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Editor's Preface to the Spring Edition

Here at Elon University, we are extremely grateful to host The *Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics* for the sixth semester. We are proud to present the Spring 2023 issue and congratulate all authors published in this issue for their high achievement.

This publication seeks to highlight the intellectual curiosity that leads to innovative scholarship in all subfields of political science, scholarship that addresses timely questions, is carefully crafted, and utilizes diverse methodologies. We are committed to intellectual integrity, a fair and objective review process, and a high standard of scholarship as we showcase the work of undergraduate scholars, most of whom pursue questions that have been traditionally ignored in scholarship but that drive our discipline forward.

Following the lead of the *American Political Science Review* (APSR) Editorial Board, we are excited to publish research in the areas of “American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law and policy, racial and ethnic politics, the politics of gender and sexuality and qualitative and quantitative research methods.” This publication also values the relationships formed through student-faculty collaboration and aims to build a culture of scholarship that expands beyond the college campus. We hope to encourage and empower students to seek out knowledge and pursue their potential, contributing to scholarship in a variety of disciplines.

This year, we thank our advisors Dr. Baris Kesgin and Dr. Aaron Sparks for their support, without which the issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the entirety of the Political Science and Policy Studies Department at Elon University; our Faculty Advisory Board; and all the students who shared their exceptional work with us this semester.

We are excited to present the Spring 2023 edition of the *Journal*. Thank you for your continued support and readership of our publication; we hope you enjoy the edition.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board at Elon University

Submission of Manuscripts

The *Journal* accepts manuscripts from undergraduates of any class and major. Members of Pi Sigma Alpha are especially encouraged to submit their work. We strive to publish papers of the highest quality in all areas of political science.

Generally, selected manuscripts have been well-written works with a fully developed thesis and strong argumentation stemming from original analysis. Authors may be asked to revise their work before being accepted for publication.

Submission deadlines are September 15th for the Fall edition and February 15th for the Spring edition. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis; therefore, early submissions are strongly encouraged.

Students may submit their work through Elon University's submission portal, found here: <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/arts-and-sciences/political-science/psa-journal/>

Alternatively, students may email psajournalelon@gmail.com with an attached Word document of the manuscript. In the body of the email, students are asked to include their name and university, the title of the manuscript, and the closest subfield of political science to which their manuscript pertains (American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, or policy studies). Due to the time committed to the manuscript review process, we ask students to submit only one manuscript per submission cycle.

Submitted manuscripts must include a short abstract (approximately 150 words) and citations/references that follow the *APSA Style Manual for Political Science*. Please do not exceed the maximum page length of 35 double-spaced pages, which includes references, tables, figures, and appendices.

The *Journal* is a student-run enterprise with editors and an Editorial Board that are undergraduate students and Pi Sigma Alpha members at Elon University. The Editorial Board relies heavily on the help of our Faculty Advisory Board, which consists of political science faculty from across the nation, including members of the Pi Sigma Alpha Executive Council.

Please direct any questions about submissions or the Journal's upcoming editions to the editors at Elon University: psajournalelon@gmail.com.

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“A New Republican Civil Religion: President Donald Trump and Shifts In American Civil Religion

Madeline Hossler, Fairfield University

Sociologist Robert Bellah first defined American Civil Religion in 1967 as a nonsectarian “civil religion” comprised of “beliefs, symbols, and rituals” of American identity that form a quasi-religious national faith. Scholarship on “American Civil Religion” (ACR) has largely framed it as a solution to the electoral challenge of pluralism: providing rhetorical tools for creating an American identity capable of transcending differences of race, ethnicity, religion, and cultural background. This unifying power makes ACR common in Presidential rhetoric. In this paper, ACR is identified as having three key pillars: a creed, code, and cultus. The creed frames all Americans as a chosen people, the code mandates civic engagement for the public good, and the cultus requires the creation of shrines, saints, and rituals to reinforce the creed. This paper will argue that during his 2016 and 2020 campaigns, President Donald Trump has broken from these pillars of ACR and created something new: a Republican Civil Religion. This new civil religion limits the chosen people to Republicans, glorifies political violence as a form of civic engagement, and enshrines President Trump as the highest political saint. This paper will utilize a comparative rhetorical analysis of RNC speeches by Mitt Romney in 2012 and President Trump in 2016 and 2020 to reveal this shift. This paper contributes to scholarship in two sub-fields: American political development (APD) literature that focuses on party ideological development and American political thought (APT) that highlights the evolving place of civil religion within American politics.

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION

American Civil Religion is a term first introduced by sociologist Robert Bellah (1967) in his essay *Civil Religion In America*, originally published in 1967. Bellah identifies American civil religion as a “collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things” that work to define American identity and bind citizens together (Bellah 1967). American civil religion is nonsectarian in nature and accommodates those with loyalties to all faith traditions. It is intended to be an addition to existing religious identity, not a substitute. While Bellah acknowledges that American civil religion draws some of its themes from Christianity, specifically Protestant and Puritan influences, these influences are identified as a consequence of history rather than an endorsement of Christian theology as essential to American identity. American civil religion is a tool of self-understanding, connecting Americans to a common mythology and sense of national purpose (Bellah 1967). It is a way of defining what it means to be an American and a way of combining those Americans into one unified nation.

Catherine Albanese (2013) creates a three-part framework for understanding American civil religion, defining it as having a creed, a code, and a cultus. The creed is rooted in the assumption that the United States is a chosen nation

and Americans are a chosen people, given a special purpose to construct an egalitarian democratic society and serve as an example of those values to the world. This belief prescribes a code of actions needed to fulfill the mission. This code argues that American citizens are obligated to work toward a collective good by performing certain civic obligations. This code generates the idea of an American experiment or an American project, defining the American people by their collaboration in living up to the standard of their chosenness. The cultus involves worshiping national monuments as shrines and major historical figures as saints and performing specific rituals that center on these symbols and celebrate common identity. The worship of these symbols and performance of these rituals gives American civil religion its unifying power (Albanese 2013). Philip Gorski (2021) provides a bit more rhetorical flair to this idea, defining the creed of American civil religion as “the vital center of our public life, a shared language for articulating our common dreams.” Gorski echoes Albanese’s concept of code by arguing that “Citizens are morally accountable to one another, and the best life is one dedicated to the common good” (Gorski 2021). These invocations of moral accountability, common good, common dreams, and a vital center places an emphasis on American civil religion as something people have in common, that sustains American civic life and directs Americans towards the goal of a better future.

While civil religion is present in many countries it is uniquely essential in the United States. The country's colonial roots and immigration history have produced a nation without a common cultural background, making the task of creating a unified people uniquely challenging (Gardella 2013). Catherine Albanese titles this the "problem of manyness," to which American civil religion serves as the solution. American civil religion provides an "overarching religious system under which most denominations, sects, and other spiritual groups may find a place," creating a prevailing "one story" of common identity with the power to unify a diverse people (Albanese 2013). American civil religion is intended to transcend the differences in race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and geography that result in social division. American civil religion serves as the common ground, providing a pluralistic society with one thing they can all share.

AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION IN PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

As a rhetorical tool, American Civil Religion relies on symbols and common myths meant to evoke emotions. Peter Gardella (2013) describes how "when most Americans salute the flag, or sing the national anthem, or visit Arlington National Cemetery, the emotions they feel do not arise from a rational conclusion." These symbols represent myths and stories of American history and identity. These myths and stories allow the symbols to take on a spiritual dimension. Gardella describes the flag as a "sacramental object," as it is essential for the performance of rituals that transmit spiritual power, such as the Pledge of Allegiance and the singing of the national anthem (Gardella 2013). This is the essential religious quality of American civil religion. When political leaders invoke these symbols, they are tapping into an abstract and irrational yet loyal commitment the public has towards a certain vision of the American story. The result is that "If American civil religion works well for them, the emotions will lead to an affirmation of the values" (Gardella 2013). Evoking emotions and affirming values are keyways that politicians motivate their supporters toward political engagement. Utilizing the symbols strategically can frame certain political actions as more beneficial, more necessary, and more American.

Presidential rhetoric can be seen as an essential tool for understanding the narratives of American civil religion. Bellah acknowledges this in his original piece by beginning his analysis with President Kennedy's inaugural address and paying significant attention to the words of President Lincoln (Bellah 1967). In their essay *Barack Obama and the Expansion of American Civil Religion*, authors Kevin Coe, David Domke, and Penelope Sheets (2016) articulate why this is the case. They argue that "presidents are virtually the only people in American life who invoke religious themes while also having the attention of a large segment of the citizenry," and that "mentions of groups in presidential speech help to shape public

perceptions of who matters in America—of who is and who is not part of the American family" (Coe, Domke, and Sheets 2016). Individual Americans hear religious messaging specific to their own faith tradition in their place of worship the president is tasked with speaking to the whole of a pluralistic America. What religious ideas and what values are essential to American identity at a particular historical moment are defined by how the president speaks to the people. Presidential speech utilizes these symbols, and the emotions and sense of common identity that they invoke, to generate mass appeal and direct public attention to important issues.

The idea that the Republican party has morphed its messaging and rejected many previous norms of American politics is not an original proposition. President Trump can be viewed as an individual orchestrator of some of these shifts, but they can also be seen in a broader context with origins in the Tea Party movement, the Bush administration, or as far back as the rise of President Reagan. Gorski argues that the influence American civil religion has had on the Republican party has long been in decline, since "The leaders of the Republican establishment and the religious right abandoned the vital center long ago in a ruthless quest for cultural and electoral hegemony" (Gorski 2021). Journalists, pundits, and scholars alike have labeled President Trump's behavior as ranging from populist to authoritarian. It can be argued that President Trump's politics are grounded in ideologies ranging from resentment of progressive movements, nativism, conspiracy theories and white Christian nationalism. Gorski summarizes this Republican "problem of manyness" in his analysis of the symbols present at the January 6th insurrection. Gorski describes how the capitol insurrection was also a "riot of images" that included "a wooden cross and wooden gallows; Christian flags and Confederate flags; 'Jesus Saves' and 'Don't Tread on Me banners'" (Gorski and Perry 2022). The January 6th insurrection, with its cacophony of symbols and its grounding in persistent denial of election results, "creates the foundation for a collective memory based on a separate national identity held together by the tragic stealing of his presidency and the evils of his opponents" (Onishi 2021). This paper will argue that this new memory, identity, and collection of symbols can be best summarized as a new civil religion, a Republican civil religion.

IDENTITY AND CIVIL RELIGION: RACE, GROUP POSITION, AND NATIONALISM

American civil religion is fundamentally the project of constructing American national identity. In this way, it is helpful to rely on Benedict Anderson's definition of a "nation" as "imagined political community" that is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." It is imagined because it creates a bond between all the individuals within the nation, even though most will never interact with one another. It is limited because it creates boundaries between the nation

and its outsiders. It is sovereign because it holds a source of authority that transcends a pluralistic population. And it is a community because there is a sense of “comradeship” connecting members, regardless of any animosity, inequality, and exploitation that may exist within the nation (Anderson 2006). American civil religion is the grounds on which the imagined community of America as a nation is built. Because nations are imagined communities the criteria that determine who is a part of them is also socially constructed. This creates space for the marriage of race, religion, genealogy, or other identity markers with the concept of the national identity (Anderson 2006). Civil religion is a rhetorical tool for constructing an imagined “us” and “them” which will inherently reflect the prejudices of those utilizing it.

Herbert Blumer describes how racial prejudice stems from ideas about “group position” that form within racial groups. Blumer describes dominant racial groups as holding four sentiments that determine race prejudice: (1) a sense of superiority, (2) a view of the subordinate race as fundamentally different from themselves, (3) a sense that they are entitled to the advantages their racial identity has historically afforded them, and (4) a fear that the subordinate racial group is intent on destroying the current racial hierarchy (Blumer 1958). Ashley Jardina (2021) expands on the importance of group-level understanding of race by differentiating between two types of group-related racial attitudes: out-group resentment and in-group solidarity. Out-group resentment represents explicit racial prejudice. In-group solidarity represents a desire to protect those in their in-group, which an individual can possess without necessarily holding explicit animosity towards the out-group. Jardina’s work demonstrates that both types of race group understandings have an impact on how individuals assess different presidential candidates (Jardina 2021).

The impacts of prejudice on presidential candidate evaluation Jardina finds are also present in a study by Flavio R. Hinkel Jr. and Andrew R Murphy, which draws a connection between civil religious devotion, preexisting prejudice, and support for President Trump. Their study examines two levels of existing prejudice which they term symbolic racism and modern sexism. Symbolic racism is defined as a form of racism that lacks the notion of biological inferiority but asserts that people of color don’t share American values, which leads to denials that racial inequality still exists and opposition of policies centered on racial justice. Similarly, modern sexism is defined as a form of sexism that has moved beyond the notion of biological inferiority and blatant enforcement of strict gender roles but does deny the existence of continued gender inequality and is employed to dismiss demands for corrective policy. This study concluded that individuals with higher levels of symbolic racism and modern sexism were already more likely to approve of President Trump. However, the much more impactful finding is that within the group of individuals with high levels of prejudice, support for President Trump increased as their level of civil religious belief increased (Hinkel and Murphy 2022).

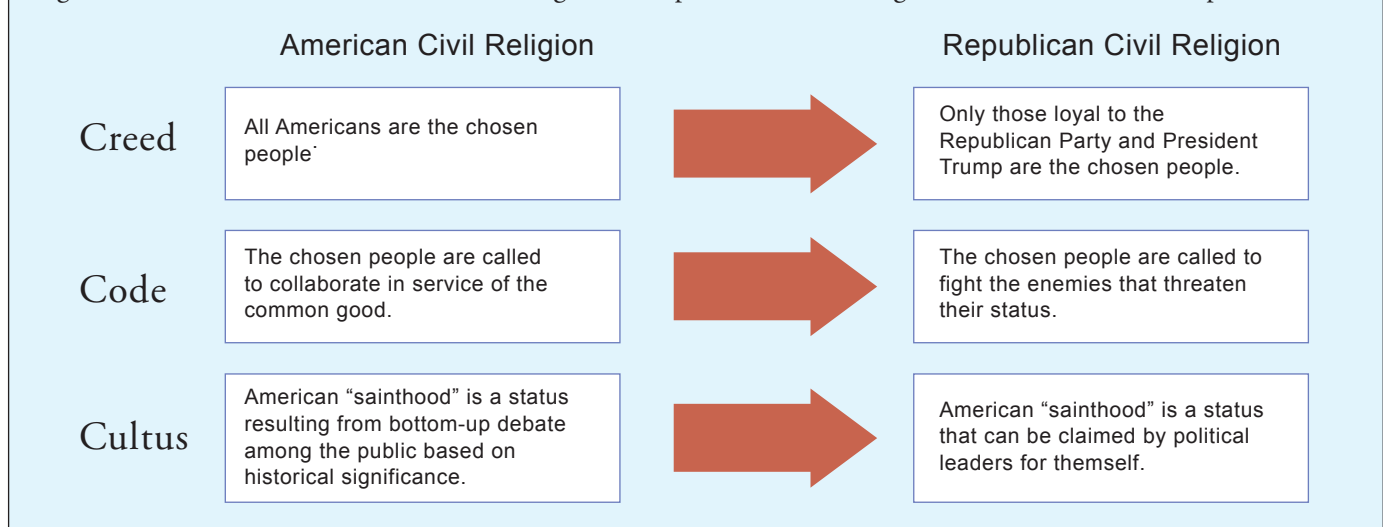
Both Blumer and Jardina’s description of racial prejudice depend on the belief within the dominant racial group that society is meant to have a racial order, and that their place at the top of that structure and the privileges it affords them represents an inflexible “natural order” of things. Gorski and Perry echo this concept in their definition of the goals of white Christian nationalism. Gorski and Perry define white Christian nationalism as having three core ideals: freedom, order, and violence. These core ideals tell a story of “(white) men exercising (righteous) violence to defend (their) freedom and impose (racial and gender) order” (Gorski and Perry 2022). This story presents a narrow vision of the chosen people in American society, where racial identity and belief system can define a “real American” and those who claim this dominant identity have the right to react violently when it is in the name of defending the group-level ideas about their rightful place Blumer and Jardina describe.

METHODS

This paper will argue that the rise of President Trump has solidified a new civil religion: a Republican civil religion. This paper will utilize Albanese’s framework of creed, code, and cultus to demonstrate that the rhetoric of President Trump has deviated from historically understood definitions of American civil religion. The creed of American civil religion creates a definition of the “chosen people” that is inclusive of all Americans, while the Republican civil religion reserves the status of the “chosen people” for those who are adequately loyal to the party. The code of American civil religion frames civic obligation as collaboration for the common good, while the Republican civil religion reframes civic obligation as a calling to fight against enemies. The cultus of American civil religion involves the creation of sacred symbols and American “saints” through bottom-up consensus, whereas the Republican civil religion’s cultus allows President Trump to claim the mantle of sainthood for himself.

This paper will analyze three speeches by recent Republican presidential candidates: Mitt Romney’s 2012 nomination acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, and both the 2016 and 2020 nomination acceptance speeches at the Republican National Convention given by President Trump. These speeches provide a beneficial opportunity for rhetorical analysis because they are positioned at a key turning point in the campaign process where the unifying power of a civil religion becomes uniquely important. The nominee must convince a party base who had supported various primary candidates to unite behind them. The nomination acceptance speech is also the first time that the candidate is speaking to the general electorate, not just their party’s primary voters, meaning they are testing out more general messaging for the first time. These speeches provide the first evidence of how candidates plan to unify a more diverse collection of voters into a winning electoral coalition.

Figure 1: The Shift from American Civil Religion to Republican Civil Religion under President Trump



This paper will utilize two methods of content analysis to explore the differences in rhetoric between these three speeches: word frequency and close analysis of quotes. Comparing the frequency of the use of certain terms provides a picture of what themes the candidate fixates on. Then, close analysis of quotes provides context for understanding how these candidates are using these words, and how they represent different versions of either the themes of American civil religion or the themes this paper proposes indicate the creation of a new Republican civil religion. Analysis of the shift in creed will focus on the use of partisan terms, analysis of the shift if code will focus on the use of terms related to fighting and conflict, and analysis of the shift in cultus will focus on the use of I-centered language in how the candidates talk about themselves.

CREED: DEFINING THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

Table 1: Partisan Rhetoric

	Romney 2012	Trump 2016	Trump 2020
Republican	0	1	5
Democrat	0	3	14
Radical	0	4	6
"Radical Left"	0	0	3

The Chosen People and Domestic Society:

The first half of Albanese's definition, the building of a peaceful, prosperous, egalitarian democracy is a mission at home. These themes are demonstrated in the differences

between how President Trump and Mitt Romney discuss their political opponents. There is no mention of either political party in Mitt Romney's speech. In contrast, President Trump utilized partisan language in both of his speeches, and it notably intensifies in his 2020 speech.

Mitt Romney's speech provides an inclusive vision of the chosen people that is tied to the rhetoric of American Civil Religion. Romney was gracious towards his political opponent. Romney stated that "The President was not the choice of our party but Americans always come together after elections. We are a good and generous people who are united by so much more than what divides us." This line fixated on the concept of unity, and promoted the idea that American identity is more essential than partisan identities. Romney defined his view of his political opponent by saying "I wish President Obama had succeeded because I want America to succeed" (NPR 2012). Romney did not stoke fear by framing President Obama's leadership as a disaster or a threat. Rather, Romney expressed a tone of disappointment, commiserating with Americans who had high hopes for the Obama administration that were not realized. This speech maintains a balance of criticizing specific choices made by the administration, while at the same time acknowledging the Democratic Party and its voters as leaders and partners in building a better America.

In 2016, President Trump's most notable use of partisan language comes in his criticism of the Democratic National Convention, where he says, "So if you want to hear the corporate spin, the carefully crafted lies, and the media myths, the Democrats are holding their convention next week" (Politico 2016). President Trump's use of the word Republican increases from one time in 2016 to five times in 2020, and his use of the word Democrat increases from three times in 2016 to 14 times in 2020. President Trump begins to more intensely demonize his political opponents in his 2020 speech. President Trump once again describes the Democratic National

Convention, this time saying that the opposing party “assailed America as a land of racial, social, and economic injustice,” and posing the question “How can the Democratic Party ask to lead our country when it spend so much time tearing down our country?” (NBC 2020).

President Trump also begins to utilize a new term in his 2020 speech: “radical left.” In 2016 President Trump uses the word radical four times, all in reference to foreign threats and immigration policy. In 2020, President Trump transitions from concern over foreign threats, to concern over domestic ones. President Trump uses the phrase “radical left” specifically three times in 2020. The additional three times the phrase radical appears it include labeling the Democratic Party a “radical movement,” referencing “Bernie Sanders and his fellow radicals,” and the “radical professors, judges, and prosecutors” hired by liberal politicians (NBC 2020). The word radical in President Trump’s rhetoric becomes reserved only for the opposing political party, and no other threats.

President Trump’s 2016 speech was characterized by populist rhetoric. Rogers Smith (2020) characterizes President Trump’s style as “pathological populism,” defined as “narratives that lionize “the people” and demonize evil elites” by playing on myths of the past, historical suffering, and cultural difference (Smith 2020). This messaging defines the chosen people as being only a specific group that perceives themselves as disempowered, negating the ability for the demonized leadership to be a part of the chosen people in the story of American Civil Religion. President Trump began with a criticism of Hillary Clinton, claiming “this is the legacy of Hillary Clinton: death, destruction, and weakness.” President Trump claims that he has “seen firsthand how the system is rigged against our citizens.” President Trump claims in his speech that America “is being led by a group of censors, critics, and cynics” that are “telling you that you can’t have the country you want” (Politico 2016). This rhetoric harnesses the existing anxieties of many Americans who feel as though they lack power and directs that anger at other Americans who hold power. A common American identity is not treated as enough to kindle a connection between these people and their leaders in this speech. The definitions of who is or isn’t a part of the chosen people are based on power imbalances: a chosen person is someone out of power, and those in power are not the chosen people.

President Trump intensifies and shifts his divisive rhetoric in the 2020 speech. In this speech he defines the chosen people not based on power status, but by political affiliation. President Trump claimed that President Biden “is the destroyer of America’s jobs, and if given the chance he will be the destroyer of American Greatness.” President Trump frames the Democratic Party and its members as a threat from every angle, both in the abstract political sense and the physical. President Trump claims that the Democratic Party promotes “cancel culture” with the goal of making “decent Americans live in fear of being fired, expelled, shamed,

humiliated, and driven from society as we know it.” The perfect synopsis of his message is this: “this election will decide whether we will defend the American Way of Life, or whether we allow a radical movement to completely dismantle and destroy it” (NBC 2020). While Romney frames his opponents as good Americans who hold ideas he does not approve of, President Trump frames those who do not hold his ideas as un-America, and a threat to the real Americans he claims to represent.

The Chosen People and The World

The second half of Albanese’s definition of the mission of the chosen people involves projecting an example of American greatness to the world. Both Romney and Trump devoted time in their speeches to the issue of immigration. The desire for those from other countries to become American citizens can be viewed as a reflection of how America projects its story of a “chosen people” to the world. Romney chooses to glorify the history of immigration in America, while President Trump directs aggression towards immigrants.

Romney embraces American civil religion in the narrative of immigration as a benefit, and as proof that American greatness is a beacon throughout the world. Romney claims that “We are a nation of immigrants. We are the children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the ones who wanted a better life, the driven ones, the ones who woke up at night hearing that voice telling them that life in that place called America could be better.” Romney invokes national symbols, describing how new immigrants “looked up to the Statue of Liberty, or knelt down and kissed the shores of freedom” (NPR 2012). Here Romney is demonstrating Gardella’s conception of the power of symbols in the rhetoric of American civil religion. Gardella describes how the Statue of Liberty is dedicated to “the most basic value of American Civil Religion, the personal freedom that is also called liberty.” Gardella describes how the statue is intentionally positioned to be viewed by ships coming into the city, symbolically projecting American greatness to the rest of the world. The Statue of Liberty’s proximity to Ellis Island has also solidified it as a key element of the “America is a nation of immigrants” narrative (Gardella 2013). By appealing to these symbols and narratives Romney is remaining consistent with previously established conception of American civil religion.

In 2016 President Trump uses the word radical four times: all in reference to foreign threats an immigration policy. The first two references are to a “radical Muslim brotherhood” and “Islamic radicals” in a section of the speech that discusses the threat of ISIS abroad and references various acts of terrorism on American soil. The second two references are to a “radical 550% increase in Syrian refugees” he claims Hillary Clinton called for, and a reference to the “radical and dangerous” immigration policy of his opponent, which he claims will lead to “mass amnesty, mass immigration, and mass lawlessness” (NBC 2020). The third and fourth sentiments

Blumer claims members of the dominant racial group hold center on societal order. These define a society where the supremacy of the dominant group represents the natural order of things and frames all minority groups as constantly working to dismantle that order (Blumer 1958). By painting a picture of a massive influx of refugees, which he proposes will bring about “mass lawlessness,” President Trump mobilizes these sentiments to electoral advantage (NBC 2020).

President Trump frames immigration as a threat to American greatness. One of the main policy proposals President Trump puts forth in this speech is the plan to build a border wall. President Trump claims that the purpose of this wall was “to stop the gangs and the violence, and to stop the drugs from pouring into our communities,” and claims that significant amounts of immigrants have “produced lower wages and higher unemployment for our citizens” (Politico 2016). When Mitt Romney discusses immigration as proof of America’s greatness. These immigrants believe so strongly in the American Dream that they are willing to uproot their lives to become a part of the chosen people. President Trump does not embrace any of the symbology of American greatness commonly tied to immigration. The motivations of immigrants are not discussed. Rather, immigrants are dehumanized and framed as abstract threats to the current citizens. In 2016 President Trump used the phrase illegal immigrant/illegal immigration four times. In 2020 the phrase appeared twice (Politico 2016). However, President Trump adopts a new term in 2020: illegal alien. This term did not appear in President Trump’s 2016 speech, but it was used three times in 2020 (NBC 2020). The adoption of this term shows that President Trump is further disconnecting his discussion of immigration from the traditional themes and symbols of American civil religion. President Trump has so strongly rejected the symbols and narratives of the American immigration story that even the term immigrant is removed from the conversation. It is then replaced with alien, severing any connection to the story of immigration proposed by American civil religion.

This embrace of nativists and nationalists as the chosen people also ties back to President Trump’s assessment of partisan identity as defining “real Americans.” President Trump appointed Steve Bannon and Steven Miller as high-level presidential advisors, both of whom have promoted a conspiracy theory called the “great replacement.” This theory assumes that non-Christian and non-white immigrants are more likely to support the Democratic party. The “great replacement” argues that Democratic politicians are supporting these kinds of immigrants as a way of growing their own voter base and “replacing” white, Christian, American voters (Gorski and Perry 2022). President Trump utilized this narrative to turn immigration into a way of reinforcing the story that only a certain kind of American can be a part of the chosen people. In President Trump’s narrative being a nativist who harbors strong in-group solidarity with white Americans and in out-

group animosity towards immigrants of other races earns an individual the title of a real Republican, and being a real Republican earns the title of being a real American.

CODE: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AS COMMUNITY OR CRUSADE

Table 2: Violence Rhetoric

	Romney 2012	Trump 2016	Trump 2020
Danger	0	3	5
Threat	1	8	4
Destroy	0	3	3
Defend	0	2	4
Fight	2	1	3
Violence	0	11	2

The code of American civil religion Albanese identified involves the execution of the themes of the creed. If America is truly a nation of chosen people fulfilling a national mission then there is a mandate that citizens need to be actively engaged in public life and working for the collective good (Albanese 2013). Romney and President Trump once again exemplify very different interpretations of what public action civil religion demands. For Romney, public participation is about building the American community. While the work he describes tends to be oriented towards economic and private efforts, not government involvement, the themes of unity and maintenance of the public good are consistent with American civil religion. In contrast, the version of public participation proposed by President Trump incites citizens to engage in a crusade against other citizens, rejecting the notion of a common good and fixating on threats.

The language of violence is largely absent from Romney’s speech. The only threat Romney mentions is that of Iran’s nuclear program. He uses the term fight to reference breaking up fights between his sons when they were growing up and to describe veterans who “lived and died under a single flag, fighting for a single purpose” (NPR 2012). The rhetoric Mitt Romney uses to describe the value of public participation in a way that is very similar to Albanese’s description. The rhetoric Mitt Romney uses to describe the value of public participation in a way that is very similar to Albanese’s description. He argues that “the strength and power and goodness of America has always been based on the strength and power and goodness of our communities. That is what makes America, America. In our best days, we can feel the vibrancy of America’s communities, large and small” (NPR 2012).

Romney defines public collaboration as the core of American life, perfectly echoing Gorski's point that "when the founders spoke of the "pursuit of happiness" it was public, rather than private happiness they had in mind" (Gorski 2021). Romney specifically utilizes this theme in his case for why President Obama should not be reelected. This case rests on the idea that President Obama failed to live up to the expectations and dreams these communities had for the administration. Romney uses the examples of opening new small businesses, being able to send their kids to college or set them up with a good job, and volunteering to support their children's sports teams and schools as vital activities that build an American community and tie together people's hopes and dreams. The strength of the American community is based on collective optimism, which motivates collective work. In making the case against President Obama, Romney asks the audience: "How many days have you woken up feeling that something really special was happening in America?" (NPR 2012). According to Romney's rhetorical choices, President Obama's biggest failure was failing to effectively facilitate the dreams Americans had for their nation.

In contrast, President Trump relies heavily on the rhetoric of violence in both his 2016 and 2020 speeches. While Romney uses the word threat only once, President Trump uses it eight times in 2016 and another four in 2020. In his use of the word threat, President Trump fixates on issues of crime and terrorism. In 2016 President Trump described illegal immigrants with criminal records who were "roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens," and pledges that his first priority in office would be to "liberate our citizens from the crime and terrorism and lawlessness that threatens their communities" (Politico 2016). In 2020, President Trump uses the term to frame voters' options in the 2020 election, saying "Your vote will decide whether we protect law abiding Americans, or whether we give free reign to violent anarchists, agitators, and criminals who threaten our citizens" (NBC 2020). President Trump uses both Jardina's notions of out-group animosity and in-group solidarity to craft his framing of the choice voters have. The "law abiding Americans" are the members of the in-group voters should be in solidarity with, and the "violent anarchists, agitators, and criminals" represent the out-group voters should have animosity for."

The rhetoric that public participation meant defending the country from political opponents began as a tool to turn out Republican voters, but it evolved from a theoretical crusade into a literal one as Trump began to endorse his supporters resorting to violence. No presidential candidate from a major party has advocated for violence in the last century. However, President Trump repeatedly condoned his supporters' attacking protesters at his rallies, at times even expressly demanding it. President Trump offered to pay the legal fees of a supporter who punched a protester. During a rally supporter were called on to "knock the crap out of" protesters, again offering to pay legal fees. At one

event President Trump even admitted to the crowd "I'd like to punch him in the face. I'll tell you" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). When politicians implore their supporters to fight for something that is typically meant to stand for some form of political advocacy. In the case of President Trump, the appeal for supporters to fight is often intended literally. Gorski outright rejects the idea that violence can be compatible with the ideals of American civil religion, arguing that those who are devoted to it "reject ideological absolutism and political violence in the understanding that civic life requires that we balance competing values and forge difficult compromises (Gorski 2017). By supporting and promoting violence as beneficial and patriotic, President Trump rejected principles of American civil religion and built a new vision of public participation that served his own political desires.

The long history of President Trump employing these tactics escalated during the speech President Trump gave ahead of the certification of the electoral college vote following the 2020 election. President Trump implored the crowd to "Fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore," before directing the crowd to walk to the capitol and "give them the pride and boldness that they need to take back our country" (Naylor 2021). That crowd then stormed the capitol building and attacked capitol police in an attempt to harm political rivals and prevent the certification of the election results. This moment represents the natural consequences of Presidential rhetoric defined by a narrative of crusade. According to American civil religion, public participation is a path to the creation of public good. According to Republican civil religion, public participation is a calling to defend a party-specific interpretation of the American way of life from those perceived to be a threat to it. While American civil religion binds the entire American public in the common pursuit of national goals, Republican civil religion unifies only a certain faction of the American public around common pursuit of purging anyone they consider to be undesirable. It utilizes a divisive creed to mobilize Americans who share President Trump's prejudices and vision of the future to fight with other Americans who oppose it.

CULTUS: DEBATING POLITICAL SAINTHOOD

Table 3: I-Centered Phrases

	Romney 2012	Trump 2016	Trump 2020
"I am"	3	13	1
"I will"	7	14	5
"I have"	3	16	4

The cultus of American civil religion is defined by Albanese as the creation and worship of shrines, saints, sacred objects, and rituals. Shrines include places like presidential homes, Independence Hall, or the Statue of Liberty. Saints can range from former presidents, military heroes, and leaders for social change. Sacred objects include the flag, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence. Rituals include the celebration of holidays like Memorial Day or the Fourth of July (Albanese 2013). Taken together the worship of the symbols and performance of these rituals reinforces the creed of American civil religion and increases its capacity to bring people together. In accepting the Presidential nomination both Mitt Romney and President Trump are on the path to one day becoming one of the saints of American civil religion. The ways that these political figures tell their life stories and frame their personal motivations for pursuing the presidency indicates how they conceptualize their own role and importance in the story of American civil religion.

Romney devotes a significant amount of his speech to telling the audience his personal story. The story kicks off with the line “I was born in the middle of the century in the middle of the country, a classic baby boomer.” Romney then proceeds to tell his life story, painting a vivid picture of his father’s blue-collar jobs, the lessons his parents taught him about love and marriage, the appreciation he has for his wife’s work in raising their family, and the love he has for his church and community. This section of the speech contains no details of Romney’s political career or business accomplishments. It’s the kind of story that could conceivably be told exactly by millions of Americans. It’s a story that presents Romney as an everyday American with nothing particularly special about him: “a classic.” This same theme is present in how he presents Paul Ryan, his nominee for Vice President. Romney introduces Ryan as “a man with a big heart from a small town” who “represents the best of America” and “will always make us proud” (NPR 2012). Again, this is not a tale of Ryan’s political successes or qualifications for the job, it’s a claim that Ryan is just an ordinary America. The narrative being pitched to voters in this speech is that both Romney and Ryan are just like you. Their story is relatable, generic, and pleasant; the story of the kind of person voters would want as their neighbor. Romney does not cast himself as someone ascending to political sainthood, he intentionally downplays his credentials and experience to not frame himself as above his supporters.

President Trump takes a very different approach to framing the role of his personal story. While Romney discussed himself as a folksy everyman with a classic American story, President Trump includes very few details of his personal story. The speech contains several sentences thanking his wife, children, and other family members. President Trump described learning to “respect the dignity of work” and of working people from his father’s business (Politico 2016). While Romney describes his parents, upbringing, and home

life, President Trump neglects these personal stories in favor of framing himself as a strong political power broker. However, just because President Trump provides fewer details of his personal story does not mean he talks any less frequently about himself. President Trump uses the phrase “I am” 13 times in 2016, compared to only three by Romney in 2012. Romney uses the phrase “I will” seven times, compared to President Trump’s 14: a doubling of Romney’s count. President Trump also uses the phrase “I have” 16 times in 2016, compared to only three by Romney in 2012. President Trump talks about his personal identity, goals, and accomplishments with a greater frequency than Romney.

In 2016 President Trump delivered the infamous line: “I alone can fix it” (Politico 2016). This line frames President Trump as essential to the success of the nation. President Trump was not just claiming that he possessed the ability to fix the problems identified in his speech but was claiming that no other politician was capable of addressing those problems. In 2020 President Trump further intensified this theme that his personal success and the success of the nation were one in the same. President Trump set the stage early on in his speech with the claim “This is the most important election in the history of our country.” Here President Trump is positioning his own agenda and election above all other political contests that have entered into the canon of American civil religion. President Trump also claimed that “I have done more for the African American community than any president since Abraham Lincoln” (NBC 2020). Here President Trump is specifically selecting an existing saint of American civil religion, President Lincoln, and framing himself as more impressive. This undermines the power that other traditionally understood symbols of American civil religion hold over President Trump’s supporters, by enforcing the idea that President Trump’s sainthood is more impactful and more sacred than other more unifying symbols.

The clearest articulation of these themes in the speech was this reminder to the crowd: “Always remember: they are coming after ME, because I am fighting for YOU” (NBC 2020). President Trump’s sainthood has been solidified as having both a religious and partisan element. This sentence brings in more explicitly religious implications of President Trump as a savior, who is willingly embracing hardship in the name of bettering the lives of his followers. Many of President Trump’s voters view him as a “divinely ordained savior uniquely able to save the nation from ruin” (Onishi, 2021). This is especially true among white evangelical protestant voters, 13% of whom believe that President Trump was chosen by God to become President, with an additional 57% saying that President Trump’s 2016 victory was a part of God’s plan (Pew Research Center 2020). There is also such a strong level of partisan devotion that a recent poll showed 28% of Republican primary voters identify as “Always Trumpers” and would be willing to support President Trump even if he even if he lost the Republican primary and ran as a third

party candidate in the general election (Longwell 2023). This demonstrates the worship of President Trump that is practiced by many of his followers.

Romney made a conscious effort in his speech to cast himself as someone who had common ground with many Americans by speaking to themes of family that resonate with them. Romney does not frame himself as above his voters. President Trump, in contrast, embraced an identity as a political savior. His rhetoric frames him as above not just his voters, but above many other well recognized saints in the canon of American civil religion. The creation of his own sainthood demonstrates President Trump's efforts to embrace a new Republican civil religion.

CONCLUSION

Overall, a comparison of the rhetorical strategies of Mitt Romney and President Trump reveals a significant shift. This shift represents a break from the creed, code, and cultus that have historically been understood as American civil religion. President Trump rejected the creed that all Americans are the chosen people, instead defining who qualified as one of the chosen people based on ideology and party loyalty. President Trump rejected the code of American civil religion by rejecting the rhetoric of togetherness and work toward a common good in favor of promoting a crusade against the enemies of the true chosen people. Finally, President Trump rejected the cultus of American civil religion by not only elevating himself to sainthood, but by framing himself as more important than previously ordained American saints. Taken together, the story of Republicans as the real chosen people called to engage in a political holy war and worship President Trump as the highest political saint, represents a new Republican civil religion. This shift from loyalty to a national unifying civil religion to a partisan divisive civil religion has the potential for broader political implications. Using the conceptual framework of a civil religion to explain the behavior of the modern Republican party could serve as a useful tool in analysis of the growing partisan divide, the lasting impact President Trump may have on the political landscape, and the future of the Republican party. Future research into the existence of a Republican civil religion should explore the rhetoric of a wider range of Republican candidates in order to better assess trends over time. ■

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