

was attacking “trumped-up trickle-down economics” and fell when she moved off economic change. Focus groups showed voters didn’t know what she was for or trust her intentions. The campaign response was to sideline all that, to deprioritise focus groups and to trust the analytics and horse-race numbers. The result was a bloodless campaign and an unnecessary loss.

The UK Labour party shouldn’t need to learn that a technically good field campaign counts for little unless the message and messenger is right. In 2015, five million conversations delivered decisive defeat.

Similarly, Clinton’s failure to invest in Michigan or Wisconsin has a lot in common with Labour’s neglect of places like Morley and Outwood. Labour simply didn’t poll in defensive seats before 2015, while Clinton took the midwest Democratic heartland for granted despite poll margins that were steady but far from overwhelming.

The Democrats, at least, have a choice about what to do next because there are places like Georgia and North Carolina that are coming more into play as the ‘rust belt’ becomes tougher. Labour has no such choice – we already have almost all the ethnically diverse seats in England.

Labour’s future depends on winning back voters that are similar to the ones Hillary lost to the Republicans in 2016. The most recent ICM poll shows Labour to have completely lost its class character – we no longer lead among working-class voters. Many have gone Ukip; perhaps not enough to deliver Ukip many seats, but certainly enough to propel the Conservatives further forward.

Cosmopolitanism vs the economy

One obvious lesson on messaging is that running on leftwing identity politics is pretty tough. In the most diverse country in the world, where immigration is part of its founding myth, Hillary Clinton ran a campaign about togetherness and lost. Over here, what chance does a similarly cosmopolitan party which (unlike Clinton) looks down its nose at patriotism, have in a country that is far less diverse?

It’s not like the UK has different patterns of diversity from the US. Just like America, our cities are younger, less white and more progressive. The electoral problem comes in small towns and villages, and also in the regions of the country that have been underserved by globalisation. For Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio read almost every region of the country outside London.

Emphasising cosmopolitan values isn’t going to win over white working-class voters, but it would be wrong to think those values are necessarily alienating these voters either. Many voters opted for Trump despite his racism rather than because of it. He increased the GOP share of Latino and black voters relative to Romney despite his deeply offensive language – presumably while they were willing to accept his offensiveness, they didn’t find it actively appealing. It is hard to imagine that his increased share of the female vote was because of his misogyny rather than despite it.

The polling evidence is mixed on how much of a draw his racism was to white voters, but our polling suggests that his stance on trade was particularly powerful in the ‘rust belt’.

Clearly, his angry phony nostalgia was motivating, but he lost the popular vote by 2 per cent while being the only real change candidate in a change election. Something was

holding people back from voting for him – perhaps it was Hillary’s magnetism, but more likely it was it was Trump’s repellent extremes.

What did draw people to Trump was a sense of authenticity, and a commitment to change. Something the Democrats never sustained.

President Obama closed the election by arguing for continuation of progress. Objectively his record is very good, but that is not how people experience it. Nearly four in 10 Americans say they could not handle an unexpected \$500 expense. Two-thirds think the country needs a bold and comprehensive change agenda rather than incremental change, only 39 per cent think the economy is beginning to deliver for them, while 51 per cent say jobs don’t pay enough and it’s a struggle to save.

In this change election, someone who used to live in the White House was always going to be at a disadvantage. What is really surprising is that Trump’s demonstrable lack of qualifications was not a deal-breaker for voters. That may appear to be a chink of light for Jeremy Corbyn. Perhaps sheer commitment to being an outsider champion of the people is enough, no matter how implausible it is.

Positive message, the right attack

However, the other explanation for the result is that voters simply had no idea what Clinton was for. Again, echoing Labour in 2015, she went into the election with a million policies but no story. She oscillated between championing change and running as Obama’s third term; she focused on the economy from the convention to the debates, then gave up on it for the last three weeks of the campaign; she barely ran a positive ad setting out her worldview until the day before election day.

That does not mean negative campaigning is dead. The Conservatives won 2015 with an entirely negative message. But, in the wake of the remain campaign’s failure with its negative message, and Hillary’s failure with hers, it is worth being sceptical of a fear-based campaign which does not sit alongside a more positive, optimistic vision.

The other lesson on negative campaigning is that it is important to pick the right battle. Obama triumphed in 2012 after spending a summer painting Romney as ‘outsourcer in chief’. Clinton chose a different fight with Trump – focusing scrutiny on his divisiveness and incompetence. A priori there was no way of knowing which would be the best tack but in retrospect it was an error to pick a line of argument that was not a huge threat to the voters she needed, including – it turns out – minority voters and women.

It wasn’t just white working-class men that became less Democrat in 2016. Women did, African Americans did, Hispanics did. A micro-targeted campaign aimed at specific groups failed for the reason those sorts of campaign normally fail – shifts in vote are normally like tides, with everyone moving in the same direction, though from different starting positions.

The trick for Labour is to look past technological campaign developments and focus on the big picture of politics. A campaign needs a clear story, to be positively for something, to define the opponent in ways people care about and a candidate who can authentically deliver the message. ■