

Schools of Authority: How Religion Shapes Americans' Trust in Institutions

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Abstract

Populism describes a world in which institutions and elites stand between the people and their will. This paper argues that such anti-institutional attitudes have a religious origin. A religious life mediated by ordained clergy, a binding confession, a church court, builds trust in institutions that extends to secular counterparts. A less mediated life, where the believer meets God directly, breeds suspicion of intermediary institutions. Coding the governing documents of 124 American Protestant denominations, I find members of more institutionalized churches are more confident in government, courts, science, and education, and less drawn to populist views. The results survive controls for partisanship, ideology, and theology, and an IV strategy that instruments adult denomination with childhood denomination to address self-selection into denominations. Counties where Protestantism is more institutionalized resisted Trump in the 2016 primaries and vaccinated more during the COVID-19 pandemic. As American religion deinstitutionalizes, fewer Americans are formed in institutions teaching the legitimacy of institutions.

Keywords: institutional trust; religion and politics; populism

Introduction

Trust in institutions is essential to the functioning of democracies (Hetherington, 1998, 2005). In the United States, trust in political institutions has fallen to a new low (Citrin and Stoker, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2025), and confidence in non-political institutions, such as the education system, the press, and the medical system, has declined alongside it (Gallup, 2026). Distrust in institutions reduces compliance with the law (Marien and Hooghe, 2011; Devine et al., 2024) and support for government programs (Jacobs and Matthews, 2017), and feeds the refusal of public health guidance (Kennedy, 2019) and the rejection of expert consensus (Merkley, 2020). Most consequentially, citizens with lower institutional trust are more likely to vote for populist politicians and parties (Hooghe and Dassonneville, 2018; Uscinski et al., 2021; Jiang and Ma, 2020; Rooduijn, 2018), who claim to be the voice of the people against the institutions and elites standing between them and their will (Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2016).

What explains confidence in institutions? One strand of the literature treats it as a response to what institutions, and the people who run them, do, filtered through the information environment in which citizens learn about them. On this account, trust declines when institutions visibly fail (Nye, Zelikow and King, 1997; Van Erkel and Van Der Meer, 2016; Zhu, Manion and Rothschild, 2025), when polarization turns trust into an extension of party conflict (Jones, 2015; Hetherington and Rudolph, 2018, 2020), when a fragmented and increasingly digital media environment amplifies failure and conflict alike (Guriev, Melnikov and Zhuravskaya, 2021; Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023), and when bodies once regarded as neutral become politicized (Zhang, 2023; Schröder, 2023; Clark et al., 2023).

A second strand treats institutional trust as a stable general disposition of the citizen rather than a verdict on any particular institution. People with little confidence in one institution tend to have little in others (Mishler and Rose, 1997; Murtin et al., 2026; Einstein and Glick, 2015; Invernizzi and Mohamed, 2023), and within individuals these answers are remarkably stable across time (Devine and Valgarðsson, 2024). The disposition cuts across the left-right divide and predicts a wide range of political attitudes and behaviors that

partisanship and ideology cannot (Uscinski et al., 2021). Where it comes from is less settled. Existing accounts point to personality (Mondak and Halperin, 2008; Freitag and Ackermann, 2016), education (Hakhverdian and Mayne, 2012), generalized trust in other people (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Zmerli and Newton, 2008; Sønderskov and Dinesen, 2016), and previous experiences with state agencies (Soss, 1999; Kumlin, 2004).

I take the second approach and propose a new answer to where the disposition to accept the legitimacy of institutions comes from: the church. Sixty-two percent of American adults identify as Christian and forty percent as Protestant, and a third attend religious services at least monthly (Smith et al., 2025). For these tens of millions, the church is where attitudes toward authority are formed, a lesson often begun in childhood and sustained across a lifetime.

Churches differ in how they organize authority. In some, religious authority is institutional. The clergyman speaks for an office that belongs to the denominational body rather than to him. Denominational training and credentials are prerequisites for ordination, and the ordained are bound to doctrine fixed in confessions with centuries of standing behind them. What those confessions require is settled by the denomination rather than by personal reading or religious experience, and departure from them is handled by written discipline and by courts above the congregation. In others, authority is personal. Nothing above the congregation may decide anything, so authority can only sit in persons, in the pastor or in each believer. A pastor either founded the church himself or was called by the congregation with no external credential, and his words carry weight because his hearers take him to be called and gifted, not because an office stands behind them. What a passage of Scripture requires is bound by no confession. It is worked out between his teaching and each believer's own understanding, and no authority outside the room reviews either of them.

I argue that this difference explains dispositions toward institutions generally. Members of institutionalized churches stand in a particular position: a body they did not personally consult has decided things of importance for them: what the right interpretation of Scripture is, who is qualified to teach it, what counts as a departure from orthodoxy, and what discipline

falls on those who depart. Such religious experience breeds institutional trust, a default expectation that decisions of this kind are properly made by institutions bound by rules and doctrine rather than by individuals acting on their own conviction. The expectation travels into realms outside religion. A government agency, a court, a scientific consensus, an editorial judgment, each asks a person to defer to a decision made by people he did not choose, on grounds he cannot check for himself. For members of churches in which nothing above the congregation may decide anything, the same demand arrives as a novel claim, and is likelier to be refused.

Empirically, I develop an original measure of church institutionalization for 124 Protestant denominations in the United States, drawing on their bylaws, constitutions, and books of discipline, supplemented by reference works. I code every denomination on four related but non-overlapping dimensions: the polity that allocates governing power between congregation and denominational body, the bindingness of confessional doctrine, the threshold for ordination, and the disciplinary machinery that enforces denominational rules. Linking this measure to five decades of survey data from four national survey programs, I show that members of more institutionalized denominations express greater confidence in the institutions of public life, including the federal government, the Supreme Court, the scientific community, the media, the education system, and local government. They are also less likely to hold anti-establishment and populist attitudes toward politicians and experts. These differences persist when personal religious attendance, ideology, partisanship, and theological conservatism are held constant. To address adult selection into denominations, I instrument the adult denomination with the childhood one, chosen by parents rather than by the respondent, and the results survive. Finally, the pattern is not confined to survey responses: counties with more institutionalized religious ecologies gave a smaller share of their 2016 Republican primary vote to Donald Trump, the anti-establishment candidate who rode distrust of institutions to power, and vaccinated at higher rates against COVID-19, a behavioral expression of trust in public-health authority.

This paper makes three contributions. First, the literature has registered a stable anti-establishment orientation as an independent dimension of public opinion that cuts across the left-right divide and persists within individuals over long stretches of time (Uscinski et al., 2021; Devine et al., 2024), but explanations of where it comes from have looked to attributes of persons, such as personality, education, and generalized social trust (Mondak and Halperin, 2008; Freitag and Ackermann, 2016; Hakhverdian and Mayne, 2012; Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Zmerli and Newton, 2008). I locate its formation instead in the most important voluntary organization in American civic life, the church. Worship in a church where doctrine, ordination, and discipline are settled above the congregation rehearses deference to institutional authority week after week, and worship where the pastor and his hearers settle them rehearses the opposite.

Second, the literature has explored religion and institutional trust, but existing accounts locate the source largely in the content of religion, in biblical literalism, in the embattled subcultural identity of conservative Protestantism, and in Christian nationalism, that identity's political expression (Smith and Emerson, 1998; Evans, 2011; Sherkat, 2011; Whitehead and Perry, 2020). Where church organization has been studied, it has been studied as a context that supplies civic skills, political cues, and social networks, with participation and mobilization as the outcomes (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995; Campbell, 2004; Djupe and Gilbert, 2009; McDaniel, 2008; Putnam and Campbell, 2010). I treat organization differently. It is not only a platform that supplies resources but something subtler and more fundamental, a template for authority, and I ask what that template teaches members about who may rightfully decide. Its imprint, I show, is independent of the theological divide the literature has centered on.

Third, the index itself is a resource for work beyond this paper. Current scholarship, on the assumption that theological division is what fundamentally matters, classifies denominations mainly by their theological orientation (Smith, 1990; Steensland et al., 2000; Woodberry

et al., 2012). How a body organizes authority internally is rarely measured at all.¹ The index scores each of 124 denominations on four dimensions of institutional form, coded from the denominations' own constitutions, disciplines, and confessional standards. Its validity does not rest on the coding alone: the scores line up with what surveys of congregations and clergy independently record about how these bodies operate. I release the coded data with this paper, together with a crosswalk that merges it into the denomination codes of the General Social Survey, the American National Election Studies, the Cooperative Election Study, and the Pew Religious Landscape Study, so that the measure can be used by future researchers.

The findings also bear on the long-term decline of institutional trust in the United States. One of the most consequential changes in the American religious field over the past half century has been the contraction of the confessional denominations and the growth of loosely organized nondenominational congregations (Wuthnow, 1988; Miller, 1997; Chaves, 2017; Smith et al., 2025). The results suggest that falling institutional trust is in part a byproduct of that shift. As American Protestantism has moved away from bodies that bind their clergy and toward congregations in which authority is personal and unmediated, a shrinking share of Americans rehearses, in weekly practice, what it is to be bound by a body one did not personally consult. Some of what has been read as a crisis of confidence in American institutions may instead be a change in where Americans learn what an institution is.

The Church as a School of Authority

Religion shapes the political arena in fundamental ways (Gill, 2001; Wald and Wilcox, 2006; Philpott, 2007; Bellin, 2008; Grzymała-Busse, 2012). It has supplied rulers with a claim to legitimate authority and shaped the formation of states themselves (Grzymała-Busse, 2015; Rubin, 2017; Grzymała-Busse, 2023), it structured the cleavages on which party systems

¹The sociology of religion has long attended to denominational organization, but chiefly through qualitative case studies (Harrison, 1959; Chaves, 1993), and the church-sect tradition grades bodies by their tension with the surrounding culture rather than by the location of authority within them (Johnson, 1963; Iannaccone, 1994).

formed (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Kalyvas, 1996), and it bears on a range of political behaviors, including vote choice (Layman, 2001; DeCanio, 2007; Swierenga, 2007; McDaniel, 2008), turnout and participation (McClendon and Riedl, 2015, 2019), and contentious politics, from the American civil rights movement to opposition under authoritarian rule (Morris, 1984; Smith, 1996; Trejo, 2009; Im, 2020; Rubinstein, 2015).

Recent studies have examined the relationship between religion, institutional trust, and populism. Among global democracies, communal religious participation is associated with greater political interest and greater confidence in democratic institutions, while private religious belief runs the other way (Ben-Nun Bloom and Arikan, 2012, 2013). In the United States, secular respondents express less confidence than religious ones across a wide range of political institutions (Kasselstrand, Couse and Sanchez, 2017). The relationship between religiosity and support for the populist right is largely context dependent: negative in Western Europe (Arzheimer and Carter, 2009), positive in Poland (Marcinkiewicz and Dassonneville, 2022), and in the United States conditioned by attendance, with the most observant evangelicals the least drawn to Trump in the 2016 primaries (Margolis, 2020). The different patterns appear to depend on whether the party system offers a confessional alternative (Cremer, 2023). A parallel literature finds religion bearing on what citizens will accept from experts, with Christian nationalism predicting opposition to scientific consensus and to public health guidance including vaccination, and religiously grounded anti-intellectualism predicting resistance to expert claims more generally (Merkley, 2020; Whitehead and Perry, 2020; Perry, Baker and Grubbs, 2021).

One feature shared across this literature is that religion enters either as a cultural identity, such as Christian nationalism, or as a set of beliefs, such as theological conservatism and biblical inerrancy. Where religious attendance is considered, it is treated as a single quantity, and the body one attends carries no information of its own. Consider two Protestants. Both are theologically conservative, both hold Scripture to be historically true, and both attend church every Sunday. One belongs to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, a conservative

confessional Lutheran body, where his minister was ordained only after a seminary degree and an examination, is bound to a confession he has no standing to revise, and can be removed from the denomination's clergy roster by a body outside the congregation. The other belongs to a nondenominational church that rejects denominational ties on principle, hired its minister on its own authority, is bound by no confession, and can dismiss him at a members' meeting. Most instruments in this literature score these two people the same. What separates them is not what they believe or how often they attend, but the kind of body they belong to, and no existing account asks what difference that makes.

The difference is one of where religious authority sits. In the first congregation it sits in an institution. The denomination carries its authority in written rules, in confessional documents, and in an inherited tradition with centuries of standing behind it, and what those documents require is administered by bodies above the congregation, which examine candidates before ordination and can try a minister whose teaching or conduct falls outside what they permit. A minister there speaks with an authority that belongs not to him but to an office, defined by an institution whose documents he did not write and cannot revise. The same body reaches into the member's own religious life and supplies much of it ready-made: a catechism he is expected to learn, a confession he affirms on entering, vows taken at membership and at confirmation, and a range of questions already settled rather than left to him to work out.

In a less institutionalized church, none of this apparatus is present, and authority can only take a personal form, residing in the pastor or in the believer himself. Interpretation of Scripture is not bound by a confession or an inherited tradition but rests with the individual minister and, beyond him, with each believer. The path to ministry is correspondingly open, often requiring no denominational credential and no examination by anyone the congregation has not itself appointed. Oversight of what a pastor teaches is internal where it exists at all, and can be revised or lifted by the congregation that imposed it. A pastor in such a church therefore speaks as a person rather than as an officeholder. What he says carries weight because those who hear him are convinced that he is called and gifted, and because they

trust him personally. What the institution does not supply, the believer must produce for himself. The work of maintaining his relation to God through practices he performs alone, in private prayer, in personal study of Scripture, in the search for guidance in daily decisions, and in the reading of his own experience as evidence of where he stands.

I argue that the religious experience of an institutionalized church resembles in structure the relation between a citizen and the institutions of modern society. An institutionalized church places its members, week after week, in a situation of a particular shape. What Scripture requires of a member is settled by a confession and by the body that administers it, not by how a passage strikes him when he reads it. A minister's standing comes from an examination conducted outside the congregation rather than from the impression he makes inside it. When a question is disputed, it is resolved by an assembly applying a text that neither the assembly nor the minister may revise at will, and whoever argues best on the day has no special claim. What makes the settlement binding is not the member's agreement: the denomination's authority over him does not depend on his assent in the case at hand. The grounds offered him are the ones a court would recognize, a text those deciding did not write, a tradition older than any of them, and qualifications the procedure required of whoever applied it.

Modern society makes the same demand. A citizen is asked to subordinate his own judgment to institutions, to the credentials they grant their officeholders, to the procedures they follow, and to the traditions that hold them together. He cannot test a drug himself, master the case law, replicate a study, or mount his own investigation to check what a newspaper reports. Some of what binds him no living body enacted at all: the precedent that governs the court hearing his case is the accumulated judgment of judges long dead, and the constitution above them all is only nominally open to revision. This holds even for democratic bodies. A citizen may vote and speak, but democratic legitimacy does not rest on his agreeing with what is decided, but on his accepting the procedure that decided it. What all of these bodies ask of him, in Weber's sense, is not agreement but the recognition that

those deciding have the right to decide (Weber, 1978).

Why should a habit formed in worship travel to institutions that have nothing to do with God? Sociologists of culture distinguish declarative from nondeclarative culture (Lizardo, 2017). The first consists of the beliefs, attitudes, and opinions a person can state when asked. The second consists of practical schemas that organize how a situation is perceived and answered before any question is put to him (DiMaggio, 1997). Schemas of the second kind are cued by the shape of a situation rather than retrieved by deliberation (Vaisey, 2009), and they can be carried into settings whose structure resembles the one in which they were formed (Sewell, 1992).² The church and many secular institutions present the believer with the same shape. A disposition formed out of weekly repetition in the pew is activated when the court, the agency, or the scientific community makes the same claim on his judgment: deference arrives as the practiced response.

I examine the imprint of institutionalization on three kinds of outcomes. The first is trust in secular institutions. If religious life under mediated authority forms a default disposition toward bodies that claim the right to decide, that disposition should appear most directly as confidence in the secular institutions that make such claims: the branches of government, the courts, science, medicine, the press, and the education system. The second is populist sentiment, the conviction that politicians and experts stand between the people and their will. Finally, the disposition should not stop at the survey page. I test whether it is visible in behavior that carries a cost, in two forms: the 2016 Republican primary vote, a behavioral revolt against the political establishment, and COVID-19 vaccination, compliance with expert guidance that no one can verify for himself. Testing these empirical implications requires a measure of how a church organizes authority, and no such measure exists. The next section builds one.

²A disposition formed in one setting has repeatedly been shown to shape how people meet authority in others. The discipline of the workplace shapes the qualities parents seek to instill in their children (Kohn, 1969; Kohn and Schooler, 1982), and the schemas of parental authority a child grows up under go on to organize his ideological orientation (Barker and Tinnick, 2006). The authority climate of the classroom shapes political engagement years later (Campbell, 2008). Encounters with a single welfare agency teach recipients what government as a whole is like (Soss, 1999; Mettler, 2002; Weaver and Lerman, 2010).

Introducing DII: A Measure of Denominational Institutionalization

Diversity in how American churches organize authority is older than the country itself. The Congregationalists who settled New England in the 1630s and the Presbyterians who organized their first presbytery at Philadelphia in 1706 shared a Calvinist theology but organized themselves in opposite ways: the first placed no authority above the local congregation, the second built a hierarchy of representative courts above it (Bonomi, 1986). Anglican parishes in the South and the Catholic settlement in Maryland brought episcopal polities, forms in which authority ran through a hierarchy above the parish (Butler, 1990). The awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries added another form: the itinerant preacher who held no local office and answered to no synod, whose standing rested on his capacity to move an audience (Finke and Stark, 2005). The Restorationist churches of the early nineteenth century rejected creeds and denominational machinery on principle (Hatch, 1989). The Holiness and Pentecostal movements gathered congregations around gifts rather than credentials (Synan, 1997). The nondenominational congregations that have grown fastest in recent decades are accountable, by definition, to no body outside themselves (Chaves, 2017). The result is a religious field in which bodies that share a theology can differ completely in how authority within them is constituted.

However, how churches organize their authority has rarely been studied by political scientists. The nearest work treats church organization as an environment that supplies civic skills and resources (Verba, Scholzman and Brady, 1995; Djupe and Gilbert, 2006). Where the structure of authority itself appears, it appears as the binary distinction of polity, episcopal against congregational (Ambrosius, 2011).³

Polity, however, is only one of the ways a religious body can locate authority outside

³Ambrosius (2011) is the closest antecedent of this paper. It finds that believers' preferences over church polity replicate onto their preferences for the design of secular institutions, and its logic, that the government of the church travels outward, anticipates the argument here. It measures polity as a binary label, however, and observes stated preferences in a single survey.

the person who exercises it, and the dimensions need not travel together. Congregations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod own their property and call their own pastors, and the synod's resolutions are formally advisory. Yet its clergy subscribe unconditionally to the Book of Concord, closed since 1580, ordination requires a synodical seminary degree and certification by the church body, a minister who departs from the confessions can be removed from the roster, and even lay membership requires instruction in Luther's Small Catechism. By any measure but polity, this congregationally governed body is among the most institutionalized in the country. The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel presents the reverse: supervisors above the congregation appoint its pastors and the denomination holds title to congregational property, yet its clergy affirm a declaration of faith that the body itself may amend, and its ministerial credential demands no degree, only completion of the church's own training program. A polity label alone would rank Foursquare above the Missouri Synod. On every other dimension the ranking reverses.

To capture this multidimensionality, I develop the Denominational Institutionalization Index (DII), which scores U.S. Protestant denominations from 0 to 3 on four correlated but non-overlapping dimensions of governance: polity, confessional subscription, the ordination threshold, and disciplinary machinery.

Polity describes how far the denomination may intervene in congregational affairs. At the low end, congregations govern themselves, call and dismiss their own clergy, and may leave the denomination at will. At the high end, clergy is appointed or approved from above, denominational decisions bind rather than advise, and exit is costly, as congregational property is held in trust for the denomination.

Confessional subscription describes how far the denomination fixes the boundaries of belief for its clergy. What varies is not whether a body holds beliefs, nor what those beliefs are, but whether they are codified in a standing confessional document whose affirmation is a condition of ministerial standing, and, where it is, how strictly: a candidate asked to subscribe because the confession agrees with Scripture retains no standing to judge where it

does not, while one asked to subscribe insofar as it agrees keeps that judgment for himself. A higher score means doctrine is externally specified and enforceable rather than left to congregational or individual conscience.

The ordination threshold specifies what a candidate must clear before being recognized as clergy, from congregational recognition at the low end to a Master of Divinity from a denominational seminary, examination before a regional body, and a supervised candidacy at the high end. A high threshold screens entrants for conformity before they hold office and makes the career specific to the denomination, an investment forfeited by defection.

Disciplinary machinery captures whether the denomination possesses and uses formal procedures against clergy and congregations that violate its standards: a written judicial process, a body empowered to hear charges, penalties up to removal, and a route of appeal. The top score requires that the machinery not only exist on paper but be demonstrably invoked, since rules never enforced impose no constraint. Table 1 gives the full coding scheme.

Table 1: The four dimensions of the Denominational Institutionalization Index

	Polity	Confession	Ordination	Discipline
0	Congregational; no authority above the congregation	No doctrinal test for clergy	No formal clergy	No written provision covering clergy
1	Congregational, but a cooperative body may expel congregations or issue credentials	Statement of faith binds agencies, not local clergy	Local ordination or correspondence credential	Written provision covering conduct but not doctrine
2	Presbyterian or connectional; representative assemblies above the congregation	Confession subscribed <i>quatenus</i> , or a signed text the body may amend	Denominational standard below the graduate degree	Provision covering both, no located enforced case
3	Episcopal; bishops appoint or ordain clergy	Confession subscribed <i>quia</i> , or a signed text beyond ordinary revision	Graduate degree with candidacy and examination	Provision covering both, plus a named, effective, unreversed case

Note: Subscription formulae differ in whether they leave the subscriber a reservation. A *quia* formula binds an officeholder to a confession *because* it agrees with Scripture, leaving him no standing to judge where it does not; a *quatenus* formula binds him *insofar as* it agrees with Scripture, which reserves that judgment to him. Each dimension is coded independently and no dimension is inferred from another. Ordination is scored at the lowest formal credential tier a candidate may use rather than the modal route; supervised or exceptional tracks do not lower the score. The first three levels of discipline are judged from documents alone, with an enforced case required only at the top. The full codebook, with the denomination assigned to each cell, appears in Appendix A.

I apply these rules to every U.S. Protestant denomination that the data sources used in this paper are able to distinguish: the General Social Survey, the American National Election Studies, the Cooperative Election Study, the Pew Religious Landscape Study, the Religious Congregations and Membership Study, and the National Congregations Study. Together these yield 124 coded bodies. Scores are assigned from each body’s own governing documents, chiefly constitutions, bylaws, books of order and discipline, subscription formulae, and published requirements for ordination, supplemented where these are silent by reference works, principally Melton’s Encyclopedia of American Religions (Melton, 2009). The references

for each coding decision and justification will be released with the dataset. Each body receives four scores from zero to three, and I add the four to produce a single index running from zero to twelve.⁴

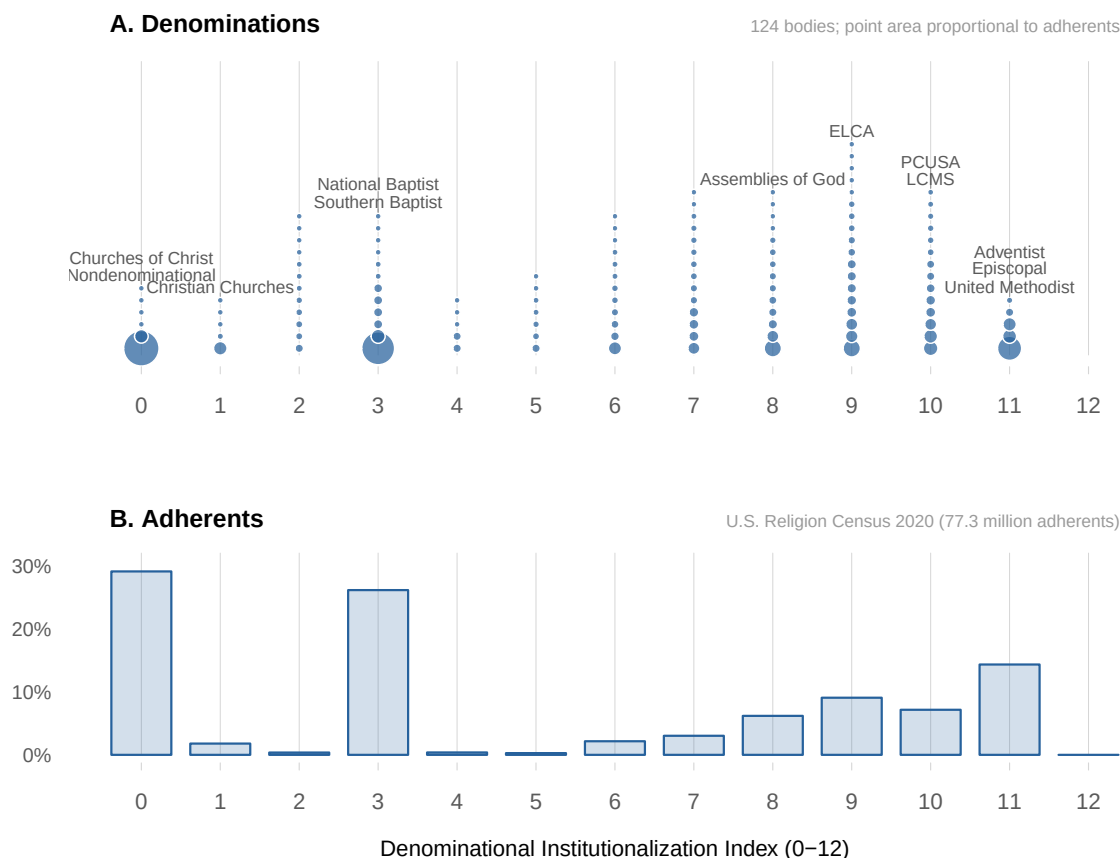


Figure 1: The distribution of denominational institutionalization.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the index. The upper panel plots each body separately, with point area proportional to adherents. The lower panel aggregates, so that the bars describe where American Protestants sit on the index rather than counting each denomination once. Nearly half of adherents belong to bodies scoring three or below: the Southern Baptist

⁴The index is an unweighted sum rather than a factor score because the four dimensions are constitutive of the construct, not reflective of it (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000; Goertz, 2006). A denomination that binds its clergy to a confession but ordains anyone who asks is institutionalized in one respect and not another, and the index must record both, whereas factor models assume the items are interchangeable indicators of a common cause. Empirically, the choice matters little: the first principal component takes 71.8 percent of the variance and correlates at .999 with the sum, which the near-equal loadings guarantee arithmetically.

Convention and the National Baptist Convention anchor the mass at three, the Churches of Christ and the nondenominational congregations the mass at zero. A second concentration runs from nine to eleven, where the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Episcopal Church, and the United Methodist Church sit.

Several clarifications are needed. First, what I code is the relationship among clergy, congregation, and denominational body, not the relation between a denomination's bureaucratic agencies and its religious authority structure, the distinction Chaves (1993) drew. A denomination can hold little authority over its clergy and congregations while maintaining a large and elaborate headquarters. The Southern Baptist Convention operates six seminaries, two mission boards, and a publishing house, and can dismiss the employees of any of them on doctrinal grounds, yet it holds no authority over the pastor of an affiliated church, who is ordained and dismissed by his congregation alone.

Second, the index does not code how strict a body is, in the sense that literature on sects and strong churches gives that term (Kelley, 1972; Iannaccone, 1994; Stark and Bainbridge, 1985; Johnson, 1963). Strictness describes what a body demands of its members and how far those demands set them apart from the surrounding culture. The index describes who within the body has standing to decide and whom the decision binds. An independent fundamentalist congregation may demand a great deal of its members' daily conduct while answering to no authority above itself, and a mainline denomination may ask almost nothing that distinguishes its members from their neighbors, while its denominational bodies have very strong control over congregations.

Third, the index measures rules as written rather than rules as practiced. Chaves (1997) shows that denominations' formal policies can be loosely coupled with practice, functioning as symbolic displays to external audiences rather than working rules. His evidence, however, concerns stance-taking policies on publicly contested questions, such as women's ordination, where an outside audience is watching. The DII codes internal governance, and no external

constituency rewards a denomination for its quorum rules or its route of appeal. The concern retains force in one place: a disciplinary machinery that exists on paper may never have been used. The coding rule answers this directly, since the top discipline score requires a located, effective case, not a provision alone. That requirement carries a bias of its own: larger denominations conduct more of their disciplinary life in public, so an enforced case is easier to find for a large body than for a small one, and some small bodies scoring two may belong at three. Because denominations enter the analysis in proportion to the respondents who belong to them, however, the bodies most at risk of miscoding carry the least weight.

Whether rules as written capture churches as governed is, in the end, an empirical question. The next section tests the coding against what surveys of congregations and clergy record about how these bodies operate, and asks whether the index leaves an imprint in the religious lives of ordinary members.

Validating the DII: From Church Governance to Religious Life

Two surveys allow me to test whether an index coded from documents captures how denominations actually operate: the National Congregations Study, which interviews a key informant, usually a clergyperson, about a nationally representative sample of congregations (Chaves, 2017), fielded in four waves between 1998 and 2019 and pooled here in its cumulative file, and the Cooperative Clergy Study Project, which surveys pastors directly in coordinated waves in 2000 and 2017 (Smidt, 2004).

Surveys do not directly ask what the four dimensions conceptualize. I therefore select the closest survey item that should correlate with each. For polity, I use the NCS item asking whether a representative of the denomination visited the congregation in the past year: where authority above the congregation is real, its agents show up. For confession, I use pastors'

Table 2: Validation: dimension scores against congregational and clergy behaviour

	A	B		C			DII	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Dependent variable	Denom. rep. hosted	Agrees <i>Jesus will return</i> (pastor)	SD of that agreement (denom.)	Seminary graduate (informant)	Seminary graduate (self-report)	Leader from inside congr.	Written budget	Board met
Institutionalization score (raw)	0.1324*** (0.0290)	0.2026* (0.0927)	-0.2055* (0.0959)	0.0843*** (0.0071)	0.1606** (0.0475)	-0.0727*** (0.0123)	0.0125** (0.0033)	0.0095*** (0.0023)
Congregation-level controls	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clergy-level controls	—	✓	—	—	✓	—	—	—
Fixed effects	Region + year	Year	None	Region + year	State + year	Region + year	Region + year	Region + year
Observations	2,505	6,652	17	1,237	2,366	1,241	2,494	626
Denominations (clusters)	17	17	17	17	10	17	17	17
Data source	NCS	CCSP 2000	CCSP 2000	NCS	CCSP 2017	NCS	NCS	NCS

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Each column regresses the outcome on the score of the dimension or on the full DII in (7)–(8). NCS columns control for log adult participants, white share, and years since founding. CCSP columns control for log adult members, urban location, and pastor gender and age. Columns (2) and (3) use the same item, agreement that Jesus will return to earth one day. Column (2) is the pastor’s own agreement. Column (3) is its dispersion within denomination, one observation per denomination and therefore without controls or clustering. All other standard errors are clustered on denomination. Full coefficients in Appendix Table SI-3.

agreement with the CCSP item "Jesus will return to earth one day."⁵ I use the item in two ways. The level of agreement tests whether clergy hold what the confession specifies. The dispersion of agreement, each pastor’s absolute deviation from his denomination’s mean, tests the binding itself, for a denomination whose clergy happen to agree is not the same as one whose clergy are held to an agreement, and only the second should show low dispersion. For ordination, I use whether the pastor holds a seminary degree and whether the congregation’s leader came from within the congregation, a hiring pattern that signals local control of the pulpit. Finally, I add two measures of congregational formality, a written budget and a governing board that met in the past year. These describe the congregation rather than the denomination, but institutionalized denominations prescribe how congregations are to be run, so local formality is a trace of denominational rules reaching down.

Table 2 reports the results, with clergy-level controls for age and gender and congregation-level controls for size, racial composition, location, and years since founding. Every check

⁵Many belief items in the survey, biblical inerrancy for example, track the modernist-fundamentalist divide, a controversy that most confessional texts predate and do not adjudicate, so agreement on them would measure where a denomination sits theologically rather than whether its confession binds. The return of Christ item is affirmed in the historic creeds and across the confessional texts the dimension codes, which makes it the one item on which a binding confession, wherever it sits on the theological spectrum, commits its clergy to a position.

lines up with the coding. High-polity denominations are more likely to have hosted a denominational representative. High-confession clergy affirm the return of Jesus at higher rates and vary less around their denomination's mean. High-ordination clergy are more likely to hold seminary degrees and less likely to have been drawn from the congregation they lead. Congregations of high-DII denominations are more likely to run a written budget and to have convened their governing board.

The index should also leave an imprint on the member's own religious life. An institutionalized body, I argued above, supplies much of that life ready-made, and where the supply is absent the believer maintains his relation to God through practices he performs himself. Institutionalization should therefore depress private devotion and direct religious experience while leaving communal engagement intact or raised.

I test this with four measures of private devotion from the General Social Survey (1972–2022) and the Religious Landscape Study (2007 and 2014): frequency of reading Scripture, frequency of prayer, born-again identification, and a life-changing religious experience. For communal participation I use seven measures, from official membership and volunteering through the church to church-affiliated groups, social activities, choir, youth work, and activities beyond services. Every one of the latter presupposes an organization to belong to, so the two panels separate what a believer can sustain alone from what only an organization can supply. Models control for attendance, the importance of religion (in the GSS, strength of affiliation), ideology, party identification, education, age, sex, and race, with geographic and survey-timing fixed effects and standard errors clustered on denomination.

The split is as predicted. In Panel A, every form of private devotion declines with institutionalization. In Panel B, not one form of communal participation falls: membership, volunteering, involvement in church-affiliated groups, and attendance at church social activities all rise, and the rest are indistinguishable from zero. Believers in institutionalized denominations are not less attached to their churches. By the organizational measures they are more attached. What they do less of is the religion one performs alone and holds directly.

Table 3: Denominational institutionalization and religious behavior

<i>Panel A: Private devotion</i>							
Dependent variable	(1) Reads scripture	(2) Reads scripture	(3) Prays	(4) Prays	(5) Born- again	(6) Born- again	(7) Rel. experience changed life
DII (0–12)	-0.0313** (0.0099)	-0.0415*** (0.0060)	-0.0136** (0.0043)	-0.0277*** (0.0041)	-0.0215*** (0.0057)	-0.0265*** (0.0044)	-0.0081* (0.0040)
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fixed effects	Division + year	State + wave	Division + year	State + wave	Division + year	State + wave	Division + year
Observations	1,299	24,503	16,664	24,458	10,221	24,054	4,343
Denominations	39	75	50	75	49	75	46
Data source	GSS	RLS 2007+14	GSS	RLS 2007+14	GSS	RLS 2007+14	GSS
<i>Panel B: Congregational participation</i>							
Dependent variable	(8) Official member	(9) Volunteers through church	(10) Church-affiliated group member	(11) Social activities	(12) Choir or music	(13) Works with children	(14) Activities beyond services
DII (0–12)	0.0084*** (0.0021)	0.0205*** (0.0029)	0.0042** (0.0014)	0.0076* (0.0032)	0.0029 (0.0051)	-0.0024 (0.0045)	0.0055 (0.0056)
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fixed effects	State + wave	State + wave	Division + year	State + wave	State + wave	State + wave	Division + year
Observations	24,578	11,174	9,928	11,194	11,195	11,205	8,885
Denominations	75	72	48	72	72	72	49
Data source	RLS 2007+14	RLS 2007	GSS	RLS 2007	RLS 2007	RLS 2007	GSS

Notes. $^{\dagger} p < .10$, $^* p < .05$, $^{**} p < .01$, $^{***} p < .001$. U.S. Protestants. Each column is a separate OLS regression of the outcome, on its native scale with higher values indicating more of the practice, on the raw DII (0–12). Controls are attendance, strength of affiliation (GSS) or importance of religion (RLS), ideology, party identification, education, age, sex, and race and Hispanic indicators, the latter dropped where it does not vary. Standard errors are clustered on denomination. Full coefficients in Appendix Tables SI-4–SI-5.

In sum, the index tracks how denominations are governed and how believers practice. Members of institutionalized bodies hold their religion through the organization, in formal membership, committees, and volunteering under its name. Members of weakly institutionalized bodies hold it directly, in prayer, in Scripture, in a personal relationship with God.

DII and Institutional Trust

I argue that members of more institutionalized churches place more trust in institutions, especially rule-making ones, both political and non-political. I focus on three groups of institutions. The first is national political institutions: the executive, Congress, and the Supreme Court, together with political parties. The second is local government: the mayor or city manager and the city council. The third is non-political bodies engaged in making and certifying knowledge: the scientific community, including modern medicine; the education system, from local schools to colleges and universities; the media; and organized religion itself. I rely on three data sources to measure institutional trust. The GSS has fielded a consistent confidence battery for five decades (1973–2022, as the 2024 release carries no detailed denomination codes). The ANES asks about fewer institutions, and many of its items are wave-specific rather than continuous, but its thermometer series covers the federal branches over the long run, and its 2024 wave asks about political parties, as well as colleges and universities. The CES 2016 is the only survey that asks respondents to evaluate their local political institutions and schools.⁶ When the same item exists in multiple surveys, I include every version, so that the findings are not artifacts of any single survey.⁷

⁶Appendix B details how denominational DII scores are linked to respondents in each survey.

⁷I distinguish trust and confidence from approval of incumbent performance. The GSS asks whether the respondent has a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in the people running each institution. The ANES asks for feeling-thermometer ratings from 0 to 100. The CSES module asks how much the respondent trusts each institution on a four-point scale. The CES asks respondents to grade the named local offices and services from A to F. The colleges-and-universities item, approval of how they are run, is the one approval-format item retained, as the only institution-level measure of higher education in any of the four sources.

Table 4: DII and confidence in individual institutions across three surveys

	GSS confidence 1973–2022	ANES thermometer 1972–2024	ANES 2024 CSES trust (4-pt)	CES 2016 local rating
<i>1. National political branches</i>				
Executive / federal government	0.0046* (0.0017), n=20,335	0.0073* (0.0035), n=5,826	0.0100* (0.0039), n=1,603	—
Congress	0.0005 (0.0015), n=20,334	0.0014 (0.0033), n=9,862	0.0056 (0.0056), n=1,606	—
U.S. Supreme Court	0.0163*** (0.0031), n=20,074	0.0074*** (0.0015), n=9,257	0.0094 (0.0067), n=1,603	—
Political parties	—	—	0.0115* (0.0047), n=1,602	—
<i>2. Local political bodies</i>				
Mayor / city manager	—	—	—	0.0064* (0.0024), n=14,146
City council	—	—	—	0.0052* (0.0023), n=14,265
<i>3. Non-political bodies</i>				
Organized religion	0.0143** (0.0049), n=20,161	—	—	—
Scientific community	0.0126** (0.0041), n=19,468	—	0.0065 (0.0051), n=1,605	—
Medicine	0.0108*** (0.0017), n=20,508	—	—	—
Press / traditional media	0.0093*** (0.0016), n=20,434	—	0.0178*** (0.0046), n=1,605	—
Television	0.0081** (0.0028), n=20,454	—	—	—
Education	0.0079** (0.0029), n=20,450	—	—	—
Colleges and universities	—	—	0.0134** (0.0048), n=1,763	—
Local schools	—	—	—	0.0085** (0.0030), n=15,330

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. U.S. Protestants. Every cell is the coefficient on the raw DII (0–12) with the outcome standardized, so cells are comparable as SD-per-DII-point. All models control for attendance, ideology, party identification, education, age, sex, race, and family income, with survey-year and state fixed effects (census division in the GSS, whose public release carries no state). Standard errors are clustered on the adult denomination. Full coefficients in Appendix Tables SI-6 and SI-7–SI-9.

Table 4 reports the results. Each cell is the coefficient on the DII from one model, with the outcome standardized, because the response scales differ across surveys. Every model controls for race, sex, age, education, family income, ideology, partisanship, and religious attendance, with geographic fixed effects, survey-year fixed effects where more than one wave enters, and standard errors clustered on denomination. The results are consistent across the three groups of institutions. Members of highly institutionalized churches have more confidence in organized religion, and they extend that confidence to secular institutions: the federal executive, the Supreme Court,⁸ political parties, the mayor and the city council, the press, the scientific community and medicine, and the education system from local schools through colleges and universities. The magnitudes are substantively meaningful. In the GSS models, the difference between a Southern Baptist and a Missouri Synod Lutheran, seven points on the index, moves confidence in the Supreme Court by slightly more than one full step on the five-category education scale, roughly the distance from a high school diploma to a junior college degree, and moves confidence in the scientific community by about two thirds of such an increase. Congress is the one institution whose coefficient never separates from zero on any of the three measures that carry it. A conjecture, though not a conclusive one, is that Congress is judged by who controls it at the moment rather than as a standing institution.

One threat to a causal interpretation of the findings is sorting into denominations. As recent work has pointed out, the causal arrow between religion and political attitudes runs both ways: religion not only shapes political attitudes but is itself sometimes the product of political views (Hout and Fischer, 2002; Patrikios, 2008; Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Campbell et al., 2018). It is therefore possible that people who already trust institutions select into churches that run on credentials and procedure, while people with a more suspicious attitude toward institutional authority go to churches that recognize no authority above the

⁸In the CSES module the standardized Supreme Court coefficient (0.0094) lies between the GSS estimate (0.0163) and the ANES thermometer estimate (0.0074), so the point estimate is in line with the other two sources. But the module was fielded in a single wave, and at that sample size ($n = 1,603$) the coefficient cannot be separated from zero.

local congregation. On this interpretation, the correlation records who joins rather than what church life does.

To address self-selection into denominations, I rely on an instrumental-variable strategy, instrumenting the adult DII with the DII of the denomination in which the respondent was raised at age 16, a choice that was not the respondent's own but his parents'. The GSS has carried the childhood-denomination item on a consistent frame for five decades. The ANES and the CES ask no such question, so the instrumented estimates are available for the GSS outcomes only. The identification assumption is that, conditional on the controls, the institutionalization of the childhood denomination affects adult institutional trust only through the institutionalization of the adult denomination, and not through any other channel. The threat to this assumption is the parents themselves. The denomination of the parents is itself shaped in part by their education, class, and income, the same backgrounds that shape their own institutional trust, and such attitudes can be transmitted to their children. In a stricter specification I therefore add the full childhood-background battery, parental education, relative family income at 16, father's occupational prestige, and the type of place and census division of upbringing.

Table 5 compares the OLS and IV results. Each cell is the estimated coefficient on the DII from one model. Column 1 shows the OLS estimates with the controls and fixed effects of Table 4. Column 2 applies the instrumental-variable strategy. Column 3 adds the strict controls for family background. To keep the estimates comparable across specifications, all three columns are estimated on the same sample for each outcome, the respondents with no missing value on any control variable including the background battery, so nothing in a row moves because of who is in the sample. The sample is smaller than in Table 4 mainly because of the background battery itself, father's occupational prestige and family income at 16 being the costliest items, rather than because of the instrument. Standard errors are clustered on the adult denomination in the OLS column and on the childhood denomination, the level at which the instrument varies, in the two 2SLS columns.

Table 5: Childhood-DII instrumental-variables estimates (GSS)

Dependent variable	OLS	2SLS (naive)	2SLS + full childhood background battery	F	F (bg)	N
<i>Confidence in... (1-3, higher = more confidence)</i>						
Executive branch	0.0045*** (0.0013)	0.0035 [†] (0.0017)	0.0025 (0.0019)	1175	1214	11,809
Congress	0.0024 [†] (0.0012)	-0.0012 (0.0023)	-0.0008 (0.0025)	1142	1184	11,810
U.S. Supreme Court	0.0108*** (0.0022)	0.0111*** (0.0029)	0.0097*** (0.0027)	1123	1163	11,690
Organized religion	0.0097** (0.0033)	0.0092** (0.0032)	0.0091* (0.0035)	1118	1171	11,680
Scientific community	0.0084*** (0.0022)	0.0085** (0.0027)	0.0058* (0.0023)	1109	1132	11,342
Medicine	0.0070*** (0.0009)	0.0100*** (0.0019)	0.0093*** (0.0018)	1137	1192	11,872
Education	0.0063** (0.0022)	0.0034 [†] (0.0019)	0.0043* (0.0021)	1157	1198	11,856
Press	0.0056*** (0.0014)	0.0042 (0.0027)	0.0032 (0.0026)	1193	1253	11,837
Television	0.0050** (0.0017)	0.0051* (0.0025)	0.0056* (0.0023)	1162	1207	11,839

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. U.S. Protestants raised Protestant, GSS 1973–2022. The instrument is the DII of the denomination in which the respondent was raised at age 16. All three columns control for attendance, ideology, party identification, education, age, sex, race, and log real family income, with census-division and survey-year fixed effects. The third column adds the childhood-background battery, parental education, relative family income at 16, father’s occupational prestige, and type of place lived in at 16, with fixed effects for the census division of upbringing. All three columns are estimated on the same complete-case sample, so nothing in a row moves because of who is in the sample. F and F(bg) are the cluster-robust first-stage F statistics on the excluded instrument. Standard errors are clustered on the childhood denomination, the level at which the instrument varies, in the 2SLS columns, and on the adult denomination in the OLS column. Full coefficients in Appendix Tables SI-10–SI-12.

The instrumented estimates tell the same story as the OLS estimates. Across the battery the coefficients move little under instrumentation, and what movement there is shows no general attenuation: medicine rises, and the Supreme Court, organized religion, television, and the scientific community stay essentially where they were. If adults sorted into denominations on their prior trust in institutions, the IV estimates would shrink across the board, which is not the case. The exceptions are the press and the executive branch, whose point estimates fall under the instrument and, once the background battery enters, cannot be separated from zero, suggesting that these two associations are partly driven by selection or parental transmission. Education dips in the naive 2SLS but returns to significance with the full battery. Congress, marginal in the OLS to begin with, goes to zero under the instrument, consistent with its null across Table 4.

DII and Populism

I next move from institutional trust to a related set of outcomes: anti-establishment attitudes. Scholarship has linked anti-institutional attitudes to populist sentiment (Rooduijn, 2018; Uscinski et al., 2021), a disposition that divides the world between "the people" and "the elite" and depicts the elite as corrupt, self-serving, and estranged from those it claims to serve (Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2016). The literature on populism has traditionally centered on attitudes toward politicians, but recent work has observed that anti-establishment sentiment is not confined to those who hold political power. It extends to those who control the making of knowledge (Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Merkley, 2020). I therefore move from confidence in specific institutions to evaluations of the government as a whole and of elites as a class, politicians and experts alike.

I rely on the ANES to test the association between the DII and populist attitudes. The first battery, in panel A, concerns the government as a whole and the officials who run it: whether hardly any officials are crooked, whether the government is run for the benefit of

all or by a few big interests, whether it can be trusted to do what is right, and whether it wastes tax money. These are the standard ANES trust-in-government items, carried in the cumulative file for five decades. The estimation series begins in 1972, where the ideology control begins, and two of the four items were retired after 2012, so the panel mixes 1972–2012 and 1972–2024 series. The second battery, in panel B, asks about politicians as a class: six statements sharing a single five-point agree–disagree stem, fielded identically in 2016 and 2020 and pooled with wave fixed effects. The statements cover whether the people rather than politicians should decide policy, whether politicians care about the people, whether they are the main problem in the country, whether they serve only the rich and powerful, whether compromise is selling out, and whether most politicians are trustworthy. The final two questions, in panel C, concern the evaluation of experts rather than government or politicians: whether the respondent trusts experts more than ordinary people, and whether ordinary people need experts’ help, both fielded in 2020.

Table 6 reports the results, and the three panels tell one story: members of more institutionalized denominations give the response that credits the establishment. In panel A all four coefficients are positive, from crooked officials to wasted taxes. In panel B every coefficient that separates from zero runs against the populist statement: high-DII respondents reject the claims that politicians do not care about the people and that compromise is selling out, and are alone in the battery in agreeing that most politicians are trustworthy. Panel C extends the disposition from political to epistemic authority: the same respondents trust experts over ordinary people, and the second expert item points the same way without separating from zero. Institutionalization does not merely predict confidence in particular institutions. It predicts rejecting the populist frame itself, whether the elite in question holds office or holds knowledge.

I additionally examine whether the DII extends to anti-immigrant and racially resentful attitudes, and it does not: the populism the DII predicts is narrow in a specific way. The populist syndrome as usually described bundles hostility to elites with hostility to outsiders,

Table 6: DII and populist sentiment about politicians and government (ANES)

Dependent variable	Coef.	(SE)	N	Denoms.	Years
<i>A. Officials and elite capture (cumulative file; higher = the trusting response)</i>					
Hardly any officials are crooked (1–3)	0.0072***	(0.0016)	11,509	63	1972–2012
Government run for the benefit of all (0/1)	0.0039***	(0.0008)	15,695	67	1972–2024
Trusts government to do what is right (1–4)	0.0053*	(0.0023)	11,248	61	1972–2012
Government does not waste tax money (1–3)	0.0047***	(0.0008)	16,287	68	1972–2024
<i>B. The people-vs-politicians battery (2016 + 2020 pooled; higher = agrees)</i>					
People, not politicians, should decide policy (1–5)	-0.0087	(0.0052)	4,006	52	2016+2020
Most politicians do not care about the people (1–5)	-0.0108**	(0.0034)	4,010	52	2016+2020
Politicians are the main problem in the U.S. (1–5)	0.0009	(0.0054)	4,010	52	2016+2020
Politicians care only about the rich and powerful (1–5)	-0.0105	(0.0063)	4,010	52	2016+2020
Compromise in politics is selling out (1–5)	-0.0163**	(0.0060)	4,010	52	2016+2020
Most politicians are trustworthy (1–5)	0.0109***	(0.0028)	4,010	52	2016+2020
<i>C. Experts versus the people (2020; higher = defers to experts)</i>					
Trusts experts more than ordinary people (1–5)	0.0061*	(0.0030)	2,722	48	2020
Ordinary people need experts’ help (1–5)	0.0066	(0.0040)	2,724	48	2020

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. U.S. Protestants. Each row reports the coefficient on the DII (0–12) from a separate OLS regression, with the outcome on its native scale. Controls are attendance, ideology, party identification, education, age, sex, race, and family income, with survey-year and state fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered on the denomination. Full coefficients in Appendix Tables SI-13 and SI-14.

and the DII moves only the first. Across the thirteen nativism and racial-resentment items the CES carries, no coefficient is significant in the exclusionary direction, and the two that reach significance run the other way (Appendix Table SI-23). Low institutionalization produces a disposition about institutional authority, not the bundled radical-right package.

From Attitudes to Behavior: County-Level Evidence

Finally, I examine whether the institutional trust and pro-establishment attitudes of high-DII members stay on the survey page or carry into behavior. For this I leave the survey data and turn to macro-level evidence.

The first behavioral outcome is vote choice. A large literature reads the rise of Trump as a populist episode, a vote against the political order and the political class rather than for a policy program (Mutz, 2018; Sides, Tesler and Vavreck, 2018; Autor et al., 2020). The general election, however, is a poor measure of populist sentiment: it is a partisan contest, and most

voters voted the party line. I therefore focus on the 2016 Republican primary, where party is held constant and the anti-establishment candidate ran against copartisan alternatives drawn from the party establishment, so a county’s Trump share measures the willingness of Republican voters to reject their own party’s establishment (MacWilliams, 2016; Rothwell and Diego-Rosell, 2016; Monnat and Brown, 2017; Bursztyn, Egorov and Fiorin, 2020).

The second outcome is the COVID-19 vaccination rate. Populism is not confined to the political domain: the same disposition that rejects the political class also rejects the authority of credentialed knowledge, and during the pandemic that rejection had a direct behavioral expression in the refusal of a vaccine endorsed by every medical authority (Kennedy, 2019; Mede and Schäfer, 2020).

To test this, I use county-level returns from the 2016 Republican primary and the county full-vaccination rate as of December 2021, from the CDC county series.⁹ I then use the 2010 U.S. Religion Census, which reports congregations and adherents by county for the 85 Protestant bodies, to construct a county-level Protestant DII: the adherent-weighted mean of the DII scores of the denominations present in the county, so a county of Episcopalians and Missouri Synod Lutherans scores high and a county of independent Baptist and nondenominational congregations scores low.

I add a battery of demographic controls: the shares white, Hispanic, foreign born, without a college degree, below the poverty line, unemployed, rural, and over 65, log median income, and log population density, together with the county’s Protestant and Catholic adherence rates, with state fixed effects and standard errors clustered on the state. I further add nine European-ancestry shares. Denomination and ancestry were historically fused. Germans and Scandinavians went to the Lutheran synods, the Dutch to the Reformed churches, and the Scots-Irish to Presbyterianism, so a county’s Protestant composition is in part a residue of ethnic settlement, and settler political cultures are known to persist (Kleppner, 1970; Jensen,

⁹December 2021 closes the first full year of availability: by then every adult had been eligible for eight months and the vaccine was free, so cross-county variation measures willingness rather than access, and the series predates the reporting changes of the booster period. The rate is each county’s last report on or before December 31, 2021.

1971; Swierenga, 2007; DeCanio, 2007). I also control for the Romney 2012 general-election share as the Republican baseline for the primary model, and the Trump 2020 share for the vaccination model. Finally, I control for total frontier experience (Bazzi, Fiszbein and Gebresilasse, 2020): frontier individualism may produce populism directly, and it may also have produced the religious ecology in which low-DII Protestantism thrives, for the frontier is where the itinerant preachers of the upstart denominations found their audience (Hatch, 1989; Finke and Stark, 2005).

Table 7: County religious composition, the 2016 primary, and vaccination

	Trump 2016 GOP- primary share (pp) (1)	Full vaccination rate, Dec. 2021 (pp) (2)
County DII (index points)	-0.5754** (0.1808)	0.7448** (0.2301)
% Protestant adherents	-0.0876*** (0.0157)	0.0246 (0.0266)
% Catholic adherents	0.0026 (0.0208)	0.0586* (0.0230)
% white	0.0189 (0.0274)	0.1384** (0.0438)
% Hispanic	-0.1098** (0.0318)	0.1800*** (0.0365)
% foreign born	0.2057† (0.1019)	0.0614 (0.0622)
% non-college	0.3661*** (0.0430)	-0.1551*** (0.0400)
Log median income	-2.2630 (1.7789)	4.3150* (1.9137)
% below poverty	0.0657† (0.0354)	-0.1974* (0.0875)
% unemployed	0.2282** (0.0836)	0.1506 (0.1088)
% rural	-0.0056 (0.0100)	-0.0008 (0.0089)
% age 65+	0.3599*** (0.0595)	0.3735*** (0.0668)
Log population density	-0.7519* (0.3312)	0.1365 (0.2373)
Romney 2012 vote share	0.0225 (0.0448)	—
Trump 2020 vote share	—	-0.4874*** (0.0567)
Frontier TFE (decades)	-0.2001 (0.2033)	0.1020 (0.1277)
% German ancestry	-0.0789* (0.0328)	-0.1189** (0.0378)
% Irish	0.0700 (0.0765)	-0.0512 (0.0542)
% English	-0.1862† (0.0965)	0.0479 (0.0564)
% Italian	0.5502*** (0.1187)	0.1263 (0.0927)
% Scotch-Irish	-0.2102 (0.1420)	-0.2936 (0.1778)
% “American”	0.0512 (0.0410)	0.0471 (0.0411)
% French	0.0160 (0.1102)	0.0766 (0.0996)
% Polish	0.1378 (0.0892)	0.0039 (0.0731)
% Scandinavian	-0.0211 (0.0827)	-0.0751* (0.0337)
State fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,732	3,079
States (clusters)	43	44
DV mean	47.0	47.7
DV SD	15.7	12.5

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Unit: U.S. county; standard errors in parentheses are clustered by state.

Table 7 presents the results. In both columns the form of a county’s Protestantism predicts its behavior. A county whose Protestant adherents belong to more institutionalized bodies gave a smaller share of its Republican primary vote to Trump and had vaccinated more of its residents by December 2021. A one-standard-deviation difference in the county DII, 1.8 points, implies 1.0 and 1.4 percentage points in the primary vote and the vaccination rate, respectively. Both estimates come from the most stringent specification, which includes the Republican electoral baseline, the Romney 2012 share in the primary model and the Trump 2020 share in the vaccination model. What institutionalized religious life shapes is not only expressed attitudes but revealed preferences.

Robustness Checks and Additional Analysis

I conduct several additional analyses. First, if members learn institutional trust inside institutionalized churches, the association should be strongest for the members most exposed to them, the most frequent church attendees. The main specifications hold attendance as a control; here I interact the DII with church attendance in every individual-level model of Tables 4 and 6, with the outcome and attendance standardized, and report the full grid in Appendix Tables SI-20 and SI-21. For confidence in specific institutions the dose is strong and consistent: seven of the nine GSS interactions are positive and significant, organized religion’s is as large as its main effect. For the populist battery the evidence is thinner: the interactions sit near zero with none significant. One reading of the contrast is that participation transmits a template for judging institutional authority rather than an affect toward politicians as a class, so the judgments deepen with exposure while the sentiment does not.

Another potential challenge is that what the DII records is the difference between theologically conservative and liberal Protestantism, the division the literature codes as evangelical versus mainline (Steensland et al., 2000). Three responses. First, the two divisions are related but not the same. The evangelical camp contains bodies out of the

confessional Reformation rather than the revivalist tradition, the Missouri and Wisconsin Synod Lutherans and the Presbyterian Church in America among them, that are no less theologically conservative than the Southern Baptists yet sit at the top of the index. The mainline camp spans both loosely institutionalized congregational bodies, such as the Disciples and the United Church of Christ, and the most hierarchical Protestant churches in the country, the Episcopalians and the United Methodists. At the level of denominational bodies the two classifications are only moderately correlated. Second, the standard classification cannot serve as a control here, because organizational structure is one of its own inputs. The RelTrad coding of Steensland et al. (2000) sorts denominations partly by their organizational ties, so conditioning on it would fold the treatment into the control. I therefore take the adjustment to the individual level, where the respondent's own theology can be measured directly. I rerun every individual-level model of Tables 4 and 6 controlling for the respondent's born-again self-identification, an individual-level operationalization of the evangelical category that performs comparably to the denominational coding (Burge and Lewis, 2018), for his biblical literalism, the item asking whether the Bible is to be taken as true word for word, the question that has divided theological liberals from conservatives since the fundamentalist controversy, and for the two together (Appendix Tables SI-15, SI-16, and SI-17). One limitation applies to the CES cells: the CES carries no literalism item, so they are checked against born-again identification alone. The results barely move, and nearly every coefficient that is significant in the main tables survives the controls. Third, the point is not that the divide the literature has identified does not matter. It is that institutionalization is a constituent of that divide, an organizational channel running beneath the theological one, and that the two have been conflated because the standard classification measures them together.

I conduct two further sensitivity checks. First, not every respondent can be matched to an exact denominational body. Some report only a denominational family, a Lutheran, a Pentecostal, a Holiness church, without naming the body, and this is especially common in the earlier GSS waves, whose denomination codes are coarser. Rather than discard these

respondents, I assign them the score of their family’s largest body, and the appendix describes the assignment in full. As a check, I re-estimate the individual-level models on the years in which the surveys probe specific denominational bodies, 1984 and later in the GSS and 1990 and later in the ANES, so that the restriction changes the instrument rather than the respondents. The estimates are unchanged or slightly stronger (Appendix Table SI-18).

Finally, I exclude the nondenominational churches, a heterogeneous set of congregations that sits at the bottom of the index. Because these churches anchor the low end, the results could in principle reflect a single contrast between nondenominational and denominational Protestantism rather than a gradient running across denominations. Dropping the cell leaves the main results unchanged (Appendix Table SI-19). The headline coefficients grow slightly rather than shrink, and the losses are confined to a few cells that lose precision as the sample thins.

Conclusion

This paper examines how the way a church organizes religious authority shapes its members’ political attitudes and behavior. In denominations where authority is mediated by institutions, written constitutions, binding confessions, ordination credentials, and disciplinary machinery, members extend more trust to secular institutions, political and epistemic alike, from the federal executive and the Supreme Court to local government, science, and medicine. They are less likely to hold populist anti-establishment sentiments, whether the elite in question holds office or holds knowledge, while no association is found between the level of church institutionalization and nativism or racial resentment. Traces of the same disposition appear in behavior: counties whose Protestants belong to more institutionalized bodies gave a smaller share of their 2016 Republican primary vote to the anti-establishment candidate and vaccinated more of their residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two directions are left to future work. First, institutionalized churches organize belonging

through rules and offices rather than personal connection, and a long literature holds that the form of associational life shapes general social trust, not only trust in institutions (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1993; Stolle and Rochon, 1998). Whether the disposition documented here extends from institutions to strangers is the natural next question. Second, the paper measures one religious family. American Protestantism spans only part of the axis it studies. Across the world's religious traditions, the organization of religious authority varies far more widely than within it. The conceptual scheme and the coding manual travel, and applying them across traditions would turn a claim about American Protestants into a claim about religion and institutional life in general.

The finding carries an important implication. The American religious landscape has been moving toward de-institutionalization: institutionalized denominations, mainline and conservative alike, that occupy the top of the index have contracted for two generations, while the nondenominational and loosely affiliated congregations have grown (Chaves, 2017). If church life trains dispositions toward institutional authority, this compositional shift has been quietly withdrawing one of the schools in which such dispositions were taught. The decline of institutional trust and the rise of populism have many causes. The changing landscape of American Protestantism may be among them, operating not through what churches preach but through what they are.

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Appendices

A The Denominational Institutionalization Index

A.1 Coding of Each Denomination

Table SI-1: The coded ledger: all 124 denominations

Denomination	A	B	C	D	DII
Christian Reformed Church	2	3	3	3	11
Episcopal Church in the USA	3	2	3	3	11
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America	2	3	3	3	11
Seventh-day Adventist	3	2	3	3	11
United Methodist Church	3	2	3	3	11
Associate Reformed Presbyterian	2	3	3	2	10
Church of God (Cleveland TN)	3	2	2	3	10
Church of the United Brethren in Christ	3	2	3	2	10
Evangelical Lutheran Synod	1	3	3	3	10
Evangelical Presbyterian Church	2	2	3	3	10
Heritage Reformed Congregations	2	3	3	2	10
Lutheran Church Missouri Synod	1	3	3	3	10
Presbyterian Church in America	2	3	3	2	10
Presbyterian Church USA	2	2	3	3	10
Protestant Reformed Churches in America	2	3	3	2	10
Reformed Church in America	2	3	2	3	10
Reformed Church in the United States	2	3	3	2	10
Salvation Army	3	3	2	2	10
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	1	3	3	3	10
African Methodist Episcopal	3	1	3	2	9
AME Zion	3	1	3	2	9
Anglican Church (US respondents mostly ACNA/continuing)	3	2	2	2	9
Bible Presbyterian Church	1	3	3	2	9
Christian and Missionary Alliance	3	2	2	2	9
Christian Methodist Episcopal	3	1	3	2	9
Church of God in Christ	3	2	2	2	9
Church of God of Prophecy	3	2	2	2	9
Church of the Lutheran Confession	1	3	3	2	9
Evangelical Congregational Church	3	2	2	2	9
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	2	2	3	2	9
Foursquare Gospel	3	2	2	2	9
Free Methodist (holiness family entry)	3	2	2	2	9
Free Methodist Church	3	2	2	2	9
Moravian Church in America	2	2	3	2	9
Orthodox Presbyterian Church	2	2	3	2	9
Pentecostal Holiness (IPHC)	3	2	2	2	9
Worldwide Church of God (Grace Communion)	3	2	1	3	9
Anglican Orthodox Church	3	2	2	1	8
Assemblies of God	1	2	2	3	8
Bible Fellowship Church	2	2	2	2	8
Church of the Nazarene	2	2	2	2	8
Churches of God, General Conference	2	2	2	2	8
Cumberland Presbyterian	2	2	2	2	8
Evangelical Covenant Church	1	2	2	3	8
Evangelical Methodist Church	2	2	2	2	8
Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	2	2	2	2	8
Open Bible Standard Churches	2	2	2	2	8
Pentecostal Church of God	2	2	2	2	8
Reformed Mennonite Church	2	2	1	3	8

continued on next page

Table SI-1 (continued)

Denomination	A	B	C	D	DII
The Missionary Church	2	2	2	2	8
Wesleyan Church	2	2	2	2	8
Apostolic Faith Mission of Portland OR	3	2	1	1	7
Brethren in Christ Church	2	2	2	1	7
Church of God (Anderson IN)	1	2	2	2	7
Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America	1	2	2	2	7
Congregational Holiness Church	2	2	1	2	7
Congregational Methodist Church	1	2	2	2	7
Disciples of Christ	1	2	2	2	7
Evangelical Free Church of America	1	2	2	2	7
Evangelical Friends Church International	2	2	1	2	7
Fellowship of Evangelical Churches	1	2	2	2	7
Independent Methodist	1	2	2	2	7
Mennonite Church USA	1	1	2	3	7
North American Baptist Conference	1	2	2	2	7
United Church of Christ	1	2	2	2	7
Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection	2	2	1	1	6
American Baptist Churches USA	1	2	2	1	6
Apostolic Christian	1	2	2	1	6
Church of the Brethren	2	0	2	2	6
Conservative Congregational Christian Conference	1	2	1	2	6
Convention of Original Free Will Baptists	1	2	1	2	6
Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches	1	2	1	2	6
Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ	1	2	1	2	6
Primitive Methodist Church in the USA	2	2	1	1	6
Seventh Day Baptist General Conference	1	2	1	2	6
Sovereign Grace Churches	2	1	2	1	6
United Pentecostal Church International	1	2	1	2	6
Assembly of Christian Churches	1	1	1	2	5
Association of Free Lutheran Congregations	1	2	1	1	5
Central Yearly Meeting of Friends	2	1	1	1	5
Free Will Baptist	1	1	1	2	5
Friends United Meeting	2	1	1	1	5
International Pentecostal Church of Christ	1	2	1	1	5
Pillar of Fire	3	1	1	0	5
Apostolic Lutheran Church in America	1	1	1	1	4
Charis Fellowship (Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches)	1	1	1	1	4
Church of God of the Apostolic Faith	2	1	1	0	4
Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship	1	1	1	1	4
Vineyard USA	1	2	1	0	4
Baptist Bible Fellowship International	0	2	1	0	3
Baptist General Conference (Converge)	1	1	1	0	3
Baptist Missionary Association	1	1	1	0	3
Calvary Chapel Association	1	1	1	0	3
Conservative Yearly Meetings of Friends	2	0	0	1	3
General Association of Regular Baptists	1	1	1	0	3
National Baptist Convention	1	1	1	0	3
National Baptist Convention of America	1	1	1	0	3
National Missionary Baptist Convention	1	1	1	0	3
Progressive National Baptist Convention	1	1	1	0	3

continued on next page

Table SI-1 (continued)

Denomination	A	B	C	D	DII
Schwenkfelder Church	1	1	1	0	3
Southern Baptist Convention	1	1	1	0	3
Advent Christian Church	0	1	1	0	2
American Baptist Association	0	1	1	0	2
Church of God General Conference	0	1	1	0	2
Conservative Baptist Association	0	1	1	0	2
Friends General Conference	2	0	0	0	2
Independent Baptist	0	1	1	0	2
Independent Presbyterian	0	1	1	0	2
Independent Yearly Meetings of Friends	2	0	0	0	2
Midwest Congregational Christian Fellowship	0	1	1	0	2
National Association of Congregational Christian Churches	1	0	1	0	2
Primitive Baptist	0	1	1	0	2
Reformed / Calvinist Baptist	0	1	1	0	2
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	0	0	1	0	1
Congregational Christian Churches, Additional	0	0	1	0	1
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship	0	0	1	0	1
Independent Congregational Church	0	0	1	0	1
Plymouth Brethren (Christian/Open Brethren)	0	1	0	0	1
Church of Christ	0	0	0	0	0
Community church	0	0	0	0	0
Interdenominational	0	0	0	0	0
Nondenominational charismatic	0	0	0	0	0
Nondenominational evangelical	0	0	0	0	0
Nondenominational fundamentalist	0	0	0	0	0

Notes. A = polity, B = confessional subscription, C = ordination threshold, D = disciplinary machinery, each 0–3. DII is the unweighted sum. Bodies are sorted by DII. Sources and the justification for every coding decision are released with the dataset.

B Data and Measurement

B.1 Data Sources

Table SI-2: Data sources

Source	Waves used	Denomination frame	Role	Coverage	Fallback
<i>Individual-level surveys</i>					
General Social Survey	1972–2022	detailed codes (DENOM, OTHER)	trust, behaviour, IV	88.0%	53.5%
ANES cumulative file	1972–2024	detailed codes 1990+, family frame before	trust, populism	80.6%	52.0%
ANES time series	2016, 2020, 2024	wave denomination codes	trust, populism, experts	99.5%	15.7%
Cooperative Election Study	2016, 2022	religpew two-step	local government, robustness	94.2 / 93.5%	1.0 / 0.4%
Pew Religious Landscape Study	2007, 2014	detailed codes	religious behaviour	79.6 / 78.9%	15.3 / 16.6%
<i>Validation and aggregate sources</i>					
National Congregations Study	1998–2019 (cumulative)	denomination reported by informant	validation	n/a	n/a
Cooperative Clergy Study Project	2000, 2017	sampled by denomination	validation	n/a	n/a
U.S. Religion Census	2010	85 reporting bodies	county DII	98.8%	n/a
County outcomes	2016 primary; CDC series to Dec. 2021	—	behaviour	n/a	n/a

Notes. Coverage is the share of self-reported Protestants routed to one of the 124 coded bodies. Fallback is the share of routed respondents assigned by family fallback rather than an exact body match, described in Appendix B.2. For the GSS, the ANES cumulative file, and the CES 2022 the figures come from the coverage audit (86.1 percent pooled coverage, with 53.9 percent of coded respondents matching an exact body, 42.3 percent assigned by family fallback, and 3.8 percent in within-family residual categories). The remaining figures are computed by the same rules: ANES time series pooled over the three waves, CES and RLS shown per wave. The high ANES time-series coverage reflects a code frame the crosswalk covers in full. The low ANES cumulative figure reflects the coarse family frame of the 1960–1988 waves. For the U.S. Religion Census, coverage is the share of Protestant adherents belonging to the 85 mapped bodies. Cells marked n/a are sources where the concept does not apply: the NCS records the denomination directly from the congregation’s informant, the CCSP samples pastors by denomination, and the county outcome series carry no denomination at all.

B.2 Linking Respondents to the Ledger

Each survey asks its own denomination question, and each is routed to the coding ledger through a survey-specific crosswalk. The routing has two steps. Where the respondent names a specific body, the response matches that body directly. Exact matches account for 53.9 percent of coded respondents across the three audited frames, and for nearly all coded

respondents in the CES, whose two-step question first asks the denominational family and then the specific body within it.

Where the response identifies only a family, the respondent is assigned the family's largest body by adherents, with race taken into account where a family bundles historically white and historically Black bodies. A Baptist without a named convention scores as the Southern Baptist Convention, a Methodist as the United Methodist Church, a Lutheran as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a Presbyterian as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and a nondenominational identifier enters at zero. A Black respondent goes instead to the largest body of the family's Black wing, the National Baptist Convention for Baptists and the African Methodist Episcopal Church for Methodists, following Steensland et al. (2000). For Baptists the reassignment changes the cluster rather than the score, as both conventions sit at three on the index. The fallback carries 53.5 percent of coded GSS respondents and 52.0 percent of the ANES cumulative file, where the 1960–1988 waves recorded only the family, against roughly 16 percent in the recent ANES waves and the RLS and about 1 percent in the CES. Because the fill compresses variation, it attenuates the estimates toward zero, and the coefficients reported in the paper are conservative on this account.

C Full Regression Tables

C.1 Validation: DII, Church Governance, and Religious Life

Table SI-3: Validation of the dimension scores: full specifications

Dependent variable	A			B		C			DII	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)		
	Denom. representative hosted	Agrees <i>Jesus</i> <i>will return</i>	SD of agreement (denom. level)	Seminary graduate (informant)	Seminary graduate (self-report)	Leader from inside congr.	Written budget	Board met		
Institutionalization score (raw)	0.1324*** (0.0290)	0.2026* (0.0927)	-0.2055* (0.0959)	0.0843*** (0.0071)	0.1606** (0.0475)	-0.0727*** (0.0123)	0.0125** (0.0033)	0.0095*** (0.0023)		
Log adult size / members	0.0222† (0.0124)	-0.1198*** (0.0249)	—	0.0573*** (0.0086)	0.0821* (0.0264)	-0.0038 (0.0088)	0.0612*** (0.0091)	0.0295† (0.0153)		
White share of congregation	-0.0010 (0.0006)	—	—	0.0004 (0.0004)	—	-0.0014*** (0.0003)	0.0010*** (0.0002)	0.0003 (0.0003)		
Congregation age (years)	0.0006* (0.0002)	—	—	0.0008* (0.0004)	—	-0.0003 (0.0003)	0.0002* (0.0001)	-0.0002 (0.0001)		
Urban location	—	-0.1191** (0.0377)	—	—	0.0678* (0.0267)	—	—	—		
Clergy female	—	-0.4835** (0.1216)	—	—	0.0441 (0.0278)	—	—	—		
Clergy age (years)	—	-0.0095*** (0.0019)	—	—	-0.0025** (0.0007)	—	—	—		
Fixed effects	Region + year	Year	None	Region + year	State + year	Region + year	Region + year	Region + year		
Observations	2,505	6,652	17	1,237	2,366	1,241	2,494	626		
Denominations (clusters)	17	17	17	17	10	17	17	17		
DV mean	0.532	4.501	0.716	0.808	0.848	0.187	0.897	0.941		
DV SD	0.499	0.897	0.351	0.394	0.359	0.390	0.305	0.236		
Data source	NCS	CCSP 2000	CCSP 2000	NCS	CCSP 2017	NCS	NCS	NCS		

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. The regressor in each column is the raw score for the dimension in the column group: A (polity, 0–3), B (confessional binding, 0–3), C (ordination threshold, 0–3), or the full DII (0–12) in columns (7)–(8), which are reported as associations with internal formalisation rather than validation, both items being amendable by the congregation itself. NCS models (1, 4, 6, 7, 8) are estimated on congregations with controls for log adult participants, white share, and years since founding, and region and survey-year fixed effects. CCSP models (2, 5) are estimated on individual clergy with controls for log adult members, urban location (community of 100,000 or more, or its suburb), clergy gender, and clergy age, neither wave asking when the congregation was founded; column (5) uses the 2017 wave, the only one carrying a geographic identifier, with state fixed effects; columns (2) and (3) use the 2000 wave, the only one carrying the belief battery. The outcome in column (2) is agreement with the proposition that Jesus will return to earth one day, on the five-point agree–disagree scale reversed so that higher values indicate more agreement. It is the one item in the CCSP doctrinal battery affirmed in the ecumenical creeds and in every confessional standard the second dimension codes; the battery’s remaining doctrinal items state positions in the fundamentalist–modernist controversy, biblical inerrancy chief among them, and so measure theological conservatism rather than confessional subscription, while the one other creedal-sounding item, that the sacraments are necessary for salvation, states a proposition the Reformed confessions deny and is null on this score. The coefficient is unchanged by controlling the pastor’s own biblical literalism and theological self-placement (+0.2111 with both). Confessional binding is a property of a denomination rather than of a pastor, so column (3) reports the dispersion of the same item where it lives: one observation per body, the outcome being the standard deviation of agreement among that body’s clergy. The two columns are the individual and the collective face of one prediction. Both are identified off a narrow range of the score, with a single body at zero: dropping the Churches of Christ, the only such body, leaves +0.1274 (0.1136) in column (2) and –0.0426 (0.1018) in column (3), and that body’s disagreement is concentrated in a fifth of its clergy who reject the item’s premillennial phrasing, *return to earth*, rather than the proposition of the creeds. An individual-level absolute-deviation version of column (3) is not reported: 68 per cent of pastors sit at the top of the scale, so the denominational mean and the mean absolute deviation correlate at –0.898 and at the individual level the dispersion is not separable from the level. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on denomination, except in column (3), where the observation is the denomination and the ordinary standard error is reported.

Table SI-4: Denominational institutionalization and religious behavior I: private devotion

	Reads scripture		Prays more often		Born-again		Rel. exp. changed life
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
DII (raw, 0–12)	-0.0313** (0.0099)	-0.0415*** (0.0060)	-0.0136** (0.0043)	-0.0277*** (0.0041)	-0.0215*** (0.0057)	-0.0265*** (0.0044)	-0.0081* (0.0040)
Attendance	0.2271*** (0.0245)	0.3972*** (0.0080)	0.1539*** (0.0067)	0.2219*** (0.0121)	0.0475*** (0.0030)	0.0684*** (0.0040)	0.0389*** (0.0041)
Strength of affiliation	0.4168*** (0.0413)	—	0.3340*** (0.0274)	—	0.0804*** (0.0099)	—	0.0844*** (0.0158)
Importance of religion	—	0.7163*** (0.0158)	—	1.1023*** (0.0342)	—	0.1696*** (0.0119)	—
Ideology	0.1021*** (0.0215)	-0.1119*** (0.0137)	0.0420** (0.0136)	-0.0807*** (0.0170)	0.0228*** (0.0047)	-0.0659*** (0.0079)	0.0265*** (0.0051)
Party identification	0.0008 (0.0197)	0.0221† (0.0124)	0.0083 (0.0064)	0.0212* (0.0090)	0.0042† (0.0023)	-0.0112** (0.0040)	-0.0049 (0.0044)
Education	-0.0603 (0.0386)	-0.0124 (0.0132)	-0.0464*** (0.0121)	-0.0028 (0.0098)	-0.0372*** (0.0095)	-0.0509*** (0.0087)	-0.0117 (0.0102)
Age	0.0061* (0.0028)	0.0114*** (0.0033)	0.0079*** (0.0009)	0.0046 (0.0029)	-0.0006 (0.0005)	0.0023 (0.0015)	-0.0015† (0.0008)
Female	0.2594** (0.0852)	0.1615*** (0.0232)	0.5075*** (0.0376)	0.3836*** (0.0345)	0.0168* (0.0071)	-0.0043 (0.0060)	0.0313* (0.0119)
Black	0.3398* (0.1550)	0.2186*** (0.0435)	0.3372*** (0.0331)	0.0539 (0.0367)	0.0613† (0.0360)	0.0469 (0.0316)	0.0408 (0.0355)
Other race	0.1584 (0.2827)	0.1626*** (0.0390)	0.1002 (0.0611)	0.0757* (0.0368)	0.0240 (0.0230)	0.0484* (0.0227)	-0.0905* (0.0412)
Hispanic	—	0.1733*** (0.0475)	0.1930** (0.0593)	0.0982† (0.0548)	0.0937** (0.0293)	0.0835*** (0.0235)	0.1972*** (0.0296)
Fixed effects	Region + year	State + wave	Region + year	State + wave	Region + year	State + wave	Region + year
Observations	1,299	24,503	16,664	24,458	10,221	24,054	4,343
Denominations (clusters)	39	75	50	75	49	75	46
DV mean	2.765	3.686	4.644	5.815	0.591	0.601	0.504
DV SD	1.546	1.528	1.417	1.581	0.492	0.490	0.500
Data source	GSS	RLS 2007+14	GSS	RLS 2007+14	GSS	RLS 2007+14	GSS

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. U.S. Protestants. All estimates are OLS with every dependent variable on its native scale, coded so that higher values indicate more of the practice: scripture reading is a 6-point scale in the GSS and a 5-point scale in the RLS, prayer frequency a 6-point scale in the GSS and a 7-point scale in the RLS, and the born-again and life-changing-experience items binary 0/1. GSS models control for attendance, strength of religious affiliation, ideology, party identification, education, age, and sex, with census-division and survey-year fixed effects. RLS models pool the 2007 and 2014 waves with wave fixed effects, replace strength of affiliation with importance of religion, and carry state fixed effects; education is harmonized to five common levels across the waves' differing category frames (less than high school; high school graduate; some college, vocational, or associate; four-year degree; postgraduate), and age enters as the 15-band grouping released in 2014, with 2007 ages cut to the same bands. Race indicators are included, with white non-Hispanic as the reference, the Hispanic indicator dropped where it does not vary. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on denomination.

Table SI-5: Denominational institutionalization and religious behavior II: congregational participation

	Official member	Volunteers through church	Church-affiliated group member	Social activities at church	Choir or musical program	Works with children/youth	Church activ. beyond services
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
DII (raw, 0–12)	0.0084*** (0.0021)	0.0205*** (0.0029)	0.0042** (0.0014)	0.0076* (0.0032)	0.0029 (0.0051)	-0.0024 (0.0045)	0.0055 (0.0056)
Attendance	0.1407*** (0.0059)	0.5361*** (0.0126)	0.0967*** (0.0018)	0.6127*** (0.0160)	0.4146*** (0.0137)	0.4711*** (0.0223)	0.5706*** (0.0114)
Strength of affiliation	—	—	0.0728*** (0.0053)	—	—	—	0.3101*** (0.0221)
Importance of religion	0.0853*** (0.0100)	0.2027*** (0.0265)	—	0.2125*** (0.0303)	0.1034*** (0.0247)	0.1169*** (0.0312)	—
Ideology	0.0058† (0.0032)	-0.0187 (0.0127)	0.0055† (0.0028)	-0.0113 (0.0151)	-0.0026 (0.0131)	-0.0356** (0.0106)	-0.0246 (0.0203)
Party identification	-0.0159*** (0.0031)	0.0244 (0.0164)	0.0035* (0.0015)	-0.0076 (0.0130)	0.0302* (0.0133)	0.0060 (0.0119)	0.0188* (0.0092)
Education	0.0194*** (0.0024)	0.0654*** (0.0154)	0.0381*** (0.0050)	0.0466*** (0.0095)	0.0229 (0.0162)	0.0477*** (0.0114)	0.1295*** (0.0259)
Age	0.0045*** (0.0012)	-0.0118*** (0.0031)	0.0018*** (0.0002)	-0.0083** (0.0027)	-0.0275*** (0.0035)	-0.1229*** (0.0037)	-0.0008 (0.0012)
Female	-0.0100† (0.0054)	-0.0633** (0.0215)	0.0287** (0.0086)	-0.0300 (0.0193)	-0.0453* (0.0199)	0.0389† (0.0207)	0.0535 (0.0355)
Black	0.0519*** (0.0116)	0.2048*** (0.0535)	0.0323** (0.0114)	0.0954† (0.0512)	0.4997*** (0.0601)	0.2934*** (0.0795)	0.0814 (0.0718)
Other race	-0.0020 (0.0136)	0.1189** (0.0356)	-0.0448 (0.0412)	0.0692 (0.0586)	0.1389* (0.0666)	0.1752** (0.0566)	0.0649 (0.1037)
Hispanic	0.0085 (0.0149)	0.1324* (0.0609)	—	-0.0054 (0.0763)	0.1015 (0.1052)	0.0548 (0.0613)	-0.1327 (0.1090)
Fixed effects	State + wave	State	Region + year	State	State	State	Region + year
Observations	24,578	11,174	9,928	11,194	11,195	11,205	8,885
Denominations (clusters)	75	72	48	72	72	72	49
DV mean	0.725	2.626	0.420	3.185	1.838	2.324	3.641
DV SD	0.446	1.350	0.494	1.290	1.452	1.501	2.505
Data source	RLS 2007+14	RLS 2007	GSS	RLS 2007	RLS 2007	RLS 2007	GSS

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. U.S. Protestants; specifications identical to Table SI-4. Official membership is asked of all respondents in both RLS waves (2007 of the respondent or their family, 2014 of the respondent personally; the wave fixed effect absorbs the level difference) and is coded 1 if yes. The four church-activity items (volunteering through one's place of worship, social activities, choir or musical programs, and work with children or youth) form the complete 2007 battery, asked of respondents who attend services at least a few times a year, on 5-point frequency scales; every item of the battery is reported. Church-affiliated group membership is from the GSS voluntary-associations module (1974–1994 and 2004), coded 1 if the respondent belongs to a church-affiliated group. Church activities beyond services is the GSS 11-point frequency item on taking part in church activities other than attending services. Race indicators are included, with white non-Hispanic as the reference, the Hispanic indicator dropped where it does not vary. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on denomination.

C.2 DII and Institutional Trust

Table SI-9: The CES cells of the institution matrix (full coefficients)

	Outcomes standardized (SD units)				
	Local schools	Local police	Mayor / city mgr.	City council	Trust federal govt (2022)
DII (raw, 0–12)	0.0085** (0.0030)	0.0057* (0.0026)	0.0064* (0.0024)	0.0052* (0.0023)	0.0111* (0.0045)
Attendance	0.0300*** (0.0048)	0.0394*** (0.0061)	0.0413*** (0.0069)	0.0505*** (0.0082)	0.0339*** (0.0052)
Ideology	-0.0287** (0.0099)	0.0460*** (0.0117)	-0.0494*** (0.0124)	-0.0385** (0.0119)	-0.1879*** (0.0150)
Party identification	-0.0041 (0.0054)	0.0346*** (0.0053)	-0.0023 (0.0069)	-0.0017 (0.0057)	-0.1494*** (0.0098)
Education	0.0047 (0.0058)	0.0126† (0.0065)	0.0098 (0.0066)	0.0026 (0.0060)	-0.0073 (0.0073)
Age	0.0019* (0.0008)	0.0070*** (0.0005)	0.0015† (0.0008)	-0.0008 (0.0008)	-0.0006 (0.0008)
Female	-0.0227 (0.0194)	-0.0461** (0.0156)	0.0289 (0.0202)	0.0701*** (0.0165)	0.0391† (0.0197)
Family income (z)	0.1001*** (0.0090)	0.1004*** (0.0094)	0.0690*** (0.0125)	0.0625*** (0.0127)	-0.0248* (0.0119)
Black	-0.2573*** (0.0216)	-0.3928*** (0.0202)	-0.0526* (0.0261)	-0.0750* (0.0329)	0.1471*** (0.0346)
Other race	-0.1788*** (0.0373)	-0.1155** (0.0383)	-0.1287** (0.0379)	-0.0890* (0.0397)	-0.1974*** (0.0317)
Hispanic	-0.0638 (0.0431)	-0.0491 (0.0309)	0.0103 (0.0333)	-0.0552 (0.0451)	0.0540 (0.0388)
Observations	15,330	15,320	14,146	14,265	13,212
Denominations (clusters)	78	78	77	77	77

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Full stack behind the CES cells of Table 4. Columns 1–4 are the CES 2016 local report-card battery, reversed so higher = better, then standardized. Column 5 is the CES 2022 trust-in-federal-government item, standardized. U.S. Protestants, state fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on denomination.

Table SI-6: Denominational institutionalization and confidence in institutions (GSS)

Confidence in... (1–3, higher = more confidence)									
Supreme Court (1)	Executive branch (2)	Congress (3)	Press (4)	Tele- vision (5)	Educa- tion (6)	Scientific community (7)	Medi- cine (8)	Organized religion (9)	
DII (raw, 0–12)	0.0109*** (0.0020)	0.0031* (0.0012)	0.0003 (0.0009)	0.0062*** (0.0011)	0.0053** (0.0018)	0.0051** (0.0019)	0.0078** (0.0025)	0.0068*** (0.0011)	0.0095** (0.0033)
Attendance	-0.0013 (0.0027)	0.0153*** (0.0023)	0.0155*** (0.0019)	-0.0054** (0.0016)	-0.0215*** (0.0022)	0.0119*** (0.0031)	-0.0117** (0.0040)	0.0052* (0.0025)	0.0514*** (0.0047)
Ideology	-0.0147*** (0.0032)	-0.0175** (0.0053)	-0.0105* (0.0039)	-0.0498*** (0.0084)	-0.0288*** (0.0069)	-0.0259*** (0.0068)	-0.0182** (0.0054)	-0.0059 (0.0052)	0.0032 (0.0050)
Party identification	0.0092** (0.0030)	0.0092† (0.0046)	-0.0097*** (0.0026)	-0.0340*** (0.0034)	-0.0130*** (0.0016)	-0.0122** (0.0039)	-0.0039 (0.0029)	0.0013 (0.0029)	0.0134*** (0.0030)
Education	0.0614*** (0.0075)	0.0320*** (0.0059)	0.0016 (0.0066)	0.0033 (0.0051)	-0.0333*** (0.0064)	0.0048 (0.0057)	0.0863*** (0.0046)	0.0299*** (0.0057)	0.0003 (0.0059)
Age	-0.0011* (0.0004)	-0.0001 (0.0003)	-0.0020*** (0.0004)	-0.0001 (0.0003)	0.0002 (0.0003)	0.0007* (0.0003)	-0.0005* (0.0002)	-0.0020*** (0.0005)	0.0008* (0.0004)
Female	-0.0369*** (0.0101)	-0.0063 (0.0106)	0.0276* (0.0135)	-0.0080 (0.0089)	-0.0186* (0.0084)	0.0015 (0.0129)	-0.0662*** (0.0074)	-0.0456*** (0.0091)	-0.0118 (0.0133)
Log family income	0.0080 (0.0083)	-0.0062 (0.0061)	-0.0208*** (0.0050)	-0.0297*** (0.0055)	-0.0402*** (0.0049)	-0.0322*** (0.0052)	0.0333*** (0.0051)	0.0089† (0.0051)	-0.0138* (0.0056)
Black	-0.0332† (0.0196)	0.0120 (0.0143)	0.0161 (0.0128)	0.0192 (0.0158)	0.1180*** (0.0152)	0.1018*** (0.0233)	-0.1531*** (0.0191)	-0.0236 (0.0153)	0.0433† (0.0230)
Other race	0.0821*** (0.0196)	0.1173** (0.0428)	0.1502*** (0.0294)	0.1462*** (0.0402)	0.0876*** (0.0224)	0.1012** (0.0359)	-0.0166 (0.0164)	-0.0276 (0.0197)	0.0208 (0.0445)
Hispanic	0.0063 (0.0283)	0.1160** (0.0377)	0.1028** (0.0343)	-0.0175 (0.0213)	-0.0486† (0.0276)	0.0612* (0.0300)	0.0278 (0.0401)	-0.0705** (0.0202)	-0.0545* (0.0206)
Observations	20,074	20,335	20,334	20,434	20,454	20,450	19,468	20,508	20,161
Denominations (clusters)	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52
DV mean	2.149	1.819	1.775	1.798	1.782	2.156	2.319	2.377	2.128
DV SD	0.670	0.682	0.629	0.675	0.649	0.647	0.616	0.632	0.665

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. U.S. Protestants, GSS 1973–2022 (the 2024 wave lacks the detailed denomination codes in the current cumulative release). The columns are OLS with controls for attendance, ideology, party identification, education, age, sex, and log real family income (constant dollars), with census-division and survey-year fixed effects; strength of religious affiliation is excluded as a posttreatment control (see the main text). Adding it moves the Supreme Court coefficient from 0.0109 to 0.0116 on a sample 8% smaller, and no estimate changes by more than 0.001. Race indicators are included, with white non-Hispanic as the reference, the Hispanic indicator dropped where it does not vary. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on denomination.

Table SI-7: Affect toward institutions, ANES cumulative file (full coefficients)

Feeling thermometers (0–97) and the media-fairness / Congress-approval items				
	Supreme Court (1)	Federal govt (2)	Congress (3)	Media fairness (4)
				Congress approval (5)
DII (raw, 0–12)	0.1468*** (0.0294)	0.1647* (0.0794)	0.0305 (0.0716)	0.0096* (0.0037)
Attendance	-0.0776 (0.1260)	0.6144** (0.2257)	0.5120** (0.1608)	-0.0124 (0.0129)
Ideology	0.6856*** (0.1741)	-1.2998*** (0.2776)	0.0239 (0.1703)	-0.0718*** (0.0167)
Party identification	0.4224** (0.1412)	-0.9072*** (0.1955)	-0.3163** (0.1073)	-0.0252*** (0.0062)
Education	0.2455 (0.2600)	-0.8968† (0.4723)	-1.7165*** (0.3413)	-0.0275† (0.0160)
Age	0.1261*** (0.0095)	0.0589*** (0.0137)	0.0111 (0.0143)	0.0009 (0.0007)
Female	0.7510* (0.3187)	1.2574 (0.8374)	3.5837*** (0.5054)	0.0186 (0.0329)
Family-income group	0.0399 (0.1730)	-1.0759*** (0.2210)	-1.3031*** (0.1781)	-0.0265 (0.0191)
Black	4.2867*** (0.6377)	11.2386*** (1.0097)	6.9122*** (0.4927)	-0.0430 (0.0272)
Other race	0.5387 (0.9522)	5.0731*** (0.8010)	2.9346** (1.0456)	0.0649 (0.1184)
Hispanic	2.1580 (1.4809)	8.7197*** (1.2984)	6.2510*** (1.6198)	0.0340 (0.0576)
Observations	9,257	5,826	9,862	2,262
Denominations (clusters)	67	61	68	48
DV mean	60.88	48.49	48.43	2.17
DV SD	19.74	22.58	21.68	0.76

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Full stack behind the ANES cumulative-file cells of Table 4. U.S. Protestants, ANES cumulative file; state and survey-year FE; race controls; SEs clustered on denomination. The matrix (Table 4) reports these DII coefficients divided by the DV standard deviation in the meta rows. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table SI-8: Trust in intermediary institutions, ANES 2016–2024 (full coefficients)

	CSES scientists 2024 (1)	CSES judiciary 2024 (2)	CSES Congress 2024 (3)	CSES government 2024 (4)	CSES parties 2024 (5)	CSES trad. media 2024 (6)	Colleges & universities 2024 (7)
DII (raw, 0–12)	0.0051 (0.0041)	0.0067 (0.0048)	0.0040 (0.0040)	0.0074* (0.0029)	0.0082* (0.0034)	0.0156*** (0.0041)	0.0227** (0.0081)
Attendance	-0.0254*** (0.0062)	0.0063 (0.0063)	0.0088 (0.0056)	0.0136 (0.0085)	0.0202* (0.0082)	0.0105 (0.0090)	0.0176 (0.0236)
Ideology	-0.1126*** (0.0163)	0.0089 (0.0137)	-0.0393* (0.0157)	-0.0656*** (0.0150)	-0.0056 (0.0142)	-0.0968*** (0.0172)	-0.2761*** (0.0306)
Party identification	-0.0905*** (0.0108)	0.0279** (0.0093)	0.0324** (0.0104)	-0.0107 (0.0101)	0.0114 (0.0101)	-0.1133*** (0.0121)	-0.0542† (0.0319)
Education	0.0924*** (0.0237)	0.0469** (0.0151)	0.0017 (0.0144)	0.0436*** (0.0115)	-0.0466*** (0.0126)	0.0062 (0.0129)	0.0037 (0.0602)
Age	0.0026** (0.0008)	0.0060*** (0.0017)	0.0049*** (0.0007)	0.0103*** (0.0008)	0.0062*** (0.0009)	0.0039*** (0.0008)	-0.0077*** (0.0021)
Female	-0.0093 (0.0231)	-0.0036 (0.0305)	0.1306*** (0.0354)	0.0162 (0.0235)	0.1197*** (0.0251)	0.0565 (0.0448)	0.2461* (0.1142)
Family-income group	0.0500** (0.0184)	0.0397** (0.0141)	0.0134 (0.0116)	0.0187 (0.0181)	-0.0193† (0.0102)	0.0156* (0.0073)	-0.0419 (0.0307)
Black	-0.2900*** (0.0750)	-0.0643† (0.0380)	0.0743 (0.0465)	0.0592 (0.0489)	0.1128** (0.0343)	-0.0740 (0.0875)	0.2532 (0.2488)
Other race	-0.1130* (0.0542)	0.0241 (0.0636)	0.0812 (0.0575)	0.1524* (0.0603)	0.2729*** (0.0552)	0.0335 (0.0453)	-0.0147 (0.1295)
Hispanic	0.0674 (0.3548)	-0.1262 (0.4194)	0.5066*** (0.1000)	0.3537 (0.3425)	0.3861† (0.2066)	0.3702* (0.1479)	0.2307 (0.2537)
Observations	1,605	1,603	1,606	1,603	1,602	1,605	1,763
Denominations (clusters)	43	43	43	43	43	43	44
DV mean	3.05	2.70	2.36	2.37	2.22	2.25	3.14
DV SD	0.80	0.72	0.71	0.74	0.72	0.88	1.70

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Full stack behind the 2024 CSES cells of Table 4, plus the 2024 approve-how-colleges-and-universities-are-run item of Table 4 (7-point, reversed so higher = approve). U.S. Protestants; state (+ wave) FE; race controls; SEs clustered on denomination; income is the within-wave quintile. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table SI-10: OLS on the common complete-case sample (full coefficients, panel A)

	Confidence in... (1–3, higher = more confidence)								
	Executive branch (1)	Con- gress (2)	Supreme Court (3)	Organized religion (4)	Scientific community (5)	Medi- cine (6)	Educa- tion (7)	Press (8)	Tele- vision (9)
DII (raw, 0–12)	0.0045*** (0.0013)	0.0024† (0.0012)	0.0108*** (0.0022)	0.0097** (0.0033)	0.0084*** (0.0022)	0.0070*** (0.0009)	0.0063** (0.0022)	0.0056*** (0.0014)	0.0050** (0.0017)
Attendance	0.0172*** (0.0031)	0.0169*** (0.0029)	-0.0006 (0.0028)	0.0505*** (0.0052)	-0.0114** (0.0036)	0.0058* (0.0027)	0.0122*** (0.0024)	-0.0057*** (0.0021)	-0.0213*** (0.0030)
Ideology	-0.0090 (0.0074)	-0.0120* (0.0050)	-0.0111* (0.0042)	0.0098* (0.0048)	-0.0178** (0.0059)	-0.0078 (0.0073)	-0.0258*** (0.0074)	-0.0567*** (0.0097)	-0.0245** (0.0080)
Party identification	0.0176*** (0.0045)	-0.0138*** (0.0028)	0.0142*** (0.0040)	0.0151*** (0.0032)	-0.0046 (0.0033)	0.0019 (0.0037)	-0.0100* (0.0049)	-0.0400*** (0.0032)	-0.0133*** (0.0022)
Education	0.0303*** (0.0065)	-0.0050 (0.0080)	0.0557*** (0.0080)	0.0075 (0.0075)	0.0839*** (0.0067)	0.0239** (0.0070)	0.0043 (0.0049)	0.0021 (0.0058)	-0.0276*** (0.0073)
Age	-0.0002 (0.0004)	-0.0021*** (0.0005)	-0.0012* (0.0005)	0.0008 (0.0006)	-0.0003 (0.0003)	-0.0019*** (0.0005)	0.0010* (0.0004)	0.0001 (0.0003)	0.0005 (0.0005)
Female	-0.0100 (0.0117)	0.0324** (0.0117)	-0.0187† (0.0109)	-0.0113 (0.0155)	-0.0552*** (0.0110)	-0.0271* (0.0103)	-0.0028 (0.0157)	-0.0015 (0.0083)	-0.0044 (0.0111)
Log family income	-0.0044 (0.0056)	-0.0213*** (0.0052)	0.0052 (0.0107)	-0.0098 (0.0074)	0.0332*** (0.0058)	0.0137* (0.0062)	-0.0216** (0.0066)	-0.0212*** (0.0058)	-0.0324*** (0.0056)
Black	0.0011 (0.0207)	-0.0141 (0.0175)	-0.0505† (0.0294)	0.0415† (0.0236)	-0.1563*** (0.0209)	-0.0488* (0.0184)	0.0618* (0.0247)	-0.0006 (0.0260)	0.0931*** (0.0186)
Other race	0.0289 (0.0899)	0.0899** (0.0312)	0.0851† (0.0431)	-0.0367 (0.0559)	-0.0467 (0.0292)	-0.0743† (0.0430)	0.0899* (0.0340)	0.0652 (0.0855)	0.0765 (0.0481)
Hispanic	0.1323† (0.0776)	0.1628* (0.0634)	0.0546 (0.0798)	0.0147 (0.0636)	0.0432 (0.0679)	-0.0607 (0.0618)	0.1296** (0.0463)	0.0969 (0.0645)	0.0118 (0.0490)
Observations	11,809	11,810	11,690	11,680	11,342	11,872	11,856	11,837	11,839
Childhood denominations (clusters)	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Panel A of the full stack behind Table 5: the OLS column, estimated on the identical sample as the 2SLS for each outcome. U.S. Protestants raised Protestant, GSS 1973–2022; census-division + survey-year FE; SEs clustered on the adult denomination (the 2SLS panels cluster on the childhood denomination, the level at which the instrument varies). Standard errors in parentheses.

Table SI-11: Childhood-DII 2SLS, baseline specification (full coefficients, panel B)

	Confidence in... (1-3, higher = more confidence)							
	Executive branch (1)	Con- gress (2)	Supreme Court (3)	Organized religion (4)	Scientific community (5)	Medi- cine (6)	Educa- tion (7)	Tele- vision (9)
DII (instrumented)	0.0035 [†] (0.0017)	-0.0012 (0.0023)	0.0111*** (0.0029)	0.0092** (0.0032)	0.0085** (0.0027)	0.0100*** (0.0019)	0.0034 [†] (0.0019)	0.0042 (0.0027)
Attendance	0.0171*** (0.0036)	0.0166*** (0.0028)	-0.0006 (0.0036)	0.0504*** (0.0045)	-0.0114* (0.0044)	0.0061* (0.0025)	0.0119*** (0.0021)	-0.0058* (0.0024)
Ideology	-0.0092 [†] (0.0053)	-0.0127** (0.0044)	-0.0111** (0.0041)	0.0097 [†] (0.0049)	-0.0177*** (0.0045)	-0.0071 (0.0051)	-0.0264** (0.0079)	-0.0570*** (0.0081)
Party identification	0.0176*** (0.0034)	-0.0135*** (0.0033)	0.0142*** (0.0035)	0.0152*** (0.0041)	-0.0046 (0.0030)	0.0016 (0.0030)	-0.0098*** (0.0027)	-0.0399*** (0.0036)
Education	0.0308*** (0.0060)	-0.0032 (0.0059)	0.0555*** (0.0095)	0.0077 (0.0059)	0.0838*** (0.0061)	0.0223* (0.0088)	0.0058 (0.0048)	-0.0277** (0.0068)
Age	-0.0002 (0.0004)	-0.0020*** (0.0004)	-0.0012** (0.0004)	0.0008 (0.0005)	-0.0003 (0.0004)	-0.0020*** (0.0005)	0.0011* (0.0004)	0.0001 (0.0003)
Female	-0.0098 (0.0165)	0.0330* (0.0154)	-0.0187 (0.0125)	-0.0113 (0.0151)	-0.0552*** (0.0146)	-0.0276** (0.0094)	-0.0023 (0.0148)	-0.0013 (0.0088)
Log family income	-0.0042 (0.0075)	-0.0207*** (0.0056)	0.0052 (0.0092)	-0.0098 (0.0080)	0.0332*** (0.0031)	0.0132 (0.0091)	-0.0211* (0.0082)	-0.0210** (0.0072)
Black	-0.0007 (0.0147)	-0.0205 (0.0164)	-0.0500** (0.0181)	0.0408* (0.0188)	-0.1561*** (0.0180)	-0.0433*** (0.0137)	0.0565*** (0.0136)	-0.0030 (0.0227)
Other race	0.0282 (0.0828)	0.0878* (0.0369)	0.0853** (0.0299)	-0.0370 (0.0672)	-0.0466 (0.0528)	-0.0724 [†] (0.0370)	0.0880 [†] (0.0440)	0.0644 (0.0959)
Hispanic	0.1327 (0.0858)	0.1639*** (0.0241)	0.0545 (0.0706)	0.0148 (0.0565)	0.0432 (0.0572)	-0.0617 (0.0696)	0.1305** (0.0380)	0.0974 (0.0590)
Observations	11,809	11,810	11,690	11,680	11,342	11,872	11,856	11,837
Childhood denominations (clusters)	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
First-stage F	1175	1142	1123	1118	1109	1137	1157	1193

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Panel B: the baseline 2SLS of Table 5, instrumenting adult DII with the DII of the denominator in which the respondent was raised at age 16. Specification and sample as panel A. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table SI-12: Childhood-DII 2SLS with the full childhood-background battery (full coefficients, panel C)

Confidence in... (1-3, higher = more confidence)								
Executive branch (1)	Con- gress (2)	Supreme Court (3)	Organized religion (4)	Scientific community (5)	Medi- cine (6)	Educa- tion (7)	Press (8)	Tele- vision (9)
DII (instrumented)	0.0025 (0.0019)	-0.0008 (0.0025)	0.0091* (0.0035)	0.0058* (0.0023)	0.0093*** (0.0018)	0.0043* (0.0021)	0.0032 (0.0026)	0.0056* (0.0023)
Attendance	0.0173*** (0.0036)	0.0163*** (0.0028)	0.0504*** (0.0045)	-0.0105* (0.0044)	0.0064* (0.0025)	0.0113*** (0.0022)	-0.0054* (0.0025)	-0.0213*** (0.0031)
Ideology	-0.0091† (0.0052)	-0.0129** (0.0046)	0.0098* (0.0048)	-0.0165*** (0.0044)	-0.0070 (0.0051)	-0.0271** (0.0079)	-0.0566*** (0.0078)	-0.0246** (0.0071)
Party identification	0.0169*** (0.0033)	-0.0133*** (0.0035)	0.0150*** (0.0042)	-0.0070* (0.0030)	0.0010 (0.0031)	-0.0088** (0.0028)	-0.0408*** (0.0038)	-0.0130*** (0.0024)
Education	0.0257*** (0.0054)	-0.0021 (0.0048)	0.0063 (0.0054)	0.0673*** (0.0052)	0.0189* (0.0081)	0.0086* (0.0040)	-0.0049 (0.0059)	-0.0270** (0.0086)
Age	0.0003 (0.0004)	-0.0021*** (0.0004)	0.0009 (0.0006)	0.0008† (0.0004)	-0.0018*** (0.0005)	0.0010† (0.0005)	0.0007 (0.0004)	0.0004 (0.0004)
Female	-0.0105 (0.0167)	0.0346* (0.0154)	-0.0188 (0.0147)	-0.0585*** (0.0143)	-0.0278** (0.0092)	0.0003 (0.0153)	-0.0024 (0.0092)	-0.0048 (0.0133)
Log family income	-0.0057 (0.0073)	-0.0203*** (0.0053)	0.0037 (0.0085)	0.0290*** (0.0035)	0.0127 (0.0092)	-0.0200* (0.0080)	-0.0231** (0.0074)	-0.0326*** (0.0081)
Black	0.0078 (0.0179)	-0.0088 (0.0176)	-0.0395* (0.0191)	-0.1545*** (0.0177)	-0.0363** (0.0135)	0.0691*** (0.0132)	-0.0072 (0.0253)	0.0895*** (0.0143)
Other race	0.0348 (0.0849)	0.0867* (0.0360)	0.0923** (0.0284)	-0.0332 (0.0561)	-0.0668† (0.0364)	0.0897† (0.0448)	0.0641 (0.0963)	0.0731 (0.0554)
Hispanic	0.1449† (0.0822)	0.1660*** (0.0253)	0.0730 (0.0686)	0.0572 (0.0534)	-0.0544 (0.0690)	0.1509*** (0.0369)	0.1045† (0.0611)	0.0070 (0.0579)
Parental education (years)	0.0039† (0.0022)	-0.0044** (0.0016)	-0.0001 (0.0027)	0.0110*** (0.0022)	0.0014 (0.0017)	0.0003 (0.0024)	0.0068** (0.0022)	-0.0012 (0.0020)
Family income at 16 (1-5)	0.0195* (0.0092)	0.0167** (0.0055)	0.0080 (0.0110)	0.0194** (0.0062)	0.0153* (0.0059)	0.0175* (0.0086)	-0.0016 (0.0080)	0.0019 (0.0054)
Father's occupational prestige	-0.0001 (0.0005)	0.0012* (0.0005)	-0.0001 (0.0006)	0.0010† (0.0005)	0.0001 (0.0004)	-0.0008 (0.0005)	0.0002 (0.0010)	0.0001 (0.0008)
Type of place at 16 (1-6)	-0.0009 (0.0036)	-0.0063 (0.0050)	0.0001 (0.0040)	0.0169** (0.0054)	0.0001 (0.0037)	-0.0194*** (0.0041)	0.0106* (0.0049)	0.0026 (0.0051)
Observations	11,809	11,810	11,690	11,680	11,342	11,872	11,837	11,839
Childhood denominations (clusters)	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
First-stage F	1214	1184	1163	1171	1132	1192	1253	1207

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Panel C: the third column of Table 5, adding the full childhood-background battery and division-at-16 fixed effects. Same sample as panels A and B. Standard errors in parentheses.

C.3 DII and Populism

Table SI-13: Trust in government, ANES cumulative file (full coefficients)

	Higher = the more trusting response			
	Hardly any crooked	Benefit of all	Trust govt do right	Does not waste
DII (raw, 0–12)	0.0072*** (0.0016)	0.0039*** (0.0008)	0.0053* (0.0023)	0.0047*** (0.0008)
Attendance	-0.0020 (0.0051)	0.0074** (0.0026)	0.0053 (0.0043)	0.0148*** (0.0027)
Ideology	-0.0108† (0.0063)	-0.0018 (0.0034)	-0.0121** (0.0037)	-0.0354*** (0.0047)
Party identification	0.0022 (0.0036)	0.0109*** (0.0030)	-0.0011 (0.0032)	-0.0115*** (0.0021)
Education	0.0589*** (0.0087)	0.0089 (0.0058)	0.0128† (0.0065)	0.0090 (0.0089)
Age	0.0021*** (0.0003)	-0.0005** (0.0002)	-0.0002 (0.0003)	-0.0022*** (0.0002)
Female	-0.0689*** (0.0113)	0.0065 (0.0047)	-0.0150 (0.0115)	0.0301*** (0.0085)
Family-income group	0.0081† (0.0046)	-0.0021 (0.0039)	-0.0102* (0.0040)	-0.0174*** (0.0034)
Black	-0.0296 (0.0251)	0.0329** (0.0111)	-0.0675*** (0.0165)	0.0620*** (0.0128)
Other race	-0.0821** (0.0302)	0.0292† (0.0162)	0.0302 (0.0604)	0.0191 (0.0295)
Hispanic	0.1295*** (0.0240)	0.0682* (0.0287)	0.0561* (0.0219)	0.0501* (0.0192)
Observations	11,509	15,695	11,248	16,287
Denominations (clusters)	63	67	61	68
Years	1972–2012	1972–2024	1972–2012	1972–2024
DV mean	1.61	0.25	2.37	1.30
DV SD	0.64	0.43	0.56	0.49

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Full stack behind panel A of Table 6. Specification and coding as there. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered on denomination.

Table SI-14: The people-vs-politicians battery (full coefficients)

	People decide (1)	Do not care (2)	Main problem (3)	Only the rich (4)	Compromise = selling out (5)	Trust- worthy (6)	Trusts experts (7)	Need experts (8)
DII (raw, 0–12)	-0.0087 (0.0052)	-0.0108** (0.0034)	0.0009 (0.0054)	-0.0105 (0.0063)	-0.0163** (0.0060)	0.0109*** (0.0028)	0.0061* (0.0030)	0.0066 (0.0040)
Attendance	-0.0136 (0.0085)	-0.0289* (0.0122)	-0.0350*** (0.0094)	-0.0228** (0.0082)	-0.0107 (0.0126)	0.0236* (0.0101)	-0.0096 (0.0124)	0.0057 (0.0120)
Ideology	0.0043 (0.0122)	0.0515† (0.0287)	0.0747*** (0.0200)	-0.0335* (0.0144)	0.1344*** (0.0171)	-0.0255 (0.0198)	-0.1153*** (0.0256)	-0.1005*** (0.0188)
Party identification	0.0171* (0.0083)	0.0197 (0.0127)	0.0375** (0.0124)	-0.0122 (0.0099)	0.0785*** (0.0100)	-0.0340* (0.0132)	-0.1030*** (0.0157)	-0.0889*** (0.0106)
Education	-0.0802*** (0.0166)	-0.1160*** (0.0161)	-0.0959*** (0.0161)	-0.1110*** (0.0130)	-0.1722*** (0.0143)	0.0175 (0.0124)	0.0958*** (0.0145)	0.0197† (0.0114)
Age	-0.0017 (0.0016)	-0.0043** (0.0014)	-0.0008 (0.0013)	-0.0043* (0.0016)	-0.0027** (0.0008)	0.0070*** (0.0009)	-0.0028* (0.0014)	0.0027*** (0.0009)
Female	0.0261 (0.0332)	-0.0076 (0.0213)	0.0371 (0.0356)	0.0445† (0.0242)	0.0791** (0.0285)	-0.0377 (0.0323)	-0.0964*** (0.0139)	0.0073 (0.0391)
Family-income group	-0.0595*** (0.0150)	-0.0524*** (0.0108)	-0.0249 (0.0185)	-0.0586*** (0.0146)	-0.1062*** (0.0200)	-0.0170 (0.0145)	0.0711*** (0.0114)	0.0286† (0.0150)
Black	0.0766 (0.0533)	0.0727 (0.0521)	0.1698** (0.0536)	0.1650*** (0.0348)	0.3545*** (0.0682)	-0.0346 (0.0581)	-0.2711*** (0.0577)	-0.1058† (0.0579)
Other race	-0.0643† (0.0334)	0.1033* (0.0463)	0.0642 (0.0611)	0.0704 (0.0691)	0.2054* (0.0776)	0.0061 (0.0571)	0.0580 (0.0644)	0.1157* (0.0478)
Hispanic	0.3283*** (0.0700)	0.1036† (0.0550)	0.1418 (0.0866)	0.1541* (0.0762)	0.1343 (0.1046)	-0.0864 (0.1310)	-0.2087 (0.1627)	-0.1023 (0.0934)
Observations	4,006	4,010	4,010	4,010	4,010	4,010	2,722	2,724
Denominations (clusters)	52	52	52	52	52	52	48	48
Waves	2016+2020	2016+2020	2016+2020	2016+2020	2016+2020	2016+2020	2020	2020
DV mean	3.50	3.32	3.28	3.55	2.92	2.40	3.18	3.43
DV SD	1.14	1.11	1.08	1.05	1.18	1.02	1.13	1.04

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Full stack behind panels B and C of Table 6; specification and coding as there. The two expert-reference items are fielded in 2020 only. Standard errors in parentheses.

D Robustness and Additional Analysis

D.1 Theology Controlled

Table SI-15: Individual theology controls: the GSS confidence battery

Confidence in. . .	Baseline	+ Born-again	+ Literalism	+ Both	N
U.S. Supreme Court	+0.0140*** (0.0039)	+0.0124** (0.0039)	+0.0133*** (0.0036)	+0.0121** (0.0037)	5,933
Executive branch	+0.0031 (0.0027)	+0.0032 (0.0028)	+0.0032 (0.0027)	+0.0032 (0.0028)	5,985
Congress	+0.0024 (0.0020)	+0.0030 (0.0020)	+0.0029 (0.0020)	+0.0032 (0.0020)	5,978
Press	+0.0031* (0.0015)	+0.0031 [†] (0.0017)	+0.0035* (0.0015)	+0.0033* (0.0016)	6,007
Television	+0.0074** (0.0021)	+0.0067** (0.0020)	+0.0078*** (0.0021)	+0.0070** (0.0021)	6,005
Education	+0.0063*** (0.0015)	+0.0060*** (0.0015)	+0.0068*** (0.0014)	+0.0063*** (0.0015)	6,016
Scientific community	+0.0103** (0.0036)	+0.0088* (0.0036)	+0.0090** (0.0032)	+0.0082* (0.0033)	5,819
Medicine	+0.0115*** (0.0031)	+0.0104** (0.0030)	+0.0111*** (0.0030)	+0.0102** (0.0030)	6,026
Organized religion	+0.0090** (0.0027)	+0.0102*** (0.0027)	+0.0101*** (0.0027)	+0.0109*** (0.0027)	5,949

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Each cell is the coefficient on the raw DII (0–12), specification as the GSS cells of Table 4 with outcomes on their native 3-point scale. All four columns are estimated on the same complete-case sample per item, requiring the born-again and biblical-literalism items observed. Born-again is a 0/1 self-identification. Literalism is a 0/1 indicator for taking the Bible as the literal word of God. These controls are plausibly post-treatment, so the columns bound the estimate rather than identify it. Standard errors are clustered on denomination.

Table SI-16: Individual theology controls: the ANES trust and populism cells

Outcome	Baseline	+ Born-again	+ Literalism	+ Both	N
<i>ANES trust cells</i>					
CSES: scientists (2024)	+0.0048 (0.0043)	+0.0034 (0.0040)	+0.0035 (0.0038)	+0.0028 (0.0037)	1,535
CSES: judiciary (2024)	+0.0072 [†] (0.0042)	+0.0060 [†] (0.0034)	+0.0065 (0.0043)	+0.0057 (0.0035)	1,533
CSES: Congress (2024)	+0.0039 (0.0040)	+0.0046 (0.0037)	+0.0041 (0.0040)	+0.0047 (0.0037)	1,536
CSES: government (2024)	+0.0079** (0.0028)	+0.0062* (0.0031)	+0.0074* (0.0030)	+0.0061 [†] (0.0032)	1,533
CSES: political parties (2024)	+0.0074 [†] (0.0038)	+0.0058 (0.0041)	+0.0080* (0.0037)	+0.0062 (0.0039)	1,533
CSES: traditional media (2024)	+0.0149*** (0.0039)	+0.0139*** (0.0037)	+0.0141*** (0.0037)	+0.0136*** (0.0036)	1,535
Colleges and universities (2024)	+0.0271*** (0.0072)	+0.0244*** (0.0066)	+0.0258*** (0.0070)	+0.0239*** (0.0065)	1,686
<i>ANES populism</i>					
People, not politicians, decide	-0.0086 (0.0055)	-0.0054 (0.0057)	-0.0073 (0.0057)	-0.0049 (0.0058)	3,831
Politicians do not care	-0.0102** (0.0036)	-0.0085* (0.0033)	-0.0091* (0.0036)	-0.0080* (0.0033)	3,835
Politicians the main problem	+0.0003 (0.0056)	-0.0006 (0.0057)	+0.0013 (0.0052)	-0.0000 (0.0054)	3,835
Politicians care only about rich	-0.0099 (0.0063)	-0.0077 (0.0063)	-0.0089 (0.0062)	-0.0073 (0.0063)	3,835
Compromise is selling out	-0.0178** (0.0064)	-0.0145* (0.0059)	-0.0133* (0.0053)	-0.0122* (0.0051)	3,835
Most politicians trustworthy	+0.0112*** (0.0032)	+0.0096** (0.0029)	+0.0119*** (0.0032)	+0.0101** (0.0029)	3,835
Trusts experts over ordinary people	+0.0078* (0.0030)	+0.0088* (0.0040)	+0.0068* (0.0025)	+0.0081* (0.0037)	2,562
Ordinary people need experts	+0.0079 (0.0048)	+0.0078 (0.0048)	+0.0072 (0.0051)	+0.0074 (0.0050)	2,564

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Each cell is the coefficient on the raw DII (0–12), specifications as the corresponding cells of Tables 4 and 6 with outcomes on their native scales. All four columns are estimated on the same complete-case sample per outcome, requiring the wave’s born-again and biblical-literalism items observed. Standard errors are clustered on denomination.

Table SI-17: Individual theology controls: the CES 2016 local cells

Rating of . .	Baseline	+ Born-again	N
Local schools	+0.0083** (0.0030)	+0.0084* (0.0033)	15,323
Local police	+0.0051* (0.0024)	+0.0048† (0.0026)	15,313
Mayor / city manager	+0.0063** (0.0024)	+0.0062* (0.0027)	14,139
City council	+0.0048* (0.0021)	+0.0056* (0.0024)	14,258

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Each cell is the coefficient on the raw DII (0–12), specification as the CES cells of Table 4 with the A–F grades reversed to their native 5-point scale so that higher is better. Both columns are estimated on the complete-case sample requiring the born-again item observed. Born-again is a 0/1 self-identification. The CES carries no biblical-literalism item, so born-again is the one individual theology control available. Standard errors are clustered on denomination.

D.2 Dropping the Family-Fallback Respondents

Table SI-18: Restricting to the years with detailed denomination codes

Outcome	Full sample			Detailed-code years		
	DII	(SE)	N	DII	(SE)	N
<i>GSS confidence (detailed codes from 1984)</i>						
U.S. Supreme Court	+0.0109***	(0.0020)	20,074	+0.0124***	(0.0020)	14,137
Executive branch	+0.0031*	(0.0012)	20,335	+0.0029†	(0.0015)	14,299
Congress	+0.0003	(0.0009)	20,334	+0.0007	(0.0018)	14,302
Organized religion	+0.0095**	(0.0033)	20,161	+0.0096**	(0.0030)	14,222
Scientific community	+0.0078**	(0.0025)	19,468	+0.0079**	(0.0028)	13,839
Medicine	+0.0068***	(0.0011)	20,508	+0.0096***	(0.0014)	14,409
Press	+0.0062***	(0.0011)	20,434	+0.0068***	(0.0013)	14,363
Television	+0.0053**	(0.0018)	20,454	+0.0062**	(0.0019)	14,380
Education	+0.0051**	(0.0019)	20,450	+0.0059**	(0.0018)	14,380
<i>ANES cumulative (detailed codes from 1990)</i>						
Thermometer: Supreme Court	+0.1468***	(0.0294)	9,257	+0.1623***	(0.0426)	7,440
Thermometer: federal government	+0.1647*	(0.0794)	5,826	+0.1576†	(0.0891)	4,673
Thermometer: Congress	+0.0305	(0.0716)	9,862	+0.0295	(0.0766)	8,714
Trusts government to do right	+0.0053*	(0.0023)	11,248	+0.0063**	(0.0020)	5,204
Government run for benefit of all	+0.0039***	(0.0008)	15,695	+0.0035***	(0.0008)	10,431
Government does not waste taxes	+0.0047***	(0.0008)	16,287	+0.0043**	(0.0012)	10,642
Hardly any officials crooked	+0.0072***	(0.0016)	11,509	+0.0080***	(0.0018)	6,435

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Each row compares the specification of Table 4 on the full sample with the same model restricted to the years in which the survey probes specific denominational bodies: 1984 and later in the GSS, 1990 and later in the ANES. Before those years most Protestants carry only a family-level code and score by the family fallback. The restriction changes the survey instrument, not the respondents, so it bounds the contribution of the family fill without selecting on who names a body. Outcomes on their native scales. Standard errors are clustered on denomination.

D.3 Dropping the Nondenominational Cell

Table SI-19: Dropping the nondenominational cell

Outcome	Full sample			Nondenominational dropped		
	DII	(SE)	N	DII	(SE)	N
<i>GSS confidence</i>						
U.S. Supreme Court	+0.0109***	(0.0020)	20,074	+0.0135***	(0.0017)	17,780
Executive branch	+0.0031*	(0.0012)	20,335	+0.0042**	(0.0012)	18,020
Congress	+0.0003	(0.0009)	20,334	-0.0005	(0.0010)	18,029
Organized religion	+0.0095**	(0.0033)	20,161	+0.0060*	(0.0029)	17,881
Scientific community	+0.0078**	(0.0025)	19,468	+0.0109***	(0.0019)	17,225
Medicine	+0.0068***	(0.0011)	20,508	+0.0064***	(0.0015)	18,186
Press	+0.0062***	(0.0011)	20,434	+0.0056**	(0.0020)	18,117
Television	+0.0053**	(0.0018)	20,454	+0.0031 [†]	(0.0017)	18,143
Education	+0.0051**	(0.0019)	20,450	+0.0026*	(0.0011)	18,126
<i>ANES cumulative</i>						
Thermometer: Supreme Court	+0.1468***	(0.0294)	9,257	+0.1342**	(0.0453)	7,841
Thermometer: federal government	+0.1647*	(0.0794)	5,826	+0.0962	(0.1057)	5,066
Thermometer: Congress	+0.0305	(0.0716)	9,862	-0.0914 [†]	(0.0505)	8,369
Trusts government to do right	+0.0053*	(0.0023)	11,248	+0.0026*	(0.0011)	10,181
Government run for benefit of all	+0.0039***	(0.0008)	15,695	+0.0031**	(0.0010)	13,675
Government does not waste taxes	+0.0047***	(0.0008)	16,287	+0.0050**	(0.0015)	14,203
Hardly any officials crooked	+0.0072***	(0.0016)	11,509	+0.0066**	(0.0024)	10,303
<i>ANES waves</i>						
CSES: scientists (2024)	+0.0051	(0.0041)	1,605	+0.0056	(0.0045)	1,546
CSES: judiciary (2024)	+0.0067	(0.0048)	1,603	+0.0060	(0.0050)	1,544
CSES: Congress (2024)	+0.0040	(0.0040)	1,606	+0.0030	(0.0038)	1,547
CSES: government (2024)	+0.0074*	(0.0029)	1,603	+0.0083**	(0.0030)	1,544
CSES: political parties (2024)	+0.0082*	(0.0034)	1,602	+0.0082*	(0.0034)	1,543
CSES: traditional media (2024)	+0.0156***	(0.0041)	1,605	+0.0139***	(0.0037)	1,546
Colleges and universities (2024)	+0.0227**	(0.0081)	1,763	+0.0192**	(0.0064)	1,700
<i>ANES populism</i>						
People, not politicians, decide	-0.0087	(0.0052)	4,006	-0.0093	(0.0059)	3,337
Politicians do not care	-0.0108**	(0.0034)	4,010	-0.0128**	(0.0038)	3,341
Politicians the main problem	+0.0009	(0.0054)	4,010	-0.0002	(0.0065)	3,340
Politicians care only about rich	-0.0105	(0.0063)	4,010	-0.0150*	(0.0067)	3,340
Compromise is selling out	-0.0163**	(0.0060)	4,010	-0.0222**	(0.0078)	3,340
Most politicians trustworthy	+0.0109***	(0.0028)	4,010	+0.0100**	(0.0032)	3,341
Trusts experts over ordinary people	+0.0061*	(0.0030)	2,722	+0.0060	(0.0043)	2,306
Ordinary people need experts	+0.0066	(0.0040)	2,724	+0.0058	(0.0046)	2,307
<i>CES 2016 local (standardized)</i>						
Local schools	+0.0085**	(0.0030)	15,330	+0.0060 [†]	(0.0033)	13,339
Local police	+0.0057*	(0.0026)	15,320	+0.0053*	(0.0026)	13,332
Mayor / city manager	+0.0064*	(0.0024)	14,146	+0.0045 [†]	(0.0027)	12,291
City council	+0.0052*	(0.0023)	14,265	+0.0033	(0.0021)	12,398

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Each row compares the specification of Tables 4 and 6 on the full sample with the same model after dropping every nondenominational entity. GSS and ANES outcomes on their native scales, CES outcomes standardized as in Table 4. Standard errors are clustered on denomination.

D.4 The Attendance Dose

Table SI-20: The attendance dose: DII $\times$ attendance across the institution matrix

	GSS confidence		ANES thermometer		ANES 2024 CSES		CES rating / trust	
	DII at mean att.	DII $\times$ att. (SD)	DII at mean att.	DII $\times$ att. (SD)	DII at mean att.	DII $\times$ att. (SD)	DII at mean att.	DII $\times$ att. (SD)
<i>1. National political branches</i>								
Executive / federal govt	0.0064*** (0.0017)	0.0070** (0.0023), n=18,046	0.0070 [†] (0.0037)	0.0051 [†] (0.0030), n=5,826	0.0104** (0.0039)	0.0063 [†] (0.0034), n=1,603	0.0095* (0.0045)	0.0007 (0.0022), n=13,212
Congress	0.0013 (0.0018)	0.0049*** (0.0012), n=18,049	0.0009 (0.0038)	0.0023 (0.0024), n=10,028	0.0054 (0.0058)	-0.0032 (0.0036), n=1,606	—	—
U.S. Supreme Court	0.0166*** (0.0019)	0.0067*** (0.0016), n=17,816	0.0075*** (0.0012)	0.0050* (0.0020), n=9,422	0.0093 (0.0068)	-0.0007 (0.0045), n=1,603	—	—
Political parties	—	—	—	—	0.0118* (0.0047)	0.0039 (0.0039), n=1,602	—	—
<i>2. Local political bodies</i>								
Mayor / city manager	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.0064* (0.0025)	0.0008 (0.0033), n=14,146
City council	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.0052* (0.0023)	-0.0006 (0.0034), n=14,265
Local police	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.0056* (0.0026)	-0.0013 (0.0027), n=15,320
<i>3. Non-political bodies</i>								
Organized religion	0.0137*** (0.0024)	0.0138*** (0.0025), n=17,885	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scientific community	0.0139*** (0.0028)	0.0078** (0.0027), n=17,245	—	—	0.0065 (0.0051)	0.0011 (0.0026), n=1,605	—	—
Medicine	0.0099*** (0.0024)	0.0036* (0.0014), n=18,207	—	—	—	—	—	—
Education	0.0081*** (0.0016)	0.0049*** (0.0013), n=18,149	—	—	—	—	—	—
Colleges and universities	—	—	—	—	0.0142** (0.0049)	0.0130* (0.0056), n=1,763	—	—
Local schools	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.0084** (0.0031)	-0.0013 (0.0022), n=15,330
Press / traditional media	0.0082*** (0.0012)	0.0018 [†] (0.0009), n=18,141	—	—	0.0180*** (0.0046)	0.0030 (0.0027), n=1,605	—	—
Television	0.0070* (0.0026)	0.0013 (0.0022), n=18,160	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. OLS only. Each pair of columns reports, from a single regression per cell, the coefficient on raw DII at mean attendance and the DII $\times$ attendance interaction, with attendance standardized on the estimation sample and the outcome standardized; controls, fixed effects, samples, and clustering exactly as the corresponding cells of Table 4. The interaction reads as the change in the DII effect (in SD of the outcome per index point) per one-SD increase in church attendance.

Table SI-21: The attendance dose in the populist-sentiment items (ANES)

	DII at mean att.	(SE)	DII × att. (SD)	(SE)	N
<i>A. Trust in government (cumulative file; outcomes standardized)</i>					
Trusts government to do what is right	0.0095*	(0.0040)	0.0032	(0.0030)	11,248
Government run for the benefit of all	0.0094***	(0.0022)	0.0031	(0.0020)	15,865
Government does not waste tax money	0.0098***	(0.0017)	0.0021	(0.0014)	16,458
Hardly any officials are crooked	0.0118***	(0.0029)	0.0029	(0.0023)	11,509
<i>B. The people-vs-politicians battery (2016 + 2020; outcomes standardized)</i>					
People, not politicians, should decide policy	-0.0078 [†]	(0.0045)	-0.0010	(0.0031)	4,006
Most politicians do not care about the people	-0.0096**	(0.0032)	0.0010	(0.0037)	4,010
Politicians are the main problem in the U.S.	0.0011	(0.0050)	0.0031	(0.0037)	4,010
Politicians care only about the rich and powerful	-0.0099	(0.0060)	0.0010	(0.0036)	4,010
Compromise in politics is selling out	-0.0145**	(0.0054)	-0.0067	(0.0047)	4,010
Most politicians are trustworthy	0.0107***	(0.0028)	-0.0001	(0.0031)	4,010

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. OLS only; specifications as Table 6 with outcomes standardized, attendance standardized on each estimation sample, and the DII × attendance interaction added. The first coefficient is the DII effect at mean attendance; the interaction is the change in that effect per one-SD increase in attendance.

D.5 Nativism and Racial Resentment

Table SI-23: Nativism and racial resentment: the DII does not predict the exclusionary direction

Item	DII	(SE)	N	Denoms.
<i>CES 2016 immigration (0/1, item selected)</i>				
Grant legal status to employed immigrants (pro)	+0.0014	(0.0014)	18,088	79
Increase border patrols (anti)	-0.0027**	(0.0010)	18,088	79
Legal status for those brought as children (pro)	+0.0017	(0.0019)	18,088	79
Fine businesses hiring illegal immigrants (anti)	-0.0010	(0.0016)	3,967	72
Admit no refugees from Syria (anti)	-0.0033	(0.0021)	3,967	72
Increase work visas (pro)	+0.0004	(0.0014)	3,967	72
Identify and deport illegal immigrants (anti)	-0.0020	(0.0020)	18,088	79
Ban Muslims from immigrating (anti)	-0.0008	(0.0019)	3,967	72
<i>CES 2022 racial resentment (1–5, higher = more resentful)</i>				
Minorities should overcome without favors	-0.0023	(0.0044)	13,212	77
Slavery did not create lasting conditions	-0.0112*	(0.0043)	13,211	77
Whites who deny discrimination (mirror)	-0.0031	(0.0080)	3,234	69
Whites get away with offenses (mirror)	+0.0108 [†]	(0.0058)	3,234	69
Whites do not try to understand (mirror)	-0.0065	(0.0051)	3,233	69

Notes. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Each row is a separate OLS regression of the item on the raw DII (0–12), CES specification as in Table 4: attendance, ideology, party identification, education, age, sex, race, and family income, with state fixed effects and standard errors clustered on denomination. Immigration items are 0/1 for selecting the option. Resentment items are on their native 5-point scale coded so that higher values are more resentful. The three items marked mirror ask about resentment toward Whites and were fielded almost entirely to respondents of color. Half-sample immigration items carry smaller N.

Table SI-22: The attendance dose, GSS confidence items (full coefficients)

	Confidence in... (standardized)								
	Exec. (1)	Congr. (2)	S. Ct. (3)	Press (4)	TV (5)	Educ. (6)	Sci. (7)	Med. (8)	Relig. (9)
DII (at mean attendance)	0.0064*** (0.0017)	0.0013 (0.0018)	0.0166*** (0.0019)	0.0082*** (0.0012)	0.0070* (0.0026)	0.0081*** (0.0016)	0.0139*** (0.0028)	0.0099*** (0.0024)	0.0137*** (0.0024)
Attendance (SD)	0.0210 (0.0159)	0.0405*** (0.0077)	-0.0395*** (0.0087)	-0.0319*** (0.0084)	-0.0909*** (0.0138)	0.0234* (0.0098)	-0.0882*** (0.0151)	0.0005 (0.0100)	0.1212*** (0.0172)
DII × attendance	0.0070** (0.0023)	0.0049*** (0.0012)	0.0067*** (0.0016)	0.0018† (0.0009)	0.0013 (0.0022)	0.0049*** (0.0013)	0.0078** (0.0027)	0.0036* (0.0014)	0.0138*** (0.0025)
Ideology	-0.0218** (0.0074)	-0.0182** (0.0057)	-0.0254*** (0.0045)	-0.0766*** (0.0106)	-0.0444*** (0.0092)	-0.0362*** (0.0098)	-0.0309*** (0.0070)	-0.0098 (0.0072)	0.0049 (0.0056)
Party identification	0.0148* (0.0058)	-0.0142** (0.0046)	0.0171*** (0.0039)	-0.0491*** (0.0061)	-0.0193*** (0.0026)	-0.0171*** (0.0038)	-0.0060 (0.0039)	0.0030 (0.0042)	0.0201*** (0.0056)
Education (degree)	0.0408*** (0.0085)	-0.0017 (0.0098)	0.0858*** (0.0132)	0.0020 (0.0080)	-0.0503*** (0.0119)	0.0041 (0.0111)	0.1349*** (0.0115)	0.0440*** (0.0125)	0.0013 (0.0080)
Age	-0.0002 (0.0004)	-0.0031*** (0.0006)	-0.0019** (0.0006)	-0.0002 (0.0004)	0.0000 (0.0004)	0.0013** (0.0004)	-0.0012* (0.0005)	-0.0033*** (0.0007)	0.0014** (0.0004)
Female	-0.0062 (0.0176)	0.0393 (0.0241)	-0.0525** (0.0180)	-0.0129 (0.0129)	-0.0253 (0.0159)	-0.0045 (0.0200)	-0.1157*** (0.0187)	-0.0718*** (0.0139)	-0.0248 (0.0210)
Log real income	-0.0074 (0.0097)	-0.0327*** (0.0069)	0.0088 (0.0132)	-0.0432*** (0.0105)	-0.0596*** (0.0105)	-0.0458*** (0.0105)	0.0566*** (0.0083)	0.0143 (0.0114)	-0.0207† (0.0104)
Black	0.0109 (0.0185)	0.0184 (0.0137)	-0.0464** (0.0155)	0.0259 (0.0188)	0.1750*** (0.0176)	0.1617*** (0.0219)	-0.2458*** (0.0257)	-0.0429* (0.0193)	0.0618** (0.0213)
Other race	0.1685* (0.0833)	0.2552*** (0.0676)	0.1335** (0.0487)	0.1599*** (0.0386)	0.1538*** (0.0338)	0.1575*** (0.0430)	-0.0449 (0.0510)	-0.0968 (0.0663)	-0.0080 (0.0893)
Hispanic	0.1645* (0.0656)	0.1215** (0.0431)	0.0694 (0.0785)	0.0382 (0.0417)	-0.0694 (0.0689)	0.1592* (0.0755)	0.0638 (0.0893)	-0.1056 (0.0643)	-0.0230 (0.0518)
Observations	18,046	18,049	17,816	18,141	18,160	18,149	17,245	18,207	17,885

Notes. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Full coefficients behind the GSS columns of Table SI-20. OLS. Outcomes and attendance standardized on each estimation sample; DII enters in raw index points, so the interaction is the change in the DII slope per one-SD increase in attendance. Region and survey-year fixed effects; standard errors clustered on the childhood denomination. Standard errors in parentheses.