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Framing the Democratic Socialist Movement: A Discourse Analysis of Pro-Movement Literature

Elizabeth Rouse

DU Political Science Honors Thesis

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Abstract:

In light of the rising prominence of the democratic socialist movement (DSM) in the United States, this thesis performs a discourse analysis of the frames utilized in pro-movement literature. Through the evaluation of five full-length books, I strive to answer the following research questions: *How has pro-movement literature framed the DSM? What is the significance of the frames that have been employed?* Based on qualitative observations reinforced with a minor quantitative study, I identify thirteen frames that are significant across pro-DSM literature. Then, in analyzing these frames, I argue that they can largely be categorized into three groups: 1) as tools meant to highlight the ways the DSM rationally and morally merits support; 2) as structures meant to contrast the DSM with its ideological and political opponents in order to emphasize its supremacy; 3) as mechanisms that encourage readers to mobilize on behalf of the DSM so that the movement can flourish in the future. It is my assertion that these frames are significant because they represent an attempt to create new advocates for the causes of the DSM, strengthen the resolve of present DSM adherents, and help the movement to build on present momentum so that it can prosper.

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Introduction

As a college student during the 2020 presidential election in the U.S., I found myself increasingly surrounded by supporters of democratic socialist thinking. Growing up in a conservative suburb of Colorado, I had never been exposed to this particular form of leftist ideology, and I became steadily more intrigued. In an attempt to better understand the political climate I was witnessing, I decided to research some aspects of democratic socialism for my honors thesis, and eventually found my way to a focus on how the democratic socialist movement (DSM) has framed itself to audiences.

After conducting an investigation of five full-length books written from pro-movement standpoints, I was able to identify thirteen significant frames employed across the pro-DSM literature. In this thesis, I will argue that the frames can largely be categorized into three groups: 1) as tools meant to highlight the ways the DSM rationally and morally merits support; 2) as structures meant to contrast the DSM with its ideological and political opponents in order to emphasize its supremacy; 3) as mechanisms that encourage readers to mobilize on behalf of the DSM so that the movement can flourish in the future. It is my assertion that these frames are significant because they represent an attempt to create new advocates for the causes of the DSM, strengthen the resolve of present DSM adherents, and help the movement to build on present momentum so that it can prosper.

Before discussing my research, I first provide a brief background on the definition of democratic socialism, and how support for its central tenets has become more widespread across America.

Defining Democratic Socialism

According to the Democratic Socialists of America, democratic socialism is “a system where ordinary people have a real voice in our workplaces, neighborhoods, and society.”¹ It is an ideology where there is universalized welfare, collective ownership under democratic conditions, and widespread prosperity. DSA perceives democratic socialism as a replacement for capitalism. However, current democratic socialists understand that replacing capitalism is not something that will be done in the short term. Due to this, present efforts tend to focus on “pursuing a reform agenda today in an effort to revive a politics focused on class hierarchy and inequality in the United States.”² In particular, democratic socialists have been identified as generally supporting “ideas such as labor reform and pro-union policies, tuition-free public universities and trade schools, universal healthcare, federal jobs programs, fair taxation that closes loopholes that the wealthiest citizens have found, and using taxes on the rich and corporations to pay for social welfare programs.”³

Notably, in the United States, there is some debate over defining “democratic socialism” as opposed to “social democracy.” In political theory terms, a social democracy is a system that “preserves capitalism, but with stricter regulations and government programs to distribute resources more evenly.”⁴ Meanwhile, “democratic socialists don’t support capitalism: They want workers to control the means of

¹ “What is Democratic Socialism,” Democratic Socialists of America, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://www.dsausa.org/about-us/what-is-democratic-socialism/>.

² Megan Day, “Democratic socialism, explained by a democratic socialist,” Vox, Vox Media, LLC, August 1, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2018/8/1/17637028/bernie-sanders-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-cynthia-nixon-democratic-socialism-jacobin-dsa>.

³ Olivia B Waxman, “Socialism Was Once America’s Political Taboo. Now, Democratic Socialism Is a Viable Platform. Here’s What to Know,” Time, Time USA, LLC., October 24, 2018, <https://time.com/5422714/what-is-democratic-socialism/>.

⁴ Maggie Astor, “What Is Democratic Socialism? Whose Version Are We Talking About?” The New York Times, The New York Times Company, June 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/us/politics/democratic-socialism-facts-history.html>.

production.”⁵ In effect, social democrats work within the system of liberal capitalism to create stricter state controls and social safety nets, while democratic socialists seek a revolution in political economy toward socialism with democratic accountability. That being said, the lines often get blurred between these two terms. This is possibly because many self-identified democratic socialists pursue political reforms within the capitalist system, so their political stances can be characterized as social democratic. While this might be because they feel it is infeasible to separate with capitalism in the short-term (even if they would like to eliminate capitalism in the long-term), it makes it difficult to draw a definitive line between how the two concepts apply to the present DSM. For our purposes, we will use the term democratic socialism.

The Rise of Democratic Socialism in the U.S.

In the United States, long gone is the era where “socialism” was a term associated with authoritarian rule and the Red Scare. In today’s society, the DSM has gained a significant following, especially among Americans under 30.⁶ While many would attribute the increased popularity of the DSM to the presidential aspirations of Bernie Sanders, the roots of this movement stretch even further back than the 2016 presidential primaries.

Following the Great Recession in 2008-09 and the government bailout of corporations, many millennials started to feel frustrated with the political and economic circumstances linked

⁵ Astor.

⁶ 50% of Americans under 30 have a favorable view of socialism according to the following source: Hannah Hartig, “Stark partisan divisions in Americans’ views of ‘socialism,’ ‘capitalism,’” Pew Research Center, June 25, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/25/stark-partisan-divisions-in-americans-views-of-socialism-capitalism/>.

to neoliberalism.⁷ They found it hard to believe that free markets underpin prosperity when they considered the extreme wealth inequality that had become increasingly stark in American society.⁸ Captured by the phrase “we are the 99-percent,” tensions developed into the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011.⁹ This movement demonstrated that a notable segment of the American populace was becoming discontent with the status quo and desired a political alternative that would better support the working classes and “ordinary Americans”.

Given such factors, a kind of revolution in public opinion about capitalism’s viability had been gaining traction for several years before Bernie Sanders carried the DSM into mainstream discussions. As a political figure who has stayed loyal to the pursuit of a liberal agenda for decades, Sanders became an icon during his 2016 campaign in the Democratic primaries. “He brought the s-word back into play in American politics, contending that democratic socialism is the fitting name for his belief that a living wage, universal healthcare, a complete education, affordable housing, a clean environment, and a secure retirement are economic rights.”¹⁰ Rather than aligning himself with corporate and capitalist interests, Sanders’s political advocacy was centered around bettering the living conditions for working-class citizens. To this end, he opted to support his presidential campaign through small donations rather than a reliance on the financial backing of big business elites and political action committees.¹¹ As a result, he caught the attention of younger voters who perceived democratic socialism as better representing “their

⁷ Gary Dorrien, “Breaking the Oligarchy: Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and the Next Left,” in *American Democratic Socialism: History, Politics, Religion, and Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 542-549.

⁸ Waxman.

⁹ Dorrien, 551.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 559-560.

¹¹ Clare Foran, “Bernie Sanders’s Big Money,” *The Atlantic*, The Atlantic Monthly Group, March 1, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/bernie-sanders-fundraising/471648/>.

ambitions of far-reaching structural change across the economy and society” then the agenda of the Democrats.¹²

Although Sanders ultimately lost the Democratic nomination to Hilary Clinton in 2016, the support that he won in several states made him a strong competitor and helped the DSM to blossom. For instance, his campaign is linked to a mass increase in the membership of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).¹³ Moreover, following his campaign, other democratic socialist politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Harbi Tlaib were elected to office and further fanned the flames of the DSM.

In the 2020 presidential election, Sanders once again ran and lost in the Democratic primary. However, the DSM itself has continued to have a significant independent presence in American society. Between 2016 and 2021, there were “more than 100 DSA members or endorsees elected to local, state and federal office.”¹⁴ Democratic socialists are partaking in grassroots organizing to deal with everything from addressing urban development to the Green New Deal. Across the country, activists are devoting time and energy to ensure this movement will grow rather than burn out.

Research Focus

After learning about the meaning of democratic socialism and coming to understand a general overview of why it was able to gain a following, I began to narrow my research focus. I

¹² Isabella Grullón Paz, “Why Some Young Voters Are Choosing Democratic Socialism Over the Democratic Party,” The New York Times, The New York Times Company, last modified August 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/us/politics/young-democratic-socialists.html>.

¹³ Dorrien, 563.

¹⁴ Rebecca Burns, “Meet the New Generation of ‘Sidewalk Socialists,’” In These Times, The Institute for Public Affairs, September 28, 2021, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/sidewalk-socialists-municipal-socialism-dsa-city-council>.

realized that what most interested me was studying how the DSM presented itself to the public. I did not want to examine external perceptions of the DSM (like news coverage); rather, I wanted to study the rhetorical tools employed by pro-movement scholars and activists trying to attract interest, support, or deeper commitments to movement objectives. This brought me to the following research questions:

- *How has pro-movement literature framed the DSM? What is the significance of the frames that have been employed?*

Following an extensive examination of five books by DSM or adjacent authors, I was able to identify thirteen prominent frames across the pro-DSM literature. There are two frames that recur in every text, four frames that recur in a majority of the texts, and seven frames that recur in a minority of the texts. Through evaluating the frames, it becomes evident that pro-movement literature frames the DSM in terms of its qualitative value, its positions relative to capitalism and the two dominant political parties, and its future viability. The significance of this is that readers are encouraged to perceive the DSM as something they should support both *rationaly* (in terms of political calculations) and *morally* (in terms of personal and community values). Readers are guided to perceive the DSM as a heroic movement that operates in stark contrast to capitalism, the Democratic Party, and the GOP. Readers are urged to mobilize and take action because the authors frame their arguments to emphasize that the future and potential of the DSM rests on citizens' collective ability to harness the momentum of the present and transform it into something even greater. That being said, pro-DSM literature frames the movement in such a way that it simultaneously uplifts democratic socialists, dismisses opposing ideologies and groups, and calls readers to action.

In the pages that follow, I will present a literature review that provides further insight into my thesis and the scholarship upon which it is based. Then, I discuss the methodology I used in my research and display my data. Next, I transition to a thorough discussion of my research findings. Finally, I conclude my paper and discuss potential avenues for future research.

Literature Review

In beginning my research, I explored the existing scholarship on framing analyses in the social sciences, and political science especially. I spent time investigating what frames are, what they do, why they matter, and how scholars are incorporating them into their studies. Through immersing myself in the current conversations on this topic, I was then able to discern the relevance of analyzing the frames emerging from pro-movement, democratic socialist literature.

Defining “Frame” and “Framing”

A frame is a rhetorical tool. It “is a thought organizer, highlighting certain events and facts as important and rendering others invisible.”¹⁵ Framing “involves the connection, or splicing together, and coordination of issues, events, experiences, and cultural items, including strands of one or more ideologies, so that they hang together in a relatively integrated and meaningful fashion.”¹⁶ In other words, a frame is a way of packing information so that it ends up being perceived in a specific way. Reporters, editorialists, organizations, but also people like politicians and activists deliberately orient their claims to encourage a certain perception among

¹⁵ Charlotte Ryan and William A. Gamson, “The Art of Reframing Political Debates,” *Contexts* 5, no. 1 (2006): 13. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/219551181?accountid=14608&parentSessionId=o7NQLZPnDIa2mXtWek38Gf4YXy6tpJYN5TwFYsCpuI4%3D&pq-origsite=primo>.

¹⁶ David A. Snow, Anne E. Tan, and Peter B. Owens, “Social Movements, Framing Processes, and Cultural Revitalization and Fabrication,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2013): 229. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.17813/maiq.18.3.2886363801703n02>

their audience. For this thesis, frames can be summarized as “the interpretive packages that activists develop to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, appeal to authorities, and demobilize antagonists.”¹⁷

The Impact of Frames and Why Frames Matter

“Like a picture frame, an issue frame marks off some part of the world. Like a building frame, it holds things together. It provides coherence to an array of symbols, images, and arguments, linking them through an underlying organizing idea that suggests what is essential—what consequences and values are at stake.”¹⁸ Frames are one of the mechanisms by which narratives are shaped and organized. They are implicit guides that encourage people to think and feel in a pre-determined way. That being said, one of the main reasons framing matters is because frames have the potential to “affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences.”¹⁹

Due to their possible impacts on an audience, frames can be perceived in both a negative and positive light. Frames are negative if their aim is to manipulate in a deceitful or misleading way. However, frames can be looked at neutrally as aiding in “a learning process in which people acquire common beliefs, as in the coordination of people around a social norm.”²⁰ Trying to comprehend experiences and subjects of debate can be a highly complicated undertaking. Since frames intentionally strive to place meaning on complex matters, frames can make those matters more comprehensible to the public. Frames are inherently biased—indeed, they are ways

¹⁷ Francesca Polletta and M. Kai Ho, “Frames and their Consequences,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, eds. Robert E. Goodwin and Charles Tilly, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270439.003.0010.

¹⁸ Ryan and Gamson, 14.

¹⁹ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, “Framing Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no.1 (2007): 109.

<https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054>

²⁰ Chong and Druckman, 120.

of building support for a particular point of view; they are potentially mechanisms for leading audiences to particular kinds of conclusions, but this is not necessarily problematic unless there is intent to deceive the audience.

Frames can be said to have “diagnostic, prognostic, and moral components.”²¹ So, frames are structuring information specifically to identify problems, propose solutions, and characterize certain concepts as either in alignment or opposition to a moral conclusion. It is this persuasive structure that helps people to mobilize around the frames. Frames actively shape what qualifies as legitimate knowledge and institutions. Thus, frames have the ability to either reinforce or challenge elements of culture and society.²²

Present Scholarship on Framing

Framing analyses regarding social movements started gaining prominent attention at the very end of the twentieth century. “By the Reagan presidency (1981-88), it became increasingly obvious that ‘spin’ was an important aspect of mainstream politics. Social movement activists found it necessary to develop rhetorical skills that would help them counter the hegemonic discourse of power elites, convert bystanders, and mobilize sympathizers and adherents.”²³ Due to this, a variety of scholarship on framing emerged.

Literature on framing in relation to social movements “discusses framing as a tactic used by political entrepreneurs to coordinate individuals around particular interpretations of their

²¹ Polletta and Ho, 14.

²² Ibid., 16.

²³ David A. Snow, Robert D. Benford, Holly J. McCammon, Lyndi Hewitt, and Scott Fitzgerald, “The Emergence, Development, and Future of the Framing Perspective: 25+ Years Since ‘Frame Alignment,’” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 19, no.1 (2014): 30. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.17813/maiq.19.1.x74278226830m69l>.

problems.”²⁴ To date, the majority of framing analyses are rooted in qualitative data. “Most qualitative studies describe the frame or frames utilized by activists and provide a narrative account, for instance, of how framing shapes a movement outcome—perhaps how activists use a particular frame successfully to attract new members.”²⁵ Notably, these studies are centered around analyzing a variety of texts and subjects; anything from newsletters to interviews with activists to media sources have been utilized to study frames. Within these studies, framing has been positioned as an independent variable, a dependent variable, both, and even neither.²⁶ Scholars have sought to determine why certain frames are employed and thus the context around framing. They have also made inquiries into the specific impacts of framing and the extent to which frames have been effective in shaping the beliefs of political audiences.

However, despite a rich repertoire of studies, there are gaps in the literature that have been identified. For instance, some claim the research has lacked ““systematic empirical studies across cases, movements, and time.””²⁷ Scholars have also suggested that ““comparative research in the field, particularly on frame variation”” would be a valuable avenue for future research endeavors.²⁸ Keeping this in mind, I next address the value that my investigation on framing in relation to the DSM will bring to existing framing conversations.

Stepping into the Conversation: The Value of my Research Project

Given both what has and has not been explored in existing scholarship on framing in social movements, I believe my research project makes a number of contributions. First, so far

²⁴ Chong and Druckman, 118.

²⁵ Snow, Benford, McCammon, Hewitt, and Fitzgerald, 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 36

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36

there is limited scholarship on the framing of democratic socialism in any dimension (media, movements, or movement leaders). In my research, I found one student thesis on the discourse of activists that supported Sanders in his 2020 campaign.²⁹ Beyond that, there have been a few studies done on how the media has framed democratic socialist politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.³⁰ Additionally, a handful of studies have specifically analyzed Sanders's rhetoric and his marketing of democratic socialism.³¹ However, none of these studies have examined the framing of the DSM across pro-movement literature. So, this seems to be an under-researched area.

Second, given that framing has the potential to impact audiences, it is imperative that scholars be aware of the rhetoric that pro-movement activists are utilizing to mobilize support for democratic socialism. If frames are successfully employed, they can help the DSM to reach new heights by convincing more and more followers to join or to deepen their commitments to the movement. In turn, democratic socialism has the potential to further challenge the economic, political, cultural, and social status quo in the United States and, at minimum, broaden our discourse around political economy models. In this way, studying the internal framing of the DSM is relevant to studying one of the mechanisms behind cultural change.

²⁹ Yuliana Ocampo, "The Gospel of Bernie Sanders: Discourse Analysis for a Radical Democratic Politics," master's thesis (Lund University, 2020), <https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOid=9023123&fileOid=9027040>, accessed February 13, 2022.

³⁰ Maha Bashri, "Framing the Democratic Socialists of America? National and Local Information Flows in Media Coverage of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez," in *Intersectional Media: Representations of Marginalized Identities*, eds. Jane Campbell and Theresa Carilli (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 117-134; Anu K. Lannen, "Marginalizing Progressives? Newspaper Coverage of Bernie Sanders in the 'Invisible Primary': A Critical Discourse Analysis," master's thesis (Malmö University, 2017), <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1483511/FULLTEXT01.pdf>, accessed February 13, 2022.

³¹ Alberto Biondi, "Framing the Candidate: A Corpus-based Rhetorical Analysis of the 2016 Primaries in the USA," (University of Bologna, 2017), <http://amsacta.unibo.it/5538/>, accessed February 13, 2022; Jamie Gillies, "'Feel the Bern': Marketing Bernie Sanders and Democratic Socialism to Primary Voters," in *Political Marketing in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election*, ed. Jamie Gillies (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 97-12. https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59345-6_7.

Additionally, my decision to examine frames across five books will contribute to filling the gap in comparative studies of framing. Rather than simply describing the frames that were prominent in one text, I opted to describe the frames in several texts, explain the role those frames are trying to accomplish, and theorize why those frames were utilized. In this way, my analysis is extensive, contains comparative elements (across texts geared toward different audiences), and provides a thorough overview into pro-democratic-socialist rhetorical strategies. Moreover, my choice to look at book-length texts rather than brief articles adds another level of depth to my research because I had enough material to perceive nuances in framing.

In sum, my thesis contributes to the existing body of social movement framing analyses because there have not been other studies that perform a multi-text analysis of how the DSM is framed in pro-movement literature; studying framing helps scholars to understand the tools employed in processes of cultural change; and my decision to carry out a comparative study of literature makes my research more thorough and relevant to addressing gaps in present scholarship.

More broadly, as a framing analysis, my thesis can be characterized as a particular form of political discourse analysis (PDA). This type of investigation is “concerned with understanding the nature and function of political discourse and with critiquing the role discourse plays in producing, maintaining, abusing, and resisting power in society.”³² It recognizes that language is central to the function of politics. The rhetoric political actors employ is of the utmost importance because arguments and their structure have the ability to translate into action and alter life as we know it. Reviewing the method of PDA, Patricia Dunmire asserts that

³² Patricia L. Dunmire, “Political Discourse Analysis: Exploring the Language of Politics and the Politics of Language,” *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6, no.11 (2012): 736. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/lnc3.365>.

discourse analysts “should examine the ways structures and strategies of text and talk are conditioned by, and, in turn, help condition, social, political, and cultural processes and structures and should address issues of power, domination, inequality, resistance and so on” and that is what this thesis strives to do.³³

Methodology

Given that Bernie Sanders’s 2016 presidential campaign is often linked with support for democratic socialist frameworks in the United States, this study performs a discourse analysis of select literature published since the 2016 election. In this way, my intent is to investigate the recent discussions that have been occurring as the DSM has been gaining prominence in the U.S. over the past few years. More specifically, I investigate how pro-movement scholars and activists frame the DSM within full-length books designed for audiences interested in learning more about or who are already supportive of the DSM. Before a discussion of how this framing analysis is carried out, I first provide introductory descriptions of the five specific texts that are analyzed:

³³ Dunmire, 739.

The Selected Literature

	Title	Author	Publisher	Year of Publication
Book 1	<i>Bernie Sanders Guide to Political Revolution</i>	Bernie Sanders	Henry Holt and Company (Macmillan)	2017
Book 2	<i>Crashing the Party: From the Bernie Sanders Campaign to a Progressive Movement</i>	Heather Gautney	Verso	2018
Book 3	<i>Why You Should be a Socialist</i>	Nathan J. Robinson	St. Martin's Griffin (St. Martin's Publishing Group)	2019
Book 4	<i>Bigger than Bernie: How We Go from the Sanders Campaign to Democratic Socialism</i>	Meagan Day and Micah Uetrict	Verso	2020
Book 5	<i>Democratic Socialism—American Style: We Own the Future</i>	Various Authors; Edited by Kate Aronoff, Peter Drier, and Michael Kazin	The New Press	2020

Figure 1. Textual Publication Information.

- **Book 1-** *Bernie Sanders Guide to Political Revolution* by Bernie Sanders³⁴ (2017)

As the former mayor of Burlington, Vermont, and “the longest-serving independent in the history of Congress,”³⁵ Bernie Sanders is a highly notable presence in American politics. In this book, Sanders aims to convert “idealism and generosity of spirit into political activity.”³⁶ He states, “We must move boldly forward to revitalize American democracy and bring millions of young people and working people into an unstoppable political movement that fights for a

³⁴ Bernie Sanders, *Bernie Sanders Guide to Political Revolution*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2017), Kindle.

³⁵ Sanders, 226.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

government that represents all of us, not just the billionaire class.”³⁷ Since Sanders is arguably the political figure most associated with democratic socialism in the U.S. today, it is sensible to analyze a text he authored, in order to capture pro-movement sentiment. Moreover, the book’s emphasis on movement-building further demonstrates the value of this text for investigating the framing of democratic socialism. Sanders identifies issues with the political and economic status quo in the U.S. and explains his proposals for making improvements to the system. His readers would likely consist of his supporters and individuals who are curious about his policy position.

- **Book 2-** *Crashing the Party: From the Bernie Sanders Campaign to a Progressive Movement* by Heather Gautney³⁸ (2018)

Heather Gautney is an associate professor at Fordham University.³⁹ Gautney served as a legislative fellow for Sanders before his presidential campaign⁴⁰ and then as a volunteer researcher and organizer during his campaign.⁴¹ In this book, Gautney offers “insights from up-close work with Bernie, mixed in with historical and sociological analysis, to perform an autopsy of the 2016 election—and to reflect on how his presidential campaign transformed US politics and inspired a generation.”⁴² As noted in the book’s foreword by UPenn professor, Adolph Reed Jr., “Gautney’s account of the campaign not only has the virtues of an insider’s knowledge and perspective; it is also focused on how to understand and build on the momentum the campaign

³⁷ Ibid., x.

³⁸ Heather Gautney, *Crashing the Party: From the Bernie Sanders Campaign to a Progressive Movement*, (London and New York: Verso, 2018), Kindle.

³⁹ “Heather D. Gautney,” Fordham University, accessed December 26, 2021, https://www.fordham.edu/info/20855/faculty/5007/heather_d_gautney.

⁴⁰ Gautney, 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² Ibid., 2.

generated. How to think about and approach going forward is the key.”⁴³ Thus, as an analysis of the 2016 presidential election with a focus on future movement building, this book is highly relevant to this analysis of pro-democratic-socialist literature. Gautney’s target audience is likely composed of educated individuals within the movement who are interested in how it challenged the Democratic Party establishment and how the movement can flourish in the future.

- **Book 3-** *Why You Should be a Socialist* by Nathan J. Robinson⁴⁴ (2019)

Nathan J. Robinson graduated from Yale Law School and is a PhD student at Harvard “where his work focuses on contemporary left social movements.”⁴⁵ In addition to his educational background, he is the editor of the leftist magazine known as *Current Affairs* and he is a political columnist at *The Guardian*.⁴⁶ In describing his mission as an author, Robinson states: “In this book, I want to convince you that everyone should join the political left and identify themselves as a democratic socialist. I want to show you, as thoroughly and persuasively as I can, that leftist politics are not just consistent and reasonable, but that elementary moral principles compel us all to be leftists and socialists.”⁴⁷ Thus, this book is pertinent to this discourse analysis as its explicit purpose is framing the DSM from within a pro-movement perspective. That being said, Robinson’s target audience is anyone in the public who is open to learning more about this political movement.

⁴³ Adolph Reed, Jr., foreword to *Crashing the Party: From the Bernie Sanders Campaign to a Progressive Movement*, Heather Gautney (London and New York: Verso, 2018), loc. 102, Kindle.

⁴⁴ Nathan J. Robinson, *Why You Should be a Socialist* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2019), Kindle.

⁴⁵ Robinson, 326.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

- **Book 4-** *Bigger than Bernie: How We Go from the Sanders Campaign to Democratic Socialism* by Meagan Day and Micah Uetracht⁴⁸ (2020)

Both Megan Day⁴⁹ and Micah Uetracht⁵⁰ work for the American socialist magazine known as *Jacobin* and are members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).⁵¹ Thus, they are both active participants in the DSM.⁵² In this book, Day and Uetracht strive to address the following questions: “What lessons should we draw from the Bernie Sanders moment? And how can we take all the energy that his candidacies have generated to build a movement that is bigger than a presidential candidate, bigger than a few dozen newly elected socialist representatives, and bigger than anything the US Left has seen in decades?”⁵³ Day and Uetracht note that they conceive their book as a “guide” for the DSM “as it strides into the future.”⁵⁴ They want to “identify what political revolution can look like and how we can continue to build it.”⁵⁵ This text is another highly applicable book for studying how the DSM is framed by the activists who support it. Its target audience is almost certainly people already within the movement because this book is focused on how best to enhance the movement going forward.

⁴⁸ Meagan Day and Micah Uetracht, *Bigger than Bernie: How we Go from the Sanders Campaign to Democratic Socialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), Kindle.

⁴⁹ “Authors: Meagan Day,” Verso, accessed December 26, 2021, <https://www.versobooks.com/authors/2428-meagan-day>.

⁵⁰ “Authors, Micah Uetracht,” Verso, accessed December 26, 2021, <https://www.versobooks.com/authors/1839-micah-uetracht>.

⁵¹ Day and Uetracht, loc.104.

⁵² *Ibid.*, loc.104.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, loc.66

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, loc. 182

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, loc.144

- **Book 5- *Democratic Socialism—American Style: We Own the Future*** edited by Kate Aronoff, Peter Drier, and Michael Kazin⁵⁶ (2020)

While Kate Aronoff is a journalist, both Peter Drier and Michael Kazin are university professors.⁵⁷ In this anthology, they edited contributions from a selection of other established professors, scholars, activists, and organizers.⁵⁸ Aronoff, Drier, and Kazin believe that “democratic socialists set their sights on moving beyond capitalism as society’s operating system, not simply to make it more tolerable. They strive to build an economy and society that prioritizes the well-being of people and planet above all else, replacing capitalism’s endless thirst for hoarded profits with a quest for widespread prosperity.”⁵⁹ Therefore, these editors make it apparent that democratic socialism is something that they broadly endorse. They state, “This collection is meant, above all, to spark a conversation about what American democratic socialism might look like, which (we think) is the best way of defining it.”⁶⁰ As this book gathers scholarly analyses that support the development of a future democratic socialist society, it is a fruitful source for investigating a potentially nuanced pro-movement framing. Due to both the academic nature of this text and its pro-leftist stance, its target audience is likely left-leaning individuals of an educated background.

⁵⁶ *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), Kindle.

⁵⁷ Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin, introduction to *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 1. Kindle.

⁵⁸ *We Own the Future*, 341-345.

⁵⁹ Aronoff, Drier, and Kazin, 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

Initial Processing of the Texts

To begin the process of researching the pro-movement framing of democratic socialism across the texts, I first read each of the five books twice through. The initial read-through was meant to provide a general familiarization with each book. The second read-through was more active. During the second reading, I highlighted key passages that seemed to indicate an attempt at framing democratic socialism. For instance, I would highlight a passage if it implicitly or explicitly conveyed an answer to the following questions: How is the DSM characterized in terms of traits and motivations? How is the movement being portrayed? What is the movement a response to?

Primary Data Collection

Based on the two readings of the texts, I created an Excel sheet for each book (see Appendix 1-5). In each Excel sheet, the various frames that I could identify in each text were listed. Next to the name of a frame, I recorded representative quotes using the highlighted passages from my second read-through of the texts. For example, a frame might be “Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo” and next to that frame name would be a series of quotes I selected that illustrated that framing of disillusionment.

After collecting a comprehensive list of frames and quotes for each book, I began a process of data sorting. Frames that could be combined into one category were combined, and frames that demonstrated minimal support (in the form of quotes) were set aside. Ultimately, only frames that were supported by 10 or more quotes and seemed relevant in light of the read-throughs of each text were included in the final data. This is because I decided only to analyze frames that appeared with empirically observable recurrence in the literature.

Secondary Quantitative Data Collection

Since identifying quotes to support the presence of frames is subjective, I added a quantitative element to the investigation to reinforce the qualitative data. Using the collected quotes, I identified various keywords/phrases that could be associated with a given frame. Specifically, I read the quotes for each frame in each text. Then, I made a list of the words and phrases that appeared to be frequently employed. Some frames had a higher quantity of identifiable keywords than others, and ultimately, I decided to list ten or fewer for each frame in each book. Then, I used the Kindle search feature to track how many times a keyword was present throughout the entirety of the text.

The idea behind this is that the notable frequency with which the keywords appear in the texts is another way to demonstrate that the listed frames are significant. Rather than just asserting that my collection of quotes indicates that the frames are present and noteworthy, I can point to the numerical presence of keywords as a more objective way of asserting the importance of the frames. For instance, my research does not solely rest on the notion that I identified 65 quotes and subjectively said they are representative of the frame “Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo” in the Sanders text. Rather, I can also assert that the keyword ‘financ’ (which would yield a tally for the number of times both *finance* and *financial* appear across the book) appears 78 times in the text as a more objective signal of the frame.

It is worth mentioning that the keyword quantification step is mainly meant to supplement the qualitative data and in no way stands alone. Again, its purpose is to illustrate that the frames are *likely significant* and not merely relevant because some quotes were cherry-picked to make them seem important. However, there are flaws to this system of searching keywords. For instance, due to shared word stems, the frequency indicated for a given keyword may be

skewed (ex.: the name of the news outlet *Politico* would be counted under the search for ‘politic’ although it is intended to count keywords like ‘politics’ or ‘political’). Additionally, some frames are difficult to capture in a keyword, some keywords could arguably relate to multiple frames, and ultimately the keywords themselves were subjectively selected by me like the quotes.

Finalized Data

After finalizing the Excel sheet for each book and completing the keyword frequency analysis, I created a qualitative and quantitative data table for each book to capture the overarching data. Each qualitative table lists the nomenclature I chose to label a given frame and the number of quotes I collected to represent the frame. Next, each quantitative table lists the frame name, one to ten associated keywords, and the number of times each keyword appears across the entirety of the text. Notably, many keywords have other words next to them in parentheses. What this indicates is that the word stem used as the keyword would have yielded a tally for the joint number of times the words in parentheses occurred across the text. For example, if the keyword is ‘econom’ than when I searched that keyword, what was counted was the joint number of times words like ‘economy’, ‘economic’, ‘economist’, etc. were found.

What I hope to demonstrate with these tables is that the data supports the identification of these frames as being significant in pro-movement portrayals of democratic socialism. On both a qualitative and quantitative level, there is identifiable information to substantiate my claim that these frames matter.

Once the data tables were finalized to capture each book’s individual data, I created a comprehensive data table to compare frames across the texts. Every single frame that was found to be significant in any text is listed at the top of the table. Then, each book is listed along the

side of the table. If an “X” is listed with a given book and frame, this indicates the specific frame’s presence in the text. By looking at this table, it can be immediately discerned if a frame was present in all the texts, the majority of the texts, only a couple of the texts, or a single text.

Book 1 – Sanders: *Bernie Sanders Guide to Political Revolution*

Frame Name	Number of Quotes Identified
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	65
A Politics of Action	29
Mainstream Appeal	21
Movement Building/More to be Done	20
An Inspiring Alternative	11

Figure 2. Book 1 Qualitative Data

Frame Name	Keywords/Phrases Indicative of the Frame	Approx. # Of Times the Keyword/Phrase Appears Throughout the Entirety of the text
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	Tax (taxes, taxpayers, taxed)	208
	Wage (wages)	109
	Financ (finance, financial)	79
	Profit (profits, profitable)	78
	Health care	72
	Income (incomes)	69
	Wall Street	63
	Education (educations, educational)	51
	Corporat (corporate, corporation, corporations)	50
	Climate Change	47
	A Politics of Action	We must
Reform (reforms, reforming)		60
We need		42
Creat (create, creates, created, creating, creation)		29
Reduce (reduces, reduced)		19
We should		17
Address (addresses, addressing, addressed)		14
Ensur (ensure, ensures, ensuring)		7
Mainstream Appeal	Americans support	4
	Americans believe	3
	American people want	3
	American people understand	2
Movement Building/More to be Done	Transform (transforming)	10
	Mobilize	8
	Movement (movements)	7
An Inspiring Alternative	Benefit (benefits)	37
	Improv (improve, improves, improvements)	17

Figure 3. Book 1 Quantitative Data

Book 2 – Gautney: *Crashing the Party: From the Bernie Sanders Campaign to a Progressive Movement*

Frame Name	Number of Quotes Identified
Disillusionment with the Democrats	41
An Inspiring Alternative	13
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	11
Movement Building/More to be Done	11

Figure 4. Book 2 Qualitative Data

Frame Name	Keywords/Phrases Indicative of the Frame	# Of Times the Keyword/Phrase Appears Throughout the Entirety of the text
Disillusionment with the Democrats	Clinton (Clintons, Clinton's, Clintonism, Clintonite, Clintonoid)	199
	Democrats	97
	Democratic Party	54
	DNC	37
An Inspiring Alternative	Alternative (alternatives)	10
	Good for	4
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	Education (educational)	86
	Econom (economy, economies, economic, economics, economically, economist)	75
	Financ (finance, financial, financializing)	69
	Corporat (corporate, corporation, corporations)	62
	Health care	54
	Job (jobs)	49
	Wealth (wealthy, wealthiest)	40
	Employment (unemployment)	37
	Income (incomes)	33
	Neoliberal (neoliberals, neoliberalism)	31
Movement Building/More to be Done	Movement (movements)	56
	Build (building, rebuilding)	43
	Grassroots	13

Figure 5. Book 2 Quantitative Data

Book 3 – Robinson: *Why You Should be a Socialist*

Frame Name	Number of Quotes Identified
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	38
Myth-busting	19
A Politics of Action	16
Moral Politics	16
Rich Political Tradition	14
An Inspiring Alternative	14
Disillusionment with the Right	12
Disillusionment with the Democrats	10

Figure 6. Book 3 Qualitative Data

Frame Name	Keywords/Phrases Indicative of the Frame	# Of Times the Keyword/Phrase Appears Throughout the Entirety of the text
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	Politic (political, politically, politics, politicians)	361
	Econom (economy, economies, economic, economics, economist, economists)	256
	Capital (capitalism, capitalist, capitalists, capitalistic)	220
	Wealth (wealthy)	156
	Money	138
	Market (markets, free market, job market, marketing)	111
	Corporat (corporate, corporation, corporations)	82
	Debt (debts, debtor, debtors)	71
	Inequality	54
	Neoliberal (neoliberalism)	44
Myth-busting	Justif (justifications, justifies, justified)	34
	Criticism (criticisms)	30
	Avoid (avoiding, avoided)	23
	Rationaliz (rationalize, rationalizing, rationalization, rationalizations)	11
	Fallac (fallacy, fallacies, fallacious)	6
	Excuses	5

A Politics of Action	Expand (expands, expanding, expanded)	16
	Needs to	9
	Passing	9
Moral Politics	Moral (morally, morals, immoral, immorality)	76
	Empath (empathy, empathize, empathized, empathetic)	17
	Humane (humanely)	16
Rich Political Tradition	Roosevelt	22
	Karl Marx	16
	Eugene Debs	9
An Inspiring Alternative	Utopia (utopias, utopian, utopianism)	61
	Alternative (alternatives)	21
Disillusionment with the Right	Conservat (conservative, conservatives, conservatism)	117
	Republican (Republicans)	44
Disillusionment with the Democrats	Clinton	92
	Democrats	62
	Democratic Party	35

Figure 7. Book 3 Quantitative Data

Book 4 – Day and Uetricht: *Bigger than Bernie: How We Go from the Sanders Campaign to Democratic Socialism*

Frame Name	Number of Quotes Identified
Movement Building/More to be Done	66
Solidarity	25
A Politics of Action	16
An Inspiring Alternative	16
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	14
DSA as a Vehicle for Change	12
Mainstream Appeal	11
Disillusionment with the Democrats	11

Figure 8. Book 4 Qualitative Data

Frame Name	Keywords/Phrases Indicative of the Frame	# Of Times the Keyword/Phrase Appears Throughout the Entirety of the text
Movement Building/More to be Done	Organiz (organize, organizes, organizing, organizer, organizers, organized, organization)	290
	Movement (movements)	244
	Build (build, building, rebuild, rebuilding)	118
	Unions	102
	Class struggle	82
	Revolution (revolutionary)	52
	Rank-and-file	50
	Strikes	34
	Protest (protests, protesters)	27
	Activist (activists)	26
Solidarity	Solidarity	33
	Together	25 ⁶¹
	Collective (collectively)	14
A Politics of Action	Action (actions, actionable)	46 ⁶²
	Bully pulpit	6
An Inspiring Alternative	Inspir (inspire, inspired, inspiring, inspiration)	32
	Opportunity	23

⁶¹ Note: The number of times ‘altogether’ was found (3 times) was subtracted from the total number of times the keyword ‘together’ was counted (28 times) in order to arrive at the number of 25.

⁶² Note: The tally for the number of times ‘reactionary’ was found (12 times) was subtracted from the total number of times words containing the keyword ‘action’ (58 times) were found in order to arrive at the number of 48.

	Hope	22
	Potential (potentially)	18
	Alternative (alternatives)	15
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	Capital (capitalism, capitalist, capitalists)	216
	Econom (economic, economics, economy)	65
	Profit (profits, profitable)	56
	Wealth (wealthy)	46
	Neoliberal (neoliberals, neoliberalism)	22
DSA as a Vehicle for Change	Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)	220
Mainstream Appeal	Mainstream	17
	Hunger/Hungry	8
	Polls	7
Disillusionment with the Democrats	Democratic Party	82
	Democrats (democrats')	80

Figure 9. Book 4 Quantitative Data

Book 5 – ed. Aronoff et al.: *Democratic Socialism—American Style: We Own the Future*

Frame Name	Number of Quotes Identified
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	73
Movement Building/More to be Done	46
An Inspiring Alternative	28
Intersectionality	26
Rich Political Tradition	23
Mainstream Appeal	22
A Politics of Action	19

Figure 10. Book 5 Qualitative Data

Frame Name	Keywords/Phrases Indicative of the Frame	# Of Times the Keyword/Phrase Appears Throughout the Entirety of the text
Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo	Econom (economy, economies, economist, economic, economics)	439
	Politic (politics, political, politicians)	346
	Vote (votes, voters, voted)	213
	Labor (laborers, labor unions)	194
	Capital (capitalism, capitalist, capitalists)	192
	Financ (finance, financial, financing, financialization)	170
	Wealth (wealthy)	165
	Corporat (corporate, corporation, corporations)	152
	Market (markets, free market, labor market)	127
	Equality (inequality)	117
Movement Building/More to be Done	Organiz (organize, organized, organizing, organizer, organization, organizations, organizational)	204
	Movement (movements)	194
	Build (builds, building, rebuild, rebuilding)	138
	Bargain (bargaining)	52
	Mobiliz (mobilize, mobilized, mobilizing, mobilization)	23
	Empower (empowers, empowered, empowerment)	19
	Grassroots	12
	Bottom-up	4

An Inspiring Alternative	Benefit (benefits, benefitting, benefited)	78
	Imagine (imagines, imagined, reimagine, reimagined)	36
	Alternative (alternatives)	33
	Opportunity	19
	Well-being	15
Intersectionality	Black (blacks)	253
	Racial	199
	Women	145
	Of color	77
	Racism	73
	Gender (genders, gendered)	37
	Immigration	35
	Discrimination	35
	Racist (racists)	27
	Intersection (intersectional, intersections, intersectionality)	10
Rich Political Tradition	History	81
	Roosevelt	27
	Martin Luther King Jr.	12
Mainstream Appeal	Mainstream	15
	Polls	10
A Politics of Action	Agenda	57
	Propos (propose, proposes, proposing, proposed, proposals)	38
	Recogniz (recognize, recognizes, recognized, recognizing)	31
	Confront (confronts, confronting)	12
	Call for	6

Figure 11. Book 5 Quantitative Data

Figure 12. Comprehensive List of Frames that Occur in the Studied Literature

Frame Names
1. Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo
2. An Inspiring Alternative
3. A Politics of Action
4. Movement Building/More to be Done
5. Disillusionment with the Democrats
6. Mainstream Appeal
7. Rich Political Tradition
8. Myth-busting
9. Moral Politics
10. Disillusionment with the Right
11. Solidarity
12. DSA as a Vehicle for Change
13. Intersectionality

Figure 13. Framing Across All Texts

	Frame Names						
	<i>Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo</i>	<i>An Inspiring Alternative</i>	<i>A Politics of Action</i>	<i>Movement Building/More to be Done</i>	<i>Disillusionment with the Democrats</i>	<i>Mainstream Appeal</i>	<i>Rich Political Tradition</i>
Book 1 - Sanders	X	X	X	X		X	
Book 2- Gautney	X	X		X	X		
Book 3- Robinson	X	X	X		X		X
Book 4- Day & Uetrict	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Book 5- Aronoff et al.	X	X	X	X		X	X

	Frame Names					
	<i>Flawed Rationalizations</i>	<i>Moral Politics</i>	<i>Disillusionment with the Right</i>	<i>Solidarity</i>	<i>DSA as a Vehicle for Change</i>	<i>Intersectionality</i>
Book 1 - Sanders						
Book 2- Gautney						
Book 3- Robinson	X	X	X			
Book 4- Day & Uetrict				X	X	
Book 5- Aronoff et al.						X

Findings

Having identified the prominent frames used in a pro-movement depiction of democratic socialism across five books, next I discuss what these frames are, how they are conveyed by the texts, and their significance. The frames will be discussed in the order of their appearance *across* the texts—meaning frames shared by all books will be discussed first and frames appearing in only one book will be discussed last.

Analysis

Overarching Frames (Frames Shared by all Five Books)

- **Disillusionment with Capitalism and the Status Quo**

One of the two frames that can be identified across all five texts can be labeled as “disillusionment with capitalism and the status quo.” At the most general level, this is a conflict frame. The pro-democratic-socialist authors are placing themselves in an “us-versus-them” confrontation with capitalism and capitalists. They make the argument that the current economic and political circumstances in the United States are unacceptable.

In Book 1, Sanders makes the following statement: “In the wealthiest country in the history of the world, a basic principle of American economic life should be that if you work more than forty hours a week, you do not live in poverty. Sadly, that is far from reality.”⁶³ With this passage, Sanders asserts that the U.S. economy is not meeting basic public needs. In structuring his thoughts, he sets up a side-by-side comparison that examines “ideals vs. reality” to demonstrate shortcomings in present-day society. Notably, Sanders does this throughout his

⁶³ Sanders, 1.

book. In each chapter, he points out and explains perceived shortcomings in the status quo, including those related to health care⁶⁴ and even climate change.⁶⁵ Then, he explains what proposals he believes the U.S. should follow going forward. His numerous calls for change and action frame current economic and political tendencies in a deeply negative light and encourage readers to perceive capitalist leaders as villains and the rising leftist movement as heroic.

Similarly, in Book 2, Gautney also discusses the failings in the political and economic state of affairs in America. For instance, she notes, "Appallingly, the United States is the only country in the industrialized world not to offer universal health care to its citizens, despite being the wealthiest country on earth."⁶⁶ In using words like "despite", Gautney is saying that while America hypothetically has the means to sufficiently support the health of its citizens, that is not what is happening. From this, the reader is encouraged to see the current system as inefficient and outrageous. This framing highlights a fundamental tension between the leaders preserving the status quo and those demanding change.

In Book 3, Robinson is extremely direct in framing democratic socialism as an ideology disillusioned with present trends. He makes assertions like the following: "The defining feature of our age is inequality";⁶⁷ "Debt is one of the defining features of contemporary American life;"⁶⁸ "We've seen how certain features of contemporary political and economic systems are irreparably dysfunctional."⁶⁹ The clear purpose of this framing is to say that the status quo is unacceptable, and something must be done. Robinson is quite straightforward in writing, "It was hard for us to believe that capitalism was the magical, rational prosperity machine that free-

⁶⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 132.

⁶⁶ Gautney, 52.

⁶⁷ Robinson, 52.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 203.

market fundamentalists insisted it was when all around us we saw foreclosure and ruin."⁷⁰

Capitalism is cast at the core of many American struggles and thus it is characterized as the enemy to justice, equality, and progress.

Perhaps Book 4 is even more blunt than the Robinson text when it comes to this frame. In presenting an argument about how to further the DSM, Day and Uetrict assert that "As with everything a class-struggle politician does, the platform must set working people's sights higher than before, and unite them together against a common capitalist adversary."⁷¹ In labeling capitalists as the "adversary," Day and Uetrict have classified democratic socialists as the valiant warrior army that will go to battle on behalf of the common good. Painting the status quo as abhorrent makes democratic socialism appear as a form of liberatory ideology (a belief system that is intentionally meant to defeat the evils of the present).

Like the four other books, Book 5 also orients the democratic socialists against the capitalists through this conflict frame. In the introduction to the text, Aronoff, Drier, and Kazin state, "An overwhelming majority of Americans are frustrated and fed up with the economic and political status quo."⁷² Moreover, many of the other authors in this compilation also make note of the shortcomings in the current state of affairs. For example, there are mentions of neoliberalism leading to inequality,⁷³ wage inequality having an acute impact on people of color,⁷⁴ politics

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁷¹ Day and Uetrict, 154.

⁷² Aronoff, Drier, and Kazin, 5.

⁷³ Andrea Flynn, Susan Holmberg, Dorian Warren, and Felicia Wong, "Toward a Third Reconstruction," in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 47. Kindle.

⁷⁴ Darrick Hamilton, "A Three-Legged Stool for Racial and Economic Justice," in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 64. Kindle.

representing a plutocracy,⁷⁵ and even capitalism having dire impacts on sports⁷⁶ and the arts.⁷⁷

Perhaps more exhaustively than any of the other books, this book delineates an extensive count of areas where reform is needed due to failures of the status quo. Through this frame, readers are encouraged to perceive urgency behind the need for change. Democratic socialism is portrayed akin to the rain showers that will quell the drought caused by capitalism.

In each book, the authors frame the DSM as a response to the failings of politics and economics in the U.S. In doing so, a story emerges where this is a movement of heroes in a fierce war for “what’s right.” When a movement is portrayed as a direct response to the inadequacies of something else, this framing is intentionally crafted to portray the actions of the movement as imminently rational and deserving of support. When there is a war, people pick sides, and this is a conflict frame that works to render democratic socialism rhetorically and conceptually as the superior ideological framework around which people should mobilize.

- **An Inspiring Alternative**

The second frame that can be found across all the texts can be labeled as “an inspiring alternative.” This frame goes hand-in-hand with the previously discussed “disillusionment with capitalism and the status quo.” The previous frame placed democratic socialism in direct contention with capitalism; its role was to say, “capitalists are the bad guys, and we democratic socialists are the good guys with a better solution.” This second frame serves the purpose of

⁷⁵ J. Mijin Cha, “We the People: Voting Rights, Campaign Finance, and Election Reform,” in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 107. Kindle.

⁷⁶ David Zirin, “Reclaiming Competition: Sports and Socialism,” in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 266-278. Kindle.

⁷⁷ Francesca Fiorentini. “What About a Well-Fed Artist? Imagining Cultural Work in a Democratic Socialist Society,” in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 280-289. Kindle.

elaborating why democratic socialists are the heroes in this political narrative. This frame situates democratic socialism as a movement with the utmost potential to aid mankind.

In every text, democratic socialism is heralded as a system with golden ideas. For instance, in Book 1, the following statement is made: "Raising the minimum wage benefits the economy, and it benefits society as a whole. There's a clear connection between poverty, despair, and crime...When wages go up, crime goes down, and everyone benefits."⁷⁸ With this statement, Sanders portrays the democratic socialist policy of an increased minimum wage as both beneficial and sociologically rational. His words present the policy as straightforward and simplistic: do this and the world will be better. This type of reasoning is highly accessible to readers, and the intent is to make it easy to side with the new leftism he promotes, rather than the status quo.

In Book 2, Gautney also strives to prove that democratic socialism should stand out for its potential. She notes, "Bernie's populism was rooted in a profoundly different kind of anti-elitism that drew masses of young people in search of a more tolerant and egalitarian future, against the jobless, debt-ridden one that the Clinton-Wall Street alliance offered."⁷⁹ In this statement, Gautney characterizes Sanders (and thus the democratic socialist views with which he is associated) as a beacon for youth in search of a future lined in opportunity. This creates a mental image of people running towards the promised land of democratic socialism and away from capitalist ruin.

In Book 3, Robinson directly states, "We were introduced to socialism, which provides a set of principles and aspirations that can guide us in the right direction."⁸⁰ If socialism is the

⁷⁸ Sanders, 12.

⁷⁹ Gautney, 124.

⁸⁰ Robinson, 203.

“right direction,” then the corollary is that we are presently headed in the wrong direction. Like the other authors, Robinson frames democratic socialism as the answer to current problems. “The democratic socialist creed is the belief not only that things ought to be better, but that they must be better, and we will do what we can to make them so.”⁸¹ Democratic socialism is portrayed as the movement that people should rally around if they have hopes for seeing a greater tomorrow.

In Book 4, Day and Uetrict specifically discuss how they see democratic socialism as having an intent of prompting inspiration among the masses:

It's our task to inspire the broad and diverse working class to dream of a different future, one where all people are truly created equal, where human life is valued above profit, where cooperation and compassion are the prevailing principles of social life, and where exploitation of person by person is a distant, shameful memory.⁸²

This passage emphasizes how democratic socialists take pride in being a greater and preferable alternative to what they see as a horrendous present. The authors want to highlight that this movement is humane, just, and thus the rational option to support. Similarly, in Book 5, this notion is captured in quotes such as the following:

Uniquely, democratic socialists set their sights on moving beyond capitalism as society's operating system, not simply to make it more tolerable. They strive to build an economy and society that prioritizes the well-being of people and planet above all else, replacing capitalism's endless thirst for hoarded profits with a quest for widespread prosperity.⁸³

In this passage, “well-being” and “prosperity” stand out as key words. Democratic socialism is framed not just as a mere alternative to capitalism, and not as a dour vision of austerity, but

⁸¹ Ibid., 255.

⁸² Day and Uetrict, 214.

⁸³ Aronoff, Drier, and Kazin, 9.

instead as an uplifting and inspiring, materially appealing alternative. Once again, framing democratic socialism in this way is intended to present the choice between it and capitalism as a no-brainer.

The previous frame set the stage for the conflict between the two ideologies. Through that frame, each text expresses that the status quo is a disaster and democratic socialism is on the offensive against the current state of affairs. This frame continues that line of thought, but rather than the primary focus being on why capitalism is a failure, the focus is on why democratic socialism should provide hope to the public. Keeping this in mind, it makes perfect sense why these two frames are the ones that recur in every text. “Disillusionment with capitalism and the status quo” asserts that capitalism is a villain because it leads to mass inequality, and it introduces democratic socialism as a hero. “An inspiring alternative” then explains a rationale for why democratic socialism is heroic. It is the “because” for why people should side with democratic socialists in the conflict introduced in the formerly explored frame. In this way, these frames are mutually reinforcing across the texts.

Frames Shared by the Majority of Texts (Frames Shared by Three to Four Books)

- **A Politics of Action (Shared by Four Books; Absent in Book 2)**

Appearing in all but one text, a third prominent frame can be labeled as “a politics of action.” This frame conveys the notion that democratic socialism is not an idle movement; rather, it is centered around the execution of concrete measures. Democratic socialists are portrayed as “doers” who not only make plans, but also ensure those plans are carried out in the here and now.

In Book 1, Sanders states, “Our political task is nothing less than the transformation of our nation.”⁸⁴ In his perspective, this transformation is tied to specific policy measures that address everything from tax reform to the fight against climate change. In expressing a desire to address current policy shortcomings, to end problematic legal structures, and to implement new programs and policies, the underlying message is that action is instinctual to democratic socialism.

The DSM is not merely meant to identify issues within the status quo, it is fundamentally about taking tangible steps to improve the status quo. In Book 3, Robinson explicitly makes this point himself. "It's funny, people often talk about leftists as impractical dreamers. But in the last few years, the most concrete solutions to social and economic problems have been coming from the left."⁸⁵ Robinson notes how democratic socialists are often labeled as seeking an unrealistic vision of utopianism. However, he makes it clear that even though the movement has extensive goals and aspirations for the future, this does not mean that democratic socialists are doing nothing in the present moment.

As Day and Uetrict note in Book 4, "If we don't muster the courage to challenge the establishment, they'll run the show forever. If we want politics to change, it's time to roll up our sleeves."⁸⁶ Across the texts, it is evident that democratic socialists endeavor to make real changes whether that entails confronting existing socio-economic structures or attempting to build new ones. In fact, proposing feasible mechanisms for how to “build a kinder, more humane, and altogether freer society—and suggest how to overcome barriers to that future” is part of the defined intent of Book 5.⁸⁷ Through the combined efforts of scholars and activists, this

⁸⁴ Sanders, 99.

⁸⁵ Robinson, 168.

⁸⁶ Day and Uetrict, 74.

⁸⁷ Aronoff, Drier, and Kazin, 11.

compilation makes specific reference to actions that need to be taken in terms of the electoral system, criminal justice, education, and beyond.

This frame is intended to accomplish a few different goals. Firstly, if readers have skepticism about democratic socialism, this frame is meant to help them understand that this movement is not hollow. Coming from a two-party system where people frequently feel as though their support will be wasted if it is not given to either the Republicans or the Democrats, these pro-democratic-socialist authors want to convince their readers that democratic socialism is more than just empty promises for a better tomorrow. They want to emphasize that democratic socialists are taking action because then the movement might gain further support. Secondly, if readers already support democratic socialism, then this frame is a way of reinforcing the notion that they are taking part in a movement and ideology that is meaningful.

- **Movement Building/More to be Done (Shared by Four Books; Absent in Book 3)**

As an additional frame, “movement building/more to be done” is essentially a specific extension of the “politics of action” frame. While there are various measures that democratic socialists want to carry out, the precise act of mobilizing into a powerful coalition recurred with such frequency across four of the texts that I believe it merits its own frame. In particular, this frame emphasizes that one of the main goals of democratic socialists is to recruit new members to the movement. The authors of the texts believe that although democratic socialism has gained supporters in the last few years, much more needs to be done before the movement is strong enough to successfully incite broad and lasting changes on social, economic, and political fronts.

In Book 1, in addition to providing ways that supporters can “mobilize” at the end of each chapter, Sanders asserts: "We must move boldly forward to revitalize American democracy

and bring millions of young people and working people into an unstoppable political movement that fights for a government that represents all of us, not just the billionaire class.”⁸⁸ His focus is on using the momentum from his presidential campaign as a starting point. He recognizes that if people do not continue to unite on behalf of democratic socialist objectives, then momentum (and thus power) will be lost in the battle against the status quo. By continually reminding his readers that this is just the beginning of the race, he is attempting to encourage them to keep acting and to keep recruiting until democratic socialists have the energy and manpower to make it to the finish line of political progress.

Likewise, in Book 2, Gautney agrees that democratic socialists must build upon the efforts of the past few years. She notes, "One way that future progressive electoral campaigns could improve upon the movement-building aspects of Bernie 2016 would be to invest larger sums in field organizing and building local political organizations.”⁸⁹ Like Sanders, she acknowledges that the DSM needs to continue growing in order to be more resilient and effective. Political change is not something that happens overnight, and if the democratic socialists drop the ball, their successes will fade into the background of history. So, Gautney and the other authors want to use their texts to emphasize that mobilization is of the utmost importance.

In Book 4, the urgency behind mobilization efforts is clear: "It's now the task of the reborn socialist movement to act boldly, intervene intelligently, and continue to invite people into the struggle, so that the potential of this movement isn't squandered.”⁹⁰ Day and Uetricht assert, “The power of the capitalist class is immense; to overcome it, we need not to just win

⁸⁸ Sanders, x.

⁸⁹ Gautney, 134.

⁹⁰ Day and Uetricht, 214.

elections but collectively assemble as millions of people marching in the street, engaging in strikes and boycotts, pressuring politicians, and pushing back against the inevitable retaliation for our victories.”⁹¹ In this way, this frame can be perceived as a call to further action. While the frame labeled as “a politics of action” was meant to demonstrate that democratic socialists are presently active in terms of what they are demanding and what they are doing, this frame is emphasizing that there is still much ground that must be covered in terms of enriching the size of the movement and increasing its capacity to act. It is trying to rally present adherents of the movement to take the next step of encouraging others to join.

In line with this frame, Book 5 contains the following passage:

'An unorganized socialist is a contradiction in terms,' Michael Harrington frequently said, and if socialism is to become a genuine force in American politics and life, it needs both to organize many thousands of unorganized socialists into a more powerful socialist organization, and to help in the process of building far broader support for social democratic reforms. For perhaps the first time ever in American history, these goals are now possible--provided socialists choose to be both in and of the world.⁹²

Each author is aware that the DSM has a long way to go before it can meet all of its objectives. However, they have confidence that if the quantity of supporters can be expanded, the movement is much more likely to succeed. They have chosen to frame democratic socialism in light of mobilization needs because making readers aware that the movement is at a critical point where it will either blossom or burn out might help convince these readers to act on a personal level.

⁹¹ Ibid., 13.

⁹²Harold Meyerson, “How Socialism Surged, and How it Can Go Further,” in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 303. Kindle.

- **Disillusionment with the Democrats (Shared by Three Books; Absent in Book 1 and Book 5)**

Similar to the previously discussed “disillusionment with the status quo,” the frame labeled as “disillusionment with the Democrats” is another conflict frame. In this case, democratic socialists are placed in specific contrast to the Democratic Party. This frame makes it evident that while the Democratic Party claims to be a strong defender of the American left, it is hardly a party that supports the needs of the general populace.

In Book 2, Gautney analyzes the 2016 election to critique the shortcomings of the Democrats. “[W]hat’s clear from 2016 is that establishment Democrats failed to address the material needs and aspirations of poor and working-class Americans of all backgrounds that have been structurally subordinated to the material interests of the ruling class.”⁹³ She takes her readers through the political contest between Clinton and Sanders to demonstrate that where the Democrats failed, the democratic socialists provided viable policy approaches. She argues “The Bernie Sanders campaign crashed the Democratic Party in 2016 by exposing the class interests its leadership represented and by expanding the horizon of political possibility in America.”⁹⁴

Similarly, in Book 3, Robinson argues that the Democratic Party’s inability to serve public needs is the reason that Sanders was able to pose a viable challenge to Clinton in the 2016 primaries. He states, “The Clinton-Sanders primary showed that the Democratic Party establishment was deeply unpopular and vulnerable, and that many voters were willing to get behind a socialist if they offered an alternative to the uninspiring centrist politics that had destroyed the Democrats’ popular appeal.”⁹⁵ In Robinson’s perspective, liberal politics is “the

⁹³ Gautney, 128.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁵ Robinson, 3.

politics of wealthy people who want to appear virtuous without actually making personal sacrifices.”⁹⁶ Whereas the Democratic Party represents the idea of being all talk and no action, democratic socialists are framed as pursuing genuine change for the betterment of society.

In Book 4, Day and Uetrict further this argument in saying, "Liberals are not taking the threats we face seriously enough. They've gotten caught up in sideshow spectacles rather than working to put forward an alternative to the grinding misery of life in America under capitalism.”⁹⁷ As with the other authors, they note that the Democratic Party is a capitalist party and that as such, it is incapable of truly supporting the working class. Meanwhile, they believe that the democratic socialists are willing to place people above profits instead of the other way around.

Parallel to how “disillusionment with the status quo” juxtaposed capitalism with democratic socialism on an ideological level, “disillusionment with the Democrats” is juxtaposing the Democratic Party with the democratic socialists on the level of political strategy. The pro-democratic-socialist authors want to convey that the Democratic Party is not doing enough as America’s token progressive party, while democratic socialist thinking is offering what Americans need to prosper.

The reason that the authors likely feel the need to apply this frame is in anticipation that their readers might ask the following question: Why should I support democratic socialists when the Democratic Party is the progressive party that already has widespread acknowledgement in the two-party system? As the Democratic Party is the biggest competitor with democratic socialism for supporters, the authors need to explicitly say where the Democrats are failing, and the democratic socialists are succeeding in order to make it clear that the DSM merits support. It

⁹⁶ Ibid., 223.

⁹⁷ Day and Uetrict, loc. 182.

is not enough to say that capitalism is broken; the authors must also underscore the idea that the Democratic Party is aligned with capitalism and thus will not be able to solve the systematic issues as successfully as the democratic socialists.

- **Mainstream Appeal (Shared by Three Books; Absent in Book 2 and Book 3)**

The final frame shared by a majority of the texts can be labeled as “mainstream appeal.” This frame attempts to convey that democratic socialism is not a fringe movement, but rather a critical perspective that has been steadily gathering the support of the American public. In doing so, this frame is meant to downplay the radicalism that some people associate with the movement.

In Book 1, Sanders makes a point of noting that his 2016 “campaign received more votes from young people than Donald Trump’s and Hilary Clinton’s combined.”⁹⁸ Additionally, he mentions that his book is based on the thesis that “on major issue after major issue, the vast majority of Americans support a progressive agenda.”⁹⁹ In stating these facts, Sanders frames democratic socialist thinking as something that has drawn people in. Rather than decrying democratic socialism as ridiculous and utopian, he wants his audience to understand that people have used their voices and their votes to express that they find reason to join Sanders and the democratic socialists.

Book 4 further observes that “Democratic socialist politicians are running and winning at the local, state, and national level.”¹⁰⁰ With this in mind, Day and Uetrict highlight that “Democratic socialism is gaining recognition and legitimacy.”¹⁰¹ If people are advocating for

⁹⁸ Sanders, ix.

⁹⁹ Ibid., ix.

¹⁰⁰ Day and Uetrict, 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 69.

democratic socialist representatives in elections and supporting democratic socialist ideology, then the movement merits attention as a pragmatic political movement with considerable mainstream appeal.

In Book 5, statistical support is provided to convey this notion of mainstream appeal. “In 2018, a Gallup poll found that the share of Democrats with a favorable view of socialism stood at 57 percent, while those with a favorable view of capitalism had dwindled to 47 percent.”¹⁰² If more left-leaning individuals support socialism than capitalism, then the resonance of democratic socialism is quite evident. In fact, it has even become acknowledged that “Policies that once seemed utopian are being offered and debated as mainstream.”¹⁰³ Policies like Medicare for All originated from more democratic socialist thinking, and now even political candidates from the Democratic Party are recognizing them.

By utilizing this frame, the authors have developed yet another technique to both try and convince skeptics to join the DSM and to reinforce the supportive tendencies of people who already have aligned themselves with the movement. Portraying the movement as mainstream is an attempt to depict democratic socialism as something that rationally merits support; it is painted as a logical ideology around which people should mobilize.

¹⁰² Meyerson, 290.

¹⁰³ Robert Kuttner, “Confronting Corporate Power,” in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 122. Kindle.

Frames Shared by a Minority of the Texts (Frames Shared by One to Two Books)

- **Rich Political Tradition (Shared by Two Books)**

Both Book 3 and Book 5 present a frame that I have labeled as “rich political tradition.” By enlightening readers about the meaningful history of democratic socialism, this frame serves to add another level of legitimacy to the movement.

In Book 3, Robinson notes, "Socialism is often considered to have a dreary pedigree. This could not be more false. The radical left has a beautiful tradition, one that has long been buried but is worth excavating and celebrating."¹⁰⁴ From Europe to the United States itself, Robinson discusses how the DSM has ideological roots that can be traced back more than 800 years. He highlights how the U.S. has had successful socialist politicians that helped develop thriving towns. He asserts that beloved figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and FDR can be associated with socialist thinking. He attempts to demonstrate that democratic socialism is something that has been constructed over time, that has been diligently thought-out by respected thinkers, and that has resulted in positive outcomes.

Similarly, Book 5 also discusses the history of democratic socialism. Aronoff, Drier, and Kazin state, “We should look to our own nation's history to find examples of progressive, even radical programs that raised standards of living, tamed the greed of big corporations, made our cities and rural areas more livable, and expanded rights to previously disenfranchised groups.”¹⁰⁵ They want it to be known that socialists were key in the development of cornerstone policies in

¹⁰⁴ Robinson, 143.

¹⁰⁵ Aronoff, Drier, and Kazin, 6.

U.S. history, like, "Women's right to vote, Social Security, the minimum wage, work-place safety laws, universal health insurance, and civil rights for all races and genders."¹⁰⁶

The authors of these books have likely chosen to use this frame so as to reinforce the idea that supporting democratic socialism is rational and has the potential to yield practical benefits for ordinary people. If readers come to understand that democratic socialism is not a new and radical ideology, but rather a system of ideas rooted in rich historical traditions, the hope is that these readers will develop more respect and support for democratic socialism.

A potential reason that this frame is only prominent in Book 3 and Book 5 is because these are the two texts that cover the widest range of content. Book 3 provides a wide overview of democratic socialism to attract as many people as possible to the movement. Book 5 contains over 20 different academic articles to analytically examine different elements of democratic socialist policy before an educated audience. That being said, these two texts intentionally strive to look at democratic socialism from a variety of perspectives, so including historical information is quite sensible. On the other hand, the other three texts have more of a limited focus. In Book 1, Sanders is more concerned with presenting policy proposals. In Book 2, Gautney is specifically examining the 2016 primaries. Finally, in Book 4, Day and Uetricht are more occupied with discussing how to further mobilize democratic socialists.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Dreier and Michael Kazin, "How Socialists Changed America," in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*, ed. Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020), 15. Kindle.

- **Book 3 – Robinson’s Unique Frames**
 - **Myth-busting**

A frame specific to Book 3 is one that I have labeled as “myth-busting.” The purpose of this frame is to debunk the rationalizations used respectively on behalf of capitalism and against democratic socialism. Robinson examines both what he perceives as flawed justifications for capitalism and flawed critiques of democratic socialists. He then says why the justifications for capitalism are illegitimate and why the critiques against democratic socialism do not exhibit sound reasoning. For instance, he identifies the following to be a flimsy rationalization of the capitalist system: “If you don’t succeed, it’s because you didn’t try hard enough.”¹⁰⁷ Then, he argues that this logic is flawed because “plenty of people fail for reasons completely beyond their control.”¹⁰⁸

Similarly, Robinson identifies what he perceives as common grounds on which people challenge socialism. He notes that people make claims such as “Socialism is when the government controls the economy and that’s always a disaster”¹⁰⁹ and “Socialists elevate the collective and forget the individual.”¹¹⁰ Then, he takes the time to present his rebuttal to each of these claims to delegitimize typical arguments against socialism.

In using this frame, Robinson aims to assert that capitalism is too flawed to be preserved and that democratic socialism is not as problematic as some people make it out to be. In other words, he is trying to “bust the myth” that capitalism is the best structure for society and that democratic socialism would lead to a perilous fate. The reason that this frame is only used in the Robinson text is because Robinson is trying to persuade even devoted skeptics to join the DSM:

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 236.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 239.

“I’m going to assume that you don’t consider yourself a socialist. In fact, I’m going to assume you’re extremely dubious about socialism.”¹¹¹ In the rest of the texts, there seems to be an underlying recognition that the primary audience is either people who are already democratic socialists or who are at the very least more inclined to support leftist thinking. Due to this, Robinson needs to directly address the likely concerns of his non-socialist readers if he has any hope of achieving his goals of persuasion.

○ **Moral Politics**

The second frame that is only prominent in Book 3 is one I have labeled as “moral politics.” As indicated by the name, this is a moral frame. The intent of this frame is to say that not only is democratic socialism a viable ideology and movement, but it is also virtuous and ethically sound. If the other frames are meant as an appeal to logic, this frame is an appeal to emotion. It is the claim that if people are good-hearted and humane, then democratic socialism is where they should place their support.

In crafting this frame, Robinson expresses, “I want to show you, as thoroughly and persuasively as I can, that leftist politics are not just consistent and reasonable, but that elementary moral principles compel us all to be leftists and socialists.”¹¹² He characterizes the rapacious form of capitalism practiced in the U.S. as “morally odious,” and thus implies that good people must be against the present political and economic system.¹¹³ He states, “I have rejected the idea that we should reconcile ourselves to human misery and accept excuses for the status quo. I have suggested that having a functioning conscience means being troubled by the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹¹² Ibid., 13.

¹¹³ Ibid., 88.

pain of others and resolving to do something about it.”¹¹⁴ Throughout his book, it becomes obvious that the “something” people should do is join the DSM because it is heralded as the movement that has the potential to make changes that genuinely benefit the most people.

In using this frame, Robinson is appealing to the humanity of his readers. He is hoping that his readers will want to act in compassion and empathy, so in turn, they will feel inclined to support democratic socialism. Once again, the reason this frame is only in the Robinson text is because Robinson is the only author whose explicit aim is to persuade even the greatest resisters of socialism to join this movement. Thus, he has to pull every rhetorical string to make his case as thorough as possible.

○ **Disillusionment with the Right**

The final frame that is unique to Book 3 is “disillusionment with the right.” This frame is more or less equivalent to the “disillusionment with the Democrats” frame, except it focuses on the Republican Party instead of the Democratic Party. It conveys the argument that the Republicans do not sufficiently support the needs of the American people. Thus, by diminishing the reputation of the GOP, it serves to elevate the position of the democratic socialists.

Robinson directly asserts, “...the politics associated with the American right, if presented honestly, are unpopular with the American public.”¹¹⁵ He states that conservative writing embodies a “kind of national chauvinism...born out of a lack of empathy, one that condones inflicting horrendous harms on other people so long as we end up better off.”¹¹⁶ He perceives the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 208.

right as “quick to trivialize or rationalize suffering and misery or tell people that their problems are *their own fault* and they should take responsibility for their pain.”¹¹⁷

In this sharp language, Robinson is very transparent in the belief that the Republicans are inadequate and ineffective in their handling of American politics. Additionally, his rhetoric denounces the right to such an explicit extent that it is fair to say Robinson is portraying the GOP as villainous. He strives to say that on a rational and moral level, the right does not deserve the support of the public. In utilizing this framing, he is making the point that the democratic socialists are the superior candidates for public support.

The Robinson text is the only one that prominently presents this frame because the other texts likely did not feel the need to address the GOP. Based on the content of the other books, one can assume that the other authors primarily intended their books to be read by people already aligned more with progressive thinking. That being said, there is an existing expectation that the readers of the other books already disagree with the GOP. Thus, it would be unnecessary to spend time convincing the readers of a belief they already hold. On the flip side, it is fully possible that Robinson’s readers include people who do align with the GOP, therefore this is a relevant frame to gather support for the cause of democratic socialism.

- **Book 4 – Day and Uetrict’s Unique Frames**
 - **Solidarity**

The first of Book 4’s unique frames is one that can be labeled simply as a “solidarity” frame. This frame is meant to convey the idea that democratic socialism is a movement based on the premises of unity and togetherness. Democratic socialism is portrayed as a community where

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 210.

advocates for change can be with one another instead of feeling lost and alone. Moreover, democratic socialists are seen as welcoming activists that are willing to work with others in the name of societal change.

In Book 4, Day and Uetrict assert that all fights must be approached “by advancing policies that not only make people's lives better but that bind us all together in a common project for our mutual salvation...We must build a new consensus and suffuse political life with the idea that we're all in this together.”¹¹⁸ They emphasize that the DSM is not just about political change; more than that, it is about giving people an ideological home. It is about showing activists that they are not alone in wanting change because there are thousands of people standing with them in the pursuit of a better future. In this way, this frame serves to make people feel as though belonging to the DSM means they are participating in something much bigger than themselves. This frame is an appeal to one’s aspirations for belonging.

Additionally, beyond intragroup solidarity, this frame emphasizes that democratic socialists are willing to be part of coalitions for change. “A successful socialist organization, and certainly one that hopes to be the seed of a future party, will always have to work closely with other progressive groups as long as they're on board with a class-struggle program.”¹¹⁹ In acknowledging that democratic socialists will not isolate themselves, but will rather partner with other groups to further push for social progress, this frame demonstrates that democratic socialists will reach across lines of difference in order to more effectively fight for the common good. As such, this frame makes the DSM seem both moral in the way it promotes inter-group cooperation, and rational in the way it recognizes the need for always amplifying support.

¹¹⁸ Day and Uetrict, 169.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 128.

It seems plausible that the reason this book is the only one to prominently present this frame is because this book arguably has the greatest emphasis on movement building across the texts. As movement building is contingent both on recruiting the masses and finding intergroup coalitions, it is logical that this text highlights the importance of solidarity.

- **DSA as a Vehicle for Change**

The second frame that is unique to Book 4 is one that I labeled as “DSA as a Vehicle for Change.” This frame has the intent of presenting democratic socialism in terms of feasibility. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is a concrete example of an organization that has a tangible impact in society due to its active and mobilized base. Thus, Day and Uetricht frequently emphasize the growth and efforts of DSA to say, “democratic socialism is real, it is promising, and it is diligently striving for social change.” As a result, this frame attempts to characterize democratic socialism as a movement and ideology deserving support.

Day and Uetricht note that DSA had significant increases in membership in both the lead-up to the 2016 general election and following Trump’s election:¹²⁰

As the group's membership numbers continued to grow, its imprint on American politics grew, too—demonstrating the outsize impact a proportionally small group of committed organizers can have in a bleak political landscape, where most citizens don't see politics as part of their daily lives and most politicians are completely divorced from an organic and active working-class base.¹²¹

They inform their audience about the various successful campaigns that DSA has launched and the ways that DSA has been able to effectively demonstrate the mobilization of the working

¹²⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹²¹ Ibid., 66.

class. In doing so, they present DSA as the key modern example that democratic socialism can function in society. Since DSA has been able to succeed in viable ways, the hope is that readers will be more inclined to see the DSM has having potential on a broader level. In this way, this is another frame that presents the DSM as legitimate and rational to help gather additional support for the movement.

There are a couple of potential reasons that this frame is only prominent in Book 4. Once again, this book is heavily centered around the “movement building” frame, so it makes sense to highlight DSA as a concrete example of mobilization efforts around the DSM. Secondly, both authors identify themselves as members of DSA, so it is understandable that they have opted to place particular emphasis on an organization with which they are familiar¹²².

- **Book 5 – The Unique Frame Provided by the Compilation’s Contributing Authors**
 - **Intersectionality**

The singular frame that is particular to Book 5 is one that can be called the “intersectionality” frame. Intersectionality is a theoretical concept that argues points of oppression can overlap and have a compounded impact in shaping people’s lived experience. For instance, it acknowledges that factors such as people’s gender, race, and economic status should often be perceived together rather than independently, since that is how they are frequently experienced.¹²³ Through drawing connections between economics, politics, race, class, gender, and beyond, this frame demonstrates how democratic socialism recognizes that the issues with the status quo are highly complex and require structurally based solutions. The significance of

¹²² Ibid., loc. 104.

¹²³ Notably, intersectionality scholarship was pioneered by black women. It was specifically coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. For more information, see the following source: Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* (New York: The New Press, 2017).

this frame is that it portrays the DSM as a movement that will strategically dismantle systemic challenges to ensure meaningful rather than superficial changes in society.

Throughout the book, particular attention is devoted to the overlap between race and other identities. "Enduring racial inequities and the durability of racism as a driver and feature of our socioeconomic system demand that progressives recommit to, reimagine, and rebuild our policies of inclusion and true social justice."¹²⁴ Various authors in the compilation want to make it clear that there cannot be widespread prosperity if the links between race and the economic/political status quo are not addressed. Moreover, other factors with intersectional relevance are highlighted in addition to race:

That new left was not simply an outgrowth of economic conditions, however, nor did it define itself in narrowly economic terms. It was also inextricably intertwined with the contemporaneous explosion of left activism on issues of race, gender, sexual orientation and identity, and climate change and the very future of the planet...There is, after all, an intersectionality of subordination. Women, minorities, and workers face systemic discrimination that's at once social, economic, and existential.¹²⁵

In recognizing the complexity of societal challenges, the DSM and its supporters are portrayed as having an acute awareness about structural issues and how to address them. This frame demonstrates that the DSM contains people with the knowledge and experience to diligently help the American public. Thus, it encourages and reinforces support of the movement.

The likely reason this is the only book to prominently encompass this frame is due to the book's being an academic compilation. Intersectionality is a highly complex analytical framework more familiar in academia. As the other books tend to have target audiences among

¹²⁴ Hamilton, 62.

¹²⁵ Meyerson, 295.

everyday activists and the general public (maybe with the exception of the Gautney text given that she is a university professor), it is understandable that they do not incorporate analytical frameworks and theories into their analysis in the same way as Book 5.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have performed a discourse analysis on the internal framing of the democratic socialist movement. In examining five full-length books by pro-DSM activists and scholars, I both qualitatively and quantitatively discerned thirteen significant frames that are being employed in portrayals of democratic socialism by movement advocates. Through subsequent exploration of these frames, it became evident that there are a few notable ways that frames can be grouped: 1) as justifications as to why the DSM is rationally and morally deserving of support; 2) as conflict frames meant to juxtapose DSM with ideological and political rivals to substantiate its superiority; 3) as a call to action to encourage readers to mobilize so that the DSM can reach its full potential. These frames are important because the pro-DSM authors are utilizing them to attract new supporters to the movement, to reinforce the position of present supporters, and to keep the movement on a forward moving trajectory. The pro-movement literature serves to fortify the democratic socialist base and strengthen its position relative to other political players in the hopes that the DSM will have a meaningful impact on America's political landscape. In studying the framing techniques being employed in these texts, we can now better understand the mechanisms underlying the DSM's attempts to rally support and bring about social change.

There are numerous avenues for future research related to the framing of democratic socialism. The frames I have identified could be used in further studies of DSM literature, for example in shorter texts such as article-length movement coverage and opinion editorials.

It would also be worthwhile to examine framing techniques in anti-DSM literature to see the rhetorical tools being employed by authors on the other side of the political spectrum.

Additionally, it would be interesting to examine both pro-DSM and anti-DSM framing in other types of sources from political websites to magazines to social media applications. In this way, we could gather insight into how framing varies across the different mediums.

Another direction that future research could take is to examine the framing of democratic socialism over time. It could be interesting and relevant to examine how frames of the DSM shifted after the Trump presidency. Moreover, given that some people are starting to note that recent world developments like the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted the DSM, it would be valuable to analyze potential shifts in framing that have resulted in conjunction with these developments.¹²⁶ Finally, I think it could be worth generally trying to incorporate more quantitatively based studies of framing into research on democratic socialism. Even though I did a small amount of quantitative research for my thesis, there are several ways that scholars can take their quantitative research to a higher level with less room for error. For instance, researchers can use coding to analyze texts. Coding can help identify word frequency, create word clouds, and perform other tasks that have the potential to lend meaningful insight into further framing studies.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Elaine Godfrey, “Thousands of Americans Have Become Socialists Since March,” *The Atlantic*, The Atlantic Monthly Group, May 14, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/05/dsa-growing-during-coronavirus/611599/>.

¹²⁷ Kosuke Imai, “Chapter 5: Discovery,” in *Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 189-241.

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Appendix

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