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Democrats' Quandary: What To Do About Bernie?

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With Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) [stretching his lead](#) over former Vice President Joe Biden in the days heading into the Iowa caucuses, the Democrat Party's leadership is getting nervous. A poll by Iowa State University shows him leading Biden by nine points: 24 to 15, while Emerson reports Sanders ahead of Biden 30 to 21. The NY Times/Siena poll shows similar results: Sanders 25, Biden 17.



This is making key Democrat leaders nervous. Matt Bennett, vice president of the Democratic think tank Third Way, said, "We issued a warning a year ago that Sanders could win the nomination and would likely lose to Trump.... It's past time for Democrats to come off the sidelines.... We simply can't stand by while there's a threat that Democrats could nominate a guy who would hand such nuclear-level ammunition to the Trump campaign."

Part of Sanders' success is his appeal to the anti-establishment Left: those who feel disenfranchised by the party ever since it quashed Sanders' campaign against Hillary Clinton in 2016. As Michelle Goldberg noted in an op-ed at the *New York Times*: "He's running a campaign steeped in the ethos of an anti-establishment left, and benefiting from elite Democrats' failure to coalesce around someone else. He has an enormous online following, with legions of trolls intimidating Democrats who seem to stand in their way. An outsider who long refused to join the party whose nomination he's seeking, he appeals to people who distrust most political institutions, the mainstream media very much included."

In other words, the Democratic leadership is afraid that Sanders is taking a page out of Trump's campaign strategy handbook: Appeal to those who feel left out of the political conversation by the party leadership.

Sanders has extended his lead over Biden in New Hampshire as well, with the latest polls showing him ahead by eight points. If he wins both contests (Iowa's caucuses meet on Monday, February 3, while New Hampshire's caucuses meet a week later), he will have enormous momentum (with history on his side as well) for winning the Democrat Party's nomination for president this summer.

The problem facing the Democrat Party leadership is simple: Sanders has raised millions for his campaign from small donors in greater numbers than the other candidates — the same donors whose votes are needed to remove Trump in the general election. If the party succeeds in offending them again, that bloc is likely to stay home in November.

"The Democratic establishment is caught in a catch-22: Attack Sanders and risk galvanizing his supporters and turning him into a martyr of the far-left. Or leave him alone and watch him continue to



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gather momentum,” noted Natasha Korecki at *Politico*.

With Sanders as the Democrat Party nominee, not only will he likely lose to President Trump in the general election, he could cost the party dearly in downline contests. Said Democrat Tom Miller, Iowa’s Attorney General: “I think there’s a concern ... that if Bernie is the nominee he may well lose and take other Democrats down with him.”

Except for Sanders’ supporters, enthusiasm for the other Democrat contenders appears to be fading. CNN polling director Jennifer Agiesta said that “enthusiasm for voting in the 2020 election appears to have dipped a bit ... with the numbers declining by double digits among both Democrats and Republicans ... [but] the drop in deep enthusiasm was sharper among Democrats.” But, she added, “the current poll finds the most enthusiastic voters leaning in Trump’s direction in just about every matchup.”

Democrat Party insiders apparently have decided to risk alienating Sanders’ supporters, as the Party’s key voice, the *New York Times*, endorsed two of his opponents — Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar. Becket Adams, writing for the *Washington Examiner*, observed that “there is a push to flood newsrooms with as many anti-Sanders narratives as possible.”

Not only is such a move likely to be too late, it’s likely to be very costly come November. A surging Bernie would almost certainly be toast in the general election, where his socialist past will be endlessly and relentlessly exposed by President Trump.

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