

# Ritual, Identity Fusion, and the Inauguration of President Trump: A pseudo-experiment of Ritual Modes theory

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## Abstract

The US Presidential Inauguration is a symbolic event which arouses significant emotional responses among diverse groups, and is of considerable significance to Americans' personal and social identities. We argue that the inauguration qualifies as an Imagistic Ritual (Whitehouse, 2004). Such ritual experiences are thought to produce identity fusion: a visceral sense of oneness with the group. The 2017 Inauguration of President Trump was a unique opportunity to examine how a large-scale naturalistic imagistic ritual influences the social identities of Americans who supported and opposed President Trump. We conducted a pre-registered 7-week longitudinal investigation among an online sample of Americans in order to examine how President Trump's Inauguration influenced identity fusion. One core prediction was that the affective responses to the inauguration would predict positive changes in fusion, mediated by self-reflection. We did not find support for this. However, the inauguration was associated with flashbulb-like memories, and positive emotional response at the time of the event predicted changes in fusion to both ingroup and outgroup targets. Finally, both positive and negative emotional responses inspired self-reflection, but did not mediate the relationship with fusion. We discuss the implications of our findings for models linking group psychology, fusion theory, and ritual modes. All material available at the Open Science Framework: <https://bit.ly/2Qu0G37>.

**Keywords:** Fusion, Identity, Ritual Modes, Trump, US Politics.

## Introduction

The first US Presidential Inauguration was held on April 30, 1789, to formally install George Washington into Office. Every four years, for the last 229 years, the inauguration ritual has been repeated. The performance of such acts is of great significance to groups (including nation states), and serve both instrumental and symbolic purposes. The nature of the inauguration is of considerable personal and collective significance, as it is a large, widely broadcast, public event, and as a result provides a unique opportunity to examine the social dynamics of rituals that involve shared emotional arousal and '*collective effervescence*' (Durkheim, 2014). In this study we focus on the inauguration ceremony of Donald Trump, one of the most controversial US presidents in modern history, and how experiences of the event impacted both the personal and social identities of those who supported him (mostly Republicans) and those who opposed him (mostly Democrats). Given the pre-existing political identities, and the dramatically polarised nature of the US political environment (Conover, Goncalves, Ratkiewicz, Flammini, & Menczer, 2011; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2008; Westfall, Van Boven, Chambers, & Judd, 2015), we hoped to pseudo-experimentally explore how individuals with distinct political identities were differentially influenced by their experiences of the same state ritual. Specifically, we examine predictions derived from both Ritual Modes (Whitehouse, 2004) and Identity Fusion theory (Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014) in order to empirically examine the psychological effects of rituals (Fischer et al., 2014; Fischer, Callander, Reddish, & Bulbulia, 2013; Cohen, Mundry, & Kirschner, 2013; Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Włodarczyk, & Zumeta, 2015; Xygalatas et al., 2013).

## Imagistic Rituals

Imagistic rituals are one of the most ancient forms of collective ritual (Whitehouse and Hodder 2010). They are characterised by infrequent performance, powerful emotions, the formation of strong and personally salient memories, and invite considerable introspection and self-reflection (Atkinson & Whitehouse, 2011; Bulbulia et al., 2013; Fischer et al., 2014; Whitehouse, 1996, 2004). In the present case we anticipated the inauguration would evoke different emotional responses due to the pre-existing political identities and group divisions, such that those who supported Donald Trump would experience the inauguration ritual positively, while those who supported Hillary Clinton would experience the event negatively. The combination of strong emotional responses and arbitrarily ritualized elements (Kapitány & Nielsen, 2016; Whitehouse, 2004) is associated with the production of vivid and enduring flashbulb-like episodic memories (Conway, 2013; van Mulukom, 2017; Whitehouse, 1995;

Whitehouse & Laidlaw, 2004; Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014). Such memories are characterised by their perceived clarity and vividness (but not necessarily by their accuracy; (Conway, 2013)) and have been found to generate considerable introspection and reflection, which in turn may generate a sense of personal meaning, uniting people with group identities (Newson, Buhrmester, & Whitehouse, 2016; van Mulukom, 2017). The cognitive processes of meaning-making have been theorised to occur in people who participate in imagistic rituals directly, but similar processes may even apply to individuals who simply observe such rituals (Xygalatas 2008) as a function of their emotional investment and pre-existing social connections (Konvalinka et al., 2011).

In a recent review, Hobson et al. (2018: p. 261) define rituals as “(a) *predefined sequences characterized by rigidity, formality, and repetition that are (b) embedded in a larger system of symbolism and meaning, but (c) contain elements that lack direct instrumental purpose*”. The US Presidential inauguration meets these requirements and thus represents a cultural ritual (Rossano, 2012), but is also consistent with the definition of an *imagistic* ritual: it is performed infrequently (only once every four years), contains considerable symbolism and many ritualised acts (e.g., the swearing of the oath of office, a 21-gun salute), and is likely to produce strong emotional responses among observers relative to the strength of their political beliefs. We argue that the inauguration, particularly in relation to a partisan candidate—such as Donald Trump—can be categorised as an *imagistic* political ritual. Therein, two identifiable subgroups exist: those who supported, and those who opposed, the Republican President-elect, Donald Trump. The inauguration as a political ritual is used to mark the exchange of political power and features a degree of rigidity and formality incommensurate with its instrumental outcomes. A recent illustration of this was the controversy associated with Barack Obama that followed after he made minor errors in reciting the oath of office, which led to a second oath ceremony being repeated at the White House the following day.

The Inauguration is a state ritual is of considerable political, social, and economic import to American citizens, thus we consider those who took time to experience it (i.e., watch or read about it) to be distant *participants* (particularly those who participated in voting). We anticipate many citizens were not simply passive consumers, but were emotionally and personally invested in the consequences of the ritual act, while recognizing the significance of the event for the leadership and direction of their country. Indeed, the topic of the inaugural ceremony attendance and viewership proved to be a subject of considerable discussion and debate for a number of weeks amongst citizens, media figures, the US Press Secretary, and the President himself.

## Identity Fusion, Meaning Making, and Pro-Group Commitments

Identity fusion is a newly identified form of group bonding that describes a viscerally experienced sense of shared oneness with a group of individuals who share the same group identity. This sharedness is an essential and inseparable part of one's personal self-concept (Fredman et al., 2015; Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Whitehouse, McQuinn, Buhrmester, & Swann, 2014). The fusion construct emerged from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Oakes, Alexander Haslam, & McGarty, 1994; Willer et al., 1989) which focuses primarily on the strength of ties to a collective identity, where the group and self are conceived of as being in a hydraulic relationship (for review: (Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014). A number of studies have validated of the identity fusion construct, and demonstrated that it can be reliably distinguished from group identification, despite sharing some common elements (Bortolini, Newson, Natividade, Vázquez, & Gómez, 2018).

Crucially, some have proposed that identity fusion is generated via participation in imagistic rituals and events<sup>1</sup> (Kavanagh, Jong, McKay, & Whitehouse. 2018; Jong, Whitehouse, Kavanagh, & Lane, 2015; Newson et al., 2016; Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012; Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014; Whitehouse et al., 2014, 2017; Whitehouse, 2018). In particular, a theoretical framework has been presented in Whitehouse and Lanman (2014) and elaborated in Whitehouse (2018) that argues that collectively shared 'imagistic' rituals serve as a focal set of stimuli which generate strong enduring personal and group-relevant memories. Such memories invite a considerable degree of reflective meaning-making, and since all those who shared the same experience, this process tends to occur concurrently in participants which can produce a sense of sharing a core essence with others. Recognition of this perceived sharedness can generate fusion, which in turn produces a willingness to commit extreme progroupp action (see: Whitehouse and Lanman, 2014 and Whitehouse, 2018). Fusion is theorized to necessarily involve this reflective processing. Importantly, what people individually come to believe as a result of this meaning-making and reflection need not correspond perfectly, what is important is that individuals expect that others who also experienced the same event also believe what they believe. Without processing and a subsequent sense of sharedness, fusion is unlikely to emerge (see: Whitehouse, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> 'Events' differ from 'rituals', and while events *may* share many similarities, such as being collectively experienced, emotionally intense, highly memorable, infrequent phenomenon that generate reflection and deliberation, they differ in that rituals are prescriptive, deliberate, and typically symbolic. See (Whitehouse, McQuinn, Buhrmester, & Swann, 2014)

An important distinction to note is that fusion can be sub-categorized into two varieties: local and extended fusion. Local fusion refers specifically to bonds between those who shared an experience, and with whom you share - or shared - some kind of personal relationship (Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012; Whitehouse, 2018; Whitehouse et al., 2014). For example, local fusion is the relevant process when examining the bonds between members of a sports team, where all members know one another; extended fusion describes fusion to an extended group category where immediate interpersonal knowledge is absent (e.g., all Americans, all academics, etc; Swann et al., 2012; Whitehouse, 2018). Because it is not possible to have a personal relationship with all members of this group, these relations appear to be based on relational bonds projected onto 'imagined communities' (Reid & Anderson, 1985). In this manner, one can fuse with those who share the same identity markers as you (e.g., all democrats), and who may have vicariously shared the same experience (by projecting relational ties at an abstract group identity). In the present study, we measure fusion to a range of targets including the individual's own family (as a control target; (Jennings, Kent Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009), local targets ('people you know') and extended and categorical targets ('all Americans').

### **Imagistic experiences and Identity Fusion**

There is growing evidence demonstrating a positive relationship between high arousal, personally significant experiences (e.g., Imagistic rituals and events), and identity fusion. For example, among a sample of individuals belonging to US college fraternities and sororities, participation in imagistic 'hazing rituals' strongly predicted identity fusion and self-reported willingness to sacrifice for the group (Jong et al., 2015; Whitehouse et al., 2014, 2017). More generally, individuals who share highly arousing negative ('dysphoric') experiences, such as frontline combat during the Libyan civil war (Whitehouse, McQuinn, Buhrmester, & Swann, 2014) or personal experiences of violence during the conflict in Northern Ireland (Jong, Whitehouse, Kavanagh, & Lane, 2015), reported high levels of identity fusion with relevant group identities. Formal mathematical models, which draw upon evidence from multiple and diverse populations, showed that sharing intense emotional experiences produces fusion, particularly when the event itself is negative (Whitehouse et al., 2017). This relationship has also been observed for positive ('euphoric') experiences. Newson et al. (2016) found that positive *and* negative feelings among British football fans in response to crucial group-related events produced a sense of having been personally shaped by the experience, which consequently influenced their level of fusion to their team identity. Kavanagh et al. (2018)

similarly found that *positive* emotional responses to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu promotion rituals, which often feature painful belt whipping gauntlets, strongly predicted fusion with the relevant group.

Finally, Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Włodarczyk, & Zumeta, (2015) and Zumeta, Basabe, Włodarczyk, Bobowik, & Páez (2016) have shown that participation in collective ritual performances (involving folkloric/drumming marches and protest demonstrations), which aroused both positive and negative emotions (respectively) strengthened identity fusion with relevant groups. Though the evidence remains preliminary, the results to date suggest that emotionally intense shared events (particularly negative events), engender strong memories, and consequently produce fusion - particularly when the event itself is negative and ritualistic.

One of the most reliable consequences of fusion is a reported willingness to commit action on behalf of the group, as measured with the 'fight and die' scale (Bortolini et al., 2018; Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009). Fusion is a better predictor than other identity constructs for predicting this kind of self-reported behavior and has also been shown to be sensitive to the activation of group identity concepts, and appears to be comparably predictive across a number of diverse cultures (Bortolini et al., 2018; Gómez et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2009; Swann, Gómez, Huici, Morales, & Hixon, 2010). (Whitehouse et al., 2014) has shown that among actual combatants, individuals who literally fight and die for their groups, that fusion strongly predicts forced-choice responses in dying for non-kin groups, instead reporting a greater willingness to die for those who belong to their immediate battalion/katiba (a group forged under extreme and dysphoric circumstances of war).

## Current Study

Herein we examine a real-world, large-scale collective imagistic ritual, and empirically investigate the links between it (the inauguration), and the potential consequent effects on memory, self-reflection, fusion, and willingness to endorse extreme progroup action. In so doing, we draw on existing evidence from a range of diverse imagistic *experiences*, and apply the theory to a naturalistic imagistic ritual. In particular, we use the polarising nature of the event to examine how positive and negative affective reactions and other relevant factors relate to changes in levels of identity fusion over time. We seek to establish first, that the emotional responses to the inauguration are consistent with an imagistic ritual experience and are associated with vivid episodic recall. Thereafter, over the course of several weeks, we examine the consequent meaning-making processes, and their influence on identity fusion to specific target groups, per theory. Finally, we demonstrate the anticipated willingness to commit extreme group-oriented action as a function of fusion.

## Methods

### Procedure

We collected within-participant data at three time points over a seven-week period in 2017. Our baseline measure, T1, was collected one week prior to the inauguration of President Trump (January 13 - 16); T2 was collected one day after the inauguration (January 21 - 23; 85.4% of the data was collected by January 22); and T3 was collected six weeks after the inauguration (March 2 - 8). Only those who participated at T1 were eligible for T2 and T3. Participants were recruited via Amazon's online Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011) and were paid \$1.50US for each completed survey (median overall completion time between 12-17 mins), approximating \$6 USD per hour. In order to be eligible, participants needed to satisfy. First participants needed to be US residents; second, they needed to have a minimum of 100 completed tasks on MTurk; and third, they needed have an approval rating > 95% on prior MTurk tasks. These standards were implemented to ensure, in the first instance, that respondents had some investment in the inauguration, and, in the latter instances, were attentive and reliable survey-takers.

### Pre-Registration

Prior to data collection we generated a pre-registration document in which we attempted to discuss all foreseeable aspects of the intended research. This included times and dates for data collection, expected sample sizes and rates of attrition, a full list of survey items, and a list of hypothesis. For clarity's sake, we have reworded and re-ordered our hypotheses here, but preserve the content of the predictions in full. Our original and complete pre-registration file is publicly available at the Open Science Framework: <https://bit.ly/2Qu0G37>; see Supplementary Material A for exploratory results).

1) We anticipate that the experience of the inauguration will be imagistic in nature. One key feature of an imagistic event is that it produces an intense affective response and strong memories. Thus, we predict that reports of affective intensity at T2 will be higher overall compared to T1, and scores our flashbulb-like memory metric at T3 will be high corresponding to one's exposure to the event.



2) Increases in fusion are most likely to occur after a period of reflection and meaning-making, a process that can take weeks or months, as such we do not anticipate a difference in fusion between T1 and T2 among any population of participants.

3) Affective intensity at T2 will predict an increase in fusion between T2 and T3 and these effects will be mediated by measures of reflection and self-defining experiences (measured at T3).

4) We predict that between T2 and T3 personal reflection will increase.

5) Past research shows that identity fusion predicts willingness to fight and die for one's group. Thus, we predict significant correlations between fusion scores and willingness to fight and die with matched group targets at each time-point.

### **Sample**

A total  $N = 1617$  respondents initiated the survey at T1,  $N = 1330$  at T2,  $N = 1096$  at T3. All data for each time-point were collected in a single wave. Responses were collected from  $N = 1015$  people across all three time points. Of these 1015 individuals, three did not list a preferred candidate (on a forced choice measure), eight were removed for rushing their responses (spending less than 6 minutes for each 15 minute survey), nine were double entries, and one did not live in the US. Finally, a total of 69 people claimed to have not watched/listened or consumed any media regarding the inauguration. After excluding these participants from analysis, three of which overlapped, we were left with a total sample size of  $n = 928$  for analysis. We conducted a set of analyses to determine whether the  $n = 928$  in the 'analyzable' set differed from the  $n = 593$  who failed to complete data collection at T2 and/or T3. These analyses are presented in Supplementary Material B and suggest that the data are Missing At Random<sup>2</sup>, thus we treat our sample as uninfluenced by attrition.

The mean age of participants was 24.82 years ( $SD = 12.25$ ) of whom 52.0% were female. 98.6% identified their nationality as 'US American', 80.5% identified as 'Caucasian', and 42.0% were either Catholic or Protestant, while 32.0% were either Atheist or Agnostic. 88.7% of

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<sup>2</sup> We tested those who dropped out of the sample and those who remained in it on gender, political affiliation, impactfulness, helpfulness/hurtfulness of the presidency, PANAS at T1, Fusion at T1, and fight-and-die at T1. Of these constructs only the Fight-and-Die differed between groups, thus we observed no systematic differences.

the sample had at least a high school education, and 51.0% of the sample reported an annual income not exceeding \$49,999. On key measures of political affiliation, 22.7% reported they were Republican, 41.9% were Democrat, and 31.0% were 'Independent' (while 4.9% were Green, Libertarian, or 'other'; it is worth noting that those who identified as 'independent' did not reliably vote independent, the term, it seems, was not used in a manner that clearly demarcated one's politics from the two primary parties). In terms of reported voting behavior, 29.6% (295) voted for Donald Trump, 48.2% (481) voted for Hillary Clinton, 3.1% (31) voted for Jill Stein, 4.8% (48) voted for Gary Johnson, and 11.4% (114) didn't vote. On a forced choice measure of preferred candidate, 39.7% (396) preferred Trump while 60.3% (601) preferred Clinton. Full demographics can be found in Supplementary Material C.

### **Materials and Procedure**

An online questionnaire was constructed using Qualtrics software and posted online via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The survey contained a variety of questions about each individual's experience of the inauguration, as well as a battery of hypothesis-relevant questions. Some of the items in the questionnaire at T3 were also directed at the election event, but as these are outside the scope of the present study they are not included below. The full questionnaire with all items collected is available in our pre-registration file and our data is available at <https://bit.ly/2Qu0G37>.

**Mode of Reception.** At T2 we asked participants to indicate the means by which they watched or experienced the inauguration. We provided five response options (ranging from 'I watched it live on TV/other media' to 'I do not watch or read about the inauguration').

**Flashbulb-like Memories.** At T3 we collected three items addressing how vivid participants' memory of the inauguration was and how confident they were in their accuracy. We regarded these items as indicative of rich episodic recall, but labelled them as 'flashbulb-like' as we examined the component of personal consequentiality separately. We asked participants to respond to the following questions: "*I remember exactly where I was during the election day event*", "*I remember exactly who I was with during the election day event*", and "*I feel as though I remember the details of the election day event very clearly*". The items combined into a scale with a strong reliability ( $\alpha = .93$ ). These items were only collected at T3, and not at T2, due to the contiguity between the inauguration and data collection (see Supplementary Material D).

**Affective Response.** In order to measure affect, all participants responded to the PANAS (Watson & Clark, 1999) during each wave of data collection. During the first and third waves participants were asked to indicate to what extent they '*generally felt each emotion **this***

**week**, and during the second wave (one day after the inauguration) we asked participants to what extent they felt each emotion '**during the inauguration of President Trump on the 20th of January**'. The PANAS independently measures both Positive and Negative affect, on a scale ranging from 10 to 50 (All PANAS  $\alpha$ 's  $\geq .92$ ). Additionally, at T2 and T3 participants were asked to rate their reaction to the inauguration event on a 9-point response scale that ranged from extremely negative (-4) to extremely positive (+4). PANAS measures at T1 and T3 strongly correlated in the appropriate directions with the inauguration PANAS collected at T2 ( $r < .66$  for positive PANAS;  $r < -0.70$  for negative PANAS).

**Self-Reflection.** To measure the degree that participants reflected on the inauguration and considered it important to their identity we presented four items: two focusing on the amount of reflection (e.g., '*I have reflected a lot on the start of the Trump presidency*') and two addressing the centrality of the experience (e.g., '*The Inauguration of the Trump presidency marked a key moment in defining who I am personally*'). As these items were novel we conducted an exploratory factor analysis, and a single factor solution emerged, with an eigenvalue of 2.47 that accounted for 61.7% of the variance in the measures. The items combined into a scale with strong reliability (T2,  $\alpha = .79$ , T3  $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Personal Consequentiality.** To measure the extent to which participants considered the inauguration to be personally consequential we asked them at T2 and T3 to respond to a single item: '*Regardless of whether your response was positive or negative how consequential did you find Trump's inauguration to be for you personally?*'. Responses were measured on a 9-point scale that ranged from extremely inconsequential (-4) to extremely consequential (+4). We originally intended to combine this measure with codings of open ended responses in response to a prompt that asked participants to '*describe your experience and how you felt in reaction to the official start of Donald Trump's Presidency on Inauguration Day, January 20th*' (see Supplementary material E). Two independent coders were asked to rate these open ended responses on a four point scale (1- *no personal consequences for the individual mentioned* to 4- *mentions direct personal consequences*). Unfortunately, there was a low inter-rater agreement: T2- ICC(2,k) = .41 and ICC(2,k) = .46 (T3). Furthermore, the combined measures revealed very weak correlations with the self-reported personal consequential item, T2,  $r = .03$ ,  $p = 0.34$ , and T3,  $r = .12$ ,  $p = .001$ . Due to concerns with the validity of the coded measures they were not included in the following analysis (see Supplementary material F).

**Identity Fusion.** During each wave of data collection we asked participants to complete multiple measures of identity fusion using the visual dynamic identity fusion index (DIFI; (Jiménez et al., 2015) to a selection of target-groups (Targets listed in Table 1). This task

required participants to drag and move a circle representing themselves towards or farther away from another circle representing the relevant group target, until the image best captured their self-perceived relationship. Fusion was calculated by 'percent overlap' between each circle. We used this scale rather than the verbal scale (Gómez et al., 2011) as it provides a wider response scale and reduces the amount of time required to answer.

**Fight and Die.** In order to measure participants' willingness to endorse extreme pro-group behaviors we asked participants to complete the fight and die scale (6 items; 7 point response scale). This scale measures the extent to which the participant endorse committing extreme and/or violent action against those who threatened, insulted, or harmed relevant group targets (Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009). Due to time constraints we asked participants to complete the scale with a relevant relational target (people you know who share your core political views) and a collective categorical target (the USA) tested at T2 and T3 (All  $\alpha$ 's  $\geq .88$ ).

Table 1. *List of Fusion Targets.*

List of Identity Fusion Target Groups
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The USA (Collective Categorical)</li> <li>2. All Americans who share your core political view (Categorical Ingroup)</li> <li>3. All Americans whose political views deeply conflict with your own (Categorical Outgroup)</li> <li>4. Your most preferred political party (Categorical Ingroup)</li> <li>5. People you know who share your core political views (Relational Ingroup)</li> <li>6. Your family (Control Relational Group)</li> <li>7. Donald Trump (Ingroup/Outgroup Leader)</li> </ol>

## Results

For the purposes of our analysis, we classified participants as either Trump or Clinton ‘supporters’ based on their response to the forced choice measure, regardless of their actual voting behavior or party affiliations (see full demographics in Supplementary Material C). We present the following hypothesis in temporal order of events, this corresponds with the longitudinal and pre-registered design, as well as the progression of anticipated causes and effects. We will first describe the event and the immediate responses of the participations, then elaborate on increasingly distal consequences.

### Hypothesis 1: Was the inauguration imagistic?

Imagistic events are emotionally intense, memorable, and consequential. Is this what we observed? Our first pre-registered prediction was that affective intensity at T2 (immediately following the inauguration) would be higher relative to T1 (baseline). We conducted a mixed ANOVA on our sample, with PANAS (T2) as our outcome measure, and used as predictors preferred candidate (Trump, Clinton) and PANAS (T1). When examining the positive PANAS (T2) measure, we observed a significant main effect of positive emotion at T1,  $F(1, 923) = 300.572$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .246$ , a significant main effect of candidate,  $F(1, 923) = 9.605$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .010$ , and a significant interaction,  $F(1, 923) = 9.448$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .010$ .

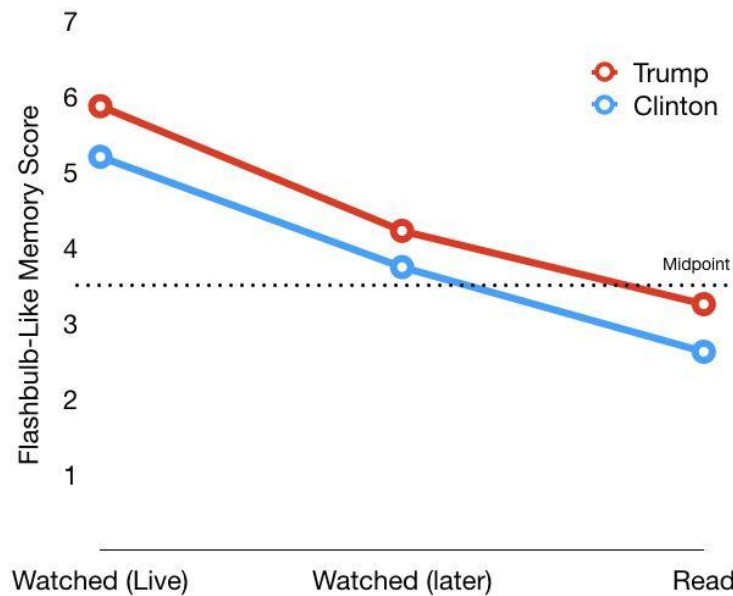
Similarly, when we examined the negative PANAS (T2) measure, we observed a significant main effect of negative emotion at T1,  $F(1, 924) = 193.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .173$ , a significant main effect of candidate,  $F(1, 924) = 66.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .068$ , but no interaction,  $F(1, 924) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .085$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .003$ . Having confirmed the presence of anticipated effects (per

our pre-registration), we conducted paired-samples t-tests on both positive and negative affect from T1 to T2 for each population of participants (see Table 2).

Among those who supported Trump we did not observe a significant difference in positive affect from T1 to T2,  $t(378) = -1.132$ ,  $p = .258$ ,  $d = .067$ . However, we did observe a significant decline in negative affect from T1 to T2,  $t(379) = 9.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.44$ . It appears that Trump supporters experienced a ‘moderate’ decline in negative affect, with no apparent change in positive affect. Among Clinton supporters we observed a significant decline in positive affect from T1 to T2,  $t(547) = 29.424$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.16$  and also a significant increase in negative affect from T1 to T2,  $t(547) = -19.727$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.99$ . Clinton supporters experience two ‘large’ shifts in affect in the anticipated directions (see Table 2).

Thus, we found that the Inauguration influenced participant’s emotions in anticipated directions, and the magnitude of the respective Cohen’s  $d$ ’s indicates the shift was moderate for Trump supporters and large for Clinton supporters.

These experiences also produced flashbulb-like memories (see Figure 1) which varied according to the mode by which participants experienced the inauguration, as well as by their preferred candidate. We used a univariate 2 (‘preferred candidate’) X 4 (‘mode of reception’) ANOVA on scores of flashbulb memory with two categorical variables as predictors. We found a main effect for preferred candidate,  $F(1, 920) = 6.48$ ,  $p = .011$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .007$ , and for mode of reception,  $F(3, 920) = 100.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .247$ , but no interaction,  $F(3, 920) = .217$ ,  $p = .885$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .001$ . Figure 1 and Table 2 show descriptive statistics for flashbulb scores by preferred candidate and mode of reception. The patterns of responses indicated that Trump supporters reported more flash-bulb like memories than Clinton supporters, and that the more directly the event was experienced, the stronger the reported flashbulb-like memories.

Figure 1. *Flashbulb-like memories by mode of watching inauguration*

Note: Our analysis included four 'modes of reception', the fourth of which was 'did not watch/read'. We have omitted this category from the plot.

Finally, we examined the self-perceived consequentiality according to the participants' mode of experiencing the inauguration, as well as their preferred candidate. We used a univariate 2 ('preferred candidate') X 4 ('mode of reception') ANOVA on our scores of self-perceived consequentiality with two categorical variables as predictors. We did not find a main effect for preferred candidate,  $F(1, 927) = 2.891, p = .089, \eta_p^2 = .003$ , but we did find a main effect mode of reception,  $F(3, 927) = 5.940, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .019$ , but no interaction,  $F(3, 927) = 2.245, p = .082, \eta_p^2 = .007$ . Collapsed across preferred candidate, those who watched the inauguration ( $M = 5.87, SD = 1.99$ ) scored significantly higher on consequentiality than those who saw/heard about the event ( $M = 5.26, SD = 2.16$ ),  $p = .001$ , and those who read about the event ( $M = 5.21, SD = 2.31$ ),  $p = .009$ , but not those who consumed it via other media ( $M = 5.93, SD = 2.02$ ),  $p = 1.00$ . No other differences were observed. We note that causation in this particular analysis is difficult to determine - those who anticipated greater consequentiality are likely to have more directly consumed primary material. This, however, may not be a critical distinction as Modes theory does not specify the degree to which one anticipates to a ritualistic event, rather than merely responding to it.

Consistent with our first pre-registered prediction, it appears that the inauguration satisfies initial conditions of an imagistic ritual: it generated medium to large affective shifts,

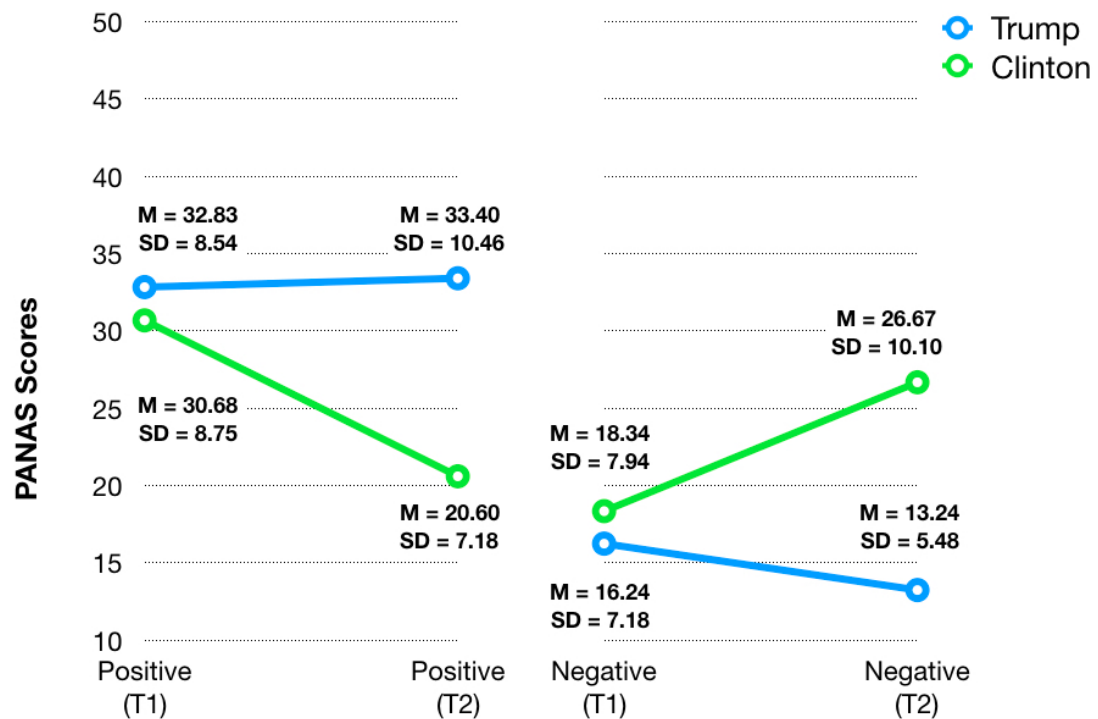
flashbulb-like memories consistent with exposure/participation, and was comparably consequential for all those to whom it was relevant, without having a differential impact among subgroups, i.e., there was no partisan split in consequentiality - suggesting *Americans* are the relevant category of participant.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for flashbulb scores by preferred candidate and experience.*

	Trump Supporters		Clinton Supporters	
	N (%)	Mean (SD)	N (%)	Mean (SD)
<i>I watched it on TV</i>	260 (68.2%)	5.87 (1.16)	270 (49.2%)	5.20 (1.62)
<i>I saw/heard clips of the event later...</i>	82 (21.5%)	4.22 (1.80)	181 (33.0%)	3.74 (1.94)
<i>I read about the event in articles</i>	34 (8.9%)	3.25 (1.66)	87 (15.8%)	2.62 (1.73)
<i>Other (described)</i>	4 (1.0%)	5.33 (1.41)	10 (1.8%)	4.47 (1.56)
<i>Total</i>	380 (100%)		548 (100%)	



Figure 2. Descriptive values for Positive and Negative PANAS for each population.



### Hypothesis 2: Did participants' reflect on the inauguration?

In order for fusion to occur as a consequence of an imagistic experience, participants need to reflect upon the experience. Thus we pre-registered the prediction that self-reflection would increase between T2 and T3. We conducted paired-samples t-tests on the likert-composite self-reflection measure. Among Trump supporters, *self-reflection* at T2 ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) was significantly higher than reported self-reflection at T3 ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ),  $t(374) = 2.045$ ,  $p = .042$ ,  $d = .106$ . Among Clinton supporters self-reflection did not change from T2 ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) to T3 ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ),  $t(543) = 1.451$ ,  $p = .147$ ,  $d = .066$ . We intended to conduct additional analyses on data coded from the open response question, but our inter-coder reliability was not high enough to justify this decision. We report additional analyses in Supplementary Material A. This data suggest that the amount of reflection on the inauguration in the first 24 hours - when the event was highly salient - was similar to the amount of reflection in the first six weeks. Thus, while we did not find evidence of an increase in reflection, the rate appeared stable across a considerable period of time, and did not decline. This null result will be interpreted in the discussion.

### **Hypothesis 3: Changes in fusion with ingroup/outgroup targets will be detected in T1-T3 rather than T1-T2**

According to Ritual Modes theory it takes weeks, potentially even months, for individuals to process the meaning of the event and for consequent changes in fusion (Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012). And despite our findings regarding reflection reported earlier, our pre-registered third prediction was that fusion scores would change substantially between T1-T3 (in contrast to T1 to T2). To test this prediction we conducted separate paired-samples t-tests on our visual fusion measure, for each target, and for each population separately, using the fusion overlap score (see Table 3 and 4, we also present our results in Figure 3). Due to the high number of comparisons we used a bonferroni corrected  $p$ -value of  $p = .0018$  (accounting for 28 comparisons)<sup>3</sup>.

Additionally, as it is inferentially weak to predict null findings, we conducted equivalence testing (Wellek, 2010) on fusion scores at T1 and T2 (where we did not expect any difference) using the *Two One-Sided Tests* (TOST) procedure (Lakens, 2017). These results are reported in full in Supplementary Material G. We found no systematic differences in fusion between T1-T2, and of those that were significant, all were less than our threshold of interest and our capacity for detection (i.e., 80% power for Trump and 95% power for Clinton for a 'small' effect:  $d_z = .15$ ), allowing us to regard these observed differences as equivalent to an effect[-size] of zero.

After examining the data, we ran analyses to determine how fusion changed over the entire 7 week period. These data are presented in tables 3 and 4.

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<sup>3</sup> Given the weakness in using NHST analysis to, in effect, confirm the null hypothesis and the reality that a conservative  $p$ -value effectively makes this simpler, we have indicated where the  $p$ -value would ordinarily be significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

Table 3. *Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Fusion Targets among Trump Supporters*

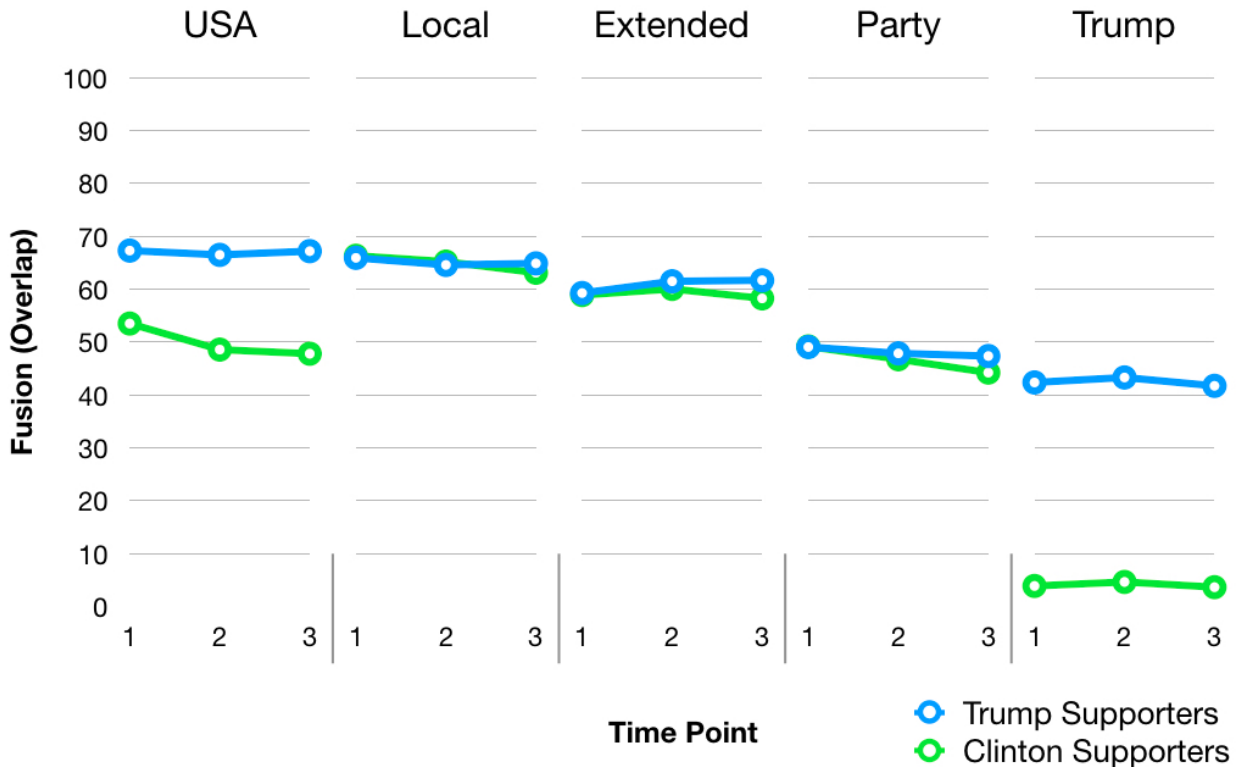
Fusion Target	TRUMP SUPPORTERS					
	Time Point			Times Compared		
	T1	T2	T3	T1 - T2	T1 - T3	<i>d</i>
Family	77.22 (32.35)	76.87 (33.27)	76.84 (32.44)	$t(378) = .263, p = .793$	$t(378) = .277, p = .782$	-
USA	67.28 (34.64)	66.47 (35.44)	67.17 (34.79)	$t(379) = .656, p = .512$	$t(378) = .021, p = .983$	-
You Know Core Politics	65.91 (31.93)	64.57 (32.88)	64.86 (32.62)	$t(375) = .967, p = .334$	$t(376) = .676, p = .500$	-
All Americans Core Politics	59.26 (30.90)	61.48 (33.23)	61.67 (33.38)	$t(379) = -1.553, p = .121$	$t(377) = -1.592, p = .112$	-
Preferred Party	49.06 (34.48)	47.86 (34.68)	47.35 (34.74)	$t(375) = .921, p = .358$	$t(377) = .990, p = .323$	-
Trump	42.36 (35.26)	43.30 (36.81)	41.72 (37.58)	$t(375) = -.725, p = .469$	$t(375) = .369, p = .713$	-
All Americans Deep Conflict	25.88 (29.00)	23.14 (28.33)	20.91 (27.81)	$t(375) = 1.976, p = .049 *$	$t(371) = 3.091, p = .002 *$	0.18

Table 4. *Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Fusion Targets among Clinton Supporters*

Fusion Target	CLINTON SUPPORTERS					
	Time Point			Times Compared		
	T1	T2	T3	T1 - T2	T1 - T3	<i>d</i>
Family	72.13 (34.28)	70.52 (34.59)	69.89 (35.18)	$t(546) = 1.492, p = .136$	$t(546) = 2.043, p = .042 *$	0.18
All Americans Core Politics	58.87 (30.75)	60.03 (33.10)	58.25 (32.59)	$t(545) = -.972, p = .332$	$t(546) = .375, p = .708$	-
USA	53.49 (35.39)	48.57 (36.86)	47.79 (36.14)	$t(544) = 3.974, p < .001 *$	$t(546) = 4.402, p < .001 *$	0.38
You Know Core Politics	66.31 (31.04)	65.20 (32.61)	63.09 (32.59)	$t(545) = .924, p = .356$	$t(546) = 2.629, p = .009 *$	0.23
Preferred Party	49.17 (32.96)	46.74 (35.13)	44.22 (33.87)	$t(544) = 1.935, p = .053$	$t(546) = 4.084, p < .001 *$	0.35
All Americans Deep Conflict	21.24 (26.81)	17.39 (26.04)	15.57 (24.12)	$t(539) = 4.947, p = .001 *$	$t(539) = 4.947, p < .001 *$	0.35
Trump	3.91 (11.29)	4.66 (14.74)	3.67 (13.05)	$t(515) = -1.302, p = .194$	$t(516) = .199, p = .842$	-

Note: Both Tables 3 and 4 order the targets via descending values of fusion at T1.

Figure 3. *Fusion at each ingroup target across each time point.*



Note: 'Local' and 'Extended' refer to 'people you know...' and 'all americans...' '...who share your core politics'. Trump has been included as he represents a potential ingroup target for his supporters.

As expected we observed no systematic changes in fusion to target groups between T1-T2. However, there were exceptions. We observed a significantly decline among Clinton supporters for two targets: the USA and Americans who hold political views that deeply conflict with them. We observed one significant decline among Trump supporters to 'Americans who hold deeply conflicting political views'.

We predicted that fusion with targets would change positively, and substantially after people had longer to reflect on the experiences. Contrary to this hypothesis, we did not observe any positive changes in fusion; however, we did observe a significant decline in fusion scores between T1-T3 for five out of seven targets among Clinton supporters. Trump supporters were much more stable, with only one significant change in fusion for the same target group as the T1-T2 time period, namely Americans who hold deeply conflicting political views.

In summary, we found no evidence of change in fusion in the short term (T1-T2), and - counter to expectations - only negative shifts in fusion over the longer period (T1-T3). This

observation was made only among Clinton supporters. Fusion scores for Trump supporters proved remarkably consistent across all time points with one exception, a significant decrease in fusion to *other Americans who hold deeply conflicting political views*.

On the face of it, these results do not immediately support our directional hypotheses. These findings may not tell the whole story, however, as the analyses of difference between earlier and latter time-points is entirely ignorant to the participant's experience. While a significant finding here would be strong evidence for the theory, the lack of significance is not necessarily evidence *against* the theory. Thus, we move on to the fourth prediction, which accounts for the participants' experience of the event in predicting change consequent to the event.

#### **Hypothesis 4: Do more imagistic experiences result in greater fusion with ingroups?**

To more thoroughly examine the proposed relationship between imagistic ritual experiences and identity fusion we examined whether the component features of imagistic experiences--elevated affect, flashbulb memories, reflection, and a sense of personal consequentiality--predicted change in fusion between T1 (baseline) and T3 (post inauguration) for three key ingroup targets. The ingroup targets we used were, in descending order of relationality: 1) *All those you know personally who share your core political views* (local fusion), 2) *All americans who share your core political views* (extended fusion), and 3) *All people in the USA* (categorical target). We built a series of mixed level regression models for each of the three fusion targets using the procedures detailed below.

For the sake of brevity, only the final model statistics are presented, but full details of the relevant preparatory models are provided in Supplementary material F. In order to allow for individual differences, we allowed y-intercepts to vary by participant. We built each model in a stepwise manner in order to determine whether person-level variables were contributing (and potentially confounding) the model. If they did not, they were omitted thereafter. First, we included demographic details (age, income, ethnicity, and religion), second, we included preferred candidate (in the forced choice question) and pre-existing political affiliation, and third, we included mode of reception of the inauguration event. Each step, for each model, proved *ns* ( $p$ 's = 1), and were excluded for parsimony. Thus, predicting fusion at an individual level was not improved by the aforementioned predictors.

Next we included the theoretically relevant constructs. We included affect measured by PANAS at T2 - both positive affect and negative affect scores were entered individually and retained for theoretical reasons, even where they did not significantly contribute to the model.

Thereafter, we included additional potential predictors: reflection at T2, Flashbulb-like memory of inauguration at T3, and Personal consequentiality at T2. After positive affect was included in each of the three fusion-target model(s), no other variable significantly improved model fit(  $p$ 's  $\geq .18$ ). Thus, these predictors were excluded from the final model for parsimony.

The final model for each fusion target allowed for random person-level intercepts, and included as predictors only the positive and negative affect measures at T2. Table 5 presents the relevant output for each target. Among individuals, in all cases positive affect predicted a small but significant positive change in fusion, while negative affect had no significant predictive value.

And so, while we found no direct effect of time on fusion (reported in the previous section), we did find partial support for the expected mechanism of action after accounting for the participants' own experiences. We will interpret this findings in the discussion section.

Table 5. *Results of mixed regression models for fusion targets.*

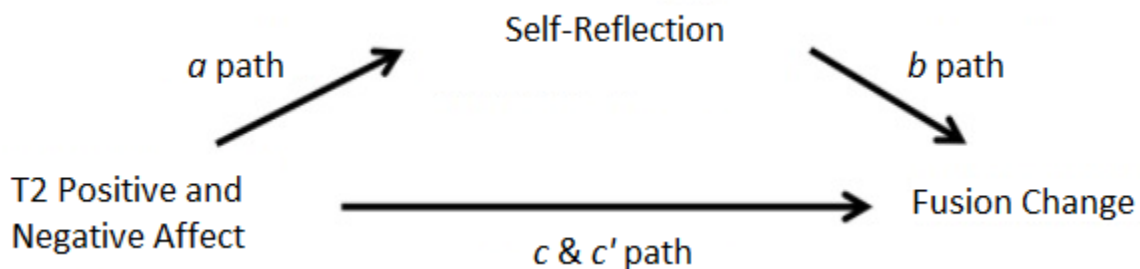
<b>‘People you know who share your core political beliefs’ (Local fusion)</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>B (SE)</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Intercept	-13.97 (4.22)	-3.329	p < .001
Positive PANAS T2	0.35 (0.10)	3.49	p < .001
Negative PANAS T2	0.13 (0.10)	1.27	p = .21
<b>All Americans who share your core political beliefs’ (Extended fusion)</b>			
Intercept	-7.46 (4.30)	-1.733	p = .08
Positive PANAS T2	0.29 (0.10)	2.76	p = .001
Negative PANAS T2	0.03 (0.10)	0.33	p = .74
<b>‘The USA’ (Categorical)</b>			
Intercept	-8.56 (4.30)	-2.1	p = .04
Positive PANAS T2	0.24 (0.10)	2.46	p = .01
Negative PANAS T2	-0.04 (0.10)	-0.41	p = .68

**Hypothesis 4: Does reflection mediate the relationship between affect and fusion?**

Building on earlier findings, our fourth prediction was that affective intensity in response to the inauguration at T2 would predict changes in fusion with ingroups, as observed between T2-T3, and that these effects would be mediated by self-reflection. To test this we computed a difference score in Fusion ( $\Delta = T3 - T2$ ), with the same three ingroup targets as in Hypothesis 3. We used these scores as our key outcomes, with both PANAS scores at T2 entered as predictor variables and self-reflection scores at T3 entered as mediators. We included positive and negative PANAS scores, despite not finding a direct relationship between

negative affect and fusion change between T1 and T3 in Hypothesis 3, as mediation need not require a significant c path (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010), and as a previous study conducted by Jong et al., (2015) reported a mediated pathway between negative fusion and affect. As a result, for each fusion target group we built two models: one with positive affect as the key predictor and the other with negative affect. The mediation pathway examined is specified in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. *Proposed Mediation Model*



**All those you know personally who share your core political views (local fusion).**

As can be seen in Table 6, neither positive nor negative affect (measured by PANAS) at T2 directly predicted fusion change with the local fusion target. However, three out of four models found a relationship between affective response and reflection with higher affect predicting higher levels of reflection (Table 6). However, we found no evidence for a mediated pathway from affect to fusion via reflection.

Table 6. *Results of mediation model to local fusion target*

All those you personally know who share your core political views (local).					
Group	Valence	c path	a path	b path	c' path
Trump	Positive	b = -0.198, SE = .145, p = .173, 95%CI -0.484 - .088	b = .061, SE = .005, p < .001, 95%CI .051 - .071 **	b = -0.198, SE = .145, p = .173, 95%CI -0.484 - .088	b = 1.66, SE = 1.24, p = .182, 95%CI -0.780 - 4.098.
	Negative	b = .458, SE = .243, p = .060, 95%CI -0.018 - .935	b = .008, SE = .012, p = .476, 95%CI -0.015 - .031.	b = -0.458, SE = .243, p = .060, 95%CI -0.018 - .935	b = .706, SE = 1.058, p = .505, 95%CI -1.374 - 2.786
Clinton	Positive	b = .223, SE = .172, p = .194, 95%CI -0.114 - .560	b = .025, SE = .007, p < .001, 95%CI .011 - .038 **	b = .223, SE = .172, p = .194, 95%CI -0.114 - .560	b = -0.841, SE = 1.04, p = .420, 95%CI -2.885 - 1.204.
	Negative	b = -0.176, SE = .129, p = .173, 95%CI -0.429 - .077	b = .042, SE = .005, p < .001, 95%CI .033 - .051 **	b = -0.176, SE = .129, p = .173, 95%CI -0.429 - .077	b = -0.075, SE = 1.104, p = .932, 95%CI -2.262 - 2.073.

**All Americans who share your core political views (extended fusion).** As can be seen in table 7, neither positive nor negative affect at T2 directly predicted fusion change with the



extended fusion target - except for Clinton supporters on negative affect. However, as with the local fusion target, we observed that in three out of four models affect positively predicted levels of reflection. Again we did not detect the anticipated mediation pathways for three out of four models. We observed one exception; there was full mediation for Clinton supporters from negative affect. However, the relationship between negative affect and reflection were small in magnitude and, contrary to hypothesis increased reflection was associated with a *decrease* (rather than an *increase*) in fusion to the extended ingroup target.

Table 7. *Results of mediation model to extended fusion target*

All Americans who share your core political views (extended).					
Group	Valence	c path	a path	b path	c' path
Trump	Positive	b = -0.096, SE = .145, p = .507, 95%CI -0.381 - .189,	b = .061, SE = .005, p < .001, 95%CI .051 - .071**	b = -0.096, SE = .145, p = .507, 95%CI -0.381 - .189	b = .623, SE = 1.229, p = .596, 95%CI -1.762 - 3.067.
	Negative	b = .100, SE = .243, p = .068, 95%CI -0.378 - .578	b = .009, SE = .012, p = .783, 95%CI -0.014 - .032.	b = .100, SE = .243, p = .068, 95%CI -0.378 - .578	b = .215, SE = 1.053, p = .839, 95%CI -1.857 - 2.286.
Clinton	Positive	b = .290, SE = .168, p = .085, 95%CI -0.040 - .621	b = .025, SE = .007, p = .003, 95%CI .011 - .038**	b = .290, SE = .168, p = .085, 95%CI -0.040 - .621	b = -0.230, SE = 1.017, p = .821, 95%CI -2.227 - 1.770.
	Negative	b = -0.294, SE = .126, p = .020, 95%CI -0.541 - -0.046**	b = .042, SE = .005, p < .001, 95%CI .033 - .051**	b = -0.293, SE = .126, p = .020, 95%CI -0.541 - -0.046**	b = 0.939, SE = 1.076, p = .383, 95%CI -1.175 - 3.052

**The USA (Categorical fusion).** As can be see in table 8, neither positive nor negative affect at T2 directly predicts fusion change for the superordinate national target. As with the previous models we found a relationship between elevated affect and increased reflection for three out of four models examined. However, none of the models found direct or indirect pathways from affect scores to changes in fusion with the USA target.

Table 8. *Results of mediation model to categorical fusion target*

The USA (categorical).					
Group	Valence	c path	a path	b path	c' path
Trump	Positive	b = .157, SE = .142, p = .270, 95%CI -0.122 - .435	b = .060, SE = .005, p < .001, 95%CI .050 - .070 **	b = .157, SE = .147, p = .270, 95%CI -1.122 - .435	b = -2.312, SE = 1.208, p = .056, 95%CI -4.700 - .057
	Negative	b = .175, SE = .237, p = .461, 95%CI -0.292 - .642	b = .008, SE = .012, p = .500, 95%CI -0.015 - .031	b = .175, SE = .237, p = .461, 95%CI -0.292 - .642	b = -1.663, SE = 1.040, p = .111, 95%CI -3.708 - .382.
Clinton	Positive	b = .310, SE = .171, p = .070, 95%CI -0.026 - .646	b = .025, SE = .007, p < .001, 95%CI .011 - .038 **	b = .310, SE = .170, p = .070, 95%CI -0.026 - .646	b = -0.878, SE = 1.039, p = .398, 95%CI -2.918 - 1.17.
	Negative	b = -0.194, SE = .129, p = .132, 95%CI -0.447 - .059	b = .042, SE = .005, p < .001, 95%CI .034 - .051 **	b = -0.194, SE = .129, p = .132, 95%CI -0.447 - .059	b = .008, SE = 1.103, p = .994, 95%CI -2.158 - 2.174.

Overall, among three distinct and theoretically relevant fusion targets, we found an absence of evidence for the anticipated mediation pathway from affect to fusion via self reflection. We did however find evidence that reflection on the experience was predicted by the level of affective response to the event (the exception to this trend was with Trump supporters negative affect scores).

#### **Hypothesis 5: Did fusion predict willingness to commit extreme pro-group behavior?**

Our fifth pre-registered prediction was that, for each specific target-group, identity fusion and fight and die would correlate at each point in time. This prediction was independent of any potential change in fusion scores. We found support for this prediction (see table 9). Using Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation analyses we found no differences between the magnitude of correlations between Trump and Clinton supporters (no difference were expected). The correlations presented in Table 9 have been collapsed across populations, and table 10 shows the raw values of the fight and die measure.

Table 9. *Correlations between fusion and fight and die measures at each time point*

Time	Target	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
T1	Country	0.30	< .001
	Those you know / core politics	0.08	0.012
T2	Country	0.29	< .001
	Those you know / core politics	0.07	0.025
T3	Country	0.32	< .001
	Those you know / core politics	0.14	< .001
	Trump	0.56	< .001

Table 10. *A table of descriptive statistics for fight and die and PANAS measures*

Preferred Candidate	Construct	Range	T1	T2	T3
Trump	PANAS Positive	10 - 50	32.65 (8.63)	32.95 (10.75)	32.61 (8.57)
	PANAS Negative (10 - 50)	10 - 50	16.23 (7.18)	13.23 (5.48)	15.39 (6.57)
	Fight and Die - USA	1 - 7	3.62 (1.29)	3.49 (1.34)	3.45 (1.36)
	Fight and Die - You Know Core Pol	1 - 7	2.95 (1.31)	2.92 (1.42)	2.88 (1.38)
Clinton	PANAS Positive	10 - 50	30.58 (8.86)	20.34 (7.32)	30.47 (8.60)
	PANAS Negative (10 - 50)	10 - 50	18.17 (7.86)	26.54 (10.28)	17.34 (7.52)
	Fight and Die - USA	1 - 7	2.92 (1.24)	2.81 (1.28)	2.76 (1.26)
	Fight and Die - You Know Core Pol	1 - 7	2.71 (1.26)	2.61 (1.24)	2.62 (1.27)

## Discussion

We find support for our first hypothesis that the inauguration conforms to the characteristics of an imagistic ritual. The event elicited medium to large shifts in affect, and after six weeks, individuals who had watched or listened to the event reported stronger flashbulb-like memories, and attributed higher consequentiality to the event (though causality in the latter case is difficult to determine). While supporters of President Trump reported stronger memories, the consequentiality of the event was not predicted by one's support (or lack thereof). Furthermore, participants found the event to be emotionally arousing: we observed significant shifts in affective responses occurring between pre-inauguration baseline, one week prior to the inauguration, and measures collected immediately after the inauguration. For Trump supporters this involved no change in positive affect and a slight decrease in negative affect, whereas for Clinton supporters it involved both a reduction in positive affect and an increase in negative affect.

Our second hypothesis was that increases in fusion would not occur immediately after the event (T2) but would emerge after a longer duration, allowing time for post event processing (T3). This prediction was based upon theoretical claims that self reflection and rumination, as well as the perception of having shared an experience with other group members, can serve to promote local and extended fusion to target in-groups. In regards to the first component of our hypothesis, we did not observe any ‘notable’ (Lakens, 2017) differences between pre-inauguration fusion scores (T1) and those collected in the days immediately following the inauguration (T2; except for a ‘very small’ decline in fusion among Clinton supporters with the US and ‘deep conflict’ outgroup target).

In line with our expectations, we found more significant changes in fusion following a longer delay. However, these effects were restricted to Clinton supporters, and importantly, ran counter to our pre-registered hypothesis, as the observed differences were *decreases* in fusion rather than increases. Specifically, we observed significant decreases in fusion scores for 5 out of 7 targets. The targets that were unaffected were Donald Trump, which unsurprisingly remained at floor levels across all three periods, and the extended ingroup fusion target (All Americans who share your core political values). Amongst Trump supporters we observed a remarkable stability in fusion scores across all ingroup targets from T1 to T3. Only the outgroup target (All Americans whose core political values deeply conflict with your own) displayed a small and negative change.

Although the changes observed were counter to our hypothesis, new research published after the study was completed have reported convergent findings. First, Vazquez, Gomez & Swann (2017) describe that following three negative national events, including political scandals, average fusion declined amongst Spanish participants. Second, Kavanagh et al. (2018) in a survey of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu practitioners find that fusion levels with relevant ingroups is most strongly associated by positive affect during ritual promotion events and that the same relationship is not observed for negative affect, mirroring the findings of the mixed regression models reported in our third hypothesis. That the effect of positive affect on fusion was replicated in these two distinct contexts suggests a potential mechanism of action, though future pre-registered tests are required to validate any stronger conclusions. Nevertheless, we recognise that due to the turbulent political and social environment surrounding the Trump administration’s early days it remains difficult to discern the precise influence of the inauguration on our dependent variables. We present the findings above acknowledging this limitation, but note also that our findings correspond with an independent study (Misch, Fergusson, & Dunham, *in press*) that focused on changes in fusion in response to the election results. The

emotional impact of the election night, which for many involved direct personal action—in the act of casting a vote—and a prolonged state of anxious arousal, punctuated by jubilation or despair, was almost certainly greater than the impact of the inauguration. Importantly, this study also reported no change in fusion between pre- and post-election time points.

It should be noted that in the Vazquez, Gomez & Swann (2017) study the reported decline in fusion observed was limited toward the group category, and did not “*tarnish sentiments toward individual group members*” (i.e., relational ties; local fusion). In our sample, conversely, there was no change in fusion observed for Clinton or Trump supporters with their extended ingroup targets but Clinton supporters did display a decrease with relational ingroup targets. Furthermore, the decreases observed across our fusion measures were consistent but not large, with effect sizes ranging from  $d = .18$  to  $d = .35$ . However, given the heterogeneity in the sample and the variation in targets these results should be informative for future studies.

Overall, these results may reflect that Clinton supporters felt more alienated from, and frustrated with, their ingroups with correspondingly greater hostility towards their outgroups (in this case Trump and his supporters). This interpretation fits with theories concerning ‘cutting off reflected failure’ (CORF) (Cialdini, 1976; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986): Clinton supporters, literally and symbolically defeated, may have sought to distance themselves from their fellow supporters and the unsuccessful Democratic party (Haslam, Alexander Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). Previous studies relatedly have found that supporters of political parties who lost an election more quickly removed political posters than winners (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2002) and more recently following the Scottish independence referendum there was a dramatic drop in tweets from the losing side (Lachlan & Levy, 2016). However, although the change in fusion levels from Clinton supporters might be reflective of CORFing processes it is notable that we do not find evidence from Trump supporters of the converse ‘basking in reflected glory’ (BIRG). This may reflect the impact of ceiling effects, with Trump supporters already elevated by the election victory, however we note that the fusion levels of Trump supporters with both Trump and the Republican party remained below the mid-point on the fusion scale across all time periods.

The results from Clinton supporters are compatible with CORFing models and it makes intuitive sense that some of those who opposed Trump experienced the election defeat as an identity threat and began to emphasise other identities in order to maintain status (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). However, the literature on identity threat also demonstrates how people with strong group identities can seek to increase their connection and evaluation of their group in the face of perceived threats (Doosje, Spears, & Ellemers, 2002; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997;

Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). While ‘identity threat’ provides a useful theoretical lens to approach our results from we note that Modes theory offers an alternative and potentially more comprehensive explanation for our results.

In particular, we note that focusing on the differences between winners and losers ignores that in our data the response of Trump supporters was in a number of ways similar to Clinton supporters. In particular, Trump supporters show almost no change in fusion scores and this is mirrored by a lack of change in positive affect, whereas Clinton supporters displayed decreases in fusion consistent with their decreases in positive affect. Our mixed model analysis offers additional evidence that change in positive, rather than negative affect, was predictive of fusion change when controlling for a host of confounding factors- including political affiliation.

To elaborate, our third hypothesis examined which factors of imagistic experiences were most strongly associated with fusion scores with three distinct in-group targets: a local-fusion ingroup, an extended fusion ingroup, and a categorical superordinate ingroup. We conducted the same sequential mixed-model regression for all three outcomes, with varying individual level intercepts, and found that positive affect, in all three models, consistently predicted fusion levels, whereas no such relationship was observed with negative affect. This is a theoretically significant finding as it offers a potential core mechanism for the ‘imagistic’ ritual bonding model posited in Whitehouse and Lanman (2014). More specifically, while studies such as Whitehouse et al. (2018) have focused on the ability of negative experiences to promote fusion, the precise mechanisms through which this occurs remain underspecified by existing studies. Our finding, in line with a recent study of martial arts promotion rituals (Kavanagh et al., 2018), imply that insofar as negative events affect fusion it seems related to how they shift positive affect. This means that whether negative experiences, including unpleasant/painful rituals, promote or depress fusion bonds with ingroups will depend on how the event is subjectively processed by the individual. If seen as a positive experience we would expect fusion to increase, and if perceived as a negative event, as in the current study for Clinton supporters, an associated decrease in fusion might be anticipated.

However, our results do not fully support the ritual bonding model proposed by Whitehouse and Lanman (2014) as our analysis also failed to detect the anticipated relationships between fusion outcomes and measures of personal consequentiality or flashbulb memory. Our results also contrast with previous findings reported by Jong et al. (2015) which demonstrated a consistent relationship between levels of reflection on negative experience and fusion scores with relevant group identities. This discrepancy could be due to differences in the timeframes involved, as studies 1 and 2 in Jong et al. (2015) involved experiences, and

consequently opportunities for reflection, that spanned decades, or, they may be a result of the relative levels of intensity or violence associated with the events examined. Currently, there are too few studies to draw firm conclusions, but the current study provides evidence in favour of the null hypothesis in regards to the relationship between reflection and fusion. We suggest it may be worth examining the role of these variables as moderators of affective arousal and the potential interactive relationships in an independent, pre-registered, investigation.

The results of hypothesis three should also be considered in the context of our analyses between affect and fusion mediated by reflection. We did not find support for our prediction that reflection would mediate the relationship between affect and fusion. Indeed, from the twelve mediations examined we only detected one fully mediated pathway - among Clinton supporters from negative affect to the extended fusion target. Though significant, we do not wish to emphasise this result, as the relationships observed were small and could represent random variance in the data. The null results of our mediation models may partly be attributable to an overall lack of substantial variation in fusion scores over time. Thus, the most parsimonious conclusion to draw from our analysis is to that we fail to reject the null hypothesis, and that in the present data there is no mediating relationship of reflection between affective response and fusion levels, while noting that affect (both positive and negatively) did consistently display a positive, if weak, relationship with motivated reflection.

Finally, we found support for our fifth confirmatory hypothesis, regarding the association between fusion scores and a willingness to fight and die for corresponding target groups (Swann et al., 2012; Swann, Gómez, Huici, Morales, & Hixon, 2010; Whitehouse et al., 2014). This is a well established relationship and confirming it in our sample increases confidence in the validity of the other findings reported. Additionally, although not the focus of the current study, we also found this relationship predicted actual behavior in the form of attendance at pro- and anti-Trump rallies and events (see Supplementary Material A).

## **Limitations**

Our study focused on the inauguration event and was limited in asking participants questions that explicitly focused on that event. As a result, it is impossible to exclude the influence other highly controversial events that occurred during the first six weeks of Donald Trump's presidency (including the 'Muslim immigration ban', the Women's March, and various contentious cabinet appointments). We cannot eliminate the impact of these post-ritual events, but note that almost all of the measures collected in the questionnaire were directly asking about inauguration experiences. Furthermore, we required all participants to respond to an open

ended prompt and write an account of their experience of the inauguration which should have served to make this event more salient. Finally, our key findings relate to affect scores reported at T2, immediately after the inauguration occurred, and thus mitigate some of the concerns that our measures could be confounded.

Nevertheless, we recognise that due to the turbulent political and social environment surrounding the Trump administration's early days it remains difficult to discern the precise influence of the inauguration on our dependent variables. We present the findings above acknowledging this limitation, but note also that our findings correspond with an independent study (Misch, Fergusson, & Dunham, *in press*) that focused on changes in fusion in response to the election results. They also reported no change in fusion between pre- and post-election time points. One limitation of the election study is that it did not employ a within-subjects design and as a result the 'changes' observed relate to population level trends. We also recognise that insofar as we can classify the inauguration as an imagistic ritual it is not a prototypical example of one, especially since our participants did not share a direct visceral experience. This is a significant limitation, though not one that invalidates our approach. We are not arguing that watching the inauguration was akin to taking part in a Melanesian 'rite of terror' (Whitehouse, 1996), or similar ritual experience, but rather that the inauguration was a ritual, and one that was broadly imagistic in nature due to its infrequent but regular occurrence, the associated emotional arousal, and potential to generate reflection.

## Conclusion

In summary, our data suggests that the US inauguration was an imagistic ritual that was able to generate powerful emotional responses, rich memories, and perceptions of consequentiality amongst many distant observers. Levels of affective response were associated with levels of subsequent reflection among both supporters and detractors of President Trump. We also found that levels of positive affect immediately after the inauguration were the strongest predictor of fusion for three distinct in-group targets, across the entire sample, when controlling for a wide variety of demographic and other confounding factors. Importantly, we did not find any evidence for a similar relationship between negative affect and fusion, including through a previously observed mediation pathway operating through self-reflection. That positive affective experiences would increase bonding to relevant ingroups is an intuitive finding, but one that is important in light of theoretical models that stress the importance of negative events in generating group bonds. Analysis of our sample supports the position that subjective responses



to negative events is crucial in determining how bonds with relevant ingroups will be impacted with *decreases* in positive affect able to reduce levels of fusion.

On the basis of the current study, we thus offer the following prediction: in imagistic ritual contexts, changes in identity fusion with relevant targets will be predicted by the level of positive affective response experienced by participants at the time and through their subsequent reflections on the event. Conversely, we do not anticipate negative affective responses to display this predictive power. If the patterns we observed are valid, fusion with groups will increase as a consequence of emotional events when subsequent reflection involves positive interpretation. In the current study, we found a direct influence of positive affect producing fusion, and a reliable effect of affect producing reflection, yet no apparent relationship between reflection and fusion. Over the seven week period, among Clinton supporters, we observed *decreases* in fusion, and corresponding decreases in positive affect. This is likely related to Clinton supporters' reactions to the first six weeks of Trump's presidency. As described earlier, feelings of alienation may have produced a desire for individual's to dissociate their personal identity from both defeated in-groups (e.g. the Democratic party) and groups now strongly associated with Donald Trump (e.g. USA). We argue we did not observe an inverse increase in fusion amongst Trump supporters because we did not observe the necessary increase in positive affect. This may have been due to the elation of the election night victory meaning that Trump supporters were already at ceiling levels by the time of the inauguration. However, as noted, overall fusion levels with Trump and the Republican party were not close to the ceiling levels possible to reach using the DIFI measurement scale.

The results of the current study imply that previous ritual studies, which have generally focused on extreme or painful ritual events, have addressed events which were likely to be evaluated positively *post hoc*. For example, Kavanagh, Jong, McKay, and Whitehouse (2018) have shown that even painful belt whipping events experienced during martial art promotion rituals, when reinterpreted positively, are associated with higher levels of fusion. Similarly, (Fischer et al., 2014) found that, on Mauritius, those who participated in an arduous fire-walking ritual reported greater post-event happiness than those who observed it (those who observed it were more exhausted for longer).

And so how are we to understand these results in the context of Ritual Modes theory? Modes theory broadly states that intense rituals (particularly those that are dysphoric) generate enduring memories, upon which individuals reflect, and this reflection produces a sense of meaning that is believed to be shared by others who were present or who have shared a similar experience. Recent formulations of the theory (Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014; Whitehouse,

2018) argue that this leads to fusion, which in turn, produces strong and enduring commitments and a willingness to act in the interests of the group. Herein, we found that a large naturalistic political ritual generated clear memories and influenced emotion, which was interpreted as consequential. However, reflection on the event amongst those who experienced the event was not particularly high, and we did not observe the anticipated change in fusion (indeed, we observed shifts contrary to theory). A single negative study is not enough to undermine a theoretical model and results should always be weighed against the accumulated evidence, which is substantial in the case of Modes theory (Whitehouse, 2004; Whitehouse et al. 2017; Whitehouse et al., 2018). Moreover, it may be that the inauguration was an insufficient ritual stimulus to activate the relevant processes.

Despite these limitations, it remains important that when amendments are made to theories that new predictive tests are used to examine the validity of the new claims. As our pre-registration indicates we believed the inauguration to be a suitable candidate event to test the theoretical predictions and therefore our findings are important to report. Moreover, confidence in our results is bolstered by replicating a recent finding (Kavanagh et al., 2018) that changes in positive affect, and not negative affect, following high arousal rituals are associated with fusion levels with relevant groups. This finding was recently reported in the context of martial arts promotion ceremonies and we find it here again in an entirely distinct ritual context.

Clearly more high powered, pre-registered, and longitudinal studies using naturalistic stimuli are necessary before any strong conclusions can be drawn. If the theory were to consistently fail at explaining what is actually occurring in the world, while working under laboratory conditions, this would be problematic. Alternatively, it may be the case that the cognitive schemas associated with the Inauguration were culturally prescribed and predetermined (Schjoedt et al., 2013), meaning that reflection was arrested. If so, this could explain the absence of the predicted downstream effects. For these reasons, we repeat our call for more research of this nature, in an attempt to falsify the phenomenon as it occurs in the real world.



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### Supplementary Material A. Exploratory Analyses

We pre-registered our intention to perform exploratory analyses. Since our focal pre-registered predictions were not supported, we took a conservative approach to exploration. Here we present some basic descriptive and inferential statistics to illustrate the data. In Tables S1, S2, and S3 we report the observed differences in fusion scores within timepoints between Trump and Hillary supporters. We used a bonferroni corrected p value of .05 / (number of comparison; 21) = .002.

Table S1. *Differences in fusion scores between supporters of Trump and Clinton at T1.*

Target	Supports	Mean	SD	t-score	p
Family	T	77.02	32.55	t(926) = 2.165	p = .031
	C	72.17	34.26		
USA	T	67.28	34.64	t(925) = 5.90	p < .001
	C	53.48	35.37		
You Know / Core Pol	T	65.91	31.85	t(923) = -.193	p = .847
	C	66.31	31.02		
All American / Core Pol	T	59.26	30.90	t(926) = .246	p = .806
	C	58.75	30.8		
Preferred Party	T	48.96	34.44	t(924) = -0.150	p = .881
	C	49.30	32.98		
Deep Conflict	T	32.98	28.95	t(922) = 2.267	p = .024
	C	21.53	27.10		
Trump	T	42.25	35.21	t(908) = 23.431	p < .001
	C	3.92	11.44		

Table S2. *Differences in fusion scores between supporters of Trump and Clinton at T2.*

Target	Supports	Mean	SD	t-score	p
Family	T	76.87	33.27	t(924) = 2.791	p = .005
	C	70.52	34.59		
USA	T	66.47	35.44	t(924) = 7.402	p < .001
	C	48.53	36.84		
You Know / Core Pol	T	64.40	33.01	t(921) = -.362	p = .717
	C	65.20	32.61		
All American / Core Pol	T	61.48	33.23	t(924) = .656	p = .512
	C	60.03	33.10		
Preferred Party	T	47.86	34.68	t(919) = .477	p = .634
	C	46.74	35.13		
Deep Conflict	T	23.07	28.37	t(918) = 3.189	p = .001
	C	17.31	25.99		
Trump	T	43.49	36.82	t(899) = 21.204	p < .001
	C	4.98	15.78		

Table S3.

Differences in fusion scores between supporters of Trump and Clinton at T3.

Target	Supports	Mean	SD	t-score	p
Family	T	76.84	32.44	$t(924) = 3.049$	$p = .002$
	C	69.89	35.18		
USA	T	67.17	34.79	$t(925) = 8.182$	$p < .001$
	C	47.71	36.16		
You Know / Core Pol	T	64.69	32.75	$t(924) = .785$	$p = .433$
	C	62.98	32.67		
All American / Core Pol	T	61.67	33.38	$t(923) = 1.554$	$p = .121$
	C	58.25	32.59		
Preferred Party	T	47.35	34.74	$t(924) = 1.405$	$p = .160$
	C	44.14	33.89		
Deep Conflict	T	20.86	27.79	$t(914) = 3.06$	$p = .002$
	C	15.58	24.12		
Trump	T	37.55	37.55	$t(900) = 21.235$	$p < .001$
	C	3.81	13.62		

We conducted paired-samples t-test on participant's flashbulb-like memory for both the Election and the Inauguration. Among Trump supporters, scores on for Flashbulb-like memory were significantly higher for the election ( $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) compared to the Inauguration ( $M = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ),  $t(379) = 7.418$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .42$ . Among Clinton supporters we found that memory for the Election ( $M = 5.79$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) was significantly greater than for the inauguration ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 2.00$ ),  $t(547) = 17.518$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .36$ .

We conducted paired-samples t-test on participant's self-reflection on the Election and Inauguration. Among Trump supporters, there was no observable difference between self-reflection for the election ( $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) and the inauguration ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ),  $t(378) = 1.882$ ,  $p = .061$ ,  $d = .09$ . There was a significant difference among Clinton supporters, such that reflection for the election ( $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) was significantly less than for the Inauguration ( $M = 5.34$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ),  $t(543) = 2.526$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $d = .11$ .

In table S4 (below) we present the pattern of correlations between the Fight-and-Die targets, and scores on questions asking how much time (1 'None...' - 5 'An extreme amount...') and how many events (capped at 5+) one attending in support/opposition of the Trump administration.

Table S4. *Correlation matrices of Fight-Die at T3 and self-reported support/opposition to the Trump Administration.*

<b>TRUMP SUPPORTERS</b>				
<b>Fight Die Target</b>	<b>Time Supporting</b>	<b>Events Supporting</b>	<b>Time Opposing</b>	<b>Events Opposing</b>
USA	.348**	.131*	0.035	0.03
You Know Core Politics	.344**	.188**	.171**	.196**
Trump	.412**	.247**	0.037	0.099
<b>CLINTON SUPPORTERS</b>				
<b>Fight Die Target</b>	<b>Time Supporting</b>	<b>Events Supporting</b>	<b>Time Opposing</b>	<b>Events Opposing</b>
USA	.209**	.141**	0.035	0.008
You Know Core Politics	.171**	.162**	.188**	.131*
Trump	.269**	.223**	-0.048	0.084

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$

With respect to the amount of self-reflection between T2 and T3, we found that our inter-coder reliability was too low to construct valid metrics from open responses, so we used a coarse measure of simple word-count of the open-ended qualitative items at each time-point. Using the standard criterion for normality of  $\pm 2$  (Field, 2000; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2016; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008), we determined that the data were not normally distributed, both among Trump supporters at T2 ( $M = 70.52$ ,  $SD = 42.81$ ; Skew = 2.34, Kurtosis = 10.38) and T3 ( $M = 66.65$ ,  $SD = 38.16$ ; Skew = 1.53, Kurtosis = 4.16); this was also true for Clinton supporters at T2 ( $M = 70.89$ ,  $SD = 42.25$ ; Skew = 1.41, Kurtosis = 3.51) and T3 ( $M = 65.19$ ,  $SD = 39.14$ ; Skew = 1.37, Kurtosis = 2.53). A Wilcoxon signed-ranks test found that there was a significant *decrease* in word-count between T2 and T3 among Trump supporters ( $z = -2.88$ ,  $p = .004$ ), but no difference

among Clinton supporters ( $z = -0.304$ ,  $p < .761$ ). While significant, this difference was not particularly meaningful; among both groups the difference was the equivalent of, on average, 5 words.

### **Supplementary Material B. Analysis exploring whether data was missing at random.**

In order to determine whether there were any systematic differences between those who were included in the final analyzable dataset ( $n = 928$ ) and those who were not in the final analyzable dataset ( $n = 593$ ) we conducted a number of analyses. Considering the age of those in each set, those in the analyzable set ( $M = 24.82$ ,  $SD = 12.11$ ) were significantly older than those in the excluded set ( $M = 21.10$ ,  $SD = 11.48$ ),  $F(1, 1473) = 33.135$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was no difference in gender (male, female, other) distribution between sets,  $\chi^2(2) = 1.485$ ,  $p = .476$ .

On a 7-point scale of political affiliation (1 = very liberal; 7 = very conservative) there was no difference between the analyzable set ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ) and the excluded set ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ),  $F(1, 1472) = 1.710$ ,  $p = .191$ . Similarly, on 9-point measure of how impactful [on one's life] a Trump Presidency would be (1 = Extremely Negatively [impactful], 9 = Extremely Positively [impactful]), the analyzable set ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 2.34$ ) and the excluded set ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ) did not differ significantly,  $F(1, 1464) = .013$ ,  $p = .908$ . Similarly, on a 9-point measure of how helpful or hurtful a Trump Presidency would be (1 = Extremely Hurtful; 9 = Extremely Helpful), the analyzable set ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 2.20$ ) and the excluded set ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ ) did not differ significantly,  $F(1, 1464) = .002$ ,  $p = .968$ .

At Time 1, on positive PANAS scores, those in the analyzable set ( $M = 31.56$ ,  $SD = 8.72$ ) and those in the excluded set ( $M = 31.13$ ,  $SD = 8.50$ ) did not significantly differ,  $F(1, 1462) = .825$ ,  $p = .364$ . At Time 1, on negative PANAS scores, those in the analyzable set ( $M = 17.48$ ,  $SD = 7.71$ ) and those in the excluded set ( $M = 18.39$ ,  $SD = 7.71$ ) did significantly differ,  $F(1, 1464) = 4.791$ ,  $p = .029$ . At Time 2, positive PANAS scores did differ between the analyzable set ( $M = 25.84$ ,  $SD = 10.71$ ) and those in excluded set ( $n = 281$ ;  $M = 24.25$ ,  $SD = 10.60$ ),  $F(1, 1207) = 4.772$ ,  $p = .029$ . At Time 2, negative PANAS score did not differ between the analyzable set ( $M = 21.17$ ,  $SD = 10.78$ ) and those in the excluded set ( $M = 21.91$ ,  $SD = 10.52$ ),  $F(1, 1207) = 1.015$ ,  $p = .314$ . The difference in  $n$  of these samples at Time 3 is too large to reliably conduct such an analyses. Scores on fusion to all targets are presented in the Table S5 below. Scores of Fight-and-Die at T1 and T2 are presented in Table S6 (T3 is not shown as the difference in sample size is too great).

Table S5.

Fusion at T1 between Analyzable and Excluded sets

Fusion (Overlap) at T1		N	Me an	SD	
The USA	Excluded	4	55.	37.	F(1,1417) = 2.408,  p = .121
		9	99	53	
		2			
	Analyzabl e	9 2 7	59. 14	35. 70	
"All Americans who share your core political views".	Excluded	4	56.	32.	F(1,1416) = 1.334,  p = .248
		9	94	25	
		0			
	Analyzabl e	9 2 8	58. 96	30. 82	
"All Americans whose political views deeply conflict with your own".	Excluded	4	26.	29.	F(1,1409) = 4.411,  p = .036
		8	63	90	
		7			
	Analyzabl e	9 2 4	23. 27	27. 94	
"Your most preferred political party".	Excluded	4	49.	34.	F(1,1412) = .045,  p = .832
		8	56	63	
		8			
	Analyzabl	9	49.	33.	



	e	2	16	57	
		6			
"People you know who share your core political views".	Excluded	4	65.	32.	F(1,1408) = .360
		8	07	93	p = .549
		5			
	Analyzabl	9	66.	31.	
	e	2	15	34	
		5			
"Your Family".	Excluded	4	69.	36.	F(1,1411) =
		8	86	33	4.900,
		5			p = .027
	Analyzabl	9	74.	33.	
	e	2	15	64	
		8			
"Donald Trump"	Excluded	4	19.	32.	F(1,1389) = .092,
		8	31	29	p = .762
		1			
	Analyzabl	9	13.	30.	
	e	1	84	79	
		0			

Table S6.

Fight-and-Die at T1 and T2 between Analyzable and Excluded sets

<b>Fight and Die Target (Time)</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	
USA (T1)	Unusable	482	4.69	1.36	F(1, 1408) = 390.210,  $p < .001$
	Analyzable	928	3.22	1.31	
"People you know who share your core political views" (T1)	Unusable	482	5.21	1.35	F(1, 1408) = 1092.077,  $p < .001$
	Analyzable	928	2.80	1.28	
USA (T2)	Unusable	264	4.83	1.33	F(1, 1187) = .344.719,  $p < .001$
	Analyzable	925	3.09	1.34	
"People you know who share your core political views" (T2)	Unusable	264	5.16	1.37	F(1, 1187) = 708.540,  $p < .001$
	Analyzable	925	2.71	1.30	

### Supplementary Material C.

Participants in the final sample all lived in the United States, and 98.6% claimed their nationality to be 'US American'. Participants reported being Caucasian (80.5%), Black/African (7.4%), South-, South-East- or East-Asian (5.7%), Hispanic (3.3%), Native American (1.1%), and Middle Eastern (0.1%), while the rest reported 'other' or did not specify an answer (1.7%).

Regarding religious affiliation, our sample reported being Protestant (24.3%), Catholic (17.7%), Atheist (17.8%), Agnostic (14.2%), 'Spiritual but not religious' (12.0%), Jewish (2.9%), Buddhist (1.4%), Hindu (0.4%), Muslim (0.4%), or did not provide a response (7.5%).

The mean age of participants was 24.82 years (range 18-81, SD = 12.25) and 47.8% reported their gender as female (with 0.1% reporting 'other'). A total of 39.7% of participants were married, and an additional 18.5% reported being in a relationship.

Regarding political affiliation, our sample consisted of Democrats (41.9%), Independents (31.0%), Republicans (22.7%), Libertarians (2.9%), and supporters of the Green Party (0.6%). Notably, on a forced-choice measure of candidate preference, 41.0% supported Donald Trump, and 59.0% supported Hillary Clinton.

Those in our sample reported holding Doctorates (1.9%), Master's degrees (10.6%), professional school degrees (3.1%), Bachelor's degrees (38.8%), and Associate's degrees (11.2%), as well as some (incomplete) college (23.0%), high school education (10.6%), or only some high school (0.6%).

The income of our sample was reported to range (per year) from \$100,000 or more (11.7%), \$75,000 - \$99,999 (13.7%), \$50,000 - \$74,999 (23.7%), \$35,000 - \$49,999 (16.7%), \$25,000 - \$34,999 (12.9%), \$15,000 - \$24,999 (11.7%), \$10,000 - \$14,999 (4.0%), or less than \$10,000 (5.7%).

Table S7. Breakdown of Trump / Clinton 'supporter' categories

Trump 'Supporters', $n = 380$		Clinton 'Supporters, $n = 548$	
Trump voters	$n = 285$	Clinton voters	$n = 443$
Independent voters	$n = 91$	Independent voters	$n = 102$
Clinton voters	$n = 3$	Trump voters	$n = 3$
Republican	$n = 196$	Republican	$n = 15$
Independent	$n = 160$	Independent	$n = 169$
Democratic	$n = 24$	Democratic	$n = 364$

## Supplementary Material D

### Reflection and Memory Measures

#### ***Self-Reflection***

1. I have reflected a lot on the start of the Trump presidency.
2. Since Inauguration Day, I have been thinking quite a bit about the Trump presidency.
3. The Inauguration of the Trump presidency marked a key moment in defining who I am personally.
4. If the Inauguration of the Trump presidency did not occur, I would be a totally different person today.

#### ***Personal Consequentiality***

1. Regardless of whether your response was positive or negative how consequential did you find Trump's inauguration to be for you personally?

#### ***Flashbulb-like Memory Measures***

1. I remember exactly where I was during the election day event
2. I remember exactly who I was with during the election day event
3. I feel as though I remember the details of the election day event very clearly

## Supplementary Material E.

### Inauguration Reactions

#### ***Qualitative Reactions***

Participants were asked to respond to two qualitative questions. During T1 and T3 this involved answering how '*Trump's victory in the presidential election will affect [their] life?*'. At T2 participants were asked to write about their '*experience[s] and ... feelings in reaction to the official start of Donald Trump's Presidency on Inauguration Day, January 20th.*' From this data we extracted two variables. The first was a measure '*self-reflection (coded)*' concerning the inauguration (a simple word count), while the second was the degree to which the inauguration

influenced participants' *'self-definition (coded)'*<sup>4</sup>. Two blinded, non-american, coders coded for the presence of several characteristics (see the Supplementary Material C or the full coding rubric). We took the mean of coders' responses as the truest value (presented below). Self definition was coded by the following criteria:

*Identity Impact*: The degree to which the response indicated a change in identity concepts. This was measured on a 4-point scale where 0 is '*Participant makes no reference to who the think/feel they are*'; 1 is '*contains moderate [identity] references, but not necessarily about change*'; 2 is '*contains moderate references to identity, and with change, which suggest a state-like aspect.*'; and 3 is '*contains strong references to identity, and with change, which suggest a trait-like aspect.*'.

### **Scale-coded Items**

Participants answered the following question regarding the consequentiality of the event: '*Regardless of whether your response was positive or negative how consequential did you find Trump's inauguration to be for you personally?*'. Participants responded on a 9-point likert scale (1 - extremely Inconsequential; 5 - neutral; 9 - extremely consequential).

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<sup>4</sup> Other data was coded from these responses but has not been included here. See Supplementary Material C for full coding rubric.

## Full Qualitative Coding Criteria.

**Note: The following was not part of the pre-registration package.**

The Qualitative question was: *“Please describe your experience and how you felt in reaction to the official start of Donald Trump's Presidency on Inauguration Day, January 20th. Please write about how it made you feel, what you thought, or anything else that comes to mind)”*

**Self Reference** (or self concerns vs other/general concerns)

Guidelines

For an account to be personal they must use self-relevant pronouns (*I, me, my, we, our*).

**0** = Not at all about the self

**1** = Up to 25% about the self

**2** = Up to 50% about the self

**3** = Up to 75% about the self

**4** = Up to 100% about the self

## Personal Consequentiality

(0 = has no personal consequences for the individual; 1 = has ambiguous consequentiality for the person; 2 = has moderate consequentiality ...; 3 = has concrete bearing on the individual)

Guidelines: **0** = should generally be awarded for general, or national concerns. E.g., *“I’m concerned for the direction of our country”, “I think Trump will divide the nation”, “I’m glad Trump will MAGA/ build a wall”, “Lots of people will be worse off because of Trump”*

**1** = should generally be awarded for non-specific or indefinite concerns. E.g., *“I’m not sure what will happen, but I’m concerned about my healthcare”*

**2** = should generally be awarded for clear potentially consequentiality. E.g., *“I’m worried that I will lose my job”, “I’m glad, because now I can go back to work”, “Building a wall will make me*

*feel safe”, “I’m scared because I or my family may be deported”.*

**3** = should generally be awarded for fairly direct consequences. E.g., *“I’m diabetic and I can’t afford my medication if Trump repeals Obamacare”*

## **Identity Impact**

### Guidelines

**0** = Participant makes no reference to who they think/feel they are.

**1** = Moderate references, but not necessarily about change. E.g., *“I’m proud/ashamed to be an American”*

**2** = Moderate references to identity, and with change, which suggest a **state-like** aspect. E.g., *“I’m very uncertain about the future”, “right now, I’m scared”.*

**3** = Strong references to identity, and with change, which suggest a **trait-like** aspect. E.g., *“I just don’t know what it means to be an American any more”, “I feel scared all the time”,*

## **Affect**

Overall intuitive evaluation of affect.

-3 = Extremely negative overall

-2 = Moderately negative overall

-1 = Slightly negative overall

0 = Neutral / No discernible affect

+1 = Slightly positive overall

+2 = Moderately positive overall

+3 = Extremely positive overall

## **Supplementary Material F. Results of mixed models**



Table S8. *Results of full sequential mixed model with retained and removed predictors for local fusion.*

No.	Model: FUSION CX CORE.REL (T1-T3) =	Variables Added	AIC	BIC	LogLik.	Model Comparison	L. Change (p value)	Action
1	Intercept Only	Intercept Only	8761	8770	-4378	-	-	-
2	Intercept + 1 ID	Random Intercept ID	8763	8777	-4378	1 v 2	p = 1	Retained (robustness)
3	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 SEX + 1 AGE + 1 INCOME + 1 ETHNIC + 1 RELIG	Random Intercept Demographics	8773	8811	-4378	2 v 3	p = 1	Removed
4	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 CANDIDATE + 1 POL.AFFLN	Random Intercept Politics	8767	8791	-4378	2 v 4	p = 1	Removed
5	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 HOWWATCH	Random Intercept Mode of Watching	8765	8784	-4378	2 v 5	p = 1	Removed
6	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS + 1 ID	Positive Affect	8755	8774	-4373	2 v 6	9.99, p = .001	Retained
7	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS + T2.NEG.PANAS + 1 ID	Negative Affect	8755	8780	-4372	6 v 7	1.61, p = .21	Retained (Theory)
8	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS + T2.NEG.PANAS + T2.Reflection + 1 ID	Reflection	8756	8785	-4372	7 v 8	p = .40	Removed
9	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS + T2.NEG.PANAS + T3.Flashbulb + 1 ID	Flashbulb	8757	8786	-4372	7 v 9	p = .95	Removed
10	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS + T2.NEG.PANAS + T2.Pers.Consq. + 1 ID	Personal Consequence	8757	8786	-4372	7 v 10	p = .84	Removed

Table S9. *Results of final sequential mixed model with retained and removed predictors for local fusion.*

#### MODEL 7

Variable	B (SE)	t-value	p-value
Intercept	-13.97 (4.22)	-3.329	p < .001
Positive PANAS T2	0.35 (0.10)	3.49	p < .001
Negative PANAS T2	0.13 (0.10)	1.27	p = .21

Table s10. *Results of full sequential mixed model with retained and removed predictors for extended fusion.*

No.	Model: FUSION CX CORE.CAT (T1-T3) =	Variables Added	AIC	BIC	LogLik.	Model Comparison	L. Change (p value)	Action
1	Intercept Only	Intercept Only	8815	8824	-4405	-	-	-
2	Intercept + 1 ID	Random Intercept ID	8815	8831	-4405	1 v 2	p = 1	Retained (robustness)
3	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 SEX + 1 AGE + 1 INCOME + 1 ETHNIC + 1 RELIG	Random Intercept Demographics	8817	8832	-4405	2 v 3	p = 1	Removed
4	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 CANDIDATE + 1 POL.AFFLN	Random Intercept Politics	8821	8845	-4405	2 v 4	p = 1	Removed
5	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 HOWWATCH	Random Intercept Mode of Watching	8819	8838	-4405	2 v 5	p = 1	Removed
6	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ 1 ID	Positive Affect	8810	8829	-4401	2 v 6	8.60, p = .003	Retained
7	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ T2.NEG.PANAS + 1 ID	Negative Affect	8812	8836	-4401	6 v 7	.11, p = .74	Retained (Theory)
8	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ T2.NEG.PANAS + T2.Reflection + 1 ID	Reflection	8814	8842	-4401	7 v 8	p = .73	Removed
9	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ T2.NEG.PANAS + T3.Flashbulb + 1 ID	Flashbulb	8813	8842	-4400	7 v 9	p = .95	Removed
10	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ T2.NEG.PANAS + T2.Pers.Consq. + 1 ID	Personal Consequence	8813	8842	-4400	7 v 10	p = .48	Removed

Table S11. *Results of final sequential mixed model with retained and removed predictors for extended fusion.*

#### MODEL 7

Variable	B (SE)	t-value	p-value
Intercept	-7.46 (4.30)	-1.733	p = .08
Positive PANAS T2	0.29 (0.10)	2.76	p = .001
Negative PANAS T2	0.03 (0.10)	0.33	p = .74

Table S12. Results of full sequential mixed model with retained and removed predictors for categorical fusion.

No.	Model: FUSION CX USA (T1-T3) =	Variables Added	AIC	BIC	LogLik.	Model Comparison	L. Change (p value)	Action
1	Intercept Only	Intercept Only	8718	8728	-4357	-	-	-
2	Intercept + 1 ID	Random Intercept ID	8720	8734	-4357	1 v 2	p = 1	Retained (robustness)
3	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 SEX + 1 AGE + 1 INCOME + 1 ETHNIC + 1 RELIG	Random Intercept Demographics	8730	8769	-4357	2 v 3	p = 1	Removed
4	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 CANDIDATE + 1 POL.AFFLN	Random Intercept Politics	8724	8748	-4357	2 v 4	p = 1	Removed
5	Intercept + 1 ID + 1 HOWWATCH	Random Intercept Mode of Watching	8722	8741	-4357	2 v 5	p = 1	Removed
6	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ 1 ID	Positive Affect	8713	8732	-4352	2 v 6	8.83, p = .003	Retained
7	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ T2.NEG.PANAS + 1 ID	Negative Affect	8715	8739	-4352	6 v 7	.17, p = .68	Retained (Theory)
8	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ T2.NEG.PANAS + T2.Reflection + 1 ID	Reflection	8715	8744	-4352	7 v 8	1.74, p = .18	Removed
9	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ T2.NEG.PANAS + T3.Flashbulb + 1 ID	Flashbulb	8717	8746	-4352	7 v 9	p = .92	Removed
10	Intercept + T2.POS.PANAS+ T2.NEG.PANAS + T2.Pers.Consq. + 1 ID	Personal Consequence	8717	8746	-4352	7 v 10	p = .58	Removed

Table S13. Results of final sequential mixed model with retained and removed predictors for categorical fusion.

#### MODEL 7

Variable	B (SE)	t-value	p-value
Intercept	-8.56 (4.30)	-2.10	p = .04
Positive PANAS T2	0.24 (0.10)	2.46	p = .01
Negative PANAS T2	-0.04 (0.10)	-0.41	p = .68

### **Supplementary Material G. TOST analyses of non-significant results on Fusion.**

Among Trump supporters we have 80% power to detect a 'small' effect of  $d_z = .15$ . Our paired-samples t-tests indicate we cannot reject the null for each target as indicated in Table S8. TOST analyses indicate (between T1 and T3) that the true effect is likely to be below a 'level of interest' of  $d_z = .15$ , and therefore, equivalent to zero, for fusion to USA,  $T(379) = 3.08$ ,  $p = .001$ , for 'Preferred Party',  $t(378) = 3.911$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for 'People You know who share your core politics'  $t(377) = 3.911$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for 'Family'  $t(378) = 3.19$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for 'Trump'  $t(375) = 3.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, the TOST procedure indicates that, while the NHST test reveals a non-significant results, the true effect is not equivalent to zero for Fusion with 'All Americans who share your Core Politics',  $t(679) = -4.55$ ,  $p = .097$ , ( $D_{z-ob} = 0.08$ ). Among Clinton supporters we had > 90% power to detect a 'small' effect of  $d_z = .15$ . Of the targets which produced a non-significant result on the paired-samples t-test, we found that the TOST analyses indicated that the true effect is likely to be below a 'level of interest' of  $d_z = .15$ , and therefore, equivalent to zero, for 'Trump',  $t(516) = 3.62$   $p < .001$ , and 'All Americans who share your core politics',  $t(546) = 3.88$   $p < .001$ .