

A On 23 June 2016, Britain voted to terminate the country's forty-three-year-old membership of the European Union. On 8 November 2016, US voters elected Donald J. Trump to be the forty-fifth president of the United States of America. In each case, the result of the vote took many people by surprise.

B Let's start with the first of the two events chronologically, the Brexit vote. Fifty-one point nine per cent of British voters voted in favour of leaving the EU. The national turnout was seventy-three per cent, the highest for any national vote since the 1992 General Election.

A And the vote stunned the political establishment.

B Yes. The outcome was expected to be close, but the final opinion polls had pointed to a narrow victory for Remain. Nigel Farage, the UK Independence Party leader, who did more than anyone to bring the referendum about, had all but conceded defeat just after voting ended. Markets were caught completely off their guard, for example, there was frantic trading on 24 June and the pound dived to a thirty-year low.

A One commentator declared that while Britain was voting on its place in the world, in fact the EU referendum held up a mirror to the divisions in the country - between those who felt they had everything to gain from an open economy and those who wanted to close the doors.

B Quite. On the one hand, the vote underlined that parts of Britain felt comfortable with the modern connected world. London and Scotland, the two most prosperous parts of the UK, turned out in large numbers to deliver a clear message that they wanted to remain in the EU and its huge single market. But in the old industrial centres of the north, the small towns of the Midlands, and seaside resorts, the ballot papers were stacked high in favour of Leave and rejection of the Establishment.

A Most of the Conservative cabinet and Labour were in the same camp, along with Liberal Democrats, Greens, Scottish and Welsh nationalists, trade unionists and others. Which is why vote Leave depicted it as the Establishment against the people.

B And then some four months later in the US, in spite of dazzling technology, big data and sophisticated modelling, the American news media revealed that by and large they had missed what was happening all around it. American journalism was yet again behind the story, behind the rest of the country. No one predicted a night like that of 8 November when Donald J. Trump pulled off a stunning victory over Hillary Clinton.

A Journalists didn't question the polling data when it confirmed their gut feeling that Donald Trump could never in a million years pull it off. They portrayed Trump supporters who still believed he could win as being out of touch with reality. In the end, it was the other way round. The New York Times's Upshot projection early in the evening of 8 November indicated that Hillary Clinton was an eighty-four per cent favourite to win the presidency, but by ten-thirty p.m., the Upshot projection had switched to ninety-three per cent in favour of Donald Trump.

B Just as most of the European media failed to foresee the vote in favour of Britain leaving the European Union, the US media failed to capture the boiling anger of a large portion of the American electorate that felt left behind by a selective recovery, betrayed by trade deals that they saw as threats to their jobs, and disrespected by the Establishment.

A The polls and the projections had underestimated the strength of Donald Trump's vote, and the movement he built, which defied all predictions and expectations since he announced his candidacy in 2015.

B It's clear that something is fundamentally broken in journalism, which has been unable to keep up with the anti-establishment mood that's turning the world upside down. It's amazing how many times the news media have missed the populist movements that have been rocking US politics since at least 2008. It failed initially to see the rise of the Tea Party, whose candidates were often successful in the 2010 and 2014 elections. Have the media at last realised that reporters must travel out into the heart of the country to better understand their fellow citizens?

#### Outline

In June 2016, Britain voted to terminate the country's membership of the European Union. The vote stunned the political establishment and underlined that only some parts of Britain felt comfortable with the modern connected world: while London and Scotland voted to remain in the EU, the old industrial centres of the north and the small towns of the Midlands, voted to leave. In November 2016, US voters elected Donald 1. Trump to be the forty-fifth president of the United States of America. None of the media predicted that Donald J. Trump would win the presidency: the media failed to capture the anger of a large portion of the American electorate that felt left behind by a selective recovery and betrayed by trade deals threatening their jobs.

#### Questions

1. What impressions did you get from the campaign that preceded the Brexit referendum?
2. Were people in continental Europe so surprised that a majority of the British voted to leave the EU?
3. Did you follow the Republican and Democratic campaigns leading up to the 8 November election?
4. From what you have read of the American press, do you consider that they have lost touch with the reality of the US today?