

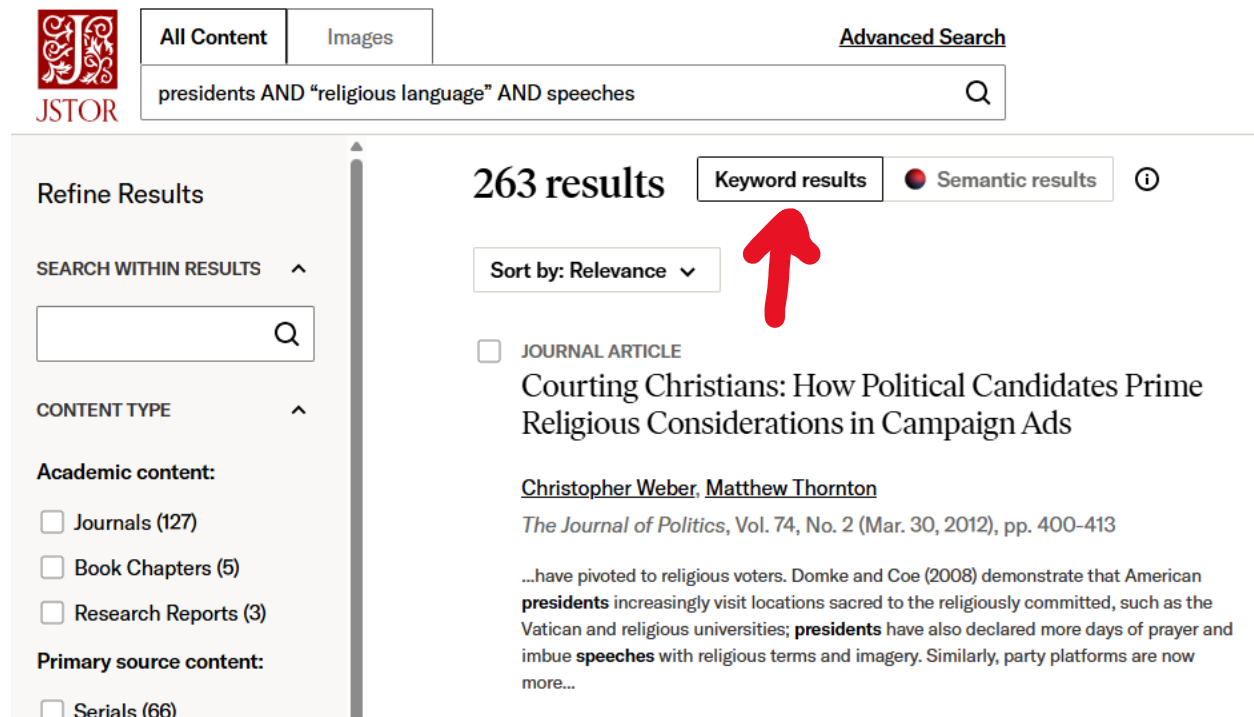
## SEMANTIC SEARCH IN JSTOR

JSTOR now offers an AI powered Semantic Search option in addition to the traditional Keyword Search option. As of 7/22/25, Semantic Search is still in the beta stage of development. To see and use the Semantic Search option, you must go to the JSTOR website and sign-in with your personal (free) JSTOR account.

Below we contrast Keyword and Semantic options. We will look for scholarly sources that discuss how US presidents use religious language in their speeches.

### Keyword Search

Figure 1 shows a traditional keyword search statement that uses operators. We use quotes to match the phrase “religious language,” and we use the logical operator AND to combine terms. So we have this: << presidents AND “religious language” AND speeches >>.



The screenshot shows the JSTOR search interface. At the top left is the JSTOR logo. Below it are two tabs: 'All Content' and 'Images'. To the right is a link for 'Advanced Search'. A search bar contains the query 'presidents AND "religious language" AND speeches'. Below the search bar, there are two buttons: 'Keyword results' and 'Semantic results'. A red arrow points to the 'Keyword results' button. To the left of the search results is a 'Refine Results' sidebar with sections for 'SEARCH WITHIN RESULTS' and 'CONTENT TYPE'. The 'CONTENT TYPE' section is expanded, showing 'Academic content' and 'Primary source content' with checkboxes and counts. The search results section shows '263 results' and a 'Sort by: Relevance' dropdown. The first result is a journal article titled 'Courting Christians: How Political Candidates Prime Religious Considerations in Campaign Ads' by Christopher Weber and Matthew Thornton, published in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Mar. 30, 2012), pp. 400-413. The article snippet begins with '...have pivoted to religious voters. Domke and Coe (2008) demonstrate that American presidents increasingly visit locations sacred to the religiously committed, such as the Vatican and religious universities; presidents have also declared more days of prayer and imbue speeches with religious terms and imagery. Similarly, party platforms are now more...

Figure 1

Our search yields 263 items. The first item seems to be relevant. Note the “263 results” label is followed by a button for “Keyword results” and another button for “Semantic results.” The red arrow points to Keyword, and Keyword is selected.

What happens if we continue with the Keyword option but use a natural language sentence to express what we want? We ask for this:

<< How do presidents use religious language in their speeches? >>

Since there are no explicit operators, JSTOR supplies the default operator AND. It searches the full-text and lists over 21 thousand articles that have these search terms somewhere in the text. It ranks by relevance. The first item does not seem helpful (but the second is). This is not the best way to use Keyword searching. See Figure 2.

The screenshot shows the JSTOR search interface. At the top left is the JSTOR logo. To its right are two tabs: 'All Content' (selected) and 'Images'. Further right is a link for 'Advanced Search'. Below these is a search bar containing the query 'How do presidents use religious language in their speeches' and a search icon. On the left side, there is a 'Refine Results' sidebar. It includes a 'SEARCH WITHIN RESULTS' section with a search box and a 'CONTENT TYPE' section. Under 'Academic content', there are checkboxes for 'Journals (6,196)', 'Book Chapters (381)', and 'Research Reports (124)'. Under 'Primary source content', there are checkboxes for 'Serials (10,814)', 'Documents (2,320)', 'Books (769)', 'Images (474)', 'Audio (15)', and 'Video (1)'. At the bottom of the sidebar is a 'DATE' filter with a question mark icon. The main content area displays '21,094 results' and two buttons: 'Keyword results' (selected) and 'Semantic results' (unselected). Below the buttons is a 'Sort by: Relevance' dropdown menu. The first result is a 'JOURNAL ARTICLE' titled 'African Languages Policy in the Education of South Africa: 20 Years of Freedom or Subjugation?' by Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi. The article is from the *Journal of Higher Education in Africa / Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Academic Freedom in Africa/Liberté académique en Afrique (2014), pp. 53-93. The abstract states: '...of South Africa: 20 Years of Freedom or Subjugation? Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi\* Abstract This paper focuses on the indigenous African languages policy in education debates in post-apartheid South Africa, and provides a policy review of language in education in the past 20 years of liberation in the South Africa...'. The second result is another 'JOURNAL ARTICLE' titled 'George Washington on Religious Liberty' by Vincent Phillip Muñoz. The article is from *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Winter, 2003), pp. 11-33. The abstract states: '...free exercise by focusing on how Washington dealt with Quaker claims for religious exemptions from military service. Individuals entering into society, must give up a share of liberty to preserve the rest. The magnitude of the sacrifice must depend...'. The 'Semantic results' button is currently unselected.

Figure 2

### Semantic Search

The search in Figure 3 is identical to the search in Figure 2 except the “Semantic results” button is selected. We have activated the new AI option. During beta testing, semantic search always lists the top 25 results. The first item seems to be very relevant.



All Content

Images

[Advanced Search](#)

How do presidents use religious language in their speeches



## Top 25 results

Keyword results

Semantic results

[Submit feedback](#)



JOURNAL ARTICLE

### Religion in American Presidential Campaigns, 1952-2016: Applying a New Framework for Understanding Candidate Communication

[Christopher B. Chapp](#), [Kevin Coe](#)

*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (JUNE 2019), pp. 398-414

..., and opponent strategy - that may help explain why political candidates **use religious language**. We employ this framework in a large-scale computer-assisted content analysis of U.S. presidential campaign **speeches** from 1952 to 2016. Findings reveal that the Reagan shift observed in prior research was driven specifically...



JOURNAL ARTICLE

### Religious Rhetoric and the Ethics of Public Discourse: The Case of George W. Bush

[Rogers M. Smith](#)

*Political Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Apr., 2008), pp. 272-300

...critics of ethical restraints on **religious** discourse have grounds to criticize the **religious** rhetoric of President George W. Bush. Quantitative and qualitative studies show that Bush has used a distinctive "prophetic" mode of **religious** expression more often than any modern predecessor. This sort of **religious** discourse is argued to be eth...

Figure 3

If you compare the search results in Figure 1 (where the search statement uses operators) with the search results in Figure 3 (where the search statement uses natural language and AI processing), then you see both searches produce reasonably helpful results for this example topic. But the semantic search option is easier to use. It resembles a search in Google, for example.

At present the JSTOR Semantic results option is powered by "All-MiniLM-L6-v2." That is a low-cost open-source AI product. We expect JSTOR to progress to more advanced products. But already Semantic Search is useful.