

Elon Musk first month of destroying America will cost us decades

And things can still get worse.

by [Elizabeth Lopatto](#)



[Elizabeth Lopatto](#) is a reporter who writes about tech, money, and human behavior. She joined The Verge in 2014 as science editor. Previously, she was a reporter at Bloomberg. Let's pause and look at what the Elon Musk administration has done so far.

There's been a lot of panic about the immediate but somewhat abstract constitutional crisis as Elon Musk's misleadingly-named Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) rips the government apart. And [as much fun as we all are having](#) watching Congress render itself irrelevant and wondering whether the courts even matter, there's a concrete nightmare looming. Mass unemployment, the defunding of crucial social programs, and just plain incompetence mean that America, as we know it, is already in for hard times.

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The scale of destruction in the past four weeks starts at the Soviet devotion to Lysenkoist biological theories, and at maximum, is the American version of Mao's Cultural Revolution: a disastrous triumph of ideological purity over basic reality. I am not sure it has occurred to the majority of people that we are about to make a Great Leap Forward and destroy our prosperous, relatively peaceful society.

Musk has, in the short term, set us up for a shock to the economy from both unemployment and frozen government grants. This will be felt more or less immediately.

But the long-term costs will be measured in decades. The degree to which we have failed not merely ourselves but also our children and grandchildren is breathtaking. Musk projects — such as undercutting practical preparations for possible disasters and dismantling an educational and scientific system so good that our actual enemies send their children to us for college — combine with disastrous Trump policies like mass deportation to undermine American society. And by alienating our longtime allies and cozying up to Russia, we set ourselves up to be a pariah state.

Let's start with the federal workers. How many federal workers has Elon Musk fired? As of Valentine's Day, *Reuters* [figured 10,000](#). That number is almost certainly higher now. Many of the “probationary” employees he targeted were, in fact, quite senior — people who had just gotten promoted or who had been working for government contractors and then transitioned to working for the government itself. Often, these people were military veterans. Another [75,000 have taken a buyout](#) from the Musk regime.

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Among those fired: [hundreds of Federal Aviation Administration employees](#), including air traffic controllers that keep flying safe. [Over 1,000 people from the Department of Veterans Affairs](#), which provides healthcare to vets. On top of these specifics lies the basic fact that unemployed people have less money to spend in the rest of the economy. The pain might be most visible in reputationally liberal areas like the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland. But it's widespread — Kansas City, Missouri, for instance, [doesn't have enough jobs](#) to absorb all its ex-federal workers. There are [laid-off workers in Illinois, Oklahoma, Iowa, and Florida](#) — in fact, all over the US.

It gets worse, because the recent pause in federal spending — driven first by an executive order from President Donald Trump and now by the chaos of DOGE — threatens the stability of many, many more people. Take, for instance, farmers and ranchers. They're Trump voters, mostly, but this [may push many of them into bankruptcy](#), since they depended on government programs to pay for farm upgrades they already made. The dismantling of the US Agency for International Development, or USAID, means that an agricultural buyer who dropped [\\$2 billion into the sector](#) is now gone. Rural areas [broadly rely on federal funding](#), of course.

It gets worse. Acts of aggression toward our trading partners mean that Canadians are [starting to avoid US products](#). The EU is [considering an import block on soybeans](#). That's fewer places for farmers and ranchers to sell their products. America might not [give a good goddamn](#) about [science](#) or [scientists](#), but [cutting their funds also hits hospitals](#), which guarantees worse patient care.

Did you think I was done? I haven't even gotten to the existential disasters. The Department of Agriculture has fired, [it says accidentally](#), a number of people working on bird flu. (The agency is now attempting to rehire those workers.) Because the Musk regime froze all communications, [there was no word](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on bird flu for weeks.

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There are other things to fear. DOGE reportedly [fired a bunch of nuclear workers](#) before realizing that they were, in fact, quite necessary, and [then struggled to rehire them](#). Oops! Good thing that's only nuclear weapons. Nothing to worry about, I'm sure.

DOGE isn't [yet inside the CDC](#), where all the dangerous microbes are kept, but they're aiming at it. Also, the CDC has access to all electronic healthcare records — so if, let's say, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. decides he wants to ship everyone on psych meds to a work farm, [a thing he has proposed](#), he can do that.

The Trump administration, obviously, would have done some of this damage without Musk — he wasn't leading the initial federal spending freeze or bringing in witless cronies, like RFK, Brendan Carr, and Kash Patel, with their own idiotic agendas. But DOGE has targeted a shocking sweep of basic government services with an unprecedented level of slash-and-burn nihilism. There's no considered plan, just careless mass destruction — and Musk's desire to control everything, whatever the risks.

DOGE is said to be seeking access to [detailed financial records](#) about every American taxpayer. [Musk also wants access to Notify.gov](#), which contains everyone's phone numbers, along with details such as whether they receive Medicaid. A [Social Security chief resigned](#) rather than let Musk into those

systems. He reportedly has access to bank account numbers, Social Security numbers, and other personal details as part of the [“God mode” access](#) granted to DOGE. So far, this access has only been confirmed at USAID — but it’s not difficult to imagine that it’s been granted elsewhere, too.

Oh, [DOGE is apparently now inside CISA](#), indiscriminately hacking away at staff. No way that can possibly expose sensitive information to the US’s adversaries, of which there seem to be an increasing number lately.

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How organized is DOGE? Well, they’re struggling to keep straight whether a contract is worth [\\$8 million or \\$8 billion](#). This isn’t an operation targeting government waste. It’s about destroying anyone and anything that might be targeted toward having a functioning society — effete goals like feeding the hungry, stopping climate change, and caring for the sick. DOGE relies on operatives’ elite [mastery of the Ctrl + F shortcut](#) and their fierce commitment to anti-“woke” Silicon Valley supremacy. Who needs government expertise when you’ve got ideological conviction, right? [Destroying bourgeois experts](#) has never [led to bad results!](#)

The military was one of the last DOGE holdouts, but [lists have already been submitted](#) for layoffs there — supplemented by plans from TV personality and [drunkard](#) Pete Hegseth, who is for some reason the defense secretary, to fire generals and other senior staff, possibly as soon as this week.

You may, at this point, be wondering, “What about Donald Trump?” It is perhaps worth noting that at no previous point in my lifetime has a sitting president had to [appear on television](#) and tell the public that he is not being manipulated by a scheming vizier. Not even George W. Bush had to do that, and plenty of people were suspicious of Dick Cheney.

Anyway, Trump shares many of Musk’s goals and has spent his free time dismantling the Pax Americana while sanctioning overseas concentration camps for refugees and dubbing himself a king. If Trump decides to try wresting back control of domestic politics from Musk, the destruction will continue — albeit perhaps with fewer people named “Big Balls.”

The Purge is being declared, but only for Trump supporters

Of course, if Musk and Trump turn on each other, that could wreak its own havoc. Sure, Musk has control of all the payments systems, everyone’s personal data, and a bunch of other sensitive stuff, but Trump also has, you know, an army.

Beside atrocities like [blocking AIDS relief](#) and the [Panamanian jungle](#) concentration camps, attacks on the rule of law might seem a little dry. Who cares that the disgraced mayor of New York may skate on corruption charges in an [open quid pro quo](#) arrangement? But let me make it practical: the Purge is being declared, but only for Trump supporters. Any illegal or violent activity they engage in will be excused, especially if it targets Trump or Musk’s supposed enemies. Pardoning January 6th rioters was just the start.

As all this happens, the putative opposition party is still [watching SNL](#), voting to [confirm picks for the Trump / Musk regime](#), and tweeting [weird shit about inflation](#). Aside from [Alexandria Ocasio-](#)

Cortez — who is presently being threatened by Trump's border czar for informing people of their rights — there has barely been pushback. New York Governor Kathy Hochul, perhaps the most lukewarm Democrat in existence, has nevertheless managed to make one of the strongest showings in the party by slamming the “king” comments. Certainly, there's resistance from some Americans. People have been annoying their elected officials and protesting fairly continuously.

But many more people are simply tuning out — trying to pretend this isn't happening. Well, it's a matter of time before all this comes for them: the potential recession; the impoverished dystopia; the sicker, worse America.

Put it all together. We are in the process of being rendered unemployed, sick, helpless, and fearful of a law that works nakedly in the interest of Musk's power. I still believe it is possible to stop what is in motion, but the window is closing. It has only been a month. Think of what a year will bring — and what we will lose.