

Donald Trump's victory challenges the global liberal order



Donald Trump's victory marks a thunderous repudiation of the status quo. The most powerful nation on Earth has elected a real estate mogul with no experience in government, a self-styled strongman, contemptuous of allies, civil discourse and democratic convention. Barring a protean change of personality, Mr Trump's victory represents, at face value, a threat to the western democratic model.

Mr Trump has succeeded where Huey Long and George Wallace, American populists of the 20th century, fell well short. In storming to the White House, he has rewritten the presidential campaign playbook. He ran against the Republican party establishment and saw off all rivals, many with proven track records in office. Finally, after a campaign long on invective and short on policy, he delivered an resounding victory against Hillary Clinton, the ultimate establishment candidate.

Americans chose a political neophyte with a simple slogan, "Make America Great Again", to a former First Lady, senator for New York and secretary of state. Democrats will be tempted to blame their defeat on Mrs Clinton's soulless campaign, with a mortal blow delivered by the FBI's late intervention in the saga of her use of a private email server.

This conveniently ignores the Republicans' clean sweep of the House, Senate and White House — a rebuff not just to Mrs Clinton but also to President Barack Obama, who put his reputation and his legacy on the line in the lastdays of the campaign. Excuses also ignore the profound faultlines in American society exposed by the global financial crisis.

Mr Trump's campaign appealed to nativism, isolationism and protectionism. He railed against immigrants and vowed to build a vast wall to keep them out, at Mexico's expense. He

castigated allies in Europe and Asia, disavowing decades of foreign policy doctrine by suggesting Japan and South Korea could go nuclear to counter security threats from China. He cosied up to Vladimir Putin, coming close to being an apologist for the Kremlin. And he pledged to tear up trade agreements such as Nafta and the Trans-Pacific Partnership in order to protect and reclaim American manufacturing jobs.

Mr Trump's sweeping rhetoric and compulsive tweeting resonated among millions of Americans who have felt marginalised by globalisation. In the US, as told by Mr Trump, globalisation and free trade have rewarded only a privileged few. There is a kernel of truth in Mr Trump's generalisations, to which more centrist leaders have given too little notice. Inequality has risen and median incomes have stagnated or fallen in recent years, especially among those without a college degree.

There is an alternative narrative that highlights the resilience of the US economy, its capacity to innovate and produce world-class winners, especially in technology as epitomised by Silicon Valley. But Mrs Clinton, remote and often robotic, failed to counter with a compelling vision of change.

Clinton tells supporters to give Trump 'chance to lead'

There is also a more accurate story to tell about American openness to the world. The global security order is underpinned by clear US commitments to its allies. The Nato Alliance in Europe, the US-Japan Security Treaty, and the US commitment to South Korea are backed by both law and US troops stationed abroad. Bringing these commitments into question, as Mr Trump has done, recklessly ignores 70 years of relative peace and stability over large parts of the globe.

Similarly, the free movement of capital, goods, and labour is one of the great achievements of the postwar era. Globalisation has lifted millions out of poverty, especially in Asia. The US has been a mainstay of the multilateral trading system since the end of the second world war. TTP is dead. If Mr Trump, as he has threatened, turns his back on the World Trade Organisation and Nafta, starting tariff wars with global partners, the world will be poorer as a whole. The effects on inequality are unlikely to be the ones that Mr Trump's working-class supporters expect.

A final failure of the Trump worldview is the notion that the changes gripping the US are uniformly bad. No: the country's changing cultural and racial mix, and the increasing role women play in running it, are sources of profound strength.

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What, then, are the prospects for a Trump presidency? The optimistic view is that the mean-spirited, Muslim-baiting candidate will transform once inside the White House. Such a change is possible, but may not be sustainable. His temperament may not allow it. Mr Trump can also argue, justifiably, that his tactics, however outrageous, won him the presidency. He

had a chance to pivot toward a more responsible middle ground after the Republican convention and he chose not to do so.

Mr Trump might nevertheless reflect that his victory does give him a second chance. He has to pick a team. He must work with Congress, notably Paul Ryan, the House speaker, whom he has regularly derided. Mr Trump prides himself on understanding “the art of the deal”. He must realise that the business of government cannot be driven by personal feuds. Politics in a democracy is the art of compromise.

The world waits nervously to see if Mr Trump's policies are as incendiary as his words. The shift to a more positive tone since the election result is a first step. But this remains a moment of great peril. Mr Trump's victory, coming after the Brexit referendum vote in Britain, looks like another grievous blow to the liberal international order. Mr Trump must decide, by his actions and words, whether he intends to contribute to the great unravelling, at incalculable cost to the west.