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The Center-Left Outperformed Progressives in House Primaries

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PRIMARY SCORECARD

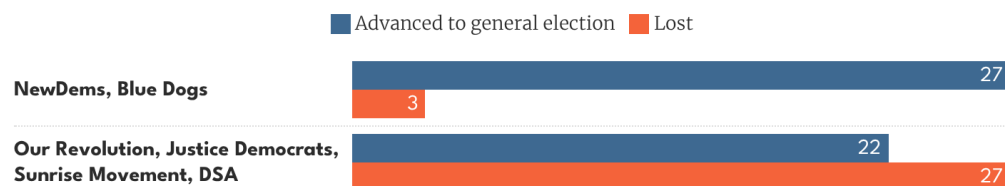
	WIN RATE	AVERAGE DISTRICT MARGIN
	90%	Trump+2
	45%	Harris+26

The 2026 midterm primaries are just about done and dusted, and we are less than two months away from Election Day. So, we wanted to take a look at how the different ideological factions that competed in Democratic primaries performed. While the headlines have focused on the far left's victories and suggested that it is ascendent, the results tell a much different story.

Non-incumbent candidates endorsed by progressive and far-left groups (Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, Sunrise Movement, and DSA) had a 45% win rate in the primaries, with 22 candidates advancing to the general election and 27 losing—despite competing almost entirely in deep cobalt blue districts, often primarying incumbents who were ideologically aligned with them. The left's 22 nominees are running in seats that average Harris+26, and the five successful DSA candidates are running in even deeper blue seats, averaging Harris+56.

Center-Left NewDems and Blue Dogs Won 90% of Their Primaries, Compared With 45% for Progressive Groups

Candidates Endorsed by Center-Left or Progressive Groups Prior to the 2026 Primary Elections



Notes: No crossover endorsed candidates were included – Rebecca Cooke (WI-03) and Bob Brooks (PA-07).
Source: Analysis of group endorsements



But House majorities aren't built in the safest seats in the country where the only competition is the primary and the Democrat can phone in the general election. They are built by the candidates who have to run uphill in purple and ruby red districts where the Democratic Party brand is underwater.

The candidates endorsed by center-left groups—the New Democrat Coalition Action Fund and Blue Dog PAC—had a cumulative 90% win rate in the Democratic primaries, with 27 advancing to the general election. These candidates are running in especially competitive terrain, as the districts average out to Trump+2.

The DCCC's Red to Blue program is targeting 37 districts averaging Trump+7, only five of which voted for Kamala Harris in 2024. These are the races that decide who holds the

Speaker's gavel in January, and, as of the second week of September, the Split Ticket House model gives Democrats the edge to flip 21 of these blue. But a model doesn't mean much until millions of dollars are spent on targeting voters and ballots are tallied.

Fortunately, in those 37 races, there are 29 candidates exclusively endorsed by the NewDems or Blue Dogs. By contrast, just two nominees are exclusively endorsed by Our Revolution in these red to blue districts. Four more have been cross endorsed across the factions, and two carry no ideological group's endorsement at all.

Red-to-Blue Districts Are Dominated by Center-Left Candidates

29 Red-to-Blue candidates have been exclusively endorsed by NewDems or Blue Dogs

District	DEM nominee	Endorsed by
AZ-01	Amish Shah	NewDems (post-primary)
AZ-02	Jonathan Nez	NewDems
AZ-06	JoAnna Mendoza	NewDems and Blue Dogs (post-primary)
CA-06	Richard Pan	NewDems (post-primary)
CA-22	Randy Villegas	Our Revolution
CA-48	Marni von Wilpert	NewDems (post-primary)
CO-05	Jessica Killin	NewDems
CO-08	Manny Rutinel	NewDems (post-primary)
FL-07	Bale Dalton	NewDems and Blue Dogs
FL-13	Leela Gray	NewDems and Blue Dogs
FL-22	Pia Dandiya	NewDems
IA-01	Christina Bohannon	NewDems
IA-02	Lindsay James	NewDems
IA-03	Sarah Trone Garriott	NewDems
KY-06	Zach Dembo	NewDems and Blue Dogs (post-primary)
ME-02	Matt Dunlap	Our Revolution
MN-01	Jake Johnson	NewDems
MI-04	Sean McCann	NewDems
MI-10	Christina Hines	NewDems

Additional 18 rows not shown.

Source: Third Way analysis of endorsements



Take a closer look at some of the candidates who are running and the coalitions that they are building, and it becomes clear that these are the candidates who are the models for the party.

Paige Cagnetti (PA-08) is the mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and she is building a working-class coalition in a part of the country that used to be the Democratic base. Bobby Pulido is running a campaign in TX-15 to win over culturally moderate, working-class Latino voters. Cait Conley in NY-17 is making inroads with veterans and organized labor. And in Iowa, three NewDems in Sarah Trone Garriott, Christina Bohannon, and Lindsay James are centering campaigns on reversing the damage Trump has done to rural, working-class communities.

The last few cycles show that these kinds of candidates are key to flipping the House. Since 2018, moderate Democrats have flipped 50 House seats from red to blue. Meanwhile, leftier groups have not flipped a single seat in Congress from red to blue—not one seat despite having tried dozens of times. By our count, they are 0 for 30 in failed red-to-blue attempts.

The critical task going forward is to ensure that Democrats do not fall victim to the electoral illusion that the far left is selling. The GOP's entire playbook in the next two months will be to paint Democrats as far left, card-carrying socialists. Democrats are favored to flip the House, but there are a dozen races that will decide how big the House margin in 2027 will be. These races will come down to whether candidates run on a mainstream playbook and offer a clear break from the status quo and from the Democratic Party brand. Despite the wall-to-wall coverage of the left over the primary season, the center-left dominated in the districts that will determine which party holds power—and they will be the majority makers this fall.
