

# Democrats need to get out of their own way



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"We're in trouble," Rep. [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) (D-N.Y.) [told journalist Errol Louis](#). "We need to acknowledge that this isn't just about middle of the road, an increasingly narrow band of independent voters. This is really about the collapse of support among young people, among the Democratic base, who are feeling they worked overtime to get this president elected and aren't necessarily being seen."

Ocasio-Cortez is right about the general point. Democrats are in trouble. But the data simply don't support her position that the collapse of support amongst younger, liberal voters — which hasn't been documented, by the way — is the problem.

The reality is that the Democratic Party's progressive wing is openly hunting moderates and President [Biden](#), who are the ones accurately reading the bright, flashing signs in front of them. Ninety percent of Americans are [worried about inflation](#). Seventy-five percent rate the economy as [fair or poor](#). And according to Gallup's [monthly poll](#), in addition to inflation and the economy, Americans also worry about crime and violence, homelessness, health care and federal spending.

Notably missing from top concerns are climate change and canceling student loan debt — two key progressive rallying cries.

Indeed, a recent [NBC News poll](#) found that voters care more about traditional economic issues than progressives' priorities. The top issue was cost of living, followed by jobs and the economy. Cost of living had displaced voting rights/election integrity and the coronavirus, both of which ranked higher than cost of living in January's survey. On the other hand, climate change and the coronavirus were ranked sixth and eighth, respectively.

In light of this, [Biden](#)'s recently released 2023 budget proposal, with its strong focus on economic and security concerns, makes a lot of sense. The \$5.8 trillion budget emphasizes two big issues for Americans: crime and inflation. It outlines [significant increases](#) in military and police department funding and would raise taxes on corporations and top earners.

Right on cue, Republicans erupted that the budget proposal doesn't meet the moment and [falls short](#) on adequately strengthening military spending. That's to be expected. But the more surprising negativity — the one we would certainly hope to avoid — is the continual criticism [flowing from the left flank](#) of the Democratic Party.

Chief among their targets is Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), who torpedoed [Biden](#)'s Build Back Better spending bill in late 2021. Manchin has an outsized

impact on the Democratic agenda because of the slim majority Democrats hold, which is understandably frustrating to party leaders at times. But the reality is that moderate Democrats are espousing an agenda that's more in step with Americans' priorities. With an eye toward the November midterms, these moderates are in a far better position.

The data are clear: Voters are practically begging Democrats to shift to the center. And the Democratic establishment is backing moderate candidates they think can win, not catering to progressive agendas.

The latest Schoen Cooperman Research (SCR) [survey found](#) that 54 percent of voters say they want [Biden](#) and the Democratic Party to shift to the center and embrace more moderate policies. Only 18 percent think they should shift more to the left, and 13 percent are happy with where the party is currently.

Further, in perhaps the biggest blow to the party — and AOC's argument — [SCR reports](#) that 61 percent of voters agree that [Biden](#) and Democrats are "out of touch with hard-working Americans" and "have been so focused on catering to the far-left wing of the party that they're ignoring Americans' day-to-day concerns," such as "rising prices" and "combating violent crime."

Consequently, it comes as no surprise that [SCR found](#) that voters trust Republicans more to handle key issues, including lowering crime with a 15-point advantage, controlling inflation with a 12-point advantage, and a six-point edge on managing the economy.

Just as we saw in the 2018 midterms and the 2020 general election, [Biden](#) and moderate Democrats are listening to the electorate.

The president's 2022 [State of the Union address](#) showed a shift to the

center with calls to “fund the police,” touted the bipartisan infrastructure bill, and called for securing the border. The [2023 budget](#) proposes increased national security spending; outlines \$32 billion in public safety spending, including for beat officers and crime prevention; and focuses on items with popular support, including money for the opioid crisis, expanded mental health services, spending for veterans’ health, and more money for cancer research.

New Jersey Gov. [Phil Murphy](#), a key Democratic politician, focused on affordability with no mention of climate change or social justice in his [budget address](#) just a few months after winning a tight race. Frontline representatives such as Reps. Elissa Slotkin (D-Mich.) and [Abigail Spanberger](#) (D-Va.) are touting the importance of [securing the border](#). Slotkin introduced legislation last month that would require the Department of Homeland Security to develop a comprehensive plan to identify, deploy and integrate emerging technologies to heighten “situational awareness” along U.S. borders.

And in one of the clearest examples of Democratic officials running to the center, while Lt. Gov. John Fetterman leads the Pennsylvania Senate primary, the state’s Democratic Party voted to endorse moderate Rep. Conor Lamb. He is seen as more conventional and most electable in the general election in this presidential battleground state. Lamb [has backing](#) from the state party’s Latino Caucus, the National Organization for Women and most of the building trades unions, as well as Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney and Rich Fitzgerald, the chief executive of Allegheny County, which includes Pittsburgh.[17]

We could go on. There is that much data to support the argument that moderates and their policies are Democrats’ best hope to avoid a complete wipeout in the November midterms.

But what's crucial for Democratic prospects is that progressives stop bad-mouthing moderates and stay in their lane. If your district is left leaning, run a campaign that caters to those voters. Just don't flood the media with criticism and policy that turns off other voters.

Keeping the Democratic majority in both chambers of Congress should be more important than ragging on [Joe Manchin](#).

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