

# An Unstable Candidate

Watching Donald Trump's Las Vegas Rally Reinforced My View That, At Our Magazine, We Can Best Serve Our Readers  
By Treating Him Like Any Other Candidate For High Office Who Is Emotionally And Mentally Unstable.

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Earlier This Year, *Atlantic* Staff Writer McKay Coppins Suggested That Voters, In The Interest Of Civic Hygiene And Personal Illumination, Attend A Trump Rally. This Would Be The Way To Understand The Candidate, His Thoughts, And His Supporters, Coppins Argued. He Himself Has Attended More Than 100 Such Gatherings Since 2016, And He Noted, Correctly, That “Nothing Quite Captures The Trump Ethos Like His Campaign Rallies.”

I Myself Have Attended Only A Few Of These Rallies (Though Among Them Was Trump's January 6, 2020, Rally On The Ellipse, Which Should Count Double). But What One Derives From The Experience Is, In The Words Of Our Colleague Tom Nichols, The Visceral Sense That Trump Is Deeply Unwell.

Attendance At Trump Rallies Can Be Metaphysically Taxing — And Some Seem To Go Longer Than A Taylor Swift Concert. So Watching Them From Beginning To End Online Is Occasionally A Welcome Substitute.

A Couple Of Weeks Ago, On C-SPAN, I Watched My First Trump Rally In Quite Some Time, A

Gathering Under A Heat Dome In Las Vegas. I Watched Not Because I Expected To Learn New About The Candidate, But Because I Had Been Alerted By Concerned Friends And Colleagues That Trump Had Attacked Me By Name. This Hadn't Happened In Quite Some Time, And Self-Interest Dictated Watching.

Trump Is Upset With Me, And With *The Atlantic*, For A Story I Wrote In September Of 2020, In Which I Reported, Among Other Things, That He Referred To American Soldiers Killed In Action As "Suckers" And "Losers." (For More On The Particulars, Please Read [This Story](#) By Adrienne LaFrance.) Trump Is Also Upset By A Profile I Wrote Late Last Year [Of Retired General Mark Milley](#), The Former Chairman Of The Joint Chiefs Of Staff, In Which Milley, A Decorated Combat Veteran, Is Portrayed As Someone Who Defended The Constitution Against Trump's Depredations. In Response To This Article, Trump [Suggested](#) That Milley Be Executed.

At His Las Vegas Rally, Trump Described Me As A "Horrible, Radical-Left Lunatic Named Goldberg" (He Hit The Word *Goldberg* With What I Perhaps, Or Perhaps Not, Overinterpreted As Special Feeling.) He Articulated, At Great Length, Why He Would Never Disparage American Service Members. (Dear Reader: He [Disparages](#) The Military Constantly.)

All Of This Was To Be Expected. What I Found Surprising, As I Watched His Entire Presentation, Was The Ratio Of [Gibberish](#) To Normal Sentences. Which Is To Say, There Was Even More Gibberish Than I Remembered In The Typical Trump Speech. The Apotheosis Of Gibberish Was His Extended Soliloquy On Sharks And Battery-Powered Boats. No Summary Could Do It Justice, So Here Is An Extended Cut:

“By The Way, A Lot Of Shark Attacks Lately. Do You Notice That? A Lot Of Sharks. I Watched Some Guys Justifying Today. “Well, They Weren’t Really That Angry. They Bit Off The Young Lady’s Leg Because Of The Fact That They Were Not Hungry, But They Misunderstood Who She Was.’ These People Are Crazy. He Said, ‘There’s No Problem With Sharks. They Just Didn’t Really Understand A Young Woman Swimming,’ Now, Who Really Got Decimated And Other People Too, A Lot Of Shark Attacks. So I Said, ‘So There’s A Shark 10 Yards Away From The Boat, 10 Yards Or Here. Do I Get Electrocuted If The Boat Is Sinking, And Water Goes Over The Battery — The Boat Is Sinking; Do I Stay On Top Of The Boat And Get Electrocuted, Or Do I Jump Over By The Shark And Not Get Electrocuted?’ ‘Nobody’s Ever Asked Me That Question.’ I Said, ‘I Think It’s A Good Question. I Think There’s A Lot Of Electric Current Coming Through That Water.’ But You Know What I’d Do If There Was A Shark Or You Get Electrocuted, I’ll Take Electrocution Every Single Time. I’m Not Getting Near The Shark. So We Going To End That. We’re Going To End It For Boats. We’re Going To End It For Trucks.”

Please Watch The Whole Thing, And As You Do, Imagine Trump’s Words Coming From The Mouth Of President Biden, And Then Imagine The Democratic Party Allowing Biden To Continue To Run For President.

Trump Overwhelms Us With Nonsense. This Is The “Banality Of Crazy,” As The Atlantic Contributor Brian Klaas Calls It. By “Us,” I Mean, Of Course, The Voting Public, But I Especially Mean The Editors And Headline-Writers Of My Industry, Who Sometimes Succumb To One Of The Most Pernicious Biases In Journalism, The Bias Toward Coherence. We Feel, Understandably, That It Is Our Job To Make Things Make Sense. But What If The Actual Story Is That Politics Today Makes No Sense?

It Works Like This: Trump Sounds Nuts, But He Can't Be Nuts, Because He's The Presumptive Nominee For President Of A Major Party, And No Major Party Would Nominate Someone Who Is Nuts. Therefore, It Is Our Responsibility To Sand Down His Rhetoric, To Identify Any Kernel Of Meaning, To Make Light Of His Bizarro Statements, To Rationalize. Which Is Why, After The Electric-Shark Speech, Much Of The Coverage Revolved Around The High Temperatures In Las Vegas, And Other Extraneities. The Associated Press Headline On A Story About The Event Read This Way: "Trump Complains About His Teleprompters At A Scorching Las Vegas Rally." *The New York Times* Headlined Its Story Thus: "In Las Vegas, Trump Appeals To Local Workers And Avoids Talk Conviction." CNN's Headline: "Trump Proposes Eliminating Taxes On Tips At Las Vegas Campaign Rally."

In My House, The Headline From The Las Vegas Rally Was The Disconcerting And Surprising News That I'm A "Radical-Left Lunatic." Outside My House, Though, The Public Should Have Been Informed That A Former And Possibly Future President Went On A Ludicrous, Illiterate Rant About Sharks And Batteries, A Rant That Calls Into Question Not Only His Fitness For Office But His Basic Cognitive Abilities.

Watching The Las Vegas Rally Reinforced My View That, At Our Magazine, We Can Best Serve Our Readers By Highlighting Aspects Of Trump's Rhetoric And Behavior That We Would Highlight About Any Other Politician, Including Joe Biden. I've Never Wanted This Magazine To Become Part Of The "Resistance." (You Just Have To Read Our Coverage Of Biden To Understand That We Are Not.) I Simply Believe That We Should Tell The Unadorned Truth About Trump, And Treat Him Like Any Other Candidate For High Office ***Who Is Emotionally And Mentally Unstable***. A Bias Toward Coherence Is Understandable. But ***Reality*** Is What

We Must Live With Long After The Debates And Rallies Are Over.

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