

Radical Responses to Electoral Politics: Event Summary
GenderJUST
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It's a presidential election year! What's a radical to do other than decide to vote or not vote? Many radical groups avoid electoral politics, suspicious of giving a mandate to office holders who rarely share their transformative values. But sometimes we have no choice but to engage with politicians and politics, especially at the local level, in order to advocate for ourselves and our communities. How do we do this meaningfully without compromising our core values?

Gender JUST explored strategies for electoral politics based upon three starting points for radical engagement. 1) A refusal to engage or refusal to participate in electoral politics is a form of reclaiming stolen mandates; 2) The capacity of office holders to implement radical policies is not dependent on the extent to which they as individuals espouse radical values; 3) Not all elections are created equally - some elections and office holders are more available to accountability to marginalized values and communities than others. We explored these principles through discussion of historical examples such as the work of W.E.B. DuBois and recent local work, including the #ByeAnita campaign and BLM.

Significant points:

- Non-voting as a strategy can be in response to marginalization as an individual voter, such as that which De Buis describes as a black socialist at a time when the Socialist party participated in voter suppression in the south, or to marginalization of popular mandate through other interventions, such as gerrymandering or mass incarceration.
- Non-voting is not an either/or option, harm reduction can include voting on specific offices or legislation in the name of facilitating more radical projects.
- Radical direct action, such as BLM's highlighting of police violence, can serve as a bedrock for activating a broader electoral response against office holders implicated in systemic violence or engaged in marked abuse of their power of office.
- Not all votes are created equally - engaging with electoral politics in local or regional contexts, or in primary campaigns can create different opportunities for reclaiming mandate versus national offices or general elections.
- The #byeAnita campaign's efficacy was ultimately the result of a multi-generational organizing effort within the city of Chicago which was not focused on electoral politics, but was able to capitalize on the broader awareness of the general population about systemic violence to make a decisive intervention into the election of a state office. While this does not lend the campaign to easy replication, it does highlight the value of treating electoral politics as one tool among many.