



Covering the 2026 Campaigns (Part 7)

Understanding Political Parties

By

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The History of Political Parties

How many political parties do we have in the United States? Two? Three? Four? Five? Would you be surprised to know that there are 'scores' of political parties in the U.S.? I read one report that claimed there are about 400 parties in America. Most of those parties are known as 'minority' because of the low number of members. Some are only 'single state' parties because they don't have enough members to qualify in other state elections.

The major parties currently are two: Democratic and Republican. However, the Democratic Socialist Party - a liberal wing of the Democratic Party - is currently growing in size and influence. They will most likely continue to grow in the coming years based on recent primary elections. More about that in a few minutes.

Some of the earliest political parties in America included:

- Federalist Party
- Democratic-Republican Party
- Whig Party
- Democratic Party
- Republican Party

By the time I began following political campaigns as a young journalist in the 1960's, the Democratic and Republican parties dominated political campaigns. Personally, I am an Independent and have been since I began voting. That's because I believe, as do many older journalists, that the people who cover political campaigns should not belong to any particular party. Many other Americans also believe in the importance of being politically 'Independent.' We are not beholden to any political persuasion. If someone wants the vote of an 'Independent,' they have to earn it through persuasion. Hopefully, that persuasion is logical.

“A record-high 45% of U.S. adults identified as political independents in 2025, surpassing the 43% measured in 2014, 2023 and 2024. Meanwhile, equal shares of U.S. adults — 27% each — identified as either Democrats or Republicans.

In most years since Gallup began regularly conducting its polls by telephone in 1988, independents have been the largest political group. However, the independent percentage has increased markedly in the past 15 years, typically registering 40% or higher, a level not reached prior to 2011.” [Gallup](#) (January 12, 2026)

This means that the dominant political parties must pay attention to the interests of Independent voters. Journalists should remember that as they cover political campaigns. While politicians want to keep their party’s ‘base’ on their side, they must also appeal to ‘independent’ voters. That often places candidates and their campaign staffs walking a ‘fine line’ when it comes to issues and policies. 45% is a big number.

Socialist Parties in America

I remember interviewing leaders of the **Socialist Party of America** in the late 1960's and early 1970's. They told me the party had hundreds of dues-paying members at that time. Those numbers grew during the 80's, 90's, and 2000's.

“Originally founded in 1901, the Socialist Party of America has a history that is of the American Socialist movement. It has had its share of critical missteps and fractures, but like that movement, we have a chance to rededicate freedom from the two-party system and constitute what could have been.

We're refounding as an independent socialist political party working to awaken and empower fellow workers and compatriots. You are invited to join us in rebuilding a movement dedicated to the working masses, not the wealthy ruling classes.” [Socialist Party](#)

As I mentioned above, I interviewed leaders of the **Socialist Party of America** between the years of 1968 and 1972 — then they changed names.

“The Socialist Party of the United States of America (SPUSA), usually simplified as Socialist Party USA or Socialist Party, is a multi-tendency democratic socialist party in the United States. The SPUSA was founded in 1973 as a successor to the Socialist Party of America, which had been renamed Social Democrats, USA a year before. The party is officially committed to multi-tendency democratic socialism.” [Library of Congress](#)

“Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—and its two predecessor organizations, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM)—had their origins in the early 1970s, at the beginning of a long-term rightward shift of U.S. and global politics. This shift to the right—symbolized by the triumph in the 1980s of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher—somewhat overshadowed the central role these organizations played in the movements of resistance to corporate domination, as well as in today’s

ongoing project: organizing an ideological and organizational socialist presence among trade union, community, feminist and people of color and other activists.” [Atlanta DSA](#)

Many people credit U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders as the most powerful influencer to move the Democratic Party toward Socialism even though he runs as an Independent. Current DSA-affiliated House members include Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib. Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush were also part of the DSA push in Congress until their defeat in the 2024 elections. It appears that more members of the DSA may win election to Congress in 2026. Other DSA-backed candidates have already won Democratic primaries in heavily Democratic districts. If you are a journalist in one of those districts, you should find this newsletter of special interest as you cover election issues.

The DSA has come a long way from the small group of Socialists I interviewed in the 1960's and 70's. They are quickly becoming a major force in American politics:

“On July 4, 2026, Democratic Socialists of America passed 120,000 members, making us the largest socialist organization in United States history and surpassing the Socialist Party of America under Eugene Debs, which reached its peak dues-paying membership in 1912.” [X](#)

Socialism in America, which was often ignored by Americans years ago, is now making itself heard and seen in powerful ways. They have won and continue to win elections in many cities and states across the country. They are demonstrating a great deal of enthusiasm and influence inside one of the primary political parties in the United States (Democrats). Many people believe Socialism could be a dominant wing of the Democratic party within the next five to ten years.

“Despite its name, the DSA is not exclusively made up of democratic socialists. The organization consciously operates as a ‘big tent’ for leftists (as described by Maurice Isserman, a charter member of the DSA), lacking a rigid orthodoxy to which participants must adhere. Such ideological diversity often leads to fractious debate within the group, but members are united in the basic belief that capitalism is fundamentally unjust and must be replaced by a more democratic system that economically and socially empowers all people, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or age.”

[Britannica](#)

The focus of Socialism's influence currently appears in local, state, and federal elections. The new mayor of America's largest city is a member of the DSA. As I mentioned earlier, members of Congress are already members of the DSA. Many of the candidates running for Congress, the U.S. Senate, state political offices (e.g. governors, lieutenant governors, state representatives), and city and county elected offices are members of the DSA. They are well-organized, well-funded, and focused on winning elections to bring about their broad agenda.

The Socialist Agenda

For people who may be unfamiliar with what Socialists want to happen in the United States (and across the world), here is what they want and why (in their own words):

“The political and economic system under which we live is built on private ownership and profit at all costs. As capitalism fails to solve problems of its own making, it turns to right-wing authoritarianism. Big business makes deals with the government to line their pockets, and politicians stoke hatred between working people. Instead of offering real solutions to unemployment and the cost of living, they attack immigrants, communities of color, and trans people. Rather than fixing our broken healthcare system, they push snake oil and circulate conspiracy theories. The Republicans are in on it, the Democratic Party is asleep at the wheel, and both are funded by the same criminal class of billionaires and war profiteers.

The Democratic Socialists of America is building a party whose goal is a democratic society of the working class. Our enemies are not just individual bosses, but the entire global system of capital; not just this or that cop, judge, or president, but the entire anti-democratic structure of our society. We are workers fighting to transform society: to win the battle for democracy, draft a new constitution, and create a democratic socialist republic.

DSA has written this program for ending capitalist oligarchy and creating a real democracy. Some of these demands may be won under our current system, but we know complete victory will require building a new society from the ground up. We push these demands to their furthest extent today, so we can fight for their fullest realization in a socialist future.” [Democratic Socialists of America](#)

It's important as a journalist that you thoroughly understand what's happening politically and economically in the United States (and across the world). As they've stated, members of the DSA want to:

- transform society
- win the battle for democracy
- draft a new constitution
- create a democratic socialist republic

The more journalists know and understand the positions of each political party, the better they will be able to cover politics and political campaigns in 2026, 2028, 2030, 2032, and for many years in the future until the United States is a completely 'Socialist' nation.

DSA Proposals

Core economic and social proposals from the DSA include (quoting directly from the official [DSA website](#)):

- Guarantee universal healthcare at no cost to individuals, including complete access to reproductive and gender-affirming care
- Expand healthcare access and quality by investing in new public hospitals and clinics
- Make all medical education and training public and free
- Expand public resources to support recreation, learning, and social spaces accessible to all
- Establish paid family leave for all workers, a 32 hour work week with full pay and benefits, and a living minimum wage
- Provide free, quality public education from pre-K to college and cancel all student debt
- Build new, publicly-owned social housing

- Strictly regulate investment properties
- Establish universal rent control
- Guarantee right to counsel for all tenants
- Free childcare (including undocumented immigrants)
- Free education for all (including undocumented immigrants)
- For the working class to govern, we need a new political system
- End political corruption and legalized bribery
- Get rid of lobbyists, dark money, and Citizens United, and publicly finance all elections
- Abolish the Electoral College
- Replace the President and Supreme Court with an executive and judiciary chosen by and subordinate to Congress
- Replace the two-party system with a multi-party democracy

- Expand the House of Representatives
- Implement proportional representation and ranked choice voting in all elections
- Abolish the Senate
- End ICE detention and deportations and punish federal agents' brutality
- Legalize migration
- Grant amnesty for all immigrants regardless of status
- Provide a path to citizenship for all permanent residents
- End visa caps and quotas
- End the legacies of slavery and colonialism
- Reinforce anti-discrimination laws
- Honor all treaties and tribal sovereignty
- Enact reparations and massively invest in good jobs, quality housing and infrastructure in neglected minority communities
- Demilitarize police departments

- Disempower police unions
- Redirect funding to public services as steps towards fully abolishing the police and prison system which protects the rich and jails the poor
- Treat drug addiction and mental illness as health issues, not crimes
- End qualified immunity and empower civilian oversight bodies with real authority over the police
- Socialist feminism fights for queer liberation and the freedoms of all working class women
- Stop gender violence and end policies that oppress bodily autonomy and intimate life, including patriarchal restrictions on abortion, childbirth and childraising, gender expression and transition, marriage, and divorce
- Ban sex discrimination and ensure fair compensation and support for all forms of labor, including care work
- Workers must lead our democratic transition to a green future

- Pass a federal jobs guarantee
- Implement massive investment in sustainable, publicly owned energy and transit infrastructure
- Phase out the use of fossil fuels
- Reclaim and repair our earth's resources for all
- Defund the Department of War
- End all foreign wars and close overseas military bases
- Support and fully employ veterans
- End immunity for U.S. war criminals and support the International Criminal Court's mandate to prosecute war crimes
- Recognize the rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of return, the right to resist military occupation, and the right to self determination in a free Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital
- End all military and economic aid to Israel
- Prosecute U.S. and Israeli leaders responsible for the genocide in Gaza

- People around the world deserve to live their lives without U.S. interference
- End economic warfare against countries whose governments act independently of the United States, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Iran
- Extend full voting rights to all permanent U.S. residents and restore the right to vote for incarcerated people and people with criminal convictions
- Establish statehood for Washington D.C.
- Recognize the right to self-determination for all U.S. territories and colonies
- Expand and protect voting rights and end voter suppression
- Establish public ownership of the largest corporations and essential industries to ensure democratic control and accountability to the people
- Enact aggressive wealth taxes on the richest individuals and corporations to spend on public goods and infrastructure

- Empower workers to come together and fight the boss
- Protect, expand, and enforce the rights of all workers to form, join, and strike with their unions, regardless of industry
- Support union members who organize reform caucuses, democratize their unions, and take political action

Our job as politically independent journalists (***which you should be***) is to fairly represent the views of each candidate and political party. The only way to do that is dig into every plank of every political party's platform and cover campaigns fairly and honestly. Be curious. Be skeptical. Our country depends on our independence from the influence of any political party.

Next Time

I'll look at the platforms of the **Democratic** and **Republican** parties as our series continues.



1960s Radio News, © Mark McGee