

The campus tour of Michigan Democrat Abdul El-Sayed and the dead end of pseudo-left politics

Shane Latrobe, Kevin Reed
29 March 2026

Democratic Party candidate for US Senate in Michigan Abdul El-Sayed is appearing at back-to-back events at Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Michigan (UM) on April 7, along with US Representative from Pennsylvania Summer Lee and podcaster Hasan Piker.

El-Sayed is one of three candidates seeking the party's nomination for US Senate in the November midterm election. His campus tour is a calculated intervention by a faction of the Democratic Party—along with its pseudo-left satellites—to corral the growing leftward movement of students behind capitalist politics.

With Democrat Gary Peters retiring, the seat is open in a state that Trump carried in 2016, lost in 2020, and narrowly recaptured in 2024, making Michigan a key state from the standpoint of bourgeois electoral politics. Former Representative Mike Rogers has emerged as the leading candidate for the Republican Party, advancing a law-and-order, national security platform aligned closely with the White House.

In his Senate campaign, El-Sayed has positioned himself as the “left” candidate in a three-way Democratic contest with US Representative Haley Stevens and State Senator Mallory McMorrow. Polling by Emerson College in late January 2026 shows McMorrow at 22 percent, Stevens at 17 percent and El-Sayed at 16 percent among Democratic primary voters, with a huge 38 percent still undecided, showing that the race is wide open.

Since the campuses of MSU in East Lansing and UM in Ann Arbor are centers of mounting opposition to war, social inequality and Trump's fascism, the intervention is above all aimed at blocking a turn by students toward an independent movement of the working class for socialism.

The essential political function of the campus tour—which pairs the Democrat El-Sayed with a “progressive” member of Congress and a media personality branded as a leftist—is to direct opposition behind the false hope that electing Democrats in 2026 will stop the threat of fascism and the descent into a Third World War.

Who is Abdul El-Sayed?

Abdul El-Sayed is a physician and former Detroit health director who first came to national prominence in 2018, when he ran in the Democratic primary for Michigan governor with the backing of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), ultimately losing to Gretchen Whitmer, who went on to win the gubernatorial election and is currently serving a second term.

Born in Detroit in 1984 to Egyptian immigrant parents, El-Sayed has become a significant figure in Michigan Democratic Party politics, with media and Democratic Party-aligned groups referring to him as the “Mamdani of Michigan.” This is an attempt to connect him to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Zohran Mamdani, who won the New York City mayoral election as a Democrat in 2025.

El-Sayed's posture on the US-Israeli war against Iran illustrates clearly the alignment of his politics with that of the Democratic Party. On social media he has issued posts under slogans like “NO WAR WITH IRAN,” presenting himself as an opponent of the conflict. But his actual criticism centers not on the criminal character of the war itself, but on procedural objections and Trump's betrayal of his “America First” rhetoric.

In a widely circulated statement, El-Sayed denounced Trump for launching another “regime change war” and for failing to obtain congressional authorization, casting the central issue as one of constitutional process and presidential overreach. While he declares that “the war must end” and “the aggression must stop,” El-Sayed does not state that the US and Israel are carrying out a war crime under international law, nor does he call for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US military forces from the region.

This position is entirely within the framework of the official line of leading Democrats, who criticize Trump for bypassing Congress and for jeopardizing “stability,” while accepting the geopolitical aims of US imperialism in the Middle East.

El-Sayed's criticisms are a repackaged version of this fundamental agreement between both parties, while carefully phrased to appear to align with widespread public anti-war sentiment. El-Sayed does not condemn the criminal murder by the US and Israel of the Iranian leadership, including the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, in a series of “decapitation” strikes beginning on the first day of the war.

Branding himself as a “single-payer champion,” El-Sayed's

program is entirely reformist and pro-capitalist. He has presented himself as one of the most prominent advocates of Medicare for All. He proudly declares that he has “never touched corporate money” and that he is the only candidate openly running on Medicare for All, which supposedly distinguishes him from the Democratic Party establishment.

Yet El-Sayed speaks of building a “broad-based movement” that comes together around policies that address affordability and expand public goods—not to expropriate the capitalist class and place major industries under workers’ control—but to “prove out” a policy through the Democrats.

Jacobin, DSA and the lessons of Mamdani

The nomination and victory of Mamdani in the New York City mayoral race in November 2025 was seized upon by the DSA and its affiliated publication *Jacobin* magazine as proof that figures like El-Sayed can similarly harness discontent and be elected to high office. El-Sayed is not a member of the DSA and, unlike Mamdani, does not refer to himself as a “democratic socialist.” El-Sayed instead refers to himself as a “progressive Democrat.”

However, within weeks of his election, Mamdani’s veneer collapsed as he moved quickly to bind his administration to the capitalist ruling establishment. He publicly reassured Wall Street about fiscal discipline and appointed Democratic Party operatives to key posts. Most damningly, he opened direct lines to Donald Trump, including meeting with the president on two occasions.

His second in-person encounter with Trump in the Oval Office—which took place on the eve of the imperialist assault on Iran—made clear that Mamdani’s priority is collaboration with both ruling parties and the fascist in the White House rather than anti-capitalist politics and “democratic socialism.” While the Mamdani experience is being referenced by El-Sayed’s boosters, the rapid unmasking of the New York City mayor provides a foreshadowing of what to expect from a potential victory of the Michigan Democrat.

Jacobin has praised El-Sayed for never taking corporate money and for being the only Medicare for All candidate, presenting him as anti-establishment. The publication frames Michigan as a laboratory for demonstrating the viability of “movement” politics that can push the Democratic Party to the left on social issues, notably healthcare and affordability.

In an interview with *Jacobin*, El-Sayed emphasized that winning in Michigan would “suggest a way forward in the rest of the country,” meaning he had a strategy for rebranding the Democratic Party. While insisting he could “speak truth to power,” El-Sayed promised the ruling class that his proposals—single-payer, limited debt relief, modest taxation of the wealthy—would not fundamentally threaten their wealth, property or control of the state.

This narrative is designed to obscure the lessons of Mamdani’s election-- that such figures—including Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—do not represent the working class and

are not independent in any way of American imperialism. The El-Sayed candidacy represents the same perspective in Michigan.

In the case of Sanders, his presidential campaigns in 2016 and 2020 ended not in a break with the Democrats, but in endorsements of Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. While millions of workers and young people were attracted to Sanders’ talk of a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class,” in the end this leftward movement was twice betrayed.

The effort to corral growing student opposition to capitalism and war behind El-Sayed takes place under conditions of a mounting political crisis and disaffection of millions from both the Democrats and Republicans. Demonstrations against the bombing of Iranian cities and the assassinations of Iranian leaders—along with outrage over the ongoing genocide in Gaza—have radicalized a generation of youth that has known only war, economic crisis and climate catastrophe.

The movement of the working class and program of the SEP

Globally, strikes and protests by workers, from autoworkers to logistics and public sector workers, indicate that a new period of class struggle is underway. As the wars and attacks on democratic rights are pushing masses of people to the left, the El-Sayed campaign and its April 7 campus tour serve a specific political purpose: to create a dead-end trap for the emerging mass movement and divert it back into the Democratic Party.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) advances a fundamentally different perspective. The SEP insists that the fight against war, fascism and social inequality requires a break from the Democrats and the independent political mobilization of the working class based on a socialist program. War is not an aberration, but the inevitable outcome of the capitalist system. Ending war means abolishing capitalism.

The SEP fights for the construction of rank-and-file committees in workplaces and schools, independent of the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic and Republican parties, to organize strikes and mass action, including a general strike against austerity, layoffs and war. It calls for the expropriation of the banks and major corporations, placing them under democratic control as public utilities; the cancellation of student and medical debt; the guarantee of free, high-quality healthcare and education; and the defense of democratic rights.



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