

Republicans say communism is on the ballot as socialists rack up wins

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House Republicans are branding Democrats as “communists” ahead of November’s midterm elections, betting that voters have a visceral aversion to the ideology as a growing wave of socialists reshapes the Democratic Party.

Democrats reject the “communist” label as desperate political hyperbole, but their sensitivity to the criticism underscores their dilemma.

“We’re fighting right now in Congress over whether we’re going to maintain our status as a constitutional republic or we’re going to ... dismantle the foundations and go down this dark road of death to communism,” House Speaker Mike Johnson, Louisiana Republican, said recently. “That is the question on the ballot this fall.”

Last month, three socialists won U.S. House primaries in New York City, and another unseated Rep. Diana DeGette, a three-decade Democratic incumbent in Colorado.

The socialists often prevailed despite opposition from the party establishment, including beating several candidates endorsed by House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, New York Democrat.

Socialism has made moderate gains in popularity in recent years, though Americans still overwhelmingly favor capitalism.

In 2010, 36% of Americans said they had a positive view of socialism. By 2025, that number had risen to 39%, according to Gallup.

Americans’ view of capitalism has slipped from 61% positive in 2010, but it still had the backing of a majority (54%) in 2025, Gallup said.

The Democrats’ socialist candidates in New York won running on slogans such as “abolish ICE” and “Medicare for All” and policies such as restricting U.S. aid to Israel, positions that the party’s establishment increasingly embraces.

A few Democratic voices warn that the shift toward socialism could cost the party elections.

Rep. Josh Gottheimer, New Jersey Democrat, has accused socialists of wanting to “hijack the Democratic Party.”

“The Democrats have a big tent. That’s our

strength. We embrace a range of ideas — but there's no room for anti-American bomb-throwers who oppose our ideas, values, & leaders," he recently said on social media.

Rep. Adam Smith, Washington Democrat, described the democratic socialist platform as "a significant challenge to our coalition."

"They're pushing ideas and agendas that are not popular in this country — and frankly, not good policy on immigration enforcement, criminal justice and the basic concept of personal responsibility, accountability and economic opportunity," he said on CNN.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Louisiana Republican, said the primary upsets demonstrate that Mr. Jeffries has lost control of his party to communists.

"The Bolshevik takeover of the Democrat Party is in full swing, and communism is on the ballot this November against freedom," he said at a Capitol Hill press conference.

He described a feud between Mr. Jeffries and socialist icon Sen. Bernard Sanders, Vermont independent.

"They're in public war with each other right now, and Bernie Sanders is winning," Mr. Scalise said. "Bernie's candidates are beating Hakeem's candidates in Democrat primaries. ... In swing districts, it draws an incredibly sharp contrast between our incumbent Republicans ... against these communists."

Mr. Jeffries shrugged off Republicans' focus on communists.

"These people are desperate. They're flailing all over the place because Republicans have failed to deliver a single thing that makes life better for the American people," Mr. Jeffries said.

"I haven't really followed all of the hyperbole that's come out of Mike Johnson and Steve Scalise and others because I don't think the American people are taking it seriously. ... This effort to label us as communists is going to fail."

Mr. Jeffries, who would likely become House speaker if Democrats win the majority, has extended an olive branch to the hard-left candidates who won the New York City primaries.

One of those candidates, Brad Lander, has committed to supporting Mr. Jeffries for speaker.

Rep. Greg Casar, Texas Democrat, chairman of the House Progressive Caucus and part of Congress' far-left "Squad," scoffed at the communist label.

“They tried that against Harry Truman; it didn’t work. They tried that against Barack Obama; it didn’t work. I think if that’s all they’ve got, they’re screwed,” Mr. Casar said.

Rep. Jason Crow, Colorado Democrat, accused Republicans of attacking a “bogeyman” to make up for having “no ideas.”