

# **The Real Political Agenda of Barack Obama**

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## **Introduction**

Every four years in November, the United States fights over who they think the best presidential candidate is. Sometimes people choose their favorite candidate based on their political party, others because their parents like the candidate, and many because they believe them to be the best for our country's future. Each typically has different things that make them appealing to the public. One good example is Donald Trump's unorthodox or eccentric way of speaking. Another is Barack Obama's intricate and unique speech writing and speaking ability. Barack Obama has always been a president that people considered a great speaker, but why were his speeches so compelling and moving? By looking at some of Barack Obama's speeches, one can see that many of the things he habitually included were things that united everyone together and explain how we, as Americans, can do the greatest good. I hypothesize that because he constantly used words that appealed to the majority of Americans, he was able to be more compelling and genuine to his audience.

## **Background**

Throughout Barack Obama's presidency he was always known for his compelling and entertaining speaking ability. Some people believe that he is one of the best presidential speakers of all time and they state that it is mostly because he uses creative language with a clear purpose. Obama often uses the "rule of three" in which he addresses things that are deeply embedded in our culture, and he uses lots of repetition or restatement of ideas to really drive his points to his audience ("Why Barack Obama will be Remembered," 2016). These uses of language allow for Obama to appeal to the variety of people and to effectively get his points across to his viewers. Part of his charm may also be because he was very personable who never had any outbursts or negative scenes portrayed in the media. He was always respectful to others and this was reciprocated through his speeches. Barack Obama's intentions are clear when you look at his word choice and the repetition of words that he chooses. These words show the type of president that Obama was and the ideals that he held close to him which makes him one of the most praised speakers of all time.

## **Study of Corpus**

Learning about the corpus, which is a collection of written texts, was quite a different and somewhat difficult task to learn about. At first, I thought it would be easy because it was simply plugging in the speeches that I chose and finding similarities within the word choices that were used throughout the speeches. This led me to discover the words that were used most frequently, specifically nouns, and to filter out the ones that weren't used as frequently. After conducting my corpus, I realized that it is much more time consuming and tedious than I first thought. Honestly, I think I learned the most about creating a corpus while I was creating it, in that, there are several features that you can limit your results to. I decided for my

project to limit my word count results to nouns. I decided to do this because my word count list was so large that most of the results I was getting were simple words that are commonly used such as conjunctions and pronouns. This limited my search to meaningful word choices that could help me narrow down some of the more important words that he was using throughout his speeches.

In my study, I decided to use a variety of different speeches that all happened at different times during Obama’s presidency. When deciding between which ones to use, I first looked at some of the speeches he was most known for and then opted for a more variety of years during his presidency to account for some of the changes that he may have made to his speech tendencies over time. When analyzing these sources, I used the electronic transcript of what Obama said and filtered out any words that weren’t said by him. For example, I omitted the words like applause, laughter, and any words that were spoken by anyone other than Obama (only for the interview source). I used transcripts to avoid as much bias as possible because they go off of exactly what President Obama spoke during these speeches, even if what he prepared beforehand might be slightly different.

### Word Count

Overall, the corpus containing all 20 of my articles included 61,965 words and 3,263 sentences. **Figure 2** illustrates the words, articles, and sentences used in the speeches. This significant amount of words allowed for me to have a broader idea of what words were actually used most often over the course of these speeches. Three of the most common words that were significant and used a lot throughout the corpus were “people,” “Americans,” and “nation.” **Figure 1** illustrates the most commonly used words in the speeches/articles. These words indicate some of the reasons why people may have been so compelled during his speeches as well as demonstrate what some of his ideals were based on the use of these words. It’s not surprising that Obama’s most commonly used noun is “people” because he commonly used this word when referring to different groups that he discussed in his speeches.

Lemma	Frequency ↑ ↓	Lemma	Frequency ↑ ↓	Lemma	Frequency ↑ ↓
1 people	307 ***	16 democracy	77 ***	35 power	52 ***
2 america	243 ***	17 united	76 ***	36 citizen	51 ***
3 year	181 ***	18 thing	76 ***	37 security	48 ***
4 country	177 ***	19 states	74 ***	38 future	47 ***
5 world	147 ***	20 generation	70 ***	39 god	47 ***
6 time	145 ***	21 change	70 ***	40 law	45 ***
7 way	104 ***	22 right	70 ***	41 peace	45 ***
8 nation	102 ***	23 community	65 ***	42 opportunity	44 ***
9 woman	98 ***	24 day	65 ***	43 cuba	42 ***
10 americans	97 ***	25 war	65 ***	44 progress	42 ***
11 life	95 ***	26 work	64 ***	45 economy	42 ***
12 child	94 ***	27 part	64 ***	46 freedom	41 ***
13 today	87 ***	28 place	61 ***	47 faith	41 ***
14 man	86 ***	29 job	60 ***	48 everybody	41 ***
15 family	83 ***	30 government	58 ***	49 home	41 ***
16 story	80 ***	31 history	58 ***	50 effort	41 ***
17 president	77 ***	32 issue	55 ***		

Figure 1

COUNTS ⓘ	
Tokens	71,923
Words	61,965
Sentences	3,263
Documents	20

Figure 2

### Word Interplay

After analyzing the nouns that were found in my corpus, I further analyzed the chosen words for their meanings in context with the speeches that I chose. The words I looked at were people," "Americans," and nation." One of the most commonly used words was "people," and as you can imagine, it was used in many different forms. However, after analyzing the bulk of Obama's use of the word, I came to the conclusion that he referred to a wide variety of different groups as people with human qualities, even in some of his speeches about controversial matters. This highlights one of Obama's main ideals that we should care for everyone regardless of where they are from or what nationality they may be. This leads me into his use of "Americans" which he uses as a technique to appeal to his audience, which is in this case, Americans. He uses patriotism and praise to help be a part of an inclusive, sympathetic, and peaceful existence. This allows Obama to connect with his audience on a deeper level. The last word I used was "nation" which encompasses the unity and goodness that our nation should be. This shows Obama's clear vision of creating a nation where we all help others and unite together for good. He uses the word "nation" to play off of the American idea that we, as Americans, should help other nations in any way that we can. He praises America and encourages us to help others because of our goodness and kindness as a nation.

For the word "people," I found that Obama talked about a variety of different kinds. **Figure 1** illustrates the use of the word "people" throughout the speeches. He mostly mentions Americans but also brings up Trinity, black, Alaskan, Iraqi, people in general, and others. The use of the word "people" seems to be used as a pattern to describe his audience or who he is addressing. The use of "people" could relate to Obama wanting to acknowledge the fact that everyone is a person and he makes it clear what type of people he is addressing in his speeches. One of the most common uses of the word "people" is referring to Americans. This is no surprise considering that Americans are typically his audience and the people he is trying to appeal to. He refers to many American ideals when talking about people.

When it comes to Obama's use of the word "Americans," he uses many different variations of who is included as an American. **Figure 2** illustrates the use of the word "Americans" in the speeches. He purposely chooses to use "American" multiple times throughout his speeches in order to appeal to his audience. Obama will typically refer to different minority groups as Americans because he wants to group them into the same group as the majority, who may not align themselves with the minority group in any other way. For example, a white, conservative man might not align himself with a radical, black, gay man. By including all groups into the term "American," he unites people together, even with their perceived differences. Obama uses this tactic often in order to promote unity and to promote the inclusive agenda that he supports.

The word "nation" is used throughout Obama's speeches to indicate groups of countries or people that are united together. **Figure 3** illustrates the use of the word "nation" in that speeches. In the corpus, I noticed that when he talks about "nation" he specifically refers to mostly "our nation." He continuously refers to many ideals that we hold as Americans to talk about what we need to accomplish or work for,

such as rebuilding, renewing, achievement, and well-being. However, he also discusses the things that we need to improve on in order to achieve the ideal America that he is trying to accomplish. The things he talks about are rising and falling, conquering fear, stains, issues, and concerns, among others. These words are used to appeal to Americans because we do not typically align ourselves with these attributes, meaning that we feel the need to fix it in order to create a better America of achievement, which is what Americans are good at doing.

1 doc00 Yes man.</s></s>A man who butchers his own people to secure his own power.</s></s>He has repudi-  
2 doc00 He's a bad guy.</s></s>The world, and the Iraqi people, would be better off without him.</s></s>But I all-  
3 doc00 is and the Egyptians, stop oppressing their own people, and suppressing dissent, and tolerating corrup-  
4 doc01 years ago, in the furthest reaches of Alaska, the people of a small, thousand-year-old, oceanfront huntin-  
5 doc01 politicians of almost every political persuasion, people are realizing that an oil future is not a secure fut-  
6 doc01 mit the need for change is coming from the very people who are running the country.</s></s>By now, the  
7 doc01 greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people, "It's bad when the star w-  
8 doc02 start today.</s></s>Thank you.</s></s>"We the people, in order to form a more perfect union..." - 221  
9 doc02 under the law: a Constitution that promised its people liberty and justice and a union that could be and  
10 doc02 in the decency and generosity of the American people.</s></s>But it also comes from my own story.</s>  
11 doc02 the contrary, we saw how hungry the American people were for this message of unity.</s></s>Despite il-  
12 doc02 be the experience of my first service at Trinity." People began to shout, to rise from their seats and clap.  
13 doc02 the city, I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, M-  
14 doc02 med once more a vessel carrying the story of a people into future generations and into a larger world.</s>  
15 doc02 it need to feel shame about - memories that all people might study and cherish, and with which we cou-  
16 doc02 stereotypes that made me cringe.</s></s>These people are a part of me.</s></s>And they are part of Am-  
17 doc02 I and in the pews.</s></s>The fact that so many people are surprised to hear that anger in some of Rev-  
18 doc02 in my faith in God and my faith in the American people - that, working together, we can move beyond s-  
19 doc02 munity does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination - and current i-  
20 doc02 n in this campaign whether or not the American people think that I somehow believe or sympathize with

Figure 3

1 doc00 minate their stores of nuclear material, and that nations like Pakistan and India never use the terrible we-  
2 doc01 acted nearly every aspect of our well-being as a nation.</s></s>And never have the possible solutions I  
3 doc01 ng millions of fuel-efficient cars.</s></s>Brazil, a nation that once relied on foreign countries to import 80  
4 doc01 hesitated to raise fuel economy standards as a nation in part because of a very legitimate concern - th-  
5 doc01 this moment, we can change the course of this nation forever.</s></s>I hope we can start today.</s></s>  
6 doc02 mately unfinished.</s></s>It was stained by this nation's original sin of slavery, a question that divided the  
7 doc02 America lived in one of the world's poorest nations.</s></s>I am married to a black American who c-  
8 doc02 eared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts - that out of me  
9 doc02 ate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation, and that rightly offend white and black alike.</s>  
10 doc02 s.</s></s>But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now.</s></s>We wo-  
11 doc02 n change.</s></s>That is the true genius of this nation.</s></s>What we have already achieved gives t-  
12 doc02 d around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen; by people who waited three ho-  
13 doc02 look forward to working with them to renew this nation's promise in the months ahead.</s></s>I want to ti-  
14 doc02 he rock of our family and the love of my life, our nation's next first lady, Michelle Obama.</s></s>Sasha a-  
15 doc02 ll, I will ask you join in the work of remaking this nation the only way it's been done in America for 221 y-  
16 doc02 rts.</s></s>In this country, we rise or fall as one nation - as one people.</s></s>Let us resist the tempt-  
17 doc02 I back our progress.</s></s>As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours, "We are not enemies  
18 doc02 proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the sca-  
19 doc02 lowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs ar-  
20 doc02 been a part of America's story.</s></s>The first nation to recognize my country was Morocco.</s></s>Ir-

Figure 5

1 doc01 generations to come.</s></s>Of course, many Americans have gotten this point, and it's true that the call  
2 doc02 verful coalition of African-Americans and white Americans.</s></s>This is not to say that race has not be-  
3 doc02 </s></s>Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privi-  
4 doc02 and yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist, wit-  
5 doc02 and better jobs - to the larger aspirations of all Americans: the white woman struggling to break the glass  
6 doc02 for previous generations.</s></s>It requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to com-  
7 doc02 and the homes for sale that once belonged to Americans from every religion, every region, every walk of  
8 doc02 I my heart that this is what the vast majority of Americans want for this country.</s></s>This union may n-  
9 doc02 can, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled - Americans who sent a message to the world that we have  
10 doc02 doors of perfect strangers; from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized, and proved th-  
11 doc02 our bonds of affection.</s></s>And, to those Americans whose support I have yet to earn, I may not ha-  
12 doc02 and now Pakistan determined to kill as many Americans as they possibly can.</s></s>But that is not yet  
13 doc02 se.) At the same time, we will encourage more Americans to study in Muslim communities.</s></s>And w-  
14 doc02 se things must be done in partnership.</s></s>Americans are ready to join with citizens and governments  
15 doc02 some here tonight as an American who, like all Americans, kneels to pray with you today and will stand b-  
16 doc02 ar hearts are full of hope and thanks for the 13 Americans who survived the shooting, including the Congr-  
17 doc02 Is, who knew first and foremost that we are all Americans, and that we can question each other's ideas  
18 doc02 over our hearts, and we commit ourselves as Americans to forging a country that is forever worthy of be-  
19 doc02 people.</s></s>(Applause.) This generation of Americans has been tested by crises that steeled our resc-  
20 doc02 ask and a gift for reinvention.</s></s>My fellow Americans, we are made for this moment, and we will sei-

Figure 4

## Conclusion

After completing my corpus, the real agenda and ideals that Barack Obama held as a president really stuck out to me. Many things, such as being good and helpful people to others, were emphasized with his use of rhetoric convincing his audience that we should want to do the same. One can tell that Obama really cared about unity, not just in the United States, but for all countries. He does accept the fact that we will not always agree, but he never alienizes or villainizes the other side, which I think says a lot about who he was as president. After analyzing this data, it made me think about the things that we can learn from simply putting together a corpus of information to find tendencies or similarities in data. I think it would be quite interesting to try these same projects with other presidents, like Bush or Trump, to see if any of their true ideals come out in their speeches. The rhetoric and word choice that Obama uses is unique and creative, allowing for many people to feel moved by his speeches. This corpus only confirmed the fact that Obama was one of the best presidential speakers of all time and that his ideals align with the greater good for the entire world, not just the United States of America.

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