



A public education and mobilization initiative

## What is – and isn't -- Christian Nationalism?

*Above all, it's a political movement, say experts.*

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The simplest definition of Christian nationalism is as a belief that the United States is a country defined by Christianity. In practice, this means that the government should take steps to keep the country's Christian roots and identity intact. The government should advocate Christian values and pass laws and enact policies that reflect those values. The separation of church and state is not a formal law that should be followed. God's plan, say Christian nationalists, is for the U.S. to be a successful nation based in Christian ideals.

That last part is where this belief may conflict with US law, as stated in our Constitution, which protects religious liberty and establishes the separation of church and state in law and policy.

### Is it a religion?

Christian nationalism is *not* a formal religious denomination or sect with a stated doctrine of beliefs; nor is there any single person or council leading Christian nationalism that oversees followers. The term “accurately describes American nationalists who believe American identity is inextricable from Christianity,” states Georgetown University scholar Paul D. Miller, who studies the movement. About one-third of Americans now identify as Christian nationalists.

### It's about political power.

Christian nationalism goes beyond religious belief and patriotism and into “a worldview that guides how people believe the nation should be structured and who belongs there,” explains Eric L. McDaniel, a political scientist at the University of Texas at Austin. “Christian nationalism is, first and foremost, a political movement. Its principal goal, and the goal of its most active leaders, is power,” states expert Katherine Stewart, author of *The Power Worshipers*.<sup>1</sup>

### Are all evangelists also Christian nationalists?

Not necessarily, though many are. There is no single leader or central doctrine in evangelical Christianity, which involves multiple Christian denominations, including Pentecostal, Anabaptist, and Charismatic traditions, according to the National Association of Evangelicals. That means many myriad stripes of Christianity are found among Christian nationalists.

### Does Christian nationalism violate the First Amendment?

The First Amendment protects people's deepest beliefs and protects petitioning for laws and policies that one believes in. So *belief* in Christian nationalism does not violate the First Amendment. ***But the First Amendment does prevent government from establishing a national***



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**religion.** So passing a law based on Christian nationalism may or may not violate the First Amendment. Courts decide whether a government action or law violates the Constitution.

What is not in question is that the First Amendment and the Constitution overall prevent:

- Establishing one faith as the official national religion of the US (First Amendment establishment clause).
- Stopping you from practicing your preferred religion or forcing you to practice any religion at all (First Amendment free exercise clause).
- Requiring a religious test or oath for an elected office (US Constitution Article 6).

### **How many Americans identify as Christian nationalists?**

A 2022 *Politico* poll<sup>ii</sup> showed Republicans who identify as evangelicals or born-again Christians make up the strongest base of US Christian nationalists. White evangelicals are a majority, compared to other faiths. Age is also a factor: millennials and younger Americans do not support declaring the US a Christian nation, *Politico* found, while a majority of elderly respondents do. Pew Research Center 2022 data showed:

#### ***People who say the US should be a Christian nation now:***

- All US adults: 45%
- All Christians: 62%
- White evangelicals: 81%

#### ***People who have not heard or read anything about Christian nationalism:***

- All US adults: 54%
- All Christians: 59%
- White evangelicals: 57%

#### ***People who are adherents to or sympathizers with Christian nationalism:***

- All Americans: 30%
- White evangelicals: 66%
- Hispanic Protestants: 55%
- Black Protestants: 39%
- Latter-Day Saints: 42%
- White Catholics: 31%
- Hispanic Catholics: 25%

### **For more about the Christian nationalist movement, check out our related briefs.**

*This summary is adapted from What Is Christian Nationalism? The Complete Guide (freedomforum.org)*

<sup>i</sup> Stewart, Katherine. *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

<sup>ii</sup> Rouse, Stella and Telhami, Shibley. "Most Republicans Support Declaring the United States a Christian Nation," *Politico*, August 9, 2022.