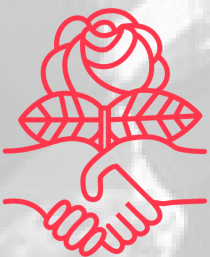




**2021**

**DSA  
Member Survey  
Report**

**Authored by the Growth & Development  
Committee Surveys Team**



## Methodology

The 2021 survey instrument was designed by the DSA Growth and Development Committee. The survey was launched in May 2021, and followed up with emails, text messages, mobilization of chapter leaders and Twitter reminders. By the end of August, 12,971 unique responses were received, representing approximately 14% of our roughly 95,000 members. This survey is a follow-up to 1991, 2013 and 2017 surveys of the DSA membership, which had 1718, 893 and 3240 respondents respectively.

As you're going through the report, please **keep in mind**:

While we can get actionable feedback from the people that reply (generally our most active members), we cannot make assumptions about people that did not respond. We can look at correlation but not causation. We can compare snapshots of attitudes and behaviors over time and most importantly, surveys can help us start a discussion!

For questions, email [training@dsacommittees.org](mailto:training@dsacommittees.org)

A large red graphic element in the bottom right corner of the page, consisting of several overlapping triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, abstract shape.

## Demographics

### Geographic and Regional representation

Almost all respondents (96%) live in areas with organized chapters.

More than half (57%) live in urban areas and only about 8% of respondents identifying as living in rural areas. Of responding members, 30% live in the South, 29% in the West, 26% in the Northeast, and 14% in the Midwest.

	Rural		Suburban		Urban	
	In a Chapter	At Large	In a Chapter	At Large	In a Chapter	At Large
Unknown	0	16	0	25	0	31
Midwest	165	73	671	20	924	16
Northeast	301	26	890	20	2168	10
South	239	68	1369	66	2079	34
West	219	54	1267	20	2143	15
Total	924	237	4197	151	7314	106

### Generational Transition

In 1991, the median age of respondents was about 50, and in 2013 the median age of the respondents had risen to 68. **The median age of both 2017 and 2021 respondents is 33.** Three quarters (73%) of 2021 respondents were born on or since 1980.

	1991	2013	2017	2021
Zoomers: 1997-2010	-	-	3%	13%
Millennial: 1980-1996	-	7%	59%	60%
X: 1965-1979	6%	10%	12%	12%
Boomers: 1946-1964	41%	40%	15%	12%
Silent: 1925-1945	27%	38%	11%	3%
GI: 1914-1924	27%	5%	1%	-

## Progress on Ethnic Diversity

In 1991 and 2013, more than 90% of respondents identified as non-Hispanic white (92% and 96%). In 2017 and 2021, less than 90% (89% and 85%) of respondents listed white as one of their ethnic identities, and in 2021, white as the sole identity was only 77%. By 2021, we see enormous growth in Hispanic (9%) and Asian or South Asian (5%) respondents. Even more encouraging is that younger cohorts are more ethnically diverse than the older cohorts, picking up many more Hispanic, Asian and multiethnic members. Our Black membership doubled from 2017 to 2021 but is still at only 4%.

	<b>1991</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2021</b>
White	92%	96%	89%	85%
Hispanic	1%	3%	7%	9%
Asian (E&S)	0.50%	1%	3%	5%
Black	1%	2%	2%	4%
Middle Eastern	-	-	2%	2%
Native American	2%	3%	1%	2%
Multi-Ethnic	-	6%	5%	9%
None/No Answer	3%	4%	2%	3%

## Growing Sex and Gender Diversity

Respondents in 2021 were significantly more diverse in gender and in sexuality than in previous surveys. This year, 64% identified as male, 27% as female, and 10% as non-binary or other. LGBTQIA+ membership has also tripled, from 10% in the previous two surveys to 18% in 2017, to 32% today. Identifying as LGBTQIA+, transgender or non-binary is strongly correlated with age.

## Majority are Workers

In 2013, more than half (54%) of respondents were retired, whereas now only 9% are retired and 75% are in paid employment. 6% of respondents indicated they were disabled or unemployed. A third of respondents are either a teacher, scholar, or academic, a private sector white-collar worker, or a tech worker. Military service is more common among older respondents than younger ones, and overall 5% of responding members have served.

	2013	2017	2021
teacher, scholar, academic	11%	12%	10%
white-collar	3%	21%	13%
tech worker	-	-	9%
non-profit organization	3%	7%	7%
public sector (fed, state, local)	4%	7%	7%
retail/food/other service sector	2%	5%	6%
health care or social work	-	3%	6%
self-employed	3%	5%	5%
blue-collar	2%	3%	4%
writer, performer, arts	3%	5%	4%
political org/ union	1%	3%	4%
unemployed, disabled, retired	67%	20%	15%
student	2%	9%	8%

## Union Membership

In 2013, 31% of respondents over 24 years of age and not retired belonged to unions. In 2017 that had declined to 20%, and **in 2021, 21% of members over 24 and not retired are current members of unions.** The occupations in which all respondents (including those under 25) were most likely to be unionized were school teachers (60%), political organization or union (51%), and the public sector (47%). Of all respondents, 3% are current union leaders and 2% are former leaders.

## **Most are College Graduates**

Six in ten of the (older) DSA respondents in 1991 and 2013 had a masters degree, doctorate or professional degree compared to only 35% today. Looking just at those respondents 25 years old or older, more than 80% have bachelors degrees, as in 2013 and 2017.

## **Household Income Roughly Reflects the US**


In both 2017 and 2021 the median household income among all respondents, and those 25-65 years old, was \$60- \$80K. In 2021 45% of respondents had household incomes below \$60K, and 28% of \$100K or more, roughly comparable to the United States.

## **Six in Ten Live in Cities**

Compared to the 2013 respondents, this survey's respondents are more concentrated in urban areas, 57% as opposed to 45%. This is related to our significant chapter expansion, most of which is based in urban areas. Younger cohorts are more likely to live in urban areas, until you get to the HS and college age cohort which is more likely to live in suburban areas.

## **Majority are Secular**

In 2017 and 2021, about 60% identified as agnostic/atheist, with the principal declines since 2013 in the proportion identifying as Jews, Christians and Unitarians. Younger cohorts are more secular.



## Political Identities Are Shifting, But Overlapping

The most popular political identity in 2021 was "democratic socialist," although it was only selected by 61% of respondents. Almost as many (58%) are OK with just "socialist." "Anti-racist" (54%) is now the third most popular identity. The proportion of DSA respondents identifying as "feminist" doubled from 19% to 42%, and half (48%) identify as "feminist/socialist-feminist." "Liberal" declined from 34% in 2013 to only 8%, "social democrat" declined from 32% to 16%, and "Democrat" declined from 39% to 9%.

	2013	2017	2021
Democratic Socialist	73%	76%	61%
Socialist	-	-	58%
Antiracist	39%	54%	56%
Feminist	19%	42%	41%
Marxist	-	-	38%
Progressive	56%	46%	38%
Ecosocialist	19%	24%	34%
Communist	-	-	27%
Socialist Feminist	16%	38%	25%
Radical	17%	30%	22%
Berniecrat	-	32%	19%
Green	32%	18%	19%
Revolutionary Socialist	9%	22%	17%
Social Democrat	32%	22%	16%
Anarchist	3%	11%	15%
Democrat	39%	18%	9%
Religious Socialist	11%	10%	8%
Liberal	34%	13%	8%
Market Socialist	10%	9%	8%

## Activism and Engagement

### Half Joined in 2020 or 2021

In both 1991 and 2013 half of the respondents had joined in the three years before the survey. Of the 2017 respondents four out of five (81%) had joined in the last year and a half. This year, since we have retained many of the members recruited since 2015, only half the respondents joined in the last year and a half.

### One-to-One Recruiting is Up

In 2013, half of respondents had joined DSA through direct mail solicitations, compared to less than 1% today. In 2021, 46% heard about DSA via the internet or finding us on social media, and 61% cited a desire to join a socialist organization or sympathy with DSA's ideology and priorities as their reason for joining. Today, 1 in 5 (21%) heard about DSA from a friend, co-worker or family member, and 11% attribute joining to an individual's encouragement/direct ask.

social media	34%
friend, family, or coworker	21%
internet search	11%
DSA activism, tabling or meeting	6%
via another organization	4%
pre-1995: NAM, DSOC, Harrington	2%
Bernie, AOC	2%
via YDSA	2%
non-left news stories	1%
direct mail	1%
left media (ITT, Jacobin, Dissent, etc)	1%

22% of respondents had been members of another socialist organization, as was true in 2017 (21%), and some of these recruits cited their desire for a new socialist home as a reason for joining.



## More than Half Have Engaged in DSA Activism

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents have attended a DSA meeting or have engaged in DSA activism, as in 2017 (65%), compared to only 23% and 25% in the 1991 and 2013 surveys respectively. 1 in 7 respondents are not attending local meetings or are not close to a chapter but have engaged in local/national study groups, campaigns, working groups or other activism. Also 57% say they are interested in becoming even more involved at the local or national level.

## Layers of Engagement

9 out of 10 respondents follow DSA on social media or read DSA emails. 6 in 10 respondents have attended a DSA meeting in the last year, and half are currently attending. 22% are current or former chapter leaders. Only 13% aren't interested in attending meetings, and only 1% of respondents do not plan to renew their dues.

read DSA emails	85%
follow DSA social media accounts	70%
attend chapter meetings	52%
organize with chapter WG/committee	34%
attend study group or poli ed event	32%
organize with chapter campaign or project	28%
attend training events hosted by chapter	20%
formal leadership role in my chapter	16%
attend national poli ed or training events	15%
organize through a national campaign	7%
organize with a national WG/committee	7%
formal leadership role in national body	2%
not involved at all	5%

## Giving to DSA is Up

More than half (54%) of respondents have given more than dues, spent personal funds, or bought merch. Respondents between 25 and 55 are more likely to have given more than dues to their local chapter, while those over 55 (and more affluent respondents) were more likely to have given more than dues to national DSA.

lifetime membership	1%
recurring dues payer	19%
renewing dues (monthly or lifetime)	85%
pay national dues	75%
contributions other than dues	53%
pay local dues	46%

## Sources of Information

Today, almost all of us turn to “online publications” for political information. Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitch and Discord are all sources more popular with younger respondents, while Facebook, print newspapers, books, magazines, radio and television are more popular among older respondents. Younger respondents also report learning more from conversations with family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

online publications	79%
twitter	53%
podcasts	48%
conversations (family, friends, neighbors)	48%
print	39%
YouTube	31%
Facebook	23%
radio	21%
conversations (colleagues, coworkers)	21%
Instagram	18%
TV	14%
conversations (union members, leaders)	12%
TikTok	7%

## Top Priorities: Green New Deal, Medicare For All and Labor

In 1991, the respondents' top priorities were poverty reduction, health care, peace/disarmament, and ecology. In 2013, the most popular priorities were poverty reduction, labor solidarity, defending Social Security/Medicare, and progressive taxation. In 2017, the top priorities were Medicare4All, electoral work, and labor solidarity. In 2021, the top priorities are dealing with climate change, Medicare for All, and labor solidarity.

	2013	2017	2021
ecology and climate change	15%	14%	40%
health care/ M4A	12%	47%	37%
labor solidarity	19%	25%	33%
defund the police/abolition	-	-	24%
anti-racism	4%	12%	22%
internationalism/anti-imperialism	1%	1%	17%
supporting candidates/electoral work	14%	27%	14%
poverty reduction	23%	14%	14%
housing/anti-foreclosure	1%	4%	14%
socialist education	16%	13%	12%
decarceration/prison industrial complex	4%	5%	12%
progressive taxation	17%	7%	8%
anti-cuts/austerity	11%	5%	8%
mutual aid	-	-	8%