

It Can\222t Happen Here?  
Posted On:December 31, 1969

e are just two weeks from the US Presidential election, far too late to change minds. However, many level-headed people around the country take comfort in the thought that American government is designed with so many checks and balances that nothing really drastic can happen. Others say that their "change agent," Donald Trump, will just shake up the government a little.

The saving grace in this country is that the president does not have dictatorial powers. No, he cannot single-handedly change laws, imprison his political opponents, shut down the "lying press," or replace judges he does not like. And thank goodness for this! He really cannot do what he says he will, nor can he make America "great again."

But there are things that he could do that would be very dangerous, if not irreversible. His inclination is to void a number of the international treaties that this country has endorsed: the Climate Treaty that was signed by China and India; or the treaty with Iran, that could result in an instant ramp-up of nuclear weapons. All international leaders who are our NATO allies panic at the thought of a Trump presidency. They can see the end of America projecting its power to ensure global rule of law. On the domestic level, he could try to void Obama Care, not just improve it, throwing millions of Americans out of health insurance.

Other once-democracies around the world offer examples of what can happen that is not reversible.

\225 Zimbabwe. This African country was once a British colony, Rhodesia, which was a breadbasket of bountiful agriculture that fed much of Africa. When it won its independence and was renamed Zimbabwe, a national pro-independence leader, Joseph Mugabe, was elected president in 1980. That hero turned quickly into monster, where, now in his 90s, he continues to "win" elections. Dissidents are murdered.

The horror of his governance is that despite his promise to treat white and black citizens equally, he drove out the white farmers, breaking up their holdings and giving them to political cronies with no experience in farming. The result has been years of famine and a once-solid economy in shambles. In 2001, foreign reserves of money had run out and serious food shortages began. Western donors cut aid and the World Bank and IMF cut the country off. After Parliament passed a law limiting media freedom the EU imposed sanction. In a recent "election," the opposition candidate was jailed, just as Trump would like to do to Hillary Clinton.

The US now labels Zimbabwe one of the world\222s six "outposts of tyranny." This has not deterred the African Union in 2015 from choosing Mugabe as chairman of that union. Today, there are riots and demonstrations in the streets demanding Mugabe\222s ouster. The population is desperate and miserable, with no chance of throwing this "president for life" out of office.

\225 Philippines. This once colony of the United States did not even have to fight for their independence. The US promised it during World War II and kept their word. The country has struggled with corrupt governance and for a period during the Cold War had a President for Life (Fernando Marcos) who was ultimately dethroned by a popular revolt. Since then, elections have brought to power leaders with good intentions (and one popular actor) who were not strong enough to prevail over their country\222s poisonously corrupt culture.

A new election has brought them a very scary monster, Rodrigo Duterte, who has a Trump-like tendency to say vulgar and insulting things---some aimed at our own president---and then have to tread them back. He has a thuggish face which telegraphs his character. Nearly 1800 people have been murdered (drug users, he says) in extrajudicial executions.

He thinks he can get our goat by threatening to drop our bilateral defense treaties and turn to China instead. I really hope he does. China will then be faced with trying to control two thugs, North Korea\222s Kim Jong-un, and what looks like another elected "president for life," Rodrigo Duterte. And yes, the ignorant populist mobs there love him. Elections matter.

685 words

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