

Towards 2026: The Fight for Recognition

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The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has a program: Workers Deserve More!. Our program calls for thriving working class communities, an economy for the working class, working-class foreign policy, and—most important—working-class democracy that includes universal suffrage, proportional representation, a popular presidential vote, and limiting the Supreme Court. Our aspirations are great, and with comrade Mamdani's extraordinary victory in the NYC primary we continue to gain more national fame. Fame, though, does not achieve our program; if we want to realize our program, we must build an infrastructure, such as statewide electoral commissions and coordinated campaigns, that is capable of demanding it.

The DSA constitution's article IV is dedicated to the question of state and regional organizations. Resolution 11: A 50 State Strategy has been put forward for consideration at DSA's 2025 convention. This comes on top of countless labor, housing, and electoral resolutions passed in the previous conventions that include lines of statewide organizational efforts, such as CR05: the National Electoral Commission's (NEC) consensus resolution, which recognizes the need for formal DSA caucuses in municipal and state legislatures. The vision for statewide bodies is present and strong, but little text is devoted to building a roadmap and early structural tests for nascent statewide organizations. This essay will attempt to provide that roadmap for readers to use in their areas.

First, I will explore the current position of DSA in relation to national politics, arguing that while we caught the attention (and fear) of both parties and the political classes, our impact is more spectral than material, in large part because we lack the necessary structures to follow up on our successes. I then propose a timeline for our principal target: the 2026 midterm elections. We must capitalize on the degeneration of both national parties by running, at minimum, one hundred state representatives whose campaigns are interconnected by the NEC. I will explore the reasoning behind state campaigns and the NEC's centrality to the races. In short, the NEC allows us to declare, as an organization, that the socialist movement is rising and demands political recognition. I will close with an outline of the first phase of building statewide electoral commissions, providing suggestions for readers who seek to put these proposals into practice.

The Spectral versus the Material: DSA in National Politics

Both parties fear the DSA. The Republican Party screams of the specter of Democratic Socialism in all corners of their rival party, the Democratic Party. Republican pundits in Fox News write articles endlessly fretting about DSA, pairing us with communism, Beijing, seizing the means of production, and, when our pro-Palestine work is mentioned, even Islamism. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party wishes us dead. This is because, as KIND snacks founder Daniel Lubetzky vocalizes in his whinging op-ed, we are their Project 2025, an existential threat to their existence. We are stoking the fears of the capitalist class in concrete ways that the country has not seen in decades. Yet, we cast a shadow that is larger than our physical presence. Our organization is below 100,000 members. We have elected officials sporadically spread across the nation. We have made inroads in the labor movement, but have yet to reestablish fighting unions. We have won ballot initiatives and other popular vote struggles, but all of these have not been threaded together. We are a specter haunting the pundit class, but we go largely unnoticed among the checked-out masses.

We should be proud of our success! We should be proud that the \$2.2 billion CEO of a \$5 billion company states that “the once marginal group [DSA] has become the most prominent ‘socialist’ organization in American politics.” We should be proud that we strike fear in the hearts of capitalists and their political class. But the fear and concerns of individuals among their class does not destroy the inequalities present in our society, much less move them to dismantle our undemocratic government structure. If the DSA wishes to realize the vision for democratic socialism outlined in the political program, we need more than fear to reach our base, who are either coerced to vote for one of two parties who do not have their interests at heart, or who do not vote because they are keenly aware that politics has nothing to do with them. The past few years have been an exercise in developing our reputation as the head of the nascent socialist movement. We have shown the pundit class that we are not a group that can be ‘bought out’ and turned into one of their many non-profit organizations. We are not Democrats. We are Socialists.

But how do we build our movement from the nightmare of CEOs and pundits into a mass militant force capable of accomplishing our programmatic goals? 2026 must be the year of the socialist movement.

**Porque esta vez no se trata de cambiar un Presidente; será el pueblo que construya un Chile bien diferente...*

Because this time it is not about changing a President; it shall be the people who builds a very different Chile...

—Inti-Illimani, “Himno de la Unidad Popular”

Four years ago, comrade Grove wrote a strategic program that should be required reading for our movement. In her “Twelve-Step Program for Democrat Addiction,” Grove stresses the need for DSA to take its historic position as the leader of the socialist Movement, build state party formations, and challenge seats within the state and federal House of Representatives. The Marxist Unity Group proposed two resolutions in the 2021 convention in line with Grove’s ideas, both of which failed to pass. The 2022 and 2024 elections have passed, and our organization remains stagnant at best, or shrinking at worst. With the Democratic Party in crisis after a historically bad election, it is imperative we revisit these twelve steps and where we are with them.

Step 1: Declare Political Independence

Our political program has some traces of political independence scattered within, but none that make a meaningful—much less declarative—statement of our independence. Like in many other respects, DSA steps into political independence by dipping its toe in the water, afraid of what may come. Our program declares political independence by showing us in opposition to both parties, who cannot advance a positive program for the working class. We state in our preamble that “[w]ithout a working-class alternative to the Democratic Party, capitalists, Democrats, and the far right will continue to perpetuate violence and injustice at home and abroad.” While such a declaration is admirable, there is no tangible articulation in either the program or in national statements/campaigns of a pathway for a ‘working-class alternative’ that can meaningfully contest elections. Our talk and little action make us seem weak, uncertain, accentuating that we are more shadow than figure.

Marxist Unity Group’s R07: Principles for Party-Building, a proposal for 2025’s DSA convention, presents a sorely needed declaration of political independence with a plan to actuate the countless dirty break strategies that have been debated and passed over the past decade within DSA.

Step 2: Hold Annual Conventions

We do not yet hold annual conventions. Under the Trump presidency, the idea of Annual Conventions becomes more pressing, since the triumvirate

of Executive, Congressional, and Judicial powers are all in the hands of the far-right.

Step 3: Form Statewide Organizations

There are current statewide organizations that have been formed, such as in Connecticut, Maine, and Rhode Island. However, the exact number, level of organization, and extent of active statewide campaigns are all unknown. The examples above are publicly available because they are organized as one single chapter following the DSA Constitution's Article III, rather than as an organization of various chapters as defined by Article IV Sections 1 and 2, which asks for a constitution for the state organizations, the officers of two chapters chartered in the state, and requires a statewide meeting annually and the election of chapter representatives to the state organization. Even if there may be statewide DSA organizations, their lack of public visibility is an error that needs to be corrected.

Statewide organizations must be the first place an office is established. This space can be used to print mass amounts of flyers, pamphlets, newsletters, etc., to be distributed to local chapters for internal and external use. Statewide organizational offices can serve as the central location for statewide conventions, where all locals come together and decide what slate of candidates can and should be run, along with the manner (e.g., whether to run on Democrat, Independent, Third Party, or DSA ballot lines) candidates should run. A State Political Committee should be formed, modeled in part after the National Political Committee (NPC).

Some of this may exist, but it is hard to know. DSA, even internally, does not regularly report on its own activity, nor what the internal development campaigns are. Our movement should not be afraid to plan out development and announce it to its militants, so everyone is aware of what is going on across the country.

Step 4: Cultivate a Committed Membership Base

This has been happening to some extent, partly because of shrinking numbers and partly because of slow-going activity during Biden's interregnum period. The members who have stuck during Biden's so-called "return to normalcy" were members who are committed to building socialism in the United States far more than simply opposing Trump. During the past four years, any semblance of a perceived relationship between the Democratic Party and the socialist movement was dismantled

as Sanders was shoved off the center stage, and progressives were either bought off or had their influence reduced. Those who stuck through the past administration did it under these circumstances, firm in their dedication to the socialist movement and the Democratic Socialists' central role in it.

More can be done to develop the social and alternative parts of our movement, particularly on a state and national level. Coordinating social groups and clubs at the state- and nation-wide levels can strengthen our cultural presence beyond dozens of local interest clubs that go uncoordinated and not used to their fullest extent. Similar to the SPD's worker clubs prior to WWI, and even to the book clubs and literary organizations tied to MORENA in Mexico in the present day, we must go beyond building a strong activist organization to a mass organization with an alternative culture. Building an alternative culture and expanding ways people can act as DSA members further builds our base and strengthens workers' commitment to DSA and the socialist movement.

Step 5: Adopt a Nationwide Political Platform

We have developed two platforms since this article was published, of which the current Workers Deserve More! platform has been very externally and publicly focused. This is a positive step forward.

Step 6: Run Dedicated Organizers for Office

The failure to strategically implement this is a major contributor to DSA's stagnation. While we have certainly run dedicated organizers for offices in locals across the nation, we have not developed a national process to provide locals with the tools to encourage its organizers to run for office. As it stands, the NEC endorses existing local campaigns that can only apply once the campaign is already set up and underway. The process is reasonable given that a national electoral commission has neither the connections nor the manpower to scope out possible cadre candidates across the fifty states, but it is extremely restraining for potential coordination.

A step down from national are the local chapters, which are extremely varied in size, vision, capacity, and skills. The NEC offers resources for chapters like tips and mentorship, and they are in the process of building a toolkit. But what it cannot offer is coordination between other chapters within a state who are running similar campaigns and could stand to benefit from joining forces. As such, many chapters are left to their own devices, weighing how many dedicated organizers they can lose to political offices,

or seeing how much their hamstrung budget can fund an electoral race or two. If we want to strengthen our ranks and give our movement the influence we hope to gain, we must focus on preparing our militants to challenge the political order. We are the ones who have the best knowledge of what DSA is, what the socialist movement is, and what its demands are. This point will be critical for imagining a strategy for 2026.

Step 7: Stop Endorsing Outside the Party

Many chapters have learned lessons about endorsing outside DSA. Those endorsed outside of DSA have no need nor interest in advancing our movement and its politics, instead using us as yet another non-profit NGO that they may throw a bone to when they win their political position. To my knowledge, there are no hard rules about endorsements. This needs to change. If we had countless millions of dollars to provide for electoral races or we had thousands of comrades knocking doors, perhaps we could allow endorsements to be broader. But we are a poor and small organization, and every decision we make must use our resources as efficiently as possible to grow our power.

Step 8: Choose Ballot Lines at the State Level, and Step 9: Target the House of Representatives

As seen in Step 6, we do not have a publicly expressed national strategy. Any “wins” expressed in social media are not connected. A state representative in Washington, a city council member in Louisville, victories in Delaware, Georgia, Vermont: all of these we should take pride in, but currently, they seem more of a sporadic list of wins than something tied to a well-known strategy.

State-level party offices can be the place where key strategic decisions are made: what ballot lines are chosen, which banner we run under, what electoral rules can facilitate (or, most likely, complicate) our recognition as a political party, and what battlegrounds we can and should contest. Our country is too large and varied for the NPC and the NEC to determine an effective electoral strategy for each of the fifty states, regardless of whether the candidate has a (D), an (I), or a (DSA) next to their name. Instead, we have 183 chapters possibly developing their strategies and an NEC tasked with handling them all. How can we expect to win a notable fraction of elections run under a cohesive political strategy if we do not have the internal structure for it?

A painful by-product of a non-existent national strategy is a lack of focus. Should we run for school boards? City council? State house or senate? National congress?

**Giving up on large-scale political change, the progressive returns to their village to do what little they can.*

-Grove, step 3. Form Statewide Organizations.

Grove challenged the idea of local-centered politics and progressive abdication of the state and national struggle. Still, the progressive and the socialist went to their cities and ran, oftentimes winning. What was won? Texas saw a wave of progressives win city and county positions with the hope of bettering people's lives and building a challenge to the GOP powers-that-be. Governor Abbott, in response, passed House Bill 2127 and killed local rules that went against the Governor. Local politicians will remain restrained by the state government. If the Right constantly yells about States' Rights and its sanctity in our constitution, let them choke up as they see state houses become the foundation of socialist electoral strategies.

Step 10: Agitate for Electoral Reform, Step 11: Shoot Down War Budgets, and Step 12: Demand a New Constitution

To achieve this, we need a national presence, both in state and federal Congresses. At minimum, we need to be a Party in all but the ballot line. We can only win electoral reform if both parties are afraid that the legitimacy of their undemocratic system has eroded, AND there is a revolutionary presence gaining steam. People are already skeptical of the legitimacy of US democracy, as Gallup polls show, but we do not yet have enough power to pass democratic reforms and establish ourselves and other left-wing groups as legitimate political parties. That power only comes through a tangible, organized political opposition. The more their undemocratic system is delegitimized while we exist as a force demanding a true democracy, the more Democrats and Republicans will feel forced to pass reforms or risk an explosion of revolutionary fervor.

Mexico 1988: Candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) won in what appeared to be a fraudulent election. As seen in this photo, people responded to the fraudulence with a wave of violence and discontent that eroded the state's legitimacy, paving the way for further democratization.

Building A Timeline for a Democratic Socialist '26

The Democrats are a dead-end party. Their results this election show voters' disdain for do-nothing Democrats. Will they learn their lesson and, moving forward, take up the banner of progressivism? If we accept Schoen's opinion that Democrats should take the Third Way between the progressive "far left" and Republican Party as the future direction of the Democratic Party, then we can only expect the ship to continue sinking. Good. Let them sink in the millions of PAC and SuperPAC funds, courting the dozens of people who admire George W. Bush and Dick Cheney but are outside Trump's corruption racket. These past eight years have shown that people want an alternative—a real alternative—to '90s colorblind neoliberalism. A minority takes the banner of white supremacy and fascism to restore the standing of the US Empire, while a majority wants their voices and lives to matter. We must be the party of democracy, of democratic republicanism, of a socialist tomorrow. 2026 must be Democratic Socialist.

We cannot win a national congressional contest for power. Not yet. We may be able to retain some seats in Congress, but we lack the organization, electoral legitimacy, and resources to win a substantial number of seats. We also cannot pass any meaningful reforms to the system without betraying our values and committing to horse trading, and even if we compromise, it is not guaranteed we will pass what we hope for (Hello, PRO Act! Nice to see you Green New Deal!).

What we need is impact. One hundred coordinated state representatives are much louder than ten uncoordinated national representatives. Sure, they may not have a national pulpit from which to agitate for Socialism. But our pulpits cannot be limited to talk shows or news channels where it is the personality that is accentuated, not the party. If we want DSA to be seen as the candidate rather than just the individual, we must show that all these candidates are part of a larger whole.

Political advertisements of DSA's sister party, MORENA, often show candidates, particularly of smaller offices or recognition, in relation to a larger figure or higher office.

This is especially the case if they win as Independents or as DSA. In those cases, our victories further delegitimize the Democratic Party's claim that, because they are "the alternative to Trumpism," all must uncritically fall in line or be accused of being the reason they lost an election.

Contesting state houses of representatives provides a reason to develop functioning party bases. Let us use Texas for an example. Texas has, at the

time of writing, nine DSA chapters of varying sizes.

Texas DSA's electoral performance leans heavily on Propositions, which generally trend towards mass coalitions of which DSA chapters are usually a junior partner in. We cannot say for certain how much of an impact DSA had on the various propositions we successfully organized for in Texas, and it is mostly our fame that grows from such victories, not durable, material organization. I am not arguing for us to abandon Proposition struggles, but we must know how they support our final aim of a mass democratic party for revolutionary democratic socialism, and how to use them accordingly.

For electoral races—a potentially more direct method of analyzing our influence with the people—Texas DSA chapters fielded candidates in 2024 two city council races (Austin, Corpus Christi), one district attorney race (Austin), and one federal house race (Lubbock). The first three were victories, and the last one was not. None appear to have collaborated with the NEC. Where are the state races? What was the logic of running a federal house race, a city council race, and a district attorney race? What happened in Houston, North Texas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Amarillo, and Rio Grande Valley—all chapters which do not appear to show any electoral contests?

It appears as if our Texan comrades stuck to local politics. This comes as no surprise. There is no apparent Texas-state organization nor a cross-chapter electoral commission that can examine potential sites of struggle and pull together a shared electoral fund. In the absence of a state organization and political program, the cities stay in their regions, attempting to improve the conditions in their cities or, at least, minimizing the harm imposed by the State of Texas. We should be engaging in that, but we should desire more. The problem is that we have an uncoordinated struggle in Texas. We have city council members in a state that limits the power of city and county governments; we have a district attorney that is bound to the laws of the city (not in our control), county (not in our control) and state (not in our control); and we have a federal race that, while important, is not paired with state house races in a way that supports the state struggle. How do we change this for 2026?

Maps of the 88th Texas Legislature. Left: formal 2023-2025 districts. Right: ArcGIS-rendered map comparing the state-produced GIS State House Districts with the latest available GIS borders of Texan DSA Chapters. GIS renderings may not be wholly accurate. Future work should create more accurate renderings of national DSA chapters and state house districts they cover.

If we want to meaningfully contest for political power, we need to overhaul our internal structures. While we should develop statewide electoral commissions, these structures must be built by the rank-and-file, with an eye towards national coordination. Electoral Commissions mainly built by the NEC will further stretch an overstretched committee, while statewide electoral commissions that are not tied to the NEC will be unable to produce a concerted national contest for political power, instead presenting unconnected state representatives who may stand with their fellow state reps but are detached from their comrade representatives in other states. The local organizations have the numbers but vary in their resources; the national organization has resources but lacks the numbers to establish our road to power, develop our core organizers into candidates, and see it carried out meaningfully across the nation. Statewide electoral commissions can be the conduit between the two.

If we want to field one hundred candidates for state offices across the nation, the overhaul must be done quickly and efficiently. I propose the following three phases as key to achieving this:

- Build statewide electoral commissions; agitate for Democratic Socialist cadre candidates during DSA's 2025 National Convention through electoral resolutions. This phase will begin during the National Convention in August 2025 and continue in the following months.
- Develop statewide political party organizations / political action committees to fundraise for state elections; identify core members to run for state offices. This must be achieved by end of year 2025.
- Present a public-facing national candidate slate, coordinating chosen statewide issues with the national political program. The first fruits of our labor will be seen in November 2026, but we must be clear-eyed that the real gauge will be 2028 when we learn from our first attempt and redouble our efforts.

The first and second phases will inevitably find variance across states. Not every state will be able to develop a statewide electoral commission, nor should we force every state to do so. Ten states can run ten candidates to reach one-hundred candidates nationally, or, if we organized electoral commissions for every state, we would only need two candidates per state. If the aim is to maximize impact, a balance between these two approaches must be struck. We must develop statewide organizations in as many states as possible, but it should be the responsibility of the NEC to determine which states are of national priority for this election.

I recommend that our comrades in the NEC prioritize statewide electoral

commissions that can act as a party independent of the Democratic Party, whether that means running independent, third party, or Democratic Socialist party candidates. We will inevitably choose some electoral commissions that use the Democratic Party to field candidates, but a candidate that wins with (DSA) or (I) to their right rather than (D) gives our organization and movement all of the credit and can be used to show that an alternative party not only is possible, but is winnable. After all, our impact must be centered on the masses who know little of our existence, rather than the political and pundit classes who already know we exist and despise and fear our shadow. If the majority of our elected officials are still part of the Democratic Party, we will exert a heavy shockwave on the pundit and political classes but make small—though much-needed—waves among the masses. The more electoral commissions that can meaningfully contest outside of the Democratic Party, the stronger our impact will be.

I also recommend we prioritize Southern electoral commissions. The political and pundit classes love to reductively present the South as a deeply reactionary place, with people who deserve the punishment that far-right governments will bring. The Democratic Party apparatuses in these states, as a result, have little political influence, and their continuous defeats deflate their claims of being an effective opposition. These are also the states that cry the loudest about states' rights, while tearing away any autonomy local and county offices have, should they step out of line. Our southern comrades are at the frontlines of state repression and undemocratic rule of law, in a region fielding the highest poverty rates, lowest literacy rates, and wide expanses of privatized land whose use is either forest or industrial. The South is key if we hope to build a socialist heartland.

State house elections cost less than national house elections, but they still cost money. Stronger statewide electoral commissions will make it easier for the national organization to fundraise for as many candidates as possible, and statewide electoral commissions that do not get prioritized can still serve a helpful role in fundraising for the prioritized states. The working class has no country, nor should it have any state; unprioritized statewide electoral commissions can raise funds for candidates in other states and either keep a share of those funds for 2028 or, if finance laws do not permit that, build the local networks to make fundraising more effective in the 2028 elections. The NEC can boast the money we raised, the candidates we fielded, the states we organized, and, when we win our races, tout our vote totals and organize an assembly of these candidates to establish priorities for the 2026-2028 interventions of future socialist tribunes.

Building Phase 1

If we hope to achieve a fraction of what I have written thus far, it is paramount that we accomplish the first phase of my plan:

- Build statewide electoral commissions; agitate for Democratic Socialist cadre candidates in the 2025 National Convention through electoral resolutions. This phase will reach its natural end at the National Convention in August 2025.

Statewide electoral commissions don't come out of thin air—it is our responsibility to create them. As we have seen with other resolutions passed through the national convention, majority delegate support does not always translate to their realization. This must be a rank-and-file initiative first and foremost, and so we need to convince our comrades on the ground to agree and support it. Readers who agree with my vision must work in their DSA chapters to convince our comrades to pass this and delegate volunteers to develop these structures and commit to coordinated state and nationwide electoral interventions

This must be a truly statewide effort: chapters that consider a resolution on a statewide electoral strategy that can sync up with DSA's national electoral project should include a resolved clause that sends communications out to fellow state local chapters to pass a similar resolution. The more locals that pass these resolutions, the greater momentum exists to hold a statewide convention to work out the details of the electoral commission. This is an effort I hope to do for my own state of Texas through a resolution that puts into action what I argue in this article. For any DSA comrades who agree with this article, I strongly recommend reviewing my resolution language and rewriting it for their local and state conditions.

There are an estimated 5,413 state house seats across the nation. Winning one-hundred seats—the goal we stated above—would represent less than 2% of the total. Though the number may be hardly impressive, and we cannot expect to make substantial reforms with such numbers, we should not imagine that to be our purpose. 2% is a tiny fraction, but it would be massively higher than the “major” third parties that exist: the stagnant Greens have no representatives, and the loyalist Libertarians can only boast one seat. DSA is already at a higher number than these other minor parties, and if we carry out a strategy to deliberately expand our electoral presence and agitate for a new style of politics where workers are the protagonists, those one-hundred representatives will not serve as lawmakers but as agitators. They will serve as tribunes of the people and as representatives of

a socialist and popular politic. Our electoral aims should not be to serve an undemocratic congress, but to point out the undemocratic nature of these congresses.

We do not need to delegitimize a system that is already illegitimate in the eyes of the people. People's faith in institutions is at an all-time lows, and criticisms of our system are rampant. The Republicans want to move us towards a fascistic ethnostate, and the Democrats are laughing their failures all the way to the bank. The grave corruption of the governing classes demands we meet our historic responsibilities. As Kautsky wrote in *The Road to Power*:

The more the Socialist party maintains an indestructible power in the midst of the destruction of all authority, the more the Socialists will increase their authority. And the more they persevere in their irreconcilable opposition to the corruption of the ruling class the more complete the trust that will be vested in them by the great masses of the population in the midst of the universal rottenness which has today seized the bourgeois democracy, which has completely surrendered its principles for the purpose of gaining governmental favors... The more immovable, logical and irreconcilable the Socialists remain, the sooner will they conquer their opponents.

The window has once again opened for the organized proletariat—for the DSA. Where the Sanders movement opened hope for a revival of proletarian politics, Democratic Socialism must open the window for the revival of Socialism in the United States. In 2026, we win 2% of the states' houses, introducing to the working class their Socialist Party of the twenty-first century. In 2028, we can shoot for 10% or more, transforming DSA into a party-movement whose program declares, with unshakable valor, the demands of the exploited. 2026 is the beginning of our long war for recognition, paving the way for a Socialist 2028. It is our time to act: history demands it of us, and it is our responsibility to let in the dawn of a socialistic future. Anything less would be a betrayal of our duty and—more gravely—the mass extinction of countless species on Earth.

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