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# How Elon Musk's expanding footprint is shaping the future of sub-Saharan Africa

Dirk Kohnert <sup>1</sup>

Cartoon : Musk - Ramaphosa interaction



Source: © Themba Siwela, *The Citizen*, SA, 6 February 2025

**Abstract:** South African-born tycoon Elon Musk, the world's richest person, is also a senior advisor to US President Donald Trump and head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) since 2025. Musk's influential role in American politics is largely based on the money he spent to finance Donald Trump's campaign. His influence is growing globally, including in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Trump's second presidency will be difficult for sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), especially South Africa. Both Trump and Musk have their own agendas. Trump's well-known prejudices against Africa have been reinforced by South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. Musk supports white Africans' claims against Pretoria for alleged land dispossession. Musk's key projects seek to establish political and cultural hegemony in global markets. For example, 'Starlink', which already provides global internet access in 114 countries, including SSA, and Tesla's energy Megapack solutions. It includes solar power and energy storage projects, to support the integration of renewable energy by providing grid-scale energy storage as in his 'SolarCity' project. Musk's goals show that he is not only an economic actor but also a leader who wants to shape the future of humanity. His projects are not limited to technology and commerce, but aim to change the power dynamics in international relations. However, the services provides often seem out of reach for many Africans due to the high cost. Musk's role as 'techno-feudal lord' is unprecedented. He even acts as arbiter in wars between nations, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. His random swings from altruistic to narcissistic, from strategic to impulsive, have been the subject of countless publications. He apparently wants the world to be saved, but only if he can be the one to save it. His political shift to right-wing populism began with his purchase of 'Twitter', when he deliberately spread misinformation on the platform. Within days of his purchase, for example, thousands of anonymous accounts began bombarding feeds with racist content. Musk's involvement in AI, including 'ChatGPT', seemed to be mainly about control, credit and rivalry. It is difficult to say whether his interest is driven by scientific curiosity and altruism, or by a desire to dominate a new and potentially powerful industry. Musk's support for autocratic leaders in Turkey, India and SSA, for example, is a reminder that big tech companies, not just states, are active players in transnational repression around the world. Authoritarian regimes and tech companies share a striking similarity: an appetite for information about their populations. While Big Tech uses this data for advertising profits, authoritarian states use it to tighten their grip on their populations. Multinational corporations are not simply subservient to the state. They can become more powerful, and sometimes more dangerous, than nations or even empires.

**Keywords:** [Elon Musk](#), [Business magnate](#), [Trump government](#), [Sub-Sahara Africa](#), [Trade policy](#), [nationalism](#), [South Africa](#), [Nigeria](#), [Kenya](#)

**JEL-Code:** D22 Firm Behavior: Empirical Analysis; D25 Intertemporal Firm Choice: Investment, Capacity, and Financing; D31 Personal Income, Wealth, and Their Distributions; D42 Monopoly; F13 - Trade Policy ; International Trade Organizations, F51 - International Conflicts ; Negotiations ; Sanctions; F52 - National Security ; Economic Nationalism, F6 - Economic Impacts of Globalization, P16 - Political Economy, P52 - Comparative Studies of Particular Economies

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# 1. Introduction

**Cartoon 2:** Musk and Trump shut down USAID



Source: © [Grolik](#), CartoonMovement, 2025

South African-born tycoon [Elon Musk](#) is the world's richest person, a businessman known for his key roles in [Tesla](#), [SpaceX](#) and [Twitter](#) (which he renamed X). The cumulative fortune of the head of SpaceX, Tesla and [SolarCity](#) could, according to some statistics, exceed the [GDP](#) of his native [South Africa](#). And although he was born in South Africa, he became a naturalised [Canadian](#) citizen in 1988 and an [American](#) citizen in 2002. As a "white South African", Musk may not be seen by Donald Trump as a man from a "[shithole](#)" country, to use the term the US president chose to describe some parts of the African continent, revealing Trump's racial views (Glez, 2022; 2025).

Elon Musk was born in 1971 in [Pretoria](#), the country's administrative capital. He and his younger brother [Kimbal](#) and sister [Tosca](#) grew up under [apartheid](#) in the male-dominated culture of [South Africa](#). The will to compete and dominate, which made him so successful in business, was already instilled in him from birth (Farrow, 2023). Musk once said that he had [Asperger syndrome](#), a form of what is now known as [autism](#) spectrum disorder, characterised by difficulties with social interactions (Farrow, 2023). His upbringing in elite, segregated white communities that were littered with anti-Black government propaganda, and detached from the atrocities that white political leaders inflicted on the Black majority, might have a sensitive impact on his sense of reality. He grew up in the economic hub of [Johannesburg](#), the executive capital of Pretoria and the coastal city of [Durban](#). His suburban communities were largely shrouded in misinformation (Eligon & Chutel, 2022). It is unclear what role his childhood, coming up in a time and place in which there was hardly a free exchange of ideas and where government misinformation was used to demonize [Black South Africans](#), may have played in that decision to leave South Africa shortly after graduation at 17 to go to college in [Canada](#), barely ever looking back. He said he did not want to partake in South Africa's mandatory military service because it would have forced him to participate in the apartheid regime (Eligon & Chutel, 2022).

When, in 2022, it was announced that Elon Musk was taking over [Twitter](#), human rights groups immediately voiced their concerns (Glez, 2022). Their fears: that an unbridled social network would quickly become overflowing with conspiracy theories, misinformation and violent discourse towards, among others, minorities. If there is some apprehension it is because the man himself has often proved to be divisive, megalomaniac and even whimsical, therefore unpredictable. With his start-up [Neuralink](#) in 2021, he claimed to have ambitions to

link the human brain directly to the computer. He has compared Prime Minister [Justin Trudeau](#), who opposed Trump's threats to integrate Canada as 51. US state, to [Adolf Hitler](#) (Glez, 2022). On 10 March 2025, Trump reiterated his claims on Canada's territory as he increased tariffs, threatening to bring the country's economy to its knees (Stevis-Gridneff, 2025). Musk also challenged [Vladimir Putin](#) to a duel after he made his [Starlink](#) satellite constellation and [connection stations available to an attacked Ukraine](#) (Glez, 2022).

Musk's leadership style was found to be complex, pacesetter, coercive, and authoritative. But he also inspires a shared vision, challenging the process, enables others to act, and encourages the heart. Overall, Elon Musk's complex leadership style, is characterized by a mix of effective and challenging traits, as he strives to drive innovation, solve global problems, and positively impact humanity (Miklaszewicz, 2023).

Musk was ideologically opposed to the idea of government enforcement of public health regulations. In March 2020, as the [COVID 19 pandemic](#) lockdown began, Musk sent an email to Tesla employees telling them he intended to defy orders and asked them to show up to work, thereby downplaying the significance of COVID-19. Soon after, he lost an initial battle to keep open a factory in [Alameda County, California](#), Tesla's most productive in the US. In April of that year, after county officials extended the order to keep the factory open, he radicalised. On a conference call with outside financial analysts, his rhetoric became nakedly political to an extent that would have been uncharacteristic just a few years earlier: "I would call it forcibly confining people in their homes against all their constitutional rights," he told the analysts, speaking of the lockdowns. "What the hell?" he added. "It's an outrage. An outrage. . . . It's fascist". The pandemic seems to have triggered a marked change in Musk. The lockdowns were an example of what Musk considered a cardinal sin: "getting in the way of the mission." (Farrow, 2023).

In 2024, Elon Musk publicly acknowledged using [ketamine](#). His use of the drug has been publicly discussed on several occasions. For example, in June 2023, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that Musk uses ketamine in small doses to treat depression and in higher doses at social events. In March 18, 2024, in an interview with journalist Don Lemon, Musk detailed his prescription ketamine use to manage depression, stating that he uses "a small amount once every other week" to alleviate a "negative chemical mind state." He emphasized that this regimen helps him maintain productivity, which he believes benefits Tesla investors. In August 2024, he mentioned on his social media platform, X that he takes ketamine when his brain "goes super negative." Musk's openness about his ketamine use has sparked discussions on mental health treatments and the pressures faced by high-profile individuals. His approach reflects a growing interest in alternative therapies for managing mental health conditions (Farrow, 2023). Reports, including those from The Wall Street Journal and [Bloomberg](#), suggest once more that he uses it in small doses to manage depression. He has also tweeted about ketamine being a better option than [SSRIs](#) (antidepressants) for some people. Some reports speculate that his risk-taking behaviour and unpredictable tweets might be influenced by ketamine use. While Musk is known for his high-functioning and intense work ethic, the impact of ketamine on his leadership and decision-making remains debated (Farrow, 2023).

Musk began spreading misinformation on [Twitter](#). He shared theories that the physical [attack on Paul Pelosi](#), the husband of the former Speaker of the House, had followed a meeting with a male prostitute, and retweeted suggestions that reports accurately identifying a mass shooter as a white supremacist were a 'psyop'. The attack fit a pattern. Musk's trolling increasingly adopted the language of far-right social media, where grooming, paedophilia and human trafficking were associated with liberalism (Farrow, 2023).

Later, in 2025, he became a senior adviser to US [President Donald Trump's second cabinet](#) (Kohnert, 2025) and head of the Department of Government Efficiency ([DOGE](#)) since 20 January 2025. Musk's influential role in American politics is largely based on the money he spent to fund Donald Trump's campaign. In the 2024 US election cycle, Musk emerged as the most significant individual political donor, contributing around \$ 277 million to support Trump's re-election campaign. That's more than a quarter of a billion US dollars (Siwela, 2025). Musk's influence is growing globally, including in [sub-Saharan Africa](#) (SSA). The symbiotic relationship between Musk and the Trump 2.0 administration is constitutive of the new direction of politics. It is big business oriented, largely free of moral or ethical concerns. What counts is a 'good deal' with the highest possible profit for the deal-maker. This is particularly true of foreign policy.

Eight years ago, the '[Washington Post](#)' came up with a pathetic motto: "Democracy dies in darkness". The new owner of the newspaper, '[Amazon](#)' founder and multi-billionaire [Jeff Bezos](#), like Musk a buddy of Trump, assured that "the values of the 'Post'" would "not change", when he took over the newspaper in 2013 (Hanfeld, 2025). However, his policy changed dramatically. Early 2025 he set a commentary line for the paper's opinion editors: Commentary should be guided by the "pillars" of "personal freedom and free markets". In plain language, this meant that the commentators should sing the song of the owner, whose understanding of freedom coincides with that of the other super-rich who have come to power in the USA with Donald Trump.

[Freedom of speech](#) in the sense of diversity of opinion is a thing of the past. In doing so, Trump added another element to the dismantling of [democracy](#) that [Donald Trump's second US government](#) is carrying out at breakneck speed. Trump and his buddies are undermining the state, attacking the independence of the judiciary and going after the press, the informal "[fourth estate](#)", whose contribution to democracy is to "tell it like it is". In their place, Trump and his chief advisor Elon Musk are protecting their power. The campaign against the independent media, which Trump and his entourage have always denounced as "[fake news](#)" makers, began shortly after the president took office with brazen false claims (Hanfeld, 2025). This was followed by instructions to employees of ministries and authorities to cancel all media subscriptions. Trump took the [Associated Press](#) news agency to set an example. Because it did not follow his instructions to call the [Gulf of Mexico](#) the "Gulf of America", it was excluded from appointments in the [Oval Office](#). In the next step, Trump disempowered the [White House Correspondents' Association](#), a body of journalists that decides who has direct access to the president and is allowed on board [Air Force One](#), for example. In future, Trump's people will decide themselves. It will no longer be agency journalists who write down "what's going on", but claqueurs and right-wing propagandists who are in line with the president (Hanfeld, 2025).

Meanwhile, Trump's chief advisor Musk is blasting the world with his [platform X](#), where he uses algorithms to determine which information has the greatest reach and which will perish. Musk's own opinion, based on "alternative facts" and insults, naturally takes precedence (Hanfeld, 2025). And those who pay homage to Donald Trump's autocratic behaviour, or who themselves work for the transition from democracy to [autocracy](#), are promoted above all on a global scale. In [Germany](#), for example, this is the far-right [AfD](#) which is opposing the established democratic order in the country and the stand of the governments against Vladimir Putin, in his [aggression of the Ukraine](#) (Hanfeld, 2025).

In this way, Donald Trump is building a new public sphere together with technology tycoons. Independent media are being shredded, filled with false information, defamed, sued and economically attacked. They are being replaced by their own news apparatus of the Trump



government that dominates the digital world. Thus, [Elon Musk](#) brings [platform X](#), [Mark Zuckerberg](#) provides [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), and if [TikTok](#) follows soon, it will all be "[Truth Social](#)" (as is the name of the social media platform owned by Trump), in the sense of Donald Trump. Thus, [Bezos](#) is destroying a symbol of the free press, the "Washington Post", which is committed to criticizing and controlling the powerful, from within. This is how democracy is switched off (Hanfeld, 2025).

Musk's shadow rule also extended to the [war in Ukraine](#) shortly after the Russian invasion, in February 2022. A [Pentagon](#) official said of Musk's role in the war in Ukraine: "We're living off his goodwill". Alongside conventional attacks, the [Kremlin](#) launched [cyber-attacks](#) against Ukraine's digital infrastructure. Ukrainian officials and a loose coalition of expatriates in the tech sector, brainstorming in group chats on [WhatsApp](#) and [Signal](#), came up with a possible solution: SpaceX, which makes a line of mobile internet terminals called [Starlink](#). The devices have limited range, but in this situation that was an advantage: although a nationwide network of dishes was needed, it would be difficult for Russia to completely cut off Ukrainian connectivity. But the Ukrainians feared that Musk, if angered, might withdraw his services. They had originally overlooked the importance of his personal control. Initially, Musk was unreservedly supportive of the Ukrainian cause. A year later, however, he made a U-turn. By 2023, Musk was already expressing support for [Vladimir Putin](#). He tweeted a proposal for his own peace plan, which called for new referendums to redraw Ukraine's borders and gave Russia control of [Crimea](#). Musk volunteered that he had spoken to Putin personally. His consultations with the Kremlin were regular, to the consternation of Pentagon officials of the [Biden administration](#) (Farrow, 2023). Afterwards, following the public backlash and with obvious annoyance, he retracted his threats to withdraw the service. "To hell with it," he tweeted (Farrow, 2023).

The interference of business tycoons in politics is nothing new. During [World War I](#), [J.P. Morgan](#) lent vast sums to the Allied powers. Later, [John D. Rockefeller Jr.](#) poured money into the fledgling League of Nations. The same goes for [Thyssen](#) and [Krupp](#) in Imperial and [Nazi Germany](#). Hungarian born American investor [George Soros's Open Society Foundations](#) underwrote civil society reform in post-Soviet Europe, and casino mogul [Sheldon Adelson](#) funded right-wing media in [Israel](#) as part of his support for [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) (Farrow, 2023).

But Musk's influence is bolder and more far-reaching. There is little precedent for a civilian becoming the arbiter of a war between nations. Musk has become a hyper-exposed pop culture figure, and his sharp swings from altruistic to vainglorious, strategic to impulsive, have been the subject of countless articles (Farrow, 2023). In 2023, Musk was asked if he had more influence than the American government. He immediately replied: "In some ways". Musk's attitude is apparently like that of [Louis XIV](#): *'L'état, c'est moi'*. (Farrow, 2023).

The latest evidence of this '[bread and circuses](#)' game, made in the USA, was the diplomatic scandal at the White House on 28 February 2025, on the occasion of the visit of the Ukrainian President, [Volodymyr Zelensky](#). This has never happened before: A US president insults the president of another country in the Oval Office in front of live television cameras and then throws him out of the White House. Trump knows exactly how to make the most of the attention economy: he wants to stage a drama. True to the motto, the more shocking, the more outlandish, the more boorish, the more unprecedented, the better for the ratings (Rehfeld, 2025). However, Trump's humiliation of Zelensky although unprecedented in its form, was nothing new in U.S. foreign policy. It has been done before in [Latin America](#) (e.g. [Pinochet's Chile](#), the [1954 Guatemalan coup d'état](#) and the [National Reorganization Process](#) in 1976 fascist Argentina), the murder of President [Patrice Lumumba](#) in [DR Kongo](#) 1961, but not yet

in Western Europe. For [Brussels](#) this represented the most important turn of an era since [World War II](#), according to a statement [Ursula von der Leyen](#), [president of the European Commission](#), on 4 March 2025. Apparently, Trump also wants to treat [NATO](#) countries "like a restaurant under the control of the mafia, just healthy enough to be a regular source of protection money" (Steffens, 2025). For [Europe](#) and [sub-Saharan Africa](#) (SSA), this means a direct confrontation with Trump's "[bullying policies](#)", for example in [South Africa](#), as shown below. As for Europe, it is not entirely clear, whether he wants to destroy Ukraine or NATO in cooperation with Russia or not. The aim of his bullying policy does not necessarily have to be the destruction of Ukraine or the dissolution of NATO. It is enough that he acts like a mafia boss in order to extract some kind of protection money. It may be enough for [Trump](#), [Musk](#) and [vice president J.D. Vance](#) to turn both into spheres of influence along the lines of the [mafia](#) model or similar to earlier variants of bullying politics (Steffens, 2025).

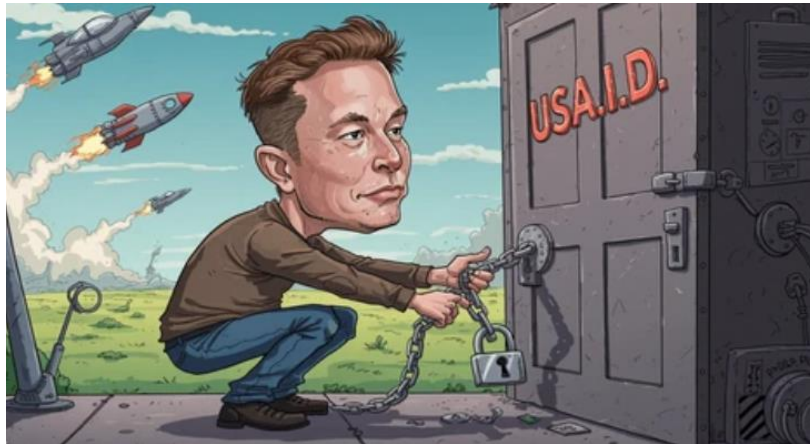
The scandal between Trump and Zelenskyy of 28 February 2025 has exposed the rupture in the Western community of values for all to see (Winkler, 2025). Under Donald Trump's second presidency, Trump and his buddies are preparing to renounce not only this responsibility, but also their commitment to the normative legacy of their own founding fathers. The immaterial commitment to the ideas of unwavering [human rights](#), the 'rule of law' and the '[checks and balances](#)' has no longer any guiding force for Trump and his allies. This illustrates what new advisers like Musk and Vance and their White House masters consider 'Realpolitik'. They are dividing up the world in an imperialist manner and only recognize Xi Jinping's China and Vladimir Putin's Russia as equal spheres of influence. As far as the international side of his policy is concerned, Trump is currently saying goodbye to the rules-based order in the form of the [Charter of the United Nations](#) of June 1945, which is largely the work of the USA, and to the tri-continental '[post-Cold War order](#)' in the form of the [Charter of Paris](#) of November 1990, which declares democracy to be the only legitimate form of government and guarantees all member states of the then CSCE, now the [OSCE](#), the right to national sovereignty, territorial integrity and free choice of alliance. Elon Musk is now even calling for the USA to leave the [transatlantic alliance](#). The consequences of this for Europe are currently the dominant topic of all intergovernmental contacts within the so-called Western community of values (Winkler, 2025).

The relationship between the United States and [Russia](#), as it has emerged since Donald Trump took office, seems like a parody of [Convergence theories](#) that had their heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. They stated that the rival systems of [capitalism](#) and [communism](#) would de-ideologize themselves due to the same economic and technological challenges, thereby reducing their antagonistic character. Yet, the convergence nowadays is marked by Trump and Putin's joint rejection of liberal ideas of order and binding norms. 'Peace' for Ukraine, as Trump would like to agree with Putin, would be an arrangement without security guarantees for the attacked state. It would amount to a new [Yalta](#), without the USA being able to invoke a military predicament as it did in early 1945. This constitutes an unacceptable prospect not just for Ukraine, Europe, but also for SSA (Winkler, 2025).

As far as [sub-Saharan Africa](#) (SSA) is concerned, [Elon Musk](#) not only supports the negative stance taken by the United States (US) government towards his home country [South Africa](#), he is probably the mastermind behind it. In early February 2025, South Africa's president, [Cyril Ramaphosa](#), responded to Trump's threats to cut foreign aid to South Africa over alleged land seizures. He denied that any land had been seized. Ramaphosa insisted that South Africa was a 'constitutional democracy' deeply rooted in the rule of law, justice and equality. However, Musk responded on X, asking why South Africa had 'openly racist land ownership laws'. This led to speculation that Musk was influencing Trump's decisions. Musk has

previously expressed concern about anti-white sentiment in South Africa, referring to controversial political actions and rhetoric (Siwela, 2025).

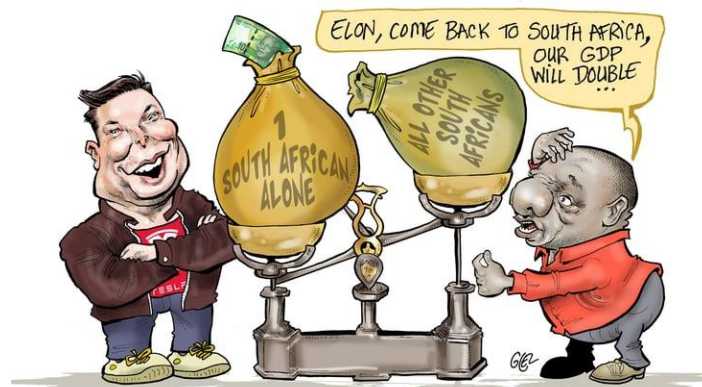
**Cartoon 3: ‘Musk locks USA.I.D.’**



Source: © shutterstock, 2025

Musk’s and Trump’s decision to shut down [USAID](#) had devastating effects for poor countries, notably [in sub-Saharan African](#) countries like [Sudan](#) which is threatened by hunger starvation. It also faces the worst displacement crisis in the world, with over 11 million people forced from their homes by conflict (Grolik, 2025). In late 2024, the [World Food Programme](#) launched a major surge in food aid across Sudan, doubling the number of people receiving monthly assistance to over 2 million. Famine was first confirmed in August in [North Darfur’s Zamzam refugee camp](#) and has since spread to four more areas. It is projected in five additional areas in North Darfur, between December and May 2025. A total of 24.6 million people (around half the population) are acutely food insecure, while 638,000 (the highest anywhere in the world) face catastrophic levels of hunger, according to the [World Food Program](#). In 2021 Elon Musk has agreed to give up a small part of his colossal fortune, if the UN can prove how it will help solve world hunger (Glez, 2021).

**Cartoon 4: Can the fortune of South Africa’s Elon Musk solve world hunger?**



Source: © [Damien Glez](#), *the africa report*, 1 December 2021

Musk's strategies aim to deepen innovation in his new digital empire to sustain market leadership. He acts like a ‘*Techno-Feudal Lord*’ in the [feudal age](#) (Yüksel, 2025). However, these goals go beyond mere economic gain and seek to establish political and cultural



hegemony in global markets. Musk has signalled his and the Trump 2.0 government's exercise of power in an autocratic, repressive and charismatic manner.

In 2002, when Musk's [Space X](#) was founded, American officials were alarmed by [NASA's](#) reliance on American space technology for essential services. They warned that "there's only one thing worse than a government monopoly, and that is a private monopoly on which the government depends (Farrow, 2023). By 2024, Musk's Starlink project was operational in 114 countries, providing global internet access, including SSA. While Musk's short-term goals could be interpreted as efforts to achieve commercial success, his medium-term goals extend beyond technological innovation to rebuilding social and economic infrastructures and shaping societal expectations of future technologies. Musk's Tesla ['Megapack'](#) product, for example, supports the integration of renewable energy by providing grid-scale energy storage, thereby improving the sustainability of energy infrastructure. These projects reflect Musk's desire to transform global economic and energy policy. In addition, Musk's medium-term goals include an ideological emphasis on transforming societal structures. He is trying to change the power dynamics in [international relations](#). By increasing his influence even in state-to-state relations, including [sub-Saharan](#) countries of interest to the Trump administration's imperial ambitions and the quest for African resources, Musk could become a significant figure in future global geopolitical equations, especially as he secures an important place in US politics (Yüksel, 2025).

Unprecedented efforts are underway to connect the unconnected in SSA, many of whom live in conflict-affected rural areas (Stremlau, 2020). The [UN's Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) outlines the goals that all countries should adopt to address global poverty and peace over the next fifteen years, including a commitment to provide internet connectivity for all by 2020 (United Nations n.d.). While it seems clear that this goal will not be met, ambitious experiments are underway. Western companies are trying to lead the way. [Google](#), for example, is experimenting with drones and hot-air balloons in what it calls ['Project Loon'](#). The balloons are currently in their first commercial trial in rural, mountainous communities in [Kenya](#), where it would be expensive to build infrastructure on the ground.

Musk's ['SpaceX'](#) has launched the first of what is expected to be tens of thousands of satellites that he hopes will provide global internet coverage from space by flying in low orbit above the Earth (Stremlau, 2020). On 3 August 2008, his company SpaceX made its third attempt to get a rocket into orbit. Just as the second stage separated, residual fuel in the first stage thrust it forward, and the two parts collided mid-flight, knocking the ship off course. It was a disaster. Musk was close to bankruptcy; he had only ever budgeted for three launches (mainly funded by the US government plus his own money). They'd all failed (Williams, 2023).

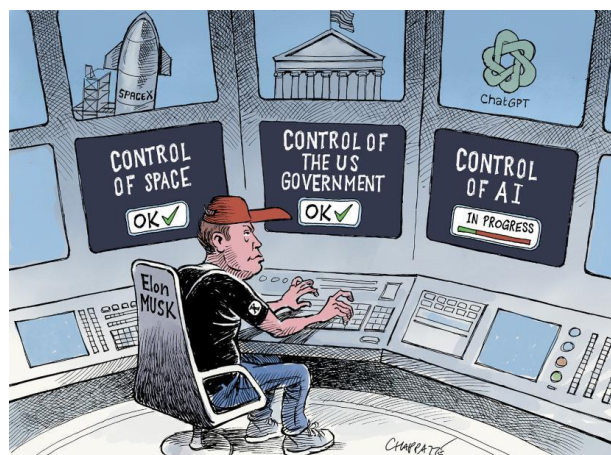
On 7 March 2025, SpaceX's ambitious ['Starship'](#) programme faced another major setback as its eighth test flight ended in failure. The spacecraft, designed for deep-space missions, lost control minutes after reaching space, breaking apart and scattering debris over Florida and the Bahamas. This marked the second consecutive failure for ['Starship'](#) in 2025, raising questions about the challenges of developing a fully reusable space system. Despite the disappointment, SpaceX continues to push forward, with NASA closely watching as ['Starship'](#) remains integral to future Moon and Mars missions (Norcross, 2025).

Regardless of this, [Facebook](#) recently announced a plan to build undersea cables around the continent, a project dubbed 'Simba' after Disney's *The Lion King* (a title unlikely to allay concerns that these efforts are part of a new form of colonisation). Access is expected to be offered on an open-access basis, and is partly motivated by efforts to extend the reach of Free

Basics (a Facebook service that links to local telecoms operators and allows people free access to Facebook and certain websites) and related products. With markets in North America and Europe close to saturation, the developing world, particularly [Africa](#), offers the growth market for the next billion users. But there has been little discussion of the impact of these technologies on conflict-affected populations (Stremlau, 2020).

In addition to '[Starlink](#)' (SpaceX) and [Twitter](#) (X), there is another project of particular interest to Africans: '[Paypal](#)'. Musk made his first millions by creating and reselling the online payment service Paypal. Previous similar services from French companies have been welcomed by many people, for example in French-speaking West African countries such as [Benin](#) and [Togo](#), where access to banking facilities is limited, especially in remote rural areas. Thus, in February 2020, three new players joined the "[Cizo](#)" project in Togo, which already successfully met the challenge of electrifying 40,000 households in neighbouring Benin in 2019. These are the off-grid suppliers Fenix International, Solergie and Moon. Ugandan-based Fenix International, a subsidiary of French energy giant [Engie](#), competed with Solergie, which operates in Togo through a partnership with French oil giant [Total](#). The Belgian company offers a solution called '[SolergieBox](#)'. This is a mini-grid consisting of solar panels, an inverter and a battery to store electricity. This off-grid solar system can serve 8 households in rural areas. Households connected to the mini-grid can pay their bills using "[mobile money](#)", a mobile phone payment system. The mobile phone is also a key part of the service provided by Moon. This French company, which is also involved in the '[Cizo](#)' project, offers solar home kits. Theirs consists of solar panels, a storage system and USB ports for charging mobile phones. Unlike other suppliers of solar kits, their solution comes with a smartphone ('[Moonphone](#)') on which an application is installed that allows the solar kit to be paid for in small amounts ([pay-as-you-go](#))<sup>2</sup> (Kohnert, 2021)

### Cartoon 5: 'Elon Musk is after ChatGPT'



Source: © *chappatte – global cartoons*, 12 February 2025

However, the [pay-as-you-go](#) service of [Paypal](#) appears to be out of the economic reach of most Africans: a subscriber has to pay an initial \$499 (about €420) for the equipment (a satellite dish, tripod, power cable and router) and then \$99 per month as a connection fee. Despite these limitations, [Starlink](#) had begun discussions with [Nigerian](#) and [South African](#) regulators to obtain local operator licences in 2021 (Velluet, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Takoulev, Jean Marie (2020) : [Togo: Fenix, Solergie and Moon join Cizo project to electrify villages](#). *Afrik21*, February 17 2020.

In March 2023, a petition led by Elon Musk for a six-month moratorium on AI [chatbot](#) innovation began circulating, raising serious ethical concerns about the [AI revolution](#), making it critical for a continent like [Africa](#), which has largely been a consumer of these technologies rather than an innovator, to urgently develop policies that can protect it. The AI revolution that is currently unfolding, fuelled by the significant advances in generative AI-based technologies, requires an urgent response from the African continent to ensure that the potential harms associated with this cutting-edge technology are mitigated.

The '[arms race](#)' by major technology companies such as [Google](#), [DeepSeek](#) and [Meta](#) to develop chatbots that can rival Open AI's [ChatGPT-4.0](#) technology is not only accelerating the pace of the AI revolution, but also bringing to the fore the double-edged nature of this technology (Chagonda, 2024). As early as July 2017, Musk warned that we need to regulate AI before it becomes a danger to humanity because it poses a fundamental risk to the existence of civilisation (Vincent, 2017). He likened working on AI to '[summoning the demon](#)' and urged governments to start regulating AI now. According to him, AI is a rare case where we need to be proactive rather than reactive with regulation, because he believes that if we are reactive with AI regulation, it's too late. [Machine learning](#) could also be used to mask unethical human activity. Arguably, the biggest threat is mass population control through targeted messaging and armies of [propaganda bots](#). Researchers have warned that the Trump administration's lack of interest in AI (and science in general) means that many aspects of this emerging field won't get the scrutiny they deserve (Vincent, 2017).

Although [sub-Saharan Africa](#) is divided by multiple borders of [colonial heritage](#) and [ethnic divisions](#), it needs to develop an ethics-based framework for AI that protects the majority of its population, who live in poverty and are likely to be at the receiving end of any harms associated with AI technologies. According to proponents, this framework should be largely grounded in the [African philosophy](#) of [ubuntu](#), but also pragmatic enough to incorporate positive facets of philosophical strands from the global North, such as [deontology](#), which places ethical principles and rules largely above the outcomes they produce (Chagonda, 2024).

Also, Africa is emerging as a significant player in space-related activities, with 22 African nations having [space agencies](#) and 59 [African satellites](#) in orbit. While Africa does not yet have its own launch capabilities, plans for spaceports on the continent are underway. Africa's space ambitions are supported by regional and global partnerships, and the African space economy is projected to reach \$ 22.64 billion by 2026. African countries actively seek support from major global space powers like [China](#), [Russia](#), and the [United States](#), and partnerships with companies like [SpaceX](#) are playing a pivotal role. Africa's engagement in space initiatives offers opportunities for cultural, economic, educational, and scientific cooperation, as well as strengthening diplomatic relations on the global stage (Firsing, 2024).

The benefits of [space exploration](#) should be available to all countries, regardless of their level of scientific, technological and economic development, and should not be limited to countries with a space programme. The [African Union](#)'s decision to establish an [African Space Agency](#), headquartered in [Egypt](#), will hopefully realise its full potential to advance African space policy and strategy as a key driver of the African Union's [Agenda 2063](#) (Mefteh, 2023). The use of space is seen as a key driver in addressing the triple challenges for SSA. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the "Argentine Doctrine" (Ferreira, 1952), which states that the benefits derived from the exploitation of space resources must be offered to all mankind without discrimination, and that steps should be taken to share these benefits in such a way as to promote better standards of living and conditions for economic growth, in accordance with

Article 55(a) of the [Charter of the United Nations](#) (Williams 1970, 157-158) (Mefteh, 2023). Furthermore, a space-based economy should be based on what international law calls the "common heritage of mankind", which is made more specific in the context of space law. The concept of the common heritage emerged during discussions on the [Law of the Sea](#) at the United Nations in 1967 (Mefteh, 2023).

The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs ([UNOOSA](#)) works to ensure strong international cooperation in space, the sustainability of space exploration and the inclusion of developing countries in the benefits of space. UNOOSA's mission is to promote the peaceful uses of outer space and to ensure that the benefits of space technologies and applications are accessible to all, everywhere. The International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)), on the other hand, is dedicated to connecting all the world's people, wherever they live and whatever their means, so that they can communicate effectively through radio and satellite technology. The UNOOSA/JAXA "[KiboCUBE](#)", one of the initiative's flagship programmes, has already enabled [Kenya](#) and [Guatemala](#) to launch their first satellites. Other programme winners are expected to follow suit, with [Mauritius](#) likely to be next, so it is very exciting (International Telecommunication Union 2021) (Mefteh, 2023).

[Big Tech](#)'s partnership with [authoritarianism](#) is a serious and unresolved problem. Musk claimed that this act of censorship was for the greater good. The company's Global Government Affairs account explained in a tweet that it is better to restrict a handful of accounts than, for example, to close the website in [Turkey](#) in the weeks before an election. Such '[kowtowing](#)' to autocrats by tech companies is neither unique nor new. In fact, X did the same in [India](#) in April 2023, blocking prominent journalists, activists and a member of parliament at the request of the populist [Modi government](#). Musk's actions are a powerful reminder that big tech companies, not just states, are active actors in transnational repression around the world. In the [Middle East](#), particularly in the wealthy authoritarian Gulf Cooperation Council ([GCC](#)) states, high rates of digital penetration offer tempting markets for exploitation. Authoritarian regimes and tech companies share a striking similarity: an appetite for information about their populations. While Big Tech leverages this data for advertising profits, authoritarian states use it to tighten their grip on their populations. Corporations are not simply subservient to the state. History is littered with examples of how corporations, in the words of [William Dalrymple](#) writing of the [East Indian Company](#), can run amok and become more powerful, and sometimes more dangerous, than nations or even empires (Jones, 2023). Tech companies are corporations, not charities. They exist to make money. These companies seek to maximize profit by expanding audiences and preserving access to authoritarian state revenue. The regimes themselves are repressive in their own right, but tech companies provide useful tools of surveillance and intimidation. Moreover, companies like [Meta](#) are hesitant to address transnational repression if it hurts the bottom line. Hate speech on [Facebook](#) helped fuel the [genocide in Myanmar](#), in part, because there was a dearth of content moderation in the Burmese language. This ethos of companies in the global north, exploiting data in the global south with minimal responsibility is labelled "[data colonialism](#)". As whistle-blowers have revealed, social media companies like Facebook are less vigilant in monitoring (dis)information in countries where they are less likely to encounter negative publicity or where it may not serve their political interests to do so. Such exploitation is not born of [Silicon Valley](#)'s ignorance of these regions. On the contrary, it is calculated indifference. As whistle-blowers have revealed, social media companies like [Facebook](#) are less vigilant in monitoring (dis)information in countries where they are less likely to encounter negative publicity or where it may not serve their political interests to do so (Jones, 2023).

The world outside the US/Europe was basically like the [Wild West](#). In the Western view, digital repression was only really a problem when it came from the United States' enemies



and not its allies. On the flipside, social media companies can facilitate repression when it comes to countries the [United States](#) considers strategic allies, like [Israel](#). Facebook's curation algorithms, for example, have suppressed content supportive of [Palestine](#), reducing the exposure of Palestinians online. Meanwhile, companies like [Google](#) and [Amazon](#) have been criticized for supporting the occupation, for example, by participating in [Project Nimbus](#), a \$1.2 billion agreement to supply Israel and its occupying forces with artificial intelligence and other technological services (Jones, 2023).

[Google](#) systematically silences [Palestinian](#), [Jewish](#), [Arab](#) and [Muslim](#) voices concerned about Google's complicity in violations of [Palestinian human rights](#), to the point of formally retaliating against workers and creating an environment of fear. Similarly, [X](#) prohibits paid political advertising. Yet, citing local context as a reason, the platform allows political propaganda that supports autocrats in countries with human rights violations, like [Saudi Arabia](#). The problem of digital repression and [digital authoritarianism](#) is often framed as something done exclusively by states like [China](#), [Iran](#) or [Russia](#). But this framing is a misconception. Authoritarian regimes across the world, including African autocrats, like that of the [Gnassingbé](#) family in [Togo](#), and US-based [Big Tech](#) converge in transnational repression through a combination of content control, surveillance and data collection. Big tech platforms looking to make a profit often selectively moderate content and amplify certain narratives while suppressing other content due to corporate interests or geopolitical alignments. Elon Musk's takeover of X has prompted other tech companies, like [Meta](#) and [YouTube](#), to roll back their own commitments to tackling hate speech, disinformation and other forms of harmful content. Moreover, tech companies continue to vie for audiences and capital from authoritarian states in the Middle East and North Africa. This expansion into the region may be accelerated if tech companies seek to plug financial gaps left as a result of stricter privacy laws in big markets like the European Union (Jones, 2023).

## 2. Case studies:

**Cartoon 6: 'Elon Musk butchering USAID'**



Source: © [Ella Baron](#), *The Guardian*, 9 February 2025

[Elon Musk](#) has invested or plans to invest in several countries in [sub-Saharan Africa](#) (SSA), particularly in the areas of [satellite communications](#) and [renewable energy](#). Regulatory challenges and local regulations play an important role. SSA is of particular interest to Musk because of the region's growing potential in technology, renewable energy and connectivity. While Musk himself has not made direct personal investments in the region, his companies have initiated projects or expressed interest in expanding their presence there. Below are some of the key countries and projects. Musk's companies are likely to continue expanding their presence in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in areas like renewable energy, internet connectivity, and electric vehicle infrastructure. The region's vast natural resources, growing population, and increasing demand for technology make it a strategic area for future investments. However, challenges such as regulatory hurdles, infrastructure gaps, and political instability may impact the pace of these projects.

The three major SSA countries, [South Africa](#), [Nigeria](#) and [Kenya](#), are also the main targets for Musk's investments. South Africa, Elon Musk's birthplace, is a key target for his ventures. In December 2024, Musk discussed with President [Cyril Ramaphosa](#) the possibility of building a [Tesla battery factory](#) in the country. But there are regulatory challenges. South Africa's licensing laws require 30% of the company's shares to be given to black-owned businesses, which Musk has criticised as 'blatantly racist'. These regulations have delayed [Starlink's](#) launch in South Africa. In [Nigeria](#), Starlink, SpaceX's satellite internet service, was due to launch in January 2023. The Nigerian government has been in talks with Starlink to create jobs and improve digital infrastructure. In [Lesotho](#), Musk met with Lesotho's Prime Minister [Sam Matekane](#) in September 2024 to discuss improving connectivity in the country. This could be a sign of future investment in digital infrastructure. In [Namibia](#), Starlink has been ordered to cease operations for operating without the required telecommunications licence. The Communications Regulatory Authority of Namibia (CRAN) has warned the public against purchasing Starlink terminals or subscribing to the company's services.

Other important SSA countries with interest for Musk are [Rwanda](#), the [DR Congo](#), [Mozambique](#), [Malawi](#), and [Zambia](#). Rwanda has embraced Starlink to enhance internet connectivity and support its vision of becoming a tech hub in [East Africa](#). While not directly tied to Musk, Rwanda's advancements in [drone technology](#) (e.g., [Zipline](#)) align with Musk's broader interest in innovation and technology. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is of interest because of [rare earth elements](#), notably [cobalt mining](#) (Kohnert, 2024a). The DRC

is a major global supplier of cobalt, a critical mineral for Tesla's electric vehicle batteries. Tesla has sought to secure ethical and sustainable sources of cobalt from the region. Also, the DRC's vast [hydropower potential](#) could support Tesla's energy projects in the region. Starlink is actively expanding across Sub-Saharan Africa, including countries like Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia, to provide affordable and reliable internet access. Tesla's [Powerwall](#) and solar products are being explored in various countries.

Another of Musk's key projects in SSA was '[SolarCity](#)'. It began as an idea conceived by Musk, who saw opportunity in providing cost-effective and highly-efficient solar-panel systems that incorporate battery-pack technologies direct to consumers (Wandasan, & Hawk & Cheatham, 2018). Peter and [Lyndon Rive](#), both cousins of Musk, co-founded SolarCity Corporation in 2006 and leveraged access to low-priced solar panels to gain initial successes in the photovoltaic industry. Over the years, SolarCity became the first in the industry to provide an all-in-one, direct to consumer, photovoltaic system solution that integrates design, sales, financing, installation, monitoring, and other services. The company's investments toward in-house production of solar panels enabled significant growth, which increased further after Musk's company, Tesla, acquired the company in 2016. In August 2016, Tesla shareholders approved a proposal by Musk to acquire SolarCity and merge the two companies to allow them to scale both battery and solar-panel system operations. Successful collaboration with [Panasonic](#) on a battery pack known as "[Powerwall](#)" resulted in Tesla producing a game-changing, energy- storage device that is currently without any near- peer competition. On average, the "Powerwall 2" has a 5 kW greater capacity and costs approximately \$ 800 less per kWh to operate than its current nearest competitors, while including an integrated inverter at a competitive price point. Since December 2013, SolarCity has been supporting efforts by the United Nations to fight [climate change](#) and ensure that people around the globe have access to electricity by 2030 through the company's "Give Power Foundation".

**Cartoon 7: 'Musk Meme',<sup>3</sup>**



Source: © [Zapiro](#), *Daily Maverick*, 21. January 2025

For example, in [Liberia](#) the impact of adopting a battery- and solar-powered alternative for the economy was seen as win-win situation, for both Liberia and the U.S. It was expected, that as a result of increased education and educational opportunities, the economy in Liberia will

<sup>3</sup> Musk was accused of giving Nazi salute during Trump inauguration celebrations. Was Elon Musk's gesture a Nazi salute or a Roman sign of power? 'The gesture speaks for itself': Germans respond to Musk's apparent Nazi salute.

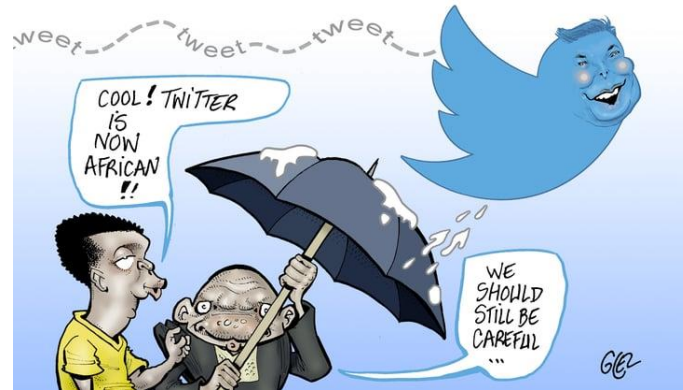
increase and stabilize the government and protect it from being vulnerable to other state and non-state actors operating within the region (Wandasan, & Hawk & Cheatham, 2018). Battery-solar power also helped to create jobs. As an example, the [Ivanpah Solar Power Facility](#), the world's largest solar-thermal power station in Liberia, was developed by [Brightsource](#) and [Bechtel](#) and is estimated to “involve some 1,000 jobs at the peak of construction, permanent jobs, and total economic benefits of \$ 3 billion.” Hydropower generation through MCC's current plan to renovate the [Mt. Coffee Hydroelectric Plant](#) will lead to these same ends. With SolarCity Musk's ambition would offer the ability for stability within the government and economy. A solar-energy consortium project between [West African](#) nations implemented by MCC, in cooperation with private industry corporations such as Tesla, SolarCity, and [Give Power Foundation](#), would be much more advantageous to create stability, energy security, national security, and subsequent secondary and tertiary effects on political, military economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and sewage, water, electric, academics, trash, medical, security (PMESII-PT/SWEAT-MS) throughout the region (Wandasan, & Hawk & Cheatham, 2018).

However, Musk's imaginary of [climate change](#) and its impact on the [sustainability](#) discourse corresponds to the [climate change denial of Trump](#) and his friends. Musk has developed a socio-technical imaginary that creates a rival discourse to the conventional understanding of sustainability. The multi-planetary notion of sustainability extends to life beyond Earth to ensure the long-term survival of humanity, facilitated by SpaceX technology. This vision has created a division, for example among users of X (Twitter), into proponents and opponents. While proponents support the multi-planetary notion of sustainability, opponents argue that 'planetary' sustainability, which means staying within planetary boundaries, should take precedence. This could pose new challenges for policymaking and governance and the understanding as well as potential future implications of the emerging sustainability discourses at the earth-space interface (Wagenknecht, 2024).



## 2.1 Musk's impact on South Africa

**Cartoon 8:** *Elon Musk: the African who wants to unleash Twitter*



Source: © [Damien Glez](#), *the africa report*, 26 April 2022

As mentioned, [Elon Musk](#) was born in [Pretoria, South Africa](#), and has expressed an interest in contributing to the country's development, but on his own terms. [Starlink](#) has been approved for use in South Africa and is expected to improve internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas. [Tesla](#) has been exploring opportunities in renewable energy, particularly solar power and battery storage, to address South Africa's energy crisis and frequent power cuts (load shedding). However, as Pretoria failed to honour his visions and pursued a policy of equity between the white [Afrikaner](#) (Boer) minority and the [black majority](#), relations soured.

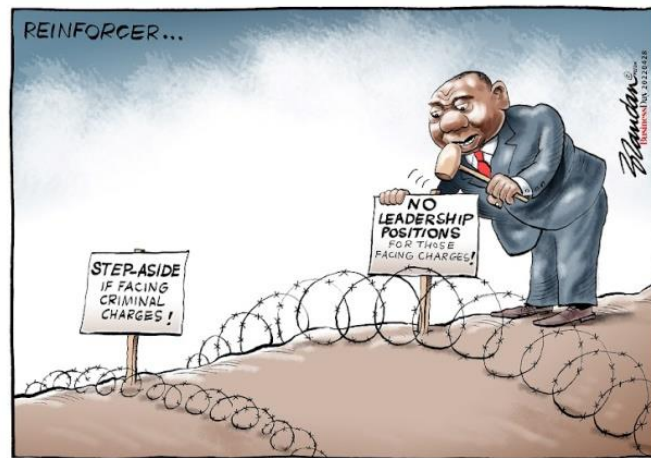
Another of Musk's inventive projects in South Africa was the [Hyperloop](#) concept. Musk has been credited with reviving the concept. At the end of 2016, he came up with the idea for his tunneling company, called [The Boring Company](#), which aims to allow commuters to avoid city traffic on underground highways. At the moment, there is only the [Hawthorne test tunnel](#) in [Los Angeles County](#) and, from April 2021, a 1.83km double-tunnel 'loop' providing a shuttle service in Tesla cars at the [Las Vegas Convention Centre](#), but there are plans to expand this and negotiations are underway for more.

However, long before Musk's involvement in the Hyperloop revival and tunnel construction, other South African-born innovators were making important inventions related to tunnels or trains (Bruton, 2021). In 2016, a South African company, [DCD Rolling Stock](#), revolutionised the manufacture of railway bogies by moving away from the traditional casting-based design to the manufacture of hot-rolled steel. This has resulted in significant weight reductions by using exactly the right steel thickness to achieve the required strength without over-engineering. South African parastatal [Transnet](#) has developed its first indigenous locomotive, the [Trans-Africa Locomotive](#) (TAL), specifically for African conditions. Launched in 2017, the diesel-powered locomotive provides a cost-effective solution for the majority of Africa's currently unused railway lines, and Transnet plans to sell the TALs to other African countries to boost rail transport on the continent. Transnet Engineering also manufactures and sells railway bogies, passenger coaches and freight wagons adapted to African conditions. The [CSIR](#) has refined the [Ultrasonic Broken Rail Detector](#) (UBRD) to detect breaks in train rails and communicate this information remotely to railway engineers (Bruton, 2021).

At the 10th anniversary of the [Economic Emancipation Forum](#) (EEF) in July 2023, the organisation's president, [Julius Malema](#), was again seen (and heard) singing the song '[Kill the Boer](#)' (Ryan, 2023). Since then, there has been much debate about the issue, not only in South

Africa, but also abroad. [Musk](#) even tweeted about the issue, asking South Africa's President [Cyril Ramaphosa](#) why he was silent while Malema and the EFF, the country's third largest political party, called for the alleged "genocide of white South Africans".

**Cartoon 9: 'Reinforcer - Musk channels Trump on South Africa'**



Source: © Brandan Reynolds, [BusinessDay](#), 28 April 2022

Much of the world's mainstream media sided with the EFF on this issue, arguing that 'Kill the Boer' was meant as a struggle song and not to be taken literally. Even the [Equality Court](#) ruled that the song should not be taken literally after [AfriForum](#) sued Malema and the EFF for promoting the murder of white South Africans by singing it (Ryan, 2023). Struggle songs have a place in the history of South Africa's struggle against the inhumanity of [apartheid](#). In particular, most farmers are actively involved in trying to right the wrongs of the past by mentoring and funding new and emerging farmers. However, and this cannot be ignored, the struggle now facing South Africans, whether white or black, has little to do with the past. The [ANC](#) has been in power for almost three decades, and while there are remnants of the past and aftershocks that will be felt for many years to come, the greatest impediment to the success of South Africans is failing infrastructure, unemployment and poverty. Responsibility for this lies largely with the corruption and looting caused and presided over by the ruling ANC (Ryan, 2023). It also cannot be ignored that white farmers are being murdered in South Africa. But to call this 'genocide' is irresponsible and treacherous. Nevertheless, at least seven farmers have been attacked and/or killed since Malema sang the song. This is a massive year-on-year increase and it would be foolish to simply ignore these statistics. If 'Kill the Boer' is really about 'mobilising against an oppressive system', as the EFF has stated, then the party should have no trouble condemning these heinous crimes or reminding its supporters that the song should not be taken literally. Of course, this will not happen because the EFF only remains relevant as long as it can foment disunity among South Africans. Africans of all races and creeds should show the political parties that they will not be segregated on the basis of race again. The majority of South Africans live in peace and unity. They have major problems with poverty and inequality, which is the highest in the world and poverty is itself a divider, but this cannot be overcome by separation. It will take a united approach to tackle these challenges, and most South Africans are ready to work together (Ryan, 2023).

Questions have been raised about the role that [Musk](#) is playing in the negative posture that the United States government has taken against South Africa (Siwela, 2025). Early February 2025 President [Cyril Ramaphosa](#) reacted to Trump's threats of cutting foreign aid to South Africa due to alleged land seizures and denied that land had been confiscated. He underlined that

South Africa is a “constitutional democracy” deeply rooted in the rule of law, justice, and equality. However, Musk replied to Ramaphosa on [X](#), asking why South Africa has “openly racist land ownership laws”. However, Donald Trump and Elon Musk had in mind another form of [land-grabbing](#). Trump openly threatened the people of [Greenland](#), that he would take control of this world-wide biggest island, rich of mineral resources and of immense geo-strategical importance, in one form or other (Glez, 2025).

**Cartoon 10:** *Promised land -, Cyril Ramaphosa:  
A peculiar dance over South African land reform law*



Source: © © [Damien Glez](#), *The Africa Report*, 6 February 2025

This led to speculation that Musk was influencing Trump’s decisions. Musk had already previously expressed uneasiness about anti-white sentiments in South Africa with reference to controversial political actions and rhetoric. He may be whispering in President Trump’s ear as an advisor about South Africa (Siwela, 2025). [Pretoria](#) should expect the next few years under the Trump presidency to be difficult. Trump and his cohorts have their own agenda, and that agenda is against South Africa, and we all know President Trump's bias against Africa, who once referred to African countries as "[shitholes](#)".

**Cartoon 11:** *'Trump's 'African shitholes' utterance' <sup>4</sup>*



Source: © [Zapiro](#), *SundayTimes*, 14 January, 2018

<sup>4</sup> [Zapiro](#), *SundayTimes*, 14 January, 2018, accessed: 10 July 2018. - "Jonathan Shapiro (born October 27, 1958) is a South African cartoonist, known as *Zapiro*, whose work appears in numerous South African publications and has been exhibited internationally on many occasions." (Zapiro, [Wikipedia](#)).

## 2.2 Musk's impact on Nigeria

**Cartoon 12:** *'We are very accommodating' ... Generously insane Nigeria's President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and Musk*



Source: © Oluwatosin Ogunjuyigbe, [Business Day](#), 6 December 2024

[Nigeria](#) was one of the first African countries to receive [Starlink](#) services, which aim to bring high-speed internet to underserved areas. [Tesla](#) has also shown interest in Nigeria's renewable energy sector, particularly solar power and energy storage solutions, to support the country's growing energy needs.

In Nigeria, the [Internet Service Provider](#) (ISP) sector has also seen significant growth, with 225 licensed ISPs as of September 2022. An additional 38 companies, including Elon Musk's Starlink, were granted licences in 2022, further contributing to the expansion of the industry (Ifonlaja, 2023).

[Twitter](#) and the Twittersphere have become the central platform for activism in Nigeria. The functional uses made possible by Twitter's architecture allow Twitter to be used as a platform for young elite influence and the perception of Twitter as a leveller (Obia, 2023).

However, there are significant challenges in integrating [AI ethics](#) into higher education curricula in West Africa, including Nigerian universities (Onyejegbu, 2023). AI is a useful tool, even in education, but it needs human control. AI does not have self-awareness, nor does it have something called '[empathy](#)', which is the basis of ethics. Despite the clear need to understand how AI will affect people around the world, including Nigeria, a truly global perspective remains a critical blind spot in the ethical conversation. The [United Nations](#), national legislatures and industry bodies in developed countries are asking these questions and are already acting to protect their constituents from some of the potentially negative effects of AI, such as [algorithmic discrimination](#) and voter manipulation. There have been initiatives such as the African [AI Accelerator](#) or deep learning processor, as well as global giants such as [Google](#) setting up its first [AI research and development centre in Accra](#), Ghana, opened in 2023. The [University of Lagos](#) followed suit, launching [Nigeria's first Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Startup Incubation and Research hub](#) in 2018 with a focus on fostering interest in AI among the youth (Onyejegbu, 2023).



However, in Nigerian scholarly circles, questions have been raised as to whether the big techs of [Silicon Valley](#) are not also promoting surveillance or [digital capitalism](#) behind the scenes, mostly through social media platforms, within the confines of the [global digital economy](#) (Obi, 2024). A growing body of literature has pointed to [digital colonialism](#) and [prosumer capitalism](#) as critical components in understanding the global digital economy. Yet, according to these scholars, [postcolonial Africa](#) lags behind in terms of negotiating power within the political economy dynamics of digital capitalism. Using Nigeria as a geo-economic prism, radical Nigerian scholars sought to reimagine digital colonialism from a critical perspective. They wanted to unpack the underlying appropriation of economic power through digital colonialism and show how prosumer capitalism grounds its practices in Nigeria. They also wanted to refocus the debate on [digital economic inequalities](#) in light of the global paradigm of digital capitalism (Obi, 2024).

In 2023, Musk's [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) announced that revenue from advertising on content and data would be shared with the content creators and online influencers who created it (Obi, 2024). In Nigeria, for example, this was followed by the payment of some Nigerian content creators and digital influencers in August 2023. That Elon Musk could consider paying for online influence explains the level of exploitation of digital capitalism over all these years. Surprisingly, in September 2023, Musk announced that users on the X platform would be charged a subscription fee. All in all, X gives to users on its platform on the right hand and takes from them on the left hand, showing the complexity of economic exploitation in the digital platforms. This phenomenon represents the cases of digital capitalism in line with the economic value that Silicon Valley [Big Techs](#) attract in isolation from the wages of content creators and prosumers. This often feeds into the broader web of [prosumption](#), i.e. of individuals who both consume and produce, and global digital capitalism (Obi, 2024).

In pursuit of national development, the Nigerian government was urged to adopt emerging technologies such as [Artificial Intelligence](#) (AI), [Blockchain](#), [Big Data Analytics](#), [Robotics](#), [5G](#) and [IoT](#) to harness the potential of the country (Chinalu Ujah-Ogbuagu, 2021).

Up to date, the major barriers to emerging technology utilization in Nigeria include low technology education capacity, inadequate infrastructure, low human capacity, and policy inefficiency. [Starlink](#) already provides high-speed, low-latency broadband connectivity in Nigeria where internet access had been expensive, unreliable, or entirely unavailable due to poor internet infrastructure. Prospects exist given the 5G network deployment plan in Nigeria, for the establishment of [AI and Robotics Centre in Abuja](#) (NITDA), the capital of Nigeria (Chinalu Ujah-Ogbuagu, 2021).

The National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (NCAIR) was created to promote research and development on emerging technologies and their practical application in areas of Nigerian national interest. The centre, a state-of-the-art facility, along with its modern digital fabrication laboratory ([FabLab](#)), is co-located in the same building complex with the [Office for Nigerian Digital Innovation](#) (ONDI). NCAIR as a digital innovation and research facility is focused on [Artificial Intelligence](#) (AI), [Robotics](#) and [Drones](#), [Internet of Things](#) (IoT), and other emerging technologies, aimed at transforming the Nigerian digital economy, in line with the [National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy](#) (NDEPS). NCAIR is also focused on creating a thriving ecosystem for innovation-driven entrepreneurship (IDE), job creation and national development ([NCAIR-website](#)).

However, generative artificial intelligence also presents new challenges, such as the management of [Internet taxation](#) of online transactions in Nigeria (Dashe & Asada, 2023).

The e-reality such as [e-governance](#), [e-commerce](#), [e-learning](#), [generative artificial intelligence](#) (AI) and [augmented reality](#) (AR) offer a great opportunity for the government to harness the internet or cyberspace. However, online commercial activities are not taxed, resulting in a huge loss of revenue. This necessitates the need to manage, block leakages and generate huge revenues that abound in [cyberspace](#) to argue the paucity of resources the Nigerian government has hitherto generated from [fossil fuels](#) in providing basic amenities to Nigerians (Dashe & Asada, 2023).

The introduction of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tax software has become even more compelling given its undeniable benefits, which will not only simplify online tax collection, but also eliminate delays in the remittance of the collected tax, and will help combat the incidence of [tax fraud](#) through real-time reconciliation among beneficiary states, bearing in mind the cliché that the world is a global village or hamlet (Dashe & Asada, 2023). Minimising human interference in tax administration, especially in the [taxation of internet transactions](#), will eliminate the human factors and/or errors associated with inefficiency, ineffectiveness and/or [corruption](#), which is endemic since decades in Nigeria. On [Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index](#), Nigeria scored in the bottom half, at 26 on a scale of 0 ('highly corrupt') to 100 ('very clean'), alongside [Cameroon](#), [Madagascar](#) and [Uganda](#), which also ranked 140th out of the 180 countries in the index. The Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tax software would also improve the government's non-oil revenue collection in an unprecedented way. Finally, it will also provide the government with real-time data and a database of online commercial activities for security agents when needed (Dashe & Asada, 2023). A collaborative effort by all relevant stakeholders in Nigeria with the necessary and enabling environment, the worthy endeavour of internet taxation will be achieved in Nigeria given the huge demographic impact as the most populous country in SSA with an estimated 227 million people. To achieve this feat, there is the need for a unified tax regime where all taxes are brought under one platform but with different interfaces where each tax has a unique code, the platform must have the capacity for tax reconciliation on daily, weekly or monthly basis as the case may be (Dashe & Asada, 2023).

Given the relatively low level of [education](#) of most Nigerians, Elon Musk's comments about the seeming uselessness of traditional [PhDs](#) and [academic publications](#) are not entirely unfounded (Oseloka, et al., 2022). Around 68% of young people in Nigeria in 2020 had completed secondary school. This was the highest level of education they had achieved. About 15% will have completed primary school. 17% of Nigerian youth will pursue higher education after secondary school (Zoe Talent Solutions, 2023). It echoes Elon Musk's views on the low impact of such PhDs in society, and expands on the character of a growth mentality required for a different kind of PhD to be trained, the PhDTechs (Oseloka, et al., 2022). It shows that the shortcomings of traditional education are at the heart of the extremely low impact of traditional research as produced in universities around the world, but even more so in developing countries like Nigeria. Therefore, a new publishing model should be developed to liberate traditional academic publishing from its limiting focus on publishing for promotion to senior academic ranks to publishing for all-round excellence in producing high-impact, actionable knowledge for academia, government, industry and society at large, collectively called the '[Quadruple Helix](#)' which involves representatives from all members of society; public authorities, industry, academia and citizens (Oseloka, et al., 2022).

[Artificial intelligence journalism](#) has been incorporated into the professional routines of institutional news media training in the West for more than a decade, but it is only now slowly being adopted in SSA (Kperogi & Ishiekwene, 2025). In-depth interviews with senior editors in Nigeria to explore the state of AI journalism in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, revealed that AI journalism is no longer a new-fangled fad that offers no real

advantage over more traditional methods of doing journalism. Even in transitional and technologically evolving societies like Nigeria, it promises to continually define and redefine the boundaries of journalistic practice. All major news organisations in the country are now moving towards integrating AI into their professional routines. Although there are still fears about the breadth and depth of the disruption it will bring to journalism, the experience of news organisations in the West suggests that robots and humans can work together in the business of journalism without displacing each other. AI is mostly a retooling of the news, rather than a fundamental change in the needs and motives of news organisations. It does not affect the fundamental need to access and gather information, to process and package that information into 'news', to reach existing and new audiences, and to make money (Kperogi & Ishiekwene, 2025).

The impact of individualism and culture on entrepreneurial growth of [SMEs in South-South Nigeria](#) may also be influenced by AI. [Cultural values](#) are integral parts of SME owners to achieve optimal [business performance](#). There is a strong relationship between individualism culture and entrepreneurial development of selected SMEs in South-South Nigeria. However, there is a need to improve individualism in entrepreneurship education so that entrepreneurs have 'hands on' business experience and practice entrepreneurial oriented approach to improve entrepreneurial mind-set. This has already been shown by the Silicon Valley start-up environment, which relies heavily on a culture characterised by the coexistence of self-interest and idea exchange, as well as a mix of openness and competition. Being open means, being willing to share ideas with the wider community, as well as being open to the acceptance and integration of new competitors in the marketplace. One such example is [Elon Musk](#), who made the company's electric motor patents public in 2014. Sharing expertise and experience is highly valued, and reflection and comment are expected. Many wealthy entrepreneurs continue to be involved in the community as angel investors and investors, facilitating the flow of finance and expertise. Start-up entrepreneurship, combining vision, risk-taking and teamwork, thus embodies the entrepreneurial values of post-industrial society. The largely male figures hailed as idols of the global startup scene, including [Tesla's Elon Musk](#), [Apple's Steve Jobs](#) and [Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg](#), show how these ideas have been criticised for their masculine bias. As a result, startup culture in Nigeria is still said to be predominantly masculine and gendered (Udoyiu & Edward, 2024).

Industrialization of the Nigerian economy will depend to a large extent on the imperatives of imbibing [artificial intelligence](#) and [robotics](#) for national growth and development. Artificial intelligence and robotics will contribute to enhance Nigeria's economic growth. It is said to be the latest and best form of automation, which will enhance a better product output and win global work challenge. However, rapid technological progress in AI in Nigeria has been predicted to lead also to mass [unemployment](#), rising [inequality](#), and higher [productivity growth](#) through automation. But AI now seems poised to automate many tasks once thought to be out of reach, from driving cars to making medical resolutions and beyond, e.g. by safer and a better power outage, inculcating inventive ingenuity in the Nigerian populace, growth of the country's gross domestic product, which has been dubbed as near impossible ventures over ages (Akang & Afolayan & Iorpenda, 2019). The media tends to recognize those with the most outrageous claims, setting a pattern whereby it continuously escalates the perceived implications, challenges, and threats brought by the new technology. This has been the pattern with AI. Skeptics and antagonists have engaged in hyperbolic and emotional rhetoric that the media then repeats and amplifies. This phase of panic has been marked by apocalyptic and dystopian imagery for AI, including Elon Musk's warning that it could be "summoning the demon" that destroys the human race. As a result, when an [AI dystopian](#) suggests that we are only a few short steps away from artificial general intelligence or even artificial superintelligence, such that Elon Musk called it our biggest existential threat, the vast

majority of Nigerian people have no common-sense way to judge the validity of his claim (Akang & Afolayan & Iorpenda, 2019).

Last but not least, AI is influencing the adoption of [cryptocurrencies](#) in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the largest economies of South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya (Ramji, 2023). The growing popularity of cryptocurrencies such as [bitcoin](#), [blockchain](#) and [Web 3.0](#) has also sparked interest in Africa. The widespread adoption of cryptocurrencies in Africa can be attributed to several factors, including high [mobile phone](#) and [internet penetration rates](#). [Blockchain](#) technology has the potential to increase efficiency and reduce [transaction costs](#), contributing to the growth of cryptocurrencies on the continent. Most Africans seek information from various media sources, partly due to comments from various celebrities and media hype about how cryptocurrencies make people rich. This has led to numerous individuals believing that crypto will allow for greater financial rewards, which is propagated through social media (Ramji, 2023). This has led many to follow crypto influencers and other social media celebrities. This is an anomalous new phenomenon coined as the '[Musk effect](#)', which shows how much of an impact Musk's tweets via social media have on short-term price movements and volume of cryptocurrency transactions. Moods and personal sentiments affect the pricing of financial markets, and Musk's tweets about bitcoin are indicative of such moods or sentiments, at least to some extent. In this respect, Musk's tweets about cryptocurrencies may be perceived by the market as "accurate news", which has essentially led many to buy these cryptocurrencies. Many low-income Africans have been excluded from Africa's banking system, coupled with weak currencies in countries such as [Nigeria](#) and [Kenya](#), are now influencing more citizens of these countries to hedge [inflation](#) against the depreciating currencies (Ramji, 2023).

The role of [social media](#) is also shaping public discourse on government policies in Nigeria, as can be demonstrated by the example of the Nigerian X space (Omipidan, et al., 2024). Social media sites, especially [X](#), have become integral tools for public discussion on issues that affect or relate to government policies, information dissemination tools to shape opinion and create a community where individuals dialogue and share opinions on government policies, governance and human interest issues, mainly when it affects the general wellbeing of citizens. This has been demonstrated by the example of the X discourse surrounding President [Bola Tinubu's](#) economic policies. Studies revealed that X plays a vital role in shaping discussions surrounding government policies. Therefore, they recommend using X to promote the interpretation of government policies by government officials to avoid misinterpretation of government intention for the citizens (Omipidan, et al., 2024). [X](#) had in May 2024 a total of 600 million users, thereof 5.75 million users in Nigeria. Hence, in Nigeria, X, has become a pivotal communication platform offering real-time interaction, information sharing, providing news update and public engagement. This immediacy in keeping people updated on issues around them is crucial in a country like Nigeria, where traditional media may sometimes lag in reporting or be restricted by political influences. X provides a space for a diverse range of voices, including those marginalized in traditional media. X enables individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds to express their views, share their experiences, and participate in public discourse, especially those on government policies. X allows for the dissemination of uncensored information, often bringing to light issues that might otherwise remain hidden (Omipidan, et al., 2024). However, in March 2023, following the purchase of Twitter by Elon Musk, the platform was rebranded to X, there has been criticism also in the Nigerian public of using X to promote fake news and misinformation (Omipidan, et al., 2024).

Over the years, World powers like the [USA](#) and [Russia](#) and other countries have leveraged on the importance of [space law](#) in building formidable technological strength by fashioning out



legal and institutional frameworks to regulate space exploration within their reach (Audu, 2022). Nigeria today is considered as among the pioneer nations in Africa because of its venture into space exploration. Therefore, also the Nigerian government, in the bid to broaden the regulatory and institutional framework of space law in Nigeria, needs to establish a legal framework in the name of [National Space research and development agency](#) (NASRDA) Act, 2010. The objective of this Act is to pursue the development and application of a space focused science and technology for socio-economic benefits of the nation. This the more so, because researchers exposed loopholes existent in the act that needs reforms to meet up with internationally acceptable standards (Audu, 2022). Elon Musk once described space as “a fixer upper of a planet but we could make it work.” This spelled out how necessary space exploration is. Amidst the necessity for space exploration, there is a need for a regulatory legal framework, which is known today as space law (Audu, 2022).

In recent years, Nigeria has faced growing insecurity characterised by issues such as the [Boko Haram insurgency](#), clashes between farmers and herdsmen, separatist movements and kidnapping (Oshionebo & Okoronkwo, 2023). There is an ongoing debate about the causes of this insecurity, with the government often blaming social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), while citizens argue that it is due to a lack of effective leadership. A key finding of studies on this issue is that positive use of Twitter promotes security, while negative use of the platform promotes insecurity. Some Twitter users have used the platform to pursue their personal interests. They sometimes engage in spreading falsehoods and negative information to achieve their goals. This negative use of Twitter has increased tensions and security threats among Nigerian citizens, impacting on national security. On the other hand, other Twitter users have used the platform to advance their modest and legitimate interests. Thus, the responses show that individuals and organisations promoting good causes also use the Twitter platform. Therefore, it is not valid to argue that all negative influences on society come from Twitter; positive influences also come from Twitter. For example, the responses indicate that Nigerian security agents and agencies also use Twitter. Ultimately, the responses indicate that the increase in insecurity in Nigeria cannot be blamed solely on Twitter, but rather on misguided citizens who use the Twitter platform negatively to achieve their selfish, destructive agenda. Consequently, it has been recommended that government agencies, private organisations and individuals promoting good causes should be present and active on Twitter with the intention of propagating good causes as well as monitoring and countering any negative influence of misguided Twitter users (Oshionebo & Okoronkwo, 2023).

## 2.3 Musk's impact on Kenya

**Cartoon 13:** *Kenya must adapt to the new order as Trump effect spreads across nations*



Source: © Muinde, Patrick, 2025

Despite being a controversial public figure both in America and the rest of the world, many world leaders have been quick to embrace [Donald Trump 2.0](#) (Muinde, Patrick, 2025). As part of his series of immediate executive orders, Trump has since declared for example that it is the official policy of the US government that there are only two genders, male and female. In [Kenya](#), the need for a member of parliament to weigh in on the [gender issue](#) was immediate. Kenyans asked themselves what they needed to do as a country to protect their national interest in this new geo-economic and political order created by Trump. This was also seen as a veiled attack on the pleas of [Kenya Kwanza](#), the Kenyan political alliance currently led by [William Ruto](#), the current President of Kenya (Muinde, Patrick, 2025). The country could be caught in this crossfire given the cozy relationship President Ruto enjoyed under [President Biden's administration](#). From a critical perspective, while there will definitely be several ongoing programmes that will suffer from the new politics, there is still a small window of opportunity to ensure some sense of continuity. The Kenyan mission within the [Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti](#) (MSS) also serves Washington's interests and would fit perfectly with Trump's 'America first' stance (Muinde, Patrick, 2025). In 2023, the [UN Security Council](#) approved sending a [Kenya-led force to Haiti](#) to fight violent gangs (Borger & Kimeu & Taylor, 2023). It is noteworthy that the second contingent of 217 officers arrived in Haiti hours before Trump was sworn in. In addition to the Haiti operation, Kenya remains a strategic ally of the [US in security operations in the Horn of Africa](#), particularly against the [threat of terrorism](#). All factors considered, it is highly unlikely that President Trump will interfere with the budgetary, technical and logistical support to Kenya on security matters. On the other hand, trade, health, human rights and devolution programmes are likely to suffer. On trade, policy controls to protect American industries and create jobs are unlikely to be selective. As a result, Trump and his pals, notably [Elon Musk](#), are likely to slow down existing trade negotiations between Kenya and the US. However, the suspension of USAID and the withdrawal from the WHO, as well as the redefinition of gender, will have a direct impact on the agency's existing health programmes and funding for gender-related civil society activities. Nevertheless, Kenya has strategic trade interests with the two countries in conflict (Muinde, Patrick, 2025).

The recently established Department of Government Efficiency ([DOGE](#)), headed by Elon Musk, saw many of the ongoing aid programmes as avenues for waste and corruption within the US government. Kenyan politicians expected a radical business investment approach to how each of the ongoing programmes would be evaluated. [Climate change](#), a pet issue for [President Ruto](#), is likely to be the next big casualty. But as an experienced deal-maker, Trump has signalled a possible end to the crisis. After all, [Nairobi](#) has a strategic interest in maintaining good trade relations with the US despite current and potential future conflicts (Muinde, Patrick, 2025).

Kenya has also been a focus for [Starlink](#), with the service being rolled out to improve internet access in remote and rural areas. Moreover, Musk has expressed interest in [Kenya's geothermal energy](#) potential, which could align with [Tesla's](#) energy storage and renewable energy projects.

**Graph 1:** *Geographical advantages of Kenya's potential launching sites  
Depiction of current launch facilities with relation to equatorial belt*



Source: © Gugelev-Shapiro, 2024

**Graph 2:** *Map of Kenya with potential launching sites*



**Fig. 2** Map of Kenya with Malindi, Mombasa, Nairobi, and Lamu highlighted (left) [4]  
**Fig. 3** Kenya with depicted available recovery area to the east (Indian Ocean) (right) [5]

Source: © Gugelev-Shapiro, 2024

Kenya's coastal region offers a strategic edge in space launch operations due to its equatorial positioning and Eastern-facing ocean, optimizing both [fuel efficiency](#) and satellite deployment trajectories (Gugelev-Shapiro, 2024). Also, it meets existing safety requirements for potential [debris field ellipses](#). The [Broglia Space Center](#) (in [Malindi](#), Kenya), with a successful mission legacy dating back to the 1960s, stands at the forefront of this advantage, now pivotal in the [Commercial Space 2.0](#) era. The centre benefits from the aforementioned equatorial launch advantage, enabling cost-effective access to [geostationary orbits](#). Moreover, it disposes of the established infrastructures, like repurposed offshore oil platforms acting as (flight-tested) small-to-medium orbital-class launch sites, the [port of Mombasa](#), offering easy access to major nearby shipping lanes with direct channels to [JAXA](#), Japan's increasingly active space industry, and [ESA](#) and [NASA](#) through the [Suez Canal](#). Last but not least, it has a well-developed road and rail infrastructure directly from the port to the launch site, as well as low-wind, mild weather all year round (Gugelev-Shapiro, 2024).

The potential benefits of a partnership between the Western “new space” industry as well as governmental bodies such as NASA and ESA and the already-poised Kenya Space Agency (KSA), which has recently signed deals with commercial space giants such as Musk's [SpaceX](#), have far-reaching ramifications, for the aerospace sector and beyond. Although low-cost renovations would be needed to modernize the [Broglia Space Center](#) to assert Kenya as a key player in the global space market, these cost have to be compared with the challenges faced by traditional launch sites such as ESA in [French Guiana](#) and NASA at [Cape Canaveral](#), including logistical and environmental issues. This approach would not only promote innovation and international collaboration but also strategically positions Kenya as an indispensable hub in the international space launch landscape. The current SpaceX business model revolves entirely around a single relationship, for better or worse, the collaboration of [Elon Musk](#) (Gugelev-Shapiro, 2024).

[Africa](#) is rapidly emerging as a significant player in space-related activities (Firsing, 2024). Presently, 22 African nations boast space agencies and 59 [African satellites](#) are already in orbit. Although Africa has yet to develop its own launch capabilities, plans for spaceports on the continent are actively underway. The newly established [African Space Agency](#), headquartered in [Egypt](#), is a key contributor to the [African Union's Agenda 2063](#). This agenda underscores the critical role of space in Africa's development, with the AU's space policy and strategy being one of 15 key programs within this visionary plan. To achieve accelerated economic and social development, many African countries actively seek support from major global space powers such as [China](#), [Russia](#), and the [United States](#). This support includes access to equipment, launch facilities, and research collaborations, with companies like SpaceX playing a pivotal role. Africa's quest for transformational change increasingly intertwines with efforts to bridge the digital divide (Firsing, 2024). The continent was an early adopter of satellite technology for [mobile phone networks](#), bypassing the costly infrastructure of copper wire and fiber optics. However, [Starlink's](#) dominance has sparked debates over local ownership in telecommunications, with some countries, like [Kenya](#), negotiating exceptions to local ownership requirements in deals with SpaceX. Governments also express concerns about their inability to control the content accessed by their citizens through such platforms, which poses potential security threats. In terms of security, satellites play a critical role in many aspects of governance and daily life, from communications and financial systems to weather monitoring and military security. Satellites are invaluable for monitoring agriculture, coastal areas, and the movement of militant groups, as well as for search and rescue operations. One of the most notable efforts is the [China National Space Administration's](#) International Lunar Research Station ([ILRS](#)), supported by Russia's [Roscosmos](#). The ILRS aims to establish a primary station at the lunar south pole by 2035, with [South Africa](#) and [Egypt](#) contributing to the project. [Ethiopia's](#) Space Science and



Geospatial Institute and the Kenya Advanced Institute of Science and Technology also joined the Chinese Moon project in April 2024 (Firsing, 2024).

Big Tech corporations such as Amazon, Apple, Meta (Facebook), Alphabet (Google), or Alibaba are eyeing financial markets and so-called “underbanked people”. PayPal is one of the most successful FinTech companies in the world, including sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and contributed enormously to the wealth of South African- born billionaire Elon Musk. Money is the key to socio-economic development, i.e. the financing of investment as well as participation in the economy (De Masi, 2023). Large parts of the global population, especially in SSA and especially in the large African informal sector (Kohnert, 2000), are excluded from the traditional banking system because they have no regular income or can hardly build up savings. Financial technology (FinTech) corporations promise financial inclusion for “underbanked people”, notably in SSA. The two biggest SSA FinTech economies, include Kenya and South Africa, expect economic growth and poverty reduction (De Masi, 2023). In SSA, FinTech platforms such as the mobile phone-based banking and money transfer service M-Pesa capitalize on millions of unbanked people in the informal sector. Basic phone banking has facilitated financial access for the unbanked population in Kenya. However, M-Pesa is still highly concentrated on urban areas and extracts exorbitant fees, mostly out of reach for poor people. Mobile money finances consumer debt rather than sustaining investment into the productive capacity of previously unbanked people. Therefore, some economists criticize value extraction from poor communities by FinTech corporations through high interest rates and service fees (“digital colonialism”) (De Masi, 2023). This is why African countries should strengthen data protection and public ownership in the telecommunications sector, as well as enforce antitrust legislation and regulate FinTech to at least the same extent as the banks. Another option could be to tax local data mining. Further, cash payments for smaller amounts should be protected and Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDC) considered as a means of offering financial technology as a public good (De Masi, 2023).

**Cartoon 14:** ‘Loan us Elon Musk’ ... Musk and the ‘Deep State’



Source: © Harry, The Standard (Kenya), 24 February 2025

An illustrative example of the dangers to democracy without public alternatives in Africa's data infrastructure is the current furor surrounding tech entrepreneur and billionaire Elon

[Musk](#) (De Masi, 2023). He bought [Twitter](#) and soon reinstated the accounts of controversial social and political figures such as former US President [Donald Trump](#). While Musk has been criticised for promoting right-wing views and allowing [hate speech](#) on Twitter, African experts question whether he should be allowed to block or allow opponents on a major social network, and whether such decisions should be left to a private company in the first place. They ask what happens if, for example, [Meta](#) (Facebook) or Musk discriminate against political movements that seek to curb the power of social media companies through democratic means? With the private sector heavily involved in [FinTech](#) and Western governments dominating the majority of these organisations, the power imbalance could potentially undermine the tech and data sovereignty of African countries, including the unbanked population in Kenya (De Masi, 2023).

Thus, unprecedented efforts are underway to connect the unconnected, many of whom live in conflict-affected rural areas (Stremlau, 2020). Western companies are trying to lead the way. Google, for example, is experimenting with drones and hot-air balloons in what it calls '[Project Loon](#)'. The balloons are currently in their first commercial trial in rural, mountainous communities in [Kenya](#), where it would be expensive to build infrastructure on the ground. In addition, Elon Musk's [SpaceX](#) has launched the first of what is expected to be tens of thousands of satellites that it hopes will provide global internet coverage from space by flying in low orbit above the Earth (Stremlau, 2020).

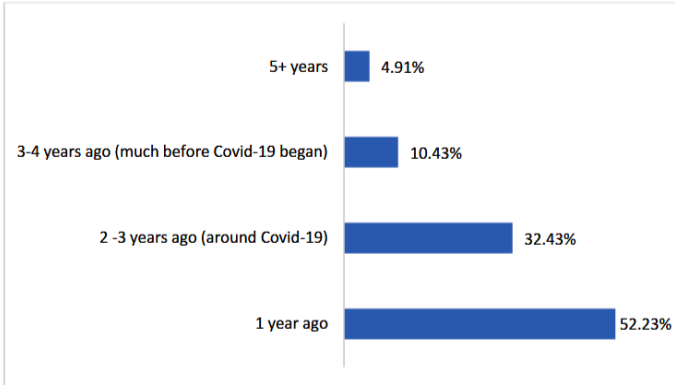
The mission of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs ([UNOOSA](#)) is to promote the peaceful uses of outer space and to ensure that the benefits of space technology and applications are accessible to all people, everywhere. The International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)) is dedicated to connecting the world's people, wherever they live and whatever their means, so that they can communicate effectively through radio and satellite technology. "[KiboCUBE](#)", one of the initiative's flagship programmes, has already enabled [Kenya](#) and [Guatemala](#) to launch their first satellites. Other programme winners are expected to follow suit, with [Mauritius](#) likely to be next (Al Fatayri, 2023).

The growing popularity of [cryptocurrencies](#), such as [bitcoin](#), [blockchain](#) and [Web 3.0](#), has sparked interest not only in developed countries but also in Africa (Ramji, 2023). The widespread adoption of cryptocurrencies in Africa can be attributed to several factors, including high mobile phone and internet penetration rates. Blockchain technology has the potential to increase efficiency and reduce transaction costs, contributing to the growth of cryptocurrencies in SSA, including [Kenya](#), [Nigeria](#) and [South Africa](#). Social and other media have had a significant impact on the adoption of cryptocurrencies in Africa. Field research has shown that most Africans seek information from various media sources, in part due to comments from various celebrities and [media hype](#) about how cryptocurrencies can make people rich. This has led many people to believe that crypto will enable greater financial rewards. In SSA, where the availability of information is typically driven by cheap mobile phones, access to [social media](#) is quick and easy, which has also led many to follow crypto influencers and other social media celebrities. What is essentially being reported, who is doing the reporting and who is consuming the content is critical (Ramji, 2023).

As shown in the graphs below, the growth of interest in crypto was marked in 2022 (Ramji, 2023). This was probably due to a number of factors, such as the rise in the price of crypto, the fact that numerous news sites and blogs were reporting on the rise of cryptocurrencies, as well as the rise in the overall global fame of [Elon Musk](#). Most importantly, [COVID measures](#) were also in place in many parts of Africa, preventing people from getting out of their homes and spending their time on other things. In this sense, the graphs show that the rise of crypto

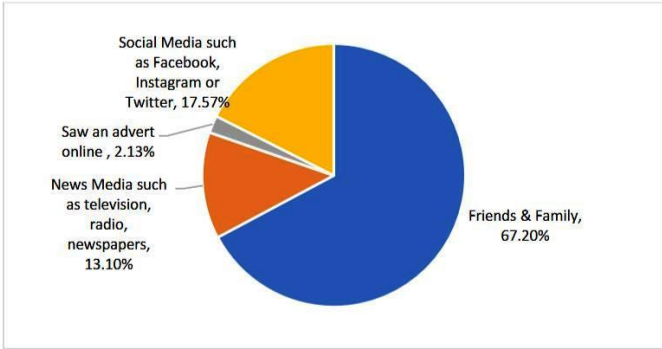
came from the influence of friends and family, as well as social media for those who had access to the internet (Ramji, 2023).

**Graph 3:** ‘When did you first hear about Crypto and crypto-currencies’



Source: © Ramji, 2023

**Graph 4:** ‘Where did you first hear about Crypto and crypto-currencies’



Source: © Ramji, 2023

In [sub-Saharan Africa](#) and other parts of the world, [social media](#) has become an important part of discussions on the political economy of development, but it is difficult to assess its impact. Depending on the country, social media is used for civic engagement, anti-corruption efforts, following news, and maintaining political engagement in the face of disillusionment with national leaders. The incredible growth of internet and mobile phone use in Africa and most of the developing world over the past decade has accelerated this process. Thus, a region with some of the least developed socio-economic infrastructure in the world has embraced and used social media for democratic, social and economic growth (Ogunbanjo, 2023).

The term '[social media](#)' encompasses interactive systems that go beyond well-known websites such as [TikTok](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) (Ogunbanjo, 2023). Two social media platforms that have emerged in Kenya are [M-Pesa](#), launched in 2007 by [Vodafone](#) and [Safaricom](#), the largest mobile phone operator in [Kenya](#), and [Ushahidi](#), an open source software application that aggregates and maps data using user-generated reports. It uses the concept of crowdsourcing as an early model for what has been termed 'activist mapping'. Both platforms are increasingly being integrated into financial and electoral processes. Although they originated in Kenya, they have gained popularity in Africa and beyond. The mapping of [Kibera](#), a large slum in Kenya, raised awareness of its problems and attracted national attention (Ogunbanjo, 2023).

The [post-election violence in Kenya](#), fuelled by social media, is another example. The example shows the many ways in which information and communication technology (ICT), especially social media, has impacted life in different countries, even beyond Kenya, such as [Senegal](#) (Kohnert & Marfaing, 2019), with different outcomes in terms of the political systems in these countries (Ogunbanjo, 2023).

In [Senegal](#), for example, the ever-increasing use of modern media such as mobile phones and the internet has almost doubled the number of followers of the Islamic movements of the late [Marabout Sy](#), [Mouride Mbacké](#) and other religious leaders. As a result, the media also became a decisive factor in the election campaign, for example for the [presidential elections in 2019](#). Therefore, all five admitted presidential candidates in 2019 invested heavily in the digital field, especially in [WhatsApp](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#), [Snapchat](#) and other internet platforms used by nearly 10 million, mostly young people, out of a population estimated at 16 million. As a result, online social networks in Senegal have been hailed as "guardians of democracy". However, the use of social media for campaigning is increasingly at risk of being exploited by opponents, including manipulation with [fake news](#). [Y'en a marre](#) ('Enough is Enough'), a pro-democracy grassroots agency of young activists who oppose neo-colonialism, rallied behind the movement. Apparently this was not to the taste of the established political elite in France [Françafrique](#) either. The [France Dégage](#) group also campaigned for the "[monetary sovereignty](#)" of the [CFA franc](#) countries (Kohnert & Marfaing, 2019).

There is a growing awareness in SSA of the impact of online media socio-political discourses on [deepfakes](#) - with a focus on Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. Online media have reported extensively on the emergence of deepfakes in these countries (Karanja, 2023). Deepfakes media are produced using artificial intelligence neural networks known as [Generative Adversarial Networks](#). This AI technique, apparently of particular interest to [Elon Musk](#), has been used to combine, replace or overlay images and videos to create controversial deepfake videos. There are deep concerns about the increasing cases of [financial fraud](#), [religious hostility](#), [xenophobic attacks](#) and [cyber harassment](#) fuelled by deepfakes. Even though there are genuine efforts to enumerate the benefits of deepfakes through media/legal/public education and awareness, the general online media logic and perception is [dystopian](#) (Karanja, 2023).

Thus, the [2023 presidential election in Nigeria](#) was a testing ground for how [Nigerians](#) would react to being bombarded with a truckload of synthetic and almost believable news (Karanja, 2023). For example, a deepfake video of Tesla CEO [Elon Musk](#) endorsing [Peter Obi](#), one of the leading presidential candidates, surfaced online. [Kenya](#) also faced a growing problem of fake news in the wake of the [post-election violence](#) that followed the disputed 2008 presidential election. The idea that deepfakes could also be used in politics is frightening, and local online media picked up on it. With more and more people using social media, the peddlers of fake videos are stepping up their quest for hearts, minds and votes by any means necessary, including creating videos to spread inflammatory propaganda and fear. The media fear that political actors will take advantage of this technology (Karanja, 2023). With high internet penetration in Kenya and other African countries, the same technology can be used to spread fake news that can undermine security or even democracy. Young people in particular are susceptible to deep fake misinformation and disinformation on newer platforms such as [TikTok](#) (Karanja, 2023).

Technological advancements have also made it possible for tech-savvy individuals to compile computer programs that make it possible to swap faces and replace them with those of celebrities, politicians, et cetera (Amatika-Omondi, 2022). Yet even more sophisticated



technology uses [Artificial Intelligence](#) (AI) methods to create videos and photos that are not easily distinguishable from the real ones. ‘[Deepfakes](#)’ has become a buzzword. There is wide-scale misinformation due to deepfakes and assesses the regulation of deepfakes in Kenya to curb the misinformation. Such manipulation has evolved from simple cartoon depictions with wrong or misleading captions to photo or video edits to deepfake content that seems to be authentic. Such doctored content has both positive and negative applications. The positive applications include use in the entertainment industry, advertising industry, and education among others. The negative applications include use in hate speech, incitement to violence, attacking one’s reputation and [political mudslinging](#). Such hate speech has the potential of further negative effects for instance causing chaos and [civil unrest](#) (Amatika-Omondi, 2022). Other negative applications include the doctoring of court evidence leading to wrong verdicts by judges and judicial officers. As such, deepfake technology has introduced several challenges. Some of the challenges brought about by the deepfake technology include the difficulty in regulation since it advances quite fast making it almost impossible to pin it down. The other challenge is the difficulty involved in detecting deepfake content so as not to rely on it for instance as a judicial officer while adjudicating a case. It has emerged that most of the technical modes of detecting deepfake content are advanced and require well- equipped laboratories and highly trained personnel to use them. This problem can be solved by the Government of Kenya making such investments and training forensic experts (Amatika-Omondi, 2022).

Traditional and online media share the contemporary media landscape in Kenya (Simiyu, 2023). However, with the redefinition of media in the digital age and the growth of online media such as [social media](#), new media is complementing, competing with and replacing traditional media as a media source for some segments of the population. It is therefore possible that large social media companies such as Meta, Google and Elon Musk's Twitter (now X) are also part of the mainstream media. Both types of media face a number of challenges, including the [political economy of the media](#), some restrictive media laws and law enforcement actions, and peace and conflict, which have a significant impact on the performance of the media's institutional functions. This [public sphere](#) is arguably [chimerical](#) but ideal. The media is the medium that objectively sets and frames the political agenda, collects, disseminates and amplifies information, and guides the public in decision-making. This is important in critical processes such as elections, where access to accurate and credible information helps to foster an informed electorate that can meaningfully exercise its right to [political participation](#). The degree of media freedom is also a determinant of the freedom and [fairness of an election](#). Media regulation has often adopted a tripartite approach of self-regulation, state regulation or co-regulation, which revolves around the regulatory actors. Their regulation has a significant impact on media freedom and its ability to fulfil its normative functions. Therefore, a rights-based approach to media protection in the digital age would be required for meaningful political participation of the electorate in Kenya and beyond (Simiyu, 2023).

The satellite internet potential in rural Kenya and beyond is crucial for expanding information and communication technology (ICT) access, thereby potentially reducing the [digital divide](#). (Okello, 2023). However, up to now rural Kenyans, who constitute 75 % of the population, prefer older, less cost-effective broadband technologies over newer, more affordable satellite internet options. Despite the satellite internet expansion in Kenya, provided largely by Musk’s [Starlink](#) project, the country is still deficient in coherent initiatives, unequivocal policy frameworks and robust technological [governance](#) essential for [sustaining development](#). The [Fourth Industrial Revolution](#) is driving the need for high-capacity wireless ICT services globally, with satellite internet offering a cost-effective solution, particularly in developing nations’ rural areas. Kenya needs robust policy frameworks to support and maintain the

technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Yet, impeded by limited ICT infrastructure, nascent policy mechanisms and affordable access to sufficient electricity, the diffusion and adoption of low-cost satellite internet in Kenya remains limited, constraining its population's access to economical, advanced technological innovation, which is critical to the country's economic and social development (Okello, 2023).

Last, but not least, [social media](#) and its misuse may impact on [national security](#) in Kenya (Mbithi, 2022). The country is not immune to the dynamics of social media in terms of its use and abuse as a member of the international community. The government and military must deal with severe security and privacy risks raised by the use of social media as a new mode of communication, as well as new [cyber-attack](#) vectors. Criminal gangs, terrorist organizations, bad-faith non-state players, and rebellious elements, such as [Al-Qaeda](#) and [Al-Shabaab](#), often use social media platforms to disseminate propaganda with the explicit goal of getting to, recruitment, and radicalization of their intended audience. Over the years the dominance of social media in Kenya has continued to grow and its presence can no longer be ignored. As observed, Social media can be viewed as a double-edged sword not only in Kenya but the entire globe. Terrorist attacks, hacking, sensitive data leaks, cyber bullying, cyber fraud and [money laundering](#), [cattle raiding](#), [illegal hunting](#), [ethnic conflicts](#), [information warfare](#), and [hate speech](#) are other negative examples. The government of Kenya needs to ensure that the policies that are already in place concerning social media and internet security are fully enforced in order to ensure the perpetrators are fully prosecuted and brought to justice (Mbithi, 2022).

With [Elon Musk's](#) takeover, many scientists are considering doing away with [Twitter](#) for other options (Kupferschmidt, 2022). In fact, Twitter has become arguably a major [public good](#). When Elon Musk first suggested buying the social media platform widely used in SSA and by nearly 240 million worldwide, many were concerned that such a purchase would increase the nastiness of Twitter and allow misinformation to drown out reasonable discourse. Musk calls himself a “free speech absolutist” and promised to stop censoring accounts. Originally dismissed by many as a platform for self-promotion, Twitter has in recent years also provided a venue for hate speech, including abuse directed at scientists. Indeed, the use of [racial slurs](#) on the platform spiked after Musk took over the platform, even though he has said the rules have not changed. However, in Kenya, which has stepped up surveillance, most Twitter (X) users have not picked up alternative platforms like [Mastodon](#) yet (Kupferschmidt, 2022).

### 3. Conclusion

**Cartoon 16:** *The world, including Africa, are in for a wild ride with the Trump 2.0 administration, backed by Elon Musk*



Source: © [Brandan Reynolds](#), *Business Day*, 14 November 2024

[Elon Musk's](#) policies and business ventures have had a notable impact on socio-economic development, particularly in the largest economies of [sub-Saharan Africa](#) (SSA), [South Africa](#), [Nigeria](#) and [Kenya](#). His policies and ventures, particularly through companies such as [Tesla](#), [SpaceX](#), [PayPal](#), [X \(Twitter\)](#) and [Neuralink](#), have had both direct and indirect impacts on the region.

Musk's roots in [apartheid South Africa](#) have sparked debates about technological innovation, economic growth and social inequality. While he has not been actively involved in large-scale business operations there, his global prominence has influenced South Africa's push for innovation, particularly in [electric vehicles](#) and [renewable energy](#). His companies' advances in renewable energy are in line with South Africa's energy transition, although local implementation remains challenging due to infrastructure and political factors. However, bilateral relations between the US and South Africa have recently soured, with both Trump and Musk accusing the South African government of alleged [land-grabbing](#) from white settlers ([Boers](#)).

In [Nigeria](#), Africa's largest economy, Musk's ventures have influenced the tech startup ecosystem. His promotion of internet connectivity through SpaceX's [Starlink](#) offers a potential solution to Nigeria's connectivity challenges, particularly in rural areas with a large unconnected population. This could significantly improve access to education, e-commerce and [FinTech](#), sectors in which Nigeria is already a regional leader. However, the high cost of Starlink terminals remains a barrier to widespread adoption. Tesla's EV technology has also sparked discussions about transitioning Nigeria's transportation sector to cleaner energy sources. However, barriers to widespread adoption include affordability and political instability.

[Kenya's](#) focus on [renewable energy](#) aligns with [Tesla's solar and battery storage solutions](#), which could support the country's energy goals. In addition, [SpaceX's](#) satellite technology has potential applications in Kenya's growing technology and space sectors. It could encourage innovation and access to global markets. However, local regulatory frameworks and infrastructure remain barriers.

Overall, Musk's policies and technologies have the potential to drive significant economic and social change in [sub-Saharan Africa](#), particularly in improving connectivity, promoting renewable energy and fostering innovation. However, challenges such as affordability and infrastructure gaps need to be addressed for these impacts to be fully realised. However, the socio-economic impact on sub-Saharan Africa remains uneven. Benefits are often tempered by the region's underlying infrastructure and governance challenges, which hinder the full realisation of these advances.

**Cartoon 15:** *'Each abrupt and erratic jerk and jolt on policy in Washington reverberates around the world.'*



Source: © Illustration: Rita Liu/Guardian; Jones, 2025

Meanwhile, [Trump's erratic policymaking](#) has created a lot of uncertainty and is increasingly unsettling businesses and investors, with a knock-on effect on the stock market (Jones, 2025), not only in corporate America, but also globally, including in SSA. The dizzying policy shifts have triggered a sell-off in the stock market, concern among businesses and panic in foreign capitals, which fear a repeat of the chaotic decision-making of Trump's first term, when he threatened and launched trade battles with America's biggest trading partners, then backed down. Growing concerns over Trump's tariffs have deeply unsettled markets, with Wall Street's [S&P 500](#) falling nearly 2 % in early March 2025 alone, putting it on track for its worst week since September (Politi & Williams & Chazan, 2025).

As the US president warned of "a little short-term disruption", businesses are struggling to make decisions amid heightened uncertainty. Trump declared there was "no room left" for a deal with [Canada](#) and [Mexico](#) in early March 2025, launching a trade war against America's closest allies that he portrayed as an effort to protect America's soul. Then he backtracked. It wasn't his first feint and retreat. It probably won't be the last. The day after imposing steep tariffs on his country's neighbours, the US president announced a one-month reprieve for carmakers. The following day, tariffs on almost all goods from Canada and Mexico were also suspended. Tariffs on [China](#), which were imposed at a rate of 10 % in February and doubled to 20 % on 11 March, remained in place. Trump and his aides are now heralding a new wave of tariffs in early April as "the big one", with countless markets, including the [European Union](#), and industries in their sights. Every abrupt and erratic twist and turn of policy in Washington reverberates around the world, with companies in the US and far beyond trying to keep track of day-to-day developments and figure out what they mean (Jones, 2025).

The architects of '[Trumponomics](#)', including [Elon Musk](#), insisted it would pave the way for a bigger, more prosperous future. But businesses are struggling to make sense of the economic landscape now, let alone what might happen next. In the four short months since his election victory last November, Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on Canada and Mexico in



January, threatened to impose tariffs on Canada and Mexico in February, threatened to impose tariffs on Canada and Mexico in March, briefly imposed tariffs on Canada and Mexico in March, reversed those tariffs on most goods, and threatened to impose tariffs on Canada and Mexico in April. For companies trying to navigate North America, from automakers to juice makers, the world has shifted and re-shifted at a dizzying pace in a matter of days. The first results are delayed business investment, shaky consumer confidence, stalled capital flows and a volatile stock market. People's livelihoods are at stake. As a campaigner, Trump's great political skill is his ability to use rhetoric - often brash, crude and even false - to bend perceptions of reality. But the reality of tariffs is more complex. Tariffs are generally paid by the importers, in this case the US companies that buy goods from overseas, rather than the exporters who sell the products or the countries in which they are based. Many of these US companies were quick to say this week that they would pass these higher costs on to their customers (Jones, 2025).

Today, as in the past, there are five main reasons to oppose any plans to make the world a better place through tariffs. As history shows, the opposite is being achieved and we are heading for hell with more tariffs (Koch, 2025). More tariffs will make America richer! That's what Donald Trump thinks. In 1930, the US introduced the [Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act](#), which made 20,000 products more expensive. World trade collapsed like never before, followed by nationalism, crisis and war. Trump ignores this lesson. The [Wall Street Journal](#) recently put it in strikingly similar terms in the debate over Donald Trump's current tariff policy: Trump is launching "the dumbest trade war ever", America's leading business newspaper wrote. Canada's social-liberal Prime Minister [Justin Trudeau](#) said he rarely quoted the leading journal of US capitalism. But then, at a press conference, he said of the US president: "Donald, it's really very stupid". Today, as then, the warnings fell on deaf ears. Hoover signed the bill, initially to the applause of his party colleagues. Criticism of Smoot-Hawley, Republicans said at the time, came only from internationalist lunatics. "Anybody who opposes our bill," declared the proud, now famous [Senator Smoot](#), "is betraying American interests".

The [American right](#) is rolling its eyes at the "[globalists](#)". Unfortunately, they keep losing sight of the national. [Elon Musk](#) and [Steve Bannon](#) are the masterminds behind Trump's "[Make America Great Again](#)" movement. In an interview with the Canadian news platform [Global News](#) in February 2025, Bannon took the liberty of saying that Canada was not just about tariffs, but, like [Greenland](#), about something bigger, i.e. US "[hemispheric control](#)". Bannon's comment highlights five reasons why [tariffs](#) should not be used to make the world a better place. As history shows, the opposite will be achieved and we are heading for hell with more tariffs (Koch, 2025).

*First*, tariffs provoke power struggles. A tariff measure usually triggers a countermeasure, even on the side of the party that is likely to be the long-term economic loser in the exchange of blows. The fact that supermarkets in Canada are currently removing American goods from their shelves is just the beginning (Koch, 2025).

*Second*, tariffs divide friends. The situation in 1930 was similar: power struggles divided friendly countries and nationalism grew everywhere. The atmosphere grew increasingly hostile. In Washington, friendly states such as Canada, France and Britain distanced themselves from the US and threatened to look for new partners. But Smoot and Hawley proved politically short-sighted. They simply did not anticipate the blows and counterblows of a global trade war. Nor did they realise that the world economy, ailing since 1929, needed trade barriers as much as a freshly operated patient needs salt in his wound. And they had no idea that in a Germany already plagued by high unemployment, nationalism would turn into National Socialism (Koch, 2025).

*Third*, tariffs encourage war rather than peace. In 1932, one in three able-bodied men in Germany was unemployed. In this situation, Washington's decision to slow down world trade by imposing more tariffs acted as an accelerant. The Nazis put up posters at mass rallies showing hollow-eyed people with the inscription: "Our last hope: Hitler". In the Reichstag elections on 5 March 1933, the NSDAP became the largest party for the first time. The Smoot-Hawley Act also exacerbated economic hardship and tensions in Asia. For example, Japan, hit hard by American tariffs, invaded Manchuria in 1931 in search of new markets and raw materials. In the space of a few years, a global scenario had emerged that ran dangerously counter to the interests of the US as a whole: politically, economically and, ultimately, militarily. In the current situation, a new rift between the Americans and the Europeans could prove to be a global political folly. In the 21st century, the US and the EU had planned to defend themselves more strongly against a dictatorial China and its drive for global dominance. Instead, Washington and Brussels are now sharpening their knives against each other over Trump's new tariff initiatives (Koch, 2025).

*Fourth*, tariffs are a costly illusion. Trump is almost obsessed with tariffs, he is interested in testing a theory that he has cherished and nurtured for decades - a theory that many people in the US find quite comforting. It is, after all, the beautiful illusion that a strong leader will miraculously protect them in hard times. Trump says that for him, "tariffs" are "one of the most wonderful words in the dictionary". In a speech to supporters shortly after he was sworn in on 20 January 2025, Trump insisted: "Tariffs will make us rich as hell". But any surcharge on foreign goods will ultimately result in higher prices for the American consumer. Inflation, which has been a major problem in the US since the end of the pandemic, will rise again. However, the relocation of production as a result of higher tariffs will do nothing to combat inflation. New inflationary effects will arise simply because wages in the US are higher than in manufacturing countries such as China, Vietnam or Mexico. In addition, there is a foreseeable shortage of skilled workers in the US (Koch, 2025).

*Fifth*, tariffs create uncertainty. The impact of Trump's tariffs on complex industrial supply chains is not yet fully understood. Some car parts, for example, cross the borders of Canada or Mexico several times before being assembled. Recognising these modern complexities, Trump recently delayed many of his tariff plans by 30 days at the last minute. These uncertainties are already fuelling fears in financial markets of a possible recession under Trump. The phrase "Trump recession" is making the rounds. And the mere suspicion of an economic slowdown is getting more and more fodder every day (Koch, 2025).

The erratic movements of President Donald Trump's policies also had a negative impact on his buddy [Elon Musk](#) (Megerian, 2025). On 11 March 2025, Trump bought a new Tesla on the White House driveway, choosing a shiny red sedan for around \$80,000 and leaving it at the White House for his staff to drive. In doing so, he showed his support for Elon Musk's electric car company Tesla, which has faced backlash for its work to advance the president's political agenda and reduce the size of the federal government (Megerian, 2025). The president also said he hoped his purchase would boost Tesla, which has struggled with falling sales and share prices. It was the latest and most unusual example of Trump's loyalty to Musk, who spent heavily on his comeback campaign last year and is a key figure in his second administration. Tesla's share price rose almost 4% on 11 March. March 2025, after falling nearly 48% since Trump took office in January (Megerian, 20/25). How long this symbiotic relationship between Trump and Musk will last in the face of rising [consumer inflation](#) and a gloomy outlook for the US economy is open to question. It cannot be ruled out that Trump will drop Musk like a hot potato if he acts against his interests or if Trump's popularity is threatened by Musk's actions. The impact of such a development on Musk's business policy in sub-Saharan Africa is written in the stars.

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**Résumé :** *[Comment l'expansion d'Elon Musk façonne l'avenir de l'Afrique subsaharienne]* - Elon Musk, le magnat d'origine sud-africaine, la personne la plus riche du monde, est également un conseiller principal du président américain Donald Trump et dirige le département de l'efficacité gouvernementale (DOGE) depuis 2025. Le rôle influent de Musk dans la politique américaine repose en grande partie sur l'argent qu'il a dépensé pour financer la campagne de Donald Trump. Son influence s'accroît à l'échelle mondiale, y compris en Afrique subsaharienne (ASS). La deuxième présidence de Trump sera difficile pour l'Afrique subsaharienne (ASS), en particulier pour l'Afrique du Sud. Trump et Musk ont chacun leur propre agenda. Les préjugés bien connus de Trump à l'égard de l'Afrique ont été renforcés par la plainte pour génocide déposée par l'Afrique du Sud contre Israël devant la Cour internationale de justice. Musk soutient les revendications des Africains blancs à l'encontre de Pretoria pour une prétendue dépossession de terres. Les principaux projets de Musk visent à établir une hégémonie politique et culturelle sur les marchés mondiaux. Par exemple, « Starlink », qui fournit déjà un accès internet mondial dans 114 pays, dont l'Afrique subsaharienne, et les solutions énergétiques « Megapack » de Tesla. Il s'agit notamment de projets d'énergie solaire et de stockage de l'énergie, afin de soutenir l'intégration des énergies renouvelables en fournissant un stockage de l'énergie à l'échelle du réseau, comme dans son projet « SolarCity ». Les objectifs de Musk montrent qu'il n'est pas seulement un acteur économique, mais aussi un leader qui veut façonner l'avenir de l'humanité. Ses projets ne se limitent pas à la technologie et au commerce, mais visent à modifier la dynamique du pouvoir dans les relations internationales. Toutefois, les services qu'il propose semblent souvent hors de portée de nombreux Africains en raison de leur coût élevé. Le rôle de Musk en tant que « seigneur techno-féodal » est sans précédent. Il joue même le rôle d'arbitre dans les guerres entre nations, comme l'invasion russe de l'Ukraine. Ses oscillations aléatoires entre altruisme et narcissisme, entre stratégie et impulsivité, ont fait l'objet d'innombrables publications. Il veut apparemment que le monde soit sauvé, mais seulement s'il peut être celui qui le sauve. Son virage politique vers le populisme de droite a commencé avec l'achat de « Twitter », lorsqu'il a délibérément diffusé des informations erronées sur la plateforme. Quelques jours après son achat, par exemple, des milliers de comptes anonymes ont commencé à bombarder les fils d'actualité de contenus racistes. L'implication de Musk dans l'IA, y compris dans le « ChatGPT », semble être principalement liée au contrôle, au crédit et à la rivalité. Il est difficile de dire si son intérêt est motivé par la curiosité scientifique et l'altruisme, ou par le désir de dominer une nouvelle industrie potentiellement puissante. Le soutien de Musk à des dirigeants autocratiques en Turquie, en Inde et en ASS, par exemple, rappelle que les grandes entreprises technologiques, et pas seulement les États, sont des acteurs actifs de la répression transnationale dans le monde entier. Les régimes autoritaires et les entreprises technologiques partagent une similitude frappante : un appétit d'informations sur leurs populations. Alors que Big Tech utilise ces données pour réaliser des profits publicitaires, les États autoritaires s'en servent pour resserrer leur emprise sur leurs populations. Les multinationales ne sont pas simplement soumises à l'État. Elles peuvent devenir plus puissantes, et parfois plus dangereuses, que des nations ou même des empires.

**Zusammenfassung :** *[Wie Elon Musks wachsender Einfluss die Zukunft Afrikas südlich der Sahara prägt]* - Der in Südafrika geborene Tycoon Elon Musk, der reichste Mensch der Welt, ist auch leitender Berater von US-Präsident Donald Trump und seit 2025 Leiter des Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Musks einflussreiche Rolle in der amerikanischen Politik beruht größtenteils auf dem Geld, das er zur Finanzierung von Donald Trumps Wahlkampf ausgegeben hat. Sein Einfluss wächst weltweit, auch in Afrika südlich der Sahara. Trumps zweite Präsidentschaft wird für Afrika südlich der Sahara (SSA), insbesondere für Südafrika, problematisch. Sowohl Trump als auch Musk verfolgen ihre eigenen Agenden. Trump hegt massive Vorurteile gegenüber Afrika, die durch die Genozid-Anklage Südafrikas gegen Israel vor dem Internationalen Gerichtshof verstärkt wurden. Musk unterstützt die Klagen weißer Afrikaner gegen die südafrikanische Regierung wegen angeblicher Landenteignung. Musk's Schlüsselpunkte zielen darauf ab, politische und kulturelle Hegemonie auf den globalen Märkten zu etablieren. Beispiele dafür sind ‚Starlink‘, das bereits 114 Ländern, darunter vielen Ländern des SSA, globalen Internetzugang bietet, sowie Tesla's Megapack-Energielösungen. Dazu gehören Solarenergie- und Energiespeicherprojekte, um die Integration erneuerbarer Energien zu unterstützen, um die Nachhaltigkeit der Energieinfrastruktur zu verbessern, wie in seinem ‚SolarCity‘-Projekt. Musk's Ziele zeigen, dass er nicht nur ein Wirtschaftsakteur ist, sondern auch ein Führer, der die Zukunft der Menschheit gestalten will. Seine Projekte beschränken sich nicht auf Technologie und Handel, sondern zielen darauf ab, die Machtdynamik in den internationalen Beziehungen zu ändern. Diese Dienste scheinen jedoch für viele Afrikaner aufgrund der hohen Kosten oft unerreichbar. Musk's Rolle als ‚techno-feudaler Herrscher‘ ist beispiellos, wobei er sich sogar zum Schiedsrichter in Kriegen zwischen Nationen aufspielt, z.B. im Russisch-Ukrainischen Krieg. Seine willkürlichen Sinneswandlungen, von altruistisch zu narzisstisch, von strategisch zu impulsiv, sind Gegenstand unzähliger Veröffentlichungen. Er will offenbar, dass die Welt gerettet wird, aber nur, wenn er derjenige sein kann, der sie rettet. Sein politischer Wechsel zum Rechtspopulismus begann mit seinem Kauf von ‚Twitter‘, als er absichtlich Fehlinformationen auf der Plattform verbreitete. Innerhalb weniger Tage nach der Übernahme begannen beispielsweise Tausende anonymer Konten, Feeds mit rassistischen Inhalten zu überschwemmen. Bei Musk's Engagement in der Entwicklung künstlicher Intelligenz, einschließlich ChatGPT, scheint es hauptsächlich um Kontrolle, Anerkennung und Rivalität mit anderen Anbietern zu gehen. Es ist schwer zu sagen, ob sein Interesse von wissenschaftlicher Neugier und Altruismus oder von dem Wunsch getrieben wird, eine neue und potenziell mächtige Branche zu beherrschen. Musk's Unterstützung für autokratische Führer in der Türkei, Indien und SSA ist sollte daran erinnern, dass große Technologiekonzerne, und nicht nur Staaten, aktive Akteure der transnationalen Unterdrückung auf der ganzen Welt sein können. Autoritäre Regime und Technologieunternehmen haben eine auffallende Gemeinsamkeit: einen unstillbaren Appetit auf Informationen über ihre Bevölkerung. Während Big Tech diese Daten für Werbegewinne nutzt, gebrauchen autoritäre Staaten sie, um ihren Zugriff auf die Bevölkerungen zu verstärken. Multinationale Konzerne sind nicht einfach dem Staat untergeordnet. Sie können mächtiger und manchmal gefährlicher werden als Nationen oder sogar Imperien.