With the results of the presidential race still freshly in mind, a panel of political experts sought to explain to a packed Headliners crowd the raucous, rollercoaster ride that elected Donald Trump to the White House.

How Trump upended the establishment and why almost everybody got it wrong was the lively focus of ABC News analyst and former George W. Bush strategist Matthew Dowd, University of Texas political scientist and MSNBC contributor Victoria DeFrancesco Soto and Texas political consultant Matt Mackowiak.

Moderator Evan Smith, CEO of the Texas Tribune, launched the evening by describing the 2016 race as "the most repulsively, compulsively entertaining election of all time."

Dowd said the Republican nominee's message was simple: "The system is broken and we need something new."

He said because voters picked "the two most unelectable candidates nominated by any party," people faced two flawed choices. Many voters were willing to look beyond Trump's objectionable behavior because he promised something more important – to change the status quo.

Dowd said voters – especially in rural areas and the industrial Midwest – were so frustrated with Washington that they were like a patient with cancer. The patient is told there's a therapy in Mexico but warned there could be side effects. "I don't care," Dowd said of the patient, who's willing to take a chance even if the results are unknown.

Mackowiak said Trump was like "a 100-year-flood. Unlike anything that has come before it and you can't plan for." The Republican nominee arrived at a moment voters want change, he said.

Democrats have long looked to a growing Latino population to boost the party's fortunes. But DeFrancesco Soto warned Democrats against relying too heavily on the growth of Latinos as a panacea for their party. She noted that 70 percent of the national electorate is white (57 percent in Texas), and most of them voted for Trump. Despite Trump's comments viewed widely as misogynist, more than half of white women voted for him.

DeFrancesco Soto said Hispanics are a growing, but politically diverse, electorate. Until Democrats do better among white voters, attracting new Latinos won't be enough. "Do not rely on demography," she said.

The performance of the media came in for critical assessment by the panel. Dowd said the 2016 race marked a convergence of news and entertainment. Trump, star of his own reality TV show The Apprentice, proved adept at working the media.

At first, the media did not treat Trump as a real candidate but an entertaining personality, extending hours of free cable television time, Dowd said. The media were anchored in poll data, not what regular people were saying.

By the end, he said, the media "did not differentiate between what what's important" – treating Trump's Twitter feeds, Clinton's email problems, potential Russian hacking, an Access Hollywood tape, Trump's income taxes, the FBI director's on again-off again inquiry and Clinton's speaking style as if they were all of equal value. "But it was not the media who were responsible for Donald Trump," he said.

Ultimately, voters divided into separate camps, seeking out information that reinforced their views and avoiding information that did not, he said. Dowd said he is a believer in the cycles of history. Every 75 to 80 years America goes through a huge disruption. Eighty years ago it was the Great Depression, 80 years before that was the Civil War. These disruptions – culturally, economically, technologically – can produce new leaders. Whether Trump proves to be a transformative leader or an abject failure, Dowd said, we'll know soon enough.

    --Wayne Slater