

Trump and Clinton Rallies: Are Political Campaigns Quasi-Religious in Nature?

By

Mary Ellen Fernandez and Roger Clark

Abstract

Earlier social scientists (e.g., Durkheim 1915/1962; Gentile 2006; Le Bon 1895/1960; Mosca 1939/1980) have suggested analogies between political movements and religions. However, we are not aware of scholars who have explicitly looked at American political campaigns as potentially quasi-religious movements. We examined film of 2016 rallies for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton to see the degree to which there were traces of sacralized objects, rituals and beliefs, the three defining characteristics of religions, according to Emile Durkheim. We found enough evidence to infer that both of the campaigns were quasi-religious. The two campaigns were quasi-religious to different degrees, however, with Trump and his campaign seeming to indulge quasi-religious symbolism and behavior more than Clinton and her campaign. To the degree that the quasi-religious nature of campaigns may help to understand the fervor of supporters, we think that this kind of analysis may be worth even more attention by sociologists and other social scientists.

Keywords: quasi-religious, sacralization, sacred objects, ritual, beliefs, politics as religion

Introduction

This article's origin can be traced to reading, and reflecting on, a single essay. In this case, the essay was Marci Cottingham's (2015). "The Terrible Towel and Fair-Weather Fans: Steelers Nation as a Quasi-Religion." Based on Emile Durkheim's work (1912/1965), Cottingham (2015) used a functionalist model to make the case that Pittsburgh Steelers fandom is, as her title suggests, a quasi-religion. The "terrible towel" mentioned in the title of her essay, Cottingham (2015) argues, is a sacred object for Steelers fans.

Before doing the research for this article, we paid reasonably close attention to the 2016 U. S. presidential campaigns. Therefore, we were fairly confident that both Donald Trump's and Hillary Clinton's campaign had been led by someone who'd attained a kind of cult status among a substantial portion of the American populace. This observation led us to speculate that political campaigns themselves might be seen as quasi-religious

in nature. Subsequently, we read various other authors who had applied the concept of quasi-religion to sports (Brody 1979), back-to-land movements (Brinkerhoff and Jacob 1987), vegetarianism (Hamilton 2000), and conspiracy theories (Frank and Bauer 2013). Based on these sources, it seemed that the concept might be fruitfully applied to political campaigns, as well.

Over time, both major candidates for the 2016 U. S. presidency were called out for being cult leaders. This calling out was frequently done by journalists who clearly disliked the candidates or their policies, writers who were using the term "cult leader" in a pejorative sense. After the final presidential debate, for example, one conservative blogger inferred that "Clinton wants to be the leader of America's suicide cult," so dangerous were her economic, cultural, health, open borders and "vaccine" policies, among others (Adams 2016).

Donald Trump, possibly because he was the eventual winner of the election, has perhaps garnered even more sustained attention as a potential cult leader.

Commentators pointed to his cult status even during the campaign. Shortly after the Republican convention, for example, Rebecca Nelson picked up on what she saw as his messianic claim that the country was in “crisis” and that he—and only he—could get it back on track (2016). She believed that this was clear evidence that he considered himself a cult leader and found evidence that many of his followers saw him that way as well. The claim that Trump followers constitute a “dangerous cult” has persisted after his election (e.g., Aslan 2017).¹ We thought that, if analysts like Cottingham could find evidence of quasi-religiosity among fans of a football team, then we might do so among those who participated in the campaigns of both Trump and Clinton.

As we read further, we discovered that the concept of politics as religion or quasi-religion already had a substantial pedigree (e.g., Durkheim 1965 [1912]; Eliade 1987 [1957]; Gentile 2006; Le Bon 1960 [1895]; Mosca 2015 [1939]). Mosca, considered a founder of modern political science, in his book *The Ruling Class* (1938/1980) suggested that political parties “ultimately are quasi-religions stripped of the divine element” (p. 283). Mosca believed that the ritualistic nature of parties and political movements is, like those of religious sects, used to manipulate the masses. In fact, Mosca (1980: 163-198) devoted a whole chapter to the similarities among “churches, parties and sects.”

Historian of religion Mircea Eliade asserted in *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957/1959) that, although modern humans may see themselves as non-religious, “they still behave religiously, even though they are not aware of it” (1959: 204). This behavior, he claims, can be seen in political movements, especially writ large. Eliade points, for example, to the ways Karl Marx used various religious myths to construct his view of history. For example, Marx used the myth of the Golden Age to derive his view of the classless society. He used Judeo-Christian messianic ideology to envision the “prophetic role and soteriological [world saving] function” of the proletariat. Marx also used the myth of the battle between Good and Evil to predict the “total victory of the former” (1959: 206-207). Eliade’s larger point was that even in modern, presumably secularized society, we find ourselves drawn to “little religions” and “political mystiques” (207).

Gustave Le Bon, an early social psychologist, provides a reason why. Rather than emphasizing the

¹ Even Bernie Sanders, whose campaign we also examined but will not report on in detail here, drew fire for being a cult leader. Criticism sometimes came from people who actually liked him but who thought he was too self-centered for the good of party unity (e.g., Ambinder, 2016), especially as the Democratic party approached its nominating convention.

manipulative possibilities of political movements (and religions), as Mosca did, or the myths to which we are drawn, as Eliade did, Le Bon stressed how political movements meet the psychological needs of people. Le Bon claimed, in fact, that religion, in all its forms, stems from people’s need to submit themselves to some sort of faith. This faith “may apply to an invisible God, to a wooden or stone idol, to a hero or to a political conception . . . [In all these cases] its essence remains religious” (Le Bon 1960: 60). Le Bon thought that modern societies, in which traditional religions tended to lose their hold on the masses, are fertile ground for secular religions like political movements, religions that enabled “crowds” to express and focus their need to believe.

Readers of this sociological journal may recall that Durkheim, in *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965/1915), suggested that religion has, as its functions, the elevation of people from their individual lives and connecting them to a collectivity to which they belong. Religion need not entail the presence of supernatural beings, because the divine, in Durkheim’s view, was the collectivity itself. Durkheim argued that religion consists of three key elements: sacred objects or entities, ritual behaviors, and beliefs. While Durkheim did not explicitly mention in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that the political elements of a society sometimes bleed into the religious, it is possible to imagine, as we propose, that such elements may acquire the kinds of sacred objects, ritual behaviors and beliefs that lead them to look suspiciously religious.

To our knowledge, Emilio Gentile, was the first theorist that we know of to devote a whole book to viewing politics as religion. In fact, his *Politics as Religion* (2006) argued explicitly that a political movement or regime becomes a religion when it:

- a. [C]onsecrates the primacy of a *secular collective entity* by placing it at the center of a set of beliefs and myths . . .
- b. . . [I]mposes loyalty and devotion . . .
- c. . . [I]nterprets its political action as a *messianic function* to fulfill a mission of benefit to all humanity.
- d. Creates a *political liturgy* for the adoration of the sacralized collective entity through the cult of the person who embodies it . . . (138-39).

Gentile studied fascism, as a form of political religion, particularly in Italy. He concluded that there were

two types of politics as religion in the modern world. One was the *political religion*, which refers to the kind of sacralization of politics that occurs in totalitarian regimes. In such regimes, *political religion* sanctifies the use of violence in the fight against political enemies, among other things. The other type, *civil religion*, sacralizes politics in democratic regimes (Gentile, 2006: 139 ff.).

As far as we can tell, no one has looked seriously at political campaigns with an eye to whether they constitute quasi-religious movements. This is the goal of the current article.

Methods

We examined Youtube, and other available, recordings of five campaign rallies each for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton during the 2016 pre-election period.² We selected a purposive, nonprobability (e.g., non-random) sample of the longest recordings we could find of rallies during 2016 for each candidate. Our rationale in doing this was that these recordings would give us the fullest picture of what typically went on in them. We list the campaign rallies that we watched in the Appendix at the end of this article. Tracking down the origin of certain catch phrases, rituals and beliefs manifest at the campaign rallies frequently required additional observations, notably of the 2016 Democratic and Republican nominating conventions.

We employed a mixed-method approach. Primarily, we did a content analysis of the recordings. As we watched them, we each took notes on three particular phenomena: sacred objects, rituals, and beliefs. These three phenomena were suggested by Durkheim's classic (1915/1965) work and were used by Cottingham (2015) to organized her study of Pittsburgh Steelers fans, one hundred years later. Durkheim defined sacred objects as "those which . . . interdiction protect and isolate." He said rituals were "the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of sacred objects." He also said "religious beliefs are representations which express the nature of sacred things and the relations which they sustain" (1915/1965: 56).

To check whether some of the beliefs expressed by the candidates were shared by their followers, and not just the followers expressing approbation at rallies,

² We did the same for Bernie Sanders, but discovered that, because his campaign did not last to the end of the election year, it was not strictly comparable to the other two presidential candidates. We will briefly summarize our findings about the Sanders campaign at the end of the paper.

we supplemented our content analysis with statistical analyses of data about a probability sample of voters in the 2016 presidential election from the American National Election Study.³

Results

Having reviewed video recordings of five campaign rallies for the two major candidates—Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton—for the 2016 U. S. presidency, we are prepared to compare and contrast these recordings in terms of sacred objects, ritualistic behavior and the expression of fundamental beliefs. In doing so, we, like Cottingham (2015) in her study of sports fans' behavior, will frame these elements in terms of the degree of sacralization they evince. We believe that, in the context of campaign rallies, one cannot dichotomously classify these elements as sacred or profane, but must place them on a continuum between these two extremes.

Sacred Objects

At one level, each of the campaigns seemed to have generated literal objects that held special meaning for pilgrims to the rallies. The red "Make American Great Again" baseball-style *caps* worn often by Trump and many of his supporters may be the most easily remembered objects in the 2016 campaigns. However, the Trump campaign generated a substantial variety of other campaign-related paraphernalia—and, some of it, especially towards the end of the campaign, became a bit hostile.

In January 2016 (at Rock Hill, South Carolina), there were relatively tame *t-shirts* (saying "Make America Great Again") and *posters* (stating that "The Silent Majority Stands with Trump"). By the time of the later rallies (at the end of October and in the first week of November), the *hats* were almost as likely to have the name *Trump* written on them or an *American flag* depicted on them. The posters also became much more differentiated. These posters bore messages like "Trump-Pence," which defined the constituency of their bearers ("Women for Trump" and "Veterans for Trump"), or that implied varying degrees of anger ("Drain the Swamp" and "Trump that Bitch").

We debated about classifying people, candidates and surrogates, as sacred objects because we wanted to avoid objectifying any persons or group of people. We decided, however, that such a classification was

³ These data are provided online through the *Survey Documentation and Analysis* posted by the University of California, Berkeley in 2017.

unavoidable. In our defense, we reiterate that theorists like Le Bon have paved the way for doing this. Le Bon (1960: 60) suggested that religious faith “may apply to an invisible God, to a wooden or stone idol, [or] to a hero.” He also pointed out that, occasionally, political candidates seem to invite such treatment.

To one degree or another, the goal of many political campaigns is to elevate people, usually the candidates themselves, to the level of sacred objects—and, in many cases, to portray others—often opponents—either as simply unholy or as devils incarnate. Trump rallies provided many examples of both efforts. At an October 31 rally, for example, Trump was introduced by former college basketball coach Bobby Knight who said he thought of Trump as “Saint Donald.”

Trump did not require surrogates to point out his near mythical status. At earlier rallies, like one in Rock Hill, South Carolina, on January 18, 2016, he suggested that he, Cincinnatus-like⁴, had been chosen [by himself?] to lead a movement against the Washington establishment. Trump stated: “I enjoyed my job [in real estate; on television?]; I did it well.” He also implied that he would be willing to make this sacrifice (of seeking the presidency) for the people.

On the other hand, Trump was famous for vilifying opponents. Sometimes he did this with snide asides (as in the January rally where he chided his remaining Republican opponents as well as Clinton for using teleprompters and not “speak[ing] from the heart . . . and brain,” as he did). At other times, he used full-on assaults. For example, in an October rally in Cincinnati, he called Clinton a “corrupt person,” asserting that “She should be locked up” and that, when he became President, “I will ask my Attorney General to look into her crimes.”

By the end of her campaign, Clinton’s followers had also accumulated a fair number of clothing-worthy slogans and images (“I’m with her,” “Hillary 2016 [with an image of Rosie the Riveter],” “Clinton-Kane,” and, perhaps, most provocatively, “Nasty Woman”) and poster-worthy (“USA,” “Stronger Together,” “I Will Vote,” “Clinton-Kane,” and “Love Trumps Hate”) slogans.

Clinton was fairly good at tooting her own horn, but, in doing so—as when she suggested she’d demonstrated her endurance by standing next to Trump for over four and a half hours during three debates—she sometimes

seemed slightly defensive. Trump had, after all, accused her of not having sufficient energy for the presidency. Perhaps trying to avoid the appearance of self-aggrandizement that Trump more clearly embraced, Clinton sometimes seemed more comfortable having surrogates sing her praises. Barack Obama did this at the Democratic National Convention in July, and at other rallies during the campaign, when he said that “there has never been a man or a woman—not me, not Bill, nobody—more qualified than Hillary Clinton to serve as president of the United States of America.”

Other surrogates pointed to specific issues on which Clinton was “on the side of the angels” while Trump was on the opposite side. In a Miami rally in October, for example, Al Gore claimed, “[W]hen it comes to the most urgent issue facing this country and the world, Hillary Clinton will make solving the climate crisis a top national priority. Her opponent, based on ideas he has presented, would take us toward a climate catastrophe.” In Manchester, New Hampshire near the end of the campaign, Elizabeth Warren observed, “Hillary is ready to fight for us. Are you willing to fight for Hillary?” At a North Carolina rally in October, Michelle Obama had many positive things to say about Clinton. One comment that was uniquely her own was: “First Ladies, we rock!” Surrogates like the Obamas, Warren and Gore sometimes seemed to assume the role of disciples, preaching Clinton’s worthiness for high office. They often shared the stage, with Clinton while she would simply nod her head in agreement.

These shared appearances meant that Clinton spent some time returning the favor, making her surrogates look a bit saintly, while hinting that her opponent was not. Gore, she observed, had devoted much of his life fighting man-made climate change—had won, in fact, the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. She pointed out that Elizabeth Warren and Maggie Hassan (then governor of New Hampshire, campaigning to be New Hampshire’s next U.S. senator) “fight for you every day.” But she also regularly tried to take luster from Trump’s candidacy. For example, in New Hampshire, Clinton stated that, while Trump claimed that he “knows more than the generals, I don’t think so!” Thus did Clinton, somewhat like Trump, try to paint the election as an apocalyptic battle between, if not good and evil, then the qualified and the unqualified.

Rituals

The rituals evident at these rallies, at least as much as we saw of the rallies, were largely confined to music

⁴ Cincinnatus, a patrician in the early Roman Republic, was reputedly begged by his fellow citizens to give up his retirement as a farmer, assume complete control of the state, and vanquish an invading enemy. After he did all this, Cincinnatus is said to have walked away from public life for good.

played and crowd chants. Trump usually walked to and from the stage, for example, accompanied by the national anthem, the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” or, ironically, the London Bach Choir’s choral introduction to the Rolling Stones’ “You Can’t Always Get What you Want.” The latter two, at least, might have given listeners the impression they were at a church service, rather than at a political gathering. Clinton, too, might be introduced by the national anthem. Just as frequently she would walk up to Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believin’ (Small Town Girl),” probably emphasizing her humble origins. In later rallies, Clinton also walked out to “Brave,” by Sara Boreiles, a song that advocates “speakin’ up” to “someone’s lack of love.”

For Trump, what had been simple “Trump, Trump, Trump” chants and “Who’s going to pay for the Wall/”Mexico” call and responses in January at Rock Hill morphed, by October and November, into many iterations of “Lock Her Up,” “Drain the Swamp,” “USA,” “All Talk No Action,” “Build the Wall,” “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs.” By the end, Trump was sharing information about his part in the creation of such mantras. At a rally in Phoenix, Arizona, on October 29th, for example, he asserted that when his people brought the “drain the swamp” concept to him, he didn’t like it at first, but admitted: “Now I like it.”

Clinton gave the impression of being less calculating about inspiring the chants that emerged from her galleries, but, since some of them, like “Deal Me In,” mimicked lines in her speeches (“Mr. Trump accused me of playing the woman card. Well, if fighting for women’s health care and paid family leave and equal pay is playing the woman card, then deal me in”), she clearly had a hand in some of them. In her later rallies, Clinton also gave her audiences time to chant this, as well as “Love Trumps Hate.” Her crowds also, more spontaneously, chanted things like “Hillary, Hillary, Hillary,” and “We Love You, Hillary” at the later rallies. And, of course, when Michelle Obama spoke on Hillary’s behalf at various rallies, as she did at the Democratic Convention, crowds would often join in when she said, “When they go low, we go high.”

Trump’s and Clinton’s responses to crowd chants were noticeably different. Both candidates would typically pause to acknowledge the participation, but Trump would happily stop what he was saying and walk around the stage, looking at and pointing to various crowd members, seemingly egging them on. On the other hand, while Clinton would usually stop, smile, and occasionally would seemingly admonish the crowd for getting off topic. She noticeably did the latter at

her joint rally with Al Gore, when she cut the crowd short by raising her open hand, as if to say “Stop,” and continued with, “This is really important.”

Beliefs

One of the most daunting stumbling blocks in Cottingham’s (2015) observational study of Pittsburgh Steeler fans was that observation alone is a tricky guide to understanding people’s, especially football fans’ beliefs. Without being able to ask questions of those being observed, the researcher cannot be sure of what they hold dear. Observing film of political rallies, on the other hand, provided us with a more reliable way of determining what convictions motivated candidates and, presumably, their followers. However, in this section, we augment our observations with data from the American National Election in 2016 to help determine how much Trump and Clinton followers did indeed differ in their beliefs.

As good researchers know, the validity of what a person says depends, among other things, on how deeply s/he believes in what is being said and whether s/he intends to be truthful (Adler and Clark, 2015: 215). Thus, the fact that Trump criticized other candidates for using a teleprompter in January 2016 rallies, and then used them himself in October and November rallies, *may not be* an indicator of Trump’s flock’s changing beliefs about teleprompters. Rather, one might conclude that his flock’s faith in him, not his stated beliefs, could withstand such mild contradictions. In fact, at a Sioux City, Iowa, rally in January 2016, Trump famously said: “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose any voters, OK?” Yet there did seem to be some fundamental beliefs shared by Trump and his followers--beliefs that forged the loyal bond.

Trump announced his candidacy on June 16, 2015, and simultaneously announced his commitment to building a wall between Mexico and the United States. In doing so, he laid the foundation of his campaign on an anti-immigrant theme that struck a chord for many Americans (e.g., Rocha, Sabetta and Clark, 2017). Trump reiterated this theme at all the rallies we observed. This, plus the promise to bring and hold onto well-paying jobs for the working class Americans, may well account for the ironclad loyalty that seems to have bound Trump to around 40 percent of American voters both before the election and since. Some of Trump’s proposed policy changes were related to these two themes or goals (e.g., abandoning trade agreements like NAFTA and

the TPP, developing the country's infrastructure, and cutting business taxes). Some proposed policies were less clearly so (e.g., rebuilding the military, taking care of law enforcement and veterans, saving the Second Amendment, appointing Justices to the Supreme Court "that will uphold the Constitution," and ending Common Core). The belief in the salience of limiting immigration and creating jobs seems to have been crucial, almost sacred, to Trump and his followers.

Towards the end of the campaign Clinton regularly argued that the government should not be making money off students (via high interests on loans) and that college and university should be tuition free for students whose families made under \$125,000 a year. She also advocated raising the minimum wage, taxing millionaires and corporations, and an infrastructure enhancement program that would provide jobs. However, much of Clinton's eventual position was defined in contradiction to Trump's nativist stance and, more generally, in contradiction to his messages of exclusivity. In a rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan the day before the election, she said simply: "Anger is not a plan." She also said that the election was about choosing between "division and unity in our country."

Based on candidates' expressed beliefs, one can derive certain inferences about their followers' *probable* beliefs as well. However, enthusiastic responses by rally goers, conceivably the most fervid followers, *may not* translate into patterned differences in the beliefs of the candidates' followers. Using American National Election Study (ANES) data, we were able to determine that they often did. Based on their candidates' statements, one might expect that Trump voters would be more averse to immigration than Clinton voters. The ANES data suggest that, in general, they were. **Table 1** compares Trump and Clinton voters in terms of their openness to immigration. The ANES asked respondents: "What should immigration levels be?" Almost 46 percent (45.7%) of people who voted for Trump said they should be "decreased a lot," while only 8.8 percent of Clinton voters said this. Conversely, 10.9 percent of Clinton voters said that immigration levels should be increased a lot, while only 1.7 percent of Trump voters said they should. (See **Table 1**.)

Table 1. Trump and Clinton Voters Answer the Question: "What Should Immigration Levels Be?"

Response Options	Trump Voters	Clinton Voters
Increased a lot	1.7% (19)	10.9% (136)
Increased a little	2.7% (30)	16.5% (205)
Left the same	25.9% (290)	50.1% (623)
Decreased a little	24.0% (269)	13.6% (169)
Decreased a lot	45.7% (513)	8.8% (109)
Total	100% (1121)	100% (1242)

Source: American National Election Study, 2016. Note: Ns are in parentheses.

Regarding increasing the minimum wage, one might also expect that Clinton voters would be more likely than Trump voters to have supported it. The data in **Table 2** show that they were. Specifically, 83.5 percent of Clinton voters *avored* raising the minimum wage, while only 45.0 percent of Trump voters did. (See **Table 2**.)

The ANES data revealed other substantial differences between Trump and Clinton voters registered. Regarding favoring raising taxes on millionaires, a large majority (84.9%) of Clinton voters approved. In contrast, less than half (47.8%) of Trump voters did so. More than half (56.4%) of Trump voters responded that immigration was extremely or very likely to "take away jobs," while only 18.9% of Clinton voters felt this way.

The ANES did **not** ask questions that allowed tests of expected differences in attitudes on all beliefs professed by the candidates; but the tests that were possible did suggest that the beliefs of Trump and Clinton voters were so different that these voters seemed almost to belong to two different, perhaps rival, churches. For an empirical account of other attitudes and beliefs that differentiated Trump and Clinton voters, we refer readers to an article that appeared in volume three of *Sociology between the Gaps* (Rocha, Sabetta and Clark 2017).

**Table 2. Trump and Clinton Voters’ Answers to the Question:
“Should the Minimum Wage be Raised?”**

Response Options	Trump Voters	Clinton Voters
Raised	45.0% (502)	83.5% (1046)
Kept the same	45.4% (506)	14.5% (181)
Lowered	2.7% (30)	0.6% (8)
Eliminated	6.9% (77)	1.4% (18)
Total	100% (1114)	100% (1252)

Source: American National Election Study, 2016. Note: Ns are in parentheses.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis examined sacred objects, rituals and beliefs in the 2016 presidential campaigns of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. It provides insight into how aspects of a campaign’s culture undergo sacralization to greater or lesser degrees. We see, for example, how surrogates like Bobby Knight and the Obamas labored to turn Trump and Clinton, respectively, into sacred objects. We also see how Trump worked to make himself look Cincinnatus-like, if not divine.

The rituals we observed in the campaigns also struck us as differentially sacralized, or at least subject to differential attempts to seem religious in nature. In the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and the London Bach Choir’s introduction to the Rolling Stones’ “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” someone in the Trump campaign was certainly trying to create a sacred air to the candidate’s comings and goings. It’s not clear whether or not the version of “Battle Hymn” is the one sung by the Mormon Tabernacle choir in the Mormon Tabernacle; but, it could have been. The London Bach Choir’s introduction to the Stone’s song was clearly designed to echo inspirational classical chorale music. In using “Don’t Stop Believin’ (Small Town Girl)” and “Brave” to introduce Clinton, much more secular foci were evoked.

Evidently, Trump took pride in the chants that constituted notable ritualized activities on the part of his supporters at his rallies. As soon as a “Lock Her Up” or “Build the Wall” chant would begin, he would typically stop whatever he was saying and walk around. He often turned to the people behind him and let the chanting behavior run its course. Trump took credit for giving his stamp of approval to some chants, such as “Drain the Swamp.” Clinton would frequently stop and smile in reaction to a “Hillary, Hillary, Hillary” chant, but, as we have mentioned, she actually discouraged crowd participation at a rally about climate change.

The beliefs espoused by the candidates, at least as evidenced in the rallies we watched, often seemed fairly fundamental, maybe even sacred in their nature and presentation. Of course (in Grand Rapids, Michigan) we observed throwaway ideas, especially, for example, from Trump, about the value of not using teleprompters. But about his two fundamental themes, he was consistent, if, given his background, apparently at odds with his own historical interests: the needs to limit immigration and to provide well-paying jobs. According to Ballesteros (2017), Trump is thought to have used immigrant labor to save money on the construction of Trump Tower. Clinton’s fundamental beliefs are less easy to summarize or, perhaps, too numerous to do so quickly. Clinton frequently suggested to crowds that they look for her policy positions on her website: a site that enumerated positions on forty-one issues ranging from, alphabetically, “A Fair Tax System” to “Workforce Skills and Job Training.” Our analysis of ANES data indicates that, to the extent that we could measure them, the belief systems of voters for Trump and Clinton were very different.

In general, then, both campaigns evinced, through their rallies, elements of quasi-religions, although they did so to differing degrees. Donald Trump’s campaign seemed most clearly to embrace quasi-religiousness. Many of Trump’s followers wore the red baseball cap with the “Make America Great Again” logo and this was by far the most obvious “thing” that followers sacralized in the campaigns. Trump seemed not at all averse to defining himself, and being defined, as a sacred object. And the rituals that played out at his rallies were, while varied, strongly encouraged and almost sacramental in nature. Hilary Clinton seemed more reluctant to embrace the sacralization of her campaign, although she did not reject it entirely.

In concluding this article, we would like to report that we did an analysis of five Bernie Sanders rallies to get added perspective on our findings. Perhaps because

of the shorter length of his campaign, Sanders followers never seemed to amass the collection of sacred objects that both Trump and Clinton supporters did, nor were their ritualized chants anywhere near as insistent as those of Trump and Clinton rally attendees. Part of the reason for the relative absence of these elements of quasi-religion may be understood by Sanders' discouragement of them. Even more than Clinton, Sanders seemed to disapprove of ritualized behavior. He would, for example, raise what seemed to be a warning hand when his followers began to chant, "Bernie, Bernie, Bernie." Even more than Clinton, Sanders gave the impression that he wanted to get back to his presentation. This behavior may either be taken as evidence that his campaign had fewer religious elements than the other two candidates or that what Sanders really valued were the beliefs (not the objects or rituals) of his campaign.

Limitations of the Current Study

The current study has several significant limitations. First, we could have focused on other 2016 U. S. presidential candidate campaigns. However, the Trump and Clinton campaigns were the ones of the most likely candidates to have won in 2016. Second, the degree to which our findings may be generalized to other political campaigns in American politics is unclear. It is possible that the sacred objects, rituals and beliefs described here may (in some generic way) be generalizable to other campaigns in American history. Indeed, they may be generalizable, in generic ways, to campaigns going on in other nations, both in the contemporary period and in the past. However, some specifics, like those in any exploratory study, will not be generalizable.

Third, a major limitation of the current study is its focus on easily accessible recordings of political rallies. There are not only a variety of biases that may account for variation in what off-site observers of such rallies see. Editing, the placement of cameras and the interests of the camerapersons are factors which limit the coverage of the videos of rallies. It is also likely that rallies themselves offer only limited access to the variety of ways in which political campaigns play out as quasi-religious movements, or not. To the extent that a campaign's quasi-religiousness can account for the intensity of its participants' commitment to a candidate, it may be very useful for future research to further outline what it takes for political campaigns to encourage a kind of religious fervor.

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About the Authors: **Mary Ellen Fernandez** is a senior at Rhode Island College, where she is a Psychology major. **Roger Clark** is a Professor of Sociology at Rhode Island College, where he teaches Research Methods and Sociology of Gender.