



## There's No Wizard Behind the Curtain

Veronique de Rugy

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As this column was first being drafted, voters all across the United States were streaming to the polls to deliver their collective verdict on what has arguably been the most bizarre presidential campaign in modern U.S. history. According to their favorability -- or, should we say, unfavorability -- ratings, the choice between the major-party candidates couldn't have been more unpalatable.

Headlining the Democratic ticket was a person with a reckless -- and, to some, repulsive -- ambition for power who epitomizes the Washington culture of cronyism and corruption. For the GOP, it was a rich reality television star who, from at least a policy knowledge standpoint, could make the town drunk sound like a "Jeopardy" grand champion at times.

As this column is being read, the election results are known -- and for many voters, they may feel a mixture of euphoria, relief and childlike hope that their choice will bestow upon the kingdom great prosperity (and lots of "free" stuff, better judges, etc.). But for a sizable number of other voters, an ugly mood has set in as they contemplate the horrors to be unleashed over the next four years by the person they voted against. For some of those who voted against Donald Trump, his victory is cause for fleeing the country. For some of those who voted against Hillary Clinton, her election would have made them feel as if the end times were finally near.

Those are extreme but genuine feelings engendered by presidential elections in a country where the stakes are perceived to be so immense. Indeed, Trump and Clinton weren't just vying to lead the country; they were vying to become the new "leader of the Free World." For me, the thought of either of those two leading anything is alarming, let alone the Free World.

Yikes.

Yet despite the perception (either real or imagined) that candidate X or Y would ruin the country if elected, both those on the right and those on the left have been content to allow the presidency to accrue greater and greater power when it has been their guy in office. The left rightly lamented the excessive war powers that George W. Bush granted unto himself with the backing of the right. But those on the left largely dropped their concerns about executive overreach when it was their man, Barack Obama, in the White House. Likewise, the right thundered its indignation over Obama power grabs but was curiously unable to acknowledge its role in helping to set the stage.

If there is a silver lining in this election cloud, please let it be that Americans will come out of it with a greater recognition that the presidency -- like the federal government in general -- has become way too powerful.

And along with appreciating the need for a chief executive with less power and a smaller profile, it would be a welcome change for more of the electorate to realize that it is not the president's responsibility to find us a job, help finance our house, buy us a cellphone or provide for any of our other wants and "needs."

As the Cato Institute's Gene Healy -- an expert on presidential overreach -- recently wrote in response to those dreading a Trump presidency, "if someone so manifestly unfit, so transparently likely to abuse power, can come within striking distance of the presidency, then maybe it was a bad idea to concentrate so much power in the Oval Office in the first place." Those words apply equally to those who were dreading Clinton on the throne.

Come the 2020 election season, let's hope more Americans will have realized that giving one human being such powers was a mistake in need of correction. After all, there is no wizard behind the curtain.