They stood on stages at locations chosen to accentuate the meaning of their words: in university auditoriums, town squares, a performing arts center, a military aircraft hanger, the steps of the US Capitol. The men stood, anyway (except for one who digitally mailed in his announcement as a blog post). The two women relied on video, and the second made a performative point of turning away from an in-screen video of the first.

Their speeches blended autobiographical success stories with policy diagnoses and calls for support. A majority, 13 of the 21, invoked the American Dream (see Appendix A). They stressed their unique qualifications. They castigated the leadership of the opposite party and the politicians in Washington, D.C. They exalted the resilience and idealism of other Americans, especially their family members and military personnel. They trotted out slogans, phrases they hoped would catch on to advance their messages and brands.
And they all uttered the pivotal sentence declaring their candidacy for the presidency of the United States of America.

Now we enter the nomination contest debate season. A first cut arrives for the large Republican field even before the first debate begins, since only the top ten in the polls get to interact onstage at the August 6 Fox/Facebook debate. It is a good time to review what each of the candidates said at their self-designated debut moments in the context of what the public re-circulated of what they said.

**Announcement Strategy and Form**

There is rarely a better opportunity for an aspirant to a presidential nomination to benefit from exclusive public focus than on the day of candidacy declaration. For that reason, along with whatever truth adheres to the cliche about the value of a good first impression, campaigns devote considerable effort to the composition of the words and pictures to be released during the announcement.

In the spring and summer of 2015, the campaigns opted for one of three basic approaches to their candidates’ formal debut:

- **The traditional method** featured a speech to an assembled, reliably enthusiastic, and perhaps partially paid crowd; the cheers, applause, smiles, and signs become part of the message. So too do any disruptions. In 1999, AIDS activists began shouting during Al Gore’s announcement speech in Carthage TN, and their banners obstructed the television cameras’ view of the candidate.

- **The digital method** featured a video, tweets, and posts, sacrificing the excitement of a live and supportive audience in favor of greater control over content and lowered expectations about the capacity of the candidate to construct and perform at an event. This was the option chosen by Clinton, Fiorina, and Webb.

- **The delay for dollars method** builds on a pre-announcement ritual that has been part of public expectations for decades. This year, candidates teasing media interviewers, publicized events in key states, and formation of committees involved campaigning in all but legal name had a new rationale, so that the candidate could personally raise more funds for a super PAC; Bush and Walker pursued this course of action most noticeably. Others may have as well. As can be seen in the accompanying chart, 18 of the 21 candidates had super PACs and/or 501 (c) entities operating on their behalf at the times of their announcements. The exceptions: Chafee, Sanders, and Trump.

Sanders was the true outlier, opening with a small press conference on the steps of the US Capitol. He and Clinton later delivered traditional speeches punctuating their announcements; by that time, however, their message and brands were already public and reacted to, so we consider these stump speeches.

The form of the announcement speech --and, for that matter, the early stump speeches-- consists of seven parts, listed here in the order they often appear:

1. **The welcome**, in which the speaker explains the choice of location in symbolic terms and thanks people for their attention and attendance. Barack Obama, 2007: “It was here, in Springfield [IL], where I saw all that is America converge -- farmers and teachers, businessmen and laborers, all of them with a story to tell,
all of them seeking a seat at the table, all of them clamoring to be heard. I made
lasting friendships here -- friends that I see in the audience today."

2. The onerous backstory, in which the speaker recounts how difficult life was for
ancestors if not self.

3. The rise to power, in which the speaker achieves increasingly greater things with
the help of individuals along the way, some of whom “are here today” and get duly
recognized.

4. The touting of executive accomplishments, in which the speaker establishes
competency to hold the office sought: “When I became governor, things were bad;
today, things are good.” Legislators have a harder time with this segment.

5. The foreboding national horizon, in which the speaker assesses threats at home
and abroad. Bill Clinton, 1991: “Middle class people are spending more hours on the job,
spending less time with their children, bringing home a smaller paycheck to pay more for
health care and housing and education. Our streets are meaner, our families are broken,
our health care is the costliest in the world and we get less for it. The country is headed
in the wrong direction fast, slipping behind, losing our way...and all we have out of
Washington is status quo paralysis. No vision, no action. Just neglect, selfishness, and
division.”

6. The issue litany, in which the speaker takes positions that contrast
advantageously with rivals and opponents. On these issues, “we” are divided against
“them,” and “I will fight for us.” Transitions between issue positions are accomplished via
a repeated phrase. George W. Bush, 1999: “You’ve heard me talk about compassionate
conservatism. These goals are what I mean. It is conservative to cut taxes. It is
compassionate to help people save and give and build. It is conservative to reform
welfare by insisting on work. It is compassionate to take the side of charities and
churches that confront the suffering which remains.”

7. The rousing conclusion, in which life improves because we are
Americans. Ronald Reagan, 1979: “Someone once said that the difference between an
American and any other kind of person is that an American lives in anticipation of the
future because he knows it will be a great place.”

In the speech capsules that follow we have focused on what stands out against this
formalized structure, what seemed most politically distinctive, what marketers refer to as
the unique selling proposition. That does not necessarily correspond to what was most
important to the campaign from a policy agenda perspective. Nor does it correspond
necessarily to what the public echoed from the speech.

The 2015 Class: Rhetoric and Response (In Alphabetical Order)

Jeb Bush laced his speech with epigrammatic zingers aimed at the Democrats. “They
have offered a progressive agenda that includes everything but progress.” “This
supposedly risk-averse administration is also running us straight in the direction of the
greatest risk of all --military inferiority.” His main theme, however, was “the right to rise,”
with its emphasis on the importance of opportunity, “nuestra causa de oportunidad para
todos.” He promised four percent economic growth and nineteen million new jobs,
predicating it on his record while governor of Florida.
His word cloud shows that talk about him did feature the “economy.” However, a comment he made on July 8 garnered negative attention for seeming to favor having Americans work “longer hours.” His slogan and promised job creation and growth rate numbers were not visible.

**Ben Carson’s** speech was preceded by a gospel choir rendition of “Lose Yourself,” a song by a fellow Detroit native, Eminem. He said he was not a politician “because I am not going to do what is politically expedient, I am going to do what is right.” He assailed manipulative people “who think that they are the kingmakers, the rulers of thought.” He promised that “we are going to change the government into something that looks more like a well-run business than a behemoth of inefficiency.”

**Lincoln Chafee** addressed an audience in Founders Hall at George Mason University’s Arlington VA campus. He eschewed autobiography and plowed straight into his issue litany, advocating “environmental stewardship,” disentanglement from “expensive wars,” and, in a “bold embrace of internationalism,” converting the US to the metric system. In a three minute video, he proudly pointed out that he has been elected to government office nine times. The metric system reference registered and not much else.

**Chris Christie** spoke of emotion as well as with emotion to bear out his slogans as the candidate who is “telling it like it is”: “real, honest, direct.” (Is he old enough to remember Howard Cosell?) “Americans are not angry, Americans are filled with anxiety. They're filled with anxiety because they look to Washington D.C. and they see a government that not only doesn't work anymore, it doesn't even talk to each other anymore. It doesn't even try to pretend to work anymore.” Christie’s strained relationship with teacher’s unions showed up on the word cloud, as “Education Association” were prominent.

**Hillary Clinton** did not speak or appear in her video until the final forty-five seconds. She was preceded by “everyday Americans” preparing to embark on new adventures. The first were women, followed by Hispanics, Asians, African-Americans, and (what appeared to be) gays and a traditional family. She popped up to say she was “getting ready, too,” and expressed her desire to be their “champion” as president. In contrast to her speeches, the video announcement did not contain policy diagnoses and prescriptions, although some of the personal stories illustrated them.

**Ted Cruz** spoke from his ideological home, Liberty University, “the largest Christian university in the world.” He chose to announce on the 240th anniversary of Patrick Henry’s “give me liberty” speech down the road in Richmond. His father’s hard life was redeemed by Christ. He asks his audience to imagine a litany of changes which could be accomplished if they also imagined “millions of courageous conservatives, all across America, rising up together to say in unison ‘we demand our liberty.’” He calls on them to text “imagine” or “Constitution.”

**Carly Fiorina’s** announcement video lasted scarcely a minute. It was long enough for her to cast herself as the anti-Clinton and an citizen politician. There were no issue position statements. The bio on her web site featured her rise from a secretary to CEO.

(Jim Gilmore declared for the presidency after our study set.)
**Lindsey Graham** stood for “Security Through Strength.” He said he was “ready to be Commander-in-Chief on day one,” with more national security experience than any other candidate. “That includes you, Hillary.” In an e-book autobiography available for downloading on his campaign website, Graham depicted himself as never backing down from a challenge. He declared that peaceful co-existence with radical Islam was an impossibility. While Middle Eastern nations dominate his top five issues, on his word cloud “confederate flag” stood out.

**Mike Huckabee** rooted his announcement speech in the language and perspective of his Arkansas hometown. He appealed to folks to join him on a journey “From Hope to Higher Ground.” “How can anyone ever trust government again if they steal from us and lie to us?....When I hear the current President say he wants Christians to get off their high horse so we can make nice with radical jihadists, I wonder if he could watch a western from the fifties and be able to figure out who the good guys and bad guys are!”

**Bobby Jindal** claimed that none of the “great talkers” among his competition could match the record of his state administration in shrinking the size of government. Additionally, “I am the only candidate who has written a replacement plan” for Obamacare based on free-market principles. A proud Christian, he said the following “slowly, so that even Hillary Clinton can understand it. American did not create religious liberty, religious liberty created the United States of America.” His slogan: “Believe Again.” “Marriage” and “woman” surfaced on his word cloud, along with other referents to cultural issues.

**(John Kasich declared for the presidency after our study set.)**

**Martin O’Malley** assailed the economic concentration of power turning “our land of opportunity into a land of inequality.” He depicted the two “royal families,” Bush and Clinton, in league with the CEO of Goldman Sachs. “Tell me how it is,” in his rhetorical question refrain, “that you can get pulled over in this country for having a broken taillight, but if you wreck the economy, you’re absolutely untouchable?” O’Malley pledged himself to “rebuilding the American Dream we share.” “Hillary Clinton” showed up prominently on his word cloud. So did “Bernie Sanders.”

**George Pataki** stuck closely to the standard phrases and components of the candidate announcement speech. He spoke of Ellis Island and Peekskill New York, criticized government in Washington DC as too big, said that members of Congress should live like normal Americans, and made repeated references to the events of September 11, when he was Governor of New York. “Sponsor” “Terrorism” and “Iran” stood out on his word cloud.

**Rand Paul** labeled and enunciated his campaign message straight away: “We have come to take our country back.” He blamed “both parties and the entire political system” for rising government debt. While vowing to call the enemy by its name “Radical Islam” and defend the country from it, he also promised to end “unconstitutional surveillance” on his first day as president. His campaign slogan: “Defeat the Washington Machine and Unleash the American Dream.”

**Rick Perry** surveyed the American political landscape from the perspective of a farm child turned soldier turned Governor. “No decision has done more harm,” he said,” than the president’s withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.” He addressed by turns
millennials, “forgotten Americans,” and small business. He spoke about three of the military heroes on his stage, including those featured in the books/films *American Sniper* (the widow being present) and *Lone Survivor*. The word cloud was dominated by the words “Charleston” “shooting” and “accident.”

**Marco Rubio** emphasized his relative youth: “the time has come for our generation to lead the way toward a new American Century.” Too many leaders are stuck in the last century, he asserted. By overhauling the education system and “empowering American innovation,” among other things, better-paying jobs could be created. “I have heard some suggest that I should step aside and wait my turn. But I cannot. Because I believe our very identity as an exceptional nation is at stake, and I can make a difference as President.”

**Bernie Sanders** began by telling the reporters gathered for his statement that he did not have a lot of time. “The major issue is how do we create an economy that works for all of our people rather than a small number of billionaires, and the second issue, directly related, is the fact that as a result of the disastrous Supreme Court decision on Citizens United, we now have a political situation where billionaires are literally able to buy themselves elections and candidates. Let’s not kid ourselves. That is the reality right now.” He closed by admonishing the media not to treat this as a “campaign soap opera.” His web site called for a “political revolution.”

**Rick Santorum** portrayed himself as a coal-miner’s son serving as a tribune for the American worker. He assailed Clinton, big government, and big business, who among other things call for “a massive influx in unskilled labor.” Santorum recounted his record as a candidate who won two statewide elections in Democratic-dominated Pennsylvania and eleven states in the 2012 Republican primaries. He vowed to “Take Back America.” His word cloud featured “Pope” “Restoring Marriage,” and, oddly, “Climate Change.”

**Donald Trump** (about whom more in the next section) opened with a potshot at his fellow candidates, whose announcements in poorly air-conditioned venues before sparse crowds indicated that they were unlikely to be able to defeat ISIS. Strength and competence continued to serve as his principal contrast terms. He spoke of how America’s feckless leadership, corporate as well as political, had allowed their counterparts in other nations to take advantage of the American people. He promised to “Make America Great Again” but those words did not echo well. Instead, references to a critical tweet by actress America Ferrera prevailed on his word cloud.

“Traveling the country,” **Scott Walker** recounted, “I’ve heard people say that they are tired of politicians who only tell them what they’re against and why they should vote against someone. Americans want to vote FOR something and FOR someone. So let me tell you what I’m for: I’m for Reform. Growth. Safety.” Walker described his accomplishments and ambitions as “big” and “bold.” In a sort of Venn diagram of prose, he said he alone was both a fighter and a winner. “I will fight and win for you.” “Living” “Wage” are featured on his word cloud, a sign of intense interest by unions and those concerned about unions.

**James Webb** announced in epistolary fashion. “Dear Friends,” began his 2,000 word letter. Webb wrote that it is time for a fresh approach not dependent on consultants and big money. As credentials to be Commander-in-Chief, Webb cited his opposition to the
war in Iraq and the attack on Libya; he also voiced skepticism about the nuclear deal with Iran and took credit for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The small volume of reaction as detected through the word cloud shows little thematic resonance for what Webb wrote.

Conclusion

The word clouds depict nothing so much as clutter. Given that the people echoing this early on are literal political attentives, this clutter shows how hard it is for announcement speeches to resonate over a period of months. The message and brand must be repeated in order to cut through, just as the campaign maxim bids. The large number of contenders vitiates the situation.

Given the 30-45 minute-length of the standard announcement speech, one must wonder about the enduring value in a digital environment of ringing all the changes of the form. Do the seven components still coalesce into a reassuringly recognizable background against which keywords can emerge sharply, or does their familiarity desensitize the ever-distracted audience mind and dispatch the candidate’s message and brand straight into the cloud clutter? Strategists and speakers have much to learn about applying word cloud data and drawing good lessons from them for actionable analysis.

We can say with confidence based on our research that talk about the 2016 presidential candidates during the announcement period revolved around five of the entrants:

- Donald J. Trump, the non-political billionaire who promised to fire America’s incompetent politicians in order to rescue the country from its mostly non-white foreign threats. Trump’s speech and subsequent tweets stood out much more than of other unorthodox Republican change agents Benjamin Carson, Carly Fiorina, and Rand Paul.

- Bernie Sanders, the small-state Senator who promised to rescue the country from billionaires through a political revolution in how money flows into campaigns and out from the federal government, stood out much more than Lincoln Chafee, Martin O’Malley, and the ideological Democratic outlier unorthodoxly James Webb.

- Hillary Clinton, the familiar combination of progressive policy proposals and suspicious self-protective set-ups, was the constant. As the hands-down favorite for the nomination, she occupies her own category: a cynosure of qualified support from Democrats and stuck car-alarm enmity from Republicans.

- Ted Cruz, who staked an early claim to be the top crusader for Christian conservatism out-performed Mike Huckabee, Bobby Jindal, and Rick Santorum by a large margin in the conversation, although the three rivals were not at the bottom of the pack.

- Jeb Bush, whose persona and campaign remained indistinct from his family name and prodigious fundraising, nevertheless attracted a constant level of attention in conversation, ahead of Chris Christie, Marco Rubio and Scott Walker,
and far ahead than Lindsey Graham, John Kasich, George Pataki, and Rick Perry.

We do not think the announcement speech contents themselves alone determined the higher conversational salience of these five speakers. But the contents, and the circumstances of their delivery, did set loose categorical boundaries for how the public would come to understand these candidates as the campaign process continued.
## Appendix A: Table of 2016 Presidential Candidacy Announcements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2016 Presidential Candidacy Announcements</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Mention of American Dream?</th>
<th>Keywords/Slogan</th>
<th>Super PAC/501?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Wave</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rand Paul</td>
<td>4/7/2015</td>
<td>Louisville KY</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Defeat the Washington Machine/Unleash the American Dream</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>4/12/2015</td>
<td>(Video)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Champion of Everyday Americans.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bernie Sanders</td>
<td>4/30/2015</td>
<td>US Capitol presser</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Billionaires; political revolution.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly Fiorina</td>
<td>5/4/2015</td>
<td>(Video)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Citizens and a leader.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Huckabee</td>
<td>5/6/2015</td>
<td>Hope AR</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>From Hope to Higher Ground.</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Wave</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rick Santorum</td>
<td>5/27/2015</td>
<td>Butler PA</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Take back America, workers.</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin O’Malley</td>
<td>5/30/2015</td>
<td>Baltimore MD</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Rebuilding the American Dream we share.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey Graham</td>
<td>6/2/2015</td>
<td>Central, SC</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Security through Strength. C-in-C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald Trump</td>
<td>6/16/2015</td>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Strength/Strong. Deal. Make America Great Again.</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Bobby Jindal</td>
<td>6/24/2015</td>
<td>Kenner LA</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Believe Again.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Christie</td>
<td>6/30/2015</td>
<td>Livingston NJ</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Telling It Like It Is.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Webb</td>
<td>7/2/2015</td>
<td>(Open letter/blog)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Leadership You Can Trust.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott Walker</td>
<td>7/13/2015</td>
<td>Waukesha WI</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Fight and Win. Reform, Growth, Safety.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Outside of Study</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>John Kasich</td>
<td>7/21/2015</td>
<td>Columbus OH</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>He’s for All of Us. Balanced budgets.</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Jim Gilmore</td>
<td>7/30/2015</td>
<td>(Video)</td>
<td>not reviewed</td>
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