

## ELON MUSK CONTROLS YOUR WORLD

In the first three days of 2025, Elon Musk commandeered global politics through dozens of rapid-fire, often inflammatory posts to his 210 million followers on X.

The world's richest man called for the release of a jailed British far-right extremist. He shared a post pressing King Charles III to dissolve Parliament and order a new general election, as he posted memes and a flurry of attacks directed at Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Musk accused Starmer of failing to prosecute so-called "rape gangs" more than a decade ago, a child exploitation scandal that has prompted Britain's Conservative Party to call for a full national inquiry.

Musk reposted a message from Rupert Lowe, a politician in the Reform UK party who serves in Parliament and who said he spent Friday talking to rape gang victims.

"Victims, past and present, don't need 'thoughts and prayers' from politicians, they need justice," Lowe said. "We will fight for that in Parliament."

Musk also briefly turned his attention to the United States' northern neighbor and praised an interview with Pierre Poilievre, a populist firebrand who leads Canada's Conservative Party. He announced that next week he would live-stream a conversation with Alice Weidel, the chancellor candidate for the Alternative for Germany, a far-right political party he has endorsed ahead of that country's snap elections in February.

Last year, Musk dominated U.S. politics, using his deep war chest and X microphone to boost Donald Trump and other Republicans in the 2024 elections. As the GOP prepares to retake control of the White House and both chambers of Congress, Musk has emerged more powerful than ever. His fortune has exploded, and he has a perch as Trump's right-hand man, weighing in on his Cabinet choices and joining his conversations with global leaders.

In the new year, Musk is flexing his political muscle on the global stage as well. He appears to be applying a playbook similar to the one he used to disrupt American politics, now boosting conservative politicians in the governments of the United

States' top allies. But his disregard for the veracity of his posts and his elevation of far-right and extremist figures have alarmed liberal leaders around the world.

“Elon Musk is an American citizen and perhaps ought to focus on issues on the other side of the Atlantic,” Health Minister Andrew Gwynne said during a Friday interview with the British radio station LBC.

The long-running British child exploitation scandals that Musk has seized on have become a rallying point for Reform UK, a right-wing populist party. An independent review in 2022 found that local government agencies in the town of Oldham, England, had left children vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

That review followed an earlier probe in 2014 that found an estimated 1,400 children had been sexually exploited in Rotherham, England, over 15-plus years. According to the report, most perpetrators were of Pakistani origin, and some in the town said they were nervous about identifying the ethnic origins of perpetrators for fear of being seen as racist.

Although these historical cases of abuse go back decades, right-leaning outlet GB News laid blame this week with the ruling Labour Party, reporting that minister Jess Phillips had recently rejected a request for the national government to conduct a further investigation into the Oldham “grooming gangs.”

Reform UK leader Nigel Farage, right, congratulates former Conservative lawmaker Marco Longhi as he defects to Reform UK during the party's East Midlands Conference on Friday in Leicester, England. © Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Gwynne said the government was carefully considering the recommendations from the 2022 probe. He also said there had been numerous local investigations into the allegations.

“Had Elon Musk really paid attention to what’s been going on in this country, he might have recognized that there’ve already been inquiries,” Gwynne added.

Gwynne’s boss, the health secretary, Wes Streeting, told reporters, “Some of the criticisms Elon Musk has made, I think, are misjudged and certainly misinformed.”

Musk’s moves have prompted speculation that he could seek to financially boost conservative politicians abroad, after becoming America’s top political donor by

spending \$277 million on U.S. elections last year. In December, Musk met with British politician Nigel Farage at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, where they posed for a photo in front of a painting of a young Trump wearing a white sweater. Farage, the leader of Reform UK, told the BBC that he and Musk discussed money, perhaps up to a \$100 million donation to the party. Musk told Axios that he had not yet donated and was not sure whether it would be legal.

As he injects chaos into other countries' political systems, Musk has faced fierce criticism for elevating far-right figures who have made racist comments. He called for the release of Tommy Robinson, the onetime leader of the English Defense League who for years has organized anti-Islam protests around Britain. Robinson, whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, was sentenced to 18 months in prison for repeating a libelous claim that a Syrian refugee schoolboy had attacked English girls.

Germany's government has accused Musk of trying to sway its February elections, following his decision to write an opinion piece for a German newspaper about his support for Alternative for Germany, a far-right political party that has been classified by German intelligence as a suspected extremist organization. Musk wrote that the populist party was the "last spark of hope for this country" and praised its approach to regulation, taxes and market deregulation.

Musk's numerous posts at all hours of the day and night about Britain's politics mirror his recent efforts to test his political influence in Washington. In December, the tech billionaire's critics accused him of behaving as a "shadow president" after he used his X account to pressure House Republicans to torpedo a bipartisan deal intended to keep the government open. Trump and other MAGA allies soon also publicized their opposition to the bill, triggering a shutdown crisis just before Christmas.

Elon Musk speaks before Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump at a campaign rally at Madison Square Garden in New York on Oct. 27. © Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post

When House leaders reached a new deal to keep the government open, Musk claimed it was a success because the bill's text shrank from 1,500 pages to just over 100. The bill was much smaller because it removed highly technical health-care rules, but the overall cost of the deal changed little.

Amid his interventions in Europe and Canada, Musk has not taken his eye off U.S. politics. He rang in the new year at Mar-a-Lago, where he and the president-elect donned tuxedos and danced to “YMCA.” In between memes trashing Starmer and calls for new elections in Britain, Musk also retweeted a post from House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana), thanking Trump for his support as he defended his gavel in a contentious speakership vote Friday. Johnson won reelection Friday afternoon.

Musk also is directly assisting in the probe of a New Year’s Day Cybertruck explosion, believed to be a suicide, outside the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas.

Musk’s international tangles this week foreshadow how he could seek to influence foreign affairs more directly through his close relationship with Trump — especially in ways that could favor his many business interests.

On Thursday, Musk reposted a tweet that said Britain’s Online Safety Act will take effect in March 2025. The law requires social media companies like X to prevent children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content and to give adults more control over what they want to see online. Companies that run afoul of the law can face fines of up to 10 percent of their global revenue.

“President @realDonaldTrump will take power just in time,” Musk wrote. “Thank goodness.”