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How not to get Trumped

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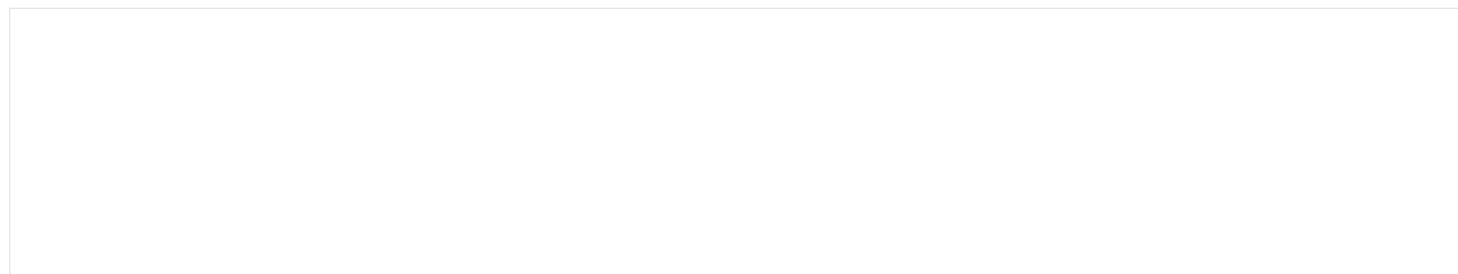
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The writing is on the wall. Republican Party nominee Donald Trump is headed for defeat in the American presidential elections and he has no one to blame but himself for this disastrous outcome. His fall from what looked a few months ago like a rising graph with a shot at winning to abysmal lows of practically zero probability of making it to the White House is a lesson in political intelligence and morality. “The Donald”, as the narcissistic Trump is often labelled, has proved to be his own undoing.

A plethora of opinion polls show Mr Trump trailing Democratic rival Hillary Clinton by wide margins. By no means is this American election a close race or a tight finish. Ms Clinton has this one safely in the bag thanks to the self-destruction of her maverick opponent.



Until July, trend lines suggested that Mr Trump might give Ms Clinton a run for her money. But a shameful cascade of sexist, racist and boorish behaviour brought down the king of American reality TV and lord of Twitter to a low point where he is now resigned to fate and ranting that the election is “rigged” and “fixed” to block his “revolution”.

The game is up for the egomaniacal Mr Trump, who dwells upon “the beauty of me” and boasts that “my IQ is one of the highest”. To use his catchphrase from the TV show that brought him fame, *The Apprentice*, the majority of Americans look set to hand him the ultimate tongue-lashing — “You’re fired!”

The first lesson from Mr Trump’s disgraceful failure is that insulting and abusing your way to power does not succeed. It alienates and turns off average American voters who are moderate in views and inclinations. Mr Trump did shock the Republican Party’s traditionalists with his extreme angry right-wing populism during the primaries and rose remarkably against more accomplished mainstream contenders.

But he could never transition from the “red meat” rhetoric, the stereotyping of women, the “dog whistle” aspersions on minorities, and inflammatory appeals to violence which worked for the sullen Republican grassroots but is not resonating with the general public.

Only nine per cent of the total American electorate voted in the primaries and caucuses. Mr Trump aced that small demographic with his combative anti-establishment invective by harping on hatred and fear. He was so full of himself and his unexpected triumph within the Grand Old Party that he misread the expectations of the wider American population.

No matter how much his image managers and campaign advisers sought to remould him after the primaries to appear more “presidential”, the braggart in Mr Trump kept offending this group or that, outraging broad sections of American society and reducing the quality of the election to sleazy levels.

The flurry of allegations of Mr Trump’s long history of sexual misconduct and misogyny, which is surfacing at a politically critical moment, has tainted him as a manipulative macho character who parlays his power and wealth to coerce and degrade women. Americans across the ideological spectrum do not want a predatory pervert of a President who flaunts his so-called sexual prowess and judges women by their physical looks.

The excessive virility, promiscuity and testosterone that Mr Trump has exuded unabashedly is a fundamental miscalculation as it robs him of not just women and men who detest sexism, but also religiously-minded conservatives who form a huge voter base for the Republican Party. Mr Trump’s diehard loyalists adore his blunt plainspeaking and political incorrectness, but there is a red line of decency and values which he has fatefully crossed. The unrepentant bully inside him is the antithesis of a compassionate and considerate President that most Americans seek.

The second lesson of Mr Trump’s descent is captured by the adage that empty vessels make the most noise. For a brash real estate billionaire who evaded paying taxes to reinvent himself as a champion of middle and working class underdogs who are losing jobs and whose incomes are stagnating is quite a stretch. His unique brand of right-wing politics, which appropriates some left-wing ideas of fighting an unfair political and economic system loaded against the everyman, has no substance.

The dearth of policy depth or thought in Mr Trump’s campaign and the endless factual inaccuracies he rattles off have exposed him as a hollow candidate who li-

elites. But in his bid to simplify reality for common folks and rally them against the supposed hegemony of complicated and compromised intellectuals, he replaced policy with rhetoric.

Hammering away nonstop at bugbears like trade and immigration cannot win an American presidency even though there is a general dismay at the way globalisation has produced iniquitous outcomes. Mr Trump is all fury with no credible alternative roadmap to “make America great again”. The dumbing down effect that he has brought to presidential debates is unappealing, particularly to voters who have had a college education. America is a literate society that Mr Trump attempted to take for a ride.

The third lesson from Mr Trump’s almost guaranteed loss to Ms Clinton on November 8 is that successful politics is about building coalitions and unifying societies. Mr Trump’s divisive methods have alienated African-Americans, Latinos, women and his own party’s legislators. His not-so-thinly-disguised reference to some “communities” which might steal the election is an assault on non-white Americans and a throwback to a nostalgic era where people of colour were suppressed in the name of “law and order”. Demographically, America is moving in the opposite direction to where Mr Trump wants to drag it back. Great Republican leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan gave hope to voters in trying circumstances. Mr Trump is promoting despair and pessimism — qualities that don’t gel with the American psyche.

Ms Clinton herself has numerous drawbacks and shenanigans. But if a problematic candidate like her can become a shoo-in in this presidential election, it is a reflection of just how wrong Mr Trump has been on major issues and principles that matter to American people.

In 2007, “the Donald” published a book called Trump 101: The Way to Success. The 2016 sequel can be titled “Shooting Oneself in the Foot”.

The writer is the author of Modi Doctrine: The Foreign Policy of India’s Prime Minister

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