

Against Top-Down National Reorganization Plans

Affected Items

- CB 16: Democratic Regional Organizations and a National Organizing Council
 - Changes the rules for organizational forms between the national and local level to involve only regional organizations. The operating requirements for regional organizations place few limits on large chapter voting power and yet grant regional organizations broad authority to charter locals and determine local boundaries. In many ways, the current national decision-making structure is reproduced at a regional level under this proposal.
- CB 31: Regionally Elected National Organizing Committee
 - Shifts national decision making power from the NPC to a larger body, the National Organizing Committee, which encompasses the NPC but is mostly composed of representatives of “regions.” The exact scope of these regions is not fixed and there is no guaranteed representation for local chapters, yet it is granted broad powers.
- R 26: Creating the DSA Regional Coordinating Committee
 - Proposes an NPC-created central committee to place chapters into regional orgs within one year. This committee has the power, among other things, to write the model regional org constitution. This is a very powerful committee, whose appointment is left in the hands of the NPC, with a top-down approach to its task.

Why Is Build Opposing These?

- We listen to the Locals and uphold bottom-up organizing.
 - *Haven't we had enough of poorly conceived central committee decisions?*
 - We would need to have a lot of trust in the NPC to convene a fairly representative Regional Coordinating Committee for the results of R 26 to be desirable. It would have the power to set the stage for regional organizing with the basic constitution, and we know what happened the last time national proposed a standard constitution, [right?](#)
 - From the national to the regional level, these proposals drown out the concerns of smaller local chapters. The closest things to safeguards against large chapter dominance are:
 - In regional orgs, local chapters are guaranteed at least one delegate to Regional Conferences (the regional equivalent of National Conventions). No such luck on the NOC however: representation there is at-large per arbitrary “region” and chapters have no guaranteed representation.

questions. They envision regional orgs as eventually condensing to the state level, but there are no guarantees that this will happen. This leaves it unclear whether, for example, decisions on statewide policy or endorsements will actually be taken up by a state-level organization. Given the power of the NOC to rearrange regional organization borders, this presents some unsettling possibilities for manipulation of regional organizations. If we want statewide organizing, why remove an organizational process dedicated to that purpose?

- For the election of the NOC, CB 31 states that the electoral regions “will be determined by the NOC using as guidelines existing chartered Regional Organizations.” Guidelines, though, are not mandates. This presents the prospect of regional gerrymandering in DSA elections, with electoral regions drawn out of sync with the boundaries of Regional Organizations.
- While proponents of these proposals say that some regions may only contain small chapters, is there anything but the goodwill of whatever national committee is in charge to ensure this? Beyond the first NOC election (based on state boundaries), there is not. Again, we should actually put the structures in place that we want, rather than hoping that central committees get it right.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Concern:** I want to get to work on organizing at regional scale in DSA, and we need some reforms to make this easier!
 - **Answer:** Great! So do we, and we agree. Build has supported proposals for this purpose - CB 25 (State Organizations and Optional Regional Organizations) and CB 21 (Forming State & Regional Organizing Committees) - but these did not make the Convention agenda. If you want the opportunity to consider those, perhaps we should amend the agenda to make time for them?
 - **Answer:** Unfortunately, though, if this is the only reform on the table, we want you to consider the problems of instituting a very flawed reform. The most likely outcome from the kinds of structures these proposals would create, we believe, are top-down in conception and alienating to new and small chapters in practice. This would hardly be an improvement and we’d probably have to fix it in two years anyway.
- **Concern:** Isn’t basing decision-making authority on majoritarian representation more democratic?
 - **Answer:** Democracy happens when the people have power. But this prompts a question: The people of what? This matters because not all questions can be answered the same way in every context. Every democratic system must balance this tension between the will of the people in a particular area against the will of the people of an overall encompassing area in order to maintain the integrity of a larger system that contains diverse needs. Asking what the majority of people in some arbitrarily conceived area want and leaving it at that pays no attention to this tension.

- **Answer:** Putting this in less abstract terms, do DSA members identify more with their local chapters or with a hazily conceived-of “region”? What is the more relevant organizing context? Any system that has so much potential to create tension between local and “regional” concerns is untenable.
- **Answer:** In practical terms, if DSA wants to grow, it needs to start and maintain new chapters in new areas. A system where decision making can be controlled by larger established chapters gives the new and smaller chapters little incentive to participate in decision making when their voices may count for very little if anything.
- **Answer:** Even if we assume a purely majoritarian understanding of democratic authority, these proposals contain a strange lapse: they specify that regional organizations may be chartered with the consent of “both a majority of Locals and Locals representing a majority of members” in the region. However, why not just require “a majority of members in the region” instead? What do they hope to accomplish by continuing to use the local chapter as a basic decision-making unit while effectively granting special approval power to very large chapters? This seems to give a lot of power to elected chapter officers in practice.
- **Concern:** Hey, I read all that and it sounds like some kinda “state’s rights” thing...
 - **Answer:** The fact that right wingers have invoked particularist rhetoric in bad faith doesn’t mean the tension between the particular area and the encompassing area does not exist. All democratic systems need to manage that tension and balance concerns to maintain their integrity.
 - **Answer:** It’s worth drilling in on that “bad faith” aspect of right wing particularism: they only want to use that rhetoric to consolidate power for ulterior motives. The Confederacy did not allow states to secede from it, for example. Republican state governments regularly quash progressive municipal initiatives. For this comparison to have meaning, we’d need to assume some ulterior motive by those concerned about the lack of a local voice in DSA structures. What is it?
 - **Answer:** Finally, it’s worth noting that the DSA is not really comparable to a national government in this way. It’s a voluntary organization. Members who feel disconnected from decisions they have no voice in will eventually just drift away. Chapters that can’t keep an engaged membership due to the decisions of higher bodies overriding their concerns will either seek ways to remove themselves from those larger bodies or fade away. We want to avoid that.