

## Emotions versus Facts

The surprise election of Donald Trump has sent shock waves through America and the rest of the world. Trump was a rank outsider in the race for the Republican Party nomination. His past – the bankruptcies, the failure to disclose his tax payments, his total lack of experience in elected office, the allegations of misogyny and sexual assault – resulted in many senior members of his party distancing themselves from him.

His attacks on fellow Republicans, policy initiatives such as building a wall to keep out Mexicans and making them pay for it, forced deportation of illegal immigrants, a ban on Muslims entering the country, tearing up trade agreements and demonstrating only the haziest understanding of foreign policy, served to make his relationship with the Republican Party even worse. And yet, in January, he will become the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

Trump's victory underscores the populist anti-establishment sentiment that is increasingly a feature in other Western countries. Hillary Clinton ran a campaign that many believed resonated with the electorate. Trump channeled popular discontent and tapped into voters' deep-seated sense of alienation, but Clinton failed to appreciate the extent to which millions of Americans felt disenfranchised, and her campaign did not do nearly enough to address issues important to the angry voters who swept Trump to power.

From a communications perspective, the outcome highlights important lessons, including a meaningful change in how messages are developed and disseminated, and which ones actually resonate and drive people to action. Clinton ran a policy-rich campaign. Her positions on issues were carefully researched and, with many years of relevant public service, she was a superbly qualified candidate. Trump, on the other hand, has no political experience. He made extreme statements, a significant number of which were simply wrong, insulting to many people and played to the lowest common denominators among his supporters. He attacked Clinton, accusing her of criminal behavior, even though there was no basis for the claims. And he generated great enthusiasm for changing the culture in Washington DC, a mission he referred to as "draining the swamp".

Donald Trump did not run a policy-based campaign. Instead, he galvanized a powerful populist revolt against the status quo. He tapped into angst about jobs, and white voters' concern about the changing racial makeup of the country, an issue that played a key role in the UK's Brexit vote. He based his campaign on emotions, not facts. The media, and many Democrats, interpreted his outlandish statements literally and dismissed him. His supporters, however, did not. They increasingly believed him to be a serious candidate who understood their issues and would do something about them.

It is clear from the outcome of this election, and other popular movements around the world, that sentiment is driving change and facts play little or no part in serious debate. Politicians everywhere would be well advised to review their communication strategies.