

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Purpose-Driven Congress: Measuring and Explaining Legislative Outcomes of House Investigations

 Claire Leavitt 

Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, USA

 Correspondence: Claire Leavitt (cleavitt@smith.edu)

Received: 2 June 2025 | Revised: 14 May 2026 | Accepted: 9 June 2026

ABSTRACT

What inspires and propels investigative work in Congress? Members consistently cite legislative action to claim credit for their investigations, but what makes certain inquiries more legislatively productive than others? In this paper, I link members' investigative and legislative work and argue that committee investigations represent a crucial stage in the broader policymaking process in Congress. I assess the structure of House Oversight Committee investigations and the role of each component part in predicting legislative outcomes. I show that, contrary to their reputation as theatrical time-wasters, public nonlegislative committee hearings contribute to problem-solving via both individual and collective legislative action. Additionally, I offer a normative upside to the effects of partisanship on executive-targeted investigations: Committee investigations are more legislatively productive under divided rather than unified government.

1 | Introduction

In the 1957 Supreme Court case *Watkins vs. United States*, no less a constitutional authority than Chief Justice Earl Warren established that “the power of the Congress to conduct investigations is inherent in the legislative process. That power is broad. It encompasses inquiries concerning the administration of existing laws as well as proposed or possibly needed statutes.” However, Warren included in his majority opinion a caveat, warning that “no inquiry is an end in itself; it must be related to, and in furtherance of, a legitimate task of the Congress. Investigations conducted solely for the personal aggrandizement of the investigators or to ‘punish’ those investigated are indefensible” (354 U.S. 178, 187).

In other words, investigations must have *legislative purpose*, a term that has been routinely weaponized by recalcitrant government and nongovernment officials alike against Congressional investigators. For just one instance, in the 2020 Supreme Court case *Trump vs. Mazars*, President Donald Trump grounded his refusal to turn over his tax returns in House committees' lack of a “valid legislative purpose” for the inquiry. Yet despite the

constitutional entanglement of Congress' investigative and legislative responsibilities, the scholarly literature has tended to treat the processes as distinct and motivated by disparate incentives. While there is a robust body of work on Congressional committees' use of oversight and investigations to align administrative outcomes with their own preferences (Dodd and Schott 1979; Moe 1987, 2013; McGrath 2013; MacDonald and McGrath 2016; Feinstein 2018; Lowande and Potter 2021; Ban and Hill 2025), the effect of investigative activity on the legislative process is less known (though see Lewallen et al. 2016; Lewallen 2020; Fagan and McGee 2022).

This paper explores the *legislative outcomes* of Congressional investigations. Via an analysis of 18 years of investigations on the primary oversight committee in the House of Representatives, I assess several factors that may explain variations in the legislative productivity of committee investigations. Congress's legislative work, perfectly intuitively, is measured by legislative action—by the bills, amendments and other provisions introduced, marked up, passed and enacted. But I argue that committees' *investigative* work can and should be assessed in the same way. “Legislative purpose” is

not simply a term parsed by courts when ruling on disputes between Congressional committees and their legislative targets; rather, the passage of legislation in service of a problem revealed by an investigation is one of the purposes of the investigation itself.

Thus, I argue that scholars and political actors should conceive of the investigative and legislative processes as interrelated parts of a long and complex effort toward *problem-solving* in Congress. During committee-led investigations, members collect, process, and present information about salient problems to themselves, their colleagues, and the public, which in turn informs the legislative solutions they devise and build coalitions to pass.

This paper proceeds in four parts. In Section 2, I explicitly link the investigative and legislative processes in Congress by identifying committees' practice of what I call *investigative credit claiming*. In Section 3, I deconstruct committee investigations: I justify my use of *investigations* rather than their constituent activities—letters, hearings and reports—as a relevant unit of analysis, and posit that each type of activity plays a distinct role in building an investigation and setting the stage for legislative action. In Section 4, I assess the effect of partisanship on the legislative productivity of investigations aimed at the executive branch. Finally, in Section 5, I test how a committee leader's strategic deployment of *information resources* affects the legislative output of her panel's investigations. My findings offer some solace to observers who worry that partisanship and the theatricality of public hearings have eroded the effectiveness of investigations in Congress: Both partisan opposition to the president and frequent public hearings predict that an investigation is *more* legislatively productive.

2 | Investigative Credit Claiming

In 1973, Richard Fenno identified members' desire to “make good public policy” as a goal distinct from their reelection imperative (Mayhew 1974); Congress' oversight work advances this goal (Ogul and Rockman 1990; Evans 1994). There is a rich literature on how committees rely on nonlegislative activity to collect and process information about politically salient problems and, subsequently, devise policy solutions (Talbert et al. 1995; Diermeier and Feddersen 2000; Lewallen et al. 2016, 2018; Park 2017; Levin and Bean 2018; Lewallen 2020; Fagan and McGee 2022; Ban et al. 2023; Eldes et al. 2024). And while there is certainly evidence (Lewallen 2020) that members may consciously pursue investigations at the expense of legislative work, the choice between oversight vs. legislating is not necessarily zero-sum. I argue that information gathering and processing during the *investigative process* facilitates a member's *legislative* goals by (a) substantively contributing to her understanding of a given problem and, thus, to a higher-quality proffered solution; and (b) publicly demonstrating her grasp of the problem and, thus, enhancing her credibility in proposing and advocating for a particular solution.

While not every investigation has immediate or clear legislative relevance, investigations can serve as vehicles for future legislative action. Reports from legislative watchdog agencies such as the Government Accountability Office (GAO) explicitly cite

the need for legislative, in addition to administrative, policy responses to waste, fraud and abuse in government (Leavitt 2024). Members also routinely propose or discuss various possible solutions to a problem they are investigating, even if exact legislative language does not yet exist. Rep. Katie Porter (D-CA) refers to hearings as “an opportunity to educate the American people about what's at stake in the policy choices we're making. The average American doesn't have hours to spend to educate themselves on these topics. They don't have staff—we do” (quoted in Dayen 2021).

Members of Congress claim credit for policy actions that directly benefit their constituents, and the *frequency* with which members claim credit affects their levels of support back home (Grimmer et al. 2012, 2014). Credit claiming is not dependent on legislative success, as less effective legislators claim credit at the same rate as their more effective peers (Simas et al. 2025), though the translation of these claims into electoral capital depends on whether a member's actions actually meet her constituents' demands (McLaughlin 2025). And while most of the literature on credit claiming focuses on particularistic spending, members also link themselves to broader pieces of regulatory legislation, emphasizing in press releases and social media posts their roles as co-sponsors and other forms of engagement in getting a bill across the finish line.

But scholars and practitioners have often emphasized the distinction between the *legislative* role, which permits credit claiming, and the *investigative* role, which provides opportunities for position taking via public actions (Mayhew 2000). And while in 1885, Woodrow Wilson maintained that “the informing function of Congress should be preferred even to its legislative function” (172), contemporary political actors appear eager to denigrate oversight as a distraction from Congress' “real” work. In 2007, President George W. Bush criticized the Democrat-controlled House and Senate for “not getting its work done. The House of Representatives has wasted its time on a constant stream of investigations” (The White House 2007). In 2019, President Donald Trump Tweeted, referring to House-led investigations: “You can't investigate and legislate simultaneously—it just doesn't work that way. You can't go down two tracks at the same time” (quoted in Tillett and Watson 2019). That same year, former House Oversight Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) noted that “the Democrats have taken their A-list freshmen and put them on the Oversight Committee—there is a reason why. If you want to be a viper and aren't afraid of mixing it up, Oversight is a good place for you” (quoted in Caldwell and Moe 2019).

These comments are not necessarily insincere or even inaccurate; partisan grandstanding is an all-too-familiar part of the investigative process, particularly during public hearings (Park 2021; Lewallen et al. 2024) and in online communications (Grimmer 2013; Wang and Tucker 2021). But the rhetorical separation of oversight and supposedly more substantive legislative work places members in a defensive position, searching for ways to justify and legitimize their investigative work.

Voters also tend to be skeptical of the value of oversight. After the 2022 midterm election cycle, a majority of Americans worried that the new Republican majority would focus “too

much” on investigating President Joe Biden, presumably at the expense of legislating (Pew Research Center 2023). In 2018, voters had the same concerns about the prospective new Democratic House majority (Geiger 2018). As the political scientist Matthew Levendusky puts it: “Issues of interbranch power are complex and inside-baseball and tend to matter most to those who are deeply invested in the process and are typically the most partisan. Most voters see this sort of feuding and wonder why Congress isn’t spending time trying to fix health care, tackle climate change, and so forth” (Penn Today 2019).

Thus, members have an incentive to explicitly link their oversight work with their legislative efforts—what I term *investigative credit-claiming*. I argue that not only are the investigative and legislative processes connected via the gathering and processing of information, which informs legislative language, but also that members intentionally and publicly tie legislative actions to information uncovered and presented during an investigation. Former House Oversight Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA) called nonlegislative hearings a “golden opportunity to bring public attention to an issue, which instantly makes it a higher priority for Congress. ...The practical effect of a successful hearing is that the media will immediately want to know three things: How did this happen? Whose fault is it? Why isn’t it being stopped? The ensuing pressure often forces the responsible party to take action or creates an imperative for legislation” (Waxman 2009, location 482). Put differently by Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), one of Waxman’s successors as committee chair: “Let’s not forget the full name of our committee—Oversight and Reform. We’re not here just to watch what’s going on; we’re here to correct it when it’s wrong” (Cummings and Dale 2020, 98).

Congress is clear about its desire to address problems uncovered through investigations via legislative reforms. In reports released publicly at the end of particularly salient or heavily resourced investigations, committees often lay out a series of legislative recommendations intended to solve the problems the report has just finished delineating, even if the committee itself does not have legislative jurisdiction over the issue (and thus less of an incentive to couple investigations with reforms). For instance, in December 2022, the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol released its final, 845-page report laying out its case that President Trump was responsible for attempting to overturn a free and fair election. In the final section of the report, the committee made a series of policy recommendations, including four legislative items, based on the cache of evidence it had spent nearly 2 years collecting. Though the report focused on building a criminal case against President Trump, members of the committee stressed that “we also have an obligation to recommend legislation to make sure such an attack never happens again” (Cheney and Lofgren 2022). The month the report was released, Congress passed, and President Biden signed, the Electoral Count Reform and Presidential Transition Act as part of its year-end consolidated appropriations bill, clarifying and strengthening the procedures for certification of states’ electoral votes.

Given that members are eager to tout the legislative effects of their investigative work, and that partisanship does not

necessarily kill fact-finding during committee investigations, why do certain investigations succeed legislatively while others do not within highly polarized environments?

3 | The Structure of an Investigation

In this paper, per Lowande and Peck (2017), I use committee *investigations*, rather than specific activities such as committee hearings, as my unit of analysis. An investigation may focus on a specific accusation of waste, fraud, or abuse, or on a broad policy problem that spans the jurisdiction of multiple agencies and nongovernment actors. Each investigation may also comprise a variety of information-gathering activities, including not only hearings but also letters to institutional targets, public reports, memoranda, and program audits by legislative watchdogs such as GAO (Aberbach 1990; Selin and Moore 2023).

My choice to focus on investigations has two chief benefits. First, it permits a more complete picture of committee investigative work, since the most commonly used proxy (a nonlegislative hearing) is a particular beast, more labor-intensive and public-facing compared with other forms of oversight (Selin and Moore 2023). Second, looking at investigations allows for the consideration that each type of activity plays a specific role within the larger inquiry.

Letters, in which members request information from an institutional target, usually denote the beginning of a committee inquiry. Letters as a form of Congressional action are increasingly studied by oversight scholars as an important mode for influence over the bureaucracy (Ritchie 2018; Ritchie and You 2019; Reynolds and Gode 2020) but are also often mocked for their supposed futility: In May 2025, former White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki quipped of Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer’s (D-NY) “strongly worded letter” to the Trump administration, “if that’s not going to make you shake in your boots, I don’t know what is” (quoted in Herzlich 2025).

I argue that letters are best viewed as tools by which committees establish their investigative agendas and present the scope of their investigations; a committee might target the leader of one particular agency, or it might send letters to 50 agencies, indicating a government-wide inquiry. The substantive information that the letters request, and the number of letters sent, are thus visible forms of committee agenda-setting and are also subtle reminders of the panel’s institutional power when signed by the committee’s chair: If the target of the inquiry does not provide the requested documents or testimony within a set window of time, follow-up letters threatening a subpoena may be sent. Thus, the number of letters sent during an investigation can indicate, in addition to the scope of an inquiry, the chair’s commitment and determination to acquire the requested information.

Nonlegislative hearings serve as public forums in which members can both obtain new information from witnesses but also process existing information while framing it for a public audience. While hearings are choreographed and witnesses are chosen and prepped based on their suitability for a specific public forum, all members are permitted to ask these witnesses questions, and chamber rules permit the minority to invite their own

witnesses (Burgat 2019; Rapallo 2026). Thus, the committee is exposed to new information gleaned from targets they grill in public, from experts and from ideological opponents.

Finally, *staff reports* are publicly released reports published by either the majority or minority staff office, or sometimes—and more rarely—as a joint committee product written and approved by both the majority and minority offices. Reports present and summarize the information staff retrieved over the course of the investigation and often include proposals for policy solutions—both legislative and administrative—to the problems the committee has just described (Moore et al. [Forthcoming](#); Theriault [Forthcoming](#)).

A committee investigation thus takes place in three basic stages: the initial establishment of the scope and targets of the investigation, during which requests for information are made and the sources of that information established; the public presentation and processing of *existing* information, along with exposure to new information and to new frames for understanding it; and the final summary of information after it has been collected and processed, coupled with discussion of the implications of that information for future policy choices. Not every stage will be present in every investigation: some inquiries will begin and end with a letter, some will include multiple public hearings, and most will *not* end with a polished staff report. Similarly, many inquiries will not yield legislative solutions, whether proposed in bills or amendments, passed by the committee's parent chamber, or enacted into law. But many will.

What, then, accounts for why certain committee investigations are more legislatively productive than others? To answer this question, I look at evidence from the primary oversight panel in the House of Representatives. In the 119th Congress, this is the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,¹ which I will refer to henceforth as the House Oversight Committee (HOC). This project looks at HOC's investigative work over an 18-year period, from 2007 to 2024, under the authority of eight different committee chairs, four Republicans and four Democrats, in an era defined by high levels of partisan polarization.²

Investigations can take many forms, and those forms are often contingent on an investigator's formal power: Majority-party investigators enjoy the benefits of agenda control and subpoena power, which are effective for compelling new information and witnesses from investigative targets, whereas minority-party staff offices send requests that are not enforceable by subpoena and thus are routinely ignored, even by agencies and other targets who may be ideologically sympathetic to the minority party's goals.³ Minority-led investigations provide valuable insights into members' legislative efforts and priorities; in particular, minority staff reports strategically and effectively challenge majority-led narratives in the media (Drolc and Butcher [Forthcoming](#)). However, this project focuses only on majority-led investigations.

I establish the existence of an "investigation" by the presence of at least one of the following products of committee inquiries: letters sent, hearings convened and reports published.⁴ My data include 968 discrete inquiries conducted by HOC from the 110th Congress (2007–2008) to the 118th Congress (2023–2024).

To gather the data on the component parts of each investigation—letters, hearings and reports—I relied on three separate sources: the Congressional Oversight Records Database (CORD) at the Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy for the committee reports published by HOC's majority office; the Congressional ProQuest database for HOC hearings; and HOC's cache of letters made publicly available on the majority office's website.⁵ I then relied on HOC's press releases, available on the committee's website from 2011–present and via the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) digital archives from 2006–present, in order to classify committee activities into discrete *investigations*. Releases announcing a letter to a government agency, for instance, would also routinely refer to previously sent letters on the same topic, or to hearings conducted on the same issue the letter addressed. Committee press releases facilitated the classification of approximately 90% of HOC letters, hearings and reports into separate investigations. Appendix A provides examples of classifications made via press releases, and also describes how the other 10% of activities were classified into discrete investigations.

In this paper, I explicitly connect the stages of information gathering, processing and presentation on a committee to Congress' attempts to solve the uncovered problems through legislation. In other words, I argue that committee investigations represent a crucial step in the *policymaking process*. House rules grant HOC near-complete jurisdictional freedom to investigate any issue at any time; however, its *legislative* jurisdiction is comparatively limited, covering the federal workforce, the postal service, federal records-keeping and the Census. Thus, HOC itself does not have much direct control over whether legislative solutions to issues within its oversight jurisdiction make it to the markup stage. As a result, HOC members may align their investigative activities with their legislative work on other, policy-centric committees, and use the information gleaned through investigations as a mode for coalition-building with legislators on other committees with the necessary policy jurisdictions.

Other, policy-centric committees have issue jurisdictions that cover both their legislative *and* their oversight work. Because House rules require committee consideration of a bill before it reaches the floor, panels in the lower chamber continuously battle for control over certain policy areas (Jones et al. 1993; King 1994). However, HOC is the only House committee dedicated primarily to oversight, with an unlimited *investigative* jurisdiction coupled with a very limited *legislative* jurisdiction; the panel can investigate virtually anything but can only act legislatively on a select few of those issues. Thus, of all House committees, HOC has the least strategic incentive to establish jurisdictional boundaries and zealously guard *legislative* action on the issues it investigates. And as a result, HOC members would be *more* willing to publicly claim credit for legislation that is written and passed outside of the committee. For these reasons, HOC is an especially valuable analytical tableau for assessing *chamber-wide* legislative action on issues the committee investigates.

The major challenge in measuring an investigation's legislative productivity, of course, is credibly linking policy outcomes to investigations. Members' and committees' credit-claiming may be more beneficial than mere position-taking

(Fiorina 1977) but, in order to work, it must be credible and legitimate, and members are hurt by attempting to claim credit for outcomes they cannot plausibly link to their own efforts (Mayhew 1974). Since press releases are a valuable tool for legislators' credit claiming (Yiannakis 1982; Grimmer et al. 2012; Grimmer 2013), I relied on committee press releases to gather data on the *legislative* effects of the committee's investigations: I assume that if the committee believes a legislative action is a direct result of an investigation, it will take credit for the action in a press release.

I rely on two definitions of "legislative action": first, the introduction of a legislative provision by any member of the committee;⁶ and, second, the passage of a legislative provision by the full House. "Provisions" include stand-alone bills, amendments, spending items, and bills folded into omnibus legislation, in order to account for a more expansive and accurate definition of law-making (Eatough and Preece 2025). Again, and importantly, I only consider the aforementioned types of legislative actions to be the result of specific investigations if *the committee itself* links the action and investigation in a press release. Additionally, I linked provisions to investigations only if the legislative action occurred *after* the date on which the investigation began.⁷ Assigning legislative actions cited by HOC press releases to specific committee investigations permits analysis of *why* some of those investigations are more legislatively productive than others.

One important limitation of my research is that I do not make substantive distinctions between the legislative provisions that I link to investigations. Because all provisions in my data are mentioned in committee press releases, I assume that the *salience* of each provision (at the time it is mentioned by the committee) is comparable to the others. But I do not account for possible differences in the quality or urgency of the provisions. Future work should and will include more fine-grained distinctions between types of legislative action: for instance, is one provision more likely to solve a given problem? Are certain provisions more popular with party leadership? Is there an electoral incentive for the committee to claim credit for, or for the chamber to act on, certain provisions over others?

4 | Probing the Legislative Productivity of Investigations: The Role of Partisanship

One of the most consistent findings in the oversight literature is that committees investigate the executive branch more under divided government, when Congress and the presidency are controlled by different parties, than under unified government (Mayhew 2005; Kriner and Schwartz 2008; Parker and Dull 2009, 2013; Lee 2015). Kriner and Schickler (2016) show that Congressional investigations aimed at the executive branch are able to diminish the president's public standing.

Table 1 reports the number of *new* investigations initiated by HOC in each of nine congresses, from the 110th (2007–2008) to the 118th (2023–2024). The table also presents the number of new investigations per congress that target *the executive branch* specifically, as well as the proportion of all new investigations that are executive-targeted. Each investigation in my data set was hand-coded according to its institutional target; all inquiries that were classified as executive-targeted focused on one or more executive agencies or on individuals who worked within those agencies, including the president himself.⁸

A glance at Table 1 indicates that HOC initiated more new investigations when the presidency was controlled by its partisan opposition, per the consensus in the literature that partisanship incentivizes committees to launch new, potentially politically damaging investigations of the executive. But does partisanship also play a role in translating these inquiries into legislative proposals and actions? In other words, are committees better at solving, through legislation, the problems their investigations uncover when the targets of those investigations are controlled by the opposition?

I assess the effect of divided partisan control of government—defined here as whether the House majority and the presidency are controlled by opposite parties—on four dependent variables that measure the legislative productivity of an investigation:

TABLE 1 | Investigations by Congress, 2007–2024.

	Partisan control	No. new investigations	New investigations (executive branch-targeted)
110th Congress (2007–2008)	Divided	94	59 (62.8%)
111th Congress (2009–2010)	Unified	57	24 (42.1%)
112th Congress (2011–2012)	Divided	99	65 (65.7%)
113th Congress (2013–2014)	Divided	49	34 (69.4%)
114th Congress (2015–2016)	Divided	111	81 (73%)
115th Congress (2017–2018)	Unified	117	73 (62.4%)
116th Congress (2019–2020)	Divided	147	75 (51%)
117th Congress (2021–2022)	Unified	99	30 (30%)
118th Congress (2023–2024)	Divided	158	96 (60.8%)

- A binary measure of *whether* a legislative provision related to an investigation was introduced, representing whether committee members have engaged with possible policy solutions to a problem;
- A count of *the raw number* of separate legislative provisions related to an investigation that were introduced, representing the *extent to which* members have engaged with policy solutions to a problem;
- A binary measure of whether a provision was approved by the full House, representing whether an investigation yielded legislative success; and
- A count of the raw number of separate provisions that were approved by the full House, again representing the extent to which members have attempted to solve a problem.

Crucially, because my dependent variables measure the *introductions* and *passage* of legislative provisions, rather than the enactment of laws, I expect that HOC investigations that commence under divided government will be *more* legislatively productive than those under unified government. Congress does pass fewer important laws overall under divided compared with unified government (Coleman 1999; Howell et al. 2000; Binder 2003; Hughes and Carlson 2015). However, I contend that members in the strictly majoritarian lower house introduce and pass legislative solutions to problems unpacked during investigations *as a form of credit-claiming for their investigative work*. Introducing legislative language, and even passing a bill in the full House, are much less costly responses to a particular problem than building the kind of broad legislative coalition required to scale steep institutional hurdles, such as Senate passage and the presidential veto, along the path to enactment. Thus, not only can we expect committees to investigate the executive branch more under divided government, but we can also expect members to introduce and pass more legislative solutions as a visible and relatively low-cost way to claim credit for investigations.

Table 2 presents the results of four models assessing the effect of divided House-executive control on the legislative productivity of *investigations that target the executive branch*. For Models 1 and 3, I use a standard logit model; for Models 2 and 4, I opt for a negative binomial count model, which allows the variance of the

counts (in this case, legislative provisions) to differ from their expected value. For Models 3 and 4, which assess effects of the covariates on legislative *passage*, I control for the seat margin of the House majority, since larger majorities provide a cushion that eases a bill's path to passage.

Executive-targeted investigations are more likely to produce legislative language *and* legislative action when the investigative target is controlled by the committee's political opposition. Additionally, investigations of the executive yield a greater number of proposed *and* chamber-approved solutions under divided than under unified partisan control. These results provide support for the existence of investigative credit-claiming on committees: HOC initiates more investigations of the executive branch under divided government *and* publicly embraces legislative action on the very issues the investigations articulated.

Though introductions (compared with passage) and passage (compared with enactment) are less costly forms of legislative action—and thus obvious modes for investigative credit-claiming—we may still consider these actions as legitimate, good-faith efforts on the part of individual members and the larger chamber to solve problems explored and revealed through investigations. Credit-claiming, after all, must be *credible*, and I argue it is reasonable to assume that committee support for publicly touted reforms is genuine. Thus, my results offer some normative implications as well: Yes, under divided government, committees investigate the executive branch more, but they are also more eager to solve the problems those investigations uncover. These findings indicate that committees do not necessarily view investigations—and the political damage they inflict—as ends in and of themselves, but see committee-led inquiries of their opposition as opportunities to gain information and grease the proverbial wheel for a viable policy solution.

5 | Probing the Legislative Productivity of Investigations: The Role of Information Resources

While partisanship appears to affect the legislative productivity of executive-targeted investigations over time, given the limited nature of the data, which represents just one committee in the House, it is difficult to discern how much of the effect of divided government on the legislative effectiveness of *this committee* is

TABLE 2 | Effects on legislative productivity of executive-targeted investigations, 2007–2024.

	Likelihood of provision introduced	No. provisions introduced	Likelihood of provision passed	No. provisions passed
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	−3.0*** (0.42)	−2.9*** (0.43)	−3.55*** (0.47)	−2.91*** (0.48)
Divided Govt. (1 = yes; 0 = no)	1.09* (0.44)	1.31** (0.46)	1.57*** (0.36)	1.02** (0.37)
Majority Seat Margin	—	—	0.02*** (0.006)	0.02** (0.007)
Model	Logit	Negative Binomial	Logit	Negative Binomial

Note: Estimates are standardized coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. $N = 540$. * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

due to committee-specific factors or the idiosyncrasies of specific chairs. Over the time period of my study, only two chairs, Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) and Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), presided under both divided and unified conditions—and the former was chair for only 5 months under unified control, before Trey Gowdy (R-CA) took over in June 2017. Thus, while the results in the previous section do suggest that partisan control of government appears to affect the legislative productivity of investigations, more data is needed to test this pattern across all committees and a broader expanse of history. (See Table B.1 in Appendix B for within-chair results; like Models 1–4 in the previous section, the “divided government” covariate is significant across all models.)

However, I am also interested in *inquiry-specific* factors that predict investigations’ legislative success absent a change in committee leadership. Why are certain investigations more legislatively productive than others *even when they are initiated by the same chair*, and thus presumably motivated by the same ideological or political incentives? Additionally, by assessing within-chairship variations in the legislative effectiveness of investigations, we can assume as constant not just the chair’s ideology but also the basic structural and resource arrangements of the committee. Even when partisan control of the committee remains unchanged, when there is a change in committee leadership, there is often significant staff turnover⁹ and the previous chair’s commitments, while nominally echoed, may not be prioritized. For instance, after the retirement of Jason Chaffetz, new chair Trey Gowdy continued Chaffetz’s investigations into waste and fraud in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the water contamination crisis in Flint, Michigan, but opted to discontinue Chaffetz’s ongoing investigations into Planned Parenthood, student loan debt and improving airline safety. Thus, when a new chair assumes control of a committee, we can expect to see shifts in staff resources as well as investigative agendas.

Table 3 presents HOC’s investigative activity across eight chairs, from Henry Waxman in the 110th Congress (2007–2008) to James Comer (R-KY) in the 118th (2023–2024). I report the number of discrete investigations begun under each unique chair; when a new chair takes over in the middle of a congressional session, I count an investigation that began under the old

chair *but continues under the new chair* as “new” for the incoming chair.

Figure 1 presents the number of new investigations initiated in *each month* of a particular chairship. Unsurprisingly, the first 1–2 months of a new chairship boast the highest number of new investigations. Carolyn Maloney, the only chair in my data who assumed the role after the death of a colleague (rather than after resignation or shuffling of committee assignments and roles in a new congress), inherited and continued many of her predecessor’s investigations, which accounts for the unusually high number of new investigations (31) in the first month of her chairship. Otherwise, the number of new investigations per month is fairly stable across chairs.

In Table 3, I also report the number of individual letters, hearings and committee reports per chair, which helps contextualize the investigations data. While more separate investigations per chair indicates a more expansive agenda, and fewer a more constrained agenda, the number of investigations alone does not paint a full picture of the extent of the committee’s work under each chair. One chair might pursue a tighter agenda than another, focused on a smaller set of key issues, and yet each inquiry might be more in-depth and yield more hearings, letters and reports—and, crucially, more legislative action.

To assess effects on the legislative productivity of investigations within chairships, I concentrate on the effects of *information resources* on six dependent variables. The previous section assessed the effect of divided government on (a) the *likelihood* of the introduction and passage of a legislative provision; and (b) the *number of legislative provisions* introduced and passed by the full chamber. In this section, I consider two additional dependent variables:

- The hazard ratio of the amount of time, in months, that elapses between the beginning of an investigation and the first subsequent introduction of a legislative solution under a given chair’s leadership; and
- The hazard ratio of the amount of time, in months, that elapses between the beginning of an investigation and the first subsequent passage by the full House of a legislative solution under a given chair’s leadership.

TABLE 3 | Investigations by Chair, 2007–2024.

	House oversight committee			
	Discrete investigations	Hearings	Letters	Staff reports
Henry Waxman (D) (January 2007–December 2008)	94	204	917	13
Edolphus Towns (D) (January 2009–December 2010)	57	154	170	4
Darrell Issa (R) (January 2011–December 2014)	148	358	548	64
Jason Chaffetz (R) (January 2015–May 2016)	131	209	375	18
Trey Gowdy (R) (June 2016–December 2018)	102	89	233	6
Elijah Cummings (D) (January 2019–October 2019)	73	68	159	3
Carolyn Maloney (D) (November 2019–December 2022)	206	198	787	40
James Comer (R) (January 2023–December 2024)	158	144	570	11

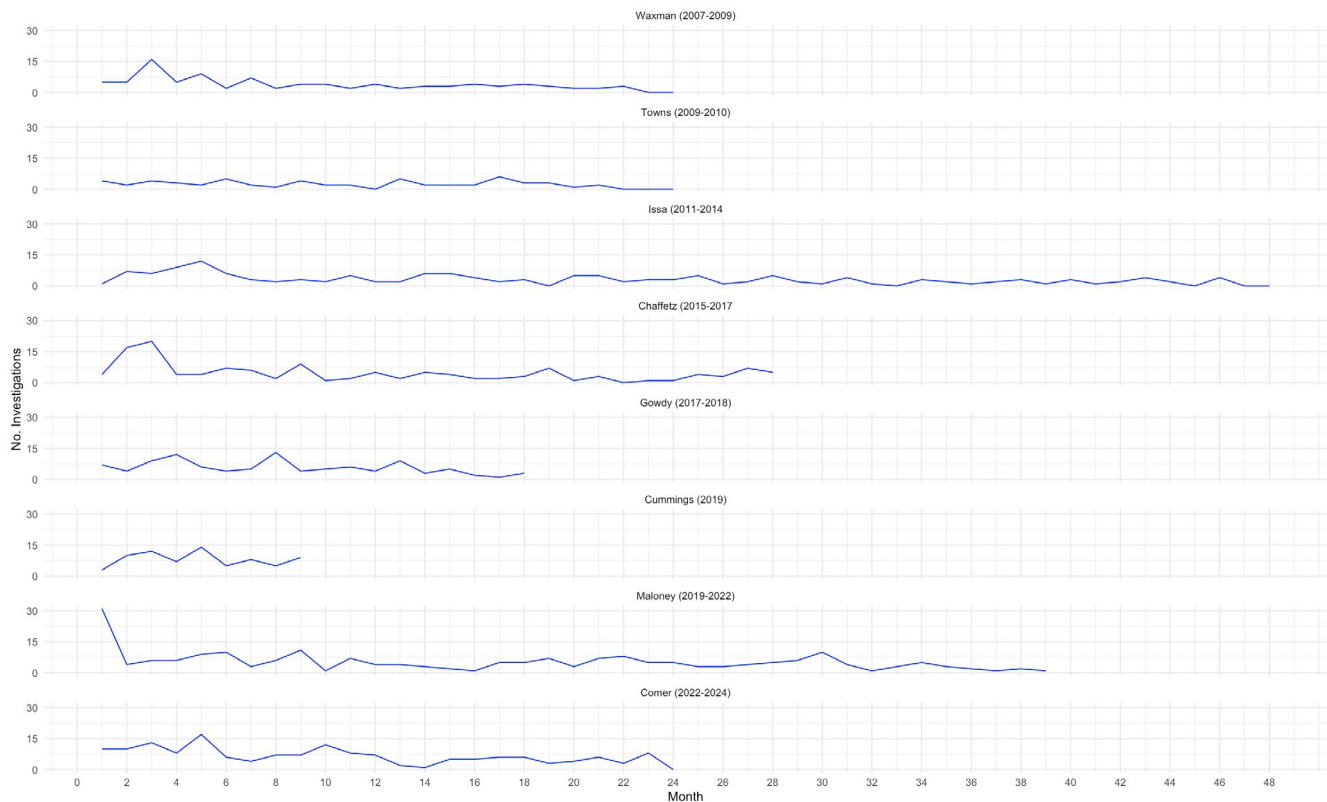


FIGURE 1 | New Investigations Per Month, By Chair, 2007–2024.

The hazard ratio represents the probability that an event (the introduction/passage of a legislative provision) will occur during a specific time window (the length of a chair's tenure, which varies in my data from 10 to 48 months), *given that the event has not already occurred*. A higher hazard ratio represents a higher risk of the event's occurring sooner rather than later. This variable thus reflects the legislative priority to which HOC assigns a particular investigation, with a higher hazard ratio's reflecting higher priority (and greater efficiency of a legislative response).

I measure the time until the event by subtracting the month in which the investigation began from the month in which the first legislative provision related to that investigation was introduced/adopted. For instance, if an investigation began in February 2011 (month 2 of Darrell Issa's chairmanship) and the first legislative provision related to that investigation passed the House in April 2013 (month 28 of Issa's chairmanship), the duration would be recorded as 26 months. Much of the data are right-censored because the clock "resets" at the end of each chair's term even if a legislative provision was not approved. I right-censor the data at the end of a chairship rather than at the end of a congress because, for chairs whose tenures span multiple congresses, there is no systematic reason to suspect that in a new congress the very same chair would curtail legislative efforts to address certain issues that remain on her investigative agenda. (The results from data right-censored at the end of a congress are presented in Appendix B, Table B.4; there is one difference in significance across the models, which I discuss later in the paper.) I use a Cox proportional hazards (PH) model because it avoids placing parametric assumptions on the data; the model assumes that the hazard can take any shape at any time and that

the distribution of the hazard is the same for all data points (in this case, legislative provisions).

For all models, I assess the effects of three covariates, each representing a type of information resource. As discussed in Section 3, the *number of letters* sent as part of a given investigation may serve as a proxy for (a) the scope of an investigation and (b) the chair's commitment to the inquiry. Letters are the "cheapest," and therefore most common, form of investigative activity; of 968 investigations across eight chairs, 703 (73%) included at least one letter. Thus, because more letters signal greater commitment from the committee without exacting much higher resource costs, and because a broader investigative scope provides more opportunities for solving problems via legislation, I expect a higher number of letters sent over the course of an inquiry to predict greater legislative productivity of an investigation, both in terms of introduction *and* passage of legislative provisions.

The *number of hearings* serves as a proxy for the public nature of the investigation. How eager is the committee to investigate an issue in real time under the watchful eyes of C-SPAN cameras and members of the media? Hearings are more resource-costly than letters; they require literal hearing-room space as well as staff and member time spent requesting and prepping witnesses, and drafting opening statements and question lines that will play well in a public and press-attended forum. Of 968 total investigations, 580 (60%) included at least one hearing. I expect a higher number of hearings conducted as part of an investigation to yield more legislative productivity: Members who gain, process and present information in a public deliberative space are

more likely to claim credit legislatively for proposing and passing solutions to the issues they have highlighted.

Finally, a binary measure of whether the committee published a staff report as part of a given investigation indicates both an overall resource commitment and, crucially, the panel's commitment to problem-solving. Policy proposals in reports demonstrate that committee staff have thought through possible solutions to the problems they have identified and, indeed, new scholarship shows that staff reports are particularly effective for spurring legislative action, especially in the House (Theriault [Forthcoming](#)). A staff report is the most "expensive" form of activity and thus is also the rarest. Of 968 total investigations, just 115 (12%) produced a staff report over the course of the chairship. Due to the high cost of publishing staff reports and because these reports almost always present recommended policy solutions, I expect the presence of a staff report to predict the legislative success of an investigation.

I also assess the effect of a fourth covariate, bipartisan collaboration, on the legislative productivity of an investigation. This covariate, unlike the others, does not represent an information resource, but it does represent possible enhanced credibility of the information resource variables (letters, hearings, and reports) that we can assume will lead to more legislative productivity. I define a bipartisan investigation by the presence of *at least one* of three criteria: a letter signed by at least one member of the committee's partisan minority; a committee report endorsed by both the majority and minority staff offices; and a subpoena voted for by at least one member of the minority party.

Bipartisan oversight work is far more common in the Senate than in the House; in the lower chamber, in an era of high polarization, cross-party investigative work has become increasingly rare. Thus, the imprimatur of bipartisan support on a HOC investigation may indicate the potential for bipartisan support for related legislation; even in polarized Congresses, successful policymaking is enhanced by bipartisan support (Curry and Lee [2019](#); Harbridge-Yong et al. [2023](#)). Bipartisan oversight also tends to vary widely across congresses, chairs and political circumstances even in constrained time periods (Maehr and Reynolds [2021](#)), making this metric useful for assessing variations in legislative action. There is also evidence

that bipartisanship leads to more effective oversight (Levin and Bean [2018](#); Reynolds and Maehr [2023](#)). Additionally, new scholarship from Lowande and Weiss ([Forthcoming](#)) shows that bipartisan staff reports tend to include more policy recommendations. Thus, I expect investigations that command bipartisan support to be more legislatively productive.

Table 4 presents the effects of the covariates on the likelihood that a provision is introduced during the chairship (Model 5); the number of legislative provisions introduced during the chairship (Model 6); and the hazard ratio of the time elapsed between an investigation's commencement and the first subsequent introduction of a provision during the chairship (Model 7).

Table 5 presents the effects on the likelihood that a provision is *passed by the full House* during the chairship (Model 8); the number of provisions passed during the chairship (Model 9); and the hazard ratio of the time between the beginning of an investigation and the first subsequent passage of a provision during the chairship (Model 10). For the models assessing effects on legislative passage in Table 5, I control for the majority party's seat margin. (For readers who are interested, I present the results of these models in stepwise fashion in Appendix B.)

For all logit and negative binomial models, I include chair-level fixed effects. For all Cox PH models, the data are right-censored at the end of a chairship. For the PH models, I report the hazard ratios rather than the coefficients, for ease of interpretation. The hazard ratio is the exponentiated coefficient, or the ratio of the hazards for a 1-unit change in the relevant covariate. Thus, if the ratio is greater than 1, there is an increase in the hazard, or "risk" of an event's occurring sooner, due to a 1-unit increase in the value of the covariate. Ratios less than 1 represent a decrease in the hazard, or the chance of "survival" (which in this case means the chance that no provision is introduced/passed).

The number of letters produced null results almost across the board (though see Model 9 in Table 5). The results for the presence of a staff report, the most expensive form of oversight activity, were mixed. For the introduction of provisions related to an investigation (Table 4), the publication of a staff report had no predictive value. However, though these resource-costly

TABLE 4 | Effects on legislative productivity (introductions), 2007–2024.

	Likelihood of provision introduced	Number of provisions introduced	Time elapsed before provision introduced (in months) hazard ratio
	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Staff report (1 = yes; 0 = no)	0.42 (0.28)	0.44 (0.24)	1.04
No. hearings	0.25*** (0.05)	0.27*** (0.07)	1.14**
No. letters	0.01 (0.008)	0.02 (0.02)	1.0
Bipartisan (1 = yes; 0 = no)	0.68* (0.31)	0.57** (0.22)	1.82*
Model	Logit (with chair fixed effects)	Negative binomial (with chair fixed effects)	Cox proportional hazards (right-censored at end of chairship)

Note: Models 5–6: Estimates are standardized coefficients with chair-clustered standards errors in parentheses. Model 7: Estimates are exponentiated coefficients (ratio of the hazards). $N = 968$. * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

TABLE 5 | Effects on legislative productivity (House Passage), 2007–2024.

	Likelihood of provision passed	Number of provisions passed	Time elapsed before provision passed (in months) hazard ratio
	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Staff Report (1 = yes; 0 = no)	1.27*** (0.25)	0.36* (0.18)	1.5
No. Hearings	0.38*** (0.06)	0.29*** (0.06)	1.1**
No. Letters	0.01 (0.007)	0.02* (0.009)	1.004
Bipartisan (1 = yes; 0 = no)	0.48 (0.33)	0.39 (0.27)	1.85*
Majority Seat Margin	0.007 (0.01)	−0.0003 (0.02)	1.0
Model	Logit (with chair fixed effects)	Negative binomial (with chair fixed effects)	Cox proportional hazards (right-censored at end of chairship)

Note: Models 8–9: Estimates are standardized coefficients with chair-clustered standards errors in parentheses. Model 10: Estimates are exponentiated coefficients (ratio of the hazards). $N = 968$. * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

investigations do not appear to inspire individual legislative salies, the presence of a staff report significantly predicts both the probability of collective chamber action (Table 5, Model 8) and the extent of that action (Table 5, Model 9). These results indicate a legislative purpose for committees' investigative reports: While reports may not be useful modes for *individual* legislative efforts, they instead may serve as valuable blueprints for *collectively* legislating on complex and salient problems. Most reports explicitly recommend the passage of specific pieces of legislation that may have originated, and have extant coalitions of support, outside of HOC itself. Noncommittee members and party leaders may thus rely on the evidence presented in HOC reports to spur legislative action, affirming the continued utility of committees as factories for information and expertise (Krehbiel 1991).

However, the null result for the staff report covariate in the PH model (Table 5, Model 10) suggests that reports do not predict the legislative *efficiency* of an investigation; in other words, the House does not appear to prioritize legislative action on investigations that culminate in a report. Assessed within the context of the other models explaining legislative passage, however, we might conclude that high-cost, behind-the-scenes work does indeed result in more legislative action overall—but that this action is simply delayed or back-loaded until the end of a congress or chairship.¹⁰ In a lame-duck Congress especially, House leaders are often eager to pass as many bills as possible before power shifts in the next congress.

Swift passage is only one facet of legislative success, and this paper does not make substantive distinctions between legislative provisions; it assumes instead the substantive equality of all provisions for which HOC claims credit. Thus, future work might explore whether provisions passed at the end of a congress or chairship are more important (in terms of policy content) and salient than those passed more quickly. But the expectations here are not clear: House leaders might delay passage of major legislation until right before an election cycle (i.e., in the 21st or 22nd month of a congress) in order to give incumbents something to run on; however, passage in the earlier months of a congress might insulate members from the electoral consequences of a controversial vote. Because I do not

expect substantively important provisions to cluster in certain months of a chairship or congress, I assume that the PH models are unlikely to be biased toward or against more “important” legislative provisions.¹¹

The number of hearings conducted over the course of an investigation was the only information resource that was *consistently* significant in predicting both the introduction of legislative language *and* the passage of legislative solutions, across all models. More public hearings predicted (a) a higher likelihood that an investigation would lead to legislative action; (b) a higher number of provisions that were introduced and approved by the full chamber; and (c) a greater hazard, or “risk,” that legislative action would occur more quickly. (These results are robust, as the hearings covariate retained its significance in the hazard models in Appendix B.) These results suggest the importance of a public deliberative forum for members' ability to both draft legislative language to solve a problem *and* build coalitions for broad legislative action on that problem.

One interpretation of these results is that committees are simply more likely to claim credit, via press releases, for legislative action related to the most visible form of investigative work. Holding hearings and thus permitting issues to be presented and debated in public incentivizes members to subsequently act—and act quickly—on those issues and emphasize their follow-up efforts in public-facing media.

However, the causal arrow could point in the other direction: Committee chairs may schedule more hearings on an issue precisely *because* proposed legislative solutions from panel members are already under way. To reiterate, while all introductions/passages of provisions must occur *after* the commencement of the related investigation to be included in my data, I do not account for the timing of any investigative actions after the first. A first letter or hearing initiates an investigation, which in turn may prompt the introduction or passage of a legislative solution. But thereafter, the panel chair might decide to hold several more hearings in order to build support for the related bill or amendment. Do hearings inspire legislation, or does legislation inspire more hearings? Future work can and should trace the linear

progress of investigations in order to tease out the chicken-egg relationship between *investigative* and *legislative* actions.

However, the fact that only *hearings*, as opposed to letters and staff reports, are consistently highly significant across models predicting legislative *passage* indicates that particular forms of investigative activity are more effective for legislative coalition-building than others. While noncommittee members may turn to information revealed through HOC investigations to inform their floor-level support for proposed legislative solutions, *how* that information is revealed to other members appears to matter. Members may pay more attention to information when it is gathered and processed in public, and when their colleagues are able to clearly present evidence and walk through an argument for a possible solution. After all, while most letters to investigative targets are made publicly available, members who are not directly involved in that particular investigation don't see the responses; instead, responses (or lack thereof) from institutional targets are often mentioned, summarized, and debated in public hearings. And while staff reports lay out detailed findings and recommendations for a public readership, most investigations don't produce one.

But hearings are public events where information is presented orally,¹² and during which members can question an ideologically diverse array of witnesses—and hear arguments from their own colleagues—in real time. Public hearings virtually guarantee some form of press coverage, and also produce televised broadcasts—and social media clips—that can easily inform noncommittee members who did not directly participate. My results suggest, then, that nonlegislative hearings may serve as a unique mechanism for pushing policy solutions through the legislative process.

Finally, my results show that investigations with bipartisan support predict the *introduction*, but not the passage, of legislative solutions. (Model 10 in Table 5 does provide some evidence that bipartisan investigations may lead to *quicker* passage of a related provision, and the robustness checks in Appendix B, Table B.4, confirm the significance of this result.) Overall, bipartisanship does seem to promote the *desire* to problem-solve through legislation. Members may assume that if an investigation commands at least some bipartisan support, the introduction of a proposed solution might garner some cosponsors across the aisle, increasing the viability of passage.

However, there are degrees of bipartisan support for investigations, with varying implications for the legislative effectiveness of the investigation. In some cases, the committee chair and ranking minority member both spearhead an investigation; in others, one or two rank-and-file committee members from the minority will sign on to a majority investigation without the support of the rest of their caucus. Under both of these circumstances, the bipartisan support simply lends credibility to an inquiry the majority already had the power to conduct and enforce. And while we can imagine that these types of bipartisan inquiries might prompt more introductions—again, either because members actually see an opportunity for bipartisan legislative work or because it gives individual members an opportunity to tout their cross-party collaboration—the support would not necessarily make a difference in terms of passage in the full

House, especially if the majority already has a comfortable seat margin (which my models control for).

Alternatively, a rank-and-file member from the *majority* may choose to join a minority-led investigation; however, this type of bipartisan action is a relatively meaningless form of position-taking unless the gavel-wielding committee chair also lends her support. And without the support of party leaders, any legislative solution to the problem uncovered in the inquiry is unlikely to make it past the introduction-and-referral stage.

6 | Concluding Thoughts

I argue that the success of an investigation may be measured by its *legislative output*—a fulfillment of the Supreme Court-mandated “legislative purpose” of a Congressional inquiry. A committee-led investigation represents a crucial stage in the broader policymaking process, during which members receive information about a problem, process that information, present it to their colleagues, make arguments about what it means and, subsequently, work to transform it into legislative language and action.

The investigative stage is itself a complex and multipartite process, and thus committee chairs must allocate resources strategically to achieve their goals. Should they convene a public hearing and, if so, how many? Which and how many institutional targets should be asked to turn over information; if the information is not provided, should a subpoena be issued? Should the committee publish a report that maps the architecture of a problem and offers a path forward for other investigators and legislators both on and outside of the committee? Is seeking bipartisan support on an investigation worth the effort?

More work is necessary, across more committees and longer periods of time, to fully understand the modes through which Congress' investigative work leads to successful policymaking, but this paper contributes to our knowledge in a few crucial ways. First, it demonstrates that members use legislative action to claim credit for their *investigative* work, linking the investigative and legislative processes. Second, the paper provides evidence that investigations of the executive that occur under divided government, when the incentive for partisan attacks is strongest, are actually more legislatively productive than inquiries under unified government. This finding offers more nuance, and a potential normative upside, to the effect of partisan polarization on the oversight process. Members may initiate investigations to politically damage an opposition administration, but they also appear to take seriously the need to *fix* the waste, fraud and abuse they uncover.

Finally, the paper shows that different forms of investigative activity affect the legislative productivity of an investigation in different ways. Most notably, what happens during public hearings—that is, the real-time processing and presentation of information—contributes to the legislative success of an investigation. Hearings, especially on highly polarized committees, are often dismissed as elaborate time-wasters, in which politicians yell back and forth for public consumption and no real work gets done. But while scholars and political

actors may be tempted to focus on the action *behind* the curtain, I argue they should also pay due attention to the stage: Hearings, these often dramatic *mise en scenes*, may in fact be where the “real magic” happens.

But legislative success is just part of what makes an investigation successful. Future work should focus on other ways in which the success of an investigation might be measured, probing both the electoral and legal effects of Congress's oversight work. Additionally, scholars should continue to acknowledge and account for the complexity of the oversight process, which requires supporting and excavating new and innovative sources of committee data.

While data on committee hearings are readily available, thanks to sources such as Congressional ProQuest and the Policy Agendas Project at the University of Texas-Austin, data on other oversight activities, such as letters and reports, are sparser. The Levin Center's Congressional Oversight Reports Database (CORD), the first comprehensive database of committee reports from both majority and minority staff offices, is thus particularly valuable not only for facilitating the scholarship in this issue of *Legislative Studies Quarterly* but also for the future opportunities it presents for oversight scholars. Do committees reap particular benefits for expending valuable resources on reports as opposed to hearings and letters? How do committees use reports to both guard their own issue jurisdictions and signal priorities to colleagues and leadership? Which policy recommendations are more likely to be enacted, and why? Do minority-party investigative reports predict committee agendas after a shift in partisan control? What is the electoral value of the narratives endorsed in minority-party reports? These are only a few of the avenues of oversight research the CORD database makes possible, and through them a more holistic and systematic understanding of a longstanding but relatively understudied institutionalized process.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Endnotes

¹ This committee has enjoyed several names throughout the 21st century: the Committee on Government Reform prior to 2007, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform from 2007 to 2018, the Committee on Oversight and Reform from 2019 to 2022, and the Committee on Oversight and Accountability from 2023 to 2024.

² Beginning in the 111th Congress (2009–2010), the most conservative Democrat in Congress was ideologically to the left of the most liberal Republican (Mann and Ornstein 2012), and this distribution of preferences has not changed since. Over the period of my study, first-dimension DW-NOMINATE measures of polarization between the two major parties in the House was 0.805 in the 110th Congress (2007–2008) and 1.11 in the 118th Congress (2023–2024) (see Lewis et al. 2025).

³ To be clear, any member of the minority party on a committee may move to issue a subpoena. However, subpoenas may be approved only (a) unilaterally by the committee chair or (b) via a majority vote of the entire panel. As David Rapallo (2026) puts it: “It has become common for members of Congress and the media to state as a fait accompli that ‘the minority does not have subpoena power.’ Although it is true

that only certain committee chairs have authority to issue subpoenas unilaterally, and although it is unlikely the minority will win votes on subpoena motions, there have been multiple instances in which both Democratic and Republican minorities have been successful in obtaining subpoenas” (27–28). Subpoenas proposed by the minority party but approved by either the committee chair or a majority of the panel have the same legal status and enforceability as any others; it is simply that subpoenas proposed by the minority party are *politically unlikely* to be approved.

⁴ I include only letters issued on committee letterhead from the committee's majority office, and only reports published by the committee's majority office, thus excluding any related letters and reports issued by committee members' individual offices.

⁵ Committees do send letters that they choose not to make publicly available; my study only accounts for publicly available letters.

⁶ The provision may be introduced by any member of the committee, whether that member is part of the majority or the minority, as long as the majority press office claims credit for the introduction in a release. In other words, my data includes provisions introduced by minority members of the committee *only if* those provisions are endorsed in a press release from the majority office. Additionally, it is important to mention that, because of HOC's limited legislative jurisdiction, most of the provisions introduced by HOC committee members were referred to other House committees.

⁷ The beginning of an investigation is defined as the earliest date, under a given chair's tenure, on which the committee sent any letter, held any hearing, or published any report as part of the investigation. See Appendix A for further description and examples of how I classified the duration of investigations.

⁸ Each investigation was classified as targeting one or more of the following institutional types: the executive branch; non-government organizations (including for-profit corporations or not-for-profit institutions such as universities); state and local governments; foreign governments and international institutions such as the United Nations; the federal judiciary; and Congress itself. No investigation targeted more than four of these institutional types.

⁹ The end of many chairs' tenures coincide with the end of a congress, especially in the House; the end of a congress and of a House electoral cycle thus may explain the staff turnover between chairs even when the majority party retains control from one congress to the next. However, because committee staff serve at the pleasure of the chair (Romzek and Utter 1997), staff retention is linked to personal ties to, and commitment to the policy goals of, the member (Jensen 2011; Brant 2024).

¹⁰ In Appendix B, Table B.4, the survival data is right-censored at the end of a congress rather than at the end of a chairship and, as in Table 5, the staff-report covariate does not reach significance.

¹¹ However, as in all proportional hazards models, events that occur earlier in a given time period exert greater influence on the estimated likelihood of an event's occurring. As time progresses, and as more introductions/passages occur, the “risk set” of investigations for which legislative action is still outstanding diminishes and, thus, introductions/passages that occur later supply less information to the likelihood function.

¹² However, committees almost always make the information presented during a hearing available in written form, from testimony submitted prior to the hearing by witnesses to members' opening statements to hearing transcripts to press releases summarizing the hearing's takeaways.

References

Aberbach, J. D. 1990. *Keeping a Watchful Eye: The Politics of Congressional Control*. Brookings Institution Press.

- Ban, P., and S. J. Hill. 2025. "Efficacy of Congressional Oversight." *American Political Science Review* 119, no. 4: 1742–1760.
- Ban, P., J. Y. Park, and H. Y. You. 2023. "How Are Politicians Informed? Witnesses and Information Provision in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 117, no. 1: 122–139.
- Binder, S. A. 2003. *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Brant, H. K. 2024. "Polarization and the Ties That Bind: Congressional Staff Turnover." *Congress and the Presidency* 51, no. 3: 324–357.
- Burgat, C. 2019. *The Minority Witness Rule Explained, and Why It Might Be Irrelevant for Impeachment*. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-minority-witness-rule-explained-and-why-it-might-be-irrelevant-for-impeachment/>.
- Caldwell, L. A., and A. Moe. 2019. *New Members Are Prepared for Battle on House Oversight Committee*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/new-members-are-prepared-battle-house-oversight-committee-n963751>.
- Cheney, L., and Z. Lofgren. 2022. *We Have a Bill to Help Prevent Another Jan. 6 Attack*. Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/we-have-a-bill-to-prevent-another-jan-6-attack-cheney-committee-electoral-count-president-11663535092>.
- Coleman, J. J. 1999. "Unified Government, Divided Government, and Party Responsiveness." *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4: 821–835.
- Cummings, E., and J. Dale. 2020. *We're Better Than This: My Fight for the Future of Our Democracy*. Harper.
- Curry, J. M., and F. E. Lee. 2019. "Non-Party Government: Bipartisan Lawmaking and Party Power in Congress." *Perspectives on Politics* 17, no. 1: 47–65.
- Dayen, D. 2021. *Investigating Oversight: Why Congressional Hearings Are Bad, and How They Can Be Made Great Again*. American Prospect. <https://prospect.org/2021/05/27/investigating-oversight-why-congressional-hearings-are-bad/>.
- Diermeier, D., and T. J. Feddersen. 2000. "Information and Congressional Hearings." *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 1: 51–65.
- Dodd, L., and R. Schott. 1979. *Congress and the Administrative State*. Wiley.
- Drolc, C., and J. Butcher. Forthcoming. "Ulterior Oversight: Minority Party Investigations and the Politics of Exclusion." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.
- Eatough, M., and J. R. Preece. 2025. "Crediting Invisible Work: Congress and the Lawmaking Productivity Metric (LawProM)." *American Political Science Review* 119, no. 2: 566–584.
- Eldes, A., C. Fong, and K. Lowande. 2024. "Information and Confrontation in Legislative Oversight." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2: 227–256.
- Evans, D. 1994. "Congressional Oversight and the Diversity of Members' Goals." *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 4: 669–687.
- Fagan, E. J., and Z. A. McGee. 2022. "Problem Solving and the Demand for Expert Information in Congress." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 1: 53–77.
- Feinstein, B. D. 2018. "Congress in the Administrative State." *Washington University Law Review* 95: 1189–1249.
- Fenno, R. F., Jr. 1973 (1995). *Congressmen in Committees*. University of California Institute of Governmental Studies Press.
- Fiorina, M. 1977. *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment*. Yale University Press.
- Geiger, A. W. 2018. *A Look at Voters' Views Ahead of the 2018 Midterms*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/11/01/a-look-at-voters-views-ahead-of-the-2018-midterms/>.
- Grimmer, J. 2013. *Representational Style in Congress: What Legislators Say and Why It Matters*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grimmer, J., S. Messing, and S. J. Westwood. 2012. "How Words and Money Cultivate a Personal Vote: The Effect of Legislator Credit Claiming on Constituent Credit Allocation." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 4: 703–719.
- Grimmer, J., S. J. Westwood, and S. Messing. 2014. *The Impression of Influence: Legislator Communication, Representation, and Democratic Accountability*. Princeton University Press.
- Harbridge-Yong, L., C. Volden, and A. E. Wiseman. 2023. "The Bipartisan Path to Effective Lawmaking." *Journal of Politics* 85, no. 3: 1048–1063.
- Herzlich, T. 2025. *Jen Psaki Mocks Chuck Schumer's Letter to Trump on Harvard Funding Freeze: 'Shake in Your Boots'*. New York Post. <https://nypost.com/2025/05/01/media/jen-psaki-mocks-chuck-schumers-letter-to-trump-on-harvard-funding-freeze-shake-in-your-boots/>.
- Howell, W., S. Adler, C. Cameron, and C. Riemann. 2000. "Divided Government and the Legislative Productivity of Congress, 1945–94." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 2: 285–312.
- Hughes, T., and D. Carlson. 2015. "Divided Government and Delay in the Legislative Process: Evidence From Important Bills, 1949–2010." *American Politics Research* 43, no. 5: 771–792.
- Jensen, J. M. 2011. "Explaining Congressional Staff Members' Decisions to Leave the Hill." *Congress and the Presidency* 38, no. 1: 39–59.
- Jones, B. D., F. R. Baumgartner, and J. C. Talbert. 1993. "The Destruction of Issue Monopolies in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3: 657–671.
- King, D. C. 1994. "The Nature of Congressional Committee Jurisdictions." *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 1: 48–62.
- Krehbiel, K. 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization*. University of Michigan Press.
- Kriner, D. L., and E. Schickler. 2016. *Investigating the President: Congressional Checks on Presidential Power*. Princeton University Press.
- Kriner, D. L., and L. Schwartz. 2008. "Divided Government and Congressional Investigations." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 2: 295–321.
- Leavitt, C. 2024. "Good Governance and the Partisan Wars: The Effects of Divided Government on Administrative Problem Solving and Oversight Agenda Setting in Congress." *Political Science Quarterly* 139, no. 2: 201–223.
- Lee, F. E. 2015. "How Party Polarization Affects Governance." *Annual Review of Political Science* 18: 261–282.
- Levin, C., and E. J. Bean. 2018. "Defining Congressional Oversight and Measuring Its Effectiveness." *Wayne Law Review* 64, no. 2: 1–22.
- Lewallen, J. 2020. *Committees and the Decline of Lawmaking in Congress*. University of Michigan Press.
- Lewallen, J., J. Y. Park, and S. M. Theriault. 2024. "The Politics of Problems Versus Solutions: Policymaking and Grandstanding in Congressional Hearings." *Policy Studies Journal* 52, no. 3: 515–531.
- Lewallen, J., S. M. Theriault, and B. D. Jones. 2016. "Congressional Dysfunction: An Information Processing Perspective." *Regulation & Governance* 10, no. 2: 179–190.
- Lewallen, J., S. M. Theriault, and B. D. Jones. 2018. "Field Hearings and Congressional Oversight." *Wayne Law Review* 64, no. 1: 163–184.
- Lewis, J. B., K. Poole, H. Rosenthal, A. Boche, A. Rudkin, and L. Sonnet. 2025. "Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database." <https://voteview.com/>.
- Lowande, K., and J. Peck. 2017. "Congressional Investigations and the Electoral Connection." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 33, no. 1: 1–27.

- Lowande, K., and R. A. Potter. 2021. "Congressional Oversight Revisited: Politics and Procedure in Agency Rulemaking." *Journal of Politics* 83, no. 1: 401–408.
- Lowande, K., and M. Weiss. Forthcoming. "Partisan Knowledge Claims in Congressional Oversight." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.
- MacDonald, J. A., and R. J. McGrath. 2016. "Retrospective Congressional Oversight and the Dynamics of Legislative Influence Over the Bureaucracy." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 4: 899–934.
- Maehr, N., and M. E. Reynolds. 2021. *Amid Polarization, Bipartisan Oversight Still Exists in Congress*. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/amid-polarization-bipartisan-oversight-still-exists-in-congress/>.
- Mann, T. E., and N. J. Ornstein. 2012. *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*. Basic Books.
- Mayhew, D. R. 1974 (2004). *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. 2nd ed. Yale University Press.
- Mayhew, D. R. 2000. *America's Congress: Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison Through Newt Gingrich*. Yale University Press.
- Mayhew, D. R. 2005. *Divided we Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking, and Investigations, 1946–1990*. 2nd ed. Yale University Press.
- McGrath, R. J. 2013. "Congressional Oversight Hearings and Policy Control." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 3: 349–376.
- McLaughlin, P. T. 2025. "Priority Projects: Constituent Spending Demand and the Benefits of Congressional Credit Claiming." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 4: e70008.
- Moe, T. M. 1987. "An Assessment of the Positive Theory of Congressional Dominance." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4: 475–520.
- Moe, T. M. 2013. "Delegation, Control, and the Study of Public Bureaucracy." In *Handbook of Organizational Economics*, edited by R. Gibbons and J. Roberts, 1148–1183. Princeton University Press.
- Moore, G., D. Rapallo, and M. Sean Theriault. Forthcoming. "Placing Congressional Oversight Reports in Context." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.
- Ogul, M. S., and B. A. Rockman. 1990. "Overseeing Oversight: New Departures and Old Problems." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1: 5–24.
- Park, J. Y. 2017. "A Lab Experiment on Committee Hearings: Preferences, Power, and a Quest for Information." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1: 3–31.
- Park, J. Y. 2021. "When Do Politicians Grandstand? Measuring Message Politics in Committee Hearings." *Journal of Politics* 83, no. 1: 214–228.
- Parker, D. C. W., and M. Dull. 2009. "Divided we Quarrel: The Politics of Congressional Investigations, 1947–2004." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3: 319–345.
- Parker, D. C. W., and M. Dull. 2013. "Rooting Out Waste, Fraud, and Abuse: The Politics of House Committee Investigations, 1947 to 2004." *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 3: 630–644.
- Penn Today. 2019. *U.S. President vs. Congressional Investigators: How the Battle of the Branches Could Play Out*. Penn Today. <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/trump-congress-subpoenas-oversight-battle>.
- Pew Research Center. 2023. "Republicans Leery of Compromise With Biden; Majority Want GOP to Focus on Investigations." <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/01/31/republicans-leery-of-compromise-with-biden-majority-want-gop-to-focus-on-investigations/>.
- Rapallo, D. 2026. "Mapping Minority Investigative Powers in Congress." *Harvard Journal on Legislation* 63: 1–51.
- Reynolds, M. E., and J. Gode. 2020. "Tracking Oversight in the House in the 116th Congress." *Wayne Law Review* 66, no. 1: 237–258.
- Reynolds, M. E., and N. Maehr. 2023. *How Partisan and Policy Dynamics Shape Congressional Oversight in the Post-Trump Era*. Governance Studies at Brookings Report. Brookings.
- Ritchie, M. N. 2018. "Back-Channel Representation: A Study of the Strategic Communication of Senators With the US Department of Labor." *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1: 240–253.
- Ritchie, M. N., and H. Y. You. 2019. "Legislators as Lobbyists." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 1: 65–95.
- Romzek, B. S., and J. A. Utter. 1997. "Congressional Legislative Staff: Political Professionals or Clerks?" *American Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 4: 1251–1279.
- Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. 2022. "The January 6th Report: The Report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol." In *House Report*, 117–692. United States House of Representatives. <https://january6th-bennithompson.house.gov/report-executive-summary>.
- Selin, J. L., and G. Moore. 2023. "Keeping Tabs on the Executive." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2: 186–208.
- Simas, E., M. Kistner, D. Hilden, and J. Wright. 2025. *Credit Claiming and Accountability for Legislative Effectiveness (Working Paper No. 2025–01)*. Center for Effective Lawmaking. https://thelawmakers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Credit_Claiming.pdf.
- Talbert, J. C., B. D. Jones, and F. R. Baumgartner. 1995. "Nonlegislative Hearings and Policy Change in Congress." *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 2: 383–405.
- The White House. 2007. *President Bush Urges Congress to Pass Appropriations Bills*. Office of the White House Press Secretary. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071030.html>.
- Theriault, S. M. Forthcoming. "The Legislative Effectiveness of Congressional Oversight Reports." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.
- Tillett, E., and K. Watson. 2019. *Hope of Bipartisanship Fades as Trump Ends Pelosi, Schumer Meeting Over 'Cover-Up' Comment*. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-speech-to-reporters-in-the-rose-garden-live-stream-unscheduled-event-today-2019-05-22/>.
- Trump vs. Mazars, LLP. 2020. "591 U.S. _."
- Wang, R. T., and P. D. Tucker. 2021. "How Partisanship Influences What Congress Says Online and How They Say It." *American Politics Research* 49, no. 1: 76–90.
- Watkins vs. United States. 1957. "354 U.S. 178."
- Waxman, H., and W. J. Green. 2009. *The Waxman Report: How Congress Really Works*. Hachette: Kindle Edition.
- Wilson, W. 1885 (2002). *Congressional Government*. Routledge.
- Yiannakis, D. E. 1982. "House Members' Communication Styles: Newsletters and Press Releases." *Journal of Politics* 44, no. 4: 1049–1071.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Appendix A.** Classification of Investigations. **Appendix B:** Robustness Checks. **Table B.1:** Effects on Legislative Productivity of Executive-Targeted Investigations, 2007–2024. **Table B.2:** Effects on Legislative Productivity (Introductions), 2007–2024. **Table B.3:** Effects on Legislative Productivity (House Passage), 2007–2024. **Table B.4:** Effects on Legislative Productivity, 2007–2024.