).

Christian nationalists viewed Justice Amy Coney Barrett’s confirmation as a triumph, owing to her firmly held religious beliefs and affiliation with charismatic Catholic groups. Her appointment to the Court reinforced a 6-3 conservative majority, and was followed by momentous judgements like *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, which overruled *Roe v. Wade*, a US Supreme Court case that established a woman’s constitutional right to have an abortion. The Court ruled 7–2 that the right to privacy, protected by the Fourteenth Amendment, extended to a woman’s decision to terminate a pregnancy (Oyez). Many religious conservatives viewed this judgement as a spiritual victory that had been decades in the making. This event was "the culmination of a strategic plan by Christian nationalist networks to install justices who would rule according to biblical, not constitutional, values" (Theoharis).

The judicial selections appointed during Donald Trump's presidency have considerably promoted Christian nationalist aims, particularly in terms of abortion and religious liberty. The Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* (2022), was a case that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending federal protection for abortion rights. The Court upheld a Mississippi law banning most abortions after 15 weeks and ruled that the Constitution does not guarantee a right to abortion, returning the authority to regulate abortion to individual states (Cornell Law School). It was hailed by Christian nationalist leaders as the

conclusion of decades of efforts to reconcile US law with religious views. This decision was viewed as a “vindication of their power and a preview of more to come,” particularly for laws formed by their interpretations of Christian teaching (Thielman).

Beyond abortion, these judicial selections have influenced rulings that broaden the scope of religious liberty in ways that are consistent with Christian nationalist goals. In *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* (2022), the Court found in favor of a public-school football coach who prayed on the field, citing First Amendment rights. This decision was viewed as a step toward reinstating Christian traditions into public institutions, a key goal of Christian nationalists who argue that religious expression, particularly Christian expression, should have a prominent position in public life (Gresko). Furthermore, in decisions such as *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* (2021), the Court agreed with a Catholic foster care organization that refused to engage with same-sex couples, highlighting the use of religious liberty as a legal shield against anti-discrimination measures. These verdicts demonstrate a shift in judicial interpretation that is strongly aligned with Christian nationalist beliefs, stressing religious freedom even when it contradicts civil rights provisions for vulnerable groups (Thielman). Through strategic judicial appointments and landmark rulings, Christian nationalists have successfully reshaped the legal landscape-advancing a vision of America where biblical values increasingly dictate constitutional interpretation, often at the expense of secular precedents and minority rights.

In summary, Donald Trump's administration enacted a series of policies and initiatives that closely mirrored the priorities of Christian nationalism. From anti-abortion measures and expanded religious liberty protections to the calculated use of religious rhetoric and strategic judicial appointments, Trump effectively elevated Christian nationalist ideals into the

mainstream of American governance. These efforts not only reinforced his support among white evangelical voters but also laid the foundation for a long-term cultural and legal transformation-one in which religious identity increasingly shapes public policy, legal decisions, and the national political narrative.

### **Chapter Three: The January 6 Capitol Attack and the Collapse of Democratic Norms**

Throughout history, democratic societies have faced moments of crisis that test the strength of their institutions, the resilience of their civic norms, and the integrity of their leaders. In the United States, one of the most dramatic of these moments occurred on January 6, 2021, a day that exposed deep fractures in the political and social fabric of the nation. What was meant to be a routine certification of the presidential election results turned into a violent insurrection as thousands of individuals, fueled by conspiracy theories and encouraged by political leaders, breached the Capitol building in an attempt to overturn the outcome of a democratic election. It is important to have an overview about certain events of violence pre-2020 attacks then further details about the case study of the present dissertation takes place.

This chapter examines the rhetoric and mobilization that led to the attack, the events of that day, and the lasting consequences for American democracy.

### **3.1. Events of Violence pre-2020**

A number of violent incidents that took place in the United States before 2020 expose underlying social, political, and cultural tensions. These events include riots, protests, and other violent outbursts that frequently resulted from conflicts. A more comprehensive grasp of the historical background of the current violence can be gained by looking into these pre-2020 events, which reveal trends and causes that still have an impact on American society now.

#### **3.1.1 Oklahoma City Bombing 1995**

Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols carried out the Oklahoma City bombing which was a heinous act of domestic terror on April 19, 1995 killing 168 people and injuring hundreds. Although the precise reason for the explosion came from McVeigh's anti-government worldview, which bemoaned the Waco siege and the 1992 Ruby Ridge shootings, Christian nationalism was a component of the larger extreme milieu that influenced his thoughts. The theocratic Christian identity movements, which was popular among the militias at that time, advocated the doctrine that the United States government was unconstitutional and usurped by forces inimical to Christian values and white supremacy. Although, not openly religious. McVeigh's memberships and the right-wing networks in which he was active routinely used Christian nationalist discourses that cast the federal government as an enemy of religion and individual freedom. It was an ideology that permitted radicals to justify violence in their own minds and one in which an event like Oklahoma city bombing could be justified as being part of a broader conflict against perceived oppression. The incident is a stark reminder of how religiously driven nationalism can fuel radicalism and domestic terrorism against the state.

This tragedy highlights the perilous effect of radical ideologies that combine religious nationalism with anti-government emotion, demonstrating how these views can turn into violent deeds that jeopardize democratic stability and national security (Michel and Herbeck 426).

### **3.1.2. The Planned Parenthood Shooting in Colorado Springs 2015**

Robert Lewis Dear Jr. has been indicted by a Denver federal grand jury for crimes in the Planned Parenthood shooting of November 27, 2015. Dear would be required to appear before U.S. Magistrate Judge Nina Y. Wang in Denver after being taken into federal custody. As suggested by the indictment, Dear intended to "wage war" when he traveled to the clinic since it conducted abortions. He brought with him a shotgun, five handguns, two other rifles, four SKS rifles, propane tanks, and over 500 rounds of ammunition. Then, Dear shot through a side door off the front entrance and broke into the clinic. He and members of a number of law enforcement and public safety departments were in a standoff for about five hours. Dear is charged with three counts of discharging a firearm during a crime involving violence that resulted in death and 65 charges of violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act. Christian nationalism frames abortion as a direct assault on America's Christian identity and portrays it as a sacred war in which extreme action is warranted. This rhetoric has inspired violence, such as when Robert Dear used terminology from anti-abortion and Christian nationalist circles, repeating "no more baby parts." Extremist groups such as the "Army of God" have bombed and shot abortion providers, and Christian nationalist politicians push extreme anti-abortion legislation that allows violence against abortion providers as legitimate. By characterizing abortion as a genocidal or demonic activity, Christian nationalist discourse creates a context wherein religious violence becomes justified, and individuals commit

terrorist acts against abortion clinics and abortion providers (“Robert Dear Indicted by Federal Grand Jury for 2015 Planned Parenthood Clinic Shooting”).

### **3.1.3. Tree Of Life Synagogue Shooting 2018**

A federal grand jury in Pennsylvania has indicted Robert Bowers for the 2018 mass shooting at the tree life Synagogue. Bowers was accused of targeting Jewish congregations due to their religion, resulting in 11 deaths and injuries. The charges stem from Bower’s alleged anti-semitic motivations. The indictment includes 22 capital-eligible offenses, with Bowers potentially facing the death penalty if approved. Christian nationalism has been very successful in building exclusionary and hateful ideologies in America, mainly by its framing of America as a country for Christians. It alienates and excludes religious minorities such as Jews, Muslims, and others who do not belong to its exclusive understanding of national identity. The shooter’s anti-Semitism blaming Jewish groups for advancing immigration picks up on conspiracy theories more commonly exhorted by Christian nationalist and white nationalist groups depicting Jews as an essential threat to Christian civilization. Historically, the Ku Klux Klan represented this ideology in its violence against Jewish, black, and Catholic communities in the guise of defending “Christian America”. Christian nationalist politicians now continue to espouse policies that exclude non- Christians, cementing a social and political hierarchy which shields bigotry. This ideology has catastrophic consequences, as the normalization of this rhetoric feeds increased hate crimes and incites extremist violence against religious and ethnic minorities (“Jury Recommends Sentence...”).

Collectively, these tragedies demonstrate the perilous effects of ideologies that combine exclusionary nationalism with religious zealotry. They show how violent acts incited by radical movements can jeopardize not just the lives of individuals but also the fundamentals

of democratic governance. The fact that these ideas are still prevalent in American culture highlights the continuous danger that militant nationalism and extremist speech offer. Confronting and opposing these beliefs is essential as the nation forges ahead in order to promote a pluralistic culture that respects the values of equality and inclusion. America can only expect to avert similar catastrophes and defend its democratic values by making this effort.

### **3.2. Trumpism at the Capitol**

The January 6th, 2021 attack on the United States Capitol is a watershed moment in contemporary American history. While some initially portrayed it as a spontaneous protest, mounting evidence reveals it as the result of weeks of deliberate disinformation, incendiary rhetoric, and ideological mobilization stemming from the movement known as Trumpism (Gorski 340). Trumpism with its populist appeal, anti-institutional stance, and cult-like loyalty to Donald Trump, created a political climate in which rejecting democratic outcomes became not only acceptable but virtuous (Snyder 27). The rioters, many of whom supported Trump's accusations of a stolen election, believed they were defending their country from internal betrayal. As political theorist Ruth Ben-Ghiat claims, such movements use emotional manipulation and mythologized national collapse to justify harsh actions (5).

#### **3.2.1. Rhetoric leading up to Jan 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

The rhetoric preceding the January 6th Capitol attack was deliberate, emotionally charged, and overtly motivating. Beginning in the weeks following the 2020 election, Donald Trump and his allies spread the false claim that the election had been stolen, gathering supporters under the slogan "Stop the Steal." Trump's tweet from December 19th, 2020: "Big protest in

D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!” was a clear call to action that many followers perceived as a direct encouragement to challenge the electoral certification (Trump qtd. in Frisch et al. 3).

At the “Save America” rally on the morning of the attack, Trump declared, “if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore” (Trump qtd. in ABC News). This phrase, far from symbolic, was used by at least 21 Capitol rioters to justify their involvement in the violence (Mallin et al.). Furthermore, in the month following the election, the hashtag #StopTheSteal gained popularity on social media platforms such as Twitter and Parler, appearing in over 1.7 million messages between November 4th, 2020 and January 6th, 2021 (Hine et al. 2). This inflammatory rhetoric, particularly when portrayed as a defense of democracy and national survival, was directly responsible for inciting thousands of people to march on the Capitol and attempt to overturn the election results. Approximately 2000 individuals took part in the January 6th Capitol attack. They were prompted by direct encouragement from Donald Trump, who urged them to “pressure weak Republican leaders in Congress” to prevent the certification of Joe Biden’s electoral victory (Pape 3).

Despite the legal consequences, most defendants had not rejected the ideology that drove their participation. While 83 % expressed remorse at sentencing, only 22% publicly repudiated the attack’s core political motivations, and fewer than 5% admitted that the 2020 election was not stolen. These data show that even after being prosecuted, a large number of participants maintain the same justifications that drove them to violence. The endurance of these attitudes demonstrates how destructive and long-lasting the power of anti-democratic discourse can be when reinforced by a charismatic leader and legitimized within a political movement (4).



### 3.2.2. Trump's Speech on the Day of the Attack

On the morning of January 6, 2021, just hours before the Capitol was stormed, President Donald Trump addressed a crowd of supporters at the “Save America” rally near the White House. This speech, delivered at a moment of peak political tension, has since become one of the most scrutinized elements of the events surrounding the attack. Through a combination of charged language, repeated false claims about a stolen election, and calls to action, Trump framed the day as a decisive battle for the future of the country. While he included a passing call for peaceful demonstration, much of his rhetoric invoked images of strength, struggle, and urgency.

He asserted, “We will never give up. We will never concede. It doesn't happen. You don't concede when there's theft involved,” reinforcing his false accusations about a stolen election. Trump energized his fans by stating, “Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore... we will stop the steal,” portraying them as patriots fighting a corrupt system (Trump qtd. in Noone and Russo). Although he briefly stated, “I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard,” this was overshadowed by repeated demands to “fight like hell,” with the warning, “if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore” (Trump qtd. in National Security Archive). Trump further told the crowd, “We're going to walk down to the Capitol,” pushing his supporters to confront Congress as it validated the electoral votes (Trump qtd. in the National Security Archive). Legal experts and federal courts have since observed that Trump's speech may have constituted incitement, with US. District Judge John Bates noting that Trump's words could be taken as a signal to his followers to commit illegal acts (Vargas). Trump's speech, infused with anger, urgency, and nationalistic passion,

reframed the democratic process as a war for America's life, ultimately contributing directly to the Capitol attack.

### **3.2.3. Manifestations at the Capitol**

The rioters' actions and words on January 6th showed how deeply they were politically and emotionally invested in the situation. From chants to the display of altered American flags and personalized banners, the event became a spectacle of ideological expression that blurred the line between protest and rebellion. These visual and verbal signals served not only to rally participants but also to frame their actions as part of a historic and moral struggle.

During the January 6th "Stop the Steal" rally, shouts and slogans like "Fight for Trump" and "This is our 1776" reflected the crowd's emotional intensity and revolutionary spirit. As President Trump spoke, supporters started chanting "Fight for Trump," which he acknowledged and encouraged, heightening the crowd's indignation and sense of urgency (Edwards-Heller 4). Trump pumped up the crowd by saying, "we fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore," showcasing their acts as a patriotic defense of democracy (Edwards-Heller 4). Trump's constant use of phrases like "fight like hell" depicted the day as a last battle to preserve the country from ruin (Edwards-Heller 4). Beyond loyalty to Trump, many rioters shouted "this is our 1776," a slogan described by Vanity Fair as an attempt to portray the Capitol assault as "an act of patriotic rebellion rather than political violence" (Sharlet). Many of the January 6th participants believed they were acting as modern revolutionaries, opposing what they perceived as a corrupt and oppressive government. The death of Ashli Babbitt who was an advocate of far-right ideological movements, Babbitt was fatally shot by a Capitol Police officer while attempting to unlawfully enter the Speaker's Lobby during the January 6, 2021 attack, her

death was framed in a similar revolutionary light, with comparisons made between her and Crispus Attucks, the first martyr of the American Revolution (Hsu). This symbolic connection strengthened the perception that their cause was morally justified. By drawing on imagery from the nation's founding and framing their actions as a defence of liberty, the rioters attempted to portray their violence as a necessary act of patriotism, even as they disrupted the democratic process (Sharlet).

During the January 6th Capitol revolt, the overwhelming display of Trump flags, banners, and personalized political symbols highlighted the shift from national to political identity. As Dunleavy explains, “hundreds of flags representing political views were carried,” including Trump banners that visually overpowered traditional American symbols like the Stars and Stripes (1). These flags, based on a semiotic study functioned as vehicles of symbolism, so strengthening rioters by linking them to a shared cause larger than themselves (Dunleavy 2).

The demonstrators gathered under a "twisted ideological quilt" combining Trump's image with Confederate flags, QAnon banners, and even Christian nationalist symbols instead of coming together behind national identity (Dunleavy 1). This visual terrain indicated that devotion to Trump had replaced more general democratic values as the main signal of belonging. Although violent protests often shatter political loyalty, the Capitol assault only partially retreated: social media users did reduce their identification with the Republican Party, but not especially with Trumpism as a movement (Eady et al .1152).

In fact, symbols and flags helped sustain this political identity despite the attack's violence. Flags provided “allegorical and metaphorical meaning,” transforming political grievances into a sacred duty for many of the attackers (Dunleavy 3). The presence of altered American flags such as upside-down versions or black-and-blue “Blue Lives Matter” flags further illustrated

how national symbols were co-opted to serve partisan narratives (Dunleavy 4). In the aftermath of the Capitol insurrection, around 7% of Twitter users who previously identified as Republicans began distancing themselves from the party label. However, this distancing did not extend to a rejection of Trump-associated symbols or ideology. Instead, it reflected a shift toward a more personalized form of political identity, where allegiance to Trump persisted despite the abandonment of formal partisan identification. Thus, while public expressions of Republicanism decreased, the embedded loyalty to Trump as an icon remained resilient (Eady et al. 1153). In this way, the Capitol riot made visible a dangerous evolution where political fandom and tribal loyalty eclipsed civic and national solidarity (1157).

The January 6th attack on the Capitol demonstrated a profound transformation in political identity, where loyalty to a leader and movement supplanted allegiance to democratic institutions and national unity. The widespread use of Trump imagery, revolutionary slogans, and repurposed American symbols reflected a deeper ideological shift, one where political grievances were elevated to sacred cause, and violence was framed as virtuous resistance. Even though the riot fractured broader party ties, it strengthened the Trumpist movement's symbolic unity rather than undermining it. The protests at the Capitol ultimately represented the emergence of a political culture based on spectacle, identification, and commitment, which continues to threaten the stability and unity of American democracy.

### **3.3. Christian Nationalism at the Capitol**

While devotion to God may promote optimism, it can also spark anarchy when combined with nationalism. As rioters marched with crosses, used biblical language, and claimed divine justifications for their conduct, Christian nationalism fanned the violent energy behind the attack on the US capitol on January 6th. This ideology presented the attackers as spiritual

fighters rather than criminals, framing the uprising as a divine mission (“Christian Nationalism...”).

Those who stormed the Capitol were motivated by a strong conviction that America is and must remain a Christian nation. Following the incident, a number of Christian leaders issued warnings that this kind of nationalism undermines democracy and distorts faith, and organizations were formed to oppose what they perceived as a toxic movement that threatened both national unity and religious freedom (Chui). The events of January 6th demonstrate how religious extremism can turn into actual violence with serious consequences when combined with political identification.

### **3.3.1. Religious Symbols and Language during the Attack**

The January 6th assault on the Capitol was a highly symbolic religious demonstration that conflated nationalism and religion. The strong undercurrent of Christian nationalism that fueled the revolt was made evident by the fact that many of the rioters carried crosses, waved “Jesus Saves” banners, and even stopped to pray in the Senate Chamber. The attack has been framed as a form of spiritual warfare by scholars who contend that these actions were not unique but rather represented a larger conviction that “God had ordained Trump’s presidency” (Du Mez 234).

The religious symbols used during the riot represented a shared identity based on political loyalty as well as spiritual belief. In addition to functioning as expressions of individual religion, these symbols assisted in portraying the attack as a holy obligation and a righteous uprising against a government that was thought to be at odds with divine will (Baptist Joint Committee). This perspective provided the insurrectionists with inspiration and justification for their acts, effectively cloaking violence in the language of divine purpose (Gjelten).

A poisonous combination of nationalism and religion resulted, one that not only erodes democratic principles but also perverts the central ideas of Christianity. This moment was made possible by decades of evangelical culture centred on militant masculinity and political allegiance to conservative power structures. This allowed believers to see Trump as a warrior appointed by God rather than just a leader (Du Mez 8-9, 234). The events of January 6th highlighted how such a belief system has real world consequences, as the flag and the cross are no longer distinct symbols but rather and the same.

In addition to combining religious and political identities, the adoption of Christian nationalist slogans during the January 6th Capitol riot such as “Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president” was an outward sign of a larger ideological movement. Christian nationalism basic tenets that political leaders must represent and defend a particular Christian worldview and that the American identity is intrinsically linked to it have been reflected in such slogans. Protesters publicly linked their unshakable devotion to Donald Trump with their faith-based loyalty to Jesus by carrying signs and wearing clothing bearing the slogan (Washington University in St. Louis). This along with other mantras effectively turn religious belief into a partisan statement by reducing Christian religion to a political identity.

These statements are a part of a broader attempt to baptize American nationalism by using Jesus to defend authority, hierarchy, and power rather than to advocate for humility and peace. These phrases were widely used throughout the riot demonstrating how strongly many participants felt they were fighting a holy war instead of participating in nonreligious political protest. Furthermore, the slogans functioned as rallying cries that combined complaints of perceived political injustice with a sense of divine purpose, rendering democratic or compromise methods appear not only immoral but also insufficient. The religious-political

fusion created a dynamic, one in which violence could be seen not as a betrayal of Christian principles but as a necessary act of faith. Moreover, such discourse encourages the notion that Trump was anointed by God rather than elected by people, which gave some individuals the confidence to see the capitol attack as an act of obedience rather than rebellion (Whitehead).

The Capitol riot revealed how deeply Christian nationalism has corrupted political discourse, transforming faith into a weapon and democracy into heresy. By framing their assault as divine mandate, the rioters exposed the dangerous endpoint of merging religious fervor with political fanaticism. What began as a protest became a sacrament of power—proof that when religion justifies authority, dissent became sin, and violence became duty. In this context, loyalty to Donald Trump had transcended politics, becoming an article of faith immune to reason or law. Ultimately, the insurrection was not just an attack on a government building, but a chilling testament to how easily religious belief can be twisted to justify force and undermine democracy itself.

### **3.3.2. Public Prayer Circles and Religious Rituals during the Riot**

Along with being a political upheaval, the capitol riot on January 6th, 2021 was also a clear example of religious zeal, as evidenced by open prayer circles and spiritual rites. Some protesters formed outdoor prayer circles, kneeled, laid hands on one another and invoked divine intervention to “take back” the nation for God as they gathered in front of the Capitol. As others around him echoed “Amen”, a group of rioters within the Capitol stopped in the Senate chamber to perform a group prayer. One man led the gathering in praising God for enabling them to “send an appeal to all the dictators, communists, and the globalists” (Public

Affairs Ejournal). The purpose of these practices was to glorify the political violence of the day and present it as a divinely permitted spiritual mission.

The ideology of Christian nationalism, which maintains that the United States is divinely ordained to be a Christian nation and that political power should reflect biblical values, fits in with this combination of faith and political fanaticism .Originally associated with the American revolution , symbols like Wooden crosses, “Jesus Saves”, and “Appeal to Heaven” banners were not only evident but also essential to the activists’ identity and sense of heavenly approval .The act of praying in public while surrounded by shattered glass and screams of violence highlights how Christian terminology and worship styles were used to elevate what was really an attempt to bring down democratic government. Such religious practices during an uprising serve as a reminder of the growing risk of confusing religious piety with political violence, as well as the strong cultural foundations that support it (Yahoo News).

### **3.4. The events of the attacks (pre, during, post)**

The January 6th attack on the US. Capitol unfolded over the course of a single day, but its roots stretched back weeks and its consequences continue to resonate. Understanding the full scope of the Capitol insurrection requires examining not just the events of the day itself, but also the conditions that led up to it and the aftermath that followed. From the buildup of disinformation and planned rallies, to the violent storming of the Capitol, and finally to the political, legal, and social fallout in its wake, this section traces the timeline of January 6 as both a national crisis and a turning point in the American democratic experience.

#### **3.4.1. Pre-Attack**



### **3.4.1.1. Political climate after the 2020 election**

The political climate following the 2020 US presidential election was volatile and deeply polarized. Donald Trump's repeated claims of election fraud created a widespread sense of grievance among his supporters. As tensions escalated, Republican officials in swing states like Georgia and Arizona faced intense pressure to overturn certified election results (Gellman). Even before the election, Donald Trump sought to delegitimize the process, claiming without evidence that mail-in ballots would enable widespread fraud and foreign interference. After his loss by over seven million votes, Trump falsely declared victory and insisted that the election had been stolen, despite more than 60 court cases rejecting these claims.

Central to his narrative was the so-called "Red Mirage," the unfounded claim that early leads were erased by fraudulent mail-in ballots (Bomberg 2-3). On December 19, 2020, Trump tweeted, "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild (3). His legal allies, including Rudy Giuliani and John Eastman, intensified the pressure by spreading falsehoods, with Giuliani calling for "trial by combat" and Eastman wrongly asserting that Vice President Pence could overturn the election (3-4). These escalating claims and calls to action laid the rhetorical groundwork for the violent mobilization that would soon follow at the Capitol.

At the January 6 rally, Trump escalated the rhetoric further, insisting, "We will not let them silence your voices... We're not going to let it happen" and urging followers, "we fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore" (qtd in. Bomberg 4). He publicly pressured Pence, declaring, "I hope Mike has the courage to do what he has to do," framing the vice president's ceremonial role as a last line of defence (4). These repeated falsehoods and calls to action created an explosive environment where political

loyalty to Trump was elevated above the rule of law. The culmination of these escalating tactics was the violent assault on the Capitol, which symbolized the breakdown of democratic norms and public trust. The period following the election thus exposed deep fractures in American political culture and raised urgent questions about the resilience of its democratic institutions (Bomberg 4).

In the aftermath of the 2020 election, false claims of voter fraud became a central theme in the events leading to January 6th. Former President Trump played a major role in spreading these baseless allegations, popularizing the phrase “Stop the Steal” and even exploring the possibility of using the military to take control of voting machines. These misleading statements were reinforced by prominent individuals and organizations, intensifying public outrage. Trump’s refusal to accept the election results was pivotal in stirring up his supporters. By repeatedly insisting the election had been stolen, he fostered a climate of frustration and desperation among his base, many of whom already distrusted government institutions and the media. This narrative proved especially powerful in rallying far-right groups and individuals who were eager to act on their grievances (9).

The January 6th attack was fueled not only by extremist groups but also by mainstream Republican figures who amplified false claims of election fraud. Congressman Josh Hawley, investigated by the January 6th Committee for encouraging rioters with a raised fist, had previously defended Confederate symbols, framing efforts to rename military bases as an attack on US cultural institutions. Similarly, Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, also under scrutiny for her role in the Capitol riot, promoted Lost Cause ideology, suggesting Black Americans should feel “proud” of Confederate monuments (Martinez 11).

Polling revealed broad GOP support for the insurrection, with 61% of Republicans backing the events of January 6th. Many rioters carried Confederate flags and white supremacist imagery, not as fringe extremists, but as part of the mainstream right. A striking example was Kevin Seefried, who paraded a massive Confederate flag through the Capitol, marking the first time in U.S. history the banner had breached the building (11). The convergence of official endorsements, popular conservative support, and unabashed racist imagery underscored how the insurrection stemmed from both calculated political rhetoric and the deliberate distortion of historical truths.

#### **3.4.1.2. Online coordination by extremist groups (Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, etc.)**

In the lead-up to January 6th, extremist groups used digital platforms not just to share ideas, but to actively organize and coordinate a targeted assault on democratic institutions. The Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and similar far-right organizations exploited social media, encrypted messaging apps, and online forums to recruit followers, spread misinformation, and plan their actions in detail. These virtual networks allowed them to convert ideological anger into concrete strategies, enabling a high level of coordination that made the violence at the Capitol possible. Far from being a spontaneous protest, the attack was shaped by digital radicalization and operational planning, revealing how online extremism can translate into organized threats against the political system itself.

Central to both the planning and execution of the attack, the Proud Boys played an outsized role, with at least 40 of their members later charged in connection with the Capitol assault (“Investigation Details...”). Leaders like Enrique Tarrio and Joe Biggs were indicted for seditious conspiracy, a charge rooted in Civil War-era law, with court documents revealing they had participated in discussions about storming and occupying Capitol buildings

(Reilly). These revelations made clear that January 6th was not merely a spontaneous riot but a coordinated and deliberate action.

The Proud Boys had been emboldened months earlier when former President Donald Trump, during a nationally televised presidential debate, told them to "stand back and stand by." This remark was immediately celebrated in far-right online spaces, with members interpreting it as a form of presidential endorsement. In the aftermath, the phrase became a rallying cry that fueled online recruitment, radicalization, and logistical planning in the lead-up to January 6th (Collins and Zadrozny). This digital coordination was instrumental in transforming ideological support into organized action, highlighting the increasingly dangerous intersection of online extremism and real-world political violence.

Similarly, the Oath Keepers, a far-right militia with deep ties to white supremacist and neo-Confederate movements, openly coordinated their plans on social media and encrypted messaging apps (The Editors of...). Founder Stewart Rhodes escalated the rhetoric, warning of a coming civil war and referring to government leaders as "would-be slave masters" (Giglio). In two open letters, the Oath Keepers pledged to Trump that millions of American military and law enforcement veterans stood ready to answer his call to arms (Reilly). Their coordination was explicit and tactical: during the attack, group chats reveal members reporting live from inside the Capitol, with one writing, "We are in the main dome right now," and another replying, "this is what they trained for". Their preparation included spending over \$20,000 on firearms, bringing explosives to Washington, and even carrying a "death list" with the names of targeted elected officials. The Oath Keepers wore tactical gear and marched in formation, treating the assault as a paramilitary operation rather than a protest (Kunzelman, and Whitehurst).

In sum, the January 6th insurrection was not a spontaneous outburst but the result of calculated mobilization by extremist groups who coordinated online, armed them, and treated the attack as a planned operation. The Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and their allies transformed digital propaganda and historical grievances into direct violence against democratic institutions. Their actions on that day marked a dangerous escalation in far-right extremism, demonstrating how online radicalization, political rhetoric, and organized militia tactics converged to produce one of the most serious assaults on American democracy in modern history.

### **3.4.2. During the Attack**

One of the most concerning violations of American democratic procedures in contemporary history occurred on January 6, 2021, when the US Capitol was stormed. False allegations of a rigged election served as the catalyst for the event, which broke out quickly and violently when thousands of rioters stormed the Capitol building as Congress was getting ready to confirm the Electoral College results.

Thousands of people turned out for the “Save America” event that morning in the vicinity of the White House. Around midday, Trump addressed the throng, urging them to march to the Capitol and restating accusations of election fraud. Groups started moving in the direction of the capitol building even before his address concluded. Crowds gathered outside the Capitol’s west front by 12:45 pm and USCP reported seeing a “wall of people” approaching the structure. At the same time, a vehicle carrying explosives and guns was uncovered, and pipe bombs were located at the headquarters of the democratic national committee and the republican national committee

At 12:53 pm demonstrators used a metal bike rack to breach the outer perimeter of the US capitol police, soon overpowering police and forcing the secret service and the metropolitan police department to send in support. As the rioters moved rapidly, scaling walls, climbing scaffolding, and attacking officers with chemical sprays, the Capitol was placed under lockdown at 1:00 pm. Despite repeated calls for National Guard assistance, they had penetrated the upper west terrace within an hour. Rioters broke through the rest of the barricades and cracked windows around 2:10 pm and entered the building by 2:13 pm. Vice president Pence and lawmakers were swiftly evacuated as the unruly mob rushed inside, and both houses were placed under lockdown. Reinforcements from several federal and local authorities did not start regaining control until after 3:00 pm and by 6:14 pm they had established a secure zone (U.S. Senate 21–26).

Government officials were quickly evacuated from the Capitol to avoid damage following the tumultuous events of January 6th, which led to one of the most urgent evacuations in recent US history. The secret service and US Capitol police worked together to escort important officials and members of congress to safety after rioters broke through security and entered the Senate and House chambers. At 2:12 pm, vice president Mike Pence was first led off the Senate floor and taken into temporary refuge in his Senate office while officials hurried to find a safe evacuation route, which was made more difficult by rioters being dangerously close to his potential escape path. By 2:25 pm he was led to a secure area. Additionally, Senators were evacuated from the chamber about 2:30 pm. Speaker Nancy Pelosi, majority leader Steny Hoyer, and whip James Clyburn were all taken out of the house side at the same time as Pence. Pelosi was observed entering the basement by 2:18 pm and arriving at a safe place by 2:23 pm.

As rioters made their way through the structure. About 2:38 pm, only minutes before Ashley Babbitt was shot while trying to enter the speaker's lobby, house members who were still in the chamber floor started to leave. Threats in the hallway caused a delay in the evacuation of members in the house gallery, but by 2:49 pm USCP armed response team had cleared a safe path. All surviving members were eventually safely transferred unidentified secure areas. More bloodshed was probably avoided thanks to these well-planned evacuations, which also highlighted how serious the situation was that day (United States 664-666)

Enraged by Vice President Mike Pence's refusal to overturn the certified results of the 2020 presidential election, a violent mob attacked the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, with Pence as a primary target. Former President Trump had repeatedly pressured Pence, both publicly and privately, to reject electoral votes. When Pence refused, many of Trump's supporters turned against him. At 2:12 p.m., just minutes after Pence was removed from the Senate chamber, rioters breached the Capitol, erected gallows on the West Front lawn, and chanted, "Hang Mike Pence" (Final Report 429, 464). Members of the crowd demanded Pence be brought out and searched the building while shouting accusations of treason (429, 661).

A Secret Service agent monitoring events at the time flagged a 2:24 p.m. tweet by Trump—claiming Pence "didn't have the courage to do what should have been done"—as dangerously provocative, noting it was "probably not going to be good for Pence" (596). According to White House Counsel Pat Cipollone, Trump later remarked, "He thinks Mike deserves it," despite being aware of the crowd's threats to hang the vice president (579–596). Jacob Chansley, known as the "QAnon Shaman," left a chilling note on the Senate dais stating, "It's only a matter of time, justice is coming" (661). These threats were not idle: Pence and

his family were forced into hiding in a secure underground location as rioters came within 40 feet of them (464). Testimonies documented in the final report of the House Select Committee underscore how Trump's inflammatory rhetoric and inaction placed the vice president's life in immediate danger (Final Report).

The breach of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, marked an unprecedented attack on the seat of American legislative power. It was not merely a protest turned violent but a deliberate attempt to obstruct the democratic process through intimidation and force. The storming of the Capitol building, fueled by misinformation and incited by political leadership, revealed deep fissures in the nation's political and security systems. This breach stands as a defining moment in modern US history—one that exposed the fragility of democratic norms and the urgent need to protect them.

### **3.4.3. Post-Attack**

The January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol by a pro-Trump mob seeking to overturn the 2020 election results triggered profound immediate and long-term consequences. The violent breach disrupted the constitutional process of certifying the electoral vote, delaying the confirmation of Joe Biden's victory until late that night (Herb et al.). It caused significant casualties, with five deaths, including a rioter shot by police and a Capitol Police officer who died following assaults, alongside over 138 injured officers and widespread trauma among staff and lawmakers (Writer). The Capitol's physical and institutional integrity was damaged, with \$2.7 million in destruction to offices and symbolic spaces (Smith). In its wake, a robust legal response led to over 1,500 arrests and serious federal charges, including seditious conspiracy (Matza). The political fallout, including former President Trump's second



impeachment for inciting the insurrection, deepened national divisions and reshaped the political landscape (Aaro).

#### **3.4.3.1. Immediate Consequences**

The January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol resulted in significant casualties and injuries, profoundly impacting both civilians and law enforcement personnel. Five individuals lost their lives: Ashli Babbitt, a civilian rioter, was fatally shot by a Capitol Police officer while attempting to breach a barricaded door (Franey). While Rosanne Boyland was initially believed to have been trampled but was later found to have died from an accidental overdose amid the chaos. Two rioters, Kevin Greeson and Benjamin Phillips died of natural causes, specifically heart attack and stroke, respectively; and Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick died the following day from injuries sustained during the riot, including assaults with chemical irritants and physical blows (Healy). Beyond the fatalities, the violence inflicted serious injuries on law enforcement. Over 138 officers suffered injuries, ranging from concussions and broken bones to severe trauma, inflicted by rioters using metal pipes, flagpoles, and improvised explosives (Serbakov 116). A total of 81 Capitol Police officers and 65 D.C. Metropolitan Police officers sustained injuries, including head trauma, fractured ribs, and chemical burns inflicted during the attack (Jalonick and Richer).

While specific data on civilian injuries is scarce, congressional staff and lawmakers endured significant psychological trauma, with many hiding or barricading themselves during the attack. Lawmakers and staff experienced significant physical danger and psychological trauma. Video footage and media reports showed rioters violently breaking through police barricades and entering Congressional chambers, forcing an abrupt interruption of democratic proceedings and causing the deaths of five individuals (Das et al.).

Inside the Capitol, members of Congress and their staff were evacuated or forced to shelter in place, many hiding in fear as the mob ransacked offices and vandalized property (Sardarizadeh and Lussenhop). The traumatic event left lawmakers and staff grappling with ongoing psychological effects; for many, the riot incited fear, anxiety, and distress over the fragility of democratic institutions. In a national survey conducted shortly after the attack, 37% of respondents reported strong negative emotions about the event, with distress particularly pronounced among Democrats, who viewed the attack as an attempted coup .The Capitol Riot, widely broadcast and publicized, not only endangered the physical safety of those within the Capitol but also produced lasting mental health consequences among the broader political community and the nation at large (Das et al.,).

In the days and weeks that followed, some congressional aides have struggled with panic attacks, sleepless nights, and overwhelming anxiety in the days and weeks after the attack (Tully-McManus). Some staffers reported feeling intense guilt for encouraging friends and family to take pride in their work at the Capitol, only to have that space violently desecrated. Others recounted the sheer terror of hiding under desks and barricading office doors while rioters stormed the halls, shouting threats and vandalizing property (Tully-McManus). For many, the violence was not only physical but deeply personal, shaking their trust in the safety of government institutions and the security procedures meant to protect them. Lawmakers, too, have spoken openly about the emotional toll, with some seeking counseling to cope with the trauma of fearing for their lives inside the chambers. Staff members, particularly people of color, reported feeling uniquely targeted and retraumatized, as racial slurs and Confederate symbols were brandished by the attackers (Tully-McManus).

In the aftermath, fear persists among workers who now question whether they can ever feel safe returning to what was once a symbol of democracy. The enduring psychological toll on law enforcement was evident, as four Capitol Police officers later died by suicide, their families attributing these tragedies to the riot's trauma (Jackson). Officer Howard Liebengood of the Capitol Police died by suicide just three days after the violent riot, becoming one of the earliest casualties in the insurrection's aftermath (Bradford) . Less than two weeks had passed since the violent assault on the Capitol building when Officer Jeffrey Smith of the DC Metropolitan Police, who also responded to the attack, took his own life (Reilly). By mid-2021, six months following the Capitol attack, another DC officer, Gunther Hashida, died by suicide, marking the third known officer death connected to the events of that day (Casiano). Shortly afterward, Officer Kyle DeFreitag, also from the Metropolitan Police, was found to have committed suicide in August of that year (Chamberlain).

These tragic losses underscore the profound psychological toll the Capitol riot inflicted on those tasked with defending democracy under siege. The deaths of these officers stand as a sobering reminder that the violence of January 6th extended far beyond the physical injuries sustained during the attack, leaving lasting mental scars that, in several cases, proved fatal. The rising number of officer suicides in the wake of the insurrection has intensified calls for better mental health support for first responders who face such traumatic events (Bradford).

Inside the Capitol, significant destruction took place as rioters vandalized the office of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, ransacked the desks of legislators, and smeared feces on the walls. The Confederate battle flag was carried through the corridors of the building for the first time in history, while Trump supporters displayed hateful paraphernalia and placed MAGA hats on statues and busts, including that of George Washington. Offices were looted, furniture was

overturned, and important government spaces were desecrated as the mob took selfies, livestreamed their actions, and reveled in the ease with which they had overrun the halls of Congress, long regarded as the symbolic heart of American democracy (Heine 127).

The attack inflicted deep and lasting wounds, not only in terms of physical destruction but also through profound psychological trauma and symbolic desecration. For lawmakers, staff, and law enforcement, the events of that day shattered any sense of safety within the very heart of American democracy. The emotional aftermath, marked by fear, guilt, anxiety, and tragic loss of life, reflects a broader national reckoning with the consequences of political violence. Ultimately, the breach of the Capitol left behind more than damaged property; it left scars on the American conscience and raised urgent questions about how the nation protects its democratic institutions and the people who serve them.

#### **3.4.3.2. Legal and Political Fallout**

In democratic societies, the stability of governance depends on the rule of law, institutional trust, and peaceful political transition. When these foundations are shaken, nations must confront the consequences through both legal accountability and political reflection. The January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol marked a severe disruption to these democratic norms, prompting an urgent response across multiple fronts. In the months and years that followed, the United States witnessed an unprecedented wave of legal actions and political fallout aimed at addressing the breach and reinforcing the integrity of its democratic institutions.

#### **3.4.3.2.1. Federal Prosecutions after January 6: Unprecedented Scale, Strategic Legal Approach, and Lasting Implications**

The violent breach of the US Capitol sparked what would evolve into the largest and most complex criminal probe ever conducted by American law enforcement. Within just one year, authorities had apprehended more than 600 individuals connected to the attack. This extraordinary investigation required unprecedented coordination between multiple agencies, including the FBI, ATF, and numerous field offices, highlighting both the nationwide reach of the participants and the sophisticated nature of the assault. Federal prosecutors implemented a multi-layered charging strategy, pursuing everything from simple misdemeanors like illegal entry to grave felonies such as assaults on police officers and obstruction of Congress's constitutional duties (Bernat 11-12).

As the cases advanced through 2022, the Justice Department refined its targeted prosecution framework. Ordinary protesters who entered the Capitol faced charges tied to their specific conduct, while prosecutors focused their most severe accusations on militant group leaders believed to have orchestrated elements of the violence. This distinction became particularly clear in the indictments against Proud Boys and Oath Keepers members, some of whom were prosecuted under the seldom-invoked seditious conspiracy law. The case against Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes stood out as especially consequential, as it sought to establish that certain attackers had engaged in organized resistance against federal authority (Bernat 6).

These groundbreaking prosecutions exposed both the capabilities and constraints of the American legal system when confronting such an extraordinary challenge. While the sedition charges carried severe potential penalties, they demanded proof of a specific intent to forcibly

resist government operations, an exceptionally difficult standard to meet. This rigorous requirement resulted in some defendants negotiating reduced charges, while other cases became high-stakes legal experiments in applying conspiracy statutes to mass civil disorder. Conspicuously missing from the government's approach was any employment of the federal insurrection statute, a calculated decision that balanced evidentiary realities with long-term legal strategy (Richer et al.). This prosecutorial choice generated significant debate among scholars, with critics contending it failed to properly characterize the attack's severity, while supporters maintained it reflected prudent legal judgment given the challenges of securing convictions.

The ramifications of these cases transcend individual punishments. They have set critical jurisprudential markers regarding permissible political expression and violent resistance, while delivering an unequivocal warning about targeting democratic processes. Furthermore, the investigation's enormous scope-requiring analysis of countless digital records, video footage, and cross-agency collaboration-has transformed how authorities handle crimes involving mass public participation. As these historic cases progress, they represent both accountability for the perpetrators and a stress test for America's judicial institutions confronting extraordinary circumstances (Carpenter).

The federal prosecutions following January 6th underscore the gravity of the Capitol attack and the government's resolve to uphold the rule of law amid unprecedented challenges. These cases not only sought justice for the individuals involved but also redefined legal approaches to politically motivated violence and mass unrest. As the courts navigated complex questions of intent, conspiracy, and constitutional boundaries, the prosecutions set enduring precedents for how future threats to democratic institutions may be addressed. Ultimately, the legal

response to January 6 stands as a pivotal moment in American jurisprudence—one that will shape the nation's legal and political landscape for years to come.

#### **3.4.3.2.2. Trump's second impeachment ("incitement of insurrection")**

The US Constitution establishes impeachment as a vital mechanism for addressing presidential misconduct, specifically "high crimes and misdemeanors." The process starts in the House of Representatives, which drafts and approves impeachment articles by a majority vote. The Senate then conducts a trial, where a two-thirds vote is necessary to convict and remove the president from office. Judicial oversight is minimal. Despite criticisms, particularly regarding partisan obstacles during Donald Trump's two impeachments, the process retains significant impact. It tarnishes a president's legacy, public standing, and influence, preserves a documented account of wrongdoing, and discourages future misconduct. Furthermore, public sentiment and state-level interventions can amplify its effects, reinforcing accountability beyond the Senate's decision (Gerhardt 745).

Following the violent attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, President Donald J. Trump was impeached for a second time by the House of Representatives, charged with "incitement of insurrection." The impeachment article accused Trump of repeatedly making false claims about election fraud and directly encouraging his supporters to march to the Capitol, leading to the deadly assault that disrupted the certification of the 2020 presidential election results (Chappell). The House voted 232-197 in favor of impeachment, with ten Republicans joining Democrats -marking the most bipartisan presidential impeachment in American history ("News Wrap"). In the Senate trial that followed, seven Republican senators crossed party lines to vote for conviction, but the final tally of 57-43 fell short of the two-thirds majority needed, resulting in Trump's acquittal (United States Senate). Despite the

acquittal, the trial underscored Trump's central role in the insurrection, as highlighted by both the House managers and the findings of the January 6 Select Committee (Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington). Trump's second impeachment was historic and showed bipartisan recognition of his role in the Capitol attack. Though acquitted, it exposed deep political divides, warned of democracy's fragility, and left a lasting mark on his legacy.

#### **3.4.3.2.3. Senate acquittal and lasting political division**

The Senate's acquittal in impeachment proceedings has historically reinforced political divisions rather than resolving them, highlighting the inherently partisan nature of such trials. The article emphasizes how, even at the time of the Constitution's framing, concerns were raised that the Senate might become too entangled with political loyalties to deliver impartial judgments. This issue has persisted into modern times, where impeachment trials often function more as political theatre than as genuine efforts to enforce constitutional accountability. As a result, acquittals tend to embolden political factions rather than unite the nation, deepening existing partisan rifts and undermining public trust in democratic institutions (Siegel 204–205).

The Senate's acquittal of former President Donald Trump in his second impeachment trial on February 13, 2021, underscored the deep political divisions in the United States. Charged with inciting an insurrection following the January 6 Capitol riot, Trump was acquitted by a vote of 57-43, falling short of the two-thirds majority needed for conviction, with seven Republicans joining Democrats in voting guilty. This outcome, highlighted the partisan split, as many Republicans argued the trial was unconstitutional for a former president or politically motivated, while Democrats emphasized the need to hold Trump accountable for the deadly violence that left five dead, including a police officer (Montanaro). The earlier context of



Trump's first impeachment trial, showed a similar pattern of partisan loyalty, with the Senate's acquittal on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress setting a precedent for the challenges of achieving bipartisan consensus. These repeated acquittals, despite strong evidence presented by House managers, deepened the political divide, emboldening Trump's base and leaving lasting tensions within the Republican Party and the broader political landscape (Naylor et al.).

The Senate's decision to acquit Donald Trump in both impeachment trials-especially the second one after the January 6 Capitol attack-highlights how impeachment has become a catalyst for deepening partisan conflict rather than promoting national reconciliation, reinforcing a pattern of performative politics that diminishes public confidence in democratic governance and intensifies political polarization.

### **3.5. Reaction of Christian Nationalists**

Christian nationalists' response to the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021, exposes the problematic nexus between political extremism and religious fervor. Instead of denouncing the violence, many in the movement either minimized the attack's seriousness or exploited it to support the erroneous claim that the election was rigged. This discourse was purposefully employed to avoid taking accountability for the rioters' acts and to preserve the appearance of legitimate cause.

For instance, Paula White, a well-known Evangelical supporter of Donald Trump, began the "Save America" event with a prayer that portrayed the conflict as a spiritual one between good and evil in addition to calling for divine intervention. She positioned the uprising as a part of a higher mandate to defend the nation's Christian character. The Capitol attack was justified as a reaction to a perceived existential danger according to this apocalyptic framing.

Furthermore, by quietly fostering a sense of divine justification among their supporters, Christian nationalist leaders played a significant role in forming the ideological climate that prepared the ground for the attack. Even though some Christian leaders, like Beth Moore and Russel Moore, condemned the violence, their voices were sometimes overshadowed by widespread silence, collusion, or explicit backing of other well-known people. Even prominent figures such as Robert Jeffress and Franklin Graham avoided accountability by erroneously attributing the violence to organizations like Antifa. This selective denunciation and subsequent endorsement of the election-related conspiracy theories exposed the perilous ways in which Christian Nationalism can sustain political violence and erode democratic values, demonstrating the movement's deeper commitment to retaining political power under the pretense of religious obligation (Stewart 10-14).

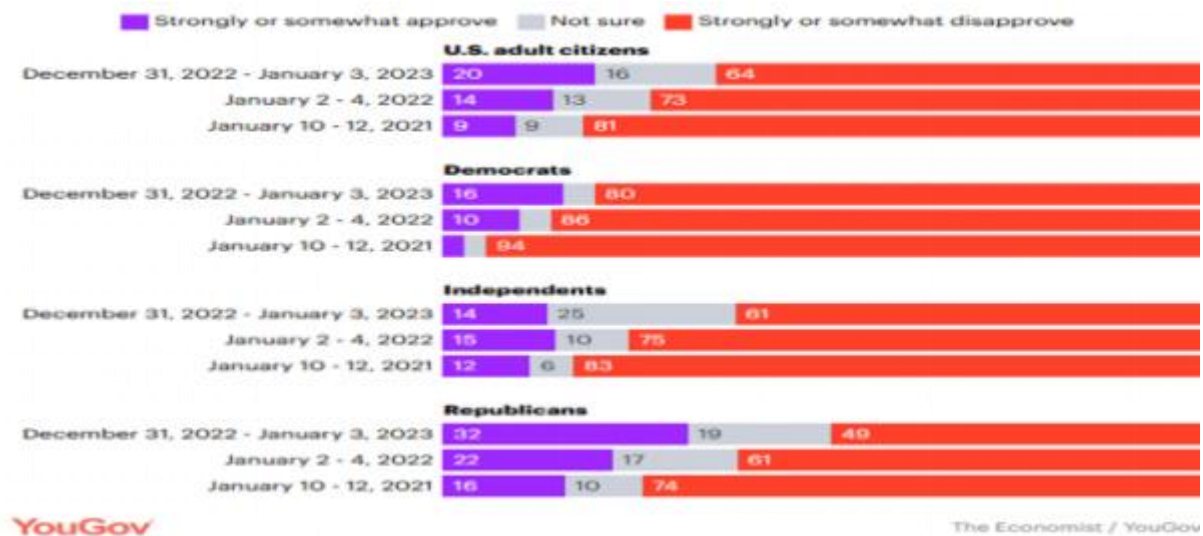
Symbolic events often serve as powerful markers in a nation's political memory, crystallizing deeper social tensions and revealing the health of its democratic institutions. The January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol was not only a physical breach of a key government building but also a profound symbolic rupture—an assault on the very ideals of peaceful governance, civic order, and constitutional continuity. Beyond the broken windows and breached chambers, the riot reflected growing ideological polarization and the willingness of some to reject democratic norms in favor of radicalized beliefs. Among these forces, Christian nationalism emerged as a significant and troubling influence, blending religious conviction with political extremism to justify, minimize, or even sanctify the violence that unfolded

The Capitol attack remains a stark reminder that democracy can be undermined not only by force but by deeply rooted narratives that distort truth and moral authority. Christian nationalism's response to the events of January 6 revealed how religious rhetoric can be

weaponized to legitimize anti-democratic behavior, blurring the lines between spiritual devotion and political allegiance. While some faith leaders denounced the violence, the broader movement's selective silence and complicity signaled a dangerous tolerance for insurrectionist ideology. As the nation continues to grapple with the meaning and legacy of that day, the symbolic weight of the Capitol attack underscores the urgent need to defend democratic principles from both overt threats and those cloaked in the language of divine purpose.

### **3.6. Evaluating US Public Opinion Following the Capitol Hill Attacks**

Public opinion plays a critical role in shaping the legitimacy and stability of democratic institutions. In times of political crisis, how citizens interpret and react to major events can either reinforce democratic values or deepen societal divisions. The January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol was not only a political and constitutional crisis but also a revealing moment in American public sentiment. Reactions to the attack varied significantly across political affiliations, ideological lines, and media ecosystems, exposing sharp cleavages in how Americans understand democracy, accountability, and political violence. There are clear party differences in the acceptance or rejection of Trump supporters' January 6th, 2021 invasion on the Capitol to prevent Congressional certification of the election results. Analyzing the responses of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents over time reveals not only divergent political and moral perspectives on the incident, but also the wider breakdown of a common democratic foundation in the US.



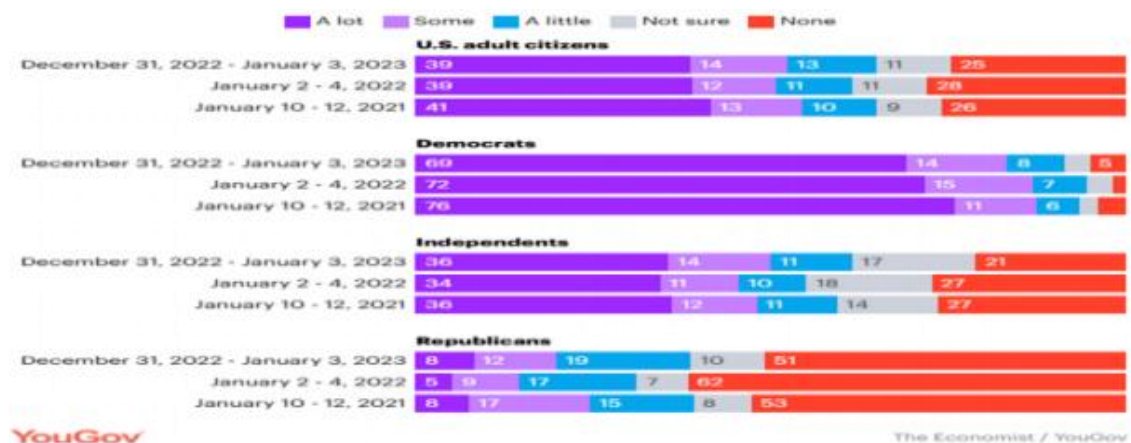
**Fig.5.** Approval or Disapproval of Trump Supporters Storming the US Capitol to Stop Congressional Proceedings among Different Parties.

**Source:** “Most Americans but Fewer than in 2021 Disapprove of the January 6 Capitol Takeover | YouGov.” *Today.yougov.com* [today.yougov.com/politics/articles/44904-most-americans-disapprove-january-6-capitol-attack](https://today.yougov.com/politics/articles/44904-most-americans-disapprove-january-6-capitol-attack).

A concerning pattern in American political polarization and collective memory can be seen in the changing public assessment of the Capitol attack on January 6th, 2021. Even if the incident sparked widespread political criticism at first, new polling data shows that unanimity is gradually eroding. This polls shows that while approval virtually quadrupled from 9% to 20% among U.S adults, disapproval decreased from 81% in 2021 to 64% by early 2023. Republicans have seen the most change, with approval rising from 16% to 32% and

disapproval falling from 74% to just 49%. Independents also exhibit increasing ambivalence, as seen by notable rise in “not sure” answers (from 6% to 25%), which points to a shift towards ambiguity or disinterest. Democrats on the other hand, have continuously opposed it, with disapproval rates remaining above 80%. These trends demonstrate the vulnerability of democratic consensus in the face of ideological entrenchment by highlighting not only widening partisan divides but also the alarming normalization of political violence among some demographic groups.

Perceptions of political accountability are increasingly shaped by partisan identity, as evidenced by public opinion regarding Trump’s involvement in the January 6th attacks. The vast differences between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents exposed a fractured civic landscape where views of leadership, responsibility, and democratic norms are increasingly interpreted via ideological glasses, even while national sentiments has stayed mostly unchanged since 2021.



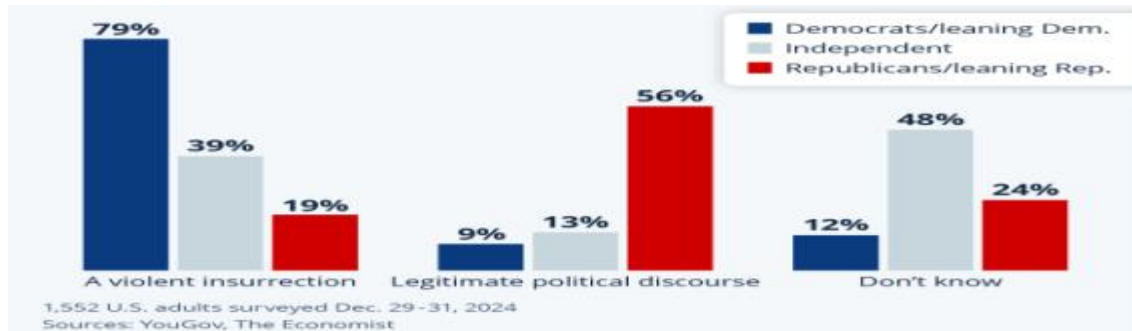
**Fig.6.** Trump’s Responsibility on the Capitol Attack among Different Political Perspectives throughout Years.

**Source:** “Most Americans but Fewer than in 2021 Disapprove of the January 6 Capitol Takeover | YouGov.” *Today.yougov.com* [today.yougov.com/politics/articles/44904-most-americans-disapprove-january-6-capitol-attack](https://today.yougov.com/politics/articles/44904-most-americans-disapprove-january-6-capitol-attack).

As illustrated in figure 7, the public perception of Donald Trump’s involvement in the Capitol incident seems to be shifting more and more along party line over time. Since January 2021, the national percentage of Americans who think Trump has a “lot” of responsibility has stayed largely constant, ranging between 39% and 41%. Deeper party division however, shows glaring disparities in responsibility. The vast majority of Democrats 76% in 2021 and 69% in 2023 continue to place a great deal of responsibility on him, which is consistent with a narrative that portrays Trump as the primary initiator. The opinion of independents is far more divided; just roughly one third give him “a lot” of responsibility, while almost as many give him none or are unclear. Notably, the majority of Republicans do not believe that Trump is at fault; in 2023 51% of them claimed that he is not responsible, which is a little drop from 62% in 2022 but still represents a majority. These numbers point to a serious problem in our common civic reality, indicating that although national sentiment has stayed relatively stable, Americans’ interpretations of the events of January 6th and the role of political leadership in inciting or justifying violence are nonetheless influenced by partisan identity.

Following the Capitol attack on January 6, the public’s description of the incident has emerged as a crucial barometer of wider ideological and political differences. Recent surveys have started to track how partisan affiliation affects Americans’ interpretations and labels of the incident, providing insights into the changing discourse surrounding one of the most

important political events in the recent US history as various groups adopt competing terms to frame what happened.

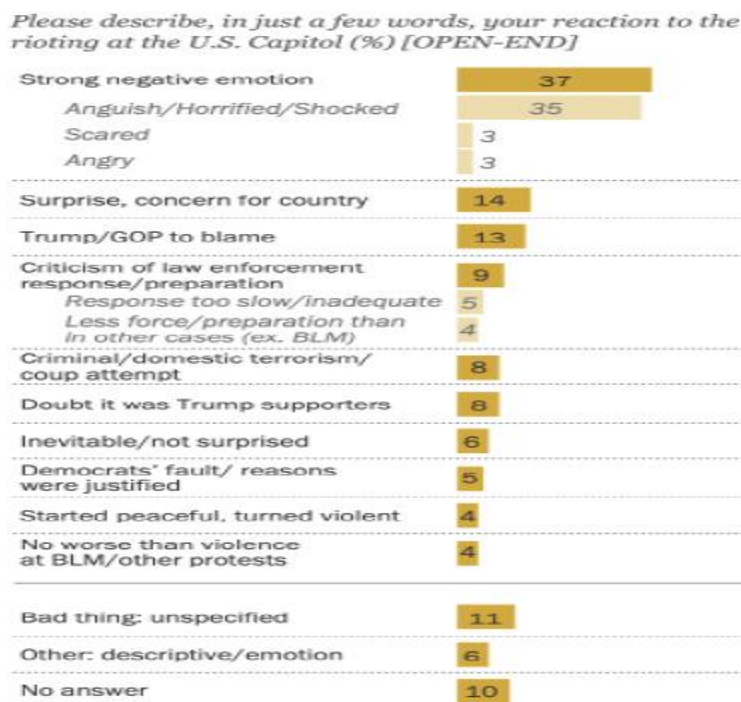


**Fig.7.** American Public Opinion on the January 6 Capitol Attack, Share of US Adults Characterization of the Events Four Years Later

**Source:** "Public View of the Events of January 6, 2021." *Statista*, 2024.  
<https://www.statista.com/chart/33714/public-view-of-the-events-of-january-6-2021/>.

Figure 7 reveals that 79% of democrats or democratic-leaning respondents consider the events at the US Capitol to have been a “violent insurrection”, while only 19% of republican-leaning respondents agree; a dramatic 60 points difference. In contrast, a majority of republicans 56% now characterize the attack as a “legitimate political discourse” despite the fact that it happened four years after the January 6 attacks. More than half of the GOP base now supports a framing that was formerly employed defensively by the party’s leadership. Independents are still divided; 39% support the term “violent insurrection”, 13% refer to it as a “legitimate discourse”, and a sizable 48% are unsure, indicating a risky breakdown in in agreement over fundamental democratic principles. In addition to reflecting political rhetoric and partisan media influence, this ongoing disagreement also indicates a serious breakdown in civic consensus, since fundamental notions of violence, protest, and legitimacy are no longer in agreement.

From astonishment and outrage to defence and justifications, Americans' responses to the disturbances at the US Capitol on January 6 are diverse. Others have presented different interpretations, demonstrating how reactions to the incident are significantly influenced by political identity and perspective, even if some quickly blamed then- president Donald Trump.



**Fig.8.** Range of American Reactions to the January 6 Capitol Riot; Emotional Responses and Attribution of Blame.

**Source:** Hartig, Hannah. "In Their Own Words: How Americans Reacted to the Rioting at the U.S. Capitol." *Pew Research Center*, 15 Jan. 2021     [www.pewresearch.org/short-](http://www.pewresearch.org/short-)



reads/2021/01/15/in-their-own-words-how-americans-reacted-to-the-rioting-at-the-u-s-capitol/. Accessed 13 May 2025.

The Capitol riot in the United States has sparked a range of emotional and cognitive responses, highlighting political disagreement and deep-seated differences in how Americans interpret and process the country's suffering. Respondents reported intense emotional reactions, often evoked by patriotic images and incredulity. Some saw the incident as a "slap in the face of democracy" and others, particularly younger ones, saw it as a result of growing right-wing divisiveness. Responsibility was distributed unevenly, with 8% calling it domestic terrorism or sedition, while 13% blamed Trump or republican leaders. Some attempted to downplay the violence, while others criticized law enforcement's lack of readiness or lax response. This demonstrates the deep political and epistemological divide among Americans, raising questions about the stability of a common national reality (Hartig).

These shifts in public opinion reflect more than partisan disagreement, they indicate a deeper unraveling of shared civic understanding. Increasingly, political identity shapes how individuals interpret key democratic events. This fragmentation of perspective undermines the possibility of a common national dialogue. As consensus over fundamental truths erodes, so too does the capacity for collective accountability. Ultimately, such divisions pose a serious threat to the stability and integrity of democratic governance.

## **Conclusion**

The last decade in American politics has seen a considerable ideological convergence within the conservative movement, particularly through the integration of Christian nationalism and Trumpism. Christian nationalism, a worldview that sees the United States as a divinely chosen nation destined to defend biblical principles, has long existed at the margins of American political discourse. However, it has garnered significant widespread acceptance in recent years. It frames political struggle in moral and spiritual terms, portraying followers as defenders of a precious national identity under assault from secularism, pluralism, and liberal principles. In contrast, Trumpism is a populist political movement founded on grievance politics, anti-establishment rhetoric, and the personalization of power through allegiance to a single charismatic leader.

Under Trump's leadership, various beliefs were aggressively blended rather than merely coexisting. Trump's strategic use of religious language, policy alignment with evangelical priorities (particularly on abortion, religious liberty, and judicial appointments), and portrayal of his presidency as divinely sanctioned by some religious leaders all contributed to a strong and mutually beneficial relationship. Christian nationalist actors supported Trump not for his personal qualities, but for his projected function as a political tool capable of advancing their religious and cultural goals. In turn, Trumpism used religious themes to sanctify its political goals, bolstering its legitimacy and rallying a devoted and ideologically driven support base.

The results of this alliance were most obvious during the January 6, 2021 Capitol rebellion, which used religious symbolism and nationalist passion to both instigate and justify political violence. The prominence of Christian images, prayers, and chants among rioters, combined with widespread condemnation of the 2020 election results as illegitimate, demonstrated how religious belief and political commitment had become inextricably linked. This event was more than just a break in American political continuity; it was the manifestation of an ideological current that views democratic institutions as subservient to a higher divine will, especially when electoral results do not reflect the beliefs of a politically active religious minority.

The Capitol attack thus serves not just as a historical marker of democratic crises, but also as a warning about the long-term risks of combining religious extremism with authoritarian populism. It demonstrates how charismatic leadership, spiritual reasoning, and anti-democratic attitude may work together to erode institutional legitimacy and incite violent resistance. Addressing this threat demands more than just reactive actions. It advocates for ongoing civic education, the reinforcement of democratic norms, institutional accountability, and a broader cultural push to reject apocalyptic, zero-sum narratives that conflate political disagreement with existential or spiritual battle.

Crucially, these trends have not diminished after Trump left office; on the contrary, they have gotten stronger since he took office again. Authoritarian populism and Christian nationalist ideology have been more ingrained in the state apparatus after Trump's reelection in 2024. While his rhetoric continues to characterize political opposition as not just incorrect but wicked, his administration has redoubled its efforts to restructure federal institutions along ideological lines. Extremist elements of his base have grown more confident as a result of

this framing, which has also made threats and acts of violence against journalists, election workers, political rivals, and underprivileged groups more commonplace.

The threat of political violence in this political environment is not merely theoretical; it is happening right now. Conflicts at local and national events, threats against public leaders, and armed protests all indicate a serious deterioration of democratic standards. Flashpoints have emerged during perceived political crises, such as court decisions, investigations into Trump's supporters, or cultural conflicts over topics like immigration, abortion, or LGBTQ+ rights. The forces unleashed during Trump's presidency are likely to not only remain, but to intensify, in the absence of robust civic education, institutional safeguards, and a cultural shift away from zero-sum confrontation. The Capitol attack should be seen not as an anomaly, but as a warning of how entrenched ideologies, when combined with charismatic leadership and religious fervor, can pose a serious threat to democratic stability.

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