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## Trump and Musk Are Trying to Dismantle Social Security From the Inside

Elon Musk's DOGE is inflicting crashes, hang-ups and hours-long waits on Social Security recipients, eroding trust.

By Katie Rose Quandt, TRUTHOUT

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U.S. President Donald Trump prepares to watch the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) with UFC CEO Dana White and Elon Musk at the Kaseya Center on April 12, 2025, in Miami, Florida.

JOE RAEDLE / GETTY IMAGES

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In recent months, people trying to reach the Social Security Administration (SSA) have encountered website crashes, automatic hang-ups and hours-long waits on the phone or in person. But horrible customer service appears to be just the first step in Donald Trump and Elon Musk's plan to destroy Social Security — the United States' largest social welfare program, which provides benefits to 73 million people

([https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat\\_snapshot/](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat_snapshot/)), or one in five U.S. residents.

President Donald Trump has granted Elon Musk's "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE) team significant access and power within SSA. In just three months, the agency has implemented plans to decrease the staff count (<https://blog.ssa.gov/social-security-announces-workforce-and-organization-plans/>) from 57,000 to 50,000 (with rumors of deeper cuts (<https://apnews.com/article/social-security-layoffs-doge-musk-trump-93efbed33957af5ec8ac37744d0592de>) to come), started closing offices, made it harder for people to register and access benefits, spread lies about fraud, accessed recipients' personal information, and created an environment of chaos, fear and confusion. All the while, DOGE is on an obsessive hunt for widespread benefits fraud, which one federal judge characterized (<https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mdd.577321/gov.uscourts.mdd.577321.49.0.pdf>), as "a search for the proverbial needle in the haystack, without any concrete knowledge that the needle is actually in the haystack."

Advocates fear that as DOGE makes Social Security increasingly nonfunctional, trust in the enormously popular program (<https://www.nirsonline.org/reports/socialsecurity2024/>) will erode, allowing Musk and his allies the opportunity to further weaken or privatize aspects of the program.

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Weakening Social Security has serious and even deadly consequences: Among older people who receive benefits, 39 percent of men and 44 percent of women derive more than half their income (<https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/basicfact-alt.pdf>) from it. Around 80 percent of recipients are retired workers (or their spouses and dependents), who paid into the system during their working years, while the rest qualify due to a disability or are children of deceased workers.

Despite its crucial role lifting millions of Americans (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/top-ten-facts-about-social-security>), out of poverty, Trump and Musk repeatedly disparage the program as dysfunctional, rife with fraud, or an outright scam. In February, Trump falsely claimed that millions (<https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-social-security-all-scam-2034985>) of dead Americans were collecting benefits, alleging: "It's all a scam, the whole thing is a scam." Meanwhile, in a recent interview with Joe Rogan, Musk called Social Security "the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time" (<https://www.newsweek.com/elon-musks-social-security-remark-rebukes-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-2038384>). And in a *FOX Business* interview about DOGE cuts, Musk ominously called entitlements like SSA "the big one to eliminate" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzIol6PC5vc>). (The White House insists (<https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/dems-zero-musk-wanting-cut-social-security-medicare-waste-white-house-responds>), Musk was referring to eliminating "waste and fraud," not entitlement programs in their entirety.)

“Never before did we have a president claiming that there was all this fraud where there wasn’t any, or all this waste where there wasn’t any,” Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, a political advocacy group that calls for expansion of Social Security, told *Truthout*. “And then using that to make changes precipitously, without any kind of thought — some of which are just going to create more fraud. And no one has ever had access to all this data, people’s most personal data.”

## DOGE Influence at SSA

Trump replaced his initial acting SSA Commissioner (<https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/AFSCME-et-al-v-SSA-Flick-Decl.-3.7.25.pdf>), Michelle King, a 30-year veteran of the agency, in February after she refused to allow DOGE unfettered access to recipients’ private data. Her replacement is Leland Dudek, a mid-level staffer, who at the time was on administrative leave (<https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/22/politics/leland-dudek-acting-social-security-head-doge/index.html>) for leaking information to DOGE behind his supervisors’ backs.

Unsurprisingly, Dudek has acted as a rubber stamp for DOGE’s staff-cutting agenda.

“DOGE has been all over the Social Security Administration,” said Altman. “They’re calling the shots.”

Under Dudek, SSA rapidly laid off employees, offered buyouts to the entire staff, ordered the entire workforce back into the office full-time, dissolved teams (<https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/trump-administration-news-02-25-25#cm7kyl42w000r3b6q8ccw1440>), announced the closure of 6 out of 10 (<https://blog.ssa.gov/social-security-announces-workforce-and-organization-plans/>), regional offices and circulated plans to close (<https://www.govexec.com/management/2025/04/ssa-reorg-plan-contemplates-field-office-closures-contradicting-public-statements/404369/>), dozens of field offices.

“It’s not an exaggeration to say around 1,000 years of institutional experience and knowledge have walked out the door,” said Altman. “The top cyber security people, the top people who maintain the systems, and so forth. ... There has really been an enormous brain drain from the agency, and that’s continuing.”

Dudek admitted, behind closed doors, that he is following the orders of DOGE and the White House. “I work for the president. I need to do what the president tells me to do,” Dudek told senior SSA staff and advocates in a mid-March recording leaked to ProPublica (<https://www.propublica.org/article/recording-reveals-leland-dudek-thoughts-trump-doge-social-security>). “I’ve had to make some tough choices, choices I didn’t agree with, but the president wanted it and I did it.” Later in the meeting, Dudek said: “Again, I work for the president. DOGE is part of that.”

Trump’s nominee to lead the agency, Frank Bisignano, is a financial services CEO with a net worth of around \$1 billion (<https://qz.com/trump-rich-cabinet-billionaires-musk-lutnick-rfk-jr-1851718924/slides/2>), Bisignano, who told CNBC (<https://www.cnbc.com/2025/03/25/trump-pick-to-lead-social-security-faces-questions-on-doge-involvement.html>), he is “fundamentally a DOGE person,” has a reputation for cutting staff, while taking home 380 times the compensation (<https://www.equilar.com/reports/111-table-equilar-new-york-times-top-100-highest-paid-ceos-2024.html>), of the median employee at his company.

Bisignano apparently lied at a March 25 confirmation hearing, telling the Senate Finance Committee he hasn't had contact with SSA or DOGE. But a whistleblower told (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/03/25/frank-bisignano-social-security-doge-musk/>) Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) that Bisignano has had frequent conversations with SSA executives, requested explicit approval of all hires and intervened to ensure a DOGE engineer was hired and given immediate access to private data systems — claims that were confirmed by the *Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/03/25/frank-bisignano-social-security-doge-musk/>).

Although the Finance Committee voted along party lines to advance Bisignano's nomination in March, Senate Democrats are calling for Trump to withdraw the nomination (<https://www.govexec.com/management/2025/03/dems-call-bisignano-withdraw-ssa-tweaks-controversial-plan/404106/>). "There's a trust gap between the nominee and the American people before he's even gotten in the door," Wyden said in a statement.

## Social Security Recipients Are Scared

Social Security employees and beneficiaries are feeling the effects of the mayhem introduced under Dudek. Staff is stretched thin and demoralized, struggling to keep up with constant changes from above, and dealing with a growing backlog of claims. Spending freezes leave workers unable to purchase office supplies, make copies of documents or hire necessary services like interpreters for hearings.

**"This chainsaw of the Musk-Trump co-presidency is gutting this agency. It is breaking it from within."**

The SSA website is crashing repeatedly, and callers find themselves hung up on or put on hold for hours. Meanwhile, the team in charge of monitoring customer experience was cut by DOGE. AARP reported that its help line is flooded with calls (<https://www.newsweek.com/seniors-flood-aarp-hotline-concerns-about-social-security-2057166>) from confused, frustrated and angry older people.

"Morale is in the toilet," an employee told the *Washington Post* (<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&copi=89978449&url=https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/03/06/doge-is-driving-social-security-cuts-will-make-mistakes-acting-head-says-privately/&ved=2ahUKEwj7u9PR2rCMAxVSKlkFHUCXDuoQFnoECA0QAQ&usg=AOvVaw35Fc8dYvMk9iB5c-n57niB>), in March. "We all know what DOGE wants to do, which is just break us, so they can privatize us."

"What's going on is the destruction of the agency from the inside out, and it's accelerating," Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) told the *Washington Post* (<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&copi=89978449&url=https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/03/25/social-security-phones-doge-cuts/&ved=2ahUKEwjqr6qgmcaMAxWMlokEHUxCF4wQFnoECBgQAQ&usg=AOvVaw0U5L3aaBgslmhesatui0-Q>). "I have people approaching me all the time in their 70s and 80s, and they're beside themselves. They don't know what's coming."

Even before Trump came into office, SSA was at a 50-year staffing low (<https://www.npr.org/2025/03/22/nx-s1-5320263/social-security-administration-changes-identity-office>), following years of budget cuts (<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/social-security-administration-needs-additional-funding-to-avoid-exacerbating-customer-service>), forced by Republicans. Even as more than 11,200 Americans (<https://www.cnbc.com/2024/02/08/baby-boomers-hit-peak-65-in-2024-why-retirement-age-is-in-question.html>), turn 65 each day, the agency's operating overhead costs (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/STATS/admin.html>) remain incredibly efficient at below 1 percent, all the while never missing a month of payments. But it might not keep that record for long.

“This chainsaw of the Musk-Trump co-presidency is gutting this agency. It is breaking it from within,” Martin O’Malley, former SSA commissioner under President Biden, testified (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1S6NYHHCg&rt=17m>) before the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee on April 1. “And it ultimately will lead to cascading failures, interruptions and system shutdowns that will eventually — and I think within the next couple of months — lead to benefit interruptions for the first time in 90 years.”

A former deputy SSA commissioner under George W. Bush has expressed similar concern (<https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/atypical-social-security-administration-reveals-what-caused-website-errors/3717120/>)s that benefits could soon be disrupted.

“It would appear that what they’re trying to do is crater this agency, and kneecap its ability to serve the public,” O’Malley testified. “They have to do that, because 80 percent of Americans believe that Social Security should be strengthened and made better. So they can’t really rob it, until they wreck it and sour enough of the public against it.”

He warned: “I truly believe that the Musk-Trump co-presidency has already taken 90 percent of the actions necessary to crater this agency.”

While Trump and Bisignano insist they will not cut benefits, advocates and Democratic politicians argue that cutting services achieves the same end. “[T]here are backdoor ways to accomplish the same thing as a benefits cut,” Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts) pointed out (<https://www.govexec.com/management/2025/03/senators-grill-bisignano-about-contact-ssa-doge-officials/404044/>) in Bisignano’s hearing. “[L]onger lines, more errors, and everyone who gives up or dies before they get their benefits sorted out due to those delays is also a benefit cut.”

Bisignano deflected a question on whether Social Security should be privatized, stating,

([https://www.cantwell.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/03252025\\_bisignano\\_hearing\\_transcript.pdf](https://www.cantwell.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/03252025_bisignano_hearing_transcript.pdf)). “I’ve never heard a word of it, and I’ve never thought about it.” In his 2000 book, Trump called Social Security a “Ponzi scheme” and called for its privatization (<https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/27/politics/trump-desantis-social-security-ponzi-scheme/index.html>). And in a leaked March email to staff (<https://www.thebulwark.com/p/clon-is-coming-for-your-social-security#footnote-1-158377954>), Dudek alarmed advocates by saying the agency would begin to outsource “non-essential functions to industry experts,” a seeming reference to privatizing aspects of the program.

Altman warned that as DOGE messes with SSA and makes system crashes more likely, it could open the door for privatization. “There’s about \$1.5 trillion that flows through Social Security. None of that goes to Wall Street or any of these for-profit companies,” she said. “But I think these ‘tech bros’ and others would love to get their hands on it.” She fears that if the Trump administration breaks the system and disrupts benefits, “They’ll say, ‘See? Government can’t do it. We’ve got to get the private sector.’”

She also warns that if SSA outsources customer services, people needing assistance will find themselves “trapped in an AI nightmare.”

“There are so many reasons that artificial intelligence just cannot do what humans do on this program,” explained Altman. “People who call don’t always know exactly what their issue is, or how to describe it, and it takes some conversation to figure it out. And sometimes they have one problem, and then they discover there’s three others. And the other thing is that people call at very vulnerable times. You know, they’ve lost a loved one, or they’re disabled and can no longer work.”

## DOGE Is Lying About Fraud, While Creating Opportunities for Theft

Another key strategy to destroy trust in Social Security is lying about widespread benefits fraud

(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/01/elon-musk-social-security-immigrants/>). Trump and Musk repeatedly tout the fact that millions of Social Security accounts (<https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-social-security-all-scam-2034985>), exist for people born more than 100 years ago — even though the vast majority are not receiving benefits. In fact, of the 18.9 million centenarians in the SSA database without a recorded death date, 18.4 million haven’t received benefits in over 50 years. The claim is so off-base that even Dudek has disputed it (<https://apnews.com/article/social-security-doge-musk-trump-improper-payments-57f9e374e77e7a24fdff3afa294aa7fc>).

Musk also repeatedly suggests that millions of noncitizens illegally receive Social Security benefits. At an April rally that was part of Musk’s failed attempt to buy a Wisconsin Supreme Court seat, Musk and DOGE associate Antonio Gracias presented a so-called “mind-blowing chart,” showing that millions of immigrants have Social Security numbers (<https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2025/antonio-gracias-non-citizen-social-security-numbers/>). But this is not fraud: Immigrants who are legally authorized to work are issued Social Security numbers. In fact, undocumented immigrants (who do not receive Social Security numbers, but are required to pay federal taxes) contributed \$25.7 billion in Social Security taxes (<https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/>) in 2022, even though they are ineligible to receive benefits.

In an even more wild claim, Musk has repeatedly accused Biden (<https://www.scrippsnews.com/politics/truth-be-told/no-elon-musk-millions-of-immigrants-are-not-committing-social-security-fraud>), of illegally handing out Social Security numbers to immigrants to encourage voter fraud in a “massive, large-scale program to import as many illegals as possible, ultimately to change the entire voting map of the United States.”

Musk (<https://www.rev.com/transcripts/musk-town-hall-in-wisconsin>), DOGE members ([https://www.nextgov.com/digital-government/2025/03/musk-and-doge-make-case-their-efficiency-tech-work/404146/?oref=ng-author-river&\\_hstc=121679188.b110ddcbf2b6491918d6f8c619d22183.1744203177114.1744336555748.1744381064204.5&\\_hssc=121679188.1.1744381064204&\\_hsfp=3097762860](https://www.nextgov.com/digital-government/2025/03/musk-and-doge-make-case-their-efficiency-tech-work/404146/?oref=ng-author-river&_hstc=121679188.b110ddcbf2b6491918d6f8c619d22183.1744203177114.1744336555748.1744381064204.5&_hssc=121679188.1.1744381064204&_hsfp=3097762860)) and

Vice President J.D. Vance (<https://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/maddowblog/jd-vance-peddles-familiar-false-claim-social-security-hotline-rcna199565>) have all also peddled the absurd lie that 40 percent of calls to SSA are fraudulent. This may be a gross misrepresentation of an entirely different statistic: That 40 percent of SSA direct deposit fraud incidents occurred via phone calls. In congressional testimony, O'Malley corrected the claim, noting that, in fact, just 0.032 percent of calls to SSA (<https://thehill.com/opinion/5248808-clon-musk-social-security-fraud/>) are successful attempts at direct deposit fraud.

Musk, who has promised to slash \$2 trillion from the federal budget, seems to hope to find much of that in SSA. But the fraud and waste just aren't there: On average, SSA makes \$9 billion in improper payments each year, representing less than 1 percent of total payments (largely through overpayments and error, not fraud), most of which is ultimately recovered, according to a 2024 Inspector General report (<https://oig.ssa.gov/news-releases/2024-08-19-ig-reports-nearly-72-billion-improperly-paid-recommended-improvements-go-unimplemented/>).

"They have just done this over and over again on Social Security, just coming up with these wild claims that bear no resemblance to the truth," Kathleen Romig, director of Social Security and disability policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, told the *Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/01/clon-musk-social-security-immigrants/>).

What's more, DOGE seems to be using its fraud allegations to justify major policy overhauls. "In the name of preventing fraud, they make these changes, and the changes keep coming," said Altman. "It's created waste and inefficiency, and actually the opportunity for fraud."

Citing fraud protection, SSA abruptly announced in mid-March that people would no longer be able (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/abruptly-eliminating-social-security-phone-services-threatens-access-to>) to apply for benefits or make changes to their direct deposits by phone. Instead, these activities could only be done online or in-person at a field office.

Social Security advocates and recipients were alarmed. Many older Americans lack internet access or the technological savvy to apply for benefits online — a problem set to worsen if the SSA website keeps crashing. But to visit in person, they would have to wait hours on the phone to make an appointment, survive without benefits for weeks or months until the next available appointment and travel to the field office (at least a 45-mile round trip (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/abruptly-eliminating-social-security-phone-services-threatens-access-to>) for 6 million older adults, many of whom don't drive). The SSA estimated that ending these phone services would add 75,000 to 85,000 new in-person office visits (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/abruptly-eliminating-social-security-phone-services-threatens-access-to>) each week.

In response to public outcry, SSA scrapped the changes (<https://www.newsweek.com/social-security-halts-change-days-before-scheduled-start-what-know-2057674>) on April 9. But other changes remain in place, and the rapid announcements have created an environment of confusion and fear for recipients.

Rather than rooting out actual fraud, the confusion at SSA has made recipients more susceptible to scams. "Scammers have been sending out very official looking notices saying, 'Okay, you've got to authenticate yourself, or your benefits are going to stop,'" said Altman. "It looks very official, and you're desperate, you can't live without your

benefits.”

DOGE meddling also increases the risk of a data breach. In testimony (<https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/AFSCME-et-al-v-SSA-Flick-Decl-3.7.25.pdf>), former SSA acting Chief of Staff Tiffany Flick described how, under Dudek, DOGE associates were given sensitive information without requisite training, which they viewed from within Trump’s Office of Personnel Management offices, surrounded by White House staffers. In this environment, she warned, “Others could take pictures of the data, transfer it to other locations, and even feed it into AI programs. In such a chaotic environment, the risk of data leaking into the wrong hands is significant.” She also warned that SSA’s IT is built on an “incredibly complex web of systems” that are extremely reliable, but could easily be broken by DOGE associates, leading to benefits delays.

In a lawsuit brought by unions and retiree advocacy groups, federal Judge Ellen Lipton Hollander issued a preliminary injunction (<https://www.npr.org/2025/04/18/nx-s1-5369295/doge-data-social-security>) in mid-April, blocking DOGE from accessing personal SSA data, and ordering them to delete any already obtained, including Social Security numbers, medical information, payment and bank records, earnings and tax information. She also required DOGE to remove software installed on SSA systems and stop accessing SSA code.

This was an extension of Hollander’s March temporary restraining order (<https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mdd.577321/gov.uscourts.mdd.577321.49.0.pdf>), in which she noted that “the DOGE Team is essentially engaged in a fishing expedition at SSA, in search of a fraud epidemic, based on little more than suspicion.” Complaining about the order to *Bloomberg*, Dudek initially claimed it would force him to essentially shut down the agency (<https://www.cnbc.com/2025/03/21/social-securitys-lee-dudek-raises-concerns-following-judges-restraining-order.html>), and promising: “I will follow it exactly and terminate access by all SSA employees to our IT systems.” Hollander called Dudek’s representation “inaccurate,” noting that her order “expressly applies only to SSA employees working on the DOGE agenda.” In response, Dudek walked back his threats to close down SSA.

## Weaponizing Social Security

Dudek has also helped Trump weaponize Social Security. In late February, SSA abruptly cancelled two contracts for the collection and maintenance of data on births and deaths in Maine, a move that would have forced parents (<https://apnews.com/article/maine-trump-doge-social-security-newborns-70840b39658b8702c6cb9b66f0f920db>), to register their newborns at a Social Security office instead of the hospital. When a senior SSA official warned that the cancellations would increase fraud, Dudek emailed back (<https://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/maddowblog/white-house-retaliation-maine-sparks-calls-key-officials-resignation-rcna199520>): “Please cancel the contracts. While our improper payments will go up, and fraudsters may compromise identities, no money will go from the public trust to a petulant child.”

That “petulant child” was Democratic Gov. Janet Mills, whom Dudek believed had been “disrespectful” and “unprofessional” to Trump. Mills had drawn Trump’s ire for insisting that Maine would follow state and federal law, and would not ban transgender athletes from girls’ and women’s sports. While the data contract cancellations were



rolled back, Trump has continued other retaliatory attacks [\(https://mainemorningstar.com/2025/04/16/heres-a-running-list-of-all-the-probes-funding-cuts-since-trump-threatened-maine/\)](https://mainemorningstar.com/2025/04/16/heres-a-running-list-of-all-the-probes-funding-cuts-since-trump-threatened-maine/) on the state.

The Trump administration is also using SSA to attack immigrants. In April, SSA added thousands of migrants  [\(https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/10/us/politics/migrants-deport-social-security-doge.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/10/us/politics/migrants-deport-social-security-doge.html) to the agency’s “death master file,” with the intention of cutting them off from banks, credit cards and government benefits.

And in March, it was reported that SSA has frozen a process called Enumeration-Beyond-Entry  [\(https://popular.info/p/exclusive-secret-policy-shift-could\)](https://popular.info/p/exclusive-secret-policy-shift-could), in which immigrants who are granted work authorization are automatically issued and mailed Social Security cards. This change will create more work and costs for SSA, while adding hurdles for immigrant workers.

## Are We at Risk of Running Out of Funds?

Despite being enormously popular, SSA has long weathered attacks from the right — often through claims the program is unsustainable. From the mid-1980s through 2020, Social Security collected more each year than it paid out, allowing it to build trust funds worth \$2.8 trillion  [\(https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/top-ten-facts-about-social-security\)](https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/top-ten-facts-about-social-security). But as the American population ages, the latest Social Security Trustees’ Report indicates that by 2033, the agency may no longer be able to pay out full benefits.

But there are solutions to shore up the program. Currently, wages above \$176,100 are not taxed for Social Security. Altman’s organization, Social Security Works, supports bills from Democratic congressmembers that would lift or eliminate this so-called “wage cap”  [\(https://www.cbsnews.com/news/social-security-benefits-tax-cap-2023/\)](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/social-security-benefits-tax-cap-2023/). In addition, the payroll tax could be increased, and promoting and expanding legal immigration  [\(https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-immigration-reforms-could-bolster-social-security-and-medicare-solvency-and-address-direct-care-workforce-issues/\)](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-immigration-reforms-could-bolster-social-security-and-medicare-solvency-and-address-direct-care-workforce-issues/), would increase the size of the workforce.

Despite Republican attacks, Social Security has remained extremely popular over the years. And so far, public anger over the current problems seems to be directed at Trump, Musk and DOGE. Voters have berated Republican Congressmembers at town halls, demanding they protect Social Security and sharing their horror stories and fears  [\(https://apnews.com/article/musk-trump-doge-social-security-92de2ce547df0dcdcc00a5876e1a7bd6\)](https://apnews.com/article/musk-trump-doge-social-security-92de2ce547df0dcdcc00a5876e1a7bd6). Trump’s approval rating dropped in mid-March, including a drop among older people  [\(https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-approval-plunges-baby-boomers-2050071\)](https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-approval-plunges-baby-boomers-2050071), from 49 to 45 percent.

While Democrats have never attempted to destroy the Social Security system, many Democratic presidents have signed legislation reducing or cutting benefits for certain groups. In 1994, Bill Clinton supported cutting people off disability SSA benefits  [\(https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/06/20/congress-planning-cutoff-for-addicts-on-disability-rolls/cea55f41-e69d-4451-a0e3-33141e4722b0/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/06/20/congress-planning-cutoff-for-addicts-on-disability-rolls/cea55f41-e69d-4451-a0e3-33141e4722b0/) after 36 months if their disability was based on drug or alcohol use. And in a 2011 effort to compromise with Tea Party congressmembers obsessed with lowering the national debt, Barack Obama supported an ultimately failed “grand bargain” agreement that would have raised taxes on the rich while cutting social safety net programs,

including Social Security. (In the final month of his presidency, Joe Biden signed legislation (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/biden-signs-bill-that-raises-social-security-payments-for-millions-of-americans>) that boosted some recipients' benefits, by ending provisions that limit benefits for some public service retirees.)

Although SSA has long faced attacks, Altman said this time is “qualitatively different.”

“It strikes me what they’re trying to do is convince everybody there’s an enormous amount of fraud. Then they can say, ‘Hey, we’re not cutting legitimate benefits. We’re cutting fraud.’ And also, perhaps make the whole thing collapse, and privatize the administration. And then beyond that — who knows.”

### HELP TRUTHOUT RESIST THE NEW MCCARTHYISM

The Trump administration is cracking down on political dissent. Under pressure from an array of McCarthy-style tactics, academics, activists and nonprofits face significant threats for speaking out or organizing in resistance.

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*On Bluesky? We created a starter pack (<https://bsky.app/starter-pack/truthout.org/3lawibu3ufd2i>) to make it easy for you to follow Truthout folks there.*



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