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# Daring to dream of systemic change

## The Democratic Party needs a progressive vision for the future — a bold, anti-establishment alternative to MAGA

The downfall of the Democratic Party is attributable to the party's concentration on the above-average income, college-educated class. It espoused language and ideas that lean too far left for the majority of Americans, driving divisive identity politics. The party's decline has exposed the underlying irreparable system flaw: the failure of the American Dream in the 21st century.

A comeback strategy for the Democrats requires a bigger dream — system change.

## A new political playing field

The direction of the Democratic Party in recent years has isolated and, in some cases, frowned upon and excluded those who only agree in part and feel they do not benefit from the reproduction of its ideology. This has led to a massive loss of working-class supporters, young people and young men, in particular. Republicans have been targeting these groups, especially the latter, for years. In a first attempt to make sense of the Democratic Party's decline, California Governor Gavin Newsom released a rather uninspiring and disorientated podcast in which he interviews the big names at the forefront of the MAGA movement. His first guest, conservative activist Charlie Kirk, pointed out that the Republican Party's goal was to move the youth, a typically progressive demographic, 10 points to the right in 10 years — a goal the Grand Old Party (GOP) achieved much faster: voters aged 18 to 24 supported Joe Biden in 2020 by 29 points; Kamala Harris led with 10 points in 2024.

*The MAGA movement's stated goals of restoring American manufacturing and prioritising working Americans go hand in*

This comes as no surprise: since the pandemic, the Republican Party has broken new ground — dominating the podcast landscape. Joe Rogan, Tucker Carlson, Ben Shapiro — in a politically fractured media environment and a post-Covid world, conservatives have gained access to a far broader audience. Democrats have relied on

*hand with the fundamental promises of the American Dream.*

their strength to organise and work with grassroots movements. Meanwhile, they have failed to develop a clear vision of change since the last time they enjoyed widespread approval. Barack Obama embodied such a prospect of change for many Americans, leading with a vision and relatable backstory. And the momentum continued with Senator Bernie Sanders, a candidate who championed populist, anti-establishment change — much like the MAGA movement. Its strategist Steve Bannon described Sanders and Senator Elizabeth Warren as the only threat the right-wing populist MAGA movement faced.

To Bannon's point, one of the few Democrats who performed better than Harris in the 2024 elections was Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC). She won New York's 14th district with 69.2 per cent, while also splitting the ticket with a significant number of votes for Donald Trump as president. Trump's support in the district increased by 33 per cent, while Harris' dropped to 65 per cent (compared to Biden's support of 77 per cent in 2020). AOC and Trump may represent opposing agendas, but they have one thing in common that seems to strike a chord with American voters: a more radical approach to change.

This observation begs the question: Do the Democrats need to stop trying to improve the existing political and economic structures and dare to envision new ones; a new American Dream?

## Pieces of a broken dream

The MAGA movement's stated goals of restoring American manufacturing and prioritising working Americans go hand in hand with the fundamental promises of the American Dream: anyone can achieve lasting middle-class prosperity – an elevated economic status and a better education – through hard work. This certainly applies to those who have fled a country with significantly worse economic, political and social conditions. The dream also promotes the unique opportunities this country offers. The US continues to equip individuals with the confidence and opportunities they need to go 'from rags to riches' if they are destined for success — especially those with enough resources and privilege to dream colossal dreams: revolutionising space exploration, building the world's most influential technology companies, earning fame and fortune through exceptionalism. Most Americans, however, do not dream those dreams.

Most Americans are faced with a different reality. They live in a country that can no longer deliver on the basic promise that the middle-class individual will be better off than their parents' generation. As the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world, with all the resources to serve its citizens, the United States fails to provide its working- and middle-class citizens with the necessities — an affordable home, an affordable education, the security of a health care system that doesn't break the bank. It is precisely this frustrated, disillusioned and sprawling segment of society that has failed to point the finger at the real problem: the American Dream is no longer attainable, and the parts that are do not resonate with or apply to the majority of the American population.

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Globalisation has created losers, especially in rural working-class America, many of whom feel abandoned by the country's political institutions and economic structures. Even the children of the non-college-educated, hard-working people who toiled to send their children to college are now watching as they are gradually replaced by AI: the cycle continues with no improvement in sight. It is precisely the MAGA movement that is picking up these frustrated and defeated Americans — promising to resettle American manufacturing and build an 'America for Americans' as a restoration of the American Dream. A large portion of recent MAGA supporters, who have emerged from all demographics of society, have one thing in common: They believe they have elected the rebel who will upend the system and institutions that have kept them down.

If the political and economic structures do not change, citizens will increasingly take matters into their own hands to redress deep-seated grievances, whether by joining the only anti-system movement being pushed in this country – MAGA – or considering acts of 'vigilante justice'. An example of the latter may be the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson on 4 December 2024. The assassin, Luigi Mangione, was celebrated as a martyr by some, or at least received 'moderate' sympathy from around 27 per cent of Americans. The change this country craves goes beyond the political realm; it encompasses institutions and entities such as healthcare, businesses and banks.

The United States strives for superlatives – bigger, better, faster – and is designed to achieve them. Innovation and change come with a certain

radicalism here. Biden and Harris have stood as bulwarks for a final battle to revitalise a system that aspires to an antiquated American Dream — a dream that 41 per cent of adult Americans claim is no longer attainable.

Instead of seeking policy reforms that can be undone from one administration to the next, the Democratic Party must be bold enough to dream a new dream and make it its policy platform. At a time when the Democratic Party is leaderless and bereft of vision, progressives should be pushing for systemic change, a more daring vision that resonates with the American people and is well executed. A progressive anti-establishment alternative to MAGA; one that should arguably be run with a left populist touch and must reach Americans through a holistic approach to the media landscape. It should be identity-independent, welcome a diversity of opinion (ranging from far left to far centre) and expand its reach well beyond those privileged enough to cast their vote for a majority of Americans who have led less privileged lives — for whatever reasons that may be.

The moment to dream big is now.

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**Marlies Murray**
Washington, D.C.

Marlies Murray is the Program Officer for Domestic Political Affairs at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Washington, D.C. She previously served at Aspen Institute Germany where she was responsible for the Leadership Program. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the Freie Universität Berlin.