

# [***Opinion: Don't take the progressive threats in Michigan seriously***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BF0-FGG1-DY7V-G007-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Though the primary season has yet to officially conclude, with Democrats heading to the polls in Michigan on Tuesday, the presidential race is almost certain to consist of two widely unpopular candidates in President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump facing off for another eight months. Unfortunately, nothing good happens to incumbents when you give people that much time to stew about ***politics***.

Progressive activists have decided to use this interlude to [*attack Biden*](https://www.wsj.com/politics/elections/bidens-support-from-progressives-at-risk-over-border-bill-and-israel-f44ed8f7) for his centrist positions on immigration, energy policy and the Israel-Hamas war, in particular. Rashida Tlaib, a Democratic member of Congress from Michigan who has delivered [*constant criticism*](https://thehill.com/homenews/house/4293191-tlaib-asserts-biden-is-supporting-genocide-in-gaza/) of Biden's policy toward Gaza, even urged residents in her state to vote "[*uncommitted*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/18/politics/tlaib-biden-michigan-democratic-primary/index.html)" in Tuesday's primary, openly challenging and undermining her own party's presidential candidate. Her implicit goal is to ostensibly [*prove*](https://twitter.com/Listen2michigan/status/1758956419741561302?s=20) to Biden through this primary challenge that if he doesn't change course on Gaza, he risks losing votes in the November election.

Threats from the progressive left often [*employ*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/feb/11/biden-progress-alienated-voters-election-2024) the same pressure as Tlaib: If you don't adopt our positions, "our voters" won't support you or turn out in November. Climate activists in particular like to [*threaten Democrats*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/05/politics/joe-biden-climate-emergency-2024/index.html) to get their way on fossil fuel projects. That no doubt encouraged Biden to recently take the controversial step of pausing the export of liquid natural gas.

Yet Democratic [*Sens. John Fetterman and Bob Casey*](https://www.inquirer.com/politics/pennsylvania/lng-pause-biden-john-fetterman-bob-casey-pennsylvania-natural-gas-20240201.html#:~:text=Bob%20Casey%20and%20John%20Fetterman%20said%20Thursday%20they%20have%20concerns,administration%20for%20the%20Pennsylvania%20Democrats.) from the key battleground state of Pennsylvania weren't afraid to oppose this step. Like the senators from his birth state, Biden should ignore these threats from the left and stand up strongly for his vital [*center perspective*](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/09/us/politics/biden-centrist.html).

It's both good policy and good ***politics***.

The claim that young people or racial and ethnic minority voters won't turn out for Democrats unless the party pursues maximally leftist positions on select issues is built on the false assumption that the default ideological position of base Democratic voters is progressive.

In fact, the opposite is true: Black and Hispanic Democrats, who comprise about 30% of the party, are far more moderate or conservative than they are liberal, and although Millennials and Gen Zers are [*more liberal*](https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/) than other age groups, this perspective is far from universal among younger voters.

In Gallup [*research*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/467888/democrats-identification-liberal-new-high.aspx) examining partisan trends in ideological self-identification, about 6 in 10 Black and Hispanic Democrats called themselves moderate or conservative, along with roughly 4 in 10 young people ages 18 to 29. Among the whole population in [*Gallup*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/388988/political-ideology-steady-conservatives-moderates-tie.aspx)'s aggregate examination of ideology from 2021, nearly 4 in 10 American adults classified themselves as moderate, along with 36% who called themselves either conservative or very conservative. In comparison, only one quarter of American adults identified as either liberal or very liberal.

Although Democrats have [*become more liberal*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/467888/democrats-identification-liberal-new-high.aspx#:~:text=Democrats%27%20Political%20Ideology%2C%20Based%20on%20Annual%20Averages&text=Percentage%20liberal%20has%20gradually%20increased,%25%20and%2010%25%2C%20respectively.) since the 1990s, the Gallup data shows the ideological trends among the wider electorate mean that there is more for Biden to lose than to gain in pursuing a hard-left perspective in ***politics***. Likewise, the Pew Research Center's [*political typology*](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/) shows that a mere 6% of Americans overall fall into the "progressive left" camp with extremely left-wing views on issues such as immigration, the Black Lives Matter movement, the military and America's engagement in the world.

Looking at Michigan specifically, the threat of Arab Americans tanking Biden must also be put in wider perspective. As [*research*](https://www.aei.org/politics-and-public-opinion/will-support-for-israel-cost-biden-michigan/) from Karlyn Bowman, Nate Moore and Ruy Teixeira on Arab American opinion and voting trends shows, Democratic support has been steadily declining since highs in the Obama years - mainly due to these voters' more conservative views on social issues like gay rights and abortion as much as critical views on foreign policy.

Even with these larger trends in the state, the authors find: "In Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Hamtramck, and Livonia - the Michigan cities with the highest proportion of Arab American voters - Biden defeated Trump by a combined 38,000 or so votes. In 2020, Biden's statewide margin was about 155,000 votes. Even if his advantage in those four cities was completely erased, Biden would still carry Michigan by more than 100,000 votes."

Of course, the kind of close election expected in 2024 means every vote matters, and there are other groups that are taking issue with Biden's Gaza policy. But it would be a mistake to think that shifting his policy to the left would be a net gain for him. As pollster Mark Mellman of Democratic Majority for Israel rightly states: "You'll find there are more people that are likely to vote for Biden because of his pro-Israel stance than to vote against him because of that." Beyond [*moderates who support Biden's approach*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/19/politics/polling-israel-hamas-biden/index.html), Mellman pointed out that Jewish voters make up about [*2-3%*](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/the-size-of-the-u-s-jewish-population/) of the electorate as opposed to Muslims, who account for [*1%*](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/01/14/measuring-religion-in-pew-research-centers-american-trends-panel/) or less.

Beyond general ideological orientation, a deeper examination of the views of young people on key issues animating activists shows a lack of alignment with the loudest voices on the left.

For example, on energy policy, Millennial and eligible Gen Z voters (covering ages 18-44) support practical all-of-the-above solutions over the elimination of fossil fuels supported by extreme climate activists. By a [*64% to 36%*](https://www.aei.org/op-eds/the-progressive-left-is-a-paper-tiger/) margin in a poll from the [*Survey Center on American Life*](https://www.americansurveycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Survey-Center-on-American-Life-Political-Coalitions-Survey-April-2023-Topline-Questionnaire-FINAL.pdf) conducted by the American Enterprise Institute, these younger voters favored an approach designed to "Use a mix of energy sources including oil, coal and natural gas along with renewable energy sources" over one focused on steps to "Phase out the use of oil, coal and natural gas completely, relying instead on renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power only."

On immigration, nearly 6 in 10 Americans ages 18 to 29 and 7 in 10 of those ages 30 to 49 say that the large numbers of migrants seeking to enter the US at the Mexican border is either a crisis or a major problem, according to just-released [*data*](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/02/15/how-americans-view-the-u-s-mexico-border-situation-and-the-governments-handling-of-the-issue/#:~:text=Republicans%20and%20Republican%2Dleaning%20independents,.%2020%25%20of%20Republicans).) from Pew. Importantly, nearly two-thirds of Black adults and more than three-quarters of Hispanic adults also agree with the severity of the migration challenge on the southern border.

Looking at the [*strictest policy proposal*](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/02/15/what-would-improve-the-u-s-immigration-system/) in this same poll, Democrats overall are slightly more likely to believe that "increasing deportations of people who are in the country illegally" will make the situation at the border better rather than worse (30% vs. 28%). Democratic support for more moderate proposals [*backed by Biden*](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/biden-administration-speed-asylum-cases-expand-legal-resources/story?id=98431530) is even higher: Three-quarters of Democrats support a plan to increase the number of immigration judges to speed up action on asylum claims.

No matter how you look at it, base partisan voters, particularly Black and Hispanic Democrats and even a sizable number of young people, are much more aligned with Biden's centrist world view than they are with the more extreme policy positions ascendant on the left.

With Trump and the right saying things sure to alienate the middle this cycle, the center lane is wide open for Biden to turn his sensible, moderate views on securing the border, advancing American energy independence and supporting Israel into a viable electoral majority. But Biden can only do this if he clearly delineates his differences with the progressive left and continues to defend his moderate perspective with the wider American electorate.

The path to reelection for Biden goes through the vital center, not through the noisy left.

Opinion by John Halpin

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