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The Images of Giant Corporations in 21st-Century American Politics

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Abstract

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This dissertation uses content analysis to explore the Congressional Record and Congressional Hearings as artifacts providing insight into a specific thematic political discourse in the United States from 2000 to 2020: what I have termed the big corporation hostility discourse. This dissertation is situated within the semantic tradition of communication study, which focuses on the social construction of public perception via language, knowledge, information and messages, often with a focus on mass media and political discourses. In the discourse of big corporation hostility, participants attempt to associate, directly or indirectly, certain political and economic issues with the image of big corporations. The discourse creates a narrative in which certain social groups take up their rhetorical positions as the asserted or implied victims of corporate interests. It is also a discourse marked by the sentiment of indignation with respect to the actions of big corporations, and in which all offering their reasoned views are cast in the role of serving “the American people”, in contrast to corporate interests.

This dissertation has touched on a topic or theme within political discourse in the United States that has not been systematically theorized to date. It contributes theoretical tools for understanding one of the manifestations of this class consciousness and conflict in the contemporary politics. This research also inspires related research in the broader context, including but not limited to effects of the discourse, different forms and variations of the reproduction of the discourse, and comparative international studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>LIST OF TABLES</i>	9
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i>	7
<i>Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION</i>	12
1.1 Conceptual Argument	15
1.2 Research questions linking political communication and big corporation hostility.....	22
<i>Chapter 2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY</i>	32
2.1 Text as data	32
2.2 Time Frame	34
2.3 Datasets	37
2.4 Content Analysis	39
<i>Chapter 3. THEMES AND EMPHASES IN THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD</i>	48
3.1 Descriptive Overview of Textual Data	48
3.2 Research Questions and Propositions Testing.....	52
3.3 Extending the Propositions	75
3.4 Summary of Findings	87
<i>Chapter 4. THEMES AND EMPHASES IN CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS</i>	92
4.1 Descriptive Overview of Hearings.....	94
4.2 Discursive Patterns in Congressional Hearings.....	96
4.3 Discursive Characteristics in Hearings Across Political Identities of Speakers	108
4.4 Discursive Characteristics of Hearing Committees in the Congressional Hearings Data	116
4.5 Summary of Findings	126
<i>Chapter 5. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF BIG CORPORATION HOSTILITY</i>	132
5.1 Discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility: A summary	134
5.2 Significance of the research.....	143
5.3 Limitations of this research and future prospects.....	146
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	154
<i>APPENDIX A</i>	161

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1. Instances Distribution of Congressional Record by Year.....	52
Figure 3.2. Instances Distribution by Party in Congressional Record.....	53
Figure 3.3. Instance Distribution by Party and Attitude in Congressional Record.....	53
Figure 3.4. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Health Insurance Issues in Congressional Record.....	77
Figure 3.5. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Taxation Issues in Congressional Record.....	77
Figure 3.6. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Low Income Issues in Congressional Record.....	77
Figure 3.7. Distribution of Instances Mentioning American Economy in Congressional Record.....	78
Figure 3.8. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Environmental Issues in Congressional Record.....	78
Figure 3.9. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Competition in Congressional Record.....	78
Figure 3.10. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Political Influence in Congressional Record.....	79
Figure 3.11. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Political Benefits in Congressional Record.....	80
Figure 3.12. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Judiciary Inference in Congressional Record.....	80
Figure 3.13. Distribution of Instances Mentioning “Elites” in Congressional Record.....	81
Figure 3.14. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Working Class in Congressional Record.....	81
Figure 3.15. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Middle Class in Congressional Record.....	82
Figure 3.16. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Working Class in Congressional Record.....	82
Figure 3.17. Distribution of Instances by Party and Political Influence/Political Benefits.....	84
Figure 3.18. Distribution of Instances by Party and Low Income/Taxation.....	84
Figure 3.19. Distribution of Instances by Party and Indignant/Happy Sentiment.....	84
Figure 3.20. Distribution of Instances by Party and “Magnitude”/ “American Fighter”.....	85
Figure 3.21. Distribution of Instances by Chamber.....	86
Figure 4.1. Instance Distribution of the Congressional Hearings by Year.....	95
Figure 4.2. Instance Distribution of the Congressional Hearings by Party Affiliation.....	95
Figure 4.3. Instance Distribution of Mentioning Environmental Issues in Congressional Hearing.....	100
Figure 4.4. Instance Distribution of Mentioning Competition in Congressional Hearing.....	100
Figure 4.5. Instance Distribution of Mentioning Health Insurance Issues in Congressional Hearing.....	100
Figure 4.6. Instance Distribution by Party and Attitude in Congressional Hearing and Congressional Record.....	109
Figure 4.7. Instance Distribution by Party and Political Influence/Political Benefits in Congressional Hearing.....	110
Figure 4.8. Instance Distribution by Party and Low Income/Taxation in Congressional Hearing.....	111
Figure 4.9. Instance Distribution by Party and Local Economy/Small Business in Congressional Hearing.....	111

Figure 4.10. Instance Distribution by Party and Magnitude/American Fighter in Congressional Hearing.....	112
Figure 4.11. Instance Distribution by Party and Characterizing Public Opinion/Social Connectedness in Congressional Hearing.....	112
Figure 4.12. Instance Distribution by Party and Indignant/Happy Sentiment in Congressional Hearing.....	114
Figure 4.13. Instance Distribution by Party and Sad/Excited Sentiment in Congressional Hearing	115
Figure 4.14. Activeness in Mentioning Big Corporation By Committee Type in Congressional Hearing.....	118
Figure 4.15. Distribution of Instances from Hearings Held by Economy Type of Committees.....	119
Figure 4.16. Distribution of Instances from Hearings Held by Environment and Science Type of Committees	120
Figure 4.17. Distribution of Instances from Hearings Held by Politics and Law Type of Committees.....	120
Figure 4.18. Distribution of Instances from Hearings Held by Security Type of Committees	120
Figure 4.19. Instance Distribution by Committee Type and Attitude.....	121
Figure 4.20. Instance Distribution by Committee Type and “Elite” in Congressional Hearing	122
Figure 4.21. Instance Distribution by Committee Type and Small Business	122
Figure 4.22. Instance Distribution by Committee Type and Political Benefits in Congressional Hearing.....	123
Figure 4.23. Persuasive Tactic Distribution by Committee Type in Congressional Hearing.	125
Figure 4.23. Sentiments Distribution by Committee Type in Congressional Hearing.	126

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. Summary of Searching Result.....	38
Table 2.2. Summary of Variable Description (1)	40
Table 2.3. Summary of Variable Description (2)	41
Table 2.4. Summary of Variable Description (3)	42
Table 2.5. Summary of Variable Description (4)	44
Table 2.6. Summary of Variable Description (5)	44
Table 2.7. Summary of Variable Description (6)	45
Table 2.8. Summary of Inter-coder Reliability.....	46
Table 3.1. Percentage of Mentioning by Economic Variables.....	54
Table 3.2. Percentage of Mentioning by Political Variables.....	57
Table 3.3. Percentage of Mentioning of “Big money”	58
Table 3.4. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Social Groups.....	61
Table 3.5. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Persuasive Tactics	64
Table 3.6. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Ideographs.....	69
Table 3.7. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Sentiment.	72
Table 4.1. Percentage of Mentioning by Economic Variables.....	99
Table 4.2. Percentage of Mentioning by Political Variables.	102
Table 4.3. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Social Groups.....	104
Table 4.4 Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Persuasive Tactics.....	107
Table 4.5. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Ideographs.....	107
Table 4.6. The Categories of Committee Type.....	116

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

One senses that not even the highly paid public relations specialists at Amazon – not even Jeff Bezos himself – could have foreseen this. A bidding war to attract Amazon’s second world headquarters after Seattle, one that began with applications from more than 200 cities in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, ended with city council hearings, protests outside of the hearing, harsh comments on all sides and eventually one of the two final city choices dropping out of the race. Member of Congress Rep. Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez tweeted the following on the same day (Nov.13, 2018) the announcement of New York’s Long Island City as the winning location was made:

“Amazon is a billion-dollar company. The idea that it will receive hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks at a time when our subway is crumbling and our communities need MORE investment, not less, is extremely concerning to residents here.”

Several other New York City politicians communicated their positions right after the announcement. Council member Jimmy Van Bramer, State Senator Michael Gianaris, and Assemblyman Ron Kim also used Twitter to announce their disapproval: “offering massive corporate welfare from scarce public resources to one of the wealthiest corporations in the world at a time of great need in our state is just wrong.” New York State Assembly member Ron Kim and former new York Attorney Zephyr Teachout (2018) wrote an opinion piece in the *New York Times* in which they stated that the city should "not offer incentives and giveaways to an internet giant known for squashing small businesses". A month later, at the first of three scheduled public hearings before the New York City Council, protesters held a rally outside council chambers and interrupted the hearings, chanting “G-T-F-O, Amazon has got to go!” City Council members

were also fiery in their remarks, notably ridiculing the city's plans to help Amazon build a private helipad for its executives. Despite Governor Andrew Cuomo offering his personal "guarantee" of support, Amazon cancelled the offer of partnership with Long Island City on February 14, 2019.

Half a year later, another big tech company was facing its own trial by public opinion. Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg testified before House and Senate committees in October 2019, after revelations that the political research firm Cambridge Analytica had gained access to 87 million Facebook users' data during the 2016 election season. While Zuckerberg underwent hours of grilling on a wide range of questions related to user privacy and to misinformation, a 'delete Facebook account' movement was brewing. Clearly, politicians were following as much as leading public opinion of the day regarding this mega-corporation, with its 2.3 billion active monthly users.

Countless other examples of public disquiet over big corporations can be found in the contemporary political climate. As part of this dynamic, not a few politicians have made their biggest (rhetorical) enemy out to be big corporations. Republican Senator Ted Cruz has said he would have let all the big banks that were in peril in 2008 simply failed. He has insisted that "big business" is a natural ally of big government, which he opposes, and that Republicans instead "should be the party of small business" (Lemann, Surowiecki, and Ross 2016). During his term in office, President Donald Trump attacked hedge-fund managers, promised to tax the profits big corporations make overseas, and complained that big banks lend to people like him instead of to small-business owners who really need the money. Democratic presidential candidate (in both 2016 and 2020) and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders argued that drug manufacturers — along with Wall Street, the fossil fuel industry, and the healthcare industry — embody the kind of

“corporate greed” he believes political leaders must take on. He called them “private monopolies...operating outside of any real democratic oversight and often subsidized by taxpayers – with the power to control almost every aspect of our lives.” Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, also a 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, focused on Big Tech, asserting that “big tech companies have too much power — too much power over our economy, our society, and our democracy. They’ve bulldozed competition, used our private information for profit, and tilted the playing field against everyone else. And in the process, they have hurt small businesses and stifled innovation” (Warren 2019).

The vignettes above are emblematic of the way in which public disquiet over big corporations has featured prominently in U.S. political discourse over the past twenty years (and arguably beyond). Both influencing and feeding off this disquiet, many politicians across the ideological spectrum have made gigantic corporations into a gigantic political target – in their rhetoric if not in the substance of their policy proposals. Hostility towards big corporations has become an arena in which communication strategies can be and are deployed by politicians in order to mobilize support and electoral coalitions.

This dissertation is an inquiry into the political discourse that underpins such strategies. I label it the ‘big corporation hostility discourse’. How can we characterize this discourse – in which various politicians on the right and left participate – with respect to the construction of the image of big corporations? I aim to shed light on this question by developing a series of research questions informed by political communication theory, and by exploring these questions through the application of content analysis to the speeches of Congressional politicians and the transcripts of related committee hearings.

In exploring this terrain, the dissertation asserts and tests for the presence of a range of discursive features underlying the discourse. The focus here is specifically on the past two decades of political discourse, in which multiple issues on the political agenda in the U.S. have been operationalized into partisan stances and simplified into binary choices of good/bad, left/right, and so on. Within this polarizing discourses, a division between corporations (or “corporate people”) and “the rest of us” has become a class and culture division with huge political significance, reflecting the overarching “good” vs. “bad” / “privileged” vs. “oppressed” binary divisions that Coe and Domke (2004) assert are “ideally suited for a U.S. political culture dominated by mass media; that is, binaries well fit the dominant norms of news construction, making it likely that a political leader’s use of them would be echoed in press coverage.” In short, this dissertation develops a framework for conceptualizing and measuring political communication in this sphere, with implications for our understanding of the growing levels of polarization in U.S. politics.

1.1 Conceptual Argument

What Amazon and Facebook have experienced in the last couple of years is not new. Generations of giant/complex organizations have experienced a highly complex relationship with their political and public opinion environments since the advent of corporate behemoths over 120 years ago. Even well before that time, Presidents Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson in the early 1800s fought against the establishment of the first Bank of the United States, because both “saw a powerful bank as a corrupting influence that could undermine the proper functioning of a democratic government” (Lessig 2016). There are clearly many factors that could affect public perception of big corporations; among these factors, one must first examine the emergence and

sustainability of large corporations in the past half century in America as fundamentally rooted in the economics of the matter. Although economic factors are not the focal point of my analysis in this dissertation, it is important to lay a foundational understanding of its importance in shaping the political discourse that subsequently emerges.

1.1.1 Socioeconomic causes of hostility towards giant corporations

Historically, scholars suggest complex socioeconomic reasons trigger ‘anti-big’ hostility. First and the foremost, popular opinion against big businesses has emerged when such corporations are seen to threaten smaller business and consumers, through their limiting effects on competition. In the 1920s, the first American grocery chain, A&P, was expanding rapidly and was able to bypass wholesalers and deliver lower prices and more choices to customers. As a major backlash, independent grocers united with everyone from progressives and women’s groups to the Ku Klux Klan and populist Southern politicians like Huey Long to oppose the perceived takeover of America’s Main Street (Braswell 2019). This was a ‘war’ that saw newspapers and radio stations involved prominently. It resulted in 26 states passing taxes on chain stores, and in Congress passing the Robinson-Patman Act in 1936, making it largely illegal for manufacturers to give big chains preferential prices (Braswell 2019). Amid the Great Depression, the transition from the first to the second New Deal brought the shifting of federal assistance from big banks to the labor unions, which meant economic assistance was becoming more accessible and directed towards lower and middle-class citizens. In this context, at the Democratic Party’s national convention in 1936, President Franklin Roosevelt devoted much of his speech to the problem of “industrial dictatorship” (Mitchell 2017). A small group of powerful corporations and banks, Roosevelt declared, “had concentrated into their own hands an almost

complete control,” such that many Americans were “no longer free” and throughout the nation, “opportunity was limited by monopoly” (Mitchell 2017).

Such monopoly and oligopoly power, economic theory contends, is almost inevitable in an economy where there is excessive market power exercised by relatively few corporations. Khan and Vaheesan (2017) note that “[g]iven the current distribution of business ownership assets in the United States, market power can be a powerful mechanism for transferring wealth from the many among the working and middle classes to the few belonging to the 1% and 0.1% at the top of the income and wealth distribution. In concrete terms, monopoly pricing on goods and services turns the disposable income of the many into capital gains, dividends, and executive compensation for the few.” In the short term, monopoly might bring lower-priced commodities or even ‘freebies’, such as Microsoft giving free internet browsers to customers who purchased their operating systems. But in the longer term, the oligopolistic enterprises will come to dominate the industry, decimate other competitors, consolidate control over customers, provide lower quality of services, and limit employment in the industry, among other potential effects. That explains why the federal government brought an antitrust case against Microsoft in 1998, at a point when even public opinion was not fully mobilized around the issue. Twenty years later, Senator Elizabeth Warren stated that the “government’s antitrust case against Microsoft helped clear a path for Internet companies like Google and Facebook to emerge” (Warren 2019). Bringing the story full circle, the Trump administration’s Justice Department in late 2020 accused Google of monopolistic practices in search advertising.

Second, high unemployment rates and economic hardship tend to spur negative perceptions of wealthy individuals and large businesses. Historically, massive rises in unemployment have often exacerbated social frictions in industrialized countries. Facing such

societal dislocations, big businesses that represent wealth can become an easy target. According to Galambo (2019) in his research on the late 1800s, “the depression condition of that economy frequently brought the trust issue to mind in the mid-nineties, and throughout the period 1893-1901 other publications – including books and articles – often stirred up controversy about the concentration movement.” Farmers rallied against the control Wall Street banks had achieved over the agricultural industry, and residents of big cities protested the high prices charged by holding companies that had gained control of the electricity supply. President Theodore Roosevelt’s opined that “[c]orporate expenditures for political purposes... have supplied one of the principal sources of corruption in our political affairs” (Galambo 2019). In a 1936 campaign speech, his fifth cousin President Franklin Roosevelt bemoaned the “old enemies of peace – business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering” (Galambo 2019).

Third, economic inequality is one of the biggest reasons behind hostility towards big business. In his 2017 book *The Broken Ladder*, Keith Payne, a social psychologist at the University of North Carolina, argues that humans are hardwired to notice relative differences. When people are reminded that they are poorer or less powerful than others, they become less healthy, angrier, and more politically polarized (Payne, 2017). The inherited basis of much wealth and advantage only adds to the resentments inequality may provoke. As Thomas Piketty argues in *Capital in the 21st Century* (2014), market capitalism eventually leads to an economy dominated by those lucky enough to be born into a position of inherited wealth. Piketty (2014) argues that this is how the economy of early 20th century Europe worked, that the tyranny of this inherited wealth was erased only by the devastation of two world wars, and that in the 21st Century, the United States and Canada are experiencing equally pronounced levels of inequality.

Who, then, are the wealthy through inheritance? To present an extreme example in America: As of 2018: “[t]hree dynastic wealthy families—the Waltons, the Kochs, and the Mars—have seen their wealth increase nearly 6,000 percent since 1982. Meanwhile, median household wealth over the same period went down by 3 percent” (Collins & Hoxie 2018). And who are the Waltons, the Kochs and the Mars? They are the owners of Walmart, Koch Industry and Mars Inc. (the food and pet food producer). Thus, we can see how the linkages between big corporations, inherited wealth, and economic inequality might easily become a wellspring for hostility toward big corporations.

Thus, there are many economic reasons and roots in capitalism that stoke the tension between big corporations and average workers and customers. While different segments of the public may take ideologically left or right stances on different issues, the anger/hostility underlying a number of these issues can easily be tied to perceptions of inequality in the distribution of power and wealth. People not at the center of societal economic power may reasonably feel that the political/economic system is not working for them. Agendas attempting to operationalize this resentment for purposes of political mobilization emerge on all sides. The key question in this dissertation is how to characterize the way in which US political leaders have drawn on these tensions to craft their communication strategies, where they have assigned implicit and explicit blame, and how the discourses around these issues might reflect political branding and mobilization strategies.

1.1.2 Communication as social construction

Big corporation hostility as a discursive phenomenon is neither new nor accidental. Communication is the most ordinary social behavior, but it is also a very complex one. The study

of communicative strategies has taken on great significance over the past half century, in what Pearce (1989) calls the “revolutionary discovery” of the power and impact of communication across every domain of contemporary society. Communication, Pearce suggests, is “far more central to whatever it means to be a human being than had ever before been supposed.”

A simple model of communication might include a few major dimensions: message, source, channel, and receiver. But that is just the beginning; the study of communication has developed into a sprawling set of sub-fields with different emphases and theoretical perspectives. Among distinct paradigms, this dissertation draws primarily on the *semantic* tradition of communication study. In this paradigm, communication is defined as processes of information transmission between at least two agents. This body of scholarship focuses on the social construction of public perception via language, knowledge, information and messages that derive from mass media and political discourses. This analytical tradition traces its lineage to the very first traditions within the study of political communication, which can be dated to Aristotle, who defined rhetoric as a means of persuasion and who took a qualitative and critical approach to studying the content and effects of political messages (Lin 2004).

Aristotle claimed that in order to achieve the goals of speakers – such as attitude and behavior change among a particular intended audience – a speaker must adapt to an audience’s personality, culture, and experiences. The factors a speaker has the most control over include the form and content of the message itself. Aristotle’s three persuasive appeals – “logos”, “pathos” and “ethos” – form a sophisticated early theory breaking down how communication affects people. “Logos” and “pathos” here refer to how people can be persuaded by rational and emotional appeals respectively, laying an important foundation for further research that has seen fruitful elaboration. For rational appeals, speakers may offer an analysis suggestive of causation.

For emotional appeals, the speakers might express sympathy, share similar experiences with the audience, or sooth, intensify, or ignite certain emotions in the audience. “Ethos” emphasizes that the image and appearance of the speaker may have an impact on the audience. So the speaker would strive for a more trustworthy and in general a more likable image (Lin 2004).

Meanwhile, the context in which communication occurs takes on enormous importance in this (and other) paradigms. According to Peters (1999), “Communication is a rich tangle of intellectual and cultural strands that encodes our time’s confrontations with itself. To understand communication is to understand much more.” Logos and pathos need to be appropriate with respect to the time and location of the communication in order to achieve the expected goals of the speaker. The audience’s cultural background, education level, age and gender are all important factors a speaker needs to put into consideration when crafting a message.

All these tactics may be deployed in a message construction aimed at building a closely knitted relationship between the speaker and the audience. This explains the extensive usage of these appeals in the political communication arena, especially in electoral politics.

Indeed, the study of rhetoric surfaces power relations (Martin 2014). Language is posited to be a means of building social cohesion and maintaining social control (Hayakawa 1948); political connotations are thus embedded in all human communications. As early as 1966, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, writing about *social constructionism* from the perspective of knowledge production, asserted that “[k]nowledge is social in origin; knowledge is not predetermined by some natural order. Therefore, social constructionism can be viewed as antithetical to another philosophical system, namely determinism, which maintains that all human actions and ideas are the consequence of prior conditions and causes”.

Not only does social constructionism emphasize the power of knowledge, but it also underscores the compelling role of languages in the process of knowledge production and relationships. In that sense, communication is a social practice. Social constructionism is seen as a highly influential communication theory because it intended to answer questions of fundamental importance to human existence (Allen 2017): (1) What is the basis of knowledge; (2) What is the nature of reality; and (3) How do people make sense of their experiences? All these questions point to the power of communication. The control of knowledge and information – essential to the exercise of power – becomes a way of influencing people’s consciousness. Knowledge mechanisms such as socialization, education, media, secrecy, information control, and the shaping of political beliefs and ideologies all become important to the understanding of power and how it operates (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008).

1.2 Research questions linking political communication and big corporation hostility

Zaller (2011) once argued that the nature of most of the information people receive on a daily basis in American life is, directly or indirectly, from “elites,” defined as elected or accepted cultural leaders. And these elites frame current events using already available stereotypes when they engage with the public. Information disseminated to the public is thus an elite discourse and by no means politically neutral (Zaller 2011). As James Martin (2013) argues, persuasion is indeed central to politics. Elites can never assume the messages they release to the public would be the sole and effective shapers of public opinion; yet it is difficult to escape the conclusion that politicians have over time been getting better at, and have more varied and extensive resources for, information management, political message crafting and the techniques of persuasion.

Most Americans, as Edelman put it a half century ago, are more likely to experience the language about political events rather than the events themselves (Edelman 1972). Thus, how entities are depicted in discourse becomes highly influential. Popular understandings of political institutions rest on the beliefs or perceptions of different groups in society, regardless of whether those cognitions are accurate (Kenski, Jamieson & Jarvis 2017). As Hart and Sparrow (2001) asserted, “political authenticity is a symbolic, mediated, interactional, and highly contested process by which political candidates attempt to “make real” a version of themselves and their political characters within the public sphere.” A significant amount of the work of constructing political institutions is carried by the task of carefully crafting language. In the words of Edelman (1988), “political language *is* political reality.” Campbell and Jamieson (2013) even contend that presidential rhetoric is “one source of executive power.”

While political constituencies never share a single reality, communities may share a “mediated reality” that has been carefully designed, formatted and crafted to be effective in shaping perceptions and in constraining or enabling certain forms of collective action. Banning (2013) points out that “[p]olitical discourse has always been characterized – if not defined – by the powerful using discursive and coercive strategies to maintain and expand their hegemony, whether they are located on the right, left, or center.” While individual politicians may only aspire to achieving such “hegemony”, they will attempt to exploit the often large gaps that exist between what Key (1961) once called “latent” public opinion on the one hand, and the public positions taken by politicians on issues and (separate from the public positions) the actual content and effects of policies supported by those same politicians, on the other. In an even imperfect democracy, this information asymmetry – between the public with ‘latent’ or contradictory opinions on issues and politicians who are in a better position to know the actual

mechanisms through which policy shapes public life – can become a resource to be manipulated, even as politicians keep an eye out for constituent opinion that may be uninformed, vague, or entirely missing on a given subject (Zaller 2003).

One sees diverse and competing images regarding big corporations across various discourses in the political realm. According to some economists, “economic giants destroy smaller competitors by obsessive attention to consumer preferences,” as opposed to unfair market advantage or political corruption (Lemann, Surowiecki & Ross 2016). For some politicians like Hillary Clinton (2015), “[l]arge corporations are concentrating control over markets” and “using their power to raise prices, limit choices for consumers, lower wages for workers, and hold back competition from startups and small businesses.” The attempt by influencers and politicians to selectively draw on different sources of data to attempt to prove or disprove various purported impacts of big corporations ultimately underscores the politicized nature of discourse. It also gives us a good reason to analyze claims on all sides from a political discourse perspective. Through the history of American politics, attacking the so-called “undeserving rich” has been, for those seeking political and public support, a tantalizing rhetorical tactic and policy target. In short, the discourse of hostility towards big business is gaining renewed traction in recent decades, while remaining relatively under-researched. The impact of a discursive tactic is at its maximum when its instrumental nature goes unexamined.

Thus, building upon previous research, this dissertation explores the way in which big corporation hostility expresses itself in different forms in contemporary political discourse, with a focus on Congressional politics. In order to identify attributes of this discourse, the essential literature in the field provides a necessary theoretical foundation. I draw on the theoretical foundation and analytical tools from narrative theory, identification theory and ideograph theory

in developing six specific research questions. These three theoretical frameworks are heavily rooted in rhetorical study. However, this dissertation is not itself designed to be a rhetorical study, but rather only to borrow from methodological power of these theories to analyze the discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility.

1.2.1 Narrative Theory

First, anti-big corporation hostility can be explored using narrative theory. According to Walter Fisher's narrative theory, a narrative is a means of interpreting and articulating reality that "do[es] not just tell a story but also put[s] forth arguments and persuade[s] listeners to participate through some sort of action. Thus, the storyteller is a rhetor attempting to persuade the audience to action, via the functional elements of a story, and the narrative paradigm can be used as a tool" (Allen 2017). According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), "[n]arrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated ... narrative inquiry is stories lived and told." In short, narratives are a representational device (Robert and Shenhav 2014).

I employ narrative inquiry as a specific set of analytical procedures deployed to aid in the analysis of the Congressional Record and Congressional Hearings (the key political texts of analysis that will be introduced below). The questions for the analyst become, what can we learn about the voices represented in the narratives – about their self-presentation, and about their

framing of different issues? And what is the implied relationship between the narrator and the audience?

Fisher's narrative paradigm is particularly relevant to this research because, echoing Aristotle, it emphasizes both rational appeals and emotional (experiential and story-based) appeals. In this view, people can be persuaded by both rational arguments and aesthetic elements in stories, consistently embedded as they are in political discourses. This is very much the case, as we shall see, with discourses centered on hostility towards big corporations. Narratives utilize elements of plot, tone, imagery, and language (Allen 2017).

In many cases, when big corporations are rhetorically targeted, there is blame to be assigned, implicitly or explicitly; therefore, causality features centrally as a plot. Big corporations are put forward as the cause for a given economic or political problem, and often, business greed specifically is put forward as the root of all the unfairness. To take one example of this approach, When Bernie Sanders and other lawmakers introduced a package of legislation aimed at dramatically reducing the nation's prescription drug prices, he stated: "If the pharmaceutical industry will not end its greed, which is literally killing Americans, then we will end it for them. The United States pays by far the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. This has created a health care crisis in which 1 in 5 American adults cannot afford to get the medicine they need." (Sullivan 2019) This short script adopts a 'life or death' tone, as the word "killing" vividly indicates. It contains a kind of rational analysis of the context of the action proposed, but also contains emotional appeals as conveyed by the language and tone.

Therefore, particularly in anti-big corporation hostility, the discourse usually unfolds by exhibiting a *causal narrative* in order to provide an explanation of some dire economic or political condition. In the process, speakers participating in the anti-big corporation hostility

discourse attempt to establish a connection with people's experiences of inequality in their relations with other groups in particular places and times, accentuating any resentments they may feel. Building on this insight, my first research questions are:

RQ1: What key social, economic, environmental or political problems have politicians associated with big corporations in America in the early 21st century?

RQ2: Is there a causal narrative that can be identified in particular public communications that are associated with big corporations? Who is presented as the victim, and who the perpetrator?

1.2.2 Identification theory

The discourse of big corporation hostility is a form of identity politics. In 1979, Anspach first used the term identity politics to refer to activism by people with disabilities to transform both self- and societal conceptions of this group (Anspach, 1979). In modern society, identity politics can be used to describe a wide range of social phenomena, including feminist activism, the LGBTQ and civil rights movements, and separatist movements in Canada and Spain, among others. The concept attempts to capture the way in which people invest in their unique identities to justify their claims, seek support and secure or consolidate their interests on various fronts. In a nutshell, an identity becomes a vehicle for contestations of power, resources, opportunities (Lipsitz 2006). According to Kenneth Burke's identification theory, "[i]ndividuals form selves or identities through various properties of substances, which include such things as physical objects, occupations, friends, activities, beliefs, and values. As they ally themselves with various properties of substances, they share substance with whatever and whomever they associate and simultaneously define themselves against or separate themselves from others with whom they choose not to identify" (Foss, Foss & Trapp 2014).

Identification as a discursive tactic can be operationalized on three different levels. First, identification can be constructed by shared experiences. Anti-big corporation hostility is typically targeted at a broad swathe of the US population. Hostility signals can be targeted at people who directly suffer from unemployment, economic inequality and stress, which might be assumed to increase people's awareness of the socioeconomic class differences and to stimulate related political conflicts. Second, identification is also a process to identify common enemies. The audience of anti-big corporation hostility is identified in contrast with – indeed, as a victim of the machinations of - big corporations, in order to establish an us-vs.-them relationship, in which 'us' refers to the rhetor and the audience, while 'them' refers to big corporations. For example, Bernie Sanders often contrasts big corporations' profitability with the high unemployment rate in the United States and underscores the way in which he as a politician rejects the political agendas of 'big money'. This rhetorical strategy is attempting to demonstrate that Sanders shares a joint interest – i.e., he identifies – with the 'rest of us', as opposed to 'big money' or big corporations. Third, identification can be promoted by taking advantage of people's pre-existing perceptions regarding certain problems. For example, big corporations are often blamed both for repressing small businesses and exploiting consumers through their monopoly-based pricing, and for unfairly exercising political influence (over one's political opponents, of course). In this way, by attacking big companies, politicians can identify both themselves and their audience as the victims of big corporations.

Yet there are also ambiguities and tensions. In terms of the sheer number of discrete entities, according to the US Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy (2016), American businesses are overwhelmingly small business (99.7%). On the other hand, fully 39.2 percent American workforce was employed at either a large or very large company in 2014

(Gaetano 2017). In this context, different words may resonate with people in different ways. Against the backdrop of the census data, it is plausible that “small business” might be a positive element in the identities constructed for a significant share of the population, while in contrast, working as an employee of a big corporation may not necessarily trigger an identification politically (among such employees) with the interests of big corporations generally – Marx’s theory of alienation might have provided explanations on why this might be the case. Any identity associated with big corporations would arguably not cross the boundaries of an individual company; an employee of a major tech giant is unlikely to feel an affinity with the interests of a major bank, or a large pharmaceutical company. In this way, attacking big corporations to address individual voters and an amorphous but resonant class of small business owners may become an effective way for political influencers to address themselves to a (possibly incipient and amorphous) socioeconomic class consciousness.

Thus, my next research questions are:

RQ3: Is there a commonality/shared set of experiences implicit in particular public communications by political influencers regarding big corporations?

RQ4: Is there an “us-vs.-them” relationship identifiable within the discourse concerning big corporations? If yes, then who is identified as “us” and who is “them”?

1.2.3 Ideograph theory

The discourse of big corporation hostility provides *dialogues of conflict* and shapes the speaker as the fighter or the representative of the “people” by deploying battle imagery, moral critiques and ideographs. Ideograph, coined for use in the study of rhetoric by Michael McGee in 1980, is a term used to describe words that illustrate or reveal cultural ideology, collective

thought, and a system of ideals and ideas. Often noted in scholarship through the use of brackets (e.g., <freedom>), an ideograph sheds light on the political and social consciousness of a collective of people (Stassen-Ferrara, 2017). “The concept ‘ideograph’,” McGee (1980) elaborated, “is meant to be purely descriptive of an essentially social human condition. Unlike more general conceptions of ‘Ultimate’ or ‘God’ terms, attention is called to the social, rather than rational or ethical, functions of a particular vocabulary. This vocabulary is precisely a group of words and not a series of symbols representing ideas.” McGee further distinguished the “usage” from underlying “ideas” associated with the words: “[t]he significance of ideographs is in their concrete history as usages, not in their alleged idea-content” (McGee, 1980). Ideographs are frequently used in political discourse to justify actions, such as articulating an act of war as protection of <freedom> (Stassen-Ferrara 2017). Some participants in the big corporation hostility discourse frequently link anger or resentment towards corporations with ideographs such as <equality>, <middle class>, and <family>.

The study of ideographs as a research paradigm is a useful method to uncover ideological structures in a society. It identifies the values implicit in ideographs, how the culture employs ideographs in clusters to create a consonant effect, and how ideographs perpetuate particular interests (Hutchison 2013). The practical application and use of clustered ideographs can also help to distinguish between discursive communities and/or factions within those communities (Hutchison 2013).

There are many ways to operationalize ideograph analysis. *Diachronic* analysis usually has a historical focus and asserts that “ideographs must remain relatively stable in terms of their application to a given social issue and their relationship to other ideographs” (Hutchison 2013), which provides researchers a referenceable range of concepts and related applications. For

example, President Barack Obama addressed American economic inequality with the classic ideology of the <American dream>: “While some have prospered beyond imagination in this global economy, middle-class Americans – as well as those working hard to become middle class – are seeing the American dream slip further and further away” (Luce 2007). *Synchronic* ideograph analysis examines analyzes the extended heuristic values and different dimensions of meaning across different ideographs. In scrutinizing big corporation hostility, many ideographs repeatedly surface in multiple politicians’ public communications and media programs.

In this dissertation, the deployment of ideographs is identified as one of the major traits within the big corporation hostility discourse. Thus, my next research questions are:

RQ5: What kind of ideographs can be identified from public communication associated with big corporations?

RQ6: What specific affective effects are achieved when certain ideographs deployed in public communication are associated with big corporations?

Chapter 2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

My research questions focus on characteristics within specific communication texts, and I employ the method of content analysis. Content analysis is particularly suitable to this topic, because it is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use” (Krippendorff, 2013). Neuendorf points out that content analysis is a quantitative form of analysis that can systematically and objectively capture message characteristics (Neuendorf, 2017). Content analysis has strictly defined steps that should be used in any research design. In this dissertation, the main goal of conducting content analysis is to systematically analyze the verbal symbols of big corporation hostility in particular settings of public expression by American political leaders.

2.1 Text as data

As many communication and politics scholars have agreed on, language is the medium of politics and political conflicts (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). To characterize the discourses of big corporation hostility, I conducted content analysis on two sets of corpora I collected for this research. One was *speeches* from the Congressional Record that included an emphasis on big corporations. The second set of data was the discourse within congressional *hearings* about big corporations. These two datasets provided a rich foundation of texts on which to draw.

The Congressional Record is a daily account of the business and communications in each chamber of the U.S. Congress and their committees. The Record consists of four sections: the House of Representatives section, the Senate section, the Extensions of Remarks (used only by House of Representative members to publish additional statements not actually delivered on

the House floor) and the Daily Digest (providing a summary of the previous day's legislative activity).

Speeches in the Congressional Record that include discussion of big corporations formed the first corpus of this study for several reasons. First, congressional discourse provides a public embodiment of politicians' stances on issues related to big corporations; it includes the rhetorical devices and positions that politicians explicitly wish to emphasize on the record to define their stances with respect to any given issue. Second, because of their scope and ability for remarks to be extended at will in some cases, the speeches in the Congressional Record provide an inclusive and relatively unabridged picture of one source of the politics around big corporations in the United States. Third, most of the speeches collected in the Congressional Record occur in the context of specific debates among representatives and senators, which include not only the political stances on the issues but a complex and context-rich presentation of the rationales behind such stances -- at least in theory. Thus, these debates reveal not only politician stances, but also the discursive tactics politicians deployed to attempt to make persuasive arguments. By conducting content analysis on the broader dataset, we can grasp the general patterns found in this discourse and address the research questions that undergird this dissertation.

The second corpus set was Congressional Hearings that include discussion of big corporations. Congressional Hearings are part of overall congressional actions, but they are not included in the daily Congressional Record (which focuses on what occurs in "regular" business and does not include hearings). In addition, communications in hearings differ from speeches on the congressional floor or in committees in two significant ways. First, the intended or implied audiences are different. Speeches in the Congressional Record are mainly political debates between professional politicians and are generally reflective of significant moments in policy and

legislation formation. In the hearings, the politicians interact with a wide range of public actors, the vast majority of whom are not elected officials. Thus, the communicative interchanges are different in hearings. Second, congressional hearings also are often high-profile because “witnesses” are “called to testify,” which can at times elevate the drama above regular-business congressional discourse. As a result, public hearings on big corporation-related cases often draw significant attention from the mainstream news media. Although Congressional Record content is a public record, which grants longevity to the speeches collected, mass media-amplified texts have the potential for a different kind of impact in the public arena. This is true both because mass media distribute information to a bigger population, and because of the intrinsic power of social media, in which some excerpts in hearings become fodder for social media posts and go viral in short periods of time. I do not in this dissertation examine mass media texts, but by closely looking at the hearings, we can elaborate some contextual factors that shed light on the specific political agendas behind the big corporation hostility discourse.

2.2 Time Frame

For the first set of data, I examined the big-corporation-related content in the Congressional Record for the period 2000 to 2020. This is a 21-year time span, which has the potential to capture some changing emphases and trends within the discourse over time. According to available public opinion surveys among Americans, some significant changes over this period appear to be evident in regard to attitudes toward big corporations. In 2001 – the first year for which I can find this kind of specific question being asked in a major survey – 47% of Americans reported feeling very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the size and influence of major corporations, while 17% of Americans said they were very dissatisfied with the same

(Gallup, 2001). In 2020, Gallup asked the same question: this time, the number of “very satisfied” and “somewhat satisfied” had dropped modestly to 41%, while the number of “very dissatisfied” people nearly doubled, to 32%. The factors driving and amplifying such longitudinal opinion changes can be very complicated, but may plausibly include changes in the political discourse surrounding corporations.

There are also social incidents to mark changes over time. The end of 1999 saw a series of massive protests surrounding the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference of 1999. It has been estimated that no fewer than 40,000 protesters participated in these large-scale demonstrations in Seattle, Washington. In this anti-global trade protest, many of the targets for vandalism by protestors in downtown Seattle were the outlets of large corporations. The ‘anti-globalization’ and ‘anti-big corporation’ discourses are very plausibly linked, conceptually and practically.

Also, Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* was published in 1999. It posited that intrusive marketing schemes of consumer capitalism led to significant human misery. Klein focused on many household-name brands of large corporations, such as McDonalds, Nike, Shell, Starbucks, Disney, Coca-Cola, and Microsoft. In Klein’s view, the bombarding stream of “logo” marketing is all about monopoly power, which is not coincidentally one of the socioeconomic reasons underlining big corporation hostility discussed in the previous chapter. Klein had a hard time finding a publisher in the United States at the time, but her book has since been translated into more than 30 languages and it continues to be in print around the world. It has inspired both artists and protests, and has become an influential part of youth subculture. So, too, did the concentrated anti-corporate anger expressed in her book, one can infer.

In the first decade of the period under review (2000 to 2010), anti-corporate anger intermingled further with strains of anti-globalization, anti-monopoly and anti-consumer capitalism and became one manifestation of ‘resentment politics’ in the United States. Katherine Cramer in her book *The Politics of Resentment* (2016) explores the intense resentment on the part of rural residents against their urban counterparts. The geographic boundaries between rural and urban coincide with the “us” and “them” parsed out from the big corporation hostility discourse; the headquarters of big corporations are, of course, typically located in big cities, and the cultures in big corporations tend to be more urban and more liberal, socially if not politically. In general, the images associated with most big corporations are primarily urban. While from a genealogical perspective, as Engels (2021) asserted, the history of resentment politics can be dated to Athenian Democracy, there is ample evidence that the discourse still takes on numerous contemporary forms, as shown in both Cramer’s research findings (based on interviews she conducted from 2007 to 2012) of the existence of a strong “rural consciousness”, and the current discussion of big corporation hostility discourse.

Further, the manifestation of resentment politics intensified between 2009 and 2020. The Tea Party movement crystallized in 2009, and it targeted, among other facets, a significant reduction in the size and purposes of the government. Furthermore, in September 2011 a protest against economic inequality arose as the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement. The protestors’ slogan “We are the 99%” referred to income and wealth inequality in the U.S. between the wealthiest 1% and the rest of the population. In the 2016 election year, Democratic Party presidential candidate Bernie Sanders campaigned with a strong emphasis on economic inequality and with a clear policy-based and rhetorical attack on the wealthiest 1% of the population and on big corporations. From 2016 to 2020, the camp of politicians who branded themselves as anti-big

corporation grew, including high-profile candidates and national political figures such as Elizabeth Warren and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

In a nutshell, 2000 to 2020 has been a time during which contemporary big corporation hostility grew *in conjunction with* the rise of resentment politics, and marks a period from which we have yet to clearly emerge. This time frame is thus of significant interest and value for the potential contribution of empirical research in this dissertation to the understanding of contemporary political dynamics in the United States.

2.3 Datasets

To build the two corpuses, I began by searching the Congressional Record and Congressional Hearings for content using the search terms “big corporation” and “big business.” After conducting searches using these two key terms, I read 20 randomly selected items from the Congressional Record to immerse myself further in the discourse, before settling on final search terms. After this close reading, I added the search term “corporate interests.”

Using these three search terms, I collected two sets of corpora – one for the Congressional Record, the other for the Congressional Hearings. To be clear, my search string for both of these datasets included any mention of the following terms: “big corporation” *or* “big business” *or* “corporate interests”. The “or” means that any communication that contained at least one of these phrases was flagged in the sample. The time frame applied was January 1, 2000, to December 31, 2020.

The Congressional Record is a daily collection of the communications within each chamber of the U.S. Congress and their committees. The Record includes legislative activity by the chambers and their committees, member remarks, communications from the president etc. –

basically, everything that occurs as a matter of public record. At congress.gov, I implemented the search string for the dates; the returned communications were downloaded into an Excel file. I removed duplicates, leaving 2,638 items. Each record, as noted, contained at least one of the search terms. Most of the items collected from the Record were individual speeches by senators or House representatives during floor proceedings and debates, while other items included statements, news coverage, and testimony that Senators or Representatives did not present on the floor but rather inserted into the Congressional Record as an official position with respect to bills under discussion.

The corpus of Congressional Hearings was retrieved at govinfo.gov. This web database contains select House and Senate hearings beginning with the 104th Congress (1995-96) onward. Thus, not *all* congressional hearings are available in this database; however, note that no hearings are included in the Congressional Record, and therefore the govinfo.gov source is the best available collection of congressional hearing transcripts. Using the search string, I identified 1,205 congressional hearings over the 21 years in question. The search results were downloaded into an Excel file; there were no duplicates.

Table 2.1. Summary of Search Results

<i>Search Terms</i>	<i>Congressional Records</i>	<i>Congressional Hearings</i>
<i>"big corporation" OR "big business" OR "corporate interests"</i>	2638	1205

The search results in the excel file included title, dates, URL of the full text of the issue (and URL links to pdf. files), issue number, and unique code. The same python text-extracting codes were applied, and 1,205 full texts of congressional hearings were downloaded. Each record

contained at least one of the search terms, as noted above. The retrieved items were full public hearings, usually including witness statements and the remarks of senators or representatives.

For both corpora, I defined the unit of analysis to be *the specific instance of invocation of a search term*, together with its immediate context. Each instance was then coded for all of the variables in the study, to which I now turn.

2.4 Content Analysis

2.4.1 Unit of Analysis

Once these two corpora were collected, the next step was to transfer the texts into data. For both corpora, I parsed the texts into instances as the units of analysis. Because of the nature of the Congressional Record, one record often contained more than one speaker's speeches and more than one theme. To locate and focus on big corporation-related invocations, I located each instance by counting about 100 words above and after the appearance of the search term. So, each instance included was approximately 200 words long, unless the speech itself was shorter than 200 words; in such cases, the whole speech of one speaker was considered as a complete instance.

2.4.2 Sampling Strategy

Given the nature of the data, I decided to draw a sample from the two corpora that I collected. To ensure a 99% confidence level and 5% margin of error for my findings, the sample size for the Congressional Record dataset was set at 550 instances. With the same rules applied, the sample size for Congressional Hearing dataset was set at 334 instances. As mentioned above, the two sets of samples were randomly selected.

2.4.3 Descriptions of Variables

The codebook was designed to capture the latent characteristics of the big corporation hostility discourse. Every question in the codebook corresponded, at least partially, to one of the research questions presented in chapter one. In this way, there were groups of variables corresponding to the five research questions.

The first group of variables aimed at recording the general information of each instance. These variables included “time”, “official”, “party”, “attitude”, “company”, “industry”, and “business leader”.

Table 2.2. Summary of Variable Description (1)

Variables of general information ***Variable Description***

<i>“Time”</i>	The variable “Time” recorded the date the instance was published as part of Congressional Record.
<i>“Official”</i>	The variable “Official” recorded if the speaker of the instance was an elected official at the time when the speech was given.
<i>“Party”</i>	The variable “Party” recorded the party affiliation of the speaker of the instance.
<i>“Attitude”</i>	The variable “Attitude” captured the general attitude expressed in the whole communication containing the instance, could be negative, neutral and positive.
<i>“Company”</i>	The variable “Company” recorded if an instance mentioned the name of any particular company/corporation.
<i>“Industry”</i>	The variable “Industry” recorded if an instance mentioned the name of any particular industry.
<i>“Business Leader”</i>	The variable “Business Leader” recorded if an instance mentioned the name of any particular business leader(s).

The second group of variables addressed answer research question one, and was designed to examine multiple social, economic, environmental or political issues potentially associated with big corporations. As a result, this second group contained a series of binary variables indicating if any of the issues was mentioned as a problem, or in a negative light, in the instance. If the instances mentioned any issues not identified in the code book, the coders identified the issue in one open-ended question.

Table 2.3. Summary of Variable Description (2)

<i>Issues associated with big corporations</i>	<i>Variable Description</i>
<i>“Low Income”</i>	The variable “Low Income” indicated if the instance associated low-income population issues with big corporations.
<i>“Taxation”</i>	The variable “Taxation” indicated if the instance mentioned/associated unfair taxation issues with big corporations.
<i>“Competition”</i>	The variable “Competition” indicated if the instance mentioned/associated unfair competition issues with big corporations.
<i>“Local Economy”</i>	The variable “Local Economy” indicated if the instance mentioned big corporations having a negative impact on local economy.
<i>“Health Insurance”</i>	The variable “Health Insurance” indicated if the instance mentioned/associated health insurance issues with big corporations.
<i>“Environmental Issues”</i>	The variable “Environmental Issues” indicated if the instance mentioned/associated environmental issues with big corporations.
<i>“Economic Efficiency”</i>	The variable “Economic Efficiency” indicated if the instance mentioned big corporations as having a negative impact on economic efficiency.
<i>“Net Neutrality”</i>	The variable “Net Neutrality” indicated if the instance mentioned/associated net neutrality issues with big corporations.
<i>“Political Influence”</i>	The variable “Political Influence” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied big corporations having unfair political influence on the government and on policymaking.
<i>“Macroeconomic Impact”</i>	The variable “Macroeconomic Impact” indicated if the instance mentioned big

<i>“Judiciary Injustice”</i>	corporations having a negative impact on macro-economic factors in the U.S. The variable “Judiciary Injustice” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied big corporations as having an unfair impact on or influence over the judiciary.
<i>“Political Benefits”</i>	The variable “Political Benefits” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied big corporations as receiving any undue political benefits.
<i>“American Economy”</i>	The variable “American Economy” indicates if the instance mentioned big corporations as having any negative impact on the national economy in the U.S.
<i>“Big Money”</i>	The variable “big money” indicated if the instance mentioned big corporations in association with: i) illegal conduct like bribery/corruption; ii) legal influence activities like lobbying or making (legal) campaign contributions; or iii) both.

The third group of variables focused on social groups, and was designed to capture whether corporate people were identified as having ‘elite’ characteristics, and whether any particular social groups were depicted as being victims of big corporations. The variables were designed to cover as many social groups as possible; if any social group mentioned in the instance fell outside the scope of variables listed below, the coders added it in an open ending question.

Table 2.4. Summary of Variable Description (3)

<i>Social groups</i>	<i>Description of variables</i>
<i>“Elites”</i>	The variable “Elites” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied corporate people as being elites who are different than average Americans.
<i>“Young”</i>	The variable “Young” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied young people as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Senior”</i>	The variable “Senior” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied seniors as being the victims of big corporations.

<i>“Female”</i>	The variable “Female” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied females as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Male”</i>	The variable “Male” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied males as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“LGBTQ”</i>	The variable “LGBTQ” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied members of the LGBTQ community as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Caucasian”</i>	The variable “Caucasian” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied Caucasians as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Minority”</i>	The variable “Minority” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied any racial minorities in the U.S. as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Working Class”</i>	The variable “Working Class” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied the American working class as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Middle Class”</i>	The variable “Middle Class” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied the American middle class as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Rich”</i>	The variable “Rich” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied high-income people as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Small Business”</i>	The variable “Small Business” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied American small businesses as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Union”</i>	The variable “Union” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied unions as being the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Employee”</i>	The variable “Employee” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied employees of big corporations as being the victims of those big corporations.
<i>“Customer”</i>	The variable “Customer” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied that customers as a social group were the victims of big corporations.
<i>“Rural”</i>	The variable “Rural” indicated if the instance mentioned/implied rural communities as being the victims of big corporations.

The fourth group of variables focused on the discursive tactics evident speakers addressed big corporation-related issues in the sample. They are also binary variables that indicated if the characteristics were present.

Table 2.5. Summary of Variable Description (4)

<i>Discursive Tactics</i>	<i>Descriptions of variables</i>
“Characterizing Public Opinion”	The variable “Characterizing Public Opinion” indicated if the speaker used terms/words/sentences to evoke any purportedly common-sensical or universally held views (e.g., “we can all agree that...”, “we have all seen...”, “people all acknowledge that...” etc.)
“Magnitude”	The variable “Magnitude” indicated if the speaker implied/described that the problem under discussion was a very significant one in the experience of many Americans, or with particularly widespread social, political or economic consequences.
“Social Connectedness”	The variable “Social Connectedness” indicated if the speaker implied/described himself/herself as sharing, or being personally affected by, the predicament described in problem associated with big corporations.
“American Fighter”	The variable “American Fighter” indicated if the speaker implied/described himself/herself as fighting to protect America’ (i.e. the American public’s, the average American’s) interests.

The fifth group of variables aimed at locating any ideographs employed by the speakers in the instances. If any ideograph mentioned in the instance were not in the scope of the variables listed below, the coders added it to an open-ended question.

Table 2.6. Summary of Variable Description (5)

<i>Ideograph Variables</i>	<i>Descriptions of Variables</i>
“Change”	The variable “Change” indicated if the speaker used the ideograph <Change> in the instance.
“Fair”	The variable “Fair” indicated if the speaker used the ideograph <Fair> in the instance.
“Freedom”	The variable “Freedom” indicated if the speaker used the ideograph <Freedom> in the instance.
“American Dreams”	The variable “American Dreams” indicated if the speaker used the ideograph <American Dream> in the instance.
“Family”	The variable “Family” indicated if the speaker used the ideograph <Family> in the instance.

“God”	The variable “God” indicated if the speaker used the ideograph <God> in the instance.
“American People”	The variable “American People” indicated if the speaker used the ideograph <American People> in the instance.

The last group of variables examined the affective elements in these communications. Each binary variable indicated if there were certain sentiments expressed in the instances.

Table 2.7. Summary of Variable Description (6)

<i>Sentiments Variables</i>	<i>Descriptions of Variables</i>
“Indignant”	The variable “Indignant” indicated if the speaker expressed indignant sentiments in the instance.
“Excited”	The variable “Excited” indicated if the speaker expressed excited sentiments in the instance.
“Sad”	The variable “Sad” indicated if the speaker expressed sad sentiments in the instance.
“Happy”	The variable “Happy” indicated if the speaker expressed happy sentiments in the instance.

2.4.4 Coder Training and Inter-Coder Reliability

After the codebook was drafted, 84 instances (approximately 10% of the two datasets combined) were coded by two coders in order to test inter-coder reliability. All of the content variables were tested, but variables identifying the time, names (of business, industry and business leaders), and party affiliations were not tested. After several rounds of coder training, combined with revisions to the codebook, coders reached acceptable intercoder reliability.

Variables including “attitude”, “low income”, “net neutrality”, “taxation”, “environmental issues”, “political influence”, “political benefits”, “local economy”, “elites”, “senior”, “rural”, “fair” and “freedom”, all achieved 100% agreement rate, and thus Krippendorff’s Alpha were all reported as “1”.

The variables “macroeconomic impact” and “happy” both reported 100% agreement rate, but the coefficients were calculated as “undefined”. According to Freelon (2009), the reason the coefficient resulted as such was because of “invariant values” (when both coders selected the same variable value for every unit of analysis). Given the nature of the data and the clarity of the understanding reached with the two coders, these two variables were determined to be appropriately measured and accordingly were maintained in the sample.

The remaining variables and their Krippendorff’s Alpha coefficients are reported in Table 2.8.

Table 2.8. Summary of Inter-coder Reliability

	<i>Percent Agreement</i>	<i>Krippendorff’s Alpha</i>	<i>N Cases</i>	<i>N Decisions</i>
<i>“Health Insurance”</i>	95.2%	0.878	84	168
<i>“Judiciary injustice”</i>	97.6%	0.896	84	168
<i>“Big Money”</i>	96.4%	0.876	84	168
<i>“Competition”</i>	96.4%	0.838	84	168
<i>“Economy Efficiency”</i>	98.8%	0.95	84	168
<i>“American Economy”</i>	98.8%	0.95	84	168
<i>“Charactering Public Opinion”</i>	97.6%	0.919	84	168
<i>“Magnitude”</i>	95.2%	0.878	84	168
<i>“Social Connectedness”</i>	97.6%	0.896	84	168
<i>“Americans’ Fighter”</i>	94%	0.863	84	168
<i>“Young”</i>	98.8%	0.95	84	168
<i>“Working Class”</i>	92.9%	0.83	84	168
<i>“Middle Class”</i>	“90.5%”	0.799	84	168
<i>“Small Business”</i>	96.4%	0.838	84	168
<i>“Change”</i>	97.6%	0.845	84	168
<i>“Family”</i>	94%	0.86	84	168
<i>“Indignant”</i>	90.5%	0.81	84	168

2.4.5 Coding and Data Analysis

Two graduate students were trained to conduct human content analysis (the author was not a coder for this research). The coding process transferred textual data into statistical data in order to examine the research questions. The final sample size included 542 instances from the Congressional Record and 327 instances from the Congressional Hearings.

Quantitative content analysis was applied on these two samples, and descriptive and inferential statistics generated as results and research findings. I then included a comparative analysis of the two datasets. These findings are all reported the next chapter.

Chapter 3. THEMES AND EMPHASES IN THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

In this chapter, I present the results of the content analysis of big corporation discourse in the Congressional Record for the period of 2000 to 2020. I divide the chapter into four sections. In section 3.1, I provide a description of the underlying textual data, in order to provide insight into the range of issues and the approaches captured in the congressional communications. In section 3.2, I present in-depth statistical analysis on a number of propositions that I developed from my research questions (as introduced in chapter 1). In section 3.3, I summarize the empirical findings and extrapolate them into some new directions. Finally, in section 3.4, I summarize the key findings of the chapter.

3.1 Descriptive Overview of Textual Data

Communications in the Congressional Record are at the apex of the American political system at the federal level. Some speakers focused on assigning big corporations as the cause of a series of economic and political misfortunes in American society. Other speakers framed big corporations or corporate leaders in opposition to “average Americans,” and as so grotesquely privileged that other social groups must perforce be the victims of a rigged economic system. Beyond such prominent ideological themes, some speakers deployed discursive tactics functioning to demonstrate the bonds between the politician speakers and their audience and constituents, through the mentioning of some ideographs with emotive characteristics and through expressions of indignation. In what follows, I first present several indicative examples of

prominent characteristics of the discourse surrounding big corporation hostility, as observed in this setting, as a precursor to diving into the quantitative evidence.

The first key characteristic of big corporation hostility discourse was its rhetorical grounding in economic and political issues. The top two economic issues appearing in the speeches were taxation and health insurance. California Representative Maxine Waters made comments on the taxation theme in 2018 that aligned with many others in the sample:

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the many ways the bill would be harmful. Republicans have stacked the bill with provisions that have nothing to do with benefiting hardworking Americans and everything to do with helping out Wall Street. Donald Trump and the Republicans already gave a huge gift to big corporations with the tax scam, which came at the expense of hardworking Americans. Now they are pushing this rotten giveaway to Wall Street and big banks that harms consumers and increases the risk of another financial crisis.

Water's comments very explicitly pointed to what she saw as the conflict at the core of the issue: corporate interests being furthered by an unfair taxation policy, which had harmful effects on welfare programs and ultimately on working class Americans' interests, in ways that had played out over many years.

Besides reducing overall social welfare, big corporations were sometimes portrayed as an encompassing cause of economic problems faced by Americans. Senator Edward Markey in 2017 said: "Instead of protecting our privacy, our healthcare, our environment, or our net neutrality, the Republicans want to give it all away to their friends and allies and big corporations." The tendency in this and related statements was to accuse one's political opponents of advocating some underlying substantive policy content considered pernicious or

unfair, such as the taxation policy referred to here, while at the same time implying that those opponents benefited politically from the support of unworthy actors in a quasi-corrupt exchange. Indeed, among several other high-profile politicians, 2020 presidential candidate and senator Elizabeth Warren made a political brand out of fighting the presumed illegitimate interests and pernicious effects of big corporations. In a legislative session in 2018, she said:

The first move by the White House is not a memo to the American people talking about the nominee's independence or talking about his commitment to justice for everyone but a memo to business lobbyists highlighting Judge Kavanaugh's loyalty to big business. That is a key part of Donald Trump's public case for Judge Kavanaugh -- the promise that Judge Kavanaugh will tilt the playing field even further in favor of corporations and against working people.

In this speech, Warren elaborated her opposition to an alleged nexus of business lobbyists, big corporation elites, President Trump and the Republican Party, all of whom she asserted worked in secretive ways to the detriment of the working class in America; in this way, middle- and working-class America, on the one hand, and the unholy nexus described above, on the other, were practically defined in opposition to each other.

An example in a similar vein was an excerpt from Representative Bob Brady in 2011: Corporations and special interests are donating massive sums of money, and some may expect a return on their investment. Unfortunately, this return often comes at the expense of the American people and sometimes at the expense of the integrity of this body.

Brady's rhetoric marked the second characteristic arising in the big corporation hostility discourse, in which the "middle class" – especially "working class Americans" or in general

“the American people” – were framed as the victims of corporate interests. At times, this rhetoric was further elaborated to identify specific alleged categories of the victims of corporate power and interests, including younger generations, seniors, small businesses, corporate employees, and consumers, among other groups.

Third, there were numerous examples of discursive tactics deployed to appeal to cognitive and affective public reactions. Rhetorical strategies in this vein included the combination of emphasizing the *magnitude* and *dire nature* of the problems Americans faced, combined with expressions of strongly “indignant” sentiments, oftentimes deployed via ideographs including <American>, <Fair>, and <family>. As Representative Brady continued, in the same 2011 legislative session quoted above:

The voluntary public finance system for Presidential campaigns was created in the early seventies as a direct result of the corruption of Watergate, the largest political scandal of our generation. Stopping corruption and the appearance of corruption is as important today as it was during the Nixon years. The level of spending by corporations and special interests since the Supreme Court’s decision in Citizens United should give every American reason for concern. Do my Republican colleagues really believe that more corporate and special interest money in politics is going to benefit in any way the 99 percent of Americans who don’t have lobbyists?

This excerpt captured several characteristics of the big corporation hostility discourse: the magnitude (severity) of the problems caused by corporations and the notion that the politician speaker was fighting for the majority of the Americans, both coupled with expressions of indignation and the invoking of emotive ideographs (e.g. <American>).

In the following section, I turn to the description and analysis of systematic quantitative evidence from the data with the goal to address the research questions established in Chapter 1.

3.2 Research Questions and Propositions Testing

This section begins with an overview and descriptive statistics regarding the big corporation-related speeches in the Congressional Record sample. Figure 3.1 presents the distribution of identified instances within this discourse by year. There is no outstanding pattern except to note significantly more mentions of big corporations in 2011, 2017 and 2020.

Figure 3.2 presents the identified distribution of instances by party affiliation of the speakers. More than two-thirds – 70.3% – of the big corporation-related mentions were made by politicians from the Democratic Party, while 27.1% of the instances from the sample were made by Congressional Republicans. In 2.6% of the instances, the speaker’s party affiliation was unclear; for example, speakers sometimes quoted excerpts or statements from sources outside of Congress.

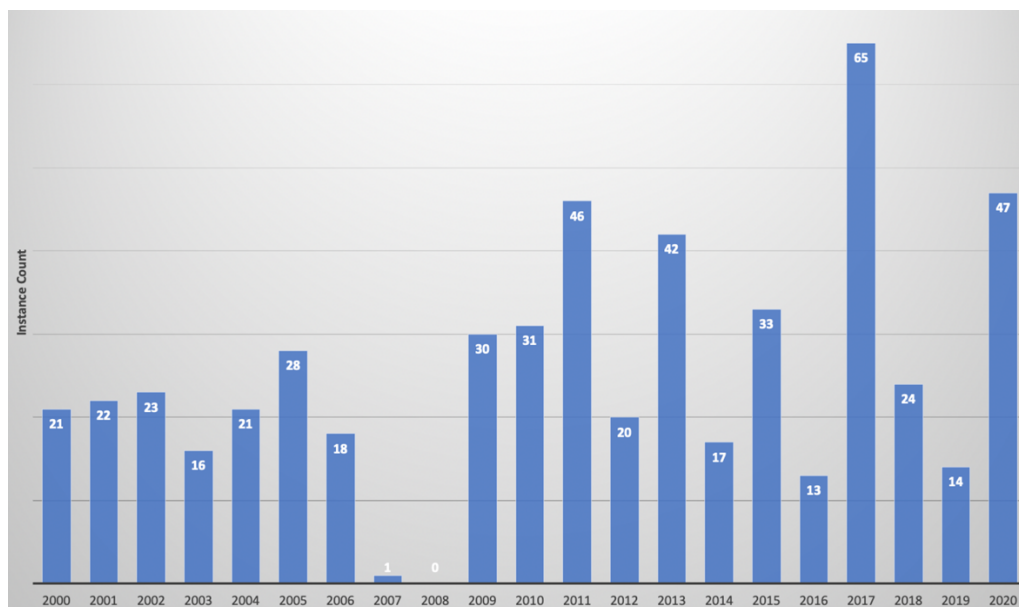


Figure 3.1 Instances Distribution of Congressional Record by Year

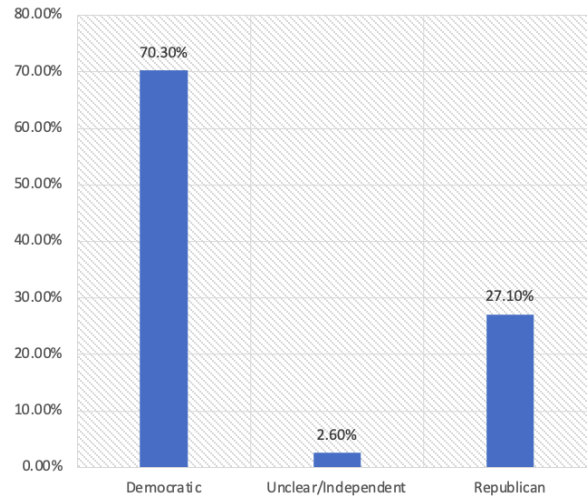


Figure 3.2 Instances Distribution by Party in Congressional Record

In terms of the discursive choices made by speakers, Democratic politicians mentioned big corporation issues more frequently than Republicans. At the same time, the attitude revealed was overwhelmingly negative when big corporations did appear in these speeches (Figure 3.3.), no matter which party invoked them (though more subtle distinctions between parties are explored below). A Chi-Square Test shows the contingency between party affiliation and attitude expressed in the speech, which is statistically significant ($p < .05$). More implications are discussed in the following sections in this chapter and in chapter 4.

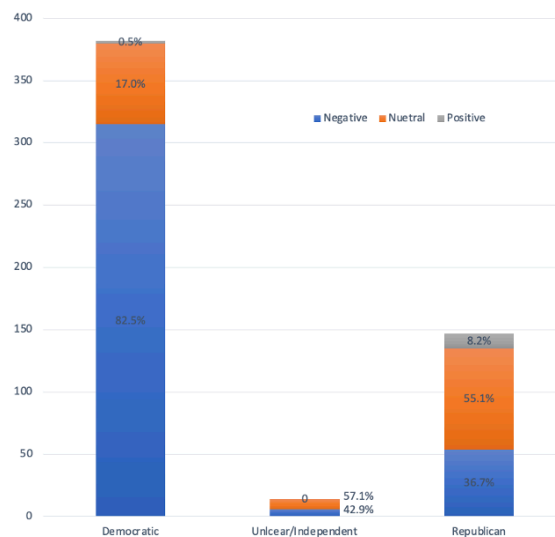


Figure 3.3. Instance Distribution by Party and Attitude in Congressional Record

The research questions designed in Chapter 1 aimed at capturing discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility. As a next step in my conducting of this research, I drew upon scholarship and a close reading of the historical and contemporary political climate in the U.S. context to move from the research questions to several more specific propositions – or what might be thought of as informal research expectations. The process of developing these propositions was a hybrid of deductive and inductive reasoning. I started from the theoretical frameworks presented earlier, then looked for patterns emerging in data analysis I conducted, going back and forth between the theoretical frameworks and data analysis. In this way, I was able to capture and test the discursive characteristics found in the data and indicated from the theories. I will state these propositions while moving through the analysis.

The first research question was this:

RQ1: What key social, economic, environmental or political problems have politicians associated with big corporations in America in the early 21st century?

Building upon this, the first proposition I developed was that “the image of big corporations was likely to be negatively associated by the speaker with economic problems, including income inequality, (insufficient) health insurance, (unfair) taxation, and economic inefficiency, whether at the national or local levels of the U.S. economy.” In Table 3.1, I summarize the range of percentages of the total analyzed speaking instances that addressed economic issues; these factors were coded ‘present’ when they were negatively associated with big corporations. The number of identified instances was large enough to determine the mean occurrence of specific economic themes with a high degree of confidence.

Table 3.1. Percentage of Mentioning by Economic Variables
Variables Percentage of Mentions

	<i>95% Confidence interval</i>
<i>Health Insurance</i>	23.0% [19.5% ~ 26.6%]
<i>Taxation</i>	21.4% [17.9% ~ 24.8%]
<i>Low Income</i>	15.8% [12.8% ~ 18.9%]
<i>American Economy</i>	13.1% [10.2% ~ 15.9%]
<i>Environmental Issues</i>	12.9% [10.1% ~ 15.7%]
<i>Competition</i>	8.5% [6.3% ~ 11.0%]
<i>Economic Efficiency</i>	2.8% [1.4% ~ 4.1%]
<i>Net Neutrality</i>	2.4% [1.2% ~ 3.9%]
<i>Macroeconomic Impact</i>	1.5% [0.5% ~ 2.5%]
<i>Local Economy</i>	1.5% [0.5% ~ 2.5%]

The top three economic issues that were associated by members of Congress with big corporations across this 21-year period were “Health insurance”, “Taxation”, and “Low income” populations. Among these economic variables, health insurance was often presented in combination with taxation issues; in fact, these two variables were correlated in instances, $r = 0.21$ ($p < .001$). This was due to two factors: one, the assertion by speakers that one of the first areas affected by tax cuts was or would be health insurance; two, an association of gross unfairness underlying both phenomena (i.e., “undeserving rich receiving a tax break while basic needs suffer”), a communication pairing that emphasized the indignation of the speaker.

Low-income populations were also posited as being one of the major social issues caused by big corporations. For example, here is Representative Jim McGovern talking about the wage difference between a minimum wage worker and a corporate CEO in 2006:

If you want a minimum wage, then vote for it up or down. Don’t clutter it up with tax breaks for millionaires and for special corporate interests...The fact of the matter is that it takes a full day’s pay for a minimum-wage earner to fill just one tank of gas. The average CEO earns 821 times more than a minimum-wage worker. The average CEO earns more before lunchtime than a minimum-wage worker earns all year.

In this speech, the causal relationship was not clearly demonstrated, but the narrative illustrated the dramatic contrast and the image of unfairness – discursive characteristics that were quite commonly found in the broader sample.

Environmental issues were another item often associated with big corporations, mainly from the perspective of large agriculture and industrial conglomerates that have dominated the market, and oil companies posited as overly exploitative of natural resources while enjoying political influence over the politicians who might otherwise restrain them. An excerpt from Representative Rosa DeLauro in 2003 presented this dynamic:

It consists entirely of subsidies to corporations and rollbacks of environmental protection laws. It is a virtual grab-bag of giveaways to corporate interests. To say nothing of the severe public health threat posed as a result of the environmental exemptions included in the bill affecting the air we breathe and the water we drink, I would specifically like to raise my strong opposition to two provisions that exemplify the special interest giveaways in this twelve hundred-plus page bill.

Ever since big business became an important economic entity in America some 150 years ago, anti-monopoly sentiment has been a mainstream criticism leveled against big corporations. One of the most foundational arguments against monopoly is that big corporations repress competition. This argument was expressed by Senator Chuck Schumer in 2018: “We will have less competition because this tax bill has given the big corporations money so they can buy other corporations and reduce competition.” The presumption was that virtually every penny big corporation saved from a tax cut would contribute to their efforts to repress competition. Along the same lines, big corporations also were associated with low efficiency, and in that way were asserted to be exerting a negative impact on the American economy writ large, in general terms.

The interesting contrast here was that this negative impact did not tend to be delineated by scale (variable “local economy”: 1.5% [0.5% ~ 2.5%]) nor by specific type of impact (variable “macroeconomic impact”: 1.5% [0.5% ~ 2.5%]), but rather focused in very general terms on “American economy” (13.1% [10.2% ~ 15.9%]). From a rhetorical point of view, this allowed speakers to combine the economic critique with a broad construction of the victims of the nexus of politicians and big corporations.

To summarize, several variables surrounding economic factors proved to be consistent predictors of the big corporation hostility discourse. In this way, proposition 1 found support in the Congressional Record communications analyzed.

I developed a second proposition: “The image of American’s big corporations is likely to be negatively associated with political issues, including big corporations political influence, alleged corruption and judicial interference.” In Table 3.2., I identify the political issues most frequently associated with big corporations by congressional speakers.

Table 3.2. Percentage of Mentioning by Political Variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions 95% Confidence interval</i>
<i>Judicial interference</i>	10.1% [7.6% ~ 12.7%]
<i>Exerting undue political influence</i>	23.8% [20.3% ~ 27.5%]
<i>Receiving undue political benefits</i>	59.9% [55.7% ~64.0%]

These data show that claims about big corporations being the beneficiaries of undue political benefits (i.e., inappropriate, corrupting in its effects or undermining of democracy) were by far the most commonly connected negative influence (present in 59.9% [55.7% ~64.0%] of instances), followed by exertion of general undue political influence 23.8% [20.3% ~ 27.5%]. In addition, 10.1% [7.6% ~ 12.7%] of the instances negatively associated big corporations with

undue influence in the judicial setting. In many ways, the variables “political influence” and “political benefits” are two sides of the same coin, implying the mechanism by which big corporations achieve their favored status, with the implied losers or victims in the process being any group or ideal presumed virtuous, such as small businesses, middle America, or democracy itself.

The mention of “big money” was another important characteristic of the big corporation hostility discourse, appearing in 12.1% [9.5% ~ 15.1%] of all instances. “Big money” was typically presented as synonymous with big corporations and highlighted the mechanisms and pathways through which big corporate influence was supposedly exerted. This emphasis attempted to distinguish between presumably, or at least possibly, “legal” pathways through which “big money” works influence – such as through the lobbying process or (legal) campaign contributions – as opposed to explicitly corrupt or illegal pathways, such as the bribery of public officials. Table 3.3 indicates that most of the mentions of “big money” were on the ostensibly legal path. The supposed “legality” did not imply approval of the practice, but rather the sense in which the “legal” system was arguably itself rigged against the “good/virtuous/little” people.

Table 3.3 Percentage of Mentioning of “Big money”

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions 95% Confidence interval</i>
<i>Bribery/corruption or any illegal misconduct</i>	3.0% [1.6% ~ 4.4%]
<i>Lobbying or sponsoring electoral campaign</i>	6.7% [4.3% ~ 9.0%]
<i>Both bribery/corruption and lobbying/sponsoring</i>	2.4% [2.0% ~ 2.8%]
<i>Big Money (total)</i>	12.1% [9.5% ~ 15.1%]

The following excerpt from Senator Chuck Schumer's speech in 2000 is a long one, but it well summarizes the basic discursive logic of the negative associations between economic political issues and big corporations:

Yes, if your principles say the law should be used time and time again to support powerful corporate interests over average Americans, maybe there is no principled objection. But for most Americans, the overwhelming majority of whom want the Court to bring justice to the people who have less power -- and the Court is their last resort -- there are plenty of principled reasons to vote against Judge Gorsuch. Because of starkly unequal concentrations of wealth and ever-increasing corporate power, aided and abetted by decisions like Citizens United, because they have skewed the playing field even more decisively to special interests and away from the individual citizen, we need a nominee who would reverse that trend, not exacerbate it. Donald Trump campaigned on helping average people. His nominee sides with corporate interests against average people like Mr. Maddin, Ms. Caplinger, and the Hwang family over and over again. From all indications, Judge Gorsuch is not the kind of nominee who has sympathy and helps average Americans when it comes to judging and the law.

This speech excerpt captures that economic and political factors appearing in the big corporation hostility congressional discourse were often mixed and combined to synergistic effect.

To summarize, the variables concerning various political factors and effects of big corporations were a notable presence in the big corporation hostility discourse. Both propositions above received support in the empirical findings. It is interesting in this context to note that the

single most common characteristic of any examined so far was the assertion of big corporations as unduly and unfairly benefiting from the political system, present in 55.7% ~ 64.0% of all instances of congressional discourse about big corporations.

The second research question was:

RQ2: Is there a contrast narrative that can be identified in the public communications that is associated with big corporations? Who is presented as the victim and who is the perpetrator?

Based on RQ2, I developed the proposition that “American big corporations and corporate people would likely be depicted as an elite class in politicians’ speeches.” “Elites” is far from a value-neutral term in the American social context; in fact, it is loaded with affective appeals. The findings suggest that framing corporate people as “elites” was present, but far from ubiquitous in big corporation-related speeches. One t-test was run on the data, showing that 15% ($p < .001$) of the communications identified corporate people as elites (95% confidence interval: 12%~19%). This statistically significant result provides evidence that framing corporate people as “elites” was one of the prominent discursive tactics politicians chose to apply in their speeches. To give an example of this pattern, U.S. Senator of Illinois Dick Durbin connected “corporate interests” with the wealthiest families in the U.S. in 2014 and emphasized that they are both economic and political elites:

Big-money donors – and their names are familiar to those who follow the world of politics; the Koch brothers, Sheldon Adelson, and the corporate interests they represent – certainly deserve a seat at the policymaking table. But the size of their bank accounts does not entitle them to buy every seat at the table, control the agenda, and silence their critics. Unfortunately, this is exactly what we are seeing

across the Nation being played out, even as I speak, in this current election campaign. Big-money campaign donors and special interests, emboldened by the Supreme Court, have flooded our elections, unfortunately, to a great degree with secret contributions.

In contrast, other major social groups were usually framed as the “victims” of big corporations. Given this, I developed a proposition that “a variety of social groups would be likely to be depicted as the victims of corporate interests in big corporation-related speeches.” In contrast to social elites, variables surrounding social groups were designed to capture whether the big corporation-related discourse would identify certain social groups as the victims of big corporations, in the sense that these social groups’ interests would be depicted as negatively affected by big corporations. Table 3.4 summarized the results of a t-test on these variables. “Working class”, “middle class” and “small business” were the top three supposed victims of big corporations, although the range of interests that big corporate interests were seen as negatively affecting was very broad – from youth to the aged, from employees to customers.

Table 3.4. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Social Groups

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions</i> <i>95% Confidence interval</i>
<i>Middle Class</i>	11.3% [8.7% ~ 14.1%]
<i>Working Class</i>	9.2% [7.1% ~ 12.1%]
<i>Small Business</i>	8.5% [6.3% ~ 11.0%]
<i>Employee</i>	7.6% [5.5% ~ 10.0%]
<i>Customer</i>	5.4% [3.6% ~ 7.5%]
<i>Union</i>	3.0% [1.7% ~ 4.6%]
<i>Rural</i>	2.2% [1.1% ~ 3.7%]
<i>Minority</i>	1.8% [0.8% ~ 3.2%]
<i>Rich</i>	0.4% [0%* ~ 1.2%]

* Lower bound of CI crosses 0.

<i>Caucasian</i>	0.2% [0%* ~ 0.9%]
<i>LGBTQ</i>	0.1% [0%* ~ 0.5%]

For example, Representative Dan Lipinski said that Wall Street economic leaders were responsible for a lack of transparency affecting working families, in a speech from the year 2000:

There are a lot of things Wall Street does not want to talk about, and there are a lot of things they do not want American working families to know. So they only tell us what they want us to hear. We hear about how free trade and free markets are such wonderful things, that we need to give PNTR to China for us to continue our robust economic growth. But contrary to the elitist proclamation of the high priests of free trade, free trade will not save the world and it certainly is not going to save the surging U.S. trade deficit.

The middle class was also depicted as having been ‘thrown under the bus’ due to unfair taxation policies benefitting big corporations. In the words of Senator Schumer in 2017:

What has united the Republican tax reform efforts so far in this Congress has been a stubborn desire to reduce taxes paid by big corporations and the superrich. That is the core. The middle class ends up with the leftovers. Shockingly, millions in the middle class will actually see a tax increase, not just a handful but a large number.

Schumer’s words were typical of many of Democratic Party assertions found in the data.

In sum, in considering RQ2, the data provided evidence that a contrast narrative did exist in American politicians’ public communications when discussing big corporations within this sample. In this contrast narrative, big corporations and corporate people were presented as

* Lower bound of CI crosses 0.

* Lower bound of CI crosses 0.

economic and political elites, while the middle class, working classes and small business were presented as the main victims, along with some other social groups. Note the rhetorical positioning here was not to directly accuse the corporations of malfeasance; rather, there was guilt via a causal chain, particularly for speakers from the Democratic Party: the effect of corporations on the working and middle classes was alleged or implied to be transmitted through the political machinations of their Republican allies. It was implied to be the result of the unfairness of a political system in which approximately half of the political establishment – the opposing Republican party – was alleged to overwhelmingly represent the interests of a small segment of the population – big corporations and their primary shareholders – at the expense of virtually everyone else. Therefore, the big corporations were presented as predators while a few social groups were presented as victims in this contrast narrative.

The third research question was this:

RQ3: Is there a commonality/shared set of experiences implicit in particular public communications by political influencers regarding big corporations?

For this research question, I developed the proposition that “American politicians in big corporation-related speeches would likely highlight claims about public opinions; the magnitude or stakes involved in big corporation-related issues; their own social connectedness to groups affected by big corporations; and themselves as fighters on behalf of Americans’ interests in their speeches.” To posit themselves as being close to their constituents and their constituents’ interests, politicians often attempt to deploy persuasive tactics in their public communications, and this is of course also applicable when it comes to the big corporation hostility discourse.

Table 3.5 shows that the most often deployed tactic was to emphasize the magnitude of big

corporation-related issues. In over 59.1% [61.6% ~ 70.0%] of all instances, politicians sought to emphasize that the situation associated with big corporations was dire.

Table 3.5. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Persuasive Tactics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions</i> <i>95% Confidence interval</i>
<i>Magnitude</i>	59.1% [61.6% ~ 70.0%]
<i>American Fighter</i>	44.1% [45.3% ~ 53.8%]
<i>Social Connectedness</i>	19.7% [16.3% ~ 23.1%]
<i>Characterizing Public Opinion</i>	9.9% [6.9% ~ 11.9%]

In terms representative of this discourse, Senator John Kennedy in 2005 argued that the so-called malicious bankruptcies of some big corporations caused many people to lose their health insurance:

By contrast, just before Polaroid filed for bankruptcy, it canceled the health and life insurance for 6,000 retirees, coverage for workers on long-term disability. Do you understand what we are saying here? Here you have these individuals who lost their coverage. Can you imagine the number of those individuals who do not have health insurance and then run into serious health problems, cancer or heart disease? What happens to them. This is a typical example. We have other examples of corporate abuse which I will come back to.

In Kennedy’s portrayal, details were selected and emphasized to make the case for the dreadful situation and dire consequences arising from big corporation greed. This tactic helped to highlight the importance of the issues and to sharpen the emotive appeal to his audience/constituents.

A second commonly employed tactic was what I called the language of the “American fighter”, by which I mean speakers who framed themselves as the leaders in fighting for their

constituents or fellow Americans. This approach was present in 44.1% [45.3% ~ 53.8%] of the identified instances. For example, when Senator Warren talked about student loans in 2014, she emphasized her plans and her roles in drafting and pushing legislation aimed at relieving student loan burdens:

But our need to reduce the cost of college must not blind us to the urgency of addressing the massive debt already crushing our young people. The pressure is building, and we must act to provide real relief to our students and young graduates now. In the coming weeks I will join with my colleagues to introduce legislation to do just that -- legislation which will allow eligible borrowers with high-interest loans to refinance at interest rates which are at least as low as those currently being offered to new borrowers in the Federal student loan program.

There were also 19.7% [16.3% ~ 23.1%] (Table 5) of instances in which politicians attempted to demonstrate their connections to the people they represented through their rhetoric about big corporations. This number was also statistically significant, showing it was a clear pattern within the big corporation hostility discourse. One example was this excerpt from Senator Bill Nelson's speech in 2015:

Some people might think this is a political issue that Big Business is unanimously opposed to. When I first heard it, that is what I thought would be the case. But, lo and behold, that is not the case. On June 1, six major oil and gas companies, including Shell, signed a joint letter to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in support of establishing a carbon pricing system.

Nelson purported to share the same view as the general public, then went on to convey his deeper and more developed understanding of the issue. In so doing, he emphasized there were confusing

aspects of the issue and portrayed himself as understanding of the perceptions of his constituents (even when these are misguided, in his view).

Finally, in almost 9.9% [6.9% ~ 11.9%] of instances, politicians characterized public opinion in ways that purported to demonstrate a common-sensical view, or a social consensus around particular perceptions relating to big corporations. One saw this, for instance, in cases in which politicians used terms such as: “As you know...”, or “We all know...”, positing a public consensus (that may or may not exist in reality) as the foundation of their arguments. This excerpt from a 2017 speech by Senator Schumer is a good example:

Big corporate America is flush with money. They are not using it to create jobs. Why in God’s Name anyone thinks, after giving them more money through a tax break, all of a sudden they are going to start creating jobs when they are not doing it now is beyond me.

These emphases, examined via research question 3, tell us that politicians did indeed invoke what they claimed were commonly shared sets of experiences when talking about big corporations.

The fourth research question was this:

RQ4: *Is there an “us-vs.-them” relationship identifiable within the discourse concerning big corporations? If yes, then who is identified as “us” and who is “them”?*

We have already seen how members of Congress in some cases characterized corporate people as economic and political elites. To answer RQ 4 in a couple steps, I developed a proposition that “American politicians would be likely to characterize corporations and their leaders as a ‘them’ separate from the general public ‘us’.” To subject this to empirical testing, I deployed two steps; first, I identified social groups whose interests were presented as being

negatively affected by big corporations (shown previously in Table 4). Second, I deployed Pearson's Chi-square test, with which I examined if contingent associations existed discursively between the earlier variable pairings of "elites" and "working class" ($p < .001$) and "elites" and "middle class" ($p < .001$); the results show these associations were indeed present. Contingency also existed between "elites" and "young" ($p < .01$). Contingency was also examined between "elites" and "employee" and between "elites" and "small business", but these pairings were not found to be statistically significant.

As an example of this rhetoric in action, the supposed economic and power contrasts between elites and others was well illustrated in the following excerpt in 2005 by Senator John Kennedy:

This bill was supposed to be about spendthrifts. This bill does not take care of the sheltered income, as the Senator from Illinois points out. It does nothing about the corporate irresponsibility where the corporations go into bankruptcy and leave their workers high and dry and they walk off with the golden parachutes.

A couple of days later, Senator Kennedy again talked about how bankruptcy abuse is an exploitation of average Americans by big corporations:

Today we will pass a bankruptcy bill that rewards the credit card companies at the expense of average Americans. Last month, we passed a class action bill that makes it harder for average Americans to hold big corporations accountable, and we have a President who wants to give your Social Security away to Wall Street.

In this excerpt, big corporations were allegedly the actors who are able to take advantage of various loopholes in laws and regulations, while average Americans would end up paying the price of big corporation failures (with the ultimate failure being bankruptcy). Senator and former

United States Attorney Jeff Sessions contrasted corporate and public interests in one of his speeches from 2009:

The American people are not naive about this. They want something done, and they have a right to expect it. We in Congress have to figure out a way to be responsive to their demands and not focus only on the demands of special interests, certain big businesses, and certain activist groups, but to focus on legitimate demands of the public for good public policy. Good public policy requires the end of the illegality in immigration and the establishment of a lawful system of immigration that honors our great heritage of immigration of which we have always been proud.

In sum, politicians participating in the big corporation-hostility discourse regularly divided the world into “us” and “them”, and in so doing positioned themselves on the side of the general public, and thus implicitly as “American fighters.”

The fifth research question was:

RQ5: What kind of ideographs can be identified from public communication associated with big corporations?

With this research question in mind, I developed the proposition that “American politicians would be likely to associate the ideographs <fair>, <Americans>, <family> with big corporations in their public communications.” Table 3.6 summarizes the distribution of the usage of ideographs in the analyzed instances: <American people> and <American workers> were second-level ideographs of <American>, which was the most used ideograph in big corporation-related public communications, amounting to 20.6% of all instances (<American people> and <American workers> combined). <family> was the second most used ideograph in big corporations-related public communications, present in 18.2% [15.0% ~ 21.5%] of the instances.

And the variables “unfair” and “equity” can be combined as second-level ideographs of the ideograph <fair>, to bring that to being mentioned in 7.5% of the speeches.

Table 3.6. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Ideographs

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions 95% Confidence interval</i>
<i>American people</i>	17.5% [14.3% ~ 20.7%]
<i>American workers</i>	3.1% [1.7% ~ 4.6%]
<i>Family</i>	18.2% [15.0% ~ 21.5%]
<i>Change</i>	5.0% [3.1% ~ 6.8%]
<i>Unfair</i>	4.2% [2.5% ~ 5.9%]
<i>Equity</i>	3.3% [1.8% ~ 4.8%]
<i>Freedom</i>	3.1% [1.7% ~ 4.6%]
<i>American dream</i>	2.2% [1.0% ~ 3.5%]
<i>God</i>	1.7% [0.6% ~ 2.7%]

One good example of the use of the ideograph <American> can be found in a speech by Senator John Thune in 2013, in which his first sentence stated, “Madam President, I think the American public overwhelmingly opposes ObamaCare.” Then he continued:

But this week Senate Democrats voted in lockstep with the President and refused to give low-income and middle-class families that same relief that has been provided to big businesses and to some of the President’s allies....I don’t think that is what the American people sent us here to do. I think they sent us here to do the people’s business. I said before, when I started my remarks, I believe the American people overwhelmingly dislike ObamaCare and the effect it is having.

In this way, Thun mentioned variations of the ideograph <American> , including <American public> and <American people>, multiple times in the same speech. Meanwhile, he mentioned low-income families and middle-class families, which also could be observed as a deployment of ideograph <family>. In fact, 20.6% (a combination of <American people> and <American workers>) of the big corporation-related speeches mention the ideograph

<American>. This suggests that <American> as used in such a context is not a concrete social group, but a very broad image standing in for virtuous and deserving – but apparently vulnerable and maligned – people in these politicians’ public statements. The <family> ideograph was employed in a speech by Representative Pete Stark in 2002:

This bill is more about letting the \$5 billion dollar a year rent-to-own industry get out from under strict consumer protection standards in force in several states. This shouldn’t come to anyone’s surprise considering the Republican leadership’s track record of giving corporate interests a free ride at the expense of America's working families.

And here is an instance by Senator Mitch McConnell in 2018:

Small companies and big business alike are thrilled that they finally have a 21st-century tax code. It makes them more competitive with overseas rivals and frees up more money to invest right here at home, and middle-class workers are reaping the rewards. Major national companies like Pfizer and Home Depot, which together employ more than half a million Americans, have announced hundreds of millions of dollars in employee bonuses--again, thanks to tax reform.

McConnell called the tax reduction “tax reform”, and the benefits of this “reform” included increasing employment and boosting U.S. competitive capacity in the international market. And an excerpt from Senator Tom Harkin in 2000 was a good example of how the ideograph <fair> was deployed:

But now when we want to raise the minimum wage just a paltry two dollars and something cents an hour, we can’t do that? Where is the fairness? Where is the fairness for the American worker? No wonder the average American’s esteem of

Congress has gone down--along, I might add, with the President's, because the President is not up here asking for a minimum wage increase either. No wonder people don't think we are doing anything. We raise our salaries 7 times in 9 years. We have tax breaks for the wealthy. We have tax breaks for big business. We want to do away with estate taxes for the wealthiest few. But we won't raise the minimum wage. It all leads us to conclude that when it comes to the issues of poverty and the working poor, the American public should watch what we do, not what we say.

In sum, "Americans", "family," and "fair" became contested political constructs, deployed in a political context with very loose or no definition, in service of politicians attempting to make their cases about big corporations.

The sixth research question was this:

RQ6: What specific affective effects were expressed in public communications relating to big corporations?

Expressing emotional affect in public communications can help a politician's goals by echoing emotions presumed to be held by, and showing empathy with, the public, while at the same time seeking to amplify or elicit those same sentiments. Therefore, I developed a proposition that "American politicians would be likely to express indignant, excited, sad or happy sentiments when referencing big corporations." Table 3.7. shows that the dominant affective sentiment in big corporation-related speeches was "indignant", occurring in 84.5% [81.5% ~ 87.6%] of the speeches, which was statistically significant. Other types of sentiments also were expressed by members of Congress, albeit in markedly lower proportion as part of the discourse characteristics.

Table 3.7. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Sentiment

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions</i> <i>95% Confidence interval</i>
<i>Indignant</i>	84.5% [81.5% ~ 87.6%]
<i>Excited</i>	6.4% [4.4% ~ 8.5%]
<i>Sad</i>	2.6% [1.2% ~ 3.9%]
<i>Happy</i>	4.4% [2.7% ~ 6.2%]

Consider Representative Susan Davis in 2011:

The American people are frustrated. They are frustrated by what I call super-sized campaigns. It's all too much. It's too slanderous. It's too hard to tell who's paying for what and who's saying what. They feel that big donors, big corporations, and ideological groups are running the show, and they're being left out. But the American people care, and they believe in "we the people."

This excerpt contains multiple discursive tactics, including the usage of the ideograph <American people>, the identification term "we the people", and the sentiment of indignation. Senator Chuck Grassley also expressed the sentiment of indignation in his 2005 speech talking about the corporation tax on small business:

We recognized the detrimental impact that was having on the economy. So we looked at the Federal tax policy bias against small business, and then we had a bipartisan majority in this Senate, including Senator Baucus, the ranking Democrat, and one-fourth of the Democratic caucus at that particular time voted to gradually-- because we couldn't do it all at once--gradually equalize the top marginal rate between big corporate business and small unincorporated business, small unincorporated business paying the individual rate that was 15 percent higher, a 15-percent small business tax penalty, something that common sense ought to dictate is totally unfair.

Usage of phrases such as “detrimental impact”, “tax penalty” and “totally unfair”, along with the emphasis on the magnitude of the issue, collectively led to a strong and accumulated indignant sentiment. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse also expressed indignation and anger regarding the undeserved amnesty big corporations allegedly received in one of his 2020 speeches:

What does the corporate negligence amnesty bill do? It gives corporations that are not innocent, that are negligent, that have caused harm, and that have even caused death, amnesty. If that is the standard, when you are small and innocent and a child and have done no harm, then we are going to be outraged at any amnesty for you, at any kindness, but if you are a big corporation and you actually are negligent and as a result of your negligence someone dies of this disease, what is the solution?

Amnesty. That is what we will do. We will help our corporate friends.

The sentiment of “excited” was also occasionally expressed by members of Congress in big corporation-related speeches. For example, Senator Ed Markey in 2017 expressed his high hopes towards the issues of net neutrality:

Openness is the internet’s heart. Nondiscrimination is its soul. Any infringement on either of those features undermines the spirit and intent of net neutrality. So I proudly stand with my fellow netizens out on the Senate floor and all across America who oppose any efforts to undermine net neutrality. We are on the right side of history. I am ready for the historic fight to come.

Markey focused on how proud he was to be choosing the “right” side of history and being able to work for the interests of the netizens. While not overly common in the two decades of

discourse analyzed, such sentiment was occasionally deployed to define one's position in contrast to the opposite party.

"Happy" was also very occasionally expressed. For example, Representative Carolyn Maloney conveyed an overall positive attitude while introducing a bill she supported, the Investing in America's Small Businesses Act of 2011. She said: "It's my hope that this "micro biz" bill will be a bridge not only to vital financing for entrepreneurs, but also to a brighter economic future for our country." Big corporation images were invoked when she stated her belief that "this is a goal that even big business should share, a critical component of the bill is to foster public private partnerships." In this speech, the default image of big corporations was neutral or even positive, while the tone of the speech was upbeat or, in the terms of this proposition, "happy". It was, though, a relatively rare occurrence in this sample of political communications related to big corporations.

Finally, "sad" was another rarely expressed sentiment in big corporation related speeches. When it did occur, it was usually highly contextualized, as when Senator Patrick Leahy spoke in 2019 of former liberal Supreme Court Justice John Stevens:

Many of these nominees have long records of outright hostility toward reproductive rights, environmental protections, and voting and civil rights. They even refuse to accept that *Brown v. Board of Education*, a foundational civil rights decision settled 65 years ago, is indeed settled law. It is equally predictable and deeply unfortunate that Americans increasingly view the courts as a purely political institution.

Later in the speech, Senator Leahy compared today's justice system with the era of Justice Stevens, asserting that "[t]oday, the Supreme Court almost reflexively sides with

corporate interests over individuals' interests, even when precedent or so-called textualism and originalism stand in the way.”

In sum, indignation was a sentiment highly consistent with other discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility and that appeared frequently in this body of communications. Together with the alleged great magnitude of the issues being discussed, and contrasting social positions as constructed in big corporation-related speeches, indignation was the most commonly noted sentiment in the sample. Other sentiments were also expressed in this body of communications, but more rarely and in circumstantial contexts.

3.3 Extending the Propositions

In this section, I examine three groups of propositions that build upon, yet move farther than, my original research questions. The first group examine a time trend of variables, with the goal to capture any changing features of the issues that members of Congress associated with their hostility toward big corporations in the past 20 years. The second group explores party differences, capturing variations about the ways in which big corporation hostility discourse played out in America's partisan politics, as evidenced by the sample. And the third set focuses on discourse patterns across the Senate and House of Representatives.

3.3.1 Variations over time

The first group of propositions suggested “there would likely be a shifting salience of issues associated with big corporations over the 20-year period.” The goal of observing and comparing the variations over time in the raising of selected issues was to capture the changing themes surrounding big corporation hostility. I selected the top six economic issues, the top three

political issues and the top three social groups, and plotted histograms on each of these variables. Other variables in these groups were not selected because of the low percentages of the mentions in the sample, indicating those themes had relatively low salience in general. In the histograms shown below, the Y-values were the percentages of the mentions among all the instances in that year. The rationale for this construction is the following: given that there were different numbers of instances every year, comparing the percentage of mentions should be a more precise measurement of their salience in the discourse as opposed to comparing actual counts of the mentions.

I ran the linear regression and plotted the trend of politicians mentioning health insurance issues (Figure 3.4, $B=0.001$, $SE=0.003$, $p\text{-value}=0.67$), taxation (Figure 3.5, $B=-0.006$, $SE=0.003$, $p\text{-value}=0.03$), low-income populations (Figure 3.6, $B=0.003$, $SE=0.003$, $p\text{-value}=0.27$), the American economy (Figure 3.7, $B=-0.004$, $SE=0.002$, $p\text{-value}=0.11$), environmental issues (Figure 3.8., $B=-0.0008$, $SE=0.002$, $p\text{-value}=0.74$) and competition (Figure 3.9, $B=-0.003$, $SE=0.002$, $p\text{-value}=0.145$). As the trendlines show, the mentions of health insurance issues and low-income issues in big-corporation communications increased in the last 20 years, but by very small magnitudes. At the same time, the mentions of taxation, American economy, environmental issues and competition all decreased over the last 20 years in this same content. After excluding the effects of outliers, such general trends of the decreasing mentions were also in very small magnitude. Therefore, we observed that economic themes in the big corporation hostility discourse have been quite stable in the past two decades.

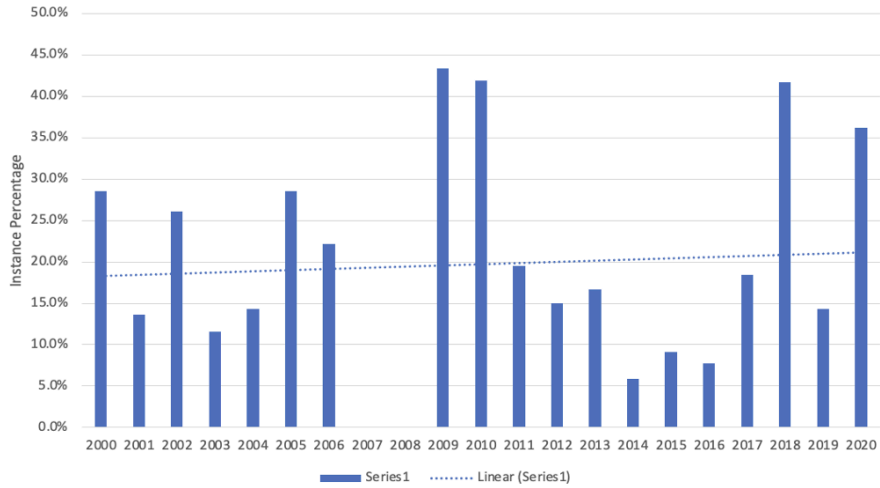


Figure 3.4. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Health Insurance Issues in the Congressional Record

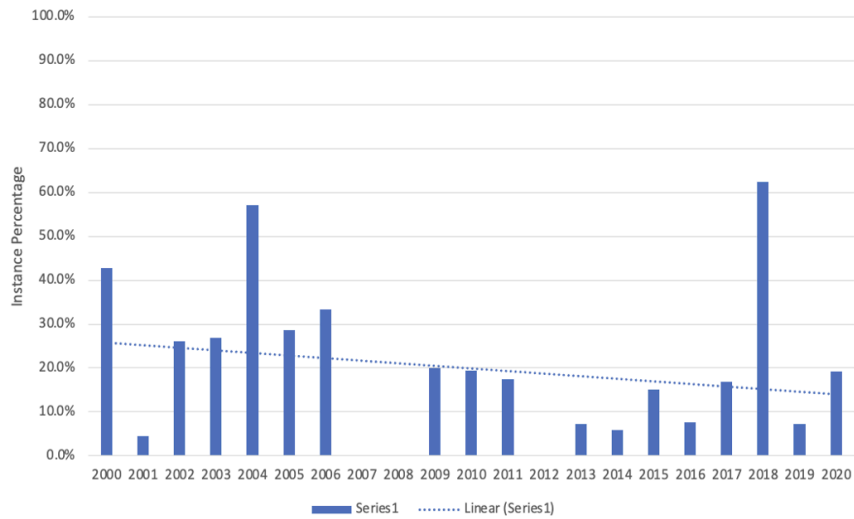


Figure 3.5. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Taxation Issues in the Congressional Record

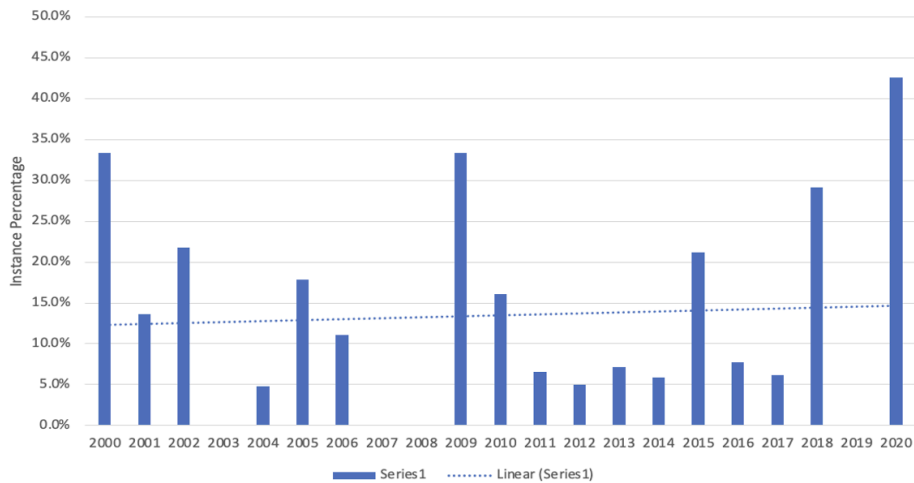


Figure 3.6. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Low Income Issues in the Congressional Record

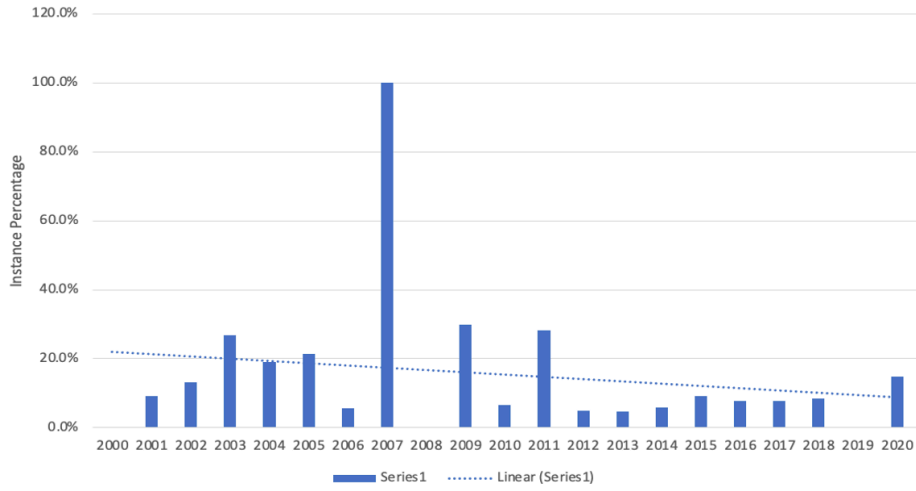


Figure 3.7. Distribution of Instances Mentioning American Economy in the Congressional Record

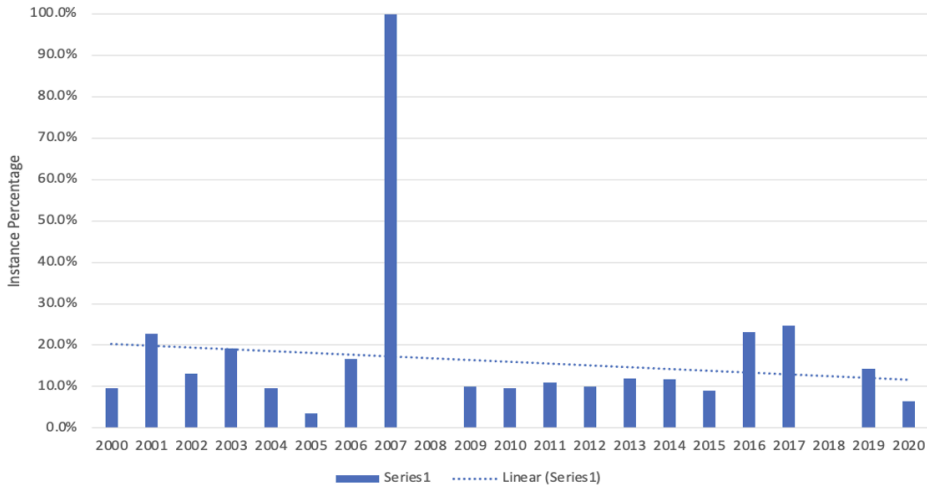


Figure 3.8. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Environmental Issues in the Congressional Record

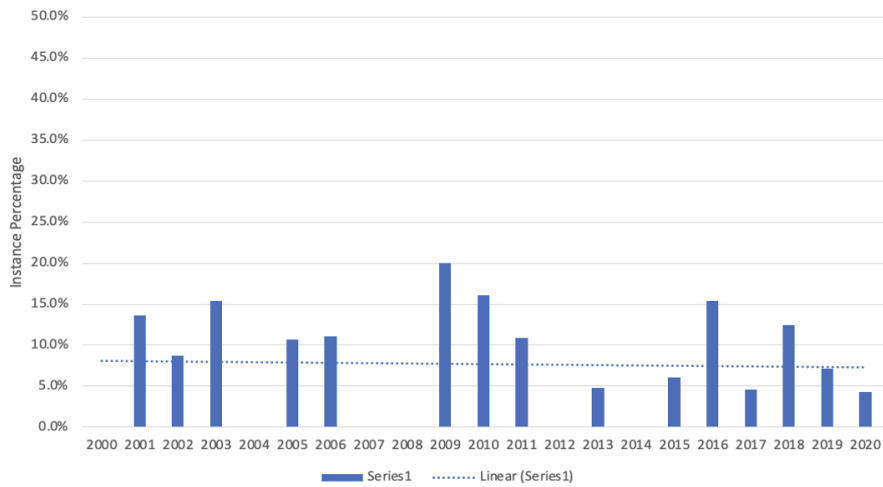


Figure 3.9. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Competition in the Congressional Record

For political variables, I ran the linear regression test and plotted the trend of politicians mentioning big corporation political influence and political benefits (Figures 3.10, $B=0.001$, $SE=0.003$, $p\text{-value}=0.68$ and Figure 3.11, $B=0.004$, $SE=0.003$, $p\text{-value}=0.28$) and judicial interference (Figure 3.12, $B=0.005$, $SE=0.002$, $p\text{-value}=0.01$). In general, the assertion of big corporation political influence and benefits was a very stable theme in the discourse of big corporation hostility, and it increased over the period by a relatively small degree. Alleged judiciary interference by big corporations was also increasingly mentioned over the last two decades, and especially after 2014.

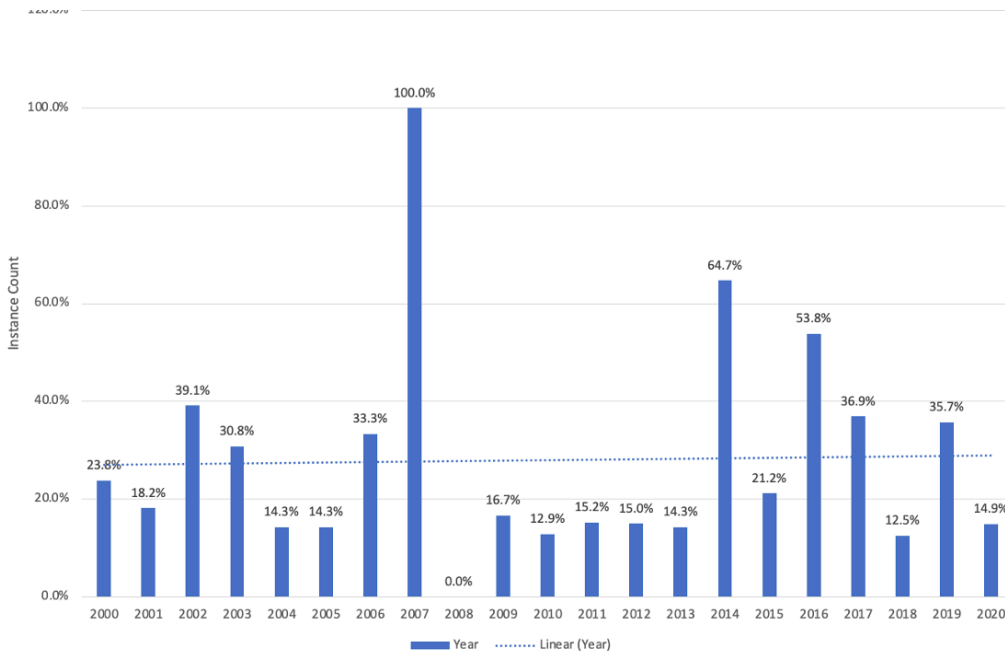


Figure 3.10. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Political Influence in the Congressional Record

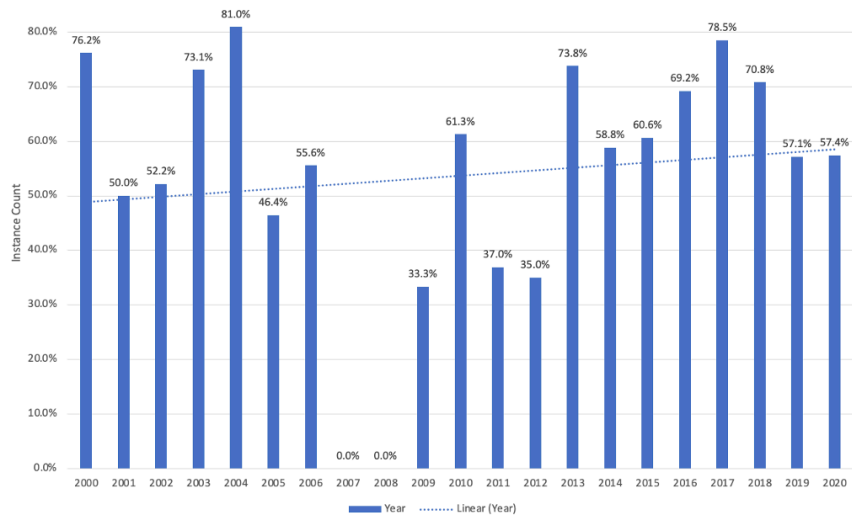


Figure 3.11. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Political Benefits in the Congressional Record

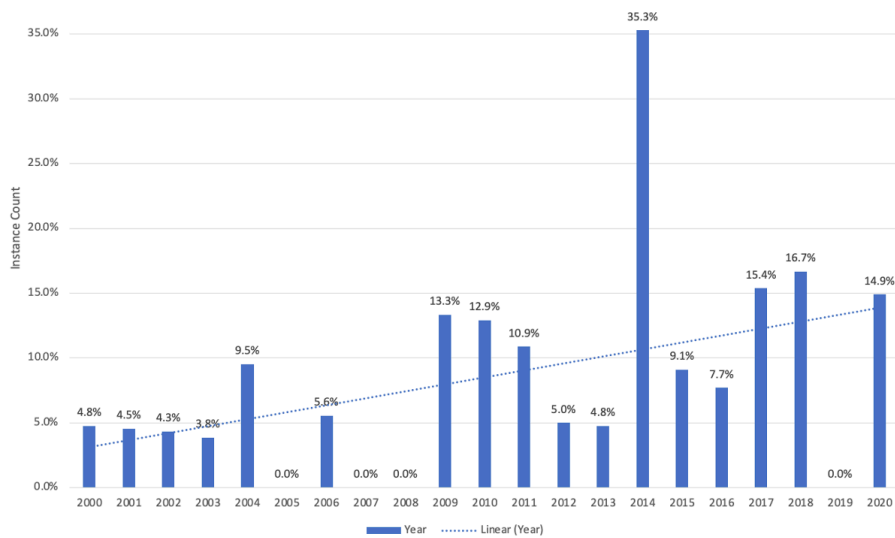


Figure 3.12. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Judiciary Inference in the Congressional Record

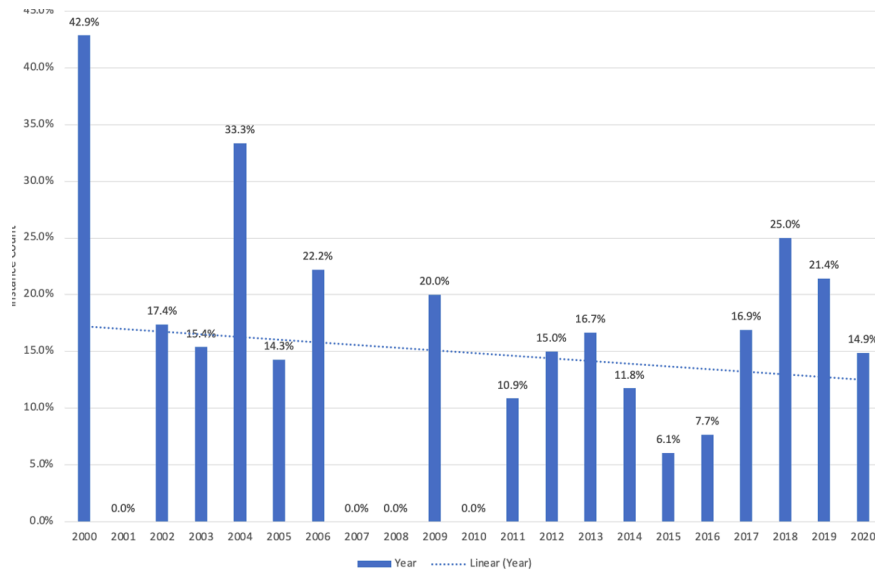


Figure 3.13. Distribution of Instances Mentioning “Elites” in the Congressional Record

In terms of social groups, I plotted the histograms for the variables working class (Figure 3.14, $B=-.004$, $SE=0.002$, $p\text{-value}=0.06$), middle class (Figure 3.15, $B=-.003$, $SE=0.002$, $p\text{-value}=0.25$) and small business (Figure 3.16, $B=0.0004$, $SE=0.003$, $p\text{-value}=0.87$). The mentions of working class and middle class decreased, while mentions of small business increased, over the 21 years.

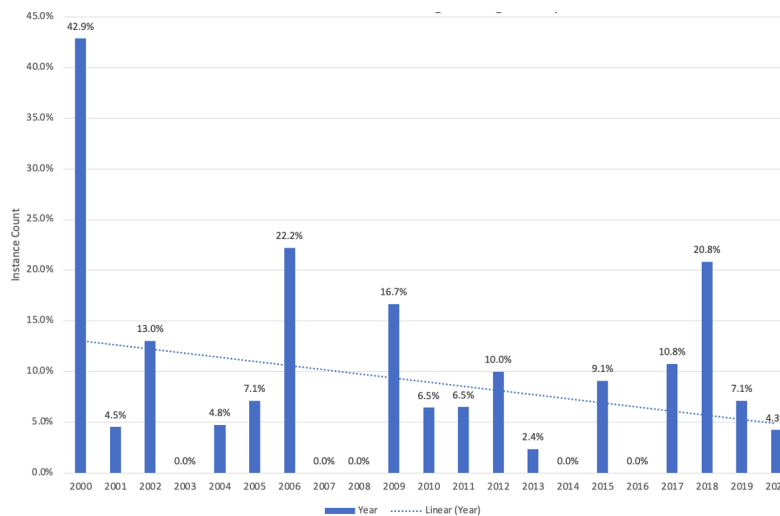


Figure 3.14. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Working Class in the Congressional Record

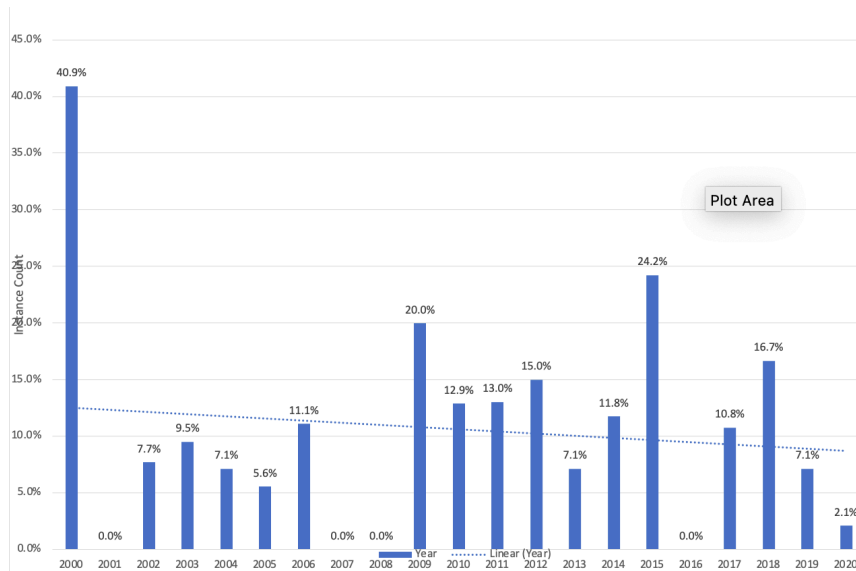


Figure 3.15. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Middle Class in the Congressional Record

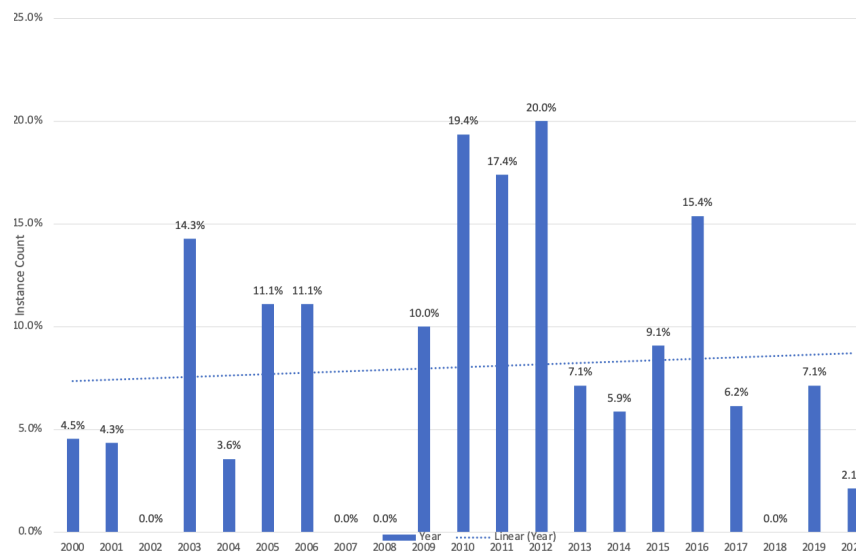


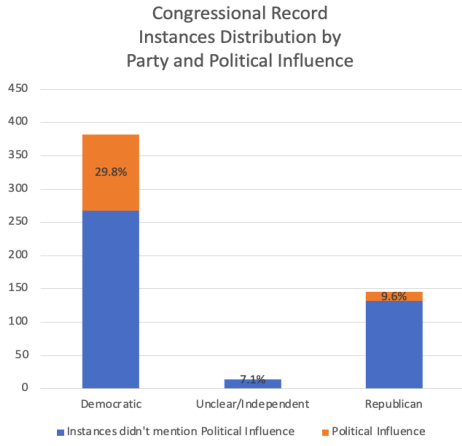
Figure 3.16. Distribution of Instances Mentioning Small Business in the Congressional Record

None of the individual issues mentioned above saw a significant linear increase or decrease, but the overall trend (Figure 3.1.) of instances distribution observed from these histograms, determined after comparing the trend changes across variables, was that the themes politicians chose to focus on when they gave big corporation-related speeches shifted from economics-focused themes towards politics-focused themes. Another interesting observation was that the issues illustrated above all rose exponentially in or after 2017; of course, this

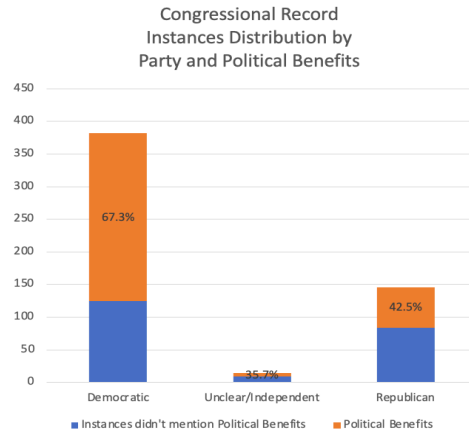
observation is consistent with the sample distribution, which altogether indicated a general discursive change entering the Trump administration.

3.3.2 Partisan patterns

The second set of propositions focused on how the partisan identities of the congressional members shaped their discourse about big corporation-related issues. This group of propositions suggested that “Democrats would generally be more likely than Republicans to make negative and group-connected associations of victimhood deriving from big corporations than Republicans.” Four charts show intriguing patterns and the results of the 3-sample test for equality of proportion in order to confirm the statistical inferences of the partisan patterns. Figure 3.17 shows that Democrats were more likely than Republicans to emphasize the unfair political influence of, and political benefits enjoyed by, big corporations. Figure 3.18 suggests that Democrats were more likely to highlight low income and unfair taxations issues. Figure 3.19 shows that Republicans and Democrats were similarly indignant in their affective expressions, while it was Republicans who expressed “happy” sentiments in their speeches to a greater extent. Finally, Figure 3.20 shows a perhaps unexpected finding, that Republicans more often emphasized the magnitude of the issues and framed themselves as “American fighters” who serve their constituents wholeheartedly, as compared with Democrats.

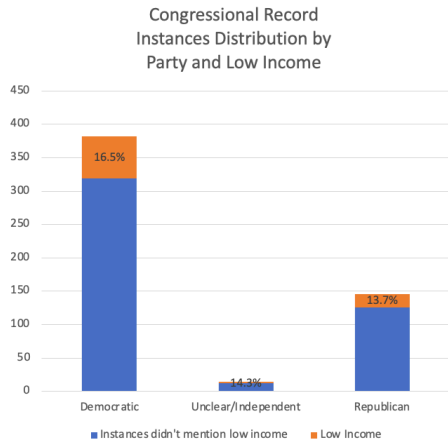


(X-squared = 24.71, df = 2, p<0.001)

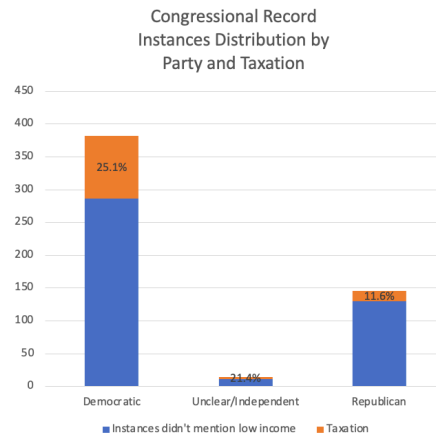


(X-squared = 29.829, df = 2, p<0.001)

Figure 3.17. Distribution of Instances by Party and Political Influence/Political Benefits

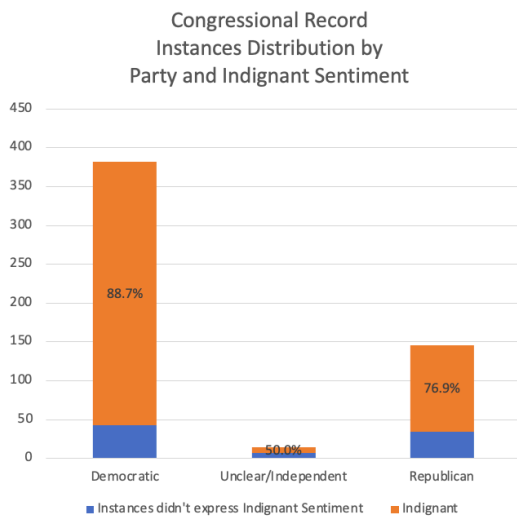


(X-squared = 0.41367, df = 2, p= 0.8132)

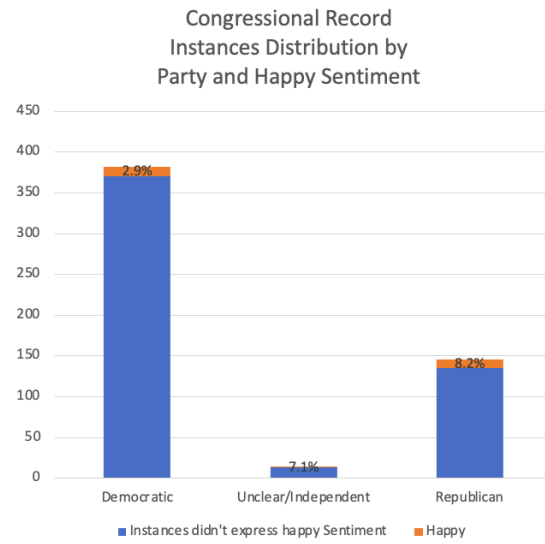


(X-squared = 11.629, df = 2, p<0.01)

Figure 3.18. Distribution of Instances by Party and Low Income/Taxation



(X-squared = 24.546, df = 2, p<0.001)



(X-squared = 7.2671, df = 2, p<0.05)

Figure 3.19. Distribution of Instances by Party and Indignant/Happy Sentiment

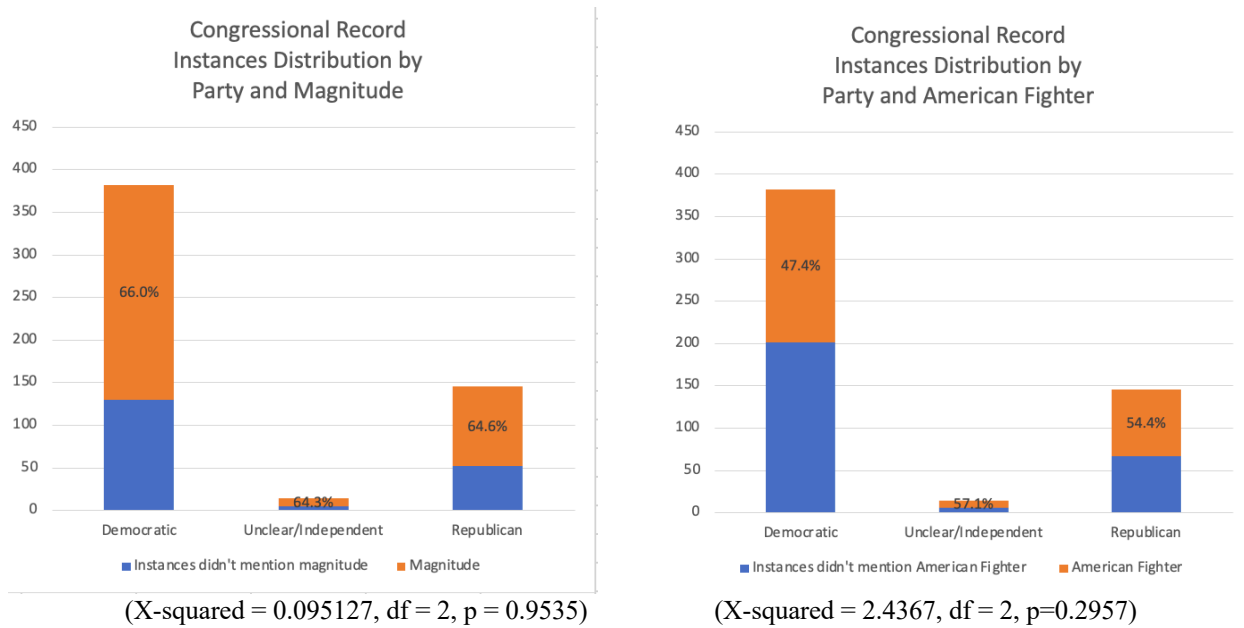


Figure 3.20. Distribution of Instances by Party and “Magnitude”/ “American Fighter”

As we can tell from these charts, Democrats and Republicans took completely different approaches when talking about big corporation-related issues. Democratic politicians focused on political benefits (67.3%) and the political influences (29.8%) big corporations enjoy a very high percentage of mentioning, while Republican politicians emphasized political benefits for 42.5% of the time and political influence 9.6% of the time (Figure 3.17.). In terms of economic issues related to big corporations, the divergence between Democrats and Republicans was much smaller. On issues of taxation policy, the deep contrast between the two parties resurfaced in the data (Chart 16). In terms of the sentiments the two parties expressed, both expressed indignations frequently: 88.7% of the time for Democrats, and 76.9% for Republicans. Although the sentiment of “happy” was very rarely expressed overall in this body of communications, Republicans were more than twice as likely to express this sentiment (8.2% of the time, vs. 2.9% for Democrats; Chart 17). Chart 18 shows how the two parties used persuasive tactics differently. As the data suggest, Republicans used these tactics (such as emphasizing the magnitude of

issues, or their own self-portrayal as fighters for the interests of average Americans), significantly more often than Democrats.

In sum, these observations indicated that in the scope of the big corporation hostility discourse, Democrats’ public communications were more critical of big corporations while Republicans were more positive and more oriented towards their self-representation as fighters for the interests of their constituents and the American people.

3.3.3 Differences across Congressional chambers

I was also interested in whether there were differences in the volume of discourse between the two chambers of Congress. Due to the higher-profile nature of the Senate and the foundational commitments to reforming big corporations by certain well-known Senators, my proposition was that “senators would be more likely to talk about big corporations than representatives.” And indeed, Chart 18 shows that significantly more of big corporation-related instances came from the speeches of Senators.

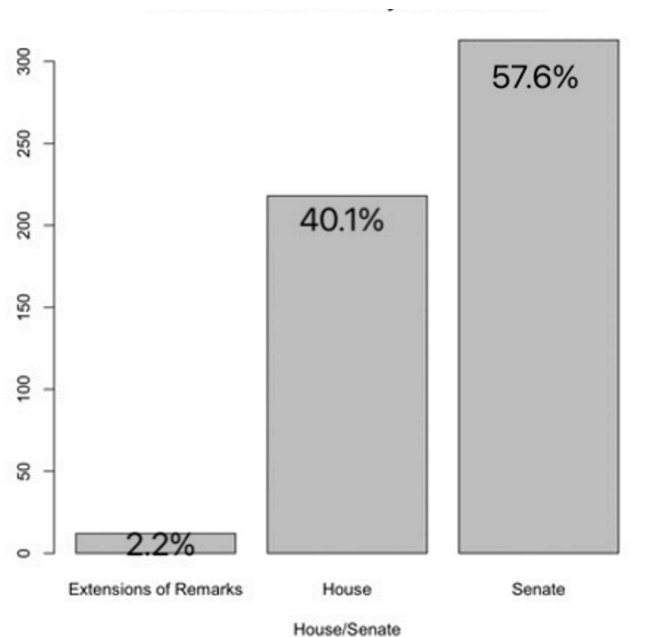


Figure 3.21. Distribution of Instances by Chamber

One potential explanation for this may have to do with the characteristics of the American political system. Representatives serve two-year terms representing the people of a specific congressional district, while senators serve 6-year terms with constituencies that are state-wide. The focus of representatives, given the greater frequency of their election cycle as well as the smaller size of the population they represent, as compared with senators, is more likely to be on issues with direct local salience. In contrast, big corporation hostility as a discourse is more likely to operate on a more conceptual level to denote ideological differences at the macro level – and thus more likely to be taken up in the Senate.

3.4 Summary of Findings

In this section I summarize the results of my content analysis of discourse about big corporations in the Congressional Record.

The discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility examined by RQ1 (What key social, economic, environmental or political problems have politicians associated with big corporations in America in the early 21st century?) show that the most discussed *economic* issues in big corporation-related speeches included income inequality, health insurance, unfair taxation policy, and national (as opposed to local or global) economic prospects. The most discussed *political* issues in big corporation-related speeches included the claim that big corporations exert undue political influence and receive undue political benefits. At the same time, these political issues were mainly viewed as influence (lobbying or election support) within legal parameters, rather than as corruption per se (Table 3.3). At the same time, public communications concerning big corporations increasingly became, over the course of the sample, political in focus rather than economic. The thematic choices of big corporation-related speeches reflected party differences

as well. Democratic politicians were more critical of big corporations' perceived privileges than were Republican politicians. In general, Democrats tended to make more negative connections between economic and political issues when discussing big corporations.

The discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility explored by RQ2 (Is there a contrast narrative that can be identified in the public communications that is associated with big corporations? Who is presented as the victim and who is the perpetrator?) were also present in the speeches analyzed. Big corporations or "corporate people" were often described as economic and political "elites" that enjoy more privileges than ordinary people, while a variety of social groups were often identified as "victims" or at least as negatively affected by corporate interests. The middle class, working class, and small businesses were most often mentioned as groups whose interests had been harmed by big corporations. Instead of being mutually supportive, the relationship between big corporations and the rest of the society was portrayed as being in clear opposition, with big corporations and corporate people portrayed as "perpetrators", and the rest of the society as "victims". While this discursive characteristic was found in the data, major indicators seemed to be on a slowly decreasing trend. In the last two decades, mentions of the middle and working classes and "elites" both decreased in percentage terms in big corporation-related speeches. "Elitism" and "perpetrator v. victim" mentions have a long history in American political discourse, and this general logic of these two discursive patterns is clearly still applicable with respect to big corporation hostility.

The discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility examined by RQ3 (Is there a commonality/shared set of experiences implicit public communications by political influencers regarding big corporations?) also were present in the data. In most cases, politicians emphasized the magnitude of the issues caused by or arising from the influence of big corporations. In the

vivid contrast between the interests of big corporations and the rest of the society, politicians posited themselves as fighters on behalf of the ‘people’, while also emphasizing their shared emotions of indignation and outrage over the transgressions of big business, and to a lesser extent, their shared experiences or hardship. The data also revealed that the discourses around big corporation hostility reflected and arguably reinforced partisan politics in the American political arena. While Republicans mentioned big corporation issues less overall, they tended, when they *did* focus on them, to deploy tactics that emphasized the magnitude of particular issues, and to more frequently claim the mantle of “fighters” for their constituents’ interests.

The next research questions, RQ4 (Is there an “us-vs.-them” relationship identifiable within the discourse concerning big corporations? If yes, then who is identified as “us” and who is “them”?) proved to be useful rhetorical and analytical terrain. The relationship between big corporations and the rest of the society was portrayed as contradictory, not just in general terms, but specifically in terms of the contingent relationships between “elites” and “corporation employees” on the one hand, and “small business” and “younger generations” on the other. Most importantly, this opposing relationship and contrasting social status engendered a space where American politicians could strategically posit themselves on the side of the underdog, in pursuit of specific political advantage. To oppose big corporation interests with those of the rest of society was not the ultimate goal; the goal was to play a long game of personal and partisan political advantage against the backdrop of identity politics. In crafting an image of corporate America as a huge and unrelenting problem, politicians – particularly Democrats – posited different versions of the problem and rendered themselves as the solution, all in service of consolidating their political support.

Further discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility were revealed in the examination of RQ5 (What kind of ideographs can be identified from public communication associated with big corporations?). Ideographs are typically emotionally loaded, broad concepts that can be deployed to signal political identities and interests. <American> as an ideograph was the most commonly addressed ideograph in big corporation-related speeches, while <fair> and <family> were also frequently invoked. The usage of ideographs like <American> and <family> had strong symbolic conveying both an ultimate goal and the common good. They simplify a set of assumptions and meanings, and presume different target audiences for their rhetoric, but the energy and the emotions attached to these ideographs all propelled the discourse into the realm of the ideological. Where <Americans> and <family> were addressed, and when people were assumed to agree on the values and assumptions behind them, speakers sought to deploy these discursive devices to ‘stand in’ for much argumentation, in service of persuading their audience that the speaker was part of the solution rather than the problem.

Further, RQ6 (What specific affective effects were expressed in public communications relating to big corporations?) also fruitfully yielded a number of discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility. The most expressed sentiment was that of the politician giving the speech being “indignant” over the conduct or effects of large corporations. This is consistent with other discursive characteristics explored, such as the magnitude of a supposedly dire situation being faced with respect to big corporations, the expression of negative sentiments associated with corporations, and the situation of social groups posited to be the victims of big corporations. Indignation perfectly expresses and channels the energy and presumed efforts that were claimed to be needed to fix the underlying causes of the offense created by big corporations, as rendered in this body of public communications. Party divergence was also reflected in the sentiment

variables. Compared to Democrats, Republican politicians expressed relatively “happy” or positive attitudes significantly more often in big corporation-related speeches, although this tended to be a very small portion of this overall body of communications. In these ways, discourses around big corporation hostility seemingly served to reinforce party identity, and implied strategies to align such identities with those of voters and their presumed interests.

Besides the discursive characteristics explored in the research questions, the data also extrapolated several other features of corporation-related speeches. First, the general trend of big corporation mentions increased slightly over the last two decades (Figure 3.1.). While there was some variation from year to year, particularly large increases in mentions were noticed in 2017, which could be seen as a key discursive development entering into the first year of the Trump administration. Secondly, the extrapolations from the research questions suggested there were significant differences in the sample distribution between speeches in the House and the Senate (Figure 3.21.), i.e., in the frequency of mentioning big corporations. These additional features of congressional discourse about big corporations will be the subject of further examination in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. THEMES AND EMPHASES IN CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

In this chapter, I present the results of quantitative content analysis of the second key dataset in this dissertation – Congressional Hearings. This dataset was designed and collected in order to gain insights alongside the Congressional Records dataset, since the purpose and setting of the speech events in the Hearings are qualitatively distinct from those in the Record.

According to govinfo.gov, “A hearing is a meeting or session of a Senate, House, joint, or special committee of Congress, usually open to the public, to obtain information and opinion on proposed legislation, conduct an investigation, or evaluate/oversee the activities of a government department or the implementation of a federal law. In addition, hearings may also be purely exploratory in nature, providing testimony and data about topics of current interest.” From this description, we see that hearings have at least three elements that are distinct from the communications captured in the Congressional Record, which potentially may matter in considering political discourses.

First, congressional hearings are open to the public, which means they may enjoy a larger audience than a typical congressional debate. (In many instances, speeches during debates are made without an audience even of congressional peers, but rather only for the record and for the C-SPAN channel.) Although the Congressional Record is a public record, hearings have the potential to reach a larger scale of media exposure, especially in some high-profile cases.

Second, compared to the speeches in the Congressional Record, hearings take on a more open-ended, inquisitive character with respect to specific policy issues; information may be collected, and issues explored, without party or politician-specific positions *necessarily* being foregrounded or sign-posted (although particularly high-profile issues explored in a hearing may

well come with pre-set party positions). Congressional debates of course also often center on specific issues, but typically with the intent of the orator to state his or her position for the record, in what is definitively an exercise in political identity and branding. The differing primary goals of the two settings may presumably lead to differences in discursive characteristics.

And third, in hearings there are witnesses who are invited to appear and receive on-site questioning. Political representatives may strike overt political postures through and around the questioning, but the primary focus of the discourse is on the answers and testimonies being presented by the witnesses. While the witnesses *can* have clear political affiliations, they do not necessarily arrive with them clearly sign-posted. In this way, party positions in their intersection with specific issues and as articulated by different participants in hearings about corporations may be more ambiguous or less prominent.

Given these differences as compared with speeches in the Congressional Record, the question becomes how speech acts in hearings concerning big corporations may potentially differ in their discursive characteristics. This chapter explores this issue through four sections. In section 4.1, I present some descriptive statistics on the hearing dataset. In Section 4.2, I present some statistical tests to examine several propositions that were developed to provide comparisons with the Congressional Record dataset. In section 4.2, I take a close look at some notable discursive characteristics of independent speakers in this dataset. And in section 4.3, I examine the hearings by committee sub-categories to gain further insight. Lastly, I summarize the findings of the chapter.

4.1 Descriptive Overview of Hearings

This section presents statistical tests on most of the variables introduced in the analysis of the Congressional Record dataset, in order to capture similarities or differences in the discourse as we move across political forums with differing publicity, participants, and overall goals. Figure 4.1 presents the distribution of hearings that contained big business references by year. Quite different than the Congressional Record data, the distribution of hearings on big corporations decreased over the past two decades. According to govinfo.gov., it takes two months to two years for hearing transcripts to be uploaded onto the website, so the 2019 and 2020 numbers are potentially imprecise, but from 2010 onward, the number of hearings was significantly lower than the first decade in the 21st century. In congressional hearings, the highest volume of big corporation-related discourse occurred from 2006 to 2009, with the final year being the apex; in the Congressional Record, the presence of such discourse in 2007 and 2008 dipped. Compared to the increasing trend of distribution of Congressional Record communications on this topic, the decrease in the number of hearings in this second decade is intriguing.

In terms of the kinds of speakers, the hearings exhibited marked differences from the Congressional Record speeches. In hearings, speakers who were independent or whose party affiliation was not clear represented 49.4% of the data proportion, compared to 2.6% in the Congressional Record, where of course speakers are party-aligned. Consistent with the greater proportion of speech acts by non-partisan (or unclear) participants in the discourse, big business-related invocations were issued by Republican speakers in 17% of the hearings sample, compared to 27.1% in the Congressional Record, while the invocations from Democratic speakers were 33.6% of the hearings data, compared to 70.3% in Congressional Record.

The attitude distribution also differed from the Congressional Record communications (Figure 4.2). In the hearings, 33.3% of instances expressed a neutral attitude about big corporations, compared to 28.4% in the Congressional Record; 59.7% of the hearings sample expressed a negative attitude, compared to 69% in the Congressional Record; and 7% of the hearings instances expressed a positive attitude, compared to 2.6% in the Congressional Record. Although “negative” was still the predominant attitude articulated with respect to the big corporation, it is the case that “neutral” and “positive” attitudes were more commonly expressed in the hearings. This is likely related to the differing goals of hearings relative to congressional speeches and to the differing composition of the participants of the hearings.

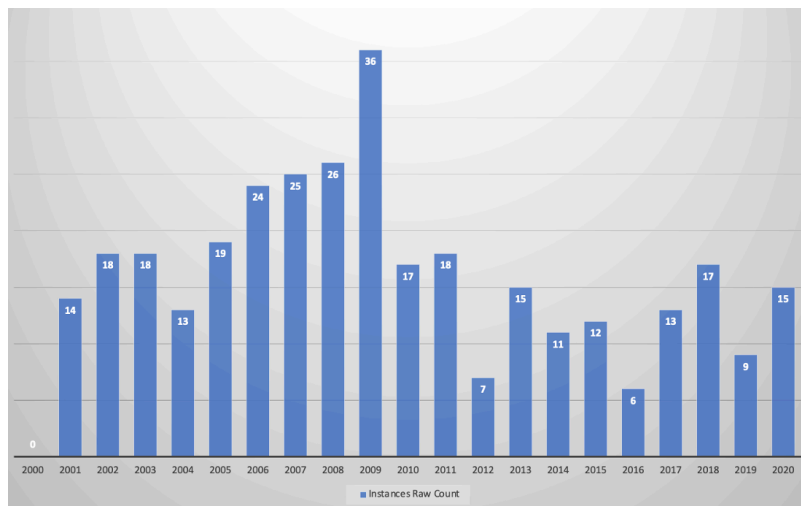


Figure 4.1. Instance Distribution of the Congressional Hearings by Year

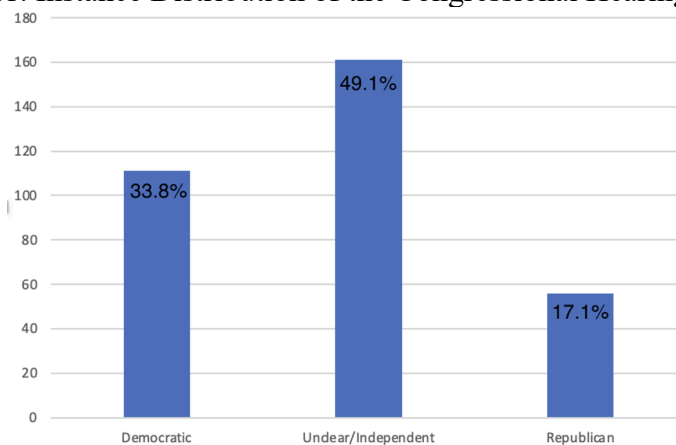


Figure 4.2. Instance Distribution of the Congressional Hearings by Party Affiliation

4.2 Discursive Patterns in Congressional Hearings

In this section I examine a series of proposition tests aiming at comparing patterns found in the Congressional Record and Congressional Hearings datasets.

Proposition 1 focused on the ranking of top economic issues negatively associated with big corporations. In the Congressional Record, the top three economic issues negatively associated with big corporations were “health insurance”, “taxation” and “income inequality.” In the Congressional Hearings, the top three economic issues negatively associated with big corporations were “environmental issues”, “competition” and “health insurance” (see Table 4.1). This differential ranking could have multiple causes. One may relate to the technical content discussed in hearings. Environmental and competition issues (e.g., anti-trust cases) can be not only controversial but also highly technical as well, so that the hearings format for this discourse would elicit more detailed information incorporating both public and expert opinions. For example, in the Senate hearing “Implementation of The Clean Water Act”, in 2003, a staff attorney with the Earthjustice Environmental Law Clinic at Stanford, Michael Lozeau, gave a statement in which he addressed environmental matters and the perceived conflicting interests of corporations and the American public:

Neither a weak TMDL[†] program nor questionable legal positions that simply invite litigation will cleanup or protect the Nation’s waters; nor will these policies provide any certainty to businesses that must comply with clean water laws. If the agency’s administrators continue down these and other paths aimed at weakening the Clean

[†] A total maximum daily load (TMDL) is a regulatory term in the U.S. Clean Water Act, describing a plan for restoring impaired waters that identifies the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can receive while still meeting water quality standards.

Water Act and its implementation, they ultimately will not be able to convince the American public that EPA is serving the public's rather than corporate interests. Similarly, in a 2019 hearing on "Toxic, Forever Chemicals: A Call for Immediate Federal Action on PFAS[‡]", Democratic Representative Harley Rouda elaborated on the goal of the hearing in a manner consistent with that of "expert" Lozeau above:

I hope we take the opportunity to learn from our mistakes rather than repeat them. We are finished with being hoodwinked by corporate interests. We are done being placated, being told we are moving forward when we are actually standing still.

In these views, corporate interests and rhetoric were presented as a barrier that must be overcome in order to have a safer environment.

Competition and antitrust was another predominant theme in big corporation-related congressional hearings. This was particularly evident in the Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy and Consumer Rights under the Committee on the Judiciary. During the hearing "Oversight of The Enforcement of The Antitrust Laws," in 2011, President pro tempore of the Senate Orrin Hatch, a Republican, gave a statement questioning the fairness of federal government antitrust enforcement:

In fact, in many circles, including among some of my colleagues here in the Senate, it was considered common knowledge that the Bush administration was too lenient in antitrust enforcement and was too eager to give big business a pass when it came to anticompetitive conduct. And while I did not really share this view at the time, I

[‡] Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of man-made chemicals that includes PFOA, PFOS, GenX, and many other chemicals.

am interested to learn more about what has changed since the Antitrust Division came under new management in 2009.

Hatch took pains to present his position as open-minded and receptive to any analysis being offered, which is a rhetorical posture to be expected in hearings of this type. In the same hearing, however, White House Cabinet Secretary Christine Varney seemed to take a clearer clear stance on the issue:

My view is that sports are business. They are a big business, whether they are in college or out of college. And so far as I know, the only enterprise that enjoys antitrust immunity is baseball. Other than that, all of these enterprises are subject to the antitrust laws. We will obviously investigate, thoroughly pursue, and bring the appropriate action against any enterprise, whether it is sporting or otherwise, that is in violation of the antitrust laws.

Her statement was factual, while her overall attitude towards big businesses was negative, or at least skeptical. Meanwhile, taxation and health care, while having significant underlying complexity, are more likely to be seen as distributive, zero-sum issues – who gets more and who is left out – and therefore more likely to draw the political brand-building attention which is often the focus in the Congressional Record.

A second reason may relate to the institutional settings of congressional debates -- the focus of the Congressional Record in chapter three -- and congressional hearings, the focus here in chapter four. Hearings cover a broad range of issues prefigured and shaped by the agendas of the standing committees from both Senate and House. These committees cover virtually every type of economic, social, technological, and political areas, from the “Budget Committee”, “Judiciary Committee”, and “Small Business Committee” through to the “Environment and

Public Works Committee” – and much in between. The setting and the makeup of such committees naturally define the level of the salience of issues that are advanced in the Hearings setting, which may or may not lead to specific legislation. In contrast, the Congressional Record is primarily structured around debates over specific pieces of proposed legislation, in which Congressional members preview the votes they are about to cast, or their posture towards the issue in general. Politics suffuses both datasets, to be sure, but the positioning of speakers in the policymaking process accentuates political position-taking and posturing to a greater extent in the Record as opposed to the Hearings.

Table 4.1. Percentage of Mentioning by Economic Variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of Mentions</i> <i>95% Confidence Interval</i>
<i>Environmental Issues</i>	12.7% [8.9% ~ 16.1%]
<i>Competition</i>	12.7 [8.6% ~ 15.8%]
<i>Health Insurance</i>	10.8% [7.6% ~ 14.4%]
<i>Taxation</i>	8.9% [6.3% ~ 12.6%]
<i>American Economy</i>	6.4% [4.2% ~ 9.8%]
<i>Low Income</i>	5.7% [4.0% ~ 9.4%]
<i>Net Neutrality</i>	2.2% [0.6% ~ 3.7%]
<i>Local Economy</i>	1.9% [0.4% ~ 3.3%]
<i>Economic Efficiency</i>	1.6% [0.2% ~ 2.9%]
<i>Macroeconomic Impact</i>	1.3% [0.03% ~2.4%]

Finally, another element to consider is the waxing or waning influence of issues. In this regard, the trend is towards an increasing frequency of environmental and health issues, with a decreasing emphasis on competition (see Figure 4.3, $B=0.004$, $SE=0.005$, $p\text{-value} = 0.39$, Figure 4.4, $B=-0.002$, $SE=0.005$, $p\text{-value}=0.77$ and Figure 4.5, $B=0.002$, $SE=.0005$, $p\text{-value}=0.76$). It should be noted, however, that these are weak trends according to linear regression tests, and they were influenced by the start and end dates, with significant fluctuation from year to year.

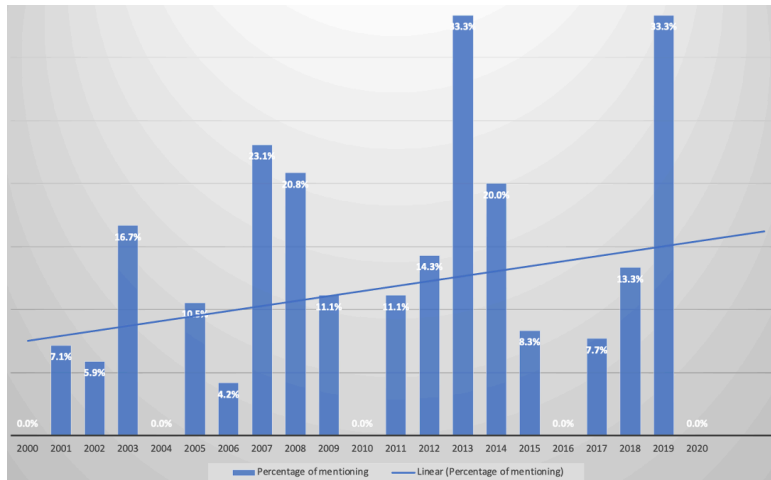


Figure 4.3. Instance Distribution of Mentioning Environmental Issues in Congressional Hearings

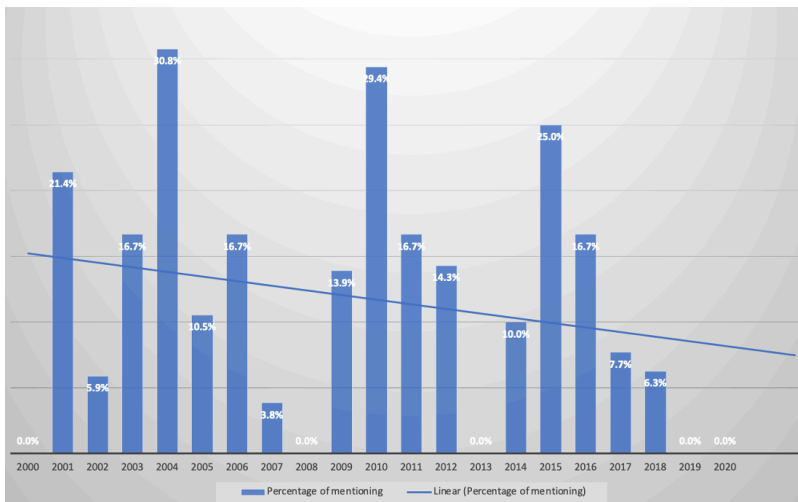


Figure 4.4. Instance Distribution of Mentioning Competition in Congressional Hearings

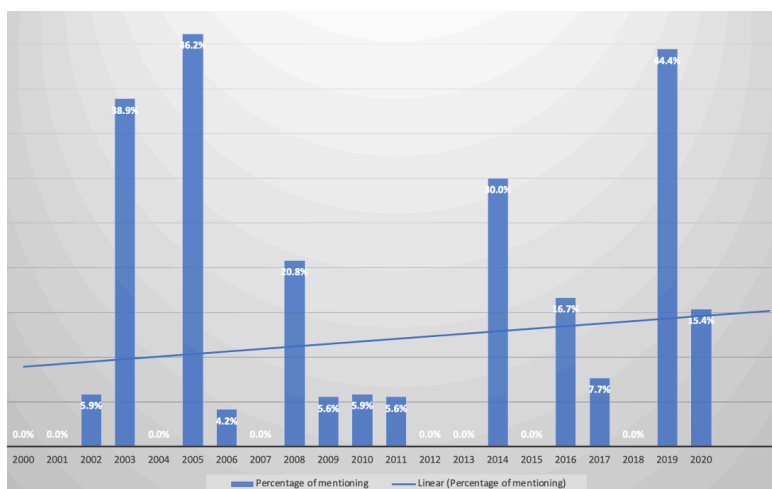


Figure 4.5. Instance Distribution of Mentioning Health Insurance Issues in Congressional Hearings

Proposition 2 investigated the relative salience of the political issues negatively associated with big corporations. Table 4.2 shows political factors associated with big corporations in descending order of the frequency. Compared with the Congressional Record data (see Table 3.2. in Chapter 3), the overall proportion of mentions of political issues was lower in the Congressional Hearing dataset, but the relative ranking was the same in both datasets: big corporations' political influence and benefits were often mentioned as either background information or the focal point of the legislation discussion itself. For example, during the DISCLOSE Act hearing held in 2010, government affair lobbyist Craig Holman directly addressed the issues surrounding lobbyist representation of corporate interests:

Citizens United has the danger of reversing much of those achievements in allowing corporate lobbyists to walk into meetings with you and your staff, carrying this big club of a potential campaign expenditure for Members who are friendly and punishing those Members who may not be as friendly to the corporate interests that are being pursued. This is something that should be discussed more. When we are talking about Citizens United, we are not just talking about money and politics. We are talking about the lobbyists who are going to represent these corporations.

In addition, the assertion of unfair favoritism exerted by the government in favor of specific corporations (rather than big business as a whole) also appeared in the Hearings sample. The following excerpt from Kentucky Representative Ed Whitefield in an environmental policy hearing held in 2014 is a good example:

So it appears that this administration, rather than just being in favor of big business in general, it is determined upon whether or not they like the big business. And, for example, Google is a large company that is taking advantage

of some Federal tax codes to invest in the wind industry. And so, for this administration to basically say we are not going to enforce, we are going to grant exemptions to certain big businesses from the Migratory Bird Act and the Golden and Bald Eagle Protection Act--I would ask if any of you would like to make a comment on that, how this administration has--we have two Federal laws, and this administration has affirmatively said we are going to grant exemptions from these Federal laws for certain industries that we agree with what they are doing.

The skeptical tone, focused on the alleged hypocrisy and unfairness of the administration, was unmistakable here.

Table 4.2. Percentage of Instances Mentioning in Political Variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions</i> <i>95% Confidence Interval</i>
<i>Receiving undue political benefits</i>	47.1% [42.7% ~ 53.6%]
<i>Exerting undue political influence</i>	18.8% [14.4% ~ 22.8%]
<i>Judicial interference</i>	3.8% [1.6% ~ 5.7%]
<i>Big money: Lobbying or sponsoring electoral campaign</i>	3.7% [2.1% ~ 5.4%]
<i>Big money: Bribery/corruption or any illegal misconduct</i>	2.7% [0.9% ~ 2.8%]
<i>Big money: Both bribery/corruption and lobbying/sponsoring</i>	0%
<i>Big Money (total)</i>	6.4% [4.8% ~ 8.2%]

Proposition 3 investigated the salience of social groups negatively associated with big corporations in the hearings. Just as in the Congressional Record, big corporations and “corporate people” were portrayed as “elites”. A single-sample t-test found that in 11.1% of the hearings instances, speakers identified corporate people as elites (95% confidence interval: 7.6%~14.6%), which is slightly lower than in the Congressional Record dataset (15%). This statistically significant result provided evidence that framing corporate people as “elites” is a prominent discursive tactic applied in the Congressional Hearings as well as the Record.

In terms of other social groups negatively associated with big corporations, however, the ranking of the distribution proportion was very different than in the Congressional Record. The top three social groups in the hearings, as shown in Table 4.3, were “Small business” (21.3% [CI:17.4% ~ 26.5%]), “employee” (4.8% CI:[4.0% ~ 9.4%]), and “females” (3.5% CI:[1.6% ~ 5.7%]), while in the Congressional Record, the top three social groups were “middle class” (11.3% CI:[8.7% ~ 14.1%]) “working class” (9.2% CI: [7.1% ~ 12.1%])and “small business” (8.5% CI: [6.3% ~ 11.0%]). Not only was “small business” the most mentioned social group in the Hearings, but it also received a much higher proportion of mentions than both “working class” and “middle class” combined in the Congressional Records. This observation is important because it reflects the different focus on the issues between Congressional Hearings and speeches in the Congressional Record. When small business was mentioned in the Hearings, the issues related to them were often very concrete and policy-driven, while mention of “middle class” and “working class” was associated with discursive characteristics and rhetorical traditions more than with well-defined social groups. For example, in a hearing on food prices and small business held in 2008, small business owner Geoff Tracy gave a statement on behalf of the National Restaurant Association:

I am one of over 13 million people who work in restaurants in this country. And other than the government, we are the largest employer in the United States. Sales for 2008 are estimated to be \$550 billion. The industry serves 133 million guests a day, and every dollar spent dining out generates \$2.34 in business for other industries. In short, we buy and sell a lot of stuff, creating a paycheck for a lot of Americans, and generating a ton of tax revenue. I am told that the total economic impact is \$1.5 trillion. That is a little bit beyond my scope of understanding. And in a world of big business, in a nation where big corporations outsource jobs to foreign countries, we remain an industry of small businesses and local operators. We are rooted in communities and our neighborhoods.

In this excerpt, Tracy both portrayed himself as a representative of the working/middle class – a class serving its own diverse neighborhoods and communities, and whose interests are alleged to be harmed by the outsourced job market by big corporations. In this way, he sought to contrast the interests and degrees of virtue of big and small businesses, and the equivalency of small business interests with that of “average Americans”, in a rhetorically compelling way.

Table 4.3. Percentage of Mentioning by Variables of Social Groups

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions</i> <i>95% Confidence Interval</i>
<i>Small Business</i>	21.3% [17.4% ~ 26.5%]
<i>Employee</i>	4.8% [4.0% ~ 9.4%]
<i>Female</i>	3.5% [1.6% ~ 5.7%]
<i>Minority</i>	2.5% [1.4% ~ 5.3%]
<i>Middle Class</i>	2.5% [0.8% ~ 4.1%]
<i>Working Class</i>	1.9% [0.4% ~ 3.3%]
<i>Senior</i>	1.9% [0.6% ~ 3.7%]
<i>Rich</i>	0.6% [0%* ~ 1.5%]
<i>Male</i>	0.6% [0%* ~ 1.5%]

* Lower bound of CI crosses 0.

* Lower bound of CI crosses 0.

<i>Union</i>	0.6% [0%* ~ 1.5%]
<i>Customer</i>	0.6% [0%* ~ 1.5%]
<i>LGBTQ</i>	0.3% [0%* ~ 0.9%]
<i>Caucasian</i>	0.3% [0%* ~ 0.9%]

Proposition 4 examined the relative deployment of persuasive tactics used in Congressional Hearings when people talked about big corporations, including positioning oneself in relation to one’s audience and the usage of ideographs. The distribution of the self-positioning tactics in the Hearings had a lower frequency (Table 4.4.) as compared to speeches in the Congressional Record. “American Fighter” was identified in 22.0% ~ 31.6% of instances in Hearings, but in 45.3% ~ 53.8% of instances in the Congressional Record. “Social Connectedness” was identified in 14.6% ~ 23.2% of instances in the Hearings, and 16.3% ~ 23.1% of instances in Congressional Record. However, the ranking of the proportion of tactics was the same across contexts. This demonstrates two things: first, that there was a general consistency across congressional speeches and hearings in the usage of persuasive tactics in this discourse; second, that these rhetorical tactics were employed less overall in the more technically oriented hearings (though it should be noted that the difference was not huge, as the majority of speech acts included in the hearings were still being delivered by politicians).

Here is an example of the usage of persuasive tactics and ideographs. In a hearing titled “Oversight of Federal Communications Commission” in 2018, Congressional Rep. Anna Eshoo, a Democrat, stated:

The majority has done this harm not only by revoking high-profile policies like net neutrality, but also through quieter actions such as roll-backs of multiple media

* Lower bound of CI crosses 0.
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ownership rules and reducing eligibility for Lifeline beneficiaries at the behest of incumbent corporate interests. [...] I believe, as many of my colleagues do, that recent actions by the FCC have prioritized corporations over consumers, undermining the fundamental public interest mission of the FCC. Congress has oversight jurisdiction of the Federal Communications Commission, pursuant to the Communications Act, which is an Act of Congress. This is an FCC oversight hearing which means that as Members of Congress, we must ensure that the Commission is doing its job--and that job first and foremost is to advance the public interest.

In this excerpt, we can identify multiple persuasive tactics. Eshoo first contrasted public and corporate interests, then emphasized that she and her colleagues' duty was to ensure the public interest – a typical illustration of the discursive characteristic “American Fighter”. Also, two paragraphs ahead of this excerpt, Eshoo had applied the ideograph “American People”: “On December 14, 2017, the Commission voted to upend the net neutrality rules that had been tested in the Court twice. Those rules were supported on a bipartisan basis by the American people and businesses, but they were rescinded by the FCC.”

Table 4.5 shows the general distribution of the usage of ideographs in Congressional Hearings, which aligned with a pattern in the Congressional Record dataset in terms of the rank order of different ideographs, while the overall percentage of mentions was lower than in the Congressional Record. For example, <American people> was employed in 20.6% (CI:[16.0% ~25.3%]) of the instances in the Congressional Record speeches, but only 10.7% (CI: [6.1% ~ 15.3%]) of the instances in the Congressional Hearings. <Family> was mentioned in 18.2% (CI:

[15.0% ~ 21.5%]) of the instances in the Congressional Record dataset, and 7.0% ~ 13.7% of the instances in the Hearings.

Table 4.4 Percentage of Instances Mentioning Various Persuasive Tactics

<i>Variables of persuasive tactic deployment</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions</i> <i>95% Confidence Interval</i>
<i>Magnitude</i>	36.3% [32.5% ~ 43.1%]
<i>American Fighter</i>	26.1% [22.0% ~ 31.6%]
<i>Social Connectedness</i>	19.1% [14.6% ~ 23.2%]
<i>Characterizing Public Opinion</i>	2.9% [1.2% ~ 4.9%]

Table 4.5. Percentage of Instances Mentioning Ideographs

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Percentage of mentions</i> <i>95% Confidence Interval</i>
<i>American People</i>	8.5% [5.5% ~ 11.6%]
<i>American workers</i>	2.1% [0.6% ~ 3.7%]
<i>Family</i>	10.4% [7.0% ~ 13.7%]
<i>Equity/Unfair</i>	6.1% [3.5% ~ 8.7%]
<i>American Dream</i>	2.7% [0.02% ~ 2.4%]
<i>Freedom</i>	1.0% [0 %* ~ 2.0%]
<i>God</i>	0.6% [0%* ~ 1.5%]

In summary, as compared with the Congressional Record dataset, the Hearings dataset demonstrated a greater attention to economic as opposed to political issues. The social groups posited to be the victims of big corporations also saw a different rank order, with the Hearings touching on local economic issues to a greater extent and paying more attention to customers’ interests (which were rarely mentioned in the Congressional Record). Given the quite different composition of speakers, the rank order of persuasive tactics usage was, surprisingly, the same in both the Congressional Records and Hearings. But the overall usage of ideographs was lower in the Hearings as compared with the Congressional Record. The next section will further analyze and discuss these and related observations.

* Lower bound of CI crosses 0.

* Lower bound of CI crosses 0.

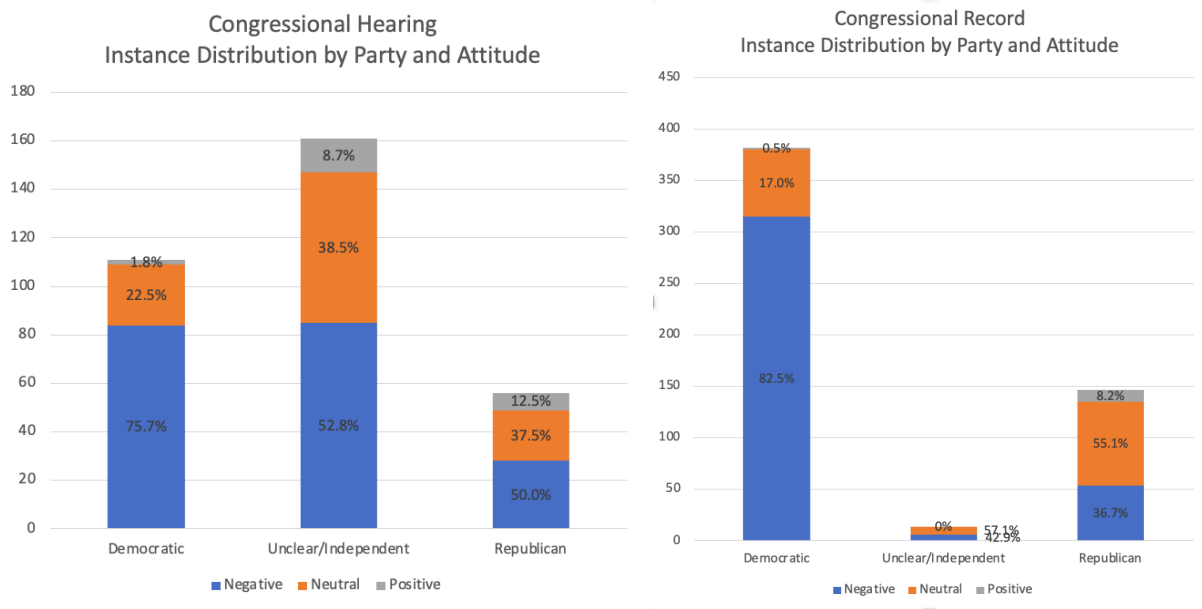
4.3 Discursive Characteristics in Hearings Across Political Identities of Speakers

In researching political discourse, political identity is almost by definition a variable of critical importance. Not only is political discourse fundamentally ideological (van Dijk, T. A. 2003), but also, as amply evident in both the Congressional Record and Hearings datasets, a rhetorically constructed shared belief on the part of certain social groups is assumed or asserted, and reinforced, through the prism of different issues and in various contexts. Partisan identity is, of course, one of the major characteristics reflected in political discourse. It is notable, therefore, that in the Hearings the percentage of independent speakers – speakers who either stated they were independents or where their party affiliation was unclear – was significantly higher (49.4%, compared to 2.6% in the Record), as noted earlier. A strong presumption is that this single factor of partisan identity may be a key driver of differences between the manifestations of big corporation hostility in the two contexts, as shown in several facets.

First, the overall attitude present in the Congressional Hearings was less negative toward big corporations than in the Congressional Record communications. Proportionally, Democratic speakers expressed slightly *less* negative attitudes, and independent (party affiliation-unclear) speakers and Republican speakers expressed slightly *more* negative attitudes, in the Hearings dataset as compared with the Congressional Record (Figure 4.6.). In the Congressional Record dataset, 82.5% of instances by Democratic speakers were negative, 42.9% of instances from independent speakers were negative, and 36.7% of instances from Republican speakers were negative. In the Hearings, 75.7% of instances by Democratic speakers were negative, 52.8% of instances from independent speakers were negative, and 50% of the instances from Republican speakers were negative. Though the findings are not dramatic, they suggest a moderating effect

of the Hearings on the discourse of big corporation hostility – a possible relaxation of political posturing – due again to the different nature of the setting and composition of participants.

The next series of propositions explores elements of partisan discourse in the Hearings dataset, something that was implied but not directly examined in the earlier propositions relating to the different salience of issues. With respect to proposition 5, the Hearings dataset contained more instances in which speakers of ambiguous or expressly independent political standing spoke of big corporations’ undue political benefits and political influence as compared with the Congressional Record dataset. The stacked columns below presented the frequencies with which certain issues were mentioned across different parties. The height of the columns represents the raw counts of instances as mentioned by speakers of each party (and independents), while the frequencies of negative, neutral and positive attitudes are shown. Meanwhile, Chi-squared test was conducted among each set of variables in order to explore statistical inferences.

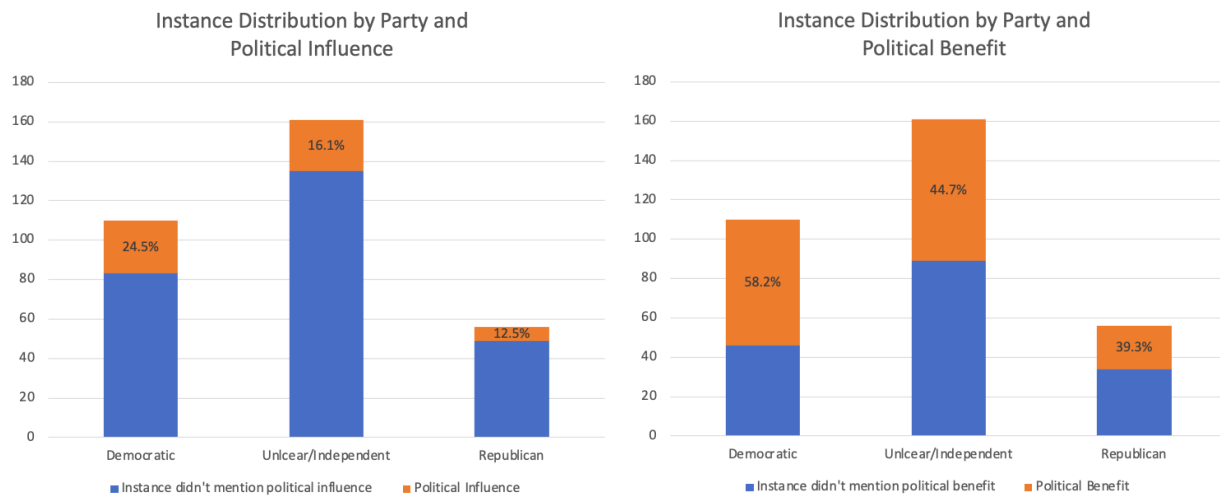


(X-squared = 19.747, df = 4, p<0.001)

(X-squared = 116.46, df = 4, p< 0.001)

Figure 4.6. Instance Distribution by Party and Attitude in Congressional Hearing and Congressional Record

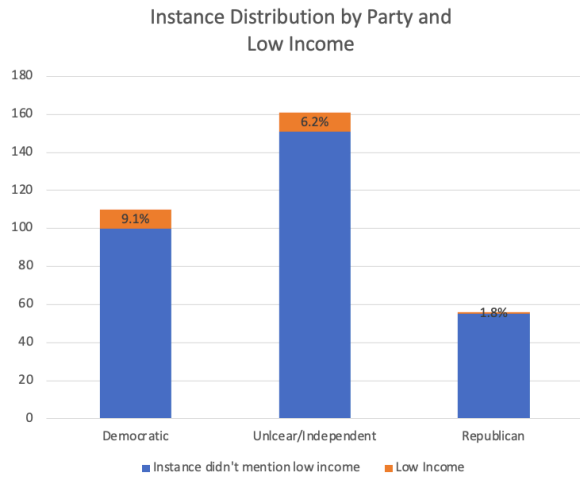
Figure 4.7. shows that in the Hearings dataset, big corporation-related political influence and associated benefits had a high frequency of mentions, including significantly more mentions by independent/party affiliation-unclear speakers. Figure 9-10 explore a similar comparison with respect to economic issues as surfaced in the two datasets. The two datasets presented a similar basic pattern of mentions on economic issues, except that the Hearings showed a greater proportion of mentions from independent (or party affiliation-unclear) speakers. On most of the economic issues, the frequency of mentions by independent speakers were higher than Republicans but lower than Democrats (Figures 4.8-4.9), except for “local economy” and “small business”. Local economy-related comments were delivered only five times in the Hearings sample, and only by independent speakers. Independent speakers also mentioned small business the most, at a level similar to Democratic speakers (Figure 4.10).



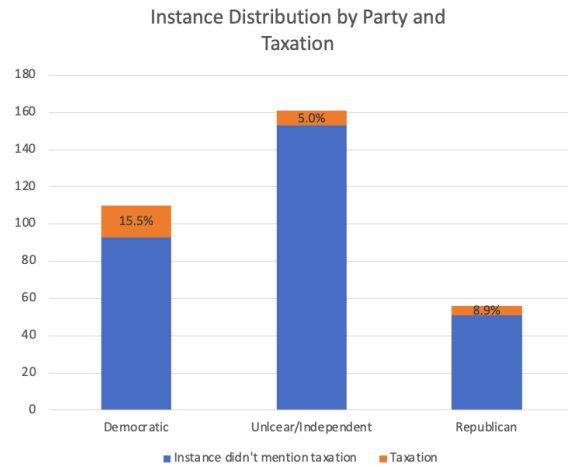
(X-squared = 6.5675, df = 4, p = 0.1606)

(X-squared = 8.1324, df = 4, p = 0.08685)

Figure 4.7. Instance Distribution by Party for Political Influence/Political Benefits Variables in the Congressional Hearings

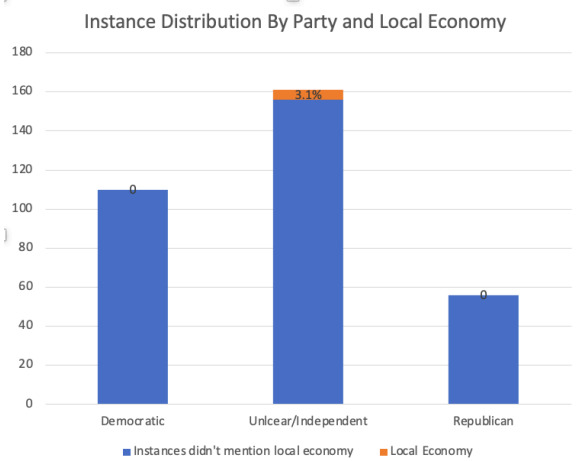


(X-squared = 5.278, df = 4, p= 0.2599)

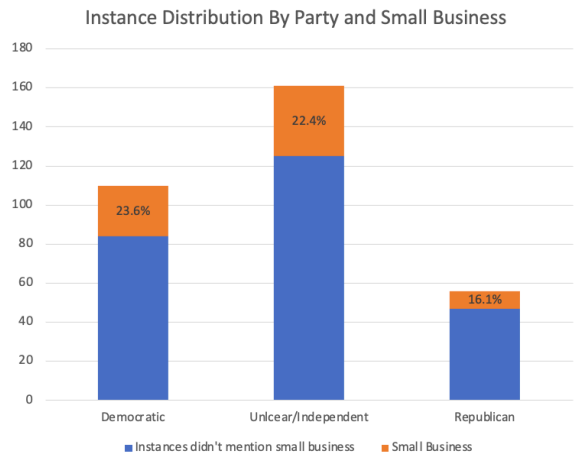


(X-squared = 10.568, df = 4, p<0.05)

Figure 4.8. Instance Distribution by Party for Effect on Low Income Populations and Unfair Taxation in the Congressional Hearings

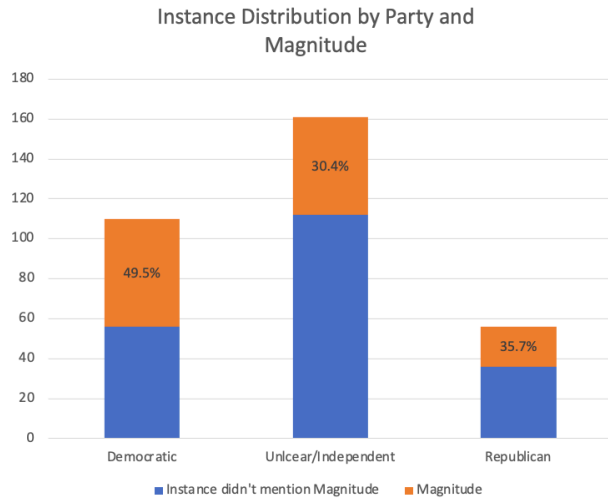


(X-squared = 7.1968, df = 4, p = 0.1258)

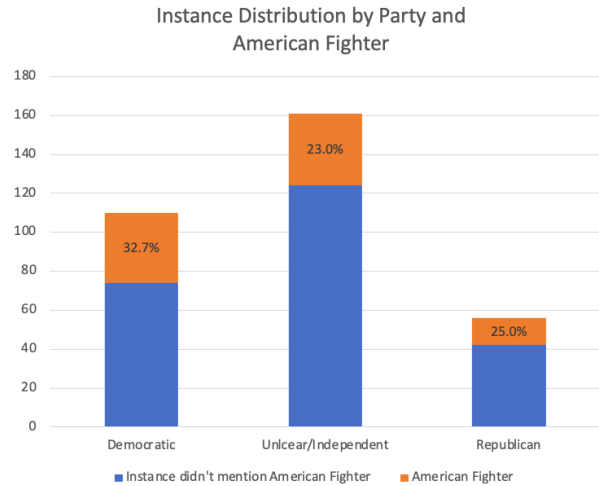


(X-squared = 3.2904, df = 4, p = 0.5104)

Figure 4.9. Instance Distribution by Party for Local Economy/Small Business Variables in the Congressional Hearings

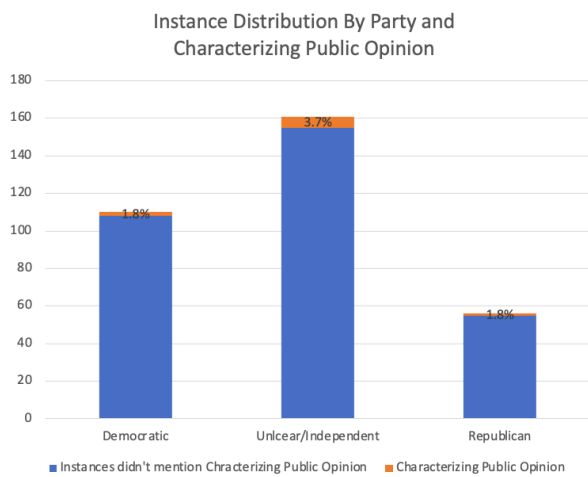


(X-squared = 11.732, df = 4, p-value = 0.01946)

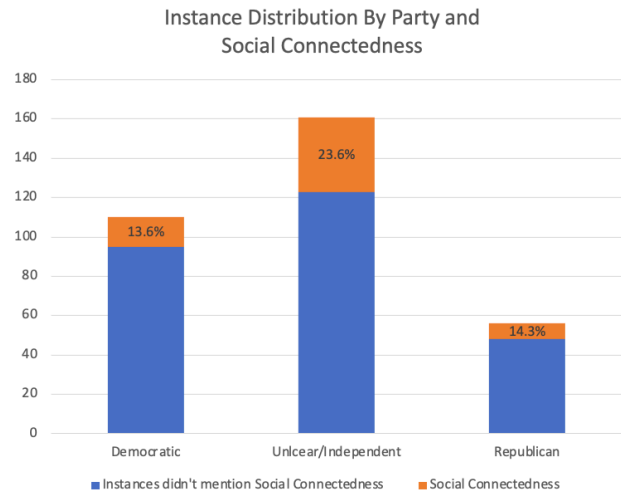


(X-squared = 5.2198, df = 4, p-value = 0.2655)

Figure 4.10. Instance Distribution by Party for the Magnitude/American Fighter Variables in the Congressional Hearings



(X-squared = 3.0863, df = 4, p = 0.5435)



(X-squared = 7.0875, df = 4, p = 0.1313)

Figure 4.11. Instance Distribution by Party for Characterizing Public Opinion/Social Connectedness Variables in the Congressional Hearings

Compared to the Congressional Record, both parties employed far fewer persuasive tactics in the Hearings, but this difference was more significant among Republican speakers. At the same time, independent/party affiliation-unclear speakers used more of these tactics in the Hearings – a perhaps counter-intuitive finding. Unlike in the Congressional Record dataset, in which Republican speakers were found to use more of these tactics, in the Congressional Hearings, independent speakers were identified using these tactics quite often, not only in terms

of describing the magnitude of the issue (Figure 4.10), but also in characterizing public opinion, demonstrating social connectedness, and positioning themselves as “American Fighters” (Figures 4.10-4.11.). Both “social connectedness” and “characterizing public opinion” were quite often applied by independent speakers, more so, in fact, than Democratic and Republican speakers (by both proportion and count). This is also very intriguing as one would assume that using persuasive tactics is politicians’ specialty. It may also underscore that our image of witnesses before the hearings may need to change from one of being ‘neutral experts’ to that of ‘advocates’ perhaps carefully selected by the politicians themselves to advance political perspectives into the Hearings under ‘non-partisan’ cover.

Figure 4.12 presents the distribution of instances relating to particular sentiments in the Hearings dataset. Whether “indignant” or “happy”, independent/party affiliation-unclear speakers expressed a significantly greater frequency of sentiments as compared with what was found in the (primarily partisan) Congressional Records dataset. The frequency distribution of such sentiment expressions between the two political parties presented a similar pattern as in the Congressional Record dataset (Chapter 3, Figure 3.19.) except that more positive sentiments were expressed overall in the Hearings. In the Congressional Record, 88.7% of the instances from Democratic speakers expressed indignation; this number in the Congressional Hearings was 86.4%. In the Congressional Record, 76.9% of the instances from Republican speakers expressed indignation; in the Hearings, it was 78.6%. While these numbers were very close across the discourse contexts, a divergence occurred among the independent speakers: in the Hearings, 73.3% of instances from independent speakers expressed indignation while this number was 50% in the Congressional Record.

“Indignant” was the most expressed sentiment, across all political identity categories (Figure 4.12). While sentiments of “happy”, “sad” or “excited” were much less expressed overall in both the Congressional Record and Hearings datasets (the latter are shown in Figure 4.12), independent speakers claimed a significant share of them. What was especially noticeable was that in the Hearings dataset, Democratic party speakers expressed a “happy” sentiment 9.1% of the time – substantially more often than the 2.9% recorded for such speakers in the Congressional Record dataset.

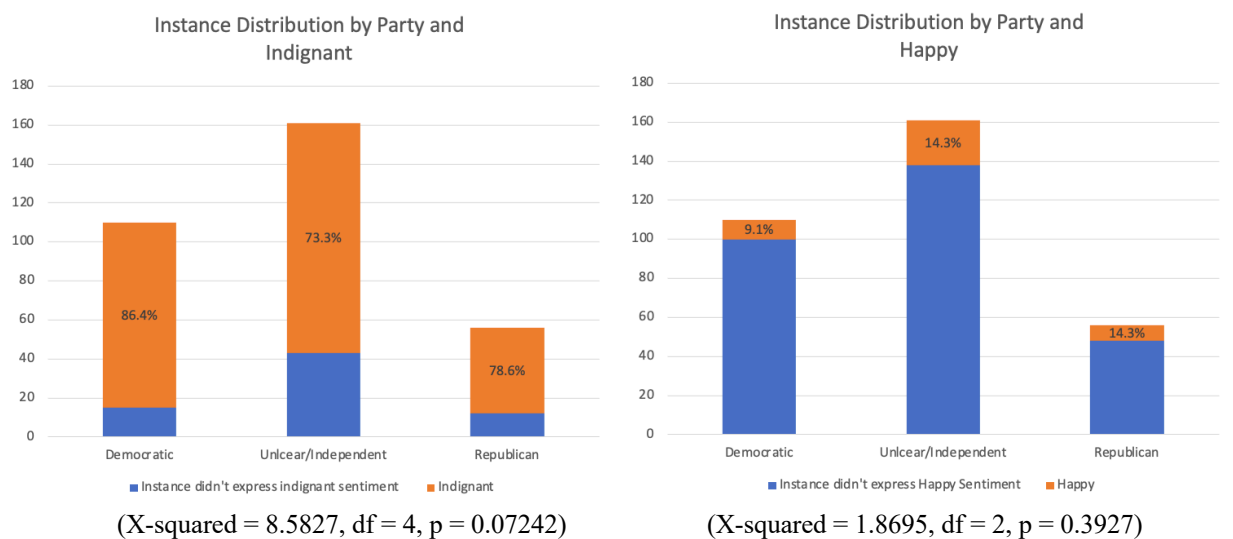
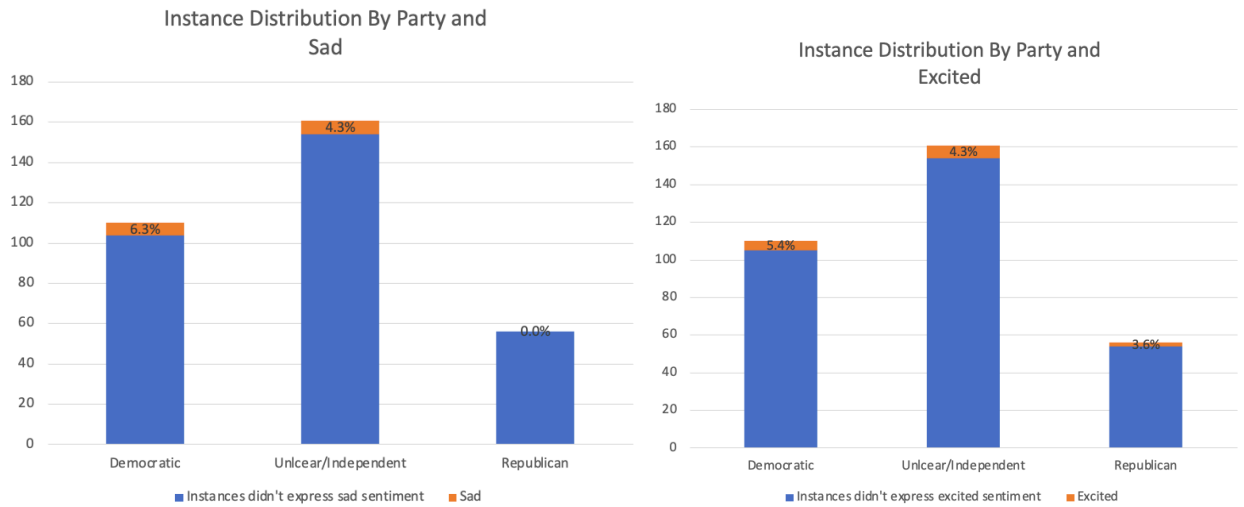


Figure 4.12. Instance Distribution by Party and Indignant/Happy Sentiments in the Congressional Hearings



(X-squared = 4.9717, df = 4, p = 0.2902)

(X-squared = 2.0504, df = 4, p = 0.7265)

Figure 4.13. Instance Distribution by Party and Sad/Excited Sentiments in the Congressional Hearing

In summary, independent speakers' public communications were a very significant constituent of the congressional hearings (49.1% of the total instances). On some measures, they appeared to bring more neutral testimony, evidence and comments than did public officials. On big corporation-related political issues, these communications appeared to occupy a middle ground between Democratic and Republican speakers, according to the frequency of asserting undue political benefits and influence enjoyed by big corporations. Their discussions on most big corporation-related economic issues also showed that independent speakers focused more testimony on local economy, small business and rural issues in comparison to Democratic and Republican speakers. Despite the independent/unclear party status, persuasive tactics were identified quite often in these speakers' communications, which was also suggestive of how the witness testimonies were organized, how the hearings were orchestrated by both parties, and what kind of advocacy orientations even apparently non-partisan witnesses might bring. In many cases, the independent/party affiliation-unclear speakers also presented evidence and testimony

in support of one or other of the parties, so one cannot discount the likelihood of rhetorical strategies being deployed by these speakers for specific purposes. No utterances can or should be assumed to be apolitical in the Hearings context, no matter how technical the content or apparently neutral the stance being adopted. Certainly, the politicians orchestrating the hearings will not take them as such.

In sum, the discursive characteristics of big-corporation hostility were present in congressional hearings, but these characteristics had been re-distributed in comparison to the Congressional Record, likely due to the nature of the Hearings and their participants.

4.4 Discursive Characteristics of Hearing Committees in the Congressional Hearings Data

One of the distinctive features of the Congressional hearings is the role of hearing committees. There are standing committees (16 of them), joint committees and special or ‘select’ committees. Hearings are a method by which committee members gather information. Business dealt with in hearings may be broadly classified into four types: legislative, oversight, investigative, and consideration of presidential nominations[§]. Table 7 lists all the committees that made an appearance in the Congressional Hearings. I categorized them into 4 groups by the type or jurisdiction of their work, for the purpose of further analysis. I found that big corporation-related themes appeared here in ways that were consistent with the previous analysis of both the Congressional Record and Hearings. This section extends these findings by examining the discursive characteristics as they correlate with the committees in which the discourse arises.

Table 4.6. The Categories of Committee Type
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

[§] https://www.senate.gov/committees/committees_faq.htm

<i>Politics and Law</i>	Committee on Governmental Affairs
	Committee on Oversight and Reform
	Committee on Government Reform
	Committee on Judiciary
	Committee on Appropriations
	Committee on House Administration
	Congressional Oversight Panel
<i>Security</i>	Committee on Armed Services
	Congressional-Executive Commission on China
	Committee on Indian Affairs
	Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
	Committee on Foreign Affairs
	Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
	Committee on Veterans' Affairs
<i>Environment and Science</i>	Committee on Homeland Security
	Committee on Foreign Relations
	Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
	Committee on Natural Resources
	Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
	Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming
	Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
	Committee on Science
	Committee on Science and Technology
	Committee on Environment and Public Works
<i>Economy</i>	Committee on Agriculture
	Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
	Committee on House Administration
	Committee on Financial Services
	Committee on Small Business
	Committee on Energy and Commerce
	Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
	Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
	Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
	Joint Economic Committee
	Committee on Finance
	Committee on Ways and Means
	Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Joint Select Committee on Solvency of Multiemployer Pension Plans	
Committee on Education and the Workforce	
Committee on Budget	

Committees play a defining role in Congressional hearings, with their work of organizing hearings around the in-depth examination of specific issues that are often signposted to be either bi-partisan concerns or beyond party differences. The investigation of the effects committee types have on discursive characteristics can complement our analysis by adding a different contextual factor, thus adding further variation and nuance to the study of the big corporation hostility discourse.

In the Hearings dataset sample, there were 328 instances of anti-big corporation discourse from 41 committees holding hearings. Table 4.6. divides these observations into particular types according to the themes of the committees. Figure 4.14 presented their activeness in mentioning big corporations, with the numeric values on each bar being the results of total hearings per type divided by number of committees in each type of committees (keeping in mind that these hearings all contained mention of big corporation-related issues). Dividing the number of hearings by the number of committees gives us a simple measure of the frequency with which big corporation issues appear in each type of Committee. The ‘Economy’ category came out clearly on top, the “Politics and Law” category was second and close to the combined total of the remaining “Security” and “Environment and Science” categories. By doing so, a new variable – “Committee type” – was generated in the Hearings dataset.

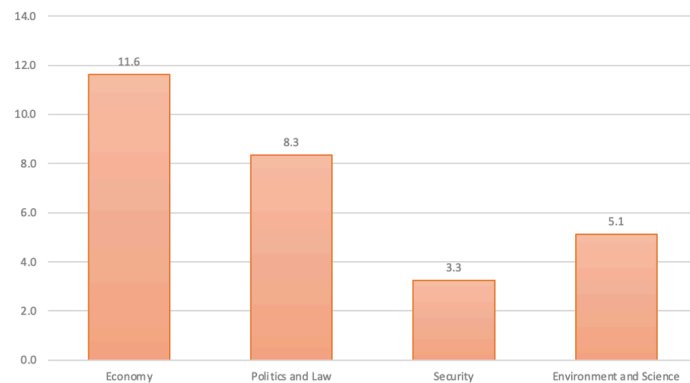


Figure 4.14. Activeness in Mentioning Big Corporation by Committee Type in Congressional Hearing

Over the past 20 years, the number of hearings held by economy committees that discussed big corporations appeared to be on a slightly decreasing trend (Figure 4.15) with 2006 and 2009 as the peaks. In fact, the overall trend lines (linear regression) across the committee categories all appeared to be decreasing in the last 20 years, *except* for Security committees (Figure 4.14, $B=-0.14$, $SE=0.19$, $p\text{-value}=0.47$, Figure 4.15, $B=-0.06$, $SE=0.08$, $p\text{-value}=0.5$, Figure 4.16, $B=-0.12$, $SE=0.09$, $p\text{-value}=0.20$, Figure 4.17, $B=0.09$, $SE=0.48$, $p\text{-value}=0.09$). This is interesting because it reveals the changing focal point of big corporation hostility, with shifting importance assigned to different issues.

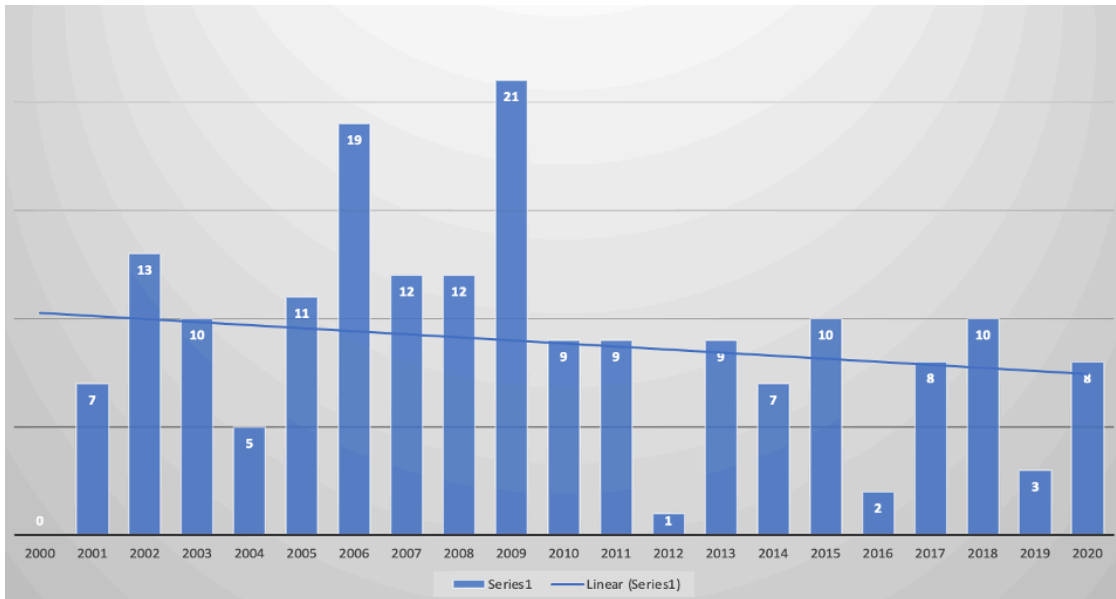


Figure 4.15. Distribution of Instances from Hearings Held by Economy Type of Committees

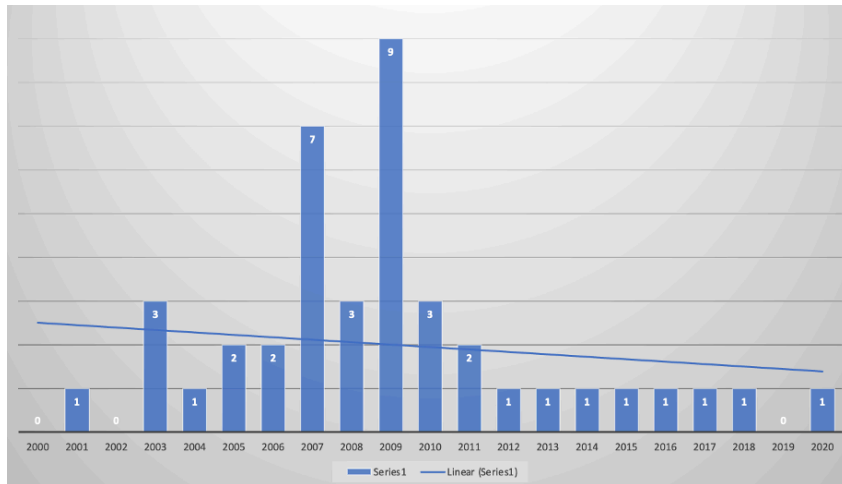


Figure 4.16. Distribution of Instances from Hearings Held by Environment and Science Type of Committees

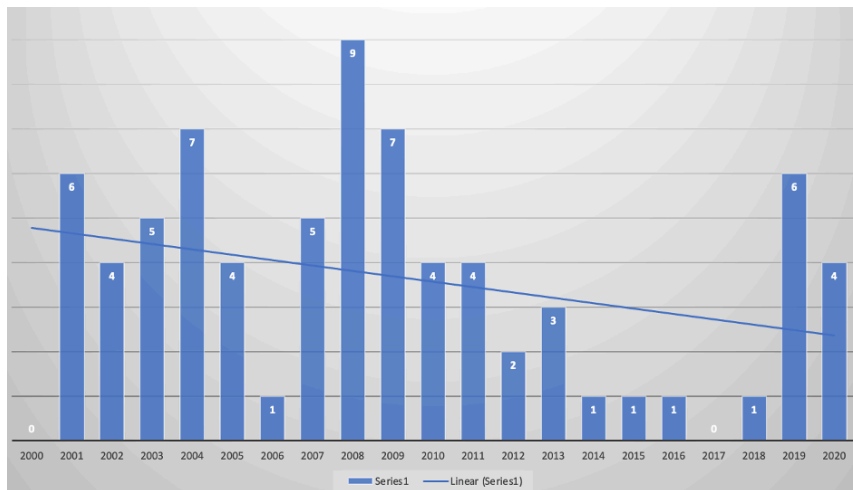


Figure 4.17. Distribution of Instances from Hearings Held by Politics and Law Type of Committees

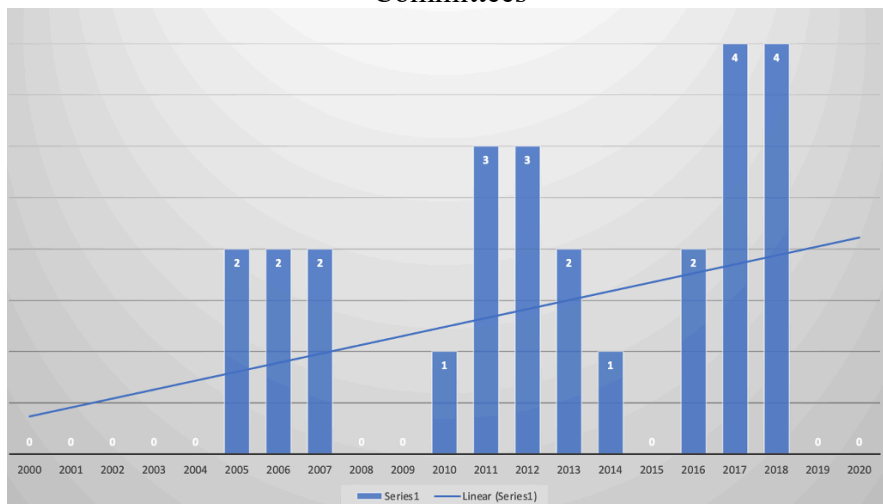


Figure 4.18. Distribution of Instances from Hearings Held by Security Type of Committees

Second, I examined the general attitude exhibited in hearings across the committee types.

Figure 4.19 shows that negative attitudes towards big corporations were dominant in the Economy, Politics and Law as well as the Environment and Science categories, but not in security committees, in which the neutral attitude was most present. The results from a Chi-Square test supported that there were significant differences between types of committees and types of attitudes ($p < .001$).

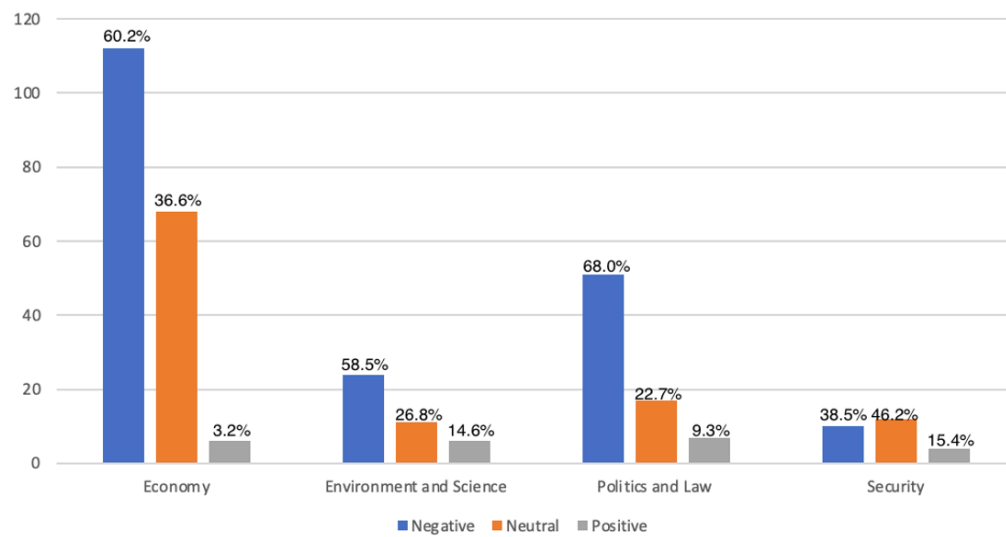


Figure 4.19. Instance Distribution by Committee Type and Attitude

In terms of drawing discursive differences between big corporations and the rest of the society, there were notable differences across the committee types. As mentioned earlier, 11.1% ($p < .01$) of the instances in the Congressional Hearings identified corporate people as elites (95% confidence interval: 7.6%~14.6%); this proportion of instances was quite evenly distributed across the four committee types, being only slightly higher than average in the Politics and Law type of committees (Figure 4.20).

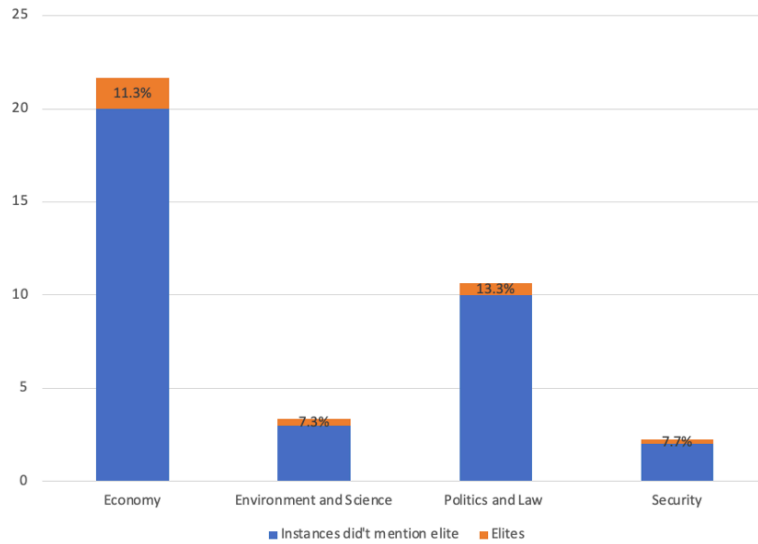


Figure 4.20. Instance Distribution by Committee Type and “Elite” in Congressional Hearing

In addition, 21.3% ($p < .001$) of the hearing instances portrayed small businesses as the victims of big corporations, with these instances predominantly found in committees of the Economy as well as Politics and Law types. Committees focused on Environment and Science generally did not include instances mentioning small businesses as the victims of big corporations, but interestingly, 7.7% of the security related instances included this point of view in the Hearings (Figure 4.20).

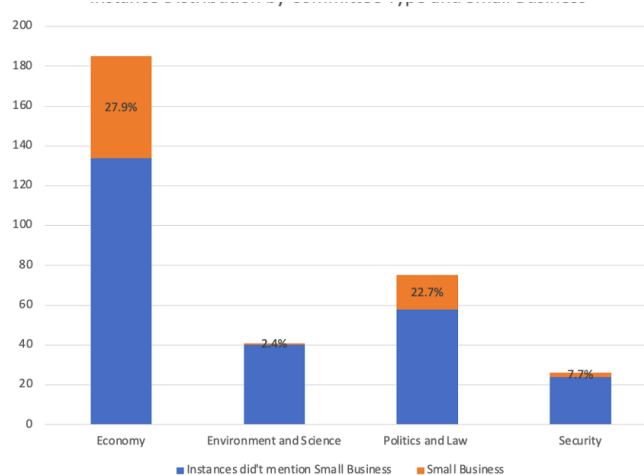


Figure 4.21. Instance Distribution by Committee Type and Small Business

The combination of Figure 4.20 and Figure 4.21 suggests that among economic and politics-related Congressional hearings, discursive devices underpinning partisan discourses were pronounced in comparison to other themes. The discursive opposition of big corporations and small businesses is the dominant theme in the economy-based committees, while the inclusion of divisive discursive features in the Politics and Law Committees hearings further suggested the political framing and utility of big corporation-related hostility in political communications. The assertion or description of unfair political benefits and influence enjoyed by big corporations was one of the focal points of discursive hostility in this context. This discursive characteristic saw the highest percentage of mentions in the hearings held by the Environment and Science committees. This implied that when Environment and Science-related issues were discussed in these hearings, the uneven distribution of political resources was often highlighted – surprisingly, even more frequently as a proportion of all mentions in this category than in the Politics and Law-related hearings (Figure 4.22.).

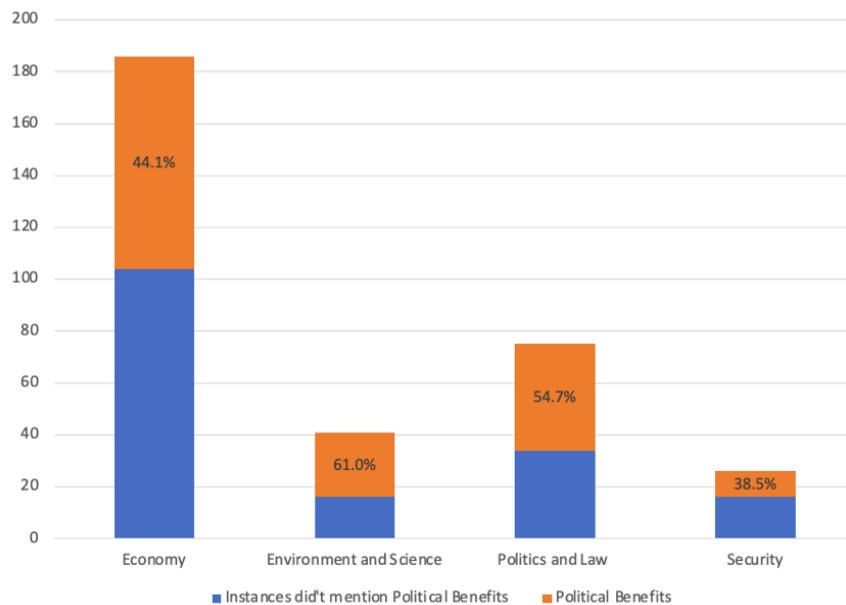


Figure 4.22. Instance Distribution by Committee Type and Political Benefits in Congressional Hearing

Next, I examined the persuasive tactics committees employed in hearings. The most common tactic, found in 37.5% of the hearings, was to emphasize the magnitude of the issue associated with big corporations. The second most common was to posit oneself as an “American fighter” (in 26.5% of the hearings). In contrast, very few hearings saw speakers attempting to “characterize public opinion” (2.7% of the hearings). The overall distribution of the persuasive tactics used across different categories of committees is shown in Figure 4.23. “American fighter” and “Social connectedness” were the tactics identified earlier in this chapter that express the intention of the speaker to posit a shared identity; these two tactics made frequent appearances in the Politics and Law and in the Environment and Science types of committees. These two areas traditionally appeared to be more divided in American politics, and political figures regularly use evidence or discursive tactics to achieve their objectives. In other words, where meaning was more contested, more discursive tactics were deployed. The results from a Chi-Square test also supported that contingency existed between types of committees and types of persuasive tactics had been used in the speeches ($p < .001$). This result reveals that speakers tended to use different persuasive tactics on different types of issues. In other words, while some of the discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility were applied evenly and somewhat generically – for example, the emphasis on the magnitude of the issues – some other characteristics were more associated with specific themes taken up by the speakers. Thus, context helps to drive the deployment of discursive variations.

Quite different from the situation in the Congressional Record dataset, the employment of ideographs in the Hearings dataset was relatively insignificant (as shown in Table 4.5.). It saw a lower percentage of mentions overall, though the frequency rank order of different ideographs was the same as in Congressional Record. For example, the highest percentage mentioning the

ideograph <American> was 14.6% of the instances, and was found in the Environment and Science Committees, while other types of ideographs were mentioned at much lower percentages. (For this reason, I do not include a chart of the distribution across committees, as the frequency was too low to add up to a distinctive discursive feature.) This could be seen as further evidence to show that hearings usually have a stronger focus on specific issues/themes, rather than being tangled with discussions on a conceptual or ideological level.

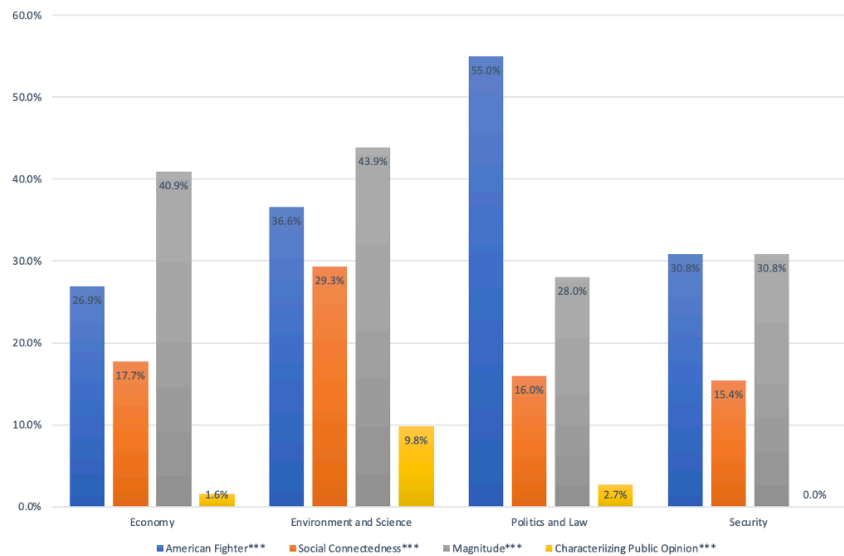


Figure 4.23. Persuasive Tactic Distribution by Committee Type in Congressional Hearing

The final variables I investigated here were sentiments. Similar to the findings in the Congressional Record dataset, the sentiments of “excited” and “sad” were expressed very rarely (they are not included in the chart due to their very low frequency of mention). The expression of indignation was very consistent across different committee types, and occurred with high frequency. In contrast, the sentiment “happy” was expressed consistently across committee types in the Hearings dataset (see Figure 4.24). The results from a Chi-Square test supported the contingent relationship between types of committees and types of sentiments. Between Committee types and “indignant”, the p-value was less than .001, while between Committee

types and “Happy”, the p-value was less than .05. This is intriguing for two reasons. First, there was not such a high percentage of “happy” sentiment expressed in Congressional Record (4.4% in the whole Records dataset). Second, the contingency between sentiment and committee type indicated that there were more positive attitudes expressed in the context of certain issues; Environment and Science Committees expressed the sentiment “happy” 19.5% of the time, which Political and Law Committees only expressed that same sentiment 8% of the time. Big corporation hostility is a discourse heavily intertwined with and affected by general public opinion on certain issues, which could explain the fluctuation in the attitude across committee types.

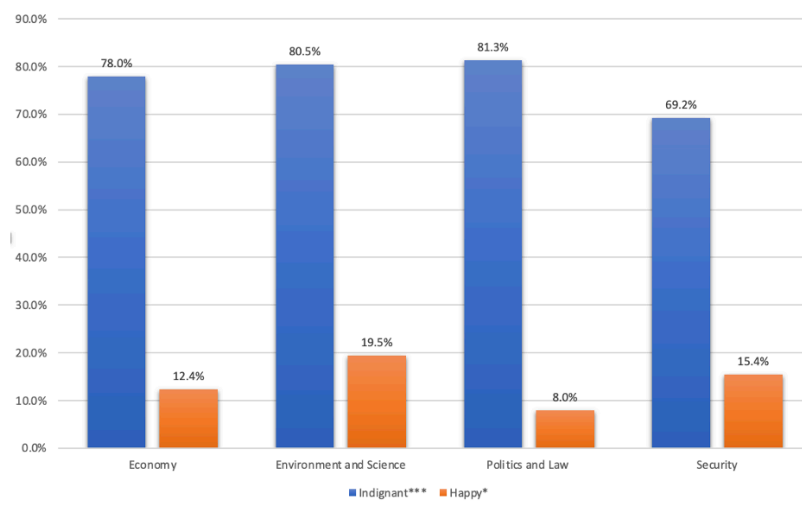


Figure 4.24. Sentiments Distribution by Committee Type in Congressional Hearing

4.5 Summary of Findings

This chapter covered considerable ground in the analysis of Congressional Hearings in which big corporations were discussed. In comparing the hearings to speeches in the Congressional Record, and then in some deeper analysis of distinctive characteristics in the hearings, I sought here to broaden and deepen what I have termed the big corporation-related

hostility discourse in the public communications of members – and invited witnesses – of Congress. In this section, I present some summaries and reflections on the hearings.

The general frequency of big corporation instances in the Congressional Hearings increased over the first ten years of the 21st century and peaked in 2009, then took on a fluctuating pattern from 2010 to 2020. The instance distribution across parties was also significantly different than in the Congressional Record dataset. Due to the nature of the hearings, almost half (49.4%) of the instances were by independent or party affiliation-unclear speakers, compared to only 2.6% of the instances were from independent speakers in the Congressional Record dataset. Since in Chapter 3 we saw that party affiliation was strongly related to big-corporation hostility discourse, this distinctive characteristic in the Hearings dataset raises the question of the impact of partisanship on the overall pattern of discourse. Compared to the Congressional Record dataset, the overall expression of negative attitudes was far lower in the Congressional Hearings dataset, while Republican speakers actually expressed more negative attitudes (and less neutral attitudes) in the Hearings. (The attitudes expressed by Democratic party speakers were similar across the Congressional Record and Hearings data.) When independent speakers' attitudes were examined in greater detail, it was found that their attitudes mirrored closely those of Republican speakers (Figure 4.5.), expressing significantly fewer negative attitudes, and more neutral and positive attitudes, as compared with Democratic speakers.

The themes emphasized in the communications of Congressional Hearings were different than in the Congressional Record. The top three issues were “environmental issues”, “competition” and “health insurance” in the hearings, differing from the rank ordering in the Congressional Record dataset (which was “health insurance”, “Taxation”, and “Low income”).

Meanwhile, the overall proportion of mentions of political issues was lower in the Congressional Hearings, while the relative rank of frequency within the political issue category was the same in both datasets. Independent speakers had the highest frequency of mentioning topics related to small business, local economy and rural areas, another distinctive feature as compared with the Congressional Record. The asserted or imputed “victims” of big corporations were different between the Hearings and Congressional Record, with a higher proportion in the Hearings mentioning “competition”, “small business”, “customers” and “female” – none of which were mentioned as frequently in the Congressional Record. In terms of persuasive tactics and ideographs deployed, there were no major differences in the rank order, although their overall deployment was lower in the Hearings as compared with the Record. In short, probably because non-partisan speakers were so prevalent in the Hearings dataset, the focus of the issues in the big-corporation hostility discourse shifted somewhat, with a different focus on particular social groups, and with less intensive use of discursive characteristics. Interestingly, the overall hostility/negative attitude towards big corporations was not greatly reduced in the Hearings compared to the Record dataset; rather, its prevalence was only redistributed among speakers of different party affiliations (with a higher percentage of Republican politicians and independents expressing negativity, balanced by a slightly lower percentage of Democratic speakers).

Another distinctive finding in the Hearings dataset that could potentially affect the presentation of characteristics of big corporation hostility was the composition of the committees. Congressional Hearings are convened at the discretion of congressional committees, the foci of which have a defining effect on the discourse. From examining the different presentations of big-corporation hostility across different types of committees, the chapter presented evidence that “big corporations”, “big business” and “corporate interests” (my search

terms for communications in the Record and Hearings) were most frequently mentioned in “economy”-related committees, followed by committees on “politics and law”. Committees focusing on “security” mentioned big corporations the least in the aggregate; notably, though, security-related committees saw an increasing tendency to take on such issues over the last two decades. Further, attitudes toward big corporations were in general negatively correlated with the activeness of committees mentioning big corporations, i.e., the greater that activeness, the more negative were the attitudes, except those hearings held by “politics and law” committees contained the highest percentage of negative attitudes – slightly higher than in hearings held by committees related to the economy. Although we would think that hearings usually have a stronger focus on specific issues/themes, rather than being tangled with discussions on a conceptual or ideological level, in fact the use of persuasive tactics was quite widespread in the hearings examined. Hearings held by committees related to the “economy” and to “environment and science” most commonly emphasized the magnitude of particular issues as a persuasive tactic, to a far greater degree than in hearings held by committees on “politics and law”. In contrast, in “politics and law” committees, the most-used persuasive tactic was the self-claiming of a speaker as an “American fighter”. This finding is important because it provides nuanced and comparative empirical evidence that can help us define the characteristics of big corporation hostility in the Congressional Hearing dataset. Although the overall attitudes expressed in the hearings were more neutral and positive than those found in the Congressional Record dataset, this finding in itself does not imply that hearings speakers were less politically motivated, so to speak. Instead, it suggests the complexity of this discourse and the important mediating influence of context on discourse characteristics.

Ideograph deployment was not a prominent characteristic found in the Hearings dataset. This finding reflects that the context and audience of most hearings were very specific, such that demagogical speech skills were less relevant – i.e., presumably less likely to be effective when deployed here. At the same time, it provided further evidence to help us distinguish the Hearing dataset from Congressional Record dataset, in order to grasp the variations of big corporation hostility discourse in different contexts.

However, it is noteworthy that the sentiment “indignant” was quite evenly distributed across different type of committees, and it occurred with high frequency. This provides further evidence for the way in which indignation – a sentiment stoked by the resentment politics of our age – has become closely associated with big corporation-related political discourse over the last two decades. It is also interesting to observe that even with a higher percentage of positive attitudes and sentiments found in the Hearings dataset, the percentage of indignant expressions in the Hearings dataset remained at a similar level, implying that the hostility towards big corporations does not tend to be balanced against other positive factors that may be found in the speeches. This further underscores that hostility *is* the primary sentiment attached to the image of big corporations.

To summarize, the big corporation hostility discourse as it was manifested in Congressional Hearings shared both similarities and differences with speeches in the Congressional Record. Given two distinctive characteristics of the Hearings – a greater proportion of independent speakers, and the distinctive pattern of topics taken up by different types of hearing committees – it is not surprising that the frequency, intensity, and foci of certain characteristics in this discourse might differ somewhat from communications in the Congressional Record. The identification of independent speakers and different types of hearing

committees, as two important variables in the Hearings context, has enriched our understanding of the discourse in Congress about big corporations. Speakers can attach to different issues, or project different victims onto the discourse of big corporation hostility, in part based on their own identity. While hostility/negativity towards big corporations may be used to demonstrate party positions as we saw in Chapter Three, and to a lesser degree in these Hearings, its usage is definitely not limited to that aim.

Indeed, the discourse of big-corporation hostility exists in public communications in a versatile and prevalent fashion. It may find its greatest voice in the context of economic issues, but the hostility is also often articulated in perceptions of undue political benefits and political influence wielded by big corporations, and this pattern surfaced in both the Congressional Record and these Congressional Hearings, as well as across types of committees in the hearings. Overall, the discursive locus of the hostility seems to be found in the collaboration and common interests shared between economic and political elites, who are asserted to jointly form an exploitive social class vis-à-vis the “American people.”

Chapter 5. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF BIG CORPORATION HOSTILITY

This dissertation has examined the Congressional Record and Congressional Hearings as artifacts providing insight into a specific thematic political discourse in the United States over the last two decades: what I have termed the discourse of “big corporation hostility.” Political discourse refers to the text or speech of professional politicians or political institutions (Kitaeva and Ozerova 2019), and is widely viewed as the formal exchange of reasoned views (Johnson and Johnson 2000). This dissertation is situated within the semantic tradition of communication studies, which focuses on the social construction of public perception via language, knowledge, information and messages, often with a focus on mass media and political discourses. In the discourse of big corporation hostility, the purveyors of ‘reasoned views’ attempt to associate, directly or indirectly, certain political and economic issues with the image of big corporations. The discourse creates a narrative in which certain social groups take up their rhetorical positions as the asserted or implied victims of corporate interests. It is also a discourse marked by the sentiment of indignation with respect to the actions of big corporations, and in which all offering their reasoned views are cast in the role of serving “the American people”, in contrast to corporate interests.

In these ways, this discourse can be described as a consistent collection of ideas about, and patterns of describing, big corporations in the United States. Because the patterns are consistent, they can be described and assessed in terms of the specific discursive tactics typically deployed to produce and reproduce various corporate images, which can then further be linked to the political agendas that are associated with contrasting images of big corporations. Of course,

big corporation-hostility is only one example of a political discourse that prominently addresses or seeks to trigger the public's presumed fears or biases. Like other targets of political or public fear or hostility, big corporations become in some parts of this discourse an enemy at once concrete and imagined, *both* the product of economic and political conditions in a given society at a given time *and* a product of prevailing human psychology.

Big corporations manifest within the hostility discourse as a set of presumed intentions, effects and attributes that are evoked and imagined, separate from any necessary direct experience of them. At the same time, big corporations are also a highly influential category of economic actors, and due to their size and prominence within the economy, they have been associated with controversial events and issues that directly affect the interests of broad segments of the population. In recent decades, the awareness of growing economic inequalities in the United States has become heightened and more politicized, and these inequalities are associated in much of the political discourse and public imagination with the political influence big business is said to enjoy over economic policymaking. Thus, a combination of objective and subjective factors drives the shifting landscape of public opinion related to big corporations, and offers to politicians an irresistible target – a perfect enemy, one might say – to which to pin a host of maladies.

To say this is not to take a position in the debates over the objective drivers of income inequality or other social, political and economic ills; and it is certainly not to “defend” American corporations or big business against specific critiques. Instead, the research presented in this dissertation has focused attention on how the image of big corporations has been constructed in national politicians' public communications. By examining the discursive characteristics in this political space, we can better understand how images associated with big

corporations accrue emotional and perceptive values shared between speakers and their imputed audiences, and how politicians seek to manipulate those meanings to serve their own agendas. The dissertation describes the characteristics of these constructed and molded images, attempting in the process to explicate the world-as-perceived and the world-as-described.

5.1 Discursive characteristics of big corporation hostility: A summary

The discourse of big corporation hostility does not exist in a vacuum; it shares many discursive characteristics with related political discourses. In order to capture these characteristics, this dissertation has drawn upon insights from narrative theory, identification theory and ideograph theory. This section examines each in turn.

The first foundation for this study is narrative theory. Politicians in the empirical texts examined in this dissertation – political speeches and hearing transcripts drawn from the Congressional Record and Congressional Hearings – not only associate many major economic and political problems (even rising to the level of unfixable systematic flaws) with big corporations; they also convey the impression or imputation of shared experiences with their intended audience. Narrative theory provides a tool with which to analyze how the stories and narratives on which politicians draw are constructed, and how the arguments, values, and ideologies they imply are embedded in these narratives and conveyed to their audiences. Through observing big corporation hostility discourses in the Congressional Record and Hearings, we have learned that the narratives around big corporations have a strong connection to concerns over political corruption and economic inequality. The most discussed *economic* issues in big corporation-related speeches included income inequality, health insurance, unfair taxation, an unequal competitive playing field between big business and small business, and

national (as opposed to local or global) economic prospects. The most discussed *political* issues in big corporation-related speeches included the claim that big corporations exert undue political influence and receive undue political benefits.

What is the nature of this political influence, as it surfaces in the accusations contained in this discourse? It is interesting to note that these political issues were mainly described or implied in the speeches to be forms of legal (if pernicious) influence – i.e., direct lobbying or the attempt to influence policymaking through campaign contributions – rather than directly implied to be corruption *per se*. On the surface, it might therefore appear a less severe accusation than a direct assertion of corruption or illegality might be; but this would be mistaken. A careful reading of the texts suggests that the narrative of political influence and undue benefits as repeatedly mentioned in the Congressional Record and hearings (particularly as advanced by Democratic speakers) is one of *systemic corruption* and a *rigged economy*, to the point where no piecemeal or policy solution is readily apparent. That rather common form of the big corporation hostility narrative asserts or implies big corporations to be the perpetrators (or at least part of the cause) of this systemic corruption, in which the very political elites (of the opposing party, to be sure) present in the room as the speeches are being made, are willing co-conspirators. Rather than focusing on *cases* of corruption, the speeches tend to assert a *syndrome* of corruption in Washington, D.C. – a view that these politicians appear to assume the U.S. public will share.

Besides helping us to identify and describe discursive patterns in which rhetorical enemies are constructed, narrative theory also emphasizes the assertion of shared experiences between speakers and their audiences. This line in narrative theory proved very valuable in the current study, because it guided the investigation of persuasive tactics that had been deployed in big corporation-related public communications in the sample. Speakers might typically address

their audience by characterizing public opinion, describing the pressing urgency or magnitude of the issues, emphasizing the bonds of identity connecting them with their audience, and then even claiming themselves to be fighters in the interests of the common people (“American fighters” as I termed this construct in the study).

Indeed, this claim of speakers to be ‘American fighters’ leads us to the second prominent characteristic found in the big corporation-hostility discourse, which is derived from identification theory. This second theoretical foundation examines the linguistic tactics employed in this discourse to build, maintain or reinforce political identity and relationships with the imputed audience or constituents. Identification itself is a discursive tactic addressing the relationship(s) implied between speakers and their audiences and is commonly studied in different settings of political communications.

From the perspective of identification theory, there are three pairs of relationships that need to be addressed in this discourse: the relationship between Republicans and Democrats; between politicians and their constituents; and between big corporations and the populations they are implied to have an impact on. The data also revealed that the discourse of big- corporation hostility reflects and arguably reinforces partisan politics in the American political arena. There were very divergent attitudes towards big corporations as expressed by Democratic and Republican politicians, who had different foci on the issues, and who also tended to use different persuasive tactics in their public communications. For all their differences, they shared one tactic in common: that is, their deployment of big-corporation hostility to reinforce the differences they had against each other. Just like other controversial and highly politicized issues in the United States, Democratic and Republican politicians not only pick differing stances, but reinforce their party identity through the divergences shaped by their rhetorical and policy positions.

Indeed, in the U.S. context, the competition between Democrats and Republicans manifests through almost every topic and theme in public policy. Taken to an extreme, the semantic construction of a “perfect enemy” is an extremely useful weapon in this competition. It facilitates the construction of an (implied or asserted) in-group (to which the speaker belongs, or on whose behalf he or she advocates) and the enemy who is blamed for various ills and conditions. And it allows that enemy – if it is not the opposing party itself – to be *associated* with the opposing party, which is claimed to be conspiring with, or a functional tool of, that enemy. In this way, the “perfect enemy” creates ample opportunity both for policy construction *and* (perhaps more importantly) for the reinforcement of political brands and identity. It helps to develop new appeals to one’s political constituents, who are certainly more often the targeted audience than the opposing party or rhetorical enemy themselves. Some empirical studies (i.e., Druckman, Peterson & Slothuus 2013) claim these rhetorical strategies can contribute to the polarized political environments that alter the decision-making and political self-identification of voters, whether or not these voters can and do articulate specific substantive viewpoints on related issues.

In examining the relationship between politicians and constituents, identification theory prompted me to observe the “us vs. them” tension as expressed in the big corporation-hostility discourse. In the content analyses, big corporations or “corporate people” were often described as economic and political “elites” that enjoy more privilege than ordinary people, while a variety of social groups were identified as “victims”, or at least as having been negatively affected by corporate interests. The middle class, working class, and small businesses were most often mentioned as groups whose interests had been harmed by big corporations. In that sense, corporate interests and the interests of the rest of the society were juxtaposed, described as

landing on vastly differing sides. With this description of a divided population, politicians position themselves rhetorically to choose to stand with their constituents, broadly construed – to persuade these constituents that they can be righteous advocates for their interests.

In this way, the big corporation hostility discourse shares characteristics with other “us vs. them” political discourses. It rhetorically excludes “others” (Riggins 1997), produces self-claims of legitimacy or representativeness of the speakers (Oddo 2011), and attempts to convey a sense of empowerment to the constituents (Riggins 1997). Such political utility as a tactic comes at a system-wide cost. As Stuart Hall (1992) pointed out: “with sufficient time and effort, certain ways of understanding and talking about the world can become so natural or taken for granted that they come to be seen as ‘true’ and, in doing so, make it difficult for alternative understanding of the world to take root.” And the “imagination to truth” serves as the mediation of a socio-cognitive interface that is shaped by hegemonic interests and power relations, as Van Dijk (2014) claimed. For all its populist overtones, the discourse may ultimately serve many aspects of the pre-existing power structure.

The last set of relationships is that between big corporations and the populations they are asserted or implied to affect. Politicians from both parties, in adopting overwhelmingly negative attitudes and indignant sentiments vis-à-vis corporations, seek to insert themselves as the protectors of the people. In fact, a defining characteristic of the discourse is to equate the relationship between corporations and the public as being one of ‘perpetrator and victim’. In constructing corporations as enemies of the people (to exaggerate but slightly), the political speakers aim to position themselves as a protector and ally to the common person and to broad public interests. This political framing of the issue, like all forms of framing, both focuses

attention onto some aspects of the relationship while excluding other dimensions from consideration.

Thus, one implication of the analysis contained in this dissertation is the importance of examining the *patterns* of focus, exclusion and simplification at work here, as they concern the relationship between U.S. corporations and the broader public. The big corporation hostility discourse typically does not attempt to provide analytical answers – and certainly not balanced and multi-sided ones – on dimensions of issues such as full employment, income inequality or consumerism. Rather, speakers within this discourse typically only construct a narrative of vulnerability and victimhood affixed to certain preferred social groups, while casting aspersions onto, and denying the frame of reference of, other groups – notably corporations and their presumed political defenders. In that sense, the rhetorical technique functions much like ‘gaslighting’ (Carpenter 2018), in that it simultaneously assumes a distinctive frame while entirely discrediting, or even ridiculing, the possibility of viewing the issue from the different perspective of one’s political opponents. Big corporation hostility may not be the most extreme site of gaslighting tactics on the highly polarized scene in contemporary U.S. politics, but it exhibits some classic functions of such tactics: generating claims and discrediting opponents, all without taking responsibility for the moderation or openness to evidence that reasoned debate typically demands. And just like other political discourses centered on gaslighting, the ultimate goal in attempting to create and reinforce a new reality in communicating with one’s constituents is the extension or consolidation of electoral support and ultimately the achievement of electoral wins. As Schlozman and Rosenfeld (2019) state, “today's parties are hollow parties, neither organizationally robust beyond their roles raising money nor meaningfully felt as a real, tangible presence in the lives of voters or in the work of engaged activists. Partisanship is strong even as

parties as institutions are weak." This is the breeding ground for the discourse of big corporation hostility.

The third defining characteristic within the big corporation hostility discourse explored in this dissertation is the usage of ideographs such as <Americans> and <family>. Ideograph theory guided me to observe the elements of a system of ideas that are constructed to express big corporation hostility. Ideographs as deployed in this discourse are not only designed to manipulate people's affects, but also to short-circuit reason debate; they purport to settle arguments almost by their assertion alone (Boyd, 2018). As McGee (1980) pointed out, whether in or out of public policy debates, however, ideographs are "one-term sums of an orientation" that carry with them assumptions ordinarily associated with complete propositions of arguments. Because ideographs are based on people's conditioned way of thinking, no one is permitted to question their fundamental logic. This makes the deployment of ideographs a highly manipulative tactic. As van Dijk (2006) pointed out, "[d]iscursively, manipulation generally involves the usual forms and formats of ideological discourse, such as emphasizing Our good things, and emphasizing Their bad things. At all these levels of analysis it is shown how manipulation is different from legitimate mind control, such as in persuasion and providing information, for instance by stipulating that manipulation is in the best interest of the dominated group and against the best interests of dominated groups."

The ideographs I identified were rooted in the most fundamental aspects of cultural and social consciousness and were highly emotive. The most referenced ideographs were <Americans> and <family>. These two ideographs directly speak to people's sociality, to identity and values, and they remind the audience that "we" (the speaker and the audience) speak the same language. Politicians and the public presumed to agree on the 'common-sensical'

values and assumptions behind these ideographs, allowing speakers to deploy these discursive devices to save or ‘stand in’ for much argumentation, in service of persuading their audience that the speaker was part of the solution rather than the problem (in ways that were to be assumed rather than demonstrated through evidence). Thus, ideograph theory not only helped this research to describe the ubiquity of the ‘indignation’ sentiment; it also assisted in probing the variations in its expression and the likely rhetorical purposes served by these sentiments when expressed by speakers in different settings. According to McGee (1980), such ideographs serve the role of conveying a dominant ideology; they connect the “power” of a state and the consciousness of its people. Ideographs not only make certain elements within the big corporation hostility discourse extremely persuasive. They also arguably directly serve the role of social control, via the channeling of public discontent into a limiting and pre-defined channels.

The final important characteristic of the big corporation hostility discourse explored in the dissertation was its sensitivity to context, even within the Congressional setting. The ability to construct the comparisons between the Congressional Record and Congressional Hearings samples introduced two key sources of nuance, each of which has important implications both for the way we view the current findings and for future research. The first source of nuance research explored the way in which the introduction of a far greater percentage of independent (or political affiliation-unspecified) individuals in the Congressional Hearings, as opposed to the Record, impacted the pattern of findings. Compared to the Congressional Record dataset, the overall expression of negative attitudes was lower in the Congressional Hearings dataset, primarily because Democratic speakers moderated their stances somewhat, and because of the high percentage of independent speakers (who were less negative than Democrats towards big corporations, on average). The salience of the issues and related social groups discussed in the

Hearings dataset was different than in Congressional Record dataset as well. The second source of nuance was the way in which the Hearings setting allowed identification of committee type as a key mediating variable. Committees exhibited different levels of activeness on different themes as well as differing levels of overall negativity. However, despite these variations, the level of the indignation expressed was fairly consistent across all committees, defining a key feature of the discourse.

These context-specific factors enrich our understanding of the congressional context of the big corporation hostility discourse. They reinforce that we need an understanding of the nature of politics that goes beyond partisan affiliation. Affiliation is clearly a key driver of the current political landscape, and as argued in this dissertation, partisan polarization has profoundly shaped (and is shaped by) the rhetorical landscape in government. My findings underscore its importance. But they also show that the deployment of rhetorical devices forming the big corporation-hostility discourse extends beyond partisan discourse, to ostensibly neutral technical experts and witnesses. Those offering testimony in the hearings draw from the same rhetorical well-spring that feeds the partisan discourse of big-corporation hostility to shape the delivery of their own testimony. There is, in short, no neutral, technical standpoint from which the rhetorical contours of the big corporation-hostility discourse become irrelevant. All participants are shaped by the discourse in which they participate. Put differently, the discourse parameters shaping the delivery and assumptions of the discourse become as important to the reception and significance of the discussion as the content the participants are introducing into substantive debates.

The contextual factors here also demonstrate that the platform on which the political communication occurs exercises an independent effect on the discursive characteristics. If even

introducing the relatively minor contextual differences between the Congressional Record and Hearings datasets – such as the mediating influence of committee structure – was shown to impact discursive features, how much greater can we expect those influences to be when we shift to entirely unrelated platforms – political communication on social media, as opposed to congressional proceedings, for instance? That does not mean we will stop looking for discursive commonalities, only that these will always need to be understood in light of the mediating impact of context on the discourse.

5.2 Significance of the research

This dissertation has touched on a topic or theme within political discourse in the United States that has not been systematically theorized to date. It extends our knowledge about political discourse more generally, by showing how an emerging theme (one that with roots and echoes in previous eras of American politics) is being forged by political communications in one part of the federal government.

The landscape of American politics is rapidly changing in the last two decades. The presidencies of both Barack Obama and Donald Trump accelerated the phenomenon of extreme partisan polarization (Baker & Edmonds 2021), coupled with a rise in discourse of nationalist populism under the Trump presidency (Rowland 2019). In addition, we see increases in the use of dehumanizing language in political discourse (Cassese 2021), along with the greater purchase of conspiracy theories and general paranoia (Van der Linden, Panagopoulos, Azevedo and Jost 2021). Such increasing division and anger all trigger the perception of danger and risk to voters from across the political spectrum, which in turn induces, or creates fertile ground for, even more resentment, insecurity and paranoia. An important function for scholarship in this context is to

deepen our understanding of such emerging political discourses, as one pre-condition for potentially breaking such a vicious circle.

The study of the big corporation hostility discourse is an attempt of this kind. The discourse is a species of resentment politics. In contemporary America, resentment is everywhere, and can be directed towards numerous social groups, socio-economic classes and geographic areas. It is vividly seen in the racialized resentment and anti-immigration sentiment that has been nascent for several years (Mora & Paschel 2020), and has been systematically researched from the perspective of rural-urban dynamics (Cramer 2016) and socio-economic inequality (Piston 2018). Resentment is an energy coming from status competition in society (Edsall 2020), while resentment politics in its varied rhetorical forms represents a survival strategy for current and would-be politicians in a turbulent era. Studying big corporation hostility helps us to substantively interpret this important element in contemporary political discourse. Even more importantly, it aids in the understanding of the influences on public discourse and sentiment that may be perpetuating a vicious circle of polarization, at the cost of weakening the ecology of American democracy – and with only short-term, narrow political gain as the compensation.

In addition, my research helps us to draw out the political implications of the new discourse. Corporation consciousness may be described as one facet of the ‘new’ class consciousness; it defines the economic ‘other’ while assigning to it blame for the alienation and disempowerment of the ‘American people’ from the political system. While American public opinion with respect to perceptions of class and the persistence of income inequalities has been traditionally characterized as possessing a strong belief that its class system is fluid (i.e., marked by great intergenerational mobility; see Kraus & Tan 2015), public concern over the effects and

persistence of socioeconomic inequalities has been growing (Cheng & Wen 2019). As early as the 1940s, books examining the way in which the older bourgeoisie was being replaced by a new managerial class (such as Burnham 1941) were appearing; in short, they alleged the emergence of a new ruling class in the era of large-scale capitalism and the bureaucratic state.

More recently, the presence of such tension has been widely alleged over the past decade to be shaping political dynamics in both the United States and several other countries. Michael Lind (2010) has used the term “overclass” to describe college-educated managers and professionals, a group expanding on the traditional manufacturing big corporation category of the ‘white collar’ worker. Lind (2020) also stated that the working class “find their economic status, political power, and cultural dignity under threat from below as well as from above,” while the only winner is the “mostly white overclass elites”. No matter which specific term we use to describe the privileged class, political discourse in the U.S. – certainly in the period covered by my sample, and arguably more generally – has long taken as its starting point the question of who, then, represents the non-privileged classes? The space in which the big corporation hostility discourse has grown up has been generated by powerful economic trends in the past decades, manifesting in growing tensions between the working class and more educated and wealthy Americans.

Thus, this dissertation contributes theoretical tools for understanding one of the manifestations of this class consciousness and conflict in the contemporary politics. The big corporation hostility discourse can be expected to continue to shape politics on both the right and the left, in different ways – and not least through the politics of resentment, which is being studied in a variety of ways.

A final element marking the significance of this dissertation is the way in which it has attempted to situate and characterize a political discourse through the application of content analysis to Congressional Record and Congressional hearing datasets. This is a relatively new undertaking, as most content analysis applied to these two types of texts has to date focused on the substantive analysis of certain issues such as climate change (Majdik 2019), national security (Del Sesto 1980) or education (Smietana 1965). In short, little research exists that attempts to thoroughly investigate a *field* of political discourse by utilizing the records of Congressional politicians in their policy debates and public hearings, tracing patterns in the datasets over time in the process. Also, the novel method here is the combination of longitudinal research coupled with its comparison to partisan and independent speakers and to different committee contexts. Longitudinal research allows us to probe the stability of this discourse and its characteristics over time, as well as shifting emphases on different content areas (such as a growing emphasis on the political influence exercised by big corporations). And examination of the effects that different committees touching on the big corporation hostility discourse can have on the discursive patterns reinforces the theoretical and practical importance of understanding the mediating impact of context and platform when characterizing any political discourse.

5.3 Limitations of this research and future prospects

This dissertation shares some general limitations of a primarily descriptive research. The main aim has been to accurately and systematically describe the discursive patterns at work, so that future research might begin to generate more theoretically grounded hypotheses. It could not cover all related questions, nor provide answers to a broader scope of questions, due to both data and methodological limitations. In terms of data, the research did not examine or attempt to assess mass media content, nor did it attempt to describe patterns of political communication

beyond the congressional context. Instead, it hewed closely to two important, but ultimately specific and even narrow, datasets capturing congressional speeches and hearings. The strength of this choice was that I was able to fully capture, scrutinize and characterize an important platform for public communications by American politicians on big corporation-related issues, and to how their communications were characterized. It also provided an intensive examination of the *images* associated with big corporations, without assuming what specific social, economic, political or business problems would be driving these. All speech instances were located by applying consistent search strings (only the terms “big corporation”, “big business” and “corporate interest” were applied to the Congressional Record and congressional hearing datasets). This approach ensured that this work would not be biased by assumptions of the type of speech contexts in which big corporation-related discourse would surface within these sources.

However, the effort made to pursue carefully validated presentation of empirical research in this dissertation may lead to tradeoffs, such as the lack of ability to pursue particular cases or idiosyncratic data in greater depth. To give an example: because I applied consistent search strings, the possibility of omitting cases relevant or tangential to the big corporation hostility discourse (without the identifying terms being used) cannot be ruled out. In essence, as in all sample research, the sample amounts to an inevitable reduction in the variation we could actually study and describe in the broader universe of political discourses.

In addition, the research did not focus on highly prominent cases that may have influenced or shifted the discourse. To take an example outside the time horizon applied to these datasets, consider the March and April 2021 Senate Hearings on antitrust and extremism in the case of Facebook, Google and Twitter. Such high-profile coverage in these hearings could

conceivably make a tangible impact on people's perceptions of these tech giants, and exercise a perceptible shift in the public discourse around big corporations in the process. My method could not capture such proximate effects, even if they occurred in the 2000-2020 time frame for the research.

Another limitation on the measurement is that the party affiliations of speakers could mean different things in Congressional Record and Congressional Hearings. In Congressional Record, almost all the communications were among congressmen and senators, while in hearing dataset, a lot of speakers' party affiliation was not clearly labeled as in Congress, but it doesn't mean they are not registered as Republican or Democratic party members. This factor was almost impossible to measure in hearing dataset, but it should affect the tone/tendency on many issues discussed in various hearings.

In terms of methods, this dissertation assessed the discourse surrounding big corporation hostility by observing the consistency of its characteristics in congressional debates and hearings, and associating these characteristics (discursive tactics, attitudes and sentiments, among others) with particular issues, themes and speaker identities. Content analysis is an ideal method to capture such these elements from the texts. I did not attempt, however, to measure the effects of the discourse surrounding big corporations, nor to attempt to characterize the specific intentions of politicians who participated in it. Content analysis is a method for surveying textual data and capturing the "what", "when", "who", and "how" of the structuring and positioning of these texts. It is not particularly well suited to address the question "why". Ultimately, content analysis is a research technique for making replicative and valid inferences about data in their context (Krippendorff 1980). The reliability and validity of content analysis allowed me to reduce the communication phenomena to manageable data through consistent measurement, by which

inferences might be drawn. In the process, much information and nuance were “trimmed off,” excluded from analysis. As a result, I could make only limited inferences about speakers’ intentions – about why specific discursive tactics were deployed, for instance. Of course, we should not assume such intentions could be accurately articulated by the speakers themselves; even in-depth case research struggles with such questions. Experimental designs, in turn, are exceedingly difficult to envision as applied to speech acts of politicians on a national stage. In that sense, tracing the pattern of the discourse is arguably a more feasible and valid proposition than pursuing the question of “why” a speaker behaves in the observed manner.

Despite these limitations, this dissertation successfully explored an evolving political discourse of great significance in the last 20 years. Looking ahead, we can anticipate a number of fruitful possibilities for related research.

One potential area is the examination of intertextuality in the discourse surrounding big corporations. This dissertation studied big-corporation hostility in the rhetoric of congressional proceedings. This discourse was not generated spontaneously or without context; a discourse can only survive or stay significant if it reproduces. Future research can examine the proximate influences that lead to the discursive forms evident in this sample, as well as its influence on other venues of the discourse. This dissertation has provided a conceptual foundation and relevant operationalization of key indicators with which to situate and assess big corporation hostility in public communications on different platforms. Further research can vary the contexts and platforms in which the discourse takes place in order to better understand the significance of big-corporation hostility.

One might perform such extensions in different ways. One is methodological – tracing the trajectory of the discourse as it replicates and transmits itself using the tools of social network

analysis. Another is observing the manifestations of the big corporation hostility discourse across different public (including social media, journalistic, and popular culture) platforms. For example, several public figures and politicians have in recent years seen their political identity linked to big-corporation hostility; they include Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders, and Elizabeth Warren, among others. Future research could trace the reproduction of the discourse across platforms used by these politicians, observing similarities and differences between them and among their advocates.

Another variation worth exploring is examination of this discourse in different parts and levels of government itself. How, for instance, would things look when examining the discourse of mayors' offices in large cities in the "rust-belt" Midwestern part of the country, rather than in the legislative branch of the federal government? We fully expect that changing the constellation of political actors and local issues, along with different dynamics associated with different parts of government, will (like changes in platforms themselves) have an influence on the pattern of discourse found. Examining these local contexts would raise challenges of measurement and standardization, but promises to deepen our understanding of the implications of the big corporation hostility discourse in its diverse manifestations.

Secondly, future research can take on the *effects* of the discourse. Such effects might be explored on two levels. One is discursive but extends to other areas: as implied above, big-corporation hostility appears to be part and parcel of a broader discourse of resentment politics – but how exactly is it related? How does the study of big-corporation hostility add to our understanding of resentment politics, and vice versa? Big-corporation hostility might share a similar core logic with resentment politics, but as a more narrowly defined area, it certainly will have unique origins and foci. One direction to move in for future research would be analysis of

the dynamics of corporate-related hostility in the electoral strategies of the political right and the political left. Both right and left have targeted and even defended big corporations to different degrees, in different sectors, at different times. Research can aim to tease apart the specific political signaling at work in the evolving discourse. Another direction is very different, methodologically. To measure the effects of big corporation hostility discourse, we can imagine experimental online experiments, in which participants view or read transcripts containing various statements about big corporations, then have their attitudes on related issues, political parties, specific corporations, or industry sectors recorded and assessed.

A second dimension of effects to explore with respect to this discourse is related to public policy. It addresses the general question of how discourse correlates with policy and regulatory actions in the various policy arenas concerning and affecting corporations. One will never be surprised to find disjunctions between stated policy positions by politicians and substantive voting records in any given area; indeed, political signaling is both rhetorical and action-oriented, and many barriers exist to the public fully assessing the substantive records of their elected representatives in different policy sectors (many with highly technical characteristics). So, too, in the big corporation-hostility discourse, it will be possible and enlightening to compare rhetorical stands with respect to big corporations (which may be presumed, as in this dissertation, to primarily relate to political branding and support mobilization) with substantive voting records on issues that affect those same big corporations (which may have many roots, including the effective exercise of influence by big corporations themselves, e.g. through campaign contributions), in order to analyze the consistency and alignment (or lack thereof) between the two.

A third line of research might concern evolutions in the political positioning of the discourse. What new forms of big corporation hostility are waxing, and which elements waning, based on the trajectory we have seen over the past twenty years and growing trends beyond? To give a recent example of such an evolution, a significant segment of the Republican Party has in recent months expressed a high level of hostility towards big social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter, due to censorship actions they took towards Donald Trump in early to mid-2021, a period just outside the frame of this dissertation's analysis. In response to being excluded from these platforms in this period, Trump's team quietly launched a new social media platform GETTR, with one element in its mission statement being challenging social media monopolies**. Such criticism may or may not have something in common substantively with critiques of big corporations coming out of Democratic Party circles. In this way, the same discourse can and does contain multiple opposing camps, which develop their own internal logic and signaling to marshal their supporters, while likely contributing to the deeper polarization affecting the political system. This is a concrete example on how big corporation hostility can take new forms with new political ramifications, while also at times returning to old critiques (such as opposition to "monopoly"). How will such developments shape the future of the discourse and its multiple effects? That is worthy of study.

Finally, cross-national comparative research can be feasible and valuable in this discourse. The U.S. is far from being the only country with evidence of the big corporation hostility discourse. A number of Western countries have been evincing movements in the class- and/or corporation-consciousness of their public discourse in recent years, implying that the

** Meredith McGraw, Tina Nguyen and Christiano Lima, July 1, 2021 "Team Trump quietly launches new social media platform", <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/07/01/gettr-trump-social-media-platform-497606>, accessed July 5, 2021.

discursive construct developed in this thesis might be adaptable for cross-national comparative research. What makes this potential line of research potentially more interesting is the way it would link to broader comparative research on the resurgence of political authoritarianism and its supporting discourses in multiple parts of the world (Applebaum 2020). The challenge facing researchers is to link political discourses to evolving institutional configurations such as authoritarianism, in order to explicate their mutual connections, which are typically supporting but may contain subversive elements as well. Of course, this line of research would be part and parcel of the broader stream of research on comparative political communication, focusing on the relationship between understanding “individual-level processes” (such as politicians’ orientations towards the big corporation hostility discourse, in the terms of this thesis) and “the significance of macro-level characteristics [that] only becomes visible when different national political communication arrangements are compared with each other” (Esser 2019).

Research examining the political discourses around big corporations can be expected to be productive in the coming years. This dissertation has laid the foundation for this research by conceptualizing a “big corporation hostility discourse” that is alive and well over the past twenty years on the U.S. political scene, and by operationalizing this discourse in the context of congressional speeches and hearings. I have found that hostility directed towards big corporations lies at the intersection of intensifying issues such as growing economic inequality, partisan polarization and the rise of populism in the U.S. political system, with potential echoes to the situation in some other countries. Given that these trends all seem to be intensifying in recent years, political discourse centered on big corporations will be well worth continued close scrutiny in the coming years.

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APPENDIX A

Content Analysis Codebook

0) Name of the coder

When in serious doubt, make a note – either in the question itself or separately for the row on a separate sheet of paper, noting the concern so it's easy to remember– so we can come back to it and resolve. This is easy to do.

1) Number of the instance

2) [official] Is the speaker an elected official?

Almost all of the instances should refer to the speech of a congressperson or senator. In very few random cases, the reference to 'big business' is in an exhibit (like a newspaper article) that the speaker is putting into evidence, in which case you should code "No" for 2) and code "Unclear/Independent" for 3).

0. No. 1. Yes

3) [party] What's the party affiliation of the speaker? *Mark only one oval.*

1. Democratic 2. Unclear/Independent 3. Republican

4) [attitude] What kind of attitude toward big corporation was projected by the speaker in the entire communication:

This is a critical question and it's important to lay out my intent. For 'negative', I am looking for anything in which big corporation is associated in the speaker's rhetoric with the 'wrong' or 'bad' side, as being problematic, or put in context with other problems that are wrong or bad. It does not have to be a direct statement that corporations are evil. For 'positive', this would be the obverse – any time big corporations are directly or indirectly implied to be something good or positive. Neutral would be for instance a case in which the keyword is just mentioned, but factually and without context of being good or bad or problematic around it. Note: if big corporations are not mentioned the context mentioned here – as formal corporations, usually U.S.-based – then do not proceed to code at all – just set it aside. Examples: "Drug-trafficking of Mexican cartels is becoming a big business" – if this is the keyword, then don't proceed, because (illegal) drug trafficking is not what is intended in this study to cover – that is, large formal corporations.

0. No. 1. Yes

5) [company] Did speaker mention any specific companies?

0. No. 1. Yes

5-1) which companies were mentioned?

6) [industry] Did speaker mention any specific industry?

0. No. 1. Yes

6-1) Which industry was mentioned?

7)[businessmen] Did speaker mention any individual business leaders? *Mark only one oval.*

0. No. 1. Yes

7-1) Which business leaders were mentioned?

8) [low income] Did the speaker associate low wage or low welfare of workers with big corporations?

From question 8-13: "associate with" means speak of either directly or indirectly. For example of indirect, the speaker may mention a problem, but without necessarily saying that big business is the direct cause of that – that is fine, as long as big corporations appeared around or in conjunction with that problem too, you can code it as "Yes". For question 8): Low wage or low welfare: Mark "yes" even if big corporations are mentioned directly or indirectly as associated with problems in this regard.

0. No. 1. Yes

9) [health insurance] Did the speaker associate healthcare /health insurance issues with big corporations?

Answer "yes" if corporations or a corporate-favoring political position is related in any way to a negative picture of healthcare outcomes or insurance, etc.

0. No. 1. Yes

10) [net neutrality] Did the speaker associate issues of net neutrality with big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

11) [Judiciary injustice] Did the speaker associate issues of Judiciary injustice with big corporations?

Only answer yes if injustice is related to courts, court cases, or judicial branch.

0. No. 1. Yes

12) [taxation] Did the speaker associate unfair taxation (corporate welfare) with big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

13) [Environmental issues] Did the speaker associate environmental issues with big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

14) [political influence] Did the speaker imply/describe the big corporations' impact on policy, judiciary or law making?

Political influence – describing / implying big corporations political influence, whether on the courts, lawmaking or politicians generally. This could be indirectly implied, e.g. if speaker mentioned corporations were well represented in the policymaking process in a way that the average American is not, so they have political power. It doesn't have to directly be saying someone is corrupt.

0. No. 1. Yes

15) [big money] Did speaker imply/describe any type of money influence from big corporations? If yes, which type?

Key to this question is whether the activity is stated or implied to be corrupt (option 1) vs. just mentions lobbying or electoral support without the specific implication of illegality or corruption (option 2). Note it is hard to imagine answering 2 or 3 here if you don't mark 14 "yes".

0. No.

1. Bribery/corruption or any illegal misconduct

2. Lobbying or sponsoring electoral campaign

3. Both Bribery/corruption and lobbying/sponsoring

15-1) What other type of money influence were mentioned by the speaker?

16) [political benefits] Did the speaker imply/describe big corporations, whether specifically mentioned or just in general, are the beneficiary of some specific policy, law, program or court case under discussion?

0. No. 1. Yes

17) [competition] Did the speaker imply/describe big corporations as a competition repressor?

Mark yes if any anti-competitive behavior or attempt to dominate market is implied.

0. No. 1. Yes

18) [economic efficiency] Did the speaker imply/describe big corporations as inefficient?

0. No. 1. Yes

19) [Macroeconomic impact] Did the speaker imply/describe big corporations could contribute damage to Global economy?

0. No. 1. Yes

20) [American Economy] Did the speaker imply/describe big corporations could contribute damage to the economy of United States?

0. No. 1. Yes

21) [Local Economy in U.S.] Did the speaker imply/describe big corporations could contribute damage to the economy of a region state or locality within U.S.?

0. No. 1. Yes

22) [characterizing public opinion] Did the speaker use terms/words/sentences to evoke any common sense or public view? (i.e., “we can all agree on...”, “we sure had experiences like...”, “people all think...”)

0. No. 1. Yes

23) [magnitude] Did speaker imply/describe that the problem under discussion is a big / significant / common one in the experience of many Americans?”

0. No. 1. Yes

24) [social connectedness] Did the speaker imply/describe himself/herself share the predicament Americans are facing?

0. No. 1. Yes

25) [Americans fighter] Did the speaker imply/describe himself/herself as fighting to protect Americans’ (American public, average Americans) interests?

0. No. 1. Yes

26) [elites] Did the speaker imply/describe people associated with big companies as any kind of elites (financial, political, etc.)?

0. No. 1. Yes

27) [young] Did the speaker imply/describe young people as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

28) [senior] Did the speaker imply/describe senior/retired citizens as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

29) [female] Did the speaker imply/describe females as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

30) [male] Did the speaker imply/describe males as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

31) [LGBTQ] Did the speaker imply/describe LGBTQ as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

32) [Caucasian] Did the speaker imply/describe White Americans as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

33) [minority] Did the speaker imply/describe any racial minorities as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

34) [working class] Did the speaker imply/describe lower income class/ working class (otherwise poor or vulnerable population) as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

35) [middle class] Did the speaker imply/describe middle class as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

36) [rich] Did the speaker imply/describe high income class as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

37) [small business] Did the speaker imply/describe small business owners as a social group had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

38) [union] Did the speaker imply/describe unions had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

39) [employee] Did the speaker imply/describe big corporation employees had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

40) [customer] Did the speaker imply/describe big corporation customers had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

41) [rural] Did the speaker imply/describe rural communities as negatively affected by corporate interests?

0. No. 1. Yes

42) Did the speaker imply/describe any other social groups (not mentioned above) had been negatively affected by big corporations?

0. No. 1. Yes

43) [Change] Did the speaker mention ideograph term <Change>?

0. No. 1. Yes

44) [equity] Did the speaker mention ideograph term < equal/equity>?

0. No. 1. Yes

45) [freedom] Did the speaker mention ideograph term < Freedom>?

0. No. 1. Yes

46) [American Dream] Did the speaker mention ideograph term < American Dream>?

0. No. 1. Yes

47) [family] Did the speaker mention ideograph term < Family>?

0. No. 1. Yes

48) [God] Did the speaker mention ideograph term < God>?

0. No. 1. Yes

49)[American people] Did the speaker mention ideograph term < American people>?

0. No. 1. Yes

50) Did the speaker mention ideograph term besides the ones above?

51) [indignant] Did the speaker express the sentiment of indignant?

0. No. 1. Yes

52) [excited] Did the speaker express the sentiment of excited/ebullient?

0. No. 1. Yes

53) [sad] Did the speaker express the sentiment of sad/gloomy?

0. No. 1. Yes

54) [happy] Did the speaker express the sentiment of happy/elated?

0. No. 1. Yes

55) Questions or thoughts.