

Elon Unbound: Some first, second, and third-order effects of the election

By Glenn Harlan Reynolds

There are lots of consequences to this week's election, ranging from economics, to diplomacy, to outright freedom. But I want to focus on one in particular, what it means for Elon Musk.



It's quite possible that had Musk not become actively involved in Trump's campaign after the first assassination attempt, Trump wouldn't have won. It's certain that, had he won, it would have been much closer, not the landslide it turned out to be. And had Musk not bought Twitter earlier, thus disrupting the Democrats' message-control strategy, Trump's chances of winning at all would have been much, much lower.

But let's look at what it means for Musk, and what that means for America.

The first-order effect is that the campaign of bureaucratic harassment aimed at Musk under the Biden Administration, which likely would have escalated, will now recede. After facing a suspiciously simultaneous assault from the SEC, the EPA, the FAA, and various other regulatory agencies, Musk can now expect reasonably clear sailing. He won't be free from regulation, of course, but he will be free from bureaucrats' efforts to weaponize regulatory powers, and bureaucratic discretion, against him. Knowing his clout with the White House – and possibly his own budget-cutting powers if Trump actually makes him efficiency czar – they will be reluctant to cross him.

The second-order effect of that is that Musk will be able to move his space plans forward more rapidly. Instead of having to fight against bureaucratic headwinds, he'll be able to move at the speed that his technological capabilities permit. Musk's plans for 5 uncrewed test missions to Mars in 2026, followed by [human missions in 2028](#), will proceed if the rockets are ready.

There will also be Moon flights, Moon bases, at least one new space station, and possibly orbital solar power stations and asteroid mining beginning within a decade. The second-order effect of Trump's election is that humanity will likely take over the solar system, and do so decades earlier than it might have. (It's also much more likely that the humanity doing so will be largely American, instead of Chinese.) The result of this takeover will be incalculable amounts of resources available to humanity, and eventually a diversity of human settlement rivaling or exceeding that of Earth.

The third order effect, however, will be the biggest. This space expansion will turn America into a dynamic frontier nation again. As I wrote a few years ago in [America's New](#)

[Destiny in Space](#), the existence of the frontier had a huge impact on the character of America, making opportunity a positive-sum game rather than a zero- or negative-sum game.

And even beyond that, it imbues a sense of purpose. For her next book, my wife has been interviewing men of all ages, but what has struck her most is that younger men are looking for some grander purpose than working in a cubicle or going to school. (Many of them mentioned Elon Musk or Jordan Peterson as role models or influences.) And that search for purpose, and Musk's role in providing one, already bore fruit in this election. In an article on the "silent male voters" who appeared to vote for Trump – and, by extension, Elon, Claire Lehmann interviewed some of those guys at a Lower East Side bar on election night, and [reported](#):

Nothing about the young men I spoke to appeared particularly conservative or "right-wing." Yet it was easy for them to explain why they voted for Trump. And if we zoom out and look at broader cultural trends, it should be easy for us to understand too.

If we take a macro perspective, we see that such young men have never known a culture in which males are not routinely described as "problematic," "toxic," or "oppressive." Going to university, and working at modern companies, they live in a world of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies—many of which promote an insidious and pervasive form of anti-male discrimination. Yet to talk about it in public invites social ostracism. To criticise DEI is to risk being called a Nazi.

These young male voters know about theories of patriarchy and white supremacy, but they have never known a culture which celebrates the Great Man Theory of history. Thomas Carlyle's nineteenth-century framework for understanding the past is seen as an anachronism, not worthy of serious thought. Today we acknowledge historical figures not for their feats, but for their crimes. Whether it is due to slavery, colonisation,

racism, or sexism, we tear down the monuments of our past, while building no new heroes for our future.

The problem with this way of viewing the world is that it is alienating and self-defeating. It is also wrong. By any objective standards, Elon Musk is a great man of history, who is influencing the course of human civilisation for generations to come. As one party-goer told me, "He caught a fucking rocket with mechanical chopsticks." Yet despite his achievements, Musk is more likely to be scorned than celebrated by the Democratic establishment.

This tension between achievement and resentment explains much about our current moment. The young men I met that night in Manhattan weren't just voting for Trump's policies. They were voting for a different view of history and human nature. In their world, individual greatness matters. Male ambition serves a purpose. Risk-taking and defiance create progress.

Socialism doesn't favor Great Men, unless they're some sort of political Great Leader type. And it doesn't favor open horizons or positive-sum games, because socialists get their power – and at least as important – their self-importance from dividing up a fixed pie.



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Elon Musk explains why SpaceX sent Starman on Falcon Heavy:

"There need to be things that inspire you, that make you glad to wake up in the morning and be part of humanity.

That is why we did it.

We did it for you."



But dynamic societies, while worse for the *apparatchiks*, are better in general, and exploration and expansion are how you get a dynamic society. This was true in the day of Columbus, and it's true now. In my Columbus Day postings I regularly quote Samuel Eliot Morison's [*Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus*](#), a book that is undoubtedly viewed with suspicion by today's academic drips. But this passage is seeming newly apt:

At the end of 1492 most men in Western Europe felt exceedingly gloomy about the future. Christian civilization appeared to be shrinking in area and dividing into hostile units as its sphere contracted. For over a century there had been no important advance in natural science and registration in the universities dwindled as the instruction they offered became

increasingly jejune and lifeless. Institutions were decaying, well-meaning people were growing cynical or desperate, and many intelligent men, for want of something better to do, were endeavoring to escape the present through studying the pagan past. . . .

Yet, even as the chroniclers of Nuremberg were correcting their proofs from Koberger's press, a Spanish caravel named Nina scudded before a winter gale into Lisbon with news of a discovery that was to give old Europe another chance. In a few years we find the mental picture completely changed. Strong monarchs are stamping out privy conspiracy and rebellion; the Church, purged and chastened by the Protestant Reformation, puts her house in order; new ideas flare up throughout Italy, France, Germany and the northern nations; faith in God revives and the human spirit is renewed. The change is complete and startling: "A new envisagement of the world has begun, and men are no longer sighing after the imaginary golden age that lay in the distant past, but speculating as to the golden age that might possibly lie in the oncoming future."

Christopher Columbus belonged to an age that was past, yet he became the sign and symbol of this new age of hope, glory and accomplishment. His medieval faith impelled him to a modern solution: Expansion.

I've quoted this passage somewhat hopefully with regard to space exploration and development in the past. Now I'm much more hopeful. The consequences of Elon's dream moving forward will not only be good for those who go to Mars, but also for those of us who don't. Ad Astra, per ardua.

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