

[BBC](#) | April 26, 2025

What should Democrats do now? Everyone has a different answer

The rural, agricultural town of Bakersfield, California, is an odd stop for a pair of East Coast progressive politicians. After all, Trump won the surrounding county by 20 points. Yet Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Independent Senator Bernie Sanders packed a local auditorium during a recent stop on their Fighting Oligarchy tour.

The visit felt like an answered prayer for local Democrats and left-leaning Independents who oppose Trump and his policies, while directing much of their fury at their own party, which they feel has failed to mount an effective opposition.

It is not a great time to be a Democratic politician in the United States. The party is out of power. Elected officials cannot agree on a course of action to counter Trump's agenda. No clear leader has emerged to unify the unwieldy coalition. Various ideological and generational factions are warring against each other, and nobody seems to be winning.

"I think people feel like the survival of the system we have all counted on is itself on the line, and they want us to act with that level of urgency," said former Pennsylvania Congressman Connor Lamb, who added, "It's important for us not to forget just to be advocates for things that are specific and concrete, and really affecting people."

Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez's tour is just one attempt to solve that. It stops in conservative-dominated areas and remains laser-focused on the economy, citing cost of living grievances that propelled Trump to a second term, while framing him and his billionaire supporters like Musk as the culprits.

Ocasio-Cortez put the argument simply: "Oligarchy or democracy?"

But the Fighting Oligarchy tour is only one theory about how the Democratic Party should evolve. Some Democrats accused their party of falling out of step with more conservative Americans on subjects like transgender rights, or failing to accommodate diverse viewpoints within the party's ideological spectrum. Without widening their potential base, these Democrats argue, they stand little chance of regaining power.

One such gambit by California Governor Gavin Newsom involves moving the party's branding more to the center. The governor, known nationwide as a liberal defender of abortion and LGBTQ rights, recently launched a podcast to host conversations with politicians who disagree with him. Newsom's decision to interview right-wing strategist Steve Bannon infuriated many Democrats.

Disgruntled Democrats rallying in Bakersfield told the BBC that it doesn't matter as much what leaders do, as long as they do *something* — preferably something loud.

[The New York Times](#) | October 14, 2025

Pete Buttigieg on rebuilding America after Trump

Pete Buttigieg ran for president in 2020 and has served as U.S. Secretary of Transportation and as mayor of South Bend, Indiana. These are excerpts from a [podcast interview](#) with David Leonhardt.

Leonhardt: How can we get the country to move out of this incredible darkness?

Buttigieg: I think part of what has to happen is a sense of a shared national project. I've long believed that climate could be one — it's an example of something bigger than any one of us. I also think, paradoxically, that all the damage the Trump administration has done to our institutions actually creates a very important potential future moment where, even if we bitterly disagree about how those institutions were destroyed, we can come together on what we should build in their place.

Now, for that to happen, it means the Republican Party needs to evolve into being more about building than destroying. And it means the Democratic Party needs to get more interested in what we can do next than in preserving the status quo that's being smashed to pieces.

Leonhardt: How do you think that can appeal to people, given the level of cynicism today?

Buttigieg: I think it actually begins saying, okay, a lot of the things we've inherited or built don't work. It's a bit of a tough-love message for my party. That doesn't mean it was okay [for the Trump administration] to burn them down... But since it's happening, we might as well face the fact that they weren't perfect before, and now we can rebuild them.

Leonhardt: How do you diagnose how the Democratic Party came to be seen as defenders of the status quo?

Buttigieg: Well... If more of the people who make up the Democratic Party are disproportionately those who are socially and economically doing better in the status quo than everybody else, you can expect a kind of reluctance — even ironically, a small-c conservatism — about necessary changes... I think that's why you see such a fierce clash within the party between people who sound more populist and those who would like to make more incremental change.

Leonhardt: How do you think about the trade-offs and tensions between trying to work within the system and trying to bring about more radical change?

Buttigieg: I definitely understand, as someone who has had to deliver results in government, that building consensus is a really important part of what you do in public life. But I also believe that we need to open the window on big, bold changes, even if people aren't prepared for that yet.

[Vanity Fair](#) | May 19, 2025

Ro Khanna believes “Blue MAGA” can save the Democrats

Ro Khanna represents San Jose and other parts of Silicon Valley in the U.S. Congress and co-chaired Bernie Sanders’s 2020 presidential campaign.

“This is an opportunity for rebirth,” Ro Khanna insists. “Crisis is a time for renewal, revitalization, new leadership. And I think that that is the opportunity we have as Democrats.”

To his credit, Khanna has been preparing for this moment for years, doggedly selling a left-wing answer to MAGA populism that he has dubbed “progressive capitalism,” or more recently, “economic patriotism” (or sometimes, half-jokingly, “blue MAGA”). Since 2016, Khanna has made repeated visits to MAGA districts in states like Ohio and Pennsylvania to field-test his big idea: investing billions of federal dollars in American tech and steel companies to build new factories and create jobs in middle America, without trade wars and demagoguery. Democrats, Khanna argues, need to offer “a bold economic transformation of rebuilding this country, rebuilding our industrial base, using technology to have massive advances in society.”

Khanna is an unlikely populist: His California district covers Silicon Valley and includes many of the most powerful tech companies in the world, including Apple and Nvidia. Khanna also has unlikely fans on the right, most famously Steve Bannon, one of Trumpism’s primary architects, who singles Khanna out as a favorite Democrat who speaks the same populist language that he does.

From 1965 to 2025, Khanna says, the story of America was the story of ever-growing diversity and pluralism. But Democrats took it for granted. He says there is “an assertion of nationalism now, hearkening back to a nostalgic past... Were we just expecting that we would just kind of sleep our way into becoming this perfect multiracial democracy and everyone would just applaud?”

[Fox News](#) | January 13, 2026

Democratic Senate candidate calls national party “condescending”

Democratic Texas Senate candidate James Talarico said during an interview posted Tuesday that the national party was “hostile” toward cultural issues in red states, specifically religion.

“Just from my observations, being in a red state, someone who flipped a Trump district and was able to build this kind of coalition: Our national party is pretty condescending to people,” Talarico said during an interview with Ezra Klein, who had asked the Senate candidate how the national party could appeal more to Texans. Talarico, a state representative, is a former middle school teacher and a

current Presbyterian seminarian.

“You always hear this, especially if you are out on the coasts: Why do all these people vote against their material interests? You’ve heard that before, I’m sure. Such a condescending thing to say to somebody. It’s acting like they don’t know how to make decisions for their own lives, and they don’t know what they need,” he said.

Talarico said people have interests outside their material interests, citing cultural, personal and spiritual interests. “And the Democratic Party culturally, in many ways, has become hostile to some of these cultural values in red states and red communities — faith maybe being foremost among them,” he continued.

The Democratic state representative said shared faith can open doors for other conversations and said the party should focus on building relationships with people who aren’t necessarily supportive of the party.

“So I would just advocate for our party to think about how to actually build real relationships at scale with people who aren’t with us yet... We have a moral imperative to win, because if you don’t win, you don’t get power. And if you don’t get power, you can’t make people’s lives better.”

[The New York Times](#) | May 12, 2026

Barney Frank, in hospice, has advice for the Democrats

Barney Frank represented a district near Boston in the U.S. Congress from 1981-2013 and led the Financial Services Committee. These are excerpts from an interview with Jenna Russell.

Russell: What do you see as the biggest problem Democrats need to overcome?

Frank: The key to liberal democracy being able to come back is to get rid of the perception that the entire Democratic Party is committed to a series of very drastic social reconstructions that go beyond the politically acceptable.

Russell: How do you reconcile that concern about political acceptability with your history as an advocate for gay rights, the first member of Congress to voluntarily come out as gay, and the first gay congressman to marry while in office?

Frank: I am not arguing that people shouldn’t advocate for things that are currently unpopular. I know there are some issues that I support that are currently unpopular. And the first thing to do is to try and increase the degree to which they have public support.

The problem with my friends on the left today is that they want these things to be litmus tests, immediately. They don't want to spend any time [building support]. So what happens is they demand that more mainstream liberals sign on to these things, and then they lose elections because of it.

Russell: So what do you advise for advancing unpopular causes? Are there lessons to be drawn from the gay rights movement?

Frank: When we were fighting for gay rights — a fight I think we have essentially won — we knew that some issues were more popular than others. So we tended to start by trying to win the ones that were most popular. Gays in the military. Employment. We didn't go after same-sex marriage, we didn't make marriage a litmus test, until the very end.

I analogize that to transgender participation in sports. That is the most controversial part of the agenda — the equivalent of gay marriage — so put it at the end. If you go at it that way, you build support for it. But if you insist on the most controversial parts all at once, you make it harder.

Russell: What other tough issues could benefit from this approach?

Frank: I think it would be a better world, a better America, if somehow everybody had Medicare. But they don't. And so something that I think would be very helpful, substantively and politically, is to reduce the age of Medicare to 60 from 65. A lot of families would benefit. You could do it right away, and it would work, and it would build support for going even further. But the left does not support an increase in Medicare coverage. They want to do "Medicare for All," something more revolutionary.

Most of my mainstream Democratic colleagues agree with me, but they have been reluctant to say it because they're afraid of being attacked in primaries and accused of being secret conservatives. So I want to use my unfortunate situation to say something that I think is very important.

[The Late Show with Stephen Colbert](#) | May 5, 2026

Barack Obama speaks to Stephen Colbert

Barack Obama served as a U.S. senator from Illinois and then as President of the United States from 2009-2016. This is an excerpt from an interview with comedian Stephen Colbert.

Colbert: The next generation really wants things to change. You have great leaders, people like Virginia Governor Abigail Spanberger and New Jersey Governor Mikie Sherrill who are very centrist, but then you have further left leaders like Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani. What direction do you think would be best for this party in order to actually achieve change?

Obama: I'm not as worried about this so-called rift between the left and liberals as you describe it, because I think that within the Democratic Party — and I would argue a bunch of independents and even some Republicans as well — there's an overarching belief in equality and fairness: If you work, you should be able to make a living wage and support a family and retire with dignity and respect. We should not allow companies to run roughshod over the rights of workers. There are a bunch of things that we agree on, and it's really more a question of the specific things that we have to do.

Look at somebody like Mamdani, who I think is an extraordinary talent. He wants people to be able to afford housing in New York. You know, I would assume liberals in New York want the same thing.

And so I don't worry as much about some of these issues within the Democratic Party. What I'm more interested in is: Do you know how to just talk to regular people like we're not in a college seminar? Can you talk plain English to folks?... No gobbledygook. Just talk like normal people talk! You know? "The rent's too high!"