

President Mark Zuckerberg? It may not be as crazy as it sounds



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Many believe Mark Zuckerberg has political ambitions CREDIT: AP

When 13 tech bosses – among them some of the world’s richest entrepreneurs – were summoned for [a meeting](#) with Donald Trump, one face was conspicuous in its absence.

Facebook’s role in the US election had been much scrutinised: it was accused of being a petri dish for [fake news](#) that allowed anti-Clinton stories to spread like wildfire; and the social network was [employed to great effect](#) by the Trump campaign, which built up profiles of voters to target and bombarded them with ads. And yet, Mark Zuckerberg was nowhere to be seen at Trump Tower. Instead, he sent his trusted deputy and chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, making Facebook the only company at the meeting without its CEO in attendance.



Sheryl Sandberg at Donald Trump's tech summit CREDIT: BLOOMBERG

Zuckerberg has not explained his absence, but two likely – and related – reasons may well become clear. Firstly, the man who started Facebook 13 years ago now has priorities outside of its daily running: as with many tech founders, he would prefer the nitty gritty of advertising relationships and regulatory tangles to be dealt with by someone else, as Zuckerberg focuses on his missions – the \$45bn fund [he has set up](#) with his wife Priscilla Chan, or the [internet.org](#) project to bring connectivity to the world's poor.

But more fundamentally, Zuckerberg may see a photo-op with the president-elect as harming his own political ambitions, especially if he plans to act on them sooner rather than later.



Donald Trump with tech CEOs in December CREDIT: AP

If your main impression of Facebook's founder came through seeing *The Social Network* in 2010, you might find the film's portrayal of Zuckerberg as an awkward Machiavellian schemer a little difficult to square with the idea of a role in public office.

But in recent years he has been spring cleaning his image. Connecting directly to the world via his own Facebook page, Mark Zuckerberg is now the family man, the internationalist and the statesman (his profile is full of images documenting meetings with Narendra Modi, officials in Beijing, and Pope Francis).

While like much of his Silicon Valley brethren, he is a natural liberal, lobbying on [immigration](#) and [science research](#), but Zuckerberg has been careful to appeal to a wider base. In response to [allegations](#) that Facebook suppressed conservative news, he [fired](#) the team responsible and replaced them with supposedly bias-free algorithms. He has declined to take the immediate action that many liberals demanded on Facebook's fake news problem.

He has come out [as religious](#) after years of claiming atheism, a move that a cynic could point to as practically mandatory for high office. And most recently, he announced his ambition [to visit every state](#) in the US in order to understand the effect of globalisation. "We need to find a way to change the game so it works for everyone," he said on Tuesday.

But if you're still not convinced, the proof of Zuckerberg's political ambitions lies in leaked conversations between Facebook board members over how to get shareholders to approve a corporate shakeup that would see him retain control of the company even after selling almost all his shares. According to [Bloomberg](#), the

billionaire wanted to be able to serve two years in government without having to sell his stake.

If Zuckerberg's ambitions are almost certain, the remaining question is why? He is one of the richest men in the world, and after all, his position at Facebook gives him more influence than most politicians.

A system that propelled Donald Trump (who is loathed in The Valley) to power may be seen as the ultimate call to action. After all, a lack of experience is no longer much of an obstacle to a life in public office.

To date, the politics of the super-rich tech elite has been expressed in terms of philanthropy – both Zuckerberg and Bill Gates are giving away almost all their money to good causes – but it could soon become more direct.

Not that this should ever be seen as a good idea – the consensus is that tech's utopian leaders would make terrible officials - but try telling them that.

Political views | Mark Zuckerberg

On Trump

During Trump's campaign, Zuckerberg said: "I hear fearful voices calling for building walls and distancing people they label as others. For blocking free expression, for slowing immigration, reducing trade, and in some cases around the world even cutting access to the internet. It takes courage to choose hope over fear"

Donations

Zuckerberg has donated to both Republicans and Democrats, although more often to the latter. Facebook itself has also donated to both.

Immigration

Zuckerberg has spearheaded FWD.us, a lobbying group that is largely focused on improving immigration for skilled workers and allowing illegal immigrants to gain citizenship. It also campaigns for better science and tech education.

Republican or Democrat?

Zuckerberg supports many traditionally liberal views such as supporting gay marriage, investing in clean energy and defending encryption. However, he has been careful not to appear aligned to one side of the divide.

China

Zuckerberg speaks Mandarin and his wife is the daughter of Chinese parents, and has sought to be close to Beijing. However, this is mostly explained by his efforts to have Facebook unbanned in the country.

