

# **The Election Cycle as Counter-Insurgency**

It's Going Down

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# Contents

<b>Running <i>From</i> Policy</b> . . . . .	3
Signs of a Deep Rot . . . . .	5
Influencers of the World, Unite . . . . .	5
The Task Ahead . . . . .	6

It has been four years since a deadly pandemic ripped through the social terrain and the George Floyd uprising brought millions out into the streets, as those in power responded by telling us all to go back to work and sending in the National Guard. Months later, tens of thousands of Trump supporters, Proud Boys, and militia members attempted to install an internet troll as emperor.

Since then, the government has rolled back safety nets put in place during the pandemic, attempted to forestall an economic crisis while another tech bubble seems poised to burst, and rising inflation and price gouging has led to record corporate profits and increased anger and anxiety. In short, there should be *no wonder* why a deep pessimism has permeated in the face of what the two ruling parties have offered up this election cycle.

But while history will remember this year as a time when much of the country simply shrugged when a former president was shot by a member of his own party and a deeply unpopular incumbent was pushed out in the face of mass dissatisfaction, hidden from the headlines and the toxicity of the pundit class is both the worsening conditions *of our lives* and the attempt by the capitalist State to manufacture a narrative that not only distracts from the deepening crisis, but attempts to proclaim that the very system which accelerates it *has a future*.

Trump proclaims, again, that if he wins we'll all be rich. The Democrats tell us we already are.

## Running *From* Policy

We're told so often that "we live in a democracy," some of us forget that we actually don't. What is up for offer from the ruling parties is not an organic expression of the will of the people, but instead an attempt at popularizing an operating system for a social order that is in deep crisis. Those that seek to rule us have no desire to even address, let alone fix, the material structural problems which permeate our lives. "Vibes" aside, the nausea produced by the current race has led to a deafening roar of mass nihilism, as we all doom scroll through the slow collapse of this civilization.

The scenes are different, but all speak to a drastic reactionary lurch happening within the ruling institutions of this society. The leader of the Teamsters union speaks at the RNC amid calls for the military to carry out mass deportations and with a straight face heralds the party as a friend to workers. White boomers hold up signs reading, "Mass Deportations Now!," and the Democrats respond by openly declaring that they will in fact be *even more draconian* at the border than Trump. Meanwhile millions of so-called "progressives" organize to "do the work" over Zoom calls, as families in Gaza watch as their children explode in Israeli airstrikes and the Democratic governor of California helps police evict a homeless encampment.

And here in lies the greatest irony of all: while both parties say they are "running on policy," by and large, their *actual positions are not that popular*. While in 2020, Harris attempted to appear as a bridge between the Dollar Store social democracy of Bernie Sanders and the Center-Right neoliberalism of Biden, by 2024, Harris had already walked back calls for things like universal healthcare, which of course, actually has mass support. There are many other examples, from turning their back on trans and LGBTQ+ rights, pushing for continued border militarization, and pivoting from calling for a version of the Green New Deal to pushing "cap and trade" schemes to shield corporations from climate fallout.

And despite Biden being pushed out of office in large part due to his unwavering support for the ongoing genocide in Palestine, the Democrats, while also rolling back COVID relief and healthcare protections, continue to fast-track billions in weapons and military aid to Israel. Cutting funding to Israel would swiftly end the war, which is deeply unpopular, especially among the Democratic base, yet the party remains deeply committed to supporting Israel's continued genocide. In short, many progressive voters are putting hopes in Harris being in fact *something she is not*.

Ironically, one of the largest co-signers of this continued right-ward shift has in fact been Bernie Sanders and "the Squad," who not only threw their support in with Biden, pushing back against growing calls to remove him, but have continued to fulfill their role, much like Kid Rock and Hulk Hogan in MAGA world, as a hype-man to the DNC, attempting to excite young people, the Left, and low-wage workers about a ticket that has by and large, abandoned any assemblage of "progressive" policy.

Thus, less than a decade after the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) began a project of mass entryism into the Democratic Party, succeeding in gaining almost 100,000 members and getting several high profile candidates elected into office, the end result has by and large been a continued move to the Right. There is a word for this: *recuperation*.

Meanwhile, on the MAGA side of the street, Trump has attempted to piece together a campaign by building a brand around simply *not being Joe Biden*. But Trump has also gone to great lengths to obfuscate his policy proposals, insofar as he has them. This has been the most apparent in his attempt to re-imagine the overturning of Roe v. Wade as a way to "send it back to the states." But abortion is only part of a bigger issue for Trump, as popular opinion against Project 2025 has deeply soured, leading Trump to disavow the massive set of policy proposals produced by members of his former administration and backed by many of his most loyal subjects.

In short: Trump and the wider MAGA movement – in all of its factions – are attempting to sell themselves as a "better boss" for the country, while running from their very real and very unpopular plans for establishing a corporatized Christian theocracy. At the same time, the Democrats are lurching to the Right, while attempting to brand themselves in the baptism of "good vibes" rising from the base, which largely have materialized through the mirage that the Harris ticket is in fact *progressive*.

The recent response from Trump to a question about skyrocketing rent costs which has gone viral over the past week illustrates this point. Responding to a question from an attendee at the Sturgis motorcycle rally, Trump, speaking over the phone to a reporter at *Fox News*, replied that he would increase the amount of oil drilled, claiming that expanded petrol production would bring down energy costs and thus, lower the price of goods. Putting aside the fact that Trump is a real-estate tycoon and from the class of people who are literally *creating* the current housing crisis, the rise in the cost of everyday goods is driven chiefly by price gouging. And, since the 1970s, wages have been flattening while the cost of rent has risen astronomically. In short, more oil production won't bring down the cost of goods – but it will continue to make Trump and those of his class, very rich.

Even more ironically, despite running a platform that in theory at least addresses the *existence* of climate change, the Biden administration has pushed for more oil drilling than ever before, as the US now leads the world in oil production. But of course, the Democrats don't like to speak to this reality, at least to their base, who actually cares about the threat of climate change.

Both parties aren't running on anything. Instead, they're telling us a story they think *we want to hear*.

## Signs of a Deep Rot

It's no surprise that after nearly a decade of intense struggle: mass strikes, uprisings, riots, mass mobilizations, the occupation of buildings, and growing mutual aid networks, the ruling class has come to embrace a set of increasingly reactionary and neofascist ideas. The political order wholesale has continue to move far to the Right.

There are differences. Just like during the civil rights era, where those on the Right attacked the movement as a stepping stone to "communism," in today's landscape, the "war on woke" is seen as a block against growing anti-capitalist sentiment and self-organization from below. Meanwhile, the neoliberals take a different route, putting pronouns in their Twitter bios and posing for choreographed "take a knee" photo-shoots while sending in the National Guard against protesters. One side pushes conspiracy theories about Martin Luther King, Jr., the other quotes him while indicting bail funds on RICO charges.

As we step back and look at the electoral political landscape, we see this reality come into focus. The Democrats are carrying out a genocide in Palestine while campaigning to the right of the GOP on immigration. Harris placates protesters while hinting at a possible ceasefire, as children huddling in bombed out schools are murdered en masse in Gaza. At a campaign rally, Trump shouts-out white nationalist influencers and touts his Vice Presidential pick who is financed by reactionary Silicon Valley billionaires and influenced by Alt-Right podcasters who literally advocate for a monarchy.

Meanwhile, the largest third party in the US, the uber-capitalist Libertarian Party, which is controlled by the far-Right Mises Caucus, is largely backing Trump, as RFK Jr., the most popular third party candidate, advocates an escalated assault on Gaza and cultivates support among crunchy Qanon stans and anti-vaxxers.

The ruling class is hoping to bury the uptick in class struggle over the past decade using everything from conspiracy charges to conspiracy theories. The message to partisans of the mass eruptions of popular anger and action that have exploded over the last few years against capitalism, white supremacy, and war should be clear: we can't win at this game.

The feeling held by many that both major political parties do not represent their interests *is correct*. Our true power lies in our ability to organize and act outside of the established State system, in our own interests.

## Influencers of the World, Unite

Just as we have come to expect, the liberals and so-called "socialists" of groups like Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) are all rushing toward the electoral spectacle. Some of these groups, specifically liberals, are repeating the line that American institutions are the only way to defeat authoritarianism, as long as the people they like are the ones giving the police their orders. The "socialists," which are just reformist liberals with red flags, have become a parody of themselves; embracing electoralism, with increasingly absurd arguments about "visibility" to back them up as they run their hopeless, wasteful, Quixotic campaigns for president. Not only are

all of these attempts repetitions of failed movement strategies of the past, not only do they rely on approaches that give our power away to others, but these are all approaches which engage the state at its point of greatest strength, and at the point of our greatest weakness.

Not to be out done, much of the online Left is lining up lock and step behind the Democratic Party. Progressive streamers like David Pakman applaud Vice President Harris “shutting down” so-called “hecklers” who would dare to remind us of dead Palestinians. “Socialist” streamers like Vaush call the current Democratic ticket “based,” as everything is reduced to pumping out viral click-bait and online content, which for streamers amounts to actual dollars. *Pathetic.*

To be clear: this is not a call for shitting on people excited about change. It is a reminder that we must intervene and say what *only we can say*. Instead of pretending we have a dog in this race, we should be pointing out how deeply flawed this entire spectacle is. Regardless of if we vote are not, more critically, we should be putting our energies into building new forms of popular organization, infrastructure, and action from below which can challenge and push back against the systems of exploitation and domination which are threatening life on this planet.

We should be centering the social movements and struggles which actually have the ability to improve our lives and communities and also point towards new forms of life. This work is hard, often dangerous, and won’t win us many Patreon subscribers or YouTube followers, but it is the task before us.

## The Task Ahead

Each cycle, political parties attempt to pull into their orbit antagonistic currents which seek to change society in an effort to gain power. Obama smashed the Occupy encampments and sent in the military against Standing Rock and then talked about the “99%.” Biden invoked the memory of Heather Heyer and the fight against fascism as members of his party applaud the indicting of Cop City protesters on RICO charges and the police assassination of Tortugueta in the Weelaunee forest. Now, Harris and Walz are making overtures about a ceasefire while the Biden administration continues to facilitate a genocide.

Every apparent nod to our demands is an attempt at recuperating the disillusioned back into the fold for another round of the same nonsense, where no matter who wins, we lose. What often seems as a betrayal of the “soul” or “values” of a party, system, or nation-state is simply the organization functioning as intended. The elite project of co-optation depends on short memory spans, distraction, and threats to keep voters returning to the trough of so-called representative democracy every few years. For those feeling alienated by it all, *you’re not wrong*. Trust yourself, not the pundits or the candidates. They don’t care about you, why should you care about them? The difference is that they need you for their game to work, but you don’t need them to get free.

Despite the allure of “vibes,” most of us know deep-down that regardless of who wins the election, as soon as they step into office, the mood will shift. Despite Trump’s populist veneer, his loyalty is to himself and those of the billionaire class, while he attempts to carry out a deeply unpopular authoritarian program. Harris will continue to support the ongoing genocide by Israel, in the face of growing anger at rising costs and climate chaos. Just as under Obama, what manufactured “hope” people have placed in the possibility of a Harris/Walz administration will soon be dashed by the realities that *this is America*.

The question for those involved in autonomous social movements is, where will we be? Ready and poised, with networks of action, education, solidarity, and infrastructure – to engage those disillusioned, just as many of us once were, at the failures of the electoral system, or caught off guard, when it fails to deliver and functions, *exactly as intended*.

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