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Attacks on the Federal Workforce Target Women and People of Color

BY SARAH JAVAID

The federal government is the largest employer in the United States,¹ with over 2.3 million federal workers, including nearly 1.1 million women, as of September 2024 (not including those working for the United States Postal Service).² While federal salaries are often lower than those for comparable roles in the private sector,³ federal jobs have long provided security and stability, predictable schedules, reliable salary increases, opportunities for promotion, strong union representation, and workplace benefits,⁴ as well as greater pay equity relative to other industries. Federal jobs have helped build a path to the middle class for many workers, especially for Black people, women, and other workers who frequently face discrimination in the workplace.⁵ Since January 20, 2025, however, these jobs—and the promise of fair treatment they have offered—have been under attack by the Trump-Vance administration.⁶

On his first day in office, for example, President Trump issued an executive order that directed the termination of all diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and programs in the federal government, the closure of federal offices related to diversity, equity and inclusion, and the termination of all relevant federal jobs.⁷ Many similar orders have since followed, designed to roll back decades of progress in combating sex- and race-based workplace discrimination under the guise of “protecting” workers from “DEI.”⁸ At the same time, the Trump-Vance administration has taken aggressive and potentially unlawful steps to dramatically shrink the federal workforce through rapid, large-scale terminations—largely carried out thus far by the “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE) run by unelected adviser Elon Musk. These actions are directly in line with the administration’s anti-diversity, anti-equity, and anti-inclusion agenda.

*Note: This data is from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) FedScope Federal Workforce Data,⁹ which provides the most detailed and accurate federal employee data but excludes data for United States Postal Service workers. In March 2025, **the Trump-Vance administration removed current and historic diversity data, which includes race and ethnicity indicators for the federal workforce, from the main public data website (fedscope.opm.gov).** NWLC was able to conduct the following analysis by race and ethnicity with saved data on file.*

As the following analysis shows, women and people of color make up the majority of the workforce in many of the agencies being targeted for massive staff reductions. As a result, women and people of color are likely to be disproportionately harmed by the Trump-Vance administration's sweeping efforts to dismantle our government—pushed out of good jobs not due to their performance or agency needs, but due to the authoritarian agenda of a handful of billionaires.

Women and people of color made up a majority of the workers in the agencies now targeted for elimination or reduction by the Trump-Vance administration

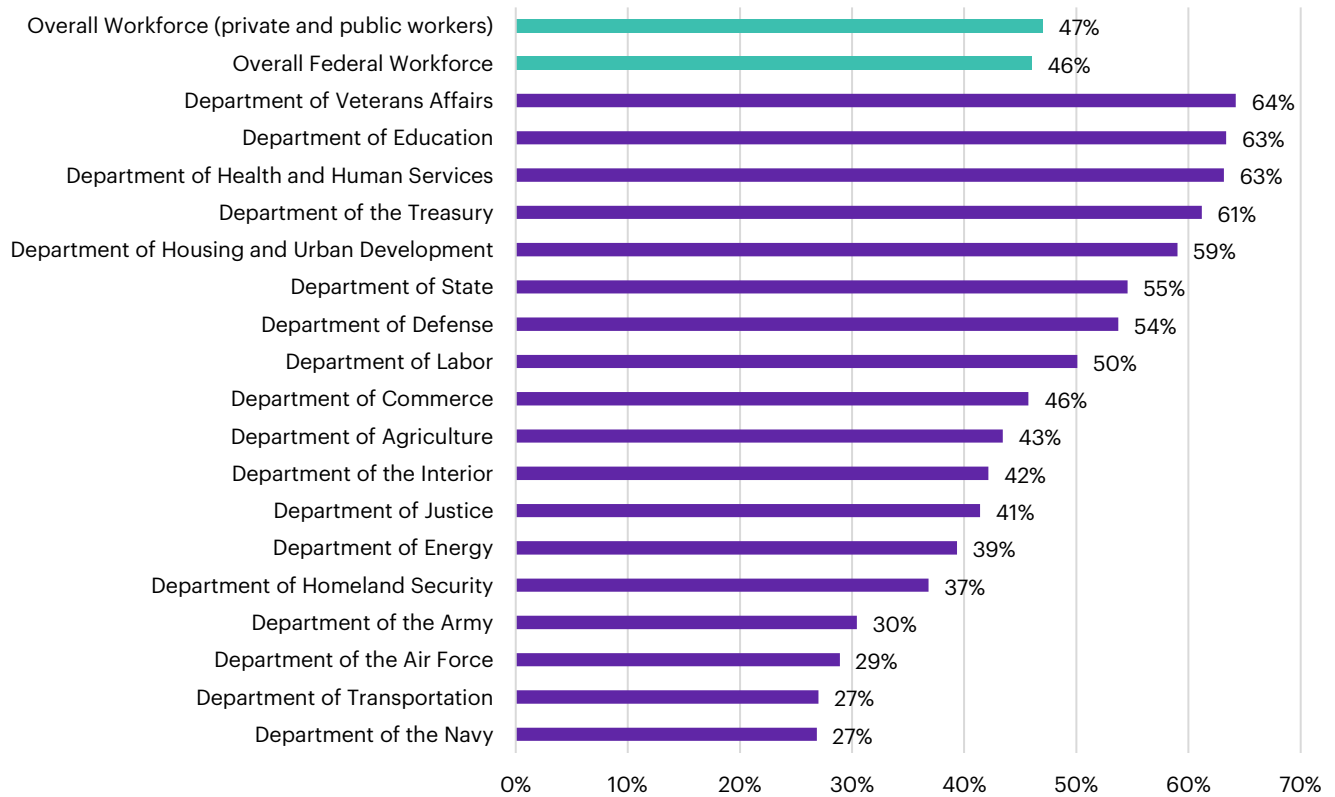
This fact sheet explores Cabinet departments and select independent agencies—i.e., agencies that exist outside the federal executive departments and do not report to a Cabinet secretary.

The Trump-Vance administration has launched plans to dismantle numerous agencies where women and people of color make up much of the federal workforce.

While women made up 46% of the total federal workforce in September 2024, they represented a substantial majority of the workforce in five Cabinet-level Departments that have now been targeted for large-scale layoffs:¹⁰ the **Department of Veterans Affairs** (64%), the **Department of Education** (63%), the **Department of Health and Human Services** (63%), the **Department of the Treasury** (61%), and the **Department of Housing and Urban Development** (59%).

- About 2,400 employees have been laid off at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Secretary Doug Collins has confirmed that terminating 80,000 VA employees (almost 20% of the agency's workforce) is the administration's goal.¹¹
- In a recent executive order, Trump called for the elimination of the Department of Education.¹² Although Trump does not have the authority to shut down the department, the Trump-Vance administration has severely impaired the department by firing roughly 50% of the Department's staff.¹³
- The Department of Health and Human Services recently announced the elimination of 10,000 jobs, concentrated in critical sub-agencies like the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, and the Food & Drug Administration.¹⁴
- And layoffs in the Department of Treasury have been concentrated in the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which is reportedly preparing to reduce its nearly 100,000-person workforce by about 50% through layoffs and buyouts; the Trump-Vance administration already laid off about 7,000 IRS workers in February, at the peak of tax season.¹⁵
- The Trump-Vance administration also plans to fire half of the workforce at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and has already made extreme cuts to some HUD sub-agencies; for example, nearly 85% of staff for HUD Community Planning & Development, which provides federal funds to help communities respond to homelessness—have already been terminated.¹⁶

WOMEN'S SHARE OF THE WORKFORCE BY CABINET DEPARTMENTS (SEPTEMBER 2024)



Source: NWLC federal calculations based on U.S. Office of Personnel Management FedScope Federal Workforce Data. NWLC calculation of overall workforce using U.S. Census Bureau 2023 American Community Survey.¹⁷

In addition, as of September 2024, women made up a majority of the workforce in a number of independent agencies that have since been targeted for massive reductions or elimination.

- Women were 66% of the workforce at the **Social Security Administration (SSA)**, which manages social insurance programs providing retirement, disability, and survivor benefits, and where the Trump-Vance administration has already laid off staff and threatened office closures, impacting people’s ability to access their benefits.¹⁸
- The staff of the **U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)** was 59% women. USAID, which provides foreign aid, education, health, and humanitarian aid, was one of the first agencies targeted for cuts. Its staff will soon be reduced to approximately 15 legally required positions, down from about 10,000 before Trump took office.¹⁹
- Women were 54% of the workforce at the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**, which enforces regulation protecting the environment and human health. The Trump-Vance administration aims to cut the EPA workforce by 65%.²⁰
- Women were 51% of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), which protects consumers from abusive practices and unfair practices by companies and corporations. The administration has already fired staff at CFPB and seeks to close the agency entirely.²¹

- Women were 62% of the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**, the primary federal agency charged with enforcing workplace anti-discrimination laws. In an unprecedented action, Trump fired two EEOC commissioners before the conclusion of their statutorily mandated terms, prompting a legal challenge,²² and DOGE has targeted several local EEOC field offices²³—offices that conduct outreach, investigate complaints, and seek redress on behalf of victims of discrimination—for closure.
- Women were 61% of the **National Labor Relation Board (NLRB)**, which enforces labor laws and protects employees' right to unionize. Trump also removed Gwynne Wilcox, the first Black woman to become a member of the NLRB, from her position on the board. Wilcox is currently challenging her removal as unlawful.²⁴

Federal efforts led by the Trump-Vance administration have inspired some states to initiate their own DOGE-like efforts to cut government staff, programs, and services.²⁵ Like federal positions, state and local government jobs tend to be stable jobs with quality retirement and health benefits—and the state and local government workforce is even more predominantly comprised of women.²⁶ Replicating DOGE initiatives at the state level thus further threatens economic security for women and families.

While people of color made up 41% of the overall federal workforce in September 2024,²⁷ they made up a majority of workers in the **Department of Housing and Urban Development (56%)**, the **Department of Education (54%)**, the **Department of the Treasury (54%)**, and the **Department of Health and Human Services (52%)**.

- Black workers' share of the **Department of Education (36%)** and **Department of Housing and Urban Development (36%)** was double their share of the overall federal workforce (18%).²⁸ Black workers were also disproportionately represented in many other agencies. For example, they made up 29% of workers in the **Department of the Treasury**, 25% in the **Department of Veterans Affairs**, and 20% in the **Department of Health and Human Services**.
 - Black workers also made up a large portion of the independent agency **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (36%)**.
- Indigenous workers were overrepresented in some federal agencies. Their share of the workers in the **Department of Health and Human Services (11%)** and the workers in the **Department of the Interior (10%)** was five times their share of the overall federal workforce (2%).
 - Trump has proposed cutting nearly one in four workers at the Department of the Interior,²⁹ further impacting Indigenous workers.
- Latino workers made up 11% of the entire federal workforce but 23% of the workers in the **Department of Homeland Security**, 15% of the workers in the **Department of the Treasury**, and 13% of the workers in the **Department of Labor**.
 - Latino workers were also overrepresented in the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (17%)**.
- Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) workers made up 14% of workers in the **Department of Health and Human Services** and 13% of the workers in the **Department of Commerce**, while making up 8% of the entire federal workforce.

People of color also made up the majority of select independent agencies: 62% of the **EEOC** and 57% of the **SSA**.

SHARE OF THE WORKFORCE BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND CABINET DEPARTMENTS (SEPTEMBER 2024)

	Total People of Color	AANHPI	Black	Indigenous	Latinos
Overall Workforce (private and public workers)	42%	7%	12%	1%	19%
Overall Federal Workforce	41%	8%	18%	2%	11%
Department of the Air Force	32%	5%	12%	1%	11%
Department of Agriculture	31%	4%	11%	1%	12%
Department of the Army	32%	4%	14%	1%	10%
Department of Commerce	39%	13%	16%	0%	7%
Department of Defense	43%	8%	20%	1%	12%
Department of Education	54%	7%	36%	1%	7%
Department of Energy	30%	7%	11%	1%	9%
Department of Health and Human Services	52%	14%	20%	11%	5%
Department of Homeland Security	49%	6%	17%	1%	23%
Department of Housing and Urban Development	56%	7%	36%	1%	9%
Department of the Interior	28%	3%	5%	10%	7%
Department of Justice	34%	4%	15%	1%	11%
Department of Labor	45%	8%	22%	1%	13%
Department of the Navy	37%	11%	13%	1%	8%
Department of State	41%	8%	22%	0%	8%
Department of Transportation	33%	6%	13%	1%	10%
Department of the Treasury	54%	8%	29%	1%	15%
Department of Veterans Affairs	45%	10%	25%	1%	8%

Source: NWLC federal calculations based on U.S. Office of Personnel Management FedScope Federal Workforce Data. NWLC overall workforce calculations using U.S. Census Bureau 2023 American Community Survey.³⁰ Data on people of color includes all workers who are not white, non-Hispanic. The people of color data will be greater than the sum of AANHPI, Black, Indigenous, and Latino workers data because it additionally includes multi-racial workers who are not represented in this table. Data for Asian, Black, Indigenous, and NHPI workers is for those who identify as non-Hispanic.

Women and people of color made up a majority of probationary workers in targeted agencies

Probationary workers—including those in their first year of service, as well as workers who recently moved to a new role or were promoted³¹—are at heightened risk of firing by the Trump-Vance administration, which has been using these workers’ status as a categorical basis for termination. Federal probationary workers lack some protections against firings, such as the right to appeal or advance notice of a termination.³² In addition, probationary employees may be the most economically insecure workers in the federal government, as many are younger and newly entering the workforce; in September 2024, one-third of federal probationary employees were under 30 years old (34%).³³

Within their first two days in office, the Trump-Vance administration demanded federal agencies provide a list of probationary employees to OPM and determine whether those workers should be retained, making clear their target.³⁴ Two months later and after thousands of workers had been fired, a court ordered the administration to hire back nearly 25,000 probationary workers who were illegally terminated.³⁵ Very soon after, the U.S. Supreme Court halted that order, preventing thousands of probationary workers from being reinstated.³⁶ The uncertain fate of probationary workers may continue to be fought out in courts while these federal workers navigate unemployment and a lack of steady benefits. Combined with the administration’s attack on federal union protections, currently employed probationary workers are at even greater risk.

While women made up 46% of the overall federal workforce in September 2024, they made up a greater share of probationary workers overall (50%)³⁷ and often an even greater share of probationary workers in targeted departments. Women made up:

- 72% of probationary workers in the **Department of Education**;
- 69% of probationary workers in the **Department of Veterans Affairs**;
- 64% of probationary workers in the **Department of Health and Human Services**;
- 63% of probationary workers in the **Department of Defense**;
- 62% of probationary workers in the **Department of Housing and Urban Development**; and
- 61% of probationary workers in the **Department of the Treasury**.

Women also made up most probationary workers in the **SSA** (75%), **USAID** (66%), the **EPA** (60%), the **EEOC** (58%), and the **NLRB** (58%), independent agencies that have been named for future cuts and/or have already experienced mass layoffs by the Trump-Vance administration.

While people of color made up 41% of the overall federal workforce, they represented 46% of probationary workers as of September 2024. People of color made up:

- 65% of probationary workers in the **Department of the Treasury**;
- 55% of probationary workers in the **Department of Housing and Urban Development**;
- 55% of probationary workers in the **Department of Homeland Security**; and
- 53% of probationary workers at the **Department of Health and Human Services**.

People of color also made up 64% of probationary workers at the **SSA**, 62% of the **EEOC**, and 58% at the **CFPB**, independent agencies targeted by the Trump-Vance administration.³⁸

Women and people of color are being forced out of federal jobs that—compared to jobs across all industries—have provided stability, benefits, and retirement security

Full-time, year-round positions can provide economic security to workers by way of a steady schedule and consistent pay.³⁹ Nine in 10 federal employees worked full-time, year-round as of September 2024, including 89% of women,⁴⁰ 89% of Asian workers,⁴¹ 92% of Black workers, and 89% of Latino workers in federal jobs.⁴² Across all industries, a smaller share of all workers worked full-time year-round in 2023 (70%), including 65% of working women, 73% of Asian workers, 73% of Black workers, and 69% of Latino workers.⁴³

Unions offer important benefits and protections to workers and those in unions often experience more economic security for themselves and their families, as well as greater access to benefits such as affordable health insurance, retirements benefits, and the right not to be fired without cause.⁴⁴ Over half of federal workers (56%) were unionized in September 2024.⁴⁵ In comparison, only 6% of private sector workers were members of unions in 2024.⁴⁶

All federal workers had greater enrollment rates in retirement, health, and paid parental leave benefits compared to private industry workers. In 2023 (the latest year for which benefits data for federal workers is

available):

- 98% of federal workers were enrolled in the available retirement benefits,⁴⁷ compared to 75% of private industry workers.⁴⁸
- 81% of federal workers were enrolled in the available health care benefits,⁴⁹ compared to 64% of private industry workers.⁵⁰
- Federal workers are also eligible for up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave,⁵¹ a benefit most private sector employees lack.⁵²

On March 27, 2025, Trump signed an executive order instructing agencies to end unions for an estimated 1 million federal workers, primarily targeting workers with roles in national defense, energy security, pandemic preparedness, public safety, and additional broad categories.⁵³ These targeted roles are likely a pretense to ending union representation for all federal workers. Trump had previously ended collective bargaining rights for Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officers.⁵⁴ While the administration claims that this action safeguards our country's interests, the reality is that this executive order removes protections for federal government workers, including hardworking women and people of color, leaving them more vulnerable to discriminatory firings and at risk of their benefits being terminated.

Women and people of color in the federal workforce are also at risk of losing the greater pay equity they experience relative to workers across industries

Women and people of color face pay inequity in the federal government, but the wage gap is narrower than the gaps that exist for all workers across all industries and occupations. Increased pay transparency and salary grids⁵⁵ in the federal government are important tools in narrowing gender and racial wage gaps. Women working full-time, year-round across all federal agencies were paid 95 cents for every dollar paid to men in September 2024;⁵⁶ in contrast, among those working full-time, year-round in all industries, not just the federal government, women were paid 83 cents for every dollar paid to men.⁵⁷

Due to data limitations in OPM data, we are unable to conduct an intersectional analysis for women by race and ethnicity.

Within the federal government, gender wage gaps vary by department, and in some agencies, the gender wage gap had nearly closed as of September 2024; for example, in the **Departments of Labor, Justice, Interior, and Navy**, women were paid at least 98 cents for every dollar paid to men, and in the **Department of Agriculture**, women were paid \$1.01. Only in the **Department of the Treasury** did women workers face a wage gap as wide as the gender wage gap for women across all industries.

WAGE GAP AND ANNUAL EARNINGS LOSS FOR WOMEN COMPARED TO MEN BY CABINET DEPARTMENTS (SEPTEMBER 2024)

Department	What Women Were Paid for Every Dollar Paid to Men	What Women Lose to the Wage Gap Every Year
<i>Overall Workforce (private and public workers)</i>	\$0.83	\$11,550
<i>Overall Federal Workforce</i>	\$0.95	\$5,906
Department of the Air Force	\$0.95	\$4,820
Department of Agriculture	\$1.01	-
Department of the Army	\$0.97	\$2,737
Department of Commerce	\$0.92	\$11,347
Department of Defense	\$0.88	\$13,145
Department of Education	\$0.96	\$5,962
Department of Energy	\$0.95	\$6,698
Department of Health and Human Services	\$0.94	\$8,640
Department of Homeland Security	\$0.95	\$5,104
Department of Housing and Urban Development	\$0.96	\$5,837
Department of the Interior	\$0.98	\$1,855
Department of Justice	\$0.99	\$1,532
Department of Labor	\$0.99	\$1,178
Department of the Navy	\$0.98	\$2,529
Department of State	\$0.94	\$8,172
Department of Transportation	\$0.95	\$6,436
Department of the Treasury	\$0.83	\$19,370
Department of Veterans Affairs	\$0.92	\$8,980

Source: “-” indicates that women do not experience an annual earnings loss. NWLC federal workforce calculations based on U.S. Office of Personnel Management FedScope Federal Workforce Data. Overall workforce data comes from Ashir Coillberg, “A Window Into the Wage Gap: What’s Behind it and How to Close it,” National Women’s Law Center, (February 26, 2025), <https://nwlc.org/resource/wage-gap-explainer/>.

People of color working in the federal government also typically face smaller wage gaps relative to all workers. Across all federal agencies, Indigenous people working full time, year-round were paid 79 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic workers. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) workers were paid 82 cents, Black and Latino workers were paid 87 cents, and Asian workers were paid \$1.13 for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic workers.⁵⁸ Across all industries, Indigenous full-time, year-round workers were paid 70 cents, NHPI workers were paid 78 cents, Black workers were paid 75 cents, Latino workers were paid 68 cents, and Asian workers were paid \$1.17 for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic workers.⁵⁹ Wage gaps for workers by race and ethnicity as of September 2024 also vary by department, but almost universally are narrower than the gaps experienced across industries—often much narrower.

- Black workers in a few agencies experience particularly small wage gaps, or no wage gap, relative to white workers. For example, in the **Department of Housing and Urban Development**, the **Department of Labor**, and the **Department of Energy**, Black workers were paid at least 97 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic workers, and in the **Department of Agriculture**, Black workers were paid \$1.09 for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic workers.
- Latino workers in the **Departments of the Air Force, Army, Commerce, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, Navy, and Transportation** all were paid at least 90 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic workers.

WAGE GAP AMONG FEDERAL WORKERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND CABINET DEPARTMENTS (SEPTEMBER 2024)

Department	What Federal Workers of Color Were Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, Non-Hispanic Workers				
	Asian	Black	Indigenous	Latino	Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI)
<i>Overall Workforce (private and public workers)</i>	\$1.17	\$0.75	\$0.70	\$0.68	\$0.78
<i>Overall Federal Workforce</i>	\$1.13	\$0.87	\$0.79	\$0.87	\$0.82
Department of the Air Force	\$0.97	\$0.92	\$0.85	\$0.91	\$0.86
Department of Agriculture	\$1.21	\$1.09	\$0.89	\$0.89	\$0.97
Department of the Army	\$1.10	\$0.95	\$0.89	\$0.90	\$0.87
Department of Commerce	\$1.10	\$0.93	\$0.87	\$0.90	\$0.87
Department of Defense	\$0.99	\$0.88	\$0.83	\$0.86	\$0.76
Department of Education	\$0.98	\$0.93	\$0.97	\$0.92	\$1.14
Department of Energy	\$1.03	\$0.98	\$0.92	\$0.96	\$0.95
Department of Health and Human Services	\$1.03	\$0.88	\$0.52	\$0.91	\$0.84
Department of Homeland Security	\$0.97	\$0.91	\$0.90	\$0.88	\$0.79
Department of Housing and Urban Development	\$1.02	\$0.97	\$0.92	\$0.93	\$0.97
Department of the Interior	\$1.09	\$1.03	\$0.90	\$0.93	\$0.90
Department of Justice	\$1.14	\$0.92	\$0.91	\$0.87	\$0.85
Department of Labor	\$1.06	\$0.97	\$0.99	\$0.92	\$0.92
Department of the Navy	\$0.95	\$0.85	\$0.85	\$0.92	\$0.82
Department of State	\$0.95	\$0.89	\$0.94	\$0.85	\$0.86
Department of Transportation	\$0.99	\$0.96	\$0.94	\$0.91	\$0.91
Department of the Treasury	\$1.14	\$0.83	\$0.89	\$0.74	\$0.91
Department of Veterans Affairs	\$1.33	\$0.77	\$0.88	\$0.87	\$0.86

Source: Data for AANHPI workers is separated into Asian workers and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) workers for pay data due to OPM data limitations. Data for Asian, Black, Indigenous, and NHPI workers is for those who identify as non-Hispanic. NWLC federal workers calculations based on U.S. Office of Personnel Management FedScope Federal Workforce Data. NWLC calculations for overall workforce using U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2024 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table PINC-05 and U.S. Census Bureau 2023 American Community Survey (ACS). See footnote 59 for more information.

- Indigenous and NHPI workers also faced notably narrower racial wage gaps in most federal agencies relative to the gaps they face in the workforce overall. However, in **Health and Human Services**, Indigenous workers were paid only 52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic workers, and in the **Department of Defense**, NHPI workers were paid 76 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic workers.
- Asian workers, who typically are paid more than white, non-Hispanic workers in both the federal government and the workforce overall, experience narrower pay differentials in a number of agencies, but still typically are paid wages comparable to or higher than white, non-Hispanic workers.⁶⁰As of September 2024, women and people of color made up a majority of the workforce in many federal departments now targeted by the Trump-Vance administration for cuts and reductions, including the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Housing and Urban Development. In his sweeping attacks on federal agencies, Trump is not only decimating services that women and families rely on,⁶¹ but also eliminating good jobs for workers who deserve the security, benefits, and pay equity the federal government can provide. The result of Trump’s attack on the federal workforce is directly aligned with his anti-diversity and anti-equity agenda that aims to harm women and people of color.

As of September 2024, women and people of color made up a majority of the workforce in many federal departments now targeted by the Trump-Vance administration for cuts and reductions, including the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Housing and Urban Development. In his sweeping attacks on federal agencies, Trump is not only decimating services that women and families rely on, but also eliminating good jobs for workers who deserve the security, benefits, and pay equity the federal government can provide. The result of Trump’s attack on the federal workforce is directly aligned with his anti-diversity and anti-equity agenda that aims to harm women and people of color.

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FOOTNOTES

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- 7 90 Fed. Reg. 8339 (Jan. 20, 2025), Federal Register :: Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing Section 2(a) and 2(b)(i), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/29/2025-01953/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing>.
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