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# Moderates Made Democratic Majorities



By: **Third Way**

It was a terrific night for Democrats across the country. Two years after Donald Trump swept every battleground state, voters delivered an overwhelming rebuke and stopped Trumpism in its tracks. But Democrats should be clear-eyed about who the majority makers were in these midterms. The majority makers of 2026 were mainstream and

moderate Democrats who overperformed and flipped red and purple places blue—especially in seats that have been moving further away from Democrats over the last decade.

As the Democratic Party looks to the next presidential election, the lesson from this cycle is unequivocal: high-quality Democrats in the middle were the majority makers in 2026—and they are the model for 2028.

1. **Red-State Democrats—All Moderates—Overperformed and Delivered the Senate.** As of Wednesday, mainstream or moderate Senate Democrats flipped 6 states from red to blue (Iowa, Kansas, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas) and held the Trump state of Georgia. Together, they ran on average 21 points ahead of Harris's 2024 margin, and 5 points ahead of their party's statewide House vote. In two purple states that Trump won, Jon Ossoff ran 20 points ahead of Harris and 6 points ahead of Georgia Democrats; Roy Cooper ran 23 points ahead of Harris and 5 ahead of North Carolina Democrats. Moderate Democrats overperformed in deep ruby red states, too. James Talarico (+26 vs Harris, +6 vs House Democrats), Annie Andrews (+22, +7), Hamilton (+21, +7), Turek (+17, +3), and Brown (+16, +2) ran ahead of typical Democrats to flip all their states from red to blue and deliver the Senate majority.

2. **Leftier Blue-State Democrats Underperformed.** In another three swingy purple states, leftier candidates underperformed and pushed these races into Republicans' direction in an extremely blue environment. Despite the claims that nominating leftier candidates would excite the base, drive turnout up, and lead to massive overperformances, El-Sayed in Michigan, Flanagan in Minnesota, and Jackson in Maine, all ran on average 5 points behind their party's statewide House vote. El-Sayed ran 2 points behind, Flanagan 3 points behind, and Jackson 10 points behind. And they ran just 5 points ahead of Harris in a blue environment—16 points less than successful center-left candidates in Trump-won states.

3. **Moderate Democrats Flipped Red Places Blue and Delivered the House.** As of Wednesday, center-left Democrats endorsed by the New Democrat Coalition Action Fund, Blue Dog PAC, and WelcomePAC have flipped 29 Republican-held House seats from red to blue—of those called so far. Democrats can now expect at least a 240-seat majority because of these candidates. On average, they ran 15 points ahead of Harris's 2024 margin in these districts, and 23 of them won seats Trump carried in

2024. Since 2018, center-left candidates have now flipped 79 House seats from red to blue. Newly elected moderates will outnumber DSA at least five-to-one.

4. **Moderate Governors Won and Overperformed Their Senate Counterparts.** In Michigan, Jocelyn Benson outran El-Sayed by 4 points. In Minnesota, Amy Klobuchar ran ahead of Flanagan by 3 points. In Maine, Hannah Pingree outran Jackson by 11 points, despite there being an independent in the governor's race. And while David Jolly did not win Florida's gubernatorial, he ran 2 points ahead of Nixon.

5. **Moderate Democrats Won with Swing Voters.** In exit polls, moderate voters broke heavily for Talarico (71%), Cooper (75%), Ossoff (73%), Hamilton (72%), Andrews (71%), Turek (67%). They won supermajorities of independent voters: Talarico 63%, Cooper 63%, Ossoff 72%, Hamilton 64%, Andrews 64%, Turek 58%. Democrats also won huge swaths of non-college voters: Talarico 50%, Cooper 51%, Ossoff 53%, Turek 46%, Andrews 46%, Hamilton 44%. They made inroads back with Latino voters: Talarico 61%, Cooper 69%, Ossoff 67%. And they persuaded Trump voters: Ossoff 13%, Talarico 11%, Andrews 11%, Cooper 9%, Turek 9%.

6. **Moderate Democrats Won Because They Escaped the Party's Far-Left Brand.** *New York Times* polling found a 52% majority of voters in red Senate battlegrounds (Alaska, Iowa, Kansas, Ohio, North Carolina, Texas) believe the Democratic Party is "too far to the left;" however, just 35% of voters in these states believe the center-left Democratic nominees are too far left, while 52% say they are not too far in either ideological direction. These candidates' ideological positioning is central to why they are overperforming expectations in deep red states and escaping attacks painting them as socialists.

7. **Moderates won by running on tackling costs and corruption, and mainstream immigration and border policies.** James Talarico was laser-focused on addressing costs, tackling corruption, and breaking from the status quo of the Democratic Party. He also pledged to secure the border, backed an all-of-the-above energy agenda, and called himself a capitalist who opposes "crony capitalism," leaving the GOP with little room to paint him as a socialist. Adam Hamilton ran as an "independent-minded Democrat dedicated to leading from the center." He ran against the extremes on left and right—including against socialism and open borders—to root out corruption and help Kansans hurt by Trump's tariffs. The far

left does not own an agenda of lowering costs, rooting out corruption, and creating a fairer economic system for hardworking Americans—mainstream Democrats won on it in 1992, 2006, 2008, and again in 2026. The 50 moderate-endorsed Democrats in red seats spent $281M on ads explicitly focused on costs and inflation, and $124M on ending corruption and stock trading.

8. **Voters Want Democrats Focused On Costs—Not DSA policies or impeachment.** This election was a referendum on Trump, not a mandate to lurch to the left. According to CNBC polling, voters are most concerned a Democratic Congress will pass DSA policies (28%), fail to bring down costs (22%), and weaken the border (21%). Followed by increasing taxes (17%) and impeaching Trump (16%).

9. **Voters Want the Democratic Party to Move to the Center.** *New York Times* polling has found that 61% of voters want the Democratic Party to move to the center, nearly four times the share who said the party should move further left. The voters who think the party is too far left includes 61% of white non-college voters, 58% of men, 57% of white voters, 52% of independents and non-college voters, 44% of undecided 2026 voters, and 43% of voters who did not vote in 2024.

10. **2028 Democratic voters want the next presidential nominee to moderate to win.** 52% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents want the next Democratic presidential nominee to move to the center in order to win in 2028, while only a quarter said the nominee should move to the left. A plurality of Democratic supporters also said the next Democratic nominee needs to move to the center on crime (50%), immigration (46%), the economy (42%), and transgender issues (38%) in order to win in 2028.

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