

ELON MUSK IS THE ACTUAL ANTICHRIST

We still don't really know what Elon Musk's Doge actually did

Calculating the actual savings and impact of the bulldozing US department that vowed to cut \$1tn in waste is difficult

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When **Elon Musk** vowed late last year to **lead** a “department of government efficiency” (Doge), he **claimed** it would operate with “maximum transparency” as it set about saving \$2tn worth of waste and exposing massive fraud.

Today, with Musk out of the White House, Doge having cut only a tiny fraction of the waste it promised, and dozens of lawsuits alleging violations of privacy and transparency laws, much of what the agency has done remains a mystery.

The effects of Doge's initial blitz through the federal government – which included dismantling the US Agency for International Development (**USAID**), embedding staffers in almost every agency and **illegally firing people en masse** – are still playing out. Contrary to Musk's promises, Doge's success is vague and tough to quantify. Measuring the full impact and determining **whether the agency even exists** as a centralized entity anymore is difficult, complicated by an ongoing effort from the government to block disclosure of documents, which is itself a symptom of the chaos that the department created.

Although the disarray and destruction left by Doge is evident across the globe, we still do not really know exactly how the agency operated and its true effects. Instead, humanitarian aid organizations are still trying to assess the extent of the damage that Doge created while **ethics watchdogs** have launched lawsuits trying to compel more transparency out of the government.

“I know it feels like all this happened over the course of several years, but the first year of this administration isn't even done,” said Nikhel Sus, the deputy chief counsel at Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (Crew). “We still want to know what happened, and we still want the record to be out there, because the public is entitled to this information.”

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Outside of the US, Doge's **cuts to USAID** have also caused months of turmoil in countries around the world as humanitarian organizations struggle to make up for lost funding and calculate whether they

can continue their operations at all. Thousands of aid workers have **lost their jobs**, testing for diseases such as **HIV/Aids** has drastically declined and researchers have warned there could be **around 14 million excess deaths** across the globe in the next five years if the US fails to restore aid funding. Yet because of the nature of Doge's cuts, non-profits including the International Aids Society (IAS) say that it's hard to pin down the exact numbers of people who are affected.

"The cuts also damaged monitoring and communications infrastructure, which means it is quite difficult to obtain full data," IAS president Beatriz Grinsztejn said.

All of the costs and chaos of Doge have also come while ethics groups and **government workers say** the central premise of the agency – making the government more efficient – hasn't been delivered on. Musk's **claims of finding** large-scale **voter fraud** have likewise borne no fruit, finding neither backing in concrete evidence nor law enforcement action. Instead, some former federal workers have described officials **tearing down functional parts** of the government and building ineffective replacements – if they replace them at all.

The mystery of how much Doge 'saved'

Doge, christened after a **cryptocurrency** that was itself named for a doe-eyed shiba inu, emerged out of Musk's **backing of Donald Trump** during the 2024 presidential election and months of suggestions on the campaign trail that the billionaire could root out "waste, fraud and abuse" within the government. In its formative days, Musk made extravagant predictions about the amount of money that Doge would save.

"I think we can do at least \$2tn," Musk said during a Trump rally in October of last year. He later revised that following inauguration, still claiming that Doge would save \$1tn worth of "waste" from the budget by the end of September of this year.

Doge vowed to keep track of its contract cuts throughout its existence via an online tracking site, but even by Doge's own count it is falling far short. The cost-cutting tracker, which has also been shown to contain egregious errors that make the **figures overblown and unreliable**, projects that the effort has cut \$214bn in spending. The site's "**wall of receipts**" of canceled contracts states that it has cut \$61bn. Although Doge promised to eventually update the site in real time, the page states it has not been updated since 4 October.

The true dollar amount of how much Doge has cut and how much the agency has cost taxpayers is **far harder to pin down** due to the convoluted nature of government contracts, Doge's poor accounting methods and court challenges to layoffs, some of which have resulted in reinstatements. Organizations across the political spectrum that have attempted to track Doge's cuts agree, however, that Doge's numbers do not give an accurate representation of how the agency operated.

The sudden halting of US foreign aid had a ripple effect

Beatriz Grinsztejn, president of International Aids Society

Doge's calculations also ignore the more difficult-to-measure long-term equations of cuts, such as demolishing a department that **coordinates policy on homelessness** or effectively **shutting down** the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which may result in greater costs down the road once those

services are no longer available. A report in August from Democrats on the permanent subcommittee on investigations in August **found that Doge** may have caused around \$21.7bn in waste through actions such as paying federal employees not to work due to deferred resignation. The **Trump administration's** top human resource official **announced** in August that there would be around **300,000 fewer** government employees at the year's end, largely due to Doge efforts, cut from a workforce of roughly 2.25 million civilians.

“DOGE did not reduce spending, but it did reduce federal employment by nine percent in less than 10 months,” a **recent analysis** from the libertarian Cato Institute thinktank concluded. “A decline that large has not happened since the military demobilizations at the end of World War II and the Korean War.”

Beyond mass firing personnel, one of the areas where Doge has had the most pervasive effects is foreign aid. Its shuttering of USAID, which Musk **bragged** about feeding “into the wood chipper”, disrupted global operations involving food aid and the treatment of a wide range of diseases. The cuts deeply affected testing and **preventative care** for HIV/Aids, which has left aid organizations scrambling to repair the damage.

[The chaos Elon Musk and Doge are leaving behind in Washington](#)

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“The sudden halting of US foreign aid had a ripple effect,” Grinsztejn said. “It pulled a plug on our extensive network of partners, who immediately reported staff losses, suspended outreach and interruptions in HIV testing.”

Aid agencies such as IAS already have snapshots of how funding cuts and freezes in Washington have specific, real-world effects. In Mozambique, anti-retroviral treatments for HIV dropped by a quarter, and in Johannesburg, South Africa, those treatments dropped by a third, according to IAS. About 156,000 people in Latin America and the Caribbean have lost access to HIV testing and treatments entirely.

Cuts to **food aid** have meanwhile resulted in **children starving to death** and programs being halted, although the full global effects are similarly hard to put an exact number on. One measure, from a **study** published by the Gates Foundation this month, showed that overall cuts in humanitarian aid would mean that 2025 was the first year in decades where the death rate of children under five years old would rise globally.

“The world’s richest man has been involved in the deaths of the world’s poorest children,” Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates told **the New York Times** in May.

The winding legal cases against Doge

As soon as Trump issued an executive order in January creating Doge, multiple non-profits and ethics watchdogs **filed lawsuits** against the government demanding that the agency disclose its power structure and comply with transparency laws. The number of cases against Doge multiplied in the following months as reports emerged that shadowy staffers were **accessing sensitive government databases** and **spearheading mass layoffs** of federal employees.

Several of these cases have been resolved over the past months, including the supreme court **granting some Doge staffers** access to social security databases and a **federal judge ruling** that the mass firing of probationary employees was against the law. Most of the thornier cases around what powers Doge wields and whether it must disclose its internal documents are still tied up in litigation and appeals, however, which government ethics groups say has meant that much about Doge has remained a black box.

[How Elon Musk's billionaire Doge lieutenant took over the US's biggest MDMA company](#)

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“There are still very basic questions about Doge’s operational structure and activities that have not been answered because the entity has evaded transparency laws and evaded discovery requests,” Crew’s Sus said.

Almost 11 months after filing its suit and winning two lower court victories, Crew’s case is still working its way through the court systems as the government has filed numerous appeals and a petition for rehearing. There’s no definitive timeline in sight for when it might compel more transparency out of Doge.

Crew’s case is just one of many lawsuits involving Doge that are still pending a final decision and have no definitive end date in sight. Yet ethics watchdogs emphasize that these cases are important for getting a legal definition of what Doge is and what it is allowed to do. Otherwise, they say the risk is that the White House could re-empower Doge to carry out another rapid, opaque gutting of the government in the future.

“Let’s say Doge’s influence wanes for some temporary period. They could immediately come back in a very strong and decisive way in which they’re operating similar to how they did at the outset of the administration,” Sus said. “They would have the apparatus to do that.”

Does Doge still exist?

In late March, Musk and seven other top Doge staffers sat down for a Fox News interview with host Brett Baier to defend their agency as backlash swelled. Almost all of those men – who included Musk’s deputy Steve Davis, longtime friend and Tesla board member Antonio Gracias and cloud-computing CEO Tom Krause – are no longer with Doge. Others, such as Airbnb co-founder Joe Gebbia, have stayed on in a diminished capacity.

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Nikhel Sus, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington

Many of Doge’s roles were intended to be temporary to begin with, allowing staffers to serve as **special government employees** on short-term contracts. Yet some of the staffers’ exits embodied the messy, dramatic nature of their agency. Musk notoriously **left** the White House in May after feuding with other

officials and engaging in a public spat with Trump, in which he accused the president of having ties to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Davis officially left the following month but continued to hold meetings and send deputies to assess staffers' loyalty, **according to Politico**, leading to confusion and concern among those employees about potential legal issues around following his dictates.

Davis returned to Musk's empire after his government exit, appearing on a livestream last month in his role as CEO of the Boring Company to talk about tunneling under Tennessee. Anthony Armstrong, another Musk lieutenant, was **named chief financial officer of Musk's xAI** artificial intelligence company. Gebbia, one of the top Doge executives who remained in government, is now **in charge of redesigning** federal websites.

Much of the early coverage of Doge's staff also focused on the young engineers that Musk brought in to access data systems and work long hours at various agencies. Several of those employees – such as **Ed Coristine**, who became well-known after his online pseudonym “**Big Balls**” became public – have been **moved to** full-time government positions. Coristine now works at Gebbia's National Design Studio, **according to Wired**. Trump **also used** Coristine's assault during an apparent carjacking outside of a DC nightclub as a prelude to sending the national guard to the city.

[Musk calls Doge only 'somewhat successful' and says he would not do it again](#)

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Other staffers who came from Musk's enterprises have gone back to their corporate roles. Erica Jehling, seconded to the Environmental Protection Agency as a member of Doge, now appears to be back working at SpaceX as a purchasing director, according to a LinkedIn profile matching her name and employment history. Gracias, Musk's close friend and a billionaire venture capitalist, left Doge after gaining **operational control of an MDMA-therapy company** and amid backlash from the AFL-CIO over him working for Doge while his private equity firm managed retirement plans for public employees.

The spectre of Doge still looms over federal workers, even if the days of engineers placing **guards outside of conference rooms** and setting up bunk beds in offices are no more. Inside many agencies, the ethos of canceling contracts and trying to run operations like a tech startup remains. Tools that Doge helped develop for processing information, often using AI and replacing human oversight, have also been put into use at agencies such as the **General Services Administration** and the **Department of Veterans Affairs** – where ProPublica reported a Doge staffer put together an error-prone AI tool for “munching” government contracts.

When Musk's former Doge aide Katie Miller asked the Tesla CEO this month how he assessed Doge's accomplishments, Musk gave a toned-down response compared with his usual declarations of total victory and unlimited growth.

“We were a little bit successful. We were somewhat successful,” Musk told Miller on her podcast, adding that it was his “best side quest”. When Miller asked whether he would go back and do it all over again, Musk was even less confident.

“I mean, no, I don’t think so,” Musk said. “Would I do it? I mean, I probably ... I don’t know.”