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Madison's Constitution is Coming Undone

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In the *Federalist*, James Madison laid out the logic by which tyranny would be prevented in the new American nation. Donald Trump and Elon Musk are testing his logic as never before.

Madison wrote that national stability would depend upon an “extended republic,” a heterogeneous country in which no single “faction” could dominate (*Federalist* 10). Its constitution would make “ambition ...counteract ambition,” with judges, legislators, and presidents each jealously guarding their powers against encroachment by the others (*Federalist* 51). Moreover, it would depend upon legislators and judges hewing as much to the powers of their own offices as to political ideology (*Federalist* 48).

Madison's system is in crisis as Trump and Musk remake and abolish federal agencies that Congress enacted and refuse to spend monies it appropriated. As scholars of separation of powers and republican government, we write with confidence that these attacks on our government are unprecedented. Finding the words to describe these moves is challenging. **Journalists have been wrestling**, often unsuccessfully, with the best ways to clarify these actions to the public.