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Christian nationalism, apocalypticism, outgroup hate, and support for violent extremism

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have found that Americans subscribing to Christian nationalist beliefs are more likely to endorse political violence. In this study I examine the role that apocalypticism – the belief that the United States is doomed to imminent collapse due to political, economic, socio-cultural, demographic, environmental, or religious causes – plays in explaining the link between Christian nationalism and support for political violence. Specifically, I theorize that Christian nationalists are more likely to hold apocalyptic outlooks and that these, in turn, produce feelings of threat that reinforce negative attitudes toward social outgroups. Hatred of outgroups prompts Christian nationalists to normalize political violence. I employ a serial mediation analysis on an original survey of 1300 white American subjects and find that close to 70% of the effects of Christian nationalist beliefs on support for political violence are mediated through apocalypticism and its effects on attitudes toward outgroups.

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Introduction

Scholars and commentators have found that Americans who subscribe to Christian nationalist beliefs are more likely to tolerate or endorse the use of political violence¹ (Armaly, Buckley, and Enders 2022; Edsall 2022; Perry and Whitehead 2023). In a recent Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) survey, white Americans who agreed that ‘God intended America to be a promised land for European Christians’ – a key tenet of Christian nationalist ideology² – were four times more likely to also agree that violence by ‘true American patriots’ is needed to save the United States (Perry 2023). What explains the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for political violence? In this study, I examine the role that American apocalypticism – the belief that the United States is imminently facing destruction – plays in shaping Christian nationalists’ attitudes toward political violence. I argue that white Americans exhibiting Christian nationalist beliefs are more likely to have an apocalyptic outlook for the United States. This, in turn, fosters strong feelings of threat and insecurity among white Christian nationalists and

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triggers aversion toward outgroup members. Outgroups are defined as social groups that an individual does not identify with or belongs to. Outgroup aversion drives greater normative tolerance for transgressive political behaviors like political violence among Christian nationalists. To test these propositions, I conduct a serial mediation analysis on an original survey sample of around 1300 white American subjects. I find that apocalypticism and its effects on outgroup resentments explain close to 70 percent of the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for political violence.

The study makes several contributions to the relatively small empirical literature on Christian nationalism and attitudes toward political violence. It examines a novel explanatory variable linking Christian nationalism with political violence: apocalypticism. Apocalypticism is central to Christian nationalism. Moreover, apocalyptic themes are becoming more prevalent within American political discourse. However, apocalypticism has not been systematically studied as a potential explanation for Christian nationalists' attitudes toward political violence in the United States. The study, therefore, seeks to fill a crucial gap in scholarly understanding for why Christian nationalists are more likely to express support for political violence. Indeed, the findings of the study suggest that apocalypticism explains the lion's share of the effect of Christian nationalist beliefs on endorsement of political violence. The study also investigates outgroup aversion as part of the link between Christian nationalism and political violence. This helps to add further dimension to the findings of other studies showing that racial attitudes and identity are important moderators of the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for political violence (e.g. Armaly, Buckley, and Enders 2022). The study utilizes serial mediation analysis to empirically dissect the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for political violence. This technique, while unique, facilitates a better understanding of how and why Christian nationalists come to be more supportive of political violence. Finally, the study employs a comprehensive empirical measure of subject support for political violence that combines support for political violence as an abstract concept with support for political violence when presented in a specific context. This is important given controversies surrounding how to survey Americans about their attitudes toward political violence (see Kalmoe and Mason 2022a; Westwood et al. 2022).

In the next section, I define Christian nationalism and then discuss several of the literatures associated with my core theoretical argument that apocalypticism and its effect on attitudes toward outgroups mediates the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for political violence. I then present my empirical tests and their results. I conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of the findings.

Defining Christian nationalism

What is meant by the term Christian nationalism?³ According to scholars, Christian nationalism is political-religious ideology that is defined by the following tenets: First, Christian nationalists assert that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and that contemporary American government, society, and culture should reflect and be guided by conservative Christian religious values. Second, Christian nationalists identify 'true Americans' as those who hold conservative Christian values. Christian nationalists typically believe that Americans of other religious traditions, along with nonreligious Americans, should be excluded from public life and the national culture. Third, Christian

nationalists affirm that the contemporary forces of liberalism, secularism, and multiculturalism malignly work to undermine America's true and good Christian heritage. This prompts Christian nationalists to seek to 'reclaim' America for God. What this means in practice varies, but a core belief is that American political and public institutions should be realigned toward conservative Christian values (Delehanty, Edgell, and Stewart 2017; Gorski and Perry 2022; Perry and Whitehead 2015a, 2015b; Whitehead and Perry 2020). According to PRRI (2023), approximately one third of Americans subscribe to Christian nationalism in some form. Christian nationalism is also more prominent among politically conservative Americans. Around 55% of Republicans hold Christian nationalist attitudes according to PRRI.

Scholars also note that as an ideology and a political movement Christian nationalism dovetails with far-right, white identity political ideologies. This is because a significant component of the Christian nationalist mindset is rejection of multiculturalism and the belief that contemporary America has become contaminated by immigrants, non-Christians, and empowered nonwhites (see Delehanty, Edgell, and Stewart 2017). Empirically, scholars have determined that Christian nationalist subjects exhibit higher levels of anti-white racial resentment (Davis and Perry 2021), and stronger anti-immigrant attitudes (McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011). Christian nationalists also express stronger support for the use of violent force by the police against African Americans (Perry et al. 2019). As a result, in this study I focus on white Americans who hold Christian nationalist beliefs. This quality also leads me to hypothesize that the relationship between Christian nationalism and increased support for political violence is mediated, in part, by white Christian nationalist aversion toward nonwhite racial minorities.

Theory

As previously discussed, Americans who subscribe to Christian nationalism are more likely to express support for the use of political violence. I propose that two attitudinal characteristics of Christian nationalists – apocalyptic beliefs and hostility toward social outgroups – help explain why they are more likely to support political violence.

Christian nationalism and apocalypticism

Apocalypticism is the belief that human society has entered end times and that the world is facing imminent destruction. According to Gross and Gilles (2012), individuals who subscribe to apocalypticism envision a diverse range of scenarios in which the world collapses. This includes economic collapse, the breakdown of public institutions and political order, social and cultural dissolution, wars, climate change, nuclear Armageddon, and God's last judgement. Apocalyptic scenarios can therefore be both religious and secular in people's imaginations (Davidson 2025). Moreover, apocalyptic outlooks are becoming more prominent in American political discourse. Politicians and political movements across political ideologies more frequently issue dire projections of apocalyptic collapse (Davidson 2025; Gross and Gilles 2012).

That said, apocalypticism is particularly prominent within Christian nationalist ideology and discourse (Whitehead and Perry 2020). Gorski (2019, 2020) explains that apocalypticism is a key theme permeating white Christian nationalist discourse in the United States.⁴

Several public opinion studies show that Christian nationalist subjects are more likely to exhibit apocalyptic beliefs (Adkins, Djupe, and Neiheisel 2023; Shanley 2024). In their landmark 2022 book on Christian nationalism, Gorski and Perry (2022) empirically show that Christian nationalist beliefs are correlated with belief in an imminent Armageddon or prophesized rapture in which the world is destroyed. The importance of apocalypticism to the Christian nationalist mindset is also consistent with a host of studies showing that perception of threat motivates and reinforces Christian nationalists' beliefs about politics and society (Al-Kire et al. 2022; Djupe 2022; Djupe, Lewis, and Sokhey 2023; McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2022; Perry 2023). Mattson (2017) speculates that this is perhaps why the apocalyptic imagery present in Donald Trump's 'American Carnage' speech during the 2016 Presidential race had such appeal for adherents of Christian nationalism. These literatures prompt me to expect that Christian nationalist subjects in my study are more likely to subscribe to apocalyptic predictions for the United States.

Apocalypticism and outgroup hate

In turn, I expect apocalypticism to reinforce Christian nationalists' aversion toward social outgroups, particularly toward racial minorities. My main argument is that apocalyptic thinking patterns, prevalent among Christian nationalists, reinforce anxieties, fears, and feelings of vulnerability that sharpen mistrust and hatred towards members of social outgroups. This expectation is consistent with multiple literatures. The first is associated with threat management theory. McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle (2016) find that perception of vulnerability to threats primes hatred of outgroups. In other work, McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle (2022) determine that Christian nationalists are more likely to perceive America to be vulnerable to internal and external threats, including those from cultural outgroups, and that this is correlated with heightened support for political violence.

A second source of theoretical support can be found in the intergroup threat theory literature. According to intergroup threat theory, when individuals are faced with threats and challenges, they more closely associate with members of their social ingroup and become more adverse towards members of social outgroups (see Bobo 2004; Brewer 1999; Duckitt and Mphuthing 1998; Quillian 1995; Stephan and Stephan 1985; Tajfel 1982). For example, Shamir and Sagiv-Schifter (2006) observe that during the 2000 Intifada, Jewish Israelis who faced heightened security threats became closer to other Jewish Israelis and less supportive of protecting Palestinian human rights. Brewer (1999) summarizes this process in stating that perception of threat fosters 'ingroup love and outgroup hate.' I expect that the heightened perception of personal threat, fostered by apocalypticism, prompts Christian nationalists to exhibit higher levels of outgroup hate (consistent with McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2016). I further expect that Christian nationalist outgroup hate will be particularly focused against racial minority outgroup members, as racial resentment is a highly salient feature of Christian nationalist attitudes (see Broeren and Djupe 2024).

Third, a smaller literature finds that perception of existential insecurity and exposure to severe social, political, and economic dislocations prompt individuals to respond with increased intolerance and xenophobia toward outgroups (Gibson 2002; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Rohrschneider 1999; Sniderman et al. 2021). For example, Inglehart,

Moaddel, and Tessler (2006) find that Iraqis were confronted with severe political, economic, and physical insecurities brought on by the civil war following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Consequently, they responded by exhibiting greater sectarianism and hatred toward ethnic and religious outgroups. Scholars also determine that individuals beset with anxieties driven by feelings of threat and insecurity often lash out at outgroup members that are not logically connected to the source of the threats and insecurities (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Lahav 2004). Balmas, Harel, and Halperin (2022) argue that this explains why hatred toward racial and ethnic outgroups increased among U.S. whites during the Covid-19 pandemic.

These literatures connect general feelings of insecurity and threat with outgroup aversion. Other work draws a more specific link between apocalypticism and negative feelings toward outgroups. At the group level, several scholars argue that demonization of outgroups is a key ideological feature of apocalyptic and millenarian religious movements (Rinehart 2006). This is because apocalyptic religious movements adopt a dualistic, zero-sum framework in which their members are on the side of good while nonbelievers and outsiders are on the side of evil, and are therefore worthy of scorn or punishment, according to divine plan (Jones 2010; Wessinger 2016). On the individual level, Fetterman et al. (2019) show that apocalypticism is correlated with social dominance orientation among individuals. Social dominance orientation is a personality trait that devalues social group equality and reinforces beliefs that members of social outgroups are unworthy of respect or rights (Pratto et al. 1994). Fetterman et al. (2019) also determine that apocalyptic beliefs foster paranoia, conspiratorialism, and a desire to compete with other groups. Morris and Johnson (2002) find that individuals harboring apocalyptic beliefs draw a sharper distinction between themselves and outsiders and exhibit diminished desires to connect and cooperate with outgroup members. Strozier and Boyd (2010) similarly associate apocalypticism with an ‘us versus them’ outlook on outgroups and dehumanization of others. Finally, Shafiq (2023) argues that apocalypticism produces strong feelings of anxiety and stress and that these facilitate the adoption of anti-minority hate ideologies among adherents. Overall, these literatures are consistent with McDaniel et al. (2022) who determine that Christian nationalists are more likely to fear outsiders and cultural ‘others’ and Broeren and Djupe’s (2024) who find that perceptions of insecurity and threat prompt Christian nationalist subjects to increase their animus towards outgroup members.

Outgroup hate and support for political violence

The final link in the theory ties together outgroup resentments with increased normative tolerance for political violence. Outgroup hate works to facilitate a process of dehumanization of outgroups while fostering a general feeling of social group competition (Brewer 1999). Dehumanization is a particularly crucial component of the relationship between outgroup hate and tolerance of the use of violence. Bandura (1999) and Ellemers, Pagliaro, and Barreto (2017) explain that dehumanization – a psychological process that involves stripping other people of their essential human elements – creates a permission structure to harm other people with less emotional cost. Scholars argue that dehumanization is a necessary step in normalizing the use of violence (Hogg, Abrams, and Brewer 2017). McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008) identify

dehumanization as a critical for explaining episodes of political violence. At the same time, outgroup hate also stokes feelings of intergroup competition and reinforces normative tolerance for political violence. Outgroup hate helps to drive fears among dominant social group members, such as whites in the United States, that marginalized groups seek to supplant them. This makes political violence more tolerable (Kunst et al. 2018; Obaidi et al. 2022; Thomsen, Green, and Sidanius 2008). Outgroup hate also predicts support for violent policies against outgroup members. Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle (2023) find that ethnocultural forms of nationalism, including Christian nationalist beliefs that true Americans must be Christian and white, are associated with support for anti-outgroup policies such as immigrant family separation. Finally, the theorized link between outgroup hatred and support for political violence is consistent with several empirical studies showing that individuals who express hatred toward various social outgroups are more likely to support political violence (Bartels 2020; Kalmoe and Mason 2022b; Piazza and Van Doren 2023).

Hypotheses

Given the arguments above, I formulate and then test the following two hypotheses:

H₁. *White subjects who hold Christian nationalist views are more likely to express support for political violence.*

H₂. *The effects of Christian nationalist views on expressed support for political violence among White subjects is serially mediated through increased apocalypticism and its reinforcing effects on outgroup hate.*

Research design

To test these hypotheses, I conducted an original survey of more than 1300 white, non-Hispanic subjects residing in the United States. I limited the survey sample to whites because I theorize that Christian nationalism increases support for political violence by, in part, activating threat-based, racialized intergroup conflict attitudes among Christian nationalist whites.⁵ I fielded the study between July 18-23, 2024 using the Lucid Theorem online panel.⁶ Lucid Theorem provides a high-quality survey panel (Coppock and McClellan 2019) that scholars have previously used to study political violence attitudes (see, for example, Armaly and Enders 2024). All subjects were briefed on the survey prior to taking it and provided consent. Subjects were informed that the survey was optional and that they could terminate at any time. Subjects were also debriefed upon completion.⁷ Because scholars have argued that subject inattentiveness impacts how they answer survey questions about political violence (see Kalmoe and Mason 2022b; Westwood et al. 2022), I embedded attention checks into the survey and excluded subjects who failed them. The median subject took approximately 17 minutes to complete the survey.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable of the study is subjects' support for the use of political violence. Political violence is defined as the use of violence to express political opinions or to achieve political goals. My operationalization of support for political violence in the study is informed by current discussions among scholars regarding best practices (see Kalmoe and Mason 2022a, 2022b; Westwood et al. 2022). First, I measure support for political violence using a diverse set of 12 survey questions. These questions cover a wide range of contexts and manifestations of political violence. The survey questions collectively measure subjects' attitudes about political violence in the abstract – i.e. whether political violence in general is a normatively acceptable behavior – as well as asking subjects if they support or sympathize with political violence when it is linked to a (fictitious) specific incident. Scholars argue that subject support for political violence tends to be higher if it is presented in the abstract versus in the context of a specific incident. I build both into my dependent variable. The questions also present subjects with various manifestations of political violence. These include threats of political violence and actual political violence, political violence targeting civilians as well as government officials, political violence against both people and property, and political violence against political rivals and co-partisans. Several of the questions I use are gleaned from other studies (e.g. Kalmoe 2014; Kalmoe and Mason 2019; Uscinski and Parent 2014) while others are original. Second, I include a neutral response option in all survey questions. This affords subjects the opportunity to neither support nor oppose political violence. Finally, as previously mentioned, I exclude inattentive subjects. This latter point is critical given some research showing that inattentive subjects are more likely to endorse political violence in a survey setting (see Kalmoe and Mason 2022a). Exclusion of inattentive subjects also lends a conservative bias to my study. This helps to increase confidence in the results.

Each political violence question is accompanied by a 5-point Likert response scale with a neutral response item. I combine responses into an additive index that ranges from 12, indicating a rejection of political violence across all survey items, to 60, indicating strong support for political violence across all survey items ($\alpha = .909$).⁸ Support for political violence is skewed leftward in the sample. The median subject scored a 19 on the 12 to 60 scale while the mean subject scored a 22.1. The plurality of subjects, around 17.4 percent, reject political violence in all survey questions. Only around 3% of subjects expressed strong, consistent support for political violence.⁹

Independent variable

The independent variable of the study is subject belief in Christian nationalist principles. To measure this, I employ a set of six survey questions derived from Armaly, Buckley, and Enders (2022). Armaly, Buckley, and Enders (2022) is the key empirical study to date on the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for political violence and I opt to use their survey questions so that my findings are consistent. These items present subjects with statements depicting various elements of the Christian nationalist political ideology. These include having the government explicitly declare the U.S. to be a Christian nation, recommending that the government overtly advocate Christian values, recommending the display Christian religious symbols in public, mandating Christian prayer in school,

and endorsing the belief that the success of the United States is part of God's divine plan. Subjects then indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with the items on a 5-point Likert scale with a neutral response option. I combined the responses into an additive index ranging from 6, indicating very low support for Christian nationalism, to 30, indicating strong Christian nationalist sentiments ($\alpha = .760$).¹⁰ Christian nationalism is somewhat normally distributed within the sample. The median subject scored a 19.5 on the 8 to 30 Christian nationalism scale, indicating a middling level of support, while the average subject scored a comparable 18.1. Approximately 14% of subjects in the sample expressed strong support for Christian nationalism¹¹

Mediators

I use two mediating variables to test the second hypothesis of the study. The first of these, apocalypticism, is an original variable that I constructed using a series of eight statements that present a comprehensive range of scenarios under which the United States may suffer a collapse in the next 20 to 40 years. These scenarios include civil conflict and breakdown of the U.S. political system (political apocalypse), runaway inequality that undermines the U.S. economic system (economic apocalypse), a nuclear conflict that destroys the U.S. (nuclear apocalypse), U.S. collapse due to global warming (climate change apocalypse), societal collapse in the U.S. due to severe ethnic and racial group discrimination (racism apocalypse), U.S. breakdown due to large-scale immigration (immigration collapse), social collapse in the U.S. due to the dissolution of families (family breakdown collapse), and U.S. collapse as part of the second coming of Christ and divine judgement (rapture apocalypse). These encompass the imagined religious and secular apocalyptic scenarios discussed by Davidson (2025). Subjects indicated whether they believed or disbelieved that each of these scenarios are likely to come to pass using a 5-point Likert scale with a neutral response option. I then combined the responses into an additive index that ranges from 8 to 50, where 8 indicates an absence of an apocalyptic outlook and 50 indicates a strong apocalypticism ($\alpha = .838$).¹²

Apocalypticism is relatively common among all subjects in the sample. The median subject scored 29.5 on the 8 to 50 scale while the mean subject scored 29.4, indicating middling levels of apocalypticism. A little over 40% of subjects exhibit moderate to strong apocalyptic outlooks.¹³ However, apocalypticism is particularly evident for Christian nationalist subjects. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 plots regression coefficients for the relationship between Christian nationalism and the different scenarios used to construct the apocalypticism measure. The aggregate additive measure is also plotted in Figure 1. The figure shows that white Christian nationalist subjects are more likely than other U.S. whites to subscribe to all apocalyptic predictions of the U.S., regardless of whether those visions are secular or religious in nature. Apocalyptic beliefs are also highly correlated with one another¹⁴ suggesting that individuals who fear the apocalyptic collapse of the U.S. tend to envision multiple, perhaps interrelated, apocalyptic scenarios. This is also true of Christian nationalists in the sample.¹⁵ Several scholars note that Christian nationalists tend to see a variety of contemporary challenges facing the U.S., including immigration, multiculturalism, loss of individual economic autonomy, socio-cultural change, the prospect of nuclear Armageddon, and even climate change-fueled disasters, through the lens of a foretold

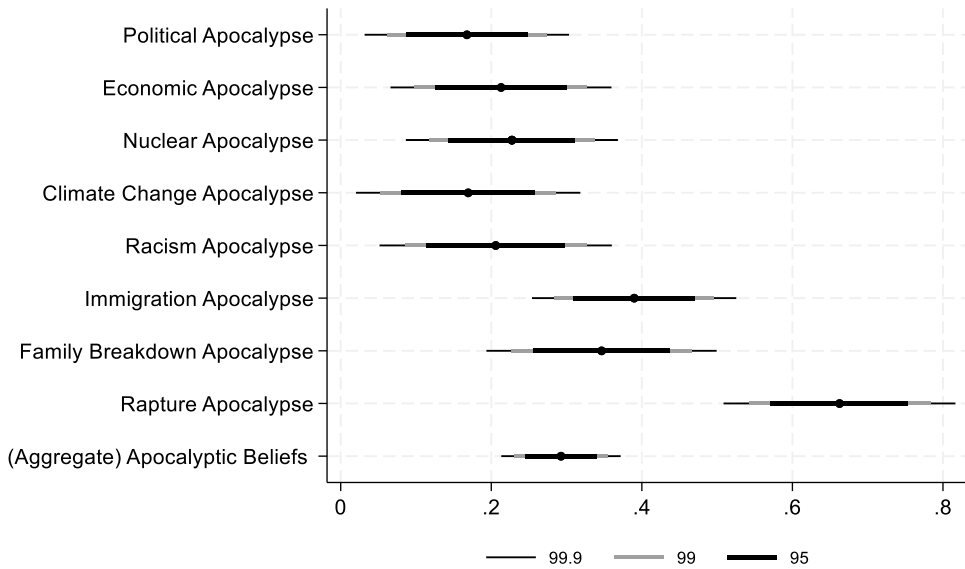


Figure 1. Christian nationalism and apocalyptic outlooks. Ordinary Least Squares regression estimations 1,398 white subjects. All variables scaled 0-1. Results are from separate models. Controls in each model: age, gender (male = 1), income, unemployment, education level, married, rural, Christian Democrat, Republican, voted in 2020, politically engaged, conservatism, follows news, conservative media, social media, perceived victimhood, racial resentment, election conspiracy, Northeast, Midwest, South, survey duration (log).

apocalypse (e.g. Baker and Whitehead 2024; Furse 2022; Hartman 2024). Moreover, combining attitudes about apocalyptic scenarios together into an aggregated measure helps to capture a general apocalyptic worldview about subjects.¹⁶

The second mediator is a measure of racial and social outgroup aversion, or what is referred to as outgroup hate. Subjects were asked two questions about whether they believe we are too concerned about protecting minority rights today in America and whether racial, religious, and other minority groups are too demanding in pushing for equal rights. Responses across these two questions were aggregated into an additive index ranging from 2, indicating very low levels of outgroup aversion or hate, to 10, indicating very strong outgroup aversion/hate ($\alpha = .510$).¹⁷ Outgroup hate is evenly distributed across the sample. The median subject scored between a 6 and 7 on the 2 to 10 scale while the mean subject scored 6.27. Around 18.7 percent of all subjects exhibited high levels of outgroup hate.¹⁸

Controls

I include a set of demographic and attitudinal control variables in all estimations. These include subjects' age, gender, income level, employment status, education level, marital status, rural or urban residence, religious orientation (whether they self-describe as a Christian), partisan affiliation, voting behavior, political engagement, political ideology, news consumption habits, and regional residence within the United States. Because scholars have found that subjects displaying higher

levels of trait aggression are more likely to endorse political violence (e.g. Kalmoe 2014), I also control for subject aggressiveness.¹⁹ Given that Armaly, Buckley, and Enders (2022) also found a link between Christian nationalism, perceived victimhood,²⁰ white racial resentment,²¹ and adherence to conspiracy theories, I also control for all of those elements. Specifically, to measure conspiratorial thinking, I ask whether subjects believe that the 2020 U.S. Presidential election was rigged against Donald Trump, a core conspiratorial belief among white conservatives.²² Finally, I control for the amount of time it took subjects to complete the survey.²³

The ages of subjects in the survey ranged between 18 and 96. The median subject was 52 years of age. Approximately 47.9 percent of subjects identified as male. The median annual household income of subjects in the study was between \$45,000 and \$49,999. Around 10.02 percent of subjects reported being unemployed and looking for work. In terms of educational achievement, the median subject completed some college but did not obtain a college degree. Around 30.8 percent had a bachelor's degree or more. 40.7 percent of subjects were currently married when taking the survey. Around 32.2 percent reported living in a rural area or small town while 23.6 reported living in a city or urban area. 62.1 percent of subjects identified their religion as Christian, a designation that includes Protestants, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Mormons, and unaffiliated Christians. In terms of partisanship, 27.2 percent of subjects identified as Democrats or Democratic leaners. 38.4 percent identified as Republicans or Republican leaners. 25.9 percent identified as independents. Around 18.9 percent of subjects reported residing in the Northeast. 21.2 percent were from the Midwest, 36.9 percent were from the South, and 22.8 percent were from the West.

In terms of political ideology, approximately 25 percent of subjects reported being extremely or slightly liberal, while 37 percent reported being extremely or slightly conservative. 37.8 percent reported that they were politically 'moderate or middle of the road.' Around 74.5 percent of subjects reported that they had voted in the 2020 U.S. Presidential election while another 46.8 percent reported that they were politically active outside of voting, meaning that they contacted a member of government, urged another person to vote, or participated in a political meeting or protest in the past 3 years. The median subject reported following politics in the news daily or several times per week. Approximately 10.5 percent of subjects reported that they rely mostly on conservative media such as Fox News, Newsmax, Truth Social, or conservative newspapers and talk radio to obtain their news. Around 18.9 percent relied upon social media for news.

Subjects were evenly divided regarding perceived victimhood. 31.4 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that other people 'always seem to get more advantages and opportunities than I do,' suggesting that they exhibit victimhood tendencies. Around 35 percent, however, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 33.5 were neutral. The distribution of racial resentment is normal in the sample. The median subjects scored a 10 on the 3-to-15-point racial resentment scale, while the mean subject scored a 9.7. Approximately 16 percent of subjects exhibited high levels of racial resentment, scoring a 13 or higher. In terms of conspiratorial beliefs, 33.2 percent of subjects either agreed or strongly agreed that the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election was stolen from Trump while 47.6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. 19.1 percent were

neutral. Trait aggression is also normally distributed in the sample. The median subject scored a 7 on the 3-to-15-point aggression scale while the mean subject scored a 7.4.

Estimation strategy

To test the first hypothesis – that Christian nationalist subjects are more likely to support political violence – I employ an ordinary least squares regression estimation technique. To test the second hypothesis – that the impact of Christian nationalism on support for political violence is mediated through apocalypticism and its effect on intergroup conflict orientation – I employ a serial mediation analysis using structural equation (SEM) modeling.²⁴ Mediation analysis using SEM provides an empirical test that determines whether mediation is evident and calculates percent of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables that can be explained by the mediator.²⁵ Moreover, the SEM technique facilitates analysis for serial mediation. That is, it evaluates the effects of multiple mediators that are theorized to have a sequential relationship with one another. To ease substantive interpretation of the results, and to facilitate cross-variable comparisons for substantive effects, all variables in the study are scaled to a 0-1 range.²⁶

Results

The results of the study are presented in Figures 2 and 3 below.²⁷ Both sets of results provide support for hypotheses 1 and 2. In Figure 2, the coefficient plots for the test of the first hypothesis are presented. Christian nationalism is found to be strong, significant

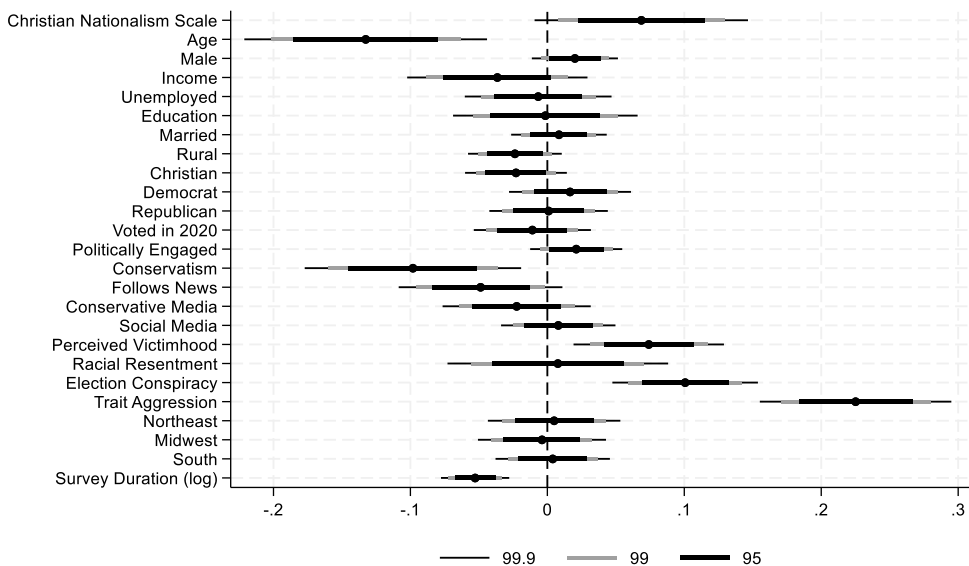


Figure 2. Christian nationalism and support for political violence (hypothesis 1). Ordinary Least Squares regression estimation 1,386 white subjects. All variables scaled 0-1.

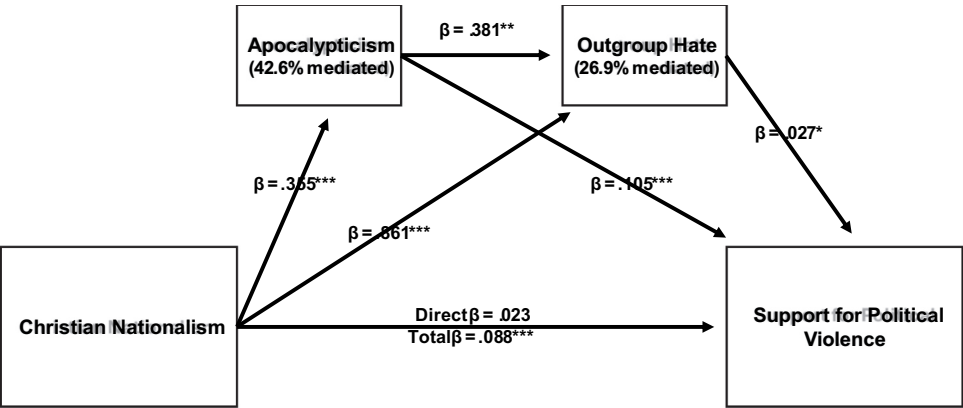


Figure 3. Christian nationalism, apocalypticism, outgroup hate, and support for political violence (hypothesis 2). Structural Equation (SEM) Mediation Analysis 1,364 white subjects. All variables scaled 0-1. *** $p \leq .000$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .1$. Controls :age, gender (male = 1), income, unemployment, education level, married, rural, Christian, Democrat, Republican, voted in 2020, politically engaged, conservatism, follows news, conservative media, social media, perceived victimhood, racial resentment, election conspiracy, Northeast, Midwest, South, survey duration (log). Indirect Effect β for Apocalyptic Beliefs = .037***. Indirect Effect β for Intergroup Conflict Orientation = .023*.

predictor of support for political violence. This finding is consistent with research by Armaly, Buckley, and Enders (2022).

Subjects exhibiting Christian nationalist attitudes are significantly more likely to express support for political violence [$\beta = .068$ (95% confidence interval .022 — .114)]. Each 10% increase in Christian nationalist proclivity is associated with a 3.3 percent increase in subject support for political violence, according to marginal effects simulations.²⁸ Increasing Christian nationalist sentiment from its lowest to highest level is associated with a 38.7 percent increase in support for political violence cumulatively. Moreover, the effect of Christian nationalism on support for political violence is robust when accounting for other significant covariates. Older, higher income, rural, and conservative subjects who regularly follow political news and who took longer to complete the survey are significantly less likely to express support for political violence. Subjects who identify as Christian but do not necessarily exhibit Christian nationalist beliefs are also less supportive. In concordance with Armaly, Buckley, and Enders (2022), males²⁹ and subjects with higher levels of perceived victimhood who are prone to conspiratorialism are more supportive of political violence. Consistent with Kalmoe (2014), subjects exhibiting higher levels of trait aggression also endorse political violence at higher levels. Finally, more politically engaged subjects are more supportive of political violence.

Figure 3 summarizes the findings of the mediation tests, providing support for the second hypothesis. The analysis in Figure 3 includes all covariates but only reports the coefficients for the main variables of interest: independent, dependent, and mediating variables.³⁰

In Figure 3, Christian nationalism is found to have a significant total effect on support for political violence [$\beta = .088$ (95% confidence interval .041 — .134)]. This means that when the mediators are excluded Christian nationalism is a significant positive predictor of political violence, as found in the previous analysis. However, for the direct effect, when

the mediators are included in the model, the coefficient for Christian nationalism is reduced [$\beta = .023$ (95% confidence interval $-.024 — .071$)] and the relationship becomes not significant, suggesting mediation (Baron and Kenny 1986). Christian nationalism significantly predicts apocalypticism [$\beta = .355$ (95% confidence interval $.304 — .407$)] and apocalypticism significant predicts outgroup hate [$\beta = .381$ (95% confidence interval $.289 — .477$)]. In turn, outgroup hate significantly predicts support for political violence [$\beta = .027$ (95% confidence interval $.005 — .050$)]. This provides evidence for the hypothesized relationship between Christian nationalism and support for political violence. Christian nationalists are more likely to hold apocalyptic outlooks regarding the political, social, security, cultural, and environmental status of the United States. This works to reinforce aversion or hatred toward outgroups among Christian nationalists, making them more normatively tolerant of political violence.

As shown in Figure 3, both apocalyptic outlook and intergroup conflict orientation are, individually, significant partial mediators of the effect of Christian nationalism on support for political violence. Apocalyptic outlook mediates approximately 42.6 percent of the relationship between Christian nationalism on support for political violence, while outgroup hate mediates around 26.9 percent of the relationship. Taken together, around 69.5 percent of the effects of Christian nationalism on support for political violence is serially mediated by apocalypticism and its reinforcing effect on outgroup hate.

Conclusion

This study provides a potential explanation for why individuals holding Christian nationalist beliefs are more likely to view the use of political violence to be a tolerable behavior. White Christian nationalists are prone to an apocalyptic view of United States, believing that the U.S. is likely to collapse in the next several decades due to political, economic, social, environmental, religious, and security calamities. This apocalyptic outlook fuels feelings of existential threat that reinforce aversions toward outgroups among white Christian nationalists. Existential threat-induced outgroup hatreds work to normalize political violence through processes of dehumanization and resentments that reduce inhibitions against harming others. These findings are robust even when other important factors are considered such as demographic attributes, economic grievances, ideological orientation and partisan affiliation, news consumption habits, perception of victimhood, general racial resentment, conspiratorial beliefs, and personal aggressiveness.

The findings are relevant to our contemporary political climate. Though apocalypticism has been present in political subcultures in America since colonial times (McQueen 2017), as previously noted it has become highly prevalent in contemporary American political life (Davidson 2025; Gross and Gilles 2012), particularly on the American political right. This potentially portends a dangerous future. As Christian nationalist apocalypticism continues to be represented in mainstream political discourse, normalization of the use of political violence may grow. It is possible that increased normalization of political violence among a politically influential group of Americans, such as Christian nationalists, will also create a more permissive environment for actual political violence, creating a real threat to public security.

Though the analysis provides support for the hypotheses, the study leaves some important questions unanswered. For example, what types of outgroup hatreds are

triggered by apocalypticism and do they have implications for political violence attitudes among Christian nationalists? This study focuses on white Christian nationalists and their attitudes toward racial outgroup members. Does apocalypticism among Christian nationalists also contribute to aversion towards members of other religious communities, women, perceived political outgroup members, or sexual minorities in ways that normalize political violence? Also, the study theorizes that outgroup hatred is linked to increased tolerance for political violence through, among other things, a process of dehumanization. However, the study does not empirically test this. Future research might empirically examine how dehumanization of outgroups affects support for political violence specifically. Finally, while the study empirically examines ‘outgroup hate’ as a mediator, it does not examine ‘ingroup love.’ The literature discusses how feelings of threat foster both outgroup hate and ingroup love. Some studies indicate that these processes work in tandem with one another, while others suggest that outgroup hate and ingroup love may have different effects on attitudes and behaviors, including transgressive politics and political violence. Future research may investigate whether apocalypticism and attendant feelings of existential threat may work to draw Christian nationalists closer to one another, reinforcing a sense of community while at the same time producing a zero-sum desire use violent force to protect the ingroup.

Notes

1. In this study, political violence is defined as the use of violence to achieve political goals or to communicate political messages.
2. Christian nationalist core beliefs are described in more detail below.
3. It is important to carefully distinguish Christian nationalism from simple Christian religiosity or piety. Christian nationalism is a specific political ideology subscribed to by a small subset of Christian Americans. In contrast, Christian religiosity or piety is personal and frequently apolitical. Armaly, Buckley, and Enders (2022) do not consistently find that observant Christians, measured by self-reported religious attendance, to be more likely to express support for political violence. In this study I find that self-identified Christians, as opposed to Christian nationalists, are significantly *less* supportive of political violence. This further distinguishes Christian nationalists from religious or observant Christians.
4. Other important elements of Christian nationalism according to Gorksi are ‘sacrificialism,’ nostalgia for a ‘golden age’ of America, conquest, and racism.
5. McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle (2022) observe that Christian nationalist beliefs can be found among nonwhite Americans as well, and other evidence shows that nonwhite Christian nationalists harbor apocalyptic beliefs. As a check, I reran the mediation analysis including both white and nonwhite subjects and produced similar, though more muted, results. The effect of Christian nationalism on increased support for political violence is mediated through apocalypticism and its effect on outgroup. However, the overall percentage mediated is lower: 52.3% for the white and nonwhite sample as opposed to 69.5% for the white-only sample. See online appendix table 8 for results. I explain this by noting that my theory expects apocalyptic beliefs among Christian nationalists to reinforce anti-white outgroup sentiments and that the lower percentage mediated for the combined white and nonwhite sample in alternate estimation is consistent with this.
6. Note, I fielded the survey before the July 13, 2024, attempted assassination of Donald Trump in Butler, PA.
7. Official IRB approval for the survey is available upon request.
8. The 12 survey questions measuring subject support for political violence are presented in online appendix table 1 along with the frequency distribution of the aggregate measure.

9. Measured by as a score of 48 or higher in the aggregate indicator, which would denote somewhat or strong agreement with all survey questions measuring political violence.
10. The survey questions along with the frequency distribution for the Christian nationalism measure are presented in online appendix table 2.
11. Measured as a score of 24 or higher, which would indicate somewhat or strong agreement with all Christian nationalism components.
12. The actual questions for the apocalypticism measure along with the frequency distribution are presented in online appendix table 3.
13. Measured as a score of 32 or higher, indicating somewhat or strong agreement that all of the apocalyptic scenarios will occur in the United States.
14. $\alpha = .838$. Average interitem correlation = .393.
15. For subjects scoring above median on the Christian nationalism scale: $\alpha = .850$ and average interitem correlation = .414.
16. As a check, I reran the mediation analysis separately for each of the different categories of apocalypticism. Each apocalyptic category is found to be a significant mediator, except for belief in climate change apocalypse. As an example of these tests, I present the results for rapture apocalypse, the category most strongly correlated with Christian nationalism in the sample, as a mediator in online appendix table 7. Disaggregating the apocalypticism measure into its specific categories reduces the percentage mediated in all cases. This suggests that it is general apocalyptic outlook, rather than the belief in a specific apocalyptic scenario, that best explains the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for political violence.
17. The questions and the frequency distribution for the outgroup hate measure can be found in online appendix table 4.
18. Measured as a score of 8 or higher, which indicates somewhat or strong outgroup aversion or hate.
19. Trait aggression is measured using an additive index composed of three survey questions derived from Kalmoe (2014). Questions are presented in online appendix table 5.
20. Perceived victimhood is measured using one survey question derived from Kalmoe (2014). The perceived victimhood question is presented in online appendix table 5.
21. Racial resentment is measured using an additive index composed of three survey questions derived from Kinder and Sanders (1996). Questions are presented in online appendix table 5.
22. Election conspiracy question presented in online appendix table 5.
23. The survey items I use to operationalize these controls are detailed in online appendix table 5. Summary statistics are presented in Table A1 at the end of the manuscript.
24. I used Stata SE 19.0 to conduct all analyses in the study.
25. Mediation is found when the following occur: The independent variable predicts the dependent variable. The independent variable predicts the mediator. The mediator predicts the dependent variable. Inclusion of the mediator in the estimation reduces the coefficient of the independent variable (see Baron and Kenny 1986).
26. The unscaled results are also presented in Table A2 at the end of the manuscript.
27. Note, descriptive statistics and full model results for all estimations are presented in Tables A2 and A3 at the end of the manuscript.
28. A graph of the marginal effects is presented in online appendix table 6.
29. Note, as a further check I reran the analysis interacting gender (male = 1) with Christian nationalism. These tests do not show a significant interaction effect between gender and Christian nationalist beliefs and support for political violence. Taken along with the main findings, the pattern appears to be that males in general are more supportive of political violence, but that Christian nationalist males are not more supportive than Christian nationalist females.
30. Full results available from author.

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Appendix

Table A1. Summary statistics for all variables used in analysis.

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Support for Political Violence	1,402	22.17832	10.13117	12	60
Christian Nationalism	1,408	18.08097	6.06426	8	30
Apocalyptic Outlook	1,398	29.48426	10.45292	8	48
Outgroup Hate	1,410	6.273759	2.595559	2	10
Age	1,417	50.988	17.01409	18	96
Gender (Male = 1)	1,417	.4791814	.4997428	0	1
Income Level	1,417	9.206775	6.955387	1	25
Unemployed	1,417	.1002117	.3003881	0	1
Education Level	1,411	4.155209	1.895311	1	8
Married	1,417	.407904	.4916186	0	1
Rural	1,417	.3225124	.4676029	0	1
Christian	1,417	.6217361	.4851252	0	1
Democrat	1,417	.2724065	.4453551	0	1
Republican	1,417	.3846154	.486676	0	1
Voted in 2020	1,417	.7459421	.435484	0	1
Politically Engaged	1,417	.4685956	.499189	0	1
Conservatism	1,417	4.202541	1.613605	1	7
Follows News	1,417	5.072689	1.776239	1	7
Conservative Media	1,417	.1058574	.3077637	0	1
Social Media	1,417	.1898377	.392311	0	1
Perceived Victimhood	1,417	2.875088	1.221538	1	5
Racial Resentment	1,414	9.742574	2.742331	3	15
Election Conspiracy	1,417	2.639379	1.590207	1	5
Trait Aggression	1,417	7.41355	2.973952	3	15
Northeast	1,417	.189132	.3917517	0	1
Midwest	1,417	.2124206	.4091653	0	1
South	1,417	.3697953	.4829196	0	1
Survey Duration (log, base 10)	1,417	17.01834	.6552163	15.43808	21.36085

Table A2. Full model results, hypothesis 1 tests.

	[1] (unscaled coefficients)	[2] (scaled coefficients)
Christian Nationalism	0.137** (0.047)	0.069** (0.024)
Age	-0.082*** (0.017)	-0.133*** (0.027)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.965* (0.458)	0.020* (0.010)
Income Level	-0.073* (0.040)	-0.037* (0.020)
Unemployed	-0.322 (0.780)	-0.007 (0.016)
Education Level	-0.010 (0.140)	-0.001 (0.020)
Married	0.407 (0.508)	0.008 (0.011)
Rural	-1.137* (0.498)	-0.024* (0.010)
Christian	-1.100* (0.541)	-0.023* (0.011)
Democrat	0.794 (0.648)	0.017 (0.013)
Republican	0.043 (0.630)	0.001 (0.013)
Voted in 2020	-0.526 (0.622)	-0.011 (0.013)
Politically Engaged	1.011* (0.489)	0.021* (0.010)
Conservatism	-0.786*** (0.192)	-0.098*** (0.024)
Follows News	-0.390** (0.145)	-0.049** (0.018)
Conservative Media	-1.076 (0.787)	-0.022 (0.016)
Social Media	0.383 (0.608)	0.008 (0.013)
Perceived Victimhood	0.889*** (0.200)	0.074*** (0.017)
Racial Resentment	0.031 (0.098)	0.008 (0.024)
Election Conspiracy	1.207*** (0.193)	0.101*** (0.016)
Trait Aggression	0.900*** (0.085)	0.225*** (0.021)
Northeast	0.237 (0.704)	0.005 (0.015)
Midwest	-0.189 (0.680)	-0.004 (0.014)
South	0.188 (0.608)	0.004 (0.013)
Survey Duration (log, base 10)	-2.532*** (0.363)	-0.053*** (0.008)
Constant	60.291*** (6.195)	1.068*** (0.128)
Obs.	1,385	1,385
F	29.22***	29.22***
r-squared	0.3496	0.3496

OLS regression estimations.

Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p \leq .000$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .1$.

Table A3. Full model results, hypothesis 2 tests.

X (Christian nationalism) → M1 (Apocalypticism)	.355***
M1 (Apocalypticism) → Y (Support for Political Violence)	.105***
Indirect Effect for M1	.037***
Percent Mediated for M1	42.6%
X (Christian nationalism) → M2 (Outgroup Hate)	.862***
M2 (Outgroup Hate) → Y (Support for Political Violence)	.027*
Indirect Effect for M2	.023*
Percent Mediated for M2	26.9%
M1 (Apocalypticism) → M2 (Outgroup Hate)	.381***
Direct Effect (X → M1 → M2 → Y)	.023
Total Effect (X → Y)	.088***

Structural Equation (SEM) Mediation Analysis.

1,364 white subjects.

All variables scaled 0-1.

*** $p \leq .000$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .1$.

Controls : age, gender (male = 1), income, unemployment, education level, married, rural, Christian, Democrat, Republican, voted in 2020, politically engaged, conservatism, follows news, conservative media, social media, perceived victimhood, racial resentment, election conspiracy, Northeast, Midwest, South, survey duration (log).