DSA's Nithya Raman wins Los Angeles mayoralty amid shift to the left

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Nithya Raman, a Los Angeles City Council member affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), defeated incumbent Mayor Karen Bass, a fellow Democrat she previously endorsed, to become mayor-elect of the second-largest city in the United States.

Bass initially led the count, but by Thursday morning Raman had pulled ahead by nearly 35,000 votes. By Thursday evening, with more than 80 percent of the estimated vote counted, Raman's lead had widened to 47,253 votes: 460,772 (52.7 percent) to Bass's 413,519 (47.3 percent).

The 874,291 votes tallied by Thursday evening approached the final total of 929,974 cast in the 2022 mayoral runoff, when Bass defeated billionaire real estate developer Rick Caruso. Thousands of ballots remained to be counted.

Bass, a former congresswoman endorsed by Governor Gavin Newsom and former Vice President Kamala Harris, conceded Thursday. In a campaign statement, she said she was "committed to ensuring a smooth and seamless transition."

Raman, 45, was born in Kerala, India, and emigrated to the United States with her family at age six. She will become Los Angeles's first Asian American mayor. An urban planner educated at Harvard and MIT, she lives in the affluent Silver Lake neighborhood with her husband, television writer and producer Vali Chandrasekaran, and their twin children.

Raman released her own victory statement praising Bass as someone who has "given decades of her life to make the city what it is today." She added that her administration would be focused on "building housing people can afford, parks for our children to play in, a transit system that can get people to where they need to go, a city that is safe for working people and its families and a city government that is actually capable of delivering on its promises."

Bass's defeat followed widespread anger over her administration's handling of the January 2025 Palisades fire. As the fire erupted, the mayor was in Ghana with a Biden administration delegation, despite advance warnings of extreme fire weather. Her absence crystallized hostility toward an administration that had cut essential firefighting resources. The initial 2024-25 budget reduced fire department funding by $17.6 million, eliminating civilian positions and cutting overtime. Fire Chief Kristin Crowley publicly charged that the cuts undermined the department's ability to respond. Bass subsequently removed Crowley, blaming her leadership for failures during the disaster. Crowley disputed these accusations and charged that the mayor was making her a scapegoat.

Bass's promises to address homelessness failed miserably. The city of Los Angeles paid millions to Lincoln Safe Sleep Village for shelter beds that did not exist. Audits of the joint city-county Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority exposed weak financial controls and inadequate oversight. Rather than mobilizing public resources to provide permanent housing, city officials relied on the police to sweep encampments and a network of nonprofit and private contractors.

Following the June primary, Bass sought to rebuild her electoral support by courting voters who had backed Republican Spencer Pratt, emphasizing policing and depicting Raman as soft on crime. The Los Angeles Police Protective League, backing Bass, targeted Pratt voters with attacks on Raman's DSA affiliation. This rightward campaign gave Raman room to present her limited promises of affordable housing and improved public services as an alternative to the incumbent's record.

Raman's victory follows the election last year of DSA member Zohran Mamdani in New York City. On Tuesday, fellow members Janeese Lewis George, David Morales and Yousef Rabhi won mayoral elections in Washington D.C., Providence, Rhode Island, and Ann Arbor, Michigan, respectively. Lewis George did not face any Republican opponent and will succeed Democrat Muriel Bowser, who took office in 2015.

The electoral gains extended to Congress, where six new DSA-backed Democrats won House seats, including Claire Velez and Darializa Avila Chevalier in New York City, Chris Rabb in Philadelphia, Donavan McKinney in Detroit, Melet Kiros in Denver, and Angela Gonzales-Torres in Los Angeles. Together with returning representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, their victories expand the organization's congressional contingent from two to eight. Both of Detroit's two congressional seats are now held by DSA members, Tlaib and McKinney.

The election of DSA-affiliated mayors in the two largest US cities and the national capital reflects a broad shift to the left among workers and young people. Faced with soaring living costs, poverty wages, unaffordable housing, unending war and the growth of fascism, spearheaded by attacks on immigrants, millions are looking for a socialist alternative to the reality of capitalist America.

Raman, like Mamdani, Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders, is a political beneficiary of this mass radicalization. These bourgeois politicians employ socialist branding and occasional left-wing phraseology to sow illusions in the possibility of reforming capitalism and the Democratic Party. They advance neither democratic control of the means of production by workers nor the international unity of the working class against capitalism. Their program consists of timid reforms and policies aimed at a more equal distribution of wealth within the top 10 percent, while channeling mass social anger back into the Democratic Party.

Raman advanced to the November runoff after finishing second in

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the June 2 primary, just ahead of right-wing reality television personality Spencer Pratt. DSA-LA declined to formally endorse a mayoral candidate in the primary, although its voter guide recommended Raman.

The chapter formally endorsed Raman in September; 937 members voted in favor, 484 opposed and 52 abstained. Less than 25 percent of the membership participated in the vote, with only 1,473 people out of a claimed membership exceeding 6,000 voting. The endorsement committed the chapter's volunteers and organizational resources to her campaign.

The decision prompted a dispute with the DSA's National Political Committee over compliance with Resolution 22, which required chapters to question candidates about their support for the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. DSA-LA's questionnaire omitted the BDS question. In an account published by the Young Democratic Socialists of America's *The Activist*, the chapter acknowledged that its questionnaire "did not fully respond to what was laid out in R22." On social media, right-wing supporters of Raman argued that any enforcement of anti-Zionist resolutions was an infringement on their democratic rights.

The dispute continued through October. National Political Committee members questioned whether Raman supported BDS herself or merely recognized other people's right to participate. On October 26, the committee adopted amended resolutions requiring further discussions with Raman about BDS and her relationship with pro-Israel organizations.

On November 2, one day before the election, the National Political Committee voted 14-13 against rescinding the endorsement, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. DSA-LA co-chair Leslie Chang welcomed the decision, declaring, "We're relieved that the NPC is honoring the will of our members."

In addition to securing the support of the DSA-LA, Raman was heavily supported by wealthy hedge fund managers and real estate developers. The *Washington Post* reported hedge fund billionaire Aaron Sosnick contributed $7 million to pro-Raman committees.

Raman also was endorsed by several trade unions, including Unite Here Local 11, which purports to represent the city's hotel workers, along with United Auto Workers 4811, which claims some 60,000 members, including grad students, teachers and other workers employed by the University of California.

Raman told CNN in May, "I appreciate the comparison" to Mayor Mamdani. The two DSA Democrats are very similar: While campaigning, they barked about "defunding" the police and abolishing ICE, but once in office did the exact opposite. As a member of the City Council, Raman voted for at least four annual city budgets that increased police funding. Asked by CNN earlier this year whether she still supported reducing police funding, she answered, "No."

During the October 13 mayoral debate, Raman positively invoked fascistic former LAPD Chief Daryl Gates while criticizing police cooperation with federal immigration enforcement:

"This city used to be the gold standard, in terms of noncooperation with immigration enforcement, years ago—under the era of Daryl Gates," she said. "And now, under this mayor, we've actually lost trust from our immigrant community."

Raman subsequently said she was referring to Special Order 40, the 1979 policy restricting police stops conducted solely to determine immigration status.

Gates led the LAPD from 1978 to 1992 and helped establish its SWAT unit, which spearheaded the militarization of police departments across the country. The department's Public Disorder Intelligence Division conducted illegal surveillance and infiltration of political organizations. In response to revelations about the unit's criminal operations, Gates said police intelligence work "cannot be and never will be as pristine pure as some would like it. There is absolutely no way that we cannot, on occasion, trample on some people's privacy and their freedom."

Defending chokeholds, the racist Gates said, "blacks might be more likely to die from chokeholds because their arteries do not open as fast as they do in 'normal people.'"

Journalist David Cay Johnston, who investigated Gates, described an international intelligence operation used to discourage scrutiny by politicians and publishers. Separately, the Christopher Commission, established after the 1991 beating of Rodney King, documented repeated excessive-force violations which were covered up. Violent cops with numerous complaints against them continued to receive favorable evaluations and promotions.

The election of DSA politicians will not halt the rightward trajectory of the US ruling class and its ongoing attacks on democratic rights. The record of New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani proves this. In August, his administration announced the removal of Haitian city employees, who lost their work authorization following the termination of Temporary Protected Status, allowing them to be attacked by Trump's immigration Gestapo.

Mamdani has met three times with the fascist president, presenting the billionaire con man simply as a "New Yorker" interested in improving "affordability" for ordinary people. While whitewashing Trump and the danger of dictatorship, Mamdani has covered for the most reactionary elements in the Democratic Party, including opposing a primary challenge to Democratic House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, an ardent supporter of the state of Israel, slated to be the next House Speaker.

The crisis of unaffordable housing, growing inequality and attacks on democratic rights will not be resolved by electing Democratic Party-approved "socialists." The way forward does not involve electing Democrats, but in building an independent movement in the working class, organized in rank-and-file committees against all parties and tendencies that defend the profit system and artificial division of workers.

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