ABSTRACT

Child trafficking has been a primary interest of international actors. The United States has steered its legislation and anchored it in a solid treat narrative. Recent years have seen QAnon construct a competitive framing of the issue. This paper addressed how the established securitisation of the United States was disrupted by QAnon's intervention. It inquired about the nature of the disruption and questioned whether and how both actors entered a competitive securitisation dynamic over child trafficking. This has been done through the lens of discourse analysis to operationalise securitisation theory and evaluate the prominence of its three criteria: the framing of the threat, audience acceptance and subsequent measures. It found that the United States securitisation was being contested by QAnon's attempt at securitising the issue from below. While the attempt has only been partially successful, QAnon successfully established itself as a legitimate competing narrative actor. However, adherence to QAnon's narrative is on the rise and attention should be given to its evolution to prevent further damage to the government's rule of Law. The discursive competition processes have also impacted the perception of child trafficking and its subsequent mitigation by perpetrating stereotypes and misconceptions, a reminder of the potentially harmful consequences of securitisation. The present research contributed to the nascent literature on securitisation from below by providing a process through which a non-state actor can attempt a bottom-up securitising move. It studied securitisation from below not independently but in relation to the dominant securitisation and provided insights on their connection. Finally, it highlighted further research pursuits in securitisation from below: the changing nature of speech acts due to social media and the role of identity.

Keywords

QAnon, securitisation from below, child trafficking, counter-securitisation, United States, social media, non-state actor, frame contests, audience trust