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Lay down your sword? Christian nationalism, race, and opposition to requiring gun permits

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ABSTRACT

Christian nationalism and race are both important predictors of firearm policy preferences in the United States, and a growing body of research argues that ideas about gun control tend to be racially coded. Building on these findings, we use data from the 2021 General Social Survey to examine how race and ethnicity moderate the association between Christian nationalism and firearm policy preferences – specifically requiring a police permit to purchase a gun. Analyses show strong, racially divergent associations between Christian nationalism and opposition to requiring gun permits. Christian nationalism is associated with *higher* opposition to requiring gun permits for non-Hispanic White Americans, but *lower* opposition for non-Hispanic Black Americans. Moreover, accounting for biblical literalism attenuates the association for White Americans but amplifies the association for Black Americans. These findings support the conceptualization of Christian nationalism as a racialized ideology, i.e. one which has different meanings and effects across ethno-racial identities.

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Introduction

Gun laws are among the most politically divisive topics in the contemporary United States (US). There is presently broad partisan disagreement about appropriate regulations around gun ownership and accessibility (Enten 2017; Pearson-Merkowitz and Dyck 2017), as well as sociodemographic and regional divergence of public opinion (Oraka et al. 2019). Research aimed at better understanding the ideologies and beliefs underpinning these differences has shown that *Christian nationalism*, an ideology characterized by the belief that American civil society should be structured around conservative Christian social values (Whitehead and Perry 2020), is robustly associated

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with Americans' views on guns, including elevating the 2nd Amendment as the "most important right" (Davis, Perry, and Grubbs 2023), belief that "the best way to stop bad guys with guns is to have good guys with guns" (Gorski and Perry 2022), and opposition to gun regulation among the US public, predicting greater opposition to gun control above and beyond political, religious, and social factors (Whitehead, Schnabel, and Perry 2018).

However, recent work has shown that the effects of Christian nationalism on attitudes and behaviors often differ across racial and ethnic groups (Armaly, Buckley, and Enders 2022; Gorski and Perry 2022; Perry et al. 2022). These findings are central to furthering our understanding of Christian nationalism as a racialized ideology and refining conceptualization and measurement of Christian nationalism in social scientific research. The present study contributes to these efforts by examining how the effects of Christian nationalism on gun policy preferences may diverge across ethno-racial identities. While prior research and theory predict that Christian nationalism will motivate opposition to gun control among White Americans (Davis, Perry, and Grubbs 2023; Gorski and Perry 2022; Whitehead, Schnabel, and Perry 2018), there are theoretical reasons to expect that Christian nationalism may correspond to increased support for gun control among Black Americans. The present study brings empirical evidence to bear on this question, which has important implications for not only the literature on Christian nationalism but also research on race, religion, and policy preferences more broadly.

In the following section, we first review prior literature on attitudes about guns, focussing particularly on ethno-racial correlates and how these patterns may be underpinned by racially coded ideas about guns and gun control. Next, we situate burgeoning research on Christian nationalism within broader research on American political ideologies, explaining why its meaning is racialized, and why we expect it to have divergent effects on opposition to gun control across ethno-racial identities.

Literature review

Gun control and race in the United States

The US public holds a wide array of views on guns and gun control, and prior research has uncovered several key sociodemographic and ideological correlates of these opinions (e.g. Oraka et al. 2019; Pew Research Center 2015). As noted above, the issue is highly politicized and has become a point of partisan division, particularly since Obama's presidency (Miller 2019). In broad terms, policies promoting greater gun control tend to be more favored among those who are politically progressive, have relatively high educational attainment, and reside in urban areas. In contrast, political conservatives and

those living in rural areas tend to prioritize the protection of gun rights over restrictive policy measures, though the magnitude of partisan and regional differences tends to depend on the specific policy items in question (Pew Research Center 2015), and prior research has noted that political and demographic divergence on these issues is often overstated in ways that mask important nuance and conflate public opinions with positions of the political elite (Miller 2019).

Prior research has also highlighted racial and ethnic differences in gun policy preferences. For example, US-representative survey data shows that minoritized racial and ethnic groups (Black, Hispanic) tend to feel more favorably about the implementation of stronger gun control policies, while White Americans prioritize the protection and expansion of gun rights (Filindra and Kaplan 2017; Pew Research Center 2015). In addition to variation in broader political attitudes and practical concerns such as one's desire to own guns (Wolpert and Gimpel 1998), recent research suggests that these demographic differences in attitudes about gun control are underlaid by racialized ideologies and belief structures that are intrinsically linked to the meaning of gun access, gun regulation, and community safety. For example, several studies have connected attitudes of racial resentment and racist beliefs to gun control opposition among White Americans (Filindra and Kaplan 2016, 2017; O'Brien et al. 2013; Schutten et al. 2022), highlighting a "relationship between racial resentment and classical liberal narratives about rights and freedom, such as the gun rights discourse" with far reaching sociohistorical roots (Filindra and Kaplan 2016, 271). Strongly supported in this literature is the notion that the very meaning of gun control is racialized; for example, recent studies have shown a tendency for White Americans to conceive of gun access and ownership as a right of White Americans and found Whites' opposition to gun control may be weakened when the issue is framed in terms of Black gun ownership (Hayes, Fortunato, and Hibbing 2021; Higginbotham, Sears, and Goldstein 2023). Relatedly, recent experimental and quasi-experimental studies have argued that racial differences in attitudes toward gun control are underpinned by White Americans' apathy about the consequences of gun violence, given its disproportionate impact on majority-Black communities (Walker, Collingwood, and Bunyasi 2020).

Although there is little extant research focussed on the ideological motivations underpinning heightened support for gun control among minoritized racial and ethnic groups, available evidence suggests that Black Americans are etiologically distinct with regard to their attitudes about guns and gun control. For example, Filindra and Kaplan (2017) found that anti-Black racial resentment predicted opposition to gun control among White Americans (and, to some extent, Latino Americans) but tended to have null effects or correspond to greater support for gun control among Black Americans. The authors noted that additional research is needed to elucidate the

mechanisms underlying this finding. Despite the relative shortage of empirical studies focussed on why minoritized racial and ethnic groups have higher support for gun control measures, some related research suggests that the pattern may be motivated by concerns about gun-related victimization. Black and Hispanic Americans bear the brunt of gun violence, and most Americans have at least some knowledge of these disparities (Ward et al. 2023). Recent scholarship has argued that Black Americans largely oppose arming teachers due to concerns that such policies would enable lethal violence against Black students (Baranauskas 2021, 2024), and it is plausible that these concerns motivate broader resistance to gun access among the US public, particularly in light of numerous, highly publicized murders of Black victims not only at the hands of police but also by armed, White civilians (Hajela 2022).

In sum, although attitudes about gun control are subject to a myriad of influences including sociopolitical concerns and self-interest (Burton et al. 2021; Wolpert and Gimpel 1998), a growing literature has shown the importance of racial attitudes and beliefs to shaping these policy preferences, particularly among White Americans (Filindra and Kaplan 2017; O'Brien et al. 2013). Indeed, the very meaning of “gun rights” has become racially and politically coded (Filindra and Kaplan 2016; Higginbotham, Sears, and Goldstein 2023; Schutten et al. 2022), a result which may help to explain the robust differences across racial groups in terms of opposition to gun control policies (i.e. starkly higher opposition among White Americans compared to Black and Hispanic Americans).

Christian nationalism and guns

A growing literature has focussed on Christian nationalism, typically defined as “an ideology that idealizes and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a particular type of Christian identity and culture” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, ix–x). As we elaborate in the following section, this “particular type of Christian identity and culture” is largely Anglo Protestant, reflecting the construct’s racialized implications. Recent experimental evidence shows support for Christian nationalist views increases in response to perceptions of demographic threat (Al-Kire et al. 2021; Walker and Haider-Markel 2024), suggesting the construct represents what Gorski and Perry (2022, 14) call “ethno-traditionalism” or a longing to restore cultural and political influence to the nation’s “traditional” leaders (i.e. White Protestant men). The ideology is thus also closely related to authoritarian populism, being powerfully associated with support for strongman politicians like Donald Trump (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020; Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018), support for restrictive immigration policies and limiting the civil rights of Muslims (Al-Kire et al. 2022; Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020;

Dahab and Omori 2019; Shortle and Gaddie 2015), and opposition to government welfare spending (Davis 2019), and endorsement of political conspiracy theories and anti-government violence (Armaly, Buckley, and Enders 2022; Walker and Vegter 2023). Being understood as a form of authoritarian ethno-traditionalism and populism, we can also better contextualize American “Christian nationalism” as one instantiation of similar right-wing movements around the world that leverage religious identities and concepts to mobilize citizens toward exclusionary and authoritarian goals.

Likely reflecting some underlying elements of authoritarian populism that valorizes “righteous violence” (Gorski and Perry 2022), Christian nationalist rhetoric is commonly found in campaigns against gun control. Following the Parkland High School Shooting in 2018, Executive Vice President of the National Rifle Association, Wayne LaPierre (C-SPAN 2018) argued the 2nd Amendment was “not bestowed by man, but granted by God to all Americans as our American birthright”. Indeed, Donald Trump commonly includes gun rights and religious freedom together in campaign speeches. In an August 2020 campaign address, Trump warned “[Biden] is following the radical left agenda. Take away your guns, destroy your second amendment, no religion, no anything, hurt the Bible, hurt God. He’s against God, he’s against guns” (Associated Press 2020). Reflecting this merging of “Christian nation” and “gun rights”, Republican candidates have campaigned on slogans like “Jesus, Guns, and Babies” (Ali 2022) or posted photos of themselves holding a Bible in one hand, a gun in the other (Pierce 2020).

Consistent with these examples, prior research has shown Christian nationalism to be a robust predictor of opposition to more stringent gun control policies. Specifically, Whitehead, Schnabel, and Perry (2018) used nationally representative survey data to demonstrate that greater endorsement of Christian nationalism corresponded to lowered probability of agreeing that “the federal government should enact stricter gun laws”, adjusting for a host of sociodemographic, religious, and political controls. The authors argued that these results are underpinned by a perception of guns as a “God-given right” and the attribution of gun violence to national “moral decay”, rather than high gun prevalence and ease of access (2018, 2). Notably, the study also explored the extent to which the effects of Christian nationalism on gun control preferences were conditioned by religious affiliation, gender, rurality of residence, and political affiliation. Effects were remarkably consistent across subgroups, reinforcing the authors’ conclusion that “Christian nationalism is a key determinant of American opposition to stricter gun control across religious and sociodemographic groups. Americans who desire that religion, specifically Christianity, be officially promoted in the public sphere are deeply opposed to federal gun control laws” (2018, 9). These findings were largely replicated in a 2018 survey by Djupe, Lewis, and Sokhey (2023, 24) who used a multi-item index of support for gun

control such as “A nationwide ban on the sale of semi-automatic weapons”. Just as with Whitehead and Perry (2020), the authors found as Christian nationalism increased, support for gun control plummeted.

In more recent research, Gorski and Perry (2022, 95) found that Christian nationalism among White Americans in particular strongly predicted greater agreement with the belief that “The best way to stop bad guys with guns is to have good guys with guns”. Situating the construct as a form of authoritarian ethno-traditionalism, the authors theorized that Christian nationalism represents part of a broader set of underlying assumptions many White Americans hold that they personally must be ready to defend the social order against domestic threats by deploying “righteous violence”. This is consistent with the recent finding by Davis, Perry, and Grubbs (2023) that Christian nationalism predicted Americans’ tendency to prioritize the right to keep and bear arms as the “most important right” in the Bill of Rights, even more so than freedom of speech or even religion. Similarly, other recent research shows that Christian nationalism, in conjunction with threat-based conspiratorial thinking (reflecting the populist element), explains substantial portions of political and partisan differences in US gun ownership (Seto and Upenieks 2023). Indeed, Whitehead has recently noted the stark contrast between White Christian nationalism’s strong support for “righteous violence” and biblical mandates for non-violence, i.e. to “lay down your sword” (2023, 105).

Christian nationalism as a racialized ideology

Given the documented connections between Christian nationalism and White Christian ethnocentrism, the question remains whether Christian nationalism operates similarly across racial and ethnic groups with respect to gun policy preferences. There are theoretical reasons to expect divergent effects. As with American religious identities and beliefs in general (Wilde 2018), Christian nationalism is fundamentally racialized, that is, shaped by racial group experiences and interests. Christian nationalism in particular conflates the elevation of Christianity in American civic life with the preservation and defense of nativist and white supremacist social hierarchies (Gorski and Perry 2022; Whitehead and Perry 2020). Indeed, this formulation of “White” Christian nationalism is argued to be fundamentally distinct from conceptions of a Christian America among racial and ethnic minorities (Gorski and Perry 2022). Empirical investigations of racial and ethnic differences have supported this notion; for example, White Americans who endorse Christian nationalism are more likely to deny racial injustice in American society and hold perceptions of White victimhood, but such effects were not observed for Black Americans (Perry et al. 2022). Similar patterns have been observed with regard to attitudes about government control; for example, among

White Americans Christian nationalism is associated with endorsement of free-market capitalism and antipathy toward socialists, but these effects are not present for Black Americans (Gorski and Perry 2022). Other research has found that Christian nationalism is more salient to explaining political differences in some types of gun ownership among White Americans compared to the general population (Seto and Upenieks 2023). In sum, among White Americans, Christian nationalism is strongly linked to support for racialized conceptions for “freedom, order, and violence” that are conducive to opposing gun control policies (Gorski and Perry 2022, 7).

However, Christian nationalism may have a different meaning – and different consequences for attitudes about gun control – among racial and ethnic minorities. Perry and Whitehead (2019) found that while Christian nationalism was associated with White Americans blaming Black Americans’ lack of motivation for persistent racial inequality, Black Americans who subscribed to Christian nationalism were more likely to blame racial discrimination. This suggests Christian nationalism for Black Americans may be associated with more civil religious understandings of community solidarity and justice (Dawson 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004; McKenzie and Rouse 2013; McRoberts 2020). Similarly for Hispanic Americans, Perry, Schleifer, et al. (2024) found that while White Americans who subscribed to Christian nationalist views were more likely to hold anti-immigrant and assimilationist views, their Hispanic counterparts were more likely to reject such views. And most recently, Perry, Shortle, and colleagues (2024) found that Black Americans who subscribed to Christian nationalism were more likely to identify with the term “woke”, and Black and Hispanic Americans were more likely to identify with the term “progressive”, while White Americans who subscribe to Christian nationalism were less likely to identify with either term. Taken together, these findings suggests Christian nationalism among minoritized racial and ethnic groups may evoke ideas of community solidarity, even protection.

Given these patterns, we would anticipate that Christian nationalism among White Americans operates as a form of authoritarian ethno-traditionalism and populism (following Gorski and Perry 2022), associating one’s religious identity with the preservation of traditional order, perceiving one’s own group as embattled by mysterious threats (thus the strong connection with conspiratorial thinking), and endorsing the defense of “us vs. them” boundaries, by violence if necessary. In contrast, among minoritized racial and ethnic groups, Christian nationalism operates more like the traditional understanding of American “civil religion” (Bellah 1967; Gorski 2017), evoking aspirational ideas of justice and community stewardship. Thus, we would expect that religiopolitical views that evoke community solidarity among Black and Hispanic Americans would not promote reactionary conservatism, but protection.

Methods

Data

Data for this study are taken from the 2021 Wave of the General Social Survey. The GSS has historically been a face-to-face, nationally representative survey of non-institutionalized adults in the US collected by the National Opinion Research Center starting in 1972. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020, the 2021 GSS was administered as two studies, the second of which was an address-based and mail-to-web survey that was conducted from 1 December 2020, to 3 May 2021. Though the response rate was well below the typical response rates for previous GSS waves (17.4 per cent), and this has demonstrable implications for some religious measurements (Schnabel, Bock, and Hout 2024), a comparison between the 2021 and 2018 GSS (see Table 1) shows largely consistent patterns across most demographic variables including the outcome variable. The noteworthy differences are in the religion measures, marital status, and educational attainment. We discuss the implications of the surveying mode in the final section of the paper.

Outcome

Our dependent variable for this study is a single-item question frequently used in the General Social Survey. Though in most GSS waves the question is asked of a subsample, in the 2021 wave, each respondent was asked the question: “Would you favor or oppose a law which would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun?” Respondents could answer either “favor” or “oppose”. We coded responses such that 0 = favor and 1 = oppose. Nearly 69 per cent of Americans favor such a law, while 31 per cent oppose it. Because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, we estimate models with binary logistic regression.

Key independent variables

The key independent variables for this study are Christian nationalism and racial/ethnic identity. Christian nationalism has been measured in a variety of ways (Braunstein and Taylor 2017; Davis and Perry 2021; Gorski and Perry 2022; McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011). The 2021 General Social Survey included three questions intended to capture the construct, which have sense been used to that end (Lieberman, Lehman, and Kawakami 2023). Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements: “The federal government should advocate Christian values”, “The success of the United States is party of God’s plan”, and “The U.S. would be a better country if religion had less influence”. Responses ranged from 1 =

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

	Range	2021 GSS		2018 GSS
		Mean or %	SD	%
Outcome				
Favor Required Gun Permits	0–1	68.5%		72.0%
Oppose Required Gun Permits	0–1	31.5%		28%
Christian Nationalism	0–12	5.4	3.2	
Race				
White, Non-Hispanic	0–1	73.1%		66.1%
Black, Non-Hispanic	0–1	10.7%		14.7%
Hispanic	0–1	10.7%		14.6%
Non-Hispanic Other	0–1	5.5%		4.5%
Party Identity				
Democrat	0–1	37.1%		32.9%
Independent/Other	0–1	40.8%		44.5%
Republican	0–1	22.2%		22.6%
Ideological Identity				
Extremely liberal	0–1	5.8%		5.6%
Liberal	0–1	16.6%		13.4%
Slightly liberal	0–1	13.4%		11.3%
Moderate	0–1	33.4%		38.5%
Slightly conservative	0–1	12.1%		12.1%
Conservative	0–1	14.4%		15.1%
Extremely conservative	0–1	4.2%		3.8%
Religious Tradition				
Conservative Protestant	0–1	23.4%		32.9%
Mainline Protestant	0–1	13.2%		12.5%
Catholic	0–1	22.9%		21.1%
Other Religion	0–1	9.5%		8.1%
Unaffiliated	0–1	31.0%		25.4%
Religious Service Attendance				
Never	0–1	30.4%		29.7%
Less than once a year	0–1	13.2%		5.1%
About once or twice a year	0–1	11.2%		12.0%
Several times a year	0–1	9.4%		9.7%
Several times a month	0–1	17.7%		19.8%
Every week or more	0–1	18.2%		23.8%
Marital Status				
Married	0–1	50.6%		42.3%
Divorced, Widowed, Separated	0–1	25.3%		29.2%
Never married	0–1	24.1%		28.5%
Highest Degree				
Less than high school	0–1	4.8%		9.8%
High school	0–1	38.6%		49.8%
Associate/junior college	0–1	9.0%		8.1%
Bachelor's	0–1	27.3%		20.9%
Graduate	0–1	20.3%		11.4%
Family Income				
Less than \$20,000	0–1	13.6%		16.2%
\$20,000–\$49,999	0–1	21.5%		25.2%
\$50,000–\$89,999	0–1	24.5%		25.5%
\$90,000 or more	0–1	32.6%		27.0%
Not answered	0–1	7.9%		6.1%
Sex				
Female	0–1	54.2%		55.7%
Male	0–1	45.8%		44.3%
Age Categories				
18–24	0–1	4.0%		8.8%

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

	Range	2021 GSS		2018 GSS
		Mean or %	SD	%
25–34	0–1	15.5%		19.5%
35–44	0–1	17.6%		18.0%
45–54	0–1	14.8%		14.9%
55–64	0–1	19.1%		15.7%
65–74	0–1	18.2%		13.4%
75 and older	0–1	10.8%		9.7%
Region				
Northeast	0–1	15.3%		14.1%
Midwest	0–1	25.2%		22.1%
South	0–1	36.4%		41.8%
West	0–1	23.2%		22.0%
<i>N</i>		2,979		1,363

Source: 2021 and 2018 General Social Surveys (unweighted).

Note: The significantly smaller sample for the 2018 GSS is due to the fact that the outcome variable was only asked of half the original sample ($N = 1,541$) whereas in the 2021 GSS it was asked of the full sample.

strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. We recoded items so that higher values indicated greater support for Christian nationalist views. Following the majority of studies using multi-item Christian nationalism indexes, we created a summative scale, ranging from 0 to 12 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .823$).

Racial/ethnic identity was measured with four dichotomous dummy variables constructed from two measures in the GSS that ask about racial identity and Hispanic ethnicity: White, Non-Hispanic (reference); Black, Non-Hispanic; Hispanic; and Other Race.

Controls

All models include a variety of control variables in order to better isolate any potential association between our key independent variables and outcome. These include political characteristics, religious characteristics, and other sociodemographic controls.

Political characteristics include party identity and ideological identity. We measure party identity with three dichotomous dummy variables: Democrat (reference), Independent/Other, and Republican. Ideological identity is also measured with a series of seven dummy variables with extremely liberal (reference), liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, conservative, and extremely conservative.

Religious characteristics for the first set of models include religious tradition and religious service attendance. For religious tradition we collapse several categories from the traditional "RELTRAD" classification scheme (Steensland et al. 2000) to avoid collinearity issues with the race items (Sherkat 2014). Our dichotomous categories are: Conservative Protestant (reference); Mainline Protestant; Catholic; Other Religion; and Unaffiliated.

Religious service attendance is also a series of dichotomous variables: never (reference), less than once a year, about once or twice a year, several times a year, once a month to several times a month, and every week or more.

For a second phase of analyses, we include an additional item to capture Americans' beliefs about the Bible, which we interpret as an indicator of fundamentalist thinking. Unfortunately, this item was only asked of half the sample, and thus, its inclusion splits the analytic sample nearly in half. Nevertheless, we anticipate it is strongly correlated with gun views (Merino 2018; Yamane 2016) and incorporate it into additional analyses. Respondents were asked "Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?" (A.) The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word. (B.) The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word. (C.) The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man. And (D.) Other. We use the first item "literally, word-for-word" as the reference category.

Lastly, we include a number of relevant sociodemographic controls. Marital status is a series of dummy variables with married (reference); divorced, widowed, or separated; and never married. Educational attainment includes a series of dummy categories from 0 = less than high school to 4 = graduate degree. Family income includes four substantive categories from 0 = less than \$20,000 per year to 3 = \$90,000 or more; and a fifth category (coded 4) where we put respondents who did not answer so as not to lose their cases. Sex is measured with female = 0, male = 1. Age is measured in seven categories from 0 = 18–24 to 7 = 75 years or older. And region of the country is measured with four categories: Northeast (reference), Midwest, South, and West.

Plan of analysis

The analysis proceeds as follows. Table 2 presents binary logistic regression models predicting that Americans oppose a law which would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun. Model 1 represents the full model, while Model 2 introduces the interaction term for Christian nationalism \times Black, Hispanic, and Other Race. Table 3 replicates Table 2 but adds the bible views measure as a cross check to see how the introduction of an indicator for fundamentalism potentially modifies the outcomes for Table 2. Tables present unstandardized betas and robust standard errors to account for the regression weights.

Results

Model 1 in Table 2 shows that Christian nationalism in the main effects is not significantly associated with opposition to a law requiring a gun permit. As

Table 2. Binary logistic regression models predicting opposing required gun permits.

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	SE	b	SE
Christian nationalism index	0.03	(0.02)	0.06*	(0.03)
Ethno-racial identity (Ref. non-Hispanic white)				
non-Hispanic Black	-0.15	(0.22)	1.37***	(0.42)
Hispanic	-0.64**	(0.20)	0.16	(0.41)
non-Hispanic other	-0.48	(0.30)	-1.28	(0.79)
Christian nationalism (CN) × ethno-racial identity				
CN × non-Hispanic Black			-0.25***	(0.06)
CN × Hispanic			-0.14*	(0.06)
CN × non-Hispanic other			0.14	(0.11)
Political affiliation (Ref. Democrat)				
Independent / other	0.66***	(0.14)	0.61***	(0.14)
Republican	0.98***	(0.18)	0.90***	(0.18)
Political ideology (Ref. extremely liberal)				
Liberal	-0.60*	(0.30)	-0.62*	(0.29)
Slightly liberal	-0.43	(0.31)	-0.42	(0.30)
Moderate	-0.08	(0.29)	-0.07	(0.27)
Slightly conservative	0.36	(0.31)	0.36	(0.30)
Conservative	0.81*	(0.32)	0.76*	(0.30)
Extremely conservative	0.93*	(0.36)	0.88*	(0.35)
Religious affiliation (Ref. none)				
Mainline Protestant	0.08	(0.20)	0.09	(0.21)
Catholic	-0.01	(0.16)	0.01	(0.16)
Other Religion	-0.34	(0.22)	-0.28	(0.22)
Unaffiliated	-0.21	(0.20)	-0.18	(0.19)
Religious attendance (Ref. never)				
Less than once a year	-0.02	(0.18)	-0.02	(0.18)
About once or twice a year	-0.26	(0.20)	-0.26	(0.21)
Several times a year	-0.79***	(0.22)	-0.79***	(0.22)
About once a month – nearly every week	-0.32+	(0.19)	-0.31+	(0.19)
Every week or more	-0.49*	(0.20)	-0.43*	(0.21)
Marital status (Ref. married)				
Divorced, widowed, separated	0.06	(0.14)	0.05	(0.14)
Never married	-0.16	(0.16)	-0.14	(0.16)
Highest degree (Ref. less than high school)				
High school	-0.13	(0.22)	-0.13	(0.22)
Associate / junior college	-0.23	(0.26)	-0.25	(0.26)
Bachelor's	-0.49*	(0.25)	-0.47+	(0.24)
Graduate	-1.02***	(0.27)	-0.99***	(0.26)
Family income (Ref. less than \$20,000)				
\$20,000–\$49,999	-0.07	(0.19)	-0.08	(0.19)
\$50,000–\$89,999	-0.14	(0.19)	-0.17	(0.19)
\$90,000 or more	0.02	(0.21)	0.01	(0.20)
Not answered	-0.14	(0.24)	-0.18	(0.23)
Sex (Ref. female)				
Male	0.39***	(0.11)	0.42***	(0.11)
Age category (Ref 18–24)				
25–34	0.11	(0.28)	0.12	(0.27)
35–44	-0.33	(0.28)	-0.30	(0.28)
45–54	-0.57+	(0.29)	-0.55+	(0.29)
55–64	-0.40	(0.29)	-0.37	(0.29)
65–74	-0.75*	(0.30)	-0.74*	(0.30)
75 and older	-0.96**	(0.33)	-0.97**	(0.33)
Region (Ref. Northeast)				
Midwest	0.19	(0.18)	0.18	(0.17)
South	0.32+	(0.18)	0.34*	(0.17)

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	SE	b	SE
West	0.17	(0.18)	0.14	(0.18)
Pseudo R^2	0.140		0.148	

Source: 2021 General Social Survey ($N = 2,979$).

Note: Robust standard errors.

+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

we will see below, this non-association masks considerable racial variation. Though Black Americans are no different from White Americans in their opposition to required gun permits, Hispanics and Americans of “Other” racial groups are less likely than White Americans to oppose such a law.

Patterns of association for political characteristics are largely what we would expect, with non-Democrats and more conservative Americans more likely to oppose gun permits than Democrats and liberals, respectively. Interestingly, the more Americans attend religious services, the less likely they are to oppose a law requiring gun permits compared to Americans who “never” attend worship services. Likewise, older Americans are less likely to oppose a law requiring gun permits compared to 18–24-year-olds.

Model 2 introduces the interaction terms for Christian nationalism and racial minority groups and several immediate changes are apparent. Christian nationalism now has a significant, positive association with opposing required gun permits ($b = 0.062$, $p = 0.015$). Likewise, the lower order term for Black Americans is strongly significant and positive ($b = 1.374$, $p = .001$) indicating that at the lowest values of Christian nationalism, Black Americans are actually more likely than White Americans to oppose required gun permits. The interaction term for Christian nationalism \times Black Americans is also significant and negative ($b = -0.249$, $p < .001$) as is the term for Christian nationalism \times Hispanic Americans ($b = -.143$, $p = .02$). To aid in interpreting these moderating associations, we turn to predicted marginal effects.

Figure 1 plots marginal probabilities of opposing a law requiring a gun permit by three primary racial groups across Christian nationalism. Here the divergent patterns are quite clear. At the lowest values of Christian nationalism Black Americans are significantly more likely than White Americans to oppose required gun permits. But as Christian nationalism increases, Black and Hispanic Americans sharply decline in their opposition to a law requiring gun permits, while for White Americans, Christian nationalism corresponds to a steady increase in opposition to such a law. Error bands indicate that White and Non-White Americans diverge significantly from one another essentially following the mean score for Christian nationalism.

Might these divergent patterns be adjusted somewhat if we take fundamentalist Bible views into account? To test this possibility, Table 3 replicates

Table 3. Binary logistic regression models predicting opposing required gun permits with bible views included.

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	SE	b	SE
Christian nationalism index	-0.03	(0.04)	0.02	(0.04)
Ethno-racial identity (Ref. non-Hispanic white)				
non-Hispanic Black	-0.11	(0.32)	2.84***	(0.70)
Hispanic	-0.57*	(0.27)	0.42	(0.50)
non-Hispanic other	-0.62	(0.38)	-1.42	(0.90)
Christian nationalism (CN) × ethno-racial identity				
CN × non-Hispanic Black			-0.48***	(0.11)
CN × Hispanic			-0.18*	(0.08)
CN × non-Hispanic other			0.15	(0.13)
Political affiliation (Ref. Democrat)				
Independent / other	0.75***	(0.20)	0.65**	(0.20)
Republican	1.14***	(0.25)	1.02***	(0.25)
Political ideology (Ref. extremely liberal)				
Liberal	-0.70+	(0.41)	-0.83*	(0.39)
Slightly liberal	-0.23	(0.42)	-0.23	(0.39)
Moderate	-0.14	(0.38)	-0.14	(0.35)
Slightly conservative	0.51	(0.41)	0.48	(0.39)
Conservative	0.67	(0.43)	0.56	(0.41)
Extremely conservative	0.64	(0.50)	0.53	(0.50)
Religious affiliation (Ref. none)				
Mainline Protestant	0.14	(0.29)	0.19	(0.29)
Catholic	-0.19	(0.24)	-0.12	(0.24)
Other Religion	-0.26	(0.33)	-0.16	(0.32)
Unaffiliated	-0.15	(0.29)	-0.10	(0.28)
Religious attendance (Ref. never)				
Less than once a year	-0.18	(0.25)	-0.23	(0.25)
About once or twice a year	-0.35	(0.27)	-0.35	(0.28)
Several times a year	-1.13***	(0.33)	-1.17***	(0.32)
About once a month – nearly every week	-0.25	(0.26)	-0.26	(0.27)
Every week or more	-0.32	(0.28)	-0.22	(0.29)
Marital status (Ref. married)				
Divorced, widowed, separated	0.27	(0.20)	0.25	(0.20)
Never married	0.19	(0.21)	0.15	(0.21)
Highest degree (Ref. less than high school)				
High school	-0.10	(0.32)	-0.13	(0.32)
Associate / junior college	0.03	(0.38)	0.01	(0.37)
Bachelor's	-0.58+	(0.35)	-0.51	(0.34)
Graduate	-0.96*	(0.39)	-0.92*	(0.38)
Family income (Ref. less than \$20,000)				
\$20,000–\$49,999	0.11	(0.27)	0.06	(0.28)
\$50,000–\$89,999	0.19	(0.27)	0.08	(0.27)
\$90,000 or more	0.39	(0.29)	0.30	(0.28)
Not answered	0.29	(0.33)	0.21	(0.34)
Sex (Ref. female)				
Male	0.59***	(0.15)	0.65***	(0.15)
Age category (Ref 18–24)				
25–34	-0.02	(0.43)	0.02	(0.42)
35–44	-0.56	(0.44)	-0.51	(0.43)
45–54	-0.78+	(0.45)	-0.74+	(0.45)
55–64	-0.53	(0.45)	-0.51	(0.45)
65–74	-0.88+	(0.46)	-0.88+	(0.46)
75 and older	-1.33**	(0.51)	-1.42**	(0.51)
Region (Ref. Northeast)				
Midwest	-0.06	(0.25)	-0.01	(0.24)

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	SE	b	SE
South	0.02	(0.23)	0.10	(0.23)
West	-0.04	(0.25)	-0.01	(0.24)
Bible views (Ref. Literal, word-for-word)				
True, not literal	-0.47*	(0.22)	-0.55*	(0.22)
Ancient book of history	-0.76*	(0.30)	-0.78**	(0.29)
Don't know	-0.99**	(0.36)	-1.05**	(0.36)
Pseudo R^2	0.161		0.179	

Source: 2021 General Social Survey ($N = 1,504$).

Note: Robust standard errors.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

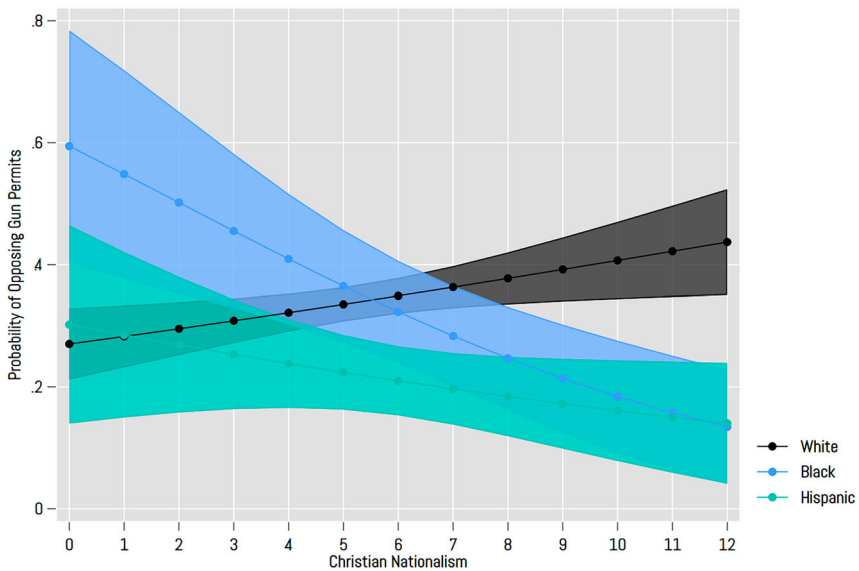


Figure 1. Predicted marginal probability of opposing required gun permits by race across values of Christian nationalism.

Source: 2021 General Social Survey. Note: Controls held at their means. Bands are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

models from Table 2. As in Model 1 of Table 2, Christian nationalism is not significantly associated with the outcome in Model 1, but each of the alternative Bible views is negatively associated with support for a law requiring permits compared to Americans who affirm biblical literalism. Unlike in Model 2 of Table 2, Model 2 in Table 3 does not find Christian nationalism to be significant, once interaction terms are included. However, like in Table 2, the lower order term for Black Americans in Model 2 of Table 3 shows that Black Americans are significantly more likely than White

Americans to oppose a law requiring gun permits. And the interaction terms for Christian nationalism and both Black and Hispanic Americans are negative and statistically significant.

Turning to predicted marginal probabilities in [Figure 2](#), we see a slightly different pattern for White, Black, and Hispanic Americans, that helps put into perspective how Christian nationalism likely works differently for White and Black Americans in particular. The trend line for White Americans is essentially flat now, suggesting that accounting for biblical literalism controlled away any influence of Christian nationalism for White Americans. This may indicate that Christian nationalism and fundamentalist orientations reflected in biblical literalism operate similarly for White Americans. However, once bible views are held constant for Black Americans, the link between Christian nationalism views on required gun permits is even stronger. This suggests that while fundamentalist bible views may operate similarly for Black and White Americans (inclining both to hold more conservative views on gun laws), Christian nationalism operates quite differently for the two. Whereas for White Americans, Christian nationalism operates much like reactionary conservatism, for Black Americans (and also for Hispanic Americans), the construct more likely connects to ideas of community protection and justice.

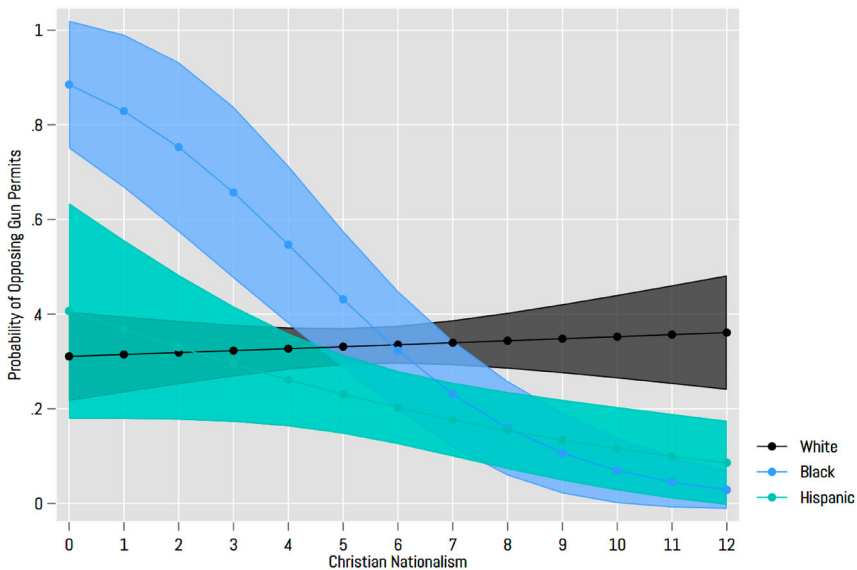


Figure 2. Predicted marginal probability of opposing required gun permits by race across values of Christian nationalism (taking Bible views into account).

Source: 2021 General Social Survey. Note: Controls held at their means. Bands are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Discussion and conclusions

The extent to which guns should be regulated is a polarizing and societally important debate in the contemporary US. Prior research has shown that attitudes about gun rights and regulations are shaped by the ideology of Christian nationalism (Davis, Perry, and Grubbs 2023; Djupe et al. 2023; Gorski and Perry 2022; Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018). Building on the conception of Christian nationalism as a form of authoritarian ethno-traditionalism, particularly among White Americans, there were strong theoretical reasons to expect its influence of Americans' gun policy views would vary strongly across ethno-racial identities. This study used recent, national data to address this question and found a substantial interaction effect between Christian nationalism and race with regard to attitudes about gun control. Specifically, among non-Hispanic White Americans, Christian nationalism was associated with higher opposition to requiring gun permits, adjusting for a host of social, demographic, political, and religious covariates. The association was reversed for non-Hispanic Black Americans (Christian nationalism was associated with lower opposition to requiring gun permits) and null for Hispanic Americans. This finding builds on recent research that frames Christian nationalism as a racialized ideology – i.e. one that is racially coded for White Americans but may be imbued with different meaning for minoritized ethno-racial groups (Gorski and Perry 2022; Perry and Whitehead 2019). Our results support this conceptualization, showing that – when it comes to attitudes about gun control – substantial, divergent effects of Christian nationalism across ethno-racial groups may be masked by estimating a single effect for the entire population.

Why is the association between Christian nationalism endorsement and opposition to gun control so strongly conditioned by race? Our results suggest that the interaction effect is underpinned by qualitatively different meanings, experiences, and priorities linked to Christian nationalism itself, particularly between non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black Americans. Specifically, biblical literalism was able to largely explain the positive association between Christian nationalism and opposition to requiring gun permits among non-Hispanic White Americans. This implies that (a) fundamentalist views about the Bible are closely linked to Christian nationalism for non-Hispanic White Americans and (b) that both measures operate similarly in their relationships to gun control attitudes. As such, our findings in this regard are consistent with existing literature on *White* Christian nationalism that finds this belief system to be strongly tied to embattled, fundamentalist Christianity and perceptions of ethno-religious victimhood, which legitimize expressions of power through violence (Gorski and Perry 2022). In other words, for non-Hispanic White Americans, resistance to gun control is likely to be motivated by perceived social and political threats (from the

government, from secular social institutions, from racial minorities and immigrants, etc.), with Christian nationalism and fundamentalism both being facets of a cohesive, reactionary worldview constructed in response to these threats (Armaly, Buckley, and Enders 2022; Davis, Perry, and Grubbs 2023; Gorski and Perry 2022; Seto and Upenieks 2023; Whitehead and Perry 2020) and recurrently amplified by them (Al-Kire et al. 2021, 2024; Walker and Haider-Markel 2024).

However, our findings suggest that Christian nationalism has a qualitatively different relationship with religious fundamentalism for ethno-racial minorities, particularly Black Americans. Specifically, the negative association between Christian nationalism and Black American's opposition to requiring gun permits was *amplified* after controlling for biblical literalism (i.e. biblical literalism partially suppressed the effects of Christian nationalism among Black Americans in the original model). This suggests that, although Christian nationalism and fundamentalism are correlated for Black Americans, their effects on attitudes about gun control are very different. We expect that this difference is linked to different conceptions of what it means for the US to be "a Christian nation" among minoritized ethno-racial groups in the US, particularly Black Protestants. For example, prior research has highlighted how conceptions of Christian nationhood have historically been used by Black religious leaders to call for racial equality and criticize oppressive political violence (Dawson 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004; McKenzie and Rouse 2013; McRoberts 2020; Perry et al. 2022). Our findings build on this important literature, showing that this emphasis on community protection and progress embedded in *Black* Christian nationalism is salient to understanding racial differences in attitudes about gun control in the contemporary US.

How do we explain the less prominent trend among Hispanic Americans than for Black Americans? Part of this may be due to the measurement of Hispanic identity as well as the unique of experiences of Hispanic Americans in the United States compared to that of Black Americans. First, Hispanic identity in the GSS incorporates a wide variety of ethnic heritages and origins, each with varying degrees of assimilation to White racial identity. That is, there may be quite different religious and political opinions among Cuban Americans than for Puerto Rican and Mexican Americans. The category of Hispanic American may mask these differences. Additionally, while the vast majority of Black Americans identify with Protestantism and even those who do not typically come from families and communities in which the Black church was still prominent, Hispanic Americans often come from a more diverse and altogether different religious heritage and relationship to the nation. Future research, ideally with large enough sample sizes to account for the internal diversity within the pan-Hispanic identity, are needed to further tease out the complexity of Christian nationalism's relationship to gun preferences (and other political views) among Hispanic Americans.

Other data limitations of the study should be noted to chart a path for future research. First, although the GSS was advantageous because of its recency, coverage, and representativeness, our reliance on observational survey data is a challenge to causal identification. Specifically, if a characteristic that was not measured by the GSS exerts a causal influence on both Christian nationalism and attitudes about gun control, this may bias our estimates. A possible example is respondents' moral intuitions – particularly sensitivity to harm – which has been argued to underlie variation in American ideological and political differences (Haidt 2013), as well as influence propensity for gun ownership (Schutten et al. 2023). The control variables that we were able to include (e.g. political affiliation, ideological identity, religious affiliation, etc.) likely help in this regard, but further exploration of this topic is merited. For example, extensions of this research might benefit from examining the process by which Christian nationalism develops and how this process may differ across ethnic and racial identities. Such exploration would likely incorporate salient variables that are outside the scope of the present study (e.g. moral socialization, early-life experiences), as well as a temporal dimension that would be beneficial in establishing causal implications on policy attitudes. A related limitation concerns measurement – specifically, our analysis was constrained by the variables included in the GSS. Although our approach followed prior research in operationalizing Christian nationalism and fundamentalism (Lieberman, Lehman, and Kawakami 2023), we acknowledge that these are complex ideological orientations, and some nuance may have been lost in our measurement approach. Exploring these differences, as well as how their implications may vary across race, remains an important opportunity for future research. Similarly, we encourage extensions of this work to explore facets of gun control beyond just the requiring of police permits. Public opinion on gun control has been shown to vary substantially across specific policy measures (e.g. Pew Research Center 2015), so expanding the present study in this regard may also add nuance to our findings. Relatedly, the divergent meanings of “Christian nationhood” across racial groups implied by our findings are likely to have important implications for political attitudes beyond gun control policy preferences. As such, further exploration of how race and ethnicity moderate Christian nationalism's influence on other attitudes, particularly those that tend to be racialized in political discourse (e.g. immigration, criminal justice reform, government welfare, affirmative action) is warranted.

In summary, our study showed that the relationship between Christian nationalism and attitudes about gun control is strongly conditioned by race and ethnicity. Non-Hispanic White Americans who endorse Christian nationalism are much more likely to oppose requiring police permits to purchase a gun, while the association is reversed for non-Hispanic Black Americans. Further analysis suggested that these differences were likely to be

underpinned by substantive differences in the meaning of Christian nationalism across racial groups – for White Americans, Christian nationalism is closely tied to threat perceptions and reactionary fundamentalism; for Black Americans, conceptions of a Christian nation are more closely linked to ideals of social progress and community protection (see Perry, Shortle, et al. 2024). Our findings provide important nuance on Christian nationalism and how its meaning may be racially coded and qualitatively different across ethnoracial identities. Our analysis links these important differences to gun control – a timely and societally significant policy debate. We encourage future research along these lines, particularly focussed on how the causes and consequences of US Christian nationalism may differ across diverse strata of American society.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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