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Congressional Oversight Reports as Legislative Branch Work Product and Research Resource

Grace A. Moore¹  | David Rapallo²  | Sean M. Theriault³ ¹The Levin Center, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA | ²Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, DC, USA | ³The University of Texas, Austin, Texas, USACorrespondence: Sean M. Theriault (seant@mail.utexas.edu)

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ABSTRACT

The Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy at Wayne State University Law School is in the process of creating the first-ever comprehensive database of congressional oversight reports for all House and Senate Committees since the 106th Congress (1999–2000). In this article, we place these reports into the broader context of the tools Congress has to conduct oversight in service of its many legislative branch responsibilities under the Constitution. We also explain the development of the database. We conclude the article by discussing how the congressional scholars in this special issue use this database to examine how Congress conducts oversight, and we propose several additional areas for future study.

1 | Introduction

The Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy launched a new project in 2021 to create a database of congressional oversight reports. What became known as the Congressional Oversight Records Database (CORD) began as the brainchild of Elise Bean, former Chief of Staff of the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations under then-Chairman Carl Levin and Director of the Levin Center's Washington Office. She worked on many impactful oversight investigations that produced high-profile hearings and resulted in significant legislative reforms. These investigations also produced many extensive oversight reports detailing the results of their work, making findings, and proposing recommendations that formed the basis for subsequent legislative action. She knew many other oversight reports existed, yet she could find no comprehensive list of those released by her own subcommittee let alone by others across the House and Senate. To fill this void, Elise proposed that the Levin Center create CORD—a comprehensive database of oversight reports available free to everyone, designed to spur research and public accountability on an important tool Congress uses to conduct oversight.

The initial project timeline was set for 6 months, with a target of compiling oversight reports for all congressional committees

from the 106th to 116th Congresses (1999–2020). As perhaps the leading expert on these reports, Elise predicted at the time that approximately 200 existed. Within a few months, it became clear that her prediction was a great undercount. CORD currently houses more than 2000 oversight reports from the 32 congressional committees that are currently included, and that number is growing monthly as new committees are added to the database.

In this article, we first situate oversight reports in the broader context of the tools Congress has to conduct oversight, and we highlight some of the most impactful historical and modern-day congressional oversight reports as illustrations. Second, we explain the details of how the database was constructed. We conclude by discussing how the congressional scholars in this special issue use this database to examine how Congress conducts oversight, and we propose additional areas for future scholarship.

In honor of her incredible drive to see this project succeed, we dedicate this special issue of *Legislative Studies Quarterly* to Elise Bean, who passed away on January 14, 2025. She had many professional accomplishments, but few would bring her as much satisfaction as seeing CORD expand to numbers she thought

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unimaginable, evolving into a critical data source for innovative scholarly research. When she retired from Congress, she made it her mission to bring practitioners and scholars closer together so they could each learn from each other. This article and the entire issue are the epitome of Elise's lasting legacy, which we hope and expect will continue growing with time.

2 | Authority and Usage of Congressional Oversight Reports

One of the most well-known investigations in congressional history was led by Senator Harry S. Truman when the United States entered World War II.¹ The Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, popularly known as the "Truman Committee," issued more than 50 reports between 1941 and 1948, all of which were approved unanimously.² These reports, which identified deficiencies in the work of defense agencies and wartime contractors, not only summarized the committee's work but resulted in major reforms. They reportedly helped save taxpayers between \$10 and \$15 billion, spared the lives of thousands of service members and workers by uncovering defective equipment and dangerous manufacturing conditions, and shortened the war by reforming federal contracting practices.³

The Truman Committee's oversight reports, and many others through the decades, have been among Congress's most impactful tools when conducting investigations, both to inform the American people about the functioning of their government and to spur meaningful legislative, administrative, and institutional change. For example, the 1934 Pecora investigation report after the 1929 stock market crash exposed manipulation by Wall Street bankers and led to the creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission.⁴ The 1975 Church Committee report uncovered spying and assassination attempts by U.S. intelligence agencies and helped establish stronger congressional oversight mechanisms.⁵ The 9/11 Commission report in 2004 was groundbreaking not only for its compelling description of the events, but for its recommendations to transcend stovepipes among agencies, leading to the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security and other reforms.⁶ Oversight reports can become part of the nation's history by providing definitive accounts—and unflinching critiques—that can catalyze transformations of government and entire sectors of society.

2.1 | Constitutional Basis for Congressional Oversight Reports

The authority to issue congressional oversight reports is rooted in the Constitution. Congress's power to conduct investigations and share its results is inherent in the legislative process itself. Although the Constitution does not mention congressional investigations or oversight reports, Congress has asserted—and the Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld—Congress's implied power to obtain information from the other branches and private parties, as well as the power to compel compliance and enforce demands for information through a compulsory process.⁷ Without this power, the Court has observed, Congress would

be operating in the dark.⁸ In other words, Congress's ability to craft clear and effective legislation would be impinged, its ability to fulfill its constitutional functions would be degraded, and its charge to serve as a check on the other branches would be undermined.

Congress's power of inquiry is very broad and includes access to a wide range of information that the House and Senate need to inform their legislative branch responsibilities. This power "encompasses inquiries into the administration of existing laws, studies of proposed laws, and 'surveys of defects in our social, economic or political system for the purpose of enabling the Congress to remedy them.'"⁹ This power is also critical to other legislative branch functions under the Constitution, including providing advice and consent for presidential nominees, impeaching and trying officials for misconduct, appropriating funds for government programs, considering amendments to the Constitution, and many others.¹⁰ This power though is not unlimited. It is constrained by specific constitutional provisions, such as the Fifth Amendment's right against self-incrimination, and by judicially recognized constitutionally-based exceptions, such as the president's qualified right to withhold information covered by executive privilege.¹¹

Congressional investigations are normally, though not always, conducted by committees that are granted jurisdiction over certain legislative subject matters by the House or Senate rules.¹² In addition, two panels, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (and in particular its Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations) and the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, have been granted broad jurisdiction to investigate a wider spectrum of topics and provide their findings to committees with legislative jurisdiction over the agencies and private sector entities involved.¹³ The House and Senate also may establish temporary special or select committees to investigate specific topics, as well as investigative commissions, such as the 9/11 Commission, that include members who are not senators or representatives.¹⁴ Individual members of Congress also can conduct investigations and issue reports, although their power to compel the production of information is more limited.¹⁵

2.2 | Types and Uses of Congressional Oversight Reports

During a typical investigation, committees may employ various tools to obtain information furthering the objectives of their inquiries. For example, they may send to government agencies or non-public parties voluntary requests for documents or witness accounts, conduct transcribed interviews or more formal depositions, issue mandatory subpoenas when individuals fail to comply with voluntary requests, and hold a range of forums to exchange information that may include confidential briefings, public roundtables, and official committee hearings. Committees also may take additional steps, such as referring matters to the Justice Department or other agencies for criminal or other enforcement actions.¹⁶

Included among Congress's many investigative tools are oversight reports. When committees or individual members reach points in their investigations when they believe they have important information, findings, or recommendations to convey, they can issue reports to inform their colleagues and the public. Some of these oversight reports are issued during investigations, others are issued after investigations have largely concluded but before public hearings have been held, and still others are issued after investigations and hearings have been completed. Oversight reports are sometimes adopted by committees, but they can also be authored by individual members, including minority committee members, as well as by majority or minority committee staff or personal office staff. While oversight reports may recommend legislation, they differ from legislative reports that accompany bills approved by committees, which are not included in CORD.¹⁷

The most classic, but by no means exclusive, iteration of congressional oversight reports are those that committees adopt at the conclusion of their investigations to summarize the steps taken, set forth the facts and information gathered, draw conclusions about how the information relates to the implementation of existing or proposed laws or programs, and offer recommendations about how Congress might proceed based on the results.¹⁸ In some cases, both Senate and House committees may issue reports on the same or similar topics.¹⁹

To be considered a committee report, an oversight report must comply with rules that typically require advance notice, pre-circulation of a draft, opportunity for debate, and approval by a majority of committee members, after which these reports are included in congressional publications.²⁰ Typically, committees consider oversight reports at business meetings when they can be debated, amended if warranted, and voted on or adopted by unanimous consent. Under these rules, committee members who disagree with facts, findings, or recommendations in an oversight report may submit their own "minority" or "additional" views.²¹ These views are included as appendices in, or entire volumes of, committee-approved oversight reports when they are published.²²

Committees may use oversight reports to summarize their work at the conclusion of their investigations, but countless other iterations exist. For example, committees may release interim, periodic, or series of reports to convey information prior to the end of their investigations.²³ This approach may make sense when legislation is simultaneously moving on a parallel track and consideration of policy changes may benefit from information from ongoing investigations sooner rather than later. This approach also may give committees multiple opportunities to highlight their work as legislative campaigns are underway, thereby mobilizing public support and advocacy for stronger policies. In addition, this approach may be warranted when witnesses are blocking the progress of investigations and committees seek to ratchet up pressure prior to subpoena votes. And if witnesses continue to defy subpoenas, committee members may consider and vote on contempt reports that summarize investigative steps taken to date, explain the committee's need for the information being withheld, and seek the approval of the full House or Senate for enforcement actions.²⁴ All of these types of reports may be issued while investigations are ongoing.

Variations in the types of oversight reports are limited only by the creativity of the members who issue them. For example, committees may issue a series of "flash reports" that convey key information in an expedited manner. In these reports, which tend to be shorter, committees may publicize critical information they recently obtained, or they may release information that has been in their possession for some time but has become particularly relevant in light of external events.²⁵

When deciding among various types of oversight reports, members of Congress may assess the extent to which these reports promote the core purposes of their investigations. At the most basic level, one key duty of Congress as a representative governing institution is to collect information about how taxpayer funds are being used and share that information with the electorate. Oversight reports also inform other members of the House and Senate about challenges with existing programs and possible legislative solutions they might support. Since spurring legislative change is often an important aim of congressional investigators, committees may use multiple forms of oversight reports to maximize the likelihood of legislative success.²⁶

Oversight reports also may prompt changes without the need for legislation. By shining a light on waste, fraud, or duplication, for example, oversight reports may encourage federal agencies to adopt their own reforms.²⁷ Similarly, by revealing misconduct or abuse by government officials, oversight reports may prompt disciplinary action, policy changes, and structural improvements.²⁸ Oversight reports are by no means limited to investigations of federal agencies and personnel; they have exposed systemic deficiencies in private sector institutions and regulatory frameworks.²⁹

2.3 | Committee, Member, and Staff Oversight Reports

Oversight reports carry the imprimatur of congressional committees when they are approved through a vote or unanimous agreement of committee members.³⁰ Any individual member or group of members though may issue oversight reports on the same topic, on a bipartisan or partisan basis, without going through this formal process.³¹ For example, committee chairs or ranking minority members may draft oversight reports using their own majority or minority committee staffs and publish these staff reports on their websites, in press releases, or through social media.³² These reports are not considered committee-approved reports if they have not been considered and adopted by committees. Issuing staff reports in this manner can have drawbacks. Unlike committee-approved reports, staff reports are not typically published and made available through online databases of official congressional materials. In addition, they may not include information obtained through depositions, which may require committee votes to release their contents publicly.³³

Importantly, minority committee members may conduct their own proactive investigations and issue their own minority oversight reports.³⁴ Since these reports generally are not supported or approved by a majority of committee members, they are not considered committee-approved reports. Nevertheless, they can

be powerful tools for minority members to highlight areas they believe the majority misjudged, overlooked, or may be unwilling to consider.³⁵ Minority members can even issue oversight reports at the beginning of investigations to compile and highlight work that has already been done or key questions that have already been answered.³⁶ In this way, they can help narrow and refine investigative objectives and avoid retreading old ground. In addition, Representative Henry Waxman pioneered a particular type of minority oversight report known as a district-level report.³⁷ Using information that he and his staff obtained through alternative sources, such as whistleblowers, corporate filings, and staff surveys, he issued hundreds of reports on behalf of members of Congress who wanted to focus on specific issues within their districts.³⁸

Members of Congress, scholars, practitioners, and others who want to study congressional oversight sometimes face challenges in obtaining these reports. Well-known reports voted on and adopted by committees are relatively easy to access and compare through existing sources.³⁹ However, oversight reports issued by majority or minority committee staff, minority committee members, or individual members are more difficult to access because they are not always published or archived in publicly accessible databases. Moreover, the congressional websites on which they have been posted are not necessarily preserved when members retire, leave Congress, or lose their positions on committees.⁴⁰ For these reasons, some individual or minority committee members have made motions to include their oversight reports in the published records of committee hearings to ensure they are preserved.⁴¹

Compiling a database of congressional oversight reports that includes not only committee-approved reports but various other iterations of oversight reports that members use on a regular basis significantly streamlines this process. Research can be conducted on their uses, purposes, and evolution over time, and scholars can gauge the types of reports that have been most effective in achieving the goals set out for the underlying investigations. Constructing such a database requires a significant commitment and a substantial dedication of time and resources, as we discuss next.

3 | Construction of Congressional Oversight Records Database (CORD)

In 2021, the Levin Center launched a data collection effort “to create the first ever repository of congressional oversight reports.”⁴² It began making these reports public on a rolling basis in 2023. In addition, the Levin Center hosted an academic seminar in 2024, co-sponsored by the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute, in which scholars presented the “first-ever working papers using data gathered in CORD.”⁴³ The overarching goal of this project has been “to make available for scholars, oversight practitioners, and the public oversight documents that are not easily accessible.”⁴⁴ Specifically, the Levin Center has focused on collecting “congressional oversight reports and records from the 106th to the 116th Congress” and on making all of these records available to the public free of charge.⁴⁵

The Levin Center created a strict methodology to propagate CORD, including relevant metadata to facilitate access and use

of the oversight reports. An “oversight report,” as defined by the Levin Center, is any document that was produced by a congressional committee, subcommittee, member of Congress, or their staffs; is labeled or formatted like a report; involves fact-finding; and is distinct from a House or Senate filing in connection with specific legislation.

The Levin Center gathered oversight reports using an eight-part process. The first phase scans the committee's current website(s) and browses its repository of reports if it is available. The second phase performs a search across the entire website for the word “report” and includes any relevant hits. Phase three utilizes the Government Publishing Office's (GPO) digital repository (GovInfo) to browse published reports.⁴⁶ In phase four, committee activity reports, which must be approved and published by GPO,⁴⁷ are collected to ascertain if any previously undiscovered reports are mentioned.⁴⁸ Phase five searches a database called the Homeland Security Digital Library (HSDL) created by the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security and sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.⁴⁹ Perhaps the most important step in the process, phase six uses the Internet Archive's WayBack Machine to access committee websites that are no longer active to search meticulously for any missing oversight reports. The Library of Congress's collection of archived congressional websites is also used to fill in any gaps. Phase seven scours all of the committee chairs' and ranking members' websites to find mentions of oversight reports not yet discovered in the previous phases. Finally, phase eight searches committees' social media pages for any mentions of any oversight reports previously missed.

The Levin Center began this enterprise by collecting oversight reports from the two congressional committees with the broadest oversight jurisdiction: the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (parent committee to the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations). Owing to their broad oversight authority, these committees were suspected to have a high volume of reports, providing a basis for the initial dataset. It proved to be an effective strategy that yielded upwards of 800 oversight reports, creating a solid foundation for the nascent database. It was the release of these reports that prompted the call for papers for the 2024 conference at Wayne State University that provided the initial spark for this special issue.

CORD not only provides an archive of all the discovered reports, but also provides basic metadata such as title, chamber, committee, date, and Policy Agendas Project code (Jones et al. 2025). The database differentiates between staff reports and committee-approved reports as well as whether they are authored by the majority or minority parties.

As of May 2026, CORD housed 2309 individual reports from 32 congressional committees and individual members of Congress. The initial scope—106th to 116th Congress—has now expanded to go as far back as the 102nd Congress (where applicable) and as recently as the 119th Congress. The database now contains up to 26 points of metadata for each oversight report.

4 | Scholarship on CORD

In this special issue, the authors wrestle with congressional oversight reports not only as a mechanism of government or political accountability, but also as a core component of the legislative process. These studies detail the frequency, subject matters, and importance of the reports. They analyze the purposive behavior of members of Congress and committees in gathering the information, developing the contents, and orchestrating the reports' release. In addition to providing Congress with a critical tool in conducting oversight, they also help structure the agenda for subsequent legislative action and inform other legislative branch tasks dictated by the Constitution.

These articles demonstrate that the content of oversight varies systematically with partisan incentives and institutional context. Majority and minority parties deploy investigations and reports strategically, balancing the pursuit of policy influence with the need to signal expertise, challenge opposing narratives, and maintain political visibility, particularly under divided government. They also show that members are strategic in how and when they conduct oversight.

The articles examine oversight's effects in broader institutional arrangements. Capacity—most especially, investigative staff—can sustain congressional competence over long periods, even when operating outside the public eye, while the erosion of such capacity may have lasting implications for Congress's ability to monitor the executive branch effectively. They stress the importance of accounting for selection effects in oversight behavior, noting that Congress may resolve policy disputes either by conducting investigations or by acting preemptively to change policy without formal hearings. Together, these perspectives underscore that oversight is best understood as a dynamic and strategic process embedded within the broader policymaking system, including but not limited to legislating, rather than an entirely different enterprise.

4.1 | A Summary of the Articles in the Special Issue

In the first article, Sean M. Theriault (2026) analyzes the frequency of congressional oversight reports and the topics that they cover. He finds that the policies analyzed in the reports spur bill referrals on those topics to the committees. He also finds a direct linkage from congressional oversight reports to downstream legislative activity, though only for the topics in reports in which the majority party played a part.

Claire Leavitt (2026), in the second article, places oversight reports into the broader context of a committee's investigative toolbox, which also includes letters to bureaucracies and hearings. She shows that, contrary to their reputation as theatrical time wasters, public non-legislative committee hearings contribute to problem-solving via both individual and collective legislative action. She finds that investigations conducted under divided government are more legislatively productive than under unified government.

In the third article, Lowande and Weiss (2026) study the acquisition and sharing of information in oversight. They employ a

large language model to extract findings, evaluations, predictions, and recommendations from oversight reports. They find that partisan investigations result in more raw findings and fewer recommendations than bipartisan investigations.

Butcher and Droic (2026), in the fourth article, analyze when and how minority parties use oversight. By showing how minority parties use reports to challenge the narratives offered by majority parties, they find that minority-issued reports become shorter under unified government, less frequent when they are legislatively blocked, and longer when they recently lost power. These findings highlight how oversight reports can serve as a real yet limited tool for the minority party.

Kim et al. (2026) explore committee dynamics in attempting to overturn unfavored policies under different partisan dynamics. Committees use oversight reports as an operationalization for the involvement of a committee in pursuing policy change. In arguing that mechanisms for information gathering, information sharing, and policy change do not operate independently from one another, they find that hearings can best be thought of as opportunities to share information about the bureaucracy consistent with members' electoral and ideological goals.

In the final article, Matthew Dull (2026) examines another congressional avenue of oversight—the Surveys & Investigations (S&I) team of the House Appropriations Committee—which conducted investigations outside of the spotlight from its inception in 1943 until it was quietly reorganized out of existence in December 2024. He uses committee reports, archival documents, and interviews to construct a comprehensive record of an investigatory tool that purposefully remained behind the scenes. His time-series analysis of S&I study titles from 1975 to 2004 shows how partisan dynamics may affect congressional oversight.

Taken together, these six articles converge on a common insight: congressional oversight is best understood as playing a role in the informational and agenda-setting stage in the policymaking process rather than a discrete activity separate from legislation. Work linking oversight outputs to subsequent legislative activity shows that investigations and reports help channel policy attention and shape the content of bills that follow, while research on the structure of investigations demonstrates that even ostensibly non-legislative hearings can contribute to problem-solving and legislative productivity. Complementing these findings, studies of knowledge claims within oversight reports highlight how committees transform raw information into findings, evaluations, and recommendations that legislators can use in crafting policy. In this way, the articles collectively trace a sequence from information acquisition to information articulation to legislative action, reinforcing the idea that oversight generates the substantive and political groundwork upon which policymaking relies. At the same time, the articles are linked by a shared emphasis on how institutional position and political incentives condition the form and effectiveness of oversight. Research on majority and minority party behavior shows that control of the agenda and access to institutional resources shape the visibility, depth, and policy influence of oversight activities, while studies of minority investigations demonstrate how actors operating under

constraints may use oversight reports strategically to sustain relevance and contest dominant narratives.

Together, the six articles illuminate a coherent set of linkages among information, institutions, and incentives, offering a more integrated understanding of oversight as a strategic, capacity-dependent process embedded within the legislative system.

4.2 | Scholarly Use of CORD

At the most fundamental level, CORD is a database for both scholars and practitioners to assess who conducts oversight, with whom, which topics, and when. Given the recurrence of some public policy problems, simply having this database may save future members the costly effort of those first steps in the oversight process—gathering facts. Furthermore, scholars can use the database as a simple fact-check for previous congressional investigative efforts.

Beyond the nuts and bolts of when Congress has done oversight, CORD can be used as a testing ground for how parties relate to each other. On what issues and under what conditions reports become officially adopted by the committee, and when minority party members or even majority party members offer dissenting or additional views? Under what conditions do the reports remain at the “staff” stage, and what does the reports’ final stage suggest about their impact?

Second, how do reports trade-off with final products for other investigative entities such as the Government Accountability Office, Congressional Research Service, and inspectors general, which are more removed from, though ultimately accountable to, Congress? The manner and forum for oversight may be determined by policy topic. At other times, the problem may be so pervasive and pernicious that Congress uses all of its tools of oversight at the same time. Furthermore, research can parse out the drivers of oversight, whether they be costs, corruption, or public demand.

Third, building on the studies in this issue, future research can deepen the understanding of the causal mechanisms that connect oversight activities to legislative outcomes. While these articles and the literature preceding them show that oversight reports, investigations, and hearings are associated with downstream policymaking, an important next step is to identify the conditions under which these linkages are strongest and the avenues in which they are most likely to occur. For example, scholars could examine whether oversight is more likely to translate into legislation dependent upon committee expertise, party leadership priorities, or broader constitutional partisan dynamics. Disentangling these conditions could move the literature from documenting relationships to specifying the circumstances that make oversight consequential for lawmaking.

A related avenue for research involves tracing the life cycle of specific policy ideas from investigation to bill introduction to enactment. Using process-tracing, network analysis, or text-as-data methods, scholars can map how information generated during oversight is incorporated into legislative proposals, committee markups, and ultimately statutory language. Such projects would

clarify whether oversight serves primarily as an agenda-setting device, a venue for refining policy solutions, a mechanism for building legislative coalitions, or all three. They would also help identify the institutional actors—committee staff, party leaders, or rank-and-file members—who play the most important roles in translating investigative findings into durable policy change.

A fifth promising direction lies in expanding the study of oversight capacity and institutional development across committees and over time. Organizational resources and specialized staff can sustain congressional competence, yet systematic comparisons across committees, chambers, and historical periods have been limited until now. Future research could examine how variation in staffing levels, professional expertise, and internal rules shape the scope and effectiveness of oversight activity. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for understanding how institutional investments accumulate—or erode—and how those changes affect Congress’s ability to monitor the executive branch and respond to emerging policy challenges. Research could be done to determine the inputs and conditions that yield the best oversight even while scholars develop operationalizations for what that is.

In addition, scholars can refine what we know about partisan strategy by examining how majority and minority parties adapt their oversight behavior in response to shifting political and institutional constraints. An analysis of unified and divided government, changes in majority status, or varying levels of floor success could illuminate how parties recalibrate the frequency, depth, and tone of their investigations. Researchers might also explore the downstream political consequences of these strategies, including how oversight narratives shape public perceptions, media coverage, and electoral positioning. By linking partisan incentives to institutional capacity and legislative outcomes, this line of inquiry would further integrate the study of oversight into broader theories of congressional behavior and governance.

CORD now gives scholars and practitioners a much more robust ability to examine the historical record, but at its broadest level CORD offers significant new opportunities to further understanding of how Congress’s oversight and informing function is serving society. CORD data could support analyses of whether committees are expending oversight resources on particularly risky agencies or programs, as well as how much time committees are spending on vexing problems and concerns identified consistently as top priorities for the electorate. Turning inward, these data also could help Congress identify and promote circumstances that produce the most impactful oversight efforts and that lead to landmark bipartisan legislative achievements.

We hope that the development of CORD and this special issue contribute to the growing literature on how Congress conducts oversight. We suspect that the articles in this volume introduce as many new questions in this line of research as they answer. If so, we will have done Elise proud.

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Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Data Availability Statement

We did not use any data beyond those available at the Levin Center to produce this article (see: <https://www.cord-levin-center.org/>).

Endnotes

- ¹ See, for example, *Investigator Truman: A Democracy Has to Keep an Eye on Itself*, TIME (Mar. 8, 1943) (cover); *Billion-Dollar Watchdog*, TIME (Mar. 8, 1943) (accompanying story referring to the Truman Committee as “one of the most useful Government agencies of World War II”).
- ² Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy, Portraits in Oversight: Harry Truman and the Investigation of Waste, Fraud, & Abuse in World War II (undated), <https://levin-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/5-Portraits-in-Oversight-Harry-Truman-and-the-Waste-Fraud-Abuse-in-WWII-Levin-Center-at-Wayne-Law.pdf> (citing Hess, J. N. (1967, November 28). Matthew J. Connelly oral history interview, November 28, 1967; Harry S. Truman Library and Museum. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/connelly1>).
- ³ *Id.* (citing Poole, R. M. (2012, August). How Truman Led the Charge in Congressional Oversight, HistoryNet. <https://www.historynet.com/when-everybody-loved-congress-2.htm>).
- ⁴ S. Comm. on Banking and Currency, Stock Exchange Practices: Report of the Committee on Banking and Currency Pursuant to S. Res. 84 (72nd Congress) and S. Res. 56 and S. Res. 97 (73rd Congress), S. Rept. No. 73-1455 (1934), <https://www.senate.gov/about/resources/pdf/pecora-final-report.pdf> OR https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/SERIALSET-09771_00_00-002-1455-0000/pdf/SERIALSET-09771_00_00-002-1455-0000.pdf.
- ⁵ Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, 94th Cong., S. Rept. No. 94-755 (1976), <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/resources/intelligence-related-commissions/>.
- ⁶ Nat'l Comm'n on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the Nat'l Comm'n on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (2004), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-911REPORT/pdf/GPO-911REPORT.pdf>.
- ⁷ *Trump v. Mazars USA, LLP*, 591 U.S. 848, 862 (2020) (noting that the “power of inquiry—with process to enforce it—is an essential and appropriate auxiliary to the legislative function”) (quoting *McGrain v. Daugherty*, 273 U.S. 135, 161 [1927]).
- ⁸ *Id.* (noting that “[w]ithout information, Congress would be shooting in the dark, unable to legislate ‘wisely or effectively’”) (quoting *McGrain*, 273 U.S. at 75).
- ⁹ *Id.* (quoting *Watkins v. United States*, 354 U.S. 178, 187 [1957]).
- ¹⁰ *Id.* at 862–63 (noting that a congressional subpoena is valid if it is “related to, and in furtherance of, a legitimate task of the Congress” [citing *Watkins*, 354 U.S. at 187] [emphasis added]). See also David Rapallo, *House Rules: Congress and the Attorney-Client Privilege*, 100 WASH. U. L. REV. 455, 460 (2022) (noting that instead of using the shorthand “valid legislative purpose,” the more precise framing is whether Congress’s investigative demands serve a “valid legislative branch purpose”) (emphasis in original).
- ¹¹ *Mazars*, at 863.
- ¹² See generally Standing Rules of the Senate, R. XXV, S. Doc. No. 113–18, at 19–31 (2013); Rules of the House of Representatives, R. X, H.R. Doc. No. 118–187, at 463–577 (2025).
- ¹³ Standing Rules of the Senate, R. XXV(1)(k)(1), S. Doc. No. 113–18, at 24–25 (2013); Rules of the House of Representatives, R. X(1)(n), X(3)(i), and X(4)(c), H.R. Doc. No. 118–187, at 498–501, 521, and 527–29 (2025). For information on the evolution of the jurisdiction of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, see Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Historical Background (updated through 116th Cong.), <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/PSI-Historical-Background-Updated-to-116th-Congress.pdf>.
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- ⁴⁰ Committees may have websites that are updated with new websites or URLs over time when parties change control, committees change names, or new chairs or ranking members are elected. For example, the House Oversight Committee’s majority website is currently <https://oversight.house.gov>, and the minority website is currently <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov>. But they have used others over the years, including reform.house.gov, republicans.oversight.house.gov, and democrats.oversight.house.gov. Some websites may no longer be accessible, while others may be accessed through non-governmental archiving services. See, for example, web.archive.org/web/20070312170814/http://oversight.house.gov/.
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- ⁴⁹ In early 2025, the HSDL was temporarily inaccessible while the Trump Administration reviewed its content. While unavailable, the website featured this message: “The Homeland Security Digital Library is temporarily unavailable. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.” When it came back online, a banner at the top of the homepage read: “Some content on this platform has been removed in accordance with the President’s executive orders and DHS priorities.” In response, CORD now lists the date it releases each collection of committee reports in the committee’s description so researchers know some information may be missing after 2025.

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