

War of smears and scandals in US election campaign

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With only four days remaining before Election Day in the United States, the two main capitalist candidates have stepped up their campaigns of scandal-mongering to divert public attention from any serious examination of the critical issues of war, economic inequality and attacks on democratic rights.

Republican Donald Trump has focused his campaign almost entirely on Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server while Secretary of State, and on the operations of the Clinton Foundation, calling her corrupt and demanding she be prosecuted and jailed. Congressional Republicans have chimed in with threats of impeachment if Clinton wins the November 8 vote.

The response of the Clinton campaign and the Democrats has been to intensify their own smear tactics, promoting allegations of sexual misconduct, and even rape, against Trump, and claiming, without any evidence, that Russian President Vladimir Putin has backed the Manhattan billionaire by unleashing Russian intelligence agencies to hack into the communications of the Democratic campaign.

The presidential contest has appeared to narrow significantly since the intervention of the FBI against Clinton last Friday, when FBI Director James Comey sent a letter to Congress announcing additional "investigative steps" in relation to the investigation into Clinton's private email server.

Clinton retains a small lead in national opinion polls, and in the "battleground" states whose votes in the Electoral College are the most closely contested. She also appears to have benefited from higher Democratic turnout in the early voting that is permitted in 38 of the 50 states. The result of the election remains highly uncertain, as well as the outcome of voting for 33 Senate seats and 435 seats in the House of Representatives, both now controlled by the Republican Party.

Opposition to Clinton's candidacy within the FBI—a

supposedly non-political investigative agency headed by an appointee of President Obama—was underscored by reports in right-wing media outlets Wednesday that agents were pushing an investigation "into possible pay-for-play interaction between Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the [Clinton] Foundation."

Fox News anchor Bret Baier, citing unnamed sources close to the FBI investigation, claimed that the investigation into the Clinton Foundation was "a very high priority" and that "agents are actively and aggressively pursuing this case." He claimed that "an indictment" was believed likely, although he did not indicate who was to be indicted or for what alleged crime.

The *Wall Street Journal*—like Fox News, owned by ultra-right billionaire Rupert Murdoch—also reported Wednesday that FBI agents were engaged in a major investigation of the Clinton Foundation, during which they had obtained "secret recordings of a suspect talking about the Clinton Foundation," without giving any details.

The *Journal* report also revealed that the FBI investigation began in response to the 2015 publication of an anti-Clinton book, *Clinton Cash: The Untold Story of How and Why Foreign Governments and Businesses Helped Make Bill and Hillary Rich*, written by right-wing activist Peter Schweizer. In other words, FBI agents set out to collect evidence that would vindicate a political screed written to torpedo Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

The various anti-Clinton investigations led to clashes between the FBI agents and career prosecutors in the public integrity section of the Justice Department, who regarded the evidence as flimsy and the probes politically motivated. These conflicts intensified after FBI Director James Comey announced in July that the investigation into the Clinton email server had not uncovered evidence that warranted any criminal prosecution.

Comey's letter to Congress last week, apparently

reviving the email investigation, was prompted by the continuing unrest within his agency. According to former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, as many as 100 FBI agents had threatened to resign unless Comey took the extraordinary step of dropping a political bombshell only 11 days before Election Day. Other press reports described the ranks of the FBI as “Trumpland,” indicating that there is widespread support in the agency for the Republican candidate and his embrace of authoritarian methods against political opponents.

The Clinton campaign and the Democratic Party have responded in kind to the scandalmongering by Trump and the Republicans. Television advertising for Clinton in the final days of the campaign has focused almost entirely on the allegations that Trump has engaged in abusive conduct towards women, which Clinton uses as the basis of her appeal to those layers of the upper-middle-class obsessed with identity politics—the politics of race, gender and sexual orientation.

On Wednesday, Los Angeles attorney and media commentator Lisa Bloom, the daughter of multi-millionaire defense attorney Gloria Allred, announced a news conference at which her client, a woman now 35 years old, was to detail claims that Donald Trump raped her 22 years earlier, when she was only 13. The press conference was then abruptly cancelled with the claim that “death threats” from Trump supporters made it too dangerous.

The effect was to associate the Republican candidate first with sexual assault and then with threats of violence, without actually presenting any evidence. Bloom is also the attorney for one of the women suing Trump for alleged sexual harassment.

Meanwhile congressional Democrats and the Clinton campaign continue to peddle allegations that the Russian government is the source of the trove of emails, now being made public by WikiLeaks, hacked from the account of John Podesta, Clinton’s campaign chairman.

The WikiLeaks emails have proven highly damaging, detailing efforts by Bill Clinton and his top aides to cash in on the operations of the Clinton Foundation by inducing corporate contributors to the charity to pay Clinton lucrative fees for giving speeches or becoming a “consultant” to their businesses.

On Thursday, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange flatly denied the claims that the Russian government had supplied the emails to his organization. “The Clinton camp has been able to project a neo-McCarthyist hysteria that Russia is responsible for everything,” Assange said in

an interview with Dartmouth Films in Britain, where he has been confined to the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Assange pointed out that the Clinton campaign has repeatedly lied about the emails, claiming the US intelligence agencies had determined that Russian intelligence agencies were responsible for the hacking. In fact, he said, no such determination had been made. US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has claimed that the email server of the Democratic National Committee had been hacked by the Russian government—without providing any evidence—but the DNI has been silent on the hacking of Podesta’s emails.

The mutual mudslinging and scandal-mongering between the Democrats and Republicans is not merely an “aspect” of the 2016 presidential campaign. The two parties rely on such degraded methods to fight out bitter internal conflicts within the ruling class while concealing from the American people the right-wing, anti-working-class policies that the next US government, whether headed by Clinton or Trump, will carry out.

Whether it is President Clinton or President Trump, the next administration will be compelled by the deepening global economic crisis of capitalism and intensifying geopolitical conflicts to adopt even more aggressive and right-wing policies than those of the Obama administration.

The next administration will employ US military force even more widely than Bush and Obama, not only in the Middle East but against more formidable nuclear-armed opponents like Russia and China. And it will respond to renewed financial crisis with sweeping attacks on jobs, working class living standards and public social services.



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