# AUTOPSY

# One Year Later
# (October 2018)

## Contents

## Democratic Autopsy: One Year Later

### Introduction

In October 2017, a team of progressive researchers published "Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis," which probed the causes of the disastrous 2016 election defeat. The report came in the wake of the party leadership's failure to do its own autopsy.

In a cover story for *The Nation*, William Greider wrote that the Autopsy is "an unemotional dissection of why the Democrats failed so miserably, and it warns that the party must change profoundly or else remain a loser." *La Opinión* reporter María Peña summed up the findings this way: "To revitalize its base for future elections, the Democratic Party has to clean up the rubble of its defeat in 2016 and develop a strategy beyond condemning the actions of President Donald Trump."

Now, "Democratic Autopsy: One Year Later" evaluates how well the Democratic Party has done in charting a new course since the autumn of 2017. This report rates developments in each of the seven categories that the original Autopsy assessed -- corporate power, race, young people, voter participation, social movements, war and party democracy.

The upsurge of progressive activism and electoral victories during the last year has created momentum that could lead to historic breakthroughs in the midterm elections and far beyond. Realizing such potential will require transforming and energizing the Democratic Party.

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## Corporate Power and the Party
*Somewhat worse*

The Democratic Party has implemented modest reforms, but corporate power continues to dominate the party. In the fall of 2017 and early summer 2018, the Democratic National Committee voted to [refuse donations](#) from employees or corporate PACs of a handful of toxic industries that contradict the party's platform, namely the payday loan, tobacco, gun manufacturing and fossil-fuel industries -- though the ban on fossil-fuel money was [effectively repealed](#) in August 2018. Meanwhile, the [DNC](#) and the [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee](#) continue to freely take [big corporate donations](#).

The "Better Deal for Democracy" platform that Democrats put forward for the 2018 midterms does include proposals to lessen corporate control over politics with an emphasis on campaign finance reform. But the reality of corporate leverage over the party remains largely intact. One measure of the clout corporate interests wield is revealed by analyzing how Democrats act on economic issues in states (from California to Connecticut) that they politically control. [David Sirota published such an analysis](#) in *The Guardian* in September. He put his conclusions in a [tweet](#): Democrats in blue states "have used their power to block single payer & a public option, enrich Wall St, subsidize corporations, slash pensions, lay off teachers, promote fracking & engage in pay to play corruption."

A test of whether Democrats on Capitol Hill would side with corporate or public interests was provided this year by the GOP's successful effort, working with powerful bank lobbyists, to weaken the Dodd-Frank Act (under the guise of helping small community banks). More than

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one-third of Senate Democrats joined the effort to weaken Dodd-Frank, many of whom were recipients of significant banking donations. In the House, 33 Democrats joined most Republicans to pass the measure; journalist David Dayen reported that nearly all of the 33 identify as corporate "New Democrats" (and nine were members of the Congressional Black Caucus).

Think tanks that are closely allied with party leadership continue to rake in millions from corporate donors, billionaires and Persian Gulf despots. A case in point is the Center for American Progress, which takes major donations from Apple, Walmart, the Walton family, Bill Gates and the dictatorship of United Arab Emirates (along with dozens of "anonymous" donors). It's difficult to tell how much influence those big donors have on CAP's policy initiatives, but it's worth noting that the influential think tank didn't back Medicare for All (such as the bill proposed by Bernie Sanders and Kamala Harris) but instead promoted something called "Medicare Extra for All." While an improvement over the Affordable Care Act, CAP's proposal stops short of putting its weight behind existing initiatives to provide Medicare to all Americans. To critics, CAP's plan is needlessly complex and, at worst, an effort by the corporate wing of the party to co-opt -- and water down -- the growing single-payer movement.

While Democratic leaders -- beginning with President Clinton and NAFTA, if not earlier -- have been, at best, half-hearted supporters of the labor movement, Democrats should take note that the U.S. public is warming in its attitudes toward unions. Harold Meyerson reports that a Gallup poll timed for this Labor Day "showed support for unions at 62 percent, the highest level in 15 years, with majority backing from every demographic group except Republicans, and even they are evenly split, 45 percent to 47 percent." And there was much public sentiment in support of teachers who went on strike against neo-liberal budget restraints this spring, including in "red states" like West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona.

Further evidence that Democratic Party priorities often align more with wealthy elites and corporate newspaper editorial boards than with average Americans is that the party's top leaders still obsess over deficits -- something the tax-cut-happy Republican Party long ago stopped even pretending to care about. In September, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi preemptively boxed in any potential left-populist agenda on Capitol Hill by backing reinstatement of a "pay-go" rule to offset all new spending with tax increases or budget cuts. A former legislative director for three Democrats in Congress, Justin Talbot-Zorn, responded with an article for *The Nation* pointing out that "bold progressivism and 'pay-go' fiscal conservatism are mutually exclusive." He added: "The existential challenge of climate change demands that we fully overhaul our energy and transportation infrastructure in a short period of time. The issues of America's rising inequality and frayed social contract -- including stagnant wages,

unaffordable college, and exorbitant health care can only be fixed with major new investments. While much of this needed spending can and should be offset -- for example with cuts to our exorbitant and wasteful military budget -- it's far more important that the underlying problems are solved."

Why the Democratic leadership stays in the "deficits" trap can seem like a mystery, but the main clues point to corporate power and the leverage of great wealth. Our society is in desperate need of massive public investment, but such talk is anathema to Wall Street and other sectors where maximizing private profits is the top priority. While the platforms offered by Democrats have moved leftward on economic issues during the last year, a crucial disconnect remains between rhetoric about corporate influence and subservience to it.

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## Race and the Party
### *Mixed developments*

Speaking to a [predominantly black audience](#) in the summer of 2018, Democratic National Committee chair Tom Perez said: "We lost elections not only in November 2016, but we lost elections in the run-up because we stopped organizing… We took too many people for granted, and African Americans -- our most loyal constituency -- we all too frequently took for granted. That is a shame on us, folks, and for that I apologize. And for that I say, it will never happen again!"

During the last 12 months, voters of color have been key to notable electoral wins. But the party has a long way to go to fulfill Perez's promise. Too much money still goes to big ad buys instead of community-based outreach and organizing. Overall, the party has not done enough to advance positions that would appeal to voters who want to end ICE repression, promote sanctuary cities, and credibly affirm that black lives do indeed matter.

In the November 2017 Virginia gubernatorial election, Democrat Ralph Northam "won three-quarters of the votes overall" in racial minority neighborhoods "and more than 80 percent in African-American neighborhoods," the *Washington Post* [reported](#). "Margins grew by 10 percent in Hispanic neighborhoods." Black voters turned out in higher numbers than they had before. However, the degree to which this was thanks to Northam and the party's campaign strategies is debatable. While Northam vocally opposed Confederate monuments, he also [omitted](#) his

black lieutenant governor from some campaign literature and pledged to ban sanctuary cities in Virginia if one was ever created. Though he has since vetoed a bill that would have implemented such a ban, his willingness to stand up for the rights of people of color has been weak.

Northam's campaign spending priorities were also distressingly similar to the party's 2016 behavior. Heading into the home stretch, his biggest expenditure was nearly $9 million for TV commercials given to an advertising firm with an all-white board. The ads, highlighting his opponent's ties to Enron, were the sort of spending that last year's Autopsy warned against. Groups like BlackPAC and New Virginia Majority handled essential local black organizing, but had a difficult time securing adequate resources.

Alabama's special election for the Senate seat vacated by Jeff Sessions tells a similar, slightly more encouraging story. Democrat Doug Jones defeated Republican Roy Moore, a man accused of pedophilia with a history of pro-slavery and birther remarks. To be sure, Moore's racist past played a role in Jones' overwhelming margin among black voters. Jones won 96 percent of the black vote, and black voters accounted for 29 percent of those who cast ballots -- a higher share than in either of Obama's presidential victories, and more than the state's 27 percent black population. All told, 56 percent of Jones voters were black.

That victory was due to the robust organizing among Alabama's communities of color. BlackPAC and other groups, including local NAACP chapters, organized and knocked on more than 500,000 doors with a tailored message addressing criminal justice reform, education and health care. The DNC also contributed to operations, spending around $1 million on engaging black and millennial voters and hiring black consultants to handle organizing. Jones, like Northam, devoted huge sums to advertising; out of the $9 million that Jones had spent overall as Election Day approached, nearly $7 million went toward TV ads targeting white voters, according to Democracy in Color's Steve Phillips.

While spending priorities remain misguided, the party is making some progress toward aligning policy positions with the needs of communities of color. Such alignment requires forcefully advocating for steps to ensure economic security for everyone through policies like Medicare for All and progressive tax reform, while also addressing specific forms of state violence that target communities of color.

Donald Trump's assault on immigrants has mobilized some in the party to take a stronger line on immigrants' rights, including calls for the abolition of ICE. Yet congressional Democrats were seen as having sold out Dreamers in their budget negotiations with Republicans in early 2018 --

contributing to mistrust. An April 2018 poll found that while 40 percent of Hispanics believe Democrats care about undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, 54 percent believe they're "using this issue for political gain."

Likewise, the Democratic Party must do much more to reform the police and justice systems. Eighty percent of Democrats want reform and 87 percent want to decrease the prison population. Running for Philadelphia district attorney as a comprehensive reformer, Larry Krasner showed that these desires for change could be mobilized into a winning campaign; turnout for his November 2017 election was much higher than previous DA elections. Krasner went on to implement policies such as dropping marijuana charges and dismissing problematic prosecutors in the DA's office.

Such policy approaches, coupled with grassroots organizing, enabled police accountability advocate Randall Woodfin to win the Birmingham (Ala.) mayoral race in 2017 and enabled progressive Democrat Earnell Lucas to win the race for Milwaukee County (Wis.) sheriff in August 2018. These campaigns suggest a path forward for Democratic candidates -- where the priority is to inspire voters and maximize turnout rather than to woo "persuadable" Republicans.

However, as Shaun King of *The Intercept* pointed out in August 2018, national and state-level party organizations have not adequately supported reform-minded candidates in winnable races. To fulfill Perez's recent promise, that must change.

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**Young People and the Party**
*Mixed developments*

On the front of addressing young voters, the Democratic Party still isn't offering a bold vision that can excite a demographic known for not showing up much on election day. For the 2018 midterms, the party decided to center on issues of corruption and ethics, as laid out in its "Better Deal for Our Democracy" platform. This is a modest step forward -- especially the "Crack Down on Corporate Monopolies" provisions, which are overdue -- but missing is a focus on the bread-and-butter issues that can materially affect young people's lives, such as

redirecting resources from our bloated military toward popular programs for free college education and Medicare for All.

Young people, more than their older counterparts, are increasingly against obscene military budgets and U.S. wars -- as are Democratic voters in general. But citizens with those views are without powerful representation in Washington. Roughly 68 percent of House Democrats and 85 percent of Democratic senators voted for the record-breaking 2019 military budget. High-profile "resistance" lawmakers, such as House members Nancy Pelosi, Ted Lieu and Adam Schiff, voted yea on giving Trump a military budget of over $700 billion to expand America's imperial footprint and devoting vast sums to expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. It's noteworthy that most of the major prospective candidates for the party's 2020 presidential nomination -- including Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris and Jeff Merkley -- voted against the most recent Defense Authorization bill. Those who actually have to win over voters in the 2020 primaries nationwide see which way the wind is blowing at the grassroots. Why don't Democratic leaders? At the top of the party, there is little-to-no "resistance" to the rubber stamp of bloated, violent militarism.

One of the main drivers of young people's cynicism about the Democratic Party is the belief that there isn't much of a distinction between it and the Republican Party. Case in point: nonstop war and support for Trump's airstrikes, which are not just unopposed but praised by many Senate Democrats. Working to draw sharp contrasts to Republicans via principled opposition would likely be more effective than showing up to university campuses and scolding millennials for not voting, as former President Obama did in September.

On the issue of paying for college, something obviously key to exciting young voters, party leaders have made a bit of progress. But instead of taking a clear, aggressive stance in favor of free public college tuition -- something a strong majority of Democrats support -- congressional Democrats proposed a law in July that would subsidize community colleges only and work to "make college more affordable by reducing debt and simplifying financial aid," as the *Washington Post* reported. This tepid, process-oriented approach hardly made big news. Again, it's an improvement (and could legitimately benefit many) but is still bogged down in too many qualifiers and cost-neutral niceties -- something the GOP has long given up on doing.

Free public-college tuition has support among a sizable minority of Republicans, at 41 percent. How many young, right-leaning voters could be drawn in with a clear embrace of free public college for all? Likely many. Most Democratic presidential contenders for 2020 have learned to push some compelling, simple policy measures. So have a growing number of successful candidates for local and state offices as well as congressional seats. But the Democratic

leadership is still using a 1990s-era playbook of technocratic half-measures that don't inspire -- or bring out to the polls -- America's youth.

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## Voter Participation and the Party
### *Somewhat improved*

The depressed turnout that cost Hillary Clinton the 2016 election was due to both voter suppression efforts by Republicans and the Democratic Party's own inability to mobilize its base. The party has made some progress on both counts in the past year. However, party leadership still does little to energize voters to turn out for candidates running credible campaigns for genuinely progressive policies.

Republican strategists are hell-bent on keeping targeted voters from the polls -- specifically people of color, the young, and others apt to cast ballots for Democrats. Those efforts got a big boost from the Supreme Court's *Husted* decision in June 2018 to uphold Ohio's mass purge of so-called "inactive" voters. The ruling is expected to prompt other states to follow suit, just as the 2013 court decision weakening the Voting Rights Act and allowing purges without federal approval coincided with aggressive voter removal in nine states with a history of racial discrimination.

The Democratic National Committee's response to such measures has grown more robust in the past year, with the creation of the "IWillVote" program to register new voters and fight voter-suppression efforts. The initiative has provided grants in 41 states and territories, aiming to reach 50 million voters by the November midterm election.

The party has also supported restoring felons' right to vote. In April, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo pledged to restore suffrage to felons on parole. And Democratic leaders in Florida, including the party's gubernatorial candidate Andrew Gillum, are supporting a ballot measure to restore felons' voting rights. The Florida ballot measure is particularly important, taking place in a purple state where as many as 10 percent of adults are unable to vote because of a conviction. These common-sense, fundamentally democratic measures are popular among both Republican and Democratic lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

Meanwhile, automatically registering everyone to vote has emerged as a popular and practical way to address discriminatory voter restrictions. In 2018, eight states and the District of Columbia approved or began implementing automatic voter registration (AVR). These laws were virtually nonexistent in the U.S. three years ago, but now 13 states and DC have enacted them.

AVR represents a double victory for the party -- registering millions of voters when higher turnout benefits Democrats, while also siding with clear public opinion. Two-thirds of Americans want automatic voter registration for citizens, including a majority of both Republicans and Democrats.

Yet most of the Democratic leadership has remained hesitant to organize around other clearly popular policies. As the Autopsy pointed out a year ago, a sizable number of voters in marginalized communities are apt to see scant difference between the two major parties; for many, the Democratic Party simply does not have credibility on what should be its core issues. In a country where only 61.4 percent of eligible voters turned out for a hotly contested presidential race in 2016, the Democratic Party could dramatically boost voter participation by mobilizing around voters' hunger for progressive policies:

- 76% of the U.S. public supports higher taxes on the wealthy.
- 70% of the U.S. public supports Medicare for All.
- 59% of the U.S. public supports a $15 minimum wage.
- 60% of the U.S. public supports expanded tuition-free college.
- 69% of the U.S. public opposes overturning *Roe v. Wade.*
- 94% of the U.S. public supports an Equal Rights Amendment.
- 65% or more of the U.S. public supports progressive criminal justice reform.
- 59% of the U.S. public supports stricter environmental regulation.

The Democratic Party routinely seems unable or unwilling to take full electoral advantage of such public opinion. Despite its expressed resistance to Trump's agenda throughout 2018 and its embrace of some genuinely progressive positions, the party has not come close to addressing its fundamental lack of credibility with voters. This is manifested in the party's continued slide in favorability; a Quinnipiac poll in March 2018 showed just 31 percent of the country had a positive view of Democrats -- down from 37 percent four months earlier and 44 percent a year earlier, according to CNN polls. A survey by Rasmussen Reports found that 71 percent of voters wish Democrats would stress the specific policies where they disagree with Trump, as opposed to vague resistance.

The ties that bind the party to big-money donors constrain policy shifts that could appeal to widespread public sentiment on a range of issues. Democrats now receive about 44 percent of all contributions given by industry PACs, up 3 percent from last year. Voter turnout is apt to fall short when many are left doubting that the Democratic Party will make good on its progressive rhetoric.

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## Social Movements and the Party
### *Mixed developments*

In last year's Autopsy, *ambivalence* about growing and intensifying social movements seemed the most accurate description of the DNC. From the party platform struggles of 2016 through the "Summer for Progress" coalition convened by Our Revolution in the summer of 2017, the DNC seemed tone-deaf to the policy demands of its base. When Summer for Progress activists marched to DNC headquarters in Washington to deliver their People's Platform, they were met outside the front door by barricades.

But since mid-2017, the DNC and party leadership have been pulled along by the grassroots to recognize and even embrace policies that likely would have been rejected by a Hillary Clinton White House: for example, the single-payer "Medicare for All" movement. The U.S. House recently saw the formation of a Medicare for All caucus, with at least 70 members. Even ex-President Obama recently got on board. Thanks to pressure from activists, including groups like National Nurses United with significant organizational resources, party leaders may have little choice but to follow the lead of its own rising stars and future presidential hopefuls. A year ago, a Vox headline summed it up: "The stunning Democratic shift on single-payer: In 2008, no leading Democratic presidential candidate backed single-payer. In 2020, all of them might."

Benjamin Day of Healthcare-Now, the grassroots single-payer advocacy group, recalled that "the DNC had nearly denied the existence of our activists before Bernie Sanders' campaign moved the issue forward." Years of organizing have overcome the claim that single-payer is "politically infeasible," according to Professor Lindy Hern, who cites polls revealing "majority support for Medicare for All within the public at large." (Hern's research also shows a record increase in news media coverage using the term single-payer -- an increase of 94 percent in 2017 from the previous year.) No one is under the illusion that the DNC has fully embraced single-payer. But notes Alex Lawson of Social Security Works: "Two-thirds of House Democrats

support Medicare for All and over 90 percent support expanding Social Security. In the Senate, every potential presidential candidate supports expanding Social Security and Medicare… The 2016 Democratic platform had a strong plank in support of expanding Social Security, but the 2020 platform must be even stronger and include Medicare for All as well."

Student survivors of the Valentine's Day mass shooting at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School became accidental leaders of an intense new push for gun control. Within six weeks, the #NeverAgain movement helped organize the March for Our Lives in Washington -- with more than 800 solidarity events across the country -- and a national voter registration drive. Though most congressional Democrats had been avoiding or downplaying the gun control issue, it was hard to ignore this youth movement that targeted Republican intransigence first, but also Democratic avoidance. After an initial faux pas of using a Parkland survivor in a DNC fundraising email less than three weeks after the shooting, the party seems poised to support multiple candidates who are making gun control a prominent issue in their campaigns -- some with the backing of grassroots groups.

Another youth-energized social movement, the climate justice movement, was dealt a slap in the face by the DNC, when it reversed its two-month ban on accepting donations from the fossil-fuel industry. The August 2018 reversal led a co-founder of 350.org to declare: "This sort of spineless corporate pandering is why Democrats keep losing."

This has been a banner year for successful primary campaigns by progressive Democrats nationwide allied with organizations such as Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, Democratic Socialists of America, People's Action, Democracy for America, Citizen Action, Working Families Party and Progressive Democrats of America, to name just a few groups that knocked on doors and email inboxes all year. In New York State alone, there was the stunning defeat of powerhouse Rep. Joe Crowley by 28-year-old political newcomer (and former Bernie for President organizer) Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and then a progressive deluge that unseated six "Independent Democratic" state senators -- corporatists allied with the GOP and Democratic Governor Cuomo. If there's a "blue wave" across the country in November 2018, much of the credit will belong to grassroots groups that magnified their resources and/or held Democratic incumbents to account.

How did the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee react to this grassroots energy and campaign engagement? Often by resisting it -- on behalf of establishment primary candidates against progressives. In Colorado's 6th District, where the DCCC favored establishment candidate Jason Crow, progressive favorite Levi Tillemann secretly taped House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer urging him to get out of the race and to not be negative toward

Crow. The "be nice" request sounded hypocritical in light of the DCCC's intervention in Texas' 7th District, where the DCCC bizarrely issued an "opposition research" attack on progressive primary candidate Laura Moser. In both districts, local activists in groups like Progressive Democrats of America, Our Revolution and Justice Democrats protested the DCCC interference.

Progressive social movements have the ability to energize the Democratic Party, but not if blocked by party leaders.

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## War and the Party
### *Somewhat worse*

Chants of "No More War" from delegates at the 2016 Democratic National Convention gave voice to sentiments that still resonate through the base of the party and the broader U.S. public, notably in communities with higher rates of military sacrifice. While Trump's 2016 victories in swing states may well have been aided by his posing as a foe of protracted war, his administration's Mideast policies have largely exposed that masquerade. Unfortunately, the positions of Democratic leaders on endless war and bloated military spending offer little alternative to voters.

Few Democrats in Congress are willing to strongly challenge the unaccountable military budget, which soaks up most discretionary spending that could be redirected toward the party's proclaimed domestic agenda. During federal budget negotiations early this year -- with Trump requesting a staggering 11 percent Pentagon budget increase over two years -- Nancy Pelosi boasted in an email to House Democrats: "In our negotiations, Congressional Democrats have been fighting for increases in funding for defense." The office of Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer declared: "We fully support President Trump's Defense Department's request." Months later, an overwhelming majority of House and Senate Democrats supported the massive 2019 "National Defense Authorization Act" of $717 billion.

In 2018, few Democratic candidates for Congress conveyed to voters how military budget cuts could make an expansive domestic agenda possible. Notable exceptions include four newcomers (all women of color) expected to be sworn into Congress in January: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY), Ilhan Omar (MN), Rashida Tlaib (MI) and Ayanna Pressley (MA).

While Democratic leaders failed to resist Trump over war spending, they did loudly resist the prospect of peace breaking out in Korea. In June, on the eve of nuclear talks between Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong Un (a process sparked by South Korea's progressive-leaning president), Schumer and six other senior Democratic senators sent a rejectionist letter to Trump demanding that any hint of sanctions relief for North Korea be dependent on an agreement with obviously impossible conditions. The letter mirrored GOP objections to Obama's Iran nuclear deal.

Trump has a dangerous admiration for authoritarian leaders. Democrats need to condemn such admiration without succumbing to reckless bellicosity.

The United States and Russia possess 93 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. Amid evidence of a Russian effort to help Trump during our 2016 election (evidently less effective and overt than the U.S. effort 20 years earlier that successfully backed an erratic, anti-democratic candidate in Russia's presidential election), many Democratic leaders seem oblivious to the ongoing threat of armed conflict with Russia -- a peril that was profoundly understood by Democratic presidents during the height of the Cold War when Russia had a much worse form of government. Reacting to evidence of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. election, numerous Democrats have engaged in extreme rhetoric, calling it an "act of war" and "equivalent" to Pearl Harbor. Democratic leaders have rarely acknowledged the crucial need for "a shift in approach toward Russia" including "steps to ease tensions between the nuclear superpowers," in the words of an Open Letter for "Election Security and True National Security," released this summer.

With consistently moral foreign policies that reject costly militarism and continuous intervention, Democrats could inspire the party base and gain support among swing voters and independents (especially third-party voters). But advocacy of those policies comes mostly from a minority of Democratic "backbenchers," not leaders.

The party leadership has routinely been absent in the face of a humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen caused primarily by the U.S.-backed Saudi war (and the close White House alliance with Saudi Arabia). In March, Bernie Sanders, Democrat Chris Murphy and Republican Mike Lee forced a vote on their Senate resolution to end U.S. military support for the Saudis in Yemen. In the face of White House opposition and apparent indifference among Democratic leaders, it went down to defeat (55-44) thanks to ten Democratic "no" votes. With the disaster continuing to worsen in Yemen, the House Democratic leadership reportedly dragged its feet while progressive first-term Congressman Ro Khanna persistently led a bipartisan effort to get a vote

on a similar measure; finally, in late September, Khanna was able to introduce the [resolution](#) with some high-level party [support](#).

On matters of war and peace -- for instance, the 17-year war in Afghanistan and the Trump team's extremely one-sided Israel-Palestine policy -- top Democrats have offered few coherent alternative policies. In May, for example, [Schumer praised Trump](#) for moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem days after he [criticized Trump](#) for withdrawing from the Iran nuclear agreement -- a deal Schumer had [originally opposed](#). And Democratic leaders have made scant objections to Trump administration actions that a director at Amnesty International USA, Daphne Eviatar, [described](#) as "hugely expanding the use of drone and airstrikes, including outside of war zones, and increasing civilian casualties in the process."

Democrats often denounce the GOP for immoral and extremist domestic policies favoring the powerful. But the party's failure to challenge such foreign policies is a moral and political tragedy.

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## Democracy and the Party
### *Somewhat improved*

Efforts to democratize the Democratic Party made some progress in August 2018 when the full DNC voted to bar superdelegates from voting [for the presidential nominee](#) on the [first ballot](#). This significant reduction in the power of superdelegates -- Democratic leaders, party officials and lobbyists -- grew out of anger among many Bernie Sanders supporters about [DNC favoritism](#) exerted via superdelegates for Hillary Clinton. In the end, the reform passed with much support from the Clinton wing of the party and a major assist from DNC chair Tom Perez.

Contrary to [claims](#) made in last-ditch efforts to retain the superdelegate system at the DNC's decisive meeting, the reform moved toward greater racial diversity at the national convention. The most extensive research into the 2016 superdelegates, by the Pew Research Center, [found](#) that 20 percent of superdelegates were black and about 36 percent were people of color; [numbers](#) provided by the Hillary Clinton campaign showed that convention delegates as a whole were *more diverse* than superdelegates -- 25 percent black and 50 percent people of color.

During the 2018 midterm election campaign, Democratic leaders who were ostensibly committed to playing even-handed roles within the party too often acted as power brokers working against new insurgent candidates by backing their usually better-funded opponents. For instance, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee designated certain primary candidates for exclusive financial and strategy resources from the party, many times edging out a progressive opponent. The DCCC's focus on fundraising orients candidates and elected officials to be politically inclined toward big-money donors and disconnected from constituents.

A similar failure to maintain impartiality in primaries has persisted at the top of the DNC. Early in 2018, Chairman Perez repeatedly declared that the DNC should not endorse candidates in contested primaries. "One thing we've learned at the DNC is that when you, in fact or in perception, are trying to put the thumb on the scale in a spirited primary, that can undermine public confidence in us," he said on C-SPAN. Yet in May he did a backflip and endorsed New York Governor Andrew Cuomo for reelection over progressive challenger Cynthia Nixon.

The DNC'S encouraging action on superdelegate reform contrasts sharply with the DNC's failure to act on a proposal by its Unity Reform Commission to establish a Financial Oversight Committee that would present an annual report on the DNC budget to the entire DNC, so that it could assess the effectiveness of expenditures and staff, as required by the DNC's Bylaws. The current Finance Committee -- entirely appointed by the DNC chair -- conducts no evaluations of whether expenditures for consultants, media outreach and staff are accomplishing measurable goals. A Financial Oversight Committee could help achieve what the DNC has continued to lack: transparency and accountability in how DNC money is spent. After lengthy delays, the DNC's Rules and Bylaws Committee has promised to place the oversight proposal on the agenda of the DNC winter meeting.

In response to criticism of the secret joint fundraising arrangement that the DNC entered into with candidate Hillary Clinton in 2015, the DNC has now committed itself to making transparent its fundraising with candidates and its agreements with state parties.

This summer, the DNC voted in reforms to promote more openness and accessibility in presidential primaries and caucuses. The reforms urge state parties to work with their state government to combat voter suppression and implement measures such as same-day party switching and same-day registration. An extreme example of anti-democratic barriers is in the state of New York, where voters must declare their party affiliation more than six months in advance. Those rules discourage electoral engagement, especially among people of little means and young adults.

To get closer to living up to its name, the Democratic Party should rely on a broad base of small donors and refuse donations from corporations, particularly those with interests adverse to the party's platform. The DNC's reversal of its ban on fossil-fuel donations was a step backward. And the party gave a nod to insular politics when it adopted a new provision requiring a presidential candidate to affirm that he or she is "a member of the Democratic Party" and to acknowledge that the DNC chair is authorized to determine whether the candidate "is a bona fide Democrat." Treating the party as a club that looks askance at non-club-members makes no sense when far more voters identify as independents than as Democrats.

Barriers to democracy inside the Democratic Party have obstructed efforts to make the party a powerful vehicle for progressive change. During the last year, grassroots pressure has reduced some of those barriers. Looking ahead, a truly democratic Democratic Party could profoundly revitalize the politics of our country.

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**"Democratic Autopsy: One Year Later"**
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