

Article

DSA's 2025 National Convention: Red Slate Reflections

Introduction: Convention in a Nutshell

On the heels of several electoral wins, and in the face of an ongoing genocide in Palestine aided by an increasingly fascist US administration, the Democratic Socialists of America's 2025 National Convention was the site of several significant inflection points for the organization. Held every two years, 2025's convention brought together over 1,000 elected delegates from chapters across the country in Chicago to deliberate and decide on DSA's paths forward and to elect its highest body, the newly expanded, now 25-person National Political Committee (NPC).

[The Metro DC chapter elected and sent 46 delegates and four alternates to convention](#), including 14 on the [Red Slate](#), four of whom contributed to the takeaways in this piece about [debate](#), [highlights from programming](#), and [bringing reflections back to our chapter](#).

[Aura]

About me: Aura (she/her), third-time delegate, Red Slate, NoVA branch chair for the last three years.

Convention is, roughly, half debates and voting, one-quarter socializing, and one-quarter whatever delegates make of it. Debates and voting on bylaw changes, resolutions, and the NPC reflect that DSA is a member-driven organization and set out our collective policy and priorities for the next two to four years. Socializing is a chance to connect across chapters, caucuses, and working groups with comrades across the US. And "whatever delegates make of it" can include deepening these connections, learning from one another, and sharpening organizational skills.

My main goal at convention was to help other comrades in our delegation navigate the complexities of convention, and to represent our branch and chapter. I also wanted to improve our internal culture, from the Harassment and Grievance Officer (HGO) process to how we actually debate across political lines. Lastly, I wanted to connect with comrades across Virginia, small and large chapters across the US, and various caucus affiliations, to better learn from one another.

Convention this year felt far better to me than previous ones. To begin, our chapter had a much more diverse delegation across geographic and political lines — compare this to our 2023 delegation when, out of 38 delegates, 37 were on the same slate and only one was from NoVA. There were fewer procedural and delaying maneuvers (albeit still too many), and fewer last-minute changes from the floor. And there was no "August surprise" or attempts to smear NPC candidates like in years past.

Still some problems remained. The debates in favor of the amendment to "For a Fighting Anti-Zionist DSA" obfuscated the fact that the amendment mainly removed the ability to expel members for repeated and ongoing support of Zionism. There was needless disrespect to convention chairs via motions to replace the chair and one point-of-personal-privilege to tell the

chair to "stop using so many 'ums' when speaking." And there were delays with OpenSlides voting that, while mostly due to technology, I still hope can be improved upon.

[Nell]

As a first-time convention delegate, I was impressed by the level of organization and felt positive about the democratic process that unfolded over three days. Given the large volume of resolutions, I found it invaluable being part of an organized slate (Red) and national network (the [Springs of Revolution](#) formation). It's much more possible to evaluate the large volume of proposals and determine how to strategically engage when you're part of a group of like-minded comrades rather than tackling it alone. Through extensive pre-convention organizing, what I consider the broad "left wing" — which includes the Communist Caucus, Marxist Unity Group, Libertarian Socialist Caucus, Red Star, and several other caucuses, along with uncaucused members like me who got involved in the coalitional project of Springs of Revolution that grew from anti-Zionist organizing — succeeded in moving DSA in a more constructive direction with consistent values and a clearer program. We did this by adopting several substantive resolutions, including For A Fighting Anti-Zionist DSA, which codifies strong anti-Zionist standards and programs; Fight Fascist Repression & ICE, which takes an abolitionist approach to challenging attacks on immigrant community members; Fair Representation through STV Delegate Elections, which requires single transferable vote for all future delegate elections; and Principles for Party Building, which clarifies our approach to building independent political power. Overall, I was encouraged to see a recognition by the majority of DSA delegates that our power flows from organized communities capable of taking on powerholders across all terrains.

[Sam]

About me: Sam (he/him), former *Washington Socialist* managing editor

I was also a first-time delegate, and being at convention with Red Slate and [Poder Popular](#) meant something in itself. We ran on platforms to bring members from more areas of our local chapter work to national DSA — from the Internationalism and Abolition Working Groups to chapter branches and publications work. For many of us, who knew each other primarily from campaign calls and general body meetings, traveling together to Chicago and making it through the deliberations was an exercise in unity in itself. I carpooled with comrades to Chicago, and stretching our legs and rotating seats was practice for solidarity on the convention floor. Reading the convention proposals together and debating their finer points was our practice for debate. Gathering around hot-pot dinner the night before brought us together after travel — we certainly sat together a lot after that. Finding enough space for our slates was our first challenge every morning. And when deliberation starts and the fatigue of following each minute step of procedure sets in, you need to trust the people around you to tell you exactly what just happened so you can vote your principles. I think the whole Metro DC delegation came away from convention strengthened and educated from that experience.

Aside from [our slate's platform](#) (anti-imperialism, abolition, and hard-line principles for labor organizing and electoralism), I wanted to get a better sense of *what* the national debates in DSA even are. I had done almost nothing at the national level of DSA before convention, so figuring

out not just what the abstract disagreements are but also *who* they're happening between was also important. I joined A L, Aura, Tim, and Christian in attending a panel on the national Harassment and Grievance Officer process to learn more about how it has evolved over time and how the "unified" process being proposed in a resolution would change it. I also got a lot out of the political exchange by meeting with some of the observers from allied organizations, like Higher Education Labor United. I nearly leapt out of my seat when a member of the Build a Fighting NALC gave a short speech during political exchange and ran over to show him [our recent Washington Socialist labor history on the letter carriers](#). I talked to him at his table later and learned more about [their reform caucus and its approach to forming new chapters](#). It felt like a moment of unplanned learning that would only be possible in the context of convention.

[A L]

About me: first-time delegate, uncaucused, Red Slate.

I was honestly expecting the convention floor to be a snooze, but I found it quite thrilling, undoubtedly in part because I was conducting live correspondence and often waited till the very last second to use the bathroom so I could finish transcribing. Before convention, resolutions and amendments were submitted, required to meet a minimum vote threshold, then compiled in a compendium and prioritized on the consent agenda (all passed unanimously except for a resolution that violated DSA's bylaws) and business agenda. The body wasn't able to deliberate as much as it should've — the thought that we might have been able to reach the overflow agenda remains laughable. Much of the time wasted was spent debating if we should extend debate and being plagued by technical difficulties.

That said, it was incredibly informative to be surrounded by other delegates with whom I could discuss why every resolution and amendment mattered. Convention ultimately sharpened my political and strategic analysis. I'm excited to dive into some of our key takeaways and, speaking for myself, how they'll inform my approach to upcoming (and ongoing) chapter work.

Debate: Key Tensions the Body Deliberated

[A L]

Across the resolutions and amendments debated, I noticed the following key tensions, many of which defined one caucus as distinct from another. At the risk of over-simplifying, I describe these in broad strokes:

- Should we focus more on local work or national work? Some delegates fought for more resources to be directed to chapters, while others expressed that building a mass movement to meet the moment requires national-level coordination.
- Does more voting mean that we are a more democratic or participatory organization? Many resolutions related to One Member One Vote (1M1V) were based on the premise that voting would improve democratic practices. Many members arguing against 1M1V highlighted how this premise does not incentivize more participatory democracy.
- How much of our capacity can or should be grown by hiring staff? Those in favor of hiring staff viewed it as a way to immediately grow the organization's ability to increase

membership and revenue, while those against hiring staff preferred that members continue to lead much of the existing work and wanted to explore other potential solutions like offering stipends.

- When do we focus on “internal” versus “external” organizing? This binary was often reinforced, including by delegates seeking to prioritize debating certain resolutions over others. However, I did not hear substantive discussion to justify this binary, or reasoning on how organizing ourselves and our structures wouldn't also improve the ways we organize our communities.
- How much do we balance prioritizing electoralism with other crucial strategies?
- Within electoralism, should we stick with the Democratic Party or not? The final resolution this body passed, Principles for Party Building, commits us to organizing working people around a common program. Its strategic premise of building an independent socialist party is that the ballot line is the least important aspect of political independence.
- How do we hold ourselves, and our elected officials, accountable? Members showed divisions on welcoming more people into our movement versus upholding principles that would firmly “call people in.”

Two observations I made on the convention floor that I wouldn't qualify as a key tension include:

- The idea of “Americanness” is core to many delegates’ sense of identity. This emerges especially in the language of internationalist resolutions or amendments that impose particular demands, often justifying them as being “morally right” demands to impose. It was a personal reminder that we still need education and accountability to fundamentally understand settler colonialism, what it means to organize in an imperial core, and how to sincerely follow the lead of others.
- Is the power of the convention body the most democratic process for the organization? What capacity does it require for members to run and be elected as delegates? What informs the experiences of delegates when they show up to convention? How do the decisions made during convention politically or materially impact every DSA member and our allies?

[Aura]

There are so many ways to define the key tensions across the organization:

- By caucus alignment: It's impossible to describe each caucus in a way that someone won't take issue with (unless you use the broadest terms, like every one is Marxist and values mass politics). But in reality, there are general tendencies. Libertarian Socialist Caucus (LSC), Red Star, Communist Caucus, and other similar caucuses tend to prioritize anti-imperialism and abolition (to note, this is my own tendency). Socialist Majority Caucus (SMC) and Groundwork tend to prioritize creating a more party-like structure, including participation in electoral politics. Bread and Roses (B&R) prioritizes labor and can align with either direction depending on the issue. This is necessarily a simplification, but even the most neutral viewer has to admit that most tensions can be mapped onto caucus lines.

- Local versus central: Tensions over the degree of central control versus localism affect everything — from how defined a given program or policy is, to setting standards over things like election questionnaires or internal election methods. While factions tend to value either localism or a stronger central structure, the division is not strict and some issues — such as requiring single transferrable vote (STV) for all delegate elections — have greater support amongst factions that value localism.
- Large versus small: How NYC, LA, and Metro DC operate is radically different from the 105 chapters with under 200 members. Smaller chapters can operate in very different environments (e.g., rural areas and southern states), face different challenges (e.g., transportation, finding meeting space), and have different political tensions (the concept of slates or caucuses is less meaningful when your chapter has one to three delegates). This is less relevant in terms of specific votes or resolutions, but is very relevant when it comes to which chapters' concerns are actually heard or reflected in the organization.
- Priorities: There is very little disagreement on whether labor, housing, healthcare, ecosocialism, education, abolition, anti-imperialism, internationalism, or elections are important (well, perhaps some disagreement on elections). But the priorities are different: whether one is willing to risk elections or relationships with labor organizations for the sake of maintaining a strong stance on abolition and anti-imperialism is one example, and this comes out strongly with anti-Zionism resolutions that actually impose requirements and expectations of members and electoral endorsements.

I am uncaucused but align variously with LSC and Communist Caucus, and during convention I mostly aligned with Springs of Revolution (currently not a caucus but rather a slate of NPC candidates and policy recommendations). More broadly, my own focuses are anti-imperialism and abolition (including migrant justice), which are the reasons I first joined DSA eight years ago. This included supporting anti-Zionism and Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) resolutions *with* the ability to suspend or expel members for repeated and ongoing support of Zionism (similar to our local resolution that passed last December). More specifically, there were other resolutions I supported based on past experience: the unified HGO resolution addressed a few shortcomings in our HGO procedures, and the requirement of STV for all delegate elections addresses the gaming of elections that occurred every two years with various chapters, including Metro DC in 2023.

[Neil]

DSA is a big tent — which is its strength and its challenge. As a DSA member [wrote](#) on the Liberation caucus website, a major tension within DSA is one regarding basic strategic tenets for achieving revolutionary change. I've believed since I was about 17 in centering the fight against capital and building strong unions as a central avenue for structural change towards the ultimate goal of economic democracy, AKA communism. But many in DSA's [Groundwork](#) and [Socialist Majority](#) Caucuses seem to center electoral politics above other avenues for change.

Alongside labor organizing, global solidarity with people's struggles is another key arena of revolutionary mass politics and, interestingly, the International Committee (IC) tends to be another lightning rod in DSA (I have served two terms on IC steering). Through the IC, we face

mirrors of our own political dilemmas across the world and can learn from people's movements, though they face different circumstances outside the imperial core. Working-class people in many colonized countries have continually demonstrated concrete pathways for achieving revolutionary change — we face an imperative to make common cause and push beyond efforts to reform a broken system.

Ultimately, we are reliving the fears and loathing of many political forbearers who were taught through repression and censorship to leave behind communism for amorphous progressivism. It sometimes feels like a slow path towards a renewed socialist-communist movement in the United States, but we're building it in good faith, in a big tent.

[Sam]

I was surprised to see how some of the local debates that we have had in Metro DC, e.g., ranked-choice voting, mass membership polls, and red lines around anti-Zionism, appeared in the national context. We were aligned with more of the delegates than I thought we would be, which was reflected in the passage of single transferable voting as the mandatory voting procedure for delegate elections; the voting down of confusing [“one-member, one-vote” proposals](#), similar to MDC DSA's straw poll resolution in the spring; and the passage of a national anti-Zionism resolution with teeth, as MDC DSA did at our local convention last winter. Again, as someone who does little national work, it was interesting to see our local issues reflected in the consensus across the organization.

Something unexpected, also, was the approach to the convention agenda and procedure. There were technical issues on the first day of convention, so we lost almost an entire deliberation block because we had no way to manually count votes. (The presidium sent people out into the city to find clicker counters.) As a result, we were behind schedule almost the entire time, which made the body extremely unwilling to consider any proposals (like agenda changes, reconsideration of votes, etc.) that would take time away from the main business agenda. But by the end of the convention, a single disciplined chair was able to shepherd us through an entire day's agenda of business in a single deliberation block. It made me wonder how much more effective the convention could be with both more procedurally practiced delegates and better procedures for vote-counting. It is important to have the accountability of OpenSlides showing every delegate's votes, but the fastest voting method was for the chairs to ask for a card-raising count.

Non-Debate: Highlights from Programming

[Aura]

Deliberation and voting is just half of convention; the rest is effectively what delegates make of the fact that over 1,500 active members across the organization are gathered in one place.

One of my goals was to get a better handle on HGO processes, both the technical (including with the new unified grievance policy) and chapters' practical experiences. The “Status of the Grievance System” panel was useful — less because of reviewing the procedures themselves,

more because we could discuss specific weaknesses in the system. How do we handle issues before they become a grievance? How do we avoid personal issues becoming politicized and vice versa? When should people recuse themselves from a decision? When is transparency necessary, and when is confidentiality necessary? Why is there such inconsistency in how members are treated after a code of conduct violation or worse? We're far from the only chapter, or the only organization, dealing with these questions, but getting the chance to discuss this was valuable.

Outside of programming and panels, chapters, caucuses, and other groups had the chance to meet. Virginia comrades met up over the course of the weekend, and hopefully we can organize more commonwealth-wide conferences and gatherings like we had in previous years. I took the time to meet up with comrades from other large chapters (like NYC) to learn more about how they function and deal with internal political differences, and from smaller chapters to learn about how they deal with very different and often hostile organizing environments. The Afrosocialist meetup(s) were pretty incredible, and I'm excited that a local Afrosocialist chapter will be restarting in our chapter soon.

I want to also defend the value of caucus meetings and informal gatherings. As much as we worry about factional divides, caucuses can help sharpen and cohere political messages — we're a political organization, and I'd rather all factions, even ones I disagree with, have clear messages and foundations we can deliberate on. And informal gatherings equally help remind us that we're ultimately on the same side, fighting the same fights.

[Nell]

The International Committee had a historic delegation of 17 international guests attending the convention from countries including Brazil, Mexico, Pakistan, Cuba, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, and Belgium. I learned a lot in 20 minutes chatting with the representative from the Belgian Workers Party about their organizational structure and annual cultural festival. Hearing from [MORENA](#) representatives on a panel was also very educational, as it illuminated how the movement aims to avoid the pitfalls of party politics while pushing forward a working-class agenda that codifies much stronger labor laws. A panel about resisting fascism highlighted the challenge facing Lula's Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, the ruling Workers Party) in taking on the entrenched economic, political, and propaganda power of the right wing. The IC also tabled and invited convention delegates to get fast-tracked membership on the IC, an open body with nearly 1,000 members in good standing. More than 40 delegates took the IC up on that invitation.

Conclusion: Bringing It Home to Metro DC

[Aura]

One principle I'm carrying forward is that our anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, and abolition goals cannot be secondary to other platforms — labor, elections, etc. — and in fact, strong principles on the former strengthen the latter. The anti-Zionism resolution we passed at convention and the chapter resolution we passed last December include a principled commitment to BDS (and

the ability to expel members for continued and ongoing support of Zionism). I expect us to have similarly strong commitments to abolitionist and anti-imperialist principles as we confront the next few years, and to learn from other chapters how they manage to accomplish this, especially in the face of high-profile elections (like NYC) or complex relationships with labor (like St. Louis).

There are internal issues that deserve attention as well. The HGO process needs support — there are common problems, but there are also ways to resolve them, and I expect us to continue to learn from other chapters' (and other organizations') experiences in order to improve. There are also common problems with internal democracy across several chapters — some of these we've worked out, such as standardizing STV for delegate elections to address issues we had with [Metro DC's 2023 election](#) and [LA's 2025 elections](#), and others will require ongoing work.

That said, I left convention with a few positive notes. As I noted before, I'm looking forward to more Virginia-wide meetups and a local Afrosocialist chapter starting in Metro DC, both of which are coming off the heels of convention.

In general, yes, convention was exhausting. But the political debates make us a more principled and dynamic organization. And gathering this many committed organizers in one place inevitably leads to more planning, organizing, and action that continues well outside of voting and debates. I want to thank all my comrades who put their trust in me to be one of the delegates to national convention, and my fellow convention delegates for making this extremely worthwhile.

[Nell]

We've had a lot of new energy flowing into the Metro DC chapter of DSA in the past couple of years, but I realize we've also lost a lot of institutional knowledge as people drifted (or in some cases moved) away. At convention I met a comrade who moved out of DC just before I joined the chapter in 2020, and hearing his account of past practices of community-building and internal political struggle was ... bittersweet. Many people who organized communal spaces and practices left the chapter because they felt pushed aside by an insular leadership group. We need a better oral tradition, and we need to hang on to more of our active members to keep building upon their knowledge and experience.

[Sam]

I think we can bring a lot of practices from national convention to our local chapter. Convention debate was livelier and more detailed than ours often are, and we all benefited from that. Live voting meant that business could be dealt with quickly, whether it was a main motion or procedural adjustment. Skilled chairs had a practice of both quieting the body and repeating the exact issue we were considering to allow all delegates the time and information to make informed votes. The synthesis we were able to see on difficult topics *was only possible* because delegates were willing to engage in that process.

And although the steps were tentative, it seems clear that DSA is settling into a path toward building a party — even if it took different forms in different factions' proposals. For electoralists, that will mean building up cadre candidates and preparing for local and national election campaigns. For labor organizers, recommitting to the rank-and-file strategy but also pressing union leadership *and* members on political issues like the liberation of Palestine. For party builders like the Marxist Unity Group and Reform & Revolution caucuses, spreading [their "Principles for Party Building"](#) far and wide so they become common sense in the organization. For comrades creating mutual aid and abolition projects, building material alternatives to our current carceral state that put socialist politics into visible practice.

Our next two years will be difficult, but we know the path to climb.

Notes

Using this document

Thank you for contributing your writeup to our reportback for the Washington Socialist! We will submit this for publication in the fall issue. Below, please find headers for a suggested article structure that we will collectively use. If there is no header for what you'd like to write, feel free to start another sub-section. When writing your part of the reportback, please note how you would like to be credited (e.g. your initials, a pen name, etc.).

If useful, here are some guiding questions adapted from Dem Left's writing workshop:

- 1. What was the state of convention?*
- 2. Why were you organizing around this specific convention issue?*
- 3. How were you (and others) organizing around this specific convention issue?*
- 4. What lessons did you learn and experience did you gain?*
- 5. How does this further the socialist movement, especially for our local chapter?*

Materials to Help Drafting:

- <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/ogos56ttoie26xa79oxv1/2025.8.8-DSA-Convention-Write-Up.pdf?rlkey=wkigrs54vpgoig3i8m327w96z&e=2&st=2a46c6ec&dl=0>
-  Red Letter Days, '25