The Relationship Between Bible Literacy, Christian Nationalism, and Support for Redistribution in the U.S.

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Introduction

▪ Religion plays an important role in shaping American political attitudes, including views on taxation, welfare, and redistribution (McCarthy et al., 2016; Savage, 2020).

▪ Bible literalism historically has been associated with cultural conservatism, but its relationship to economic attitudes is less clear (Bibeau et al., 2023; Layman et al., 2021).

▪ Christian nationalism (CN) is a belief among Americans that the U.S. should be a Christian nation. This ideology has emerged as a powerful predictor of political attitudes, including opposition to government intervention, immigration and taxation (Whitehead & Perry, 2019; Perry & Braunstein, 2025).

▪ Gap in literature: While CN is strongly connected to policy attitudes, it is unknown whether Bible literacy (how one literally interprets the Bible) independently predicts and influences views on redistribution after accounting for CN and political ideology.

Research Questions

1. Is Bible literalism associated with opposition to income redistribution after accounting for Christian nationalism and political ideology?
2. Does Christian nationalism moderate the relationship between Bible literalism and redistribution attitudes?

Methods

Sample

▪ Respondents were drawn from the 2021 General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized U.S. adults (n = 1,131).

▪ Analyses used complete cases for all variables.

Measures

▪ Bible Literalism: Measured via GSS item: whether the Bible is the literal word of God, inspired word, or a book of fables. Recoded (0=Non-Literalist 1=Literalist).

▪ Christian Nationalism: Constructed from items measuring agreement that the U.S. should be a Christian nation, that biblical law should guide government, etc. Higher scores indicate stronger CN.

▪ Support for Redistribution: Agreement that "the government should reduce income differences between the rich and the poor." Higher scores = more opposition.

▪ Covariates: Age, income, education, political ideology, race, gender, religious attendance.

▪ A significant share of all respondents endorsed moderate to high levels of Christian nationalism (24.87%), while (21.49) of total respondents endorsed Bible literalism.

▪ Opposition to redistribution was distributed across the political spectrum, but strong CN adherents reported the highest levels.

Results

Bivariate

▪ Bible literalism and redistribution are significantly related: literalists are more likely to oppose redistribution than non-literalists (χ^2 = 23.33, p < .001).

▪ Christian nationalism shows an even stronger bivariate association, with high-CN respondents substantially more opposed to redistribution than low-CN respondents (χ^2 large, p < .001).

▪ Bible literalism and Christian nationalism are moderately correlated (r = .30), indicating overlapping but distinct constructs.

▪ Both religious variables appear influential when examined alone, suggesting that higher religio-political conservatism corresponds to greater resistance to redistribution in simple associations.

▪ However, bivariate results cannot account for political ideology or demographics, meaning these observed relationships may be partially confounded by other factors.
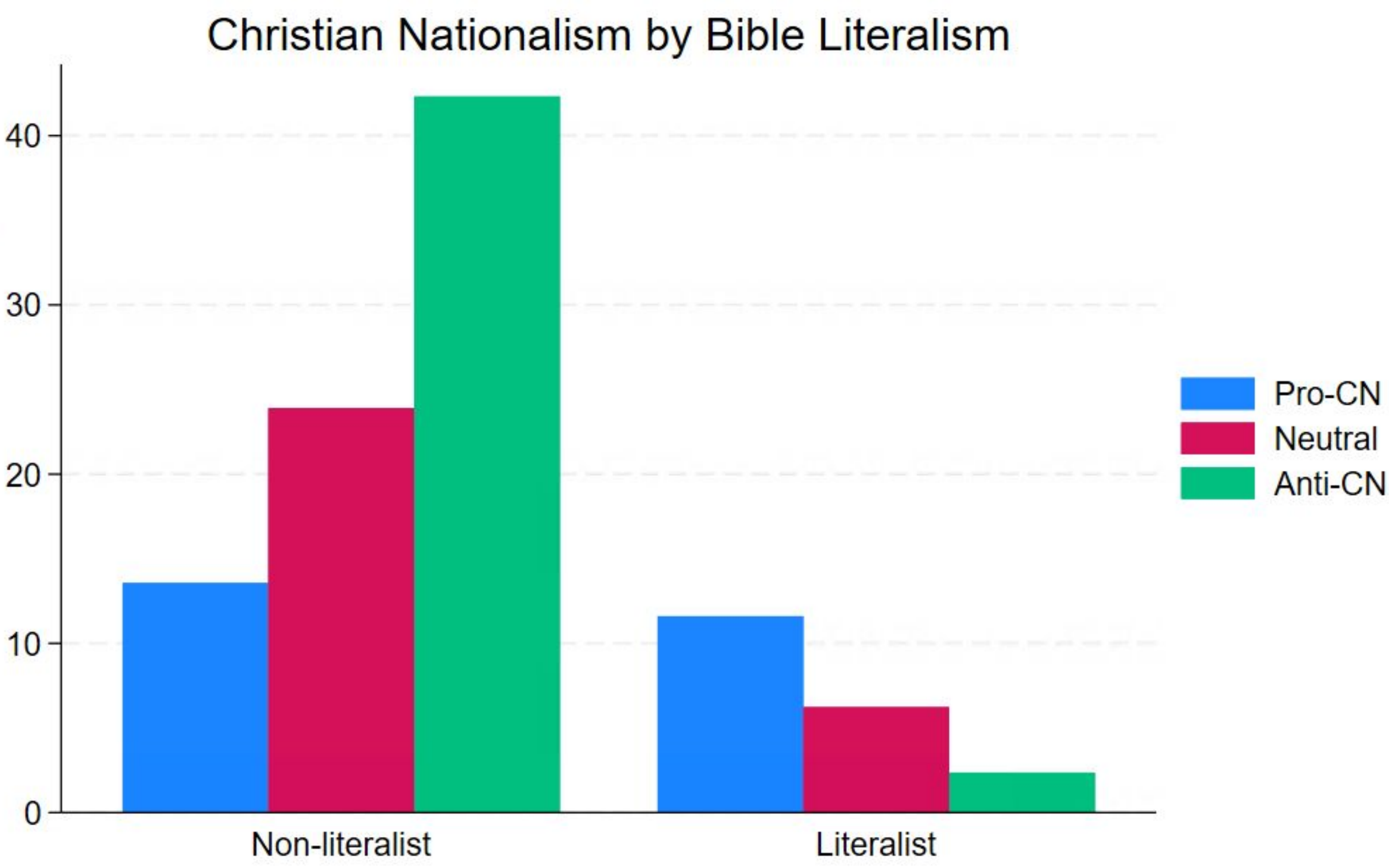
Multivariate

▪ Christian nationalism emerges as a powerful and unmistakably significant predictor of opposition to redistribution, even after controlling for political ideology, education, sex, and Bible literalism. Anti-CN respondents are 50% less likely to oppose redistribution compared to strong Christian nationalists (OR = 0.50, p = .001), revealing a striking ideological divide that persists even under rigorous controls.

▪ In contrast, Bible literalism, often assumed to be a central driver of economic attitudes, completely loses its influence once Christian nationalism and ideology are included (OR = 1.23, p = .28). What looked like a religious effect in the bivariate analysis vanishes, suggesting literalism had been masking deeper political-religious dynamics.

▪ Political ideology, however, explodes in magnitude. Conservatives are nearly 19 times more likely to oppose redistribution than liberals, with moderates over three times more likely (both p < .001). These are substantial effects, dwarfing nearly every other predictor.

▪ The anticipated interaction between Christian nationalism and Bible literalism, often theorized to reinforce each other, fails to appear entirely, offering no evidence that literalism intensifies CN's effect on economic attitudes.

▪ Taken together, the multivariate results reveal a striking reality: Christian nationalism (not biblical literalism) is the dominant religious force shaping opposition to redistribution. Once ideology and CN are accounted for, literalism fades into statistical irrelevance, exposing the uniquely political nature of Christian nationalist economic attitudes.
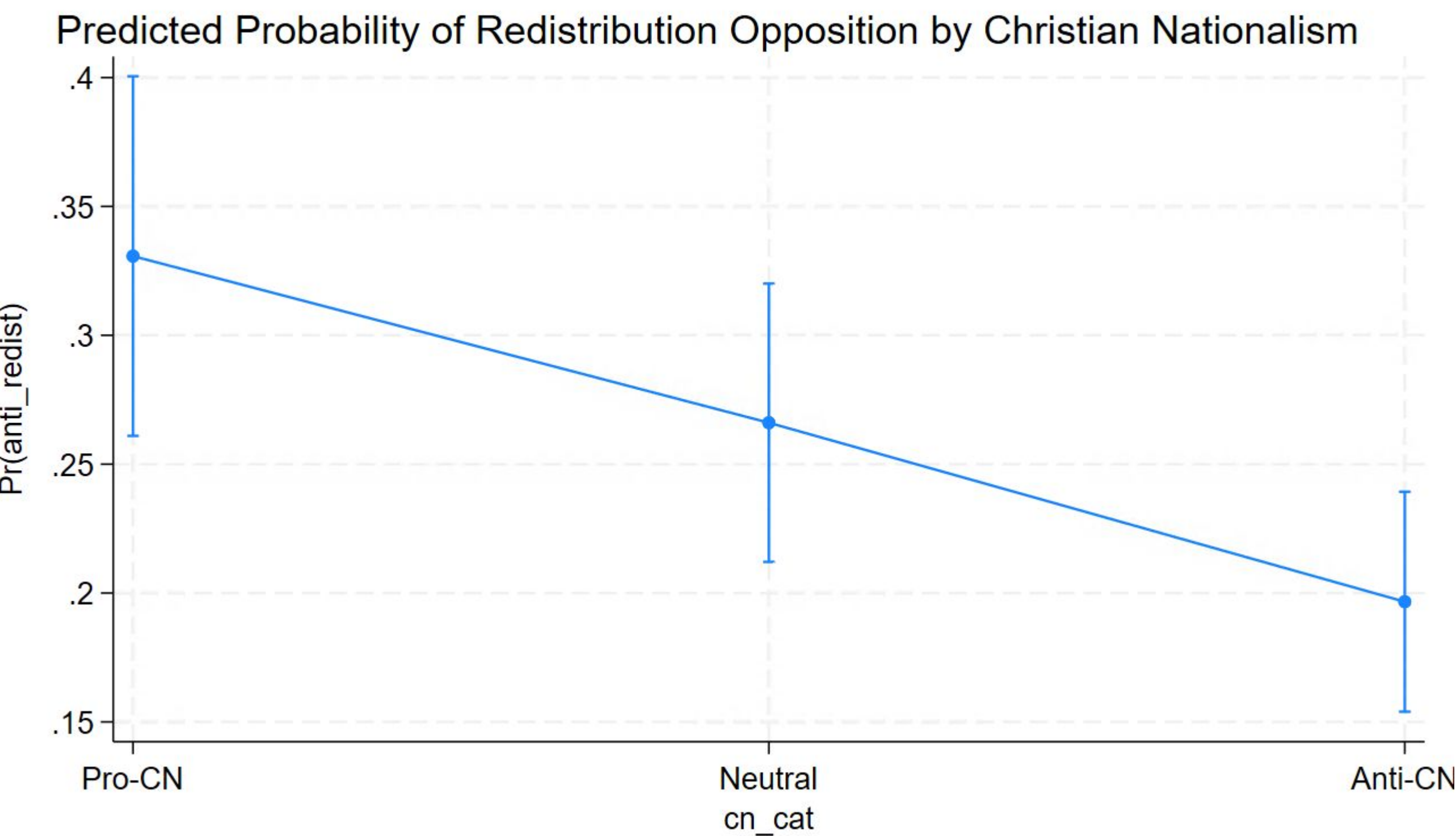
Christian Nationalism by Bible Literalism

(Legend: Pro-CN, Neutral, Anti-CN)

Figure 1: Support for Christian Nationalism by Bible Literalism

Predicted Probability of Redistribution Opposition by Christian Nationalism

Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Opposing Redistribution by Literalism × Christian Nationalism

Discussion

▪ Christian nationalism and not Bible literalism is the main religious predictor of redistribution attitudes.

▪ Although literalists appear more opposed in bivariate analysis, their effect diminishes once CN and ideology are included, this suggests that the influence of literalism is indirect and ideological rather than direct.

▪ CN appears to capture a broad political spectrum linking religion, nationalism, and economic conservatism, consistent with recent literature (Li & Froese, 2023; Perry & Braunstein, 2025).

▪ These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between religious belief (literalism) and religious political ideology (CN) when studying economic attitudes.

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