



Thinking about...




Subscribe Sign in



Share this post



 Thinking about...
Of course it's a coup

- Copy link
-  Facebook
-  Email
-  Notes

More

Of course it's a coup

Miss the obvious, lose your republic


Timothy Snyder

Feb 05, 2025



6,027



Share this post



[Thinking about...](#)
[Of course it's a coup](#)

Copy link



Facebook



Email



Notes

More



[307](#)



1,671

[Share](#)

Imagine if it had gone like this.

Ten Tesla cybertrucks, painted in camouflage colors with a giant X on each roof, drive noisily through Washington DC. Tires screech. Out jump a couple of dozen young men, dressed in red and black Devil's Champion armored costumes. After giving Nazi salutes, they grab guns and run to one government departmental after another, calling out slogans like "all power to Supreme Leader Skibidi Hitler."

Type your email..

Subscribe

Historically, that is what coups looked like. The center of power was a physical place. Occupying it, and driving out the people who held office, was to claim control. So if a cohort of armed men with odd symbols had stormed government buildings, Americans would have recognized that as a coup attempt.

And that sort of coup attempt would have failed.

Now imagine that, instead, the scene goes like this.

A couple dozen young men go from government office to government office, dressed in civilian clothes and armed only with zip drives. Using technical jargon and vague references to orders from on high, they gain access to the basic computer systems of the federal government. Having done so, they proceed to grant their Supreme Leader access to information and the power to start and stop all government payments.

That coup is, in fact, happening. And if we do not recognize it for what it is, it could succeed.

In the third decade of the twenty first century, power is more digital than physical. The buildings and the human beings are there to protect the workings of the computers, and thus the workings of the government as a whole, in our case an (in principle) democratic government which is organized and bounded by a notion of individual rights.

The ongoing actions by Musk and his followers are a coup because the individuals seizing power have no right to it. Elon Musk was elected to no office and there is no office that would give him the authority to do what he is doing. It is all illegal. It is also a coup in its intended effects: to undo democratic practice and violate human rights.

In gaining data about us all, Musk has trampled on any notion of privacy and dignity, as well as on the explicit and implicit agreements made with our government when we pay our taxes or our student loans. And the possession of that data enables blackmail and further crimes.

In gaining the ability to stop payments by the Department of the [Treasury](#), Musk would also make democracy meaningless. We vote for representatives in Congress, who pass laws that determine how our tax money is spent. If Musk has the power to halt this process at the level of payment, he can make laws meaningless. Which means, in turn, that Congress is meaningless, and our votes are meaningless, as is our citizenship.



Resistance to the coup is the defense of the human against the digital and the democratic against the oligarchic. If Musk controls these digital systems, Republican elected officials will be just as helpless as Democratic ones. The institutions that they voted to create can also be “deleted,” as Musk puts it.

President Trump, for that matter, will also perform at Musk’s pleasure. There is not much he can do without the use of the federal government’s computers. No one will explain this to Trump or to his supporters, of course.

A coup is underway, against Americans as possessors of human rights and dignities, and against Americans as citizens of a democratic republic. Each hour this goes unrecognized makes the success of the coup more likely.

Thinking about... is a reader-supported publication. To receive new posts and support my work, consider becoming a free or paid subscriber.

Subscribe

[Share](#)

[On resistance see On Tyranny](#)

[For positive solutions see On Freedom](#)



6,027



Share this post



[Thinking about...](#)
[Of course it's a coup](#)

Copy link



Facebook



Email



Notes

More



[307](#)



1,671

[Share](#)

Discussion about this post

Comments Restacks



Write a comment...



Barry Coburn

[1d](#)



And so we have a coup, as predicted. As a criminal lawyer, my sense of it is that a record -- as detailed as possible -- needs to be made. It won't be easy but, in the hope that the day comes, years from now, when the Executive Branch is run in a sane and legal manner, we'll need to know who did what and precisely what they

did. Those in a position to know and preserve this information should be encouraged to do so, asap.

Also, where are all of our other academics? Most politicians can be expected to cower out of craven self-protection, but what about all of those academics in Ivy League ivory towers who have spent careers studying American democracy or teaching it at law school? Why are the only academic voices we're hearing the courageous, persistent ones of Tim Snyder and Heather Cox Richardson? Is the great American academic brain trust just going to let American democracy slip away without a public word?

Expand full comment

Reply

Share

[68 replies](#)



88

Hank Greenspan

[1d](#)



Indeed, I have been saying this on every Substack I can.

1. The coup has mostly succeeded.
2. We are at war.
3. We must fight back in every strategic, disruptive, and useful way.

Indivisible is a start.<https://indivisible.org/> That's how we get to those "elected officials" not themselves cowardly or corrupt.

Expand full comment

Reply

Share

[13 replies](#)

[305 more comments...](#)

[Top](#) [Latest](#) [Discussions](#)



No posts

Ready for more?

Type your email..

Subscribe

© 2025 Timothy Snyder

[Privacy](#) · [Terms](#) · [Collection notice](#)



[Start Writing](#)[Get the app](#)
[Substack](#) is the home for great culture



Share

Copy link



Facebook



Email



Notes

More