
AN APPRAISAL ANALYSIS ON JOE BIDEN'S RHETORIC OF GUN CONTROL

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ABSTRACT

The recurring gun violence in the U.S. has been a prevailing issue for a long period. To tackle these, the government has implemented various policies and regulations. However, a transformation is nowhere to be seen. Having advocated for a change is Joe Biden, the president of the United States. In the light of recent unfortunate occurrences, Biden delivered a public speech that addressed this issue. This study aims to understand and thoroughly comprehend Biden's speech using appraisal analysis, in which the elements of appraisal are used to classify the terms within Biden's speech. This research uses qualitative methods, and it is concluded that it is clear from the performed research and supplementary data in the preceding sentence that Biden's speech contains a total of 37 evaluative items. 19 of these appraising items are positive, while 18 are negative. 19 of these appraising items are positive. This study found 12 findings for each of the appraisal parts of affect and appreciation, 7 findings of Judgment-social esteem and 6 findings of judgment-social sanction. Upon analyzing, it is found that Biden's speech contains numerous meanings, some of which are how he is saddened by the unfortunate event, and subsequently advocates transformation on gun regulation in the future years. In conclusion, Biden's position on gun issues as president of the U.S. is that the owner and the regulation, not the gun, are the issue.

Keywords: *appraisal; gun control; gun law; POTUS, presidential speech*

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INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment in 1776, the United States of America has had to endure numerous issues from various aspects. One of the recurring, and often deep-rooted issues is gun violence. The CDC (2020) reports that 45,222 Americans died from gun-related injuries in 2020, the most recent year for which complete data is available. 19,384 out of 24,576 homicides in the U.S. in 2020 (or 79%) involved a firearm. Among the three American largest cities, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, there has also been an increase in shooting incidents—except in Los Angeles. In the 2019-2020 timeframe, according to the NYPD (2020), there is an 11.7% increase in shooting incidents in New York, and a 23% increase in shooting incidents in Chicago (CPD, 2020). In 2021, the LAPD reported that there is a 141% increase in shooting incidents (CNS, 2021).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the U.S. population to have more access to firearms during the pandemic, and access to firearms is independently correlated with the likelihood of homicide and suicide with firearms (Studdert et al., 2020). Yamane (2017) established a concept called Gun Culture 2.0, which is focused on the culture of an armed citizenry, also known as armed self-defense. The idea of “armed citizenship” acknowledges the numerous and increasing numbers of Americans who exercise their constitutional right to carry weapons for self-defense in public, resulting in an increase of gun-related incidents. According to an analysis of gun sales in the U.S., the number of criminal background checks for gun transactions significantly increased during

the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. The FBI carried out 13,674,878 background checks for firearm transactions between March and June 2020, up 42% over the same period in 2019 (FBI, 2020). However, an estimated 6.6 million weapons, or 40% of all transactions of firearms, occur each year without any background checks (McLean et al., 2019).

Finally, the U.S. regulates the legal possession of firearms. This refers to any legal action taken to prevent or limit access to or use of weapons, especially firearms. In a larger historical sense, the phrase also refers to restrictions on the ownership or use of other weapons, including some that date back to before the discovery of gunpowder. Only those in possession of a current, state-issued permit may buy handguns in the Empire State. After submitting fingerprints, paying a number of fees, undertaking a thorough background investigation that includes speaking with acquaintances in the police, and convincing a local court that they have a good cause for wanting to acquire a handgun can applicants obtain that permission (Spitzer, 2020). However, despite the thorough process, gun possession in the U.S. is protected by the law—the second amendment—to be exact. The U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment has been read to safeguard the majority of gun ownership, and according to the preponderant judicial view, it offers strong protection for gun rights (Pomeranz et al., 2021). The constitution reads “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”. Gun control is regulated by the government of the United States under this

amendment. As Reeping et al. (2019) claimed in their study, a fully adjusted model analysis revealed a significant 11.5% (95% confidence interval 4.2% to 19.3%, $P=0.002$) greater rate of mass shootings for every 10 units higher state gun legislation permissiveness. Mass shooting rates increased by a significant 35.1% (12.7% to 62.7%, $P=0.001$) for every 10% rise in state gun ownership. Similar findings were obtained from studies that only included domestic and international mass shootings as well as from partially adjusted regression models. It adds to the fact that owning a gun is considered a birthright and an essential part of the nation's heritage by many advocates (Masters, 2015) in addition to sociocultural factors, such as fear of African-American violence (O'Brien, 2013). Gun violence is multifactorial (Sanchez et al., 2020). However, from a compilation of data shown prior, the amendment and gun possession law are arguably linked to the high number of mass murders committed with guns—significantly higher than any other country in the world.

To assess this issue, a thorough analysis of the government's stance in regard to this issue needs to be performed. In this article, the government's stance is studied on the highest-leveled representative of the executive, the U.S. President. As a leader of the country, the president often delivers speeches regarding various issues. These speeches possess meanings and serve as a direct reflection on the president's stance concerning a subject. Therefore, analyzing the president's speech is the most ideal method to conclude how gun control and gun violence in the U.S. are addressed and practiced.

The speech of the current president of the U.S., Joe Biden, is selected as the object of this study. The underlying reason for this designation is that Biden is the active president of the U.S., and has delivered several speeches addressing gun violence. Particularly, the speech that is used in this study is Biden's latest speech regarding gun control and gun violence, which was delivered on Thursday, 2 June 2022 at the White House.

In order to examine the speech, the full transcript of the speech will be analyzed using appraisal analysis by Martin & White (2005). Appraisal is one of three major discourse semantic resources constructing interpersonal meaning (alongside involvement and negotiation). The evaluation process itself is regionalized into three interconnected domains called "attitude", "engagement", and "graduation". People's emotions, including emotional responses, behavioral assessments, and objectivity assessments are all part of our attitude. Engagement deals with the play of voices surrounding opinions in debate as well as the sourcing of attitudes. Graduation addresses the phenomenon of grading, in which classifications are muddled and emotions are heightened. However, this study focuses only on the attitude aspect of the appraisal theory. The three areas of feeling that make up attitude are "affect", "judgment", and "appreciation". Affect is concerned with tools for understanding emotional responses. It is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings: happy or sad, confident or anxious, interested or bored. Judgment deals with attitudes towards behavior, which we admire or criticize, praise or condemn. Resources for evaluating behavior in accordance with different normative norms

are relevant to judgment. Appreciation considers resources for determining the worth of things, such as natural occurrences and semiosis (as either product or process). It involves evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena, according to how they are valued or not in a given field.

This study aims to analyze, understand and establish a conclusion on the U.S. government regarding gun violence. The implementation of appraisal theory will help the author understand the interpersonal meaning of the speech better. Therefore, the objective of this study can be obtained. The methodology chosen for this study is qualitative as the data were gathered through non-numerical modes of observation and data collection. The process of comprehending the meaning people have created, how people make sense of their reality, and the experiences they have in it is referred to as descriptive qualitative (Merriam, 2009; Rudy & Adhitya, 2022, p. 338). Additionally, a case study or participant observation approach can be used in qualitative research to produce narrative, descriptive accounts of a situation or activity (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011). The qualitative method with the researchers as the human instrument is the most ideal option for this research (Adhitya, Rosmawati & Fainnayla, 2022, p. 73).

The concept of analyzing speech using appraisal analysis has been implemented in various studies. A study conducted by Nasution (2018) utilized this theory to analyze Donald Trump’s speech. The purpose of this study, was to evaluate Trump’s emotive speech. It used Praat to support the results regarding emotion in

terms of feeling based on the voice of Trump and Appraisal theory to assess the text.

The study uses Praat to detect and analyze speech emotion to examine the emotional circumstances present in Trump’s speech transcription. The research’s textual and audio sources were Trump’s remarks at the U.N. General Assembly’s 72nd session. The study concentrated on a particular line in which Trump expressed emotion while speaking to North Korea. The affect, judgment, and appreciation Attitude aspects were used by the researcher to analyze the emotional conditions present in Trump’s speech. Then, using Praat, an algorithmic approach is implemented to detect and analyze normal, furious, and panic emotions from the sound pitch and intensity. According to the findings on attitude, the percentages of effect, judgment, and appreciation were 30.3 percent, 45.5 percent, and 24.2 percent, respectively. According to the results of the Praat analysis, at Affection, 6 words (16.6%) showed furious emotion in both pitch and intensity, while 5 words (13.8%) displayed angry emotion in both pitch and intensity and panic emotion in intensity. In judgment, 10 words (27.7%) showed angry emotion and 5 words (13.8%) of the pitch showed panic emotion. In appreciation, 6 words (16.6%) showed angry emotion, and 3 words (8.3%) showed panic emotion. Lastly, 1 word (2.7%) of Trump’s pitch showed normal emotion. The research found The data revealed that the number of Affect (11/30.3%), Judgment (15/45.5%), and Appreciation (10/24.2%) could be noticed in the results of the attitude study. When delivering his statement regarding North Korea, Trump displayed attitude in both positive and negative ways. In Trump’s speech, judgment predominated in terms of

word count and sentiment. As a result, these findings suggested that Trump tended to expose the true nature of North Korea's leader. The tone that Trump used in his address to the leaders of North Korea was generally unfavorable. Trump called North Korean leaders derogatory names, such as Rocketman, which targeted nuclear-powered North Korea. The research by Nasution (2018) used the same theory that is used in this article. However, there is a gap between the study conducted and this research. Nasution's research studies the pitch and intonation of Trump's speech, whereas this study will focus on the appraisal as the only instrument.

In addition, a study by Zebua (2018) also utilized appraisal theory as the instrument of the research. The research analyzed the speech of Martin Luther King Jr., the thesis examines the use of appraisal from the Attitude subsystem of the Appraisal Theory in King Jr.'s demonstration speech. This study primarily highlights the affect elements that were present in the speech "I Have a Dream." Martin and White's (2005) theory, which classified affect elements into two categories—realis affect and irrealis affect—was the foundation for this thesis. Realis affect is divided into six sub-systems: happiness, unhappiness, security, insecurity, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction. Irrealis affect is separated into two sub-systems: inclination and disinclination. The writer can conclude the following based on the analysis: there are 71 manageable clauses in King Jr.'s speech. He employed the realis and irrealis systems of Martin and White's theory in terms of affect. The writer found 48 items for evaluation, including 20 for security, 10 for insecurity, 7 for inclination, 3 for unhappiness, 3 for dissatisfaction, 2 for

disinclination, 2 for satisfaction and 1 for happiness. and 3 for disinclination (1). The outcome above demonstrated that security in the category of "trust" is where Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech dominates. Martin Luther King demonstrated his skills as a persuasive public speaker by communicating his message using both positive and negative affect. In sum, Zebua (2018) demonstrates the same method used in this research. The use of realis and irrealis affect—however—sets the two researches apart. Nevertheless, the elements from the two researches mentioned in this literature review are helpful in evaluating this research.

This article will thus discuss the appraisal aspect—namely affect, judgment and appreciation—of Biden's speech on gun control and gun violence. The appraisal theory is implemented to obtain a thorough understanding and classification of the terms used by Biden. Therefore, the complete interpersonal meaning of Biden's speech will be able to be concluded by the end of this research.

DISCUSSION

The process of analyzing the transcript of the speech is performed by classifying the words used by Biden in his speech into a set of tables that contain affect, judgment and appreciation. In the initial part of the discussion, the tables displayed contain the total amount of sub-categories found in Biden's speech. The subcategory in affect includes un/happiness, in/security, dis/satisfaction, and dis/inclination. The subcategory within judgment are divided into social esteem (normality, capacity and tenacity), and social sanction (veracity and propriety). Lastly, appreciation has a

subcategory that includes reaction, composition and valuation. In addition, each

of these subcategories are classified into positive and negative.

Table 1. Affect

No.	Type of Affect	Appraising Items		Total
		Positive	Negative	
1.	Happiness	<i>Honoring.</i>	-	1
2.	Unhappiness	-	<i>Broken, suffering, hurting, wounded, heartbreaking, cry.</i>	6
3.	Security	<i>Willing.</i>	-	1
4.	Insecurity	-	-	-
5.	Satisfaction	-	-	-
6.	Dissatisfaction	-	<i>Carnage, rampage, outrageous.</i>	3
7.	Inclination	-	-	-
8.	Disinclination	-	<i>Horrificed.</i>	1
				12

In effect, the terms found are amounted to 12 in total, with “honoring” which resembles positive happiness, “broken”, “suffering”, “hurting”, “wounded”, “heartbreaking”, “cry” which are part of

negative unhappiness, “willing” from positive security, “carnage”, “rampage” and “outrageous” of negative dissatisfaction, and “horrified”, part of negative disinclination.

Table 2. Judgment – Social Esteem

No.	Type of Judgment	Appraising Items		Total
		Positive (admire)	Negative (criticize)	
1.	Normality (how special?)	<i>Beautiful, shine.</i>	-	2
2.	Capacity (how capable?)	<i>Responsible, best-trained, succeed.</i>	<i>Ordinary, fail.</i>	5
3.	Tenacity (how dependable?)	-	-	-
				7

In judgment - social esteem, the total of appraising items found is 7, with 5 capacity–3 positive capacity in “responsible”, “best-trained”, and “succeed”--and 2 negative

capacity in “ordinary” and “fail”. Lastly, the 2 positive normality is represented by “beautiful” and “shine”.

Table 3. Judgment – Social Sanction

No.	Type of Judgment	Appraising Items		Total
		Positive (praise)	Negative (condemn)	
1.	Veracity (how honest?)	<i>Innocent.</i>	<i>Unconscionable.</i>	2
2.	Propriety (how far beyond reproach)	<i>Lawful, rational.</i>	<i>Violent, danger.</i>	4
				6

In the table of judgment - social sanction, upon analysis, it is found that the total of appraising items are 6. 2 of them are positive veracity with “innocent” and

negative veracity with “unconscionable”. The rest of the 6 are 2 terms of positive propriety, which are “lawful”, “rational”, and 2 terms of negative propriety: “violent” and “danger”.

Table 3. Appreciation

No.	Type of Appreciation	Appraising Items		Total
		Positive	Negative	
1.	Reaction	<i>Hallowed, free, easy.</i>	<i>Devastating.</i>	4
2.	Composition	<i>Clear.</i>	-	1
3.	Valuation	<i>Absolute, vast, tougher.</i>	<i>Liability, bad, hard, invisible.</i>	7
				12

The last table, appreciation, contains 11 appraising items. These 10 items are divided into 3 positive reaction: “hallowed”, “free” and “easy”. 1 positive composition: “clear”, 3 positive valuation: “absolute”, “vast”, and “tougher”, and 4 negative valuation: “liability”, “bad”, “hard”, “invisible”.

to this subcategory is “broken”, “suffering”, “hurting”, “wounded”, “heartbreaking” and “cry”. In addition to the terms within negative unhappiness, his sorrowful stance toward this issue is also reflected on other subcategories, with the words “devastating”, and “horrified”.

Objectively, Biden’s foundational stance about gun violence is negative. According to the data shown, he highlights how this unfortunate occurrence is rather sorrowful, proven as he mentions a total of 6—the most among subcategories. Biden’s word in regard

Evidently, his stance on gun regulation is positive. With a total of 7 mentions, comprising “absolute”, “vast”, “tougher”, “liability”, “bad”, “hard” and “invisible”, Biden proclaimed that the war on gun violence and implementing proper gun

control is a task that is anything but easy. In addition, these terms also highlight how Biden is willing to establish tougher and tighter regulations despite the fact that it would be a hard task.

In this speech, Biden also covers sentimental values, showcasing his sympathy towards the victims with positive terms such as “beautiful”, “shine”, “innocent”, “hallowed”. This adds into the dynamic of his speech, as these sympathetic terms are integrated with the violent nature of this issue which are reflected by the words “carnage”, “rampage” and “outrageous”.

CONCLUSION

From the conducted study and supported evidence in the prior paragraph, it can be concluded that Biden’s speech has a total of 37 appraising items. Among these appraising items, 19 of them are positive, whereas 18 of these appraising items are negative. The appraisal elements with the most findings in this research are affect and appreciation, with 12 findings each, followed by judgment-social esteem with 7 findings, and the elements with the least findings is judgment-social sanction with 6 findings. The other terms mentioned in his speech are just as essential, and combined with other appraisal elements, these words successfully showcased Biden’s stance and his future acts in regard to this issue.

To conclude, Biden is not at all fond of this situation. In his speech, he repeatedly emphasized how he suffered from this situation, as an American and as a leader. He also paid his condolences towards the victims, whom he referred to as “beautiful and innocent”. Despite being saddened and furious, Biden did not only focus on what

had happened, but instead provided a solution on the upcoming times. He shared his opinion on gun regulation, and was willing to perform a transformation on gun regulation, while not taking the freedom of the US citizens to possess firearms—which is protected by the second amendment. In sum, Joe Biden's stance as the president of the United States towards gun issues is that the firearm itself is not a problem, the owner and the regulation is. His personal views on this issue are reflected entirely on the speech that he delivered, making his speech the ideal focus of this study.

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