

The Future of White Christian Nationalism: A Qualitative Study of Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

White Christian Nationalism has made a deep cultural, political, and social impact on the United States in recent years. While certainly not the majority of American citizens, white Christian Nationalists have profoundly affected American society using anti-democratic rhetoric and actions to disseminate racist, sexist, and xenophobic ideology under the guise of promoting religious freedom. Sociologists have examined the implications of various white Christian Nationalist beliefs of older generations which we can view on numerous new channels and through certain government officials. Generation Z has yet to be studied and I believe by collecting data from this up-and-coming generation, we can predict the direction that white Christian Nationalism will head within the next decade. Using survey data from religious studies scholars, sociologists, and the Baylor Religious Survey I recreated a survey by which I could compare ideological and religious trends from previous generations to Gen Z. Through survey and ethnographic work, I have identified certain changing characteristics within Gen Z that I believe are most impactful to the changing religious landscape of the post-Trump, post-covid landscape.

My findings have indicated that Protestant Christian members of Gen Z have not been spiritually impacted by recent religious controversies but have become more religious in the past five years. These students have indicated more of an acceptance toward progressive policies like universal healthcare and police reform but maintain the importance of keeping prayer in public schools and increasing religious freedom. The implications of these findings are discussed in-depth in my analysis but at first-glance

Generation Z will usher in a new relationship between religion, politics, and American society.

Introduction

Following the 2016 election of President Donald Trump and more recently the Capitol insurrection attempt on January 6th, 2021, sociologists and religious studies scholars have been attempting to understand the behaviors of white Christian nationalists, whom scholars might have previously assumed to be on the fringes of mainstream society. The years of Trump's presidency had scholars and media outlets pointing fingers at various groups in order to explain how an incendiary right-wing populist leader could be elected immediately following the first African American president. Evangelical Christians seemed to be the explanatory variable for many scholars who had fervently thrown their support behind President Trump with 77 percent supporting Trump in the 2016 election and increasing to 84 percent in the 2020 election.¹ However, in recent qualitative research surveys, Christian Nationalism has been shown to correlate much higher than evangelical Christianity in predicting voting patterns, political beliefs, and social values.

Throughout this thesis I will create an analysis of the most recently published results pertaining to Christian Nationalist beliefs, and their impact on the broader American society while also comparing them to results collected from people within Generation Z. Contemporary sociologists are debating the impact of Christian Nationalism on American society and the influence that ideology has on democratic structures, voting patterns, and extremist movements. Some scholars argue that Christian

¹ Pew Research Center 2016 and 2020 poll responses.

Nationalism is on its last legs, being fueled by the waning religious right, while others predict that Christian Nationalism will remain a large threat to American democracy, separating itself from religion and establishing a secular form of Christian Nationalism that will appeal to a broader population. The sources throughout this analysis are dominated by a handful of sociologists who have preeminently shaped the empirical study of Christian Nationalism in the contemporary United States. These scholars use a mixed methods approach of survey implementation, interviews, and ethnographic field work to reach the conclusions discussed throughout this thesis.

Christian Nationalism is defined as the belief that the United States was founded on Christian ideals and principles and that the government should take active steps in order to keep Christianity at the forefront of American society. Christian Nationalists advocate for Christianity to maintain a privileged position in American government and reject many democratic ideals like cultural and religious pluralism.² With changing cultural landscapes and increased secularization in the United States, Christian Nationalists are becoming more desperate to maintain “social order” or hold on to their power. This project looks specifically at varying degrees of Christian Nationalism within members of Gen Z who identify as Christian in an attempt to understand how their Christian Nationalistic values are changing within this demographic.

² Gorski, P.S. (2020). *American Babylon: Christianity and Democracy Before and After Trump* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi-org.proxy01.its.virginia.edu/10.4324/9780429318146>

Chapter 1: Review of the Literature

Sociologists Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead observed through the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS) that it was not religious affiliation that correlated most strongly with conservative political values and authoritarian beliefs, but rather propensity toward Christian Nationalism. Perry and Whitehead, in *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (2020), use the BRS data to support their hypothesis. *Taking America Back for God* is separated into three main arguments: first, that understanding Christian Nationalism is vital to understanding polarization in American political discourse; next, that Christian Nationalism must be examined in its own terms and cannot be reduced to political beliefs or religious ideologies; and lastly, Perry and Whitehead argue that Christian Nationalism is neither American Christianity nor religion in general, but to use sociologist Phillip Gorski's words, "[Christian Nationalism] is political idolatry dressed up as religious orthodoxy."³ Perry and Whitehead emphasize that white evangelicalism and Christian Nationalism are not necessarily synonymous, however they do include some telling statistics that demonstrate how white evangelicals are statistically much more likely than any other religious affiliation to hold Christian Nationalist values.

Perry and Whitehead use the data collected by the BRS to explain how Christian Nationalism influences social and political beliefs. They explain that Christian Nationalist beliefs were an extremely high indicator of voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 election, not because they saw Trump as a candidate that shared their moral and

³ Perry, S. L., & Whitehead, A. L. (2020). *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. Oxford University Press. 21

ethical beliefs, but because they saw Trump as the candidate who would maintain the status quo of white, Christian supremacy in the United States.⁴ The authors continue to discuss four salient political issues for which Christian Nationalism is the largest explanatory variable that helped to elect Trump to the presidency. They address Americans who advocate for travel bans, citizens who express fear of refugees from the Middle East and terrorism as being most likely Christian Nationalists instead of being politically conservative, or Republican.

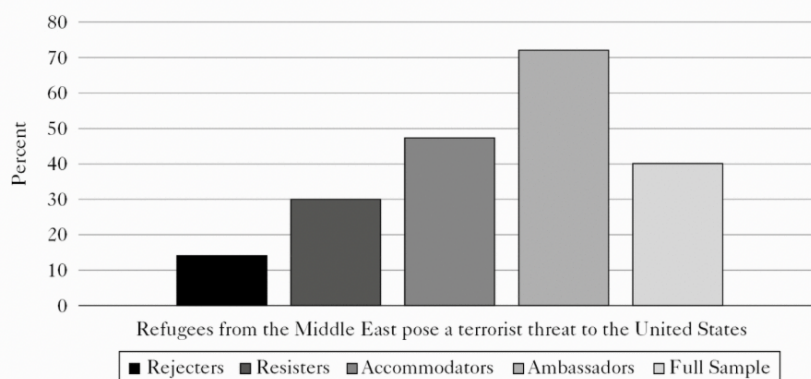


FIGURE 2.3.
Variation in Americans' Agreement with Fear of Muslim
Refugees for Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters,
and Rejecters

Sources: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

The authors explain, “Americans who adhere more strongly to Christian nationalism are generally more comfortable with restricting the political freedoms and civil liberties of Muslims, whom they deem as a threat to social order.”⁵ The Supreme Court and *Roe v. Wade* was another arena in which Christian Nationalist principles predicted outcomes.

⁴ *Taking America Back for God*, 58

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72

Many Christian Nationalists voted for Trump because of a fear that the United States Supreme Court was becoming too secular and therefore would begin a systematic oppression of American Christians. *Roe v. Wade* was an important factor for many Christian Nationalists who maintain a commitment to male authority over women's bodies and who wanted to see a world in which abortion was no longer an option. Connection to the military is another deciding factor for Christian Nationalists who place the military and military members on a sacred level, worthy of being venerated. By re-issuing military symbols and rituals as religious iconography and religious traditions, any attempt to kneel during the national anthem, or even spend less on the military budget is seen as a direct threat to "Christian America." For Christian Nationalists surveyed, to be American is to be a Christian. Finally, gun control remains an important predictor of Christian Nationalists political attitudes. Perry and Whitehead claim that since Christian Nationalism sacralizes American founding documents like the Constitution, proponents of Christian Nationalism are sensitive to threats of gun control or gun reform. Christian Nationalists see instances of gun violence or mass shootings as inevitable outcomes of a society with failing moral values and see the solution as increasing the prevalence of God and Christianity in American society. Each of these issues carried enormous weight for Christian Nationalists and led them to be the group that voted most consistently with Donald Trump.

As Perry and Whitehead have discussed, Christian Nationalists believe that they are part of a divinely favored "in-group" which happens to be white in almost all cases. Looking at Christian Nationalists who see white people as "good" and "law-abiding" and minority groups as "out-groups" that do not have the favor of God on their side, we see

how authoritarian values increase. They are more likely to favor extreme and authoritarian forms of control and punishment. Christian Nationalists desire to “preserve or return to a mythic society in which traditional hierarchical relationships (e.g., between men and women, whites and blacks) are upheld, and authority structures are biblical and just.”⁶ Christian Nationalists will therefore always take the side of “law and order”—enthusiastic about and defensive of the fairness of using force (often unnecessarily) against minority groups because it is understood that force will never be used against them. Ultimately, according to Perry and Whitehead, Christian Nationalists are attempting to maintain a culture of white, Christian supremacy within the United States.

While *Taking America Back for God* maintains that white evangelicalism is not synonymous with Christian Nationalism, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*, written in 2022 by Perry and sociologist Philip Gorski, argues that it is only a matter of time until Christian Nationalist beliefs overtake all white evangelical spaces.⁷ They cite increased support of white evangelicals on individual and institutional levels for President Trump from the 2016 to 2020 presidential elections.⁸ Perry and Gorski’s main goal is to define Christian Nationalism and its origin in American history while examining its political influence and finally predicting where Christian Nationalist beliefs will lead American society. They argue that Christian Nationalism is inherently incompatible with democratic ideals and

⁶ Ibid., 105

⁷ Gorski, P. S., & Perry, S. L. (2022). *Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*. Oxford University Press US., 33

⁸ *Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*, 32

Christian Nationalists do not support American democracy when faced with a looming threat of religious and cultural pluralism.

Perry, Schnabel, and Grubbs explore the relationship between religious freedom in the United States and Christian Nationalist belief in anti-Christian discrimination in their article, “Christian Nationalism, Perceived Anti-Christian Discrimination, and Prioritizing ‘Religious Freedom’ in the 2020 Presidential Election.” The key difference in religious freedom for Americans comes with a careful distinction— does this freedom only apply to an in-group, or is it freedom for all? According to empirical work done by Perry, Schnabel, and Grubbs, evangelical Christians and Christian Nationalists favor a “Christian pre-eminence” in American society, a belief that is incompatible with the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.⁹ For many Christian Nationalists, the ability to protect their own religious freedoms and liberties is directly related to how much they can control the actions of others—usually in the form of limiting abortion access, LGBT+ rights, or the enforcement of the separation of church and state. Compared with other contemporary issues like the economic success of the country, healthcare, and terrorism, religious liberty was ranked significantly more important for Christian Nationalists.¹⁰ Religious freedom for Christian Nationalists, translates into “Christian” freedom, without leaving room for the cultural or religious pluralism integral to a functioning democratic tradition.

⁹ Perry, S. L., Schnabel, L., & Grubbs, J. B. (2022). “Christian Nationalism perceived anti-Christian discrimination, and prioritizing “religious freedom” in the 2020 presidential election.” *Nations and Nationalism*, 28 (2), 714– 725

¹⁰ “Christian Nationalism perceived anti-Christian discrimination, and prioritizing “religious freedom” in the 2020 presidential election.”

Perry and Gorski outline the seemingly logical contradiction of Christian Nationalists who call for “institutionalizing Christianity as the national religion but also claim that one of their top priorities is ‘religious freedom’” or advocating for “Christian values,” but supporting the “use of torture and opposing gun regulations.”¹¹ Perry and Gorski further explore Christian Nationalist beliefs after initial definitions provided by Perry and Whitehead (2019). They argue that Christian Nationalists’ understanding of three key areas—freedom, order, and violence—explain why they advocate for such paradoxical issues:

Freedom is understood in a libertarian way, as freedom *from* restrictions, especially by the government.¹² Order is understood in a hierarchical way, with white Christian men at the top. And violence is seen as a righteous means of defending freedom and restoring order, means that are reserved to white Christian men.¹³

In changing cultural landscapes and increased secularization in the United States, Christian Nationalists are becoming more desperate to maintain “social order” or hold on to their power. Violence, when performed by Christian Nationalists, becomes a righteous exercise used to defend freedoms and control social (racial and sexual) order.

Authoritarian control is entirely appropriate when attempting to curtail the rights of minority groups while advocating for freedom (lack of restrictions) for white Christian men.

Where Perry and Gorski expand on other Christian Nationalist work is the theological background of Christian Nationalism that justifies many of these political and

¹¹ Ibid., 27

¹² Emphasis added.

¹³ Ibid., 28

social beliefs. They discuss the “us versus them tribalism” that accompanies Christian Nationalism— seemingly inconsistent with Christian values— but that is supported by Christian eschatology. Pre- and post-millennial end times theology creates a world of “us versus them” or “good versus evil” in which exists constant spiritual warfare that must be waged against the evil forces. Perry and Gorski call this an “ethno-traditionalist impulse of Christian Nationalism” that marches its followers toward a “bloody battle.”¹⁴ Framing the political and social ebb and flow of progressive and conservative democracy as having spiritual and eternal consequence reveals why Christian Nationalists take the extreme positions they do and act in violent, anti-democratic ways like an insurrection attempt.

The Flag and the Cross argues that the reason Christian Nationalism, and not another extremist ideology, is the largest threat to American democracy is because of the drastically shifting demographics of the United States. White Christians are quickly approaching minority status in the United States after holding a place as the majority since the beginning of American history. As Perry and Gorski explain,

The basic principle of democratic government is majority rule. So long as white Christians were in the majority and could call the shots, they were willing to tolerate a certain amount of pluralism, provided that “minorities” did not insist too much on equality. Now faced with the prospect of minority status themselves, some members of the old white majority are embracing authoritarian politics as a means of protecting their ‘freedom.’¹⁵

Using “Christian” e.g., “Christian values” “Christian heritage” as a dog-whistle for “white-” “white values” “white heritage” has allowed Christian Nationalists to use

¹⁴ Ibid., 29

¹⁵ Ibid., 30

platforms of religious freedom and religious liberty to subtly fight to maintain a culture of white supremacy and white power. Perry and Gorski argue that in contemporary politics and within the ethno-tradition of white Christian nationalism, both “Christian” and “American” have been racialized to mean “white.”¹⁶ Christian Nationalists have reframed much of American history to celebrate their white heritage as using violence to oppress and kill the “threat” to their freedom. In some of the most extreme forms of violence and white supremacy, Perry and Gorski cite lynchings as ritualized violence used by Christian Nationalists to punish those who had “violated the racial order” established by white supremacy.¹⁷ While contemporary lynchings are rare (but still occur) Christian Nationalists use new forms of violence, including interpersonal violence such as mobs, riots, individual attacks, and state-sanctioned violence such as the use of excess force from police, and the carceral state to continue to maintain their racial hierarchies.

Perry and Whitehead, co-authors of “Racialized Religion and Judicial Injustice: How Whiteness and Biblicist Christianity Intersect to Promote a Preference for (Unjust) Punishment” explore further the relationship between Christian Nationalism and violence. The authors connect Christian Nationalism with the conservative theological belief in biblical literalism which they argue is rooted in an understanding of “societal disorder and cultural victimization.”¹⁸ Perry and Whitehead collected survey data that empirically determined that Christian Nationalists and those who believe in biblical

¹⁶ Ibid., 66

¹⁷ Ibid., 138

¹⁸ Perry, S.L. and Whitehead, A.L. (2021), “Racialized Religion and Judicial Injustice: How Whiteness and Biblicist Christianity Intersect to Promote a Preference for (Unjust) Punishment.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 60: 47.

literalism turn to “sacralized authoritarian efforts” in order to re-establish control over what they perceive as disorder.¹⁹ Biblical literalists justify the use of excess punishment, whether through the legal system or not,²⁰ as reaffirming the religiously appointed social order. Data from the study demonstrates that conservative Christians who believe in biblical literalism would overwhelmingly support wrongful convictions over erroneous acquittal.²¹ These beliefs are inherently racialized as the implications are that those who commit crimes and need to be punished are people of color, while white Christians continue to maintain racial order. Perry and Whitehead explain that “ideologies reinforcing white supremacy [like Christian Nationalism] tend to heighten white Americans’ sensitivity to potential threats...triggering an increased preference among whites for greater institutional control and harsh treatment.”²² It is implied that the white Christians who have these views will never be punished in the hands of the law and therefore never be victims of the punitive measures that they promote.

Perry and Gorski’s *The Flag and the Cross* links Christian Nationalism and authoritarianism through the violence that Christian Nationalists not only support, but participate in. An inherent belief in Christian Nationalist values is that those in the in-group (white and Christian) are deserving of freedom, while those in the out-group (non-white) need to be controlled, often by violence.²³ “Righteous violence” can and should be

¹⁹ “Racialized Religion and Judicial Injustice: How Whiteness and Biblicist Christianity Intersect to Promote a Preference for (Unjust) Punishment.” 47.

²⁰ For example, police use of excess force against minority groups.

²¹ “Racialized Religion and Judicial Injustice: How Whiteness and Biblicist Christianity Intersect to Promote a Preference for (Unjust) Punishment, 57

²² Ibid., 58

²³ *Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*, 185

used against those who pose a threat to the white supremacist status quo of American society. Perry and Gorski explain how:

White Christian nationalism designates who is “worthy” of the freedom it cherishes, namely, “people like us.” But for the “others” outside that group, white Christian nationalism grants whites in authority the “freedom” to control such populations, to maintain a certain kind of social order that privileges “good people like us” through violence if necessary.²⁴

Christian Nationalists are more likely than any other demographic to advocate for an increased use of the death penalty, torture, and any-means-necessary policing against people of color and other minority groups.²⁵ “Divided by Faith in Christian America: Christian Nationalism, Race, and Divergent Perspectives of Racial Injustice” articulates similar sentiments to *The Flag and the Cross* of Christian Nationalists perspectives on race in America.²⁶ Perry et al. define a sociological phenomenon in which Christian Nationalists have a “perception gap” of racial discrimination. When surveyed, white Christian Nationalists believe that discrimination against Black Americans is much lower than reality while also believing that discrimination against white, especially Christian Americans is on the rise— contrary to actual data.²⁷ According to Perry et al., the

²⁴ Ibid., 191

²⁵ Ibid., 190

²⁶ Samuel L Perry, Ryon J Cobb, Andrew L Whitehead, Joshua B Grubbs, “Divided by Faith (in Christian America): Christian Nationalism, Race, and Divergent Perceptions of Racial Injustice,” *Social Forces*, 2021.

²⁷ “Divided by Faith (in Christian America): Christian Nationalism, Race, and Divergent Perceptions of Racial Injustice”

“perception gap” emphasizes “epistemologies of ignorance” and “religio-cultural” mechanisms.²⁸ The authors explain:

The former category includes analyses that proceed under the assumption that ethnoracial hierarchy, and anti-blackness specifically, is an “essential social fact” of American life and thus White racial dominance in all facets of life must be constantly defended and hidden, even from Whites themselves.²⁹ The latter category includes studies that theorize subcultural narratives and commitments that are not fundamentally racist, but as they interact with racial identity or structural location, motivate Whites to ignore their racial privilege and blame Blacks for inequality.³⁰

Forwarding arguments found in *The Flag and the Cross*, Perry et al. argue that certain words like “heritage,” “culture,” and “history” have become so racially coded that they are now used as dog-whistles to imply whiteness. Christian Nationalists, who view the United States as a “Christian nation” and want to promote the Christian legacy in America, hold an understanding that the “Christian nation” provides rights and freedoms to “true” citizens— white Christians.³¹ By using religious, race-neutral language, and carefully placed dog-whistles, Perry et al. argue, Christian Nationalists can conceal their “veiled defense of white supremacy” making Christian Nationalist rhetoric the “language of covert racism.”³²

²⁸ “Divided by Faith (in Christian America): Christian Nationalism, Race, and Divergent Perceptions of Racial Injustice”

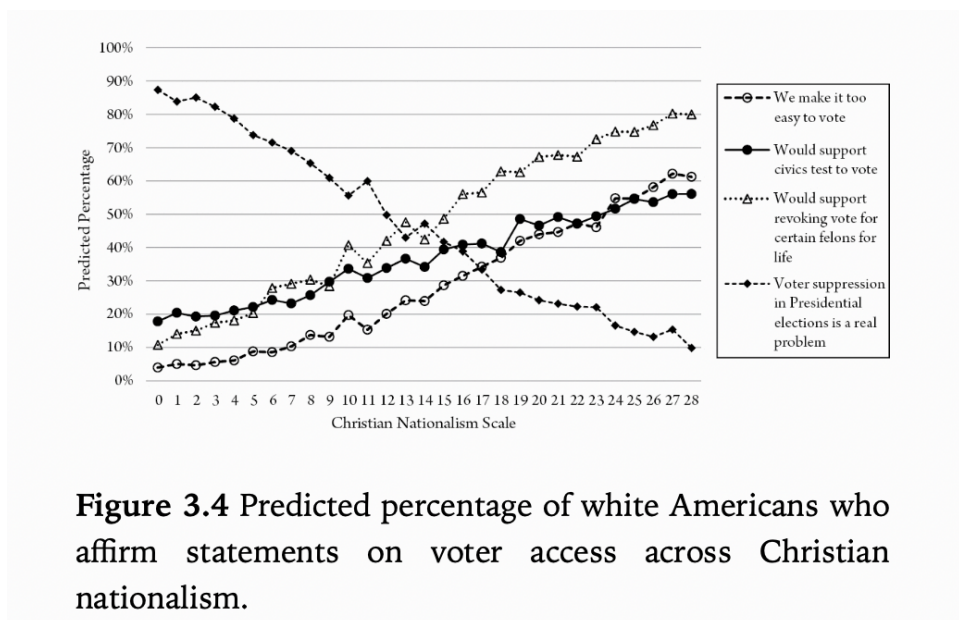
²⁹ (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Hughey 2010; Mueller 2017, 2020; Ray 2019; Tuch and Hughes 2011).

³⁰ (Brown 2009; Edgell and Tranby 2007; Emerson et al. 1999; Frost and Edgell 2017; Hinojosa and Park 2004; Hunt 2002; O’Brien and Abdelhadi 2020)

³¹ “Divided by Faith”

³² “Divided by Faith”

Violence is not the only way in which Christian Nationalists advocate for maintaining their cultural and political power as they reach minority status. By removing



access to the democratic process, like increasing voter restrictions or further disenfranchising minority groups, they can maintain the political power they have held since the founding of this country.

According to Perry and Gorski, Christian Nationalists believe that only a privileged few (read: white Christians) should be eligible to have a say in government. Here we see the culmination of Perry and Gorski's thesis in *The Flag and the Cross* that Christian Nationalists are the greatest threat to democracy. As projected in the January 6th insurrection attempt and the widely debunked "Stop the Steal" conspiracy, Christian Nationalists do not believe that a democratic voice should be given to all American citizens— rather it should be reserved for those who "are worthy."³³ Perry, Whitehead,

³³ *Flag and the Cross*, 194

and Grubbs' "'I Don't Want Everybody to Vote': Christian Nationalism and Restricting Voter Access in the United States" argues similarly that Christian Nationalists do not believe that voting is a right afforded to all citizens, but rather a privilege for those who are deemed "worthy."³⁴ The authors claim that supporting voting restrictions is "undergirded by a pervasive ideology that cloaks authoritarian ethno-traditionalism with the ultimacy and polysemic utility of religious language."³⁵ By appealing to the United States' religious heritage of Christianity, Christian Nationalists justify restricting others' democratic freedoms in order to maintain dominance. "I Don't Want Everybody to Vote" states that themes of "moral traditionalism rooted in hierarchical social arrangements (e.g., patriarchy, heterosexism), authoritarian social control that justifies violence and militarism, and strict ethno-racial boundaries surrounding national membership, civic participation, and social belonging" are the major factors that place Christian Nationalists at the forefront of the threat to American democracy.

Philip Gorski's 2020 book *American Babylon: Christianity and Democracy Before and After Trump*, expands on white evangelicals (who tout Christian Nationalist ideals) as undermining democratic principles throughout the Trump presidency and implies that they will continue to do so. Unlike Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs who see voter suppression as the Christian Nationalist's most prominent attempt to subvert the democratic process, Gorski explains that the election of Donald Trump was the gravest

³⁴ Perry, S.L., Whitehead, A.L. and Grubbs, J.B. (2022), "I Don't Want Everybody to Vote: Christian Nationalism and Restricting Voter Access in the United States." *Sociol Forum*, 37: 4-26.

³⁵ "I Don't Want Everybody to Vote: Christian Nationalism and Restricting Voter Access in the United States."

threat to American democracy.³⁶ Arguing that Donald Trump existed as an authoritarian leader who worked to silence opponents and consolidate power, Gorski claims that by supporting Trump, evangelicals have already started to erode the democratic process. As white Christian Nationalists and white evangelicals lose power, Gorski argues that similar to the 2016 presidential election when the president did not receive a majority of the popular vote, white Christian Nationalists will continue to attempt to maintain power through minority rule, an inherently undemocratic ideal.³⁷ Gorski sees the future of white evangelicalism and American democracy as contingent on whether Christians will continue to align themselves with authoritarian leaders like Donald Trump who work to undermine American systems of democracy. If they do, Gorski predicts that American evangelicalism and the Christian Nationalists who associate with it will continue to splinter across racial and generational lines, eventually falling apart.³⁸

While *American Babylon*, *The Flag and the Cross*, and *Taking America Back for God* all discuss the implications of the waning power of white Christian America, Robert Jones' *The End of White Christian America* argues that the white Christians' power and influence has already ended. Jones' book, published in 2016, argues that with the election of former President Obama and the death of many influential evangelical leaders in the 2000s and 2010s, white Christians have been forced to forfeit their power.³⁹ Jones offers an interesting perspective as he writes before the election of Donald Trump (the book was

³⁶ Gorski, P.S. (2020). *American Babylon: Christianity and Democracy Before and After Trump* (1st ed.). Routledge. 114

³⁷ *American Babylon: Christianity and Democracy Before and After Trump* 116

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125

³⁹ Jones, R. P. (2017). *The End of White Christian America*. Simon & Schuster. 58

published in July 2016) and the seeming increase of extremist Christian Nationalist sentiment in the United States. Perhaps key to understanding white Christians' perspective of their loss of power is Jones' explanation of anger (as one of the stages of grief over the death of White Christian America). Jones explains that even in the years of Obama's presidency, white evangelicals emphasized apocalyptic anger which originated in the "evangelical theological emphasis on human sin and divine judgement but is bolstered socially by evangelical's self-perception as an outgunned minority struggling valiantly against outside powers."⁴⁰ Their desire to return to the days of peak white evangelical power sees them scrambling to create and pass legislature that will, in the very least, limit the power of citizens outside of white Christian America.⁴¹ Jones sees this pattern throughout the 2010s which continues on into contemporary political discourse as an attempt to resuscitate white Christian America. *The End of White Christian America* predicts that the years following its publication will entail evangelicals taking pride in their "foreignness" while operating with the same levels of entitlement they have always possessed. Jones expects evangelicals "to wield what remaining political power they have as a desperate corrective for their waning cultural influence," a prediction that seems to have come true.⁴² However, Jones is sure that while evangelicals are fighting the culture wars of contemporary politics, they will ultimately be ensuring a complete demise of the influence, power, and privilege they have held for so long.⁴³

⁴⁰ *The End of White Christian America* 223

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 232

⁴² *Ibid.*, 252

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 252

Gorski, Perry, and Whitehead seem to agree with Jones that the days of unchecked conservative Christian power are dwindling but argue that it is simply being

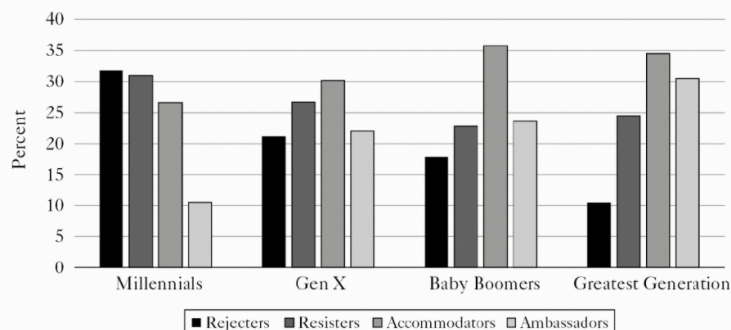


FIGURE 1.11.
Percent of Americans Across Generational Divides Who
Are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or
Rejecters

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

transformed into the white Christian Nationalism of today. This literature review set out to examine the current academic discussions around Christian Nationalism and its relationship with mainstream American society. Each source argued that Christian Nationalism was detrimental to the progress of American society either by limiting democratic values, or by promoting values that are not conducive to cultural or religious pluralism— both valued in a democracy. Christian Nationalists have been shown to actively limit the rights of those who they consider “unworthy” of the freedoms they readily enjoy and expect. These people (usually non-Christian or people of color) pose a direct threat to Christian Nationalists by demanding power for themselves and working to undermine the status quo of xenophobia, patriarchy, and white supremacy.

Ideologies will be measured using the same Christian Nationalist scale provided by the Baylor Religious Survey, used by Perry and Whitehead. *In Taking Back America for God* the sociologists used a Christian Nationalist scale provided by the Baylor

Religious Survey to divide the respondents into four distinct categories: Rejectors, Resisters, Accommodators, Ambassadors.⁴⁴

Each respondent was scaled on a six-question “Christian Nationalist scale” based on their responses. Rejectors are categorized by their belief that there should be no

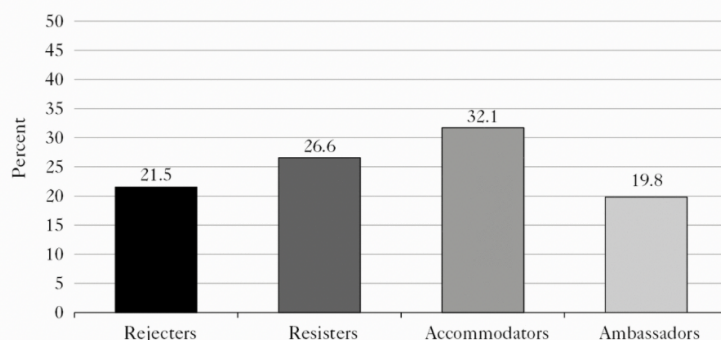


FIGURE 1.1.
Percent of Americans who are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejectors of Christian Nationalism

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

connection between Christianity and politics, Resisters generally lean toward opposing Christian Nationalism, conversely Accommodators lean toward accepting it and are the largest group of respondents—making up about one-third of the survey responses— and Ambassadors are wholly supportive of Christian Nationalism.

Recent qualitative studies have demonstrated that it is not in fact strict adherence to religion (fundamentalism) that is the causal mechanism for authoritarianism, but that the strongest explanatory variable is level of Christian Nationalism.⁴⁵ This certainly

⁴⁴ *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, 4

⁴⁵ Gorski 2021; Gorski and Perry 2022; Perry and Whitehead 2019

relates strongly to fundamentalist religious belief, but there remain a few key differences that make Christian Nationalist values and beliefs the strongest explanatory variable.

Perry and Whitehead provide a compelling qualitative analysis of the status of Christian Nationalism in contemporary American politics, religion, and culture. They argue that it is the strength of Christian Nationalist beliefs that is the strongest predictor for a number of social and political beliefs like xenophobia, homophobia, authoritarianism, white supremacy, and state-sponsored violence. The authors make clear that Christian Nationalists are not exclusively evangelical Christians and vice versa, however they do provide statistical evidence that demonstrates that evangelicals are most likely to have Christian Nationalist beliefs than other Protestant denominations, or political affiliations.

The reason that I am not selecting a more religiously diverse population to study

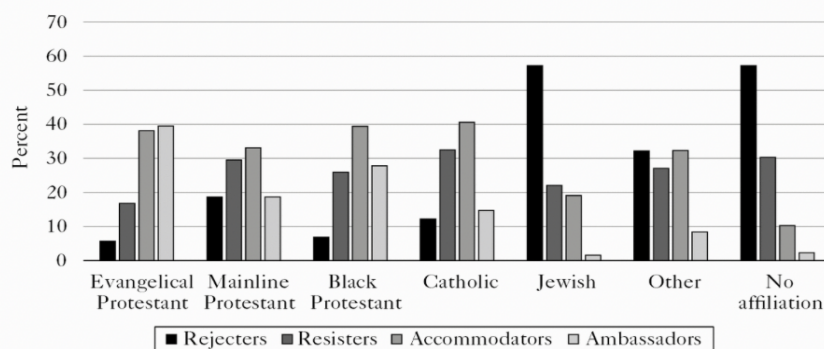


FIGURE 1.6.
Percent of Americans Across Religious Traditions Who
Are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or
Rejecters

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

is that I would like to focus on the change in Christian Nationalist attitude by those that would be the most likely to perpetuate those beliefs. Christian Nationalists desire to

“preserve or return to a mythic society in which traditional hierarchical relationships (e.g., between men and women, whites and blacks) are upheld, and authority structures are biblical and just.”⁴⁶ Following the election of Donald Trump who ran on a platform that promoted Christian Nationalist ideals— for example, putting prayer back in public schools and claiming that the United States is a nation for [Christian] believers— Christian Nationalists have become empowered, even going so far as to attempting to upend a presidential election.

Hypothesis

My hypothesis for this study is that there will be an increase in the polarization of Christian Nationalist attitudes from older generations (Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers) to Gen Z because of various political, social, and religious trends. The polarization of evangelicals while using the Christian Nationalist scale will look like an increase in respondents who identify with either the “Rejector” or “Ambassador” category— those that either repudiate or advance Christian Nationalist ideas. I am focusing my attention on Generation Z while briefly exploring older generations because there is very little data available about how members of Generation Z are responding to contemporary social and political issues. I believe that as Generation Z enters into American society— in the workforce and the voting booth— they will carry vastly different values than previous generations.

The original hypothesis for this project did not include a prediction for the direction of change for Christian Nationalist affiliation in evangelicals who are members of Generation Z. However, after conducting some virtual ethnographic work at Liberty

⁴⁶ *Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* 105

University events the largest evangelical Christian university in the United States, I predicted that polarization would increase compared to previous generations— looking like an increase in “Rejector” and “Ambassador” categories and a decrease in “Resistor” and “Accommodator” categories.⁴⁷

I analyze *if* and *how* Christian Nationalist ideas were being discussed at Liberty to inform my hypothesis. Only having watched four separate convocations as of this project, I have witnessed the propagation of a vast amount of Christian Nationalist ideas and values. For example, visiting pastor Michael Youssef, in his sermon “The Change of America’s Foundation” discussed that the United States was a nation founded on Christian ideals and that the secularization of America was a threat to Christians and Christian America. He explained to the students that they needed to fight to return back to American Christian values.⁴⁸ This is a very common sentiment believed by Christian Nationalists— fear that their Christian privilege and power is slowly waning.⁴⁹ Another visiting pastor, Robert Jeffers, spoke about “The Inevitable Collapse of America” during which he claimed that Supreme Court cases reinforcing the separation of church and state were actively discriminating against Christians.⁵⁰ He continued on to explain that the removal of the Ten Commandments from a public school in Kentucky after the *Stone v. Graham* Supreme Court case was the direct cause of a mass shooting in a Kentucky school some years later. He further explained to the students that the terrorist attacks of

⁴⁷ The results of the Christian Nationalist scale are discussed in depth in Chapter 3: Results.

⁴⁸ Liberty University. (2019). *The Change of America's Foundation. LU Convocation On Demand*.

Retrieved from <https://watch.liberty.edu/channel/LU%2BConvocation%2BOn-Demand/82178501>.

⁴⁹ *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, 67

⁵⁰ Liberty University. (2020). *The Inevitable Collapse of America. LU Convocation On Demand*. Retrieved from <https://watch.liberty.edu/channel/LU%2BConvocation%2BOn-Demand/82178501>.

September 11, 2001, were the result of God punishing the United States for *Roe v. Wade* and the legalization of abortion. Finally, Jeffers said that the restrictions in the 1st Amendment should not apply to Christians, and they should be allowed to limit who can legally get married since they do not agree with homosexual marriage.⁵¹ This is all to say that Christian Nationalist values are still being taught and promoted among young evangelicals.

Perhaps the most influential element of observing these convocations was not the rhetoric from the various speakers, but the students' responses to the speakers' messages. I found that students attending the convocation appeared to be engaged, especially when participating in the worship segment of the event, but also during the sermons. I gauged interest based on applause frequency and length and students were not shy in expressing their agreement with many of the Christian Nationalistic ideas that were promoted at those convocations. During one convocation, the president of Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Jr., took to the podium after the speaker had left the stage and made some remarks about a recent mass shooting that had occurred only a couple days beforehand. At first, he spoke about the tragedy of the event and the bravery of first responders, but then started expressing outrage at calls for gun control following the mass shooting. Falwell then implied that he was carrying a weapon of his own and moved to grab for it in his back pocket like he was going to wave it around or show it off to the crowd—before he thought better of it. Falwell then started saying some extremely incendiary things like he would “end those Muslims before they even walk in- kill ‘em.” To which he was met with a long applause—longer than anything the students gave to the guest

speaker. Falwell then promoted the free concealed carry course that Liberty has for its students and encouraged every student to get a weapon and a concealed carry permit so that the “good guys” would have guns to fight against the “bad guys”. His reason for this was so he and the students could teach “them” a lesson if “they” ever arrived on Liberty’s campus. These exclamations were all met with long applause and standing ovation by some students. All of Falwell’s points have extreme Christian Nationalist connotations that include fighting against “bad” people— in this case Muslims (the attack was perpetrated by Muslim extremists, but Falwell chose to address all Muslims in his speech). The enthusiasm to use violence against those who are outsiders in order to maintain control and dominance is another facet of Christian Nationalism that was espoused at this convocation and thoroughly endorsed by the students in attendance.

Scholars of Christian Nationalism express the importance of a “perception gap” of racial and religious discrimination. When surveyed, white Christian Nationalists believe that discrimination against Black Americans is much lower than reality while also believing that discrimination against white, especially Christian Americans is on the rise— contrary to actual data.⁵² Youssef and Jeffers are examples of active believers in this “perception gap” and are working to persuade young evangelicals of the same. Having only viewed a few of the many videos at Liberty’s convocations, I posit that Christian Nationalism is not a belief exclusive to previous generations but is still being propagated among young evangelical communities at rapid rates.

⁵² Samuel L Perry, Ryan J Cobb, Andrew L Whitehead, Joshua B Grubbs, “Divided by Faith (in Christian America): Christian Nationalism, Race, and Divergent Perceptions of Racial Injustice”, *Social Forces*, 2021

While my ethnographic work has demonstrated that Christian Nationalist values are still being circulated in Christian communities, survey data implies that Generation Z might be less likely than other generations to identify as Christian Nationalists. Religious

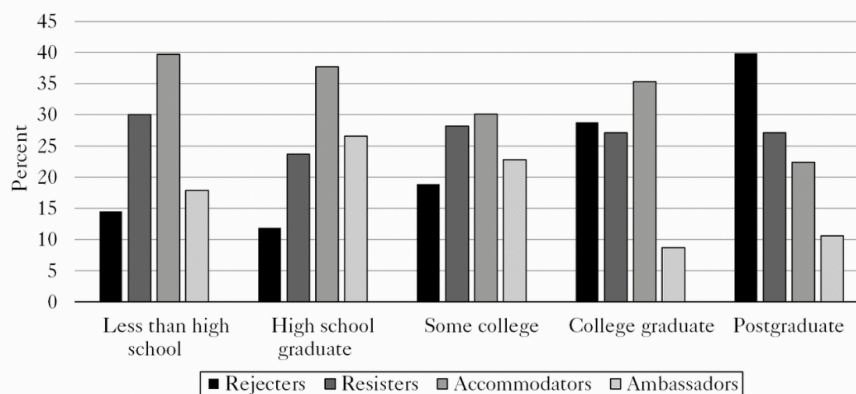


FIGURE 1.2.
Percent of Americans with Different Education Levels Who are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

affiliation in the United States is at an all-time low with one-third of Gen Z self-identifying as “unaffiliated” which correlates negatively with Christian Nationalist beliefs.⁵³ Historically in the United States when religious affiliation has waned religious conservatives⁵⁴ have clung to their religious affiliations even tighter with fears of the apocalypse⁵⁵, persecution complex, and demonic influences increasing. However, that is not to say that Gen Z evangelicals will react the same way. Gen Z is on track to be the most educated generation in the United States and white Gen Z members only barely hold onto a racial majority, both factors which negatively correlate with Christian Nationalist

⁵³ American National Family Life Survey 2021.

⁵⁴ Those who are NOT ecumenical, mainline Protestants.

⁵⁵ The end of the world that culminates in Jesus Christ returning to earth and condemning all non-believers to an eternity in hell.

beliefs.⁵⁶ Each of these factors indicate that Generation Z evangelicals might not all skew toward Christian Nationalism, but that this generation will instead be more polarized than previous generations with the majority of the population falling under the “Ambassador” and “Rejector” categories.

Alternative hypotheses might include predictions that evangelical members of Generation Z move only to one pole or another on the Christian Nationalist scale. In that case, I will be able to discuss the importance of certain influences, either Christian Nationalist propaganda found at institutions like Liberty University or an increase in higher education and the waning of religious influence on the social and political values of these students.

⁵⁶ Pew Research Center 2020

Chapter 2: Methods

This thesis is a mixed methods analysis and includes three means of collecting information. I have completed virtual ethnographic work by analyzing the Christian Nationalist rhetoric that is being propagated at Liberty University as well as student's responses. This type of work has informed my hypothesis while giving me insight into what specific beliefs are being discussed— whether it is Islamophobia, support for state-sanctioned violence, or homophobia in Christian Nationalist circles. The literature review found in Chapter 1 allowed me to collect and synthesize data from previous authors. It gave me a framework by which I could then collect my own original data. The survey and its analysis, while limited in size, supports new ideas about the future of Christian Nationalism in the United States.

Setting

Attending virtual Liberty University convocations (biweekly mandatory religious gatherings) has greatly informed how I have viewed the future of Christian Nationalism in the United States. My motivation in watching these convocations was to conduct a brief study of social and political attitudes that are being shared outside of an academic context to the entire student body at an evangelical institution. I had originally hoped to travel to Liberty University's campus, but time and financial restraints kept me from doing so. Liberty University is well known for its conservative Christian values and its former president Jerry Falwell Jr has made headlines for his support of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. Conservative pundits are regularly invited to Liberty's convocations, often invited to speak in lieu of a pastor or worship session. Liberty is a

quintessential Christian Nationalist institution with enormous influence on their impressionable young students.

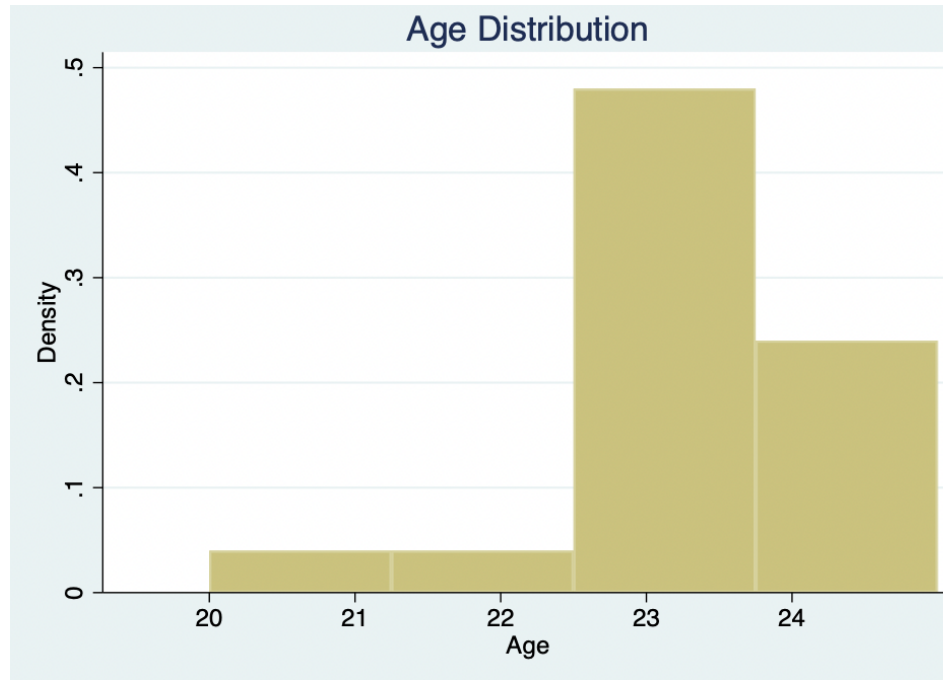
When considering how and where to distribute my survey, I wanted to look for a religious location where I could reach Gen Z Christians who came from a variety of backgrounds. This, I found at The Hub at Trinity Presbyterian Church; a young adult ministry whose mission is to minister “the young adults and young families of Trinity”.⁵⁷ The Hub caters to young people from churches around the Charlottesville and Albemarle area and holds Wednesday night meetings during which young people participate in worship, listen to a sermon, and respond to discussion questions in a small group. After attending a few Wednesday-night sessions I was able to connect with a handful of young students and adults to whom I distributed the survey.

Participants

The primary goal when reaching participants for this survey was to connect with people who are considered to be Generation Z. At the time of this paper, that includes people born from 1997 to 2012.⁵⁸ The age distribution of those who took the survey is the following:

⁵⁷ “The Hub.” *The Hub | Young Adult Ministry | Trinity Charlottesville*, 1 Jan. 1970, <https://www.trinitycville.org/Hub>.

⁵⁸ Dimock, Michael. “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins.” *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 21 Apr. 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.



Of those responses, 80% identified as female while 20% identified as male. The respondents were also overwhelmingly white at 80% while 10% indicated that they were Asian and 10% selected the “other” racial category.

Measurement Instruments

The survey was broken into three main sections: demographic information, religious beliefs, followed by social and political belief questions. There were no theological questions were asked except for a question that gauges their belief in biblical inerrancy which has been shown to correlate strongly with an authoritarian belief system.⁵⁹

The scale of Christian Nationalism that I used comes from the Baylor Religious Survey and includes six questions ranked on an agreement scale:

1. The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation.

⁵⁹ *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, 103

2. The federal government should advocate Christian values.
3. The federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state.
4. The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces.
5. The success of the United States is part of God's plan.
6. The federal government should allow prayer in public schools.

Responses to these questions were then scored and ranked on a Christian Nationalist belief scale. I included social and political questions to gauge how affiliation or disaffiliation with Christian Nationalist ideals affects beliefs about police brutality, LGBTQ+ rights, and government social assistance. Survey responders were asked if they strongly oppose, oppose, favor, or strongly favor each of the following statements.

1. Government funding for abortions.
2. Government Provided health insurance.
3. Requiring children to be vaccinated in order to attend public school.
4. Laws to reduce differences in income levels.
5. Sending all unauthorized immigrants back to their home countries
6. Tighter restrictions on the sale and use of guns.
7. Stronger environmental laws to fight climate change.
8. Stronger laws to protect religious liberty.
9. Stronger laws to protect LGBTQ+ rights.
10. Government providing free college tuition.
11. Reforming police to prevent racial bias.

Procedures

The survey for this project was created and implemented using Qualtrics, chosen for having the most user-friendly interface. It allowed survey creators to ask questions with multiple different formats when asking different kinds of survey questions. Qualtrics provides its users with an anonymous link to the survey so that respondents names and locations are kept unidentified. Each respondent was met with the following introduction upon selecting the link:

Hello! Thank you for taking this survey. The following questions will ask you some demographic information, your religious, social, and political beliefs and values. The data collected in this survey will be used to inform Grace Stotlemeyer's master's thesis which will explore the social values of religious members of Generation Z. If you have any questions or concerns, please email hpa8rz@virginia.edu.

I attempted to keep the introduction as vague as possible so that respondents would not feel off-put or feel the need to alter their answers to fit a specific narrative. There was no mention of Christian Nationalism throughout the survey. Respondents did have the option at the end of the survey to leave their contact information if they wanted to further explain their answers or if they would like to be interviewed further about their beliefs. There were only two respondents who left contact information who later declined to be interviewed.

Data Analysis

The bulk of this data analysis was completed through the statistical software program STATA. I exported the data from Qualtrics to STATA in a .csv file that allowed the variables to remain unchanged. A significant amount of data wrangling was required after downloading the raw data file into STATA. Each question from the survey was

downloaded as a separate variable with a numeric value. This was helpful when trying to find the averages of variables, for example, the share of men and women who responded. However, when trying to create graphs that were easy for a reader to observe and quickly understand, it caused quite a few issues, especially in terms of labeling. I had to re-label each individual variable that was essentially each survey question using `lab var` commands.

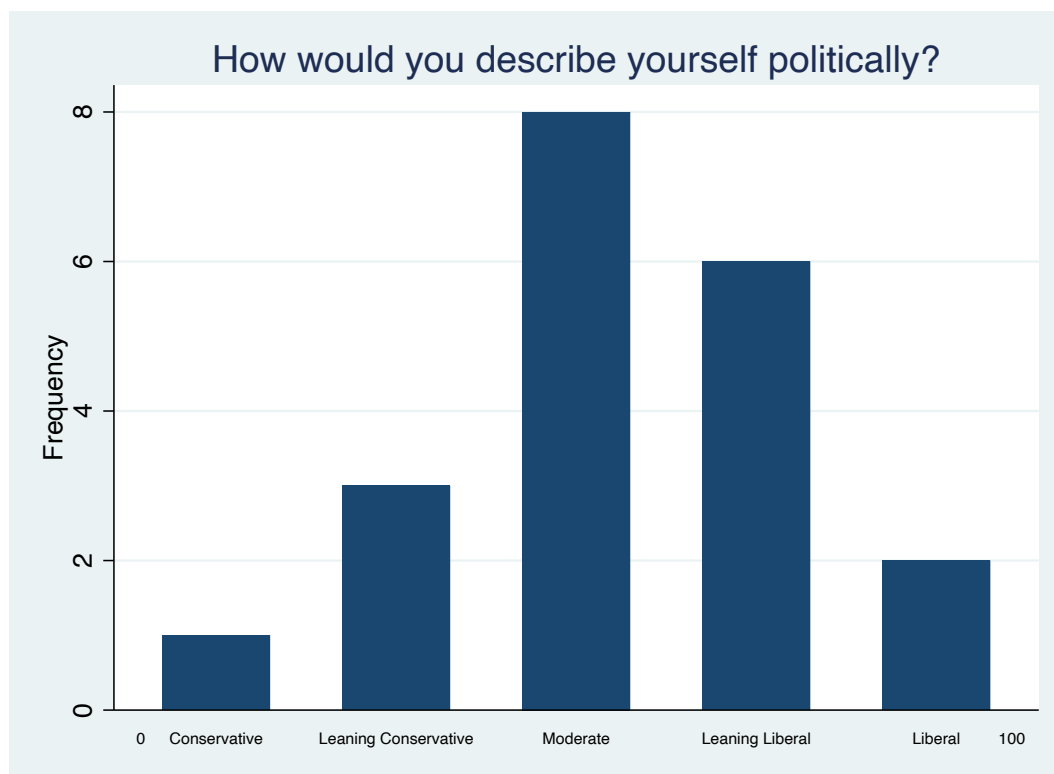
As the data was converted from Qualtrics to a STATA .csv file, it was coded as a string variable, meaning that there were letters in the place of a value in each variable. This occurred because the title of each question was coded into STATA as a response. For example, looking at the dummy variable Gender where Male = 1 and Female = 2 the first value of that value was the term “Gender” instead of the response of the first survey. I attempted to use the Data Editing tool within STATA to reformat each value, but that process was extremely arduous for even one variable. Instead, I used the code `gen nvar = real(var)` to change the string variable to a numeric variable which is much easier to manipulate within the software.

In order to produce readable graphs for this thesis I used the Graphics tab in STATA. It is a relatively straightforward tool that asks for the input of the variable and allows for editing of the X and Y-axis as well as the tick marks on the graph. Since my sample size is small, I did not indicate that the graphs should display summary statistics like the mean, quartiles, or standard deviations. The graphs were set to measure the frequencies between categories which can be seen on each of the Y-axis, making it much easier for the average social science student and researcher to understand.

Chapter 3: Results

The survey data, informal interviews, and ethnographic events reveal that Generation Z differs from prior generations in four significant ways but does not vary greatly from many of the core beliefs and values of previous generations. In general, Gen Z appears to be a more moderate generation when it comes to social assistance, police reform, and gun control. Like the generations before them, they emphasize the importance of religious liberty, religious freedom, and biblical authority.

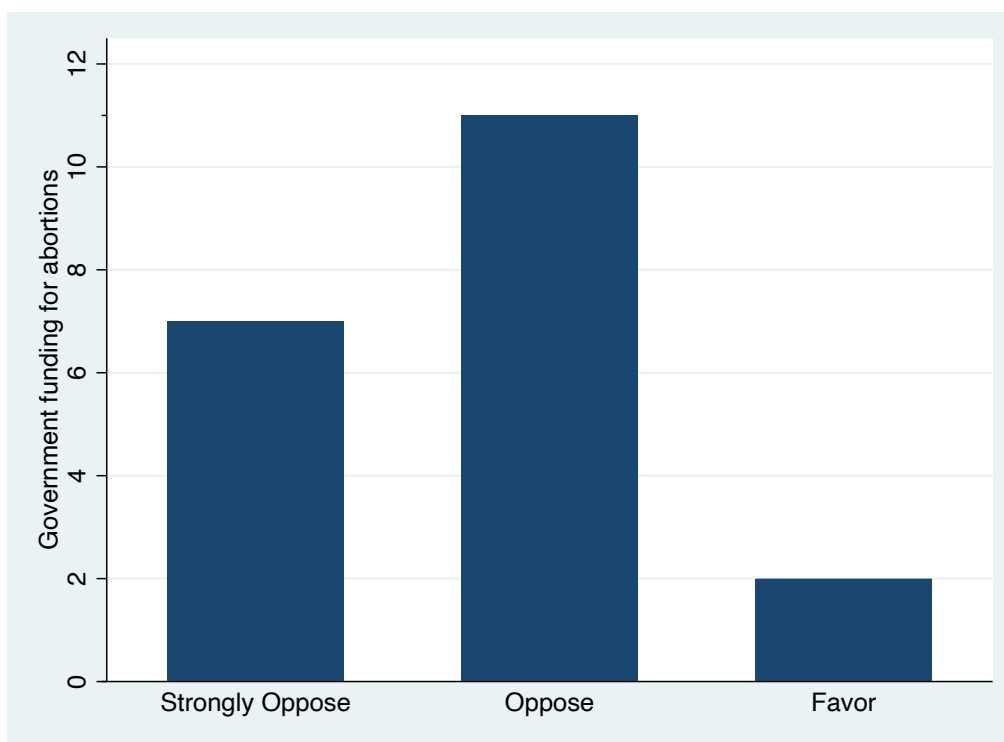
This population of students maintains a normal distribution in their political alignment. Most consider themselves to be politically moderate and there are no students who align themselves with being either extremely conservative or extremely liberal.



Since the population of respondents are located in a liberal-leaning college town, it is expected that the student population would reflect similar values and political

alignment.⁶⁰ The social and political questions posed to the survey respondents were much more telling when analyzing how these students felt about contemporary issues.

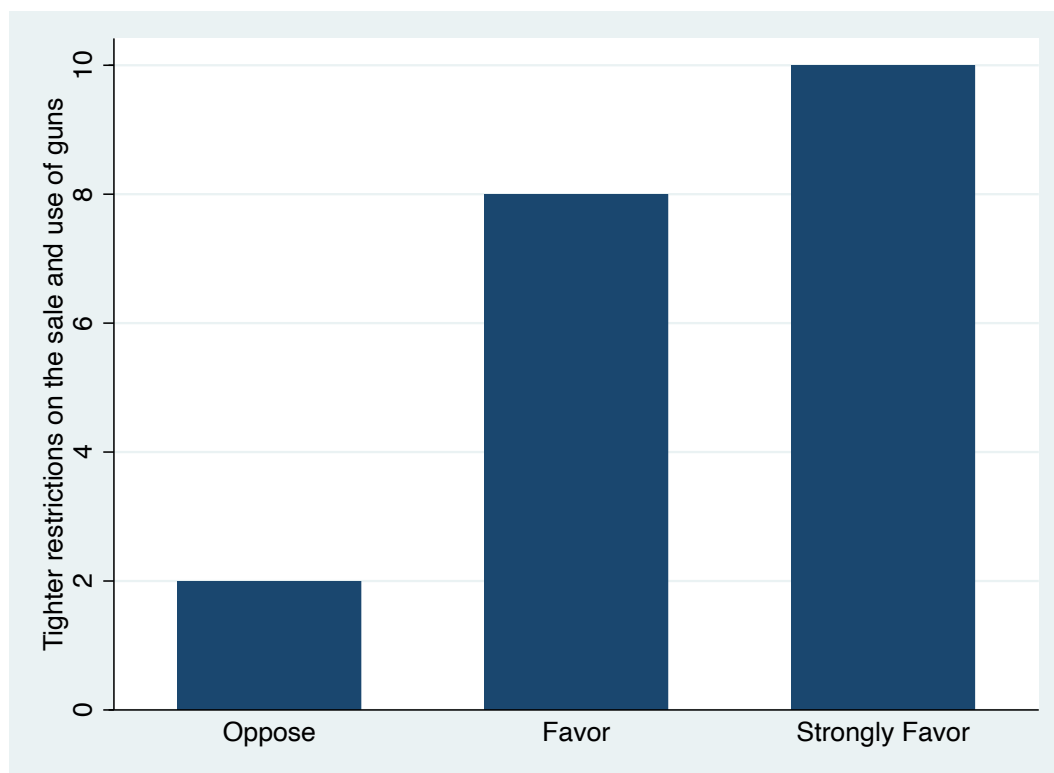
Religious members of Generation Z appear to support more forms of social and government assistance than older generations. Issues like government-funded health insurance are highly favored among this generation and laws to reduce differences in income are more favored than not.⁶¹ Unsurprisingly, abortion still remains an area in which religious members of Gen Z do not think the government should provide any funding or assistance.



Overall, the respondents of the survey favor more progressive policies like laws that give LGBTQ+ people more rights and laws creating stronger gun control. With a massive increase in gun violence in recent decades, it comes as no surprise that Generation Z sees

⁶¹ See Appendix A & B

a need to change the current legislation around gun ownership.⁶² Generation Z has largely grown up in a time in the United States during which they have been directly exposed to gun violence especially in the form of school mass shootings.

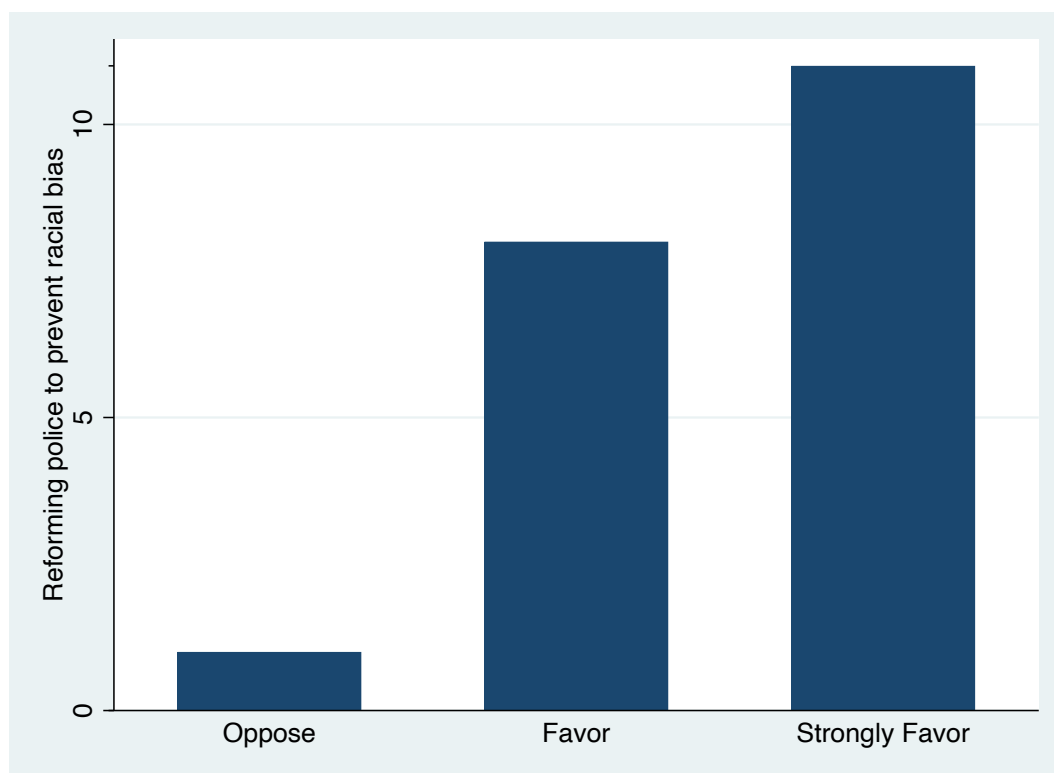


The belief that the “good guys” with guns will stop the “bad guys” with guns as Perry and Whitehead describe does not seem to hold true with this generation. When asked about their own experience with firearms, respondents who owned guns or whose family owned a gun did not articulate additional confidence, control, or safety as a result. 66% of respondents who owned a weapon indicated that they either “Disagreed” or “Neither

⁶² Gramlich, John. “What the Data Says about Gun Deaths in the U.S.” *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 16 May 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>.

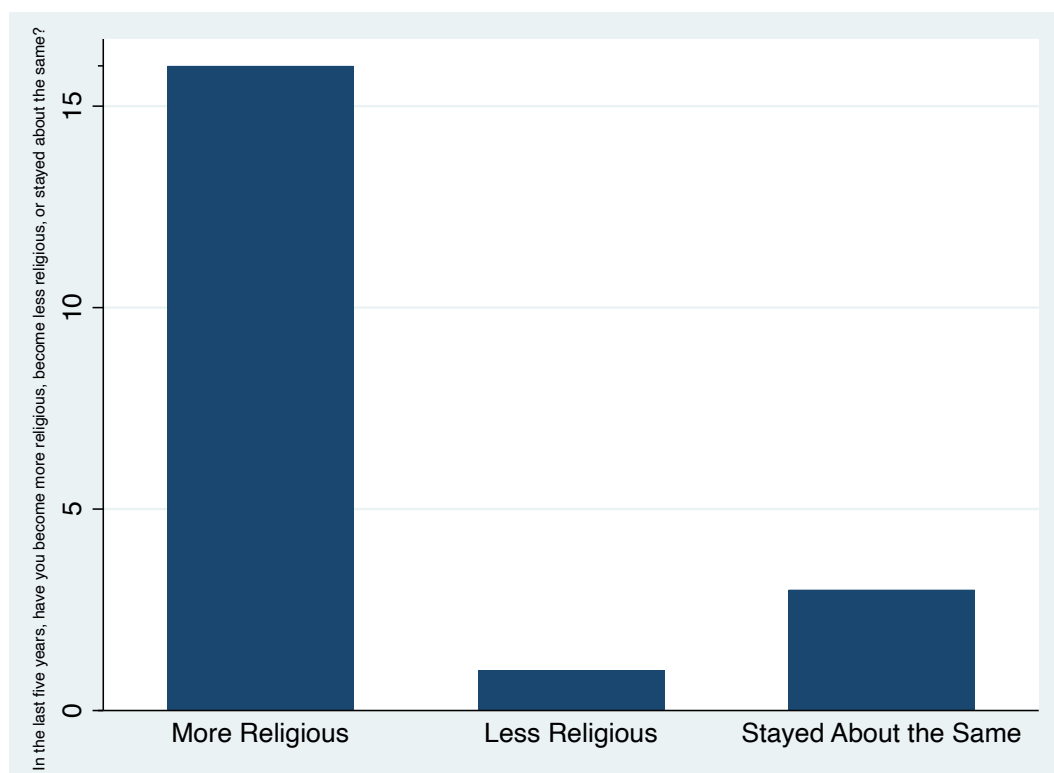
Agreed nor Disagreed” that a gun made them feel safer. None of the respondents who owned a gun indicated that it made them feel more confident or in control.

Beliefs around police reform and police brutality appear to be changing as most respondents indicated they favor or strongly favor reform to address racial bias.



The oldest members of Generation Z were in college during the summer of 2020, a time that witnessed a lot of unrest and protests of police violence and police brutality. Videos of violence against Black and Brown Americans by police officers have circulated around many media platforms with the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and dozens if not hundreds of others. Generation Z has grown up watching instances of police brutality on social media and experiencing it themselves as they attend protests and marches. These experiences may have influenced the way Generation Z views the police and the role of law enforcement within American society.

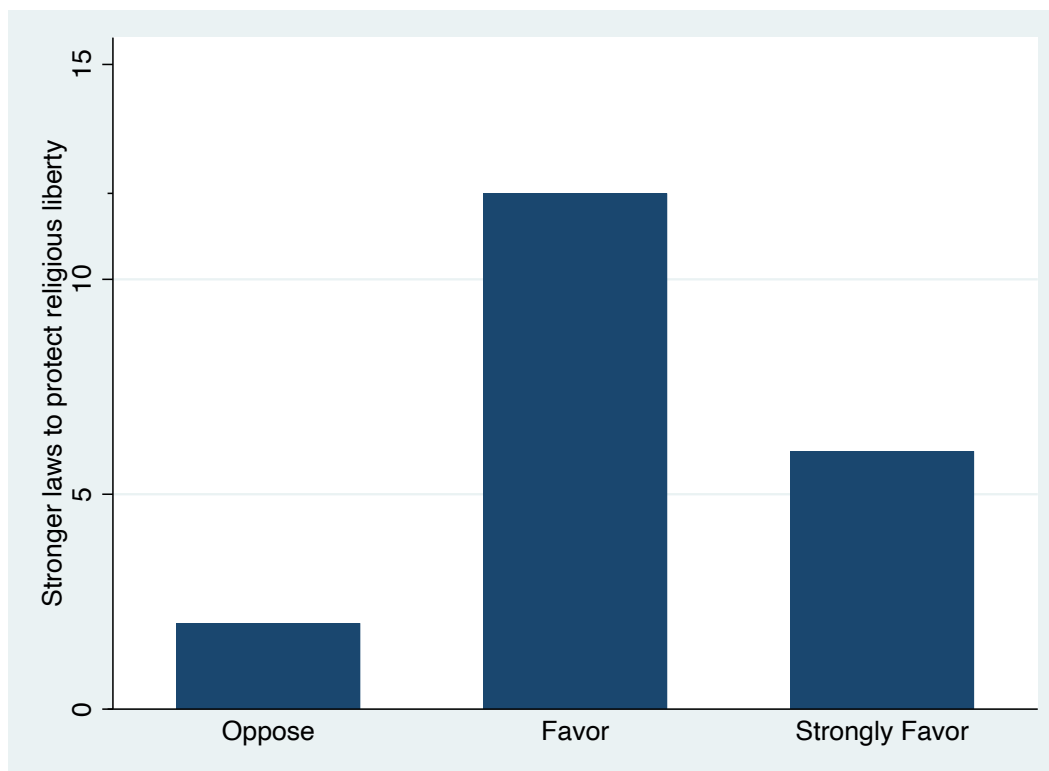
While many of these trends appear to associate with a generation that is becoming increasingly progressive and therefore less religious, the religious members of Generation Z are not waning from their religious beliefs. 85% of respondents consider themselves to be “very religious” and 60% attended religious services more than once a week.



The majority of religious Gen Z respondents have also expressed an increase in religiosity over the past five years. This time period (2018-2023) includes half of the presidential term of Donald Trump, the global COVID-19 pandemic, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, dozens of school shootings, and the Capital Insurrection.

This increase in religiosity correlates with the belief that the United States needs stronger laws to protect religious liberty. As Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs have previously stated: “freedom is understood in a libertarian way, as freedom *from*

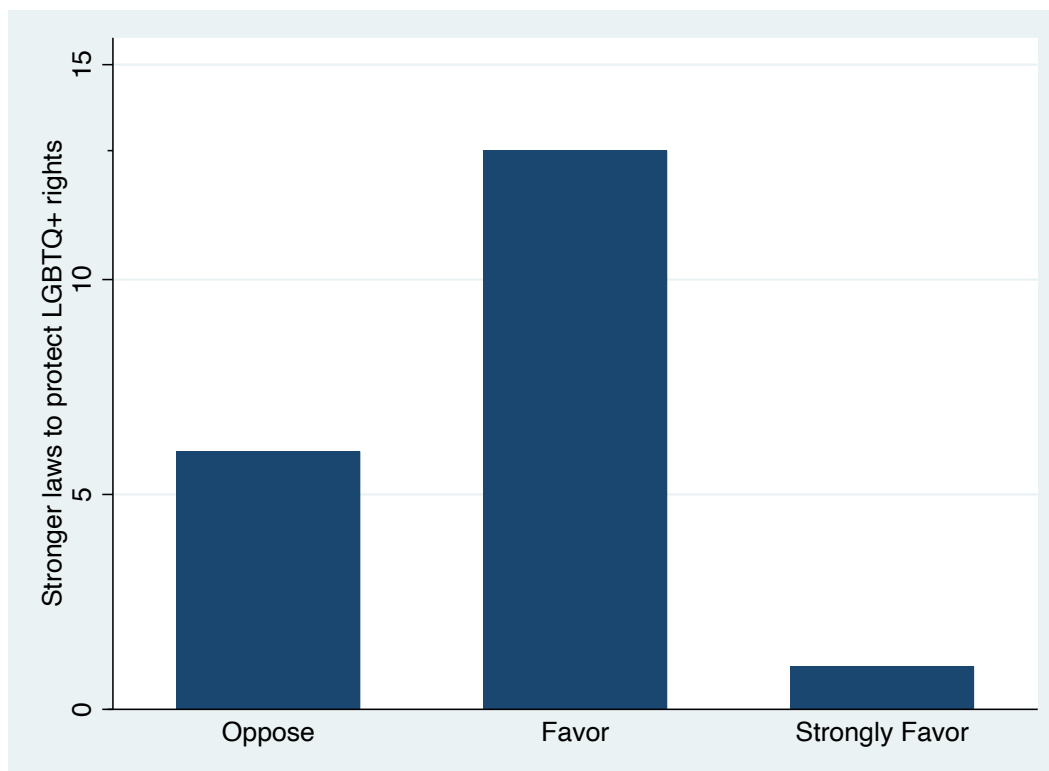
restrictions, especially by the government.”⁶³ Religious freedom for Generation Z remains one of the most important concerns which coincides with Christian Nationalist beliefs. As *The Flag and the Cross* explains, “religious freedom for Christian Nationalists, translates into “Christian” freedom, without leaving room for the cultural or religious pluralism integral to a functioning democratic tradition.”



Here we can see a conflict of interest for Generation Z. While religious liberty remains at the forefront of their social and political concerns, freedoms for select minority groups appear to be of equal importance. Religious members of Gen Z do not appear to conform to the idea that racial minorities need to be kept “in line” with state-sanctioned violence like police brutality (Figure 3). They have also reported support for expanding LGBTQ+

⁶³ Emphasis added.

rights which is infamously opposed by biblical literalists as being explicitly forbidden in the Bible.⁶⁴

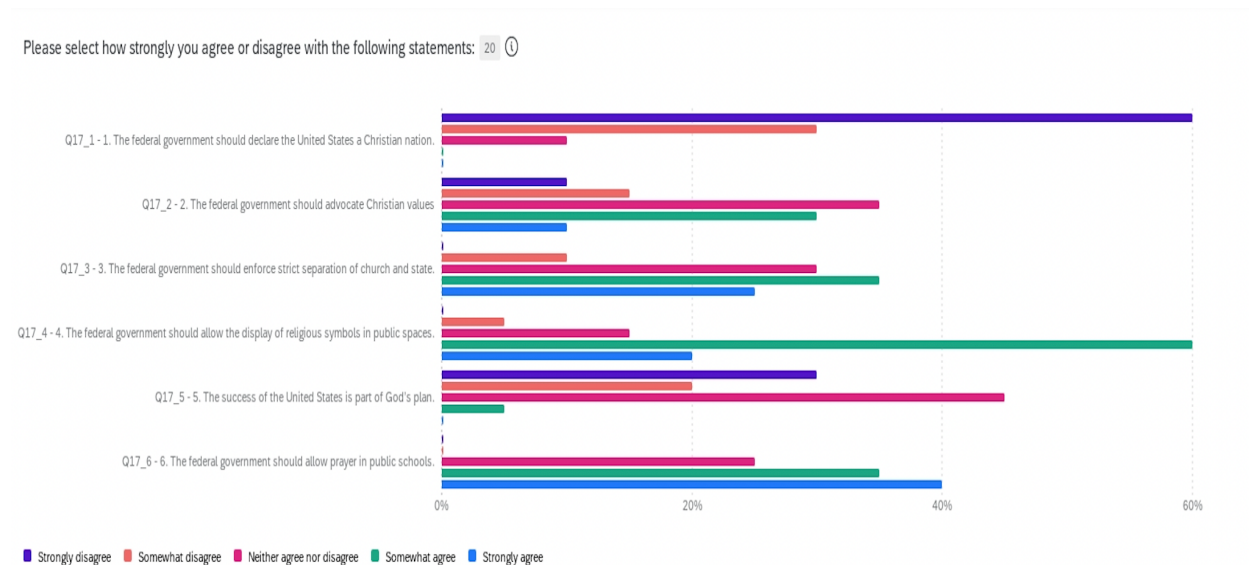


Other minority groups do not see the same support from religious members of Generation Z. Abortion remains an issue that this generation appears to be conflicted about. Certain biblical truths believed by conservative and evangelical Christians seem to be infringeable like prohibiting abortion for themselves and others, but others like support of the LGBTQ+ community have become laxer over the years.

Importantly, the religious members of Generation Z do not follow the same Christian Nationalist beliefs as previous generations. They no longer agree that the United States should be declared a Christian Nation and appear increasingly neutral on

⁶⁴ This survey question is vague in its wording. Future researchers might consider exploring which members of the LGBTQ+ community is deserving of these rights. For example, do transgender rights to healthcare score the same as support for same-sex marriage.

other Christian Nationalist beliefs. Following previously mentioned trends, this generation prioritizes religious liberty and freedom with virtually all respondents believing that the federal government should allow prayer in public schools. One respondent added the caveat that they believe if teachers get permission from parents, *then* they believe that prayer should be allowed.



These values align with beliefs that Christianity is becoming increasingly outside the social norm. In speaking with students at the Hub, they all seemed to express some level of perception gap, meaning that they believed they were being persecuted or discriminated against because of their Christian faith. As the majority religion in the United States, Christianity has been built into the core of much of American society from the Pledge of Allegiance to American currency. Perry and Cobb et al. explain this belief in terms of the belief of racial discrimination from a white majority. They label it the “perception gap” which illuminates how people in the majority (white, Christian) feel that they are experiencing discrimination and persecution akin to the way a person in a minority group would feel.

Based on the survey data, it appears as if religious members of Generation Z don't support many of the overt forms of Christian Nationalism like a strict separation of church and state but feel positively or maintain neutrality when considering the more passive types of Christian Nationalism. These respondents still feel it important to allow religious symbols in public and believe that the United States government should advocate Christian values. This variable seems to align with the belief of a Christian, and therefore white, superiority. As discussed by *The Flag and The Cross*, Christian values are often used as dog whistles for white values and by advocating for Christian values, these respondents seem eager to maintain the status quo of whiteness in the United States.

This appears to be in direct contradiction to some of the social and political survey responses which lean toward religious plurality and racial equity. Religious members of Generation Z seem to be at an impasse regarding their religious values and their differing social and political values where one contradicts the other. As more data is collected from this generation, we will see a much clearer picture of what the future of Christian Nationalism will look like in this country.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Limitations

As with any qualitative research method, the limitations of this study must be considered in conjunction with my findings. The survey used did not garner many responses (N=20) which makes extrapolating from my thesis difficult. Since only a small subset of the American population was used (Christian Gen Z members) the question of external validity is very prominent. With the temporal and financial restrictions that accompany a master's degree a true observational study that would lead to statistically significant causal effects was not possible. However, this subject has the potential to be studied at length. With additional time and resources, academics in the field of religious studies or sociology would be able to publish statistically significant and socially significant results.

Recommendations for Future Research

For scholars who continue this line of research, I recommend building relationships early with people from whom you would like to collect data. Members of religious communities that have limited trust of those outside of their groups (like evangelical Christians) are much less interested in answering questions about their religious and political beliefs when it is framed as a survey or a data collection effort. When speaking with individuals in a more informal capacity, I found that they were much more inclined to share their beliefs even if they were intolerant, misogynist, or homophobic. The questions themselves in the survey could also be interpreted as off-putting to members of religious communities. I had a chance to speak with a pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church about my research and my hope to reach as many young

people in the Charlottesville area as possible.⁶⁵ He appeared very enthusiastic about my research and reassured me that he would encourage the young people to complete the survey. However, once I sent the survey to him so that he could peruse the questions I was met with a wall of silence. A pastor that was previously very easy to connect with could not be reached after many attempts even through the secretary of the church. Now, there could be other reasons for this lack of communication, but it leads me to my next recommendation for the future of this research project.

In the years following the #MeToo movement, the Black Lives Matter protests and the rise and falter of Trumpism, I suggest that many evangelical Christians or conservative Protestant Christians are becoming increasingly aware that their beliefs are failing to meet the progressive demands of American society. I argue that these groups are fully aware of their general lack of acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, racial and ethnic minorities, and their support for the subordination of women and how it has hindered their growth and acceptance into mainstream American culture of the 21st century. Based on survey responses and informal interviews with Christian members of Generation Z, it appears as if this new generation knows what is “socially acceptable” or “politically correct” and gives the answer they think the data collector wants to hear. For example, at Trinity Presbyterian the congregation had recently split due to conflict over women wanting leadership roles in the church. Trinity Presbyterian maintained that women should not be allowed to hold pastoral roles and that it was unbiblical. However, young people at Trinity Presbyterian maintained through survey data that they (70%)

⁶⁵ This individual had just completed their PhD at the University of Virginia in Christian Ethics and I made the assumption that they would be inclined to assist students who were doing research in the field of Christian Nationalism

were indeed feminists that believed in the equality of men and women. This creates a cognitive dissonance for the researcher when trying to examine a person's true religious or political beliefs. I suggest that religious members of Generation Z know what "correct" response to articulate so that they are no longer seen as outside the mainstream of contemporary America.

Future researchers might benefit from re-formatting the standard Christian Nationalism scale questions as well as giving the survey to multiple generations. In my analysis I have operated under the assumption that the social and political opinions of former generations discussed in Perry, Whitehead, Grubbs' et al. books have remained relatively constant. This assumption could be incorrect and the latest social and political movements had the ability to modify beliefs and behaviors of all Americans, not just the youngest generation. To establish external validity in later studies, I recommend an inter-generational survey to compare against previous researcher's work.

Conclusion

The impact of this study has the potential to predict how American society will evolve in the coming years as more members of Generation Z become eligible to vote and participate in society. Some scholars believe that Christian Nationalism is incompatible with democracy and therefore Christian Nationalists will attempt to undermine democratic systems. We have already seen a foreshadowing of this with the January 6th, 2021, insurrection attempt and the "stolen election" conspiracy theory. These extremist views might only increase as Christians lose their religious and cultural power in American society.

The empirical research surrounding the impact of Christian Nationalism on contemporary American society has wide-reaching implications for the fields of sociology, political science, and religious studies. Since the most prominent scholars of an empirical methodology to Christian Nationalism are sociologists, the approach to Christian Nationalist thought has focused on understanding the actions and beliefs of Christian Nationalists almost entirely separate from their theological beliefs. Religious studies scholars have an opportunity to enhance empirical analyses by not only informing the theological foundations of Christian Nationalism, but also predicting how the impact of Christian Nationalist beliefs will affect religious communities in the United States. Empirical research itself also comes with its own limitations. While these sociologists have included a handful of interview and observations to supplement their work, they rely mostly on survey responses. While surveys can be incredibly helpful in collecting data and providing clear patterns, they leave very little room for nuance and discussion. Christian Nationalism is a complex system of beliefs and influences Americans in a variety of ways. With the negative effects of Christian Nationalism so visible in contemporary American civil and political discourse, any additional attempts to understand Christian Nationalists should be taken advantage of by scholars.

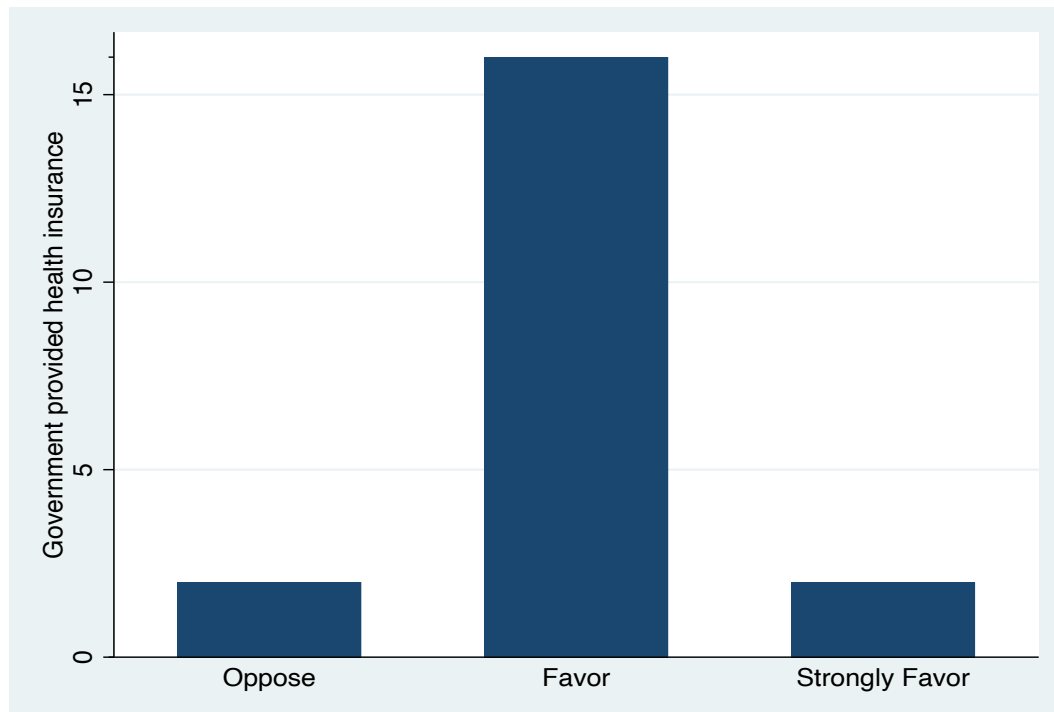
Perry, Whitehead, Gorski, and Jones have all explored the social and political influence of Christian Nationalism on contemporary American culture. Whitehead and Perry discuss the social and political beliefs of Christian Nationalists and how their understanding of religion and race has influenced their values. Gorski and Perry meanwhile make a more urgent claim that Christian Nationalists are becoming the biggest threat to American democracy with their desire to maintain political and social

control while subverting democratic ideals like free and fair elections. Jones, however, claims that white Christians have already lost majority power in the United States and that they will eventually fracture so much as a group that they will lose any further cohesion. However, the authors in this bibliographical analysis fail to examine the historical extent to how much Christian Nationalists have influenced American society and politics. Perry and Gorski briefly explore how Christian Nationalists influenced the history of lynchings in the United States but fail to do an in-depth analysis of how Christian Nationalist ideas have affected historical political beliefs, systemic racism, or past social perspectives. There are ample openings in the current literature that could be filled by scholars of history, religious studies, or American studies to get a better understanding of how Christian Nationalist ideals and values have shaped American history.

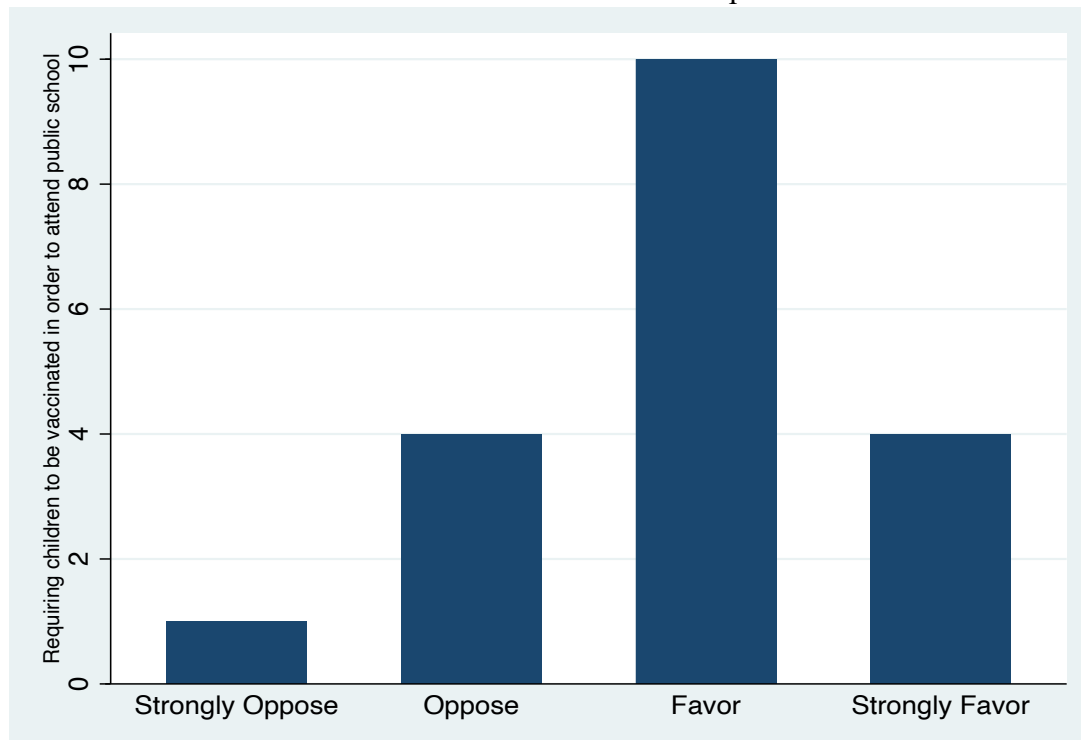
I anticipate that in the upcoming years, there will be an increased need in the study of Christian Nationalism that works to mitigate the effects that Christian Nationalists have on American society. With such a radical following, it is possible that academic scholars and even psychologists might work to understand the effects that such bigotry and prejudice has on the brain, as well as find a way to reach out to Christian Nationalists themselves in order to transform their controversial beliefs to be more conducive to a democratic society of tolerance and pluralism.

Appendix A.

Frequency of respondents who oppose, favor, or strongly favor government provided health insurance.

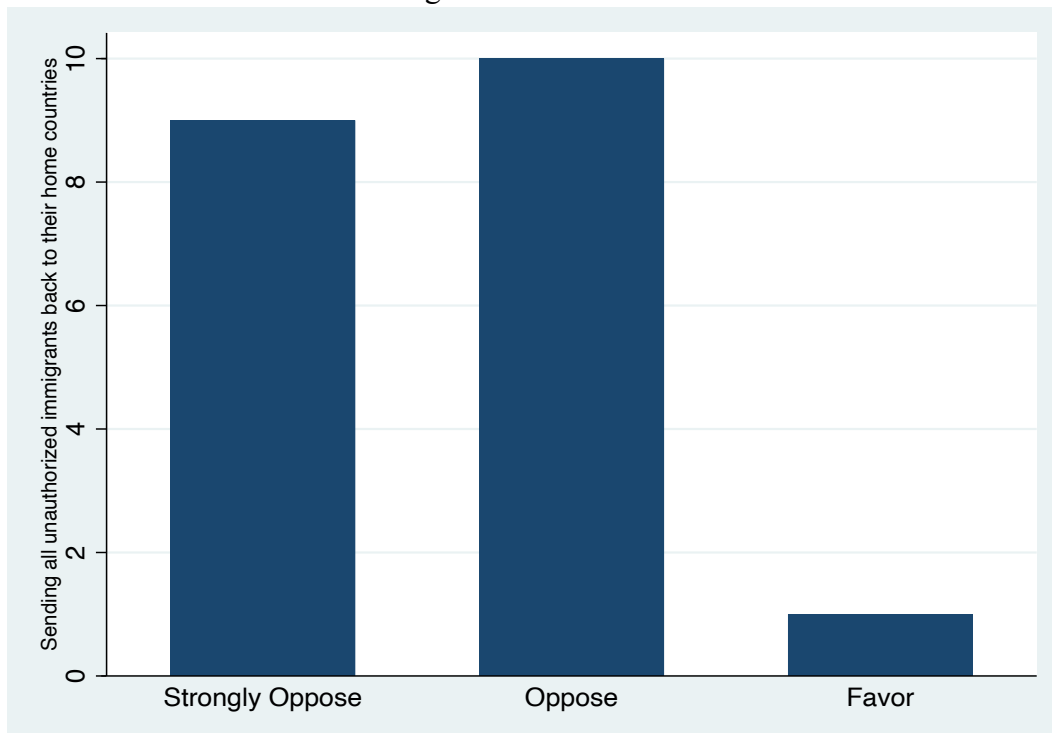
**Appendix B.**

Frequency of respondents who strongly oppose, oppose, favor, or strongly favor requiring children to be vaccinated in order to attend public school.

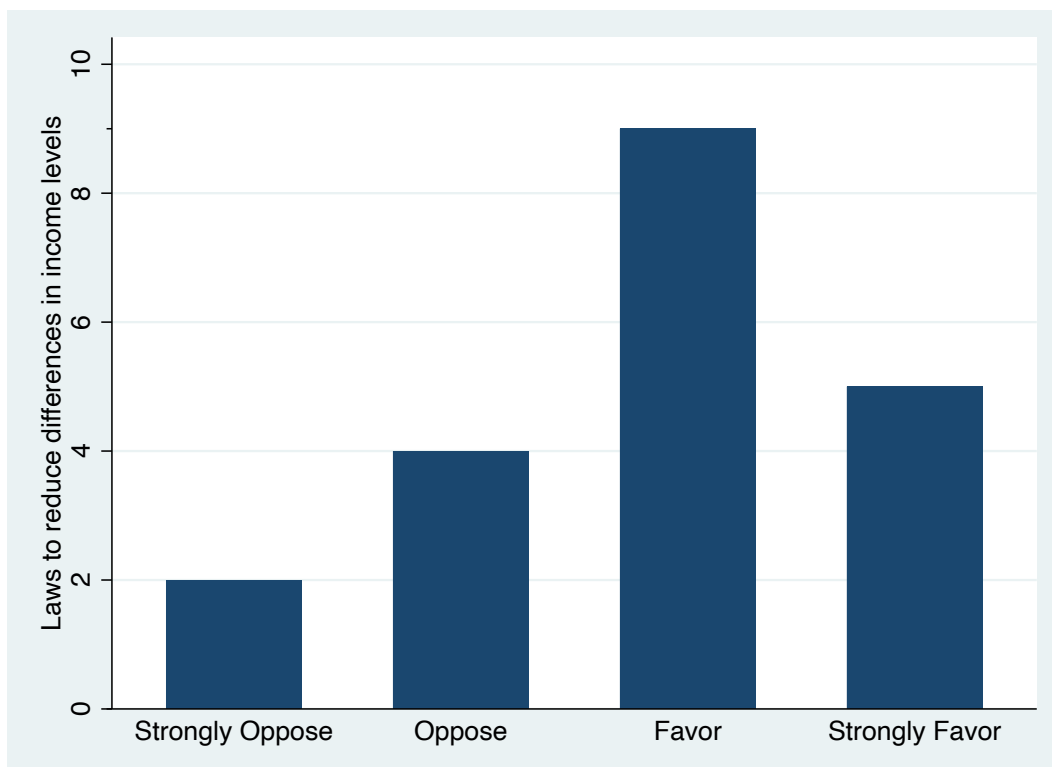


Appendix C.

Frequency of respondents who strongly oppose, oppose, or favor sending all unauthorized immigrants back to their home countries.

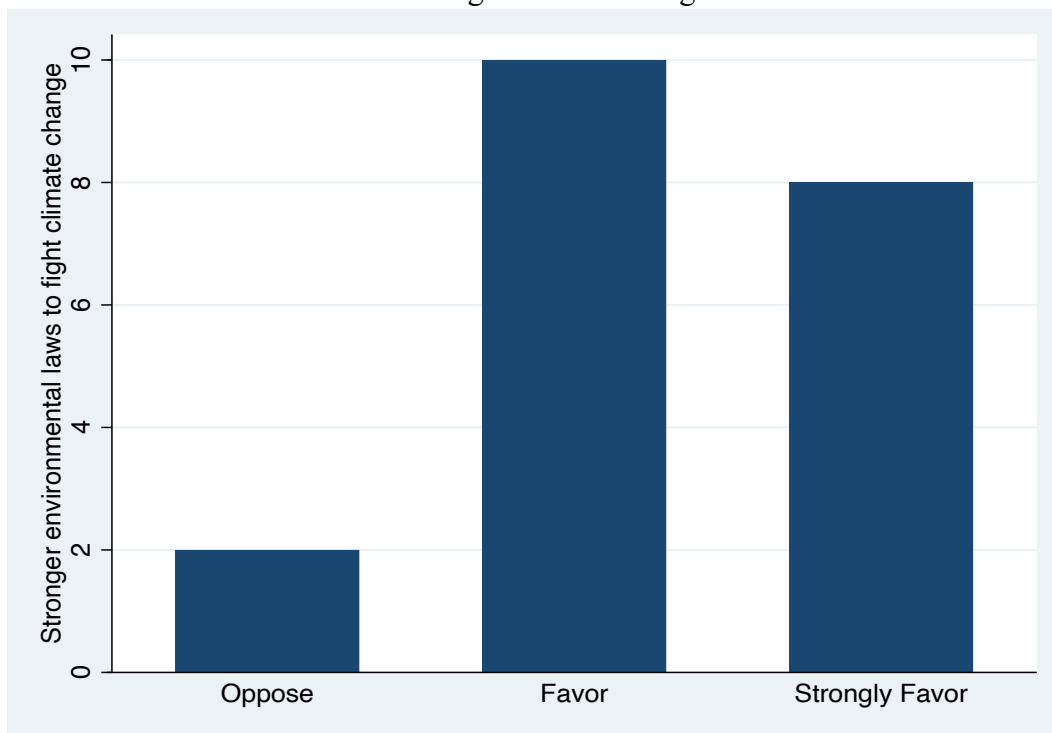
**Appendix D.**

Frequency of respondents who strongly oppose, oppose, favor, or strongly favor laws to reduce differences in income levels.

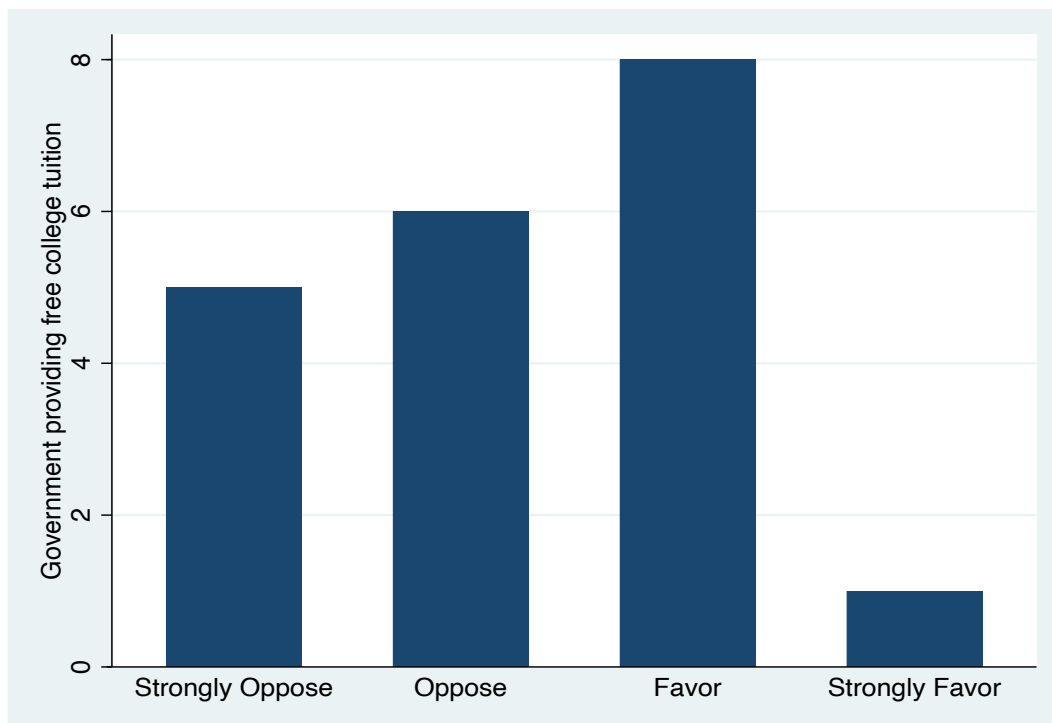


Appendix E.

Frequency of respondents who oppose, favor, or strongly favor stronger environmental laws to fight climate change.

**Appendix F.**

Frequency of respondents who strongly oppose, oppose, favor, or strongly favor laws to reduce differences in income levels.



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