

Boycott Tesla

Electric car buyers don't like right-wing politics. This means Elon Musk's position at Tesla is very vulnerable and susceptible to economic pressure.

- "We struggle to think of anything analogous in the history of the automotive industry, in which a brand has lost so much value so quickly," wrote JP Morgan analysts this week. They were describing the reputation crisis facing Tesla, one of the world's leading electric vehicle manufacturers. The problem for Tesla is straightforward: their CEO, Elon Musk, has embraced hard-right politics. He has supported the neo-Nazi-friendly AfD party in Germany and even made a gesture that looked an awful lot like a Nazi salute at Donald Trump's inauguration. (Nazis were certainly thrilled by it.) Musk has a leading role in a presidential administration that is waging war on the civil service and gutting climate and environmental policies.
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- Musk's political swing is a brand disaster for Tesla, because their product is electric cars. That means that their most likely consumers are Democrats. The Republican Party broadly dislikes electric cars and has promised a fossil future. While Tesla owners have a mix of politics, Gallup polling has found that 71 percent of Republicans "would not consider owning an electric vehicle" (compared with 17 percent of Democrats). It's not purely ideological, because "Republicans are more likely to live in areas

with less charging infrastructure [while] [c]ities and areas with more progressive governments typically have more plugs available." But because Teslas are expensive and charging an electric car can be inconvenient, climate consciousness and "the appeal of the 'green' movement" is a major reason why people buy them. With their combination of luxury and eco-friendliness, Teslas long ago became "the car of choice for virtue-signaling Democrats," and in fact a major problem for EVs is that they are "seen as political statements, not as cars."

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- Musk has now made sure "virtue-signaling Democrats" want nothing to do with his company. He couldn't have more enthusiastically embraced the MAGA movement. He spent hundreds of millions of dollars on getting Trump back into power and is personally supervising Trump's attack on regulatory agencies. In doing so, Musk is showing contempt for the very people most likely to want to buy his cars (professional class Democrats), and he's poisoning his brand. Driving a Tesla is now "like driving a big red MAGA hat," and some have nicknamed it the "Swasticar." (As with the hats, its best use might be as a people repellent.) The press is full of stories quoting Tesla owners who became embarrassed by their cars:
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 - "I got it because it was great for the environment, and at the time he was more on the liberal side of politics," [said one owner.] But, she added, she felt that Musk by last fall had become "volatile and

turned radically right." "I wouldn't want people to think I was a Trumper or that I am associated with Elon, because he is so tied to the brand... I am so happy I sold it, because if I was driving it today, in the current climate I would be so embarrassed."

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- Of course, these are just anecdotes. But Tesla has taken a serious hit to its stock price, which was only temporarily reversed when Donald Trump turned the White House lawn into a Tesla showroom. (Ironically, Trump's endorsement may have actually hurt Tesla even more, because it only exacerbated the very problem facing the company.) Financial publications report that "Musk has done little to reassure investors" and patience is "wearing thin" even among Musk's most bullish supporters.
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- Tesla's stockholders and board members have long tolerated the fact that Musk doesn't give Tesla his full attention, since he's also the CEO of three other companies (SpaceX, Twitter/X, and xAI, as well as being involved in two others, Neuralink and The Boring Company). His inattention was immaterial as long as the share price kept going up, which for a long time it did, to the point where it looked like an unsustainable bubble. The interest of Tesla shareholders is in making money, not in efficiently and effectively bringing about a green transition. They therefore had no reason to object when Musk demanded a \$50 billion pay package or created the world's ugliest truck, which has been recalled multiple times and is seeing its demand dry up. (To me, the Cybertruck looks like the car of choice for a death squad in a dystopian movie.)

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- It's a different story when Musk's antics begin to affect the bottom line, which is why investors are getting spooked. Eighty-five percent of them now believe Musk's politics are having a negative or very negative effect on the company, and they stand to lose quite a bit of money if he continues to show no interest in fixing the brand. Protests have now broken out at Tesla dealerships, flyers have appeared in the Bay Area demanding that owners sell their cars, liberal owners have put stickers on their Teslas disavowing Elon, and Teslas have even been vandalized.
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- Boycotts are not always an effective weapon, but in the case of Tesla, protesters may have found an important way in which the world's richest man can be pressured, or at least punished, over his politics. If Elon Musk's presence harms Tesla enough, a huge portion of his own net worth will be wiped out, and with it some of his power, because Musk uses Tesla stock as collateral for loans and sells the stock in order to buy things. A collapsing Tesla stock genuinely erodes Elon's economic power. If the stock is hurt enough, Tesla's board will have no choice but to remove Musk as CEO in order to save the company.
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- This makes a strong case for an organized, disciplined, and total boycott of Tesla. Musk is doing catastrophic damage to the United States right now by helping a president who wants to destroy the social safety net, consumer protection, and the environment. Musk

putting USAID into the “wood chipper” has already destroyed vital social programs in developing countries and has likely consigned many vulnerable poor people to disease and death. (That he did this with glee shows that he is a deeply evil man.) There are not many levers of power that the dissatisfied can use to stop or slow down Musk and Trump. But the boycott may be surprisingly powerful.

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- The method is simple: first, don't buy a Tesla. Very easy, because most of us weren't considering it anyway. There are other electric cars on the market. Many are cheaper than Teslas. But then go further. Friends don't let friends buy Teslas. If you know someone with a Tesla, encourage them to sell it. Don't even take a ride in a Tesla. It should feel like driving a big red MAGA hat. Protests outside dealerships should escalate.
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- This is a peaceful method of registering dissatisfaction. (No, do not destroy cars and Tesla dealerships! A protest becomes popular when it has the clear moral high ground.) It shows that Musk cannot rely on the public to continue buying his cars while he slashes federal programs. It will make Elon Musk panic, even if he doesn't show it. It will severely undermine his empire. It might even bring an end to “DOGE,” if it truly threatens the future of his company and he decides to prioritize saving Tesla over serving Trump.
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- Republicans are clearly alarmed by a Tesla boycott. Trump denounced it as “illegal,” which it is not, since anyone can decide what car they’d like to buy. They are already trying to portray a Tesla boycott as hypocritical or somehow internally inconsistent. Oh ho ho, you are in favor of EV mandates and yet you boycott the leading EV manufacturer. Guess you don’t care about climate change! But it’s precisely because we care about climate change that we don’t want the EPA destroyed, and Musk has allied himself with climate deniers and exposed that he never really cared about the effects of global warming. It’s no different to boycott Tesla than it would have been to boycott Ford because Henry Ford was pro-Nazi. That wouldn’t have meant an opposition to combustion engines, and boycotting Tesla says nothing about one’s stance on EVs or climate. At the same time as we try to undermine Tesla specifically, we should be demanding a real Green New Deal that will lead America full speed ahead toward a complete switch to renewable energy, which must include a rapid and dramatic reduction in fossil fuel emissions.
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- Musk has saddled himself to a movement that wants to undermine the EV transition. That’s pretty foolish. His cars should, by now, have a virtually nonexistent customer base: is the Cybertruck supposed to appeal to “people who vote Trump but also care about the climate”? Good luck finding those people—and getting them to shell out \$100,000 for an ugly, poorly-made truck, one that people will throw eggs at, and will be booed and pelted with Mardi Gras

beads if it tries to join a parade in New Orleans. Who wants the grief of being a Tesla owner in the Trump era?

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- As we know, capitalist companies are amoral in their pursuit of profit. It is therefore up to us, the public, to punish this company by peacefully stigmatizing the purchase of Musk's products and doing everything we can to drive the stock price to zero.