Attorney General Barr’s testimony last week before the Senate Judiciary Committee was simultaneously instructive and frustrating. From a rhetorical perspective, there was a difference between how the Republicans and Democrats questioned, as well as Barr’s responses to each side.

The Democrats’ pointed and direct questions, followed by Barr’s hair-splitting and extraordinarily evasive responses, may not get us anywhere. Americans don’t have the patience to wade through this interaction; nor will they read a 400 page report. The Republicans, on the other hand, diverted the issue to FISA procedures and the reason for Mueller’s appointment. They applauded Mueller’s report and his credibility, claiming the matter is concluded.

Future testimony by Mueller may do little to change the narrative Trump preemptively framed and made more persuasively potent by Barr’s initial letter and news conference. Holding Trump accountable and providing a check against his lying and inappropriate—perhaps illegal—behavior comes down to devising a rhetorical strategy that will remove the President from office.
As a communication scholar, that strategy is talking about the 2020 election and not immediately calling for impeachment. Congressional oversight is important but must not blur the issues capable of persuading Americans to vote for the Democratic nominee.

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