

Socialists Lead Democrats Into the Tea-Party Trap

Extremist candidates make it harder for a party to win and make a victory perilous for the country.

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At right: Darializa Avila Chevalier, U.S. House candidate, speaks during a rally in New York, June 30.

It's easy to think [Donald Trump](#) molded today's Republican Party. After all, he oversees a revamped government that prosecutes political enemies, conducts foreign policy by coercion, and endlessly tries to undermine public confidence in U.S. elections.



But Mr. Trump ascended largely because an earlier political force—the tea-party movement—had cleared a path for him. Its extremist philosophies and refusal to compromise initially seemed too radical to go far. But its fiery energies eventually transformed the GOP into a hard-right party with no room for a John McCain, a Mitt Romney or even a Ronald Reagan, let alone the voters who might support them.

Democrats are fooling themselves if they think a similar hijacking can't happen to their party. Recent Democratic primary successes by socialist candidates in New York, Colorado and the District of Columbia should alarm Democrats nationwide. We need viable candidates who can win this fall's crucial midterm elections and regain the White House in 2028.

How far beyond the mainstream are the Democratic Socialists of America? The organization's website denounces capitalism as an exploitative system that must be replaced with "democratic socialism." "We want to collectively own the key economic drivers that dominate our lives, such as energy production and transportation," it says. It calls for tuition-free higher education, "Medicare for All," "freedom for all incarcerated people" and allowing workers "to freely migrate between countries to seek employment without restrictive immigration controls." It seeks to "defund the police by rejecting any

expansion to police budgets or scope of enforcement while cutting budgets annually towards zero.”

Zohran Mamdani, a self-described democratic socialist, gained global attention when he was elected New York City mayor last year. Now he is helping the movement’s candidates win Democratic primaries for the U.S. House, and they may claim some Senate and gubernatorial nominations as well.

Backed by Mr. Mamdani, socialist candidate Darializa Avila Chevalier ousted a four-term incumbent from an Upper Manhattan-based district. She has a history of lobbing mean and sometimes vulgar barbs at mainstream Democrats and ordinary patriots. “I forgot to get napkins, so I just wiped my hand on the American flag behind me,” she wrote in a since-deleted 2019 social-media post.

Ms. Chevalier shrugs off such remarks as “the past,” but Republican candidates nationwide will try to wrap them around every Democratic candidate’s neck.

It’s important to note that Democratic Socialists of America is “an activist organization,” not a political party. It is trying to have it both ways—and sometimes succeeding—by running in Democratic primaries without adopting the party title or, in many cases, its priorities. Democratic voters are facilitating these moves. Mainstream party activists had better wake up soon to the threat.

Some might say it hardly matters whether socialist firebrands like Ms. Chevalier or more-traditional Democrats fill House seats from bright blue Manhattan. This is a mistake. Every socialist elected to Congress as a Democrat will help Republicans vilify the entire party, just as Mr. Trump now denounces “communists.” Additionally, hard-left ideologues in Washington will make it harder to forge the type of political consensus and collaboration that our pluralistic government requires.

Democrats rightly blame Congress’s gridlock mainly on zealous lawmakers from the political right. But our only hope for a better future is that the MAGA fever eventually breaks. When that happens, do we want congressional Democratic delegations that will simply swing us back into angry gridlocks, this time championed by the left instead of the right?

Some mainstream Democrats are beginning to speak out, but more must be vocal. “I have profound differences” with Ms. Chevalier, Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro recently said on CNN. “The people who are making a lot of noise, who are engaging in these performative politics, have to now figure out how to deliver results.”

Socialists have a longtime hero in Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont. While he caucuses with Senate Democrats, he calls himself an independent and a democratic socialist. Mr. Sanders can't be blamed for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential loss to Mr. Trump. But he did her no favors by challenging her for the Democratic nomination and by criticizing her positions on trade, Wall Street and other issues without permanently joining the Democratic Party.

Americans are accustomed to having a socialist, now 84, from the small state of Vermont. But younger socialists are making strong bids in Democratic primaries for statewide offices in crucial toss-up states like Michigan and Wisconsin. Republicans in such places hope for "defund the police" opponents, who are easier to beat.

Despite its flaws, the Democratic Party is a vital and venerable institution. It created the New Deal, Social Security, the Civil Rights Act, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act. It's worth fighting for. Socialists with outlandish, fringe platforms and no loyalty to the party are threatening to snatch control, much as the tea-party movement waylaid the GOP more than a decade ago and opened the way for Mr. Trump's MAGA dystopia.

What a catastrophe that would be. Democratic leaders and rank-and-file voters must wake up and fight back.

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