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## OPINION

# Democrats need to start winning elections in all 50 states

Congressional Democrats could help by allowing Democrats from Republican-dominated states to participate in their caucuses.

By **Roger Myerson and Kael Weston** Updated January 29, 2025, 47 minutes ago



Attendees at the 2024 Democratic National Convention were disappointed with the results of the November election. Can the Democratic National Committee have more success moving forward with a 50-state strategy? ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

When the Democratic National Committee meets to elect new leadership on Feb. 1, representatives of all 50 states will be included. But after the DNC members go home, the Democrats' national agenda will be largely shaped by their caucuses in Congress, which include Democratic representatives from only 38 states. ([Twelve states have sent no Democrats](#) to Congress, while 8 states have sent no Republicans.) Single-party disparity across the United States has not been this high in more than 70 years.

The [candidates](#) for DNC chair have talked about developing a [50-state strategy](#) for the party, but such plans are unlikely to succeed when voters in a dozen states perceive that the Democrats in the US Capitol are not able to hear their concerns.

If leaders of the Democratic Party are serious about reaching out to Americans everywhere, an essential first step would be to ensure that every state has some voice in the congressional Democratic caucuses. We have a proposal that would achieve that goal.

For any state that has no elected Democratic representatives, that state's Democratic Party would designate a recent congressional candidate to serve as a liaison with the House Democrats. The House Democratic Caucus includes nonvoting members from Washington, D.C., and the Virgin Islands, so why can't it add a few more to represent people in states like Iowa and Utah, where [over a million Americans](#) voted for Democratic congressional candidates last year?

Introducing such liaisons could help the Democrats break a vicious cycle of contraction. For too long, regions that elect few Democratic representatives have found that their local concerns get little attention from Democratic leaders in Washington, causing them to turn even more strongly toward the other party.

In the coming years, America will need two healthy parties that can compete to

serve the interests of people in every state. But voters cannot be expected to trust a party that has no effective mechanism for communicating their local concerns to its national leaders.

There are real opportunities today to widen Democrats' appeal in traditionally Republican strongholds. For example, the [Utah Supreme Court](#) recently unanimously declared the Republican-dominated Legislature's extreme gerrymander of the state's congressional districts to be unconstitutional, possibly opening the door to more competitive races.

Approximately [1 out of 3 Utah voters](#) regularly vote for Democratic congressional candidates. These Democratic candidates, who are not intimidated by the odds of running in GOP-heavy gerrymandered districts, are well positioned to persuade swing voters and disaffected Republicans on issues where Democratic positions are broadly popular, like rural health care, local infrastructure investments, social security and Medicare, abortion access, farm aid, water conservation and clean air. Utah was the fastest-growing state between 2010 and 2020, and it exemplifies the opportunities for Democrats to gain traction as the Mountain West continues to be a magnet for transplants.

While farmer-turned-politician Jon Tester, a former Democratic US senator, lost his Montana seat last November, he was right to emphasize the importance of [Democrats showing up](#) and speaking up in unexpected places. Persevering Democrats who run but lose in red America arguably have the most extensive election-year lessons to share with Democrats nationally, as they have faced Trumpism head-on.

These politicians have learned how to pivot away from accusations of “you’re going to take our guns away” and “you’re all baby killers” to messages of longstanding Democratic Party values and policy priorities that have helped people in small-town

America. Congressional Democrats need to hear the lessons from these campaigns.

Working-class voters used to be a key part of the national base for Democrats. To win them back, national Democratic leaders should help red-state Democrats keep at it, delivering the fundamental message that the party is working for voters everywhere. But this message is harder for people in red states to believe when they know that congressional Democratic leaders are not listening substantively or regularly to anybody in their state.

A strong Democratic bench of red-state congressional candidates needs to be ready by the 2026 midterms. Local talent will be more willing to step forward, and local voters will take them more seriously, if Democrats in Congress commit themselves now to listen to local Democrats -- including those that lose in overwhelmingly Republican districts. It is widely accepted that, for Democrats nationwide to appeal to more voters and win more elections, their party must start looking at America's electoral map differently.

The introduction of Democratic congressional liaisons from these states is a necessary first step in reckoning with Donald Trump's reelection and rebuilding the national Democratic brand.

This argument is not entirely new but has not gained as much support as it deserves. In addition to Tester, former North Dakota senator [Heidi Heitkamp](#) of North Dakota has spoken about the importance of the rural vote. [J.D. Scholten](#), a Democratic state senator in Iowa and former candidate for Congress, has likewise been a strong proponent of [the need for Democrats to “up our game in rural America.”](#)

And in the last presidential election, Bill Clinton, a Democrat who became governor of a red state, Arkansas, [hit the campaign trail](#) in rural parts of the South to attract

more votes. President Trump himself recently said that he believed Bill Clinton was [“a very good politician”](#) by focusing on voters in Michigan and Wisconsin in the 2016 presidential election and had “a great political sense.”

Directly taking on today’s Electoral College math that favors Republicans can only begin when front-line Democrats in these red regions are able to help shape the Democratic Party’s strategy and messaging in fundamental and enduring ways.

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