

In college writings, Third District candidate Beej Das compared minority organizations to Nazis

By **Matt Stout** Globe Correspondent, June 9, 2018, 4:42 p.m.



Businessman Abhijit "Beej" Das during a April debate in Lowell between the Democratic candidates for the Third Congressional District seat. KEITH BEDFORD/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Abhijit "Beej" Das, a businessman vying to represent a congressional district where one of five residents are foreign-born, once denounced efforts to "make America bilingual," backed making English the country's official language, and compared student minority organizations to Nazis under the Third Reich.

Das, 44, espoused the controversial ideas as a writer and editor-in-chief of a student-run publication at Middlebury College in the mid-1990s, two decades before he launched his first political campaign for the Third Congressional District's open seat.

In a statement, his campaign said he no longer holds those views, and that Das, a hotel executive and self-described "dyed-in-the-wool" Democrat, has "evolved" since writing for the publication, known as "Symposium: Middlebury College Journal of Politics." As a candidate, he believes in offering residents better avenues to government services, including "language access," his campaign said.

"His views have grown based on real-life experiences," the statement reads.

But the comments, written in editions spanning nearly two years, could strike a chord in the Third District, where 18 percent of residents weren't born in the United States, and in its second-largest city of Lawrence, where Spanish is widely spoken among the 77 percent of its 80,000 residents who identify as Latino.

Das, who is himself the son of Indian immigrants, has touted his work for the journal as an early outlet for his interest in politics and where he "wrote about everything from Aristotle to anarchy," according to his website.

Left unsaid in campaign material, however, were his views then about bilingualism. In a piece entitled "Multiculturalism" and published in the fall of 1993, Das openly lamented what he called a "persistent movement that seeks to make America bilingual." He cites a push to consider Spanish as an alternate "official" language, and notes he's "even seen some bank ATMs which use Spanish as the default language."

"The movement overlooks the factor that language plays in national cohesion," he wrote, according to copies requested and obtained by the Globe from the school's archives.

"Lack of one strong common language threatens the unity of any state or nation; America is no exception."

Das also argued that minority student organizations were damaging efforts to integrate society, going as far as to draw a parallel to Nazi Germany.

"[T]he formation of exclusive groups which cater and are restricted to 'minorities' is as repulsive and counterproductive to our objectives as the Third Reich's belief that 'Aryans' were superior to non-Aryans," Das wrote.

Das expanded upon his ideas in the publication's spring 1995 edition, where he enthusiastically supported making English the country's "official" language. Without such a designation, he argued, it gives the "mistaken perception that American society is fully accessible to language minorities."

" 'Official English' seeks only to maintain a common language for government usage so that all Americans may communicate with each other," he wrote. "... Because our societies [sic] institutions are established and operate exclusively using English, other languages cannot be effective as primary ones within this country."

Das's campaign did not make him or anyone available for an on-the-record interview. In the statement, which it attributed to an unnamed strategist, it downplayed his writings, saying "our country has changed a lot in the decades since those articles were written."

"His experiences studying law, working in small businesses and as a part of this vibrant community that posits roots from many places, speaks various languages and represents many different people, has given him a true understanding of what makes this country great," the statement reads. "There's more that brings us together than separates us."

The idea of establishing English as the country's official language is decades old, and more than 30 states, [Massachusetts included](#), recognize it as such. (The state's Constitution holds that only those who can "read the constitution in the English language and write his name" are eligible for office.)

But efforts to expand it to the federal level have largely been led by conservative lawmakers. US Representative Steve King, an Iowa Republican and immigration hard-liner, has repeatedly filed bills to require all US government functions be conducted in English. Vice President Mike Pence also co-sponsored legislation to do the same when he was in Congress.

President Trump has not expressly backed such a measure, but his campaign drew attention earlier this year when it posted an online survey that included the question: "English is currently not recognized as the official language of the United States. Do you think it should be?"

The issue is often tied to revived debates over immigration but it can also be fueled by an undercurrent of "anti-Latino sentiment," said Dr. Wayne E. Wright, a professor of language and literacy at Purdue University.

"Debates about language are rarely about the language itself. It's about the people who speak it," said Wright, adding that several bills at the national level have run into resistance. "I think there's recognition on both sides that ... English is not endangered or in need of protection."

Before the revelations about his writings, Das was facing other headwinds as one of 10 Democrats running for the nomination to replace retiring US Representative Niki Tsongas.

Scott Ferson, a seasoned Democratic strategist and one of Das's top political advisers, recently decamped from the campaign, along with a number of staffers he hired, Das aides confirmed. Das's campaign said they "parted ways," but Ferson disputed that. He said he quit.

Das is also working to keep fund-raising pace with other candidates. As of late March, he had sunk more of his own money into the race — nearly \$284,000 in loans — than he's raised from individual donors.

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