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Committee on Oversight and Reform

“Rightsizing Government” Hearing

Testimony of William G. Resh, Ph.D.

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Mr. Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Mr. Connolly, and Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is William Resh. I am an Associate Professor of Public Policy and Management at the University of Southern California's Sol Price School of Public Policy, where I hold the C. C. Crawford Professorship in Management and Performance and direct the Civic Leadership Education and Research (CLEAR) Initiative.<sup>1</sup>

The federal workforce is the backbone of American governance, ensuring the effective delivery of essential services both domestically and internationally. However, discussions about the size and function of government often obscure this reality, reducing complex issues of institutional capacity to simplistic debates about efficiency and workforce size. This testimony aims to clarify what is at stake in these discussions by drawing on extensive research from public administration, political science, economics, and management. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that governance capacity—rooted in institutional continuity, professional expertise, and a well-supported and merit-systems-protected<sup>2</sup> civil service—is a fundamental determinant of government performance.

Today's panel is titled "Rightsizing the Federal Government." While I take no position on the ideal size of government in terms of spending levels or specific policy allocations, my expertise focuses on the government's capacity to meet the demands placed upon it. That capacity hinges on investment in human capital—the skills, knowledge, and institutional memory that enable government to function effectively. Any discussion of rightsizing must therefore go beyond headcount reductions and consider whether the workforce is strategically aligned with national needs.

Currently, the real challenge facing the federal workforce is not excessive size but a growing misalignment between its structure and the demands placed upon it. The last several decades have seen an expansion of government responsibilities—through increased contracting, regulatory oversight, and emergency management—without a corresponding increase in the civil service's ability to manage these obligations. Rather than a bloated bureaucracy, we face a workforce stretched thin, forced to oversee an increasingly complex web of outsourced operations with limited personnel and resources. Moreover, these demands have been exacerbated by a fraught political environment that focuses more on symbolic ideological victories than substantive delivery of basic public goods.

A wicked aspect and default outcome of these challenges lies in one of the most dominant mechanisms for service delivery in the federal government: an increasing reliance on contractors to deliver on behalf of government agencies due to the capacity limitations imposed on those agencies. However, contract management is just one piece of a larger oversight imperative. Federal agencies are increasingly doing much less rowing—delivering public services directly—and instead mostly steer through various policy tools, including grants, loans, tax expenditures, contracts, vouchers, licensing, and regulations. This shift in governance requires a civil service capable of navigating and managing a networked system of public service delivery, ensuring accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness across all forms of federal outlays.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://clear.usc.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> Merit Systems Protections are a set of policies and legal safeguards designed to ensure that federal employees are hired, promoted, and retained based on competence rather than political affiliation or other non-merit factors. Ideally, these protections uphold the principles of fairness, accountability, and efficiency in public service by preventing arbitrary actions, favoritism, and political coercion. They aim to foster a professional and impartial civil service that serves the public interest rather than political interests.

Yet, as oversight responsibilities have expanded, the capacity to perform them has not kept pace. The increasing reliance on private contractors, state and local partnerships, and financial disbursement mechanisms has made effective oversight from their ranks more essential than ever. The challenge is not simply the size of the workforce but ensuring that federal employees have the expertise, institutional knowledge, and professional autonomy necessary to manage, regulate, and hold accountable the growing array of actors involved in public service delivery.

Moreover, efforts to increase political control over the civil service—whether through mass firings, loyalty-based appointments, or weakening institutional safeguards—do not enhance government effectiveness. Instead, they exacerbate the very problems critics claim to address, reducing institutional competence, increasing inefficiencies, and undermining the government’s ability to act in the public interest.

In the following discussion, I will outline the empirical evidence demonstrating these risks, highlighting how systemic skills gaps, excessive reliance on private contractors, and politicization<sup>3</sup> threaten both operational efficiency and constitutional governance. The solution does not lie in arbitrary workforce reductions or executive overreach but in a strategic reinvestment in civil service capacity—ensuring that government remains accountable, competent, and responsive to the needs of the American people.

In simple terms, despite fivefold budget increases since the 1960s by our federal government, the number of actual government employees (who take the same oath to the Constitution that the honorable committee members take) remains essentially the same.<sup>4</sup> However, the spending is not directed in the same ways that puts the federal employee in a position of direct accountability for results. In fact, while spending has increased exponentially, it has been directed in a way that relies on the federal employee to be more reactive than proactive and recoup these costs through monitoring, auditing, and investigation much more than through direct delivery of public goods.

Over the past four decades, federal contracting has expanded exponentially, outpacing the size and capacity of the civil service to manage it effectively. While the number of federal employees has remained relatively stable at around 2.4 million civilian workers (excluding postal employees), the number of private contractors working on federal projects has ballooned, with some estimates suggesting that there are now three private contractors for every federal employee in the United States (Light, 2018; Verkuil, 2017). Federal procurement spending has reached unprecedented levels, with over \$694 billion spent on contracts in Fiscal Year 2022 alone, representing nearly 10% of total federal expenditures (Resh, Lee, & Ha, 2024). Yet, the capacity to oversee these contracts has not kept pace with this expansion, leaving career civil servants with increasingly overburdened oversight responsibilities (Resh & Marvel, 2012).

This outsourcing trend was initially justified under the logic that private sector expertise would provide flexibility, cost savings, and innovation in government services. However, the reality has been far different. The shift away from direct public administration and toward contracted

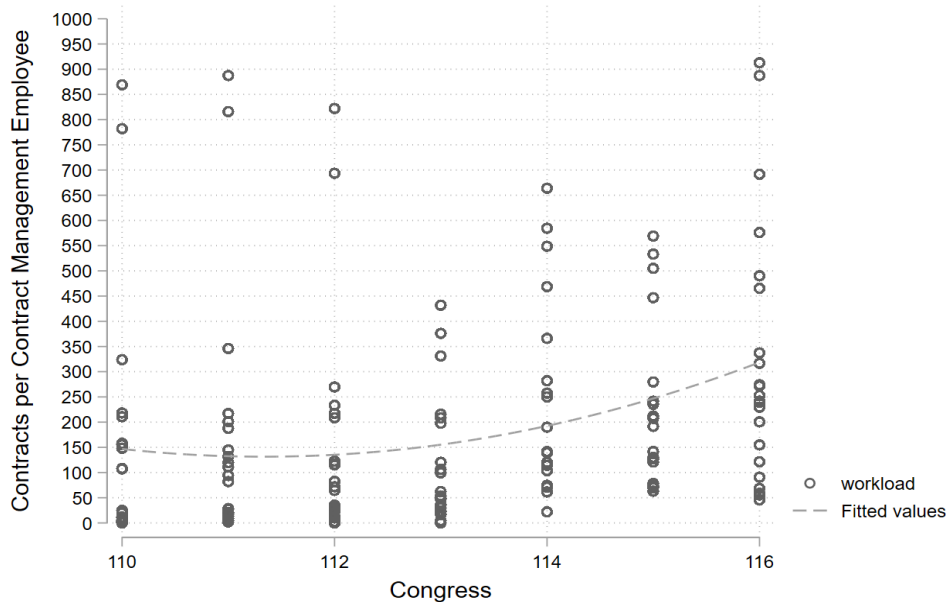
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<sup>3</sup> Politicization, in the context of public administration and governance, refers to the practice of appointing at-will employees (such as political appointees) into leadership positions based primarily on their loyalty to the appointing authority, rather than on merit or professional qualifications. This form of politicization is often associated with efforts to align the bureaucracy with the political priorities of an elected official, particularly the president or executive leadership. It can influence decision-making, administrative effectiveness, and the degree of insulation of public institutions from partisan influence.

<sup>4</sup> [ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FedFigures\\_19Shutdown.pdf](https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FedFigures_19Shutdown.pdf)

governance has resulted in an erosion of accountability and oversight capacity, not efficiency gains (Verkuil, 2017). Agencies now depend on private firms not just for implementing federal programs but also for core governmental functions such as procurement management, data analysis, and regulatory enforcement—roles that were once the purview of professionalized public servants (Light, 2018). As a result, rather than strengthening governance, privatization has effectively hollowed out the state’s ability to govern itself, creating what some scholars call the “hollow state” (Milward & Provan, 2000).

The burden of contract oversight has fallen on an already stretched civil service. As reflected in Figure 1, contract managers in federal agencies are now responsible for overseeing upwards of 300 contracts per year, more than double the capacity they managed in the early 2000s (Resh & Marvel, 2012). This workload is simply unsustainable. Agencies are unable to adequately monitor contractor performance, ensure compliance with federal regulations, or prevent cost overruns and fraud. The consequences of this capacity shortfall are evident in repeated government contracting failures, such as the mismanagement of disaster response funds following Hurricane Katrina and the botched rollout of Healthcare.gov (Light, 2006; Light, 2018). In both cases, excessive reliance on private vendors—combined with inadequate public sector oversight—led to inefficiencies, waste, and ultimately, failures that cost taxpayers billions while undermining public trust in government institutions.



**Figure 1. Contracts per Contract Management Employee in the US Federal Government by Congress** (source: the US General Service Administration’s Federal Procurement Data System and the US Office of Personnel Management’s Electronic Human Resources Initiative)

Again, I use contract management as merely an example. The uses of indirect policy tools mean that countless private entities are used to deliver policy in ways that are far more obscured than any transactional contract design. For instance, private tax preparation companies like Intuit play a significant role in administering tax policy by influencing access to free tax filing services, despite the IRS being the official tax authority. Similarly, banks serve as intermediaries for federally subsidized

student loans, shaping how borrowers experience government aid without direct federal administration. Other examples include private insurers managing Medicare Advantage plans and state-run but federally funded unemployment systems, all of which blur the lines between public governance and private delivery, creating a form of "submerged government" (Mettler, 2011). Federal civilian employees are tasked with overseeing these complex policy designs, ensuring compliance, accountability, and equitable service delivery. However, without proper capacity investments from the political branches—such as adequate staffing, training, and modernized systems—federal employees often struggle to effectively manage these intricate arrangements, leaving gaps in oversight and diminishing the effectiveness of public policy.

Moreover, the reliance on these policy tools has not insulated government from politicization—it has only restructured how political influence manifests in governance. The unchecked expansion of the contract state has created a system where politically connected firms often receive lucrative government contracts, regardless of their performance record or public service mission (Michaels, 2017).

This dynamic was on full display in the Trump administration's expansion of immigration detention policies, which disproportionately benefited private prison companies that had made substantial donations to pro-Trump political action committees (PACs) (Verkuil, 2017). Similarly, recent scholarship on defense contracting reveals that companies with strong political ties are more likely to receive non-competitive federal contracts, raising serious concerns about cronyism and reduced accountability in public procurement (Berry et al., 2010; Dahlstrom et al., 2021).

Despite the growing financial footprint of federal contracting, the United States has not invested in building the necessary civil service capacity to manage this outsourced system. Unlike other countries that have expanded centralized procurement oversight, the U.S. federal government continues to delegate contract management to individual agencies, many of which lack the personnel or expertise to effectively oversee these operations (Resh, Lee, & Ha, 2024). Without renewed investment in civil service professionals trained in procurement, auditing, and regulatory enforcement, the government will remain reliant on external vendors, with little ability to ensure that public funds are being used effectively and ethically.

The reality is clear: while the total size of the federal workforce has remained stagnant, the true expansion of government has occurred in the outsourcing of state functions to third-party vendors, with minimal accountability. Any discussion of "rightsizing" the federal government must recognize this structural transformation. The solution is not to shrink the career civil service further but rather to reinvest in the workforce needed to ensure that federal funds are spent wisely, contractors are held accountable, and public services are delivered effectively. Without such investments, the government's ability to act in the public interest will continue to deteriorate, replaced by a system that prioritizes private profit over democratic accountability.

Therefore, I am surprised by a lot of rhetoric on the size of government that focuses on a static headcount of federal employees, when the true growth of government has happened in terms of spending that these employees have very little control over in terms of who gets what, when, and how much. The truth is that while our federal budget may have ballooned, the responsibility for marshaling that budget, overseeing its implementation by third-party actors, and identifying incidents of waste, abuse, and fraud have fallen almost exclusively on a federal workforce that is

understaffed, misplaced (in terms of what occupies much of their task environment), underpaid (relative to their private sector counterparts), and beaten up repeatedly through political rhetoric to which they are professionally obligated not to engage.

In fact, there are some key structural features of our civil service system that enable some rather impressive functionality of our government despite these issues. This structure underpins historic achievements and innovations like the development of the internet, GPS, energy efficiencies, technologies in health research, and cybersecurity breakthroughs, demonstrating what Oliveira et al (2024) terms a “meritocratic advantage” of the United States in cross-national comparisons. Indeed, compared to our political branches of government, federal administration is incredibly more trusted by the public.

Over time, the Pew Research Center has repeatedly polled Americans to assess their views on the extent and influence of government, their attitudes toward specific federal departments, and their comparative trust in career bureaucrats versus political appointees. Survey results reveal that, irrespective of the sitting president, a larger proportion of respondents expressed considerably higher levels of confidence in career government workers compared to presidential appointees.<sup>5</sup>

This public sentiment aligns with scholarly findings on the matter. The American people’s greater trust in career civil servants is not unfounded. There is an extensive literature across social sciences that indicates a substantial risk when any given president attempts to (or effectively does) politicize the civil service in attempts to push policy to his preferences in lieu of the agency’s legislative mandates.

The structural features of the U.S. federal workforce reveal a complex interplay between institutional capacity and vulnerability to politicization. Here, I provide just a few examples.

**Table 1. Tensions Between Structure, Capacity, and Politicization**

Structural Feature	Capacity Impact	Politicization Risk
70% in national security roles	Ensures defense continuity	Target for loyalty purges
80% outside DC metro	Embeds governance locally	Centralized management risks
Underpaid professionals	Relies on mission-driven ethos	Talent loss to private sector
Indirect policy tool management focus	Adapts to networked governance	Increases favoritism opportunities

First, there is a concentration of 70% of federal employees in national security roles.<sup>6</sup> This underscores the government’s prioritization of defense and intelligence continuity. This structure ensures a stable and experienced workforce in critical areas of national importance. However, it also

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/01/07/what-the-data-says-about-federal-workers/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/public-service-and-the-federal-government/>

presents a significant risk of politicization through potential loyalty purges, which could compromise the integrity and effectiveness of these crucial functions.<sup>7</sup>

Research demonstrates that more politicized agencies (i.e., those with higher numbers of presidential appointees layered through lower executive and managerial ranks) tend to be less responsive to public and congressional inquiries,<sup>8</sup> potentially undermining accountability in national security matters.<sup>9</sup>

A second structural feature of our civil service is the geographic dispersion of the federal workforce, with 80% of employees working outside the Washington D.C. metro area.<sup>10</sup> This has traditionally been viewed as a strength that embeds governance within communities across the nation.<sup>11</sup> The vast majority of federal employees are not part of the so-called ‘Washington bureaucracy.’ They are our neighbors, family, and friends, working in communities across the country. But beyond individual employment, the federal government serves as a critical economic engine, providing specialized expertise in areas such as water quality, pollution reduction, public safety, agricultural and economic development, public health, disaster management, and infrastructure.



**Figure 2. Federal Civil Service Job Announcements by Location 2018-2023** (available at <https://clear.usc.edu/insight/dashboard>)

Federal employees contribute not only as workers but as problem-solvers embedded in local and regional governance networks. However, politicization and relying on all policy to be managed centrally within the Executive Offices of the President (EOP) threaten to undermine this advantage, to detrimental effects on public service delivery and community responsiveness. Centralization, in terms of policies being dictated to regional offices rather than informed by those localized perspectives, can lead to a disconnect between federal policy implementation and the communities it affects.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/fall/agloso.html>

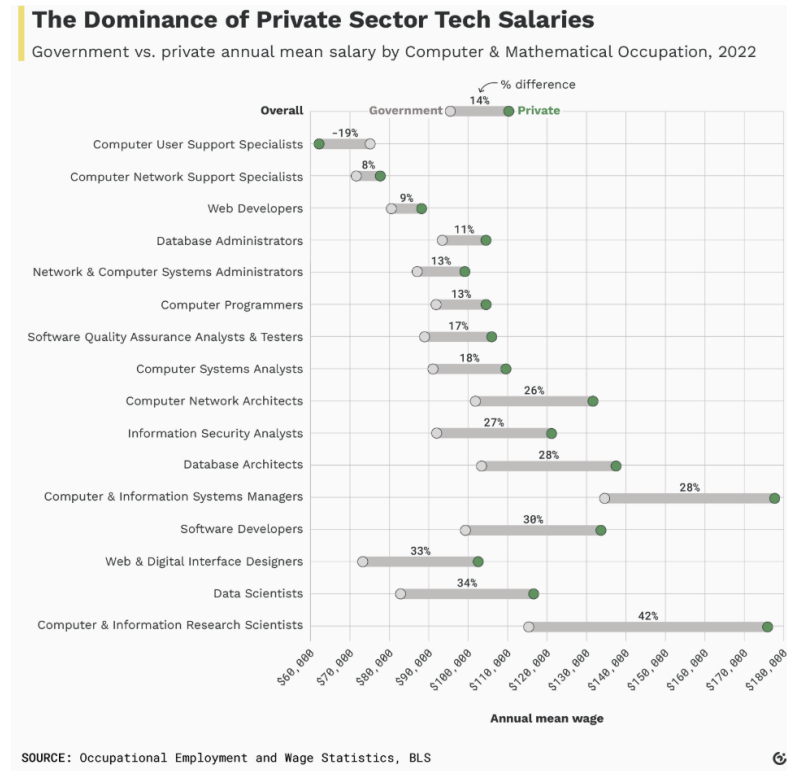
<sup>8</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/jpart/article-abstract/27/4/581/3867390>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.meritalk.com/articles/fed-experts-warn-schedule-f-revival-would-weaken-national-security/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/public-service-and-the-federal-government/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9681988/>

Federal employees are actually underpaid when one compares them on an occupational and educational basis relative to their private-sector counterparts.<sup>12</sup> The Federal Salary Council (FSC) reports that federal employees on average earn 22.47% less than their private sector counterparts, at least in terms of salary.<sup>13</sup> This creates a unique capacity impact on the US civil service system, where we rely heavily on a mission-focused ethos to attract and retain talent. While this can lead to a workforce driven by public service motivation,<sup>14</sup> it also poses a significant risk of losing institutional capacity due to employee exits to better-paying private sector jobs.<sup>15</sup> This is particularly worrisome in terms of the federal government’s ability to attract and retain top tech talent (Pahlka, 2023).



**Figure 3. Disparities in Tech Pay between the Federal Government and the Private Sector** (available at <https://www.citizencodex.com/our-stories/government-tech-workers-earn-less-is-that-a-bad-thing>)

The persistent underinvestment in federal personnel has created an imbalance between the growing scope of government responsibilities and the shrinking ability of the civil service to effectively oversee them. While the federal workforce has remained relatively stable in number, the government’s reliance on private contractors to perform critical functions has expanded dramatically. The result is a state where federal employees, rather than implementing policy directly,

<sup>12</sup> [https://nffe.org/nffe\\_news/public-and-private-pay-gap-continues-to-widen/](https://nffe.org/nffe_news/public-and-private-pay-gap-continues-to-widen/)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.fedsmith.com/2022/08/09/fsc-says-federal-employee-pay-disparity-now-at-22-47/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/puar.12505>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.citizencodex.com/our-stories/government-tech-workers-earn-less-is-that-a-bad-thing>



are increasingly forced into oversight roles for which they lack the necessary staffing and support (Resh & Marvel, 2012).

The scale of the mismatch is staggering. While total government spending has increased fivefold since the 1960s, the federal workforce remains at roughly the same level, even as agencies oversee exponentially more contracts, grants, and regulatory responsibilities (Light, 2018). Unlike other advanced democracies that have expanded public sector capacity in parallel with government functions, the United States has outsourced much of its administrative capacity to private entities, without ensuring sufficient oversight mechanisms within government itself (Verkuil, 2017).

The consequences of this oversight gap extend beyond inefficiencies—they fundamentally alter the nature of governance. The federal government is increasingly unable to function as a direct provider of public services and instead operates as an intermediary, reliant on external actors to carry out core governmental functions (Verkuil, 2017). Without reinvesting in the expertise and staffing necessary to oversee outsourced functions, the U.S. government will continue to cede critical policymaking and operational control to private actors with little public accountability.

A meaningful discussion about “rightsizing” government cannot simply focus on reducing headcounts—it must address the structural issue of a government that is shrinking its direct capacity while simultaneously expanding its obligations. The choice is not between “big” or “small” government, but between an effective, professional civil service and a hollowed-out state dependent on private contractors who often lack transparency, oversight, or commitment to public service values (Michaels, 2017). If investment in civil service capacity is not prioritized, this will leave critical governmental functions in the hands of unaccountable private entities (Resh & Marvel, 2012).

Finally, in the US, our federal government has a much larger focus on grant and contract management within the federal workforce than most developed democracies. This reflects an adaptation to networked governance structures and the robustness of our private sector in some ways. It gives us substantial advantages in how it allows for flexibility and potentially more efficient service delivery through partnerships with private and non-profit sectors. However, it also opens up opportunities for contract favoritism and patronage, which could also lead to inefficiencies, waste, and potential corruption if not properly managed.

While the federal government has shifted toward contract management as its primary mode of service delivery, it has failed to invest in the workforce necessary to oversee and regulate this vast network of private contractors. The assumption that public-private partnerships would enhance government flexibility and efficiency has instead created a lopsided system where public sector oversight has not kept pace with the expansion of outsourced responsibilities (Verkuil, 2017).

The structural imbalance between government obligations and its ability to manage those obligations has led to repeated failures across administrations. One glaring example is the failure of the Department of Defense to conduct a clean audit of its contracts, despite managing over \$1 trillion in obligations (Light, 2018). Similarly, the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s inability to properly vet emergency relief contracts after Hurricane Maria led to millions in taxpayer dollars wasted on vendors who could not deliver critical supplies (Verkuil, 2017). These failures are not anomalies—they are the predictable outcome of a civil service that has been systematically deprived of the resources and training necessary to ensure that federal dollars are being spent effectively.

Moreover, as career civil servants continue to exit government due to low morale, political pressures, and stagnant wages, the knowledge gap is widening. Many of the most experienced procurement

specialists have retired, leaving behind a workforce that has not been adequately trained to manage the increasingly sophisticated strategies used by large federal contractors to maximize their profits at taxpayer expense (Resh & Marvel, 2012). This creates a vicious cycle where the fewer skilled public servants available to regulate and negotiate contracts, the greater the leverage private firms have to dictate terms that benefit them at the expense of the public.

In contrast, countries that have expanded their public sector's capacity to manage contracts—such as the United Kingdom's Crown Commercial Service or South Korea's centralized procurement system—have seen greater cost savings, reduced waste, and increased transparency in contract awards (Resh, Lee, & Ha, 2024). Yet in the U.S., the federal government continues to underinvest in hiring, training, and retaining professionals who specialize in contract oversight, leaving agencies vulnerable to corporate capture and regulatory failure (Verkuil, 2017).

If the federal government does not address the growing gap between what it is responsible for and what it is actually capable of managing, public trust will continue to erode, and the government's ability to deliver services effectively will deteriorate. The long-term solution is not simply to reduce the number of federal employees or further outsource services but to reinvest in building a workforce that is capable of managing, regulating, and overseeing the extensive network of private vendors upon which the government now depends. Without this reinvestment, the administrative state will continue to weaken, and private actors will assume even greater influence over public policymaking—often without public accountability (Michaels, 2017).

These structural features present a complex picture of the U.S. federal workforce, highlighting both strengths and the vulnerabilities that this system faces under conditions of politicization and the increased use of privatization. The government's ability to leverage these features while mitigating the risks that politicization creates is critical for maintaining an effective and impartial civil service. Policymakers like yourselves should be informed and conscientious in addressing these challenges to ensure the long-term effectiveness of the federal workforce.

## **In the Context of DOGE**

The recent administrative reforms implemented and proposed by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), particularly those aimed at reducing the federal civil service and increasing its politicization, pose significant risks to both the presidency and the American public. These reforms threaten to undermine governmental efficiency, erode public trust, and compromise the foundational principles of a merit-based civil service. At the core of the “administrative presidency” (i.e., the tools and strategies available to presidents to push policy toward their preferences through implementation)<sup>16</sup> is the necessity of a professional, competent bureaucracy that ensures continuity, safeguards institutional knowledge, and fosters effective governance. Attempts to shrink the federal workforce or replace career civil servants with political appointees will not lead to a more responsive government; rather, they will create conditions that diminish state capacity, reduce democratic accountability, and ultimately backfire on the very executives who push for such changes.

A functioning civil service is essential for stability and governance, yet reforms such as those proposed under the “Policy/Career” reclassification of tens of thousands of federal employees introduce instability by allowing for the wholesale replacement of career bureaucrats with political loyalists. The very design of the civil service system—merit-based hiring, tenure protections, and

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<sup>16</sup> <https://press.jhu.edu/books/title/11232/rethinking-administrative-presidency>

professional norms—ensures that expertise and institutional memory persist even through political transitions.

The Trump administration’s workforce reduction strategy is fundamentally misguided. Such moves disproportionately impact the most competent federal employees, as those with transferable skills are the first to leave. This leads to a talent drain where the government loses those best equipped to maintain operational effectiveness. The supposed cost savings from such buyouts are illusory when weighed against the long-term damage to administrative competence and oversight capacity.

Comparative studies demonstrate that governments with higher levels of bureaucratic insulation from political interference tend to perform better across policy domains, from economic management to public health. Research indicates that non-politicized, merit-based hiring and tenure protections are associated with higher government performance and lower corruption, as evidenced by cross-national analyses of 52 countries (Oliveira et al, 2024; Fernandez & Cheema, 2024).

In the United States, historical analyses of the State Department, the Postal Service, and other agencies reveal that performance improved dramatically after the introduction of civil service protections in the late nineteenth century. For example, the implementation of the Pendleton Act led to significant performance improvements in the postal system, reducing patronage-based inefficiencies and increasing service reliability (Aneja & Xu, 2024). Similarly, research on police departments shows that the introduction of merit-based hiring led to a measurable decrease in violent crime rates and improved law enforcement outcomes (Ornaghi, 2019).

Politicization, on the other hand, has the opposite effect—replacing experienced managers with short-term political appointees reduces efficiency, disrupts long-term planning, and increases the likelihood of policy failure. The average tenure of political appointees is only 18-24 months, which means they rarely develop the expertise necessary to manage complex programs effectively (Gallo & Lewis, 2012; Lewis, 2008). Moreover, increased politicization results in greater turnover, lowers investment in expertise, and erodes agency capacity (Richardson, 2019). As Moynihan argues, contemporary efforts to weaken civil service protections, such as Schedule F, threaten to undermine administrative competence by creating a chilling effect on civil servants and facilitating the mass purging of experienced personnel (Moynihan, 2022).

Politicization also weakens state capacity by creating an incentive structure that prioritizes loyalty over competence. When job security is linked to political allegiance rather than expertise, career civil servants are discouraged from making independent, evidence-based decisions. The result is a chilling effect on the flow of factual information within government agencies. As well, the likelihood is low that you can attract the most competent professionals who can exercise their professional competence without political interference in other domains.

Trump-era directives targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion programs have added to an atmosphere of fear among civil servants, leading many to self-censor their work or abandon initiatives that might draw political scrutiny. This suppression of professional judgment and expertise undermines not only the effectiveness of agencies but also the integrity of democratic governance. Policymaking suffers when career professionals—who are often best positioned to provide objective, empirically grounded recommendations—are sidelined in favor of ideologically driven appointees.

Recent executive actions that limit telework have further demoralized the federal workforce, discouraging talented professionals from remaining in public service. The erosion of workforce morale, combined with the insertion of political operatives into key roles, results in a less effective and less trustworthy government.

The consequences of this shift extend beyond internal agency dynamics to the broader political landscape. Presidents who embrace these tactics may believe that increasing their control over the civil service will lead to more effective policy implementation, but the evidence suggests otherwise. A more politicized bureaucracy does not necessarily mean a more responsive one; rather, it results in greater instability, inefficiency, and internal resistance.

Presidents of both parties have historically sought greater control over the executive branch, but research has shown that excessive politicization undermines performance in the long run. The average tenure of political appointees is significantly shorter than that of career officials, leading to high turnover and a lack of continuity in governance. Furthermore, agencies staffed primarily by political loyalists are more likely to experience decision-making failures, as appointees often lack the technical expertise needed to manage complex programs effectively.

Beyond inefficiency, politicization creates avenues for corruption and waste. Federal agencies oversee billions of dollars in contracts, grants, and entitlement programs. Career civil servants serve as essential watchdogs, ensuring that these funds are distributed and managed in accordance with established regulations and public interest goals. When oversight mechanisms are weakened—whether through workforce reductions or the installation of partisan appointees—the risk of fraud and mismanagement increases significantly.

Politically connected firms can exploit government procurement processes, securing lucrative contracts without adequate oversight. The increasing entanglement of private interests in the EOP creates perverse incentives where the state becomes an instrument for political and financial gain rather than a neutral arbiter of public policy.

This problem is exacerbated by efforts to weaken traditional accountability structures. Transparency and responsiveness to legitimate congressional inquiries will suffer under a more politicized civil service. Studies show that agencies with higher proportions of political appointees are less likely to comply with Freedom of Information Act requests, less responsive to congressional oversight, and more prone to ethical breaches.

The reforms proposed by DOGE reflect a broader ideological agenda that seeks to dismantle professional government in favor of a more centralized, loyalty-based model. However, this vision is fundamentally at odds with the principles of democratic governance. A professional civil service serves as a crucial counterbalance to executive overreach, ensuring that government functions in the interest of all citizens rather than catering to the whims of political elites. Effective governance requires a balance between responsiveness and expertise—an equilibrium that is disrupted when competence is subordinated to political loyalty.

Ultimately, the administrative reform tactics pursued by DOGE are likely to produce perverse outcomes not only for the civil service but also for the country. Presidents who weaken state capacity in the name of control may find themselves unable to implement their own policy agendas effectively. Research on bureaucratic responsiveness indicates that presidents are often more successful in achieving policy goals when they delegate authority to competent, nonpartisan administrators rather than attempting to micromanage the executive branch. The very tools that

presidents rely on to shape policy—regulatory agencies, administrative rulemaking, and intergovernmental coordination—are rendered less effective when state capacity is undermined.

For the American public, the costs of these reforms are even greater. A less professional civil service means lower-quality public services, increased inefficiency, and greater susceptibility to corruption. It means environmental regulations that are inconsistently enforced, social programs that are mismanaged, and public health crises that are exacerbated by bureaucratic dysfunction. The pursuit of a politicized government may serve short-term partisan interests, but it comes at the expense of the long-term stability and effectiveness of American governance.

The lesson from history and empirical research is clear: a strong, merit-based civil service is essential to both democratic governance and effective policymaking. The reforms proposed by DOGE threaten to undermine this foundation, creating a government that is less competent, less accountable, and ultimately less capable of serving the public good. If these reforms are allowed to proceed unchecked, they will not only weaken the federal government's ability to function but also erode the very principles that sustain American democracy.

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