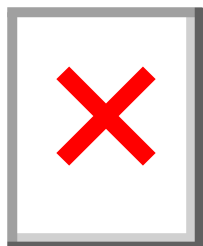


From: POLITICO Nightly <politiconightly@email.politico.com>
Sent: Jul 07, 2025 22:50:34.000000000 UTC
Subject: How Elon Musk's third party gamble could succeed
To: jperperian@cityofmelrose.org <jperperian@cityofmelrose.org>

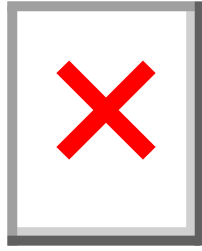
Jul 07, 2025

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BY **ALEXANDER BURNS**

Presented by 



President Donald Trump, left, claps as Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk prepares to depart after speaking at a campaign event at the Butler Farm Show, on Oct. 5, 2024, in Butler, Pa. | Alex Brandon/AP

ELECTORAL EXPERIMENT — Elon Musk is reentering national politics after a brief hiatus, vowing to disrupt the midterm elections with a new “America Party” that will contest a narrow set of federal offices and aim to control the balance of power in Congress.

It’s a daring scheme if Musk commits to it, which is by no means certain. His alliance with President Trump lasted less than a year, his role at DOGE just a few months and his recent vow of abstinence from national politics only days.

So what would a serious attempt at this plan look like? The usual third-party fantasy in Washington involves finding unicorn candidates who can claim the ideological center and rally temperate problem-solvers on all sides (see: Unity08, No Labels, Americans Elect, Bloomberg 2016.) This is a recipe for failure in a divided country where most Americans have chosen a side.

Musk's plan can only work if he learns from the most successful political disruptors, including Trump on the right and Bernie Sanders on the left, and identifies places where both political parties are neglecting the real preferences of voters. This means not finding a midpoint on a left-right spectrum but rather seizing issues beyond the standard D-versus-R menu.

Trump built his political rise on three areas of policy where much of the electorate felt unrepresented: immigration, trade and global security. He rejected Clinton- and Bush-era consensus on all three.

For Musk's new party to have a purpose, it must find similar ideological targets of opportunity.

Here are three that might make sense:

— Championing free trade. Trump shattered U.S. trade policy and reorganized national politics around protectionism. In a way, he was too successful. Now, there is no longer a major party that consistently backs lowering trade restrictions and defends free trade as a force for good.

The Republican Party is so deferential to Trump's worldview that even former free-trade conservatives now mouth support for the most aggressive tariff policy in generations. Among Democrats, there are plenty of officials eager to trash Trump's version of protectionism — and far fewer making an affirmative case for free trade. Even the Biden administration tried to coopt rather than roll back MAGA trade policies.

This protectionist consensus excludes most voters. [Gallup has found since 2015](#) that at least 60 percent of independent voters consistently see foreign trade as an opportunity rather than a threat; this spring, that number stood at 81 percent and even higher among Democrats. This is a fat opportunity for a political disruptor willing to defy regional voting blocs and special interests.

— Radical fiscal rebalancing. Most Americans say they worry about government overspending and debt. Neither major party is credible on this issue. The Biden administration grew the size of government, failed to enact promised tax hikes on the wealthy and only proposed raising taxes in the first place to pay for more spending. Republicans, meanwhile, have put tax cuts ahead of fiscal responsibility at every opportunity for a quarter century;

Trump's Big Beautiful Bill put America on track to assume trillions in new debt, [obscuring that reality](#) with a brazen congressional accounting trick.

It is unclear how many Americans would vote for a take-your-medicine party that advocates fiscal austerity, even if that means asking conservatives to raise taxes and left-leaning voters to give up on resurrecting the New Deal era. Perhaps someone should find out.

Musk — whose sneering, chainsaw-swinging DOGE theatrics alienated much of the public — is not the ideal figure to test this proposition. Other wild-card outsiders, running for office backed by Musk's money, might connect on this issue.

— Securing American technological and scientific supremacy.

Both parties say they want the United States to outcompete China and dominate this century. When it comes to scientific research and technological competition, Republicans and Democrats tend to subordinate that goal to factional and cultural politics.

The Trump administration's onslaught against elite universities, its crackdown on foreign students and academics and the grant-slashing spree carried out by DOGE have upended some of America's core strategic assets in a global intellectual arms race. In his post-DOGE persona, Musk also blistered Trump's sprawling tax law for "severely damaging industries of the future" — a reference to the legislation's attempt to throttle growing parts of the clean-energy sector where the United States is already lagging behind China.

Democrats have not gone on the attack like this against incubators of innovation. But they have treated investment in technology as a vehicle for other social change, rather than as an end unto itself. Exhibit A is the Biden administration's implementation of the CHIPS Act, when a law aimed at upgrading U.S. semiconductor manufacturing became an instrument for advancing progressive workplace equity policies. And Biden kept tech tycoons like Musk himself at a distance, viewing them as malignant oligarchs despite some obvious overlapping interests.

Despite his DOGE record, Musk could be a magnet for this strain of politics: one that says the United States must win the future by amassing all the intellectual and industrial might it can muster, using every available lever of

policy — including the tax code, trade deals, immigration policy, energy regulation and more.

High-tech research policy is not typical soapbox fare. But American leaders have a history of inspiring voters with scientific goals, separated from other cultural and interest-group politics. John F. Kennedy did not say the United States would put a man on the moon, so long as rockets were built in compliance with Davis-Bacon. Ronald Reagan did not call for scientists to help make nuclear weapons obsolete, provided that no woke postdocs were working in the lab.

Is all this an agenda for Musk's America Party? Probably not. It's unclear that the party will exist in any organized form or that Musk is even capable of executing a disciplined political strategy.

Still, in an age of churning disorder in U.S. politics, these ideological gaps and blind spots are opportunities for any political entrepreneur — especially one who can freely spend billions of dollars on an electoral experiment.

Welcome to POLITICO Nightly. Reach out with news, tips and ideas at nightly@politico.com. Or contact tonight's author at aburns@politico.com or on X (formerly known as Twitter) at [@alexanderburns](https://twitter.com/alexanderburns).

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WHAT'D I MISS?

— Trump sends tariff letters to Japan, South Korea, extending deadline: President Donald Trump [is threatening to slap 25 percent tariffs on Japan and South Korea](#) as he continues to negotiate trade deals with the countries ahead of a new Aug. 1 deadline. The rates, which were detailed in letters Trump posted to Truth Social Monday afternoon, effectively match the initial reciprocal tariffs Trump briefly imposed on the two countries in April.

But the letters extend the deadline for the tariffs to kick in — from July 9 to Aug. 1 — allowing negotiations to continue, as Trump continues to press the countries to increase their defense spending and boost agricultural imports, among other measures.

— Trump urges Brazil to spare its former president over

attempted coup: President Donald Trump is [coming to the defense of Brazilian former President Jair Bolsonaro](#) as he faces a trial for his role in trying to overturn the results of his country’s 2022 election. Bolsonaro is accused of participating in a plot to prevent the return of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency of the largest nation in South America, an attempt that echoed Trump’s own earlier efforts to stay in office despite losing an election. “Brazil is doing a terrible thing on their treatment of former President Jair Bolsonaro,” Trump wrote today on Truth Social. “I have watched, as has the World, as they have done nothing but come after him, day after day, night after night, month after month, year after year! He is not guilty of anything, except having fought for THE PEOPLE.”

— White House fights claims that NWS staffing hurt Texas flood

response: The White House [pushed back Monday against claims that the DOGE cuts to the National Weather Service played a role in the deadly floods](#) that swept through Texas Hill Country. President Donald Trump and the Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency presided over deep cuts to the NWS, but White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told reporters that the weather service issued alerts and the administration shouldn’t be blamed for the disaster. “That was an act of God,” Leavitt said. “It’s not the administration’s fault that the flood hit when it did. But there were early and consistent warnings, and again, the National Weather Service did its job.”

— Judge scolds DOJ for shifting positions on Abrego

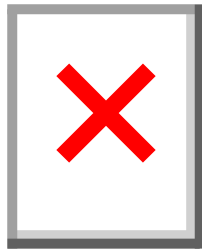
deportation: A federal judge grew frustrated today over [the Trump administration’s shifting claims about its handling of Kilmar Abrego Garcia’s illegal deportation](#) to El Salvador — and whether it plans to deport him again before a criminal case against him is resolved. U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis said getting certain answers from the administration was like “nailing jello to a wall” and ordered the Justice Department to produce a witness from the Department of Homeland Security on Thursday to testify about its designs for Abrego.

— Musk and Yang have connected on the billionaire's third party threat: As Elon Musk moves to create a third party to upend America's political system, [he's spoken with one-time Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang about the nascent effort](#). Yang, the 2020 White House contender and founder of the independent Forward Party, said in an interview that he has been "in touch" with Musk and his team.

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AROUND THE WORLD



The MV Tutor sinks in the Red Sea after it was struck by a Houthi drone vessel on June 12, 2024. | Etat-Major des Armées/France via AP

ATTACK AT SEA — At least two crew members of a Greek-owned vessel [were wounded and two were missing](#) today in the Red Sea, according to Greek government officials and the vessel's owner.

In the second comparable attack in the Red Sea in 24 hours, the Liberian-flagged Eternity C cargo ship was targeted by sea drones and skiffs off Hodeidah, 50 nautical miles west of the Yemeni capital Sanaa, which is controlled by the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels.

No one has claimed responsibility for the strikes.

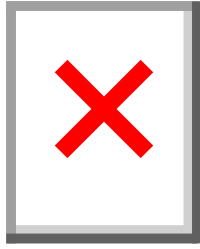
The attack came hours after Houthi militants claimed responsibility for a similar assault on another Greek-owned ship in the Red Sea, the Liberian-flagged bulk carrier Magic Seas, which they claimed to have sunk. The vessel was attacked on Sunday with drones, missiles and rocket-propelled grenades, forcing its crew to abandon ship. They were picked up by a passing vessel and transferred to Djibouti.

DEATH IN RUSSIA — Russia's former Transport Minister Roman Starovoit who was fired by President Vladimir Putin [has shot himself dead](#), Russian authorities said today.

According to Kremlin-controlled media, Starovoit was found dead with a gunshot wound in Odintsovo near Moscow. Officials said they believe it was a suicide. "The circumstances of the incident are being established. The main version is suicide," Russia's Investigative Committee Official Svetlana Petrenko said in a statement, as speculation swirled in Moscow.

The Kremlin published a decree earlier today saying that Putin had fired Starovoit, without giving an official reason for his dismissal — but airports across Russia have faced multiple delays, cancellations and stranded passengers over the weekend due to Ukrainian drone attacks.

One lawmaker said that Starovoit's death may have occurred before he was sacked by the president.



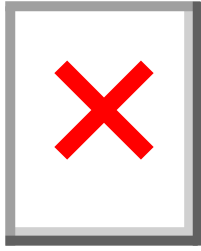
Around 80,000

The number of [Hondurans and Nicaraguans who are losing the temporary status](#) that allowed them to live and work in the United States for the last 25 years, after the Trump administration moved today to remove their Temporary Protected Status.

MLM MAGIC — The most-enduring multilevel marketing company, Nutrilite, began over 90 years ago. Since then, the business's model — which treats individual sellers as customers — has expanded to publicly traded companies, including one owned by Warren Buffet. Though some argue the companies are predatory and exploitative, [Robin Kaiser-Schatzlein writes for The New Republic](#) that multilevel marketing schemes do more than make money for those at the top of the chain. He argues that the potential of status and success from owning part of a business provides emotional and financial fulfillment during economic downturn.

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On this date in 1988: Iranian mourners in Tehran carry one of 72 caskets to the Cemetery of Martyrs after attending a mass funeral and "Death to America" rally in response to the downing of Iran Air Flight 655 by the USS Vincennes on July 3. | AP Photo

Jacqueline Munis contributed to this newsletter.

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