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UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT OF WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM
TO AMERICAN DEMOCRACY TODAY

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PARTICIPANTS:

Opening Remarks:

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Presentation on Survey Results:

ROBERT P. JONES
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Moderator:

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Panelists:

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Historian, Race and Religion; Author; Professor, Simmons College of Kentucky

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William Galston: Well. Good morning, everyone. And let me welcome you to the friendly confines of Falk Auditorium here at the Brookings Institution. And I'd also like to welcome virtually the more than 1500 people who are watching this event live as, as it is streamed; I think it's an indication of the interest that the topic has aroused. But I've gotten ahead of myself. My name is Bill Galston, I'm a senior fellow here at Brookings and on behalf of the institution as a whole and the Governance Studies program, a venerable, indeed founding part of Brookings, it's my pleasure to welcome all of you to this event, which is the latest, but I fervently hope not the last fruit of a more than decade long collaboration between the Public Religion Research Institute and the Brookings Institution.

As many of you probably know, this collaboration for more than a decade has produced the annual American Values Survey, which has become a real cornerstone of our collaboration. But from time to time, we get an opportunity to do a deep dive into a timely topic of special interest. And today's report and meeting represent a perfect illustration of the deep dive and what it can produce. We'll be talking today about Christian nationalism, which is really at the heart of much of contemporary American politics, and which cries out for a better understanding not only among scholars, but also journalists and citizens that it is received so far. We hope that you will emerge from today enlightened and invigorated, but not angered.

It's now not only my duty, but also my pleasure to introduce the CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, Melissa Deckman. If I had the rest of, the rest of the session, I could walk you through her many accomplishments. Suffice it to say that she's a political scientist who studies the impact of not only religion, but also gender and age on public opinion and behavior. Among her other writings, she's the author of *Tea Party Women*, which examines the role of women in conservative politics. And her writings, in addition to scholarly locations, have appeared in obscure publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, *The Hill*, *Vice News*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *FiveThirtyEight*, and *Politico*, which pretty much covers all the bases. And so now let me without further ado, turn the podium over to her on behalf of PRRI to fill you in further on the event. Melissa.

Melissa Deckman: Thank you, Bill. And that was a very gracious introduction. Good morning, everybody. Since 2009, Public Religion Research Institute has served as a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to conducting independent research at the intersection of religion, culture and politics. And the Brookings Institution, as Bill indicated, has really been a steadfast partner with us

over the years. And I believe this is our 17th joint public event with E.J. and Bill and the Brookings Governance Studies team. So on behalf of PRRI, I'd like to welcome you to our presentation today on the findings from this very important new study on Christian nationalism. This survey of more than 6000 Americans conducted jointly with Brookings sheds new light on the underpinnings of Christian nationalist ideology. As always, it's a pleasure working with both E.J. Dionne and Bill Galston and the Brookings team. Thanks also to the staff of Brookings for helping to organize this event this morning.

I'd also like to acknowledge the excellent work done by our talented team at PRRI, including Dr. Natalie Jackson, who is our director of research at PRRI and our research staff, including Dr. Diana Ortiz, Ian Huff and Mattie Snodgrass. We couldn't be here today without the work of our Chief of staff, Sean Sands, who helps coordinates all of these events and does so many things behind the scenes, as well as our digital communication specialist Jessica Royce, and our operations associate Tony Baptiste. And we're also very grateful for our graphic designer, Tim Duffy, for making the report look so beautiful. I also wanted to say thank you to our panelists for appearing today. And also just to note that Dr. Anthea Butler was originally scheduled to appear on our panel, she's a professor at, at University of Pennsylvania, but unfortunately had a family emergency. So I just wanted to make that note.

And finally, I wanted to recognize one special guest in the audience, Todd Stiefel. He is the founder of the Stiefel Free Thought Foundation, who is one of our general funders, we're very grateful for the support of the Stiefel Foundation for the work of PRRI. And for those of you watching along today on livestream, all 1500 plus of you, which is exciting, you can find a full copy of the survey at our website at [WWW dot PRRI dot org](http://WWW.PRRI.ORG). You can also sign up for regular takes about news at the intersection of religion and politics, including our Morning Buzz and as you'll see in the corner there, hashtag Christian nationalism if you want to follow along with some live tweeting and looking at some commentary about the event today as well.

It is my pleasure now to introduce to you Dr. Robert P. Jones, the president and founder of PRRI. He is the author of "White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity," which won a 2021 American Book Award. He is also the author of "The End of White Christian America," which won the 2019 Grawemeyer Award in Religion. He holds a Ph.D. in religion from Emory University and M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a B.S. in Computing Science and Mathematics at Mississippi College. Without further ado, Robby.

Robert Jones: Hi, everyone. Glad to see everyone here in person. And again, so grateful of so many online. Well, it's my job to take you through the main findings of the survey today, and I'm going to do that via this PowerPoint presentation. It's going to be a fairly quick drive through the data, we'll have time to unpack it a little bit later, but I'm thrilled to be here, see all of you in person. So thank you for being here. Without further ado, let me just jump in here. First, just some basics. See what you're, so, you know what you're looking at. The survey was conducted at the very end of last year, between November 21st and December 14th. Responses, a representative sample of over 6000 Americans is a very large survey, gives us a fairly small margin of sampling error and ability to break out smaller subgroups with higher confidence. It was made possible through the generous support of the Foundation to Promote Open Society with additional support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Wilbur and Hilda Glenn Family Foundation and the Unitarian Universalist Program at Shelter Rock. So thank you to all of those funders who made this study possible today.

All right. So one of the biggest questions in front of us was how to measure this idea of Christian nationalism. And one of the ways that we do that, as we've done with other studies in partnership with Brookings, is to kind of think about this as a kind of composite worldview and to get not just one question, but a number of questions to help us zero in on, on a particular orientation toward a topic. So in this case, and we use five questions here to construct a Christian nationalism scale, and basically the way this works is you ask everyone these questions, you get sort of completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, completely disagree, and then you score people like one through four, right, for each of those answers. And then you standardize the scores, you add them all up and standardize them between zero and one, and everybody gets a composite score for how they answered all five of these questions, that could be high on one, low on another, etc, etc. So these are the percentage of the American public who agree with each of these questions.

Right. So ranging from a low of God has called Christians to exercised dominion over all areas of American society, one in five Americans, 20% agree with that statement ranging down here from the high, 40% of Americans agree with the statement either completely or somewhat agree with the statement, U.S. law should be based on Christian values, and you can see other questions in between. So we combine all of those questions. So everyone where you see Christian nationalism, adherence or other categories, it is based on these five questions.

So how do those questions then sort Americans? We basically looked at the distribution of the data and it looks like it sorted Americans into four basic categories. These are names that we assigned to these groups, right? So we didn't ask people about these names, we, we came up with these labels to describe where people fell on that continuum with those five questions. So starting at the top, we gave the name of the people who completely or mostly agree with almost all of those statements Christian nationalism adherents. They basically had a composite score of 0.75 to 1 when we added all those questions together and standardized the scale. One way to think about them is they're just people who overwhelmingly agree or completely agree with all five questions.

The next group down are sympathizers. These are people who agree, but they are less likely to completely agree with those statements. They have this composite score between point five and .74, and then finally kind of goes down the same way, skeptics, those who disagree, but less likely than the last category to completely disagree and then rejecters. And this category is actually a little bit different because they completely disagreed with all five questions. Right. So there were enough people in that category to just have, so they had a score of zero, right. Which means that they score, they completely disagree with everything in the scale.

So where do Americans fall? If you take those categories, this is what the country looks like. On the one hand, in the top category of adherents, they can, almost completely agree with everything in the scale, it's 10% of Americans. There are an additional 19% of Americans who we call Christian nationalism sympathizers. That is those who lean toward supporting that, but with, but less strongly than, than adherents do. So basically, it's three in ten Americans, right, who lean into supporting this Christian nationalism view with only 10% in the top category. So that leaves, you know, the rest of the country kind of leaning the other way. 39%, nearly four in ten are skeptics and mostly disagree. And then we have 29% that completely disagreed with all with all five of those, those questions.

So one way in thinking about this this wedge here is that there are basically as many people who completely disagree as there are, who either completely agree or somewhat disagree with those five statements and then a plurality of Americans leaning away, right, is kind of one way of thinking about this. So three in ten on one side and six in ten, it's basically a 2 to 1 ratio between those who lean away from supporting that orientation and those who lean towards supporting Christian nationalism. So that's kind of where the country is as a whole and I'm going to break it down for you a little bit so you can see how it goes across demographic groups. You'll get a little better idea here.

Oh, but first, let me get this one orientation question here to kind of give you a sense of how, how it operates on a, on a basic question about what the nation should look like in terms of religious diversity and pluralism. So we had this question. We had two options responders could pick from, I would prefer the U.S. to be a nation made up of people belonging to a wide variety of religions, or I would prefer the nation to be primarily made up of people who follow the Christian faith. Now, as a country as a whole, like that same pattern, it's basically a 3 to 1 lean toward the first question, I would prefer the nation to be made up of people belonging to a wide variety of religions. Nearly three quarters of the country believes that compared to only about a quarter who would like to see a primarily Christian nation.

But check out what happens across these categories, give you a sense of the orientation here. So there are Christian nationalism adherents, basically mirror images of the public, right? So they lean completely the opposite way. Three quarters said they prefer the nation to be primarily made up of those who follow the Christian faith. Among sympathizers, you'll see they, they're a little more divided, still lean toward majority, saying they prefer the nation to be made up of the Christian faith. And then here are the other two categories here, you can see big, big differences, right, in terms of what they want, what these different groups want the country to look like. So that's just kind of give you a sense of how strongly they think about religious pluralism in the country here.

One other thing we did, it was, the term Christian nationalism, as many of you know, is fairly new in our public kind of vocabulary. And so it's part of the vernacular, but it's, we were wondering about how many people actually know about the term and whether they think about the term. And this turned up actually some pretty interesting data. So the first thing is to say that those who are Christian nationalism adherents are much more likely to view the term favorably. Right. So it doesn't have a pejorative ring to those who actually are Christian nationalism adherents. Sympathizers, a little less likely so and then as you can see, down to skeptics and objectors, very few have a positive association with the term. But here's something fairly interesting is that a plurality of Americans have not heard of the term. Right. So we have a big swath of the country and even among adherents, four in ten say they don't really know, haven't really heard of the term and don't have an opinion about it, noticeably, are the people most likely to have heard of the term are the people who oppose it. Right. So the rejecters are the ones who really, only 19% of the rejecters say they haven't heard of the term.

But here's the other side of it. So you can see here are people who say they have either a mostly unfavorable or a very unfavorable view of the term. And you can see the rejecters down here, 71% very unfavorable view of the term. But among adherents, right, it's very clear that those who know about the term overwhelmingly have a positive association with it. So who are Christian nationalism adherents? And kind of walk you through some demographics here. One of the more interesting things here is how does this break along religious lines? I'm going to put up just the first half, the adherents and sympathizers here. And the first thing to say is at the top one here, white evangelical Protestants really do stand alone. There's no other religious group in the country that's anywhere near, this is basically two thirds of white evangelicals who are either in the first, in the adherent category or the sympathizer category.

This group, other Protestants of color, is an interesting one, too. It doesn't actually show up on most surveys because this is only 3% of the population, right. So the reason why we have it here is because we have a very large survey. We're actually able to break this group out. I think it's a, is a kind of mixed group. It's consist of Asian American and Pacific Islander Protestants, mixed race Protestants or those who are of a racial or ethnic identity other than Black or Latino. Right. And so it's a, it is a mixed group. It does tend to lean Republican and lean conservative. So that's one of the reasons why you see it up there really in the neighborhood of Latino Protestants, Latino Protestants.

Also, you see the real difference between Latino Protestants and Latino Catholics here on the chart, that really goes toward their voting patterns. Latino Protestants tend to lean toward voting for Trump, Latino Catholics lean toward voter, voting for Democratic presidential candidates very consistently over the last few years. And then there is we'll talk more about this, there is one Democratic leaning constituency that's up there around four in ten, and that is Black Protestants, right, who, who tend to score higher than, than other kind of Democratic leaning constituencies, we'll come back to that in a minute. But just to kind of flag that here.

And then clearly those who are non-Christian religious traditions, Jewish-Americans and the religiously unaffiliated, very, very few, right, in the Christian nationalism cohort. And just here's the other side just so you can see it. But among white evangelical Protestants, it really is only about a third who are either skeptics or rejecters. That group sticks out more than any other group.

One other question that, that often comes up is whether people who claim to be Christian nationalists are really just nationalists, right? And whether they really are religious or whether they're

just Christian in name only, is the term that gets thrown out a lot of times. What we found is in fact that religious attendance is positively correlated with, with claim, with belief in Christian nationalism views. Right. So the more likely you are to attend church, the more likely you are to hold Christian nationalist views. So it is very connected to churches, not to people who are just sitting it out on Sunday morning. So those who attend once a week are more, basically half of that group is either in the adherer or sympathizer category. As you go down to less frequent religious attendance, you see the less likelihood of being either a Christian nationalism adherent or a sympathizer. Here's the other side, so you can see that as well. So I think that's an important kind of contribution in the study as well.

Here's one other thing, is that we found that that evangelical identity is actually operative, not just in white circles, right. But is operative in African-American and Hispanic circles as well. So, for example, here is among whites who are, among whites, those who identify as evangelical born again are basically about five times as likely to be an adherent than those who are Christian, but not evangelical. Right. So that's the difference that an evangelical identity makes among whites here. And you see a very similar thing among Hispanic Americans, those who identify as evangelical or born again, much more likely to be adherents than those who are Christian, but do not identify as evangelical. And a similar thing among African-Americans as well. The factor, you know, is here somewhere between a factor of five and six, that evangelical identity makes, even within different racial or ethnic groups and the likelihood of being an adherent.

And here is partisanship as well. And there is you know, we sometimes in political science circles, you will hear the term asymmetric polarization, right. So we know that we're polarized, right? But the asymmetry of it, right is important. And here we really see this, right? We've got a majority of Republicans, 54% in either the Christian nationalism adherent or the sympathizer category. Independents way down at 23, Democrats at 15. So kind of just again, pause here for a moment. If we take the religious and the political thing together, what we see is the country, right, 2 to 1 leaning against these ideas of Christian nationalism, but one religious group, two thirds of white evangelicals leaning toward it and one political party, Republicans leaning toward it. So that's kind of the, kind of power picture that we're seeing in terms of what these numbers mean here.

One of the things that is playing a big role in this and driving this is media, media consumption. So who people most trust and the way we ask this question is, who do you most trust to

give you accurate information about current events and politics? And we give a whole range of television news sources here. This first category of far-right news are outlets like One America News, Newsmax, those kinds of, there are newer media outlets on television, but you can see the difference that these make here, right, in driving adherence to Christian nationalism. Those who trust those more far right news outlets are overwhelmingly so eight, eight and ten, right, are in one of these top two categories. Fox News continues to play a big role there. They've got a bigger following than the other far right news that 54% looks about like the Republican number here are either in adherents or sympathizers category. Those who say they do not trust any television news sources are kind of lower, and those who trust basically any other mainstream news or broadcast news, CNN, etc., are down here about, about a quarter in those categories.

And then here's the other side. And you really see the, you know, the difference between these top two and really anything else here that so it is this kind of these media centers driving this worldview as well. I'm going to show you some things about demographics here. One interesting thing is there really aren't that many gender differences here in likelihood of being a Christian nationalism adherent or Christian nationalism sympathizer. They look very, very similar. There are some age differences that you'll see here, and the break is basically under 50, over 50. That's where we see the biggest, the biggest breaks. They're not huge, but they're kind of linear. And with a big jump between over, over 50, those older, more likely to be Christian nationalism adherents or sympathizers.

Education, very similar thing. A break between college, four-year college degree or more, and those with some college or less. Here you can see, you know, and if you look at the rejecters too, you can kind of see the, you know, those with the four-year college degree, basically twice as likely as those with a high school or less degree to be Christian nationalism rejecters. And here we saw less differences by race than we really thought we might see; I'm going to come back to this in a minute. We saw a hint of that in the Black Protestant numbers in the religion slide. But basically, the numbers between all white Americans, all Black Americans look very, very similar. Right. There are some small differences here, but, but not big ones here. I'm going to come back to the role that whiteness plays in a moment.

So we also were interested in this survey in thinking about how does Christian nationalist views correlate with other kinds of ideologies that have been circulating, particularly on the political right. So we're going to ask about a number of these and show you the correlations here. So that, you

know, basically it's the Christian nationalist views don't sit in a vacuum. They're intersecting with a number of other sets of views. So here are a number of views that have to do with kind of denials of structure, structural racism in the country. And, and in each of these, you'll see that we have all Americans as the top one and Christian nationalism adherents in the second one, and we've scaled them all the same direction. So you can kind of see it. So some are do agree some are disagree depending on which direction the question leaned.

So the first one, just to give you an example, generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for many Black Americans to work their way out of the lower class. So the number, this is the number of people who disagree with that statement, in other words, deny that anything in the past has anything to do with upward mobility or opportunities for, for African-Americans today. Among all Americans, 45% disagree with that statement. But among Christian nationalism adherents, 70% disagree with that statement, right. So big jump. Here's a positive correlation. And you can see that across all the rest of these questions, I won't read them all, but you basically see this, you know, 20, 30-point jump among Christian nationalism adherents.

And here I do want to see, show you across the next few slides the difference that sort of white identity makes within Christian nationalism right here. And you basically see these numbers just tick up one more click among those who are Christian nationalism adherents and who are white, basically at least another ten points that they that they come up the scale. So and that one we were looking at here, 83% of Christian national adherents who are white disagree with that statement about structural racism. And then look at Christian nationalism adherents of color on this. Right. Really different here. So like again the first one Christian national adherents of color look like the general population, only 46% disagree with that statement and you can see these gaps 20, 30, even 40, almost 40 points on the first one. So even within kind of Christian nationalism adherents, it's kind of whiteness tends to have its own kind of vector of operation here.

Here is one about anti-immigrant views, very similar. These are the number of Americans, for example, I'll do the bottom one this time as an example, immigrants are invading our country and replacing our cultural and ethnic backgrounds, essentially a survey version of kind of so-called replacement theory that you kind of heard kind of bouncing around conservative media. Only 30%, 32% of Americans agree with that statement. But 71% of Christian nationalism adherents agree with that statement. Right. And if you look at those who are white, it ticks up another ten points. Right.

Christian nationalism adherents who are white, much more likely to hold this kind of anti-immigrant view. And Christian nationalism adherents of color, higher than the general population, but are nearly 30 points different than those who are white among Christian, Christian nationalism. Another one around anti-Muslim views. A couple of questions here, the values of Islam are at odds with American values and way of life. That question was on a scale that says, do you think this describes the situation in the U.S. today completely or somewhat are those that we've graphed, and then we should prevent people from some majority Muslim countries from entering the U.S. These are people who agree.

So again, the general population, take the bottom one, prevent people from coming, from entering the U.S. 29% of the public, but 67% of Christian nationalism adherents agree with that statement. And then if we look at numbers who are white, again, it ticks up a little bit, not quite as much as it does, is it did in the other questions. And you can see this gap between Christian nationalism adherents who are white and those who are not white. So that's the pattern really on anti-Muslim views, anti-immigrant views and attitudes around racism with regard to African-Americans.

The view gets a little more complex when we get to anti-Semitism. So we have a number of questions here that are around kind of attitudes about Jewish Americans. And you see, again, already the gap between all Americans and, and the Christian nationalism adherence here. And that gap is there. But look what happens when we look at white, the Christian nationalism adherents who are white basically look at that average for Christian National overall. And we see in a couple of places actually Christian nationalism adherents of color actually scoring a little bit higher on these attitudes that kind of correlate around anti-Semitism, particularly around Jewish people sticking together more than other Americans. And this idea that American Christians love Israel more than most American Jews do. So some complexity there in terms of race among Christian nationalism adherence.

And then finally, the other place that we, we saw is that there is a high correlation between holding traditional patriarchal gender roles and adherence to Christian nationalism as well. So here again, a number of statements here for the, society as a whole has become too soft and feminine, for example, 38% of the country agrees with that, but 66% of Christian nationals adherents agree with that. And then you can look at the numbers of white and nonwhite here again, the differences aren't quite as pronounced. And on a couple, for example, in a truly Christian family, the husband is the head of the household, and his wife submits to his leadership, we actually have Christian nationalism

adherents of color scoring slightly higher on that measure than we do. But overall, again, this kind of idea of patriarchal gender roles is something highly correlated with Christian nationalism as well. So we've said a little bit about whiteness in those, but two other places to kind of think about this, we had a standalone question that was not part of the scale that really tried to put the idea of kind of Eurocentric Christianity right heart and center of the question.

So this question says, God intended America to be a new promised land where European Christians could create a society that would be an example to the rest of the world. So we got kind of white Christianity built into the question here. Among all Americans, you'll see there's about three in ten Americans agree with that statement. And then you can see it's highly stratified by Christian nationalism views. So Christian nationalism adherents, it's 83% of of well of Christian nationalism adherents and sympathizers kind of agree with that statement. You can see it kind of going down here as you go down the scale toward rejecters as well. And here's the rest of the the other side of that who mostly agree and mostly disagree. But again, this with whiteness kind of built into it, you can see still highly correlated by Christian nationalism.

The other thing the survey did to try to test out, because one of the challenges is with a survey, is getting people to tell you things that are sensitive, right? People, survey respondents, even if we kind of give them guarantees of anonymity, which we do, the surveys are all online and anonymous, it's still sometimes difficult to get people to tell you the truth about, especially things about racism. So we designed an experiment where we basically gave, we split our sample in half, and because we had a big 6000 person sample, we had two samples of 3000 people and we gave one group only the first three of these questions and asked, and here's what we did, we said, don't tell us which one of these questions you agree with, just tell us how many you agree with what you gave them an extra level of anonymity, right, they could just say, I agree with two, I agree with three of those statements. So that was one half of the sample. The other half of the sample. We gave all four questions. Same thing. Don't tell us how many, or don't tell us which ones, just tell us how many. So I agree with three, I agree with four.

So it turns out that what you can do is because the sample is split, the only way the average number of questions people agree with can be higher on the treatment side is if people picked that last question. Right. So it's a kind of indirect way of measuring people being willing to pick something that they might not be willing to tell you directly. Right. So it turns out, so that's what we did in the

survey. And we were able to estimate the number of people picking that fourth question. Right. Without telling us directly that they picked it. And it turns out that our estimates are that 17% of, of Americans picked that question. And it's a pretty strong one, right? The United States is a white Christian nation, I am willing to fight to keep it that way. Right. That was the question. Right. And we estimate using that survey experiment, 17% of Americans kind of hold that idea.

And I just wanted to put up our scale here, our Christian nationalism adherents and sympathizer scale, just so you can see them side by side. It's kind of gives us some confidence that we're probably, we're in the ballpark here with our scale with that experiment kind of verifying somewhere in the middle of this group the number of people who think this about, it's not just a Christian nation, but a white Christian nation and willing to keep it that way.

So finally, here I'm going to wrap up with so, questions around violence. And one of the kind of key concerns we saw on January six, right, is whether Christian nationalism leads itself to violence and willingness to kill, harm or maim other fellow citizens, attack our government institutions here. And so we asked some questions about whether people, when they've had a disagreement, had they done any of the following, had they pushed, grabbed or shoved someone or they hit, bit, or slapped someone, or have they threatened to use or actually used a gun, knife or a weapon on someone? So not that many Americans have done this, right? Thankfully. And you can kind of see the numbers here for, for all Americans. But it does turn out that among those who are Christian nationalism adherents, the numbers do tick up slightly more likely to say just in resolving disagreements here, and if you compare that to rejecters, you can see the gap, right, those on the other opposite end of the spectrum, so that's kind of individual experiences or tendencies toward violence.

What about political violence? So we've been asking this question for a while, this question about whether, so it reads, because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country. Here is all Americans, 16% of the country agrees with that statement. But again, among those who are Christian nationalism adherents, that number jumps to 40. Or among, you know, jumps to 40%, sympathizers is 22, and you can kind of see it going down. So there is a much higher relationship between attitudes towards political violence as well among Christian nationalism adherents. So on that cheery note, I'm going to kind of wrap the presentation and I'm going to take my seat, I'll have a little bit more to say in terms of commentary as part of the panel. But thank you for your patience. And with that, let me welcome the panel to join me.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: I always have some compliment for the way in which Robby does PowerPoints, I try to find some metaphor. I will prove myself to be a Boston Celtics adherent and sympathizer by saying he is the Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown of Power Points. And if you know me, you know, that's a really high compliment. That was a fantastic, I want to thank Melissa for pointing out this is the 17th time we've done this together. You don't count when you're having a good time. So I had no idea. But it's not surprising. And Bill Galston and I and all the people at Brookings are really, really grateful for this partnership with PRRI. I do want to thank, so I don't forget, Catalina Navarro, the person you see running around to make sure this actually works has done so much work to put this together. Max Keeney, my assistant, is here somewhere. Max has worked really hard, and I want to go back and thank Megan Bell, my former assistant who has done, did exceptional work when Robby and I first started, and Bill first started talking about this project.

And one thing I want to underscore is that in all of this polling, all 17 surveys, we have always assumed that religion has an important role to play in public life, the name of the organization, Robby and Melissa's organizations suggests that. But the issue is how this commitment to religion and its role in public life is disciplined in a free and pluralistic society, which is marked by a dedication to the religious freedom of all people, believers and non-believers alike. And that's why, that's why this study, I think, is very important.

And one other note here that I feel obligated to do, tomorrow there is a memorial service at the National Cathedral for a friend of many of ours, Michael Gerson, a who was a columnist for The Washington Post, a very devout faithful, an eloquent Christian and a conservative. And he wrote an extraordinary essay at the end of his life where he condemned an approach to politics that he said was closer to Game of Thrones than the Beatitudes. Nowhere, Mike went on, did Jesus demand political passivity from his followers, but his teaching are entirely inconsistent with an approach to public engagement that says this Christian country is mine, you are defiling it, and I will take it back by any means necessary. I just want to honor Mike today because he is in the thoughts of so many of us, so many of us.

We have an amazing panel here today and we are very, very grateful and I will introduce them. Well, I'll just start with Jemar Tisby is the author of The New York Times best-selling book, "The Color of Compromise"—what a great title— "The Truth about the Church's Complicity in Racism." His

latest book is "How to Fight Racism: Young Readers Edition," and he is the co-host of, co-host of the Pass the Mike Podcast. He's been the co-host since its inception seven years ago.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez is the William— see I got your name right; I'll get your professorship wrong— the Williams chair and professor of history and gender studies at Calvin University. Her research focuses on the intersection of gender, religion and politics. And she's the author— another great title for a book— she is the author of The New York Times best-selling book, "Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation."

And finally, a very, very old friend of mine. You know, he's not all that, I've committed, by the way, I'm never going to describe old friends anymore, a dear friend, we've known each other for a long time. Pete Wehner is, is the in-resident senior fellow at the Trinity Forum, a contributing opinion writer, as many of you know, for The New York Times and the contributing editor at The Atlantic, Pete served in the Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush administrations, including as deputy director of speechwriting and later, one of my favorite White House titles ever, the director of the Office of Strategic Initiatives for President George W. Bush. Some of you will remember the Saturday Night Live skit about strategery. He was the strategery coordinator. He is the author, a coauthor with Mike Gerson of "City of Man, Religion and Politics in a New Era," his most recent book is "The Death of Politics" How to Heal Our Frayed Republic After Trump," there's a good thought, and we will begin in the, it will begin today in the order I mentioned. Jemar, why don't you start us off?

Jemar Tisby: Thank you. Hi, everybody. My name's Jemar. Why don't we each go around and introduce ourselves. No, I'm just kidding.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: And all the 1500 people online.

Jemar Tisby: Shout out to you coming out on a random Wednesday morning to hear about a light and fuzzy topic like Christian nationalism. It can be heavy. It can cause us to go like this and frown. But being together and learning and trying to do something about it makes me feel like smiling. So we're going to go on a journey. It's going to be okay. We'll be dealing with some hard facts, but we'll do it together. How's that? Yeah. All right. So with that preamble, let me make this statement. White Christian nationalism is the greatest threat to democracy and the witness of the church in the United States today. White Christian nationalism is the greatest threat to democracy and the witness of the church in the United States today. These data back it up.

I define Christian nationalism as an ethno-cultural ideology that uses Christian symbolism to create a permission structure for the acquisition of political power and social control. An ethno-cultural ideology that uses Christian symbolism to create a permission structure for the acquisition of political power and social control. Lots of different definitions out there. Many of them very good. That's just how I think of it.

As we look at these most recent findings, one particular aspect stood out to me as a historian of race and religion, and it was this part. It says there are minimal differences in adherence to Christian nationalism beliefs by race. Minimal differences. Rates of support for Christian nationalism are roughly the same among white Americans, about 30% lean, and Black Americans, about 30% lean toward Christian nationalism. And I said, huh. That's interesting. Given the racial implications and ramifications of Christian nationalism, how could it be that there are minimal differences by race? And then I thought about it. Two things came up. One, there has always been some cooperation of the oppressed with the oppressor. That's how you get the trope of the Uncle Tom, right? It's the idea that you betray your own community and take sides with the dominant power. So that's always the case in whatever kind of oppression you're dealing with.

But secondly, Black Americans as a group are a highly religious group. On average, most Americans believe in God or a higher power. According to a Pew Research study in 2021, 97% of Black Americans believe in God or a higher power. And the vast majority of those folks are Christian. Protestant, at that. So it wouldn't surprise us that this language of God and country resonates with Black people. The difference is, what do we mean? What do we mean by those words? I contrast white Christian nationalism with black Christian patriotism. Nationalism and patriotism.

Let me give you one example. Last night, we heard the State of the Union, and if you had your caffeine going, you heard the response to the State of the Union from Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the new governor of Arkansas. She ran against Chris Jones, a Black man with a Ph.D. from M.I.T. What's so interesting about those two figures is that they both ran what I call faith forward campaigns. They foregrounded their Christian faith. They're both children of preachers, they both adhere to Christianity. Chris Jones is a minister. And yet what they meant when they looked at the intersection between faith and politics was very different. Just broadly speaking, when you talk about white Christian nationalism, it tends toward a rigid, narrow, authoritarian kind of politics. When you're talking

about black Christian patriotism, it tends toward an expansive, flexible, inclusive kind of politics. And so it's not just the words people use, it's the ramifications of what they mean by those words.

Now, you've heard me say a couple of times white Christian nationalism. I think Christian nationalism is a perfectly appropriate term. Takes less time to say. But I don't want us to forget the white in the white Christian nationalism part. That is to say, we cannot overlook the racial dimensions of Christian nationalism. Dr. Jones pointed some of that out. I'll just remind us that as we see resurgence of what we're now calling white Christian nationalism, that tends to happen around times when Black rights are expanding.

So we can look at sort of the most notorious group that represents white Christian nationalism— and if you never thought of them in these terms, I think it'll be appropriate— the Ku Klux Klan. First arose in the 1860s. What happened then? Emancipation after the Civil War. They got real active again in the 1950s and sixties. What was going on then? A civil rights movement where Black people were pushing for more civil rights. But perhaps the most widespread and virulent form happened in the Jim Crow era. What was going on then? Coincided in 1915 with this film, "The Birth of a Nation," which mythologized and romanticized the founding of the Klan and of a white Christian, mainly Protestant America.

So in conclusion, white Christian nationalism is not only the greatest threat to democracy and the witness of the church in the United States today, to put a finer point on it, white Christian nationalism is the greatest threat to a multiracial, inclusive democracy and a diverse church in the United States today. Thank you.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: I want to thank Jemar. And I want to, if I could, you, you raised a couple of issues which I'd like to sort of throw down to Robby to think about at the end, because Robby is going to respond, because there are two things I'd love you to talk about that you didn't in the PowerPoint. One is the remarkably close relationship of attitudes toward Christian nationalism, to attitudes both toward Donald Trump and toward Joe Biden, when you go through the data. And my read— and you could help me on this— when we're looking at the data is that there is actually some differentiator within the Republican coalition on, you know, measured by attitudes toward Christian nationalism.

The other thing which— thank you for mentioning the rise of the Klan— the, I, so much of research shows similarities between white Catholics and white Protestants, there's a real split between Catholics and Protestants in all of this data, white Catholics and white Protestants. I'd be

curious for you to address those. And with that, I want to turn, by the time this panel is done, we're going to have 5 million great questions that we're going to have to answer, I'll go to Pete and Pete, thank you so much for joining us, too.

Peter Wehner: Thanks. Thanks, E.J., ladies and gentlemen, for being here, Jemar for those powerful and, and I think true, true comments. A couple of points. I'll turn it over to Kristin and then we'll, we'll have a conversation. Maybe the first one is it to begin with, I'm going to speak as a person of the Christian faith because I am a person of the Christian faith. It's core to, to who I am. And I just want to say what I think is a cognitive dissonance, which is I think it'd be hard to find a figure in human history less likely to be a Christian nationalist than Jesus. It's, I just think the cognitive dissonance of that is a tremendously power, powerful, this is a person who was trying to break down the dividing walls and didn't see in nationalist terms. And yet to see him involved or his movement invoked, or those who claim to follow his name, to use Christian nationalism the way they do is, is puzzling and in many ways horrifying and saying that as a person of the Christian faith.

Second thing that I want to do is when I go over the data that Robby amassed, which is very, very helpful, I think it does need to be disaggregated. And he touched on this in his remarks. One is just the general public. How much affinity, is there varying degrees of affinity for Christian nationalism in the country as a whole? And it's certainly not a majority. But then how much of a hold does that movement have on the Republican Party? And that's a very different question. Two thirds of white evangelicals have some degree of affinity with how white nationalism, white Christian nationalism is defined. The evangelical, white evangelicals are the core, the most important constituency in the Republican Party. And so they basically carry the tune and, and, and the party itself follows it.

So there's a disproportionate influence on one of the two most important political parties in the world. And I think that means that this what I perceive to be a threat is, is larger than just the aggregate numbers would, would say. I'd also make the point that, that there are, there are views that one has, and then there's the question of what flows from the views. Right. So you can check a box and say, I agree or I disagree with X. That's very different from thinking that what I believe is going to drive me to act. And I do think a couple of the numbers that stood out to me that, that are in the, in the poll and data was 17% of white Christian nationals are willing to fight to keep the country that way.

And the other is the resort to violence, 40, 40%. What I think that means is it's not, again, just how you check your box on if you, life and politics is about disposition, temperament and sensibilities.

And I think that this Christian, white Christian nationalism view is shaping sensibilities in a very strong way. E.J. has covered politics for, for a long time, too, but I can't remember the sort of the energy that's behind this movement in politics in general in my lifetime in politics. Politics is, by its nature, a passionate endeavor. And it should be because it involves a lot of, a lot of stuff. But I think the aggression and the cultural aggression that we're seeing now is different and worrisome.

Third thing I want to talk about is, is catechesis, fancy word, but if you talk to a lot of people within the Christian community, theologians, pastors, it's the shaping of those, of those sensibilities. And in a lot of the conversations that I've had with pastors and theologians, they talk about this failure of catechesis. And we saw that, Robby, in the sources of information that people watch. This is what they imbibe, Russell Moore is a good friend of mine, has, has a term, he talks about Jesus as a hood ornament. And I think what's happened— and this is unwitting, I think for a lot of people of Christian faith— they would say that the Christianity, following Jesus is the most important thing in their life. I think in practice it's not. And I think that a lot of people are blind to it.

And I'm going to confess, I'm sure I struggle with this too, it's easier to see it in other people, blind spots than it is obviously in your, in your own. But I think what's happening is that culture, sociology, politics, partisanship is the thing that's driving a lot of people's views and faith is subordinate to that. And then people proof text the Bible to affirm what, what they, what they already believe. So I think this catechesis point is, is a very important one. And just one figure that I'll mention in that context is Tucker Carlson. Tucker Carlson is the most important figure on the American right media, he's the most important figure at Fox News. And you can see a, the direction that he's going in, you know, over time. And it's a bad direction and it's an ugly direction and it's a dangerous direction. But that's the kind of fuel that's, that's driving, driving this.

And last thing, and this is echoing Jim Morrison, a lot of what I said, I guess is echoing what he said, but you know that we're talking here about the threat to American democracy, which is really important, and we should care about that. But I do want to end by emphasizing the threat to American Christianity. This, this is acid. This is acid. And a lot of people who are not of people of faith are watching this unfold, and they're looking at it and are saying, this is a freak show. You want me to join this thing? And this is antithetical, as Mike wrote to the Beatitudes and to, and to much else. And I do think that if this issue is going to be solved or at least mitigated, an awful lot of work has to come from the church itself. And that is a task.

And a lot of people that I know, pastors and theologians again, are really concerned about, but they're searching around because they haven't traditionally wanted to involve themselves in politics. But they're going to have to do it. Because that's the landscape. And if that's happening, if this is unfolding among your own adherents, seems to me you have some moral obligation to be able to, to take responsibility for, for that. There's a great line in Wordsworth in the poem, the prelude that we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how. And I do think that people who are authentic followers of Jesus have to love that, and they have to teach other people within their community how to love that as well.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you so much, Pete. That's really powerful. And I just want to say before I turn to Kristin, the last point Pete made I think is really dramatized by one of the slides that Robby showed us, which is there is a really radical difference in attitudes toward Christian nationalism between Americans 65 and over and those 18 to 29. And when you look at people who are disaffiliating from religion, they are overwhelmingly in significant numbers in that 18 to 29 category. And I don't think and I, Pete suggests this, I don't think these facts are inconsistent, not only are they not inconsistent with each other, I think these facts are related. But thank you, Pete, so much. Kristin, thank you so much for joining us today.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez: Thank you. So as a historian, let me start off by saying that Christian nationalism is nothing new, right? And it might seem like it because the media has recently kind of discovered it. It's a, it's a handle that can help us talk about some of these patterns. But if you, if you look at thinking that America was founded as a Christian nation, that America's laws should reflect Christian values, that true Americans are Christians, right. These are commonly held views over time. And but they find expression in different ways. And so sometimes liberal Protestants are going to promote these values, Black Protestants again, in different ways. Since the 1970s, the dominant strand of Christian nationalism is that, has been shaped by the Christian right. And that's really what we're talking about here, for the most part, and that's what this survey is illuminating.

So a couple of things have changed, though, I think, in terms of, it's only quite recently that you have people proudly self-identifying as Christian nationalists, you could see some evidence of that in the survey. And people like Marjorie Taylor Greene most prominently, you've got folks like Andrew Torba, founder of Gab, writing a book on Christian nationalism and inside Christian spaces and conservative evangelical spaces, we're seeing more people embrace the term. Yes, I'm a

Christian nationalist. Not only am I a Christian nationalist, but all Christians ought to be Christian nationalists. True Christians are, by definition, Christian nationalists, right? This is not still the majority view, though I would say that there is still a lot of pushback inside these spaces that those who would adhere to ideas that we label Christian nationalism will often reject the label still and say that is a smear campaign that the left is using, the media is using to smear good Christian Americans. Right. And so it's a contested term inside these spaces.

Just a couple of days ago, I got a letter from somebody, an email who said exactly this. This is a smear campaign from the left, I have yet to see anybody in the media, any scholar define Christian nationalism. Professor that I am, I responded with a couple of book suggestions and a number of links to surveys, right. He wasn't particularly receptive. But I hold out hope it, when we look at surveys, then, what do we see? Right. We see nuance, we see variation. Not all Republicans are Christian nationalists. Not all white evangelicals are Christian nationalists. We also see variation in terms of enthusiasm, adherence, right. We have the adherents, and we have the sympathizers. And these are kind of boxes, but then within those boxes, there is a range of views, there's a spectrum of levels of commitment. And that is really important to keep in mind.

Surveys also show us what this actually means, right? What, what both Jemar and Pete have already surfaced here. What does this actually mean? And we can see that Christian nationalist commitment, some of these core commitments correlate to a number of views where we can flesh this out. What are the contours of Christian nationalism today with respect to race and racism, with respect to immigration, with respect to patriarchy, political violence, authoritarianism? Right. And we see these correlations and we see a lot of consistency over time across various surveys. And as a historian, let me say that the, the data being produced by social scientists here aligns very closely with what I've seen in the historical evidence as well.

All right. So there's a lot of, there's a close fit here. Just last night, I got a call from a local reporter who is covering essentially a Christian nationalist takeover of a local county commission. And she's very, very sharp. She's not a Christian herself, not used to covering religion. And so she said, I just have one question I can't quite parse out. I'm not a Christian, but I've read the Christian Bible and I don't understand what's Christian about this. Because when I look at the teachings of Jesus Christ, as he was saying, I don't see how it logically follows that these, these positions. Right. And I said that would be a really great question to put out to some of these, you know, Christian nationalists county

commissioners. Right. And so there is, there is that tension. And this, this surveys are going to show us what this actually means, how this is worked out.

A couple of other points here. The fact that there's a lot of consistency across these surveys in terms of how this is working out in contemporary Christian nationalist circles is because these are not random commitments, or kind of random, randomly collected agenda. There is a deeper story underneath these. That is, it defines a sense of meaning, purpose and identity for those who hold these views. An, just one example. Patriarchy, gender. How does this actually work in the stories that— I'm a scholar of conservative evangelicalism— the stories that they tell themselves. It all fits together. God has created strong men, given them strength, aggression to protect faith, family and nation. Christian nationalism turns around a sense of loss, right. Something has been lost that needs to be restored. There is a sense of threat, this us versus them. And therefore we need to fight to restore Christian America. And strong men have to, have to fight to defend their faith and their nation. Right. So there is this deep story.

Finally, what kind of threat are we looking at? I will say I'm hearing from a lot of people, not just reporters, but ordinary folks at the local level saying this is a real threat. People are leaving, moving out of their states, moving out of school districts and feeling this at the local level, national level, the threat to our democracy. And here I'm going to echo I think what Pete was suggesting is that among adherents, there are clear anti-democratic impulses here, very clear. Democracy is held up as idolatry in some of these circles. What is more important? Upholding democracy or upholding God's law, right. And the answer is clear. But that's not the case for all who lean in this direction. The commitment to democracy varies here, but as we look at what threat this actually poses and if we look to the future, what I have my eye on is these sympathizers and precisely where their sympathies lie.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you so much. And I'm so grateful for those comments. Two points I want to lift up. One is, it is really important to know there's a long history of Christian nationalism in the United States or Christian nationalist movements and parties in the 1930s, some of them very anti-Semitic that were very active in the country. So this term is not new. Secondly, if I may invoke scripture at some risk, you know, in my father's house, there are many mansions, in Robby's surveys, there are many boxes. And I think one of the things that those of you who look at this survey in more detail might think about is there's a lot of subtlety here. Just before the event started, we were talking about the difference you underscore between sympathizers and adherents. This is very complicated

and it's something to bear in mind. And 10% is a big number, but it's not a big number. And it's worth thinking about what that means for our polity.

Before Robby begins, I want to say that we got, we put out an invitation— and again, thank you, Catalina, for organizing this— for questions that people out in the country had. And in my time at Brookings, and maybe I missed something, I have never seen a response like we got to this event. A question after question after question from New England to the Deep South, from the East Coast to the West Coast through the Rockies and Plains, it's amazing how many people and I'm just going to read, we cannot, I am sorry, I hope we answered some, some of the questions I think we've answered. We cannot answer them all directly.

I, just before Robby begins with his reply, I just want to read a few of them to give you a flavor of what people around the country were interested in. Is Christian nationalism liable to decline if Trump is not elected president? What relations can be discerned regarding beliefs in climate change and identity as a Christian Nationalist? What, what is the role— and Pete raised this— of Christian school educators in combating Christian nationalism? Is Christian nationalism inherently authoritarian or intolerant, or are there moderate forms? How do you start a conversation with friends who don't think this is a problem and just a one other, two others? And then I could, the whole list, I could take the whole event with all these good questions of what are the connections, if any, between the so-called prosperity gospel and white Christian nationalism, which I thought was a really interesting and sophisticated question. And, and again, to go back to Pete's question, how can clergy be persuaded to return to teaching Jesus instead of division? Anyway, I want to thank everybody out there for these questions. And Robby, you can take all of those, plus the ones I threw at you and do it very economically in a few minutes.

Robert Jones: All right. I want to make sure we leave some time for questions, but I do want to, I'll just try to stitch together a few things. I'm so glad to have historians in the room, by the way, thank you for that. You know, Jemar, to your points, you know, the one thing I was interested in is seeing the way, what difference white identity made, right. So even in people who share the set of commitments to kind of Christian supremacy really in the country and like that you know the one that you know, the, you know, that U.S. law should be based on Christian values. I mean, pretty straightforward. These are, by the way, just like if you go back and look at all five of those questions, they are all anti-democratic sentiments, right? When I make that point, sure, they are Christian

dominionist sentiments, are fundamentally incompatible with a pluralistic democracy. So I want to get that out there to you.

But even, even inside there, what you see is that the way they correlate, there's some complexity, as I showed, but the way they correlate with concepts of anti-blackness, concepts of anti-immigrant attitudes and anti-Muslim attitudes in particular, is where whiteness really where it rears its head, even inside of the group that shares those, those sentiments. And I think, and it's stronger right, among those who go to church, right. So that's the thing we've got to remember here.

And so that takes me to Pete and Pete, so as someone so I grew up, you know, in the South as an Evangelical Southern Baptist in Jackson, Mississippi. And it is heartbreaking to see this data, right? Those are my people, right. And you see that data, and but the journey that I've been on is I realize, you know what Kristin said, this is not new. And how do we get, how did we get here, right. That we've lost all purchase on the difference between the Jesus of the Bible and, you know, the stuff. And I think the way we got here is, you know, the Southern Baptist Convention, which became and still is the largest expression of Protestant Christianity in the country, was founded to justify slavery. That's how we got here, right?

And so every time we took the path of accepting white supremacy as part and parcel of Christianity, which we did over and over and over through Jim Crow, through the civil rights movement, every time we did that, we strengthened its hand. Right. And so now we wonder about the impotence of our churches to kind of wrestle control back. Right. But it's because for hundreds of years, we've accepted these things as being compatible. So I think that's, that's the real challenge. And on the not new part, I think that's really important. This is a new label for a very old problem.

And the one thing I wanted to point to, too, that that hasn't really come up, that this, this idea of America as a promised land for European Christians is so deep and so strong, right, within us. And this idea that the words you will hear this prefix re over and over and over, reclaim, revive, restore, right, and make America great again. Right. All these backward looking, reclaiming kind of things I think are about how old this idea really is and the power that it has with us today. So I'll stop there.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Just would you just briefly, the question, two questions I had just to share the data a bit. One, on the direct connection to politics, which I think people found really striking on, just looking at Trump and Biden. And the other is I was really struck because as a student of your work, seeing over time the, the differences between white Catholics and white Protestants are really

diminishing on a lot of questions. And this one, you really had quite a gap. I was curious your reflections on that.

Robert Jones: Yeah. Okay, great. So just, just quickly then. So it is also, Christian nationalism is also very tightly tied with support for Trump. So in this survey, our overall favorability for Trump is 32%, right, that's pretty consistent with other, other surveys so among all Americans, 32%. I'll just give you the numbers as they go up. Among Christian nationalism rejecters, it is 8% among Christian nationalist skeptics, it is 29% among Christian nationalism sympathizers, it jumps to 57% and among Christian nationalism adherents, it is 81%. Right. So you can just see that. And Biden just looks like the inverse of that essentially there.

And then the other question was about, oh, about, yeah, so on that that religion side, what we did see is you still see white evangelicals up there on some other measures, we did see this clustering of basically white Christians, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, right. And you see that still in voting patterns, there is this, if we look at voting patterns, white evangelicals tend to vote like 80% for Republican presidential candidates, white Catholics, white mainline Protestants, the non, the non-evangelical tend to vote about six in ten for Republican candidates. We see a little bit more distance between the evangelicals and the, so the white evangelicals are still, Protestants are very still very distant from the white Catholics. But the main liners and the, and the white Catholics are further down, they're only about three in ten who are either in the white Christian adherence or the, the sympathizer category. So there's more distance on this question between, between those two.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Yeah, I was grateful to Jemar for bringing up the Klan and it's worth there may, I wonder if there's some historical memory lurking back there, because the revived Klan in the twenties was anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, as well as anti-Black, and it was all linked together. And you wonder if there's part of that. Jemar, did you want to comment on that? Because I think you, you almost feel it in the data. But go ahead.

Jemar Tisby: You don't have to speculate. So this is a quote from the founder of the Resurgent Klan in a New York Times article in the 1920s remarking about and describing the Klan, he said, the Ku Klux Klan admits membership to none but native born, white, gentile, Protestant Americans who statement of principles was a restoration of the fundamental principles of American democracy, as embodied in the Constitution and an organization whose code of conduct was Christianity.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you. I don't think I've ever had as on point an answer as that one. Thank you, thank you so much. Last thing before we go to the audience, and we're going to have mikes going around, by the way, if you could confine preaching to the weekend, we'd be grateful if you could keep your, notice that was a cross tradition question, weekend broadly Friday through Sunday. The, if you could keep your questions short, I'd like to bring a lot of people in for that period. A lot of interest on these questions in antisemitism. What can you say about that Robby and anyone else on the panel?

Robert Jones: Yeah, there was more complexity as I showed on those slides on anti-Semitism. There were actually, some of the scores among white Christian adherents of color being slightly higher, right. And that's something we didn't see on many of the other measures. So that's within white Christian nationalism adherence. But it's still worth saying that white Christian nationalism is positively correlated with anti-Semitic attitudes, right? We should not miss the forest for the trees here. There is this kind of racial complexity within the group, but it is part and parcel of, you know, the worldview here.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: You know, thank you. I just had interest, I should have said concern in the, among many of the many of the questioners. So who wants to start? We've got Rachel, do you want to come in? So I'll go across the first row and right around. So why don't I take all three of you if I could, and then people can pick, pick the questions that they want and evade the hard ones that they don't want to answer. Please, welcome, it's great to see you.

Audience Member: Thank you very much. Economic power up until the sixties, pretty much rested with white people. It didn't matter if you were in control of the Ford GM management structure, or you had the day versus the night shift in the factory floor. So isn't it true for white people that they have less economic power and feel that way than they did in 1955 when they didn't have to compete with Blacks. They didn't have to compete with women. I'm not justifying it. I'm just saying the average 75 year old remembers when they ruled rich or poor.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you for that. Thank you so much. Rachel Laser right over here, Catalina, I'm just going to do this corner here and then we'll do, we'll do it geographically. Go ahead.

Audience Member: Thank you. Yeah, this, this has been incredible. Thanks for the amazing research once again, Robby. So, church state separation feels like the obvious solution and antidote, right? Because for a group that is trying to cement their power and privilege and codify it in our law, if

we say you have to separate church and state, you fight back effectively. What is the most important strategy in your minds for nationally recommitting to church state separation, and especially since we're such a predominantly still religious nation because of church state separation.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Would you remind people of your job inside of that question?

Audience Member: Yes, I am the president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: All right. Bless you. Thank you, sir. All four of you, then. Yeah, go ahead.

Audience Member: Sure. Todd Stiefel, head of Stiefel Free Thought Foundation. I'm curious, at least in my mind, it feels like the kind of war in education that's going on in Florida and elsewhere is much rooted in an attempt to kind of whitewash the history of Christian nationalism in this country. And I'm curious if you folks agree with that and what we can do about it.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: And then lastly for this round, thank you.

Audience Member: Hi, I'm Amanda Tyler, executive director of Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and lead organizer of Christians Against Christian Nationalism. So I have two questions that really stood out for me from the excellent presentation, Robby. One was the slide on the relationship between Christian nationalism adherence and anti-Black racism. And I thought it really complicated the question of the relationship of white supremacy and Christian nationalism. How much is this white supremacy that is using, in Jemar's words, the permission structure of Christian nationalism? And how much of this can be really attributed to Christian nationalism as an ideology itself?

And the second slide that caught my attention was about the fact that the more, if you go to church more, you're more likely to be a Christian nationalist. I think that begs the question about what's going on in our churches and how much of it is Christianity, how much of it is Christian nationalism? That's an active conversation going on in a lot of quarters. And I would just love your understanding of how we understand Christianity as opposed to Christian nationalism.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: And could I add an extra point to that question, which is how much of it is a detachment of liberal Christians from Christianity? Because the fact that they're churchgoing is connected to that suggests there's, it's a two-way street going on there. And I'd be very curious who wants, anyone else before Robby throws data at us with, with the great curve and fastball. Yeah, go ahead.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez: Yeah. I wanted to respond to this, too, in terms of what we saw in that the media kind of quote unquote, secular media, right. Fox News and so on, very important, I don't want to diminish their role. What's not in, in this survey is Christian media and, you know, explicitly Christian media, because I don't know that we can call Fox secular purely. And, and so what we're looking at this deep story has been, I mean, you used the term catechesis, we could, we could use the term indoctrination, grooming, if you will, or discipleship, right. You know, what are we talking about here? But what we see is for generations now, Christian publishers, Christian Radio, Christian Homeschool Curriculum, Christian school textbooks have told this story, the story about America, the story about Christianity. Right. It runs deep.

And so this is not ultimately a story of politics hijacking religion, right. Christianity, you know, whether we can make claims about you got Christianity wrong, but people who think they are Christians, who claim the Christian faith are from the grassroots up inculcating this, articulating this and reinforcing it. So I think that's a very important point.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: And also the possibility that the mainstream media may give disproportionate attention. I suppose we are guilty of that today, but that the mainstream media give disproportionate attention to this brand. I'd be curious, Pete, if you've thought about that.

Peter Wehner: I'd say yes and no. Yes, in the sense that that white evangelical Christianity involves millions and millions of people and really good and decent people. And I know of stories, I mean, I was out at Calvin University a couple of weeks ago, and, and Nick Wolterstorff was talking about the church that he had started to house Syrian refugees. I mean, you see this all over the country, these acts of tremendous charity and self-giving, church that I'm a part of McLean pres, it's taking it Afghan refugees. Those stories often don't get told. They, they, they ought to be told.

On the other hand, this is, this is real. I mean, something has changed, and this is a, there's a real threat. We saw it most vividly on January six and you see it see it rising. This is below the radar, but I think it's important that this tour that Michael Flynn, former national security advisor, is doing, which has the imprimatur of Charisma News, is I mean, that's really grassroots and a lot of people aren't, aren't following it, they should, just want to make one quick point, E.J., it touches on one of the questions you got, which is how do you start conversations with people who hold views different.

And here I'm talking to you, but I'm also talking to myself and that is I have to be careful not to dehumanize the people who I disagree with. It's really easy to do and it's easy for me to put people in

cartoon, create cartoon images and boxes in the same way that I feel like others do. In my experience and this I've changed in the last 15 years, I would say ten, 15 years, I have much less faith in the capacity to overwhelm people by, by arguments, by data, certainly by condescension. Ultimately, I don't know how you do this writ large, I do know how you do it writ small, which is you have to enter into people's lives. And what I've tried to do, when I've done it best and I haven't always done it best, is to try and listen to the people, tell me about your experience. Why do you believe what you believe.

Kristin said something very important. There are issues and then these issues are often proxy for core identity, right? You're having a discussion with someone and you're thinking, why is there so much energy around this issue? And the reason is it's not the issue, it's what that issue represents. And when any of us feel our core identity is under attack, if we feel like we're losing power, if we think that the country is on the edge, if we think our kids are under attack, that's going to stir up a lot of strong feelings. So I just think it's really important to try and enter into the world without necessarily, I would say, my strong views on this, without ceding to to to them. So I just wanted to.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Could I do the following? What I'd like to do is have Jemar and Robby close. I'm going to keep these three questions on tap for them. I have the church state separation issue, the economic displacement issue, and the Florida, Florida policies issue. Let me bring in two more people. And then, Jemar, you can respond to any of this. And then Robbie will answer everything else. But let's go over who had hands on that side, Rich Cizik. The three across here, if you'll be quick, because I'm going a little over time. Rich, grab the mic. Thanks.

Audience Member: A number of evangelicals created evangelicals for democracy to respond to the threat, broad threat, not just Christian nationalism, but the issue that we found most interesting is the response of Hispanics. For example, we did a Facebook ad you can look for, it's called Was Judas the First Christian Nationalist and pardon the theology, and I don't, don't, don't decipher that. But the point was to factor out, you know, what do people think about this? And we got an immediate response within a few weeks before the election of over 700,000 Hispanics when we put it in Spanish. And so my question, Robby, and to anyone else is we found, we found that the Hispanic community is particularly interested in the question and very susceptible. And any reactions on that score?

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you, sir, I think it was. Or the lady in the back there. Oh, go ahead. Why don't you give it to the gentleman if you can be quick and then the lady in the back there and then we'll close.

Audience Member: [inaudible] You brought up the what I called a major, the chief inconsistency of the Christian nationalism today, the belief that the life is precious, in a woman or girls womb, she should be required to give birth to it. But at the same time, after the life is born, that it become a burden on, on society especially if it comes across the border or is dependent on welfare. And that sort of an inconsistency that should be pointed out in Christian nationalism. Thank you.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you. And then ma'am, yeah, go ahead.

Audience Member: Thank you. So as was mentioned earlier on the panel, 10% isn't a lot, but then 10% is a lot, especially in the American political system where a lot of our like institutions aren't necessarily dependent on just like a strict majority, like the Electoral College or state government. And I'm wondering if there's any disparities in the rate of adherence to white Christian nationalism between the electorate at large and then government officials, where we're seeing the people who are adherents in the electorate able to kind of leverage that collective power to have a disproportionate influence on governance in the United States.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you. I just, just so it doesn't get lost on the economic displacement thing, I think there is, although not necessarily much in this survey, some evidence that there is a linkage between this economic change in areas, you know, I think the city of Detroit lost two thirds of its population because of deindustrialization, Pittsburgh lost half its population. I think there is evidence of a relationship between some of this discontent and an economic change. But we could talk about it after.

Audience Member: [inaudible] 1950 would have white jobs, colored jobs and then female jobs. And sometime in the sixties that changed. And consequently, whites at the top and bottom of the income scale are competing beyond themselves.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you. But anyway, that, we should. There's a whole big argument and discussion to be had about, I'm glad you put that on the table. Sir, yeah, Jemar, so you've got this rich panoply to work with, and then Robby can bring us home, and Bill will close with a final prayer. Our final, I guess, in prayer, but in the broad, inclusive sense.

Robert Jones: Don't leave anything on the table, Jemar.

Jemar Tisby: Yeah. Very good. To, to the whole kind of concept of white people, some white people feeling embattled and disenfranchised and it's not the America they once knew, I'll just say this oft recited phrase: when you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression. When you're

accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression. I didn't come up with that, but it's very helpful, right? So as rights and wealth and resources get more equitably spread— which they're not even close to yet— then the people who had those privileges feel like something is being taken away when really we're just increasing equality.

To the schools. Oh, my, my, my. So I began as a sixth-grade teacher and a middle school principal. And what is happening in our school systems is chilling. Last night, Sarah Huckabee Sanders announced that today she's going to release her education plan, which, given her talking points last night, just look like a big volley in the culture wars. Right? And when I went to a conservative seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, that was the first time I heard the phrase Caesar's schools, the idea of giving up your children to the secular state and how evil that was.

So what I see happening is an attempt at one of two things, either to take over public education and put prayer back in schools and read the Bible and say, in God we trust and all of those kinds of things in the public sphere in education or completely defund and under-resource schools even more, and funnel all of that toward quote unquote, school choice, which then allows institutions to teach and inculcate, disciple their students in this Christian nationalist ideology. That's very important, happening in real time right now.

I'll also say a lot of the questions, particularly online, have to do with the practical aspects. What do we do? I would point to Christians Against Christian nationalism. Just Google it, there's a whole suite of resources mainly directed at the church because that's been a big part of the problem. But I think there's also resources for everyone there.

The last resource I'll point to is one we should not overlook but often do, which is the Black church. It is a religious institution expressly founded because of racism and white supremacy and for generations has been combating what we're labeling white Christian nationalism, but what to Black people has always been racial discrimination. And so this is a time, if we really want to see change, we've actually got to start learning from different voices than we're typically accustomed to learning from. And they don't have the most money, they don't have the biggest platforms, so we have to seek them out. But I'm letting you know it's there. It's there.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: Thank you. Robby. All right.

Robert Jones: All right. I'll start with Florida. So my daughter lives in Florida, so I've been following things fairly closely down there. And you know, the word that just keeps coming to my, to my

mind, I haven't read anything about this, but is cover up. Right. That's what we're really seeing. Right. Just at the moment that our very challenging history's coming to light. Right. We have the Black Lives Matter movement kind of bringing this stuff up into kind of broad international consciousness. Right. At least in my generation, that's something fundamentally unique that, you know, in my lifetime that I really haven't experienced.

And I think just at the time that's coming to the fore, just the time there's a reckoning with that history, there's a cover up. Right. And I really, I think all of the stuff around so-called critical race theory is really about just not wanting to deal with this. How do we not, we take it off the shelves, right. Just as there is an explosion of resources and books and stuff coming online, we just make sure that stuff's not there. Right. And so I think it is a denial of history as a way of kind of maintaining the status quo, right. That's really what's going on there. And it's under the guise of Christianity like much of this is going on.

And, you know, really this goes to your point, too. Like you could take the point, your economic point to public schools, right? So I grew up in public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. We had a Christmas party in my homeroom every year, like without any sort of, you know, blink of an eye. And that, by the way, I'm 50, 54, my school, my public school in Jackson, Mississippi, wasn't even desegregated until I was in third grade. 1976. Right. By the time desegregation actually happened in Jackson, Mississippi. So we had Christmas parties and all white Christmas parties until third grade, right. And so but those changes, you know, they're big, right? And we are, like that's, that's still very much barely in the rearview mirror. So I think we're still struggling, right, with these things that are, that have happened.

And then, Rachel, to your point, one interesting thing, and we will have a longer conversation about this, but we did have a question about maintaining a separation of church and state in the survey. And it turns out that that language of maintaining a separation of church and state goes right by, right. And they, so people will hold all of those Christian nationalist views and affirm separation of church and state at the same time. Right. And so that's a real issue here. They don't think that they're violating this old civic idea of separation of church and state, even while they say the U.S., all the laws in the U.S. should be based on Christian beliefs in the Bible, right. So that's part of the challenge we're working with.

E.J. Dionne, Jr.: So we end on a note of unity. Thank you. I just want to thank our great panel, Jemar, Pete, and Kristin and Robby. It's a joy to work with you and it's a joy to work with my colleague, Bill Galston, who will close.

William Galston: Well, I hope you'll agree with me that this has been a spectacular panel dealing with an incredibly important question. Everybody has already been thanked, so let me just conclude with a brief benediction which might also be regarded as a provocation. You know, Pete Wehner asked not the political question, but the political theological question, namely, how do you get from Jesus to Christian nationalism? Great question with a great history. Only took 250 years to get from Paul's official, epistle to the Galatians to the Emperor Constantine, you know, in [inaudible]. And so this whole question of the relationship between a universal faith and a national or even imperial mission is an ancient one, not a modern one. And, you know, to begin to understand the complexity of Christian universalism, but a universalism that claims to be the only true path to salvation, universalism and particularism in the same doctrine. One might do worse than to begin to reflect on Matthew 10:34, a passage that has intrigued and troubled me. And with that, we are adjourned.