

# The Bag of Words

POS6933: Computational Social Science

Jake S. Truscott, Ph.D

University of Florida  
Spring 2026



## Overview

- Discussion Re: Topic Selection Assignment & Final Project Assessment
  - Week 4 Problem Set Review
  - Contextualizing the *Bag of Words* (BoW)
  - Document Frequency Matrices
  - Word Clouds

## Topic Selection Assignment

- If haven't already: Respond to my questions/comments on Canvas
- **Big Items:**
  - Substance v. Application
  - Depth > Breadth
  - Cool Data & Method ≠ Sufficient – Needs to have (*coherent*) structure of academic research article
  - I am a resource – collaborate and ***Don't Procrastinate***

## Submission, Presentation, and Evaluation

### Formatting

- Final papers must be compiled in Latex or RMarkdown and submitted as PDF.
- Must include supplemental appendix with any and all R or Python code used to render tables/figures
- Presentation slides can be in PowerPoint – though I can provide my template for UF Beamer (LaTex) for anyone interested.
- Presentations should be 12-15 minutes and allow for 5-10 minutes of Q&A (lead by instructor & peer evaluators)

### Evaluation

- Topic Assignment (5pts)
- Instructor Evaluation (35pts) – *Rubric Coming Soon*
- Peer Review (5pts) – *Assignment(s) Coming Soon*

## Looking Forward

- I want drafts for review by **April 1** – *I will tell you what to fix...*
- I'm happy to collaborate but not workshop – *No half-baked ideas...*
- **Seriously...** don't put this off until April – **Fair Warning:** *undevloped work will be treated as such.*
- **Any questions re: formatting, expectations, etc.?**

## Week 4 Problem Set

### Notes:

- Generally good work
- I am going to start being more critical of RMarkdown submissions
- Most Common Problem: Text pre-processing (*More Today...*)

## The Bag of Words

- **The Bag of Words:** Represents documents as a collection of individual words, ignoring grammar and word order – emphasizes co-occurrence of these terms as a principal indicator of similarity or cohesion across documents.
- Intuitive Analogy:
  - Imagine dumping all the words from a document into a bag – shake it!
  - Either reach into the bag and collect words or dump it out
  - Count the word frequencies
- Order and context are unnecessary (vector multiset) – the existence (and prevalence) of words is sufficient to make sophisticated assessments about the document(s)

## The Bag of Words (Cont.)

- **Why it's Useful:** Converts text into numerical features that can be used for classification, regression, and clustering tasks (*Coming Soon!*).
- In short: We'll build a *vocabulary* of all unique words across documents, then represent each document as a vector of word counts (*frequencies*) corresponding to that vocabulary.
  - Can use these vectors to inform of us both individual documents (ex: emphasize of certain words over others), as well as in comparison to other documents (e.g., how some documents use certain words more than others)

## State of the Union Address

- We want to know how (if) presidents talk about military issues during annual State of the Union addresses.

## State of the Union Address

- We want to know how (if) presidents talk about military issues during annual State of the Union addresses.
- **First Step:** Construct a vector of terms we associate with the topic of interest (e.g., troops, defense, war, security, veterans).

## State of the Union Address

- We want to know how (if) presidents talk about military issues during annual State of the Union addresses.
- **First Step:** Construct a vector of terms we associate with the topic of interest (e.g., troops, defense, war, security, veterans).
- **Operationalization:** For each address, count the frequency (or proportion) of these military-related terms.

## State of the Union Address

- We want to know how (if) presidents talk about military issues during annual State of the Union addresses.
- **First Step:** Construct a vector of terms we associate with the topic of interest (e.g., troops, defense, war, security, veterans).
- **Operationalization:** For each address, count the frequency (or proportion) of these military-related terms.
- **Key Assumption:** We are confident about capturing a generalizable series of statements concerning military issues because these specific terms should appear in any military-related section of the speech.

## SOTU Address – Military (Cont.)

```
library(sotu) # Load SOTU Dataset
sotu_info <- sotu::sotu_meta %>%
  filter(president %in% c("Dwight D. Eisenhower",
  "George Bush")) # Get Info for Eisenhower and H.W.
head(sotu_info) # Print Head
```

X	president	year	years_active	party	sotu_type	
1	165	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1953	1953-1957	Republican	written
2	167	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1954	1953-1957	Republican	speech
3	168	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1955	1953-1957	Republican	speech
4	169	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1956	1953-1957	Republican	speech
5	170	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1956	1953-1957	Republican	written
6	171	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1957	1957-1961	Republican	speech

## SOTU Address – Military (Cont.)

```
indices <- c(sotu_info$X) # Indices to Partition sotu_text

sotu_eisenhower_bush <- setNames(lapply(seq_len(nrow(sotu_info)),
  function(i) {
    cbind(sotu_info[i, ], text = sotu::sotu_text[[indices[i]]])
  }), paste0(sotu_info$president, " (", sotu_info$year,
  ")")) # Nest Each Speech in List

names(sotu_eisenhower_bush) # Print Names
```

```
[1] "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953)" "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1954)" "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1955)"
[4] "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1956)" "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1956)" "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1957)"
[7] "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1958)" "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1959)" "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1960)"
[10] "Dwight D. Eisenhower (1961)" "George Bush (1989)" "George Bush (1990)"
[13] "George Bush (1991)" "George Bush (1992)"
```

## SOTU Address – Military (Cont.)

```
military_words_regex <- paste0("(", paste(c("military",
  "army", "navy", "marines", "air force"), collapse = "|"),
 ")") # 'Military' Words Regex
```

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953)	--	12	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1954)	--	15	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1955)	--	17	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1956)	--	0	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1956)	--	9	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1957)	--	8	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1958)	--	25	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1959)	--	11	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1960)	--	6	Sentences
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1961)	--	7	Sentences
George Bush (1989)	--	4	Sentences
George Bush (1990)	--	6	Sentences
George Bush (1991)	--	1	Sentences
George Bush (1992)	--	2	Sentences

## SOTU Address – Military (Cont.)

- Let's validate

```
validation <- unlist(sotu_eisenhower_bush[[14]]$military_text) # Bush 1992 -- Print Example  
  
cat(validation)
```

Two years ago, I began planning cuts in military spending that reflected the changes of the new era. But now, this year, with imperial communism gone, that process can be accelerated. Tonight I can tell you of dramatic changes in our strategic nuclear force. These are actions we are taking on our own because they are the right thing to do. After completing 20 planes for which we have begun procurement, we will shut down further production of the B - 2 bombers. We will cancel the small ICBM program. We will cease production of new warheads for our sea-based ballistic missiles. We will stop all new production of the Peacekeeper missile. And we will not purchase any more advanced cruise missiles. The Secretary of Defense recommended these cuts after consultation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And I make them with confidence. But do not misunderstand me. The reductions I have approved will save us an additional \$50 billion over the next 5 years. By 1997, we will have cut defense by 30 percent since I took office. These cuts are deep, and you must know my resolve: This deep, and no deeper. To do less would be insensible to progress, but to do more would be ignorant of history. We must not go back to the days of "the hollow army." We cannot repeat the mistakes made twice in this century

## SOTU Address – Military

- Sample appears to confirm that we're indeed recovering parts of the address related to the military.
- FWIW, certain policy elements are *always* in SOTU Addresses – e.g., the economy, education, and the military
- **What are some additional terms we can use to capture rhetoric related to the military?**

## SOTU Address – Military (Cont.)

```
military_speeches <- data.frame()

for (i in 1:length(sotu_eisenhower_bush)) {
  temp_military <- unlist(sotu_eisenhower_bush[[i]]$military_text)
  if (length(temp_military) == 0) {
    next
  }
  temp_speech <- names(sotu_eisenhower_bush[i])
  temp_df <- data.frame(speech = temp_speech, military_text = temp_military)
  military_speeches <- bind_rows(military_speeches,
    temp_df)
} # Combine to Single DF

military_speeches$president <- ifelse(grepl("Eisenhower",
  military_speeches$speech), "Eisenhower", "Bush") # Add President ID

rownames(military_speeches) <- NULL
```

## SOTU Address – Military (Cont.)

```
tibble(military_speeches)
```

```
# A tibble: 123 x 3
  speech           military_text
  <chr>            <chr>
1 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "But the problem of security demands closer cooperation among the nations
2 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "Europe's enlightened leaders have long been aware of these facts. All the
3 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "The needed unity of Western Europe manifestly cannot be manufactured from
4 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "This war is, for Americans, the most painful phase of Communist aggression
5 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "This has meant, in effect, that the United States Navy was required to see
6 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "Consequently there is no longer any logic or sense in a condition that re
7 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "Our problem is to achieve adequate military strength within the limits of
8 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "Both military and economic objectives demand a single national military p
9 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "We must not let traditions or habits of the past stand in the way of deve
10 Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953) "Because of the complex technical nature of our military organization and
# i 113 more rows
```

## SOTU Address – Exercise

Using the sotu dataset, let's analyze another pairing of executives and policy area.

- Select another pair of presidents (since 1960)
- Select another policy area (ex: the economy, civil rights, energy, etc.)
- Develop a vocabulary and regular expression (regex) to capture parts of the speeches discussing those policy areas.
- Validate your data collection by sampling a few elements of the collected data

## High-Dimensional Text

- **Recall:** Using text data often relieves concerns re: small observations **but** high-dimensionality often introduces sparsity problems of its own.
- As the number of unique **tokens** (word units) increase, observations become sparse and distances between documents become less informative.

## Normalizing Text

- **Complexity Reduction:** Process of systematically transforming raw text to reduce the number and variability of unique tokens (features) while preserving meaningful semantic content.
- Reducing feature complexity constrains the hypothesis space, improving generalization to new documents.
- **Normalization** (lowercasing, lemmatization, stopword removal, etc.) reduces dimensionality and stabilizes similarity measures.

## Normalizing Text – Big Consideration

- Denny & Spirling (2018) – **Main point?**

## Normalizing Text – Big Consideration

- Denny & Spirling (2018) – **Main point?**
- Pre-processing – *if & how* – can have fundamental impact on results.
- Week 4 Problem Set: How you partitioned text impacted your summary values
- Models produce values/estimates given observational data – how (and how much) your input is structured will have an impact on output!

## Complexity Reduction – R Function

```
reduce_complexity <- function(text) {  
  text <- tolower(text) # Lower Case  
  text <- tm::removePunctuation(text) # Punctuation  
  text <- tm::removeNumbers(text) # Numbers  
  text <- tm::removeWords(text, tm::stopwords("english")) # Stop Words  
  text <- unlist(stringr::str_split(text, "\\s+")) # Tokenize  
  text <- textstem::lemmatize_words(text) # Lemmatize  
  text <- paste(text, collapse = " ") # Re-Append  
  text <- gsub("\\s{2,}", " ", text) # 2 or More Spaces --> One Space  
  text <- trimws(text) # White Space  
  return(text)  
} # Function to Process Text for Bag of Words
```

## Complexity Reduction – Comparison

```
regular <- military_speeches$military_text[1] # Print Regular Text
normalized <- reduce_complexity(military_speeches$military_text[1]) # Processed Text Example

cat(regular)
```

But the problem of security demands closer cooperation among the nations of Europe than has been known to date. Only a more closely integrated economic and political system can provide the greatly increased economic strength needed to maintain both necessary military readiness and respectable living standards.

```
cat(normalized)
```

problem security demand close cooperation among nation europe know date closely integrate economic political system can provide greatly increase economic strength need maintain necessary military readiness respectable live standard

## Complexity Reduction – Exercise

- Using `reduce_complexity()` function, recover text from your example SOTU policy.
- *Note:* Goals of this pre-processing step are to preserve information while reducing noise – do you think that's still the case once you've normalized your text?

## Document Frequency Matrix

- **DFM:** A *sparse* matrix where rows represent documents and columns represent features (usually word types), and each cell contains the frequency of that feature in that document.
- **Recall:** Our first step to analyze text at the document unit was to create a corpus of text – we will do the same then convert that corpus into a sparse matrix using `quanteda`.

## Creating a DFM – Create a Corpus First!

```
military_speeches <- military_speeches %>%
  mutate(military_text_clean = sapply(military_text,
    reduce_complexity)) # Apply Complexity Reduction

sotu_corpus <- quanteda::corpus(military_speeches,
  text_field = "military_text_clean") # Convert to Corpus Object

sotu_tokens <- quanteda::tokens(sotu_corpus) # Recover Tokens from Corpus Object

sotu_dfm <- dfm(sotu_tokens) %>%
  dfm_trim(min_termfreq = 2) # Convert to DFM -- Remove Words w/ Less Than 2 Appearances
```

## Creating a DFM (Cont.)

```
quanteda::topfeatures(sotu_dfm, 20) # 20-top Features (Words)
```

military	will	defense	must	force	nation	security	economic	program	world	strength	ma
132	65	50	44	43	40	38	34	34	32	31	
year	new	power	peace	need	maintain	shall					
28	26	24	24	23	22	22					

## Visualizing the DFM – Heatmap

```
sotu_dfm_reduced <- sotu_dfm[, names(topfeatures(sotu_dfm, 10))] # Filter to Top-20 Terms
speech_labels <- docvars(sotu_dfm_reduced, "speech")

sotu_dfm_reduced %>%
  quanteda::convert(to = "data.frame") %>% # Convert DFM to DF
  mutate(speech = speech_labels) %>% # Append Speech Labels
  tidyverse::pivot_longer(cols = -c(doc_id, speech), names_to = "term", values_to = "frequency") %>%
  ggplot(aes(x = term, y = speech, fill = frequency)) +
  geom_tile(colour = 'grey') +
  geom_label(aes(label = frequency)) +
  scale_fill_gradient(low = "white", high = "deepskyblue4") +
  theme_minimal() +
  labs(x = "\nTerm", y = "Speech\n") +
  default_ggplot_theme
```

## Visualizing the DFM – Heatmap

	defense	economic	force	military	must	nation	program	security	will	world
George Bush (1992)	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1
George Bush (1991)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
George Bush (1990)	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
George Bush (1989)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1961)	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1960)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1959)	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1958)	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1957)	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	2
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1956)	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1955)	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1954)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953)	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

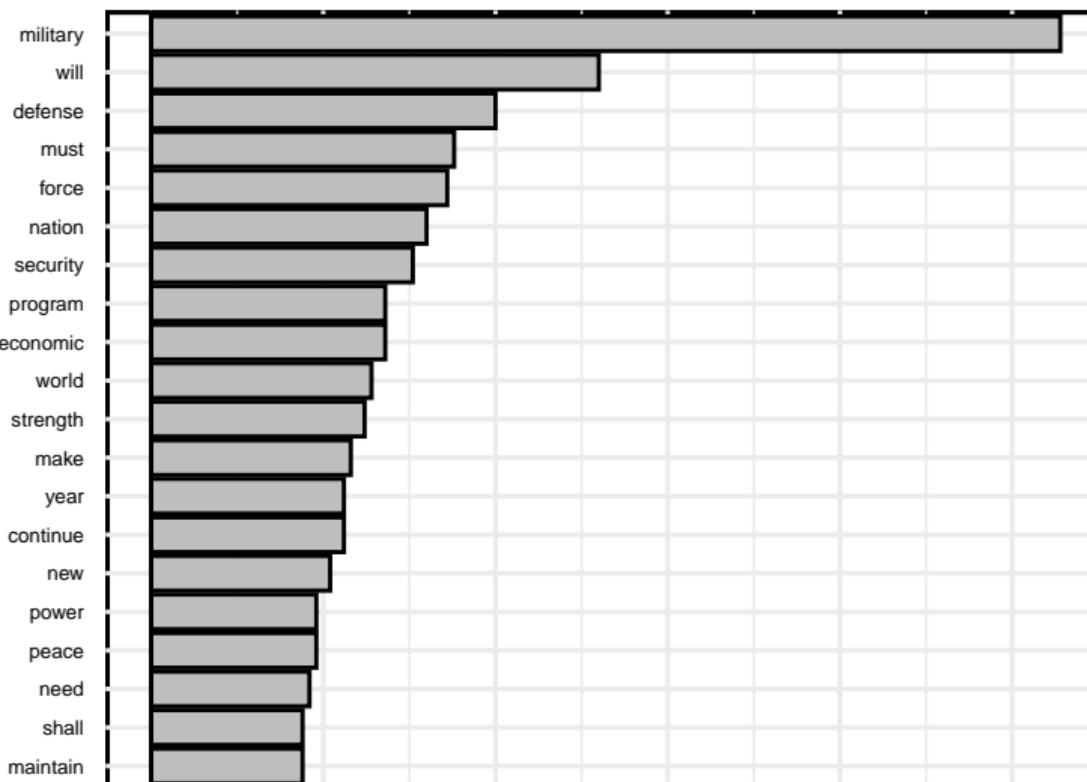
## Visualizing the DFM – Top Terms Bar Plot

```
top_terms <- topfeatures(sotu_dfm, 20)

sotu_bar_df <- data.frame(term = names(top_terms),
   frequency = as.numeric(top_terms))

sotu_bar_df %>%
  ggplot(aes(x = frequency, y = reorder(term, frequency))) +
  geom_col(fill = "grey", colour = "black") + labs(x = "\nFrequency",
  y = "Term\n") + geom_vline(xintercept = 0) + scale_x_continuous(breaks = seq(25,
  150, 25)) + default_ggplot_theme
```

## Visualizing the DFM – Top Terms Bar Plot

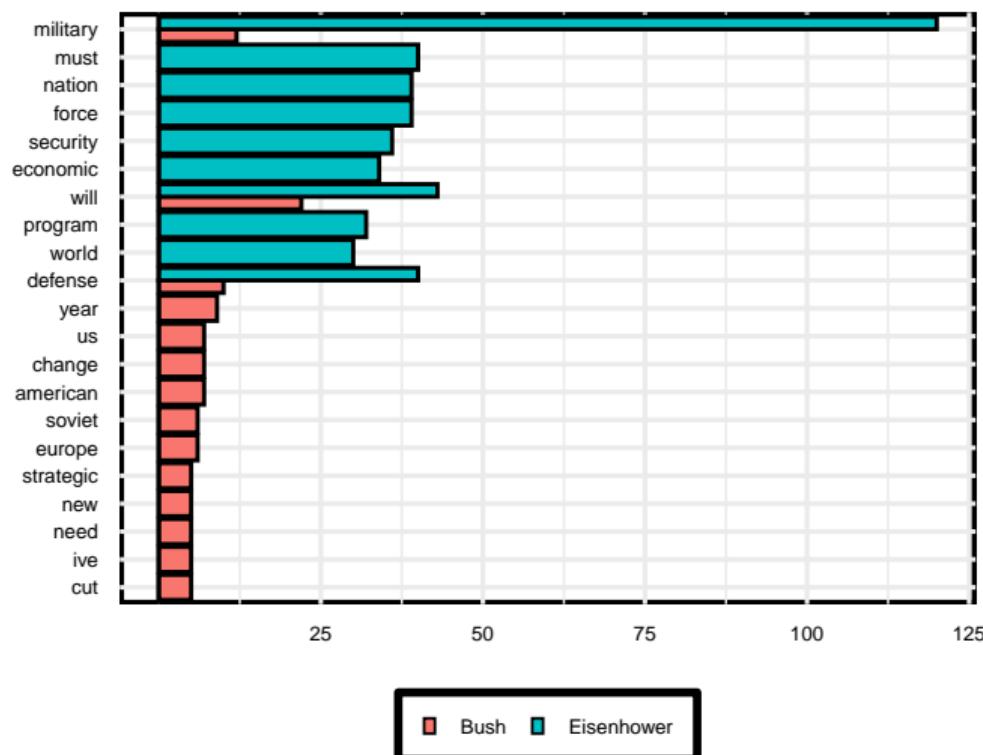


## Visualizing the DFM – Top Terms Bar Plot (By Pres)

```
sotu_term_freq <- textstat_frequency(sotu_dfm, group = president)

sotu_term_freq %>%
  group_by(group) %>%
  slice_max(frequency, n = 10) %>% # Take top-10 Terms
  ggplot(aes(y = reorder(feature, frequency), x = frequency)) +
  geom_col(aes(fill = group), colour = 'black', position = position_dodge()) +
  scale_x_continuous(breaks = seq(25, 125, 25)) +
  geom_vline(xintercept = 0) +
  default_ggplot_theme
```

## Visualizing the DFM – Top Terms Bar Plot (By Pres)



## Visualization Exercise

**Your turn – Use your custom policy area to replicate the three visualizations.**

## WordClouds

```
president_dfm <- dfm_group(sotu_dfm, groups = military_speeches$president) # Group DFM by President

quanteda.textplots::textplot_wordcloud(president_dfm,
  comparison = TRUE, max_words = 100, color = c("blue",
  "red"))
```

# WordClouds



Eisenhower

## Next Class

- Modeling the Bag of Words – Dictionaries, Multinomial Language Model, and Vector Space Model
- **Reminder:** Class 6 Problem Set Due Sunday
- **Reminder:** Respond to Final Project Notes!