

The 'Grumpy Trumpers' could ignore all the mad stuff if he made them feel better off. Perilously for him, he doesn't...



By **LORD ASHCROFT**

HAS the red-hot glow of the MAGA movement in America given way to a new and less enthusiastic band of devotees to The Donald: the 'Grumpy Trumpers'? As one such disgruntled voter in the crucial swing state of Pennsylvania puts it nearly a year on from the President's second inauguration: 'Nothing has changed, but every day you turn round and something crazy is going on.'

Last year, voters put their doubts about Trump to one side because they thought he, rather than his Democrat rival Kamala Harris, would deliver on things that mattered to them, especially the cost of living. My polling shows that around one in eight of last year's Trump voters – more than enough to swing an election – backed him as the lesser of two evils.

And polling Trump enthusiasts and those more reluctant Trump voters about the President's record in office reveals truths that both Republicans and Democrats would be wise to heed.

A year in, half of Trump's less enthused supporters think the US is going in the wrong direction and more of them think they are worse off than better off. They give Trump low marks for his handling of the economy and worry that his beloved tariffs are making their lives more expensive. Though they applaud his tough stance on border control, the spectacle of immigration officers raiding businesses and arresting suspected illegals is too much for some.

And while these 'Grumpy Trumpers' think his second term is more disciplined and focused than the first, some think those qualities are being applied to the wrong things.

'It's like the revenge tour,' one told us, talking of the President's blizzard of legal action against perceived critics, now including the BBC. 'He's going after people who said things that hurt his feelings. I wouldn't care if he did what he was supposed to be doing, then I could turn a blind eye to it,' the poll respondent added.

Since Trump burst on to the political scene a decade ago, voters have made a trade-off between the way he behaves and the things they hoped he would do. If they feel life is getting better, Trump behaving like Trump is just the cost of doing business. But without delivery on those things, the 'Donald Trump Show' is all there is.

Having abandoned his claim that he may try for an unconstitutional third term (teasing or tyrannical, depending on your view), Trump might not think this matters. He's clearly having the time of his life.

But it matters to his party. If

Americans are to elect another Republican in 2028 – likely contenders include Vice-President J.D. Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and even Donald Trump Jr, the President's eldest child – they will have to consider the current presidency a success.

In other words, unless Americans start to feel decidedly better off in the next three years, the door to the White House will be open to the Democrats. Whether they prove capable of walking through it is another question.

For one thing, they are still unable or unwilling to come to terms with last year's defeat. In my polling, Americans as a whole said Trump won because many found his vision attractive, and that people felt worse off under Biden.

But Democrats we polled said it was because people wouldn't accept a woman president, didn't realise what was at stake, were misled by misinformation and didn't want a person of colour as president. As a party loyalist in Chicago told us: 'The people who voted for him are uneducated.

They didn't have the sense God gave them.' Another charmlessly characterised Trump supporters as 'those crazy nut-heads with their old no-teeth grandmama in the trailer'.

Believing that the voters you need to win over are sexist, racist and stupid hardly seems the most promising platform on which to build a popular recovery.

SOME Democrats say they want a more moderate and less divisive agenda. But it depends on your definition of moderate. To a lot of them, things such as open borders and a radical approach to transgender rights are perfectly reasonable policies, and the only divisive thing is to oppose them.

Beyond that, these voters – who will begin choosing their party's nominee for president just over two years from now – are in no mood to reach out to waverers who, by voting even reluctantly for Trump, have put themselves beyond what they consider the bounds of civilised debate. All this

TRUMP: THE VOTERS' VERDICT

TRUMP ENTHUSIASTS		RELUCTANT TRUMP VOTERS
Is the United States on the right track?		
76%	YES	36%
17%	NO	49%
Are you better or worse off than last year?		
23%	MUCH BETTER OFF	7%
29%	A BIT BETTER OFF	21%
29%	ABOUT THE SAME	40%
11%	A BIT WORSE OFF	16%
7%	MUCH WORSE OFF	16%
How will the economy affect you next year?		
27%	VERY WELL	7%
50%	FAIRLY WELL	47%
12%	FAIRLY BADLY	25%
6%	VERY BADLY	12%
Do you approve of how Trump is handling his job?		
58%	STRONGLY APPROVE	12%
33%	SOMEWHAT APPROVE	48%
6%	SOMEWHAT DISAPPROVE	24%
3%	STRONGLY DISAPPROVE	14%



QUOTES of the week

'Now I have gnashers that make your average street-dweller look like a Love Island contestant.'

Writer Julie Burchill reveals one of the after-effects of the spinal infection that almost killed her last Christmas and still sees her mostly confined to a wheelchair.

'Like a Michelin-star chef who starts juggling the plates he's just made on the way to the table, just to liven things up.'

Frustrated BBC cricket commentator Henry Moeran after England's supremely talented but cavalier batsman Harry Brook tamely surrenders his wicket in the latest Ashes Test in Brisbane.

'Rage bait.'

Oxford University Press's word of the year – it means online content that is meant to provoke or offend.

'I presumed you got dressed up for breakfast, so I bought a Christian Dior white satin negligee.'

Marie Helvin, recalls spending Christmas with Queen Camilla and her family in the 1980s when she dated Camilla's brother Mark Shand.



'This is the opening of Pandora's box. Once those MPs have got their big noses in there, they are not going to let this go.'

Royal biographer Ingrid Seward as MPs announce an inquiry into the rent being paid by senior royals.

'I was working at The Observer Magazine when I got pregnant. It was so boring I had to have sex.'

Journalist Eve Pollard recalls the conception of her daughter Claudia Winkleman.

'I'm really embarrassed that happened on TV, but a big thank-you to my colleagues at ITV who have really looked after me tonight – and for Wrighty and Neets for catching me.'

Laura Woods, who was caught by pundits Ian Wright and Anita Asante after collapsing during ITV's coverage of England's women versus Ghana.