

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

Joe Biden and Donald Trump

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Abstract - This article presents a comparative discourse analysis of environmental rhetoric in the speeches of Donald J. Trump and Joseph R. Biden Jr., focusing on their contrasting approaches to climate change. Drawing on a small, focused corpus of eleven texts—including presidential speeches and electoral debates delivered between 2017 and 2022 – the study combines tools from discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to investigate how language constructs political stances, social identities, and ideological positions. Particular attention is paid to vocabulary (including “hooray” and “boo” words), grammatical structures (such as nominalizations and ergative constructions), and rhetorical strategies (metaphors, euphemisms, dysphemisms, and logical fallacies). Trump’s emphasis focuses on nationalistic, adversarial, and economically framed discourse, in which climate regulations are depicted as threats to prosperity and freedom, while environmental issues are minimized or reframed through euphemism. By contrast, Biden seems to employ a cooperative and institutional rhetoric, aligning environmental action with justice, responsibility, and global leadership, often invoking collective pronouns and legal-rational authority. The analysis demonstrates how similar keywords (e.g., “clean,” “jobs,” “freedom”) are strategically deployed to produce divergent ideological narratives. Ultimately, this study illustrates how environmental discourse functions as a site of political struggle in U.S. presidential rhetoric, where language not only reflects but actively shapes competing visions of economic development, environmental responsibility, and global governance.

Keywords: climate change; environmental discourse; presidential rhetoric; Donald Trump; Joe Biden.

1. Introduction

Is climate change still the issue on which Republicans, exemplified here by President Trump – former president at the time of writing this article – remain most vulnerable, as suggested by Luntz (2002)? Are there substantial differences in how the last two American presidents communicated about climate change? To address these research questions, this paper is divided into three complementary parts. The first section outlines key biographical elements of both figures, with an emphasis on traits that influence their approaches to prioritization.

The second section reviews significant events from the 1960s to the present that have shaped international climate policies, with a focus on the decisive role of the United States (Napolitano and Aiezza 2019).

1.1. Donald J. Trump

His visibility helped him outmaneuver other Republican primary candidates in 2015 with the slogan “Make America Great Again.” Despite his lack of political experience and numerous controversies, he defeated Hillary Clinton in the 2016 general election, promising to boost the economy, build a wall on the Mexico-U.S. border, and ban Muslim

immigration.

Following his presidency, Trump ran for reelection in 2020 but lost to Joe Biden. He subsequently claimed widespread voter fraud, which led to the January 6 Capitol breach and his second impeachment by the House of Representatives. In November 2022, Trump announced his intention to run for president again (Ibid.) and was elected to a second, non-consecutive term as President of the United States in the election of November 5, 2024.

McAdams (2020) analyzed Trump's personality using the "Big Five" taxonomy, which includes extroversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness. Trump displayed "sky-high extroversion" and exceptionally low agreeableness, along with traits like narcissism and distrust, possibly developed during his early real estate career. As president, he withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Climate Accord.

1.2. Joseph Robinette Biden Jr.

Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, on November 20, 1942. At 23, he became one of the youngest individuals ever elected to the U.S. Senate. Biden served as a Senator for 36 years, including 16 years as Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, establishing himself as a Senate leader. In 2008, after previous failed presidential bids and controversies, he became Vice President under Barack Obama. In this role, he was instrumental in advising Obama and averting budget crises, as well as shaping U.S. policy in Iraq. During the 2016 campaign, he supported Hillary Clinton, who lost to Trump (Ibid.).

On April 25, 2019, Biden announced his presidential candidacy and won the 2020 election with more than 81 million votes, the highest in U.S. history. Wagner-Pacifici (2023) analyzed Biden's leadership style using Weber's concept of authority types: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. Biden embodies what the author calls "anticharisma," characterized by his ordinary, consultative, and cooperative approach, framing him as an "institutional president" (Ibid.). Upon taking office, Biden rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement, though Trump's second term has reinstated regulatory rollbacks and climate-skeptical measures.

1.3. The subject of climate change from a historical perspective: international cooperation and popular activism

Climate change is a critical global issue that has evolved through phases of public awareness, activism, and governmental inaction. Initial concerns emerged in the 1960s when policymakers began recognizing the risks of climate change, with Wallace Broecker coining "global warming" in 1975 (Bell 2021; Kestin *et al.* 2020). Despite rising awareness, political action remained limited. By 1979, the geopolitical landscape shifted, leading to a redirection of resources to environmental issues, though progress was still hindered by weak commitments (Gupta 2010).

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol marked a key milestone but was undermined by U.S. opposition and lobbying from the oil industry (Childress 2012; Gupta 2010). In 2001, President George W. Bush withdrew the U.S. from the agreement, citing exemptions for developing countries. However, Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, raised public awareness. The global focus shifted during the 2008 financial crisis, but President Obama reignited climate action with a comprehensive plan for carbon reduction and renewable energy investment (Napolitano and Aiezza 2010). In contrast, the Trump administration rolled back environmental policies and fostered climate skepticism (Napolitano and Aiezza 2010). In 2025, President Biden's administration took significant

steps to combat climate change, including permanently banning oil and gas drilling on 625 million acres of federal waters and implementing policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Conversely, President Trump's second term has seen a reversal of many climate policies. His administration has withdrawn from the Paris Climate Accord, but the U.S. remains pivotal in shaping global climate discourse, which also addresses geopolitical and economic threats tied to climate impacts.

2. Methodology

The core aim of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis of environmental discourse in the public speeches of two U.S. Presidents: Joe Biden and Donald Trump. This study draws on a small, focused corpus consisting of 11 key texts. The corpus is composed of five speeches delivered by Donald Trump, four speeches by Joe Biden, and two electoral debates featuring both candidates, spanning from 2017 to 2022. These texts form the foundation for our analysis. Discourse analysis and corpus linguistics are powerful methodologies that enable the systematic examination of language use within specific contexts.

Discourse analysis, as articulated by scholars like Gee (2014) and Fairclough (2013), focuses on how language reflects and constructs social realities, power structures, and identities. By analyzing language in its social context, discourse analysts uncover ideologies, values, and power relations embedded in communication. On the other hand, corpus linguistics (e.g., Biber *et al.* 1998; McEnery and Hardie 2012) offers a data-driven approach to studying language by examining large collections of texts to identify patterns of word frequency, collocation, and syntactic structures. By combining both approaches, this study aims to investigate patterns of language that reveal underlying ideologies, social practices, and communicative strategies, aligning with the work of scholars such as Stubbs (2001), who advocates for a combined approach to discourse and corpus analysis to deepen our understanding of language use.

Our objective is to demonstrate how linguistic, rhetorical, and persuasive elements are employed to shape distinct political stances, social identities, and belief systems concerning climate change. Notably, this research will highlight how similar keywords can be strategically used to convey vastly different messages. The analysis is primarily rooted in the field of linguistic examination, focusing on vocabulary and grammatical structures, with attention to additional persuasive techniques, such as rhetorical devices and logical fallacies, when these features prove relevant to the vocabulary analysis. The methodological approach of this study is primarily qualitative, focusing on how language is used to construct discourse on climate change and to enhance the persuasiveness of presidential rhetoric. While some quantitative measures - such as word frequency counts and collocation analysis - are incorporated, these are employed merely as supporting tools rather than as the central analytical framework. In other words, the study does not adopt a corpus linguistics methodology *per se*, but utilizes selected techniques derived from corpus linguistics to enrich a discourse-analytic investigation.

2.1. Tools and Analytical Framework

Two primary digital tools are used to provide various types of quantitative data related to textual analysis: Voyant Tools and Compleat Lexical Tutor:

1. **Voyant Tools:** This software provides both analytic and visual representations of



text data. The following features were particularly useful: the Correlation Tool which analyzes how term frequencies vary in correlation with each other; the Phrases Tool which identifies repeating word sequences and organizes them by frequency; and Word Count and the Corpus Collocates which displays terms that frequently appear near specific keywords across the entire corpus.

2. **Compleat Lexical Tutor:** Specifically, I employed its Keywords Extractor function. This feature highlights words that occur significantly more often in a text compared to a reference corpus. I used the BNC-Coca lists (a 10-million-word reference corpus developed by Paul Nation) as a benchmark. The output indicates the relative frequency of each keyword compared to the corpus average.

2.1.1. *Linguistic Analysis*

Linguistic analysis examines lexical items and grammatical structures by decomposing language into its constituent elements and investigating how these elements interact to construct meaning.

2.1.1a. *Vocabulary Analysis*

The initial linguistic analysis focuses on the use of "hooray" and "boo" words.

- Hooray Words:** These are positively connotated terms (e.g., "justice," "equality," "respect," "natural") that elicit approval and consensus. As Partington & Taylor (2018) point out, such words often carry little inherent meaning upon scrutiny but are powerful in evoking support.
- Boo Words:** Conversely, these negatively connotated terms are used to generate disapproval or rejection.

2.1.1b. *Grammatical Structures*

I will also investigate how grammatical constructions can obscure or emphasize agency. For example:

- Nominalization:** The transformation of verbs into nouns to downplay agency and focus on processes rather than actors, a tactic often used to diffuse responsibility.
- Ergative Constructions:** The use of ergative verbs instead of transitive clauses to describe natural phenomena. This usage can subtly shift responsibility away from human agents. For example, industries may use these constructions to deflect accountability for environmental damage (Alexander, 2013).

Additionally, I will evaluate how the suppression of agency impacts public perception. Schleppegrell's (1997) research shows that omitting agents from environmental education materials can hinder the identification of responsible actors, leading to a sense of helplessness among students. This study will assess the extent and potential implications of such grammatical strategies in the presidents' rhetoric.

2.1.2. *Rhetorical and Persuasive Strategies*

The analysis of rhetorical and stylistic elements, including the use of metaphors and logical fallacies, was conducted manually. Although this manual approach does not

guarantee exhaustive coverage, it will provide valuable insights into the strategic and persuasive differences between the two leaders.

2.1.2a. *Metaphors*

As figures of speech where a term or phrase is applied to something it does not literally describe. Charteris-Black (2004) argues that metaphors are fundamental to human communication and thought, rather than being merely decorative elements of language. He states that metaphors shape our understanding of complex and abstract concepts by linking them to more concrete, familiar experiences. This cognitive function of metaphor is complemented by its rhetorical role in discourse, where metaphors can subtly frame ideologies and influence perceptions.

2.1.2b. *Logical fallacies*

Conserva (2003) examines how these rhetorical strategies are used to shape public opinion and discourse. He addresses how each of these tactics can distort the truth and mislead audiences. By categorizing these techniques, he aims to educate readers on identifying and critically assessing manipulative communication methods. Key fallacious techniques to be examined include:

- **Euphemism:** Softening the impact of controversial topics with neutral terms.
- **Dysphemism:** Exaggerating negative aspects to delegitimize opponents.
- **Ad Hominem:** Personal attacks aimed at undermining the credibility of an individual rather than addressing their arguments.
- **Slippery Slope Argument:** Suggesting that an action, even if harmless, could lead to severe consequences.
- **False Parallel:** Equating unrelated phenomena to make one appear more problematic.
- **False Binary Opposition:** Presenting an issue as having only two opposing sides, excluding any middle ground.

2.1.3. *Comparative Analysis with Established Frameworks*

Finally, this research will compare the rhetoric of Trump and Biden with established principles of persuasion. Specifically:

2.1.3a. *Cialdini's Principle of Authority*

It is one of the six principles of persuasion identified by Cialdini (1984) and is a powerful concept in the context of political discourse, leveraging the human tendency to respect and follow credible experts (at least those who are believed to be) and authority figures. This principle suggests that people are more likely to be persuaded by someone who is perceived as an authority, based on factors like expertise, status, or official power.

Cialdini maintains that the principle is rooted in social psychology, where humans are conditioned from an early age to respect and obey authority figures, like parents, teachers, and community leaders. In political settings, this psychological tendency translates into increased trust and compliance when messages or endorsements come from perceived authorities. I will assess how the presidents leverage authority to strengthen their arguments, considering societal deference to powerful figures and norms.

2.1.3b. Frank Luntz's Memorandum

The study will analyze connections to Luntz's strategic language guidelines, highlighting continuity or divergence in the Republican narrative on climate change. In this document, Luntz provided strategic advice to Republican politicians on how to communicate environmental issues more effectively to the American public. *Language Matters*: Luntz emphasized that language is crucial in shaping public perception of environmental policies.

He recommended using words and phrases that evoke positive, reassuring, and forward-thinking ideas.

3. Analysis of texts

This study draws on a small, focused corpus consisting of 11 key texts, which total approximately 11,500 words (refer to the appendix for a detailed breakdown). The corpus includes five speeches delivered by Donald Trump, four speeches by Joe Biden, and two electoral debates featuring both candidates, spanning from 2017 to 2022. To maintain consistency and focus, any questions posed by interviewers in the two face-to-face meetings have been excluded from the analysis. Our objective is to demonstrate how linguistic, rhetorical, and persuasive elements are employed to shape distinct political stances, social identities, and belief systems concerning climate change.

Notably, this research will highlight how similar keywords can be strategically used to convey vastly different messages. The analysis is primarily rooted in the field of linguistic examination, focusing on vocabulary and grammatical structures, with attention to additional persuasive techniques, such as rhetorical devices and logical fallacies, when these features prove relevant to the vocabulary analysis.

Text 1 (Donald Trump)¹

The first public speech analyzed in this study was delivered on March 27, 2017. This address marked one of President Donald Trump's early policy actions following his election, specifically targeting the rollback of significant environmental regulations enacted by previous administrations. In this speech, Trump pledged unwavering support to the coal, oil, and gas industries, framing his deregulatory agenda as a means to restore American prosperity and generate thousands of new jobs. He employed vivid metaphors, such as "job-killing" regulations, to emphasize the perceived economic harm of environmental rules. The term *job-killing* is notably repeated three times:

I am taking historic steps to lift the restrictions on American energy, to reverse government intrusion, and to cancel JOB-KILLING regulations.

By the way, regulations not only in this industry but in every industry. We are doing them by the thousands, every industry. [...] So many are unnecessary and so many are JOB KILLING. We are getting rid of the bad ones, one after another.

We are lifting JOB-KILLING restrictions on oil, natural gas, clean coal, and shale energy.

¹ <https://youtu.be/Q9P6dLvFTZI>

Despite emphasizing deregulation, Trump made assurances about safeguarding the environment, claiming:

We are going to have clean WATER; we are going to have clean AIR.

[Our] primary mission [is] protecting our AIR and protecting our WATER.

Trump's speech is deeply infused with nationalistic rhetoric, as seen through the frequent use of terms like *America*, *American*, *Americans*, and *USA*, which occur 4, 15, 2, and 1 times respectively. This linguistic emphasis clearly aligns with his signature campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," reinforcing the message of energy independence and economic revitalization. Trump's narrative framed the exploitation of American energy resources as pivotal for economic growth, job creation, and the restoration of American pride. The rhythmic and emphatic use of a tricolon amplifies this point:

That is what this is all about: bringing back our jobs, bringing back our dreams, and making America wealthy again.

As Partington and Taylor (2018) (2018) explain, tricolons are impactful rhetorical devices that create a memorable cadence and reinforce key ideas through repetition. The word *pipeline* is a standout keyword in Trump's speech, appearing six times and being 1,897.72 times more frequent compared to the reference corpus. Examples include:

We will transport American energy through American PIPELINES made with American steel.

If you want to build PIPELINES in this country, you are going to buy your steel.

We approved the permit to finally build the Keystone XL PIPELINE.



Figure 1
Cirrus (word cloud) visualizes the top frequency words of text 1.

Moreover, Trump uses several striking metaphors to frame environmental regulations as adversarial forces: *attacks on their jobs, war on coal, regulation which threatens our miners, crushing attack on American industry, and theft of American prosperity*. These expressions draw heavily from military language, portraying regulations as aggressive and harmful. The metaphor *war on* is particularly notable, a phrase that has become entrenched in political discourse, first popularized by President George W. Bush as *war on terrorism* in 2001. As Partington & Taylor (2018) note, *war on* frequently collocates with terms like *cancer, drugs, poverty, and obesity*, and serves as a potent rhetorical tool. In Trump's speech, it echoes the industry narrative accusing President Obama of waging a *war on coal*.

Trump strategically employs euphemisms and hooray words to cast his policies in

a positive light. Euphemisms such as *new era in American energy, job creation, restoration of economic freedom*, and *new energy revolution* sanitize the implications of deregulation. Simultaneously, hooray words like *freedom, thrive, dreams, health, clean, and prosperity* infuse the speech with optimism and validate his policy agenda.

A key persuasive strategy evident in the speech is binary opposition, a common logical fallacy in political rhetoric. Trump presents a false dichotomy, suggesting that the U.S. must choose between economic growth and environmental protection. He argues that emission regulations contribute to job loss, health risks, and societal distress, ultimately preventing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from fulfilling its core mission. By framing the issue as an *either/or* situation, Trump implies that prioritizing economic well-being necessarily precludes stringent environmental oversight, leaving no room for compromise.

Trump also uses a false parallel to resonate with his audience, likening his career in real estate to the livelihoods of coal miners. Despite vast disparities in wealth, privilege, and power, this comparison seeks to establish him as relatable and empathetic, portraying him as “one of them.” Though this parallel may appear inconsistent, it serves the rhetorical purpose of connecting with American workers and bolstering his populist image (Partington and Taylor, *op. cit.*).

References to nature in Trump’s speech are sparse, with only one mention: “*We are going to have clean water and clean air.*” This brief acknowledgment lacks elaboration, suggesting a significant de-emphasis on environmental issues. The term *clean coal* is a glaring oxymoron, underscoring Trump’s focus on the energy sector rather than ecological concerns.

Given that environmental issues are a vulnerability for Republicans (Luntz, *op. cit.*) Trump’s rhetoric adheres to key guidelines from Frank Luntz’s Memorandum. He emphasizes terms like *safer, cleaner, and healthier* to frame deregulation as beneficial to public well-being. Additionally, he invokes human-centric impacts, emphasizing job loss and lifestyle degradation, to put regulatory costs in relatable, emotional terms.

The presence of fifteen miners beside Trump during the speech serves as a powerful visual, symbolizing “real Americans” hurt by environmental regulations and adding emotional weight to his argument. While climate change is not mentioned, Trump’s frequent use of “I” emphasizes his desire to claim credit for energy reforms, while “we” aligns him with the American public, reinforcing his populist appeal.

Text 2 (Donald Trump)²

In his June 1, 2017 speech, Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, calling it unjust and harmful to American interests. He framed the decision as vital for restoring jobs and economic power. Rather than focusing on environmental issues, Trump emphasized economic grievances, delivering a clear and forceful message that prioritizing the American economy over global climate commitments was necessary.

² <https://youtu.be/jP55meWILt4>

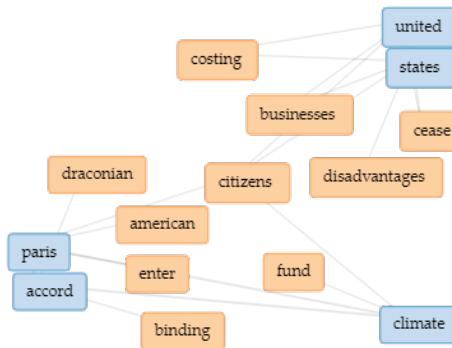


Figure 2

The collocates graph represents the keywords and terms that occur in close proximity in text 2.

The links tool in Figure 2 highlights the two primary focal points of President Trump's statement: the United States and the Paris Climate Accord. Specifically, the connections illustrate how Trump frames the United States as a victim of the agreement's severe economic damages, arguing that the nation's withdrawal is necessary to protect American livelihoods. Correspondingly, terms associated with the Paris Accord and climate issues are linked to descriptors of unjust and burdensome costs imposed on U.S. citizens, suggesting a waste of resources that could otherwise enhance the well-being of the American people.

Trump's message is further intensified through vivid metaphorical language, such as the term *draconian burden*, which conveys the notion of a harsh and disproportionate punishment inflicted upon America while other countries escape with benefits. He states:

...and the draconian financial and economic burdens the agreement imposes on our country.

The speech's adherence to Frank Luntz's communication principles on environmental policy is evident. Trump emphasizes economic distress by listing *lost jobs*, *lower wages*, *shuttered factories*, and *vastly diminished economic production*. The use of a tetracolon climax gives the statement dramatic impact, with each phrase building in intensity. The progression — marked by negatively charged adjectives (*lost*, *lower*, *shuttered*, *diminished*) — creates a crescendo effect, emphasizing the human cost of climate regulations and implying that they ultimately compromise Americans' safety and well-being.

Additionally, in line with Luntz's advice, Trump makes a perfunctory nod to environmental protection, asserting his deep care for the environment, but without offering any substantial evidence or detailed plans to support this claim. He also leverages Luntz's argument that environmental responsibility must be a shared global burden by targeting nations like China and India. He accuses these countries of benefiting from the accord without contributing adequately to climate efforts or global safety, thereby framing the agreement as grossly inequitable.

Lastly, Trump reinforces his authority as President by repeatedly invoking his role as a protector of the American people. He emphasizes that his decision to withdraw from the Paris Accord is driven by his "solemn duty" to ensure the economic and social welfare of the nation. By speaking on behalf of all Americans, he positions himself as a committed guardian of national interests, reinforcing the legitimacy of his action.

Text 3 (Donald Trump)³

The intervention on 26 November 2018 at the White House in Washington, D.C. represents President Trump's response to a journalist's question about the Fourth National Climate Assessment, which was produced by various U.S. government agencies and departments.

One notable aspect of Trump's reply is how he largely evades directly addressing the contents of the report. Instead, he resorts to familiar rhetorical techniques. For instance, he repeatedly uses the hooray word *clean* when referring to natural elements, claiming that America has never been in such good environmental health. This rhetorical strategy is meant to convey the idea that the U.S. is doing its best to care for the environment, while subtly implying that the environmental damage is primarily caused by other nations and their "dirty" (boo word) policies.

In addition to this, Trump utilizes his presidential authority to dismiss the credibility of the experts who contributed to the report. He essentially undermines their findings, suggesting that the report cannot be trusted. This highlights a broader issue: Trump's complicated and often adversarial relationship with science, which has been marked by multiple instances of his administration's dismissal or undermining of scientific evidence on various issues (Napolitano and Aiezza *op. cit.*, p. 147).

Furthermore, it is worth noting how Trump's approach diverges from Frank Luntz's Memorandum, which advises Republicans to always align their arguments with "sound science" when discussing global warming. Luntz emphasized the importance of presenting scientifically backed claims, while Trump's remarks not only contradict scientific consensus but also dismiss expert opinions, thus ignoring a key principle of effective political communication outlined in Luntz's guidance (Luntz, *op. cit.*).

Text 4 (Donald Trump)⁴

The fourth speech analyzed in this study took place in Florida on 8 July 2019 and marks a key development in President Trump's narrative following his earlier withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement. In this address, Trump emphasizes the positive outcomes he attributes to this decision, particularly in terms of job creation and economic growth. He asserts that the removal of climate regulations has resulted in significant benefits, underscoring how the U.S. economy has prospered as a result of these actions.

Interestingly, Trump also demonstrates an unusual level of specificity regarding environmental issues in this speech. He not only references several of his executive actions on the subject but also presents concrete examples of their purported effects, further framing his administration's approach to environmental policy as both effective and beneficial for the American people.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46351940>

⁴ <https://youtu.be/KgIAeZRJpvQ>



Figure 3
Cirrus (word cloud) visualizes the top frequency words of text 4.

As illustrated by the visual element above, Trump's speech is strikingly balanced in how it presents his arguments. Key terms such as "American" (85.15 times more frequent) and "jobs" dominate, alongside "environment" (51.81 times more frequent) and "clean." This shows the former President's intent not only to emphasize but also to demonstrate the need to balance economic interests and climate concerns, highlighting the actions he took to address both.

Trump's speech uses metaphors like "war on American energy" and "punishment of workers" to discredit the previous administration and highlight his own achievements, positioning himself as the one who restored lost benefits. These metaphors suggest that his policies were far superior to those of his predecessors. The speech also employs euphemisms and dysphemisms, calling his policies "pro-growth" and "unlocking innovation," while criticizing past environmental regulations as "ineffective global agreements." He uses "hooray words" like "clean" and "innovation" and contrasts them with "boo words" such as "threaten" and "punishment."

A key strategy is Trump's attempt to blame the Obama administration for failing to balance environmental protection and economic growth. This binary framing simplifies the complex issue of balancing the two. While Trump addresses renewable energy and expresses concern for the poor and minorities, his message contains inconsistencies, like calling fossil fuels both "clean" and "affordable," despite their environmental impact.

Trump's rhetoric aligns with Frank Luntz's guidelines, focusing on national prosperity and sovereignty. His frequent use of "I" and "we" emphasizes shared credit, and he invites an ordinary citizen to speak, reinforcing the idea that his policies benefit both the nation and individuals.

Text 5 (Donald Trump)⁵

Trump's address during the G7 press conference in Biarritz, France, on 26 August 2019, is an illustration of his typical rhetorical approach regarding climate change. When asked about necessary actions to combat global warming, Trump avoided the question and instead used the opportunity to focus on the economic achievements of his administration. In his 445-word response, the noun *wealth* appears 8 times and the adjective *wealthy* once,

⁵ <https://youtu.be/p11Rnz4zNkg>

emphasizing his primary concern for the economic well-being of the country over environmental issues. For example, Trump states:

I want the cleanest water on earth. I want the cleanest air on earth and that's what we are doing.

And:

I think I know more about the environment than most people. I want clean air. I want clean water. I want a wealthy country.

These examples showcase Trump's repeated desire for a cleaner environment. However, his focus quickly shifts toward economic considerations, with references to how he has improved the country's *wealth*. In one key part of his speech, he states:

I feel that the United States has tremendous wealth, the wealth is under its feet. I have made that wealth come alive.

Here, Trump insists that the country's prosperity comes from fossil fuel extraction, a direct contradiction to his earlier rhetoric on environmental health. He frequently frames energy projects, such as pipelines and liquefied natural gas (LNG) resources, as the central contributors to this "tremendous wealth." For example:

World so on it will be by far the number one it is tremendous wealth and LNG is being sought after all over Europe and all...

Trump's message is clear: despite his repeated declarations of wanting clean air and water, the policies he highlights, such as expanding LNG infrastructure, focus on economic growth, which is largely tied to energy production. This reveals a disconnect between his environmental statements and his economic policies. Another significant moment is when Trump uses a metaphor to dismiss renewable energy, particularly wind energy, positioning it as ineffective:

I am not gonna lose [LNG] on dreams on windmills which frankly aren't working too well.

This statement reflects Trump's preference for fossil fuels over renewable energy, further emphasizing his reluctance to prioritize climate action. By dismissing wind energy in favor of LNG, Trump underscores his commitment to traditional energy sources, even though they are at odds with the long-term health of the environment. Trump also uses *hooray words* to bolster his image and frame his administration's actions positively. Words like *clean*, *tremendous wealth*, and *number one* are designed to persuade his audience of his success in both economic and environmental terms. For instance:

The WEALTH is under its feet.

We can't let that WEALTH be taken away.

These expressions create a narrative of abundance, positioning Trump as a defender of America's economic and environmental future. However, this narrative focuses on the preservation of wealth through fossil fuels, rather than addressing the broader environmental challenges posed by climate change. Additionally, Trump's frequent use of the personal pronoun *I* further underscores his ego-driven rhetoric. For instance:

I think I know more about the environment than most people.

I have made that wealth come alive.

Trump frames himself as the sole driver behind America's prosperity, positioning himself not just as a representative of the people, but as the key architect of the country's economic future. This reinforces the individualistic tone of the speech, where his personal achievements take center stage over collective or global action on climate change.

Text 6 (Face to face debate)⁶

The first presidential debate held at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, on 30 September 2020, provides a valuable contrast between Donald Trump's and Joe Biden's positions on environmental issues, with Trump being asked about California's wildfires, human-caused pollution, and the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord. Biden was questioned about his environmental policies, the Paris Agreement, and his opinion on Trump's stance regarding balancing economics with environmental protection.

Trump's responses during this debate reveal several key rhetorical techniques and strategic maneuvers. As seen in Figure 4, three main arguments dominated his approach: the wildfires, human pollution, and the Paris Accord. Each of these points was linked not only to his political stance but also to his broader narrative about economic growth and national sovereignty.

When confronted with questions about California's wildfires, Trump admitted, albeit reluctantly, that humans played some role in climate change—this marks the first time in the analyzed speeches that he acknowledged human responsibility for environmental damage. However, instead of focusing on the global or systemic causes of climate change, he cleverly shifted the responsibility to California's state government. He suggested that poor forest management, rather than broader climate factors, was the real culprit behind the devastating fires. This approach served to redirect the conversation away from the larger issue of human impact on the environment and instead blamed local policies, such as forest management, for the problem.

Trump's language here was strategically designed to diminish his own responsibility in addressing the global climate crisis and instead focus on California's mismanagement:

If you look at the kind of forest they have, it's a mess... they didn't manage the forest properly.

Trump highlighted a "billion-tree project" to position himself as an environmental advocate, using optimistic language to appear proactive on climate change. This aligns with Frank Luntz's strategy of offering simple, appealing solutions that sound impactful but lack substance. The project was more symbolic than practical, aiming to downplay the severity of climate change. Regarding pollution and the Paris Climate Accord, Trump framed his withdrawal as protecting American sovereignty and jobs, arguing that the agreement unfairly burdened the U.S. while allowing other countries like China to pollute without penalty. His focus remained on economic interests over environmental concerns. *"The Paris Accord is a disaster... it was designed to take away our competitive edge."* (Trump, 2020 debate)

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wwv5DBUgupk>

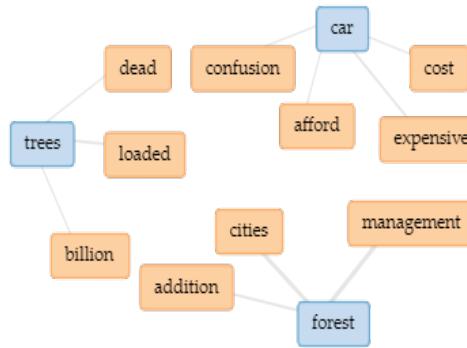


Figure 4

The collocates graph represents the keywords and terms in Trump's part that occur in close proximity in text 6.

In this section of the 2020 presidential debate, Trump's rhetoric continues to reflect his distinctive approach to environmental issues. His responses to questions about the Paris Accord and the rollback of Obama-era environmental policies highlight his focus on the tension between economic growth and environmental protection. Let's break down the key rhetorical techniques and arguments used by Trump.

He frequently invokes his trademark phrase, "*I want crystal clean water and air*", as a way to position himself as someone committed to environmental protection. However, the repetition of this slogan appears to be more about creating a perception of concern for nature, rather than offering substantive solutions to climate issues. This repetition serves as a rhetorical tool to assure his audience that his administration's policies are not harmful to the environment, even if they may contradict this in practice.

By repeatedly invoking "*clean*" terms (clean air, clean water), Trump follows Frank Luntz's guidance in using "*hooray words*" that evoke positive emotions. The goal here is to reassure voters that the environmental damage caused by certain policies is minimal or justifiable, given the economic benefits.

Trump frames his environmental policies as finding a balance between economic needs and environmental protection. For instance, he discusses the relaxation of fuel economy standards for cars, which he claims led to a "slight" increase in pollution but simultaneously brought significant business investments. This rhetorical strategy aims to downplay the environmental impact of deregulation, emphasizing that the economic benefits outweigh the environmental costs.

It's a very slight increase in pollution, but a great improvement in terms of business investment. (Trump, 2020 debate)

Here, Trump uses a false dichotomy—he suggests that there is an unavoidable trade-off between economic prosperity and environmental health, positioning himself as the pragmatic leader who chooses economic growth while still caring about the environment, even though his policies may contradict this balance.

Trump uses the metaphor of "*they want to take out the cows*" to criticize what he views as an overly radical approach to environmental regulation by the Democrats. This metaphor connects to his broader narrative of innovation versus regulation, where he presents the democratic approach to climate policy as an unreasonable, anti-business position. The metaphor implies that Democrats are so extreme in their environmental policies that they would go so far as to eliminate cows (a central part of the American agricultural industry) to reduce emissions—something Trump suggests is absurd and

harmful to American jobs.

The metaphor also fits into his broader rhetorical strategy of using dysphemism (negative, exaggerated language) to demonize opponents and their policies, particularly on environmental issues. By using terms like “*they want to take out the cows*”, Trump frames the Democratic Party’s climate proposals as radical and out of touch with the needs of American workers.

Trump praises European countries for their effective forest management, contrasting it with the issues in California, to deflect blame for mismanagement. This move allows him to present himself as a pragmatic leader willing to learn from others, while distancing himself from any responsibility for domestic environmental problems. By saying “a lot of people” agree with him, he shifts from relying on his own authority to a broader, more general consensus. This rhetorical tactic aims to make his argument seem popular and widely supported, reinforcing his image as someone whose policies reflect the will of the people, not just his own views. It aligns with a populist approach that emphasizes collective agreement and avoids positioning him as the sole authority on the issue.

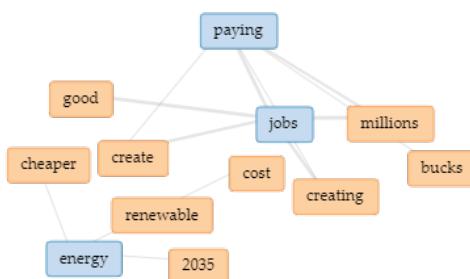


Figure 5

The collocates graph represents the keywords and terms in Biden’s part that occur in close proximity in text 6.

In contrast to Trump, Biden directly addresses environmental issues by proposing alternative policies, such as weatherizing homes to reduce oil use and investing in renewable energy to achieve net-zero energy production by 2035. He also counters Trump’s emphasis on job creation from fossil fuels by linking his environmental initiatives to the creation of millions of well-paying jobs. Biden’s rhetoric positions his plan as a more sustainable and forward-thinking approach to both climate and economic growth. However, Biden struggles to respond directly to Trump’s claim of needing a balance between environmental and economic interests. Instead, he shifts to personal attacks, questioning Trump’s motives by suggesting his policies are driven by self-interest rather than genuine concern for the environment. Biden also critiques Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Accord, highlighting the severity of global warming and mocking Trump’s dismissive stance. Biden’s rhetoric differs from Trump’s in his use of “global warming,” a term with more urgent connotations, whereas Trump favors “climate change,” which is seen as less alarming. Biden emphasizes his past experience as vice president, citing his efforts to reduce renewable energy costs and limit coal and oil reliance. Additionally, Biden occasionally uses passive constructions, like “*the rainforest of Brazil are being torn down*,” which depersonalize blame, though he does link extreme weather to human-caused pollution and acknowledges the U.S.’s significant role in global environmental issues.

Text 7 (Face to face debate)⁷

In the second presidential debate on 22 October 2020, Trump and Biden presented contrasting positions on climate change. Trump reaffirmed his opposition to economic regulations, criticizing the Paris Accord and renewable energy initiatives. He maintained that his policies prioritize economic growth, with a focus on fossil fuels, and repeatedly emphasized his desire for "crystal clean water and air." He framed the withdrawal from the Paris Accord as a defense of American jobs and rejected renewable energy, particularly wind power, which he claimed causes cancer, emits carbon, and kills birds.

In contrast, Biden pushed for immediate action on climate change, linking environmental policies to job creation. He advocated for expanding solar and wind energy industries, positioning them as a crucial part of the future economy. Biden argued that investing in clean energy would create millions of good-paying jobs while reducing reliance on fossil fuels. He also criticized Trump's environmental stance, calling it harmful to public health and future generations, and used *Ad hominem* arguments to discredit Trump's views.

Thus, Trump framed his approach around protecting jobs in traditional energy sectors, while Biden focused on transitioning to renewable energy as both an economic opportunity and a necessary solution to global warming.

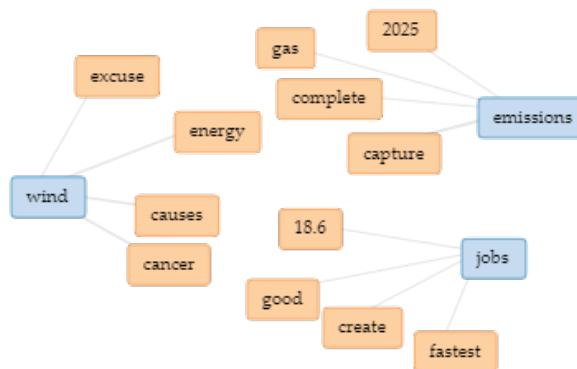


Figure 6

The collocates graph represents the keywords and terms in Trump's part that occur in close proximity in text 7.

The figure highlights key differences in how the two candidates approach common topics. Trump criticizes wind energy, calling it harmful by linking it to cancer, high carbon emissions, and bird deaths, while Biden supports it as a vital future energy source with economic potential. On jobs, Trump defends his withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord as a move to protect traditional energy jobs, while Biden sees job creation in renewable energy sectors. Trump repeats his "crystal-clean water and air" slogan and attacks other countries for pollution, claiming to be an environmentalist. Biden counters with an *ad hominem* attack, questioning Trump's beliefs on climate change. Lastly, Biden cites Wall Street's endorsement of his job creation plans, contrasting with Trump's reliance on personal authority, like claiming, "I know more about wind than you do."

⁷<https://youtu.be/jqRqZ6yB970>

Text 8 (Joe Biden)⁸

The eighth speech, delivered by Biden on 14 September 2020, provides a clear contrast between his views on climate change and those of President Trump. The speech is divided into two sections: the first focuses on criticizing Trump's policies, suggesting that they indirectly contribute to worsening climate events. The second part centers on Biden's proposals, emphasizing their long-term positive impact on both health and the economy.

As seen in Figure 7, several key terms emerge as central to Biden's rhetoric. Notably, the term *climate* appears 23 times, with a frequency 512.69 times higher than in the reference corpus, highlighting its prominence. This is often paired with words like *urgent* (68.33 times more frequent) and *crisis* (50.45), signaling the urgency Biden places on addressing the climate issue. His environmental plans, which he describes as *practical* and not just *pies in the sky*, emphasize *infrastructure* (71.76 times more frequent) and the *automobile industry* (201.47 times), signaling his focus on green job creation and economic development through sustainable energy policies.



Figure 7
Cirrus (word cloud) visualizes the top frequency words of text 8.

Biden employs several rhetorical strategies to delegitimize Trump's handling of climate change. *Ad hominem* attacks are used to undermine Trump, such as labeling him a "climate denier" and "climate arsonist." He also uses a slippery slope, claiming that if Trump were reelected, climate-related disasters would continue to worsen. Biden uses dysphemisms like *punish*, *disdain*, and *threat* to further criticize Trump. In contrast, Biden's rhetoric includes euphemisms like "ambitious" and "modern" infrastructure programs, alongside positive terms such as "clean," "innovate," and "healthy," to highlight the positive impact of his own plans.

Interestingly, both Trump and Biden emphasize promises of clean air and clean water, showing how Frank Luntz's principle of using agreeable, familiar phrases crosses party lines. Biden invokes authority to strengthen his position, citing science, military leaders, and veterans as key sources backing climate action. He also draws on his own authority as former Vice President, highlighting his previous success in reducing emissions and creating jobs.

Regarding agency, Biden identifies fossil fuel companies and Trump as the primary perpetrators of climate damage. He accuses them of knowingly contributing to environmental destruction without taking action to address it. To counter this, Biden frames himself as a future leader who will reverse these harmful trends. Biden's frequent

⁸ <https://youtu.be/f1ZFhVwnV6I>

use of the pronoun "we" (appearing 49 times) is a rhetorical tool to connect with his audience, positioning himself as an ally to the American people. He repeatedly stresses the importance of acting together to tackle climate change, such as in statements like:

We will build back better than we were before.

Our response should be the same in science, acting together all of us.

This collective approach emphasizes the power of unity and action to overcome climate challenges and symbolizes hope for a better future.

Text 9 (Joe Biden)⁹

The ninth speech, delivered by President Biden at the COP26 conference in Glasgow on 1 November 2021, focused on the United States' commitment to tackling climate change. Biden emphasized the country's leadership role in the global fight against global warming, positioning the U.S. as both the primary actor and a key model for other nations, especially developing countries. He presented ambitious environmental plans that were intended to engage not only American citizens but also people around the world, highlighting the global nature of the climate crisis and the need for collective action.



Figure 8

The collocates graph represents the keywords and terms that occur in close proximity in text 9.

President Biden emphasized urgent action to combat climate change, focusing on both the U.S. and global responsibilities. Key terms like "climate" (254.81 times more frequent) and "world" (238.04 times more frequent) show Biden's call for global cooperation to limit warming to 1.5°C. His speech connected clean energy and adaptation to create new opportunities, while stressing future benefits for coming generations.

Biden used metaphors such as "fight" and "combat" to stress the seriousness of issues like hunger and deforestation, and "marathon" to describe the long-term challenge of transforming the U.S. into a sustainable, clean economy. Dysphemisms like "existential threat" and "destroyers of lives" contrasted with euphemisms like "opportunity" and "clean air," reflecting urgency but maintaining hope.

⁹ <https://youtu.be/foMAIEIChxY>

The speech employed both boo and hooray words to frame the debate, using terms like "condemn" and "threat" alongside "opportunity" and "resilient". Biden framed climate change as a moral and economic issue, urging all leaders and citizens to take action.

In terms of agency, climate events like wildfires and hurricanes were attributed to climate change itself, with responsibility placed on global leaders and citizens to act. Finally, Biden appealed to science and his own authority as President of the U.S., stressing the country's role as a leader in the fight against climate change.

Text 10 (Joe Biden)¹⁰

In his 1 November 2021 intervention at COP26, President Biden expressed the U.S.'s commitment to addressing climate change, which can be seen as an apology to the world for Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord. This speech, when analyzed alongside his earlier speeches at COP26 and other environmental addresses, shows Biden using his presidential authority to distance himself, his administration, and the U.S. from the "dangerous" actions of his predecessor. Biden frames the U.S. return to global climate leadership as a corrective measure, emphasizing that under his leadership, the U.S. is once again committed to international climate agreements and actions.

Text 11 (Joe Biden)¹¹

The 20 July 2022 speech in Somerset, Massachusetts marked President Biden's announcement of new executive actions to tackle climate change. This speech, echoing his COP26 address, blends self-acknowledgment of the accomplishments of his administration in addressing climate change with a clear warning about the ongoing threat it poses. Biden also framed climate change as a significant economic opportunity, emphasizing how addressing environmental challenges could drive growth and create jobs. The speech was designed to reinforce his commitment to both combating climate change and capitalizing on the economic potential of green technologies.



Figure 9
Cirrus (word cloud) visualizes the top frequency words of text 11.

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/jT65nlAteEQ>

¹¹ <https://youtu.be/L8XvgnYoqLc>

As highlighted in Figure 9, we can once again observe how the word climate is one of the most frequent in the speech (14, with a frequency 261.75 times higher than in the reference corpus) and it is related to other very different concepts, explained in Table 3: if by the one side it is certainly easy to note Biden's description of "climate change" as an emergency and a threat for humanity that necessarily needs to be metaphorically fought, on the other one it is also noticeable his evaluation of the crisis as an "opportunity" to create new jobs and health benefits.

- 1) doing a great job leading our special residential envoy on CLIMATE traveling the world and talking to an awful lot of
- (2) great massachusetts neighbor jenna mccarthy my national CLIMATE advisor leading climate efforts here at home it is a
- (3) neighbor jenna mccarthy my national climate advisor leading CLIMATE efforts here at home it is an honor to be joined by
- (4) when our nation faces clear and present danger that is what CLIMATE change is about it is literally and not figuratively
- (5) causes delays and shortages for consumers and businesses CLIMATE change is an accidental threat to our nation and the
- (6) as president i will use executive powers to combat the CLIMATE crisis in the coming days administration will
- (7) than carbon dioxide folks with american leadership back on CLIMATE i was able to bring more world leaders together we g
- (8) states not have to import them folks when i think about CLIMATE change and i have been saying this for 3 years i
- (9) change and i have been saying this for 3 years i think jobs CLIMATE change i think jobs applause almost 100 wind
- (10) not a single republican congress stepped up to support my CLIMATE plan not one so let me be clear climate change is an
- (11) up to support my climate plan not one so let me be clear CLIMATE change is an emergency and in the coming weeks i am
- (12) that the president possesses when it comes to fighting CLIMATE change i will not take no for an answer i will do
- (13) my national climate advisor leading climate efforts here CLIMATE it is an honor to be joined by your neighbor from rh
- (14) things we should be acting together on it is climate it is CLIMATE and by the way my dear mother god rest her soul she

Moreover, again consistently with his previous speeches, the President uses the same pack of boo words, like urgent, threat, danger and hooray words, like the keyword clean or believe, safer and protect, and even his classical reference for the children and for their future. Curiously, we can note the significant mention of two "foreign territories" that, nevertheless, are not mentioned with the aim of exalting the United States in comparison (how happened with Trump): more in particular, Biden cited Antarctica to strongly support his thesis of the "existential threat" that causes, among other things, the terrible rising of temperatures in such well-known cold areas. Furthermore, he also names China as a power nation that America needs to outcompete not in the construction of big fossil-fuel plants but in the development of renewable energies such as the solar and the wind ones.

Not surprisingly, natural events possibly linked to global warming like hurricanes, wildfires and droughts are accompanied using verb forms that do not help to identify real responsible actors (no agent is clearly mentioned). However, in outlining the ways to contrast such phenomena, it is observable a strong request coming from Biden to his citizens, as well as to the whole World, to act all together. Lastly, it is here notable a slight distinction from the previous climate-related Biden's speeches: more specifically, if it is true that he always refers to science and to his presidential authority as the main

persuasive ways, it is also evident to unusually spot a certain tendency to overuse the personal pronoun I, which underlines, at least apparently, the willingness to celebrate not only his administration but also his personal figure.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have observed various aspects related to the subject matter. The first section examined the main political actors, highlighting how former President Trump, through an unconventional, often narcissistic approach, reached the presidency, whereas Biden followed a traditional political trajectory characterized by an understated, ‘anti-charismatic’ style. The second section traced the evolution of climate change as a global issue, noting periods of international cooperation and conflict, particularly between developed and developing countries and between the United States and the European Union, alongside the rise of popular movements expressing concern over political inaction. Through the use of both qualitative methods, related to grammar, persuasion, and rhetoric, and quantitative methods, we were able to analyze our corpus, and we can now answer our two research questions.

For the first question, “Is the climate question still the single issue on which Republicans, in this case represented by President Trump, are the most rhetorically vulnerable?” we can now answer: yes. It is a fact that Trump’s discourse, with the exception of one speech, generally avoids even citing the words “climate change” and “global warming.” He always justifies the deregulation that affected the environmental sector during his mandate in terms of safeguarding American jobs and lifestyle—elements that appeared extensively throughout his speeches. Moreover, a general appeal to pathos is used to easily persuade the audience of Trump’s “generosity,” such as when he invited fifteen miners who risked losing their jobs because of “harmful” environmental policies.

In terms of authority, Trump seemed uninterested in “sounding scientific” and often opposed independent scientific reports that criticized the consistency of his actions (and his administration’s inaction) by relying on his exclusive “personal authority.” If all the above elements do not directly suggest vulnerability, it is in comparison with Biden that these elements acquire more meaning. We can observe how Biden effectively took the “environment round” in the two face-to-face debates analyzed, using the occasion to prevail over his opponent. Biden presented a more organized program to fight climate change, with a focus on creating new jobs, and discredited Trump’s policies, which seemed more focused on mitigating the consequences of climate change rather than addressing its causes.

Furthermore, the “enthusiasm of the moment” offered Biden the chance to use completely unrelated logical fallacies to personally attack and delegitimize President Trump, who appeared notably “impacted” by Biden’s words. Under this light, we can now answer the second research question: “Is there any substantial difference between the communication of the two most recent American presidents towards climate change?”

We observe that the overall most used keywords in the speeches of the two protagonists reflect their positions. Trump’s key terms are “American,” “job,” and “clean,” suggesting his priorities are tied to maintaining the current labor force and restoring overall American economic wealth and international power. However, his references to “crystal-clear water and air” appear frequent but vague. On the other hand, Biden’s most used terms are “climate,” “urgent,” and “World,” indicating his view of the climate crisis as an immediate issue to be countered, and that the United States plays a key role in addressing it responsibly for the world.

Moreover, we note how both Trump and Biden employed metaphors to simplify the content of their speeches. Trump used terms like “attack,” “threat,” “fight,” and “draconian burden” when discussing environmental regulations and their alleged impact on American jobs. He also used the expression “taking out the cows” to criticize the Democratic preference for alternative energy over fossil fuels and frequently invoked the phrase “I want crystal-clear water and air” to emphasize his commitment to environmental protection. Biden used metaphors such as “fight” (in reference to deforestation and global hunger) and “marathon” to describe the transformation of “the largest economy in the world into a thriving, innovative, equitable, and just clean country.” Like Trump, he also used the expression “crystal-clear water and air.”

In terms of logical fallacies, we observed that Trump often employed persuasive devices such as two false binary oppositions, when he claimed environmental regulations could lead to an increase in drug abuse and mortality rates, and a false parallel, comparing his “humble” origins with those of coal miners. Biden, on the other hand, used three ad hominem arguments to delegitimize Trump, referencing exaggerated and unrelated claims about nuclear bombs, and one slippery slope argument, suggesting that if Trump had a second mandate, “these hellish events will continue to become more common, more devastating, and more deadly.”

Regarding the use of authority, we’ve seen that Trump relied on his personal authority, often disregarding scientific consensus, while Biden emphasized scientific authority, along with his institutional authority as former Vice President and Senator.

Finally, concerning agency, Trump often used the pronoun “I” to position himself as the main architect of a new American energy revolution and “we” to identify with his audience. In contrast, Biden used “we” to call his audience to act collectively to address environmental distress. In conclusion, we can claim that there are significant differences in the communication strategies of the two most recent American presidents regarding climate change. Further research is needed to yield more comprehensive findings, and this study provides a foundation to track how President Trump may rhetorically respond in real time to challenges such as the California wildfires.

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Speeches

SPEECH 1 (TRUMP): <https://youtu.be/Q9P6dLvFTZI>.

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SPEECH 6 (FACE TO FACE DEBATE): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wwv5DBUgupk>.

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SPEECH 8 (BIDEN): <https://youtu.be/f1ZFhVwnV6I>.

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