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The Delegitimization of Democracy

William Gillis

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There's a number of folk celebrating the collapse of the legitimacy of US civil institutions in this election, but regrettably it's not so simple as de-legitimize the state and presto anarchism. Liberal democracy is an incoherent, ultimately unstable and unsustainable system, but there are many more stable configurations of society and a lot of them are far more dystopian.

Our strongest critique against liberalism is not that its founded upon horrific, unnecessary and intolerable violence — although it is — but that it is insecure against slow rolls or sudden descents towards greater authoritarianism and fractious civil war.

When the civic religion of a country withers and the treaty of liberal democracy is revealed as nothing more than paper, what is most often released is the mass of fascistic predators who have grown fat slowly nibbling the democracy's flesh from within. The state survives on top of a much broader ecosystem of sociopathic power-seeking that it encourages. It powers itself on the fuel of constructed tensions and contestants for power, forces that can burst

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out of its control explosively. The collapse of a democracy is most usually a *reconfiguration* of power, hardly ever its *abolition*.

That is not remotely to suggest that anarchists stop or show timidity in our efforts to delegitimize our current state, but rather that we must stay steely-eyed about the incredibly hard work to prepare for such a collapse and survive it, much less guide it.

When one morning in 1936 the president of the Second Spanish Republic called his ministers, his assistants and secretaries and found that they had all abandoned their posts — his government de facto dissolved like a silly dream — the people of Spain were already building barricades and raiding the armories. Either for the fascists or for the anarchists.

We lost that war.

In part because we did not get to choose its outset. And were not ready for its vicissitudes.

There are presently far far far more Trump brownshirts in this country than there are anarchists. An insurrection by white supremacists and populist authoritarians against a thoroughly corrupt and totalitarian establishment looking for any excuse to suppress all dissent is a conflict we are ill-prepared to leverage to our advantage. This is a plain and uncontestable truth.

Obviously our state must fall. Democracy must be revealed as illegitimate. But these goals must happen on our terms. And they are nowhere near sufficient conditions for anarchy to flourish. When they are brought about on someone else's timetable we should be concerned.