Faculty of Humanities, Social Science, and Education – Center for Peace Studies

# The United States Securitization Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic:
**A study of Post-truth governmentality from January – May 2020**

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**Photocreo Bednarek**

To those who have lost their lives due to the pandemic.

To all of us who have been directly or indirectly affected in countless ways.

May humanity learn, adapt, and grow.

May we never again take for granted those we love and those we cherish.

# ABSTRACT

Since December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly spread across the globe. This pandemic has inherently affected international relationships between countries and regional alliances. The extreme discomfort and strain placed upon the daily lives of the citizenry have transformed state-society relations. This dynamic can be especially be illustrated in the United States of America. Within the United States, the Trump Administration has articulated the severity of this virus in a fractured and incohesive manner. The American citizenry has responded, positively or negatively, to this discourse in various ways throughout 2020.

This academic study uses the method of multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the power dynamics, through linguistic practice, of the Trump Administration concerning their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using governmentality, securitization theory, and post-truth politics, I investigate seven actors' COVID-19 discourse from January to May 2020. I implement a comprehensive multi-step analytical approach that comprises four phases while researching sixty-one instances. This analytical approach introduces a new theoretical framework encompassing Post-truth governmentality. The analysis is further supplemented by five interviews with American citizens who have experienced the pandemic in the United States from the beginning.

The findings present three thematic narratives: 1) a clear and evident difference in discourse between the medical experts and the Trump Administration 2) Donald Trump, as an individual, radically stands out from all other researched actors, even those in his own administration 3) A shift in securitized rhetoric from January and February to March through May 2020.

Under the context of this academic study, a sizable amount of the United States' COVID-19 securitization was conducted with Post-truth governmentality features. Four of the seven actors qualified as a Post-truth governmentality actor. These individuals exercised discourse regulating citizenry behavior while simultaneously and/or deliberately omitting objective knowledge to preserve authority. The United States' Post-truth governmentality discourse, as it relates to COVID-19, has damaged the governmental apparatuses attempting to prevent the pandemic's spread. This discourse has eroded the confidence and faith of the American populous.

# List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| **CDA** | Critical Discourse Analysis |
| **CDC** | Center for Disease Control and Prevention |
| **COVID-19** | SARS-CoV-2 |
| **NIAID** | National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases |
| **PTG** | Post-truth governmentality |
| **SSI** | Semi-structured Interviews |
| **WHO** | World Health Organization |

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"*Doublethink* means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them… therefore knows he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of *doublethink* he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated… and so on indefinitely, with the lie always one leap ahead of the truth… Men are infinitely malleable."

- George Orwell, *1984*

# 1    Introduction

## 1.1    Background and Need

Where does one start an academic conversation? How do you articulate to forthcoming generations about what exactly occurred? The memories seared into our minds of what we observed and what we endured. I've contemplated how to detail the introductory phase of this thesis research; of how to properly chronicle an account in which each one of us is a sentence of the entire story. How the majority of individuals living under this era will forever recollect where and who they were. Perhaps people will view their existence in a 'before' and 'post' framework. To adequately describe, it naturally demands commenting on these greater events that reverberated around the world. This was the year of 2020. A seismic shift of grandiose consequence and experience. Of frustration. Of anxiety, anger, and loss. 2020 stands as truly unparalleled. By the time of my thesis' submission, 2021, a change will have transpired. This has been a time of duality – of silent isolation and unyielding pandemonium.

The connective thread to these sentiments is the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic. This global pandemic has extended to every corner of the world; drastically altering the landscape of each society and community. Discriminating against no one. Something as minuet as shaking hands with another or the distance between yourself and a stranger must now be properly acknowledged. From global sociology to individualistic psychology and mental health, our societal structures and institutions have undoubtedly been stressed to the extreme. Since the COVID-19 surge, the world has witnessed thousands upon thousands lose their jobs, homes, access to food or water, social services, and even loved ones. As of April 1st, 2021, there have been over 2.7 million deaths worldwide, with 125 million confirmed COVID-19 infections (John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021). Virtually every nation has been afflicted, scrambling how best to confront the outbreak. No country is immune from the rampant nature or ramifications of this virus. Each state has abided by its restrictions and protocols with varying degrees of success. Some countries have initiated complete governmental lockdowns, forcing citizens to remain indoors not including essential travel. Others have resisted this approach, remaining accessible, embracing the notion of herd immunity. The majority of state governance had fallen somewhere in between these practices, including the United States of America.

Just as this pandemic has spread around the planet, so historically, has the United States' unbridled foreign influence. Since the end of WWII, the United States of America has been the epicenter of liberal globalization, military power, and individualism. The amount of leverage and authority the United States upholds cannot be overstated in our international society. With these expectations comes a tremendous level of scrutiny; both foreign and domestic. For better and worse, the United States is under a constant microscope. Criticisms concerning the United States have been further exasperated by the 2016 presidential election of Donald J. Trump. During these last four years, the President of the United States has operated in a clear demonstrative and divisive fashion. Through inflammatory rhetoric and executive action, President Trump has sowed discord among the United States citizenry and allies abroad. The Trump administration has regularly broken conventional norms and customs. His controversial conduct as Commander-in-Chief has drawn sharp criticism from both Democrats and Republicans. Donald Trump himself, and several known associates, have maneuvered through various scandals involving corruption, tax fraud, accusations of sexual misconduct, and even impeachment.

These political and personal transgressions have done little to quell emboldening his right-leaning political base, quite the opposite. A central characteristic of Donald Trump's political appeal to the American people is his unfiltered and eccentric persona and rhetoric. He has touted himself as the embodiment of a winner seemingly impervious to any sense of fault or imperfection - literally to the point of self-deifying. Corresponding alongside his temperament is his propensity for the truth; or lack thereof. Throughout his presidency, Trump has leaned into severe disinformation campaigns, promoted right-wing conspiracy theories, and more simplistically, not held himself accountable for past public statements. A constant pillar of these maligned attitudes is the notion of 'fake news'. The discourse by Trump and his administration is pure malleability. In common reoccurrence, objective truth and fact have taken a backseat to egocentricity and agenda progression. The absurd COVID-19 spike in the United States has not forced Trump and his administration to modify their tone in the least. Ironically, the events of the COVID-19 pandemic, in many instances, have offered the Trump administration a more ample platform.

## 1.2    Problem Statement

Starting in December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly spread across the world within a brief interval of time. As the virus vaulted from one country to the next, nations swiftly shut down their borders to contain the invisible threat. The governmental shutdowns have come through emergency and radical strategic implementation. Each sovereign state abides by its own set of governance structures and apparatuses. This is acutely discernable in the United States. The actions made by the United States government have further monopolized the flow of power and information away from the American populous. Through the Trump Administration, this academic research will examine the United States' governance response to the COVID-19 pandemic from January to May 2020.

## 1.3    Research Objective

1. The objective of this thesis is to identify how the United States has handled the COVID-19 pandemic, through action and rhetoric, from January to May 2020.

## Research Questions

1. How has the United States government conducted its COVID-19 pandemic response?
2. What characteristics of governance are included in this response?

## 1.4    Research Motivation

I was initially planning on conducting my thesis in southern Ethiopia during the summer of 2020. As we transitioned into 2020, it became apparent the COVID-19 virus was of far greater consequence than any of us originally anticipated. Upon reflection of research options in March 2020, I believed the COVID-19 crisis to be a distinct opportunity in which to research as it was developing in effectively real-time. The process of this study has been, and remains to be, wholly captivating from both an academic and personal perspective. The thought of frontline, critical examination of such an unprecedented period in world history was alluring. I quickly pivoted away from my initial thesis plan and began focusing my attention on the pandemic. There are many qualities of the pandemic on which I could specifically concentrate. As COVID-19 was in

the beginning pandemic stages, I have focused on how the virus's severity and legitimacy were articulated to a population. I selected the United States of America based on its governmental structure and administration, global authority and influence, and personal familiarity as being my country of origin. My research motivation for this thesis has proven to be far and beyond everything I expected. As will be reviewed in the Conclusions chapter of this dissertation, the sheer magnitude of proceeding events after May 2020 opens a plethora of possibilities for future research.

## 1.5   Relevance to Peace Studies

This research topic applies to Peace Studies, as COVID-19 has altered the current state of the planet. This has occurred in a litany of ways; whether that is through a political, economic, or social lens. Logistically, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected every single country and will have far-reaching implications over the coming years and decades. Until the virus is eradicated or, at the very least, subsided across the globe, we may not fathom the full magnitude of impact. This crisis has the latency to unify or deteriorate regional and international relationships and associations. As the pandemic continues, unemployment, access to food, and social services have caused extreme discomfort to those regions that have not sufficiently prepared. This has placed an additional strain on the daily lives of citizens. Subsequently, this pressures national governments to intact policies that reconstruct their relationship with fellow states across the planet. These mechanisms hold the sway to garner potential for violent conflict or civil unrest. As COVID-19 continues to evolve in the impending months, national and international institutions shall be positioned to prove security, aid, and confidence among the populous. The expectation for this thesis research is to provide an opening for an extended analytical study into how the United States government, and administrations worldwide, have framed their domestic discourse and policy during COVID-19. Having synthesized the phrase and definition of PTG (Post-truth governmentality), I believe future Peace Studies academia can continue to expand on and explore the possibilities of PTG analysis. I believe the concept of Post-truth governmentality can apply to larger global conflicts, international relations, and principles of securitization outside of a COVID-19 conversation.

## 1.6    Academic Contribution

The communication of how the COVID-19 pandemic has been articulated by this administration to the American citizenry is of paramount significance. These repercussions, in rhetoric and action, will be explored in the months and years to come in a myriad of ways. To a far greater extent, this entire time in our species history shall be exhaustively dissected and investigated. This thesis examines the governance of the Trump Administration in the authoritative management of COVID-19. I hope that the following pages of research augment a more concerted discussion on how the United States government responded to this pandemic and its pronounced governance toward impartial truth and fact. This academic study uses multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the power dynamics, through linguistic practice, of the Trump Administration concerning their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. My academic contribution introduces a new theoretical framework of Post-truth governmentality that implements a comprehensive multi-step analytical approach which comprises four phases. This contribution is designed to not only be applicable in this particular research but across future academic studies of state governance.

## 1.7    Outline for Thesis

The United States Securitization Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: A study of Post-truth governmentality from January – May 2020 contains seven chapters including this opening introductory chapter. I have outlined the background and need regarding the problem issue. Additionally, I've discussed what the research intends to examine in terms of objectives, questions, motivations, and contributions. Chapter Two: Contextual Review will provide a contextual framework on the landscape of COVID-19, previous global pandemics, and the rise of Donald Trump. Chapter Three: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework explores the epistemological stance of social constructivism and the position of securitization theory. The two concepts are the foundation of this dissertation, a groundwork for the utilized methodology. I shall additionally introduce two critical theories to this thesis: Post-truth politics and Foucault's governmentality. Chapter Four: Methodological Framework elaborates on the techniques used to gather research data. This involves multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured

interviews. Also, thematic diagrams including, discourse, text, and visual mapping components, illustrate how the data is analyzed and research themes are extracted. Chapter Five: CDA and Interview Results represents the data collected from January to May 2020. The data is complemented by monthly and overall totals through various graphs and charts. Chapter Six: Post-truth Governmentality Analysis harnesses the research data for discussion and excavation of narrative themes. The last chapter, Chapter Seven: Conclusions, summarizes the key findings and implications of this study while offering potential avenues for future research.

# 2      Contextual Review

The ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic will be researched and deliberated upon for years to come. That much is undeniable. In certain respects, our world won't truly be able to comprehend the gravity of 2020 and the pandemic until it is firmly in the rearview mirror of history. As of this thesis submission, that has not occurred, and we are still amid a rampant pandemic. The following contextual review has had to make do with the fact that the academic study has occurred in essentially real-time. The second chapter consists of extensive analysis and exploration concerning previous global pandemics, the role of the WHO, COVID-19, and Donald Trump. I have presented the context in a topically and thematic manner to remain consistent in narrative structure. The first section of Chapter 2 shall offer the reasoning behind specifying a contextual review instead of a standard literature review. I will discuss previous examples of global pandemics and the effects had on the world. Within that context, I examine state-society relations and how media operates during a pandemic. Furthermore, I give background on the political rise of Donald Trump as President of the United States. He was the highest-ranking government official during the researched timeframe in the country. This section expands on the electoral divide in the United States during the 2016 presidential election, which is crucial in understanding how the Trump Administration carries out its strategies of governance. Afterward, I detail the history of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) along with its virology and spread across the world in 2020.  Last, I position myself within the previous research and illustrate how my contribution is both distinct and essential in future peace studies academia.

## 2.1    Limitations of Academic Literature

Given the recent phenomenon of the COVID-19. pandemic, it is important to immediately note the lack of quality academic literature surrounding the thesis. There is no well-established theoretical, academic framework. There is virtually no previous information in relation to a combination of the three theoretical underpinnings this study implements within the research. Only very recently have there been academic publications of singular concepts in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was not able to locate any publications that offered two or more of these concepts, even without considering a concentration on COVID-19. The combination of the three demonstrates a significant gap in past literature. I will discuss this further in the last section of the chapter. We can also say the same as it concerns the methodological framework of multimodal critical discourse analysis in relation to the other theoretical concepts at large. Regardless of the fact this research breaks new theoretical ground, a pandemic's fundamentals and implications within societies are not an unprecedented problem. As such, the decision was made to present a contextualized framework review that thematically remains constant in the narrative.

## 2.2    Pandemic Development and State-Society Relations

All pandemic manifestations, as with the COVID-19 virus, affect states in numerous ways. From governmental communication and logistical outreach to economics and the mental health of the populous. Infectious outbreaks of this caliber evolve in stages. Charles Rosenberg crafted an archetypal structure of an outbreak that unfolds in three acts. The first act involves subtleties of self-reassurance in which citizens may ignore the developing signs until acceleration occurs. The recognition of the outbreak begins the second act in which citizen's demand explanations with moralistic implications. This generates a public response that can be dramatic and disruptive until the outbreak is resolved (Jones, 1). "Epidemics start at a moment in time, proceed on a stage limited in space and duration, follow a plotline of increasing tension and crisis" (Jones, 2). This spectacle is currently being played out with COVID-19 in most countries around the world. The demographic impact of outbreaks may trigger various behavioral responses amongst societies, including a combination of fear and flight mechanisms. In many

instances, populations will typically turn to a religious or administrative, authoritarian structure for assistance or resolution to the outbreak. The psychological impact of a pandemic is difficult to properly quantify and is proportionate to the demographics perception of risk and control during the time frame (Van Damme, 511-512). Certain elements of this can be further shown by the SARS outbreak in the early 2000s.

The origins of SARS (acute respiratory syndrome) can be traced back to China's Guangdong province in 2003. However, it was some months before the outbreak spread throughout the Western world. Part of the issue, similar to the current COVID-19 pandemic, was the lack of transparency from the Chinese government. There was difficulty with public-tracing of the disease as investigators were still left with questions about the virus (Lee, 8). Even with only less than 800 deaths around the world, the SARS outbreak still had various political and economic repercussions that affected state-society relations. According to Jong-Wha Lee and Warwick McKibbin, the SARS outbreak particularly affected the rate of consumer demand in travel and retail sales service. The psychological effect of transmission through international travel was evident in larger regions of the world (Lee & McKibbin, 94). Second, the uncertainty of the disease affected foreign investment in China. The Chinese government's response to SARS was fragmented. This elevated concerns with China's institutional quality and future growth potential (Lee & McKibbin, 94). The effects of SARS were felt for months afterward, especially in the state of Taiwan. Once the decision was made to act by China, they could mobilize a top-down approach, pressuring the lowest levels of government. Taiwan's SARS response was relatively ineffective despite having a better developed public health network and a smaller population. This had resounding effects on state-society relations.

Jonathan Schwartz describes civil society-state relations as "either cooperative, where the two work together to achieve common goals, or as oppositional, where civil society seeks to undermine the state to advance a distinct agenda at the expense of the state" (Schwartz, 1140). This can be exemplified through either horizontal or vertical networks of administration. Horizontal networks are inherently cooperative and hold equal power, while vertical networks are hierarchical and have a dependent relationship (Schwartz, 1141). The example of Taiwan illustrates this duality between both China and Taiwan as they are geographically close to one another and regularly interact.

Taiwan's Department of Health formulates policy responses to outbreaks, while local-level authorities develop implementation procedures (Schwartz, 1144). A key role in facilitating state-civil society cooperation is played by the Li Zhang. The Li is, more or less, state-supported structures for administrative grassroots engagement. The head of the Li, the Li Zhang, is elected by residents every four years. The Li Zhang mobilize neighborhood volunteers who may be family members or retirees (Schwartz, 1150). Generally, the Li Zhang has lived in their communities for a substantial period before being elected while having many connections and relationships in the area. During disease outbreaks, such as SARS, the Li Zhang established groups to cooperate in disease control with local district, police, and public health officials. They had the responsibility to track quarantine procedures while handing out masks and thermometers to residents (Schwartz, 1154). Although the overall response to SARS wasn't as effective in Taiwan as it should have been, the Li Zhang offers a positive example in which state-society relations can properly coincide and work like a horizontal network. Community resilience during and post-pandemic signals the ability for a community to recover. Examples like the Li Zhang, illustrate the necessity for transparency and creativity when dealing with situations that cause a tremendous amount of stress to a social system.

## 2.3  The Role of WHO and Previous Pandemics

When better understanding a global pandemics' development and resulting spread, it is crucial to dialogue about the largest international agency charged with maintaining a global standard of health. The World Health Organization, an apparatus of the United Nations system, coordinates with 194 member states to prepare, surveil, and combat infectious diseases while promoting more comprehensive access to better health (WHO, 2021). Not only does WHO partner with member states but also various other international organizations, foundations, and research institutions. The World Health Assembly is attended by delegations from all member states and determines organizational policy. The WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, was elected in May 2017 for a five-year term. He serves as WHO's chief technical and administrative officer (WHO, 2021).

The psychological effects of an issue, such as a pandemic, go hand in hand with how the issue is framed to the audience. This framing is called 'securitization'. The concept of

securitization stems from Barry Buzan's conceptual framework of security studies in People, States, and Fear. Essentially, securitization involves labeling an intellectual or political danger by simply framing the issue as an existential security threat to the population (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 93). Securitization is about survival. When an issue is securitized, it becomes necessary for specific actions to rectify the threat. This is a conventional focus on national security and defense. The pandemic of COVID-19 has been securitized across the world in various methods and techniques. There will be a more specified embellishment of securitization from a theoretical perspective in the next chapter, Chapter 3: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.

International organizations, such as WHO, also shape agendas to build institutional power. The World Health Organization securitizes infectious diseases to claim more power on a global scale. WHO will frame an infectious disease as an existential threat to security (Jin & Karackattu, 182). The organization is also authorized to seek verification of an alleged public health crisis that may have international ramifications. In this situation, they would offer consultation and report within the specific state's territory (Jin & Karackattu, 183). For example, take the infectious disease of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS has been linked to WHO's securitization process in the past and may hold a notable comparison to how the COVID-19 pandemic is handled. WHO was in charge to provide strategic information concerning HIV/AIDS. This involves tracking and monitoring the pandemic as it develops along with the responses; including surveillance techniques to identify particular risk groups (Elbe, 407). The strengthening of surveillance mechanisms is certainly critical in containing the spread of diseases.

Equally important is the support infrastructure on both the national and regional levels which demonstrate cooperative capabilities in combating epidemics and pandemics. Across the world, there is an undeniable variance of access to health care systems. The burden of disease is further expounded by poverty, political instability, or regional conflict (Caballero-Anthony, 107). Next, I will discuss the impact of previous pandemics in the 20th century, narrowing the focus on two specific diseases, influenza and HIV/AIDS. Both diseases presented their own challenges and struggles, which shall also be illustrated in the following section.

The difference between an 'epidemic' and a 'pandemic' is constantly blurred, even amongst medical professionals. For technicality, epidemics spread over a large community

infecting many people. If the spread continues, it becomes a pandemic which affects significantly more people in a larger geographical area (Merriam-Webster). The chronicling of influenza outbreaks dates back hundreds of years. Influenza behaves in unpredictable ways and has caused significant morality every few years, killing off a thousand at irregular intervals. In the 20th century, there have been four influenza pandemics due to their new emergence of subtype of the virus. History has seen outbreaks in 1918, 1957, 1968, and 1977 during the twentieth century (Beveridge, 223). In all the history of influenza, there is one event that stands out above all others, the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919. It occurred over three waves in a twelve-month span (Beveridge, 227). According to Burke Cunha, "Epidemiologic evidence suggests that the Spanish flu (influenza strain) originated in the United States and was transported by American troops to Europe during World War I; after decimating Europe, the influenza pandemic spread worldwide" (Cunha, 149). Each of the influenza waves brought an increased death rate. What made this influenza strain so deadly is that it affected healthy young adults causing severe pneumonia.

When governments realized it was a pandemic, they attempted to maintain an accurate record of fatalities, calling on public health agencies to control the situation and determine its cause (Cunha, 149). Military services, which had complete control over their personnel, kept the most accurate records. Within the United States, US Public Health Service records were accurate in large cities, but smaller towns were not included in their survey attempts (Cunha, 150). In the United States, there were a reported nearly 550,000 deaths. There is reason to believe that in the pandemic's totality an estimate of twenty million deaths worldwide is smaller than the actual number reported (Beveridge, 228).

Influenza pandemics provide critical information into better understanding the complexity of pandemic development. For example, influenza outbreaks often first occur around institutions such as schools or military training camps. Cities are usually affected and later towns and outlying farming communities (Beveridge, 230). The mortality rates vary in each pandemic and geographical location. COVID-19 began in a Chinese wet market with a concentration of both humans and various animal species. As stated above, the communication and public health service response may differ from country to country depending on the severity of the pandemic in an area. Next, I shall examine the development of the HIV/AIDS disease and notably discuss the similarities and differences between influenza outbreaks.

AIDS – acquired immunodeficiency syndrome is the result that occurs after years of infection with HIV – human immunodeficiency virus. There is the assumption that HIV/AIDS originated in the continent of Africa from a type of chimpanzee. Studies have shown that HIV may have jumped from chimpanzees to humans as far back as the 1800s (CDC, 2021). Over decades, HIV spread across Africa and to the rest of the world. The virus has existed in the United States since at least the 1970s. However, the disease was first detected in the early 1980s and coined a year later (Samal, 166). In the United States, there was general stigmatization with sexual freedoms, particularly in the gay community with the onset of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The discourse around unprotected sex was met by gay personal and civil rights. The population was also disproportionately affected by drug users from needle-sharing transmissions while prisons became further infected with the disease. Not only this but under American criminal law, i.e. the war on drugs was declared by a series of governmental responses imposing heavy prison sentences for these convicted drug users (Hays, 431). The various responses, which included a moral objection to life-style habits, clearly affected American politics and culture that was seldom seen during a pandemic. Since the early 1980s, HIV/AIDS has killed between twenty-five and thirty-five million people around the world (LePan, 4). This disease marks as one of the highest and most dangerous in the modern tracking of pandemic spread.

Disease and illnesses have plagued humanity for hundreds of years, that much is not new. A more recent phenomenon is the shift from agrarian communities to more urbanized populations within states. Globalization and international commerce have allowed for more opportunities widespread disease and pandemics to flourish. More interaction between people and their ecosystems heightens this probability. The pandemic examples of influenza and HIV/AIDS further exemplify how humanity has contested the spread of disease. Historical lessons from the past can and should apply to the COVID-19 pandemic to better understand the future ramifications it will have on society.

## 2.4   Donald Trump's Rise

On November 8th, 2016, Donald J. Trump was elected President of the United States. His victory over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential elections was an outcome very few in the media and academia thought possible. During his presidential run, Trump branded himself as a

man for the "forgotten men and women" of the country (Berezin, 2). Mabel Berezin's article, On the construction sites of history: Where did Donald Trump come from?, examines how Trump's victory is deeply cultural while speaking to the structural changes occurring in the United States during the 1970s. Ignoring the fact that Donald Trump's father provided him a substantially large loan to develop properties in New York City, Donald exhibited the persona as someone from outside the system and an ordinary citizen (Berezin, 3). When Trump identified himself with the connection to the rural, less-educated voter, he found his campaign's political base. Trump's identity can be coupled with a clear disconnect in the Republican party's conservative policy platforms of recent years. The Republican mainstream's detachment with a certain portion of their political base provided this opening for 'Trumpism' (Manza & Crowley, 7). In a macro-level assessment of the United States, it isn't particularly difficult to correlate Trumpism with political populism. When economic marginalization increases in democratic societies, the potential for authoritarian movements and candidates increases. The development of Trumpism personifies counter-subversive movements in America – emphasizing anti-elitism and institutionalism hysteria (Manza & Crowley, 7). These associations support notions of racism, nationalism, and xenophobic principles. The fracturing of class divisions further perpetuates these systemic issues. Therefore, lower-class support increases for authoritarian ideas and phenomena.

In the article, The Anger Games: Who Voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 Election, and Why?, David Smith and Eric Hanley discuss how deeply divided the American electorate was during the 2016 election. They found that Trump's prejudices were simultaneously the reason people did and did not vote for him for president. Nearly 75% of Trump supporters in their research counted themselves among his enthusiastic supporters. Even 'mild' Trump voters fell on a spectrum of attitudes more closely affiliated with Trump enthusiasts than non-Trump voters (Smith & Hanley, 1). These divisions across the political electorate within the United States represent a growing trend of partisan affiliation and ideological splintering that has been only further exasperated five years later. The deep-seated discord has allowed for populism to fester, culminating with the rise of Donald Trump.

## 2.5  SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)

In late December 2019, an outbreak of mysterious pneumonia occurred in a seafood wet market in Wuhan, China. By January 1st of 2020, the market was shut down after an epidemiologic alert was sent out by local health officials the previous day. The infection was characterized by fever, cough, and fatigue (Wu & Chen, 217).  By the end of January, thousands of people in China were infected. Soon, the outbreak spread to Southeast Asia and hopped continents throughout the world. The pathogen of the pandemic we've experienced has been identified as SARS-CoV-2 (Wu & Chen, 217). SARS-CoV-2, or regularly defined as coronavirus-19 (COVID-19), is a highly transmittable, pathogenic viral infection. Recalling history, this coronavirus is closely related to the original SARS-CoV (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak within China in the early 2000s. Coronaviruses are a positive, single-strained virus that infects humans and a wide range of animals (Velavan, 278). This was found to be the case when the World Health Organization was notified by the Chinese government concerning these several cases. The COVID-19 outbreak was first started in the Hunan seafood market where there are a variety of live animals that are sold, including bats, snakes, birds, and marmots (Shereen, 92). It is believed COVID-19 most likely originated from bats and transferred to Chinese pangolins. These wet markets lack hygiene standards in slaughtering and selling animals, which creates an environment susceptible to contamination (Mamzer, 8). This indicated the virus has a human to human spreading capability. It has been confirmed that the infection can spread through respiratory droplets from an infected patient's cough or sneeze. The transmission and circulation of COVID-19 occur at close contact distances, only a few meters apart (Ayenigbara, 4).

The incubation period for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 span a time frame of two to fourteen days. The average incubation is roughly six days. There have been reports of infected patients lasting until twenty-four days before symptoms emerge (Ayenigbara, 4). The reproductive number or Ro indicates the transmissibility of a virus. This represents the average number of new infections generated by an infectious person to a population. For Ro > 1, the number of infected is likely to increase, and for Ro < 1 the infection will subside. Conceptually, the goal is to get the infection below 1. WHO estimates that the Ro number for COVID-19 is between 1.4 and 2.5. Individual studies consider this to be in the lower estimate; closer to 2.5 and

3 (Liu, 1). Overall, the infection is considered being highly transmissible and predisposed to spread.

There has been a steady rise in cases and mortality rates since the outbreak began in January 2020. The category of people with the highest susceptibility and causalities is the elderly. This is especially true with individuals who have underlying medical conditions (Ayenigbara, 7). In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a host of health responses varying from state to state. The state's healthcare infrastructure plays a significant part in how the virus is articulated to the population. What resources and apparatuses are available to the public inevitably bear a role in the discourse. The media coverage of an outbreak may further exacerbate an already direr situation. In part, this is due to what is called 'framing theory'. Framing theory suggests that the media framing of an issue, in this case, COVID-19, affects how the audience feels and reacts. The effects are associated with the associative network model of memory (Shih & Wiljaya, 142). According to this framework, a news story will activate certain thoughts or feelings in an individual's mind, making them more likely to react predictably. In doing so, the viewer or reader will cognitively shortcut complex issues, instead of coming to a more simplistic conclusion.

The way the infection is framed has a direct correlation to whether or not people obey their governmental authorities. Since the pandemic began in the United States, state governments have had the responsibility to place various restrictions on bars, restaurants, and mass gatherings. The severity or lack of restrictions varies between each state as well. Stephen Reicher claims citizens are more likely to be obedient when there is an active 'identity leadership'. Group engagement is predicated on the interactions between leadership authorities and the public (Reicher, 695). When positive interaction and treatment is in place, identity and commonality within the group are formed, offering a stronger probability to maintain order and obedience. The relationship between authorities and the American population during the COVID-19 pandemic has come under heightened scrutiny. The Trump Administration's discourse and policy response to this outbreak has led to a further conversation of identity leadership within the United States impacting state-society relations. The Trump Administration's governance during the pandemic while coinciding with state-society relations, opens an academic opportunity this thesis means to address.

## 2.6 Position within the Research

The COVID-19 pandemic has concurrently tracked with the development of this dissertation in effectively real-time. The outbreak's data information and academic literature will continue to grow in complexity during the coming months and years. However, there is no previous academic evidence of the combination of the three theoretical underpinnings this study implements within the research. Beginning in the fall of 2020, I only identified singular concepts proportional to the pandemic. There is a clear and evident gap in the academic literature. We can attribute much of this to the recent phenomenon that is the COVID-19 virus. Complementing this global occurrence is how this study presents new theoretical research and discovery.

I have been in an incredibly unique position to provide academic data and analysis of how the United States has handled the COVID-19 pandemic as it is transpiring in the present. I am positioning my academic research by critically analyzing members of the Trump Administration and other medical experts in their lexical and visual articulation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The positionality of this study will be predicated on data through the methodology of multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews with American citizens. My contribution is inherently distinct as it focuses on a highly specific group of individuals for a short interval of time. I have critically analyzed these actors through a multifaceted and comprehensive manner of examination. My academic contribution introduces a new theoretical framework that implements a comprehensive multi-step analytical approach that comprises four phases. This contribution is designed to not only be applicable in this particular research but across future academic studies of state governance. The next chapter, Chapter 3: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework will introduce and explain the epistemological foundation and new theoretical framework from three academic concepts to this study. Chapter 4 of this thesis elaborates on the step-by-step methodology of data collection and analysis.

# 3      Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical and conceptual framework, which represents a critical pillar in this research, is focused through an epistemological lens. Social constructivism was the chosen epistemology with three integral concepts: governmentality, securitization theory, and post-truth politics. The notion of interpretative exploration, relative to an epistemology of social constructivism, became incredibly appealing when I began contemplating the structure of the study. Social constructivism not only became advantageous, but essential when designing and implementing the foundation of 'Post-truth governmentality' from researched actors. This chapter shall discuss the concept of social constructivism and the principles of governmentality, securitization theory, and post-truth politics. Afterward, I introduce a new theoretical framework and synthesized terminology of Post-truth governmentality (PTG). I will explain how PTG analysis fits into the larger research questions. Additionally, I will elaborate on how this interpretive framework and academic concepts explicitly apply to the research while contemporaneously identifying Post-truth governmentality features within the United States handling of COVID-19. The section will begin by introducing the epistemological stance of social constructivism as a theory of international relations.

## 3.1    Epistemology - Social Constructivism

For any dissertation to pragmatically come to fruition, there must be an epistemological and basis of the study. The term 'epistemology' derives from the Greek word 'episteme' that can be translated as 'knowledge' or 'understanding'. Concretely, epistemology is a philosophical investigation into the study of knowledge and what distinguishes justified belief over opinion (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). There can be no academic research without an epistemological source at its heart. The epistemology stance selected for this thesis research is constructivism, specifically social constructivism. Origins of constructivism are believed to date back to the time of Socrates, who argued that teachers and students should dialogue with one another and interpret and construct hidden knowledge by asking questions (Amineh & Asl, 1). The nature of constructivism is a combination of various theories into one. It is an assimilation of behaviorist and cognitive ideals. The position believes that learning is a continuous process of

constructing meaning, principally, how people make sense of their experience and the world around them (Amineh & Asl, 1). In many respects, theoretical constructivism has been traditionally applied to a paradigm of educational learning. For example, the teacher-learner relationship or classroom setting orientation. In the disciplinary study of international relations and security, social constructivism is not limited to purely constructivist theories.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman submit what remains a foundational work to the social constructivist doctrine. The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge focuses on the intersubjectivity of the world and how it is constructed. They emphasize that human beings, inherently, are social beings and live within societies (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 16). Humans, consciously or subconsciously, immerse themselves in the norms and traditions of the social world to engage with their surroundings. The pre-existing social institutions and frameworks filter this learning and understanding. This develops the process of self-identification and subjectivity – intersubjectivity. The term 'intersubjectivity' contextually refers to how these processes occur in communication and interaction (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 16). The intersubjectivity and socio-cultural determinants of engagement with the world and its inhabitants produce social constructivism.

Operating under a social constructivist view, my epistemological theory empowered the self-awareness of my personal experience when conducting fieldwork and research. In this sense, I did not run from but embraced conceptual interpretation. This interpretative approach provided the opportunity to construct and apply my methodology of multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews with greater malleability. I formulated templates of analysis for the theoretical framework of Post-truth governmentality through which to pour the data information. The epistemological flexibility of social constructivism not only logically assisted in the research process but permitted this academic study to be of greater interest.

## 3.2   Foucault's Governmentality

The principles of governance apply to various social science disciplines. Applications of governance can be shrewdly demarcated in international relations, economics, public management, and political science depending on presupposed assumptions. The International Security Sector Advisory Team of the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance defines state governance as: "A system of checks and balances and established norms ranging from

formal institutions to informal processes of governing the interactions of entities " (ISSAT, 2017). We may identify state governance through the mechanisms and apparatuses employed at the government's disposal. An analysis of political power can offer a wide variance of logistical tools and justifications used by governments to maintain this authority over its geographical borders.

One of the central developments over the last decades in political academia is the relation of government control over its populous; particularly the concept of 'governmentality'. Michel Foucault introduced the term 'governmentality' in the 1970s in his course lectures titled "Security, Territory, and Population". He later summarized the phrase as "understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behavior. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself" (Rose & O'Malley, 83). Governmentality is the collection of tactics formed by governmental institutions and apparatuses that allow for population control of a state. A paradigm of governing in which the state exercises power to intervene and manage the habits of its subjects. Governmentality has no fixed end. Instead, it is an ongoing process, constantly refined.

Kim McKee articulates how the perspective can be viewed as a political project, a way of problematizing life while seeking to act upon it. The intention is to link what is desirable with what can be made possible (McKee, 468). Most decisively, governmentality isn't concerned with political truth or falsity. Instead, the concept exemplifies how these rationalities are constructed as objective knowledge. By emphasizing the interconnection between thought and mode of governing – as manifest in the emergence of particular governmentalities (or mentalities of rule), attention is directed to what authorities want to happen, in pursuit of what objectives (McKee, 466). Not that Foucault believes governmentality is self-generating. The production of these mechanisms of power is made to be more consistent, or stable (Foucault, 17). The concept of governmentality plays a decisive role in Foucault's analytical approach to power.

This theoretical framework has been used to better understand critiques of neoliberalism from Thomas Lemke. He articulated how critiques of neoliberalism "operate by opposing knowledge to power, state to the economy, subject to repression, and we may well ask what role these dualisms play in constituting and stabilizing liberal-capitalist societies (Lemke, 54). He believes the critical contribution of governmentality relative to neoliberalism comes in bridging the symmetries outlined. By pairing forms of knowledge, approaches of power, and technologies

to the self, it provides a more complete account of the socio-political transformations (Lemke, 54). In doing so, we can better understand the depth that neoliberal democracies possess in terms of the dominion and exploitation of their populous. This offers an analytical perspective to how Post-truth can and has affected political discourse and procedure.

Foucault's governmentality is not without its criticisms. Two of the central criticisms draw on its disregard for empirical reality. As Stenson argues, the dominant approach within post-Foucauldian governmentality studies is 'discursive governmentality'. Foucault draws on discursive rather than material practice and more specific concrete art of governing (McKee, 473). This results in a disconnect between the study of approaches to rule and the socio-political dealings concerning them. Second, concerning the first criticism, Foucault's governmentality promotes an abstract view of governing where politics is simplified to notions of rationality. There is virtually no representation of individual freedoms of semblances of human agency as, by governmentality standards, power is total and universal (McKee, 474). These criticisms bear merit when considering the limitations of Foucault's governmentality. The political concept maintains credibility, especially when understanding the implementation of securitization theory into the collective consciousness. The merging of these models plays a vital role in this academic study.

## 3.3   Securitization Theory

The pairing of Foucault's governmentality and the conceptual framework of securitization theory is an organic combination. Recall in Section 3.1 the phraseology of socio-cultural determinants and intersubjectivity. States bear certain similarities to human beings in the demand to survive. A multitude of these socio-cultural and political variables occurs through social interaction in people and the state. These variables may include state interest and existential security. Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan, the core of the Copenhagen School, define securitization as a successful speech act:

> "…through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat" (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 491 from Stritzel, 358).

Securitization theory comprises three steps: (1) identification of existential threats; (2) requisite action; and (3) effects of audience relations by breaking free of procedures (Taureck, 3). By framing an issue as an existential threat, the securitizing actor implies the need to survive through action. The actor's purpose is to generate legitimization by the targeted audience that is proportional to the desired action taken. The referent object is the entity that is being securitized by the actor. Securitization combines the politics of threat design with threat management (Balzacq & Leonard, 495). Securitization theory is a subset of how governmentality, and therefore state governance, operate in times of crisis.

For this study, the securitized existential threat is COVID-19. How the United States government securitized the COVID-19 pandemic to the American population. A securitized speech act, where the language is communicated with authoritative power, establishes a social reality that leaves room for social interaction and interpretation. The audience is portrayed as an essential component of securitization. They are brought into the fold with the creation of shared security meanings and values based on the socio-cultural environment. The entire securitization process depends on the audience's acceptance (Cote, 542). Additionally, securitization theory opens a window into procedural language within politics and how that language is characterized by the audience. This shall be examined further in the following methodology chapter. The third and final concept deployed in the research is post-truth politics as a form of securitization.

## 3.4   Post-truth Politics

Over the last decade, the United States of America and the world at large have greater access to information than at any other point in human history. Individuals and communities can gather on a seemingly limitless number of social media points to dialogue and organize. Simultaneously, with the exponential rise in accessibility to these online platforms, is the opportunity to spread disinformation. Through this array of disinformation and falsehoods gives rise to the concept of post-truth politics.

Political foundations rest on the repudiation of fact and commonsense. Post-truth is a manner in which objective facts become less influential to public opinion than personal emotion or belief. These claims or assertions are completely unverified, and the offender does not face

any consequences or accountability (Al-Rodhan, 1). Post-truth politics split from divisional ideologies and draw lines of objective fact and lies. Post-truth is a threat to liberal democratic institutions and consequently exposes the vulnerability of a liberal order (Al-Rodhan, 2). Within political discourse, Post-truth judges fact not by evidence but by consistency with the listener's existing beliefs and values:

"A post-truth politician does not simply pick-and-chose among relevant facts, offer questionable interpretations or avoid inconvenient questions. The Post-truth politician manufactures his or her own facts in their own interest" (Lockie, 1).

Oxford Dictionaries even declared 'Post-truth' as the word of the year in 2016. In the brief history of the concept, Oxford Dictionaries noted a spike after movements in liberal democracies (Peters, 563). Earlier formations of the Post stem can be traced to post-national (1945), at the end of World War II, and post-racial (1971), during the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War (Peters, 563). This offers a historical outline of previous socio-political waves and ideological flows of the last century or so.

The political campaigns of Brexit in the United Kingdom and the presidential elections in the United States took place. Post-truth discourse in politics has substantiated genesis with the rise in populism in many liberal democratic countries including both the United Kingdom and the United States. The most widely held view of populism is that it results from increased economic inequality and growing exclusion with post-industrial societies. For example, the changes in traditional manufacturing that include technology and global flow of labor, especially with migrants and refugees (Speed & Mannion, 249). This insecurity contributes to large portions of the population harboring resentment of traditional political institutions. Running concurrently with populism are elements of cultural backlash. This can be illustrated against waves of progressive cultural change where, particularly older, white males feel displaced from their traditional social values. They may desire to return to a 'golden age' of national identity and tradition (Speed & Mannion, 249). This creates ample opportunity for dissatisfied communities to establish alternate realities and facts that align and validate their frustrations, i.e. post-truth.

The denial of facts and rumor-based allegations are nothing new in the political arena of the United States. However, since the election of Donald Trump in 2016, a rise in what can be

described as 'fake news' has entered the mainstream of public consciousness. Trump and other politicians have weaponized this phrase as a way of deflecting responsibility to words and actions or simply disregarding objective facts. Post-truth is propaganda. Propaganda is a common tool of organizational control used to dehumanize while legitimizing violence or repression on certain groups (Lockie, 2). Jane Suiter, the Director of the Institute of Future Media and Journalism, argues the propaganda of 'fake news' and post-truth contribute negatively when incorporated into an effective two-party system used by the United Kingdom and the United States. A two-party system leaves large swathes of people disillusioned and feeling their vote doesn't matter unless they live in a swing state (Suiter, 26). The disillusionment and frustrations are perpetuated by the lack of transparency and trust attributed to politicians and greater political institutions are large. A belief that politicians lie is pervasive in political systems. Jonathan Rose found when accessing the online search engine, Google, phrases regularly appeared casting politicians in negative standing:

> "Beginning a Google search with the phrase 'politicians are' brings up the autocomplete suggestions of 'liars,' 'criminals', 'puppets', and 'all the same'. While such findings are localized by Google to specific countries and regions, these suggestions seem to accurately reflect my experiences of the attitudes of voters towards politicians in many diverse countries" (Rose, 555).

Situationally, within the culture, political mistrust builds to where individuals search for other outlets of truth. It is no happenstance that the previous example illustrated detailed an online search engine. A self-perpetuating cycle of disinformation and distrust is established. Donald Trump operated under similar parameters during his election in 2016 to garner electoral support. His ideological base feeds of his discourse identified as the 'forgotten working people of America' eerily similar to the 'forgotten men and women' in Section 2.2. This electoral base is based on a community of people who are anti-establishment, law-and-order, anti-diversity, with a mixture of xenophobia and conspiracy of political elites (Montgomery, 4). The fervent enthusiasm for Trump's aura and propensity for post-truth and fake news has also be seen throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The dialogue around the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States has been reasonably uneven. News outlets, including the United States government, have fluctuated in speech and actionable response as the virus has progressed. Social media is a natural avenue in which misinformation is spread and shared. One of the central problems with social media is that users focus their attention on factors other than the accuracy of information. For example, emphasizing the amount of positive social feedback they will receive (Pennycook, 3). This can lead the social media user to prioritize misleading content, post-truth, to get the desired response. The rise in post-truth as a form of securitization within the United States since Donald Trump's election has had far-reaching implications across the country. Governmentality, securitization theory, and post-truth politics directly align to formulate a new theoretical framework. This academic study will now introduce and explain the framework of Post-truth governmentality.

## 3.5   Post-truth governmentality

Post-truth governmentality originates from two separate phrases – post-truth and governmentality. First, I'll briefly recap each, then detail how Post-truth governmentality is commissioned within this framework. If you recall, post-truth is a manner in which objective facts become less influential to public opinion than personal emotion or belief. These claims or assertions are completely unverified, and the offender does not face any consequences or accountability (Al-Rodhan, 1). Post-truth is propaganda. The political discourse around the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States has been noticeably imbalanced, particularly from federal department heads and administrative leaders. Post-truth speech acts ease responsibility and objectivity to increase or maintain social standing with the targeted audience. This rhetoric is exasperated when branded through a securitized optic. As just discussed, Michel Foucault introduced the term 'governmentality' – summarizing it as "understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behavior. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself" (Rose & O'Malley, 83). Governmentality is the collection of tactics formed by governmental institutions and apparatuses that allow for population control of a state. A paradigm of governing in which the state exercises power to intervene and manage the habits of its subjects. Governmentality, therefore, is an ongoing practice. The state apparatuses dictating governmentality are perpetually

being refined and developed. As such, governmentality isn't stressed over notions of political truth or falsity. This concept demonstrates how these rationalities are constructed as objective knowledge with control at its heart. The academic intermingling of governmentality and Post-truth weave seamlessly into the engineering of Post-truth governmentality (PTG). I have originated this term for my thesis, introducing a new theoretical framework of study and analysis. Post-truth governmentality is defined as:

> Post-truth governmentality is any governmental exercise for the systemic purpose of regulating citizenry behavior while simultaneously and/or deliberately omitting objective knowledge in order to preserve authority.

Of critical note and interest are the words - 'regulating citizenry behavior' and 'deliberately omitting objective knowledge'. The implemented methodology of multimodal critical discourse analysis conjured resilient thematic narratives from the studied actors and institutions. Critical discourse analysis and its exercises will be discussed in Chapter 4: Methodological Framework. By designing this terminology from an interpretive approach, I am more discernibly able to magnify forthcoming answers to the research questions. This is pronounced in Chapter 5: CDA and Interview Results and Chapter 6: Post-truth Governmentality Analysis and Narrative Discussion. I have isolated and classified any securitized features, whether or not recognizably apparent, of Post-truth governmentality. The last section of this chapter illustrates how each of the presented epistemological and theoretical concepts applies to the conducted research.

## 3.6   Application to Research

When applying the epistemological and theoretical concepts to the research, it was necessary to take a hardnose approach to how this would inevitably affect the data collection and analysis. How is the COVID-19 information and discourse being securitized to the American populous? Where is there dialogue that perpetuates or hinders the COVID-19 securitization? How subtle or overt are the features of Post-truth governmentality within the language communicated? These were the questions and concerns I constantly asked myself during the research process.

Social constructivism applies to this study as my foundational baseline of approach. I am using academic interpretation of an issue centered on pre-existing social institutions and frameworks. Social constructivism permeates into the three concepts as the model of investigation. Securitization theory applies to this study as a lens to examine how the United States government has exercised the principles of governance to the COVID-19 pandemic and the citizenry. By framing an issue as an existential threat, the securitizing actor implies the need to survive through action. An actor's purpose is to generate legitimatization by the targeted audience. The actor is the United States government with the audience as the American people. The concept of securitization theory originates as an interpretative framing, which naturally coincides with social constructivism. These additions of post-truth politics and governmentality fuse with securitization theory as a means of further comprehending communication, whether overt or subtle, to identify elements of manipulation or exploitation. Post-truth politics is applied to this study as manner to further examine securitized rhetoric concerning COVID-19. Discourse in which objective facts become less influential than personal emotion or belief. These claims are unverified, and the actor does not face any accountability. Post-truth is coupled with the concept of governmentality. Post-truth rhetoric may be a governmentality tactic by the state institutions to assert population control while preserving and perpetuating authority. The synthesis of post-truth politics and governmentality birth the new theoretical framework of Post-truth governmentality. PTG is applied as a theoretical analysis on two fronts: identifies any governmental exercise to control citizenry behaviors (governmentality) while omitting objective truth or knowledge (post-truth politics) to conserve authority.

I believe these concepts collectively explicate and blend this entire academic study. This framework was reasonably effortless to implement. Utilizing the methodological approaches of multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews, I captured and expounded upon particular strands of data, growing into larger thematic narratives.

## 3.7   Summary

Chapter 3: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework has presented the positions of social constructivism, governmentality, securitization theory, and post-truth politics. Each concept played a pivotal role while reciprocating one another. An interpretive approach provided an ample variance in exploring the United States' COVID-19 securitization response. The applied

concepts assisted in the theoretical creation, identification, and classification of Post-truth governmentality. The following chapter, Chapter 4: Methodological Framework, shall delve into the two techniques exercised in the research: multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. Here, I will elaborate on how these processes came about and how the data was analyzed.

# 4      Methodological Framework

Chapter 4: Methodological Framework will introduce the operational approach of this academic study. I conducted the methodological framework through both primary and supplementary approaches. This thesis utilizes multimodal critical discourse analysis (CDA) and semi-structured interviews (SSI) for data collection. However, the focal point of this research was shepherded through the critical discourse analysis. The decision to employ critical discourse analysis in my study allowed me to apply visual, audio, and written cues within a specific instance. This lens of analysis is more multifaceted than other methodologies as it focuses on how language shapes social interactions while establishing power relations. A supplementary approach of semi-structured interviews in this study further contextualizes the data results and analysis provided by CDA. The SSI offers a personalized understanding of COVID-19, its consequences, and the United States' governmental response. The first two sections of this chapter offer background on the methodologies of critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews as it pertains to this study. Afterward, I will elaborate on the two types of methodological triangulation used: within-method triangulation and across-method triangulation. This chapter will climax by articulating how the extensive thematic mapping of this study is fleshed out within the data collection and analysis - a multi-step analytical approach that contains four phases. Last, I will provide critical reflexivity and positionality as I've extracted from both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis.

## 4.1   Critical Discourse Analysis

Before discussing the depths of CDA, it is essential to understand its origins in the larger sphere of cultural studies. The genesis of critical discourse analysis stretches back to the late 1970s in the classic publication of Roger Fowler, Robert Hodge, and Gunter Kress: Language

and Control. Here, 'critical linguistics' sought to illustrate how language and grammar could be used as ideological instruments (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For example, we can study texts for the ways they categorize people, events, and actions. Analysts investigate what information is presented to the audience. Not only this, but what information is deemed crucial by the actor, what information is placed in the periphery, and what is excluded altogether. Hodge and Kress argued that a language is a form of social practice. They believed that language is intertwined with how we act and reinforce our societies (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Through language, humans endorse particular sets of worldviews, beliefs, and identities. Institutions regulate language and knowledge to advance their objectives. This relationship between language, power, and ideology has been a central criticism of critical linguistics. Critical discourse analysis sought to fill this void.

CDA develops theory and method to better understand the relationship behind socio-political rhetoric and dynamics. CDA is also interested in political intervention and social change. Over the years, this has been a hotbed for discussion. Some research analysts believe in exposing institutional racism and marginalization, while others prefer to maintain notions of objectivity in their work. Prominent professor and one founder of CDA, Norman Fairclough, describes the methodology as "Interdisciplinary when addressing contemporary processes of social change… the overriding objective is to find ways in which social changes in discourse, and the relations between discourse and social life" (Fairclough, 452). This methodology investigates how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use. This involves examining social interaction coupled with linguistic practice.

As an analytical practice, CDA is not one direction of research among many others in the study of discourse. Rather, it is a critical perspective that may be found in all areas of discourse studies focusing its attention on social problems and political issues (Van Dijk, 466). There is no singular version of critical discourse analysis; instead an array of subset approaches and methods. However, it is crucial to remember that all CDA analysts have a common perspective on language as a means of social construction:

"Language both shapes and is shaped by society. CDA is not so much interested in language use itself: but in the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures" (Machin & Mayr, 4).

CDA intentionally departs from the principal components of critical linguistics in terms of descriptive goals within the analysis. Critical discourse analysis features more concerning the why and how these features are produced and what ideological or political motive may be behind them. The term 'critical' refers to the methods used in deconstructing the language revealing ideas or assumptions within the text. For example, CDA will analyze media texts, political speeches, and advertisements, etc. divulging strategies that appear neutral on the surface but maintain underlying ideological motives (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Exposing and dissecting how authoritative relations are practiced and exercised within a discourse reveals these previously discussed connections between language, power, and ideology. Even the smallest discursive details are often the most illuminating.

To further analyze communication, one must know the visual features and components within its exercise. Theorists like Kress and van Leeuwen believed that linguistic analysis and the basis of CDA could be equally applied to visual communication. They argued for a set of tools to allow the study of choices of visual features as CDA examines lexical and grammatical choices in language. Kress and van Leeuwen coined the term 'Multimodal Analysis' (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The subcategory of CDA I have chosen for this methodology is multimodal critical discourse analysis. In selecting this specification, I am more readily able to analyze both the linguistical and visual elements of a speech act. Multimodal critical discourse analysis couples the visual and lexical meaning of the communication. This mode of analysis also seeks to identify and reveal the actor's strategic choices that may appear neutral on the surface. However, the choice may have an underlying ideological purpose that aims to influence the audience in a particular fashion. Section 4.4 of this chapter details the visual and linguistic indicators of my CDA process and classification.

Critical discourse analysis is not without criticism. I will briefly summarize two main denunciations that have emerged since the establishment of the CDA methodology. First, CDA is an exercise in interpretation, rather than objective analysis. Henry Widdowson has been an outspoken critic of CDA. He maintains CDA is not a method of analysis, but an interpretation. Support of belief takes precedence over the analysis to support the theory (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In some respects, I concur with Widdowson. How can we completely operate in this brand of academic research under purely objective terms? Humans bring intrinsic baggage of

bias and assumptions, whether conscious or unconscious. The goals of the analyst are to effectively use CDA tools to demonstrate that this is more than a simple interpretation. Instead, the goals are to display systemic exercise in empirical replicability by others. I believe I have achieved this through a multi-step, analytical structure of analysis. A second criticism: CDA is too selective and qualitative. The view here is that the analyst will select a text or type of discourse that further validates certain patterns of language (Machin & Mayr, 2012). An analyst may predetermine what text is most efficient in incorporating the larger sociological or political issue they aim to discuss. In doing so, leaving out other potentially critical fragments of analysis. In addressing this criticism, Teun van Dijk acknowledges CDA should be combined with some element of ethnography (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Ethnography can yield the knowledge that CDA extracts from the text. This kind of research practice complements the CDA analysis, validating it in greater scope. I have also incorporated SSI to complement the CDA data collected. The SSI provides an indispensable balance in which van Dijk is referencing.

Harnessing the apparatuses of CDA has permitted the opportunity in which to fulfill my research questions: 1) How has the United States government conducted its COVID-19 pandemic response? 2) What characteristics of governance are included in this response? Critical discourse analysis attempts to interpret and understand the power dynamics affiliated with discourse from governmental institutions. Multimodal critical discourse analysis focused on analyzing speeches, interviews, press conferences, and other video-based social interactions of heads of state departments, within the executive office, and leading medical experts. As previously mentioned, the intricacies and subtleties of any social interaction demand multiple coded indicators of analysis. This involves a compilation of words, phraseology, voice tone, body language, targeted audience, and social setting, etc. all work in an interwoven network of mapping. The mapping is broken down into two subsets: Discourse and text mapping and visual mapping. The coded indicators correspond to larger themes. Upon completion, the mapping systems offer clarity to the interpretive thematic narratives being pushed by these actors. These narratives reveal a more complete representation of the greater societal power relation at play. In doing so, this study brings to light any correlations of manipulation, exploitation, or Post-truth governmentality features.

The CDA template of analysis is compiled from January 2020 to May 2020. It individualizes each month with the actors involved for that interval of time. I prepared this

decision to linearly track how the dialogue and framing of COVID-19 evolved. In the preliminary stages, I wanted to analyze between two and three CDA instances of an actor for the month. However, as the research progressed, there are portions where an actor was analyzed only once or not at all. This was because an actor was not found to have publicly spoken on COVID-19 for that month. I will provide further elaboration in the following chapter. Below is the list of prominent actors within the United States government chose to be analyzed from January to May 2020:

1. U.S. Department of State – Secretary: Mike Pompeo
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Secretary: Alex Azar
3. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases – Director: Anthony Fauci
4. Center for Disease Control and Prevention – Director Robert Redfield
5. President: Donald Trump
6. Vice President: Mike Pence
7. U.S. Department of Defense – Secretary: Mark Esper

I chose these actors based on their intimate knowledge of COVID-19, their position in federal leadership to influence national decision-making or a combination of both. The vast majority of the documented CDA instances were located from website databases, governmental and independent. It was essential to only pick particular CDA instances in which I could watch an audiovisual from beginning to end. This provided me with an unblemished canvass for data collection. The videos could not be edited or manipulated for advancing an ideological agenda. The vast majority of audiovisuals came from the archives of C-SPAN, State Departments, or White House websites. In every instance, the full audiovisual was readily available.

The decision to employ multimodal critical discourse analysis in my study permitted me to access how COVID-19 was securitized by the Trump Administration to the American citizenry. The multidimensional nature of this method focuses on how language, such as communication, shapes social interactions while establishing power dynamics. A process of securitization invokes an intricate approach that may contain visual, audio, and written components in order to be successful. Multimodal critical discourse analysis effectively tracks

and analyzes these variables in a highly competent manner when other methodologies may not be as prosperous. The next section outlines the second approach of semi-structured interviews.

## 4.2    Semi-structured Interviews

The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to provide further contextual data for this study. Here, I offer specific detail into the lives of those United States citizens affected by the governmental discourse and policy concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. I conducted the SSI over the summer of 2020. The purpose of the SSI is to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of the US government decisions and rhetoric. The data collected will be presented as supplementary to the CDA results. Although the SSI was not coupled with participant observation in the strictest sense, each interview was conducted during an interval of time in which CDA analysis was occurring. This illustrates a loose ethnography from a research standpoint. As the researcher, I was actively engaging in the Minnesota community through both day-to-day living and academic interviews, during a time in which COVID-19 was explicitly active. I remained within this community from the start of preliminary data collection to the submission of the thesis. I have chosen various interviewed quotes that provide a clearer picture as to the day-to-day livelihood of Minnesota residents. These interviewed perspectives will be presented in Chapters 5 and 6. I asked the interview questions to touch on a variety of issues such as the interviewee's mental health during the pandemic, perception of government decision-making, and how or if they stay informed with national and global news. The list of questions can be found in the Appendices. I have recruited five interviewees from my personal social circles within the Wisconsin and Minnesota area. The lone requirement is that they must be an American citizen who had lived in the United States since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals remain completely anonymous and were clear on the purposes of this academic study. For anonymity, the interviewees were numbered 'Participant #1, #2, #3… and will be addressed.

The setting for each interview was one-on-one. I wanted the structure of the interview to feel naturalistic and informal so the interviewee would be open to elaborating on the presented questions. I used two separate recording software on my laptop simultaneously. The software applied was speech-to-text. Having two separate recordings going at the same time offered a stronger probability of consistently receiving the interviewee's responses to the questions. I

believe this was successful as I found a couple of instances where one recording missed a sentence or two that was picked up by the other and vice versa. A speech-to-text software saved valuable time in transmitting the interview to documentation.

The SSI offers a more personalized understanding of COVID-19, its consequences, and the United States' governmental response. The need for SSIs arose as a means of analyzing a reaction to the Trump Administration's securitization of COVID-19. As a securitization process relies heavily on how the audience responds, the SSI evaluates a sampled-size audience reaction to this securitization. The audience reaction is crucial in comprehending the whole and complete scope of securitization regarding COVID-19.

## 4.3 Triangulation

One of the central goals of any research is to maintain strong internal and external validity and reliability across the study. Researchers may employ multiple perspectives or techniques for a decrease in any potential biases associated with the research. The intent is to use two or more aspects of research to strengthen the design and increase the ability to interpret findings through triangulation (Thurmond, 2001). There are various forms of triangulation depending on how the specific study is conducted and what kinds of results the researcher is attempting to uncover. For this study, collection and analysis fell under time triangulation and across-method triangulation. Time triangulation can vary based on the time and setting the data was obtained. This indicates a collection of data at various times to determine if similar findings occur or patterns of development. These patterns can morph into thematic narratives, which increases the confidence of findings (Thurmond, 2001). This is predominantly found in my CDA collection spanning the months of January to May 2020.

Methodological triangulation also uses over one kind of method to study an issue or phenomenon. There are two types: within-method triangulation and across-method triangulation. This thesis combines both quantitative and qualitative data-collection techniques with CDA and SSI constituting across-method triangulation. From a qualitative stance, I extract explanatory and contextual pieces of research data. Conversely, from a quantitative position, I've included a statistically quantifiable analysis of outcomes. This has been collected from scales of measurement which are expressed numerically. With triangulation, researchers can use two

research methods to decrease the weaknesses of an individual method and strengthen the outcome of the study (Bekhet, 2012). Both qualitative and quantitative studies understand and explain behavior and events. The blending of each for this study offers a more complete narrative illustration. To properly identify these overarching narratives through CDA and SSI, I found it obligatory to construct a thematic mapping system that involves linguistic and visual indicators. The following section will explain this two-fold mapping system: discourse and text mapping, and visual mapping.

## 4.4   Thematic Mapping

**Figure 2.1 – Discourse and Text Mapping**

Figure 2.1 – Discourse and Text Mapping details a chosen list of coded indicators of analysis within a text. All seven coded indicators of the Figure 2.1 mapping system were used in each researched CDA instance. The Formal Lexical Choices and Informal Lexical Choices indicators were chosen to help interpret the sophistication and complexity of textual discourse. The sophistication level will be elaborated upon in the next section. An informal lexical choice characterizes a more conversational style of communication in a word or phrase informal in usage. In contrastingly, a formal lexical choice is a more technical language connoting facts or information to the audience. Infusing the two is common in political and media-based discourse (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The Classification of Actors indicator classifies people, organizations, and institutions into particular groupings to better understand their ideological fit or motive. The Meaning of Quoting Verbs indicator organizes how verbs are articulated within a text. For example, different verb usage can create an actor to appear more authoritative, subservient, legitimate, or not depending on how they convene their communication. The Nominalization indicator is concerned with the way a phrase or sentence may obscure agency or responsibility for an action or event. We can be seen through the usage of passive verbs. The Rhetorical Tropes indicator, hyperbole, is focused on exaggeration within a communicative instance. Last, the Modality and Hedging indicator refers to the level of certainty or commitment in communication by an actor.

Each of these indicators played a vital role in CDA data collection and analysis. The individual CDA Coding Form can be found in Appendix D of this thesis for reference. This form details each indicator represented in both Figure 2.1 and 2.2. Once the indicators were quantitatively and qualitatively documented on the CDA Coding Form, the CDA instance was then processed through a multi-step analytical approach that consists of four phases.
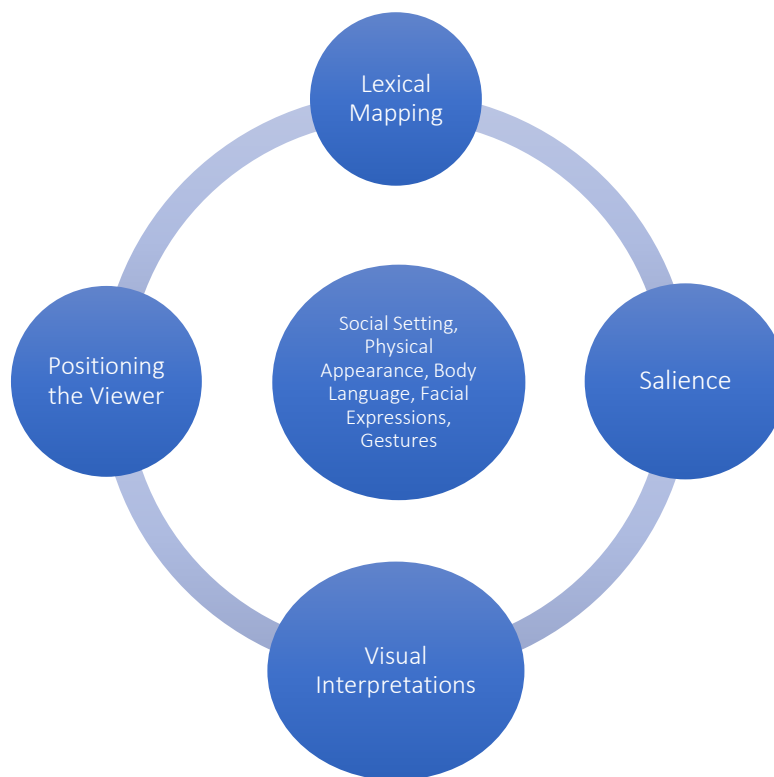
**Figure 2.2 – Visual Mapping**



Figure 2.2 – Visual Mapping details a chosen list of coded indicators of analysis within a social setting. I used the four coded indicators in this mapping system in each CDA instance, just as in Figure 2.1. The study of multimodal critical discourse analysis involves unearthing direct or indirect meanings within a text or communicative instance. This requires analysis of even the most incremental detail. However, on a larger scale, a broader representation of symbols within a territory is called lexical mapping. The Lexical Mapping indicator provides a structural overview of the communication. The Salience indicator is where certain features within a visual or composition are made to stand out or draw our attention (Machin & Mayr, 2012). A prime example of this is political symbols such as national flags or statues. I found the symbolic value through the size, color, and tone of the images. The Visual Representations indicator in Figure 2.2 refers to an actor's gaze and pose in a social setting. A speech act's complexities are exhibited by observing the depicted gaze and pose of an actor. The manner in which they articulate a speech act can convey an array of meanings – unsympathetic or cheerful, looking up or down, etc. Last, the Positioning of the Viewer indicator refers to the distance and angle of the

targeted audience in a social setting. For example, during a politician's speech, we notice how far away the media or cameras may be from the podium. The visual mapping in multimodal critical discourse analysis plays a central function in understanding the societal power dynamics of this communication.

A CDA instance is processed through a multi-step analytical approach consisting of four phases. The first phase involves unpacking all interpreted indicators using the CDA Coding Form. The second phase uses the template of Figure 1.1 to categorize and classify the discovered indicators. The third phase places each instance on a securitization spectrum. The fourth and final phase identifies any features of Post-truth governmentality. I will discuss phase three and four in Section 4.5. Figures 2.1 and 2.2, detailed in the CDA Coding Form (found in Appendix D), represent the first phase of academic analysis for the collected data. It is helpful to visualize a siphon. The CDA Coding Form for each researched instance is the initial siphoning of data collected using multimodal critical discourse analysis. The second phase of analysis is through Figure 1.1.

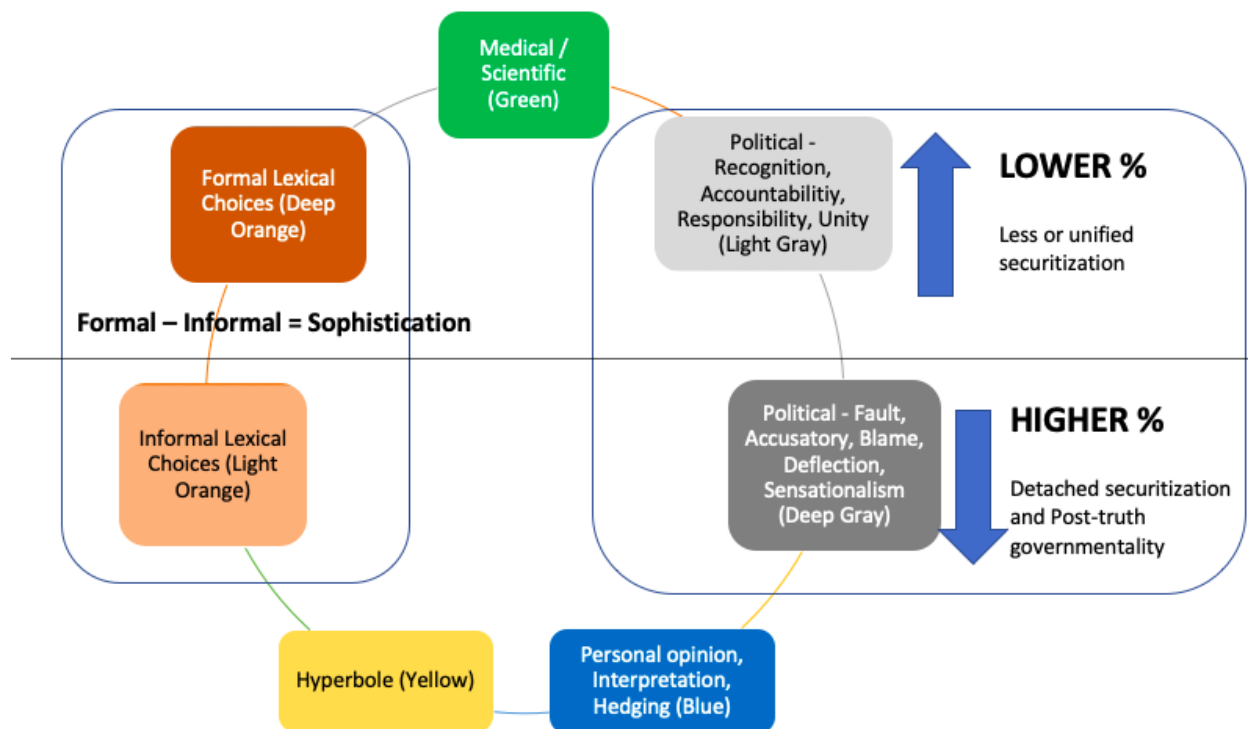**Figure 1.1 – Color-coded Phrases and Terminology**

Figure 1.1 – Color-coded Phrases and Terminology is a template I've created to meticulously analyze and dissect each CDA instance during the research process. The above diagram details the central mapping choices for every CDA occurrence. This led to a more comprehensive understanding of underlying thematic narratives. I chose what I believed to be the most critical pieces of mapping from Figures 2.1 and 2.2. Figure 1.1 was effectively placed into a spreadsheet as a part of the multi-step approach of analysis. This spreadsheet is completely laid out to view in the hyperlink of Appendix C: Link to Data Collection.

The five essential pieces of mapping as illustrated in Figure 1.1: Medical and Scientific (Green color-code), Formal Lexical Choices (Deep Orange color-code), Informal Lexical Choices (Light Orange color-code), Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes (Yellow color-code), and Personal Opinion/Hedging (Blue color-code).

The gray color-coded boxes in Figure 1.1 are an indicator of what securitization spectrum the CDA occurrence falls upon as the central component to phase three. The light gray color-coded box indicates recognition, accountability, responsibility, and unity. A light gray overall incidence suggests a lower measurement of detached securitization; more toward a unified securitization. The deep gray color-coded box represents the issuing of fault, accusation, blame, deflection, or sensationalism in a researched CDA instance. A deep gray overall occurrence hints at a higher measurement of detached securitization and the potential for Post-truth governmentality features as a part of phase four.

Observe the line directly horizontal within the Figure 1.1 template. This is a visual of cutting the diagram in half, above and below the line. Formal Lexical Choices, Medical and Scientific Terminology, and Political – Accountability, etc. are all above the horizontal line. This signifies that the more Formal Lexical Choices and Medical/Scientific Terminology incidences used in a CDA instance, the stronger probability the individual or group is being politically transparent and responsible to the targeted audience. Informal Lexical Choices, Hyperbole, Personal Opinions/Hedging, and Political – Fault, etc. are all below the horizontal line. This signifies the more instances of Informal Lexical Choices, Hyperbole, Personal Opinions/Hedging, and Political – Fault, etc. the higher probability the individual or group is being isolated and using detaching securitization with potential features of Post-truth governmentality.

Notice the line horizontal within the template is labeled Formal – Informal = Sophistication. The level of sophistication is analyzed by subtracting the amount of formal lexical choices from informal lexical choices in a researched audiovisual instance. The total number remaining after subtraction demonstrates one technique to grade the sophistication of that instance. This can be understood with the circular line around the two orange boxes to indicate their simultaneous relationship and distinction from the other lexical topics of measurement. A circular line is also around the gray boxes, measuring securitization with the same purpose.

In each CDA instance, the topics of Medical/Scientific Terminology, Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes, and Personal Opinion/Hedging were calculated quantitatively. When each lexical measurement was identified, it represented a quantity of (1). None of the lexical topics of measurement were subtracted or modified to understand sophistication level within an audiovisual instance. However, each provided greater insight as to where an occurrence would fall on the securitization spectrum.

## 4.5   Securitization Spectrum and PTG

A securitization spectrum is based on the overall interpretation of an audiovisual instance while considering phase one and two. The securitization spectrum represents the third phase of this multi-step analytical approach to analysis. Totals and averages of the previously discussed lexical measurements are certainly considered when completing an actor's securitization spectrum for a month (January to May 2020). The securitization spectrum references the previously discussed light and dark gray boxes in Figure 1.1. Monthly securitization totals for each actor was given a number. This monthly number was between -5 and 5 along a spectrum. The lower the number indicates higher recognition, accountability, responsibility, and unity. The higher the final number suggests a higher measurement of detached securitization and possibility of Post-truth governmentality features for the particular actor.

This analysis was conducted from January 2020 to May 2020, at a five-month interval of time. The analysis of each actor was totaled monthly. I present the data on radar charts and spectrums of securitization. Next, the monthly totals were numerically averaged and presented on further radar charts. These same totals are also presented on a clustered column chart. The

averages for each measurement bear significance moving forward in the analysis. Chapter 5: CDA and Interview Results and Chapter 6: Post-truth Governmentality Analysis and Narrative Discussion will exhaustively expound on this transitory outline. Chapter 5 details the first three phases of this analytical approach.

The fourth phase is PTG (Post-truth governmentality) dissection. If an individual actor is above or below at least two averages of the whole, they qualify for PTG dissection. The actors that qualify for PTG dissection are then interpretatively analyzed by the amount of quantitative PTG incidences. I found the length of an incidence has been found to vary from just one sentence or phrase to a full paragraph. These incidences are totaled and categorized into five narratives: "Decisive Action/Unprecedented Steps/Forward Thinking…", "Emphasis on Clear/Transparent Coms.", "Threat to Americans Low/Slowed/Unimportant", "Utopian Prophecy – Religious or Political", and "Accusatory/Deflection – The Other". These PTG narrative categories are calculated into a pie chart for each actor, along with the overall PTG narrative percentages. Chapter 6 details the fourth phase of the analytical approach.

The semi-structured interviews are used frugally in the data results and analysis. The purpose of the interviews is to provide a complementary set of data to the overall thematic narratives and discussion that has arisen from the CDA research. I believe the interviewees provide adequate descriptions of their reaction to the COVID-19 securitization of the Trump Administration. These reactions are reinforced by the resulting CDA data. In the totality of collected research, I would estimate there is an 80/20 split of CDA data analysis to SSI data analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.

## 4.6   Interpretative, Quantifiable Indicators

For this academic study, I have utilized the methodology of multimodal critical discourse analysis as both a qualitative and quantitative measure. As CDA predominantly operates as a qualitative component of the analysis, I recognize the irregularity. I've measured the five coded pieces of mapping: Medical and Scientific, Formal Lexical Choices, Informal Lexical Choices, Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes, and Personal Opinion/Hedging as interpretative, quantifiable indicators. As I identified a coded indicator, based on my interpretation of the audiovisual, it was counted as (1). In Chapter 5: CDA and Interview Results, I divided the amount of identified

indicators by the number of audiovisuals per actor, per month. I am justified in measuring CDA as partly a quantitative interpretation for three central reasons. First, using interpretative, quantifiable indicators provides a more complete understanding of my interpretative approach while utilizing multimodal critical discourse analysis. This offers insight into my analytical rationality. Second, functionally operating as also a quantitative measure is necessary for identifying what actors qualify as Post-truth governmentality actors, along with PTG instances in their securitized rhetoric. Third, the quantifiable indicators assist in the justification of thematic narratives and overall themes of this academic study. I am aware this utilization is not necessarily replicable and irregular. However, I believe this justification strengthens my research while producing a comprehensively distinct theoretical framework and thesis.

## 4.7    Reflexivity and Positionality

One of the primary roles of the researcher is understanding the reflexivity necessary during the entire research process. Reflexivity is a critical reflection of the researcher on how their personal experience, bias, and assumptions affect every facet of the research. Reflexivity deals with the ethical awareness of how researching a community may disrupt, whether positively or negatively, the overall group dynamic or social organization. In a quantitative approach, the researcher's role is less concerned with notions of reflexivity. Not that reflexivity is completely disregarded. It is, however, considered to not be the highest priority. As the researcher is at a distance from the research, an uneven power dynamic may come into play. The researcher is concerned with what they specifically want to know or have answered. Prioritization of self-interest makes it more difficult for relationship-building between the researcher and insider.

Qualitative researchers deal heavily in notions of reflexivity. The data collected in this thesis was heavily focused on a qualitative approach. The foundation of qualitative research is understanding and interpreting the insider's perspective. Based on this, a high degree of reflexivity is necessary to complete fieldwork. CDA and SSI data collection and analysis. Social awareness when observing or conducting interviews. A practical sensitivity in remaining open-minded to culturally specific situations or interacting with a certain social group. The determining levels of reflexivity by a researcher, in both quantitative and qualitative approaches,

is a building block of all contemporary social research. When collecting CDA and SSI data for this research, I found myself in multiple situations that required the utilization of reflexivity. Primarily, I applied reflexivity through the semi-structured interviews. Implementing SSIs used a purposive sampling method. The subjectivity came when selecting interview participants from my social circle. This social circle is predominantly left-leaning [Democrat] from a political standpoint. Consequentially, the participants are more liable to critique the Trump Administration. I was aware of this bias. However, I believe the SSIs to be a strong, complementary element to this academic study. This creates a limitation to this study, which will be further discussed in the Conclusions chapter.

Throughout the data collection, it has been undeniably difficult to remain thoroughly objective and impartial. The events, decisions, and actions, directly and indirectly, related to this research have had a substantial impact on my personal life. Returning to the United States in the middle of an ongoing pandemic has inherently caused anxiety and frustration. I've experienced, firsthand, how the level of isolation with social groups affects mental and physical health. Through this experience, I am incredibly aware of my positionality as a researcher in the area I live. I believe I have maintained a purely academic mindset in data collection, analysis, and thematic discussion.

## 4.8   Summary

I conducted this methodological framework through approaches using multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. CDA has allowed me to apply visual, audio, and written cues to specific seven actors over five months. This lens of analysis is significantly more complex than other methodologies by studying how language shapes social interactions while establishing power relationships. I studied these actors from January 2020 to May 2020, a five-month interval. The approach of semi-structured interviews in this study further contextualizes the data results and analysis as an auxiliary to CDA. The SSIs offer a personal understanding of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the U.S. governmental response. Each audiovisual case was directly guided by both discourse and text mapping and visual mapping as a part of the four analytical phases. The data was gathered and compiled for analysis by Figure 1.1 - Color-coded Phrases and Terminology. I generated all three diagrams

through an interpretive lens for thematic mapping. A spectrum of securitization and PTG dissection represent the final stages of the analytical investigation. The following two chapters, Chapter 5 and 6, will present my findings, discuss the analysis, and expand on the emerging thematic narratives of this study.

# 5      CDA and Interview Results

## 5.1          CDA Data Results – January to May 2020

This chapter summarizes the data collection for this research project. I collected my data over a five-month interval, from January 2020 to May 2020. I supplemented this data research with semi-structured interviews (SSI), which I conducted and completed upon my return to the United States in May and June 2020. In this chapter, I will detail and expand on the data collected for each month of study. I will discuss which actors were analyzed through multimodal critical discourse analysis. I will provide be a clear and concise breakdown of the individual findings along with collective findings for each month. I will incorporate principle quotes from these actors, providing further context to the environment during each month. Afterward, I will transition to the semi-structured interviews. The accounts provided by the five anonymous participants enhance the CDA findings by offering on-the-ground perspectives regarding securitization during the COVID-19 pandemic. They consider a variety of topics concerning COVID-19 and how the government has dealt with the pandemic.

The complete CDA totals and encapsulated data figures present larger thematic narratives of discussion. I have examined these thematic narratives in the succeeding chapter, Chapter 6: Post-truth Governmentality Analysis and Narrative Discussion. The final data calculations provide averages for each actor and their securitization level within a linear timeline. Before transitioning to the next chapter, we comprehensively breakdown the qualifications for Post-truth governmentality (PTG). I then express the qualifying actors and their quantitative instances in two data figures. The constructed thematic narratives are pronounced and finalized for the following chapter of conversation in Chapter 6. In the first section of this chapter, I present the data findings for January.

## 5.1.1        January 2020 – Data Results

January 2020 marked the beginning of the United States' securitization response to COVID-19. As China did not officially report any COVID-19 positive cases to the World Health Organization until December 31, 2019, it was weeks before the United States registered its first case. The CDC (Center for Disease Control) confirmed the first official case within the United States on January 20th 2020 when a 35-year old woman from Washington state checked into a local clinic (Holshue, 929). On January 29th, the Trump Administration had announced the formation of the President's Coronavirus Task Force. In a statement from the Press Secretary, "The Task Force will lead the Administration's efforts to monitor, contain, and mitigate the spread of the virus while ensuring that the American people have the most accurate and up-to-date health and travel information" (The White House, 2020). Two days later, on January 31st, the President of the United States suspended entry into the U.S. for immigrants and nonimmigrants who were physically present within China during the fourteen days preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States. This would not include permanent residents, spouses, or parental guardians of U.S. citizens (The White House, 2020).

During January, I studied eight audiovisual speeches by governmental officials. Each speech had a central focus on COVID-19 as expressed to the American citizenry. The eight audiovisual speeches came from four actors: Donald Trump, Robert Redfield, Anthony Fauci, and Alex Azar. The eight speeches were divided: two by Alex Azar, three by Anthony Fauci, two by Robert Redfield, and one by Donald Trump. A lone January instance by Donald Trump is unique because it combines three separate public appearances. However, each provided such a minuscule amount of COVID-19 discourse, I combined these into one analysis. Furthermore, the very lack of public discourse by the President of the United States bears merit, specifics notwithstanding. Three of the researched actors who did not have a publicly available audiovisual speech concerning COVID-19 for January were Mike Pompeo, Mike Pence, and Mark Esper. That there is no record on COVID-19 by these actors in January notes the lack of perceived severity during this time. This notion is supported by the small number of infected people and the number of deaths within the U.S. for January as well. There were six infected Americans with zero deaths during this period (Ritchie, 2020). In referencing back to Figure 1.1 – Color-coded Phrases and Terminology, recall how each actor's audiovisual speech is broken down by specific CDA criteria. As a reminder from Chapter 4, the CDA indicators are: Formal
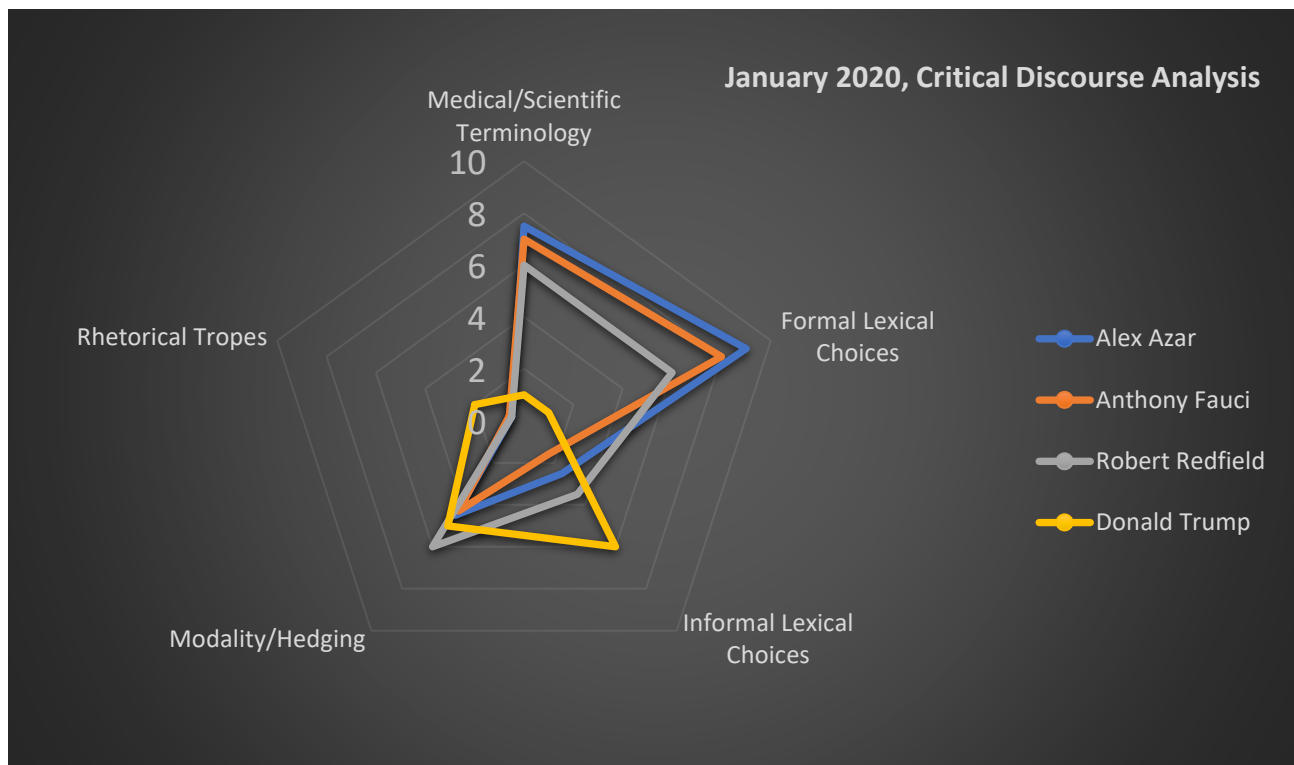
Lexical Choices (Deep Orange), Informal Lexical Choices (Light Orange), Medical/Scientific Terminology (Green), Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes (Yellow), and Modality/Hedging (Blue).[1]

The total amount of times each indicator appeared for an actor in January is represented on the following page below in Figure 3.1 – January 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis. This is the first and second phase of the multi-step analytical approach utilized for this thesis. This radar chart scatters the classifying indicators on a visual map. It shows a stark difference between the word choices used by President Donald Trump and the other three actors. Donald Trump has a higher Rhetorical Tropes/Hyperbole choice average at (2.0). None of the other actors have anything higher than (.6) average. Additionally, we can see that Trump is substantially higher in Informal Lexical Choices than (6). That is nearly double the amount of any other actor. Where Trump's data analysis is also noteworthy under the category of Medical/Scientific Terminology and Formal Lexical Choices. For each, Donald Trump holds (1). The rest of the actors all maintain at least a (6) in each category. I combined three separate, however brief, instances in which Trump mentioned COVID-19. Below is the entire set of statements in which the President of the United States publicly acknowledged COVID-19, for the month of January:

- "Hopefully, everything's going to be great… they (China) has somewhat of a problem, but hopefully it's going to be great" (C-SPAN, 2020).
- "…that's a new thing that a lot of people are talking about. Hopefully it won't be as bad a some people think it could be" (C-SPAN, 2020).
- "We have it totally under control. It's one person coming in from China, and we have it under control. It's going to be fine" (Belvedere, 2020).

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[1] See Appendix C for a hyperlink to this thesis' complete data set.

**Figure 3.1 – January 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**



The other three actors, Alex Azar, Anthony Fauci, and Robert Redfield, all fall on similar categorical lines. Redfield has a slightly less average in Medical/Scientific Terminology and Formal Lexical Choices than either Azar or Fauci. Redfield has the second-highest amount of Informal Lexical Choices for January, behind only Trump. In January, the medical experts emphasized the amount of "unknowns" concerning the virus along with how it required much more research. Robert Redfield stated, "…we really don't know a lot about this new coronavirus. I would be reluctant for people to transmit knowledge of those [other strains of corona] virus' to this virus. We don't know actually how this virus jumped to man" (Coronavirus Task Force, Jan. 2020). Anthony Fauci reiterated, "Unknown aspects of this particular outbreak – compares certainty of influenzas in given timetable…issue is the unknowns – we understood more about people who are asymptomatic and that they can transmit to others" (Coronavirus Task Force, Jan. 2020). Figure 3.1 is significant because it illustrates the contrast in the discourse of COVID-19 between Donald Trump and the medical experts. The discrepancy in discourse is unambiguous. This is particularly highlighted in Trump's Informal Lexical Choices and Rhetorical Tropes/Hyperbole. Trump stated that was nothing to worry about in relation to

COVID-19. The medical community, including Azar, emphasized, how the risk to Americans was low, but that situation contained dealing with plenty of "unknowns" and uncertainty.

**Figure 3.2 – January 2020, Securitization Spectrum**
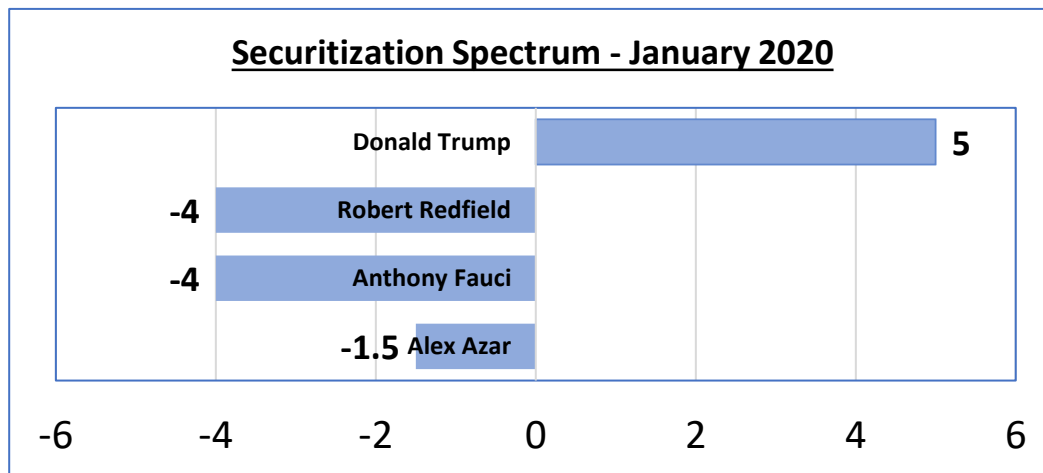


Figure 3.2 – January 2020, Securitization Spectrum represents an interpretive picture of how each actor securitized the COVID-19 pandemic to the American citizenry. Recall, the spectrum of securitization falls between (-5) and (5). A (-5) signifies that securitization is unified, centered on accountability and responsibility. A (5) means that securitization is detached, focused on sensationalism and accusation and deflection. The closer an actor is to (5), the greater probability of Post-truth governmentality features in their discourse. This is the third phase of the multi-step analytical approach.

In Figure 3.2, Donald Trump stands out among all actors in January with a (5). The sheer lack of acknowledgment throughout January, along with the seemingly dismissive attitude toward COVID-19 as a national security threat, dictates the reasoning for this number. Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield each received a (-4). Each medical expert elaborated on the uncertainty and unknown involving COVID-19. They both articulated practices to mitigate and contain the virus. Alex Azar falls in the middle of the spectrum at a (-1.5). Based on his particular discourse during the month of January, Azar emphasized similar medical rationalities as Fauci and Redfield. However, Azar was a member of the Trump Administration. Political

allegiances were pre-determined in his discourse. This was found to slightly adjust his overall mark.

## 5.1.2        February 2020 – Data Results

February saw a slight increase in the securitization process of COVID-19. This could be seen both domestically and internationally. By this time, the virus had spread to numerous other countries. In an op-ed released by the U.S. Department of State on February 7th, Mike Pompeo explained the United States' efforts in offering assistance to China and others while acknowledging the minimal impact COVID-19 had within the U.S. (Pompeo & Azar, 2020). It was not until the end of February that Donald Trump announced a second suspension of entry. This suspension, to immigrants and nonimmigrants, involved the Islamic Republic of Iran and anyone who had traveled there in a 14-day period (Coronavirus Task Force, Feb. 2020). This suspension of entry specifically targeted Iran. This proclamation illustrated the growing awareness of the COVID-19 virus on a global level. By the end of February, the total number of infected people was 66, along with only 2 confirmed deaths (Ritchie, 2020).

During February, I studied thirteen audiovisual speeches. I analyzed every actor in two separate instances, except for Mark Esper. I found only one instance in which he publicly discussed COVID-19 during February. The greater accessibility to audiovisuals from the seven actors illustrates the growing level of importance during this month. The in the below Figure 4.1 – February 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis, each actor is represented on a visual map across the radar chart. Two immediate actors stand out: Anthony Fauci and Donald Trump. Anthony Fauci holds an average of (22) for Medical/Scientific Terminology and (23) for Formal Lexical Choices. The likely reason for Fauci's high scores in both categories is because of his participation in a roundtable with the Council on Foreign Relations in one studied instance. This audiovisual's length of time was longer than the other researched instances. Correspondingly, this instance was more informal, materializing more than a conversational format. Donald Trump especially stands out in the categories of Modality/Hedging with (9) and Informal Lexical Choices with (9.5). Both audiovisuals came during White House Task Force briefings with the media. It is important to note that the chart appears slightly skewed because of Fauci's averages in two categories. The other five actors have a close approximation in averages throughout. Between the other five, there are limited Formal Lexical Choices and Medical/Scientific

Terminology. Mike Pence received the second-highest score for Formal Lexical Choices with (9) and the highest in Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes at a (2.5). Figure 4.1 is significant because it demonstrates how Trump is distinguished in securitized discourse relative to the other actors. The medical experts received higher scores than the other actors, specifically members of the Trump Administration.

**Figure 4.1 – February 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**
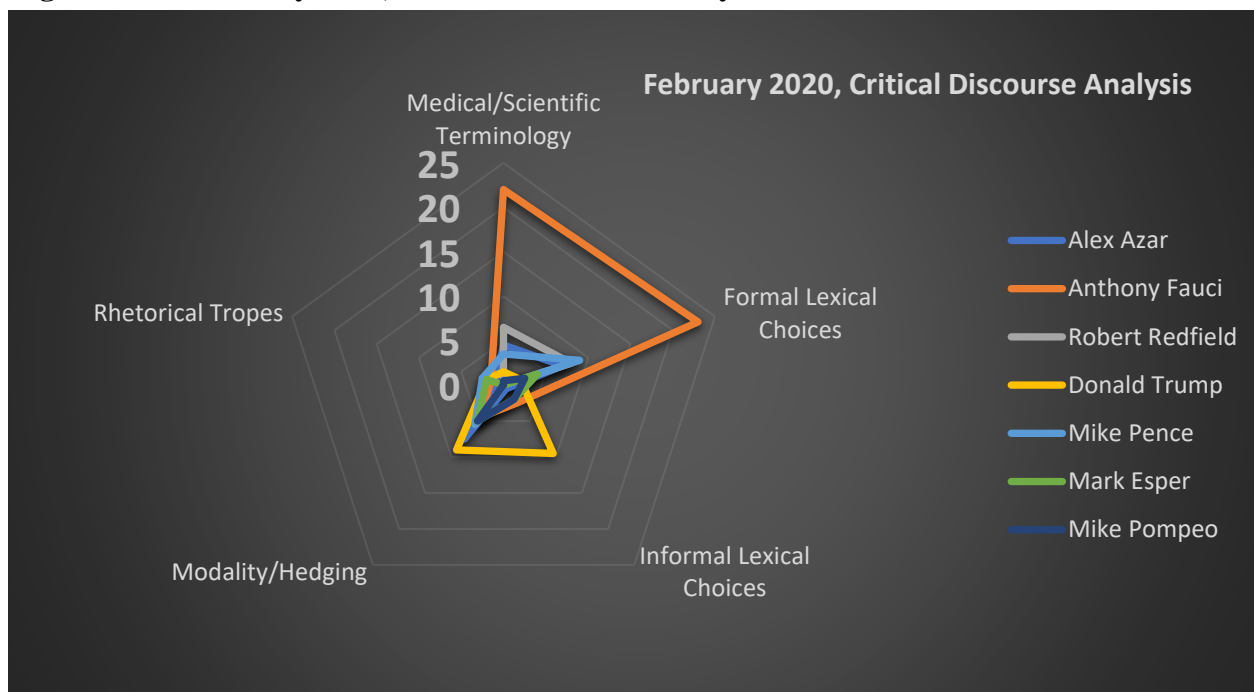


During February, Donald Trump acknowledged COVID-19 slightly more regular, however, he continued to emphasize that the risk remained low and if someone was to contract the virus, they would be fine. "So, healthy people, if you're healthy, you will probably go through a process and you'll be fine (Coronavirus Task Force, Feb. 2020). Throughout Trump's State of the Union speech, given annually at the beginning of February, Trump mentioned COVID-19 in three sentences. In the other instances where he discussed COVID-19, Trump hailed his administration as taking aggressive action to mitigate the spread:

"We've taken the most aggressive actions to confront the coronavirus. They are the most aggressive taken by any country. And we're the number one travel destination anywhere

in the world, yet we have far fewer cases of the disease than even countries with much less travel or a much smaller population" (Coronavirus Task Force, Feb. 2020).

Both Mike Pence and Mike Pompeo reiterated Trump's sentiments that the United States was demonstrating unprecedented action and a "world-leading response" in the face of COVID-19. Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield continued to emphasize the amount of uncertainty as it pertained to the virus, and how it would continue to be a rapidly developing situation, and that there would be continuous countermeasures and governmental responses. For example, Redfield states, "We should anticipate to see additional clusters and cases in the days ahead, and we will continue to aggressively evaluate them by the state and local territorial and tribal health departments, in conjunction with CDC, by embracing early case recognition, isolation, contact tracing, and begin to do that to limit the further spread" (Coronavirus Task Force, Feb. 2020). During this time, all actors remained steadfast that the risk to Americans remained low.

**Figure 4.2 – February 2020, Securitization Spectrum**
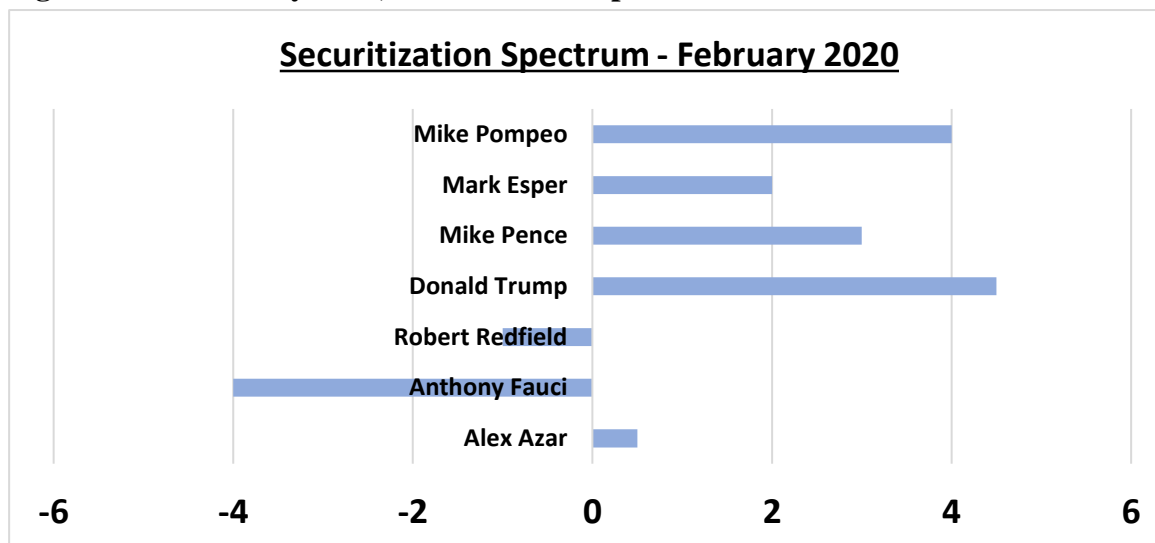


Figure 4.2 – February 2020, Securitization Spectrum illustrates where each actor fell on an interpretive spectrum concerning the COVID-19 pandemic during February. In contrast with January's figure, this month saw all seven actors placed on the spectrum. Donald Trump and Mike Pompeo stand out with high securitization at (4.5) and (4) respectively. They are followed

by Pence and Esper. Fauci remains in stark contrast with the Trump Administration at (-4) with Redfield to a lesser degree. This is primarily due to the fact that both actors stressed the unknowns and uncertainty with the pandemic at large. One of the most significant shifts is Alex Azar. In January, Azar held at (-1.5). In February, Azar moved to (.5) because of his shift toward the Trump Administration's rhetoric and away from his fellow medical experts. For example, his comments on February 29th illustrate this shift: "From day one, this what we predicted, this is what we expected. The risk to any average American is low, from the novel coronavirus. The risk remains low. Thanks to the unprecedented actions President Trump has taken and the actions he's announcing today, that risk remains low" (Coronavirus Task Force, Feb. 2020). As with the month of January, it is critical to understand how political allegiances may dictate discourse around the COVID-19 pandemic. For Azar, that was found to be more of the case in February's securitization.

## 5.1.3       March 2020 – Data Results

The month of March saw a sharp rise in the United States' discourse and policy action with the COVID-19 virus. March 11th marked a turning point, both internationally and domestically, in how the virus was securitized. On this day, the WHO officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. The WHO noted that the spread had increased 13-fold in two weeks and the number of infected countries had tripled (Hauck, 2020). The Trump Administration issued another proclamation banning entry to immigrants and nonimmigrants traveling from Europe (AJMC, 2020). This announcement came as Europe's COVID-19 infection rate skyrocketed. Two days later, Donald Trump officially declared COVID-19 a national emergency. This was followed by state-wide shutdowns and social gathering restrictions. By the end of March, there were over 164,000 infected Americans and 3,807 deaths (Ritchie, 2020). The rising infection numbers spiked exponentially when compared to the end of February. This illustrates the sudden shift in policy for March.

I studied fourteen audiovisual speeches in March. I studied all seven actors in two instances, demonstrated in Figure 5.1 – March 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis. The immediate standouts in this radar chart are Redfield, Esper, and Trump. Redfield had the highest average of Medical/Scientific Terminology at (14) and Formal Lexical Choices at (17). Mark Esper recorded the second-highest in both categories with (6.5) and (16.5) respectively. Donald Trump

stands out with the highest averages in Informal Lexical Choices at (6) and Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes at (3). Moreover, Trump had the lowest average in Formal Lexical Choices with (1). I bunch the other four actors in a fairly consistent lexical framework during March. The most notable variance is in the category of Formal Lexical Choices. After Esper's average of (16.5), there is a substantial drop-off to Alex Azar's average of (9). Figure 5.1 is significant because it illustrates Esper's reasonable consistency to maintain accountability and transparency while not falling into political partisanship. The same cannot be said for other actors, such as Donald Trump.

**Figure 5.1 – March 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**
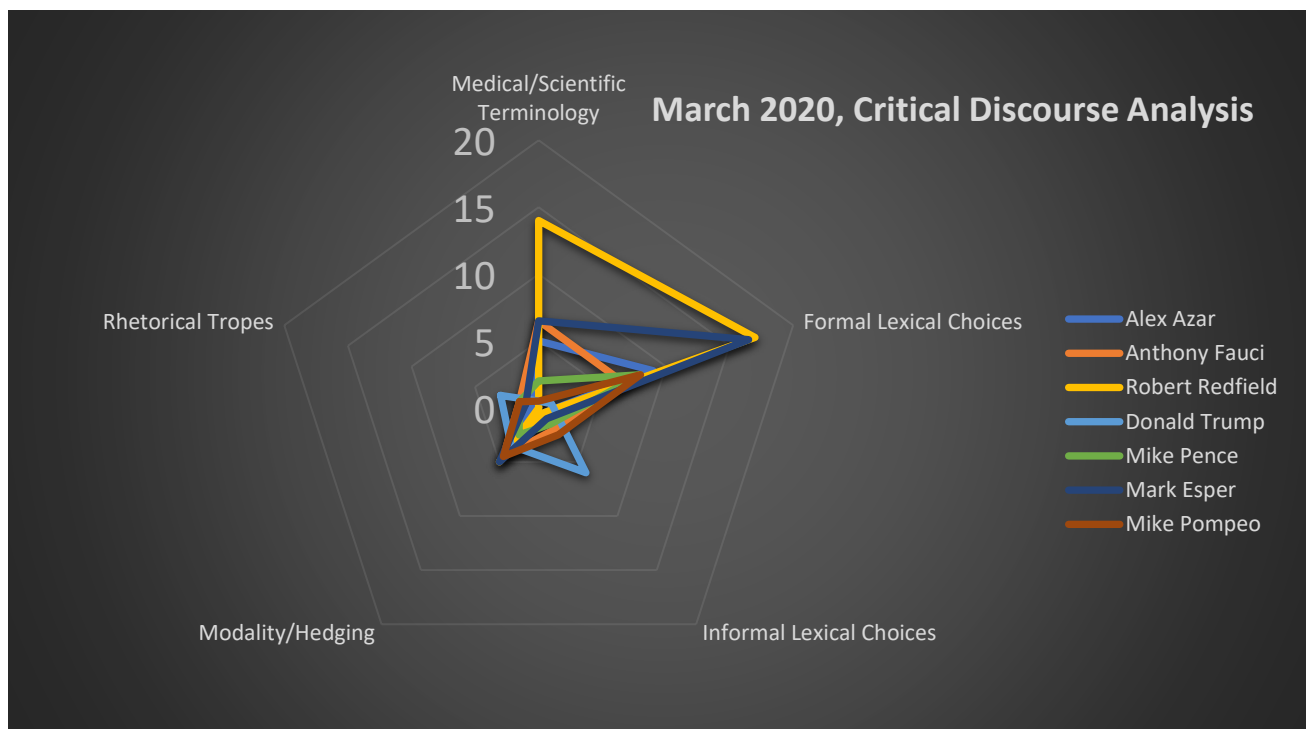


March saw a significant rise in infected cases and a growing number of deaths. With the travel ban for Europe and state shutdowns, we can witness shifting narratives toward the pandemic. For example, I found Mike Pompeo and Alex Azar found to blame China and Iran for the increasing global outbreak, even labeling the COVID-19 virus derogatorily as the "Wuhan virus". Pompeo struck out at Iran's leaders by claiming that they "are trying to avoid responsibility for their grossly incompetent and deadly governance. Sadly, the Iranian people

have been suffering these kinds of lies for forty-one years. They know the truth: The Wuhan virus is a killer and the Iranian regime is an accomplice" (Pompeo, 2020). As Azar and Pompeo increase their securitized rhetoric in March, Trump and Pence were found to have been promoting the reopening of America days after the states shut down. They each expressed the progress made to combat the virus in the country. Mike Pence stated, "…thanks to the President's strong leadership and professionalism of all of our federal agencies – Health and Human Services, CDC – and state and local health officials all across this country, the risk to the American public of contracting the coronavirus remains low… and let me say again, as we've said before. There's no need for Americans to buy masks" (Coronavirus Task Force, Mar. 2020).

The medical experts, Fauci and Redfield, remained fairly consistent in their rhetoric throughout March. Fauci detailed the United States' increase in testing ability and function: "If you come back in the fall, it will be a totally different ball game of what happened when we first got hit with it at the beginning of this year. There'll be several things that'll be different. Our ability to go out and be to test, identify, isolate and contact trace will be orders of magnitude better than what it was just a couple of months ago" (Fauci & Trump, 2020). Figure 5.2 illustrates how these shifting narratives have caused a split between actors in the Trump Administration and the medical experts, specifically Fauci and Redfield.

**Figure 5.2 – March 2020, Securitization Spectrum**
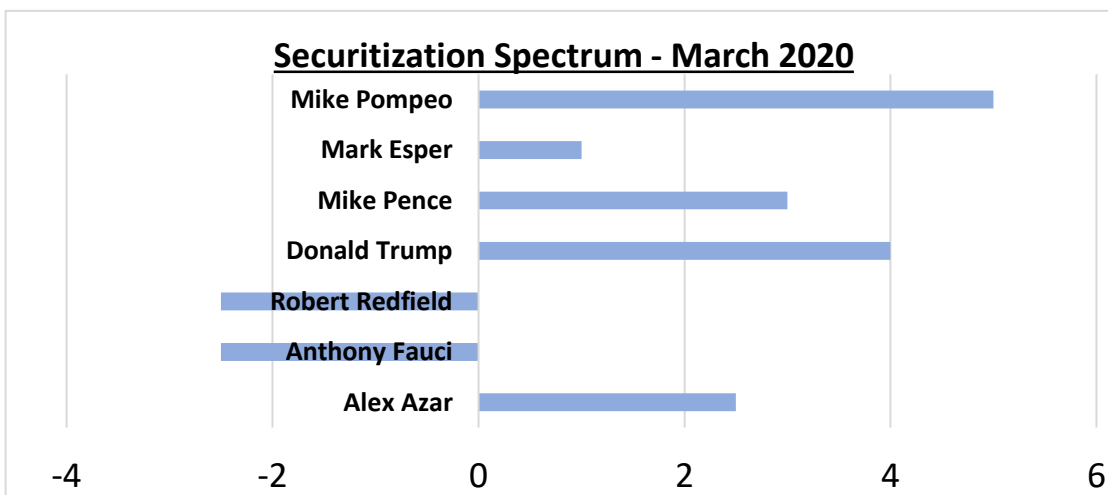
Members of the Trump Administration received high securitized grades for March. Trump and Pompeo fair the highest at (4) and (5). This would remain fairly consistent with the previous month (see Figure 4.2). Esper and Pence hold steady as well for March. Azar's increasingly detached securitization rhetoric concerning COVID-19 rose in February; by March, Azar's rhetoric can be viewed as weaponizing the COVID-19 discourse for political gain. One example of such weaponization was his statement that "During this pandemic, a number of health challenges arise when illegal immigrants arrive at our northern and southern borders and are taken into immigration custody. We're talking about significant numbers of illegal immigrants" (Coronavirus Task Force, Mar. 2020). Azar's status for March increased to (2.5) for the month. Both Redfield and Fauci remained consistent, each with a grade of (-2.5). Throughout the month, each was reasonably consistent in tone and rhetoric while maintaining medically objective discourse.

## 5.1.4       April 2020 – Data Results

The month of April saw another surge in COVID-19 cases and politicized discourse from the studied actors. During April, Americans witnessed the Trump Administration outline guidelines for re-opening America. This included the responsibility already given to state-level governments as state governors chose if they wanted to lift restrictions state-wide or by county. Donald Trump signed an executive order blocking green cards for prospective immigrants' temporally. Mark Esper extended the travel ban through June 2020 (AJMC, 2020). Throughout the month of April, the total number of infected people skyrocketed to over 1.04 million in the United States. The 'to-date' deaths stretched to over 57,000 people (Ritchie, 2020).

**Figure 6.1 – April 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**



April 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis
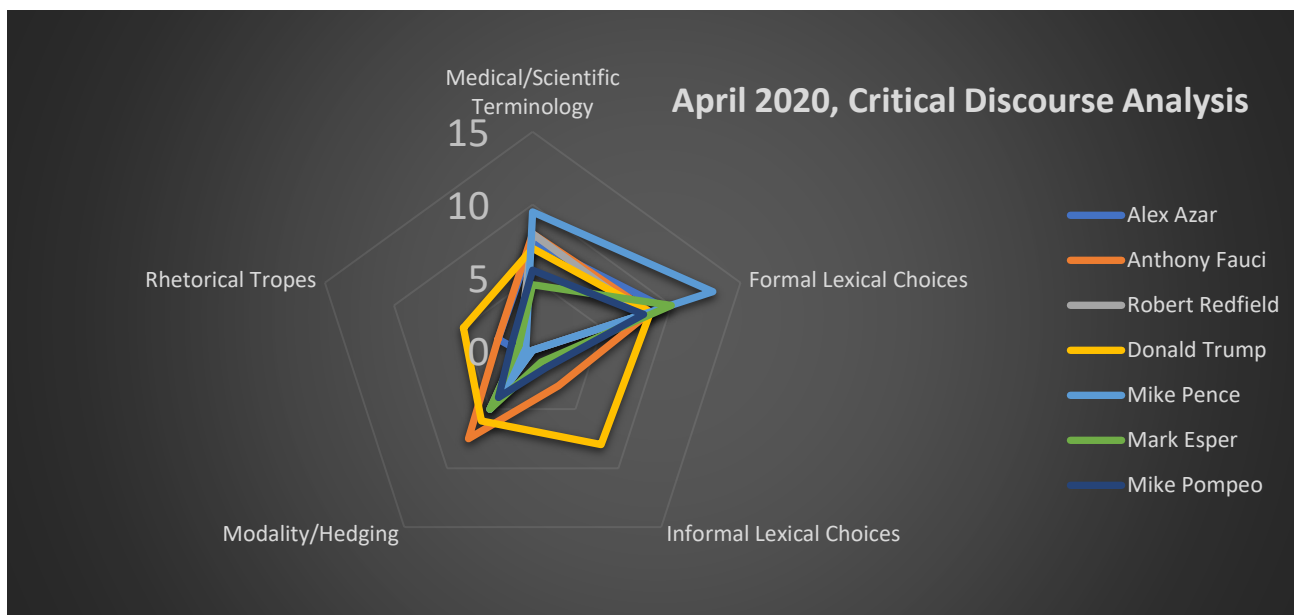
I studied another fourteen audiovisual speeches from all seven actors for this month. I studied each actor in two instances. The above Figure 6.1 – April 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis reflects the monthly averages of each actor's lexical discourse. The three standouts in this figure are Donald Trump, Mike Pence, and Anthony Fauci. Trump recorded the highest averages in Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes at (5) and Informal Lexical Choices at (8). He was second in Modality/Hedging with (6). Mike Pence recorded the highest in Medical/Scientific Terminology and Formal Lexical Choices with (9.5) and (13) respectively. Anthony Fauci tops all actors in Modality/Hedging at (7.5). The rest of the social actors are fairly clustered together in each category. Figure 6.1 is significant because it represents a rare occurrence in which a medical expert did not receive the highest score in Medical/Scientific Terminology and/or Formal Lexical Choices.

Donald Trump and Mike Pence continued to promote the amount of progress that their Administration had made to quell the COVID-19 pandemic. Mike Pence stated, "…specifically to speak about the progress that our governors are making expanding testing across the country. And we were pleased to hear about the extraordinary and rapid progress that governors are making… and I truly do believe the day will soon come when we will heal our land, and we'll be able to reopen, America and put this great nation back to work" (Coronavirus Task Force, Apr. 2020). As in March, we have seen some actors place blame on China as a manner of deflection

blame. In April, Donald Trump and others have pushed an accusatory narrative, this time focusing attacks on the World Health Organization:

"One of the most dangerous and costly decisions from the WHO was its disastrous decision oppose travel restrictions from China and other nations. They were very much opposed to what we did. Fortunately, I was not convinced and suspended travel from China, saving untold number of lives. Thousands and thousands of people would have died" (Coronavirus Task Force, Apr. 2020).

Mike Pompeo also issued similar remarks concerning the WHO and China. The medical experts held similar rhetoric as in previous months. Both Fauci and Redfield promoted notions of social distancing, mask-wearing, and various mitigation strategies. Fauci articulated that, "What we've been telling them all along, that the – the only tool, but the best tool we have is mitigation. We know it worked in other countries, and we're seeing how it's working here… its mitigation, mitigation, mitigation. That's the answer" (Coronavirus Task Force, Apr. 2020). I paired this with Redfield's emphasis on social distancing, "I just want to re-emphasize – I've said this before – that we're not defenseless against the virus. We have a powerful weapon. That is social distancing… the purpose here is foremost to embrace the social distancing" (Coronavirus Task Force, Apr. 2020).

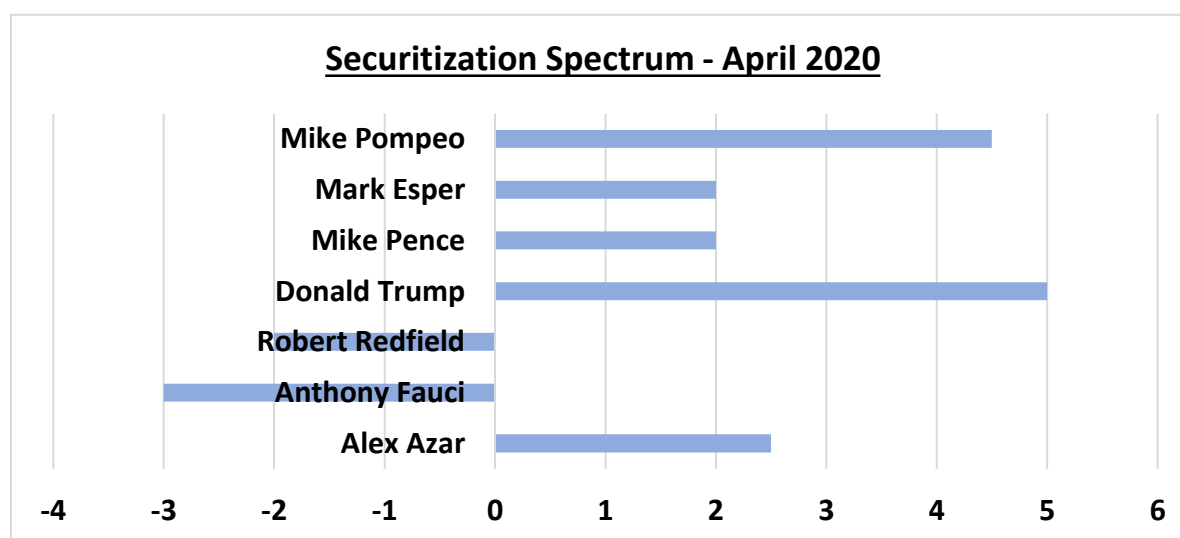**Figure 6.2 – April 2020, Securitization Spectrum**

Figure 6.2 – April 2020, Securitization Spectrum details where actors fell for their securitization of COVID-19 during the month of April. Donald Trump and Mike Pompeo each have the highest securitization grades at (5) and (4.5). This was due to their continued accusatory stances while promoting the reopening of the country as the pandemic objectively worsened. Esper, Pence, and Azar all essentially remained in a similar securitized placement as they had been in March. I can also see this with Fauci and Redfield. I graded them each at (-3) and (-2) because they overall remained consistent in approach and messaging to the American populous.

## 5.1.5 May 2020 – Data Results

The month of May saw more of the same for the United States. The total number infected rose to 1.7 million. By the end of the month, the U.S. had passed 100,000 deaths. The United States began leading the world in COVID-19 cases and deaths (Ritchie, 2020). Securitized narratives that had been built in the preceding months of March and April were continuously fostered and emboldened in May. The Trump Administration continued to direct blame toward the WHO and China and touted the "unprecedented progress" made in combating the virus within the U.S. Other actors urged science and medical-based strategies to lessen the COVID-19 impact across the country.
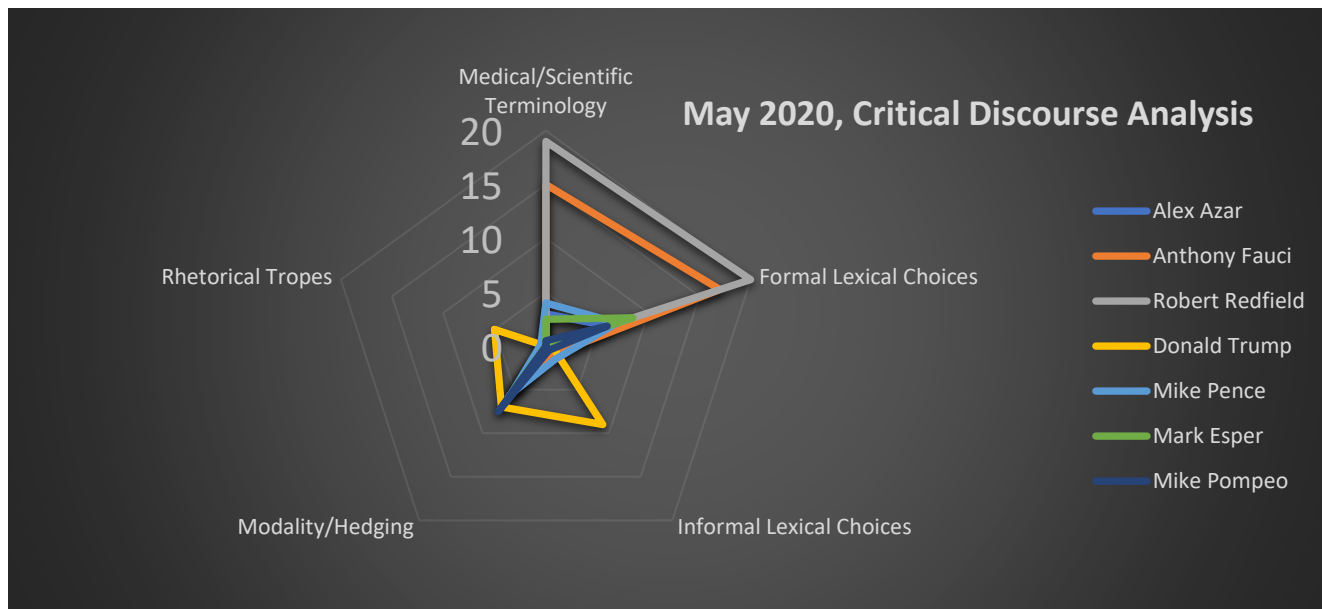
**Figure 7.1 – May 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**

Figure 7.1 – May 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis represents a visual map of where each actor quantitatively averaged in the five recorded categories for May. During this month, I studied twelve audiovisual speeches. I studied only Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield were studied in one instance for May. The other five actors each have two recorded instances. Three actors stand out: Donald Trump, Anthony Fauci, and Robert Redfield. Donald Trump finished with the highest averages in Informal Lexical Choices and Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes with (9) and (5) respectively. He also finished second to only Mike Pompeo in Modality/Hedging with (7). It is also worth mentioning that Trump averaged the lowest in both, Medical/Scientific Terminology with (0), and (0.5) in Formal Lexical Choices. Anthony Fauci had notably high averages in Medical/Scientific Terminology and Formal Lexical Choices with (15) and (17). Only Robert Redfield held a stronger average in those two categories with (19) and (20). Each were by far and away the two highest. The other four actors were fairly clustered together in each category. Figure 7.1 is significant because it illustrates the clear contrast in the discourse of COVID-19 between not only Donald Trump and the medical experts, but Donald Trump and other members of his administration.

May was a critical month for Azar, who continued increasing his securitization of COVID-19 by aligning closer with other members of the Trump Administration and away from his fellow medical experts. He placed clear blame on the WHO as the actor responsible for the pandemic's spread. "We saw WHO failed at its core mission of information sharing and transparency when member states do not act in good faith. This cannot ever happen again. The status quo is intolerable" (Azar, 2020). Mike Pompeo also reiterated this message. Over March and April, he had regularly been outspoken against China's handling of COVID-19. "It is pretty clear that the Chinese Communist Party misled the world. They knew more, and they didn't share that and they had an obligation to do so under international health regulations. They didn't do that. The World Health Organization also failed to do that" (Pompeo, 2020).

Donald Trump and Mike Pence pushed narratives of rebuilding the county, while yet again, promoting the work their administration had done to prevent the further spread. In early May, Trump stated, "And we're rebuilding our country. We had the greatest country in the history of the world. No country had anywhere near us. And we had the best we've ever had, but we've had the best ever in the world… we were doing much, much better than anybody. But we've ever done" (Trump, 2020). Fauci and Redfield remained consistent during May. They

offered a sense of cautious optimism in terms of vaccine development and mitigation strategies. I found Mark Esper to have remained steady in COVID-19 discourse and securitization. He was chiefly concerned with military logistics during the coming months and strategies the military was using for safety.

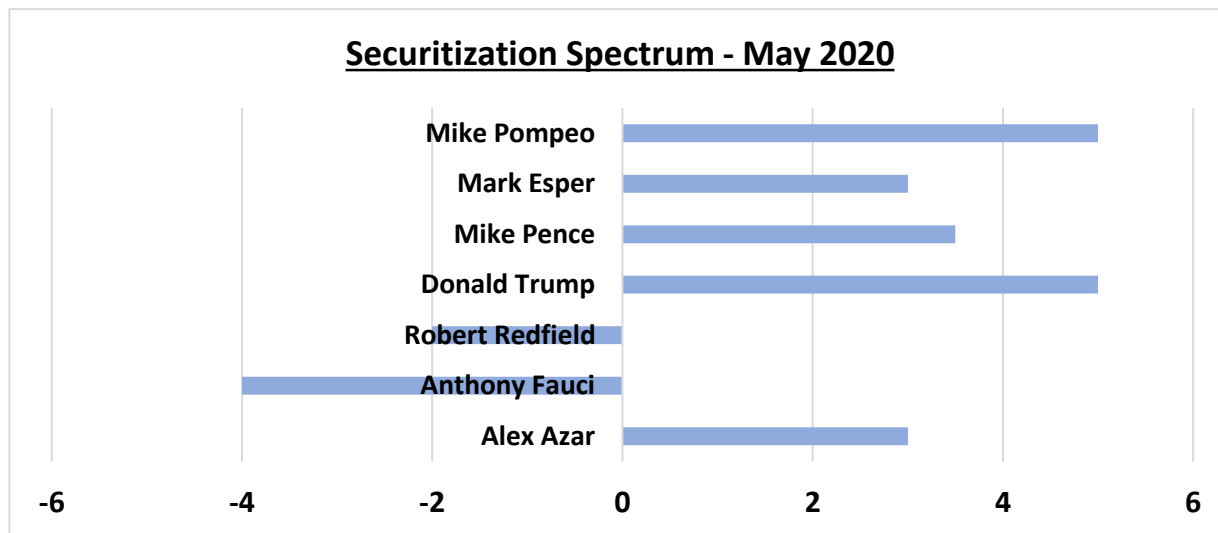**Figure 7.2 – May 2020, Securitization Spectrum**



Figure 7.2 – May 2020, Securitization Spectrum illustrates where each actor fell in their securitization of COVID-19 during May. The figure remains fairly similar to Figure 6.2. The immediate standouts are Mike Pompeo and Donald Trump, with the two highest marks at (5) and (5). Mike Pence received his highest securitization mark at (3.5) for May. This was also the case for Alex Azar, who graded at (3) for May. This was his highest mark of any month. Fauci and Redfield remained steady at (-4) and (-2) with minimal movement from either. The following section will discuss the averages for each actor from January to May 2020. I will display the total data through a securitization spectrum, similar to the previous months, and a visual timeline of each month.

## 5.2    Total Averages & Timeline

The final two figures represent the total averages for each actor and the securitization timeline throughout these five months. This is the accumulation of January through May 2020. Figure 9.1 – Securitization Averages (Jan. – May 2020) demonstrates the average mark for each actor securitized discourse of COVID-19. The scale is graded from -5 to 5 where the lower the number means the greater probability of political accountability, responsibility, and unity. The higher the number, the greater the probability of accusation, blame, and sensationalism. A high securitized number can contribute to discovering any inclination of Post-truth governmentality features. I will discuss this further in Chapter 6: Post-truth Governmentality Analysis and Narrative Discussion.

**Figure 9.1 – Securitization Averages (Jan. – May 2020)**
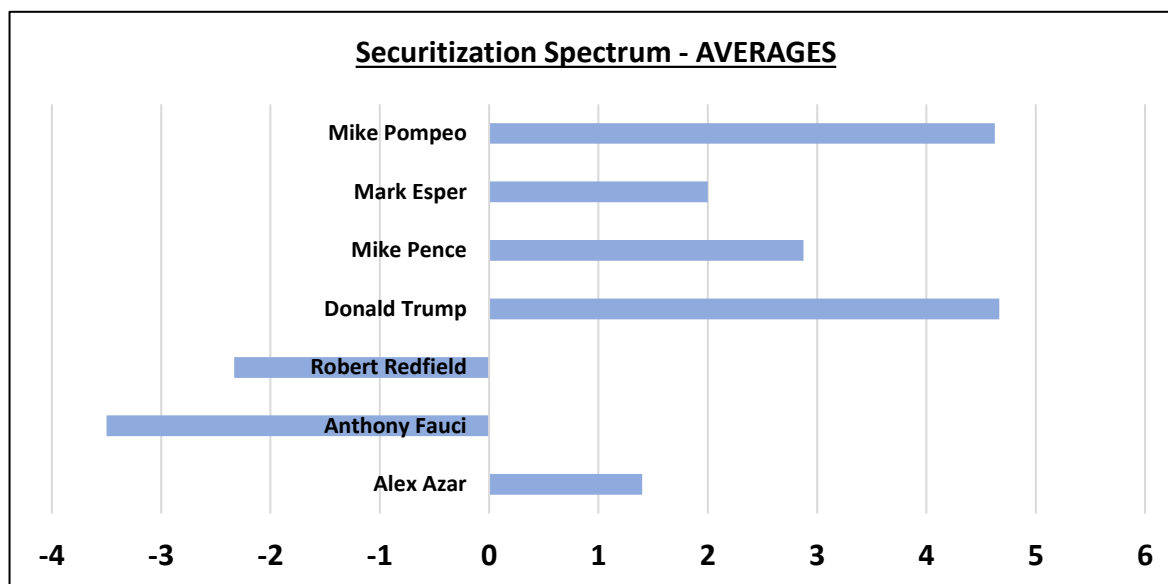


Figure 9.1 shows the overall severity of securitization as it pertains to COVID-19. Donald Trump has the highest securitization average of (4.66). Pompeo averaged a close second with (4.62). Much lower on the scale, Mark Esper finished with (2). I found him to have remained consistent in rhetoric and tone throughout each month. Mike Pence falls in between Esper and the combination of Trump/Pompeo with (2.87). Alex Azar is centered between the

politicians and the medical experts with an average of (1.4). Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield have graded on the other side of the spectrum with the lowest graded averages of (-3.5) and (-2.33) respectively.

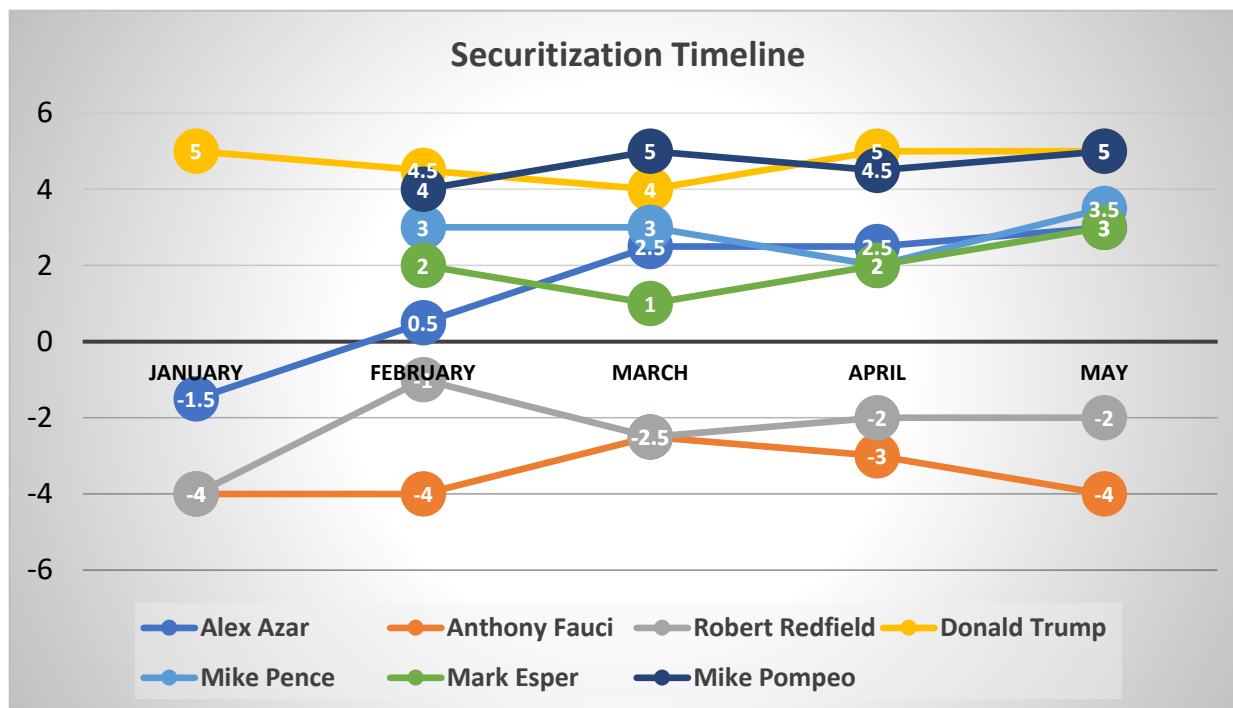**Figure 9.2 – Securitization Timeline (Jan. – May 2020)**



Figure 9.2 – Securitization Timeline (Jan. – May 2020) visually details the trend markers for each actor from January to May. There are three central trends of note when looking at this figure. The first is the shift of Alex Azar's securitized discourse. In January, Azar began at (-1.5) and consistently trended upward, finishing at (3) for May. This trend shows Azar's clear break from his fellow medical experts and greater alignment with the Trump Administration's rhetoric and discourse. The second trend concerns Mark Esper, who gradually trended upwards from (1) in March (3) in May. The final trend, though short, was the spike in Robert Redfield's discourse from January at (-4) and spikes to (-1) in February. He stabilized at (-2) the rest of the way, but never reaches the heights of (-4) again. The rest of the actors all remain relatively stable throughout the five months. I have found there to be no noticeable trends for these actors for this interval.

The securitized rhetoric of these actors is principally felt by the audience they mean to persuade. This audience is the American citizenry. The last section of this chapter will detail the five semi-structured interviews conducted during the month of June 2020. Anecdotally, the SSI demonstrates how the securitized rhetoric was received by the Americans. Although the SSI is meant to be supplementary, these five interviewees contribute a balance to the research. The participants further contextualize how the COVID-19 securitization was transmitted and processed. Without the addition of these participants, this study would have been unable to fully exhibit the pandemic's securitization.

## 5.3   Semi-structured Interviews

I conducted the SSI over the summer of 2020. Their purpose is to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of the United States' government's policy action and discourse. I present the interview data as complementary to the CDA results from the seven actors. Through purposive sampling, I have recruited five interviewees from my personal social circles within the Wisconsin and Minnesota area. The sole requirement was that they must be American citizens who have stayed in the United States since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. I informed the participants of the purposes of this academic study. For anonymity, the interviewees are numbered 'Participant #1, #2, #3… and will be addressed.[2] In this section, I will present the highlights of each interview followed by any overall themes identified.

Participant #1 is a middle-aged woman who lives in western Wisconsin. She works in the public school system, teaching in the Minneapolis, Minnesota area. During the time under consideration for the COVID-19 pandemic, she has found the governmental rhetoric and response to be disappointing. "The governmental response has been very disappointing. I am upset with the leadership or lack thereof by our president and his administration… we would have liked to see the leadership understand the seriousness of the issue from the beginning" (Participant 1, 6.18.20). During this time, Participant #1 was working from home. She rarely saw anyone except close family and some friends. Most of the time, she used the technology application Zoom when visiting any friends or associates. Her perspective of the government changed since the start of the pandemic. "The Trump Administration, I couldn't have a more

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[2] See Appendix B for list of interview questions

intense lack of respect for them. However, it has definitely increased since much of our society isn't taking it (COVID-19) seriously. They [the Trump Administration] haven't done a good job in providing the essentials like masks and PPE [personal protective equipment] to everyone" (Participant 1, 6.18.20).

Participant #2 is a younger man in his late twenties living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He has worked from home since the pandemic began. He believed the governmental discourse around COVID-19 had been quite poor. "…overall very poor [governmental response] as there should have been more access to testing upfront" (Participant 2, 6.18.20). One of the biggest pandemic issues Participant #2 elaborated on was how conspiracy theories affected the misinformation about the virus. He believed that China and the WHO needed to be held accountable for their role in mitigating the spread, but argued that misinformation had been just as responsible.

"You're seeing our leaders essentially deny what's happening, like, you're supposed to be representing the county and world! I think a lot of people only choose to read what they share on Facebook from a friend… something comes across their timeline and Instagram or Twitter where conspiracy theories concerning the virus and flu are regular. It doesn't help that there has been a very inconsistent narrative from Trump's mouth and people grasp onto whatever he says" (Participant 2, 6.18.20).

Participant #3 is another younger man in his late twenties. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and works for the county government. Similar to the other participants, he worked from home for months because of the pandemic. He found the governmental response and discourse to be severely lacking. "You would have liked to see some things done differently especially by the government's guidelines for safety. The government has shown no accountability. This, in turn, creates chaos in with the general public… with COVID-19, there's a lot of blaming, even people calling it the 'Chinese virus'" (Participant 3, 6.25.20). Participant #3 was born in the Middle East and immigrated to the U.S. when he was a teenager. He understands how the United States is viewed around the world. "I expected more from a first-world nation like the United States. A lot of other countries are looking for leadership and the United States is seen as this lasting democracy, it's honestly a disgrace" (Participant 3, 6.25.20).

Participant #4 is a young woman in her late-twenties, living in St. Paul, Minnesota. As with the other participants, she has been working from home during the pandemic. She immediately discussed her dissatisfaction with the Trump Administration's handling of the pandemic:

"It really seems like President Trump cares more about the economy over people's lives. I think that's incredibly problematic. Even though, yes, there are a lot of small business owners who are struggling right now. Nonetheless, the sanctity of human life is more important than a monetary value" (Participant 4, 6.26.20).

She has appreciated how the Governor of Minnesota has communicated COVID-19 guidelines and updates to Minnesota residents. For context, in April 2020, Trump deferred to state governors in issuing their COVID-19 restrictions in public and social gatherings. "I've been pleased with how the state government is handling the response. I enjoy how the governor provides weekly or bi-weekly updates on their actions. I'm not worried about any of my civil liberties at this time because it's for the safety of everybody" (Participant 4, 6.26.20).

Participant #5 is a younger woman in her mid-twenties, living in St. Paul, Minnesota. She works for the State of Minnesota and has been in a work-from-home setting since the pandemic began. She was outspoken against the Trump Administration's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. "I feel like the federal government didn't take it seriously haven't listened to health officials. They left it up to each state to kind of do whatever you want. The more conservative states aren't following the protocols. The federal government still hasn't made it clear what the guidelines we should be following" (Participant 5, 6.27.20). She described how the pandemic, exasperated social issues within the United States; specifically around affordable housing and healthcare: "…this creates a focus on huge social issues we already have like people not having access to healthcare and people not having access to affordable housing. With the pandemic these are only amplified like a dystopian reality" (Participant 5, 6.27.20).

The five participants shared an underlying dissatisfaction with the federal government's response to COVID-19. They each held the reoccurring notion that the Trump Administration was not being completely transparent in their discourse and rhetoric concerning the issue. This established uncertainty and misinformation about the best policies and practices for the

American citizenry. The participants detailed how they decided to instead follow the medical experts, specifically Dr. Anthony Fauci while staying up-to-date with more liberal news outlets. Each participant discussed their tolerability with social distancing and working from home. At no time did any of them perceive this as an attack on their civil liberties. Instead, they believed in the restrictions to be wholly necessary for their safety and the safety of others. Some participants believed that at the state-level, the state government was doing a fairly decent job. They appreciated the frequent bi-weekly updates and administrative transparency. This, in their minds, was missing on the federal level. In the larger scope of the academic study, the socio-political views of each participant represent a small limitation of the study. Future research can and should delve into the differences of those who are both left and right-leaning politically regarding the handling of COVID-19.

## 5.4   Summary

This chapter provided the results of the data collected from multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. I presented the findings for each month and the accumulative averages for each actor. Afterward, I detailed the highlights for each interview-participant in how they perceived the COVID-19 response by their government. I touched on some universal narratives in the interviews. In the following chapter, Chapter 6: Post-truth Governmentality and Narrative Discussion, I shall briefly return to the CDA data results. Using the totals for each actor, I elaborate on the qualifying threshold for Post-truth governmentality which represents the fourth and final phase of this analytical approach. The actors who have qualified will be further evaluated under a PTG capacity. From here, I finish with three overarching thematic narratives found in this academic study.

# 6 Post-truth Governmentality Analysis and Narrative Discussion

The previous chapter presented the CDA data in a linear timeline which culminated in each actor's securitization averages and semi-structured interviews. The following chapter summarizes Post-truth governmentality analysis and the thematic narratives discovered through this research. Chapter 6 shall delve into further analysis by breaking this study down into three particular segments. First, I have filtered the total securitization averages of each actor through a PTG-qualifier which represents the fourth phase of analysis. If this specific analytical threshold is met, the actor then qualifies as a PTG-actor. The phase-four qualifier will be explained in Section 6.1. Second, once each actor is siphoned through this qualifier, I detail the quantitative amount of PTG instances for that actor from January to May 2020. From this, I identified what PTG narratives emerge. I have classified these narratives into six distinct categories. The last section of Chapter 6 explores the three thematic narratives that have materialized over the course of the academic research.

**Figure 8.1 – Critical Discourse Analysis Totals (Jan. – May 2020)**
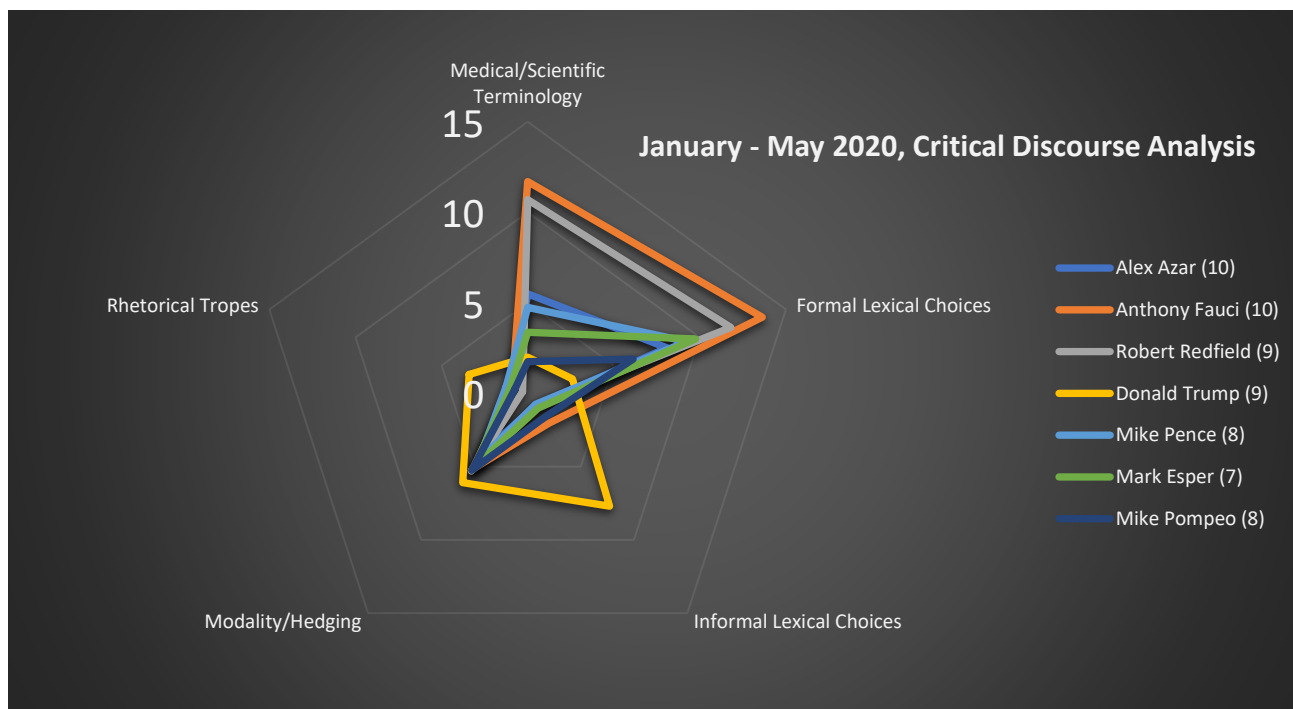
Figure 8.1 – Critical Discourse Analysis Totals (Jan. – May 2020) illustrates a radar chart of the securitization averages for each actor from January to May 2020. I base this on the five coded indicator categories of analysis. The placement of this chart at the beginning of Chapter 6 is to remind the audience of where each actor scored in the CDA research. This is before beginning the fourth, and final, phase of my multi-step data analysis. I chose to place Figure 8.1 in this chapter because it provides a smoother bridge to the second half of my analysis concerning Post-truth governmentality. The amount of data collected alongside generated graphs required the expansion for two chapters of results, evaluation, and discussion.

There are multiple notable points in Figure 8.1 that should be mentioned. First, Donald Trump explicitly stands out in virtually all five categories. He is uniquely high in Informal Lexical Choices, Modality/Hedging, and Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes finishing at (7.7), (6.1), and (3.4). He was the highest in these three categories. Furthermore, he finished with the second-lowest in Medical/Scientific Terminology and lowest in Formal Lexical Choices at (2) and (2.6). Overall, Trump is in clear contrast with the other actors. I would consider Mike Pompeo the closest to Trump in Modality/Hedging and Medical/Scientific Terminology at (5.25) and (1.75). He is also next closest to Trump in Formal Lexical Choices at (6.125) but is still roughly twice as high.

Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield each maintained similar averages across all categories. Both, Fauci and Redfield, had the highest marks for Medical/Scientific Terminology and Formal Lexical Choices. Fauci edged out Redfield in both categories at (11.7) and (13.625) compared to Redfield's (10.7) and (11.8). Mark Esper, Alex Azar, and Mike Pence all hovered around the same level of categories across the radar chart. Nothing, in particular, stands out from this perspective. However, Pence did have the second-highest number, (1.25), in Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes behind only Trump. Using this information, I will now transition to Section 6.1. Here, I expand on the logic behind my PTG-qualifier.

# 6.1 Post-truth governmentality Qualifier

**Figure 8.2 – Jan. – May 2020 Totals, PTG Qualifier**
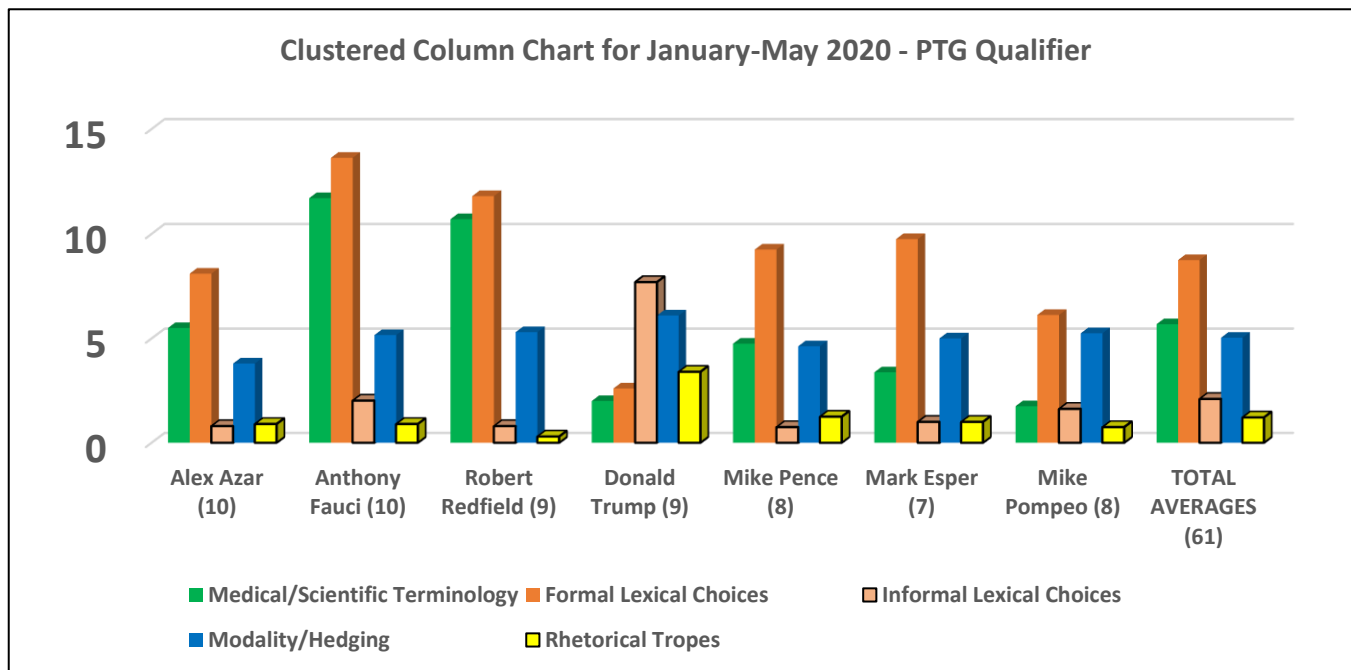


I have ostentatiously mapped out all the CDA data collected for each of the actors. Now, I filtered all the data totals through the PTG-qualifier. Figure 8.2 – Jan. – May 2020 Totals, PTG Qualifier examines which actor qualifies as a PTG-actor based on where they individually landed relative to the total collective averages. I researched sixty-one instances between the seven actors. The total number of researched instances for each actor is represented next to their name in Figure 8.2. On the far right of Figure 8.2, notice the 'Total Averages' cluster. This grouping represents the complete average for each category for all actors. The Total Averages cluster is critical for regulating which actor qualifies as a PTG-actor.

To determine which actor qualifies as a PTG-actor, I paralleled each actor's totals with the Total Averages cluster. In a side-by-side analysis, if an actor's totals were higher or lower, depending on the category than the Total Averages cluster in at least two categories, that actor qualified as PTG-actor. Essentially, an actor needed to meet at least two thresholds of the five categories to be labeled as a PTG-actor through my quantifiable interpretation. The total

averages for each category are: Medical/Scientific Terminology is (5.68), Formal Lexical Choices is (8.5), Informal Lexical Choices is (2.09), Modality/Hedging is (5.03), and Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes is (1.21). To qualify as a PTG-actor, an actor must be higher or lower, depending on the category, in at least two of the five categories. My decision to qualify an actor in at least two categories originated from two points of interpretation based on the data. First, minimizing the threshold to only one category opened a higher probability of variance where each actor could qualify. Second, raising the threshold to three or more categories would be too severe a qualification in which I potentially miss an opportunity to identify legitimate PTG incidences. The qualifiers for PTG dissection are below:

- Medical / Scientific Terminology – Below: 5.68 average
- Formal Lexical Choices – Below: 8.75 average
- Informal Lexical Choices – Above: 2.09 average
- Modality / Hedging – Above: 5.03 average
- Hyperbole / Rhetorical Tropes – Above: 1.21 average

Based on this interpretative analysis, four of the seven actors qualified as PTG-actors. This included Alex Azar, Mike Pence, Mike Pompeo, and Donald Trump. Alex Azar qualified in two categories. He qualified in the categories of Medical/Scientific Terminology and Formal Lexical Choices. Mike Pence qualified in two categories as well. Pence qualified based on his averages in Medical/Scientific Terminology and Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes. Mike Pompeo qualified for three of the five categories. Pompeo qualified in Medical/Scientific Terminology, Formal Lexical Choices, and Modality/Hedging. Last, Donald Trump qualified in all five categories as a PTG-actor. Anthony Fauci, Robert Redfield, and Mark Esper did not qualify as a PTG-actor. The following section of this chapter will present the amount of PTG incidences found for each of the four qualified actors.

## 6.2    Post-truth governmentality Incidences

Figure 10.1 PTG Quantitative Incidences (Jan. – May 2020) charts the quantitative amount of times each PTG-actor was discovered using a Post-truth governmentality feature over the five months. The four qualifying actors are Mike Pence, Alex Azar, Mike Pompeo, and Donald Trump.

**Figure 10.1 – PTG Quantitative Incidences (Jan. – May 2020)**
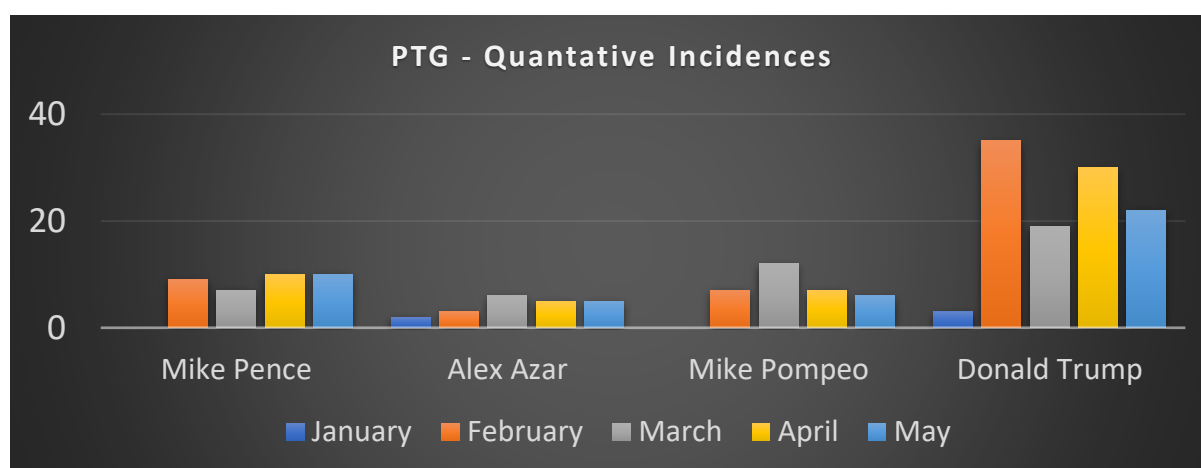


I defined Post-truth governmentality as "any governmental exercise for the systemic purpose of regulating citizenry behavior while simultaneously and/or deliberately omitting objective knowledge to preserve authority". Each PTG incidence was determined through my interpretative analysis of each audiovisual of the four qualifying actors. This is the culmination of my four-phase analytical approach. These incidences were flagged, whether blatant or subtly manipulative, in exercising PTG rhetoric. I determined the length of a PTG incidence could vary from one sentence or phrase to a full paragraph. Figure 10.1 illustrates the amount of PTG incidences in each month for each actor. Mike Pence hovers between seven and ten incidences from February to May. Mike Pence had zero researched instances in January. This was likely because I did not research an audiovisual for Pence during January for lack of public acknowledgment. Alex Azar lingers from two to five incidences from January to May. His PTG incidences remain low and relatively consistent throughout the five months. Mike Pompeo starts

with seven incidences in February and upticks to twelve in March. He settles with seven and six for April and May. Similar to Azar and Pence, Pompeo maintains consistent over the researched interval. As with Pence, Pompeo did not have a researched audiovisual for a January for a similar lack of public acknowledgment.

The conspicuous outlier in Figure 10.1 is Trump's PTG incidences. In January, Trump had only three incidences. This is drastically lower than the other four months. However, I believe this is attributed to his clear lack of public acknowledge to the COVID-19 pandemic in January as discussed in Chapter 5. Trump's PTG incidences shot up to thirty-five in February, nineteen in March, thirty in April, and twenty-two in May. There don't appear to be noticeable trends in any direction across the four actors. Each actor maintains a relatively constant amount of PTG incidences over the five months.

Donald Trump has, far and away, the most PTG incidences during this interval. The divide between him and the others is undeniably substantial. This is certainly due to him qualifying as a PTG-actor in all five categories. This notion can be exemplified further in the graph below.

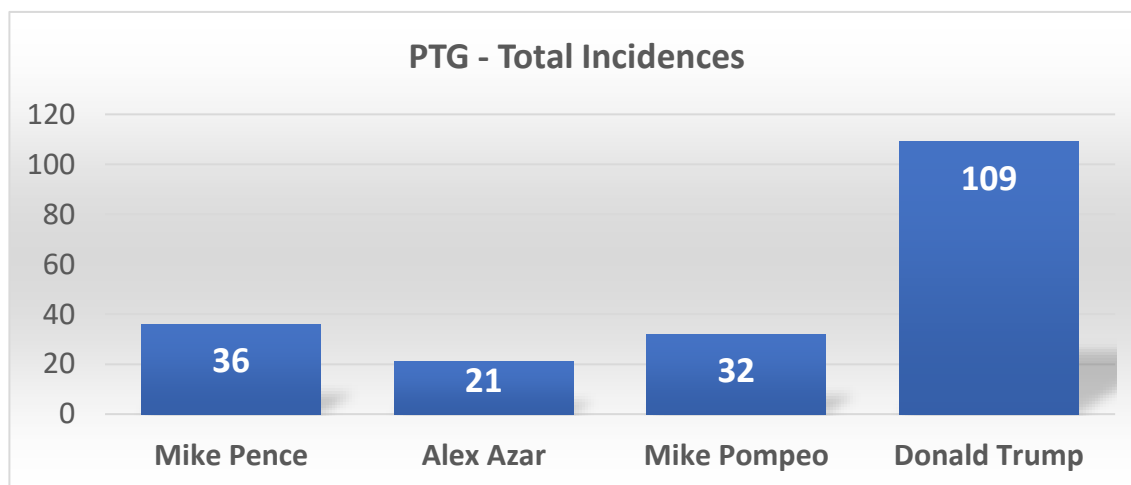**Figure 10.2 – PTG Total Incidences (Jan. – May 2020)**



Figure 10.2 – PTG Total Incidences (Jan. – May 2020) demonstrates the total PTG incidences for each qualifying actor. As with Figure 10.1, Donald Trump radically outpaces the other three actors in PTG incidences. Trump averages 21.8 incidences per month. The other

actors assumed a range of 21 – 36 total incidences. Mike Pence averaged 9 incidences per month. Alex Azar averaged 4.2 incidences per month. Finally, Mike Pompeo averaged 8 incidences per month. There were 198 total incidences of Post-truth governmentality between the four actors over the five months. I broke these 198 incidences down into six different PTG-narrative categories based on the quantifiable coded indicators and my assessment of the incidence. The category was decided upon after the incidence was analyzed. The categories are:

- Decisive Action / Unprecedented Steps / Forward-Thinking
- Emphasis on Clear / Transparent Communications
- Threat to Americans Low / Slowed / Unimportant
- Obedience to Authority
- Utopian Prophecy – Religious or Political
- Accusatory / Deflection – The Other

## 6.3    PTG Narratives

The following section of this chapter will expand on each actor's Post-truth governmentality narratives. I review what PTG narratives the actor was concentrating their discourse on as it relates to COVID-19. The following figure, along with the rest of the figures in this chapter, are visualized through pie charts. I break the pie chart down by PTG narrative percentage. I offer PTG examples discovered within the discourse for every qualifying actor to better understand how Post-truth governmentality is identified and categorized.

### 6.3.1        Mike Pence – PTG Narrative

First, I start with Mike Pence. Figure 11.2 – Mike Pence PTG Narrative Totals categories his 36 PTG incidences over the five months. Pence touched on five of the six narratives over this time. His two highest percentages were 'Decisive Action…' with 14 incidences at 39% and 'Obedience to Authority' with nine incidences at 25%. 'Threat to Americans Low…' is a reasonable close third at 19% with 7 incidences.

**Figure 11.2 – Mike Pence PTG Narrative Totals**
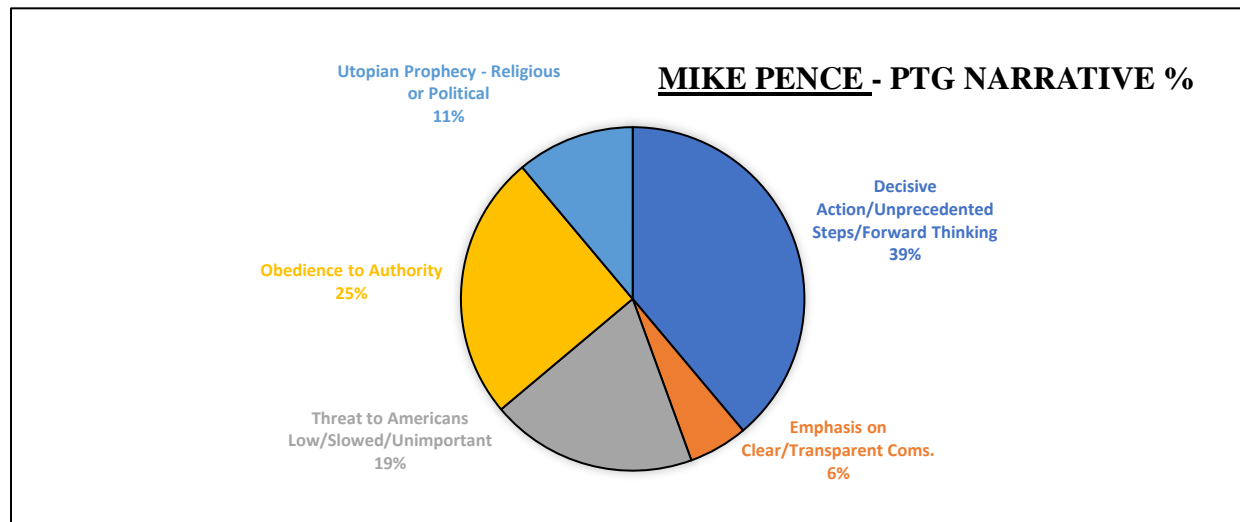


Incidences like the following, on February 29th, exemplify Pence's PTG narrative. I classified this under 'Decisive Action…': "At the President's direction, this team has been working seamlessly with health officials at the state and local level. And I can assure the American public that we will continue to live out the President's admonition a few days ago that we're all in this together" (Coronavirus Task Force, Feb. 2020). From an interpreted analysis, virtually none of what Pence expressed in this quote was true or came to pass, starting with direction from the President of the United States. There was not a seamless transition with health officials, and the administration has been notorious against communicating semblances of unity over their four-year term.

The second quote from Pence came on March 22nd and is categorized under 'Utopian Prophecy…': "…that we can do this, America; that we can – we can lessen the magnitude of the coronavirus in our country. With the cooperation, compassion, generosity, and prayers of the American people, we can slow the spread we can protect the most vulnerable, and we can heal our land. So let's do it, America" (Coronavirus Task Force, Mar. 2020). In this example, Pence articulates a utopian future by attempting to fixate on emotional components with Americans under a Judeo-Christian perspective, specifically in the phrases "heal" and "prayers". The other adjectives described by Pence contradict how the Trump Administration has explicitly handled the COVID-19 pandemic in rhetoric.

## 6.3.2        Mike Pompeo – PTG Narrative

The next PTG-actor detailed is Mike Pompeo. Figure 11.4 – Mike Pompeo PTG Narrative Totals categories his 32 PTG incidences below. Pompeo exhibited five of the six categories over this time. His two highest percentages were 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other' with 21 incidences at 66% and 'Decisive Action…' with five incidences at 16%. The other three categories finished around 6%. As the Secretary of State, Pompeo's probability of sustaining an 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other' narrative would inherently be higher than other categories. His role, as Secretary to State, is to regular dialogue and travel to other countries outside of the United States.

**Figure 11.4 – Mike Pompeo PTG Narrative Totals**
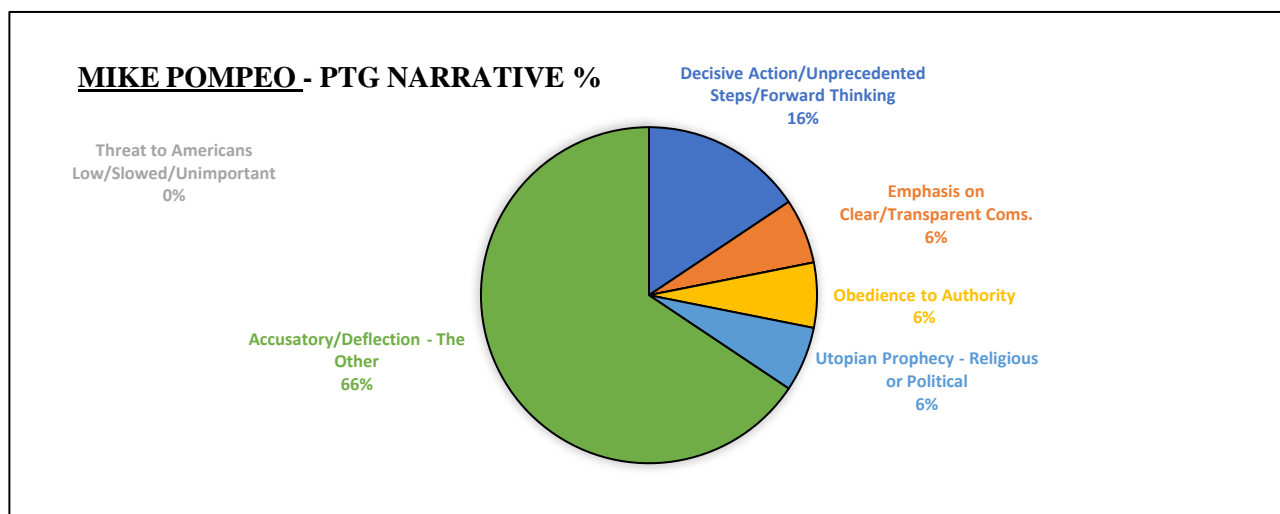


Incidences like the one on May 6th illustrate the manner Pompeo has regularly used the PTG narrative of 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other'. "It is pretty clear that the Chinese Communist Party misled the world. They knew more and they didn't share that and they had an obligation to do so under international health regulations. They didn't do that. The World Health Organization also failed to do that" (Pompeo, 2020). In this example, Pompeo deflects blame and responsibility to another actor, in this case, China and the WHO. This quote came at the beginning of May when, as previously discussed in Chapter 5, came when COVID-19 was hitting new heights within the United States. Weaponizing the rhetoric of "Communist Party"

harkens back to Cold War sentiments in the mid-twenty century. This is the standard discourse Pompeo has used during the research months.

Another PTG example came on May 20th when Pompeo again attacked China: "We greatly underestimated the degree to which Beijing is ideologically hostile to free nations. The world is waking up to the fact. A Few reported this past week that 66% of Americans have an unfavorable view of China, that is a direct result of the Chinese Communist Party choice" (Pompeo, 2020). Once again, Pompeo is keen to say "Communist Party" when expressing China. He references a Few report that validates the dislike toward the country. Americans hearing this may assume it is a representation of all of America. This further reinforces China as 'the Other'.

## 6.3.3 Alex Azar – PTG Narrative

I represented Alex Azar below in Figure 11.3 – Alex Azar PTG Narrative Totals. Azar finished with 21 total incidences from January to May. He exhibited four of the six narrative categories. His two highest percentages were 'Decisive Action…' with 14 incidences at 66% and 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other' with five incidences at 24%. As Azar is the Secretary of Health and Human Services for the Trump Administration, he has frequently been one of the dominant faces during the COVID-19 pandemic. His role entails touting procedural steps to curtail the virus' spread within the country. Parallel with Pompeo, Azar's 66% PTG narrative of 'Decisive Action…' shouldn't come as a surprise based on his prescribed governmental role within the administration.

**Figure 11.3 – Alex Azar PTG Narrative Totals**
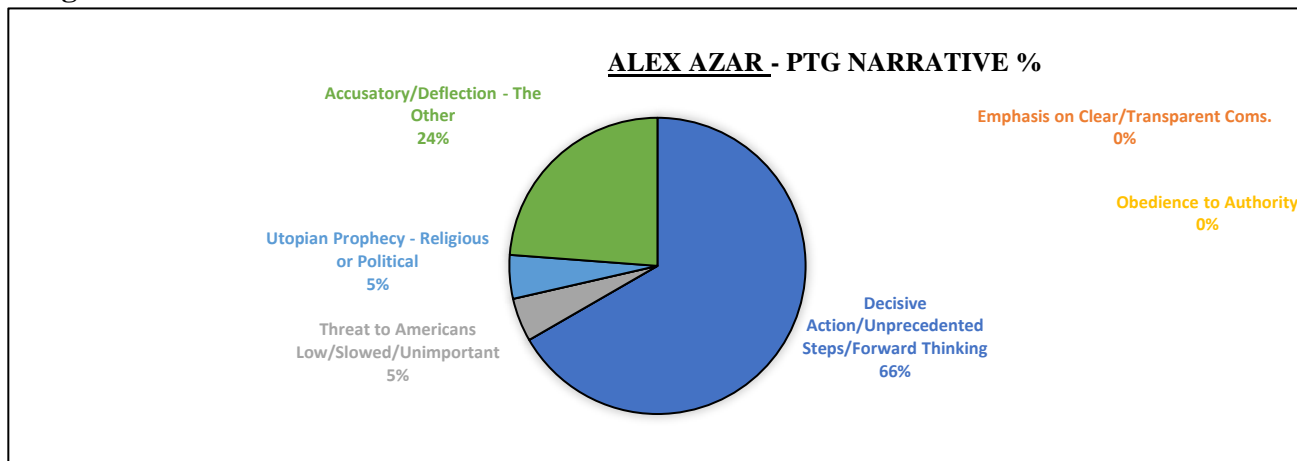
A quote in late February by Azar personifies the 'Decision Action…' narrative: "From day one, this what we predicted, this is what we expected. The risk to an average American is low, from the novel coronavirus. The risk remains low. Thanks to the unprecedented actions President Trump has taken and the actions he is announcing today, that risk remains low" (Coronavirus Task Force, Feb. 2020). Here, he maintains the risk to Americans is low in multiple instances even as COVID-19 took off in the United States. Furthermore, and perhaps most critically, he uses the phrase 'unprecedented actions'. How Azar uses these words markets the idea of how forward-thinking the Trump Administration is. This is a systematically used tactic by the Trump Administration during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another PTG example came on March 20th, falling under the 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other' category:

> "During this pandemic, a number of health challenges arise when illegal immigrants arrive at our northern and southern borders and are taken into immigration custody. We're talking about significant numbers of illegal immigrants… when held at border facilities, these migrants risk spreading the virus to other migrants, to CBP agents and border healthcare workers, and even the United States population as a whole" (Coronavirus Task Force, Mar. 2020).

Azar takes multiple opportunities to say "illegal immigrants" in this incidence, which has a two-fold effect. First, it places blame on 'the Other'. Here, Canadians and Mexicans are on either side of the United States border. This deflects responsibility and accountability from the Trump Administration. Second, brings to light the political issue of immigration, which is a regular topic of discussion in the United States. This represents a politicized quote by Azar to policy.

# 6.3.4　　　Donald Trump – PTG Narrative

The final PTG-actor is Donald Trump. Figure 11.5 – Donald Trump PTG Narrative Totals demonstrates his 109 incidences over five months. Trump had more PTG-qualifying incidences than every other actor combined. He exhibited all six of the PTG narratives and was the only actor to do so. His two highest percentages were 'Decisive Action…' with thirty-eight incidences at 35% and 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other' with twenty-four incidences at 22%. Trump also marked high in 'Utopian Prophecy…' and 'Threat to Americans Low…' with seventeen and sixteen incidences a piece.

**Figure 11.5 – Donald Trump PTG Narrative Totals**
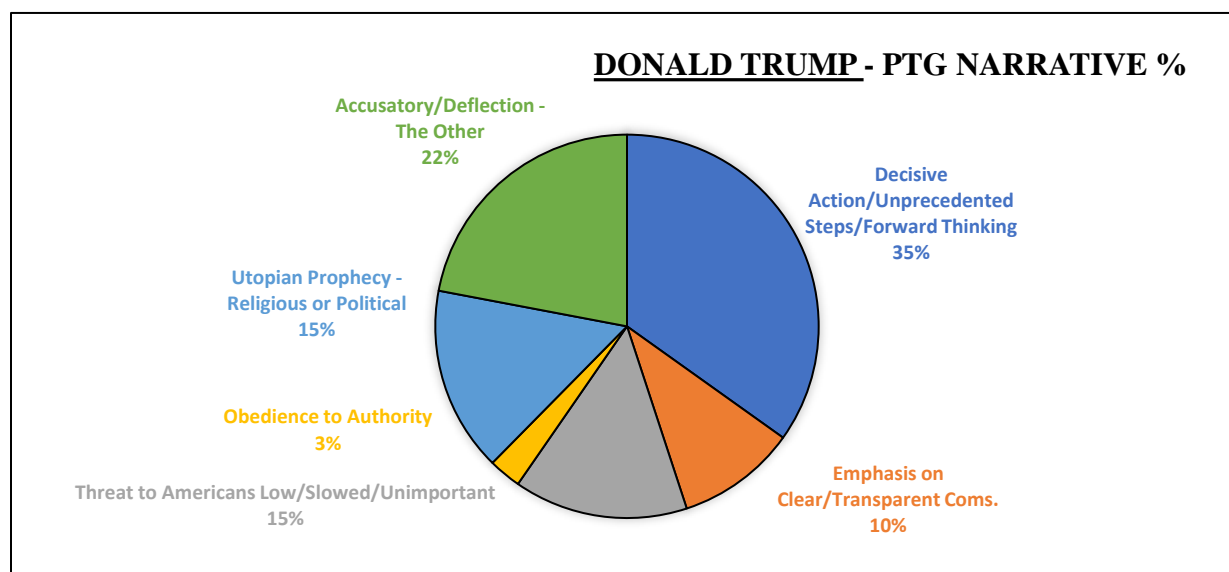


Below is a PTG example said by Trump on February 29th: "We've taken the most aggressive actions to confront the coronavirus. They are the most aggressive taken by any country. And we're the number one travel destination anywhere in the world, yet we have far fewer cases of the disease than even countries with much less travel or a much smaller population" (Coronavirus Task Force, Feb. 2020). There are multiple takeaways from this. First, Trump uses verbs such as "aggressive" when boasting about governmental action taken against COVID-19. Second, he simultaneously dabbles in hyperbole while stating "most aggressive by any country" and "number one travel destination in the world". Trump slides in a statement

validating popularity. Given as the issue does not call for such a statement, this represents Trump's skewed logic of a win-loss mentality. This is further confirmed by his last sentence in which he downplays the severity of the virus once again.

The second example of PTG is a quote by Trump recorded on May 8th. I categorize this PTG example under 'Utopian Prophecy…'. "And we're rebuilding our country. We had the greatest country in the history of the world. No country had anywhere near us. And we had the best we've ever had, but we've had the best ever in the world… we were doing much, much better than anybody. But we've ever done" (Trump, 2020). Trump flaunts hyperbole through ideas of American exceptionalism and his win-loss mentality. During May, COVID-19 cases were continuing to grow at a sizable rate. The United States continues to be, and at the time of this quote, near the top of infections and deaths. He uses the terminology of "best", "greatest", "better", and "rebuilding" to exhibit notions of America's superiority and invincibility to the virus. These examples display the reoccurring PTG incidences Trump maintained throughout the five-month interval of time.

## 6.4  Thematic Narratives

**Figure 11.1 – PTG Narrative Totals (All Qualifiers)**



TOTALS - PTG NARRATIVE %

Decisive Action/Unprecedented Steps/Forward Thinking 36%

Emphasis on Clear/Transparent Coms. 8%

Threat to Americans Low/Slowed/Unimportant 12%

Obedience to Authority 7%

Utopian Prophecy - Religious or Political 12%

Accusatory/Deflection - The Other…
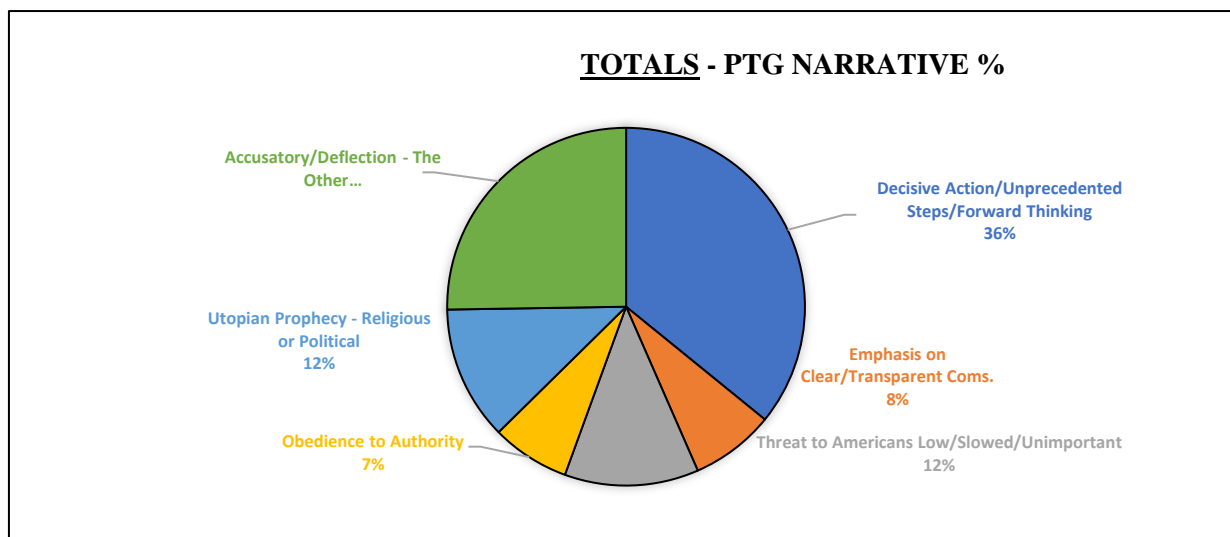
The final chart is Figure 11.1 – PTG Narrative Totals (All Qualifiers). This figure demonstrates the total narrative percentages for all qualified PTG-actors. The highest percentage was 'Decisive Action…' with 71 incidences at 36%. The second highest percentage was 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other' with 50 incidences at 25%. These two narratives were, far and away, the two most exposed for all actors. The third highest narrative percentage was a tie between 'Threat to Americans Low…' and 'Utopian Prophecy…' at 24 incidences with 12% each. These determined Post-truth governmentality narratives flow into a larger conversation of themes found in the academic study.

The accumulative analysis of my CDA research, and reinforced through my SSI research, can be reflected through three key thematic narratives from January to May 2020: 1) A clear and evident difference in discourse between the medical experts and the Trump Administration 2) Donald Trump, as an individual, radically stands out from all researched actors, even those in his own administration 3) A shift in securitized rhetoric from January and February to March through May 2020.

Over this five-month interval, there has been an explicit difference between the medical experts and the Trump Administration through both tone and rhetoric concerning COVID-19. Recall Figure 9.1 – Securitization Averages (Jan. – May 2020). It is here we can see the innate disparity between the country's medical experts and politicians within the Trump Administration. Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield finished with securitization averages of (-3.5) and (-2.33) respectively. The vast majority of their securitization discourse from January to May 2020 regarded COVID-19 as a legitimate and emerging threat to the country. An existential threat, they detailed, is one with many unknowns and uncertainties in the beginning stages of development. Early on, the two insisted on daily mitigation strategies such as social distancing and mask-wearing. Not only this but also recommended official policies and procedures by the United States government to curtail the virus's spread. Their discourse during this interval of time illustrated, through my interpretative analysis, accountability and, responsibility as to the gravity of the situation. There were very limited instances when I interpreted their rhetoric to politicize the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been validated by Figure 9.2 – Securitization Timeline (Jan. – May 2020). Figure 9.2 demonstrates the consistency Fauci and Redfield have shown through this timeframe. We better can understand how they have maintained a level of concise stability.

On the other side of the proverbial spectrum, we have the Trump Administration. Every single actor who is officially classified to be a member of Donald Trump's Administration fell on the opposite end. Again referencing Figure 9.1, each actor finished with high marks in my interpretative analysis. Each member of Trump's Administration displayed varying degrees of securitization labeled as accusatory, deflective, or sensationalized. This is noticeable with Donald Trump and Mike Pompeo, who finished with marks of (4.66) and (4.625). Their securitization was regularly identified as one to delegitimize or deflect accountability regarding COVID-19. Figure 9.2 signals the consistency in which every actor under the Trump Administration tempered the pandemic's severity for various political reasons. The perfect example of this is Alex Azar. In January, I marked Azar at (-1.5) on the securitization spectrum. By May, he finished at (3). Over these researched months, Azar's COVID-19 rhetoric became more aligned with other actors in the administration. He emphasized accusations towards WHO and China, lessening the perceived responsibility of the United States government. He is considered a medical expert and a key member of the Coronavirus Task Force. However, his political alliances under this administration gradually gave way to a less unified securitization approach. The semi-structured interviews further epitomize how the Trump Administration was viewed by the American citizenry. Interviewees expressed a general frustration with how the Trump Administration articulated the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of transparency or sense of urgency to mitigate the virus' spread. All the analysis builds to a thematic conclusion of the separation of existential securitization between the medical experts and Trump Administration from January to May 2020.

The second thematic narrative is how Donald Trump, as an individual, radically stands out from all researched actors, even those in his administration. This is clear in two figures. First, Figure 8.1 features how Donald Trump's lexical mapping is vastly different from any other actor. Recollect, Trump finished with the highest averages in Informal Lexical Choices, Modality/Hedging, and Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes. He also averaged the lowest in Formal Lexical Choices and second lowest in Medical/Scientific Terminology. Extreme averages in these categories are all signs of a higher securitization mark, in which he finished with (4.66), and a greater probability of Post-truth governmentality features. The PTG subject matter brings in Figure 8.2 – Jan. – May 2020 Totals, PTG Qualifier. Donald Trump qualified in all five

categories as a PTG-actor. He was the only actor to do so. The next closest was Mike Pompeo with three. Azar and Pence followed this with two each.

Subsequently, Figure 10.2 embodies the totality of Trump's character. He finished with 109 PTG incidences over the five-month interval. This was more than the other three PTG-actors combined. In virtually every opportunity, Trump spearheaded rhetoric that delegitimized the COVID-19 pandemic while advancing his agenda. He regularly declared his forward-thinking administrative actions while downplaying any existential threat to the American populous. This is further elaborated upon by the semi-structured interviews. There appeared to be a consensus of dissatisfaction with how Trump would oppose and even humiliate any recommendations or discourse from any medical experts as it pertains to COVID-19. The entirety of Donald Trump's vitriol demeanor towards the pandemic's severity, even relative to actors in his administration, culminates in the second thematic narrative from this academic study.

The third and final key narrative theme of this research is the shift in securitized rhetoric from January and February 2020 to March through May 2020. During January and February, effectively all actors believed the COVID-19 threat to be low to the American people. This included medical experts, Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield. However, they both emphasized caution and uncertainty in the virus's development. The two immediately began touting mitigation strategies in contrast to the Trump Administration. Nonetheless, we can see how the securitized rhetoric concerning COVID-19 rolled into the PTG narratives.

Recall, there are six interpretative PTG-narrative categories: Decisive Action/Unprecedented Steps/Forward-Thinking, Emphasis on Clear/Transparent Communications, Threat to Americans Low/Slowed/Unimportant, Obedience to Authority, Utopian Prophecy – Religious or Political, and Accusatory/Deflection – The Other. Of those six categories, the highest instances were classified under 'Decisive Action…' and 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other' in second. 'Threat to American Low…' and 'Utopian Prophecy' tied for third. The PTG-actors publicized the pandemic's severity, during January and February, as an insignificant and illegitimate existential threat to Americans. This explicitly arose from Trump, Pompeo, and Pence. Alex Azar, during this timeframe, was still more centrally aligned with Fauci and Redfield. Beginning in March, we have seen how the virus rapidly spread across the country with a substantial rise in COVID-19 cases and deaths. From March to May 2020, the PTG narrative dramatically shifted away from 'Threat to Americans

Low…'. Instead, the narratives became how the United States government had exuded an unprecedented, logistical policy response to COVID-19. They would yield any semblance of blame, fault, or responsibility to other actors, primarily the WHO and China. I have validated this through discussions with the interviewees in this study. Roughly half explicitly stated they wished the Trump Administration would be more accountable and transparent about issues concerning COVID-19. The multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews build to a thematic conclusion of a shift in securitized rhetoric from January and February 2020 to March through May 2020.

## 6.5   Summary

The following chapter provided an overview of Post-truth governmentality analysis as the fourth phase of my analytical approach along with the three thematic narratives emerging through the research: 1) A clear and evident difference in discourse between the medical experts and the Trump Administration 2) Donald Trump, as an individual, radically stands out from all researched actors, even those in his own administration 3) A shift in securitized rhetoric from January and February to March through May 2020. Chapter 6 delved into further investigation of the total securitization averages of each actor through the PTG-qualifier while additionally detailing the quantitative amount of PTG instances for the actor during January to May. The last chapter, Chapter 7: Conclusions, provides a final summary and implications of this study's results and narratives. I will discuss the limitations of my methodological processes and the research at large. Last, I present how significant events occurring after May 2020 provide an opportunity for future research.

# 7 Conclusions

The last chapter of this academic thesis summarizes the findings in their entirety, along with the implications of the examined research. I shall retrace the direction of this study by returning to the original research questions and objectives set forth in my introductory chapter. How adequately were these research questions answered and research objectives achieved during this study? I will briefly restate the overall totals of data collected along with the three thematic narratives which bore out. Afterward, I will show the limitations of the study and its scope. I will discuss methods that expand upon this preliminary research relative to the narrow time interval, where future research may explore, and in particular how the theoretical framework of Post-truth governmentality may be employed. This will be illustrated by stating some major events that have occurred within the United States since the end of May 2020. I will finish by closing with this study's final considerations.

## 7.1 Summary and Implications

This academic study, through CDA and SSI research, has provided three central thematic narratives from January to May 2020: 1) A clear and evident difference in discourse between the medical experts and the Trump Administration 2) Donald Trump, as an individual, radically stands out from all researched actors, even those in his own administration 3) A shift in securitized rhetoric from January and February to March through May 2020. We have seen the disparity in COVID-19 securitization between Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield and the rest of the Trump Administration. Referring to Figure 9.1, Fauci and Redfield fall on the opposite side of the spectrum than the other actors. Also garnered through the semi-structured interviews, Fauci and Redfield demonstrated a difference in the level of accountability and responsibility necessary to respond the COVID-19 pandemic during this period. Actors within the Trump Administration demonstrated a propensity to deflect blame while being accusatory towards others and spreading sensationalist rhetoric. This can be exemplified in the same figure as they finished on the other side of the spectrum. The inflammatory rhetoric was further exasperated by four actors qualifying for Post-truth governmentality features: Donald Trump, Mike Pompeo, Mike Pence, and Alex Azar. All four had at least twenty-one PTG incidences in which they

exercised rhetoric regulating citizenry behavior while simultaneously and/or deliberately omitting objective knowledge to preserve authority. Donald Trump graded out significantly higher than anyone else, flowing into the second thematic narrative of this thesis: Donald Trump, as an individual, radically stands out from all researched actors, even those in his administration.

Donald Trump, being a dominant figure in this academic study, was continuously placed under a critical microscope. President Trump averaged the highest of all actors in Informal Lexical Choices, Modality/Hedging, and Hyperbole/Rhetorical Tropes. Furthermore, he averaged the lowest in Formal Lexical Choices and second-lowest in Medical/Scientific Terminology. Donald Trump qualified as a PTG-actor in all five categories during analysis. He easily finished with the most PTG incidences at 109, more than the other three actors combined as illustrated in Figure 10.1 and 10.2. I researched Donald Trump nine times over these five months. In every instance, he provided at least one PTG incidence. Donald Trump habitually touted 'decisive action' and 'unprecedented steps taken' by his administration in curtailing the COVID-19 pandemic. Recall Figure 11.5, Trump finished with a PTG narrative percentage of 35% for 'Decisive Action…'. I found this to simultaneously run alongside rhetoric where Trump repeatedly dismissed the severity and legitimacy of the COVID-19 virus with his PTG narrative percentage of 15% for 'Threat to Americans Low…'. This represents the contradictory and hypocritical nature of Donald Trump's discourse concerning COVID-19. President Donald Trump brazenly stood out within this academic study and analysis throughout these five months.

The third and final thematic narrative: A shift in securitized rhetoric from January and February to March through May 2020 demonstrates the fluidity and lack of accountability in COVID-19 discourse within the Trump Administration. I detailed how in January and February all PTG-actors believed the threat of COVID-19 to be low to the American people. During these two months, the virus was not considered an issue priority. We have also come to understand, beginning in March, the virus rapidly spread across the country with a substantial rise in COVID-19 cases and deaths. From the interval of March to May 2020, the PTG narrative dramatically shifted away from 'Threat to Americans Low…'. This rhetoric was supplanted by two PTG narratives: 'Decisive Action…' and 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other'. This was also a reoccurring theme by participants in the SSI. There appeared to be a consensus of dissatisfaction by the Trump Administration's rhetoric and policy toward the pandemic's severity. In Figure 11.1, we have the accumulation of this study's CDA and PTG analysis.

'Decisive Action…' and 'Accusatory/Deflection – The Other' finished with the two highest percentages at 36% and 25%. This confirms the fluctuating securitization discourse from March to May 2020 from where it began in January.

This academic study has made positive strides in answering the two-part research question posed in the introductory chapter: 1) How has the United States government conducted its COVID-19 pandemic response? 2) What characteristics of governance are included in this response? Regarding the first question, as discussed through the thematic narratives, the United States government has had a disjointed securitization response. Early on, the Trump Administration classified the COVID-19 pandemic as an irrelevant threat to America. The medical experts expressed caution and uncertainty in the early stages. Donald Trump disregarded, even belittled, members of the medical community when provided evidence of its spread. In the following months, the narrative shifted away from COVID-19's illegitimacy and toward the unprecedented strides the administration had taken to combat the virus. As the number of cases and deaths mounted at an alarming rate, accusations and blame transferred to other actors both domestically and internationally.

Under the context of this academic study, a considerable amount of the United States' COVID-19 securitization was conducted with Post-truth governmentality features. Concerning the second question, four of the seven actors qualified as a Post-truth governmentality actor. These individuals exercised discourse regulating citizenry behavior while simultaneously and/or deliberately omitting objective knowledge to preserve authority. Individually, President Donald Trump exercised PTG at a rate far higher and more explicitly than the other three actors collectively. The United States' PTG discourse, as it relates to COVID-19, has harmed the governmental apparatuses attempting to prevent the pandemic's spread. Furthermore, and perhaps more consequently, this discourse eroded the confidence and faith of the American populous. The acute implications of this study further place scrutiny the Trump Administration. Not only in their COVID-19 rhetoric and policy implementation during this five-month interval, but the ramifications of future political discourse in the United States. Particular political consequences of this COVID-19 securitization will be laid out in an upcoming section of this chapter. I would expect the fallout of this rhetoric and action to continue in the coming months and years.

## 7.2   Limitations of Study

This academic study was conducted effectively in real-time while living under the detailed circumstances I researched as a citizen of the United States. The limitations of this study and the possibility of future research are irrefutably more unique than the standard dissertation. The interval of time this research focused its attention began in January 2020 to May 2020. This is a five-month period. In the entire COVID-19 pandemic, five months is only a portion of its collective impact. The limitations of the study are also addressed in the quantitative amount of researched CDA instances over this cycle. There was an average of two researched instances, per person, per month, during this time. This amount of instances can be expanded further for a more comprehensive dissection of these actors. Researched actors and interviewees were controlled to seven actors and five interviewees. This study concentrated on COVID-19 through the principles of securitization theory; utilizing the methods of multimodal critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. The COVID-19 pandemic is not complete. The virus is still in a maturation period. As a piece of academic and historical interest, there are a plethora of avenues in which to expand this particular research or examine a facet wholly distinct.

Another limitation of the study, as expressed in Chapter 4, is the purposive sampling of the SSI. Future research should know how too much reliance on purposive sampling may negatively affect an academic study's reliability. The concluding, and most fascinating, limitation of the study is the synthesized terminology of Post-truth governmentality as a theoretical framework that I generated. PTG application and analysis can be used in a litany of manners as it pertains to politically vested academia. Post-truth governmentality isn't limited to the study of the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe this academic study is a microcosm in understanding the full, unbridled extent of governance in the United States and many states around the world. My hope would be that others feel compelled to expand on this foundational and preliminary research in how the COVID-19 pandemic has been securitized, inside and outside, the United States.

## 7.3    Significant Events Since May 2020

This academic study condensed its focus from the beginning of the pandemic in the United States, January to May 2020. Over the year, this concentration represents only a share of the entire COVID-19 impact and ensuing events within the country. Accompanying this pandemic, 2020-2021 has unfolded in a variety of unexpected ways. Below is a list of the most gripping events that occurred after May 2020:

- The killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota – May 25th, 2020
- Continuous protests and demonstrations across the United States and the world for George Floyd – June to September 2020
- President Trump contracts the COVID-19 virus – October 2nd, 2020
- Donald Trump fires Mark Esper as Secretary of Defense – November 9th, 2020
- Joe Biden officially wins U.S. Presidential Election – December 14th, 2020
- COVID-19 vaccine begins its rollout in U.S. – December 14th, 2020
- Multiple COVID-19 variant strains begin circulating across the globe – December 2020
- U.S. Senate majority flips from Republican to Democrat – January 6th, 2021
- Pro-Trump protestors storm the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C. over presidential election results provoked by Donald Trump – January 6th, 2021
- House of Representatives votes to impeach Donald Trump for a second time – January 13th, 2021

This list of events epitomizes the monumental year of 2020 and our transition into 2021. It is my belief that many of these events are a direct or indirect political consequence of the Trump Administration's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each one of these events can and should be researched in the coming future. Although this list is not exhaustive, these events represent a surreal time for the United States.

## 7.4    Final Considerations

The Trump Administration will be historically intertwined with the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. The glaring lack of accountability and responsibility has further provided evidence of fractured administrative direction to this threat. Led by the President of the United States, Donald Trump, many members of this administration refused to acknowledge the pandemic's legitimacy even as the country was ravaged with infection. When its severity became exceedingly indisputable to ignore, they lay blame at other's feet. The medical community has issued the same caution since day one, advocating various migration strategies which included mask-wearing, social-distancing, and contact-tracing. Unfortunately, even now, the pandemic continues to cost the lives of so many. As of April 1st, 2021, there have been over 30 million COVID-19 infections with nearly 550,000 deaths in the United States of America (John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021). These numbers appear fictitious given that at the time of this chronicling, it has been roughly one year since this virus was announced to the world. The Trump Administration's decision-making will continue to have dire consequences as we inaugurate the new administration in 2021.

With slippage of time rolling forever onward, the American population shall ultimately begin a healing process. A process for some that may take years, even decades. These wounds are not easily mended. I wrote this academic thesis side-by-side with the presented events. More than once, an event transpired as I typed words on the page. Time and time again, I could not believe the reality of what I was a witness to. This has been a transformational and profound experience. The United States' securitization of the COVID-19 pandemic offers a glimpse into mounting existential questions of objective truth and lies – reality and fiction. An emerging political crisis of alternative facts and reality was inflamed the moment President Donald Trump took office five years ago. The COVID-19 pandemic, and its surrounding discourse, have only amplified this fraudulent platform. A collective unwillingness to confront the reality of COVID-19 has cost the lives of thousands of Americans. In doing so, we recollect the haunting of Orwellian prophecy. Orwell's warning of the dangers of a malleable reality has reincarnated before our eyes through this virus. A forewarned disease of deception and manipulation. On this front, the United States of America is combating two separate infections. The desire and disposition to truly contend with them will signal the trajectory of the country, now and into the foreseeable future.

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# Appendix A: Figures

**Figure 1.1 – Color-coded Phrases and Terminology**
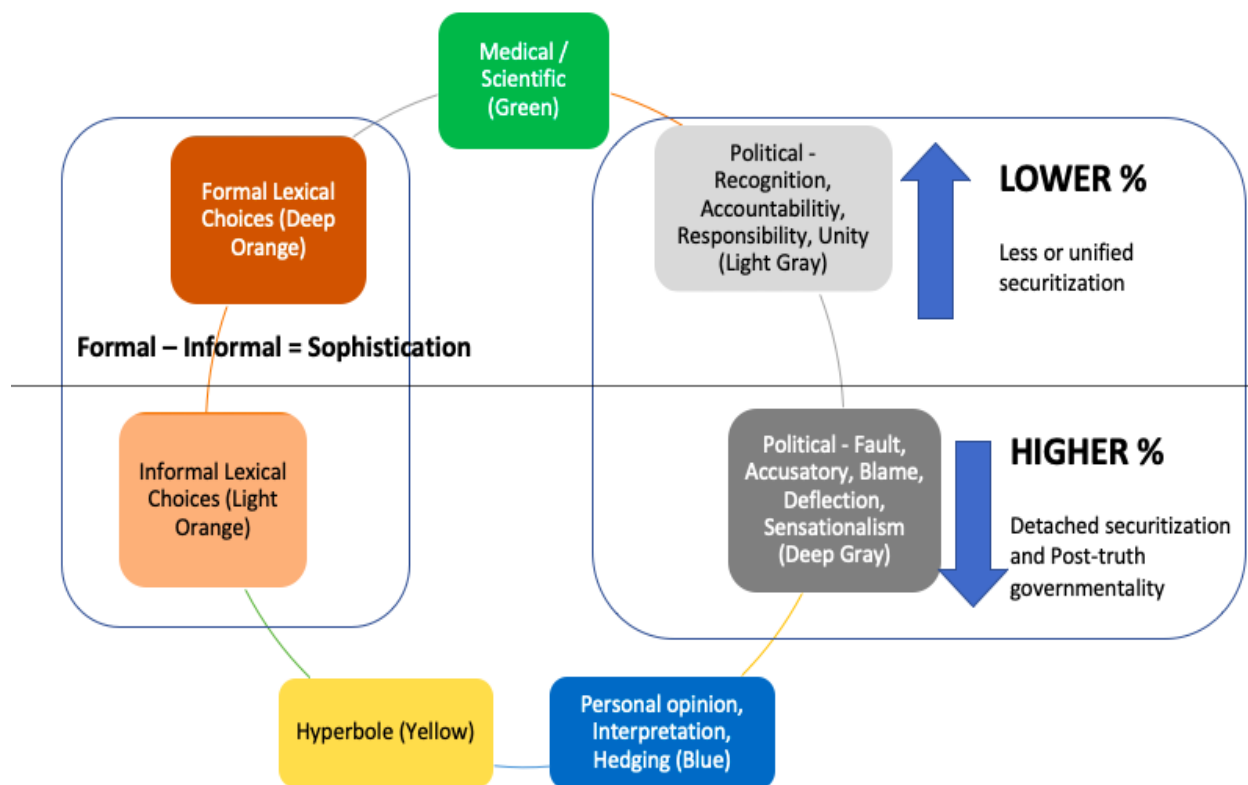
**Figure 2.1 – Discourse and Text Mapping**
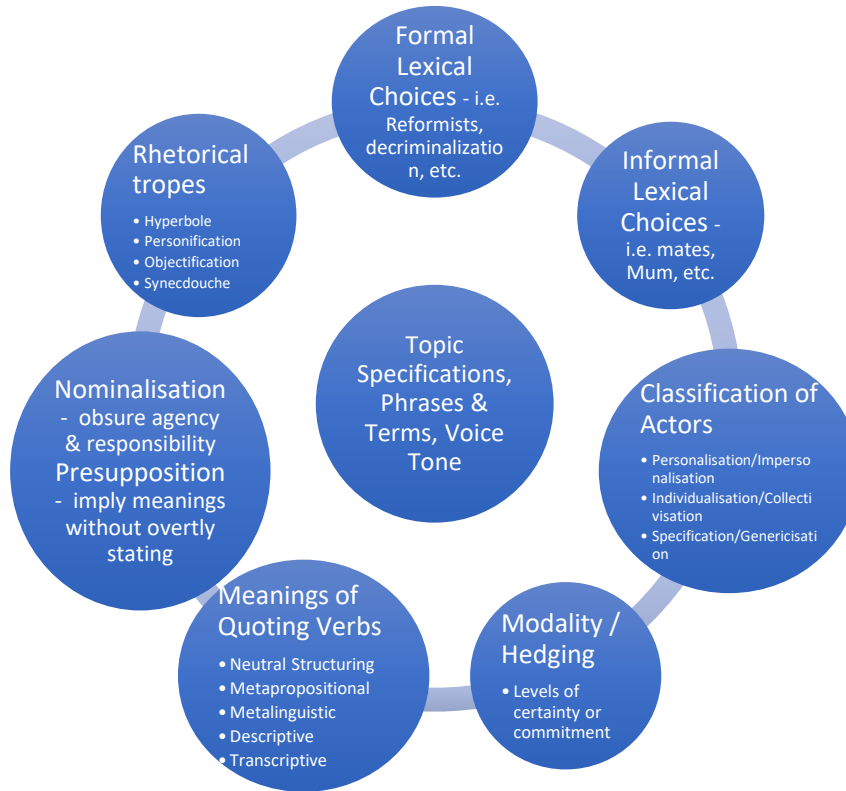


**Figure 2.2 – Visual Mapping**

**Figure 3.1 – January 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**
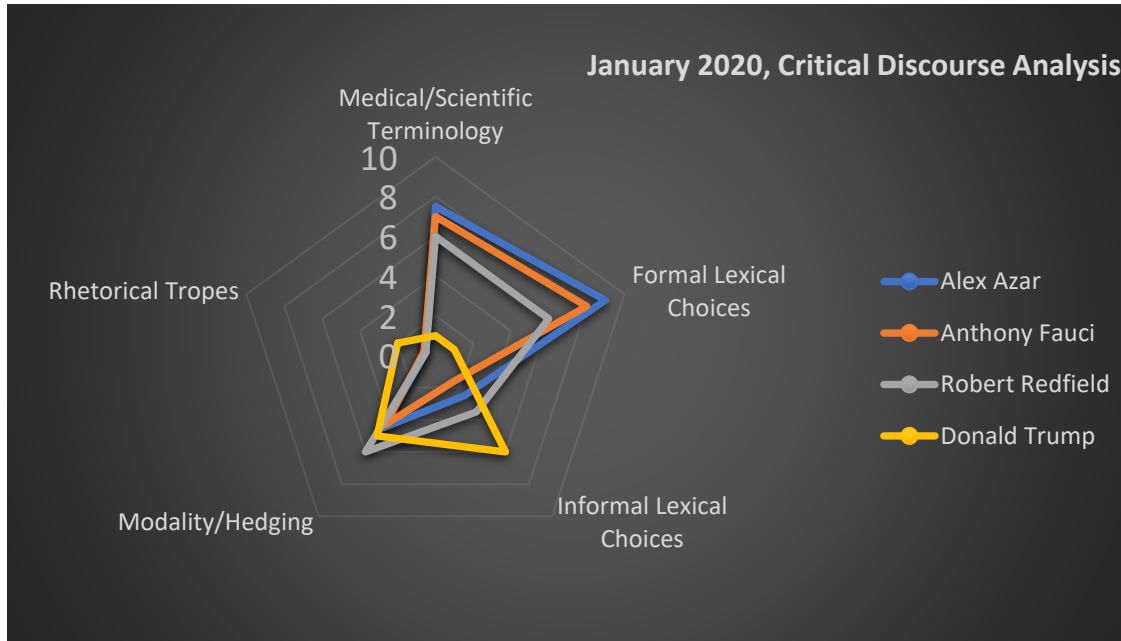


**Figure 3.2 – January 2020, Securitization Spectrum**
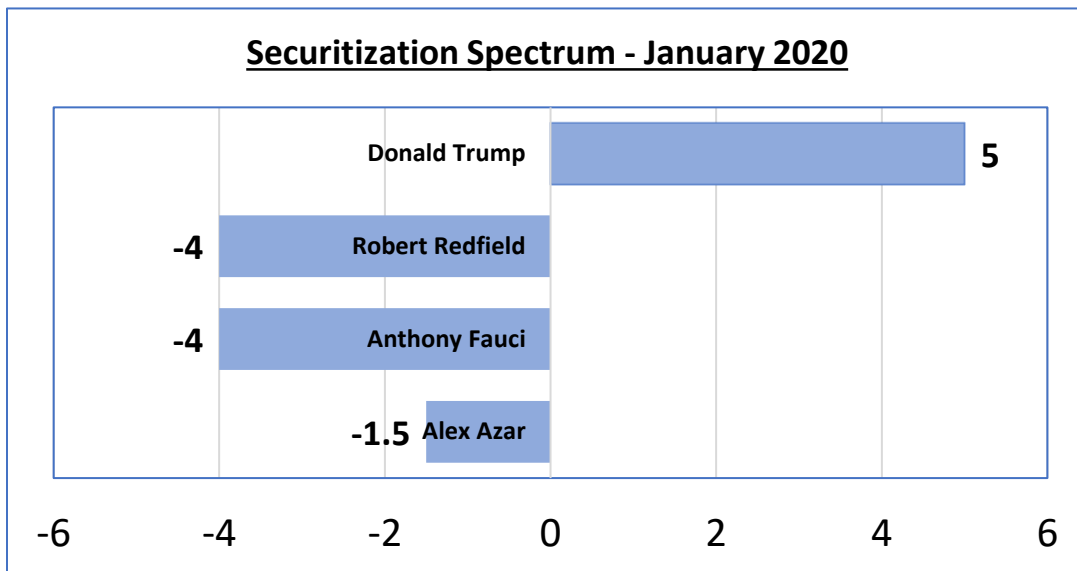
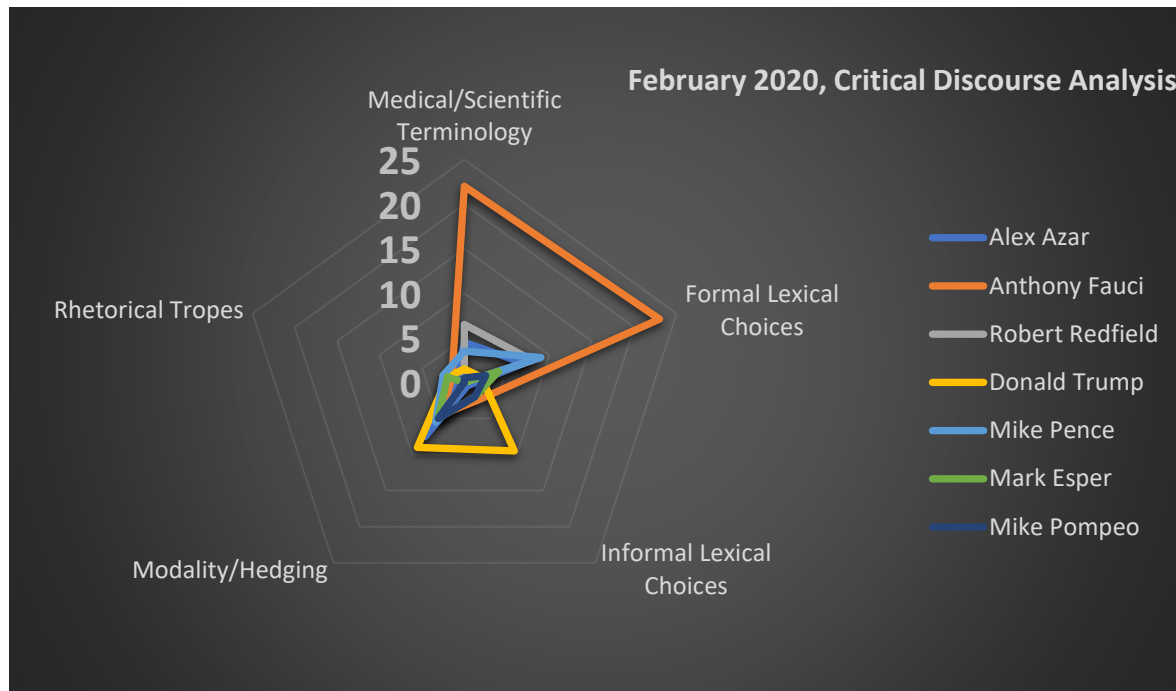**Figure 4.1 – February 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**



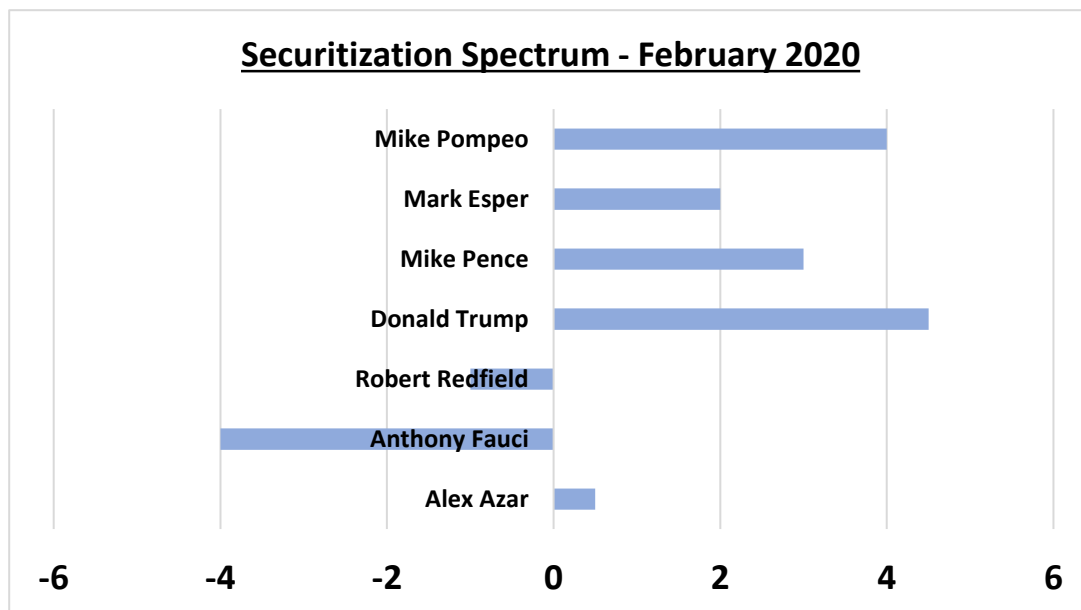**Figure 4.2 – February 2020, Securitization Spectrum**

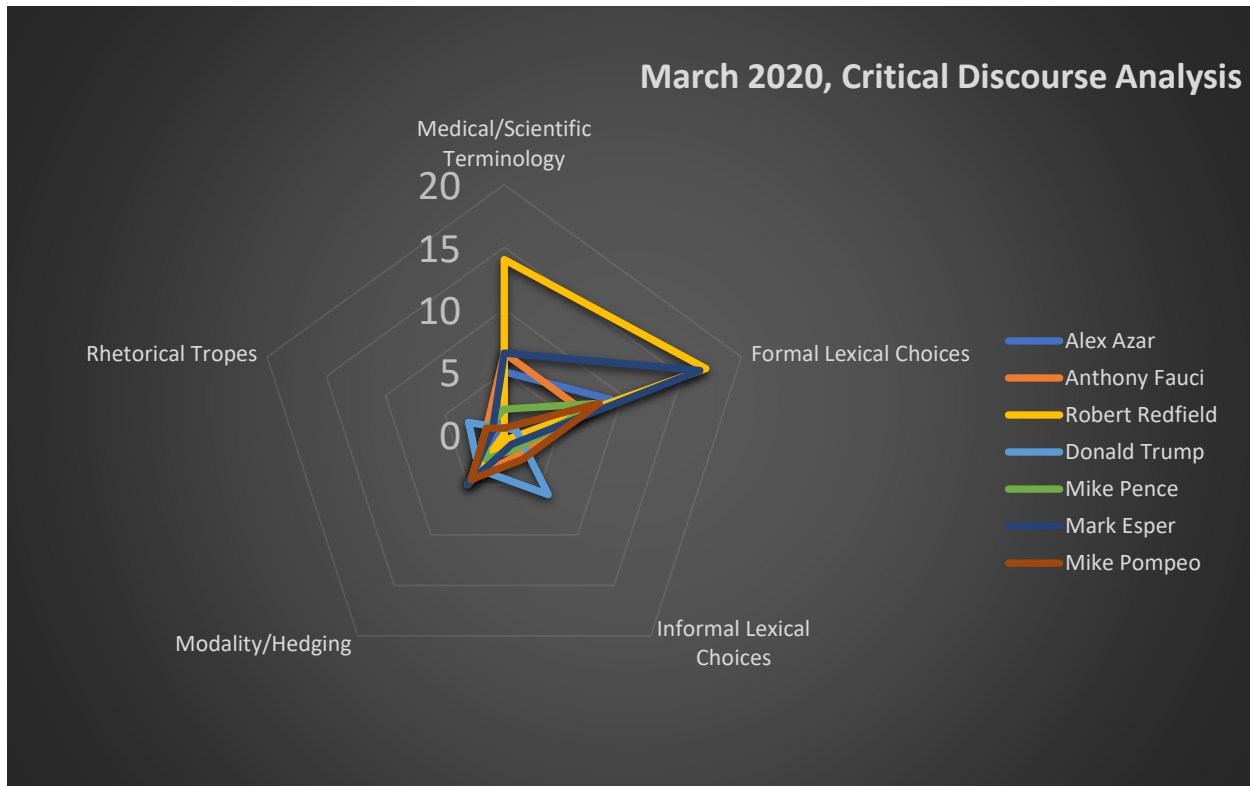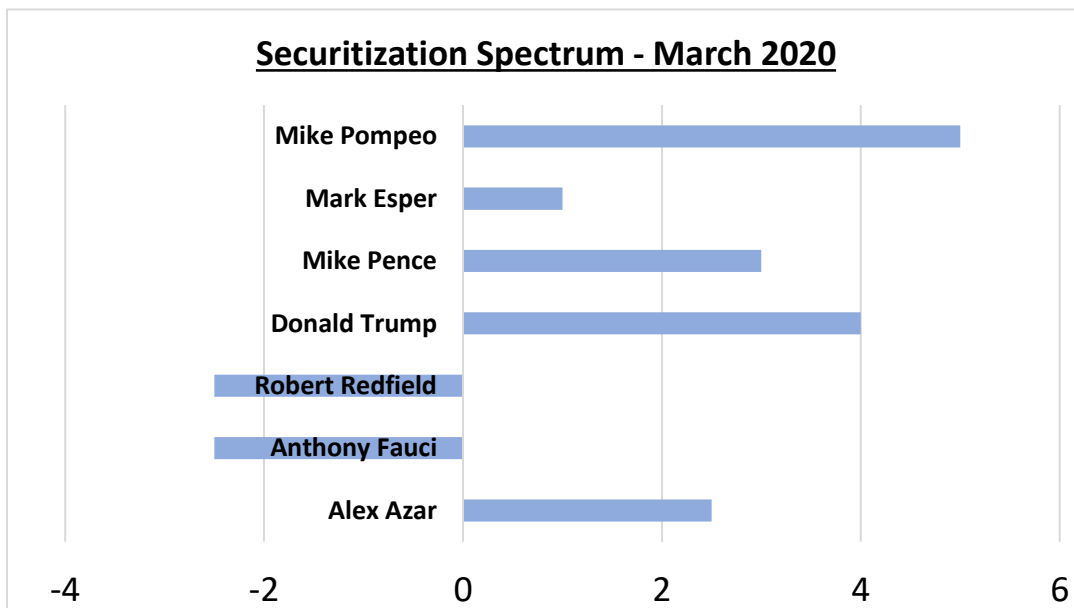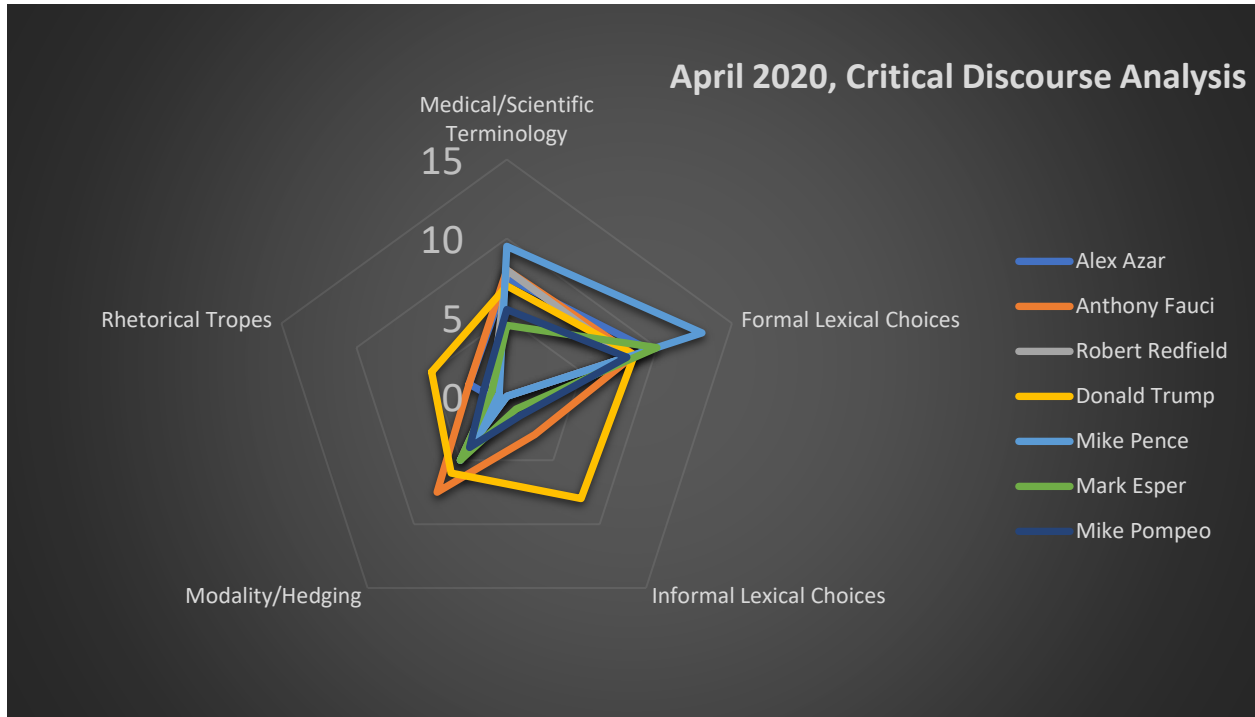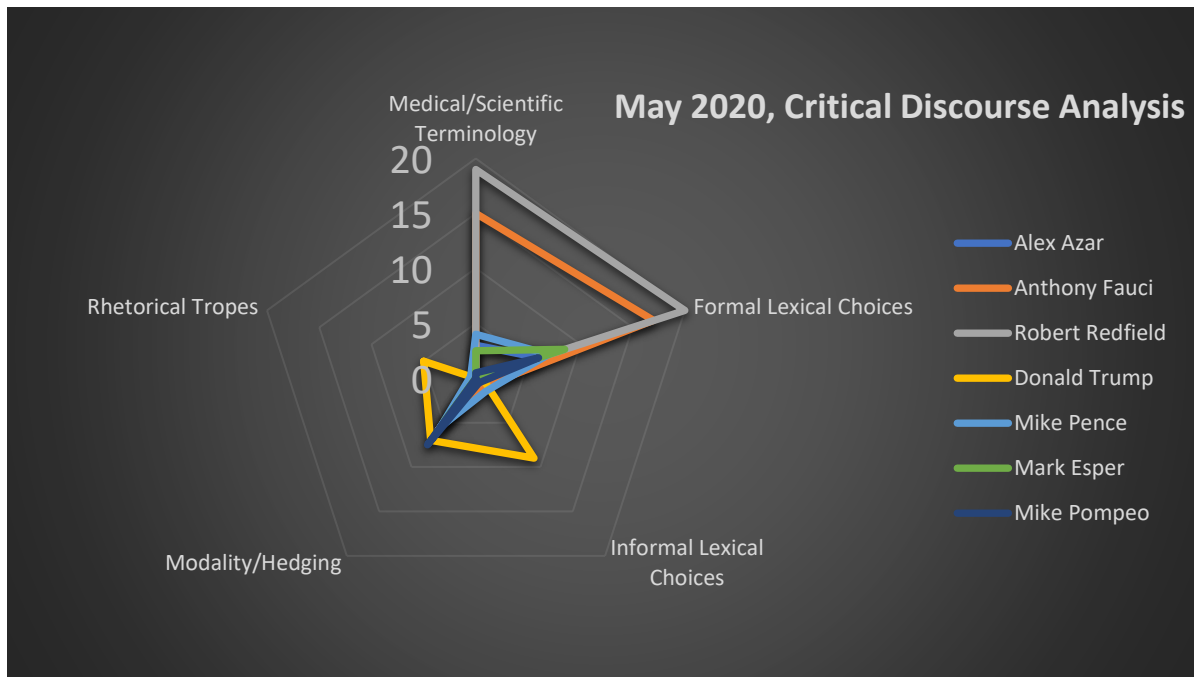**Figure 5.1 – March 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**



**Figure 5.2 – March 2020, Securitization Spectrum**

**Figure 6.1 – April 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**



April 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis

**Figure 6.2 – April 2020, Securitization Spectrum**



Securitization Spectrum - April 2020
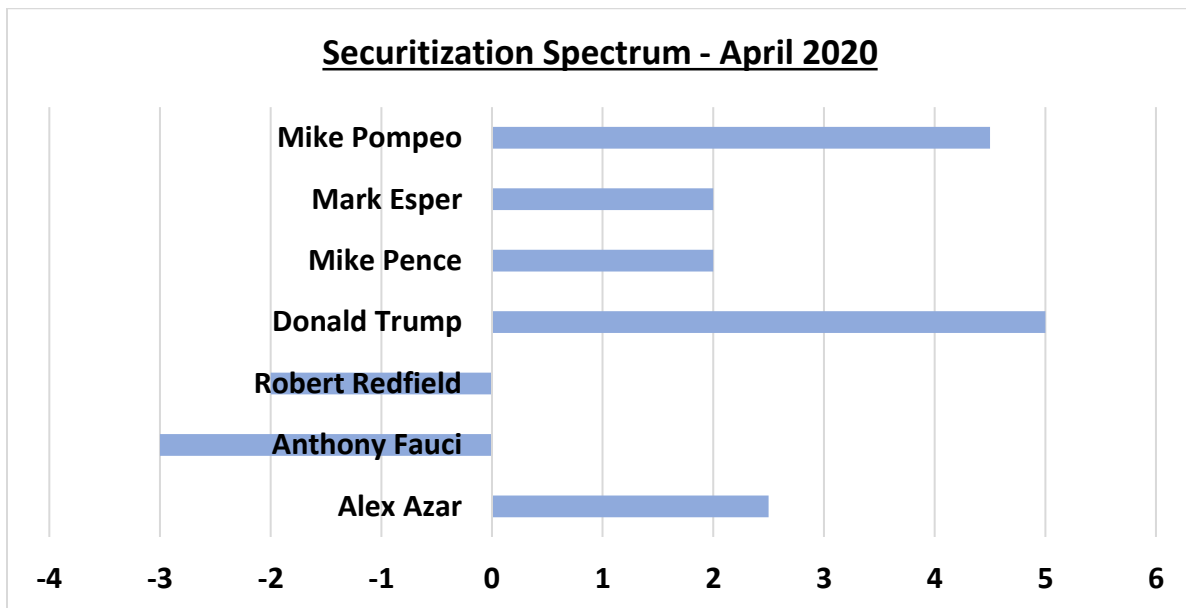
**Figure 7.1 – May 2020, Critical Discourse Analysis**



**Figure 7.2 – May 2020, Securitization Spectrum**
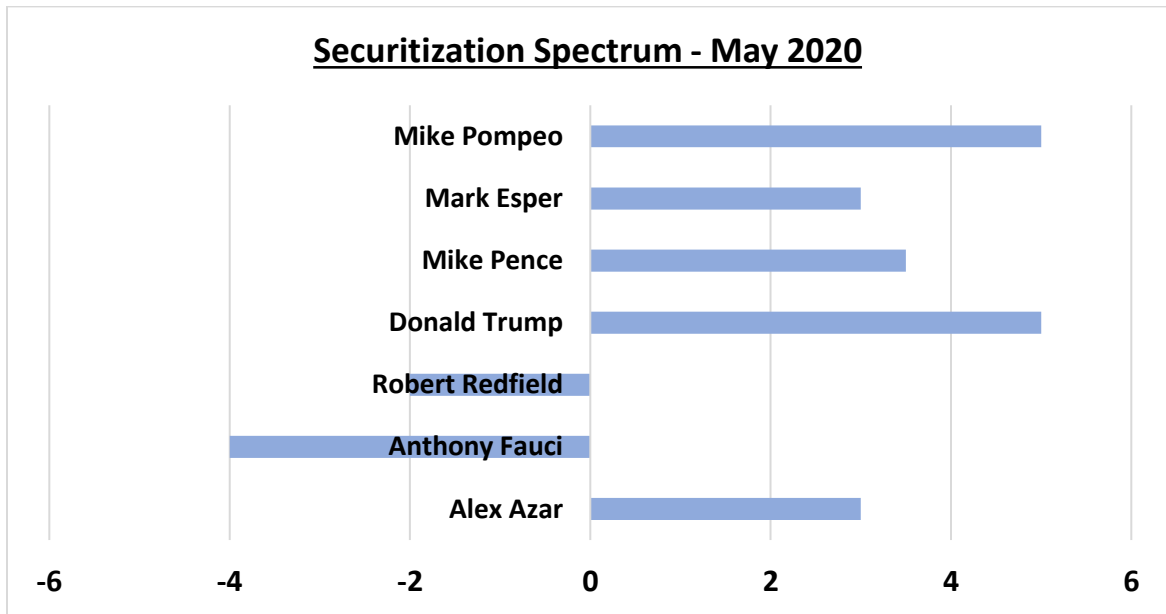
**Figure 8.1 – Critical Discourse Analysis Totals (Jan. – May 2020)**
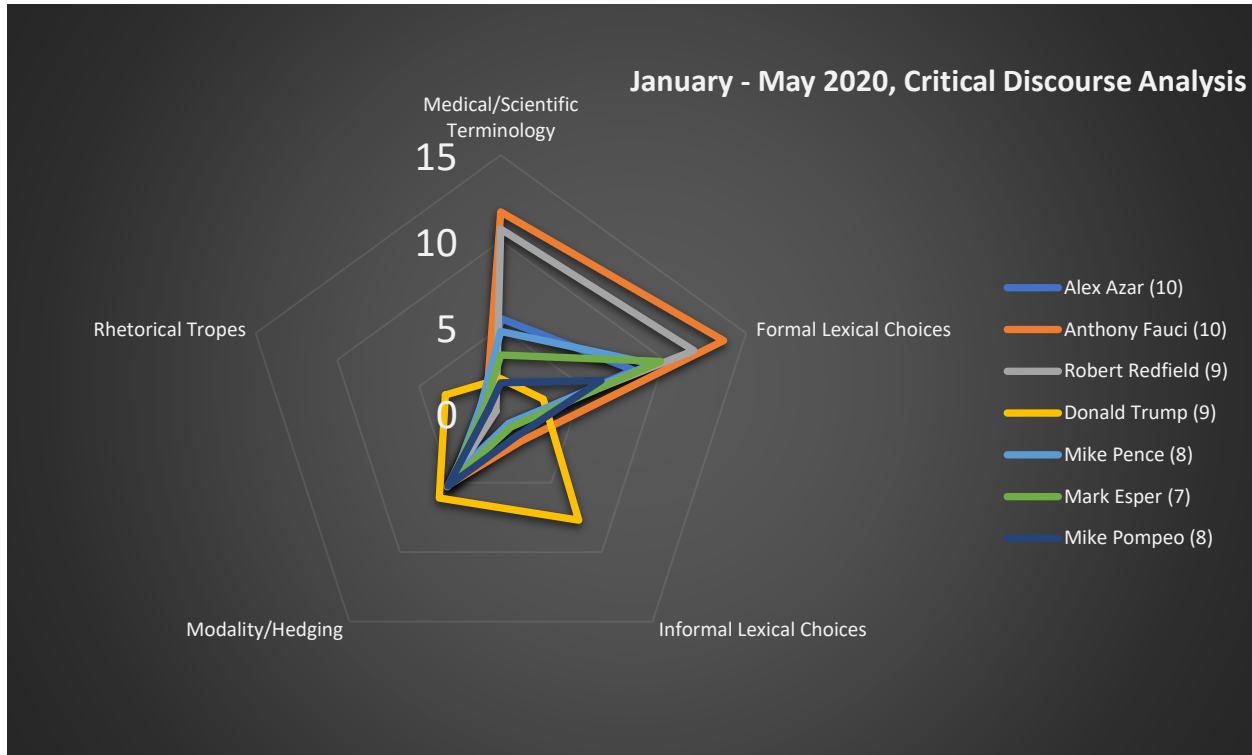


**Figure 8.2 – Jan. – May 2020 Totals, PTG Qualifier**
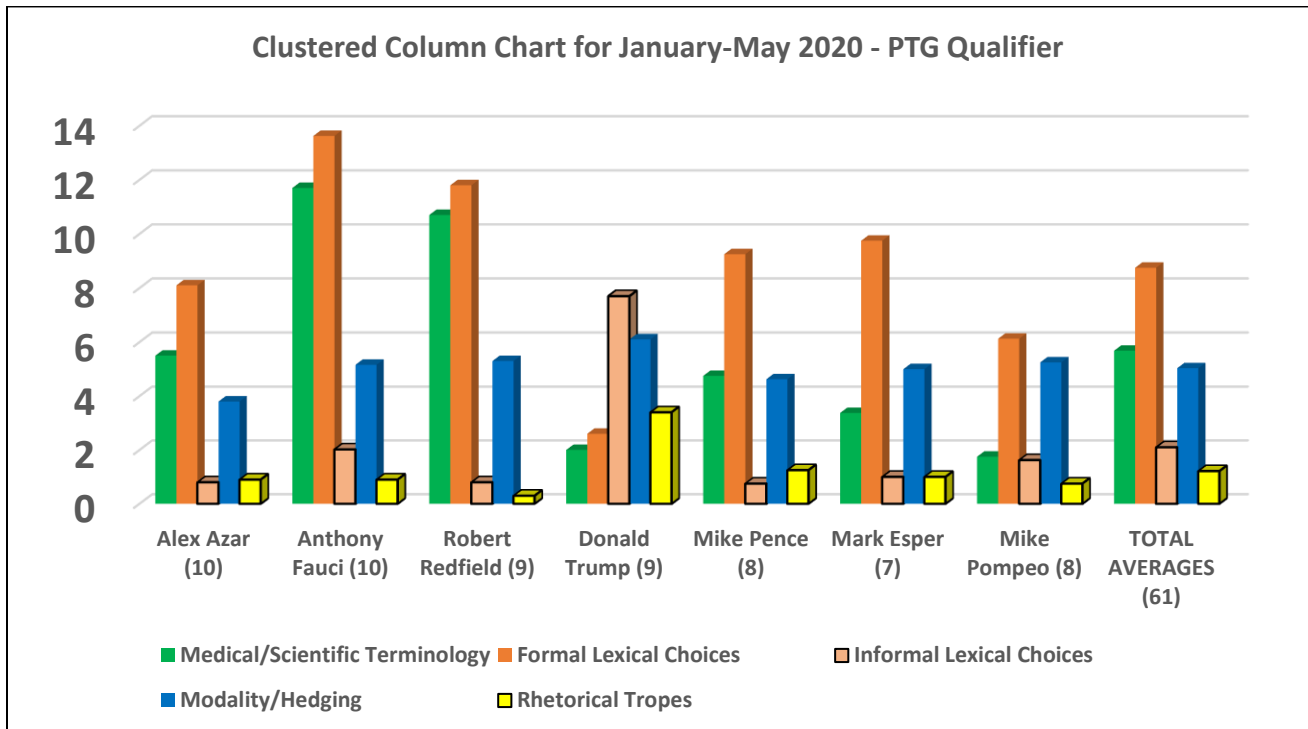
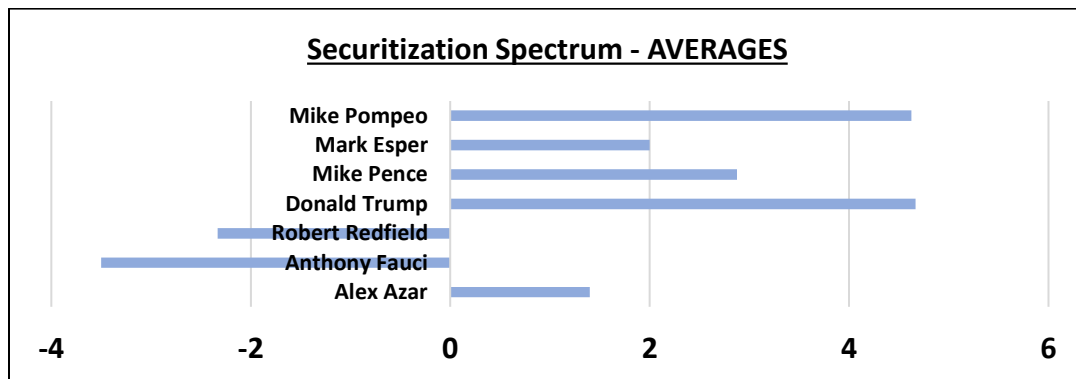**Figure 9.1 – Securitization Averages (Jan. – May 2020)**



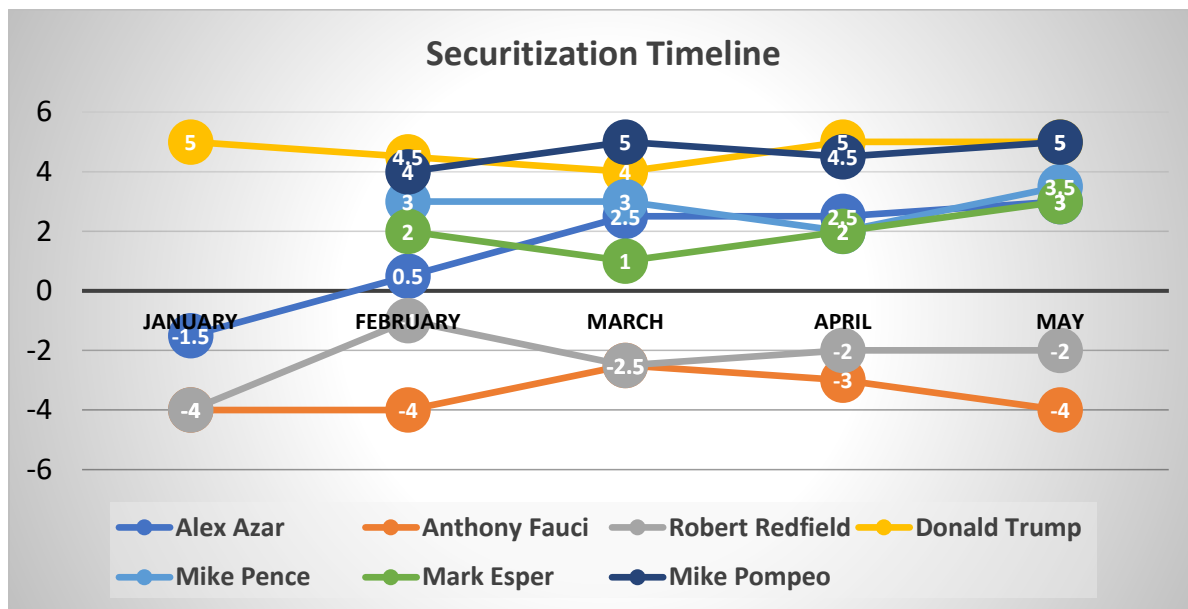**Figure 9.2 – Securitization Timeline (Jan. – May 2020)**



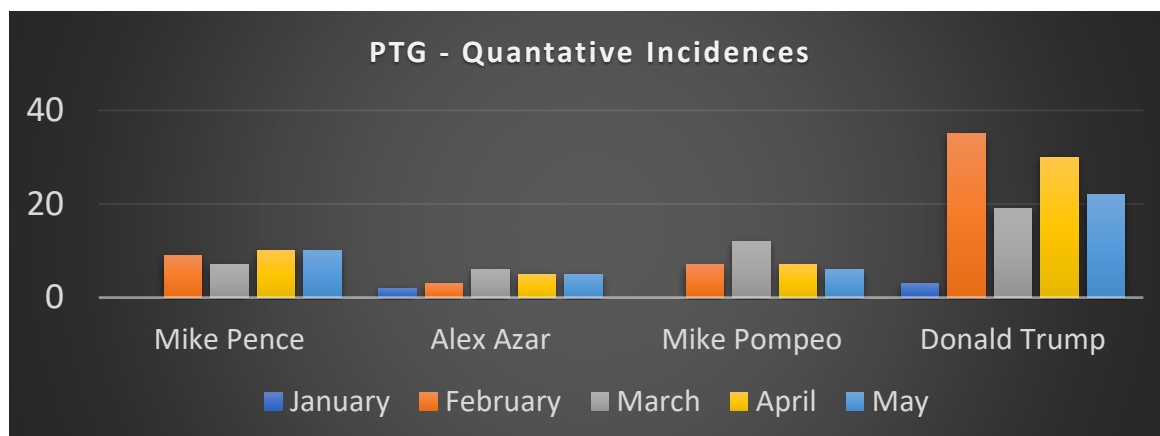**Figure 10.1 – PTG Quantitative Incidences (Jan. – May 2020)**
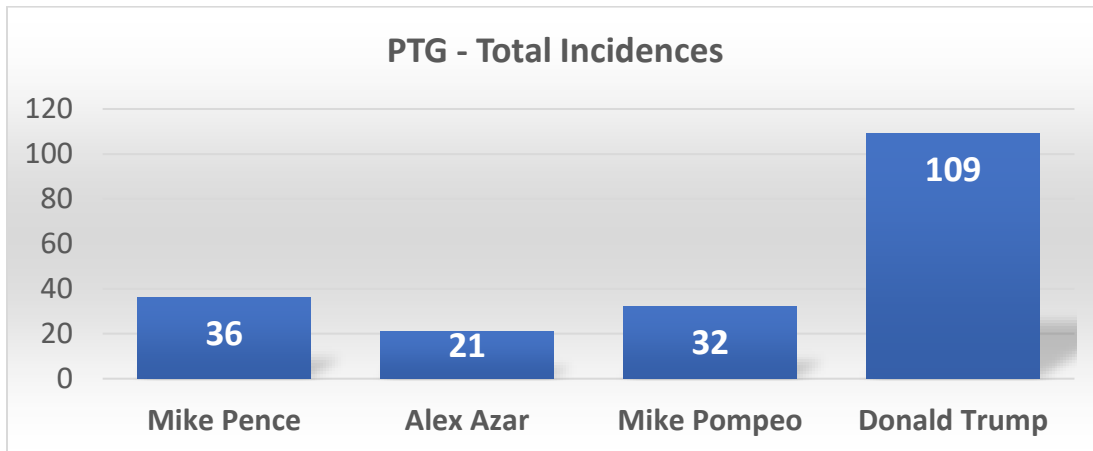
**Figure 10.2 – PTG Total Incidences (Jan. – May 2020)**



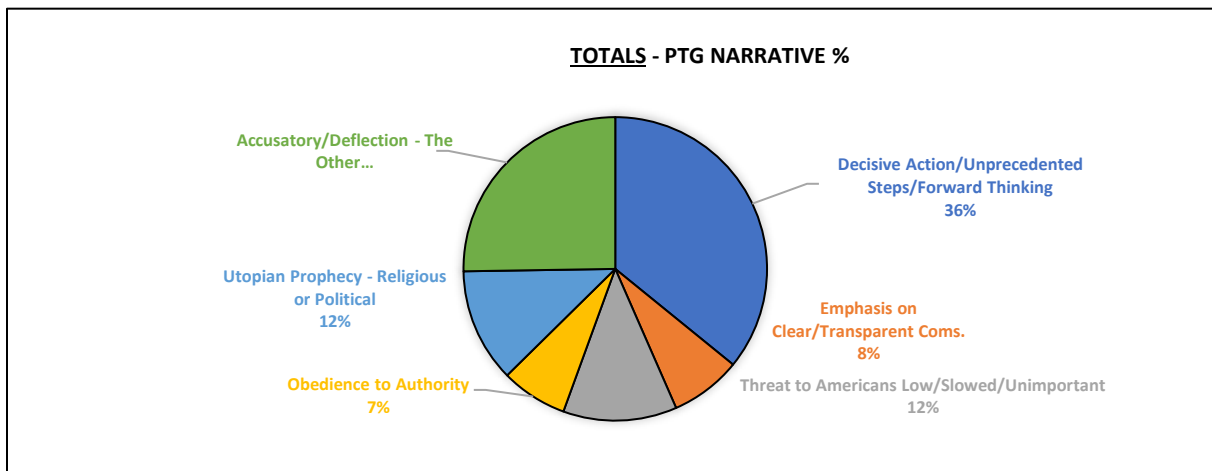**Figure 11.1 – PTG Narrative Totals (All Qualifiers)**
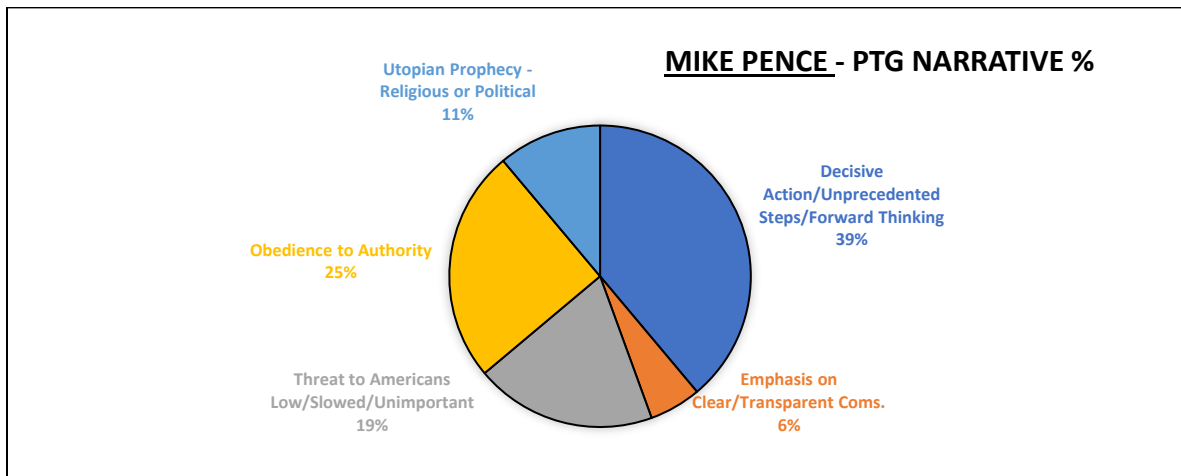


**Figure 11.2 – Mike Pence PTG Narrative Totals**
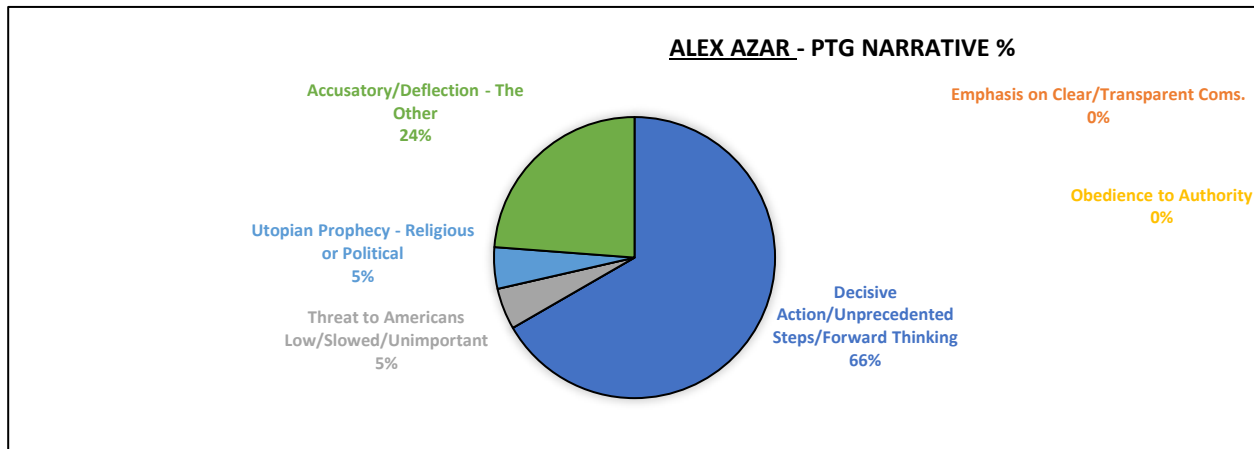
**Figure 11.3 – Alex Azar PTG Narrative Totals**

**ALEX AZAR - PTG NARRATIVE %**

- Accusatory/Deflection - The Other — 24%
- Emphasis on Clear/Transparent Coms. — 0%
- Utopian Prophecy - Religious or Political — 5%
- Obedience to Authority — 0%
- Threat to Americans Low/Slowed/Unimportant — 5%
- Decisive Action/Unprecedented Steps/Forward Thinking — 66%

**Figure 11.4 – Mike Pompeo PTG Narrative Totals**

**MIKE POMPEO - PTG NARRATIVE %**

- Threat to Americans Low/Slowed/Unimportant…
- Decisive Action/Unprecedented Steps/Forward Thinking — 16%
- Emphasis on Clear/Transparent Coms. — 6%
- Obedience to Authority — 6%
- Accusatory/Deflection - The Other — 66%
- Utopian Prophecy - Religious or Political — 6%

**Figure 11.5 – Donald Trump PTG Narrative Totals**

**DONALD TRUMP - PTG NARRATIVE %**

- Accusatory/Deflection - The Other — 22%
- Decisive Action/Unprecedented Steps/Forward Thinking — 35%
- Utopian Prophecy - Religious or Political — 15%
- Obedience to Authority — 3%
- Threat to Americans Low/Slowed/Unimportant — 15%
- Emphasis on Clear/Transparent Coms. — 10%

# Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What is your current social setting and situation?

2. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affecting your day to day living?

3. How do you feel about the governmental response to this pandemic?

4. If so, what would you like to see done differently?

5. How do you feel about the way the government is articulating the situation to you?

6. How do you feel about your civil liberties during this time?

7. Do you have a different perspective of the government and society in general since this epidemic began?

8. What media have you been using to stay informed and up to date?

9. Do you trust what this media is telling you?

# Appendix C: Link to Data Collection

[../../Critical Discourse Analysis/CDA & PTG - January to May 2020.xlsx](../../Critical Discourse Analysis/CDA & PTG - January to May 2020.xlsx)

# Appendix D: Individual CDA Coding Form

Social Actor/Department:
Individual:
Web Source:
Date:

## <u>VISUAL MAPPING</u>

Lexical Mapping:

Positioning the Viewer:

Salience:

Visual Interpretations:

## <u>AUDIO / TEXT MAPPING</u>

Formal Lexical Choices:

Informal Lexical Choices:

Classification of Social Actors:

Modality/Hedging:

Meanings of Quoting Verbs:

Nominalization:

Presupposition:

Rhetorical Tropes: