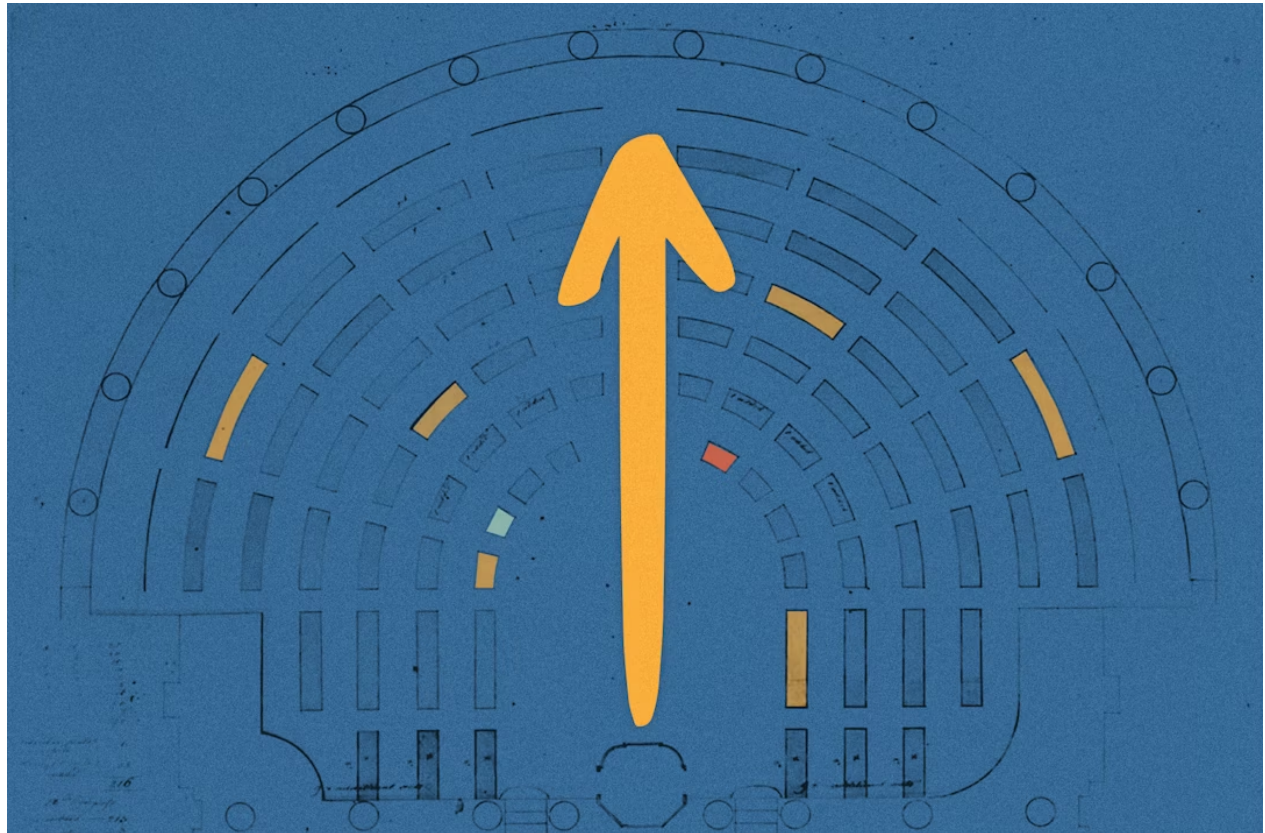**MEMO** *Published October 2, 2024 · 6 minute read*

The Majority Makers: Why the House Will Be Won Through the Middle

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Takeaways

- There is an asymmetry in the ideological makeup of competitive House districts versus safe Democratic districts.

- Across the 31 DCCC Frontline districts (which protects vulnerable Democratic incumbents in the House) moderate and conservative voters outnumber liberals more than 4-to-1.

- Liberal voters make up 32% of the active voter electorate in Our Revolution districts, 11% higher than the average Frontliner, while conservatives make up 31% of the electorate in Frontline districts.

- Due to this asymmetry, candidates running in these left-leaning districts need only rely on their liberal base for the lion's share of the vote and a sliver of moderate voters to put them over the top.

- In the most competitive Democratic pickup opportunities for the cycle, Majority Maker districts, 46% of voters are ideologically moderate, 34% are conservative, and 19% are liberal. Democrats must win over a supermajority of moderate voters in order to pull out victories in these districts.

Far-left groups have been arguing for years that the more progressive the congressional candidate, the better the chance of winning, saying their candidates will energize base voters, increase turnout, and deliver victory. Yet, for three election cycles in a row, mainstream Democrats have outperformed far-left candidates in the races that determine who holds power in Congress. Candidates endorsed by the New Democrat Coalition have flipped 43 seats from red to blue since 2018, while Our Revolution and Justice Democrats have not managed to flip a single Republican-held seat over the last three cycles. We looked at how the ideological makeup of Frontliner Democrats' districts and competitive Red-to-Blue districts compares to those of Our Revolution Democrats—and how this helps explain why moderate Democrats are the majority makers in Congress.
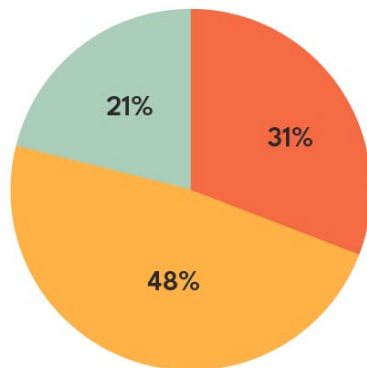
Ideological Asymmetry of Competitive vs. Safe Dem House Districts

While hard-left insurgent candidates have succeeded in winning a select few safe Democratic districts, the last three election cycles have shown that those candidates fall flat in the competitive districts central to winning a majority in the House. A prime example: In 2022, Our Revolution candidate Jamie McLeod-Skinner primaried the moderate incumbent Rep. Kurt Schrader in OR-05, a Biden+9 competitive district, but the Our Revolution strategy of leaning into base energy rather than persuading high propensity voters in the middle failed in the general election. McLeod-Skinner proceeded to lose the seat to Republicans that November. Catalist's data reveals that moderate and conservative voters overwhelmingly dominate the makeup of this district, leaving a progressive Our Revolution candidate at a significant disadvantage in a general election.
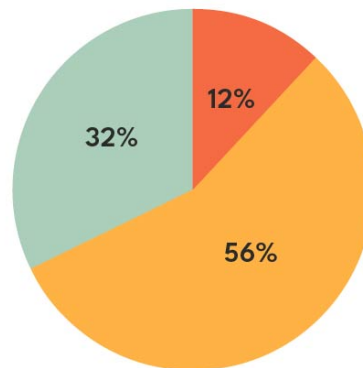
Using Catalist's Ideology Plus model, we broke down the ideological makeups of voters across the 31 districts of incumbent Frontline Democrats running for re-election. This research shows that there is an asymmetry in the ideological makeup of competitive House districts versus safe Democratic districts. Frontline districts are overwhelmingly made up of ideologically moderate and conservative voters, while safe Dem districts, held by Our Revolution candidates, contain a disproportionate number of ideological liberal voters.

Across Frontline districts, ideological moderates and conservatives combined make up nearly 80% of the electorate—outnumbering liberal voters 4-to-1.

Frontline Districts

Our Revolution Districts

■ Liberal ■ Moderate ■ Conservative

Source: Analysis of Catalist active voter data & Ideology Plus Model.

This is a sta rk contrast when measured against the nine districts held by folks endorsed by Our Revolution. Across these districts, conservative voters make up a paltry 12% of the electorate—with the rest being distributed into the liberal and moderate shares of the pie. On average, liberal voters make up 32% of the active voter electorate in Our Revolution districts, 11 percentage points higher than the average Frontliner, which is largely what makes Democratic primaries in these districts more advantageous for progressive candidates.

By comparison, conservatives make up 31% of the active voter electorate in Frontline districts, and there is no Frontline district where liberal voters make up a majority or even a plurality of the active voter electorate. Because conservatives make up a larger portion of the electorate in these competitive districts than liberals do, Republicans don't have to look far beyond their conservative base to win. Democrats running in these Frontline districts have a tougher path to winning and must appeal to a broader tent of voters. The most conservative Frontline seats on this measure are those held by Rep. Mary Peltola (AK-AL), Rep. Sharice Davids (KS-03), and Rep. Chris Pappas (NH-01).

Frontline Candidates: District Ideology

State	CD	Representative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Cook Political Rating
AK	AL	Mary Peltola	39%	51%	10%	Lean D
CA	9	Josh Harder	31%	41%	28%	Likely D
CA	49	Mike Levin	37%	31%	32%	Likely D
CO	8	Yadera Caraveo	27%	48%	25%	Toss Up
CT	5	Jahana Hayes	32%	48%	20%	Lean D
IL	13	Nikki Budzinski	23%	56%	21%	Solid D
IL	17	Eric Sorensen	27%	57%	16%	Lean D
IN	1	Frank Mrvan	22%	59%	19%	Lean D
KS	3	Sharice Davids	45%	35%	19%	Likely D
ME	2	Jared Golden	40%	38%	21%	Toss Up
MI	3	Hillary Scholten	26%	64%	11%	Likely D
MN	2	Angie Craig	23%	70%	8%	Lean D
NC	1	Don Davis	36%	48%	16%	Toss Up
NH	1	Chris Pappas	43%	29%	27%	Likely D
NM	2	Gabe Vasquez	33%	46%	21%	Toss Up
NV	1	Dina Titus	28%	52%	20%	Likely D
NV	3	Susie Lee	29%	50%	21%	Lean D
NV	4	Steven Horsford	28%	52%	19%	Likely D
NY	3	Tom Suozzi	32%	49%	19%	Likely D
NY	18	Pat Ryan	35%	44%	21%	Lean D
OH	1	Greg Landsman	30%	45%	25%	Likely D
OH	9	Marcy Kaptur	32%	49%	19%	Toss Up
OH	13	Emilia Sykes	31%	46%	22%	Toss Up
OR	4	Val Hoyle	30%	42%	29%	Likely D
OR	6	Andrea Salinas	29%	45%	26%	Lean D
PA	7	Susan Wild	40%	32%	28%	Toss Up
PA	8	Matt Cartwright	41%	31%	28%	Toss Up
PA	17	Chris Deluzio	37%	27%	35%	Lean D
TX	34	Vicente Gonzalez	14%	78%	8%	Lean D
WA	3	Marie Gluesenkamp Perez	21%	62%	17%	Toss Up
WA	8	Kim Schrier	18%	59%	23%	Likely D

THIRD WAY

Contrary to the Frontline districts, a winning coalition in left-leaning Our Revolution districts need only rely on the liberal base for the lion's share of the vote and a sliver of moderate voters to put them over the top. This is largely why progressives have seen success in these districts' primaries, but when it comes to Our Revolution candidates competing where liberals are not near the majority of the electorate, Our Revolution candidates have fallen flat. The most liberal seats among these districts are held by Rep. Pramila Jayapal (WA-07), Rep. Ayanna Pressley (MA-07), and Rep. Ro Khanna (CA-17).

Our Revolution Candidates: District Ideology

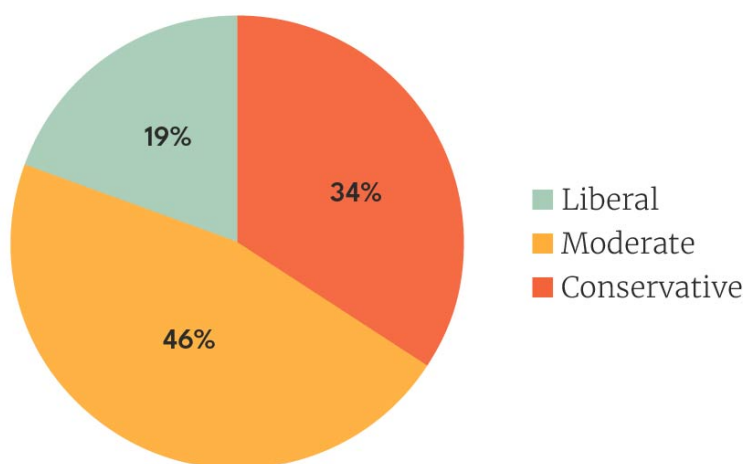| State	CD	Representative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Cook Political Rating
CA	17	Ro Khanna	16%	40%	44%	Solid D
IL	3	Delia Ramirez	13%	55%	32%	Solid D
MA	7	Ayanna Pressley	5%	44%	51%	Solid D
MI	12	Rashida Tlaib	12%	69%	18%	Solid D
MN	5	Ilhan Omar	6%	69%	25%	Solid D
NY	14	Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	10%	67%	24%	Solid D
PA	12	Summer Lee	28%	29%	42%	Solid D
TX	35	Greg Casar	14%	72%	15%	Solid D
WA	7	Pramila Jayapal	3%	41%	56%	Solid D

Source: Analysis of Catalist active voter data & Ideology Plus Model.

✴ **THIRD WAY**

When we examine the most competitive congressional races that Democrats are eyeing to flip to win the majority in the House, Red-to-Blue districts that are often referred to as Majority Maker districts, we see that these districts' ideology are overwhelmingly more conservative and much more closely resemble the ideological makeup of Frontline districts. In total, 34% of the voters in these Majority Maker districts are ideologically conservative, 46% are moderate, and 19% are liberal. Conservatives and moderates combined outnumber liberal voters more than 4-to-1 across Majority Maker districts.

✴ **THIRD WAY**

Majority Maker Districts Ideology

19%	
34%	■ Liberal
46%	■ Moderate
	■ Conservative

Source: Analysis of Catalist active voter data & Ideology Plus Model.

Similar to Frontline districts, Republicans don't have to look far beyond their base to win in these places, as conservatives make up nearly half of the electorate in several Majority Maker districts. In fact, Democrats must win over a supermajority of moderate voters in order to pull out victories in

these districts. Take NE-02, which went for Joe Biden by 6 points in 2020: Conservatives make up 43% of the electorate, while liberals make up 21%. To eke out victory in 2024, the Democratic congressional candidate, Tony Vargas, must win over 80% of moderate voters. By comparison, Our Revolution candidate Rep. Ro Khanna (CA-17) needs the support of just 15% of moderate voters to win in a district that is 44% liberal. This asymmetry confirms that the formula for a winning coalition in a Majority Maker district requires a broad ideological tent, while the formula for victory in Our Revolution districts often does not have to extend far beyond the liberal base.

Majority Maker Candidates: District Ideology

State	CD	Representative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Cook Political Rating
AZ	1	Amish Shah	45%	31%	24%	Toss Up
AZ	6	Kirsten Engel	42%	31%	27%	Toss Up
CA	13	Adam Gray	30%	48%	23%	Toss Up
CA	22	Rudy Salas	28%	54%	18%	Toss Up
CA	27	George Whitesides	31%	42%	28%	Toss Up
CA	41	Will Rollins	39%	35%	26%	Toss Up
CA	45	Derek Tran	34%	39%	27%	Lean R
CA	47	Dave Min	37%	31%	32%	Lean D
CO	3	Adam Frisch	37%	41%	22%	Lean R
IA	1	Christina Bohannan	44%	34%	22%	Likely R
IA	3	Lanon Baccam	44%	31%	25%	Lean R
MI	7	Curtis Hertel	28%	61%	11%	Toss Up
MI	8	Kristen Rivet	26%	65%	9%	Lean R
MI	10	Carl Marlinga	27%	67%	6%	Lean R
MT	1	Monica Tranel	39%	55%	7%	Likely R
NE	2	Tony Vargas	43%	36%	21%	Lean R
NJ	7	Susan Altman	37%	40%	23%	Toss Up
NY	4	Laura Gillen	32%	50%	18%	Toss Up
NY	17	Mondaire Jones	31%	46%	24%	Toss Up
NY	19	Josh Riley	39%	40%	21%	Toss Up
NY	22	John Mannion	36%	46%	17%	Lean D
OR	5	Janelle Bynum	31%	41%	28%	Toss Up
PA	1	Ashley Ehasz	43%	25%	32%	Lean R
PA	10	Janelle Stelson	48%	27%	25%	Lean R
TX	15	Michelle Vallejo	22%	70%	8%	Likely R
VA	2	Missy Cotter Smasal	33%	54%	13%	Lean R
VA	7	Eugene Vindman	29%	55%	16%	Lean D
WI	1	Peter Barca	25%	66%	9%	Likely R
WI	3	Rebecca Cooke	34%	58%	7%	Lean R

✦ THIRD WAY

Conclusion

Given the asymmetry of our congressional districts and electoral coalitions, it is clear that the burden is significantly greater for Democrats running in Majority Maker districts and Frontline districts than Our Revolution districts to build broad and wide support. These competitive districts are overwhelmingly made up of ideologically moderate and conservative voters, and winning them

requires moderate and mainstream Democratic candidates that can appeal to a big tent of voters. In an election year where control of the House of Representatives will come down to less than a dozen conservative-leaning districts, it is clear that the path to winning the gavel lies through the center.

Note

Using Catalist's Ideology Plus Model, ideological groups were broken down along the following segments: Active voters modeled with a score between 0-30 were sorted into the "conservative" group, those with a score between 30.1-70 were sorted into the "moderate" group, and voters with a score between 70.1-100 were allotted to the "liberal" group. People with higher scores tend to hold more progressive views on more issues, middle-scorers are more likely to identify as moderate, and those with lower scores tend to hold more conservative views.