

Vemund Sandvik Tønnessen

## Polarization in U.S. Senators' Twitter Discourse on the Covid19 Pandemic

A qualitative analysis that identifies manifestations of polarization in U.S. Senators' Twitter discourse and investigates in what way U.S. Senators frame the other(s) on Twitter during the outbreak of the pandemic.

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Anna Bil-Jaruzelska

Co-supervisor: Astrid Rasch

May 2022



Vemund Sandvik Tønnessen

## **Polarization in U.S. Senators' Twitter Discourse on the Covid19 Pandemic**

A qualitative analysis that identifies manifestations of polarization in U.S. Senators' Twitter discourse and investigates in what way U.S. Senators frame the other(s) on Twitter during the outbreak of the pandemic.

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education  
Supervisor: Anna Bil-Jaruzelska  
Co-supervisor: Astrid Rasch  
May 2022

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Language and Literature



# Abstract

Messages sent by political elites are considered to influence public attitudes and behavior. Polarization in political discourse may hamper effective responses to public health crises. National unity, accurate information, and behavioral change can slow the spread of the coronavirus and save lives. By analyzing 21 tweets on Twitter, this thesis detects manifestations of polarization in messages sent by U.S. Senators during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, and it investigates in what way U.S. Senators frame a specific other. I have inductively designed several political strategies that illustrate the political motives of the tweets. I argue that Democratic Senators primarily frame President Trump and his Republican administration as the negative other. At the same time, the Republican Senators primarily frame China and the World Health Organization. This thesis suggests that the Senators vary the degree of aggressiveness in their tweets depending on what effect they intend to achieve. Finally, I argue that positive self-presentation implicitly functions as negative other presentation.

# Sammendrag

Politisk retorikk kan påvirke holdninger og oppførselen i befolkningen. Polarisering i politiske oppfordringer kan hindre en effektiv respons til en omfattende krise. Felles handling, presis informasjon og endring i oppførsel kan senke spredningen av koronaviruset og redde liv. Denne oppgaven finner tegn på polarisering i twittermeldinger publisert av amerikanske senatorer under utbruddet av koronavirus pandemien. Oppgaven ser også på hvordan amerikanske senatorer representerte "den andre" i sine meldinger. Jeg har designet flere kategorier som illustrerer motivene i twittermeldingene. Jeg argumenterer for at medlemmer fra det demokratiske partiet representerte president Trump og hans regjering som den primære negative aktøren. Samtidig presenterte medlemmene fra det republikanske partiet Kina og Verdens helseorganisasjon (WHO) som de negative aktørene. Denne oppgaven argumenterer for at politikerne varierer sin grad av aggressivitet ut ifra hvilken effekt de prøver å oppnå. Helt til slutt argumenterer jeg for at positiv representasjon av seg selv eller sin gruppe også fungerer som negativ representasjon av den andre aktøren.

# Acknowledgments

I am left with a special feeling after completing the final steps of this thesis. Not only is it the end of a thesis and a master's program of five years, but an era. It has been challenging to write but also exciting and interesting. However, it feels incredible to have accomplished this great challenge.

Now that this thesis is completed, many deserve gratitude:

First and foremost, I would like to thank my two supervisors, Anna Bil-Jaruzelska and Astrid Rasch. You have been fantastic throughout this process, and I am very grateful for your inspiring dedication and competent contribution to this thesis.

I would also like to thank all my fellow students for discussions, conversations, and distractions. A special thank you goes out to all the ones who have impacted my time in Trondheim. You have all contributed by making these five years remarkable.

Thank you to my mom and dad for supporting me throughout this rollercoaster of a journey. I will forever be grateful for your eternal encouragement.

A final appreciation goes out to my brother Ørjan Tønnessen and my American host-parents, Margie Manion Pyron and Mark Pyron, for providing external feedback.

Vemund Sandvik Tønnessen  
Trondheim, May 31, 2022

# Table of Contents

FIGURES .....	IX
TABLES .....	IX
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2 CONNECTING POLITICAL COMMUNICATION TO COVID19: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND PARTISANSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES .....	12
2.2 AN IDEOLOGICALLY POLARIZED PANDEMIC ON TWITTER AND SOCIAL MEDIA.....	14
2.3 CORONAVIRUS ON TWITTER.....	15
<b>3 THE FRAMING OF THE DISCOURSE ON POLARIZATION: CONCEPTS AND THEORY .....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 POLARIZATION AND CATEGORIZATION .....	17
3.2 THE UNCOVERING OF IDEOLOGIES IN DISCOURSE: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE CONCEPT OF FRAMING. ....	18
<b>4 ANALYZING DISCOURSE: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1 WHY CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS? .....	20
4.2 CHALLENGES OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A METHOD: MAKING A SELECTION.....	21
4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	22
4.4 SOURCES AND CODING.....	25
<b>5 ANALYSIS OF NEGATIVE OTHER PRESENTATION AND POSITIVE SELF-PRESENTATION .....</b>	<b>27</b>
5.1 NEGATIVE OTHER PRESENTATION .....	27
5.1.1 <i>The other does not act in the interest of the nation</i> .....	28
5.1.2 <i>The other lacks credibility</i> .....	30
5.1.3 <i>The other is accountable for negative consequences</i> .....	32
5.2 POSITIVE SELF-PRESENTATION .....	34
5.2.1 <i>The self represents generosity</i> .....	35
5.2.2 <i>The self is one with the nation</i> .....	36
<b>6 MANIFESTATIONS OF POLARIZATION IN TWITTER DISCOURSE AND FRAMING OF THE OTHER(S): A DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>38</b>
6.1 THE DEMOCRATS EMPHASIZE PRESIDENT TRUMP’S NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES .....	38
6.2 THE REPUBLICANS EMPHASIZE CHINA’S AND THE WHO’S NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES .....	40
6.3 A POSITIVE PRESENTATION OF THE SELF FUNCTIONS AS A NEGATIVE PRESENTATION OF THE OTHER .....	41
<b>7 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>50</b>
I. THE THESIS’ RELEVANCE FOR MY WORK IN THE NORWEGIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM .....	6.3-5
II. BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	6.3-5



# Figures

Figure 1: The Ideological Square (Van Dijk, 2011a, p. 396). ..... 23

# Tables

Table 1: Semantic structures: meaning and reference (Van Dijk, 2011a, p. 398). ..... 24  
Table 2: Formal structures (Van Dijk, 2011a, p. 398)..... 24  
Table 3: Overview of the sources ..... 25  
Table 4: Purposeful sampling strategies (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535)..... 25

# 1 Introduction

This is not the one to use for politics. It's like playing with fire so more than ever before national unity is important if we care about our people, if we care about our citizens. Please work across party lines, across ideology, across beliefs, across any differences for that matter. We need to behave. That's how we can defeat this virus (Ghebreyesus, 2020, p. 6).

The coronavirus (Covid19) pandemic has affected almost every aspect of economic, social, and political life in the United States and the rest of the world (Gadarian et al., 2021). As countries around the globe designed policies and legislation to combat and contain the global pandemic, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Ghebreyesus, reached out to the world's governments in an attempt to encourage unity. Cues and messages sent by political elites influence public attitudes and behavior (Lenz, 2013). Therefore, it is essential that the entire political elite in various countries, in this case, the United States, should send out messages of unity in times of crisis, such as the coronavirus pandemic. Partisan polarization remains the dominant, seemingly unchangeable condition in America (PewResearchCenter, 2021), and a high level of partisan polarization may hamper an effective national response. However, elites send conflicting cues to audiences who are inclined only to be receptive to the messages of co-partisans (Clinton et al., 2021). This is problematic since the severity of this crisis is dependent on public opinion, and behavioral change is integral to successfully slow the spread of the virus (Green et al., 2020).

This public health emergency materialized in a media environment characterized by misinformation, rancorous partisan infighting, and messaging from elites that undermined health experts and undercut national unity (Green et al., 2020). The motives behind different use of communication strategies could be numerous, which include the desire to establish credibility in the eyes of the citizens (Ross & Rivers, 2018), diversion from criticism (Lakoff, 2017), and legitimization of an administrative regime (Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2018). Essentially, in the absence of a scalable vaccine or other practical solutions for treatment, the effectiveness of slowing down the spread of the virus depends on the degree to which the public is willing to adopt and coordinate their behavior in the population (Kerr et al., 2021). This makes it extremely important for elites to communicate a homogeneous message (and deliver a clear statement) to the public. However, here we encounter the problem of polarization and all its implications.

Senators from both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party seem to have blamed a specific other in their communication. Categorization of an other requires belief systems that are not individual. Ideologies are a form of social cognition that is a represented truth that is shared and distributed by group members (Van Dijk, 2011a). More precisely, for such beliefs to be shared by members of groups, they must be socially important beliefs. Van Dijk (2011a) specifies that this can be "their interpretation of, and participation in, major events and actions of social life and the relations to other social groups" (p. 382). If ideologies serve to defend the interests of a group, they will tend to oppose themselves or articulate their relation to other dominant, dominated, or competing groups (Van Dijk, 2011a). In the context of the pandemic outbreak, the members of the Democratic Party attempted to question the credibility of President Trump and his administration's federal response to the pandemic. In contrast, the

members of the Republican party defended the federal response and criticized China and the WHO.

This thesis sets out to detect manifestations of polarization in the political discourse on Twitter through a Critical Discourse Analysis. Twitter is the most used social media by politicians, and the public's easy access to these messages has made Twitter an important platform for elite communication. Elite communication influences attitudes and behavior, which is vital since the severity of this crisis is dependent on public opinion, and behavioral change is integral to slowing down the spread of the virus successfully. This makes it extremely important for the elites to communicate their message (and deliver a clear message) to the public. However, here we encounter the problem of polarization and all its implications. That is why it is crucial to understand in what way the politicians frame the other through the creation of in-group and out-group categorization. To do that, I will conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis of tweets by U.S. Senators. This analysis will enable me to zoom in on the nuances of language in positive self-presentation and negative other presentation. Consequently, the research questions this thesis aims to answer are: What manifestations of polarization can be detected in elite discourse, and in what way have U.S. Senators framed the other(s) on Twitter during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic? I argue that Democratic Senators primarily frame President Trump and his Republican administration as the negative other, while the Republican Senators primarily frame China and the World Health Organization. This thesis suggests that the Senators vary the degree of aggressiveness in their tweets depending on what effect they intend to achieve. Finally, I provide categories that illustrate the effects of the Senator's objectives, and I argue that positive self-presentation functions as negative other presentation.

The thesis consists of seven chapters. The second chapter is a review of the literature, arguing that this study fills a gap in the methodology chosen, its focus on elite discourse, and the coronavirus pandemic as its case. Chapter three introduces the conceptual framework of frames, Critical Discourse Analysis, ideologies, categorization, and the theoretical basis, based on previous research on these topics. Chapter four discusses the methodology of discourse analysis and the research design. Chapter five presents the findings of the analysis, which identifies manifestations of polarization in the elite discourse and shows in what way U.S. Senators have framed the other(s) during the outbreak of the pandemic on Twitter. Chapter six discusses some nuances in the discourse, such as aggressiveness, the inductively designed categories of elite communication strategies, and the relationship between negative other and positive self-presentation. Chapter seven concludes the study but also recommends areas for further research.

## 2 Connecting political communication to Covid19: an overview of the literature

This chapter gives an overview of the different strands of literature that are most relevant for this study. This includes political polarization in the United States, social media and the change in the media landscape, and the coronavirus pandemic. The first section reviews the existing literature on political polarization and partisanship. Partisanship is an important concept in this thesis because it categorizes the Senators into two different camps. This categorization represents the framework for what attitudes and beliefs Senators have, and it will function as the framework for the further analysis conducted in this thesis. The second section assesses how the emergence of social media has altered the media landscape, emphasizing how it has affected and challenged political communication. The third and final section looks into how other scholars have researched elite communication on social media during the pandemic outbreak.

### 2.1 Political polarization and partisanship in the United States

Partisan polarization remains the dominant, seemingly unchangeable condition in America (PewResearchCenter, 2021). The amount of research done on political polarization has increased considerably in the last decades (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). A majority of scholars suggest that political elites (Heaney et al., 2012), elected officials (Hare & Poole, 2014), and the general public (Frimer et al., 2017) are polarized in the United States. There are two specific forms of political polarization. The first is *ideological polarization*, which is "the divergence of political opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and stances of political adversaries" (Dalton, 1987, p. 188; Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). The second is *affective polarization*, which is characterized by an increased animosity between the political parties, both members and those who identify with political parties (Iyengar et al., 2019). Iyengar et al. (2019) argue that ordinary Americans increasingly dislike and distrust those who identify with the other political party.

Increased polarization can, in some instances, be positive for societies because it encourages greater political participation and makes perceptions of electoral choice more distinct (Wagner, 2021). However, political polarization can also be harmful for democracy, increasing the centralization of power (Lee, 2015), congressional impasse (Jones, 2001), and making the public frustrated (Wagner, 2021). People are unwilling to engage with their political opponents, so many build their impressions of the other group through media and social networks (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). While some scholars suggest that media can influence political polarization in specific ways (Prior, 2013), others suggest that social media (Valenzuela et al., 2021) and traditional media (Udani et al., 2018) do not affect political polarization. However, Kubin and von Sikorski (2021) have found limitations within these studies and call on future research to consider the effect of social media and news media on political polarization and include research from across the world.

In the United States, partisanship means identifying with the Democrats or the Republicans. Identifying with one side ultimately provides behavioral and attitudinal expectations for the in-group (*Us*) to follow (Iyengar et al., 2019). Partisanship is acquired at a young age and commonly remains constant over the life cycle of most individuals. Partisanship is considered especially powerful because Americans receive partisan cues, are exposed to partisan news regularly, and receive partisan news based on what media and elites they follow or affiliate with. Modern governance is always concerned with the next campaign, which directly affects ordinary Americans by seeing the political world through a partisan prism (Iyengar et al., 2019).

Partisanship is especially relevant in contexts with fluctuating and contrary information and functions as a guide that influences voters' choices in elections (Campbell et al., 1980), how to process information (Lodge & Taber, 2013), and attitudes within politics (Zaller, 1992). The increased partisan polarization on the elite level, and the ideologically aligned media, cause partisan identifiers to follow the recommendations of their in-group elites and actively influence members to dislike members of the other party (Gadarian et al., 2021; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). Further, as recent history has amply illustrated, elites can play a decisive role in the distribution of polarizing content, primarily through social media (Tucker et al., 2018).

We have seen that the evidence suggests that the research on partisan polarization is extensive but incomplete. Whereas most studies have provided additional research on political polarization, further research is required to examine how news media and social media affect political polarization (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). Kubin and von Sikorski (2021) argue that the understanding of political polarization within the academic field is not clearly defined nor consistently measured. Despite the increase in research conducted on political polarization, Karpf et al. (2015) call for additional qualitative research within the field of political communication and specify that further empirical research is required. In addition, Kubin and von Sikorski (2021) argue that there is a need for research on other topics than climate change within this field of political communication. It is crucial to understand how partisanship affects political communication since the role of social media has grown excessively (Lelkes et al., 2017), users of social media increasingly consume partisan news through such intermediaries (Lelkes et al., 2017), and media has become more fragmented (Van Aelst et al., 2017). Qualitative studies may provide detailed answers to how and in what way these occurrences take place.

## 2.2 An ideologically polarized pandemic on Twitter and social media

The literature on polarization and social media is fairly new but already quite extensive. Many authors have already conducted quantitative studies covering elite rhetoric on Twitter (see Russell, 2018; Soares et al., 2018), qualitative studies (see Borgmann et al., 2016; Chilman et al., 2021), and Hong and Kim (2016) investigated implications of the use of social media in digital governments. The extensive use of social media for information gathering has led to “even the politically disinterested are exposed to nontrivial doses of partisan news” (Lelkes et al., 2017, p. 5). Citizens gather information, form attitudes, and shape their behavior from content on social media (Banks et al., 2021; Lelkes et al., 2017). The increasing news consumption on social media has been documented through numerous studies, both when voters intentionally seek out political information and when it is unplanned (Boczkowski et al. 2018; Kalogeropoulos et al. 2017; Banks et al., 2021). This development has made social media a popular field of research, especially within the field of communication.

Hong and Kim (2016) suggest that online social media outlets such as Twitter can potentially influence and contribute to partisan polarization. Their study indicates that politicians with extreme ideological positions had a considerably greater public audience than their moderate peers. However, although users on social media are polarized, Banks et al. (2021) claim that there is little research showing that social media contribute to further polarization of the consumers. It is important to understand that the objectives of politicians differ across social media. Banks et al. (2021) argue that some seek to change attitudes, while others advocate influencing political institutions. Since neither social media nor polarization seem to fade away, Banks et al. (2021) suggest that it is vital to have an enhanced understanding of the sources of polarization and the mechanisms that exacerbate it.

Most studies that focus on political polarization in social media, including Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) and Green et al. (2020), used Twitter data in their research. Likewise, Twitter is the favored data source in this thesis because it is the commonly used social media among politicians. There are layers of power relations and power structures functioning in the discourse of political tweets (Masroor et al., 2019). While Twitter communication has been extensively explored for ideology construction and dissemination of racist and nationalists ideologies, additional research is required to explore the exploitation of this medium by the political elites for the spread of their political ideologies (Masroor et al., 2019). The concepts of dominance and power are vital since politicians’ tweets represent the encounter of ideologies, and this discourse is easily made available to the public. Partisanship in the American context is profoundly conflictual and is inherently based on the formation and competition of parties and party members (Lelkes & Westwood, 2017). The study by Lelkes and Westwood (2017) suggests that partisanship is influential in many aspects of American life. Since partisan identification impacts individual behavior (Lelkes & Westwood, 2017), this thesis investigates what manifestations of polarization that can be found within elite discourse. Looking at how politicians frame the other through in-group and out-group categorization may help to illustrate the manifestations of polarization in elite discourse.

## 2.3 Coronavirus on Twitter

In the aftermath of the two-year anniversary of the pandemic outbreak, the literature on the coronavirus pandemic is already quite extensive. In addition, several studies have been conducted about political polarization in the elite communication during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic (Box-Steffensmeier & Moses, 2021; Green et al., 2020; Grossman et al., 2020). The coronavirus pandemic has become a popular area of research within political communication because of the effect partisanship has proved to have. For instance, Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) demonstrated that Democrats and Republicans sent divergent cues and tone across topics used in the debate on the coronavirus crisis.

Elite messaging has a substantial role in framing policies, shaping public debates, and affecting the public mindset (Box-Steffensmeier & Moses, 2021). Simultaneous with the spread of the coronavirus, political elites published advice and information about the erupting pandemic. Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) researched elite political communication during the international crisis to investigate the role of tone in messaging, information spread, and public reaction. They found evidence of partisan differences and the differential impact of message tone on engagement and information spread based on a large dataset. This suggests that partisanship and strategical political positioning play a critical part in elite communication. Kerr et al. (2021) support that the public response to the coronavirus pandemic was politicized in the United States. Their study suggests that partisanship extended beyond attitudes and influenced protective health behavior. Republicans (compared to Democrats) perceived lower risk, placed more trust in politicians to handle the pandemic, were less trusting of medical experts such as the WHO, and were less critical of the federal response (Kerr et al., 2021).

Green et al. (2020) conducted a study that researched polarization in elite communication during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Their study discovered that Democrats discussed the crisis more frequently, emphasizing threats to public health and American workers, while Republicans emphasized China and businesses (Green et al., 2020). They claim that the divergent cues correspond with the partisan divide in the public's early reaction to the crisis. Both Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) and Green et al. (2020) are examples of quantitative studies done with extensive datasets that researched elite communication strategies and their effect on the attitudes and behaviors of the public. These studies are supported by Gadarian et al. (2021), who discovered that partisanship was a crucial element in shaping individual responses to the early stages of the coronavirus outbreak.

Clinton et al. (2021) found that partisanship trumped public health concerns in explaining individuals' willingness to stay at home and reduce social mobility during the first six months of the pandemic. Democrats were 13.1% more likely to avoid mobility over time compared to independents, while Republicans were 27.8% less likely to avoid contact with others (Clinton et al., 2021). This study adds to a growing consensus that partisanship became an important aspect in explaining attitudes and behavior surrounding the coronavirus pandemic (Gadarian et al., 2021; Makridis & Rothwell, 2020; Young & Bleakley, 2020). The results illustrate the importance of politics and political considerations for public health, even during a global pandemic.

The studies mentioned have significantly mapped the general trends of political communication and behavior during the early stages of the pandemic. Both Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) and Green et al. (2020) explored how partisanship

proved to be an essential aspect of elite communication, while Clinton et al. (2021) showed that partisanship affected behavior and attitudes among the general public. Quantitative studies such as these are well suited to take on the challenges of creating an overview based on large sets of data to show the more general patterns. However, qualitative studies may supplement quantitative studies by detecting communication strategies and deconstructing power structures. Since elite communication influences attitudes and behaviors, and this behavior directly influences the severity of the crisis, how elites communicate their message to the public becomes especially important. However, this is where the polarization problem and all its implications emerge. To truly understand how polarization influenced elite communication during the pandemic, it is necessary to study discourse and the frames on polarization in elite communication strategies. The next chapter introduces the conceptual framework that will be used to investigate these frames, and it also looks deeper into how polarization and categorization affected the elite discourse.



## 3 The framing of the discourse on polarization: concepts and theory

A qualitative analysis of language is important to extract the nuances of the data. For instance, this thesis will argue that the Democrats negatively present Trump and his administration. Other studies have already demonstrated such patterns (See Box-Steffensmeier & Moses, 2021; Hughes et al., 2020). However, this thesis will look at in what way the Democrats frame President Trump by studying qualitative nuances in the data. One of the contributions of this thesis is the creation of categories based on communication strategies. I have inductively created these categories to illustrate how politicians use similar strategies in their discourse to present the other as not acting in the nation's interest, lacking credibility, or being accountable for negative consequences. These communication strategies would not exist without the concept of categorization and the tendency of humans to categorize themselves into groups. The concept of categorization and its relation to polarization is conceptualized in the first section of this chapter. The second section in this chapter will be about Critical Discourse Analysis and its relation to uncovering ideologies in discourse.

### 3.1 Polarization and Categorization

The purpose of influencing the minds and attitudes of citizens is not a straightforward affair for politicians. Politicians use several strategies to communicate their ideas to attempt to influence the voters. An obvious motive does not necessarily require additional explanation than through the expression itself, such as encouragement to vote in an election. However, a motive that is not explicitly expressed may also be delivered through discourse, for instance, in the circumstance of biased or incomplete information, to serve the manipulators' interest to accomplish a political agenda (Masroor et al., 2019). A political discourse takes advantage of specific ideological strategies beneath the surface of the discourse. These strategies may not always be apparent to the public. However, some may be more prevalent than others. This is yet another argument for a systematic and thorough analysis of communication. Humans possess an ability to identify hidden agendas but are not always actively and concisely interested in doing so (Chilton, 2004). This thesis offers a way to understand in what way the strategies of communication that create deep divisions in the United States are being used. A close-up view of how polarization manifests itself in language.

Categorization is among the most basic acts of human nature (Lodge & Taber, 2013). The tendency of humans to categorize themselves into groups, and typically the in- and out-group, is fundamental in human information processing. However, categorization has its well-known disadvantage when it is applied to humans "in the rapid and spontaneous creation of in-groups and out-groups and the subsequent tendency to favor "us" at the expense of "them"" (Lodge & Taber, 2013, p. 95). People generally consider members of in-groups as more respectable or good, while out-group members are viewed as inferior or evil. This tendency has shown that categorization can cause discriminatory attitudes

and behaviors despite no objective differences between the groupings (Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, and Clark (1986); Lodge & Taber, 2013).

Exclusion and sorting presumably lead people to perceive identifiers of both parties to be more extreme than what is reality, and misperceptions tend to become more intense (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016). According to Levendusky (2009) and Iyengar et al. (2019), the percentage of sorted partisans, partisans who identify with the party most closely reflecting their ideology, has steadily increased. When more people identify as either Democrats or Republicans, a consequence appears where co-partisans pursue togetherness and consider non-identifiers as socially distant (Iyengar et al., 2019). This serves as a contradiction to the togetherness a crisis such as the pandemic is dependent on. The handling of the pandemic is reliant on behaviors and attitudes to change in favor of a united effort.

Whatever one may think of the political debate in the United States, most readers will agree that the political discourse in this thesis contains a negative presentation of the other. Hence, we have the truth and they have an ideology. Accordingly, ideology is used in a degrading way when characterizing the ideas or policies of others (Van Dijk, 2011a). Such degrading use of the notion of ideology may itself be ideological when it expresses a polarization between an in-group and an out-group, the distinction between *Them* and *Us*. The following section will analyze the notion of ideology and especially the ways ideologies are expressed in and reproduced by discourse to become capable of identifying such polarization in discourse.

### 3.2 The uncovering of ideologies in discourse: Critical Discourse Analysis and the concept of framing.

When we think of politics, we think of the continuous struggle for power in order to secure specific ideas and interests and put them into practice (Schaffner, 1996). In America, the infinite struggle for power in politics is based on the differences in ideologies between two political parties: the Democrats and the Republicans. Van Dijk (2006) defines *ideologies* as "foundational beliefs that underlie the shared social representation of specific kinds of social groups" (p.120). However, ideologies are foundational social beliefs of a general and abstract nature. They function as a general key to provide ideological meaning to everyday situations and challenges. This includes specifications of general cultural values such as freedom, equality, and justice (Van Dijk, 2006). These representations are, in turn, the basis of discourse and other social practices.

We acquire larger parts of our knowledge through exposure to discourse, and we can neither produce nor understand discourse without contextualizing it with our previously obtained knowledge (Van Dijk, 2011b). We also know that, by definition, ideological discourse is based on underlying ideologies. Regardless of this fundamental mutual dependence on ideologies and discourse, recognized especially in cognitive science, we have only limited insight into the relationship between the concepts. Since Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is primarily interested in deciphering the underlying ideologies of discourse, and since ideologies are mainly reproduced by discourse, it is clear that this interference requires detailed analysis.

In recent decades Critical Discourse Analysis has become popular within social sciences. However, Critical Discourse Analysis is not a discrete academic discipline with a fixed set of research methods. Instead, CDA functions as a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement containing a variety of approaches, each with an individual set of theoretical models, research methods, and agenda (Fairclough et al., 2011). What unites them is a shared attraction towards the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change. CDA is well-suited to analyzing the relationship between language and society and has a critical approach to methodology (Fairclough et al., 2011). CDA must be considered engaged and committed; a form of intervention in social practice and social relationships.

Politicians have different purposes with their messaging, and their motives are often hidden (Entman & Usher, 2018). Since studies already show that political discourse is polarized (Banks et al., 2021; Green et al., 2020; Hong & Kim, 2016), it is important to understand in what way politicians create frames. An explanation of frames will illustrate how communication strategies and motives are implicit in discourse. The purpose of deciphering frames is to illustrate how politicians communicate with their audience. Voters need to understand when they are taken advantage of based on their beliefs and ideology to identify in what ways the politicians try to influence them.

When we interpret the world, we emphasize certain elements and leave other aspects of an issue out of the debate. Mental models give all individuals prerequisites to interpret, experience, and later remember experiences or events that occur in their lives.

“Ideologically biased mental models control all our ideological practices and hence also our ideological text and talk” (Van Dijk, 2011a, p. 391). For Gofman (1974), frames denote “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences in life (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). Frames help provide meaning and understanding to events and occurrences by organizing experiences and guiding action. These collective action frames add an interpretive dimension that simplifies complex occurrences in the world (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Discourse can be interpreted differently, depending on the context and audience. Interpretation and understanding develop through the lens of feelings, beliefs, values, and knowledge (Fairclough et al., 2011). The form and functions of political discourse have substantially altered direction with the evolving ways of communication. Political elites have mainly taken advantage of a platform such as Twitter with their tweets that are intended to gain public acclaim and propagate political ideologies (Masroor et al., 2019). This entails a detailed analysis of the tweets and how they are embedded in social conditions and linked to context. The political discourse on Twitter requires critical attention toward linguistic structures and strategies to uncover the relationship between language and social practices. In the environment of the increased quantity of sources, CDA plays a vital role in analyzing the competing sources and their agenda.

## 4 Analyzing discourse: methodology

Traditionally, Critical Discourse Analysis has primarily targeted texts produced by elites and powerful institutions, such as news and political speeches, with the ambition to reveal the discourse used to maintain power and sustain existing social relations (Bouvier & Machin, 2018). Nonetheless CDA has been increasingly encouraged to engage with language and communication on internet and social media (Masroor et al., 2019). Whereas former texts in news articles and speeches were considered static, texts in social media are dynamic and multimodal. New technology has provided possibilities for social media members to mix voices and genres of communication and provide attachments such as pictures, videos, emojis, or articles (Fletcher & Park, 2017). These texts may be generated and received in different manners, making discourse analysis more complex.

In this chapter, the methodological choices of this thesis are presented. It starts by discussing the theoretical assumptions of the discourse analysis and the choice of discourse analysis as opposed to content analysis. To follow, it discusses the main challenges in discourse analysis and how these have been addressed in this study. The third section discusses the theoretical background for the choice of analysis and presents the research method used to conduct the analysis. The final section in this chapter presents the sources used and describes how they have been collected and coded.

### 4.1 Why critical discourse analysis?

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a sub-category of discourse analysis that studies the role of language in society and political processes (Bouvier & Machin, 2018). Initially, CDA emerged from Critical Linguistics in the late 1970s based on the consideration that 'language is a form of social practice' used to legitimize, maintain, and accustom variations of social injustice and inequality (Fairclough, 1989 in; Bouvier & Machin, 2018). This means that communication is first given meaning in a social landscape through discourse. Leading from this assumption, one can assume that polarization on Twitter has developed in a discursive context. Studying discourse thus becomes necessary to understand attitude formation and behavior based on political agenda and actions.

This thesis has previously argued that a Critical Discourse Analysis of the elite communication strategies on Twitter is necessary. Another possible approach to achieve this would be to use content analysis, a method not too different from CDA. However, content analysis, a more quantitative method than discourse, would however entail other assumptions. The most prominent reason for not choosing content analysis is that I assume that it is not the number of exposures that influences the individual but the quality of the data and the individual's relation to the data and its composer. Entman (1993) suggests that an increase in salience would enhance the probability of perceiving information, discerning, processing, and storing meaning in memory. However, "because salience is a product of the interaction of texts and receivers, the presence of frames in

the text, as detected by researchers, does not guarantee their influence in audience thinking” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). This indicates that the individual’s relation to the discourse matters. This thesis attempts to look into the personal relation to the discourse, while other studies seem to have covered the quantitative exposure. A person’s attitudes are most likely to be shaped by a combination of the two.

A hypothetical example of how personal relation to the frames affects attitudes: Voter one worked as a housemaid for a small company in the United States. She lost her job when the company went bankrupt due to a lack of income. This happened because of increased competition with larger companies that could operate at lower costs. She eventually finds out that larger firms hire foreign employees, mostly Chinese workers, who can work for lower wages. Voter two lived in China for five years when she studied for her degree in cultural studies. She learned how to speak Chinese and got to know numerous Chinese people. In a political debate, one candidate blames China for the ongoing domestic problems in the United States. It is reasonable to believe that Voter one would support this candidate’s aggressive and destructive posture towards China. However, Voter two would be critical of this stance because she has learned to know China from a different perspective. It is easy to think that Voter one would support the negative view of China. At the same time, it is also likely that the views are affected by exposure over time. However, if there is no personal relation to the frame, than the voter may ignore it entirely, no matter how much one is exposed to it. This example is meant to illustrate that personal relation to the frame matters. Therefore, the primary purpose of this analysis is to identify and interpret the existence of frames, not the quantity of them.

## 4.2 Challenges of discourse analysis as a method: making a selection

The example above does also demonstrate the intertextuality of discourse. Representations are ultimately re-represented, and language is constructed rather than mirroring reality (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). This suggests that discourse continuously builds on interpretations of other discourses. Making a selection of tweets becomes a significant challenge since it is difficult not to leave out data that would enrich the analysis. Accordingly, the researcher’s capacity is always restricted, making it necessary to prioritize a representative selection of data with the highest relevance to the thesis question. This study focuses on the negative and positive presentation of the other and the self in the political discourse. The data has been collected and analyzed accordingly.

When making a selection, the researcher does not only have to limit the discourse but also has to decide which data to study within the discourse. The aim of the selection is to represent the discourse as a unity as well as possible. To focus on the U.S. Senators’ Twitter communication is the most obvious approach when studying elite communication since they mainly communicate through writing, and their publications are directed at the citizens. Another significant aspect of this analysis is that the tweets are limited to 280 characters. This means that the authors need to be brief and have little room to contextualize and clarify their statements. Since they control the narrative, they may have reasons to avoid specific topics. This may lead to that the topics discussed on Twitter varies from the topics discussed in the media or among the public. However, previous studies, such as the extensive study of Medrano (2021), find that frames among

the public and the elites, as represented by the journalists in Medrano's study, are coherent. This again supports the assumption that there is a close connection between the discourse that is discussed in the media and the discourse that is presented by the elites. I hope to detect the frames closest to the dominant frames from public debates, but I may focus on other aspects of the topics. Ultimately, the intention of the selection and analysis has been to detect what manifestations of polarization that can be found within the elite discourse and identify in what way U.S. Senators frame the other(s) during the pandemic outbreak.

There will always be some interpretations that have to be made when studying discourse, which raises another issue of discourse analysis, specifically the role of the researcher. When studying discourse in a foreign language and culture from one's own, it is particularly relevant to be aware of the power dynamics (Reich & Reich, 2006). Stuart (2004) defines *cultural competence* as "the ability to understand and constructively relate to the uniqueness of each individual in the light of the diverse cultures that influence each person's perspective" (p. 6). Recognizing these differences can provide innovative solutions to multifaceted problems by implementing alternative worldviews, customs, methods of communication, ideas, and values (Reich & Reich, 2006). However, the role of the researcher may also differ when one is a 'native' to the culture and language analyzed. One always brings a subjective aspect that colors the discursive environment in which one acts. It is therefore expected that I would have viewed and interpreted the discourse differently if I had another socio-cultural belonging than the one I have. I will try to conduct as transparent an analysis as possible, although one must accept subjective influence in a qualitative study.

## 4.3 Research methodology

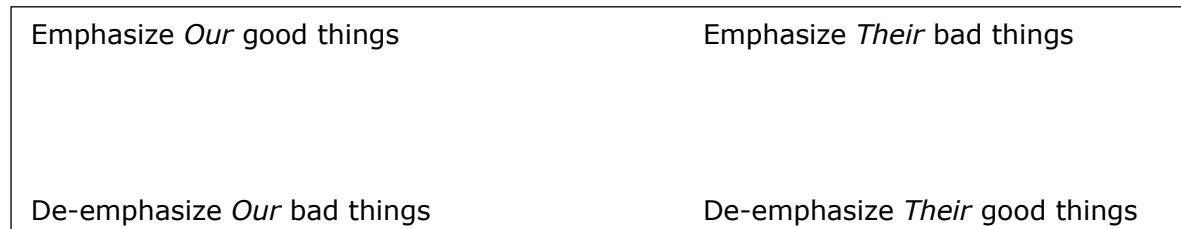
After having explored ideologies and how ideologies influence social practices in previous sections of this thesis, we have better prerequisites to look at how ideologies are represented in discourse. Ideologies are rarely expressed directly in discourse, and it is usually only certain segments of ideologies that will be conveyed in discourse simultaneously. However, even in these instances, attitude may be combined with other elements from mental models such as experiences or personal opinions (Van Dijk, 2011a).

Tweets are influenced by general and abstract group ideologies such as a party program and specific individuals' mental models. This means that there are numerous layers of representation in a single tweet. Accordingly, ideologies are not necessarily directly visible or detectable in discourse. Mental models influence discourse to appear as something different than how the ideological stance would have appeared by itself. In these instances, an analysis of the context may be required to understand the hidden ideological meaning in certain expressions (Van Dijk, 2011a). Based on this information, the role of discourse analysis is to identify and interpret discursive structures and strategies as the expression and reproduction of group ideologies. This must be done by considering several constraints of discourse, such as the textual, the cognitive, and the social (Van Dijk, 2011a).

A well-known strategy of ideological discourse control is through a manifestation of group relations. This strategy attempts to analyze how in-groups and out-groups are represented in text and talk, represented by ideological pronouns *Us* and *Them* (Van

Dijk, 2011a). Based on the presumption that the underlying ideological structure of Us and Them is polarized, we may expect the same from the ideological discourse that contains these pronouns. Van Dijk (2011a) has appropriately named this approach the Ideological Square because of its four complementary overall strategies.

**Figure 1: The Ideological Square (Van Dijk, 2011a, p. 396).**



There are numerous ways whereby language users may use out-group derogation in the discursive reproduction. Discourse affects the formation or change of mental attitudes via the formal structures of syntax, style and rhetoric, to the semantic manipulation of local and global meaning (Fairclough et al., 2011). According to Van Dijk (2011a) there are two primary categories: semantic and formal structures. The use of semantic structures and strategies happens by selecting and emphasizing negative topics, persons, or action descriptions. For instance, this could come into sight through a detailed description of their negative properties. The formal structure is created by drawing attention to some elements of the discourse through visual, phonological, or structural strategies. One example of this strategy could be to emphasize their negative implications in a headline or an irregular (first, earlier) position. These strategies may also be used for a positive self-description of in-groups. This proves that the general structures and strategies of discourse are ideologically neutral since any ideological group may use them. However, *what* is being communicated is of relevance and importance. Accordingly, ideological analysis can never only conduct a formal analysis of discourse. An analysis of the meaning that expresses underlying ideological beliefs must be conducted, in addition to the context: who is speaking about what, to whom, when, and with what agenda (Van Dijk, 2011a).

This basic classification of groups and their intergroup perception and interaction requires sophisticated discourse analysis in order to understand how it is deployed at all levels of text and talk (Van Dijk, 2011a). This can happen through a discourse analysis that “goes beyond a superficial content analysis of positive or negative terms describing attributed in-group or out-group characteristics” (Van Dijk, 2011a, p. 397). These semantic and formal structures and strategies may facilitate to illustrate the effects of Senators’ objectives. Highlighting the language strategies in discourse identifies what the politicians implicitly or explicitly attempt to achieve. Some of the strategies and structures used in discourse to influence mental models are shown below in table 1 and table 2.

**Table 1: Semantic structures: meaning and reference (Van Dijk, 2011a, p. 398).**

<b>Semantic Structures: Meaning and Reference</b>	<b>Description:</b>
Negative Topics:	Any overall discourse topic describing <i>Them</i> as breaching our norms and values; deviance, threat, insecurity, criminality, inability, etc.
Level of Description	<i>Their</i> negative properties or actions tend to be described in more specific detail than <i>Ours</i> .
Implications	Propositions may be used that have negative implications about <i>Them</i> .
Presuppositions	Presupposing propositions (negative about them) that are not known to be true.
Agency	Emphasizing <i>Their</i> (and de-emphasizing <i>Our</i> ) agency or active responsibility of negative actions.
Focus	Any participant, property, or action may receive special focus, e.g., by stress, volume, size, color, etc., in order to draw attention of the recipients.

**Table 2: Formal structures (Van Dijk, 2011a, p. 398).**

<b>Formal Structures:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
Superstructures	Specific semantic categories – e.g. with negative meanings about <i>Them</i> – may be <b>foregrounded</b> when placed in an irregular (first, earlier) position, e.g. in headlines or leads. Negative properties of <i>Them</i> may be emphasized by persuasive arguments and fallacies or by captivating forms of storytelling that also promote the later memorizing of such alleged negative properties.
Pronouns	May signal in-group and out-group membership, as in <i>Us</i> vs. <i>Them</i> , and in general different degrees of power, solidarity, intimacy, etc. when speaking to <i>Us</i> vs. <i>Them</i> .
Demonstratives	May signal closeness or distance to people being described, e.g. <i>those people</i> .
Rhetorical moves	Repetitions, enumerations, rhymes, alliterations to emphasize and hence draw attention to emphasize negative meanings about <i>Them</i> .

These structures and strategies can be revealing when viewed in relation to how the group members represent themselves and others in discourse. The discourse can be critically analyzed through the perspective of discourse analysis by recognizing the devices and strategies politicians use. This happens through how actors are projected, the type of authorities referred to, and whether they are considered respectable. It also values how arguments are designed, how in- and out-group categories are made visible, and how the devices of evidence, facts, presupposition, vagueness, victimization, polarization, and self-glorification are realized linguistically for competing and enforcing specific ideologies (Masroor et al., 2019).



## 4.4 Sources and coding

The overall topic is the management and organization of the coronavirus pandemic. The authors of the following material are all Senators from the 116<sup>th</sup> U.S. Senate. This means that the Senators represent, or affiliate with, one out of the two political parties in the United States. Accordingly, this is an ideological topic considering that the two parties have different attitudes regarding policies. With this information as a basis for the context, these tweets are being constructed, interpreted, and analyzed as ideological texts. In the table below, I have outlined the number of tweets that have been analyzed in this thesis. This section will also elaborate on how the data has been collected and selected.

**Table 3: Overview of the sources**

Tweets by Democratic (D) Senators	11
Tweets by Republican (R) Senators	10

I have chosen to collect data material through purposeful sampling to get as transparent a thesis as possible. *Purposeful sampling* is a technique widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015). This technique aims to identify and select agents that are exceptionally knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. In contradiction, probabilistic or random sampling is used to ensure the generalizability of the results. This happens by reducing the potential for prejudice in the selection and minimizing the risk of potential known and unknown confounders (Palinkas et al., 2015).

There are numerous purposeful sampling designs (see; Palinkas et al., 2015). Each strategy can identify, compare, and contrast similarities and differences of the specific examples in the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). The two strategies that are used in this thesis are shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Purposeful sampling strategies (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535)**

Strategy	Objective	Example	Considerations
Criterion-i	To identify and select all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance	Sampling all Tweets that contains the keyword "Covid".	Can be used to identify cases from standardized questionnaires for in-depth follow up (Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535)
Typical case	To illustrate or highlight what is typical, normal, or average.	Blaming the opposition of not cooperating.	The purpose is to describe and illustrate what is typical to those unfamiliar with the setting, not to make

			generalized statements about the experiences of all participants (Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535)
--	--	--	--

For this study, criterion-i was chosen as a strategy to identify and select all tweets that met the predetermined criteria of importance. Through the explorer function on Twitter, the first predetermined criterion was set that all qualified participants had to be a Senator from the 116<sup>th</sup> Senate. Only the official accounts of these Senators were included in the selection. The second criterion was that the tweets had to be published between February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, and May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. The rationale behind this data collection period came from the increased level of attention on the coronavirus among the political elites during this period. The final criterion for the first selection was that one out of two keywords had to be involved (COVID and CORONA). These two words were selected based on research conducted by Green et al. (2020) and Pew Research Center (Hughes et al., 2020). Hughes et al. (2020) only used keywords such as "COVID" and "coronavirus" while Green et al. (2020) used a far more complicated method of collection. However, the corpus of Covid19 related tweets collected by Green et al. (2020) tracked closely (0.99 correlation) with the more straightforward corpus put together by Pew Research Center (Hughes et al., 2020).

After collecting the tweets, I performed several data cleaning procedures, including the 'typical case' strategy to reduce the amount of data. Before the analysis, I created a new word-document where I created sub-categories based on inductive pattern recognition and the analysis conducted by Masroor et al. (2019). I then sampled the tweets into the different sub-categories and adjusted them until I reached the point of saturation. Instead of sole reliance on content or thematic analysis, the operationalization of strategies and structures concentrates on linguistic categories. This involves focusing on elements such as actors, time, context, and argumentation (Masroor et al., 2019). This analysis cannot provide a flawless list of linguistic devices because a comprehensive analysis of even a short passage can "take months and fill hundreds of pages" (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 99). The data size of this thesis was kept small because of considerations regarding theoretical saturation and depth of research analysis, such as rhetorical means, context, and text surface. However, the research goals of uncovering socio-cognitive strategies in the ideological construction of in- and out-group discourse remained intact. The essential credentials within this type of analysis are the constructionist and interpretative requirements (Masroor et al., 2019).

## 5 Analysis of negative other presentation and positive self-presentation

The complex meta-strategy of the ideological square implies that group members will tend to negatively portray the others that they consider as enemies, opponents, or competitors (Van Dijk, 2011a). In contrast, they will tend to speak or write positively about their own group. The analysis intends to identify and interpret political strategies and structures meant to illustrate the represented social groups' actions, identities, motives, and beliefs. These strategies do not only appear through acknowledging positive attributes and actions of the in-group but also by exposing weaknesses of the other out-group (Van Dijk, 2006). The different categories have been developed inductively through an examination of the data material, in addition, it has been inspired by Masroor et al. (2019) and their analysis of the Pakistani presidential election in 2016. I have inductively designed the following categories:

- *The other does not act in the interest of the nation*
- *The other is accountable for negative consequences*
- *The self represents generosity*

The study by Masroor et al. (2019) has inspired the following categories:

- *The other lacks credibility*
- *The self is one with the nation*

This identification is one of the main contributions that this thesis adds to the field of research. Furthermore, these categories enable this thesis to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the dynamics of such constructions. In the following sections this thesis will explore what manifestations of partisanship that can be detected in the discourse on Twitter. The first section will present findings from negative other categorization by providing specific examples that will be interpreted. Furthermore, a similar section of positive self-presentation will provide examples and interpretations of tweets.

### 5.1 Negative other presentation

Shaping a negative image of the other in the public eye is the motive of this strategy. Our way of doing things is directly contrasted with the oppositional actor's way of doing things. Although the most intuitive construction of the other would be of the other political party in the discourse on Covid19, it does not rule out the construction of other others. It is also important to clarify that all negative (or positive) representation is not equal. Since this is a qualitative analysis, I will try to highlight some of the nuances that would not be noticed in a quantitative analysis. For instance, this will be done by identifying more aggressive language or pay attention to language that use humorous or rhetorical features.

### 5.1.1 The other does not act in the interest of the nation

This strategy is used to portray bad intentions and showcase the other as working against the interests of the nation. Most of these tweets target members of the opposing political party, or the oppositional party itself, to showcase how they are acting contrary to the interests of the American public.

For instance, the Republican Senator Tim Scott displays how the Democrats voted no to the draft of extending funding that would help small businesses combat the economic toll of the coronavirus pandemic (Iacurci, 2020).

Just so everyone knows, Senate Democrats just objected to extending funding for the Paycheck Protection Program. More games keeping more workers from getting paychecks. #coronavirus #covid19 (Scott, 2020, Apr. 9).

Tim Scott uses the *agency* strategy (See table 1, section 4.3) to emphasize *their* active responsibility for the negative outcome. According to Senator Scott, the small businesses are simply not getting funding for paychecks because the Democrats objected to providing further funding. This is an effective strategy since it is easy to identify whom Senator Scott portrays as the cause of the problem. The choice of words in his tweet carries an underlying message to the public: the Republicans are trying to save the American people by providing workers with paychecks, while the Democrats are playing a political game. Scott presents the Democrats as more interested in playing a political game rather than providing funding for the public. A message is sent out to his followers that the Democrats act contrary to the interests of the Americans.

However, Tim Scott is far from alone in accusing the opposition of acting against the the nation's interest. Despite some improvements in test equipment supply, Democratic Senators Tammy Duckworth and Chuck Schumer blame President Donald Trump for the lack of expansion within testing months into the pandemic (Lopez, 2020).

Donald Trump's chaotic response to #COVID19 has failed to prevent shortages of the testing supplies, PPE and other medical equipment that our frontline healthcare providers rely on to take care of patients and keep themselves safe (Duckworth, 2020, Apr. 30).

It's April 29th, and President Trump still doesn't have an adequate national testing strategy (Schumer, 2020, Apr. 30)

Senator Duckworth presents the other as not acting in the interest of the nation by criticizing Trump's "chaotic response" (Duckworth, 2020, Apr. 30). She uses the formal structure known as *superstructures* (See table 2, section 4.3) to foreground who is responsible in her tweet. This strategy used by Duckworth creates suspense and immediately attracts the attention of her followers because Trump is a popular object of criticism among her followers. That Senator Duckworth draws focus to the healthcare providers is not accidental. *Focus* (See table 1, section 4.3) is a commonly used strategy in discourse. It is purposeful in this context because healthcare workers were considered especially important in the outbreak of the pandemic. Defending this critical group is likely to be a popular strategy, and it is difficult for the opposition to criticize her for it. Accordingly, this strategy creates a bad image of the other in the public eye while she also positively presents herself. Senator Chuck Schumer also blames President Trump for the insufficient testing strategy. He uses the strategy of *agency* (See table 1, section 4.3)

to emphasize the active responsibility Trump has for the inadequate national testing strategy. The motive of his tweet is to display how President Trump's actions do not suffice. He emphasizes that it has taken too long for President Trump to develop an adequate national testing strategy. Accordingly, Trump is not working efficiently enough for the nation's interests.

President Donald Trump signed the \$2 trillion coronavirus relief bill on the March 27, 2020, to prevent economic devastation (Pramuk, 2020). However, the bill would have been signed a few days prior if it had not been for the Democrats. They withheld the vote with the ambition of increasing the total funding. The Republican Senator Jim Risch shared his thoughts on the matter.

We are in the center of a crisis and Idaho families and small businesses need relief NOW. Deeply disappointed my Democrat colleagues chose politics over the urgent needs of the American people #COVID19 (Risch, 2020, Mar. 23).

Senator Jim Risch has taken advantage of all the components of the theory of framing (See chapter 3) by Entman (1993). Risch defines the problem as follows: "we are in the center of a crisis and Idaho families and small businesses need relief NOW" (Risch, 2020, Mar. 23). He proceeds by stating that the Democrats are the cause of the problem. Senator Risch considers the Democrats the problem because they did not support the first draft of the proposed stimulus package in Congress. Furthermore, his evaluation suggests that he is deeply disappointed by the Democrats. He justifies his disappointment by explaining that the democrats chose "politics over the urgent needs of the American people" (Risch, 2020, Mar. 23). To break down this tweet into components provides an explanation that describes the power of a communicating text. These components show how Risch's strategy portrays the Democrats negatively in the public eye.

This section has shown how the other has been presented negatively through an analysis of how the politicians strategically portray the other as not acting in the interest of the nation. The Senators position themselves as superior by attributing the other to shameful and harmful characteristics. Whereas the two Republican examples criticize the Democrats for their political actions, the Democratic examples verbally criticize President Trump and his failed leadership and inefficiency. This indicates that the Democrats focus on the personal suitability of the other. In contrast, the Republicans focus on the more general insufficiency of the Democrats. After having mapped the data collection and patterns from studies such as Green et al. (2020), this seems to be reoccurring strategies used by members of both the political parties. The following section will look further into how politicians frame the other as someone who lacks credibility.

### 5.1.2 The other lacks credibility

Members of Congress use this strategy to show that the other cannot be trusted by providing evidence for other occurrences where the other has lied, failed, or been immoral. The underlying strategy is to put oneself in a positive light by illustrating that the other has failed to serve the nation properly.

President Trump and the Republicans accused other groups of being responsible for domestic issues when the Republicans were under intense pressure from the press and the public for their handling of the pandemic (Atwood & Collinson, 2020; Reston, 2020). The Republican Senator Tom Cotton and two Democratic Senators, Tammy Duckworth and Mazie Hirono made their attitudes clear.

The circumstantial evidence about the virus all points to a breach at the Wuhan labs. China covers up or destroys any direct evidence. Asking intelligence agencies to collect more information is exactly what should be done (Cotton, 2020, Apr. 30).

Donald Trump's basic responsibility is to keep Americans safe. The rising death count shows that he's failing. Instead of spending his time deflecting blame, he should start \*listening\* to Governors & giving them the supplies they need to fight the #COVID19 public health crisis (Duckworth, 2020, Apr. 21).

We have a president that takes "no responsibility" for his failures on #COVID19. Now he's trying to distract us from his incompetence with yet another attack on immigrants. We don't need another "executive order." We need executive leadership @realDonaldTrump refuses to provide (Hirono, 2020, Apr. 21).

Senator Tom Cotton uses the strategy of *implications* (See table 1, section 4.3) to remove all credibility from China. Cotton creates an ambiance that inevitably will have negative implications for *them* by using the negative phrase "China covers up or destroys any direct evidence" (Cotton, 2020, Apr. 30). He backs up this proposition with the action to continue surveillance and collect more evidence. This action serves as another component in his strategy of removing credibility from the other. The Democratic Senator Duckworth and the Democratic Senator Hirono use *agency* (See table 1, section 4.3) to emphasize President Trump's failed leadership. By verbally attacking Trump's irresponsible leadership, Duckworth and Hirono build their argument that his accusations of blame are entirely unnecessary and are deliberate attempts to distract the public eye from his own failings. Duckworth and Hirono have accordingly used *negative topics* (See table 1, section 4.3) and *focus* (See table 1, section 4.3) to illustrate the President's inability and showcased his undependable behavior. The language used by Duckworth and Hirono seems to be more aggressive than the examples of the Democratic Senators in *The other does not act in the interest of the nation* (See section 5.1.1). This may be random and not representative of all Democrats. However, it may also signal that a more aggressive discourse is used when one is verbally attacking the credibility of the other.

In April, President Trump's administration verbally attacked the World Health Organization because it had failed in its basic duty. Several Republicans criticized the United Nation agency's "China-centric" tendencies and accused WHO of having mismanaged and covered up the spread of the virus after it emerged in China (Bender,

2020). The Republican Senator Joni Ernst and the Democratic Senators Ed Markey and Sheldon Whitehouse tweeted about the issue.

The folks around the world who have lost loved ones to #COVID19 deserve answers. The @WHO needs to be accountable for its role in helping Communist China cover up this pandemic. I joined @SenRickScott & my colleagues to request info on the WHO's failed and delayed response (Ernst, 2020, Apr. 14).

It's hard to tell which one Donald Trump cares about less: the world, health, or organization. But one thing is clear, Trump is blaming WHO because he mismanaged our #COVID19 response. The millions of people whose lives are at stake cannot afford these political games (Markey, 2020, Apr. 15).

Trump calls for review of the World Health Organization while lashing out against reviews of his incompetent response to #COVID19. Just another day for our very stable genius (Whitehouse, 2020, Apr. 15).

Republican Senator Joni Ernst's statement argues that the WHO is to blame for the extensive consequences of the pandemic since they are responsible for providing information. Senator Ernst uses an established out-group, Communist China, to construct another out-group, the WHO. By associating WHO with Communist China she removes credibility from the agency. Furthermore, Ernst requests answers to give her followers the impression that something immoral has been going on. She creates a *presupposition* (See table 1, section 4.3) with the intention of diminishing all credibility of the other. The intention is to diminish whatever the other says so her followers will regard the agency's communication as lies, immoral, or false. This shows the intertextuality of discourse. Representations are ultimately re-represented, and language is constructed to create alternative realities.

It was not only the Republicans who responded to President Trump's criticism of the WHO. Senator Markey uses a reflexive question's *rhetorical feature* (See table 2, section 4.3) to argue that *he* (Trump) does not care about the world, health, or the WHO. This strategy is used as a *presupposition* (See table 1, section 4.3) to reveal that his lack of care will negatively affect *them* (the millions of people whose lives are at stake). Senator Markey accordingly showcases how President Trump lacks credibility simply because he does not care. Democratic Senator Sheldon Whitehouse uses irony's *rhetorical aspect* (See table 2, section 4.3) to convey his feelings about the President's behavior. By describing President Trump's state of affairs humorously, Whitehouse ends his tweet with an ironic punchline. President Trump is a popular object of scorn among the Democratic voters, and this ironic tweet strengthens the argument against Trump as an unreliable president. These two examples have shown new nuances of elite communication strategies. This illustrates that there is more to this discourse than a binary choice between positive and negative. Senators Markey and Whitehouse have accomplished their motive of presenting President Trump as an incredible president by using rhetorical features in their presentation of the other.

Bill Bryan, the acting undersecretary of science and technology for the Department of Homeland Security, explained that new experiments showed that the coronavirus did not fare well under sunlight or heat, at a White House briefing in April, 2020 (Dale et al., 2020). Furthermore, he explained that disinfectants such as bleach and isopropyl alcohol quickly killed the virus. Afterward, President Trump suggested that ingesting disinfectants could be used to treat people who have the coronavirus and asked medical

experts to look into that (Dale et al., 2020). This caused disruption in the mass media and the public, and certain Senators, such as Democratic Senator Ben Cardin addressed the issue.

.@POTUS, this is dangerous and irresponsible.

Do not, under any circumstance, inject or ingest disinfectants. For accurate information on protecting yourself from #COVID19, visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) instead (Cardin, 2020, Apr. 24).

Senator Ben Cardin uses the strategy of *superstructures* (See table 2, section 4.3) when addressing President Donald Trump (@POTUS) at the onset of the tweet. By placing *his* (Trump) negative properties in an early position, Cardin creates suspense which he uses to support his initial accusation with additional information. Addressing the President's dangerous and irresponsible actions before referencing credible information sources provides evidence for Cardin's claim that the President cannot be trusted. Furthermore, by directing the audience to a credible source, Cardin portrays Trump as someone who challenges scientific research and official advice while simultaneously presenting himself as a credible and reliable source.

This section has shown how the political elites have presented the other as someone that lacks credibility. The Senators have taken advantage of several strategies to showcase the other negatively. This section has shown tendencies that indicate that it requires more direct and aggressive language to verbally attack the credibility of the other than to claim that the other does not act in the interest of the nation. The examples in this section seem to support this claim. However, the examples also suggest alternative strategies. The Democratic Senators Markey and Whitehouse illustrate that rhetorical features such as reflexive questions and irony can challenge the credibility of the other. The next section will identify in what way the U.S. Senators presented the other of being accountable for negative consequences.

### 5.1.3 The other is accountable for negative consequences

This strategy proves to the public that the negative consequences have been caused by the other. Accusing someone of being accountable for severe consequences is a serious accusation and must be considered abnormal, even in polarized politics. Lelkes et al. (2017) suggest that partisan animus has been increasing and Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) claim that tone in messaging has become more hostile. This section supports this tendency because the language politicians use seems to have become more aggressive.

The economic ravages of the pandemic have proved to be a toxic topic. On April 24, 2020, lawmakers provided the Paycheck Protection Program with additional funding, which offers loans to small businesses. However, there was uproar when it emerged that large, publicly traded companies had obtained some of the previous funding (BBC, 2020). The Democratic Senator Bob Casey provided his perspective on the issue. In contrast, his Democratic colleague Tom Udall confronted the lack of follow-through from the Trump administration regarding the #CARESAct that previously had been granted. This far-reaching legislation was considered the most expensive emergency aid package in U.S.



history, and it was supposed to provide a financial injection into all parts of the economy (Foran et al., 2020).

It is this same Republican obsession with hollowing out the core functions of government that has hampered our COVID response in the U.S. For decades, Republicans have used the pretext of unregulated markets as a ploy to hand out trillions to corporate overlords (Casey, 2020, Apr. 30).

We passed the #CARESAct a month ago & Tribes STILL haven't seen a dime of the \$8 billion relief fund for native communities. It's long past time for the Trump admin. to follow the law & get this money out the door & to the people who need it. Indian Country can't wait any longer (Udall, 2020, Apr. 30).

The Democratic Senator Bob Casey criticized the Republicans' exploitation of the system "as a ploy to hand out trillions to corporate overlords" (Casey, 2020, Apr. 30). Casey's strategy was to reach out to the public masses and illustrate how the Republicans prioritize the wealthy few. His motive was to negatively present the Republicans as an other that expands the gap between the rich and the poor. Consequently, the Republican obsession with exploiting the core functions of government has restrained *our* (the United States') Covid19 response. Tom Udall blames the Trump administration for not having followed through with the funding of native communities. Udall implied that the Republican-controlled administration does not work efficiently enough and is not fulfilling the promises made. Simultaneously, Udall's choice of words carries an underlying message to the native communities - the Republicans do not value or respect them. The motive of this message seems to be to build a positive self-representation by emphasizing negative other presentation.

In a previous section of this chapter, we have seen that China has been framed as an other by the Republican Senator Joni Ernst. In March 2020, President Trump's administration engaged in a verbal battle as the United States and China fought to shape the narrative about the pandemic's origins (Cohen et al., 2020). The portrayal of the Chinese Communist Party's level of direct responsibility has been prominently used in political discourse. The selection of words within this discourse has been especially vigorous, exemplified in the tweets by the Republican Senators Cotton and Blackburn below.

The Chinese Communist Party is responsible for every single death, every job lost, every retirement nest egg lost, from this coronavirus. And Xi Jinping must be made to pay the price (Cotton, 2020, Apr. 16).

From tanks in Tiananmen Square, to Bird flu and SARS, the Chinese coronavirus is another example of a culture of suppression and censorship that kills thousands of people #chinesevirus #COVID19 (Blackburn, 2020, Mar. 18).

Republican Senator Tom Cotton emphasizes the Chinese Communist Party's responsibility for the negative consequences of the pandemic. The motive of this strategy seems to be to deemphasize *our* (the Republican administration) responsibility by accusing the *other* of all blame. In addition, Senator Cotton focuses on the Communist perspective of the Chinese government in an attempt to gain public support. Communism is an ideology that Americans, and Republicans in particular, have a long aversion to. Senator Marsha Blackburn also shapes a bad image of the other by projecting the Chinese culture as

suppressive, controversial, and responsible for thousands of deaths. Blackburn associates former devastating crises, such as the Bird flu and SARS, with the Chinese culture to attack the characteristics of the other. Using a well-established assumption before accusing the other is a potent tool to persuade the audience that whatever is to come is based on facts (Masroor et al., 2019).

This section has identified, showcased, and interpreted how U.S. Senators have portrayed the other as accountable for specific negative consequences in the United States. What we have seen in this section correlates with the explanation from Entman and Usher (2018). Their study suggests that politicians have different purposes with their messaging, and their motives are often hidden. We have seen that the Democratic strategy mainly targets President Donald Trump and his Republican administration in the examples of this negative other presentation. The most obvious motive for weakening the governing administration is to facilitate a change of power in the upcoming election. In contrast, the Republicans have redirected blame overseas at China. My impression is that since it is difficult for the governing party to blame those in opposition, which are not in power, for what is going on, they have constructed another other. Green et al. (2020) support this claim by providing evidence for differences in substantive content that members of each party send out. Their study suggests that Republicans blame China, while the Democrats blames the Trump administration. Ironically, one might say that the Republicans are less divisive because they focus on external others (China & WHO) rather than another domestic party. I will discuss the nuances of this instance in section 6.2. Consistent messaging within each political party implies that partisanship strongly affects the political discourse. This categorization into groups is likely to create further polarization by causing discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards the out-group. Accordingly, this section has shown that exclusion and sorting have led discourse to become more extreme than it traditionally has been (Dalton, 2021; Westfall et al., 2015).

## 5.2 Positive self-presentation

The complex meta-strategy of the ideological square reveals that group members favor communicating positively about in-group members and negatively about those in the out-group simply because they are different (Van Dijk, 2011a). The positive self is closely connected to negative other presentation and is achieved by reinforcing negative other presentation or by creating comparisons between the self and the other. We may find traces of the underlying identity, actions, goals, norms, values, group relations, and interests of the ideological group(s) discourse that belong to and identify with the current context (Van Dijk, 2011a). Most evident is the general polarization between a positive self-presentation and a negative other presentation, and the relation of how positive attributes are emphasized. In contrast, the expressions and meanings of discourse deemphasize negative attributes.

### 5.2.1 The self represents generosity

This strategy emphasizes the positive attributes of the self, such as hard work, efficiency, courage, honesty, trustworthiness, resilience, and loyalty (Masroor et al., 2019). The motive of this strategy may be to acknowledge the unselfish and honorable attributes and characteristics of the self to establish a contrast from the negative other.

For instance, when President Trump signed a \$484 billion coronavirus relief bill into law on April 24, 2020, Democratic Senator Dick Durbin addressed the issue accordingly.

By holding our ground for 5 days on #COVID19 aid bill, @SenateDems added \$100b for hospitals & testing. After weeks of frustration where we tested only 350 people/day in Illinois, we now require \$25B for testing. We cannot begin to open up our economy safely without more testing (Durbin, 2020, Apr. 23).

Senator Durbin demonstrates determination and self-glorification by focusing on the resilience that the Democrats expressed. Not only does Durbin express what the Democrats managed to accomplish, but he also illustrates a contradiction. The Republicans did not support this additional funding for hospitals and testing, while the Democrats did. Durbin shares his ambitions for initiating more testing in his home state since the current system is inadequate. Accordingly, he continues to demonstrate determination and generosity for Illinois by expressing what needs to be done to re-open the economy safely. The motive of this strategy seems to be to showcase his accomplishments while he simultaneously manifests his resilience and care for his home state.

Another Senator who showcased his effort after cooperating with the Korean Embassy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide additional equipment for testing, was the Republican Senator Cory Gardner.

My approach through #COVID19 has been all hands on deck – when our state needs something, we go to bat to find it. I’m grateful for our great relationship with @mofa\_kr & @ROKEmbDC and their help securing more than 100,000 #COVID19 tests for Colorado as we beat #COVID19 together (Gardner, 2020, Apr. 25).

Senator Gardner uses the strategy of *agency* (See table 1, section 4.3) to emphasize his active responsibility of providing more than 100,000 coronavirus tests for his home state. This strategy seems to have created an image of Gardner as someone willing to go the extra mile. Gardner’s determination to provide tests for his home state proves that he is resilient. His efficient ‘all hands-on deck’ strategy has been vital in providing this arrangement. Gardner also shows that he cooperates with others and has a broad network of resources. The motive of Gardner’s tweet seems to be to portray his hard work, positive relationship with others, and determination to find solutions. However, it is not necessarily required to promote personal work to create a positive self-image. The Republican Senator Richard Shelby portrayed a business from his home state to display the positive efforts in Alabama.

Another great example of businesses in #AL doing all they can to combat #COVID19 and satisfy the needs of local communities during this time: Yellowhammer Brewing in #Huntsville decided to shift all production to make hand sanitizer (Shelby, 2020, Apr. 8)

Senator Shelby's praise of Yellowhammer Brewing shows that small businesses such as this one take their responsibility seriously in times of desperate measures. While Shelby attributes goodwill to Yellowhammer, he also attributes goodwill to the ongoing work in Alabama, the work he represents as an elected representative of the state. Accordingly, Shelby's attribution of great work to his state's business also works as attribution of praise to himself and his office. This strategy serves to signal greatness and demonstrates the great work that is going on in Alabama. The motive of this strategy could be to show other states how it should be done and signal that Alabama is a state of progressive leadership.

Durbin, Gardner, and Shelby all show how generosity is present in the self or their state. The portrayal of this self-glorification is an important tool in politics to show one's incredible effort and emphasize that this is because of the self's governing. Since elite communication influences attitudes and behaviors, this positive presentation may likely influence certain citizens. This portrayal may also serve to establish credibility in the eyes of the public (Ross & Rivers, 2018) or legitimize the governing administration at the state level (Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2018). This worship of the self may create further polarization by illustrating profound distinctions between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. However, perhaps it may be less harmful than attacking the other. The intended strategy may also be to present oneself as a positive contribution to the debate, a debate dominated by negativity.

### 5.2.2 The self is one with the nation

A strategy that the politicians use to convince the followers that the glory and success of the nation have happened because of one's own contribution, and whatever is good for the nation is good for the self and vice versa. However, it also serves as a strategy to show that the other is not responsible for this glory and success. Personal preference emerges into the nation's strategy, and personal gains are considered national achievements.

During the pandemic, the United States government passed several bills to prevent economic devastation (Pramuk, 2020). The Republican Senator Jerry Moran suggested that he is one with the nation by combining personal interest with national achievements.

Pleased @realDonaldTrump & @SecretarySonny announced much needed support for our farmers and ranchers. I worked with my colleagues to secure funding in the CARES Act to help address the financial damage #COVID19 has caused agricultural producers, including Kansas cattlemen (Moran, 2020, Apr. 18).

Senator Morgan signaled closeness to the administrative leadership represented by President Trump and Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue. The motive of this closeness is to show that he has connections with the most powerful of staff in Congress. Furthermore, Senator Morgan used *agency* (See table 1, section 4.3) to visualize his active responsibility in securing funding for farmers and ranchers. It becomes clear that Morgan did not only work for agriculture nationwide, but he also influenced his powerful connections and managed to secure funding for cattlemen from his home state, Kansas. Senator Morgan has accordingly demonstrated that his ambitions correlate with the interests of the farmers from Kansas while simultaneously implying that his Democratic colleagues hardly contributed.

Another extensively discussed issue during the pandemic outbreak was in regards to what national and local strategies that should be chosen to control the spread of the coronavirus (Vannabouathong et al., 2020). Two Senators that suggested that they were one with the nation were Richard Burr and Amy Klobuchar.

The @WhiteHouse Coronavirus Task Force has issued new guidelines to help slow the spread of #COVID19. The next 15 days are absolutely critical for us to #flattenthecurve. This only works if we all do our part (Burr, 2020, Mar. 16).

Like Vice President @JoeBiden said, we are dealing with an exponential curve when it comes to #COVID19 diagnoses – so this is not a matter of choosing between helping the economy and defeating coronavirus, they are one in the same (Klobuchar, 2020, Mar. 31).

Republican Senator Richard Burr used the strategy of *agency* (See table 1, section 4.3) to highlight *our* (the nation's) responsibility to follow the guidelines. He *focuses* (See table 1, section 4.3) on the next 15 days and emphasizes that the strategies only work if *we* (the American people) do our part. Accordingly, Burr is a promoter of health care and prioritizes the interests of the nation. Similar to Senator Burr, Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar promotes national health care. She demonstrates closeness with former vice-President Joe Biden when she refers to his statement in her tweet. She strengthens the united Democratic strategy by supporting his argument of helping the economy and defeating the coronavirus. This effect suggests that it is an important issue for her, for the democratic party, and for the nation. Klobuchar's *focus* (See table 1, section 4.3) on flattening the curve strengthens her argument that the Democrats prioritize national health care. Simultaneously, she demonstrates togetherness.

The political elites do not only negatively present the other, but they also present themselves in a positive view to the public eye. This positive presentation is only interesting in relation to the general polarization between positive self-presentation and negative other presentation. The positive attributes are emphasized, whereas negative attributes are deemphasized. Within positive self-presentation, the Republicans seem to defend the governing administration's actions. In contrast, the Democrats seem to highlight the adjustments and achievements reached by the Democrats' togetherness. Consequently, they create a contrast between themselves and the other by emphasizing one's own positive attributes. Only by including these findings in the context of the negative other presentation we become aware of the differences in representation of the in-group and the out-group. This issue will be discussed further in chapter 6.

## 6 Manifestations of polarization in Twitter discourse and framing of the other(s): a discussion

Historically, political elites have assembled during times of crisis and committed to broadcasting a unified message (Eismann et al., 2016; Kapucu & Boin, 2017). However, increased polarization fractures messaging and strengthens officials' positivity or negativity in messaging (Box-Steffensmeier & Moses, 2021). The studies of Green et al. (2020), Hughes et al. (2020), and Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) all indicate that members of Congress quickly polarized around the coronavirus pandemic. The way partisanship was visible in the political discourse of the coronavirus demonstrates the fundamental position partisanship has in U.S. politics and society. Messaging related to a crisis such as the pandemic is especially important for public health, information sharing, and personal behavior (Box-Steffensmeier & Moses, 2021). Consequently, the following sections will discuss the manifestations of polarization and review how political elites created their frames of the other on Twitter during the outbreak of the pandemic.

The identification of the various others in the analysis chapter has already recognized certain manifestations of polarization that can be detected in elite discourse. However, this chapter will expand on and explain the nuances of findings from the analysis. Through the categories of negative other presentation and positive self-presentation, this thesis has identified strategies and frames used by U.S. Senators. These categories illustrate the strategies U.S. Senators use in their tweets and create a framework for discussing the qualitative nuances of the discourse. One such nuance that will be discussed is the degree of aggressiveness in the different categories. Aggressive language may cause harmful implications. Since elite communication influences behavior and attitudes, one may speculate that Chinese Americans can be discriminated against because of the harmful language directed at the Chinese government. Finally, this thesis will argue that positive self-presentation functions as another strategy to present the other negatively.

### 6.1 The Democrats emphasize President Trump's negative attributes

The literature review and the analysis of this thesis showed that President Trump and his administration were framed as the primary other by the Democratic Party:

1. As the primary cause for a failure in leadership and acting against the interests of the nation.
2. For lacking credibility and wrongfully blaming 'innocent' others.
3. For being accountable for negative consequences such as withholding funding for native communities.

What also emerged in the analysis was variation in the degree of aggressiveness between the frames in each category. This section will discuss in what way the

Democrats targeted President Trump and the variation of aggressiveness within the specific categories.

That the opposing party blames the governing administration when things go wrong domestically is in no way a new phenomenon. However, that Donald Trump as the governing executive has become such an easy target seems to imply that something has changed. The study by Green et al. (2020) shows that 'trump' is the second most important text feature used by the Democrats, only second to 'crisis'. This also becomes very clear in the analysis conducted in this thesis. The tweets by Senators Duckworth (2020, Apr. 30), Hirono (2020, Apr. 21), and Whitehouse (2020, Apr. 15) all frame Donald Trump as the cause of the problem. By implementing the remaining steps of Entman (1993)'s framework for analysis (chapter 3), it becomes evident that making moral judgments and criticizing Trump and his suitability is a prominent strategy used by the Democrats. The toxic frames of President Trump as *dangerous* and someone who does not take any responsibility for his actions seem to indicate a strengthening of negativity in messaging, such as Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) predicted.

I argue that the strategy the politicians choose to present the other affects the aggressiveness of the language. The existence of categorization unlocked another aspect regarding the aggressiveness in each category. As previously mentioned in section *The other lacks credibility* (5.1.2), it seems that challenging the credibility of the other requires a more aggressive and harmful language than accusing the other of not acting in the interest of the nation (section 5.1.1). Whereas the language in the tweets of Duckworth (2020, Apr. 30) and Schumer (2020, Apr. 30) must be considered quite neutral in its criticism, the language in the tweets of Hirono (2020, Apr. 21) and Duckworth (2020, Apr. 21) are more aggressive and direct. This seems to be the case with the Republican examples represented in both categories as well. Accordingly, it seems that a strategy such as challenging someone's credibility requires more aggressive language than a strategy such as presenting the other as not acting in the interest of the nation.

Although the categories of positive and negative other presentation indicate a binary choice, I argue that there are greater nuances to the political discourse. The complex meta-strategy of the ideological square (section 4.3.) illustrates well how four different methods of emphasizing serve one strategy. For instance, politicians may achieve negative other presentation by emphasizing *Our* positive attributes and emphasizing *Their* negative attributes. However, these strategies may appear in multiple forms. The examples by Senators Markey and Whitehouse illustrate that it is possible to negatively present the other by using rhetorical features such as irony and reflexive questions. Although aggressiveness seems to be a popular effect within negative other presentation, these examples demonstrate that there are other linguistic ways to present the other.

Whether one uses aggressive language or other rhetorical features, the construction of Trump as an other in the political discourse of the pandemic can hardly come as a surprise. Historically, the oppositional party is more likely to discuss the federal response, its agents, and use a negative tone when doing so (Box-Steffensmeier & Moses, 2021). The Democratic Party uses negative strategies to display the incapability of Trump and his government. This is made public by specifically targeting how damaging his leadership is to the interest of the nation, that he lacks credibility, and that he is accountable for negative consequences. The Democratic Senators display a mastery of rhetorical and stylistic devices when they negatively present President Trump. This has

been shown in this analysis through both examples of conventional and unconventional methods.

## 6.2 The Republicans emphasize China's and the WHO's negative attributes

Since the governing Republicans cannot blame the oppositional Democrats for federal responses, it makes sense that they construct another other. Whereas the Democrats' construction of Trump as the other was negative, the Republicans' depiction of China and the WHO must be considered even more hostile and aggressive.

This thesis has demonstrated that partisanship, in the U.S. context, means to identify with one out of two parties: the Democrats or the Republicans. Identifying with one ultimately provides behavioral and attitudinal expectations for the in-group members (Iyengar et al., 2019). Partisanship is especially powerful because Americans receive partisan cues and are exposed to partisan input frequently. Green et al. (2020) mapped the most important text features. They found that 'china' was the third most used feature in the Republican Senators' discourse during the outbreak of the pandemic, only after 'coronavirus' and 'inittogether'. Although Hughes et al. (2020) found relatively few mentions of 'Chinese virus' or 'Wuhan virus' in congressional tweets, Green et al. (2020) study implies that China was a prominent topic.

I argue that China has been the receiver of the most aggressive use of language during the outbreak of the pandemic. The tweets by Ernst (2020, Apr. 14), Blackburn (2020, Mar. 18), and Cotton (2020, Apr. 16) signal harmful and destructive attitudes toward China and its government. Cotton (2020, Apr. 16) even goes as far as to blame the Chinese Communist Party "for every single death, every job lost, every retirement nest egg lost". The strategy of blaming an external other may be less divisive in terms of party politics than blaming a domestic other. One can argue that a solid majority of the population may support the verbal attack against an external other such as China or the WHO. In contrast, you may only gain the support of the partisan identifiers (Democratic voters) or Trump opposers when criticizing President Trump. However, the Democrats opposed the Republicans' attack on China and the WHO as illustrated by Hirono (2020, Apr. 21) and Markey (2020, Apr. 15). The reluctance from the Democrats to frame China as an evil other must be considered another manifestation of a highly polarized partisan climate in the United States.

Since elite communication influences attitudes and behavior among the public (Lodge & Taber, 2013), I believe that the hostile framing of China and the Chinese government may cause discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. Dhanani and Franz (2021) argue that the pandemic has triggered a notable increase in prejudicial and xenophobic attitudes. Their study suggests an increase in negative attitudes toward Asian Americans and beliefs that resources should be prioritized for Americans rather than immigrants. It is reasonable to believe that this is an effective strategy since the virus originated in China. Adding emphasis to this specific origin of the issue contributes to creating mental associations among the politicians' audience. These tweets do not target Chinese Americans but China and the Chinese government. The xenophobic rhetoric touted by media outlets and political leaders echoes a long history of oppressive anti-Chinese sentiments in ways that may contribute to cultural mistrust and racial trauma (Litam,



2020). While these tweets target the Chinese nation, we may speculate that such hostile framing could lead to discriminatory attitudes towards Chinese Americans.

Finally, among the many other semantic properties in the political discourse, it is also important to notice what is being left out of the texts. By identifying the causes behind the identified problems in the framework of analysis generated by Entman (1993), we see that the Senators seem to portray one specific other as the harmful cause. Deemphasizing the self's involvement in the issue, and attacking outside others instead, suggest that the negative properties of 'Us' are either omitted or downgraded in the text. The valence and context of the tweets we have seen in this analysis indicate that political elites crafted messages to represent their opinions and emphasize political identity rather than communicating a united message across party lines. Box-Steffensmeier and Moses (2021) support this hypothesis, suggesting that members' communications are polarized even around an emergent, life-threatening pandemic. The politicians distinctly frame the coronavirus pandemic as a political issue instead of it solely being a public health issue. The parties prioritize criticizing the others instead of taking responsibility for their own limitations and failed actions.

### 6.3 A positive presentation of the self functions as a negative presentation of the other

Not surprisingly, the political representatives promote their party's achievements and defend their party's political actions. However, the positive self-presentation does not make much sense in a discussion about polarization when it stands by itself. The positive self-presentation is closely connected with the negative other presentation, and it serves as a tool to create a contrast between the in- and the out-group. The categories I have provided in this study may help to illustrate this contradiction between the two groups.

I argue that the positive self-presentation primarily creates a contradiction between the in- and the out-group. In positive self-presentation, the first category that I inductively designed was *The self represents generosity* (section 5.2.1.). Although it may have been important for Gardner (2020, Apr. 25) to provide extra tests for the people of Colorado, my impression is that it was even more important to illustrate who did not provide extra tests for Colorado – ultimately, his competitors. The complex meta-strategy of the ideological square (section 4.3.) attempts to analyze how in-groups and out-groups are represented in text and talk. The point is to demonstrate how emphasizing *Our* positive attributes may serve the same purpose as emphasizing *Their* negative qualities, as this study primarily has focused on. Accordingly, I argue that the strategy of Gardner (2020, Apr. 25) is to present his Democratic competitors negatively by representing himself as generous.

*The self is one with the nation* functions as a means to show that the other is not in accord with the nation. The second and final category I allocated tweets to was *The self is one with the nation* (section 5.2.2.). The tweet by the Republican Senator Jerry Moran (2020, Apr. 18) illustrates another aspect of the ideological square. Senator Moran emphasized the much-needed support from President Trump and Sonny Perdue (U.S. Secretary of Agriculture). Accordingly, he emphasizes *Our* good attributes while he de-emphasizes the role of *Their* (the Democrats) involvement. For instance, it is likely that when Moran refers to his colleagues, this also includes Democratic Senators. The funding could not have been granted without a majority in Congress. This means that at least

some Democratic Senators must have contributed. However, Senator Moran emphasizes the Republicans' involvement while he de-emphasizes the role of the other. In my opinion, this serves as a mechanism to present the other negatively.

I have argued in this section that positive self-presentation must be seen in relation to negative other presentation. Positive self-presentation is essentially ideological since it is based on the self-schema that defines the ideology of a group (Van Dijk, 2013). Accordingly, the positive self-presentation works as a mechanism to distinguish the self from the other and create partisan contrast. The categories that I have provided illustrate that the positive self-presentation also serves as a mechanism to present the other negatively. Ideological discourses are collective discourses of groups and, in many ambiguous and delicate ways, reflect their organizations' ideological positions and interests (Van Dijk, 2006). The paragraphs in this section have demonstrated that negative other presentation may be achieved through other methods than emphasizing *Their* negative attributes.

## 7 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to answer the questions of what manifestations of polarization that can be detected in elite discourse, and in what way U.S. Senators frame the other(s) during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. I have offered an analysis that demonstrates in what way U.S. Senators frame the other through negative presentations of the out-group and positive presentations of the in-group. Since elite communication influences attitudes and behaviors, it has been of interest to investigate what strategies U.S. Senators use in their messaging and cues to the public. This thesis has argued that even positive self-presentation functions as a strategy to present the other negatively. I have expanded on the broad themes of negative other presentation and positive self-presentation by designing inductive categories. These sub-categories have exposed gradations of the polarization that exists in political tweets by highlighting the ideological differences between in- and out-groups. They have also provided me with a well-suited framework for studying the nuances of the elite communication strategies in discourse.

This study has identified that President Trump has been a popular object of scorn among the Democrats. At the same time, China was a prominent topic in the Republicans' other presentation during the outbreak of the pandemic. This thesis has argued that it is not as simple as a binary choice between positive and negative presentation in political discourse. I have shown that the level of aggressiveness changes based on what strategy the politicians wish to achieve through a comparison of two sub-categories. It seems that the Republicans constructed China as an external other since it was difficult to blame the opposition, who was not in control of the policies. Although I have argued that the Republicans used the most aggressive language in their presentation of China, I have also suggested that the Republicans chose the less divisive strategy. Finally, I have argued that positive self-presentation functions as another mechanism to present the other negatively. The two parties de-emphasized their own responsibility by leaving it out of the discourse.

Several limitations have been identified throughout this study. Making a selection will always be a subjective matter which influences the interpretations in a qualitative study such as this. Another limitation is the size of the data. One may not generalize the findings from this study simply because the data collection is too small. However, the findings may inspire and provide ideas for further research. Such further research may include other sources than tweets as well. Analyzing speeches, interviews, or news articles may also provide interesting nuances to this study. Recommended venues for further research could be a comparative study of tweets in Obama's and Trump's periods of the presidency to see if the singling out of the president is a new phenomenon. Such studies would strengthen the field of research by demonstrating whether there has been an escalation in negative framing. This study has shown what nuances of language one might look for in political discourse. Further data from varied contexts can be collected to validate the discovered themes and uncover new strategies under changing times and situations.



# Bibliography

## Primary Sources

- Blackburn, M. [Twitter]. (2020, Mar. 18). *@MarshaBlackburn*  
<https://twitter.com/MarshaBlackburn/status/1240082908511178752>
- Burr, R. [Twitter]. (2020, Mar. 16). *@SenatorBurr*  
<https://twitter.com/SenatorBurr/status/1239673740016988161>
- Cardin, B. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 24). *@SenatorCardin*  
<https://twitter.com/SenatorCardin/status/1253717640276828161>
- Casey, B. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 30). *@SenBobCasey*  
<https://twitter.com/SenBobCasey/status/1253688396901474307>
- Cotton, T. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 16). *@SenTomCotton*  
<https://twitter.com/SenTomCotton/status/1250601403099349004>
- Cotton, T. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 30). *@SenTomCotton*  
<https://twitter.com/SenTomCotton/status/1255922172851355649>
- Duckworth, T. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 21). *@SenDuckworth*  
<https://twitter.com/SenDuckworth/status/1252415131054534658>
- Duckworth, T. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 30). *@SenDuckworth*  
<https://twitter.com/SenDuckworth/status/1255890399387955201>
- Durbin, D. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 23). *@SenatorDurbin*  
<https://twitter.com/SenatorDurbin/status/1253109539366371329>
- Ernst, J. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 14). *@SenJoniErnst*  
<https://twitter.com/SenJoniErnst/status/1250129359781986305>
- Gardner, C. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 25). *@SenCoryGardner*  
<https://twitter.com/SenCoryGardner/status/1253854991628095491>
- Hirono, M. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 21). *@maziehirono*  
<https://twitter.com/maziehirono/status/1252674887874985986>
- Klobuchar, A. [Twitter]. (2020, Mar. 31). *@amyklobuchar*  
<https://twitter.com/amyklobuchar/status/1244754067441713152>
- Markey, E. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 15). *@SenMarkey*  
<https://twitter.com/SenMarkey/status/1250224687172521992>
- Moran, J. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 18). *@JerryMoran*  
<https://twitter.com/JerryMoran/status/1251285568916422657>
- Risch, J. [Twitter]. (2020, Mar. 23). *@SenatorRisch*  
<https://twitter.com/SenatorRisch/status/1241875918349574148>
- Schumer, C. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 30). *@SenSchumer*  
<https://twitter.com/SenSchumer/status/1255644760154537984>
- Scott, T. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 9). *@SenatorTimScott*  
<https://twitter.com/SenatorTimScott/status/1248257971374653440>
- Shelby, R. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 8). *@SenShelby*  
<https://twitter.com/SenShelby/status/1247978311470497793>
- Udall, T. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 30). *@SenatorTomUdall*  
<https://twitter.com/SenatorTomUdall/status/1255899816959320064>
- Whitehouse, S. [Twitter]. (2020, Apr. 15). *@SenWhitehouse*  
<https://twitter.com/SenWhitehouse/status/1250476336105377795>

## Secondary Sources

- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Taking the linguistic turn in organizational research: Challenges, responses, consequences. *The journal of applied behavioral science*, 36(2), 136-158.
- Atwood, K., & Collinson, S. (2020). Trump Administration draws up plans to punish China over coronavirus outbreak. *CNN*, Retrieved March 22, 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/30/politics/us-china-coronavirus-diplomacy-intelligence-donald-trump/index.html>
- Banks, A., Calvo, E., Karol, D., & Telhami, S. (2021). #polarizedfeeds: Three experiments on polarization, framing, and social media. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 26(3), 609-634.
- BBC. (2020). Coronavirus: Congress passes \$484bn economic relief bill. *BBC*, Retrieved March 22, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52398980>
- Bender, M. (2020). Trump Funding Threat Against World Health Organization Linked to Hiring Practices. *The Wall Street Journal*, Retrieved March 15, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-funding-threat-against-world-health-organization-linked-to-hiring-practices-11586807090>
- Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual review of sociology*, 26(1), 611-639.
- Borgmann, H., Woelm, J.-H., Merseburger, A., Nestler, T., Salem, J., Brandt, M. P., Haferkamp, A., & Loeb, S. (2016). Qualitative Twitter analysis of participants, tweet strategies, and tweet content at a major urologic conference. *Canadian Urological Association Journal*, 10(1-2), 39-44.
- Boukala, S., & Dimitrakopoulou, D. (2018). Absurdity and the "blame game" within the Schengen area: Analyzing Greek (social) media discourses on the refugee crisis. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 16(1-2), 179-197.
- Bouvier, G., & Machin, D. (2018). Critical discourse analysis and the challenges and opportunities of social media. *Review of Communication*, 18(3), 178-192.
- Box-Steffensmeier, J. M., & Moses, L. (2021). Meaningful messaging: Sentiment in elite social media communication with the public on the COVID-19 pandemic. *Science Advances*, 7(29), 1-5. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1126/sciadv.abg2898>
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1980). *The american voter*. University of Chicago Press.
- Chilman, N., Morant, N., Lloyd-Evans, B., Wackett, J., & Johnson, S. (2021). Twitter Users' Views on Mental Health Crisis Resolution Team Care Compared With Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups: Qualitative Analysis. *JMIR Mental Health*, 8(6).
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge.
- Clinton, J., Cohen, J., Lapinski, J., & Trussler, M. (2021). Partisan pandemic: How partisanship and public health concerns affect individuals' social mobility during COVID-19. *Science Advances*, 7(2).
- Cohen, Z., Marquardt, A., & Atwood, K. (2020). Blame game escalates between US and China over coronavirus disinformation. *CNN*, Retrieved March 15, 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/24/politics/us-china-coronavirus-disinformation-campaign/index.html>
- Dale, D., McDermott, N., Cohen, M., Vazquez, M., Steck, E., & Fossum, S. (2020). Fact check: Trump dangerously suggests sunlight and ingesting disinfectants could help cure coronavirus. *CNN*, Retrieved March 18, 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/23/politics/fact-check-coronavirus-briefing-april-23/index.html>
- Dalton, R. J. (1987). Generational change in elite political beliefs: The growth of ideological polarization. *The Journal of Politics*, 49(4), 976-997.
- Dalton, R. J. (2021). Modeling ideological polarization in democratic party systems. *Electoral Studies*, 72, 1-10.

- Dhanani, L. Y., & Franz, B. (2021). Why public health framing matters: An experimental study of the effects of COVID-19 framing on prejudice and xenophobia in the United States. *Social science & medicine*, 269, 1-8.
- Eismann, K., Posegga, O., & Fischbach, K. (2016). Collective behaviour, Social Media, and disasters: a Systematic literature Review. *ECIS*, 1-20.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *McQuail's reader in mass communication theory*, 390-397.
- Entman, R. M., & Usher, N. (2018). Framing in a fractured democracy: Impacts of digital technology on ideology, power and cascading network activation. *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 298-308.
- Fairclough, N., Mulderrig, J., & Wodak, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis. *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction*, 357-378.
- Fletcher, R., & Park, S. (2017). The impact of trust in the news media on online news consumption and participation. *Digital journalism*, 5(10), 1281-1299.
- Foran, C., Raju, M., Byrd, H., & Barrett, T. (2020). Trump Signs historic \$2 trillion stimulus after Congress passes it Friday. *CNN*, Retrieved March 22, 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/27/politics/coronavirus-stimulus-house-vote/index.html>
- Frimer, J. A., Skitka, L. J., & Motyl, M. (2017). Liberals and conservatives are similarly motivated to avoid exposure to one another's opinions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 72, 1-12.
- Gadarian, S. K., Goodman, S. W., & Pepinsky, T. B. (2021). Partisanship, health behavior, and policy attitudes in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Plos one*, 16(4), 1-13.
- Ghebreyesus, D. T. A. (2020). *COVID-19 virtual press confrence - 8 April, 2020* <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/transcripts/who-audio-emergencies-coronavirus-press-conference-full-08apr2020.pdf>
- Green, J., Edgerton, J., Naftel, D., Shoub, K., & Cranmer, S. J. (2020). Elusive consensus: Polarization in elite communication on the COVID-19 pandemic. *Science Advances*, 6(28), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abc2717>
- Grossman, G., Kim, S., Rexer, J. M., & Thirumurthy, H. (2020). Political partisanship influences behavioral responses to governors' recommendations for COVID-19 prevention in the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(39), 24144-24153.
- Hare, C., & Poole, K. T. (2014). The polarization of contemporary American politics. *Polity*, 46(3), 411-429.
- Heaney, M. T., Masket, S. E., Miller, J. M., & Strolovitch, D. Z. (2012). Polarized networks: The organizational affiliations of national party convention delegates. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56(12), 1654-1676.
- Hong, S., & Kim, S. H. (2016). Political polarization on twitter: Implications for the use of social media in digital governments. *Government Information Quarterly*, 33(4), 777-782.
- Hughes, A., Shah, S., & Smith, A. (2020). Tweets by members of congress tell the story of an escalating covid-19 crisis. Retrieved February 11, 2022. <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/616279/tweets-by-members-of-congress-tell-the-story-of-an-escalating-covid-19-crisis/1596888/>
- Iacurci, G. (2020). Your forgivable loan may be undercut by this provision of the Paycheck Protection Program. *CNBC*, Retrieved March 15, 2022. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/07/this-part-of-paycheck-protection-program-could-reduce-forgivable-loans.html>
- Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22, 129-146.
- Jones, D. R. (2001). Party polarization and legislative gridlock. *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(1), 125-141.
- Kapucu, N., & Boin, A. (2017). *Disaster and Crisis Management: Public Management Perspectives*. Routledge.

- Karpf, D., Kreiss, D., Nielsen, R. K., & Powers, M. (2015). Qualitative Political Communication| Introduction~ The role of qualitative methods in political communication Research: Past, present, and future. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 1-19.
- Kerr, J., Panagopoulos, C., & van der Linden, S. (2021). Political polarization on COVID-19 pandemic response in the United States. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 179, 1-9.
- Kubin, E., & von Sikorski, C. (2021). The role of (social) media in political polarization: a systematic review. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 45(3), 188-206.
- Lakoff, G. (2017). A taxonomy of Trump tweets [On the Media]. WYNC, Retrieved February 15, 2022.  
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/taxonomy-trump-tweets>
- Lee, F. E. (2015). How party polarization affects governance. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18, 261-282.
- Lelkes, Y., Sood, G., & Iyengar, S. (2017). The hostile audience: The effect of access to broadband internet on partisan affect. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(1), 5-20.
- Lelkes, Y., & Westwood, S. J. (2017). The limits of partisan prejudice. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(2), 485-501.
- Lenz, G. S. (2013). *Follow the leader?: how voters respond to politicians' policies and performance*. University of Chicago Press.
- Levendusky, M. S., & Malhotra, N. (2016). (Mis) perceptions of partisan polarization in the American public. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 378-391.
- Litam, S. D. A. (2020). "Take Your Kung-Flu Back to Wuhan": Counseling Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders with Race-Based Trauma Related to COVID-19. *Professional Counselor*, 10(2), 144-156.
- Lodge, M., & Taber, C. S. (2013). *The rationalizing voter*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lopez, G. (2020). Why America's coronavirus testing barely improved in April. *Vox*, Retrieved March 15, 2022.  
<https://www.vox.com/2020/5/1/21242589/coronavirus-testing-swab-reagent-supply-shortage>
- Makridis, C., & Rothwell, J. T. (2020). The real cost of political polarization: Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic. *SSRN*, 1-44.
- Masroor, F., Khan, Q. N., Aib, I., & Ali, Z. (2019). Polarization and ideological weaving in Twitter discourse of politicians. *Social media+ society*, 5(4), 1-14.
- Medrano, J. D. (2021). Framing Europe. In *Framing Europe*. Princeton University Press.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research*, 42(5), 533-544.
- PewResearchCenter. (2021). *Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology*.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/>
- Pramuk, J. (2020). Trump Signs \$2 trillion coronavirus relief bill as the US tries to prevent economic devastation. *CNBC*, Retrieved March 29, 2022.  
<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/27/house-passes-2-trillion-coronavirus-stimulus-bill-sends-it-to-trump.html>
- Prior, M. (2013). Media and political polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16, 101-127.
- Reich, S. M., & Reich, J. A. (2006). Cultural competence in interdisciplinary collaborations: A method for respecting diversity in research partnerships. *American journal of community psychology*, 38(1), 51-62.
- Reston, M. (2020). An aggrieved Trump blames press for furor over disinfectant comments as Birx defends him. *CNN*, Retrieved March 22, 2022.  
<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/26/politics/trump-briefings-media-blame-disinfectant-comments/index.html>



- Ross, A. S., & Rivers, D. J. (2018). Discursive deflection: Accusation of "fake news" and the spread of mis- and disinformation in the tweets of President Trump. *Social media+ society*, 4(2), 1-12.
- Russell, A. (2018). US senators on Twitter: Asymmetric party rhetoric in 140 characters. *American Politics Research*, 46(4), 695-723.
- Schaffner, C. (1996). Political speeches and discourse analysis. *Current issues in language & society*, 3(3), 201-204.
- Soares, F. B., Recuero, R., & Zago, G. (2018). Influencers in polarized political networks on Twitter. *Association for Computing Machinery*, 168-177.
- Stuart, R. B. (2004). Twelve practical suggestions for achieving multicultural competence. *Professional psychology: Research and practice*, 35(1), 3-9.
- Tucker, J. A., Guess, A., Barberá, P., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018). Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature. *SSRN*, 1-95.
- Udani, A., Kimball, D. C., & Fogarty, B. (2018). How local media coverage of voter fraud influences partisan perceptions in the United States. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 18(2), 193-210.
- Valenzuela, S., Bachmann, I., & Bargsted, M. (2021). The personal is the political? What do Whatsapp users share and how it matters for news knowledge, polarization and participation in Chile. *Digital journalism*, 9(2), 155-175.
- Van Aelst, P., Strömbäck, J., Aalberg, T., Esser, F., De Vreese, C., Matthes, J., Hopmann, D., Salgado, S., Hubé, N., & Stępińska, A. (2017). Political communication in a high-choice media environment: a challenge for democracy? *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 41(1), 3-27.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Multidisciplinary CDA: A plea for diversity. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 1, 95-120.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of political ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2011a). Discourse and ideology. *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction*, 379-407.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2011b). Discourse, knowledge, power and politics. *Critical discourse studies in context and cognition*, 1-41.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2013). Ideology and discourse. *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies*, 175-196.
- Vannabouathong, C., Devji, T., Ekhtiari, S., Chang, Y., Phillips, S. A., Zhu, M., Chagla, Z., Main, C., & Bhandari, M. (2020). Novel coronavirus COVID-19: current evidence and evolving strategies. *The Journal of bone and joint surgery. American volume*, 102(9), 734-744.
- Wagner, M. (2021). Affective polarization in multiparty systems. *Electoral Studies*, 69, 1-13.
- Webster, S. W., & Abramowitz, A. I. (2017). The ideological foundations of affective polarization in the US electorate. *American Politics Research*, 45(4), 621-647.
- Westfall, J., Van Boven, L., Chambers, J. R., & Judd, C. M. (2015). Perceiving political polarization in the United States: Party identity strength and attitude extremity exacerbate the perceived partisan divide. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 145-158.
- Young, D. G., & Bleakley, A. (2020). Ideological health spirals: An integrated political and health communication approach to COVID interventions. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 3508-3524.
- Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge university press.

# Appendices

## I. The Thesis' Relevance for my Work in the Norwegian Educational System

In this following passage, I will elaborate on the relevance of this Master-thesis for the occupation as a "Lektor". I will primarily focus on my role as a future Lektor in English.

The curriculum in English (ENG01-04) values the pupils' understanding that their views are culture-dependent (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019). This has been a core theme in my thesis and something I feel encouraged about. In my analysis of political discourse, I experienced that different perspectives provide for different understandings of the world. I believe this has been a crucial takeaway from writing this thesis and something I may use to promote curiosity and prevent prejudice within the classroom. It may be challenging to understand someone else's point of view on a sensitive topic without understanding what they have been through. This aspect is connected to the classroom. Trust and dialog are required in a classroom for the pupils to feel safe and acknowledged.

According to the curriculum in English (ENG01-04) "Writing requires planning, formulating and processing texts that communicate, and to adapt the language to the purpose, receiver and situation, and to choose appropriate writing strategies" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019, p. 4). This is something I have experienced during the work with the thesis. Writing an academic text such as a is not done in a few days. It requires dedication, motivation, and lots of time to succeed with writing. In the final draft of my thesis, I examine a minor aspect of the broad field that I have studied. I have learned how important it is to revise and how much better an academic text will be by receiving feedback. I have acquired new knowledge about theory, methodology, and the research field of polarization in particular. In addition, I have expressed myself in a nuanced and precise manner with fluency and coherence (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019). This makes me capable of mentoring my pupils in their future writing processes. I am proud of having completed such a great challenge and feel confident to face new ones that may appear in the nearest future. I now feel that I have better prerequisites to teach English and mentor pupils in their language acquisition.

## II. Bibliography

Utdanningsdirektoratet. (2019). Curriculum in English (ENG01-04). Retrieved May 11, 2022. <https://data.udir.no/kl06/v201906/laereplaner-1k20/ENG01-04.pdf?lang=eng>

