

Can a democracy survive the amounts Musk can spend on politics?

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Democracy is based on the principle of rule by the people – all of whom stand equal in the process. But with the money he's willing to spend, Musk does not stand equal in any democratic country – and can upturn free choice as a result. That is a threat we have to manage.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1oVsEqUDBk?si=Nt8uBSIHhn3lhkT-

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=gpnjg-177a84b-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript.

Is Elon Musk a threat to democracy? It's a question that needs to be asked for one very simple reason, and that is I think he might be.

Let me look at two examples that suggest that he is a threat to democracy. One is happening in the USA right now.

The US House of Representatives, which is the lower House of Congress, the equivalent of the House of Commons in the UK, has a Bill before it right now, as we approach Christmas, that has to be passed to authorise the spending of the federal government

in 2025.

Now, what the federal government spends is pretty important to the US people. It covers things like the armed forces, air traffic control and Medicare, which is the equivalent of the NHS for those who are in real need in the USA, and some social security. And it pays the interest on the US national debt. So having that Bill passed, it's pretty important.

But, Musk, using his social media platform - call it Twitter, call it X, call it what you will - has mobilised opposition to that bill because he claims it is going to be the antithesis of what he is going to be asked to do by President Trump, who has asked him to slash US federal expenditure. So, he is encouraging the House of Representatives to reject this Bill, where a bipartisan agreement between the Republicans and the Democrats looked as though it had been pulled together to ensure that the spending could continue.

The consequence of the failure of that bill is pretty significant.

US armed forces will, for example, not be paid. There won't be any legal basis to pay them.

Nor will US air traffic controllers be paid.

Nor will Medicare bills be paid. And half of U. S. children are dependent on Medicare for their healthcare support.

This is really existential stuff when it comes to the maintenance of the federal government in the USA.

But Musk is standing up against it. He's using the power that he has obtained as a financial oligarch - and I think that's a fair word to use in his case, so wealthy is he - to actually mobilise opinion against the forces in the House of Representatives who were, despite their differences of opinion across the Republican and Democrat benches, coming together to try to authorise that spending so that federal government could continue.

Now, if that isn't a personal threat to democracy from a very powerful person, I'm not sure what is. And it worries me, because this is the use of power by somebody with immense wealth, who has already used that wealth to influence the election of Donald Trump by, we believe, expending something like \$270 million to support Trump's campaign.

But it's the use of that wealth to actually influence outcomes within democracy in a way that might be severely contrary to the wellbeing of the employees of the federal government, including the US armed forces, but also the people of the USA. So, there is a direct conflict here.

And now let's come to the UK. What we know is that Nigel Farage, the leader of the Reform Party, is seeing Musk and is asking him for financial support for his party. He's not hiding this fact. He's completely brazen about it, and pictures have been taken at Mar-a-Lago, which is, of course, Donald Trump's place in Florida, where it seems the centre of power now is in the USA.

And the request that Farage is making is simple and straightforward. He wants Musk to provide him with substantial funds - a figure of a hundred million, I'm not sure whether it's dollars or pounds, it doesn't make a lot of difference which one it is - has been requested to fund Reform to win the 2029 general election.

That is out of all proportion to any funding ever previously supplied by anyone to a UK political party. It would swamp Reform with money and change the nature of UK democracy as a consequence because no other party could stand up to the pressure that would be brought to bear by Reform in that case through advertising on social media, in the media, in direct mailing, and everything else. This is an attempt to take over democracy by spending.

Now, of course, it may not happen. Let's be clear: Musk might entertain Farage, but he might see through him and decide he doesn't want to part with his money for this reason.

But equally, messages have come out which have implied that he might. And if he did, the nature of UK democracy would at the very least change altogether forever, and it might simply cease to exist because I cannot see another source of funding that could in any way match that which Musk - as the wealthiest, or if not the wealthiest, one of the most wealthy men in the world - can supply.

And legally he's able to do this. Although he's not a British citizen and therefore is not able to make a direct donation to a UK political party, because he has businesses that operate in the UK, he can donate through them. And that is, of course, where the weak underbelly in his plan is.

If we are to preserve democracy, which is based upon the idea that one person has one vote, and that each person stands equal, then we have to exclude the likes of Musk from influence within British politics.

We also have to exclude the likes of quite a lot of other people who have undoubtedly been trying to influence politics in their favour for some time by making significant donations to, in particular, the Conservative Party, but also to Labour and, to a lesser degree, to other parties. We would need to clean up British political party funding.

We might also need to change our electoral system to defend ourselves against the possibility that one party, with an enormous amount of money to spend, could secure an overwhelming majority in Parliament without having mass support in the population

- a bit like Labour has now, to be totally honest, which is as unacceptable to me as it would be if Reform won on the same basis in 2029 because neither represents the people of this country.

So, we need to keep dirty money, in the sense that it is trying to buy influence, out of British politics.

And we need to make British politics representative of us all by being based upon proportional representation.

That would curiously increase Reform's representation in Parliament. And I would be happy with that. I could live with that because people in this country do support Reform. And their voices should be heard as a result. But what it would prevent is the corruption - because we could not find someone like Musk funding a party in the UK to take control with a minority of votes.

And this is key. We must preserve democracy, shallow as it is at present, because without it, we get an alternative. We get oligarchy. We get what The Economist calls kakistocracy, which is rule by the most unfit - those who want power, but who are not suited to manage it. Whatever we end up with, is going to be very much worse than the democracy we have, inadequate as it is.

And therefore, this is a time for democratic renewal in the UK, heeding the threats, the challenges, and the impossibilities that are arising in the USA - which we thought would never happen, but which are, and which could so easily be replicated here unless, Labour now realises the threat to our future that the likes of Musk, even if not Musk himself, present to this country.

They must act. They must stop that sort of money coming into British politics. And most of all, they must change our electoral system so that it is truly representative. Then we have a chance of democracy surviving. And everything else that we cherish depends upon that.