



Racist rhetoric could play against Trump's campaign

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If U.S. President Donald Trump has waded into his re-election campaign by playing the race card with the undeclared aim of capturing the white and more reactionary base of Republican voters, he has succeeded, judging by their initial response.

But this is a high-risk strategy, according to political analysts based in Washington. It could even turn against him and bury his chances of winning a second four-year term if he alienates minorities and centrist segments who still have not found an attractive alternative among Democratic candidates.

Trump has radicalized his remarks in recent days, attacking four Democratic congresswomen, all of them minorities: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (representing New York), Ilhan Omar (Minnesota), Ayanna Pressley (Massachusetts) and Rashida Tlaib (Michigan). In addition, he praised the crowd at one of his campaign rallies after it launched into a xenophobic chant against one of the congresswomen: "Send her back!" they said. He also equated political criticism with being anti-patriotic and doubled down by stating that if these Democratic congresswomen "are not happy, they can leave".

By doing this, the American leader suggested that the United States is not their country. But the opposition reminded Trump that three of them were born in the U.S. and the fourth, Omar, a Muslim refugee of Somali origin, became a naturalized citizen when she was 17 years old.

Despite the response of the congresswomen and their party, Trump has continued his attacks, especially on social media. On Twitter, he has defined 'The Squad' (a term used by the U.S. media to refer to the four legislators) as "a very racist group of troublemakers who are young, inexperienced, and not very smart. They are pulling the once great Democrat Party far left".

"In 2016, I almost won Minnesota. In 2020, because of America hating anti-Semite Rep. Omar, and the fact that Minnesota is having its best economic year ever, I will win the State! 'We are going to be a nightmare to the President,' she says. No, AOC Plus 3 are a Nightmare for America!" he said earlier this week on Twitter.

For Juan Carlos Hidalgo, a political analyst at Washington-based think tank the Cato Institute, it is clear that behind the presidential attacks, there is an electoral strategy that is in tune with the

concerns expressed by the voters who put Trump in the White House in the last presidential election.

“Various studies show that the reason that motivates Trump's base to go to the polls and support him are mostly racial, cultural and identity issues, and not economic issues,” Hidalgo told Anadolu Agency. Therefore, he said, Trump “is responding to those polls in a way that served him already in 2016 and that he hopes will serve him in 2020”.

But the radicalization of Trump’s remarks has another objective in addition to mobilizing Republican followers. It aims “for people to identify the Democratic Party with its further left wing,” says Erick Langer, an analyst and academic from Georgetown University.

It means that the most “uninformed” voter and less interested in the political debate sees the opposition “as socialists who want to redistribute income and increase taxes,” said Langer. The four congresswomen who were the target of Trump’s attacks since last week belong precisely to the most diverse and progressive sector of the Democrats.

Their challenging stands have even led to confrontations with the moderate sectors of the party, including House of Representatives leader Nancy Pelosi. Differences became noticeable long ago over the possibility of advancing with Trump’s impeachment, for example, but they were erased in recent days in light of the president's offensive against the four young women.

Mark Jones, a political analyst at Rice University in Texas, agrees with this assessment. In his opinion, because of Trump’s “radical ideology”, in terms of the American debates, the congresswomen pointed out by Trump “can cause Democratic candidates to lose votes, especially where they compete in disputed districts either to keep their seats or lose them to a Republican”.

But the intolerant remarks of the president, supported by simple slogans, entail risks for the Republican Party, since they could turn off the independent or central sectors that are likely to be those who decide the next election. President Trump's attacks “are seen as racist by many voters, and that erodes minority support for the Republican Party,” Jones explained.

Much will depend on who is the candidate chosen by the opposition for the 2020 elections.

“I doubt that moderate voters still have a hesitant attitude towards the attitude of President Trump, but (those same voters) could be in play in case the Democrats choose a very radical candidate for the next elections, a candidate who openly embraces socialist or far-left positions,” said Hidalgo.

Such a decision from the opposition, he added, “would put at a crossroads many moderate Republican voters, who while not supporting Donald Trump also do not want the United States to go on a radical policy path set by the extreme left, at least in economic matters”.