



Absent a Record, Republicans are Running on Racism

By Lanae Erickson and Ryan Pougiales



Politics has long been a contact sport. In political advertising, this manifests itself in candidates and committees leveling a barrage of brutal, negative ads at one another. In the last midterm election, Kantar Media political ad data shows that both Republicans and Democrats aired more negative ads than positive ones during the summer and fall general election months.

But this year, the parties have diverged on negative advertising. In contrast to 2014, Democrats have aired more positive ads than negative ones over the summer and fall, while Republicans have continued to flood the airwaves with negative ads. In fact, Republicans have aired more than 664,000 negative ads since June 1, 2018. This negative advertising has spanned 83 different issue areas. They even aired more than 67,000 ads using anti-Clinton messaging. Two full years after her defeat.

But not all negative ads are created equal. And if you look under the surface, it quickly becomes evident that Republicans are engaging in a more nefarious kind of negative advertising in 2018. Candidates and committees have put their names on unequivocally racist ads attacking Democratic candidates—especially candidates of color and women. Their message on race in

the Trump era, which has been marked by right-wing terrorism, xenophobia, and conspiracy theories, is intentionally stoking the fear and division peddled by this President.

This is not a case of rogue ads from fringe candidates or groups. Rather, national Republican Party committees like the Republican Governors Association (RGA) and groups like the Paul Ryan-linked Congressional Leadership Fund (CLF) are among the worst offenders. Major corporations and high-profile individuals fund these groups, and many of these actors have tried to distance themselves from the overtly racist parts of the right wing—yet the ads they are paying for echo those dark messages and dog whistles. Below we detail a few of the most egregious ads pushed out by national Republican groups, along with some key data points using Kantar Media ad data.

No Democrat has been subjected to more racist attacks than Antonio Delgado, who is running in New York's 19th Congressional District (NY-19) against incumbent John Faso. The National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) and CLF have run ads characterizing Delgado, a Rhodes Scholar and Harvard Law graduate who at one time had burgeoning hip-hop career, as a “big city rapper,” included ominous imagery of Delgado in a hoody sweatshirt, and grossly misrepresented his lyrics. All in all, the NRCC and CLF have created eight different racist ads that have aired around 3,000 times in the NY-19 race. By contrast, 70% of Delgado's ads have focused on health care with messages like protecting coverage for preexisting conditions.

In Georgia, Democrat Stacey Abrams is running an inspired campaign for governor on issues like Medicaid expansion and criminal justice reform that would create meaningful change and expand opportunity for all Georgians—white, black, Hispanic, and Asian. In response, the RGA has carpet-bombed the state with over \$2 million in dog whistle TV ads. In one egregious example, the RGA uses racially charged tap dance imagery to depict Abrams and also attempts to shame her over her debt. (It was later reported that Republican nominee Brian Kemp owes \$800,000 in “insider loans” to a bank he helped start.)



Watch AD



Watch AD



Watch AD

Last, in this far from exhaustive list, is the recent spate of ads from Speaker Ryan's CLF attacking Democrat Aftab Pureval in the race for Ohio's 1st Congressional District (OH-01). Pureval, an American of Indian-Tibetan descent, has been relentlessly and falsely accused of working on behalf of former Libyan dictator Muammar el-Qaddafi. These ads state that Pureval is "selling out Americans" and warn voters that he has "shady values" and "can't be trusted." One ad, included below, shows a split screen image of Pureval and the Lockerbie bombing and another with him and ISIS terrorists. (Pureval was six years old at the time of the Lockerbie attack.) These racist ads have aired more than 700 times across the Cincinnati media market. By contrast, the top three issues in Pureval's ads have been health care, jobs, and Social Security.

Racism in political advertising is not new. However, this year's embrace of overtly reprehensible ads by national party committees and "mainstream" candidates is a break from precedent. This week, Trump shared a scathingly racist ad on his Twitter feed. One that we will not share. By contrast, in 1988, the racist "[Willie Horton ad](#)" was released by an outside group called National Security PAC and not the George H.W. Bush campaign directly. And there is no semblance of partisan equivalency on this issue. This year, Democrats have focused on positive messaging in their ads, while the official Republican Party power brokers have intentionally gone all in on not just negative but racist themes. Democrats have learned you have to be FOR something in politics to appeal to voters. Hopefully after November 6th, Republicans will be served the same lesson.