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Politics and the era of uncertainty

Rita Marcella

And so again this month many of us woke to an unexpected election outcome: and the deep irony is not that you and I did not expect it but that governments, pollsters and political experts all over the world did not expect it. As with Brexit, we woke to find a world surprised and unprepared for what would come next – but knowing that the world order had changed.

When I was asked to write about the consequences of the election result, it seemed that we had two possible outcomes: one a vote for the career politician who has prepared for a lifetime for the opportunity to stand: and one a vote for the maverick, the classic bystander with views and beliefs and opinions but little knowledge of the realities of political life.

And in the end and by a cat's whisker, the maverick has won. And there are now two interesting questions: What does that augur for the future? And what does that tell us about politics today?

Let's start by attempting to assess the likely future impact of this decision. One of the certainties is that the vote will change Donald Trump's understanding of the political world and how hard, complex and intractable many of the problems to be faced actually are. For the truth is that what seems an easy win in terms of swaying the public to vote may in fact prove a logistical nightmare to achieve. He may wonder why he felt that it would be possible even easy to transform the manufacturing and infrastructure of the US to say nothing of renegotiating its diplomatic and trade relationships with the rest of the world. But that is what has been promised – “make America great again” has reverberated throughout the campaign. He will transform the lives of the forgotten, the unemployed, the underpaid and the ignored. After an extended period of recession this was for many (as with Brexit) a message of hope – never mind the fact that none of us are at all clear how these worthy outcomes might be achieved.

And that's our next area of potential impact – there is now and to an unprecedented extent concern amongst all of the nations of the world about what this election will mean in terms of global relations. Does the map shift radically to a greater entente with Russia than the UK? Those of us who lived through the Cold War who would then have found this notion hugely reassuring, now wonder what that might mean for us. How does this play for Europe and trade: does this mean we are closer in spirit with the new US regime because of Brexit? And the truth is that every government in the world is now considering how they will be affected by the election of Donald Trump.

And what of global economies – we have immediately seen volatile activity across the world. And do we know what is coming next? No – and again not only do you and I not know, governments, banks and experts don't know either. Mexico's currency is dramatically down and the Euro is up. Who would have predicted that a year ago? And that is the message of this and the other recent votes. You cannot predict them. One prediction that I believe I can make is that of the death of the political pollster –

that the polls, the predictions are now demonstrably pointless. That what people predict and what they self-report do not necessarily match what they actually do when in the privacy of the voting booth.

[inRead](#) But what will Mr Trump when elected actually do? Probably far less than the campaign would begin to suggest. Can he keep his campaign promises? Unlikely in the cold light of post election triumph. Will he want to keep all of his campaign promises? – this too I believe is highly unlikely and what is absolutely the case is that these gaps will very quickly become evident, as with Brexit and in line with the phenomenon of post-fact politics when suddenly what was a fact becomes something rather less factual than was envisaged. When in the ultimate leadership position, Mr Trump will find that the choices to be made are hard, that prioritising the possible may become a better strategy than chasing an impossible goal.

And what of the electorate? We have, as with Brexit and the Independence referendum immediately, seen something of the expression of the phenomenon of what I'm going to call "voter regret". This regret has been hugely communicated on social media over the last 24 hours. It is the regret of those who voted on the losing side, but more than that it is the regret of those who voted and are now confronted with the reality of what they wished for. The regret of those who voted not for the actuality of the outcome – but for change, for something new, for a bit of a shake up, for a new type of politics without knowing what that new type of politics might be and how it would work. It was certainly a vote for the non-career politician, an anti-establishment vote – a vote for the lone voice, for the outsider who sees more of the game. This is similar to the recognised phenomenon of buyer remorse when you are carried away to buy a thing and cite to yourself all the good reasons for doing so, you overcome your qualms, ignore any doubts and negative reviews and buy and almost instantly you are overwhelmed with regret. We saw that post the independence referendum, we saw it after the Brexit referendum and we are seeing it again now. And it doesn't matter how long the campaign or the debate lasts – it remains a very real phenomenon. I'd hypothesise that there is also a degree of winner regret that kicks in too.

And that is where we ask ourselves how does the election result change what we know of political engagement? The Trump campaign rhetoric was that it was all about the man without a political party machine, the anti-spin guy, the man on the street with flaws just saying what he thinks, untainted by political expediency in the past – just like you and me. It questions everything that was believed about how to run effective and winning political campaigns, about the importance of political correctness, indeed it is almost a triumph of anti-political correctness. Given the huge swings of both candidates' fortunes during the campaign and unprecedentedly negative issues haunting both, it is highly significant that there was such passion amongst the electorate, such strength of feeling, a bigger turnout than in recorded history in Florida – and indeed each candidate, warts and all, securing almost 60million votes apiece. Ultimately the Trump bid for the White House has turned on its head much accepted wisdom about how to run an election campaign.

And political engagement is changing, governments for many years expressed a desire for greater voter participation in politics and now we are most decidedly seeing that. But the most obvious immediate consequence is that you may get an answer that is not what was envisaged. But we are also seeing far greater polarisation of candidates and followers and very divisive campaigns. We are seeing a renewal of ideological

politics at admittedly a fairly superficial level where it is not about the policy more about the big and possibly divisive messages.

It is impossible to call the impact of this election on the rest of the world – there is huge concern and rightly about the uncertainties in its aftermath and what this will mean for us all. For me the outcome is likely to be much more measured than the election might have suggested: now as President elect, there will be much reflection and learning being done in the cold light of day. This is when above all a newly elected leader needs good counsel and needs to be able to listen to it thoughtfully and with humility. Let us all be hopeful that good counsel is available and heeded.