

'Dog Whistle' Smear Attacks Dominating Elections in US and UK

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societies.

said.

Muslim, but his offer was rejected.

controversial cleric Suliman Gani.

In both the US and the UK, politicians are using racial smears and anti-Muslim rhetoric to try to gain white votes. However, the strategy carries risks in increasingly multi-cultural

Within days of his election last week as London mayor, Sadiq Khan entered into a war of words with Donald Trump over the Republican candidate elect's decision to ban Muslims from entering the US. Trump had offered to "make an exception for Khan", who is a devout

"Trump's ignorant view of Islam could make both our countries less safe. It risks alienating

mainstream Muslims around the world and plays into the hands of the extremists," Khan

However, Khan has been fighting anti-Muslim rhetoric on all fronts of late. Khan's rival in the Mayoral election, the Conservative billionaire Zac Goldsmith, tried to smear him by

suggesting he had "shared a platform" with extremists and Islamists, including

Goldsmith wrote that Khan had "repeatedly legitimised those with extremist views". However, Khan dismissed Goldsmith's election strategy as "Trump-like". He told the Observer newspaper: "They used fear and innuendo to try to turn different ethnic and religious groups against each other – something straight out of the Donald Trump playbook."

The Goldsmith campaign carried little force because Khan is known for his liberal views. He received death threats after voting for equal marriage and his campaign team included gay men and Jewish women. Though the "politics of slurs" is increasingly prevalent in both US and UK politics, the

strategy is being used in different ways. In the US, Trump has made more explicit use of race and religion to earn the support of disaffected whites. His main targets have been illegal Latino immigrants and the Muslim community. Speaking of Mexicans, Trump has said, "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." Meanwhile, he has

advocated a ban on all Muslims entering the US.

welfare abusers.

immigrants.

The bluntness of Trump's attacks has astonished liberal Americans, but they are firmly in a Republican tradition known as the Southern strategy, which successfully wooed Southern white Democrats by exploiting their anti-black animosities. Jessica Brown, an assistant sociology professor at University of Houston, said, "The Southern strategy emerged in the late sixties when Presidential Candidate Richard Nixon

and Senator Barry Goldwater consciously appealed to the racial resentment of whites to

win the support of the historical slave states which had been staunchly democratic.

By the late sixties, explicit racism wasn't allowed so Republicans used coded language and spoke about 'state rights', 'urban crime' and the urban welfare poor'. However, all the voters knew they meant 'blacks'." Trump has created his own version of the Southern strategy, focusing mainly on Latino

immigrants rather than the black community. The emphasis has changed because they are the fastest-growing minority group, accounting for 20% of pupils in suburban public schools. In Trump-land, undocumented Latino immigrants are the ones demonised as

However, the emphasis on Latinos does not mean blacks escape censure. Trump supporters have attacked black protesters at his rallies. At one event in North Carolina, a protester was punched in the face by an audience member, while another yelled a racist slur. Afterwards, Trump condoned the behaviour, saying: "That's what we need more of." "Trump's strategy shows it's still possible to run on a platform of unapologetic racism and

get enough conservative support in the US," said Brown. "Because there is very little

Southern strategy is used as another means of winning working-class white votes."

about the Republican's pro-business policies that appeal to the working-class voter, the

Trump's electorate are especially vulnerable to being manipulated by the 'Southern' strategy'. Wages for the US working-class have long been stagnant and the job market has collapsed for workers without college degrees. A recent study by Princeton University Professor Anne Case and her co-author Angus Deaton found that white working-class Americans are increasingly dying from suicide, alcohol abuse, and drugs.

In 1999 people in this group died from accidental drug and alcohol poisonings at four times the rate of Americans with a bachelor's degree, or higher. By 2013, they were dying at seven times the rate and committing suicide at more than twice the rate of people with more education, the study found. They were also dying from alcoholic liver disease and cirrhosis at five times the rate of

those with a college degree. As a group, they are looking for someone to blame for their

Despite its insidious power, the Southern strategy is doomed to fail in the long term in a

plight. Instead of targeting establishment politics, they are seduced into blaming

nation with rapidly changing demographics. In 2011, the US reached a tipping point where there were more babies born to minority parents than white parents. "The Republicans are running a race to the edge of a cliff and will either have to rethink their strategy or risk irrelevance in a majority-minority nation," said Brown. "It also seems unlikely that Trump could win the national election for the same reason. His electorate is

too narrow." Back in London, Zac Goldsmith's disastrous mayoral campaign showed the dangers inherent in Trump's 'dog-whistle' strategy of appealing to bigoted whites. London is one of the most ethnically diverse cities on earth. Around 37% of the population was born abroad and more than 300 languages are spoken.

Liberal, tolerant and left-leaning, the city overwhelmingly rejected Goldsmith's divisive

As the backdrop to the London mayoral elections, however, there was a more complex and far more powerful attempt to smear the entire Labour Party as "anti-Semitic". At one point, the accusations dominated all UK media to the extent that Khan feared he might lose the election and the Labour Party feared they would lose hundreds of seats in local

campaign on May 5, with Khan winning 56.9% of the vote.

Behind the allegations was the right-wing political commentator Paul Staithes, whose Guido Fawkes website is one of the powerhouses of new media. He mounted a campaign

council elections last week.

attacked verbally in front of TV cameras by the Labour MP John Mann who accused him of being a "disgusting racist and Nazi apologist". Livingstone, too, was suspended, but the media claimed Labour had a "huge problem" with anti-Semitism.

of Israel shouldn't exist and Zionism is an imperialist, racist ideology.

is meat and drink to people in the media like Guido Fawkes and journalists at The Sun newspaper, who spend days trawling through old speeches and Tweets looking for something they can use."

There is a profound irony in the right-wing Conservative Party attacking the Labour Party for being racist, however. One of the most vocal critics was discredited mayoral candidate Zach Goldsmith, who made the exaggerated claim that: "There is anti-Semitism running right the way through the Labour Party." Meanwhile, the previous Conservative incumbent as London mayor, Boris Johnson, used racist language to dismiss the validity of US President Obama's opinion in the UK's Brexit campaign. Johnson, who is leading the 'out' campaign, which wants to leave the EU, said Obama's support for Britain's continued membership was based on his "part-Kenyan" heritage and

"ancestral dislike of the British empire". Johnson has form in this respect. He once

Johnson's remarks about Obama's ancestry carry echoes of how Trump took the

president - and turned it into a political movement. Even though Obama has since

referred to black people as "piccaninnies" and talked about their "watermelon smiles".

"birtherism" conspiracy - the belief that Obama is foreign-born and thus an illegitimate

produced his birth certificate, 62% of Trump's supporters still believe he is a Muslim, and

distance himself from his past associations."

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against Labour's alleged anti-Semitism that moved into the national press. Staithes unearthed the two-year old Facebook postings of Labour MP Naz Shah, who had shared a graphic suggesting that the best solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict was to relocate Israel to the US. Shah apologised profusely and was suspended from the Labour party. However, that was just the beginning of the storm. Veteran Labour left-winger Ken Livingstone defended Shah's remarks on BBC radio, saying Hitler had once supported "Zionism" before going mad. Livingstone was then

"The only reason it blew up in the media was because Jeremy Corbyn is the leader of the

Labour Party," said Steven Fielding, a political philosopher at the University of Nottingham. "Corbyn and Livingstone are both from Labour's hard left and share a belief that the state

Although neither is anti-Semitic, they have shared platforms with anti-Zionist groups who are anti-Semitic, and have carried out terrorist atrocities, such as Hamas and Hezbollah."

On occasions, the right has distorted the hard left's pro-Palestinian, anti-Zionist views and labelled them "anti-Semitic". "Infelicitous language about Jews is easily distorted. All this

The slurs about Labour anti-Semitism carry far more force than Goldsmith's attacks on Sadiq Khan. The entire right-wing media is behind the campaign to discredit the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. Even the left-leaning The Guardian has run several articles by columnists, including Nick Cohen and Jonathan Freedland, in support of the allegations. "They are slurs and media distortions, which happens in Britain all the time," said Fielding. "But if there were nothing there they wouldn't be able to spin it. It's difficult for Corbyn to

61% believe he was born in another country. It's not beyond the bounds of possibility that Johnson and Trump could one day compare notes as leaders of their respective countries. Such is Johnson's popularity in the Tory Party that there is every chance he could take over from David Cameron when he steps down as Prime Minister. In the unlikely event that Trump becomes President of the United States, the UK and US would be led by two right-wing politicians willing to use racial smears to manipulate public opinion. Both men are also celebrities with media-friendly personalities. However, that's

not all they have in common. Trump's hair has been described as "Boris-like", whereas

Johnson has been accused of sporting a "Donald Trump-style comb-over".

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