

Insurgent Faction Response to Democratic Electoral Failure: Exit, Voice, and Loyalty¹

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Abstract

Parties losing elections face the challenge of both holding onto the activist core from the last election and expanding its appeal to both activists and the electorate. Understanding how party activists across the ideological spectrum respond to defeat is an important and understudied area of research.

Utilizing surveys with over 2000 Our Revolution supporters, gathered from shortly after Biden's election to shortly after Trump's reelection we look at the responses from this important insurgent faction. We apply Albert Hirschman's typology of Exit, Voice, and Loyalty to understand the range of reactions. We find comparatively little exit, but significant voice and demand for change, as well as significant loyalty.

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A perennial challenge political parties face is recovering from loss. Because losses are overdetermined, with a multitude of possible causes, assigning meaning is complex and contentious (Masket 2020). But controlling the narrative matters as various members of the party coalition work to (re)assert control in the run-up to subsequent elections (Cohen et al 2008). Consider the Republicans' 2012 Growth and Opportunity Project that sought to dissect the failure of the party and Romney to win an election many Republicans thought winnable. After 2024, a similar if less formal debate has absorbed many Democrats about whether the party's best choice is moderation or embracing more aggressive progressive policies.

These debates occur typically among office-holders and other elites, among activists, and within the mass public. Successful performance in subsequent elections requires keeping an activist base ready and engaged over a significant period of time, while appealing to an expanded set of voters. Success in doing so can make a huge difference in how the party positions itself.

In this paper our focus is on the activist stratum within the Democratic Party. In looking at these activists, we adopt Albert Hirschman's (1970) framework of exit, voice, and loyalty to think about how the party in the electorate, and especially the activist stratum, responds to electoral loss. For the most part true exit is unusual and personally painful in a two-party system, where the parties are ideologically distinct, but the threat of exit to a third party by dissatisfied activists on the far left or far right of party exists, especially after multiple attempts to influence the party in the desired direction (Hirschman 1970:82-83), or at least exit from electoral politics altogether, remains. This is

particularly the case with supporters of “insurgent” factions whose aim to reshape the party may surpass their desire to win elections (Blum 2020). In a 2013 survey of supporters of the largest Tea Party organization, FreedomWorks, almost a quarter of respondents refused to identify with either major party and wrote in a third-party preference (Rapoport 2015). Such activists present real challenges for the party, but with no credible outside options in the 2012 election, the “other” party respondents who participated in the election still reporting voting for the Republican nominee at a rate of 92 percent, showing significant loyalty as well. Supporters of factions at the extremes with the goal of reshaping the party might not only support electorally weaker but ideologically preferable primary candidates as a way of influencing the party’s ideological direction, but they pose the threat of diminished involvement in the general election when their preferred nomination candidate loses. Although this turned out not to be the case for Republicans in 2012 even with a significant Libertarian candidate in Gary Johnson (Rapoport 2015), the threat remains.

While exit is possible, we find voice and loyalty more likely. Voice, for the party in the electorate, would appear as diminished assessments of the party and establishment figures coupled with a desire for change. A desire for change could appear many ways, but we find instructive thinking about it vis-a-vis party issue and ideological positions. Voice of course carries with it the threat of exit if voice is not heeded.

Acknowledging the relative weakness of mass ideological thinking and its frequent endogeneity to partisanship itself (Carsey and Layman 2006; Converse 1964; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Lenz 2012; Levendusky 2009; Wattenberg 2019), we think a push for

ideological change is a desire for the party to move towards the individuals' ideological and tactical preference. For more ideologically moderate members of the coalition this produces support for the more moderate candidate and often, via motivated reasoning, a belief that the party lost because it was too extreme. On the other hand more, extreme members are likely to support the more extreme alternative, frequently with the similarly motivated belief that the party lost because it was too moderate. Tactically, the desire for more electable candidates may dominate ideological purity concerns or vice versa. Both groups might be united in some cases, as a recent Pew Report highlights, in frustration with how the party and its leaders are doing their job and wish for it to just do *something* (Shepard et al 2025).

In this paper we focus on the response of an insurgent Democratic faction to the surprising (to our respondents) of Trump's 2024 victory. Our paper is based on a three-wave panel of supporters of Our Revolution, the group founded in 2016 as a continuation of Bernie Sanders' progressive campaign agenda. It's a particularly apt group to study as its founding perspective was to:

“Reclaim democracy for the working people of our country by harnessing the transformative energy of the ‘political revolution.’ Through supporting a new generation of progressive leaders, empowering millions to fight for progressive change and elevating the political consciousness, Our Revolution will transform American politics to make our political and economic systems once again responsive to the needs of working families.”

Unlike other groups that formed in the aftermath of the 2016 election like Swing Left and Indivisible, Our Revolution's involvement in the Democratic Party is focused on reshaping the Democratic Party as vehicle for their goals. As a result, it is heavily involved in intraparty competition, endorsing primary candidates that reflect its ideological

commitment to move the party to the left, even when these are not the strongest general election candidates, and reshaping the internal structure of the Democratic Party to diminish the role of party elites and dark money. As Hans Noel (2016) points out, the Sanders group differed from the Clinton group in 2016 almost as much on willingness to compromise as on issue differentiation—they were both to the left ideologically, but also less prone to compromise

Our analysis is particularly important because little research on activists extends over multiple elections. Critically, assessing the effects of the loss requires being able to look at changing attitudes of activists across different contexts of electoral success and failure (but see Miller and Jennings 1986). Because our panel covers the period from shortly after Biden’s victory in 2020 to shortly after Trump’s return to power in 2024 we are able to look at changing attitudes and activity among supporters of Our Revolution, an insurgent group, in the wake of the 2024 election.

It is critically important to a losing party that it both retain engaged individuals from the prior election while also considering ways to expand the pool into upcoming election. Using Hirschman’s terminology, the party wants loyalty, can accept voice, and is most concerned with exit. As we will see, the 2024 election did not lead to a large increase in exit from the party, but also shows significant voice as well as a strong base of loyalty, even among those who show dissatisfaction with the party.

Data

We worked with Our Revolution to survey individuals on their email list at three separate times. The first survey occurred during early August 2021 (n = 2539), the second in summer 2023 (n = 1069), and the third in October 2025 (n = 849). The 2023 wave included a

panelback to the 2021 survey as well as a fresh cross-section of first-time respondents who did not complete the 2021 survey. The 2025 survey recontacted everyone who completed either the 2021 or 2023 surveys, as well as including a sample of non-respondents to both previous waves of the survey. We focus primarily on the 2021 and 2025 surveys and treat them as cross-sections, but also compare this to 394 respondents who completed all three waves.

Our surveys contained several different questions that help us think about supporters' commitment to the Democratic party. We focus first on individuals' political commitments. We measured this two ways. First, we measured partisanship on the traditional 7-point scale, ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican, with an eighth category available for "other" party. Trends in partisan attachments would point toward relative incidence of voice or loyalty—for stayers—or exit, for defectors. The 2021 and 2025 waves also asked respondents how well the Democrat, progressive, and liberal labels described them using a 7-point scale, anchored by "not at all" and "completely." These items offer a sense of how respondents think about themselves, and utilizing the 2021 and 2025 waves how self-perceptions might shift in response to the changing political context.

We then turn to respondents' evaluations of the party and key figures. We recorded these on zero to 100 feeling thermometers. Changes in evaluations of the Democratic Party provides an insight into levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the party brand as a whole, and the potential for exit and voice as well as loyalty. We also asked about

Democratic (and Republican) office holders and leading figures to see how major figures representing different wings of the party have been viewed over time.

In addition, we asked respondents to use 7-point scales to place themselves, the parties, and key figures on a left right scale. Combined, these items provide an important foundation for our analysis by shedding light on supporters' evaluations of the political system.

Third, we asked questions to capture more directly ideas of exit, voice, and loyalty. First, we asked respondents in 2025 to think prospectively about their chances of supporting the Democratic candidate for congress in their district and the conditions under which they would be willing to support them. As we describe later, we use different degrees of support to index those loyal to the party, those supportive but wishing for change, and those most likely to exit. Second, we asked questions across our surveys that capture theories of change to probe what sorts of reforms respondents had in mind, with these reforms, too, reflecting our framework of exit, voice, and loyalty. One of these items gave respondents a choice between a candidate who agreed with them on most important issues but who experts and poll information suggest was running behind a conservative Republican already nominated versus one who disagreed with the respondent on some important issues but was running even with or ahead of the conservative Republican candidate. Choice of the competitive Democrat indicates loyalty. The second item asked respondents how progressive change could best be accomplished. They selected among three options: working to elect more progressive Democrats, working to elect more

candidates that fit their district in order to elect a Democratic majority in Congress, or by creating a progressive/left third party.

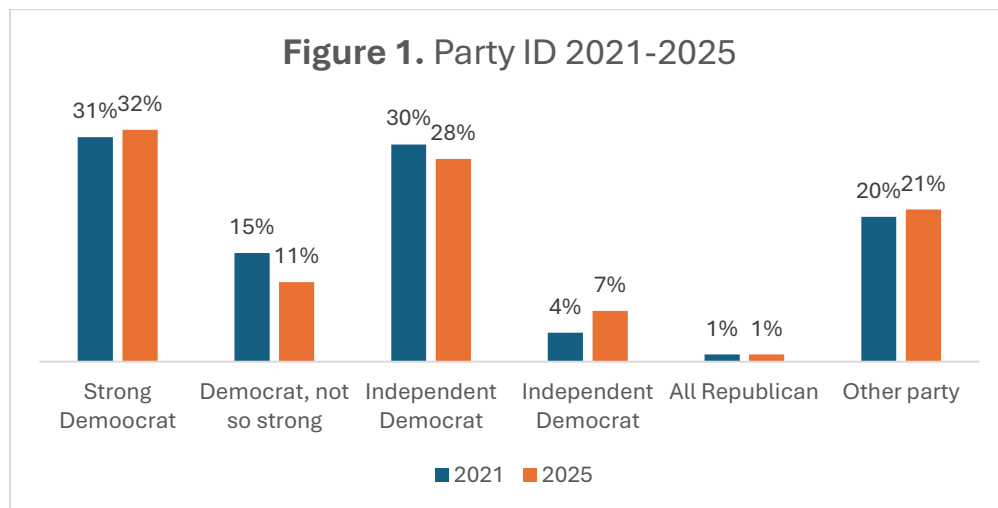
Our assessment is mainly descriptive. We are interested in tracking patterns in this unique sample to shed light on how a group of more progressive individuals thinks about themselves vis-a-vis the Democratic party and how this corresponds with changes in the background political context.

Evaluations of the Self and the Political System

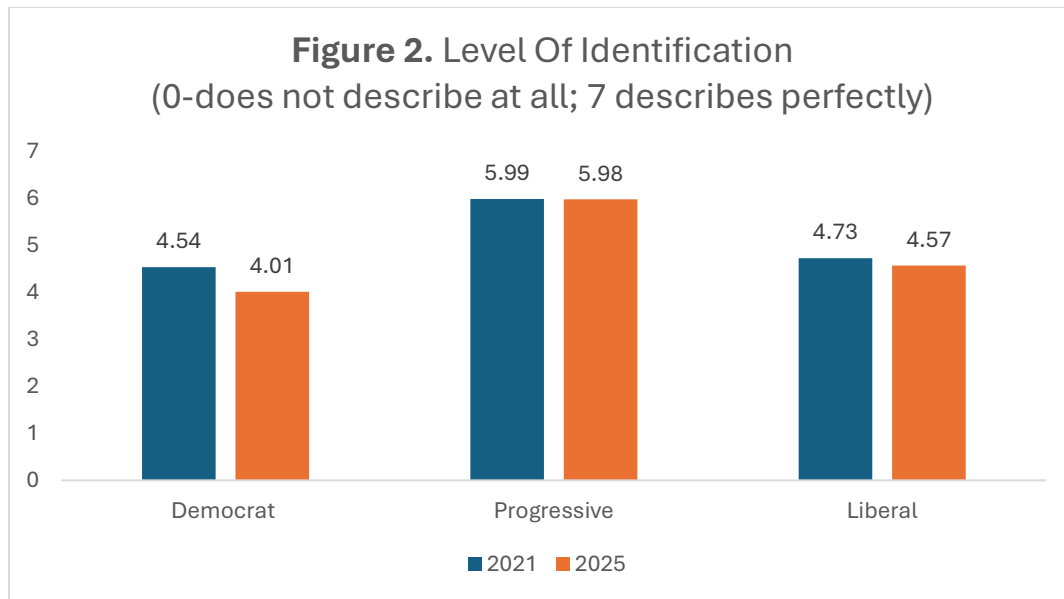
To set the stage for our other analyses, we first asked respondents about their party identification. Here, a first sign of concern for a party would be meaningful change among activists in their partisanship. A large increase in respondents rejecting Democratic identification would signal exit, a serious weakening of strength of Democratic identification might indicate greater potential for exit. Our data reveal no such change. Instead, they show remarkable stability from 2021 to 2025. As Figure 1 shows, the percentage of strong Democrats is slightly higher in 2025, while the percentage of weak and independent Democrats is slightly lower. In both years there is a significant percentage of respondents who claim allegiance to another party, but this percentage also remains stable.

The aggregate stability is also reflected in individual level change. More than 80 percent of strong Democrats in 2021 remain in this category in 2025 and almost half of those who identified as pure independents, Republicans, or with another party shift to Democratic identification, balancing those who shift out of the Democratic camp. That we cannot clearly predict direction of change across waves in our panel strengthens our belief

that the party is unlikely to face a strong exit problem. Instead, we might see more prominence of voice.



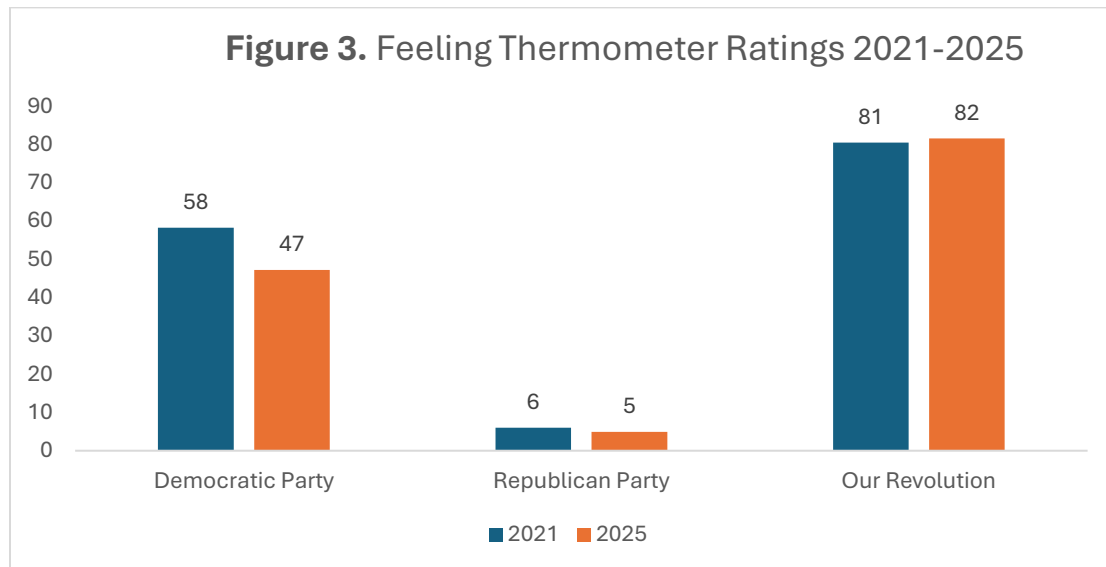
Turning to our other measure of identification, Figure 2 shows a mix of continuity and change. Here too we find a drop in level of Democratic affiliation. Between 2021 and 2025 the sample dropped about half a point on the 7-point scale. Put differently, while 33 percent in 2021 said that “Democrat” described them perfectly or in the adjacent category, that percentage dropped to 22 percent in 2025. These changes are in contrast to near identical overall levels of self-description as progressive and liberal. Particularly informative is that the drop in Democratic identification is twice as large as that for liberal, indicating more of a turn away from the party specifically than a turn away from a more traditional liberal policy program.



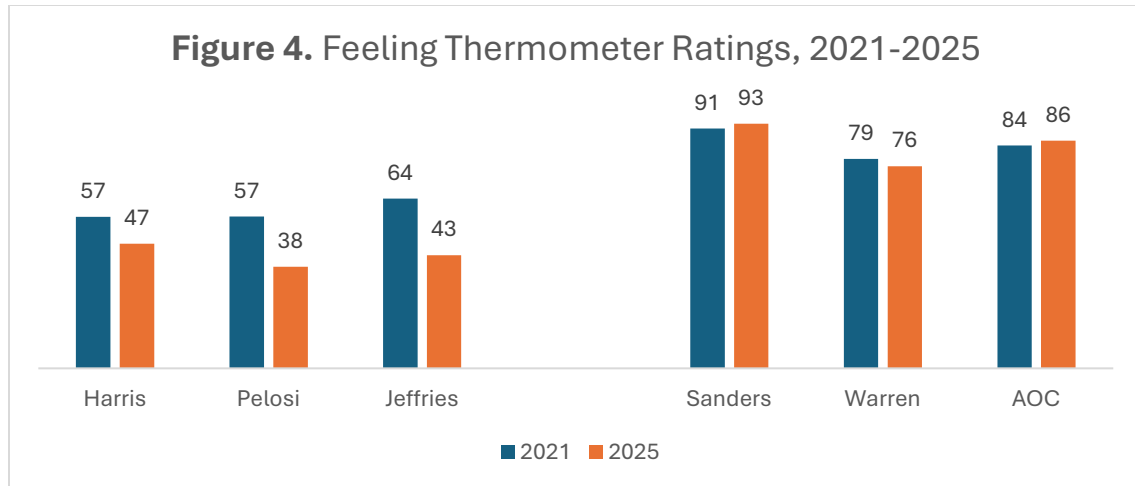
While our respondents have clearly demonstrated some distancing from the party, it was not reflected in party identification. But at the same time, any fluctuation in self-definition is potentially consequential, especially when considered alongside perceptions of other attitude objects.

We now turn to feeling thermometer evaluations of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and Our Revolution. Figure 3 reports average feeling thermometer ratings for all three groups. Our Revolution shows very high and stable ratings in both years, while the Republican Party remains rock bottom in both years. The one case of significant change is for the Democratic Party. In 2021 the party rated significantly above the 50 degree level at 56. Although this pales in comparison with Our Revolution ratings, it is clearly positive. But by 2025, our respondents' feelings about the party soured, dropping a substantial 11 points to below the neutral point of 50. To put this magnitude in perspective, the increase in affective polarization, the gap between individuals' ratings of their in-party and out-party—since 2000 that has motivated so much research is 19 points

(Iyengar et al 2019). This change also contrasts sharply with the stability in evaluations of both OR (rated very high in both waves) and the Republican Party (rated very low in both years).



Our second set of relevant attitude objects includes figures within the Democratic Party. As Figure 4 shows, we see similar sorts of change and continuity. Not surprisingly, in 2021 figures most associated with the progressive wing of the party (Sanders, Warren, and AOC) rated significantly higher than those who were more in the leadership wing (Jeffries, Pelosi, and Harris) and who participants also saw as more ideologically moderate. But what is most striking is that while the progressive trio shows almost identical ratings in each year, Harris, Pelosi, and Jeffries all show large drops in evaluation, widening the evaluation difference between them and the progressive leaders, and emphasizing factional differences.



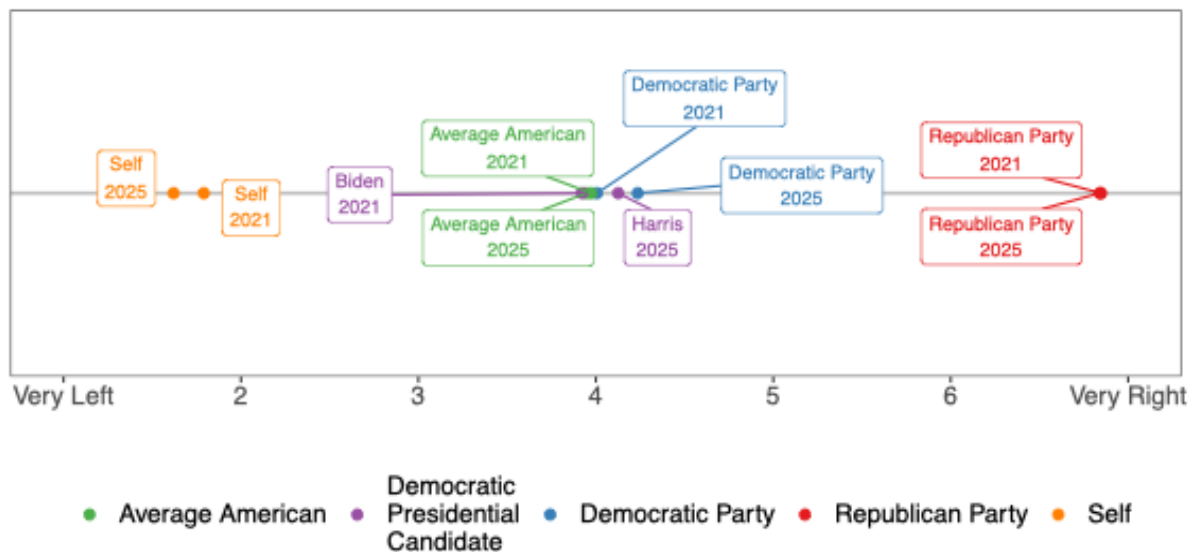
Combined, these changes in evaluations point to dissatisfaction with the party apparatus and its notional leaders. While magnitudes of change do vary, that the declines are all quite similar and in the same direction suggests a common cause or set of causes. Furthermore, the generally greater stability of partisan attachments compared to evaluations of the party and its leadership makes more likely the possibility that OR supporters will be best characterized by voice or loyalty. But then if it is loyalty, the natural question is to which wing—the liberal establishment or the more progressive left.

To think about this we consider whether the change in evaluations (and identification as a Democrat) between 2021 and 2025 is associated with ideology. This would not be surprising since the Sanders campaign identified as being clearly to the left of both Biden in 2020 and Clinton in 2016, and the ineffectiveness of the Biden administration in accomplishing many of the goals of the Sanders and OR platforms could be taken as lack of commitment to progressive ideas.²

² In our 2025 survey we asked respondents to think back to “2021 and the beginning of the Biden presidency, are there any of the following on which the Democratic Party has been particularly **ineffective**”? They could then select from: climate change, living wage, overseeing government quid pro quo contracts, eliminating dark money in campaigns, stopping deportations of undocumented immigrants, and Medicare for All. All

It is possible that our respondents saw the party moving away from the left progressive ideology over the four years of our survey panel, but as Figure 5 shows that is not the case. Instead, there is remarkable stability in the placements of the Democratic Party over the four-year panel. Concurrently, we find virtually no change in our respondents' self-placement. In both 2021 and 2025 respondents saw themselves as far to the left of the party and far to the left of the party's nominee. But their distance from the Democratic Party remained constant over the four year period. Overall, respondents had quite consistent evaluations of the ideological landscape.

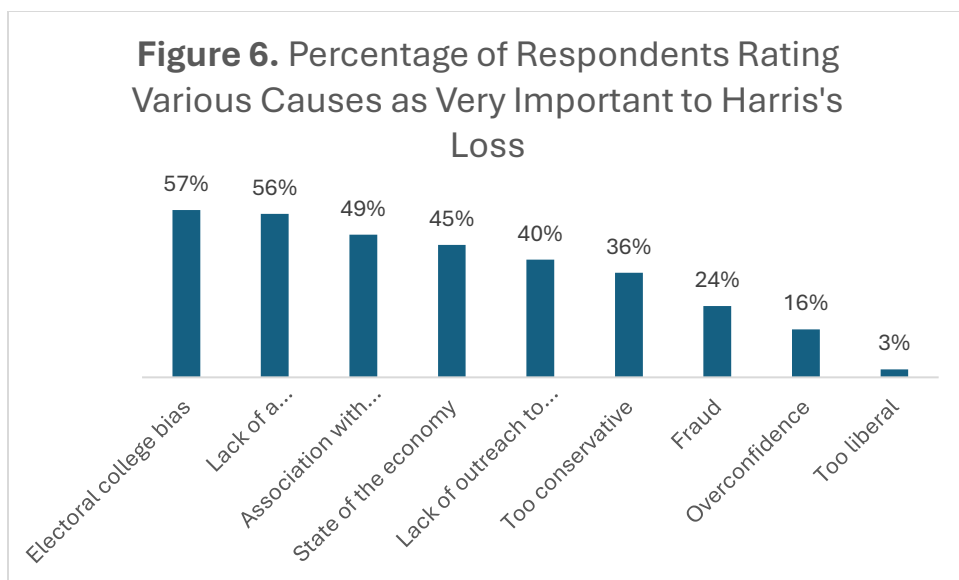
Figure 5. Average ideological placement of the self, parties, Democratic presidential candidates, and average American over time.



respondents selected at least one of the six options, with 21% selecting all 6. We asked a comparable item on effectiveness. Almost two-thirds selected only one area in which the party had been effective.

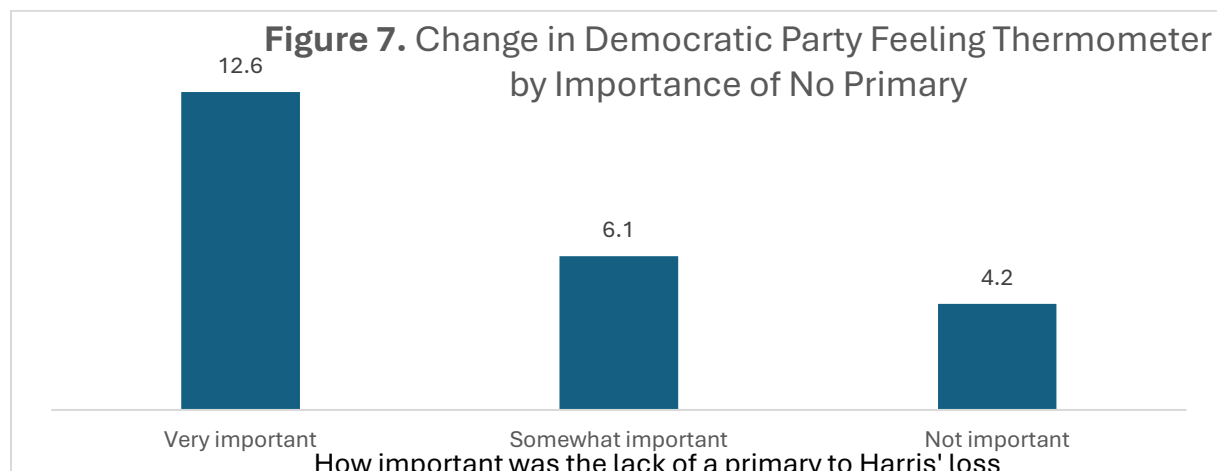
Shifts in affective judgments of the party and establishment politicians might then reflect disappointment with the 2024 election outcome. We asked respondents to report how important to the result each of several different things was. The conventional wisdom was that it was the economy and Biden's unpopularity which were the main causes of Harris' defeat.³ We included these as well as a variety of possible concerns about how Harris positioned herself and how she ran her campaign. Did Harris run too far to the left, too far toward the center, was there campaign over-confidence, did the campaign fail to mobilize people of color, and was the failure to have a primary a cause of her defeat. To these we added items like election fraud and the electoral college bias against the Democrats. Somewhat surprisingly given the conventional wisdom, neither the economy nor Biden, while clearly viewed as important, emerged as the perceived top causes. As Figure 6 shows, the lack of a primary (together with electoral college bias) was cited by more respondents than any other cause. So we have a mix of party blame and broader institutional climate.

³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/11/biden-harris-economy-election-loss/680592/>, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/5063265-james-carville-kamala-harris-donald-trump-2024-election-economy/>, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-donald-trump-won-and-kamala-harris-lost-an-early-analysis-of-the-results/>



But, this also reflects frustration with the party. Primaries are an important way for activists to give voice to their views about the direction of the party. In 2024 this channel was closed to them. Our Revolution were denied access to the nominee selection and this carried over to evaluations of the party.

As Figure 7 shows, those who thought that the party not running a primary was a very important reason for the loss on average shifted their views by almost 13 points. This was over twice the change for those who saw the lack of primary as only somewhat important and three time as great as those who saw it as not important.



Political Campaign Activity in 2024

Evaluations of the self and the political system are one thing. Revealed preferences, related to one's willingness to work for the party, offer potentially stronger indications of dissatisfaction, and tendencies toward exit, or an orientation toward voice. We look at this by comparing what participants reported doing on behalf of the Democratic presidential ticket in 2020 with similar reports for 2024. Respondents could indicate whether they donated to the campaign, persuaded someone else to support the ticket, sent postcards for the campaign, posted a blog or shared information on social media about the campaign, or canvassed for the campaign either in-person or over the phone.

Even with a diminished view of the party (at least as captured after the election), we find that activity for Harris-Walz was actually slightly greater than it had been for Biden-Harris. More than two-thirds (68 percent) did at least something for Harris-Walz, compared with just under 60 percent who did something for Biden-Harris. Of course, while the difference in the times (especially COVID) make comparisons difficult, it is nonetheless impressive that 2024 activity was so high. Our respondents seem particularly animated to defeat Republicans and Donald Trump even if not fully enthusiastic about the Democratic Party as the alternative. This combination of lower evaluations with continued or increased activity suggests voice is a particularly plausible response to electoral loss.

Of course, when considering the effects of an election defeat, our focus has to be on future activity. Will our respondents become less active as a result of the defeat as Whiteley and Seyd (2002) find in their analysis for party activists in Britain or might they remain as active or even become more active? Understanding sustained participation

sheds further light on potential for voice or exit, as evidenced in research on the 2016 election's consequences focusing on the creation of different progressive groups (Skocpol and Tervo 2019).

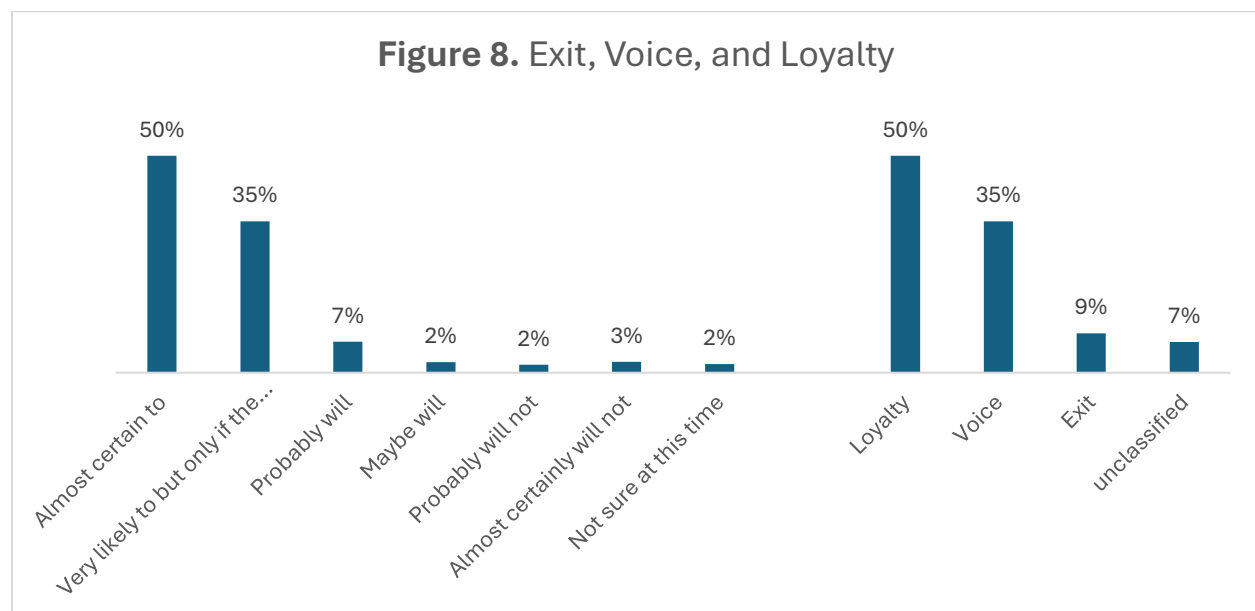
We asked respondents a series of questions about their future activity and the conditions under which they would be willing to be active. Asking about future activity of course does not guarantee that level of activity. But our earlier research on another group formed in the aftermath of 2016, Swing Blue Alliance, found that respondents' reports of their likely activity in the 2022 election actually surpassed their planned activity as reported in 2021 (Engelhardt and Rapoport 2024). This is further supported by respondents indicating that they were more active now (October 2025) than they had been a year ago.

When presented with the question “compared with your past level of activity, how active do you expect to be over the next few years,” OR supporters by an almost 5:1 margin reported that they would be more active. In fact, only 11 percent said they would be somewhat less active or much less active compared with 54 percent who said they will be much more or somewhat more active. Although this did not specifically ask about activity on behalf of the Democratic Party or Democratic candidates, it is instructive that it is the strong Democratic identifiers who show the highest level of intended activity.

Separate from participation, we also asked respondents about their willingness to support Democratic candidates for House and Senate in 2026. We use this item to engage more directly with the Hirschman trichotomy. As we noted above, this item allowed respondents to indicate how likely they would be to support these candidates using a 6-point scale ranging from “almost certain to” to “not at all certain” with an additional “not

sure at this time” option. But usefully, we included a scale point immediately below “definitely certain” labelled “Very likely to but only if the party takes more strongly progressive positions.” We then divide this item into 3 categories. Loyalty constitutes responses of “almost certain,” voice of “very likely but if more progressive,” and Exit options including “Maybe will,” “Probability will not”, “almost certainly will note,” and “not sure.”

Figure 8 reports the distribution of this component item as well as our classification into Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. As it shows, we find that fully 50 percent fall in our loyalty category. But more than a third (35%) fall into our voice category, indicating support but only for a more progressive candidate.



To corroborate this classification scheme we look at a set of questions we asked about candidate position-taking on 7 different issues. We asked, for instance, whether the Democratic candidate not emphasizing climate change would make a respondent

unwilling to support the candidate or if they would still willingly support the candidate.⁴ Of our “loyalty” group, more than half (55 percent) report that on zero issues (of the seven) would the party’s position mean that they could not support the candidate. Such is the case for less than half the voice group and even less for the exit group.

Importantly, the question about which issue positions would deter Democratic candidate support does not consider the alternative choice. It is unlikely that those indicating that lack of support on specific issue would actually fail to support the Democratic candidate in a race against a MAGA Republican candidate. We interpret this then as if anything tilting respondents more toward voice than exit given the opportunity.

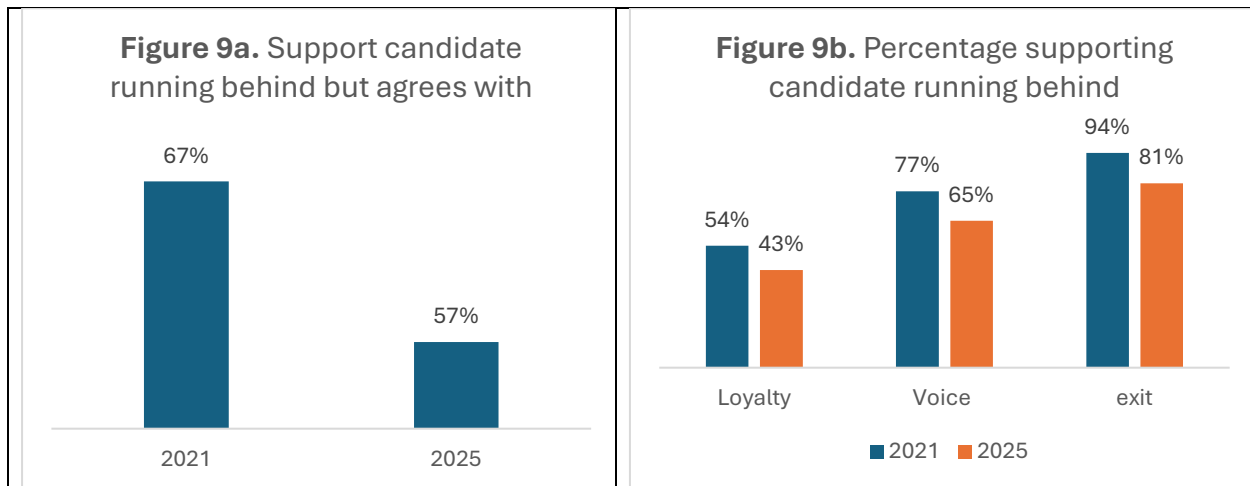
To tie together the analysis we think about individuals’ goals for the party and how they relate to these Exit, Voice, and Loyalty types. Our survey respondents are clearly frustrated with the Democratic Party, so we conclude by thinking about how they might resolve it electorally.

To understand this we take advantage of two questions we asked that solicited respondent’s theories of change. This distinction matters to us because party factions need not be defined in terms of ideology. Hans Noel points out that there is much more consensus on party goals across factions. Medicare for all was not opposed by supporters of Hillary Clinton in 2016, rather they thought that it was not achievable. Clinton campaigned as a “progressive who likes to get things done” (Noel 2016:185).

⁴ The other issues included: living wage, Medicare for all, stopping deportations of undocumented immigrants, stopping the expansion of executive power by Trump, oversight of government contracts to prevent quid pro quos, and eliminating dark money in campaigns.

Willingness to compromise is, as Noel argues, an important cleavage within parties, separate from ideological concerns, and the Sanders faction in 2016 and again in 2020 was not only to the left on issues like climate change and health care but also less willing to compromise than either Clinton or Biden. This motivates our attention to the survey question on candidate choice in a hypothetical primary. As we mentioned above, this item asked respondents to indicate the Democratic candidate they preferred run against a conservative Republican incumbent. One candidate aligned with respondents on most important issues but was running behind the Republican. The other candidate they disagreed with on some important issues but was running even with or ahead of the Republican.

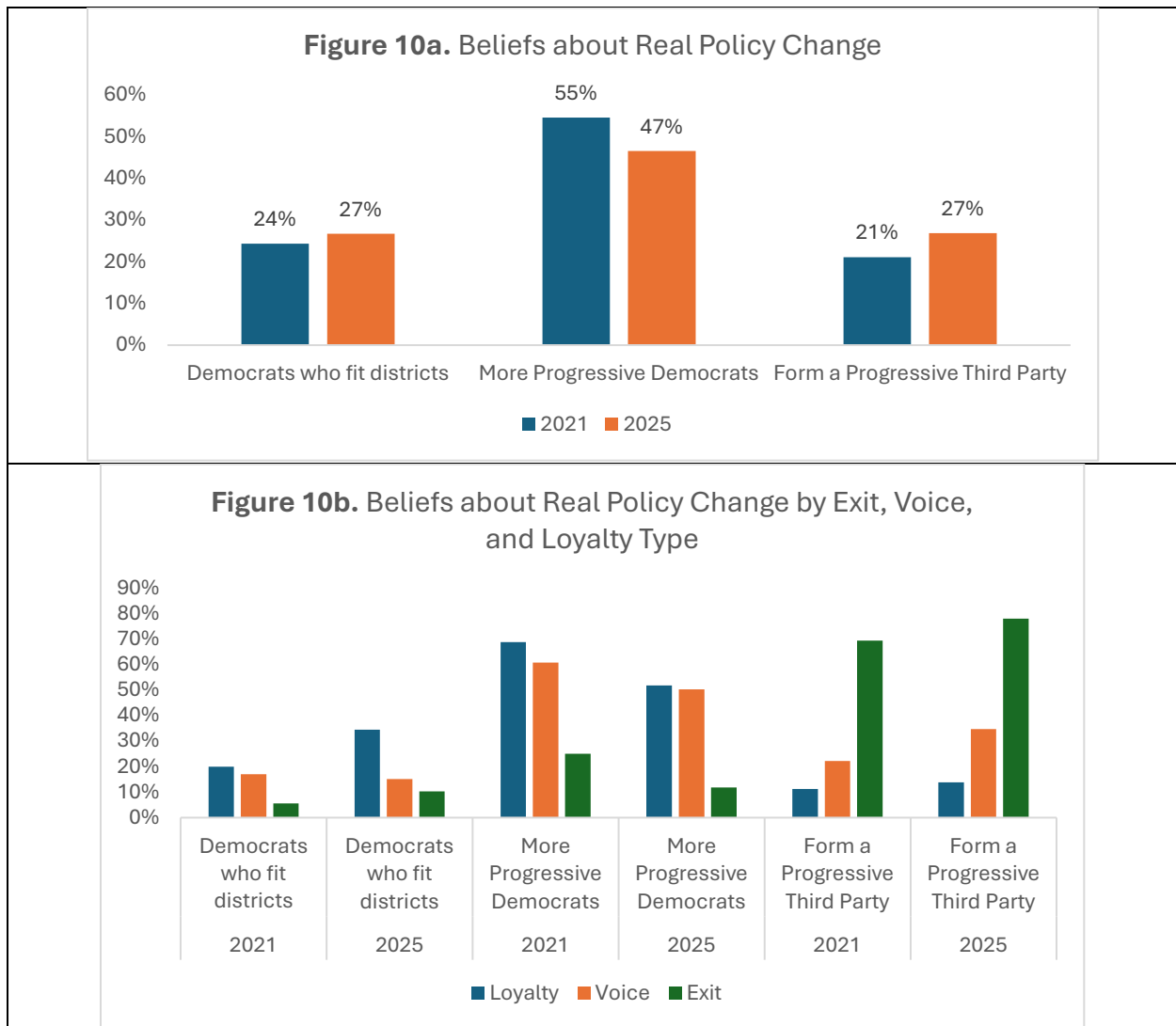
Figure 9a shows that in 2021, OR respondents were particularly likely to select the candidate who was aligned with them on policy but had a good chance of losing. Some 67% of respondents selected this candidate. But four years later this dropped to 57%. While still a majority, this reduction is informative. What's more, Figure 9b also shows that this reduction occurs for OR supporters across Hirschman response categories. This result suggests that even though individuals may present an orientation toward voice or exit in the abstract, when placed in a common choice context for a primary election there is increased concern with winning. The present context may see dissatisfaction with the Democratic party and its leaders, but the bigger goal is winning elections.



This perspective, or course, is incomplete, as we’ve situated the hypothetical in a primary election context. Also important to resolving how people understand Loyalty, Voice, and Exit are broader philosophical beliefs. We thus conclude with our item asking respondents how real policy change is best realize: electing Democrats who fit their districts to control Congress, electing more progressive Democrats, or creating a progressive third party. These ideas, respectively, we think provide an alternative take on theories related to Loyalty, Voice, and Exit.

Figure 10a shows how these beliefs in best effecting change shifted from 2021 to 2025. As with the primary choice opinion, it is perhaps unsurprising that a group like supporters of Our Revolution believe that electing more progressive Democrats is the best way to achieve change. In 2021, a majority of supporters landed here. This is still the plurality category in 2025, but rate of selection is 8 points lower. Instead, we find roughly similar increases in selection of Democrats who fit their districts—what we can think of loyalty—and preference for forming a progressive third party—an exit option.

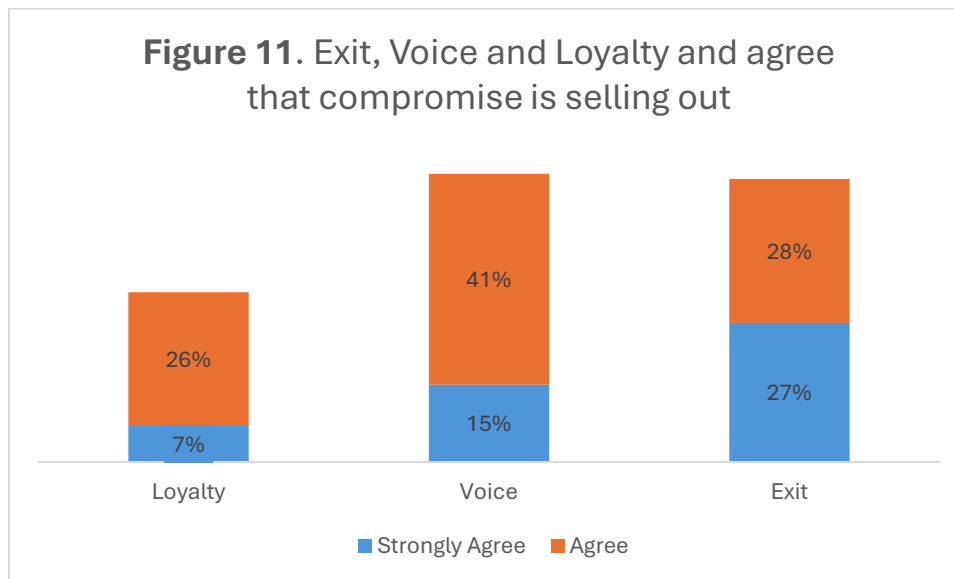
Focusing on our panelists, we find a fair degree of stability, but also interesting variation. Some 62% of those in the “elect progressive Democrats” category in 2021 remained here 2025, but 20% moved to exit and forming a progressive third party while a similar share moved to loyalty and a belief in electing Democrats who fit their districts. Interestingly, while 75% of individuals preferring a progressive third party stayed here, 20% shift to electing more progressive Democrats. Finally, 62% of those preferring to elect Democrats who fit their districts selected this again in 2025. Twenty-six percent moved into the voice category while 12% went to exit.



We conclude by linking these beliefs about change to preferences over 2026 Democratic congressional candidates and our loyalty, voice, and exit types. Figure 10b shows that individuals we classified as “loyal” became much more likely to say that real policy change is best realized by electing Democrats who fit their districts. Loyalty thus appears consistent. But we also find that our Voice and Exit types became much more likely to say that forming a progressive third party is the best way of achieving policy change, with this particularly true for those in the Exit category. This clearly reinforces the relationship between exit and voice. Unimpactful voice can lead to exit when frustration becomes too great. We thus find that voice is inconsistent, again reflecting a likely general displeasure with the Democratic party but lack of certainty on how to resolve this tension. While the results here suggest voice might be related to potential defection from the party, the rest of the results we present are consistent with a more general desire to reform the Democratic party.

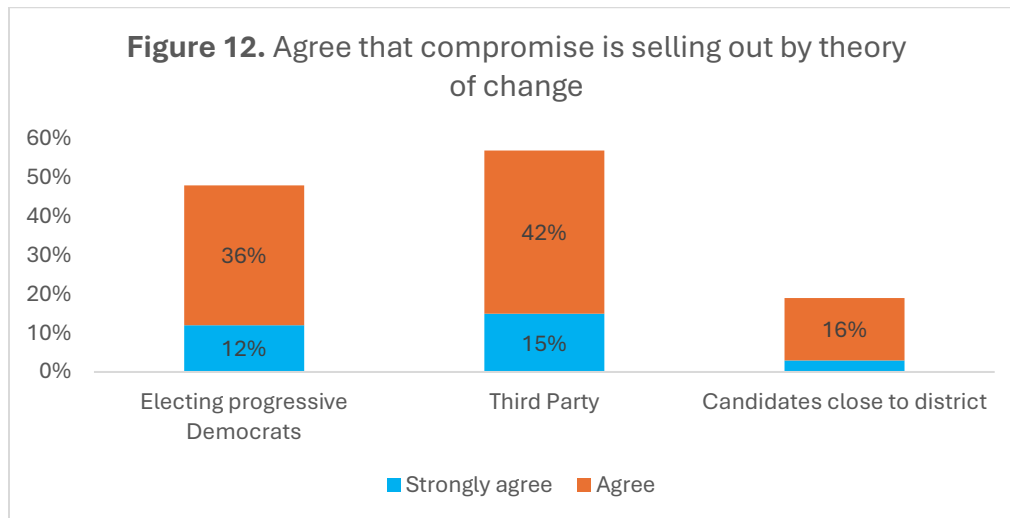
To ensure these dissatisfied activists remain in the party, the Democratic Party needs to do everything it can to avoid the appearance of compromising with the Republican Party. The fall 2025 government shutdown is exemplary. If Democratic politicians vote on a continuing resolution that does not expand healthcare subsidies or otherwise get the party anything material, then our respondents will become even less enamored with the party. In our 2025 survey, we asked respondents how much they agreed that “what people call compromise in politics is really just selling out on one's principles?” We find 42% agreed with this statement (compared with 33% who disagreed), which is a 9% drop from 2023 responses, agreement intensity varied across our exit, voice, and

loyalty types. Only 7% of those we classified as party loyalists strongly agreed, but this increased to 15% for voice and 27% for exit. Total agreement (strongly agree and agree) is almost equal between voice and exit respondents. Considered with the above, a principled, progressive Democratic Party seems most capable of ensuring activists like those in OR remain committed to the party.



The perils of compromise are particularly stark when seen alongside respondents' theory of change beliefs. Figure 12 shows how agreement that compromise constitutes selling out one's principles varies in degree across these outlooks. Some 48% of those preferring to elect progressive Democrats endorse this perspective, with this increasing to 57% for those preferring a progressive third party. But in sharp contrast, we find that only 19% of those who emphasize securing power in Congress over progressive ideology see compromise as selling out. Consequently, while compromise might not be problematic for those presently loyal to the party, it is particularly unappetizing to those wanting something

different from the party. Party elites would benefit from attending to this asymmetry in preference intensity when trying to gauge downstream consequences.



Conclusion

We set out to understand how an insurgent part of the Democratic Party's activist base, seen in members of Our Revolution, learned from loss. We found Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty typology useful in understanding this.

Our unique panel of supporters spanning 2021-2025 offered important insight into how individuals in the organization saw themselves vis-a-vis the Democratic Party at the start of the Biden administration and then how they shifted four years later. We find very little change in either party identification or in ideology (either the respondents' or their placement of the Democratic Party). Such stability is indicative of significant loyalty. We also find some movement to a greater focus on winning elections over ideological purity of candidate (although such is still a minority position among our respondents) and a greater willingness to view compromise as acceptable.

However, we also find dissatisfaction with the party as reflected in significantly diminished feeling thermometer ratings for the party as well as for congressional leaders over the four years of our panel. And this voice response is reflected in the third of our candidates who condition support of Democratic congressional candidates in the 2026 elections on the party's adopting more progressive stances on issues. These voice-oriented people were also split on how best to resolve their concerns, with some increasingly seeing policy change effected by electing more Democrats to control Congress and others more prone to the exit alternative seeing a progressive third party as the best approach for progressive policy change.

Tendencies toward voice among our respondents do not appear uniquely connected to the Democratic party, either. We asked respondents in our 2025 survey whether they had ever signed a petition, joined a boycott, attended a peaceful demonstration, or joined a strike. The individuals we identified as most likely engaging in voice reported doing an average of three activities out of the four we asked about. This was a full quarter activity more than both the loyalty and exit groups. This feature, we think, points to voice as an effective strategy to bring about political change both within and outside of the party apparatus. This is further reinforced by the remarkably high feeling thermometer ratings of Our Revolution over the period of the panel and to the high level of involvement in the organization's activities.

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