

Who is helping Elon Musk gut the US government?

The billionaire's cost-cutting 'Doge' staff includes wealthy executives, far-right ideologues and young engineers

By **Nick Robins-Early**

Elon Musk's rapid attempt to defund and depopulate the federal government has thrown [US politics](#) into chaos while the billionaire's so-called "department of government efficiency" seizes control of operations at key agencies. Carrying out this hostile takeover are a team of staffers made up of wealthy executives, far-right ideologues and young engineers that have come to make up "Doge".

At government institutions such as the treasury department, General Services Administration and [United States Agency for International Development](#), Musk's allies have [gained access to computer systems](#), including the sensitive personal data and payment information of tens of millions of Americans. His team is working to [shut down USAid](#), the world's largest single supplier of humanitarian aid, and members have been spotted at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Education and National Institutes of Health.

To undertake this unprecedented and [potentially illegal gutting](#) of public funding, Musk has assembled loyalists who largely lack government experience and who range from tech elites to Maga diehards, according to a review of the people publicly associated with Doge.

Doge has not released any detailed account of who is working at the unofficial agency, and Musk, along with other staff, is technically a "special government employee", which allows him and others to evade ethics and financial disclosures that would normally apply to government workers. The Doge team has taken steps to avoid public scrutiny, including limiting their online footprints.

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A lawsuit filed by unions of federal workers alleges that Musk's allies in Doge have held calls and interviews in which they have withheld their last names in an effort to escape media scrutiny. These interviewers have also allegedly refused to answer questions while talking to federal employees.

Musk shared a letter on X sent to him from the Trump-appointed federal prosecutor for Washington DC that vowed to pursue "any and all legal action against anyone who impedes your work or threatens your people", which includes identifying them.

As hundreds of employees were put on administrative leave at USAid, several sources told the Guardian that Musk was directing Doge's day-to-day operations personally.

"This was just the Doge dudes just literally on the phone with Musk just getting directions from him," one USAid employee said.

Within the White House, Musk appears to be running Doge with a high degree of independence and with Donald Trump's backing. The president briefly praised Musk's team on Monday, although he said that he had not met with them personally.

"They work, actually, out of the White House," Trump said. "They're smart people."

A Doge spokesperson did not respond to a list of questions concerning its staff and operations.

Tech executives and engineers take over major agencies

Several people at Doge come directly from Musk's private companies, including the Boring Company, Tesla and xAI. One executive taking a lead role overseeing the effort, according to [multiple outlets](#), is Musk's longtime lieutenant Steve Davis.

Davis has worked for Musk in different capacities for about 20 years and is president of the tunnel-digging Boring Company. He was present on Saturday night at USAid when Doge staffers and agency security officials clashed over Musk's team's demands for access to restricted areas, multiple sources told the Guardian. When USAid officials attempted to block the team, two sources said that Davis threatened to bring in US marshals to the agency. The Guardian granted anonymity to those sources to protect them from retaliation.

Davis is known for cost cutting and running fast-paced operations, which have at times resulted in clashes with safety regulators. While he was president of Boring in 2023, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Osha) found that [15 to 20 Boring employees in Las Vegas had been burned](#) with chemical accelerants due to hazardous working conditions at the site. The company's former safety manager [told Fortune](#) that Davis had undercut and isolated him in ways that prohibited him from doing his job, while former employees said Davis imposed difficult deadlines and encouraged a breakneck pace. One Boring employee emailed the safety manager warning that workers "consistently flirted with death" while in the tunnels, [according to Fortune](#). The Boring Company did not return a request for comment on these allegations.

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Another former Musk employee, Amanda Scales, worked at the billionaire's artificial intelligence startup xAI before becoming chief of staff at the office of personnel management, which functions as the government's human resources agency. Shortly after Trump's inauguration, the acting head of OPM instructed heads of agencies to [send Scales a list of employees](#) on probationary periods or administrative leave as the new administration seeks to make drastic cuts to the federal workforce.

Allies of the world's richest man have also been placed in key positions at the General Services Administration – which handles government real estate and federal IT structure – and the treasury department. The former Tesla engineer Thomas Shedd is now in charge of the GSA's Technology Transformation Services, with [404 Media reporting](#) that Shedd told workers he wants to implant artificial intelligence throughout government systems to write software and automate services. Musk himself has said he wants to deploy AI to review government payments for potential waste.

Tom Krause, the CEO of the [multibillion-dollar tech company Cloud Software Group](#), and a Musk ally, is now working within the treasury department. A judge [ruled on Thursday](#) that he was one of two “special government employees” associated with Doge who can access sensitive treasury data.

Marc Andreessen. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

Several tech moguls have said they are collaborating with Doge, though it's not always clear in what capacity. The billionaire venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, [who donated \\$2.5m](#) to a pro-Trump political action committee and celebrated his re-election, [told the](#)

[New York Times](#) last month that he was “helping Doge”. Andreessen did not go into detail on what his help entailed and said he was not speaking for Musk, but he appeared to have advance knowledge of Doge’s goals and told the Times it had plans for “the money side”, head count and regulation. Weeks after the interview, Musk’s lieutenants went after the money side of the federal government – [the treasury department](#).

In addition to the more established executives working at Doge or collaborating with the group, [Wired reported](#) that Musk had hired a group of young engineers fresh out of college or high school who possess little experience outside of tiny tech firms. These Doge staffers, who according to the outlet range from 19 to 25 years old, have at times been given huge amounts of access and power over the federal government – [including sources telling Wired](#) that the engineer Marko Elez had gained direct “[write access](#)” to treasury department payment systems.

[Elez resigned](#) on Thursday after [the Wall Street Journal asked](#) the White House about his links to a now-deleted social media account that promoted eugenics and racism. Among other racist posts, the account posted on X that “you could not pay me to marry outside my ethnicity” and called for repealing the Civil Rights Act, according to the Journal. Earlier that day, [a judge had granted](#) Elez and one other Doge employee the power to see sensitive treasury department data.

Elez [was reinstated](#) on Friday.

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Another young Doge staffer with access to sensitive government systems, 19-year-old Edward Coristine, has gone by the username “Big Balls” online and founded a company called “Tesla.Sexy LLC”, [according to Wired](#). He has reportedly been on calls with GSA employees as they are asked to defend their jobs.

“These people are clueless, given how smart they’re supposed to be,” one USAid employee currently on administrative leave said of the young Doge team. “They’re under the impression that if you just say [to do something], then it will magically happen.”

Maga world gets a role in Doge

Along with the staff working with Doge full-time, with some even [sleeping in government buildings](#), Musk’s team has worked in tandem with Trump hardliners to dismantle or exert control over government agencies. Doge staffers showed up to USAid in the past week with Peter Marocco, who briefly served at several agencies during Trump’s first term and was accused by [multiple staffers](#) of poor leadership and toxic workplace behavior.

Marocco was [allegedly photographed](#) inside the Capitol building during the January 6 riot, according to a widely cited, citizen-led investigation that has accurately named numerous other rioters. When Dallas’s [D Magazine asked him](#) about the allegations last year, Marocco did not deny them but called the reports “smear tactics”.

The secretary of state, Marco Rubio, has now tapped Marocco to run USAid and review its programs as Musk continues work to shut down the agency entirely. Current and former USAid staffers [told the Guardian last week](#) that Marocco represented a disaster for the agency, with one former official calling him “a destroyer”.

“He’s the most unqualified person to be sitting in any seat of government, let alone the person who has the keys to our foreign assistance,” another former colleague at USAid who still works at the agency said.

Also working with Doge is the far-right Georgia representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, who is head of a “delivering on government efficiency” group within the House oversight committee. Greene, who has espoused [numerous extremist conspiracies](#) and in 2022 [spoke at a white nationalist event](#), has used her power to demand that NPR and PBS testify about their operations. Greene cited a PBS report that stated Musk gave “what appeared to be a fascist salute” during a speech last month as one of the reasons to compel the news outlet’s executives to appear at the hearing.

The conservative ideology extends to Doge’s human resources department, where the head of HR is an employment attorney and consultant who has promoted a “non-woke” alternative to diversity, equity and inclusion programs, [404 Media reported](#). Stephanie Holmes told the rightwing [Federalist Society in 2022](#) that she started her firm to counter the “really progressive ideology that HR was pushing into corporate America”.

The spokesperson for Doge is Katie Miller, who is married to the deputy White House chief of staff, Stephen Miller. Before working at Doge, Miller was Mike Pence’s press secretary and a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, where she defended Trump’s anti-immigration policies, including during the period when it was separating families at the border. During Doge’s takeover of agencies on Sunday, Miller issued a statement on X claiming that no violations of security protocol had taken place. On Wednesday night, she told reporters that Musk would decide for himself when his actions constituted a conflict of interest.

Stephen Miller has also begun working closely with Musk in the new Trump administration, [according to the New York Times](#), and on Monday went on Fox News to defend the shutdown of USAid by decrying it as a “swamp nest of bureaucrats”. During Trump’s first term, Miller served as a key policy adviser and pushed for extreme policies such as banning immigration and travel from Muslim-majority countries. In 2019, more than 50 civil rights organizations and 20 Democratic senators [called for Miller’s resignation](#) after it emerged that he had [sent hundreds of emails](#) to far-right editors at Breitbart that included him citing information from prominent white nationalist websites.

Changing staff and hidden identities

Some of the people who had been associated with Doge in the months before Trump's official order on 20 January have either been given roles elsewhere in the administration or pushed out entirely. The former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy was originally slated to co-lead Doge with Musk, trumpeting the agency in posts on X. He left after [reportedly facing internal tensions](#) with the Tesla CEO and announced a run for Ohio governor.

The former Trump tech adviser Michael Kratsios was helping interview hires for Doge, [according to Bloomberg](#), but has since been nominated as the president's science adviser. The top Silicon Valley investment banker and Musk ally Michael Grimes was [also reportedly in discussions](#) about joining Doge. He's [now expected](#) to join the commerce department.

Others hold unclear roles within Musk's unofficial agency, such as the Silicon Valley venture capitalist Baris Akis, who, [the New York Times reported](#), has become close to Musk and an integral part of Doge in recent weeks. Akis is a Turkish national who does not hold US citizenship, [according to the Atlantic](#), which reported that Trump's advisers declined Musk's request to officially hire him because of his immigration status. It is unclear in what capacity, if any, he is still involved in the effort. The Doge spokesperson, Katie Miller, did not respond to a request for comment on whether Akis is still involved in Doge.

Government watchdog groups have condemned the lack of transparency around Doge's operations.

"It's inappropriate for the federal government to purposely hide the identities of senior officials who are shaping the policies and servicing the public," said Scott Amey, the general counsel of the Project on Government Oversight. "These officials must be held accountable for their work, both by their colleagues and the public. It's also crucial that these officials abide by ethics and transparency requirements to assure the public they are serving in the best interest of our communities."

Andrew Roth contributed reporting

