

Most bills *never* get a vote — that’s the *norm*, not a *cover-up*

One mechanism of federal lawmaking, examined in depth — what actually happens to the roughly 93% of bills that never become law.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How This Guide Works

This is part of **Incognati Civics**, applying the field-guide format to the mechanics of federal lawmaking — the parliamentary process most people never see explained. Each specimen goes deep on one mechanism, with the heavier sourcing a legal or procedural claim actually requires: official records, primary-source rules, and peer-reviewed or nonpartisan scholarship, listed in full on the references page.

INCOGNATI CIVICS – HOW FEDERAL LAWS ACTUALLY GET CREATED

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“Died in Committee” ≠ Suppression

Mors in Committio

Governing precedent / case Ongoing Status Consistent across recent Congresses

OBSERVED SPECIMEN

GOVTRACK.US HISTORICAL BILL-OUTCOME ANALYSIS

*Across recent two-year Congresses, GovTrack's tracking finds that only around **3% to 7%** of introduced bills are ultimately enacted into law (directly or via incorporation into other legislation). The remainder mostly never receive a committee vote at all — not because of a hidden decision to bury them, but because thousands of bills compete for a small number of floor days each session.*

THE HOOK

“The bill died in committee” sounds like something was deliberately killed — a single dramatic decision made behind closed doors.

THE MECHANISM

With thousands of bills introduced each Congress and only a limited legislative calendar, committee chairs must choose a small fraction to schedule. Most bills simply never reach the front of that queue — no vote, no hearing, no explicit rejection required.

Field mark: before treating a stalled bill as evidence of suppression, check how many other bills were introduced that same Congress — a stalled bill is the statistically ordinary outcome, not the exception.

See the full references page for complete citations.

References

every source checkable at the link provided; DOIs given where the source has one

PRIMARY SOURCE · DATA ANALYSIS

GovTrack.us, "Analysis Methodology": bill enactment-rate statistics.

<https://www.govtrack.us/about/analysis>

States that roughly 3% of bills are enacted by presidential signature or veto override, with additional bills incorporated into other enacted legislation.

PRIMARY SOURCE · DATA ANALYSIS

GovTrack.us, "Historical Statistics about Legislation in the U.S. Congress."

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/statistics>

Congress-by-Congress breakdown of introduced bills by final status.

REFERENCE SOURCE

U.S. House of Representatives, "The Legislative Process."

<https://www.house.gov/the-house-explained/the-legislative-process>

Official explainer of committee referral and scheduling.

Reading This Mechanism: A Gut Check

four questions before a headline changes what you think happened in Congress

1 Ask about the denominator

Thousands of bills compete for floor time each Congress — check how many others were introduced.

2 Check for a scheduled vote

Most bills never get one — that's the norm, not a sign of a specific decision to block this bill.

3 Look for incorporation

A bill can “die” as a stand-alone measure while its provisions pass inside another bill entirely.

4 Separate priority from suppression

Not being prioritized isn't the same as being actively killed.

INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 4 of Incognati Civics. The full queue of twelve specimens on federal lawmaking is listed on the cover, and four further Civics subprojects — local government, elections, official data reporting, and institutional communications — are planned beyond this one. The Incognati Atlas catalogs the underlying patterns across all of it.

Civics Field Edition · Specimen No. 4

All specimens independently sourced