

A changing government

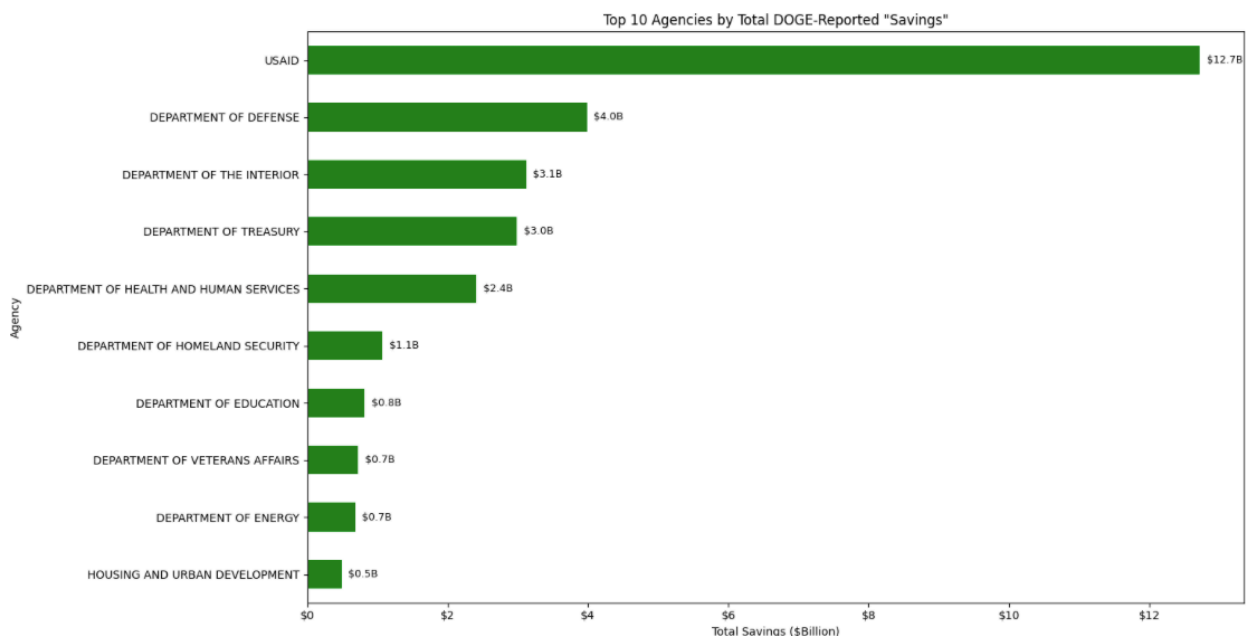
By Becky Kimble 13 May 2025

Budget cuts and downsizing are in the news. Nearly every federal agency is undergoing radical changes. This isn't new, but the way they're being done and calculated is. As DOGE reports record-breaking "savings," but with shuttered offices, contracts canceled, and people laid off — who will pull the data? And at what cost?

Inkwell created the **Data Transparency Dashboard** to help track a piece of what is being lost. One of the critical missions of many government agencies is data procurement and accessibility. Access to government data sources enables independent groups to act as watchdogs for what happens in our government and communities. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) claims to be trimming the fat and leaving the good. The CEO of defense software company Palantir Technologies likened it to Wagyu beef - richly marbled with waste. Many don't feel that is true.

Each day, government agencies share vast amounts of data on a wide range of topics. Inkwell charted the number of data releases over time in a dynamic dashboard and will update it each month to help monitor for changes. <https://inkwell-report-dashboard.onrender.com/>

DOGE claims to have saved \$170 billion. Their website, <https://doge.gov/>, features a leaderboard of agencies that have undergone the most significant change. Leading the list is the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), followed by the General Services Administration and the Department of Education. The Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration are the least changed.

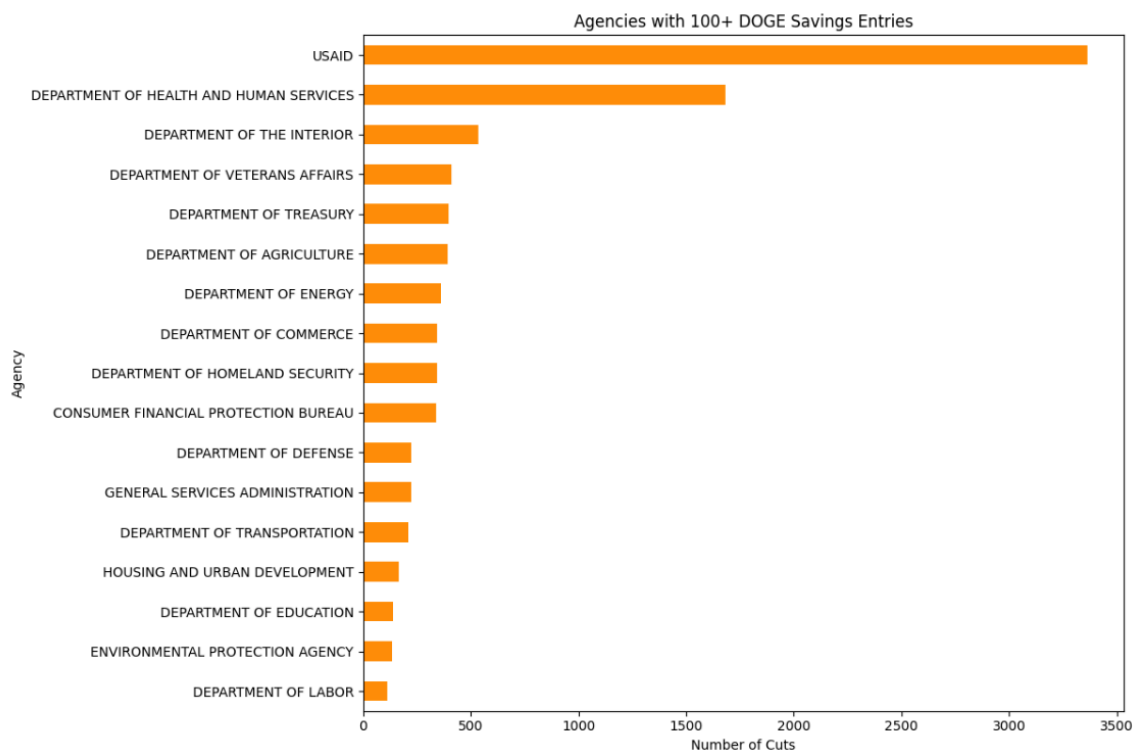


Also featured is a "Wall of Receipts," which claims that changes in the Department of the Interior's Office of Refugee Resettlement have saved* nearly \$3 billion. One receipt explains the cancellation with: "Terminate for convenience." It goes on: "the purpose of the modification is to termination this task order, in its entirety, for the convenience of the Government." The phrasing alone raises questions. The logic raises more. Further complicating the matter is the choice

between savings and total value. For the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the difference between the two is \$400 million. Overall, they list 10248 contracts cut, 12256 grants, and 563 leases terminated. It is unclear if those numbers are included in the savings calculation.

They use the historical amount that the HHS Program Support Center (PSC) disburses yearly, \$215 billion, in the description of what DOGE has redispersed. It is not clear how the number is related to disbursements. It is also not clear if these disbursements are simply the element “not saved” from the first chart. The National Institutes of Health has had 24,854 disbursements ranging from \$3 to millions of dollars. The CDC had 2253 disbursements totaling \$146,670,424, all of which took place on March 5th and 6th.

***Breaking down the terms:**



The **total value** listed is not what Congress has appropriated. It is the total they **plan** to appropriate over a variety of timelines. A federal **obligation**, per the Government Accountability Office guidelines, is an order placed, a contract awarded, or services rendered. DOGE **savings** is the difference between the total planned for by Congress and the money spent, or “obligated.” Most groups are funded in a manner that Congress specifies a certain amount for a specified number of years. They fund the first year and leave the remaining years for future budgets. The first year is obligated, and the rest is a hoped-for plan. This imaginary future cash is considered savings by DOGE.

DOGE savings is like canceling your Netflix subscription. You paid through the end of the month (obligated). Next month you will have a little more money in the budget since you will no longer be giving any to Netflix. You will also not have movies. Or in this case, no more vaccines.

Will data disappear?

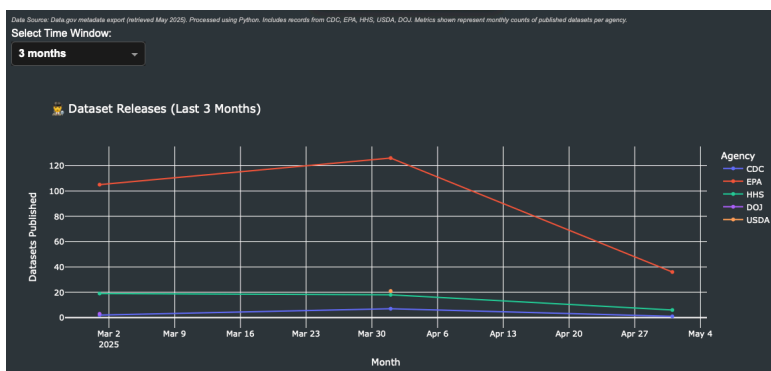
DOGE's website is difficult to navigate, and its data isn't easily downloadable - a design choice that seems intentional. This is not a good look for an agency that wants to bring all data under one roof.

Looking at the services side of the equation may be more illustrative. One of the key contributions of government offices is the collection and distribution of data. The CDC WONDER database provides up-to-date disease surveillance and critical information for public health and physicians worldwide. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is a part of HHS, the most affected agency on the list. Will it still be able to collect and share the data we depend on?

The FACA database gives the public access to essential policy data. They track who is on advisory committees and when they meet. Importantly, they enable people to identify who is overrepresented in key decision-making areas, such as fossil fuel and Big Pharma. FACA is run through the General Services Administration, the second hardest hit.

Without independent agencies producing reliable information about what is happening, both in our government and in our communities, the American people will soon become blind. Nothing stokes fear like the unknown. The groundwork of distrust is already well established. Lose the ability to work with raw numbers, and disinformation and the tweaking of definitions like "savings" will run rampant.

DOGE has been cutting costs for several months now. Has there been a change in the number of datasets governmental agencies are releasing? Fewer people, less money, it would make sense that if Elon Musk's assurances that he is only cutting the fat, leaving the things that matter, are trustworthy, then there shouldn't be a change.



Tracking Data Erosion — A Living Dashboard:

Inkwell Global Report surveyed six government offices to determine the number of datasets they release each month. We started back in 2010, well before the publication of Project 2025. The CDC data is the most historically robust, while other agencies only more recently started to track their releases electronically.

Their data begins in 2020. This is the baseline for what these agencies usually share. While the CDC is part of HHS, it releases data separately from other HHS components. Therefore, both have a column.

If DOGE cuts impact the availability of governmental data, we should see a decrease in the number of reports released each month. This does not account for the quality of the data, which may also change. Inkwell will update the dashboard each month, and we can discover this piece of the truth together.

Both the EPA and HHS released more datasets last month than they had in the same month the previous year. Over the last three months, the EPA has released 267 datasets, and HHS has released 43. The CDC has only released 10 since March. Comparing year-over-year, the CDC released 14 datasets in April 2024, and only seven last month.

Data release varies tremendously month to month and from agency to agency. Therefore, examining changes over time becomes very important.

Doge and Dash

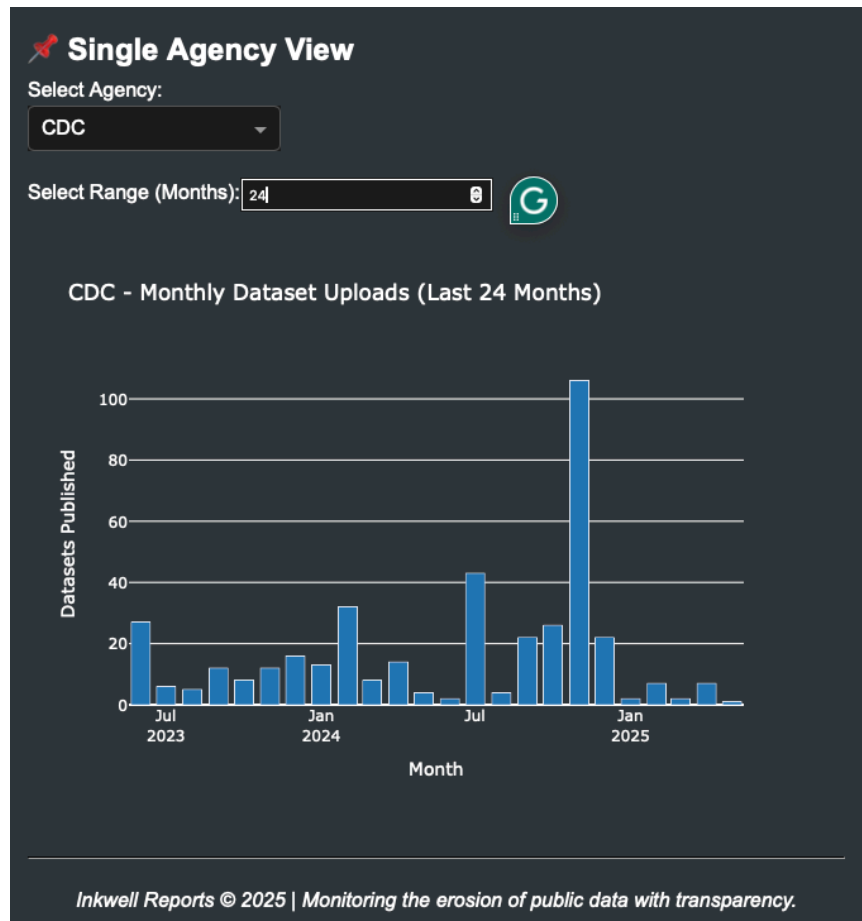
While [doge.gov](https://www.doge.gov) lists a lot of numbers, their meaning is yet to be determined. One potential outcome is a loss of independent, trustworthy data procurement on a national level. Watch with us as we check a small window of what this new definition of 'savings' will mean for the future of the country.

You can find the Inkwell Data Transparency Trends dashboard at <https://inkwell-report-dashboard.onrender.com/>. It draws its data from data.gov sites, including data.cdc.gov, catalog.data.gov, and healthdata.gov. You can see the nitty gritty of the Python code at <https://github.com/cronecoding/Inkwell-report/>. The code and data from [doge.gov](https://www.doge.gov) can also be found there under https://github.com/cronecoding/inkwell_blog-data/

If you want to learn more about the financial terms and the differences between their historical and current uses, you can refer to the sources at the

Government Accountability Office. (2004). A glossary of terms used in the federal budget process (GAO-05-734SP). U.S. Government Printing Office. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-05-734sp.pdf>

Office of Management and Budget. (2023). Preparation, submission, and execution of the budget (Circular No. A-11). Executive Office of the President. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/a11.pdf>



For an easier-to-read overview of DOGE's claims, see the March 13, 2025 article from Fortune: *"DOGE says it's saved the federal government \$115 billion. Experts say the figures don't stack up."*