

An examination of federal personnel changes in the Trump era

January 18 2023



The study found that the total number of people employed full-time by the U.S. federal government remained largely unchanged by the end of the Trump administration, but with significant variation in growth, downsizing, and turnover between agencies. Credit: Caleb Perez, Unsplash, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

According to a new analysis, the total number of people employed full-time by the U.S. federal government remained largely unchanged by the end of the Trump administration, but with significant variation in growth, downsizing, and turnover between agencies. Brian Libgober of Northwestern University and Mark Richardson of Georgetown University present these findings in *PLOS ONE*.

During President Trump's term, some instances of downsizing or high turnover in the federal workforce—for instance, loss of staff at the State Department and at the Environmental Protection Agency—drew much attention. A growing body of research is deepening understanding of exactly how federal staffing changed during Trump's time in office.

Adding to this knowledge, Libgober and Richardson analyzed rates of change in non-seasonal, [full-time](#) employment at executive branch agencies during the Trump presidency. They used a method known as Bayesian hierarchical modeling, which helped them compare employment changes between very large and very small agencies in a more statistically sound manner than if they had simply compared raw rates.

The analysis showed that aggregate federal employment remained relatively unchanged during the Trump presidency. However, some agencies grew significantly, some downsized, some remained relatively stable, and some—for instance, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture—had major turnovers in staffing without significantly changing size.

Certain agencies related to immigration and federal affairs, such as the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs, grew significantly. Meanwhile, the Departments of the Interior, Labor, and the Treasury shrank.

Certain agencies focused on [civil rights](#) had high turnover, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Minority Business Development Agency. Despite being subjects of major political conflict, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement remained fairly stable in terms of size and turnover.

Many of these trends were in line with the Trump administration's priorities, the researchers note.

Hiring rates during the Trump administration did not clearly vary from hiring during the prior two (Obama and G.W. Bush) administrations, but loss of staff was higher for most agencies, especially when compared to the Bush presidency.

The authors add that "Contemporary news coverage often made it appear as though the Trump administration was doing significant damage to the federal civil service by pushing out apolitical officials who resisted their agenda, and in some cases that certainly happened. But how widespread the 'damage' to the civil service was, and the exact nature of the damage, has not been too clear until now."

More information: Identifying bureaus with substantial personnel change during the Trump administration: A Bayesian approach, *PLoS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0278458](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0278458)

Provided by Public Library of Science

Citation: An examination of federal personnel changes in the Trump era (2023, January 18) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-01-federal-personnel-trump-era.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.