

Protecting America's borders: Christian nationalism, threat, and attitudes toward immigrants in the United States

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Abstract

Attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policies are divisive issues in American politics. These attitudes are influenced by factors such as political orientation and religiousness, with religious and conservative individuals demonstrating higher prejudice toward immigrants and refugees, and endorsing stricter immigration policies. Christian nationalism, an ideology marked by the belief that America is a Christian nation, may help explain how religious nationalist identity influences negative attitudes toward immigrants. The current research addresses this through four studies among participants in the US. Across studies, our results showed that Christian nationalism was a significant and consistent predictor of anti-immigrant stereotypes, prejudice, dehumanization, and support for anti-immigrant policies. These effects were robust to inclusion of other sources of anti-immigrant attitudes, including religious fundamentalism, nationalism, and political ideology. Further, perceived threats from immigrants mediated the relationship between Christian nationalism and dehumanization of immigrants, and attitudes toward immigration policies. These findings have implications for our understanding of the relations between religious nationalism and attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy in the US, as well as in other contexts.

Keywords

Christian nationalism, dehumanization, immigration, prejudice, threat

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In 2018, in response to criticism about a U.S. government policy separating immigrant parents from their children, then Attorney General Jeff Sessions retorted, “I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order” (Gonzales, 2018). In using a biblical verse, Sessions evoked a Christian nationalist ideology, implying that, as a Christian nation, U.S. policy should be dictated by Christian values. In

addition to believing that America is a divinely endowed Christian country, Christian nationalists endorse sacred boundaries of American identity,

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respect for order and hierarchy, and authoritarian rule (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). Consistent with Sessions's religious rhetoric, an emerging body of research suggests that those who hold more Christian nationalist views also hold more prejudiced views toward immigrants (see McDaniel et al., 2011).

In the present research, we contribute to this emerging literature in two ways. First, we conceptually replicate research linking Christian nationalist beliefs with anti-immigrant views and extend this work by testing whether Christian nationalism also predicts more extreme forms of anti-immigrant prejudice, such as support for family separation at the border and dehumanization of immigrants. Second, building on research implicating perceived threat as a source of anti-immigrant attitudes (Caricati et al., 2017), we test whether intergroup threat perceptions mechanistically explain why people who endorse stronger Christian nationalist views hold more anti-immigrant attitudes. In what follows, we briefly define Christian nationalism and expand on our rationale for testing this mechanistic link.

Christian Nationalism

Christian nationalism refers to the belief that America is a Christian nation, and that Christianity should be prominent in daily American civic life (Whitehead & Perry, 2015). Thus, Christian nationalism refers to a specific evangelical form of "civil religion," whereby individuals see America as created and endowed by God (Gorski, 2017; Whitehead, Perry, & Baker, 2018). As a result, people who endorse Christian nationalism are likely to believe that prayer should be allowed in public schools and that American political leaders should be Christian.

Although Christian nationalism represents a combination of nationalist and Christian fundamentalist ideologies, Christian nationalism exemplifies more than the sum of its parts (Shortle & Gaddie, 2015). Whereas nationalism refers to the belief that the US is a superior and dominant country, nationalist ideology does not in itself contain a religious component (Kosterman &

Feshbach, 1989). Conversely, whereas religious fundamentalism refers to the belief in biblical inerrancy (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), such a belief is not a defining feature of Christian nationalist ideology. Indeed, Christian nationalism and fundamentalism are both conceptually and psychometrically distinct (Shortle & Gaddie, 2015). Consistently, Christian nationalism is associated with outcomes beyond the variance accounted for by political conservatism, fundamentalism, and religiosity (Shortle & Gaddie, 2015; Whitehead & Perry, 2019; Whitehead, Schnabel, & Perry, 2018).

In addition to predicting support for conservative sociopolitical attitudes (Davis, 2018; Whitehead & Perry, 2015; Whitehead, Schnabel, & Perry, 2018) and system-justifying beliefs (Shepherd et al., 2017), recent works have found that Christian nationalism predicts prejudicial attitudes toward religious outgroups (i.e., Muslims; Shortle & Gaddie, 2015) and immigrants (McDaniel et al., 2011; Sherkat & Lehman, 2018). Because many immigrants to the US are Christian (i.e., Catholic, Protestant; Pew Research Center, 2014), Christian nationalists' prejudicial attitudes toward immigrants cannot merely be explained by religious group membership. Thus, we seek to better understand why Christian nationalism predicts anti-immigrant attitudes. As reviewed in what follows, we propose that perceived threat may play a key explanatory role.

Christian Nationalism and Threat

Recent research suggests that Christian nationalist rhetoric and beliefs are cloaked in a narrative of threat. For example, Christian nationalists often perceive threats to their religious freedoms (Whitehead & Perry, 2020), and view other rights that they believe are God-given (e.g., the right to gun ownership) as being under attack (Whitehead, Schnabel, & Perry, 2018). Intergroup threat theory offers cues as to why Christian nationalists may be especially sensitive to threat, suggesting that adherence to strong belief systems, high ingroup identification, cognitive rigidity, and

belief in a dangerous world, among other traits and beliefs, predispose people to be threat-sensitive (Stephan & Stephan, 2016). In their conceptualization of Christian nationalism, Whitehead and Perry (2020) underscore how Christian nationalists endorse “sacred boundaries” of cultural purity, which, when threatened, can result in racial or ethnic exclusion (Whitehead, Perry, & Baker, 2018). Researchers propose that using threat as justifications for prejudice and discrimination may help explain the link between Christian nationalism and animus toward outgroups (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). Moreover, valuing cultural purity may lead Christian nationalists to perceive immigrants as a threat to their cultural value system, such as threatening what it means to be an American.

Threat as a Link Between Christian Nationalism and Anti-Immigrant Prejudice

If Christian nationalists are especially threat-sensitive, intergroup threat theory may hold cues as to why Christian nationalists hold more anti-immigrant attitudes, including stereotypic beliefs and prejudiced evaluations. This is because (a) threat is an important mechanism through which different ideologies promote prejudice (Brandt & van Tongeren, 2017; Duckitt, 2006) and (b) people who view immigrants as posing a greater threat to their economic or physical security (i.e., realistic threat) or to their worldview or culture (i.e., symbolic threat) are more likely to hold prejudicial attitudes towards them (Cowling et al., 2019; Stephan et al., 2005; Stephan et al., 1998). Research shows that stereotypes, as beliefs about characteristics of a group and its members, shape how people think about and respond to groups, with negative stereotypes giving rise to prejudice (Dovidio et al., 2010). Prejudicial attitudes may even become extreme to the extent that threat leads people to see immigrants as violating morality, and viewing people or a group as lacking morality can lead to dehumanization (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Schwartz & Struch, 1989).

Extreme anti-immigrant attitudes, such as dehumanization, may also be driven by negative stereotypic portrayals, such as believing all immigrants are in the US illegally (Esses et al., 2013). Additionally, Americans might be especially likely to observe such extreme anti-immigrant attitudes toward Mexican and Muslim immigrants, as they are salient national and/or religious outgroups who are dehumanized the most by individuals who endorse high social dominance orientations (Costello & Hodson, 2010; Kteily et al., 2015).

The Present Research

Building on prior work, we hypothesized that Christian nationalism would be positively associated with anti-immigration prejudice and greater perceptions of immigrant-related threat, the latter of which we hypothesized might play a mechanistic role in explaining why people who endorse more Christian nationalism hold anti-immigrant attitudes. As described in the following lines, we operationalized anti-immigration prejudice as greater stereotypic views about immigrants, support for harsh anti-immigration policy, and dehumanization of immigrants. We test these hypotheses across four studies. In Study 1, we sought to first replicate the relation between seeing America as a Christian nation and negative representations of immigrants and support for anti-immigration policy in a large, nationally representative sample. In Study 2, using a separate large national probability sample, we tested whether Christian nationalism was associated with negative stereotypical representations of immigrants and refugees as threatening. In Study 3, we used a community sample to tease apart Christian nationalism from other sources of anti-immigrant attitudes and determine with greater certainty the extent to which Christian nationalism accounts for unique variance in these attitudes. Lastly, using a community sample in Study 4, we tested our novel prediction that perceived threat would mediate the relation between Christian nationalism and anti-immigrant attitudes while also extending our work to include more extreme measures of anti-immigrant prejudice: dehumanization and support for family separation.

Study 1

We analyzed data from the nationally representative Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and Brookings 2016 Immigration Survey to examine the relation between the belief that America is a Christian nation and two forms of anti-immigrant beliefs and attitudes: (a) negative stereotypes, and (b) support for restrictive/anti-immigrant policy. We predicted that belief that America is/was a Christian nation would be associated with negative stereotype endorsement of immigrants and support for exclusionary political policy (building the US–Mexico border wall).

Method

Participants and design. Participants were randomly drawn from a nationally representative sample of adults living in the US, including all 50 states and the District of Columbia ($N = 2,607$; $M_{\text{age}} = 50.92$, $SD = 17.49$), through AmeriSpeak. Participants were primarily Christian (72.9%). Respondents' racial composition was 68.7% White (non-Hispanic), 12.0% Hispanic, 11.4% Black (non-Hispanic), 4.4% other (non-Hispanic), and 3.6% two or more races (non-Hispanic). Participants were interviewed online ($n = 2,146$) or over the telephone ($n = 461$) between April 4, 2016 and May 2, 2016 in English and Spanish. For all studies, we report all data exclusions (when applicable) and all measures used within our analyses. Analyses were conducted using all available data for each measure.

Measures

Christian nationalism. A single-item measure of Christian nationalism was used (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). The item asked, "Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?" Response options included: "America has always been and is currently a Christian nation" ($n = 1,061$); "America was a Christian nation in the past, but not now" ($n = 1,071$); "America has never been a Christian nation" ($n = 431$); or "Don't know/refused" ($n = 44$). Responses

of "Don't know/refused" were excluded from analyses.

Religiosity. A single item assessed religiosity—participants' frequency of attending religious services (aside from funerals; 1 = *more than once a week*, 2 = *once a week*, 3 = *once or twice a month*, 4 = *a few times a year*, 5 = *seldom*, 6 = *never*). These were reverse-coded so higher values indicated more frequent religious attendance. Responses of "Don't know/refused" ($n = 11$) were coded as missing.

Political ideology. Participants rated their political beliefs from 1 (*very conservative*) to 5 (*very liberal*). This item was reverse-coded so higher numbers reflected more political conservatism. Responses of "Don't know/refused" ($n = 42$) were coded as missing.

Negative immigrant stereotype endorsement. A single item measured negative immigrant stereotype endorsement: "How well do you think the following describes immigrants coming into the US today?: They increase crime in local communities" (1 = *very well*, 4 = *not at all well*). Responses were reverse-coded so higher numbers reflected stronger endorsement. Responses of "Don't know/refused" ($n = 71$) were coded as missing.

Attitude toward immigration policy. An item assessing immigration policy attitudes asked, "Do you favor or oppose the following—Building a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico" (1 = *strongly favor*, 4 = *strongly oppose*). Responses were reverse-keyed so higher numbers reflected stronger endorsement. Responses of "Don't know/refused" ($n = 34$) were coded as missing.

Results

To estimate the relation between the belief that America is/was a Christian nation and immigrant stereotype endorsement and support for anti-immigrant policy, we regressed attitudinal measures on Christian nationalism, which was dummy-coded (with the belief that America has never been a

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for Study 1.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Christian nationalism	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. Religiosity	.12**	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	3.76	1.67
3. Political ideology	.20**	.28***	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	3.07	1.01
4. RWA	.11***	.08***	.20***	1.00	–	–	–	–	2.39	1.06
5. Age	.16**	.14	.12**	.08***	1.00	–	–	–	50.92	17.49
6. Gender	.02	–.07*	.07***	–.03	.11***	1.00	–	–	–	–
7. Race	.00	–.08**	.04	–.04*	.19***	.03	1.00	–	–	–
8. Immigrant stereotype	.13**	.10**	.28**	.26***	.08**	.05**	.11	1.00	2.72	0.88
9. Anti-immigrant policy	.19**	.14**	.40**	.35***	.11**	.10**	.13***	.45***	2.75	1.08

Note. Means and standard deviations are not reported for dichotomized variables. Additional descriptive statistics for these variables are shown in the Method section. $N = 2,607$. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Christian nation serving as reference category). As a robustness check, we conducted a secondary model controlling for religiosity (religious attendance) and political ideology, which are both predictors of outgroup attitudes. We also included demographic covariates of race (White = 0.5, non-White = –0.5), gender (male = 0.5, female = –0.5), and age (centered). Models reported in what follows use regression weights (provided by PRRI and the Brookings Institution) to provide estimates that approximate the U.S. adult population. Assumptions of the multiple regression test were examined prior to interpreting analyses and indicated no violations, including multicollinearity. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

As hypothesized, Christian nationalism was associated with greater immigrant stereotype endorsement and support for anti-immigrant policy (see Figures 1 and 2). Compared to those who believe America has never been a Christian nation, those who believe America was ($b = 0.52$, $t = 10.25$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.42, 0.61]) or currently is ($b = 0.47$, $t = 9.24$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.57]) a Christian nation reported greater stereotype-consistent beliefs about immigrants. Likewise, compared to those who believe America has never been a Christian nation, those who believe America was

($b = 0.75$, $t = 12.55$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.64, 0.87]) or currently is ($b = 0.64$, $t = 10.57$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.52, 0.75]) a Christian nation reported greater support for anti-immigrant policy. These relationships held with covariates in the model. See Table 2 for full regression results.

Discussion

Belief in a Christian America (both currently and historically) was significantly related to the negative stereotype that immigrants increase crime and to support for building the US–Mexico border wall. Most participants endorsed the view that “America is currently a Christian nation” or “[it] was previously, but no longer,” whereas only 16.7% of participants endorsed the belief that America has never been a Christian nation. There were also significant differences in negative immigrant stereotypes and support for the US–Mexico border wall between those who viewed America as historically or currently a Christian nation and those who endorsed the view that America has never been a Christian nation. Among the latter group, negative stereotypes of immigrants and support for the U.S. border wall were lowest, showing more positive attitudes toward

Table 2. Regression results for Study 1.

Predictors	Negative immigrant stereotype					Support for anti-immigrant policy				
	B [95% CI]	β	<i>t</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	<i>R</i> ²	B [95% CI]	β	<i>t</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	<i>R</i> ²
Step 1					.04					.06
CN										
Past versus never	0.52 [0.42, 0.61]	.29	10.25***	.04		0.75 [0.64, 0.87]	.35	12.55***	.06	
Always versus never	0.47 [0.37, 0.57]	.26	9.24***	.03		0.64 [0.52, 0.75]	.29	10.57***	.04	
Step 2					.13					.24
CN										
Past versus never	0.36 [0.26, 0.46]	.20	7.01***	.02		0.49 [0.37, 0.61]	.23	8.30***	.02	
Always versus never	0.34 [0.24, 0.44]	.19	6.59***	.02		0.39 [0.28, 0.51]	.18	6.67***	.01	
RWA	0.15 [0.12, 0.18]	.18	9.20***	.03		0.24 [0.21, 0.28]	.24	13.18***	.05	
Religiosity	0.02 [0.00, 0.04]	.04	1.94	.00		0.02 [-0.01, 0.04]	.03	1.49	.00	
Political	0.18 [0.14, 0.21]	.19	9.53***	.03		0.32 [0.28, 0.36]	.30	15.43***	.08	
Age	0.00 [-0.00, 0.00]	-.00	-0.14	.00		0.00 [0.00, 0.01]	.07	3.52***	.00	
Gender	0.05 [-0.02, 0.11]	.03	1.31	.00		0.17 [0.10, 0.25]	.08	4.40***	.01	
Race	0.21 [0.14, 0.28]	.11	5.69***	.01		0.29 [0.21, 0.37]	.13	6.91	.02	

Note. CN = Christian nationalism; RWA = right-wing authoritarianism. $N_{\text{immigrant stereotype}} = 2,503$; $N_{\text{anti-immigrant policy}} = 2,535$. *** $p < .001$.

immigrants and lower support for anti-immigrant policy.

Interestingly, the effect of Christian nationalism in this study was small. This small effect could be due in part to the single-item categorical measurement of Christian nationalism, which may insufficiently capture variance in the strength of these attitudes and may not fully capture all features of the construct itself (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). For example, this item does not assess the belief that the United States has a special role in God's divine plan—a central feature of Christian nationalism. Additionally, our measure may have tapped into a sense of nostalgic deprivation, or a sense of threat to or loss of status (Gest et al., 2018). Consistent with this possibility, ancillary analyses revealed that participants who endorsed the belief that America was a Christian nation in the past demonstrated slightly stronger support for anti-immigrant policies ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.09$, $p = .030$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.18]) and endorsed negative immigrant stereotypes

($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.10$, $p = .010$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.17]) compared to those who believed America has always been a Christian nation. This is consistent with research showing that demographic shifts can lead people to perceive status-based threats, which in turn increases outgroup prejudice (Craig & Richeson, 2014). However, we are apprehensive to draw strong conclusions based on the measure used and the small difference detected. Future work may seek to test the Christian nationalism as nostalgic deprivation hypothesis further.

Furthermore, the item used to assess anti-immigrant attitudes (belief that immigrants increase crime in local communities) may be conflated with perceptions of threat. It is also unclear whether this reflects a unique threat posed by immigrants, or general immigrant animus. To address these limitations, in Study 2 we use more nuanced measures and investigate other important attitudes toward both immigrants and refugees.

Table 3. Correlations and descriptive statistics for variables in Study 2.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Biblical literalism	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	2.55	1.11
2. Religiosity	.66**	1.00	–	–	–	–	2.68	1.07
3. Political ideology	.41**	.43**	1.00	–	–	–	3.98	1.41
4. Christian nationalism	.68**	.60**	.55**	1.00	–	–	2.41	0.83
5. Refugee stereotype	.31**	.27**	.56**	.50**	1.00	–	2.24	0.93
6. Mexican immigrant stereotype	.32**	.25**	.40**	.46**	.57**	1.00	1.67	0.67

Note. ** $p < .01$.

Study 2

We sought to conceptually replicate results from Study 1. With data from the national 2017 Baylor Religion Survey (2017), we use a multi-item, commonly used measure of Christian nationalism that addresses some of the limitations from Study 1 and tests for robustness of effects by controlling religiosity, religious fundamentalism, political ideology, and demographics. Further, we examined separate negative stereotypes of Mexican immigrants as well as Muslim refugees—two immigrant groups of which people’s perceptions of legal residency vary. We hypothesized that Christian nationalism would be associated with negative attitudes toward immigrants and refugees, and that these relations would hold while controlling for religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and political ideology.

Method

Participants and design. The Baylor Religion Survey is a national probability sample that includes items about sociopolitical attitudes, religious variables, health, psychosocial characteristics, and individual demographics. We used the 2017 wave, which included 1,501 completed surveys. We excluded participants who did not respond to Christian nationalism items, reducing our sample size to 1,452 (58% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 54.86$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 17.01$). Participants were 69.5% Christian; 79.1% White, 10.7% Black, 4.0% missing, 2.9% two or more races, 2.5% Asian, 0.6% American Indian, and 0.3% Pacific Islander. Sample data were weighted to reduce occurrence of bias and over/underrepresentation by subgroups by Gallup.

Analyses were conducted with sampling weights, using all available data for each measure.

Measures. Descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Table 3.

Christian nationalism. Six items assessed Christian nationalism (Davis, 2018; McDaniel et al., 2011; Whitehead & Perry, 2015). Items read as follows, “The federal government should declare the United States a Christian Nation”; “The federal government should advocate Christian values”; “The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces”; “The federal government should allow prayer in public schools”; “The success of the United States is part of God’s plan”; and “The federal government should enforce a strict separation of Church and State” (reverse-coded item). Items were rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Participants who indicated “undecided” were coded as missing ($n = 193$).

Endorsement of negative immigrant stereotypes. Two items assessed attitudes toward refugees and immigrants: “Refugees from the Middle East pose a terrorist threat to the United States” and “Illegal immigrants from Mexico are mostly dangerous criminals.” Both were rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). These items tap into assumptions about people coming into the US both legally (refugees) and illegally (illegal immigrants).

Control variables. To assess the robustness of Christian nationalism on endorsement of

stereotypes toward immigrants, we controlled for a series of established prejudice predictors.

Religious fundamentalism. Biblical literalism is a central component of Christian religious fundamentalism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), which is moderately related to negative attitudes toward religious outgroups (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999). This single-item measure has been used as a proxy for religious fundamentalism and is highly correlated with standard validated measures (Brandt & van Tongeren, 2017). The item assessed personal beliefs about the Bible (1 = *The Bible means exactly what it says. It should be taken literally, word-for-word, on all subjects*, 4 = *The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends*). We reverse-coded this item such that higher values reflected higher endorsement of biblical literalism or fundamentalism.

Political ideology. One item was used to assess political ideology: “How would you describe yourself politically?” (1 = *extremely conservative*, 7 = *extremely liberal*). We reverse-coded this item such that higher values reflected more conservative attitudes.

Religiosity. We used a single-item question to measure religiosity: “How religious do you consider yourself to be?” (1 = *not religious*, 4 = *very religious*, 5 = *not sure*). We coded responses of “Not sure” as missing ($n = 19$).

Results

To estimate the relation between Christian nationalism and endorsement of stereotypes of both Mexican immigrants and Muslim refugees, we regressed stereotype endorsement on Christian nationalism (centered). To test robustness, we conducted a secondary model controlling for religious fundamentalism (centered), religiosity (centered), and political ideology (centered). We also included demographic covariates of race (White = 0.5, non-White = -0.5), gender (male = 0.5, female = -0.5), and age (centered). Models reported in the following lines use regression weights (calculated for the Baylor

Religion Survey by Gallup) to provide representative estimates of the U.S. adult population, using the Current Population Survey 2015 population projections. Assumptions of the multiple regression test were examined prior to interpreting analyses and indicated no violations, including multicollinearity.

As expected, Christian nationalism predicted greater negative stereotype endorsement of Mexican immigrants, $b = 0.37$, $t(1421) = 19.35$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.41], $\eta_p^2 = .21$, and Muslim refugees, $b = 0.56$, $t(1405) = 21.71$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.51, 0.62], $\eta_p^2 = .25$. These relations held with covariates in the model (see Table 4).¹

Discussion

In a second national sample of Americans, Christian nationalism was associated with greater endorsement of negative immigrant stereotypes, even when accounting for religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and political ideology. Political ideology accounted for more variance in negative immigrant stereotypes than religious variables, and about the same amount as Christian nationalism. This builds upon Study 1, which found Christian nationalism accounted for a much smaller percentage of variance in stereotype endorsement and policy attitudes (2%, compared to 23–25% in this study). This is likely due to the improved measurement of Christian nationalism in Study 2, which taps into the strength of Christian nationalist beliefs.

Results are consistent with research showing Christian nationalism’s influence on conservative political attitudes, including immigration attitudes (McDaniel et al., 2011). It is also noteworthy that this combination of predictors accounted for 13% more variance in negative immigrant stereotypes of Middle Eastern refugees, who may be in the US legally, versus Mexican immigrants who were described as being in the US illegally. This could also be due to the presumed religious affiliation of these immigrant groups, with Muslims being evaluated more negatively. This is consistent with research showing that religious fundamentalism, a construct related to Christian nationalism,

Table 4. Regression results for Study 2.

Variable	Mexican immigrants					Muslim refugees				
	B [95% CI]	β	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i> ²	R ²	B [95% CI]	β	<i>t</i>	<i>r</i> ²	R ²
Step 1					.21					.26
Christian nationalism	0.37 [0.33, 0.41]	.46	17.68***	.21		0.57 [0.52, 0.63]	.51	19.96***	.26	
Step 2					.28					.41
Christian nationalism	0.26 [0.19, 0.32]	.32	7.92***	.04		0.38 [0.30, 0.46]	.34	9.05***	.04	
Fundamentalism	0.00 [-0.04, 0.05]	.00	0.07	.00		-0.05 [-0.11, 0.00]	-.06	-1.85	.00	
Religiosity	-0.07 [-0.11, -0.02]	-.11	-2.30**	.01		-0.05 [-0.10, 0.01]	-.05	-1.66	.00	
Political ideology	0.13 [0.10, 0.16]	.31	9.06***	.05		0.24 [0.21, 0.28]	.41	13.37***	.09	
Age	0.00 [0.00, 0.00]	.06	2.16*	.00		0.00 [-0.00, 0.00]	.02	1.00	.00	
Gender	-0.01 [-0.08, 0.05]	-.01	-0.39	.00		0.19 [0.10, 0.28]	.10	4.28***	.01	
Race	0.03 [-0.06, 0.12]	.02	0.72	.00		0.23 [0.12, 0.35]	.10	4.05***	.01	

Note. $N_{\text{Mexican immigrant}} = 1,156$; $N_{\text{refugee}} = 1,144$.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

was more strongly associated with prejudice toward Muslims (a religious outgroup) than Hispanics (Brandt & van Tongeren, 2017). Future work should be conducted to determine if legal status moderates the link between Christian nationalism and prejudice toward immigrants.

Study 3

In Studies 1 and 2, we assessed relations between Christian nationalism and both negative immigrant stereotype endorsement and attitudes toward immigration policies. In these studies, we included several theoretically relevant covariates to determine the unique variance accounted for by Christian nationalism on these outcomes. However, proxies and single-item measures were almost exclusively used rather than multi-item, validated measures. Additionally, some theoretically relevant variables associated with anti-immigrant attitudes were not available in these datasets, such as social dominance orientation (Esses et al., 2008) and nationalism (Mummendey et al., 2001). Previous work on Christian nationalism has differentiated the construct from political conservatism and religiosity (Whitehead & Perry, 2019). However, researchers have yet to test if Christian nationalism is associated with prejudice toward immigrants beyond secular (i.e., nonreligious) nationalism.

Here, we explored the relation between Christian nationalism and three indices of prejudice toward immigrants: modern prejudice (i.e., covert/subtle), classical prejudice (i.e., overt), and general attitudes toward immigrants. As in Studies 1 and 2, we also tested the robustness of these associations by including theoretically relevant covariates in a follow-up model. We hypothesized that, as in Studies 1 and 2, Christian nationalism would be associated with prejudice toward immigrants, and this effect would be robust to inclusion of theoretically relevant covariates.

Method

Participants and design. Data were drawn from a larger preregistered project on Christian nationalism (https://osf.io/7ummaq/?view_only=62511b8

ec81e452884a8e7b1afb9307c). The core hypothesis tested here (see preregistered Hypothesis 4) was that Christian nationalism would predict more negative attitudes toward immigrants. Five hundred US-based Christian participants were recruited via Cloud Research in late 2019. Prior to analyses, data were cleaned using preregistered data exclusions (e.g., those who failed attention checks, or reported they were not Christian). The final sample included 425 individuals ($M_{\text{age}} = 46.18$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.30$; 65.9% female, 34.1% male). Of these, 77.9% were White, 9.4% Black/African American, 5.4% Hispanic, 3.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.9% Native American, and 1.9% reported “other.” Additionally, 54.8% were Protestant, 32.0% Catholic, and 13.2% reported “other-Christian.”

Measures

Christian nationalism. To measure Christian nationalism, we used the same scale reported in Study 2.

Nationalism. We used Kosterman and Feshbach’s (1989) eight-item scale to assess nationalism. Participants responded to items such as, “Generally, the more influence America has on other nations, the better off they are,” on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*).

Social dominance orientation. We used Pratto et al.’s (1994) 16-item Social Dominance Orientation Scale. Participants responded to items such as, “In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups,” on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *extremely positive*, 7 = *extremely negative*).

Religious fundamentalism. We used the 12-item Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004). Participants responded to items such as, “God has given humanity a complete, unfailing guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed.” Items were rated on a 9-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*, 9 = *very strongly agree*).

Religiosity. A single item assessed religiosity: “How interested are you in religion?” Participants responded on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all interested*, 9 = *extremely interested*).

Modern and classic prejudice toward immigrants. Classic and modern prejudice toward immigrants were assessed using two subscales from the Classical and Modern Racial Prejudice Scale (Akrami et al., 2000), adapted for immigrants in the US. Example items included, “Immigrants are generally not very intelligent” (classic prejudice) and “Special programs are needed to create jobs for immigrants” (modern prejudice; reverse-keyed). Participants responded on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

Attitudes toward immigrants. A single item assessed general attitudes toward immigrants. Participants were asked their attitudes toward immigrants on scale from 0 (*cold*) to 100 (*warm*). Responses were reverse-keyed so higher values reflected colder attitudes toward immigrants.

Attention checks. We included two attention checks in the survey. First, participants responded to a fill-in-the-blank style question: “What is the color of most grass?” Second, they were instructed to select a given answer from a series of responses.

Results

First, we regressed each dependent variable (i.e., each measure of prejudice toward immigrants) on Christian nationalism. Second, we tested robustness by including a series of predictors known to account for variance in prejudiced attitudes toward immigrants, including religiosity, political conservatism, social dominance orientation, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism, as well as demographics (age, race, gender). Correlations, means, and standard deviations for study variables are reported in Table 5.

Before testing hypotheses, we explored how much of the variance in Christian nationalism could be accounted for by the interaction between

Table 5. Correlations and descriptive statistics among variables in Study 3.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	M	SD	α
1. ATI	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	37.93	28.45	–
2. Classic prejudice	.63***	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.32	0.79	.87
3. Modern prejudice	.51***	.66***	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.89	0.77	.82
4. Christian nationalism	.28***	.45***	.50***	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3.18	1.00	.85
5. Social dominance	.39***	.56***	.55***	.32***	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.73	1.30	.95
6. Nationalism	.23***	.39***	.44***	.43***	.31***	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	3.10	0.81	.81
7. Religious fundamentalism	.15**	.24***	.31***	.64***	.13**	.31***	1.00	–	–	–	–	5.45	2.07	.94
8. Religiosity	.03	.08	.01	.39***	-.05	.06	.62***	1.00	–	–	–	6.54	2.24	–
9. Conservatism	.31***	.46***	.60***	.49***	.45***	.39***	.44***	-.20***	1.00	–	–	3.71	1.77	–
10. Race	.02	-.01	-.17***	.04	-.00	-.11*	.11*	.12*	.12*	1.00	–	–	–	–
11. Sex	.09	-.08	-.05	.02	-.16***	-.01	.00	.06	.07	-.11*	1.00	–	–	–
12. Age	-.02	.02	.19***	.12*	-.03	.20***	.05	.00	.13**	-.27***	.10	46.18	14.30	–

Note. ATI = attitudes toward immigrants.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

religious fundamentalism and nationalism. We regressed Christian nationalism on nationalism, fundamentalism, and the interaction term. Religious fundamentalism and nationalism were both significantly associated with Christian nationalism, and accounted for 46.6% of the variance. However, the interaction between fundamentalism and nationalism was nonsignificant ($\beta = -.01$, $t = -0.35$, $p = .725$). This suggests that over half of the variance in Christian nationalism is not accounted for by nonreligious nationalism or religious fundamentalism, and Christian nationalism is not a product of nationalism and fundamentalism.

Attitudes and prejudice toward immigrants. Consistent with hypotheses, Christian nationalism significantly predicted general attitudes toward immigrants, $b = 7.94$, $t(422) = 5.96$, 95% CI [5.32, 10.56], $\eta_p^2 = .08$; classical prejudice toward immigrants, $b = 0.36$, $t(423) = 10.43$, 95% CI [0.29, 0.43], $\eta_p^2 = .21$; and modern prejudice toward immigrants, $b = 0.38$, $t(423) = 11.78$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.45], $\eta_p^2 = .25$. As shown in Table 6, effects remained significant with covariates in the models.

Discussion

In Study 3, Christian nationalism was associated with greater prejudice toward immigrants across three different measures. This effect was robust to inclusion of several known correlates of anti-immigrant attitudes, including social dominance orientation, nationalism, and political ideology. Social dominance orientation was the strongest predictor of prejudice toward immigrants in all three models, followed by Christian nationalism and political ideology, which each accounted for equal variance across the three indices of prejudice toward immigrants. Here, we provide additional evidence that Christian nationalism is robustly associated with negative attitudes and evaluations of immigrants; however, the mechanism underlying this relationship is unclear.

Study 4 tested threat as a mechanism in the relationship between Christian nationalism and

dehumanization, a more extreme manifestation of prejudice. Given the economic and political climates present in America in 2018–2019, immigrants and refugees may have been perceived as drawing on important limited resources such as jobs and state funding. An intergroup threat perspective would imply immigrants and refugees pose a realistic threat to Americans—driving negative intergroup attitudes (Renfro et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2005). Additionally, immigrants might have also posed symbolic threats by changing the idea of “what it means to be an American,” which may be particularly important for Christian nationalists. As such, we examined the role of intergroup threat in immigrant attitudes in Study 4.

Study 4

Studies 1–3 identified consistent positive associations between Christian nationalism and negative beliefs about and attitudes toward immigrants and refugees among Americans in two different national samples and one community sample. What remains unclear is why people who endorse Christian nationalism demonstrate negative representations and evaluations of immigrants and refugees, and the extent of these anti-immigrant attitudes. In Study 4, we aimed to replicate findings from the previous studies and investigate the extent of these anti-immigrant attitudes and perceptions by testing associations between Christian nationalism and both dehumanization—a more severe form of immigrant prejudice—and support for anti-immigrant policy. Specifically, we examined attitudes toward the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA; Department of Homeland Security, 2012; which allows some immigrants legal affordance to remain in the US after immigrating as a child) and toward policies that allow for the separation of immigrant families (Zero Tolerance for Offenses, 2018). We chose to assess attitudes toward these policies because they were being fiercely debated in the media during the time of our data collection (summer of 2018) and are relevant to U.S. immigration attitudes more broadly. We also tested whether perceived threats (to safety or worldviews) from immigrants mediate

Table 6. Regression results for attitudes toward immigrants in Study 3.

Variable	Attitudes toward immigrants					Classical prejudice					Modern prejudice				
	B [95% CI]	β	<i>t</i>	<i>s</i> ²	R ²	B [95% CI]	β	<i>t</i>	<i>s</i> ²	R ²	B [95% CI]	β	<i>t</i>	<i>s</i> ²	R ²
Step 1					.08					.21					.25
Christian nationalism	7.94 [5.32, 10.56]	.28	5.96***	.08		0.36 [0.29, 0.43]	.45	10.43***	.20		0.38 [0.32, 0.45]	.50	11.78***	.25	
Step 2					.20					.43					.55
Christian nationalism	4.26 [0.71, 7.82]	.15	2.36*	.01		0.20 [0.12, 0.28]	.25	4.73***	.03		0.17 [0.10, 0.25]	.23	4.72***	.02	
Social dominance	5.65 [3.38, 7.92]	.26	4.90***	.05		0.22 [0.17, 0.28]	.37	8.35***	.10		0.18 [0.13, 0.22]	.30	7.52***	.06	
Nationalism	1.41 [-2.20, 5.01]	.04	0.77	.00		0.14 [0.06, 0.23]	.15	3.33***	.02		0.09 [0.02, 0.16]	.10	2.45*	.01	
Religious fundamentalism	0.39 [-1.50, 2.28]	.03	0.41	.00		-0.04 [-0.08, 0.00]	-.11	-1.81	.00		0.03 [-0.01, 0.07]	.08	1.45	.00	
Religiosity	-1.42 [-2.88, 0.03]	-.11	-1.93	.01		0.01 [-0.02, 0.04]	.03	0.57	.00		-0.06 [-0.09, -0.03]	-.16	-3.76***	.02	
Conservatism	1.87 [0.06, 3.68]	.12	2.03*	.01		0.07 [0.03, 0.12]	-.16	-3.40***	.02		0.13 [0.09, 0.16]	-.29	-6.80***	.05	
Age	-0.02 [-0.21, 0.16]	-.01	-0.24	.00		-0.00 [-0.01, 0.00]	-.04	-1.12	.00		0.01 [0.00, 0.01]	.09	2.43*	.01	
Sex	1.94 [-3.40, 7.27]	.03	0.71	.00		0.02 [-0.11, 0.14]	-.01	-0.24	.00		-0.00 [-0.11, 0.11]	.00	0.05	.00	
Race	0.31 [-6.08, 6.70]	.00	0.10	.01		-0.02 [-0.17, 0.13]	.01	0.28	.00		0.17 [0.04, 0.30]	-.09	-2.56*	.01	

Note. N = 424.

p* < .05. **p* < .001.

the relations between Christian nationalism and both dehumanization of immigrants and support for anti-immigrant policy. We hypothesized that Christian nationalism would be uniquely associated with dehumanization of immigrants and associated with stronger endorsement of exclusionary immigration policy. We also hypothesized that perceptions of immigrants as threatening would mediate the relations between Christian nationalism and immigrant dehumanization and support for anti-immigrant policy.

Method

Participants and design. Participants ($N = 183$) were recruited from MTurk in July 2018 (106 men, 77 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.28$, age range: 18–71). Of these participants, 39.5% identified as Christian. The racial and ethnic breakdown was: 74.3% White/Caucasian; 8.7% Black/African American; 8.2% Asian American; 7.1% Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin; 1.1% Native American; and 0.5% other. Participants were directed to an online survey, which contained questionnaires, attention check items, and demographic questions. Participants were compensated US\$1.00 for their participation. Analyses were conducted using data available for each measure included.

Prior to data analysis, participants who failed the attention check items ($n = 5$) were removed from analyses, as were participants who were flagged as potentially participating multiple times ($n = 46$, identified via location coordinates and IP addresses; Dennis et al., 2018).

Measures. Data were drawn from a larger project on anti-immigrant attitudes (see <https://mfr.osf.io/render?url=https://osf.io/wrf63/?direct%26mode=render%26action=download%26mode=render>). Only measures analyzed in this study are described in what follows.

Dehumanization. Dehumanization was assessed using the Ascent of (Hu)man Dehumanization Scale (Kteily et al., 2015), which consists of a visual caricature depicting a simian (primate) on one

end, ascending to an upright-standing human on the other end. Participants rated, on a sliding scale from 0 (*ape*) to 100 (*human*), how they perceive immigrants. Responses were reverse-keyed so higher values indicated stronger dehumanization.

Realistic and symbolic threat. Realistic and symbolic threat were assessed using the Realistic and Symbolic Immigrant Threat Scale (Stephan et al., 1999). Example items included, “Immigration has increased the tax burdens on Americans” and “The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding moral and religious issues are not compatible with the beliefs and values of most Americans.” Participants responded on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Christian nationalism. Items assessing Christian nationalism were adopted from the 2017 Baylor Religion Survey reported in Study 2. To keep the measure brief, the following three items were used: “The federal government should advocate Christian values,” “The federal government should allow prayer in public schools,” and “The success of the United States is part of God’s plan.” Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each item on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Policy attitudes. Participants rated the degree to which they agreed with three policies: DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), the policy that allows a path to citizenship for undocumented people brought to America as minors; separating families of immigrants caught crossing the border illegally; and separating immigrant families seeking asylum. Participants responded to each on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Religious fundamentalism. We used the same measure of religious fundamentalism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004) from Study 3.

General religiosity. Religiosity was measured using a single item: “How religious do you consider

yourself to be?” Participants answered on a 4-point scale (1 = *not religious*, 4 = *very religious*).

Political ideology. Participants rated their general political belief on a 7-point scale (1 = *very liberal*, 7 = *very conservative*).

Attention checks. We implemented three attention check items randomly throughout the survey (sample item: “What color is most grass?”).

Results

Dehumanization of immigrants. Multiple regression analyses were run to examine the association between Christian nationalism and dehumanization of immigrants. Correlations, means, and standard deviations for study variables appear in Table 7.

As hypothesized, Christian nationalism was associated with dehumanization attitudes toward immigrants, $b = 4.24$, $t(175) = 4.59$, 95% CI [2.41, 6.06], $\eta_p^2 = .10$. After including covariates, Christian nationalism remained a significant predictor of dehumanization of immigrants, accounting for 8% of the variance. See Table 8 for full results.

Immigration policy. We investigated how Christian nationalism was associated with political policy attitudes related to immigration. We ran three regressions examining the association between Christian nationalism and attitudes about the DACA policy, separating children from parents crossing the border illegally, and separating children from parents seeking asylum. Christian nationalism significantly predicted attitudes toward DACA, $b = -0.47$, $t(175) = -6.40$, 95% CI [-0.62, -0.33], $\eta_p^2 = .19$; attitudes toward separating children from parents caught crossing the border illegally, $b = 0.52$, $t(176) = 7.40$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.66], $\eta_p^2 = .23$; and attitudes toward separating children from parents seeking asylum, $b = 0.59$, $t(176) = 8.44$, 95% CI [0.45, 0.72], $\eta_p^2 = .29$. We also examined whether the relations between Christian nationalism and policy attitudes were robust to other correlates of anti-immigrant

Table 7. Correlations and descriptive statistics among variables in Study 4.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M	SD	α
1. Religiosity	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.74	1.02	—
2. Threat	.29***	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.59	1.59	.94
3. Christian nationalism	.61***	.56***	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.36	1.75	.93
4. Religious fundamentalism	.65***	.37***	.70***	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	2.94	1.92	.96
5. Political	.41***	.59***	.53***	.41***	1.00	—	—	—	—	4.73	1.87	—
6. Dehumanization	.09	.49***	.32***	.12	.27***	1.00	—	—	—	14.73	22.75	—
7. DACA	-.22**	-.72***	-.41***	-.26***	-.51***	-.35***	1.00	—	—	2.72	1.95	—
8. Border	.25***	.61***	.48***	.32***	.49***	.41***	-.60***	1.00	—	5.63	1.89	—
9. Asylum	.31***	.60***	.55***	.33***	.50***	.44***	-.55***	.89***	1.0	5.66	1.91	—

Note. DACA = support for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy; Border = support for separating families caught crossing the border illegally; Asylum = support for separating families seeking asylum.
*** $p < .001$.

Table 8. Regression results for Study 4.

Variable	B [95% CI]	β	t	sr^2	R^2
Dehumanization of immigrants					
Step 1					.11
Christian nationalism	4.24 [2.41, 6.06]	.33	4.59***	.10	
Step 2					.18
Christian nationalism	5.84 [3.06, 8.63]	.45	4.14***	.08	
Religious fundamentalism	2.21 [-4.79, 0.36]	-.19	-1.70	.01	
Conservatism	2.00 [-0.04, 4.03]	.16	1.94	.02	
Religiosity	-2.61 [-6.87, 1.65]	-.12	-1.21	.01	
Race	0.89 [-6.72, 8.51]	.02	0.23	.00	
Age	-0.10 [-0.42, 0.23]	-.04	-0.58	.00	
Gender	4.03 [-2.49, 10.55]	.09	1.22	.01	

Note. $N = 176$.

*** $p < .001$.

attitudes. In all three models, Christian nationalism remained a significant predictor of policy beliefs (see Table 9). These results support our hypothesis that Christian nationalism is associated with stronger support of exclusionary, anti-immigrant policies.

Intergroup threat as a mediator. Next, we examined whether intergroup threat could help explain the observed relationships between Christian nationalism and attitudes toward immigration policies and dehumanization of immigrants. We ran a series of mediation models in SPSS using PROCESS (Version 3.0; Hayes, 2017) Model 4, using 5,000 bootstrapped samples. We tested realistic and symbolic threat as a combined index of threat due to their high correlation ($r > .9$), to avoid violating the assumption of multicollinearity in our regression model.

Results showed consistent evidence of mediation through intergroup threat for the indirect effect of Christian nationalism on dehumanization of immigrants, support for family separation of immigrants and asylees, and agreement with DACA. See Figures 3–6 for the significant mediation models with standardized beta coefficients. Together, results support the hypothesis that intergroup threat mediates the relations between Christian nationalism and dehumanization of

immigrants, and immigration policy endorsement.

Discussion

In Study 4, Christian nationalism predicted dehumanization of immigrants and anti-immigrant political policies, including disagreement with DACA and agreement with family separation of migrants crossing the border illegally and of asylum seekers, even when general religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and political ideology were statistically controlled. This indicates that Christian nationalism robustly contributes to dehumanization of immigrants and support for anti-immigrant policies.

We also found that intergroup threat mediated the relations between Christian nationalism and dehumanization of immigrants and immigration policy endorsement. These findings are consistent with a growing body of literature showing that Christian nationalist attitudes positively predict conservative sociopolitical attitudes (Whitehead & Perry, 2015; Whitehead, Schnabel, & Perry, 2018). This study also provides evidence for intergroup threat as a potential mechanism within these relations, consistent with recent work showing similar associations between threat, nationalism, and restrictive immigration policy

Table 9. Regression results for policy attitudes.

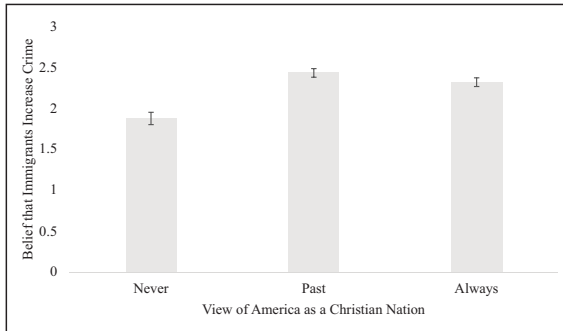
Variable	DACA				Border separation				Asylee separation			
	B [95% CI]	β	t	s ² R ²	B [95% CI]	β	t	s ² R ²	B [95% CI]	β	t	s ² R ²
Step 1				.19				.23				.29
Christian nationalism	-0.47 [-0.62, -0.33]	-.44	-6.40***	.19	0.52 [0.37, 0.66]	.48	7.20***	.23	0.59 [0.45, 0.72]	.54	8.44***	.29
Step 2				.34				.32				.37
Christian nationalism	-0.38 [-0.59, -0.17]	-.35	-3.61***	.05	0.41 [0.20, 0.63]	.39	3.87***	.06	0.53 [0.33, 0.74]	.49	5.10***	.10
Fundamentalism	0.07 [-0.12, 0.26]	.07	0.72	.00	-0.03 [-0.23, 0.16]	-.03	-0.33	.00	-0.11 [-0.30, 0.08]	-.11	-1.15	.00
Conservatism	-0.40 [-0.55, -0.25]	-.39	-5.19***	.11	0.34 [0.18, 0.49]	.33	4.32***	.08	0.30 [0.15, 0.45]	.30	4.00***	.06
Religiosity	0.25 [-0.07, 0.57]	.14	1.55	.01	-0.16 [-0.48, 0.16]	-.09	-0.99	.00	-0.05 [-0.36, 0.26]	.03	-0.31	.00
Race	-0.08 [-0.65, 0.49]	-.02	-0.27	.00	-0.27 [-0.84, 0.31]	-.06	-0.91	.00	-0.11 [-0.67, 0.45]	-.03	-0.39	.00
Age	-0.02 [-0.05, 0.00]	-.12	-1.79	.01	0.00 [-0.02, 0.03]	.01	0.09	.00	-0.01 [-0.04, 0.01]	-.07	-1.10	.00
Gender	-0.22 [-0.70, 0.28]	-.06	-0.87	.00	0.28 [-0.21, 0.78]	.07	1.12	.01	0.33 [-0.15, 0.81]	.08	1.34	.01

Note. N = 176.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

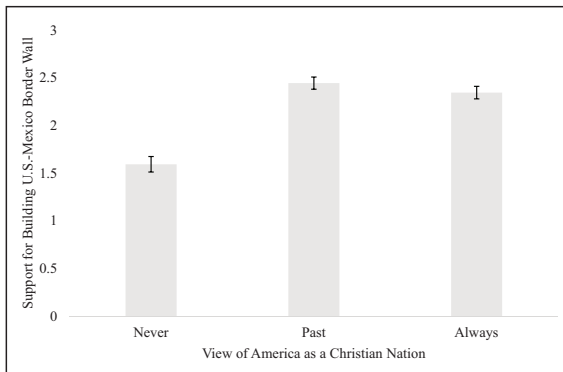
(Molina & Preddie, 2020). Notably, there is evidence to suggest that perceived threat can actually increase identification with conservative,

Figure 1. Comparison effects of beliefs of America as a Christian nation on perceptions of immigrants as increasing local crime.



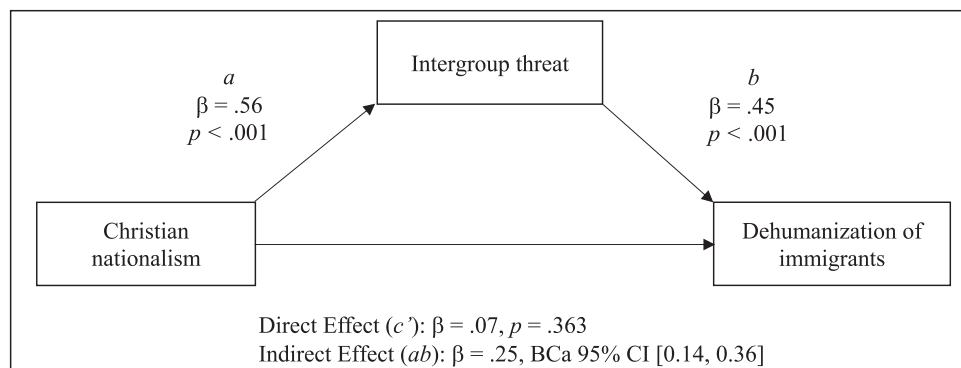
Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2. Comparison effects of beliefs of America as a Christian nation on opposition to building a US–Mexico border wall.



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between Christian nationalism and dehumanization of immigrants, as mediated by intergroup threat.



nationalist identity (Hogg, 2000; Knowles & Tropp, 2018). However, in this study, we utilized cross-sectional data, which cannot establish temporal precedence within such a relationship. There could be other plausible models. Future studies may benefit from utilizing experimental methods to ascertain with greater confidence the directionality of these relationships. Importantly, understanding the mechanisms underlying Christian nationalism's effects on prejudice may provide crucial insight into how to combat prejudiced attitudes, and particularly dehumanization of outgroups.

Further, given the moderate–high correlations among study variables in this study, multicollinearity may have been problematic. We examined indicators of multicollinearity in our analyses, and the tolerance and variance inflation factor values were within normal range as to not indicate any violations. Even so, these findings should be regarded with some caution.

General Discussion

With politicians evoking Christian nationalist rhetoric in political discourse, researchers have sought to identify how Christian nationalism is associated with sociopolitical attitudes. An emerging literature has identified Christian nationalism as a predictor of prejudice toward immigrants (McDaniel et al., 2011) and refugees (Shortle & Gaddie, 2015). However, several questions remained. For example, it was unclear whether these anti-immigrant attitudes extend to relevant

Figure 4. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between Christian nationalism and support for DACA, as mediated by intergroup threat.

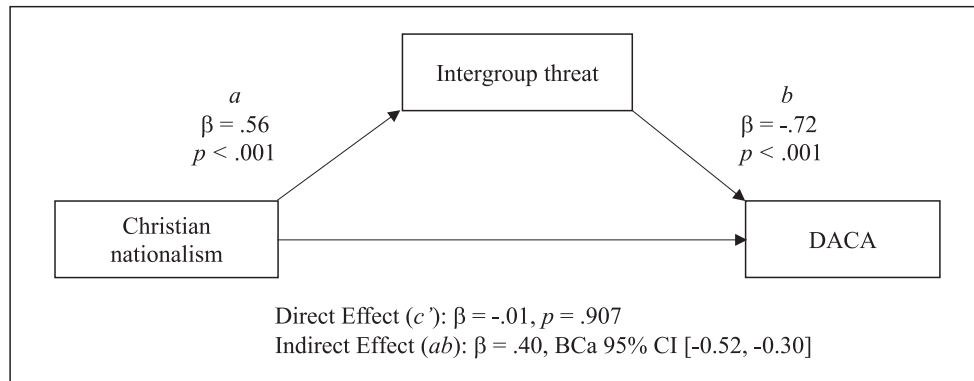


Figure 5. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between Christian nationalism and attitudes toward separation of immigrant families crossing the border illegally, as mediated by intergroup threat.

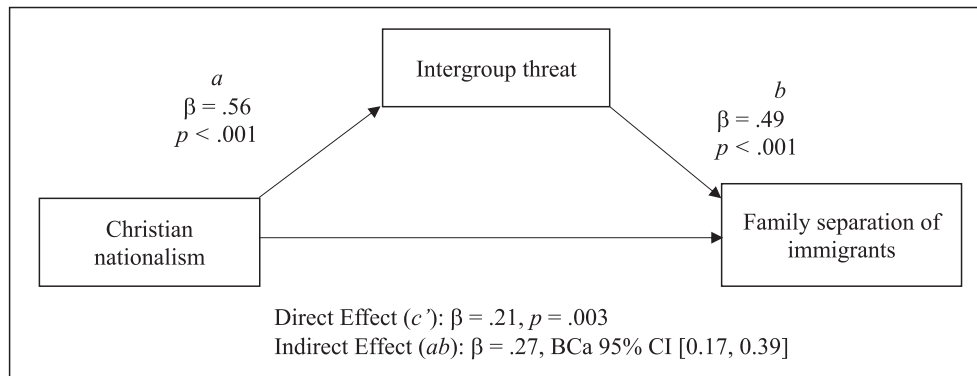
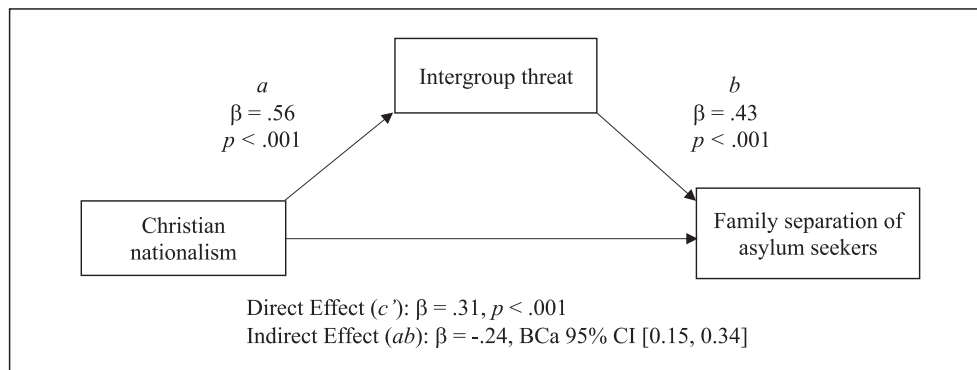


Figure 6. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between Christian nationalism and attitudes toward separation of immigrant families seeking asylum, as mediated by intergroup threat.



policy attitudes and dehumanization of immigrants, as well as if this construct was distinct from other predictors of prejudice toward

immigrants. The present research extends the previous literature by addressing these questions and testing the association between support for

Christian nationalist ideology and a variety of anti-immigrant attitudes, including negative stereotype endorsement of immigrants and refugees (Studies 1–2), prejudice toward immigrants (Study 3), dehumanization of immigrants (Study 4), and support for anti-immigrant policies (Studies 1, 2, 4). We also provide initial evidence for the mechanistic role of intergroup threat in explaining these relations (Study 4). This research represents an important step toward understanding the role of Christian nationalist ideology in sociopolitical attitudes and intergroup relations.

Across four studies, Christian nationalism significantly predicted negative attitudes toward immigrants and refugees, operationalized through stereotypic endorsement, support for anti-immigrant policies, and dehumanization. Study 1 showed that people who believed America is or was a Christian nation held more negative stereotypes about immigrants being dangerous criminals and expressed more support for building a US–Mexico border wall. Study 2 showed that Christian nationalism was a significant predictor of negative stereotypes of Mexican immigrants and Middle Eastern refugees, and this effect held when accounting for religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and political ideology. Study 3 conceptually replicated the association between Christian nationalism and immigrant prejudice using multiple validated measures of prejudice and provided evidence that this relation was robust even when accounting for covariates (using validated measures) such as fundamentalism, religiosity, nationalism, political ideology, and demographic variables. Finally, Study 4 conceptually replicated these findings using validated multi-item measures of religious fundamentalism, intergroup threat, and dehumanization of immigrants; importantly, the study found relations between Christian nationalism, support for anti-immigrant political policy (i.e., support for family separation of immigrants crossing the border illegally, and asylum seekers; nonsupport for DACA), and dehumanization to be mediated by perceived threat from immigrants. This was consistent with the hypotheses that threat may be an important pathway through which Christian nationalist ideology promotes dehumanization of

immigrants and policy support. Findings have important implications for our understanding of the role of religious nationalism in immigrant attitudes and policy attitudes in the US, which are discussed in the following lines.

Replicating previous work (Mummendey et al., 2001), Christian nationalism was associated with immigrant animus. This is consistent with literature demonstrating strong associations between Christian nationalism and conservative, right-wing political viewpoints such as opposition to gun control (Whitehead, Schnabel, & Perry, 2018), support for punitive action against lawbreakers and “troublemakers” (Davis, 2018), and support for a conservative presidential candidate (Whitehead, Perry, & Baker, 2018). We build upon extant literature by also identifying Christian nationalism’s association with intergroup attitudes. Even though many immigrants coming to the US are Christian, we consistently found a link between Christian nationalism and anti-immigrant attitudes. This suggests that the social identity of Christianity is insufficient to promote positive attitudes toward immigrants in those who score high on Christian nationalism. Moreover, Christian nationalist ideology was associated with higher perceptions of threat from immigrants.

Additionally, this research follows the theoretical conceptualization of nationalism posed by Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) that nationalism is based on ideals of superiority and dominance, and concomitant attitudes toward outgroups are almost exclusively downward comparative and negative. Our results support this theory by showing that higher identification with Christian nationalism is related to negative stereotypes and policy attitudes toward minority and low-status outgroups—Muslim refugees and immigrants. Moreover, we extend this work by demonstrating how Christian nationalism extends beyond general nationalist views and further predicts anti-immigrant attitudes and policy endorsement.

Another goal of this research was to investigate threat as a potential mechanism between Christian nationalist ideology and negative attitudes toward immigrants. We found that perceptions of intergroup threat from immigrants

mediated this relationship. The mechanistic role of intergroup threat is consistent with previous literature identifying threat as an important antecedent of outgroup attitudes (Caricati et al., 2017; Nail & McGregor, 2009), and a mechanism between nationalism and attitudes toward immigration policy (Molina & Preddie, 2020). Our data showed that individuals scoring higher on Christian nationalism more strongly endorse anti-immigrant policies, and this may be explained by perceptions of threat. Consistently, threat has been identified as an important pathway through which negative attitudes toward immigrants arise. For example, Stephan et al. (2005) found that attitudes toward immigrants were most negative in the presence of both realistic and symbolic threats. Likewise, our results showed that intergroup threat was similarly related to dehumanization of immigrants, and these perceptions mediated the pathway from Christian nationalism to dehumanization. Perceptions of threat from immigrants may be an important motivator behind immigrant animus among Christian nationalists.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite convergent evidence from four separate samples, we acknowledge several limitations. The first is the measurement of Christian nationalism. The measure used in Studies 2–4 came from a series of items in the Baylor Religion Survey, which has not been formally validated. Additionally, these items contain several statements about whether participants think the federal government should endorse the combination of Church and State, which may not capture the attitudes of individuals who believe the federal government should not have as much influence in the lives of Americans (e.g., libertarians). Lastly, these items do not assess perceptions of America's dominant status in the world, which is integral to nationalist ideology (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Including items such as Shortle and Gaddie's (2015) "God has chosen America to lead the world" may better tap into these central nationalist views of dominance and provide better insight into Christian nationalism as a

construct. Future measurement work on Christian nationalism may benefit from inclusion of items that better tap into both nationalist and religious facets.

We demonstrate robust relations between Christian nationalism and negative attitudes toward immigrants across four studies, but our mediation analyses with these data are unable to identify directionality (MacKinnon et al., 2007). It is possible that prejudiced attitudes promote stronger identification with Christian nationalism. However, an abundance of theoretical and empirical research has investigated the antecedents of prejudice, and supports the directionality of the relationship modeled in our study (see Sibley & Duckitt, 2008, for a review). Conversely, it is possible that threat promotes stronger identification with Christian nationalism, which could influence attitudes toward immigrants. Our alternative model did not support this position; however, experimental and/or longitudinal work is needed to investigate the direction and stability of these relationships further. Future studies may seek to manipulate perceptions of threat and experimentally investigate the relationships between Christian nationalism, threat, and intergroup attitudes.

We specifically examined attitudes toward immigrants and refugees in the US. Results may not generalize to attitudes toward other minority groups within the US or to other countries. Future work should investigate whether Christian nationalism is associated with prejudice toward other outgroups (e.g., sexism, ideological/religious prejudice) and in other countries and cultures. It is possible that Christian nationalism is a manifestation of a type of religious nationalism more broadly. For example, the Hindu nationalist party (BJP) in India evokes similar narratives to Christian nationalism in the US (e.g., a specific religious identity of the nation; emphasizing threat from minority religious groups). Researchers should investigate whether these other forms of religious nationalism similarly predict prejudice in other countries, and how they compare to Christian nationalism in the US. For example, Hindu nationalism may be associated with politically conservative attitudes and

prejudices toward Muslims and refugees in India, and religious nationalism among Israeli Jews may influence intergroup relations in the Israeli–Palestinian context.

Additional research should also further investigate the relations between nationalism, social dominance orientation, and right-wing authoritarianism in the nationalism–prejudice link (Osborne et al., 2017). More specifically, nationalism is theoretically based on social dominance values but may also be associated with a higher degree of authoritarianism (see Osborne et al., 2017). Christian nationalism may show a similar relationship with social dominance orientation and submission to both political as well as religious authority. Further testing these relationships would provide additional clarity to the nomological network of the Christian nationalism construct.

Conclusion

It is important for researchers to understand the factors associated with prejudice toward immigrants and support for immigration policies to ultimately identify ways to combat them. Across four studies, we showed that Christian nationalism was associated with negative attitudes and representations of immigrant groups (i.e., negative stereotype endorsement of immigrants and refugees; prejudice; dehumanization), as well as support for anti-immigrant policies (i.e., building the US–Mexico border wall; family separation of immigrants caught crossing the border illegally; lack of support for DACA). Moreover, relations were robust to the inclusion of covariates linked to immigrant prejudice (i.e., nationalism, social dominance orientation, fundamentalism, religiosity, age, gender, race). Finally, we show evidence that perceived threats posed by immigrants may motivate these negative evaluative reactions. This research represents an important step toward understanding the role of Christian nationalism in one corner of American politics, as well as prejudice toward immigrant groups. Future research is needed to determine both the scope and extent of the association this identity has with sociopolitical attitudes and behaviors, particularly across cultures and world religions. As religious nationalism

continues to be evoked in American politics, its role in attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policies merits continued study.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Note

1. Because our response scale had only 4 points, we also tested whether effects held when using ordinal regressions. As shown in the supplemental material, results were consistent.

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