



SECURITY &
DEMOCRACY
FORUM

Congressional Oversight and Investigations

How Congress Holds the Executive Accountable

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Course Objectives

- Understand the constitutional and political foundations of oversight
- Identify the main tools and processes used in investigations
- Learn best practices for working with IGs, GAO, whistleblowers, and external stakeholders
- Explore the dynamics and challenges of high-profile inquiries

Why Oversight Matters

- Article I powers: checks and balances in action
- Oversight ensures accountability, transparency, and effective governance
- Beyond politics: preventing waste, fraud, abuse, and misconduct



Oversight Toolkit Overview

- Letters and briefings
- Hearings (public and closed-door)
- Reports and audits
- Investigations (targeted, time-bound)
- Informal inquiries

Compulsory Powers

- Subpoenas: authority, issuance process, and enforcement challenges
- Depositions: formal under-oath questioning outside hearings
- Document requests: scope, specificity, and compliance



Key Partners Inside Government

- Inspectors General (IGs): independent internal watchdogs
- GAO: nonpartisan audits, reports, and legal opinions
- Agency liaisons and legislative affairs offices



Key Partners Outside Government

- Whistleblowers: protections, channels for safe disclosure
- Press/reporters: shaping public narrative, amplifying findings
- Transparency & watchdog organizations (POGO, CREW, OpenTheGovernment)
- Advocacy groups with relevant expertise



Planning an Investigation

- Setting objectives and scope
- Identifying leads and potential witnesses
- Coordinating with legal and subject-matter experts
- Managing timelines and milestones



Gathering Information

- Requests for documents and data
- Interviews and depositions
- Site visits and field inspections
- Leveraging IG/GAO reports as evidence

Oversight vs. Investigations vs. Audits

- Oversight: continuous monitoring, broad scope
- Investigation: targeted, high-priority fact-finding
- Audit: systematic financial or performance review

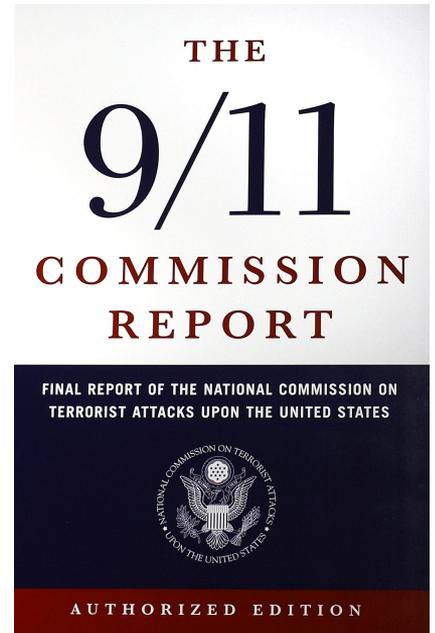


Hearings

- Purpose: fact-finding, public accountability, legislative groundwork
- Structure: opening statements, witness testimony, questioning
- Public vs. closed hearings: when each is used
- Coordinating with media strategy

Using Findings

- Drafting reports and recommendations
- Informing legislation or appropriations decisions
- Referring matters for criminal or administrative action





Political and Strategic Dynamics

- Majority vs. minority powers and resources
- Partisan vs. bipartisan approaches
- Managing leaks, narrative control, and public opinion
- The role of external stakeholders in shaping the investigation's impact

Case Study: A Successful Oversight Cycle

- Example: IG report → hearing → legislation enacted
- Key moments, challenges, and turning points
- Lessons for future investigations



Best Practices for Effective Oversight

- Be clear and specific in requests
- Build a comprehensive record
- Protect sources and sensitive data
- Coordinate with allies inside and outside government

Common Pitfalls

- Overbroad requests leading to delays
- Partisanship undermining credibility
- Neglecting follow-up on findings
- Poor media handling



Key Takeaways & Resources

- Oversight is essential to democratic accountability
- Effective investigations require both process and politics
- Open Q&A
- Encourage review of recent NDAA's
- Invite to take other related modules (Getting a Gov Job, Military 101)