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Brief Reviews of Books and Products Overton (Database).

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BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND PRODUCTS

Overton (Database). <https://www.overton.io/>

Pricing: Based on research intensity; free 30-day institutional trials

Overton is a database of over 11 million (and growing) global policy documents “written primarily for and by policymakers” and “published by a policy focused source,” including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, and more (2023e, paras. 1, 3). Documents are captured from open websites; therefore, a subscription does not provide unique content, but the platform adds value by “surfacing” policy documents from many websites and adding information regarding the academic outputs cited by these policy documents. As such, Overton demonstrates how research impacts policy.

Audiences for this database include funders, universities, journals, and researchers wishing to explore policy or understand the influence of research on policy. Overton would be relevant for any researcher wanting to search policy-related gray literature, but it seems particularly well-suited for individuals involved in an institutional research assessment to answer various questions regarding how many and which works and researchers, in which disciplines, have been cited by what kinds of organizations.

Multiple browse and search entry points serve different user needs. Users can browse all policy or all cited articles and explore via numerous facets; tag “Key” policy sources, which Overton will then flag in search results; and search by keywords in policies or articles, researcher names, or persistent identifiers such as digital object identifier (DOI) and Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID), including batch-searching for lists of identifiers. Flag icons by each result identify a document’s geographic origin, and snippets show search terms in context. Alongside standard facets are more unique filters such as “source region,” which allows users to see documents from classifications of regions such as G7 and G20 nations. An example search for “tobacco packaging” found document types that included publications, transcripts, clinical guidance, working papers, blogs, periodicals, legal documents, and scholarly articles, with results originating from federal and state/province levels in countries such as the United States, the UK, Thailand, Sweden, India, Uganda, Nigeria, Turkey, and more.

The subscribing institution remains “pinned” in the interface, always accessible for searching and filtering, highlighting the tool’s appeal for institutional research offices. When viewing



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citations by institution, each result shows the article title and institutional author, communicating relevance at a glance. Results are detailed yet highly readable, and data are easily exported for analysis. An August 2023 feature links policy documents to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to help users understand how cited research has impacted SDGs (Overton, 2023d). With an optional personal account, users can save searches, create search alerts, and add tags and highlights to documents. Documents in portable document format (PDF) are accessed on the originating organization's website.

The "Explore" tool enables new searches based on existing results: for example, after a keyword search produces policy documents, a user can "Explore" to see the research and policy cited, people mentioned, or more recent citing documents. This tool provides a novel way to navigate content with a more three-dimensional view of relationships and is particularly helpful for tracing citation influence backward and forward in time. Additionally, access to an application programming interface (API) can be requested by power users for more flexible querying and downloading.

The help files are robust, and the transparency regarding data sources, which include CrossRef and OpenAlex, is laudable. A signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), Overton details how they meet DORA's expectation in practice (Overton, 2023c). They also include a self-report using the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) Altmetrics Code of Conduct and guidance on responsible use of policy-related metrics (Overton, 2023b).

Overton was built by Open Policy Ltd. in the UK. Overton's founder and director, Euan Adie, previously founded Altmetric, although Overton has no connection to Altmetric or Digital Science (Overton, 2023a). The product's team has professional experience in areas such as academic libraries, think tanks, bibliometrics, data management, and open access (Overton, 2022; Overton, 2023a).

Overton is not the only subscription policy database. Policy Commons, like Overton, contains policy-related gray literature from governments, agencies, think tanks, and others. Although they advertise competitive content quantity, Policy Commons focuses on the discovery of policy itself versus identifying an institution's contribution to policy and lacks Overton's institutional filters. Therefore, Overton's interface seems better suited for institutional research assessment. Compared with free tools with limited policy citations, Overton has advantages in not only greater document quantity but also multidirectional search, i.e., the ability to search forward from an article or researcher for policy they influenced or search backward from policy to its cited research. Additionally, data can be aggregated at the institutional level for a broader picture of influence.

Overton links to documents on the originating organizations' sites, which is both efficient and ethically sound but raises preservation questions. If a document is removed from a website or a website disappears, are preservation copies stored, or are these documents removed from Overton's indexing? An Overton representative acknowledged this issue, although a plan is not in place; they respect the need to preserve access while also wanting to ensure that resources are referenced appropriately and legally.

In summary, Overton provides a rich interface for exploring policy documents, their references and citations, and research institutions' impact on policy. Although the documents themselves represent open content, the subscription-based platform adds significant value by collocating dispersed gray literature, adding powerful search facets, and layering in citation data to show relationships among policy and research documents. The company appears to prioritize transparent, ethical operation and supports core values in scholarly communication. This product could be useful for gray-literature research and for librarians responsible for assessing institutional research impact with an emphasis on policy and SDGs.

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