

Public Law Technical Documentation

QuantGov

January 20, 2021

1 Purpose

The Public Law Database (PLDB) identifies associations between parts published in the *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) and public laws passed by Congress.

The Public Law Database consists of two datasets which are meant to answer certain questions about the relationship between acts of congress and federal regulations

Users who are familiar with the relationship between Public law and Federal regulation can skip to the bottom of this section. Those who are not familiar might benefit from this brief explanation:

Federal regulations are promulgated and enforced by the executive branch of the federal government. They are compiled and published as the *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR). This is the code that we analyze for the RegData US project.

It is the legislative branch, through acts of congress, which authorizes the executive branch to create and enforce regulations. In other words, the legislative branch does not directly write or enforce regulations. Rather, it passes laws which authorize the executive branch to do so. Thus, every federal regulation must be justified by a reference to the specific act of congress which gave the executive branch the authority to write it.

The “Parallel Table of Authorities and Rules” lists each part of the code of federal regulations next to the U.S. public law (federal bill pertaining to the public at large passed by congress and signed into law by the president) which authorized the executive branch to regulate that area of economy/society. If a citizen wanted to know which act of congress authorized the federal

government to promulgate a given regulation, this table would allow them to work backwards and find that original act of congress.

This table can be a confusing because of the existence of something called the *U.S. Code*. The *U.S. Code* is NOT the same thing as the *Code of Federal Regulations*. Instead, it is codification of U.S. Public Laws that re-sorts and reorganizes them by subject matter. It essentially functions as a dictionary of U.S. Public Laws which allows citizens to find laws by searching through them by subject matter rather than wading through them chronologically as they were created. In the Parallel Table of Authorities and Rules, most regulations are justified by citing areas in the US Code rather than in the Public Law on which it is based. This is similar to a researcher who justifies a claim by citing a secondary source rather than the primary source on which it is based; it is technically a valid citation, but it requires the reader to do more work to find the original source of authority for the claim.

2 Content

The Public Law Database was created to solve some of the problems which arise from the situation described above.

The first dataset helps users identify which acts of congress correspond to which specific sections in the code of federal regulations. It cuts out the “middleman” effect of the US Code by linking particular parts of the CFR directly to those public laws which authorized them.

The second dataset links each particular public law to the number of unique new restrictions that were likely created by that law. I.e. if a user wants to pinpoint which acts of congress ultimately resulted in the largest number of federal regulations or if they had a certain act of congress in mind and wanted to know how many regulations it created, this dataset could help provide that information.

3 Citation

If you use this data, please cite:

McLaughlin, Patrick A., and Oliver Sherouse. Public Law Database (dataset). QuantGov, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, 2017. <https://quantgov.org>.

Current Version: 1.0