

Chicago mayor defeated in municipal elections, challengers Paul Vallas and Brandon Johnson advance to April run-off

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The first round of the Chicago municipal elections on February 28 led to the defeat of current mayor Lori Lightfoot. Lightfoot, formerly a US Attorney, was appointed by her predecessor Rahm Emanuel to head the Chicago Police Board. She later led an accountability task force that whitewashed the city's responsibility for the police murder of teenager Laquan McDonald.

Eight candidates challenged Lightfoot, who was widely unpopular, for the mayor's office. The main contenders were Democratic Representative Jesus "Chuy" Garcia; Brandon Johnson, a Cook County Commissioner and the Chicago Teachers Union's legislative official; and Paul Vallas, a former Chicago Public Schools CEO and city budget management official. Vallas in particular oriented himself to the police and the far-right in the Chicago region.

The two mayoral candidates with the most votes, Vallas, endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police, and Johnson, endorsed by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), SEIU and United Working Families, now advance to an April 4 run-off election.

Lightfoot's time in office was marked by the ruthless pursuit of the interests of ruling class and brutal acts of police violence, including the murder of 13-year-old Adam Toledo, the beating and intimidation of protesters, the shutting down of the city center during protests, and later the imposition of a curfew on youth in the wealthy downtown area.

Lightfoot also attempted to block the release of footage of a 2019 police raid made in error on the home of social worker Anjanette Young, who was forced to stand naked in her living room as police ransacked her

home. She defended the Chicago Police Department's decision to keep two officers on the force who are involved with two different far-right extremist groups, the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers.

The first mayor to go down to defeat after one term since 1983, Lightfoot joins two other elected mayors ousted after their first term, Michael Bilandic and Jane Byrne.

While early voting was reportedly higher than in the past, total voter turnout overall was extremely low. Residents cast about 600,000 ballots, accounting for roughly 32 percent of eligible voters. This was even lower than in 2019, when 35 percent turned out. Older residents turned out in the highest numbers, with more than 51 percent of total votes coming from people over the age of 55. Just 16.9 percent of votes came from residents under 34 years old.

Notably, the lowest turnout was in the predominantly working class sections of the city.

Vallas received 33.77 percent, or about 172,000 votes; Johnson received 20.29 percent, or about 103,300 votes; Lightfoot 16.89 percent, or 86,900 votes. Chuy Garcia, the former darling of the Democratic Socialists of America turned Democratic Party machine hack, took 14 percent or 70,000 votes.

Democratic Party leaders behind the candidacies of Vallas and Garcia, along with the corporate media, made every effort to portray the election itself, as well as the foreseeable defeat of an unpopular sitting mayor, as a popular rebuke of insufficiently aggressive policing by her administration.

The most significant aspect of the 2023 election is its profoundly right-wing character, with overwhelming emphasis placed on crime and "public safety." Reports

indicate this is expected to intensify in order to create conditions more favorable to Vallas' election, which is supported by sections of the financial aristocracy and the *Chicago Tribune*.

The relentless hammering on crime, and warning of the “fiscal cliffs” facing pensions, crumbling transit system and a school district battered by privatization, corruption and neglect, only further alienates wide sections of the population blasted by decades of deindustrialization, austerity, police violence, and then ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A fight back is under way, and the real target of the howling for “law and order” is the intensifying class struggle.

All nine candidates accepted as central to their campaigns that crime is the number one issue. Johnson, who also enjoys support from the Democratic Socialists of America candidates in the city council races, claimed he will be “tough and smart” about crime. He has promised to raise funds from businesses in order to increase social services that go to the “root causes” of crime.

Johnson has proposed a \$4 per month corporate head tax to raise \$20 million, as well as a \$1 to \$2 tax on securities trading, and returning \$100 million in the enormous tax increment financing schemes that siphon off city tax revenues reserved for mayors' pet projects. He has also proposed a number of regressive taxes, including on hotel rooms, suburban commuters to the city through a regional rail transit surcharge, and “user fees” for areas frequented by tourists. He has suggested “getting serious” about selling Chicago's water.

Johnson has distanced himself from any association with political radicalism, comparing himself to Lightfoot before her election, saying, “Everything she pretended to be in 2019 is everything we truly are, today.”

Johnson told the media, “Tonight is about building a Chicago that truly invests in our people. The most radical thing we can do as a city is to love the people of Chicago. Loving people and investing in people—that is the way my father raised me. The finances of this city belong to the people of the city. So, we're gonna invest

in the people of the city.”

For his part, Vallas served as city budget director under former mayor Richard M. Daley. He was a central figure in the Democratic Party-led school “turnaround” and privatization efforts throughout the 2000s. He worked in several public school districts after leading Chicago Public Schools, including Philadelphia, New Orleans and Bridgeport, Connecticut, before being removed by a judge for lacking sufficient credentials to serve as superintendent.

Both Vallas and Johnson are promising job training and hiring programs through public schools, with Vallas claiming that Chicago Public Schools will remain open at night and on weekends.

After the initial election results were announced Vallas said, “Public safety is the fundamental right of every American. It is a civil right, and it is the principle responsibility of government. We will have a safe Chicago. We will make Chicago the safest city in America.”

Whatever their tactical differences, both Vallas and Johnson are political representatives of the ruling class, the former basing himself on the most right-wing forces, including the Fraternal Order of Police, and the latter seeking to rely more on the trade union apparatus as a critical instrument for the suppression of the class struggle.



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