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THE DEMOCRATS BEFORE THE MIDTERMS

A Movement to the Left?

By Moritz Wichmann

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The Democrats Before the Midterms

A Movement to the Left?

By Moritz Wichmann

Is there a “civil war”¹ in the Democratic Party, as some suggest, and is the party “rushing to the socialist left,”² as ex-FBI director James Comey warned in July? As with every bold and catchy narrative there is some truth to this, but only some. The world took note of a primary race in New York City, where Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, an outspoken member of the Democratic Socialists of America from the Bronx, won against an eleven-term incumbent who outspent her more than ten to one.

Ever since the primary loss of Senator Bernie Sanders, the “Bernie-would-have-won” faction and the Clinton Democrats face off from time to time. The last big challenge came in February when progressives contested the establishment over heading the Democratic National Committee, which in 2016 had sabotaged the Sanders campaign. Progressive candidate Keith Ellison lost the vote to establishment-backed Tom Perez with 235 to 200 votes. It was the first time the chairmanship of the committee was challenged since 1985. Then, however, in a move to ease tensions, Perez made Ellison his deputy chair. In turn, Ellison pledged his support for Perez. Tension rose high again in March this year when the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee published damaging opposition research on progressive Democrat Laura Moser. The publication occurred just before the primary in Texas’ 7th Congressional District. Simultaneously, the Democratic Party in California voted not to endorse longtime Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein as more progressive challenger Kevin de León called for a more dynamic agenda for the party.³

Meanwhile, there were stunning progressive upsets not only in liberal bastions like New York City, but also in the Republican heartland. In Kansas’ 4th Congressional District, for instance, James Thompson won the Democratic nomination. The same phenomena also happened in Nebraska’s 2nd Congressional District where Kara Eastman secured a win against a more conventional candidate. Political scientists point out that for every progressive upset in some primaries, more conventional or moderate Democrats won in others.

Now that primary season is over, this paper looks at the bigger picture. Instead of documenting instances of a “civil war” in the party, it tackles the following questions: How are progressives doing in general? How have they performed in the primaries? And how will they most likely be presented in the 116th Congress after the midterm elections on November 6? Related to this is the issue of whether Democrats are indeed moving left and if so, how far.

The data collected in this paper focuses on the House only as all House Congressional Districts hold elections whereas only 35 states hold elections for Senate. What is more, the playing field is stacked

1 www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/25/civil-war-raging-inside-democratic-party

2 twitter.com/Comey/status/1021132108381683712

3 www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/26/democratic-party-laura-moser-texas; www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/25/dianne-feinstein-loses-party-endorsement-kevin-de-leon

against Democrats in the Senate. One reason for this is that while Democrats have to defend 26 seats, Republicans only have to defend 9 seats. In addition, there is the problem of the overrepresentation of rural Midwestern conservative states like Wyoming, which has a total population of only 579,000 but two senators just like California with its 39.5 million residents. Put differently, “the 21 smallest states have the population of California but 42 Senators compared to California’s two.”⁴ The much bigger influence of rural conservative voters and the development of Senate control is worth studying on its own.

For similar reasons, this paper does not consider gubernatorial races where some progressives, like Abul Abu Sayed in Michigan, lost their primaries, while others, like Ben Jealous who became the Democratic nominee for Governor in Maryland, are well behind in the polls. In comparison, Florida’s progressive Democratic candidate for Governor, Andrew Gillum, is in a neck-to-neck race with his Republican opponent Ron de Santis. Finally, the paper also eclipses the ballot races in those states where progressives have won races and got elected to local school board seats and statewide to Lieutenant Governor. There are numerous indications that people across the country have heard the call, broadening and “anchoring”⁵ the continued leftward move of the party locally.

The narrative of Democrats moving to the left is pushed by those Republicans, who want to present Democrats as unelectable Socialists. They are not the only ones spreading this narrative, however. Some moderate or establishment Democrats also warn of a party becoming too left; these politicians try to present themselves as the reasonable center that stands up against a right-wing or extreme Trump-Republican party.⁶ At the same time, there is a long tradition of sectarianism on the far left; here, the cause for distrust of Democratic party politicians is the concern that they are “selling out.” However, as the development of the Democratic Party over the last 30 years as well as current data from the primaries show, none of these concerns are justified.

There is, of course, a long tradition of left-wing activism within the Democratic Party. The Bernie wing and other progressives who are “storming” the party these days are only the newest wave in a party that is slowly but continuously moving to the left, as political scientist Sam Rosenfeld has observed. Bernie Sanders pledged to help rebuild the party after the loss of the 2016 presidential election. During the Obama years, a loss of about 1,000 legislative seats occurred in all layers of government across the country. Bernie Sanders has been supporting progressive candidates ever since with “Our Revolution.” Other newly formed progressive organizations like the Justice Democrats are doing the same. However, this is not new. Rosenfeld points to “liberal institution” building that took place in the Bush era, especially concerning “media, advocacy, donor consortia, and policy development,” as well as “a notable shift toward both increased party discipline and a more ambitious national policy agenda.”

Since the 1950s, towards the end of the New Deal, when the Democratic Party governed the entire country as a tent-and-coalition party, activists have pushed the party slowly further left. As Rosenfeld writes, even though each “wave of activism and insurgency within the Democratic Party has eventually crested and receded, the impact on the party’s makeup, agenda, and behavior has

4 archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/03/11/us/politics/small-state-advantage.html; andrewgelman.com/2004/10/15/overrepresentat; www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/03/11/if-youre-from-california-you-should-hate-the-senate/?utm_term=.368671f5f870

5 theintercept.com/2018/09/15/jess-king-pennsylvania-lancaster-stands-up

6 www.nytimes.com/2018/07/23/opinion/democratic-party-progressive-left-midterm-elections.html

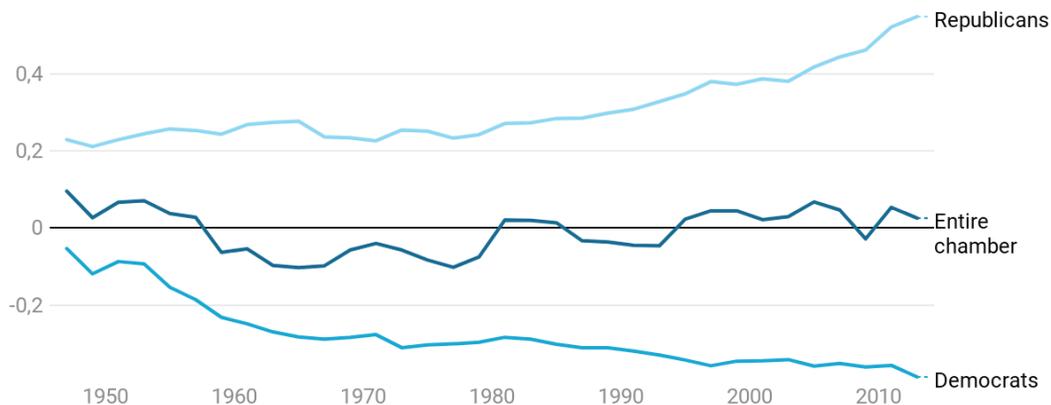
been cumulative — and powerful. Look at the party today: Staunch conservatives are now extinct within it.”⁷

Data For Progress founder Sean McElwee argues that “the election of Obama in 2008 sealed the end of the ‘centrist Democrat’ era, and the 2016 primary showed this reality.” For McElwee, this is “a Democratic party united in opposition to Trump, and in closer alignment on issues like abortion, health care, and climate change.”⁸ The Poole-Rosenthal score about ideology confirms this, and it shows the Democrats’ slow but constant move to the left over the last decades. Republicans in contrast have moved considerably faster to the right since the end of the 1970s.⁹

Historian David Greenberg has also pointed out that very few moderate Democrats remain in national office today. In addition, while the “Clinton blend of liberal and centrist approaches held for a quarter of a century,” its support eroded among voters and the base when Democrats voted for the Iraq War and the bail-out of banks—but not of people—during the 2008 financial crisis. With a fierce rebellion erupting in 2016, Greenberg describes the new fault line in the party as between liberals portrayed as centrists on one side and insurgent leftists on the other.¹⁰

Since the 70s Republicans have moved to the right considerably, the Democrats moved left, but slower

Average ideological positions of House party coalitions 1947 - 2014. A positive score denotes a conservative ideology, while a negative score denotes a liberal one.



Source: Keith Poole/Howard Rosenthal/voteview.com/brooking.com

Daten herunterladen · Erstellt mit Datawrapper

This paper provides evidence that supports the theses put forward by Rosenberg and, to some extent, also by Greenberg. Polling data show that the U.S. as a whole, and the Democratic base in particular, is becoming more liberal. Progressive policy ideas like a 15 dollar minimum wage or Medicare-for-all,

7 www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2018/6/22/17490410/democratic-party-sanders-left-liberal-interparty-fights-sanders-socialism-clintonism

8 theoutline.com/post/2568/the-democratic-party-is-fine?zd=1&zi=2xzxl7

9 www.brookings.edu/interactives/average-ideology-of-the-house-and-senate-1947-2014/

10 www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/08/16/the-lefts-misleading-attacks-on-liberal-Democrats/?utm_term=.d29dc403d60d

for example, are fairly popular among the general public as well as among Democratic voters. The outcomes of this year's Democratic primaries show that whereas the Republican party is becoming more of a party of and for white males who seek to defend their privileges and prejudices, the Democratic Party's candidates and nominees are approaching the full representation of the diversity of the U.S. population.

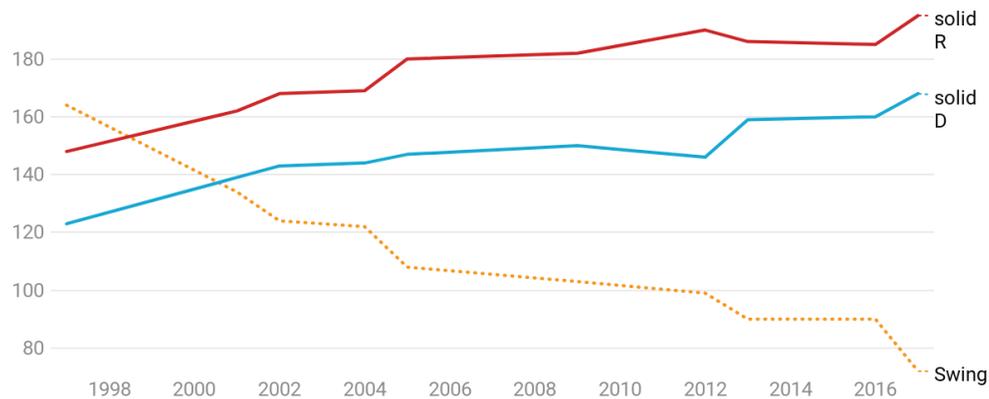
In addition, the available data suggests an underrepresentation of progressives among elected House Democrats; while the total number of progressives in the House will likely increase, the share of all Democrats might not. To go beyond the at times "false dichotomy" of progressive vs. establishment ideas: An analysis of the support for Medicare-for-all, which is this year's key campaign theme, shows that while single-payer health care is still mostly ardently supported by progressives, some moderates support it too. This indicates that the party continues to move to the left, if ever so slightly. The support among elected House members for Medicare will likely grow, further transforming the party on this important issue to become a "vehicle for social democracy."¹¹

Democrats In An Increasingly Divided Country

Over the last few years, the U.S. has become increasingly polarized. One way to research this is to look at the partisan divide in each congressional district. The independent Cook Political Report calculates the Cook Partisan Voting Index (PVI) with the votes cast in the last two presidential/national elections in a district comparing them to the national average.¹² It shows a country that is still

The ever shrinking swing seat: In 2017/2018 there are only 72 congressional districts that are competitive

Congressional districts with a Cook Partisan Voter Index (PVI) of less than R+/D+5 (swing seats) vs. the numbers of districts who are solid Republican (PVI of R+5 or greater) or solid Democrat (PVI D+5 or greater)



Quelle: Cook Political Report • [Daten herunterladen](#) • [Erstellt mit Datawrapper](#)

¹¹ www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2018/6/22/17490410/democratic-party-sanders-left-liberal-interparty-fights-sanders-socialism-clintonism

¹² www.cookpolitical.com/introducing-2017-cook-political-report-partisan-voter-index

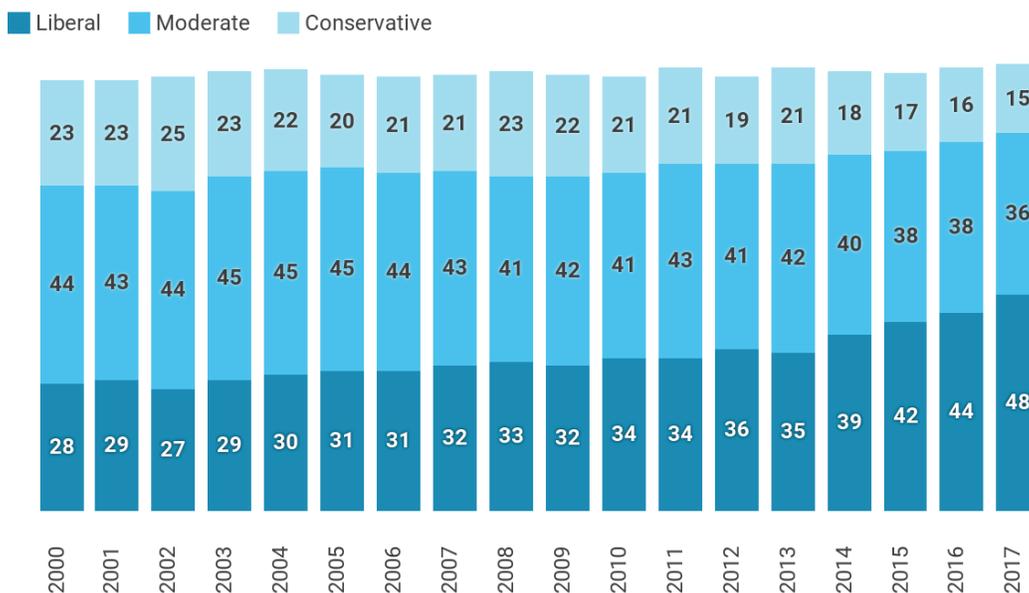
rather conservative: Since 1997, there were more solid Republican districts in the country than solid Democratic ones with a PVI of R+5 or one of D+5 or more, respectively. It also suggests an increasing polarization as the number of solid Republican seats has increased to 195 in this election cycle while solid Democratic seats total 168. Meanwhile, the number of swing seats has more than halved since 1997 to only 72 this year. The biggest factor in this is not actually redistricting but geographic self-sorting, which means that Democrats tend to move to Democratic areas and Republicans flock to already conservative districts.

While the number of voters who identify as Republican or Democrat has more or less been unchanged in recent years, it looks as if the U.S. is becoming more moderate and liberal overall. Data from repeated Gallup surveys show that the number of people who describe their views as conservative has been more or less unchanged since 1992, with 35 percent still giving this answer in 2017. However, the number of Democrats identifying themselves as liberals has gone up from 17 percent in the Clinton year of 1992 to 26 percent last year, thus reducing the “conservative lead” to single digits.¹³

Corresponding to this is a move to the left among Democrats and those who lean towards the party. Whereas, according to Pew Research, only 28 percent in this group self-identified as liberal in 2000,

48 percent in 2016: Democrats increasingly describe themselves as liberal

Percentage of Democratic and Democratic-leaning registered voters who describe themselves as...



Yearly aggregates

Grafik: Moritz Wichmann • Quelle: PEW Research Center • [Daten herunterladen](#) • [Erstellt mit Datawrapper](#)

¹³ news.gallup.com/poll/225074/conservative-lead-ideology-down-single-digits.aspx

this figure stood at 48 percent in 2018. The share of moderate Democrats has dropped from 44 to 36 percent and that of conservative Democrats from 23 to 15 percent. In both cases—whether it concerns being conservative or liberal in general or as a democrat—this change is driven by millennials, who are more liberal than older generations.¹⁴ And the change is real: While some moderate Democrats are leaving the party to become independents, the Democrats are becoming more liberal while the percentage of Americans identifying as Democratic only fell 5 percentage points from 2000 to 2017.

Based on the answers given to two big ideological questions that opinion researchers ask the American public each year, the U.S. is becoming more progressive too. Data from Gallup on positive views on capitalism and socialism shows a change of view. In contrast, the answers provided by Republicans and Republican-leaning respondents have been more or less stable. Less than 20 percent have a positive view of socialism while more than 70 percent have a positive outlook on capitalism.

This is very different for Democrats as well as those who lean towards the party. The Bernie Sanders campaign has made a real impact here: Since the beginning of his campaign, the share of Democrats with positive views on socialism has jumped from 53 to 58 percent in 2016, and it has remained there ever since. Simultaneously, the positive view on capitalism has further eroded: Two years ago, 56 percent of those who lean towards or identify as Democrats held positive views on capitalism. This year, the number dropped to only 47 percent. The change was driven particularly by the younger generation. Progressives like journalist Sarah Jones from the New Republic have noted how this “reveals a need for democratic socialists to educate voters. The decline in support for capitalism didn’t correlate to increased support for socialism overall.”¹⁵

Americans Are Pretty Liberal

When Barack Obama began his national political career in 2004, he did so with an appeal to all Americans, rhetorically denying the existence of a black or white America. During much of his presidency, he managed to avoid the topic of race relations, or he spoke about it very cautiously, as he knew he might lose white voters if he was too critical. While the right-wing and white (or white supremacist) backlash against Obama’s presidency has been much discussed, another effect that his presidency had for the country is less talked about: the increased racial liberalism among Democrats.

Data from the General Social Survey on racial inequality shows that, for the first time since 1977, a 54 percent majority of white Democrats now believe that discrimination—and not a lack of individual willpower—is the cause of racial inequality. Other polls collected by Data For Progress confirms the finding: a leftward shift of racial attitudes among white Democrats between 2011 and 2016. It seems that Black Lives Matter and other anti-racist protests clearly had an effect. For Data For Progress founder Sean McElwee this means that Democratic politicians are “being held to an increasingly stringent standard on racial equity.”¹⁶

¹⁴ www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/07/democratic-voters-are-increasingly-likely-to-call-their-views-liberal/

¹⁵ www.commondreams.org/news/2018/08/13/change-gonna-come-poll-shows-democratic-voters-socialism-more-capitalism

¹⁶ www.nytimes.com/2018/05/23/opinion/Democrats-race.html

A majority of Americans support progressive policies

Support for key progressive policy ideas



Grafik: Moritz Wichmann • Quelle: Data For Progress/American National Election Studies • [Daten herunterladen](#) • [Erstellt mit Datawrapper](#)

A report by Data For Progress commissioned by Justice Democrats, a progressive group founded in 2017, analyzed polling data and found that both the party base and the general electorate have moved leftward on key progressive policies that were once deemed (and often still are portrayed as) “over-the-horizon” by centrist Democrats. The report also shows that Democratic politicians tend to overestimate the conservatism of their base and voters. Data from the 2016 American National Election Studies shows that a majority of the American public nationwide supports a pathway to citizenship for immigrants, an increase in infrastructure spending, the legalization of Marijuana, a financial transaction tax, the end of mandatory minimum sentencing for offenders, a 15 Dollar minimum wage, and Medicare-for-all.

In addition, the Data For Progress researchers point to a study by political scientist Seth Hill that shows that swing “voters contribute on average 4.1 percentage points to change in party vote shares, while change in turnout influences outcomes by 8.6 points.”¹⁷ Therefore, they argue, instead of appealing to the few mythical “milquetoast” swing voters, Democrats should increase turnout. As part of this, the researchers also argue for turning out nonvoters as a majority among them support the aforementioned policies.¹⁸

Newer data from this year also shows that, compared to 2016, support for key midterm campaign themes—such as a minimum wage increase and Medicare-for-all—has gone up in both parties as well as among the general population. According to a poll by the National Restaurant Association from April of this year, 71 percent of Americans support a 15 Dollar minimum wage while 70 percent support Medicare-for-all, as a Reuters poll from August of this year suggests.¹⁹ Party-wise, Medicare-for-all is now supported by 85 percent of Democrats and even by 52 percent of Republicans.

A YouGov survey commissioned by Data For Progress shows that even “bolder” progressive policy proposals, which are less polled by big media organizations or think tanks, have the support of a majority of Americans. For example, 55 percent of Americans support a federal jobs guarantee program—an

¹⁷ Hill (2017): Changing Votes or Changing Voters? How Candidates and Election Context Swing Voters and Mobilize the Base, in: Electoral Studies, June 2017, www.sethjhill.com/SJH_CandidatesAndContext.pdf

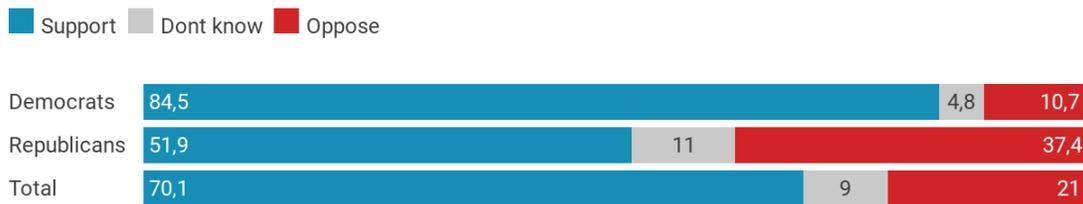
¹⁸ billmoyers.com/story/progressives-new-silent-majority; www.futureoftheparty.com/

¹⁹ theintercept.com/2018/04/17/the-restaurant-industry-ran-a-private-poll-on-the-minimum-wage-it-did-not-go-well-for-them; www.cnbc.com/2018/08/28/most-americans-now-support-medicare-for-all-and-free-college-tuition.html

idea proposed by Bernie Sanders and several progressive congressional nominees, including Ocasio-Cortez.²⁰ Another 56 percent is for a public option for the internet that would come with the creation of publicly owned internet providers.²¹ This idea, which has been pushed forward by some progressive Democrats, is not only supported in urban and suburban areas. It is particularly popular in rural areas that are burdened by a lack of choice for internet providers or a lack of fast internet.

Even Republicans like Medicare for all now

Would you support the following when it comes to the US healthcare system. A Medicare for all policy? (in percent)



Grafik: Moritz Wichmann • Quelle: [Reuters/Ipsos](#) • [Daten herunterladen](#) • [Erstellt mit Datawrapper](#)

Polls on other issues suggest a similarly liberal attitude among many Americans: In a country with high costs for prescription and other drugs, 51 percent of the population supports the creation of generic versions of life-saving drugs. Another 46 percent support ending cash bail, which is significant considering that on any given day 65 percent of the U.S. population are held in local jails simply because they cannot afford the median sum of 10.000 U.S. dollars bail for felony arrests.²²

Even more far-reaching progressive ideas concern a 90 percent millionaire tax, which receives a net support of one percent among working class people of color and college educated people of color respectively. The net support among white working class and white college educated respondents for taxing all income above one million US dollar with a 90 percent tax rate is minus five and minus two percent. While a universal basic income is more popular with people of color, who give it a ten to 17 percent net approval, it also receives a slight positive net approval of two percent among working class whites. Only college educated whites reject the proposal with a net support of minus 26 percent. The report notes that the seemingly small net support that these “bold” left-wing ideas receive is still bigger than the net support for the tax cut passed by Republicans, which stands at minus seven percent, and the failed effort to repeal “Obamacare,” which has a negative 24 percent net support nationwide.²³

In sum, the United States is a structurally conservative nation. However, as it is becoming increasingly polarized, this also means that the country is becoming more progressive. This is true on a very fundamental level as more Americans and Democrats identify themselves as liberal. The latter group in particular is not only growing more racially liberal as well, but the support for capitalism is eroding amongst it too. As Americans are increasingly open to key progressive ideas when it comes to policy changes, this only highlights the need for politicians to enact those policies.

²⁰ [ocasio2018.com/issues; www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/us/politics/Democrats-guaranteed-jobs.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/us/politics/Democrats-guaranteed-jobs.html)

²¹ newrepublic.com/article/148330/public-option-internet; theweek.com/articles/647871/america-needs-public-option-internet

²² www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/30/abolish-bail-bonds-cash-bail

²³ www.dataforprogress.org/polling-the-left-agenda

Approaching Full Representation

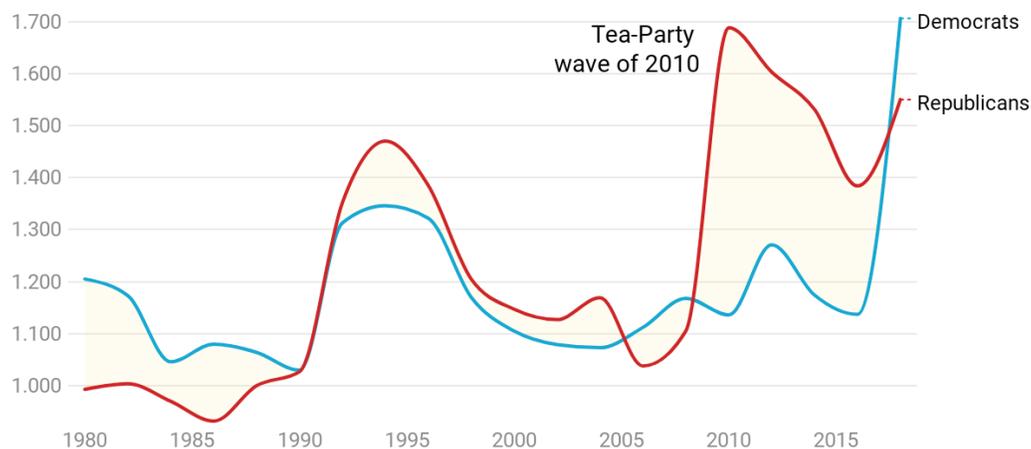
The politicians that are emerging among Democrats in this year's primaries break several records. The election of U.S. President Donald Trump has provoked an intense Democratic backlash. Data compiled by FiveThirtyEight shows that, as early as June 2017, a record number of 209 candidates, who were challenging sitting House members, had raised more than 5.000 U.S. dollars. In the election cycles dating back to 2004, this number had hovered below 50 in most years for both Democrats and Republicans.²⁴ The 209 candidates had a year to raise their name recognition and run their campaigns.

Axios assembled Federal Election Commission data, which shows that by April 2018 the number of Democratic candidates that had filed to run for the House stood at 1415—the highest number since 1990. This is more than the Republican record of candidates in 2010. Back then, a wave of 1406 candidates filing resulted in the Tea Party wave election that provided Republicans with a gain of 63 seats in a conservative backlash against Obama.²⁵ By August, the researchers from Brookings midterms project put the tally of Democratic candidates at 1900.²⁶

Part of that spike of candidates is what observers have called the pink wave, with a total of 475 women candidates. The majority of them (356 candidates) are Democratic women, who filed to run for the House this year. The “year of the woman,” as it was dubbed by media after the figures were reported, set a new record. It shattered the one of 2016, when a total of 120 Democratic women ran for the House.

A record number of 1706 Democratic candidates in the 2018 midterm election shows Democratic enthusiasm

Number of candidates for US Congress who have raised money and filed reports with the Federal Election Commission



Grafik: Moritz Wichmann • Quelle: Axios/Federal Election Commission • Daten herunterladen • Erstellt mit Datawrapper

²⁴ fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-sheer-number-of-Democrats-running-for-congress-is-a-good-sign-for-the-party

²⁵ www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/06/us/surge-in-democratic-candidates-for-the-house.html

²⁶ This number includes candidates for Senate, however.

www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/08/09/progressives-versus-the-establishment-an-updated-score/

This year, the win rate of democratic candidates running for the House was better than those of the even more numerous male candidate. Whereas they represented 33 percent of all candidates before primary season, they now represent 43 percent of all nominees with 183 female Democratic nominees. This means that while the Republican Party is getting even more male-dominated, with only 13 percent of all House Republican nominees being female, Democratic women are approaching full representation. Based on a Cook Political Report rating, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University currently evaluates 73 Democratic women as favored to win their House races and it places a further 12 in House races that are deemed a tossup.

However, more female than male candidates are running as challengers to incumbents, which reduces their chances to get elected, as CAWP-researcher Kelly Ditmar notes. Several women are poised to make historic gains: Democrat Deb Haaland is likely to be the first Native American woman in Congress, Jahana Hayes and progressive Ayana Pressly are poised to be the first female House delegates from Massachusetts, and four Latina women from Texas are favored to win their races on November 6 making them the first Latinas from the Lone Star state in congress.²⁷

Given the favorable climate for Democrats this year, it is very possible that a lot of women in the 12 tossup races will win. If all would win and the Democrats will not gain any seats but merely defend their current 193 seats, 44 percent of Democrats in the House of Representatives will be female. However, it is more likely that Democrats will gain about 20 to 30 seats overall. That would bring female representation among Democrats in the House down to 40 or 38 percent. Their share currently sits at 33 percent of all Democrats in the House. Currently, white males make up close to 40 percent of all Democrats in Congress, as data compiled by lobbying firm Mehlman Castagnetti Rosen & Thomas shows. That means that it is possible for women to surpass white male candidates and become the biggest group among Democratic House delegates.²⁸

Data from Rutgers University shows that female Democratic candidates are almost representative of the ethnographic make-up of the female U.S. population. This means that 63 to 62 percent of candidates are white women, black women are overrepresented with 19 to 13 percent, and Latina women are starkly underrepresented with 8 percent compared to 17 percent Latinas among the female U.S. population overall. As a result, in the composition of their likely female delegation Democrats are looking more and more like an America that is becoming “minority majority”—that is, dominated by a plurality of minorities.

And Democrats in the House are likely to become even more diverse with advocates hoping for a rainbow wave. While data from Gallup shows that in 2017 close to five percent of the U.S. population identified as LGBTQI, currently only six House members—five gay men and one bisexual woman, all of them Democrats—identify as LGBTQ. This is only little more than one percent of members of Congress. According to data compiled by the Victory Fund, 430 LGBTQ candidates filed to run for office at every level of government this election cycle. Of these, 244 candidates won their primaries.

In addition, 19 LGBTQ candidates are on the ballot for Democrats in November, with most of them being LGBTQ women. If all of them win their race, this would help achieve LGBTQ people a representation of slightly over four percent among House Democrats, which mirrors their share in the general

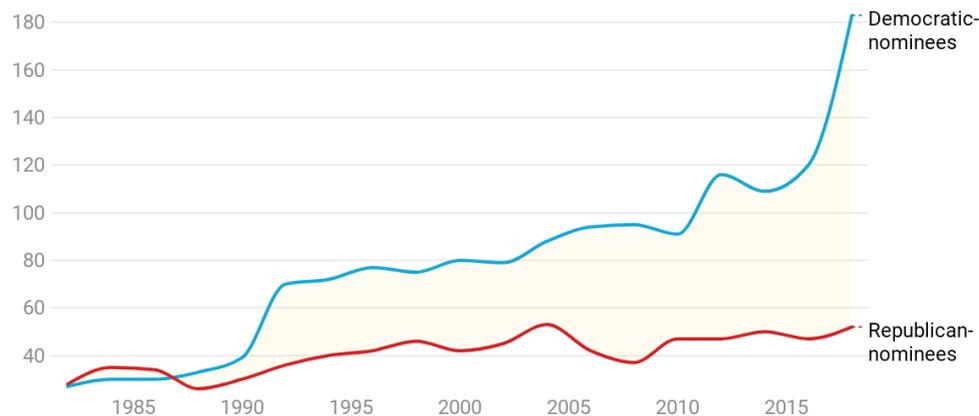
²⁷ cawp.rutgers.edu/congressional-candidates-summary-2018

²⁸ thehill.com/homenews/house/398519-house-Democrats-may-soon-have-more-women-lawmakers-than-white-men

population. Whereas Democrats are approaching LGBTQ representation similar to female representation, the Victory Fund data shows that Republicans are regressing to become a more heterosexual male party. This year, and for the first time since 2010, there are zero known Republican House candidates who identify as LGBTQ.²⁹

The year of the woman: A record number of 183 Democratic nominees is widening the Gender gap

Total number of nominees for the US House of Representatives in the Democratic and Republican Party by year



Grafik: Moritz Wichmann • Quelle: [Center for American Women and Politics/Rutgers University](#) • [Daten herunterladen](#)
• [Erstellt mit Datawrapper](#)

Currently, the black caucus has 47 Democratic House members; there is only one member of the black caucus, Mia Love from Utah, who is Republican. This means that although the share of black people in the U.S. according to Census figures ranges at 13 percent, the black members of the House make up only eleven percent. In addition, more than half of the black caucus is male.³⁰ “Less than 20 seats in the House of Representatives were held by black women, while a single black woman, Kamala Harris (D-CA), serves in the Senate. Collectively, black women made up just 3.6 percent of Congress.”³¹ A list of black female candidates and nominees shows that this year black women can hope for gains—and quite some of them are progressive.³²

Progressive Democratic House Candidates and Nominees

But what about the representation of the left in the party? Elaine Kamarck from the midterms project at the Brookings Institute—herself a rather centrist Democrat—speaks of an “enormous outpouring

²⁹ victoryfund.org/rainbowwave2018/36b1in21z14j14tff374sjh-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/01/ResearchBrief_RainbowWaveByTheNumbers_091918.pdf; www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/us/politics/gay-candidates-midterms.html

³⁰ ballotpedia.org/Congressional_Black_Caucus

³¹ www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/5/17823582/ayanna-pressley-massachusetts-black-women-voters-2018-midterm-elections

³² database.blackwomeninpolitics.com/candidate/custom?q=federal; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/us/politics/minority-candidates.html>; <https://newrepublic.com/article/151619/fearless-rise-black-southern-progressive>

of energy on the left.”³³ Since 2014, she has been tracking the development of the party in the primaries. While there were 60 progressive, non-incumbent candidates four years ago, who entered the political arena through the primaries of the parties, and 24 who advanced to a runoff election two years later in 2016, there were already 97 self-identified progressive candidates who were not already House members. Of the latter, 31 advanced to face a Republican candidate in the election. The share of progressive candidates compared to moderate or “other” Democrats, who could not be classified, increased from 17 percent to 26 percent.

As of July 12 of this year, looking at the 31 states that already held primaries, there were 280 progressive, non-incumbent candidates, who spared with moderate Democrats. This brought their share to 41 percent of all candidates. Kamarck sums up the win rate of progressives in Democratic primaries as “good but not great” and as “respectable but not overwhelming.” Expressed in numbers, this means that 101 progressive, non-incumbent Democrats won their primaries while 139 establishment Democrats advanced to the general elections. This puts the win rate of the first group at 27 percent and of the latter at 34 percent.

Kamarck notes that for “every stunning progressive upset there are victories of more conventional Democratic candidates,” who did “somewhat better.” The Brookings researcher also notes that it is unlikely that the Democratic caucus will be pulled to the left in substantial ways, because establishment or moderate Democrats tend to run in districts who already lean towards Democrats or are only slightly Republican. In contrast, progressives tend to run in districts with a partisan score that is more Republican and are thus facing an “uphill battle.” Kamarck predicts that despite leftist enthusiasm and many progressive candidates progressives will remain a minority among House Democrats.³⁴

While this is exactly where we are at today, progressives in the party are a minority that might grow. What is more, progressives are increasingly better organized within the Democratic Party since 1991, when the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) was founded. Currently, the caucus, which includes one U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, has 78 members, which means that its share among House Democrats is at 40 percent.³⁵

For different reasons, seven members of the caucus are not running for re-election. Some are retiring after a long political career like Carol Shea-Porter in New Hampshire’s 1st Congressional District or Luis Gutiérrez from Illinois’ 4th Congressional District. While the first one is a true swing district that has changed hands a few times in recent history, the second is solidly democratic with a Cook PVI of D+33. Keith Ellison from Minnesota’s 5th Congressional District and Jared Polis from Colorado’s 2nd Congressional District are running for higher office—the former for Attorney General in Minnesota, the latter for Governor of Colorado; the same goes for Rick Nolan from Minnesota’s 8th Congressional District, who unsuccessfully ran for Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota. Ruben Kihuen from Nevada’s 3rd Congressional District, already vulnerable because his district has a Cook PVI of only D+3, decided not to run again after allegations of sexual misconduct. Other caucus members, such as Michael Capuano from Massachusetts 7th District, lost to their progressive challengers.

33 www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-progressives-specialrepo/inside-the-progressive-movement-roiling-the-democratic-party-idUSKCN1L81GI

34 www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/07/12/progressives-versus-the-establishment-whats-the-score-and-does-it-matter/; www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/09/14/whats-happening-to-the-democratic-party/; www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/08/09/progressives-versus-the-establishment-an-updated-score

35 cpc-grijalva.house.gov/caucus-members

Due to the incumbency bonus and because most of them run in heavy democratic districts, it can be expected that most of the other 70 caucus members from the House of Representatives will be re-elected. 34 of them run in mostly urban districts that have a partisan index of D+20. This list is topped by representative José Serranos from New York's 15th Congressional District in the Bronx, which has a PVI of D+44 and is the most Democratic district in the nation. 22 other caucus members reside in districts with a PVI between D+10 and D+19; only 9 have a PVI between D+6 and D+9, and of these most are at the upper end of this section.

However, five of these 70 CPC members are in districts that are competitive at least when looking at fundamental historical data—the Cook PVI—only: They all have a partisan index of D+5 or less.³⁶ However, given the current political climate as expressed in the average of the generic congressional ballot—which currently leans on average 8 percentage points towards Democrats—they are not in danger of losing re-election.³⁷ This means that, for example, the caucuses' whip, Matt Cartwright, who is seeking re-election in Pennsylvania's 17th Congressional District, which has a PVI of R+3, has a good chance to be re-elected. Currently, the FiveThirtyEight model forecasts a vote share of 54 percent for Cartwright.³⁸

The CPC Incumbents

However, the CPC—if we assume it actually stands for progressives—or more generally the number of progressives, is poised to grow after the midterm elections. It has endorsed 41 nominees via its political action committee, all of whom run in non-incumbent districts where other candidates are not members of the CPC yet.³⁹ Other progressive organizations like Emily's List, Our Revolution, or Justice Democrats have endorsed some of the CPC nominees. They have also endorsed 16 other progressive nominees, who have no CPC endorsement.⁴⁰ All in all, there are 58 non-incumbent Democratic nominees running for House seats that have the endorsement of at least one progressive organization.

Of these nominees, 14 are in solid Democratic districts with a Cook PVI of D+6 or more. Two of them are in democratic strongholds that were formerly part of the CPC: Illinois' 4th Congressional District, where former CPC member Luis Gutiérrez endorsed progressive candidate Chuy Garcia; and Minnesota's 5th Congressional District, where Ilhan Omar will continue the progressive work of Keith Ellison. Other examples include New York's 14th Congressional District, where Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ousted 14 term incumbent Joe Crowley, as well as Michigan's 13th Congressional District, which is a Democratic stronghold as well, where candidate Rashida Tlaib is poised to be among the first two Muslim women to be elected members of Congress. Both are unapologetically progressive.

However, 22 endorsed candidates are also in "competitive" districts with a PVI of D+5 or less, or R+5 or less. While Gil Cisneros is running in the only district that Cook rates as "even," five progressive candidates run in districts that are "Clinton Republican"—that is, they are leaning Republican in the PVI but voted with a narrow margin for Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. Some of them are in highly symbolic rural seats like Kara Eastman, who surprisingly won her primary in Nebraska's 2nd

36 www.cookpolitical.com/introducing-2017-cook-political-report-partisan-voter-index

37 projects.fivethirtyeight.com/congress-generic-ballot-polls

38 projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2018-midterm-election-forecast/house/pennsylvania/8

39 weareprogressives.org/#endorsements

40 fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-establishment-is-beating-the-progressive-wing-in-democratic-primaries-so-far

Congressional District. This is the same district, in which Trump came in almost ten percent ahead of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election and local Republicans assert that socialism is not liked by a majority of the local electorate.

The Newcomer Progressives

In Wisconsin's 1st Congressional District, metal worker Randy Bryce is trying to capture the seat of GOP speaker Paul Ryan, who is retiring, and in Florida's 26th Congressional District in South Miami Ecuadorian-American immigrant Debbie Mucarsel-Powell is trying to unseat Cuban-American GOP congressman Carlos Curbelo, who has tried to distance himself from Donald Trump in this heavy Latino district. Whereas the only poll for Wisconsin's 1st district shows Bryce trailing six percent, a recent poll found Mucarsel-Powell leading in Florida within the margin of error by two percentage points.⁴¹

A total of 23 districts where Democratic candidates were endorsed by a progressive organization have a PVI or R+6 or greater. In all but one of them (Texas' 10th Congressional District), voters voted for Donald Trump in the double digits in 2016. Those districts are a far shot for Democrats even in the current national climate. Nevertheless, candidates like James Thompson who wants to turn Kansas' 4th Congressional District blue, present a rural populism to mobilize an energized Democratic base in their district and to sway independents—or even Trump voters—with messages like those from Thompson, who is touting serving in the army.

In all of 128 House races, progressive Democratic candidates won their primaries or are running as unopposed incumbents—that makes for 29 percent of all seats in the House of Delegates. However, 23 of them are a long shots for Democrats—progressive or not—given that they have a Cook PVI of R+6 or more. Georgia's 9th Congressional District around Gainesville even has a partisan index of R+31 and its population voted with a margin of 58 percent for Trump in 2016. Nevertheless, Democrat Josh McCall is running in the district with a message of Medicare-for-all, stricter background checks for gun owners, and the legalization of Dreamers.

There might also be other, "softer" progressives, who should not be overlooked here. For instance, Democratic candidate Richard Ojeda stars in Michael Moore's newest movie *Fahrenheit 11/9*, he is a fierce union supporter, and presents himself as a champion of the working class; he also endorses a public option instead of Medicare-for-all and supports Marihuana legalization. He has chances to win West Virginia's rural and poor white 3rd Congressional District—a district that voted almost 50 percent for Trump in 2016.⁴²

Overall, this makes for a new House that will be populated by at least 84 progressive Democrats (only counting progressive incumbents and progressive newcomers in solid Democratic districts). This modest increase might very well be higher if progressive Democrats win the 23 competitive districts, where a progressive organization has endorsed a candidate. And maybe progressives will pull off a few surprise victories in more conservative seats, so that it is very likely that more than 100 members

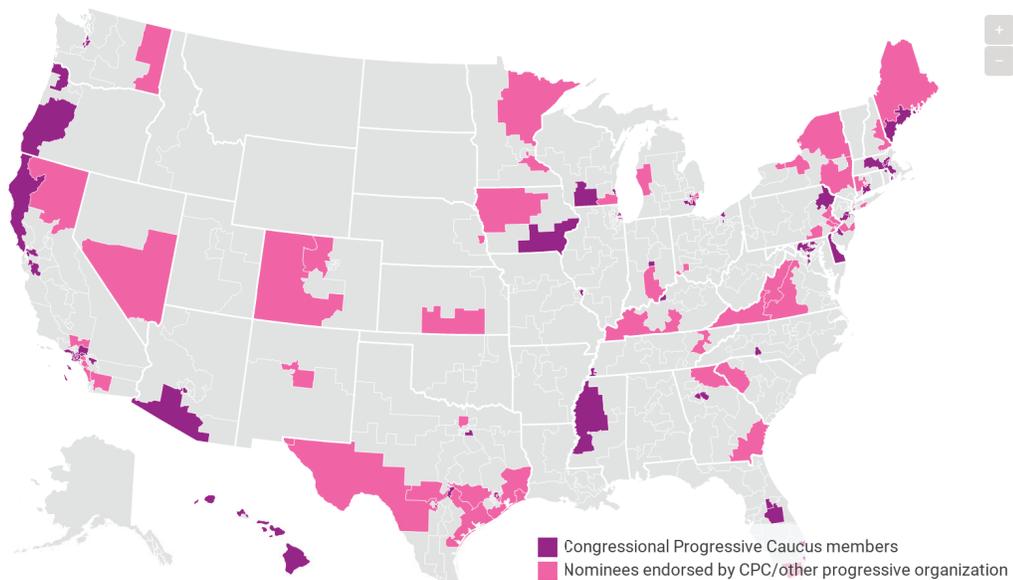
41 www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/upshot/elections-poll-wi01-1.html; www.rollcall.com/news/politics/mucarsel-powell-narrowly-leads-curbelo-dccc-poll-floridas-26th-district

42 www.nytimes.com/2018/07/17/us/politics/richard-ojeda-west-virginia-congress.html

of the House of Representatives will be progressives after November 6. In that case, almost a quarter of all House delegates will be progressives.

The left wing of the Party: After the midterms more than 100 Democratic House members could be Progressives

In addition to the 70 Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) members that are on the ballot for re-election some 35 progressive nominees could get elected, as they run in solidly Democratic or competitive seats - 23 other candidates running in districts with a PVI of R+5 are long shots



Map: Moritz Wichmann • Source: PCC/Ballotpedia/FiveThirtyEight/own coding • [Get the data](#) • Created with Datawrapper

However, while CPC members already make up 41 percent of current Democratic representatives in the House, it is unclear whether a CPC of more than 100 members would increase the share of progressives among all House Democrats. As Brookings researcher Elaine Kamarck notes, a rising tide lifts all boats. Different forecast models and ratings by various organization, such as Cook Political Report, FiveThirtyEight, or Daily Kos, which do not vary much in their ratings, predict that Democrats are likely to gain between 20 and 40 seats. Given that establishment Democrats are already overrepresented among nominees and progressive Democrats are on the average running in “redder” districts, it would take not only a blue wave—between 35 and 48 seats according to Cook Report and Ballotpedia respectively—but a “blue tsunami.” Only then would the share of progressive Democrats that self-identify as such or have been endorsed by progressive organizations increase significantly.

A Party Moving To The Left

And yet, as FiveThirtyEight has noted, the progressives vs. establishment is a bit of a false dichotomy. Studying endorsements of organizations in and around the Democratic Party, it becomes clear that several candidates who are backed by the party (establishment), which has won over insurgent candidates from the left, also support rather progressive policies. In other words, there are indicators that key democratic thinkers and politicians are moving to the left.

In a recent speech, former U.S. President Obama said that Democrats should move beyond “good old ideas like a higher minimum wage” and embrace “good new ideas like Medicare-for-all, giving workers seats on corporate boards, reversing the most egregious corporate tax cuts to make sure college students graduate.” And Obama made good on that: In September, he officially endorsed Medicare-for-all in a speech. Jake Sullivan, senior policy advisor of the Hillary Clinton campaign, now says that “Democrats should not blush too much, or pay too much heed, when political commentators arch their eyebrows about the party moving Left. The center of gravity itself is moving, and this is a good thing. [...] We Democrats do need to embrace a big, bold policy agenda.”⁴³

One indication for the growth of these “bold” progressive ideas and the willingness of Democrats to embrace it is H.R.676, the Medicare-for-all bill introduced by John Conyers in January 2017. Sponsorship has grown from 51 to 123 House delegates.⁴⁴ Currently, 15 U.S. Senators—that is, one third of the Democratic delegation—are backing another Medicare-for-all proposal created by Bernie Sanders. This list is likely to grow and not only new progressives are signing on to it. According to Brookings data from July of this year, 384 Democratic primary candidates in 31 states that have already held their primary elections explicitly supported some form of a single-payer health care system. This score, which accounts for 44 percent of all candidates, includes incumbents and non-incumbents. Most of them were progressives, but 119 more moderate establishment candidates back the idea, too. Some of those progressive and some of the moderate candidates who were backing Medicare-for-all lost their primaries, but overall it has not decreased the relative support for Medicare-for-all among Democratic nominees.

Updated data from political consultancy firm Kingston Creative as well as from the healthcare advocacy organization Demand Universal Healthcare (DUH) shows that 219 Democratic nominees for Congress support Medicare-for-all—a number far beyond those identified as progressive Democratic nominees in this paper.⁴⁵ Some Democratic nominees were a bit vague in their language suggesting they might change their position or might be persuaded easily. Native American candidate Sharice Davids is running in Kansas’s 3rd Congressional District, which is R+3, and says that “Medicare-for-all is a goal and a good slogan,” suggesting she is willing to “work towards it.”⁴⁶ Incumbent Democrat Joe Kennedy, who is running for re-election in Massachusetts’ 4th Congressional District, is supporting single-payer healthcare, “but only in theory,” at least so far.⁴⁷

It should be mentioned that the actual support for Medicare-for-all in the new House might be bigger given that there are a total of 29 nominees in this category. In the past, several candidates have signed on to bill H.R.676, like incumbent Eddie Bernice Johnson from the heavily Democratic 30th Congressional District in Texas, who came out supporting the bill in July 2018 (three of the 123 current co-sponsors decided to join the cause this year).

If we stick to the rather strict definition, around 50 percent of all Democratic nominees that run in the 431 congressional districts support Medicare-for-all. In other words, this year about every second Dem-

43 unherd.com/2018/10/americas-Democrats-corbynised

44 www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/676/cosponsors

45 We coded candidates as supporting Medicare-for-all only when they mention it on their homepage or went on the record endorsing it with media organizations. Our rather strict definition did, for example, not capture the support of someone like Cindy Axne, who is running in Iowa’s 3rd Congressional District, which has a PVI of R+1, and who calls for a “real public option” rather than explicitly endorsing Medicare-for-all. Thanks to Alex Panagiotopoulos from Kingston Creative for helping with coding and researching the support for Medicare for all, the data is based on: kingstoncreative.net/practical-democrats-guide-medicare

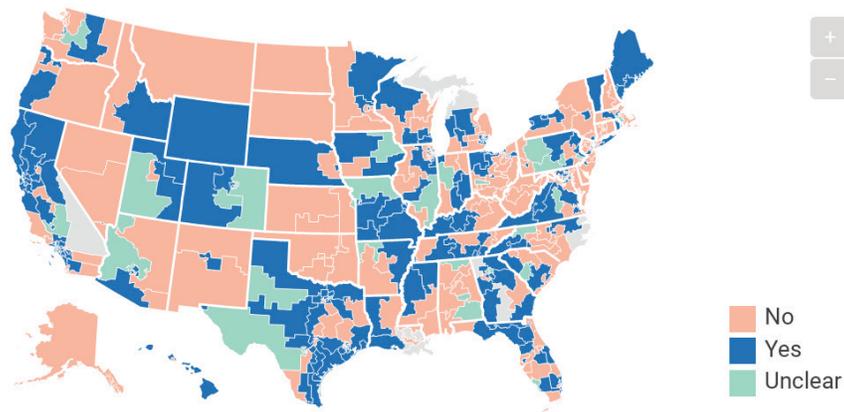
46 www.kansascity.com/news/politics-government/article216296940.html

47 www.wgbh.org/news/2017/09/14/boston-public-radio-podcast/joe-kennedy-supports-single-payer-only-theory

ocratic nominee supports the cause. Brookings researcher Elaine Kamarck concludes, “Progressive Democrats may not be winning a civil war inside the party. But, if and when Democrats have a chance at power again progressives will have moved them on some pretty big issues.”⁴⁸

218 Democratic nominees for the House support Medicare for all, others are not so sure

All 430 nominees Democratic nominees for the US House of Representatives and their support for Medicare for all



In four districts no Democratic candidate is running, two Louisiana districts have more than one Democratic candidate and held no primaries yet

Map: Moritz Wichmann • Source: Kingston Creative/Rosa Luxemburg Foundation • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Of those now supporting Medicare-for-all, 114 are incumbents and 24 are running in open seats, with half of those seats leaning toward Democrats (12) and the other half (11) toward Republicans in the PVI. If most of them win their races, this potentially brings the share of Democrats, who will continue to support Medicare-for-all in the House once elected, to somewhere between 120 to 139—slightly more than the 123 current supporters of H.R.676. This increase in support for Medicare-for-all among elected House members might not be all, however. There are 79 candidates, whose election is all but ensured as they run as challengers—and most of them in ruby-red districts (two in Democratic leaning districts, two in even districts). If the 2018 midterms will be a wave election, some of those candidates might overcome the structural barriers in their districts and get elected.

The Progressive Insurgency

The Democratic party is unified in its opposition to Trump, but it is divided over how to exactly beat him. While centrist Democrats portray themselves as the reasonable common sense center that offers an alternative to the Republican Party, which is increasingly veering towards “extremist” positions, progressive Democrats claim that being anti-Trump is not enough. The party establishment has heard the call and has moved somewhat to the left—a move that is not only expressed in the

48 www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/07/12/progressives-versus-the-establishment-whats-the-score-and-does-it-matter/

recent endorsement of Medicare-for-all from more moderate Democrats in the primaries but also by Obama's shift. Less than a decade ago, Obama's spokesperson Robert Gibbs derided the "professional left" for making what he suggested were preposterous demands—such as pressing for "Canadian health care".⁴⁹

Now, the democratic platform, which is still amended further, demands a 15 Dollar minimum wage.⁵⁰ Between 2017 and 2019, the party has also shifted to the left with its "A better deal for our democracy" platform,⁵¹ which promises campaign finance reform, a topic of particular importance to progressives.⁵² The party platform now sees health care as a right and includes "universal health care as a goal," the concrete proposal that "those over 55 should be able to opt in to Medicare," and the creation of a "public option" (something progressive Democrats were not able to achieve in the negotiations around the Affordable Care Act in 2009).⁵³

Still, progressive writers critique this shift to the left as being only "modest," arguing that party leaders still favor "1990s-era playbook of technocratic half-measures" instead of clear and simple policies. They also take note of the party abolishing super-delegates from voting on the presidential nominee—a measure the Sanders wing of the party has demanded.⁵⁴ As Ruy Terceira of the Center for American Progress writes, the Democratic Party is moving from "fiscal and social moderation" to be one that more "forthrightly promis[es] active government," which means that it is not becoming a "radical party" but certainly one with a "steady party-wide movement to the Left," approaching "at most, mild European social democracy."⁵⁵

Fundamental data and polling suggests, however, that even though the party might be moving left, and has been doing so, albeit slowly, for years, it still does not adequately represents its more progressive base. Especially when it comes to key policy proposals, such as a 15 Dollar minimum wage, its support for those propositions is "lagging" behind the high level of public support for a progressive agenda. Those "bread-and-butter" issues might become more central while identity politics and issues of representation might become less so given that the party has "demographically moved leftward." In other words, as the Democratic Party approaches the full representation of minorities among its candidates and nominees, it thus ends undemocratic underrepresentation.

Data For Progress has argued for focusing on base turnout and the campaigns of successful insurgent progressives, who combine their popular policy ideas with aggressive organizing on the ground and get out the vote efforts. As the analyses of Progressive Congressional Caucus members and candidates endorsed by progressive organizations show, the total number of progressives is likely to grow. That in itself is good. However, because moderates tend to run in winnable districts while more progressive candidates often run in rather red districts, progressives will gain more should a wave election really materialize. In the event of a wave election, their share might in fact grow to 50 percent, which has implications for control of party committees like the DNC and for setting the policy agenda.

49 www.nytimes.com/2018/07/21/us/politics/democratic-party-midterms.html

50 www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/Democrats-add-15-minimum-wage-platform-n606351

51 www.nytimes.com/2017/07/24/us/politics/Democrats-economic-message-trump-2018-better-deal.html

52 www.vox.com/2018/5/21/17376128/Democrats-better-deal-democracy-midterm-2018

53 democrats.org/about/party-platform/newrepublic.com/article/75077/how-they-did-it

54 www.thenation.com/article/democratic-autopsy-one-year-later/

55 unherd.com/2018/10/americas-democrats-corbynised/

Some non-incumbent progressives endorsed by its PAC, for instance, might join the CPC. Although still often criticized for not being active enough, the caucus has slowly become more active over the years. While it started out being primarily anti-War in the Bush-era and unsuccessfully tried to move the Affordable Care Act to the left in 2009, from 2012 onward it has put out a “peoples budget” and it was almost successful in sinking the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement that was ultimately passed by the Obama administration in 2015.⁵⁶ This year, the caucus organized a strategy congress with guests from European left parties and at the beginning of October it opened a new policy center to be able to become a “party within the party.”⁵⁷ This year’s “confrontational progressives” are, however, criticizing the incumbent caucus members for still accepting corporate donations. As an analysis by The Intercept shows, only “four caucus members [...] have pledged to decline corporate funds: Reps. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash.; Ro Khanna, D-Calif.; Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii; and David Cicilline, D-R.I. [...]” That number, however, is about to balloon to as many as 40 or more, as a wave of successful progressive insurgents—including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Jahana Hayes, Rashida Tlaib, and Ilhan Omar—are poised to join the House of Representatives.

It looks like the new progressives are setting higher standards. Ocasio-Cortez, who has criticized the current Progressive Caucus for not often enough voting as a bloc, has put forward the idea of a progressive sub-caucus of 10 to 30 members that could “generate real power” when voting together. The rationale behind this is that in a House, where Democrats hold a slim majority, a few determined progressive Democrats could make “strong demands” and win concessions.⁵⁸ However, observers quickly pointed out that Democrats—unlike the Republican Freedom Caucus—like “to get things done” as they want to increase the welfare state. Which is why in the past—for example, in the negotiations around the Affordable Care Act—CPC members were not willing and able to provide a credible threat of “blowing things up” if their demands were not met.⁵⁹

Still, it seems clear that the new progressive members of the House represent a more aggressive brand of progressivism. More generally, it might also be the case that progressives have not maxed out their potential countrywide yet. As the party as a whole and its voters have slowly inched to the left over the past few years—and most likely will continue as long as the trend towards partisan polarization does not suddenly stop—the potential for an even more progressive Congress is there.

Conventional wisdom and political theory have it that elections are won in the political center. That means that in general elections candidates have to appeal to a voting base that is wide enough to get the majority of votes. Conventional Democratic strategy has it that in competitive or rather conservative seats centrist candidates have to run in order to get enough Democrats elected in a country that might be becoming more liberal overall, but is still structurally conservative. The 23 rural progressive candidates will be testing whether this is true in a highly polarized nation and partisan environment. This is, of course, also an environment where parts of the working class in swing states like Michigan and Wisconsin, who cost Hillary Clinton the presidency, decided to break for Trump having

56 www.thenation.com/article/its-time-for-the-congressional-progressive-caucus-to-raise-its-game; www.minnpost.com/dc-dispatches/2015/07/how-keith-ellison-made-congressional-progressive-caucus-political-force-matter

57 newrepublic.com/article/147466/party-within-democratic-party; edition.cnn.com/2018/10/09/politics/congress-progressive-center

58 thehill.com/business-a-lobbying/397244-ocasio-cortez-floating-progressive-sub-caucus

59 www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2018/07/16/why-progressive-Democrats-cant-create-their-own-freedom-caucus/?utm_term=.c49c3222e3c7

voted for Obama before. While some evidence suggests that this has cultural and racist reasons, the appeal of Trump populist trade agenda cannot be ignored.

If the “elections-are-won-in-the-center” thesis is correct, the flipside would be that in heavily democratic districts candidates can “veer” left without being punished (immediately) at the ballot box—especially given the strong public support way beyond the Democratic base for key progressive politics. Looking at the current Cook partisan index and current candidates, there are 64 districts that have a partisan index of D+10 or more and no progressive candidate in this election cycle. Another 33 districts with no progressive candidates (measured in endorsements by the CPC or the progressive organizations researched by FiveThirtyEight) even have a PVI of D+20.

This means that in theory progressives in the Democratic party have the potential to increase their share of Democratic nominees in the 2020 election cycle. This year, a lot of those heavily Democratic districts with no progressive nominee are in liberal coastal states, first and foremost in California but also in New York and New Jersey. In addition, it looks like there is some unrealized progressive potential in Texas and a few other states as well.

As the analysis of the primaries and of the 219 nominees endorsing progressive ideas has shown, Medicare-for-all is emerging as a central and powerful theme in the Democratic party. Yet, it remains unclear to what extent the midterms in November will be a wave election, which is what will determine how much support Medicare-for-all will receive. At the same time, looking back towards the increase in support for bill H.R.676, which started out with 50 co-sponsors and even in 2018 gained a few new supporters after more House members signed on to the bill, it seems almost certain that support for the idea will grow at least a little bit. The 16 Democratic nominees, who do not support Medicare-for-all, do not outright reject it but use unclear language, which suggests that that they could be persuaded or will change their position if they get elected to Congress—especially since the idea has now been endorsed by Obama.

The group Physicians For A National Health program (PNHP) lists 11 members of Congress, who are not currently co-sponsors of H.R.676, as “Potential Democratic Co-sponsors.”⁶⁰ PNHP sends out calls to e-mail or phone those congress members to “encourage them to co-sponsor” the bill. These members of Congress might feel more pressure to sign on to the bill once the elections are over and they are increasingly a minority in the party. There is hope then that we might not have to wait another 15 years to see a new attempt at health care reform, as was the case when Democrats had failed in their 1994 reform attempt. And yet, nine years have passed again since the Affordable Health Care Act was approved by Congress. Progressive Democrats certainly think it is time for the next big step forward.

⁶⁰ <http://www.pnhp.org/hr676cosponsors>

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