

insights

TYPES NOT MAPPED YET July 11, 2022 | TTR not mapped yet | Christopher T. Murray

Select Committee

A congressional committee created to conduct investigations or consider measures, usually on a specific topic, that is often limited in scope and duration.

Gimme More

Much of Congress's legislative work is conducted at the committee level. From oversight and nominations hearings to marking up and reporting legislation to the floor for consideration, committees are one of the fundamental cogs in the wheels of our democratic process. The House and Senate form their own committees at the beginning of each Congress; some of these are permanent (*e.g.*, the Appropriations Committees), and some are "select."

During the [First Congress](#) (1789-1791), the House appointed roughly six hundred select committees, and the House did not appoint the first permanent committees until the Third Congress (1793-1795). In the Senate, select committees performed the overwhelming majority of committee work until 1816. After that time, the Senate transitioned to having [permanent committees](#) consider the bulk of its legislative work and reserved the use of select committees for unique circumstances.

Oops! ... I Did It Again

Congress has turned to select committees to address a variety of issues, from negotiating large federal legislative packages to investigating some of the nation's biggest scandals and tragedies. In 1972, the Senate voted to create the [Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities](#), which investigated Watergate. Just four years later, in 1976, the House appointed 14 members to the Select Committee on Assassinations, which investigated the murders of both President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

More recently, select committees addressed intelligence activities before and after the September 11 terrorist attacks and the attack on the US compound in Benghazi. The latter became one of the longest and costliest congressional investigations in history.

... Baby One More Time

Following the events of January 6, 2021, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) sponsored [H.Res. 503](#), a resolution establishing the select committee within the House of Representatives to investigate the attack on the US Capitol. The Speaker took this action after the Senate failed to overcome a Republican-led filibuster to create a bipartisan, bicameral January 6 Commission. On June 30, 2021, the resolution passed the House on a 222-190 vote, and the Select Committee's highly publicized work remains ongoing. Other select committees, such as the House Select Committee on Climate Crisis, allow a wider range of policymakers to have a voice and weigh in on substantive federal legislation.

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