

# World Religions & Global Issues

Week 4 Lecture | RELS 332

Professor Chris Crews

# Week 4 Readings

- *Pandemic Politics in South Asia: Muslims and Democracy* – Matthew Nelson
- *Viral Fundamentals: Riding the Corona Waves in India* – Banu Subramaniam
- *Donald Trump, the Christian Right and Covid-19: The Politics of Religious Freedom* – Jeffrey Haynes
- *Save the Economy, Liberty, and Yourself: Christian Nationalism and Americans' Views on Government Covid-19 Restrictions* – Samuel Perry, Andrew Whitehead, Joshua Grubbs

# The Big Picture

In our readings this week we look at the global Covid-19 outbreak and how religion has shaped different political responses. In the case of many South Asian nations, our author argues the global pandemic has **given a boost to authoritarian regimes, with emergency powers being invoked in the name of “public health”** used to suppress public dissent and government criticism.

As our ongoing dive into Hindu nationalism and Hindutva ideologies in India show, religious nationalism continues to play an important role in targeting religious and ethnic minorities who are the most vulnerable to Covid-19 outbreaks and have limited access to adequate medical care, **leading to further demonization and ghettoization under the guise of quarantine politics**. We also look at how **Vedic science is being abused by figures like Prime Minister Modi and Hindu yogi Baba Ramdev to promote bogus health claims and Covid-19 remedies** that have no documented medical basis, but which instead rely on the popular legitimacy of Hindu nationalism for their social power.

In turning to religion and the pandemic in the US, we return to questions of religious nationalism, looking at the **role and influence of Christian nationalism in debates over Covid-19 and legal and political debates about the limits of personal liberty and religious freedoms in a pandemic**. Current Covid-19 debates are the latest episode in a long-running battle between the Christian Right and the government **on the legitimacy and reach of secular authorities over religious politics in the US**.





# Pandemic Politics in South Asia: Muslims and Democracy

**Matthew Nelson**

# Pandemic Politics in South Asia – Nelson

In his discussion of the impacts of Covid-19 on countries in South Asia, Nelson argues that what we are seeing is not the emergence of a new trend, but rather the intensification of existing dynamics in places like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the contested region of Kashmir.

**“In this sense it has altered the political landscape much as climate change has altered our weather, introducing more intense versions of familiar challenges—**for example, stronger ‘hurricanes’ of Hindu majoritarianism and Muslim marginalization in India; longer ‘droughts’ restricting civil liberties on the Indian side of Kashmir; more expansive ‘floods’ of anti-state protests in Pakistan; hotter ‘fires’ of religious authoritarianism in Afghanistan.”

Debates over Covid-19 have focused on two dominant political regime types, which are described as either **authoritarian—with a greater focus on bureaucratic capacity**, or **democratic—with a greater focus on electoral legitimacy**. As Nelson importantly notes about democratic states, “patterns of legitimacy are often mediated by entrenched social divisions, with electoral legitimacy varying dramatically across social groups. **Patterned social exclusion thus creates segmented patterns of legitimacy** and, then, uneven patterns of state capacity and effectiveness.”

These **“segmented social cleavages”** are especially important when these divisions are closely tied to religion, as was the case in the 2002 Gujarat massacre we explored recently.

# Pandemic Politics in South Asia – Nelson

Nelson looked at political responses involving Covid-19 in four different cases across South Asia and concludes that Covid-19 “has emerged **as a force multiplier**, accelerating anti-democratic trends already shaping the region.”

In the case of India, Nelson argues that both enforcement and containment strategies are **shaped and determined by Hindu nationalism and the underlying political philosophy of Hindutva**. For examples, Nelson describes how the Deobandi Sunni Muslim group Tablighi Jama’at (TJ) became a target of government Covid-19 restrictions under an outdated British colonial law, **the Epidemic Diseases Act (1897), which allows for government-imposed mandatory quarantines**, laws which were then used to target Muslim communities in India.

The selective focus on Muslim communities by Hindu political leaders included referring to Muslims as “human bombs” and using divisive language that clearly targets Muslims in India. “But **this pattern of demonization—indeed overt securitization**—was not limited to BJP statements targeting the TJ.” Other examples included the use of **#coronajihad** and **coronaterrorism**.

“In India, **the ruling party’s response to the pandemic built on existing social cleavages in ways that *reinforced* a ‘segmented’ approach to state legitimacy**. In fact India’s *selective* application of existing laws challenged the formal underpinnings of a liberal democracy.”



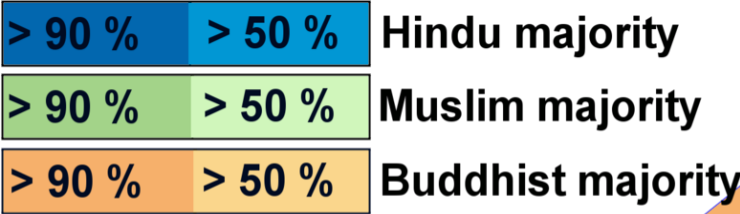
# Pandemic Politics in South Asia – Nelson

In Kashmir, a Muslim-majority area of India that in recent years has been the center of a protracted independence movement, selective Covid-19 enforcement was even more pronounced, and **new restrictions built on a series of changes from 2018-2019** that included:

- Sweeping curfews imposed by the Modi government
- The 2019 amendment of Article 367, which disbanded the Kashmiri Constituent Assembly
- Invoking Article 370 to further undermine local Kashmir political parties' autonomy and self-rule
- In 2019 Indian Parliament redefined Kashmir as two new Union territories (Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh)
- Parliament removal of rules preventing outside ownership of land and other foreign work restrictions



# Religious demographics in Kashmir & Jammu and Ladakh





# Pandemic Politics in South Asia – Nelson

In addition to efforts to undermine Kashmiri autonomy and impose Hindu nationalist politics, **non-BJP politicians were arrested, a communications blackout was imposed, and internet access was restricted or shut off completely.** As Nelson notes, “In short, the state was placed under a type of siege for nearly six months until a Supreme Court review led most restrictions to be lifted.” Soon after the Modi government re-imposed these policies under the guise of “public health” measures.

These included using India’s **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (1967)** as well as the **Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (1978)** to grant broad powers of arrest and detention, as well as disruption of normal political rules by the Indian army and police forces.

“It would be difficult to describe a more dramatic escalation of Muslim marginalization under the cover of Covid-19. What distinguished the experience of Kashmir, however, **was not merely the segmented marginalization and securitization of Muslims, but the use of legal provisions that explicitly ‘suspended’ democratic norms in order to deal with an emergency**—provisions that might have been expected to expire, were it not for Covid-19, which **simply placed ‘public-order’ restrictions into a new ‘public-health’ legal envelope.**”

# Pandemic Politics in South Asia – Nelson

In the case of Pakistan, Nelson argues that intra-religious discrimination can also be seen in Covid-19 responses. Here the majority Sunni Deobandi leaders referred to Covid-19 as the “Shi’i virus,” blaming the minority Shi’a Muslim community and pilgrims for spreading the virus. What was different in the case of Pakistan, however, is that Muslim political groups mobilized against state Covid-19 restrictions in order to assert their religious autonomy from the state.

“Repeating a familiar line amongst religious leaders who claim that God, not government, is their primary source of protection, prominent [Sunni] clerics...**insisted that faith alone was powerful prophylactic against the virus. They argued that government intervention was not merely unnecessary but objectionable, with government anti-virus measures being framed as a conspiracy led by anti-Muslim foreign governments to weaken Pakistan and undermine the power of Islam...**the pandemic was recast as another platform for religious elites to compete with state-sanctioned secular elites **in a push to define the parameters of popular legitimacy.**”

Here we see **two key themes** we have discussed previously—religious claims that lead believers to claim their **faith makes them immune from the pandemic**—and faith leaders asserting their **religious authority as superior to**, and more legitimate than, secular government authorities.



These issues were highlighted by **protests over mosque closures and other religious restrictions**, which led the Kashmiri government to renegotiate mosque closures around Ramadan due to concerns of violence from Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) militants and other religious supporters. These concerns also led the Pakistan Army to press the government to enact **Article 245**, which granted the police and army broad detainment and lockdown powers with little oversight.

“As in India, and again in Kashmir, **Pakistan’s approach to the Covid-19 pandemic combined already-existing forms of marginalization with enduring patterns of resistance to state-based assimilation or ‘encroachment.’** And as in Kashmir, Pakistan opted to reject familiar democratic norms—including fundamental rights—in favour of emergency provisions.”

Policing Covid-19 curfew in Pakistan



# Pandemic Politics in South Asia – Nelson

In the case of Afghanistan, Nelson argues one of the most important factors remained the ongoing hostilities between the Afghan government and Taliban militias. As Nelson points out, **government and Taliban efforts to delegitimize each other has significantly reduced public-health responses** by the state, with medical care and doctors used as a political weapon by Taliban militants to further delegitimize the Afghan state.

Yet as Nelson also points out, Taliban leaders and Muslim clerics in Afghanistan by and large took the threat of Covid-19 seriously, with the Taliban halting fighting in areas with known outbreaks and both the **National Ulema Council** and the **Ulema High Commission issued fatwas (religious edicts) declaring mosques should close** to prevent the spread of the virus.

As Nelson points out, “a more effective anti-pandemic response was still thwarted by segmented forms of state legitimacy and the restricted forms of stated capacity associated with these enduring divisions. **In short, a pandemic was not enough to bridge the most important social and political cleavages.** On the contrary, the pandemic reinforced those cleavages and bolstered the Taliban’s delegitimization of Afghanistan’s democratically elected government.”

# Pandemic Politics in South Asia – Nelson

What this suggests, Nelson argues, is that in South Asia the “legitimacy gaps associated with entrenched social and political cleavages involving Muslims or particular groups of Muslims have shaped state efforts to address the global Covid-19 pandemic...**If there is one pattern that has prevailed across all four cases (India, Kashmir, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), however, it is a pattern pushing away from the legitimacy of elected governments and away from democratic norms.**”

“There is a persistent risk that Covid-19 analysts will focus on state capacity more than segmented legitimacy, inadvertently supporting either **(a) a Chinese model of ‘bureaucratic state capacity’ (biosurveillance)** or **(b) an anti-democratic model focused on ‘emergency’ powers**—not in the service of that old chestnut, ‘public order,’ but rather **in the service of a new emergency framed by ‘public-health’**. This shift may help elected leaders defeat the virus; but, as with so many emergencies, **those leaders may succeed in defeating the virus only to discover that they have killed their democracies in the process.**”

These trends, Nelson argues, are part of **a broader wave of anti-democratic, authoritarian politics** that are appearing in many countries around the world, including in the US, thanks to Covid-19.



# Viral Fundamentals: Riding the Corona Waves in India

**Banu Subramaniam**



# Viral Fundamentals - Subramaniam

As Subramaniam argues, the Covid-19 outbreak has brought the links between Hindu nationalism and contested views involving science and medicine into sharp relief in India. These trends have drawn on, and further strengthened, the power of the BJP and Hindutva ideologies in India.

“There is a **powerful campaign within India and outside to rewrite the history books and tell a new story of India—its past, present, and future.** Hindu nationalists have selectively, and strategically, used rhetoric from both science and Hinduism, modernity and orthodoxy, western and eastern thought to build a powerful but potentially dangerous vision of India as a Hindu nation...**at the heart of Hindu nationalism is not only a mythological, but an imagined mytho-scientific corpus—where Hindu mythology and modern science meld seamlessly into the other.**”

The examples of Prime Minister Modi talking about how plastic surgery may have begun when someone put an elephant's head on a human body—symbolizing lord Ganesha—shows how Hindu mythological beliefs are fused to modern science. “Even gods need doctors,” Subramaniam suggests.



Ganesha

# Viral Fundamentals - Subramaniam

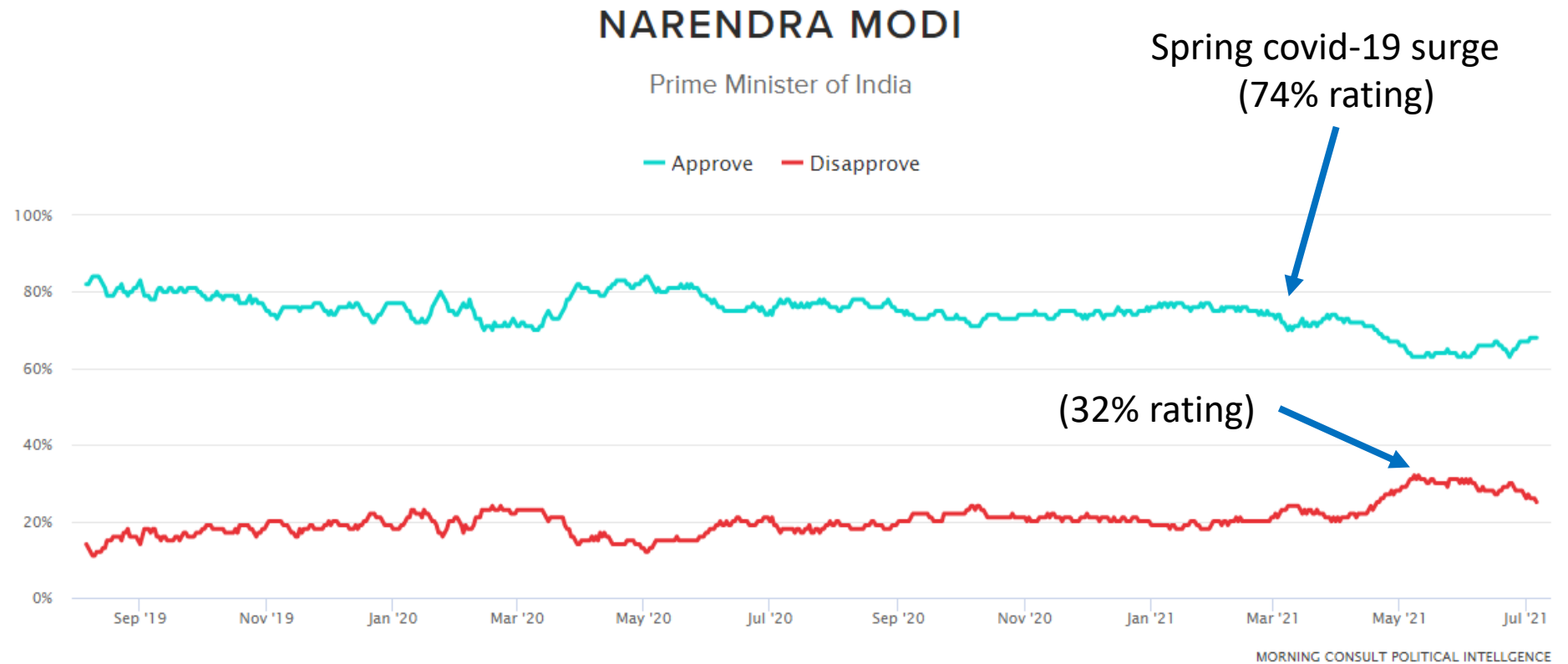
Subramaniam draws an important contrast between Christian and Hindu views on science, noting that unlike many Christian fundamentalists, Hindus embrace science, albeit through Vedic-tinted glasses. “Indeed, India has embraced scientific epidemiology and followed global protocols, often more vigorously than other nations...But, and this is key—**modern science is not all that constitutes “science” in contemporary India.** In addition to global scientific protocols, the Indian government and Indian popular culture have enthusiastically promoted Vedic science as modern science...Thus, **the constant blurring of the boundaries between ancient Vedic science and modern science is significant in the circulations and consolidation of Hindu nationalism in Corona times.**”

Our author argues these dual systems of science (Vedic and Western), the former of which has a rich history, could help expand Western scientific practices, but instead, Hindu nationalists are simply making non-scientific religious beliefs appear scientific.

As she argues, “**Hindu nationalists have reduced Vedic science to a handmaiden to western medical systems of knowledge,** a facile system compatible to the aspirations of a neoliberal and increasingly corporatized state.” As she argues, this approach fits squarely with the ruling agenda of Modi’s BJP.

Subramaniam also echoes some of the same concerns that Nelson raised, including Hindu nationalists targeting Muslims during lockdown and the scapegoating of Muslims and Chinese for spreading the virus. These are the same social cleavages Nelson discussed, as well as Juergensmeyer earlier.

India hadn't seen the massive outbreak in the spring of 2021 when our author wrote this piece, and the question about Modi's continued popularity in the fall of 2020 finally reversed as the virus surged in the spring of 2021. We can see how **Modi's approval rating dropped as the outbreak grew worse in India.**

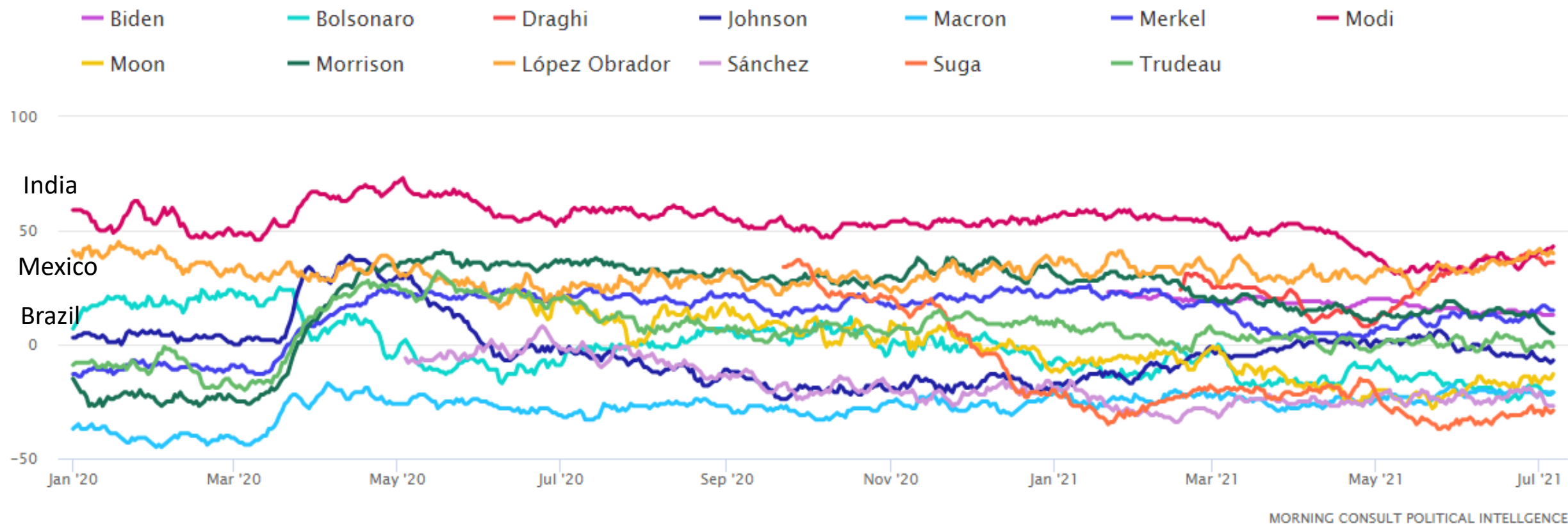


Updated July 8, 2021 (Approx. Sample Size: 2,126 Adults; MoE: +/- 2.2%; 7-Day Moving Average)



# NET APPROVAL FOR ALL LEADERS

The share of each country's residents that approve minus the share that disapprove of their respective head of state



Updated July 8, 2021 (Sample sizes vary; 7-Day Moving Average)

Subramaniam reminds us that part of Modi's continued high public appeal, which remained above 60% even at the height of the most recent Covid-19 outbreak and shortages of oxygen, ICU beds, and Covid-19 vaccines, is due to his strong support for Hindu nationalism and support among "affluent, educated, and urban citizens," many of whom benefitted the most from the abrupt 4-hour lockdown imposed in 2020 at the expense of poor and marginalized groups, including Dalit caste Hindus and Muslims.

She also calls attention to the "**blurring boundaries of science and pseudoscience**" in India, from "symbolic offerings and drinking of the sacred cow urine 'gaumutra'... to worship of new religious deities such as Corona Mata."

Even the "Ministry of AYUSH have issued various advisories during the pandemic that include **dubious prevention measures and prophylactics to the virus, such as cow urine, ginger, and turmeric.**"

She also notes how official government spokespeople and Hindu advocates have circulated many slick ads and infographics that play up bogus Vedic medical cures, such as Baba Ramdev and his debunked Coronil and Swasari ayurvedic cures for Covid-19.



## Baba Ram and Covid-19 Skepticism





Subramaniam argues this blurring of boundaries between religion and science is central to Hindutva, and “the mainstream political apparatus, media, and the judiciary have all been coopted into an unquestioned support for Hindu nationalism...**Even opposition parties are afraid to embrace a secular agenda, and instead promote a Hindutva-lite message.** We are seeing a brazen march towards a Hindu India, with actions such as abrogating provisions of **Article 370 that gave Kashmir special status**, removing Article 35A from the constitution that gave special rights and privileges to those in Kashmir, the recent Supreme court verdict **allowing the building a temple in Ayodhya** where the Babri Masjid stood, and the passing of the **Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) that differentially targets and treats Muslim immigrants** from neighboring countries.”

So here again we hear echoes of what Nelson discussed in South Asia, and some links back to themes from week 2, including the Hindu-Muslims tensions that lead to communal violence in Ayodhya around the destruction of the Babri mosque in the 1990s, and later with the Gujarat massacres in 2002.

Subramaniam notes how modern medical technologies are being abused to target certain segments of the Indian population, practices also at work in Kashmir. As Subramaniam argues, “**this translated into poorer neighborhoods and slums being more heavily surveilled as “high risk,” and people tracked if they move between zones.** Many of the high risk “red” zones are in Muslim and Dalit neighborhoods. Thus, **a public health tool was transformed into creating and enforcing ghettos of the sick.**” Rather than bringing people together during the pandemic, religious nationalism in India is tearing people apart.



# World Religions & Global Issues

Week 4 Lecture | RELS 332

Professor Chris Crews





Save the Economy, Liberty, and  
Yourself: Christian Nationalism and  
Americans' Views on Government  
Covid-19 Restrictions

Samuel Perry  
Andrew Whitehead  
Joshua Grubbs



# Save the Economy, Liberty, and Yourself – Perry et al.

As Perry and co-authors argue, public responses in the US to the Covid-19 pandemic have varied widely, with major differences between those on the political left and right. As they note, **vaccine skepticism and vaccine opposition has mostly emerged from the conservative religious right**, as well as claims that **government health restrictions are illegitimate and threaten Christian religious freedoms and American capitalism**.

“We propose that a critical ideological element that undergirds many of the political and religious rationales for anti-restriction discourse is “**Christian nationalism**.” By this we mean **a pervasive ideology constituted by identities, values, and historical narratives that center on preserving or “restoring” the preeminence of an identitarian and embattled form of Christianity in American civic life.**”

As the authors point out, research on Christian nationalism and Covid-19 skepticism has shown they are closely linked, but we know less about Christian nationalists’ responses to various government Covid-19 regulations. As they suggest, “**both political and Christian conservatism unite and amplify one another within Christian nationalism,**” and in the past year these groups were central to Covid-19 protests.

# Save the Economy, Liberty, and Yourself – Perry et al.

There is a long, complex history of Christian nationalism that dates to the post-WWII and Cold War era geopolitics of the “capitalist west” versus the “communist east,” which we explored in week 1 related to changing global religious dynamics. As they note, **“Allegiance to free-market capitalism and a concomitant suspicion of government overreach became a “Christian” value.** In subsequent decades [1980s onwards] the Republican party was able to **further solidify the ideological link between Christian identity, patriotism, and a preference for neoliberal political economy...”**

This is where we begin to see the rise of the Christian Right as a political force in US domestic politics, as embodied in the **1980 election of Ronald Reagan as president and efforts by the Moral Majority to fight against LGBTQ+ and reproductive rights** legislation and legal protections and support for free market reforms and the privatization and dismantling of the welfare state. By the early 2000s these issues were championed by the **Tea Party movement**, but in recently years this fusion of Christian nationalism and economic libertarianism is commonly found among **QAnon adherents and groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers**, as well as among many vocal Trump supporters.

As the authors argue, such beliefs have led prominent Republican leaders to express skepticism (or outright hostility) towards Covid-19 restrictions, especially those infringing on church and business.

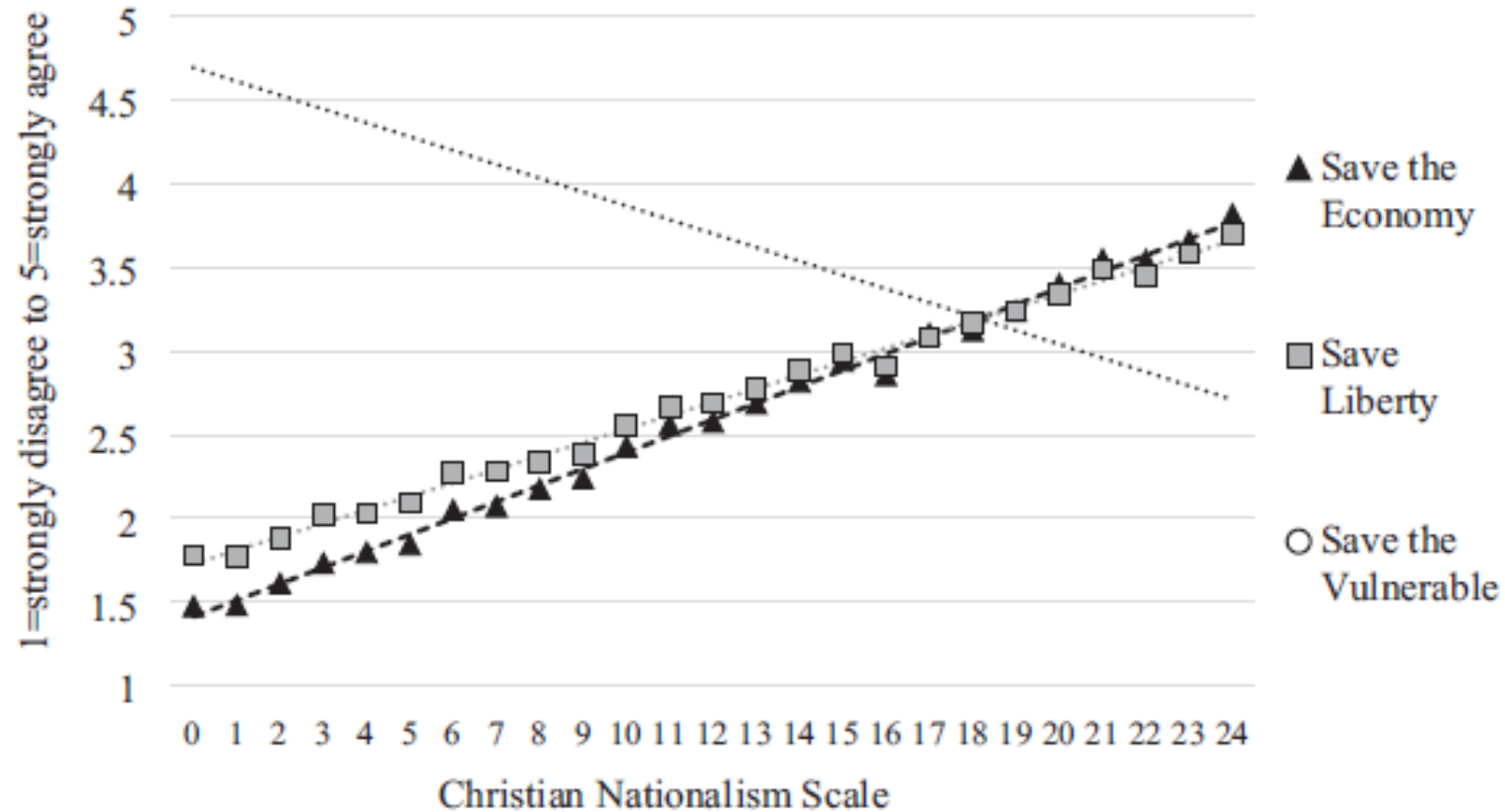
# Save the Economy, Liberty, and Yourself – Perry et al.

Some Christian fundamentalists went so far as to suggest Covid-19 was the work of the devil, with one conservative Catholic pundit claiming that **“There is a demonic side to the sentimentalism of saving lives at any cost...the mass shutdown of society to fight the spread of COVID-19 creates a perverse, even demonic atmosphere.”** Other religious conservatives denounced Covid-19 social distancing guidelines as a threat to capitalism, religious freedom, individualism, and even America.

As Perry et al argue, **“adherence to Christian nationalist ideology was the leading predictor that Americans engaged in “incautious” behavior** in May 2020 such as attending gatherings with 10+ people, eating out at restaurants, or shopping for non-essential items; and **it was the second leading predictor that Americans failed to follow recommended precautions such as wearing masks...”**

Because of this, the authors hypothesized that **“Christian nationalism will powerfully predict that American prioritize the economy and individual liberty over protection for immune-compromised or otherwise vulnerable populations.”** To test this theory, the authors used 3 sets of public opinion data from YouGov (2019-2020) in the Public Discourse and Ethics Survey (PDES), focusing on 3 key themes—***Save the Economy, Save Liberty, and Save the Vulnerable***—to try and measure beliefs.

FIGURE 1. Predicted Values of Americans' Views on Social Distancing Restrictions Across Values of Christian Nationalism.



**Save Economy:** We must lift social distancing restrictions as soon as possible in order to avoid economic collapse.

**Save Liberty:** Citizens have the right to expose themselves to risk if they would prefer to work and travel freely.



# Save the Economy, Liberty, and Yourself – Perry et al.

As the authors found when testing their hypothesis, “These trends are consistent with the direction of associations we see among **males, Republicans, political conservatives, born-again Protestants, and those who are more religious** (in other words, all those characteristics we would associate with Christian nationalism)...we see that **Christian nationalism powerfully predicts Americans’ views toward mandated distancing restrictions** in the ways predicted above.”

The authors found one other important detail in their analysis of religious views, and that was that **religious views themselves are not a reliable predictor of political views**. As they noted, “at the bivariate level, religiosity was associated with Americans prioritizing the economy and liberty and deprioritizing the vulnerable, **once Christian nationalism is accounted for in multivariate models, religiosity is associated with actually favoring imposed** restrictions in spite of concerns over the economy and liberty, and is also **positively associated with concern for protecting the vulnerable**.”

This suggests that the **most important variable is politics, and then politics + religion**. When strong Christian beliefs are also combined with conservative nationalist leanings is when we see politically damaging ideologies like Christian nationalism emerge. But **religion on its own pushed people in the opposite direction, towards more care for the vulnerable and greater support for government Covid-19 restrictions**.



Today's Topic:  
**Christian Nationalism and COVID**





As Perry and co-authors argued:

**“Christian nationalist ideology, even after accounting for sociodemographic, religious, and political characteristics, is the leading predictor that Americans prioritize the economy and deprioritize the vulnerable. And it is the second leading predictor (behind only political conservatism) of prioritizing individual liberty.”**

“Clearly, social scientists, pollsters, and those in the media **need to employ greater nuance** when explaining why so many Americans are resistant to governments implementing and/or maintaining sweeping social distancing restrictions. The answer is not political partisanship or evangelicalism per se, but much of it has to do with the **pervasive ideology that blends Christian identity with conceptions of economic prosperity and individual liberty**, even at the expense of the vulnerable.”







# Donald Trump, the Christian Right and COVID-19: The Politics of Religious Freedom

Jeffrey Haynes



# The Politics of Religious Freedom - Haynes

Haynes' paper builds on and complements findings from Perry et al., and his article delves deeper into the links between religious freedom and secular governance. As he notes, the strong support for Trump among religious conservatives was **based on political calculations that he would help advance their religious political agenda, especially rolling back LGBTQ+ and women's rights issues through legislative and judicial activism.** This is what happened with the Supreme Court, which is now dominated by conservative Christian judges who may roll back legal protections for both groups.

Yet in other ways, Haynes argues, **Trump was not successful in advancing a Christian Right political agenda in relation to Covid-19 restrictions,** which as we saw in Perry et al., is a major issue for Christian nationalists. Despite the lack of leadership from former president Trump, several key Christian fundamentalist groups took matters into their own hands by challenging local Covid-19 restrictions in state and federal court, with groups like Liberty Counsel leading the charge.

What unites members of the Christian Right is a shared belief that **"America's Christian foundations are fatally undermined by secularisation and that it is crucial to reverse this trend to return to the founding (Christian) values of America."** These lawsuits were seen as one way to accomplish this.

# The Politics of Religious Freedom - Haynes

Although the impacts of the Christian Right go back decades, **recent demographic shifts in the US are driving an increasing level of religious political activism** as historically dominant groups lose power, namely middle-class white male Protestants Christians of Western European ethnic descent. We saw this fear among white nationalist marching in Charlottesville and chanting “you will not replace us.”

As Haynes notes, **“White Christian conservatives, once the ‘silent majority’, are no longer a demographic majority in America today; and many feel beleaguered.** Many regard Trump as their savior, and Trump’s aim to ‘make America great again’ involved policies with which most white Christian conservatives strongly agreed...The % reduction in white Christians was accompanied by a **growing sense among many that America’s “Christian values” had significantly declined.**”

This speaks to arguments from Mark Juergensmeyer in weeks 1-2 about global religious trends which are driving religious violence and calling into question secular states and political liberalism, **movements which are rooted in identity-based grievances and a loss of power.** In the context of global politics, this fact that **white Christians of European descent are becoming a global minority** is driving a surge of Christian nationalism in countries like the US, UK, Denmark, France, and Germany.



Religious  
Affiliation



Demographics



Politics

KEEP STOP  
Reproductive  
Health



Immigration



LGBTQ



Discrimination



Inequality

SELECT QUESTION:

Religious Tradition ▾

SELECT RESPONSE: (0 selected)

Select a Response ▾



CHANGE GEOGRAPHY

Regions

States

Metro Areas

MAP/LIST



YEAR

2020 ▾

Response (%) ▾

California ▾

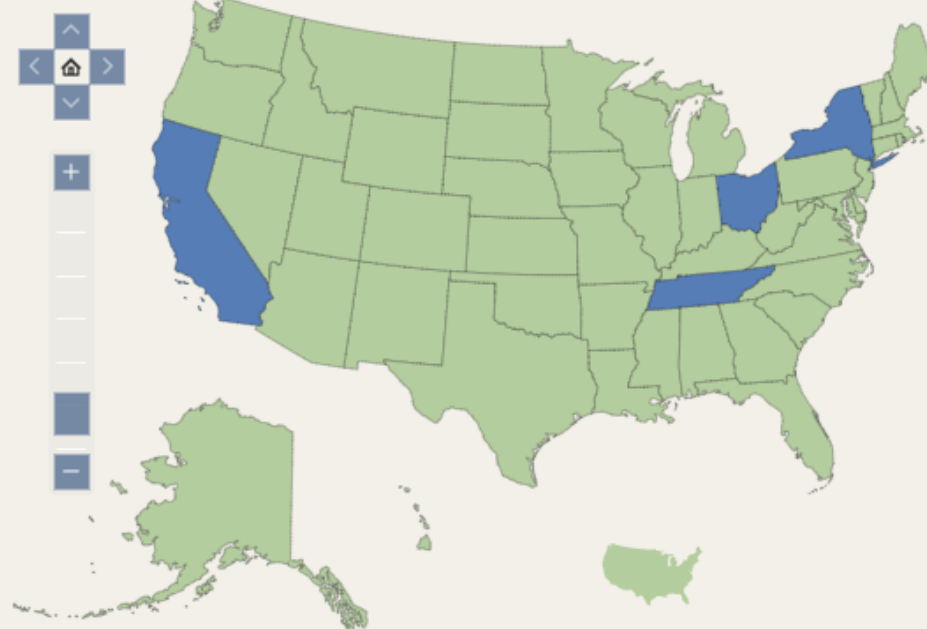
New York ▾

Ohio ▾

Tennessee ▾

White evangelical Prot.	9	6	17	27
White mainline Prot.	12	12	20	19
Black Protestant	4	8	9	8
Hispanic Protestant	7	5	1	3
Other non-white Prot.	4	2	3	4
White Catholic	9	17	14	7
Hispanic Catholic	19	12	2	3
Other non-white Catholic	2	3	2	1
Jehovah's Witness	1	1	< 0.5	< 0.5
Mormon	1	< 0.5	< 0.5	1
Orthodox Christian	< 0.5	1	1	< 0.5
Jewish	1	4	1	1
Muslim	1	2	1	< 0.5
Buddhist	1	1	1	< 0.5
Hindu	1	1	< 0.5	< 0.5
Unaffiliated	25	22	23	22
Unitarian / Universalist	< 0.5	< 0.5	< 0.5	< 0.5
Other religion	1	1	1	1
New Age Religions	< 0.5	< 0.5	< 0.5	< 0.5

No Question Available



# The Politics of Religious Freedom - Haynes

As Haynes argues about post-1960s cultural changes, “the world that white Christian conservatives thought they knew appeared to be disappearing. **They did not like what they saw and wanted it reversed...**These two developments—the numerical decline of white Christians and growing liberalism of Americans on some social issues—make it implausible that a re-Christianization of America would occur through a large scale, voluntary readoption of Christian conservative values. How then to bring this about? The **answer was to revive and embed Christian conservative values via legislation in relation to religious freedom.**”

This is when we see the birth of the modern Christian Right in the US, **including the creation of the Moral Majority (1979), which was led by Christian activists like Jerry Falwell and Pat Buchanan**, and embraced by conservative politicians from Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan to Margaret Thatcher.

This embrace of religious politics continued in the Bush years and was revived with a new fervor by Trump. As Haynes argues about the Christian Right’s embrace of Trump, “In the context of seemingly inexorable secularization, it would not be enough simply to assert that Americans should become “better Christians”. **It would be necessary to legislate to enforce a return to particularistic religious values favored by the Christian Right.**” One way to do that was to gain control of the Supreme Court.



# The Politics of Religious Freedom - Haynes

As Haynes discusses, historian and Evangelical writer John Fea has identified **three overlapping strands in today's Christian Right, which he calls "court evangelicals,"** Christian political advocates who were Trump supporters and helped promote and advocate this religious agenda. These include:

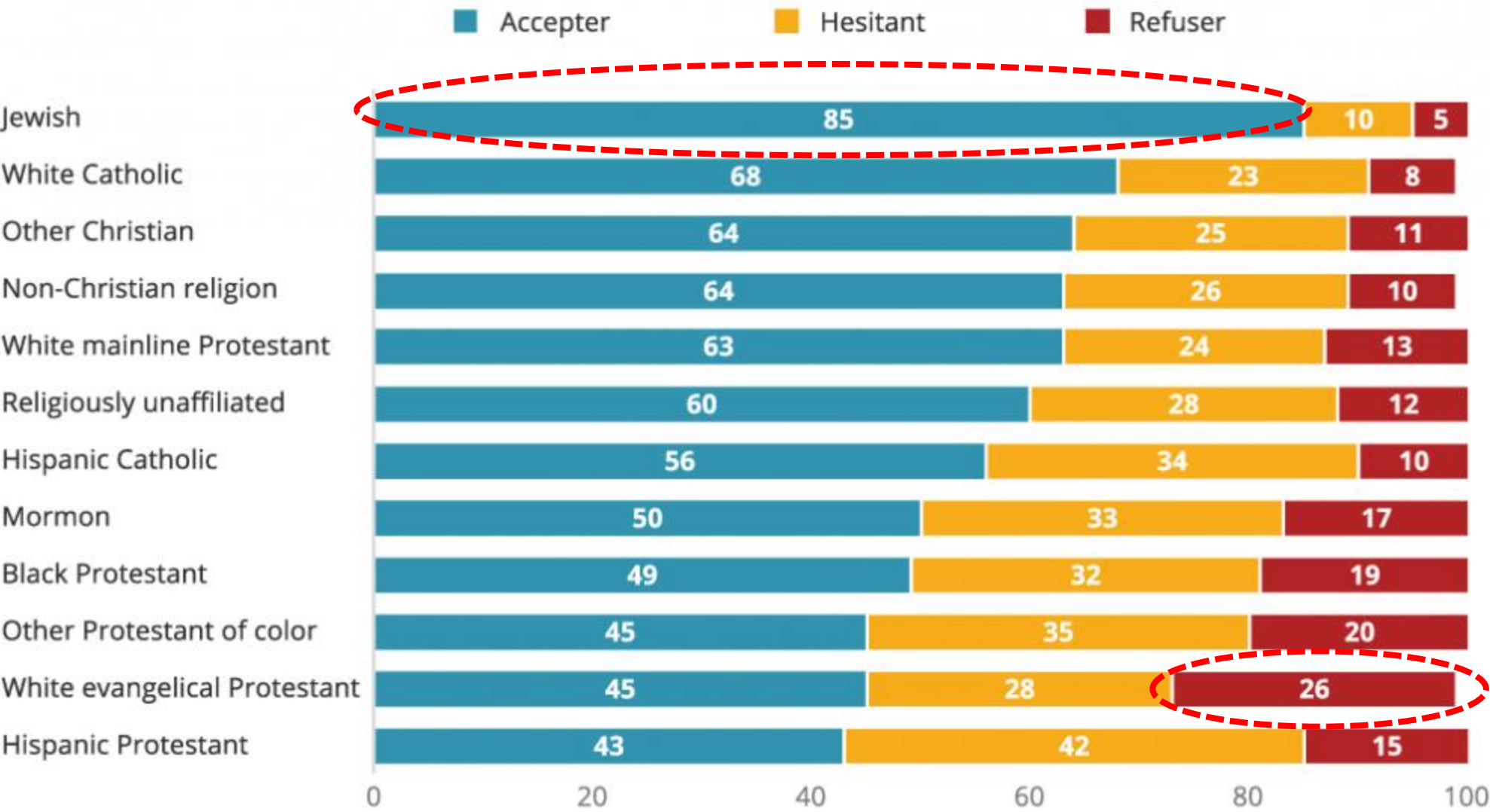
- A section of the mainstream **Christian Right**, whose origins go back to the 1980s.
- A cohort of independent **"charismatics"** who claim the gifts of the **Pentecostal** tradition (visions, miracles and direct revelations from God) but do not belong to any established Pentecostal group.
- The **"prosperity gospel"** advocates who resemble the second category but put more emphasis on the material rewards, which following their version of Christianity would bring to the faithful.

Individuals like **Mike Pence, Mike Pompeo, William Barr** also helped to bring conservative religious politics deeper into secular government and their broader cultural and political influences are still evident in fights over government pandemic restriction, mandatory social distancing and masking policies, and temporary closures or restrictions on churches and other places of worship.

As Perry and co-authors argued, this mix of conservative politics, religious nationalism and unfettered capitalism **is the primary force** driving public opposition to Covid-19 vaccines and health restrictions.

**FIGURE 1.3a Vaccine Acceptance, Hesitancy, and Refusal, by Religious Affiliation**

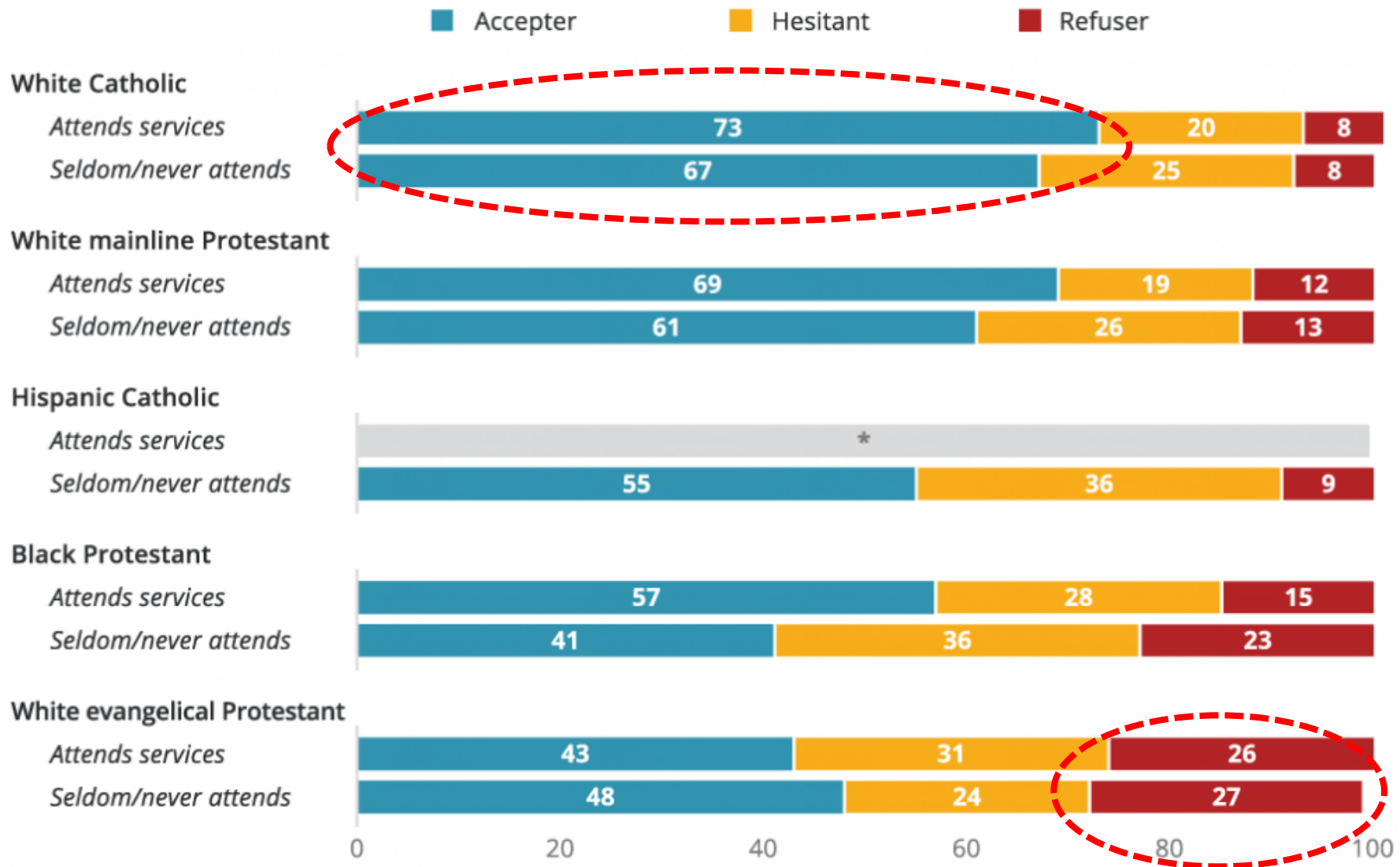
Percent who are:



Source: PRRI-IFYC March 2021 Survey.

**FIGURE 1.3b Vaccine Acceptance, Hesitancy, and Refusal, by Religious Affiliation and Attendance**

Percent who are:

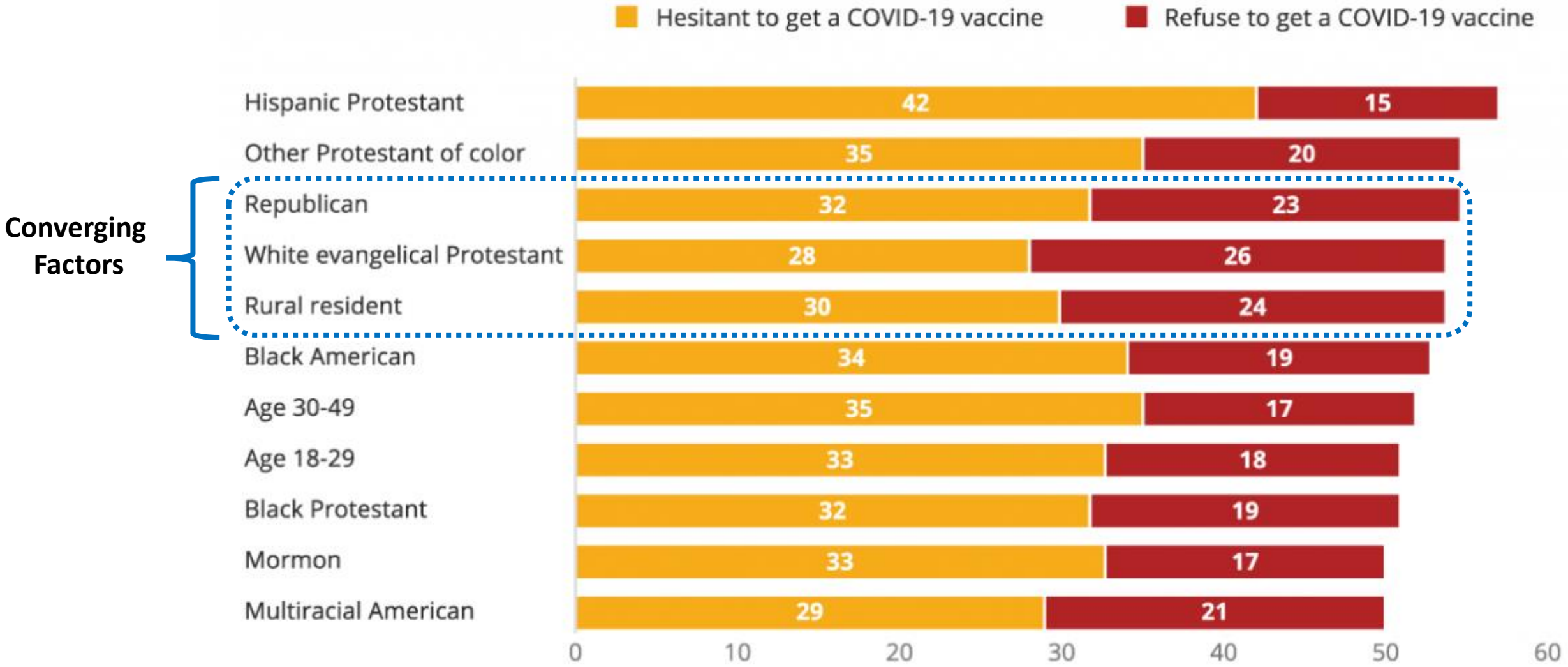


\*Sample size too small to report.

Source: PRRI-IFYC March 2021 Survey.

**FIGURE 1.5 Groups Among Whom Half or More Are Vaccine Hesitant or Refusers**

Percent who are:



Source: PRRI-IFYC March 2021 Survey.



# The Politics of Religious Freedom - Haynes

Despite the inroads by the Christian Right under President Trump and supporters like Pence, Pompeo, and Barr, Haynes argues **one key issue they failed to succeed on was preventing a broad government push to prioritize public health over the economy, religious institutions, or individual freedom.**

As Haynes reminds us, “Christian nationalists are likely to scorn social distancing recommendations, be skeptical about the views of science on the coronavirus pandemic, **claim that coronavirus related lockdown orders unacceptably threaten both the economy and Americans’ liberty**, and downplay or overlook the danger to vulnerable members of society from catching the virus.” This echoes similar findings from Perry et al. in their research into Christian nationalism and the pandemic.

But Haynes also notes one other important dynamic we need to keep in mind, **the crisis of legitimacy**, which Juergensmeyer also raised in earlier readings. “When Christian nationalists were asked whom they trust for pandemic-related information, such as medical experts and the Centers for Disease Control, **they tended to choose President Trump “by a landslide”, followed by religious organizations and Republicans.**”

So Christian nationalists not only hold radically different views from most people, but they also **reject the authority of scientific experts and public health officials**, creating a closed feedback loop in which **public health messaging itself becomes “fake news” and part of a secular, liberal conspiracy.**

A key example of this resistance to secular forms of governance has been playing out over the past year with Covid-19. As Haynes shows, **the legal system has become a central battleground for these fights**, with groups like Liberty Counsel filing multiple lawsuits in state and federal courts. As Liberty Counsel founder Mathew Staver argued about California Covid-19 restrictions in the fall of 2020, “It is criminal in California to go to your neighbor’s home to pray with them or have a Bible study! Let this sink in—you can go to prison in CA for worshipping.”

In exploring these debates, Haynes argues that the “**key constitutional question is this: Is free exercise of religion really being denied**, as Gonzales, Spell and others claim? Certainly, not allowing religious services to take place as normal—temporarily—restricts the free exercise of religion, especially the very important ability to assemble together in faith. **However, note that such restrictions temporarily end only one, albeit important, aspect of the expression of faith; they do not stop someone worshipping their god.** Indeed, followers of most faiths, not restricted to Christianity but also including other world religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism, moved online during the pandemic and accepted associated social distancing measures.”

At the heart of this issue is not just a question of religious belief, but also religious liberty, at least as seen from the perspective of Christian nationalist and those opposed to Covid-19 restrictions. As Haynes notes, “**For Christian nationalists, personal freedom and religious freedom are the same.**”

# Ideology is Driving Restrictions on Churches



with Mathew Staver

Staver and Liberty Counsel filed many lawsuits against state-imposed church restrictions, including the **2020 lawsuit on behalf of Harvest Rock Church (Pastor Ché Ahn) and Harvest International Ministry in California**. A final settlement was reached in May of 2021 between the two parties, and as part of that settlement, **California can no longer impose restrictions upon houses of worship and the state will pay Liberty Counsel \$1.35 million to cover their attorney fees**.

Staver argued that “Governor Gavin Newsom’s COVID restrictions discriminated against churches while providing **preferential treatment to many secular businesses and gatherings**...California may never again place discriminatory restrictions on churches and places of worship...**Pastor Ahn’s leadership and courage has toppled the tyranny and freed every pastor and church in California.**”

In their settlement, the courts effectively told California that they had to impose the same sets of restrictions on churches as they do with other “essential services,” and could not, with a few limited exceptions, place further or new restrictions on religious gatherings in California. But as Staver’s comments illustrate, **Liberty Counsel sees these efforts as part of a larger national strategy to overturn all public health restrictions on churches in the US, not just in California.**

What we see, then, is a pattern in which during 2020 the courts largely upheld the right of state governments to impose public health restrictions on churches, **but by 2021 courts began to back away from this earlier position, giving greater latitude to religious freedom arguments** then it had in the past, and these shifts were due in part to guidance from a now conservative Supreme Court.



# The Politics of Religious Freedom - Haynes

As Haynes suggests, “Following Donald Trump’s failure to win the November 2020 presidential election, Mathew Staver of Liberty Counsel believed that it was **essential to challenge the restrictions on religious services in California and because of the Supreme Court’s new conservative preponderance, now was the time to file the case.**” As it turns out, Staver was right.

Haynes argued in his piece that “the ability of state governors to close religious places of worship both illustrated limits on the power of the president **and that public health can take supremacy over religious freedom in today’s America.**” That was true in 2020, but after the 2021 rulings in favor of removing church restrictions and upholding arguments about religious freedom as advanced by Liberty Counsel and others in their lawsuits, Haynes’ claim seems much less certain.

As Staver made clear in the previous video clip, Liberty Counsel is not just fighting for religious freedom. This work is part of a larger ideological struggle between Christian nationalists and secular government, echoing a point made by Haynes in his piece. “State governors who ordered the closure of religious places of worship for normal meetings **were vilified as aggressive secularists who acted in order not to protect public health, but to undermine religious freedom.**”

# Religion, Covid-19, and Nationalism

I want to end with two important points that Haynes calls our attention to in his piece.

First, he argues that “the issue of religious freedom in America is not closed by the failure of Donald Trump to win re-election. For more than 40 years, the Christian Right has been a powerful political player and has **recently managed to take over the Republican Party and establish religious freedom as a key Republican Party position.**” Along with the growing influence of Christian nationalists, these political trends will continue shaping American politics for the foreseeable future, including in 2022.

Second, Haynes argued that the “coronavirus pandemic has shown however that there are certain conditions when religious freedom is not the first freedom in America. **It has shown that public health, in the face of a virulent virus which killed hundreds of thousands of Americans in less than a year, is more important, and as a result, religious freedom is necessarily temporarily curtailed for the greater public good.**” As the recent 2021 rulings show, this is no longer the case, and religious freedom arguments, bolstered by a conservative Supreme Court majority, are now gaining favor.

As we begin to see another surge in Covid-19 outbreaks around the world linked to the new Delta variant and rising vaccine skepticism and denial, **debates involving public health measures and arguments about religious freedom are likely to grow more intense.**

# Assignment Reminders

A few reminders about class assignments for this final week:

This is our final week, with one less day of classes (ending on Thu 7/22).

Be sure to watch the videos included in the Weekly Schedule to provide you more context and details about the cases we are exploring this week.

- Discussion post #4 is due Tue July 20 by 11:59 pm in discussion forum.
- Peer response posts (x2) are due Thu July 22 by 11:59 pm in discussion forum.
- Quiz #2 will open on Wed (7/21) and be open until Fri (7/23) at 11:59 pm.