

A Letter to New York Democrats

by Ken Granderson – Founder / CTO, <https://BlackFacts.com>

TLDR; (The “Too Long, Didn’t Read” a/k/a Short Version):

I am looking at the New York State Assembly primary results for Assembly District 56, and if the numbers I am seeing are accurate, I believe my candidate, Stefani Zinerman, is likely to lose to Eon Huntley.

I am not claiming that I can prove everything I am about to say. I am not accusing anyone of anything improper. I am not pretending that my gut feeling is evidence.

But I am saying that if my gut is accurate, then what we may be seeing is not simply one candidate beating another candidate. What we may be seeing is the traditional Democratic operation getting outmaneuvered by a political movement that is more disciplined in its messaging, more emotionally effective in its appeals, and very possibly much better at using technology and online community channels to move relatively small numbers of voters.

That is the part that concerns me.

Because when you are talking about a low-turnout primary, the numbers needed to change the outcome are not huge. When I am seeing vote totals in the range of several thousand votes, and I am in Bed-Stuy Facebook Groups and online community spaces with scores of thousands of members, it raises a serious question for me: are the traditional Democratic folks fighting a modern communications battle with an older playbook?

My concern is that DSA and DSA-adjacent campaigns may be combining three things very effectively:

1. Emotional messaging that hits people harder than facts and logic.
2. Message discipline, where supporters repeat the same talking points with striking consistency.
3. A digital communications game that may allow a small number of people who know EXACTLY what they are doing to reach and influence LARGE numbers of voters MUCH more efficiently than traditional field operations.

Again, I am not claiming proof. This is a hypothesis.

But if this hypothesis is even partly right, then the Democratic Party needs to understand it quickly, because this is not just about one Assembly race. This is about whether the old guard understands the communications environment it is actually operating in.

Now.



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The Long, Detailed Version:

I am looking at the New York State Assembly primary results, and from the numbers I am seeing, if those numbers are accurate, I believe that my candidate, Stefani Zinerman, is going to lose.

Now, interestingly enough, I actually spoke with her challenger earlier today. I found him to be a pleasant enough fellow. This is not personal. I do not have any interest in demonizing the man as a human being.

But I still believe actual knowledge of the domain should be a prerequisite for being seriously considered for certain kinds of public responsibility. If my car is broken, and someone comes up to me and says, “Hey, I am interested in fixing cars, let me fix your car,” I am not just handing them the keys. Interest is not the same thing as demonstrated competence.

If someone else says, “I have been working on cars for the past couple of years, I understand the systems, I know what to check, I know what to do when the first thing does not work,” that is a different conversation.

And politics, government, budgets, legislation, constituent services, coalition management - all of that is a complicated machine. People are angry at the political system, and they have every right to be angry. But being angry at the mechanic does not mean you should hand the car to someone who has not demonstrated they know how to fix it.

That is the core of what I am trying to get at.

What I Think May Be Happening

My concern is based on a few factors, including conversations I have had with DSA folks and DSA-aligned supporters.

What I have noticed is that multiple people seem to repeat the exact same talking points. Not similar ideas. The same talking points.

That suggests to me that this is not just independent thought bubbling up organically from different directions. It suggests discipline. It suggests rigor. It suggests a messaging operation where people are being trained, or at least strongly socialized, to say the same things in the same ways.

And to be fair, that kind of discipline can be very effective.

The traditional Democratic side, at least from what I have seen, often defaults to facts, logic, experience, résumé, policy detail, and institutional knowledge. Those things matter. I believe those things should matter.

But emotionally, that may not be enough.

Because if one side is appealing to facts and logic, and the other side is pushing emotional hot buttons, the emotional hot buttons often win. That does not mean the emotional argument is more accurate. It means it may be more powerful.

People do not always vote based on who has the better spreadsheet. People vote based on what story makes sense to them emotionally. They vote based on who seems to understand their pain. They vote based on who gives them a villain, a promise, a sense of belonging, and a feeling that their frustration has somewhere to go.

The “Left MAGA”

I know this is a spicy thing to say, but DSA sometimes feels to me like the Left MAGA.

I do not mean that in terms of policies. I am not saying the policy content is the same. I am talking about political mechanics.

What I mean is the emotional certainty. The simplified messaging. The us-versus-them framing. The repeated talking points. The sense that if you disagree, you are not just wrong, you are morally suspect. The way some supporters seem less interested in independent thinking than in repeating the movement line.

That is what feels a little bit MAGA and another bit cult-ish to me.

Again, I am not saying every individual person involved is like that. I am not saying people do not mean well. The DSA folks I have met clearly do. I believe they are responding to real problems, real pain, real housing pressure, real economic anxiety, real frustration with politics as usual.

But when I hear people saying the same emotionally loaded things over and over again, and not really engaging the complexity of governance, I get concerned.

Because that doesn't sound like politics. That sounds more like indoctrination.

The Messaging Problem

If you are fighting emotional hot buttons with facts and logic only, you are probably already behind.

I am not saying Democrats should become dishonest. I am not saying they should demonize people. I am not saying they should go low just because the other side goes low. I actually think it is important to hold the higher road as long as possible.

But holding the higher road does not mean refusing to understand how people actually make decisions.

The challenge is to create a counter-message that connects emotionally without becoming reckless or dishonest.

The ideal communication, in my mind, is not where you beat someone over the head with your conclusion. The ideal communication is where the person you are trying to reach arrives at the conclusion in their OWN mind.

A saying I heard many years ago:

“If **I** say it, they can doubt it.

If **THEY** say it, it's **TRUE**.”

Crafting messages that lead the viewer to resonate with your message on their own is usually not easy, but I think that should be the goal.

In a future incumbent / untested challenger race, the point would not just be, “Our candidate has more experience.” That is true, but it may not move people emotionally.

The better frame may be something closer to the car example.

If your car is broken, and you are angry because it has been broken for a long time, do you hand it to somebody because they are also angry about the car being broken? Or do you look for someone who has actually worked on cars?

That kind of framing lets the voter reach the conclusion themselves: frustration is valid, but frustration is not the same thing as qualification.

The Technology Problem

The bigger threat, to me, is not just the messaging. It is the possibility that they are deploying technology much better than the traditional Democratic operation.

When I look at the numbers I was seeing - roughly 7,978 votes for Eon Huntley and 5,120 for Stefani Zinerman at the point I was looking - those are not giant numbers in the context of the communities we are talking about.

I am in 2 Bed-Stuy Facebook groups with a combined 49,000 members. I am in larger Brooklyn-wide online spaces. My company BlackFacts has a Facebook group of 18,000 people that we never promote, and around 100K followers on various socials, and we're not that well known.

My point is: The numbers of people directly accessible via social media groups can easily be 10X the number needed to win a low-turnout race.

So if the DSA is really effectively leveraging technology - social media, group messaging, targeted outreach, feedback loops, content testing, whatever the tools are - then they may be able to run rings around traditional campaigns that may still be thinking mostly in terms of bodies, clipboards, palm cards, and election day visibility.

I am not saying the old methods do not matter. They do.

But if the other side has the old methods plus a superior digital communications game, then the old guard is not just being challenged. It is being outmaneuvered.

What 30 Years of Creating Technology Has Taught Me

I am looking at this partly through the lens of my own firsthand experience.

I have been creating online community and communication systems since 1996, and my creations have been read and watched by hundreds of millions of visitors to <https://BlackFacts.com> since 1997, connected scores of thousands in Boston in the 90s and 00s, and directly impacted hundreds of thousands using the Official Website of the Government of Saint Lucia (<https://govt.lc>) since 2014.

If you are curious about any of those projects or more, I touch on the highlights of my work in this 3½ minute video called “[Unapologetically Black Technology](#),” or you can just Google my name.

My point is - I know firsthand how even ONE person with the right technical understanding can have a MASSIVE impact - far beyond what people expect, unless they are on the production side of technology.

Traditional voter operations are often labor-proportional. If you want more output, you need more bodies. More canvassers. More phone bankers. More people standing outside. More people knocking on doors.

But technology **COMPLETELY** changes that equation.

One person who REALLY understands targeting, messaging, feedback, online communities, and digital distribution can potentially do the work of an entire team. Or at least can amplify the work of the people they already have.

That is what I worry the traditional Democratic side may not fully understand.

I have a funny feeling that a lot of people involved in the party do not really understand the level of sophistication behind what I am saying. They may think “digital” means posting on Facebook or sending emails.

That is not what I mean.

I mean understanding where people are already gathered online. Understanding what emotional stories are moving them. Understanding what messages are being repeated. Understanding what content gets shared. Understanding how to test and refine a narrative. Understanding how to move people from passive agreement to actual voting.

That is not the same thing as just having an active social media account.

What Tonight Feels Like To Me

Tonight’s non-success, if the numbers hold, feels to me like being outmaneuvered.

- Outmaneuvered emotionally.
- Outmaneuvered through disciplined messaging.
- Outmaneuvered through simplified but powerful narratives.
- And very likely outmaneuvered through a vastly superior digital communications game.

Again, I am NOT saying I can prove any of this. I cannot. But I AM saying is that this is what it looks like it could be, to me.

And if I am even partly right, then the lesson should not be reduced to “one candidate lost” or “one challenger won.” The lesson should be that the Democratic Party needs to understand how modern political persuasion is actually working at the neighborhood level, especially in low-turnout primaries.

Because if a disciplined movement can use emotional messaging plus digital targeting to move a few thousand voters, that can change local power.

And once people win local power, they become the new establishment.

What I Think Needs To Be Examined

I think Democratic Party folks need to study this without defensiveness.

Not dismiss it. Not mock it. Not assume voters are stupid. Not assume the answer is just more mailers or more endorsements or more elected officials standing together for a picture.

They need to ask:

- How are these messages being distributed?
- Where are voters actually hearing them?
- Which online spaces are shaping opinion before the campaign ever knocks on a door?
- Why are the same talking points showing up in different mouths?
- What emotional needs are these messages satisfying?

- Where is the traditional Democratic message failing to connect?
- Are we trying to answer emotional frustration with procedural competence?
- Are we assuming that experience speaks for itself when, in reality, experience has to be translated into a story people can feel?

And most importantly: who in the party actually understands the technology side deeply enough to see what is happening?

Because if nobody is asking those questions, then the same thing could keep happening over and over, and there would be no reason to expect a different result.

Final Thought

I am writing this as a gut-level analysis, not as formal proof.

I may be wrong about some of the details. The numbers may shift. There may be factors I am not seeing. There may be ground-game dynamics I do not know about.

But the pattern feels real enough to pay attention to.

My fear is that the traditional Democratic side is still trying to win arguments, while the other side is trying to win emotions.

And in modern politics, especially in low-turnout primaries, winning emotions may be enough to win power.

That is the thing I think people need to understand. Not tomorrow.

Now.



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See 30 Years of Advanced Tech
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