



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on November 11, 2021

Progressives' New Strategy: Elect "Defund the Police" Radicals as Sheriffs

If the Left can't defund the police from the outside, they'll hollow it out from the inside.

One progressive activist's bid to unseat a longtime incumbent sheriff in Louisiana reveals a new strategy among the anti-police movement: Transform policing, not from the outside via legislators or district attorneys or judges, but by getting left-wing partisans elected to county law enforcement.

A piece over at [Politico](#) details the story of Susan Hutson, an "attorney with a background in activism" running against New Orleans Sheriff Marlin Gusman, who has held his seat since 2004 and faced criticism from prison-reform advocates.



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Politico notes that "In 2008, the jail ranked among the deadliest in the nation. The next year, the Justice Department issued a report on what it said were unconstitutional and dangerous conditions inside the jail. In 2012, Gusman was sued, and the jail was placed under a consent decree, subjecting it to federal monitoring until it can bring confinement conditions up to legal standards."

For over a decade, Hutson was the independent monitor for the New Orleans Police Department. In that role, she pushed for the types of programs she's now advocating for as a candidate. That includes restrictions on policing inspired by the death of George Floyd.

While there are currently three other candidates on the ballot, none of those are expected to win a significant share of the vote. The top two candidates from Saturday's nonpartisan primary will move on to a December election if no one wins more than 50 percent of ballots cast.

The election comes at a complicated time for the Defund the Police movement. Rising crime and the failure of federal attempts to overhaul policing have led to an atmosphere of stagnation.

And while the immediate impact of the George Floyd riots gave progressives some victories in electing district attorneys and some local police reforms, sheriffs offices present a unique challenge to left-wing activists. Whereas police chiefs in big cities can be appointed by liberal elected officials, sheriffs are elected at the county level. This makes for a broader electorate, and even in a relatively blue area this causes candidates to have to move to the center to appeal to conservative voters.

Moreover, the culture surrounding sheriffs has traditionally been a tough-on-crime one, which doesn't lend itself easily to calls for progressive reforms.

It remains to be seen how certain political conditions will affect the race: Both Gusman and Hutson are Democrats in a town where two-thirds of voters Democrat, although Gusman has the support of the local Democrat Party establishment. And both candidates are black.

While Gusman takes the traditional approach, Hutson casts herself as a reformer. Her persona certainly



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doesn't fit the mold of the typical sheriff candidate; she's never worked in law enforcement. Yet Hutson hopes this will help her in a city where left-wing activists have long called for more "racial justice" in the criminal-justice system.

Politico notes that the Left has in recent years made a concerted effort to win elections in those public offices that directly affect law enforcement:

For the past decade, criminal justice reformers have taken to the ballot box to elect progressive-minded prosecutors and judges who vow to reduce penalties — or dismiss charges altogether — for low-level crimes, avoid excessive sentences and right the injustices of the past by reviewing questionable cases. More than two dozen progressive-minded prosecutors have managed to win elections in that time, including Kim Foxx in Cook County, Illinois (home to Chicago); Rachael Rollins in Boston; Larry Krasner in Philadelphia; and Chesa Boudin in San Francisco. Although these prosecutors have faced challenges once in office, their elections alone signaled a change....

There have been recent successes, many related to immigration reforms. In 2016, after decades of organizing, Latino activists in Maricopa County, Arizona, ousted Joe Arpaio, the county's fiercely anti-immigrant sheriff. (Liberal megadonor George Soros contributed \$2 million to the effort, which probably helped.) In 2018, North Carolina voters elected a slate of reform-minded sheriffs in Mecklenburg, Durham and Wake counties, each of whom agreed to withdraw from a federal program that enables sheriffs to assist Immigration and Customs Enforcement in deporting jail inmates. And in 2020, Cobb County, Georgia, and Charleston County, South Carolina, both elected sheriffs who ran on reform platforms.

The author of the piece highlights some of the hurdles left-wing sheriffs have faced, which offers insight into how citizens can curb the power of such individuals if elected. For instance, Democrat Alex Villanueva, a progressive who was elected sheriff in Los Angeles in 2018, has continuously found himself fighting with the Civilian Oversight Commission, the county Board of Supervisors, and the district attorney.

Ultimately, the New Orleans race may determine whether the George Floyd protests merely unleashed transitory noise or whether "woke" sheriffs are the future.





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