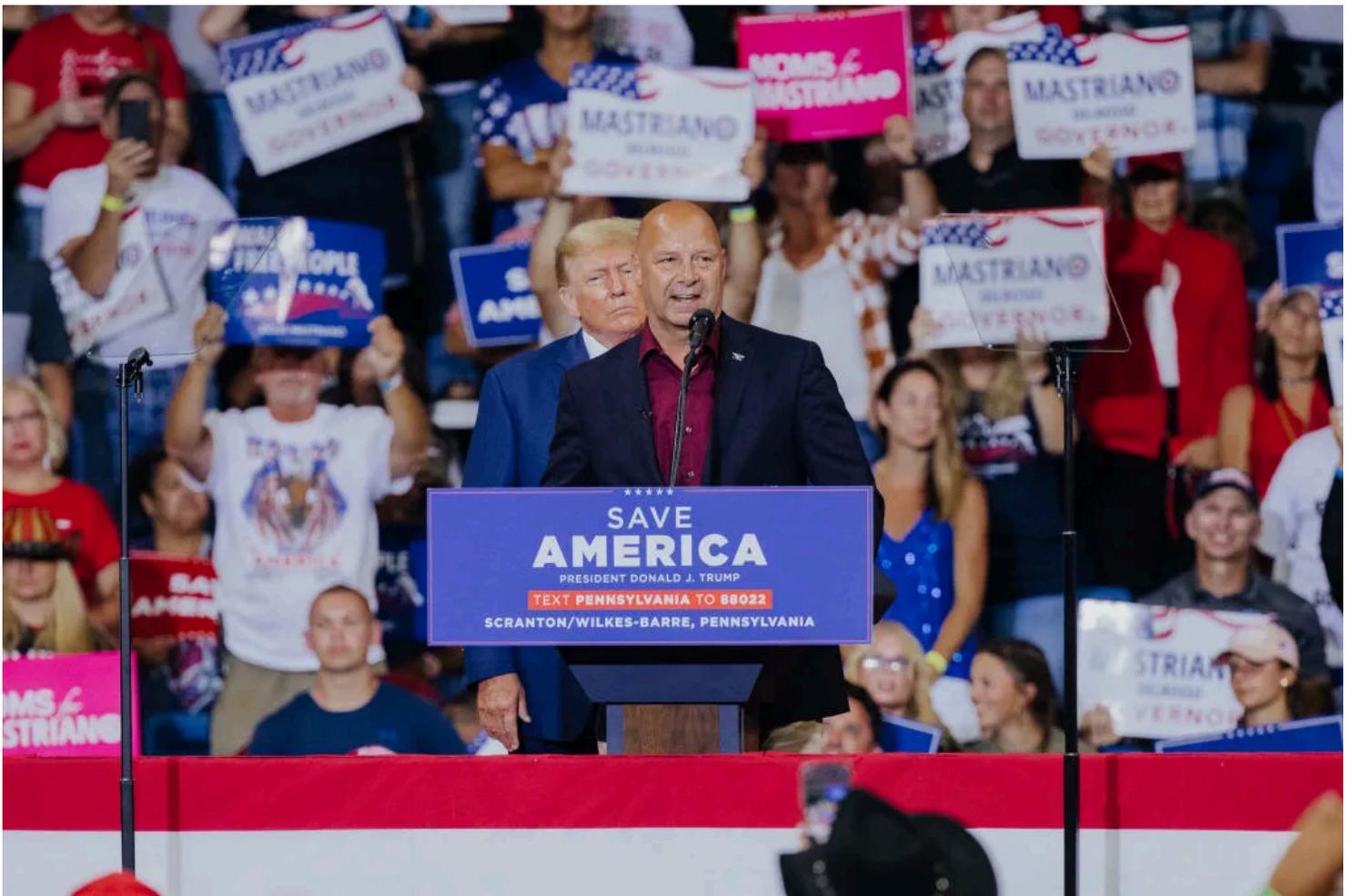


IDEAS RELIGION

3 Threats Christian Nationalism Poses to the United States

6 MINUTE READ



Doug Mastriano, Republican gubernatorial candidate for Pennsylvania, speaks during a rally with former US President Donald Trump in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, US, on Saturday, Sept. 3, 2022. Trump used a Pennsylvania rally to vent his anger at an FBI search of his Florida home and President Joe Bidens attack on political extremism, staking his claim as his successors election rival in 2024. Michelle Gustafson-Bloomberg

IDEAS

Whitehead (@andrewwhitehead) is an Associate Professor of Sociology at IUPUI and author of the forthcoming book, *American Idolatry: How Christian Nationalism Betrays the Gospel and Threatens the Church*. He is co-author (with Samuel Perry) of the award-winning book *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*.

In a recent national **poll**, researchers found that a majority of Republicans favor declaring the United States a Christian nation. In July, Marjorie Taylor Greene made waves on social media when she claimed Republicans should proudly **embrace** Christian nationalism. Politicians like Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano have increasingly used Christian nationalist **rhetoric** on the campaign trail, likely due to seeing how well it worked for **Trump**. It is clear more people are paying attention to and using the term; there were more tweets including “Christian nationalism” in July of 2022 than in all of 2021 **combined**.

But what is “Christian nationalism” and is it really worth the fuss?

Christian **nationalism** refers to an ideology that asserts all civic life in the U.S. should be organized according to a particularly conservative and ethnocentric expression of Christianity. Christian nationalism is more than theological or religious beliefs. It includes several cultural assumptions including:

- Strict moral traditionalism focused on sustaining social hierarchies.
- Comfort with authoritarian control—exercised by the “right” people—that includes the threat and use of violence.
- A desire for strict ethno-racial boundaries around who is a “true” American, where non-white and non-natural born citizens are viewed as unworthy of full participation in American civic life. (This is why many label it *white* Christian nationalism)

Christian nationalism centers and privileges the white, Christian experience. It believes the founders of the U.S. were conservative, white Christian men intent on founding a country where they and others like them could lead and flourish. Now, many Americans believe Christianity played an important role in the founding period or that the founding fathers were religious in one way or another. No reputable historian disputes these claims.

However, Christian nationalism moves well beyond such observations. It views this particular expression of Christianity as the undisputed **framework** of the U.S. and wants all levels of the government to preserve that framework.

This means that Christian nationalism does not want a government for the people by the people. It wants a government *for a particular people, by a particular people*. Namely, politically and religiously conservative white American Christians.

Survey after **survey** show between 15-20 percent of Americans strongly embrace the tenets of Christian nationalism, while another one-third support it, albeit less fervently.

Perhaps now we can sense the danger Christian nationalism poses to the U.S. if it sees our country as primarily for the benefit of a small subset of the overall population. A burgeoning collection of recent social science research provides evidence of the threats Christian nationalism poses and here I will identify three.

Christian nationalism is anti-democratic

Christian nationalism is about power. Power in the “right” hands to ensure the U.S. fulfills its covenant with God. However, democracy demands we share power. This places Christian nationalism at odds with **democracy**.

Americans who embrace Christian nationalism want to ensure the country does not turn its back on God. So when the political winds turn against stances they see as endorsed by God, they must do all they can to stand for what they see as the ultimate good. Candidates like Mastriano are willing to set aside democracy itself, ignoring the results of fair and free elections, to fulfill their interpretations of God’s commands.

This is why in one **recent study** we find that Americans who embrace Christian nationalism are more likely to:

- Deny voter suppression is a problem
- Believe it is “too easy to vote” in the U.S.
- Believe voter fraud is rampant
- Support having to pass a civics test in order to vote
- Support laws that would disenfranchise anyone who committed certain crimes

And the national **poll** showing a majority of Republicans favor declaring the United States a Christian nation referenced above? It found Republicans support this stance *despite* recognizing such a move would be unconstitutional.

The anti-democratic propensities of Christian nationalism preserves the unequal access to the political process enjoyed by white, natural-born, conservative Christian citizens. Moves to expand who can pull the levers of power imperils this access. Therefore, Christian nationalism will discard democracy, if necessary.

Christian nationalism perpetuates racism

Various recent books **demonstrate** how white **Christianity** in the U.S. was a key part of the creation and **preservation** of racial hierarchies. White Christian nationalism served as the ideological mortar that allowed for the walls of racial division and inequality to be built, brick by brick. Today it perpetuates these systems.

Recent **research** shows Christian nationalism obscures the origins of racial inequality by allowing some to consider the current state of affairs as “just the way things are” or attributing racial inequality to personal or individual shortcomings of Black Americans. In fact, for white Americans, Christian nationalism is linked to affirming *whites* are the real victims. Christian nationalism is also **directly linked** to blaming Black Americans when police use deadly force.

According to the ideology of Christian nationalism, the negative experiences of racial and ethnic minorities in our country are mere distractions bent on sowing division.

Christian nationalism approves of political violence

Comfort with violence is a natural byproduct of Christian nationalism's obsession with power. At times, the only way to get people to do what they should—as God commanded—is with the use (or threat) of force.

Embracing Christian nationalism is a leading predictor of which Americans believe the riots at the Capitol on January 6th were **justified** and that violence is acceptable in advancing **political** goals. Christian nationalism is also closely linked to believing true American patriots may have to resort to physical violence in order to **save** the U.S. These findings suggest that to a subset of the American population, January 6th was no mere **aberration**.

The next time we hear anyone confidently declare “true Americans” and “faithful Christians” should embrace Christian nationalism, or that the outcomes of elections are battles of biblical proportions of good versus evil, we can remember how Christian nationalism is anti-democratic, perpetuates racism, and approves of political violence.

These three threats are especially concerning when a national **poll** shows a majority of one political party favors declaring the U.S. a Christian nation.

It is vital we identify and help others recognize the threats Christian nationalism poses if we want to move closer to a country that truly exemplifies liberty and justice for all.

MORE MUST-READS FROM TIME

- The Rise of a **New Kind of Parenting Guru**
- The **50 Best Romance Novels** to Read Right Now
- **Mark Kelly** and the History of Astronauts Making the Jump to Politics
- The Young Women **Challenging Iran's Regime**
- **How to Be More Spontaneous** As a Busy Adult
- Can Food Really **Change Your Hormones?**
- Column: Why **Watching Simone Biles** Makes Me Cry

- Get Our **Paris Olympics Newsletter** in Your Inbox

CONTACT US AT LETTERS@TIME.COM

TIME Ideas hosts the world's leading voices, providing commentary on events in news, society, and culture. We welcome outside contributions. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of TIME editors.



► Discover

MD: Building Muscle After 60 Comes Down To This 1 Thing

primenutritionsecrets.com | Sponsored

This Game's Graphics Will Leave You Speechless

A Stunning Fantasy Role-Playing Game. It Is So Beautiful It's Worth Installing Just To See

Raid: Shadow Legends | Sponsored

Install No

Why Jade Carey Fell During Her Floor Routine

After falling during her floor routine, gymnast Jade Carey of Team USA explained that she's been fighting an illness

TIME

Heart Surgeon Begg Americans Over 50: "Stop Eating This for Breakfast"

The Top 3 Common Foods That You Would Have Never Guessed Were The Cause Of Your Fatigue

Gundry.MD | Sponsored

Learn more

Amazon Hates When Seniors Do This, But Can't Stop You (It's Genius)

Think you're getting the best deal when you shop online? Don't buy a single thing until you try this - you won't regret it.

Online Shopping Tools | Sponsored

Buy This "Next-Gen AI" Stock Immediately

Chaikin Analytics | Sponsored

Search War Records by Name

MyHeritage™ | Sponsored

Who Has the Cheapest Car Insurance in Maryland (Check Zip Code)

Otto Quotes | Sponsored

Warren Buffett's Top 5 Retirement Stocks

Zacks Investment Research | Sponsored

Learn More

The Story Behind Simone Biles' Viral Instagram Caption

Simone Biles took to social media to celebrate Team USA winning a gold medal, but it was her caption that caught the most attention.

TIME

Man Who Called Nvidia at \$1.10 Says Buy This Now.

Oxford Club | Sponsored

Roofers Tested 17 Gutter Guards...Here's What They Discovered

More Than 410,000 Homeowners Have Already Done it. Check it out!

Homebuddy.com | Sponsored

Read More

Mix Toothpaste and Vaseline and Just Watch

lifehackguru.com | Sponsored

Japan Gymnastics Captain Exits Olympics After Rule Violation

Shoko Miyata, the 19-year-old captain of Japan's Artistic Gymnastics Olympic squad, has exited the sporting event.

TIME

Unsold Cruise Cabins Cost Almost Nothing For Seniors (See Why)

Seniors have access to a lot of great cruise deals, but some of the best ones are hidden. Here's how to find them.

Online Shopping Tools | Sponsored

TIME



Home

U.S.

Politics

World

Health

Business

Tech

Personal Finance by TIME Stamped

Shopping by TIME Stamped

Entertainment

Ideas

Science

History

Sports

Magazine

The TIME Vault

TIME For Kids

TIMECO2

[Future of Work by Charter](#)

[Coupons](#)

[TIME Edge](#)

[Press Room](#)

[Video](#)

[TIME Studios](#)

[Masthead](#)

[U.S. & Canada Customer Care](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Global Help Center](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Contact the Editors](#)

[Digital Magazine](#)

[Reprints and Permissions](#)

[Give a Gift](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Shop the TIME Store](#)

[Media Kit](#)

[Careers](#)

[Supplied Partner Content](#)

[Modern Slavery Statement](#)

[About Us](#)

© 2024 TIME USA, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [Terms of Service](#), [Privacy Policy](#) ([Your Privacy Rights](#)) and [Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information](#).

TIME may receive compensation for some links to products and services on this website. Offers may be subject to change without notice.