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# PROGRESSIVES CONTROL THE FUTURE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

**Ethan Winter**, Senior Advisor  
**Sean McElwee**, Executive Director  
**Julian Brave NoiseCat**, Vice President of Policy & Strategy

## Executive Summary

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- ▶ We find popular support among registered voters for a range of progressive policies, including a deportation moratorium, Medicare for All, a 70 percent marginal tax rate, and a \$2.5 trillion investment in public housing.
- ▶ The youngest block of voters, aged eighteen through twenty-nine, overwhelmingly supports these policies. On net, voters under the age of thirty support a deportation moratorium by 26 points, Medicare for All by 32 points, affordable housing by 48 points, and a 70 percent marginal tax rate by 46 points.
- ▶ A plurality of Democrats prefers socialism to capitalism, with support driven by younger voters.

## Introduction

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A fundamental change is taking place within the Democratic Party. For decades, Democrats feared being called “liberal,” let alone “progressive.” Indeed, it was President Bill Clinton who declared the “era of big government” to be over. Now, however, Bernie Sanders, a senator from Vermont and a self-professed democratic socialist, is a frontrunner in the Democratic Party’s presidential primary. And it’s not just Sanders. First-year Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez rose to prominence following her endorsement by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), and she has quickly become one of the most recognizable and popular figures in the party.

Yet a specter is haunting the minds of some of the commentariat. The ghost of George McGovern clouds their vision.<sup>1</sup> Take for example Jim Cowan, president of Third Way, a centrist think tank. He has warned that not only does running on an unabashedly left-wing agenda raise electability concerns but also that the candidacy of Sanders—and democratic socialism, more generally—are an “existential threat to the future of the Democratic party.”

Surely, Mr. Cowan and his Third Way associates want this to be true, but we here at Data for Progress strive to have a little quantitative rigor in our political analysis. To this end, we recently polled support for both the policies that constitute the Sanders–Ocasio-Cortez progressive agenda, and the ideology to which they both subscribe: democratic socialism. Each of these was measured in our December 2019 poll from YouGov Blue.

## Policies

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We pulled three policies directly from Sanders’s 2020 campaign website, and one policy from a recent interview with Ocasio-Cortez. In our poll, we found strong support among registered voters for all four policies, and more than that, each policy is overwhelmingly popular with the youngest generation of voters. In order to ensure that this was as intellectually rigorous as possible, we replicated this finding using entirely distinct polling methodologies to account for any anomalies, and we found broadly similar outcomes among each (see Appendix for more detail on the replication).

The first three questions were drawn from the Sanders website, and the fourth was from the interview with Ocasio-Cortez:

1. Do you support or oppose instituting a moratorium on deportations until a thorough audit of past practices and policies is complete?
2. Do you support or oppose creating a Medicare for All, single-payer, national health insurance program to provide everyone in America with comprehensive health care coverage, free at the point of service?
3. Do you support or oppose investing \$2.5 trillion to build nearly 10 million permanently affordable housing units?
4. Do you support or oppose a 70 percent tax rate on income over \$10 million?

As these questions cover a range of economic and social issues, they represent a good proxy of support for a broader progressive agenda.

The deportation moratorium is part of Sanders’s larger immigration plan, which the campaign released in November of last year. As part of this package, Sanders also proposed to “break up” Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The New York Times described his plan as “among the most progressive offered by a 2020 Democratic presidential candidate to date.”

Medicare for All would enroll all Americans in a government health insurance plan that includes dental and vision care. The policy would eliminate premiums, co-pays, and deductibles, as well as the private, for-profit health insurance industry. (Data for Progress has previously polled Medicare for All, finding considerable support.)

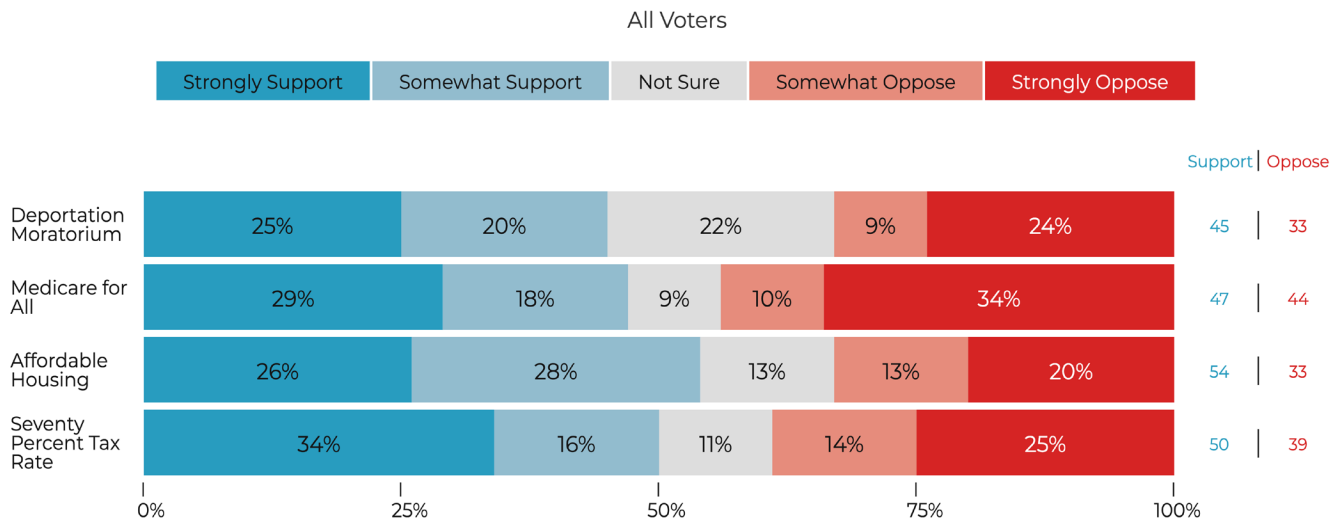
The \$2.5 trillion investment in affordable housing is a component of Sanders’s broader “Housing for All” platform, which also includes strengthening the Fair Housing Act and enacting a national rent-control standard.

The fourth and final policy we studied is a 70 percent tax rate on income over \$10 million (i.e., a 70 percent marginal tax rate on income in excess of \$10 million dollars). According to the Washington Post, this tax, if implemented, would raise \$720 billion over the next ten years.

Notably, we found that all four proposals enjoy the support of registered voters. Net support for each of these is as follows:

- ▶ Deportation moratorium: +12 percentage points
- ▶ Medicare for All: +3 points
- ▶ Massive investment in affordable housing: +21 points
- ▶ Seventy percent marginal tax rate: +11 points

## Voters Support the Progressive Agenda



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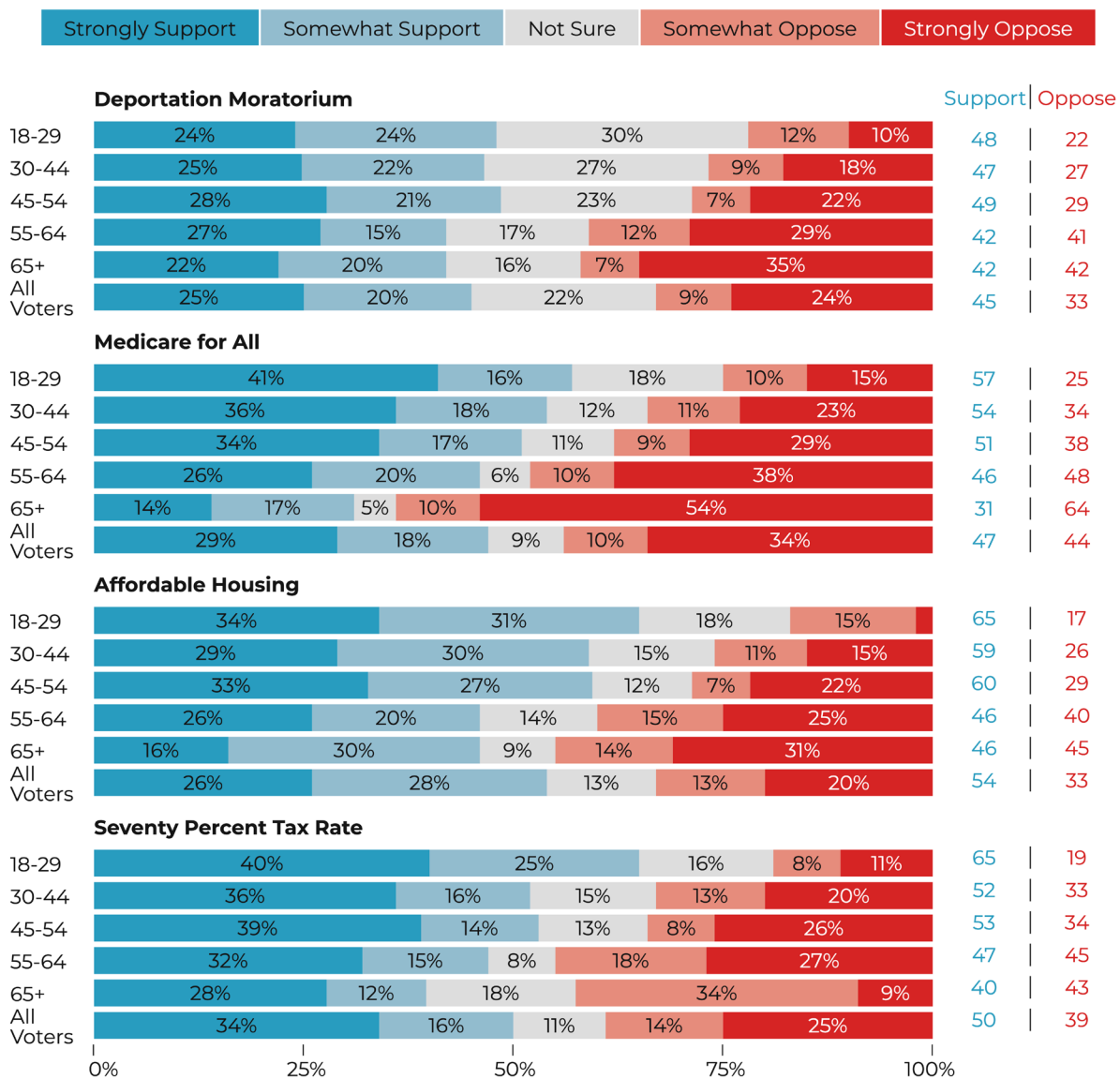


It is striking just how popular progressive policies are, especially when pundits repeat again and again that winning requires tacking to the center. Take for example the implementation of a 70 percent marginal tax rate. Its 11-point margin of support (50 percent for, 39 percent against) sits in stark contrast to the Republican tax law of 2017, which, according to the RealClearPolitics polling average, is 6 points underwater.

When we broke out support by age, we found that the youngest block (ages eighteen through twenty-nine) overwhelmingly support all four policies. On net, voters under thirty support a deportation moratorium by 26 points (48 percent for, 22 percent against), Medicare for All by 32 points (57 percent for, 25 percent against), a massive investment in affordable housing by 48 points (65 percent for, 17 percent against), and a 70 percent tax rate by 46 points (65 percent for, 19 percent against).

## Young People Support the Progressive Agenda

Support by age



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More broadly, we found that placing a moratorium on deportations enjoys plurality support among all age groups, except for voters over sixty-five. Among voters aged thirty through forty-four and those aged forty-five through fifty-four, the policy sits 20 points above water (47 percent to 27 percent and 49 percent to 29 percent, respectively). Among voters aged fifty-five through sixty-four, a deportation moratorium has a slim, 1-point margin of support (42 percent for, 41 percent against). And among voters over sixty-five, support and opposition are split evenly, at 42 percent apiece.

Support for Medicare for All appears tightly linked to age. The policy is enormously popular among voters aged fifty-four and younger. As noted above, voters under thirty widely support the policy. Voters aged thirty through forty-four support the policy by a 20-point margin (54 percent for, 34 percent against); those aged forty-five through fifty-four support it by a 13-point margin (51 percent for, 38 percent against). Among voters aged fifty-five through sixty-four, Medicare for All is 2 points underwater (46 percent for, 48 percent against). The policy is most unpopular with voters over sixty-five—i.e., among voters already enrolled in or have access to Medicare.

A massive investment in affordable housing, meanwhile, enjoys net support across all five age groups. It is most popular with voters under thirty, enjoying a 48-point margin of support (65 percent for, 17 percent against), while it is least popular with voters over sixty-five, among

whom it is only 1-point above water (46 percent for, 45 percent against).

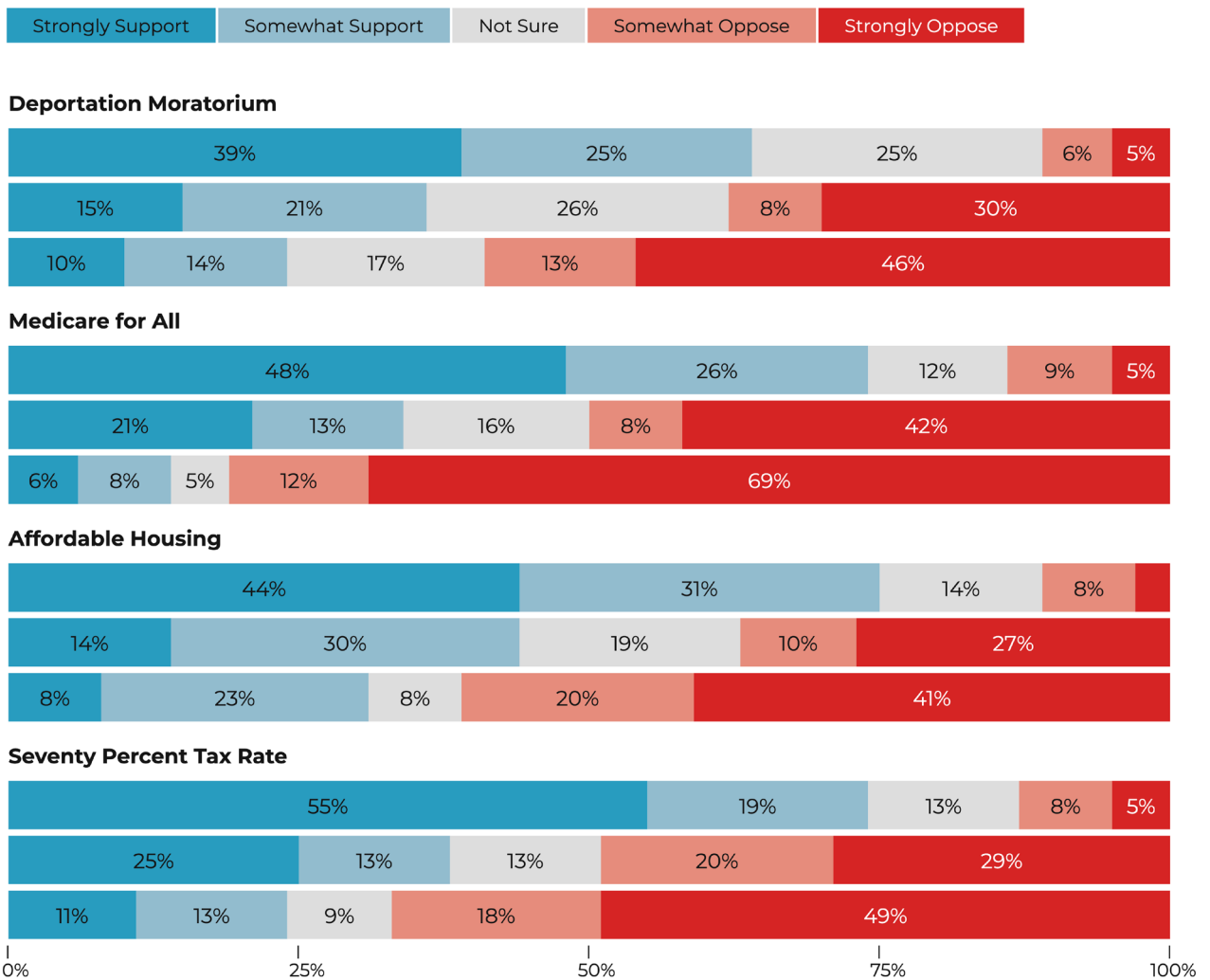
Lastly, a 70 percent marginal tax rate enjoys net support across all five aging groups, except among voters over sixty-five. It is most popular among voters under thirty with a 46-point margin of support (65 percent for, 19 percent against), and it is least popular with voters over sixty-five, among whom it is 3 points underwater (40 percent for, 43 percent against).

Next, We broke out support for these four policies by party ID. (If a person “leaned” toward one party, we grouped them with it.) Among Democratic voters, each policy is extremely popular. On net, Democratic voters support a deportation moratorium by 53 points (64 percent for, 11 percent against), Medicare for All by 60 points (74 percent for, 14 percent against), affordable housing by 64 points (75 percent for, 11 percent against), and a 70 percent tax rate by 61 points (74 percent for, 13 percent against). Suffice to say, the agenda of Sanders’s campaign is in line with the policy preferences of Democratic voters. And far from fracturing the Democratic Party’s coalition, progressive policies provide a point of solidarity.

While support for these policies is limited among independents and Republican voters, we found that a plurality of independents (44 percent) support a massive investment in affordable housing.

# The Democratic Party Backs the Progressive Agenda

By party ID and their leaners



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## Ideology

Lastly, we asked voters whether they prefer capitalism or socialism. We ran this question in two different polls, one with YouGov Blue and the poll conducted by Data for Progress. In each poll, voters prefer capitalism by a hearty margin: 34 points in the YouGov Blue poll, and 32 points in the Data for Progress poll.

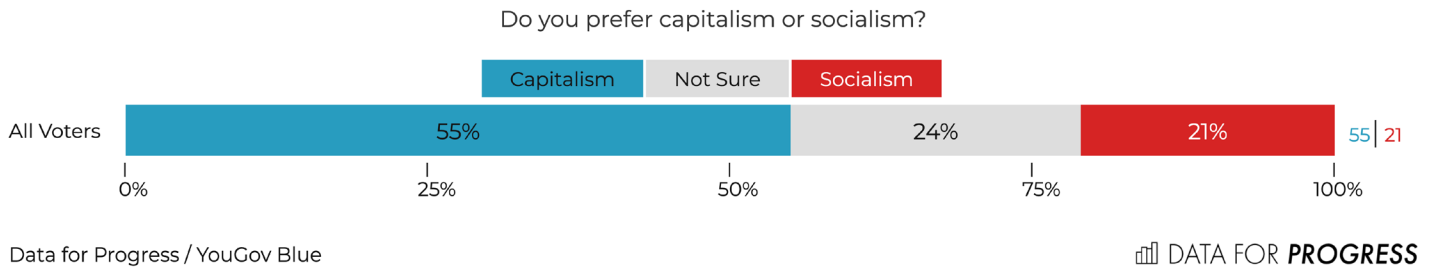
When we broke out support by party ID—again, “leaners” were grouped with the party they lean toward—we found that a plurality of Democrats (38 percent) prefer socialism

to capitalism. While the Democratic Party is not yet a socialist party, it is increasingly becoming a party of socialists.

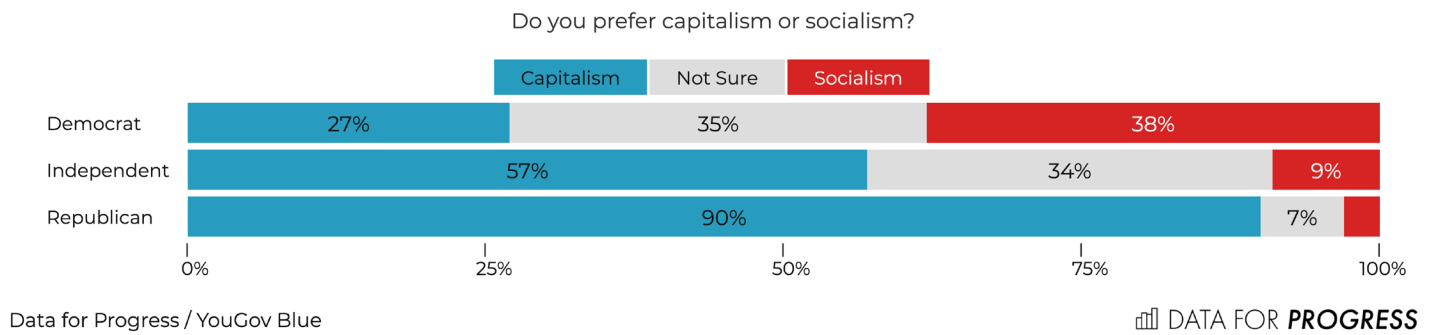
This trend of a Democratic Party increasingly dominated by socialists were further highlighted when we broke out preferences by party ID and age.

Democrats under thirty prefer socialism by a 29-point margin (18 percent for capitalism, 47 percent for socialism). Similarly, Democrats aged thirty through forty-four prefer socialism to capitalism by a 19-point margin (28 percent for capitalism, 47 percent for socialism).

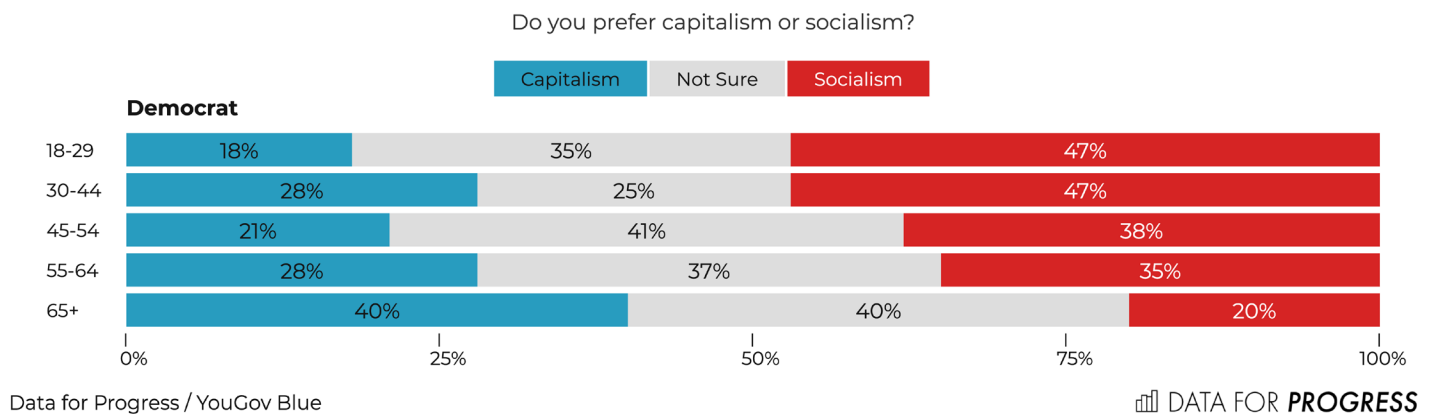
### Capitalism or Socialism



### A Plurality of Democrats Prefer Socialism to Capitalism



### Young Democrats Strongly Prefer Socialism to Capitalism



## Conclusion

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The media often portrays Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as too extreme for the general electorate and as a key contributor to the “polarization” of American politics. As shown in this memo, this idea seems disconnected from the truth. In adopting these four left-wing positions, Sanders is leading the Democratic Party not toward some radical fringe but toward a broadly popular policy platform. This memo’s findings should push people to reconsider what they understand to be “radical” and what ideas are actually supported by the majority of voters.

As part of his campaign for the Democratic nomination for president, Sanders is pushing an agenda widely supported among young voters—voters who will play an increasingly important role within the Democratic Party.

*On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue conducted a survey of US registered voters, using YouGov’s online panel. The survey included US registered voters and were weighted to be representative of the population by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US Census region, and 2016 US presidential vote choice. This survey was fielded from December 27 through December 30, 2019, and surveyed 1,025 registered voters. The mean of the weights is 1.7, and they range from 0.2 to 6.2.*

## ENDNOTE

1. McGovern, a progressive Democrat, infamously won just a single state (and Washington, DC) in the 1972 presidential election against Richard Nixon. Present partisan polarization makes such an eventuality, even in a worst case scenario, unlikely.

### EDITED BY

Andrew Mangan, Senior Editor, Data for Progress

### DESIGN BY

Billie Kanfer, Designer, Data for Progress

### COVER PHOTO

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