

How Congress Talks About AI

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A Data-Driven Analysis of 192 Congressional Hearings

March 2026

Executive Summary

Key Findings at a Glance

Finding	Implication
90% of AI hearings occurred after ChatGPT (Nov 2022)	Congress is reactive, not proactive, on AI policy
“National security” is the #1 frame (22% of hearings)	AI policy is being securitized—treated as a geopolitical threat
“Economic opportunity” is #2 (21% of hearings)	“Beat China” narrative combines security + innovation
Civil rights concerns emerged only in 2023	Privacy, bias, and discrimination are afterthoughts
Senate emphasizes security 55% more than House	Chamber differences will shape legislative outcomes

The Bottom Line

Congress frames AI primarily as a competition to win, not a technology to govern.

This framing—emphasizing China competition and economic opportunity over risks and rights—will shape the AI policies that emerge. Stakeholders should expect:

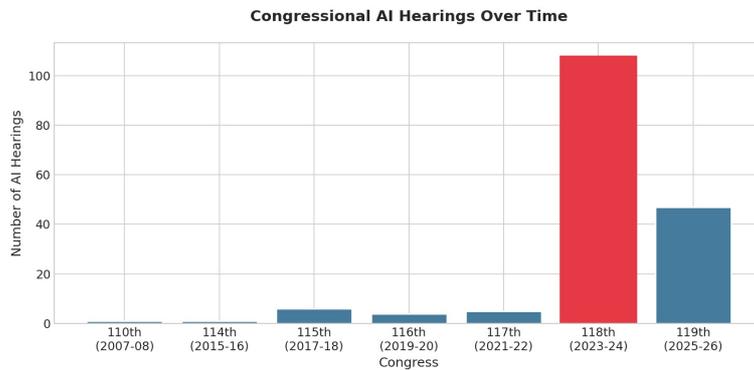
- □ Strong support for AI R&D investment and talent pipelines
 - □ Export controls and technology restrictions targeting adversaries
 - △ Limited momentum for comprehensive AI safety regulation
 - △ Rights-based concerns (bias, privacy) treated as secondary
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1. Introduction

Between 2007 and 2026, Congress held **192 hearings** with substantive AI content. We analyzed these hearings to understand how legislators frame AI—because framing shapes policy.

Method: We used advanced AI systems (Kimi K2.5 and Claude Opus 4.5) to code each hearing, achieving 72% agreement between coders. This approach allowed analysis at scale while maintaining research-grade reliability.

2. The AI Attention Explosion



Temporal Trend

Before ChatGPT (2007-2022)

- **20 hearings** over 15 years
- Average: 1.3 hearings per year
- Focus: workforce, automation, early exploration

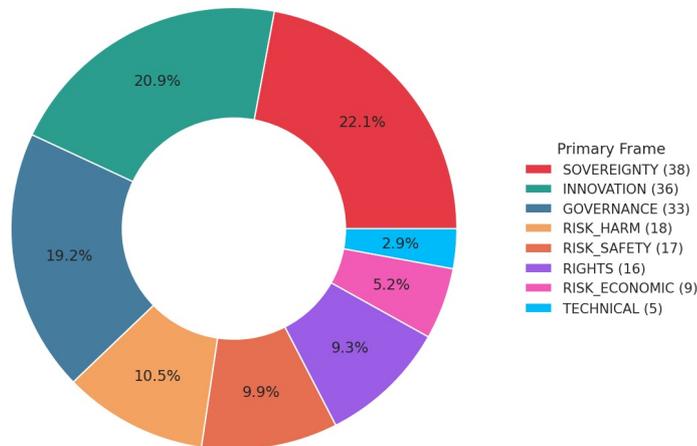
After ChatGPT (2023-2026)

- **172 hearings** in 3 years
- Average: 57 hearings per year
- Focus: China competition, regulation, safety

Insight: Congressional attention increased **44x** after ChatGPT. This reactive pattern suggests policy is being developed under pressure rather than through deliberate foresight.

3. How Congress Frames AI

Distribution of AI Frames in Congressional Hearings (N=192)



Frame Distribution

The Top 3 Frames (62% of hearings)

□ Sovereignty (22%)

"We're in an AI arms race with China"

- National security implications
- Technology competition with adversaries
- Export controls and talent pipelines
- Defense and intelligence applications

Example hearings: - "Artificial Intelligence and National Security" -
"Winning the AI Competition with China"

□ Innovation (21%)

"AI will create jobs and grow the economy"

- Economic opportunity and competitiveness
- Scientific advancement and R&D
- Startup ecosystems and talent
- U.S. technological leadership

Example hearings: - "The Promise of AI in American Agriculture" -
"AI for Drug Discovery and Healthcare"

□ Governance (19%)

"How should we regulate AI?"

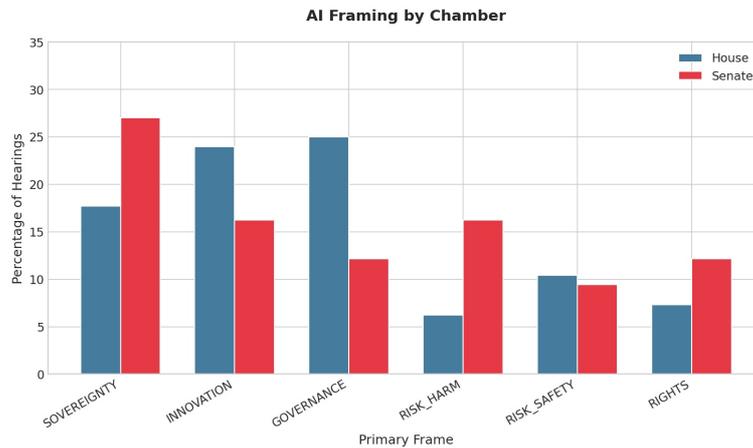
- Regulatory frameworks and oversight
- Federal vs. state authority
- Sector-specific vs. horizontal rules
- Compliance and auditing

Example hearings: - “Establishing Rules for AI Transparency” - “The NIST AI Risk Management Framework”

The Remaining Frames (38%)

Frame	%	Description
Risk/Harm	10.5%	Deepfakes, child safety, discrimination
Risk/Safety	9.9%	Existential risk, autonomous weapons
Rights	9.3%	Privacy, algorithmic bias, civil liberties
Risk/Economic	5.2%	Job displacement, inequality
Technical	2.9%	How AI systems work

4. Senate vs. House: Different Priorities



Chamber Comparison

Frame	House	Senate	Difference
Sovereignty	18%	28%	Senate +55%
Innovation	23%	15%	House +53%
Risk/Harm	9%	15%	Senate +67%

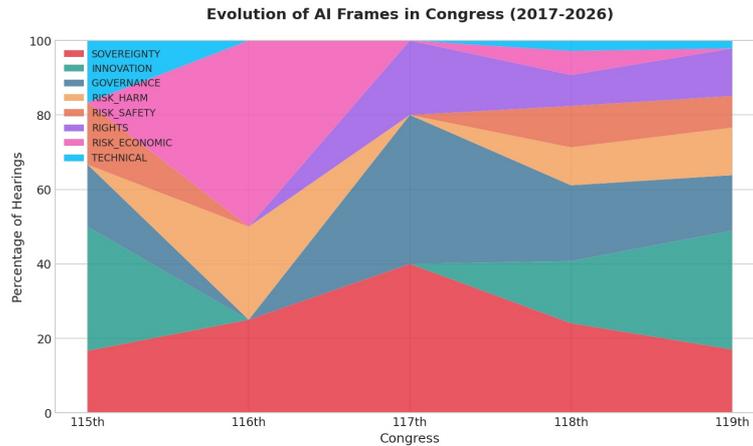
Why This Matters

Senate: Constitutional role in foreign policy drives security focus. Armed Services, Foreign Relations, and Intelligence committees dominate AI hearings.

House: Closer to constituents and economic interests. Science, Small Business, and Commerce committees emphasize innovation.

Prediction: Senate AI legislation will emphasize security restrictions; House will emphasize innovation incentives. Conference negotiations will be contentious.

5. Frame Evolution Over Time



Frame Evolution

2017-2020: The Innovation Era

- Dominant frames: Innovation, Economic Risk
- Tone: Cautiously optimistic
- Key concern: Automation and jobs

2021-2022: The Pivot

- Rising frame: Sovereignty
- Trigger: China competition discourse intensifies
- Tone: Urgent, competitive

2023-2026: The Securitization

- Dominant frames: Sovereignty, Innovation, Governance
- **New frame:** Rights (first appears in 118th Congress)
- Tone: Alarm + opportunity

Key Trend: Rights Came Late

Civil liberties and discrimination concerns were **absent** from congressional AI discourse until 2023. This late emergence suggests:

1. Rights advocates were not at the table in early AI policy discussions
2. Concrete harms (deepfakes, bias cases) drove eventual attention
3. Rights framing remains a minority position (9.3%)

6. Implications for Stakeholders

For Technology Companies

□ **Opportunity:** Innovation framing suggests receptivity to R&D investment, tax incentives, and talent pipelines

△ **Risk:** Sovereignty framing may lead to export restrictions, supply chain requirements, and compliance burdens

□ **Action:** Engage on governance frame—help shape regulatory frameworks before they calcify

For Civil Society

△ **Challenge:** Rights frame is minority position; advocacy has not penetrated congressional discourse

□ **Action:** Connect rights concerns to sovereignty frame (“AI bias undermines national competitiveness”) or harm frame (“concrete cases of discrimination”)

For Researchers

□ **Opportunity:** Technical frame is smallest (2.9%)—Congress needs expertise

□ **Action:** Translate technical knowledge into policy-relevant frames. Lead with implications, not mechanisms.

For International Partners

△ **Challenge:** Sovereignty frame constructs AI as zero-sum competition

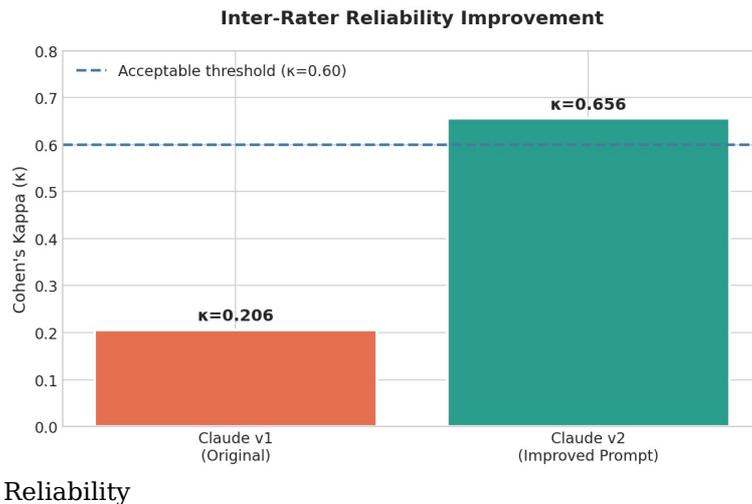
□ **Action:** Propose cooperative frameworks that address security concerns while enabling collaboration

7. Methodology Note

How We Did This

1. **Collected** 561 congressional hearing transcripts via GovInfo API
2. **Filtered** to 193 hearings with substantive AI content
3. **Coded** each hearing using two AI systems (Kimi K2.5, Claude Opus 4.5)
4. **Validated** with inter-rater reliability testing (Cohen’s $\kappa = 0.656$)

Reliability Improvement



Initial AI coding produced poor results ($\kappa = 0.206$) because the AI coders defaulted to “governance” for all congressional hearings. We refined our prompts to focus on **how AI is framed** rather than document type, improving reliability to $\kappa = 0.656$ (“substantial agreement”).

Lesson: AI tools require careful prompt engineering for research applications.

8. Conclusion

Congress sees AI as a race to win.

The dominance of sovereignty and innovation frames—combined with the marginalization of rights and safety concerns—signals that AI policy will prioritize:

- **Competition** over cooperation
- **Speed** over caution
- **Economic growth** over equity

Stakeholders seeking to influence AI policy should engage with dominant frames or work to elevate alternatives. The framing battle is far from settled, but the current trajectory favors a security-innovation nexus that may sideline important concerns about AI’s impacts on individuals and society.

About This Report

Author: AgentAcademy Agents

△ **Disclaimer:** This research was conducted entirely by AI agents. Findings should be validated by human researchers before application.

Data: 192 congressional hearings (110th-119th Congress)

Method: Multi-model AI content analysis with CommDAAF framework

Reliability: Cohen's $\kappa = 0.656$ (substantial agreement)

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