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# Squaring Elon Musk's EV Future With Donald Trump's EV Knocks

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7–8 minutes

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When it comes to the newly declared bromance between [Elon Musk](#) and [Donald Trump](#), there remains an inconvenient truth: electric vehicles.

Musk is all about them, while [Trump has been campaigning](#) against them.

But in recent weeks, a subtle détente emerged that helps explain how Musk could justify his [endorsement of Trump](#) for the White House—even if it might seem on the surface counter to his interests as the chief executive of [Tesla](#), the world's bestselling EV maker.

In short, Trump says he is OK with electric cars as long as the government isn't forcing their purchase. And Musk is reiterating that he is OK killing off government subsidies for EVs.

The very public embrace appears to be a gamble on Musk's part that he will be able to influence Trump on a host of issues—from AI regulations, space contracts and more—and that Tesla is already so far ahead in [developing electric cars](#) that it doesn't need the kinds of government help it once did for the technology to

take root.

“Take away the subsidies. It will only help Tesla,” [Musk tweeted](#) this past week in the midst of pushback from Tesla supporters questioning his new bedfellow.

For so many years, the entrepreneur was working to turn the automobile industry toward electrification. Now, Musk appears OK with pulling up the bridge to the EV future while rivals are still trying to cross. The risk is that Tesla remains alone on the EV side—at least in the U.S.—and others simply retrench, dooming a broader electric transition.

The former president has made the [electrification of the automobile](#) a cudgel on the campaign trail to hit President Biden, suggesting that the Democrat is trying to stuff costly EVs down the throats of Americans at the expense of manufacturing jobs (including in key swing states).

“The damn things don’t go far enough and they’re too expensive,” Trump said of EVs during a rally near Detroit in September.

The Environmental Protection Agency has said it isn’t imposing an EV mandate. Republican critics argue that the Biden administration’s [tightening of emission standards](#) effectively requires electric vehicles to make up an increasingly larger part of future car sales over gasoline-powered ones.

The politicization of electric cars during the past 18 months is credited with hindering sales growth and disrupting plans by automakers who had previously announced aggressive ambitions to ramp up production as they aimed to replace their lineups with new EVs, in part to meet those regulations.

Even Tesla has been affected by a slowdown in sales. It is still too early to say how Musk's high-profile endorsement of Trump might affect Tesla's customer base, which traditionally had a large segment of buyers who identified as Democrats. His embrace of contentious social topics late last year coincided with the [proportion of Democrats buying Tesla vehicles](#) falling off dramatically, only to return as he calmed down for a bit.

In California, a primarily blue state, the [registration of new Tesla vehicles](#), a proxy for sales, fell 17% in the first six months of this year while the overall industry remained relatively flat, according to the California New Car Dealers Association.

All the while in recent months, Trump and Musk have been talking [behind the scenes](#), repairing a chippy relationship. The results of those private talks lately began emerging in public.

Last month, during an appearance in Arizona, Trump's tone changed. While he continued to decry EV policies, he added a twist.

"I'm a big fan of electric cars, I'm a fan of Elon—I like Elon," Trump told the crowd. "I like him, and I think a lot of people are going to want to buy electric cars but...if you want to buy a different type of car you have to have a choice—some people need to go far."

A few days later, at the [Tesla annual shareholder meeting](#), an investor asked Musk: "He surprised us by saying he's a big fan of Tesla and a big fan of you. What did you tell him?"

"Well, you know, I can be persuasive," Musk said to laughter.

The billionaire added that they have been talking about electric cars, saying a lot of Trump's friends now own Tesla vehicles and

that the former president is a “huge fan” of the company’s Cybertruck pickup.

“He’s very nice when he calls,” Musk said, “and I was like, you know, electric cars I think are pretty good for the future, America’s the leader in electric cars...buy America.”

Trump, too, alluded to their conversations, including that he shared his criticisms of the technology’s limits with Musk. “I tell him...and, I think he agrees with me frankly, they don’t go far,” Trump said in June.

For Trump, whatever has been said to patch things up seems to be working. He has won Musk’s full embrace and with it the megaphone that comes with his almost 200 million followers on X and potentially some of his personal fortune in the form of [contributions to help the campaign](#).

For Musk? Perhaps it will be as simple as a friend in the White House willing to hear what he has to say after his relationship with Biden devolved into bitterness and recrimination. [Musk’s own mother](#) has publicly fumed about how badly she felt her son was treated by the Democrat, who aggressively advocated for EVs but didn’t give Musk the kind of credit the billionaire said he deserved. (Reached for comment, the Biden campaign said America doesn’t want or need “arrogant billionaires only out for themselves.”)

When it comes to Musk, the Trump world has, at times, been savvier. In 2020, for example, Trump called Musk “one of our great geniuses, and we have to protect our genius,” and the Republican Party’s platform, celebrated at its convention, included rosy language about expanding the commercial-space sector.

“Elon Musk is in some ways a throwback to an older generation of American entrepreneur—he builds real things, he builds cars, he builds rockets—and that’s, I think, the kind of economy that President Trump wants to create,” JD Vance told Newsmax this past week after he was named Trump’s pick for vice president. The senator from Ohio had proposed legislation to eliminate federal tax credits for EVs.

Then, during his convention speech Thursday, Trump returned to talking about ending electric-car policies that he dislikes on “day one” of his new administration. But, again as in June, he took a moment during his attacks to stress one thing.

“By the way,” Trump said of cars, “I’m all for electric, they have their application, but if somebody wants to buy a gas-powered car...or a hybrid, they’re gonna be able to do it.”

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Appeared in the July 22, 2024, print edition as 'Musk, Trump in EV Detente'.