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What the 2025 Results Tell Us

Third Way



It was a terrific night for Democrats across the country. The project of reviving the Democratic Party, stopping Trumpism in its tracks, and turning red and purple places blue saw enormous wins on Tuesday. As we turn our attention toward the 2026 midterms, Third Way will remain obsessively focused on the critical task of ensuring Democrats follow the moderate playbook to win competitive elections. Here is some of what Tuesday's results told us about this playbook:

1. Moderate Democrats Overperformed. Abigail Spanberger won in a 15-point blowout of historic proportions in Virginia, and Mikie Sherrill shocked the political world with a landslide 13-point win in what was supposed to be a squeaker race, breaking a 63-year streak of parties failing to get third terms in New Jersey. Spanberger outperformed Harris's margin by 9 points statewide—surpassing Harris in 91 of 95 counties—as did Sherrill by 7 points—outperforming Harris in all 21 counties.

2. Moderate Democrats Flipped Red Places Blue. All eleven New Jersey counties that went for Trump swung toward Mikie Sherrill, with Sherrill flipping five of those counties from red to blue. Of the 80 Virginia counties that went for Trump, 76 swung toward Abigail Spanberger, with Spanberger flipping six of them from red to blue.

3. Moderate Democrats Turned Voters Out. Whoever said that moderate Democrats can't energize the Democratic base should reassess their priors. On Tuesday, overall turnout in Virginia and New Jersey outpaced turnout in NYC when compared to the 2024 presidential race. (75% of 2024 turnout in VA and NJ, and 74% in NYC.)

4. Democrats Followed the Moderate Playbook. Spanberger's opening line of her victory speech was: "Virginia chose pragmatism over partisanship." Both Spanberger and Sherrill were authentic and relentless in focusing on kitchen table issues like the affordability crisis, taxes, education, and crime—and their willingness to engage across the aisle. Running on this kind of mainstream playbook is what will make Democrats the majority makers in 2026 and 2028.

5. Moderate Mayors Won, Too. Moderate mayors in Minneapolis and Seattle swept aside serious progressive challengers, with Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey winning 53% of the vote and Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell garnering 54% support. Mayor Justin Bibb of Cleveland cleaned up with 75% of the vote, as did Corey O'Connor in Pittsburgh who won with 88% support.

6. Voters Who Ranked the Economy Their Top Issue Swung Toward Democrats. In 2024, Trump won voters who ranked the economy their top issue by 32 points in New Jersey and 15 points in Virginia. On Tuesday, Mikie Sherrill won these voters by 24 points in New Jersey, a whopping 56-point leftward swing, and Abigail Spanberger won them by 23 points, a 38-point leftward swing. Democrats have begun to win back voters' trust in handling the economy, but they must stay laser focused on pocketbook issues if they are to win back the House.

7. Winning Moderates, Independents, Trump Voters, and Working-Class Voters Was Key to Victory. Both Sherrill (62%) and Spanberger (69%) won supermajorities of moderate voters. Both Sherrill (56%) and Spanberger (59%) won with independent voters. Both Sherrill and Spanberger flipped 7% of Trump voters to their side. And after hemorrhaging with working-class voters cycle after cycle, Democrats made significant progress in winning back this cohort. Sherrill won 50% of non-college voters in New Jersey, while Spanberger won 51% in Virginia, with non-college voters swinging 19 points left from Youngkin's victory in 2021.

8. These Wins Portend a Big 2026 Midterms. Compared to the 2021 gubernatorial elections, Spanberger swung Virginia 17 points left and Sherrill swung New Jersey 10 points left. Both Spanberger and Sherrill reached higher support levels than their Democratic predecessors in 2017, which portended Democrats picking up 40 House seats in a landslide 2018 election. Democrats are fired up and ready to vote Republicans out of office.

It was a great night for Democrats because voters are dissatisfied with Trump and the Republican Party, and they are bought in on the mainstream agenda that Democrats put forward. Democrats can only win competitive races in 2026 and 2028 if we nominate candidates who can be credibly called mainstream and follow the moderate playbook. If we do, then we will find our way out of the wilderness.

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