

POLITICS

What the Broligarchs Want From Trump

Tremendous power is flowing to tech and finance magnates.

By Brooke Harrington



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After Donald Trump won this month's election, one of the first things he did was to name two unelected male plutocrats, Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, to run a new Department of Government Efficiency. The yet-to-be-created entity's acronym, DOGE, is something of a joke—a reference to a cryptocurrency named for an [internet meme involving a Shiba Inu](#). But its appointed task of [reorganizing the federal bureaucracy and slashing its spending](#) heralds a new political arrangement in Washington: a broligarchy, in which tremendous power is flowing to tech and finance magnates, some of whom appear indifferent or even overtly hostile to democratic tradition.

The broligarchs' ranks also include the PayPal and Palantir co-founder Peter Thiel—Vice President–Elect J. D. Vance's [mentor, former employer, and primary financial backer](#)—as well as venture capitalists like Marc Andreessen and David Sacks, both of whom added millions of dollars to Trump's campaign. Musk, to be sure, is the archetype. The world's

richest man has reportedly been sitting in on the president-elect's calls with at least three heads of foreign states: [Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky](#), [Serbia's Aleksandar Vučić](#), and Turkey's [Recep Tayyip Erdoğan](#). Musk joined Trump in welcoming [Argentine President Javier Milei](#) at [Mar-a-Lago](#) and, according to *The New York Times*, met privately in New York with Iran's ambassador to the United Nations in a [bid to "defuse tensions" between that country and the United States](#). Recently, after Musk publicly endorsed the financier Howard Lutnick for secretary of the Treasury, some in Trump's camp [were concerned](#) that Musk was acting as a "co-president," *The Washington Post* reported.

Musk doesn't always get what he wants; Trump [picked Lutnick to be secretary of commerce](#) instead. Even so, the brologarchs' ascendancy on both the foreign- and domestic-policy fronts has taken many observers by surprise—including me, even though [I wrote last August](#) about the brologarchs' deepening political alignment with Trump. Though some of them have previously opposed Trump because of his immigration or tariff policies, the brologarchs share his [politics of impunity](#): the idea that some men should be above the law. This defiant rejection of all constraint by and obligation to the societies that made them wealthy is common among the world's ultrarich, [a group whose practices and norms I have studied](#) for nearly two decades. Trump has exemplified this ethos, up to the present moment: He is [currently in violation of a law](#)—which he signed into effect during his first term—requiring incoming presidents to agree to an ethics pledge.

Trump—who infamously said of sexual assault, "[When you're a star, they let you do it](#)"—cites his celebrity as a basis for his elevation above the law. Many brologarchs also see themselves as exceptional beings, but arrived at that view through a different path: via science fiction, fantasy literature, and comic books. Ideas from these genres have long pervaded Silicon Valley culture; last year, Andreessen published a manifesto calling for "[Becoming Technological Supermen, defined by embarking on a "Hero's Journey" and "conquering dragons."](#)

Superhero narratives also appear to inform many of Musk's more eccentric political views, including his [reported belief](#) that the [superintelligent have a duty to reproduce](#), and may help explain why in September he reposted a claim that "[a Republic of high status males](#)" would be superior to our current democracy. Last week, Musk [likened Matt Gaetz](#), Trump's then-nominee for attorney general, to Judge Dredd, a dystopian comic-book character authorized to conduct summary executions. Musk seems to have meant this as a compliment. He described Gaetz—who, until his resignation from the House, was [under a congressional investigation](#) in connection with an alleged sex-trafficking scheme—as "our Hammer of Justice."

Whatever its source, the brologarchs' sense of their innate superiority has led many of them to positions on taxation quite similar to Trump's. In 2016, the Republican presidential nominee bragged about avoiding tax payments for years—"That makes me smart," he [crowed from the debate stage](#). The brologarchs have quietly liberated themselves from one of the only certainties in life. As ProPublica [reported in 2021](#), Musk paid zero federal income taxes in 2018 and a de facto tax rate of 3.3 percent from 2014 to 2018, during which his wealth grew by \$13.9 billion. Thiel used a government program

intended to [expand retirement savings by middle-class Americans](#) to amass \$5 billion in capital-gains income, completely tax-free. The [Trump-friendly brologarchs' political ascendancy](#) turns the rallying cry of the Boston Tea Party on its head, achieving representation with minimal taxation.

In their hostility to taxation and regulation, the men who rule Wall Street and Silicon Valley resemble earlier generations of wealthy capitalists who enjoyed outsize influence on American politics. Even some tech barons who supported Kamala Harris [clamored for the firing of Federal Trade Commission Chair Lina Khan](#), who favors vigorous antitrust enforcement. But the brologarchs are distinct from old-school American oligarchs in one key respect: Their political vision seeks to undermine the nation-state system globally. Musk, among others, has [set his sights on the privatization and colonization of space](#) with [little or no government involvement](#). Thiel and Andreessen have invested heavily in creating alternatives to the nation-state here on Earth, including [libertarian colonies with minimal taxation](#). One such colony is up and running in [Honduras](#); Thiel has also invested in [efforts to create artificial islands and other autonomous communities](#) to serve as new outposts for private governance. “The nature of government is about to change at a very fundamental level,” Thiel [said of these initiatives](#) in 2008.

Cryptocurrency is the financial engine of the brologarchs' political project. For centuries, states have been defined by two monopolies: first, on the legitimate use of coercive force (as by the military and the police); and second, on control of the money supply. Today's brologarchs have long sought to weaken government control of global finance. Thiel notes in his 2014 book, *Zero to One*, that when he, Musk, and others started PayPal, it “had a suitably grand mission ... We wanted to create a new internet currency to replace the U.S. dollar.” If brologarchs succeed in making cryptocurrency a major competitor to or replacement for the dollar, the effects could be enormous. The American currency is also the [world's reserve currency](#)—a global medium of exchange. This has contributed to U.S. economic dominance in the world for 80 years and gives Washington greater latitude to use financial and economic pressure as an alternative to military action.

Undercutting the dollar could enrich brologarchs [who hold considerable amounts](#) of wealth in cryptocurrencies, but would also weaken the United States and likely [destabilize the world economy](#). Yet Trump—despite his pledge to “Make America great again” and his previous claims that crypto was a [“scam” against the dollar](#)—now seems fully on board with the brologarchs' agenda. Signaling this alignment during his campaign, Trump gave the [keynote speech at a crypto conference](#) last July; he later pledged [to make crypto a centerpiece of American monetary policy](#) via purchase of a strategic bitcoin reserve. The day after the election, one crypto advocate posted on X, [“We have a #Bitcoin president.”](#) The incoming administration is reportedly vetting candidates for the role of [“crypto czar.”](#)

If American economic and political dominance [recedes](#), the country's wealthiest men may be well positioned to fill and profit from the power vacuum that results. But in a weakened country, greater global instability, and rule by a wealthy few really what voters wanted when they chose Trump?

Musk spent millions of dollars to support Trump’s campaign and promoted it on X. He’s now doing everything he can to capitalize on Trump’s victory and maximize his own power—to the point of [sicking his X followers on obscure individual government officials](#). Some evidence, including *Axios*’s [recent focus-group study of swing voters](#), suggests that Americans may already feel queasy about the influence of the brologarchs. “I didn’t vote for him,” one participant said of Musk. “I don't know what his ultimate agenda would be for having that type of access.” Another voter added, “There’s nothing, in my opinion, in Elon Musk’s history that shows that he’s got the best interest of the country or its citizens in mind.” Even so, we can expect him and his fellow brologarchs to extend their influence as far as they can for as long as Trump lets them.

About the Author

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