

RELATIONAL TURBULENCE THEORY, CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM, AND PATTERNS
OF POLITICAL TALK IN PARENT-YOUNG ADULT CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

by

Olivia Margaret Lavin

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Olivia Margaret Lavin

Thesis approved:

Andrew M. Ledbetter Digitally signed by Andrew M. Ledbetter
Date: 2022.04.22 13:49:41 -05'00'

Committee Chair Date

Paul Schrodt Digitally signed by Paul Schrodt
Date: 2022.04.22 14:25:13 -05'00' **4/22/22**

Committee Member Date

 Digitally signed by Kristen Carr
Date: 2022.04.22 17:05:07 -05'00' **4/22/22**

Committee Member Date

O'Neil, Julie Digitally signed by O'Neil, Julie
Date: 2022.04.27 07:03:50 -05'00' **4/27/22**

Associate Dean Date

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ABSTRACT

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by

Olivia Margaret Lavin

Master of Science, 2022
Department of Communication Studies
Texas Christian University

Advisor: Andrew Ledbetter, Ph.D., Professor

Differing political ideologies have been shown to create divides between people and turbulence within relationships. Using relational turbulence theory (RTT), this study aimed to explore how the political endorsement of Christian Nationalism influences the parent-child relationship. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the extent to which (dis)agreement on Christian nationalism serves as a boundary condition for RTT's theorized associations. Participants included 452 people who completed an online questionnaire concerning their perceptions of their relationship with one of their parents. The pattern of results generally supported RTT, as uncertainty predicted valence and valence predicted turbulence. However, the association between relational uncertainty, relational turbulence, and engagement did not emerge. Results found that (dis)agreement on the endorsement of Christian nationalism moderated RTT processes that directly affected evaluations of relational turbulence. With these findings, parents and children can have a greater understanding of how political conversations and (dis)agreement potentially influences their relationships

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the Trump presidency, Christian nationalism (the belief that America is a Christian nation and should be governed as such; Whitehead et al., 2018) gained momentum in the United States. This ideology joins Christian identity with American identity to endorse the merging of church and state, among a variety of other conservative Christian beliefs (e.g., allowing prayer in public schools, Christian symbols in public spaces). More generally, the 2020 election, the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the United States Capitol are all events that have exacerbated divides between people holding differing political ideologies, and endorsement of Christian nationalism frequently shapes how people interpret these and other political events.

Amid such current political division in the United States, often along political party lines, people may experience uncertainty and relational turbulence when they disagree politically with family members. Previous research has shown that romantic partners who share political beliefs are generally more satisfied in their relationship (Afifi et al., 2020). Similarly, political differences within the parent-child relationship may influence relationship quality (Scruggs & Schrodtt, 2021). This study investigates parent-child dyads, considering how their (dis)agreement on Christian nationalism may shape their political conversations, which may in turn influence the quality of the parent-child relationship.

This study builds from relational turbulence theory (RTT), which claims that relationships experience turbulence as a result of uncertainty brought on by the accumulation of negative communication events (Solomon et al., 2016). Endorsement of Christian nationalism may create relational turbulence, particularly if the parent and child do not agree. Within the RTT, which explains turbulence in light of a wide array of factors, two particularly relevant

constructs are (a) the valence of communication and (b) engagement (i.e., frequency) of communication. Specifically, the valence of communication refers to the positive or negative “tenor” of the interaction, whereas communication engagement refers to the frequency of communication about the topic (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 516). RTT situates valence and engagement of difficult topics (such as politics) as mediators of the association between (a) relational uncertainty, or the global evaluation that partners are uncertain how to act around each other and about their relational future, and (b) relational turbulence. However, the theory does not indicate how (dis)agreement on the topic may shape this process. Thus, the chief purpose of this study is to evaluate the extent to which (dis)agreement on Christian nationalism serves as a boundary condition for RTT’s theorized associations among relational uncertainty, communicative engagement and valence, and relational turbulence.

Existing literature on relational turbulence theory has primarily been applied to romantic relationships, though the scope of its assumptions is much broader. A few scholars have used RTT to study the parent-child relationship (Scheinfeld & Worley, 2018; Droser, 2020) but not in relation to political beliefs. The parent-child relationship is often a central and fundamental relationship in a person’s life. This study aims to expand our knowledge of this relationship by investigating the turbulence that may arise from political conversations. First, I will contextualize the study by briefly explaining Christian nationalism, establishing its importance as a significant political belief that might shape parent-child political conversations. Then, in light of this background, I will consider RTT’s claims about how the engagement and valence of political conversations might mediate the association between relational uncertainty and turbulence, considering the extent to which parent/child (dis)agreement about Christian nationalism may serve as a boundary condition for these processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It seems likely that recent current events in the United States have generated increased political tension, including within parent-child relationships. Accordingly, a Pew Research study concluded that approximately “77% of Americans said the country was now more divided than before the outbreak [COVID-19]” (Dimock & Wike, 2020). Political polarization may extend to family relationships as families often share their political values and beliefs with one another (Johnson et al., 2019; Scruggs & Schrod, 2021). Political beliefs are linked to an individual’s fundamental moral understandings of right and wrong and good and evil, which is why political conversations can be emotionally charged. Additionally, political conversations often reflect the increased hostility between political parties and subsequent disdain towards members of opposing groups (Klar et al., 2018; Tappin & McKay, 2019). In this section, I will consider why Christian nationalism might, at this particular political and historical moment, serve as a point of tension between parents and their young adult children.

Christian Nationalism

Nationalism, often mistaken as patriotism, is the doctrine of asserting the interests of one's own nation over the interests of other nations and the common good of all nations (French, 2021; Kidd, 2020). *Patriotism* is defined as devoted love and support of one's country, often leading to greater selflessness and national loyalty. This distinction is important as nationalism is founded in the exclusionary belonging of national identity at the expense of the “other.” Nationalism takes national loyalty to a new level by placing it above all other forms of political, religious, and social commitments and valuing the survival of the collective nation at the expense of its members (Harrison & Boyd, 2018). Nationalism holds three fundamental propositions: (a) the world is divided into nations, (b) each individual belongs to a nation, and (c) nations must be

united, autonomous, and free to pursue their goals. Thus, *nationalists* view their identity through the lens of belonging to a nation.

Christian nationalism is the belief that America is a Christian nation and should be ruled as such (Whitehead et al., 2018), and therefore adds religious parameters to the defining characteristics of nationalism. More specifically, Christian nationalism is “a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life” (Whitehead & Perry, 2020, p. 10). This ideology joins Christian identity with American identity to endorse the merging of church and state among various other politically conservative Christian beliefs (e.g., allowing prayer in public schools, Christian symbols in public spaces).

According to Whitehead and Perry (2018, 2020), Christian nationalists hold six fundamental beliefs: (a) the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation, (b) the federal government should advocate Christian values, (c) the federal government should not enforce the strict separation of church and state, (d) the federal government should allow religious symbols in public spaces, (e) the success of the United States is part of God's plan, and (f) the federal government should allow prayer in public schools. These beliefs lay the foundation Christian nationalists use to support other politically conservative values. Christian nationalists recognize religious identity (Christian, preferably evangelical Protestant), political ideology (conservative), race (white), and citizenship (American) as the exclusionary boundaries defining their group identity (Whitehead & Perry, 2020; Perry et al., 2021). Christian nationalism has frequently been referred to as white Christian nationalism due to the heavy emphasis on white supremacy. There is a long history of evangelicals using race to further separate the ingroup from the outgroup (Fea et al., 2021). However, although Christian nationalism

recognizes race as an ingroup qualifier, there is a small part of the movement that is not white. Whitehead and Perry (2020) found that among people who strongly embrace Christian nationalism, 70% were white, 11% were black, and 11% Hispanic. For this reason, many scholars have chosen not to explicitly use race as a marker of Christian nationalism. Doing so would not account for the small part of the movement that identifies as a race other than white.

Although it is beyond the scope of this project to trace the historical, political, and religious dimensions of Christian nationalism as a movement, it is worth clarifying Christian nationalism's relationship with other religious and political groupings. First, Christian nationalism is but a subset of Christianity as a much broader religious category, and indeed Christian nationalism often has little to do with Christian doctrine but instead is undergirded by conservative cultural preferences (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). Conservative Christian values have historically been used to validate conservative political values, and Christian nationalists often use evangelical Christian rhetoric to endorse Republican candidates, gun rights, and the pro-life movement, to name a few salient political issues (Whitehead & Perry). Although the Christian nationalist movement has roots in Protestantism more generally, and the fundamentalist and evangelical theological traditions specifically, not all Protestants, evangelicals, or fundamentalists identify as Christian nationalists. Second and relatedly, some political conservatives adopt evangelicalism not for religious reasons, but rather as a socio-political category that expresses their cultural identity. Burge (2021) stated that "many Americans are coming to the understanding that to be very religiously engaged and very politically conservative means that they are evangelical, even if they don't believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ." For example, "16% Trump supporters who didn't identify as evangelical in 2016 started considering themselves evangelical by 2020" (French, 2021, para. 6; Smith, 2021). For the purposes of this

study, this means that it is possible parents and children may find common ground on various religious beliefs (e.g., agreeing with evangelical Christian doctrine regarding the authority of the Bible) and/or political beliefs (e.g., supporting tax reform, border security, etc.), yet still disagree on whether they endorse Christian nationalism.

This study aims to understand how the endorsement of Christian nationalism may shape political conversation and the extent to which it generates relational turbulence within parent-child relationships. Specifically, the endorsement of Christian nationalism can challenge relational beliefs and stability particularly if the parent and child do not agree politically. This study will demonstrate how political (dis)agreement influences turbulence within the parent-child relationship by examining what mediates and moderates these differences, allowing insight into the parent-child relationship and hopefully enabling scholars to better understand how to prevent turbulence in relation to the endorsement of Christian nationalism. Next, I will consider how relational turbulence theory leads to relevant hypotheses and advance (dis)agreement on Christian nationalism as a possible boundary condition for the theory's claims.

Relational Turbulence Theory

The relational turbulence theory (RTT) was derived from the relational turbulence model (RTM). The RTM was created by Solomon and Knobloch (2001) in an effort to study how transitions influence relational development, proposing relational uncertainty and interdependence as predictors of cognition, communication, and emotions in response to relational turbulence (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). The relational turbulence theory (RTT; Solomon et al., 2016) redefines and expands this model to specify the underlying causal relationships and processes that exist between factors and clarify how specific experiences affect the overall relational perceptions and outcomes. Specifically, RTM “treats cognitions, emotions,

and communication as equivalent outcomes of relational uncertainty and qualities of interdependence,” whereas RTT specifies “the relationships that exist among cognitive appraisals, emotional intensity, and communication behavior” (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 515). Essentially, RTT builds on RTM to explore the more specific theoretical relationships between factors that influence relational turbulence.

RTT identifies a variety of social, relational, and personal outcomes as a result of relational turbulence. Solomon et al. (2016) define *relational turbulence* as “a global and persistent evaluation of the relationship as tumultuous, unsteady, fragile, and chaotic that arises from the accumulation of specific episodes” (p. 518). Essentially, specific episodes coalesce to influence an individual’s overall evaluation of the relationship. These evaluations lead people to characterize the relationship itself as unsteady, tumultuous, fragile, or chaotic. RTT identifies both relationship parameters (e.g., self/partner uncertainty; partner influence and interference) and episodic experiences (i.e., biased cognitive appraisals, intensified emotions, communication engagement, communication valence) that shape relational turbulence and its related outcomes. For the sake of parsimony, this study focuses on the role of communication engagement and valence in political conversations, examining the extent to which they mediate the association between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence.

The creators of RTT have visually divided this theory into three panels depicting these causal relationships and processes that create relational turbulence within a relationship (Solomon et al., 2016). This study does not test RTT as a whole. The creators of RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) never intended for it to be tested as a whole as the theory “encompasses relationship and communication experiences that exist on different time scales and within different contexts” (Solomon et al., 2019, p. 319). Without diminishing the importance of studying interdependence

as a relationship parameter, this study focuses on how relational uncertainty shapes the processes described by RTT. Additionally, although RTT recognizes biased cognitive appraisals and intensified emotions as mediators of communication valence and engagement, for the sake of parsimony this study tests how relational uncertainty and relational turbulence are mediated by communication valence and engagement and moderated by the endorsement of Christian nationalism.

Beginning with the first panel (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 509), RTT outlines the relationship parameters that shape an individual's experiences of *specific episodes*, which refers to transitions or experiences that result in relational uncertainty and creates relational turbulence. *Relational uncertainty* is "the degree of confidence [or lack of confidence] people have in their perceptions of involvement within interpersonal relationships" (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004, p. 797). There are three different types of relational uncertainty an individual can experience: (a) *self uncertainty* refers to uncertainty about one's own investment in the relationship, (b) *partner uncertainty* is uncertainty about the partner relational involvement, and (c) *relationship uncertainty* refers to uncertainty surrounding the future of the relationship as a unit (Solomon et al., 2004). Self, partner, and relationship uncertainty can occur simultaneously, meaning an individual can experience a combination of uncertainties. RTT states that all three sources of relational uncertainty are experienced on a *global level* (an individual's sense of ambiguity about the relationship) and on an *episodic level* (a specific experience in response to a discrete communication event) (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 511). Additionally, uncertainty provokes a response from the individual experiencing uncertainty due to the need to process contradictory information.

Relational transitions are marked by “a period of discontinuity between times of relative stability, during which individuals adapt to changing roles, identities, and circumstances” (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 510). For example, these transitions can be in the internal relational environment (e.g., pregnancy) or external relational environment (e.g., moving), can range from minor to severe, and appear gradually or suddenly. These transitions can be positive or negative, and they create incongruity between previously established relational beliefs, routines, and/or circumstances. Although RTT states that transitions are a turbulent juncture in a relationship, the theory does not recognize transitions as a scope condition, as relational turbulence also occurs in the absence of transition (Solomon et al., 2016; McLauren et al., 2011). Several types of episodes may generate relational turbulence, including interpersonal conflict and disagreement. Specifically, RTT asserts *relational uncertainty* as a fundamental factor influencing people’s experience of specific episodes.

RTT assumes that communication behavior, specifically communication valence and communication engagement, are outcomes of relational uncertainty and mediators of relational uncertainty’s association with relational turbulence. *Communication engagement* refers to how actively people communicate with a partner versus withdraw or avoid and how explicitly people communicate with a partner using direct versus indirect responses (Solomon et al., 2016; Knobloch et al., 2020). *Communication valence* is the tenor or tone of the interaction ranging from positive to negative, integrative to distributive, and constructive to destructive. RTT assumes that cognitive and emotional reactions (triggered by relational uncertainty) govern communication engagement and valence. Previous research has found that uncertainty distorts communication due to the lack of “contextual information creating ambiguity about the

meanings, intentions, and consequences of the symbolic exchange” (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 104), consequently corrupting communication comprehension.

RTT and Parent-Child Relationships

Existing literature on relational turbulence theory has primarily been applied to romantic relationships, though the scope of its assumptions is much broader. Although RTT was designed to address voluntary relationships, this study applies RTT within a parent-child context. Limited scholarship has used RTT to study the parent-child relationship (Scheinfeld & Worley, 2018; Droser, 2020), and not in relation to political beliefs. Given the importance of the parent-child relationship, including in the development of political identity (Scruggs & Schrodt, 2021), relational turbulence arising from parent-child political disagreement merits research attention.

The parent-child relationship is fundamental and influential in an individual’s life. Parents significantly shape their child’s development as they communicate and enforce rules, endorse family values, promote connectedness, shape behavior, and socialize their children. Through this, parents are able to instill morals, values, rules, and expectations into their children at a young age that often carry into adulthood. In fact, Healy and Malhotra (2013) found that parents create similarity by aligning children’s attitudes and parental beliefs. Of these, political beliefs are often passed down between parent and child. Scholars have previously studied how political beliefs are passed down from parent to child regarding childhood experience, political socialization, relational outcomes, and so forth (Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Healy & Malhotra, 2013; Tedin 1974, 1980). For example, Scruggs and Schrodt (2021) highlight the family as “an important ingroup and the place where children learn not only how to communicate more generally, but about politics specifically as they begin to develop their political identity” (p. 17; McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009). In fact, “decades of research have concluded that party

identification has its origin in pre-adult political socialization” (Dinas, 2013, p. 281).

Understanding the importance of the parent-child relationship is crucial to knowing how political beliefs, including Christian nationalism, can serve as a potential source of conflict in this relationship.

Political learning begins at an early age as parents, directly and indirectly, socialize their children to adopt specific values and beliefs (Aggeborn & Nyman, 2021; Jennings & Niemi, 1968). Family is where children first form their fundamental moral understandings of right and wrong and good and evil (Waldron & Kelly, 2015). These morals transfer to politics as individuals seek to endorse their moral beliefs in the political realm. These political values instilled at a young age have the potential to carry into adulthood. However, as children grow, they develop a sense of autonomy, making their own decisions and seeking more independence from their parents (Bi et al., 2018). As children gain autonomy over their decision-making, the moral backing of the political foundation created during childhood can be called into question. This is when an individual becomes an “autonomous political agent who plays an important role in their own, and the family’s, political learning and development” (Scruggs & Schrodt, 2021, p. 17). This growing independence can often lead to conflict as children grow and adopt different political ideologies than those instilled at a young age. In fact, Hatemi and Ojeda (2021) found that less than half of American adults share their parents’ political beliefs. Following the RTT, such political disagreements may lead to conflictual political discussions that could accrue into relational turbulence.

With political rifts deepening, political communication is becoming increasingly difficult as “it gets harder to talk to people across the political divide” (Butters & Hare, 2017; Weir, 2019). Further complicating this communication, RTT recognizes relational uncertainty as

influencing people's communication behaviors (engagement and valence) due to the need to sensemake contradictory information. Uncertainty, experienced on either a global or episodic level, creates challenges for sense-making, communication, and relational function (Solomon et al., 2016; Droser, 2020) which RTT recognizes as an important mechanism underlying relational turbulence. This study examines how relational uncertainty inversely predicts engagement and valence of political conversations, and following RTT, I predict that young adult children experiencing relational uncertainty are motivated to withdraw or avoid political communication, and that such conversations are more negatively valence when they do occur.

H₁: Relational uncertainty inversely predicts engagement in political conversations.

H₂: Relational uncertainty inversely predicts valence of political conversations (i.e., higher uncertainty predicts lower valence; lower uncertainty predicts higher valence).

Although many people maintain relationships with people of different political beliefs, approximately 80% of Americans have “just a few” or no friends at all on the other side of the political aisle (Pew Research Center, 2020). RTT suggests that relational turbulence is influenced by communication valence and engagement; however, engagement in political conversations does not always result in a tumultuous, fragile, or chaotic relational evaluation, such that some conversations may result in positive political talk. In fact, Keating et al. (2013) found that engaging in difficult conversations (such as politics) “strengthened the family relationship through increased trust, understanding, and open communication” (p. 175). Additionally, Johnson et al. (2019) found that when politically similar family members engage in political communication, they experience less stress and more relational closeness. This study tests RTT by investigating whether parent-child engagement in political conversations creates relational turbulence.

RQ1: Is engagement in political conversations associated with relational turbulence?

Political values and beliefs are linked to moral understandings of right and wrong and good and evil, which is why political conversations can be emotionally charged. Additionally, politics are a frequent source of conflict within relationships as differing political beliefs can lead to increased stress (McCarthy & Saks, 2019) and hostility (Dimock & Wike, 2020). RTT claims that “experiences of specific episodes characterized by biased cognitive appraisals, strong emotions, and polarized communication coalesce into a sense of chaos within the relationship,” causing an overall evaluation of the relationship as turbulent (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 507). This study aims to test this within the parent-child context by evaluating how the valence of political communication is associated with relational turbulence. As predicted by RTT:

H3: Valence of political conversations inversely predicts relational turbulence (i.e., more positive valence predicts lower relational turbulence; more negative valence predicts higher relational turbulence).

The RTT recognizes relational uncertainty as an important mechanism underlying relational turbulence. Specifically, RTT assumes that communication behaviors (valence and engagement) are outcomes of relational uncertainty and mediators of relational uncertainty’s association with relational turbulence (see Figure 1). Political differences can challenge relational beliefs and stability, potentially influencing parent-child relational evaluations (relational uncertainty and turbulence) and communication behaviors (valence and engagement). For example, previous research has found that it is difficult for “relational partners with differing political ideologies to avoid political discussion” (Afifi et al., 2020, p. 5). The valence and engagement of the communication event explains why discussions on difficult topics (such as

politics) may generate turbulence in a relationship. This study tests RTT by investigating these associations within the context of parent-child (dis)agreement regarding Christian nationalism.

H4: Engagement and valence mediate the association between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence.

Although RTT explains how relationship parameters (e.g. relational uncertainty) accrue to influence communicative engagement and valence during specific episodes, the theory does not elaborate (a) the nature of the conversational topics that might be influenced by relational uncertainty or (b) how the nature of those topics might shape subsequent relational turbulence. Particularly at the current moment, politics seems like one potentially relevant topic in part-child relationships. Previous research has found that political differences within the parent-child relationship influence communication behaviors and strain family relationships (Warner et al., 2021). Similarly, family members who disagree politically engage in less frequent political conversations and experience less relational closeness (Johnson et al., 2019). Thus, it could be that agreement exacerbates the connection between relational uncertainty and engagement/valence, whereas political disagreement may weaken or even nullify that theorized association.

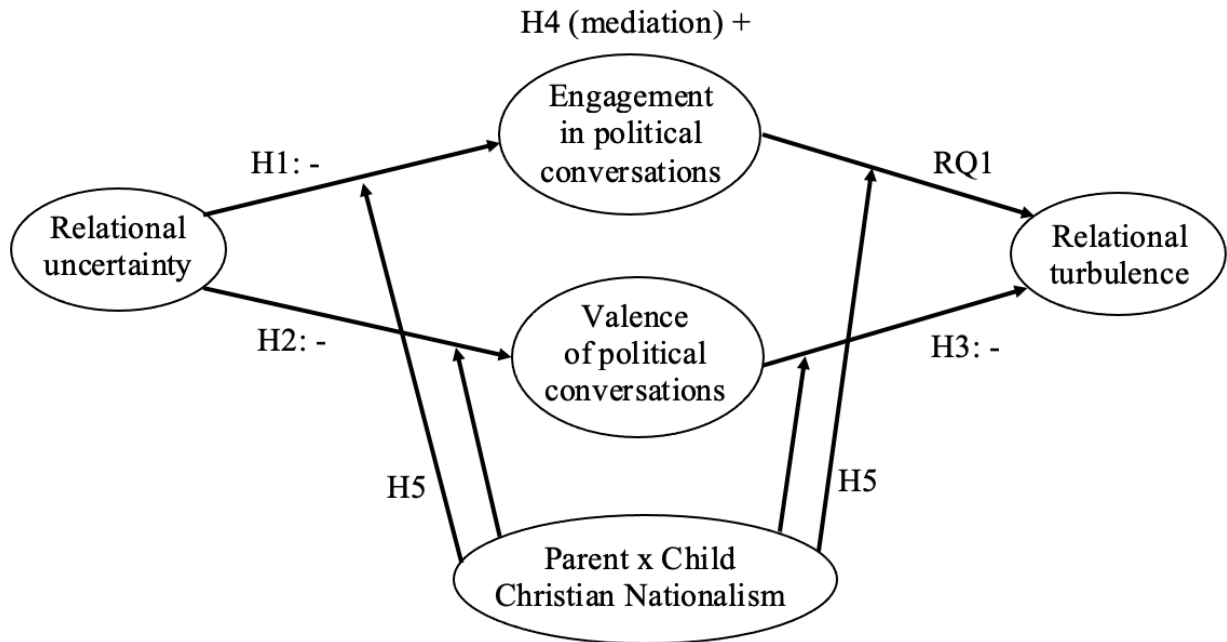
Political (dis)agreement may also shape the extent to which engagement and valence create turbulence. Previous research has found that engagement in “political talk has more influence on the health of the relationship than the political disagreements themselves” (Warner et al., 2021, p. 580). Thus, political (dis)agreement may heighten negative outcomes (such as relational turbulence) arising from political conversations. On the other hand, when parents and children agree politically, such background agreement may act as a stabilizing force that mitigates the effect of engagement and valence on relational turbulence.

Given the logical importance of political (dis)agreement to the predictors and outcomes of parent-child political conversations, this study aims to contribute to the RTT literature by considering political (dis)agreement as a boundary condition of the processes described by the theory. We predict:

H₅: The participant's endorsement of Christian nationalism and their perception of their parent's endorsement of Christian nationalism moderate the processes described in relational turbulence theory.

Figure 1

Moderated Mediation Model Depicting the Conditional Indirect Effect of Parent and Child Christian Nationalism on the Processes of RTT



METHOD

Participants

The sample included 452 participants with a mean age of 20.35 ($SD = 2.60$). Over half of the participants identified as female ($n = 284, 61.7\%$) and 4 participants did not report their sex. A majority of participants were Caucasian ($77.8\%, n = 350$), though $10\% (n = 47)$ were Hispanic, $5\% (n = 23)$ were African American, $3.9\% (n = 18)$ were Asian, $1.1\% (n = 4)$ did not report their ethnicity, and $1.9\% (n = 9)$ were classified as “not listed.” Additionally, $45.1\% (n = 213)$ of participants self-identified as being politically affiliated with the Republican party, $28.6\% (n = 128)$ were independent (no affiliation), $21.4\% (n = 88)$ were affiliated with the Democratic party, $2.8\% (n = 13)$ libertarian party, $1.9\% (n = 9)$ preferred not to specify, and one person identified with the Green Party. Participants were also asked to report on the perceived political beliefs of one living parent or primary caretaker. Results found that $58.0\% (n = 262)$ of participants perceived their parent to be politically affiliated with the Republican party, $14.4\% (n = 65)$ were independent (no affiliation), $18.1\% (n = 82)$ were affiliated with the Democratic party, $2.9\% (n = 13)$ libertarian party, and $0.7\% (n = 3)$ indicated their parents’ party was not listed.

Procedures

Upon securing institutional review board approval, participants were recruited to complete an online survey through an undergraduate general education public speaking course at a medium-sized, private university in the Southwest or social media posts made by the investigators (i.e., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat). In order to participate, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and have at least one living parent or primary caretaker. Students who completed the survey received 5 points of course credit, and non-student

participants were entered to win a drawing of 2 Amazon gift cards. All responses remained confidential. After consenting to participate in the study, participants voluntarily completed an anonymous online questionnaire using Qualtrics (see Appendix). The questionnaire began with basic demographic information. Participants then were instructed to identify up to four people who they consider to be parents, and the software then randomly assigned one of the parents to serve as the focus of the survey. It was randomized to reduce self-selection bias that might lead participants to choose a parent with similar beliefs or one who is relationally closer. Additionally, the presentation of each measure, as well as the order of questions in each measure, were randomized to minimize order effects.

Measures

Participants were first asked a series of demographic questions, including their gender, age, race/ethnicity, and educational status. Additional information about politics was collected, such as political ideology and party affiliation. Participants were also asked about perceived parental political ideology and party affiliation. The following sections describe the remaining measures for each variable in this study (see Appendix for all items).

Political Beliefs

Political beliefs were measured using McDevitt's (2005) political predisposition scale. Participants were asked to disclose their political party affiliation using a multiple-choice question (e.g., “republican party,” and “democratic party”). Participants were also asked to identify their political ideology regarding political issues (e.g., “social policy,” and “economic policy”) with four questions on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = liberal, 7 = republican). Additionally, participants were asked to answer these questions again, but in regard to their perceived parental

political ideology and party affiliation with the parent randomly selected. The alpha reliability for political beliefs was .91.

Christian Nationalism

Christian nationalism was measured using Whitehead and Perry's (2020) Christian nationalism scale. This scale consisted of six statements: (a) "the federal government should advocate Christian values," (b) "the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation," (c) "the federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state," (d) "the federal government should allow religious symbols in public spaces," (e) "the federal government should allow prayer in public schools," and (f) "the success of the United States is part of God's plan." Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the six questions on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Additionally, participants completed the measure again with regard to the focal parent (i.e., the extent to which the participant perceived that the parent endorses Christian nationalism). The interaction between participant responses and the participant's perception of the focal parent was used to assess the degree of parent-child (dis)agreement regarding Christian nationalism. The alpha reliability for Christian nationalism was .83.

Relational Uncertainty

Relational uncertainty was measured using a shorter version of Knobloch and Solomon's (1999) scale. Knobloch and Solomon (1999) divided their scale into self, partner, and relational uncertainty using confirmatory factor analysis, creating a total of 19 questions. This study adapted their measure of relational uncertainty to measure it within the parent-child relationship. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with six questions on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) regarding their relationship with the parent (e.g.,

“I am sometimes unsure about whether or not my parent and I feel the same way about each other” and “I sometimes question the stability of my relationship with this parent”). These questions measured “doubts about behavioral norms, mutuality of feelings, definition, and future of the relationship” (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, p. 272). The alpha reliability for relational uncertainty was .92.

Relational Turbulence

Relational turbulence was measured using McLaren et al.’s (2012) measure adapted from Knobloch’s (2007) measure. McLaren et al. (2012) used confirmatory factor analysis to refine Knobloch’s (2007) measure to create greater face validity to operationalize relational turbulence (Solomon & Brisini, 2017). Accordingly, participants responded to four 7-point semantic differential scales that asked participants to indicate on a 7-point scale where their relationship fell along dimensions of turmoil (e.g., chaotic--stable, calm--turbulent). The alpha reliability for relational turbulence was .93.

Engagement in Political Conversations

Items assessing engagement in political conversations were modeled after Knobloch and Theiss’s (2011) enacted relational talk scale. Participants were asked to identify the frequency of political talk during the last year on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = very often) with the parent randomly selected regarding 20 political topics (e.g., President Biden, voting, taxes). The 20 questions regarding political topics were drawn from Scruggs and Schrodt (2021) political talk measure designed to measure the frequency and comfort of political talk. The alpha reliability for engagement was .94.

Valence of Political Conversations

The valence of political conversations was measured using Brisini et al.'s (2018) valence of the transition experience measure. Participants responded to three semantic differential scales asked participants to indicate on a 7-point scale which term most closely described their feelings about political conversations within the last year with the parent randomly chosen to report on (e.g., negative—positive, destructive—constructive). Second, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 29 questions on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) regarding their relationship with the parent (e.g., “I attempt to make our interactions very enjoyable” and “I act cheerful and positive when with this parent”). Higher scores indicate a positive valence of political conversations whereas lower scores indicate negative valence of political conversations. The alpha reliability for valence was .94.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlations for study variables. A series of regression analyses were carried out to test the study hypotheses using PROCESS for SPSS. Specifically, I used model 73, which allows two parallel mediators (valence and engagement of political conversations) between the independent variable (relational uncertainty) and dependent variable (relational turbulence), with two moderators (child Christian nationalism and perception of the parent's Christian nationalism) of all paths in the model. I controlled for participants' own political beliefs and their perception of their parents' political beliefs. Thus, effects for Christian nationalism are those effects beyond those accounted for by identified as politically liberal versus conservative.

The first hypothesis (H1) predicted that relational uncertainty inversely predicts engagement in political conversations. This hypothesis was not supported (see Table 1). Results

found that relational uncertainty did not predict engagement with political talk. However, results also revealed a significant interaction effect, such that the participant’s support of Christian nationalism and their perception of the parent’s support of Christian nationalism jointly predicted engagement in political talk (see Figure 2). Decomposition of the interaction effect revealed that parents and children talk more about politics when they agree on Christian nationalism. In other words, when both parent and child endorse Christian nationalism, they talk about politics with relatively more frequency, as do parents and children who do not endorse Christian nationalism. In contrast, when parents and children disagree, they are less likely to engage in political talk, especially in the case where the child endorses Christian nationalism, but the parent does not.

Figure 2

Decomposition of two-way interaction effect

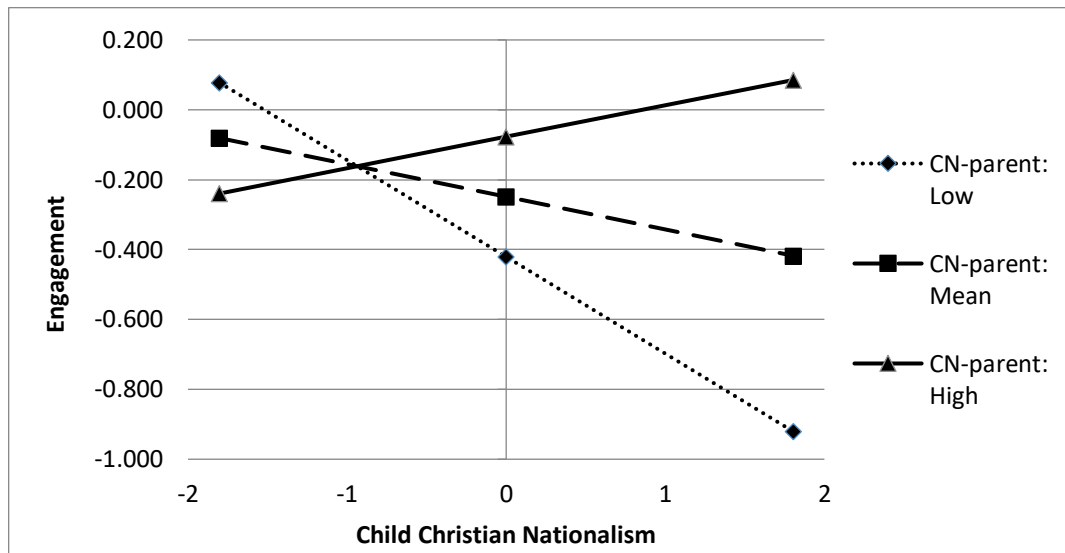


Table 1*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables*

Variables	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Child CN	3.79	(1.20)	--					
2. Parent CN	4.23	(1.20)	.63**	--				
3. Relational Uncertainty	2.47	(1.43)	-.14**	.02	--			
4. Relational Turbulence	2.35	(1.40)	-.08	-.02	.52**	--		
5. Engagement	2.73	(0.78)	.01	.06	-.07	-.09	--	
6. Valence	5.27	(1.52)	.26**	.05	-.45**	-.46**	.06	--

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

^aHigh scores on valence indicate more negative (i.e., more severe) tenor or tone

The second hypothesis (H2) predicted that relational uncertainty inversely predicts the valence of political conversations. This hypothesis was supported (see Table 2). However, this inverse association was qualified by three significant interaction effects. First, a two-way interaction effect found that relational uncertainty was moderated by perceived parental support of Christian nationalism. A second two-way interaction effect found that relational uncertainty is

also moderated by the child's support of Christian nationalism. Finally, and most importantly for interpretation, results revealed a statistically significant three-way interaction effect between relational uncertainty, perceived parental support of Christian nationalism, and child support of Christian nationalism. I decomposed these interaction effects by examining the interaction between relational uncertainty and child's endorsement of Christian nationalism at three different levels of perceived parental endorsement of Christian nationalism (low = -1.5 standard deviations, mean, and high = +1.5 standard deviations) (see Figure 3). When the child perceived that the parent supports Christian nationalism, relational uncertainty exhibited an inverse association with valence, regardless of the child's support of Christian nationalism. In contrast, when the child perceived that the parent does not support Christian nationalism, the inverse association only emerged when the child also did not support Christian nationalism. Furthermore, when the child endorsed Christian nationalism (but perceived that the parent does not), the association between uncertainty and valence was positive, contrary to the prediction of RTT. In between these at the mean of perceived parent Christian nationalism, the inverse effect only emerged when the child did not support Christian nationalism and the association was nonsignificant when the child was high in Christian nationalism.

Table 2*Summary of Regression Analyses*

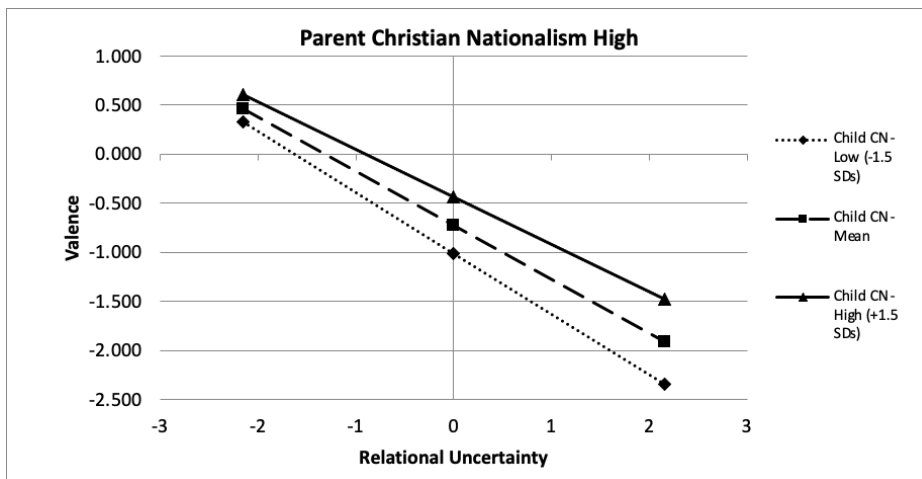
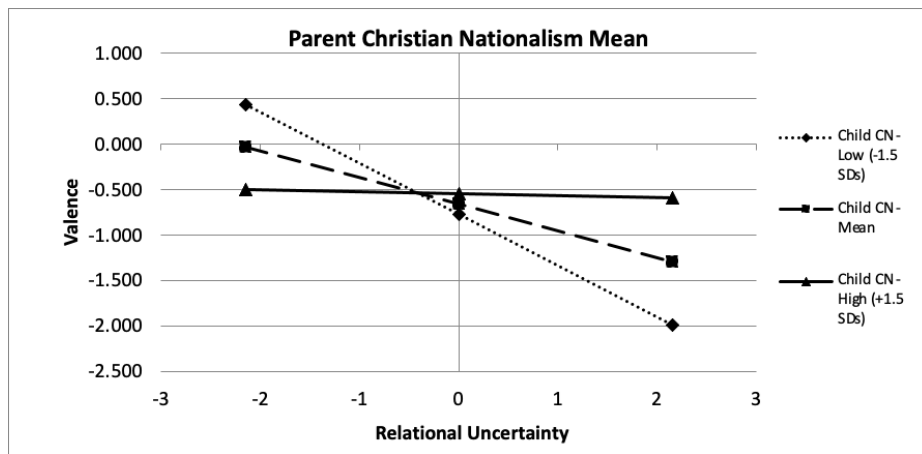
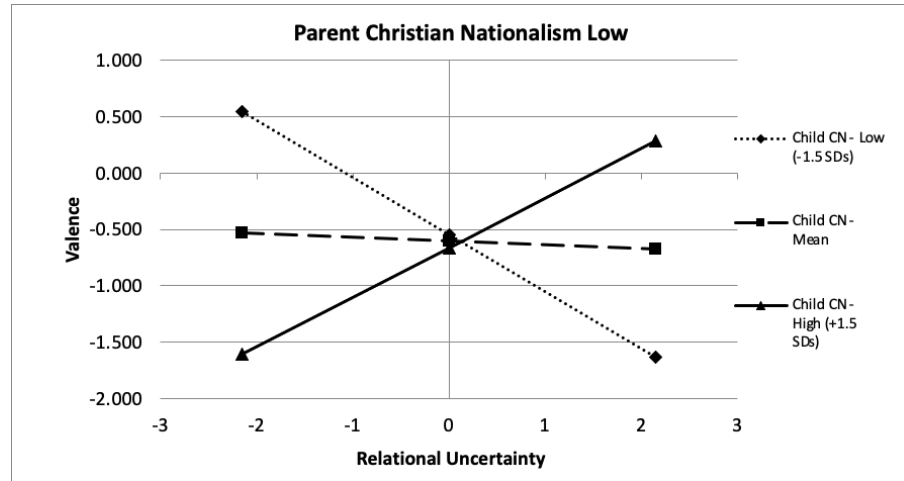
Predictors	Engagement <i>B</i> (SE)	Valence <i>B</i> (SE)	Relational Turbulence <i>B</i> (SE)
Relational Uncertainty (RU)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.30 (0.05)**	0.40 (0.05)**
Child CN	-0.09 (0.05)*	0.06 (0.05)	0.01 (0.07)
Parent CN	0.10 (0.04)*	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.07)
Child Political Belief	0.02 (0.03)	0.30 (0.05)**	0.12 (0.05)*
Parent Political Belief	0.02 (0.03)	-0.12 (0.05)*	-0.01 (0.04)
RU x CN-parent	0.00 (0.03)	-0.14 (0.04)**	-0.04 (0.04)
RU x CN-child	0.00 (0.03)	0.15 (0.04)**	-0.05 (0.04)
Parent CN x Child CN	0.10 (0.02)**	0.05 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)
RU x Parent CN x Child CN	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.06 (0.03)*	0.03 (0.04)
Engagement			-0.04 (0.08)
Valence			-0.32 (0.05)**
Engagement x Parent CN			-0.04 (0.08)
Valence x Parent CN			0.04 (0.04)
Engagement x Child CN			-0.07 (0.08)
Valence x Child CN			-0.09 (0.04)*
Engagement x Parent CN x Child CN			0.03 (0.04)
Valence x Parent CN x Child CN			0.01 (0.02)
<i>R</i> ²	<u>.26</u>	<u>.57</u>	<u>.61</u>

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Note. All regression parameters are unstandardized.

Figure 3

Decomposition of three-way interaction effect

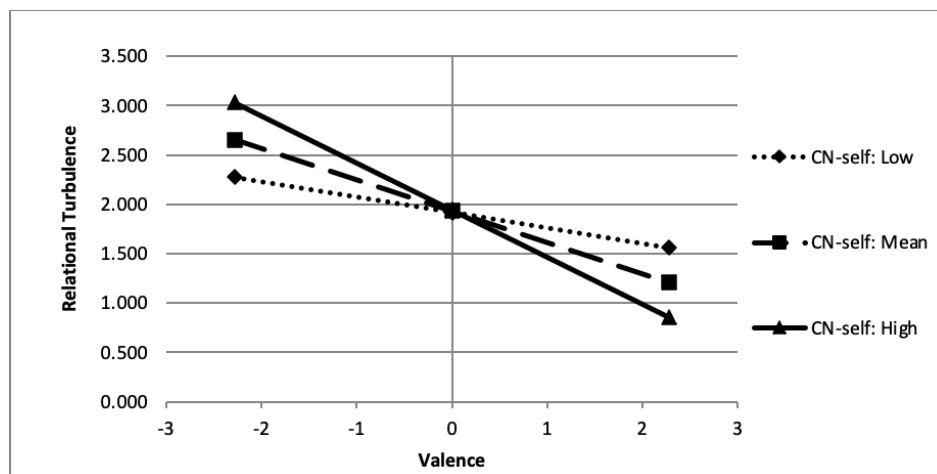


RQ1 asked if engagement in political conversations was associated with relational turbulence (see Table 2). Results revealed that engagement in political conversations was not significantly associated with relational turbulence, and thus RQ1 was answered negatively.

H3 predicted that the valence of political conversations inversely predicts relational turbulence. This hypothesis was supported (see Table 2), meaning that when political conversations were more negative in tone, participants also reported more relational turbulence, and positive valence was associated with lower levels of relational turbulence. A significant two-way interaction found that the valence of political talk was moderated by the child's support of Christian nationalism. Decomposition of the interaction effect revealed that the inverse association between valence and turbulence was highest when the child endorsed Christian nationalism (see Figure 4). The strength of the inverse association weakened when the child's support for Christian nationalism was lower.

Figure 4

Decomposition of two-way interaction effect



The fourth hypothesis (H4) predicted that engagement and valence of political conversations mediates the association between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence, whereas H5 predicted that the child's and parent's endorsement of Christian nationalism would moderate this mediation. Results revealed that engagement in political conversations was not a significant mediator between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence. However, results revealed that the valence of the political talk was a significant mediator between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence. Indirect effects revealed that valence only served as a mediator when the parent and child exhibited at least a rough level of agreement on Christian nationalism (see Table 3). This pattern of results supports both H4 and H5.

Table 3

Bootstrapped Estimates of Unstandardized Indirect Effects Predicting Relational Turbulence via Engagement

Conditional indirect effects depending upon Christian nationalism

Relational Uncertainty → Engagement → Relational Turbulence

Indirect Effect	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>
Child CN low, parent CN low	-0.01	0.01	-0.03: 0.01
Child CN low, parent CN moderate	0.00	0.01	-0.02: 0.02
Child CN low, parent CN high	0.00	0.02	-0.05: 0.05
Child CN moderate, parent CN low	-0.00	0.01	-0.02: 0.01
Child CN moderate, parent CN moderate	0.00	0.00	-0.01: 0.01
Child CN moderate, parent CN high	0.00	0.01	-0.02: 0.03
Child CN high, parent CN low	0.00	0.02	-0.04: 0.06
Child CN high, parent CN moderate	0.00	0.01	-0.01: 0.02
Child CN high, parent CN high	0.00	0.01	-0.01: 0.02

Note. Low values are at the 16th percentile, moderate values are at the 50th percentile, and high values are at the 84th percentile the relevant variable.

Bootstrapped Estimates of Unstandardized Indirect Effects Predicting Relational Turbulence Via Valence

Relational Uncertainty → Valence → Relational Turbulence

Indirect Effect	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>
Child CN low, parent CN low	0.09*	0.03	0.04: 0.16
Child CN low, parent CN moderate	0.05	0.03	-0.01: 0.12
Child CN low, parent CN high	-0.06	0.07	-0.21: 0.08
Child CN moderate, parent CN low	0.10*	0.04	0.04: 0.17
Child CN moderate, parent CN moderate	0.08*	0.02	0.04: 0.13
Child CN moderate, parent CN high	0.03	0.04	-0.05: 0.12
Child CN high, parent CN low	0.10	0.07	-0.02: 0.25
Child CN high, parent CN moderate	0.13*	0.04	0.07: 0.21
Child CN high, parent CN high	0.14*	0.04	0.07: 0.23

Note. Low values are at the 16th percentile, moderate values are at the 50th percentile, and high values are at the 84th percentile the relevant variable.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to evaluate parent/child (dis)agreement on Christian nationalism influences the processes outlined by RTT within the context of the parent-child relationship. In order to examine this, this study tested how the association between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence was mediated by valence and engagement in political conversations, and how this overall process was moderated by the endorsement of Christian nationalism. Overall, the results provided modest support for the theoretical line of reasoning advanced in this report. On one hand, the results supported predictions of valence mediating RTT processes, but on the other hand, results provided no evidence to suggest that engagement of political conversations mediated the association between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence. Of particular theoretical interest for RTT, endorsement of Christian nationalism served as a boundary condition, such that valence only served as a mediator when the child perceived that their parent generally agreed regarding Christian nationalism. This discussion section will consider each of the hypotheses and their associated results more closely.

Relational Uncertainty and Engagement

First, results did not support RTT's claim that relational uncertainty predicts engagement (H1). This could be due to the different nature of the topic being investigated as the bulk of RTT literature has not explored political beliefs as a boundary condition. Previous RTT research has focused on topics internal to the relationship such as relational conflict (Brisini & Solomon, 2021; Goodboy et al., 2022; Solomon et al., 2016) and turning points (Knobloch et al., 2021; Knobloch & Theiss, 2018; Scheinfeld & Worley, 2018; Tian & Solomon, 2020) creating uncertainty and resulting in turbulence. However, politics may have little to do with the internal functioning of most parent-child relationships, and instead is an external topic that could

challenge existing relational evaluations and outcomes. Rather than focusing on an internal episode of transition, this study focused on how political conversations specifically acted as experiences affecting the overall relational perceptions and outcomes which could potentially explain why engagement was not found to be a significant outcome of relational uncertainty.

Another potential explanation could be that RTT literature has primarily, but not exclusively, focused on voluntary relationships (i.e., romantic, friendship). The nature of voluntary relationships differs from involuntary relationships such that, in the latter, there are more expectations placed on the relationship and there is an assumption of permanence. As compared to friendships and romantic relationships, parent-child relationships are characterized by relational expectations surrounding power and authority (Bugental et al., 1997; Hoffman, 1975), rules and boundaries (Barrowclough & White, 2011; Parkin & Kuczynski, 2012), and roles and communication (Fisher & Dixon, 2001; Laursen & Collins, 2004), all of which could potentially explain why relational uncertainty did not significantly influence engagement in political conversations. For example, this suggest that the permanence and power dynamics of the parent-child relationship could impact the relationship between engagement and uncertainty as children may have little power over engagement despite experiencing uncertainty.

An interaction effect did reveal that engagement in political talk was predicted by parent-child (dis)agreement on Christian nationalism, such that more agreement led to more engagement. These results support findings in the realm of political and family communication. For example, Jurkowitz and Mitchell (2020) found that 45% of U.S. adults have stopped talking about politics with someone as a result of a political dissimilarity. Similarly, people engage more frequently with those who share similar political views as “it gets harder to talk to people across the political divide” (Butters & Hare, 2017; Weir, 2019). This extends to family relationships as

previous research has found that, within a familial context, agreement or similarity on certain topics (such as politics) is associated with how frequently a topic is discussed within the family (Gerber et al., 2012). These results suggest that the extent to which people talk about politics depends more heavily on their perceived political (dis)similarity than with their sense of relational uncertainty.

Relational Uncertainty and Valence

Consistent with the prediction of RTT, results revealed that relational uncertainty inversely predicts valence of political conversations, such that more relational uncertainty led to more negatively valenced political conversations (H2). However, interaction effects revealed that this association was moderated by both parent and child Christian nationalism, with both functioning together to shape the effect of relational uncertainty on valence. Given that the parent-child relationship is typically characterized by role and age differences that give parents a degree of power, I decomposed the interaction effect by examining how the interaction between relational uncertainty and the young adult child's Christian nationalism changes at different levels of perceived parental Christian nationalism.

First, when perceived parental support for Christian nationalism was low, an inverse association between relational uncertainty and valence (i.e., higher uncertainty and worse political conversations) was found only when the child also did not endorse Christian nationalism (see Fig. 3). This indicates that, in the case of political agreement via shared rejection of Christian nationalism, less relational uncertainty led to more positively valenced political conversations, which supports RTT's prediction. In contrast, a positive association emerged between relational uncertainty and valence (i.e., higher uncertainty and better political conversations) when parental support for Christian nationalism was low, but child support was high. This runs counter to the prediction of RTT, and further inspection of the data revealed that

very few participants identified as Christian nationalists and perceived that their parents did not. Thus, this positive finding seems to be something of a statistical artifact, and what appears to be of greater theoretical importance is that, when parents were not perceived to endorse Christian nationalism, increased Christian nationalism in the child reduced the association between relational uncertainty and valence to nonsignificance.

This null association could be attributed to the discomfort associated with the topic of political conversations driving valence. For example, political conversations, especially across the political divide, can be difficult and create conflict (Butters & Hare, 2017; Weir, 2019) as differing political beliefs can lead to increased stress (McCarthy & Saks, 2019) and hostility (Dimock & Wike, 2020). This suggests that despite low levels of relational uncertainty, political disagreement (child endorses Christian nationalism, parent does not) may lead to negatively valenced political conversations. Another explanation for this could be the emphasis placed on uniformity and the culture of dogmatism fostered by Christian nationalism. Not only is Christian nationalism often characterized by a high level of pride (particularly in one's national/ethnic identity), but nationalists also place national loyalty above all other forms of political, religious, and social commitment (Harrison & Boyd, 2018), such as family relationships. Perhaps, since the future of the relationship is uncertain and Christian nationalists are proud of their beliefs, they may consider the opportunity to express their political views to their parents as positive since Christian nationalists place their political loyalty above the state of their relationships. Additionally, similar to Christian nationalists, perhaps children think less communally and more individualistically due to age and maturity which could explain these results. The child's adherence to a dogmatic religious/political view, coupled with lack of maturity and individualistic focus due to their young age, might mean that the political dissimilarity with their

parents shapes conversational valence rather than the uncertainty in the relationship. Ultimately, valence seems to depend on whether the parent and child is a Christian nationalist.

Second and likewise, when perceived parent Christian nationalism is at the mean, the inverse effect only emerges when the child does not support Christian nationalism. However, when the child does endorse Christian nationalism, a null association emerged, such that valence was relatively low (i.e., political conversations were somewhat negative) no matter the level of relational uncertainty. This could echo the previous findings in that discomfort associated with the topic of political conversations drives valence despite relational uncertainty. Additionally, children have less control over their emotional reactions and regulations due to their age and maturity (Deng et al., 2019), suggesting that political disagreement could result in more negative emotions experienced after a political conversation. This could potentially explain why political conversations were more negatively valenced when the child strongly endorsed Christian nationalism.

Third and finally, when perceived parental support for Christian nationalism was high, a straightforward inverse association was found regardless of the child's level of Christian nationalism, which supports RTT's prediction. This suggests that the power dynamic of the parent-child relationship may play an influential role in relational uncertainty and valence despite political (dis)similarity. Given that parents are in a position of authority and Christian nationalists often have little tolerance for dissent (French, 2021), children of parents who strongly endorse Christian nationalism may be more motivated to maintain a positive relationship despite political (dis)similarity. For example, Keating et al. (2013) found that "during difficult conversations, adherence to the family's hierarchical structure (i.e., conformity) may hold greater value than open conversation" (p. 174). This would support previous research that states role expectations and relational scripts "provide relatively concrete schemas for

making sense of the relationship” (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004, p. 797; Miller & Steinberg, 1975; Clark et al., 1999).

Valence and Engagement as Mediators

Whereas RTT suggests that both engagement and valence of communication predict relational turbulence, findings revealed that only valence inversely predicted turbulence. However, this relationship was moderated by child Christian nationalism, such that the inverse association between valence and turbulence strengthened when the child strongly endorsed Christian nationalism. This could potentially be due to the strong political endorsement creating an ego-involved political perspective. Ego-involvement, or “the amount of engagement and commitment one has with an issue” as it becomes central to an individual’s identity (Levine, 2022, p. 380), is likely to have a strong influence on the perception of the overall relationship. Those who are ego-involved are motivated to be seen as holding “particular attitudes or beliefs by relevant others within their network” (p. 381; Kunda, 1990) and tend to be overconfident in their judgements and knowledge (Chow, 1999; Klein & Schoenfeld, 1941). Therefore, negatively valenced political conversations between children who strongly endorse Christian nationalism and their parent could result in higher relational turbulence as they view this negativity as a threat to their relationship and confidence. This may not be unique to Christian nationalism; it is possible that ego-involvement in other political stances (e.g., committed libertarians; environmental activists; etc.) might also heighten negative outcomes arising from difficult political conversations.

As with the connection between relational uncertainty and valence, it could also be that children tend to take valence more personally potentially due to age and maturity compared to their parent. Children have less control over their emotional reactions and regulations (Deng et al., 2019) suggesting that the negative emotions experienced after a political conversation could

result in a more tumultuous relational evaluation. The child's emotional reactions and regulations paired with an ego-involved political perspective could potentially explain why valence of political conversations more strongly predicted relational turbulence when the child strongly endorsed Christian nationalism (whereas perception of the parent's Christian nationalism did not serve as a moderator). This suggests that strong endorsement of Christian nationalism could become so central to the child's identity that their emotions are able to predict their relational outcomes.

Following engagement's nonsignificant association with relational turbulence, tests of indirect effects revealed that only valence (not engagement) mediated the association between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence. However, this mediating role of valence was qualified by the child's commitment to Christian nationalism and their perception of the parent's Christian nationalism, such that the mediating effect was significant only when the parent and child exhibited a rough level of agreement on Christian nationalism (see Table 3). Specifically, significant mediating effects emerged only when child and parent Christian nationalism were both low, when the child's Christian nationalism was moderate and the parent was low or moderate, and when the child's Christian nationalism was high and the parent was moderate or high. In all cases, these indirect effects were positive, such that higher uncertainty predicted higher turbulence due to lower (more negative) valence of political conversations.

Whereas previous research might suggest that political similarity would result in positive political conversations (Afifi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2019), these results suggest that despite agreeing on politics, relational uncertainty may lead to negative political talk which could generate turbulence. In line with RTT, when people are uncertain about the nature of the relationship, they become more reactive about things that would be normally mundane (Solomon & Brisini, 2017). For example, despite the parent and child agreeing on politics, political

conversations could become more negative as thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are exaggerated due to the uncertainty experienced (Solomon et al., 2016). These findings suggest that the valence of political conversations seem to matter for the outcome of the relationship only when the parent and the child have some level of political agreement.

In contrast, these results also indicated that when there is some level of parent-child political disagreement, valence of political conversations did not mediate relational uncertainty and turbulence. Although RTT states that conflict or disagreement can threaten the degree of confidence in a relationship, results found that political dissimilarity and negative political conversations did not result in relational turbulence. One explanation points to the significance of the parent-child relationship as it is often prioritized above politics. The parent-child relationship is one of the most fundamental and long-lasting relationships an individual will have. Although political differences may lead to conflict (Dimock & Wike, 2020; McCarthy & Saks, 2019), perhaps in order to maintain a close parent-child relationship, political disagreements are overlooked. It also may be the case that, when parents and children know that they disagree regarding politics, they avoid the topic (as the results for engagement revealed). Thus, as a known topic that they avoid, it is not mundane, and reactivity occurs to it regardless of the level of relational uncertainty. Overall, then, these findings indicate that agreement regarding the topic of conversation may be a boundary condition for RTT's claim that the positive association between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence is explained by the valence and engagement of conversational topics.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The pattern of results generally supported RTT, as uncertainty predicted valence and valence predicted turbulence. However, the association between relational uncertainty, relational turbulence, and engagement did not emerge. This may suggest that the topic of discussion

matters as this study only measured conversations pertaining to politics. Perhaps more inherently uncomfortable topics may trigger topic avoidance more than other topics of discussion. As previously mentioned, it might be that topics external to the relationship such as politics do not influence engagement as do topics internal to the relationship. For example, previous research has explored RTT regarding how topics such as intimacy (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004), grief (Tian & Solomon, 2020), and irritation (Theiss & Solomon, 2006) result in relational turbulence, but none of these studies focuses on the parent-child relationship. Exploring how different topics of conversation create relational turbulence can give scholars, parents, and children insight into how relational turbulence is created through engagement and valence of conversations. Additionally, further understanding how different topics predict relational turbulence within the parent-child relationship would allow RTT to refine its theoretical processes.

Results found that valence plays a more crucial role in influencing the processes of RTT than engagement. This could imply that there are other factors that need to be considered aside from engagement in political conversations that influence valence and relational turbulence. Perhaps the nature of involuntary relationships alters perceptions of engagement such that boundaries or previously established rules of communication within a relationship influence an individual's perception. For example, family communication patterns theory would suggest that high-conversation orientation patterns would encourage engagement in topics such as politics (Ledbetter, 2015; Scruggs & Schrodt, 2021). Scholars should consider why engagement may not be a significant predictor within involuntary relationships. This could potentially allow for further insight into the parent-child relationship, highlight other significant factors influencing valence and engagement, and further refine this process of RTT. It might prove useful to explore the theoretical line of reasoning within other voluntary or involuntary relationships such as

sibling relationships or romantic partnerships. This study suggests that the parent-child relationship may be more influential over relational turbulence than political differences.

As political polarization extends to family relationships (Johnson et al., 2019), this study aimed to understand how this can be exacerbated by (dis)agreement on endorsement of Christian nationalism. Overall, results revealed that parents and children who agree on Christian nationalism appear to follow the predictions set forth by RTT, with greater relational uncertainty leading to greater relational turbulence due to negatively-valenced (political) conversations. These findings suggest that similarity of values or beliefs may moderate conversations, supporting previous findings in the realm of political and family communication (Butters & Hare, 2017; Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020; Weir, 2019). The findings of this investigation may be useful as political talk can be difficult to avoid in such a politically polarized climate. Specifically, when parents and their young adult children are experiencing a season of relational uncertainty, they should understand that some formerly mundane topics might trigger a negative response. This allows scholars, parents, and children to understand that relational uncertainty can influence relational turbulence despite agreeing on the topic under discussion.

Finally, this study found that engaging in political conversations despite (dis)agreements does not significantly alter relational turbulence. This information proposes that parents and children may want to avoid political conversation in the case of disagreement because such conversations are uncomfortable. Scholars should consider why engagement within this context did not mediate these processes and explore whether disagreement on other topics yields the same results. For example, family communication scholars might explore how conversation orientation alters these conversational outcomes. Overall, this study not only allows scholars, parents, and children the ability to better understand the impact of the endorsement of Christian

nationalism, but also allows further insight into how this (dis)agreement moderates the processes of the RTT.

Limitations and Conclusion

There are a few limitations recognized within this study. First, this study did not ask about who initiated the political conversations. Future research should explore who initiated political conversation and why the conversation was initiated in order to further understand how the relational processes outlined in RTT are influenced. Another limitation of this study was that children were reporting and analyzing their parent's political beliefs. It is often hard to be accurate when asked questions about someone else. For example, it is hard to spot passive communication being used by someone else, but is easy to identify in one's self. Future research should analyze the responses of both the parent and child to get the most accurate results. It would also be beneficial to further extend this research to see how different family dynamics (single father, stepmother, no parents, four siblings, no siblings, etc.) affect both processes of RTT and political (dis)agreement. Similarly, exploring how the current theoretical line of reasoning changes between voluntary and involuntary relationships and among different topics might prove to be useful for RTT to refine its processes. Future research could focus more on how Christian nationalism influences other relationships, how political communication affects parent and child relationships, and how RTT processes are influenced by other outside factors. Finally, cross-sectional data was utilized limiting claims about causation as this study analyzed a specific population (mostly white women at a socioeconomically affluent private university in the South) at a single point in time. This suggests that these results might not extend to other populations and are tentative at best.

With political rifts deepening, and polarization extending to the family relationship, this study tested how relational uncertainty and relational turbulence are mediated by communication

valence and engagement and moderated by the endorsement of Christian nationalism. In conclusion, (dis)agreement on the endorsement of Christian nationalism is important because it moderated RTT processes that directly affected evaluations of relational turbulence. With these findings, parents and children can have a greater understanding of how political conversations and (dis)agreement potentially influences their relationships.

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APPENDICES

STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

[DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION]

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Prefer not to say
 - d. Not listed: _____

2. What is your race/ethnicity? Check all that apply.
 - a. White/ Caucasian
 - b. Latino/a/Hispanic American
 - c. Black/African American
 - d. Native American
 - e. Asian American/ Pacific Islander
 - f. Prefer not to say
 - g. Not listed: _____

3. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
 - a. Less than a high school diploma
 - b. High school degree or equivalent
 - c. Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)
 - d. Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS)
 - e. Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)
 - f. Not listed: _____

4. Are you currently an undergraduate student?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5. If you are an undergraduate student, what is your class rank?
 - a. First-year
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior

[POLITICAL BELIEF MEASURES – SELF] (adapted from McDevitt, 2005)

6. How would you classify your political ideology in the following areas?

Liberal			Moderate			Conservative
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. Social policy (such as abortion and gay marriage)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Economic policy (such as taxes and job creation)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Foreign policy (such as military conflicts and United Nations involvement)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Overall (across all political issues)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. What is your political party identification?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1) Democratic Party | 4) Libertarian Party |
| 2) Green Party | 5) Republican Party |
| 3) Independent (no affiliation) | 6) Not listed (please specify): _____ |

[CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM – SELF] – Whitehead & Perry, 2020

Directions: In the following section, please select the most accurate response in regard to *YOU*. Read each question carefully and answer accordingly. Follow the directions of each prompt.

On this 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, identify how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

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

[PICKING A PARENT]

Now, we would like to ask you about who you consider to be your parents. By *parents*, we mean *people who had primary responsibility for bringing you up and caring for you when you were a child*. These are often adoptive or biological mothers, fathers, or step-parents, although you may consider other people to be parents if they had primary responsibility for your upbringing.

Please list up to four such caregivers who are still alive using the form below. (If you have no caregivers who are still living, please report one living relative with whom you feel close.)

Name: _____	Relationship:
Name: _____	Relationship:
Name: _____	Relationship:
Name: _____	Relationship:

[Note: “Relationship” will be a drop-down menu with the following options: Biological father, biological mother, adoptive father, adoptive mother, stepmother, stepfather, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, sibling, not listed.]

The person or people that I listed above are people who had primary responsibility for bringing me up and caring for me when I was a child.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

The person or people that I listed above are currently alive.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

[After this screen, the survey program will randomly choose from among the names entered and inform the participant:]

We would like you to think about your relationship with [PARENT NAME.] You will be asked several questions about this parent. Please keep them in mind for the rest of the survey.

[POLITICAL BELIEF MEASURES – PARENT]

Directions: In the following section, please select the most accurate response in regard to [PARENT NAME]. Read each question carefully and answer accordingly. Follow the directions of each prompt.

1. How would you classify THIS PARENT’S political ideology in the following areas?

Liberal			Moderate			Conservative
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. Social policy (such as abortion and gay marriage)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Economic policy (such as taxes and job creation)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Foreign policy (such as military conflicts and United Nations involvement)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Overall (across all political issues)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. What is this parent’s political party identification?

- 1) Democratic Party
- 2) Green Party
- 3) Independent (no affiliation)
- 4) Libertarian Party
- 5) Republican Party
- 6) Not listed (please specify): _____

[CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM – SELF] – Whitehead & Perry, 2020

On this 7-point scale, identify how strongly you think THIS PARENT agrees or disagrees with each statement.

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

[RELATIONAL TURBULENCE THEORY]

RELATIONAL UNCERTAINTY

Directions: In the following section, please select the most accurate response in regard to your relationship with [PARENT NAME]. Read each question carefully and answer accordingly. Follow the directions of each prompt.

On a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree), identify how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. I am sometimes unsure about whether or not my parent and I feel the same way about each other.
2. I sometimes wonder whether or not my parent and I will be emotionally close in the future*.
3. I sometimes question the stability of my relationship with this parent.
4. I am sometimes unsure about the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior with this parent*.
5. I sometimes wonder whether or not my parent loves me as much as I love them.
6. I sometimes question how I should or should not behave around my parent.

RELATIONAL TURBULENCE (McLaren, 2012):

For each pair of words, please indicate the mark that most closely describes your feelings toward your relationship with [PARENT NAME] over the past month.

Chaotic	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Stable
Calm	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Turbulent
Tumultous	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Running
														Smoothly
Peaceful	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	:	_____	Stressful

[ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS]

Directions: In the following section, please select the most accurate response in regard to you and [PARENT NAME]. Read each question carefully and answer accordingly. Follow the directions of each prompt.

On this 5-point scale, please indicate the frequency of talk about these topics with [PARENT NAME] during the last year. (1- Never, 2- Seldom, 3- Sometimes 4- Often, 5- Very Often)

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	
1	2	3	4	5	
1. President Biden	1	2	3	4	5
2. Former President Trump	1	2	3	4	5
3. U.S. Congress	1	2	3	4	5
4. Voting	1	2	3	4	5
5. Democratic Party	1	2	3	4	5
6. Republican Party	1	2	3	4	5
7. The news media	1	2	3	4	5
8. Abortion	1	2	3	4	5
9. Gay marriage	1	2	3	4	5
10. Death penalty	1	2	3	4	5
11. Gun rights	1	2	3	4	5
12. Debt-free college	1	2	3	4	5
13. Immigration	1	2	3	4	5
14. Environment	1	2	3	4	5
15. Taxes	1	2	3	4	5
16. International affairs	1	2	3	4	5
17. Health care	1	2	3	4	5
18. Attending a political rally	1	2	3	4	5
19. Upcoming elections	1	2	3	4	5
20. Racial justice					

[VALENCE OF POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS] Brisini, Solomon, & Nussbaum, 2018

Now we would like to know how you feel about political conversations with [PARENT NAME]. For each pair of words, please indicate the mark that most closely describes your feelings about political conversations with [PARENT NAME] during the last year.

Political conversations with [PARENT NAME] are...

Negative _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ Positive
 Unpleasant _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ Pleasant
 Destructive _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ Constructive

Directions: The following items concern things people might do to maintain their relationships. **With [PARENT NAME] in mind**, please indicate the extent to which each of the following describes behaviors that you currently use to maintain your relationship with this parent.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	SD			N			SA
1. I attempt to make our interactions very enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I encourage this parent to disclose his/her thoughts and feelings to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am cooperative in the way I handle disagreements between us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I stress my commitment to this parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I like to spend time with people we both know.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I help equally with tasks that need to be done.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I simply tell this parent how I feel about our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I try to build up this parent's self-esteem, including giving him/her compliments, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I ask how his/her day has gone.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. I seek to discuss the quality of our parent/child relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I share in the joint responsibilities that face us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I am very nice, courteous and polite when we talk.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I imply that our relationship has a future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I act cheerful and positive when with this parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I focus on common friends and affiliations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I do not criticize this parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I disclose what I need or want from our parent/child relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. I do my fair share of the work we have to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I try to be friendly, fun and interesting with this parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. I show my love for this parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I am patient and forgiving of this parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I show that I am willing to do things with this parent's friends or family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. I remind this parent about relational decisions we made in the past.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. I present myself as cheerful and optimistic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. I like to have periodic talks about our parent/child relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I show myself to be faithful to this parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. I include people we both know in our activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. I perform the responsibilities this parent expects from me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. I do not shirk my duties.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

IOS CLOSENESS SCALE (ARON, ARON, & SMOLLAN, 1992):

Directions: Please choose the picture below which best describes your relationship with [PARENT NAME]. In the diagrams below, you are “self” and [PARENT NAME] is “other.”

