



GALCON 2026

The McCarthy Investigations: McCarthyism on Trial



US Senate

**US Senate Committee
Research Report**

Key Terms and Definitions

Senate¹: A senate is a legislative body or a council that debates, discusses, and votes on laws and major political decisions, often serving as the upper chamber of a government.

The U.S. Senate²: The U.S. Senate is one of the two law-making bodies of the United States Congress. It represents the states equally, with two senators from each state

Censure³: A formal statement of disapproval issued by the U.S. Senate against one of its members for misconduct, which does not remove the senator from office, but severely damages their reputation and influence.

McCarthyism⁴: the political practice of aggressive use to unproven accusations of disloyalty without having proper evidence. The term is named after the U.S. senator, Joseph R. McCarthy, who used this practice a lot throughout his investigations in the 1950s, oftentimes resulting in unemployment and blacklisting of accused people.

Communism⁵: the economical-political ideology of creating a classless society, where according to the Oxford Dictionary:⁶ All property is publicly owned by the society as well as each individual works and is paid according to their abilities and needs.

Background

Note: This committee simulates the US Senate Bi-Partisan Select Committee discussing the actions of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and voting on his censure on 9 November 1954. You will be representing US Senators. This committee will have a special ROP document published soon.

The Cold War

It all started back in 1947, the year the Cold War began, when a heated yet mostly nonviolent rivalry broke out between the two remaining world powers after World War II: the USA and the USSR (Soviet Union). The Cold War was not a direct armed war, but rather an ideological and political conflict, it was more of a fight over dominance, which system dominates the world, communism or capitalism. The USSR aimed to expand communism to other countries, while the USA aimed to contain its spread and preserve its system as a capitalist democracy.

Each country had its own reasons for why it wanted to adopt the ideology that it chose, but one thing was certain: both were competing to become the most leading military and

¹ Senate <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/senate>

² The U.S Senate <https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/education-resource/us-senate>

³ Censure in the U.S Senate <https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/censure.htm>

⁴ McCarthyism <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/educational-resources/age-of-eisenhower/mccarthyism-red-scare>

⁵ Communism <https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism>

⁶ Communism According to Oxford
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810104639758>

economic nation on the international stage. This created a heavy atmosphere of espionage, suspicion, as well as numerous conflicts that revolved around the growth of the Communist parties and nations around the world and the development of a nuclear arms race that created a possibility of worldwide annihilation. This became more acute as communism began to spread, especially in many eastern European and Asian countries. The US adopted the “domino theory,” which stated that one country falling to Communism meant the surrounding countries were likely to fall as well. This policy pushed the US to enter Cold War conflicts, including the Korean War, Vietnam War, and other conflicts, all because it wanted to contain communism, and try to make it stop spreading across different countries, because in the eyes of the US and its allies, communism was seen as a threat to individual freedoms, free trade, and also free elections; therefore, the threat and fear among citizens were intensified by the spread of nuclear weapons.⁷

Both superpowers began to plant spies and intelligence agents in one another’s territories to spy on one another, in addition to seeking out ways to hinder any effort at growing global power. The Communist Party of America and other left wing movements already had a strong presence on the political scene, with massive representation in local politics and trade unions. They had many sympathizers amongst members of the academia and amongst members of the acting profession (A famous example of such was Charlie Chaplin). Consequently, fears spread around wider circles of the American public and establishment about the loyalty of their compatriots who belonged to left wing and communist movements. This created widespread panic among American citizens, and the frenzy eventually became known as “the Second Red Scare”.⁸

In addition, American citizens were given another reason to believe that their fears were justified, and that was through official government action. In 1947, President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9835, a policy introduced during the early “Cold War” to address concerns about loyalty within the federal workforce, and at a time of growing tension between the US and the USSR, the order obligated loyalty screenings for both current and future federal employees. The initiative emerged at a time when fears of communist infiltration were widespread, fueled by real espionage cases, and increased political rivalry, especially from the Republican Party.⁹

The Rise of McCarthyism

Amid this fear and panic **Senator Joseph R. McCarthy** of Wisconsin used the public fear of communism to rise to fame. On February 9, McCarthy delivered a speech at the McLure Hotel in Wheeling, claiming that he had a list of 205 communists that had infiltrated the State Department. As a result, the accusations made him rise to fame and become a national spotlight, as many Americans who were fearful believed McCarthy’s accusations were justified, although he was proved unable to produce the name of a single “card-carrying communist” in any government department upon testifying before the

⁷Cold War Diplomacy <https://diplomacy.state.gov/discover-diplomacy/period/cold-war-diplomacy/#:~:text=To%20combat%20the%20influence%20and,increased%20number%20of%20nuclear%20weapons>.

⁸ The Cold Conflict <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/cold-conflict>

⁹ Executive Order 9835

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/analysis-executive-order-9835>

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Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Nevertheless, his claims triggered aggressive investigations and accusations that would dominate U.S. politics for the next four years.

McCarthy's search for communists in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the State Department, and elsewhere made him an incredibly polarizing figure. As a result of McCarthy's reelection in 1952, he obtained the chairmanship of the Committee on Government Operations of the Senate and of its Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. For the next two years, he was constantly in the spotlight, investigating various government departments and questioning many witnesses about their suspected communist affiliations. For example, Senator McCarthy launched an investigation and 11 hearings examining the State Department's foreign-language radio station, Voice of America, in which he accused it of employing many communist sympathizers. None were found, instead, the investigations severely damaged morale among the 2,000 employees, and one of them, Raymond Kaplan, committed suicide.

He also launched an inquiry into U.S. Information Service Libraries around the world, leading to the removal, or even the burning, of "Red Books" which were written by communists or communist sympathizers. The books were first donated to soldiers during World War II and later kept in libraries to represent different political views in a democracy, but rather than questioning the librarians responsible for the books, McCarthy called in the authors of the "Red Books," including Langston Hughes and Dashiell Hammett, and questioned them about their values and beliefs. In other hearings, Senator McCarthy targeted professors, including those at well-known universities such as Harvard and Columbia, where he challenged principles of academic and intellectual freedom, which are the basic freedoms that universities rely on. As a consequence of his accusations, several professors lost their jobs despite the lack of evidence of their communist affiliation.

McCarthy also attacked the military, which led to a chain of events that put him into conflict with the Army and President Dwight D. Eisenhower and eventually led to his political downfall.¹⁰ During the public hearings, 106 witnesses appeared before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and invoked the Fifth Amendment. Meanwhile, McCarthy openly pressured and criticized these witnesses for asserting their constitutional rights, claiming that doing so meant they were guilty and labeling them "Fifth Amendment Communists."

One of the important events that stoked the rising fear among American citizens was "**the Rosenberg Case**", in which Julius Rosenberg and Ethel Rosenberg, two American civilians and members of the Communist Party, were accused of passing U.S. military and atomic secrets to the Soviet Union. This case convinced many Americans that communist espionage was real and that enemies could exist within the country.¹¹ Another example was the case of **Alger Hiss**, which took place during a period of increasing fear of communism inside the United States. Hiss, a former U.S. State Department official, was convicted of perjury in 1950 concerning his dealings with Whittaker Chambers, a former

¹⁰ Senator Joe McCarthy's Oversight Abuses

<https://levin-center.org/joe-mccarthys-oversight-abuses/>

¹¹ The Rosenberg case

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julius-Rosenberg-and-Ethel-Rosenberg>

Soviet spy who later defected, and accused Alger Hiss of being part of a communist espionage ring.

Although it is debatable whether he succeeded in proving his accusations, McCarthy's accusations caused a substantial number of American citizens to lose their jobs and brought popular condemnation to others, ruining their professional and social reputation for many decades. This intensified the atmosphere of fear and doubts and opened the door to witch-hunts to run rampant, with common people accusing their innocent neighbours or colleagues of being involved in communist plots. This era (and phenomenon) became commonly known later on as **McCarthyism**.

McCarthyism on the decline?

McCarthyism both reached its peak and began facing its strongest pushback during what became known as the Army-McCarthy hearings, which was a series of 36 nationally televised investigations in 1954 led by McCarthy himself. These hearings were conducted by the Senate's Subcommittee on Investigations, and aimed to untangle conflicting accusations between McCarthy and the United States Army.

The Army accused McCarthy and his chief counsel, Roy Cohn, of trying to pressure the military into giving special treatment to David Schine, a former McCarthy aide. McCarthy claimed the Army was retaliating because he was investigating possible communist infiltration in the military following this, the hearings reached their climax when McCarthy had also suggested that the Army's lawyer, Joseph Welch, had employed a man who at one time had belonged to a communist front group. The turning point had been when Welch's publicized rebuke to the senator presented McCarthy in a serious negative light in the eyes of the public and his immense national popularity began to fade.¹²

Following these hearings, a substantial push back against McCarthy and his actions began to appear on the scene, both amongst politicians and the general public. Politicians, congressmen and senators from both Democratic and Republican circles, began looking at options that would limit the powers given to McCarthy. While said politicians were by no means communists and did firmly support their country in the confrontation with the Soviet Union, many of them found McCarthyism to have created an atmosphere that contradicts the spirit of American democratic values, with due process being superceded and the rights and well being of innocent individuals being breached due to perceived ideological disparity. McCarthyism was facing its strongest challenge, will it be able to continue in its mission or will its reach be checked by the backlash it has created?

Treaties & Organizations

Although the McCarthy investigations were primarily a domestic political issue, several international organizations and security arrangements shaped the broader climate of fear and suspicion that enabled McCarthy's rise. Understanding these institutions is essential to grasp the political environment of the early Cold War.

¹² The Red Scare

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Red-Scare-politics>

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- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): Founded in 1949, NATO arose as a response to the expansion of the Soviet Union during the Cold War era. This was a contributing factor to the growing tensions of a worldwide Communist threat and thus supported anti-communist investigations inside the USA.¹³
- Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations: (PSI) - a Senate investigative body concerned with looking into the activities of the federal government. It was on this body that Senator Joseph McCarthy established his investigative hegemony on issues related to communism in 1953 when he became its chairman, in addition to his regular Senate seat.¹⁴
- Select Committee to Study Censure Charges (Watkins Committee): This committee was formed by the Senate in 1954 to investigate the allegations against McCarthy. This committee considered various allegations made against him and finally formulated the allegations that comprised the Senate debate on November 9, 1954.¹⁵
- The House Un-American Activities Committee: (HUAC) was a congressional body tasked with looking into suspected Communist infiltration into American society. Although its workings were different from those of Senator Joseph McCarthy, its activities were instrumental in making congressional investigations into political ideologies and creating an anti discriminant climate.¹⁶
- Federal Bureau of Investigations: The FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover, launched internal investigations within the country on suspected communists. The intelligence activity served to reinforce fear of communists among the population and thus constituted one of the factors that led to congressional investigations.¹⁷
- Major Media: Especially CBS and journalist Edward R. Murrow were significant influences on public opinion. Murrow's *See It Now* television series aired criticism of the tactics of McCarthy and helped to stimulate widespread concern and investigation of his tactics by the Senate.¹⁸
- Voice of America (VOA): VOA was a government-funded international broadcaster in the USA that had the aim of promoting the values of the USA abroad. McCarthy accused the VOA staff of being loyal to communists, and his

¹³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). U.S. Department of State – Office of the Historian.
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/nato>

¹⁴ McCarthyism. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/McCarthyism>

¹⁵ Joe McCarthy's Oversight Abuses. Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy.
<https://levin-center.org/joe->

¹⁶ House Un-American Activities Committee. Encyclopædia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/House-Un-American-Activities-Committee>

¹⁷ McCarthyism / The "Red Scare". Eisenhower Presidential Library.
<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/mccarthyism-red-scare>

¹⁸ Joe McCarthy's Oversight Abuses. Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy.
<https://levin-center.org/joe->

inquiry into the VOA showed how the information sector became a target during the Second Red Scare.¹⁹

Current Situation

On July 30, 1954, Senator Ralph Flanders, introduced a resolution calling for the censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Flanders argued that McCarthy's conduct as chairman of the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was "contrary to senatorial traditions." Many members of the United States Senate who belonged to the Republican Party chose not to defend McCarthy's actions and accusations, but instead focused on the procedure that led to the addition of 46 charges to the original censure resolution.

The Senate referred the case to a **bipartisan select committee** on August 2, chaired by Senator Arthur Watkins and including respected members like John Stennis and Sam Ervin. McCarthy objected to the panel's composition, but the committee proceeded. In addition, to restore Senate dignity after the chaotic Army-McCarthy hearings, TV coverage was banned; however, judicial procedures were adopted, and throughout these procedures McCarthy was allowed to attend, speak and be represented by counsel.

After reviewing the 46 counts of misconduct, the committee reduced the charges to five categories:

1. Contempt of the Senate or a senatorial committee.
2. Encouraging federal government employees to violate the law by providing him with classified materials.
3. Receipt or use of confidential or classified documents.
4. Abuse of Senate colleagues.
5. Abuse of Brigadier General Ralph W. Zwicker during the army hearings.

However, after further deliberation by the bipartisan selected committee, the committee has recommended the censuring of Joseph McCarthy due to two main two charges:

1. "his refusal to appear before the Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections to answer questions about his personal character, and his general obstruction to the work of the panel during its investigation of him in 1951 and 1952."
2. "his conduct on February 18, 1954, when he publicly abused and defamed General Zwicker during his appearance before the army hearings."

While the committee did reduce the charges to two main ones, the other three charges remain relevant to the debate as they pertain to main charges in question. The U.S. Senate Committee the senators shall certainly be discussing and debating the initial five charges.

All of these reasons have led to the launch of the meeting which will be held on **November 9th, 1954** (the date of our simulation). In which its main purpose is to resume the debate and discussion that revolves around the resolution, the initial five charges, and

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian. Voice of America (VOA). Retrieved from

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/voice-of-america>

findings of the Watkins committee to censure Senator Joseph McCarthy. The meeting is going to the senators of the Bi-Partisan committees, made up of Pro-McCarthy, Anti-McCarthy and neutral senators. The chairs of the committee will allow some witnesses to take the stand for questioning.

The US Senate Bi-Partisan Committee is now on the cusp of deciding on the merits of a crucial period in post-WW2 American history. While the charges are very particular to McCarthy, it is vital to keep in mind that all of this commotion and charges presented against Senator McCarthy are taking place in the midst of the threat that communism and its spread have on the US and the politics of the Cold War. Thus, the dilemma of prioritizing national security of the US against communism while still preventing abuse of power and maintaining justice, has now become part of the reality that the US is currently going through, and there are none better than the leading politicians of the nation, the Senators of the United States of America, to settle that debate.

Critical Events and Timeline

1947-1957 – The Second Red Scare

A prolonged period of intense fear of Communist infiltration in the United States, driven by Cold War tensions, Soviet expansion, and espionage cases. This climate enabled aggressive domestic anti-Communist investigations, including those led by Senator Joseph McCarthy.²⁰

March 21, 1947 – Truman’s Loyalty Program (Executive Order 9835)

President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9835, establishing a federal loyalty program to investigate government employees for possible disloyalty. This institutionalized suspicion within the federal government and normalized ideological investigations.²¹

February 9, 1950 – McCarthy’s Wheeling Speech

Senator Joseph McCarthy delivered a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, claiming he possessed a list of Communists working in the U.S. State Department. Although unsupported by evidence, the speech brought McCarthy national prominence.²²

April 22, 1954 – Opening of the Army-McCarthy Hearings

The Senate Subcommittee on Investigations began televised hearings to examine the dispute between McCarthy and the U.S. Army. The hearings were broadcast nationally and attracted widespread public attention.²³

July 30, 1954 – Introduction of Senate Resolution 301 (Censure Resolution)

²⁰ McCarthyism. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved January 1, 2026, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/McCarthyism>

²¹ Executive Order 9835: Prescribing procedures for the administration of an employees loyalty program. National Archives. Retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9835>

²² McCarthyism. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/event/McCarthyism>

²³ McCarthy and the Army–McCarthy hearings. United States Senate. Retrieved from <https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/mccarthy-and-army-mccarthy-hearings.htm>

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Senator Ralph Flanders introduced S. Res. 301, formally calling for the censure of Senator McCarthy due to his conduct. This initiated the Senate's official disciplinary process.²⁴

August 2, 1954 – Creation of the Watkins Committee

The U.S. Senate voted to establish a Select Committee, chaired by Senator Arthur Watkins, to investigate the charges outlined in the censure resolution and report its findings.²⁵

October 1954 – Watkins Committee Report Completed

The Select Committee completed its investigation, narrowing five categories of accusations against McCarthy to two primary charges and submitting its report to the full Senate.²⁶

Questions to Consider

1. To what extent did McCarthy's actions damage the reputation of the United States Senate?
2. How can the Senate maintain its dignity and public trust during times of widespread fear and political tension?
3. What is your character's stance regarding the five charges against Senator McCarthy?
4. What is the most proper decision to conclude at the end of the meeting that would not cause severe consequences which could tear the US Senate apart?
5. Would the censure of McCarthy lead to a wide spread of communism across the US and how much would it affect your character's stance?
6. How far could a senator go in order to protect his anti-communist stance?
7. How could we ensure that the Watkins committee was not biased towards a certain belief throughout viewing the charges presented against McCarthy?
8. What event has influenced your character's stance to become Pro-Censure/ Pro-McCarthy?

Helpful Resources

Helpful videos and resources:

<https://youtu.be/N35IugBYH04?si=yyMf0BhshlmRuhe9>

<https://explorethearchive.com/senator-joseph-mccarthy>

https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/censure/133Joseph_McCarthy.htm

²⁴ The censure case of Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin (1954). United States Senate. Retrieved from https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/censure/133Joseph_McCarthy.htm

²⁵ The censure case of Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin (1954). United States Senate. Retrieved from https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/censure/133Joseph_McCarthy.htm

²⁶ Congressional Record: Report of the Select Committee to Study Censure Charges (1954). U.S. Government Publishing Office. Retrieved from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1954-pt12/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1954-pt12-14.pdf>

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barry_Goldwater_1964_presidential_campaign#:~:text=Rockefeller%20challenged%20Goldwater%20to%20a%20debate%2C%20%5B44%5D.a%20member%20of%20the%20New%20Frontier%20than&text=another%20Republican.%22%20Despite%20the%20criticism%2C%20Goldwater%20refused,to%20remain%20consistent%20with%20his%20conservative%20ideology , December 11th, 2025.

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