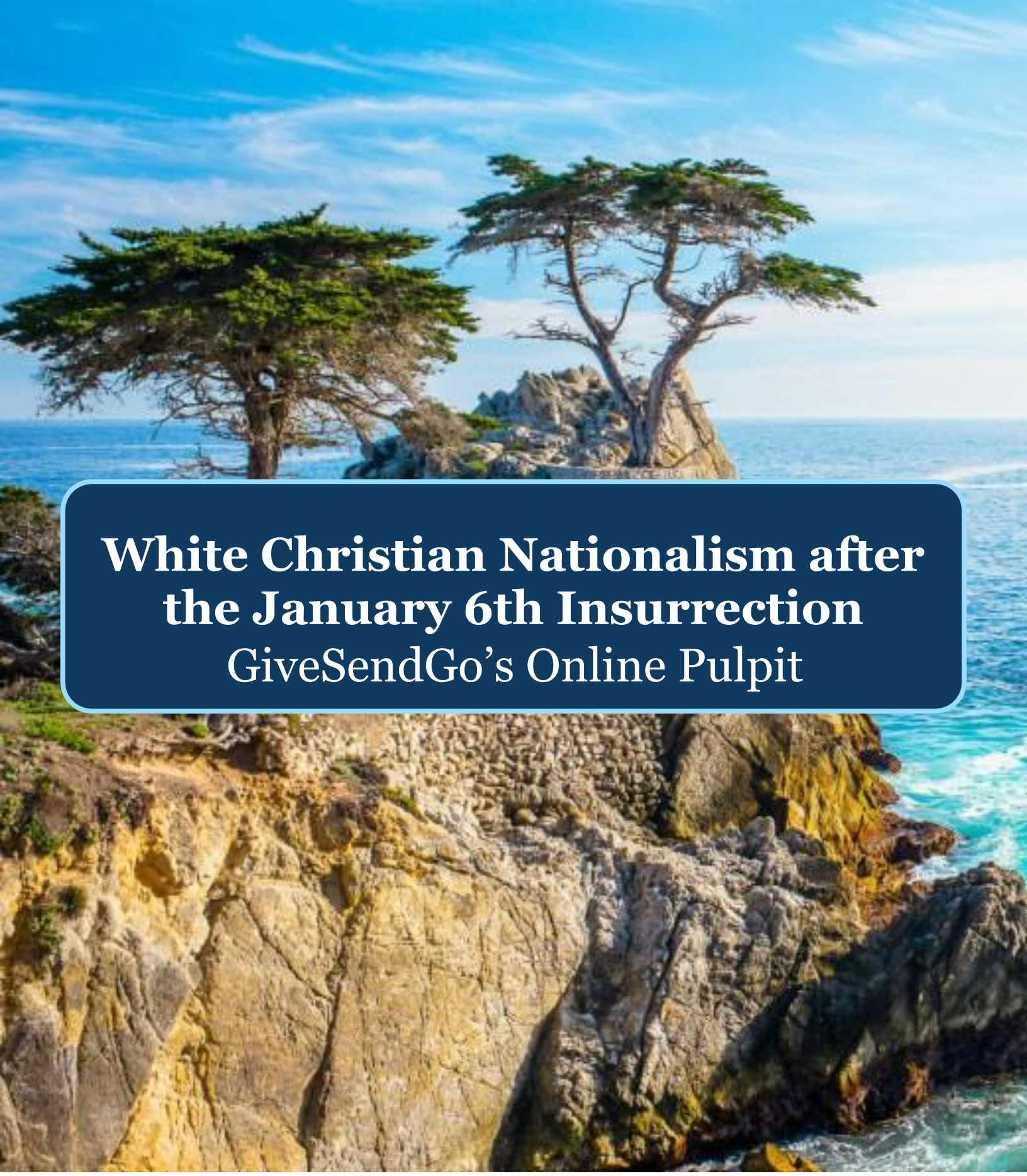

White Christian Nationalism after the January 6th Insurrection

GiveSendGo's Online Pulpit

CTEC

Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism

Middlebury Institute *of* International Studies at Monterey

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GiveSendGo's Online Pulpit

By Phoebe Jones and Amy Cooter, July 2024

An occasional paper from the Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism (CTEC) at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies

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Abstract

White Christian nationalism–an ideological framework that amalgamates politics and a specific version of Christianity–has risen to mainstream attention in recent years, especially following its visible presence at the January 6, 2021, US Capitol insurrection. Existing work on white Christian nationalism provides strong survey evidence of its core principles, but as of yet, little qualitative work has been done to better understand its narrative structures and individual-level usage. This project analyzes 91 GiveSendGo crowdfunding pages that were established to solicit donations for 96 insurrectionists who were criminally charged for their actions that day. We analyze these posts for signals of white Christian nationalism and examine how post authors use narratives and concepts central white Christian nationalism to construct retroactive narratives about January 6th, its participants, and their political violence. We find that these narratives explicitly and implicitly rely on traditional gender roles to argue that insurrectionists are not only innocent of any criminal wrongdoing but are, in this framework, patriots who are fighting against perceived enemies of both God and nation. This project adds to insights on how such narratives may continue to be used to motivate and justify real-world acts of political violence.

Cover Image: Lone cypress on 17-mile Drive, Monterey. LYNN YEH / SHUTTERSTOCK (source).

Title Image: An image of smoke and chaos at the January 6th insurrection surrounded by various flags, including the Christian flag. (source)

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1. Introduction

An Appeal to Heaven flag flutters above the agitated crowd gathered at the western front of the Capitol on January 6, 2021. As the crowd becomes increasingly confrontational with Capitol police, one insurrectionist can be seen wearing a sweatshirt that reads, “Pro God, Pro Gun, Pro Life, Pro Trump” while another dons a black sweatshirt that proclaims “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President.” Among the crowd of pro-Trump messengers, an insurrectionist holds a “Jesus 2020” sign.

These are only the overt displays of white Christian nationalism visible within the first few minutes of *Los Angeles Times’* journalist Kent Nishimura’s footage from the western front of the Capitol.[1] As the crowd overran Capitol police and entered the building, the presence of white Christian nationalism in the landscape of the insurrection only became more visible and salient. The culminating moment was captured by *The New Yorker* reporter Luke Mogelson who filmed so called QAnon Shaman Jacob Chansley leading a call to prayer from the Senate podium. Chansley invokes: “Thank you Heavenly Father for gracing us with this opportunity. […] Thank you Heavenly Father for this opportunity to stand up for our God-given unalienable rights.”[2] Other insurrectionists removed their hats and bowed their heads in reverence during the prayer. Immediately following the insurrection, journalist and author Sarah Posner succinctly observed: “While the Capitol insurrection looked like a lot of militias and survivalists with a smattering of religious iconography, it was in fact an event that was suffused with white Christian supremacy.”[3]

White Christian nationalism’s presence on January 6th has now been accepted as a truism, and other work has analyzed its presence leading up to and during the insurrection. This study looks at data points that were created *after* that event. This analysis offers a window into understanding how insurrectionists and their loved ones utilize white Christian nationalism in order to retroactively mythologize the insurrection and narrate the identity and actions of those who participated in the event. Furthermore, this data enables us to understand how white Christian nationalism *continues* to empower insurrectionists, their loved ones and the wider circle of people who support them in ways that may provide insights into similar narratives and strategies in 2024 and beyond.

2. Background: Crowdfunding

Following January 6th, many people who were present at the Capitol began to face legal, personal, professional, and social consequences for their actions. According to statistics published by the United States Attorney’s Office, District of Columbia, over 1,265 people have been charged in relation to their participation in the insurrection as of early 2024, and 749 federal defendants have received sentences.[4] The charges brought against these individuals range from entering or remaining in a federal

building, to using a deadly or dangerous weapon, to causing bodily harm to an officer, to conspiracy to obstruct a congressional proceeding, among others.[5]

As legal consequences befell defendants, some of them turned to online crowdfunding platforms to solicit financial support, often assisted or represented by their loved ones. In 2022*, Rolling Stone* reported that of the 800 defendants charged at the time of publication, 100 crowdfunding campaigns had been established on their behalf.[6] Mainstream fundraising platforms prohibited these kinds of campaigns, however.[7] GoFundMe, for example, references a "long-standing" prohibition in their terms of service against funds to support legal defenses surrounding alleged crimes of violence.[8] While not all defendants faced allegations of violence, they, too, may have generally believed there were other platforms more conducive to their plight given the perceived lack of resonance between these mainstream platforms and their cause.

The overwhelming majority of the funds were raised on the platform GiveSendGo ($3.5 million) while about $100,000 was raised on other sites including Donor Box and Our Freedom Funding, among others.[9] Founded in 2015, GiveSendGo's political and explicitly Christian commitment has historically enabled members of the so-called alt-right and various hate groups to openly fundraise on the platform.[10] These individuals include Kyle Rittenhousem who was charged and ultimately acquitted after shooting several Black Lives Matter protesters in Wisconsin, and members of the Proud Boys like Enrique Tarrio.[11] The platform's founders, Heather Wilson and Jacob Wells, defend these individuals' presence on their platform, alleging that they are in no position to "judge" whoever flocks to their site.[12] When Talia Lavin of *The Nation* asked the site's founders if they would host the Ku Klux Klan on their platform, Wells simply said, "If the KKK or any other group of people, if what they're doing is within the law [...] I would consider it an honor to have them use the platform and share the hope of Jesus with them."[13]

Based on news coverage shortly after January 6th,[14] however, it seemed that many people outside of the site's target demographic had not heard of GiveSendGo before it started receiving public attention as the insurrectionists' platform of choice. Its self-identification as a *Christian* crowdfunding platform likely helps explain why it became the insurrectionists' preferred platform and is relevant for understanding the white Christian nationalist appeals the defendants use to fundraise. The platform's stated mission is "to share the Hope of Jesus through crowdfunding with everyone who comes to our platform."[15] GiveSendGo uses Christian messaging to shape and justify a political interpretation of "freedom" that is "no holds barred." This framing superficially indicates a desire for freedom for everyone, but, in practice, is a legal and political stance that generally only protects those who are already comparatively powerful and privileged in any given society.[16] References both to standing for freedom and standing against censorship give a surface-level plausible deniability to the exclusionary acts embedded in these frameworks while also offering tacit support for people who believe their political perspectives have been censored through a "stolen" election or other perceived electoral malfeasance.

All crowdfunding sites serve, in part, as an online theater where potential donors are the active audience to a performance conducted by the author of a specific page. The author markets both the recipient of the donated funds and the cause itself to familiar friends and unknown digital passersby, ever aware that in this theater, support for a cause is contingent on an author's ability to successfully market it to the empathy and wallets of the viewer. Through visual images and denouement of characters who are amalgamated from some combination of real world events and maudlin, tragic imagining, a fundraiser's author crafts a narrative of who the recipient is, the underlying source of their imperilment, and how the viewer's donation will salvage or positively sway the recipient's storyline.

As a specifically Christian crowdfunding site, GiveSendGo's theater includes clear connections between Christian messaging and politics. The site is explicitly evangelistic in its purpose and design. It connects its stated mission to share Jesus with everyone who encounters the platform to ideas of "sharing the hope of Jesus" to "standing for freedom" and "against censorship."[17] GiveSendGo also conflates money, hope, and Jesus (a common rhetorical strategy in congregations that practice the prosperity gospel) when discussing its mission statement:[18] "Raise money to share hope. Money is temporary Jesus is eternal. Give both and watch the world be changed." By donating, in other words, the donor shares the hope and testimony of Christ in ways that may be reminiscent of more traditional church offerings in various congregations. The site also offers a "Pray button." When the donor selects this button on a fundraising page, the GiveSendGo Prayer Team calls the fundraiser to let them know that the Team is praying for them–a personalized service that comes with no charge. The platform casts the donor's action, be it the donation of prayer or money, as an enactment of their platform's proselytizing mission and works to facilitate that outcome through free, personal outreach that is unique to this site.

Taking it a step further, GiveSendGo wraps Christianity in political messaging. Their "About" section emphasizes that their mission: "[to share the Hope of Jesus through crowdfunding with everyone who comes to our platform] continues to be our focus *as we stand for freedom*"[19] [*emphasis added*]. The site and its founders frame this proclamation as apolitical, but the context around this declaration suggests otherwise, particularly given that GiveSendGo specifically welcomes fundraisers that other crowdfunding sites have deplatformed because of their allegedly violent and insurrectionary actions.[20] This inclusion is the choice that GiveSendGo references when they describe how they wanted to "take a stand" against what they perceive to be censorship from other sites and from American society more broadly.

It is crucial to understand that GiveSendGo is built upon and markets particular definitions of "freedom" and "speech" that are buttressed by a distinct Christian theological interpretation of Jesus, God, and human agency.[21] In response to being "thrust into the political spotlight" in the summer 2020 "for allowing a campaign that mainstream media had shut down and was censoring," GiveSendGo's founders narrate that prayerful discernment and counsel led to their mission statement and general

outlook. They note that the company "had stepped onto a battlefield and had to take a stand," replicating the language of warfare that evangelical denominations often use to discuss the urgency and intensity of their "fight" to protect Christianity from moldering cultural forces. That is, the founders narrate their platform, their experience in 2020, and their ensuing actions as being part of a larger cosmic battle; the founders are willing foot soldiers who dutifully fight a spiritual war they insist they did not start. Their narrative highlights the intersection of their free will and faith as they prayerfully arrived at the choice to proselytize through their platform.

GiveSendGo's dramaturgy was thus defiantly carved out of a supposedly adverse sociopolitical context to enact an evangelical and thinly veiled political mission. GiveSendGo is not apolitical nor is it neutral. Rather, it interweaves Christian messaging and the act of prayer with the language of constitutional freedoms to market a narrative of personal liberty and free speech. GiveSendGo, its politics, and its interface are crucial context for understanding the narratives of January 6th defendants who chose to use the site to make their pleas for financial and spiritual aid.

The platform's context also yields insights about the envisioned audience of these fundraisers and other people who visit the platform in order to potentially donate. By donating to a defendant's fundraising page through the site, the audience tacitly agrees that the fundraiser is itself a righteous cause. The fundraiser authors and potential donors are thereby connected in performance of perceived shared values. Fundraiser authors strategically pander to the assumed shared values of the potential donors by directly addressing them in their posts with addresses including, "Most of all, he is an American patriot just like you;" "This affects us all, United We Stand, One Nation Under God! Thank you from the bottom of our hearts;" or more detailed addresses, such as this one that connects ideas of government overreach and persecution, traditional gender protectorship, and cultural and spiritual injury:

> "My heart, mind and body have ached for our country for years and the intensity of that ache has overwhelmed me often since Jan. 6th. When the FBI surrounds your house with agents before sun-up, clothed in full combat gear, M-4 rifles pointed at you and your wife, waking you with flashbang grenades bouncing off the house, the reality of what we have become has made that pain of soul unbearable at times. I am certain I share that pain with you and through your prayers you have held me up."[22]

Direct addresses to intended audience members exhibit an assumed understanding and allyship on the part of the author. The language and content of these posts are strategic appeals to an already insulated "club," one in which white Christian nationalist rhetoric and ideology serve as the *lingua franca* of the in-group.

3. Literature Review

Christian nationalism is defined by political scientists Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead in *Taking America Back for God*:

> "[...] Christian nationalism is a cultural framework- a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems-that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life. But the "Christianity" of Christian nationalism is of a particular sort. [...] it includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism."[23]

In contrast to American notions of the separation of church and state, Christian nationalism, in short, seeks to more closely integrate a version of Christianity into all of civic life. It explicitly praises traditional values, while drawing on imagery of an imagined, nostalgic past.[24]

White Christian nationalism is a term defined and used by Samuel Perry and Philip Gorski that emphasizes the role of whiteness in Christian nationalist ideology. Gorski and Perry cite the concept of "ethno-traditionalism" as developed by Eric Kaufmann to define white Christian nationalism as a set of beliefs that "reflect a desire to restore and privilege the myths, values, identity, and authority of a particular ethnocultural tribe. These beliefs add up to a political vision that privileges that tribe. And they seek to put other tribes in their "proper" place."[25]

These authors make this distinction after conducting survey research that revealed that white versus non-white evangelicals differently conceptualize Christianity and the role it should play in the nation. On average, white Christian nationalists most typify the traditionalist viewpoint, striving to force a kind of cultural and religious homogeneity on citizens, while Christian nationalists who are not white believe Christian principles should be used to more inclusively improve social circumstances without the need for traditionalism or conformity.[26]

White Christian nationalism and Christian nationalism are not mutually exclusive. Definitionally, the former highlights how whiteness interacts with and within Christian nationalism to forge a particularly harmful and powerful political vision.[27] While Perry and Whitehead argue that Christian nationalism is not an exclusively racist ideology, Perry and Gorski underscore the fact that racism is nonetheless at the crux of white Christian nationalism; that is, racism is the operative element that activates the ideology, moving it from a "deep story" to a real world political vision.[28] They highlight how the internal hierarchy of the ethnocultural tribe that white Christian nationalism serves places white Christian men at the head and white Christian women and children

as their obedient subordinates. Other racial groups are further subordinated, and other marginalized identities beyond race are often summarily discounted as worthy of any consideration.[29] White supremacy is a core element of white Christian nationalism that weaves through other composite indicators via both explicit and implicit messaging such that some white Christian nationalists may be less aware than others of the white supremacy they are promoting,[30] potentially in the form of both overtly racist expressions and more subtle, paternalistic racism.[31]

Although the vast majority of defendants in our sample do not explicitly engage with race in their fundraising posts, this paper uses the term *white* Christian nationalism because of the xenophobic and racist political vision that underscored Trumpian politics broadly and election fraud conspiracies, specifically, all of which undeniably contributed to the January 6th insurrection and the violent, illegal actions at the nation's capital.[32] The use of white Christian nationalism in this paper is also intended to recognize that most, but not all, participants in the insurrection were white,[33] and that rhetoric of a "stolen" election reflects a desire for a particular version of American society where certain versions of whiteness and masculinity are both celebrated and prioritized.

3.1. Traditional Gender Roles and their Implications

The defendants in the dataset for this paper do not often overtly touch on ideas of whiteness or race. When they do, it is usually in rather implicit and coded terms, expressing frustrations that "agitators," "protesters," or perpetrators under other labels were not punished for their actions during Black Lives Matter events that fundraiser authors insist were much more violent than insurrectionists, such as one author who notes:

> "Here in Minnesota we all watched as Minneapolis was burned to the ground, looters broke into banks, burned down a police station....where are all the convictions for these acts of violence? Swept under the rug, that's where. We are no longer safe in our homes. The tyrants break in whenever they want."

In other words, the majority of defendants and their advocates are white, and take their standpoint for granted with their audience. They do not feel the need to explain what they mean by such statements or explain whom the "we" is that they believe to be victimized by Black Lives Matter actions because they assume their audience already understands this argument and agrees.

However, many of the posts do engage directly with gender roles and especially notions of ideal masculinity, so it is helpful to elucidate how those themes are relevant in white Christian nationalism. White Christian nationalism both explicitly and implicitly values traditional gender norms in its rhetoric and actions, such that men's "proper place" as leaders and protectors is typically replicated at the levels of the nation, the church, and the family alike.

However, women in white Christian nationalist organizations often have more power than may be readily apparent from the outside. This complexity draws on how mainstream evangelical denominations often uphold men as the heads of their households from a financial and spiritual perspective, while leaving childrearing and practical and social aspects of homestead management to women who are seen as more naturally suited to those roles. Women who evangelize other women or preach about the maintenance of gender roles even while sometimes defying those roles themselves are not only accepted in white Christian nationalist circles but are also held up as figures to be honored and emulated by men and women alike. President Trump's personal pastor, Paula White, was the first woman to deliver the prayer at a Presidential Inauguration and is a key example of this kind of tokenism.[34] Organizations like Moms for Liberty, the "parents' rights group" that has successfully advocated for anti-trans policies in classrooms and beyond is another example of how women can acceptably take visible leadership roles.[35] They maintain gendered expectations and boundaries by ostensibly staying focused on children's best interest while exerting very real and effective political power.

Additionally, women whose husbands are, for whatever reason, not fulfilling their traditional duties, are often expected to step up and fulfill those roles both in the church and the home, giving them at least temporary power for certain purposes. In all cases where women have power in this framework, they remain subservient either to a male-gendered God or a male leader–usually their husband, even if he is absent. This leads to an outcome where women can be powerful but can never be so powerful that they are not "honoring their Father" in all they do.

Kristen Du Mez[36] details how this hierarchical and protectionist framework results in white Christian nationalism's reliance on a *militant* masculinity. This militancy and the normalization of constantly thinking of cultural disputes as urgent spiritual battles facilitates other cataclysmic thinking such that interweaving characteristics of white Christian nationalist ideology include or are very comfortable with militarism, patriarchalism, traditionalism, populist fervor and apocalypticism.[37] Each of these overlapping elements not only denote a particular worldview and value system, but also collectively imply that core, godly values are actively being threatened and must be staunchly defended. When this belief system is activated or amplified by political figures and their rhetoric, some adherents may be pushed to accelerationist or other violent actions intended to bring about their desired social structure.[38]

3.2. Understanding White Christian Nationalism Through an In-Group and Out-Group Framework

As an ideology, white Christian nationalism delineates who is accepted and who is not in ways that are internally coherent, but not always easily parsed from outside the framework. This can best be understood through extremism scholar J.M. Berger's exploration of in-group and out-group dynamics.[39] An in-group, according to his framework, is composed of people who share beliefs, traits (such as physical, social, spiritual or mental traits), and practices. Out-groups are people who are not part of the in-group. The identities of the in-group and out-group(s) are built upon narratives about who one another is in relation to the other. An in-group becomes extreme when it "adopts hostile attitudes toward the out-group or -groups," meaning that group boundaries between the groups are not only identified but also given positive versus negative connotations.[40]

In order to understand white Christian nationalism as an in-group, one must suspend the assumption that the in-group is necessarily defined by any one thing such as one's faith or race. Scholars broaden away from the idea that any one "thing" makes a white Christian nationalist, much less defines the ideology, by focusing on how white Christian nationalism is ultimately about order:[41]

> "White Christian nationalism is a theory of order, and of hierarchy. It distinguishes insiders and outsiders, and when those two must occupy the same country, those on top and those on the bottom. "People like us"- white Christian citizens- are the true Americans."[42]

Therefore, white Christian nationalism can be considered Christian *not* because of the Christian identity of its adherents but because of the Christian identity of its narrative; "White Christian nationalism *provides* a Christian narrative for stigmatizing the most vulnerable" [*emphasis added*].[43] This allows adherents to rely on Christian narratives while participating in actions that may violate Christian principles without necessarily experiencing any cognitive dissonance or consternation from members of their in-group or broader eligible in-group.[44]

3.3. White Christian Nationalism in Context

Despite renewed interest in the concept in recent years, some scholars argue that white Christian nationalism has been used to advance discriminatory socio-political goals for centuries. Scholarship nonetheless differs on where to locate white Christian nationalism's exact date and place of origin. Some argue that it can be traced back as far as Emperor Constantine, when he granted Christians privileged status under the Roman Empire,[45] while Gorski and Perry argue that 1690s were the operative years for

white Christian nationalism's emergence, after Protestantism took prominence in the US following King Philipp's War.[46] Despite differences in its described origin story, there is scholarly consensus that it was the mid-twentieth century that formatively shaped white Christian nationalism into the iteration that we see in the United States today.

Throughout the twentieth century, white Christian nationalism fused with evangelicalism to fight shifting cultural and political tides that took the form of a diversifying population and the burgeoning of women's rights and civil rights.[47] Evangelicalism camouflaged itself into the secular discourse and mainstream until it achieved a level of perceived innocuousness.[48] For example, the Congressional Prayer Caucus, a national network that seeks to "preserve America's Judeo-Christian heritage and promote prayer,"[49] has been responsible for a variety of legislation that seeks to discriminate against non-Christians and laws that require schools in at least seven states to prominently display signs reading "In God We Trust," reclaiming Christian-specific branding in government.[50] To be a "real American" in this framework means adhering to particular standards and norms as defined by white Christian nationalist ideology, such as pursuing heterosexual marriage and having children to increase the number of godly citizens who will faithfully preserve this shared vision of the country.[51]

White Christian nationalism has embraced a strategic malleability through the use of coded language, which has historically allowed it to fuse onto ideas, movements and group identities that in turn, makes it novel in its presentation and enactment, yet simultaneously able to resonate with broader conservative themes. For example, the terms "socialist" or "communist" are pejoratives in broader conservatism that are used to reflect more than mere economic systems: they are allegations that someone fundamentally misunderstands the American way of life. However, when employed in white Christian nationalist circles, the terms can additionally imply someone who is also an enemy to a *Christian* way of life given the connections between libertarian, free market capitalism, individual hard work, and a prosperity-gospel framework for faith and salvation.[52] Perry argues that the political right, which is increasingly embracing white Christian nationalism, presents reactionary religious rhetoric along a spectrum ranging from overt to implicit messaging. Through the use of dog whistles and what Perry terms "mating calls," reactionary religious rhetoric is packaged in a way that has broad and unifying appeal. Put simply, one need not be a church-going Christian to peddle, hear or be activated by white Christian nationalist messaging.[53]

It is important to emphasize that white Christian nationalism is not interchangeable with Christianity as a whole, and its relationship to specific Christian denominations is also not a matter of synonymity. White Christian nationalism is a politically and rhetorically nuanced belief system that exhibits a profound ability to shapeshift its way through Christian denominations, democratic institutions, and across ideologies to maintain and advance the fantasy that white Americans and the United States are both divinely chosen. This is to say, white Christian nationalism is not found uniquely

within evangelicalism despite the fact that white Christian nationalism has undeniably found a comfortable home within it.[54]

3.4. How White Christian Nationalism is Assessed

Samuel Perry and Philip Gorski analyze white Christian nationalism through the lens of the 2021 insurrection in *The Flag and the Cross*.[55] They collected data from a nationally representative survey distributed from 2019-2021 that assessed people's level of agreement with seven Christian nationalist indicators. Their survey uses all six of the questions that Whitehead and Perry used in their foundational study:

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

Gorski and Perry added an additional question: "I consider founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution to be divinely inspired."[56] This addition reflects the notion that Christian nationalism is backwards, as well as forwards, looking, and insists on God's divine intervention during America's entire trajectory.

This project uses all seven of these questions as a baseline for analyzing the GiveSendGo accounts. We cannot directly ask fundraiser authors their responses to these questions and instead evaluate both overt and implicit indicators of the ideas these questions contain in a systematic analysis of how white Christian nationalism emerges through the GiveSendGo posts and their authors. This project adds to the existing literature by observing these previously analyzed indicators and conceptualizations of white Christian nationalism within a novel post-insurrection context and as expressed by individuals as they justify their (and their loved one's) engagement in political violence. We observe white Christian nationalism in a public (and performative) forum of a crowdfunding platform—as opposed to a survey context in which participants can reflect upon—and self-report their relationship to white Christian nationalism. Our project adds to the depth of the indicators concerning traditional gender roles and patriarchalism while analyzing narrative evidence of how white Christian nationalism motivates and is used to justify real-world acts of political violence.

4. Method

The dataset for this analysis consists of 91 GiveSendGo posts that were created to solicit donations to support January 6th insurrection participants and their families. These cases were collected through Spring 2022 by journalist Teddy Wilson. The GiveSendGo pages were active between 2022-2023, archived on and accessible through the Wayback Machine, and were analyzed in Spring 2024. In cases where multiple versions of a given fundraiser were present in this archive, we assess the most recent functional page with substantive content. The fundraisers reflect a total of 96 defendants, because three accounts were created for families with multiple defendants. While we provide information about the defendants, collectively, our unit of analysis for the findings below remains the 91 fundraiser posts unless otherwise noted.

For the present analysis, we exclude a systematic analysis of comments left on the fundraiser pages. A cursory review of these comments indicates that they are another source of valuable information on how white Christian nationalism is deployed in the interest of political framing, but our focus in this analysis is on the fundraiser text itself. Comments on the posts may be left by anyone, whether they donate to the fundraiser or not, and the purpose of this analysis is to evaluate text that is presented in defense of insurrectionists by people who have claimed responsibility for speaking and advocating on their behalf.

We similarly excluded updates to the fundraiser posts from coding because, after reviewing many of them, it was apparent that updates were coming from inconsistent sources (i.e., sometimes the original poster, sometimes a different author, sometimes an unknown author), with varying standpoints and motivations for posting updates (i.e., family updates, updates on legal proceedings, diary-entry-like accounts of how the defendants' tribulations were emotionally impacting the poster, etc.).

Despite the fact that the defendants represented in the dataset are public individuals due to their public actions on January 6th and their subsequent criminal proceedings, we do not identify individual defendants in this paper. At the time of the analysis, most of the GiveSendGo accounts have been closed, either because they reached their goal or because the poster pulled them from public view. Since many fundraiser authors are not the defendants themselves and many of the posts identify minor children, church congregations, and others who are not responsible for a defendant's actions (and who may or may not support those actions), we and Middlebury's IRB agree it is best to avoid naming individuals, particularly when doing so is not central to the present analysis.

Our study expands upon existing work on white Christian nationalism by using content and qualitative narrative analysis to understand how it operates at a micro (individual and family) level that connects to the macro (societal) level at which it has to-date primarily been investigated. That is, little work has previously been done to understand how white Christian nationalism is experienced or individually deployed

as a strategy for shaping identity and justifying exclusionary actions up to and including actions that pose a threat to democracy. We establish a preliminary coding structure informed by Gorski's and Perry's existing indicators and on other existing work on this topic. For example, we include codes that indicate whether fundraising posts discuss whether and how the federal government is interfering with God's vision for the nation or the defendant, as well as codes that frame the defendant as being "persecuted" for their beliefs in a way that violates the separation of church and state. After this initial starting point, we use an emergent coding scheme, such that relevant codes were added to our approach as new ideas or themes emerged from the dataset during the coding process. After two initial rounds of joint coding to ensure a high degree of inter-coder reliability (90%+) and discussion to resolve points of disagreement, the paper's first author was primarily responsible for coding each fundraiser entry, with the second author performing checks of a randomly selected subsample to ensure consistency and accuracy across the entire dataset.

5. Findings: Descriptive Statistics

Of the 96 defendants in our dataset, 93% (89) are men and 7% (7) are women. Veterans comprise 30% (29) of the dataset. Relative to all defendants charged for their actions on January 6th, men are somewhat overrepresented in this fundraiser dataset as they account for 81% of all those charged, and veterans are heavily overrepresented at double their 15% representation among all those charged.[57] Race and ethnicity of defendants in our sample is typically judged subjectively based on images included in the posts, and was, with very few exceptions,[58] not something the posts themselves focus on or even meaningfully mention. Based on this subjective review, it appears that 9 individuals or 9% of the defendants in our sample are racialized as non-white, which is very similar to the 8% of non-white defendants among all of those charged for their actions during the insurrection.

In order to capture the range of white Christian nationalism within these posts, we code posts that contain *no* clear evidence of white Christian nationalism, which comprise 22% (20) of all posts. It is possible that these individuals may not endorse GiveSendGo's mission or broader Christian nationalist ideals and instead post on the site simply because it was the only platform where they could publicly fundraise.

Posts that clearly evince white Christian nationalism through making connections between religious and political or nationalistic narratives comprise 46% (42) of the dataset. Examples of such posts include one that reads, "All donations will go to legal, medical and living cost strictly for my brother, his wife, and child to help aid in the fight for PATRIOTISM to live on in GODS country. Thank you all for your help and prayers from my family to the whole Patriot family." Another example post proclaims, "[the DC injustice system is] going after Patriots like [the defendant's name] for simply loving God, family and country and wanting to get to the bottom of the election fraud."

In between these easily identifiable cases were 32% (29) cases where white Christian nationalism is overt, yet likely still obvious to audience members aware of various coded language and signaling. Interestingly, most of these posts are potentially ambiguous in the fundraiser author's expression of Christian, rather than nationalistic, messaging. Only 38% (35) of the GiveSendGo posts openly identify the defendant as a Christian by indicating any of the following: stating that the defendant was a Christian, that the defendant regularly attends church or Bible studies, that the defendant is saved by God or has a personal relationship with God, or that the defendant is a part of a Christian household.

If a post author indicates only that they had been praying about their circumstances rather than fully employing the extended references to Jesus or other religious framing that is typically present for other defendants in the dataset, we code this is a potentially ambiguous case. Both authors of this article believe, given the surrounding context of these posts and the defendants' actions, that such language is intended to signal Christian belief and belonging, rather than belonging to another religion where prayer is part of practice; if anything, these cases may indicate posters who most take for granted the fundamental ingroup understanding of post audiences. As Gorski, Perry, and Whitehead have noted, white Christian nationalism emerges from the interplay of words, actions and ideology that, when put together, promulgate a particular hegemonic order.[59] As a result, the present investigation includes these cases in analyses below because the goal is to understand how the defendants' portrayals in the posts serve associated political narratives. However, these cases may be analyzed separately in future analyses.

It is once more important to emphasize that being a Chrisitan and asserting that faith does not make one a Christian nationalist. However, in the context of the GiveSendGo posts for January 6th defendants, identifying the defendant as a Christian is one variable that paints the defendant in a positive social and moral light and that flags their in-group belonging to the reader. Invoking the defendants' Christianity to the audience ostensibly helps explain and justify their actions on January 6th and, even when reflective of genuine spiritual belief, becomes a kind of heuristic device that efficiently signals patriotism and allegiance to a particular political vision.

6. Thematic Findings

For this analysis and after reading and coding each fundraiser post, we identify two overarching themes that are essential for understanding the presentation of the defendants in the fundraiser posts: authorship and positionality relative to January 6th, and ideas of masculinity and protectorship. Both themes relate to how the content of the posts signals and resonates with white Christian nationalist belief, and the theme of authorship and positionality adds additional context to how the defendants themselves are portrayed in this framework. Gender and gender roles are important constructs across both themes, so we also share an analysis on the relatively few

women present in the dataset for what they can tell us about these overarching themes.

6.1. Authorship and Positionality Relative to January 6th

Authorship of the GiveSendGo posts is an important part of understanding the data for several reasons. First, the author of the post is the point of view from which the intended audience is learning about the defendant and January 6th. The author tells a particular story by proffering a testimony about the defendant and the insurrection itself. Post authors collectively create and forge a public archive of what January 6th was, what it meant, and how they and the defendant (if different from the author) relate to it. Furthermore, the author is in charge of strategically framing this personal testimony in order to successfully solicit sympathy and donations alike. The author attempts to appeal to potential donors, crafting their narrative in such a way that it evokes a compelling connection between themselves, the defendant, and the reader of the post. This is to say, the author has outsized power in this space in terms of framing January 6th, the defendant(s), and the significance of both for the reader and potential donor.

One example of this is visible in a post from the wife of a defendant, who asserts ideological unity with her husband in framing his actions at the Capitol as nothing more than Constitutionally protected speech and assembly, thus insisting that his charges and the government's actions are unjust. While pleading for donations and prayers, she also expresses hardship caused by the loss of her husband's income and her subsequent need to step outside her usual household and gender roles to support the family's finances.

> "My husband was the sole provider of our household and has been detained now over six months. Please remember us in prayer and please consider helping our family recover from losing all our savings for believing in Freedom of Assembly and Freedom of Speech. As well as for me to keep everything together and obtain additional part-time employment to offset the costs of carrying this burden. If you should choose to contribute to support us we will be so very grateful and we covet your prayers."

When thinking about this effect across all authors, this dataset provides an alternative history of January 6th, shaped through the lens of white Christian nationalism.

The authorship of the posts also impacts the story told about the defendant. At times, the narrative emphasizes the defendant's family's struggle or the particular struggle of the non-defendant author; at other times, the defendant's personal struggle is emphasized. Authoring often offered the opportunity to explain what the author

perceives to be secondary or tertiary harms they and their family have experienced as a result of their loved one's "persecution." Examples, like this one, frequently talk about the emotional or psychological trauma inflicted on the defendants' broader family unit in addition to the financial consequences of their job loss and subsequent legal expenses:

> "I was working 3 jobs and trying to make it through Christmas, but I just had to quit it. It was a lot for me, but I was just pushing through. [...] I did need the extra money, but my girls come first, and I could see my youngest was really having a hard time without mommy being home like I was because it's hard enough doing the 2 jobs."

In cases where the post author is not the defendant, our findings indicate that the author carefully describes their relationship to the defendant and the defendant's struggles as they related to January 6th. Doing so serves to authenticate the story the author tells of the defendant as well as of January 6th.

Authorship of the GiveSendGo posts is broken down as follows. Twenty-three (25%) of the posts are allegedly narrated by the defendant and told from the perspective of "I." However, we must note that we cannot know for certain that defendants wrote these posts because there is a possibility that posts allegedly narrated by the defendant were entirely ghost-written by loved ones, or edited or published by others, particularly if the defendant was incarcerated at the time of publication. Four (4%) of the posts are openly co-authored by the defendant and another person. This sometimes takes the form of one portion of the post being written by the defendant and another portion of the post having been written by a loved one. Though some incarcerated defendants are able to access the internet, several other posts state or imply that defendants' words were conveyed to be electronically published by another individual or co-author.

Twenty (22%) of the posts claim to have been written by a significant other who identifies as a woman in a relationship with the defendant. Thirteen (14% of the total sample) of the women are wives of the defendant, three (3%) a fiancé of the defendant, two girlfriends of the defendant, one a common law partner of the defendant, and one an unknown relationship status with the defendant, although she states that she shares children and a home with the defendant. Eight (9%) of the posts are written by a defendant's parent, 3% (3) by a sibling or other extended family members and 2% (2) by a defendant's child or children. Seven (8%) are written by someone identifying as a defendant's friend.

Unrelated organizations and individuals account for 11% (10), total, of the posts, with 3% (3) written by a reporter, 2% (2) by an individual attorney representing the post's defendant, and 5% (5) written by Equity of Justice League, Inc., Americans for Justice, Inc., or Free Oregon, Inc. The first, Equity of Justice, is a New York non-profit whose YouTube page tellingly says they advocate for "JUSTICE (not Social Justice!)." Their sole video is an interview between conservative radio host Dennis Prager and a

January 6th defendant, and online footprints indicate the organization was founded by the president of the New York Proud Boys, Randy Ireland.[60] Americans for Justice, Inc. was registered in Virginia, but now appears to be inactive.[61] It nonetheless has a small but lingering online presence with social media bios that insist the organization is "focused on Uniting All Americans around the US Constitution." Free Oregon, Inc. was established in January 2020 to enact "grassroots political activism and legal warfare" in defense of "Oregonians" against what the organization describes as a "draconian assault" on their rights.[62]

When someone other than the defendant authored a post—as was the case in the vast majority of the fundraisers—those individuals assumed the role of spokesperson during the insurrectionists' absence from the public and digital arenas. In some instances, these loved ones' positions escalated to that of interlocutors, organizers, and advocates not only on behalf of the participant they know, but on behalf of all "patriots" and their perceived cause more broadly. By analyzing the authorship of these posts, we see that it is not only the defendants, but also their immediate network who participate in perpetuating a certain version of both January 6th and white Christian nationalism.

6.2. Protectorship

Protection, and especially the defendants' purported intent to be a protector, either of the country or of their family during January 6th, is a pervasive motif throughout the dataset. Eleven (12%) of posts claim that the defendant either protected people on January 6th or sought to protect people. The defendant is described as either attending January 6th in order to protect people from what they assumed would be unfolding chaos or as arriving at the Capitol on January 6th for a peaceful protest and, as the day unfolded, finding themselves protecting (or trying to protect) others who were caught up in the violence.[63] One woman author, for example, writes that her partner went to the Capitol:

> "[…] to support President Trump and to protect civilians from Antifa. For nearly five years innocent people of all ages including men, women, children, elders, and the disabled have been attacked. [He] went to escort them safely; and he would have protected you! [He] respects, supports, and prays nightly that God keeps all of our leaders safe and grants them wisdom. He also respects and values all our men and women in law enforcement and the military and prays for their safety."

Protectorship is also suggested through varied descriptions of the defendant's identity and the social and professional roles they inhabit. The most common way this was communicated is in terms of military veteran status, with 30% (29) of defendants identified as veterans. Veteran status is used as a stand-in or supplement to other

claims about a given defendant's character, behavior, motivations during January 6th, and their positive relationship to their country. For example, one defendant wrote:

> "I am a US Army Special Forces Master Sergeant that served this nation honorably. [...] I swore to an Almighty God that I would protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against ALL enemies, Foreign and Domestic; This Constitution that codifies the Rights that God granted us at birth."

This defendant's veteran status is conveyed in terms of their allegiance to their faith and country- which they describe as being intertwined. Here we see examples of overt white Christian nationalist indicators: the Constitution being divinely ordained and one's military oath being to that of God and country, both. This post additionally justifies the defendant's actions by indicating that domestic enemies-–threats, in other words-–to this defendant's idealized nation, were the impetus for his actions at the Capitol, thus making those actions not only permissible, but morally required.

Defendants' veteran status often signals how the act of protecting was an immutable part of their personal identity; their military oath now a part of them forever, such as this defendant who says:

> "I served this country in the military and I took an oath that didn't ended when I left active duty, it ends when i die and its because of that, that I will continue to serve my country and my Community to the best of my abilities."

At other times, the defendants' military status is not as clearly about a life-long obligation to protect people and country, but is cited in an attempt to demonstrate a particular valor and proven loyalty to the country that they were now accused of fighting against:

> "[The defendant] is the "EPITOME" of an "AMERICAN PATRIOT" This "noble" man has served his country for nearly 30 years! Most of that time was spent away from his family in a combat zone serving, protecting, and sacrificing his life for our great nation."

This description of loyalty as "proven" by veteran status is meant to communicate that veteran defendants would not harm the country they have fought so hard to protect and, instead, their actions at the Capitol must therefore be both noble and justified.

Protection as a characteristic of January 6th defendants can also be understood as an enactment of traditional gender roles that are valued within a white Christian nationalist framework, both within society as a whole and within defendants' family systems. Most fundraisers emphasize what they perceive to be positive character traits of male defendants, usually by highlighting the defendant's relationship to their

family. For instance, 43% (39) of posts describe the defendant as a father, "family man," or as associated with a family business, highlighting their role in the family system and as a testament to their character and as crucial to the financial health of the family, fulfilling the breadwinner role.

Further underscoring ideas of protection rather than aggression and criminality, 44% (40) of posts expressly describe the defendant as peaceful or nonviolent. Twenty two of these posts (24% of all posts) do not make a claim about whether January 6th itself was a violent or nonviolent event; however, three posts (3%) describe both the defendant and January 6th as peaceful or nonviolent, while 15 posts (16%) describe the defendant as peaceful but January 6th as having at least some degree of violence.

One example of a post that rather artfully weaves together a variety of justifications comes from an author who asserts one defendant's protectorship, his purported peacefulness alongside others' violent actions, and his status as not a military veteran but a law enforcement officer with similar implied obligations to the nation:

> "Like the many other hundreds of thousands of peaceful attendees at the rally that day, [he] was there to listen to speeches and peacefully stand with his fellow Americans, exercising his First Amendment right, which is exactly what he did. Later that afternoon, when [he] and many of the other rally attendees peacefully walked toward the US Capitol Building, [he] was stunned to see that some individuals had violently laid siege to the Capitol Building and were assaulting police officers and damaging property. [He] remained outside the perimeter barriers at the Capitol Building and made no attempt to approach or enter the structure in any way. Since he did not have jurisdiction in DC, or to investigate the criminal violations he was witnessing, [he] remained a considerable distance from the Capitol Building, and used his best judgement to help document the criminal behavior of the small, but the violent horde that was attacking his fellow brothers and sisters in law enforcement."

Describing either the defendant or January 6th in terms of nonviolence or peacefulness contributes to the narrative that January 6th defendants acted in a way that was morally justified and politically warranted because it was supposedly done out of loyalty and respect for one's country and the desire to ultimately defend it. The 16% of authors who acknowledge at least some degree of violence as happening on January 6th leave conceptual and legal room for bad actors at the event, while trying to behaviorally separate out their defendant from those actions.

6.3. What About Women?

Only seven (7%) of the defendants in our dataset are women, including one transgender woman. Four of them (57%) have strong white Christian nationalism indicators in their posts. Five of the seven (5% of the overall sample) are identified as mothers. Similar to the male defendants, for the female defendants who have children, their role as a mother is identified as a positive character trait. Motherhood is used to highlight their role and responsibility as caretakers, and criminal charges are presented as a barrier to them fulfilling that duty. For instance, one post describes how one woman struggled after being charged, "she now is restricted to home confinement on an ankle bracelet, unable to work, and unable to leave the house except for pre-approved times and days." The post elaborates on how this defendant is "behind on bills" as an expectant mother, solo-parent of a child, and caretaker of a disabled family member. These multiple and layered caretaking responsibilities are thus presented as something that should take priority over any legal consequences for this woman's behavior at the Capitol.

For the two women who were not identified as having children, one describes herself in relation to her male counterparts, specifically as a daughter and granddaughter of veterans:

> "I am a proud American, daughter and granddaughter to 3 deceased veterans. It would break their hearts to see what's happening to our beautiful country. It's up to us to stand up and fight for our freedoms, or watch them taken away by a system of tyranny."

Her stated motivation for attending January 6th stemmed from a sense of duty to protect the version of America that the men in her family sought to defend. Not unlike the male defendants, she describes her posture and actions on January 6th as defensive, not aggressive, and as intended to defend her country in line with the legacy of her male relatives.

The transgender woman is herself a combat veteran who is described as having taken a protector role during January 6th. According to the author of her GiveSendGo page, this defendant's role was directly informed by her military training:

> "[She was] there primarily to help ensure the safety of others and trying to help ex-fil people from the Capitol as things turned from a seemingly peaceful event to a barrage of crowd-effecting less lethal dispersion; she was keeping her cool getting people out as others were overcome with their first experience with such munitions."

For these two women, their protectorship is said to be informed by a sense of duty, not unlike the male defendants. One draws on her own previous experiences of military

involvement, while the other essentially borrows the valor of her family members as "proof" of their character and positive intentions during the insurrection, parallel to the male veterans in the dataset

It is also worth noting that two of the seven women in this dataset are represented by GiveSendGo accounts that doubly represent their husbands who are also January 6th defendants. These couples' joint GiveSendGo pages exude a concerted effort to package each couple under the banner of "parents" in the sense that they are defined in relation to their duties as a parental unit. But interestingly, the woman in each heterosexual couple stands out in each joint page. One joint page is said to be authored by the woman in the couple. Throughout most of her post, she jointly identifies with her husband, speaking in terms of "we" and "us" until the end of the page in which she pulls away, speaking in the single-first person, "Please consider helping our family I have never done anything like this before but feel the Holy Spirit is urging me to reach out for help." This confession suggests that she acted on her personal divine inspiration, distinct from her husband, to solicit aid for her family through the platform while nonetheless presenting them as a coherent, united family unit in their actions and efforts at defending those actions. The second joint account is authored by one of the couple's children. While the child describes their "parents" and "family" throughout the post, at one point, they break this linguistic pattern to specifically characterize their mother, "We are a good Christian family, I am active in my church as well as my mother who gave her time to helping those in need at a religious thrift store." In both of these cases, the woman is separated away from the collective "we" but only to the extent that appealing to her selfhood and her identity as an individual serves her family.

Of the remaining five women represented through five different GiveSendGo accounts, one is authored by the defendant's personal attorney, another is authored by the Equity of Justice League, two are authored by the women themselves, and one is written in the third person by an unknown author. Although we are dealing with very small numbers here, it is interesting to note that only 9% (8) of the men defendants' posts are authored by someone unrelated to them, while unrelated authors are responsible for 29% (2) of the women defendant's posts. This perhaps suggests that male defendants had more support for their actions from their network of family and friends, or, perhaps somewhat differently, that women defendants' causes were seen as more justified or urgent to some external observers. In either case, this apparent difference is a reminder of the need for more investigation of white Christian nationalists and other extremists who are women, even when they do not comprise the majority of threat actors within a given group.

7. Conclusion

January 6th remains an unfolding story for the individuals who are directly or indirectly experiencing the consequences of participating in the events of that day, a

story in which some chose to use the language of white Christian nationalism and the public facing forum of GiveSendGo, to narrate. This investigation demonstrates both the overt and subtle ways in which white Christian nationalism works. White Christian nationalism cannot be sufficiently understood through keywords alone. Nor is it, as Whitehead and Perry note, reducible to any one attribute.[64] As an ideology, white Christian nationalism not only motivated some people to attend, rally at, or breach the Capitol on January 6th, but, alongside supporting narratives about gender roles, has also proven to be a vital part of how (and why) defendants and their loved ones retroactively narrate January 6th and defendants' involvement in it.

Fundraisers frequently emphasize the defendants' inherent desire to protect and be peaceful as a way of explaining defendants' actions and motivations on January 6th. These qualities are used to justify why they went to the Capitol and what January 6th meant (and continues to mean) to them. With this framing, the defendant is portrayed as obviously innocent of whatever criminal charges they are facing, but–more than that–they are elevated to the status of "patriot," someone who is righteously self-sacrificing in the name of a shared, greater good. January 6th is thus viewed not as an example of political violence, but rather as an aspirational allegory of what it means to righteously defend one's country against a real threat.

Women, while constituting a small portion of the sample, are crucial for understanding white Christian nationalism's appeal for January 6th actors in this dataset. It is not only the women defendants themselves whose fundraisers contribute to an alternative narrative, but also the wives, girlfriends, and daughters of the male defendants who are instructive here. When they serve as fundraiser authors, they wield the power of the narratives, both in constructing and maintaining them in their partners' or fathers' absence, serving as an example of acceptable women's leadership and role-breaching within white Christian nationalism. All these women are additionally a point of reflection and ostensible motivation for their male counterparts. That is, fundraisers for male defendants rely on women's perceived vulnerability (informed by their proper place in the family structure as encouraged by white Christian nationalism) to justify their actions and the need for public donations and other support.

This study provides an analysis of how white Christian nationalism's individual- and family-level appeals can be used to construct larger narratives about political violence and cultural values. It demonstrates how we should consider giving more overt attention to notions of patriarchalism, masculinity, and traditional gender roles in indicators of Christian nationalism; just as misogyny is at the root of much extremism,[65] it similarly plays a role in supporting and spreading white Christian nationalism—even when it is softened and presented as being with women's willing participation.

While this analysis revealed relatively little content on race and racism, it is important to emphasize that our findings remain consistent with other authors' claims that white

supremacy is endemic to Christian nationalism. “Stop the steal” protestors were at the Capitol to prevent a peaceful transfer of power and to maintain a regime of exclusion and xenophobia. Trumpism’s call to “make America great again,” clearly references a false nostalgic history wherein white people (and especially white men) held much more exclusive social, economic, and political power.[66] Political violence in the name of reclaiming that imagined reality can only be fully understood through systemic white supremacy that reviles advances made by minoritized groups.

Figure 1. A “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President” flag surrounded by other flags at the insurrection (source)

The overwhelming collective whiteness of the defendants and their advocates was also evident in other ways that should be explored in future research. As briefly touched on above, it is clear that the majority of posts take their own whiteness and the whiteness of their audience for granted. Additionally, many of the fundraisers bemoan a defendant’s conditions of incarceration or confinement, lamenting, among other things, about how the person lost their job, was unable to communicate to their family at will, or was forced to eat subpar prison food and existing in a state of zero privacy behind bars. These conditions are quite typical of prisoners who are awaiting legal proceedings, but in all these lamentations, fundraiser authors presented a given defendant’s circumstances not only as dire, but also as targeted, dehumanizing, and unfathomable. Post authors lacked any understanding of (or apparent desire to understand) how such conditions are synonymous with the US prison industrial complex.

White supremacy allows actors like this to believe that they are exceptions who do not deserve the usual treatment designated for “real” criminals. From an objective perspective with an understanding of the racism that is fundamental at every stage of the criminal justice system,[67] it is impossible to deny the racist, white supremist implications of this assumption that paints a stereotypical Black defendant as presumptively guilty, dehumanized and deserving of degrading treatment in sharp

contrast to claims of one's own innocence and persecution. This is one way that white supremacy conceptually allows for people to perceive and pursue individual grievances without critiquing the system that is creating those grievances, instead leading them to displace blame onto others who are even more negatively impacted by that system. White Christian nationalism can amplify the effect of outgroup blame when adherents add an interpretive layer of spiritual or divine justice onto their comparative plights versus that of a more stereotypical criminal defendant.

This study shows how white Christian nationalism, as an ideology that is enacted through particular language and values, can be used to contort the very meaning of political violence in service of a political vision. White Christian nationalism does not suggest that the ends are justified by the means, thereby acknowledging wrongdoing in the insurrectionists' actions. Rather, white Christian nationalism is used in these posts to suggest that the defendant's intent and means were positive and divinely sanctioned. Perceptions of divine blessing and God's support for the defendants' and their beliefs are incredibly likely to be heightened in the leadup to the next US Presidential election given that the Justice Department has opted to drop charges against many of them following a Supreme Court ruling that some Trump opponents believe to be purely politically motivated.[68]

The threat of white Christian nationalism is in how it operates and is communicated at the nexus of ethics, ideology and narrative. When we consider what this means for detecting and understanding its threat to future democratic elections, we must be painstakingly aware that white Christian nationalism's strength is its multivalence. It is likely that the themes underlying the fundraiser appeals analyzed here will continue to be deployed in both familiar and new ways as the 2024 election season approaches,[69] and issues that galvanized many of this study's subjects into action will once more be center stage.

Endnotes

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[16] This concept can be seen in recent debates concerning the regulation of speech on social media platforms. Most notably, when Elon Musk, a self-identified "free speech absolutist," acquired Twitter (now X) and systematically applied his personal ideology to the platform, hate speech and other exclusionary activity rapidly increased on the platform. The proliferation of hate speech alienates those who are the targets of such speech. Furthermore, Musk's free speech absolutism has proven to not apply to those who criticize him and his ethos, once more reflecting how this messaging is truly about power and whose voices are valued or rewarded in a given space. https://web.archive.org/web/20220309174846/https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1499976967105433600?s=20; https://voxpol.eu/new-vox-pol-report/; https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/02/technology/twitter-hate-speech.html; https://apnews.com/article/elon-musk-lawsuit-cchd-twitter-x-hate-speech-extremism-434a80631f9e76833ee30387c04dd290

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[21] A full explanation of this theology is beyond the scope of this paper, but, in short, within certain strands of evangelicalism, God is believed to have uniquely blessed the United States, granting it individual liberties and self-determination most typically associated with ideas of "freedom" or "free will" in exchange for continued devotion and adherence to evangelical interpretations of Biblical principles. In this context, "speech" frequently becomes nearly synonymous with "proselytization" in the sense of adherents believing they have an ongoing moral imperative to spread God's word and God's will not only through overtly religious behaviors but also through visibly and loudly opposing social and political evolutions that they believe challenge God's imparted vision of the nation. In this framework, traditional gender norms are prioritized, public expressions of non-Christian religions are often interpreted as oppressive infringements on Christians' fundamental rights, and actions–even violent or illegal ones–are presented as morally justified if they help bring about a society that is more in line with their theological vision. For further information, readers are encouraged to consult the sources cited throughout this article.

[22] Throughout this document, quotes are presented as they are in the original posts without correcting any spelling or grammar errors.

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[63] It is worth noting that it is a common refrain among militias and similar groups in the US that they attend large protest events with the intention of serving as a kind of private security, even as their presence likely escalates tensions; Cooter, A. (2024). *Nostalgia, Nationalism, and the US Militia Movement* (1st edition). Routledge.

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