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PUNISHING THE WICKED: COMPLEX RELIGION AND PUNITIVE SENTIMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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ABSTRACT

The United States is exceptional in the scope and severity of its criminal justice system relative to similarly developed nations. An important precursor to the implementation of criminal justice policy is the underlying culture of punitiveness which supports expansive use of harsh sanctions for criminals. Prior research suggests that Americans' attitudes toward formal social control are intimately tied to their religious life. Questions remain, however, regarding when, how, and for whom these aspects of religious life may bolster punitive sentiment. Building on studies which frame religious beliefs and practices as being situated within sophisticated networks of overlapping social identities, or what scholars have called complex religion, this dissertation assesses whether religion is associated with punitiveness per se, or if these associations are contextualized. The first chapter examines whether biblical literalism predicts beliefs that local courts are not sufficiently harsh on criminals. I find that biblical literalism is only associated with punitiveness among white Americans, and that this association is both emergent and growing. In Chapter 2, I examine how partisan identity intersects with religious practice to predict support for capital punishment. I find that attending religious services at least weekly increases opposition to the death penalty among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, though the effect of service attendance does not overcome partisan support among Republicans. The final chapter investigates support for government sponsored religion and beliefs that prison sentences are too short. I find that belief in government sponsored religion amplifies punitive sentiment among white respondents and that education does not reduce punitiveness among supporters of state-religion.

Key words: Criminology, punishment, race, whiteness, religion, capital punishment, punitiveness, punitive sentiment, sociology, state-religion, Christian nationalism.

So Shall You Reap: Biblical Literalism, Whiteness, and Punitiveness in the United States

Previous research demonstrates a strong and consistent relationship between literalist interpretations of the Bible and desires for more stringent criminal punishment among Americans. This relationship has remained robust to the inclusion of a wide battery of supplemental religious measures—denominational affiliation, service attendance, religious conservatism, frequency of prayer—and across multiple datasets. However, the trajectory of this relationship over time has yet to be explored, a critical gap in light of America's shifting orientation toward mass incarceration in recent years. Drawing on data from the 1984-2018 General Social Surveys this study examines whether and how the relationship between respondents' self-identification as a biblical literalist and desires for strict punishments for criminals has changed over time. Further, this study questions the ubiquity of the association between beliefs about the Bible and punitiveness among Americans by testing this relationship across racial lines. Results suggest that the link between a literalist view of the Bible and desires for more authoritarian social control is both *emergent* and *increasing* over this time frame, but that the relationship is driven entirely by white biblical literalists. These findings support a burgeoning literature linking white religious fundamentalism to beliefs in strict and racialized social control in the United States, and challenge previous studies framing religious dogmatism *per se* as a source of punitive sentiment.

INTRODUCTION

Though criminologists have long been interested in the predictors of punitive attitudes in the United States, a systematic inquiry into the role of religion was largely foregone until the mid-1990s. Cullen (2012) points to two possible explanations for this oversight. First, many criminologists' initial exposure to religion as a predictive measure is through Hirschi and Stark's (1969) "Hellfire and Delinquency," which finds a null effect of religion on juvenile delinquency among adolescent boys in Southern California. Due to what Cullen calls a "Hirschi effect," (2012: 152), many criminologists consequently overlook or discount religion as a salient variable in their subsequent research. Second, Cullen suggests the oversight of religious influences in research on punitiveness evidences pervasive bias among criminologists themselves. Because research in criminology, and sociology more broadly, is largely conducted by those who are irreligious it is possible that studies exclude religious variables simply because researchers perceive it to be unimportant (or at least as having diminishing importance). Cullen argues that one result of this omission is a need to reevaluate religion's role in shaping attitudes towards punitive policies in the United States.

Perhaps the most salient reason for this oversight, however, is that the relationship between religion and punitive attitudes is complex and deeply entangled in political, social, and racial attitudes and often yield small, unsurprising, or non-significant results when measured in isolation and until recently there has been a dearth of appropriate data to properly disentangle these overlapping effects (Applegate et al. 2000; Britt 1998; Barkan and Cohn 2005; Davis 2018; Grasmick et al. 1992; Unnever et al. 2005). Research over the last two decades also indicates that the religion interacts with salient social identities, especially race, to influence beliefs about punishment in society (Baker et al. 2018; Harris et al. 2022; Perry and Whitehead 2021). Britt

(1998), for example, demonstrates that fundamentalist religious views do not operate uniformly across racial groups. Using Data from the General Social Survey, Britt finds that while white fundamentalists are the most supportive of capital punishment, black fundamentalists are least supportive of the death penalty suggesting that the association between religion and punitiveness may be exclusive to white Amreicans. Recently, Davis (2018, 2019; see also Perry et al. 2019), demonstrates that desires for Christianity to enjoy an explicit and exclusive position of privilege in American polity and culture among white Americans significantly increases support of formal social control, especially if that control is being exerted on a racial or ethnic out-group.

This body of research, while providing evidence that conservative and authoritarian aspects of American religious life are strong indicators of punitiveness, has focused on the issue of religious disentanglement to the detriment of investigating religiously informed trends in punitive ideology. Specifically, as American attitudes towards mass-incarceration and harsh criminal justice have shifted in recent years (Ramirez 2013), there is reason to believe that those who are religiously conservative have diverged from the general population. Though nuanced measures of religious identity such as imagery of a masculine (Baker and Whitehead 2019) or loving god (Unnever et al. 2006), or those that fully capture the convergence of religious and national identities (Davis 2018; Perry et al. 2019) have not yet been tracked over several decades, biblical literalism has.[i]

The current study draws on data from the 1984-2018 General Social Surveys to investigate how Americans' beliefs that the Bible should be taken literally, word for word, is associated with evaluations of their local court's harshness towards criminals. Further, I introduce a series of interaction variables to investigate how racial identity moderates this relationship over this time. Results indicate first that biblical literalism is an emergent indicator

of punitiveness, second that biblical literalism predicts punitive responses to crime only among white Americans, and finally that the punitive gap between white biblical literalists and other Americans has increased since the 1980s even as overall punitiveness declines.

BACKGROUND

Religious Predictors of Punitiveness

Recently, criminologists and sociologists have had a renewed interest in the role of religion in both the production of and responses to crime and delinquency in society (Applegate et al. 2000; Heaton 2006; Unnever and Cullen 2006; Unnever et al. 2006). Stemming from research outlining the role of religion in society more broadly, researchers interested in its role in the reproduction of punitiveness suggest that various aspects of American religious life are linked to social and political attitudes. Religious affiliation and practice, for example, have been linked to more conservative political ideology, authoritarian attitudes, more racial homogeny, and less tolerance of outsiders (Applegate et al. 2000; Baker and Booth 2016; Britt 1998; Eckhardt 1991). Conservative Christian values, i.e. those held in fundamentalist or evangelical denominations, are also more likely to be accompanied by beliefs in punitive or retributive justice in response to deviant behavior (Grasmick et al. 1993; Thompson and Froese 2016). Grasmick et al. (1992), specifically, find that conservative Protestants, as opposed to mainline Protestants and Catholics are, more likely to attribute intent to criminal behavior causing them to be more supportive of retributive than restorative justice principles. One possible explanation for this link suggests that religion, as an agent of socialization, teaches individuals the absolute delineation between right and wrong, and in so doing, allows the individual to legitimize stricter and more condemning beliefs regarding those who violate the sacred boundaries that are clearly defined by their religion (Erikson 2005; Savelsberg 2004; Stark 2003). Conversely, Applegate

and colleagues (2000) find that religious fundamentalism is positively associated with both restorative and retributive justice indicating that the association between conservative religious identity and beliefs regarding the role of punishment may be more complex than Grasmick et al. (1992) propose and conclude by arguing that further disentanglement of religion as a social force is needed to understand how and why it influences socio-political beliefs.

In response to this call, recent studies have sought to investigate the association between punitive attitudes towards crime and more nuanced aspects of religious beliefs (Bader et al 2010; Baker et al. 2018; Leak and Randall 1995; Unnever and Cullen 2006). Bader and his colleagues (2010), for example, using data from the Baylor Religion Survey, show that by including measures of the individual's image of god as either angry or loving we can more accurately understand how religious beliefs influence attitudes towards criminal behavior. Similarly, Leak and Randall's (1995) study indicates the need for research to control for more sophisticated measures of religiosity to accurately identify how it influences their religious beliefs. Their findings show that inclusion of more acute measures of religiosity in regression analyses, denominational influences can be mediated. Baker and Booth (2016) demonstrate that belief in role of religious evil in everyday life increases an individual's approval of the use of capital punishment as well as stricter punishment for federal crimes. Finally, adherence to Christian nationalism among all Americans is strongly associated with multiple dimensions of punitiveness including capital punishment, desires for stricter punishments for federal crimes, and agreement that America needs to "crackdown on troublemakers" (Davis 2018). These studies demonstrate the need for researchers to use more comprehensive models of religious beliefs and practice to fully understand its influence over how individuals conceptualize deviance and how they believe society should react to deviant individuals or groups.

Racialized Religion in the United States

Religion in the United States, and indeed in much of the sociological and criminological literatures, is often treated as a homogenous factor in ways that can obfuscate its role in molding Americans' social and political attitudes. Earlier investigations into religious effects on punitive attitudes, such as those reviewed in the previous section, tend to use indicators of religious belonging (Grasmick et al. 1993; Seto and Said 2022; Young 1992), religious fundamentalism, or biblical literalism (Grasmick and McGill 1994; Stokes et al. 2020; Yelderman and Miller 2017). These decontextualized expressions of religious belonging and practice unsurprisingly yield confounding results across samples leading some scholars to conclude that religion was not a reliable factor in predicting which American support for harsher treatment of criminal and delinquent behaviors (Applegate et al. 2000; Unnever et al. 2005). More recently, however, researchers have striven to disentangle "religion" as a monolithic social force in people's lives and instead recognize that its effects are significantly impacted by intersections with other social and political identities.

Pursuant to this goal, sociologists studying religion have found that it is a highly racialized social practice (Baker et al. 2020; Perry et al. 2020; Yukich and Edgell 2020). Research both in the practice and expression of religion in the United States (Emmerson and Smith 2000; Shelton and Emerson 2012) and in religious influences on social and political attitudes (Davis et al. 2023; Gorski and Perry 2022; Whitehead and Perry 2020) point to the pervasive influence of race within American religious life. Davis (2019), for example, finds that white Americans who view Christian identity as an essential aspect of being an American are more likely to support government spending that traditionally targets racial and ethnic outgroups, while simultaneously opposing government spending traditionally framed as benefiting

nonwhites. Similarly, McDaniel and Ellison (2008) find that white biblical literalists opposed the use of life sentencing over capital punishment, while black biblical literalists supported this change. Most recently, Perry and Whitehead (2021) find that biblical literalism is most salient in affecting punitiveness when couched in white racial identity.

Punitiveness and the Achievement of Whiteness

While many social identities contribute to Americans' evaluations of criminal justice policy, white racial identity is consistently among the strongest and most persistent (Barkan and Cohn 2005; Davis 2018; Perry et al. 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2021). Though punitive sentiments have been declining somewhat among Americans since the early 1990s, consistent racial gaps in support of harsh criminal punishment remain (Enns 2014; Pickett 2019; Ramirez 2013). Historically, researchers have explained the relationship between whiteness and punitiveness via two potential mechanisms. First, whiteness represents a privileged position in society which simultaneously provides white Americans with reasonable certainty that they are unlikely to face injustice or extrajudicial violence from the police, while also constructing an imagined person of color as the proposed "criminal" when asked hypothetically (Barkan and Cohn 1994, 2005; Davis 2019; Weitzer and Tuch 2004). Alternatively, physical (Stupi et al. 2016) or cultural threat (Johnson and Kuhns 2009; King and Wheelock 2007; Newman et al. 2012) have been posed as an explanation for whites' relative support for more robust mechanisms of social control. More specifically, as nonwhites in a region or society come to represent a significant political or cultural threat to white hegemony, whites respond both implicitly and explicitly with calls to expand policing or border security.

While previous research has sought to uncover which of these two explanations is most reasonably supported by the data, I argue that they work in tandem to support the broader project

of whiteness (Davis 2019; Feagin 2013). Specifically, punitiveness is an integral part of the white racial frame which both overtly enforces white supremacy through disproportionate application across racial lines, and covertly by undergirding white-racial assumptions about the color of criminality in American society. Considering both its emergence to reassert white dominance in the post-Civil War Reconstruction era, as well as its current disproportionate impact on American society today, the alliance between whiteness and mass incarceration permeates the application of justice in the United States (Alexander 2012; Evans 2021; Harris et al. 2022). Support of this alliance, and specifically express desires to *expand* the already massive criminal justice system, then, is an integral part of the achievement of whiteness in American society.

Expectations

To elucidate the connections between race, religion, Americans' and desires for harsher treatment of criminals, the current study investigates three interrelated questions. First, this study investigates how Americans who hold a literalist interpretation of the Bible may differ from those who do not in support for greater punitive responses to crime from their local courts. Second, this study assesses how white racial identity is connected to indications that local courts are not being harsh enough towards criminals, and whether this relationship has changed over time. Finally, this study investigates whether the relationship between religious authoritarianism—in the form of biblical literalism—and punitiveness is race-neutral, or if this relationship is in fact attenuated by race.

In line with findings from prior research identifying the relationship between race and support for more expansive mechanisms of formal social control, I test four hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Biblical literalism will be positively associated with respondents' desires for their local courts to be harsher on criminals, but

Hypothesis 1b: The association between biblical literalism and desires for more punitive responses to crime will be largely driven by *white*-biblical literalists.

Hypothesis 2: White respondents are significantly more likely to indicate that their local courts are "not harsh enough" in their criminal sentencing.

Hypothesis 3: Over time, the proportion of both white and nonwhite respondents indicating desires for greater punitiveness will significantly decline.

Hypothesis 4: Declines in punitiveness over time will be slowest among white-biblical literalists.

DATA

To investigate the relationship between whiteness, biblical literalism, and punitiveness I analyze data from the 1984-2018 General Social Surveys (GSS). The GSS is a nationally representative, face-to-face survey of the non-institutionalized, English-Spanish speaking American adult population in the United States. The GSS is funded by the National Science Foundation and has been conducted since 1972. While early waves of the GSS were conducted every year, the GSS has surveyed roughly 3,000 Americans in even numbered years since 1994. Beginning in 1984, each wave of the GSS contains information about respondents' race, beliefs about the Bible and attitudes regarding how their local courts handle crime and delinquency. Collecting this information in repeated waves over time makes the GSS ideal not only for testing the cross-sectional relationship between these variables, but also to track whether and how their interactions have changed during this time period. After accounting for missing data with listwise deletion, my final analytic sample includes 27,847 respondents. Mean scores, ranges,

standard deviations, and bivariate correlations with my dependent variable are all presented in Table 1. Significance for bivariate correlations reported in Table 1 are drawn from two-tailed tests produced using Stata's "pwcorr" command and are constrained to evaluate only the final sample.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

METHODS

Dependent Variable

Punitive attitudes towards crime are drawn from responses to the question: "In general, do you think that the courts in this area deal too harshly or not harshly enough with criminals?" Responses were recorded as (1) "too harsh", (2) "about right", or (3) "not harsh enough," and were dichotomized to compare those who wished their local courts would deal more harshly with criminals (1) to those who did not wish to increase the punitiveness of their local courts (0). The first column of Table 1 demonstrates that GSS respondents overwhelmingly (75.75%) indicate a preference for harsher responses to local crime. Importantly, responses to this question indicate the most tangible mechanism of punitiveness for in respondents' daily lives. While the GSS also contains questions regarding respondents' attitudes towards the death penalty, as well as a more abstract question of whether greater or fewer federal funds should be devoted to "halting the rising crime rate" in the United States these measures reflect attitudes about crime and delinquency which are more socially distal to the respondent. In contrast, by examining respondent's attitudes regarding courts in respondents' "immediate area," this study provides insight into how respondents believe crime and delinquency are treated by criminal justice officials over whom they have the most direct political and social influence.

Independent Variables

To understand the overlapping influences of race and beliefs in religiously dictated authority structures in the United States, this study interacts respondents' self-reported beliefs in biblical literalism with their racial identity. Importantly, this study seeks to address and understand how religious dogmatism *per se* is an incomplete predictor of social and political attitudes, particularly those regarding the efficacy and fairness of the criminal justice system. To accomplish this, I construct a dummy variable comparing white respondents (1) to those identified as "black" or "other race" (0) using the race variable found in the GSS.[ii] Because this study is primarily concerned with race as an indicator of privileged status within the criminal justice system in the United States, I measure the effect of whiteness on beliefs about local courts rather than use white respondents as a contrast category. As shown in Table 1, whites make up approximately 76% of my final analytic sample. Further, bivariate correlations presented in the final column of Table 1 indicate that whiteness is both positively and significantly correlated with punitiveness.

To measure the influence of sacralized authority in attitudes towards local courts, I examine responses to the question, "Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?" Respondents who indicated, "The Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word," were coded as (1), and respondents who indicated either that, "The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word," or "The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recoded by men," were held as the contrast category (0). Results presented in Table 1 indicate that 32.9% of the final sample hold a literalist interpretation of the Bible, and that biblical literalism is positively correlated with punitive attitudes towards local crime. Finally, survey year is measured using a continuous variable ranging from zero (1984) to thirty-four

(2018). Given the growing cultural concern regarding the role of mass incarceration in American civic life, this study seeks to explore whether and how Americans' attitudes regarding the harshness of their local courts have changed over time. As demonstrated in Table 1, and in line with findings reported by Ramirez (2013), survey year is negatively associated with support for harsher local courts indicating that punitiveness, while remaining relatively strong among Americans, has significantly waned over the last three decades.

While the independent influences of race, beliefs in religious authority, and survey year are important to the study of American punitiveness, this study also seeks to address how race may moderate the influence of beliefs in sacralized authority. To this end, I examine the interaction of white racial identity with self-reported biblical literalism in multivariate models. Finally, in light of recent research demonstrating ongoing racialization of religious authoritarianism, I examine whether and how the relationship between whiteness and biblical literalism has changed over time by including a three-way interaction with survey year.

Control Variables

Due in part to the large number of respondents included in these data, I include a robust battery of control variables in multi-variable analyses which can organized into socioeconomic and religious variables. Respondents' age is measured continuously and ranges from 18 to 89 with a mean age of 46.36 years. As shown in Table 1 of the results, at the bivariate level age is both positively and significantly associated with the belief that local courts should be more harsh towards criminals.

Education is measured using the highest degree earned by the respondent. Responses ranged from (0) less than high school degree to (4) graduate degree. The mean score of education presented in Table 1 indicates that on average respondents attained a high school degree, and as

one might expect, at the bivariate level higher educational attainment is negatively associated with desires for harsher criminal sentencing. The GSS measures annual family income ordinally ranging from (1) "less than $1,000" to (13) "$25,000 or more." I dichotomize this variable to distinguish between the roughly one-third of respondents who indicated they earned fewer than $25,000 (1), and those who said they earned more than $25,000 (0). Approximately 35% of the analytic sample for this study are coded as "low income," but do not significantly differ from those earning more than $25,000 in punitiveness.

To control for possible gendered attitudes towards localized justice, I compare female respondents (1) comprising roughly 54% of the final sample, to a contrast category of male respondents (0). Compared to males, female respondents were somewhat more likely to indicate that their local courts should be harsher towards criminals.

Finally, to ensure that differences between whites and non-whites, as well as biblical literalists and non-literalists are not manifestations of differences in political beliefs, I control for respondents' self-reported ideological identity. Specifically, the GSS asks respondents to describe their political beliefs with responses ranging from (1) "extremely liberal" to (7) "extremely conservative." The mean response among the analytic sample for this question was 4.11 indicating a *slight* lean towards conservatism among these respondents. Unsurprisingly, Table 1 indicates that movement away from liberalism towards conservatism was significantly associated with desires for more punitive local courts.

Religious controls used in regression analyses include service attendance and religious affiliation. As an indicator of personal religiosity, I control for how frequently respondents attend religious services with values ranging from (0) "never" to (8) "more than once per week." Results presented in Table 1 indicate that those who attend services more frequently are likelier

to believe their local courts are not harsh enough towards criminals at the bivariate level. Denominational effects of religion were controlled for using Steensland et al.'s (2000) "RELTRAD" classification scheme using evangelical Protestants (26.53%) as the contrast category and comparing them to mainline Protestants (17.28%), black Protestants (8.57%), Catholics (25.36%), those belonging to other faith traditions (7.29%), and respondents who were religiously unaffiliated (14.98%). Correlations presented in the final column of Table 1 indicate that identifying as an evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Catholic were positively correlated with wanting harsher local courts. Conversely, respondents associated with black Protestantism, other faith traditions, and those who were not affiliated with any particular religious tradition were less likely to want their local courts to deal more harshly with criminals.

Analytic Strategy

Because the dependent variable in this study utilizes a bivariate measure of Americans' attitudes towards their local courts, multivariate analyses are conducted using binary logistic regression techniques using Stata's "logit" command. While results of these models are helpful in assessing the directionality of relationships between variables, Allison (1999) cautions researchers against solely relying on p-values produced by logit or probit models to evaluate whether associations are statistically significant. Therefore, following Long and Mustillo (2021), I plot the predicted probabilities produced by multivariate analyses using the margins and marginsplot functions of Stata 17 to compare point estimates as an additional confirmation of the significance of my focal relationships.

RESULTS

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Table 2 presents x-standardized coefficients drawn from binary logistic regression models predicting Americans' agreement that their local courts are "not harsh enough" in punishing criminals. In line with bivariate relationships described in Table 1, those who hold a literalist interpretation of the Bible are more likely to favor punitive responses to crime than are those with non-literalist interpretations. The positive and significant coefficient for Biblical literalism ($\beta = 0.086$, $p < .001$) suggests that Biblicists are significantly more punitive than their peers in this sample. This result supports *Hypothesis 1a* stating that Biblical literalists would demonstrate greater support for harsher local courts.

Similarly, results from Model 1 of Table 2 indicate white respondents have significantly higher odds of agreeing that their local courts are not harsh enough on criminals. Figure 1 presents the predicted probabilities of wanting a harsher local court produced by Model 1 of Table 2 for non-white and white respondents respectively, after controlling for religious, sociodemographic, and political differences. Figure 1 confirms that white respondents have a 6% higher probability of believing their local courts are too lenient with criminals, while providing visual confirmation of the significance of this relationship. This result supports *Hypothesis 2* stating that white respondents would be significantly more punitive than would non-white respondents.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The negative and significant coefficient for survey year indicates that for a single standard-deviation increase in year between 1984 and 2018, the logged-odds wanting local courts to deal more harshly with criminals decrease by 0.670, partially supporting my second hypothesis stating that all Americans decline in punitiveness over time. Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities of believing local courts do not deal harshly enough with criminals by

survey year after controlling for other variables in the model. In support of Hypothesis 3, we see a marked decline in punitiveness over the analytic timeframe from a high of 92% in 1984, to 54% in 2018.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Beyond these focal relationships, Model 1 of Table 2 presents standardized coefficients for all socio-demographic and religious control variables described in Table 1. Predictably, respondents' age (β = 0.34, p < .05) and political conservatism (β =0.255, p < .001) are both positively associated with the belief that local courts are not strict enough on crime, and more surprisingly, female respondents (β = 0.160, p < .001) were also more likely to hold this belief than were males. This model also indicates that having an annual family income of less than $25,000 ($\beta$ = -0.166, p < .001) and attaining higher levels of education (β = -0.235, p < .001) are negatively associated with punitive attitudes towards crime. Finally, Model 1 suggests that, as compared to evangelical Protestants, black Protestants (β = -0.044, p < .05), respondents belonging to other faith traditions (β = -0.076, p < .001), and those who are not religiously affiliated (β = -.0146, p < .001) are less likely to want harsher punishments from their local courts. Apart from black Protestants in Models 2 and 5, neither the effect sizes nor significance of variables outside of the focal relationships are substantially altered with the introduction of interaction terms in the subsequent models. Therefore, I will focus on the relationships between race, biblical literalism, and survey year when discussing the results of these models moving forward.

Model 2 of Table 2 introduces the interaction of white racial identity and biblical literalism. There are several notable findings produced by this model. First, the main effect for whiteness (β = 0.100, p < .05) remains positive and significant suggesting that the racial

differences in punitiveness from Model 1 are not due to differences in beliefs about the Bible. Second, the main effect for biblical literalism ($\beta = 0.002$, $p > .10$) is both substantially reduced and no longer significant, indicating that for non-white respondents, literal interpretation of the Bible is not a significant predictor of punitive responses to crime. Finally, the interaction term between white racial identity and biblical literalism is both positive and significant ($\beta = 0.120$, $p < .001$). This result carries two important implications. First, that among white respondents—who are already more likely to hold more punitive attitudes towards crime—biblical literalism amplifies orientations towards punitiveness. Second, and more importantly, that the punitive effect of biblical literalism which is well established in literature, may be more appropriately attributed to *white*-biblical literalism.

Figure 3 visually confirms these relationships, displaying the relationship between biblical literalism and punitiveness by race. The left panel portrays the predicted probabilities of wanting a harsher local court among non-white respondents with non-biblical literalists (66%) on the left and biblical literalists (69%) on the right. The overlapping confidence intervals confirm that the difference between these two groups is neither substantively, nor statistically significant. The right-hand panel portrays these same relationships among white respondents. Because these panels utilize the same scale and were derived from a single model rather than a split-sample model, we can appropriately compare results across panels. Doing this, we see that white respondents who are not biblical literalists (78%) and those who are biblical literalists (83%) are both significantly more punitive than are non-white respondents. Further, the non-overlapping confidence intervals in this panel provide further evidence of the significance of the relationship between biblical literalism and punitiveness among white respondents. Taken together, the results from Model 2 and Figure 3 suggest that biblical literalism's association with more

punitive responses to crime is amplified by—if not solely driven by—white racial identity and membership to privileged positions in society.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Model 3 introduces an interaction between biblical literalism and survey year to the base model. With the addition of this interaction, we can see several notable changes to the focal variables of this study. First, and unsurprisingly, the effect of whiteness (β = 0.140, p < .001) is largely unchanged with this interaction. Second, as in Model 2, the main effect of biblical literalism is no longer significant indicating that at the intercept, literalists were not significantly more likely to believe their local courts were not harsh enough on criminals than were non-literalists. The third notable change between Models 1 and 3 is that the main effect of survey year slightly increases in magnitude, which taken together with the positive and significant effect of the interaction term suggests that biblical literalists among GSS respondents have declined more slowly than their non-literalist peers in their punitive responses to crime all else being equal. However, given the racialized effect of biblical literalism identified in Model 2, this relationship merits further investigation.

The fourth model of Table 2 introduces an interaction term for race and survey year. Among the focal relationships of this study, the introduction of this interaction does very little. Compared with results from Model 1, the magnitude of the relationship between whiteness (β = 0.171, p < .001) and punitiveness at the intercept is slightly larger, the effect of biblical literalism (β = 0.086, p < .001) is unchanged, and the main effect of survey year (β = -0.640, p < .001) is only somewhat reduced. The non-significance of the interaction term in this model suggests that the slopes for white and non-white respondents over survey year are not significantly different

from one another. Taken together, the results from Model 4 indicate that the relationship between race and punitiveness in this sample is remarkably stable over this analytic timeframe.

The fifth and final model of Table 2 includes all previous two-way interactions and introduces a three-way interaction between whiteness, biblical literalism, and survey year to investigate whether the relationship identified in Model 2 has changed over time. The first result worth noting is the positive and significant coefficient for the main effect of whiteness (β = 0.177, $p < .001$) indicating that white respondents are more likely to express a desire for harsher local courts at the intercept. This result supports the first hypothesis of this study stating that white respondents would be more punitive than would non-white respondents. Second, we once again see that with the inclusion of interaction terms for race and biblical literalism, the main effect of biblical literalism (β = 0.040, $p > .10$) is non-significant, suggesting that at the intercept non-white respondents do not vary in punitiveness along literalist lines. Third, the main effect of survey year (β = -0.624, $p < .001$) retains its directionality and significance. This indicates that the overall decline in punitiveness among Americans is not due solely to changes in racial differences or beliefs about the Bible during this time, supporting the second hypothesis of this study.

Turning to the interaction terms in Model 5, we see that the coefficient drawn from two-way interaction for race and biblical literalism (β = -0.029, $p > .10$) is now both negative and non-significant meaning that white respondents do not differ significantly in their punitive responses to crime at the intercept. We see this same change for the interaction between biblical literalism and survey year (β = -0.037, $p > .10$). The effect of the two-way interaction between whiteness and survey year (β = -0.095, $p < .10$) becomes marginally significant meaning that the gap between white non-biblical literalists and non-white respondents may be diminishing over

this timeframe. Finally, the positive and significant coefficient for the three-way interaction between whiteness, biblical literalism, and survey year ($\beta = 0.150$, $p < .01$) indicates that between 1984 and 2018, white biblical-literalists have distinguished themselves relative to their peers in their punitive response to crime.

Figure 4 provides visual confirmation of the trends revealed in Model 5 of Table 2. Focusing first on the trajectories for non-white respondents, we see the predicted probabilities of wanting a harsher local court for non-biblical literalists represented with the solid line with square-shaped point markers, and biblical literalists are represented by the long-dashed line with triangle-shaped point markers. Notably, the 95% confidence intervals for these two groups overlap over the entire analytic timeframe. This further supports Hypothesis 3b along with the results demonstrated in Model 2 and Figure 3 and suggests that the influence of biblical literalism on beliefs that local courts should deal more harshly with criminals is only salient among *white* respondents. When we look at the trajectories of white respondents, we find further support for this hypothesis. White non-biblical literalists' predicted punitiveness is represented with the shor-dashed line and diamond-shaped point estimate markers, while white biblical literalists' are represented with the dashed line with circle-shaped point estimate markers. In line with the results portrayed in Model 5, we see that the 95% confidence intervals for these two groups overlap at the beginning of the analytic timeframe indicating that white respondents did not differ significantly by biblical literalism at this time. We can also see that beginning in 1990, the two groups diverge considerably with white non-literalists declining in punitiveness much more quickly than white literalists. This supports Hypothesis 4 stating that white biblical literalists would decline in punitiveness more slowly than other groups. Together, these results

suggest that biblical literalism as a predictor of respondents' desires for harsher responses to crime is both an *emergent* and *racialized* influence on punitiveness among Americans.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

DISCUSSION

This study sought to address three interrelated questions about the role of religion in shaping American attitudes towards criminal punishment. First, is religious fundamentalism expressed in literalist interpretations of the Bible associated with Americans' evaluations of their local courts? Second, does this association vary for whites compared to non-whites, or is it uniform among all Americans? And finally, has the relationship between race, religious dogma, and punitive attitudes changed over recent decades or has it been stable? While previous research has examined race and religion independently influence American punitiveness, few (Perry and Whitehead 2021) have investigated their combined impact, and to my knowledge none have questioned whether and how these relationships may be changing over time. Using data from the 1984-2018 waves of the GSS I found that biblical literalism is strongly associated with respondents' evaluations of their local courts being "not harsh enough" towards criminals. When interacted with race, however, I found that this relationship was only significant among white respondents, and that over time the punitive gap between white biblical literalists and their peers has grown significantly.

The results presented in this paper hold important implications for three interrelated lines of research. First, contributing to the robust literature on American desires for strict formal sanctions for violations of the law (Baumer et al. 2003; Davis 2018; Frost 2010), this study demonstrates that both white and nonwhite Americans remain highly punitive. In support of findings from Ramirez (2013), analyses revealed that Americans were declining in their

likelihood to say their local courts are too lenient towards criminals over time, however, most members of all groups analyzed indicated that they would like to see harsher punishments for criminals.

My results also contribute to literature identifying the relationship between whiteness and punitive attitudes (Barkan and Cohn 1994, 1998, 2005; Britt 1998; Davis 2019; Green et al. 2006; Perry and Whitehead 2020; Unnever 2013; Weitzer and Tuch 2004, 2005). In line with prior research, my results demonstrated a marked difference between white and nonwhite respondents in their evaluations of how local courts deal with crime. In both main-effect and interactive models whiteness was significantly associated with expressions of greater levels of punitiveness. These findings support extant literature linking whiteness with support for expansive criminal justice organizations, and contribute to our understanding of how white racial projects are embedded in local organizations (Ray 2019) and protect dominant socio-historical narratives of the white racial frame (Feagin 2013). Punitiveness is an essential aspect of the achievement of whiteness and reproduction of racial inequalities in a color-blind society. While arguing that "crime" and "criminals" should be held to greater account for their actions, white proponents of harsh criminal sentences do so with an implicit understanding of which groups constitute "urban youths," and "delinquent troublemakers" (Alexander 2012; Davis 2018, 2019). These policies, once adopted, then become an avenue through which inequality is justified, and undergird black-white differences in public discourse (Unnever 2013). In adoption and advocacy for punitive responses to crime and delinquency, white Americans justify and reproduce their privilege in society while simultaneously shifting the blame of oppression onto black Americans, themselves (Perry et al. 2019).

Finally, the current study sheds further light on the complex interactions between race, religious life, and American social and political attitudes (Davis 2019; Gorski and Perry 2022; Whitehead and Perry 2020; Yukich and Edgell 2020). In line with prior research demonstrating that biblicism and Christian nationalism tend to operate differently across racial lines, this study revealed highly racialized trajectories for biblical literalism in American punitiveness (Perry and Whitehead 2021; Unnever, Cullen and Applegate 2005; Whitehead and Perry 2020). More accurately, my findings show that biblical literalism operates solely within the context of whiteness to amplify punitiveness among Americans. At no point between 1984 and 2018 do nonwhite respondents significantly differ in their evaluation of local courts along literalist lines all else being equal. Further, the results presented in this study show that the association between white biblical literalism and punitive attitudes towards crime is both emergent and growing among Americans. This may be due, in part, to increased sensitivity among Evangelicals in the wake of growing secularism and progressive social movements which challenge their privileged position in American social structures. Alternatively, these relationships may simply indicate that some groups with more conservative religious belief structures are slower to change than those whose beliefs about the Bible are open to interpretation. This explanation, however, is unlikely considering the null effect that theological conservatism has among non-white respondents.

The data for this study have two limitations which should be acknowledged in hopes of benefitting future research. First, these data are cross-sectional and thus I cannot definitively determine the temporal order of these relationships. While I would contend that it is likelier that people develop beliefs about the inerrancy of the Bible prior to forming opinions on courts in their immediate areas, the structure of these data do not allow me to rule out the alternative. Future studies would benefit from collection of more longitudinal data seeking to understand

how race and religious life may influence social and political beliefs. Second, early waves of the GSS rely on interviewer evaluations of racial identities of respondents allowing for respondents to be labeled in ways that they would not necessarily identify. This, along with my decision to group respondents in to a binary white and nonwhite racial coding scheme may obfuscate the complexity and nuance of racial and ethnic identity in the United States. As researchers continue to study the relationships between religion and punitiveness, evaluation of data with more sensitive measures of race and ethnicity will undoubtedly provide a more nuanced understanding of their intersection.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study adds significantly to our understanding of how race and religion operate in tandem to inform beliefs regarding formal social control in the United States. While all Americans have declined in their expressed belief that local courts should deal more harshly with criminal since 1984, I show that white Americans are consistently more likely to hold such beliefs, and that white biblical literalists specifically have steadily separated themselves from other Americans in this regard. Though previous studies have investigated the role of religion in various aspects of punitiveness (Grasmick et al. 1993; Unnever and Cullen 2005, 2005), and several have included a consideration of how religion may act in racialized ways to undergird these beliefs (Britt 1998; Davis 2019; Perry et al. 2019), to my knowledge this study represents the first attempt to understand how these relationships may be changing over time. Further, my findings highlight the continued need for research to analyze how race and religious beliefs operate in tandem to inform attitudes about the social world. Finally, the results of this study underscore the need to understand and bridge the emergent gaps between white religious conservatives and the rest of America on important social issues including mass incarceration. For researchers, activists, journalists, and lay Americans taking

actions to undo the effects and dismantle both the physical and social infrastructures of mass incarceration in the United States, understanding how white religious authoritarianism foments reactionary support for these structures is paramount.

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Table 1. **Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

Variable	*Mean or %*	*Range*	*Standard Deviation*	*Corr. with Courts*
Courts	75.75%	0-1	0.44	
White	75.78%	0-1	0.43	0.097***
Age	46.36	18-89	17.04	0.024***
Literalist	32.90%	0-1	0.47	0.075***
Low Income	35.26%	0-1	0.48	0.007
Education	1.53	0-4	1.19	-0.111***
Political Ideology	4.11	1-7	1.41	0.139***
Female	54.30%	0-1	0.50	0.061***
Attendance	3.71	0-8	2.74	0.077***
Evangelical Prot.	26.53%	0-1	0.44	0.073***
Mainline Prot.	17.28%	0-1	0.38	0.042***
Black Prot.	8.57%	0-1	0.28	-0.022***
Catholic	25.36%	0-1	0.44	0.028***
Other Faith	7.29%	0-1	0.26	-0.039***
Unaffiliated	14.98%	0-1	0.36	-0.129***
Year	18.12	0-34	10.31	-0.223***

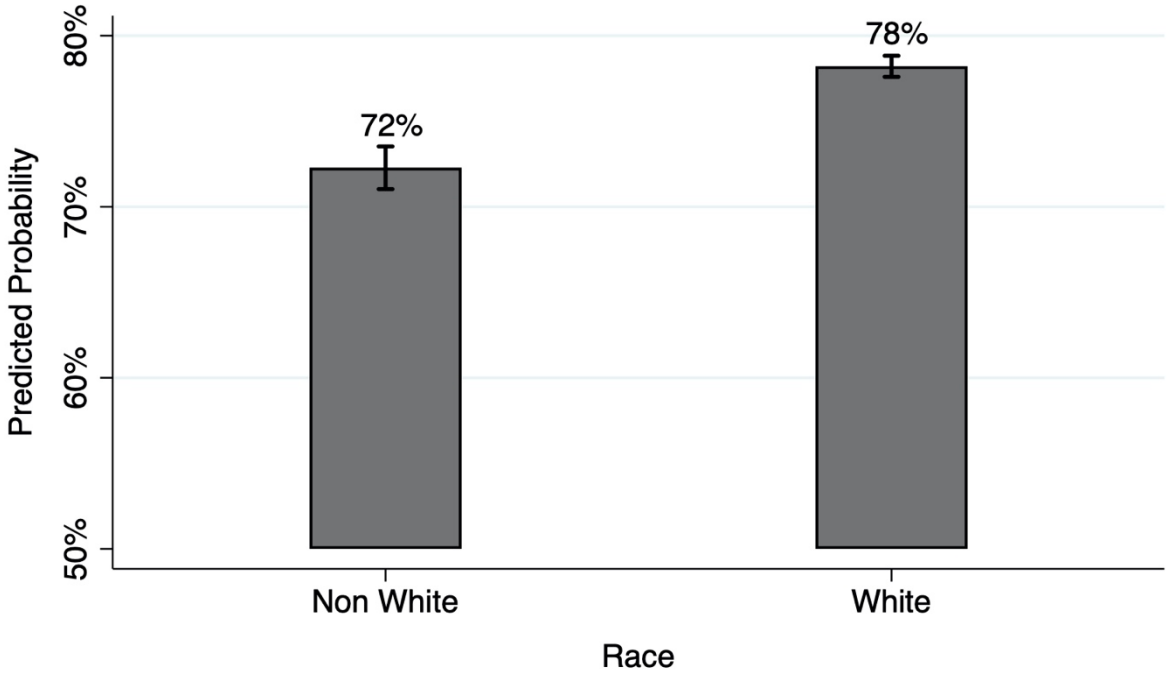
Source: 1984-2018 General Social Surveys
N=27,847
† p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 2**. Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Desires for Harsher Local Courts**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	β	SE	*β*	SE	*β*	SE	*β*	SE	*β*	SE
White	0.139***	0.05	0.100***	0.04	0.140***	0.04	0.171***	0.09	0.177***	0.11
Literalist	0.086***	0.04	0.002	0.06	0.022	0.08	0.086***	0.04	0.040	0.14
Age	0.034*	0.00	0.033*	0.00	0.034*	0.00	0.034*	0.00	0.034*	0.00
Low Income	-0.166***	0.02	-0.166***	0.03	-0.166***	0.03	-0.166***	0.03	-0.166***	0.03
Education	-0.235***	0.01	-0.234***	0.01	-0.236***	0.01	-0.235***	0.01	-0.235***	0.01
Political Ideology	0.255***	0.01	0.251***	0.01	0.255***	0.01	0.255***	0.01	0.249***	0.01
Female	0.160***	0.04	0.161***	0.03	0.161***	0.03	0.160***	0.03	0.162***	0.03
Service Attendance	-0.009	0.01	-0.009	0.01	-0.011	0.01	-0.009	0.01	-0.011	0.01
Mainline Prot.	-0.014	0.05	-0.007	0.05	-0.014	0.05	-0.014	0.05	-0.007	0.05
Black Prot.	-0.044*	0.05	-0.029	0.06	-0.044*	0.06	-0.041*	0.06	-0.027	0.07
Catholic	-0.003	0.04	0.006	0.04	-0.003	0.04	-0.003	0.04	0.006	0.04
Other Faith	-0.076***	0.05	-0.072***	0.06	-0.077***	0.06	-0.076***	0.06	-0.072***	0.06
Non-Affiliated	-0.146***	0.04	-0.139***	0.05	-0.145***	0.05	-0.146***	0.05	-0.137***	0.05
Year	-0.670***	0.01	-0.666***	0.01	-0.693***	0.01	-0.640***	0.01	-0.624***	0.01
$Year^2$	0.145*	0.00	0.142*	0.00	0.148*	0.00	0.140*	0.00	0.140*	0.00
White x Literalist			0.120***	0.07					-0.029	0.17
Literalist x Year					0.068*	0.00			-0.037	0.01
White x Year							-0.037	0.00	-0.095†	0.00
White x Literalist x Year									0.150**	0.01
Constant	1.439***	0.41	1.498***	0.10	1.484***	0.10	1.379***	0.12	1.411***	0.13
AIC	28973.346		28957.346		28971.208		28974.51		28949.986	
BIC	29105.072		29097.305		29111.167		29114.468		29114.643	

Source: 1984-2018 General Social Surveys
N= 27,802
† p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Figure 1: Predicted Probability of wanting a Harsher local Court by Race



Source: General Social Surveys 1984-2018
N = 27,847

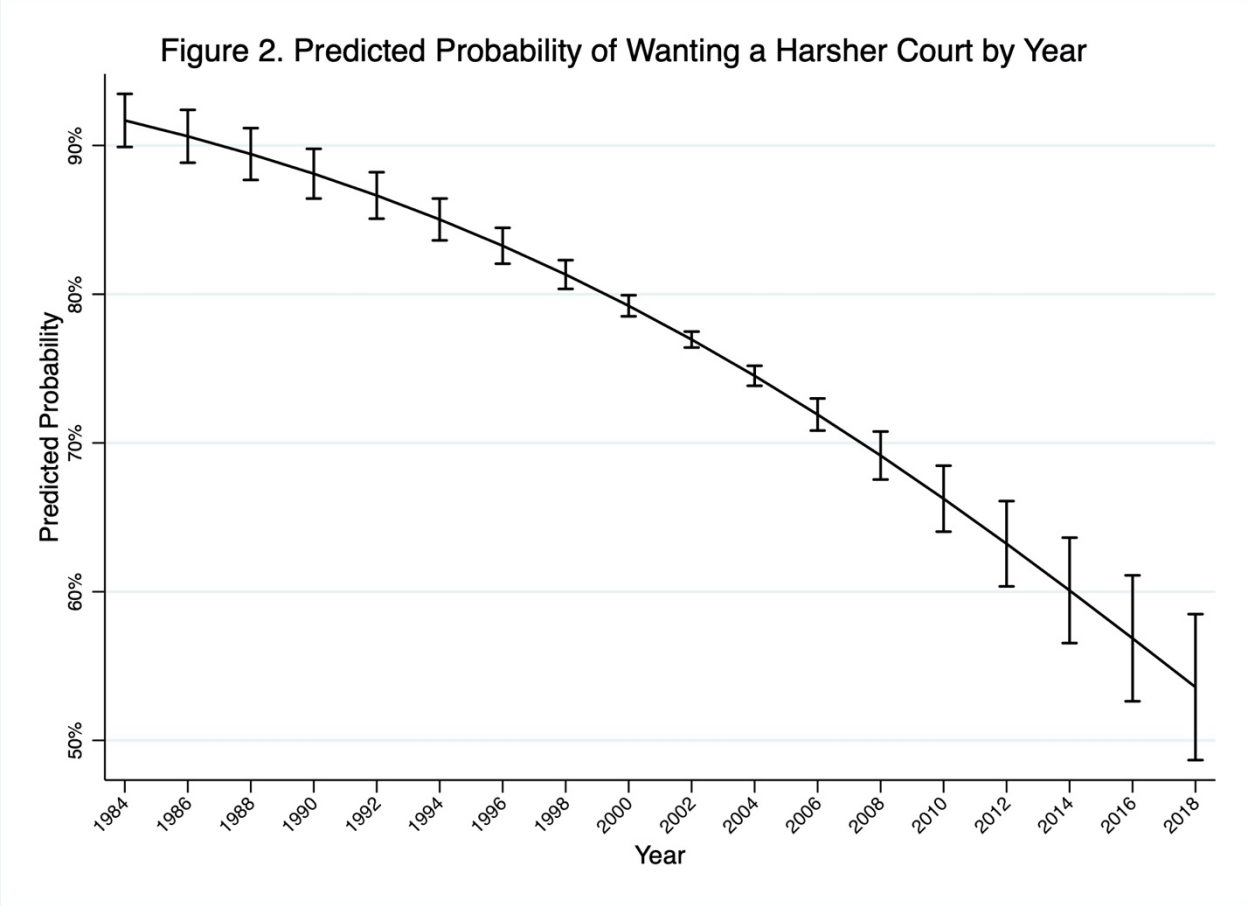
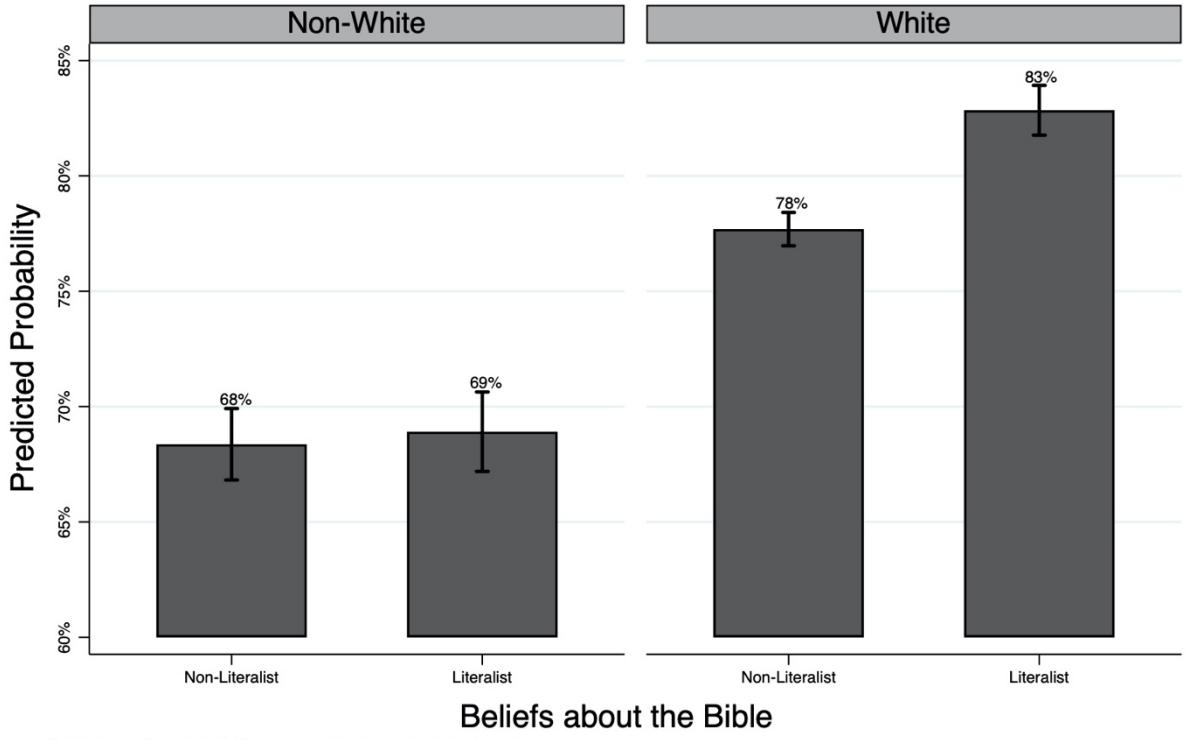
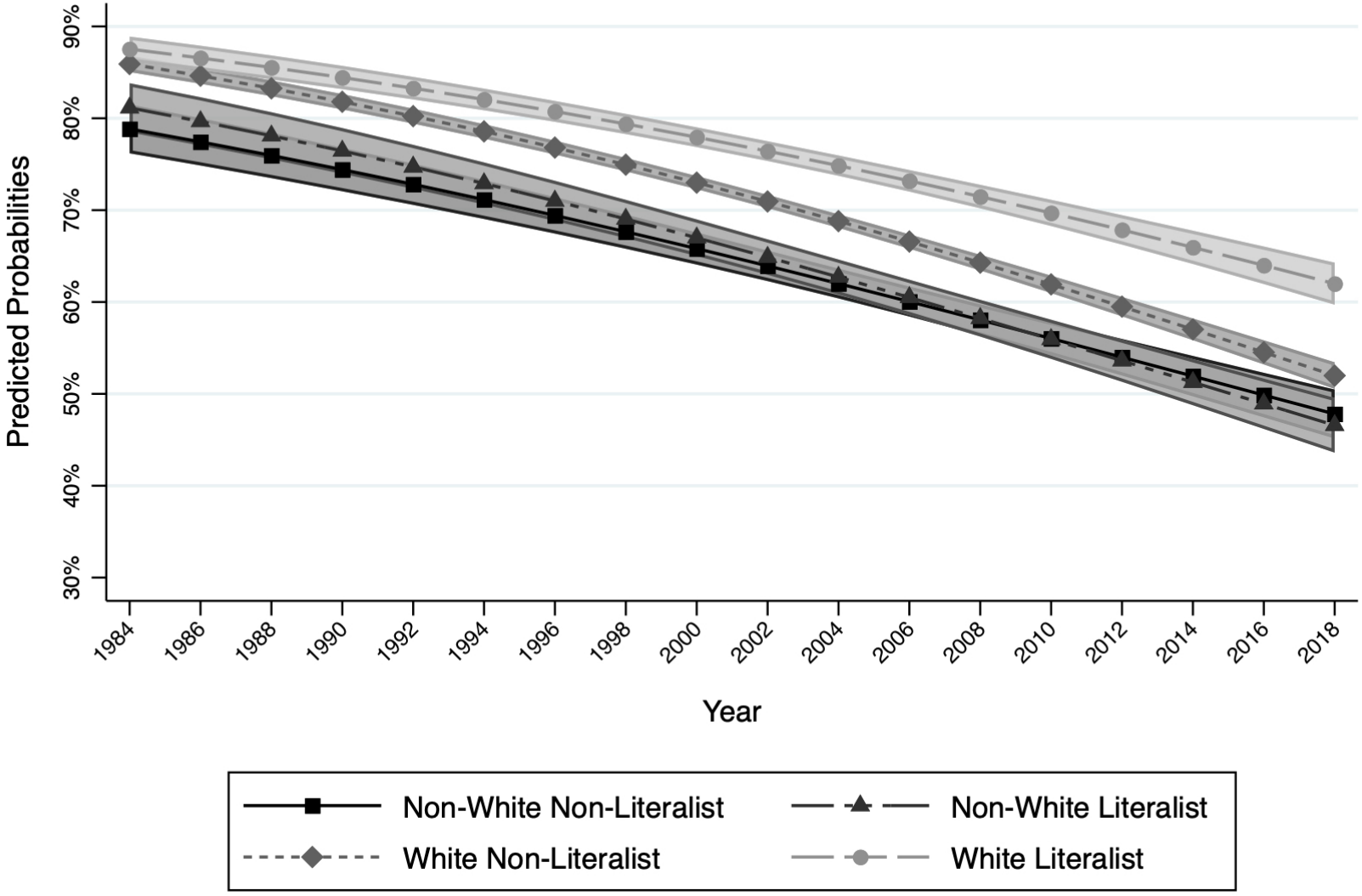

Figure 2. Predicted Probability of Wanting a Harsher Court by Year
Predicted Probability
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
1984
1986
1988
1990
1992
1994
1996
1998
2000
2002
2004
2006
2008
2010
2012
2014
2016
2018
Year

Figure 3. Predicted Probability of Harsh Court by Race and Biblical Literalism



Source: General Social Surveys 1984-2018
N=27,847

Figure 4. Predicted Punitiveness by Race and Biblical Literalism over Time



Converging in the Pews: Religious Participation, Political Partisanship, and Support for Capital Punishment in the United States

Numerous studies have explored how political identity and ideology influence support for capital punishment among Americans. Researchers consistently find both Republican affiliation and conservative ideology to be reliable predictors of support for capital punishment. Recently, sociologists studying religion have also examined this issue and find that frequency of religious service attendance is often associated with greater support for capital punishment. The current study seeks to link these two literatures and explore how political identity and religious commitment operate in tandem to affect Americans' belief in the death penalty. Further, this study utilizes unique outcomes captured in wave 87 of the American Trends Panel to evaluate pro capital punishment stances while also holding potentially confounding beliefs in its application. Results indicate that, after an extensive battery of controls, more frequent worship attendance is associated with greater opposition to capital punishment for all political parties. I also find that while there is significant convergence between Republicans and Democrats who attend most frequently, Republicans are still more likely to support capital punishment. Implications of these findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Though public support for capital punishment has diminished somewhat over the thirty years (Davis 2023; Ramirez 2013), it is still favored by a majority of Americans. Among the most common explanations for this support are gender (Cochran and Sanders 2009; Stack 2000; Whitehead and Blankenship 2000), race (Unnever and Cullen 2007), religion (Bader et al. 2010; Davis 2018), and political partisanship (Jacobs and Carmichael 2001). Research interested in the social and political correlates of support for capital punishment consistently find that Republicans are significantly more likely to approve of the death penalty than are Democrats, and that approval of the death penalty tends to be stronger among those who are more religious (Cochran et al. 2006). Generally, Republican support for capital punishment has been framed as a result of less trust institutions (Kort-Butler, and Ray 2019), greater feelings of anger about crime (Finckenauer 1988; Johnson 2009), and commitment to the social project of "law and order" (Beckett 1997; Campbell 2011; Lambert et al. 2004). Further, Republican partisans are more likely to express animus and anxieties toward racial and ethnic minority groups which has been linked to support for the death penalty (Britt 1998; Unnever and Cullen 2007). Similarly, cognitive rigidity among both political conservatives and religious fundamentalists is linked to less tolerance for outsiders (Johnson et al. 2012; Malka et al. 2017). While studies have outlined the individual connection between religious commitment, political partisanship, and support for capital punishment, it remains unclear religious commitment has the same effect for Republicans as for Democrats.

The current study seeks to add to our knowledge about public support for capital punishment in three ways. First, analyses conducted in this study examine a unique set of outcome measures capturing not only a dichotomous indicator of support for capital punishment,

but also whether respondents believe that the death penalty is administered fairly and justly. Specifically, outcomes analyzed in this study indicate whether respondents expressed opposition, *discordant* support, or *cohesive* support for capital punishment. *Discordant support* is defined as support for capital punishment while also expressing belief that a) the death penalty does not deter serious crime, b) racial or ethnic minority members are disproportionately sentenced to death, or c) innocent people are at risk of being sentenced to death. *Cohesive support*, alternatively, describes respondents who support capital punishment and do not believe that it is administered inequitably or unjustly. Second, this study seeks to understand how both partisan identity and religious commitment are associated with these beliefs about capital punishment. Moreover, this study investigates whether religious participation is moderated by partisan identity in its association with beliefs about capital punishment. Results suggest, that support for capital punishment is stronger among Republicans than among Democrats, Furthermore, this study reveals that the *kind* of support for capital punishment expressed by Republicans and Democrats differs greatly. Democrats who supported the death penalty were much more likely to also believe that it was not a significant deterrent for crime, and that racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately at risk. Republican supporters, however, were likelier to believe that capital punishment did in fact deter crime, and that whites were equally likely to be sentenced to death as racial and ethnic minorities. Finally, this study revealed that attending religious services at least weekly increased the likelihood of opposing capital punishment among all partisan groups, but that among Republicans religious commitment does not overcome partisan support for the death penalty.

BACKGROUND

Political Identity and Support for Capital Punishment

Among the most robust predictors of American support for capital punishment is political affiliation. Specifically, conservative politics have been linked to greater dogmatism, cognitive rigidity, acceptance of inequalities, and an emphasis on social order (Jost 2017). Together, the more hierarchical and constrained worldview embraced by political conservatives tend to orient them towards higher levels of support for capital punishment (Stack 2003). Political conservatives, for example, are more prone to view criminal justice as a tool for retribution, incapacitation, and deterrence, while liberals emphasize goals of rehabilitation and social welfare (Beckett 1997). These associations are robust even when presented with alternatives to capital punishment. In their analysis of Kentucky residents, Vito and colleagues (2014) investigated whether respondents believed life without parole was a more appropriate punishment for murder than the death penalty. Their results demonstrated a 59% gap in preferring long-term sentencing over capital punishment between conservatives and liberals.

Beyond the conservative-liberal divide in political orientation, partisan affiliation has increasingly demonstrated power to predict support for capital punishment in recent decades. Since the 1970s, Republicans have shown greater support for the death penalty, and the gap between them and Democrats appears to be growing (Anderson et al. 2017). Oliphant (2018), for example found that 77% of Republicans but only 35% of Democrat respondents supported capital punishment. To explain these gaps, researchers have pointed to both overt and covert messaging strategies integral to public politics since the 1970s.

Overtly, Republican politicians have relied heavily on campaigns centered around crime, justice (usually framed in terms of harsh sanctioning),and the promotion of "law and order" beginning in earnest with President Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign and eventual declaration of drug use as "public enemy number one" (Alexander 2012). Far from simple rhetorical appeals

made to gain elected office, research has found that this shift in political differentiation from largely economic and overtly racial policies in the mid-20th century significantly impacted the landscape of criminal punishment in the United States. Beckett (1997), for example demonstrated that increased focus on promoting and maintaining law and order in national politics amplified public anxiety about crime even holding fluctuations in actual crime rates and non-political media coverage constant. Other research has shown that rise in law-and-order politicking among Republicans at both the national and state levels has contributed to the rise and longevity of mass incarceration in the United States (Campbell 2011; Jacobs and Charmichael 2001). Furthermore, the fears and anxieties surrounding crime that are proliferated in law-and-order politicking significantly amplify support for more violent, retributive justice policy (Johnson 2009; Keil and Vito 1991; Kort-Butler and Hartshorn 2011).

Another line of research identifies the implicit or covert racialization of law and order rhetoric within conservative and Republican politics as a source of support for more expansive criminal justice mechanisms (Barkan and Cohn 2005; Davis 2019; Fox 2004). As Alexander (2012) notes, criminal justice policy and rhetoric was largely embraced as a replacement for overt racial appeals among conservatives in the mid-20th century. Following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s overt racial prejudice yielded diminishing political returns and as a result surrounding "crime," "drugs," and the "inner-city" quickly replaced them as more palatable alternatives (Brown 2013; Hurwitz and Peffley 2005). Current research continues to find significant links between racial animus among whites and support for capital punishment (Hannan et al. 2022; Tonry 2011; Unnever and Cullen 2007; Unnever, Cullen, and Jonson 2008).

While a robust literature outlining predictors of support for capital punishment highlights the complementary roles of political ideology and partisanship, much less is known about how

these relationships may fluctuate within the context of other social identities or practices. Furthermore, support for capital punishment exists within a nexus of social experiences and understandings of morality, justice, and equality (Unnever and Cullen 2005; Soss et al. 2003). The current study attempts to build on this literature by assessing support for capital punishment among political partisans both within the context of their religious behaviors, as well as their subjective understanding of whether capital punishment is equitably and justly administered by the criminal justice system.

Religion, Religious Commitment, and Capital Punishment

A robust literature now exists outlining the complicated roles religion plays in predicting punitive attitudes among Americans (Curry 1996; Davis 2018; Durham et al. 1996; Lytle and Bensel 2016; Santoro 2014). Researchers interested in uncovering the association between American religious life and various indicators of punitiveness have reached mixed results. On the one hand, religious affiliation and participation have been linked more conservative ideology, authoritarian beliefs, less racial diversity in peer-networks, and less tolerance of outsiders (Applegate et al. 2000; Baker and Booth 2016; Britt 1998; Eckhardt 1991). Conservative Christian identities including identification as a fundamentalist or evangelical are also more likely to be accompanied by beliefs in punitive or retributive justice in response to deviant behavior (Grasmick et al. 1993; Thompson and Froese 2016). Grasmick et al. (1992), specifically, find that conservative Protestants, as opposed to mainline Protestants and Catholics are, more likely to attribute intent to criminal behavior causing them to be more supportive of retributive than restorative justice principles. One possible explanation for this link suggests that religions socialize individuals into more absolutist belief in right and wrong, and in so doing,

facilitates stricter and more stigmatizing views of deviant behaviors (Erikson 2005; Savelsberg 2004; Stark 2003). Looking specifically to approval of the death penalty

Conversely, recent studies find that traditional or simplistic measures of American religion often obfuscate the complexity of its relationship to punitive attitudes (Baker and Booth 2016; Davis 2018; Seto and Said 2022). Specifically, research exploring the role of specific cultural images of God among Christians finds that belief in an angry (Bader et al. 2010; Bones and Sabriseilabi 2018), or masculine (Baker and Whitehead 2020) God are linked to punitiveness above and beyond denominational effects. Similarly, bourgeoning literature outlining the role of Christian nationalism in society finds that the intersection of religious identity with other socio-demographic characteristics largely accounts for denominational differences in multi-variable models (Britt 1998; Davis 2018, 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2021). Race, for example, has been shown to moderate the relationship between support for capital punishment for both religious participation (Harris et al. 2022), and spirituality (Sabriseilabi et al. 2022) such that oppositional effects tend to be stronger among black Americans than among whites. Importantly, such research also finds that as measures of religiously informed identities are accounted for, religious commitment often predicts opposition to harsh or lethal punishment for criminals (Baker and Booth 2016; Davis 2018; O'Brien and Abdelhadi 2020). Religious participation, then, may be more strongly associated with empathetic and forgiving stances on criminal justice, while identities including Christian nationalism and whiteness drive punitiveness.

Results from previous studies indicate a continued need to examine more contextualized aspects of American religious life to understand how it may influence social, political, and punitive attitudes (Davis et al. 2023). This is especially true of religious commitment. Research tracing the roots of secularization in the United States consistently find evidence that the

marriage of political partisanship to religious identity in public discourse plays a significant role (Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014). Furthermore, Djupe et al. (2018) demonstrate that political congruence at the congregational level is an important factor in people's decisions to either disaffiliate from religion or at least specific congregations. Their study also indicates that opposition to conservative or right-wing political action can motivate more liberal Americans to participate in religion if their political beliefs are reflected in their congregation. Such findings suggest a significant political segregation in institutional religious participation which may attenuate the relationship between religiosity *per se* and support for capital punishment.

EXPECTATIONS

The current study seeks to understand how religious participation and political partisanship together may influence Americans' attitudes toward the death penalty. More specifically, I am interested in how these two social factors operate in tandem to predict whether respondents report opposition to, discordant support, or cohesive support for capital punishment. Importantly, this study utilizes unique conditional measures of support for capital punishment to identify whether beliefs that capital punishment is ineffective, unequal, or unjust erode support for the death penalty. Given findings from previous studies demonstrating the positive association with Republican affiliation, and the negative influence of religious commitment, I test three interrelated hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Republican respondents will be more likely to show both discordant support, and cohesive support for capital punishment in multivariable models.
>
> *Hypothesis 2:* Religious commitment will be *negatively* associated with both discordant and cohesive support for capital punishment in full models.

Finally, because institutional religious participation and Republican partisanship have become so closely aligned in recent years (Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014; Margolis 2022), I expect the oppositional relationship between religious participation and capital punishment to be stronger among Democratic respondents than among Republicans. Stated more formally, I expect:

> *Hypothesis 3*: Religious participation will be more strongly associated with opposing capital punishment for Democrats than for Republicans.

DATA

To understand the roles religious participation and political partisanship play in shaping American attitudes towards capital punishment, I analyze data from the Pew Research American Trends Panel (ATP). The ATP is an online survey panel of Americans based on random sampling of residential addresses throughout the United States. Panelists who do not have access to the internet or a computer are provided a tablet to complete the survey. Data for this study come from Wave 87 of the ATP collected between April 5-11, 2021, and includes responses from 5,109 of the 5,970 potential respondents (86% response rate). After listwise deletion of missing cases during multivariable analyses, the final analytic sample for each dependent variable ranges between 4,587 and 4,607 respondents.

METHODS

Dependent Variables

The current study analyzes American support for capital punishment in light of three potentially confounding contextual beliefs. The three dependent variables analyzed in this study are constructed from respondents' self-reported support of capital punishment, and identification with three potentially disqualifying statements about the application of the death penalty in the

American judicial system. Participants were first asked "Do you favor or opposed the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?" Responses ranged from (1) strongly favor, to (4) strongly oppose and were dichotomized such that those who (strongly) favor capital punishment for persons convicted of murder were coded as (1), and those who (strongly) opposed capital punishment were coded as (0).

Respondents were then presented with a series of conflicting statements about the death penalty and asked to identify which comes closest to their beliefs about capital punishment. The first pair stated "The death penalty [does not] deter[s] people from committing serious crimes." Respondents who indicated that they believed capital punishment not deter serious crime (1) were contrasted against those who indicated that it does (0). The ATP then asked half of the sample to choose between the following statements: "Minorities are more likely than whites to be sentenced to the death penalty for committing similar crimes," and "Whites and minorities are equally likely to be sentenced to death for committing similar crimes." And asked the other half of respondents to choose between similar statements substituting "Black people" for "minorities." Responses to these statements were combined such that participants indicating they believed that minorities or black people are at greater risk to receive capital punishment (1) are contrasted to those who believe that whites and minorities or blacks are equally likely to receive capital punishment (0).[iii] Finally, participants were asked to indicate whether they believed there was risk that an innocent person may be put to death (1) or that there are adequate safeguards to ensure that innocents will not be put to death (0).

Responses to these statements, as well as self-reported support of the death penalty were then used to construct the dependent variables for this study. The first organizes respondents into one of three categories—opposers, discordant supporters, cohesive supporters—based on their

support of capital punishment and (dis)agreement with the deterrent effect of the death penalty. Respondents who opposed the death penalty are coded (0) and are the base outcome in multinomial regression models.[iv] Those respondents who agreed with one of the potentially disqualifying statements, but also favored the use of capital punishment were coded as (1) *discordant support*. These respondents agreed that capital punishment either did not deter serious crime, was racialized in its application, or that capital punishment potentially puts innocent people at risk but maintain their support for capital punishment. Finally, those respondents who supported capital punishment and indicated that they did not believe the potentially disqualifying information were coded as (2) *cohesive supporters*. Full descriptive statistics of the dependent variables are portrayed in Table 1.

Independent Variables

Multivariable models in this study include a battery of twenty-two measures of respondents' religious, social, and economic characteristics. The main independent variables for this study are political party affiliation and religious participation. To capture respondent's political party affiliation, the ATP asks respondents "In politics today, do you consider yourself a…" with choices for Republican (contrast), Democrat (1), Independent (1), or "something else" (1). Participants' religious participation is measured with religious service attendance. The ATP asked, "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?" Potential responses ranged from (1) "more than once per week," to (6) "never." These were then recoded to compare those who either "never," or "seldom[ly]" attend religious services (contrast), to those who attend "a few times a year" or "once or twice a month" (1), and those who attend weekly or more than once per week (1). As reported in Table 1, approximately 48%

of respondents never or seldomly attended religious services, 24% attend infrequently, and roughly 28% attend at least weekly.

This study also includes measures indicating the religious tradition with which respondents most closely identify. While the ATP does not collect detailed data regarding the denominational affiliation of its respondents, it does provide a list of eleven traditions (or non-traditions) to choose from. Respondents were coded (1) if they identified with the Protestant condition, (3) if they identified as Catholic, (4) "other religion" if they identified as Mormon, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or "Other," (5) if they identified as Atheist or Agnostic, and (6) if they indicated "nothing in particular." The ATP also asks respondents to identify whether they considered themselves to be a "born-again or evangelical Christian." Protestants who indicated that they did not characterize themselves as born-again or evangelical were recoded as (2). Multi-variable regression analyses treat religious tradition as a series of dummy variables holding born-again Protestants as the contrast category.

Respondents' race and ethnicity is captured with a series of dummy variables indicating whether they identified as white non-Hispanic (0), black non-Hispanic (1), Hispanic (1), or as some other race/ethnicity (1). Regression analyses also control for whether the respondent lived in the South (0), Midwest (1), Northeast (1) or West (1), respondent age is measured categorically from (1) "18-29 years" to (4) "65+ years", sex (female=1), educational attainment (High School or less=0), respondents' annual income is measured from (1) "less than $30,000" to (9) "$100,000 or more," and political ideology is reverse coded to range from (1) "very liberal" to (5) "very conservative." Table 1 displays concise descriptions of variables used in subsequent analyses, as well as bivariate correlations with each of the three dependent variables.

Analytic Strategy

To investigate Americans' support for capital punishment within the context of holding potentially delegitimizing beliefs regarding its effectiveness, fair application, or potential risk to innocent Americans, I employ a multinomial logistic regression strategy.[v] Because the outcome variables of interest organize respondents into three categories, multinomial logistic regression is the most appropriate method of analysis allowing for simultaneous estimation of each indicator without the need for overlapping reference categories (Agresti, 2019; Anderson and Rutkowski 2008). For each dependent variable included in this study, I first analyze a base model including all independent variables described above. I then include interactive models exploring whether and how the association between religious service attendance and respondents' beliefs surrounding capital punishment may be attenuated by political party affiliation.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents results from multinomial logistic regression models predicting support for capital punishment contextualized by respondents' beliefs about its deterrent effects. Models 1 and 3 of Table 2 present coefficients produced by the base model including all control variables described above, as well as the main effects of party identification and religious service attendance. These models present the changes in risk for a respondent to fall into either *discordant support* (model 1), or *cohesive support* (model 3) relative their odds to oppose capital punishment. Models 2 and 4 present relative risk ratios of discordant and cohesive support for capital punishment respectively produced by adding interactions between political party identification and reported religious service attendance to the base model.

[TABLE 2 AND FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Focusing on results reported in model 1 of Table 2, I find several notable results. First, as expected, Democrats (rrr = 0.390, $p < .001$), Independents (rrr = 0.553, $p < .001$), and

respondents belonging to some other political party (rrr = 0.425, p < .001) all have significantly lower odds of supporting capital punishment if they believe that it is not a significant deterrent to crime than are Republicans. More specifically, the odds of Democrats indicating discordant support for capital punishment were 41% lower than were Republicans, the odds for Independents 45% lower, and the odds for other party members 58% lower. Second, results in model 1 indicate that attending religious services at least once per week (rrr = 0.527, p < .001) significantly reduces respondents' odds of indicating discordant support for capital punishment as compared to respondents who seldomly or never attend such services. However, responses from respondents who infrequently attended such services were non-significant, indicating that religious service attendance is an important factor in contextualizes support for capital punishment, but only among those who attend most frequently.

Model 1 of Table 2 also indicates that several of the control variables in these analyses are significantly associated with respondents' discordant support of capital punishment. Compared with "born-again" or evangelical Protestants, respondents who identified with a non-Chrsitian religious tradition had 23% lower odds of supporting capital punishment and believing that it had no deterrent effect, and those who were atheist or agnostic had 50% lower odds. Compared to whites, the odds of black respondents being discordant supporters were 48% lower, while those in the other race category had odds that were 17% higher, and Hispanic respondents did not differ significantly.[vi] Women's odds of discordantly supporting capital punishment were 40% lower than men's. Respondents with some college education had 35% lower odds, and those with a bachelor's degree or more 48.5% lower odds than those with no college education, higher income was negatively associated with discordant support for capital punishment, and finally respondents who were more conservative had significantly higher odds of discordant

support for capital punishment. Because multi-variable analyses in this study include a large number of predictors, and because there are a total of 12 regression models to analyze in this study, I will constrain most discussion of future models to the focal relationships of the study rather than discuss each significant predictor of the model.

Model 3 of Table 2 presents respondents' relative risk of supporting capital punishment and believing that it is an important deterrent to crime rather than opposing capital punishment. Similar to results in model 1, model 3 indicates that Democrats had 44% lower odds of cohesive support for capital punishment than did Republicans, Independents 38% lower odds, and those belonging to some other party 46% lower odds. Furthermore, we again find that in this model infrequent religious service attendance is not significantly associated with support for capital punishment, and that frequent attendance of religious service is associated with a 55% reduction in odds of cohesive support. Together, these results introduce a challenge to prior literatures linking greater religiosity with punitiveness. Notably, the significant differences between black and white respondents' discordant support found in model 1 is not replicated in this model. This suggests that understandings of capital punishment as not contributing to the deterrence of serious criminal offending is an important predictor of support for the death penalty among black Americans, but not among whites.

Models 2 and 4 of Table 2 introduce interactions between religious service attendance and respondents' political party identification. Looking first to the focal relationships reported in model 2, we see the relative risk of discordant support for capital punishment is 63% lower for Independents compared to republicans, 77% lower for Democrats, and 72% lower for members of other political parties after the introduction of interaction terms. Respondents who attend religious services at least weekly had 73% lower odds of reporting discordant support for capital

punishment compared to those who never or seldomly attend. Out of the six interactions included in this model, only two yielded significant results. The positive and significant results among both Independents (rrr =1.914, $p < .05$) and Democrats (rrr = 2.611, $p < .01$) indicate that the association of weekly service attendance with opposing capital punishment is significantly smaller than among Republicans.

Model 4 presents similar relationships between the interaction of political identity with religious service attendance for cohesive support for capital punishment. Again, results indicate that compared to Republicans, Independents, Democrats, and other party members have significantly lower odds of reporting cohesive support for the death penalty. Further, both infrequent and frequent attenders have significantly lower odds of cohesive support compared with respondents who never or seldomly attend religious services. Finally, results from this model indicate that the association between both infrequent and frequent religious service attendance is significantly different for Democrats than it is for Republicans. Specifically, the positive and significant results of this interaction suggest that the negative relationship between service attendance and cohesive support for capital punishment is smaller among Democrats than Republicans.

The plots portrayed in Figure 1 visually confirm the relationships reported in Table 2. The top left quadrant of Figure 1 portrays the predicted probability of Republican respondents opposing, holding conflicted support for, or having cohesive support for capital punishment across religious service attendance. The trend represented by a solid line with diamond-shaped point estimates demonstrates that as Republican respondents increase the frequency of religious service attendance, their probability of opposing capital punishment also increases from roughly 10% among seldom and never attenders, to just over 30% among those attending weekly or

more. The probability that Republican respondents indicate discordant support for the death penalty decreases from about 40% to roughly 30% as service attendance increases. And Among Republicans weekly attenders are significantly less likely to indicate cohesive support for capital punishment than are those who attend infrequently or seldomly. Looking at the other three quadrants of Figure 1, there are similar patterns among Independents, Democrats, and other party members. For each, as frequency of service attendance increases, the probability of opposing capital punishment increases, and both discordant and cohesive support for capital punishment decreases.

[TABLE 3 AND FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Table 3 presents results from multinomial logistic regression models predicting respondents' odds of support for capital punishment despite beliefs that it disproportionately targets racial and ethnic minority members (models 1 and 2), or support with beliefs that racial and ethnic minorities are at no greater risk of receiving the death penalty than are whites (models 3 and 4). Model 1 produces only one significant relationship among the focal independent variables of this study. Frequent service attendance (rrr = 0.558, $p < .001$) is negatively associated with discordant support for capital punishment. After introduction of interaction terms in model 2, we see that the negative association between religious service attendance and support for racialized capital punishment remains significant, but also that this association is smaller among Democrats compared with Republicans. Looking to model 3, we see many more significant differences within the focal relationships of this study. Among political parties, Independents report 54% lower odds of supporting capital punishment than Republicans, the odds were 82% lower for Democrats, and 62% lower for other party members. Compared to those who seldomly attend religious service the odds of cohesive support for capital punishment

among frequent service attenders were 61% lower. The directionality and significance of these relationships are unchanged by the introduction of interaction terms in model 4, but now infrequent attendance is significantly associated with lower odds of support. Among the interaction terms in model 4, we see that frequent service attendance has significantly weaker effects among Independent and Democrat respondents compared to Republican respondents. Further, the positive and significant result for Democrats who attend services infrequently suggests that the negative effect of infrequent attendance is again stronger among Republican respondents.[vii]

Figure 2 visually displays the results produced in models 2 and 4. Two observations stand out in these charts. Focusing first on opposition to capital punishment, we again see that respondents across all political identities who attend religious services frequently are significantly more likely to oppose capital punishment as compared to respondents who rarely or never attend. Alongside associations found in Table 2, and portrayed in Figure 1, these results call to question the punitive effect of religious commitment *per se* and emphasize the need for contextualized understandings of how religion may be associated with support for formal sanctions including capital punishment. Second, we see that Republican respondents who support capital punishment are much less likely to believe that it disproportionately impacts racial and ethnic minorities. Conversely, Democrat respondents who support the death penalty are likelier to be doing so despite beliefs that it negatively impacts people of color.

[TABLE 4 AND FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The final analytic models of this study are presented in Table 4. These analyses predict respondents' support for capital punishment in light of their agreement that innocent people are at risk of receiving the death penalty. Models 1 and 3 present results from the non-interactive

multinomial model predicting discordant support and cohesive support respectively. Paying special attention to the focal relationships presented in model 1, we see that the odds of Republicans supporting capital punishment while also believing that innocent people may be sentenced to death are significantly higher than Independents, Democrats, and other party members. We also see, as in previous analyses, that the odds of expressing discordant support for capital punishment among those who attend religious services frequently are significantly lower than are odds among respondents who seldomly or never attend services. These relationships are similarly reported in model 3, which shows results predicting cohesive support for capital punishment. Models 2 and 4 report results from multinomial logistic regressions including interactions between party identification and religious service attendance. In model 2 we see that inclusion of these terms increases the magnitude of differences at the main-effect level somewhat from those observed in model 1, and the effect of infrequent attendance is now significant and negative. Among the interaction terms themselves, model 2 shows that the effect of frequent service attendance is more moderate for Independents and Democrats than for Republicans, as is the effect of infrequent attendance for Democrats. These relationships are again replicated in model 4 predicting cohesive support for capital punishment, though the interaction between frequent service attendance and Independents is only marginally significant in this model.

Visually evaluating these relationships portrayed in Figure 3 provides greater context to these relationships. As in previous models, Republicans at all levels of religious service attendance are likelier to support capital punishment than to support it. However, unlike beliefs in the deterrent qualities or racialized application of capital punishment, Republicans are also more likely to express beliefs that innocent people may be sentenced to death than believe there are sufficient safeguards in place to prevent that outcome. As in previous models, Republicans

who never or seldomly attend are most likely to support capital punishment, and those who attend frequently are most likely to oppose it. Among Independents, predicted probabilities were highest for discordant support for capital punishment followed by opposition with cohesive support being the least likely outcome. As in previous models opposition increases with attendance and among frequent attenders, opposition was the likeliest outcome with discordant belief falling below. Patterns for Democrats are similar to those of Republicans and Independents, though opposition to the death penalty is the likeliest outcome across all attendance levels.

Taken together, the results presented in Tables 2 through 4 suggest that contrary to pervasive understandings of religious commitment, regular attendance of religious services withers support for capital punishment rather than promotes it. Furthermore, the oppositional impact of religious service attendance seems to be strongest among Republican respondents, though partisanship is never fully overcome in these models. The implications of these results for the United States' political landscape, particularly in light of progressive secularization among Americans are explored in the following section.

DISCUSSION

Research investigating American support for capital punishment consistently finds that it has strong relationships with partisan identity and various aspects of religious life (Bader et al. 2010; Beckett and Sason 2003; Butler et al. 2017; Cullen et al. 2000). Previous research has highlighted the doles of ideological rigidity (Cullen et al 1985; Malka et al. 2017), fear or animus towards outsiders (Baker et al. 2018; Westwood 2022), and preferences for a more ordered society (Davis 2018; Perry et al. 2019) as theoretical explanations for these associations. Despite a plethora of scientific study focused on explaining these relationships, two important questions

remain. The first addresses whether institutional religious participation—which has been shown to reduce support for capital punishment (Bader et al. 2010; Baker and Booth 2016; Davis 2018)—may function differently among Republicans than it does for Democrats. Because political identity is integral not only in Americans' participation in religion writ large (Hout and Fischer 2014), but also in their selection into certain congregations (Djupe et al. 2018; Margolis 2022), it is important to understand whether religious participation operates differently along partisan lines. The second considers whether religious commitment, partisanship, or their intersection may help us understand who supports capital punishment in spite of beliefs in its ineffectiveness, inequity, or injustice.

To address these questions paper analyzed the relationships between religious practice, partisan affiliation, and contextualized support for the death penalty using data from Wave 87 of Pew Research's American Trends Panel. Using responses from four questions found in these data, I constructed three measures of contextualized support for capital punishment. Respondents were organized by their *opposition* to, *discordant support* for, or *cohesive support* for the death penalty. Using a series of multinomial logistic regression models, I found first, that religious practice is significantly associated with opposition to capital punishment among all partisan groups. Second, that the oppositional effect of frequent service attendance was strongest among Republican respondents, but that this effect was not strong enough to overcome partisanship. Third, I found that most Democrats who support capital punishment expressed discordant support, believing that it was either not an effective deterrent of serious crime, or that racial and ethinic minorities are disproportionately sentenced to death. Republicans, however, were much more likely to express cohesive support for capital punishment. This finding calls to question the impact that specific knowledge about capital punishment has on whether Americans will support

or oppose it. For a non-trivial number of Democrats, at least, the belief that capital punishment is ineffective and racialized is not sufficient to erode their support for its continued use.

While this study provides insight into the complementary roles partisanship and religion play in predicting American support for capital punishment, several limitations are worth acknowledging. First, because these data are cross-sectional, I am unable establish a temporal order to these relationships. I cannot, therefore, definitively say whether support for capital punishment, religious practice, or partisan affiliation are responsible for the associations presented in this study. It may also be that attitudes toward the death penalty shift simultaneously with changes in religious service attendance and party affiliation. Second, despite the many advantages to using the American Trends Panel, several important variables from previous research are unavailable in these data. Namely, the ATP does not include measures of religious fundamentalism or biblical literalism both of which are important predictors of support for the death penalty (Davis 2023; Perry and Whitehead 2021). This wave of the ATP also does not include any measures of respondents' belief in the role of religion in government which are associated with punitiveness in previous studies (Davis 2018; Perry et al. 2019; Seto and Said 2022). Finally, because these data come from surveys responses, they are unable to fully capture the complexity of respondents' beliefs about the death penalty, particularly among those who express discordant support. Future research efforts should seek to address these gaps by including more measures of religious belief and identity, and through qualitative studies of beliefs and attitudes toward capital punishment in society.

These limitations notwithstanding, the current study represents an important stepping stone for both future research and efforts to address issues within the American criminal justice system. Together, these results have several important implications for future research. First,

regarding the relationship between partisan affiliation and support for capital punishment, my results call to question the importance of specific beliefs about capital punishment in differentiating Democrats from Republicans. Though Democrats are more likely to believe that the death penalty both disproportionately targets minorities and is ineffective as a crime deterrent, for many these beliefs did not nullify their support of capital punishment. Second, contrary to previous literatures suggesting that more conservative religious practice may amplify support for the death penalty (Bones and Sabriseilabi 2018; Grasmick et al. 2013; Savelsberg 2004), the results presented in this study suggest that religious practice tempers support for capital punishment even among more conservative congregants. This raises concerns about the implications of secularization, particularly among Republicans, for future efforts to reform the criminal justice system. Finally, the findings of this study contribute to a growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of context when assessing social and political attitudes through a religious lens (Ammerman 2020; Baker and Whitehead 2020; Davis and Perry 2021; Perry 2023). It is my hope that this study encourages more investigations into the complexity of Americans' understandings of capital punishment and I urge scholars to continue investigating their relationship with both religious practice and belonging.

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Table 1**. Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean or %	Range	Corr. with CapPun Deter	Corr. with CapPun Racialized	Corr with CapPun Risk Innocent
Death Penalty	55.8	0-1	-	-	-
Death Penalty Deters	33.2	0-1	-	-	-
Death Penalty Racialized	67.5	0-1	-	-	-
Death Penalty Risks Innocents	82.6	0-1	-	-	-
CapPun Deter	0.832	0-2	-	-	-
CapPun Racialized	0.818	0-2	0.758***	-	-
CapPun Risk Innocent	0.707	0-2	0.754***	0.849***	-
Born-Again Protestant	25.5	0-1	0.018	0.057**	0.046**
Not Born-Again Protestant	14.6	0-1	0.049**	0.030*	0.012
Catholic	23.2	0-1	0.035*	0.058***	0.057***
Other Religion	8.2	0-1	-0.068***	-0.059***	-0.052***
Atheist/Agnostic	11.1	0-1	-0.105**	-0.148***	-0.127***
Nothing in Particular	17.5	0-1	0.031*	0.009	0.016
White	37.7	0-1	0.63***	0.172***	0.095***
Black	18.8	0-1	-0.01	-0.056***	-0.025†
Hispanic	31.9	0-1	0.007	0.003	0.014
Other Race	11.7	0-1	-0.033*	0.163	-0.001
South	45.6	0-1	0.026†	0.011	0.01
Midwest	17.1	0-1	-0.011	0.015	-0.0003
Northeast	14.11	0-1	-0.02	-0.034*	-0.037**
West	23.3	0-1	-0.004	0.002	0.019
Age	2.56	1-4	0.056***	0.101***	0.073***
Man	41.6	0-1	-	-	-
Woman	58.4	0-1	-0.012	-0.091***	-0.098***
High School or Less	23.3	0-1	0.138***	0.191***	0.163***
Some College	28.3	0-1	0.053***	0.033*	0.030*
Bachelor's Degree+	48.3	0-1	-0.164***	-0.19***	-0.165***
Income	4.78	1-9	-0.058***	-0.047**	-0.049***
Political Ideology	2.93	1-5	0.239***	0.426***	0.350***
Republican	18.7	0-1	0.1628***	0.3635***	0.2685***
Independent	27.4	0-1	0.030*	0.050**	0.025†
Democrat	42.5	0-1	-0.142***	-0.318***	-0.216***
Other Party	11.4	0-1	-0.022	-0.022	-0.030*
Never/ Seldom Attend	48.1	0-1	0.008**	-0.028*	-0.035*
Infrequent Attendance	24.2	0-1	0.052***	0.054***	0.062***
Frequent Attendance	27.8	0-1	-0.058***	-0.020***	-0.020***

Table 2**. Multinomial logistic regression predicting support for capital punishment despite knowledge that it does not deter crime**

Reference: Oppose Capital Punishment	*Discordant Support*				*Cohesive Support*			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE
Not Born-Again Protestant	0.833	0.12	0.817	0.12	1.173	0.15	1.160	0.15
Catholic	0.879	0.11	0.858	0.11	1.002	0.13	0.976	0.12
Other Religion	0.777*	0.13	0.768	0.13	0.634*	0.11	0.627**	0.11
Atheist/Agnostic	0.500*	0.09	0.503***	0.09	0.663*	0.11	0.665*	0.11
Nothing in Particular	0.867	0.12	0.860	0.13	0.974	0.14	0.962	0.14
Black	0.521***	0.07	0.493***	0.07	0.867	0.10	0.819†	0.10
Hispanic	1.123	0.12	1.113	0.12	0.918	0.10	0.911	0.10
Other Race	1.165***	0.22	1.651***	0.22	0.925	0.13	0.918	0.13
Midwest	0.967	0.11	0.963	0.11	0.836	0.09	0.835	0.09
Northeast	0.855	0.11	0.848	0.11	0.871	0.10	0.864	0.10
West	1.093	0.11	1.095	0.11	0.993	0.10	0.998	0.10
Age	1..068	0.05	1.064	0.05	1.059	0.05	1.056	0.05
Woman	0.603***	0.05	0.602***	0.05	1.021	0.08	1.019	0.08
Some College	0.647***	0.07	0.656***	0.08	0.734**	0.08	0.739**	0.08
Bachelor’s Degree+	0.514***	0.06	0.521***	0.06	0.483***	0.05	0.490***	0.05
Income	0.971***	0.01	0.972*	0.01	1.002	0.01	1.003	0.01
Political Ideology	2.025***	0.10	2.019***	0.10	1.595***	0.08	1.589***	0.08
Independent	0.553***	0.07	0.371***	0.08	0.618***	0.08	0.425***	0.10
Democrat	0.390***	0.05	0.232***	0.05	0.560***	0.08	0.323***	0.07
Other Party	0.425***	0.07	0.279***	0.07	0.540***	0.09	0.382***	0.10
Infrequent Attendance	0.985	0.11	0.641	0.17	0.909	0.09	0.523*	0.15
Frequent Attendance	0.527***	0.06	0.273***	0.07	0.452***	0.05	0.247***	0.06
Independent x Infrequent Attendance			1.408	0.45			1.643	0.55

Independent x Frequent Attendance			1.914*	0.56			1.496	0.47
Democrat x Infrequent Attendance			1.704	0.53			2.062*	0.65
Democrat x Frequent Attendance			2.611**	0.75			2.601**	0.74
Other Party x Infrequent Attendance			1.710	0.68			1.696	0.68
Other Party x Frequent Attendance			1.743	0.65			1.259	0.49
Constant	0.450**	0.28	0.707	0.24	0.543*	0.29	0.860	0.28
McFadden R2	0.11		0.13					

Note: Pew ATP Wave 87
N= 4,587
Contrast= Born-Again Protestant, White, South, Man, High School or Less Education, and Republican

Figure 1. Predicted Support of Capital Punishment Despite Belief that it does not Deter Crime.

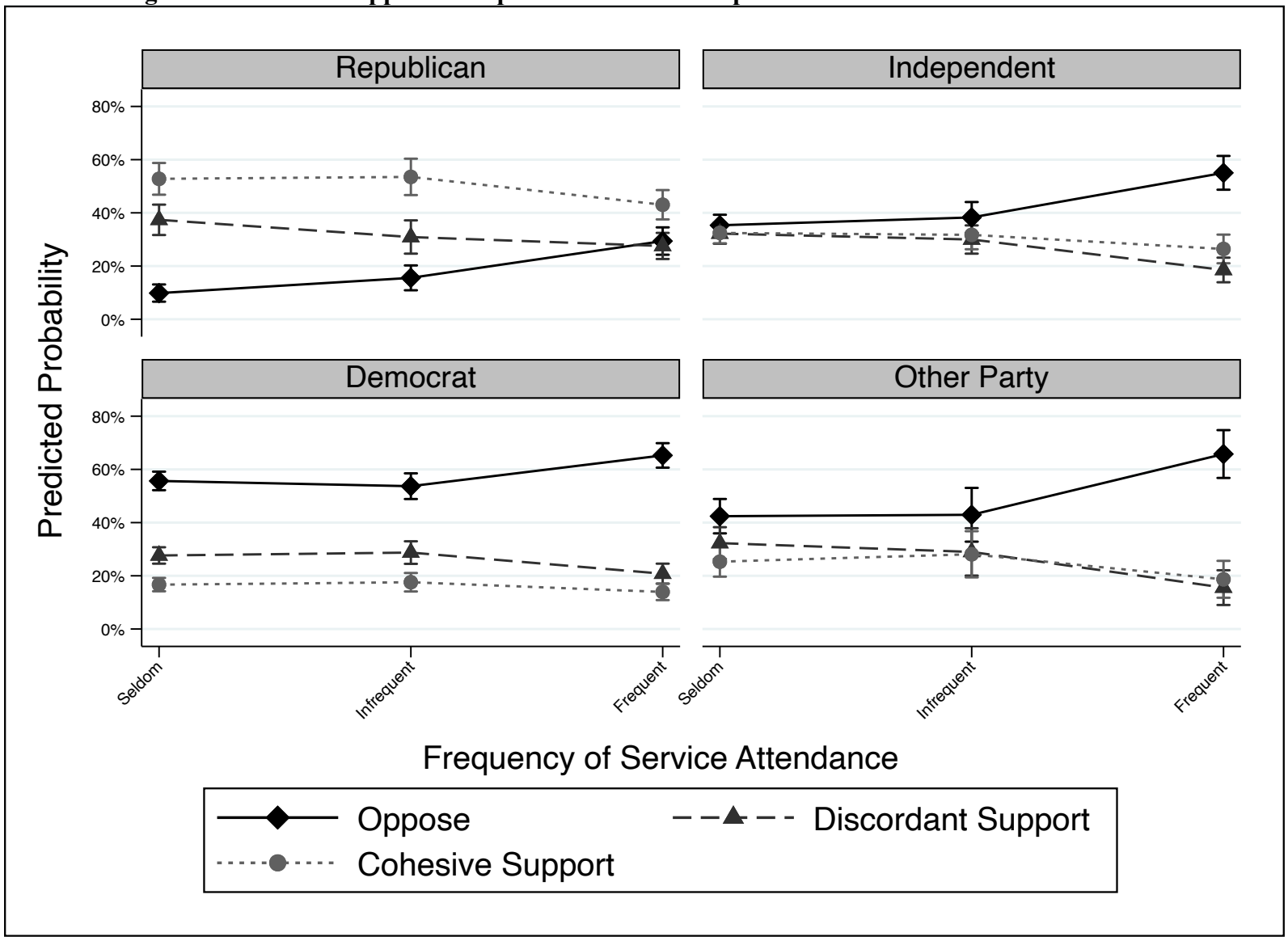


Table 3. **Multinomial logistic regression predicting support for capital punishment despite knowledge that it disproportionately impacts racial and ethnic minority groups**

Reference: Oppose Capital Punishment	*Discordant Support*				*Cohesive Support*			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Not Born-Again Protestant	1.117	0.14	1.103	0.14	0.982	0.15	0.975	0.15
Catholic	1.032	0.13	1.009	0.12	0.984	0.14	0.958	0.14
Other Religion	0.722*	0.12	0.714*	0.12	0.771	0.15	0.766	0.15
Atheist/Agnostic	0.723*	0.12	0.716*	0.12	0.420***	0.09	0.426***	0.09
Nothing in Particular	1.039	0.14	1.017	0.12	0.146***	0.15	0.885	0.15
Black	1.211†	0.14	1.163	0.11	0.777*	0.03	0.138***	0.03
Hispanic	1.260	0.13	1.249*	0.14	0.982	0.09	0.773*	0.09
Other Race	1.489**	0.19	1.482**	0.13	0.982	0.15	0.972	0.15
Midwest	0.880	0.09	0.879	0.13	0.844	0.11	0.839	0.11
Northeast	0.911	0.10	0.907	0.19	0.744*	0.11	0.732*	0.10
West	1.076	0.10	1.081	0.10	0.905	0.11	0.903	0.11
Age	1.026	0.04	1.023	0.10	1.111*	0.06	1.112*	0.06
Woman	0.907	0.07	0.904	0.10	0.665***	0.06	0.667***	0.06
Some College	0.772*	0.08	0.775*	0.04	0.614***	0.08	0.622***	0.08
Bachelor's Degree+	0.572***	0.06	0.568***	0.07	0.402***	0.05	0.410***	0.05
Income	0.997	0.01	0.997	0.08	0.975	0.02	0.977	0.02
Political Ideology	1.482***	0.07	1.477***	0.07	2.589***	0.16	20586***	0.16
Independent	1.034	0.14	0.818	0.20	0.457***	0.06	0.291***	0.07
Democrat	1.089	0.15	0.732	0.18	0.183***	0.03	0.102***	0.02
Other Party	0.837	0.14	0.614†	0.17	0.377***	0.06	0.286***	0.08
Infrequent Attendance	0.941	0.09	0.666	0.21	0.946	0.12	0.553*	0.15
Frequent Attendance	0.558***	0.06	0.345***	0.10	0.392***	0.06	0.219***	0.05
Independent x Infrequent Attendance			1.184	0.43			1.825†	0.59

Independent x Frequent Attendance			1.317	0.44			2.009*	0.61
Democrat x Infrequent Attendance			1.548	0.53			2.518**	0.86
Democrat x Frequent Attendance			2.058*	0.63			2.428*	0.84
Other Party x Infrequent Attendance			1.791	0.75			1.195	0.50
Other Party x Frequent Attendance			1.193	0.48			1.511	0.59
Constant	0.346***	0.10	0.494*	0..17	0.321**	0.11	0.480*	0.18
McFadden R2	0.16		0.18					

Note: Pew ATP Wave 87
N= 4,572
Contrast= Born-Again Protestant, White, South, Man, High School or Less Education, and Republican

Figure 2. Predicted Support for Capital Punishment Despite Belief that Minorities are at Greater Risk

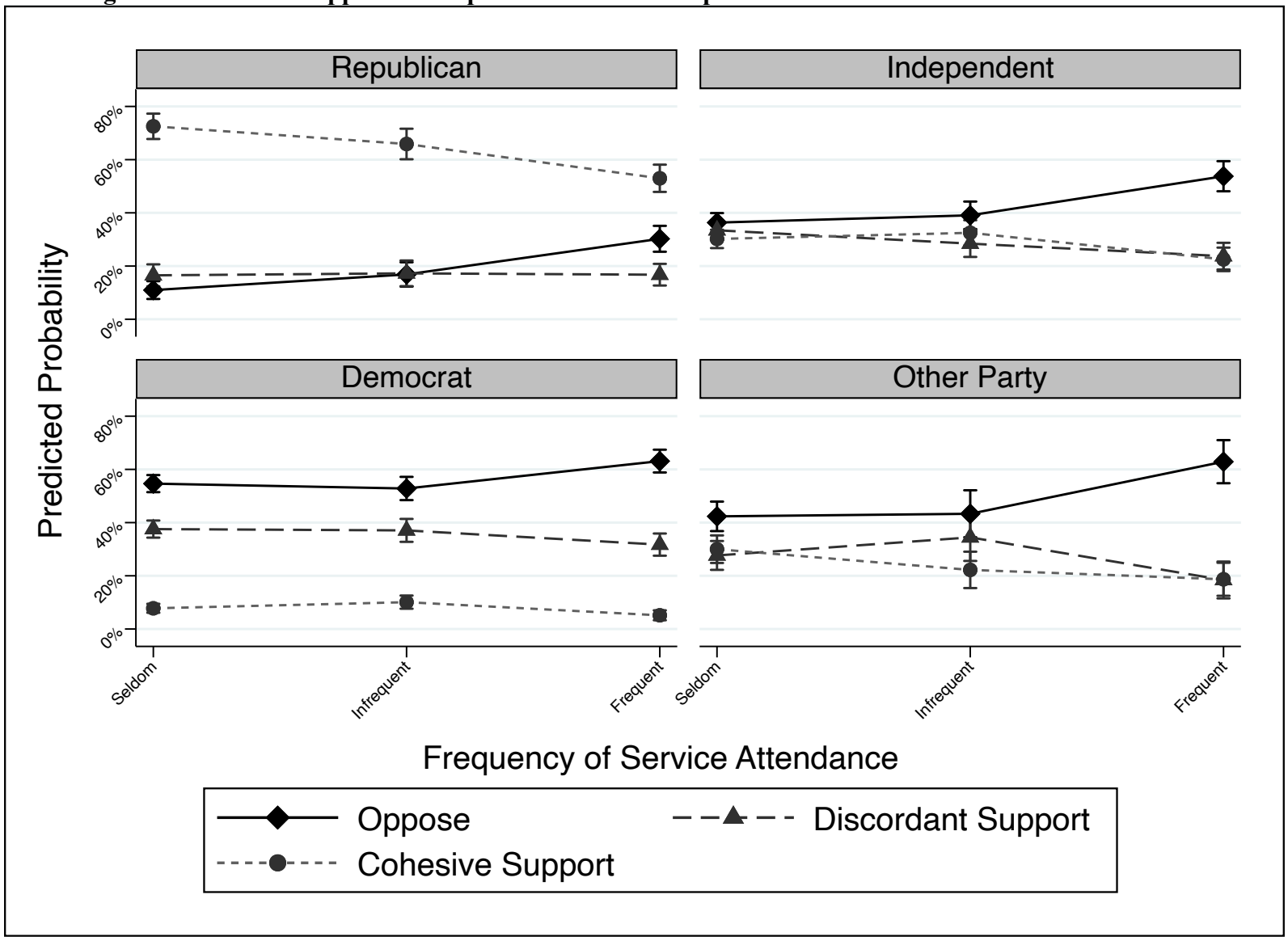


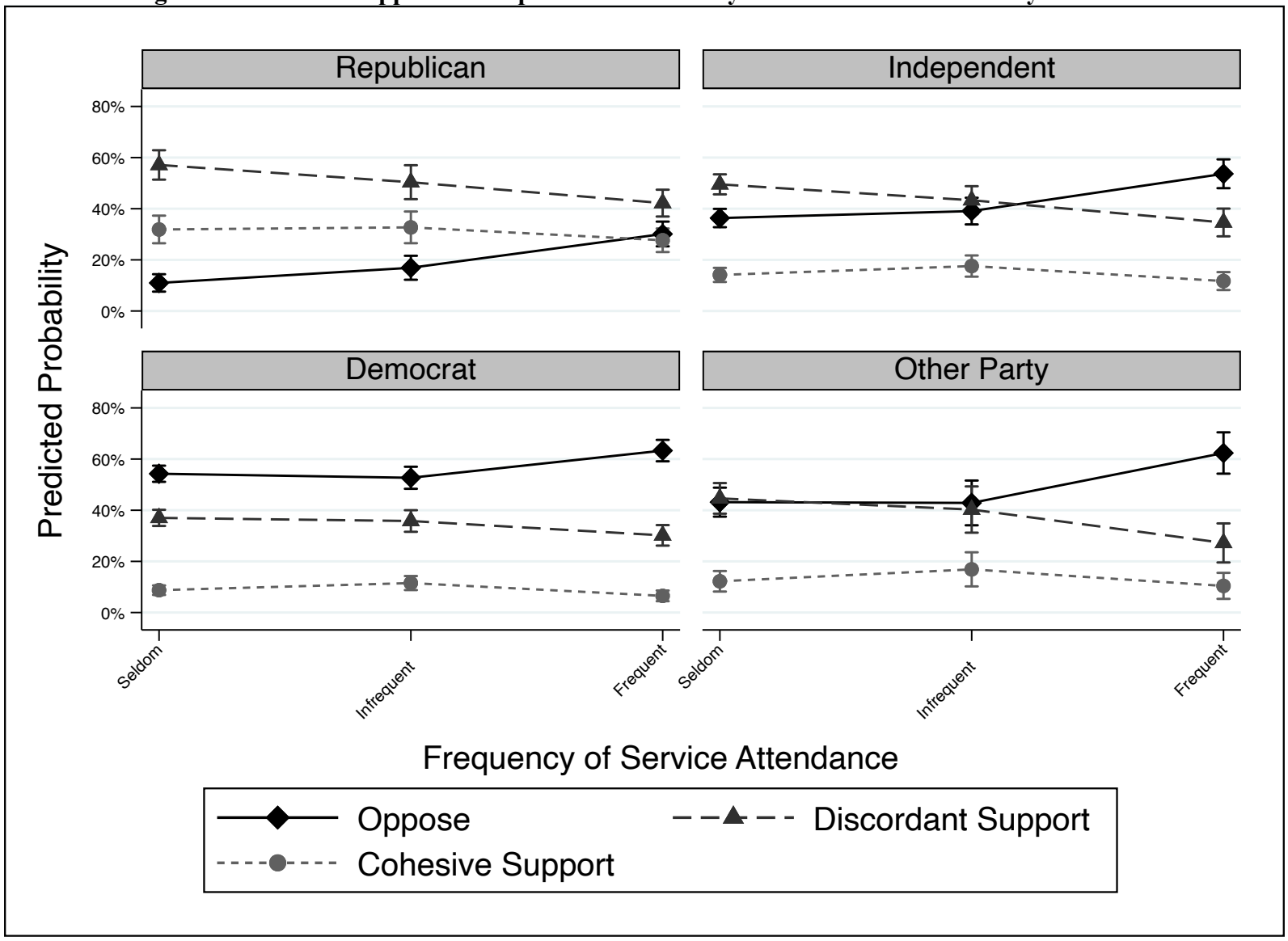
Table 4**. Multinomial logistic regression predicting support for capital punishment despite knowledge that innocents may be executed**

Reference: Oppose Capital Punishment	*Discordant Support*				*Cohesive Support*			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Not Born-Again Protestant	1.119	0.12	1.103	0.12	0.814	0.17	0..808	0.17
Catholic	0.930	0.11	0.906	0.11	1.006	0.15	0.989	0.15
Other Religion	0.666**	0.15	0.658**	0.15	0.796	0.21	0.789	0.21
Atheist/Agnostic	0.602**	0.15	0.604**	0.15	0.529**	0.23	0.535**	0.24
Nothing in Particular	0.936	0.13	0.926	0.13	0.968	0.18	0.970	0.18
Black	0.780*	0.11	0.737**	0.11	0.485***	0.18	0.471***	0.18
Hispanic	1.017	0.09	1.009	0.10	0.945	0.13	0.943	0.13
Other Race	1.207	0.12	1.202	0.12	1.355†	0.16	1.355†	0.16
Midwest	0.889	0.10	0.888	0.10	0.905	0.14	0.905	0.14
Northeast	0.886	0.11	0.879	0.11	0.779	0.16	0.773	0.16
West	1.007	0.09	1.010	0.09	1.116	0.13	1.116	0.13
Age	1.063	0.04	1.059	0.04	1.048	0.05	1.048	0.06
Woman	0.883†	0.07	0.881†	0.07	0.555***	0.10	0.554***	0.10
Some College	0.751**	0.10	0.760**	0.10	0.586***	0.13	0.580***	0.13
Bachelor's Degree+	0.535***	0.10	0.543***	0.10	0.421***	0.13	0.425***	0.14
Income	0.993	0.01	0.993	0.01	0.979	0.02	0.980	0.02
Political Ideology	1.674***	0.04	1.668***	0.04	2.273***	0.06	2.260***	0.06
Independent	0.640***	0.12	0.439***	0.21	0.435***	0.15	0.282***	0.25
Democrat	0.519***	0.12	0.307***	0.21	0.369***	0.16	0.218***	0.25
Other Party	0.520***	0.15	0.358***	0.24	0.361***	0.19	0.223***	0.30
Infrequent Attendance	0.886	0.09	0.563*	0.27	1.169	0.15	0.651	0.29
Frequent Attendance	0.484***	0.10	0.253***	0.24	0.516***	0.07	0.289***	0.26
Independent x Infrequent Attendance			1.439	0.31			1.777	0.36

Independent x Frequent Attendance			1.749*	0.28			1.766†	0.34
Democrat x Infrequent Attendance			1.789*	0.29			2.133*	0.35
Democrat x Frequent Attendance			2.654***	0.26			2.083*	0.34
Other Party x Infrequent Attendance			1.632	0.37			2.193†	0.46
Other Party x Frequent Attendance			1.514	0.34			1.774	0.45
Constant	0.746	0.26	1.169	0.30	0.210***	0.08	0.330	0.39
McFadden R2	0.10		0.11					

Note: Pew ATP Wave 87
N= 4,607
Contrast= Born-Again Protestant, White, South, Man, High School or Less Education, and Republican

Figure 3. Predicted Support for Capital Punishment by Beliefs that Innocents may be at Risk



Throw Away the Key: Government-Sponsored Religion, Race, Education, and beliefs about Criminal Sentencing

Previous research highlights the independent influences of religious commitment, racial and ethnic identity, and educational attainment on the formation of punitive attitudes among Americans. Generally, studies find that white Americans, those with lower levels of educational attainment, and those who are more religious are likelier to support more expansive or strict forms of social control. More recent research examining the role of public support for government-sponsored religion (GSR) including white Christian nationalism and public religious commitment suggests that ethno-religious identities operate above and beyond traditional measures of Christianity to predict these behaviors. Further, this research often finds that effects of the overlap of religious and civic identity varies significantly across racial and ethnic lines. A lingering question in this body of work is whether and how formal educational training may attenuate relationships between support for GSR and beliefs about the application of criminal justice. To address this gap, the current study analyzes nationally representative data from Pew's American Trends Panel to assess beliefs that prison sentences are not long enough. Results from logistic regression models indicate that Americans who support GSR are more likely to believe criminal sentences should be longer. However, results from interactive models suggest that this relationship is only salient among white respondents. Finally, results suggest the association between GSR and punitiveness is amplified at higher levels of educational attainment. Implications of these findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The United States is among the most punitive countries in the world. The International Centre for Prison Studies reports that the incarceration rate in the US is 629 persons per 100,000 population, translating to a total population of approximately 1.68 million incarcerated Americans (World Prison Brief, 2021). This dwarfs the rates of economically and technologically similar nations including England (148/100,000), and Poland (334/100,000). More than its unmatched scope, however, criminal justice in America is both excessively punitive and highly racialized compared to other Western nations (Alexander, 2012; Garland 2020; Looman and Carl 2015; Wakefield and Wildeman 2014). Adoption of policies intended to sanction crime and delinquency more harshly over the past 40 years has fundamentally altered America's relationship with criminal justice leading to the rise of mass incarceration (Clear and Frost 2020; Enns 2016; Lynch 2011). Though institutional forces in the form of policy and organizational practice have contributed to penal expansion, it has also been supported by an underlying culture of punitiveness among Americans at large (Brown and Socia 2017; Frost 2010; Trahan et al. 2019; Unnever and Cullen 2010; Western 2006).

Building on prior research investigating how the intersection of race and religion undergirds cultural support for harsher punishments for crime, as well as literature outlining the complicated relationship between educational attainment and punitiveness, I propose that commitment to particular visions of religion's role in public life works in concert with race and education to shape American's punitive sentiments. More specifically, I examine whether support for government sponsorship of religious values predicts punitiveness, and if this relationship is moderated by racial or educational contexts. I argue, first, that approval of government sponsored religion (GSR) represents a more rigid cultural schema devoted to power,

order, and specific violence such that it amplifies support for harsher sanctions for crime (Gorski and Perry 2022). Second, that white racial identity represents a historical position of privilege characterized by disproportionate control over cultural and institutional power which provides cognitive distance from proposed expansions of criminal sanctions. At the same time this privilege makes whites more acutely aware of threats to this power, particularly if those threats have been racialized in decades of public discourse about crime and "troublemakers" (Alexander 2012; Beckett and Francis 2020; Weitzer and Tuch 2004). Finally, I propose that the inconsistent relationship between educational attainment and various aspects of punitiveness is due, in part, to underlying cultural schemas including belief in state-sponsored religion which are resistant to assumed liberalizing effects of education. Drawing on data from the American Trends Panel collected by Pew Research Center, this study shows that Americans' support for GSR interacts with white racial identity to bolster punitive sentiment. I also document how the influence of support for GSR is contextualized by educational attainment such that its association with punitiveness is amplified at higher levels of education.

This study makes contributions to three important literatures: punishment, race, and religion. First, while punitive sentiments have been of great interest to criminologists, sociologists, and psychologists alike, particularly in the past 20 years (Baker et al. 2018; Kleck and Jackson 2017; Pickett 2019; Ramirez 2013a, 2013b), such studies tend to ignore how attitudes toward criminal punishment are shaped by beliefs that civic and religious life should be interconnected, particularly among white Americans (Davis 2018, 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2022; Perry et al. 2019). The current study demonstrates that support for expansive criminal punishment is at least partially shaped by beliefs in GSR, and that this connection is wholly contingent on race. Given the demonstrable and growing influence of Christian nationalism and

public religious commitment within conservative political movements in the United States, the role of support for GSR in shaping the social and political dimensions of criminal justice is of great interest.

Second, this study questions the salience of educational attainment *per se* as a viable solution to punitive cultural elements. Despite evidence suggesting that educational attainment reduces support for capital punishment (Leiber et al. 2002; Warr and Stafford 1984), and harsh criminal punishment (Anderson et al. 2017), this research has largely ignored the contextual nature of educational attainment. This study demonstrates that certain powerful cultural schemas which undergird attitudes favorable to harsh criminal punishment may moderate, or wholly mitigate, education's relationship with punitiveness. Ultimately, results from this study suggest that there is a need for continued focus on the influence of Americans' belief in institutionally supported religious values over important facets civic life, and particularly among scholars interested in the proliferation and continuation of the carceral state.

BACKGROUND

Whiteness and Punitiveness

Research tells us that white racial identity is among the strongest and most persistent predictors of punitive sentiments among Americans (Baumgartner et al. 2022; Cullen et al. 1996; Sabriseilabi et al. 2022). Two theoretical frameworks help to explain this connection. First, whiteness represents a privileged position in society which simultaneously provides white Americans with reasonable certainty that they are unlikely to face injustice or extrajudicial violence from the police, while also constructing an imagined person of color as the proposed "criminal" when asked hypothetically (Barkan and Cohn 1994, 2005; Davis 2019; Weitzer and Tuch 2004). Thus, when considering whether the American judicial system is sufficiently harsh

(Davis 2023), violent (Perry et al. 2019), or expansive (Chiricos et al. 2004), white Americans are more likely to interpret the consequences of criminal justice as socially distal. Alternatively, physical (Stupi et al. 2016) or cultural threat (Johnson and Kuhns 2009; King and Wheelock 2007; Newman et al. 2012) have been posed as an explanation for whites' relative support for more robust mechanisms of social control. More specifically, as nonwhites in a region or society come to represent a significant political or cultural threat to white hegemony, whites respond both implicitly and explicitly with calls to expand policing or border security. Furthermore, punitive sentiment generally, support for the death penalty, and approval of police use of force among white Americans has been associated with racial resentment and animosity (Baranauskas 2022; Carter and Corra 2016; Morris and LeCount 2020).

While previous research has sought to uncover which of these two explanations is most reasonably supported by the data, I argue that they work in tandem to support the broader project of whiteness (Davis 2019; Feagin 2013). Specifically, whiteness operates as a significant focal lens through which events, messages, and identities are interpreted to support extant power structures and defend the status quo. Considering both its emergence to reassert white dominance in the post-Civil War Reconstruction era, as well as its current disproportionate impact on American society today, the alliance between whiteness and mass incarceration permeates the application of Justice in the United States (Alexander 2012). The current study expands our understanding of how whiteness may interact with other social identities, specifically support for GSR, to promote punitive sentiment among Americans.

Education and Punishment

There are several reasons to suspect that Americans with higher levels of education would be less likely to support longer prison sentences. For one thing, higher levels of education

are negatively associated with dogmatism and ideological rigidity (Beyerlein 2004; Hamtiaux and Houssemand 2012) both of which would predict support for subjectivity and rehabilitation in criminal justice. College education, specifically, is associated with greater tolerance of out groups (Schwadel and Garneau 2017) exposure to cultural diversity (Moiseyenko 2005), and concern for racial justice in society (Schuman et al. 1997). Furthermore, educational attainment is assumed to promote both critical assessment of social problems and practical reasoning (Fencl 2010) which may lead people with higher levels of education to conclude that punitive sanctioning is impractical. Finally, research has argued that selection into, and achievement of higher levels of education has a liberalizing effect which may temper support for harsh criminal sentencing (Funk and Willits 1987; Uecker et al. 2007)

While theoretical linkages between education and punitiveness seem straight-forward, research exploring this relationship has yielded mixed results. Some studies do indeed find that educational attainment is negatively associated with punitive sentiment (Anderson et al. 2017; Halim and Stiles 2001). For example, Payne et al. (2004) find that education is negatively associated with punitiveness broadly defined. Further research shows that college educated Americans are less inclined to favor harsh criminal punishments (Mayhew and Kesteren 2013) and capital punishment more specifically (Soss et al. 2003; Stack 2003). Other studies, however, find evidence that educational attainment may be more weakly tied to punitive sentiment than previously thought and becomes non-significant when social and religious factors are accounted for (Bader et al. 2010; Ridener and Kuehn 2017). Results from these studies suggest that, while education may indicate a preference for less punitive forms of criminal justice in the aggregate, this association is highly contextual. Building on these findings, the current study examines the

associations between educational attainment and punitiveness and investigates whether these associations are moderated by respondent support for state-sponsored religion.

Religiosity, State-Sponsored Religion, and Punitiveness

A robust literature now exists which connects various aspects of American religious life to support for harsher, longer, and more deadly forms of punishment for criminals (Applegate et al. 2000; Unnever and Cullen 2006; Unnever et al. 2006). Religious affiliation and practice have been linked to more conservative political ideology, authoritarian attitudes, more racial homogeny, and less tolerance of outsiders (Applegate et al. 2000; Baker and Booth 2016; Britt 1998). Conservative religious identities including self-proclaimed fundamentalism, biblical literalism, and evangelicalism are especially strong predictors of beliefs in punitive or retributive justice in response to deviant behavior (Bader et al. 2010; Grasmick et al. 1992; Grasmick et al. 1993; Thompson and Froese 2016). This research argues that these forms of religious expression encourage absolute delineation between right and wrong, and in so doing, legitimize stricter and more stigmatizing beliefs regarding those who violate the sacred boundaries that are clearly defined by their religion (Erikson 2005; Savelsberg 2004).

Not all aspects of religion equally inform these boundaries, however. While religious service attendance and affiliation with more conservative Christian churches have historically been linked to increased approval of punitive responses to crime and delinquency (Grasmick et al. 1992, 1993; Payne et al. 2004), recent studies have argued that research should focus on more nuanced aspects of religious beliefs (Bader et al 2010; Davis 2018; Leak and Randall 1995; Unnever and Cullen 2006). Bader and his colleagues (2010), for example, using data from the Baylor Religion Survey show that by including measures of the individual's image of god as either angry or loving we can more accurately understand how religious beliefs influence

attitudes towards criminal behavior. Similarly, Leak and Randall's (1995) study indicates the need for research to control for more sophisticated measures of religiosity to accurately identify how it influences their religious beliefs. Their findings show that by controlling for more accurate measures of religiosity, denominational influences can be mediated. Recently, Baker and Booth (2016) found that belief in religious evil was associated with approval of the death penalty and stricter punishments for federal crimes. These studies demonstrate the need for researchers to use more comprehensive models of religious beliefs and practice to fully understand its influence over how individuals conceptualize deviance and how they believe society should react to deviant individuals or groups.

In a related and growing literature exploring the role of Christian nationalism in American civic life, research now shows that as a person more intimately intertwines "Christian" identity with being "truly American" their perception of in-group membership becomes more constrained. Specifically, Gorski and Perry (2022) contend that Christian nationalism provides cultural narratives in the form of a "deep story" which simultaneously mythologizes the role of Christianity in the founding of America and in the framing of national institutions and traditions. This story, they contend, acts as a framework through which Christian nationalists understand the past and examine the present such that legacies of social and structural stratification are often obfuscated, and efforts highlight and critique these injustices are resisted (Perry et al. 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2015; Perry et al. 2022).

Unsurprisingly, Christian nationalism tends to be associated with attitudes that are more closely aligned with the maintenance of a more "traditionalist" image of social order both formally and symbolically (Davis 2018; Whitehead and Perry 2020; Perry and Whitehead 2021). Davis (2018), for example, finds that Christian nationalists are likelier to emphasize the use of

strict or even lethal means of formal control for "criminals" and "troublemakers." Similarly, Whitehead, Schnabel, and Perry (2018) argue that Christian nationalism's conflation of a subset of civic rights with "God's plan" for America inclines adherents, above and beyond sociodemographic and political identities, to oppose the expansion of firearms legislation. At the same time, white Christian nationalism is strongly associated with efforts to constrain the liberties of perceived outsiders. Prior research demonstrates that Christian nationalism predicts greater opposition to same-sex marriage, and reigning in access to abortion services for women (Whitehead and Perry 2015, 2020). Further, Davis and Perry (2021) find that among five historically marginalized groups Christian nationalism's emphasis on social order writ large is associated with preferences for more constrained speech for all groups.

Building on this body of research, this study argues that Americans who favor government support for religious beliefs and values in civic life are more supportive of strong social control and order. The prospect of state-enforced religious values necessitates an *a priori* consideration that those values would not be shared by everyone in society, and therefore is more appealing to those for whom current power structures are most beneficial. I test this theory by examining the relationship between support for government sponsored religion and punitive sentiment. Moreover, this study considers whether this relationship is contextualized by both race and educational attainment.

EXPECTATIONS

This study seeks to understand how support for government sponsored religion may work in conjunction with race and education to predict more punitive responses to crime and delinquency. Specifically, analyses focus on the probability of respondents' belief that the amount of time spent in prison by criminals is "too little." Considering prior literature

demonstrating that Christian nationalism is strongly associated with punitive measures both independently and in concert with race and ethnicity, this study tests the following hypotheses regarding support for GSR:

Hypothesis 1: Support for GSR will be positively associated with punitive attitudes net of other factors.

Hypothesis 2: Punitive sentiments will be strongest among white respondents, net of other social and demographic influences.

Hypothesis 3: The association between support for GSR and punitive attitudes toward crime will be strongest among white respondents.

Further, in line with prior research outlining the association between educational attainment and punitive sentiments, analyses will also consider the following:

Hypothesis 4: Educational attainment will be negatively associated with punitive sentiment in multi-variable analyses.

Hypothesis 5: The association between GSR and punitiveness will be strongest among respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher level of education.

DATA

To assess the relationships between support for state religion, race, and educational attainment with American beliefs regarding criminal punishment, I analyze data from the Pew Research American Trends Panel (ATP). The ATP is an online survey panel of Americans based on random sampling of residential addresses throughout the United States. Panelists who do not have access to the internet or a computer are provided a tablet to complete the survey. Data for this study come from Wave 92 of the ATP collected between July 8 and 18, 2021, and includes responses from 10,221 of the 11,692 potential respondents (87% response rate). The ATP

includes wave specific weighting to account for variation in probability of being selected for a specific wave and oversampling of target populations. After listwise deletion of missing cases during multivariable analyses, the final analytic sample includes 9,152 respondents. Table 1 presents weighted descriptive statistics of all variables used in subsequent analyses. The final column of Table 1 presents the weighted bivariate correlation with punitive attitudes towards sentencing for each variable. All descriptive statistics are constrained to only include respondents present in the full analytic model.

METHOD

Dependent Variable

The current study analyzes Americans' beliefs about the application of criminal justice, and more specifically respondents' contention that criminal sentencing is not long enough. The dependent variable for this study is drawn from a question in the ATP asking, "Overall, would you say people who are convicted of crimes in this country serve…" with possible responses of "too much time in prison," "too little time in prison," and "about the right amount of time in prison." For this study, responses are recoded so that respondents who indicated that criminals serve "too little time in prison" (1) were contrasted against respondents indicating that criminals spend either too much, or the right amount of time in prison (0).[viii] Approximately 32.6% of the final analytic sample indicated that prison sentences were too short.

Focal Independent Variables

The three focal variables used in this study are respondents' race, educational attainment, and support for government sponsored religion. Looking first to government sponsored religion, wave 92 of the ATP asks respondents to choose between two statements outlining the role of religion in public life. The first states, "Religion should be kept separate from government

policies." Respondents who chose this option were coded as (0) and are held in contrast to those who indicated that, "Government policies should support religious values and beliefs" coded (1). While more robust measures of public religious commitment, such as the 6-item index Christian nationalism found in the Baylor Religion Surveys (Davis 2018, 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2015; Whitehead and Perry 2020), or the 7- item measure used in the Public and Discourse Ethics Survey (Gorski and Perry 2022) would be ideal, the American trends panel does not include these metrics. Following Davis and Perry (2021), multivariable analyses included in this study use a single item measure of belief in state sponsored religious values in lieu of more commonly used measures. Similar to their measure of Christian nationalism found in the General Social Survey, respondents agreeing that government should support religion represent roughly 27% of the final sample and are significantly more likely to indicate their belief that criminals are spending too little time in prison.

To capture the racial and ethnic identities of respondents, the ATP asks them to identify their race or origin among the following options: White, Black or African American, Asian or Asian American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or "some other race or origin." The ATP also includes a follow-up question asking whether respondents identify as "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin." For multivariate analyses I constructed a series of dummy variables indicating whether respondents identified as white non-Hispanic (0), black non-Hispanic (1), Hispanic (1), or as some other race/ethnicity (1). As shown in Table 1, approximately 64% of the weighted analytic sample identified as white non-Hispanic, 11.5% as black non-Hispanic, 16% as Hispanic, and 8.4% as some other race.[ix] As we might expect, white racial identity is positively associated with desires for longer prison sentences at the bivariate level, while black and Hispanic identities are negatively associated.

The third focal predictor analyzed in this study is respondent education. The ATP captures educational attainment by asking respondents to identify the highest level of education completed among fourteen options ranging from (1) "No schooling completed" to (14) Doctorate degree." For multivariate analyses these responses were collapsed into three categories. The first, and contrast category, includes respondents who indicated that they had completed anywhere from "no schooling" to "regular high school diploma" or "GED or alternative credential." This category includes 36.3% of the final analytic sample and is positively associated with wanting longer prison sentences. Respondents who indicated that they had completed "some college credit," or an associates degree were coded as (1) "some college." Respondents in this category represented roughly 30.7% of the final sample and were more likely to indicate a belief that criminals do not spend enough time in prison. Respondents who said they had completed a Bachelor's, Master's, Professional, or Doctorate degree were combined into a single category labeled "bachelor's degree" (1). As displayed in Table 1, this category includes roughly 33% of the final sample and is negatively associated with punitive sentiment.

Control Variables

Regression analyses conducted in this study also include a battery of fourteen control variables capturing respondents' religious identity, practice, and sociodemographic characteristics. Respondents' religious identity is captured using a truncated version of the RELTRAD measures proposed by Steensland et al. (2000). While the ATP does not collect detailed data regarding the denominational affiliation of its respondents, it does provide a list of eleven traditions (or non-traditions) to choose from. Respondents were coded (1) if they identified with the Protestant tradition, (3) if they identified as Catholic, (4) "other religion" if they identified as Mormon, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or "Other," (5) if they

identified as Atheist or Agnostic, and (6) if they indicated "nothing in particular." The ATP also asks respondents to identify whether they considered themselves to be a "born-again or evangelical Christian." Protestants who indicated that they did not characterize themselves as born-again or evangelical were recoded as (2). Multi-variable regression analyses treat religious tradition as a series of dummy variables holding born-again Protestants as the contrast category. Participants' religious service attendance is measured using responses to the question, "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?" Potential responses ranged from (1) "more than once per week," to (6) "never." These are reverse coded so that an increase in service attendance in regression analyses indicates more frequent religious participation.

Finally, analyses in this study include seven measures of respondents' demographic characteristics. Respondents' region of residence was measured in a series of dummy variables indicating whether they lived in the South (0), Midwest (1), Northeast (1), or West (1). Respondents' age is measured categorically and ranges from (1) "18-29," to (4) "65+." Regression models also control for respondents' gender (1=woman), annual income is measured from (1) "less than $30,000" to (9) "$100,000 or more," and political ideology is coded to range from (1) "very liberal" to (5) "very conservative." Table 1 displays concise descriptions of variables used in subsequent analyses, as well as bivariate correlations with each of the three dependent variables.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

RESULTS

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Table 2 presents results from logistic regression models predicting the logged odds of a respondent indicating that criminals spend "too little time" in prison. Results in table 2 are x-standardized using the "listcoef" post-estimation command in Stata 17. As a result, coefficients presented in Table 2 should be interpreted as a change in the logged odds of punitive sentiment given a standard deviation increase of the predictor. Model 1, for example, includes only support for government sponsored relgion with no controls. The positive coefficient (β= 0.188, $p < .001$) reported in this model indicates that a standard deviation increase in support for GSR is associated with an increase in logged odds of punitiveness of 0.188. Table 2 also includes odds ratios produced by regression models listed parenthetically beneath standardized coefficients. The odds ratio presented in model one indicates that the odds of wanting longer prison sentences for criminals among respondents who believe that government should support religious values were 52.5% higher than among respondents wanting strict separation of church and state. For the sake of brevity, discussion of results presented in subsequent models will focus on statistically significant associations.

Model 2 of Table 2 introduces religious tradition and religious service attendance to the regression analysis. The first important finding from this model is that approval of government sponsored religion remains a significant predictor of desires for extended prison sentences after inclusion of religious control variables. While inclusion of these controls does diminish its predictive power somewhat ($\beta = 0.167$, $p < .001$), respondents who identified with the GSR measure had 36% higher odds of also wanting longer prison sentences for criminals. This partially supports my first hypothesis stating that support for GSR would be positively associated with punitive sentiment net of other relevant factors. Among religious control variables, the only

significant result comes from respondents who are atheist or agnostic who, when compared to born-again Protestants, have roughly 60% lower odds of supporting longer prison sentences.

Regression results presented in Model 3 include measures of support for GSR, race, educational attainment, and the full battery of religious and sociodemographic control variables. With the inclusion of sociodemographic measures—particularly political ideology—the main effect of state religion is substantially reduced but remains significant ($\beta = 0.039$, $p < .001$). After inclusion of the full battery of controls, respondents wanting government support for religious values had 9% higher odds of supporting longer prison sentences. Results in this model also indicate that there are significant differences between white and black respondents ($\beta = -0.265$, $p < .001$), as well as Hispanic respondents ($\beta = -0.116$, $p < .05$). The odds of black respondents supporting longer sentences for criminals were 56.4% lower, and odds among Hispanic respondents 27.2% lower, than those of white respondents. Punitive sentiment was also lower among a bachelor's degree or higher level of education ($\beta = -0.260$, $p < .001$), who reported 42.5% lower odds of wanting longer prison sentences for criminals. Together, the results of this model provide further support for hypothesis 1 predicting support for GSR will be positively associated with punitiveness, as well as hypotheses 2 and 4 predicting that punitive sentiment would be strongest among white respondents and those with the lowest levels of educational attainment. Results from this model also indicate that inclusion of sociodemographic characteristics reveal significant differences between born-again Protestants and both other protestants who reported 30.6% higher odds of wanting longer prison sentences, and Catholics for whom odds were 26.1% higher. Differences between born-again Protestants and the irreligious maintain statistical significance with atheists and agnostics reporting 38.7% lower odds of punitive sentiment. Women reported 21.5% higher odds of punitive sentiment in this

study, and for every step towards “very conservative” from “very liberal” among respondents, there was a commensurate 62.8% increase in odds that they would express a desire for longer prison sentences.

The fourth model presented in Table 2 includes approval of state-sanctioned religious values, race, education, the full battery of control variables, and introduces interaction terms between each racial category and support for GSR. Looking quickly at the religious and demographic control variables we notice that they remain largely unchanged by this inclusion. Born-again protestants reported lower odds of punitive sentiment than did mainline Protestants or Catholics, but higher odds than irreligious respondents. Women and more conservative respondents also had higher odds of supporting long prison sentences than did men and liberals. Among the focal relationships in this model, we see that the odds of respondents who attained a bachelor’s degree ($\beta = -0.260$, $p < .001$) remained 42.4% lower than those among respondents with a most a high school equivalent. Focusing next on the main effect of Christian nationalism at the top of Table 2, we notice that the inclusion of race interactions *increases* the magnitude ($\beta = 0.085$, $p < .001$) of its association with punitive sentiment. Translated to odds ratios, these results indicate that among white respondents, agreement that government should support religious values is associated with 21.1% higher odds of supporting extended prison sentences. The larger effect-size for support of government religion in this model partially supports the third hypothesis in this study stating that state religion would be a stronger predictor of punitiveness among white respondents. The negative coefficient for black racial identity ($\beta = -0.197$, $p < .001$) translates to a 46% gap in odds between white and black respondents and suggests that a portion of the black-white gap reported in the previous model was due to differences in support for GSR. Finally, the negative coefficient produced by the interaction between black racial identity and

GSR ($\beta = -0.130$, $p < .05$) indicates a significant difference in the effect of support for GSR between black and white respondents. This result provides further, but not complete support for *Hypothesis 3*.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1 presents predicted probabilities of respondents' belief that criminals do not spend enough time in prison by race and support for government sponsored religion. Statistics for this figure were produced using the margins command in Stata 17 and hold control variables at their means. The two bars on the left-hand side of Figure 1 present the probabilities among white respondents by their agreement that government should support religious values. Among whites, those who believed more strongly in separation of church and state the probability of supporting longer sentences was substantially (14%) lower than among those more favorable toward Christian nationalism. Because the error bars representing the 95% confidence intervals of these probabilities do not overlap, we can visually confirm the results from Model 4 suggesting that approval of GSR is a significant predictor of punitiveness among white Americans. Importantly, Figure 1 also demonstrates that supporting GSR is only a significant predictor of punitive sentiments among white respondents. Among respondents who identified either Hispanic or were classified as other race or origin supporting GSR was associated with a substantive increase in punitiveness, but these differences are not statistically significant. Among black respondents, there is very little difference in the probability of punitiveness between supporters of GSR and those committed to the separation of church and state, and this difference does not meet statistical standards of significance. The results presented in Figure 4 support my third hypothesis demonstrating that support for GSR is not only strongest among white respondents, but that it is only significant among white respondents in this sample.

The final model of Table 2 examines whether the relationship between approval of state religion and desires for longer prison sentences is moderated by respondents' educational attainment. The model contains the full battery of controls found in model three and introduces interaction terms for support for GSR among respondents with either some college education or a bachelor's degree. Briefly looking at control measures, we see that relationships that were significant in previous models remain stable with the introduction of these interaction terms.

Looking next to the main effects of education, results in model 5 suggest that both some college education ($\beta = -0.120$, $p < .05$), and attaining a bachelor's degree ($\beta = -0.330$, $p < .001$) significantly reduce the odds of supporting longer prison sentences. For respondents with some college education or an associate's degree the odds were 23% lower, and for those with a bachelor's degree the odds were 51.4% lower than among respondents whose highest level of education was high school or equivalent. These findings support *Hypothesis 4* which predicted the higher levels of education would be associated with lesser support for punitive sanctioning. Shifting focus to the main effect of supporting GSR in model 5, we see that the introduction of interactions with educational attainment both reverses the direction and nullifies the significance of this coefficient. This suggests that among respondents with a at most a high school degree supporting GSR does not predict punitive sentiment. Model 5 also reports positive and significant coefficients for both the interaction between supporting GSR and both having some college education ($\beta = 0.122$, $p < .05$) and bachelor's degree ($\beta = 0.126$, $p < .05$), suggesting that among respondents with at least some college experience support of state-religion is an important distinguishing factor.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 2 visually presents the results reported in Model 5 using predicted probabilities. The two bars on the left-hand side confirm that among respondents whose highest level of education is a high school diploma or less, belief that government should support religious values does not differentiate those who support extended prison sentences from those who do. The two pairs of bars in the middle and on the right side of Figure 2, on the other hand, show both substantive and significant differences by beliefs in how government and religion should be structured. The middle column shows that for respondents with some college experience, support for government sponsored religion predicts a 13% gap in probability of punitive sentiment. Because the confidence intervals do not overlap we can also say that this gap is significant. For respondents who have a bachelor's degree or more, predicted punitiveness is 12% higher for respondents supportive of government sponsored religion than among those believing more firmly in the separation of church and state. Finally, a visual inspection of results presented by Figure 2 also suggest that among respondents believing that government should support religious values, education does not play a significant role in predicting punitiveness. Together, results presented in Model 5 and Figure 2 of this study support both my fourth and fifth hypotheses. Education does indeed predict less punitiveness, but not for among those who believe in government supported religion.

DISCUSSION

Research in both criminology and sociology finds that Americans' punitive attitudes towards crime tend to be associated with race (Baker et al. 2018; Cullen et al. 2021; Morris and LeCont 2020; Unnever and Cullen 2007), educational attainment (Payne et al. 2004; Soss et al. 2003) and cultural and political aspects of American religious life (Bader et al 2010; Davis 2018; Seto and Said 2022). Studies dedicated to identifying punitive facets of American religion have

found that beliefs in the existence of religious evil (Baker and Booth 2016), imaginations of God as masculine (Baker and Whitehead 2020) or angry (Bones and Sabriselli 2018), and identification with more fundamentalist religious ideologies (Grasmick et al 1992; Perry and Whitehead 2021; Unnever and Cullen 2006) tend to amplify support for harsh reactions to crime including capital punishment. In the last decade, scholars have shown a growing interest in how religious and national identities converge to affect social and political attitudes among Americans. Variously referred to as "Christian nationalism" (Gorski and Perry 2022; Whitehead and Perry 2020) or "public religious commitment/expression" (Delehanty et al 2019; Stewart et al. 2023, 2018), research shows that Americans who support the marriage of religious and public life tend to erect less permeable boundaries around civic belonging (Davis 2019; Davis and Perry 2021; McDaniel et al 2011), and support harsher forms of criminal justice and social control (Davis 2018; Davis et al. 2023; Perry et al 2019). Furthermore, many studies find that measures of Christian nationalism operate differently across racial lines such that its relationship with various indicators of warmth towards authoritarian social control are stronger among white Americans (Perry et al. 2022; Perry and Schleifer 2022; Perry and Whitehead 2023).

The current study builds on this literature using data from Pew's American Trends Panel examining the association between support for government sponsored religion and belief that criminals do not spend enough time in prison. Results from logistic regression analyses revealed first, that support for state-sanctioned religious values was significantly linked to desires for longer prison sentences. Second, that punitive sentiment was significantly more common among white respondents than their black peers. Third, my analyses revealed significantly lower odds of expressing punitive sentiment among respondents who completed a bachelor's degree or more when compared to respondents with at most a high school education. Analyses also included

interactions between support for government sponsored religion and both race and educational attainment. Results from the race interaction revealed that support for state-sanctioned religious values is only significantly associated with punitiveness among white respondents. Among Hispanic respondents, government sponsored religion was associated with punitiveness, but the differences did not meet statistical significance. Among black Americans, however, there was no such increase in predicted punitiveness, significant or otherwise. Finally, interactions between support for government sponsored religion and educational attainment revealed that a) educational attainment is negatively associated with punitive sentiment among secularists but not among supporters of state-religion, and b) that support for state sponsored religious values is a salient predictor of punitiveness among those with higher levels of education, but not among Americans with at most a high school education.

Several limitations to these results are worth noting. First, data used for this study were cross-sectional which does not allow me to assess the temporal order of these associations. While racial identity is certainly established prior to formations of punitive sentiment, it may be that the associations found with educational attainment and support for government sponsored religion are driven by punitiveness. Data collection efforts for future studies would benefit from repeated measures of public religious commitment and punitiveness to better understand how they may be related to Americans' educational attainment. Second, while the measure of support for state-sanctioned religious values compares favorably with the measure of Christian nationalism used by Davis and Perry (2021), it is a single-item measure which limits its predictive power in multivariable analyses. Future research investigating the relationships between race, education, and public religion with social and political attitudes would benefit from multi-item measures similar to those used by Whitehead and Perry (2020; see also Gorski and Perry 2022), or Stewart

et al. (2018). Finally, while these analyses reveal important relationships between punitive sentiment and Americans' religious and civic life, survey data used for these analyses are ill equipped to fully parse the mechanisms of these relationships. Qualitative research targeting the intersection of support for religiously motivated governance and social identity would help uncover why it is tied to more strict forms of social control, especially among white Americans.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study contributes to the sociological understanding of race, punishment, and American religious life in three ways. First, the results of this study contributes to our understanding of racialized punitiveness in the United States demonstrating, in line with previous studies, that whiteness is an essential aspect of American punitiveness not only as a stand-alone measure, but in its interaction with other social characteristics (Halim and Stiles 2001; Perry and Whitehead 2021; Unnever et al. 2008). Second, this study provides important insight regarding *whether* and *when* education predicts more lenient attitudes toward crime. Specifically, it suggests that mixed results found in prior literatures (Bader et al. 2010; Stack 2003) may be due to insufficient contextualization of educational attainment. Education, according to results presented in this study, may be insufficient to overcome more deeply held cultural beliefs including how religion and the state should interact structurally when it comes to developing punitive beliefs toward criminals. Future scholarship in criminology and sociology would benefit from more studies committed to capturing contextual effects of educational attainment on punitive sentiment. Finally, this study contributes to the growing literature elucidating the influence of public religion in American society. Along with prior studies in Christian nationalism literature (Davis 2018, 2019; Perry and Whitehead 2021; Perry et al. 2019), this study finds that support for the convergence of state power and religious life significantly contributes to a culture of punitiveness in the United States.

It is my hope that this study provides a steppingstone for future research devoted to understanding the cultural sources of support for mass incarceration, as well as contributes to the dismantling of the expansive carceral system in the United States.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	*Range*	*Mean or %*	*SD*	*Corr. With DV*
Sentences Too Short	0-1	32.61		
Gov. Sponsored	0-1	27.34		0.091***
Religion				
Evangelical Prot	0-1	29.11		0.044***
Not Evangelical Prot	0-1	16.57		0.050***
Catholic	0-1	17.96		0.040***
Other Religion	0-1	7.76		-0.024***
Atheist/ Agnostic	0-1	10.56		-0.120***
Nothing in Particular	0-1	18.03		-0.028**
Service Attendance	1-6	2.89	1.65	0.067***
South	0-1	38.31		-0.001
Midwest	0-1	20.98		0.032**
Northeast	0-1	17.03		-0.028**
West	0-1	23.68		-0.006
Female	0-1	50.93		0.026*
Political Ideology	1-5	3.08	1.05	0.254***
Income	1-9	4.64	3.09	0.001
White	0-1	64.02		0.105***
Black	0-1	11.50		-0.110***
Hispanic	0-1	16.09		-0.037***
Other Race	0-1	8.39		-0.006
High School or Less	0-1	36.30		0.067***
Some College	0-1	30.73		0.031***
Bachelor's Degree	0-1	32.97		-0.100***

Note: ATP W92
N= 9,152

Table 2. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Belief that Prison Sentences are Too Short

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Gov. Sponsored Religion	0.188***	0.08	0.167***	0.09	0.039***	0.09	0.085**	0.10	-0.079	0.16
	(1.525)		(1.362)		(1.092)		(1.211)		(0.838)	
Not Evangelical Prot			0.093	0.11	0.099*	0.11	0.098*	0.12	0.100*	0.12
			(1.188)		(1.306)		(1.302)		(1.310)	
Catholic			0.064	0.11	0.089*	0.12	0.090*	0.12	0.086*	0.12
			(1.126)		(1.261)		(1.264)		(1.252)	
Other Religion			-0.122	0.15	0.001	0.17	0.002	0.17	0.002	0.17
			(0.799)		(1.004)		(1.008)		(1.008)	
Atheist/ Agnostic			-0.492***	0.18	-0.145*	0.20	-0.141*	0.20	-0.144*	0.20
			(0.403)		(0.623)		(0.632)		(0.625)	
Nothing in Particular			-0.090	0.13	-0.003	0.15	0.001	0.15	-0.004	0.15
			(0.847)		(0.993)		(1.002)		(0.981)	
Service Attendance			0.000	0.03	-0.026	0.03	-0.027	0.03	-0.031	0.03
			(0.999)		(0.985)		(0.984)		(0.981)	
Midwest					0.074†	0.10	0.073†	0.10	0.073†	0.10
					(1.200)		(1.197)		(1.195)	
Northeast					-0.022	0.12	-0.022	0.12	-0.022	0.12
					(0.944)		(0.943)		(0.944)	
West					0.053	0.10	0.052	0.10	0.051	0.10
					(1.132)		(1.130)		(1.126)	
Female					0.097*	0.08	0.101*	0.08	0.098*	0.08
					(1.215)		(1.225)		(1.216)	
Political Ideology					0.510 ***	0.05	0.503***	0.05	0.501***	0.05

					(1.628)		(1.612)		(1.614)	
Income					-0.116	0.01	0.038	0.01	0.039	0.01
					(1.013)		(1.012)		(1.013)	
Black					-0.265***	0.16	-0.197***	0.20	-0.268***	0.17
					(0.436)		(0.540)		(0.432)	
Hispanic					-0.116*	0.13	-0.096†	0.16	-0.115*	0.13
					(0.728)		(0.769)		(0.731)	
Other Race					0.039	0.16	0.029	0.17	0.019	0.16
					(1.077)		(1.112)		(1.073)	
Some College					-0.056	0.10	-0.055	0.10	-0.120*	0.12
					(0.886)		(0.889)		(0.770)	
Bachelor's Degree					-0.260***	0.10	-0.260***	0.10	-0.330***	0.12
					(0.575)		(0.576)		(0.496)	
Black x GSR							-0.130*	0.33		
							(0.518)			
Hispanic x GSR							-0.040	0.28		
							(0.828)			
Other Race x GSR							-0.016	0.38		
							(0.882)			
Some College x GSR									0.122*	0.21
									(1.554)	
Bachelor's Degree x GSR									0.126*	0.19
									(1.641)	
Constant	-0.847***	0.04	-0.740***	0.13	-2.382***	0.28	-2.404***	0.29	-2.254***	0.29
AIC	11223.995		11091.404		10455.448		10448.643		10439.892	
BIC	11238.238		11148.378		10590.761		10605.321		10589.448	

Note: ATP W92
Evangelical, South, Male, and White as contrast categories
N= 9,152; † p< .01, * p< .05, ** p < .01, *** p< .001

Figure 1: Predicted Probability of Belief that Criminal Sentences are Too Short by Race and Government Sponsored Religion

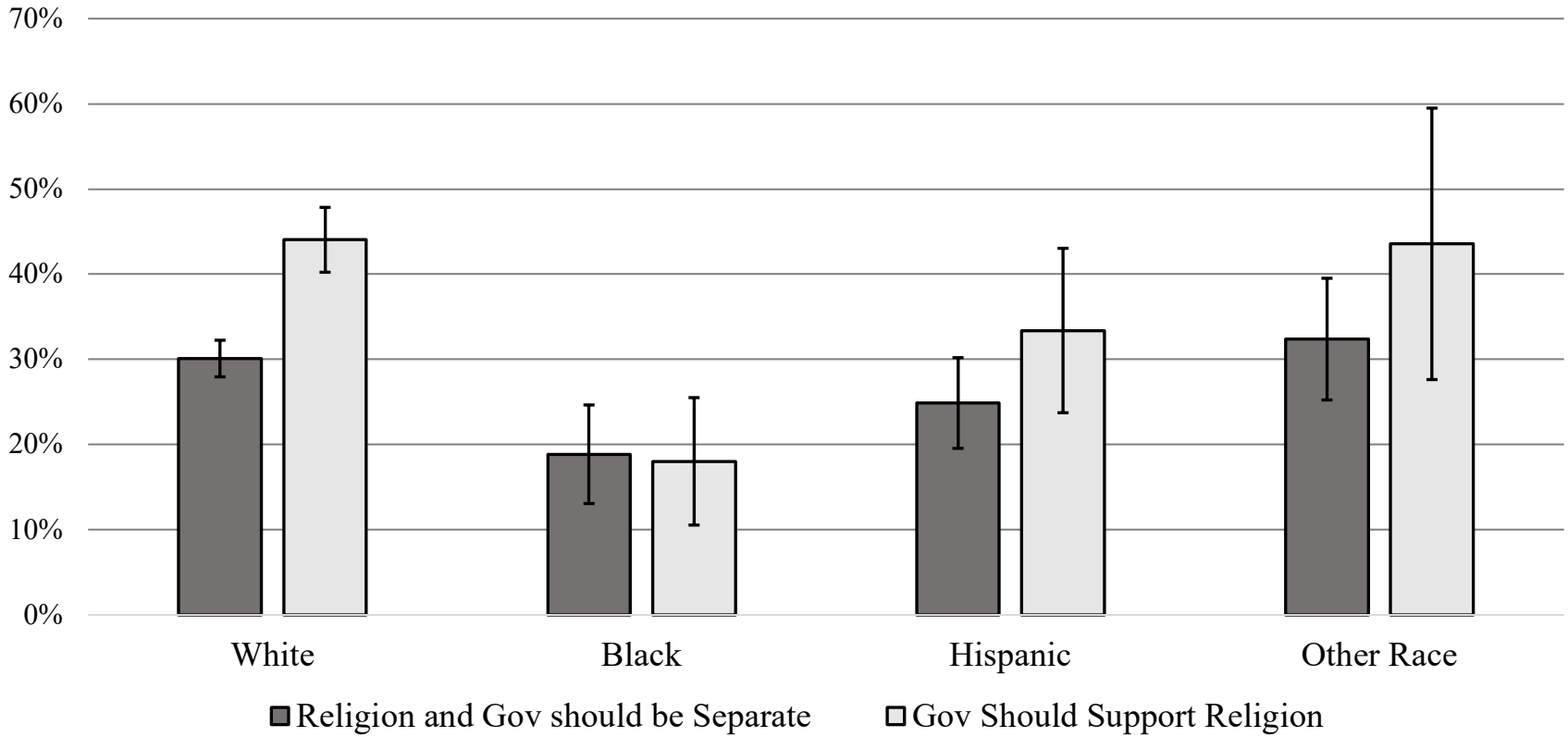
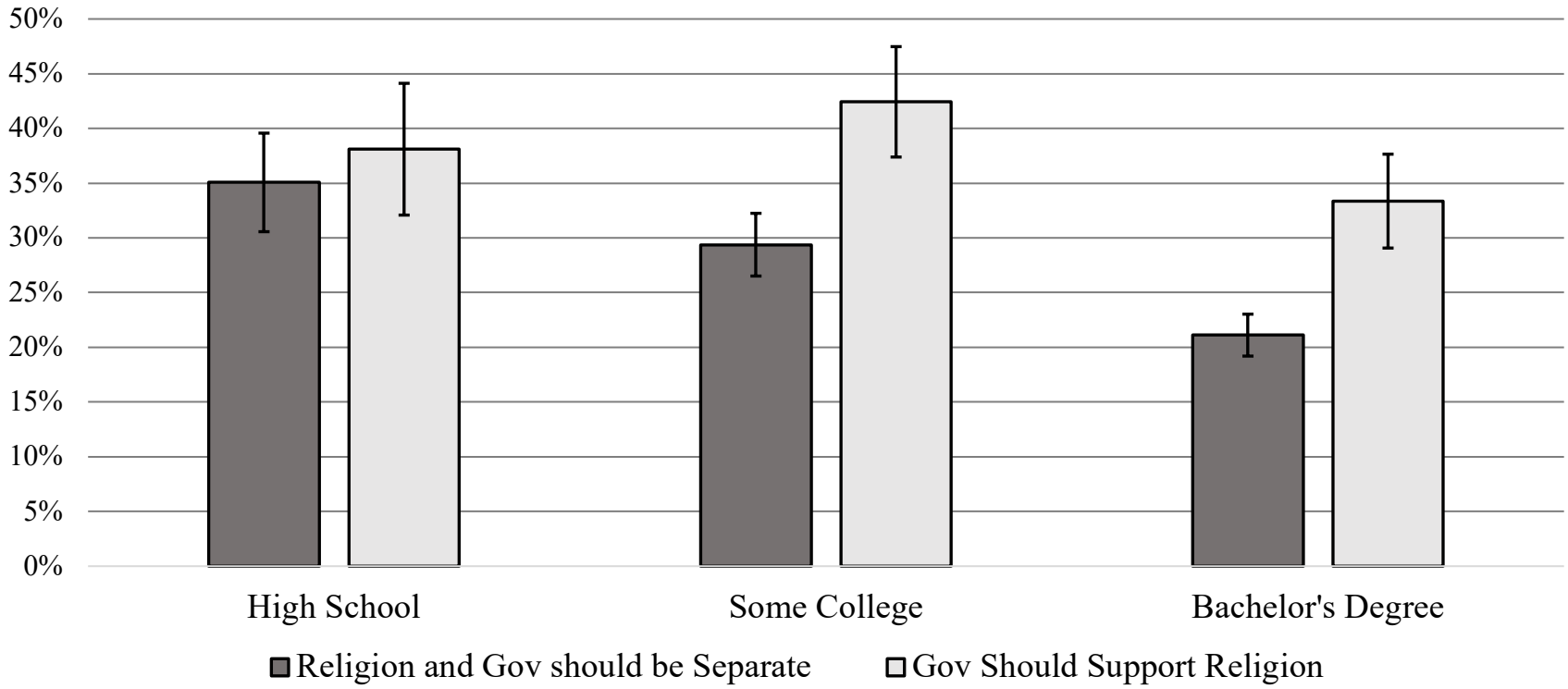


Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Belief that Criminal Sentences are Too Short by Educational Attainment and Government Sponsored Religion



[i] Though Biblical literalism has often been conflated with beliefs in inerrancy, Bartkowski (1996) argues that many conservative Protestants who claim to interpret the Bible literally actually read the bible though interpretive lenses developed culturally within their congregations and larger traditions. These findings have led scholars to consider "Biblical literalism," a stronger indicator of respondents' belief in Biblical authority or as cultural capital within highly religious subgroups than actual belief in Biblical inerrancy (Hoffman and Bartkowski 2008; Perry and Whitehead 2022).

[ii] Alternative analyses were conducted maintaining the distinction between "black" and "other race" respondents. Results did not substantively change using this coding scheme.

[iii] Supplemental analyses were conducted in the original split sample configuration of these responses and results are not substantively changed.

[iv] Original coding of dependent variables included four categories. Cohesive opposers who both accepted the potentially disqualifying information regarding the death penalty and opposed its use (0), discordant opposers who rejected the disqualifying information but still opposed capital punishment (1), discordant supporters who accepted the disqualifying information but supported capital punishment (2), and cohesive supporters who rejected disqualifying statements and support capital punishment (3). While ideally multivariable models would retain this four-category coding scheme, instances of discordant opposition were too small to draw meaningful conclusions (the largest number of discordant opposers was 320 respondents). Because of this, all opposers are grouped together for final model specifications.

[v] Though the dependent variable lends itself well to using ordered logistic regression techniques, formal testing indicates that these models violated the parallel lines assumption, and therefore multinomial models were most appropriate.

[vi] Though statistically different from white respondents, it is difficult to appropriately parse out why respondents who fall into the "other race" category in this study would show higher rates of discordant support for capital punishment. Specifically, because "other race" is not a culturally or socially cohesive group by any traditional metric, researchers should interpret the significance of this difference cautiously. Further studies are needed to fully disentangle the meaning of this result.

[vii] While models 3 and 4 report significant differences between black and white support for capital punishment, it is important to note that only 37 black respondents supported capital punishment and denied its racialized application. Therefore, the significance of these relative risk ratios should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, among black respondents who did support the death penalty, an overwhelming majority did so despite beliefs that it is disproportionately applied to minorities.

[viii] Alternative multinomial logit models were run examining all three potential outcomes to this question and results were substantively similar. Ordinal models failed to meet the parallel lines assumptions, making such models inappropriate. Further, because this study's primary aim is to examine facets of Americans' social and religious lives which contribute to *more punitive* responses to crime and delinquency, I chose to dichotomize responses.

[ix] Other race variable includes respondents who identified as Asian or Asian-American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or "Some other race or origin" These were combined in multivariable analyses due to the relatively small size of each of

these groups individually. Because of the disparate nature of this racial category, interpretations of results for “other race” in multi-variable analyses should be done cautiously.