

Christian Nationalism: Mechanizing Religion as Trump's Silent Weapon of Influence

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Flags and banners bearing the words *Jesus 2020*, *Jesus Saves*, and *In God, We Trust* were flaunted by insurrectionists during the riot that broke out at the United States Capitol last January 2020 following Donald Trump's defeat as US President over Joe Biden; while the Proud Boys brazenly recite an Evangelical Christian prayer before making their way from the Trump rally to storm and ransack the Capitol. This coup attempt against the American Constitutional system has been representative of the culminations of Christian nationalism and the extent of Trump's powerful influence to start a coup.

In repudiation to the election results, Trump claimed that the election was rigged clinging to false notions of voter fraud, ballot dumping, 'dead' voters, removal of poll watchers, and foreign ties of the Dominion, all of which had been debunked by numerous judges, state election officials, and even by individuals of his administration's Homeland Security Department. Still, he did not back down and concede.

It was on the 6th of January 2020 that Trump gave a speech at his rally inciting his supporters to march over to the Capitol and denounce the proclamation of Biden's win. Thousands of these supporters include White Supremacists, QAnon, Neo Nazi, but most significantly Christian nationalists—a dominant and dependable part of Trump's base.

America's Christian nationalist movement extends far deeper in contribution to the overturning of the 2020 elections and the coup attempt than the actions of a few of its representatives. The insurrection at the Capitol was made possible through the geriatric endurance of movement leaders cultivating a sense of persecution among these voters from early indoctrination at Christian schools and churches to infiltrating their sources of information.

Among Trump's well-known mechanisms that set the foundations for support of the claim that the election was rigged is through social and right-wing media with Cambridge Analytica and Fox News as cases in point. However, little recognition is given to the role of religion. Congregations and religious media are among the most trusted sources of information for many voters. These movement leaders take advantage of that fact by funding initiatives that repeatedly preach external sources of information are simply not credible and, at numerous times, subscribe to conspiracy theories such as QAnon. Among their conspiracy theories—which have been discredited—is that Trump is combatting a global child sex-trafficking ring. Christian nationalists' gospel embodies a de facto Christian public sphere giving Christianity undue deference. This development of an

information echo chamber immune to correction or question lay the foundations of the support for Trump's claims.

The explicit political overtones in these religious programs started when Christian conservatism was popularized in the 1970s. Protestant organizations (e.g., Moral Majority) attained national support and called for politicians to oppose abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment. Around the same time, conservative legislators have harnessed evangelicals as a voting bloc breeding closer attention to Christian media for the bloc's concerns. Thus, giving Christian media further influence in politics.

To quote Katherine Stewart, "Christian nationalism today begins with the conviction that conservative Christians are the most oppressed group in American society." Under this notion, movement leaders propagate the rhetoric that they are in a "battle against tyranny," and adding a fear factor that their scriptures may soon be outlawed. One prime example is Doug Mastriano—a Republican senator—describing Trump's electoral loss as a religious battle against the forces of evil. He had attended events held by the New Apostolic Reformation of which its members believe that God speaks to them directly, and that they bear the responsibility of combatting real-world demons who control global leaders. Mastriano also played a part in the insurrection urging his followers to attend the rally at the Capitol under the belief that it is what God wills. Other leaders of the mob label themselves as patriots.

Another factor behind Trump's outrageous support is that Christian nationalists believe that the authority of the US government is derived from its allegiance to a specific religious and cultural heritage, not from its democratic order. Thus, they rally behind a 'heaven-sent' representative that stands by these standards in which Trump embodies, as advertised by social and right-wing media albeit living the opposite of a Christian life.

The attack on the Capitol is the high-water mark of Christian nationalists in the name of their spiritual beliefs. Their central principles can be epitomized in a verse from Psalm 33:12 which reads, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." And so they enforce these principles in the political sphere detesting abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, sex education, and feminism among others because if they have these rights, then God would be unhappy leading to the downfall of the nation. This only comes to show how extremists' susceptibility to false information or their unquestioning of repeating stories with unknown sources are rooted in fear.

With Trump getting the most political and ideological support from far-right Christians, their religious doctrines have been mechanized to fuel mobilizations against liberal and leftist actions/policies in state legislation, both of which Trump does not endorse. However, this does not mean that Christian doctrine is inherently authoritarian or right-leaning as the Bible also contains material that can be used for more liberationist versions of faith. Religion would always be subject to communally mediated interpretation. It is with

the vast machinery behind the birth and indoctrination of Christian nationalism that twists versions of history and interpretation of current events, teaching their followers that they must make their nation obedient to God lest God punish the nation.