U.S. – China Congressional Securitization Codebook v1.0

Last updated August 9, 2025

I. Description

The below dataset represents a systematic, cross-committee analysis of how and when U.S. congressional actors frame China as a security threat ("securitization"). Each row represents a discrete securitization message drawn from hearing transcripts, committee meetings, and other formal congressional documents. Manual coding variables capture both the conceptual issues under discussion and the type and intensity of the messages as expressed by congressional members.

For each message, it records the congressional term and exact date, member name, party affiliation, and home state (and specific district for House members). It also identifies the committee and chamber context and specifies the document type. The time span of the dataset extends from 2013 to 2024, covering five consecutive Congressional terms.

II. Defining Securitization

Following key literature in the studies of securitization, this dataset defines the basic logic of securitization as when an issue is constructed, as well as prioritized, within a political community as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and it is then likely followed by a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with such threats.[1] The process of securitization emphasizes the importance of constructive and performative dialogues – speech acts – which create a story of threat and the need to address it.

In the context of the present dataset, securitization of China in U.S. congressional settings occurs when a member frames China or a China-linked issue as an exceptional danger to core U.S. positions – such as national security, economic interests, technological leadership, democratic institutions, and higher education – and proposes harsh actions to be employed. The language is urgent and typically urges protective or punitive steps (e.g., sanctions, export/investment controls, procurement bans). Such a statement paints China as a threat to U.S. interests, both public and private.

III. Selection of Committees

Below is an overview of the congressional committees included by this dataset:

[1] Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998), 24; Guzzini, Stefano. 2011. "Securitization as a Causal Mechanism." *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 5-6: 329-341. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611419000.

- Senate Finance Committee — Writes tax and revenue laws, manages trade and tariff policy, and oversees major health programs like Medicare and Medicaid.

- House Ways and Means Committee — The House's chief tax-writing panel with jurisdiction over revenue, tariffs, Medicare, Social Security, and trade agreements.

- Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee — Covers interstate commerce, consumer protection, communications, transportation, and federal science and technology policy.

- House Science, Space, and Technology Committee — Oversees non-defense federal research and development, including NASA, NSF, NIST, and the DOE Office of Science.

- Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee — Handles public health, education policy, labor standards, workforce development, and retirement security.

- House Education and the Workforce Committee — Governs K–12 and higher education policy, labor and employment laws, workforce training, and employee benefits.

These committees were specifically selected to enable examination of dialogues about China's threat in domains not traditionally associated with national security, yet marked by significant competition: trade, technology, and higher education. Trade rules and enforcement are made concrete in Finance and Ways & Means; innovation, standards, and critical technologies are anchored in Commerce and House Science; and the higher-education ecosystem and research workforce are shaped in HELP and Education & the Workforce. Taken together, the diffusion of concerns about China into economic, technological, and academic arenas is captured, and securitizing language is increasingly used to guide policy choices beyond the traditional defense and foreign affairs domains.

IV. Coding Exercise

All statements were identified via Congress.gov (Library of Congress). An initial corpus of approximately 300 congressional records was retrieved using the keywords "China" and "threat." Each document was screened for substantive relevance, and discrete utterances were extracted as the unit of analysis (one observation per statement). Statements were hand-coded using a predefined scheme capturing conceptual context, statement type, intensity (Statement Scale), and any proposed action, with accompanying actor and document metadata. The final dataset comprises 1,724 coded statements.

V. Variables

Below is an overview of this dataset's variables:

- **Congressional Term** — *(Identifier)* The numbered Congress in which the statement occurred (e.g., 113th–118th), used to situate entries in time and session.

- **Date** — *(Identifier)* The calendar date on which the source hearing/document took place or was published.

- **Name** — *(Identifier)* The full name of the member whose statement was coded.

- **Party** — *(Actor attribute)* The member's party affiliation at the time of the statement.

- **Home State** — *(Actor attribute)* The U.S. state represented by the member.

- **Congressional District** — *(Actor attribute)* The House member's district number (left blank or marked "NA" for Senators).

- **Entry Title** — *(Identifier)* The official title or agenda item of the hearing/document segment from which the statement was drawn.

- **Securitization Message** — *(Text field)* The verbatim or summarized text of the coded statement.

- **Conceptual Context – China** — *(Coded attribute)* The primary China-related domain or policy arena foregrounded by the statement, defined by how the speaker frames the underlying problem and the locus of proposed remedies. Coders assign a single category that best reflects the dominant emphasis of the utterance (anchored in explicit references rather than inference); secondary themes are disregarded unless they reframe the statement's core meaning, and multi-topic remarks are coded to the leading emphasis.

    - Cybersecurity: References to Chinese cyber threats and hacking against US government, society, and companies.

    - Higher Education: Discussions of China's influence on U.S. education, academic malpractices (such as theft of cutting-edge research), Confucius Institutes, or academic freedom.
    - Energy and Natural Resources: Mentions of China's impact on global or American energy resources or renewable energy competition.
    - Environment: References to environmental policies, climate change actions, or pollution.
    - Geopolitics: Comments on China's international influence, diplomatic relations, territorial disputes, regional alliances or cooperative frameworks (such as the BRI, Russian alliance, TPP, NATO, etc.)

    - Human Rights & Freedoms: Statements addressing China's human rights abuses, censorship, restrictions on freedom of expression, media, internet access, or persecution of minority and dissident groups.
    - National Health: Statements connecting China to public health concerns or pandemic-related issues.
    - Military & Defense: Mentions of China's military capabilities, modernization, or strategic threats.
    - National Infrastructure: Concerns about Chinese involvement in U.S. critical infrastructure, such as telecommunications or transportation.
    - Sci-Tech R&D: Discussions of U.S.-China competition or collaboration in technology/protection of technology (intellectual property), science, or innovation.
    - Tourism: References to U.S.-China tourism, travel policies, cultural exchanges, or tourism economics.
    - Trade & Economy Practices: Statements about U.S.-China trade relations, including currency manipulation, unfair trade practices (e.g., subsidies, dumping, market access restrictions), tariffs, and overall economic competition or cooperation.
- **Statement Type** — *(Coded attribute)* The categorical level of stance/intensity (e.g., cooperation, neutral, mild securitization, securitization, securitization with actions proposed).
    - Cooperation: Politician advocates for or explores the possibility of a cooperative stance with China's companies or government.
        - Example: Ways and Means: "I think the other thing to consider here is TPP, in reality, is not going to just be limited to the 12 nations that are at the table negotiating, there are many others that are expressing interest in joining, including possibly at some time in the future, China. And if we can get the rules done right now embodied in this agreement, then that is something that China will have to adopt".
    - Neutral: Politician lists or describes factual information about China in a primarily informative manner.
        - Example: Health, Education, Labor, Pensions: "It wasn't our policy that initiated the fact that we've pretty well said we don't want to use coal anymore? And I look at China where they're building all the green energy stuff and they're fueling it with fire or coal fired plants, building you hear, one a week, in terms of electric generation fueled by coal, India as well."
    - Mild Securitization: Politician explores the possibility of China being a threat through asking a question or voicing a concern. (Note: sometimes a politician would ask a question with a set mind that China is already a threat, e.g., "China is doing all these harmful things to America. How can we deal with it?" In that case, it is categorized as "securitization".)

        - Example: Commerce, Science, Transportation: “I'm going to go to a different product that's applicable to West Virginia and that's our hardwood lumber and metallurgical coal industries.

          They've been very hard hit by the Chinese retaliatory tariffs in response to the Section 301 Investigation, but when the Phase 1 negotiations provided us positive news on both of those, but they're still not living up to their purchase agreements.

          Do you think that's tied to this overall economy or is this something that is consistent across all product lines, and what can I tell my hardwood and metallurgical coal folks to expect in the future whether they will live up to their purchase requirements?”
    - Securitization: Politician depicts China as a threat or danger to U.S. interests but does not propose a course of action. Additionally, China is mentioned as part of a select group of threatening entities.
        - Example: Ways & Means: “China, which continues to discriminate against American companies and subsidizing its case, is the most egregious example. WTO reform needs to address harmful nonmarket practices.”
    - Securitization with Actions Proposed: Politician depicts China as a threat or danger to U.S. interests and proposes a course of action soon after.
        - Example: Health, Education, Labor, Pensions: “Specifically, the bill prohibits the use of NIH funds by any Chinese company (or its subcontractors or subsidiaries). This includes companies (1) over which the Chinese government, a Chinese national, or an entity organized under Chinese law exercises control; or (2) in which the Chinese government has a substantial interest. It also requires, as a condition of certification, that clinical laboratories that have access to U.S. health data disclose ties to the Chinese government.”
- **Statement Scale** — *(Coded attribute)* A numeric score reflecting the intensity of securitizing language.
    - Cooperation – 1
    - Neutral – 2
    - Mild Securitization – 3
    - Securitization – 4
    - Securitization with Actions Proposed – 5
- **International Rivalry** — *(Coded attribute)* An indicator for whether the statement frames China chiefly as seeking to overtake the top or leadership positions of the U.S., or if a politician expresses his/her concern or anxiety about being overtaken by China in various areas such as economic, politica, technological, energy, etc.
    - 1 – yes
        - Examples:

        - "With respect to patents just filed in the United States or China, China overtook the United States in 2011."
        - "A recent study by Stanford University ranked universities by the number of AI papers they published. The study found that nine of the top 10 universities were based in China. Coming in at 10th was the only U.S. institution, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Chinese-published papers received nearly the same percentage of citations as U.S. researchers' papers, showing the gap in research quality is also diminishing."
    - 0 – no
- **Proposed Action** — *(Coded attribute)* A summary denoting policy proposal urged by the speaker (e.g., sanctions, export controls, investigations, funding).
- **Committee** — *(Identifier)* The congressional committee associated with the source statement.
- **Chamber** — *(Identifier)* The congressional chamber in which the statement appears (House or Senate).
- **Document Type** — *(Identifier)* The form of the source record.
    - Committee Meeting
    - Committee Report
    - Bill
    - Law