

On the Campaign Trail, Elon Musk Juggled Drugs and Family Drama

As Mr. Musk entered President Trump's orbit, his private life grew increasingly tumultuous and his drug use was more intense than previously known.

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Elon Musk boarding Air Force One in March. Eric Lee/The New York Times



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As Elon Musk became one of Donald J. Trump's closest allies last year, leading raucous rallies and donating about \$275 million to help him win the presidency, he was also using drugs far more intensely than previously known, according to people familiar with his activities.

Mr. Musk's drug consumption went well beyond occasional use. He told people he was taking so much ketamine, a powerful anesthetic, that it was affecting his bladder, a known effect of chronic use. He took Ecstasy and psychedelic mushrooms. And he traveled with a daily medication box that held about 20 pills, including ones with the markings of the stimulant Adderall, according to a photo of the box and people who have seen it.

It is unclear whether Mr. Musk, 53, was taking drugs when he became a fixture at the White House this year and was handed the power to slash the federal bureaucracy. But he has exhibited erratic behavior, [insulting](#) cabinet members, gesturing like a Nazi and garbling his answers in a staged interview.

At the same time, Mr. Musk's family life has grown increasingly tumultuous as he has negotiated overlapping romantic relationships and private legal battles involving his growing brood of children, according to documents and interviews.

On Wednesday evening, Mr. Musk announced that he was [ending his stint](#) with the government, after lamenting how much time he had spent on politics instead of his businesses.

Mr. Musk and his lawyer did not respond to requests for comment this week about his drug use and personal life. He has previously said he was prescribed ketamine for depression, taking it about every two weeks. And he told his biographer, "I really don't like doing illegal drugs."



President Trump spoke about government spending alongside Mr. Musk and his son, known as X, in the Oval Office in February. Credit...Eric Lee/The New York Times

At a news conference with Mr. Trump on Friday afternoon, Mr. Musk was asked about The New York Times's coverage. He questioned the newspaper's credibility and told the reporter to "move on." That evening, President Trump told reporters outside Air Force One that he was not aware of regular drug use by Mr. Musk. "I'm not troubled by anything with Elon," he said. "I think he's fantastic."

As a large government contractor, Mr. Musk's aerospace firm, SpaceX, must maintain a drug-free work force and administers random drug tests to its employees. But Mr. Musk has received advance warning of the tests, according to people close to the process. SpaceX did not respond to questions about those warnings.

Mr. Musk, who joined the president's inner circle after making a vast fortune on cars, satellites and rocket ships, has long been known for grandiose statements and a mercurial personality. Supporters see him as an eccentric genius whose [slash-and-burn management style](#) is key to his success.

But last year, as he jumped into the political arena, some people who knew him worried about his frequent drug use, mood swings and fixation on having more children. This account of his behavior is based on private messages obtained by The Times as well as interviews with more than a dozen people who have known or worked with him.

This year, some of his longtime friends have renounced him, pointing to some of his public conduct.

"Elon has pushed the boundaries of his bad behavior more and more," said Philip Low, a neuroscientist and onetime friend of Mr. Musk's who criticized him for his Nazi-like gesture at a rally.

And some women are challenging Mr. Musk for control of their children.



Mr. Musk and Claire Boucher, the musician known as Grimes and the mother of three of his children, at the Met Gala in 2018. Credit...Damon Winter/The New York Times

One of his former partners, Claire Boucher, the musician known as Grimes, has been fighting with Mr. Musk over their 5-year-old son, known as X. Mr. Musk is extremely attached to the boy, taking him to the Oval Office and high-profile gatherings that are broadcast around the world.

Ms. Boucher has privately complained that the appearances violate a custody settlement in which she and Mr. Musk agreed to try to keep their children out of the public eye, according to people familiar with her concerns and the provision, which has not been previously reported. She has told people that she worries about the boy's safety, and that frequent travel and sleep deprivation are harming his health.

Another mother, the right-leaning writer Ashley St. Clair, revealed in February that she had a secret relationship with Mr. Musk and had given birth to his 14th known child. Mr. Musk offered her a large settlement to keep his paternity concealed, but she refused. He sought a gag order in New York to force Ms. St. Clair to stop speaking publicly, she said in an interview.

A Ketamine Habit

Mr. Musk has described some of his mental health issues in interviews and on social media, saying in one post that he has felt “great highs, terrible lows and unrelenting stress.” He has denounced traditional therapy and antidepressants.

He plays video games for hours on end. He struggles with binge eating, according to people familiar with his habits, and takes weight-loss medication. And he posts day and night on his social media platform, X.

Mr. Musk has a history of recreational drug use, [The Wall Street Journal reported last year](#). Some board members at Tesla, his electric vehicle company, have worried about his use of drugs, including [Ambien](#), a sleep medication.

In an interview in March 2024, the journalist Don Lemon pressed him on his drug use. Mr. Musk [said](#) he took only “a small amount” of ketamine, about once every two weeks, as a prescribed treatment for negative moods.

“If you’ve used too much ketamine, you can’t really get work done, and I have a lot of work,” he said.

He had actually developed a far more serious habit, The Times found.

Mr. Musk had been using ketamine often, sometimes daily, and mixing it with other drugs, according to people familiar with his consumption. The line between medical use and recreation was blurry, troubling some people close to him.

He also took Ecstasy and psychedelic mushrooms at private gatherings across the United States and in at least one other country, according to those who attended the events.



Elon Musk at a Trump rally last year in Butler, Pa. Credit...Doug Mills/The New York Times

The Food and Drug Administration has formally approved the use of ketamine only as an anesthetic in medical procedures. Doctors with a special license may prescribe it for psychiatric disorders like depression. But the [agency has warned](#) about its risks, which came into sharp relief after the death of the actor [Matthew Perry](#). The drug has psychedelic properties and can cause dissociation from reality. Chronic use can lead to addiction and problems with bladder pain and control.

By the spring of last year, Mr. Musk was [ramping up criticism](#) of President Joseph R. Biden Jr., particularly his policies on illegal immigration and diversity initiatives.

Mr. Musk was also facing [federal investigations](#) into his businesses. Regulators were looking into crashes of Tesla's self-driving cars and allegations of racism at its factories, among other complaints.

"There are at least half a dozen initiatives of significance to take me down," he wrote in a text message to someone close to him last May. "The Biden administration views me as the #2 threat after Trump."

"I can't be president, but I can help Trump defeat Biden and I will," he added.

He publicly endorsed Mr. Trump in July.

Around that time, Mr. Musk told people that his ketamine use was causing bladder issues, according to people familiar with the conversations.

On Oct. 5, he appeared with Mr. Trump at a rally for the first time, [bouncing up and down](#) around the candidate. That evening, Mr. Musk shared his excitement with a person close to him. “I’m feeling more optimistic after tonight,” he wrote in a text message. “Tomorrow we unleash the anomaly in the matrix.”

“This is not something on the chessboard, so they will be quite surprised,” Mr. Musk added about an hour later. “Lasers’ from space.”

After Mr. Trump won, Mr. Musk [rented a cottage](#) at Mar-a-Lago, the president-elect’s Florida resort, to assist with the transition. Mr. Musk attended personnel meetings and sat in on [phone calls with foreign leaders](#). And he [crafted plans](#) to overhaul the federal government under the new Department of Government Efficiency.

Family Secrets

Mr. Musk has also been juggling the messy consequences of his efforts to produce more babies.

By 2022, Mr. Musk, who has married and divorced three times, had fathered six children in his first marriage (including one who died in infancy), as well as two with Ms. Boucher. She told people she believed they were in a monogamous relationship and building a family together.

But while a surrogate was pregnant with their third child, Ms. Boucher was furious to discover that Mr. Musk had recently fathered twins with Shivon Zilis, an executive at his brain implant company, Neuralink, according to people familiar with the situation.

Mr. Musk was by then sounding an alarm that the world’s declining birthrates would lead to the end of civilization, publicly encouraging people to have children and donating \$10 million to a [research initiative](#) on population growth.

Privately, he was spending time with Simone and Malcolm Collins, prominent figures in the emerging [pronatalist movement](#), and urging his wealthy friends to have as many children as possible. He believed the world needed more intelligent people, according to people aware of the conversations.

Mr. Collins declined to comment on his relationship with Mr. Musk, but said, “Elon is one of the people taking this cause seriously.”



The Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, met in Washington this February with Mr. Musk and Shivon Zilis, the mother of some of Mr. Musk's children. Credit...Press Information Bureau / Handout/Anadolu via Getty Images

Even as Mr. Musk fathered more children, he favored his son X. By the fall of 2022, during a period when he and Ms. Boucher were broken up, he began traveling with the boy for days at a time, often without providing advance notice, according to people familiar with his actions.

Ms. Boucher reconciled with Mr. Musk, only to get another unpleasant surprise. In August 2023, she learned that Ms. Zilis was expecting a third child with Mr. Musk via surrogacy and was pregnant with their fourth.

Ms. Boucher and Mr. Musk began a contentious custody battle, during which Mr. Musk kept X for months. They eventually signed the joint custody agreement that specified keeping their children out of the spotlight.

By mid-2023, unknown to either Ms. Boucher or Ms. Zilis, Mr. Musk had started a romantic relationship with Ms. St. Clair, the writer, who lives in New York City.

Ms. St. Clair said in an interview that at first, Mr. Musk told her he wasn't dating anyone else. But when she was about six months pregnant, he acknowledged that he was romantically involved with Ms. Zilis, who went on to become a more visible fixture in Mr. Musk's life.



Ashley St. Clair, center, was asked to keep her child's paternity a secret. Credit...Jason Alpert-Wisnia/Sipa USA, via Reuters

Ms. St. Clair said that Mr. Musk told her he had fathered children around the world, including one with a Japanese pop star. He said he would be willing to [give his sperm](#) to anyone who wanted to have a child.

"He made it seem like it was just his altruism and he generally believed these people should just have children," Ms. St. Clair said.

Ms. St. Clair said that when she was in a delivery room giving birth in September, Mr. Musk told her over disappearing Signal messages that he wanted to keep his paternity and their relationship quiet.

On election night, Ms. St. Clair and Mr. Musk both went to Mar-a-Lago to celebrate Mr. Trump's victory. But she had to pretend that she hardly knew him, she said.

He offered her \$15 million and \$100,000 a month until their son turned 21, in exchange for her silence, according to documents reviewed by The Times and first reported by The Journal. But she did not want her son's paternity to be hidden.

After she went public in February, ahead of a tabloid story, she sued Mr. Musk to acknowledge paternity and, later, to get emergency child support.

Mr. Musk sought a gag order, claiming that any publicity involving the child, or comments by Ms. St. Clair on her experience, would be a security risk for the boy.

'No Sympathy for This Behavior'

Some of Mr. Musk's onetime friends have aired concerns about what they considered toxic public behavior.

In a January [newsletter](#) explaining why their friendship had ended, Sam Harris, a public intellectual, wrote that Mr. Musk had used his social media platform to defame people and promote lies.

“There is something seriously wrong with his moral compass, if not his perception of reality,” Dr. Harris wrote.

Later that month, at a Trump inauguration event, Mr. Musk thumped his chest and thrust his hand diagonally upward, [resembling a fascist salute](#). “My heart goes out to you,” he told the crowd. “It is thanks to you that the future of civilization is assured.”

Mr. Musk dismissed the resulting public outcry, saying he had made a “positive gesture.”

Dr. Low, who is chief executive of NeuroVigil, a neurotechnology company, was outraged by the performance. He wrote Mr. Musk a sharp email, shared with The Times, cursing him “for giving the Nazi salute.”



Mr. Musk was given a chain saw by the Argentine president, Javier Milei, at the Conservative Political Action Conference in February. Credit...Eric Lee/The New York Times

When Mr. Musk didn’t respond to the message, Dr. Low posted his concerns on social media. “I have no sympathy for this behavior,” he wrote on Facebook, referring to the gesture as well as other behaviors. “At some point, after having repeatedly confronted it in private, I believe the ethical thing to do is to speak out, forcefully and unapologetically.”

The next month, Mr. Musk once again found himself under scrutiny, this time for an appearance at the Conservative Political Action Conference outside Washington.

As he walked onto the stage, he was handed a chain saw from one of his [political allies](#), Javier Milei, the president of Argentina. “This is the chain saw for bureaucracy!” Mr. Musk shouted to the cheering crowd.

Some conference organizers told The Times that they did not notice anything out of the ordinary about his behavior behind the scenes. But during an onstage interview,

he spoke in disjointed bouts of stuttering and laughing, with sunglasses on. Clips of it went viral as many viewers speculated about possible drug use.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/30/us/elon-musk-drugs-children-trump.html>

These guys play us. Through long experience, they have learned how to get what they want depending on the unconscious willingness of people to be manipulated. The desire to identify with a powerful figure is in all of us. What “power” does Trump have? Moral rectitude, sage stoic vision that still preserves hope and opportunity for The Good to prevail? Nahhh. Trump has the power to crush enemies and promote lackeys as the biggest bully on the planet who has succeeded despite all efforts to block him. He “convinces” by demonstrating that bullies win, that the world is made up of bullies, with those who do not conform being crushed. For many, there is no “moral” reality beyond this, and religious types can rationalize that Trump is “perfectly” suited to succeed in this corrupt world, with their cherished delusions of “Christian” faith and practice separate. The most preposterous, lazy, and stupid beliefs—religion, like with sociopaths Trump and Musk, traffics in dressed-up and disguised narcissism—can be rationalized similarly. They can chime in with Trump in this world and, split, enjoy their greater “spiritual” destiny too. Everybody thinks they are “wise.” Those with a fundamentalist faith (“My personal relationship with Jesus”, poor guy if the actual Christ still pays any attention at all.) feel entitled to make such judgments.

Musk and Trump are laughing at us. They just have to keep putting themselves out there and then watch how the multitudes clamor to amplify it. Like-minded types come out of the woodwork and join the fun, having their babies. There is a nihilistic druggy delusional despair, fatalistic, almost suicidal, playing out in Elon Musk.



"I agree he's a homicidal maniac, but I'm saluting the office, not the man."

