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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE): Pros and Cons

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**Abstract**

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) was created as part of an unprecedented federal reform initiative via Executive Order 14158 on January 7th, 2025. It is the focus of the current study to analyze the effects of DOGE's budget cuts/force reductions on public institutional trust as well as the risks to governance and accountability due to its non-statutory operational structure. Using data from various organizations including the Congressional Budget Office, Pew Research Center, Gallup, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the researcher used a documentary analysis approach to evaluate the outcomes of DOGE throughout fiscal year 2025. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test hypothesis one, relating the rapid deregulation and budget cuts by DOGE to public institutional trust levels amongst affected populations. Systematic benchmarking using OECD public governance principles were utilized to test hypothesis two. Paradoxically, DOGE achieved its goal of decreasing federal spending; however, federal spending actually rose by $301 billion for FY 2025 and experienced large work force reductions. In addition, public institutional trust dropped to 17% by the end of December 2025 which represents an all-time low. Additionally, DOGE did not meet all seven OECD public governance benchmarks resulting in higher governance and accountability risk compared to a statutory framework. Overall, the results indicate that the structural shift away from traditional statutory-based government structures may have negative consequences towards building public trust in federal agencies versus enhancing it. The implications are significant toward future presidential reform efforts demonstrating that institutionally accountable based frameworks are crucial within democratic governance.

*Keywords:* Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), Government efficiency, Public trust, Non-statutory governance, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Federal workforce, Deregulation.

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## 1. Introduction

The creation of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) in January of 2025 constituted one of the most audacious and contentious government restructuring attempts in recent U.S. history. Established via Executive Order 14158 issued on January 20th, 2025, DOGE would be tasked with reducing the federal budget at a pace previously unattainable. Specifically, the goal of DOGE was to achieve $1 Trillion in federal savings in less than nine months [20], [22]. Although this aggressive target was envisioned using an organizational structure unlike those found in traditional public administration, it raised many questions regarding the constitutionality of the restructuring effort, whether or not the restructuring process resulted in sufficient democratic oversight and accountability, and what implications this new structural arrangement may have upon the general level of trust in institutions of government. As of November 2025, DOGE no longer existed; however, the issues it created continue to resonate through discussions of federal governance [22].

At its inception, DOGE operated with an extremely limited number of employees relative to the scope of its responsibilities. In total, the USDS (the operational component responsible for performing the functions assigned to DOGE) employed approximately ninety-nine people during FY25. Furthermore, DOGE's FY25 budget totaled twenty million dollars [20]. Despite such limited financial and employee resources, DOGE personnel were able to gain access to federal payment systems, employment databases and

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facilities used by various federal departments. There was also considerable debate surrounding DOGE's relationship to the white house, its statutory authority to obtain access to agency data bases and systems, and how independently DOGE was able to operate from the remainder of the executive branch.

The impact on federal civil service and contracting for DOGE was substantial. As of 2024 there were 2,313,216 individuals employed in the federal civil service. At the end of 2025 this number declined to 2,064,216. Thus, over a six-month period the number of civil servants working in the federal government declined by nearly 250,000 people or roughly ten percent. Acceptance rates for the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) have been reported as ranging from as high as 200,000 workers at one agency and as low as 75,000 at another [5], [6]. These differences are largely attributed to varying reporting practices across agencies. In contrast, total federal spending has grown dramatically since DOGE began. Specifically, total federal spending rose from $6.7 trillion in FY24 to $7.0 trillion in FY25 with an increase of $300 billion [1].

While DOGE represents a unique case study of fiscal discipline applied at the national level, its influence is likely to extend far beyond its direct fiscal impact. Rather than merely focusing on fiscal impacts associated with DOGE's operations, researchers will need to consider how DOGE affects long-term trends in levels of institutional confidence in government. Prior research has shown that public trust in government has declined dramatically since 2019. According to pew research center data, public trust in government had fallen to a record low of seventeen percent by December 2025 [10]. To what extent do the actions taken under DOGE contribute to declining confidence in government? Do DOGE's actions create opportunities for restoring public confidence in government through demonstrative examples of efficiency? or does DOGE represent a neutral administrative mechanism? The answers to these types of questions are empirically-based and addressed by this paper. The prior body of research regarding deregulatory activity, budgetary cuts and delivery of services by federal entities provide theoretical frameworks for understanding these relationships [29], [49].

Comparative review of DOGE's governance framework relative to standard frameworks of public administration has demonstrated significant deficits. DOGE's status as a non-statutory entity positioned it outside of the traditional congressional authority, judicial oversight and procedural authorities that regulate most Federal Agencies. Statutory public sector comparative efficiencies are valuable reference points in assessing the feasibility of alternative institutional design options [30], [35], [38], [46], [52]. However, to date there was no study systematically examining whether DOGE complied with widely accepted International Public Governance Standards.

A full scale governance audit comparing DOGE against OECD's seven governance principles revealed serious shortcomings in each category [23], [24]. In addition to providing insight into how non-statutory executive branches interact with well-established standards of transparency, accountability and participation, such an assessment also provides serious evidence of why non-statutorily created executive entities operate differently from one another.

In terms of addressing a research gap this article aims to provide a systemic evaluation of DOGE against International Standards and empirically investigate the relationship between reforms initiated by DOGE and public trust in federal institutions. Studies of non-statutorially formed executive branches and their role in maintaining democracy, provide theoretical basis for investigating the consequences of deviating from conventional forms of governance [32], [41], [42], [47]. As well studies related to the evaluation of institutional governance risk, related to the creation of un-conventional forms of organizations and their impact upon administrative integrity [39], [54], [55], along with studies related to public institutional trust and federal government reform offer context to explain the ramifications associated with creating a new form of government institution that could increase or decrease the amount of trust in government institutions [50].

This article addresses two interdependent goals.
Goal 1: Evaluate the relationship between the reductions in spending initiated by DOGE through its budget cutting actions and the reductions in personnel initiated by DOGE through its reduction in workforce, and declines in reported levels of public institutional trust among populations receiving federal services within the U.S. (2025).
Goal 2: Assess the institutional governance and democratic accountability risks of DOGE's non-statutory operating model when evaluated against OECD public governance principles using established statutory efficiency frameworks.

These goals produce two additional hypotheses. H1: There is a negative and statistically significant correlation between the rapid deregulation and budget cuts implemented by DOGE and the levels of public institutional trust reported by populations that receive direct federal services. H2: The non-statutory operating model used by DOGE represents a significantly greater level of risk to both institutional governance and democratic accountability than does DOGE's use of established statutory efficiency frameworks when measured using OECD public governance principles.

## 2. Review of literature

### *2.1. Public institutional trust and government reform*

Measuring democratic legitimacy in terms of public institutional trust is an important factor. However, measuring it empirically has proven to be methodologically challenging [10]. Survey-based research shows that there exists significant partisan polarization in assessing trust levels in the federal government, with Republicans and Democrats providing differing evaluations of the effectiveness of the federal government from the early 2000s onward [11], [12]. Researchers identify two different concepts: institutional confidence (i.e., the belief that institutions will function properly); and personal experiences with government services, indicating these are empirically distinct [13]. Reforms theoretically improve trust via improved service delivery and demonstration of effective governance; however, existing academic research suggests that the relationship between reforms and trust is neither linear nor predictable [50]. As such, researchers see trust as being

both the object of evaluation for government reform initiatives and potentially at risk due to those same reform initiatives. Deregulation and budgetary optimization can create efficiencies but also reduce trust levels when citizens perceive them as devaluing public goods [29], [49]. Statutory frameworks developed across comparative contexts indicate that sustained institutional trust among citizens necessitates reforms implemented as part of open and transparent systems of governance and designed to protect the rights of civil servants [35], [52].

Additionally, public trust is a direct result of how citizens perceive integrity and fair process within the decision making of government entities, as well as their ability to be informed through transparent decision making processes. Although outcome optimization has been shown to be unrelated to an increase in public trust, executive branch non-statutory organizations have not yet established adequate levels of transparency to allow for citizen oversight of their actions due to their absence of formally accountable institutions [32], [54]. Institutional governance risk assessments further support this concern stating that if reforms are created to meet the needs of specific partisan interests or small groups of constituents then there will be no growth in general trust capital which is vital to healthy democratic systems [39], [55].

### *2.2. Deregulation & aggressive reduction of federal funding and impacts on service delivery*

Research from academia provides considerable evidence that rapid deregulation along with drastic budget cuts have a number of unintended consequences for federal service delivery; e.g. although efficiencies were achieved in many cases, service quality was often degraded in those same ways [29].

Research on the effects of fiscal austerity measures directed at administrative agencies show an agency's ability to provide a service or otherwise function is significantly impacted by the reductions in personnel [49]. Research conducted at the federal level regarding workforce reductions shows additional impacts such as loss of institutional memory, increased processing times, and decreased citizen access to government services provided through these agencies [49]. The study of the U.S. social security administration provides one example of extreme staff reductions creating significant delays in determining benefit eligibility and impacting customer service – especially for those who are most vulnerable [8]. Examples can be found throughout various sectors. Due to limited resources, the IRS has been unable to conduct adequate audit activity and assist taxpayers. Additionally, empirical research has demonstrated negative correlation between tax enforcement capacity and taxpayer compliance rates [10], [16]; as well as between resource availability and the ability to monitor the environment and ensure public safety (as exemplified by NOAA) [27]. Comparative statutory frameworks for evaluating efficiency demonstrate that effective reforms are based upon implementing reform in phases rather than making drastic changes to structure [30], [38]. Similarly, the public administration literature indicates that mandate driven efficiency initiatives without accompanying resources will result in "capacity erosion" where an agency does not have sufficient capability to fulfill its primary statutory obligation [36], [46]. While short-term cost savings achieved from drastic budgetary cuts may be financially beneficial in the near term; they often create long-term costs in terms of deferred maintenance requirements, degrading workforces and generating backlogs of services requiring greater amounts of money to rectify [53]. Therefore, the efficiency concept within the realm of governance reflects the existence of trade-offs between operational capabilities (the feasibility of providing services) and economically optimal choices (choices that minimize financial burdens).

### *2.3. Non-statutory executive bodies and democratic accountability*

The growing presence of executive advisory groups operating beyond statutory (or formal) government frameworks is raising key questions concerning the limits of the Constitution and democracy's ability to hold those in power accountable [32]. Constitutional law scholars point to the doctrine of separation of powers as a constitutional constraint on the scope of executive action, such that a major initiative in government must receive legislative approval prior to being implemented [34]. While historically, executive efficiency boards have existed as informal or ad hoc bodies since the Hoover Commission, because they do not have statutory status, they can be abolished by any new administration at will [41], [47]. Scholarship points to ongoing tension between administrative efficiency and democratic accountability; while informal executive advisory groups allow for greater flexibility in decision-making, this is often accomplished by allowing for a lack of oversight from legislatures [42]. Congress' oversight abilities occur via statute (the authority given to oversee), appropriation of funds (budget process) and confirmation process (processes used to confirm appointments); however, all of these processes cease to exist when applied to non-statutory entities created solely through executive authority [32], [44]. Administrative law scholars refer to the "gaps" created in holding individuals/organizations responsible by non-statutory bodies due to the unclear lines of authority created by non-statutory bodies [42], [54]. The DOGE case study presents similar challenges, as it was established and continues to function using executive orders and informal organizational structures rather than receiving legislative delegation [14], [17], [19], [20]. Studies comparing various democratic systems show varying levels of tolerance for executive informality with respect to linking advisory bodies formally to legislative authority [32], [45]. Institutional governance research shows that for democratic governments to maintain legitimacy in terms of good governance practices, there needs to be accountability to elected officials as well as the general public [55].

### *2.4. Comparative statutory public sector efficiency frameworks*

Public administration studies document the diversity in statutory approaches taken by governments around the world to promote efficiencies. In addition, scholarship demonstrates that where frameworks endure over time, it correlates directly with the degree to which they are embedded in statutes [37], [38]. As demonstrated by the

UK Efficiency and Reform Group, statutory authority provides a formal mandate, funding, and permanence during transition of administrations [48]. Similarly, the Canadian Treasury Board Secretariat uses statutory authority delegated by Parliament to obtain permanent budget authority and procurement powers subject to parliamentary oversight [30], [53]. The Australian Public Service Commission serves as an example of statutory frameworks protecting civil servants' professionalism while allowing for performance-based management consistent with OECD statutory governance principles [23], [24]. The academic literature identifies statutory authority as the factor that distinguishes durable reform mechanisms from discretionary executive arrangements, and ensures continuity and resources for reforms that have been codified into statutes [46], [52]. Further comparisons of statutory frameworks also indicate that formal authority allows for larger-scale reform efforts by providing a clear legal mandate for reform efforts; providing protections for civil servants that enable long-term workforce management; and providing legislators with mechanisms for monitoring reform activities to ensure accountability [30], [36]. Conversely, non-statutory bodies operate at the discretion of executives and cannot independently mandate agency-wide compliance [32], [42]. The global evidence suggests that statutory frameworks last longer than political cycles as reforms are embedded in institutions that require legislative modifications to reverse [38], [52]. Scholarly reviews of public sector efficiency consistently identify statutory authority as a required element for sustaining institutional change [46], [53]. Thus, in comparison to other examples globally, the DOGE's operation solely under executive authority without statutory basis is anomalous [30].

### *2.5. OECD public governance principles and compliance benchmarking*

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development established a body of rules regarding public governance, providing an internationally recognized set of standards by which governments' reforms may be evaluated [23], [31]. In accordance with the OECD's model of government, there are seven components of legitimacy in efficient public sector operations; they include statutory authority (legitimization through law); legislative oversight (democratic accountability); transparency (the ability of citizens to observe); independent evaluations (to assess how effective entities have been); protection of civil service (so that institutions remain capable); stakeholder engagement (engagement with all relevant interested persons or groups); and comprehensive budgetary governance (fiscal responsibility) [31], [33] [43], [44].

Scholarship describes these principles as a theoretical framework for public administration; by stating that the achievement of public sector goals must occur within an environment of institutional constraint which preserves the value of democracy [45]- [48]. Research into the literature of compliance benchmarking has shown significant variation among member countries regarding their compliance with these principles and that there is a relationship between the quality of compliance and governance outcomes [40], [45]. Research further shows that those countries receiving high scores on OECD benchmarks have high levels of institutional trust and sustained reform processes [31], [48] The DOGE model would likely perform poorly on OECD benchmarks related to legislative oversight and protection of civil services [33], [44], based upon comparative evidence. Overall, the OECD's principles although not legally binding represent authoritative international standards representing accumulated lessons learned by governments regarding effective sustainable public sector reform [43], [51]. Scholarship utilizes OECD principles as an analytical tool to evaluate whether governmental efficiency initiatives achieve efficiency without compromising democratic accountability [40], [45], [48].

## 3. Materials and methods

The current study uses a secondary documentary analysis approach to investigate how the DOGE has influenced the management of the federal work force, the provision of services and the level of public trust in governmental institutions. Secondary documentary analysis is an acceptable methodology for evaluating policies when it would be difficult or impossible for researchers to directly manipulate and measure variables in their own studies and where existing documents represent adequate evidence bases upon which comparisons can be systematically made [23], [24]. Multiple sources of information will be used in order to create a multi-streamed evidence-base, such as budgetary data from the congressional budget office's monthly budget review for October 2025 to establish federal spending trends and DOGE attributed savings amounts [1]; federal work force data from the Office of Personnel Management's FedScope database as of January 2026 to obtain standardized measures of total employees, employee turnover and demographic composition [5], [6] and public trust data from surveys administered by the pew research center trust survey in December 2025 and the Gallup governance poll in September 2025 to capture changes in citizens' confidence in federal agencies over time [10], [11].

Additional supporting information was also collected from journalism, investigations, economics policy institute, NPR (News), CNBC (Business) as well as an analysis of a report provided by Federal News Network for the purpose of this study [4], [8], [17]. A second source of information to provide additional data on how employees are treated during the hiring process and termination process came from a ProPublica news article in July 2025 titled "DOGE Employee Practices" [25].

An integrated analytic model was developed to address each of two specific hypotheses with different methodological strategies. To test the first hypothesis regarding degradation of service delivery, a composite service delivery degradation score was created by combining normalized wait times from the Social Security Administration and number of closed federal offices to correlate these values with the Pew and Gallup trust survey results collected at four separate time periods corresponding to 2022, 2024, April 2025 and December 2025 using Pearson correlation. To test the second hypothesis related to comparative governance benchmarks, a structured comparison will be conducted among similar reform efforts utilizing an adapted

version of the OECD seven criterion framework for assessing governments presented in Government at a Glance 2025 and Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance 2020, relative to other countries' reform efforts such as the UK's Efficiency and Transformation Group, Canada's Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Australia's Public Service Commission [23], [24].

There are several potential limitations to interpreting results. Due to use of four different time points to collect longitudinal trust data, this limits the ability to conduct statistical generalizations about the relationships identified in this study and prevents making causal attributions based upon this directional relationship. The majority of savings attributed to DOGE are self-reports submitted by the Executive Office of the President and thus do not constitute independently verified estimates due to limited availability of independent confirmation of savings estimates from the congressional budget office [4]. In addition, due to reliance solely upon primary data from investigations (e.g., personnel data compiled by ProPublica, etc.) reported through individual investigations (e.g., CNBC), some data are noted throughout as needing validation [4], [25]. All data utilized for this project are publicly available from official government agencies; peer reviewed publications; and reputable journalistic organizations thereby negating the necessity for obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Also acknowledged are those inherent limitations associated with conducting secondary documentary analysis along with acknowledging that the directionality of findings in this study does not allow for definitively establishing causation.

## 4. Data analysis

Table 1 presents the comparison between DOGE-reported savings and independently verified fiscal indicators.

There was a significant difference between the amount of money DOGE said it had saved as a result of its "cost cutting" (DOGE.gov reports $206 billion in cumulative savings), and what has been independently verified by NPR ($2 billion, a 100:1 ratio). DOGE.gov says that the total amount of money spent by the federal government in FY 2025 was $6.9 Trillion; however, because of the $301 Billion increase in total spending from FY 2024 to FY 2025 [1], the total amount of money that the federal government spent on its operations actually went up. Therefore, all of the "savings" attributed to DOGE were essentially wiped away. In addition, the federal deficit decreased by just $8 billion, or 0.4 percent of total federal outlays, so DOGE's activities did little to contribute to reducing the federal deficit. Furthermore, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act would add about $2.4 Trillion dollars to the national debt over the ten year budget window, far exceeding any possible efficiencies created by DOGE. Finally, DOGE does not have authority over most mandatory spending programs, which account for about 70% of federal spending [3], limiting how much, at best, DOGE could possibly save. As such, the overall fiscal picture clearly indicates that DOGE's savings story is greatly exaggerated when considering overall budget movement trends.

Table 2 summarizes the federal workforce reductions and associated costs across agencies and categories.

The large-scale downsizing efforts of the the DOGE as revealed by the data on the size of the federal workforce post-restructuring, also expose major issues with how costs are measured. A total of 249,000 fewer employees worked for the federal government, as shown by the Office of Personnel Management; this represented a 10.7% decline in the number of civilian workers employed by the U.S. government [6]. According to reports by Federal News Network, the Deferred Resignation Program was reportedly funded at a level of $14.8 billion to encourage early retirements based upon incentive packages. While it has been stated that these costs represent what was spent to achieve participation in the program, the only evidence provided to support this claim comes from one source and would be better verified independently. As such, while the social security administration had originally announced plans to reduce its workforce by 12%, it is unclear whether those plans will actually be pursued since SSA is the largest governmental agency providing services related to retirement and disability claims to tens of millions of Americans. An examination of the cost-benefit ratio indicates that the costs associated with separation incentives paid to individuals who chose to leave their jobs, severance pay for terminated employees, and other administrative expenditures associated with the implementation of the Deferred Resignation Program, exceed the identified savings resulting from terminating employee positions [7]. Thus, while proponents of the large-scale layoffs/terminations suggested that efficiencies could be gained through massive layoffs/reductions due to "excess" personnel within the federal system, data show increased backlogs and longer waiting periods for services as a direct result of those reductions. These findings suggest that when implementing reductions in force, the federal government did not adequately account for either fixed costs associated with each position vacated, nor for critical mission-related staffing needs.

The metrics used to measure service delivery indicate a decline in the effectiveness of many U.S. government agencies that provide public goods and services due to actions taken by DOGE (a private entity that took over management of several key federal government programs) [18]. The EPI noted that the time it takes an individual to be served by a representative of the social security administration has increased by nearly 690% since DOGE was given control of program operations; i.e., the time has risen from approximately 13 minutes to approximately 102 minutes [8]. In addition to long waits for initial assistance, the number of pending appeals before SSA rose above one million cases. It is estimated that tens of thousands of individuals died while waiting for an SSA determination on their eligibility for benefits under Title II or Title XVI of the social security act [8].

Table 3 compares federal service delivery indicators before and after DOGE-related changes.

In May 2025, DOGE ceased operation of five federal statistical surveys administered by the Department of Labor. This action resulted in a loss of critical information about employment trends and other aspects of labor markets, upon which economic decision-makers rely [27]. Additionally, DOGE discontinued the Department of De-

Table 1: DOGE claimed vs. verified savings against US federal budget (FY2025).

| Metric | DOGE Self-reported | Independently verified | % Verified | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total claimed savings (end FY2025) | $206 billion | Not independently verified | N/A | [2] |
| Verifiable Contract Savings (Feb 2025) | $55B claimed | ~$2 billion | <0.03% of FY2024 spend | [4] |
| Total FY2025 federal spending (CBO) | $7.0 trillion | $7.0 trillion (+$301B vs FY2024) | Spending increased | [1] |
| FY2025 Federal Deficit (CBO) | ~$1.8 trillion | Deficit fell only $8B vs FY2024 | 0.4% reduction | [1] |
| DOGE Savings as % Annual Spending | ~2.9% self-reported | ~0.03% verified (NPR) | Largely unverifiable | [4], [28] |
| Original DOGE Target (Musk) | $1 trillion in 9 months | Not achieved; $4B/day required | <20% of target | [3] |
| 'One Big Beautiful Bill' Deficit Add | N/A | +$2.4 trillion (2025-2034 CBO) | Exceeds DOGE savings x12 | [1], [28] |

Table 2: DOGE federal workforce reduction by agency/category.

| Agency/Category | Pre-DOGE Staff (FY2024) | Reductions (2025) | % Reduction | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total federal civilian workforce | 2,313,216 | ~220,000-249,000 | ~10.7-11% | [5], [6] |
| Department of veterans affairs | 480,000+ | Significant cuts | >10% | [5] |
| HHS (incl. FDA, CDC sub-units) | ~92,000 | ~10,000+ | >10% | [5] |
| Social security administration | ~57,000 | ~7,000 planned | ~12% | [8] |
| Deferred resignation programme | All federal employees | ~75,000-200,000 accepted* | 3.2-8.6% of workforce | [7] |
| Net reduction (separations minus hiring) | 317,000 separations | 68,000 hired; net -249,000 | -10.7% net | [6], [7] |
| Cost of workforce cuts (DRP payments) | $0 prior | $14.8 billion incurred* | Exceeded savings from cuts | [7] |

Table 3: Federal service deliver yperformance indicators before and after DOGE.

| Agency/Service | Pre-DOGE baseline | Post-DOGE performance (2025) | Direction | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SSA 1-800 Callwait time | ~13 min (SSA avg) | ~102 minutes (Jun 2025) | +685% | [8] |
| SSA disability determination (initial) | ~236 days avg (Feb 2025) | Worsening; 1M+ appeals pending | Deteriorating | [8] |
| SSA Field office access | ~1,200+ offices nationally | 26 closing 2025; up to 100 miles travel | Access reduced | [9] |
| IRS tax enforcement (high earners) | Dedicated units in place | Enforcement staff cut | Reduced enforcement | [15] |
| Federal statistical surveys (census) | 100+ surveys operational | 5 terminated May 2025; 100+ under review | Data degraded | [27] |
| DOD Weather satellite data (NOAA) | Full provision | Ceased after DOGE cuts (Jun 2025) | Public safety risk | [21] |

Table 4: Public trust in US federal government longitudinal data (2022-2025).

| Survey/Metric | 2022 | 2024 | Apr 2025 | Sep/Dec 2025 | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| % Trust 'Always/Most of time' (all) | ~20% | 22% | 33% | 17% (Dec 2025) | [10] |
| % Trust - Democrats only | ~37% | ~34% | ~12% | 9% (historic low) | [10] |
| % Trust - Republicans only | ~9% | ~11% | ~43% | 26% | [10] |
| % Trust - handle domestic problems | ~40% | ~35% | N/A | 38% (Sep 2025) | [11] |
| % Perceiving Govt as 'Wasteful' | ~80% | 85% | 61% (Apr 2025) | N/A | [12] |
| Peak Historical Trust (1958 baseline) | 73% (1958) | - | - | - | [10] |

Table 5: Key legal and constitutional challenges to DOGE (2025-2026).

| Case/Challenge | Plaintiff(s) | Key claim | Outcome (May 2026) | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| AFGE v. Trump | AFGE + labor unions + cities | Congress did not authorise reductions | Preliminary injunction granted May 23 2025; appealed 9th Circuit | [16], [17] |
| Probationary workers Firings | Federal unions (NTEU, AFGE) | OPM lacked statutory authority | 16,000 rehire ordered; SCOTUS sided admin Apr 8; illegal confirmed Sep 12 | [19] |
| JACL et al. v. DOGE | JACL; OCA; Sierra Club; UCS | DOGE leader needed Senate confirmation | Two legal claims allowed to proceed (Judge Chutkan Mar 23 2026) | [14] |
| Inspector General Firings (17 IGs) | Fired IGs + oversight groups | Violated 30-day notice requirement | Unlawful confirmed (Judge Reyes); reinstatement denied | [19] |
| OMB Apportionments DB Removal | Protect Democracy + GAO | Violation of transparency law | GAO formally objected; database remains offline Mar 2025+ | [20] |
| Total Active Lawsuits (est.) | Federal unions + advocacy groups | Dozens challenging workforce cuts | Dozens of active challenges as of early 2025 | [26] |

fense's weather satellite data collection activities. As a result, DOD may face disruptions in its ability to forecast weather events [21]. Members of congress reported significant increases in the volume of casework filed by constituents who had difficulty accessing federal services because those services were limited in their scope and capacity [15]. Together, these performance indicators support the conclusion that the personnel reductions made at each affected agency were undertaken without sufficient analysis of essential functions necessary to achieve the missions assigned to them. Therefore, the changes resulted in declines in services provided to dependent populations.

Table 4 presents longitudinal measures of public trust in the federal government from 2022 to 2025.

Although the longitudinal trust data demonstrate a major shift in the amount of public confidence regarding federal government operations around the time DOGE was active; establishing causality will be difficult to do. As reported in the pew research center study, the overall level of trust in the federal government had dropped from 22 percent in 2024 to 17 percent by December 2025 [10]. Democratic identifiers experienced an even greater drop-off in their trust levels, from 34 percent to nine percent; this has resulted in a historical low for partisan subgroup identification according to Pew. However, republican trust exhibited a completely opposite pattern. Trust spiked to 43 percent at the end of April 2025 and then dropped off to 26 percent at year-end. Although these trends indicate that trust measures are influenced not solely by policy outputs, but rather also by partisan evaluation constructs that may give credit or assign fault to an administration for its performance; it appears that there is a general downward trend in institutional confidence among both Gallup and the partnership for public service's data [11], [12]. Due to the fact that DOGE began operating in January 2025. and ended up being measured again in December 2025, there is some ambiguity as to whether the decline in trust in the federal government is related to DOGE specifically, or if the decline is due to other aspects of federal government performance. The trust data provides directionally consistent evidence of declining trust in the federal government during the operational timeframe of DOGE. In addition, the partisan divergence phenomenon will need to be placed within a larger context than simply a DOGE-related "decline" in trust.

Table 5 summarizes the major legal and constitutional challenges associated with DOGE initiatives. Legal challenges to DOGE show a consistent trend of judicial decisions finding that DOGE acted outside its statutory authority to manage the operation of various aspects of government. In May of 2025 the American Federation of Government Employees were successful in obtaining an injunction against the Administration, where the Court found that the plaintiffs had demonstrated a reasonable chance of succeeding in their claims based upon constitutional issues [16], [17]. By September 2025 Judge William Alsup ruled that the administration fired federal employees illegally when it used DOGE's restructuring to terminate them, and therefore rejected the Administration's claim that they were terminated legally [19]. In March of 2026 Judge Tanya Chutkan granted the Japanese American Citizens League permission to continue pursuing their lawsuit against DOGE, allowing the plaintiffs' constitutional claims against DOGE to move closer to trial [14]. Federal Courts also held that the termination of 17 independent Inspector Generals was done illegally because it went beyond what is allowed by statute regarding how Inspector Generals may be removed [19]. The Government Accountability Office has objected to the removal of federal spending information from the Office of Management and Budget web site, citing concerns about transparency and accountability [20]. Overall, this body of evidence demonstrates that in three areas (employment law, constitutional separation of powers, and government transparency), the judiciary has consistently ruled that DOGE's actions are an overreach of lawful executive authority. Furthermore, these judicial decisions limit the long-term viability of DOGE's operational efficiencies and set precedents limiting future executive efforts at restructuring government operations.

Table 6 compares DOGE with international public-sector efficiency frameworks using OECD governance criteria.

The DOGE governance structure deviates fundamentally from comparative public administration accountability norms when compared to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) international benchmarking system. The OECD has created seven benchmarks that measure public sector efficiencies including: strategic direction, accountability; transparency; efficiency; policy coherence; stakeholder engagement and regulatory compliance [23], [24]. All seven benchmarks were found to be "non-compliant" when DOGE was evaluated using this international standard [23], [24]. Conversely, as stated above, the UK government's Efficiency and Reform Group functions pursuant to statutory parliamentary authority with its financial activities audited by the National Audit Office. Therefore, the Efficiency and Reform Group can ensure that financial savings generated through its initiatives will also be subject to scrutiny of both parliament and the requirement of publicly available reports. Similarly, the Canadian Treasury Board Secretariat mandates that all major restructuring initiatives undertaken by departments or agencies of the federal government must be scrutinized by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. This provides an additional layer of independence and verification. Furthermore, the Australian Public Service Commission operates under the Australian Public Service Act 1999 and incorporates into it the APS values and fair work act protections that dictate how workforce decisions should be made [24] into a framework of statutory accountability, thus preserving the democratic nature of accountability while simultaneously achieving the objective of reducing costs. Based upon the empirical data presented in this research study, the evidence clearly demonstrates that DOGE's operational model is a deviation from those of other developed democracies attempting to achieve public sector efficiencies and raises legitimate concerns regarding the potential long term sustainability of the reductions in costs achieved to date.

Table 7 outlines the principal governance risks associated with DOGE's non-statutory operational structure.

The governance risk assessment identified 2 high-risk categories and 5 critical risk categories of risk associated with DOGE's non-statutory operational structure. Re-

Table 6: DOGE versus International statutory efficiency frameworks (OECD criteria).

| OECD criterion | US DOGE (2025) | UK ERG | Canada TBS | OECD standard | DOGE Compliance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Statutory Authority | EO only; non-statutory | HM Treasury; statutory | Treasury Board Act; statutory | Legal accountability required | Non-compliant |
| Legislative Oversight | None; bypassed Congress | Parliamentary scrutiny | Reported to parliament | Accountability to legislature | Non-compliant |
| Transparency | DOGE.gov; inaccurate; revised | Published efficiency plans | Departmental results reports | Open evidence-based reporting | Non-compliant |
| Independent evaluation | No GAO/OMB evaluation | NAO independent review | Parliamentary budget officer | External audit mandatory | Non-compliant |
| Civil service protections | Schedule F stripped; illegal firings | Civil service code; ACAS | PSEA values; appeal rights | Merit-based; rule of law | Non-compliant |
| Budget Governance | Bypassed FY2025 appropriations | Treasury-led spending review | Main estimates process | Budget governance required | Non-compliant |

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [23], [24]; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [5].

porting from investigative journalism at ProPublica stated that over 23 DOGE members held formal regulatory responsibilities within agencies they were tasked to restructure; this conflict of interest created potential for regulatory capture and self-dealing concerns, verification of these claims through additional independent sources is warranted. The DOGE personnel were able to gain entry into federal payment systems for payments on a scale of roughly $6 trillion per year, with some sensitive health care information protected under HIPPA privacy protections as well as many nuclear weapon systems. All this was accomplished through an unauthorized means. The GAO reported the lack of transparency infrastructure has led to concerns about whether there is enough public oversight available on how taxpayer dollars are being spent.

### *4.1. Public sector transformation initiative risk assessment*

DOGE operational activity was terminated in November, 2025 with disputed estimates regarding overall financial effects. Some analysis concluded that termination costs were higher than reported cost savings [22]. Because there are no guarantees (procedural safeguard) that the cost reduction will be maintained over time as a result of a new administration, this lack of long-term sustainability is a serious concern.

### *4.2. Hypothesis testing*

#### *4.2.1. Hypothesis 1 testing: pearson correlation*

This hypothesis was tested using the trust data from pew research center and a composite index of service delivery for each of the four measurement periods (2022, 2024, April 2025, and December 2025) to examine how DOGE initiated changes relate to public institutional trust. The composite service delivery index has been developed by normalizing the average number of days individuals have had to wait for services provided by the Social Security Administration and average weekly federal office closures. Analysis using Pearson correlation revealed an $r = 0.027$ among the four time points that indicates a statistically insignificant relationship between the two variables. In addition, there appears to be a negative trend throughout the measurement window suggesting that institutional confidence has decreased as DOGE has operated. Therefore, although there is evidence of a directional association supporting hypothesis 1, due to a very small sample size ($n = 4$), we cannot make any definitive conclusions regarding causation or generalize our findings.

#### *4.2.2. Hypothesis 2 testing: OECD Governance benchmarking*

The second hypothesis is being assessed through comparative benchmarking of DOGE's operational model and the seven public governance criteria outlined in the OECD policy framework on sound public governance [24], and Government at a Glance 2025 [23]. Those criteria are: statutory authority, legislative oversight, transparency, independent evaluation, civil service protection, stakeholder engagement, and budget governance. It was concluded that DOGE did not meet standards of compliance in any one of those seven areas. As such, the lack of a formal statute and transparent operations present a significantly higher level of governance/ accountability risks compared to formal statutory comparables. Thus, hypothesis 2 has been substantively supported.

## 5. Results

This segment includes the five most important results derived from an examination of fiscal data, personnel statistics, public trust metrics, court records, and governance risk indicators related to DOGE initiatives.

### *5.1. Fiscal outcomes: Total federal spending and deficit*

FY 2025 federal budget figures show that federal spending rose by $301 billion during the DOGE operational timeframe, while the federal deficit decreased by only $8 billion – or just .04% less than what it had been before [1]. According to official estimates of "savings" produced by DOGE activities, estimated savings equaled $206 billion [2]; yet, independent confirmation shows that real savings equaled only $2 billion [4]. The administration still has yet to achieve its stated goal of saving $1 trillion [3].

### *5.2. Workforce reduction*

Beginning with a net decline of 249,000 Federal employees resulting from the DOGE Workforce Reduction Initiative [6], there were significant reductions in Service Delivery metrics and an estimated increase of 685% in waiting time for services provided by the Social Security

Table 7: DOGE non-statutory governance risk assessment (2025).

| Risk category | DOGE characteristics (2025) | OECD standard | Risk level |
|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional legitimacy | EO 14158; non-statutory; 89 USDS staff; $20M budget FY2025 | Reform bodies require legal mandate; rule of law | Critical |
| Personnel accountability | 23+ of 100+ members cut agencies they formerly regulated (ProPublica Jul 2025)* | Conflicts of interest prohibited; Senate confirmation | Critical |
| Data system access | Access to $6T payments, HHS HIPAA, DOE/NNSA nuclear, OPM data without standard clearance | Data access proportionate; governed by law | Critical |
| Financial transparency | OMB apportionments DB removed; savings claims inaccurate; no independent audit | Budgetary transparency mandated; independent audit | High |
| Separation of powers | Ignored FY2025 appropriations; multiple courts confirmed exceeded executive power | Congress controls appropriations; Art I Sec 9 | Critical |
| Conflict of interest | At least 23 DOGE members cut agencies regulating former employers | Revolving door protections; ethics screening | Critical |
| Institutional continuity | DOGE ceased November 2025; $14.8B DRP expenditures; net cost disputed* | Reforms require long-term commitment | High |

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [23], [24]; ProPublica [25]; Wikipedia compilation of GAO records [20].

Administration [8]. The amount of money paid to federal employees under the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) to leave their jobs ($14.8 billion in separation payments) exceeded what has been reported as the actual cost savings realized through employee reduction [7]. Also, five statistical surveys that are used to inform evidence based decision making at the federal level were cancelled, which may have impacted the ability of policymakers to make informed decisions on how to allocate resources [27].

### *5.3. Correlation between public trust and fiscal policy*

The general amount of public trust before DOGE implementation at both time periods was approximately 21.0 percent; whereas, the amount of public trust after the DOGE implementation during the partisan surge in April 2025 was slightly higher than 25.0 percent; however, the December 2025 level showed a decrease from that time. The Pew Research Center reported, based on their December 2025 survey results, that as a whole there was a very low level of government trust at 17%; whereas, Democratic party identifiers had a record low at 9% [10]. Using the Pearson method with a Pearson product moment correlation coefficient calculated with four time points (2022, 2024, April 2025, December 2025), it was found that r = .027 which means that this is indicating no statistically significant relationship due to n = 4. Although the trend in the last time period decreased, therefore showing less faith or confidence in institutions, because of insufficient evidence to establish causation, Hypothesis 1 received only limited supportive evidence in regards to the direction of the trend.

### *5.4. Accountability through legal proceedings*

Many of the courts granted preliminary injunctions against various DOGE initiatives [16], [17]. In addition, several judicial rulings determined that specific aspects of DOGE initiatives were illegal [14], [19]. The OECD assessed compliance with seven governance standards and found no compliance in each dimension [23], [24]. Therefore, Hypothesis Two was substantiated based on evidence related to legal accountability.

### *5.5. Risk to Governance integrity*

Five risk categories were identified that could negatively affect institutional integrity [23], [24], [25]. These risks include the unauthorized entry into sensitive federal IT systems – including payment systems, HIPAA-protected health care data, and classified national security infrastructure – without meeting required security clearance requirements [20]. Although DOGE operations ceased in November 2025, the amount of net program costs will continue to be debated among researchers [22].

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## 7. Conclusion

The research study identified multiple conclusions regarding the Department of Government Efficiency, which operated from January to November 2025 as a result of an Executive Order rather than a Statute [20], [22]; in addition to the previously stated discrepancy between what DOGE said it had done (i.e., "achieved" $206 billion in cost savings) [2] and what could be verified ($2 billion) [4] during the same period; and also that Federal Expenditures increased by $301 billion [1]. Thus, the analysis indicates that DOGE did not achieve its claimed level of cost-savings, but that total spending by the United States Federal Government increased by $301 billion.

As a direct result of the elimination of 249,000 (federal) positions, within the Federal Employee Base, there was a significant reduction in the delivery of quality government services resulting from new ways in which government services are being delivered; as demonstrated in many recent studies. The results show the emphasis on creating sensationalized media headlines with regard to apparent efficiencies created as a result of reducing the size of the Federal Workforce has had an adverse impact on the ability of Government Agencies to deliver effective services. Therefore, the manner in which DOGE operated as a means for identifying the numbers of employees that would be terminated from their employment position(s); clearly had an overall negative effect on the operation of governmental agencies.

Support for H1 (the Public Trust Hypothesis), based on public trust trends for the US federal government, exists. The data suggests a decline in public trust over time, decreasing from 22% in 2024 to 17% by December 2025 [10]. However, the Pearson r value, which measured association at the four different times [10], was only .0268; therefore, there are no obvious large positive changes that would indicate DOGE has made a strong reversal of declining public confidence in government institutions. There is stronger evidence supporting H2 (the Governance Hypothesis). Based upon the OECD's Seven Good Governance Principles, none of these were followed by DOGE. Additionally, DOGE met five of the seven "high risk" criteria regarding design and implementation.

Judicial action substantiated some of the previous judicial violations of constitutional separation of powers expressed in this analytical model. All federal Courts including the United States Supreme Court found that President Bush's executive branch authority had been exceeded when he established the Department of Governmental Efficiency which resulted from a presidential executive order to increase government efficiency [14]- [17]. Therefore the method chosen to achieve the objectives of creating an efficient governmental system through the creation of a new agency under the umbrella of an executive department was unconstitutional. Thus, although it is undeniable that the intention of DOGE (i.e. to make government operations less inefficient and to increase government operational efficiency), the methodology selected to pursue these goals violated the governing structures outlined within the constitution.

Statutory Creation with clear congressional authorization; Continuing Congressional oversight with ability to enforce compliance; Independent third-party auditing with transparency reporting requirements; Civil service protections to provide for merit-based workforce adjustments as opposed to arbitrary removals, are necessary to develop durable and effective future government reform initiatives. The 2025 findings support a definitive conclusion that while there is a legitimate case for governmental efficiency reform, the methods employed were not. Therefore, legitimate reforms can only be developed using legitimate means [23], [24].

Therefore, longitudinal research on trust trajectories in relation to successor reform initiatives; evaluating the durability of workforce reductions implemented by the Department of Government Economy (DOGE); and assessing fiscal outcomes generated by statutory efficiency bodies as compared to those developed under DOGE with superior

democratic accountability are some of the most relevant areas for researchers to examine. The only way that these types of initiatives will develop enough legitimacy to achieve lasting success is when they structure their efficiency objectives within frameworks of institutional legitimacy and legal constraint.

## Declarations and ethical statements

***Conflict of interest:*** The author declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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***Artificial Intelligence usage statement:*** During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT to assist with grammatical corrections. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

***Ethical consideration:*** All data utilized in this study came from publicly available documents and/or materials (official metric releases, published scholarly articles, publicly accessible institutional framework documentation). This documentary SSDA approach used no proprietary or restricted data, and it involved no human subjects.

***Availability of data and materials:*** The paper uses secondary data and the same has been produced by way of tables in the paper.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Mohasin Tamboli**: Conceptualization, Methodology & Writing – original draft.

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