

A Changing Government

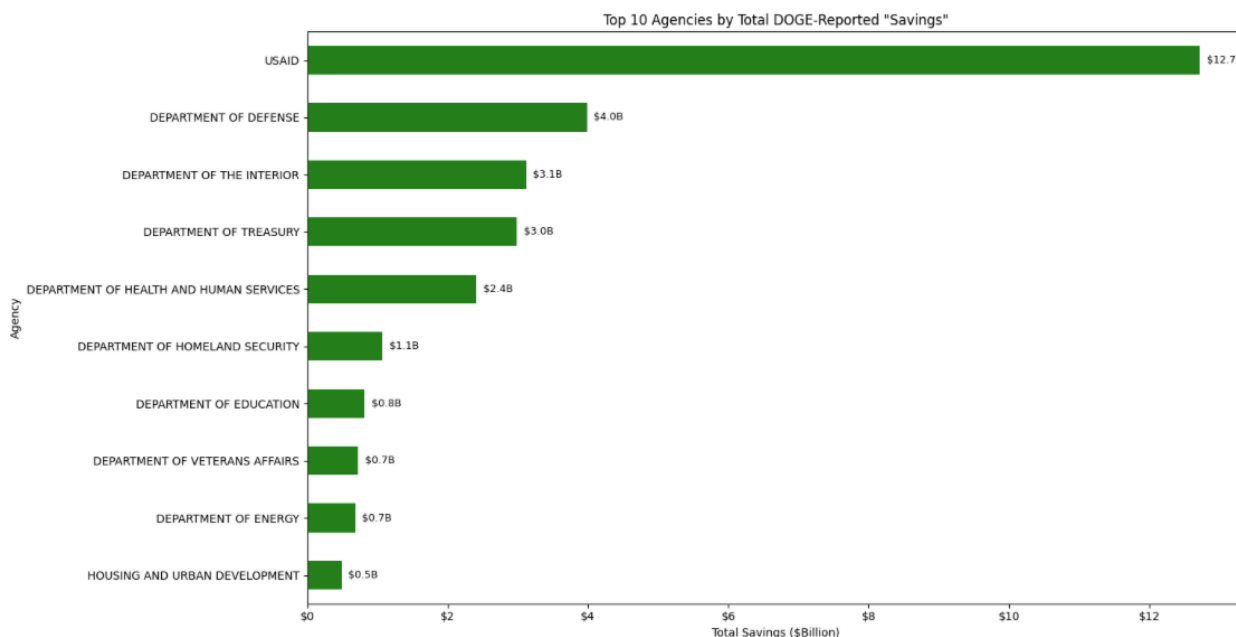
By Becky Kimble 13 May 2025

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. The Department of Government Efficiency (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 empowers independent groups to serve as watchdogs for the actions of our government and communities. DOGE claims to be trimming the fat and leaving the good. The CEO of defense software company Palantir Technologies likened the government to Wagyu beef - richly marbled with waste. Many don't feel that is true.

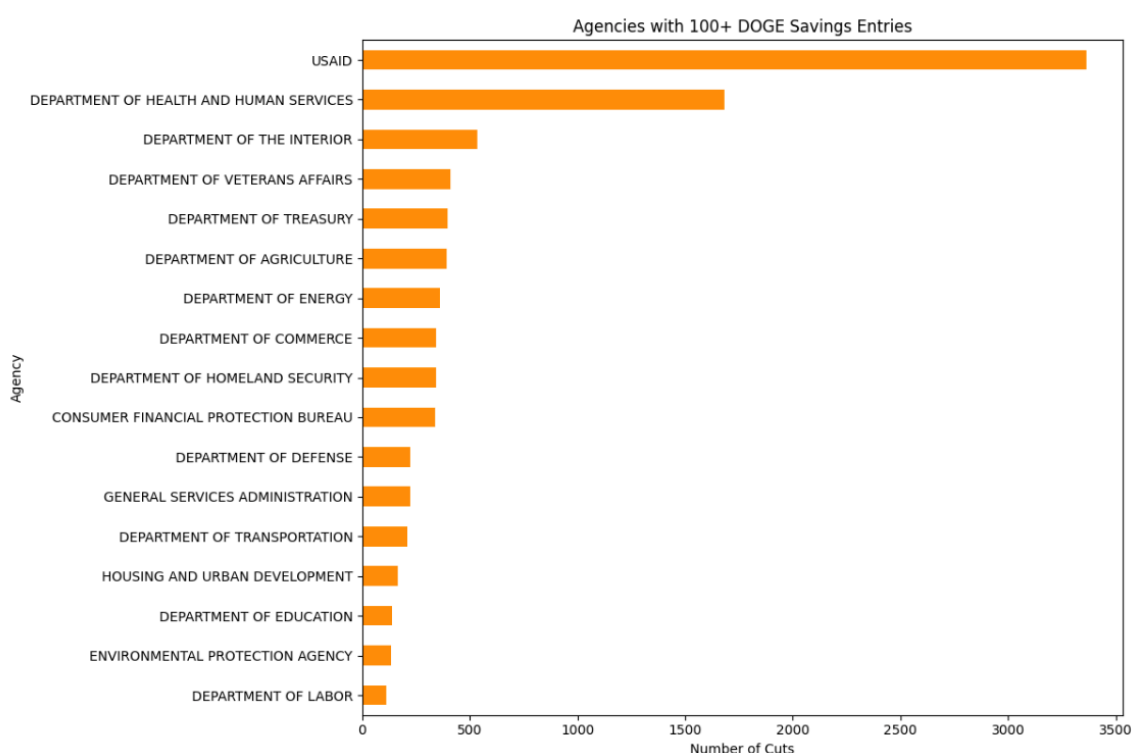
Each day, government agencies gather and share vast amounts of data on a wide range of topics. Inkwell evaluated the number of data releases for six major government agencies since 2010: the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Justice (DOJ), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Science Foundation. Using a dynamic dashboard, we will update it each month to 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 HHS, followed by the General Services Administration and the Department of Education. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration are the least changed. However, when the presented data is downloaded and analyzed, different agencies emerge on top, namely the Departments of Defense, Interior, and Treasury. USAID has by far the most reported dollars saved, having been entirely shut down. However, each USAID entry's information is redacted of any details beyond the amount.



Also featured is a “Wall of Receipts.” One entry claims that changes in the Department of the Interior’s Office of Refugee Resettlement have saved* nearly \$3 billion. The 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 calculation of savings versus total value. For example, the Office of Refugee Resettlement reports a difference of \$400 million between the two. Overall, they list 10248 contracts cut, 12256 grants, and 563 leases terminated. The connection between these charts and the savings calculation is not explained, nor do they easily align. Based on downloaded analysis, USAID, HHS, the Department of the Interior, and the VA have been subjected to the most line-item “savings.”



They use the historical amount that the HHS Program Support Center (PSC) disburses yearly, \$215 billion, in the description of what DOGE has redispersed without connecting it to current disbursements. The relationship between disbursements and the savings chart is also not explained. 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 funded by Congress receive a certain amount for a specified number of years. They

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.

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.

Will data disappear?

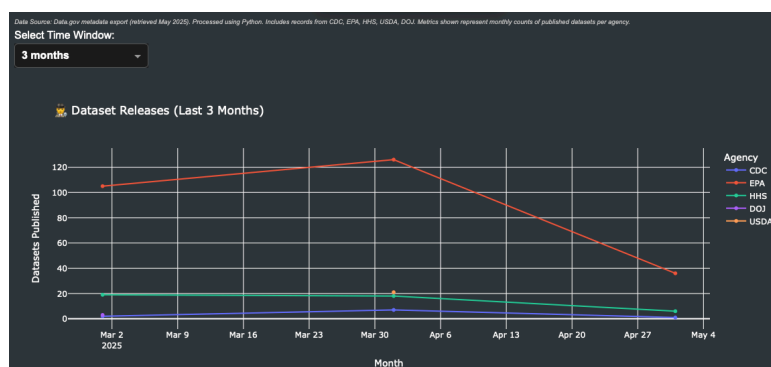
DOGE's website has a lot of big, unconnected numbers with behind-the-scenes data that isn't easily downloadable — a design choice that seems intentional. This is not a good look for an agency that wants to bring all data under one roof.

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 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 may 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

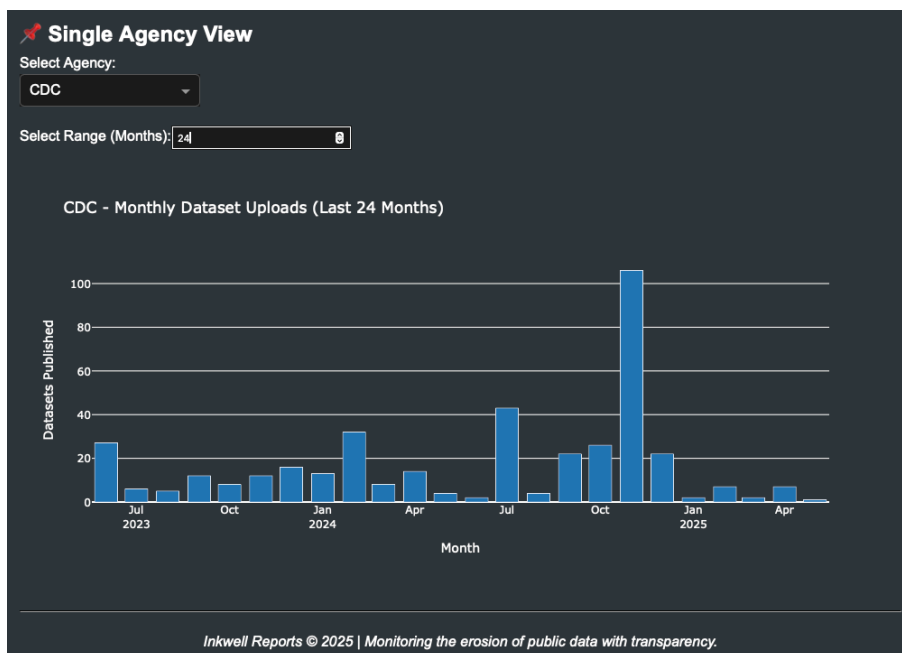
267 datasets, and HHS has released 43. The CDC has only released 10 since March. Comparing year-over-year, the CDC released 14 datasets in April 2024, and only seven last month.

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

Doge and Dash

While doqe.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 doqe.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."*