

New poll shows DSA member Nithya Raman surging ahead of Karen Bass in Los Angeles mayoral race

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A poll released September 23 on the November runoff election for Los Angeles mayor shows City Councilmember Nithya Raman, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), leading incumbent Karen Bass, the establishment Democratic candidate, by 11 points. The poll was conducted by the University of California, Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS).

Among likely voters, 39 percent backed Raman while 28 percent favored Bass, and 33 percent were undecided. The margin of error was about 3 percentage points.

Registered Democrats hold a 4-1 advantage over Republicans and have held the mayorship for the last 25 years. The poll is Raman's strongest showing to date.

In the June 2 primary election, which was distorted by the provocative candidacy of Trump-backed right-wing reality television personality Spencer Pratt, Raman placed second with 28.5 percent to Bass's 34.3 percent. An IGS survey taken just before that vote, however, showed Raman ahead of Bass by 4 percent in what was then a hypothetical head-to-head contest.

Polls commissioned by the two camps over the summer split along predictable lines, with a pro-Bass committee's August survey showing the mayor ahead by six points and two pro-Raman polls in September showing the challenger ahead by five and six points.

Raman's role as a supposed challenger to the status quo is quite recent. She has been a political ally of Bass throughout the mayor's first term and publicly endorsed her reelection before reversing course and filing her candidacy papers in February, hours before the deadline.

Sixty-three percent of likely voters view Bass unfavorably, compared to only 28 percent who view her favorably. Views on the much lesser known Raman are almost evenly split, 40 percent favorable and 39 percent unfavorable.

While the results reflect the general nationwide shift to the left, the outcome of the election remains in question. "Down ballot" polling is notoriously unreliable, and IGS Director Mark DiCamillo explained that it is unusual for so many voters to remain undecided so close to a general election. He attributed much of the undecided vote to Pratt voters, who won 25.8 percent in June based on sensationalism over crime, homelessness and the Palisades fire. According to the poll, almost two-thirds of Pratt's primary voters have not chosen a runoff candidate. Of those who have, 22 percent favor Bass and 16 percent Raman.

The poll's most significant finding is the extraordinary gap among age groups. Bass led among respondents 65 and older by 41 to 21 percent and those between 50 and 64 were almost evenly divided. But support for Bass has collapsed among younger voters. For those ages 40 to 49, Raman leads 50 to 18 percent; for ages 30 to 39, she leads Bass 64 to 12 percent; and the youngest likely voters, those under 30, favor Raman by an astounding margin of 66 to 4 percent.

The horrific January 2025 Palisades and Eaton fires that killed 12 people and destroyed more than 4,000 homes remains a major source of public anger toward Bass. A majority of likely voters, 56 percent, rated her response as poor or very poor, while only 17 percent called it fair and 14 percent good or excellent.

Raman's standing inside City Hall, even among fellow DSA members, has been called into question. In

August, Council President Marqueece Harris-Dawson, a close Bass ally, split the Housing and Homeless Committee that Raman had been chairing and gave her neither half. The three other DSA members on the City Council are backing Bass.

The DSA's Los Angeles chapter refused to endorse Raman in the primary. When the chapter finally endorsed her in September, nearly a third of those voting opposed it.

Raman was elected in 2020 amid the mass protests over the police murder of George Floyd. Since then she voted opportunistically to increase the Los Angeles Police Department budget and now openly rejects cutting police funding. She voted for the fiscal emergency that opened the way to mass layoffs and has pushed to weaken Measure ULA—the tax on luxury property sales—openly siding with real estate developers. In 2024, as Israel carried out genocide in Gaza, she sought and accepted the endorsement of Democrats for Israel–Los Angeles (DFI).

Last Tuesday, the two candidates offered differing positions on the war in Gaza during a forum hosted by the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles and other groups at the Skirball Cultural Center. Raman described Israel's assault on Gaza as genocide, while Bass rejected the term as inappropriate, aligning herself openly and unequivocally with US imperialism.

Raman's remarks were dishonest and carefully calculated. In 2024, the DSA sought to censure her for accepting the DFI endorsement in order to conceal its true role as a prop for the Democratic Party. Now she is attempting to exploit the shift to the left among youth and workers disgusted by the genocide, war and austerity, presenting herself as a progressive despite her record.

If Raman wins, as the poll suggests, the Los Angeles working class can expect more of the same. A Raman administration would inherit a \$1 billion deficit along with ongoing obligations to the banks, developers and police union.

The generational divide, however, expresses a broader process. Across the United States and internationally, workers and youth confront unaffordable rents, insecure work, the genocide in Gaza, the threat of wider war and the Trump administration's drive to dictatorship. The DSA is the initial beneficiary of this radicalization, with Zohran

Mamdani lifted into the mayoralty in New York last November.

What DSA officials do in power exposes the class character of the organization. On September 21, Mamdani hosted Trump at Gracie Mansion, their third meeting since his election. His police commissioner, Jessica Tisch, directed NYPD officers to arrest protesters opposing Netanyahu's appearance at the United Nations. In Chicago, DSA-backed Mayor Brandon Johnson sent SWAT teams against anti-genocide protesters.

The DSA speaks for privileged layers of the upper middle class who seek a secure place within the existing order rather than its revolutionary overthrow. The DSA denies the irreconcilable conflict between the working class and capital by promoting the illusion that the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and the military, can be pressured into serving working people. Syriza in Greece and the Left Party in Germany traveled the same road.

Young people drawn to Raman out of their hatred of inequality, war and police violence must study these experiences and learn from them. A vote for the DSA might change a few faces at City Hall, but it will leave intact the capitalist system that produces homelessness, austerity and war. What is required is a complete break with the Democratic Party and its DSA appendage and the independent political mobilization of the working class and youth on a socialist and internationalist program.



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