

Leader's Charisma: An Analysis of the Victory Speeches of Barack Obama

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Abstract:

After an important election victory, as a common tradition, political leaders connect with supporters through the aptly crafted victory speeches. In two hundred years of American political history; Barack Obama emerged as one of the most influential political speaker who led Democratic Party supporters by infusion of energy and unprecedented engagement after each victory. His speeches are testament to the brilliant oratory skills and therefore analysed herein to recognize the reasons for his fame as an orator. The paper evaluates all the victory speeches of Barack Obama to show interconnections between common speech elements, wordplay, themes, contextual occasions, word frequency, and presents a comparative comprehensive analysis.

Keywords: victory, Obama, orator, elections, speech, syllable.

Introduction

The American politics has a long history of witnessing a ritual that has been the delivery of victory speeches. A victory speech carries emotion that is very distinct from the speeches delivered before winning an election by a political leader. The zest to win the elections takes over as the main objective before elections. Once the elections are over and the results are public, political leaders' energy which is earlier channelised towards winning the elections, gets transformed into exuberance if the election results are in favour.

After the winning streak, the leader focuses over the task of addressing supporters whether they win with a big margin or a fractional one. A victory speech is the perfect culmination point of the synergy and hard work of a lot of party workers, co-party leaders, and the people who voted for their leader. Casted vote not only symbolizes their support but also underpins their hopes for a better future. People eagerly wait for the leader to make victorious declarations that align with the chosen direction of their lives.

Evidently the Americans posted their faith twice in a charismatic and an eloquent orator, Barack Hussein Obama II, the 44th President of the United States of America. The paper highlights the content analysis of the victory speeches of Barack Obama, who brought electrifying energy levels in his audience and charged them with hopes of a better America. His five victory speeches have been analysed to delineate how he cater to the expectations of his supporters and the destruction done to his opponents post his win in the elections.

The victory occasions

Barack Obama during his extensive political career gave five victory speeches namely the Iowa Caucus Victory Speech January 03, 2008, South Carolina Primary Victory Speech on January 26, 2008, Democratic Nomination Victory Speech on June 03, 2008, President-Elect Victory Speech on November 04, 2008 and the Second Presidential Election Victory Speech on November 06, 2008.

Obama had already won all stages of elections in 2008, defeating the front runner in the Democratic Primaries, Senator Hilary Clinton and thereafter finally defeated the Republican candidate John McCain, a senior Senator from Arizona. Further in 2012, Obama defended his Presidential candidacy for the second time when he defeated the Republican candidate, a businessman and former Governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts..

A closer look at Obama's victory speeches

Once the climax of the elections is reached and the results are out, the energy of the winning side reaches its pinnacle. The supporters who are tirelessly working till now are looking forward to hear from their leader. Obama's supporters too were bubbling with vigour and passion and were waiting for such a speech from their leader every time he won. Obama became the first Afro-American to win American elections. Obama's victory speeches also carried an eloquence which is till date considered par excellence. He uses various rhetorical techniques to be quoted as the most eloquent speaker of all times. An American online magazine quotes Seth Masket that "Barack Obama will long stand out among contemporary presidents for the strength of his speeches, especially since he was immediately succeeded by someone with little capacity for matching them" (Pacific Standard, "The Effectiveness of Obama's Oratory"). David Kusnet, the Chief speechwriter for Former President Bill Clinton during the 1992 campaign, wrote an article with the title "Obama is the nation's orator-in-chief, and he deserves the title and the accolades." The title itself celebrates Obama as a great orator.

A news editor states that Obama was a “gifted writer”; he “understood the power of words to elicit images and rouse passions in settings from the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., to the banks of the Nile in Cairo. His sentences soothed and stung, coaxed and challenged, drawing fits from his critics while urging his supporters to seek moral and political transcendence” (Fleishman, “Eloquence and literary power make President Obama one of the nation’s great orators”).

The victory speeches of Obama when breakdown into further the elements in detail, we see that how he has mastered the craft of rhetoric as an art. This been achieved by a careful selection of words, sentences, and the use of very carefully picked rhetorical strategies to create magical speeches while dealing with the sentiments of his supporters and his adversaries. The detailed analysis of these speeches is as follows:

1. Victory Speech one: Iowa Caucus Victory Speech, January 03, 2008

Relevance of the Speech: The victory speech was delivered at a very crucial juncture as it was the first most critical win for Obama as it set the ground for the fact that America was ready for its first Afro-American President. The introductory line of the speech “they said this day would never come” was a clear proof of it.

Wordplay:

Obama uses repetition of certain words as a key strategy to emphasize his point. Various phrases which have been repeated in the speech are “they said”, “You have done”, “You said”, “I’ll be a President”, “I know”, “This was the moment”, “Hope is what” and “America.” The repetition of words creates a beautiful rhythm in his speech. Alliteration as a technique has been used at few places: “affordable and available”, “brick by brick, block by block, calloused hand by calloused hand”,

Main theme:

Obama uses words to define this victory as a symbol of positivity and faith that the people have shown in him and says it is a reply to those people who thought he’ll not be successful because of his race and religion. The main objective was to tell the American people to further vote for him as he would be a President who will make America better and will keep them united.

2. Victory Speech two: South Carolina Primary Victory Speech, January 26, 2008

Relevance of the Speech:

He uses the phrase "Yes We Can" which later was quoted again and again in his speeches and became quite popular in connecting his audience to him. He states that Iowa Win was not a "fluke" but he's here to stay and become the President of America.

Wordplay:

Obama uses repetition of words /phrases to emphasize his points. The words repeated were "the most", "change", "status quo", "a politics", "the assumption", "South Carolina", "can't afford", "this election", "change" and "Yes, we can."

Main theme:

He primarily talks about how various themes like unity, health care, lobbyists trying to affect government policies, changing the status quo in Washington, jobs gone outside America, taxes and the change that his government will bring as compared to the Republicans.

3. Victory Speech three: Democratic Nomination Victory Speech on June 03, 2008

Relevance of the Speech:

The Primaries ended at this stage of elections. He primarily thanks people who really worked hard for him. The speech was very relevant as this was the first time he clearly states that he will be the official Democratic Presidential nominee for the elections. It was the longest victory speech delivered by Barack Obama.

Wordplay:

Obama uses repetition of words /phrases to emphasize his points. The words repeated were "Thank you", "because you", "I want to", "Change", "John McCain", "George Bush", "It's not change", "That's what change is", "This is our time" and "for it"

Main theme:

Obama is mainly thanking everyone including his Democratic competitors. He's talking about the wrong policies of Republicans and asks the people to bring the change for a better

American future. He talks about the issues affecting America including Iraq war, better care to the veterans, health care, Oil, jobs, genocide, poverty, better pay for teachers and primarily the change of power.

4. Victory Speech four: President-Elect Victory Speech on November 04, 2008

Relevance of the Speech:

Obama became the first Afro-American President to win the American Elections. He thanked everyone for their support.

Wordplay:

Obama uses repetition of words /phrases to emphasize his points. The words repeated were “Dreams”, “Thank”, “belongs to you”, “Yes we can”

Main theme:

It was mainly a final thanks giving after the long election campaigns came to an end with Obama winning the elections. Obama spoke about the change, Lincoln, war destroying their economy, the worst financial crisis faced by their country, Afghanistan, jobs, medical care and a 106 year old woman’s story. For the first time he said that there are challenges, there will be setbacks and false starts and there will be many who won't agree with every decision or policy his party makes and finally the new dawn of American leadership at hand.

5. Victory Speech five: Second Presidential Election Victory Speech on November 06, 2008.

Relevance of the Speech:

Obama made history to be re-elected as the first Afro-American President

Wordplay:

Repetition as a technique has been used by Obama time and again. The words repeated were “Thank you”, “but that’s not what makes us”, “America” “I’ve seen it”, “Hope”. Obama has also personified his country as a “generous America”

Main theme:

Obama thanks everyone who's taken him "forward". He mentions that it's long difficult path and lot many things were left to be completed. He thanked everyone in detail, the campaign team, volunteers, co- politicians and family for their support. He talks about numerous other things like their economy was recovering; a decade of war is ending and the long election campaign being over. He tried to assure everyone that he was returning to the White House "more determined and more inspired than ever". He also talks about health care, safety, military and the unity of America.

Comparative word analysis of the victory speeches

1. Word analysis using the word count tool:

- a. **Total words:** Although the last two victory speeches of Obama are most talked about but out of all the victory speeches Democratic Nomination Victory Speech was the longest victory speech with 2773 words and Iowa Victory Speech was the shortest with 1328 words.
- b. **Unique words:** A word that appears only once in the speech is termed as a unique word. The number of unique words used in Democratic Nomination Victory Speech is the highest at 849 which constitutes to 31%. In comparison, although the number of unique words in Iowa Caucus Victory Speech were only 476, but in terms of percentage of total unique words it amounts to 36%, which is the highest.
- c. **The average word length**(in terms of characters) of all the victory speeches ranges from 4.4-4.6
- d. **The number of short words**(≤ 3 characters):Democratic Nomination Victory Speech has the maximum short words that amounts to 1166(42%) but if we look at the % out of the total short words used President-Elect Victory Speech has the maximum % of short words used as 45% and the lowest % is of South Carolina Primary Victory Speech which was 41% (710 short words).The average word length of short words used in all these speeches was 861 words.
- e. **The number of long words** (≥ 7 characters) used in Democratic Nomination Victory Speech with maximum long words count of 534 (19%). Also, if we look at the % out of the total long words used this victory speech has the maximum % of long words and the lowest % was used in Iowa Caucus Victory Speech was 16% (209 long words). The average word length of long words used in all these speeches was 352.2 words.

Victory Speech	Iowa Caucus Victory Speech	South Carolina Primary Victory Speech	Democratic Nomination Victory Speech	President Elect-Victory Speech	Second Presidential Election Victory Speech
Total words	1328	1743	2773	2056	2161
Unique words	476 (36%)	583 (33%)	849 (31%)	699 (34%)	736 (34%)
Average word length(characters)	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.4	4.5
Short Words (<=3 characters)	583 (44%)	710 (41%)	1166 (42%)	927 (45%)	919 (43%)
Long Words (>=7 characters)	209 (16%)	299 (17%)	534 (19%)	345 (17%)	374 (17%)

2. Keyword density analysis:

- a. Out of the top ten ‘one word’ analysis using word count tool, Obama used the word ‘America’ in 4 out of 5 of his victory speeches, followed by ‘will’ which is figuring in 4 out of 5 speeches. The word ‘people’ is used in 3 out of 5 speeches.
- b. In the category top ten ‘two words’ analysis, the word used the most by Obama is “in the” which appears in all the victory speeches.
- c. Out of the top ten ‘three words’ analysis, Obama used the word “Yes we can” and “the United States” 2 out of 5 victory speeches.

Key word Density Analysis					
One word analysis (Top 10)					
Sr. No	Iowa Caucus Victory Speech	South Carolina Primary Victory Speech	Democratic Nomination Victory Speech	President Elect-Victory Speech	Second Presidential Election Victory Speech
1.	Hope 11 (0.8%)	can't 15 (0.9%)	Because 20 (0.7%)	will 18 (0.9%)	America 16 (0.7%)
2	America 10 (0.8%)	us 15 (0.9%)	thank 19 (0.7%)	America 13 (0.6%)	Country 13 (0.6%)
3	Said 9 (0.7%)	Change 13 (0.7%)	Change 18 (0.6%)	Tonight 13 (0.6%)	Us 13 (0.6%)
4	Moment 8 (0.6%)	we're 12 (0.7%)	Will 16 (0.6%)	Us 12 (0.6%)	that's 12 (0.6%)
5	Up	Carolina	Time	People	Just

	7 (0.5%)	11 (0.6%)	15 (0.5%)	11 (0.5%)	10 (0.5%)
6	Know 6 (0.5%)	South 11 (0.6%)	Her 14 (0.5%)	New 11 (0.5%)	Forward 9 (0.4%)
7	Come 6 (0.5%)	it's 10 (0.6%)	Country 13 (0.5%)	Know 7 (0.3%)	Will 9 (0.4%)
8	Nation 6 (0.5%)	People 10 (0.6%)	America 10 (0.4%)	Time 7 (0.3%)	Work 9 (0.4%)
9	States 6(0.5%)	Will 9 (0.5%)	New 10 (0.4%)	Yes 7 (0.3%)	Best 8 (0.4%)
10.	President 6 (0.5%)	up 9 (0.5%)	People 10 (0.4%)	Her 6 (0.3%)	Future 8 (0.4%)

Key word Density Analysis

Two words analysis (Top 10)

Sr. No.	Iowa Caucus Victory Speech	South Carolina Primary Victory Speech	Democratic Nomination Victory Speech	President Elect- Victory Speech	Second Presidential Election Victory Speech
1.	we are 8 (0.6%)	south carolina 11 (0.6%)	thank you 14 (0.5%)	in the 11 (0.5%)	in the 10 (0.5%)
2.	was the 7 (0.5%)	we are 8 (0.5%)	of the 13 (0.5%)	we can 9 (0.4%)	to the 10 (0.5%)
3.	hope is 7 (0.5%)	that we 7 (0.4%)	for the 10 (0.4%)	for the 9 (0.4%)	the best 8 (0.4%)
4.	this was 7 (0.5%)	this is 6 (0.3%)	there are 9 (0.3%)	of our 8 (0.4%)	we have 8 (0.4%)
5.	when we 7 (0.5%)	we can't 6 (0.3%)	in the 9 (0.3%)	of the 8 (0.4%)	this country 7 (0.3%)
6.	the moment 6 (0.5%)	of the 6 (0.3%)	this country 7 (0.3%)	on the 7 (0.3%)	i have 7 (0.3%)
7.	in the 5 (0.4%)	up against 6 (0.3%)	and the 7 (0.3%)	and the 7 (0.3%)	all the 7 (0.3%)
8.	of the 5 (0.4%)	yes we 6 (0.3%)	on the 7 (0.3%)	that we 7 (0.3%)	and i 6 (0.3%)
9.	a president 5 (0.4%)	we can 6 (0.3%)	you to 7 (0.3%)	yes we 7 (0.3%)	of a 6 (0.3%)
10.	president who 5 (0.4%)	in the 6 (0.3%)	john mccain 7 (0.3%)	and i 7 (0.3%)	we can 6 (0.3%)

Key word Density Analysis

Three words analysis (Top 10)					
Sr. No.	Iowa Caucus Victory Speech	South Carolina Primary Victory Speech	Democratic Nomination Victory Speech	President Elect- Victory Speech	Second Presidential Election Victory Speech
1.	this was the 7 (0.5%)	yes we can 6 (0.3%)	thank you to 7 (0.3%)	yes we can 7 (0.3%)	i have never 3 (0.1%)
2.	was the moment 6 (0.5%)	we're up against 5 (0.3%)	this was the 5 (0.2%)	the united states 4 (0.2%)	you'll hear the 3 (0.1%)
3.	a president who 5 (0.4%)	this election is 4 (0.2%)	the american people 5 (0.2%)	this is our 3 (0.1%)	believe we can 3 (0.1%)
4.	the moment when 4 (0.3%)	that we can't 4 (0.2%)	the united states 5 (0.2%)	united states of 3 (0.1%)	i believe we 3 (0.1%)
5.	you have done 4 (0.3%)	the assumption that 4 (0.2%)	i want to 5 (0.2%)	states of america 3 (0.1%)	in the voice 3 (0.1%)
6.	i'll be a 4 (0.3%)	thank you to 3 (0.2%)	want to thank 5 (0.2%)	in this election 3 (0.1%)	the voice of 3 (0.1%)
7.	be a president 4 (0.3%)	we know that 3 (0.2%)	you to my 4 (0.1%)	to those who 3 (0.1%)	voice of a 3 (0.1%)
8.	hope is what 4 (0.3%)	but we know 3 (0.2%)	was the moment 4 (0.1%)	and i know 3 (0.1%)	or where you 3 (0.1%)
9.	the time has 3 (0.2%)	our chance to 3 (0.2%)	our time to 3 (0.1%)	it's the answer 3 (0.1%)	but that's not 3 (0.1%)
10.	we are one 3 (0.2%)	to say that 3 (0.2%)	it was for 3 (0.1%)	new spirit of 3 (0.1%)	despite all the 3 (0.1%)

3. Sentence Analysis using the word count tool:

- Iowa Victory Speech had the least number of 56 sentences whereas both Democratic Nomination Victory Speech (2773 words) and President-Elect Victory Speech (2056 words) had the maximum sentences which are 119 in number even though the length of these speeches was not similar.
- The average sentence length(in terms of words) of all victory speeches is ranging from 17.3 -23.7
- The longest sentence is of 600 characters amounting to 119 words and the shortest is of 336 characters summing up to 60 words.

Speech	Iowa Caucus Victory Speech	South Carolina Primary Victory Speech	Democratic Nomination Victory Speech	President- Elect Victory Speech	Second Presidential Election Victory Speech
No. of sentences	56	94	119	119	112
Average Sentence Length (word)	23.7	18.5	23.3	17.3	19.3
Longest sentence	439 characters, 81 words	600 characters, 119 words	469 characters, 89 words	336 characters, 60 words	423 characters, 71 words

Conclusion

Political leaders use wide ranging strategies to address the attention of their audience. The emotions are at the peak during elections and during the delivery of the victory speeches. Barack Obama as a political leader consistently used his excellent oratory skills to the best in order to reach out the very depth of his supporters' minds and hearts. His strong support was visible though the continuous applause and slogan chanting of "Obama" and "Yes we can" during his victory speeches. He arose the inherent values of his audience and made them feel united and a part of the United States of America. It was the validation of Obama's own principles and beliefs of winning the confidence of his supporters. In order to extend out to his audience, Obama used the approach of the interplay of the words, used simple yet right words which were coupled with the technique of consistent repetition and high energy levels that truly worked for Obama. Thus, to conclude Obama's support can truly be called as Obama's charisma.

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