



By: *Carla Norrlöf*

Is Trump Really Ruling Like a King?



Kings rule by birth and blessing. They also rule by fear. When millions of protesters came out this month to say, “No Kings,” Donald Trump posted an AI-generated video of himself being crowned, only to insist, the next day, that he is not a king. So, which is it?

The young podcaster Brilyn Hollyhand takes the question literally and notes that there are **no kings in America** – that Trump’s videos are just **playful trolling**.

But the real question is whether Trump is pursuing the kinds of powers that in the past belonged to monarchs.

Following the Supreme Court’s ruling in **Trump v. United States**, presidents have absolute immunity for core constitutional acts and presumptive immunity for other official acts, making challenges to concentrated executive power even more difficult.

Against this backdrop, critics say Trump already governs like a king, claiming control over independent institutions, replacing existing staff with trusted knights, capriciously meting out punishment through tariffs and other means, and generally creating an atmosphere of fear.

Strong, decisive leadership by a president

For Trump’s supporters, however, these actions represent strong, decisive leadership by a president who did, after all, win a popular majority in the last election. They see a CEO swatting away hurdles in order to deliver results.

Still, even if Trump is not a king on paper, his strategy does recall powers once exercised by kings, most notably Henry VII, the Tudor monarch who consolidated authority by weakening rival nobles, centralizing fiscal control, and reshaping the machinery of government.

For example, Henry used quiet revenue grabs,

bonds, benevolences, and fines to shift resources toward royal priorities without others’ consent.

Similarly, the Trump administration has frozen billions of dollars in **foreign aid** that is scheduled to expire, thus exercising a power (“of the purse”) that is supposed to belong to Congress.

Although a federal judge ordered the administration to release the funds in September, the Supreme Court then allowed much of the freeze to continue until the end of the fiscal year.

Disputes that once played out in hearings or inspector-general reviews are being settled in private, leaving little public record

Trump supporters would say that such “rescissions” are legal and designed to give late-year flexibility to an executive who may want to halt **wasteful or misaligned spending**.

Viewed this way, Trump’s freeze becomes another decisive action on behalf of his voters. And since Congress can still reject any rescission by law, his power is not unchecked.

But the administration has also reclassified key jobs, pared civil-service protections, and shifted authority from career experts to loyal aides.

Agency lawyers are rewriting guidelines, scientists are toning down hazard reports, and ethics officers are revising opinions until they pass political muster.

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Loyal insiders are favored over experienced professionals

The whole point of a merit system is to

prevent the government from running like a royal court, where fealty outweighs skill.

When loyal insiders are favored over experienced professionals, decisions reflect personal connections rather than expertise, and oversight tends to be lackadaisical.

Under Trump, acting officials increasingly **fill posts** that technically require Senate approval, comment periods have shrunk from 60 days to 30, and announcements are sometimes rushed.

Again, Trump's supporters would say these shifts break entrenched bureaucratic resistance, replace obstructionists, and enable elected leaders to carry out the agenda they campaigned on.

But others see a consolidation of power that is more monarchical, even if it is lawful.

Rules exist to make those with power justify themselves publicly

Rules exist to make those with power justify themselves publicly. That is why agencies are supposed to propose actions, invite comment, and publish their reasoning.

But each step is now being compressed until it barely functions. The process remains, but it becomes more of an alibi than an accountability mechanism.

Much as Henry VII filled key posts with loyalists or simply let offices languish, prolonged vacancies in US inspector-general roles have **slowed investigations**, while interim heads who lack firm political backing have refrained from enforcing compliance.

Freedom of information laws remain, but longer delays and broader denials diminish their force, echoing the Tudor habit of keeping legal forms intact while emptying them of substance.

The law is meant to bind power, but those constraints inevitably loosen when an

executive can rely on blanket immunity for official acts, pardons for his allies, and pretextual prosecutions for his opponents.

While protest remains legal and visible, protections for such rights depend on even-handed application.

If allies are treated far more leniently than critics, those rights are not fully equal, and businesses, nonprofits, and local election officials may adjust their behavior to avoid a confrontation.

The single seat where national decisions are made

The US still has guardrails in the form of courts that sometimes rebuff the executive, states and cities that push back, reporters who expose abuses, citizens who take to the streets, and a Congress that could reassert its constitutional powers.

But these checks will erode if they are neglected. In Henry VII's England, institutions with venerable names were hollowed out from within.

The same can happen in a modern republic if citizens fail to use the tools they possess.



Whether Trump sees himself as a king will matter less than whether Congress, the courts, the business community, and the electorate do

Recent court rulings do chip away at these guardrails, not only by granting immunity for

official acts, but also by narrowing evidence rules, easing the removal of officials, curbing agency deference, and using emergency stays to freeze funds until they lapse.

But while Trump has been given more power, he has not been coronated. A president cannot do what a king can: rule without elections, spend without approval, dissolve courts, and erase subnational governments' authority.

The debate will continue between those who see Trump's tactics as legitimate ways to break choke points and deliver on promises, and those who see a strategy designed to eliminate transparency and oversight, leaving institutions intact in form but altered in function.

The question is less about crowns and titles than whether the presidency is becoming the single seat where national decisions are made.

That struggle is playing out now in budgets, appointments, and many other processes of civil administration.

Ultimately, whether Trump sees himself as a king will matter less than whether Congress, the courts, the business community, and the electorate do.

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