

United States: Elections and Votes in Congress Put Progressives, Socialists on the Defensive

Friday 12 November 2021, by [LA BOTZ Dan](#) (Date first published: 10 November 2021).

The Democratic Party and especially progressive legislators, including some members of the Democratic Socialists of America, have been put on the defensive after this month's elections and votes on President Joseph Biden's program in the Congress. In the elections, Republicans ran on issues of jobs, taxes, and against teaching about racism in schools and they attacked all Democrats, as progressive big-spenders, socialists, and soft on crime. This proved to be a successful formula in many places.

The most significant Democratic Party defeat took place in Virginia, where Biden had won the presidential race by ten points. There Republican Glen Youngkin defeated Democrat Terry McAuliffe. And in New Jersey, where final votes have not yet been tallied, it appears that the liberal Democrat Phil Murphy won election by just a handful of votes over his Republican rival. These two elections suggest that the Democrats will have a hard time maintaining their Congressional majorities in next years' mid-term elections. And they could presage the return of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2024.

At the same time, several progressive candidates lost their races and progressive legislation failed in some cities. India Walton, the black democratic socialist who won the Democratic primary for mayor of Buffalo, New York, overwhelmingly lost her mayor race to a write-in candidate, the moderate incumbent Democrat Byron Brown, as the entire establishment Republican and Democrat, turned against her. In Seattle two progressive city council members lost their races because they supported reducing the police budget or took strong stands against racism. And in that same city police abolitionist Nicole Thomas-Kennedy lost the race for city attorney to a law-and-order candidate. In Minneapolis, the city where in May of 2020 police murdered George Floyd igniting the enormous racial protests of that year, voters rejected a referendum on reforming the police department. Most cities have rejected cuts in police budgets and other reform measures.

Not all progressives lost. Most American big cities are governed by Democrats (just as most states are run by Republicans), and progressives did well in several of them. In Boston, Michelle Wu, described as "a progressive protégé of Sen. Elizabeth Warren," won the mayoral race, becoming the first woman of color to hold that office. In Pittsburgh, progressive Ed Ganey won the mayoral race, as Justin Bibb did in Cleveland.

At the same time that the elections were taking place, Biden was attempting to get his two trillion-dollar programs through Congress, both the infrastructure bill and the progressive social legislation in the Build Back Better bill. Two bills were supposed to move through Congress together, hoping that bi-partisan support for infrastructure would help carry along the social program bill as well. But after Democratic conservatives paralyzed the legislation and dramatically reduced its budget, the two were divided. As Congresswoman and DSA member Cori Bush said, voting for the bills

separately jeopardized Congress' ability "to improve the livelihood of our health care workers, our children, our caregivers, our seniors, and the future of our environment."



The Squad, now six.

Biden and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi convinced the hundred members of the Progressive Caucus to join with moderates to pass the infrastructure bill. In the end, only the six progressive Democratic representatives known as "the squad"—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Cori Bush, Jamaal Bowman, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib—voted against it. Those progressives, several of them socialists, did not trust the moderates to support the Build Back Better social programs. Having already passed the Senate, on November 5, the House voted for the infrastructure bill with all but those six Democrats and 13 Republicans supporting it.

The Republicans are enthusiastic, and the left is on the defensive in Congress, in states, and in the cities.

Dan La Botz

P.S.

- New Politics. November 10, 2021:
<https://newpol.org/elections-and-votes-in-congress-put-progressives-socialists-on-the-defensive/>

This article was written for L'Anticapitaliste, the weekly newspaper of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) of France.

- DAN LA BOTZ is a Brooklyn-based teacher, writer and activist. He is a co-editor of New Politics.