# GAO database on rules and major rules

The federal government's regulatory reports and databases serve different purposes. The *Federal Register* presents all proposed and final rules, along with numerous presidential documents and notices. The Unified Agenda presents agency priorities with details about rules at various stages in the production pipeline and their economic significance.
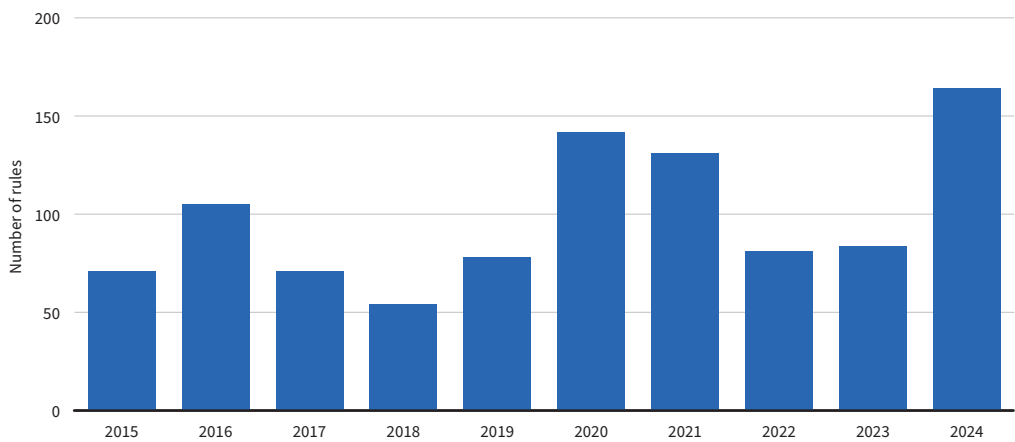
The Government Accountability Office (GAO) compiles regulatory information as well. The 1996 Congressional Review Act (CRA) requires agencies to submit rules to both houses of Congress, as well as to the GAO, and for the GAO to prepare reports to Congress on the major ones—typically those with annual estimated effects of $100 million or more. Major rules can add burdens, reduce burdens, delay policy implementation,

or set rates and standards for major government programs like Medicaid. Major guidance documents are also subject to the CRA but are rarely presented to the GAO or to Congress in a readily trackable way. The submission form provided to agencies until 2024 made no note of them apart from an "Other" checkbox.[115]

Interestingly for policymakers, given the CRA, the $100 million threshold that prevailed before Biden's "Modernizing Regulatory Review" executive order remained intact. Trump's revocation of Biden's order restored the $100 million threshold recognized in Clinton-era EO 12866.

The CRA provides Congress a window of 60 legislative days to review a received rule and pass a resolution of

## Figure 25. Major rules in the GAO database



Source: Government Accountability Office.

disapproval.[116] Despite the issuance of thousands of rules since the CRA's passage, it was invoked only once before the Trump administration, against a Clinton-era ergonomics rule. Even today, fewer than two dozen regulations have been overturned by CRA actions, the bulk of them during the Trump administration.

Thanks to the CRA, one can monitor the thousands of final rules archived at the GAO each year, as well as track reports on those regarded as major. GAO's database contained 90,481 rules through January 31, 2025.[117] For comparison, the *Federal Register* and National Archives repository indicate 104,837 rules since the CRA's passage (Appendix E). The GAO database is important, but incomplete, as not all regulations are being reported, despite CRA requirements.[118]

For the year 2024, the GAO database contains 944 rules (major and non-major) received from departments and agencies. There is a lag, so that rules landing in GAO's database after this compilation will add to the ultimate total (for example, GAO reports 2,072 for 2023). Figure 25 depicts the number of major rules between 2015 and 2024 that policymakers might compare with final significant and completed S3F1 rules presented earlier, with the caveat that recent years do swing in the GAO report before converging on a stable cardinal number. Paralleling the surge in high-significance S3F1 rules, the 168 major rules depicted in 2024 are a 94 percent increase over 2023. This report's Appendix L presents agency detail on these major rules back to 2003.

With transition overlap in mind, totals and calendar-year averages of the

number of major rules during recent administrations follow. Biden's average annual number of major rules substantially exceeds those of his three predecessors.

- ▶ George W. Bush (eight years): 492 major rules, average 62 rules per year.

- ▶ Barack Obama (eight years): 675 major rules, average 84 rules per year.
- ▶ Donald Trump (four years): 345 major rules, average 86 rules per year (includes deregulatory).
- ▶ Joe Biden (four years): 464 major rules, average 116 rules per year.