

# ***DOGE Days at the USPTO? Evidence from a Natural Experiment in Administrative Reform***

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This article provides the first estimate of the effects of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) on workforce performance within the federal administrative state. Using DOGE's 2025 announcements of substantial workforce reductions as a natural experiment, the study examines how job insecurity influences employee productivity.

Using granular data from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), the study compares the response of different categories of employees: unionized patent examiners, who benefit from strong job protections, and nonunion staff—including clerical workers and support personnel—who do not.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom that all federal employees would be adversely affected, our difference-in-differences analysis reveals that nonunion employees experienced, on average per day, a 35% decline in productivity following the DOGE announcements, while unionized patent examiners showed no significant change. A potential concern is that these effects may reflect the broader transition associated with a new presidential administration. However, our triple-difference analysis—using prior administrative transitions as controls—yields consistent results, suggesting that the observed effects stem from the specific threat of job insecurity posed by DOGE or the unique dynamics of President Trump's second term, rather than routine political turnover.

This study estimates the effects of DOGE on ordinary federal employees by leveraging the distinctive institutional feature of the USPTO: while some workers—namely patent examiners—enjoy meaningful workforce protections, others do not. Because most federal employees lack comparable union protections, our findings offer insight into the broader efficiency costs of DOGE-style restructuring across the federal bureaucracy. In addition, the results reveal an unexpected benefit of the patent examiner union. While prior scholarship criticized the union as an obstacle to reform, we show that collective bargaining agreements, especially their stability and resistance to sudden change, can help protect core agency functioning such as the patent examination system during episodes of aggressive political intervention and institutional disruption.