

Power Projection in American Congressional Hearings' Questions: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract—This study explores power dynamics in an American congressional hearing, held in the House of Representatives on June 3rd, 2024. The study develops a typology of power types for the oversight congressional hearings, based mainly on Yukl and Tracy (1992) and Nye (2011). Moreover, it integrates Reisigl and Wodak's (2017) Discourse Historical Approach to critically examine the power dynamics in the questions. The findings reveal the dominance of hard power in the questions, heavily represented by coercion (pressure and legitimation). Soft power, on the other hand, is employed to address the public opinion without direct confrontation. The critical analysis shows that questioners rely on the discursive strategies, especially perspectivization and argumentation to boost their power and control over the hearing and challenge the witness. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how discourse can be utilized as a tool of power in congressional hearing. It highlights the strategic use of the questioning process which serves to display power dynamics for political gains.

Index Terms—power dynamics, hard power, soft power, congressional hearings, questioning

I. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the power dynamics within a U.S. congressional hearing. It develops a framework for analyzing power types in investigative congressional hearings, drawing primarily on the works of Yukl and Tracy (1992) as well as Nye (2011). Additionally, it incorporates the Discourse-Historical Approach proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2017) to critically assess the power dynamics embedded within the questioning process. It aims to critically examine the power dynamics in the questions raised in the investigative hearing. The study hypothesizes that members of the parliament as questioners use these strategies to delegitimize the witness and bolster their own ideological position.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following subsections present a literature review to outline the nature and structure of congressional hearings, power and its types, current related studies:

A. Congressional Hearings

Congressional hearings are vital platforms for politicians to showcase their competence and abilities, significantly shaping voter perceptions and influencing election results (Partington, 2003 p. 43). These hearings are the primary method committees use to gather information for policymaking and oversight. They play a crucial role in monitoring government programs and activities, identifying issues for parliament to address, and allowing citizens to engage in the policy process while contributing to the public record on various measures or issues (Carr, 2006). According to Davis (2009), congressional hearings bear a closer resemblance to judicial proceedings than to deliberative interactions. In the United States, congressional hearings represent a crucial aspect of legislative activity, serving not only the lawmaking process but also the broader oversight duties assigned to Congress. These hearings are carried out by various committees and subcommittees within both the Senate and the House of Representatives (Parliament). Each committee is dedicated to specific areas of public policy—such as finance, national security, and health care—enabling in-depth examination and specialized oversight of complex issues (Heitshusen, 2015).

Furthermore, congressional hearings are characterized by the Government Publishing Office (2017) as formal public sessions in which lawmakers obtain insights and evidence concerning legislative proposals, carry out investigative inquiries, or assess the performance of federal agencies and the execution of national laws. These hearings also serve as a means of exploring and gathering insights on various issues. As such, congressional hearings are fundamental for democratic governance, acting as a crucial tool for legislative bodies to scrutinize government policies, examine societal issues, and hold public officials and stakeholders accountable. They play an essential role in informed policymaking by

offering a formal venue for presenting evidence, expert testimony, and public opinion. These hearings allow lawmakers to delve into the complexities of specific issues, oversee government functions, and ensure transparency within the state's administrative processes (Martin and Whitaker, 2019). Committees of the House hold hearings to gather information and opinions on proposed legislation, investigate the activities of government departments, or evaluate the implementation of federal laws. These committees can conduct five types of non-mutually exclusive hearings: legislative hearings on specific bills (though this does not ensure a vote on the issue); investigative hearings to examine allegations of misconduct; confirmation hearings for nominated officials; and field hearings, which are conducted off-site (Carr, 2006). However, this study is concerned with an investigative hearing in the American House of the Representatives.

Pray (2005) asserts that investigative congressional hearings, unlike legislative congressional hearings, focus primarily on probing allegations of corruption or misconduct within a specific department or by an individual official. While these investigations may eventually lead to legislative action, their main objective is to uncover the relevant facts. The decision on whether and how to address the issue legislatively usually occurs after the investigation is complete. Investigative congressional hearings, are often high-profile events, frequently initiated in response to widely publicized scandals. According to McCubbins (1984) and DeCoux (2008), the purpose of these hearings is to ascertain the facts—determining what occurred in a particular incident or transaction so that parliamentarians can decide on the appropriate course of action, including potential legislative measures. These hearings can result in new legislation to address the issues uncovered, and judicial proceedings may follow these congressional inquiries. Parker and Dull (2013 p. 636) suggest that investigative congressional hearings offer committee chairmen and congressional parties opportunities to enhance their reputations by highlighting the shortcomings of the executive branch in contrast to their own commitment to good governance. These hearings also serve as platforms for "strategic disagreement." Due to their public nature, the motivations for congressional committees to initiate and maintain investigative hearings are influenced by evolving perceptions of the presidential administration.

Because members of Congress are elected officials, their actions are often driven by the desire to secure reelection, which requires attentiveness to the interests and demands of their constituents and local districts. Consequently, they must navigate between their own policy preferences and the expectations of party leaders, who may push for ideological alignment or party unity, as well as the pressures exerted by individual voters and interest groups that attempt to shape legislative agendas through financial contributions, strategic information, and other means. Additionally, lawmakers' agendas can be shaped by media coverage, which selectively highlights certain issues over others (Perna et al., 2018). Similarly, Levin and Bean (2018) argue that investigative hearings occur in various contexts and can differ greatly in scope and intensity. The extent and intensity of these oversight efforts are determined by factors such as the significance of the issue, the level of interest within the committee and its leadership, the presence of disputed facts or allegations of wrongdoing, and the degree of media attention. Guitar et al. (2023) note that, in investigative congressional hearings, Members of the parliament take on the role of investigators rather than legislators. Moreover, Dolan (2024) emphasizes that, in investigative congressional hearings, members of the parliament implement investigative tools for political ends.

B. Power

Power is of interest to critical analysts who usually analyze language use of the powerful or those who are responsible for the existence of social, political and economic inequalities. Hence, they tend to highlight how power is created in language and maintained by power abuse of the dominant groups. Raven (1993) characterizes power as a social process through which one individual exerts potential influence over another. If the influencing party successfully persuades the other using logical reasoning, evidence, or coherent arguments, the resulting behavioral or attitudinal shift may become internalized—that is, the influenced individual fully adopts the change as their own, independent of external pressure. Fairclough (1995) defines power not only as "asymmetries between participants in discourse events" but also in terms of "unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed".

Hay (1997) distinguishes between two dimensions of power: (a) indirect or context-setting power, where an individual shapes or reshapes the environment within which others operate; and (b) direct or behavior-influencing power, where one individual compels another to act, irrespective of the latter's own preferences. In line with Hay's conceptualization, this study does not seek to assess the legitimacy of power or critique its distribution. Rather, it aims to examine how lawmakers exercise their institutional authority within the policymaking process (as cited in Perna et al., 2018). van Dijk (2001) focuses on social power of groups or organizations which is defined in terms of control. Since language users engage in discourse as members of social groups, institutions or organizations, some groups may have (more or less) power if they can (more or less) control the minds and actions of other groups' members. A moderate view of power is proposed by Nye (2011) who characterizes power in terms of "the capacity to do things and in social situations to affect others to get the outcomes we want". For Reisigl and Wodak (2017, p. 5), power is "the possibility of having one's own will within a social relationship against the will or interests of others". Power is discursively manifested not only through grammatical structures but also through an individual's ability to manage the social setting—by employing particular text genres or regulating access to certain public domains, thereby shaping participation and influence.

Fischer et al. (2011) suggest that powerful individuals tend to rely more on experiential information and achieve greater behavioral confirmation in social situations. High power influences social perception and information

processing, enabling these individuals to maintain a positive and consistent self-concept. (See et al., 2011, p. 273) also note that powerful speakers tend to employ “stereotypes” to shape public opinion by strategically taking stances that align with their own agendas. In discussing the functioning of power in discourse, Melefa and Emeka (2014) suggest that understanding how power functions as a constraint in discourse requires examining the differences in the social roles of speakers and their audiences. Furthermore, it is important to consider how these social roles impact the discourse and the relationship between the speakers and their listeners. The aspect of power is crucial in the current study, as hearing committees consist of various members who serve different roles, including chairs, ranking members, and members from both the majority and minority parties. As such, power holders might have the opportunity to direct hearing agendas with their purposes and then impress on public opinion. They have the ability to subpoena witnesses through their congressional authority, from government officials and private sector owners all the way down to ordinary citizens.

Regarding the types of power that influential individuals may exercise in social interactions within organizations, French and Raven (1959) distinguish between legitimate (the formal right to tell subordinates what to do), coercive (backed by authority through the threat of punishment), reward-based (ability to deal with incentives), expert (possession of special knowledge or skills), and referent (power due to personal relationships with key individuals). Raven (1965) later elaborated the framework by introducing informational power (the strength to offer convincing arguments and logic) as a sixth influence base. Building on that, Raven (1992) distinguishes between four variations on legitimate power: position power (authority stemming from one's role), legitimate reciprocity (the expectation that beneficial actions will be repaid by others in compliance), legitimate equity (compliance with requests as remuneration for hard work, sacrifice, or shared harm), and legitimate dependence (compliance through mutual assistance). To determine what bases of power may be in play, speakers must examine these alternative pathways using the criterion of whether they will be useful in having an influence on their implementation into action. In a similar fashion, Yukl and Tracy (1992) propose a nine-factor taxonomy of influence tactics that includes rational persuasion, inspirational appeal, consultation, ingratiation, exchange, personal appeal, coalition, legitimation, and pressure. Although this typology is more detailed, it has some categories that are derived from or equal to Raven's (1968) typology. For instance, rational persuasion is a part of informational power and exchange is equal to legitimate reciprocity.

As an American political scientist, Nye (2011) offers a broader classification of power in global political affairs by distinguishing between hard power and soft power. Hard power is concerned with the ability to use coercion or rewards to influence others to change their behavior, functioning through direct and forceful power relations with regulative effects. In contrast, soft power refers to the ability to achieve desired outcomes by influencing others. Nye categorizes coercion, and reward as forms of hard power, while attraction, persuasion, and agenda-setting framing fall under soft power. He further explains that hard power is basically related to tangible resources like force and financial assets, whereas soft power is associated with non-material elements like cultural norms, institutional frameworks, shared values, ideological beliefs, and the credibility or acceptance of policies. Additionally, Nye (2011, p. xiii) suggests that speakers can employ "smart power" by strategically combining both soft and hard power to effectively achieve their desired influence over an audience. In many cases, these hearings transform into sites of discursive struggle, where the questioning is used to publicly perform the political and ideological stances of the questioners, particularly in highly polarized environments (Thornborrow, 2002). Hence, these questions should not be looked at just within the context that they are used for inquiry — they function to reinforce and negotiate power both inside the political institution and outside it as well.

C. Discourse-Historical Approach

Discourse-Historical Approach is an approach introduced by Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 2009, 2017) to critically analyze institutional discourse. Reisigl and Wodak (2009, p. 89) describe “discourse” within the Discourse-Historical Approach as a set of context-sensitive semiotic practices embedded in specific domains of social activity. Proponents of this perspective argue that language serves as the primary vehicle for democratic organization, whereby the open and public exchange of differing interests, perspectives, beliefs, and arguments is vital for sustaining a pluralistic democracy in a modern, decentralized context. Such communicative interaction is fundamental for organizing diverse preferences through deliberation and fairness, thereby influencing how legality and democratic legitimacy interact within a political system. Legislative and administrative authority, in this view, transforms as it remains tied to an ongoing, publicly accessible process of discourse, collective opinion-building, and political accountability. This process critically monitors political power at all stages of its exercise and can even influence the implementation of laws in advance (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001).

Reisigl and Wodak suggest that the Discourse-Historical Approach seeks to go beyond the purely linguistic aspects of analysis by incorporating, more or less systematically, the historical, political, sociological, and psychological dimensions of a specific discursive event. In analyzing political and historical subjects and texts, the Discourse-Historical Approach seeks to incorporate comprehensive insights into the historical origins and the broader socio-political contexts surrounding the discursive events under investigation. Additionally, it explores the historical dimension of discursive actions by examining how specific discourse genres undergo diachronic change. Hence, this approach proposes that analysts should go beyond focusing solely on the textual or discourse-internal aspects. They should draw on their background and contextual knowledge to situate the communicative or interactional structures of a

discursive event within the broader context of social and political relations, processes, and circumstances. From this perspective, discursive practices are understood as specific forms of social practices that are interconnected with other types of social activities.

According to Reisigl and Wodak (2017), five discursive strategies to reveal the underlying intentions in the Discourse-Historical Approach: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and mitigation and intensification. First, nomination focuses on the linguistic strategies used to label or refer to individuals, objects, events, phenomena, processes, and actions within a given discourse. Second, predication concerns the assignment of specific traits or features to social actors, entities, events, processes, or actions referenced in discourse. Third, argumentation focuses on the types of reasoning or justifications used within the text. Fourth, perspectivization addresses the standpoint or viewpoint from which these labels, characterizations, and arguments are articulated. Finally, mitigation and intensification examine whether the respective utterances are intensified or mitigated.

D. Related Studies

Two key studies examine power dynamics across different fields, which can inform the understanding of discourse within congressional hearings. Bisbee et al. (2022) highlight gender biases in congressional hearings, analyzing interruptions directed at high-ranking officials, such as former Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen. This study reveals how the act of questioning and interrupting reflects gendered power imbalances, which can also be observed in broader investigative hearings. Such findings are crucial in examining how legislators might interrupt or dominate during questioning to assert authority. Another related study conducted by Perna et al. (2019) employs critical discourse analysis to explore how lawmakers construct the role and value of academic researchers within legislative hearings. The study illustrates how legislators leverage their institutional authority to portray academic witnesses either as independent experts providing objective insights or as supportive voices reinforcing the legislators' own agendas and priorities.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study explores power dynamics in an American investigative congressional hearing, particularly a hearing¹ with Dr. Anthony Fauci (director of National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease NIAID; 1984–2022) which is held in the House of Representatives in June 3, 2024 about medical measures taken during COVID19 pandemic. This hearing is conducted by Committee on Oversight and Accountability House of Representatives and chaired by Brad Wenstrup (Republican). The Republican Party is against the medical measures taken by NIAID during the pandemic while the Democratic Party thinks that such measures were necessary and correct. Moreover, the Republicans think that Dr. Fauci's recommendations to the previous Republican President Trump were inaccurate and incorrect and he should take the responsibility for that. Therefore, the study will be limited to questions raised by the Republicans as they try to use their political power to shape the public opinion about the responsibility of the pandemic decisions.

To align with its aims, this study will integrate Yukl and Tracy's (1992) detailed categories of power tactics into Nye's (2011) broader framework of hard power and soft power (see Table 1) to analyse the data qualitatively and quantitatively. Under this classification, hard power includes coercion and reward. Specifically, Yukl and Tracy's pressure and legitimation are categorized under Nye's coercion, while their concept of exchange is divided into explicit and implicit forms, both of which fall under Nye's rewards. Soft power, on the other hand, encompasses attraction, persuasion, and framing agenda settings. Within this, Yukl and Tracy's coalition and ingratiation are grouped under Nye's attraction. Additionally, their inspirational appeal and personal appeal are combined into a new category termed "irrational persuasion," which is incorporated alongside Nye's rational persuasion under the broader category of persuasion. Finally, an additional power tactic is introduced under framing agenda settings to better fit the data: controlling the narrative, where Members of the parliament guide the hearing's direction to align with their agenda. To critically analyse these types of power tactics, five discourse strategies from the Discourse-Historical Approach, namely nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and mitigation and intensification are incorporated to critically reveal Members of the parliament's underlying intentions.

TABLE 1
SUGGESTED TYPOLOGY OF POWER

Power Type	Subcategory	Tactics
Hard Power	Coercion	- Pressure - Legitimation
	Rewards	- Explicit Exchange - Implicit Exchange
Soft Power	Attraction	- Coalition - Ingratiation
	Persuasion	- Rational Persuasion - Irrational Persuasion
	Framing Agenda Setting	- Selective Controlling the Narrative

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/118/chr/CHRG-118hrg55830/CHRG-118hrg55830.pdf>

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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the methodology above, this study analyses 78 questions raised by Republicans in the selected hearing that entails power (See Appendix I). The questions are numbered from 1-78 along with the questioners’ names and positions. It also includes the type of power and discursive strategies that are carried in these questions. Table (2) highlights that hard power tactics dominate the hearing, with a percentage of 70.51%, while soft power is employed with a percentage of 29.49%. The prevalence of hard power underscores the coercive and authoritative approach taken during the questioning, particularly aimed at holding Dr. Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, accountable for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, not the President Trump at his first turn. This use of hard power also reflects the investigative nature of the hearing, where the goal was to directly challenge and accuse Dr. Fauci of failing in his responsibilities. Nevertheless, the employment of soft power, although less than hard power, still holds a significant function, especially in questions that are less confrontational. These soft power tactics indicate a strategic effort to influence public perception or guide the conversation in a way that could resonate more broadly with the audience. This distribution of hard and soft power aligns with the dual objectives of the hearing: pressing for accountability while simultaneously shaping the narrative through more subtle, persuasive means.

TABLE 2
TYPES OF POWER DISPLAYED IN THE HEARING

Type of power	Occurrences	Percentage
Hard Power	55	70.51%
Soft Power	23	29.49%
Total	78	100.00%

Table 3 below reveals that coercion is the dominant type of hard power employed, with a percentage of 100% of the tactics. This finding indicates that Republicans relied solely on coercive measures, with no evidence of reward-based strategies in their questioning. Within these hard power tactics, pressure is the primary method, comprising 69.09% percentage of the instances. From this, it can be concluded that questions designed to apply direct or indirect pressure potentially force opponents to defend or justify their stance. This approach reflects their strategic objective of shaping public perception by portraying Fauci’s decisions as misguided. For instance, in question (1), Wenstrup's question subtly applies pressure by implying that the exclusion of Redfield, a key public health figure, could suggest a lack of transparency or an intentional omission on Fauci's part. By directing such a pointed question, Wenstrup compels Fauci to justify decisions made in the early stages of the pandemic response, placing him on the defensive. This tactic aligns with the Republicans’ broader agenda in the hearing, which seeks to frame Fauci as potentially evasive or lacking openness in his communication about the virus's origins. The heavy reliance on pressure aligns with their broader goal of discrediting Fauci’s advice to President Trump and casting doubt on the credibility of NIAID’s actions during the pandemic.

The tactic of legitimation - used with percentage of 20% of hard power tactics - suggests that some Republican questions may have aimed to make their criticisms appear justified by appealing to standards, accountability, or norms. By framing their questioning as a rightful demand for transparency or accuracy, Republicans might seek to reinforce their criticisms of Fauci and cast their scrutiny as a procedural necessity rather than purely partisan. This tactic adds a layer of justification, which can help Republicans position their line of questioning as reasonable and in the public’s interest. For example, in question (3), Wenstrup's question to Dr. Fauci about awarding grants to Dr. Zhou Yusen, a Chinese PLA official and lab director, uses legitimation as a coercive tactic of hard power. By framing the question around investing U.S. taxpayer dollars to potentially funding a high-ranking Chinese military figure which might be a source of the virus creation. This tactic pressures Fauci to justify why such grants were awarded under his oversight, indirectly suggesting that there may have been a lapse in safeguarding American interests.

The mixed category, comprising 10.91% percentage of these tactics, indicates instances where Republicans combined pressure with legitimation, possibly blending assertive questioning with an appeal to accountability principles. This combination of tactics might allow Republicans to balance direct criticism with contextualization, reinforcing their narrative against Fauci in a way that appears more grounded and credible. By blending pressure with legitimation, they could bolster their efforts to portray Fauci’s recommendations as inconsistent with expected standards. For instance,

Representative Debbie Lesko, in question (29), employs both pressure and legitimation as a mixed coercive tactic to challenge Dr. Fauci's assurances about NIH-funded research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. By highlighting the lack of inspections, missing lab books, and delayed reports from EcoHealth Alliance, Lesko applies pressure by questioning the certainty with which Dr. Fauci asserts that NIH did not fund dangerous gain-of-function research. This line of questioning forces Fauci to confront gaps in oversight, pushing him to account for missing documentation and unfulfilled reporting protocols. At the same time, legitimation is used as Lesko frames these inquiries within the context of responsible scientific and financial oversight. This combination of pressure and legitimation enhances the impact of the question, compelling Fauci to justify NIH's oversight measures in light of widely accepted standards of accountability.

The absence of rewards (0%) suggests that the Republicans were not attempting to offer Dr. Fauci any positive reinforcement or acknowledge his contributions, instead focusing entirely on scrutinizing his actions.

TABLE 3
TYPES AND TACTICS OF HARD POWER

Types	No	%	Tactics	No.	%
Coercion	55	100%	Pressure	38	69.09%
			Legitimation	11	20.00%
			Mixed	6	10.91%
Rewards	0	0.00%	Explicit	0	0.00%
			Implicit	0	0.00%
Total	55	100%		55	100%

Table 4 below indicates that persuasion dominates the soft power tactics, making up 73.91% percentage of soft power, with a significant emphasis on rational persuasion (56.52%). From this, it can be concluded that logical and evidence-based arguments can lend credibility to the speakers' viewpoints, whether they are questioning or defending actions. For example, in question (24), Representative Griffith's question to Dr. Fauci about the use of humanized mice in research illustrates rational persuasion as a tactic of soft power within the hearing's politically charged atmosphere. By posing a series of logical, structured questions, Griffith seeks to lead Dr. Fauci to acknowledge that providing humanized mice to the Wuhan lab might have inadvertently enabled research with potential risks. Griffith's line of questioning is designed to build a case through logical reasoning rather than direct accusation, subtly suggesting that NIH's actions could have indirectly facilitated advanced research in Wuhan. This rational persuasion tactic appeals to reason and facts, aiming to make the audience question the oversight and possible unintended consequences of Fauci's decisions.

Irrational persuasion (17.39%) also appears in the selected questions, showing that emotional appeals or speculative arguments are occasionally employed to resonate with the audience's emotions rather than strictly adhering to facts. For example, in question 48, Representative Joyce employs irrational persuasion as a soft power tactic to challenge Dr. Fauci's decisions during the pandemic, particularly regarding school closures and the resulting impacts on American students. By emphasizing the emotional toll on students and the ongoing "suffering" caused by these measures, Joyce appeals to the audience's feelings rather than relying solely on objective data. In the broader context of the hearing, where Republicans aim to hold Fauci accountable for perceived failings in his pandemic response, irrational persuasion provides a way to resonate with public frustration and dissatisfaction.

Meanwhile, attraction tactics, like forming coalitions (13.04%) and ingratiation (4.35%), reflect efforts to subtly align with or appeal to allies, perhaps to reinforce shared perspectives without overt confrontation. In question 20, for instance, Representative Comer's question to Dr. Fauci subtly utilizes the coalition tactic as a form of attraction within soft power. By referencing prior testimony and aligning his question with Chairman Wenstrup's earlier inquiries, Comer effectively reinforces a sense of unity among the Republican members of the committee. The coalition tactic here subtly implies that multiple committee members share a common skepticism about Fauci's transparency regarding his interactions with the intelligence community.

The use of framing and agenda setting (8.7%) through selective narrative control highlights an effort to steer the discussion toward certain aspects of Fauci's actions, which can influence how the public interprets the narrative. Together, these soft power tactics reveal a strategic blend of logical argumentation, subtle alliances, and narrative framing, all intended to guide public opinion in a manner that feels less forceful but highly influential. For instance, in question (20), Representative Joyce employs selective controlling of the narrative within framing and agenda setting as a soft power tactic to challenge the credibility of Dr. Fauci's recommendations regarding the six-foot social distancing rule during the COVID-19 pandemic. By quoting Dr. Fauci's own words that the rule "sort of just appeared," Joyce strategically narrows the focus of the discussion to cast doubt on the scientific rigor behind this guideline. In a hearing where Republicans are collectively critical of NIAID's pandemic measures, Joyce's question subtly frames the six-foot rule as a potentially arbitrary decision, questioning its validity as a foundational basis for broader regulations. This tactic allows Joyce to guide the narrative toward a critique of Fauci's leadership by selectively highlighting language that undermines confidence in public health recommendations.

TABLE 4
TYPES AND TACTICS OF SOFT POWER

Types	No	%	Tactics	No.	%
Attraction	4	17.39%	Coalition	3	13.04%
			Ingratiation	1	4.35%
Persuasion	17	73.91%	Rational	13	56.52%
			Irrational	4	17.39%
Framing agenda setting	2	8.70%	Selective Controlling the Narrative	2	8.70%
Total	23	100%	Total	23	100%

Regarding the power dynamics in terms of the institutional positions, Table 5 below sheds light on the distribution of hard and soft power tactics used by the Chairman versus other committee members in the congressional hearing context. The Chairman demonstrates a strong reliance on hard power, with 77.78% of his tactics being direct and assertive, and his use of soft power is limited to 22.22%. This suggests that his role involves steering the hearing with a firm hand, potentially to underscore the committee's authority and seriousness in questioning Dr. Fauci's pandemic-related decisions. The other members display a more balanced distribution, with 69.57% of their tactics being hard power and 30.43% soft power. This entails that while members are largely aligned with the Chairman in their assertive questioning approach, they also employ soft power tactics more frequently to subtly influence the narrative and public perception of Fauci's accountability.

TABLE 5
COMPARISON OF POWER TYPES AMONG CONGRESS MEMBERS

Member Type	Chairman		Members		Total	
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.
Hard Power	7	77.78%	48	22.22%	55	100 %
Soft power	2	69.57%	21	30.43%	23	100 %
Total	9	100 %	69	100 %	78	100 %

In relation to the discursive strategies that are appeared in questions raised in the hearing, Table (6) below illustrates a multifarious use of these strategies used for an array of purposes and with varying frequencies. The most frequently used strategy is perspectivization (43.59%), indicating that committee members are actively framing questions in ways that reflect particular viewpoints, likely aiming to shape how Fauci's actions are perceived by the public. By embedding their perspectives into their questions, they subtly guide the audience to view Fauci's decisions through a critical lens. In question 9, for instance, Chairman Wenstrup employs perspectivization as a discursive strategy to subtly frame Dr. Fauci's stance on COVID-19 vaccinations in a manner that enhances the soft power tactic of ingratiation. Wenstrup begins by acknowledging the positive impact of the vaccine, crediting Fauci for his support and engagement, which serves as a form of ingratiation—a respectful acknowledgment intended to build rapport. However, Wenstrup then shifts the focus by highlighting that, despite its benefits, the vaccine did not prevent virus transmission, indirectly raising questions about Fauci's previous statements or assurances. This use of perspectivization guides the audience to see the vaccine's limitations without directly challenging its overall value. This presents Wenstrup's inquiry of Fauci's perspective about the effectiveness of the vaccine rather than an outright critique.

Argumentation follows at 28.21%, underscoring a strong reliance on logical structures to build cases against Fauci's recommendations; members use reasoned arguments to question his policies and decisions, which aligns with their objective to hold him accountable in a structured manner. In question 19, for example, Representative Comer uses argumentation as a discursive strategy to enhance the hard power approach through a pressure tactic aimed at Dr. Fauci. By listing specific alleged actions and omissions by Dr. Daszak such as delayed reports, unreported experiments, and undisclosed conflicts of interest, Comer constructs a tightly woven argument that places Fauci under significant pressure to explain why he might have "protected" Daszak and EcoHealth Alliance. In the context of the hearing, this use of argumentation strengthens the hard power strategy by making the pressure seem justified and well-founded.

Predication (10.26%) and nomination (8.97%) are also used, where specific qualities or labels are attached to people or policies, likely to attribute certain characteristics to Fauci's decisions, potentially painting them in a negative light. As an example of predication, Representative Lesko in question (30) reinforces the pressure tactic within a hard power framework aimed at Dr. Fauci. By explicitly labeling the research as "potentially dangerous" and referring to "enhanced potential pandemic pathogens" and "gain-of-function research," Lesko assigns specific, loaded characteristics to the activities potentially funded by the NIH. This choice of words primes the audience to perceive such research as inherently risky or reckless, thereby intensifying the pressure on Fauci to defend or clarify NIH's involvement. The language implies a level of danger and irresponsibility that goes beyond neutral questioning, shaping the audience's perception before Fauci even responds. In question 26, Representative Malliotakis uses nomination as a discursive strategy to intensify the pressure tactic within a hard power framework directed at Dr. Fauci. By referring to an email from Dr. Morens that mentions a "secret backchannel," Malliotakis assigns a specific, provocative label to this alleged communication, framing it as something covert or potentially inappropriate. This nomination strategy effectively captures attention and casts a shadow over the communication practices within NIAID, suggesting a degree of secrecy

that might not align with public expectations for transparency. The use of such a charged term pressures Fauci to explain or distance himself from this “backchannel” communication, implicitly questioning the ethical and procedural standards of his leadership

Mitigation and intensification (8.97%) round out the tactics, with members modulating the force of their statements to either soften or amplify the impact of their critiques, depending on their rhetorical goals. For instance, in question 42, Representative Cloud uses mitigation as a discursive strategy to temper the rational persuasion tactic within a soft power framework directed at Dr. Fauci. By framing the question in a straightforward, factual manner "Did or do the vaccines... stop anyone from getting COVID?", Cloud mitigates any overtly tone of the effectiveness of the vaccine, making the question appear objective and reasonable. The use of mitigation in this question aligns with the rational persuasion tactic, creating a space for factual discourse that feels balanced and less combative.

TABLE 6
THE EMPLOYMENT OF DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN THE HEARING'S QUESTIONS

Discursive Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Nomination	7	8.97%
Predication	8	10.26%
Argumentation	22	28.21%
Perspectivization	34	43.59%
Mitigation and intensification	7	8.97%
Total	78	100.00

These discursive strategies collectively illustrate how language is strategically wielded within the hearing, not only to question Fauci's decisions but to craft a narrative that resonates with the Republicans' intent to challenge the pandemic measures endorsed by NIAID. This critical discourse approach is integral to how members attempt to sway public perception, making their scrutiny feel both logical and emotive.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that hard power prevails more than soft power in the congressional hearing's questions. This reflects the political goal of the hearing which is confronting the witness and displaying him as flawed in front of the audience. It can also be concluded that Republicans' heavy reliance on hard power tactics comply with their partisan agenda to defend the Republican President and show their voters that they use their congressional power effectively. Since coercion is the prevailing hard power tactic, it can be concluded that hard power is the main mechanism that shapes the direction of the hearing's questions. The pressure, which is the first of the coercive devices, is utilized by questioners to press in the witness to express their stances publicly. The second coercive device used by the questioners is legitimation, which allows them to justify their positions relying on their congressional authority or the congressional rules. Such a combination demonstrates that power in the congressional questions is displayed not only based on confrontation and evidence but also achieved by reference to authority and rules. This suggests that questions intended to exert direct or indirect pressure may prompt opponents to defend or rationalize their position. Moreover, the lack of rewards tactics in their questions indicates that the Republicans made no effort to provide Dr. Fauci with positive reinforcement or recognition for his efforts, choosing instead to concentrate solely on criticizing his actions.

The soft power tactics, though less frequently used, play a crucial role in subtly shaping public perception. By balancing direct challenges with nuanced framing, the committee not only scrutinizes the witness's actions but also shapes the public perception regarding social and political issues. More particularly, it can be inferred that Republicans employ them to address the other party's voters or the hesitant voters to influence their public perception and guide them to their partisan agenda. Additionally, prominence of persuasion a soft power tactic highlights the role of logic and evidence-based reasoning in enhancing the credibility of speakers. From this, it can be concluded that using logical and evidence-based arguments can enhance the credibility of speakers' perspectives, regardless of whether they are challenging or supporting actions.

In terms of the institutional positions in the committee, the Chairman demonstrates a strong reliance on hard power, with limited use of soft power. The other members display a more balanced distribution between the two. From this, it can be concluded that the Chairman's primary responsibility is to lead and enforce procedural control, necessitating a firmer manner in the questioning process while other members might have more flexibility to employ softer tactics. This perhaps helps them to appeal to public opinion or to frame the discussion in a way that aligns with their specific political goals and complement the overall strategy and connect with broader audiences. With reference to the discursive strategies embedded in the questions, perspectivization scores the most commonly employed strategy. From this, it can be inferred that questioners deliberately frame questions to reflect specific viewpoints. In other words, questioners are not merely seeking information but are actively guiding the audience to interpret the witness's actions in ways that align with their political objectives. Additionally, relying on argumentation as a second common strategy aligns with their objective to appear logical and justified in holding the witness accountable.

APPENDIX

A full analysis of the hearings' questions is available at <https://osf.io/eb9na/files/osfstorage>.

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