

June 2022

Organizing Economies: Narrative Sensemaking and Communciative Resilience During Economic Disruption

Timothy Betts
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Organizing Economies:
Narrative Sensemaking and Communicative Resilience During Economic Disruption

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Date of Approval:
June 24, 2022

Keywords: organizational communication, communication theory of resilience, antenarrative theory, actor-network theory, Great Recession, COVID-19 recession

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I assume that dissertation acknowledgments can either be brief and inadequate or long and self-indulgent. I leave it to any who read this work to determine my course of action.

Patrice. This dissertation would not have been possible without your willingness to wade with me through the depths of weird economic scholarship and bizarre philosophy; to deal with my crazy working hours and habits; to share talk and cheese and grapefruit and wine and stories; to trust that this insane project could bear fruit. I hope that this work and I have lived up to your expectations. It has been a joy beyond comprehension to be your advisee these past three years. indefatigable, unflappable, and a fierce, fierce advocate, your work made my scholarly path possible through so much more than I can say. My gratitude is undying, even as I am undead.

To my committee: Steve, you have been a part of every turn of my USF adventure as the sensible voice, the reasonable one, who helped make even the most grandiose and outlandish concoctions of Patrice's and mine into reality. Jane, you are a light, a bright spark of optimism, and a reminder of what grounds this work: people, work, change. John, you inspired many of the loves and irritations of/with economics that drive this work when I stumbled into the class of a professor who was willing to teach his post-Keynesian economics boldly and unequivocally; you have taught me as much about economics as about being an academic. Amorette, I still know I am not qualified; I now know that *I'm exhausted*; and I know that any loveliness of this work's pattern would never have been if I had not happened to walk down one more aisle in that sweaty, stuffy, crowded gym in August heat trying to find a place to belong. I found it. As much as each of you have left your mark on this work, you have all left an even more indelible mark on me.

My adventure at USF has reminded me, every single day, how much family means. This work would not have been possible without my Mama, Dad, MorMor, and Papa. They taught me the power of a good argument and a pithy retort; they taught me the values of libraries and classrooms; they teach me patience and help me see what matters. It is always us five, but as the grandson of a genealogist, I know family roots go deeper. This work exists because of my family: Iris & Gene; Tim Huckaby; Jenny & William; Charlotte, Hayden, Jacob; Lindy, Rudy, Lacey, and Linsey; Ashley & Mannie; Judy; Bill & Cindy. And, of course, Molly. I was not yet on this journey when they died, but I would not be here if not for my Grandma and Grandad.

There are so many friends, from so many parts of my life, that I think of as I read these pages. I think of my friends from USF: Jonathan, Elizabeth & Pádraig, Josie, Dennis, LD. I think of wine and cheese; good food and better talk. I survived this process because each of you were there along the way, through pandemics, ghost-talk, elections, and the one time that Patrice tried to gas us with camembert. From my time at TCU: Colten, Katie, Laine, Shaye, Ant, Hannah, Michael, Ammie, Robin; Logan, Amanda, Sarah, Connor, Luke, Shelby, Andria, Kelsey, Fiyori, Isa, Cierra, Seth, Cathleen. From before: Pablo, Jim & Donna, Mark & Genie, Linda Lee, Jim & Barbara, Sandra, Adriana, Deb & James. You are all a part of me; I am both thankful and sorry.

I would like to thank the people at an unnamed newspaper archive for misapplying their Terms of Use to prevent me from completing this work. By blocking my appropriate use of their databases, they reminded me of the virtues of perseverance and impudence.

Finally, I come from a family of educators, so it was impossible to escape the lesson of the impact teachers have on their students' lives. I was taught by many brilliant educators along my way to this place. I list them below as a thank you for the stories told and lessons learned. "I ask that you not hold it against [them. They] meant well." –Patrick Rothfuss, *Name of the Wind*.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation unites organizational communication, and economic theory to understand how individuals make sense of economic crises, imbed power and logic in those understandings, and construct new economic realities in the aftermath of crisis. Contra economic orthodoxy, this project conceives of economy and economics as a social construct. As a social construct, individuals organize economy and economics through discourse, make sense of through narrative, and rebuild through communication. This dissertation combines different theoretical perspectives—actor-network theory, antenarrative organization theory, and the communication theory of resilience—to recenter social scientific accounts of economic reality around communication, story, and power.

Specifically, I focus on two economic crises: the Great Recession and the COVID-19 Recession. By examining the discourse present in news media and individual accounts in these two economic disruption contexts, this dissertation explores how individuals, across varying levels of society, made sense of these economic crises in situ, rather than through retrospective accounts. Thus, this work examines economics as an organizational process, constituted in communication and narrative, and shaped by power and narrative logics.

To these ends, two studies comprise this dissertation. The first study using news media combines the use of antenarrative grand narrative analysis to unpack how essentializing and mythologizing forces emerge within media accounts of economic crisis. By analyzing news media accounts of crucial dates across economic crisis contexts, this first study critiques the

construction of societal macronarratives during crisis and uncovers how those narratives shape economic and social practices related to the crises.

Next, the second study of this dissertation examines individual accounts of economic crises using antenarrative network analyses of social media and archival data related to the respective crises. Contra normative economic analyses, which often disregard individuals' experiences of crisis, this final study engages individuals' accounts of economic disruption on the social media platform Reddit to understand how individuals make sense of economic conditions and the power relations and processes that manifested them.

These studies work in tandem to illustrate, throughout various levels of society, how societies organize their experiences of, and responses to, economic crises. These analyses contribute key insights related to: (a) how people respond to economic crisis, (b) how power and discourse shape those responses, (c) how economic theory interacts with these organizational processes, and (d) how scholars and policymakers can better respond to future economic disruptions. Further, the findings from these studies (1) form the basis for a communicative theory of nullification, (2) highlight the potential of communicated finality as an oppositional force to communicated resilience and (3) advance a practical agenda for addressing the legislative and parliamentary procedures through which governments and people enact economic resilience.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Of the Great Depression, Bird (1966) wrote “Sophocles could have written the script” of this period of time as a series of “lower-case tragedies” that constituted a continued economic crisis and consumed the lives of its players (p. xviii). Interspersed amongst descriptions of the political and imprudence and mismanagement that fomented the crisis, Bird lamented the silent stories of the factory workers and widows who were driven to desperation and suicide until “there were too many in want to hide” (p. 24). A few years earlier, Galbraith (1969), a predominant voice in institutionalist economic thought, described the social influences that allowed for the continued existence of poverty in *The Affluent Society*. He connected poverty to social values and contended that poverty was the result of the concomitant social and physical marginalization of impoverished people and the exaggeration of the “character-building values of hunger and privation” (p. 329). In the United States specifically, the conservative embrace of this type of economic inequality, while not stated as such in explicit terms, is not merely, and could never be, the expression of a neutral or objective economic philosophy. Republican political strategist Lee Atwater made this entanglement clear:

You start out in 1954 by saying, “N—¹, n—, n—”. By 1968 you can’t say “N—”...so you

¹ Here, I choose to censor the use of these racial slurs, though they were used in the original quotation. I preserve their reference in this censored format so that the meaning and import of the original quotation is understandable.

say stuff like forced busing, state's rights... You're getting so abstract. Now you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is blacks get hurt worse than whites...Sitting around saying, "we want to cut this" is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "N—, n—." (Lamis, 1988, p. 26)

Atwater's vile commentary was unabashed, insidious, and damningly potent in its depiction of economic policymaking and its repercussions. The political conditions that Atwater's machinations materialized in the United States approached a zenith with Reagan's defunding of public services (Fried & Harris, 2021; Hildred, 1991) and destruction of economic safeguards (Pierson, 1994) all justified by racial animus (Porter, 2020). Atwater's stratagem can and does persist in contemporary political discourse. The dubious justifications, racial underpinnings, and material consequences of economic policymaking are abstracted away and presented as immutable facts of an objective economic science. But the political, social, historical, racial, and economic stories of the past, present, and future are inextricable; so, too, analyses of those stories must be intertwined.

This vision for analyzing economic phenomena by linking formulae and algorithms with the spectacular and mundane stories of affected peoples is a far cry from Milton Friedman's vision of economics and its contemporary practice. Friedman's (1953) vision was steeped in a disciplinary ethos (Fourcade, 2009; Harvey, 2015) and methodological dogma (Keita, 1997; Ziliak & McCloskey, 2008) of statistical purity unencumbered by reality. As part of the desire to fashion economic analysis into an objective venture, in the image of other natural sciences, and following John Neville Keynes (1917/1999), Friedman forwarded a view of an economic science that sorts wheat from chaff, truth from fiction, and speaks, in one voice, of the definitive,

predictive utility of economic theory. This view has become canonical. It has been elevated to economic orthodoxy in that it is the dominant perspective taught as an uncontested fact in economics classrooms throughout the United States (Barone, 1991; ISIPE, 2014).

There is ample justification to take up a criticism of economic analysis from this point alone. The critiques against contemporary economic analysis range from those levied by economic methodologists and philosophers (e.g., Lawson, 1997, 2003, 2008, 2010; Mäki, 2002, 2008) concerned with the shortcomings of orthodox economic inquiry, to heterodox economists (e.g., Davidson, 2002, 2009; Galbraith, 1969, 2004) offering new paradigms for economic inquiry, and to scholars in other disciplines seeking to reimagine new kinds of inquiry (Fourcade, 2009, 2010; Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Fourcade & Khurana, 2017; Holmes, 2009, 2014; Nyman et al., 2021). The criticisms of each group vary in argumentation against the status quo of economic orthodoxy, but they each have in common a rejection of the idea that the dominant paradigm in economics could ever be the type of objective analysis for which (Friedman, 1953) argued. But the impossibility of positive² economic science is well-traversed ground, even if neoclassical economists are quick to disregard their critics (Granger, 2004; Hirsch & De Marchi,

² Positive refers to an objectivist approach to social science inquiry espoused by August Comte (1865/2009). Comte believed that all knowledge could be derived through empirical observation and explanation of natural phenomenon, including social relations. Essentially, positive economics here refers to value-neutral inquiry that purports to describe the fundamental reality of human economic behavior without reference to questions of morality or value.

1990). However, the troubling and deliberate ignorance of collective histories, experiences, and stories within economic orthodoxy is, perhaps, even more damning than the fruitless quest for positive, or value neutral, economic sciences.

The limited utility of academic economic theory stems from the active refusal of economists and policymakers to acknowledge that economic conditions are the product of political and social organization. This refusal is *not* the product of some natural tendency toward the peculiar arrangements of capitalist societies (Fisher, 2009). This refusal derives from a failure to consider that the variables economists resign to coefficients embody the material conditions to which individuals are subjected in the name of apothecic markets: deified, unquestioned. In the natural sciences, abstracting away human questions when attempting to explain the movement of celestial bodies or the interactions of chemical elements is a simplifying move; in the social and behavioral sciences, abstracting away the human questions of economic relations, finance, labor, regulation, and poverty is a self-defeating act of erasure. This act of simplification is self-defeating because it ignores the quantum and relativistic principles of the natural sciences that economists so desperately wish to emulate; Friedman did not consider the idea that inquiry itself might play a role in shaping the social world it attempts to analyze. It is also erasure because the fickle nature of human actions *is* the object of social science inquiry, not a kink that needs be worked out to perfectly model economic systems that transcend the humans who created and constitute them.

In his criticism of Soviet distortions of Marxist philosophy, Sartre (1957/1963) ridiculed the “empiricism without principles” (p. 22) of the revolutionary scientist-comrades of the USSR; he argued that the imposition of failed scheme of pure knowledge was a violence against reality. He furthered that, in the USSR, “men and things had to yield to ideas—a priori, experience,

when it did not verify predictions, could only be wrong. If Budapest’s subsoil did not allow [them] to construct the subway, this was because the subsoil was counter-revolutionary” (Sartre, 1957/1963, p. 23). Perhaps, along similar lines, the economic crises that have come to characterize the past few decades in the United States are simply a product of the anti-capitalist tendencies of rabble-rousing *increasing poverty rates* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021) and *stagnating working wages* (Desilver, 2018; Wisman, 2013). Or, mayhap it is not the people experiencing economic deprivation who are failing economic theory?

Of course, the failures of contemporary capitalism represented by increasing poverty rates and stagnating working wages are not, in and of themselves, rabble-rousing; I resign the happy task of anti-capitalist organizing to human agents. As such, the above is, undoubtedly, an unfair reading of the overt attitudes of economists. But this interpretation is, in many ways, commensurate with the implicit attitudes of economic theoreticians who turn a blind eye to the overwhelming evidence of those experiences recounted by Bird (1966) and whom are given new voice in Case and Deaton’s (2019) interrogation of contemporary trends in mortality, drug and alcohol addiction, and despair among the working class in the United States. The theoretical ends may be different, but the methodology of the violence is the same. In the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2007-2008, there was hope among economists, students, and even policymakers that a paradigm shift in economic orthodoxy might finally be at hand to transform economic inquiry and reimagine economic policymaking (Davidson, 2009; Kelton, 2020; Palley, 2011). Today, as academicians and policymakers grapple with the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 economic crisis, many are renewing this optimistic call (Anderson et al., 2020; Hintz et al., 2021; Hynes et al., 2021), arguing for pluralistic approaches to both economic education and reimagined policymaking. Following Kuhn (1970), the incommensurability of the present

conditions with the explanations offered by dominant voices in economic theory should have driven and may still drive a transformation of the discipline.

And still, no scientific or economic revolution has come to pass for a variety of reasons. The causes of neoclassical economists' domination over economic orthodoxy are wide-ranging; various scholars have already explored this disciplinary dynamic (e.g., Fourcade, 2010; Harvey, 2015; Mirowski, 2013). It is *not* the project of this dissertation to explore these causes. However, some comments about these causes seem necessary and include: the organization of the economics discipline; the arrangement of institutional, professional, and social forces that discourage pluralism (read as deviance); or the discursive delegitimation of heterodox policy alternatives. Suffice it to say, the failure of the economic discipline to adequately grapple with the paradigmatic, theoretical, and methodological shortcomings previewed above have substantial material consequences for people (Ziliak & McCloskey, 2008).

And the problem remains: when positioning any aspect of economic analysis as a representation of objective fact, researchers necessarily abstract away those human questions, the social in their social science, that make economic questions distinct. Colander's (2001) retrospective account of the loss of artistic imagination in the economics discipline provided the hopeful rejoinder that economics can be rejuvenated by taking the lessons of an objective economic science and applying them to the normative world. But Colander's (2001; Colander et al., 2009; Colander et al., 2008) forceful accounts of the need to understand this relationship between positive and normative economic scholarship cannot solve the issues facing the discipline. This is, of course, not to say that no such social science can exist; instead, I argue for a social science of the economy that does not shy away from either the empirical or philosophical questions that are at the heart of meaningful inquiry. Researchers must find new ways to

transcend and oblivate the division of positive and normative economics *and* to integrate and engage with perspectives outside of the economics discipline. Only then will scholars be able to craft new theory, new methods, and new paradigms for understanding the relationships between economic phenomena and the social relationships, stories, and people who constitute them.

Thus, the overarching goal of this dissertation is threefold: (1) to map out a new vision of interdisciplinary economic inquiry borne from the insights of communication scholarship, organization studies, and post-structural philosophy, (2) to illustrate the utility of such an approach through the examination of the narrative organization of economies and policy during crisis, and (3) to engage with economic theory in ways that foreground narrative construction and social interaction so as to reimagine economic futures. I argue that the current analyses conducted across the economics discipline fail to adequately examine and take seriously the social dynamics and organization of economies. Economic practices are social practices, narratively constructed and organized, neither the product of some innate concept of human nature (Sartre, 1943/1956), nor the result of objective and fixed societal structures (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). Because of this foundation of social practices, the analyses of economic contexts, crises, and conditions must move beyond the simplifying and abstracting moves that dominate much of contemporary economic thoughts else academicians (willfully or not) participate in the same type of abstraction advocated by Lee Atwater. It is time for researchers to move beyond the analysis of economic conditions as objective fact and start seeing them as discursive materializations.

To this end, the remainder of this introductory chapter first provides an overview of the studies that comprise this work. Next, I offer a summary of the theoretical arguments and framework that outlines the theoretical framework upon which I base this inquiry. Third, I

describe the methodologies at work in this project and conclude with a preview of the following chapters of this dissertation.

Organizing Economic Disruptions

If the aims of this study are to craft and implement an alternative means of exploring economic phenomena through the lenses of communication and organization theory and toward reimagining economic theory and practice, then the context under examination must serve two purposes: (1) it must reflect conflict between practice and theory and (2) it should offer an empirical basis for reimagining that economic theory.

First, the context must demonstrate the practical and theoretical failures of economic theory. Both from the economic perspective and the communicative perspective, crises and disruptions generally serve this purpose. As Buzzanell (2010) remarked in her initial reimagining of resilience theory as a communicative venture, disruptions both allow and necessitate reckoning with the nonsensical and the unjustifiable in past and present while also to laboring to rebuild a sense of future normalcy from those shaken foundations. Betts et al. (2021) furthered this line of thinking, arguing that the stories and sensemaking surrounding disruptive events can offer insight into the prospective, forward-thinking logics upon which individuals begin to reform and reorganize a pragmatic vision of possible futures. Afifi et al. (2015), for example, examined the impact of the Great Recession on family uncertainty and stress responses. Similarly, Lucas and Buzzanell (2012) analyzed the impact of economic crises, albeit on a different time scale, by asking families who faced hardship during the economic downturn in the 1980s to recount messages that shaped their value systems and understandings of resilience in the prevailing decades. Disruptions are endemic to social organizing not because of some

deterministic logic of collapse but because they represent a failure of current arrangements (however they are organized) to address acute issues (Ahn et al., 2021; Seeger & Sellnow, 2016).

Economic disruptions also fulfill a second criterion for providing an empirical basis for reimagining economic theory as social practice: when systems fail, they contextualize the open conflict of current academic theory, political value, and social organization. Economic crises are inflections points for understanding the failures of current theory and systems in important ways. As Ziliak and McCloskey (2008) articulated, in the context of economic crises, these failures have serious and deadly consequences for people that reach far beyond the power of a macroeconomic indicator. Thus, as a site of conflict between academic, political, and social discourse, economic crises are a prime context for a critical examination of communicative economic organizing.

In the context of the United States' economic history, two recent contexts clearly illustrate these dynamics of economic disruption. Combined, they illustrate the failure of systems and reflect the conflict of varying social and political logics. Given these and other practical requirements (detailed in more length in Chapter 3), this dissertation examines the Great Recession (December 2007 – June 2009)³ and the COVID-19 Recession (February 2020 – April

³ Dates for the official beginning and ending of the recessionary periods are derived from the National Bureau of Economic Research (2021). These dates do not reflect the continued social and economic effects of these recessions, meaning that the recessionary periods extended well beyond the official reference dates for the business cycles (Economic Policy Institute, 2009) and are not entirely captured by these date ranges. As such, certain aspects of this investigation of

2020)³ and their economic organization across two discursive contexts: news media and individual accounts of the crises. In this way, as an examination of organizing economic crisis, this work engages with two of the most damaging economic crises both in terms of macroeconomic decline measured through GDP⁴, in terms of other measures of economic health such as unemployment, and in terms of their conflict with orthodox economic thought at the time of the crisis.

Both disruption contexts represented herein offer a unique opportunity to examine the warring conflicts of social/political organization and the economic theorizing that fails to account for the collapse of economic homeostasis. Understanding the impact of each disruption and its communicative, narrative organization requires both an interaction with the economic and political histories of each crisis *and* a theoretical framework that puts those narratives in conversation with the contemporary discourses attempting to make sense of those events as they were unfolding. As such, the next section previews the conceptualization of economic analysis

economic crisis fall outside these date ranges. Where dates extensions occur, justification and clarification are provided.

⁴ GDP, or gross domestic product, is a measure of economic output that accounts for goods and services produced within a nation during a given period of time. Although the measure is strictly designed to reflect output, it is often used in a variety of contexts to reflect the health and prosperity and the appropriate function of economic systems writ large. Critiques of this measure and analysis of its discursive use in economic organizing is central to this work.

and the challenge to both economic orthodoxy and heterodoxy that informs this dissertation. This next section also summarizes the theoretical framework I use to unpack these dynamics.

Theoretical Framework and Study Rationale

The theoretical positioning of this work begins and ends with the failures of both economic orthodoxy, at present the dominant neoclassical school of thought (Harvey, 2015; Mirowski, 2013), and of economic heterodoxy, an odd conglomeration of varying and perspectives on economics. This conglomeration ranges from Austrianism⁵ to Marxism. Economic orthodoxy inadequately addresses fundamental issues relating to the ontology of economics (see Lawson, 2008), the epistemology of economic analyses (see Davidson, 2002), and the varying existential threats facing contemporary economic systems (e.g., climate change; Nordhaus, 2019; Stern, 2008). As many economic methodologists (see Hausman, 1992; McCloskey, 1998) and theorists from within (Davidson, 2002, 2017; Galbraith, 2004; Harvey, 1998) and without (Fourcade et al., 2015) the economics discipline have argued, contemporary failures in economic analysis abound.

Neoclassical economics, by and large, failed to provide an adequate foundation for predicting, explaining, or responding to the Great Recession (Colander et al., 2009; Davidson,

⁵ Austrianism is a heterodox school of economic thought that, in brief, contrasts many orthodox and other heterodox views through a strictly individualistic, heavily non-interventionist perspective that emphasizes the radical decentralization of economic authority (for an overview, see Harvey, 2015). In short, Austrianism is a clear contrast to the values, methods, and theory undergirding Marxist analyses.

2017), leading to a groundswell of support for varying heterodox perspectives in recent years (Harvey, 2011b; ISIPE, 2014). Despite the considerable criticism that neoclassical economists faced in the aftermath of the Great Recession, though, the ideological and academic status quo adopted the failures of the crisis as nothing more than further evidence of their unimpeachable theoretical and methodological foundations (Mirowski, 2013). Moreover, heterodox schools of thought, although they provide convincing alternative explanations for contemporary economic crises, often act to institutionalize and reify the practices, structures, and incentives that fomented (and still actively foment) crisis by calling upon a realist epistemology to justify their analyses (e.g., Mäki, 2008). In other words, though there are benefits to rejecting the logical positivism of economic orthodoxy, there are consequences to embracing realism as an alternative; namely, it reinforces the fixedness of economic systems by framing their current existence as the real object of economic analysis (as discussed at more length in Chapter 2).

These dueling paradigms (logical positivism and realism) are the subject of the first critique I present in the second chapter, as both paradigms fail to promise the type of ingenuitive, critical, and transformative analysis of economics as social practice necessary to reimagine and reorganize more just economic systems. In this way, I begin the theoretical framework of this dissertation by reimagining a paradigm of economic analysis grounded in post-structural and discursive views of economic behavior as social practice before turning to three theories of organization and communication that ground the overarching analysis presented in this dissertation: actor-network theory (Latour & Woolgar, 1979), the communication theory of resilience (Buzzanell, 2010, 2019), and antenarrative theory of storytelling organization (Boje, 2001, 2008). In other words, the criticisms of the orthodox and heterodox perspectives that I explicate in the second chapter serve as the foundation for reimagining economic ontology,

methodology, and axiology with the aim of foregrounding social-constructionism, post-structural skepticism, and pragmatic values in the social scientific inquiry of economic contexts.

First, actor-network theory (ANT) grounds this analysis in a performative understanding of market organization and attempts to explore the relationship between economic theory and the organization of economic realities. As originally articulated by Latour and Woolgar (1979), ANT was a means of exploring the sociological implications of technological advancements. For example, one of the original applications of the theoretical framework analyzed the relationship between the adoption of electric vehicles, the implementation of public policy, and the limits and transformative potential of those technological advancements (Callon, 1986). Later, Joerges and Czamiawska (1998) and other researchers have adapted the theoretical framework to investigate organizational processes.

More recently, Callon (2007) used the concept to examine how economic theory could be considered a technological advancement that shapes how market participants make sense of economic phenomena. Along these same lines, Mackenzie and Millo (2003) used the theoretical framework to understand how the Black-Scholes (Black & Scholes, 1972, 1973) model of option pricing⁶ invaded social practices, became normative, and, then became an embedded, constructed reality for investors. This shift, from theory *explaining* reality to theory *shaping* reality, represents not only a fundamental shift in the understanding of economic phenomena, but it also represents an important recognition of the role that economists as researchers, practitioners, and

⁶ The Black-Scholes model was one of the first explanations in finance theory for determining the value of certain financial instruments traded on specialized markets.

policy advisors play in actively constructing the pseudo-objective reality they purport to analyze. For this study, then, the application of ANT directs the aims of this project toward interrogating the interrelation between economic theory, as technological and intellectual development, and the communicative construction of economic realities.

Second, Buzzanell's (2010, 2018a, 2018b, 2019) CTR has inspired a flurry of research in the communication discipline regarding the interpersonal or family (Carr & Koenig Kellas, 2018; Dorrance Hall, 2018; Wilson et al., 2014) and organizational (Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015; Seeger & Sellnow, 2016) constructions of new normals in the face of disruption. In large part, this communicative reformulation of the concept of resilience was a rejection of the trait-based focus on resilience as a characteristic of a person or a system (Skodol, 2010). However, perhaps unsurprisingly, the application of resilience in economic research is even further mired in trait-based, non-constructivist perspectives.

Perhaps most troubling is the continued refrain in economic analyses regarding the trade-offs between resilience and efficiency (Ivanov et al., 2014). Thinking of resilience and efficiency as competing values largely derives from questions of supply-chain management and the overriding concern for creating Pareto efficient states in dominant economic paradigms.⁷ However, when thinking of economic systems as social, malleable, constructed entities, the questions of efficiency, optimality, and stability in response to disruption seem to be moot points. Further, considering the various ongoing and overlapping crises facing policymakers and

⁷ A Pareto efficient state is one in which no individual can be made better off without taking from another individual.

people alike, theoretical stability can quickly become practical stagnation; destabilizing stable crises must be a part of this academic work (Costa Lima et al., 2014). Outside of the imaginary world of positive economics, rational actors, and central-bank helicopters⁸ (from which, to be fair, many economists refuse to remove themselves; see Friedman, 1953), there *are* disasters, breakdowns, mishaps, and irrationality. Jerome Powell⁹ has more substantial policy tools than a flight stick and throttle. The reformulation of resilience offered by CTR, then, is important in the context of this study of economic crisis to reimagine resilience as a constructive force rather than a reactionary characteristic (Betts & Buzzanell, 2022).

Thus, this study actively rejects the determinism of economic orthodoxy (as critiqued by De Uriarte, 1990). Instead, I embrace the idea that, as a socially constitutive process, researchers must examine how the communicative forces that construct *economies* actively shape the emergence of new normals in the aftermath of crises. Furthermore, I embrace work designed to reimagine and expand the realm of economic possibility and the possibilities of new economic arrangements and organization.

Finally, using antenarrative theory (Boje, 2001, 2008) and storytelling organization has two key impacts on the aims of this project: (1) it positions economics and economic

⁸ This is a reference to a famous work by Friedman (1969) wherein he explains the complex dynamics of inflation in terms of a helicopter dropping money from the sky. This view has been roundly critiqued by heterodox scholars (e.g., Davidson (2011)).

⁹ Jerome Powell is, as of September 2021, the current chair of the Federal Reserve System of the United States.

phenomena, even at the macro level, as a malleable product of social organizing and *not* an extant social fact, and (2) it frames analysis of this social economics in terms of narrative processes. In this way, antenarrative theory extends and amplifies some of the questions and methods posed by institutional economists (e.g., Galbraith, 1969, 2004) who examined the relationship between societal institutions and economic outcomes. The application of this theoretical framework is unique, however, insofar as it does not limit the exploration of social influences on economic outcomes to the questions of specific institutions.

As a predecessor to communication constitutes organization (CCO) theory (for an overview, see Bisel, 2010) in organizational communication studies, Boje's antenarrative perspective allows researchers to escape the bounds of the container metaphor. Simply, communication is not something that occurs *within* an economy, economic phenomena emerge from the narrative processes that people, institutions, policymakers, and news media use to make sense of the chaos of lived experience. Moreover, these narrative processes are value laden, steeped in power relations, and act to shape individuals' understanding of the future by prospecting the logic of the antenarrative forward. The antenarrative perspective also emphasizes the serious consideration of individual experience in the construction of intersubjective organizational experience, in direct contrast to the theoretical underpinnings of neoclassical economic theorizing *and* much of economic heterodoxy. By analyzing these small stories of disruption, an antenarrative approach to examining economic crisis turns a critical eye toward the large-scale, mediated, macro-narratives of disruption. In sum, this study of economic crisis and intervention as framed in terms of organization and antenarrative, examines both the social construction of economic crises and interventions and the critical implications embedded in these social processes.

In sum, by advancing an alternative perspective for examining economic phenomena, founded in the insights of critical organizational communication, and engaging in other bodies of work ranging from economics, socioeconomics, political sciences, and philosophy, I argue that researchers can provide a fuller account of economic phenomena. Thus, next, I turn to a presentation of the methodologies that undergird the present analysis and the overarching study design of this dissertation.

Overview: Study Design, Methodology, and Aims

Briefly, I conducted the studies that comprise this dissertation in two parts, with each study aimed at analyzing communicative and organizational dynamics across two crisis contexts (the Great Recession and the COVID-19 Recession) within a single discursive context (media or individual accounts). This research design offered a few primary advantages given the goals of this study. First, it provided a means of exploring the deep, contextually bound nature of economic organizing during each crisis through a variety of discursive lenses. Government organization of economic crisis is fundamentally different from the ways that individuals organize their understanding of economic crises (Jacoby, 2000; Jerit, 2008); thus, understanding their interrelation and differing expression *in situ* of economic crisis was key to unpacking the implications of this larger project. Second, the use of these two crisis contexts across the different discursive contexts offered a way to examine the persistence and change of economic logics (Glynos & Howarth, 2007) as they shape the narrative sensemaking processes (Boje, 2001, 2008) of organizing economies. This is not to say that I traced discourses or narrative logics (Legreco & Tracy, 2009) or that I assumed that these narrative logics would emerge in similar or fixed ways across time and economic space. Instead, by examining narrative practices

across a variety of discursive contexts and comparing those across crisis contexts, I worked to uncover insights regarding the congruities and incongruities across them.

Finally, the selection of these crisis contexts was of methodological import, too. These were the extraordinary days in an economic history filled with “lower-case tragedies” (Bird, 1966, p. xviii). The selection of, and the emphasis on, these crisis contexts, however, was methodologically prudent because crisis contexts presented a look into the disorganization, reorganization, and chaos dynamics (Boje, 2001) that offered the clearest insight into the logics upon which individuals relied as they tried to grasp together the edges of incoherent stories. Second, by examining crisis contexts in this way, I highlighted the social processes of crafting of new normals in response to disruption (Buzzanell, 2010). This is not only an important point theoretically, in terms of CTR; it is also a methodological point that reinforces the malleability and contingent nature of the social realities under examination (Glynos et al., 2021). Thus, to examine these varied dynamics across crisis and discursive contexts, I relied on the two different data analytic approaches—a computational grand narrative analysis and antenarrative network analysis—that I preview below.

The first study that I conducted as part of this dissertation provided a foundation for the further examination of narrative sensemaking and economic organization using a novel combination of topic modeling (using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA); Blei et al., 2003) and Boje’s (2001) grand narrative analysis. This unique combination of tools allowed me to investigate the wealth of news media accounts during some of the most impactful days of the two crisis contexts. The use of natural language processing (Blei et al., 2003) techniques was both a methodological tool for analyzing extremely large data sets (collectively totaling 129,604 articles) and a priming technique for an in-depth reading of key articles (DiMaggio et al., 2013).

The second portion of the analysis in this study was guided by Boje's (2001) grand narrative analysis, which foregrounds the various mythologizing, universalizing, and essentializing forces of narrative at macro-levels. Building from Lyotard's (1979/1984) work on grand narrative, this analysis provided a method for examining how collective sensemaking practices can become a "regime of truth" (Brown, 1990, p. 192) that acts to shape the organization of economic crisis.

Second, the analysis of individual level data provided insight into that social and economic devastation in new ways. Building from social media data, the final study of this dissertation aimed to illuminate the sensemaking practices of the everyday individual, those whose data become aggregates for statistical analysis rather than meaningful narratives in their own right. Thus, I turned to semantic network analyses, informed by Boje's (2001) antenarrative network analytic techniques and Granovetter's (1985) concept of embeddedness, to understand the narratives which emerged from the social spaces that rarely find their ways into the large, "representative" survey data files upon which econometricians base their models of economic recovery and calculate the cost of economic crises. To this end, I created a new tool for scraping data from the PushShift (Baumgartner et al., 2020) archive of Reddit data and creating data sets specifically for communication research (detailed in Appendix B). This final study, then, culminated in an examination of individuals' accounts of these crises to home in on the bottom-up story dynamics (Boje, 2001) that are often lost in telling the macro-stories and grand narratives of large-scale crises.

In sum, these two studies offered a unique opportunity from which to draw important insights regarding the *in situ* organization of economic crises while also telling the stories of the oft forgotten, untold "lower-case tragedies" Bird (1966) referenced. In combination with the theoretical framework previously summarized, these studies offered potential theoretical and

practical insights across varying disciplines and contexts. Thus, this work presents the insights from these studies to both critique and advance economic, communication, and organization theory and to provide pragmatic and policy-focused insights regarding the nature of organizing and sensemaking of those crises, new ways out of crises, and the possibility of restorying the social logics that foment crises in the first place. The results of these analyses provided the foundation for an emerging theory of communicative nullification that explores the narrative and organizational dynamics of social change, authoritative logics, and pragmatic agency. Additionally, these findings indicate new ways of addressing the discursive elements of policymaking procedures to organize a foundation for enacting economic resilience.

To this end, the remaining chapters of this dissertation proceed as follows. The second chapter both provides a review of relevant literature and articulates a theoretical framework for this present analysis. Next, the third chapter presents a detailed description of the various methodological choices at work in project, including data collection and analytic procedures. The proceeding two chapters, four and five, detail the findings from the two studies in order. Chapter six provides a structured discussion of the theoretical implications of this work, including a discussion of (1) communicative nullification and (2) finality and communicative resilience. Penultimately, the seventh chapter includes a discussion of the practical insights offered by these studies, specifically in relation to the organization and consideration of policymaking defaults and inaction. Finally, the eighth chapter concludes with a discussion of boundaries or limitations, and future directions for research. In sum, the final three chapters do the work of combining, restorying, and synthesizing the analyses of study one and two toward theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic advancements that aim at rethinking the way people communicatively organize economies.

CHAPTER 2. THEORIZING ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

Nobel laureate economist Robert Shiller made a career, in large part, based on his critiques of, and alternatives to, the efficient market hypothesis, which states that share prices are an objective reflection of all possible information because *the market*, writ quite as large as possible, is an infallible information processor (Mirowski & Nik-Khah, 2017). Following the stock market crash in 1987, Shiller (1987) collected survey data from those individual investors who were buying and selling during the crash. He asked them to provide a retrospective account of their feelings regarding the crash, their actions, and their thoughts about the market prior to the crash. The earth-shattering conclusion of this work was to proclaim that investors did “not have a clear theory how these past news events translated into predictions of market price movement” and instead relied upon the “vague intuitive assessments people under great stress made” about what was going to happen next (Shiller, 1987, p. 25).

The sarcastic tone of this summary should not be taken too harshly. On one hand, this conclusion was (and is) entirely contradictory in many ways to the prevailing neoclassical economic theories that aim to explain investor behavior and stock market movement. On the other hand, for social scientists, this claim is not groundbreaking; it is close to self-evident. The wealth of evidence, both within (Harvey, 1998; Shiller, 1987, 2019) and without the economics discipline, which repudiates the foundational axioms upon which the neoclassical view is built, is extremely persuasive. Socioeconomists have provided clear explication for how economic theory is not a predictor of economic behavior, it is a manufacturer of it (Holmes, 2009, 2014, 2019; Mackenzie & Millo, 2003). Communication scholars have worked to examine how individuals

respond to disruption, such as economic crises, and craft new normals in response to them (Buzzanell, 2010, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). Organization scholars have described the varying ways that individuals make sense of and justify their actions (Boje, 2001; Boje et al., 1997; Weick, 1969, 1976, 1995).

Each of the bodies of literature referenced above provide their own rejoinder to the naturalistic, logical positivist assumptions regarding human behavior contained within neoclassical economics. They also, in their own way, reject the realist assumptions of many of the heterodox schools of thought that seek to provide an alternative to neoclassical orthodoxy. If neoclassical thought is a rose-colored fantasy of human behavior built on faulty assumptions, heterodox views that try to embrace realism as an alternative merely seek to recreate that vision in brick and mortar without questioning the desirability of the project in the first place. In other words, turning to realism to describe a broken system in pragmatic language not only fails to replace the dominance of neoclassical thought, but it also fails to frame genuinely critical challenges to the organization of those economic realities they seek to examine. This chapter takes up the challenge of explicating this critique of both orthodox and heterodox economic thought (based in critical realism¹⁰) to establish a theoretical framework for a different kind of analysis of economic contexts grounded in communication and organization theory.

¹⁰ Critical realism is a view of social science, espoused by economists like Lawson (1997, 2008) which conceives of inquiry as founded in specific ontologies, as opposed to the methodological focus of positivism (i.e., Comte, 1865/2009; Friedman, 1953) and rejects the post-structural view by insisting on the existence of objective reality (Granger, 2004).

Given this aim, this chapter is divided into six sections: (1) a critique of orthodox and heterodox economic paradigms; (2) a presentation of an alternative, organizational communication approach to economic analysis; (3) a review of actor-network theory (e.g., Callon, 1986; Latour & Woolgar, 1979) and socioeconomic views related to performative economics (e.g., Callon, 2007; Muniesa, 2016); (4) a discussion of the communication theory of resilience (Buzzanell, 2010, 2018a, 2018b, 2019) and related issues of community resilience and crisis (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016); (5) an exploration of the antenarrative storytelling paradigm (Boje, 2001, 2008, 2014, 2017) and its implications for organizing economies; and (6) a synthesis of the reviewed literature and presentation of the research questions for the studies that comprise this dissertation.

A Critique of Economic Paradigms: Logical Positivism and Economic Realism

Milton Friedman (1953), writing on the methodological commitments of economic sciences, argued that “viewed as a language, theory has no substantive content; it is a set of tautologies. Its function is to serve as a filing system for organizing empirical material and facilitating our understanding of it” (p. 7). On one count, Friedman was presciently, if rather inadvertently, cutting to the heart of the central argument I make in this chapter. On another count, the view advanced in this seemingly innocuous quotation served as a practical warrant to craft economic and social policy in damaging, ineffective, and irresponsible ways (Ziliak & McCloskey, 2008). At the heart of this matter are ontological and epistemological questions regarding the fundamental nature of the concept *economy* and the appropriate way to examine such a concept. Thus, in this section, I do the following: (1) explore varying paradigmatic critiques of orthodox economic thought, (2) problematize heterodox alternatives, namely realist approaches, and (3) articulate the need for a new framework for inquiry.

Orthodox Economic Paradigms

Friedman conceived of economics as a positive scientific exercise. Building on the philosophies of Comte (1865/2009) and Ricardo (1817/1996), Friedman argued that the primary duty of academic economics is to perfect the predictive power of general laws of human behavior which, in turn, illuminate the need or, the lack thereof in Friedman's view, for government policy to regulate markets and ensure positive outcomes. In terms of this logical positivism, the veracity of the assumptions that undergird theory does not matter; what matters is that the logical structure is sound and the predictions are correct. Among other specific ideas regarding the nature of developing economic theory, Friedman used these ideas to justify claims that would seem outlandish in the context of other social science fields, namely his contention that realism is entirely irrelevant to the heuristic or logical value of economic theory. This construction of the economy as a subject of economic science is as contentious amongst economic methodologists and philosophers as it is widespread and unquestioned among the rank and file of neoclassical economic orthodoxy, and at a foundational level, these questions (a) serve as the warrant for this communicative reexamination of economic crisis as organizational and social phenomena and (b) ground the theoretical framework I outline later in this chapter.

Friedman was, of course, not the only economist to tackle these paradigmatic questions about economics. And his view is not wanting for critics; methodologists and heterodox scholars alike are quick to question Friedman. First, economic methodologists railed against this conception of economics. Among these critics, Mäki (2002, 2008, 2018, 2020) and Lawson (1997, 2010, 2012, 2019) advanced alternative, realist, ontologies for economic sciences. Building from on the Miltonian declaration that realism in economic theory does not matter, and from the development of increasingly technical statistical modelling, economists have learned

hide the irrelevancy of their theoretical conclusion behind the cloak of advanced econometrics (Lawson, 2017). Feminist economists have been making similar arguments for decades, noting that the dominance of quantitative analyses, survey-based data gathering, and inattention to marginality distort the validity of researchers' claims and baked-in sexist (Beneria, 2007; Berik, 1997; Berik & van der Meulen Rodgers, 2009; Grown et al., 2000) and racist (Power, 2004; Price & Sharpe, 2020) assumptions into the foundation of contemporary economic scholarship.

Second, the voices of heterodox economists of various paradigms have established entire domains of scholarship in opposition to the dominance of neoclassical orthodoxy and ontology. Most clear in their rejection of the positive science vision, post-Keynesian and Institutionalist economists have taken up the mantle of a pragmatic or realist ontologies that purport to base the validity of their economic claims in the correspondence of their arguments rather than solely on their ability to create statistically significant models of past events (Davidson, 2017; Dow, 2013; Lawson, 2012; Mäki, 2002; Rotheim, 1999). They argue that, by highlighting the unrealistic nature, and oftentimes the downright absurdity, of the central claims of economic orthodoxy, they can rebuild economic theory in terms of pragmatic explorations of how economic practices practically play out in contemporary economies.

From this ontological warring, two central problems still arise: (1) sidestepping philosophical questions about economic and (2) embracing realism as an alternative to logical positivism. First, economic theorists, particularly of the dominant, neo-classical paradigm, sidestep these ontological and epistemological questions. Even though there are logical issues of both validity and cogency in Friedman's analysis of economic methodology, there is no less willingness amongst contemporary economists to embrace this perspective (Hausman, 1992). Friedman apologists have often pointed to misunderstood intentions behind Friedman's disregard

of realistic assumptions (Hirsch & De Marchi, 1990), doubled down on the relative utility of advanced econometrics relative to realist ventures (Granger, 2004), or simply ignored the epistemological problems posed by those meddling sociologists and pointless philosophizers (Fourcade et al., 2015). In other words, for those economists steeped in the orthodox veins of thought, the serious questions scholars raise regarding the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of contemporary economics are often brushed aside or treated as evidence that those questioning the axioms must simply have misunderstood these concepts and should, perhaps, return to an undergraduate economic text to learn a little bit more.

Al-Amoudi and Latsis (2017) attempted to offer a more sympathetic analysis for the lack of engagement with these criticisms, arguing that the chasmous breaks in fundamental assumptions regarding the nature of economics and methodological justifications that render ontological criticisms less persuasive to a vast majority of economists who have a vested interest in maintaining a façade of infallibility in spite of continued failures. Fourcade et al. (2015) specifically analyzed this tendency in the context of the sense of superiority associated with many economists in elite programs, especially relative to the other social sciences. Davidson (2002) referred to this tendency as physics envy: the insistence on developing and arguing for economic theory as immutable and definitive as the laws of natural science. Ultimately, regardless of the reasoning behind the disregard for these ontological questions, their derivative problems remain, and given the evolution and escalation of social and economic issues in recent years, ranging from rampant income disparities (Birdsall, 2001; Hing et al., 2019) to the threat of global climate change (Nordhaus, 2019; Stern, 2008) to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson et al., 2020), the failure of contemporary economics to adequately address these

issues only continues to lay bare the inadequacies of policy, theory, methodology, ontology, and more.

Heterodox Economic Paradigms

Another problem arises from the methodologists' and heterodox economists' responses to these paradigmatic questions; namely, the assertion of realism as a primary barometer for the validity or utility of economic theory cannot successfully overcome the central problems of orthodox economics. To be clear, there are a variety of interpretations of realism and its application to economic ontologies ranging from correspondence theories that argue for the mapping of economic knowledge to their practical occurrence in contemporary economies (Lawson, 1997) to more eclectic visions of economic realism (Mäki, 2008). Ultimately, the depth and scope of contending perspectives regarding what constitutes appropriate realism is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, the central similarities of these views and the realist views implicit in heterodox economists' works offer realism as the obvious antithesis to what they view as the absurdities and the unrealistic assumptions of mainstream work. Davidson's (2002, 2011, 2017) post-Keynesian criticisms are rife with declarations that neoclassical assumptions, like rational expectations, ergodic axioms, and full employment, are not realistic.

What remains unclear and undemonstrated is a well-defined elucidation of the epistemological and ontological commitments these economists are advancing. For example, Lawson (1997) argued for a transcendental realist epistemology (built on Bhaskar, 1978) that informs a social ontology of *economy*. To vastly oversimplify, Lawson contended that researchers should explore the interdependence of human agency, social action, and economic structure much as a chemist might examine the potential energy stored in a molecule of sugar; in other words, transcendental realism urges exploration of the social arrangement of economic

systems with respect to both human agency and the structured tendencies of other causal mechanisms that underlie the emergent phenomena researchers seek to understand. The appeal of such a view, or some of the even more simplistic ontological alternatives, is easy to grasp: (1) it directly refutes Friedman's (and most economists' general) rejection of the necessity for realistic assumptions and (2) it provides a similarly simplistic picture of what economies are: specifically, the observable system of relations, choices, and ongoings that normatively form the backbone of economic observation in the status quo.

Therein lies the problem. Falling back on realism as an alternative to Friedman's logical positivism, fails to address the more concerning gap in this view of economy: the relationship between theorizing and social practice. When economic methodologists delve into the metaphysics of realism as an alternative to logical positivism, they are answering the right question with the wrong answer. The problem with Friedman's view is not that this view advances theories of economics that are so wildly outlandish that they delve into the realm of the absurd; the problem is that neoclassical economic theorists disregard the notion that there could be a link between the social contexts of economic conditions and the universal laws of economic behavior. This disregard is how economic realists get the wrong answer to the right question.

By noting the disconnect between social organization and economic theory (as a justification for discovering natural laws of economics), economic realists seek to draw an arrow between the "real" economy that is observable and the validity of the economic theories they seek to develop. However, this answer fails to answer various issues about the nature of the "real" economy. Whereas neoclassical economists can simply ignore the questions of how the economy "really" functions, heterodox explanations based in the realness of their explanations can be stymied by the relative construction of the economic institutions they explore. Further,

McCloskey's (1998) critique of the rhetorical justification of economic methodology and theory still applies in this realist conception. In the case of the realists, the rhetorical burden simply shifts to the demonstration and construction of what is fundamentally real about their representations of economic worlds rather than the neoclassical rhetorical burden of demonstrating the utility and validity of their advanced mathematical modelling projects. In either case, when economists attempt to validate their theoretical frameworks with reference to underlying structures and the observed behavior of economic agents, they fail to account for the relative construction of those economic institutions, the relative experiences of economic agents interacting with those institutions, and the relative interpretations of economists formulating their understanding of both into theory. Although there are distinctions between the realism espoused by economic methodologists and the myriad perspectives lumped together under the umbrella of heterodoxy, the realist ontology provides the clear contrast with orthodox views necessary for my analysis and remains central to the commitments of many heterodox scholars.

The Need for a New Paradigm

The alternative to both perspectives, then, is to draw the arrow the other way, too: to reject Friedman's distinction between economic theory and social practice *and* to reject an objectivist account that verifies economic theory through correspondence with an understanding of *how the economy really works*. Theory and society are intertwined not because theory needs to reflect society but because people create society to reflect theory (Callon, 2007; Granovetter, 1985; Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Muniesa, 2016). Simply, researchers and economists must begin to understand how the economic theories and explanations that they build are related to and inform the social practices of the worlds that they inhabit. Again, the arrow goes both ways: theory and society cannot be isolated in linear cause-and-effect; they are intertwined and

constantly negotiated in the context of the other. In large part, this is a view influenced by the various post-modern and post-structural thinkers like Foucault (1975/1995), Derrida (1967/1997), Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1983, 1980/1987), Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Lyotard (1979/1984), and many more who urged a rethinking of the *how* of societal organization instead of universal explanations of the *why*. More simply, however, researchers can understand this alternative approach to examining the economy as a reflection of the existentialist adage that existence proceeds essence (Sartre, 1943/1956). The function and the impact of economic thought must be understood in terms of how individuals use them to actively manifest and organize social worlds, and not solely the other way around. By re-thinking the aims of economic theory as attempts to unpack (a) *how* economies are being organized, (b) *how* that organizing affects individuals, and (c) *how* that organizing directs and shapes the possibilities of the future, researchers can reject both the Miltonian positivism that has so isolated the realm of economic inquiry from the worlds that people inhabit *and* the metaphysical trappings of realism that constrain and limit contemporary heterodox theorizing.

This is not to say that economists and social scientists need to lapse into Cartesian solipsism or delve into the realms of the surreal or the absurd to divine principles of economic science (although, there could be a certain humorous appeal to the concept of a surrealist economic philosophy). Post-structural philosophies can offer a useful epistemological framework for continued economic work of varying methodologies and orientations. Recall Lawson's (1997) social ontology of economy. The types of frameworks and ideas that I advance here would actively embrace this type of social constructionist thought; however, as Lawson further developed the transcendental realist epistemology mentioned above, he railed against post-structural relativism as an attempt to cling to the notion of objective truths, independent of

individual belief, rooted in some fundamental understandings of “the way the world is” (p. 234). Beyond having provided little in the way of positive justification for the necessity of seeking objective truth as the end goal of social science, Lawson’s argument only reinforced the previously demonstrated issues with realist ontologies: (1) they restrict transformative and imaginative theorizing; (2) they privilege the analysis of formal economic institutions as the most fundamentally real, much as organizational communication has privileged analysis of formal and managerial contexts (see Cruz & Sodeke, 2020); and (3) they justify the formulation of universal laws based in these problematic analyses. An epistemology that flips this script and begins to understand the contingent and contextual nature of such theorizing is not an abandonment of the utility of academic knowledge production; rather, it is an act of generating practically and theoretically insightful analyses, of embracing the transformative potential of such knowledge, and of working to advance change where possible.

Moreover, it is not a denigration of economics to reject the physics envy and come to work amongst (and more shockingly, perhaps, *with*) the other social scientists who examine similar phenomena. In large part, the lack of cooperation between economics and other disciplines has been attributed to the imperialist attitude of both economics (Mäki, 2020) and communication scholarship (Wildman, 2008). In other words, the approach of both economists and communication scholars has, historically, been one that appropriated the contexts of other disciplines and applied their own theoretical constructs without much regard for the scholarship of other social scientists. Fourcade et al. (2015) argued that this approach to expanding the discipline of economics, specifically, originated from the sense of superiority over other social scientific disciplines constructed by various economists, and this isolation is only furthered by the continued embrace of logical positivism and other paradigmatic precepts that distance

economics from other social science fields. However, the continued expansion of heterodox paradigms and challenges to the neoclassical orthodoxy has failed to break down the siloing that still affects these disciplines. Though there are some notable exceptions, primarily behavioral economics embrace and appropriation of psychological theories (e.g., Harvey, 1998; Kahneman & Tversky, 2000; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), the lack of interaction between economics and other social science disciplines has only served to stymie the growth of all disciplines, all for the sake of manufacturing the image of economics as a positive science. Accepting a different ontological and epistemological approach to economics and to economic inquiry is, in this way, a starting point for embracing cooperation and interaction with other social scientific disciplines that can prioritize dialogue between different schools of thought rather than the establishment of a dominant, economic view of all social domains of inquiry.

Finally, this reconceptualization is not an attempt to dismiss the significant contributions of realist economic thinkers and heterodox economic thought. Quite the contrary! Heterodox economists, through their rejection of neoclassical philosophies, not only provide a foundation for this extended criticism of logical positivism, but they also serve to benefit by rethinking these realist assumptions (implicit or explicit). Varying perspectives offer alternatives to neoclassical economics far beyond the three examples I have offered thus far (namely, post-Keynesian, institutionalist, and feminist perspectives).¹¹ However, contra Davidson's (2011) argument that heterodoxy is hindered by a lack of unity in response to the dominance of neoclassicism,

¹¹ There are schools of thought in economic heterodoxy that do not clearly align with realism. Heterodox economics are by no means monolithic.

economists like Garnett (2006) articulated the necessity of pluralism within economic discourse. Instead of seeing the quest of heterodox economics as a Kuhnian (1970) quest to replace the orthodox view, Garnett and other pluralists argued for scholars to craft scholastic conversations that seeks open debate rather than disciplinary dominance (McCloskey, 1998). As part of this desire for open scholarly dialogue, economists must also address fundamental epistemological and ontological questions that stymie such conversations. Specifically, Garnett (2006) Garnett (2006) cited Lawson's (1997) social ontology as a stumbling-block in achieving the kind of open conversation because of its remnants of paradigmism. Lawson (2010) later rebutted this claim by arguing that the notion of a social ontology can underpin heterodox economics (implicitly or explicitly) without necessitating the development of paradigmatic alternatives to neoclassicism. In this, Lawson is correct. A social ontology is not a stumbling-block for pluralism; rather, the realist underpinnings of Lawson's, and other heterodox thinkers', epistemologies are the obstacle.

Put differently, debates about the nature of the relationship between theory and contemporary economic organization produce insights regarding policy, theory, and social practice; debates about whether economic assumptions correspond appropriately to specific visions of economic reality tend to produce contradictory philosophizing, semantic split-hairs, and mutual resentment. And as much as scholars enjoy metaphysical questions, as is probably clear from the bulk of the review thus far, a healthy community of heterodox opposition to neoclassical orthodoxy requires a better alternative. Thus, moving to a more relativist, post-structural inflected, epistemology that accounts for the contingent construction of knowledge offers both a clearer framework for the types of academic dialogue necessary for productive pluralism and maintains the utility of Lawson's social ontology.

Conceptualizing an Organizational Communication Approach to Economics

Given the critique and alternative ontological view articulated above, I argue that the theoretical and methodological orientation of critical organizational communication scholarship offers a model for how this form of economic inquiry can be developed in heuristically valuable, theoretically insightful, and practically impactful ways. To be fair, understanding economy through lenses of organizing *or* communication alone seem to be a radical extension of all three disciplines' domains (economics, organization studies, and communication). Economists have traditionally disregarded the role of communication as a force of social construction, often treating it as a source of metaphorical lubrication or friction in the gears of the whirring economic machine (Rosa, 2013). Within organization studies, while there is precedent for the examination of economic concepts, scholars have failed to interact in meaningful ways with economic theory (e.g., Abolafia, 2010; Harmon, 2019).

Finally, communication scholars have often treated economic concepts as a mere contextual backdrop for inquiry (e.g., Afifi et al., 2016; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012) while failing to interact in meaningful ways with the social construction and organization of economic realities (Nadesan, 2001). This scholastic indifference has created a distinct lack of theoretically rich debate and interaction, even when these disciplines cross paths. Although this disregard can be considered a result of the imperialist attitude which economists have taken toward the use of other social science theory (Mäki, 2020; Wildman, 2008), thinkers across these disciplines have the responsibility to do more than waltz into each other's domains to the tune of their own theories. At the risk of sounding naively optimistic, there is vast potential for some theoretical remixing, counterpoint, and syncopation if (and only if) academicians make the space for these varied and theoretically rich disciplines to interact. Fortunately, there are a few blueprints that

researchers can build upon to clarify a framework that allows for this critical interrogation and interaction of three distinct bodies of work: postcolonial organizational communication, narrative economics, and the Essex School of discourse analysis.

Post-Colonial Organizational Communication

First, in organizational communication research, which represents a fair intersection of organization and communication theory, postcolonial thinkers have urged scholars to rethink some of the fundamental precepts of what constitutes organization. Cruz and Sodeke (2020) illustrated the way the Eurocentric biases of whiteness and managerialism have prevented organizational and communication scholars from expanding their notion of what it means to organize and how researchers can examine these social practices. They draw upon their ethnographic experiences in markets and community credit groups in Nigeria and Liberia to contrast the liquidity of these organizing spaces with the rigid formality of those represented in contemporary scholarship.

The importance of Cruz and Sodeke's argument is twofold. First, they demonstrated the wealth of opportunity for organizational communication scholarship outside of the normative workplace contexts. Second, and more importantly, they detailed the theoretical blind spots that emerge when scholars ignore the experiences of marginalized people. Their work illuminated the clear shortcomings in organizational theory when scholars fail to look to geographically dispersed organizing that often blends into the background of cultural practices. This argument echoes Nadesan's (2001) call for critical organizational scholars to analyze globalization and economic organization beyond the confines of the typified, singular-noun organization.

Unfortunately, although many have taken to Nadesan's invitation to explore post-Fordist theory, researchers are barely beginning to expand this conception of organization to encompass

new contexts. Moreover, when researchers do work to expand the confines of organization through the inclusion of hate movements (Eddington, 2018, 2020; Jarvis & Eddington, 2021), terrorist groups (Bean & Buikema, 2015; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018), grassroots organizing (Cruz, 2017), and political resistance communities (Pal & Dutta, 2013), they tend to be lumped under the umbrella term *alternative organizing* as if to say the way that people order their societies and lives outside of the normative work context is somehow alien to organization theory. The answer is organizational liquidity (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020). By working to understand economy in terms of fluid dynamics and mercurial interconnection, organizational communication scholarship can form a foundation for new economic inquiry.

Narrative Economics

Economists have begun to incorporate some elements of narrative scholarship and to challenge existing orthodoxy in promising ways. Though researchers (Dimmelmeier et al., 2017; Harvey, 2011b) and students themselves (ISIPE, 2014) have made it clear that there is a warrant for pluralist approaches at various levels within academic economics departments, there has been precious little erosion the domination of neoclassical economic orthodoxy (Dullien, 2017; Vernengo, 2010). However, dissatisfaction with the state of neoclassical theorizing has pushed some researchers to reimagine the relationship between the social and the economic world in unique ways. Robert Shiller's (2016, 2019) work advancing narrative economics is primary among this movement within neoclassical circles. Shiller's work on narrative can be traced to work with fellow Nobel laureate George Akerlof on the psychology of animal spirits wherein narrative is proposed as one of various forces that works to manifest Keynes' (1936/2018) idea of animal spirits, which they define as the animating ideas and feelings, and passions, the individual mental states that drive economies (Akerlof & Shiller, 2009). Of course, although

Akerlof and Shiller (2009) work is entitled *Animal Spirits*, their conception of the animating force that Keynes (1936/2018) described is the initial stumbling block and erroneous through line that limits the revelatory potential of this work.

By conceiving of animal spirits as psychological, rather than social, Akerlof and Shiller (2010) reinforce the neoclassical orthodoxy, by embracing the naturalistic, positivist understanding of economic worlds, rather than challenging it through innovative method and theory. In this way, Shiller's (2016, 2019) exegesis of narrative influences on economic forces can be read as either a revolutionary exposé on the use of epidemiological models to trace the mimetic spread of certain ideas as narrative (from the economist's view) or as a laughably simplistic representation of the social and organizational function of narrative and story dynamics (from the communication scholar's view). It is telling that, of the hundreds of references upon which Shiller (2019) based his understanding of narrative forces in the economy, only two come directly from communication studies (with three other references from work in mass communication) neither of which centrally informs the understanding of narrative or story represented in the work.¹²

The central issue here is not the lack of reference to narrative work in communication scholarship; communication is not, and should not be, the sole proprietor of narrative scholarship. The problem is that Shiller's work abstracts away both the communicative dynamics of narrative spread and the constitutive power of storytelling forces. In essence, by

¹² Shiller (2019) includes reference to Fisher's (1984) original work on the narrative paradigm and Machill et al.'s (2007) work regarding narrative structure in news media.

parameterizing the domain of narrative influence to the psychological instead of the social, Shiller (1987, 2016, 2019) declined to interrogate narrative influence as anything more than a driver of economic outcomes rather than as a constitutive shaper of economic reality. This declination echoes throughout economic scholarship, even in work from many heterodox scholars (Nyman et al., 2021) who have come to treat narratives as a new and exciting variable to place into increasing complex, predictive macroeconomic models (Haldane & Turrell, 2018). In this way, economists ascribe to narratives a fixed, universal, and individual character that is far removed from both post-structural (Boje, 2001; Boje et al., 1997; Browning & Morris, 2012; Clair & Kunkel, 1998; Mumby, 1987) and modernist (Czarniawska, 1998; Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004; Koenig Kellas, 2010, 2018; Labov, 1997) conceptions of narrative in communication scholarship.

By framing narratives only in terms of their predictive force, economists embrace the shell of the concept without any critical engagement with the rest of the scholarly corpus. It is as if communication scholars analyzed the Federal Reserve's communication while operating under the assumption that United States still uses a gold standard. Not only does this distort the pragmatic utility of such an analysis, but it also ignores the theoretical possibility of throwing off these assumptions. The answer, then, is not to abandon the inquiry or its predecessors; instead, researchers must continue to expand it. Although there are clear problems with the current status of narrative economic research—such as the simplistic treatment of communication and narrative theory—those problems provide a pathway for expanding the work and generating new insights, starting with these initial forays and growing into a more complex integration of disciplinary insights.

The Essex School of Discourse Analysis

Finally, there is a community of researchers associated with the Essex School of discourse analysis, who trace their common intellectual heritage to the seminal works of Laclau and Mouffe (1985). These work of these theorists and researchers offers a final example for the types of synthesis that I advance in this piece. Specifically, the researchers in the Essex School build upon and respond to many of the outgrowths and responses to post-structural theory and provide an alternative position for critical social and political analyses. Along these lines, Glynos and Howarth (2007) outlined a social scientific perspective aimed at uncovering the role of logics in social processes as a paradigmatic and methodological alternative to dominant perspectives in both positivist¹³ and social constructionists (termed subjectivist in Glynos & Howarth, 2007) perspectives. Following the same questions of agency and structure, the role of the individual within history and society, and the fragmentary nature of the subject, the concept of logics as presented in this school of thought foregrounds an ontology of lack (building from various works by Foucault, Derrida, and Wittgenstein) and the radical contingency of social arrangements. Here, the researchers of the Essex school use the concept of contingency to encapsulate the necessity of social consent and performance that constitutes the reality of societal structures that remain unfinished or incomplete (Coole, 2000). Marttila (2016, 2019) characterized this aspect of the Essex school's approach as post-foundational, motivated by an assumption that there is no objective ground for meaning and social organization, only a

¹³ Within the context of this specific discussion, the positivist refers to either the post-positivist approach common within communication or the logical positivism of neoclassical economics.

“plurality of partial grounds” (Tønder & Thomassen, 2005, p. 8).

From the perspective of post-structural and critically informed communication scholarship, this is fairly standard stuff; the relational construction of meaning and social organization is central to various contemporary approaches across the communication discipline, even when these ontological assumptions are not explicitly stated (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Baxter, 2011; Biesel, 2010; Hintz, 2019; Kuhn et al., 2017; Mumby, 1987, 1997; Suter, 2018). However, what makes this post-foundational approach of the Essex school unique both within its home discipline of political science and within communication inquiry is the application of these ontological assumptions to the examination of the macro-systems of government and economy which, heretofore, had been reserved for (1) empirical analyses of markedly different persuasions (namely, the logical positivism of neoclassical economists and the, sometimes critical, realism of economic heterodoxy) which fail to question the contingency of social systems or (2) theoretical and rhetorical analyses (e.g., Chaput & Hanan, 2015; Houck, 2001) that provide useful insights into the construction of these social regimes without the analytic force of an empirical basis for reimagining them. The analysis of discursive logics serves as an alternative that resolves both shortcomings by linking the critical analysis of theory to the empirical exploration of their conversational emergence and dominance in social spaces (Glynos et al., 2021). In this way, although this post-foundational rejection of transcendental or innate meaning in social systems is largely uncontroversial in communication scholarship, the application of these ontological assumptions to the analysis of larger systems of social coordination (mostly political systems for scholars in the Essex school) is novel. Thus, in the context of this effort to redefine and expand organizational communication scholarship to the analysis of economic organization, the Essex

school's emphasis on social, discursive logics offers a model framework for creating broader interdisciplinary inquiry informed by epistemological and ontological critique.

Toward Economic Communication Scholarship

These are the lessons that organizational communication scholars must learn if they are to provide a viable, critical alternative to the extant work in economics. All three of these models highlight distinct problems with their respective disciplines and the overarching failures of the academy writ large to address issues related to economic inquiry. Though each of these domains forward a particular view of this work, formulating new directions for scholarship by placing all three of these scholarly communities in conversation offers the clearest pathway to answer these questions related to the organization and reorganization of economic, social worlds.

In sum, the combined insights and new directions offered by postcolonial organizational scholarship, narrative economic work, and research from the Essex school can inform a framework for analyzing the concept *economy* using the theoretical and methodological tools of critical organizational communication scholarship. By examining the organization of economic crisis as a precarious, contingent social arrangement, shaped by narrative logics, and continually reinforced and recreated through discourse, I aim to provide both explication and critique, a description of what has been and is *and* a reimagined pathway forward. I do not argue that this is the *only* way to do economic inquiry; I do argue that this paradigm offers a desperately needed alternative to understanding the ontology and epistemology of economies and economics. This work does not reject the insights of economists of heterodox or orthodox schools; it is skeptical of their foundations and seeks to reactivate questions of their social contingency (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Lacan, 1981).

Thus, in the remainder of this chapter, I provide an overview of three theoretical frameworks: actor-network theory, antenarrative theory, and the communication theory of resilience. By applying these organizational and communication theories to the analysis of economic crisis and by placing these theories in dialogue with various economic counterparts (from both orthodox and heterodox paradigms), I aim to articulate a theoretical framework that: (1) illustrates how the union of economic, organizational, and communication theory can help produce novel practical and political insights regarding the organization of economic crises; (2) demonstrates theoretical gaps in economic analyses that can be filled and explored with the application of organizational and communication theory; and (3) enumerates possibilities for theoretical development in organizational and communication theory through critical engagement with economic theory.

Actor-Network Theory and Performative Economics

Friedman's (1953) dismissal of realism in economics has already previewed one of the central claims of actor-network theory (ANT): economic theory "serve[s] as a filing system for organizing empirical material and facilitating our understanding of it" (p. 7). At its core, ANT is a framework for understanding the relationship between ideas of the world and the organization of the world. Originally working in the realm of science and technology studies and sociology, originators and proponents of ANT used the framework to examine various contexts including the evolution of electric vehicles (Callon, 1986), the use of water-bottles as organizing metaphors (Joerges & Czamiawska, 1998), and the role of God as a non-human social actor in Christianity (Bialecki, 2014). In other words, as Friedman (1953) claimed, theory itself functions as an organizing influence for making sense of and performing economic realities. For many, the use of actor-network theory frames social practices as a relationship between the technological

objects and material realities that individuals inhabit and their interrelation with networks of people and ideas. Take, for example, the work of Holmes (2009, 2014) who used actor-network theory as the basis of his explanation of central bank communication. Along much the same lines as many influential economists (Bernanke et al., 2004; Blinder, 2013, 2018a; Blinder & Krueger, 2004), Holmes (2009) argued that transparent communication from central banks serves to set individuals' expectations for short-term economic futures and, in that way, acts to influence interest rates. In this way, actor-network theory has become a theoretical framework for understanding the construction of economic realities in terms of performance (Callon, 2007). If, through actor-network theory, researchers understand the individual process of economic sensemaking as an interrelation between economic theory, especially as set forth by certain authoritative voices (e.g., governments, central banks, and media), then they can conceive of the enaction of that economic reality as a collective performance of those ideas.

There is, of course, one problem with this view: it does not hold up empirically. In what (Blinder, 2018b) called the great embarrassment of this view, there is little significant evidence to suggest that individuals' economic expectations are influenced by central banks (Kumar et al., 2015)! This is distressing to economists and socioeconomists alike, given that their explanations for the influence of central banks on interest rates (and thereby on economic outcomes more generally) rest on this assumption about the role of communication in economic systems. From a communication perspective this lack of evidence does not seem particularly surprising in the slightest. As social actors, central banks have limited audiences (Blinder, 2018b), most of whom already know or can predict the tone and content of the carefully crafted statements presented by central bank authorities (Harmon, 2019). Simply put, the Fed does not speak to the public; it

speaks to the policy wonks, investors, and economists who already attuned to their foregone conclusions.

But this empirical embarrassment is not a failure of actor-network theory. It is a failure of economists' and socioeconomists' simplistic understanding of the role of communication and narrative in forming those expectations and mediating the relationships between experiences, material conditions, and economic theory. That no empirical evidence has validated the relationship between central bank communication and the general public's economic expectations is not a demonstration that actor-network theory is bunk; it is a demonstration that the simplistic view of communication as a means of transmitting information, rather than as a constitutive force which organizes economies, generally fails to capture the social dynamics at work in economic systems. The way forward, then, is not to throw out baby and bathwater. Instead, I go back to examining the original literature to review and explicate the relationship between communication and actor-network relationships as a theoretical framework for understanding the organization of economic systems. Thus, working with the extant literature on actor-network theory and performative economics, this section outlines how the examination of actor-network relations as discursive (and narrative; Boje, 2001) logics (as in Glynos & Howarth, 2007) can serve to frame this examination of organizing economic crises across various discursive contexts.

Actor-Networks and a Social Economics

Though post-foundationalist theorists Laclau and Mouffe (1985) famously claimed that society does not exist, Latour (2005), one of the originators of actor-network theory, argued instead that society is something that has to be assembled and reassembled by both the individuals and the researchers who wish to live in and study the thing itself. For Latour, the

central question of actor-network theory is the connection, the assemblage of things, beings, and ideas in connection with each other to justify and make sense of human actions. Recalling the Deleuze and Guattari's (1972/1983, 1980/1987) concept of the rhizome, Latour (1999) conceived of the network in actor-network theory as a series of transformations and translations in the process of organizing worlds. These networks are not static and neither are the meanings or ideas conveyed through them or the societies constructed in their image. As a theoretical framework, actor-network theory foregrounds two concepts that are particularly useful given the present examination of economic crises: (1) the translation and arrangement of social organization through actor-networks and (2) the interrelations of human and non-human agents.

First, the question of translation in actor-network theory relates questions of meaning to the constantly shifting relations between individuals, things, and ideas *and* the process of equating unlike things (Callon & Latour, 1981). Callon (2007), again building from Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1983), refers to the French *agencement* to capture the complexity and importance of these relationships. For want of a better English word, *agencement* can be understood as the assemblage of varying actor-network relations that shape both discourse and practice. In combination, the concepts of translation and *agencement* outline one of the central contributions of actor-network theory: understanding social worlds requires following the translations, the practice of equating unlike things, which are networked together, chained so as to construct a composite whole (Baiocchi et al., 2013; Latour, 2005). Remember, actor-network theory stems from work in science and technology studies, and aims at understanding the relationship between social organization, discourse, practice, and the influence of technological and scientific developments. The development of social theory constitutes a kind of technological development that shapes the ways that individuals make sense of and constitute the world around them. Thus,

this framework offers researchers a way to examine how the social construction of these assemblages and translated equivalencies either act to (de)stabilize meaning and social orders (Callon & Latour, 1981) or can result in a multiplicative interpretation and organization of social objects (Law & Singleton, 2005). In other words, by conceiving of economic organization as an interrelated and complex assemblage of translations and equivalencies, it is possible for researchers to examine how the attribution and construction of economic realities is shaped by economic theorizing.

Second, actor-network theorists place the question of the social in conversation with the role that objects and ideas have in conversation with social actors. For critics of actor-network theory, this treatment of objects as agents is a way of reducing the role of the individual or anthropomorphizing the insentient (Munir & Jones, 2004). Whittle and Spicer (2008) go so far as to question the critical productiveness of a theoretical framework that ascribes agency to things instead of people; they claim that the use of non-human actors within the actor-network theoretical framework creates a fundamentally conservative political ethos to the work. Though these readings of actor-network theorists are perhaps ungenerous, they touch on an important question of agential relations and non-human agents. The non-human agency attributed to actor-network theory is not the hylozoism that its critics decry (Schaffer, 1991); instead, Latour (1999) urged individuals to consider the framework “without forgetting the hyphen” (p. 24). The hyphen, as he indicated, is important because it represents the attribution of non-human agency in relation with other individuals and with other non-human actors. The question of insentient action can be conceived of as a bit of methodological prestidigitation for adequately grappling

with the complexity of social organization rather than as an ontological animism a la Cavendish¹⁴ (1664/1994). In other words, actor-network theory conceives of non-humans as actors because humans do in discourse and practice, regardless of the ontological consequences of such an assumption (Czarniawska, 2006).

This statement about ontological consequences is not a declaration that computers have wills of their own (yet); it is a recognition that people often act as though they do. More importantly, researchers working within the context of actor-network theory can interrogate those agential relationships, the networked connections of power and discourse, which are attributed to things and through which individuals' act to control and influence. To further the above example, computers do not control over their users (yet), but when people say that their computers control them, they are making sense of their behavior through metonymy, abstracting away the roles that their boss, coworkers, and clients have in forcing them back to work. As a more contextual example, consider the neoclassical axiom of money neutrality which contends that money quantities do not affect *real*, or inflation adjusted, quantities (Hayek, 1967; Patinkin, 2010).

This axiom of neoclassical economics is explicitly rejected in post-Keynesian thought because it does not play well with either the empirical evidence or contemporary understandings of human behavior (see Davidson, 2011; Keynes, 1936/2018; Rotheim, 1981). To return to the

¹⁴ Margaret Cavendish was a metaphysician from the seventeenth century whose ontological view explained questions about mechanistic, physical causation in terms of the animistic desires of inanimate objects.

questions of actor-network theory, this rejection is both sensible and a potentially fruitful analytic context. Simply, actor-network theory could offer researchers a framework for understanding the relationship between economic actors and the communicatively ascribed agency that money values have in shaping individuals' choices. Again, this is not an attribution of human-like agency to dollar bills, but instead a recognition that examinations of social organization are incomplete without taking into consideration the dynamics of human-object interplay, especially in economic contexts. Thus, understanding this type of linguistic shorthand as a communicative sensemaking practice lies at the heart of this work's application of actor-network theory.

These two facets of actor-network theory frame its contribution to understanding economic systems as performative social constructions. As Law and Urry (2004) recognized, there is power in social science theory and method to materialize certain realities. The economic world is not an extant object waiting for analysis and discovery; it is an active construction that is continually shaped and changed in response to the ideas and theories economists use to make sense of the complex and interconnected patterns of behavior and peculiar conventions through which individuals understand and perform *economy*.

Performing, Enacting, and Communicating Economic Theory

Callon (2007) framed one of the central notions of economic performativity in a brief but profound summary: "to predict economic agents' behaviors an economic theory does not have to be true; it simply has to be believed by everyone" (p. 322). This is the fundamental difference between the theories and laws of economic science (or any social science) and those of the natural sciences: the predictive power of these theories depends on human action, a notoriously fickle thing. Friedman (1953) himself acknowledged this difficulty in detailing a positive vision economic science by noting that the individuals doing the work of analyzing economic systems

are part of those same systems. This is a piece of the puzzle, not the thing entire. Eschewing a full recapitulation of the paradigmatic qualms presented earlier in this chapter, the epistemological question is not merely that of providing an objective standpoint for researchers to act as neutral observers of economic activity; the question is whether or not there exists an economic object to examine in the first place! And from a performative economic framework there is no such economic object because economies are nothing more than the product of the collective sensemaking practices of individuals who rely upon the concept for a bit of coherence regarding their place in the complex interrelations of production, consumption, expenditure, labor, investment, and more (Callon, 2007).

This is not to say that the concept of economy does not, through discourse and social practice, appear to cohere as an entity for examination; quite the contrary, the fact that humans construct and act as though there is some extant economic system in which they participate is exactly the point. In this way, the fundamental reality of economic systems derives from their production and performance by individuals who rely upon certain logics (Glynos & Howarth, 2007) and the images of marketplaces constructed by academics (Callon, 2007; Muniesa, 2016) to organize their realities.

The utility of this performative approach to economics, informed by actor-network theory, becomes even more clear when placed in conversation with contemporary economic literature that attempts to address similar questions related to the limitations of orthodox inquiry. Sternberg (2020) recently described academic economists' approach to inquiry as "appear[ing] unbidden on any doorstep they please with a box of mostly useless tools in search of problems." (para. 2). This claim derives from a discussion of Kay and King's (2020) argument regarding the importance of accounting for *radical uncertainty* in economic inquiry—an altogether silly

argument for anyone outside of neoclassical dogma which questions the impossibility of perfectly divining future states through the reliance on historical data. The interesting aspect of both Sternberg's (2020) claim and the context of Kay and King's (2020) work is that they collectively illustrated the importance of understanding economic organization through the lens of performativity. It also happens that Sternberg is entirely wrong: economists' tools are not useless and they are not looking for the problems—they are creating them. Take, for example, Williams' (2020) work on the treatment of human services clients (namely those experiencing homelessness, unemployment, and other forms of financial precarity) as the assets of the nonprofit organizations that purport to serve them. Williams described how the implementation of business models and the interpretation of social services in their image (as in Doganova & Muniesa, 2015) worked to legitimize and rationalize the economic value of these nonprofits. And in doing so, by conceiving of those in need as a revenue stream, rather than as an end in and of themselves, Williams argued that the logics of social services have shifted in response to the prevailing logics of business and economic theory.

This work is largely in keeping with the research done in organizational communication regarding the transformation of nonprofit organizing in response to prevailing neoliberal logics of contemporary organizing, (e.g., Elers et al., 2021; Südkamp & Dempsey, 2021). The transformative practices of contemporary capitalism, such as the insidiously brilliant and complex work in the mathematics and design of complex financial instruments¹⁵ which are oft

¹⁵ These complex instruments make Boje's (2001) antenarrative framework seem like a revolutionary act of clarity in academic writing.

blamed for financial instability and risk (Blinder, 2013; Coval et al., 2009; Gorton, 2010), affect the organization of economies at all levels by shaping the discursive logics and moral values upon which these systems are instituted and performed (Fourcade & Healy, 2007). These discourses influence the social pressures and institutional forces that shape economic action (Galbraith, 1969; Harvey, 1998), but they are not merely internal, psychological phenomena; they are manufactured and reinforced through the continual social performance of economic realities.

The concept of performative economics forces researchers to confront the idea that the presentation of economic inquiry as a positive, objective venture does not necessitate the removal of value claims; it necessitates their essentialization, obfuscation, and materialization through the discourses of *science*. More than this, through the professional, political, and moral trajectories (Fourcade, 2017; Fourcade & Khurana, 2017) of these academic ventures, individuals begin to enact and perform these realities as they make sense of their everyday through these economic logics. This is, of course, not to claim that individuals go around thinking of their purchasing decisions in terms of a comparative utility function (rightly citing Hicks, 1934). Instead, the influence of these economic logics has so fundamentally permeated business, media, and governance that “the criteria of [economic] efficiency often serve as a standard for evaluating the legitimacy of...programs and regulations when other criteria have been pushed aside” (Fourcade, 2010, p. 235). As such, because of the primacy of these economic evaluations in terms of law and social policy, questioning, disregarding, or attempting to replace these standards is not simply an intellectual transgression worthy of ridicule, it is as Butler (1990) spoke of the delegitimizing of any discourse perceived as radical: “the price of not conforming is the loss of intelligibility itself” (p. xviii). And even though the political price of

such transgressions is seemingly on the decline with generational shifts in political thought and burgeoning distrust of neoliberal capitalism (Rehmann, 2016), the professional cost of violating academic norms of intelligibility persist (Harvey, 2015). In this way, the continuing reconstruction of these logics is a matter of economic performance, but the next question remains: how do these logics persist and propagate themselves in times of instability, disruption, and crisis?

Communication Theory of Resilience

Economists and other social scientists are wont to think of resiliency¹⁶ in terms of the ability of systems, markets, and societies to survive disruption and rebuild normalcy in the aftermath of disruptive events (Hallegatte, 2014). This view is largely in keeping with the general concept of resilience that derives from most of social science literature on organizational resilience (e.g., Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011), psychology (e.g., Masten & Reed, 2002; Richardson, 2002; Rutter, 1999), and even natural science explorations of climate resilience (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014). At their core, these understandings conceive of resilience as a property of social and natural objects. For example, psychological resilience research has examined the various effects of specific adverse events on children and their ability to withstand and positively reintegrate after disruptive events (Rutter, 1979, 1999; Skodol, 2010).

¹⁶ Throughout this work, I use the term resiliency to refer to the trait-based understanding of this theoretical concept. This term is theoretically distinct from the use of resilience, which refers to the social processes of constructing new normals (Buzzanell, 2010).

In other words, for most researchers, resilience is a property to be cultivated and sought after. It is the necessary ability to not only survive but also to return to a thriving state. Economists, specifically, have a unique outlook on resilience. Much of the economic work regarding resilience relates to the question of supply chains and begins with an assumption of trade-offs. In this way, economists theorize of resilience as an alternative to efficiency within supply chains and markets (e.g., Otto et al., 2017); the greater the capability of the system to respond to or account for disruption, the greater its inefficiency in times of normalcy. Given the orthodox economic focus on self-restoring equilibriums and market efficiencies, this conception of resilience makes sense; however, this conception of resilience still fails to address various issues related to economic policymaking and the very real occurrences of disruption that affect both firms and individuals which have become more frequent, more intense, and more damaging in an increasingly connected world (Maluck & Donner, 2015).

Communication researchers have taken a different tack. Beginning with Buzzanell's (2010) articulation of the communication theory of resilience, communication scholars have undertaken the reexamination of resilience as a social process of adapting, transforming, and constructing new normal (Buzzanell, 2018a, 2018b). The importance of this redefinition of resilience is two-fold: (1) it conceives of resilience as a collective, social action (Ahn et al., 2021) and (2) it re-orientes resilience research toward the discursive construction of potential futures (Betts et al., 2021) rather than the maintenance or restoration of pre-disruption states. Along with the five communicative processes that Buzzanell (2010) originally articulated, communication researchers have used and extended the communication theory of resilience to encompass a wide variety of contexts and methods aimed at examining how resilience can be understood as a social process rather than as a characteristic. Contra other communication

perspectives on resilience (e.g., theory of resilience and relational load; Afifi et al., 2019; Afifi et al., 2016), Buzzanell's (2018b) work on the communication theory of resilience foregrounds the communicative tensions between individuals' understanding of the world as it is and as it could be, namely, "the possibilities for change" (p. 15). Betts et al. (2021) furthered this idea, arguing that narrative accounts of disruptive events capture the dynamic interplay between these possible futures and the social realities of disruption. In other words, as people recounted experiences of disruption, they made sense of possible futures in terms of the logics of disruptive events.

In the context of this examination of economic organization as a communicative, social construction, I turn to the communication theory of resilience to understand how individuals socially and collectively make sense of and create new normals in the face of disruptions. Though this contradicts normative approaches to economic resiliency through its emphasis on both the individuals and social processes, rather than extant characteristics of systems, these contradictions are theoretically fruitful for this type of inquiry. By focusing on economic resilience instead of economic resiliency, I aim to examine the communicative processes of economic organization in crisis as people make sense of and respond to these types of disruptions. This is not to say that, in this framework, I disregard the significant body of work related to economic resiliency. Quite the contrary: I aim to place these views and other aspects of economic orthodoxy and heterodoxy in conversation with the communication work on resilience theorizing. To this end, this section describes and theorize sensemaking and policy construction in response to economic crisis as communication processes to offer a lens for examining the communication processes at work as individuals experience and respond to economic crises.

Communicating Economic Disruptions

The communicative processes of responding to and making sense of various disruptions is fundamental to the communication theory of resilience. In many ways, the hermeneutics of disruption lie at the origins of communicative resilience. Starting with Buzzanell's (2010) articulation of the communication theory of resilience, the original account of communicative resilience begins with a litany of disasters and devastations that can serve as the impetus for resilience, the return to normalcy, the proverbial "bouncing back" which Buzzanell later eschewed as the defining character of human resilience. More recent work in this vein has even gone so far as to extend the five original communication resilience processes by including *critiquing and resisting the status quo* as a sixth resilience process (Hintz et al., 2021). Building from an analysis of healthcare workers' accounts of combatting the COVID-19 pandemic without adequate personal protective equipment, Hintz et al. (2021) contended that material, discursive, and symbolic dimensions of the various disruptions in workers' lives triggered resilience and illuminated the communication processes related to critique and resistance.

Conceiving of the relationship between disruption and resilience in terms of the interpretive process of resisting the status quo is, perhaps, a more useful frame, then, for accounting for the variant character of disruptions that individuals face. Though it is unclear from the contexts of the prevailing body of literature in communicative resilience, disruptive events need not always be unambiguously negative; disruption can manifest in varied and ambiguous ways (Scharp et al., 2021). Perhaps one of the clearest examples of the ambiguous nature of disruptive events comes from Agarwal and Buzzanell's (2015) analysis of resilience labor processes among disaster-relief workers. Though the disaster context itself is overwhelmingly negative, the humanitarian workers' descriptions of the resilience labor itself is

fraught with tensions between the devastation wrought and the aid rendered; there is joy in helping people recover from disasters. This work has interesting implications for the understanding of communicative resilience as it demonstrated the entanglement of personal vulnerability and resilient potentiality at the heart of such humanitarian work. In the context of both Hintz et al. (2021) and Agarwal and Buzzanell (2015), the question of disruption itself, and its contested nature, became central to the construction and implications of resilience. In other words, questioning, reconsidering, and contesting the fundamental character of disruptive events is essential to the social construction of resilience (Pasupathi, 2001), but it is in those communicative processes where the critical potential of examining resilience becomes clear.

The contrast between the communicative approach to examining disruption and resilience and the economic approach is similarly clear. In large part, economists' approach to understanding crisis is defined by their modelling techniques; crises are categorized as either endogenous, predicted within models, or exogenous, not predicted within models. Thus, in response to crisis, economists are wont to either exogenize crises and push aside accountability or blame for their material impacts or to endogenize crises and responses to better understand, model, and predict them in the future (Benigno et al., 2020). This tendency also reinforces the dogmatic emphasis on equilibria and self-correcting markets that characterizes neoclassical economic views (Fama, 1965; Walras, 1954). In this way, as economists consider policy options and alternatives, they think of creating automatic stabilizers (Dolls et al., 2010) and modelling the utility of specific policy options to determine optimal response strategies (Reissl et al., 2022). These invisible hand approaches (Smith, 1776/2015) are not without political implications of their own. Recognizing this is especially important considering the dynamics of capitalist economic systems that actively construct *and* garner legitimacy from crisis conditions and

periodic downturns without actively accounting for the material consequences of this instability for people (Habermas, 1973/1988). Overall, the important consideration for economists assessing and considering policymaking in the crisis context seems to be primarily the preservation and maintenance of current economic models with minor adjustments to account for and protect against the possibility of similar crises in the future.

But crises are characterized by the inability of current systems and practices to address critical social, political, and economic needs (Ahn et al., 2021; Seeger & Sellnow, 2016); in turn, resilience is the act of addressing these inabilities, adapting, and transforming the disruptive state into new normalcy (Buzzanell, 2018b). Researchers must recall the distinction between designed resiliency and enacted resilience. In this way, resilience transcends the planning and designing of systems or policies which prevent disruption (Kapucu & Sadiq, 2016). Put simply, counterfactual disruptions that *might* have occurred make for poor crisis contexts! For this analysis of economic organization, this recognition is particularly important. The communicative construction of resilience and its relation to the interpretation of disruptive events is key to understanding the social processes that undergird economic phenomena.

Save the Watches: Regarding Crisis and Disruption

Examining the social underpinnings of economic phenomena is also a driving factor behind the choice to frame the studies that comprise this dissertation in terms of the communication theory of resilience rather than in terms of organizational crisis theorizing. Though organizational and communication crisis researchers have a long and significant history of contributing to the social scientific exploration of managing legitimacy, apologia, and public relations, among other various social dynamics of organizing and crisis (e.g., Seeger et al., 1998; Ulmer et al., 2011), this body of literature, in broad terms, centers crisis in ways that would

distract from the goal of examining economies as processes of social organization. In short, the object of inquiry in crisis literature is crisis, the malfunction, the response, the recovery *and* the implications of crisis for organizing. This is largely equivalent to the treatment of these issues in economic theorizing; crisis is a deviation, it is a break with normality that exists in paradoxical duality with the ideals of normality (Seeger et al., 1998). Communicative resilience takes a subtly but profoundly different tack to understanding these situations, using the language of disruption instead of the language of crisis.

Although both the bodies of work in communicative resilience and organizational crisis theorizing refer to the concepts of disruption and crisis in uncritical ways, I use the term disruption throughout this dissertation intentionally to denote the differences between the way that these bodies of work understand and frame their analysis of organization. Betts and Buzzanell (2022) clarified this distinction by working to reframe discussions of economic disruption from risk mitigation and systemic risk frameworks (which echo the work of crisis theorists) toward that of a communicative perspective of economic resilience. Whereas much of the economic work regarding policy and systemic responses to disruptions, crisis, disaster, etc. centralize prevention or preparation of resiliency in response to some possible problem, a communicative perspective emphasizes the flexible enactment of resilience, the active construction of new normalcy in times of disruption. This is the difference between creating an economic system of automatic stabilizers that should account for most possible harms in the case they are needed versus a flexible and wholistic understanding of economic systems that includes a willingness to adapt and transform extant practices in new ways to respond to evolving circumstances.

Whereas crisis theory centralizes the examination of crisis as a way to better prepare for crisis in the future, resilience theory focuses on examining crisis as a context for understanding the social processes of enacting resilience in times of disruption. In both cases, the lessons, the narratives of disruption/crisis are significant in that they lay a framework for or demonstrate the potential of change and transformation (Betts et al., 2021; Seeger & Sellnow, 2016), but though they are not mutually exclusive, these analytic frameworks for understanding the relationship between organization and disruption are in tension with each other. This is spending billions of dollars to build seawalls along the Texas coast to unironically protect oil and gas refineries from the effects of climate change (Davlasheridze & Fan, 2019). Of course, such ventures are not without their merits; sea walls and levees can be just as important for protecting people as job guarantee policies and other structural transformations of economic systems. But levees break.

The point here is not to deny the utility of organizational crisis theorizing; quite the contrary, the types of theoretical and practical insights regarding both organizational and political transformation in the wake of disaster that crisis scholars have argued for have dramatically improved peoples' lives *and* the possibility of creating change in the future. Mitigation and preparation efforts may sometimes obfuscate the need for other kinds of change, but they also create a foundation for it, too. It is difficult for people to question the logics that resort to building levees when they are drowning for want of one.

There are certainly more theoretical nuances and intersections to examine more closely regarding communication, resilience, and crisis, further deconstruction of those distinctions are beyond the scope of this particular work. In sum, the primary contrast between understanding the economic contexts under examination in this work as crisis versus as disruption lies in the aims of this work. The central purpose here is not to determine optimal responses to similar crises in

the future or to examine how such crises might be prevented in the future. Instead, I conceive of the relationship between the economy and political systems as more fluid and intertwined and performative. Especially as they relate to economic policymaking, the questions of this dissertation center interrogating why people are letting sea levels rise than where we should start building seawalls.

Economic Policy: Communicating New Normals

Resilience as a social process is fundamentally related to questions of time and the future and their discursive relationship with the past and present; it is about constructing new normals. In the context of economic crises, the negotiation of the future takes place in debates over policy remedies and financial reactions to current economic conditions. In communication research, Canary (2010a, 2010b) framed the analysis of communication and policy in terms of knowledge construction. Specifically, she argued that individuals' understandings of and reliance on policy shape how they organize and make sense of current conditions and future possibilities. This is similar to work done by Buzzanell and Liu (2005) and Kirby and Krone (2002) regarding the organizing influences of work-family policies. Within this work, Canary (2010b, Canary et al., 2015) used the frame of structuration activity theory to integrate the insights of micro- and macro-manifestations of policy knowledge and discourse. However, policy knowledge does not always expand the realms of future possibilities; sometimes it constrains how individuals organize the potentialities of new normals. In this sense, I argue that researchers should understand policy *creation* as an organizational process steeped in the communicative processes of resilience, the social construction new normals in response to disruptions.

In many ways, the failures of economic policy to account for the complex and shifting nature of economic crises relates to paradigmatic and methodological influences. In this way,

specific assumptions of neoclassical economic thought reinforce a simplistic and ill-suited approach to policymaking and resilience. For example, Kirman's (1989, 1992) work on questions of rationality and the representative individual, a utility maximizing golem that takes the place of human actors in neoclassical economic models, demonstrated how the views of human behavior and decision-making assumed in orthodox economic thinking are ludicrously simplistic.

In further analysis, Kirman (1993) used the examples of ant behavior, and the similarity with human crowding and herding effects, to illuminate questions regarding stock-market behavior. Kirman's comparison of human behavior to ants is apt in more ways than one, considering the influence of the actor-network theory framework on performative economic thought. But the question remains, despite Kirman's rejection of neoclassical thought regarding rational human action: what is the alternative? Kirman (1992) answers, as many proceeding economists have, too, that the answer lies in the heterogeneity of economic agents. Put simply, economic actors are not the same, and even if individuals encountered the world *ceteris paribus*, their behaviors would differ. This recognition has driven the evolution of agent-based models that attempt to represent macroeconomic outcomes by modelling the behaviors of individual agents within the models (Delli Gatti et al., 2007; Delli Gatti et al., 2005). Agent-based modelling techniques allow for different agents to vary in their actions, in their frames of reference, and in their justifications for actions. Though these types of models can offer interesting insight into some operations of social systems, they still fail to capture the complex dynamics of choice mechanics which are not the type of *a priori*, individual mental calculus assumed in both agent-based models and neoclassical frameworks.

Moreover, the programming and evaluation of these models can only account for policymaking as a pre-conceived solution to economic disfunction. To be clear, this work is more practically and theoretically useful than the typical dynamic stochastic general equilibrium models that dominate neoclassical methodology (Colander et al., 2008); however, these models are stymied by computational and methodological issues related to the complexities of social interaction and a lack of theoretical foundation from which to build. Though the inception of agent-based models is a promising venture for economic theory-building and policymaking, these techniques further obviate the need for engagement with research that foregrounds social interaction. And for policymaking, especially, because of the nature of computer modelling methodologies, both agent-based and other modelling techniques are limited to conceiving of policy alternatives and options as pre-ordained, pre-designed resiliencies, not as acts of resilience (as discussed above).

Additionally, despite the growing relevance and challenge to economic orthodoxy presented by agent-based modelling and other techniques, policymakers have widely ignored the systemic failures of academic economics (Stilwell, 2019). The resultant reliance on neoclassical models as policymaking frameworks for *both* sides of political debates shapes policies in a number of damaging ways by (1) reifying non-interventionist logics, (2) limiting the scope of policy responses, and (3) abstracting away the human cost of economic crisis. First, as previously discussed, the dogmatic and sometimes fanatical reverence for the independence of market mechanisms from government systems is key within neoclassical theory. But when it comes to government policymaking and responses to serious crisis, the assertion that government action can only do harm becomes a rallying cry for inaction without consideration of the

consequences (Wilkinson, 1983) across a variety of systemic economic issues and in the cases of acute crisis (Bilchitz, 2007; Kabeer, 2004; Sharman & Perkins, 2017).

Second, when crises are allowed to reach the level of devastation that short-circuits the general political unwillingness to intervene in economic organization, the reliance on orthodox economic thought vastly limits the possible government responses to varying crises by both (a) justifying limited action and (b) limiting justified action. Researchers often blame limited government action in response to the financial crisis in the Fall of 2007 for failing to prevent and for prolonging the impact of the subsequent recession (Fligstein et al., 2017). Policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis have elicited similar reactions from economists and other scholars (Kim, 2021; Ku & Brantley, 2020). Among them, Stephanie Kelton's (2020) recent exposition of modern monetary theory was a masterclass in exposing the implications of debt hawkishness and other poor justifications for inadequate responses to large-scale crises. Additionally, recent work has highlighted how various economic logics served to justify the Federal Reserve's failure to pursue new policy options in response to changing economic circumstances (Blinder, 2013; Fligstein et al., 2017). Similarly, work from Moreira and Hick (2021) comparing the responses to both the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis discussed the further limitations of the stimulus efforts in 2007 given the insufficiencies of the mechanisms for dispersing and disbursing aid to those in need. Although they praised the agility of government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, they noted the continued necessity for policy innovation in times of crisis as responses to, not solutions for, economic disruptions.

Finally, the consideration and evaluation of economic policy alternatives abstracts away the human costs of economic crisis. By design, the statistical methods of analysis mandated in neoclassical thought aggregate and objectify the impact of both economic disasters and the

potential of policy responses. Feminist economists have, for years, decried the failure of aggregate economic measures to adequately account for women's economic contributions (Barker & Kuiper, 2003; Tescari & Vaona, 2014; Waring, 1988). Both systemically and in acute crisis, economic indicators fail to capture many of the important human costs worth considering when designing and implementing policy measures in response to crisis. In sum, these three related impacts of neoclassical dominance in economic policymaking shape and act to limit both the scope of policy knowledge and its execution and implementation in ways that must be challenged.

Antenarrative & Storytelling Organization

Organizational communication scholars have, of late, embraced the theoretical framework of communicative constitution of organizing (CCO) to theorize organization as a thoroughly communicative concept, a social ontology of organizational phenomena (Bisel, 2010). Since the (largely, albeit contested) embrace of this concept within the discipline, organizational communication scholars writing for communication and organization studies audiences alike have attempted to take what originated as a mantra for emphasizing communication in organizational analyses into a coherent (again, albeit contested) theoretical framework for scholarship using a mishmash of methods including discourse analysis, quasi-ethnographic approaches, textual analyses, or some combination of perspectives that were largely lacking explicit development or clarity in published articles (Boivin et al., 2017). This evolution is curious in the sense that the recognition from Putnam et al. (2008) that communication is constitutive of organizing is inspired by Weick (1969, 1976, 1995) and referenced (Boje, 2001) narrative methods, while simultaneously claiming that the concept had not been satisfactorily explicated in the literature. The evaluation of whether Boje's (2001, 2008)

view of antenarrative as a theoretical framework for understanding how people make sense of the world through the interplay of “retrospective, now, prospective, transcendental, and reflexiv[e]” storytelling (Boje, 2008, p. 5) constituted a thorough explication of a communicative ontology is not a point for this piece. It is nonetheless demonstrable that the antenarrative framework, as an approach for centering communication in examining organizational phenomena, is not only a clear precursor to the extant dominance of CCO in organizational communication, but also is underutilized as a theoretical framework given its relation to both narrative (Fisher, 1984, 1989) and organizational sensemaking theories. (Weick, 1995)

Antenarrative emphasizes the notion that the social phenomena that individuals understand as an organization (as a noun) is the result of collective social, storytelling processes that are better understood as organizing (as a verb). This insight derived from Weick’s (1976, 1995) understanding of organization as a retrospective sensemaking process. Boje (1991, 1995, 2001; Boje et al., 1997) imported this concept into the world of narrative theory to provide a basis for: (1) questioning the devaluation of storytelling relative to narrative; (2) conceiving of fragmented, polysemous, polyphonic emergence of narrative in situ; and (3) rethinking organizational change and possibilities. The fundamental metaphor for organization, in Boje’s conception, is that of a play, *Tamara*, by the playwright John Krizanc (1989) wherein audiences intermingle with actors throughout an entire house with various plotlines and interactions occurring in different rooms and to different ends.

In many ways, Boje conceived of organizational processes as a *Choose Your Own Adventure*¹⁷ novel where members cannot simply go back a page and choose another option; instead, the only way to get the whole story is through social interaction. Had Boje theorized this concept a little later, or Mark Burnett been a little quicker on the draw, the discursive metaphor might have been a reality TV show like *Survivor* where conversations and controversies occur in various places, between various people, across time. However, in the end, when the tribe is left to vote, they rely on the things that they have seen and the conversations they have had to form a coherent narrative for what has happened and how to proceed. It is this fragmented process of storytelling across place and time, through a cacophony of voices, from which the phenomena of organization emerge. Epistemologically, the fragmentation of organization leaves scholars with two challenges: (1) how to capture the dynamics of these interactions, especially when they can be significantly more complex than 20 strangers on an island and (2) how to account for the construction of power and oppressive logics of these interactions when attempting to unpack and understand the organizational phenomena at work.

But researchers should not shirk away from these epistemological challenges. The examination of organization and sensemaking practices forwarded in the antenarrative framework require researchers, and their audiences, to think of the manifestation of social worlds in new ways. The utility of the theory, therefore, lies in its requirement that researcher move beyond the search for coherence and the desire for harmony. If the construction of the social

¹⁷ Choose Your Own Adventure novels were a children's series that presented users with various options as to the potential actions a character could make.

world is an active discursive process, it is in those sites of disjuncture that researchers are able to most clearly peer into the abyss and observe as individuals grasp at the edges of coherence. Moreover, it is through theorizing and examining these discursive ruptures in narrative sensemaking that this inquiry goes beyond the mere description of these communicative practices toward a critical interrogation of the social and political logics at work in those practices *and* toward a reimagining and restorying of possible futures.

Performing and Storying Organization: Unpacking Antenarrative Theory

At its foundation, Boje's (2001, 2008) concept of antenarrative begins with the distinction between story and narrative. Boje (2001) began the initial articulation of antenarrative organization theory by lamenting the privileged status given to narrative in social science inquiry. By disregarding the importance of story researchers ignore the living, improper, fragmented energy qualities of storytelling in favor of the structured and formal qualities often ascribed to narrative. Beyond these qualitative distinctions in the ethos of narrative and story, however, Boje (2001) defined stories as the form of living and active accounting of events that contrasts with retrospective narratives that give stories a sense of plot, direction, and time. However, in between these spaces of lived story and recounted narrative exists antenarrative; the incoherent fragments through which individuals transform story into narrative. And herein lies the importance of antenarrative: insofar as it shapes story into narrative, it guides how individuals make sense of lived experience. Antenarrative is a double-entendre that makes use of the dual meaning of the term *ante*: it is at once a prospective bet made before seeing an end state (*ante*, as in poker) and a prefix indicating its primacy relative to narrative (*ante*, as in before).

These are the basic foundations of Boje's (2008) organizational storytelling framework. Though the division between story, antenarrative, and narrative are fairly clear, however, their

import for understanding organizational and communicative practices require explication. To this end, the wealth of organization and management research that has embraced the antenarrative framework serves as useful starting point. Hinderaker's (2017) exploration of the Ordain Women movement and dissent in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is particularly instructive, as it both described the narrative construction and justification of dissent practices and critiqued the narrative legitimation of church doctrine that remained antithetical to the movement's political goals. For a more contextual example, the work conducted by Smith and Boje (2011) examined the narrative construction of toxicity (as in toxic assets) during the beginning of the financial collapse and the great recession. Their work detailed the narrative construction and then exacerbation of public attitudes towards perceived financial imprudence as narratives changed from troubled to toxic. Smith and Boje (2011) argued that this narrative shift recharacterized the economic agency responsible for the "hazmat" (p. 345) cleanup: TARP. In both cases, these works illustrate the dual utility of this kind of narrative inquiry: to describe the construction of social realities and critique their projection into the future.

The force of prospective narrative logics is the final aspect of antenarrative inquiry that I explicate for the purposes of this work. To frame the productive force of these narrative logics, Boje (2014) turned to a metaphorical application of quantum physics principles. First, building from Heisenberg's (1930/1949) uncertainty principle, quantum narrative theory suggests that, like observations of infinitely small particles in space, the observation of narrative dynamics inherently shapes them. In some ways, this observation is a simple recognition that the bases of objective management scholarship must be questioned; however, Boje (2014) moved beyond the simple illustration of the epistemological-ontological consequences of quantum physics by articulating the four facets of the COPE quantum storytelling model. Much as quantum physics

forced natural scientists to question the interaction their methods and fundamental reality, so, too, Boje's quantum framework urged management scholars to interrogate how storytelling organization manifests critical, ontological, positivist, and epistemic storytelling. Again, Hinderaker's (2020) work demonstrated the value of this type of thinking through her analysis of the Protect LDS Children movement. Through her application of the COPE framework and a quantum antenarratology method, Hinderaker demonstrated how the spiral and rhizomatic character of antenarrative shaped the social construction of abusive religious practices as a settled truth of the faith, rooted in religious and historical practice, and thereby a fixed organizational reality likely to be continued into perpetuity. In this way, much like actor-network theorizing, antenarrative forces are predictive because they actively shape both the performative and ontic realities of organizational immanence.

The application of antenarrative approaches to organization in the context of this examination of economic organizing mandates a shift in the theoretical relationship between narrative and economics. Whereas normative approaches to economics and narrative (e.g., Nyman et al., 2021; Shiller, 2019) attempt to understand the influences that narratives have within economies, an antenarrative perspective frames the economy itself *as* narrative. This is the same ontological shift as in CCO theorizing, but when applied to the organization of economies, the methodological and theoretical reconsiderations are correspondingly unique. As previously mentioned, economists from various paradigmatic backgrounds are beginning to interact with narrative methods and theories. Shiller (2019) specifically advanced a vision of narrative economics that builds on epidemiological models and examines narrative spread *within* economies. But what these perspectives fail to capture, beyond the ontological dynamics of a constitutive, narrative view of economies, is the politics and power that operate within narrative

(Mumby, 1987, 1989), and thus they do not benefit from the critical insights and theoretical potential offered by these kinds of explorations. As such, I use antenarrative theory as both a theoretical framework for understanding organizing dynamics *and* as a methodological tool for unpacking the social dynamics of economies in terms of narratives, story, and power. This approach generates new insights by examining the discursive construction of economy at varying levels and then works to understand the relationship between and amongst them to capture the dynamics of incoherence, fragmentation, negotiation, and tension within.

Economic Communication: Organizing the Present Inquiry

The above sections provide a critical interrogation and review of the extant literature in communication studies, organization studies, economics, and other relevant fields related to the present inquiry. In sum, the sections accomplish the dual goals of providing a new model for economic inquiry and presentation of the theoretical framework that grounds the present examination of economic crises. Combined, these critiques of normative economic approaches and organizational communication theory map out a vision of economic communication research that humanizes and contextualizes the social creation of economic systems and behaviors. Through this approach, I argue that researchers can work toward new and generative insights that are simply inaccessible in most inquiry. This type of meaningful analysis, however, can only occur when there is an explicit attempt to cross these disciplinary divides. I aim for the synthesis of economic and communication theory presented in this chapter, and furthered in the remainder of this dissertation, to serve as an opening foray in bridging that divide and mapping out inquiry.

Now, in this context, this final section of the review turns to an explicit discussion of the particular aims of the studies that comprise this dissertation. Generally, the three theoretical frameworks described above focus this work on examining how individuals discursively: (1)

make sense of economic realities with or without relation to economic theory; (2) construct future-oriented, transformational logics in their accounts of disruption; and (3) embed notions of power and other logics in those contemporaneous accounts. However, it is necessary to place these foci in conversation with the disruption and discursive contexts presented in the introduction. In the following preview of the proceeding studies of this dissertation, I offer an overview of the research questions that I seek to answer in the context of each study and explicate the varying emphases of these research questions further in the context of each individual study and their connection to the central aim and question of this work:

RQ1: How do media accounts and individual accounts of economic disruption narratively organize economies and the potential for economic change?

Study One: News Media

First, the examination of news media accounts of the crisis through the lens of grand narrative analysis (Boje, 2001) offers an initial look at the construction of crisis through a metaphorical wide-angle lens. This study provides a firm foundation for the second by looking to the wide variety of accounts of these varying disruption contexts in news media and critically examining their constructed understanding of the economy generally, the crisis specifically, and the possible ways forward. In this way, this study presents an analysis of economic disruption akin to the work of (Boje et al., 2004) regarding the organizational storytelling practices of news media during the Enron scandal. Thus, by working with and moving beyond the simple concept of news framing (Entman, 1993), this work analyzes news media as more than a separate part of the process of economic organizing, but as an essential facet of the storytelling practices that works in and through individuals' experiences and government policymaking to organize social reality behind the concept of economy. Thus, this study answers the research questions:

RQ2: How does news coverage of disruption narratively organize the social reality, collective understanding, and values of economy?

RQ3: How does news coverage of economic disruption organize the potential for economic change?

Study Two: Individual Accounts

Second, the individual-level accounts of economic crisis which are the object of analysis in the final study of this dissertation should serve to illuminate a very different understanding of economic crisis. Recalling the previously mentioned work of Caroline Bird (1968) and Case and Deaton (2019), all of whom took seriously the individual experience of economic conditions, the second study conducted for this dissertation answer these questions in relation to the overlooked stories of economic crisis as they narrated their experience on Reddit:

RQ4: How did Redditors organize and narrate their individual and collective positions within economic systems during times of economic disruption?

RQ5: How did Redditors organize and narrate the values, logics, and possibilities of economic systems during times of economic disruption?

. By answering these questions, I hope to garner insight into the relationships between the economic logics and narratives which I explore and critique in the initial two studies and the individual level experience of economic disruptions. In this way, I frame this analysis of individuals' experiences as part and parcel of the organizing discourse of the economic disruption contexts. These individual stories are not a side-show to some grander narrative taking place, they are the collective economy in disruption, and any examination of these events must take the individuals' accounts into consideration as the foundation of the inquiry.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Investigating the organizational processes related to macroeconomic crises and interventions necessitates multiple data collection and analytic techniques to examine how people in different places and different positions made sense of these experiences. Furthermore, to provide a more nuanced understanding of how these organizational processes evolved, transformed, and entangled themselves, it is prudent for researchers to explore various crises across time. Simply, the processes of organizing and narrating contemporary economic conditions is inextricably bound up in the history of crises and policymaking responses that have collectively led to present conditions. I argue that examining organizational processes across time, institutions, and populations, using varied analytic methods allows me as a researcher to develop deeper insights regarding the organization of economic crisis and intervention. Thus, this chapter presents the following: (a) the overarching research design of the studies within this dissertation, (b) the methodological implications of antenarratology (Boje, 2001), (c) the data collection processes, and, finally, (d) the data analytic tools I employ in conducting the two studies that comprise this dissertation.

Research Design

The overall design of this dissertation involves intertwined projects that explore two crises (Great Recession and Covid-19 pandemic) across two different discursive contexts: news media and individual accounts. The selection of these two levels of analysis is important to the aims of the project and the scope of this inquiry. First, I have chosen to examine news coverage surrounding economic crises as a first look at how macro-discursive and macro-narrative forces

begin to shape the sensemaking of economic crisis and possibilities of intervention. Second, contrary to much of the economic literature, which tends to disregard individuals' experiences, I aim to explore accounts of economic crisis and reactions to possibilities for government intervention and policymaking in response to those crises. In sum, these two levels of analysis provide a nuanced look at how individuals, policymakers, and institutions organize economic crises and interventions.

To this end, I divide this dissertation into two conversant studies. Study one facilitated the beginning of this general inquiry regarding the questions of economic crisis and intervention by looking at media coverage of economic crises and government intervention regarding those crises. Generally, I collected news coverage of specific inflection points in the crisis (described more in detail below) and applied topic modeling (Blei et al., 2003; DiMaggio et al., 2013) and grand narrative analysis (inspired by Lyotard, 1979/1984) to understand how grand narratives essentialize, universalize, and foundationalize questions of economic reality, crisis, and recovery. In this way, grand narratives serve both a foundation for and grant coherence to epochal sensemaking practices, and post-structural approaches to grand-narrative analysis apply a skepticism to the very concept of grand narratives themselves.

Finally, study two analyzes in the examination of individuals' experiences with the economic conditions of the two disruptions. Specifically, I engage with the social media interactions of individuals making sense of the Great Recession and the COVID-19 Recession. For this final study, I employ an adapted, mixed-method approach to semantic network analysis that combines cluster analyses (Clauset et al., 2004) and text-mining approaches (Lambert, 2017) to ground an analysis of network embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985). This combination of

methods allows me to explore how networked concepts of economic reality are organized and embedded in individuals' experiences with economic crisis.

Combined, these three studies all played an integral role in understanding and theorizing economic crisis and policymaking responses as communicative, organizational phenomena. However, to provide some sense of uniformity of focus across the varying data collections and across crises, I have identified four inflection points, specific events and/or dates of note, for each crisis that ground the data collection procedures for each study, summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Disruption Inflection Points, Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) Summary

Crisis and Date	Dow Jones Industrial Average		
	Close	Net	Δ %
Great Recession			
10/15/2008	8577.91	733.08	-7.87%
12/1/2008	8149.09	679.95	-7.70%
COVID-19 Fallout			
3/12/2020	21200.62	2352.6	-9.99%
3/16/2020	20188.52	2997.1	-12.93%

Note: DJIA summary statistics from DataPlanet (2021).

Specifically, for both the Great Recession and the COVID-19 fallout I used data from the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA, or the Dow; Charles & Darné, 2014; DataPlanet, 2021) to identify two dates for each crisis with the largest declines in the stock market average. As one of the most well-known and publicly emphasized (in government and news) indicators of economic volatility and performance (Charles & Darné, 2014), during both of the crises under examination in this study (Anderson, 1949), the DJIA is an appropriate indicator for specific inflection points in times of economic crisis. However, it is important, as part of this discussion, to acknowledge that the choice of the DJIA as a metric for identifying inflection points during economic crises

can, in practice, shape these findings in important ways. Despite its omnipresence in discussions of financial and economic health¹⁸, the Dow is not apolitical, acontextual, or objective as a measure of economic performance, and thus identifying inflection points with reference to the Dow reifies a specific understanding of what economic health means. Simply, while the Dow can (and does!) capture the performance of investors and bankers dealing with large sums of money that have significant sway over various practical elements of economic performance, it also fails to capture elements of stagnant wages and continuing impacts of crises (Tilly, 2015).

Additionally, I have identified two major policy initiatives (summarized in Table 3.2) passed in response to the crises during the period of the crisis for further analysis as intervention points. Here, it is interesting to note that each of the crises under examination in this study came at a time of economic *and* political import; the crises represented in this study each began under a Republican presidential administration that then transitioned into a Democratic presidential administration during the time of the economic downturns.

Thus, for the purpose of this analysis, I selected one policy intervention from both administrations to provide adequate comparison across political changes. Together, these four inflection points, as summarized in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2, serve as the foundation for the data

¹⁸ So ingrained is the DJIA's ubiquity that I had difficulty finding any published research that explicitly justifies using it as an economic measure, even in books that ostensibly should provide such a justification (e.g., Yamarone, 2017).

Table 3.2. Summary of Policy Inflection Points

Intervention Inflection Points		Presidential Administration	Policy Details		Legislative Vote ²	
Policy	Effective Date		Major Initiatives	Estimated Cost ¹	House	Senate
Great Recession						
Emergency Economic Stabilization Act	10/3/2008	Bush	Creation of TARP	\$700 billion	263-171*	74-25*
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act	2/17/2009	Obama	IMPACT	\$830 billion	246-183*	60-38*
COVID-19 Recession						
CARES Act	3/27/2020	Trump	\$1,200 EIP; expanded unemployment benefits	\$1.7 trillion	419-6*	96-0*
American Rescue Plan	3/11/2021	Biden	\$1,400 EIP; Extended unemployment benefits	\$1.9 trillion	219-212	50-49

Notes: ¹Estimated cost of specific policy interventions from the Congressional Budget Office (2008, 2012, 2020, 2021)

²Legislative vote records provided by the Library of Congress (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009; American Rescue Plan, 2021; A Bill to Provide Authority, 2008; CARES Act, 2020) and Callahan et al. (1994).

*Votes denoted with a single asterisk were passed with bipartisan support.

collection procedures for each of the crises and act as the foci of the analyses presented in this dissertation. I provide relevant information throughout the presentations of findings to place the interpretations from my analyses in their historical, social, and economic contexts.

Antenarratology and Research Methods

In the previous chapter, I discussed the importance of the antenarrative framework as an overarching approach to understanding organizational storytelling as it applies to both normative organizing contexts and to more macro-oriented, societal organizing questions. However, it is important to acknowledge that much of the current literature that employs antenarrative perspectives on organizing uses it as both a theoretical frame and a methodological approach. Though (Boje, 1991, 1995; Boje et al., 1997) had previously discussed the potential for antenarrative as a theoretical framework, Boje's (2001) work on narrative methods for organization research emphasized the transformative potential of applying antenarrative perspectives to normative narrative methodologies. I adapt this practice and two of these antenarrative methods for this dissertation. However, given the overarching design of this study, and the theoretical underpinnings of the research questions I seek to answer through this dissertation, it is important to acknowledge and explore the implications of the antenarratology framework.

Antenarratology offers a different way of examining and interpreting and critiquing organizational discourse through individual accounts. As mentioned previously, the post-structural philosophical influences that shape Boje's (2001, 2008) conceptualization of organizing direct antenarrative theorizing and methodology toward the fragmentary and chaotic elements of data. This method is distinct when compared with the normative narrative approaches employed in communication and organizational scholarship (Czarniawska, 1998;

Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004; Fisher, 1984, 1989; Koenig Kellas, 2010, 2018). As illustrated in Table 3.3, the antenarrative approach emphasizes the examination of ruptures, disconnects, and the emergence of incoherence in data. Initially, this move may seem to frame antenarrative analysis as altogether pessimistic or negative; this also fits with the connotation of post-structural philosophies. Instead, though the emphasis on dissonance over harmony in the antenarrative approach appears cynical, perhaps that cynicism is not detrimental to the analysis. Boje (2008, 2017) argued that value assumptions of organizing are: embedded in these narrative sensemaking practices; shaped by the social, cultural, and economic contexts of organizing; and exposed when those sensemaking logics begin to break down. In this way, perhaps cynicism can be a positive

Table 3.3. Comparison of Narrative and Antenarrative Methods of Data Analysis

Noteworthy findings are...	Narrative	Antenarrative
...Noticed through	Harmony & Consonance	Chaos & Dissonance
...Revealed by	Coherence & Connection	Incoherence & Ruptures
...Interpreted in the context of	Grand narratives	Microstories
...Illustrative of	Universal ideas	Power struggles

force that allows researchers to further interrogate the construction of, resistance to, and reimagining of organizational practices.

In terms of data collection, embracing antenarratology tasks researchers with gathering data that facilitates polysemy and chaos and incoherence rather than muting it. All research methods make simplifying moves, but it is the task of a researcher to account for the implications of those moves in the process of collection. Simply put, it is impossible to distill the essence of organization into any data collection; nor, in many ways, is any attempt to do so valuable or insightful. Instead, researchers must, first, work to collect data in such a way that they do not suppress or disregard the multiplicity of voice in organizational processes and expand their

conception of organizational processes. Again, organization can be understood as more than a unilateral process that manifests in a single narrative of a monolithic institution; it is a multiplicity of influences, ideas, and voices. Data collection processes and research contexts should reflect this! Despite the embrace of CCO theorizing, scholars' research contexts are too often bound to the noun organization (Kang & Krone, 2021; Kuhn, 2021).

Antenarrative approaches facilitate the realization of Cruz and Sodeke's (2020) reimagined organizational communication scholarship as an examination of the creation of social worlds in which people live, rather than simply existing as business-oriented, Western-centered concepts of organization. Researchers can employ this approach by conceiving of organizational communication beyond the container metaphor, beyond interviews and ethnographies in specific institutional contexts that still dominate CCO-informed research (Boivin et al., 2017). This is not to say that there is not research informed by CCO perspectives that works to transcend the epistemological limitations of the container metaphor (e.g., Cooren et al., 2008; Cooren et al., 2013). Moreover, the body of work in post-colonial approaches to organizational communication provides another alternative to these normative approaches (e.g., Cruz & Sodeke, 2020; Pal & Dutta, 2013). Here, I merely recognize that as organizational communication scholarship continues to evolve, especially in the face of contemporary disciplinary, political, and economic challenges (Stephens et al., 2020), scholars should work to expand the domain and application of organizational communication beyond the firm. In doing so researchers can generate new insights with the inclusion of varying perspectives that have all too often been left out of data collections and research processes (Gist-Mackey & Kingsford, 2020). Gist-Mackey and Kingsford (2020) specifically articulated the methodological and heuristic value of challenging class-based norms of quality in qualitative methodology that researchers reinforce through

expectations regarding *rich* data or lengthy, detailed descriptions from participants. Practically, I attempt to achieve these goals through a varied data collection that examines organizing practices across time, social context, and through the collection of varying sources, voices, and peoples.

Similarly, the data analytic techniques I employ in this work are informed by the antenarrative theoretical approach. Czarniawska (1998) conceived of story as a beginning-middle-and-end recounting of events that includes a problem and resolution to that problem. Further, it is through the analysis of what is left out, what is included, whose voices are prioritized, and who is silent that researchers can glimpse power and priority in organization. This is markedly similar to many of the narrative perspectives and means of analysis. These perspectives and analyses emphasize the creation of aesthetic resolution (Clair, 1998; Clair & Kunkel, 1998), or coherence (Fisher, 1984, 1989; Koenig Kellas, 2010, 2018), or structure (Labov, 1997), or completeness (Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003) as markers of a “good” story. However, as Boje (2001) noted, “people are always in the middle of living and tracing their storied lives,” (p. 5), and thus it is not only unfeasible to presume that any account is finished or coherent, but it is also actively detrimental to the research process to assume as much.

Antenarrative methodologies, like the ones that are employed in these studies, actively focus the analysis on the speculative power and flow of narrative. In this way, contra merely employing qualitative methods as a means of exploring what occurs in organizational contexts, this post-structural perspective urges analysis of the potentiality inherent in text and utterance. For example, conceiving of Friedman’s (1969) helicopter money as an overriding metaphor for inflation processes, as many economists do, serves to shape how neoclassicists make sense of the practical functioning of monetary systems and economic institutions (even if it requires

disregarding heaps of empirical evidence to the contrary, see Davidson, 2011; Harvey, 2011a). However, the influence of the metaphor is not limited to the economists' research; it is pervasive in policymaking sphere, shapes the evaluation of policy proposals, and conceptually limits the actions that economists and policymakers and public alike even consider. Ante, as a term for a prospective bet in poker, is indicative of the emphasis on these narrative forces. The antenarrative serves as a bet that certain logics will dominate the sensemaking process and thus shape the future of organization and creation. Thus, in terms of this analyses proposed for this dissertation, I emphasize both the examination of incoherence as a marker for interesting and insightful organizational processes and the interrogation of these processes as prospective forces within and beyond their contextual bounds.

By acknowledging the practical and methodological implications of the antenarrative theoretical frame for this project, I aim to provide both transparency into the research process and to clarify the orientation of this project as an endeavor of postmodern social science. In sum, the methodological implications of the antenarrative approach can be condensed into four commitments: (1) an emphasis on expanding the understanding of what constitutes organization; (2) the collection of varying data to investigate this expanded verb form of organization; (3) a rejection of the understanding of narrative as complete or fixed; and (4) a focus on analyzing the productive and creative power of the narrative forces under examination. Combined, these commitments illustrate the unique contribution of work undertaken using antenarrative methods and the theoretical and practical warrants for such an approach. Next, I examine the specific methods that I use to collect data for this dissertation.

Data Collections

The complexities of organizational processes, beyond the bounds of the container metaphor, necessitated data collection procedures that allowed me to capture some dynamics of the multiplicity of voices that shape social organization. To this end, the data collection procedures designed for these studies combined archival analysis of news media and social media data. By combining these different means of collecting data, I aimed to gather a variety of different experiences and voices to better represent and examine the plurivocality that dominates the organization of the social world at a macroeconomic level. Thus, this section provides an outline of the procedures proposed for the three studies that comprise this dissertation. Each study included two separate but related data collections that offered insight into communicative organizational processes across the two different disruptions within a single context (e.g., news media, government, individual experiences) as examined in each analysis (represented in Table 3.4).

Study One: News Media Coverage

For the collection of news media coverage across all three crises in this study, I used the collections available a well-recognized news aggregating archive. The overarching data collection procedures for both crises in this study were the same. For each of the identified inflection points, I collected news and media reports from newspapers published in the United States, from three days prior to and three days following the dates of the specific points using a custom scraping tool programmed in Bash command language for the Unix Shell (as detailed in Appendix A). This strategy captured one week of news for each inflection point.

Table 3.4. Summary of Data Collection Procedures and Sources

Discursive Contexts	Crisis Periods	
	Great Recession (December 2007 - June 2009)	COVID-19 Fallout (March 2020 - Present)
News Media	Articles collected from news database regarding crisis and intervention inflection points. Contains articles that include the term “economy”.	Articles collected from news database regarding crisis and intervention inflection points. Contains articles that include the term “economy”.
	78,178 articles	27,788 articles
Individuals	Comments and posts scraped using keywords: “economy” and “market”. Contains posts scraped from all Reddit communities pertaining to economic content.	Comments and posts scraped using keywords: “economy” and “market”. Contains posts scraped from communities: /r/economics, /r/personalfinance and /r/povertyfinance
	1,285 posts; 3,254 comments	14,984 posts; 456,614 comments

Where there were overlaps in date ranges for either crisis or intervention inflection points, I combined the data collection window to make one large time-period for gathering data. For example, given the proximity of the two crisis inflection points for the COVID-19 pandemic (March 12 and 16, 2020), I collected data for the period of March 9 to March 19, 2020 to capture the three days prior to the first inflection point and three days after the second. All data gathered in this way were categorized and tagged with respect to their specified inflection point.

To narrow results from these collections, I only analyzed results including the search term “economy” to limit articles to those related to the coverage and framing of these crises. In this context, I opted to include only articles that mention the term *economy* based on qualitative and quantitative analyses of the overlap between the results for the term “economy” and other alternative terms such as “finance” and “market”. As indicated in Table 5, there was notable overlap between the collection of articles during the sample inflection points for both the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis context. When examining articles included in the “market” collection that did not include the term economy, results centered around topics like farmer’s markets, flea markets, specific products or commodities (“hitting the market”, “on the market”),

Table 3.5. Overlap of Search Results from Study 1 Data Collection

Search Term	Great Recession (Oct. 12 to 18, 2008)		COVID-19 (Mar. 9 to 19, 2020)	
	n	%	n	%
Economy	20,905		19,761	
Finance	6,880		8,347	
Overlap	1,940	28.2%	1,538	18.4%
Market	20,035		31,898	
Overlap	6,920	34.5%	7,419	23.3%

Note: Overlap indicates the overlap of the indicated search with the “economy” results. Percentages are calculated with respect to the total number of articles for that search term.

and market-value (i.e., financial reports for specific goods, business deals). Although many of these topics are undoubtedly connected to economic contexts, because the articles were tangential to the more general practices of sensemaking and organizing responses to these disruption or policy contexts, I did not include them in the data collection. The remaining articles totaled 80,414 for Great Recession inflection points and 49,170 articles for the COVID-19 inflection points (summarized in more detail in Table 3.5).

Finally, due to limitations of the scraping tools and analytic methods employed for this project, I excluded articles from the data set that were only available as optical character recognition (OCR) enabled scans, rather than full, text only records. It is worth noting that the difference in full-text retention between COVID-19 news articles and Great Recession news articles is a function of technological advancements and evolving practices of the news database used for this collection. Instead of providing full-text records of certain articles, the database began providing optical character recognition enabled scans of the print versions of some newspapers. These are inaccessible via the scraping means used for this project, and so these articles are excluded. However, though this procedure led to the exclusion of the articles from entire publications, the remaining samples remain highly geographically diverse (as indicated in Figure E.1 to Figure E.7, discussed in Chapter 4) and worthy of analysis (for further analysis of the data collection procedures, see Appendix E). Given these procedures, the final data sets used for analysis in Study 1 included 78,178 articles for the Great Recession and 27,788 articles for the COVID-19 pandemic, totaling 105,966 articles.

Study Two: Individual Experiences

To gather data related to individuals' experiences of the Great Recession and the COVID-19 recession, I collected social media data using the PushShift (Baumgartner et al.,

2020) application programming interface (API) using a custom script that I created in Bash (detailed at more length in Appendix B). The tool that I created for use with the PushShift collection allows users to delimit specific searches for comments and posts within certain time frames and including various additional data points not available using other, existing tools (e.g., RedditExtractoR; Rivera, 2022). For the purposes of this data collection, I scraped all posts from the social media site that specifically included the search-term “economy” and their associated comments using the same date ranges for each inflection point as with the data collection for Study 1.

Although this site-wide collection differs from the methods for many other studies, which delimit searches to specific subreddit contexts, the reason for the broad data collection in this study was two-fold. First, because the Reddit platform was relatively new around the time of the Great Recession, the number of users and subreddit communities was significantly different from the site’s current landscape. A collection limited based on specific subreddits would have resulted in a significantly smaller data set or a less targeted collection (regard to the date of these posts and comments). Thus, for consistency with the first study, I prioritized broad collection across the site rather than increasing the number of days involved in the data collection.

Second, from a methodological standpoint, limiting the data collection to specific subreddits would mean that the data would represent a much narrower range of experiences than a site-wide collection offered this study. The breadth of the data collection is beneficial because it allowed me to analyze the content of the conversations regarding economic phenomena *and* to consider the influence of the myriad contexts in which these discussions occurred. For example, the significant number of conversations regarding the economy on subreddits like /r/politics or /r/wallstreetbets is unsurprising and, though the content of these posts proved insightful, the large

number of posts about the economy in /r/unpopularopinion and /r/askreddit offered very different perspectives from those posted in communities that center discussion of the economy.

The trade-off with this approach was the potential inclusion of posts or comments that are not salient to the given conversation. For example, there was a small number of posts from a Minecraft gaming subreddit with advertisements for servers that include player-based economies. These results, though not particularly enlightening in the context of the research questions for this study, were not deleterious to the data analytics process. During the analysis, any impact of irrelevant posts was minimal for both the semantic network analysis, in which many of the terms from these irrelevant posts were algorithmically excluded from the main clusters, and the antenarrative analysis, during which I encountered very few irrelevant articles while analyzing the clusters resulting from the semantic network analysis. Even when unhelpful articles did pop up while exploring the corpus, I simply noted their irrelevance and moved on. In short, though the data collection procedures did invite some irrelevant articles into the textual corpus, the impact on the analysis was minimal and thus, comparatively advantageous relative to the normative approach of parameterizing data collection to specific subreddits.

Summary of Data Collection Procedures

Although the data collection procedures for this dissertation were extensive (as detailed in Table 3.6), they provided nuanced and varied look at the multi-layered drama of organizing economic crisis and intervention as theorized in this work. To understand and explore economic phenomena as organization, especially at the macro-level of national disruptions and federal interventions, data collection procedures must be similarly expansive to capture, at the minimum,

Table 3.6. Data Collection Summary

Inflection Point	Date Range	News		Reddit	
		Collected	Full Text (%)	Posts	Comments
<u>Great Recession</u>					
Crisis					
10/15/08	10-12-2008 to 10-18-2008	20,905	20,395 (97.56%)	376	685
12/01/08	11-28-2008 to 12-04-2008	19,019	18,481 (97.17%)	242	366
Policy					
10/3/08	09-30-2008 to 10-06-2008	19,412	18,788 (96.79%)	342	1,405
2/17/09	02-14-2009 to 02-20-2009	21,078	20,514 (97.32%)	325	798
Total		80,414	78,178 (97.22%)	1,285	3,254
<u>COVID-19 Recession</u>					
Crisis					
3/12/20	03-09-2020 to 03-19-2020	19,761	11,327 (57.32%)	7,042	227,904
3/16/20					
Policy					
3/27/20	03-24-2020 to 03-30-2020	19,266	11,328 (58.80%)	4,969	159,870
3/11/21	03-08-2021 to 03-14-2021	10,163	5,133 (50.51%)	2,973	68,840
Total		49,190	27,788 (56.49%)	14,984	456,614

Note: Only those articles included in the Full Text column were used in the data analysis for Study 1. Those articles that were not available in full text form were stored as PDFs that would have required the use of optical character recognition, and so they were excluded. More recent articles are stored in this way than older articles, thus the discrepancy in the full text percentage between the two disruption contexts.

a few of the major players that shape the organization of economic narratives. Along these lines, it is also important to note that, despite the uniformity in focus on disruption and intervention inflection points across crises, there are also distinct dissimilarities in the data collection procedures outlined above within contexts. Whereas quantitative analyses of content across contexts and time periods depend upon similarities across collection for validity, and differences in collection mechanisms across contexts could either obfuscate relationships or create spurious correlation (Krippendorf, 2018), here, the dissimilarity is a feature not a bug. By employing varying techniques and analyzing texts and voices from varying sources, I aim to provide both a deep investigation of differences in organizational processes across time periods and within contexts. Further, in the case of certain contexts, for example, individual experiences of economic crises, the differences in the collections are a methodological necessity.

Additionally, I have endeavored to mitigate the impact of these differences in data collection procedures within discursive contexts, especially regarding the individual-level data collection where the differences in social media ecology across time had a pronounced impact on the collection and analysis procedures. I have done this by using data sources which, although they may differ in terms of technological affordance of the media and multiplexity (Haythornthwaite, 2005) offer similar means of expressing individuals' experiences, frustrations, disappointments, and hopes regarding ongoing economic crises. In other words, despite the differences in media, the storytelling and the accounts (the primary objects of these analyses) represented in each data collection still provided meaningful insights and comparisons, especially given that the technological and mediated nature of this communication is not primary in these analyses of these data, as detailed in the next section of this chapter.

Analytic Method
Grand Narrative

Derived from Lyotard (1979/1984).

Aims to rethink organizing as it is simplified and totalized through macro-narratives

Stage 1

Uncovering

- Unpacking elements of universalism, foundationalism, and essentialism in narratives
- Calculating and evaluating topic model solutions

Stage 2

Mythologizing

- Moving abductively between topic model and textual corpus
- Investigating inter- and intra-topic tension
- Mapping topical relations in the text

Stage 3

Restorying

- Critiquing, rethinking, and resituating organizational process
- Articulating practical and theoretical insights

Antenarrative Network

Derived from Granovetter (1985); adapted from Lambert (2017) and Eddington (2018, 2020).

Aims to examine how story is embedded in networked relations (e.g., social, semantic networks)

Text Pre-processing & Mining

- Cleaning and preparing data for analysis
- Removing content of little semantic significance and confounding content

Semantic Network & Cluster Analysis

- Mapping relationships between concepts
- Analyzing how concepts emerge in clusters and associations

Embedded Interpretation

- Examining embedded nature of semantic relations in textual data
- Reading data to garner insight into emergent processes

Figure 3.1. Summary of Data Analysis Techniques

Data Analysis Procedures

Given the varied methods of collecting data employed throughout each of the studies in this work, I use three separate methods to examine the data from each study. Each of these methods embrace the antenarrative approach to understanding organizing processes discussed previously, however, they are all differing adaptations of other forms of narrative methods for organizational inquiry. Specifically, for these studies, I employ unique and separate methods of data analysis: grand narrative analysis and semantic network analysis, both of which are summarized in Figure 3.1.

Study One: Grand Narrative Analysis through Topic Modeling

For study one, I engaged in two complementary, albeit markedly different, methods of analysis. First and foremost, Boje's (2001) grand narrative analysis was the driving methodology of the analysis for the 105,966 articles included in the data collection for study one. Grand narrative analysis, as envisioned by Boje (2001) is a mechanism for unpacking how macro-, or meta-, narrative forces shape sensemaking processes in organization. Most clearly, this method builds from Lyotard's (1979/1984) observations about postmodernism as a skepticism toward the very concept of grand narrative. Unfortunately, this observation merely begs the question: what are grand narratives and how do they relate to the ongoing study? Thus, before describing the specific analytic steps I undertook in conducting the analyses of news media data in this project, I unpack the post-structural concept of grand-narrative analysis to provide further context for the justifications for my methodological decisions in designing and conducting this study.

Theorizing Grand Narrative Analysis.

Brown (1990), building on Foucault (1975/1995), defined grand narrative as a "regime of truth" (p. 192) which provide an overarching logic and momentum to the understanding of

history and the self in historical context. For example, the Marxist grand narrative of historical materialism offers a narrative account of history, focused on class struggle and material questions of capital, that accounts for the events of the past and projects the logic of those events into the future. Grand narrative analysis, as a means of examining the organization of economic crisis and intervention, then becomes a tool for uncovering: (a) how logics of past events shape the organization of the future; (b) how those conceptions of the future emerge in fragmented and intertextual ways; and (c) how those grand narrative accounts limit how individuals conceive of possible new realities. Thus, in the context of this first study, I apply grand narrative analysis as a means of uncovering, unpacking, and restorying news accounts of economic crisis.

Initially, grand narrative analysis emphasizes the exploration of the interplay between foundationalism, essentialism, and universalism. First, in this context, foundationalism illustrates the role those grand narratives play in constructing an ideal foundation, goal, or utopic vision with regard to inquiry. This concept is clearest through an epistemological lens; think of the Cartesian quest for foundational truths upon which the philosopher can rebuild an understanding of the rest of the universe (Descartes, 1641/2017). Grand narrative analysis explores how, in the process of making sense of lived experiences, narratives become bound up with visions of foundational truths and logics *and* the ways that we make sense of those experiences.

Second, analysis of essentialism requires researchers to examine the ontological assumptions of grand narrative forces. In this way, the grand narrative, as meta-narrative, reinforces a metaphysics of organization and social realities. This is, perhaps, best understood in the context of Boje's (2014) application of quantum physics and chaos theory to theorize of the productive capacity of narrative. In brief, narratives do not just form the foundation for understanding and making sense of organization, they can create a sense of reality or unreality,

formality or informality, stasis or mercuriality; to understand the relationship between narrative and organizational metaphysics is to acknowledge that as individuals make sense of social phenomena, they collectively enforce the nature of that social reality. Organizational adaptiveness, immutability, surrealism, skepticism, are all constructed intersubjectively. For the purpose of this study, then, analysis must go beyond the surface level of organizational performance to investigate this construction. Third, the interrogation of universalism acts to critique and reimagine the axiology of grand narrative forces. Boje (2001) described universalism as “grand principles, laws, totalizing truths” inextricably linked with how “a ‘legislator’ dealing with scientific discourse is authorized to prescribe” new courses of action. In this way, the work of grand narrative analysis ends with uncovering how the fragmented antenarrative prescribes certain futures, limits imagination, and dictates what can be understood as a realizable ideal.

From this understanding of foundationalism, essentialism, and universalism, grand narrative analysis, as an antenarrative methodology, necessitates that researchers begin conceiving of these three elements as part of overarching narratives that emerge from collected accounts. Thus, the next step in grand narrative analysis is to examine and critique the mythologizing elements of meta-narrative. Recall the Marxist grand narrative example. The elements of foundationalism, essentialism, and universalism that emerge from that metanarrative are not separate entities that each dictate the epistemological, ontological, and axiological commitments of organizational processes. Instead, they emerge from a mythology, woven by Marx, Engels, and other voices down the years that tells of the evolution of the modern capitalist system and foretells of a possible new arrangement, to be obtained through strife and struggle and revolution. Marx is critiqued for a lack of clarity regarding what the end-state, utopic vision

of the communism looks like, although some argue that this is opacity is by design (Burawoy, 2000, 2003). Arguably, it is *because* Marxism is opaque about the realization of communism that there is such a mythological, narrative power behind the ideas. Uncovering the mythological forces, like the ones described above, is the project of this type of analysis, and it can be achieved by examining instances where those mythologies break down in situ—when fundamental assumptions become questionable and the contingency of social orders becomes reactivated (Glynos et al., 2021; Glynos & Howarth, 2007). Once these forces are uncovered, the next move is to critique and examine the influences that these mythologizing forces have on the sensemaking and organizational processes represented in data.

Finally, from this critique of the mythology behind grand narrative forces, this analysis urges a turn to a reimagining of the possibilities through restorying. In many contexts the legitimacy and authority of grand narrative forces and the ways that they lend credibility and coherence to individuals' experiences seems inescapable. But grand narratives are not inescapable; they simply require an exercise in restorying. For Boje (2001), restorying allows the analyst to confront both the (a) seeming immutability organized through grand narrative forces and (b) the momentous task of reworking and rethinking the ingrained metanarrative forces. For example, in this work, I not only worked to uncover and critique the influences of metanarrative forces as they shape the process of organizing economic crisis, I also used that critique to take note of the ways that the grand narrative forces at work construct organizational constraints for what crisis is, can be, and should be. Moreover, it was the explicit task of this analysis to culminate in a restorying of those possibilities. If the metanarrative forces emphasize a certain set of policy responses to crisis, the most important practical implications for this analysis derive

from rejecting and reimagining those limitations to offer different, better, less limited, more expansive alternatives for creating new normals in the face of economic downturns.

Crafting a Computational Grand Narrative Analysis

In the context of these three elements of grand narrative analysis (unpacking foundationalism, essentialism, and universalism; critiquing mythologies; and restorying) and with regard to the significant amount of textual data collected for this study, I designed an analytic technique that leverages the natural language processing technique of topic modeling (Blei et al., 2003; DiMaggio et al., 2013) to guide a reading of the textual data collected for each of the seven inflection points. Though these two techniques are seemingly at odds, both in terms of their approach to analyzing texts and in various other metatheoretical commitments, in this section, I outline the justifications for this unique combination of methods; detail the steps I undertook to conduct the method; and briefly discuss some of the more significant implications of this method for the study at hand. Here, I should briefly note that, although this portion of the chapter is more detailed and extensive account of the method used in this study, especially relative to the other parts of the chapter, I include these details because of the novelty of these choices and the importance they have for the interpretability of the results of this study in the proceeding chapters.

Methodological Justifications. Topic modeling, as a computational method for textual analysis, emerged from the work of information science and information retrieval scholars. Building from the work of Salton and McGill (1983) and Deerwester et al. (1990), on the term frequency-inverse document frequency (tf-idf) scheme and latent semantic indexing (LSI) respectively, Blei et al.'s (2003) work on LDA represents one of the most widely used and general methods for topic modeling analysis. In sum, these methods of analysis are a

computational means of uncovering hidden thematic structures in a corpus of documents; in context, the practical goal of such an analysis is more obvious. In a library catalog, the results of a topic model could aid researchers attempting to identify relevant articles for a specific project based on the latent themes of a single example work. This application of topic modeling, termed *probabilistic topic modeling* (Blei, 2012), begins with the analysis of a large corpus of documents and their full text in order to estimate two relevant matrices (a document-topic matrix and topic-word matrix) with respect to the observable corpus. Once estimated, these matrices facilitate the analysis of the extant corpus with respect to a pre-determined number of topics *and* of new documents with respect to the topics and terms in the new documents. This mechanism allows researchers to present a journal article that is not present in the original corpus and for the model to supply various recommendations from within the original corpus based on the latent topics detected in the new document. In terms of a more niche metaphor, topic modeling can be understood as akin to an exploratory factor analysis (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012) for textual data. However, though the probabilistic application of topic modeling was central to its development, topic modeling has emerged as a central computational method for analyzing large bodies of text and applying document-topic and term-topic associations in a variety of quantitative and qualitative projects.

As a simple framework for topic modeling, LDA (Blei et al., 2003) conducts this type of analysis with reference to a few key functions and assumptions. First, LDA begins with the vectorization of documents into a term-document matrix that represents the frequency of each word in a given document with respect to its frequency in a given document and normalized with respect to its frequency across the entire corpus (Salton & McGill, 1983). This function is essential to one of the key assumptions of LDA topic modeling: “the bag-of-words” or

exchangeability assumption, which allows the analysis of text within each document to proceed without regard for the order of specific words in the text. Second, unlike other methods of topic modeling (Nigam et al., 2000), LDA allows for each document to relate to multiple topics. Third, LDA assumes that the ordering of documents used in training the model does not matter. While this assumption is most important when thinking in terms of a probabilistic application of topic modeling techniques, this assumption is important for emphasizing the lack of consideration of various metadata in model calculation. In other words, topic modeling analysis disregards any elements of a document other than its full text; it does not include, as part of its analysis, dates, authors, publisher, or other available metadata that might explain certain associations between the documents, the text, and any latent topics.

Overall, topic modeling, as a form of computational textual analysis, centers many assumptions regarding the nature of language and the documents it is analyzing that, at first glance, seem antithetical to the central claims and ideas of post-structural theory in general, let alone the particulars of antenarrative theorizing and methods. In Boje's (2001) original description of antenarrative methods of analysis and their utility in organization sciences, however, he explicitly argued in favor of the use of analytic tools for visualizing storytelling dynamics if and only if they allow researchers to grapple with the complexities of organization. For example, he noted that certain visualizing techniques that allow results to be formulated into moving or interactive visualizations work to overcome the structuralist undercurrents that result of methods that "[reduce] subjective meaning into object display ... and [proliferate the] mindless studies that dump a lot of text into a processor and pop out images" (Boje, 2001, p. 73). Though Boje's apparent zeal for the new-fangled concepts of MPEG files and the ability to "rotate, translate, and zoom in on the moving images" (p. 72) now reads like a wizard discovering

eckeltricity¹⁹, the central metatheoretical commitment here, and the key to designing and conducting insightful analyses using computational and antenarrative techniques, remains. It is a simple but powerful reminder: the storytelling, not the model, is the point.

Mohr et al. (2015) noted the importance of these types of commitments for the burgeoning areas of inquiry where researchers are combining computational methods with forms of qualitative or interpretive analyses. Specifically, they argued that a theory of the relationship between texts, people, and analysts must precede analysis. How, then, does this commitment to storytelling dynamics over simple linguistic or pictorial association gibe with the central assumptions of topic modeling, specifically, the LDA techniques I used in the conduct of this study; in what theory of the textual corpus did I ground this analysis? First, the exchangeability assumption of LDA topic modeling represented the clearest disconnect between the antenarrative framework for this analysis and the application of computational tools. At the risk of attempting to define a philosophical movement most notable for its inscrutability, the idea that language and words (among other things) only have meaning in the context of complex and continuous social and political processes is as close to a central tenant of post-structural and post-modern theory as is possible. Theorists and philosophers (among others, see Baudrillard, 1981/1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Derrida, 1967/1997; Foucault, 1975/1995; Lyotard, 1979/1984; Rorty, 1989) may differ on the relationship between contingent language and social systems, power, etc., but a method that strips words of most of their context seems fundamentally opposed to post-structural theory generally and the theoretical framework established in the previous chapter specifically.

¹⁹ Electricity.

The justification for any method in a wholly post-structural theoretical framework derives not from the mechanisms of the analysis but from the interpretation and treatment of the findings. In many ways, I think of the justification for computational methods in this dissertation as akin to the justification for not including qualitative verification procedures in similar research. As noted in Betts et al. (2021), research conducted under the auspices of post-structural theory should not include verification procedures because the communicative act of interpreting text; reading data; generating insights; and then recording, writing, or sharing those findings in any form is wholly part of the analytic process. There is no need to verify or replicate insights because they are generated at the varying intersections of analyst(s), context, and data which are fundamentally irreproducible. In the same way, computational methods, when included and reported as part of this interpretive, fundamentally social, process are simply part of the varying mechanisms researchers undergo in the conduct of research.

This is part of a post-structural epistemology that recognizes the insights of such an analysis can be theoretical, heuristically, and practically valuable without being uncontestable, comprehensive, or final. Understanding topic modeling as a practical feature of inquiry is also consistent with some of the original aims of the discipline where it originated: information retrieval. Reconsider the library catalog example. Using topic modeling to recommend related content is not a universal declaration of association; it is a practical exercise that patrons must then evaluate on their own terms, with their own knowledge, for it to have any significance. As long as researchers account for the ways that topic modeling techniques, or any computational methods, approach textual analysis, and as long as researchers have a theory of the text (Mohr et al., 2015), the combination of various techniques is justified. Simply, though the mechanistic treatment of language in LDA is blatantly antithetical to post-structuralist thought, its use is

justified as an interpretive tool for visualizing the textual corpus which in turn leads to deeper investigation of the dynamics it illustrates.

Second, the relation between documents and topics in LDA acts as a point in favor of the combination of topic modeling and grand narrative analysis that I propose. Alternative techniques that do not allow for documents to relate to multiple topics (Nigam et al., 2000) would not be suitable for this project for two central reasons. First, the idea that single texts, or even single words, would only be related to a single topic in the modeling processes would be contrary to the concepts of heteroglossia, intertextuality, and polysemy which both DiMaggio et al. (2013) and Boje (2001) emphasize as key to examining the social significance of the topics uncovered through this type of computational analysis. Thinking forward to some of the findings that I present in the next chapter, there are various contexts in which political figures and institutions factor into multiple topics in a corpus in very different ways. Just as newsworthy figures can play different roles in the mediated construction of news narratives, so, too can other figures and words play multiple roles. The central point of the analysis, then, is to unpack and explore the differences, tensions, and relationships between those multiple roles, which is made possible and clearer in large data sets through the use of such computational techniques.

Third, LDA is specifically well suited in a grand narrative framework because it can help researchers to highlight these contrasting and tensional features of corpus-wide dynamics. Whereas semantic network analysis (e.g., Eddington, 2020; Jarvis & Eddington, 2021; Lambert, 2017) allows researchers to investigate the more micro-dynamics of individual interactions and organizational sensemaking practices, such as those that emerge on social media sites, LDA, and topic modeling more generally, is better suited to investigating the more macro-level tensions of

textual corpuses because of analytic features like the exchangeability assumption and the ability for documents and words to belong to more than one topic.

Finally, the role of metadata (or, lack thereof) in LDA topic modeling poses a unique question for its plausibility as a useful tool in grand narrative analysis. Though their initial implementation of topic modeling did not include any means for analyzing documents beyond their texts (Blei et al., 2003), including important features such as: author, date, publisher, location, etc., researchers have begun developing advanced topic modeling techniques that can account for this type of metadata and more, including: author-topic modeling (Rosen-Zvi et al., 2012; Yang & Wang, 2021); spatio-temporal topic modeling (Hu et al., 2013); and relational topic modeling (Chang & Blei, 2010). However, when considering the merits of this application of LDA, even though there are techniques that could, for example, account for the geographic dispersion of topics, given the location data available from the news articles, this type of analysis would be inappropriate for two reasons. First, this type of modeling is centrally predictive; it represents an attempt at data retrieval and information recall from large sets of data. The application of topic modeling in this study is related but unique in that it is centrally concerned with identifying certain relations in these corpora that might otherwise be obscured by the surplus of data. Second, this study is explicitly attempting to grapple with the tensions between the universalizing, generalizing forces of grand narratives and local accounts of economic disruption. Attempting to isolate topics to specific locales or times would be antithetical to this goal as it would center the geographic aspects of these narratives over these grand narrative forces. In other words, though the application of these techniques might be suitable for other analyses, they are not suitable for the present analysis.

In sum, the application of topic modeling in this study is entirely in keeping with the metatheoretical commitments and analytic goals of this work. Where there are disconnects between the aims of the original, probabilistic use of topic modeling, I have adapted specific elements of their application and interpretation. The use of large data sets in qualitative data analysis is an emerging and important area of inquiry, and by necessity, developments in this area center on the use and synthesis of computational and other traditionally quantitative techniques within the overarching framework of methods that usually reject such techniques. As such, I now turn to a more explicit discussion of the steps undertaken in this analysis that allowed me to bring the visual and quantitative elements of topic modeling analysis to the interpretation of news media data in this study.

Mapping Out the Inquiry. DiMaggio et al. (2013) articulated in their initial work on inductive applications of topic modeling for cultural and textual analysis, as opposed to normative, probabilistic topic modeling, that “producing a solution is the beginning of the analysis, not the end” (p. 586). Many researchers have taken this comment as an impetus to further clarify and develop the use of inductive and iterative approaches to topic modeling analysis and its application to culture (Maier et al., 2018; Nelson, 2020), and this work has been extremely fruitful. Although DiMaggio et al. (2013) originally applied this reframed use of topic modeling generally (and LDA specifically) to the analysis of government arts funding, other researchers have begun to explore a variety of new contexts. Nelson’s (2020) work on computational grounded theory, in this respect, has been influential in mapping out various steps for combining computational and qualitative analyses. Specifically, Nelson articulated three general steps for applying this type of inductive topic modeling (or other kinds of computational textual analysis more generally), including: pattern detection, pattern refinement, and pattern

confirmation. In this way, (Nelson, 2020) advanced qualitative analysis and engagement with the textual corpus to provide firmer conceptual ground for validating and confirming the results of the computational output. I reject this framework for a computationally informed post-structuralist method.

Although Nelson (2020) cited DiMaggio et al.'s (2013) work, the framework neglects the double meaning contained in the idea of not treating models as the *end* of these data analytic techniques. This claim, not treating models as the end of analysis, is as much about analytic chronology as it is analytic axiology; insisting that solutions are not the end of analysis is a reminder to researchers that the productive insights of analysis are an end facilitated by the means of computational techniques like LDA topic modeling. Using qualitative readings of vast amounts of textual data to validate the insights of a topic modeling solution is akin to using a three-dimensional scan to validate a photograph of Heidegger's hammer. Not only is the exercise oddly recursive and reductive, attempting to use the richness of textual data to validate a model that is itself a simplification of that same textual data, but it also misses the central purpose of the use of such a model. Namely, when embarking on an analysis of rich textual data, the use of computational linguistics tools, like LDA, is to create a map or, even more appropriately in this case, a sailing guide (as in Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Pearce, 1995). Whereas a map might proffer a vision of this analysis as a directional, step-by-step guide (which may indeed be suitable for certain applications), the metaphor of a sailing guide reinforces the central concepts and facets of the analytic techniques without reinforcing specific, rigid steps. In other words, to understand models as more than an end, researchers cannot simply embark on a quest to contextualize and validate the models with respect to the text. Again, the model is not the point; achieving insights about the corpus through the topic model is the point.

With this goal, in mind, I set out to design a method of analysis that leveraged the best aspects of LDA topic modeling to more fully examine the large data sets collected for this examination of news coverage of economic disruption. To riff on Nelson's (2020) three steps and to incorporate Boje's (2001) perspective on grand narrative and antenarrative more clearly in the inquiry, I mapped out three phases of this analysis, including: uncovering, mythologizing, and restorying (as represented in Figure 3.1, above). In the remainder of this section, I explore each of these three phases and detail the specific methodological steps undertaken in each part of the data analysis process.

Uncovering. The first phase of this method involved calculating and evaluating topic model solutions with the goal of selecting a model that helps to illustrate the varying dynamics and tensions of the organizing processes represented in the data. I began by cleaning the data and calculating various topic model solutions. After the initial collection of the data using the procedures described above (and in more detail in Appendix A), I imported the XML document created by the Bash command into Microsoft Excel for ease of use and topic modeling analysis. To perform the LDA topic modeling for each of the seven data sets in this study, I used the Python package Gensim (Řehůřek, 2022; Srinivasa-Desikan, 2018) and various other tools (e.g., NLTK, Bird et al., 2009; pyLDAvis, Mabey, 2021) to clean and prepare the data for analysis.

Two elements of this data cleaning are worth specifying: the removal of stop words and stemming. First, the removal of stop words is a key part of computational analyses like topic modeling. In the case of this study, I used the stop words dictionary and pre-processing tools available in Gensim. In brief, this process removes all words from the textual corpus that are of little or no semantic value (e.g., articles, pronouns, words shorter than three characters) in the calculation of the overall topic model solutions. Second, I used the standard Gensim stemming

procedures, using the Porter (1980) stemming algorithm, that removes the suffixes of words for easier retrieval and model simplification.²⁰

After cleaning the data, I used the Gensim package to generate a variety of different models, with varying numbers of topics, and used the package pyLDAvis to create a visualization of the topics within the models, their relationships with various terms in the corpus, and their relations with each other. The visualizations generated by the package are also based on the Termite technique (Chuang et al., 2012) which allows researchers to investigate the distinctiveness and saliency of different terms within topics and to better gauge their heuristic value and suitability as a guide for further analysis of the corpus. In this context, distinctiveness of a word, w , refers to the statistical difference, measured in terms of the KL divergence (Kullback & Leibler, 1951), between the conditional probability of the word being generated by a topic, T , and the marginal probability of any word being generated by T . Saliency of w for T is then defined by the distinctiveness of w multiplied by its overall frequency in the corpus. This allows researchers to investigate topics in two different ways: (1) based on the terms that are most strongly associated with the topic, regardless of the frequency in the overall corpus and (2) based on the unique impact of that word for the topic relative to other calculated topics. The visualizations created using pyLDAvis, as interactive graphs of the intertopic distances, reduced to two dimensions using principal components analysis (Abdi & Williams, 2010). This allow researchers to visually explore relationships between topics and to order the words associated

²⁰ Though I use a different stemming algorithm in the third study, I provide a more detailed example of how stemming procedures work in general terms later in this chapter.

within topics differently, using an adjustable lambda (relevance) metric (Sievert & Shirley, 2014), that orders words in the topics differently based on their distinctiveness and saliency.

Third, after performing multiple runs of the analysis and generating various iterations of possible models with different numbers of topics, I examined the possible models to evaluate their suitability for further exploration of the associated text corpus. Although the number of iterations varied based on the inflection points, I ran at least six different models for each inflection point, including at least three 10-topic solutions and at least three five-topic solutions. Following DiMaggio et al. (2013), I selected suitable models for each inflection point based on their interpretability and potential utility for uncovering the ongoing storytelling dynamics in each of the textual corpora. Here, it is important to note that this is a markedly different strategy for selecting a model than is common in other applications of LDA and topic modeling; however, this strategy is rooted in the growing diversity of topic modeling applications (Hannigan et al., 2019; Kozłowski et al., 2019; Nelson, 2021) and consistent with the aims of this study and its theoretical and metatheoretical underpinnings. Thus, when evaluating interpretability, I first considered the sets to determine an appropriate number of topics. Although the number of topics represented in each model was not the sole deciding factor in selecting a specific model to analyze more deeply (as is the case for the COVID-19, American Rescue Plan inflection point, as illustrated in Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3), it served as an initial visual barometer as I began to examine the utility of each potential model.

During this initial overview of these models, I checked for the overlap of topics and the distribution of topics across the axes of the visualization. Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3 demonstrate how these considerations help to quickly remove a potential model for consideration. Visually, both models represented in Figure 3.2 have high degrees of overlap between topics, and topics

are not evenly distributed across the axes. Although this would not be an issue for probabilistic topic modeling, and researchers would evaluate the utility of models for those ends in very different ways (e.g., McAllum, 2002), one of the central uses of these intertopic distance mapping in this application of topic modeling is to examine the grand narrative, storytelling dynamics from which those visualized relationships occur. Thus, models that demonstrate this kind of visual clustering are less useful for this analysis, and I excluded them from consideration.

Following an initial examination of the models, I selected possible candidates and conducted a further close examination of the terms and relationships indicated by the visualization of the topic model. During this phase of the model selection, I was not attempting to find models that fit any specific notion regarding potential findings from the models. Instead, I primarily examined the potential relationships found in the words associated with the varying topics. Contrary to some perspectives on interpreting topic models, however, this evaluation was not looking for the most coherent topics possible or for word lists that did not include seemingly anomalous entries. In other words, as I examined the topics presented in potential models, I evaluated the usefulness of those models by examining the relationships between the topics and the words that comprised each topic. During this phase of the analysis, I also consulted the textual corpuses to get a clear sense of the organizational and narrative dynamics illustrated by each model.

Figures 3 and 4 provide examples for how this final selection between models worked in the case of the second policy inflection point for the COVID-19 pandemic, relating to the American Rescue Plan and news data collected between March 8 and March 14, 2021. From a visual standpoint, the lack of topic overlap, as represented in the intertopic distance maps (see

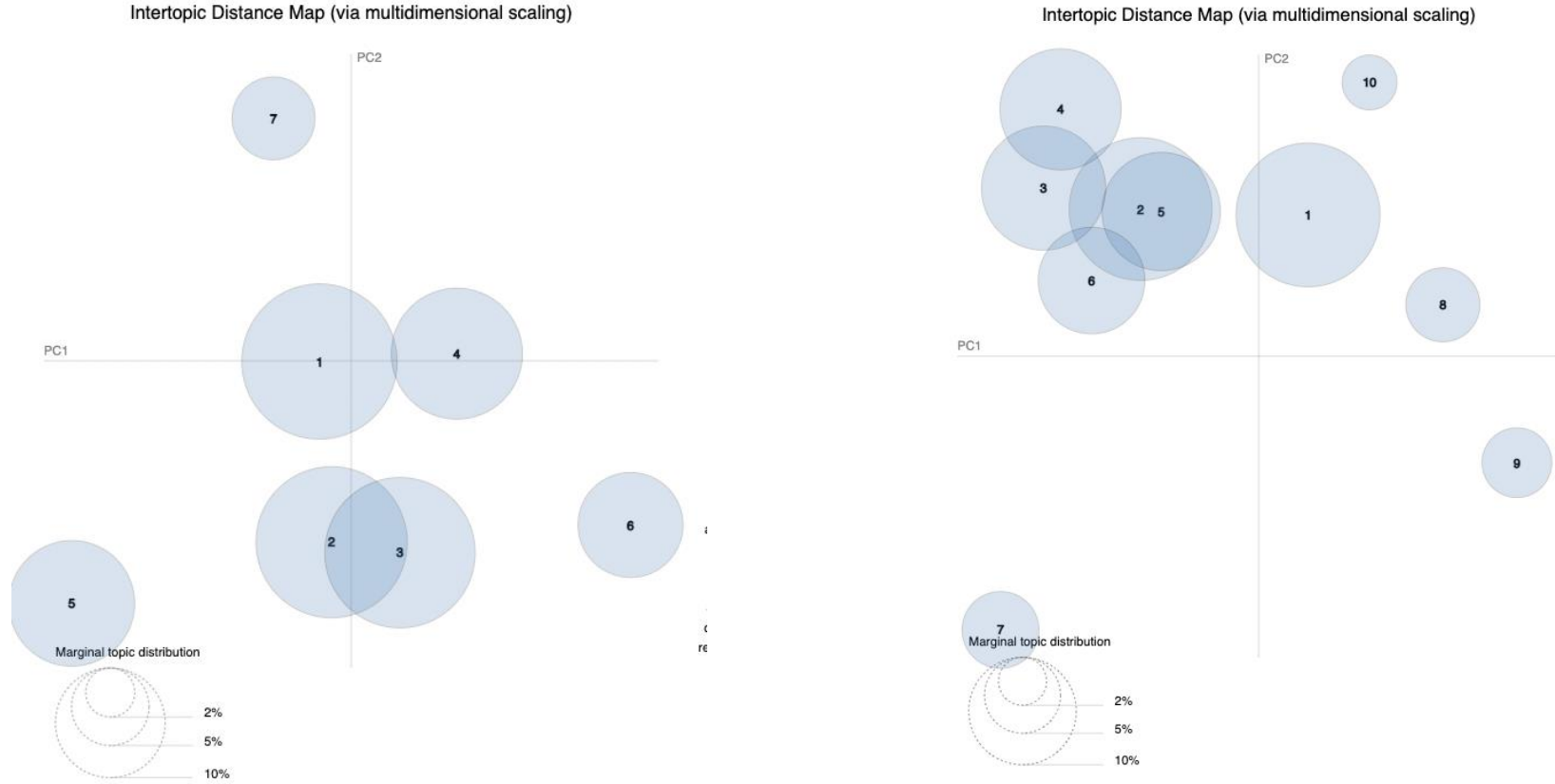
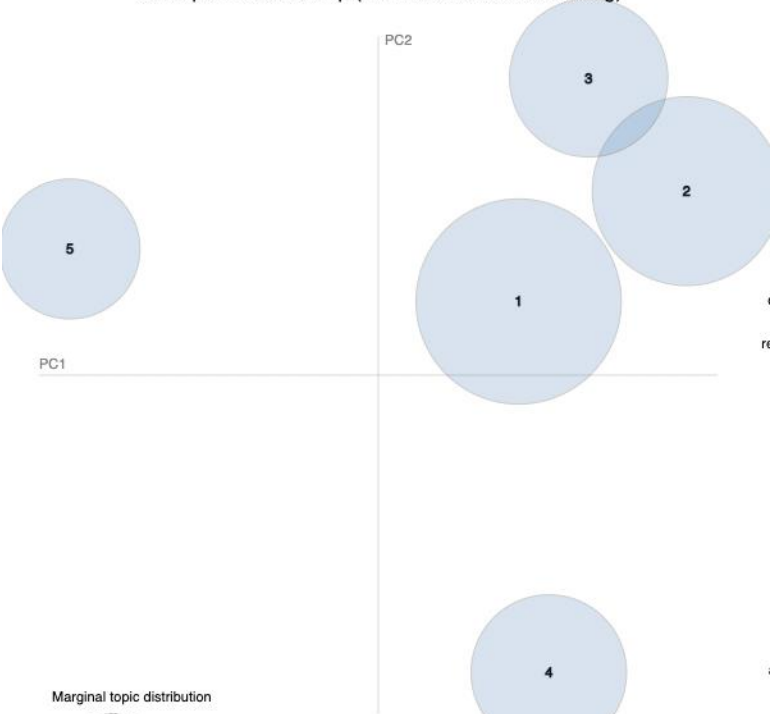


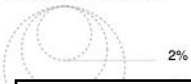
Figure 3.2. Intertopic distance maps of rejected models for the COVID-19 Policy Inflection Point: American Rescue Plan, March 8-14, 2021

Notes: The graph on the left side of the figure is of a seven-topic model that was rejected because it contained some overlap between topics and the topics were clustered toward the bottom of the y-axis. The graph on the right side of the figure contains similar problems, with considerable visual overlap, especially with topics 2 and 5 and concentration of topics in quadrant II.

Intertopic Distance Map (via multidimensional scaling)



Marginal topic distribution



Model A

Model B

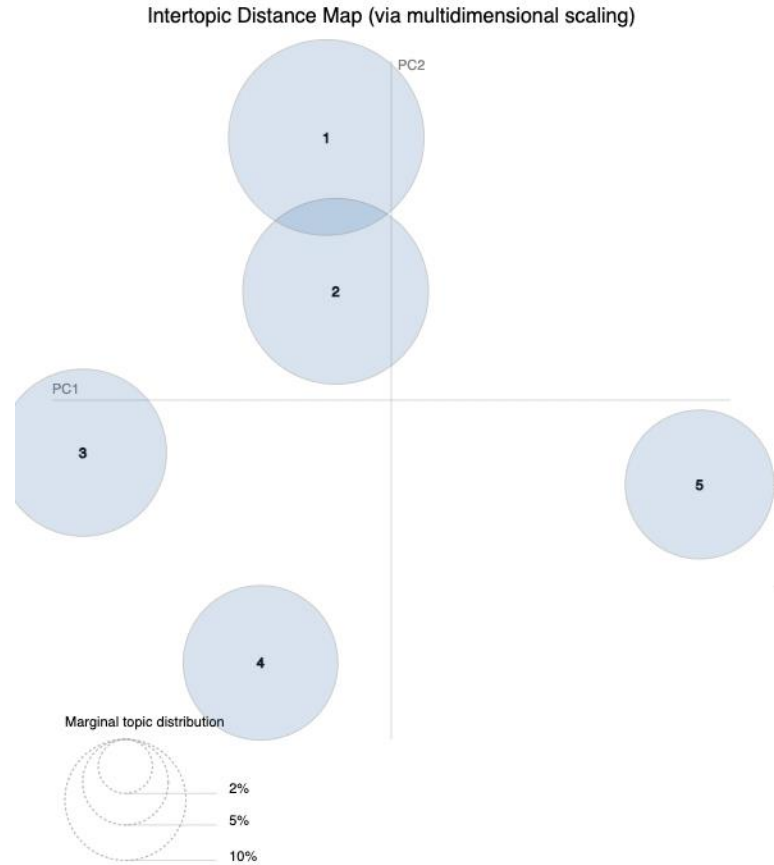


Figure 3.3. Intertopic distance maps of potential, 5-topic models for the COVID-19 Policy Inflection Point: American Rescue Plan, March 8-14, 2021

Note: Model A, the graph on the left side of the figure, was one of two final models I considered as a final model for data analysis, and Model B, the graph on the right side of the figure, is the final model that I selected for conducting the data analysis.

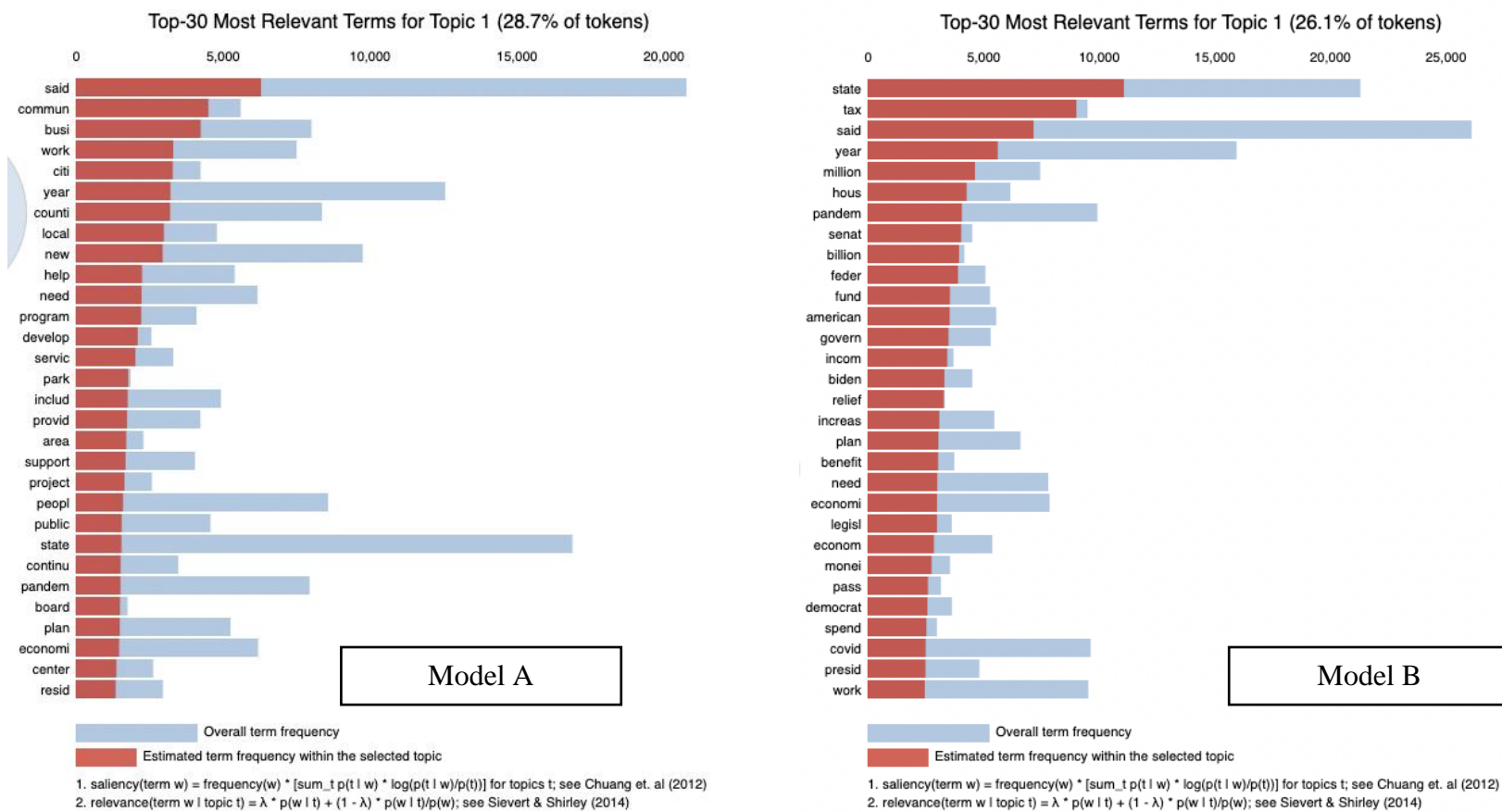


Figure 3.4. Visualization of salient terms from of potential, 5-topic models for the COVID-19 Policy Inflection Point: American Rescue Plan, March 8-14, 2021.

Figure 3.3), for both models A and B is a useful indicator that both models are suitable for analysis. Upon further visual inspection, however, the distribution of topics across the two axes represented in Model A is slightly less desirable than that presented in Model B. Though the distribution of topics is still fairly dispersed in Model A, the distribution in Model B appears to represent clearer contrast and larger distances among the 5 topics. Figure 3.4 illustrates the view of salient terms for the largest topic for both Models A and B, which was the final piece of selecting a specific model to guide the analysis of this data set. The figure represents only one view of one of the topics in each of these candidate models; however, both breakdowns of the largest topic give insight into the utility of the models.

In combination with these decompositions of the topics in each model, the visual analysis of the models, and references to the textual corpus, I selected a model for each of the data sets in this study (seven, one for each inflection point) that could serve as a heuristic tool for analyzing aspects of the organizational grand narratives at work in each of the inflection points. In this sense, though the calculation of the models is purely computational, the selection, interpretation, and use of the models in this study was aimed at working toward a post-structural narrative reading of a large data set for which such methods would otherwise be untenable. This technique is largely disconnected from quantitative and computational methods of validating topic models precisely because the validation of the model is not the point. As with qualitative research and the development of initial coding schema, the concept of validating or confirming a schema is neither the aim of, nor even a possibility in, this type of work. Instead, as DiMaggio et al. (2013) argued, establishing the model is the beginning of the analysis.

Mythologizing. Once I selected a model to analyze the data for each inflection point, I used the Gensim package in Python to create a matrix (using the code documented in Appendix

C) indicating the relationships between each of the documents and the topics in the model.

During this phase of the analysis, I used the document-topic matrix to select certain documents for closer reading. Specifically, I used the document-topic matrix to identify documents that were both closely associated with specific topics and those that were not closely associated with specific topics to get a clearer picture of the narrative dynamics through which these topical concepts emerged. To facilitate this procedure, I created an Access database that allowed me to query various articles, sort articles by their affiliation with topics, and evaluate the topics certain articles were most strongly associated with, among other operations. This database also became a repository (1) for notetaking and memoing while exploring the textual corpus and (2) for selecting those articles and exemplars that best illustrate the narrative dynamics I identified.

During this phase of the analysis, I also worked to incorporate a variety of different documents that were not strongly associated with any of the topics specifically with the aim of examining contrasts and tensions within documents as well as between them. Throughout, I used the quantitative measures of the topic-document associations and the visual representation of the topics in the intertopic distance maps to refine the concepts that emerged from the data in an abductive process that integrated the insights of the topic modeling and the close reading of the news texts.

As per Boje (2001), the purpose of this analysis is not to identify grand narrative forces or to verify them; instead, antenarrative theory questions the power and coherence of such forces and their ability to make monoliths out of such varied experiences. This is a point reinforced by the Derridean (1967/1997) understanding of power and its emergence and interpretation through text; namely, power is always and already unstable and deconstructing. Where meaning coheres, it is also incoherent. This is an understanding of power that is embodied in mythologizing. Power

is made vivid and compelling in the same way that the stories of heroes and gods created values and enforced a specific view of the real. But all it takes is a for a person to doubt that Medusa could turn someone to stone, that Orpheus *would* look back, to reimagine those stories and rewrite the histories. Thus, as I read through documents in each data set, I made note of incoherence and tension in the narrative dynamics as they emerged. This reading, of course, was not a comprehensive account of all documents in the data set. In many ways, such a venture would be fruitless and, in attempting to include and document every detail of this kind of data set, both the potential for understanding the macro-narrative, economic sensemaking practices represented in such a large corpus *and* the nuances of more specific, directed analyses of targeted data sets would be lost. This work engaged with a large data set because it aimed to investigate the organizational and power dynamics of economic sensemaking on the national, macroeconomic scale. In this way, the types of dynamics and narrative forces explored in the context of the data is not a comprehensive or objective accounting for everything contained within each corpus; instead, it is a specific framework for identifying, interrogating, and interpreting some aspect of the storytelling organizational practices at work and then starting to reimagine them.

Restorying. The final portion of this analysis came in the form of the restorying work. At the conclusion of my readings of portions of the textual corpus, I returned to specific documents to reimagine what kinds of voices and ideas, possibilities and new normal, were being left out because of the mythological, monolithical forces of grandnarrative. This work of reconfiguring, reconsidering, and reimagining narratives and possibilities is representative of the process of restorying (Boje et al., 1997). As enacted in Boje et al. (1997), restorying is a way of reorganizing the narratives and the realms of the possible to change the dynamics, to change and

challenge the obscured logics obeyed in the practice of organizing. This is not a trite exercise of contemplating what-ifs, instead, I used the notion of restorying as a foundation for reinserting and recentering voices and ideas left out of the conversations at each stage in the process of organizing economic disruptions, as represented in the inflection points analyzed in this study. After analyzing the inflection points from both the COVID-19 and Great Recessions individually, I worked to reconsider both the individual inflection points *and* the contextual whole in terms of restorying.

Finally, when working to encapsulate and draw theoretical and practical conclusions from the results of the study, I conceived of this larger work as restorying itself. Completing the hermeneutic connection by advancing theory and practice, in this sense, is the work of reimagining their narratives in the context of the study's findings. Thus, the theoretical and practical discussions presented at the end of this work are, in a way, the completion of the restorying part of this analysis, as they resituate the theoretical foundations upon which this analysis was conceived and synthesize with the work of the second study, to which I turn now.

Study Two: Narrative Network Analysis

When articulating his vision for network analytic methods in an antenarrative framework, Boje (2001) cautioned researchers to avoid relying on methods that use computerized techniques to spit out visually appealing graphics, connect dots, and divine theoretical and practical implications for discourse, organization, and social practices. For Boje, the concept of network analysis relates less to the ways that analytic techniques can visualize the relationships between concepts represented in social and semantic context; instead, the import derives from the use of such tools to highlight ongoing social meaning-making processes. Thus, for the data analytic technique for this third study, I use a form of text-mining (Lambert, 2017) and semantic network

analysis adapted from Eddington's (2018, 2020; Jarvis & Eddington, 2021) work with qualitative analysis driven by semantic cluster analyses.

To begin, once data has been collected from the sources described in the data collection section, I compile the data into three, crisis specific corpuses. For each corpus, I conduct the following procedures separately before synthesizing results among the three crises as I have proposed for the proceeding two studies.

This analytic technique begins with the pre-processing of data. After compiling a textual corpus, I import the data into the AutoMap software (Carley, 2001) which facilitates the cleaning, preparation, and semantic network mapping portions of this analysis. For textual pre-processing and preparation, I use standard procedures that include the removal of metadata, fixing misspelled words and typos, and words that occur frequently but possess little semantic significance (e.g., "the", "a", "an", "he", "they", "on", "in", etc.). Additionally, I use an automatic word-shortening technique called K-Stemming (Krovetz, 2000) that reduces words to common stems (i.e., "investing", "invested", "investor", "investment", and "invests" would all be shorted to the common root "invest").

Next, during the pre-processing of the textual corpus, I examine frequency reports of common words and phrases and software-generated recommendations for specific phrases that should be analyzed as one concept. For example: "federal_reserve", "covid_19", and "interest_rate", would each become a single concept rather than their constitutive parts (i.e., "federal" and "reserve"). It is important to note that I conduct all pre-processing steps simultaneously while keeping explicit notes related to concept mapping and word removal. To this end, given that I conclude this analysis with a synthesis of the three analyses, I work to ensure that the pre-processing steps across each textual corpus are functionally identical.

Next, once the textual corpus has been processed, I use the AutoMap software (Carley, 2001) to compute the semantic network structure. Simply, this analysis computes the association of specific words and concepts with others based on proximity. The result of this analysis is a list of co-occurring pairs that provide the structure for the semantic network analysis and cluster analysis when imported into the NodeXL software (Smith et al., 2010). From the co-occurrence list, I take the top 5% of co-occurring pairs and import them into the NodeXL software and use the Clauset-Newman-Moore (Clauset et al., 2004) clustering algorithm to group the resulting network structure into related concepts. This quantitative clustering technique operates to group network vertices into meaningful communities based on interconnections; these clusters then become the basis for the qualitative exploration that works to illuminate the contextual importance of these emergent clusters.

After graphing and saving the results of the cluster analysis, I begin the qualitative analysis of the data. Working through each crisis individually, I begin with close examinations of all of the cluster analyses. By examining the graphs and the connections between concepts, I prime myself for a close reading of the data. During this examination of the cluster analysis, I keep memos and extensive notes regarding interesting connections and overarching ideas that may come from each of the clusters. Then, when I turn to the textual corpuses, I use the cluster graphs as a guide. When reading through the texts, my aim was to uncover the narrative forces that constructed the networked concepts from the SNA portion of the analysis. Here, I emphasize: this analysis does not seek to qualitatively confirm the structure of the semantic network graphs; rather, they become a tool for further investigation of concepts and ideas that are represented in the textual corpus. Throughout my readings of the text, I keep records of how the texts and networked concepts are consonant and dissonant. As a narrative venture, then, I present

findings that derive from both the SNA and qualitative analysis to explain how individuals' narratives of experiencing economic crisis emerge in ways that are reflective of and in contrast to the semantic networks.

Summary of Methods

As this chapter has articulated, this project encompassed a wide variety of data collection techniques and data analytic tools. The expansiveness of the data collection and the detail in the analytic tools is an important aspect of this work. My aim, in this project, is not overwhelm the need for detailed and nuanced analysis with the myriad contexts, crises, data sources, and analyses at work; the breadth here is borne of necessity, not ostentation. I argue that it is only through the combination of multiple analytic techniques, across multiple discursive and crisis contexts, and engaging deeply with multiple voices and sources that researchers can begin to examine, critique, and reimagine economic organization, crisis, and intervention as a communication process, which is the overarching goal of this work. In this way, I the methods represented in this chapter were part and parcel of a commitment to this projects' goals and to their proper fulfillment through rigorous analysis. Though the methods represented in this chapter described the collection and analysis of significant amounts of data, these study designs enabled me to answer the research questions posed in the previous chapter and fulfil the various goals of this project. These techniques offered a balance between the benefits of close textual readings and wide-ranging data collections through the user of various analytic methods which facilitated reaching deep contextual insights and broader comparative analyses across the crisis contexts. I now turn to the presentation of the findings from these varied methods with the results of study one and the examination of the news media as a discursive context for organizing economies.

CHAPTER 4. STUDY ONE: NEWS MEDIA

For the substantial portion of people in the United States who do not either live or work on Wall Street, K Street, or the various other thoroughfares-cum-prosceniums on which the dramas of financial disasters and economic disruptions take place, news coverage is not a mere window into the proceedings; it is the illumination in Plato's cave that creates the shadow-play people know as *economy*. News coverage of economic disruptions is both more and less than a reflection of economic events. This contradiction in terms, this tensional and complex relationship between news coverage of economic events, the voices represented in news accounts, and the people and audiences that consume them is the first discursive site that I explore in this dissertation.

The central purpose of this study, within the larger framework of the dissertation, is not to simply trace or even set the stage for a tracing of narratives across the discursive contexts analyzed in this dissertation. This project is also not centrally interested in analyzing or making arguments about the nature of the relationship between mediated representations of economic ongoingings. Instead, the work here is intended to set a groundwork for understanding the kinds of stories and tensions that make up the macronarrative context for sensemaking during periods of economic disruption. More simply, this analysis assumes that there is a relationship between media narratives of economic disruptions and government discourse and individual experiences. This is a well-documented and researched question that is largely tangential to the point of this work (see Chapter 2). Instead, the work of this study is to examine the construction of grand

narratives regarding these economic disruptions in news media coverage *and* to analyze how those narrative forces prospect specific logics of economic organizing (Boje, 2001).

To achieve this two-fold goal, as documented in Chapter 3, I conducted a multi-level analysis of news media data using a combination of topic modeling (Blei et al., 2003) and grand narrative analysis (Boje, 2001; Lyotard, 1979/1984). This chapter presents the findings of these analyses to answer two research questions posed at the end of Chapter 2:

RQ2: How does news coverage of disruption narratively organize the social reality, collective understanding, and values of economy?

RQ3: How does news coverage of economic disruption organize the potential for economic change?

Before proceeding with the presentation of the findings from this analysis, I offer a few notes regarding the articulation of the findings from this work. First, as a structural matter, I present the findings from the analysis of the COVID-19 recession before turning to the findings from the analysis of the Great Recession; in each case, I present the findings from each inflection point in chronological order.

After detailing the findings from both crisis contexts, I turn to a synthesis of the findings from both contexts and a preliminary theoretical discussion of the import of these findings. Second, to contextualize the findings of this analysis and to highlight important economic dimensions of the interpretive work presented herein, I begin each section with important details regarding economic indicators and other important ongoingings. Although it impossible to present a full account of the context for these economic disruptions, both for reasons of brevity and

theoretical inconsistency²¹, these sectional prefaces offer important contextual details regarding this analysis. Third, at various points throughout this chapter, I may embark on contextual interludes that interrupt the presentation of the findings to note important contextual information better presented *in situ* than in a preface. I see these interludes as both an alternative to extensive footnoting (which would become typographically tedious) and as a nod to some of the chaotic dynamics of narrative sensemaking wherein power lurks and antenarratives emerge (Boje, 2001).

Finally, throughout this chapter, I include visual representations of the topic modeling analysis undertaken in this study; however, these are static representations of the visualizations offered in the Gensim and pyLDAvis packages described in Chapter 3 and tables that summarize the top terms related to topics at varying values of lambda. Inserting the full visualization outputs of these processes is impossible in a document like this one, so I have created a section of my professional website²² where all the interactive visualizations of the topic models are available for tinkering and further investigation. I included links to all visualizations in the notes for each of the figures, including general views of the topic models and direct links to the views represented in the static images.²³ This practice better captures the dynamics of these models and their utility for guiding the analysis to which I turn now.

²¹ Citing Boje's work on post-structural antenarrative theory and then claiming to tell the *complete* story regarding economic disruptions might be one grate too far.

²² <https://tbetts.org/dissertation>

²³ All of these are available and indexed under the research section of my website, tbetts.org/research on the page dedicated to this dissertation work.

Unprecedented Times, or the COVID-19 Recession in the News

Attempting to write any prelude to a discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on peoples' social and economic lives in the United States is doubly troublesome. First, any such preface will, by necessity, establish a narrative baseline for understanding the impact of the pandemic and its relationship to peoples' lives and livelihoods. In many ways, the assumptions of this brief meditation have already pre-established both the existence of the virus and pre-supposed that its impact warrants the kinds of analysis to which this is an introduction. This is troublesome not because there is any sense or credibility in the bumbling of conspiracy theorists (Gruzd & Mai, 2020); rather, it is because such presuppositions distract from the significant doubts and widespread confusion that characterized much of the talk at the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These were doubts about testing, about contagion, about lethality; these doubts were not the product of willful ignorance. The cacophony of the concomitant, overlapping, cascading (Hintz et al., 2021) disruptions, have been recorded in time lines (e.g., Bergquist et al., 2020), content analyzed (e.g., Zafri et al., 2021), and simplified in myriad academic preprints, medical journal articles, think pieces, and op-eds. Each offered their own account of the pandemic, of its costs, of its consequences, and of the future. Each made sense of the pandemic, and in turn was lent coherence in terms of the macrostories through which that sense was made. How, then, to frame an analysis of the cacophony itself without attempting to reduce the complexity of its dimensions?

Second, the troublesome nature of such an introduction is compounded by the analytic process of recording research findings. Academic writing, and even dissertations, are, themselves, texts (Derrida, 1967/1997). Sensemaking as a communicative, organizational practice is a central, inescapable part of this exercise, and writing an introduction that frames

some delicate balance, that previews some profound insight is itself a precursor to revelations of those kinds inevitably dulls their impact while also presupposing their existence. The inescapable understanding from each personal pandemic experience is as much a factor as is the knowledge of/from the intervening months. Even referring to the events that transpired during this time period as a pandemic, when the World Health Organization did not reach that determination until part-way through the first inflection point examined in this work, reflects the shape that the current language and knowledge of these events gives to this analysis. How, then, to frame an analysis of a disruption so simultaneously global and intimate?

Spivak (1988) answered: the analytic bounds of human circumstances cannot be escaped. Analysis “is obliged to develop within the discourse of the presence... [and through] an awareness of the itinerary of the discourse of presence in one’s own critique, a vigilance precisely against too great a claim for transparency” (p. 293). Spivak further invoked (Derrida, 1984) on this point: this vigilance against the claims of transparency, against the self-aggrandizement of analysis, against the sublimation of arrogance into objectivity, necessitates “rendering *delirious* that interior voice that is the voice of the other [with]in” (p. 11). As an introduction to the findings of this study regarding the grand narrative influences in news media and the organizational, sensemaking practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, these questions and answers may themselves be enough evidence of delirium to satisfy Derrida, but this argument is not intended to read as pointless sophistry. The choice to introduce the proceeding analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic in this way is both an interpretive necessity and a bit of

authorial expedience.²⁴ The project of the analysis that follows is to conjure the essentializing, universalizing, and foundationalizing influences of these micronarrative discourses and their influence through constant vigilance, constant awareness of how they shape and reshape the cacophony of voices, stories, and perspectives, all of which centered on attempting to make sense of this period characterized by the then genuine platitude, now sardonic banality: unprecedented times.

Disruption, March 9 to March 19, 2020

Near the end of the first inflection point for the COVID-19 recession, which encompassed the three largest single-day point drops in the history of the Dow Jones Industrial Average²⁵, and six days after Donald Trump declared a national emergency, the *Daily Record of*

²⁴ Noting these important aspects of this work reinforces their primacy when interpreting these findings. It is also authorial expediency in the sense that this argument might fit in other chapters of this work (e.g., the section on antenarrative theory or post-structural perspectives on economic communication), but its presence in this section helps to contextualize the argument better. It also avoids the necessity of recalling this argument from a previous chapter while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls it describes and summarizing the analysis.

²⁵ As per the design of this study, the data collection period for this inflection point reflects the combined windows of the March 12, 2020 and March 16, 2020 inflection points (three days on either side). The inflection points were combined in this case because of the overlap in the timeframe for each specific date (March 12: March 9 to March 15; March 16: March 13 to March 19). In this case, the inclusion of the March 9 drop in the Dow Jones Industrial Average is

Ellensburg, Washington, about a two-hour drive East of Seattle, printed an editorial considering the short and long terms prospective for addressing the “outbreak” of COVID-19 after a local elementary school staff member became the fourth positive case in the county. Though recent events demonstrated the damaging potential of the virus for an “economy [that] is reeling on the local, state, national and worldwide level[s],” the call to work together as a community acted as a reminder that almost any damage to livelihoods and businesses could be repaired.

But the editorial’s sense of stoic optimism began to waver at two points. The first of these emerged during a discussion of the direct implications of the pandemic for the children of the community, given its immediate impact on school employees and “the interconenctive [sic] nature of the schools and this community.” The second break in confidence came at the end of the work, where the author noted:

Our system — economic, political, social — is not structured to implement a rapid regimen of social isolation and restricted movement. Our economy is based on people moving and spending on a continuous basis. If our economy had a spirt animal, it would be a shark. COVID-19 is in our community. We all need to follow ... the health department staff and medical professionals, to self-quarantine if possible. A COVID-19 vaccine is not yet available so the main tool we have is to manage our behavior in a way

the result of these procedures, as defined in Chapter 3, and not from any alteration of the study design. Summary statistics for the status of COVID-19 spread in the United States and the state of the Dow Jones Industrial Average can be found in Table 4.2.

that limits the spread of the disease to the greatest degree possible. We can come out of this as a community, but we need to get through it first.

Framing the United States economy as a shark evokes images of predators circling: furtive, darting, deadly. It invites the questions: what happens when the water stills; what prey has been granted a reprieve? At first glance, the final note of the piece seemed to be a hopeful sentiment regarding the potential for unifying in the face of hardship, echoing the previous call to work together. Instead, the possible futures, portended by the subtle equivocation of “we *can* come out of this”, revealed the essential contradiction of urging cooperative predation.

Questioning the essential character of the United States economy was central to the findings and analysis of news coverage at this point in the COVID-19 recession. Despite the general stoicism of the headlines published by the major daily newspapers (Table 4.1), as people and papers grappled with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and began to make sense of its implications for themselves, their communities, and broader social fabrics, both in the short and long term, as in Ellensburg, WA, they revealed central inconsistencies, incoherencies in their narration of economy. These contradictions spoke to both the mercuriality the pandemic’s evolution; its potential impact; and the fragmented, fixed and unfixed, contradictory understanding of what the economy is and is not, what it can and could not be.

Ten days before the *Daily Record* piece, as the Dow plunged over 2,000 points, the first of the three record-setters that would transpire over the next week, discussions of the economy ranged from the mundanity of mayoral politics (*Wilsonville Spokesman*; OR), to the opportunity for growth embodied in a local soccer team (*Albuquerque Journal*; NM), or the threat posed by a

Table 4.1. COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (Mar 9 - 19, 2020) Daily Headlines Summary, Top 5 Circulating Papers

Date	Daily Headlines				
	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Mar 9, 2020	How the Trump Campaign Took Control of the GOP	Global Effort to Contain Virus Widens	Businesses cashing in on schools' virus fears	Trump team, Fed chair split on virus response	Containment Hopes Fade as Virus Spreads
Mar 10, 2020	Markets Spiral as Globe Shudders Over Virus	Global Markets Stagger: Dow plunges 7.8%, suffering worst drop since 2008	Virus, oil fears shatter markets: Saudi-Russia rift feeds 2,000-plus-point rout	Amid outbreak, stocks dive and recession fears rise	Cruise ship docks as virus cases increase
Mar 11, 2020	Talks Underway On Stimulus Plan to Weather Virus	Stocks Soar, Erasing Chunk of Loss	Trump's messaging takes a shift in tone	Across U.S. aggressive steps to stem outbreak	In fight against virus, officials can't settle on single strategy
Mar 12, 2020	U.S. Limits Travel After W.H.O. Cites Pandemic	Dow's 11-Year Bull market Ends	'We have rung the alarm bell': Dow's 11-year bull run is over; S&P barely avoids bear territory	WHO declares virus a global pandemic	Trump halts travel over virus
Mar 13, 2020	Worst Rout for Wall Street Since 1987 Crash	Virus Batters Economy: Dow posts worst day since 1987 as outbreak's impact deepens	Race is on to keep cases short of tipping point	Outbreak begins to upend life across U.S.	Virus' fallout grows more dire: Stocks Suffer Worst Day Since '87
Mar 14, 2020	Emergency is Declared; House Passes Aid Bill	Trump Declares Virus Emergency		Trump declares a national emergency	Trump Declares Emergency: LAUSD to shut for at least 2 weeks
Mar 15, 2020	Europe Locks Up and Faces Crisis as Virus Spreads			U.S. girds for 'more suffering,' widens travel ban	Uncertainty Returns, and We'll Get Through It Again
Mar 16, 2020	Fed Cuts Rates to Zero; Virus Tolls Soars	Fed Slashes Rates as Slump Looms	Federal Reserve Acts: Benchmark Interest Rate is Slashed to Zero	As shutdowns expand, Fed deploys its arsenal	Fight against virus intensifies: Newsom calls on seniors to stay home
Mar 17, 2020	Trump Urges Limits as Virus Batters Economy	Stocks Slide Amid Clampdown: Governments Enforce Stricter Measures To Slow Spread of Infections in U.S., Europe	Plan to stay in longer: American could be social distancing through August; officials tell people to avoid gathering of 10 or more	Trump voices new U.S. containment guidelines	A Dark Day on Wall Street; Trump Asks U.S. to Make 'Sacrifices' to Fight Virus
Mar 18, 2020	Plan Would Inject \$1 Trillion into Economy	Trump Urges \$1 Trillion Aid Deal	Trump: 'We're Going Big' Rescue Package Could Exceed \$1 Trillion	Stimulus plan: Quick cash to Americans	White House Pushes 'Bold' Stimulus Aid
Mar 19, 2020	U.S. Seeks \$500 Billion in Checks for Taxpayers	Wild Rush for Cash Rattles Markets	Senate approves emergency relief	White House seeks \$1 trillion stimulus	Trump Uses Wartime Act, Signs Virus Relief Bill

Note: All headlines summarized in this table are presented as they were formatted on the original paper.

Table 4.2. COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (March 9 - 19, 2020) Vital Statistics

Dates	COVID-19 Daily Indicators ¹		Dow Jones Industrial ²	
	Infections	Deaths	Close	Δ
3/9/20	390	4	23,851.02	-2013.76
3/10/20	498	7	25,018.16	1,167.14
3/11/20	530	12	23,553.22	-1,464.94
3/12/20	734	7	21,200.62	-2,352.60
3/13/20	951	11	23,185.62	1,985.00
3/14/20	1,218	13		
3/15/20	2,176	19		
3/16/20	2,346	21	20,188.52	-2,997.10
3/17/20	3,198	27	21,237.38	1,048.86
3/18/20	4,892	64	19,898.92	-1,338.46
3/19/20	6,121	69	20,087.19	188.27

Note: ¹ COVID-19 daily indicators from Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] (2022b) ² Dow Jones Industrial daily close from DataPlanet (2021).

traffic-light-development-turned-federal-bribery-indictment scandal (*The Northwest Herald*;

IL).²⁶ These small stories of local progress, potential, and pitfalls and transitioned into headlines

about closures and quarantines had “real impact on these businesses” (*Wilsonville Spokesman*);

about “unnecessarily shut[ting] down public life” (*Albuquerque Journal*); and about the prospect

that this might be just “a modest hit to the global economy” (*The Northwest Herald*). These

accounts of hope and anxiety illustrated the difficulty of making sense of the pandemic as it laid

bare the intertwined tensions (1) of action and reaction and (2) of publics and politics.

²⁶ The details of this last article are much less interesting than *traffic light bribery scandal* would imply.

The aim of this section, then, is to interrogate these two tensions as they emerged in the news coverage between March 9 and March 19, 2020 through the dynamics of the topic model illustrated through the intertopic distance map represented in Figure 4.1. To this end, I use this graphical representation of the topical relationships and the terms associated with each topic as an imperfect guide to analyzing the textual corpus. Using elements of both the topic model and the textual corpus, this section interrogates the two discursive tensions described above and explores how macronarrative forces shaped the process of narrating and organizing the essence of economy.

Action and Reaction: On Newtonian Economics

On March 9, 2020, the *Providence Journal* of Rhode Island documented the evolving woes of a community facing loss; specifically, the paper bemoaned the waning possibility that a golf club²⁷ would ever be restored to its former glory. Instead, “a 120-year-old, classic Donald Ross golf course is going to flip into condos and office parks.” The *Journal* brought together many commentators to bemoan the loss of “camaraderie and friendship” all the while noting that waning membership numbers meant the club’s previous prospects of “return[ing] to past glory...leaned more on dreams than economic realities.” The owner opined, “Golf has its challenges. The Rhode Island Economy has its challenges.” Later, the article noted that the club

²⁷ Throughout this section, any references to a golf club, unless otherwise explicitly noted, should be read as a group or association that governs the privilege of playing on a specific golf course and not the specific instruments with which such a game is played.

was facing trouble due to a combination of back taxes, debt, and general mismanagement that eventually made the choice obvious: sell.

Despite the undeniable significance of the events that were to transpire in the aftermath of this article's publication, this, subtly more trifling, narrative embodied the first tension that emerged in these news accounts. This account of a golf course catastrophe problematizes the question of agency, the question of action: what it means for people to act; how people can act; and why people act (or, perhaps, react) as they do in terms of economies. Teasing apart the various accounts of this Rhode Island putting green complicates the question of human action far more than any microeconomics textbook. There is a genuine sense of loss from both the community, the owners, and the author. What the article initially described as "an exciting first-class mixed-use property that will bolster both commerce and community in the upper bay" is immediately dismissed as "public relations baloney." In the article, descriptions of the owner's "hard-won reputation as a charitable champion of the game of golf" are comingled with descriptions "like 'bait-and-switch' and 'sellouts' [that] come from the mouths of some member" all despite the sense that the owners had no meaningful choice in the matter. Regarding the action-reaction tensions, as illustrated by topics one, ten, and two in Figure 4.1 (visually) and in two aspects of the golf club incident demonstrate the complexity of economic decision making and highlight its minimization in grand narrative: evaluation/fetishization and invention/capitulation.

Evaluation/Fetishization. Though the stakes were markedly different, the *Providence Journal's* coverage of the social cost and the community lost because of the sale of the golf

course, resembled the more widespread coverage of the cascading disruption caused by COVID-19. The notion of value is essential to academic explanations and the social experience of

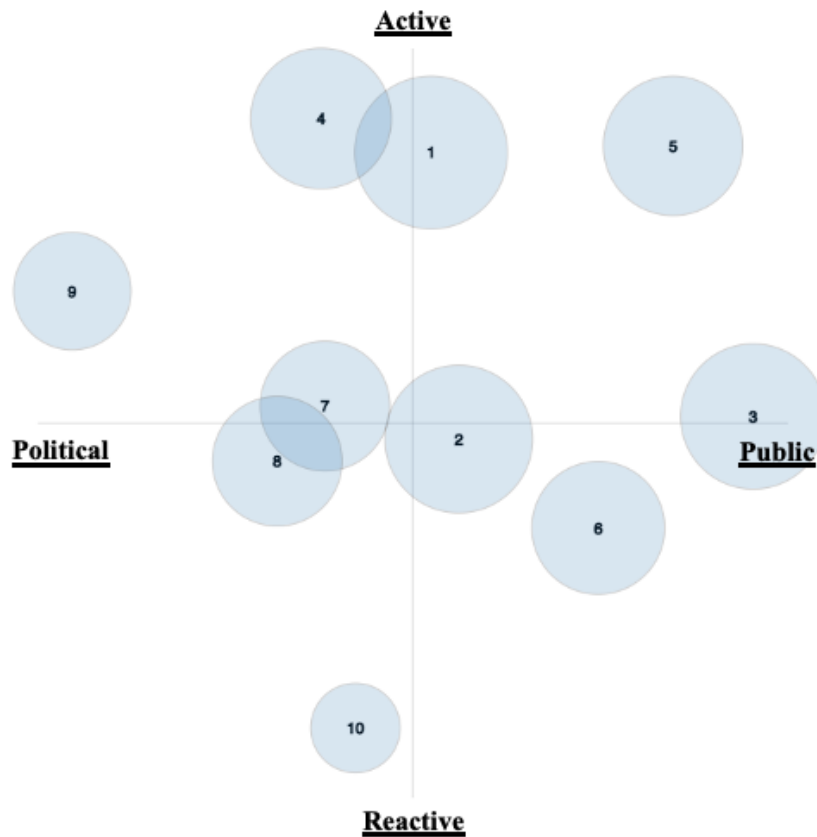


Figure 4.1. Intertopic Distance Map, COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (March 9 to March 19)

economy. It is, at once, central and illusive: a tension manifest in the conflicting accounts of material related to Topic 1 that is revealed through contrast with material from Topic 10, which is the focus of this particular section. Perhaps, in this sense, the reporting from Easton,

Maryland's *Star Democrat* was illuminating when they described the recent volatility on Wall Street as an exercise in "trading more on fear than fundamentals" and promised that "the stock Market will recover". Although these were more encouraging sentiments than might be expected in the middle of one of the worst routs in stock market history, the economic theory implicitly advanced in this quotation is profound in its simplification of the question of value, the surety of value's anchoring power, and the promise of inevitable restoration.

Regarding the notion of fetishization in Marxist economic analysis, the normative understanding centers around the fetishization of objects and the tendency to reduce the social complexity and demonstrable harm of capitalist economic arrangements *through* the notion of fixed value in the commodity (Marx, 1867/2011). However, there is another depiction of fetishization in *Capital* that is very different from the oft quoted description of money as a fetish of the capitalist economy (Marx, 1844/2007). Instead of noting the near mystical reverence with which individuals treated money and precious metals, (Marx, 1867/2011) built upon a different kind of fantastical imagery when he described the evolution of capitalist societies as the result of a "sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (p. 29). Although this illustration of human actions spinning out of control may conjure some sense of fear or desperation, as Marx's writing is wont to do, the accounts of powerlessness in many articles embraced an entirely different perspective on this loss of control. Even as reports described the evaporation of "Wall Street's unprecedented bull market run of nearly 11 years" as the stock market experienced "its heaviest losses since its nearly 23% drop on October 19, 1987" (*The Griffin Daily News*; GA). In this context, noting the end of the 11 years of growth in the stock market is telling, especially as people approached a situation where

“each day the news doesn’t get better, it gets worse”, it is only now that any significant impact will “hit Main Street to a more significant degree” (*The Griffin Daily News*).

Table 4.3. Topic Model, COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (March 9 to 19, 2020): Terms (Topics 1, 2, & 10)

	Topic 1			Topic 2			Topic 10		
Lambda	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	pollut	state	state	hoard	people	peopl	dow	market	market
	broadband	project	new	sarbuck	viru	coronaviru	buffet	stock	stock
	gallagh	develop	said	hype	health	health	warshaw	investor	said
	cannabi	fund	commun	ebola	coronavirus	viru	yerbic	fed	bank
	hoosier	citi	citi	droplet	diseas	need	goldman	bank	financi
	pmg	council	counti	epidemiological	flu	time	bayvil	dow	economi
	ordin	commun	fund	hubei	pandem	like	nasdaq	financial	viru
	kansan	support	develop	virus	spread	spread	hathawai	wall	investor
	hemp	counti	public	preval	hand	public	sank	jone	week
	turnpik	indiana	busi	apocalypse	need	covid	sach	recess	trump
	renter	properti	support	syverson	infect	new	baymen	treasuri	dai
	biofuel	legisl	year	merril	covid	pandem	dennei	index	coronavirus
	dioxide	million	need	garber	like	home	pullback	bond	recess
	ever	new	work	verili	paper	diseas	redmond	loss	peopl
	yuma	emiss	million	mulvanei	public	test	carrozza	plung	fed
	heinrich	board	project	cholera	panic	case	alpha	investor	new
	utahn	kansas	local	taiwan	sikc	care	klemann	bear	point
	donohu	environment	provid	thermomet	time	hand	boeing	point	mondai
	waterwai	energi	plan	indiscrim	toilet	crisi	bower	central	crisi
	edc	carbon	include	woodburn	care	govern	amendola	trade	investor

Note: Terms are represented in this table as they appear in the corpus after stemming. Lambda values alter the calculation of relevant terms by prioritizing unique terms (low lambda) or strong association (high lambda). The terms summarized in this table can be explored in more dynamic fashion on my website, where it is listed as “COVID-19 News Coverage, Disruption Topic Model”.

In this way, the narration of the economy as a force beyond the realms of human control reframed the evaluation of loss as a costly foregone conclusion, as a resigned inevitability, for when the results hit close to home. References to the Great Recession, especially in a majority Black community like Griffin (USCB, 2020), are not-so-subtle reminder of the pangs and aftershocks from the stunted recovery that may have raised Wall Street to newer heights but disproportionately failed to provide meaningful restitution for Black, Latinx, and working-class households (Addo & Darity, 2021). The damage wrought by financiers and bankers and laid at the feet of those lenders deemed subprime, made the “11 years of growth” both a metonymic stand-in for the disparate experiences of communities like Griffin and an invocation of the events yet to come. Like Marx’s sorcerer, for communities like Griffin, the fetishization of economic powers, especially in times of crisis, relates to the uncontrollable, distanced nature of the financial powers that have such significant impact on their existence in much the same way as the owners of the golf course in Providence described their incapacity to go against the streams of the market.

The notable difference here is that, in the evaluation of these circumstances and the consideration of individual agency, the position of the golf course owners is fundamentally distinct from others. Despite their ownership of the land, the buildings, and, in many ways, the community of support from those who were mourning the loss of the club, these means of production did not exempt the proprietors from obeisance to the whims of economic circumstance. Despite the essentially human activity of creating, establishing, and evaluating the worth of goods, services, commodities, and golf clubs, a point which even garners assent from most neo-classical economists, there is a sense that, past that point, the actions of humanity feed into the transcendent being of economics. This point, though controversial in some circles, is

comparatively banal; the notion that people refer to economies in this way is not particularly revelatory nor is the idea that individuals decline to exercise the agency that they have in response to economic, and other similar, discourses (Foucault, 1975/1995; Sartre, 1943/1956).

However, the news reports from this inflection point offered insight into the practice and exercise of those dynamics. The narratives employed to make sense of this pandemic did not divvy up populations into those who do and do not have the power to influence the shifting tides of economic fortunes, instead, the subsumption of human action into the aggregate entities to which they subject themselves regardless of ownership, capital, or positions of privilege. Articles reinforced this concept by describing the volatility of this inflection period as an example of “corrections, [which] are common during bull markets and are considered normal and even healthy” because “they allow markets to *remove speculative froth* after a big run-up and give investors a chance to buy stocks at lower prices” (*The Sentinel-Tribune*; OH; emphasis added). In other words, at some point, the market may see fit to act as intended, as the Darwinian spirit animal the *Daily Record* described it and take its predatory due.

That this fetishization of the power of the market becomes characterized as an indiscriminate force equivocates and distorts the human process with which it is framed as in tension. It distorts and equates the evaluation of harm experienced by those at the economic margins with the frustrations of those at the economic centers of power. In this context, the *Griffin Daily News* account of the “so-called circuit breakers” after “stocks fell so fast on Wall Street at the opening bell that they triggered an automatic, 15-minute trading halt for the second time [that] week” reads less like a warning for people who were likely to face the ramifications of these fluctuations in the coming days and more a glimpse into the exercise of collective self-flagellation so severe that some higher authority had to put a stop to it. And this mutual, agential

act that those at the center of power choose to participate in was, in turn, constructed as the equivalent of the subsequent harm wrought on those who never had a choice in the matter and who have far more to lose.

The question of agency and choice in the context of a pandemic was rather conspicuous throughout. Throughout the data from this inflection points, there are startling narratives that depict a growing sense of unease that evolves from the marginally concerned, especially near the beginning, to something altogether different and more difficult to analyze. And for many officials, reports and everyday citizens whose voices found their way into these narratives, as the time went on, like the proprietors of a certain Rhode Island golf establishment they found their choices restricted, closed in, quarantined off. The noteworthy thing in this context, though, is the way that these articles discussed the central choices of the pandemic in the context of the same frame seen above.

Invention/Capitulation. The second tension previewed by the *Daily Record* related more specifically to the terms raised in Topics 1, opposite of Topic 10, and 2, directly in the middle and the possibility of taking action against the possible economic and public health ramifications of COVID-19. Throughout the articles at the beginning of the crisis, especially in those toward the beginning of the collection (around March 9th and 10th) there are a number of conversations that seem tangential to the overarching context of the evolving pandemic. Notably, there are discussions of various projects, plans, investments, and changes at the community level. These are reflected in many of the terms that characterize Topic 1: pollution, broadband, cannabis, hemp, turnpike, renter, biofuel, and dioxide. These denote many of the types of ongoing projects from which the COVID-19 pandemic pulled local governments. For example, one discussion from the *Frederick News-Post* (MD) described ongoing efforts to preserve

agricultural land amidst a flurry of other local projects including “historic preservation, agricultural diversification, economic development grants, and first-time homebuyer assistance.” Many of the councilpersons quoted in the article discussed the importance of this kind of action at the local level because of the community’s specific needs; one argued that “[they] will not have viable, contiguous stretches of land and an agricultural economy by accident.” This was the first of many notions of invention, of people and government working together to “support the county [by] doing what it can ‘aggressively’” to support the goals of the local economy.

This notion of a designed economy is striking because it flies in the face of many of the accounts that pervade economic literature, *and* those explored in the previous section, which characterize the economic situation as a given fact, as a thing outside of the realm of human control. Rather than regarding the actions of this local government as an interference into the transcendent workings of a market, these local leaders framed their economic situation as directly within their control, as the irresponsibility to manage. Many of the other accounts of local action before the pandemic regarding a Sioux tribe’s efforts to legalize marijuana within their lands as “a ‘jump-start’ to the local economy that would provide jobs and bring in money” (*The Bismarck Tribune*; ND); or the conflict regarding the economic impact of rest stops and fast-food around the Pennsylvania turnpike (*The Standard Journal*; PA); or the economic impact of a local newspaper’s closure (*Camden News*; AR); or even the more cosmic aspirations of the Brunswick Landing that, according to a bill in the Maine state legislature would “advance a new space economy in space exploration and space technology development” (*The Times Record*; ME). The ambitions are different in each case, but the tone regarding even the most outlandish of these projects was one of that framed the economic possibilities of investing of building of reaching for the stars, as fundamentally an issue of proper management. In these cases,

government action was not economic intervention, it was economic invention – as long as the object was something *new*.

Unfortunately, invention cannot mean simply improving on that which already exists; invention is the creation of something deemed novel, innovative, and private (see U. S. Patent Office, 2022, "What is a Patent" section). For the people of Maine, the potential for a spaceport is economically uncontroversial because its aims are, literally, out of the realm of operation. It is new and different and therefore, acceptable. This is a narrative that has its rhetorical and logical justifications rooted in the Lockean conception of property rights and labor which were used to justify the dispossession of indigenous populations in imperialist practices (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). When, however, local authorities were perceived as meddling, moving beyond the realm of their expertise in managing the local, or even worse, state or even federal governments began contemplating altering current arrangements, the tone changed, the hackles were raised, and a sneering resentment of the notion that any type of action could produce any type of substantial benefit emerged. As one commentator argued for *The Express-Times* of Easton, PA, ostensibly in response to the perceived threat of a pandemic to the bloated and ineffective US healthcare system:

Medicare for All would eliminate jobs. ... A large portion of the 1.8 million people who work for health insurance companies or local insurance agencies, or in administrative support in hospitals and doctors' offices, would lose their jobs... Alternatives like a "public option" or "buy-in" to Medicare ... would cause private insurance premiums to skyrocket and create a slippery slope to Medicare for all. ... We can all agree our health care system has its problems, starting with rising costs. But disrupting the tire system will only spell economic trouble. The best solution is to improve our current health care

system to expand coverage in a targeted way, hold down costs through market-based approaches, and protect patients' choice of doctors and treatment options.

That any potential disruption to the extant system, the potential that insurance agents near and far might lose their jobs, is the stumbling block to even attempts at meaningful reform is as telling as the priorities implied in this writing. Much as with the narratives regarding the stock market volatility above, the equivocation of patient choice with the significant portion of uninsured and underinsured people in the United States, particularly in the context of a looming public health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, offers a startling bit of insight into the justificatory schemes and rhetorical sleight-of-hand that emerged in the articles related to topics 1 and 2 as time progressed.

As the local discussions of economic invention and expansion turned to concerns for economic preservation, the idea that any type of assistance would be forthcoming was a source of hope but it did not remove the potential opposition, like that from a congressman who claimed that "billions in spending were included having nothing to do with coronavirus, and government was mandating small businesses to pay sick leave." Later, the same representative noted that "After already voting to spend \$8.3 billion for emergency provisions, I wasn't comfortable spending another (roughly) \$50 billion not knowing exactly what it was for, other than the portion having nothing to do with the coronavirus effort. We should have stayed until we got it right." These reasons for opposition, however discouraging given the rapid escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic, were entirely in keeping with the sense of agency emplotted in these economic narratives. Much like the discussion of the threat any changes to the healthcare system might pose to the economic fabric of the nation, this congressman's opposition derives from the desire to get it right, and this is not a trivial concern. As the report went on to detail, this

representative's opposition to the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*, an aid package that was trifling compared retrospectively with the eventual aid packages (e.g., *CARES Act* and the *American Rescue Plan*), echoed the sense that if every aspect of a measure cannot be actuarial guaranteed and ideologically unimpeachable, then intervention of any kind is simply doomed to failure and inevitable backsliding into economic ruin or tyranny. News coverage reporting on opposition to COVID-19 aid package framed this position on inaction as one based in simple economic facts as an unimpeachable, inevitable conclusion even amidst unique challenges.

This contrasted with the idea that government can support invention and create opportunities for people by providing funds, legalizing drugs, or building the next Mos Eisley which was reported in uncontroversial terms. As the priorities shifted and needs changed, though, the idea that government would provide any substantive alternative to the normative routines of buying and selling, even given the extenuating circumstances of a possible public health crisis, was met with hostility and mistrust. The political ideal of legislating “until [Congress] got it right” reads as disingenuous when perfectionism is a façade for intransigency. In this way, as narratives invoked theories of market efficiency and self-restoring equilibrium they quash the prospect of legislative inventiveness with capitulation to the whims of the market. From the outset of the pandemic, reinforcing a puritanical, dogmatic approach to crafting policy was an explicit rejection of the inventive spirit of people, businesses, and governments driven by narrative logics where inaction is patience and callous disregard is faith. But promises that “the markets are going to be just fine, just fine” (*Washington Times*; DC), even from a former President, are not mere response to an essential impotence of government action; they are originators, narrative foundations, of policy failures.

After noting that Trump had canceled two trips and a campaign rally, a surprisingly circumspect action in retrospect, the *Washington Times* furthered that Trump had reassured everyone that ““We need some separation until such time as this goes away. It’s going to go away.”” This was to be a common refrain for the President, and its contradiction with the immediate note that he had “pledged aid to businesses and workers hurt by the outbreak” is a prelude to later analysis regarding the first major policy response to the pandemic, the *CARES Act*. However, as media reports began to make sense of the tectonic shifting, the emerging friction between these justifications for inaction and the sense of oncoming disaster were as prominent in the context of the contextual evidence for concern and as they seem in the present. Despite the cultural and discursive prominence of an economic perspective that can be characterized as a primary duty of non-interference, of nonmaleficence, there is a demonstrable sense from communities in need that this time, things might be different, things might *need* to be different.

Rethinking Absolution and Agency. The Evaluation/Fetishization and Invention/Capitulation dynamics described in this section illustrate some of conflicting tensions both within and between the first three topics in this model. Independently, these two sections document the narrative organization of individuals’ places in economies with respect to economic theories of human action and agency. Collectively, they set the stage for an interrogation of a central narrative from the time of this inflection point that (1) demonstrates the essentializing forces of the economic grand narratives at work in these articles and (2) exemplifies the impact of this economic sensemaking across a broader context. The *Atlanta-Journal Constitution* presented the story this way:

For several months, Americans have been given a steadily more frightening series of reports about the coronavirus. IN the past week, the news intensified with a rising number of COVID-19 cases, a plunging stock market and a series of high-profile cancellations that threatened to tip the economy into recession. Americans were also told that those exposed to the virus would be quarantined for weeks, including some well-known figures. So, consumers had good reason to be worried. ‘But to buy a year’s supply of toilet paper? That’s nuts.’”

This account was actually one of the kinder presentations of the uptick in demand for toilet paper that characterized much of the coverage near the end of this inflection point, with one report from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* arguing that “panic buying is almost as bad as the illness. ...America is resilient and has survived its share of pandemics. We must all do our part to keep ourselves safe and well. This too shall pass.”

Both these accounts of *incidents* surrounding the toilet paper, and other sanitation-related products, during this time are interesting in and of themselves because of the story they tell about the nature of economic resilience and the vulnerabilities of contemporary economic organizations. As an economists’ report in the *York News-Times* of Nebraska indicated, “Toilet paper hoarding in particular has a curious history and economy. This wouldn’t be the first panic over toilet paper.” The economist went on to discuss an incident in 1973, attributed to a joke made by Johnny Carson, and another in Venezuela were just a few examples from a history riddled with similar situations. As they noted “Birds, squirrels and other animals tend to hoard stuff” and for humans it is a “relatively cheap action” that allows people “to think that they are ‘doing something’ when they feel at risk.” (*York News-Times*; NE). Though the tone of this account of panic buying is certainly more congenial than many of the other frothing attempts to

get people to calm down, the infantilization of people caught at the intersections of an economic situation they were being told was beyond any human control and a virus about which they had very little reliable information.

In this way, the problematization of hoarding, the idea that one can consume too much raises questions about the vulnerabilities and justifications for contemporary economic arrangements. The idea that “hoarding binges [could] result in shortages of masks, gloves and supplies for the health providers who need them most” lies in direct contradistinction to the logics of capitulation described in the previous section. The theoretical frame of neoclassical economics, the presidential promises that all will be fine, justifies inaction based on the promise that “America is resilient” as in the above *Philadelphia Inquirer* article. But the untempered disgust and infantilizing excuses for consumers attempting to respond to evolving circumstances revealed a concern that, perhaps, consumers are not the rational contemplators of marginal utility that made calculating supply and demand curves much easier.

This, however, is tangential to the more novel point that these dynamics illustrate. It is not simply *that* the people were not acting in accordance with theoretical models or even *that* the models themselves establish and reify the epistemic foundations of objectivity and rationality; the contempt for those who were hoarding toilet paper were the contextual echoes, the rhetorical obverse, of the arguments made about stock market corrections, speculative froth, and economic change. These are ontological claims about human agency masquerading as an epistemological debate regarding knowledge and rationality. In the above articles and throughout the news coverage across Topics 1, 2, and 10, there is a consistent storyline regarding the economic knowledge of recovery. After the first few days of volatility the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (HI) reported on March 13, 2020 that “Wall Street roared back today from its worst day in 30 years

with a broad rally that sent the Dow Jones Industrial Average nearly 2,000 points higher — its biggest point gain ever” following indications from Washington D.C. that a federal response to the coronavirus was forthcoming. This report, and many others like it, clung to any indication that the downturn would not be prolonged, cited the Black Monday crash of 1987 both to contextualize the significance of the downturn (even relative to the more recent experiences of the Great Recession) and in homage to the more long-term financial implications of that event.

Interlude: Narrating the 1987 Stock Market Crash. As many scholars of resilience have noted (Buzzanell, 2010, 2018b; McAdams et al., 2001; Seeger & Sellnow, 2016), experiences of disruption can be an impetus for positive change, and many of the narratives that stem from the experiences on Black Monday (October 19, 1987) have profound implications for organizing contemporary economic conditions. MacKenzie (2006) began *An Engine, Not a Camera*, one of the quintessential texts in performative economics and actor-network theory, with a discussion of the events surrounding Black Monday and the experiences of an executive of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Interwoven with detailed explanations of the dire circumstances facing the exchange and its executive board as they toiled overnight to find resources, guarantee banks, and insure that the exchange would open in the morning, Mackenzie reported many conversations: conversations with Alan Greenspan, who recently had been appointed to the chairmanship of the Fed; conversations in backrooms that lead to handshake deals; conversations on frantic phone lines three minutes before the exchange was supposed to open; conversations that it all happen right after the Mercantile Exchange executive told them he needed to “call Alan Greenspan, [because] we’re going to cause the next depression.” For MacKenzie’s work, the narrative of the boy whose family evacuated on the last train before the Nazi forces took over is a demonstration of the fundamental humanity, the performativity of the economic systems surrounding people, an

instructive account about the determination of the men²⁸ whose perspicacity and effort turn the cogs of global markets.

This reading of the circumstances surrounding the 1987 crash is not limited to this specific account. Economists, bankers, and financiers laud themselves and their actions in the aftermath of the crisis for decisive intervention, particularly by the Federal Reserve, was evidence “that the system taken as a whole (i.e., including the Fed) performed acceptably during the crash” (Bernanke, 1990). For his part, Bernanke’s summation was tepid compared to the self-congratulatory approbation of the financial system’s stability that has since been implicating in legitimizing risky practices (Cecchetti & Disyatat, 2010). But the resulting narrative of the success and recovery in the aftermath of aberrant, unexplainable crisis rebuffs any consideration of the counterfactual: the potential damage to people and livelihoods far beyond the Wall Street or the Mercantile Exchange that might have occurred if things had worked out a little differently.

²⁸ Any emphasis of the exclusionary undertones of these conversations would not suffice to unpack the gender politics of these conversations. Any analysis offered in the context of this interlude would be shortchanged without significantly more specific attention that lies beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it to say, the only woman mentioned in the narrative is the bank executive who nearly lets the system fail because her “hands [were] tied” until the chairman of the bank serendipitously walks through the doors and provides his assent. Such dynamics alone are enough material for more than a single dissertation, so I aim to explore those in future analyses rather than in an abridged version here that would not adequately unpack the impact of misogyny and sexism in economic theory and systems.

There may have been a continuation of significant losses on the next day, but still the system held firm, the system performed admirably, the system did its job. And so there should be no need to question the legitimacy of that system because it has faced challenges and refused to collapse and because, even at the last minute, people happened to be in the right place at the right time. And they presumably made the right choices.

Continuation: Absolution and Agency. Comparing the events during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to the 1987 stock market crash, rather than to the financial crisis, reinforced the magnitude of the loss without invoking a more negative affective response. Moreover, the comparison built on the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and its similarity with the opacity of the 1987 crash. The backroom conversations and handshake deals that cleared the way for the markets to open on October 20, 1987, offered another vivid contrast to the more prolonged failure to produce any such deal, despite the efforts of some of the same players from the earlier story when things worked out because people happened to be in the right place at the right time and made the right choices, unlike many of the consumers who were “running to stock up on hand sanitizer, toilet paper, and water” even though “[they]’re not in a zombie-movie scenario. People are not dying in the streets” (*Staten Island Advance*; NY).

The contraposition of the panicked consumer with the calm, collected financiers is a damningly direct comparison with the free-fall panic of the previous stock market misadventures that the papers cited. The *Staten Island Advance* noted that “Trump still sometimes talk[ed] like there’s nothing out of the ordinary happening, despite all the evidence that every American can see” in ways that were reminiscent of the “‘don’t worry’ doublespeak that came out of the Bush administration as the global economy was already in a free fall” while also satirizing peoples’ motives for hoarding toilet paper and framing their justifiable concerns as the perfectly hysterical

foil to the calm, considered approach of the market. As a forward thinking, organizational antenarrative, the implication is clear: if there were any kind of failure in the system, it was not to be the fault of the financiers or the businesses or the system itself; it was the people who would not keep their wallets shut and the toilet paper on the shelves who would be the cause of any significant problems.

Absolving the *system*, broadly construed, of any negative ramifications is the final aspect of this narrative dynamic. In *Capitalism and Freedom*, Friedman (1962) argued that non-intervention in the market, especially from government, was central to maintaining individual liberties. In his view, a healthy, competitive market was the only system that could preserve any meaningful sense of liberty, but when those rights are circumscribed by what is deemed objective or rational within the market economy and those freedoms are only possible through the maintenance of the exact market system that determines value and distributes goods, the spirality of the antenarrative becomes clear. Above, I noted that influence of the grand narrative forces related to this specific dynamic acted to obscure an ontological debate as an epistemic banality regarding the relationship between rationality and economic knowledge. In many ways, throughout this section of the analysis (and many previous parts of this dissertation), I have worked to disentangle the questions related to human rationality and economic modeling without reflecting on the ontological trojan horse that these narratives obscured. Questions of whether humans or governments are foundationally rational or irrational, altruistic or egotistic, or good or bad are distractions from the ontological point of agency. The prospect of economic change does not necessitate human be fundamentally anything other than human.

This section on the narrative dynamics of action and reaction illustrated in the topic model is subtitled: “On Newtonian Economics”, and there are various relations between this

particular metaphor and the news coverage of the emerging COVID-19 disruption: the implicitly mechanistic understanding of economic actors and actions; the sense of economic inertia; and the expectation that any economic intervention will have its own equal and opposite reaction. As people began to organize a sense of the myriad implications the COVID-19 pandemic would have on daily life, the news media was not conservative in the amount of ink spilled, or pixels typeset, about the risk that taking significant action against the coronavirus would have on the economy. The logical conclusion was that any action to stop the virus would necessarily and unquestionably have an equal and opposite reaction on the health and safety of the community. By narrating these forces as natural laws to which humans are subject, rather than as predictions based on the normative bounds of a social system that is comprised of, governed by, and given meaning through human action.

The golf course closure lamented by the *Providence Journal* has permanently closed, resulting in a lawsuit, that alleges the owners defrauded members, and a local zoning kerfuffle that further complicated the new owners' plans to develop the land. In hindsight, it seems as though this may have been the kind of complexity the former owner was attempting to avoid when he described the decision as entirely out of his hands, as a matter of simple economics. And especially when seen through the lens of neoclassical theory, there is a beauty in the simplicity of this type of perspective, but like Newton's laws, these principles have limitations and shortcomings. When travelling at high speeds, economies are liable to bend the rules and maxims that undeniably useful for predictions of specific, short-term, circumstances and behaviors. But planning economic policy based on uncritical deference to these frameworks, both in the long-run and in times of substantial difficulty, is akin to plotting your interstellar voyage from a spaceport in Maine by using a sextant and abacus.

Nonetheless, the choice of destination, the choice of instrumentation, and the choices made along the road, even the very concept of roads or paths along the way, is quintessentially and unequivocally constituted in human social interaction. Again, the transition from reports of local governments' economic management to the reports of shortages and impotence is not significant because illustrated the central incapacity that defines all government, dooming any hope for collective acts of change to the failure, but because the tensions of fetishization/evaluation and invention/capitulation obscured the potential that human action held and the magnified the economic failures of which toilet paper was merely symbolic. Consequently, this analysis highlights the vulnerabilities of those economic systems that are reified in times of crisis through communicative practices that displaced the blame for failures and delegitimized efforts toward change as illegitimate, tyrannical, dangerous, or inevitably futile. However, this observation invites a different kind of question regarding the recognition of human authority over the economy and *for whom* it is organized.

Publics and Politics: Who Builds It?

During the 2012 presidential campaign, President Barack Obama ignited a controversy that spawned significant press, inspired daily theme for the Republican Party convention and, perhaps most egregiously, a country song by Lane Turner. Obama's recognition that businesspeople were not responsible for building and maintaining the physical infrastructure that logistically and physically makes business feasible is both an ethical claim, regarding the proper role of government in promoting development, and an ontological claim about the social interconnections that make the organization of contemporary economic systems possible. Though the political battle regarding the phrase largely ignored its more interesting dimensions of the implicit nougat of economic theory within the quip, it succinctly embodies the second

discursive dimension that emerged from the news coverage from March 9 to March 19, 2020, as captured in the coverage of the Maryland's county level politics and a councilwoman's vote on agricultural preservation policies, as previously discussed above, from *The Frederick News-Post*:

She still had some concerns about [the policy] before the vote...[because the] funds were in no way guaranteed to go to the first-time homebuyer assistance. ...However, she voted yes ... [because of] the need for Maryland and Frederick County to become more food resilient and the opportunity to preserve land to grow food for the community.

This description of local policymaking is, perhaps, nothing particularly enlightening on its own, given that seems to be a transparent account of a community leader changing her mind about a policy's potential based on the advocacy of a few constituents. Everything in this case seems in order, if rather banal, but in the context of this inflection point, the understanding of resilience that was noted as central to her decision on the policy indicates a meaningful assumption about the relationship between economic resilience, politics, and the constitution of publics.

The *Huron Daily Tribune's* (MI) account of policymaking during this inflection point was at least mildly less supportive of the potential for meaningful responses to the emerging concerns about COVID-19. As the paper noted, "politicians aren't known for tackling problems early. There's no reward from voters for taking painful but necessary steps." The pessimistic tone of the observation was, ostensibly, a response to an observed lack of preparation from various levels of government even when "there's no political cost to having plans ready of possible emergencies, and the obligation to do something comes with the territory." Even as the report worked through some of the potential proposals circulating in media and government, the

Table 4.4. Topic Model, COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (March 9 to 19, 2020): Terms (Topics 3, 7, 8, & 9)

	Topic 9			Topic 8			Topic 7			Topic 3		
Lambda	0	0.5	1	0	0.5	1	0	0.5	1	0	0.5	1
Terms by relevance	biden	sander	trump	ethanol	oil	said	mcconnel	worker	said	dewin	said	said
	socialist	biden	presid	shale	price	year	earner	tax	worker	poli	counti	state
	libertarian	trump	democrat	bushel	rate	econom	ir	senat	tax	henrico	covid	counti
	ioniq	polit	sander	opec	econom	market	quintil	unemploy	busi	baystat	test	health
	syrian	democrat	biden	jessurun	percent	price	percentil	paid	hous	abbott	state	covid
	nomine	presid	polit	rappahannock	market	economi	casten	hous	senat	macomb	health	test
	mpg	voter	american	lehman	year	rate	grasslei	wage	worker	macadam	case	coronviru
	impeach	elect	elect	fed	product	oil	hawlei	leav	state	fairfax	close	case
	crossov	campaign	vote	cinquegrana	consum	busi	iv	packag	unemploy	chesterfield	depart	close
	hillari	candid	voter	redfin	compani	compani	kinzler	benefit	feder	pitkin	gov	peopl
	elector	presidenti	nation	quantit	declin	percent	cassandra	lawmak	help	rsquo	announc	public
	herstand	voter	economi	buffer	demand	state	oliva	incom	need	sentara	offici	announc
	biden	american	right	marcyan	industri	impact	tester	pai	leav	stonei	public	offici
	rebel	parti	like	glut	sale	industri	galvano	payment	pai	culpep	coronaviru	school
	horsepow	joe	countri	moodi	impact	product	montanan	insur	econom	gunnison	emerg	depart
	torqu	berni	govern	apprais	growth	like	schutz	feder	paid	missoula	hospit	spread
	stafanik	america	new	carranza	month	job	dain	congress	benefit	williamsbur	governor	week
	decenc	primari	campaign	unsustain	revenu	month	rubio	billion	american	opb	patient	new
	defianc	obama	america	nar	economi	time	nun	budget	economi	vcu	center	emerg
	racist	politician	peopl	messier	spend	consum	rewrite	relief	coronaviru	ldquo	spread	gov

Note: The topics here are listed in the order in which they appear, from left to right, on the x-axis of the topic model (Figure 4.1). The interactive representation of the model, including these terms is available as the “COVID-19 News Media, Disruption Topic Model”.

concomitant concerns about the impact of COVID-19 and the uncertain potential for a blanket stimulus check to “help the public overcome the fears that are dampening spending,” lent to the inevitable conclusion that “rather than just doling out aid broadly, it [made] sense to target help to those most affected by the slowdown.” In both cases, the desire to target the right people and guarantee the right kind of aid is framed in language that is simultaneously magnanimous and defensive. The accounts seem equally concerned about working to ensure assistance for those in need and, less directly, withholding it from those who do not. And it is this process of debating and drawing those distinctions, and their implications for the that is the central focus of the analysis in this section.

Responsibility/Constituency. The reactions to the public health and economic measures, as represented in topic 3, was notable both because of (1) the clear contrast with topics 9 and 8 and (2) its invocation of local government officials and county names, such as Greg Abbot, the Governor of Texas; Mike Dewine, the Governor of Ohio; Jared Polis, Governor of Colorado; and Ben McAdams, one of the first congressional representative to test positive for COVID-19. The centrality of the local and state government was pronounced throughout the articles most strongly associated with the topic, as further illustrated by the prominence of county names (e.g., Macomb (MI); Fairfax (VA); Chesterfield (VA); Missoula (MT)) and local health care providers and hospitals (e.g., Baystate in Massachusetts; Sentara in Virginia). These articles explicitly offered readers the type of practical, direct information that they needed to obtain help if they needed and to update them on the evolving circumstances as state and local officials moved to protect their citizenry, prioritizing community health over the economic implications. For example, as the *Austin-American Statesman* noted, the response at the city, county, and state levels came quickly; the *Statesman* specifically praised the work of the Austin Public Health

authority who noted that “As [Austinites] look to other cities and states who are experiencing a faster (spread) and have been more impacted by this particular outbreak, it’s evident that we need to increase our efforts to keep our residents safe and healthy.” Along these same lines, *The Bowie County Citizens Tribune* (TX) reported on the “numerous financial management tools that [would] allow the state to react to and contend with economic pressures” that resulted from the health measures. Put simply, throughout these articles it seems clear that, in these times of great need, local and state authorities were prepared to do what was necessary.

At the same time, they were asking the people of their communities to do their civic duty by taking a simple survey.

As census forms go out through March 20, the focus will be on how people can fill them out online to reduce spread of coronavirus, but we can’t forget the other notable part of the census questionnaire: a citizenship question will not be on it.

The Berkshire Eagle (MA) emphasized the conclusion of protracted legal battle over the inclusion or exclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 census form both as a segue into a discussion (read: criticism) of the blatant Machiavellianism exemplified by the “files expos[ing] the [Trump] administration’s real reasoning [for the question]: to make possible redistricting and reapportionment schemes ‘advantageous to Republicans and non-Hispanic whites.’” Putting aside the question of whether or not such revelations were as shocking as the paper described, the more timely consideration, given the contextual importance of COVID-19, was contained within the latter half of the article, which described previous mechanisms that states historically used to disenfranchise and exclude various groups from public life and included a description of the actions of the “violently racist anti-Chinese Workingmen’s party” during the Californian constitutional convention near the end of the 19th century. After noting and condemning these

historical examples of discrimination and unfair treatment, the article concluded by noting that these exclusionary practices undermine the political power of voters in urban communities that have larger non-citizen populations and cautioning against complacency because “such policies threaten to exacerbate inequalities in representation not only during the 2020s, but for decades to come.”

And this point regarding the long-term consequences of these explicit moves toward public exclusion is well taken, but the invocation of anti-Chinese racism was not the only timely aspect of this article, as *The Folsom Telegram* (CA) demonstrated. In their article about the importance of the census, the *Telegram* noted that “the framers of the Constitution of the United States chose population to be the basis for sharing political power, not wealth or land. A complete census count means more people in power who truly represent and advocate for local communities.” The sense that the census is an incredibly important activity in American political and civic discourse is palpable throughout this article, which was published in the same county where the previously mentioned California Constitutional Convention took place. Nonetheless, the troubling aspects of this and many of the other account of the importance of the census as part of people’s collective responsibility to their communities, especially as their local governments are using those resources to protect the well-being of their communities. As the *Roanoke Times* (VA) summarized the issue: “demography is destiny. ...Behind these [population] numbers are both lessons and implications. ...These aren’t just population estimates; they really are markers for how the economy is evolving.”

The connection between the population, the census, and the economy is central to this story and the grand narrative context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The brashness of Arizona Governor Ducey’s attempt to “urge Arizonans to respond to questions that start[ed] going out

[that] week from the U.S. Census [at an event that] featured newborns and infants wearing T-Shirts with a ‘Babies Count’ message” seems less absurd given that “a 1 percent short count loses Arizona \$62 million a year in federal aid for the next decade” (*The Sun*; AZ). In many ways, the local arguments about the importance of the census and debates about the inclusion of non-citizens operated as a discursive proxy war over the definition of who constitutes the public, and the composite arguments regarding citizenship and race play an essential part of that debate. On one side, non-citizens are treated as threats to a community’s identity and a distortion of its future; on the other, non-citizens are a tool, a “law abiding constituent” (*The Berkshire Eagle*; MA) and a number for guaranteeing the financial and political future of the community. Simultaneously a threat and a commodity, neither representation extends any offer of community, only constituency: the power of creation without the right to determination.

And what of the citizen? The discrimination and degradation facing immigrants to the United States has a sorted history and disgraceful present, as demonstrated above. Simultaneously, these stories highlight another underlying element related to this discursive construction of the public; namely: in economic terms, no one is a citizen.

Let’s get some economics straight: Government health experts are causing a temporary recession by advising us to avoid traveling, gathering together and going into the office, thereby quelling consumer spending. And in response the government wants to give us cash, the better to boost spending so we don’t have a recession. What a country. The craziest thing is, on some level, it makes sense.

This report from *The News-Times* (CT) gets close to the fundamental absurdity and precarity of peoples’ positions during the beginning of the pandemic and in more general terms regarding the state of economic arrangements. As the article noted, the contradictory impulses of protecting

economic and public health during this inflection point lead politicians, doctors, public health officials, and economists to challenge many of their long-held assumptions about responding to disruption. And much as the debate regarding the census illustrated the paradoxical treatment of non-citizens, *The News-Times*' acknowledgment of the grotesquely outlandish circumstances, the kind that could lead to the remotest possibility of bipartisan economic stimulus of the nature discussed in the article, hinted at a more essential revelation about the similar precarity and absurdity of the everyday performances of economics.

The conventional simplicity of the narratives used to explain economic ongoings broke down in the context of the pandemic. Cycles of spending and earning, saving and investing are a theoretically sound for most people. The grimy images of factory work and industrial manufacturing may not predominate *most* accounts of modern labor practices, but the idea of the economy as a whirring machine, a flowing organism, an engine that requires fuel maintains an experiential resonance to this grand narrative that lends it coherence. "Global markets are crashing, the price of oil is plummeting and even entire countries are in lockdown. The odds of a recession due to the coronavirus outbreak are rising every day" (*North Port Sun*; FL). In response to the potential for systemic collapse, the unhelpful advice of "stick[ing] to your long-term plan and ignor[ing] day-to-day market fluctuations" (*North Port Sun*; FL) and the simplistic government plans of "giv[ing] us cash" (*The News-Times*; CT) contrasted with the sense that the global economy simply could not function if most people stayed home. Simultaneously the people who comprise the economy are a threat to its very existence and the commodity that allows it to function. Just as with the census, these narratives rely on an underlying logic of constitution without citizenship; the ability to create without meaningful self-determination.

Independence/Impudence. The fledgling accounts of the evolving pandemic captured in the United States media during this inflection point had few reference points to help illustrate the significant and unique threat posed by the COVID-19 virus. However, as one of the initial hotspots and the origin point for many of the initial cases in the United States, many of the articles offered a glimpse into the potential danger of community-wide spread and described the measures implemented by the Italian government amidst dire circumstances and a rapidly increasing death rate. The *Statesville Record and Landmark* (NC) even noted that members from an international aid delegation from the Chinese Red Cross “openly castigated Italians for failing to take the country’s national lockdown seriously.” This contrasted with coverage of the Chinese response to the outbreak and its, generally implicit, sometimes violently explicit, anti-Asian racism presented as political or economic criticism of public health measures. As in the coverage from *The Caledonian-Record* (VT), the threat of the preventative measures was framed as a more serious threat to people than any concern resulting from the virus’ spread:

Anyone under the age of 55, without an underlying health condition, has an infinitesimal chance of dying from the China Flu²⁹. And the entire U.S. population as a smaller chance of catching the Kung Flu than breathless OpMedia reports would have one believe.

²⁹ The racial animus of this term, and others, that are referenced in this chapter, is undeniable and violent. The choice to include these terms, only within the context of direct quotations, is rooted in the inseparability of social and economic practices which necessitates that analyst confront the explicit ties between discourses of race, racism, and economics. In the context of COVID-19, the rise of anti-Asian and anti-Asian Pacific Islander sentiment and violence, media coverage and

The openly hostile attitudes of these reports in the United States news media bore a striking resemblance to a report from the *Brooklyn Gazette*, entitled “Corona Virus [sic] Response by Middle Class European Families,” which gave an inside account of people’s experiences in Venice and their frustration with the impact that quarantines and shutdowns would have on their primary industry: “Venice has tourism that brings in all tax funds [sic]. We give the most taxes to Rome. What do we get in return? Nothing! ...We want more autonomy. And a say in our economy.” In many ways, the impudence demonstrated by this account previewed many of the attitudes expressed as people in the United States, and across the world, in response to the virus.

These attitudes echoed many of the reactions to even proposed measures from the federal government of the United States to address the concerns over the coronavirus. Exacerbated by the ongoing political battle of the 2020 presidential election, and as Bernie Sanders and Joe

political commentary, and the economic dimensions of the crisis are intimately intertwined, and the direct interrogation of these interconnections necessitates consideration of the demonstrable harm and unique aspects of this racism. Walker and Daniel Anders (2022) argued that this type of language, specifically in journalism, evinced the paradoxical hypervisibility and invisibility of Asian and Asian American reporters’ experiences of racism during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis of economic organizing during the pandemic cannot speak to the experiences of harm stemming from this language and these logics, but by directly addressing its implications in economic narratives, I aim to unpack aspects of its contextual influence and broader discursive underpinnings and theoretical and political significance.

Biden were still competing in the Democratic Primary elections, the contemplation of a federal response to the coronavirus pandemic was met with visceral reactions:

No. No. No. No. No. The answer from the American people across the political spectrum to the airline industry's plea for a \$50 billion taxpayer-subsidized bailout in the Age of WuFlu must be "Hell, no!" times 50 billion.... Steven Mnuchin is playing the world's smallest violin, crying that the COVID-19 pandemic "is worse than 9/11"... Well, boo-hoo-hoo. Or I should say: Wu-hoo-hoo. ...The repugn[ance] of rewarding companies whose CEOs have adamantly opposed President Obama Trump's [sic] attempts to enforce our borders and limit mass migration precisely for the national security and public health consequences we are all now suffering. Take United's Mexican-American [CEO], who has repeatedly bashed the southern border wall expansion.

To put it bluntly: there's a lot to unpack here, starting with the expressions of rage against China, Mexico, and the United States government, which the author of the article ostensibly combined into the cabal of "Open Border Globalists" at whom the title of the *Kaplan Herald* (LA) article aimed. The rank vilification of China and Mexico, in general terms have evident motivations independent of the open disgust, and accusations of complicity, levied at the US government. But when considered in the context of the demonstrated contempt for figures like the Secretary of the Treasury, Steve Mnuchin, and both Barack Obama and Donald Trump, the dimension of this vitriol begins to take on a more distinct shape.

The strain that the COVID-19 pandemic placed on the macro systems of government and economy was undeniable, but individual experiences of quarantines, testing, uncertainty, illness, and waiting all were of a fundamentally disparate quality. While the Federal government debated the necessary actions for safeguarding public health and economic well-being, *The Crestview*

News Bulletin (FL) noted a more primary concern: “It’s the testing, stupid.” In a way, the delays in developing and perfecting testing for the COVID-19 pandemic was the central stumbling block for people because:

If [they] were to get a handle on the rapidly multiplying spread of coronavirus, we have to know how many cases there are and where they are. ...Anthony Fauci admitted that the U.S. system “is not geared” to provide widespread access to anyone who thinks they might have a virus. The lack of knowledge from our failure to test large numbers of Americans hampers public health officials.

And for the people who were left without the certainty they needed, there was an accompanying sense of powerlessness because “[they were] largely guessing and the phrase ‘abundance of caution’ [was] getting a workout while” the frustration built, tensions grew, and the potential futility of the sacrifices people were making to protect their lives might cost them their livelihoods. Their responsibility to their community kept them from their community. And all the while the sense of inaction from political infighting, “the numbers [that] completely contradict President Donald Trump’s assertions that everyone who wants to be tested can be tested – right now”, and the contrast with other nations, like “South Korea [which was] testing at a rate of 10,000 per day” engendered a narrated anxiety of powerlessness that mirrored the constructed impotence regarding the economy.

During the final days of this inflection point, as a general (read: grand narrative) sense of the pandemic’s severity began to take shape, *The Daily-Post Athenian* published an opinion piece about the future of women’s rights. The piece argued that “free market women are not running on the mindset of victimization and they are ready to step up to the plate and break records. And what of our responsibility – the conservative women ready to see principled

representation?” In answer to the question of responsibility, the piece began to take inspiration from “the suffragettes that risked it all” and encouraged readers to think of “the women of today in the Middle East who still need permission to vote” or “the women in countries like Uganda and Kenya who face violent protests at the polls... They do not see themselves as victims – They continue to fight.” In the context of the impassioned rallying cry to make 2020 the year of free market women, the lack of any mention or contemplation of the pandemic highlights the pervasive dissonance throughout the piece: a throughline of content contrasted with overtones of inferiority. Various presuppositions throughout this piece are striking, but foremost among them is the notion that the cause of women’s liberation is best served by “free market women to support free market women,” but this no-true-Scotsman fallacy in narrative form begs entirely the wrong question. The implicit but contentious notion that women who do not support conservative causes understand themselves as victims disguised the more insidious point that the free market itself is the entity that requires defense.

But *from* whom and *against* whom and *for* whom does this defensive posture arise? This story needs an antagonist:

Saturday night, I ordered takeout from my favorite Chinese place. I did this as a gesture of solidarity after hearing that people have been avoiding Chinese restaurants because of the pandemic that originated in Wuhan China. I also did it because I had a taste for egg foo young. If my intended message was muddled by those mixed motivations, well, chalk it up to the fact that the pandemic has been hell on easy symbolism. This is supposed to be one of those times where Americans come together, where we put aside our singular, selfish needs and concentrate instead on acting in the best interests of the greater and larger us. ...After the Japanese attacked Pearl harbor, you joined the Marines, planted a

Victory Garden or collected scrap metal. After John Kennedy was murdered, you wept in the streets and embraced strangers as kin. After the terrorist attacks of 2001, you gave blood, lit candles, hung American flags from freeway overpasses. But the pandemic of 2020 offers no equivalent symbolism of national unity. No, in the great pandemic, we hoard toilet paper and Purell, and get our egg foo young to go. It's not quite the same.

In contrast to the ravings from those who blamed the varying impacts of the pandemic on China, on Mexico, on Steve Mnuchin, or on the CEO of United Airlines, it is easy to overlook the short note of derision, of disappointment that emerges near the end of this quotation from the *Casper Star-Tribune* of Wyoming. Throughout this article, elements of nostalgia grounded the narrative and cemented its pragmatic, commonsensical moralism, but the subtle turn toward lamenting the lack of unity revealed the antagonist hiding in the shadows: the entity that hoards toilet paper and Purell. "We" is the enemy from which the economy and others need protecting, and in the essentializing context of COVID-19 grand narrative sensemaking, the questions that the piece ended on, "Are we still capable of common cause?" and "Is there still a place called 'us'?", reads more like an obituary than a reminiscence.

Summary: Disruption, March 9 to March 19

The ostensible conflict between the notions of the public and the political begins to emerge as a tale of two enemies. Placing these articles and the ideas upon which they build back into the context of the topic model, the tensions of publics and politics begin to take shape. Just as the tensions of responsibility/constituency illustrate the precarious and indeterminate position people inhabit with respect to economic systems, the conflicts of impudence/independence reinforce the vilification of both the public, whose actions might exacerbate the situation, and the political, who fail to adequately respond to the disruption. With both collectives excluded from

the realm of potential refuge from the crisis, all there is left to do is trust that the market will work as intended. In the context of this tension “the natural tendency of people is to put off unpleasant actions in the hope that they won’t be needed,” (*Daily Southtown*; IL). But delaying the action was the aim, just like the aim of the firestorm, and the convention theme and the country song was not to demonstrate that *they* built it: it was to distract from the fact that it *was* built, collectively, publicly, for mutual benefit.

“If our economy had a spirit animal, it would be a shark.” *The Daily Record*’s account of the fundamental incapacity of our economic system to implement rapid change and to adapt to evolving circumstances is not a bug of the system or a failure of government or people: it is an organized impotence. Just as the dynamics of action and reaction illustrate the ways that economic narratives organized an ontology of agential futility, the storytelling logics of publics and politics vilified the avenues of political change and eroded the foundations of public citizenship. In this light, the metaphor of the United States economy as a shark reflected a darker aspect of this system. After all, sharks feed on detritus not cooperative predation; they circle waiting for morsels that are already doomed, with fates already *sealed*. So, when the sharks are circling and people are told there is no bigger boat, no place to swim, the choice to keep the sharks busy, guaranteeing their supply of fresh meat, is the same obvious and unsustainable non-choice.

Although this metaphor clearly has its limitations the paradoxical notion of identifying with the beasts that circle, waiting for any wavering, any hesitancy, is a well-worn trope. The apocryphal quotation, often ascribed to John Steinbeck, claims that economic change is stymied by the sense that, in America, poverty is the condition of temporarily embarrassed millionaires. But this quotation’s insinuation is, perhaps, better embodied in the classical musical *1776*, which

depicted a fanciful, foppish fantasy loosely based on the debates surrounding the Declaration of Independence and the Second Continental Congress of the United States. In response to the proposition that the democracy would prevent the men of property from having too much overt power in any new American society, the fictional John Dickinson responds: “Perhaps not, but don’t forget that most men with nothing would rather protect the possibility of becoming rich than face the realities of being poor” (Stone & Edwards, 1964, p. 96). Both expressions of this idea are reflections of similar frustrations regarding the unwillingness of people to change, the seeming implacability of opponents of change, regardless of whether their temporary circumstances are embarrassment or poverty.

This is a narrated prejudice exemplified by the bewilderment and derision of the articles from this inflection point that bemoaned the lack of swift action in these unprecedented times, even when there was a clear motive and ability to create action. In this vein, one final piece exemplifies the consequences of the economic essentializing forces of these grand narratives. In a piece from the *Boulder City Review* (NV), a reporter who attended a lecture by a prominent economist began extolling the virtues of the heterodox perspective, Modern Monetary Theory. To be clear, the derision and incredulity that faces MMT theorists and research, regardless of the stellar credentials of its proponents, is harmful and damaging. The foundational ideas of MMT are a positive force in contemporary economic thought, but when, as the professor is quoted as saying in the article, academics and people treat “MMT [as] not something you do, [but as] something that is” the idea that “the government can’t run out of its own currency unless the government topples and there is no more United States” does not contain the emancipatory potential or persuasive power that it promises. Perfecting the theories about the things economies

already can do is more about convincing people that there may be the potential of a better boat instead of leaving shark infested waters.

CARES Act, March 24 to March 30, 2020

The five days that occurred between the time of COVID-19 disruption inflection point and the beginning of the collection for this inflection point was a time of continued escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on various aspects of life in the United States. As noted in Table 4.5, the escalation of the rate of infections was prominent, especially compared to the numbers in the hundreds at the beginning of the pandemic. Similarly, the headlines during this time begin to reflect less uncertainty and more desperation as the continued legislative fight over the nature of the federal government's response to the pandemic warred with reports of the economic hardship that was beginning to solidify as a much more significant and long-term threat than previously understood. As the *USA Today* headline from March 27th, the day that the *CARES Act* officially became law, read: "Record 3.3 million file unemployment claims: Economists concerned that 'layoffs are just starting'". Similar reports were echoed in many of the most circulated daily newspapers during this time (summarized in Table 4.6), especially in those papers centered in New York (*Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*) reported directly from the nation's financial center and one of the first examples of the danger posed by community spread in densely populated urban centers. As the death toll escalated in the city, the *New York Post* worked to remind people that the music was only paused, because "when the Great White Way's up again and traffic's backed up to Pittsburg again, Broadway will outshpritz the Milky Way again. It'll be stars such as award-winning actor Hugh Jackman, award-winning director Jerry Zaks, award-winning actress Sutton Foster,...in what is sure to be the award-winning 'The Music Man' revival." The *Post* noted that, despite the troubles facing the city, people can always

do a little bit of good, just like the show’s would-be choreographer who “buys and [distributes] boxes of cereal, cans of soup, tins of food, packages of noodles—for the elderly or needy. Forget Tony’s³⁰ [sic] for choreography. [He] deserves a food award.”

Though the spirit of kindness and generosity reflected in the choreographer’s actions, and in many of the other stories of people working together despite the difficult times, their depiction in the Post came at a time when pictures of the city’s empty streets and darkened marquees took on an apocalyptic quality. But these types of stories kept coming. Narratives of friends helping friends, reworking and rearranging plans to work within the confines of local regulations and safety plans, or even going “door to door along [their] street... playing ‘Lord of the Dance’” (The Pueblo Chieftain, CO). Spontaneous performances, art created out of apartment windows and across social distance left neighbors “choked up to talk about [how]...for an hour and a half,

Table 4.5. COVID-19 Recession, Policy (*CARES Act*) Vital Statistics

Dates	COVID-19 Daily Indicators ¹		Dow Jones Industrial ²	
	Infections	Deaths	Close	Δ
03/24/20	11,402	212	20,704.91	
03/25/20	14,083	301	21,200.55	495.64
03/26/30	18,538	338	22,552.17	1,351.62
03/27/20	20,219	485	21,636.78	-915.39
03/28/20	20,807	560		
03/29/20	26,290	668		
03/30/20	15,304	626	22,327.48	690.70

Note: ¹COVID-19 daily indicators from CDC (2022a, 2022b) ² Dow Jones Industrial daily close from DataPlanet (2021)

³⁰ This advice was prescient. The revived production of *The Music Man* won zero Tony Awards.

Additionally, the *sic* here acknowledges that the correct pluralization is Tonys.

Table 4.6. COVID-19 Recession, Policy (CARES Act) Daily Headlines Summary

Date	Daily Headlines				
	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Mar 24, 2020	Fed Flexes Muscle as Senate Battles Over Aid	Stocks Slide as Lawmakers Tussle: Disputes over parts of \$1.6 trillion package come as Fed tries to further help business	Official: Games to be delayed	Senate close to deal on stimulus bill	Trump may ease restrictions: Amid economic carnage, businesses mount pressure to reopen
Mar 25, 2020	Aid Deal Near as Trump Pushes to Ease Limits	Dow Soars 11%, Best Day in 87 Years	Postponed Olympics will be worth the wait	Trump, experts at odds on easing up	IOC and Japan Opt to Postpone 2020 Olympics Over Pandemic
Mar 26, 2020	Senate Approves a \$2 Trillion Virus Response	Senate Passes Stimulus Package: The \$2 trillion bill, which aims to blunt pandemic's impact, now goes to House	Economic rescue plan hits a 'wartime level': What \$2 trillion will do for families, businesses, corporations	Late haggling delays vote on rescue bill	Patients caught in standoff of nursing homes, hospitals: Care facilities want proof returning residents are virus free
Mar 27, 2020	Job Losses Soar; U.S. Virus Cases Top World	U.S. Cases, Jobless Claims Soar: Historic run of growth comes to a close as unemployment filings surge to record	Record 3.3 million file unemployment claims Economists concerned that 'layoffs are just starting'	Jobless claims skyrocket to record 3.3 million	Virus Relief Bill Aims to Offset Layoffs
Mar 28, 2020	Plea for Ventilators as Trump Signs Aid Bill	Trump Signs Record Stimulus Law: House-approved relief package of \$2 trillion offers aid to combat damage of pandemic		President signs \$2 trillion economic stimulus	Trump orders production of ventilators: Hospitals facing a cruel April, But officials hope stay-at-home order will hobble virus' spread
Mar 29, 2020	Testing Blunders Cost Vital Month in U.S Virus Fight			Death toll surges past 2,000 in U.S.	Broke and stuck at LAX, desperate man carries on
Mar 30, 2020	After a Grim Forecast, Trump Extends Limits	Crisis Spurs Vast Change in Jobs	NYC hit hard. Next up: 'Every city in America'	Trump extends distancing guidelines	Once far away, dread has reached their home: Virus cases and anxiety soar on remote Navajo Nation

Note: All headlines summarized in this table are presented as they were formatted on the original paper.

[not] thinking about the virus or the economy or whatever else.” The narratives in topics three and eight (summarized in Table 4.7) told of people and businesses: working, creating, and surviving by doing what they could for themselves and others to make ends meet, to keep themselves sane, and to engage in a digital life “placing online bets for Gulfstream’s Florida Derby, streaming your parents’ downsized anniversary celebration, screening a Broadway show... visit to the Vatican and Uffizi Gallery, while ordering a delivery from your favorite Italian restaurant. Tomorrow: Pompeii. Intensely digital” (*The Miami Herald*; FL).

The peculiarities of the news coverage during this inflection point reflected a nation that had come to grips with the inevitability of a pandemic but was incapable of confronting what that might mean for the future. As Congress worked the *CARES Act* through a legislative process that was (and is) ill-suited to rapid economic policymaking for various reasons, reports emerged that criticized how “the total cost of the pending federal stimulus package has bloated up to as much as \$2.5 trillion...[and] the battle over just how generous to be has continued” (*Long Beach Press-Telegram*; CA). These concerns were echoed by various writers who reported that “economists know the country can’t take this very long...that even for America, the money to help the unemployed as well as keep their employers afloat will run out. We can keep ‘printing money,’ but not forever” (*The North Providence Breeze*; RI). As people were trying to find something and anything to keep themselves going while waiting for some form of action, some form of hope, the controversy and politicking of waiting became a morbid spectacle caught between the dire predictions of those who argued that there was no other economic option but to push through the pandemic and those who were living out the fatal consequences of systems pushed to the brink.

Table 4.7. Topic Model, COVID-19 Recession, *CARES Act* (March 24 to 30, 2020): Terms (Topics 3 & 8)

Lambda	Topic 3			Topic 8		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	music	peopl	said	acr	farm	said
	festiv	like	peopl	pollut	product	product
	dog	lot	time	maduro	farmer	industri
	film	go	like	coal	construct	compani
	bral	thing	home	gallon	plant	year
	basebal	time	go	saudi	agricultur	new
	ncaa	said	dai	fork	produc	project
	musician	feel	year	panama	oil	farm
	fun	know	work	arabia	industri	produc
	mad	home	thing	ethanol	project	market
	jesu	kid	know	livestock	truck	area
	chat	cancel	live	cattl	compani	construct
	song	sport	come wai	priu	price	farmer
	potato	think live	think	railroad	energi	state
	laptop	season	lot	hardwood	air	price
	smile	dai	famili	hemp	ga	park
	dad	wai	want	wheat	road	develop
	porch	plai	help	venezuelan	manufactur	includ
	she	year	week	pedestrian	vehicl	plant
	bibl	famili	good	bess	park	oil

Triage and Sabotage: Life and Policy in a Pandemic

“It’s time to get with the program, time to pass historic relief,” said an angry Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell early in the day as he opened the chamber after a nonstop weekend session that failed to produce a deal. “This is a national emergency.” Fuming, McConnell warned Democrats –pointedly House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to quit stalling on “political games” as he described Democratic efforts to steer more of the aid toward public health and workers.

The incredulity in the article above, from *The Spokesman-Review* (WA), regarding the frustrating lack of action on a substantive stimulus package seems either overstated or boldly

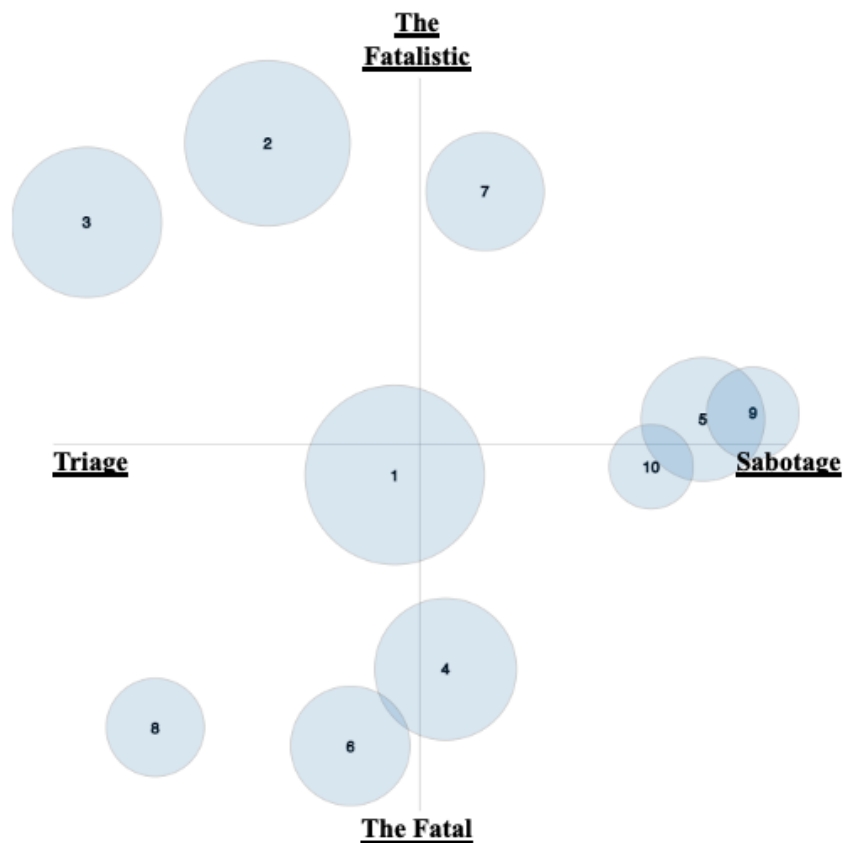


Figure 4.2. Intertopic Distance Map, COVID-19 Recession, *CARES Act*

optimistic. Nonetheless, like this article, much of the coverage regarding the legislative process and the enactment of the *CARES Act*, which became the third, and largest, COVID-19 related relief legislation passed during March 2020, centered around the political process of debating the mechanics and quantity of relief. As previewed in coverage analyzed during the previous inflection point, the discussion before the passage of the *CARES Act* was less about whether there should be a stimulus and more about *how* to go about providing that relief. This coverage, depicted in topics 10, 5, and 9 (as summarized in Table 4.8) captured the genuinely bizarre dynamics of a Republican led Senate majority crafting a spending bill that would establish a framework for trillions of dollars in government spending. However, the bipartisan conclusion of

the legislative process failed to encapsulate the more revealing aspects of the process, as captured in the news.

Political obstructionism is hardly a new tactic, especially for the United States Senate, an entity better described as a legislative corpse than a legislative body. News reports were highly critical of the politicians who were seen to dilly-dallying while the rest of the nation was in triage. A report from *The Leavenworth Times* (KS) revealed the subtler turnings of this narrative, in a report described economic provisions it deemed “rational [that] should have quickly found common ground. Republicans...wanted funds to stop the bleeding in the financial markets and to give a sign of encouragement that the economy was not going to crash.” The report went on to criticize the ongoing bargaining regarding policies related to “postal service debt, money for the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, same day voter registration...pay equity, [and] student loan bailouts” that it deemed as an attempt to co-opt the process of addressing the pandemic to, using the words of James Clyburn, “restructure things to fit our vision.” Describing the legislative process in this way, as an exercise in *they-have-every-right-to-but*, is notable because it dismisses policy claims because of germaneness and not based in any consideration of the policies themselves. Similar coverage appeared in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*’s coverage of the debate on the Senate floor and Tom Cotton’s dismissal of certain proposals as an “ideological wishlist [sic]” and Chuck Schumer’s opposition to corporate bailouts on similar grounds.

One curious aspect of this debate was its emphasis on the methodology of federal relief rather than its necessity. As Congress “work[ed] on the details this past weekend and there may be a vote as soon as Monday. Some of the sticking points revolve[d] around how to deliver aid money to Americans... Options [included] one-time stipends or checks directly to Americans

Table 4.8. Topic Model, COVID-19 Recession, *CARES Act* (March 24 to 30, 2020): Terms (Topics 5, 9, & 10)

	Topic 5			Topic 9			Topic 10		
Lambda	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	bipartisan	senat	busi	floridian	unemploy	unemploy	garff	tax	state
	mcconel	billion	said	claimant	claim	week	roanok	budget	tax
	mitch	packag	billion	cio	benefit	state	utahn	revenu	said
	forgiven	stimulu	senat	coulter	file	benefit	hofstra	utah	budget
	rickett	relief	packag	afl	florida	claim	choi	fiscal	revenu
	massi	loan	loan	florida	week	said	clinkscal	fund	year
	buyback	trillion	small	evelyn	job	job	byrd	state	fund
	toomei	congress	help	zohlen	employ	worker	hegar	salt	million
	leahi	legisl	worker	moranc	labor	file	pdf	year	utah
	rubio	vote	relief	de	worker	florida	stratodem	million	citi
	omaha	payment	stimulu	underst	jobless	peopl	nepa	legislatur	econom
	earmark	small	hous	dua	appli	employ	mvc	session	govern
	montanan	democrat	includ	steepest	laid	number	bart	raini	fiscal
	guam	hous	feder	keller	applic	worker	durham	project	billion
	fulcher	aid	govern	apex	state	depart	lynchburg	juli	new
	sass	busi	provid	fanni	insur	econom	wilk	deadlin	project
	mariana	pass	american	hartlin	desanti	new	asa	lawmak	impact
	bennet	fedr	need	edd	number	march	mendenhal	herbert	plan
	sabian	republican	state	logjam	floridian	time	madigan	said	gener
	braun	worker	legisl	multnomah	record	coronaviru	rodger	garff	spend

and reduction in payroll taxes” (*Albert Lea Tribune*; MN). The remarkable quality of this debate lies in the general acceptance of the need for broad economic stimulus, especially of the kind being debated on both sides. Although the establishment of loan programs for small businesses was not a novel solution, the consideration, let alone implementation, of direct cash payments to large swaths of the United States citizenry represented a startling departure from many legislators regarding the role of the federal government in economic matters. Simultaneously, news outlets were cautious about the general trajectory of federal economic policy: “Many states, corporations, and households set aside funds for emergencies and the proverbial rainy day. However, in Congress every day is a rainy day, so the federal government spends money extravagantly and goes deeper into debt every year, even in times of prosperity or economic sunshine” (*The Deseret News*; UT).

Although I grant that fiscal conservatism from a newspaper effectively owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is known for its conservative theology, is hardly surprising, this quotation is notable both for its concern over the Congressional tendency to “pull out all the stops and spend as if there were an infinite supply of money” and the explicit invocation of the metaphorical understanding of monetary sovereignty deconstructed and rebutted by modern monetary theorists (Kelton, 2020; Tcherneva, 2020).

Placing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of a grand narrative account about the sweeping expansion of government expenditure and mismanagement is neither isolated to *The Desert News* coverage nor neutral. Narrating the government response to the coronavirus in this way is akin to the *Tampa Bay Times*’(FL) summary of the state of the pandemic as the nation entered another week of shutdown: “We’ve chosen to put our economy in a recession to cut down the transmission of the virus.” In this case, framing the public health

response to the virus as a *choice* seems disingenuous because it simplifies the complexities and uncertainties of the circumstances as though the federal government could have effectively prevented an economic collapse by not taking action to reduce the spread of the virus. The difference between speculative fiction like *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1985) and alternative histories like *The Man in the High Castle* (Dick, 1962) is the difference between evaluating the government's response relative to various alternative policy responses and evaluating the government's response to a counterfactual world in which the pandemic never happened. This is not to say that Philip K. Dick has fewer lessons to teach people than does Margaret Atwood, but there are clear practical and dialogic differences in these justifications.

Rejecting a policy proposal in the light of some counter-proposal or of potential future consequences is foundationally different from rejecting it because it would have been better to not need to do it in the first place. In effect, this is the type of discursive obfuscation that unironically justifies *not* building sea walls because they might protect petrochemical plants in Houston regardless of the impact those actions have on people.

Moving beyond the disingenuous logics behind these attributions of agency, their narrative implications are paradoxical in triplicate. First, the idea that the federal government has the agency ascribed by the paper contrasts with the narratives from earlier in the pandemic (especially those analyzed for the first inflection point). In some ways this stemmed from the lessons of a virus that was “teaching us that we are a fragile human race. We are vulnerable to disease, death and chaos. Our masses of wealth can disappear almost overnight” (*Massapequa Post*; NY). Especially for the people in New York, who witnessed the potential damage of the virus first-hand, the calculations changed, the potential changed. Instead of looking to government to pass a considered and targeted plan, the potential for government *inaction* became

the more immediate concern reported in articles—even as those same articles engaged in the same kind of deliberative criticism of the proposed policy measures that they argued were preventing rapid Congressional action.

Second, news of economic intervention was met with aplomb on Wall Street and in the business world but was attributed to other causes. For example, *The Daily Record* (NC) attributed the rebound in the stock market to the fact that “before this health crisis hit, our economy was strong. Our country is fundamentally strong.” Framing the virus as the sole originator of the economic impacts, the article continued “this is not like other economic crises, where the collapse was the result of some major flaw in our existing institutions or the way we are managing our affairs. This crisis is the result of shutting down our economy.” The ostensible contrast with the Great Recession here, as the most recent crisis understood as a self-inflicted wound, frames the pandemic as an exogenous shock. Some of the final lines of the article make it clear how this narrative fragment is key: “Economies function as buyers and sellers meet in the marketplace. If you tell buyers and sellers they are prohibited from showing up in the marketplace, everything will collapse.”

To respond bluntly, it is hard to imagine that ringing the bell at the opening of the New York Stock Exchange would be considered such a high honor if there was the threat that the building could collapse for lack of an appropriate number of traders; if that were the case, the Exchange would have collapsed when technology changed the practice of trading, and in the same way, as the pandemic continued to take shape during this inflection point, the evidence of a rapid transition to online labor and consumption undermines this narrative. The narrative told by Amazon’s profit margins and Jeff Bezos’ fortune during the pandemic is not one of collapse.

In this context, deconstructing the third paradox implied by the coverage of the government's role in addressing the pandemic helps to illuminate the ethic that undergirds the dynamic illustrated in this tension of triage and sabotage. But unpacking this final paradox requires moving beyond the limitations of metaphorical engineering flaws, because quaking with fear does not cause a building collapse unless the tenants start digging up the foundation to hide underground. An article from the *Daily News of Los Angeles* (CA) illustrated this point in the days after the *CARES Act* was passed:

The raccoons and sparrows don't care if stores are closed. We care because our lives revolve around things. Now, there's no baseball, no movies, no paper towels and if we don't get this right, no grandparents. Have we overreacted? Have we been stampeded into destroying the economy by a bunch of mask-clad TV ninnies feeding us fear 24/7? Maybe. Maybe not. If you were in charge would you roll the dice on your loved ones lives? I wouldn't. This is the decision our leaders face. Get it right and millions lose their livelihood, their savings and their jobs. Get it wrong and millions could lose their lives.

At first glance, this opinion piece might point to a fairly standard Marxist interpretation of the role of exploitation and commodity fetishism driving the economic response to the pandemic. Economic precarity and a materialist culture offer a pleasing explanation of this dynamic, but they both invite an easy and practically uninformative account that simplifies the moral calculus of economic systems to greedy bastards doing greedy things greedily until the end of days. Smaug may be an easy scapegoat, but raiding the Lonely Mountains is not a policy, as the *Massapequa Post* previewed. "Hordes of wealth" cannot disappear without warning unless their value was more dependent on the vault doors that kept them tucked away than on any intrinsic property.

In the days leading up to the passage of the *CARES Act*, “with Congress arguing over a nearly \$2 trillion economic rescue package [an] impatient President Donald Trump mus[ed] openly about letting the 15-day shutdown expire” (*The Spokesman-Review*; WA), and although the article reported on those musings as another manifestation of Trump’s infantile approach to policy problems and legislative negotiations, the broader contextual understanding of the pandemic advanced in many papers embraced the simplicity of the idea, especially given the perception of other governmental failures, such as “their failure to stop hoarding. Hoarding is a despicable action which feeds exponentially on itself. Strict limits should have been placed on essentials from the moment it became clear that the nation was faced with a crisis situation” (*Republican Herald*; PA). Zooming out and examining the relationships between the media reports regarding the pandemic, those describing the people working to get on however they could, reframes the relationship between triage and sabotage. Although the frustrations and fears from those who were urging the government to get on with simple, common-sense policies were well-founded, they also illustrated the universalizing ethical undertones of an economic nihilism that transmogrifies the logics and ethics of capitalist utilitarianism or free-market virtue ethics into a fatalistic void that allowed politicians to “dither while Americans” felt that politicians were equating “your life and your loved one’s lives [with] your job and your lifetime of retirement savings” (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*).

The Fatal and the Fatalistic

The tone of bipartisan urgency and necessity surrounding the *CARES Act* was an extreme contrast with both the normative government discourse about spending practices and much of the coverage regarding the potential impact of the intervention. The second dynamic that emerged from the news discourse surrounding the enactment of the *CARES Act* placed the dire

consequences of the pandemic, for both people and businesses alike, in direct opposition to the presumably dire outlook facing the nation and the economy, regardless of the government's actions. As depicted in Figure 4.2 and summarized in Table 4.9, the topics related to this dynamic illustrate how this tension between schools, local governments, businesses, and communities fighting to adapt and provide support to each other as the general outlook became more and more grim. As *The Coeur d'Alene Press* (ID) framed the rapidity of the shift caused by the pandemic:

a mere three weeks ago, the U.S. economy basked in the longest expansion in its history, help wanted signs were abundant with unemployment at a half-century low, and inflation was below Fed targets. ...By late March, initial unemployment claims hit record levels, much of the nation was shut down under shelter-in-place orders, the stock market had plummeted. The question has become how long and deep the recession will be?

These general questions were simply not as meaningful, though, for those who simply had to get on with what they had, however they could because "just like households, businesses have monthly operating costs that must be paid regardless of whether the income is there...when you are self-employed, you do not get paid time off, vacation days, sick days or benefits. If we are not working, we aren't making money" (*The News-Examiner*; IN). For many people, the circumstances did not matter; regardless of the context or the consequences, the choice to work or not was potentially fatal either way.

In other contexts, the rapid transformation and transition of both community and business infrastructures that occurred during this time might have been hailed as a hallmark of capitalism. Instead, even as companies documented their transition to online work, the potential for revenue "has required us temporarily to shorten the paid work week for our employees...[who] are an

Table 4.9. Topic Model, COVID-19 Recession, *CARES Act* (March 24 to 30, 2020): Terms (Topics 1, 4, 6, & 7)

	Topic 6			Topic 4			Topic 1			Topic 7		
Lambda	0	0.5	1	0	0.5	1	0	0.5	1	0	0.5	1
Terms by relevance	tucson	school	state	curbside	busi	busi	walz	said	said	inflat	market	market
	pima	district	school	nassau	employe	said	abbott	case	state	realtor	financi	economi
	alaskan	student	counti	carryout	restaur	local	minnesotan	test	health	volusia	invest	econom
	enrol	educ	public	beverag	local	employe	icu	health	case	buchanan	stock	financi
	ducei	elect	work	njeda	commun	commun	ppe	order	order	daytona	mortgag	year
	topeka	counti	provid	sarasota	servic	servic	ivei	state	peopl	creditor	monei	month
	durn	meet	said	webinar	custom	restaur	bullock	hospit	test	mule	percent	monei
	referendum	council	commun	longmont	food	work	action	home	home	fdic	bank	time
	firearm	board	covid	bois	store	help	raimondo	counti	counti	turnov	estat	rate
	burr	kansa	servic	zion	owner	small	swab	stai	covid	cuban	month	pai
	sununu	public	citi	cdfi	deliveri	food	curfew	covid	coronaviru	sharehold	rate	percent
	wagl	vote	health	iv	small	need	iowan	spread	new	microsoft	econom	home
	kansan	arizona	student	eateri	oper	provid	coloradan	peopl	hospit	lehman	investor	bank
	allegani	state	district	napa	support	support	hotspot	viru	stai	isu	spend	like
	lafayett	virginia	need	philanthrop	help	close	parish	coronaviru	viru	swan	recess	stock
	moulton	provid	meet	montros	donat	covid	curri	confirm	spread	sprigler	economi	busi
	henslei	commun	vote	holleb	open	order	ezik	patient	week	antitrust	gain	spend
	wichita	voter	elect	midland	said	store	misdemeanor	death	care	freefal	pai	coronaviru
	sisolak	court	educ	apg	provid	time	nirenberg	number	public	kellei	credit	need
	precinct	citi	care	doordash	work	oper	symptomat	governor	dai	miseri	debt	recess

Note: The topics are presented in the order they appear (from bottom to top) in the intertopic distance map (Figure 4.2). As such, they represent, from left to right, the dynamic from “The Fatal” to “The Fatalistic”

amazing group of people who are dedicated to their form of community service” (*Portland Tribune*; OR). Thus, to support the vital conduct of business (construed as community service), all areas of government employed tools like “loans [that] offer up to \$2 million in assistance and can provide vital economic support to small businesses to help overcome the temporary loss of revenue they are experiencing” (*Virgin Islands Daily News*; VI). Even in places where supporting people directly was politically or financially infeasible, the willingness of government to support businesses and make ends meet during these difficult times, went unquestioned.

The remarkable thing about these articles lay not in their apparent contradiction with normative attitudes regarding government intervention in the economy but in their use of the COVID-19 pandemic as both a source of vulnerability and a source of strength. Even as “small business owners [were] being squeezed by the sudden decline in economic activity stemming from the COVID-19 outbreak...their survival is essential for the state’s survival” (*The Selma Times-Journal*; AL). Functionally, the language of those essential businesses that were able to remain open during stay-at-home orders became an indicator of the unshakeable value of the small business to the existence of the economy. Driven by more than just the impending federal aid, businesses also engaged in direct appeals to government for support that would make it possible for “businesses to survive and provide jobs” while cooperating with “legislators and our governor without partisan rancor and engag[ing them] with our stories, with our reality” (*Rutland Herald*; VT). In other, less genteel accounts, the sneering resentment of both the government entities and the people who do not do their part to keep small businesses afloat; “it is imperative everyone continues shopping local and small during this crisis...lessen the impact the coronavirus is taking on small business owners and employees [by]: order[ing] something to eat. Grocery stores might be sold out of certain items, but restaurants, are pretty well stocked” (*The*

Lima News; OH). More than just buying, more than just not asking questions about why grocery stores are experiencing shortages but not restaurants, the extraordinary circumstances mean that it is more important than ever that “we all stick together and support each other” and something that anyone could do was “Like, Comment and Share posts on as many local businesses as possible...[and] never criticize any business on social media ...[don’t] be part of the force that drives them out of business. It only makes you look bad” (*St. Clair News Aegis*; AL). After all “it’s the least we can do”.

The justifications for aid, of any kind, belie a very specific social primacy of businesses, especially small businesses, in the social order of a community. Describing the ways that a community could improve itself, a local newspaper argued that “development at its core is essentially paving the way for a health local economy that is shaped by the strengths of its parts such the [sic] local workforce, investment, education, quality of life, infrastructure, and business climate” (*The Pueblo West View*; CO). The concept of corporate colonization of the lifeworld is not a new concept within organizational communication (Deetz, 1992), but in the context of the COVID-19 disruption and the collective acts of sensemaking regarding the effects of the pandemic and what it might mean for the future, the underlying ethic of these emerging stories operates differently. Instead of operating to distort or undermine the discursive foundations of these policymaking dialogues with the intent of turning them into another resource for the corporate bottom line, the ethical dimension of these narratives was fragmented, like that of the triage/sabotage dynamic but with a reframed, cyclical understanding of the individual as laborer qua consumer qua laborer.

Along these same lines, the underlying threats of inflation were a fascinating exercise in economic storytelling with an antagonist ripped from the pages of neoclassical economic

textbooks. When considering government expenditure or any moderately substantial economic policy change, the assumption that the policy will create some inescapable collapse into an inflationary death spiral can serve as a convenient boogey-man, but in the context of a global pandemic, though, an additional villain might seem a trifle superfluous. Nonetheless, an article from the *Greensburg Daily News* (IN) sought to explore the similarities between COVID-19 and “Inflation in the Black Death.”

The Black Death ravaged Europe, starting in Italy, in the middle of the 14th century.

Substantial percentages of entire populations died—estimates range between 30 and 60 percent. Maybe 75 to 200 million people. Would it have made any difference for overall living standards if Spain could have tapped on its subsequent influx of gold from Central and South America? That is, would the substantial increase in the money supply have somehow mitigated the adverse economic consequences of the plague? ...The COVID-19 virus has resulted in facilities being shut down, movement of people is restricted, and people are urged to stay home. This shrinks the economic pie. *People aren't dying, but because they're not producing, they're "dead" economically* [emphasis added].

Amazingly...like dogs returning to their vomit, government does what it does best: spend other people's money...

Unsurprisingly, the affective qualities of economic theory are far more potent when comparing one of the deadliest eras of human history to the present moment.

Building on the perceived threat of government debt and inflation in this way became another element of the fatalistic ethic of this grand narrative. Moving beyond the narratives that built up the ontological impossibility or futility of government economic intervention that characterized the beginning of the pandemic, the ethical dimensions of this inflection point began

to cast the attempt to intervene as the beginning of an inevitable backslide that would fundamentally change the values and the character of the country. “Can the savings or well-being of our fellow citizens survive the \$1-2 Trillion so-called ‘stimulus’ package for the favored few...as they must be financed with counterfeit money...quickly reduce the US to Banana Republic Status?” (*Golden Transcript*; CO). Here, the comparison to a Banana Republic is more than telling, because this is the ethical continuation of the same xenophobia that drove much of the fear at the beginning of the pandemic.

This was a fear that framed both the existence of the virus and the response to it as a threat, imposed by other countries, for the sole purpose of economic subjugation and exploitation. Or, as the *Marshall News Messenger* (TX) tellingly described the issue, “The media’s reaction to the latest pandemic out of China is to say...LET’S GET ONE THING STRAIGHT: THE CHINESE HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS! [sic] Well, like most animal-to-human viruses, this one did originate in China.” Though this paper was not alone in its embrace of dehumanizing language as a mask for concern regarding both the virus and the response to it, its explicit and direct statements were startling in their full-throatedness: “As fear of the Chinese virus spread, [a lawyer] brought a lawsuit against a Los Angeles school for sending an Asian student to the school nurse after he coughed in class. Americans are cowering in their homes...but we must never violate the fundamental civil rights of an Asian to cough in class.” The malicious jubilation of such an account reveals an ethic that moves beyond neglecting the humanity of others and toward something entirely separate and more corrosive.

In any administration, the prospect that the Treasury Secretary would be the originator of a humanizing moment would be, at the very least, unexpected. Nonetheless, the tensions

analyzed in this section become clearer in the context of an attempt at just such a moment from Steve Mnuchin regarding the record number of unemployment insurance applications filed that week: “these numbers matter because people are losing their jobs” (*Sturgis Journal*; MI).

Although this could, initially, have been a moment of reflection from the Treasury Secretary, a chance to consider the immensity of the hardship facing most people in the current economic climate, the genuine object of his concern became clear as he continued, “government programs in the rescue bill should either get people back to work or supply financial support until they can find new jobs.” Although the analysis of the previous narrative dynamic illustrated the universalizing nihilism of this economic organizing, the dynamic explored in this section, that of the Fatal and the Fatalistic gives that illustration clarity.

A very deliberate piece of journalistic sarcasm from this inflection point embodied the concomitant absurdity and frustration people felt during this time with a brief thank you note: “Our president recently said that nobody had thanked him for forgoing his salary of \$400,000. Well, thank you, Mr. President. The U.S. Treasury needs more than a trillion dollars to rescue our economy and every little bit helps. And thank you Michael Bloomberg, for injecting \$1 billion into our economy during your presidential campaign” (*The Daily American*; PA). In many ways, this piece is a sardonic recapitulation of the sincere argument made by the *Portland Tribune* that labeled the actions of a company that transitioned its employees to a work-from-home model as community service or the suggestions from the *St. Clair Aegis* that people should engage in daily social media campaigns to support local businesses and help them survive by doing whatever it takes. As delivery apps became the main avenue for restaurants to sell food, apps like Grubhub™ began including invitations for customers to round up their bill to the nearest dollar to donate to their local for-profit institutions and the employees that they were

underpaying. This reads less like a campaign to shop local and more like charity drive for the Corporate Make a Wish Foundation.

Summary: CARES Act, March 24 to March 30, 2020

Before the coronavirus pandemic, life for many of us was considerably different. It was much more fast-paced and frivolous. There was very little downtime. ... We spent a lot of time in traffic. We weren't concerned about running out of toilet paper and meat. We didn't give much thought to how long we washed our hands. ... We could put a date on our calendars for a special event and not have to worry if it would need to be re-scheduled or cancelled. We could pretty much do whatever we wanted to do. (*Melrose Free Press; MA*)

Given the dynamics of the news coverage during the time of the *CARES Act's* enactment, the nostalgic tone of this meditation on pre-pandemic life exemplified the contradictory nihilism of the life and economy it eulogized. The paradoxical abundance of choice and lack of downtime, constant motion and time spent in traffic could be read as the price of the freedom that capitalism offers. But the nihilism that undergirds the grand narratives in this inflection point was not the portrait of an aggressive, questioning, Nietzschean skepticism that undermines or questions those things that are considered good and valuable in a society. Such a system is essentially relativistic: it invites discourse and dialogue and debate about what is good by creating flexibility, engaging people with the question of what is good rather than dictating it. This view is also not the nihilism of a utilitarianism that reduces anything to the price that it can fetch on the open market. Such a system is reductive in its measuring and optimization, but it still provides a central means of discourse. No, this is a form of nihilism that is quintessentially Randian in its universalism. This is an ethical system that universalizes an ethic of the self and that reduces ethical

consideration to a solipsistic death spiral that masquerades that promises radical freedom while foreclosing on any potential for systemic change.

The simultaneous dynamics that portrayed the deliberations in Congress as indifference to people's suffering and bemoaned the predestination of that very same suffering were harmful because they eroded the foundations of conversation and resilience. On March, 25, 2020, the Senate passed the final version of the *CARES Act* and Wall Street responded with a nearly 500 point increase and there were 95 COVID-19 related deaths in New York City alone (CDC, 2022b), nearly a third of the COVID-19 deaths registered in the entire nation. On the same day, in a community about thirty miles away from Time-Square—a 43-minute drive by car, longer in traffic—a local paper commented that the nation still had not learned the lesson from “the federal government shut down through January 2019, [when] massive issues persisted for weeks as federal employees were without their usual income turned to food banks for sustenance...and thousands defaulted on their student loans and other bills” (*Plainview-Old Bethpage Herald*; NY).

But the lesson was not really about the government, it was about the catch-22 facing the people in a situation where “missing work has become a financial luxury that too many Americans, including many here on Long Island cannot afford.” And for the community, “the question remain[ed] as to how many... can weather a brutal financial storm and how many cannot. The next few weeks will illustrate this gap.” Although the Long Island community that comprised the paper's audience was somewhat separated from the new national, global ground-zero of the pandemic, within a week of the article's publication, the USNS Comfort, a military hospital ship, would dock at Pier 90—just an additional eight minutes by car from Time's square, longer in traffic—by which time the daily death toll would rise to 470. In another week,

the number of daily deaths would peak at 814. At one point, the number of deaths in a city of 8 million would account for half of all COVID-19 deaths in the nation.

This is not an indifference that is born from greed; acquiring, hoarding material things all require an escape from this solipsistic nihilism because these actions are characterized by their relationship to people. Acquiring material implies both the existence of the material thing and the reality of others with whom exchange is possible. This ethical system is even less than an exercise in rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic; this is an ethical system that pilots the ship into the iceberg, because the movie would not have been as much of a blockbuster if it was merely fictional, and then passes off the choice as the only rational choice. The articles arguing that “the coronavirus is not the only threat we face...it should be a priority to keep people working and, as soon as possible, to return to work the tens of thousands suddenly being idled” (*The Stamford Advocate*; CT) did so in the framework of an ethical theory dominated by a central and overriding concern for the self as the sole-proprietor, progenitor of moral and economic value. And the irony of a nihilistic solipsism organized in narrative discourse is not lost here; the contradiction is essential to the logic. The circuitry of grand narratives examined in this section emerge from its glorification of the individual in **triage**, surviving **fatal** circumstances however they can and paradoxical condemnation of collective others, **sabotaging** the individual with their efforts that are, **fatalistically**, doomed to failure.

The revival of *The Music Man*, the story of a confidence trickster who sells the promise of art and abundance in the form of cheap band instruments and marching uniforms, began previews on Broadway on December 20, 2021, nearly 600 days after the USNA Comfort left Pier 90. Across five performances and 7,543 audience members during that week, the show grossed over \$2.2 million, only slightly below the total grossed by *Wicked* across a full week of

eight performances and 15,347 people in attendance (The Broadway League, 2022). The same week, a show with marginally fewer audience members, but a substantially less impressive box office showing, told a similar story with a different ending. *The Lehman Trilogy*, a show that won five Tony Awards, including Best Play (The American Theatre Wing, n.d.), recounted the history of a family business, started in Alabama, made wealthy and powerful because of enslaved labor, moved to the centers of power in downtown Manhattan, and then sold for pennies on the dollar at the beginning of a financial crisis that it helped to create. Derived from a novel in poetry, one of the most affecting scenes near the end of the show portrayed the turnings of the economy as:

The bank hates the stock market / the stock market hates the bank / but they dance just the same / even if they hate each other / for the important thing is not to stop. / Bobbie Lehman is 90. / And he's dancing the twist. / He knows now / it's forbidden to stop / and when you dance / you have to dance / You have to dance as long as your breath holds out / Nonstop / Without a break / even faster... Bobbie Lehman is 93 / And he's dancing the twist / ... And maybe not even he / Has realized / That / While dancing the twist / The last of the Lehmans / Has died. (Massini, 2016/2020, p. 686)

Suffice it to say, when dancing with con men, there is more profit in parading seventy-six trombones, but there is more honesty in realizing why the music cannot stop.

American Rescue Plan, March 8 to March 14, 2021

Almost a year after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated disruption of the global economy, the United States had witnessed one of the largest civil rights protest movements in national history, a divisive general election around the start of the second largest wave of infections documented, witnessed an attempted coup d'état two days before the

peak of that wave, and only near its end did the federal government pass another significant piece of pandemic relief legislation, which was finally signed into law on March 11, 2021 after a blistering and revealing political fight for the newly inaugurated president, Joe Biden. During this time, as summarized in Table 4.10, vaccination distribution began and, later, peaked around a month after the passage of the *American Rescue Plan*, a bill with the purported intent of pushing the economy out of the “cataclysmic spring of 2020, with the economy shuttered and nothing to fight the virus except social distancing and masks” and into “the much more hopeful spring of 2021, with the economy opening back up, COVID cases steeply declining and vaccinations ramping up massively” (*The Eastern New Mexico News*; NM). As much as the COVID-19 pandemic challenged the stability and utility of the United States economic system, the deployment of vaccines, the robust growth in the stock market, and the general sense of coming back out into the world seemed to drive a sense of optimism and the potential for change.

Table 4.10. COVID-19 Recession, Policy (*American Rescue Plan*) Vital Statistics

Dates	COVID-19 Daily Indicators				Dow Jones Industrial	
	Infections	Deaths	Cumulative w/ one Dose	Vaccination Rate	Close	Δ
3/8/21	43,385	822	67,961,075	20.5%	31,802.44	
3/9/21	52,923	1,019	69,775,633	21.0%	31,832.74	30.3
3/10/21	62,147	1,581	71,842,896	21.6%	32,297.02	464.28
3/11/21	60,196	1,325	74,127,588	22.3%	32,485.59	188.57
3/12/21	64,282	1,287	76,245,934	23.0%	32,778.64	293.05
3/13/21	52,411	976	77,632,301	23.4%		
3/14/21	47454	662	78,280,943	23.6%		

Note: COVID-19 daily indicators from CDC (2022a, 2022b). Dow Jones Industrial daily close from DataPlanet (2021)

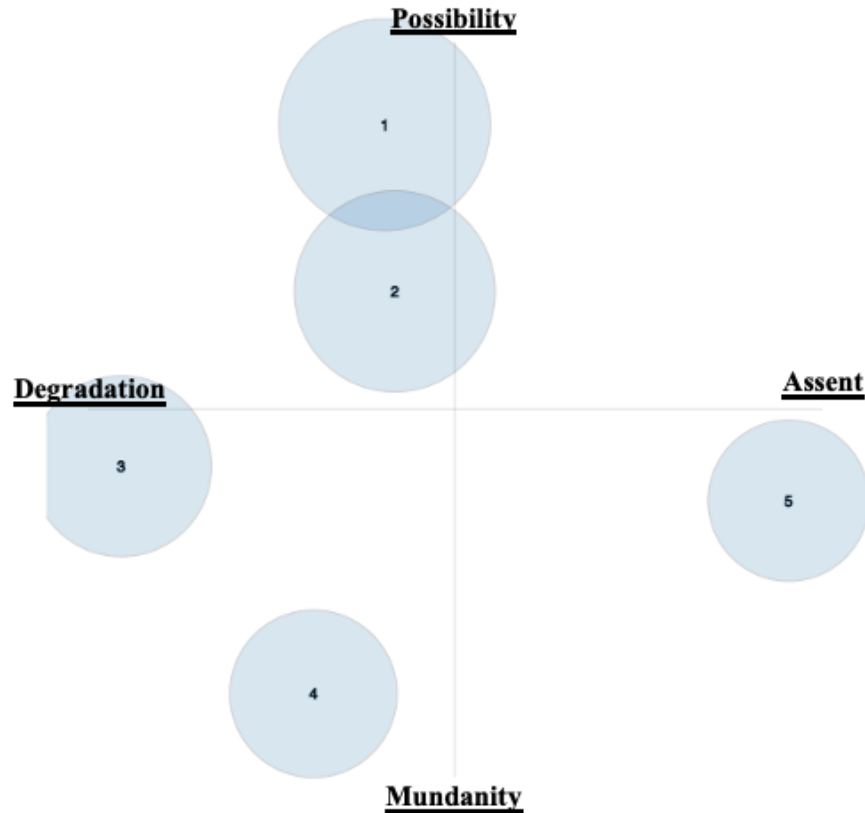


Figure 4.3. Intertopic Distance Map, COVID-19 Recession, *American Rescue Plan*

Degradation and Assent

Few musicals have captured the attention of the American theatre community and broader pop-culture in the way that Lin-Manuel Miranda’s (2016) recent *Hamilton: An American Musical* did. The reframing of the story of a founding father who, at least until the popularization of the musical, was largely ignored for the central role that he played in establishing the institutions that comprise the modern backbone of the United States’ economy. And, of course, though the central bank actions during the time of the COVID-19 crisis, including the continuation of historically low interest rates and other measures, might have been strongly

different from the national bank of Hamilton's devising, the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* (WV) used the story of Hamilton's economic genius and political savvy as one of the central reasons for dismissing the work of an economist already mentioned in a previous chapter. Regarding Stephanie Kelton's (2020) book *The Deficit Myth*, the *Gazette-Mail* cautioned "foreigners owned 30% of our national debt [and if] creditors lose confidence in our ability to pay. They begin discounting our bonds, values go down and dastardly things happen. Modern monetary theory is an idea. It's just not a good idea." Although the reference, here, to the issue of foreign debts is ostensibly levied as a contrast to the colonial debts in response to which Hamilton engineered the first national bank, but in the context of the pronouncement that had this not happened, "we'd be an agricultural servant of Europe forever." As an act of economic narration, the implication that debt will begin an inevitable, short slide into subjugation and degradation is as much an affecting story as it is indicative of the first dynamic illustrated in this inflection point.

As summarized in Table 4.11, the first key dynamic of the *American Rescue Plan* inflection point that emerged in the topic modeling procedures related to the contrast between topics three and five (illustrated in Figure 4.3) or, as I have labeled them for this analysis, degradation and assent. Initially, the idea of degradation relates to many of the key words and ideas reflected in topic three: illegal, impeach, protest, slave, civil, right, politic[al], and, the word most strongly associated with the topic: people. At the time the *American Rescue Plan* was signed into law by newly-elected President Joe Biden, in only the second month of his presidency, the impact of the January 6th insurrection and the continuation of civil rights protests across the United States continued to have significant ramifications for the administration's general priorities and the *Rescue Plan* itself. Despite the many economic indicators (summarized in Table 4.10) that indicated an economy on the rise and a population on the path to being free

from the threat of a virus, the systems of “education, healthcare, economic activity...were upended and had endured three years of a president who sought their delegitimization. This is the perfect storm of hopelessness, idleness, and disenfranchisement” (*Suburban Trends*; NJ). Of the many factors that escaped the recognition of economic indicators, were the “exposed fault lines [and] years of neglect, much like a hurricane’s devastation that requires years of physical rebuilding and policy reform. The pandemic may not have ruined buildings, but it has wrecked us in other, more lasting ways” including “widen[ing] the inequities that plague us: racial, economic, digital, education, gender. The list is long and familiar, but the pandemic has made it harder for our elected leaders to look away” (*The Miami Herald*; FL).

As a summary of the ways that the pandemic highlighted existing inequities in society and forced public figures to pay attention, this piece from the *Herald* is a startlingly honest reflection on many of the aspects of these types of policy debate that came to light during the debates over the *American Rescue Plan*. First, the metaphor of a hurricane is useful not only because the paper was speaking to an audience of Floridians familiar with the damage those storms can cause, but also because of their familiarity with the repetitiveness, the mundanity, and the sudden brutality that makes the phenomenological experience of the storms (read: inequities) so fundamentally different from the theoretical, spectacular presentation they become in media. And it is because of this type of recognition of the demonstrable harm of inequities that “the role of government is being redefined. There is now an assumption that the government should step in to reduce economic insecurity and inequality” (*Sierra Vista Herald*; AZ). In this sense, the idea that the pandemic worked to highlight the economics rifts in the nation is a vast oversimplification; it is much more than just that. The pandemic illustrated that the types of intervention that had long been touted as economic malpractice, a death knell for a system-on-

the-brink-cum-largest-economy-on-Earth, was nothing more or less than simply *an option* in the policy toolkit with which lawmakers could design and organize the economic system with consideration for the ways that the austerity measures forced on people and systems as necessary “might hurt already marginalized residents, especially as funding for essential public services” had been eroded (*Star-Tribune*; WY).

But at the same time, for those who do not experience these hardships brought on by marginalization, who bear the brunt of the economic harm of austerity policies, those experiences, the *Miami Herald*'s hurricanes, become a simple reality to which they provide their assent and move, if nothing else, because they can walk away from it. In response to a report from the Brookings Institute that warned of the role that climate change and economic policies have played in declining birth rates, *The Daily Advance* (NC) made a mockery of the arguments, questioning:

Are we not procreating because young couples are stressed out that economies are spewing too much carbon into the air? ...16% [of Americans] said having children is essential for a man to have a fulfilling life. Twenty-two percent said it is essential for a woman to have a fulfilling life. In the same survey, 57% said that ‘having a job or a career they enjoy’ is essential for a man...Forty-six [sic] percent said ‘having a job or career they enjoy’ is essential for a woman to have a fulfilling life. ...It’s not because times are so hard. Every. Time is challenging and Americans are more comfortable and prosperous today than ever before. ...But consider that in Planned Parenthood’s recent fiscal year, it performed 354,817 abortions. Having children is about life, and life is about caring for more than just yourself.

There is much about this summation of the relationship between the birth rate in the United States and the economic circumstances in which young people find themselves, but the startling willingness to translate this evidence—that more people find a quality job necessary for their well-being and happiness than find child-rearing similarly necessary—into a proxy argument about the right for women to control their own bodies and economic autonomy is revealing. Notably, because it is the same logic that undergirds many people’s willingness to reject the potential for social change and economic progress (marginal though it may have been) contained within the, at that point, potential *American Rescue Plan* legislation.

In many ways, the arguments made in the *Advance* are akin to one senator’s dogged fight to protect one of the most vulnerable populations in the United States from a terrible, self-inflicted harm. And Cindy Hyde-Smith “know[s] that the agricultural sector in Mississippi and across the nation desires...[action] that would give us an immediate and long-term boost after a terrible pandemic year and a very dark winter” (*The Sun-Sentinel*; MS). Of course, such a terrible, long, dark winter could only have been caused by the government tinkering with the natural state of affairs by asking citizens to turn their clocks back at the end of daylight savings time. The surprising willingness to change a traditional aspect of life in the United States solely because of a regard for the measured impact of that tradition is remarkable in the context of this dynamic of degradation and assent. However, it may seem to be going a bit too far to claim this as evidence that the GOP is willing to embrace change if and only if it is to the benefit of the business constituents that please them. Nonetheless, this can be read as an interesting indicator of the relationship between the ways that news during this inflection point narrated the potential of change. In the context of an issue that, *The Sun-Sentinel* described, harms businesses, disrupts people’s circadian rhythms, harms business, can increase minor public safety incidents, and can

Table 4.11. Topic Model, COVID-19 Recession, American Rescue Plan (March 8 to March 14, 2021): Terms (Topics 3 & 5)

Lambda	Topic 3			Topic 5		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	anchorag	right	peopl	dose	vaccin	vaccin
	protest	polit	state	icu	counti	counti
	slave	elect	right	newsom	covid	covid
	speci	trump	year	consecut	health	state
	civil	peopl	work	mckee	case	health
	destroi	union	time	rappahannock	death	said
	defend	polic	new	bossler	dose	new
	god	black	said	kemp	hospit	case
	arrest	human	presid	phizer	region	dai
	suprem	power	american	dupag	viru	school
	illeg	court	like	pawtucket	test	peopl
	petit	presid	elect	dekalb	state	pandem
	myanmar	war	polit	mchenri	infect	death
	haaland	vote	republican	kane	dai	regio
	impeach	parti	live	infecti	school	public
	bois	women	vote	physician	resid	resid
	plymel	republican	economi	lui	mask	report
	hogwash	live	want	michigand	new	hospit
	discrimin	countri	trump	moderna	elig	viru
	fals	world	public	lahood	shot	rate

even harm businesses, there is a remarkable willingness to listen to the potential for change. Although there, shockingly, were no such arguments of this kind made about daylight savings time, the logical equivalent of the many biting and sardonic responses to other calls for change during this time would be akin to claiming that the real victim of the campaign to change daylight savings time is Benjamin Franklin, a pioneer, founding father, philosopher, and inventor whose legacy would be devastated in the American imagination at even the thought that it might be better if the government did not, as *The Sun-Sentinel* (an appropriate name in this context) suggested, keep “monkeying around with time.”

Table 4.12. Topic Model, COVID-19 Recession, *American Rescue Plan* (March 8 to March 14, 2021): Terms (1, 2, & 4)

Lambda	Topic 1			Topic 2			Topic 4		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	trillion	tax	state	forest	commun	said	daylight	said	said
	wage	state	tax	solar	busi	busi	beer	time	time
	medicaid	billion	said	investor	develop	commun	dst	year	year
	congression	senat	year	leas	project	counti	takeout	restaur	work
	minnesotan	relief	million	lynbrook	companni	new	houghtal	daylight	need
	deficit	incom	hous	yield	energi	year	coach	home	busi
	walz	feder	pandem	shipbuild	said	work	tournament	peopl	work
	gunn	hous	senat	truste	industri	citi	dinner	like	busi
	wyden	million	billion	batteri	servic	local	husker	game	peopl
	earner	benefit	feder	albrecht	citi	state	hick	lot	like
	pension	legisl	fund	vessel	price	develop	wheel	feel	food
	medicar	biden	american	mainten	invest	project	savastano	event	know
	hosemann	fund	govern	miner	board	servic	sunshin	thing	famili
	subsidi	govern	incom	maritim	counti	program	parisi	save	open
	laffer	american	biden	cisa	local	compani	dane	pandem	live
	Mississip	unemploy	relief	crude	park	job	horsfield	food	think
	schumer	budget	increas	livestock	buld	help	coffee	spring	start
	reev	spend	plan	aaa	ga	need	larson	shop	open
	dfl	monei	benefit	meat	area	plan	she	march	live
	robi	pass	need	redevelop	market	economi	fun	sport	think

Mundanity and Possibility

The second dynamic of the articles from this inflection point (illustrated in Figure 4.3, and summarized in Table 4.12) is encapsulated by the hopeful tone of an article from *Marianas Variety* (MP) regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters had on the tourism that drives the economy. In response to the singular focus of the economy, the article argued for “acknowledge[ing] the need to diversify our economy by welcoming new businesses and quality developers” through a series of “mid- and long-term projects that include universal garbage collection, a tourism roadmap, establishing a Commonwealth Economic Development Agency” and more. In what became a striking contradiction to this spirit of innovation and willingness to invite transition and transformation, many legislators, politicians, and reporters were more than willing to stick to the devil they knew: “I know it sounds heartless and cruel, but the last thing Congress should do is raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, but [the potential to] harm the economy and hurt the people that it is allegedly supposed to help” was more than enough justification to scuttle the idea that change might be good or even possible.

In many ways, the articles and ideas that manifested the tension between mundanity and possibility were not centered on an absolute denial of the potential of certain legislative actions to promote change. In some cases, articles seem mildly convinced that the changes proposed by legislators actually might create some positive effects in the world. For example, in what the *Owensboro Messenger* (KS) described as the “by their fruits shall ye know them” notion of politics, the sense that the political winds of change during the 2020 election were primarily a product of the practical implications of Trump’s policies rather than “a mass rereading of John Maynard Keynes and John Kenneth Galbraith.” Nonetheless, in its analysis of the work that

Biden was attempting to do with the *American Rescue Plan*, the paper equivocated regarding the potential for the bill to achieve the “unprecedented era of growth” it could purportedly create.

But these equivocations and the editorial hemming and hawing was mere peanuts compared to the rage demonstrated by some responses to the program, largely based in the notion that the lack of immediate devastation in the status quo was enough of a justification to prevent the possibility that further government intervention might create some potential, additional harm. One of the more clear examples of this dynamic came from the *Hickory Daily Record* (NC) which issued, what I assume to be, its attempt at a discursive skewering of the electoral reform bill posed at the beginning of the new Congress by arguing that “same-day voter registration, which leads to voter fraud [and] makes it difficult for a state to discover if a voter is also voting in another state [and] prevents states from limiting early voting...All Democrats are offering this country is a victim mentality that lets them help you out of freedoms for their help.” As a piece of policy analysis, the ideas presented in the article are hysterical; as a representation of the legislative and political mindset of those who oppose the idea of taking the lessons learned over the course of a deadly pandemic and creating legislative solutions, it is disturbing.

Declarations that the type of policies presented in the *American Rescue Plan* were the beginning of the path down the road to socialism, to “a one-party central government run[ning] a planned command and control economy which restricts private enterprise and property” (*Standard Speaker*; PA) were not uncommon. The remarkable thing about the *Speaker*’s article specifically was that the pronouncement that a “one-party government” is the ultimate end goal of the Democratic party came directly after it printed the Oxford American Dictionary’s definition of the word socialist that decidedly fails to include any such language. Instead, the *Speaker* justified the argument by reflecting on specific policy proposals that it deemed were

self-evidently contradictory. For example, the “project of defunding the police, abolishing ICE and opening the borders to unlimited migration is not socialistic. Socialist regimes are notoriously xenophobic police states. Whatever the American left is about, it is not socialist.” In the full context of the article this passage reads as though the author intended it to be like a symphonic ovation, a towering conclusion that demonstrated the impeccable logic of the work. Instead, it is, itself, a logical contortion of a sentence worthy of Ripley’s Believe It Or Not! The central argumentative intent of the sentence is overridden by its gleeful attempt to demonstrate the irrationality of the positions held by political opponents. Ultimately, it merely functions to demonstrate that either the author (a) has no clear understanding of the historical, philosophical, or political underpinnings of socialism, (b) has no clear understanding of the historical, philosophical, or political positions of political figures like Bernie Sanders, (c) has no clear understanding of the historical, philosophical, or political positions of democratic socialist nations that they cite, or (d) some fun combination of all of the above.

But the important aspect of this type of logic is that it is rampant throughout the coverage of the *American Rescue Plan*; as proponents of the bill argued that:

This has been one of the most quietly consequential weeks in recent American politics. The COVID-19 relief bill that was just enacted is one of the most important pieces of legislation in our lifetime ...[because] the poorest fifth of households will see their income rise by 20%; a family of four with one working and one unemployed will receive \$12,460 in benefits. Child poverty will be cut in half. The law stretches far beyond COVID-19 relief. ...This is not socialism. This is not the federal government taking control...This is something new” (*Salt Lake Tribune*; UT).

In many ways, the sense of mundanity ascribed to the legislation in this piece reflects the essential tensions between the advocacy of opponents of the *American Rescue Plan* and its advocates. Either side took the term to mean a different thing. Where the proponents of the bill argued that despite the innocuous nature of the bill it could bring real possibility, its opponents saw the direful possibilities of a nation that would rather simply stay where it is.

Summary: American Rescue Plan, March 8 to March 14

As the *American Rescue Plan* moved toward its final passage and enactment, *The Gettysburg Times* (PA), sounded the alarm bills about the constitutional and moral concerns confronting the nation as “the richest, most powerful country the world has ever seen is not only technically broke, but ripe for not only a major Depression...but total dissolution as well.” The paper continued, “The great economist Milton Friedman once said, ‘There’s no free lunch.’ He was absolutely right. As long as we live in this real, material world, all resources are both limited and scarce – and carry a price tag/cost.” Now, perhaps there is some warrant for this specific town, located in south Pennsylvania, a little over 60 miles directly north of Washington D.C., to lay claim to the authority of experience regarding the toll that breakdowns in civil society can extract from people, but the National Park Service, the federal agency that protects and maintains the fields adjacent to the town that produced this paper, is bought and paid for by something far more significant than the taxes and treasury that the *Times* argues have been stolen from the public. Invoking the banality qua axiom of non-free lunches (perhaps lunch non gratis) in this context is as apothegmatic as it is spurious.

The discursive purpose of this claim, though it is ostensibly a reaction to the excesses of government “at a time when the economy clearly can’t afford to be spending (wasting?) these precious resources on clearly non-essential projects” is to claim that the projects are illegitimate,

not because they are essentially harmful to the nation, but because the author claims them as their own under the purview of their position as a tax-paying citizen. Framing public services in this way is to claim them as property bought and paid for by taxes in a way that is both practically and theoretically unjustifiable. As a future “socialism obsessed college and university... ‘educator’, [I am not] laugh[ing] at what Adam Smith’s theory of Capitalism has been subverted to”; instead, “I laugh because I will cry if I do not” (Mitchell & Trask, 2003, p. 10). In the context of the news article analyzed above, the central claim of ownership, propriety, and expense related to the conduct of business is as much a rhetorical exercise in attempting to construct the limitations of policy as it is about constructing individual ownership over the fruits of collective systems and cooperative effort in ways that market concepts cannot comprehend.

Interlude: Buying Groceries with Milton Friedman. Milton Friedman is undoubtedly still one of the most influential economic theorists and minds in contemporary economic thought. His endeavors, though they were arguably most influential in the context of monetarist economic theory, central banking, and issues of inflation, spanned a significant swath of economic and political theorizing. As an advocate for the radical transformative power of the free market, Uncle Milty (Milton Friedman) was unabashed in his criticisms of policies that he saw as infringing on individuals rights and abilities to conduct business freely and unfettered, and his policy proposals and political philosophy center those commitments in ways that are still influential even as they justify and perpetuate some of the worst impulses of humanity under the premise that, if the market decides that such actions are unprofitable, it can be the ultimate arbiter of morality, propriety, and policy. And in fact, to prevent such free exchange by, for example, preventing employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of race, would be tantamount to the Nuremberg laws that would begin the justifications for imprisoning

Jewish people, Black people, the Romani, and other groups. Since there are no free lunches in his world, it is time to go grocery shopping with Milton Friedman:

Consider a situation in which there are grocery stores serving a neighborhood inhabited by people who have a strong aversion to being waited on by [Black] clerks. Supposed one of the grocery stores has a vacancy for a clerk and the first applicant qualified *in other respects* [emphasis added] happens to be [Black]. Let us suppose that as a result of the law the store is required to hire him. The effect of this action will be to reduce the business done by this store and to impose losses on the owner. ...[who is] simply transmitting the tastes of the community. ...Nonetheless, he is harmed, and indeed *may be the only one harmed appreciably*. (Friedman, 1962, pp. 111-112)

A few things stand out about this particular commentary on capitalism and freedom, especially in the context of the above analysis regarding the sense of complacency bred from the sense mundanity during the time of the *American Rescue Plan's* passage and exacerbated by the willing assent of those for whom there is little impact or reality in the experiences of those people whose degradation the economy is organized around. Friedman makes no attempt to disguise or mask the political aim of this economic logic at all, but the many instinctual objections to this gross distortion of any meaningful account of individual rights miss the more insidious elements of Friedman's storytelling, the elements that go beyond equating the harm of a person with the harm of a business and, instead, grant the economic entity of business a transcendent moral status by virtue of its place in the market.

Further examination of Friedman's writing in this section makes this dynamic clearer. Friedman's argument regarding the harm facing the grocery store owner who is forced to hire someone against his will refuses to acknowledge any harm on any side of the equation facing the

minoritized people whom, in the original position inferred by Friedman's analysis, are unable to secure fair employment in the free marketplace. This is perhaps why the direct comparison Freidman makes between the Nuremberg laws and Jim Crow laws to non-discrimination policies is unequivocally morally repugnant. Businesses cannot die. They cannot be tortured or imprisoned or packed into trains and carted off and separated from their families and forced to labor under conditions of starvation until they are finally murdered under a brutal regime with infrastructure designed and build for the express purpose of extinguishing human life. The anthropomorphism of businesses qua humans with feeling, emotion, and value beyond that of the humans who manifest it and constitute it is the rankest reductionism possible.

The final element of this picture that might easily be overlooked is the central question of justification and the sense of time that is emplotted in this narrative. In many ways it is the same emplotted sense of time at work throughout many of the articles examined during this inflection point. In this argument, Friedman writes that, in broad terms, that "the majority will be persuaded [if] each individual case is to be decided on its merits rather than as part of a general principle, [so] there can be little doubt that the effect ...government action in this area would be extremely undesirable" (Friedman, 1962, p. 113). In this argument, Friedman makes it clear that, although he may have been a passable mathematical reductionist or helicopter imaginer, his credentials regarding matters of political or moral philosophy were no more developed than those of novelist Ayn Rand. Suggesting that non-interference might eventually lead a majority, that profits from its exploitation of the marginalized, to eventually, perhaps, accept a minority community, as Friedman suggested is the best course of action, is not a philosophical principle; it is flim-flam argumentation; it is a discursive about-face, equivalent to Graham Chapman's

strategy contra French catapults. To appropriate Graeber and Wengrow (2021), “what follows is, to put it bluntly, a modern [economist] making it up as he goes along” (p. 13).

Though Friedman justified his argument in terms of he was a contemporary of libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick and made similar arguments at varying points throughout his works, Friedman’s problem in this argument is a basic one that libertarian political thinkers of his time addressed. Nozick’s (1974)³¹ willingness to defer to the consensual transactions of consenting adults as a means of guaranteeing the legitimacy and justice of a distribution of holdings is dependent on the acceptance of the original distribution as itself legitimate. In other words, to claim that the state has no legitimate claim to interfere in the conduct of business that actively seeks to perpetuate a political, social, and economic harm based on the potential harm that action might have on an entity that transcends the two humans involved in the action is a point-blank absurdity. And worse, because of regard for both the text and its author these arguments are not just philosophical, they form an intextricable [sic] part of the moral grounding of contemporary neoclassical economics, its practice, its methodology, and its policy advocacy. In this way these arguments are a piece of the economic narrative being spun into social realities.

Continuation: *American Rescue Plan*. In sum, the discourse surrounding the *American Rescue Plan* speaks to the epistemic dimensions, the foundationalizing dynamics (in grand

³¹ Although the cited work of Nozick’s was published after Friedman’s original volume, the argument remains the same within the 40th anniversary addition of *Capitalism and Freedom* in which Friedman’s own preface exalted his role in bringing about the era of Thatcherism in the United Kingdom and Regan in the United States. Unwavering seems the appropriate descriptor.

narrative terms), that simultaneously give rise to the promise and potential for economic change and subsequently quash that hope through a dogged willingness to ignore, disregard, discount, and equivocate about the harms caused by the extant organization of the social worlds that people themselves design. Table 4.13 summarizes the headlines from the most widely circulated daily news sources in the United States during this inflection point, and the emphasis on the impact this organization might have on people, rather than businesses or the stock market, is limited to a few headlines. This includes one from the *Washington Post*, which noted the historic action offered in the relief bill for Black farmers in the United States. The article itself described how, over the course of a century, and to even greater effect and harm, Black farmers in the United States have lost 90 percent of their lands because of legal and business practices that denied them access to lines of credit, like the effect of a different bailout when “almost all of Trump’s \$28 billion dollar bailout ... went to White Farmers” (*Washington Post*; DC), an amount that came to \$6.7 billion for white farmers compared to \$15 million for Black farmers and with white farmers receiving, on average, four times as much aid (Hayes, 2021). These are the impacts of the types of logics storied by economists like Friedman, who assume the power and flexibility and omnipotence of the free market, or of the government’s ability to support that *free* market, when the distribution of the holdings and the people who will benefit are already assumed to be the right people. Friedman may not cite Atwater, but the logics are the same.

“The System Works”, or the Great Recession in News

Unlike the dynamics of the COVID-19 recession which, across each of the three inflection points, revealed startlingly distinct and unique narrative dynamics across each context, many of the ideas and concepts reflected in the topic modeling for the Great Recession were

Table 4.13. COVID-19 Recession, Policy (*American Rescue Plan*) Daily Headlines Summary

Date	Daily Headlines				
	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Mar 8, 2021	Senate Democrats Turn Up Pressure On Cuomo Exit	House Set for Vote on Aid Bill After Narrow Senate Approval	Biden's Focus Is On Selling Relief Bill: Plan with \$1400 checks to get final OK this week.	Minneapolis braces for 1 st trial in Floyd's death	They Swoop in For Shots: Locals say snowbirds are using up scarce COVID vaccines
Mar 9, 2021	Those Vaccinated Can Be Maskless in Small Groups	CDC Relaxes Safety Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People	When Will \$1400 Aid Arrive in the Bank?: Cash starts flowing after relief bill gets final OK	Relief Bill a Historic Lift for Black Farmers Hopeful Glimpse in CDC's Guidance	California vs. Florida: Who handled COVID-19 better?
Mar 10, 2021	High Risk Jockey for Shots as Rules Evolve	Swings in Tech Sector Spark Volatility in Hot SPAC Market	Who Can Expect \$1400 Checks?: Not everyone who got cash last time will again	Disarray, apathy risk upending global progress	Newsome Aims to Reassure a Weary State Democrats fine with GOP calling COVID relief 'a liberal wish list'
Mar 11, 2021	Congress Passes Biden's \$1.9 Trillion Aid Bill	Congress Passes Virus-Relief Bill	\$1.9T Aid Package Gets Final Approval	House sends stimulus bill to Biden: Signing Into Law Expected Friday	L.A. is familiar with trauma; COVID turned it up a notch
Mar 12, 2021	President's Goal: July 4 Gatherings with Close Family	ECB to Speed up Bond Purchases	Breonna Taylor, One Year Later: A life that mattered	GOP push imperils gains in voting rights	Hopeful Biden says, 'I need you': He urges Americans to 'do their part' to fight virus as he offers optimism on economy and vaccine
Mar 13, 2021	Cuomo is Defiant as Top Democrats Tell Him to Resign	As Outlook Brightens, Investors Seek Stocks with Hidden Value		'I am still here to tell my story': A woman wants justice for Floyd as the officer who knelt on her neck awaits trial	Police Make it Clear: Network of language buffs is the enemy of the opaque as it roots out government mumbo-jumbo.
Mar 14, 2021	Stimulus Signals Shifting Politics of Poverty Fight	White House Weighs How to Pay for Economic Plans		Inflation Fears: The Car in the Coal Mine?	Just 900 U.S. troops left in Syria, but not leaving soon

Note: All headlines summarized in this table are presented as they were formatted on the original paper.

similar or mutually resonant across the contexts, especially those that were chronologically sequential. This is understandable given both the nature of the disruption that the financial collapse caused in the United States (as is explored in this section) *and* given the political context in which these economic conversations were taking place (i.e., in the middle of the general election cycle rather than the primary cycle, as was the case with COVID-19). For those reasons, instead of exploring each inflection point separately, I have grouped them together in terms of organizing the financial collapse (*Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*; Disruption, October 12 to 18, 2008) and managing the recovery (Disruption, November 28 to December 4, 2008; *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*). Within each of these groupings, I explore the overlapping dynamics narrated in the news coverage across both inflection points. As I work to both relay and interrogate these stories, I reference the various terms and topics that facilitated these interpretations as they are illustrated or summarized in the various tables and figures throughout this second half of the chapter.

Organizing a Financial Collapse

At times of financial concern and economic uncertainty, one of the greatest sources of comfort and confidence for consumers is the prospect that they may be receiving a pay raise. Especially in the context of the COVID-19 recession discussed above, the centrality of wages and income to the discussions regarding individuals' economic futures, and that of the country as a whole, was clear. Which is why *The Hermiston Herald* (OR) article from the day that the *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act* was signed into law arguing that “now is not the time for a pay raise” was, at the very least, a notable assertion. The initiative that the paper described in the article was an attempt to bring a class of people's pay “into line with that of [people] in other states. This commission wants to do what? Now? And the “why” is even more ridiculous? Since

when did it become important to pay our public officials on a scale that is equal to those in other states?” Needless to say, in the context of an emergency act of congress to stabilize the economy the prospect of raising, even state, legislators’ pay seemed too far off the rail to even consider. This particular story came from an article most closely related to topic four in the *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act* topic model: stuck in the middle between the effects of Excess and Restraint, Macro and Micro economic forces. And in many ways it captured the political and economic anxieties of the time.

For people, the sense that the rug had been pulled out from under them was rampant and the accounts of mistrust in both the economic and political forces left people “paying more and more and receiving less and less” (*Kodiak Daily Mirror*; AK). The article from which that quotation derives described the desperate situation of Alaskans attempting to get adequate health care. In terms of 2008 dollars, “It’s a very difficult situation [because] our premiums are over \$20,000 a month, and that isn’t covering all our employees and it’s not a luxurious plan.” For those left out in the cold, uninsured and in need of any assistance possible, the insurance market became just another version of the “sub-prime mortgages that have ruined thousands of families [because] the insurance companies know that these families cannot possibly cash in on that insurance, because the deductibles and co-payments are so high.” And these stories contrasted with those of politicians asking for pay raises and federal government spending in the billions of dollars. The impetus to react, deny, and rage against an economic situation where people were left “holding the bag” for what they were told “is partly [their] own fault...going forward, we [just] have to examine more consistently ‘how’ we do our business. And we need to ask ‘why’ more often” (*The Pioneer*; MN) without questioning if that is the way to run the counties, school

districts, cities and families for whom those questions often mean very different things than to the people who are recommending that they start asking the questions.

Excess and Restraint/Reality and Escape

One of the more interesting features of the financial collapse was the chronology of the stock market and political response to the situation as the dire circumstances began to reveal themselves and take on new definition at each turn. To begin with, the most prominent dynamic that emerged from the topic modelling of news coverage during the final passage of the *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act* captured the tension between topics two, three, and six, as illustrated in Figure 4.4 and summarized in Table 4.14. Notably, the opposition illustrated by

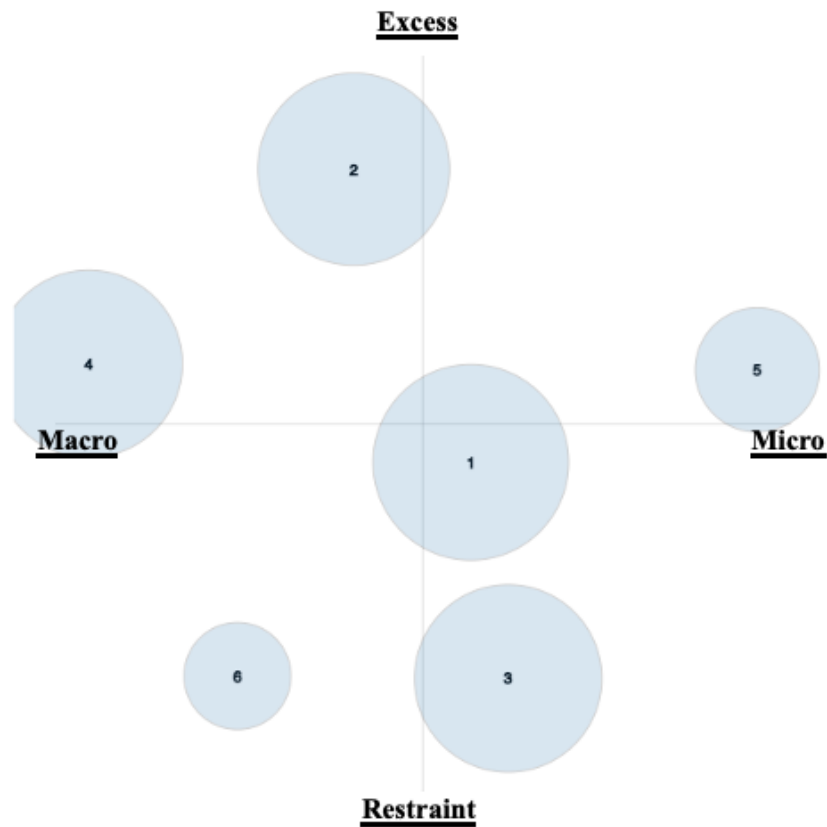


Figure 4.4. Intertopic Distance Map, Great Recession, *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*

this dynamic is most clearly between topic two and topics three and six. And the *Dover Post* (DE) illustrated that tension with its recommendations for what to do during a financial collapse:

The economy is spiraling toward the abyss, consumer prices are skyrocketing and our mood swings are fluttering like hummingbirds on speed. It is hard to put our concerns on hold and laugh a little....But laughter is indeed good medicine. It reduces stress, helps dentists grow their businesses, and adds carbon dioxide to the canopy of greenhouse gasses that will make Canada an ocean by June 30, 2025.³² But, seriously, why be so serious?...[Remember] those rare times when all your real work is done and you only have 154 house/yard work tasks to complete before Sunday Night Football. Life is a study in contrasts –stocks versus bonds, regulated markets versus free markets, ...Britney versus Madonna, Oprah Winfrey versus any other woman entertainer on the planet.

There is a surprising amount of depth in this attempt at a humor column. The central idea of this column, the motivating force behind the idea that it is fine to just let go for a little bit and think back to a better world, is not an action step, is not a policy solution, it is a moral obfuscation akin to that of a report, about a smoking ban in Atlantic city, that mentioned a familiar name: ““These greedy casino owners sit up in their smoke-free offices and we’re the ones dying for their bonuses,’ said one pit boss who fears she has lung cancer. The Donald says otherwise: ‘The smoking bank will take tens of millions of dollars of taxes away. It’s going to be a disaster””

³² Given that this date is only three years and six days after the defense date for this dissertation, it gives me great satisfaction that the organization through which this humor column was produced has been defunct for over ten years.

(*Daily Freeman*; NY). The age of this article is clear for three reasons: (1) it discussed controversy regarding the legality of indoor smoking; (2) Donald Trump still was not cited as a failed or former casino owner; and (3) Donald pretended to actually care about collecting taxes. The third piece of this reasoning is the most central because its essential premise is that if smoking is not allowed in casinos, no one will come and gamble, and tax revenue will be lost. This is the moral prestidigitation that justifies feeding the utility monster³³ (Hausman, 1995) by judging the suffering and ill-health of others as equivalent to one's right to smoke and play blackjack at the same time.

The troubling dynamic of this discussion about excess, however, becomes clearer in the context of the degrading rhetoric used to claim that a different group was really to blame:

How exactly did the government overlay of race-based goals onto the real estate marketplace help create the sub-prime mortgage industry, which, having imploded, triggered the current economic crisis, and what did Obama have to do with it? The answer goes back to one of those totalitarian drawing boards where social engineers draft their human havoc. Not “enough” minorities owned home, the social engineers decided, because not “enough” minorities were eligible for mortgages, the social engineers concluded. Therefore in the bean-counting name of what “should” be, the social engineers effectively junked all bottom-line, non-racial markers of mortgage eligibility,

³³ The utility monster is a classic issue in utilitarian philosophy that questions the legitimacy of a moral theory that could justify enormously degrading and harmful treatment on the basis of the fact that it gives one person an immense quantity of pleasure.

Table 4.14. Topic Model, Great Recession, *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act* (September 30 to October 6, 2008): Terms (Topics 2, 3, & 6)

Lambda	Topic 2			Topic 3			Topic 6		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	hartj	bank	bank	phoenixvil	oct	year	suitter	obama	obama
	libro	market	said	charic	church	peopl	dugan	mccain	said
	nasdaq	loan	market	cub	peopl	time	muskoge	campaign	mccain
	wachovia	credit	financi	jesu	event	like	kutz	poll	campaign
	metzler	financi	credit	royersford	live	new	quinnipiac	voter	voter
	winnebago	percent	percent	playoff	children	oct	mbire	caterpillar	state
	buffett	invest	year	spiritu	world	said	xtrafont	michigan	percent
	wamu	mortgag	loan	ang	year	dai	helvetica	democrat	democrat
	citigroup	stock	economi	putin	time	work	shaheen	cole	time
	jpmorgan	monei	monei	huckabe	inform	know	mudd	owen	poll
	hopkinton	govern	govern	sewicklei	women	live	landi	race	republican
	interbank	billion	billion	kulbacki	game	think	macarthur	versu	economi
	agari	investor	invest	bourbon	like	school	pgordon	ayer	new
	nyse	rate	mortag	danc	life	need	hatti	suitter	busi
	remitt	borrow	peopl	raffl	person	want	scowl	presidenti	palin
	nikkei	said	street	amant	saturdai	wai	franken	palin	year
	forti	lend	hous	islan	love	world	costaliv	said	people
	homebuy	compani	compani	kparker	www	come	hummingbir	austin	voter
	ftse	economi	time	bolourchi	team	right	majorca	elector	presidenti
	dax	year	bailout	symphoni	know	economi	caterpillar	percent	elect

Note: All headlines summarized in this table are presented as they were formatted on the original paper.

Table 4.15. Great Recession, Policy (*Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*) Daily Headlines Summary

Date	Daily Headlines			
	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Sep 30, 2008	Defiant House Rejects Huge Bailout; Stock Plunge; Next Step is Uncertain 7% Drop in Dow	Bailout Plan Rejected, Markets Plunge, Forcing New Scramble to Solve Crisis	House Rejects Financial Rescue, Sending Stocks Plummeting	House rejects historic rescue as markets take a record dive: Leaders scramble to regroup after deal crumbles under partisan rancor
Oct 1, 2008	Adding Sweeteners, Senate Pushes Bailout Plan	U.S., Europe Push to Limit Crisis: Senate Plans Vote on Revised Rescue Package That Raises Limits on Deposit Insurance	Lawmakers Revise Rescue Plan: Stocks Rise; Senate Aims To Vote Tonight	Hopes hang on bailout tweaks: Changes, including a big deposit insurance hike, are crafted to attract crucial votes.
Oct 2, 2008	36 Hours of Alarm and Action as Crisis Spiraled	Fed Considers Rate Cut As Recession Fears Mount	Senate Approves Bailout: House to Take Up Bill With Added Tax Breaks, Higher FDIC Limits	Senate OKs sweetened bailout bill: Tax breaks are added to the Wall Street plan, but House passage is far from certain
Oct 3, 2008	Agency's '04 Rule Lets Banks Pile Up New Debt, and Risk	Biden, Palin Clash on Taxes, Iraq in Sharp-Edged Debate	Courting Middle-Class Voters: Palin and Biden State Cases for Changing Washington, Repairing Economy	Biden, Palin trade jabs in fight for middle class
Oct 4, 2008	Bailout Plan Wins Approval; Democrats Vow Tighter Rules	Historic Bailout Passes As Economy Slips Further	Bush Enacts Historic Financial Rescue: House Passes Plan By Wide Margin, but Stocks Keep Falling	Approval of bailout comes amid signs that a steep recession is just beginning
Oct 5, 2008	Economic Unrest Is Shifting Electoral College		Politics at the Five-and-Dime: Where Pennies Matter, Change Is a Powerful Idea	\$700 billion doesn't go far in bad times
Oct 6, 2008	Financial Crisis Spread in Europe	Europe Races to Shore Up Banks as Crisis Spreads	Registration Giants Favor Democrats: Voter Rolls Swelling in Key States	Countrywide clients to get mortgage aid

Note: All headlines summarized in this table are presented as they were formatted on the original paper.

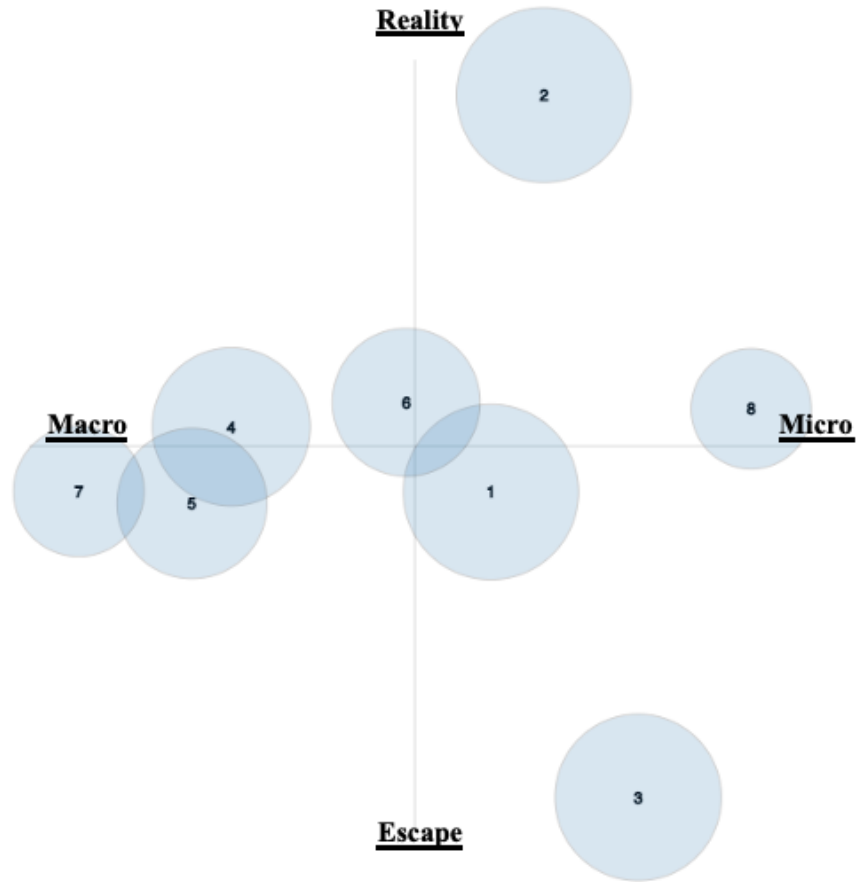


Figure 4.5. Intertopic Distance Map Great Recession, Disruption (October 12 to 18, 2008)

...this paved the way for increasingly unconventional “sub prime” loans for all including rubber-check-writing deadbeats. (*The Middlesboro Daily News*; KY).

The article continued to explain that, as a community organizer, then-candidate Obama was “training an army of ACORN organizers...shakedown artists who brought our current crisis about [with] massive help along the way [from] affirmative action lending practices foisted on the banking industry.” At this point, it is worth stopping to note that (a) the paper that printed this article is still printing biweekly to its circulation of 4,000 and (b) this particular article was authored by a columnist for *The Washington Times*, another publication, still in print, with a print

circulation of over 50,000. To be as blunt as the ideas expressed above deserve, this is type of unabashed and explicit racism was not isolated to this particular article, or this publication, or this topic. When looking to the contrast demonstrated between topics 2 and topics 3 (illustrated in Figure 4.5, summarized), in the later articles from the time of the severe stock market declines around a month after the closure of Wall Street, these narratives constructed a moral equivalency between the government bailout, the financiers who profited from it, and the people of color, particularly Black people, who were disproportionately affected by the crisis.

When the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (MN) reported on the role that racism was playing in the final month leading up to the general election, it did not censor the quotation in the second line, “Once or twice each night, people tell me, ‘I’m not voting for a N—³⁴... Race, is being overshadowed...by tough pocketbook issues that working people are facing, including job losses, stagnant wages, retirement savings in jeopardy, lack of health insurance and home foreclosures.” The Obama and union campaign organizers who spoke to the *Pioneer Press* for this article, by separating out the racism from the pocketbook issues, makes exactly the move that Atwater described in the quotation that began this work. And the pieces that contrasted this sense of extravagance, excess, opulence, discourses that have historically linked back to queer people and people of color, decadents (Wynn, 2019) used this narrative equivalence to contrapose themselves as the good, the right, the people who could “take back our country and create a new voice ‘by the people, for the people’ ...[because people] have a responsibility to our

³⁴ Although I chose to remove the racial slur here, the original print article did not censor this slur.

fellow citizens to do the right thing...A little revolution is good for a country now and then” (*The Billings Gazette*; MT).

As the *DeForest Times-Tribune* (WI) warned, “for those of you who think Monday’s stock market rally, means we’re out of the economic woods, you unfortunately have another guess coming...Because Wisconsin state government has maintained a credit card mentality when it comes to it’s [sic] state budget and...the tough times have only begun.” In response to the narrative equivocation, the emergence of moral condemnation and righteous anger led to exactly where such logics suggest:

My generation worked on a pay as you go plan. Look what the buy now –pay later mentality has gotten this country into. ...The country as a whole is bankrupt, school enrollments are down, people are being laid off, cost of living way up, property taxes way up. ...We all want our children to get a good education ...why not try raising monies with a Booster club like they do in the state of Florida (*The Northwoods River News*; WI) Have they gone broke because they became usurers? ...Money is tight, meaning there is little to none. If the financial industry is having trouble, then where does that leave us? People, it’s always praying time. ...God said he would make his people the lenders and not the borrowers. This is true, right now. The table has turned and now the borrowers will have to bail out the financial industry. He said it, and I believe it. Trust in God, not money. (*The Natchez Democrat*, MS)

Austerity equated with reality equated with piety equated with wealth equated with righteousness equated with prudence. When usury is the crime, both the borrower and the lender are equally responsible, but this is a moral claim equated as an economic one. (Graeber, 2014) has examined the impact of one direction of that equation, and this is only part of examining the other half.

Table 4.16. Great Recession, Disruption (Oct 12 to 18, 2008) Daily Headlines Summary

Date	Daily Headlines			
	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Oct 12, 2008	White House Overhauling Rescue Plan for Economy		A Mother's Final Look at Life: In Impoverished Sierra Leone, Childbirth Kills One in Eight Women	Ideology takes a back seat in bank strategy
Oct 13, 2008	Global Bid to Prop Up Banks Morgan is Backed	Europe Raises Stakes in Bank Bailout Race: U.K. to Rescue RBS, HBOS, as German Plans up to €400 billion to Aid its Institutions	Obama Up by 10 Points as McCain Favorability Ratings Fall	15 EU nations unite in bid to prop up banks
Oct 14, 2008	U.S. Investing \$250 Billion to Bolster Bank Industry; Dow Surges 936 Points	U. S. to Buy Stakes in Nation's Largest Banks: Recipients Include Citi, Bank of America, Goldman; Government Pressures All to Accept Money as Part of Broadened Rescue Effort	U.S. Forces Nine Major Banks To Accept Partial Nationalization	U.S.to invest \$250 billion in banks
Oct 15, 2008	After Big Rally, Grim Outlook Still Looms on Profits and Jobs: A Fear That Hard Times Are Bearing Down	Credit Shows Signs of Easing on Bank Rescue: Lenders See Borrowing Costs Dip, but Corporations and Homeowners Still Face Squeeze	What Went Wrong: How did the world's markets come to the brink of collapse?	Obama makes broad gains
Oct 16, 2008	Markets Suffer as Investors Weigh Relentless Problems	Economic Fears Reignite Market Slump, Stocks post Biggest Drop Since 1987 Crash as Retail Sales Fall	Stocks Sink as Gloom Seizes Wall St.: Bernanke Forecasts Prolonged Economic Turmoil, Dow Plunges 7.9%	Politics could delay a package to aid consumer
Oct 17, 2008	In A Downturn, College Strains Family Budgets	Oil's Slide Deepens as Downturn Triggers Sharp Drop in Demand	As Credit Tightens, Companies Curtail Spending, Expansion: Some Indebted Firms at Risk of Default	Getting a break at the pump
Oct 18, 2008	Federal Loop Into Banking Has It's Perils	IMF Probes Chief Over Tie to Worker: Inquiry Intensifies as Fund Battles Crisis	Thousands Face Mix-Ups in Voter Registrations: In new Databases, Many Are Wrongly Flagged as Ineligible	Mervyns collapses in retail slump

Note: All headlines summarized in this table are presented as they were formatted on the original paper.

Table 4.17. Topic Model, Great Recession, Disruption (October 12 to October 18, 2008): Terms (Topics 1, 2, & 3)

Lambda	Topic 3			Topic 1			Topic 2		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	festiv	event	new	ordin	counti	said	paulson	bank	said
	punchbowl	car	event	superintend	citi	counti	nasdaq	markket	market
	sabl	com	peopl	kingstown	school	school	fdic	percent	bank
	freilich	featur	year	riverbend	said	citi	zubrin	financi	percent
	mpg	oct	said	nixa	commun	year	hong	stock	financi
	fyi	festiv	com	narragansett	board	commun	sach	billion	new
	crossov	host	car	yamhil	district	state	ecotherm	credit	economi
	brauer	drive	time	mediodg	council	district	citigroup	investor	govern
	sperl	book	oct	sieloff	student	new	samp	loan	billion
	edmund	film	want	walsh	develop	fund	jpmorgan	govern	stock
	download	site	like	leinbach	project	need	wachovia	said	year
	pumpkin	www	look	ulster	program	board	sarkozi	crisi	credit
	torqu	new	center	ladu	fund	program	interbank	rate	econom
	mk	onlin	open	barnhardt	member	busi	ope	lend	plan
	laser	ticket	come	hein	chamber	plan	kashkari	invest	week
	awd	music	drive	mcc	budget	develop	rivlin	dow	compani
	priu	store	site	incub	grant	work	depositor	wall	price
	brewster	art	site	uri	year	student	libro	index	crisi
	carniv	saturdai	dai	childre	educ	project	cardillo	compani	rate
	jazz	restaur	www	rft	depart	million	ftse	treasurri	loan

Macro and Micro

Dividing up the contexts of economic action in terms of the macro and the micro is a quintessential aspect of the disciplinary frame, but it also disguises the social factors that move in and out of those frames, in and between, creating and shaping the worlds people inhabit. Especially within the context of the organizational communication framework of this analysis, the dynamics of macro and micro, as they emerged in the news coverage during the first two inflection points of the Great Recession, constructed the relationships and impacts of products, governments, communities, and businesses in differing ways that also became indicative of the political and economic isolation that communities, and people to whom many of these papers were speaking, faced during this time.

It is in this context that an article from the *New Haven Register* (CT) believed that it could speak to the real needs of the children of the state even during the stock market decline that characterized the first disruption inflection point: “Elementary and high schools must educate students so they can compete globally, not just locally...I would consider good economic skills as important as any other work-force skill.” During a time of creeping austerity and the sense that hard choices would have to be made, the idea of investing in the future of the United States, the school children who would soon form the backbone of its workforce and begin competing on a global level. In this time of economic uncertainty, the notion of advancing public investment in educating students on economic issues seemed to be a promising way to “think very differently about how we roll out education in this state.”

However, there was a notable piece at the bottom of the article that indicated that this piece was not written by a member of the *Register*'s staff. Instead, though it was framed as a news report, objectively detailing a new program that could have significant benefits for the

students of the state, upon further inspection, an altogether more interesting dynamic began to emerge regarding the relationship between the macro and the micro, as framed in this article. In this way, the article, perhaps unwittingly, demonstrated a defining aspect of the narrated relationship between macro and micro economic forces that are illustrated in Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5 and detailed, across the two contexts in this grouping, in Table 4.18, Table 4.19, and Table 4.20

The article from the *New Haven Register* was not written by a reporter; it was written by the executive director of an education initiative with the mission of engaging and empowering school and community leaders to provide services through education, government, and business partnerships³⁵ and the more explicit goal of bettering student performance to provide a trained workforce that attracts new industry and benefits all *sectors* of the community. There are many aspects of these details and others from the initiative's website but what seems to contrast most directly with the ideas in the article penned by the executive director is the fundamental aim of the organization. Despite the article's advocacy that students need to work toward becoming globally economically competitive, the retention of the that workforce at home is a key part of their advocacy. This is the dynamic of macro and micro that emerges from this particular

³⁵ This quotation is paraphrased from the website of the initiative, which I do not name directly because: (a) it was not included in the original data, (b) the initiative is still operational and I wish to protect the privacy of anyone associated with the group, and (c) explicit detail is unnecessary for the purposes of this analysis. Even though it was not included in the original data collection for this piece, its content is integral to examining these narrative dynamics fully.

Table 4.18. Topic Model, Great Recession, *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act* (September 30 to October 4, 2008): Terms (Topics 1, 4, & 5)

Lambda	Topic 4			Topic 1			Topic 5		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	boeher	vote	vote	gregoir	said	said	mpg	car	said
	hoyer	republican	said	transliter	counti	state	cobalt	said	year
	roskam	hous	hous	wmc	state	year	corolla	store	price
	pelosi	bush	republican	county'	citi	counti	clapa	fuel	car
	steni	democrat	bailout	andru	school	citi	corsini	ga	economi
	biggert	bailout	democrat	colei	year	tax	tomajan	price	busi
	demint	senat	mccain	millag	budget	busi	sedan	food	new
	lipinski	congress	tax	wastewat	project	school	hemi	sale	sale
	shimku	said	bush	napolitano	develop	new	horsepow	custom	peopl
	shadegg	mccain	financi	katzen	tax	need	priu	vehicl	monei
	amt	biden	senat	klimek	district	million	kocet	shop	store
	ay	republican	plan	cate	million	work	perlow	mpg	ga
	ahmadinejad	leader	congress	countywid	council	economi	scangaug	auto	fuel
	defazio	tax	economi	assemblyman	commun	commun	tjelmeland	drive	like
	kaptur	taxpay	billion	menino	icreas	plan	unlead	dealership	food
	aderhold	rescu	obama	rezon	board	increas	torqu	kid	time
	boldli	american	street	flagler	fund	budget	norwel	truck	compani
	prolugo	billion	american	swtichgrass	servic	develop	wasilkowski	electr	custom
	gravest	legisl	presid	dapper	busi	fund	lb	hybrid	good
	lehtinen	plan	govern	lowenth	educ	job	cubic	toyota	market

Table 4.19. Topic Model, Great Recession, Disruption (October 12 to October 18, 2008): Terms (Topics 4, 5, & 7)

Lambda	Topic 7			Topic 5			Topic 4		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	vo	mccain	mccain	pakistan	countri	peopl	hoogendky	state	said
	battleground	obama	obama	genocid	american	time	johann	said	state
	wurzelbach	campaign	said	weiss	world	countri	dfa	democrat	elect
	flashinski	presidenti	campaign	biospher	america	american	yago	elect	democrat
	hostra	debat	vote	royko	know	know	sestak	candid	candid
	beyer	barack	republican	incompet	right	like	merklei	republican	support
	asher	palin	candid	pakistani	peopl	presid	debloi	senat	year
	stabler	john	democrat	poppin	war	right	bralei	support	republican
	schieffer	republican	john	scriptur	editor	world	denison	issu	work
	ayer	vote	tax	darfur	presid	need	embryon	race	vote
	guerra	poll	debat	milit	god	year	maynor	repres	issu
	rezko	democrat	presidenti	oprah	fanni	vote	coppl	voter	job
	feingold	candid	presid	motherhood	time	economi	hotjob	district	govern
	mccaskil	sen	barack	fandango	biden	govern	gregoir	health	district
	crisscross	voter	palin	cedron	man	america	manzella	rep	tax
	unpatriot	joe	voter	medv	let	nation	hartsuch	vote	health
	rightlei	said	elect	flirti	letter	think	udal	smith	voter
	franken	sarah	year	cooei	foreign	good	diaz	job	need
	unrepent	presid	sen	miseri	like	econom	wyden	law	senat
	feldman	senat	support	supercalifrag	wrong	wai	charic	congress	counti

Note: These topics represent the left-most topics from the macro-micro dynamic in Figure 4.5. Table 4.15 includes the remaining two topics for this dynamic (6 & 8)

Table 4.20. Topic Model, Great Recession, Disruption (October 12 to October 18, 2008): Terms (Topics 6 & 8)

Lambda	Topic 6			Topic 8		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	leavi	monei	tax	flr	plant	percent
	schweitzer	tax	said	bushel	said	amp
	hogen	pai	monei	incl	price	sale
	denton	peopl	peopl	usda	com	percent
	alcon	parent	state	cranberry	util	industry
	bawol	kid	year	crab	fkr	people
	degroat	budget	need	calumet	sale	company
	baldridg	children	time	dep	ski	million
	jorgenson	famili	pai	soybean	rent	home
	odom	state	budget	priv	acr	new
	fumo	incom	famii	fisheri	heat	economi
	diffi	health	economi	dickei	product	busi
	unclaim	cut	spend	hoonah	year	project
	dpl	spend	fund	tscherter	incl	market
	brownstown	care	health	olei	pet	water
	kamin	save	help	acreage	bushel	said
	jupina	need	cut	skier	resort	year
	marshfield	casino	job	patio	farm	price
	stratyn	thing	children	exet	farmer	build
	adulthood	fund	work	br	water	state

Note: These are the remaining two topics that depict the macro-micro dynamic explored in this inflection point

context. During the financial collapse, as people were beginning to respond to the severe impacts of what would become the Great Recession, there was a simultaneous collapse, a gravitational spectacle that worked to establish the global within the local as a call to arms in the economic fight that the great recession became, “Every one of our international competitors is making substantial investments in its infrastructure—airports, highways, transit rails—for the next century. We’re not” (*The Sun News*; SC).

This lies in contrast to the more pedestrian coverage that dominated the micro side of the dynamic represented in the disruption inflection point (October 12 to 18, 2008). In various

articles from this topic, papers like *The Lawton Constitution* (OK) celebrated a state university football program's win over an opponent; *The Duncan Banner* (OK) gave advice about how to can food at home for a little bit of added security in a time of economic downturn; and *The Express Star* (OK) described how a swap meet brought a little bit more abundance to the area. Even as these local papers were discussing the small things that they were doing to feel better about the world, to take their minds off the economy, the central picture on the human experiences, going to the movies, celebrating a birthday party, were all noted as being diminished, made smaller by the shadow of the financial crisis. The sense from this dynamic of macro in micro seems to fall apart when considering the above quotation from *The Sun News* that talked about the path forward through investment and building. But in this context, the macro and the micro had engaged a different kind of meaning making for people.

The Lawton Constitution (OK) celebrated the state university's win as a small piece of joy despite the economy. But the economy was, in this article, always present as the author suggested that "if the economy doesn't improve soon, [Unnamed billionaire] may need a job as a janitor at the stadium that is named after [them]." Although it is clear that the author intended this as a joke, the continued references to the "[billionaire] right there next to coach [unnamed], who was probably asking [billionaire] about the hedge fund that is on the nosedive right now." There is a sense of bitterness but not resentment behind these sarcastic moments. There is a sense that because of the wealth and power encapsulated in this person's being that they are somehow foreign, somehow no longer a part of the community that they came from and still, irrevocably a part of it. When considering the conflicting and tensional construction of macro vs micro dynamics throughout these narratives, there is a clear, if fine, distinction between the

community, connected by and defined by their experiences of hardship, instances of small needs met and large needs better left out of sight and out of mind.

As an act of economic sensemaking, the role that such a dynamic plays is difficult to define. For an economist attempting to analyze a market, there is little time for grappling with the truly micro experiences of economics. Like the discussion of infrastructure earlier in this section, there is still an aggregation that constructs the needs and wants of a community into a survey point, a piece of census data, a representative individual that never really accounted for the issues about which people were concerned. And most macro of all of these systems was not the global or international experience or issues with economics, instead it was the issue that was dominating the news cycle as it drew ever nearer:

Anyone who is 18 years old and a United States citizen is eligible to vote. The economy is in a state of disaster with failing banks and historic tumbles on Wall Street. Many people are afraid we might head into another great depression. With all of these factors looming over us, no one should be complacent about exercising their right to vote this year
(Aberdeen American News; SD)

Using the word complacent in the context of a political conversation with South Dakotans seems an interesting choice. When considering the vast expanse of global and economic issues during this time of crisis, the idea that the federal government, about which they were being asked to take a stand, is the most macro of systems, the most fundamentally opposed to the interests and attitudes and values of the people who are trying to make ends meet, is as troubling a conclusion as it is unexpected. Because in the context of the economic struggles facing people during this time, the implications of such a recognition went further.

When articulating the reasons for exercising the right to vote, the *Aberdeen American News* emphasized the sacrifice of the:

Vietnam War generation [which] helped gain the right to vote for 18-year-olds because many young people were drafted into the military at that time. Many of them were sent to Vietnam to fight...[and] if having reached the age of 18 meant they were old enough to go to war and potentially lose their lives then they surely deserved the right to vote.

The comparison here is a beautiful summation of the macro/micro dynamics represented across this first grouping of inflection points, because it represents the fundamental relationship between the people and the government and the economy—the entity that has been missing from these stories. To paraphrase the above story, if people were to be the ones responsible for resolving the mess of the financial crisis, there was a sense that they deserved the right to dictate some of those terms. But unlike government, there is no reciprocal relationship between people and the narrated market, and so people could only turn to a government that they already saw as having exacerbated or created the problem. More simply, the relationship between macro and micro is not a story of ontology, it is an epistemological story that tells people where and how to look to see the villain they can blame, channeling attention up the chain, from macro to micro, so as to obviate the need for people to realize there are more directions to look than up the food chain.

Managing Economic Recovery

After the election of Barack Obama to the presidency, the economic fluctuations and impacts of the recession continued to grow, and the prospect of passing another, seemingly futile bill to support the economy and create some meaningful foundation for reform or recovery became a political quagmire despite the Democratic party's position in both the legislature and

the executive. Because the problem was not centrally one of ideological cohesion or even justification. The desire was there for some meaningful reform, but, as Guam's non-voting delegate framed the issue:

I will, however, vote Nay on the economic stimulus package. That package is intended to get our economy back on track and help Americans who are suffering through these difficult times. I will not support that package from any President's administration or any party in Congress. The stimulus package is big on the giveaways for the special interests and corporate high rollers yet lacking the real support America's ordinary working citizens and elderly need. Worst, that package has absolutely nothing for those on Guam who have been deliberately damaged by America's denial of economic freedoms and justice since WWII. Yes, I am speaking about the most patriotic Americans, in our great country, who were born and many who still live on Guam. I am one of those Americans who to this day are without a voice. Not having a voice makes my Nay vote on the economic stimulus package not even a pimple on a dog's ass especially since dogs don't get pimples on their ass or anywhere else. (*Marianas Variety: Guam Edition*; GU)

As reflected in many of the daily headlines during this time, (summarized in Table 4.21 and Table 4.26), the central issue became one of political will, of trying to do the things that were needed without destroying the people's confidence in a brand-new government. And this dynamic held emerged even before the Obama administration took office.

Abundance and Austerity

Across the second disruption inflection point for the great recession, there were a number of pieces that attempted to capture a clear sense of how to respond to the continued economic harm of the financial collapse. And after the election the level of the handwringing in letters to

the editor was enormously revealing. Before even taking office, *The Bellingham Herald* (WA) reported that “with election season done, now is a great time to get a letter to the editor or guest column published. We always experience a lull this time of the year, but one of the most interesting questions I have dealt with in letters to the editor this year was the question of Barack Obama was/is a socialist.” Along similar lines, the *Herald-Journal* (SC) warned readers that “if we lose our economic freedom, we will also our [sic] freedoms and our republic [sic] form of government and become a socialist nation. This is unacceptable to freedom-loving people...while 12 million plus parasitic illegal aliens over a number of years weakened [the economy].” Finally, in a more surprising turn of events, *the Pittsburg Post-Gazette* (PA) published its view of the election and the potential policies of the Obama administration by publishing Santa Claus’ application for a federal bailout which, it said would depend on “Santa’s ability to look like the head of a major financial institution” and reminded readers that “in the perception of certain Grinches...anything that happens when Barack Obama becomes president will be socialism. Santa rubbed his tasseled cap in puzzlement when I told him this, but anyone who doesn’t live in the Arctic Circle knows the political realities.”

The arrival of this period in American economic life, the extraordinarily unpopular George Bush lame duck period coming to an end, and a new administration, was greeted with the dire warnings of socialism and coupled with news and articles about the upcoming holidays. Both demonstrated one of the more pernicious aspects of the austerity discourses that began to take root as reporters started looking forward to the questions regarding what the new administration might bring to government. As the intertopic distance maps for both inflection points in this grouping demonstrate (illustrated by Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5) these dynamics emerge from a contrast in economic sensemaking that simultaneously sees the economic

policymaking as a battle between abundance and austerity (Table 4.22) and another that sees it as a contrast between ignition and stagnation (Table 4.23). With the march toward the holidays, the celebration of abundance and consumerism was only mildly tempered by articles like the MetroWest Daily News' advice that consumers should watch out because even though "we've got to help those suffering retailers.... this isn't Guatemala, Ghana, or South Africa where soccer fans have been killed in stampedes. We're not Indonesia where last Feb. 11 people were killed trying to get into a punk concert." More than anything else, the Christmas articles that contrast the images of shopping and abundance with those cautioning people about the impending doom of the socialist takeover reveals how the dynamic of abundance and austerity began to characterize this economic sensemaking.

Instead of attempting to define who and what the United States can or could be, there was a consistent parade of either subtle contempt or outright derision for the things that the United States and its economy *are* not. As reporters started working toward analysis of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, the litany of things that the United States is not began to pile up:

- "This is not 1982 or anything like the Great Depression." (*The Daily Review*; CA)
- "This is not the time for politically motivated resistance." (*Herald News*; NJ)
- "This [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act] is not a cure." (*Sunday Review*; PA)
- "This is not Monopoly money." (*The State*; SC)
- "This is not a job for someone faint of heart." (*The Key West Citizen*; FL)
- "This is not an income tax cut." (*The Augusta Chronicle*; GA)
- "This is not your mother's instant coffee." (*The Tuscaloosa News*; AL)
- "This is not what bipartisan ship means." (*The Hanford Sentinel*; CA)
- "This is not a happy time." (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*; PA)

Table 4.21. Great Recession, Disruption (Nov 28 to Dec 4, 2008) Daily Headlines Summary

Date	Daily Headlines			
	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Nov 28, 2008	Iraq Appoints Deal Charting End of U.S. Role	Terrorists Paralyze India's Business Capital: Death toll Mounts in Mumbai as Westerners Are Targeted	Indian Commandos Battle Assailants: Attacks in Mumbai Commercial Center Kill at Least 125	India hunts for survivors and culprits
Nov 29, 2008	Obama Aide: From a Marine to a Mediator Shopping	Mumbai Gripped by Fear: Death Toll Tops 150 as Militants Cornered; New Tactics in Terror	Last Gunmen Killed in India, Ending Siege: Operation Conducted by 15 Assailants Who Arrived by Sea, Officials Suspect	Terrorist siege quelled in Mumbai
Nov 30, 2008	Clinton to Name Donors as Part of Obama Deal		Ruthless Attackers, Desperate Victims: Survivors of Three-Day Mumbai Massacre Give Harrowing Accounts of Their Hours Under Siege	Bailout: Pay Now, Worry later
Dec 1, 2008	A Security Chief Quits as India Struggles to Respond to Attacks	India Security Faulted as Survivors Tell of Terror: At Tourist Haunts and Train Station, Swiftly Launched Assault Overwhelmed Police	In Just Minutes, Mumbai Was Under Siege: Young Gunmen Exploited Coastline Vulnerabilities to Slip Into City and Methodically Spread Terror	Health Reform Goals Sharpen
Dec 2, 2008	Recession Began Last December Economists Say	Fed Signals More Action as Slump Drags On: Recession Began a Year Ago, Making It Longest Since Early '80s Panel Says; Bernanke Considers Rate Cuts, Bond Purchases	Economics Signs Point to Longer, Deeper Recession: Decline Began a Year Ago, Experts Declare; Wall Street Reacts With Huge Sell-Off	Recession could last into 2010
Dec 3, 2008	G.M. Accepts Need for Drastic Cuts	Big Three Seek \$34 Billion Aid: GM, Chrysler Warn of Collapse This Month as Lawmakers Explore Bankruptcy	Auto Giants Ratchet Up Pleas for Aid: As States Hit 25-Year Low, Companies Pledge to Unload Brands and Slash Costs	GM raises the stakes, vows cuts
Dec 4, 2008	U.A.W. to Modify Contracts in Bid to Help Detroit	U.S. Eyes Plan to Lift home Sales: Treasury Considers Encouraging Banks to Offer Mortgages at Rates as Low as 4.5%	Treasury Weights Action on Mortgage Rates: Intervention Would Aim to Buoy the Housing Market by Forcing Down the Cost of Loans	County faulted in death at King

Note: All headlines summarized in this table are presented as they were formatted on the original paper.

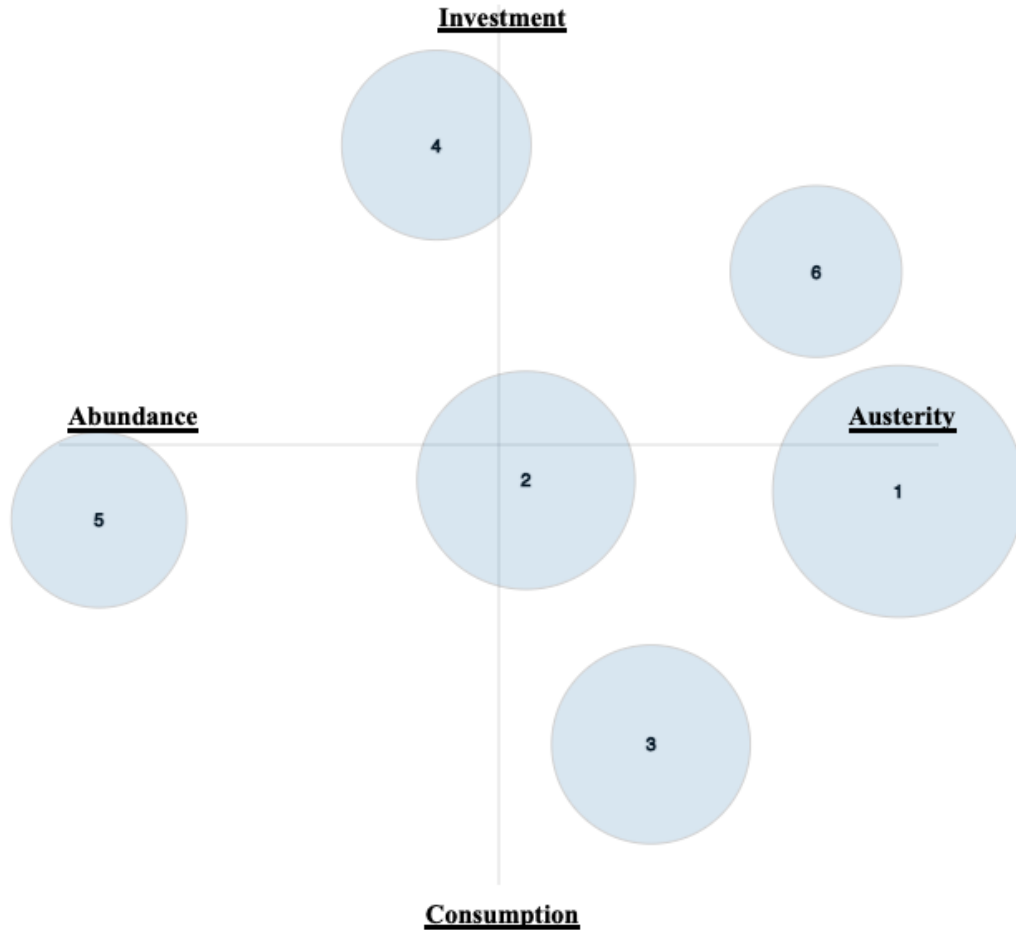


Figure 4.6. Intertopic Distance Map, Great Recession, Disruption (November 28 to December 4, 2008).

Though there seems to be a very clear image of what the United States is not, there were very few coherent articulations for what it is or, more importantly, what it *could* be. The dynamic of this debate between abundance and austerity became less about defining the resources or the ability of the United States government or economy; the essential debate became one regarding the soul of the nation.

Investment and Consumption

The final dynamic that emerged from the coverage of the Great Recession relayed the difficulties of economic prospection. As illustrated by Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7

Table 4.22. Topic Model, Great Recession, *Disruption* (November 28 to December 4, 2008): Terms (Topics 1, 5, & 6)

	Topic 5			Topic 1			Topic 6		
Lambda	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	winslet	tree	year	radogno	state	said	tireman	percent	said
	adrien	christma	christma	uaw	tax	state	mcgraw	city	percent
	od	plai	time	gettlefing	billion	year	jost	said	year
	carrei	art	like	narelli	govern	new	pmc	tire	citi
	streep	dec	holidai	sununu	said	economi	cayot	rate	new
	gort	star	said	dhl	budget	tax	costaliv	market	market
	krazi	film	tree	ohanian	econom	econom	nanosecond	price	price
	wrestler	gift	dec	nga	job	percent	jokestim	project	compani
	torino	holidai	gift	autowork	feder	job	earthtalk	month	month
	reunit	santa	plai	sabeti	economi	govern	kulk	steel	economi
	cathart	love	new	rendel	year	billion	ewood	compani	project
	heiress	movi	dai	shlae	cut	time	mansard	council	rate
	sheen	music	art	goolsbe	new	busi	sbranti	new	million
	shankman	like	famili	kulongoski	million	plan	osf	quarter	time
	jigsaw	artist	peopl	keyn	fund	million	mcmuffin	year	sale
	meryl	ag	children	lemonnt	compani	compani	radial	fell	report
	overr	toi	star	austan	plan	budget	earthentre	index	busi
	auckland	time	thing	reisnur	congress	monei	mccafe	octob	expect
	fleeting	event	want	shoutout	governor	need	everybodygre	stock	economi
	daldri	perform	economi	saab	industri	cut	prokop	report	council

Table 4.23. Topic Model, Great Recession, *Disruption* (November 28 to December 4, 2008): Terms (Topics 2, 3, & 4)

	Topic 3			Topic 2			Topic 4		
Lambda	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	sacia	obama	said	faton	said	said	rearmament	store	said
	bivin	student	state	seifert	food	percent	woodfield	shop	year
	virtuoso	state	obama	entwistl	counti	year	geometr	fridai	store
	vermilion	elect	presi	baue	donat	peopl	dougi	said	fridai
	sudan	colleg	new	cappelluzzo	famili	counti	underr	retail	sale
	bashir	presid	school	spai	peopl	food	kfrisch	shopper	peopl
	somchai	team	time	rodewald	help	help	misbehavior	sale	retail
	darfur	school	elect	neuter	commun	famili	messenger	black	holiday
	thaksin	librari	year	medaglia	year	need	limjoco	year	shopper
	clough	polit	peopl	pantri	need	work	keuka	mall	black
	suvarnabh	educ	student	trejo	volunt	commun	nrf	holiday	econmi
	bangkok	countri	nation	sangamon	church	time	doorbust	season	dai
	gaza	vote	economi	fourch	servic	economi	"black	bui	busi
	kickapoo	bush	colleg	asf	work	donat	stephanopou	mart	season
	palestinian	nov	like	dejesu	meal	servic	beall	custom	bui
	wongsawat	iraq	team	frentz	organ	new	kohl'	open	open
	conei	democrat	govern	spungen	area	home	nyhu	wal	time
	shinawatra	nation	countri	stepfath	program	program	gaspar	line	spend
	hama	militari	work	lydia	children	local	latvia	discount	like
	coic	airport	need	penrod	resid	area	hoya	peopl	percent

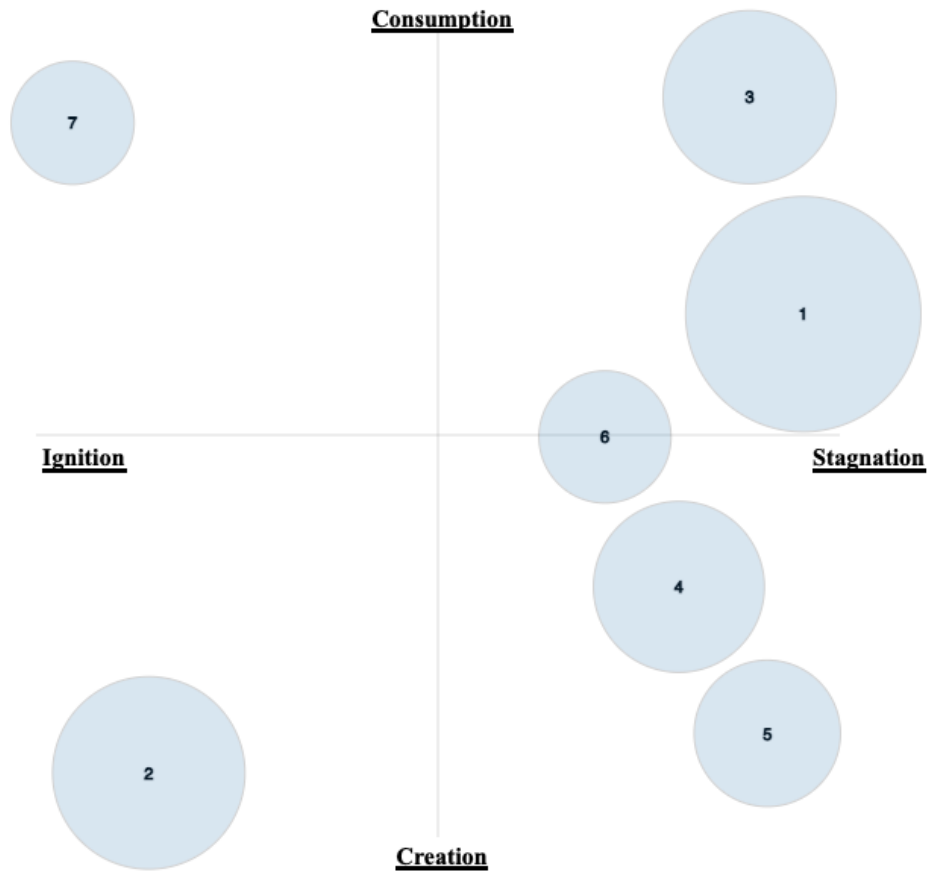


Figure 4.7. Intertopic Distance Map, Great Recession, *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*

the transformative potential to which the new administration attempted to speak was mired in a complex entanglement that saw the economy as simultaneously torn between (a) an economy that is moving and creating and one that is stagnant and destructive *and* paradoxically, (b) simultaneously destructive in its movement forward and stagnating in its ability to create new possibilities. Both illustrations offer the picture of an economy that is largely in line with the descriptions offered in the previous section. There was simultaneously a sense that there was no clear direction for the economy and a desperate need for just that.

The tensions are most clearly illustrated in Table 4.24 and Table 4.25 where the dynamics of Figure 4.7 become more clear and contrasting. Initially, the relationship between topics 2 and 3 in the context of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act inflection point details the first scenario, of an economy that is moving and creating and simultaneously stagnating and destructive. And in this context, the embodiment of the American economy as igniting, creative explains the prominence of articles like this one in the corpus: “because they habitually use any platform to push pet causes, expect actors to wear black ribbons at the 81st Academy Awards Sunday night to mark the death of the economy, which has hurt ticket sales more than Netflix” (*Philadelphia Daily News*; PA). The link between the artistic world and the economy world is not one merely defined by shallow activism, though. In contrast with the glitz and glamour of the Hollywood Red Carpet, *The Sun News* (SC) described a speech of President Obama’s, on his way to Chicago and delivered in Ohio, regarding the “questions about potential looming catastrophe” as a way of framing the economic climate as a downturn, as a chance for people to be “tough, resilience, inventive—and we will survive.” These economic pictures are fundamentally different: starlets wearing black ribbons to mourn the economic downturn, because it made their movies less successful, and a new president attempting to encourage people to think about the present in a different and more positive light.

The central focus of this dynamic is about making sense of the economic present. In this way, the representation an economy stagnating and consuming itself acted more to criticize the foundations of the economic problems, their causes and their impacts on people. Especially with regard to the impact of the automotive industry in manifesting some of the worst impacts of the crisis, the coverage that extolled the improvements in their financial management *and* fuel economy (*The Westerly Sun*; RI) was, for many, as helpful as reminding people that “your house

may be in foreclosure, but hey, there's less junk mail. These days. You've lost your job but the shoe repair business is flourishing. You can't eat out in a restaurant but you'll have a healthier lifestyle cooking at home" (*The State Journal-Register*; IL). And in many ways, this description could have just as easily applied to those walking the red carpet while mourning an economic downturn that may have cost their movies some ticket sales while hoping to win golden statues and wearing designer clothing. As a practice of making sense of the economic stories of the present, this is a dynamic that illustrates a distinct resentment for those attempting to build economic confidence in the present while people were still facing the impacts and support was still, merely, on the way.

On the other hand, the tensions in the same context between topics 5 and 7 illustrate the mirror tension, that of the difference between an economy that is moving forward however it can, consuming endlessly *and* stagnant in its ability to change that situation. If the first tension related to the construction of the economic present, this is an illustration of what the economic future might look like:

They agreed with President Obama that the United States needed to reconstruct its roads, sewers and water systems because it is aging. While Americans would understand the need to prop up Medicare and extend unemployment benefits as the unemployment rate hits double digits and the underemployment rate is about 5 percent higher, they would rather see the two programs separated from infrastructure so they could hear more arguments on the advantages and disadvantages of the programming. (*Wapakoneta Daily News*; OH).

This account in particular is an interesting reflection of the conflicting ideas that emerge during the policymaking process for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Although the

author tends to agree with sense that addressing the issue of jobs and infrastructure is the clearest way forward, they also expressed disappointment in the arguments made by Republican lawmakers on the question spending, or rather, the nonexistence of such.

The tension here was one that narrated the potential for change, the potential for the future as stuck because of the limitations of resources. The concomitant energy and oil problems facing nation and the global economic aftershocks from the beginning of the recession exacerbated the issue, “Japan’s economy the second-largest in the world, has recorded its worst performance in more than three decades. The economy shrank at an annual 12.7 percent pace in

Table 4.24. Topic Model, Great Recession, *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (February 14 to 20, 2009): Terms (Topics 2 & 3)

Lambda	Topic 2			Topic 3		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	exhibit	art	dai	nascar	compani	said
	onalaska	event	year	daytona	said	year
	exp	church	peopl	kenseth	price	percent
	lutheran	dai	time	rath	percent	compani
	artist	love	new	mmt	sale	price
	fyi	amp	like	trader	market	sale
	galleri	www	work	orchalski	year	market
	chef	book	art	evraz	product	new
	marblehead	club	com	orbit	custon	economi
	maa	game	event	vol	bank	busi
	consign	music	amp	sadler	quarter	million
	pup	artist	said	modin	consum	week
	nba	com	sai	katzman	stock	month
	kompf	plai	feb	subsidiari	demand	product
	daddi	saturdai	open	chg	race	bank
	shopahol	feb	good	fischer	month	time
	bowlin	team	home	mailand	industri	report
	orchestra	librari	free	mkt	new	expect
	comedi	restaur	want	pricket	retail	industri
	esposito	free	www	uaw	expect	rate

Note: Given the distribution of topics in this topic model, these topics represent the bottom-left (2) and top-right (3) corners of the intertopic distance model.

the last three months.” In the context of these overlapping troubles and the observation that, for a brief moment, gas prices “probably won’t [be] skyrocketing, ...but don’t expect prices to stay where they are either.” (*The Morning Sun*; KS). What seems like unhelpful equivocating on the *Sun*’s part is, reflective of the fundamental uncertainty brought on by the inability to grapple with a future when the prospects of change, the hope for the future, were largely dependent on a bill that seemed to simultaneously aim at the right things without doing enough to overcome the potential pitfalls and organize a foundation for meaningful recovery.

Table 4.25. Topic Model, Great Recession, *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (February 14 to 20, 2009): Terms (Topics 5 & 7)

Lambda	Topic 7			Topic 5		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	kleinsmith	school	school	restroom	car	new
	fetcher	student	said	bbb	engin	car
	mcbride	disctric	year	hyundai	ga	engin
	giard	educ	student	transmiss	coal	energi
	dp	colleg	district	bouchard	vehicl	ga
	cipriano	board	educ	lujan	airport	year
	cmc	said	state	airbag	fuel	economi
	csu	program	program	mpg	passeng	time
	lynx	teacher	counti	pillow	airport	includ
	callowai	year	fund	abba	energi	ike
	kyla	fund	board	fluid	power	road
	interhship	counti	commun	ara	restroom	fuel
	yampa	commun	colleg	chávez	orku	vehicl
	basinski	univers	budget	cylind	wheel	power
	anspach	children	need	palestinian	light	project
	stagecoach	graduat	new	netanyahu	airlin	plan
	poirer	enrol	project	sedan	road	air
	ozark	state	plan	rourk	bike	come
	curriculum	superintend	cut	abigail	oil	look
	superintend	high	time	faa	new	wai

Note: Given the distribution of topics in this topic model, these topics represent the top-left (7) and bottom-right (5) corners of the intertopic distance model.

Study 1 Conclusion

This study has aimed to explore the economic logics and intersecting, tensional narrative sensemaking processes of US news coverage at seven different inflection points across two of the most significant economic disruptions in the nation's history; across these sensemaking practices related to the grand narrative forces (universalizing and axiology, foundationalizing and epistemological; and essentializing and ontological) that emerged from the discourse; and across each of these aspects of grand narrative forces there were clear implications for the ways that news media accounts during these crises worked to create a sense of coherence or logic around events that were extremely uncertain and remain contentious even today. In the context of this work, then, I turn now to examining the individual accounts of these disruptive events, as they were posted and curated on the social media site Reddit. The insights of this study were central to the analysis presented in this next study and, together, they work to illuminate many of the economic narrative practices and insights for change that are, ultimately, the central goal of this work. Thus, before attempting to craft a coherent story of these findings, when they present only half of the story, I turn to the examination of the stories I collected from those who told their stories online, in public forums, and made a different kind of investigation of economic logics, at a more personal and individual level, possible.

Table 4.26. Great Recession, Policy (*American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*) Daily Headlines Summary

Date	Daily Headlines			
	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Feb 14, 2009	Stimulus Plan Tightens Reins on Wall St. Pay	Bankers Face Strict New Pay Cap: Stimulus Bill Puts Retroactive Curb on Bailout Recipients; Wall Street Fumes	Congress Passes Stimulus Package: After Voting Largely Along Party Lines, \$787 Billion Bill Goes to Obama	Stimulus will reach nearly all: The \$787 billion will work its way through the economy in stages
Feb 15, 2009	Unemployment Surges Around the World, Threatening Stability		Geithner Takes Plan To Global Leaders: Treasury Chief Reassures Counterparts About U.S. Rescue Strategy	Stimulus bill battle is only the beginning
Feb 16, 2009	States and Cities Scramble for Stimulus Cash		4 Cases Illustrate Guantanamo Quandaries: Administration Must Decide Fate of Often-Flawed Proceedings, Often-Dangerous Prisoners	One vote shy, state budget remains stuck
Feb 17, 2009	G.M. is Pressing Union for Cuts in Health Care	Auto Maker Bankruptcy Looms: GM, Chrysler Plans Due Today; U.S. Taps Car Adviser Known for Extracting Concessions	GM, Chrysler Finalize Plans To Restructure: Billions of Dollars in U.S. Aid at Stake	Deadlock halts state projects
Feb 18, 2009	A Bailout Aimed at the Most Afflicted Owners	GM Seeks \$16.6 Billion More in U.S. Aid: Saturn, Hummer Could Be History by 2011 as GM Plans to Slash 47,000 Jobs	Swift, Steep Downturn Crosses Globe: Markets are Hammered as Hope Fades for Quick Recovery	Chrysler, GM rev up the anxiety
Feb 19, 2009	\$275 Billion Plan Seeks to Address Crisis in Housing: Obama's Proposal Could Help 9 Million Refinance or Avoid Foreclosure	Housing Bailout at \$275 Billion: Obama Plan Would Fund Loan Modifications, Cover More Losses at Mortgage Titans	Obama Proposes Package To Stave Off Foreclosures: Multibillion-dollar Plan Aims to Help Modify Mortgages	Pitched battle for one vote: Election-rules deal could win Maldonado over to the budget
Feb 20, 2009	Lending Locked, U.S. Tried to Trillion-Dollar Key	Market Hits New Crisis Low: Dow Is Now 47% Below Its Peak; Analysts Warn They See Few Signs of a Bottom	Trouble Trickles From Steep Drop in Oil Prices: Once Flush Global Economies, Energy Projects Stall	Budget's fate in voters' hands: Governor to sign bill today, but much hinges on ballot measures

Note: All headlines summarized in this table are presented as they were formatted on the original paper.

Table 4.27. Topic Model, Great Recession, *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (February 14 to 20, 2009): Terms (Topics 1, 4, & 6)

Lambda	Topic 4			Topic 6			Topic 1		
	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0	0	0.5	1.0
Terms by relevance	asbesto	citi	said	wineri	busi	busi	trillion	tax	state
	sheriff	said	citi	fmd	agricultur	said	democrat	stimulu	tax
	cleanup	town	year	koehler	farm	job	schock	state	stimulu
	ordin	counti	counti	tedisco	farmer	people	pelosi	obama	said
	indict	council	peopl	petri	wine	economi	gop	govern	obama
	burglari	libbi	town	pohlman	job	econom	bipartisan	billion	monei
	ruderman	polic	home	scholz	local	work	mccain	spend	govern
	vermiculit	properti	time	calv	econom	time	partisan	monei	spend
	mcmenamin	graace	council	hmo	chamber	local	bipartisanship	presid	billion
	benefield	home	econmi	heimerich	small	state	cris	republican	presid
	superfund	resid	new monei	grape	milk	counti	geithner	budget	economi
	brockton	mayor	depart	kramer	peopl	health	keynesian	legisl	job
	pezzel	depart	hous	nfib	land	industri	limbaugh	senat	million
	rumelhart	asbesto	properti	calf	dairi	develop	arveschoug	packag	budget
	missouliau	anim	like	heifer	industri	like	tabor	democrat	year
	mainiero	year	commun	nilsestuen	insur	market	republican	vote	economi
	asbestos	peopl	reside	fonda	health	new	gerlach	cut	new
	raemisch	shelter	plan	forsman	smith	commun	specter	hous	hous
	evict	downtown	project	nba	employ	need	cbo	job	cut
	probat	crime	work	nrepa	wineri	farm	marostica	million	plan

Note: These topics represent what I call the stagnation triangle that is illustrated on the right side of the intertopic distance map.

CHAPTER 5. STUDY TWO: INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS

Despite Reddit's relative infancy during some of the early inflection points that I examined in this work, there were still a substantial amount of interaction and dialogue regarding news about the economy, the politics of the 2008 election, and general concerns about the direction of the economy on the platform. The amount and diversity of that discourse has only increased over the years since the platform established itself as the front page of the internet. Of the many posts and comments that I collected from the platform across both disruption contexts, one post from the Great Recession caught my eye both because of the number of comments on the post, an eye-popping 750 compared to an average of fewer than three comments per post, and because of its context.

Although the Redditor who posted the original article has not published under their handle for around 13 years, their long history of engagement with political and economic issues during the first years of the platform is exemplified by their post proclaiming "BREAKING: Congress approves enormous Wall Street Bailout." In the comments on the news article, which has long since become inaccessible, there were comments of outrage, questions about the implications of such a large action from the federal government, and comments of a different nature. As I examined the thousands of comments collected from Reddit during the time of the Great Recession, one particular comment, the one that drew me to this particular post, seemed like some sort of coding error. In its text form, the comment that caught my eye took the form of a series of slashes and dashes, html tags and incomprehensible combinations of symbols. To investigate further, I opened the original post on Reddit to get a better sense of what these

symbols might have meant in their original context, or perhaps, what kind of art it might represent.

When presented as a straight line of text in a spreadsheet of data, the symbols that comprise ASCII art, a technique for computer generated art that has a history in computer culture (having been popularized by the online bulletin boards of the 1970s to 1990s) and, in many ways, is traceable to the creation of typewriter art or illuminated manuscripts that combine the typographical and aesthetic in creative ways toward varying ends (Chute & Jagoda, 2014). Although including links to images and memes has become common place in internet interactions in the decades since these original social sites, on Reddit, it is still not possible to include an image directly in a comment (although they can in original posts). However, it is still possible to mark the part or all of a comment as a piece of computer code, thus displaying the work in a mono-spaced font, something like Courier New, that maintains equal size across letters and, in turn makes computer code more easily understood if somewhat less pleasing to the eye. Such fonts also make it possible to create images like Figure 5.1, posted by a Reddit user on October 3, 2008, in response to the passage of the *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*.

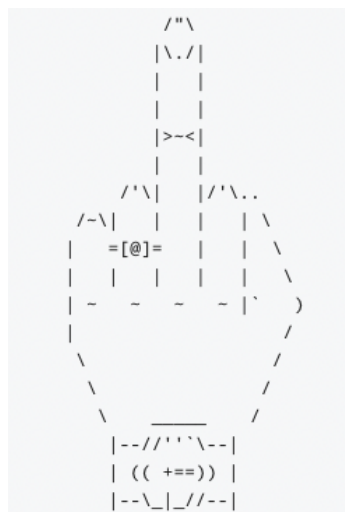


Figure 5.1. ASCII image posted on Reddit, Great Recession, *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*

As one user commented in response “[they] took the time to draw a wedding ring. That’s commitment.” For the user who created that particular piece of art, it very much was. Although the data collected over the course of the inflection points analyzed in this dissertation did not include any more of the user’s artistic stylings, over the user’s nearly 18 years on the platform, their engagement with libertarian politics, world news, and technology tell a small piece of the larger narrative tapestry woven across two of the most significant economic downturns in the recent United States history, albeit in turns of phrase and immodest imagery that is unlikely to find its way into the economic histories of these times.

These reactions, visceral and political, are representative of a specific kind of economic organizing and community building that happens in online spaces like Reddit. This is not to say that such platforms are all the same or that the manner of the economic organizing has not changed—it absolutely has; rather, this is a recognition that communities like those on Reddit, the ones captured in their infancy and near their heights in this data set, are neither the policymakers who make sense of the economy bound by precedent, law, theory, and political games, nor the journalists ostensibly bound by propriety, striving for objectivity. The stories and sensemaking practices contained within these data are messy and chaotic and confused. The stories speak of people who feel left behind and of people who do not recognize how good they have it. The stories conjure a vision of what the economy is, should be, and can be that is simultaneously shaped by and independent of the macro-discourses and grand narratives explored in the previous chapter. The stories are sometimes difficult to read because they speak of hardship. The stories are sometimes difficult to read because they inflict harm. The stories are flawed and irreverent, funny and hurtful, and hurt.

These qualities are what make the stories worthy of investigation in this analysis. The guiding research questions for this study ask:

RQ4: How did Redditors organize and narrate their individual and collective positions within economic systems during times of economic disruption?

RQ5: How did Redditors organize and narrate the values, logics, and possibilities of economic systems during times of economic disruption?

To answer these questions, unlike the previous study, although I conducted separate semantic network analyses of the varying data collections, I organize this chapter based on the various tensions and plots and ethics that emerged from reading these data in the context of the text mining and network graphs that I include throughout the chapter to contextualize these findings. Throughout, I include relevant details in the form of footnotes or, if warranted, more prolonged interludes, to contextualize users' stories and to render clearer understanding of the ongoing narrative dynamics that emerged in this work. The choice to present the COVID-19 recession alongside the Great Recession in this study is not an equivocation; there are stark differences and vast similarities across the contexts, something that I explore in the findings that follow. Analyzing these storytelling practices of economic organization is a result of the theoretical framework and methodological choices employed in this study; these results do not, nor do they claim to, capture the entirety or the essence of the relationship between Redditors, Reddit, and the economic storytelling in which they engage. This piece is just so: a piece.

Additionally, the quotations from the Redditors whose words and stories comprised the data collection are paraphrased throughout this section to protect their privacy and prevent backsearching in accordance with the best practices and ethical guidelines recommended by the Association of Internet Researchers (franzke et al., 2019). While my primary aim for the study

presented in this chapter is to investigate and interrogate the economic logics that emerged through these individual accounts, conducting this inquiry without respect for those people whose stories I engage with here would be both unethical and deleterious to those ends.

In situations where unique wordings and language would make the content easily identifiable, I have changed wordings and reordered ideas with the interest of presenting the aspects of their posts that are most central to the arguments made in this piece without rendering those words identifiable. Reddit's position as a public site with pseudonymous user handles does not render its users immune from privacy concerns nor does it excuse researcher disregard for the stories and the people that have made this analysis possible. This work is, at times, critical of the word, ideas, and actions of users. Yet, I refuse to allow the ends of this analysis to devolve into pointless *ad hominem* or dehumanization of the people behind the text (or, in some cases, the people behind the bots behind the text). This analysis aims at better understanding the practices of economic organizing that people enact and to which people are, simultaneously, subject. Understanding economy as an act of narrative organization necessitates looking at some troubling ideas and harmful language, but to neglect this fundamentally human aspect of economic narration would be to ignore the central point of this theoretical framework.

In sum, as this chapter proceeds, I present three interrelated narrative constructs that emerged across the various inflection points examined in this study. As summarized in Table 5.1, various subreddits are included in the data collection for this study. Although much of the discussion about the economy on Reddit takes place in forums that are either topically centered (e.g., /r/economics; /r/antiwork; /r/povertyfinance; /r/personalfinance) or politically related (e.g., /r/politics; /r/ChapoTrapHouse; /r/worldpolitics) to matters of economics, the data analyzed for this study include a wide variety of subreddit contexts that range from debate forums (e.g.,

Table 5.1. Study Two Data Collection, Subreddit Context Summary (COVID-19)

Subreddit	Disruption		CARES Act		Am. Rescue Plan		Total	
	Posts	Comments	Posts	Comments	Posts	Comments	Posts	Comments
wallstreetbets	236	10336	198	12943	108	3964	542	27243
AskReddit	253	1303	205	1042	21	170	479	2515
conspiracy	190	5636	131	3208	24	860	345	9704
unpopularopinion	155	5772	160	2482	17	698	332	8952
Coronavirus	152	4727	125	2386	0	0	277	7113
politics	77	3306	162	20933	12	1492	251	25731
investing	123	3692	82	5342	17	1463	222	10497
NoStupidQuestions	119	595	75	365	17	122	211	1082
NMSCoordinateExcha	39	110	34	127	138	362	211	599
Showerthoughts	144	777	57	83	6	5	207	865
worldnews	91	474	81	1969	28	534	200	2977
explainlikeimfive	103	1184	65	165	11	39	179	1388
news	70	11017	55	7291	41	0	166	18308
personalfinance	100	1384	55	435	6	66	161	1885
China_Flu	97	5323	53	971	0	0	150	6294
ChapoTrapHouse	84	73469	53	19543	0	0	137	93012
moviescirclejerk	118	576	18	59	0	0	136	635
economy	66	256	48	132	21	91	135	479
AskEconomics	55	294	36	127	31	433	122	854
stocks	51	908	35	1211	35	1891	121	4010
TrueOffMyChest	38	562	67	14239	4	20	109	14821
GME	0	0	0	0	100	4381	100	4381
worldpolitics	51	603	45	315	4	13	100	931
PersonalFinanceCana	44	1266	39	1490	14	256	97	3012
Economics	48	1679	34	314	13	1400	95	3393
CoronavirusUS	50	873	42	290	1	0	93	1163
Bitcoin	45	546	23	368	22	416	90	1330
collapse	46	1298	28	1621	10	461	84	3380
Libertarian	38	1500	30	1154	14	186	82	2840
India	23	272	44	303	9	95	76	670
Conservative	26	537	37	361	9	26	72	924
neoliberal	31	422	23	604	17	931	71	1957
Wuhan_Flu	52	924	18	371	0	0	70	1295
StockMarket	31	1370	15	425	20	174	66	1969
CapitalismVSocialism	27	1970	20	1806	18	2686	65	6462
Australia	37	1957	24	1289	2	74	63	3320
CryptoCurrency	14	844	10	379	38	870	62	2093
changemyview	28	1252	18	955	13	914	59	3121
LateStageCapitalism	23	627	27	106	9	26	59	759

Note: The listed subreddits include those communities with the highest post-totals represented in the total collection for the COVID-19 pandemic *and* at least 250 total comments.

Table 5.2. Study Two Data Collection, Subreddit Context Summary (Great Recession)

Subreddit	Posts	Comments
reddit.com	387	1071
politics	258	554
Economics	163	463
business	131	412
worldnews	46	300
environment	17	184
funny	24	104
programming	2	106
economy	29	69
canada	10	79
technology	15	50
self	2	53
Libertarian	15	38
AskReddit	6	41
WTF	11	27
science	8	28
obama	15	20

/r/changemyview) to investment forums (e.g., /r/stocks; /r/Bitcoin), to national contexts (e.g., /r/personalfinancecanada; /r/Australia; /r/India), to movie-centered meme forums (e.g., /r/moviestirclejerk). Although the relevance of each subreddit to questions of narrative economic organizing is, at least marginally, disputable, their inclusion in this analysis is a way of recognizing that economic sensemaking can emerge in various contexts and take many for(u)ms.

At the intersections of these particular data, examined as narrated networks of meaning and sensemaking, I analyzed two economic organizational tensions related to: (1) economic liberty, and (2) economic worlds. Within each context, I examine two ways that these dynamics emerged: (a) individual logics and (b) collective logics. Finally, I conclude this analysis with summary and restorying to better place these storytelling practices in direct conversation with

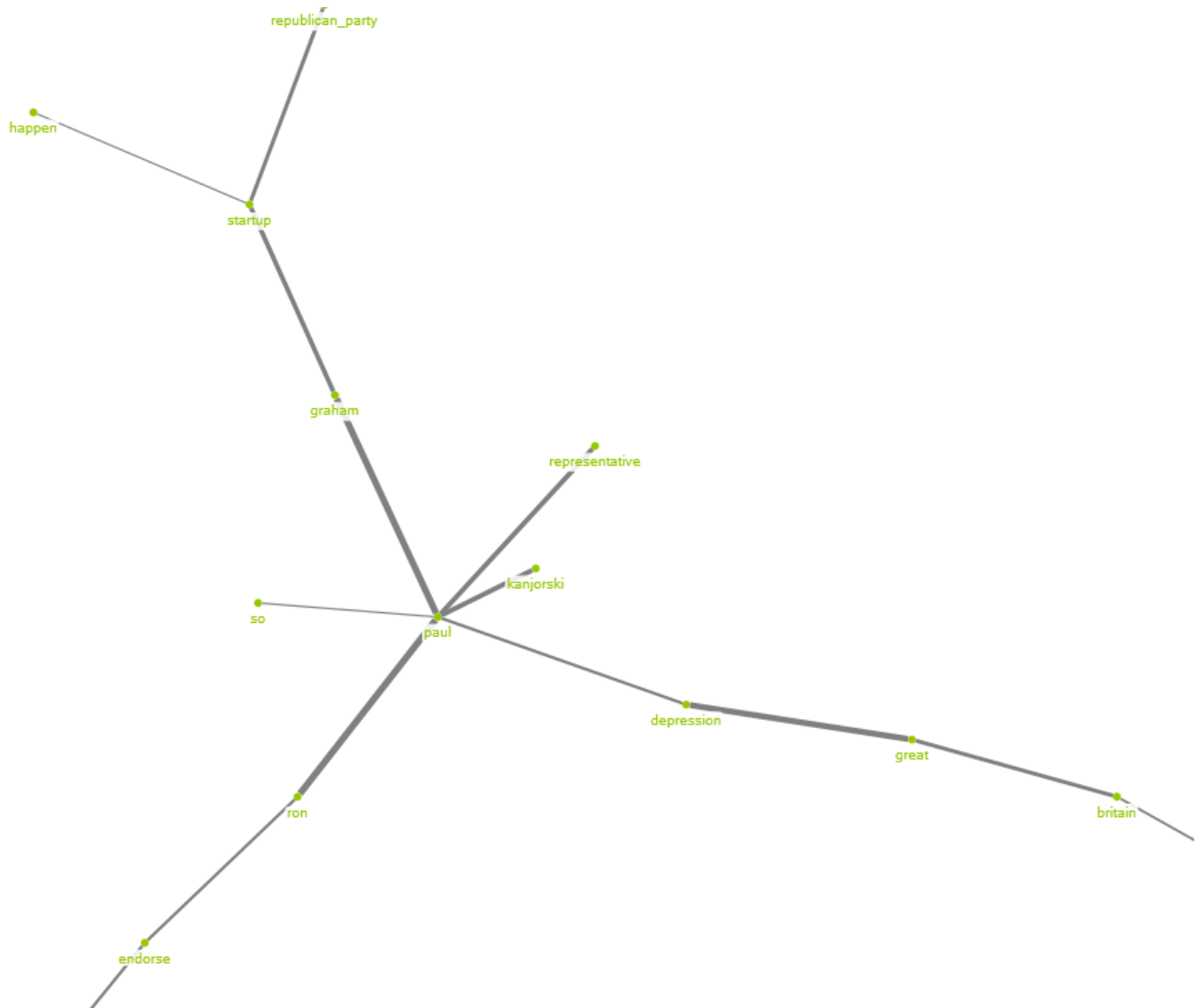


Figure 5.2. Semantic Network Graph, Great Recession, Cluster 8

each other and to explore their contextual implications and potential for manifesting change.

Crafting Economic Liberty

That Ron Paul was the first, prominently identifiable political figure represented in one of the network clusters from the Great Recession (Figure 5.2.) was not particularly surprising given both the national political climate and the peculiarities of the Reddit community throughout its early years. One of the most prominent distinctions between the Reddit of the Great Recession

and the Reddit of the COVID-19 Recession was the conspicuous absence of subreddit forums as a prominent form of community organizing. As illustrated in cluster 8 from the Great Recession (Figure 5.2), most posts collected from the time of the Great Recession were simply posted to the general reddit.com subreddit, which is now archived, rather than to a specific community.

Nonetheless, with steep economic decline came questions about the financial crisis and some mean-spirited political bashing centered around what is best described as a general distaste for both the *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act* (perhaps best previewed in the figure presented at the beginning of this chapter) and the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*.

Combining a peculiar blend of neoclassical and heterodox theory, vaguely framed as Austrian (see footnote 5), and centering an assortment of political beliefs that ranged from anarcho-capitalism to generic conservatism, many of discussions surrounding economic issues were simultaneously outraged and despondent. As one user commented in response to a CNN article speculating on the prospect of civil unrest and potential violence because of the economic downturn “you absolutely deserve this America; enjoy this future.” There was less a feeling that the system had broken than a belief that it had been deliberately destroyed for the profit of “elite bankers who want to spend more on the government’s dime to generate more interest payments and then force the government to stay ineffective and unresponsive to the poor.” Despite their belief that the essential bones of capitalism as an ideal and as a politic were possible and necessary, the system was not working. Perhaps, they felt, because it was not designed to work.

Manipulation

Waiting for deflation to just happen so that things can get better because its magically better than inflation is simply wrong. The markets are designed around inflation, not

deflation. That's what allows for the frugal to achieve poverty and the masses of wealthy to buy up cheap assets.

In response to a CNN money article claiming that the economic situation in February of 2009 was merely a means of correcting the overvaluation of the assets rather than the shrinking that might constitute a recession, many Redditors were less circumspect in their assessment of the issue than the user whose ideas are represented above. The CNN headline asked readers to "Let me throw out a 'CRAZY' idea. Suppose the economy is CORRECTING...[sic] not Shrinking" and a user, in response, decided to "give my own CRAZY idea. Suppose the economy was MANIPULATED to make just a few people wealthy and to fuck the rest of us." Another described the view of the article as "an utterly trivial perspective on the market. This should be in 'economics for dummies.'" These are notably interesting takes for people who, in comments on the same post, argued that "politicians are just operating under the assumption that markets should never go down." Together, these dynamics of conflicting respect for market force and the sense that the market was rigged revealed an inchoate conspiratorial idea that mirrored much of the ongoing political dialogues on the platform.

As the financial collapse unfolded, many Redditors regarded the outcome as a sort of just desserts for a different kind of manipulation in the political arena. As one submission put it, "Ron Paul is the best candidate America has ever dismissed for being too truthful, to correct. But the truth hurt, wear a fucking helmet crybabies." In this context, the simultaneity of the financial collapse and the 2008 election bred a sense that both sides of the political spectrum had failed the nation. In many ways this left a community of people committed to the primacy of the free market disappointed with "Republicans who are now like the bully who gets kicked in the balls every time they pick on someone. But at least I can give them credit for kicking and screaming

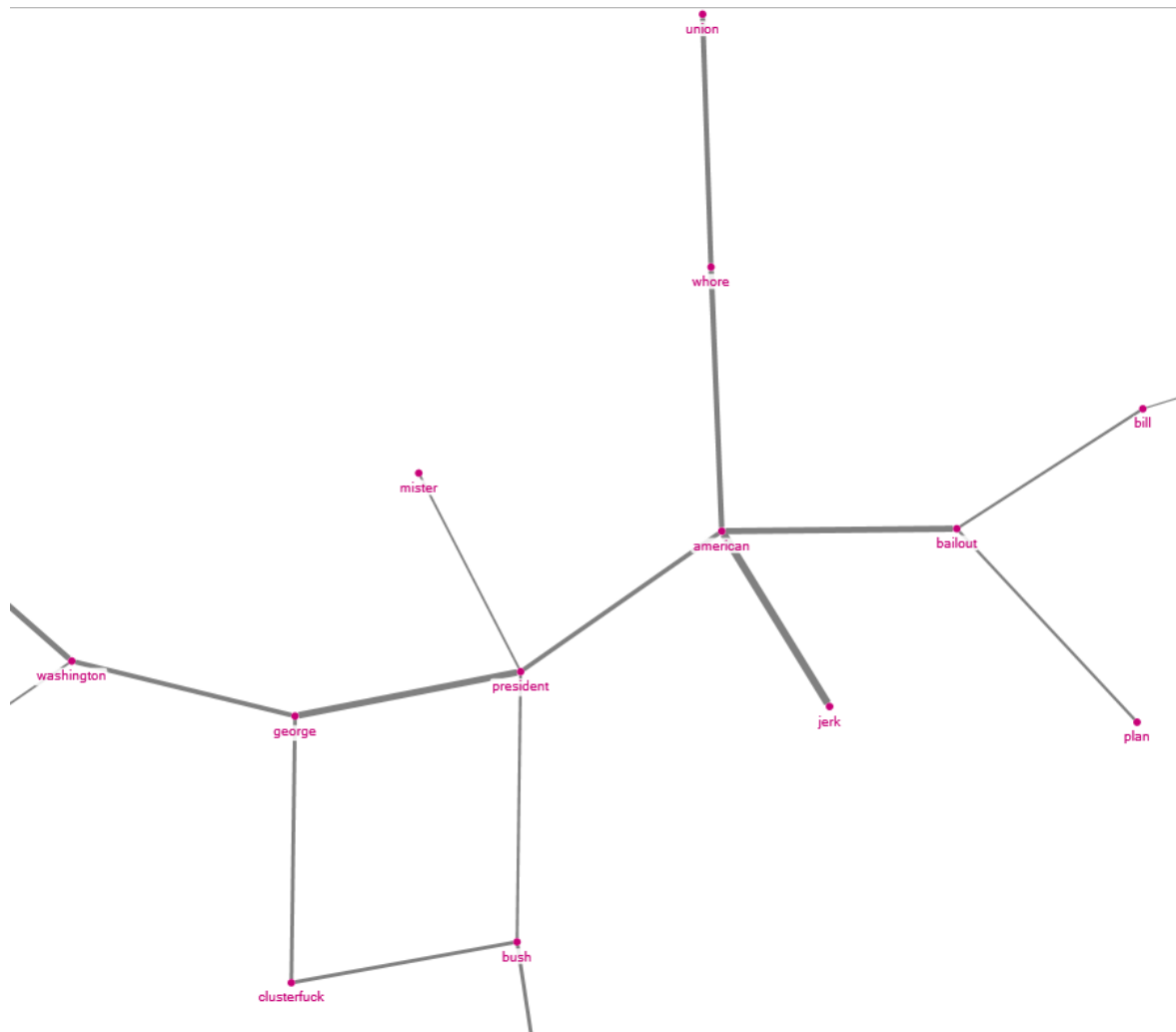


Figure 5.3. Semantic Network Graph, Great Recession, Cluster 9

on the way to complete irrelevance.” This disdain for George Bush and many of the figures storied as part of the establishment (**Figure 5.3**) represented by Cluster 9, was simply an indication that “sadly, either way, we are going to get higher taxes, more government, and less freedom. That’s always the answer for those who are in power.” In this, many of the Redditors echoed a point made by Ron Paul himself in the video that prompted the comment about his truthfulness and correctness. In the video, Paul argued that the central threat of policies like the bailout bill lay in their ideological opposition to capitalism: “If we continue to blame freedom

and capitalism, we are going to end up with a very difficult time. And ultimately that is the real test. ...The real test is to our liberty.”

Put differently, the conspiratorial circularity of the logic becomes clear: (1) people are free because of markets; (2) economic intervention destroys markets; (3) the market is failing; therefore: (4) someone tampered with the market; and (5) that intervention was to destroy people’s freedoms. This is, of course, a simplification of the logic, but it demonstrates the emplotted conclusion that “Bush and Paulson are just using fear and lies and bluster just like the WMD” to put money in the pockets of the people who rig the markets and as “an opportunity to take advantage of people’s economic situation by dishing out more favors to politically connected companies.” But the argument obfuscates its central value premise amidst some of the bluster: that the market itself is the originator of freedom, and recognizing this foundation places the narrative in a new light that highlights the underlying value framework: one that discursively elevates the individual above all else.

Conspiracy

This value premise places the narratives of the COVID-19 pandemic in a different light. “China is already returning to normal, but the people simply can’t be allowed to realize that a better world is possible!” As the debate regarding the *CARES Act* reached its zenith, the conspiracy theorizing on Reddit reached what could have been a low-point: “Before the China Flu hit America, my roommate and I double teamed options like [an adult film star]...Then it was like ‘Nam all over again...I was so pissed that the rice eaters fucked the economy and blue-collar workers so bad.” Although this, since deleted, post originated on a subreddit community that, put mildly, is deliberately provocative, any ironic intent quickly gives way to a sense of genuine disgust and contempt that cannot reasonably be passed off as neutral, either in terms of

its impact on broader discourse or in terms of its narrative foundations. Although unpacking the narrative dimension of shitpost politics is beyond the scope of this work, it is worth noting that scholars have explicitly noted the deliberate use of hyperbolically harmful language as a means of masking political ideology as an exercise in edgy or avant-garde humor (Eddington, 2018; Wynn, 2017) without acknowledging the notable counterargument that avant-gardists made art out of toilets and postcards notably without resorting to evoking racial animus in the process. In other words, regarding the conspiratorial sensemaking that occurred in these spaces, whether the obscenity is a façade or not makes little difference. When writing a scam email, they are not typos, they are a susceptibility test.

To move beyond the post-ironic posturing, though, and to address its narrative underpinnings, there are echoes of the libertarianism from the Great Recession:

China, which created the pandemic, has magically recovered and has no more cases of COVID and the world is just now beginning to feel the effects. Who recovered first? China itself? This virus was a move by the Chinese government in response to the trade war with the United States. The goal is to throw the world into a recession.

Although the similarities between the arguments regarding financiers or the Chinese government causing a recession toward selfish ends are evident, the more interesting aspects of this conspiratorial thinking lies in its distinction. The manipulation logics during the Great Recession cited Ron Paul and libertarianism; the Redditors employing them asked “God send Hayek to save us!”; and positioned the economy as liberatory. The threats to the market threaten individual GOP administration.” Reading this and other conspiracy theories that emerged across Reddit around the time of the *CARES Act* as a mere act of political expediency, persuasion through fear as a powerful tool, glorifying the leader, etc. would be to reduce the narrative to its meanest

elements because this construction of conspiracy, contra the logics of manipulation represented above, dissolves the sense of individual rights and responsibilities and instead frames the person as part of an inevitable, epochal fight for existence.

Reform and Apocalypse

Returning to the language of the Great Recession and the idea that the markets were somehow being manipulated helps to further evidence the connections and distinctions between these two discursive contexts. The Redditors in 2008 and 2009 expressed their dissatisfaction with the administration of the economy and the political environment more generally by noting the undue influence that an extraordinarily wealthy few *companies* maintained over the market. They noted the ways that economic hardship was used to manufacture profit: “Rich people got greedy on their prime and subprime loans. How shocking” and that the legislative process of passing the “\$700 billion figure that does not sound anything like a trillion but leaves enough room that a billion or more can be tacked on without thinking about it.” In this way, though there are certain elements of the criticisms evident in the Great Recession that move further into speculation themselves, the thrust of their argumentation is that government action to support those who created systemic instability was irresponsible. Although the ideas that market corrections and “recessions are necessary” disregarded the harm of those events and then passed off that harm, which they acknowledged fell disproportionately on those without wealth, the underlying ethic of these narratives articulated liberty as under threat from the actions of those with wealth, privilege, and the means to manipulate the market against the individual and their rights of liberty.

This line of argument lies in contrast with the fatalistic picture described by COVID-19 conspiracy theorists who, instead of identifying specific problems caused by damaging policies

or bad actors, manufactured a narrative supervillain complete with nefarious backstory, monstrous sidekicks, and a fundamentally incompatible worldview that rendered any conflict an impending apocalypse, unchangeable and final. This is an idea that forecloses on the possibility of conversation or even sensemaking because, as one Redditor argued during the Great Recession “it shows no nuance or sign of addressing current situations. No free market will ever exist, just as perfect communism does not exist.” Although there were significant political differences between individuals on forums in 2008, the fragmentation of political communities, such as the /r/conservative post claiming that “we have to keep China accountable for this virus” and arguing for “crippling their economy until their regime learns” left no room for such conversation. On a now-banned forum, /r/debatethealtright, one user posted his conclusions in response to the state of events: “At this rate we’re likely to have 10 million cases. Why? It’s clear that only the white economies are crashing. This has only been allowed to spread in white countries...We need to be able to defend ourselves and our people.” In contrast to the discussion of market manipulation and bad actors, there is hardly a sense of the individual in this argument; there is only the subsumed identity and their government, their economy, and their liberty which is collectively threatened.

When considered separately, the moral systems that undergird these two perspectives are separate in that one purports to universalize an ethic of individual liberty while one subsumes the notion of individual liberty in the context of the threat posed by those one the outside, those others whose existence is antithetical to that of the group. In the context of the COVID-19 conspiracy theories, the presentation of the outwardly hateful racial essentialism is corrosive to the potential for any discourse. But the narrative practices from the Great Recession, though they are outwardly less hateful, employ a very different kind of reductionism. For example, regarding

abortion rights, one user argued that “abortion is an essentially economic issue. When babies are aborted, the nation produces fewer children. Will more children make the economy better? Of course!” In many ways, this is a similar reductionism to that employed by Milton Friedman (1962) to justify employment discrimination, and in a similar way, the ethical theory that emerges from many of these posts removes the potential for considering the humanity of others beyond their position in the marketplace of ideas or goods or anything. As another user put it, in response to a comment about the acceptability of profiting from subprime loans: “Your clever fallacies are going to get you upvotes because it preaches to Reddit and its libertarian sensibilities, but you are not really even speaking to what I am actually saying.” Unsurprisingly, there was no reply.

Reorganizing Economic Worlds

In the time since January 2021, in response to their actions against the hedge fund Melvin Capital, the subreddit community */r/wallstreetbets* has exploded in size, in notoriety, and in the amount of news coverage that described how their actions endangered the market and, in turn, people’s lives, livelihoods, and futures. In response, they simply responded by telling each other “They expect us to just yolo...shorts are going get destroyed...maybe margin called...and they really start to cry. But I’m in this to become a millionaire. You apes ready?” Of the many criticisms levied at the */r/wallstreetbets* forum, one of the most disingenuous ideas that emerges is that the people on the forum are simply uneducated, they really do not know what they are doing when they attempt to work with these complicated financial instruments, and, in turn, that is what makes them dangerous to the rest of the markets.

But these ideas about the people on */r/wallstreetbets* forum are largely based in unfamiliarity with the group and the way that it communicates its ideas and ideals. As one of the

forum members put it succinctly, “To be fair, I didn’t wear a bike helmet as a kid, so I’m not qualified to give out financial help. I just like the stock.” This is precisely the point for many of the people who have found community on a forum that deliberately uses ableist slurs to describe themselves and revel in the fact that the outside world views their ideas, their tactics, and the hedge funds, or “hedgies” that they organize to take down, as irrational or deviant. They revel in it, because that’s the point.

And in this, the community captures one of the more revelatory dynamics of the economic discourse on Reddit during the time of the *American Rescue Plan*’s implementation. Although /r/wallstreetbets was created in the years after the great recession, the community itself had not reached the zenith of its supervillainy in the media until the group directly targeted the hedge fund Melvin Capital. The group targeted Melvin Capital because of its short positions, financial instruments that wager a company’s share prices going down, on the stock for the company GameStop. Here, the particular choice of the stock is an important part of the work that the /r/wallstreetbets community engaged in because, for many of the users, Gamestop (GME) is a company with some significance to them, but by the same token, the hedgefunds working to drive the price of GME down were making themselves vulnerable in the process. “Listen up you morons: everything is all just a game to them, but they get to make the rules. ...and fuck the small fry that get bit.” For the hedge funds that were on the receiving end of the /r/wallstreetbets community’s actions, the idea of a coordinated group on Reddit actively working against their position may have seemed ludicrous, but as is evidenced by both the events that transpired and the economic narratives woven as part of their work, the /r/wallstreetbets community is, in large part, a realization of both the attitudes and the beliefs that many Redditors held about the state of the economy, the market, and ultimately, what to do about it.

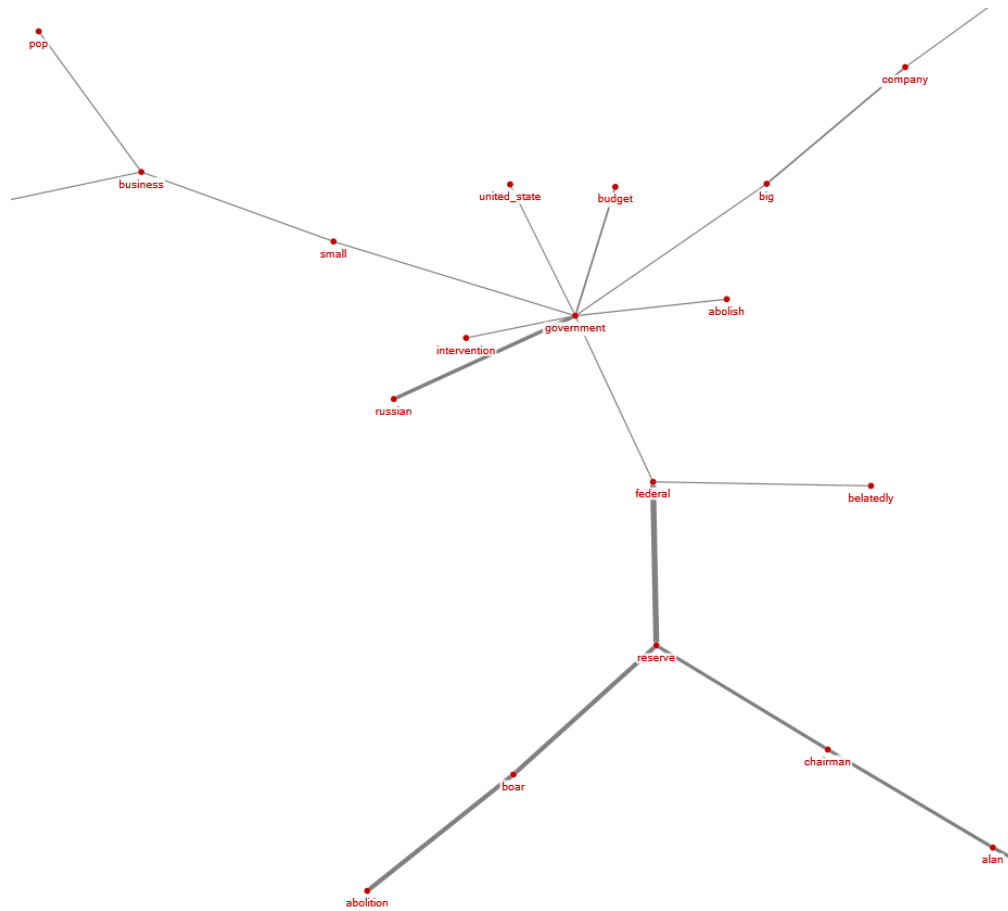
Abolition

Examining the economic sensemaking practices that emerged on the Reddit platform necessitates looking back at some of the original discourse from the Great Recession and retuning to a few of the ideas expressed as part of the “libertarian sensibilities” of users on the platform at the time. To be fair, these attitudes are and were not reflective of the entire community, but as is clear from Figure 5.5 and Figure 5., as the users on the platform were coming to terms with the implications of the Great Recession, the move towards imagining radical action to remake economic systems was neither uncommon nor isolated.

Initially, one of the clearest examples of the more extreme advocacy during the time of the Great Recession centered around the discourse of abolition. As one user described the situation “the US government is illegitimate. It was removed back in 1913 and since then we have been enslaved by our worthless money that is backed by nothing but a sense of confidence in the system.” This particular user was not alone in sharing this sentiment; specifically, the idea of inflation was a hot button issue to many people on the platform at the time, and it was often attributed to the actions of the Federal Reserve which “is just doing everything they can do to fuck with us.” Again, unsurprisingly from a group inspired by the work of Ron Paul, as libertarian ideals became pushed to the extreme on the platform, there were a sizeable number of mentions claiming that the only way to fix the system was either to abolish the Federal Reserve or to abolish the Federal Government entirely. “I’m just a Rothbardian so my answer is: hey...let’s abolish government!”

Often, these posts would emerge as a response to reports of the political actions taken by the government as a way of addressing the ongoing financial collapse. For example, in response

Figure 5.5. Semantic Network Graph, Great Recession, Cluster 5



to a David Letterman joke about John McCain skipping Letterman’s Late Night show to go save the economy, the disdain throughout was immense. “Thank God for Letterman! He knows how to stick it to two faced politicians.” Another user responded that it was probably all for the best since “McCain is older than Moses’ left testicle.” This attitude of contempt toward any federal government action emerged as a combination of pseudo-free-market ideologies and a general sense of disgust toward the perceived incompetence of leadership. In response to reports of new Federal Reserve action to limit the effects of toxic assets during the financial collapse, a

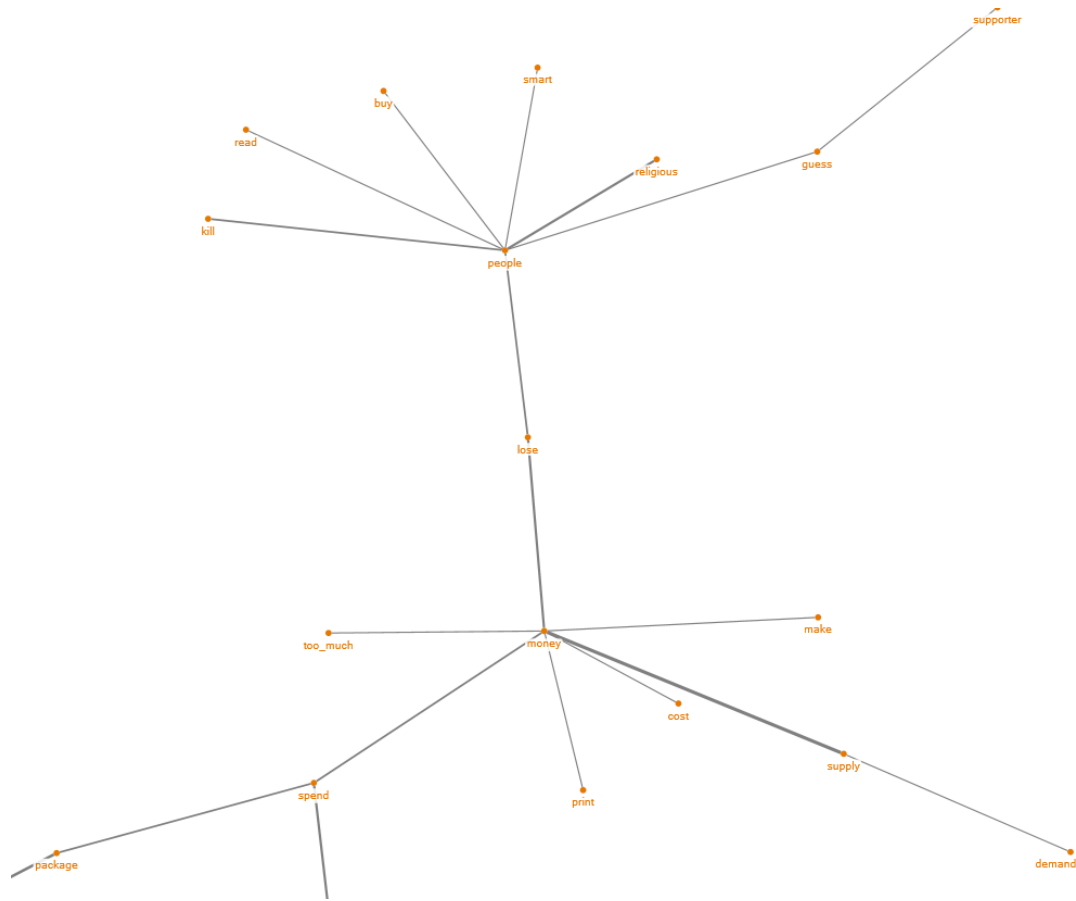


Figure 5.6. Semantic Network Graph, Great Recession, Cluster 6

commenter said everything has “been the same shit since Greenspin³⁶ did it...they are just lowering rates when they should raise them and raising them when they should be lowering them!” There was no justification or clear reason as to why the user disagreed with the Fed’s actions. Although there were some posts throughout the data collection that took the time to provide a considered commentary on their ideas, for some, the humor and derision was enough of the point. After all, when responding to reports of a Late Night joke at John McCain’s

³⁶ Presumably a reference to Alan Greenspan, Chair of the Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006.

expense, the only reasonable question to ask is, “Now, I am not a biblical scholar, so maybe I missed this part, but is Moses’ left testicle older? I mean, it wouldn’t be the weirdest part of the Old Testament.”

This simultaneous façade of jokes and derision is the context in which the arguments regarding abolishing government emerged. As one user put it, “Federal Reserve: abolished; government follows, then constitution, and finally capitalism enacted.” This attitude was driven even further by the reports that Congressman Ron Paul had filed a bill in the House of Representatives to abolish the Federal Reserve system. As one user put it, “Call your representative and tell them that you are intelligent enough to know a scam when you see one and you are not happy about it.” Regardless of their ability to see through a scam, though, the idea that abolishing any part of the federal government, let alone the government itself, is more an act of ideation than it is an act of reimagining or attempting to create new worlds. At the end of the day, the general sense that “We aren’t entering a depression, this isn’t 1929, and the public knows this. The problem is that the public is smarter than the leadership” is nothing more or less than a statement of contempt, of critique, of ideation.

Examining the ideas that emerged from cluster 6 of the data demonstrates this issue even more. Compared to the idealists whose dismissal prevented any meaningful attempt to provide dialogue or discussion about the ongoing economic issues facing the nation, those who discussed the problems of loss and money and people attempted to craft new ways of moving forward. Comments like one user’s response to a report about the environmental impact of rapid economic growth provided, in two sentences, more substantive critique of this abolition ideal, “people need to just not use the phrase Earth when they really just mean humanity’s habitat: the Earth isn’t going to die. Half of people don’t give a damn about nature, but if they think that their homes are

about to get fucked up, maybe they'll start taking notice." Put differently, as this comment articulates beautifully, the distinction between advocating for change and advocating for abolition is that one can center people and the other can only center an ideology. Whether or not that ideology is good for people is entirely irrelevant. The point is that change is more centrally human than it is ideological.

Transformation

In contrast with the advocacy of the Great Recession, the dynamic of transformation that emerged during the time of the COVID-19 recession is simultaneously more scattered and more revealing about the attitudes regarding economic and social change for the time. As demonstrated in Figure 5.6 the variety of discussion taking place on the platform during the time of the pandemic was, again, markedly different from before, but a few clusters that emerged from the semantic network analysis help to bring some of the attitudinal and political distinctions into sharper focus.

First, looking at Cluster 6, illustrated in Figure 5.6, which derived from the data gathered during the disruption inflection point for the COVID-19 recession, the connections that emerged between the question of travel, flight, international, education, school, and contact are, in and of themselves, an interesting frame to begin a discussion about economic sensemaking on the platform. In fairness, there are only a few central economic terms that relate to this particular cluster, including a group that includes Austrian-school and school-closure and another cluster near the bottom that invokes a few terms related to central banking, but the general connection of these terms to the economic questions under examination in this study are, at the very least, seemingly obscured. However, the narrative dynamic illustrated by this network cluster becomes clear in the context of a story from a user on the /r/CoronavirusTX forum, which is now defunct,

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to accelerate and communities like this one began to develop across various subreddits, the idea that the disruption caused by the virus would require significant reform and transformation of existing structures became commonplace. Although the central attitude of disappointment and even disgust toward the sense that the people who needed the most help were not going to get it, or not get enough, the conversations began to center people and creating action against those kinds of outcomes: “The economy is punching people left and right, stock markets, businesses, sales people, and eventually layoffs. How are you going to respond?”

Along these same lines, as the pandemic continued to evolve, people took the opportunity to explore the potential for social change outside of the bounds of COVID-19 but also *because of* COVID-19. For example, in the context of a long discussion about the political fight over student loan debt, one person argued that the example of the Fed’s policies during the pandemic could offer an instructive way to begin a gradual process of reform regarding this systemic issue, “The real solution is just to squash loan interest rates to practically nothing. We shouldn’t be profiting from our country’s students. Schools aren’t free yet, but this is our long-term goal.” Beyond this advocacy this user went through and explained not only how these kinds of changes could make people’s lives exponentially better as they tried to deal with the compounding issue of pandemic life and economic inequalities but also how these types of reform could “easily extend people’s payments and make them more feasible. Under my plan, it would still be profitable for the government, even at 1% rates.” Needless to say, this kind of self-reflexive and extensive policy analysis is not only a positive for general political discourse, it represents a pragmatism regarding the justification and the methods for organizing economic change that is generally elusive.

The conversations reflected in the networks of Figure 5.6 are like the more complex and nuanced conversations that emerged during other points in the COVID-19 recession. As represented in Figure 5.7, the conversations regarding community building and key players in local activities and online groups inspired people to get involved in political matters:

The crisis is simply unprecedented and no one knows what is going to happen. So many businesses are going to be impacted for a long time, but it's not the time to start preaching about how people should have saved money. We need more people to vote and get involved in politics on a lower level, instead of arguing on social media and Facebook about their ideas.

Brushing the irony of telling people to get off social media on a social media site, the ideas from this conversation are incredibly productive, “Why do people care more about the Kardashian

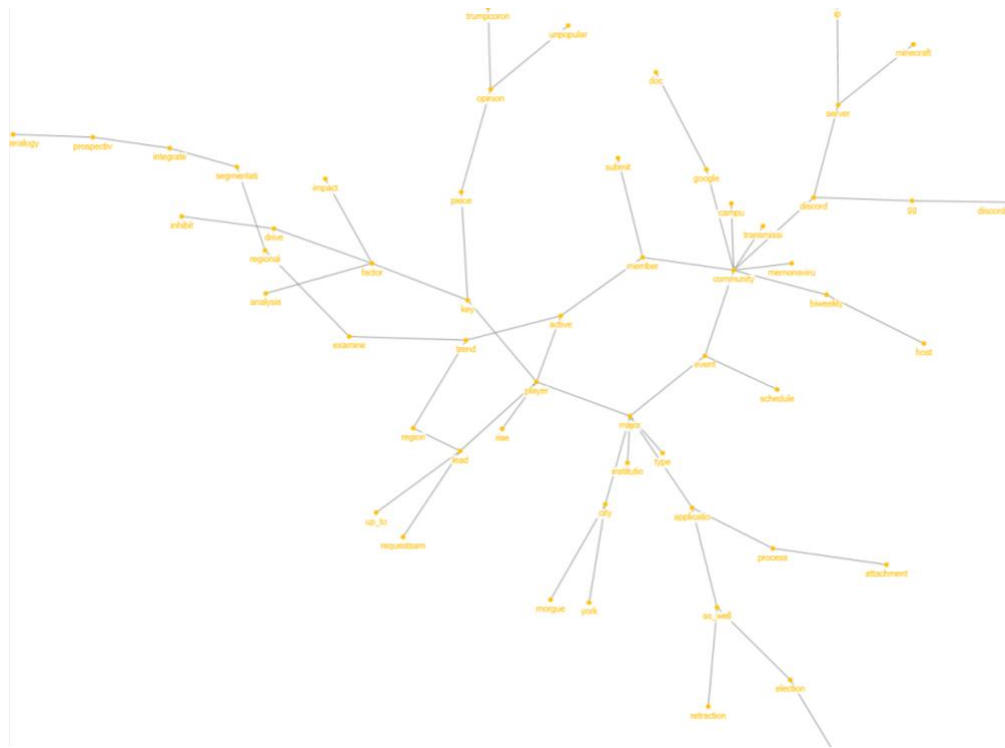


Figure 5.7. Semantic Network Graph, COVID-19 Recession, CARES Act, Cluster 7

than the local government and what's going on in their town? It starts small and trickles upward." And even a year later, during the debates about the *American Rescue Plan*, people on the /r/wallstreetbets subreddit who were still embroiled in the GMEs short squeeze business, reflected on the ideas represented in Cluster 2 (Figure 5.8). As much as one ape was in it for their own profit, the collective organizing that allowed for the successful manipulation of a stock in such a way that, a little over two years after the mayhem surrounding its actions in January of 2021, the hedge it targeted, Melvin Capital, announced that it would cease operations.

In analyzing these narratives and discourses that emerged from the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be neither fair nor honest to critically compare these discussions with those held on the platform twelve years before. Reddit as a social media site and as a collection of self-organizing communities has changed in ways that render any criticism of the users both unenlightening and reductive. However, the differences that emerged in the narrative justifications for change and the communicative practices of the organizing and collective sensemaking on the platform do hold meaningful answers for the ways that people, during these times of disruption began to make sense of the worst kinds of circumstances, organized, responded, and in some cases made genuine change. The /r/wallstreetbets community is just one example of this change contained within the data, and there are many, many more waiting to be explored in further research. In sum, then the central idea that emerges from this contrast between abolition logics and transformation logics is the beginning of a larger question about how it is that strangers online, with few personal details and limited connection, are able to, occasionally, create the kind of changes, political advocacy, and plans that emerged during these inflection points.

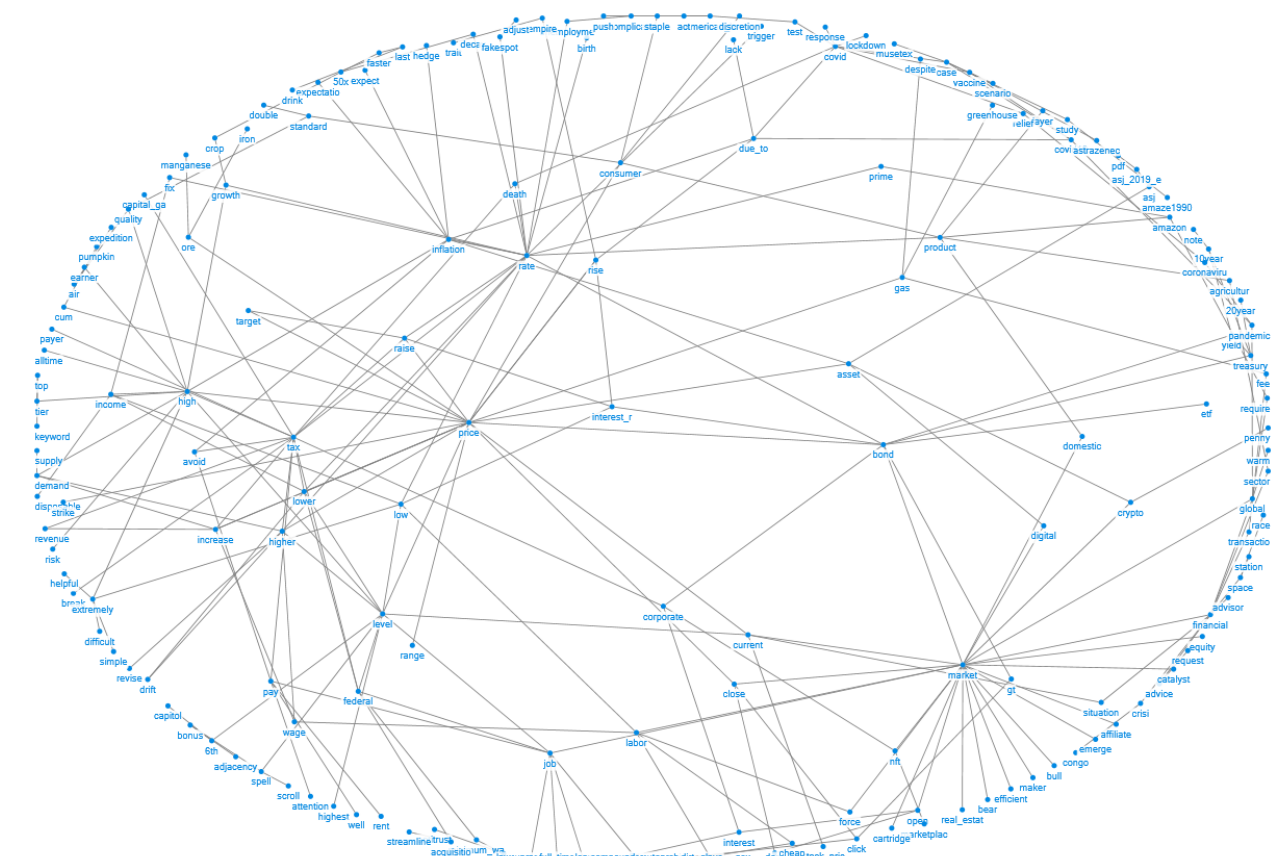


Figure 5.8. Semantic Network Graph, COVID-19 Recession, *American Rescue Plan*, Cluster 2

Summary: Study 2

The overarching purpose of this study was to take the context and lessons provided by the analysis of news narratives from both the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic and then to explore the individuals’ perspectives, the smaller stories, that emerged in the wealth of Reddit data available from those who actively engaged in communities online, prominently in the context of the pandemic. To this end, this study has highlighted two of these dynamics that have demonstrated the meaningful insights for communication, organizing, and economic practice that can derive from explorations of economic sensemaking as an individual and collective process on platforms like Reddit. To synthesize the theoretical importance of these ideas and then to explore practical implications, I turn to the final chapters of this dissertation, the discussions.

CHAPTER 6. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

After retiring as the Speaker of the United Kingdom's House of Commons, a position he held for over a decade, John Bercow was appointed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (the UK's chief political officer responsible for economic and financial affairs) to a position that is rarely mentioned among his many titles. Though he held the position, for over a year, John Bercow's stint as the Crown Steward and Bailiff of the Manor of Northstead was much shorter and less controversial than his time as Speaker. One year after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, he was replaced as the Crown Steward by a member from the Scottish Nationalist Party. In the time since, two additional former members of the House of Commons have taken on the role of Crown Steward despite the fact that the estate, which was acquired by the Crown during the 15th century, was nothing more than "an old chamber reached by wooden stairs, and a 'lowe [sic] house under it' unfit for habitation" (Page, 1923, p. 478) and had collapsed before the middle of the 16th century. The location where the manor was is now a public park, and the only role that the Crown Steward plays in contemporary UK society is to serve as position to which members of parliament (MPs) who are stepping down from their posts can be appointed. By law, MPs are neither allowed to resign nor hold any such office of profit, and so the position serves as governmental sleight of hand necessitated by a law that dates back to the time of the collapse of the Manor of Northstead (Kemp, 1952).

Before he resigned from his position in the House, however, John Bercow's final months in office were dominated by the procedural battles in the Commons over the approval process for the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. One of the more bruising battles during

that protracted political fight for the former Speaker came in the form of a proxy debate about the operating procedures of the House and the standing orders through which members can apply for emergency debates. On September 3, 2019, Bercow facilitated an emergency debate on a motion that sought to block the UK's withdrawal from the EU without a plan approved by the House. In response, the Leader of the House, Jacob Rees-Mogg, dubbed the honourable member for the eighteenth century, opined both that both the motion and the debate itself were a threat to "those rules, laws and conventions that protect us from the winds of tyranny" (Hansard, 2019) and chided the Speaker in Latin "varius et mutabilis semper dictator" (Column 94), or: varied and changeable are dictators. Brushing aside Rees-Mogg's ever-so-clever reimagining of classical sexism (Virgil, 2008), Bercow responded that the debate was substantively different because of the impending prorogation of parliament, which was then an evolving controversy about the Prime Minister's abnormal use of his authority to bring parliamentary sessions to a close; or, more accurately, to request that the Queen use her Royal authority to do so.

Many aspects of these intertwined, historically confused, and seemingly unjustifiable matters of precedence, interpretation, and ceremony can render the operations of a modern political body like the House of Commons ludicrous or arbitrary to audiences outside of the United Kingdom. The symbolism of the mace that materializes the authority of the speaker, the performance of the Lady Usher of the Black Rod during the state opening of parliament, even the practice of dividing the House by walking through lobbies and announcing the tallies after a predetermined series of bows and nods that ends with the Speaker simply repeating the numbers of votes that have already been announced to the House, all seems counterintuitive and unnecessary and, ultimately, futile because the routine of their functional exercise is so well established. It may be the Queen who has the power to prorogue parliament, but she does so only

at the request of the Prime Minister; or, more accurately, she *has* done so only at the request of the Prime Minister. In many ways, it is the paradoxical potential and possibility of defying precedent that makes plumbing the legal, historical, cultural, aesthetic, and performative depths of this particular example difficult and enlightening.

When placed in the context of the findings presented in this dissertation, this extended example is just a preface to the practical significance and transformative potential of some of the ideas I describe in this chapter. This chapter centers on two significant theoretical implications derived from the analysis presented in the previous chapters, especially as these implications relate to the intersections and overlapping goals of the various theoretical frameworks that ground this work and others that indicate the potential for their future development. As such, I frame this discussion in terms of two overarching, though still interconnected, theoretical contexts: (a) nullification and (b) finality.

On Nullification

The debate surrounding criminalized or criminalizing speech in the United States is less a hot-button issue than it is a congenital defect of American political discourse that takes on new dimensions as each fragmented controversy becomes a precedential footnote in the ever-expanding records of case law. One recent footnote came from the Colorado Supreme Court's decision in a protracted legal battle regarding the distribution of pamphlets outside of a courthouse (*People v. Brandt*, 2019). The pamphlets contained information about the right of jury nullification, a concept that has a complex and contested history dating back to the traditions of English common law upon which the United States builds (Horowitz & Kerr, 2001). In brief, jury nullification describes the practice of jurors who acquit a defendant because of a disagreement with law rather the facts of the case as argued during trial. As a political and legal

act, a juror's ability to defy precedent, statute, and evidence has been a source of consternation for judges and lawyers and a source of justice for those acquitted of draft-dodging during the Vietnam War and for those whose charges of violating the Fugitive Slave Act in 1851 prosecutors dropped after three acquittals in the first cases (Conrad, 1998). The legal, ethical, and political dimensions relating to the issue of jury nullification are a quagmire. Both the exercise of jury nullification and its controversiality in scholarship and law exemplify many of the key dynamics and implications of the perspective on economic organizing and its communicative practice discussed in this work.

Physicality and Morality: Communicative Pragmatics

One of the many cases cited in Conrad's (1998) work invited a thought provoking question regarding the origins of the jury's ability to nullify law, specifically in the context of a case of a man charged with violating a federal law prohibiting participation in enslavement, which it defined as an act of piracy, with a penalty of death upon conviction. The judge's concern was that jury nullification in this case, tried in Massachusetts, a center for the abolitionist movement, could result in some perversion, some distortion of justice whereby a jury, sympathetic to the victim, could render a guilty verdict without regard for the specific charges facing the defendant. Due to this concern, the judge noted, during instructions to the jury, that "they have the physical power to disregard the law, as laid down to them by the court. But I deny, that in any case, civil or criminal, they have the moral right to decide the law" (*United States v. Battiste*, 1820, as cited in Conrad, 1998, p. 66). Further, he argued that, "if the jury were at liberty to settle the law for themselves, the effect would be, not only that the law itself would be most uncertain..., but in case of error, there would be no remedy or redress" (p.

67). Two aspects of this claim are worth exploring in the context of organizing and economics, starting with the question of physical ability versus moral right.

In the context of jury nullification, the separation of physical ability and moral rights is an interesting intellectual compromise that acknowledges the power of the jury over the proceedings of the court but attempts to delegitimize it as an immoral act of self-endangerment. This argument is an echo, perhaps unintentionally, of the arguments laid out by Kant (1797/1999) regarding the logical and moral foundations of the citizen with respect to a state. Kant argued that obedience to the state is the primary duty of a citizen because the collective will of the people is embodied in the authority of the state, which is justly tasked with acting as the supreme arbiter of legality and justice by the people whom it governs.

Thus, any acts that subvert or deny the supremacy of the state's authority can only be legitimate if they are granted authority by that collective will embodied in the state, against which such resistance is levied. Considering the originator of the argument, this idea is relatively simple: (1) people create the state to act as a judge of legitimacy; (2) acts are deemed legitimate through the collective will embodied by the state; and (3) acts of resistance to the state, regardless of their motivations, cannot be deemed legitimate because they are in opposition to the entity that has the sole right to deem acts legitimate. These arguments function in similar terms. The act of jury nullification, like acts of resistance against the government, are unjust because they undermine the foundation of the collective entity that has been bestowed with the power to make such determinations. Acts that work to undermine that foundation, therefore, risk endangering the individual enacting the nullification (or the resistance) when their judgment day comes.

These are also the arguments that reinforced the ontological supremacy of economic systems in the first study. During the disruption inflection point for the COVID-19 pandemic, grand narratives reinforced the impossibility and futility of change based in the promise of self-restoration and the danger that any attempt to interfere with the natural processes of the market inevitably would lead to degradation and collapse of the economic system.

The implicit threat that the economy will disappoint and then endanger the interventionist becomes enacted reality when compromised reform inevitably fails because it was not designed to succeed. Shilling hydroxychloroquine did not need to be an effective measure against the COVID-19 pandemic to accomplish the Trump administration's goals. Using the imperfections of previous policies as universal evidence that intervention damages economies is akin to increasing the price of insulin to prevent the harm it is doing to the diabetes patients who are dying because they cannot afford their medicine. The medicine is not the problem; its administration, its management is.

This discursive delegitimization of human agency on the grounds that it is dangerous or self-defeating or ultimately futile is a form of paternalist self-preservation. It is unequivocally conservative in that these discursive acts cement institutional forces as immutable realities in grand narratives and social imaginaries. This is an organized dynamic whereby people work to prevent change by simultaneously acknowledging that it is within their ability to do so and threatening calamity should they attempt it. And while the analysis of these explicit dynamics and their communicative enactment in contemporary economic and social practice, as presented throughout this dissertation, is novel, these ideas are necessarily rooted in the work of post-structural theorists (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Derrida, 1967/1997; Foucault, 1975/1995; Lyotard, 1979/1984; Rorty, 1989), existentialist thought (Sartre, 1943/1956, 1957/1963), and

particularly the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) on the issues of radical democracy and the heuristic potential of looking to hegemony as an indicator of the potential for social change. The works that comprise this linguistic turn in philosophy and political theory gave credence to the impact of language, interpretation, and communication and its role in the constitution, maintenance, and transformation of social practices. Where this work differs from these thinkers, however, is in its attempt to go beyond the bounds of the philosophical questions that center their inquiry while maintaining a fundamental connection to that inquiry.

Reaching the conclusion that economic discourses delegitimize peoples' attempts to transform society does not necessitate the collection of hundreds of thousands of news articles or the interpretation of semantic networks from Reddit data. Where the perspective offered in this work differs is in the embrace of social practice as more than an indicator of the discursive disenfranchisement visited on people in society. Instead, I view the analytic work of this dissertation as an initial foray into exploring vulnerabilities in contemporary social practice, places where there is a potential for change, either good or bad, that emerge as narratives begin to break down, as incoherence breaks through, as the status quo begins to break up.

Despite his philosophical arguments regarding the metaphysics of justice, Kant was a staunch supporter of the French Revolution. To justify this support, he eventually arrived at the position that, because of the legal procedures surrounding the trial and execution of Louis XVI, a legitimate transfer of power had occurred between the King and his subjects, and everything was hunky-dory (Maliks, 2022). The intellectual honesty of this position does not matter because the philosophical content, its metaphysical sophistication, is irrelevant to its importance in the context of the political discourse of and about the French Revolution. Like the practice of jury nullification, the justification of the action is not central to its exercise and legitimacy. Instead,

its justification of social change emerges from the pragmatics of social construction. Unlike judges and justices, who rely on precedent and issue justifications of their opinions, the jury is only responsible for rendering a verdict, the central question, then, relates to the pragmatic choice to exercise that authority.

This is where this communication social science intersects with the theorizing that inspired it. Craig (1999) argued that the various traditions of communication theorizing are relevant and informative because of the undeniable practical significance of communication processes in the social worlds people inhabit. In this way, though the various traditions of communication theorizing articulate differing, and sometimes incompatible, ways of framing the issues of communication problems, those differences do not render the theories mutual exclusive. Rather, Craig (2015) noted that differences are what allow these varied traditions to address a multiplicity of problems as they emerge in the practical realm of human communication.

I contend that, in this same vein, the theory building that occurs in communication social sciences allows researchers to begin unraveling the connections among the moral, philosophical, and aesthetic dimensions of social interaction and their affective impact in their communicative exercise. More simply, whereas philosophical inquiry facilitates meditation on the moral right to render any verdict and economic inquiry facilitates a discussion of the physical exercise of that authority, a communicative perspective works to understand and transcend the relationship between the two. This is a theory based in the pragmatics of communication and social action. This is a theory of communicative nullification.

Communicative Nullification

Guy Debord's (1988/1990, 1967/1994) work on the issue of spectacle reflects one of the central concerns with post-structuralist and post-modern philosophy that this theory of

communicative nullification seeks to address. In his initial exploration of the concept of spectacle, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord (1967/1994) articulated the pernicious transformation and commodification of human experience through both concentrated and diffuse modes of spectacle that worked to either reshape individual experience in terms of a monolithic grand narrative or to shatter and fragment human experience. This, he argued was one of the causes of socialist political impotence in the latter half of the 20th century, and in a later manuscript he argued that the cyclical function of these types of spectacle had so accelerated during this time that they constituted a new kind of spectacle, integrated spectacle, and rendered the potential for political resistance obsolete (Debord, 1988/1990). Two years after the original publication of his follow-up work, Debord shot himself in the heart in an act that some have described as either an act of scholastic murder, caused by academics' appropriation of his politics, or as a final, radical act in of resistance (McDonough, 2004). Although the circumstances of his death are still contested, Debord's despondence over the impossibility of political change is routinely considered one of the most prominent contributing factors to his decision to commit suicide.

Communicative nullification seeks to provide a theoretical framework that combines the insights of antenarrative theory and the understanding of personal and social change described by the communication theory of resilience, into more direct conversation with the question of agency and material circumstances. In the context of post-structural theory, upon which antenarrative theorizing is built, there is a pronounced distrust of ideas like the traditional notion of resiliency (to which CTR is, itself a direct response). In contemporary communication scholarship, much of the dialogue regarding critiques of individual resilience derive their central concerns from material disparities and political inequities that render the call to resilience at best

a piece of futile encouragement akin to some fallacious bootstrap mythos or at worst a malicious taunt that is both aware of and indifferent to individuals' circumstances. In this vein, Ahn et al. (2021) called for a shift to organizational resilience, specifically regarding the issue of institutional support for academics during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically with regard to issues related to familial caregiving and accommodations policies. In their analysis of the systemic failures of academic institutions the authors are entirely correct, but in their explicit rejection of individual resilience (the subtitle of the piece is "Fuck Individual Resilience") is odd, especially in a context where their scholastic advocacy during a pandemic is itself a representation of the power of individual resilience.

The primary concern of this theory of communicative nullification, then, is that of providing a framework for understanding and unpacking the relationships between (1) individuals and collectives and (2) authority and agency, all of which are made clearer in the context of the findings from this study and other examples. Regarding the first relationship, that of individuals-collectives, I use the term collectives to represent the organization of social groups generally. This is not to say that communicative nullification operates universally in the same way across any collective context; instead, I argue that the idea of nullification can be applied to any communicatively constructed social collective ranging from interpersonal relationships to international affairs insofar as these social bonds become representative of something beyond the individuals: a relationship, a family, a church, a university, a government, or even a hub of galactic commerce off of the southern coast of Maine. Each of these entities are simultaneously constituted by people and narrative representations of something beyond those people.

Affective Nullification: Asserting Agency

Additionally, the framework addresses the issues of authority and agency related to the communicative and social dynamics of individuals and collectives. As exemplified in the analysis from Study 1 regarding the implementation of the *CARES Act*, the dynamic of triage and sabotage demonstrated the role of this concept in a theory of communicative nullification. Recall that, during the initial days of the inflection point, while the *CARES Act* was debated in the senate, Mitch McConnell, then the Senate majority leader, argued that the Democratic party members' continued bargaining regarding the allocation of funds were merely acts of political gamesmanship that were harming the people who needed help. As such, in his capacity as a Senator, a party leader, and as the primary decision-maker for when the bill was going to come up for a vote, this utterance can be read as an act of agency or, affective nullification (a concept explored at more length later), that attempted to define the justificatory scheme by which policymakers' practices, and by extension policy itself, would be judged as legitimate or illegitimate. In this context, the reason for calling such an act nullification is a way of acknowledging that there is no narrative *tabula rasa*, there are always justificatory schemes that, when people redefine them, are discursively nullified. In this way, the concept of jury nullification, which inspired this communication perspective, is itself an act of affective nullification.

As an execution of the agency of an individual (the juror) on the collective (the court), an act of jury nullification recreates the justificatory scheme through which the collective renders a verdict by asserting the individual's power to recreate the collective meaning of the word guilty. More essentially, this communicative action is the act of rendering the various ontological, epistemological, and axiological questions surrounding an act moot because of the exercise of

that agency that pragmatically obviates the need to answer the questions in the first place. When a juror engages in nullification, the questions of evidence no longer matter because the agency of the individual renders it moot.

Aesthetic Nullification: Asserting Authority

The flip side of the coin is an act of nullification where the individual draws upon collective authority to define individuals' justificatory schemes. For example, in the context of the news coverage related to the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* and the second disruption inflection point from the Great Recession, the multiple discussions of whether Obama or his policies were acts of socialism can be considered an act of aesthetic nullification. This act of asserting the authority over the evaluation of those policies *and their legitimacy* subsumed the political and moral questions regarding the policies themselves and reframed them as an issue of language, of communication.

The narrative and organizational force of such a discursive act derives from its obfuscation of those motivations. Arguing that a piece of policy is socialist, in this vein, is akin to the judge arguing that the jury has no moral right to engage in jury nullification. Or, as a different example that does not require multiple uses of the word nullification in both its original legal and this proposed theoretical context, the arguments of many trans exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) would fall under the category of aesthetic nullification insofar as the arguments associated with TERF ideologies subsume their explicit denial of transgender people's human rights under the guise of a semantic debate about the meaning of gender (Wynn, 2021). In both examples, the crux of aesthetic nullification is to reframe a political or pragmatic question as ontological, epistemological, or axiological.

Summary and Moving Forward

These two understandings of communication nullification (affective and aesthetic) engage the framework of organizational communication studies and storytelling organization to describe the intertwined relationships between (a) individuals and collectives and (b) authority and agency, which the theory assumes people are constantly negotiating and renegotiating with respect to various nested and overlapping and paradoxical roles that comprise the social worlds people inhabit. In a way, this perspective is directly opposed to the Habermasian tradition from which a lot of critical communication scholarship springs (e.g., Deetz, 1992) because this perspective denies that language “no longer relate[s] straightaway to something in the objective, social, or subjective worlds; instead [people] relativize their utterances against the possibility that their validity will be contested by other actors” (Habermas, 1984/1987, p. 120). The crux of this idea relates to the relationship between the contestation of an action or utterance by any agent and the social, subjective worlds (and their construction through narrative practice) through which people make sense of those very same utterances.

The distinction in these perspectives becomes clearer when considering the analysis presented in Study 2 regarding the narratives of manipulation from Redditors during the Great Recession. In that context, the Redditors were denouncing the actions of government and questioning the validity of the policy actions taken by both the legislature and the Federal Reserve. They did so by questioning the justificatory scheme upon which those policies were based. Specifically, in the context of that particular argument, their narratives were constructed in relation to Ron Paul and Milton Friedman who, even if they were neither explicitly mentioned in posts *or* if posters were even aware of those figures, the collectively organized discursive frame (in the context of those forums, on those sites, at those times) conceives of those narratives

relative to those figures. In this position, as characters within the shadow play of the organizational discourse, both Friedman and Paul themselves constructed and reconstructed relative to both each other, their own narrative self, and the myriad other elements, characters, props, theories, and so on that comprise the *dramatis personae* of those organizational narratives.

Jury Duty

Though the central components of this theoretical framework, as I have articulated them in this chapter are heavily implicated in the damnably obtuse language of post-structuralism, the aim here is not pointless philosophizing. The central metaphor of the courtroom and the jury serves a purpose beyond giving rise to the name of the concept. My use of this frame is intentional because it clarifies important concepts that can come from this theoretical framework.

At various points in this manuscript, I have identified narratives and discursive logics that emphasizes the possibilities for change; however, organizational communication theory, insofar as it has developed in the micro- to meso- level context of firms or inter-firm organization, provides little guidance on the application of the social constructionist ideals beyond the normative realm of organizing. In this vein, post-colonial scholarship (e.g., Cruz & Sodeke, 2020) has emphasized the organizational function of liquidity to reorient organizational communication scholarship toward those contexts that had long been discarded as non-organizational, not worthy of inquiry. But the opposite is also the case; where researchers like Cruz and Sodeke (2020) and Broadfoot and Munshi (2007) have urged organizational scholars to look to the margins that it had ignored for so long, the inverse is happening at many of the centers of social power, political discourse, and economic systems that also have been ignored for the opposite reasons. Whereas marginal and subaltern organizing is often derided as existing

outside of the framework of formal organizing and management practices, which are ostensibly the object of most organizational communication inquiry, the centers of power are ignored as the institutional context in which organizing takes place, no more subject to the inquiry itself than would be the composition of a beaker in which a chemist performs their experiments.

But this is demonstrably and glaringly absurd. It would be a poor chemist who, upon classifying a hunk of uranium as a beaker began to ignore its effects on either the titrations or on themselves! Similarly, the turn toward examining liquidity in organizational communication concepts reinforces the necessity of examining the solidified, ossified centers of social systems as similarly discursively organized. In this way, a communicative theory of nullification can help to frame the discursive operation of such contexts in terms of their maintenance, construction, and reification through narrative. The representations and analysis of the stock market (among various other economic systems) in the second study of this work (specifically, the section on transformation) illustrated a context in which this kind of framework could be heuristically useful. In the context of the /r/wallstreetbets discourse surrounding both Melvin Capital specifically, and the abuses of firms on Wall Street, and the general sense of disenfranchisement in the economy more generally, the idea of nullification can help to frame inquiry to specifically look at the aspects of these discourses that seek to challenge various vulnerabilities in the narratives and justificatory schemes that support them.

This goes beyond simply identifying that the act of deliberately purchasing the stock of a failing company to subvert their speculative positions *is* affective nullification; reducing this framework to a two-part typology is to miss the point. The analytic act of reading the specific actions of the community, as they organize and narrate and make sense of economic conditions and the institutional and systemic context to which they are responding, *as* discursive

nullification is itself the point. Interrogating the narrative sensemaking practices through which collectives come to reorder the world necessitates first understanding how they created a site upon which to build it. In this way, the theoretical categories of affective and aesthetic nullification must be more than boxes for sorting utterances; they are a way of unpacking discourse, identifying and constructing sites for change, and narrating the potential for transformation and justice.

On Finality, or The Opposite of Resilience

After an excruciatingly long day of parliamentary procedure, the ceremonial banging of Black Rod on the door to the House of Commons was more ominous on August 28, 2019 than it may have seemed before. Despite the protestation of members of the House on both the government and opposition benches, the Prime Minister's choice to prorogue parliament at a time when the government was still attempting to negotiate the terms of the United Kingdom's exit from the European union was undoubtedly an attempt to stymie the will of the House to avoid pressured negotiations and the potential fallout of a no-deal Brexit. For his part, the Prime Minister claimed that the prorogation was nothing more or less than an attempt to ensure the voices of the citizens who had voted for an exit from the European Union were not frustrated by the political machinations of the House of Commons. As he stood to proceed into the House of Lords for the ceremonial events that performatively enact the legal realities of a prorogation, John Bercow noted that he did not believe that the actions of the Prime Minister or his government were normal or justifiable.

The court cases that emerged from the prorogation scandal are interesting case studies in applying the language of resilience to the broader functions of government and economic systems. On one hand, the fact that the Queen had directed the prorogation of parliament,

whether or not that direction was informed by unjust or illegal advice from the Prime Minister seemed to render the issue non-justiciable for the courts of the United Kingdom. After all, the authority to prorogue parliament, even if it were only exercised in response to the advice from the Prime Minister, was still exercised, nonetheless. In this framing of the events, there is simply no way around the fact that the justifications made no difference, it was the performative exercise of the power itself that mattered, and that could not be changed. The final decision of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, however, decided differently in an opinion that rendered both the issue justiciable *and* rendered the prorogation itself of void, as though the Royal Commissioners who announced the prorogation of parliament had conducted the ceremony while pretending to read from a blank slip of paper.

Interestingly, this example is not the only instance of legal fictions rendered from blank pages that has been examined in this work, and together the *CARES Act* and the prorogation scandal offer important insights regarding the role of finality in processes of resilience, specifically, I contend, as the photo negative of communicative resilience.

When the United States Congress took up the issue of crafting a third relief bill in response to the COVID-19 recession, it was clear that the negotiation of such a bill would need to take place in the Senate chambers, where the prospect of spending trillions of dollars in the service of economic stimulus may have been a practical necessity but was still an ideological stumbling block. Nonetheless, the practical considerations of negotiating such policy measures mean little in comparison to the constitutional requirement that spending bills originate in the House of Representatives. Luckily, the *CARES Act* was originally passed by the House of Representatives in July of 2019, around eight months before the beginning of the pandemic (*CARES Act*, 2020). But this is not the claim of a conspiracy theory about the origins of the

pandemic; it is merely a legal fiction that allowed the Senate to take a bill that had already passed the House of Representatives, the *Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act*, and amend it until it resembled a new piece of legislation with the minor caveat that it did not violate the origination clause of the Constitution.

Now, to be clear, questions about the exercise of this practice to circumvent the intent of the Constitution are entirely irrelevant to the conversation of resilience. Although it is not a novel coronavirus legislative tactic, the act is itself an excellent example of the resilience processes of foregrounding productive action and crafting alternative logics (Buzzanell, 2010). But were the legal fictions described thus far in this chapter—the position of Crown Steward and Bailiff of the Manor of Northstead; the post-hoc judicial whiting-out of a royal proclamation; or the shell bill tactics employed to expedite the passage of the *CARES Act*—not possible, what are the possible results, what might the application of the communication theory of resilience indicate about these large-scale exercises in organizing economies and governments? I argue that these examples highlight the social processes at work in the communicative practice of resilience more clearly than do the interpersonal or smaller scale social organization *because* they give a clearer picture of what the alternative to resilience might look like: indecision, endless philosophizing, and impotence.

The findings presented from study one indicated the detrimental logics upon which Milton Friedman's (1962) perspectives regarding race and economics in the United States were built. Especially when Friedman's work was referenced throughout the inflection points, it was typically in the name of preserving some form of the ideal, free market or in the interest of preventing the government from doing more harm than it was already doing in the status quo. This sentiment was largely in line with the similar discourses explored in study two regarding the

abolition of the federal government. In reading the stories from which the exemplars reported in those chapters emerged, it was clear that the people writing these accounts were not satisfied with the state of things. It is hardly surprising that people interested enough in politics and economics to log onto Reddit in 2008 and wax philosophical about Ron Paul and the Federal Reserve might have been a bit despondent in the wake of the disastrous consequences of the financial collapse. But the turn to idealism instead of practicality during these times, which might otherwise have been understood as merely a coping process, people trying to grapple with the disappointments of a broken world with an online community of like-minded people, manifested the kinds of discussion that merely reinforced the echo chamber. In other cases, such as the COVID-19 conspiracy theorists also described in study two, people also descended into a moral absolutism and identity asceticism that simultaneously echo the resilience processes described by Buzzanell (2010) and foreclose on any meaningful potential for crafting a new world.

To be fair, it would be antithetical to the communication theory of resilience to argue that resilience is an agential process all the time. Sometimes, it is the epitome of resilience to resign from the world *if and only if* that is a means of creating new potential, new futures, new normal. Practices that might otherwise be considered harmful *can* be a form of resilience insofar as the, as a future oriented activity serve to facilitate some sense of continued growth or change in the person. In this way, as the prospect of communicative resilience describes the social enactment of processes of resilience, engaging in sensemaking and organizing the social worlds in new ways in response to disruption, the position of its opposite must be similarly nuanced. More than just cut off from others, the opposite of resilience must be a sense of mutually constructed impotence in the face of disruption. Considering much of the ontological storytelling that

occurred in the news coverage of the COVID-19 Recession, the narrations of economic forces embody this dynamic. At once a clear sense that there is something wrong and a concomitant belief that there is nothing to be done or that doing something would be to make the situation worse. This is finality, a socially constructed and mutually maintained willingness to relinquish agency and deny the possibility of adaptation or transformation simply because of the denial that there is such a possibility. In this way, the findings of these studies suggest a number of avenues for continuing to explore this concept of communicated impotence or finality as it emerges in other contexts. Especially in terms of economic sensemaking, the various aspects of economic life and experiences that people feel are, in this sense, fixed might offer some further illustration of the specific dynamics of this idea that are not clearly demonstrated in this work.

Obviously, this is a fledgling theoretical advancement that requires further development in terms of its heuristic value and nuance; however, with such development I argue that the theoretical ideas represented herein could present an opportunity for significant synthesis and development of understanding regarding the communication theory of resilience.

CHAPTER 7. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKING AND PRACTICE

In late December of 2018, just three days before Christmas, the United States Federal Government entered what would become its longest shutdown to date, lasting 35 days, and resulted in a counterfactual estimate of around \$11 billion in damage to the overall GDP across the last quarter of 2018 and the first quarter of 2019 (Congressional Budget Office, 2019). As Congress began considering action against the COVID-19 pandemic a little over a year after the events of the shutdown, a previously mentioned article from a local paper outside of New York City recalled the experiences of the civil servants, 800,000 of which were left without a paycheck during the time of the shutdown. The article from the *Plainview-Old Bethpage Herald* described how many government employees had to turn to gig work or were forced to default on the student loans, rent, or other bills. References to the shutdown in the article became another example of the consequences of missed work and poor government decision making, and in many ways this is correct. In other ways, this account fails to capture some of the most important dynamics of this story and the potential nugget of change tucked away behind the stories of the public employees from the National Parks Service, NASA, the Department of Homeland Security, and more who bore the brunt of the personal costs of this shutdown far in excess of any estimate from the Congressional Budget Office.

Two aspects of this particular narrative are striking. The first relates to the question of default and its legal, parliamentary, and political consequences for economic policy making. The second relates to the question of evaluation and the mechanisms and institutions responsible for creating the estimates for the economic effects of certain policy measures *and* their practices,

methodology, and effect in the context of policymaking. In the realm of organizational communication theory, Canary (2010a) is the foremost scholar of the construction and evaluation of policy knowledge. Her work explored how tensions, contradictions, and communication practices inform and shape the process of organizing policy, but as argued in Betts and Buzzanell (2022) the question of resilience and policymaking are necessarily intertwined, and this chapter discusses the pragmatic implications of the analysis conducted in these two studies for informing potential practices and reform that could create a better practical framework for the fundamentally discursive act of policymaking.

Defaulting

Government shutdowns are one of the clearest examples possible of a self-inflicted economic wound. The notion that a government body would actively force itself into a state of self-harm in the short-term to avoid the prospect of some uncertain, improbably future harm is slightly more than entirely predictable, especially given the several examples of less forced errors than even a government shutdown, but still slightly more than frustrating. Examining the historical context and communicative practices that continually justify this economic self-flagellation with sufficient depth is beyond the scope of this project. However, in the context of the analysis presented in this work, particularly engaging with the concepts of nullification and finality as described in the previous chapter, I argue that the question of default, as a communicatively organized and justified inaction, is itself a fruitful context for exploring the potential for rethinking the ways that government creates economic policy in the United States.

Within most of the traditions of scholastic debate, there is a notion of presumption that operates much as it would in a courtroom. In a parliamentary debate, for example, the Government team, which affirms the resolution offered at the beginning of the round, has the

burden of proof, and the opposition team, which negates, has the benefit of presumption. Negating a resolution is a significant advantage for debaters who have the wherewithal to address the arguments made by a Government team because of the power of that presumption. Bluntly, it is much easier to poke holes in a case for some action than it is to brainstorm, in a 15-minute preparation time, a definitive policy answer for a relevant topic that has not yet been appropriately solved by the avalanche of policy analysts and think tank researchers who have dedicated their lives to solving longstanding legalistic quandaries. This state of affairs is, almost inevitably, the cause of at least one moment of doubt over during a debater's competitive career when their plan to repair the US electrical grid is voted down because it might potentially lead to human extinction via nuclear war by the same judge who agreed that a plan to give a pony to every child in Wyoming is an appropriate solution to global poverty.

Though the world of debate is supposed to be a training ground for future politicians and policymakers, some its features make it a poor experimentation ground for considering policy because of the presumption of the status quo. Recalling the arguments made in Chapter 4 regarding the issues raised by (Nozick, 1974), even a libertarian political philosophy can justify interfering in the state of economic affairs when there is a demonstration of the unjustness of the distribution of holdings. But in most cases, this is likely to be a bad assumption. Especially when considering the types of disruptions that have faced the United States economy over the past decades, the justifications for inaction or delay are harmful to a significant portion of the population and yet the default position of the federal government is that there should be no action regarding expenditure without prior authorization of such an expenditure through congressional act or an act of executive fiat. But this is a poor way of addressing issues of economic harm for two reasons: (1) it is often likely that swift action against the practical causes of economic

hardship when they arise (e.g., something crazy like a global pandemic) and (2) many times the debate centers on the legitimacy of taking action in the marketplace rather than on the method of its exercise. Again, thinking back to Friedman (1962), the discourse surrounding the inevitable damage of any interference in the market is often the baseline for these considerations. During the *American Rescue Plan* negotiations, the default was that there would be no action to continue mitigating harms. In effect, the governmental selection of the default itself must be considered as part of the practical organization of economic systems.

Along these lines economists like (Kelton, 2020) and (Tcherneva, 2020) have argued for the benefit of a job guarantee policy that would act as an automatic stabilizer for the economy. The idea here is that, if people are out of work, they can turn to the government at the very worst, and ensure that they are bringing home a paycheck for their families. However, there are two issues with this plan. First, the primacy of the work as the means of achieving the base standard of living is itself troubling. Despite the notion that a job guarantee could reshape the job market, the idea of endorsing a plan that requires people to subject to labor in order to receive support during times of financial downturn is, at the very least, a questionable reinforcement of the place that work has human life. Additionally, this type of plan could obfuscate the need for reform or assistance to families beyond that offered by the job guarantee. Along these same lines, a job guarantee could become a justification for cutting other kinds of social safety net programs in ways that are counterproductive to the aim of alleviating the harms of poverty and privation.

Instead, I argue for a different kind of policy that would function in much the same way as the direct payments to individuals that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the type of automatic triggers (based on any variety of economic indicators or factors) that would set in motion direct cash payments to families and people in the case of economic

downturn. The essential purpose of this automatic trigger, however, is not to serve as the appropriate response for all crises. As discussed throughout this dissertation, the dimensions and dynamics and communicative practices at myriad levels of economic sensemaking are different. Instead, the central purpose of such an automatic trigger would be to shift the default policy option from inaction to moderate action while also providing some mechanism for immediate support in cases where rapid fluctuations begin before legislative action can feasibly be taken.

Again, the central purpose of this policy would not be to institute a one-size-fits all band aid to guard against any sense of future harm. However, when the default option for large swaths of the political spectrum *is* the desired outcome, there is no real incentive to engage in discourse about the potential to create some, more appropriate framework for addressing economic issues. Again, I think to the example of the UK's Brexit negotiations as a clear example of this. For the Prime Minister, an ardent Brexiteer, the default option of a no-deal Brexit, even if it would not have been a preferred outcome, was deemed a better prospect than continuing to experience the frustration of a parliament that was not going to approve his deal. So, with the default option as a mildly acceptable one, it made sense to simply close parliament, shut down discourse, rather than to continue fighting to try and get a solution that he believed was only marginally better. If I were an economist, I might use the language of a trade-off to describe the situation.

But as I hope this dissertation has made abundantly clear, I am not an economist, and the central purpose of the policy implications developed in this chapter evidence it. Communication studies, as a discipline may not often be able to speak directly to the impacts of certain legislation, but I believe this chapter has demonstrated, at least in small part, that communication studies can be leveraged as a policy analytic tool, especially when aimed at the meta discursive contexts and organizational communication dynamics that occur in policymaking.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

An Admission

Beyond the post-structuralist positioning and the relativism and the theory-crafting and the discourse and the language, a few questions remain regarding the contribution of the work contained within this dissertation and of the type of analysis for which it claims to be a starting point. Theory is praxis and praxis is theory (Woolgar, 1986); the notion that there is some fundamental rift between the two is unhelpful for developing useful versions of either. Nonetheless, it does not seem too out of line with the theoretical underpinnings of this work to suggest that communication theorizing does not, now, materialize social structure and shape organizational practices in the way that economic theory does. Rather, it would be disingenuous and counterproductive to argue that, by virtue of the analyses presented in the previous chapters, the road ahead is clear, the path forward is set, and the letters to Congress and the larger world beyond will write themselves. They do not. To read the critical work contained within these two studies as merely a rehash of the same political and social critiques that have circulated in social science and humanistic scholarship would be to neuter the transformative potential that I believe this work can hold.

As I consider this final chapter of this work, I am left with a sneaking suspicion that I am making the same mistake that I made as a high-school debater, in a quarter-final round at the district-level competition, on the topic: Resolved: Access to drinking water ought to be valued as a human right instead of as a commodity. I was arguing the affirmative in the case and was pitted against a debater from a school that was significantly better off than mine. They were dressed in

a crisp suit; they spoke incredibly quickly; and they did it with such authority and tenacity that I genuinely doubted my own knowledge of Karl Marx when they used a quotation attributed to the writer of the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital* to defend treating water as a commodity instead of as a human right. I argued the point in my first rebuttal and spent my four minutes of speaking time doing my best rendition of Atticus Finch, pinning this blatant misappropriation to the vivisection table and rhapsodizing about the self-evident contradiction and harm of their arguments. I was engrossed in the joy of my argument and confidence as I spoke while glancing back and forth from my furiously scribbled notes to my haphazard files of quotations from philosophers and policy analysts that were piled in an old-fashioned maroon briefcase I had borrowed from my grandfather. It felt as though I never took a breath. And I know I never looked up to see how the audience or the judges or even my opponent was responding to my words. Yet, I still remember the room. I still remember my opponent's grey suit. And I still remember what I saw as a look of disdain when they stood up and, with equivalent passion to my own, excoriated my misunderstanding of Marxist philosophy and gleefully reminded the judges about all their arguments that I had missed in favor of arguing about something as menial as the foundational thinker upon which they had built their case.

I remember the creeping fear, the embarrassment, and the doubt that swept in and convinced me that I simply must not have the right picture of Marx. Clearly, they had read more broadly, understood more deeply than I, and so in the final rebuttal I abandoned the argument. The judges rendered their decision quickly after I finished my final speech, and each returned the same decision with the same reasoning. When the chair of the round asked me why I discarded my argument about Marx when I was clearly right, I did not have an answer then. But I do now.

I am still left with the sneaking suspicion that I may be making the same mistake that I did during that debate. I am half convinced that I should simply begin this chapter with bold statements about the transformative potential of the conclusions that I have reached in the context of this analysis represents too many days, too many hours, and too many Diet Cokes to even consider what could be a stronger conclusion. I have a feeling it would be the same kind of self-confident joy that I had then. But I think it would also be a different kind of mistake. And so, this admission seems the only way that I can honestly begin this final chapter of my dissertation. Instead of inviting that same sense of abandon and obsession that I still feel when thinking about some of the ideas that I present, I am choosing to end with this piece of self-reflection. I choose to end with the admission that I know these arguments, solutions, and theories to be imperfect. I choose to end by avoiding the more significant mistake I made during that debate. This is my way of looking up.

Boundaries

This process of reflection, then, should start with an accounting for the theoretical and practical limitations of the claims discussed in this dissertation and the methodological and analytic choices that define these boundaries. Regarding the overall structure and aims of this work, there are two clear boundaries to the claims advanced in this work. First, the overall theoretical framework of this piece does not lend itself to, nor does it claim to, assertions of optimizing or maximizing any practical ends from the policy recommendations contained herein. There are many reasons for this, but primary among them is the desire to move away from heuristics that center on promising the best possible outcome when making policy decisions. I can say without equivocation that the policy ideas advanced in this work will not lead to any maximal state of affairs because the entire purpose of this work is to account for the human and

social practices that define policymaking and render the search for perfection a moot point. But this is also not an admission of futility. The findings from these studies illustrated how such policies and approaches could create material and social benefit above and beyond the practices of the status quo.

Second, the studies that comprise this dissertation did not directly engage with the communicative practices that occurred on the floors of the Houses debating these policy changes, and so there must be some caution when interpreting the implications of these findings. In future, examining the organizational discourse that happens in congressional debates on policy could be a useful way of honing the potential for the ideas discussed in the previous chapters, however, lacking this analysis does not render these arguments moot. The debates recorded on C-SPAN and the *Congressional Record* are not the types of spontaneous displays of discursive sensemaking that a more idealistic perspectives on the legislature might envision. Arguably, they are as much a curated narrative of economic ongoings as is the news coverage analyzed in this study (Huber et al., 2022). In other words, although this dissertation did not explicitly analyze these policymaking discourses, the clear engagement of news media with the narratives of policymakers (at local, state, and federal levels) provides a foundation for the types of claims advanced in these studies. Nonetheless, because of these boundaries, this dissertation cannot speak to the social and organizational processes that occur within legislative bodies; instead, it speaks to the larger narrative, organizational processes of economics to which those bodies speak.

Next, regarding the analysis of news media economic organizing in study one, there are a few boundaries or limitations regarding the content of the news coverage itself that are significant. Put briefly, aspects of corporate influence over news outlets bound the claims of the

analysis presented in study one. First, corporate consolidation over media outlets vastly changed the climate for news production in the time between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 recession (see Fan, 2013; Smith, 2009; Winseck, 2008). This consolidation is significant because it shapes the possibility of comparisons between the two disruptive contexts. Data collection for this study did not include detail regarding the ownership and journalistic practices of each news source, and such data is generally tangential to the grand narrative analysis because those practices may shape the content of the coverage, but it is still a part of the organizational processes analyzed for the study.

Additionally, the implementation of the computational grand narrative analysis, as articulated in Chapter 3, raises questions regarding the boundaries of the claims made in study one. The combination of the methods in study one facilitated deep analysis of the narrative and organizational practices during the time of the Great Recession and the COVID-19 dynamics, but the analytic story told in the preceding chapters does not claim to be singular or definitive; the dynamics explored in this study are significant but partial interrogations of the economic narratives spinning, twinning with people's direct experiences, their stories of these phenomena. Computational grand narrative analysis allowed me to explore a subset of these narrative dynamics which are, subsequently, a subset of the economic sensemaking practices of news coverage. This is not a minimization of the impact of this analysis; it is an actualization.

Finally, regarding the second study, the use of Reddit data as means of tapping into individual stories of economic disruption requires accounting for the differences in the platform itself and the population of its users across the time gap between the two economic disruption contexts. In the interpretive process, this required teasing apart the narrative dynamics of economic sensemaking and those stemming from the changing Reddit landscape across which

those conversations were occurring. By no means was this analytic process perfect, and so the interpretations of the economic logics presented in study two are necessarily influenced by those changing landscapes.

In this way, the conclusions drawn from study two are bounded insofar as they reflect the sensemaking practices of specific communities of online users rather than some representative body that indicates the mood of the entire United States. Nonetheless, because of the engagement with politics and news in these communities, their voices are particularly salient when attempting to answer questions about how people make sense of economic ongoingings. Thus, even as they are not holistically representative, their ideas represent a relevant and insightful portion of the larger economic-social-political puzzle that this project begins unpacking.

Future Research

Considering the places that this work has taken me over the course of this past year, it is hard to condense the number of avenues for future research that I think will derive from this work. There have been so many different avenues for developing my interest, but the clearest place to begin articulating new directions would be to continue digging into the data that I have already collected for this study. As I acknowledge both in the analyses presented in the previous chapters and above, I would never claim to have provided a holistic or complete account of the stories detailed in the literal gigabytes of data that I collected for this dissertation.

The level of depth within each collection of news articles presented above is astounding. The topic modeling analysis that I conducted for this work aided significantly in drawing interesting conclusions and led me to discover a wealth of insightful, troubling, weird, and inspiring stories throughout the collection. One of the most rewarding pieces of that analysis has been exploring the newspapers from small towns and locales. As I read through many of them, I

took note of both their location and some of the important details related to the places and people these local newspapers spoke to and continue to speak to. On this level there is much more to analyze, especially in relation to the specific dynamics between rural and urban newspapers. Individuals often think about the difference between Wall Street and Main Street, but not every Main Street is Main Street U.S.A., all bunting and butter scented. Main Street looks different in each town, and there is much more depth to the dynamics of these stories that could possibly be represented in one analysis. To this end, applying new kinds of topic modeling to guide such an analysis would be a new place for advancing the qualitative integration with computational analysis and would build on the more recent work in communication studies that engages with geographic information systems software (Costantini & Thompson, 2022) and methods to design new types of analyses.

Additionally, working with the Reddit data through semantic network analysis provided a great wealth of connection and detail that was not fully plumbed. Expanding upon that analysis both in terms of semantic network analysis and other, more specific, contextual work could help to illuminate the connections between the individual sensemaking practices and some of the larger discourse, especially related to COVID-19 conspiracies or general political and economic philosophy, that could produce interesting and relevant insights into the ways that people generally make sense of the economic world around them, how they make their decisions, and what change they think could create a better world. As this work has demonstrated, the discourse on sites like Reddit are more than they might appear at first glance. When not directly engaging with academic ideas and theories, the people who choose to spend their leisure time reading news and discussing politics, art, and economics with both the like-minded and those with differing attitudes. This kind of discourse is not only a productive site for interrogating

communicative practice but also for working with, testing, and developing theory in new and interesting ways.

Another avenue for related research, linked to Study Two from this work, relates to further developing and creating tools for researchers to engage with social media data. As discussed in Appendix B, the PSWB that I designed and used to scrape data from Reddit for this study is a first step toward a more usable tool for communication social scientists to be able to quickly and easily scrape the data that they need for future research. Moreover, as perhaps best evidenced by the introduction to Study 2, there is a wealth of sensemaking and absurdism and irony that takes place online in memery and imagery that researchers often do not engage with in their work, because such data are not as easy to analyze or scrape through computational methods. However, given the recent developments in topic modeling with imagery (Tu et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2016) researchers can no longer reasonably claim to ignore their significance in communication and narrative practices online. There is a reason that (Ricoeur, 1983/1984) conceived of narrative emplotment as a memetic process. Although they are not theoretically equivalent there is significant potential for social scientific advancement when researchers begin to take those social practices into account.

Coda

Describing the devastation wrought by economic disruptions as a “series of lowercase tragedies” (Bird, 1966, p. xviii) is more than just an attempt at a humanizing moment, more than a reminder that the cost of the economic disruptions explored in this dissertation, the Great Recession and the COVID-19 Recession, impacts peoples’ lives in ways that often go unexplored. It is simultaneously a recognition that tragedy is only prophetic when people act as though there is no choice. At the center of the work presented in this dissertation is the ardent

belief and sincere hope that academics and policymakers can begin the labor of unpacking the practices of economic storytelling and work to reorganize, reimagine, and recreate these worlds as more than just the inevitabilities foretold by those who find the status quo quite profitable. This is not a kumbaya pipedream or utopian fantasy; this is an acknowledgement that the work of social and economic change is difficult but not impossible. After all, it would not be a tragedy if Orpheus had no way out of the underworld. This is a project that combines the theoretical, the practical, the aesthetic, and the economic to uncover the potential for change and story new paths for realizing such a vision. When people can begin to “see how the world could be in spite of the way that it is” (Mitchell, 2021, p. 108), then the great work can begin (Kushner, 1992/2013).

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APPENDIX A.

NEWS DATA SCRAPING TOOL

The Code

```
1  ##SetUp the Variables for the Search
2  filename=GreatRec_Crisis1_
3  curltext="curl -Z -c CookieJar.txt -b CookieJar.txt --parallel-max 250
   -o"
4  #In the docwebsite, include a \ to escape any ampersand that goes
   through a sed command
5  docwebsite="https://infoweb.ne
   wsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB\&docref=news/"
6  searchwebsite="https://infoweb.ne
   wsbank.com/apps/news/results?page=[1-
   101]&sort=YMD_date%3AD&p=AWNB&t=stp%3ANewspaper%21Newspaper/continen
   t%3ANorth%2BAmerica%21North%2BAmerica/country%3AUSA%21USA&maxresults
   =100&f=advanced&val-base-0=economy&fld-base-0=alltext&bln-base-
   1=and&val-base-1=03/08/2021-03/14/2021&fld-base-1=YMD_date"
7  cookiewebsite="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/results?page=0&so
   rt=YMD_date%3AD&p=AWNB&t=stp%3ANewspaper%21Newspaper/continent%3ANor
   th%2BAmerica%21North%2BAmerica/country%3AUSA%21USA&maxresults=100&f=
   advanced&val-base-0=economy&fld-base-0=alltext&bln-base-1=and&val-
   base-1=10/12/2008-10/18/2008&fld-base-1=YMD_date"
8  len=6800
9
10  mkdir "Search Pages"
11  cd "Search Pages"
12
13  echo $docwebsite
14  echo $searchwebsite
15
16  ##Generate CookieJar
17
18  curl -c CookieJar.txt -b CookieJar.txt -o "CookieGetter.txt"
   $cookiewebsite
19  rm CookieGetter.txt
20
21  ##Scrape Search Pages
22
23  curl -c CookieJar.txt -b CookieJar.txt -Z -o "Search_$filename#1.txt"
   "$searchwebsite"
24
25  ##Compile DocRefs
26
27  grep search-hits Search*.txt | grep 'docref="news/' | sed 's/^. *data-
   docref="news\\/' | sed 's/" data.*$/,' >> DocRefs.txt
28  grep , DocRefs.txt | tr -d '\n' >> DocRefsTemp.txt
```

```

29
30 ##CreateCommands
31 grep , DocRefsTemp.txt | sed -e "s/.\{$len\}/&\n/g" | sed 's/,,$//' >>
    CurlCommandTemp.txt
32 grep , CurlCommandTemp.txt | sed "s|^|docwebsite {|" | sed
    "s/^/'$filename#1.txt' /" | sed "s/^/$curltext /" | sed 's/$/}'/" >>
    CurlCommandTemp2.txt
33 grep curl CurlCommandTemp2.txt | sed 's/https/"https/' >>
    CurlCommandTemp3.txt
34 grep curl CurlCommandTemp3.txt | sed 's|news/ {|news/{' >>
    ArticleCurlCommand.txt
35 mv DocRefs.txt ..
36 mv ArticleCurlCommand.txt ..
37 mv CookieJar.txt ..
38
39 #CleanTempFiles
40 rm DocRefsTemp.txt
41 rm CurlCommandTemp.txt
42 rm CurlCommandTemp2.txt
43 rm CurlCommandTemp3.txt
44
45 #Navigate to Article Collection File
46 cd ..
47 mkdir "Article Collection"
48 mv ArticleCurlCommand.txt "Article Collection"
49 mv CookieJar.txt "Article Collection"
50 cd "Article Collection"
51
52 #Execute Scraping
53
54 bash ArticleCurlCommand.txt
55 mv ArticleCurlCommand.txt ..
56
57 #Evaluate Okb Files
58
59 #Cleanup For XML Transform
60 mv CookieJar.txt ..
61
62 #Convert to XML
63
64 #Begin Documents
65     echo "<documents>" > Corpus.xml
66
67 #For loop
68
69 for file in *.txt
70 do
71
72 #Function to Transform TXT 2 XML
73 echo "<record>" >> Corpus.xml
74 echo "<id> $file </id>" >> Corpus.xml
75 grep "DA - " "$file" | head -1 | sed 's/^[ \t]*$//' | sed 's/DA - //' |
    sed 's/_*$$//' | sed 's/^\<da>/' | sed 's/$/<\/da>/' >> Corpus.xml
76 grep "JF - " "$file" | head -1 | sed 's/^[ \t]*$//' | sed 's/JF - //' |
    sed 's/_*$$//' | sed 's/^\<jf>/' | sed 's/$/<\/jf>/' >> Corpus.xml
77 grep "TI - " "$file" | head -1 | sed 's/^[ \t]*$//' | sed 's/TI - //' |
    sed 's/_*$$//' | sed 's/^\<ti>/' | sed 's/$/<\/ti>/' >> Corpus.xml

```



```

78
79 echo "<full_text>" >> Corpus.xml
80 sed '1,/\Read News Document/d' "$file" | sed '1,/(BUTTON) Close!/d' |
    sed 's/(BUTTON) Close//' | sed '/^$/d' | sed 's/^[ \t]*//' | sed
    '/^$/d' | sed 's/&/ and /' | grep '<p>' | head -1 | sed 's/<p>/ /g'
    | sed 's/<br\/><br\/>/ /g' | sed 's/<\/p>/ /'| sed 's/<\/div>/ /' >>
    Corpus.xml
81 echo "</full_text>" >> Corpus.xml
82 echo "</record>" >> Corpus.xml
83 echo "$file complete"
84
85 done
86
87 #Close Documents
88
89     echo "</documents>" >> Corpus.xml

```

News Data Collection Code Notes and Usage

The code depicted in the above section is representative of the method that I used to collect data from the unnamed news aggregating service for Study One of this dissertation. Given the widespread use of news data in various parts of communication research, there are a few portions of this code that are noteworthy and useful for other researchers. However, before proceeding with a brief discussion of these pieces, the use of this scraping tool requires that researchers authenticate their access to the database through their IP. This means that most researchers will be able to use the tool if they are located on campus or are using a proxy server to access the database.

There are three main functions in this code. Once the researcher has input the URL for the first page of any database search, they must adjust the URL to include the number of pages of search results they wish to retrieve within brackets, as indicated in line 6 of the code above. This allows the curl function to scrape all pages of the search results in order to retrieve the document ID numbers for those articles with available full-text. Other than the pieces in lines two and three, which allow users to customize the naming of the articles and certain functions of the curl command that retrieves the document, this is the only piece of the code that users need to edit in order to scrape data from this particular database.

After the researcher has specified these elements of the search, the tool continues to the second phase of scraping, which takes the collected document IDs from the search results and collects a text-based version of the website. Finally, once all the data has been collected, the final portion of the script combines all of the relevant information from the documents. These elements include publication date, newspaper, location, title, and full article text. They are incorporated into an XML document that can be easily converted into an Excel file or read using other programs.

Overall, this specific tool itself is not worthy of further development into a more generally accessible tool, as it does not directly work with a publicly available API through this specific database tool. Instead, this is a workaround that circumvents the tedium of manual scraping, which is the database's preferred method of researcher interaction with their material. It is possible to customize this script to delay or automate searches over a longer period of time to avoid unfortunate and unproductive correspondence with the company that runs this particular news database.

In the case of this dissertation, as with many other communication and social scientific researchers' interactions with the news data collected by this database, the use and collection of articles using tools like the one presented in this Appendix is entirely within the Terms of Service of the database.³⁷ However, some companies artificially limit researchers' appropriate access of their service to approximately 100 articles an hour without any alternative other than a

³⁷ To prevent confusion regarding whether or not there are legal questions regarding the use of such a script.

research service that charges universities and researchers upwards of \$10,000. These research service fees are in addition to existing subscription fees for the database. Because of these restrictions in researchers' use of data in such a controlled and limited environment, researchers may not have the freedom to conduct many of the types of analysis presented in this dissertation. For those reasons, this Appendix documents some of the tools and workarounds that might be useful for avoiding this particularly troublesome aspect of data collection.

Ultimately, although developing this tool beyond its current state is inadvisable, I am hopeful that it can serve as model or guide for other researchers who aim to interact with data in similar ways. Moreover, I always recommend that researchers are diligent, scrupulous, and circumspect in operating according to the terms of service of any database. Any research activity that uses this script or is inspired by it in any way should maintain strict adherence to the terms of the legal agreements that govern their lawful and appropriate use of research services and databases to which they have access.

APPENDIX B.

THE PUSHSHIFT WRAPPER FOR BASH (PSWB)

An unanticipated outcome of this dissertation derived from the work necessary to collect data from the PushShift API (Baumgartner et al., 2020). The interface itself has a variety of wrappers, or pre-designed tools for crafting searchers, that researchers can use in a variety of programming languages. These can range from the Python PushShift API Wrapper (PSAW; Marx, 2020) to browser-based tools (e.g., <https://camas.github.io/reddit-search/>), each with their own uses and limitations.

Although I became familiar with Python for the conduct of the topic modeling analyses presented in this dissertation (further detail and explanation in Appendix C), the use of Python can serve as a technical barrier to many researchers who would otherwise use Reddit data from PushShift in their research. The language is fairly user-friendly for new users. However, the creation of virtual environments and the process of setting up integrated development environments for using Python can be daunting for many researchers who are unfamiliar with these techniques. Additionally, although they can be useful for brief examinations of the type of data one might expect from specific searches, web-based interfaces for the PushShift API are not designed to help researchers scrape the kind of data sets that are useful for in-depth social scientific analyses.

Given the shortcomings of these extant tools, the growing use of Reddit within communication research (Hintz & Betts, 2022), and the desire to make the creation of social media data sets more accessible for communication and other social scientific researchers, I

created an executable bash script that can be run natively on Mac and Linux computers and on Windows machines using the Windows Subsystem for Linux (WSL). The PushShift Wrapper for Bash (PSWB) is a light-weight script that researchers of varying expertise can easily use with very little programming knowledge to create three different types of social media data sets—posts, comments, or all—from Reddit.

The following sections of this Appendix discuss the PushShift data collection, illustrate its aims and use, and discuss its benefits and limitations for use in future communication research. Ultimately, the aim of this Appendix is threefold: (1) to note the motivations for the development of this particular tool; (2) to detail the methodological choices I made in the creation of the PSWB and discuss the motivations and implications of those choices; and (3) to discuss the overall operation of the PSWB and give examples and guidance for its use.

The Aims and Use of the PSWB

There are two central motivations for the creation of this tool for data gathering. First, the data retrievable on the PushShift are more detailed and can be searched more easily using various parameters than data that are available through the standard Reddit API and tools that use it (Rivera, 2022). Second, there are simple web tools that can provide certain aggregate information regarding available data for researchers. However, there are very few similar tools for researchers to easily create larger data sets for various types of analyses without some of the more rigorous processes involved in coding and using tools like the PSAW (Marx, 2020). With these two concerns in mind, I created the PSWB to allow researchers to interact with a standardized and simple text-based interface that should allow researchers of various skill levels to work with social media data from Reddit.

Throughout this process, I have also worked to keep the needs of researchers, particularly communication researchers, at the forefront of the design process. As Hintz and Betts (2022) indicated, one of the more serious downfalls of standard Reddit API tools, such as the `RedditExtractoR`, is that they cannot search by date and time. There are workarounds that allow researchers to limit their searches after collecting data. Even so, ensuring a complete and accurate data collection can be difficult using normal tools. When considering the needs of researchers who may be working with older data from earlier Reddit interactions, this need to insure complete and accurate data collection becomes even more challenging.

Moreover, the Reddit API enforces limits on the number of comments that can be retrieved for each post (currently, 500). This means that researchers who are hoping to capture some of the more complex dynamics of the social interactions that take place on larger threads and in more heavily populated communities (e.g., the `/r/Medicine` subreddit during the COVID-19 pandemic or the `/r/WallStreetBets` community during the GameStop short of January 2020) may be limited to the first comments on certain posts or the most popular comments. In both cases, these limitations significantly impact the types of data that researchers can access and, in turn, the types of inquiry they can conduct. In response, though the `PushShift` API has similar (and currently more stringent) limitations on data retrieval from its site (most queries are limited to retrieving 100 records), the ability to search the `PushShift` collection by date enables the `PSWB` to collect all of the comments made on posts (barring user requested deletion). Simply put, when researchers use the `PSWB`, the integration with the `PushShift` API (Baumgartner et al., 2020) ensures substantially more complete data retrieval than is available through tools that use the Reddit API.

Second, a text-based interface using command-line tools is no longer a norm of development and can itself be considered a minor barrier to using the PSWB. As a result, I have designed the tool to be easier to use for researchers without any training in programming. No coding knowledge is required to operate the PSWB or to retrieve data using the tool. At all points in using the tool, there are instructions that guide researchers through the process of collecting data while also offering an estimate of the data that will be collected when given certain search parameters. Combined, these two features reduce (a) the technical expertise required to scrape data using the tool *and* (b) the computational power required to use the tool.

In contrast to other tools for retrieving data, the PSWB uses rudimentary and long-standing packages that have been available on the Unix system dating back to the 1970s and originating in Bell Labs (Hauben & Hauben, 1997). The essential pieces of this tool are built on the `grep`, `sed`, and `curl` commands that, in turn, allow programs to select lines of text from documents; use regular expressions logic to alter and edit text lines; and transfer and retrieve data from websites through command-line operations. That these tools date back to the time of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) should not be read as an indictment or a limitation; instead, my use of these tools facilitated my creation of a simple, user-friendly, easily malleable, and widely accessible tool. It should also be noted that, while this tool may not be the fastest means of retrieving large swaths of data from the PushShift API, its speed is reasonable for most research applications and also ensures that users respect the query limits of the PushShift system. Bluntly, you could pull more data faster, but it would be extremely rude to other users. In this case, then, the moderate speed of the tool is a desirable feature and not a bug.

The PSWB, Function, and Breakdown

To facilitate a detailed discussion and analysis of the PSWB and its usage in this dissertation and other studies, I have presented all code for the wrapper in numbered lines below as it would appear in the executable `.sh` file. This code is the implementation of the PSWB at the time that I conducted the data collections presented in this dissertation's analyses. However, this is not the final code that other researchers should use for their own research. I have included the code below so that I can provide notation and reference to specific elements of the code and its development throughout this dissertation project that offer methodological transparency and clarity in usage. An updated and maintained version of this script is currently available at my academic website, on a page of resources for the collection and use of Reddit data in communication research (available at <https://www.tbetts.org/reddit>; Betts, 2022).

Overview of Functions

The code presented below has a few simple functions. It uses standard packages available to all bash in Unix systems and terminals (i.e., most computers). The central functions of this package are designed to establish parameters for a search of the PushShift API, provide a preliminary estimation of the amount of data that will be retrieved, confirm the search with researchers, execute the search, and arrange and export data in a JSON file that can be read on any text editor or imported into Microsoft Excel or other software for further manipulation, cleaning, and adjustment as necessary for research aims.

For the purposes of their searches, researchers using the PSWB can define four central parameters: keywords, subreddit, beginning time, and end time. Each of these parameters limits the data collected in certain ways, and each of them can be excluded to fit various research needs. The first two of these parameters, keyword and subreddit, operate much like other Reddit

data scraping tools and limit searches based on key terms that should be present in the collected data or limit the searches to specific subreddit communities. It is important to note that, in each of the cases here, the PSWB and the PushShift API are not explicitly designed to handle multiple search terms at a time in either parameter. If researchers aim to conduct a search across multiple keywords or subreddits, it is important that they do so across multiple scrapes using the tool, rather than by inputting multiple parameters into one search. Finally, unlike other tools for scraping Reddit data (i.e., the `RedditExtractoR` package for R; Rivera, 2022), the PushShift API and the PSWB allow for researchers to set a beginning and end time for their searches. This function allows researchers to specifically identify time stamps (down to the second using epoch or Unix time stamp³⁸) they wish to include or exclude from their retrieved data.

Given the structure of the data available through the PushShift API, the PSWB can perform three types of searches across these parameters: posts only, comments only, or posts and their comments. The first two of these options are similar. The option to scrape posts only allows researchers to scrape data relating to posts that match their set parameters. The data returned by this search (detailed in Table B.1) will provide researchers with a bevy of details related to the posts, its evaluation in the community, interactions with the post, the full-text of the post, author details, and more. Similarly, the comment only search returns details for comments that fit the parameters of the search regardless of content of the original post to which the comment was

³⁸ Unix or epoch timestamps are a common means of indicating time in computational settings. The literal interpretation of Unix or epoch time stamps is the number of seconds since midnight on January 1, 1970 in Coordinated Universal Time (UTC).

Table B.1. Summary of PSWB Data Retrieval (Posts)

PSWB Reddit Post Data			
Value	Type	Description	Example
author	string	Username of the original posting author	aioc
author_flair_text	string	string content of author flair	Verified Alex Ocasio NY-14
created_utc	integer	UTC epoch time stamp for post creation	1507820779
domain	string	Domain of a link shared with the original post	self.Political_Revolution
id	integer	Base-36 post id	75xkvr
is_crosspostable	boolean	Indicates if the post can be placed on multiple subreddits at once	true
is_original_content	boolean	Indicates if the author marked the post as original content	
is_self	boolean	indicates if the post is text only	true
is_video	boolean	Indicates if the post includes video	false
media_only	boolean	Indicates if the post does not include text	
num_comments	integer	Number of comments on original post	267
over_18	boolean	Indicates if the author marked the post NSFW	False
permalink	string	Permanent link to the Reddit post	r/Political_Revolution/comments/75xkvr/my_family_nearly_lost_it_all_in_the_2008/
pinned	boolean	Indicates if the post was pinned on the subreddit	false
score	integer	Sum of all upvotes and downvotes	2047
selftext	string	The body of text included in the original post	I\u2019m Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and I\u2019m running for New York\u2019s 14th congressional district seat...

Table B.1 (Continued) Summary of PSWB Data Retrieval (Posts)

Value	Type	Description	Example
spoiler	boolean	Indicates if the user included a spoiler feature to hide content from users until clicked	false
stickied	boolean	Indicates if the post is pinned in a subreddit	false
subreddit	string	Subreddit name	Political_Revolution
subreddit_subscribers	integer	Number of Reddit accounts subscribed to the subreddit at the time of the post	
subreddit_type	string	Indicates if the subreddit is private or public	public
thumbnail	string	Indicates the type of content users preview before selecting the post	self
title	string	Title of the original post	My family nearly lost it all in the 2008 financial crisis...
url	string	URL for any links or images attached to the post or to the original post	https://www.reddit.com/r/Political_Revolution/comments/75xkvr/my_family_nearly_lost_it_all_in_the_2008/

replying (details on comment characteristics retrieved are in Table B.2). In this way, the data available through the PushShift API are unlike that provided by the Reddit API, which, until recently, only allowed researchers to search for keywords across posts or to identify and scrape specific comments by their linking post. The additional capabilities of the PushShift API, which are still under development, are another motivating force for developing this tool.

The final option for researchers using PSWB is to retrieve both posts and their comments. This option is different from the comments only search in that the comments retrieved by this tool do not necessarily fit any of the criteria established in the search parameters. Effectively, by retrieving all posts and their comments, researchers are conducting a multi-step process beginning with (1) a posts-only search and (2) retrieving all of the available comment data

attached to those posts regardless of whether or not those comments mention the original search criteria or were made during any specified time period in the parameters for the search. To use an example from this work, using the all posts and comments search from the PSWB for the search term “market” on the subreddit “/r/economics” during the COVID-19 crisis period of March 9 to March 19, 2020 collected a total of 14, 984 posts and 456,614 comments. However, for this type of search the PSWB retrieved a list of al

wrapper uses the API tool to identify all the comments attached to those posts, whether or not they explicitly included the term market or were posted before March 19, 2020.

Although it may be technically possible to filter comments based on their inclusion of the original search term, implementing this procedure in the PSWB would appreciably slow down the collection of comment data as part of these searches. Thus, depending on researchers aims, it is more expedient and efficient to filter comments retrieved *after* their collection through the PSWB. Further, regarding the collection of comments that may not include the original search term, for much of social science research, this is a key point for this type of data collection.

Whether or not the text of the comments include the original search term, by virtue of the act of posting the comment on a submission, the commenting user determined that their contribution to the ongoing conversation was salient. More simply, that a user replied to a post that includes the original search term is itself a social act that makes the content of that comment relevant to the ongoing conversations evolving in those posts. Just like an ethnographer studying the organizational dynamics of a small business would not disregard conversations that were not explicitly related to business operations, social media inquiry can capture the more complex dynamics of online organizing and social interaction by accounting for conversations that, at first glance, may appear to be irrelevant to the main topic of the inquiry. There are certainly cases

Table B.2. Summary of PSWB Data Retrieval (Comments)

PSWB Reddit Comment Data			
Value	Type	Description	Example
author	string	Username of the original posting author	aioc
author_flair_text	string	string content of author flair	Verified Alex Ocasio NY-14 Section 1. [Artificial Entities Such as Corporations Do Not Have Constitutional Rights]...
body	string	Content of the comment	
created_utc	integer	UTC epoch time stamp for post creation	1507911697
id	integer	Base-36 post id	dobhotp
link_id	integer	Base-10 id for original post	433228023
parent_id	integer	Base-10 id for comment or post for reply	29768434445
score	integer	Sum of all upvotes and downvotes	1
stickied	boolean	indicates if the comment is sticked in the post thread	False
subreddit	string	Subreddit name	Political_Revolution

where tangential conversations might distract from certain studies, but I argue that, especially in the context of the work presented in this dissertation, any conversational dynamic that emerges from salient posts is more helpful to uncovering the complex interactions of online organizing than they are obfuscatory.

The Code

```
1      #!/bin/bash
2      ##PushShiftAPI BashWrapper
3      ##Timothy Betts
4      #1: User defines the search parameters
5
6      function printname {
7      clear
```

```

8      echo
9      echo -e "====B====W===="
10     echo -e "This is the PushShift API Bash Wrapper"
11     echo -e "    created by Timothy Betts    "
12     echo -e "    --Apr 20, 2022--    "
13     echo -e "====W====B===="
14     echo
15     }
16
17     #for underlining
18     sgr=`tput sgr0`
19     smul=`tput smul`
20     function define_search {
21     printname
22     echo "Create the parameters for your search here."
23     echo "Type ${smul}NA${sgr} for any non-applicable parameters."
24     echo "Press enter once you have completed each parameter."
25     echo
26     read -e -p "Enter the keyword you wish to search: " search_term
27     read -e -p "Enter the subreddit you wish to search: " search_subr
28     read -e -p "Enter the beginning date for your search (mm/dd/yy): "
29     search_beg
30     read -e -p "Enter the end date for your search (mm/dd/yy): "
31     search_end
32     echo
33     echo "The search will operate in GMT unless adjusted."
34     echo "Enter number of hours to adjust or type ${smul}0${sgr} for
35     GMT."
36     read -e -p "Timezone Adjustment: " epoch_man_adjust
37
38     #1.1: Convert dates into epoch time
39     search_beg_epoch=$(date -j -u -f '%m/%d/%y' +%s $echo
40     $search_beg)
41     search_end_epoch=$(date -j -u -f '%m/%d/%y' +%s $search_end)
42     epoch_adjust=$((search_beg_epoch % 86400))
43     epoch_man_adjust=$((epoch_man_adjust * 3600))
44     search_beg_epoch=$((search_beg_epoch - epoch_adjust +
45     epoch_man_adjust))
46     search_end_epoch=$((search_end_epoch - epoch_adjust + 86399 +
47     epoch_man_adjust))
48     check_epoch_beg=$(date -r $search_beg_epoch)
49     check_epoch_end=$(date -r $search_end_epoch)
50
51     #1.2 Confirm details
52     printname
53     echo "You have defined the following parameters:"
54     echo "Search Term: $search_term"
55     echo "Subreddit: $search_subr"
56     echo
57     if [ $search_beg != NA ]; then
58     echo "The search will operate from $search_beg_epoch to
59     $search_end_epoch"
60     echo "or $check_epoch_beg to $check_epoch_end"
61     fi
62     echo "Type ${smul}yes${sgr} if this is correct. Otherwise, type
63     ${smul}no${sgr}."
64     read -e -p "Confirm: " search_confirm

```

```

57     if [ $search_confirm != yes ]; then
58     printname
59     echo "Type ${smul}yes${sgr} if you would like to adjust the dates
manually."
60     echo "Or type ${smul}no${sgr}."
61     read -e -p "Manual dates? " man_dates
62     if [ $man_dates = yes ]; then
63     printname
64     echo "Manual Date Configuration"
65     echo
66     echo "Manual dates must be set using epoch time."
67     read -e -p "Enter the beginning epoch date for your search: "
search_beg_epoch
68     read -e -p "Enter the end epoch date for your search: "
search_end_epoch
69     else
70     printname
71     echo "Type ${smul}yes${sgr} if you would like to restart your
search."
72     echo "Type ${smul}no${sgr} if you would like to continue with
your search."
73     read -e -p "Confirm: " restart_confirm
74     fi
75     fi
76     }
77
78     #1.3 Run the define_search command
79     restart_confirm=0
80     define_search
81     while [ $restart_confirm = yes ]; do
82     restart_confirm=0
83     define_search
84     done
85
86     #2: Construct and Run the First Search
87     function preliminary_results {
88     preliminary_confirm=0
89     preliminary_confirm_2="confirm"
90     preliminary_confirm_3="confirm"
91     PushShift_API_Post_URL="https://api.PushShift/reddit/search/su
bmission/?fields=author,author_flair_text,created_utc,domain,id,i
s_crosspostable,is_original_content,is_self,is_video,media_only,n
um_comments,over_18,permalink,pinned,score,selftext,spoiler,stick
ied,subreddit,subreddit_subscribers,subreddit_type,thumbnail,titl
e,url"
92     PushShift_API_Comment_URL="https://api.PushShift/reddit/search
/comment/?fields=author,author_flair_text,body,created_utc,id,lin
k_id,parent_id,score,stickied,subreddit"
93     Preliminary_PushShift_API_Post_URL="https://api.PushShift/redd
it/search/submission/?metadata=true"
94     Preliminary_PushShift_API_Comment_URL="https://api.PushShift/r
edit/search/comment/?metadata=true"
95
96     if [ $search_term != NA ]; then
97     search_term_q="q="$search_term
98     fi
99

```

```

100     if [ $search_subr != NA ]; then
101         search_subr_q="&subreddit="$search_subr
102     fi
103
104     if [ $search_beg != NA ]; then
105         search_beg_q="&after="$search_beg_epoch
106     fi
107
108     if [ $search_end != NA ]; then
109         search_end_q="&before="$search_end_epoch
110     fi
111
112     activatedate=$(date +%s)
113     title="$search_term" on "$search_subr" , "$activatedate"
114     file_title=$search_term_"$activatedate
115
116     preliminary_post_search_url=$Preliminary_PushShift_API_Post_URL$s
117     earch_term_q$search_subr_q$search_beg_q$search_end_q
118     preliminary_comment_search_url=$Preliminary_PushShift_API_Comment
119     _URL$search_term_q$search_subr_q$search_beg_q$search_end_q
120     printname
121     echo "*****"
122     echo "FETCHING PRELIMINARY RESULTS"
123     echo "*****"
124     curl -s $preliminary_post_search_url > Preliminary.txt
125     curl -s $preliminary_comment_search_url > PreliminaryComment.txt
126     printname
127     echo "You have defined the following parameters:"
128     echo
129     echo "Search Term: $search_term"
130     echo "Subreddit: $search_subr"
131     if [ $search_beg != NA ]; then
132         echo "Time: $search_beg to $search_end"
133     fi
134     echo
135     total_results_comments=$(grep total_results
136     PreliminaryComment.txt | sed 's/^.*: //' )
137     total_results_posts=$(grep total_results Preliminary.txt | sed
138     's/^.*: //' )
139
140
141     rm Preliminary.txt
142     rm PreliminaryComment.txt
143 }
144
145 #2.1 Function to confirm preliminary results
146 function confirm_prelim {
147     echo "There are $total_results_posts posts in this search."
148     echo "There are $total_results_comments individual comments in
149     this search. "
150     echo
151     echo "Type ${smul}yes${sgr} to confirm these preliminary results
152     or "
153     echo "Type ${smul}no${sgr} to restart the search process."
154     echo
155     read -e -p "Confirm: " preliminary_confirm

```



```

151 if [ $preliminary_confirm = "no" ]; then
152     printname
153     preliminary_confirm="yes"
154     echo "Type ${smul}restart${sgr} to restart the search process."
155     echo "Type ${smul}confirm${sgr} to continue with the current
search."
156     read -e -p "Confirm: " preliminary_confirm_2
157 fi
158
159 if [ $preliminary_confirm != "yes" ]; then
160     printname
161     echo "That is not a valid entry."
162     confirm_prelim
163 fi
164
165 if [ $preliminary_confirm_2 = "restart" ]; then
166     define_search
167     preliminary_results
168     confirm_prelim
169 fi
170
171 if [ $preliminary_confirm_2 != "confirm" ]; then
172     printname
173     echo "That is not a valid entry."
174     confirm_prelim
175 fi
176 }
177
178 preliminary_results
179 confirm_prelim
180
181 #3: ALL SCRAPING COMMANDS
182 function data_scrape_selection {
183     printname
184     echo "Given these $total_results_posts posts and
$total_results_comments individual comments, you have three
options."
185     echo
186     echo "Enter ${smul}posts${sgr} to only collect these posts."
187     echo "Enter ${smul}all${sgr} to collect these posts and comments
on those posts."
188     echo
189     echo "Enter ${smul}comments${sgr} to only collect the comments
including your search terms."
190     echo "    Note: These comments are retrieved individually,
irrespective of posts."
191     echo
192     read -e -p "Data selection: " data_selection
193 }
194
195 #3.1: API LIMIT ADJUSTABLE
196
197 #3.1.1: api limit as currently defined by PushShift
198 api_limit=100
199 size_q="\&size="$api_limit
200

```

```

201 #3.1.2: confidence here represents the proportion of the
    api_limit used to create search intervals later
202 #must be expressed as a fraction here because of bash limitations
203 confidence_numerator=3
204 confidence_denominator=4
205
206 #3.1.3: len is going to represent the number of requests sent at
    once, default 5; before and after pair character lengths are 36
207 len=180
208 curlcommand='curl -Z -s -o "#1.txt" --retry 40 "'
209
210 #3.2: Scraping Before and After Time Codes
211 #3.2.1 Before and After for Posts
212 function beforeandafterposts {
213
214     rm BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
215     time_gap=$((search_end_epoch - search_beg_epoch))
216     num_days=$((time_gap / 86400 ))
217     delimiter=$((api_limit * confidence_numerator /
    confidence_denominator))
218     intervals=$((total_results_posts / delimiter) - 1))
219     if [ $intervals -lt 1 ]; then intervals=1; fi
220
221 #3.2.1.1: This confirms that the number of search intervals is at
    least 2 per/day
222     if [ $intervals -lt $num_days ] && [ $total_results_posts -gt
    $api_limit ]; then intervals=$num_days; fi
223     time_interval=$((time_gap / intervals))
224     current_interval=1
225     activebefore=$((search_beg_epoch - 1))
226     while [ $current_interval -le $intervals ]; do
227         activeafter=$((activebefore + 1))
228         activebefore=$((activeafter + time_interval))
229         activepair="&after="$activeafter"&before="$activebefore","
230         echo $activepair >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
231         current_interval=$((current_interval + 1))
232     done
233
234 #3.2.1.1.1: articulate last pair (based on the end date)
235     if [ $activebefore != $search_end_epoch ]; then
236         activeafter=$((activebefore + 1))
237         activebefore=$search_end_epoch
238         activepair="&after="$activeafter"&before="$activebefore","
239         echo $activepair >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
240     fi
241 }
242
243 function beforeandaftercomments {
244     rm BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
245     time_gap=$((search_end_epoch - search_beg_epoch))
246     num_days=$((time_gap / 432000 ))
247     delimiter=$((api_limit * confidence_numerator /
    confidence_denominator))
248     intervals=$((total_results_comments / delimiter) - 1))
249     if [ $intervals -lt 1 ]; then intervals=1; fi
250

```

```

251     #3.2.1.1: This confirms that the number of search intervals is
at least 2 per/day
252     if [ $intervals -lt $num_days ] && [ $total_results_comments -
gt $api_limit ]; then intervals=$num_days; fi
253     time_interval=$((time_gap / intervals))
254     current_interval=1
255     activebefore=$((search_beg_epoch - 1))
256
257     while [ $current_interval -le $intervals ]; do
258     activeafter=$((activebefore + 1))
259     activebefore=$((activeafter + time_interval))
260     activepair="&after=\"$activeafter"&before=\"$activebefore","
261     echo $activepair >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
262     current_interval=$((current_interval +1))
263     done
264
265     #3.2.1.1: articulate last pair (based on the end date)
266     if [ $activebefore != $search_end_epoch ]; then
267     activeafter=$((activebefore + 1))
268     activebefore=$search_end_epoch
269     activepair="&after=\"$activeafter"&before=\"$activebefore","
270     echo $activepair >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
271     fi
272 }
273
274 #4: FUNCTIONS FOR SCRAPING
275 #4.0.1: Function to go back to the WorkingDir
276 function gobackposts {
277     printname
278     echo **Performing Final Scrape**
279     mv BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt ..
280     cd ..
281     rm -r WorkingDir
282     mkdir WorkingDir
283     mv BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt WorkingDir
284     cd WorkingDir
285     scrape_posts
286 }
287
288 function gobackcomments {
289     printname
290     echo **Performing Final Scrape**
291     mv BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt ..
292     cd ..
293     rm -r WorkingDir
294     mkdir WorkingDir
295     mv BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt WorkingDir
296     cd WorkingDir
297     scrape_comments
298 }
299
300 #4.0: Check the Scrapes for problems
301 function check_scrape {
302     printname
303     echo **CHECKING SCRAPE**
304     initialsrapeconducted=1
305     find . "*.txt" -size 18c -delete

```

```

306     for file in *.txt ; do
307         currenttestpostnum=$(grep -c "author" $file)
308         if [ $currenttestpostnum -ge $(( $api_limit - 10 )) ]; then
309             echo $file | sed 's/^.*&after/after/' | sed 's/.txt.*$//' >
CurrentPair.txt
310             rm $file
311             check_currentafter=$(grep after CurrentPair.txt | sed
's/^.*&after=//' | sed 's/&before.*$//')
312             check_currentbefore=$(grep before CurrentPair.txt | sed
's/^.*&before=//')
313             check_gap=$((check_currentbefore - check_currentafter)/5)
314             echo
"&after="$check_currentafter"&before="$((($check_currentafter +
$check_gap))", " >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
315             echo "&after="$((($check_currentafter + $check_gap * 1 +
1))"&before="$((($check_currentafter + $check_gap * 1 + 1) +
$check_gap))", " >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
316             echo "&after="$((($check_currentafter + $check_gap * 2 +
2))"&before="$((($check_currentafter + $check_gap * 2 + 2) +
$check_gap))", " >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
317             echo "&after="$((($check_currentafter + $check_gap * 3 +
3))"&before="$((($check_currentafter + $check_gap * 3 + 3) +
$check_gap))", " >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
318             echo "&after="$((($check_currentafter + $check_gap * 4 +
4))"&before="$check_currentbefore", " >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
319             redocount=1
320             fi
321         done
322         emptycount=$(find . -size 0c | wc -l)
323         find . -size 0c | sed 's/^.*&after/&after/' | sed
's/.txt.*$//,' >> BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt
324         rm CurrentPair.txt
325     }
326
327
328     #4.1: Scrape posts
329     function scrape_posts {
330         printname
331         echo "***SCRAPING POSTS***"
332
333         #4.1.1 Call B&A pair
334         if [ $initialscrapeconducted = 0 ]; then beforeandafterposts; fi
335
336         #4.1.1.1: Construct Searches with B&A pairs
337         grep before BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt | tr -d '\n' | sed -e
"s/.\{$len\}/&\n/g" | sed 's/^\{/ | sed 's/,,$/}'/' >
CurlCommand.txt
338
339         if [ $search_subr != NA ]; then
340             search_subr_q="\&subreddit="$search_subr
341             fi
342             postcurl=$curlcommand$PushShift_API_Post_URL"\&"$search_term_q$search_subr_q
arch_subr_q$search_subr_q
343             echo $postcurl
344             grep before CurlCommand.txt | sed "s|^|$postcurl|" >
PostCollection.txt
345             mv PostCollection.txt ..

```

```

346 cd ..
347 mkdir "Post Collection"
348 mv PostCollection.txt "Post Collection"
349 cd "Post Collection"
350 printname
351 echo "***SCRAPING POSTS***"
352 bash PostCollection.txt
353 printname
354 mv "PostCollection.txt" ..
355
356 #4.1.3: Combine Data into Single JSON file
357 echo **INITIAL SCRAPE COMPLETED**
358 #4.1.4: Make all output files txt files
359 checksum=$(grep -c "url" *.txt | sed 's:// /' | awk -v
awkvar="$(($api_limit - 10))" '$2>awkvar' | wc -l)
360 if [ $checksum != 0 ] ; then check_scrape; fi
361 if [ $redocount -eq 1 ] ; then redocount=0; gobackposts; fi
362 }
363
364 function finish_post_scrape {
365     printname
366     echo **COMPILING**
367
368     #4.1.5: Remove preface to each file
369     sed -i -e 1,2d *.txt
370
371     echo '{"data": [' >> PostFile.json
372
373     for file in *.txt; do
374         sed '$d' $file | sed '$d' | sed '$d'>> PostFile.json
375         echo '},' >> PostFile.json
376     done
377
378     echo "]" >> PostFile.json
379     printname
380     #4.1.6: Move JSON of all posts to the Main Directory
381     mv PostFile.json ..
382     cd ..
383     rm -r "Post Collection"
384 }
385 #4.2: Scrape Comments
386 function scrape_comments {
387     #4.2.2: Call Before and After
388     printname
389     if [ $initialscrapeconducted = 0 ]; then
beforeandaftercomments; fi
390     #4.2.3: Construct Searches
391     grep before BeforeAndAfterPairs.txt | tr -d '\n' | sed -e
"s/.\{$len\}/&\n/g" | sed 's/^/{/' | sed 's/,,$/}'/' >
392     CurlCommand.txt
393
394     if [ $search_subr != NA ]; then
395         search_subr_q="\&subreddit="$search_subr
396         fi
397     commentcurl=$curlcommand$PushShift_API_Comment_URL"\&"$search_ter
m_q$search_subr_q$size_q

```

```

398     echo $postcurl
399
400     grep before CurlCommand.txt | sed "s|^|${commentcurl}|" >
commentCollection.txt
401     mv commentCollection.txt ..
402     cd ..
403     mkdir "Comment Collection"
404     mv commentCollection.txt "Comment Collection"
405     cd "Comment Collection"
406     printname
407     echo "****SCRAPING COMMENTS****"
408     bash commentCollection.txt
409     printname
410     mv "commentCollection.txt" ..
411
412     echo **INITIAL SCRAPE COMPLETED**
413     #4.1.4: Make all output files txt files
414     checksum=$(grep -c "created_utc" *.txt | sed 's:// //' | awk -v
awkvar="$((${api_limit} - 10))" '$2>awkvar' | wc -l)
415     if [ $checksum != 0 ] ; then check_scrape; fi
416     if [ $redocount -eq 1 ] ; then redocount=0; gobackcomments; fi
417 }
418
419 function finish_comment_scrape {
420     printname
421     echo **COMPILING**
422
423     #4.2.5: Remove preface to each file
424     sed -i -e 1,2d *.txt
425     echo '{"data": [' >> CommentFile.json
426     for file in *.txt; do
427         sed '$d' $file | sed '$d' | sed '$d'>> CommentFile.json
428         echo '},' >> CommentFile.json
429     done
430     sed -i -e '$d' CommentFile.json
431     sed -i -e '$d' CommentFile.json
432     echo "]]]" >> CommentFile.json
433     printname
434
435     #4.2.6: Move JSON of all comments to the Main Directory
436     mv CommentFile.json ..
437     cd ..
438     rm -r "Comment Collection"
439     rm "commentcollection.txt"
440 }
441
442 #4.3: Scrape Posts and All Subsequent COMMENTS
443 function scrape_all {
444     #4.3.1: Call and execute Post Scraping
445     printname
446     scrape_posts
447     finish_post_scrape
448     cp PostFile.json WorkingDir
449     cd WorkingDir
450
451     #4.3.2: Collect and Organize the Post IDs

```

```

452     grep -B 1 "is_crosspostable" PostFile.json | grep '"id":' | sed
's/^.*: "/" | sed 's/",$/,/' > SubmissionIDs.txt
453     grep 'num_comments':" PostFile.json | sed 's/^.*: "/" | sed
's/",$/,/' > CommNums.txt
454     awk '{s+=\$1} END {print s}' CommNums.txt > CommNumber.txt
455     paste SubmissionIDs.txt CommNums.txt > IDandComments.txt
456     awk '$2>0' IDandComments.txt | sed 's/,.*$,/' >
PostIDsWithComments.txt
457     grep -c , PostIDsWithComments.txt >> CommNumber.txt
458     mv CommNumber.txt ..
459     mv PostIDsWithComments.txt ..
460     rm SubmissionIDs.txt
461     rm CommNums.txt
462
463 #4.3.3: Eliminate 0 comment POSTS and separate posts with fewer
than 20 comments and fewer than 100 comments
464     awk '$2>100' IDandComments.txt | sed 's/,.*$,/' | tr -d '\n' >
ScrapePost100IDs.txt
465     awk '50<$2' IDandComments.txt | awk '101>$2' | sed 's/,.*$,/'
| tr -d '\n' | sed 's/,$/,/' | sed 's/,/\n/1; P; D' >
SimpleScrape.txt
466     echo >> SimpleScrape.txt
467     awk '20<$2' IDandComments.txt | awk '51>$2' | sed 's/,.*$,/' |
tr -d '\n' | sed 's/,$/,/' | sed 's/,/\n/2; P; D' >>
SimpleScrape.txt
468     echo >> SimpleScrape.txt
469     awk '10<$2' IDandComments.txt | awk '21>$2' | sed 's/,.*$,/' |
tr -d '\n' | sed 's/,$/,/' | sed 's/,/\n/5; P; D' >>
SimpleScrape.txt
470     e echo >> SimpleScrape.txt
471     awk '11>$2' IDandComments.txt | sed 's/,.*$,/' | tr -d '\n' |
sed 's/,$/,/' | sed 's/,/\n/10; P; D' >> SimpleScrape.txt
472     echo >> SimpleScrape.txt
473     sed '/^[[[:space:]]*$/d' SimpleScrape.txt > SimpleScrape1.txt
474     mv IDandComments.txt ..
475
476 #4.3.3.1: Quick Scrape Posts with fewer than 100 Comments'
477     altcurlcommand='curl -Z -s --retry 40 '
478     SimplePostsAPIURL=$PushShift_API_Comment_URL"&"size="$api_limit
"&link_id="
479     sed "s|^|${SimplePostsAPIURL}|" SimpleScrape1.txt >
SimpleScrape2.txt
480     cat -n SimpleScrape2.txt | sed 's/\t/' | sed "s/^/-o
'SimpleFile/" | sed "s|^|${altcurlcommand}|" | sed "s/https/.txt"
https/" | sed 's/https/"https/' | sed 's/$/"/' | sed
's/SimpleFile /SimpleFile/' | sed 's/SimpleFile /SimpleFile/' >
PostCommentSimpleCurl.txt
481
482 #4.3.4: Organize Scraping of the ScrapePostIDs
483 #Given that each of the post IDs is separated by commas, this
command begins by inserting a line break every 6 commas to divide
things into workable commands
484     sed 's/,/\n/6; P; D' ScrapePost100IDs.txt | sed 's/,$/,/' | sed
's/^/{/' | sed 's/$/}"/' > ScrapePost.txt
485     rm ScrapePost100IDs.txt
486     PushShift_API_PostComment_URL='https://api.PushShift/reddit/su
bmission/comment_ids/'

```

```

487
488 postcommentcurlcommand=$curlcommand$PushShift_API_PostComment_URL
    grep , ScrapePost.txt | sed "s|^|${postcommentcurlcommand}|" >
    PostCommentCurlCommand.txt
489
490 #4.3.5: Organize File Structure to Collect Comments
491 mv PostCommentCurlCommand.txt ..
492 mv PostCommentSimpleCurl.txt ..
493 cd ..
494 mkdir PostCommentCollection
495 mv PostCommentCurlCommand.txt PostCommentCollection
496 mv PostCommentSimpleCurl.txt PostCommentCollection
497 cd PostCommentCollection
498
499 #4.3.6: Scrape the Comments for the Posts
500 printname
501 echo "****SCRAPING COMMENTS****"
502 mkdir SimpleCurl
503 mv PostCommentSimpleCurl.txt SimpleCurl
504 cd SimpleCurl
505 bash PostCommentSimpleCurl.txt
506 rm PostCommentSimpleCurl.txt
507 cd .. #Back to the PostCommentCollection file
508 bash PostCommentCurlCommand.txt
509 rm PostCommentCurlCommand.txt
510
511 #4.3.7: Prepare Scrape by Comment IDs
512 #Move all outputs to single file
513 for file in *.txt; do
514     cat $file >> CommentOutputs.txt
515 done
516 printname
517 altcurlcommand='curl -Z -s --retry 40 '
518 grep -v "{" CommentOutputs.txt | grep -v "}" | grep -v "\[" |
grep -v "\]" | sed 's/,,$//'| sed 's//g'| sed 's/$/,/' | tr -d
' \t'| tr -d '\n' | sed 's/,/\n/250; P; D' > CommentIDs.txt
519 sed "s|^|${PushShift_API_Comment_URL}&ids=|" CommentIDs.txt |
sed 's/$/,/' > CommentTextURL.txt
520 cat -n CommentTextURL.txt | sed 's/\t//'| sed "s/^ /-o
'File/" | sed "s|^|${altcurlcommand}|" | sed "s/https/.txt" https/"
| sed 's/https/"https/' > CommentTextCurl.txt
521 bash CommentTextCurl.txt
522 rm CommentIDs.txt
523 rm CommentOutputs.txt
524 rm CommentTextCurl.txt
525 rm CommentTextURL.txt
526
527 #4.3.8: Move to a JSON File
528 printname
529 ls | grep -v File | xargs rm
530 cd SimpleCurl
531 mv *.txt ..
532 cd ..
533 sed -i -e 1,2d *.txt
534 rm *.txt-e
535 echo '{"data": [' >> CommentFile.json
536

```



```

537     for file in *.txt; do
538         echo $file
539         sed '$d' $file | sed '$d' | sed '$d' >> CommentFile.json
540         echo '},' >> CommentFile.json
541     done
542
543     printname
544     sed -i -e '$d' CommentFile.json
545     echo "}}}" >> CommentFile.json
546
547 #4.3.9: File Clean Up
548 mv CommentFile.json ..
549 cd ..
550 rm -r PostCommentCollection
551 }
552
553 #5: Execute the Scraping
554 data_selection=0
555 while [ $data_selection != all ] && [ $data_selection != comments
556 ] && [ $data_selection != posts ]; do
557     data_scrape_selection
558 done
559 initialsscrapeconducted=0
560
561 #5.1 Set Up File Structure
562 mkdir $file_title
563 cd $file_title
564 mkdir WorkingDir
565 cd WorkingDir
566
567 #Choose Appropriate Command
568 if [ $data_selection = "posts" ]; then scrape_posts;
569 finish_post_scrape; fi
570 if [ $data_selection = "comments" ]; then scrape_comments;
571 finish_comment_scrape; fi
572 if [ $data_selection = "all" ]; then
573     scrape_all
574     echo $(grep -c "all_awardings" CommentFile.json) > tmp.txt
575     echo $(grep -c ", " PostIDsWithComments.txt) >> tmp.txt
576     paste CommNumber.txt tmp.txt > CompletionStats.txt
577     rm CommNumber.txt
578     rm PostIDsWithComments.txt
579     rm tmp.txt
580 fi
581
582 #7: File Cleanup
583 rm -r WorkingDir
584 rm PostCollection.txt
585 printname
586 echo "====PROCESS====COMPLETE===="
587 echo "view JSON File in $file_title"
588 echo "===="

```

PSWB Mechanics and Interactions with PushShift API

There are various important aspects of the code presented above that illustrate its approach to collecting data from the PushShift API and help contextualize certain methodological implications of its function and limitations for social scientific research. This section highlights three specific aspects of the PSWB and the mechanisms that it uses to interact with the PushShift API: (1) the time-interval search algorithm, (2) the search-check function, and (3) the “all” post-and-comments search function. By detailing the operation of these three specific functions, I aim to highlight the computational differences between this scraping mechanism and others *and* to articulate the methodological implications of those differences.

The Time-Interval Algorithm

First, the main limitation for any interface with the PushShift API is the restriction on the number of results that can be returned with a single query. Currently, the limitation for both post and comment queries is 100 results. In other words, although users can easily construct individual searches using the API’s URL, researchers will only be able to collect 100 results. This limiting ability necessitates the use of some mechanism to create and execute multiple queries from original parameters. The easiest mechanism, and the most common, is one that retrieves an initial collection using the original search parameters with results returned in ascending date order. From the returned results, scraping tools then identify the most recent time stamp and adjust the date parameters to search for posts that occurred after the most recent post. The process then continues until there are fewer results retrieved than the API retrieval limit.

There are three central limitations to this method: (1) it is slow because it necessitates adjustments and calculations between the execution of each individual query; (2) it is less robust to errors with retrieving data from the API; and (3) it either produces duplicate results or can

exclude certain records. Whereas the first problem is a concern for researchers who are interested in gathering larger data sets, as mentioned previously, the speed of data collection is only a minor concern. The second limitation to these procedures, however, is a significant problem for gathering larger data sets. Because the execution of any query other than the initial query is dependent on the successful retrieval of the previous results, this mechanism can be stalled or broken when errors occur with data retrieval on certain queries. Finally, because items may have been posted with the same epoch timestamp, it is possible for this mechanism to either fail to collect certain posts (when they occur on the same time stamp and at the end of a query) or to duplicate posts (if researchers include the previously collected timestamp as part of their subsequent query). In other words, tools using this method cannot guarantee a complete data collection without necessitating that researchers use other means to clean duplicated data points from the returned results.

In response to these shortcomings, I developed a time-interval algorithm that creates all of the necessary queries prior to their execution by calculating before and after pairs with varying epoch time stamps. The process, as documented in the code above (lines 211 to 241 and lines 243 to 272), begins by retrieving the number of results for any given query, denoted as N_p for posts (`$total_results_posts39`); N_c for comments (`$total_results_comments`) and calculating the total number of seconds between the

³⁹ I include the variable names represented in code in Courier New font to indicate how these quantities are represented throughout the PSWB code. I also include a dollar sign in front of the variable names as a reflection of Bash notation.

beginning time (a_0 ; `$search_beg_epoch`) and end time (b_0 ; `$search_end_epoch`) for the search, represented as t_Δ (`$time_gap`); such that $t_\Delta = b_0 - a_0$.

Next, the program calculates I , the number of intervals over which it will need to iterate the before and after timestamp pairs with reference to l , the API limit on results⁴⁰, and c , a confidence parameter where $0 < c < 1$ and is represented by a fraction⁴¹. The number of intervals for iterating the before and after pairs is calculated such that $I = [N_p/(l \cdot c)] - 1$ or $I = [N_c/(l \cdot c)] - 1$ (depending on whether the tool is scraping comments or posts; lines 218 and 248). Here, the confidence parameter, c , serves as a hedge against the possibility that the distribution of results is uniform over time. Although this is not the case in practical application, the confidence parameter works to balance computational speed and the likelihood of a uniform distribution of results over time.

The tool then uses these quantities to calculate a time interval (`$time_interval`), Δ_t such that $\Delta_t = t_\Delta / I$. This time interval represents the number of seconds between each before and after pair. Here, it is important to note a crucial feature of Bash that alters how it conducts mathematical operations. Specifically, it does not allow for floating-decimal arithmetic operations. Whereas these operations can be an issue for precise calculations, the fact that it does

⁴⁰ This quantity is currently located in the PSWB code at line 198 (`$api_limit`), but can be adjusted to account for changes in the PushShift API.

⁴¹ Because the Bash command language does not allow for floating decimal point arithmetic, the confidence parameter is represented on lines 203 and 204 as a fraction using `$confidence_numerator` and `$confidence_denominator`.

not allow for floating-decimal arithmetic operations is beneficial for these operations, as it ensures I and Δ_t are always whole numbers⁴².

Finally, the Time-Interval algorithm constructs pairs of before and after timestamps, such that $a_n = a_0 + [\Delta_t \cdot (n - 1)]$ and $b_n = a_n + \Delta_t - 1$, while $n < I$ and $b_n = b_0$ when $n = I$. This produces a list of pairs that divides the original time span for the search parameters into searchable pairs in such a way that can be reasonably assumed to have fewer than I results. From this point, the tool will construct and execute PushShift API queries based on these before and after timestamp pairs. Further, given that the calculation of these timestamp pairs is significantly quicker than the cyclical processes that many tools use to circumvent the API result limitations, creating and executing API queries using this Time-Interval process is both more efficient and more robust in the face of errors. Because the tool creates all search queries prior to fetching any results, this mechanism ensures that if one query fails, it does not prevent further collection and can be repeated and recovered at a later point.

The most significant drawback from this time-interval technique is the assumption of uniformity. Practically, the uniformity of posts over time is questionable at best. Moreover, non-uniformity is more common in queries over longer periods of time. To address concerns about uniformity, the time-interval mechanism automatically ensures that I is greater than or equal to the number of days in a comment-only query and greater than or equal to half the number of days in a post-only query. Regardless, although these mechanisms help to ameliorate the potential for

⁴² In all case where the result of an arithmetic operation is not a whole number, Bash rounds down (e.g., $19/10 = 1$ when calculating using Bash).

failing to retrieve data points, they do not eliminate the possibility altogether. Thus, without a mechanism to verify the results of initial scrapes, this algorithm could potentially leave out a significant number of results from times when particular communities and subreddits are extremely active. The next section relating to the search-check function documents how the PSWB addresses this potential limitation.

The Search-Check Function.

One of the major problems with the time-interval approach detailed above is the possibility that, with uneven distributions of submissions over time, some time-intervals would need to pull more results than the API limitations allow. To check for this possibility and then resolve these issues, the PSWB uses a search-check function (lines 301 to 325) that evaluates how many results a query initially retrieved. If the number of results is greater than $l - 10$, then a new function will remove those initial results and break the original time-interval for that query into 5 new intervals using the same method for creating intervals as before. Simply, the PSWB identifies any time-intervals that returned a number of results close to the API Limit and then reconstructs those searches after dividing that original time-interval into 5 approximately equal segments before recreating and executing those queries. This process is recursive so that, in the case of extremely uneven distributions of submissions (e.g., an extremely large number of submissions on a single topic over the course of a single 8-hour period), the Search-Check function will continue to check and sub-divide queries until no individual query has more than $l - 10$ results returned.

Overall, this function works to ensure that all available data for given search parameters are collected. As argued in the above section, the purpose of the time-interval mechanism is to make the search process more efficient and robust to errors; however, when submissions are not uniform across time-intervals either results are not retrieved or the recursive function of checking

queries makes the process untenable or less efficient. Regardless, there are some potential inefficiencies in this search-check function. These inefficiencies are limited to certain searches, meaning that, in most cases, this method for collecting posts is likely to be more efficient than other methods in most cases while still ensuring, as much as possible, complete data retrieval.

The All Search: Posts and Comments. The final detailed account of functions of the PSWB that I provide in this appendix relates to the third search option, or the “all search” which allows researchers to collect posts that match their search criteria and *all* comments that take place on those posts, regardless of whether they fit the search parameters or not. Functionally, this process is more complicated than the post-only and comment-only searches as it requires two different scraping procedures. Importantly, when users select the all search scrape, it is not possible to simply run both the post search and the comment search, as the comment search, in this case, will not retrieve many of the comments associated with posts, especially if those comments do not fall within the bounds of the original search function (including, both keyword and time parameter).

The all search, thus, begins with a normal post-search, but instead of following that with a normal scrape for comments, takes the data from the post-search and determines, first, which posts need to be scraped for comments. Thus, at line 463, the all search function begins by sorting post ID numbers based on the number of comments associated with each post. From this point, from lines 464 to 474, the tool groups posts with smaller numbers of comments together to speed up the process of retrieving comments, in accordance with the API limit, which still defines the number of comments that can be retrieved by post-id at any time. Additionally, posts with more comments than the API limit are separated for retrieval with a separate process.

At line 476 of the code, the PSWB conducts a quick scrape for those posts with fewer comments than the retrieval limit. This line allows the tool to more efficiently gather the comment contents for those posts with a smaller number of replies. For those posts that have more comments than the API limit allows users to retrieve in one go, the tool relies on a separate function of the PushShift API that allows users to retrieve the comment IDs of all comments based on an associated post id. This retrieval tool has no limit and returns all comment ids associated with posts queried. Once the content of these comment IDs is retrieved, the tool uses the general comment retrieval interface to retrieve data in batches based on the API limitations (as in line 518). Finally, the all-search concludes by combining all of the retrieved comments into a single readable JSON. The output of this command is much more expansive than other data sets retrieved by the PSWB in that, in addition to the two JSON file outputs (PostFile.json and CommentFile.json), the output file also includes readable text files that detail the number of posts and comments collected (relative to the number of posts and comments expected; listed as the CompletionStats.txt file). When these numbers are marginally different, this can be a useful indication that there were some comments or posts that were deleted or that could not be retrieved. If there is a significant difference between the numbers, this can be an indication that, at some point, the search failed. Additionally, there is another text file (IDandComments.txt) that gives a simple breakdown of the number of comments associated with each post. These two files offer important diagnostic information that helps a researcher quickly summarize and troubleshoot their data collection procedures using the all search.

Using the PSWB

Although the PSWB tool was created for use in a command-line, text-based interface, its usage is straightforward and simple, especially compared to the scripting requirements of other

PushShift API wrappers. To use the PSWB, users must open a bash terminal (in Mac or Linux, the base terminal will suffice; in Windows, the script must be run using the WSL), navigate to the file, and execute the script using the command “`bash PSWB.sh`” (with no quotation marks). This command will run the script and will allow users to proceed with entering the details of their search. From there, the script is designed to guide users through the process of entering and establishing search parameters based on their research aims. Throughout the script, users are presented with options, including underlined phrases or words, that can be entered to confirm search parameters or select specific options. The first such screen, represented in Figure B.1, allows users to set the five main parameters for their search. Additionally, users also have the option, upon entering the initial parameters of their search, to enter an epoch timestamp to further specify the specific times they wish to include or exclude in their search (as in Figure B.2).

Once the user establishes the search parameters, the user is prompted to confirm the returned preliminary results or to restart the process of defining new parameters. This confirmation process, depicted in Figure B.3, allows researchers to refine their search and check that the number of results is in line with their expectations without having to conduct a full scrape of all data. The final part of launching a scrape using the PSWB requires the researcher to define what kind of search they would like to conduct (noted in Figure B.4). Once a user confirms the types of data they would like to retrieve using their parameters, the PSWB will

```
Desktop — bash psbash.sh — 80x24
=====B=====W=====
This is the PushShift API Bash Wrapper
  created by Timothy Betts
  --Apr 20, 2022--
=====W=====B=====

Create the parameters for your search here.
Type NA for any non-applicable parameters.
Press enter once you have completed each parameter.

Enter the keyword you wish to search: economy
Enter the subreddit you wish to search: economics
Enter the beginning date for your search (mm/dd/yy): 03/09/20
Enter the end date for your search (mm/dd/yy): 03/19/20

The search will operate in GMT unless adjusted.
Enter number of hours to adjust or type @ for GMT.
Timezone Adjustment: 4
```

Figure B.1. PSWB Text Interface: Search Parameter Entry Screen

Note: Annotations in red indicate user entered information (e.g., economy).

```
Desktop — bash psbash.sh — 80x24
=====B=====W=====
This is the PushShift API Bash Wrapper
  created by Timothy Betts
  --Apr 20, 2022--
=====W=====B=====

Manual Date Configuration

Manual dates must be set using epoch time.
Enter the beginning epoch date for your search: 1583726400
Enter the end epoch date for your search: 1584676799
```

Figure B.2. PSWB Text Interface: Manual Epoch Time Entry

```
Desktop — bash psbash.sh — 80x24
=====B=====W=====
This is the PushShift API Bash Wrapper
  created by Timothy Betts
    --Apr 20, 2022--
=====W=====B=====

You have defined the following parameters:

Search Term: economy
Subreddit: economics
Time: 03/09/20 to 03/19/20

There are 48 posts in this search.
There are 1375 individual comments in this search.

Type yes to confirm these preliminary results or
Type no to restart the search process.

Confirm:
```

Figure B.3. PSWB Text Interface: Preliminary Results and Search Confirmation

```
Desktop — bash psbash.sh — 80x24
=====B=====W=====
This is the PushShift API Bash Wrapper
  created by Timothy Betts
    --Apr 20, 2022--
=====W=====B=====

Given these 48 posts and 1375 individual comments, you have three options.

Enter posts to only collect these posts.
Enter all to collect these posts and comments on those posts.

Enter comments to only collect the comments including your search terms.
  Note: These comments are retrieved individually, irrespective of posts.

Data selection:
```

Figure B.4. PSWB Text Interface: Search Type Selection Screen

conduct the data retrieval from the PushShift API and write that data into a readable JSON file. Once the scrape is complete, the user will receive a confirmation screen that indicates where the final file was stored. Upon the completion of these searches, the results of the scrape will be stored in the same folder as the executable PSBash.sh command file.

Limitations and Considerations

One of the most obvious limitations of the PSWB is that it is a fairly rigid tool that can collect data from the PushShift API through certain pre-defined parameters. Although there are many other ways to parameterize, limit, and aggregate retrieved data using PushShift (e.g., searching by number of comments on posts) that might be useful for specific research aims, this tool only allows researchers to collect data using the subreddit, keyword, and time parameters. I have constructed the tool in this way because, much of the utility of Reddit data for communication researchers derives from its specific contextual richness (Hintz & Betts, 2022). The creation, maintenance, and self-governance of topically oriented subreddit communities is a key part of what makes Reddit a useful resource for researchers, so centering a tool for retrieving data sets around this function is sensible. Additionally, if researchers are interested in retrieving certain fields that are not retrieved by the PSWB (as in Table B.1 and Table B.2), they can edit the URLs listed on lines 91 to 94 in the code to include or exclude certain fields or to limit returned results based on other parameters, as defined in the PushShift API documentation (Baumgartner et al., 2020). Moreover, for certain parameters, such as comment number, post-limiting searches in spreadsheet editing (or other) software is an easy workaround.

Second, given the nature of the time-interval search and the search-check functions used by the PSWB, it is possible that with longer search inclusion dates and extremely uneven post distributions (such as times when specific subreddit communities surge in popularity or

notoriety), the PSWB may gather data slower than alternative solutions (e.g., PSAW, PRAW). Simply put, the more uneven the distribution of comments or posts across the given time frame, the slower data collection will be through the PSWB. For this reason, it is advisable to run sequential searches on smaller time-frames with the PSWB, especially if researchers are attempting to gather large amounts of data or are working with subreddits or search-terms with unique surges in popularity (e.g., the /r/wallstreetbets community during the GME short squeeze, January 2021). Put simply, knowledge of the community dynamics, especially relative to time, will be important for users attempting to ensure that searches using the PSWB are conducted as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Third, often when using both the PushShift API and the Reddit API, researchers will come across deleted or missing data, however, the nature of the deleted data is different for each. Whereas the Reddit API, and tools that use the Reddit API (e.g., *RedditExtractorR*; Rivera, 2022) can only retrieve data that are actively available on the Reddit site, simply, submissions that users have not deleted, the PushShift data set archives comments and posts as they are made and does not actively remove data as these data are removed from the Reddit site. Even though a user deletes a comment on the platform, it will stay a part of the PushShift dataset unless users actively request that all of their data be removed from the PushShift. This means that, in many cases, the PushShift collection is a more complete record of all of the publicly available comments and submissions that have ever been posted on the platform.

However, users' ability to request that all of their data be removed from the PushShift data poses a different concern regarding the completeness of the PushShift data set. Additionally, as Gaffney and Matias (2018) identified, the PushShift archival mechanism, like any internet-based services, can fail at times, leading to the possibility of gaps in the data collection. Specifically,

they noted that approximately 0.043% of comments and 0.65% of posts may be missing from the data collection. To be fair, although the PushShift data set is centrally administered and funded by one individual, there is an entire community of researchers and Redditors who have built a community on /r/PushShift around the data set. This community is continuously working to identify missing data, troubleshoot API problems, and generally promote the development of the API.

Nonetheless, the issues of user-requested deletions and archival failures, raise questions regarding the quality of data retrieved through the PushShift API. In response, researchers using the PSWB should be scrupulous in their interpretation of conclusions derived from these data, as it is impossible to guarantee any complete or whole record of users' submissions on the platform. Additionally, given these concerns, researchers can use multiple tools to collect and verify data. While both the PushShift Reddit APIs individually account for a significant portion of possible data, researchers can use both to further refine and validate their data sets in cases where such measures are useful or warranted. For example, as referenced in Chapter 3, for this dissertation project, certain comment submissions were missing from the Great Recession inflection points. To address this issue, I used a combination of the information from the PushShift API and the Reddit API to collect the missing data and complete the data collection for this project. While adding this functionality to the PSWB is beyond the scope of this specific project, this consideration is indicative of possible future developments for this tool.

Future Directions

The PSWB has been developed for the specific needs of this dissertation and other, similar approaches to using Reddit data in communication research (Hintz & Betts, 2022). Even so, the limitations presented above provide a roadmap for future directions of development for

the PSWB. The implementation of some of these features goes beyond the purpose of this simple implementation, but this articulation of the use and features of the PSWB warrants a brief discussion of future direction for this tool.

First, given the evolving uses of Reddit data in communication research (and other social science fields) any tool that allows researchers to construct data sets for analysis with little technical expertise is a useful development. However, given the rudimentary user interface of the PSWB and the simplistic and somewhat intimidating prospects of using a command line tool for many users who may not be used to interacting with such tools, developing a more accessible, graphic interface for users, and creating an executable, non-command line application, should be the primary objective for developing this tool further.

Second, the types of data returned by the PSWB (and retained by the PushShift API, generally) prompt a variety of interesting new directions for using Reddit in social science research. One avenue that seems particularly interesting includes the analysis of both the content posted by users (in terms of images, text, and content) *and* the outside content that users post alongside their own descriptions. Specifically in the context of economic organizing, although this work provides an example of how Reddit can be used as a tool for gleaning insights regarding the ways that people made sense of economic disruptions alongside news media coverage more generally, the kinds of comparisons that I make in this work do not directly link the experiences of the individuals on Reddit to the experiences represented in the news articles. I do not link individual and media representations for good reason: the purpose of this investigation is to serve as an initial foray into understanding some of these communicative dynamics of economic organizing through grand narrative accounts in media and individual accounts on social media. However, it is worth recalling that Reddit was conceived as a place

where users can share news and ideas; originally it was called a social news site in much of the early social scientific research regarding its position amongst social media sites (Lister et al., 2009). An interesting new direction for both the PSWB and Reddit research in communication could examine the link between these individual accounts on social media and the links shared by users more clearly by constructing data sets that work with both the user-generated content (e.g., personal narratives, reactions to articles) and the content of the shared content (e.g., newspaper articles, memes). This type of work could be facilitated by a tool that creates data sets by scraping both the user data and the contents of the posted links for concomitant analysis.

Both directions for evolving the PSWB will broaden the accessibility and utility of the tool while maintaining the central function of creating usable data sets for social science researchers quickly and with little necessary technical expertise. In this way, although there are many things that this tool simply will not be able to facilitate for researchers with highly specific interests, the general applications of this tool are aimed at accessibility and ease for researchers who may not have the technical expertise that collecting Reddit data may currently require of them. Overall, there is a wealth of publicly available data that researchers can and should tap as a way to answer new research questions, advance theory, and generate new practical insights. This tool aims to be one means of removing technical barriers to those developments.

APPENDIX C.

TOPIC MODELING CODE

The following sections of code detail the computational procedures for the topic modeling portion of this dissertation, including the main script for calculating the topic models and the script for generating a matrix of topic-document associations, the use of which is detailed in Chapter Three.

Main Script

```
# Packages
import time
import gensim
import gensim.corpora as corpora
from gensim.models import LdaModel
from gensim.parsing.preprocessing import preprocess_documents
import pandas
from datetime import datetime
import pyLDAvis
from pyLDAvis import gensim_models
import os

# Configure Modeling
filename = "GreatRec_Crisis2_Corpus"
topicnumber1 = 10
topicnumber2 = 10
topicnumber3 = 10

# printdate
now = datetime.now()
toddate = now.strftime("%b-%d-%Y %H%M%S")

# ImportData
xlsxname = filename + ".xlsx"
df = pandas.read_excel(xlsxname)
docs = list(df['full_text'])

# PreProcess and Build Dictionary
start_time = time.time()
data_words = preprocess_documents(docs)
print("---- %s seconds to Complete Dictionary ----" % (time.time() -
start_time))
id2word = corpora.Dictionary(data_words)
```

```

corpus = []
for text in data_words:
    new = id2word.doc2bow(text)
    corpus.append(new)

# Create Directory for Model Saving
os.mkdir("Models")
dirname = filename + " - " + toddate
os.mkdir(dirname)
os.mkdir(dirname)

# LDA Topic Model
start_time2 = time.time()
print("Calculating Models")
lda_model = gensim.models.ldamodel.LdaModel(corpus=corpus,
                                             id2word=id2word,
                                             num_topics=topicnumber1,
                                             update_every=1,
                                             chunksize=1000,
                                             passes=100,
                                             alpha="auto"
                                             )
print("Model 1 Complete")
lda_model2 = gensim.models.ldamodel.LdaModel(corpus=corpus,
                                              id2word=id2word,
                                              num_topics=topicnumber2,
                                              update_every=1,
                                              chunksize=1000,
                                              passes=100,
                                              alpha="auto"
                                              )
print("Model 2 Complete")
lda_model3 = gensim.models.ldamodel.LdaModel(corpus=corpus,
                                              id2word=id2word,
                                              num_topics=topicnumber3,
                                              update_every=1,
                                              chunksize=1000,
                                              passes=100,
                                              alpha="auto"
                                              )
print("--- %s seconds ---" % (time.time() - start_time2))
print("Topic Modeling Completed")

# Save the Dictionary and Corpus
gensim.corpora.Dictionary.save(self=id2word, fname_or_handle="Dictionary")
gensim.corpora.mmcorpus.MmCorpus.serialize(corpus=corpus, fname="Corpus",
id2word=id2word)

# Visualize Data and Save Files
filename1 = filename + "_" + str(topicnumber1) + "top" + "_1"
filename2 = filename + "_" + str(topicnumber2) + "top" + "_2"
filename3 = filename + "_" + str(topicnumber3) + "top" + "_3"
visname1 = filename1 + ".html"
visname2 = filename2 + ".html"
visname3 = filename3 + ".html"
lda_viz = pyLDAvis.gensim_models.prepare(lda_model, corpus, id2word)
lda_viz2 = pyLDAvis.gensim_models.prepare(lda_model2, corpus, id2word)

```

```

lda_viz3 = pyLDAvis.gensim_models.prepare(lda_model3, corpus, id2word)
visualizations = pyLDAvis.display(lda_viz)
pyLDAvis.save_html(lda_viz, visname1)
pyLDAvis.save_html(lda_viz2, visname3)
pyLDAvis.save_html(lda_viz3, visname2)

# Save LDA Models
LdaModel.save(fname=filename1, self=lda_model)
LdaModel.save(fname=filename2, self=lda_model2)
LdaModel.save(fname=filename3, self=lda_model3)

```

Topic-Document Matrix Generation Code

```

# Packages
from gensim.models import LdaModel
from gensim.corpora import MmCorpus
import re

# Load the LDA Model
lda = LdaModel.load("lda_model")

# Load Corpus
filename = "Corpus"
corp = MmCorpus(filename)
with open(filename) as f:
    lines = f.readlines()[1]
    x = str.split(lines)
    numdocs = int(x[0])
    f.close()

#Create CSV File
savefile = "TopicMatrix"+
with open(savefile, "a") as f:
    for x in range(0, numdocs):
        doc_topics = lda.get_document_topics(corp[x], minimum_probability=0)
        re_doc_topics = re.sub("\, \(., ", ",", str(doc_topics))
        re_doc_topics = re.sub("^\.*, ", "", str(re_doc_topics))
        re_doc_topics = re.sub("\)\].*$", "", str(re_doc_topics))
        print(re_doc_topics)
        f.write(str(re_doc_topics))
        f.write("\n")
    f.close()

```

APPENDIX D.
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



NOT HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH DETERMINATION

May 24, 2022

Timothy Betts
2223 Tapestry Park Drive, Apt. 312
Land O'Lakes, FL 34639

Dear Timothy Betts:

On 5/24/2022, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

IRB ID:	STUDY004346
Title:	Organizing Economies: Narrative Sensemaking and Communicative Resilience During Economic Disruption

The IRB determined that the proposed activity does not constitute research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations.

IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities constitute human subjects research, please submit a new application to the IRB for a determination.

While not requiring IRB approval and oversight, your project activities should be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of your profession. If this project is program evaluation or quality improvement, do not refer to the project as research and do not include the assigned IRB ID or IRB contact information in the consent document or any resulting publications or presentations.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Walker
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

APPENDIX E.

STUDY ONE DETAILS: ON NEWS COVERAGE, GEOGRAPHY, AND POPULATION

I created the maps below, Figure E.1 to Figure E.7, with the Tableau (2016) data visualization software to indicate the locations represented in the news media data collection for Study One. It is important to note that, where certain parts of the United States are not visible (e.g., the Virgin Islands and Guam in Figure E.1), there were no news articles collected from those locations for that specific inflection point. Across all seven inflection points, the only locations for which this is true are the Virgin Islands and Guam. All other states and territories include at least one news article in each inflection point. Additionally, locations represented in these maps indicate the headquarters or publisher location of newspapers when they were not tied to a specific location. For example, the nationally circulated publication, *American Banker*, is headquartered in New York, NY, and, thus, was listed with other publications from New York.

To further assess the appropriateness of this data set, I used regression analysis to determine the associations between the number of news articles present in the data collection relative to U.S. Census data (2010); USCB, U. S. Census Bureau (2020) regarding the population of each state or territory. In brief, the results of these analyses, summarized in Table E.1, demonstrated that there was a highly significant, $p < .0001$, relationship between the number of articles collected for each inflection point and the population of each state and territory. This point alone does not warrant the suitability of this data set. These figures, and the accompanying statistical analyses, demonstrate noteworthy characteristics of the dataset that I considered in the analyses presented above.

Specifically, I used the graphs in Figure E.8 to Figure E.14 to consider the representation of certain areas of the United States in news coverage patterns relative to their population. Understanding some nuances of this dynamic and incorporating it into the analysis of grand narrative in Chapter 4, was necessary to craft a more detailed account of the macroeconomic storytelling at work. The experiences of people across the United States—in less populated and more populated areas, urban and rural areas, continental and non-continental states and territories—are necessarily going to have different experiences of economic disruption, and so the analysis represented in this Appendix offered one way to understand and account for those dynamics and their influence within the analyses described in Chapter 4.

Table E.1. News Coverage and U.S. Population (by State), Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

News Coverage Context	Population (by state) ¹		Articles		Regression Model		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	β	R^2	<i>p</i>
Great Recession²							
Oct 12 - 18, 2008	5,722	6,770	378	388	.823	.677	< .0001
Oct 28 - Dec 4, 2008			342	356	.823	.677	< .0001
<i>Emergency Economic Stabilization Act</i>			347	363	.827	.684	< .0001
<i>American Recovery and Reinvestment Act</i>			380	395	.801	.641	< .0001
COVID-19 Recession³							
Mar 9 - 19, 2020	6,144	7,345	210	180	.839	.704	< .0001
<i>CARES Act</i>			210	179	.879	.773	< .0001
<i>American Rescue Plan</i>			91	78	.761	.571	< .0001

Note: ¹Population data presented in thousands. ²Population for all inflection points during the Great Recession based on the 2010 Census (U. S. Census Bureau [USCB], 2010). ³Population for all inflection points during the COVID-19 Recession based on the 2020 Census (USCB, 2020). Each regression model represented in this table is a separate analysis of the relationship between state population and news-coverage by state. I omit the constants from each model because each was non-significant and because they are irrelevant for the purpose of this work. These models

were calculated to further contextualize the qualitative analysis presented above and not for predictive purposes.

To summarize the results presented above, regression analysis indicated that, in all cases and across all inflection points represented in this study, there was a clear association between the population of a state or territory and the news coverage that was associated with their state that predicted between 57.1% and 77.3% of the variance in coverage across states. This finding is neither surprising nor revolutionary; however, in the context of this study, this analysis is useful for understanding the representation of specific states and territories in these data collections.

Given that the aims of grand narrative analysis encourage researchers to grapple with the ways that universalizing and essentializing narrative forces gloss over the unique aspects of smaller stories and, thereby, organize a specific vision of what is necessary and possible, this analysis and the residual plots presented in Figure E.15 to Figure E.21 offer a visualization of these dynamics. Although they are not standard residual plots, these figures offer a visual indication of which states are over- or under-represented in these samples relative to their population. I used this decomposition of the relationship between these states or territories and collected news coverage to search out and analyze specific examples, as presented in the analysis in Chapter 4.

Ultimately, population is simply one explanation of the amount of news coverage generated by each state or territory. As much of the contextual history that offers a clearer explanation of those differences is both bound up in population distribution dynamics and can be more directly accounted for in other ways, this analysis illustrates a significant aspect of that relationship, which enhanced the overall project presented in this dissertation.

Great Recession, Disruption (Oct 12 - 18, 2008) News Coverage

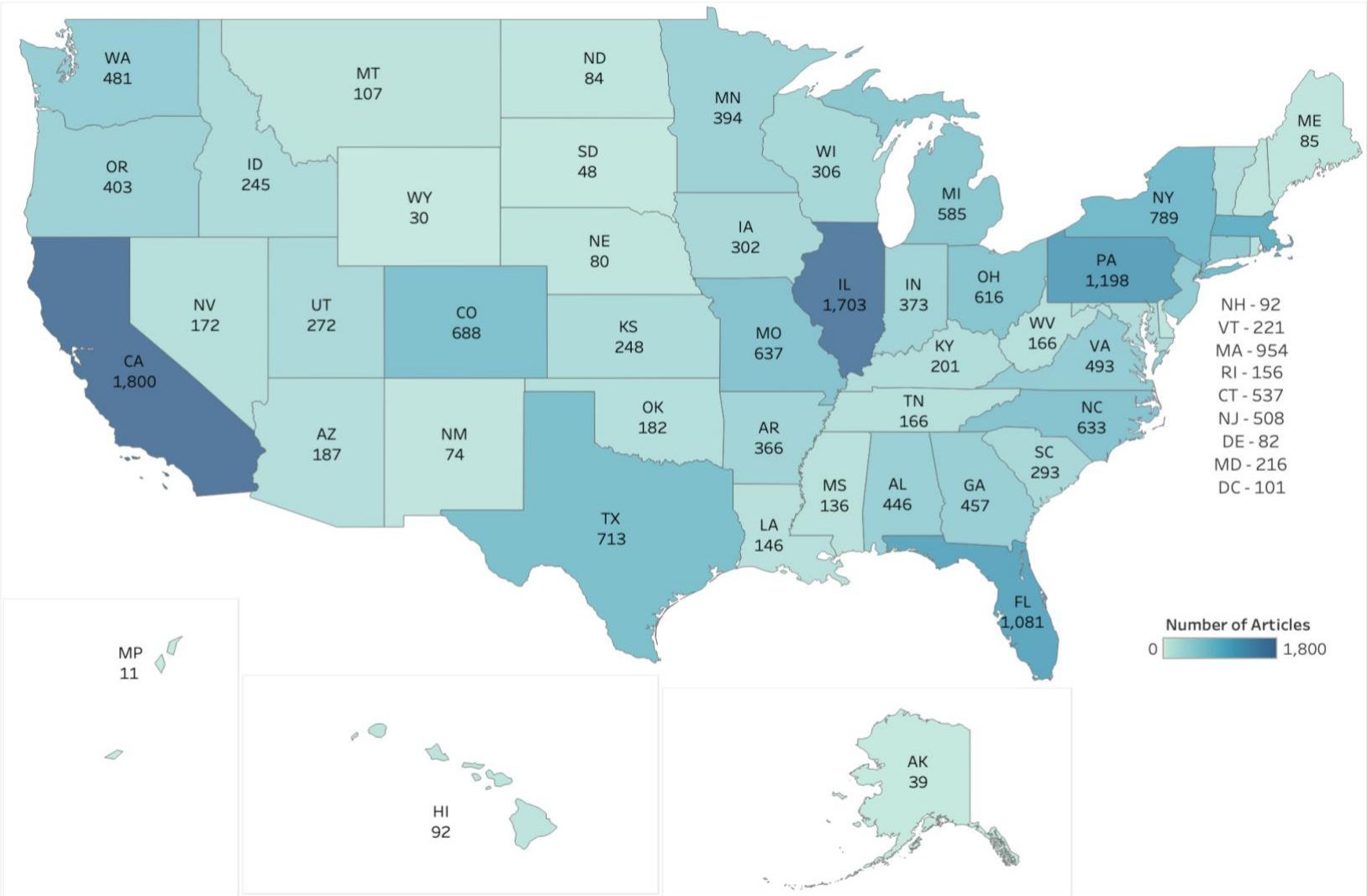


Figure E.1. Map of Great Recession, Crisis Inflection Point (Oct 12 - 18, 2008) News Coverage

Great Recession, Disruption (Nov 28 - Dec 4, 2008) News Coverage

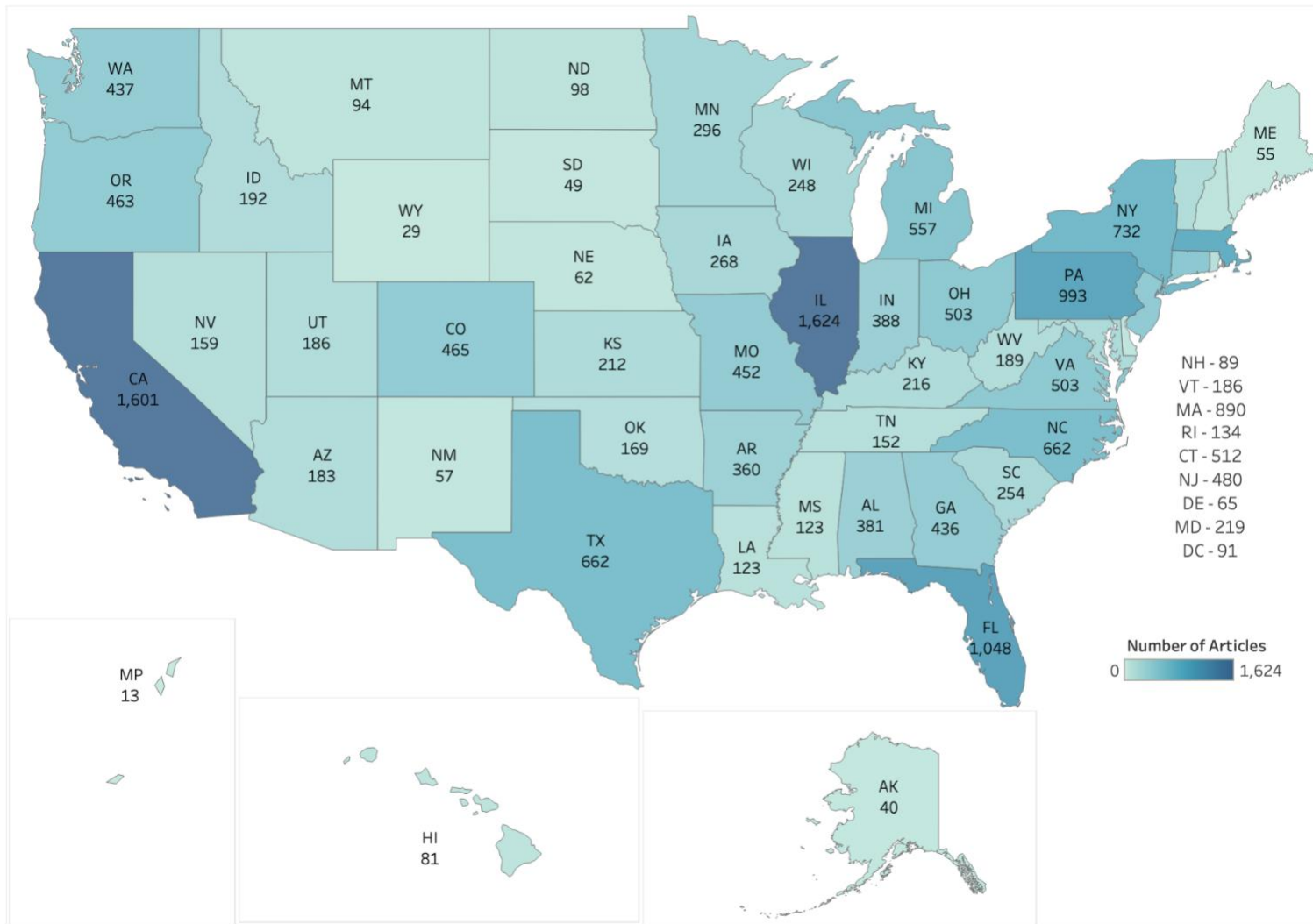


Figure E.2. Map of Great Recession, Disruption (Nov 28 – Dec 4, 2008) News Coverage

Great Recession, *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act* News Coverage

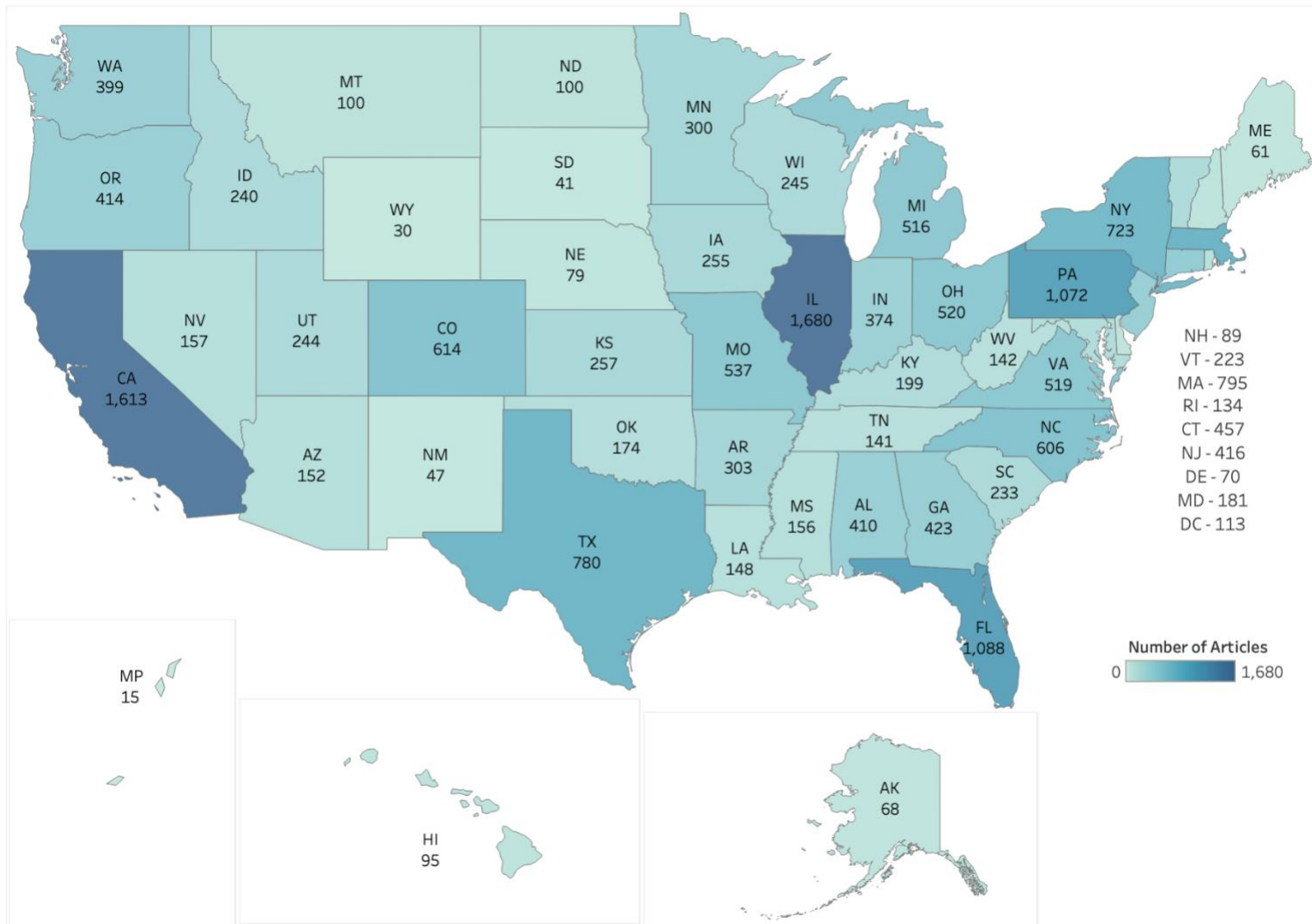


Figure E.3. Map of Great Recession, Policy Inflection Point (*Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*) News Coverage

Great Recession, *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* News Coverage

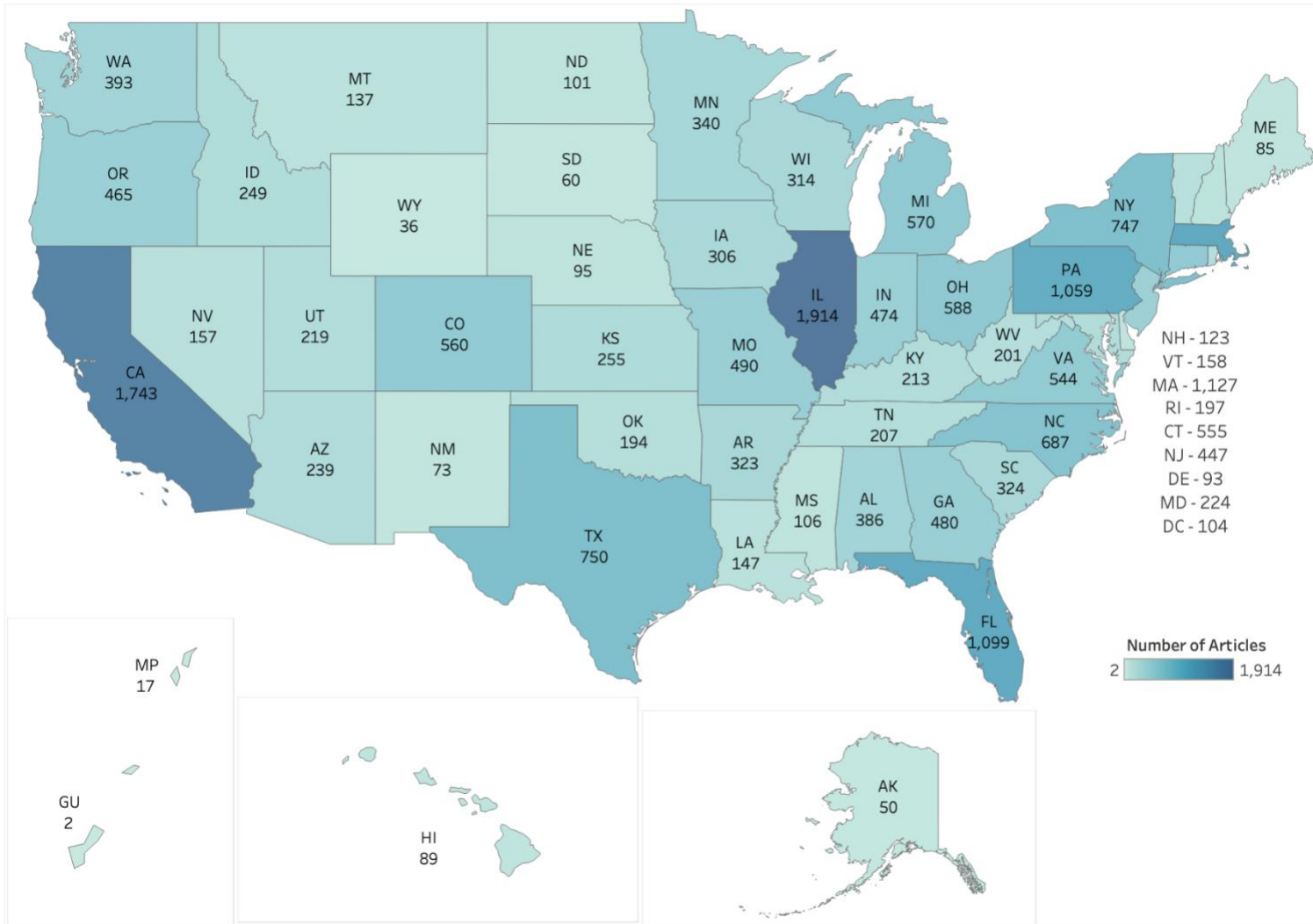


Figure E.4. Great Recession, Policy Inflection Point (*American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*) News Coverage

COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (Mar 9 - 19, 2020) News Coverage

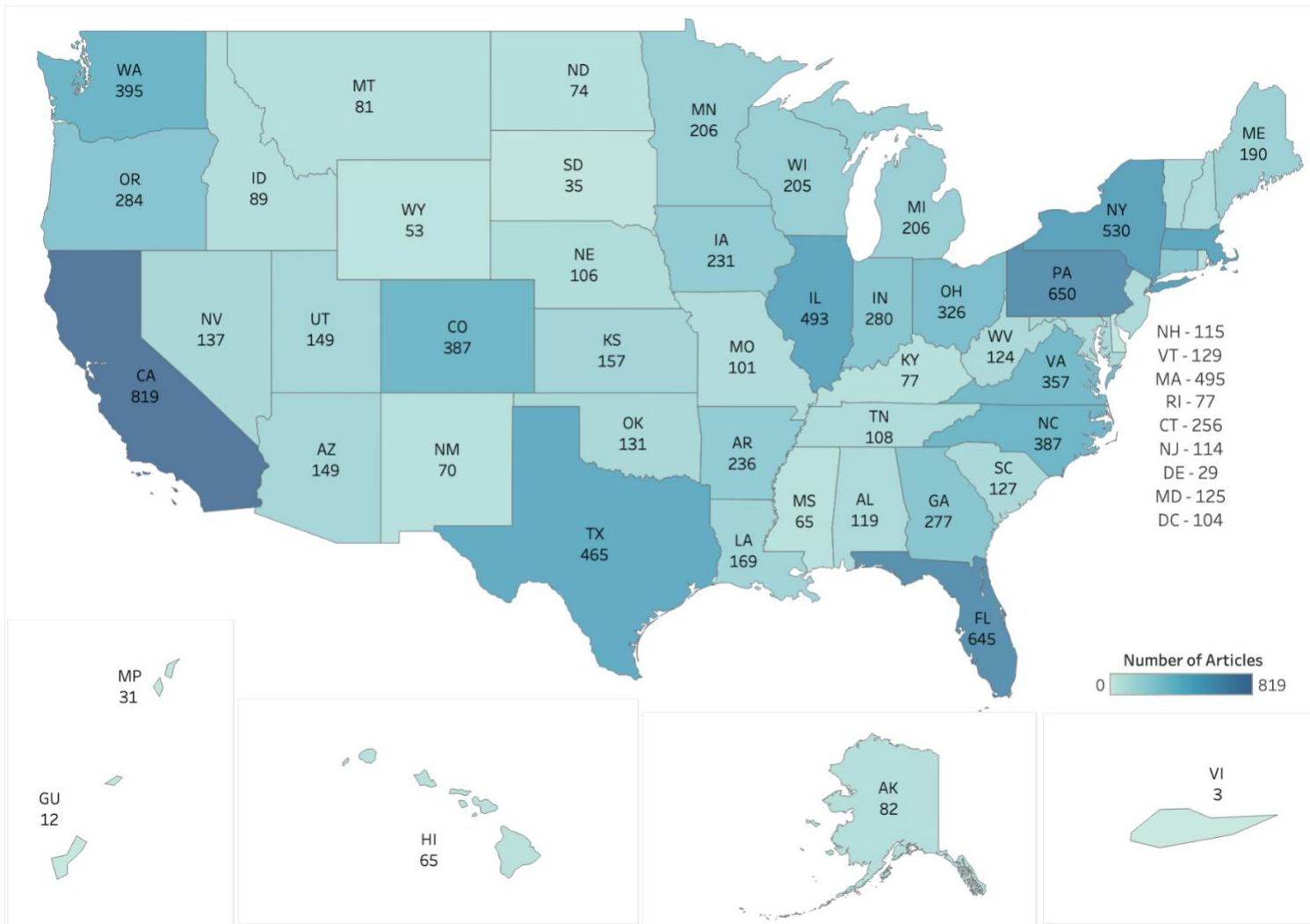


Figure E.5. Map of COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (Mar 9 – Mar 19, 2020) News Coverage

COVID-19 Recession, CARES Act News Coverage

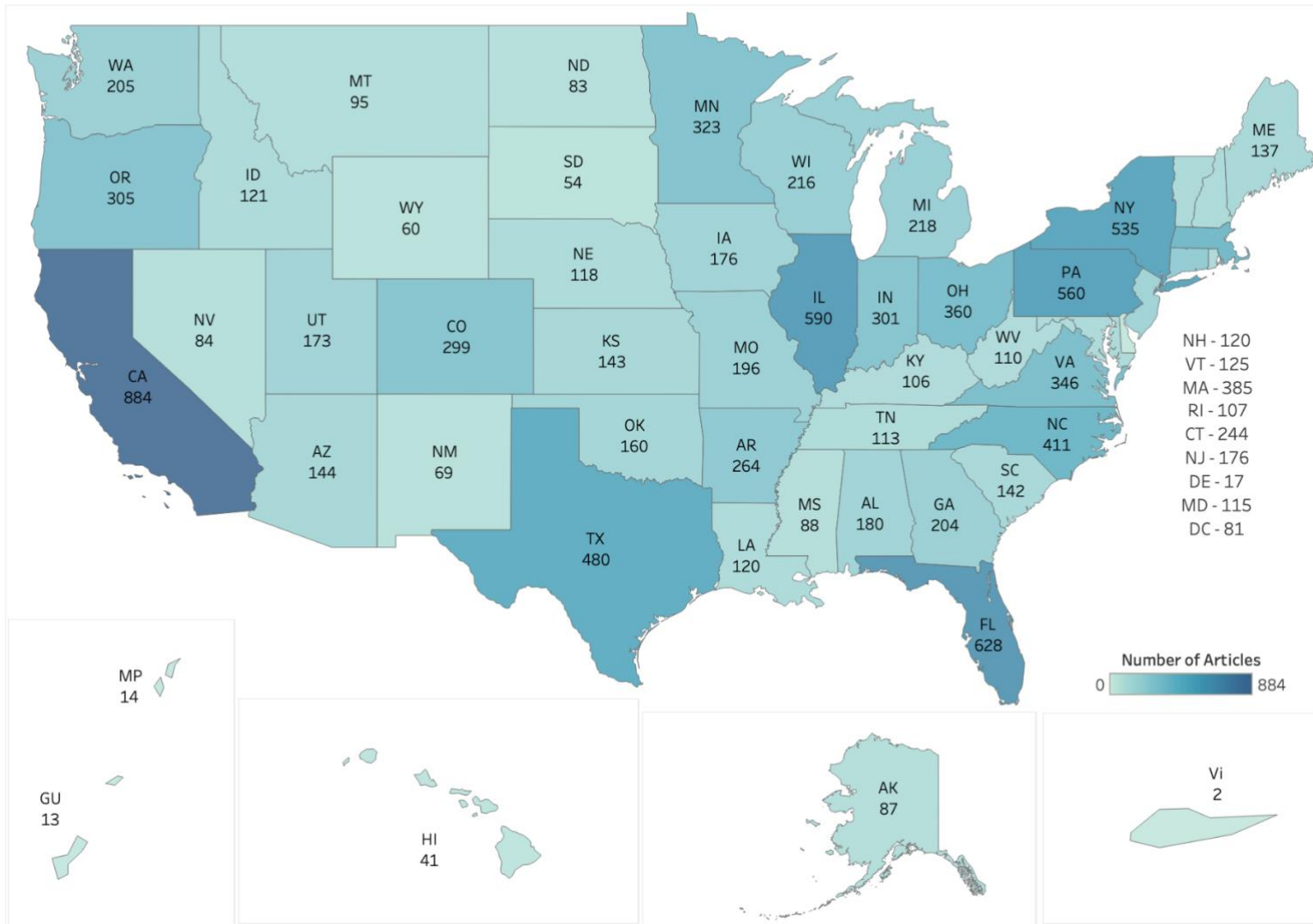


Figure E.6. Map of COVID-19 Recession, Policy Inflection Point (*CARES Act*) News Coverage

COVID-19 Recession, *American Rescue Plan* News Coverage

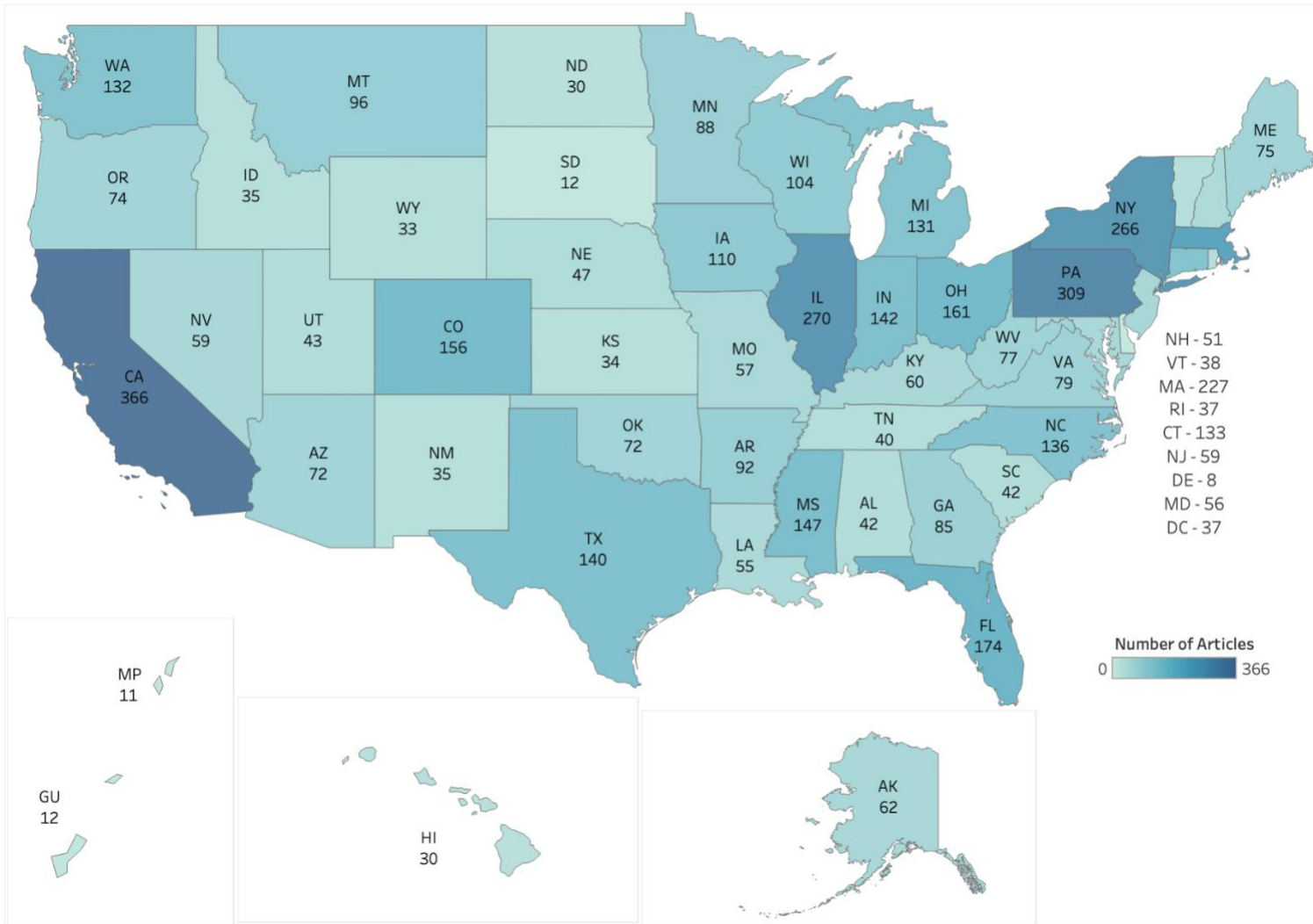


Figure E.7. Map of COVID-19 Recession, Policy Inflection Point (*American Rescue Plan*) News Coverage

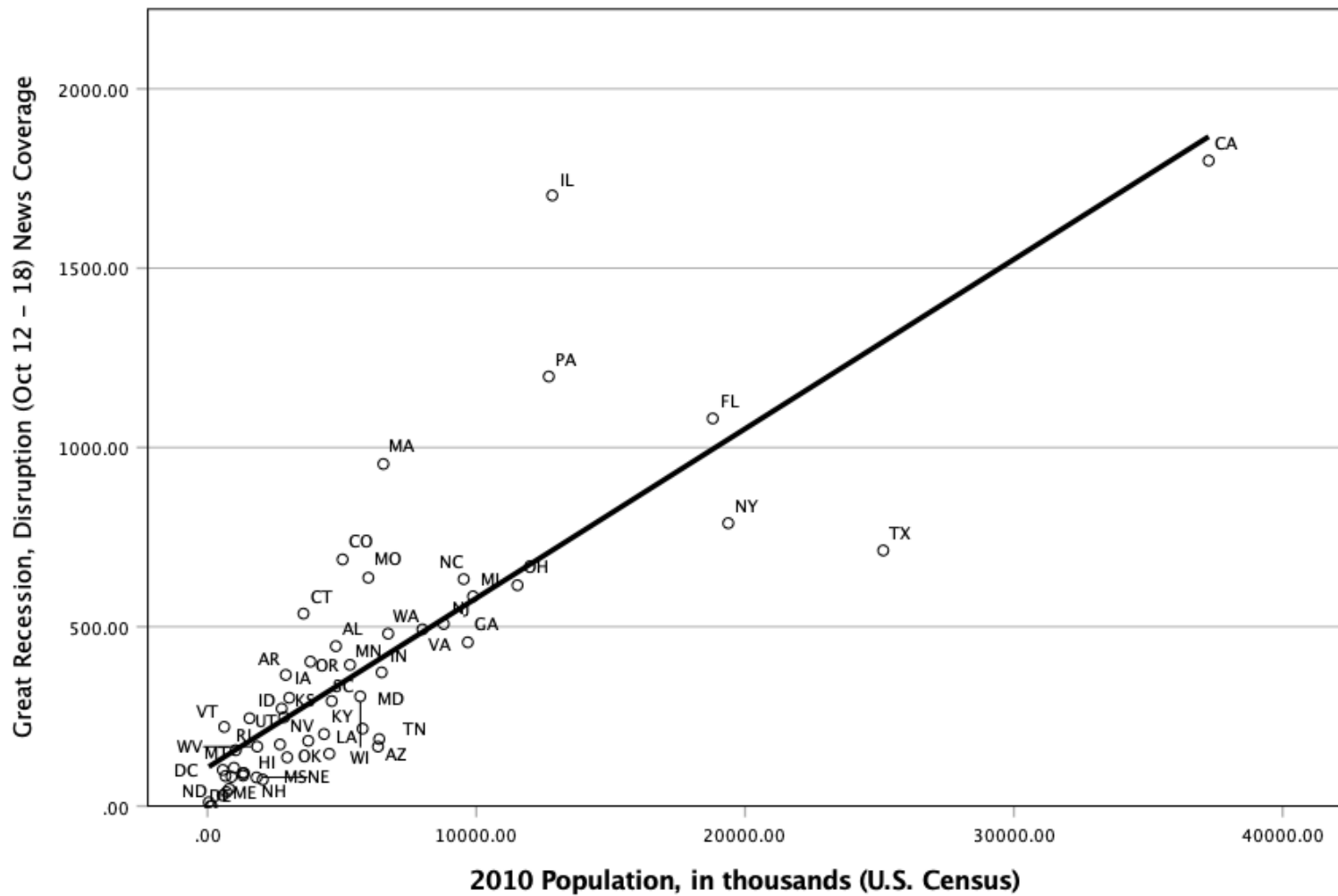


Figure E.8. State & Territory Population and News Coverage Scatterplot (Great Recession, Oct 12 - 18, 2008)

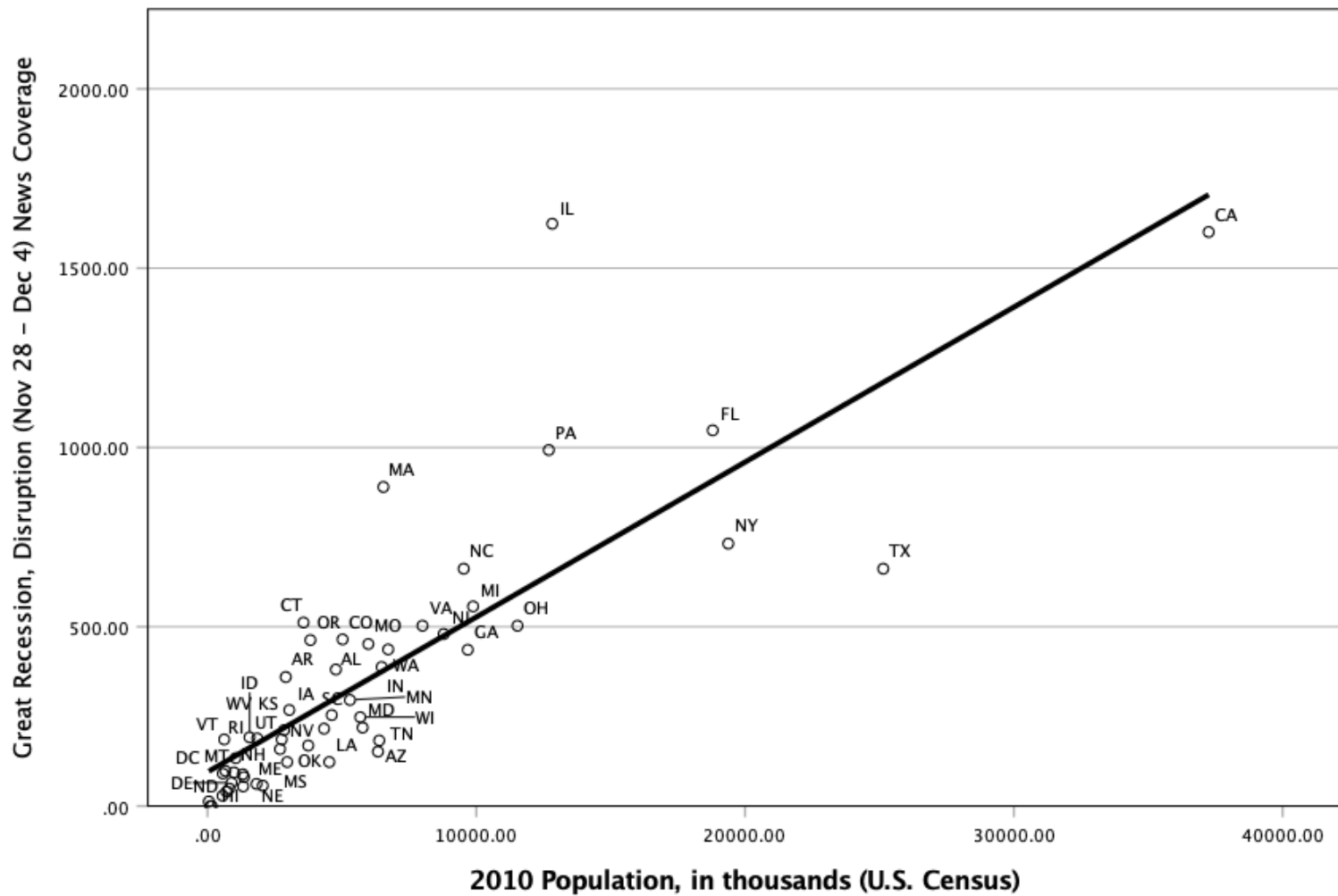


Figure E.9. State & Territory Population and News Coverage Scatterplot (Great Recession, Nov 28 – Dec 4, 2008)

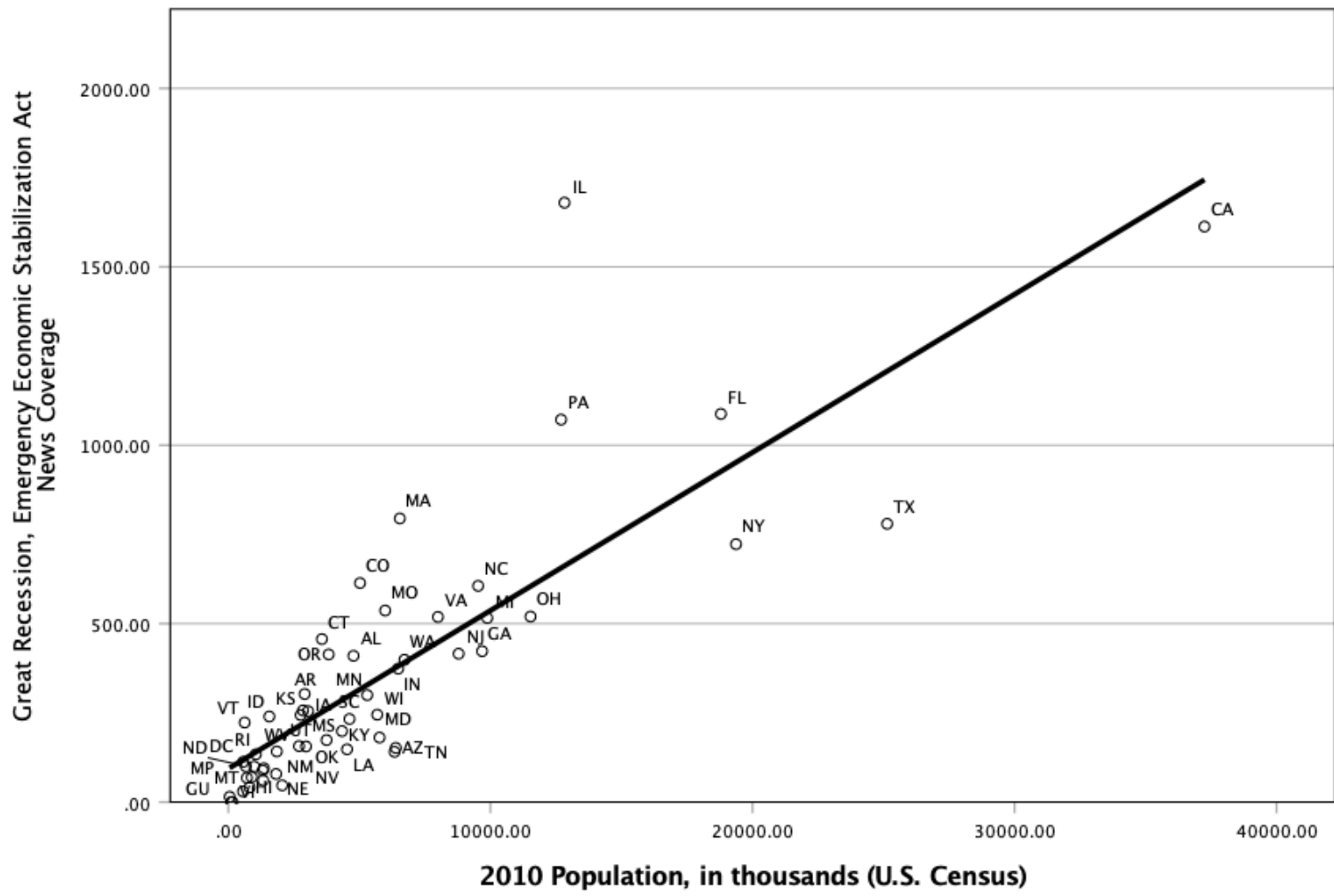


Figure E.10. State & Territory Population and News Coverage Scatterplot (Great Recession, *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*)

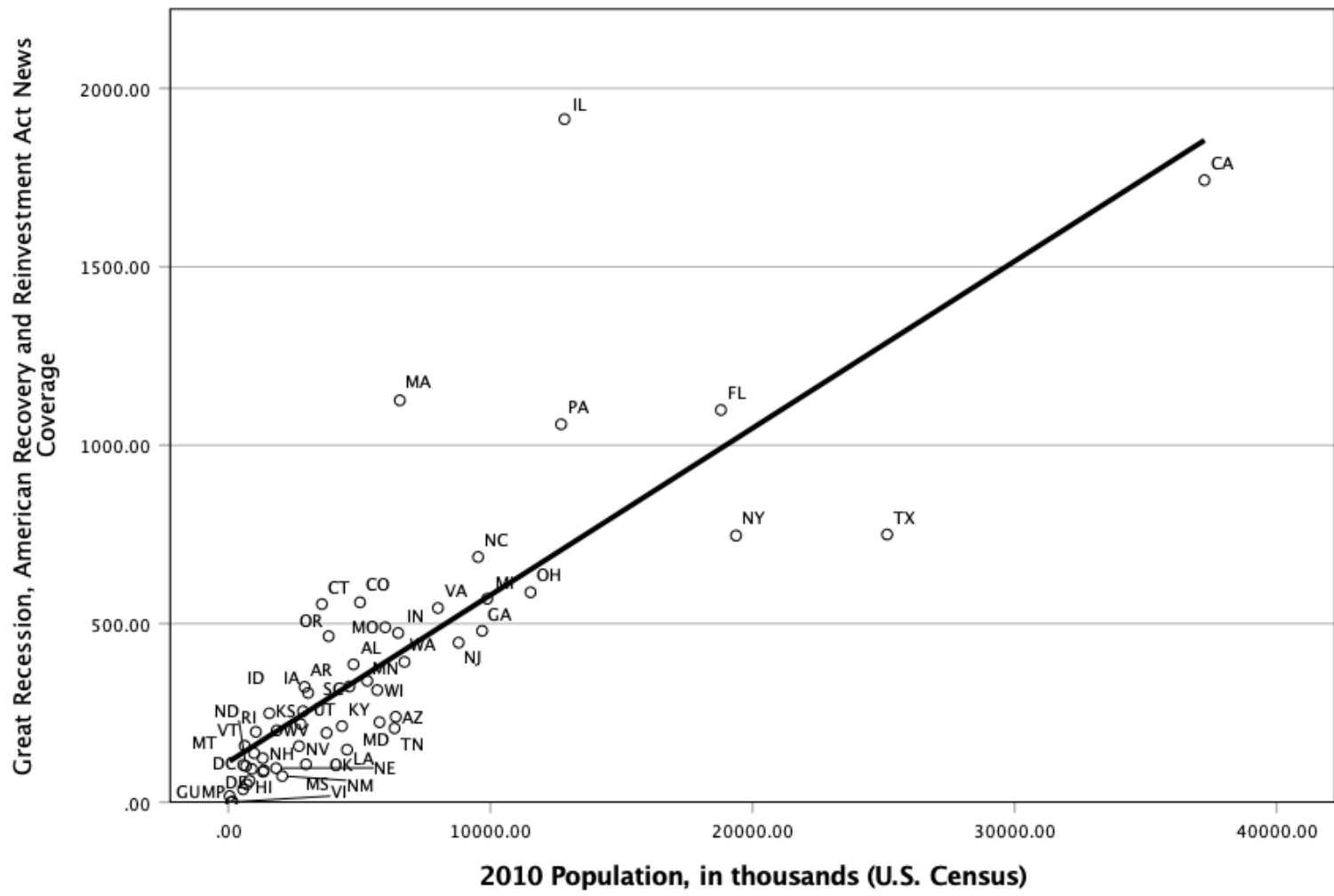


Figure E.11. State & Territory Population by News Coverage Scatterplot (Great Recession, *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*)

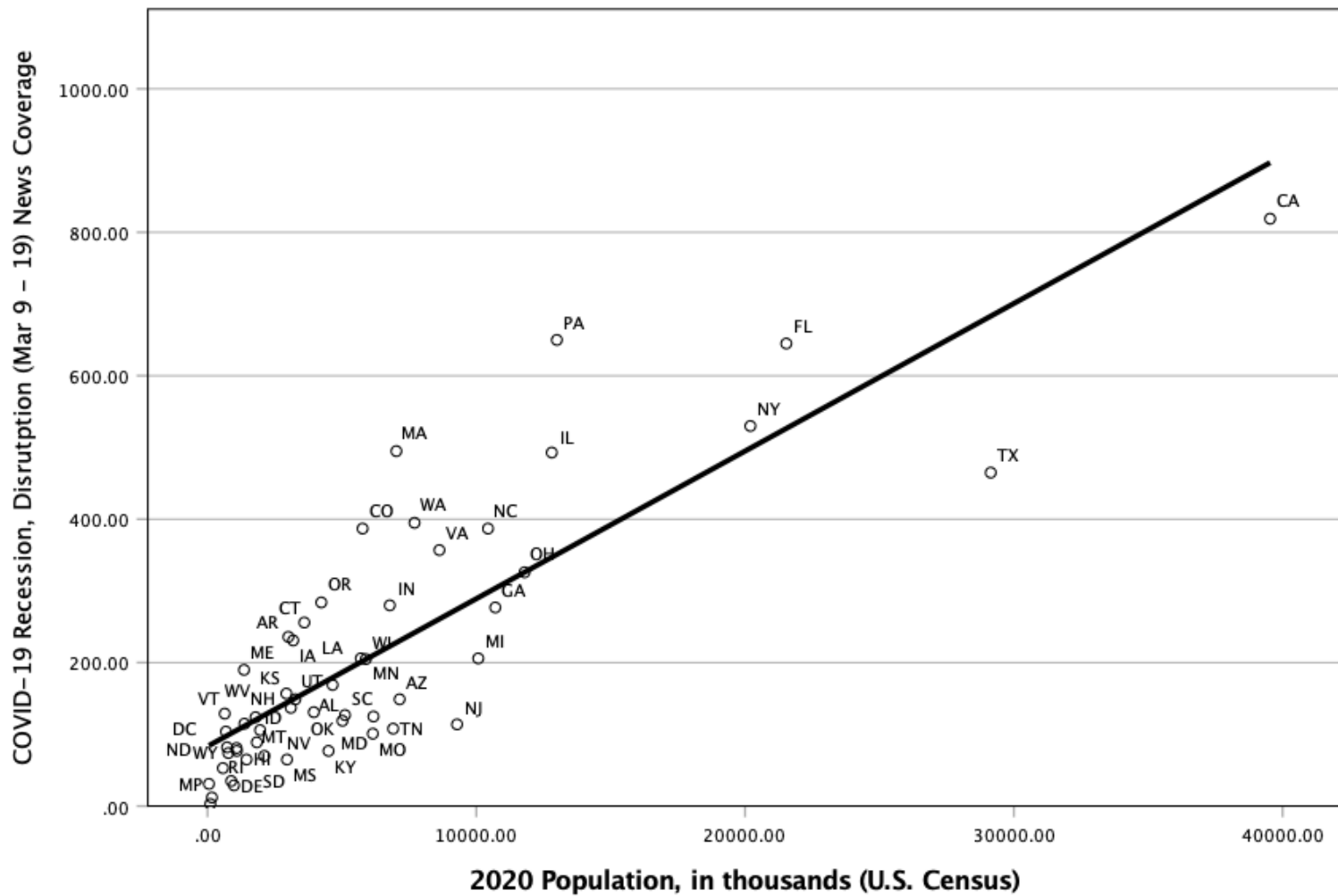


Figure E.12. State & Territory Population and News Coverage Scatterplot (COVID-19 Recession, Mar 9 – 19, 2020)

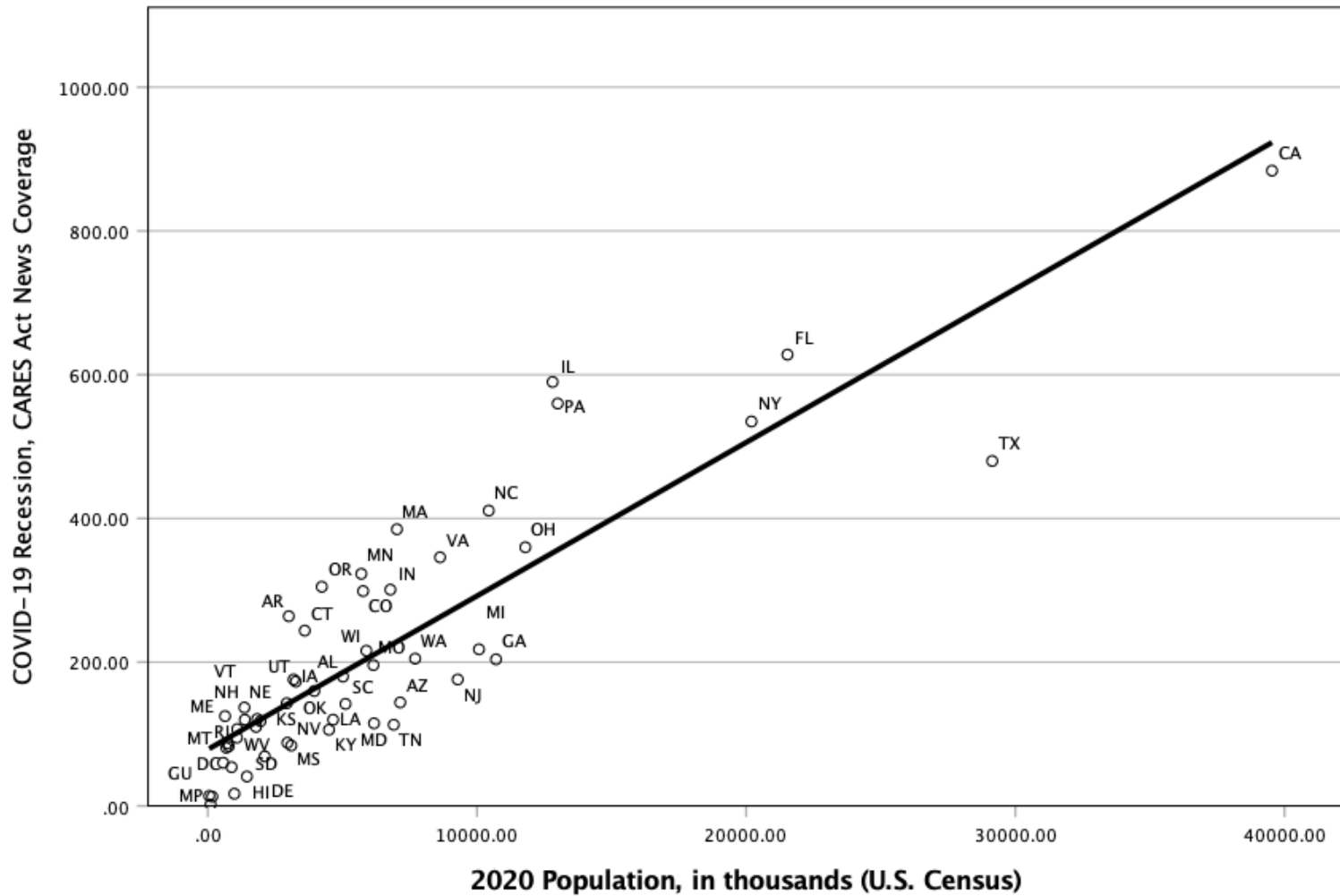


Figure E.13. State & Territory Population and News Coverage Scatterplot (COVID-19 Recession, *CARES Act*)

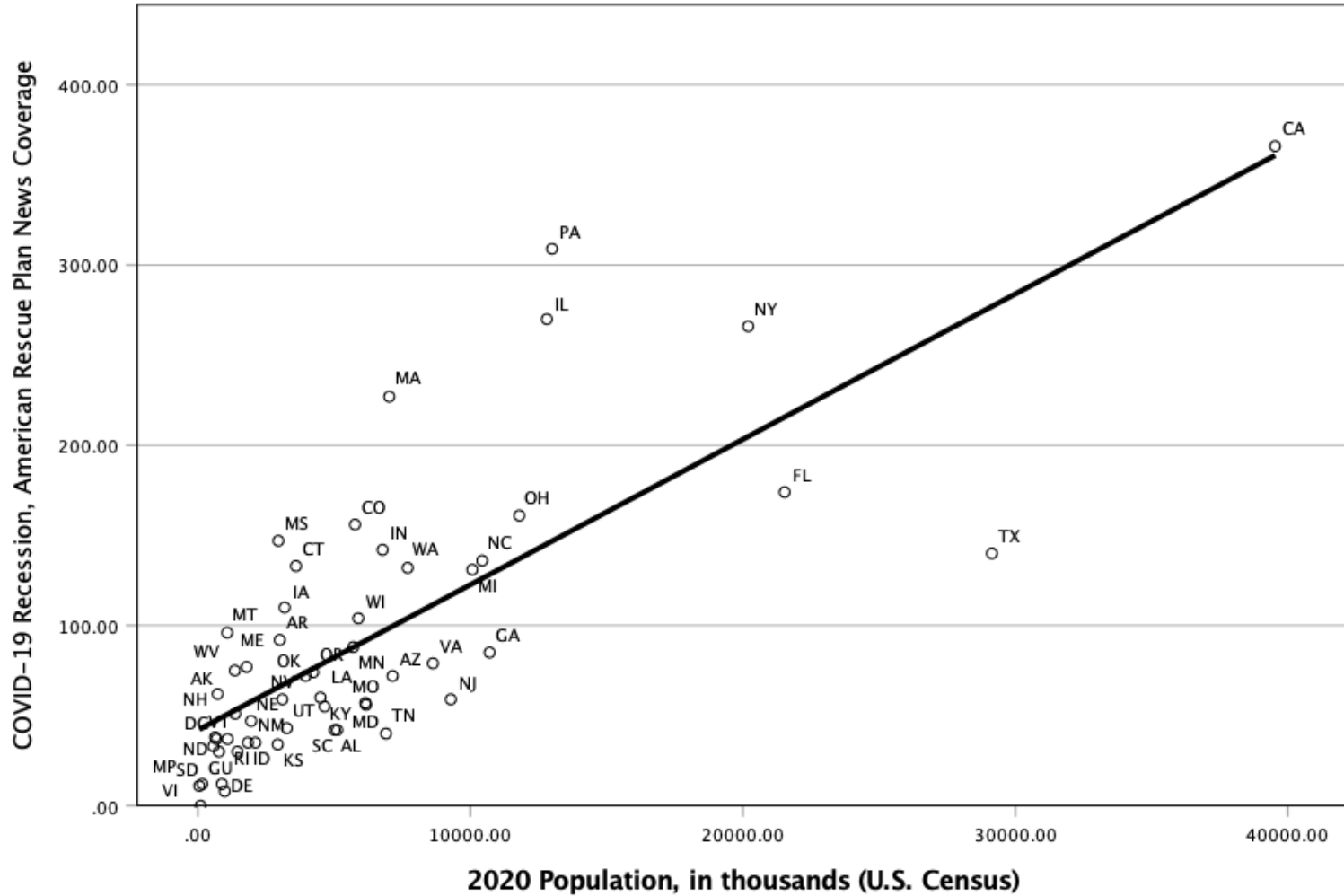


Figure E.14. State & Territory Population and News Coverage Scatterplot (COVID-19 Recession, American Rescue Plan)

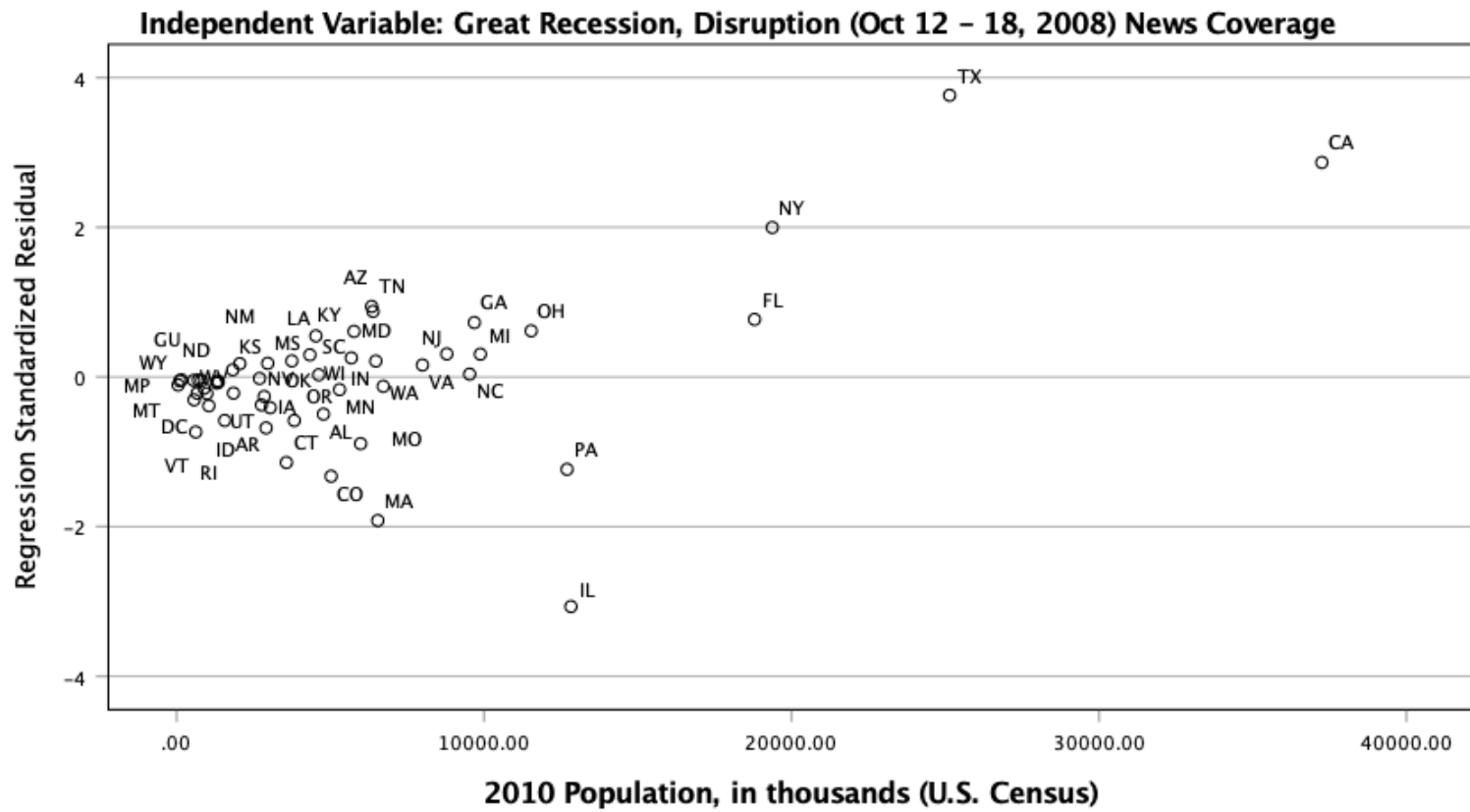


Figure E.15. Residual Plot, Great Recession Disruption (Oct 12 – 18, 2008) News Coverage

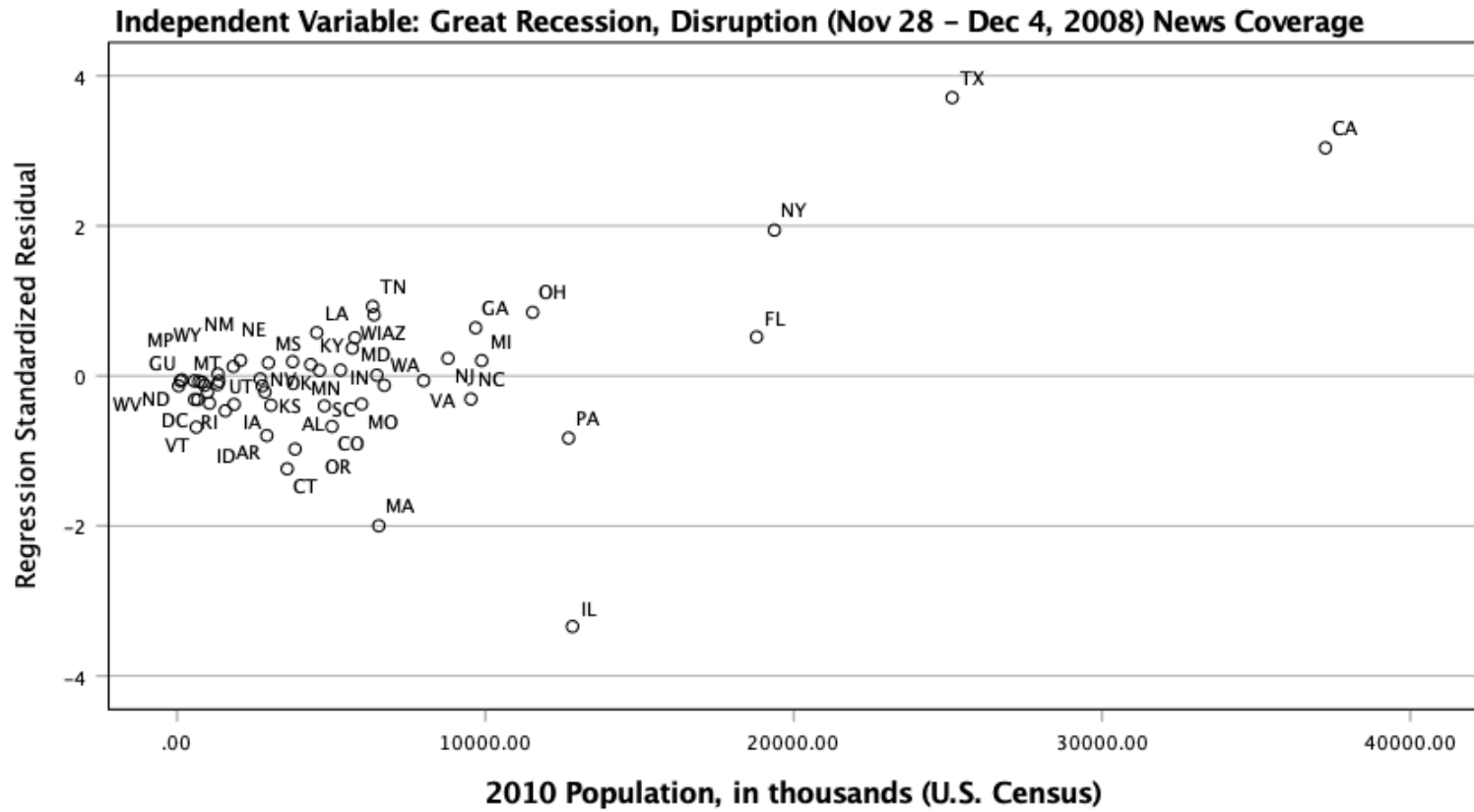


Figure E.16. Residual Plot, Great Recession (Nov 28 – Dec 4, 2008) News Coverage

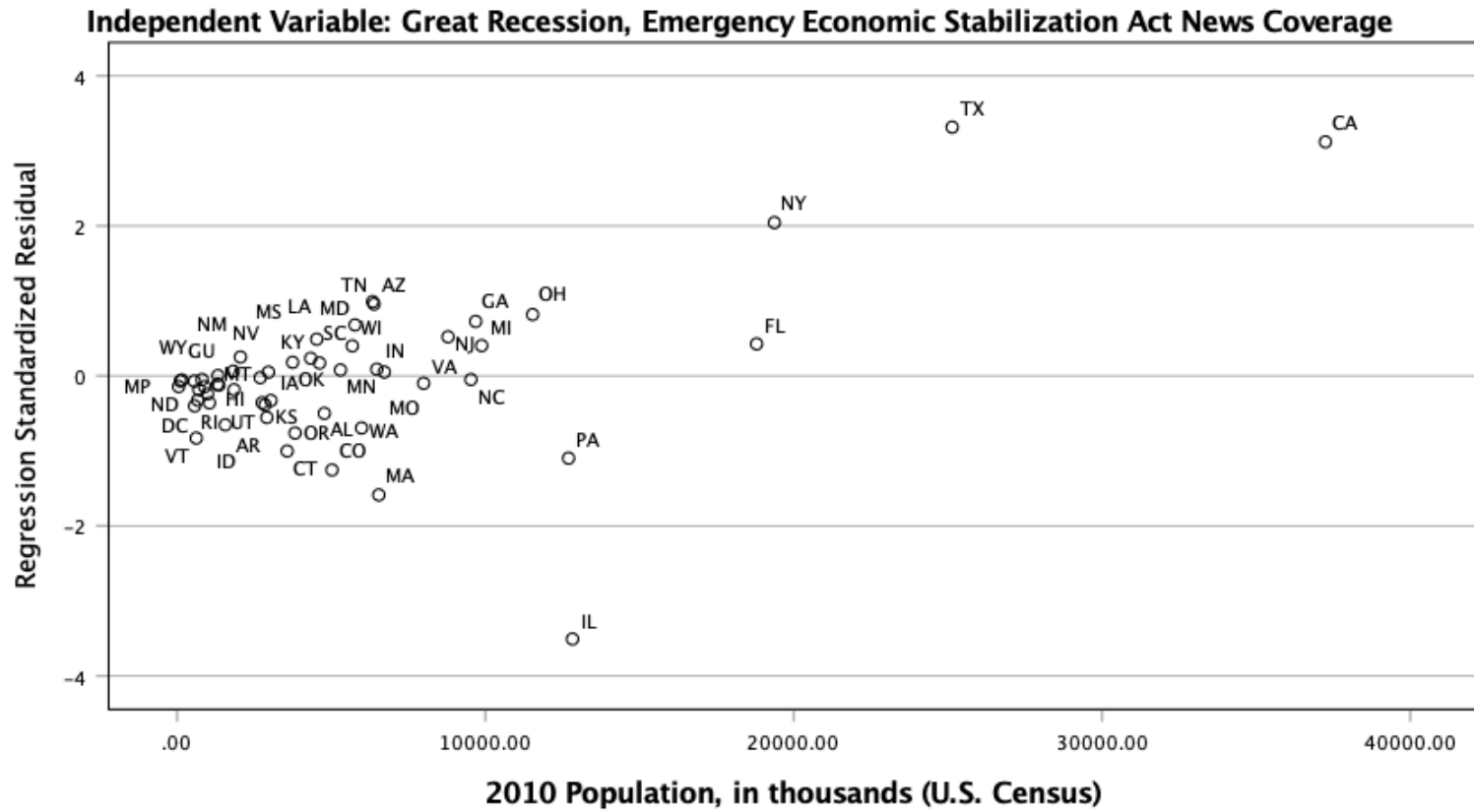


Figure E.17. Residual Plot, Great Recession Policy (*Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*) News Coverage

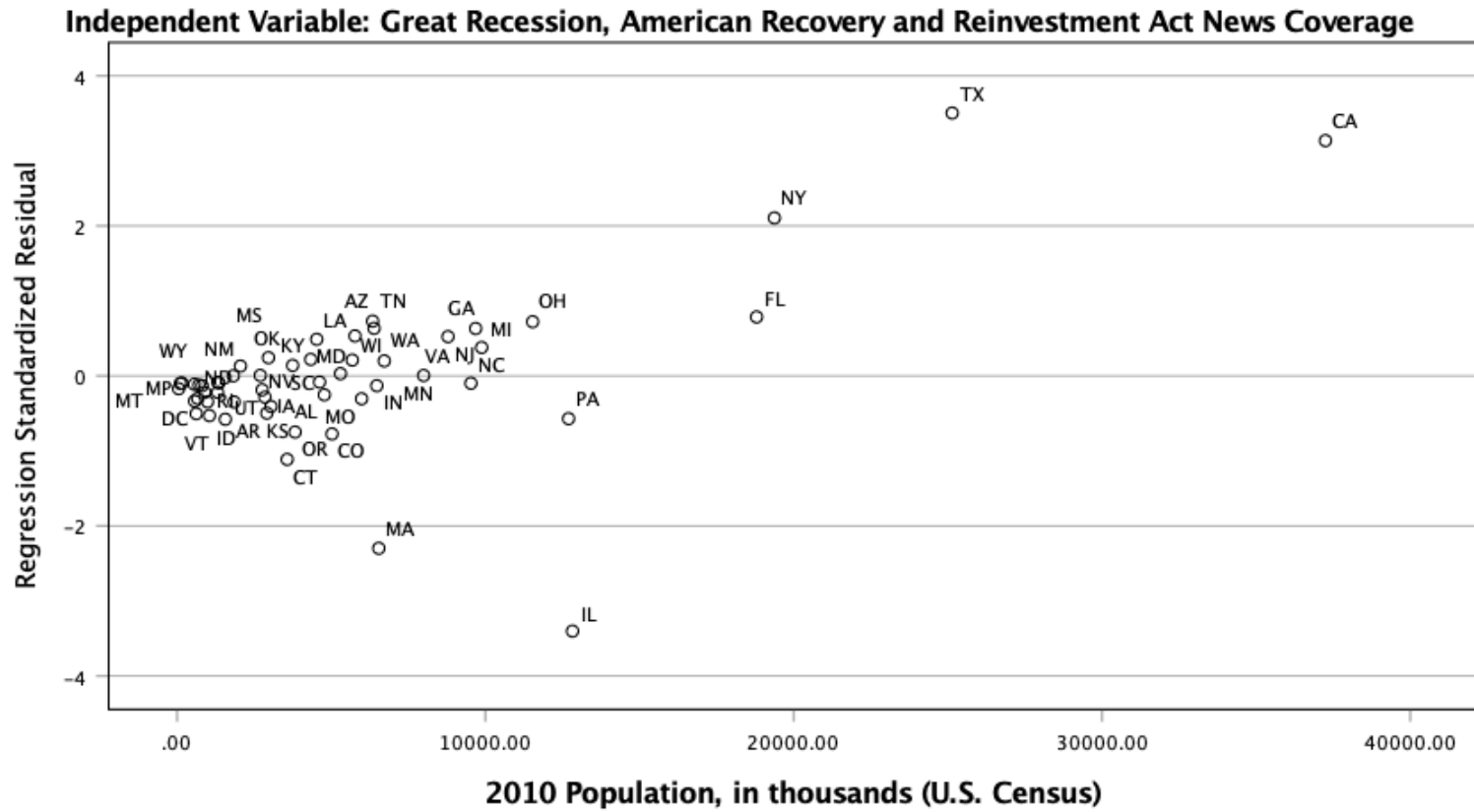


Figure E.18. Residual Plot, Great Recession (*American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*) News Coverage

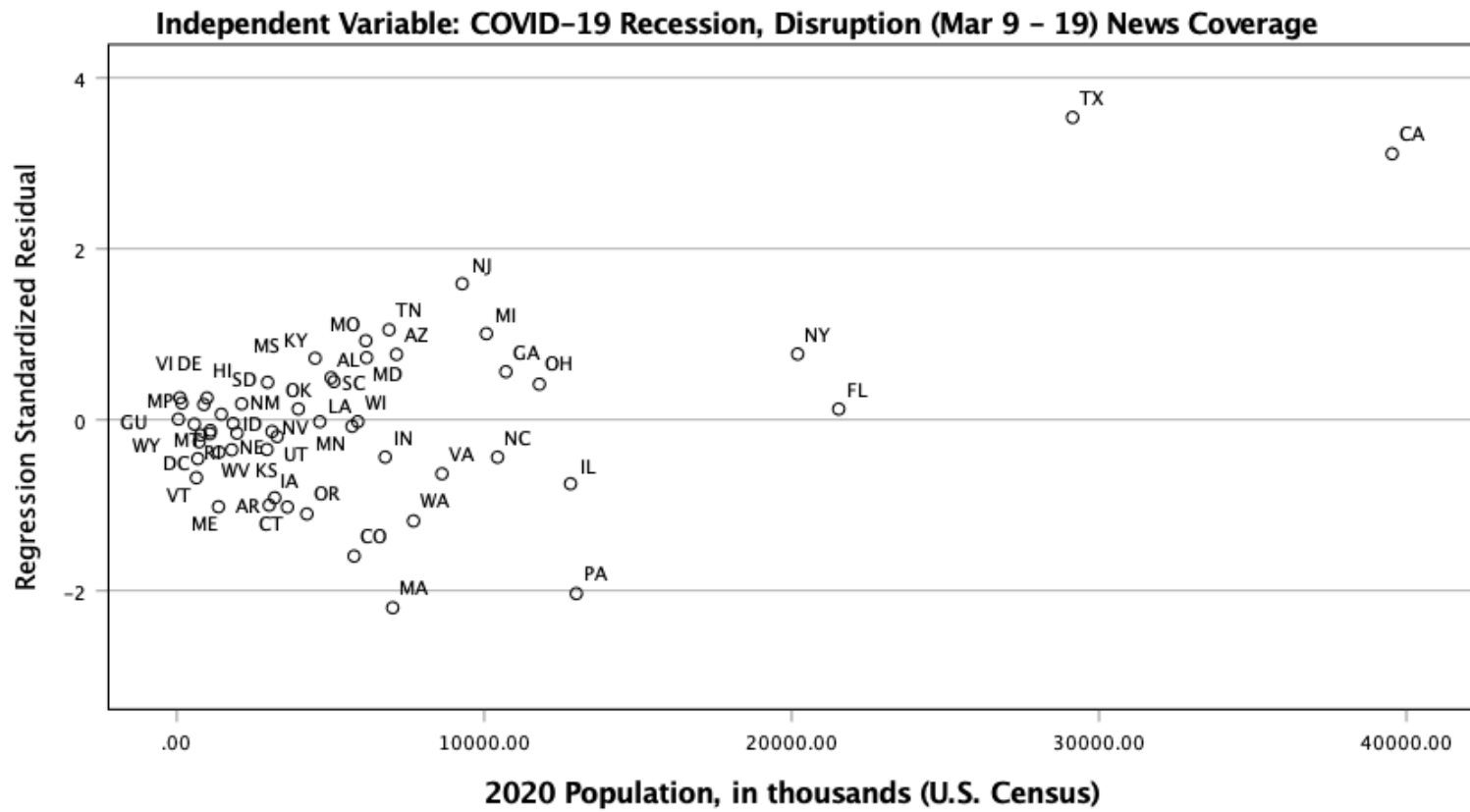


Figure E.19. Residual Plot, COVID-19 Recession (Mar 9 – 19, 2020) News Coverage

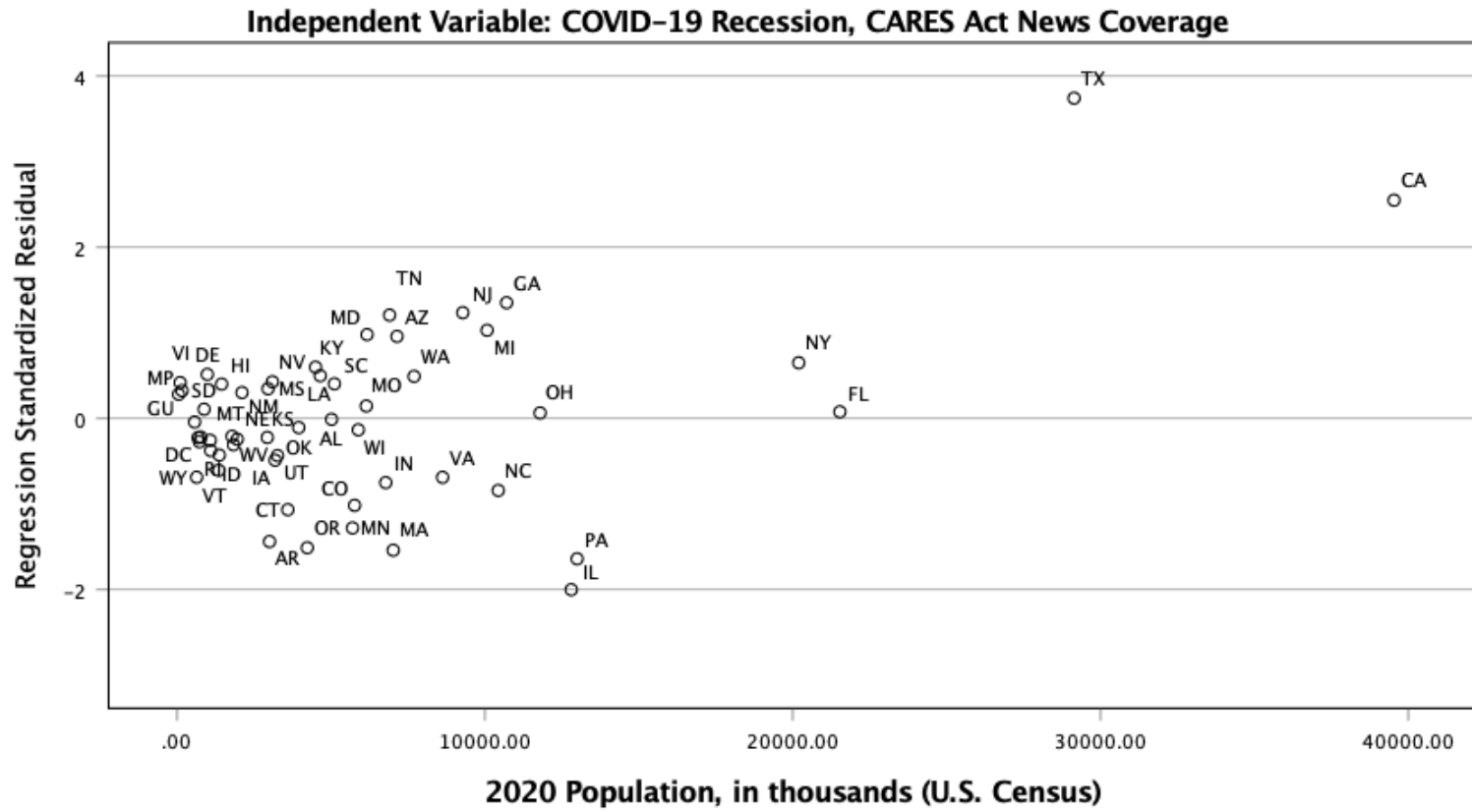


Figure E.20. Residual Plot, COVID-19 Recession (*CARES Act*) News Coverage

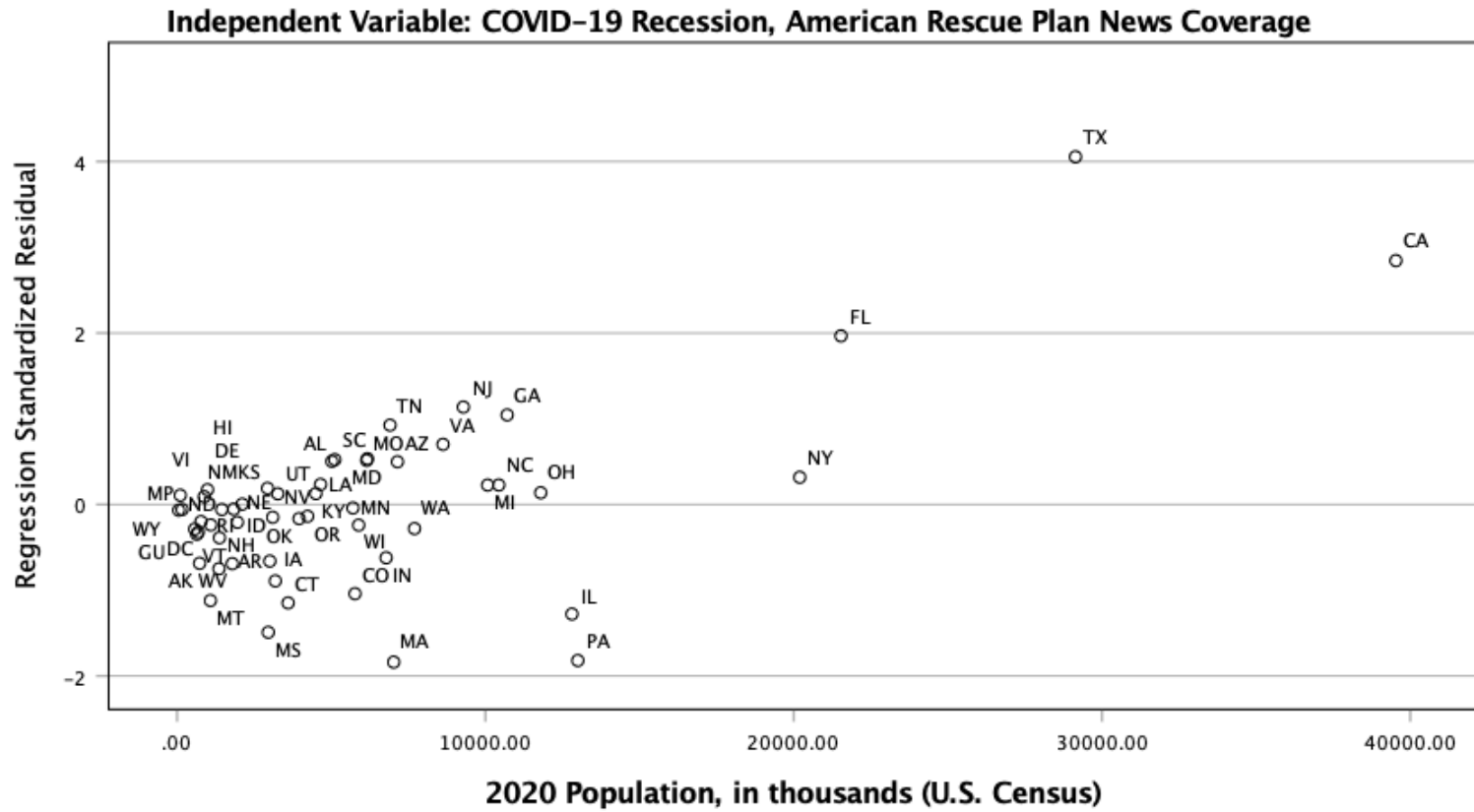


Figure E.21. Residual Plot, COVID-19 Recession (*American Rescue Plan*) News Coverage

APPENDIX F.

STUDY ONE: DATA COLLECTION BY DATE

COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (Mar 9 - 19, 2020) News Coverage by Date

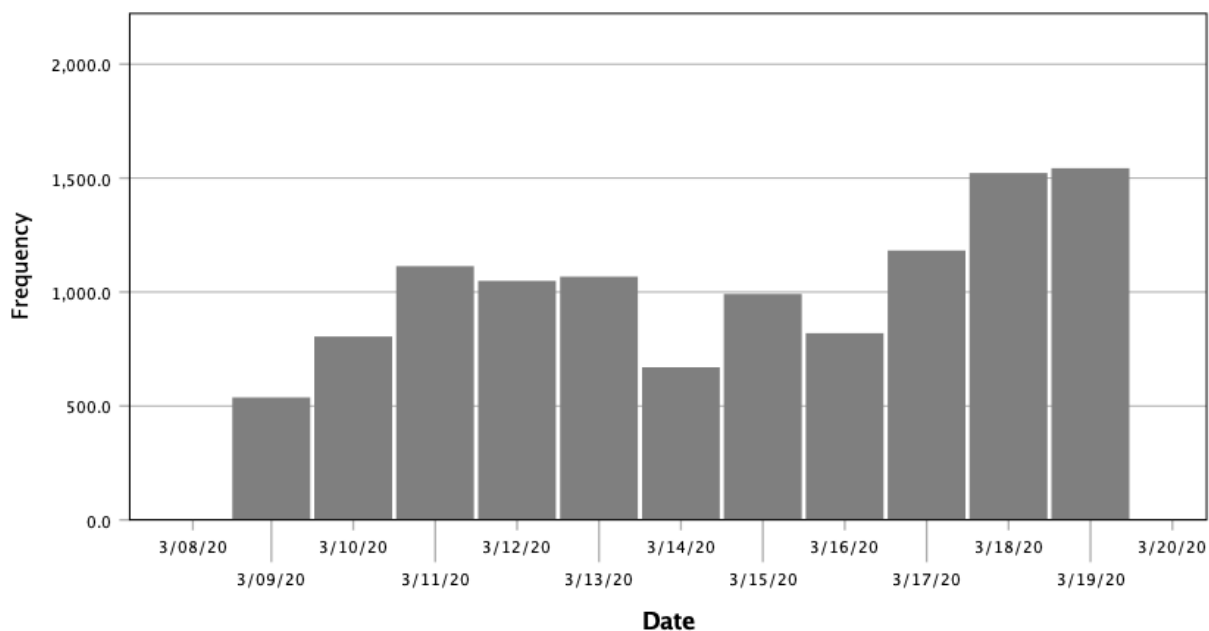


Figure F.1. Histogram, COVID-19 Recession, Disruption (Mar 9 - 19, 2020) News Coverage by Date

COVID-19 Recession, CARES Act News Coverage by Date

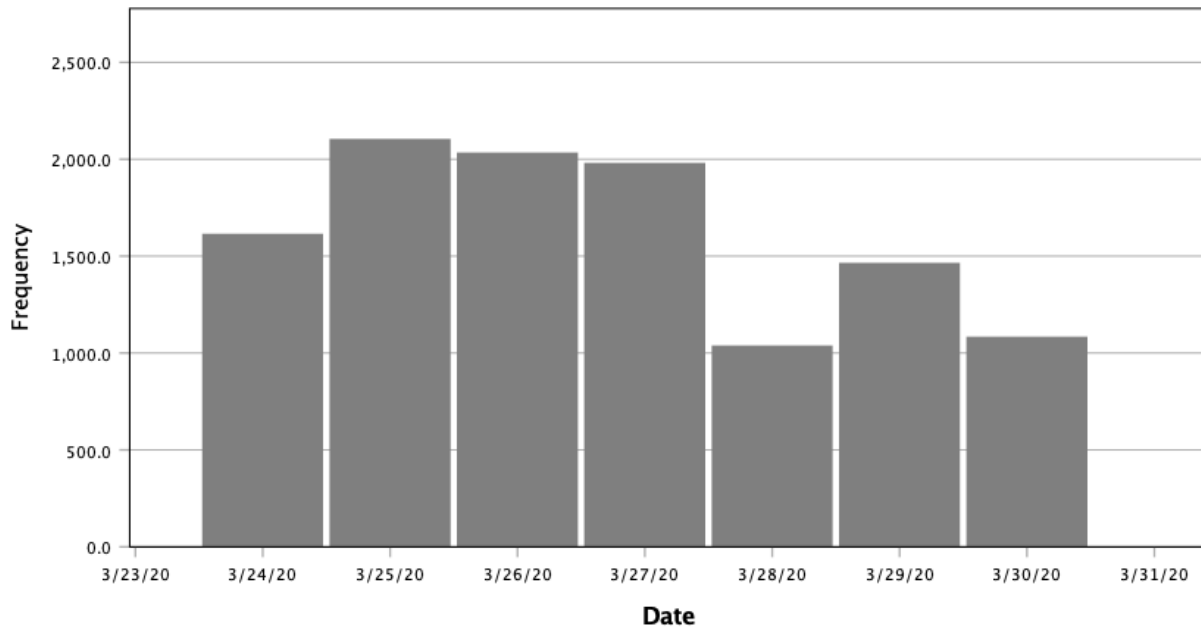
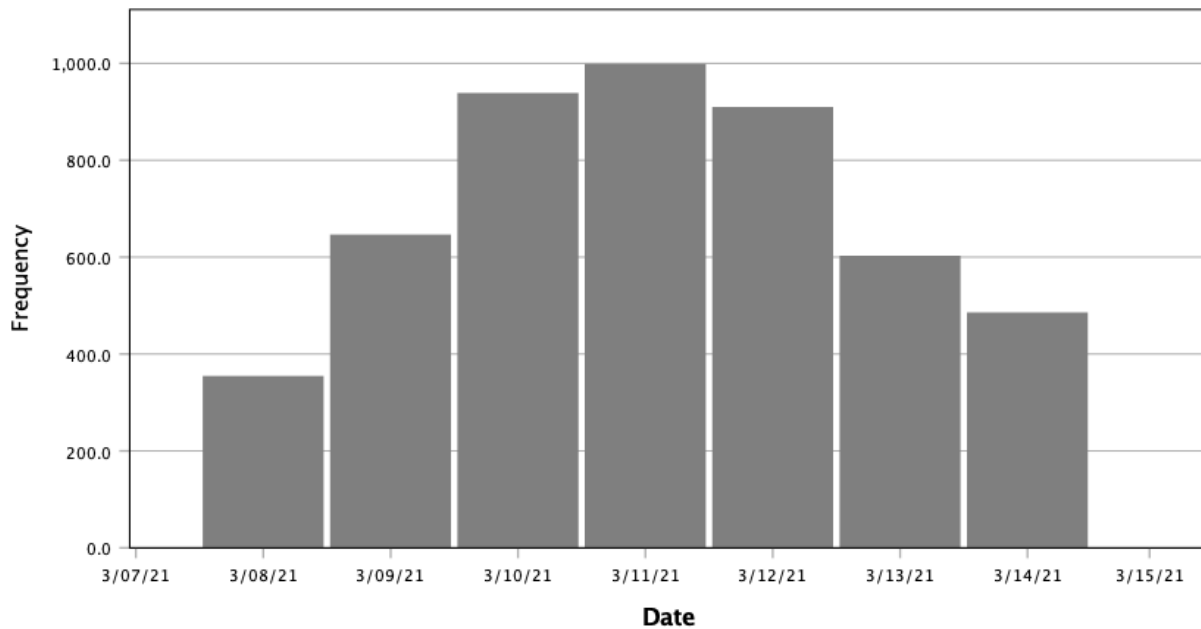


Figure F.2. Histogram, COVID-19 Recession, CARES Act News Coverage by Date

COVID-19 Recession, American Rescue Plan News Coverage by Date



dFigure F.3. Histogram, COVID-19 Recession, American Rescue Plan News Coverage by Date

Great Recession, Disruption (Oct 12– 18, 2008) News Coverage by Date

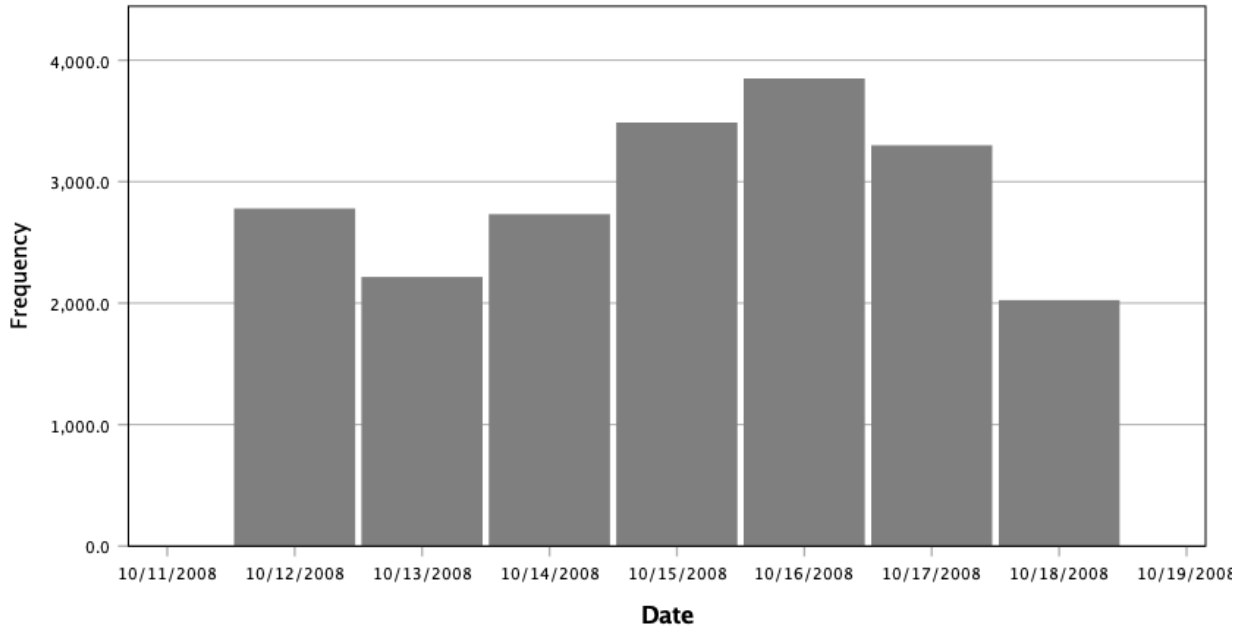


Figure F.4. Histogram, Great Recession, Disruption (October 12 – 18, 2008) News Coverage by Date

Great Recession, Disruption (Nov 28 – Dec 4, 2008) News Coverage by Date

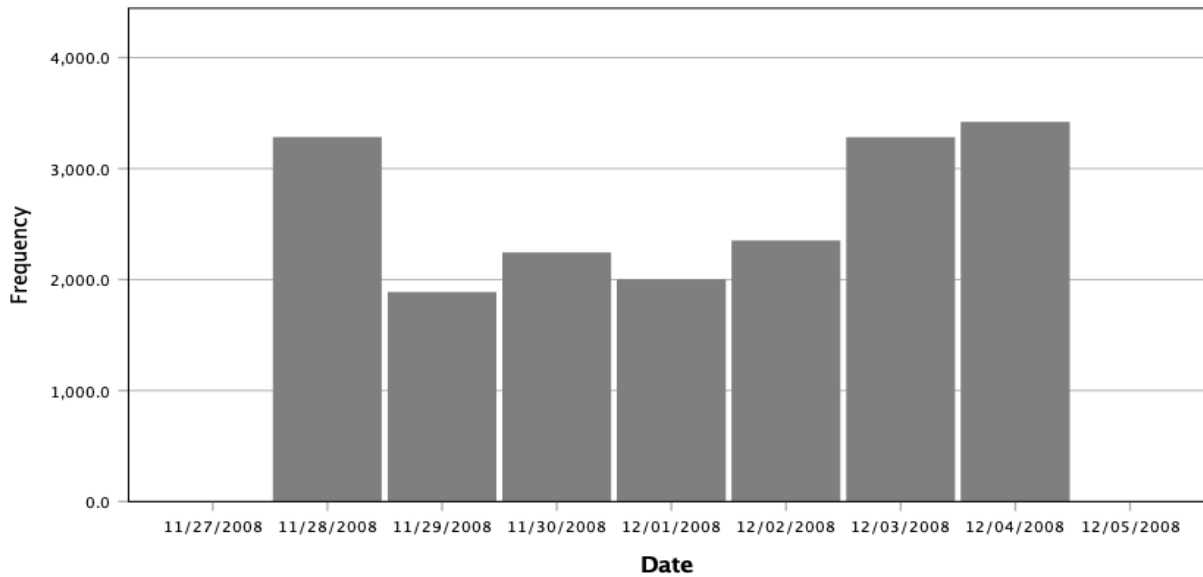


Figure F.5. Histogram, Great Recession, Disruption (November 28 – December 4, 2008) News Coverage by Date

Great Recession, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act News Coverage by Date

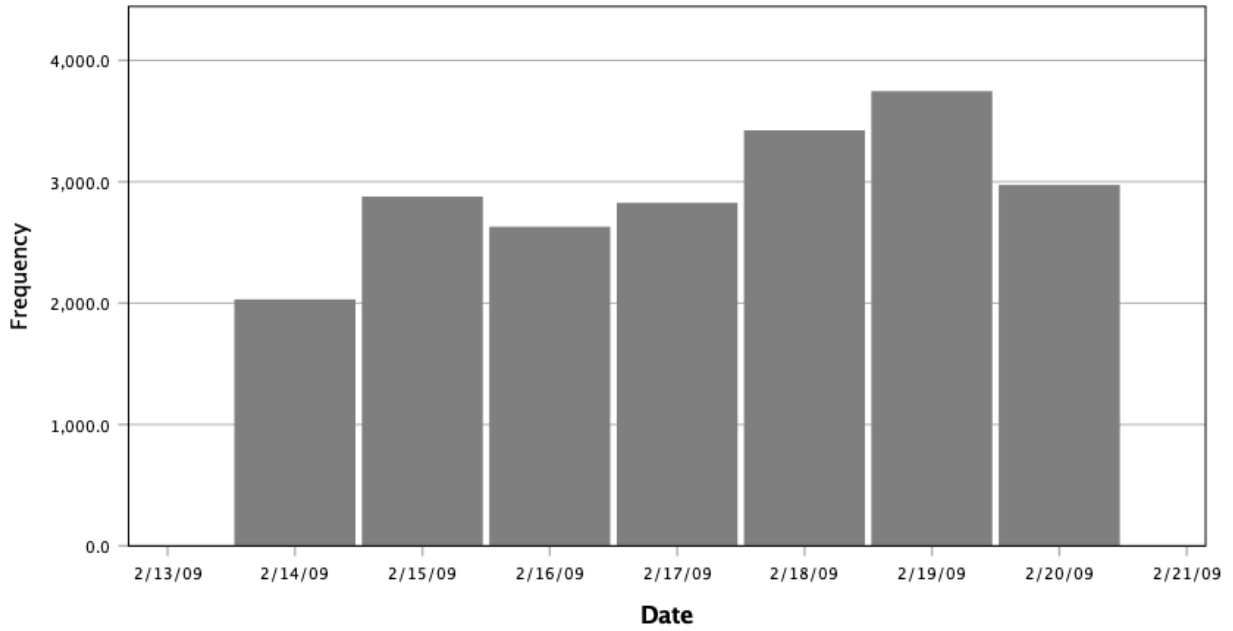


Figure F.6. Histogram, Great Recession, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act News Coverage by Date

Great Recession, Emergency Economic Stabilization Act News Coverage by Date

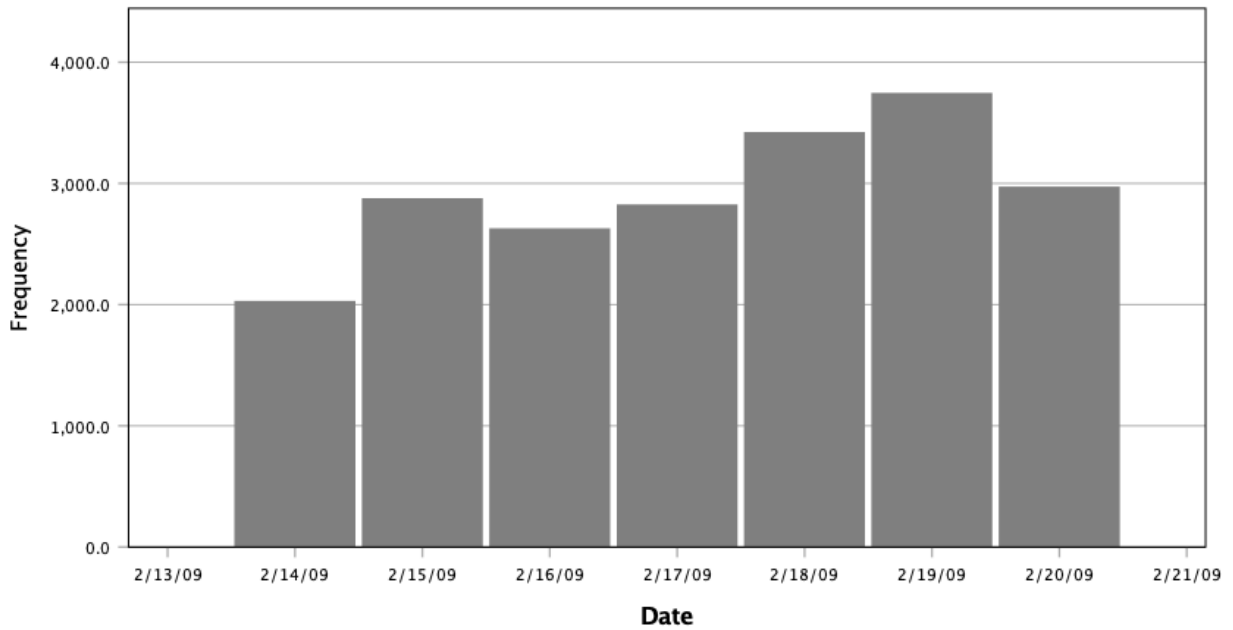


Figure F.7. Great Recession, Emergency Economic Stabilization Act News Coverage by Date