

LIFE OF THE PARTY: DEMOCRATS AND THE SEARCH FOR A POST-TRUMP FUTURE

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SUMMARY

- The Democrats could win big in the US midterm elections. This won't matter much for constraining Trump, but it will start to establish what politics comes after him.
- Our research finds three camps of Democrats, all with different diagnoses of America's problems: the revolutionaries see the system as unjust and needing structural change; the renovators see it as corrupt and needing reform; and the revivalists blame right-wing populism for breaking a system of bipartisan cooperation.
- What these camps see as broken in American domestic politics translates to how they view US foreign policy and Europe's place in it.
- No matter which camp goes on to determine the future of Democratic foreign policy, it will be a far cry from the transatlanticism of previous Democratic administrations. This year's midterm candidates have barely mentioned Europe, Russia or Ukraine in their campaigns.
- Europeans need to engage early and help shape their relationship with the party now, lest they be overlooked if and when Democrats do come to power.

What comes after Trump

This summer, the FIFA World Cup turned the world's attention to America while America turned on much of the world. As Iran was due to play Egypt in Seattle, the US launched new strikes in its four-month war with the country. On semi-final day, President Donald Trump posted on Truth Social an AI-doctored image of a map showing Canada, Greenland, Mexico and Venezuela covered with an American flag. And just days after Trump handed the World Cup trophy to the Spanish national team, his administration announced sweeping 10% baseline tariffs on 80 countries. The juxtaposition of tournament host and wartime belligerent reflects the position America now occupies in European strategic thinking: too central to ignore and too disruptive to rely on.

Europeans hoping that a midterm victory for Democrats in November will bring a reversal of this foreign policy should not hold their breath. If the party wins a majority of seats in one or both chambers of Congress—which is looking likely—they may be able to attach provisions to bills, launch investigations, issue subpoenas and lambast some of Trump's poor foreign policy choices. But the second Trump administration has shown it will route around Congress and confront it with delays, hostility and vitriol, limiting any capacity for oversight. Having spent its first 18 months in power ignoring a friendly Republican Congress, one with a Democratic majority has even slimmer chances. In other words, little will change until the occupant of the White House does.

For now, the Democrats' real power resides not in stopping the current administration but in shaping what comes next. Democratic candidates competing across the US—for both primaries and generals—have a wide ideological range, from “democratic socialists” to “centrists”. While they all heavily criticise Trump and his administration, they have different diagnoses for where the dysfunction began, what sustains it and what needs to be done about it. Engaged in party primaries across the country, Democratic candidates are putting forward competing answers to the two central questions Americans are asking themselves: “What went wrong?” and “How do we fix it?” Based on these answers, we have identified that Democrats tend to cluster into three camps—the “revolutionaries”, the “renovators” and the “revivalists”—each with distinct proposals for the future of America.

The **revolutionaries** argue that the political and economic system that drives America has always been unjust and was built to concentrate wealth at the top. Therefore, the way to fix America is to enact large, structural change. The **renovators** argue that the democratic system of government was largely built to benefit all Americans but has been corrupted by money and captured interests. Their proposed remedy is to root out large-scale corruption, rebalancing the economic and political systems to the benefit of middle- and working-class Americans. The **revivalists** argue that increased partisanship, fuelled by Trump and the MAGA-aligned right, has divided the country and undermined the collaborative bipartisanship that is necessary for the functioning of the system and its institutions. They are focused on reinvigorating those institutions, reviving the post-war international order and rebuilding political bridges, all of which they see as the path back to peace and prosperity.

The revolutionaries, renovators and revivalists are ideal types, not formal factions. They emerge from our analysis of over 50 high-profile Democratic primaries and general election campaigns throughout the 2026 midterm cycle. We also researched campaign platforms, stump speeches, debates and candidate interviews with local news, and interviewed various pundits, current and former staff, officials and pollsters in Washington. In doing so, we found that sorting candidates by their messages about the underlying cause of what has gone wrong in America proved to reliably predict how a candidate discusses domestic and global problems. For example, revolutionaries support Europe's strategic autonomy but would dislike a Europe defined by militarisation and austerity; renovators see Europe as a potential partner on anti-corruption, taxation and democracy, as long as Europeans provide for their own security; and revivalists remain attached to the NATO alliance but are still unlikely to restore the old division of labour.

The ideological battles between Democrats will matter more than the arithmetic of the Senate or the House for the next two years. One of these three camps will lead the party's ideological charge for the next presidential race, if not the next presidency. Leaders across Europe should not wait to see which will prevail. Rather, they should engage with these camps well before the presidential race gets underway. They may then be able to shape the thinking and policy proposals that Democrats put on the table between now and 2028, and beyond.

The Democratic camps

Democrats—from New York democratic socialists to staunch Iowa moderates—have more in common than not. Practically everyone in the party believes Trump is a problem and that he and the MAGA movement have fundamentally changed American democracy for the worse. Many view widespread corruption as an issue and some say corruption is encouraged by the system itself.

But while the policy views of the three Democratic camps overlap, there are a few key points of difference. To illustrate these characteristics more clearly, this paper focuses on key individuals who have gained national attention, are running in close races, or are largely representative of what other ideologically aligned candidates say. It is rare for a candidate to be a perfect “revolutionary” or “revivalist” because they must answer to constituencies with divergent interests and disparate views of American and global affairs. Some candidates will even recognise themselves across different camps. Nevertheless, these three camps represent sensitivities that are bound to clash in the primaries until one of them breaks through and is championed by the 2028 Democratic nominee for president. Understanding them helps anticipate the direction of US policy in the brouhaha of its politics.

The revolutionaries

The revolutionaries maintain that the political and economic order in the US is functioning as designed: to serve concentrated wealth rather than the American people. The enemy, in revolutionaries' rhetoric, is not necessarily any one person or party (such as Trump or the Republicans) but the economic and political system that consistently benefits the ruling class. Only a structural transformation of the system would finally make it work for the people.

Michigan Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed in his primary victory speech put the thesis as such: "It turns out that the reason so many of us ain't got is because of the system that has corrupted our politics to take it away from us. That is the thing we are taking on now". El-Sayed, who is a former public health official in Detroit, focuses his entire campaign on big structural goals: getting corporate money out of politics, and, like Kentucky Senate candidate Charles Booker, passing Medicare for All, a proposal for universal healthcare. Often revolutionaries' critiques take a moral tone, such as when Senate candidate Angie Nixon of Florida talks about cruelty out of Washington, or denounces the "liars" and "cheaters" in office.



Because the revolutionaries diagnose the political system as in need of a complete overhaul, reforms aimed at constraining the actions of individuals miss the point. Their signature domestic proposals—nationalising big American corporations, adding seats on the Supreme Court, establishing Congressional term limits, overhauling campaign funding and raising taxes on the ultra-wealthy—aim to fundamentally change the US political system rather than simply elect better leaders.

Their theory of power follows: winning office is useful, but only insofar as it can be used to structurally change power dynamics between a ruling corporate class and average working Americans. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, when asked about a potential run for president in 2028, responded: “My ambition is way bigger than that. My ambition is to change this country. Presidents come and go. Senate, house seats, elected officials come and go. But single-payer healthcare is forever. A living wage is forever. Workers’ rights are forever.”

On foreign policy, the revolutionaries argue that the current political system led America on an inevitable path of hyper-militarisation, threat inflation, an over-extension of its financial and human resources in military adventurism, and the reproduction of domestic systemic racism into foreign policy. They view the American relationship with Israel as the seminal example of everything wrong with this approach; Palestine being “one the great moral questions of our time” as New York congressional candidate Claire Valdez puts it.

Their diagnosis abroad is largely parallel to the one at home, viewing the pitfalls of US foreign policy as a metastasis caused by the American corporate class. As Valdez asserts:

“For decades, we have been sold a lie: that the US empire defends freedom, advances democracy, and protects human rights...In reality, the bipartisan war machine has delivered immense suffering around the world while doing little to improve the lives of working people here or abroad. The military-industrial complex doesn’t just enrich arms manufacturers—it has become our de facto industrial policy, sustaining enough jobs and political constituencies to make endless war challenging to stop.”

Their fixes to US foreign policy largely follow their domestic proposals: if you fix the system and its incentives for prioritising the financial gains of the wealthiest class, all else will follow.^[1] This is rooted in banning corporate political action committee spending on campaigns which they believe will ultimately diminish the influence of defence contractors and foreign interest groups—namely the American-Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC)—over candidates’ races, and therefore, diminish their influence on policy. In the short term, the revolutionaries aim to cut defence spending, bolster humanitarian aid and preference diplomacy in the American foreign policy toolkit. They also believe that the Biden administration’s foreign policy officials must be held accountable for continuing to supply Israel as its war on Gaza intensified.

Unsurprisingly, many in this camp represent overwhelmingly blue districts, call themselves “progressives” and some belong to the Democratic Socialists of America or the Working Family Party.

In these midterms, some of the revolutionary firebrands include Michigan Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed, Kentucky Senate candidate Charles Booker, Florida senate candidate Angie Nixon, Representative Chris Rabb of Pennsylvania, House candidates Melat Kiros in Colorado, and New York congressional candidates Claire

Valdez and Darializa Avila Chevalier. Disgraced Maine Senate candidate Graham Platner also used that same rhetoric.

The renovators

The renovators believe the system is imperfect, but largely worth keeping. In their view it has been co-opted and corrupted by money and corporate greed and upheld by a leadership class that is either corrupt themselves or out of answers. As James Talarico, Democratic Senate candidate in Texas, explains: “I think we’re living in an era of corruption, and I don’t just mean illegal activity... I’m talking about corruption in the deeper sense, the rotting of our systems from the inside out...” In his telling, strengthened by his moral standing as a middle school teacher and Presbyterian seminarian, the issue with the American political system is not the institutions themselves, but the way in which they are weaponised and perverted.



James Talarico  Jan 20
Team Talarico

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A handful of billionaires have redesigned our politics for their own profit.

We keep watching, we keep scrolling, we keep fighting — and they keep getting richer.

Fight the system, not your neighbor.



 10.3K  143  2.5K 

10,380 Likes • 143 Replies • 2,582 Restacks

Jan 20 at 7:52 PM

While the revolutionaries name the ruling class as the enemy, the renovators see the villain as a narrower collection of groups who have captured institutions that were otherwise built to work for the American people. This distinction yields a different theory of power: with the right rules in place, the existing machinery can be trusted to function again. Therefore, instead of demolition, this group aims to renovate.

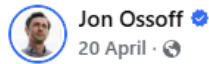
Senator Jon Ossoff spoke to this message at a campaign rally in June when he mused about what the founding fathers of America would see if they came to the US today:

"They'd see a pluralist democracy, people of all colours descended from every point on earth, stitched together from out of many nations into one. But they'd also see a nation, that at its height of wealth and power, fell into the very traps they most feared. Devouring itself in bitter conflict between warring factions, captured by special interests. And they'd see a faithless president exploiting this rot to pursue the absolute power they overthrew."

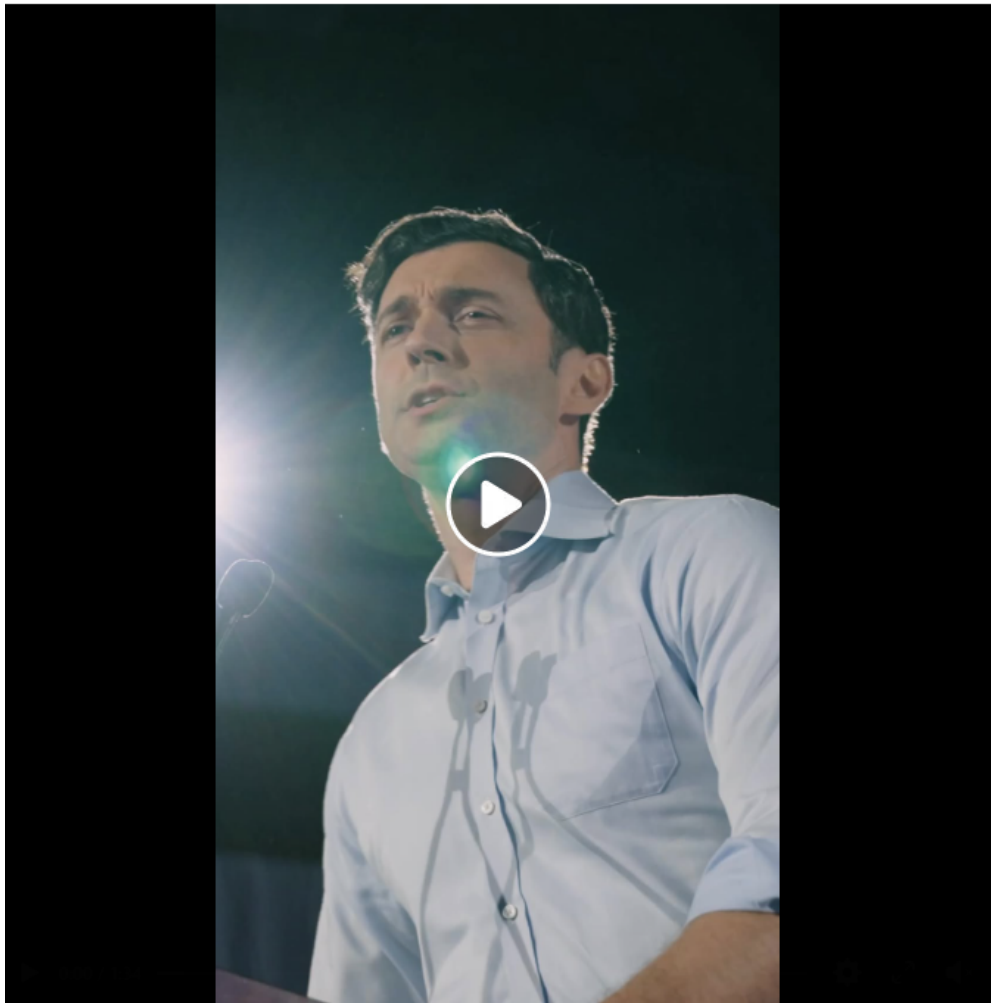
House candidate Daniel Bliss has voiced a similar critique, stating that: "While our families struggle to get ahead, politicians in Washington line their own pockets and special interests and wealthy donors flood our political system with money to protect their own power and access."

Because renovators share the same anger towards an entrenched leadership class, the remedy they prescribe overlaps somewhat with that of the revolutionaries, including stock trading bans for Congress, term limits and campaign finance reform. However, the renovators are more likely to clean out and reform an agency—namely the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—that the revolutionaries would call to abolish. The renovators also view the Democratic party as a vehicle worth trying to steer rather than run against.

On foreign policy, the renovators argue that the same corruption that is eroding domestic institutions has been exported, and that this is primarily corroding America's credibility. Ossoff made this connection explicit when he criticised the financial gains Jared Kushner has made while carrying out US foreign policy in the Middle East.



How much do you guys know about Jared?



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Senator Chris Murphy, a leader in this camp, has also described Trump's acceptance of gifts and business arrangements from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE as corruption with "no precedent in American history". Thus, the fix renovators recommend is twofold: root out the graft of those currently running foreign policy so American leadership abroad can function as intended, and then fix the political system such that future administrations cannot replicate the corrupt schemes of the current one.

Renovators are spread across the country, from candidates in conservative states and districts such as Senate candidate James Talarico of Texas, Senator Jon Ossoff from Georgia, House candidates Sam Forstg of Montana, Manny Rutinel of Colorado, and Eric Jones of California. There is also a cluster of midwestern candidates including House candidate Daniel Biss from Illinois, Senate candidate Peggy Flannagan of Minnesota, and former Senator and current candidate Sherrod Brown from Ohio.

The revivalists

The revivalists are firm believers in American exceptionalism and credit American liberalism for the peace and prosperity of the past 80 years. They see Trump and the MAGA-aligned right as the primary threat to that inheritance and to American democracy and values more broadly.

Their diagnosis is that Donald Trump and the MAGA movement behind him have steeped the country in hyper-partisan vitriol and driven it into a spiral of polarisation. Revivalists argue that these divides drive dysfunction in Washington and make it impossible to work within the political system. They often celebrate a prior era of bipartisanship and showcase their own capacity to work across the aisle.



Rebecca Cooke ✓
@RebeccaforWI

...

DC elites stir chaos into our livelihoods. I'll work with anyone if it means we deliver meaningful, felt results to people's pocketbooks in this District. In a time of uncertainty and deep mistrust in government, we can create stability with persistent, pragmatic leaders in Congress. That's how I intend to lead.



15:29 · 18 Aug 2026 · **10.2k** Views

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Their theory of power follows from that diagnosis. Democrats must defeat Trump, the movement behind him and the polarisation that produced both. Then competent, experienced hands will make the system function as intended again. They believe collaborating with reasonable, non-MAGA Republicans to build bridges and pass longer-lasting legislation will show Americans how a working government can operate. In turn, they think a government that delivers will earn back trust on its own merits. Revivalist candidates centre their electoral pitches around defeating Trump, restoring institutional norms and bipartisan collaboration. Senator Chris Coons, who is running for re-election in Delaware, made an appeal to voters saying as much:

"At some point [Trump's] chaos, corruption, and cruelty will come to an end. And a lot of work will be needed to pick up the pieces, to clean up the mess he's made, to fix a system that's still broken and not delivering results for the folks I serve in Delaware. I'm running for reelection because the job's not done."

Coons emphasises the damage that Trump has caused and his desire to restore normalcy to the halls of Congress. Additionally, many revivalists stand closest to the Democratic party leadership and often treat experience as a credential rather than a liability. In her unsuccessful race for Michigan's Senate seat, Congresswoman Haley Stevens emphasised her time in the Obama administration, for example, and Roy Cooper spotlights his accomplishments as evidence of his policy chops from his time as North Carolina's governor.

On foreign policy, the revivalists argue that American military alliances, trade relationships and institutions are integral pieces of the liberal world order. In their view, the post-war structures are worth defending, US leadership is needed and Trump's destruction of these institutions is actively harming American global power. They mostly believe that the backlash against these institutions, whether it be NATO or the WTO, is a failure of messaging. Americans were never told what the post-war order gave them, so they have had no reason to defend it.^[2]

Where revivalists identify a problem abroad, they frame it as they frame problems at home: the result of a specific bad actor's conduct or of partisan divisions. For example, they blame Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Russia's Vladimir Putin for their countries' strained relationships with the US. Change the leadership and you can restore the relationship, which is an argument for patience both at home and abroad. They argue too that foreign adversaries purposely widen American divisions, and that Americans should fight back by recognising those efforts and working across the aisle, a case New York representative Tom Suozzi made recently during a hearing on foreign influence:

"The biggest factor causing division in our country is our foreign adversaries... They are feeding division in our country. They cannot defeat us economically. They cannot defeat us militarily. So they want to take what they see as being our biggest weakness which is our diversity. And they fuel dissent in our country..."

Revivalists comprise the largest cross-section of the party and are represented from coast-to-coast, including Senator Chris Coons from Delaware, Senator Chuck Schumer from New York, Senator John Hickenlooper from Colorado, Representative Tom Suozzi from New York, Representative Maggie Goodlander from New Hampshire, Senate candidate Chris Pappas of New Hampshire, Senate candidate Roy Cooper from North

Carolina, House candidate Rebecca Cooke from Wisconsin, former Senate candidates Janet Mills from Maine and Angie Craig from Minnesota.

The ideology of America's Democratic camps

	Revolutionaries	Renovators	Revivalists
What's broken in America	<i>"The system was built to serve concentrated wealth. The enemy is not one person or party but the system itself."</i>	<i>"Corporate greed has co-opted the system, and a leadership class that is corrupt or out of answers upholds it."</i>	<i>"Polarisation broke the system and produced Trump and MAGA, which threaten to undo the successes of American liberalism."</i>
Theory of power	Changes need to be systemic. Nationalise big firms, add Supreme Court seats, impose term limits, overhaul campaign funding, tax the ultra-wealthy. Displace the party leadership rather than persuade it.	With the right rules the existing machinery can be trusted again. Stock trading bans for lawmakers, term limits and campaign finance reform. Steer the party rather than run against it.	Defeat Trump, the movement behind him and the polarisation that produced both, then work with reasonable Republicans to make the system work again. Closest to party leadership, and treat experience as a credential.
Foreign policy instincts	The system produced hyper-militarisation, threat inflation, overextension and the reproduction of domestic systemic racism abroad. The fix is upstream: ban corporate PAC money, cut defence spending, raise humanitarian aid and preference diplomacy.	The corruption eroding institutions at home has been exported, and self-dealing officials corrode American credibility abroad. Root out corruption so leadership abroad functions as intended, then strengthen the rules.	The post-war alliances, trade rules and institutions are worth defending and updating; Trump's destruction of them weakens American power. Problems abroad usually stem from bad actors or partisan dysfunction, so bipartisan cooperation, a strong military posture and standing with allies can fix global problems.
View of Europe	Wants a relationship not centred on security or defence. Accepts strategic autonomy and is least likely to campaign for returning withdrawn troops. Seeks a future transatlantic relationship centred on values like democracy, rule of law and workers' rights.	Wants a more balanced security relationship with European NATO members taking more responsibility for collective defence. Views Europe as a potential partner on corruption, taxation and democratic resilience.	Most likely to defend NATO as it was. Treats burden sharing as answered by the 5% pledge. Views Europe as a sacred ally and wants a future transatlantic relationship based on cultural values and free trade, with a strengthened NATO at the centre under US leadership.
Inspirational leaders	New York mayor Zohran Mamdani, Senator Bernie Sanders and House representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Ro Khanna and Summer Lee.	Senators Chris Murphy, Jon Ossoff, Brian Schatz and Chris Van Hollen.	Former Obama chief of staff Rahm Emmanuel, former vice president Kamala Harris, Governor Abigail Spanberger of Virginia, Governor Mikie Sherill of New Jersey and Senators Elissa Slotkin and Cory Booker.

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The five foreign policy issues

Primaries have at times led to tense disputes among Democrats. When it comes to foreign policy, our analysis shows where the camps divide on five key issues that will matter to Europeans: affordability and trade; the use of military force; China and great power competition; Israel; and Europe and European security.

1. Affordability and trade

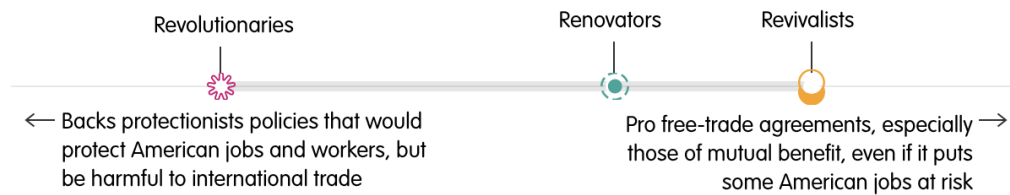
Since Zohran Mamdani's New York mayoral victory in November 2025, affordability has defined this election cycle's messaging. Candidates across the board focus on policies that would help the affordability crisis and frame other issues as perpetuating it.^[3] The focus is so singular that the headline messages are often interchangeable across the party: Abdul El-Sayed is running for "Money out of politics, money in your pocket, Medicare for all" while Roy Cooper's prevailing message is "Make stuff cost less."

In terms of foreign policy, trade is affordability gone global. And as all Democratic candidates see it, Trump's tariffs raise the price for Americans while enriching himself and his allies. But this consensus is an objection to these specific tariffs, not to all tariffs.

Revolutionaries remain sceptical of the old free-trade order itself: Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez at the Munich Security Conference called for "a recognition of NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] as a failed policy for many rural and working class communities," and Abdul El-Sayed called NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership a disaster for the American worker. Moreover, this camp sees small, strategic tariffs as legitimate tools of job protection.

Renovators, on the other hand, believe current trade agreements can be improved. Senator Jon Ossoff, for example, sent a letter to the Trump administration urging them to use the US-Mexico-Canada agreement (USMCA) review to police Mexican labour and environmental practices to ensure American growers have a chance to compete fairly on the global market.

Revivalists remain closely aligned to the old free-trade consensus. In April of this year, for example, senators in this camp asked the US trade representative to "strengthen and renew" the USMCA. They believe that trade tools like tariffs or export controls should only be used for national security issues, akin to the "small-yard, high-fence" policies of the Biden administration. Amid the Trump administration's trade wars, they suggest focusing on a narrow trade agenda that directly serves the interests of both sides, such as deals on critical minerals, new technologies or other pieces of critical supply chains.



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2. The use of military force

America's two latest military operations—Trump's war in Iran and the operation to remove Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro—have sparked debate among Democrats over what role the US military should play in foreign policy. Nearly every Democrat criticised the Iran war and many voiced reservations about Venezuela, but the extent to which Democrats are comfortable using the military as a foreign policy tool differs.

Revolutionaries read Trump's use of force in Iran and Venezuela as a natural continuation of an overly militarised foreign policy and advocate for that to change. El-Sayed called the Iran war "dumb and illegal", but argued that the real issue was the cost of a war America did not need to fight. Colorado's Melat Kiros makes this structural claim directly, "It's time to reimagine our global role: not as a militarised empire, but as a champion of diplomacy, human rights, and peacebuilding. We need to end the blank checks for endless war and reallocate that funding towards diplomacy abroad and housing, education, and healthcare here at home." New York candidate for congress Darializa Avila Chevalier puts it similarly.



Darializa for Congress ✓

@DarializaforNY

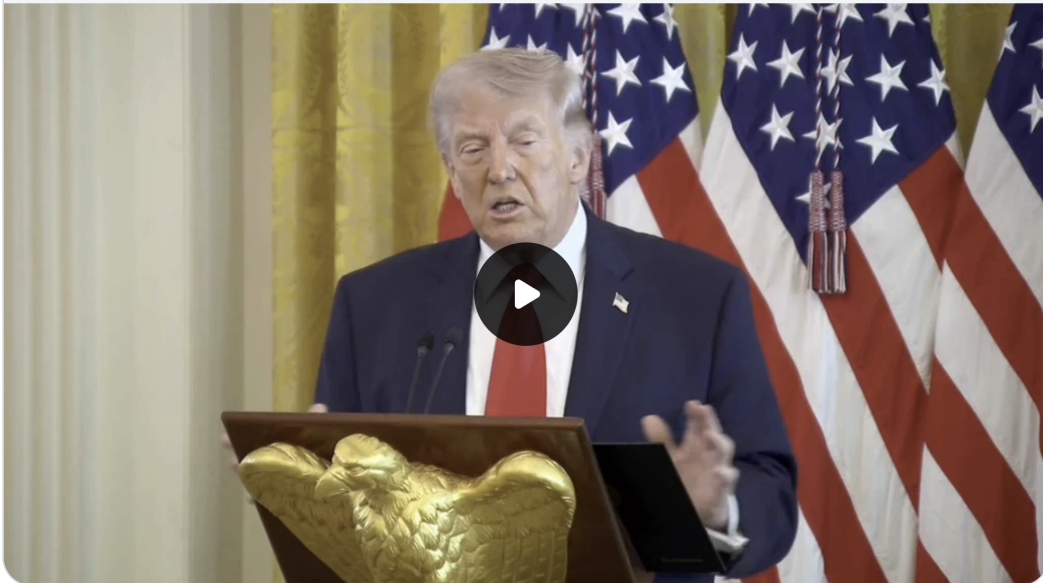


Another day, another instance of Trump saying the quiet part out loud. This is the fundamental issue with our national politics. Federal elected officials in BOTH parties CHOOSE to spend money on war & the military instead of on childcare, healthcare & our basic needs.



FactPost ✓ @factpostnews · 1 Apr

Trump: We can't take care of daycare. We're a big country. We're fighting wars. It's not possible for us to take care of daycare, Medicaid, Medicare, all these things.



23:13 · 2 Apr 2026 · 4,966 Views

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The revolutionaries, if in office, would work to cut the military budget broadly in the name of keeping the money at home. For them, the deeper fix to a foreign policy driven mainly by military action is upstream: end the corporate and defence contractor lobbies that supports these wars in the first place.

The renovators view the most recent use of force as domestic corruption running through foreign policy. They are not necessarily opposed to using military force, but uncomfortable with the corrupt forces that push the military to be a tool of first resort. Chris Murphy's office headlined his remarks on the money: "This president's foreign policy, the invasion of Venezuela, the ouster of Maduro, is about making his crowd filthy rich. It has nothing to do with American national security."

James Talarico likewise described the transaction as follows: "Trump promised the biggest oil executives in this country a 'great deal' if they gave him a billion dollars for his re-election campaign, and then he turned around and gave them a gift. He gave them the nation of Venezuela, home to the largest oil reserves in the world. Billionaires don't just run our economy. They don't just run our government. Now they run our foreign

policy.” Corruption, in this telling, drives how Trump uses force. As with domestic concerns, the way to “fix” the incentives to use military force is largely the same as the revolutionaries: reign in defence contractor graft, lobbying and campaign spending.

Revivalists press hardest on legality and cost, but the argument underneath is about what these operations do to America’s standing in the world. Chris Coons admonished the administration’s decision to launch strikes on Iran in February for their method and legality: “President Trump’s military campaign against Iran and call for regime change are the beginning of a reckless new war of choice with no clear strategy and no clear endpoint. This is not how a democracy goes to war.”

Revivalists levelled similar critiques at the military operation in Venezuela. Representative Maggie Goodlander responded to the capture of Maduro by asking: “What is the legal justification for such an action? The US Constitution entrusts the US Congress with war powers for very good reasons. The Trump Administration must immediately and truthfully answer questions about the motivation and legality of this unilateral military action, the potential for any further escalation, and the plan for peace.”

For this camp, how a country goes to war is a sign of its strength. Authorisation, a stated objective, and allies consulted in advance are what gives a war public support and partners willing to help in the effort. According to revivalists, a democracy that goes to war via unilateral decision is weaker afterward, because that decision erodes the constitutional system of checks and balances. So, Trump’s lack of consultation widens a divide between Republicans and Democrats, between the branches of government and diminishes the public image of the US military.



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3. China and great power competition

China is generally understood by all on the left as a strategic challenge. Yet Democrats disagree on just how big the threat is, whether to commit troops to the defence of Taiwan, and just how much the US should orient its economic and security policy around the strategic competition with China.

Revolutionaries fear a full-throated strategic competition with China would subvert domestic priorities. When Ocasio-Cortez was asked at the Munich Security Conference if she would commit to sending US troops to

defend Taiwan, she said: “We want to make sure we never get to that point and we want to make sure that we are moving in all of our economic, research, and our global positions to avoid any such confrontation.”

This camp’s scepticism of the use of force and relentless focus on domestic framing is clearly seen when hot-button issues in the strategic competition discussion arise. For example, this camp would rather support limits on AI development to protect jobs, workers and the environment, than to push forward on AI research in order to compete with China. Likewise, they are more likely to focus the conversation of US-China strategic competition on manufacturing gaps, lags in research and education and trade deficits, thus bringing the focus back to the working class and economic issues.



Ro Khanna ✓

@RoKhanna

...

Instead of having 56% of our budget go to defense, I'd rather put more money toward education to help us out-compete China and teach our kids American history, science, and technology.



0:29 · 19 May 2025 · **84.7k** Views

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22



At the other end, revivalists treat China as the defining national security issue and, therefore, AI, space and weapon development are part of an arms race that the US must win. All tools are on the table, whether it be an export-control regime, import controls on Chinese electric vehicles, sanctions on Chinese Communist Party officials or even bans on TikTok.



Congresswoman Maggie Goodlander  

@RepGoodlander



America, not China, should lead the world in AI to ensure that AI works for American workers, American innovation, and America's national security.

Our bipartisan MATCH Act is about closing dangerous loopholes that China is exploiting, standing shoulder to shoulder with our allies on a level playing field, and winning the AI race against China.

nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news...



From nbcnews.com

19:27 · 2 Apr 2026 · **962** Views

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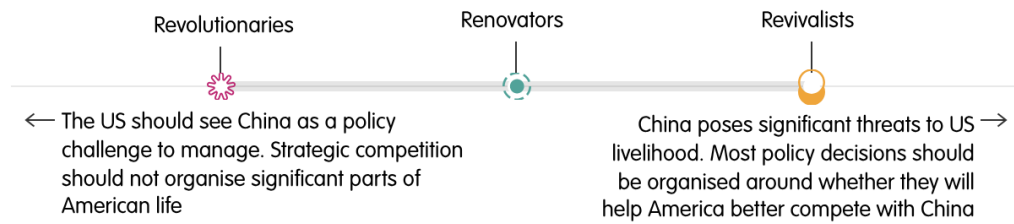
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Renovators sit in the middle. Hawkish enough to want to compete but unwilling to let strategic competition swallow the agenda. They are focused on economic fairness with China and competing beyond military means alone, but also willing to place domestic guardrails on AI and the tech race. They believe competition is important, but that it should not overtake all domestic needs. For example, they would advocate for the need for data centres to be energy and water self-sufficient, or even call for moratoriums on data centres, even if that threatens frontier model development.



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4. Israel

Israel is where the three camps separate most cleanly along a single question: what, if anything, should America sell or give to Israel?

This is a central issue for the revolutionaries, who maintain that Israel's actions in Gaza amount to genocide. This camp has concluded that conditioning aid to Israel, the previous progressive position, is no longer a viable measure to ensure any meaningful end to the conflict or long-term peace. Their preferred policy is a full arms embargo on Israel, including defensive systems.



Claire Valdez ✓

@claireforny



Two and a half years ago, Israeli leaders clearly stated their intent to carry out a genocide in Gaza. And that's exactly what they did.

I was in the streets with so many New Yorkers protesting our complicity and to free Palestine.

Antonio Reynoso stayed silent.



0:35 · 4 Jun 2026 · **186.1k** Views

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↺↻ 426

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This distinction has already defined a few primary elections. New York's Darializa Avila Chevalier, who won the congressional primary against Representative Adriano Espaillat, ran on "babies not bombs", promising to vote to halt arms sales to Israel. Melat Kiros, who unseated nearly-30-year incumbent Diana DeGette in Colorado, called for a full arms embargo to Israel and closed her victory speech leading a "Free Palestine" chant. El-Sayed takes this same position: "I support an immediate arms embargo on Israel and reject the false differentiation between 'offensive' and 'defensive' weapons."

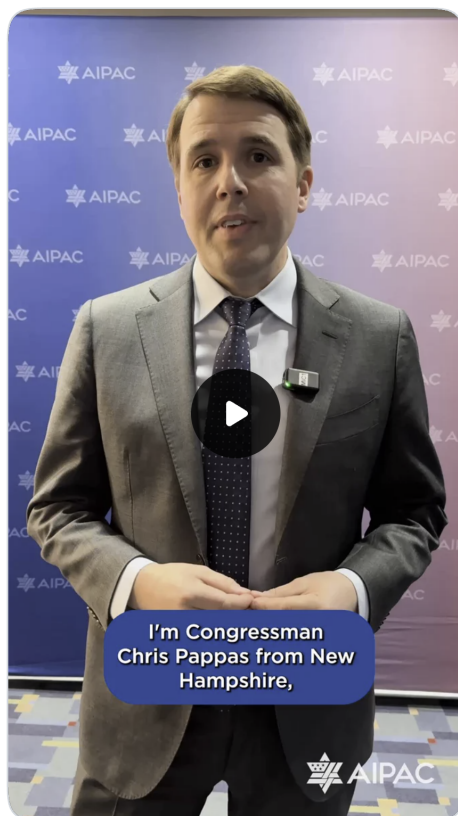
The renovators often make that distinction and are primarily focused on the need for change in the US-Israel relationship. Their belief that the system must be reformed is clearly reflected in their positions towards Israel. James Talarico, for example, has said he would work to ban the sale of offensive military weapons to Israel while still supporting Israel's defensive systems. Talarico has declined to call it a genocide but has called the destruction in Gaza a "moral disaster". Senator Ossoff similarly told constituents that he voted against sending rifles to Israel because of the "extreme mass deprivation of civilians in Gaza", and defended his vote for air-to-ground missiles because of Israel's need to be able "to strike those who would launch missiles and rockets at Israeli civilians." Senator Murphy, likewise, voted with Bernie Sanders's resolution disapproving of

the sale of offensive weapons in 2024, but has since moved even further, calling for a halt of US military aid altogether. But most in this camp have stopped short of demanding a total embargo. Instead, they try to thread the needle between respecting America's long-standing special relationship with Israel and combatting the structure that has allowed Israel's abuse of military force.

Revivalists support the US-Israel relationship but blame the two leaders, Trump and Netanyahu, for souring the once-mutually beneficial of defence relationship. In their view, Netanyahu and Trump's actions have exacerbated US public opinion of the relationship, rather than the structure of the relationship itself. Chris Coons has reiterated that his "commitment to Israel remains ironclad" while directly placing the blame on Netanyahu for the declining American sentiment towards the country. Similarly, Representative Chris Pappas, running for Senate in New Hampshire, articulates support for Israel and criticism of Netanyahu's government. Roy Cooper, meanwhile, has flatly rejected efforts to block aid to Israel.



.@RepChrisPappas on the importance of the bipartisan U.S.-Israel "at a time where we know Iran wishes 'death to Israel' and to the United States."



19:29 · 8 Mar 2026 · 162.3k Views



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12



The revivalists view on America's relationship with Israel is perhaps best expressed in Chuck Schumer's March 2024 Senate floor speech, where he called Netanyahu "an obstacle to peace" who has "lost his way

by allowing his political survival to take precedence over the best interests of Israel.” In other words, just as Trump and the rise of the MAGA right have degraded the American political system, Netanyahu and the far-right in Israel have degraded the US-Israel relationship. The solution, then, is to try to change the behaviour of Netanyahu since they cannot change that he and Trump are in power. Therefore, this camp tends to treat US-Israel arms sales on a case-by-case basis, usually agreeing to send weapons, but reserving the right to condition those arm sales based on how Israel uses them. As Governor Janet Mills, who failed to win the Democratic primary for Maine’s Senate, said while criticising Netanyahu’s conduct she would evaluate any bill to halt arms shipments “on the specifics.”



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5. Europe and European Security

Nearly all Democrats see the value of the transatlantic relationship beyond the Trump administration’s idea of a “shared cultural heritage”. For the president, this is often a thinly veiled way to value the continent for its whiteness and colonial past and lambast it when he sees this as changing. Democrats, on the other hand, value the relationship for its shared rules and norms—whether these are liberal internationalism or workers’ rights.

A Democratic congressional majority will certainly not have the same disdain for Europe as many in the Trump administration do, but the Democratic party is certain to present its challenges. Some in the Democratic coalition would like to see a renewed American role in NATO, for example, while others want a European partner that can stand on its own. One challenge is for certain: the US-European relationship will be on the back burner. In the midterm campaigns you would be hard pressed to find a single Democratic candidate talking about the transatlantic relationship with voters.

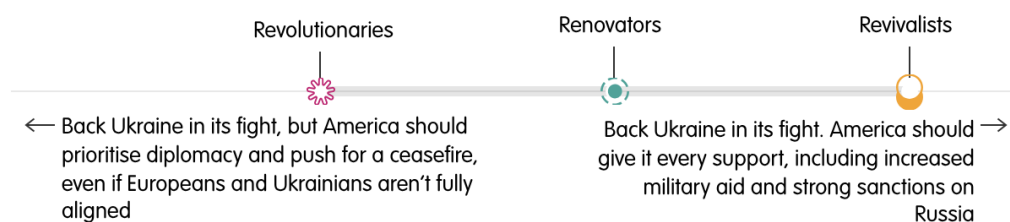
Ukraine

On the war in Ukraine, all camps are firmly behind Kyiv but divide over the specifics of what America should do in support. Revolutionaries are wary of a militarised US foreign policy and an economic statecraft whose

costs fall to the American taxpayers. Leaders in this camp voted against seizing Russian oligarch's assets in 2022, and signed, then retracted, a 2022 letter urging Biden to use negotiation and diplomacy. Much of the motivation to write that letter four years ago still exists within this camp today.^[4]

The revolutionaries are most eager to push for peace and they remain somewhat doubtful that additional weapons for Ukraine benefit Americans, viewing an open-ended war as another entry in the long book of American over-extension. However, they are not outright against supporting Ukraine. Even Abdul El-Sayed, who was extremely vocal against sending weapons to Israel, said: “When it comes to Ukraine, I think we are involved in a righteous struggle from being invaded by their neighbour.”

Those in the renovator and revivalist camps both support Ukraine's independence and the use of American military aid to secure it with varying intensity. Their divergence is on the use of sanctions on Russia. Renovators Chris Murphy and Jon Ossoff expressed some scepticism of the efficacy and knock-on effects of the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia Act of 2026, which would authorise an increase of tariffs up to 100% for the top-five foreign purchasers of Russian energy supplies. Murphy ultimately voted for the bill, and Ossoff against. Senators Mark Kelly and Ruben Gallego, both revivalists, on the other hand, vocally supported the bill from the beginning. These are arguments about how much to spend and how hard to squeeze, not about whether Ukraine should survive. The sharper disparities appear when the question turns from the war to the US-European relationship itself.



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US-European relationship

Revolutionaries are interested in a transatlantic relationship that is not centred around NATO or any military alliance. As revolutionaries believe in creating an American foreign policy that is not solely centred on military force, they also see that as a goal in the European context. Hence, they accept European strategic autonomy and might even welcome it. They are the camp most open to structural boldness and the least likely to campaign for returning any troops Trump withdraws from the continent. This camp has shown a proclivity for supporting a move towards burden-shifting, but are sceptical of a European relationship achieved only

through rearmament.^[5] Rather, they will seek an affirmative agenda as sketched by Ocasio-Cortez and Representative Jason Crow at the 2026 Munich Security Conference: a new transatlantic relationship re-centred on combatting authoritarianism on both continents and advancing labour standards, rather than one singularly obsessed with NATO and continued US security commitments.

Renovators would likely treat Europeans first and foremost as partners on the agenda they care about—corruption, taxation and democratic resilience.^[6] They would also push for Europe to continue to take an increased responsibility for its own security. Murphy explained as much during a Senate foreign relations subcommittee hearing in September 2025: “I believe in that NATO treaty, I believe in Article 5, but I also think it is absolutely time for the members of NATO on the other side of the Atlantic to take more responsibility for their collective defence.” The renovators are therefore keen on the idea of increased burden-sharing within NATO since they often view foreign policy issues through the lens of “where is the money going?” Correspondingly they view European governments as natural allies in the pursuit of tax enforcements, financial transparency, AI and digital platform regulation.

Revivalists remain the most attached to the alliance and the most likely to defend NATO. Coons released a joint statement with Senator Mitch McConnell in April of 2026 reaffirming their support for the alliance: “Americans are safer when NATO is strong and united. It is in our interest for all allies to tend this unity with care...The Senate will continue to support the alliance for the peace and protection it provides America, Europe, and the world.” The revivalists also credit European allies with responding to American pressure by committing 5% of GDP to military spending, and with this they treat burden sharing as a question already answered.



Congressman Bill Keating  

@USRepKeating



Suspending security assistance to Eastern flank NATO allies is a gift to Putin that undermines NATO and American readiness in Europe. If @POTUS wants Europe to do more, he shouldn't be cutting funding to build capacity in European armies.

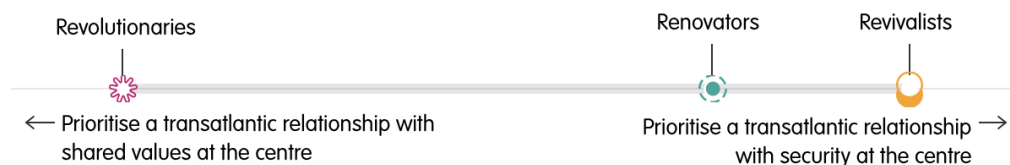


From washingtonpost.com

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Any structural change, in their eyes, is unnecessary and potentially counterproductive to continued US leadership. Rather, they see European rearmament as vindication of the alliance and reason for the US to stay committed. Even if the old division of labour and spending is not coming back, they would restore the old processes within the alliance: consultation before decisions, allies told in advance and an obligation to commitments.^[7]



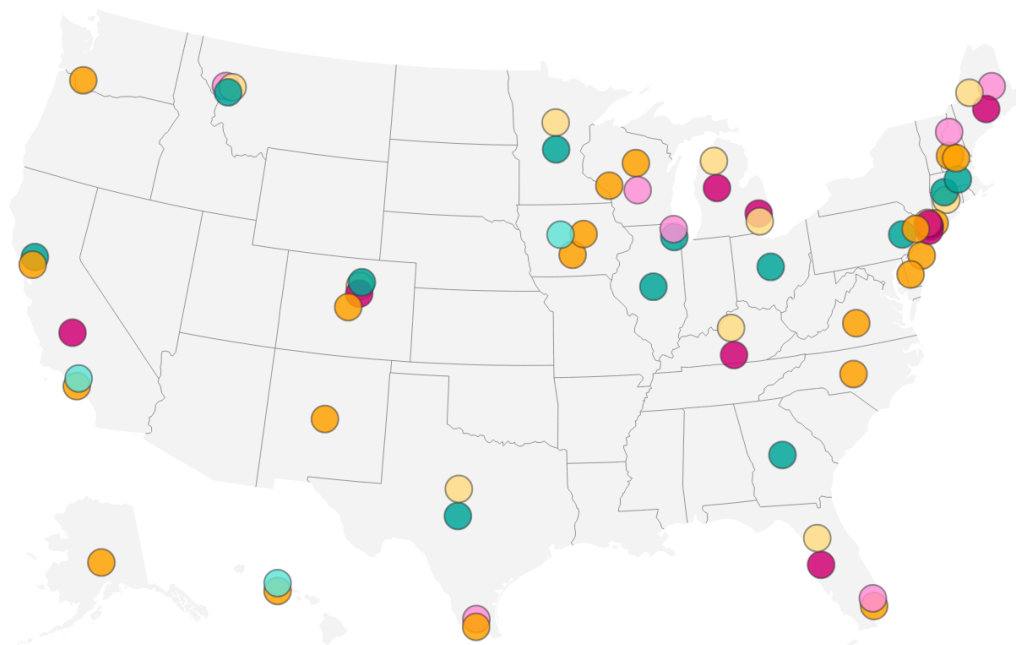
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The uncertain road ahead

It is too early to know which of the three camps will be the most successful with voters. Democratic primaries in the spring and summer 2026 have offered mixed lessons. Quite a few revolutionary firebrands, such as Abdul El-Sayed and Angie Nixon, have won their primaries in widely covered upset victories. Meanwhile, some renovators like Jon Ossoff and James Talarico are running particularly strong campaigns while revivalists continue to fare strongly across the board. In other words, Europeans could be facing any of the foreign policy positions described above, and should engage with all three camps long before the American public decides which should come out in front.

Selected competitive Democratic primaries in the race for the US 2026 midterms, sorted by camp

■ Revolutionary won ■ Lost ■ Renovator won ■ Lost ■ Revivalist won ■ Lost



Based on the results of primary races for the 2026 midterms. Data accurate as of September 14th 2026.
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Recommendations for Europe

Trump's frenzy of disruptions too often clouds European judgement on long-term evolutions. If Democrats return to power, they will not revert to "back to normal". Instead, Europeans need to engage with them on a new agenda; whether they be a far cry from the previous Democratic administration, like the revolutionaries, or a fair bit closer, like the revivalists. To anticipate what they may be dealing with in less than three years, Europeans should engage with all Democrats—from the familiar to the uncomfortable—even when

disagreements abound, and start thinking of a common agenda to help shape Democratic policy while it is still being formed.

Expect the unexpected

European governments took a long time to accept that MAGA is durable and not a deviation from the norm. To be better prepared this time around, the debates on the American left deserve early attention, especially as they too could cause surprises. The populist energy emanating from the revolutionaries may prove to be a winning electoral strategy for Democrats in the midterms, and could well be mobilised by the next presidential candidate.

One thing is for certain: the Democratic party has entered a post-Obama, post-Biden era where questions over leadership mark more than a change of personnel. They signal the passing of the generation shaped by the Iraq war, the global financial crisis, the rise of ISIS and the return of great-power rivalry with Russia and China. Strategic competition with China is no longer the *modus operandi* as it was under Biden. International trade is no longer taken as an unqualified good. The American left is not returning to the internationalism of the 2010s. A new cohort of Democratic leaders is emerging with different political instincts and foreign-policy priorities.

Many Democrats no longer see the transatlantic relationship as an inheritance that they have a duty to preserve. If and when they return to power, their expectations of burden-sharing will have hardened, historical attachment to the Atlantic alliance will have faded and Europe will no longer occupy the central place it once did in Democratic foreign policy debates. Younger Democrats in particular approach alliances through the lens of effectiveness and narrow shared interests and values, rather than a long-standing historical solidarity. Europeans need to pay attention to the debates taking place inside the Democratic party in order to engage the party of tomorrow.

Engage with every Democrat

As Europeans navigate the new American left, the biggest hurdle they will face is that they are increasingly viewed as at best as irrelevant and at worst as complicit. Europeans are not the focus of any of the three camps' foreign policies. In fact, throughout our analysis, Europe was hardly mentioned in any television interviews, stump speeches or posts on X. Even the war in Ukraine and Russia's hybrid challenges have lost prevalence in foreign policy debates consumed with China, Iran, Israel and Venezuela, to name a few.

When they do pay attention to Europe, Democrats across the board are beginning to regard European leaders who have spent nearly two years currying Trump's favour as part of the problem—whether that is because Democrats view them through the lens of upholding an oligarchy, enabling gross corruption or being pathetic in the face of a global bully. Even if European leaders are pragmatically flattering the president with paternal references or golf rounds, they should remember that there are still a lot of democrats (not the party, the philosophy) on the other side of the Atlantic who would like to see in Europeans a standard-bearer

and not an enabler.

Likewise, behind closed doors European leaders espouse a disappointment in Democratic politicians for losing to Trump twice and failing to put up decent opposition so far.^[8] Democrats, too, are acting pragmatically. The options they currently have to mount a significant opposition are few and ineffective.

Which is all to say, engagement and re-building bridges across the left now will be essential for building a transatlantic relationship fit for the post-Trump world. European leaders and all three camps want America to play a constructive, trusted and peaceful role in the world—they just differ on what exactly that looks like.

In particular, Europeans have to start meeting and engaging with revolutionaries, even if their positions appear furthest outside the norm. This camp, for its provocations and innovation, is feeding most of the political conversation and fires up the base. Engagement would make Europe's concerns and assets more prevalent to their thinking, while ignoring them only guarantees tension if they come to power.

Shape the next transatlantic agenda

As Democrats are not paying any attention to Europe, the burden of revitalising the transatlantic relationship lies with Europeans. There are significant areas—like tech regulation, corruption reform, taxation, trade and security—where European leaders will find partners in the American left if they so choose. They should not be surprised, however, if they must make the first move. Indeed, if Democrats win the midterms, the next two years will see Trump weak and the Democrats not yet strong. In that time, no policy idea will come from Washington that imagines the future of collaborations with Europe. It is up to Europeans to propose them.

Europeans' experience of the Biden administration illustrates why relying on American leadership is insufficient. Although Biden championed alliances rhetorically, several defining decisions were taken with limited European consultation. The Inflation Reduction Act prioritised domestic reindustrialisation through measures many Europeans regarded as discriminatory. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was poorly coordinated with allies. The AUKUS agreement advanced Indo-Pacific strategy but came at the expense of French interests. These episodes reflected a broader shift towards a US that increasingly pursues its strategic objectives unilaterally, even under an avowedly pro-NATO administration. Europeans' continued acquiescence towards the Trump administration has only made unilateral foreign policy more appealing.

To avoid facing a Democratic majority which operates alone, Europeans must think through what they would like to propose to Democrats. That agenda should be capable of appealing across the Democratic coalition, from revolutionaries to renovators to revivalists.

In setting an agenda, Europeans should connect with Democrats from all three camps, but there are specific opportunities to build stronger coalitions with the camps that are naturally aligned with European interests. For example, on Israel policy and a new US role in the Middle East, the revolutionaries and the renovators could find alignment with many European governments. On a framework for competing with China and derisking, Europeans should collaborate with renovators and revivalists. All three camps will be in favour of a

rebalanced NATO, but should Europeans seek more structural changes, they would find allies in the renovator and revolutionary camps. On all issues, Europeans should make the case that they can be a practical partner in solving some of the international problems around which the next Democratic coalition will organise itself. In so doing, Europeans and the US Democrats can build a new, more balanced and stable alliance.

A renewed transatlantic programme should therefore include:

- **A “fair trade” agenda** that combines openness with stronger labour protections, coordinates responses to Chinese industrial overcapacity, establishes minimum wage requirements and climate standards. All three camps could be interested in such an agenda: revivalists for competitiveness, renovators for reestablishing ethical rules and revolutionaries for climate and labour rights progress. For Europeans, it is important to move away from the logic of indiscriminate tariffs and negotiated exemptions. Instead they should put forward a logic of fair competition and sustainable industrial development on both sides. The European Commission should start by identifying partners with whom to discuss these goals.
- **A joint framework for AI** that strengthens consumer protections, ensures fair taxation of digital platforms, promotes open access to AI for public goods such as healthcare and education, and aligns technological innovation with climate objectives. The renovators would be most in favour of such a proposal, and elements of the revolutionaries and revivalists would be a natural coalition. France, which promotes international cooperation for responsible AI governance, as well as Britain, which will host the G7 in 2028, should reach out to Democrats interested in tackling the issue and working on a regulatory framework for AI and other technologies.
- **A rebalanced NATO** in which European allies assume greater responsibility for force generation, command structures and regional deterrence, allowing the US to reduce its military footprint without weakening collective defence. All three camps would find favour in stronger European allies, although revivalists are probably more comfortable in the conversation. Nevertheless, Europeans should also spend time engaging with revolutionaries and renovators, who do not see the same value in alliances, and show that collective defence can be cost-effective and a guarantee of long-term security. Transatlanticist networks in staunch US allies such as Germany, the Netherlands or Poland should start suggesting concrete transformations of the alliance to be discussed with Democrats.
- **A substantial expansion of transatlantic educational, research and cultural exchanges**, including easier access to European universities for American students, expanded researcher mobility and new funding for joint academic networks. Revivalists would applaud a greater cultural exchange and such a vision for renewed American leadership. Revolutionaries and renovators would also welcome the opportunity to centre education, research and culture in the transatlantic relationship, rather than military. The EU could help promote such a “Community of friendship for Europeans and Americans”, which a lot of Europeans may embrace, that de-emphasises trade and defence as the only pillars of the transatlantic relationship, and put democracy, innovation and human rights at the centre. Such an initiative would,

above all, help cushion Europe's fall towards irrelevance on the American left.

These proposals would resonate differently across the Democratic coalition. Revivalists would view them as a means of modernising American leadership rather than abandoning it. Renovators could see them as evidence that Europe is assuming greater responsibility for its own security while contributing to domestic American priorities on labour, industrial policy and technological governance. Revolutionaries may find opportunities to advance an ambitious climate and social agenda beyond their shores. In all cases, the objective should be the same: demonstrate that Europe can be an asset rather than a burden for the next generation of Democratic policymakers.

Methodology

The revolutionaries, renovators, and revivalists are ideal types that emerged from our analysis of 42 high-profile Democratic primaries and general election campaigns throughout the 2026 midterm cycle and of 63 individual Democratic candidates. We exhaustively researched campaign platforms, stump speeches, debates and candidate interviews with local news, and interviewed various pundits, current and former staff, officials and pollsters in Washington DC from April to August 2026.

The Democratic primary races and candidates studied include: Senate races in Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio and Texas; Governor races in Iowa, New Jersey, Virginia and Wisconsin; and Congressional races in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

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[1] ECFR conversations with current and former progressive congressional staffers, Washington DC, July and August 2026

[2] Author's conversations with congressional staffers, Washington DC, July 2026

[3] ECFR conversation with Democratic pollsters, Online, May 2026

[4] Conversations with progressive and moderate Democratic congressional staffers, Washington DC, July 2026

[5] ECFR Conversation with former and current progressive congressional staff, Washington DC, July and August 2026

[6] Authors' conversations with politicians, March 2026, Washington DC and conversation with Tim Walz, ECFR annual council meeting, Vienna, June 2026

[7] Author's conversations with congressional staffers, Washington DC, July 2026

[8] ECFR private workshop with European officials, Berlin, February 2026

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