Twitter Thread by Kristen



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A challenge with society in general is a facile understanding of the word “coup.” When the population at large thinks of a coup, they imagine a violent military (Chile, 1973) or paramilitary (Cuba, 1959) overthrow of the government. Coups are often far more complex and nuanced.

So, let’s talk about the autogolpe—the “self coup” (a perfect example of how some words in Spanish are objectively better than their English equivalents). An autogolpe is, at its simplest, when a duly elected leader revolts against his *own* government to consolidate power.

He (it’s always been a “he”) usurps powers that traditionally reside with the legislative and judiciary bodies, and of course, maintains that power beyond his elected term.

This kind of coup requires a lot of prep work. Generally speaking, you can’t just up and announce your takeover overnight. Instead, you have to spend a few years undermining federal institutions so that, when the time comes, they are powerless and/or unwilling to stop you.

How? You start by installing loyalists in key positions and courting *personal* loyalty within your party.
“Oh, everybody does that!”
Not exactly. Key positions in a democracy, for example, require approval from the legislative body.
So you have to work around that.

So, maybe you appoint a bunch of “acting” secretaries indefinitely because your country stupidly doesn’t have explicit laws against that. You disregard norms in naming political appointees, because no one thought to enshrine those norms in law.

You will reward party members for their personal support, or threaten them with political (and other) consequences if they don’t support your unqualified picks, illegal policies and absurd lies.

You’ll need the judiciary too, so you’ll pack courts at all levels full of (often unqualified) judges who will support—or at least, not object too—the extraordinary powers you’re slowly giving yourself.

Once you've got your guys installed where you need them, you then weaken the other institutions that you can't control or that are supposed to serve as a check on your powers. Fire/oust experienced career officers and institute policies and cuts to demoralize the rest.

You also want to ensure the loyalty of the military and/or police. Because when the time comes for you to formally claim your new powers, there WILL be resistance. And to quell that, you'll likely need to use force—loyal soldiers who will turn against their fellow citizens.

Of course, the media will document your actions throughout. You need to fix that too. So you undermine the media—call their reporting fake, cherry pick your favorite outlets to promote to your supporters, and paint the rest as "enemies of the people."

And all the while, you will continue preaching to the choir who elected you in the first place—you cannot hope to succeed without some faction of the populace supporting you in an almost cult-like fashion as you gradually amass power.

Then, it's a game of inches. You enact policies and procedures that are clearly illegal/unconstitutional and when no one holds you accountable or stops you, you take a bit more power. And a bit more. And a bit more. Until...

The big day is here—yay! You "temporarily" dissolve the legislature for some bs reason, declare that you won't leave office, and use your armed forces against anyone who opposes. Voila—autogolpe. You've staged a coup against your elected self, in favor of your dictator self.

So, where does Trump fit into this? Reading through, I'm *sure* you can identify in each tweet numerous things that apply, though many of them he half-assed—likely because his echo chamber had him convinced he maintained broad support and would win re-election legitimately.

Where he failed most notably was the military. He was too busy calling them suckers and losers and letting Russia put bounties on their heads to earn their loyalty.

He came close, though. He got them (and pseudo-military outfits like CBP and ICE) into the streets for BLM protests. They tear gassed and beat their fellow citizens.

He ordered DoD not to authorize DC National Guard deployment on Wednesday, and they listened, despite a threat to VP and Congress. Off duty police and military were among those storm the Capitol.

Imagine for a second that military brass hadn't seen through him. Imagine that he *had* won over the military and ordered them to the Capitol to support the insurrectionists—and they'd listened.

A smarter, more determined, more palatable version of Trump could've staged a successful autogolpe. A weaker, less entrenched democracy could've fallen.
This country is not exceptional. And if no one is held accountable, someone more competent will get the job done next time.

(For a thorough understanding of a successful autogolpe, look at Fujimori in Peru, 1992. And they came DAMN CLOSE to electing his daughter 2016. Food for thought.)