

ELECTION 2020

Sanders Campaign Says Winning Democratic Nomination Requires New Voters

Vermont senator's team is focused on demographics that generally vote at lower rates than older, wealthier, white voters



Sen. Bernie Sanders has the most money in the Democratic field, \$33.7 million, and a passionate grass roots following. PHOTO: NATALIE KEYSSAR FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Eliza Collins

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Bernie Sanders's campaign manager says the Vermont senator will have a difficult time winning the Democratic nomination for president if the same people who typically vote in primaries show up at the polls.

Faiz Shakir, who runs Mr. Sanders's campaign, told The Wall Street Journal that the lawmaker's path to both the nomination and the presidency "is the most ambitious and the most difficult path of any candidate" because it relies on support from voters who haven't been active in the nominating process previously.

"It is undeniably true that for Bernie Sanders to win, he needs a mass mobilization of people who have not voted before," Mr. Shakir said.

The campaign is focused on turning out young, working-class and minority voters, demographics that generally vote at lower rates than older, wealthier, white voters. In some states, the campaign will have to convince those voters to register with the Democratic Party to participate in caucuses or primaries. To try to change the electorate, Mr. Sanders's team is relying on a new app to stay in touch with supporters and touting endorsements from young lawmakers of color.

Mr. Shakir said national and early state polls, virtually all of which show former Vice President Joe Biden and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren leading Mr. Sanders, don't take into account voters who don't typically show up for Democratic primaries.



Bernie Sanders's campaign said nearly 26,000 people showed up for a rally in Queens on Saturday. PHOTO: NATALIE KEYSSAR FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

"It's ambitious to expand the electorate, but that's what Bernie has always done," Jane Sanders, Mr. Sanders's wife, told the Journal. When Mr. Sanders was first elected mayor of Burlington, Vt. in 1981—by 10 votes—just over 9,000 people showed up at the polls. In 1983, when he was re-elected, more than 4,000 new voters participated. Mr. Sanders won by nearly 3,000 votes, according to records from the city of Burlington.

Mr. Sanders, considered a long shot when he first entered the 2016 race, came in just 0.3 percentage point behind former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the Iowa caucuses. He beat her by 22 percentage points in New Hampshire and came in 6 percentage points behind Mrs. Clinton in Nevada.

This time around, the Vermont senator has the most money in the field, \$33.7 million, and a passionate grass roots following. The campaign said nearly 26,000 people showed up for a rally in Queens on Saturday.

Mr. Sanders, at 78 years old, is also the oldest candidate running for president, and he is fighting questions about his health following a heart attack Oct. 1.

He seems to be losing ground in some polls. A USA Today/Suffolk University poll of Iowa released Monday showed South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg, along with Ms. Warren and Mr. Biden, ahead of Mr. Sanders with likely Democratic caucus-goers. Since 1972, the Democratic nominee has come in first, second or third in Iowa and first or second in New Hampshire.

Mr. Shakir said the team believes Mr. Sanders's numbers are depressed because pollsters are only contacting likely Democratic caucus-goers, often on landlines. Mr. Sanders pulls his strongest support from voters under age 50, a group that is less likely to be identified as a likely primary voter or use a landline.

Mr. Shakir said the campaign didn't expect to win South Carolina, the fourth state on the calendar, where polls usually show Mr. Biden leading by more than 20 points. But Mr. Shakir said the campaign will have a better showing than in 2016, when Mr. Sanders lost to Mrs. Clinton by 48 percentage points. A large portion of the South Carolina Democratic electorate is black, and Mr. Biden has the most support from African-American voters of anyone in the field.

In an attempt to engage voters, particularly young people, the Sanders campaign is emphasizing its "Bern" app, which uses a point system to reward supporters for engaging their community and for completing voter profiles. Once added to the app, the campaign can contact those voters and encourage them to give money or vote.

The campaign has a Latino outreach program that spans every early state, and has held specific events tailored to the Latino community in Iowa and California. (California holds its primary on March 3, a month after Iowa. But voters can begin mail-in voting the same day as Iowa.) Of the 542 paid staff on the campaign in the third quarter, at least 70 are Latino, according to the campaign. Three of the staff members who worked on Mr. Sanders's immigration policy are beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

And most recently, the Sanders campaign is touting endorsements from prominent progressives New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar, both young women of color. Aides hope the two lawmakers will further excite a diverse coalition of voters. Ms. Ocasio-Cortez is going to travel to Iowa soon to campaign for Mr. Sanders, Mr. Shakir said.

The pair are part of a foursome that have become the face of the progressive movement for their liberal policies and willingness to take on Republicans and members of their own party. One other member, Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, hasn't endorsed anyone but will be hosting a rally with Mr. Sanders Sunday in Detroit.

“Think about the visual,” Mr. Shakir said. “You have Ilhan Omar, a hijabi-wearing Somali Muslim ... You take Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Latina woman, 30 years old ... and you put them on stage, and you get a 78-year-old Jewish American man running for president surrounded by them. It tells you the story.”

“This is exactly how we’re going to transform America,” he said.

—*Chad Day contributed to this article.*

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