

# Jacobin's Bhaskar Sunkara on the Iowa caucuses: Don't lose faith in the Democrats

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The unexplained breakdown of the Democratic presidential primary contest in Iowa this week has led millions of workers and young people to wonder whether the Democratic political establishment is rigging the Iowa caucuses against Bernie Sanders.

Three days after the vote, full results have still not been released. The chaos caused by the supposed “glitch” in an app used to report the vote has had the effect of allowing Democratic candidate Pete Buttigieg to proclaim victory, though indications are that Sanders will come out on top. Partial results have Buttigieg ahead in the delegate count and Sanders ahead in the popular vote.

The partial release of figures has only compounded the debacle and the suspicions. The *New York Times* wrote on Thursday, “The results released by the Iowa Democratic Party on Wednesday were riddled with inconsistencies and other flaws.” It added that “more than 100 precincts reported results that were internally inconsistent, that were missing data or that were not possible under the complex rules of the Iowa caucuses.”

Local precinct officials and others have reported discrepancies, mainly to the detriment of Sanders. Numerous commentators have pointed to the fact that Tara McGowan, the owner of the app used to report caucus results, is married to Michael Halle, a senior strategist with the Buttigieg campaign.

Buttigieg quickly used the chaos in Iowa to proclaim victory, in a manner reminiscent of George W. Bush's victory proclamation in the 2000 election while votes were still being counted in Florida. Buttigieg declared Monday evening, “We are going on to New Hampshire victorious.”

Many are justly concerned about the political operations behind the scenes and what they say about the Democratic Party's vote-rigging efforts in the 2020 elections.

One person who is not worried, however, is Bhaskar Sunkara, the publisher of *Jacobin* magazine and prominent member of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Writing in the *Guardian*, Sunkara claims that “we should have confidence” in the “integrity” of the vote in Iowa,

arguing that the Democratic National Committee (DNC) will not “steal the election from Bernie Sanders.”

As reports of irregularities in the vote counts from local precincts continued to mount on social media Wednesday, Sunkara wrote on Twitter: “Let's agree on a split decision, move on, and just secure a massive victory [for Sanders] in New Hampshire. Things are looking too good to get bogged down in Iowa bullshit.”

Predictably, this flippant and irresponsible statement met with an overwhelmingly negative response from commenters.

The widespread speculation of a deliberate plot against Sanders by the Democratic Party establishment is based on the keen memory of the 2016 primaries, in which exposures of deliberate efforts by the party leadership to benefit Clinton at the expense of Sanders led to the resignation of two successive heads of the Democratic National Committee.

But Sunkara denies that the primaries were “rigged.” He writes: “The Democratic National Committee pushed its preferred candidate in 2016, helping the Hillary Clinton team beat Bernie Sanders through measures such as limiting the number of debates (25 in 2008, but down to six in 2016). But these actions have been inflated into a narrative that the DNC ‘rigged’ an election that Sanders would have otherwise won.”

The message that Sunkara is conveying is clear. Don't worry about the manipulation of the election. Everything is fine. Above all, keep faith in the system—that is, in the Democratic Party.

Let us review what in fact happened in 2016. In July of that year, Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz was forced to resign after the release of emails by WikiLeaks showing what the *Washington Post* called “coordinated efforts to help Clinton at the expense of her rivals in the Democratic primaries.”

In a May 5 internal email, Wasserman Schultz wrote of Sanders, “He isn't going to be president.”

In another email, DNC chief financial officer Bradley

Marshall sought to use Sanders' religious beliefs against him, in an exchange whose subtext borders on anti-Semitism:

"It might may [sic] no difference, but for KY [Kentucky] and WVA [West Virginia] can we get someone to ask his belief. Does he believe in a God. He had skated on saying he has a Jewish heritage. I think I read he is an atheist. This could make several points difference with my peeps. My Southern Baptist peeps would draw a big difference between a Jew and an atheist."

Former DNC chairman Ed Rendell called the actions of the DNC leadership "incredibly inappropriate," adding, "It truly violates what the DNC's proper role should be."

On March 12, 2016, CNN contributor Donna Brazile, who would later serve as DNC interim chair, sent a debate question to the Clinton campaign, but not to Sanders. She later resigned in disgrace from CNN and the DNC once her actions were revealed by WikiLeaks. CNN commentator Jake Tapper called her action "horrifying," while CNN President Jeff Zucker called her behavior "unethical" and "disgusting."

In 2017, Brazile revealed the existence of a secret agreement between the DNC and the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign that involved Clinton paying off the DNC's debts and providing it a monthly subsidy in return for gaining control over the appointment of DNC officials and the right of approval over key operational decisions.

But for Sunkara, none of this constitutes a "rigged" election. Since it can't be proven that the misconduct of DNC officials *caused* Sanders to lose, no one should have any doubts in the fundamental integrity of the Democratic nomination process.

Definite political conclusions follow from this interpretation. Sunkara writes: "Fellow Bernie Sanders supporters hear my plea—we gain nothing by playing into the idea that the process is so stacked against us that we can't win."

He adds, "Why bother supporting an insurgent candidate, if the outcome is already assured?" He concludes that "we should feel confident that victory is possible. And that means letting people know that their vote will be counted, and that even the flawed institutions of American democracy can sometimes deliver progress."

Even as the Democratic Socialists of America fully subordinates itself to the Sanders campaign, it is profoundly hostile to and fearful of the sentiments driving millions of workers and young people to support him. By and large, Sanders' supporters among workers and youth see him as a vehicle to oppose the institutions of American society and are not inclined to blindly trust these institutions.

But the job of Sunkara and his co-thinkers is to tamp down

these sentiments by keeping workers and young people confined within the Democratic Party and promoting the illusion that this bankrupt, pro-corporate, pro-war party can somehow be reformed.

The fact is that it cannot. Sanders' strategy of leading a "political revolution" without ending the capitalist system or breaking with the Democratic Party is a pipe dream. This was made clear with Sanders' concession to Clinton at the 2016 convention.

Sunkara supports Sanders not *despite* the fruitlessness of his efforts to reform the Democratic Party, but *because* of them. His primary goal is to keep workers and young people shackled to this party, which has been the graveyard of every egalitarian social movement in the United States over the past century.

But unlike Sunkara, millions of workers and young people support Sanders not because he is a Democrat, but in spite of it.

Disabusing the masses of workers and young people of any illusion that the Democratic Party can be reformed will take hard and bitter lessons, of which the rigging of the 2016 primaries is one and the unexplained events in Iowa are another.

Ultimately, millions of workers and young people are striving for a world free of inequality, war and attacks on democratic rights. They will find these goals neither in Sanders nor the Democratic Party, but that only means they will continue to search.

We are confident that workers and young people will increasingly come to the conclusion that the reform of capitalism and the Democratic Party is impossible, and will support the campaign of the Socialist Equality Party in the 2020 presidential elections.



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