I'm not a robot

Politics, Law & Government Politics & Political Systems Democratic Party, in the United States, one of the two major political parties, the other being the Republican Party.political cartoon: donkey“A Live Jackass Kicking a Dead Lion,” illustration by Thomas Nast for Harper's Weekly, 1870, in which the donkey represents the Copperheads and the lion symbolizes former secretary of war Edwin M. Stanton. The cartoon helped establish the donkey as the logo of the Democratic Party.The Democratic Party has changed significantly during its more than two centuries of existence. During the 19th century the party supported or tolerated slavery, and it opposed civil rights reforms after the American Civil War in order to retain the support of Southern voters. By the mid-20th century it had undergone a dramatic ideological realignment and reinvented itself as a party supporting organized labor, the civil rights of minorities, and progressive reform. Since Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal of the 1930s, the party has also tended to favor greater government intervention in the economy and to oppose government intervention in the private noneconomic affairs of citizens. The logo of the Democratic Party, the donkey, was popularized by cartoonist Thomas Nast in the 1870s; though widely used, it has never been officially adopted by the party. The Democratic Party is the oldest political party in the United States and among the oldest political parties in the world. It traces its roots to 1792, when followers of Thomas Jefferson adopted the name Republican to emphasize their anti-monarchical views. The Republican Party, also known as the Jeffersonian Republicans, advocated a decentralized government with limited powers. Another faction to emerge in the early years of the republic, the Federalist Party, led by Alexander Hamilton, favored a strong central government. Jefferson’s faction developed from the group of Anti-Federalists who had agitated in favor of the addition of a Bill of Rights to the Constitution of the United States. The Federalists called Jefferson’s faction the Democratic-Republican Party in an attempt to identify it with the disorder spawned by the “radical democrats” of the French Revolution of 1789. After the Federalist John Adams was elected president in 1796, the Republican Party served as the country’s first opposition party, and in 1798 the Republicans adopted the derisive Democratic-Republican label as their official name. In 1800 Adams was defeated by Jefferson, whose victory ushered in a period of prolonged Democratic-Republican dominance. Jefferson won reelection easily in 1804, and Democratic-Republicans James Madison (1808 and 1812) and James Monroe (1816 and 1820) were also subsequently elected. By 1820 the Federalist Party had faded from national politics, leaving the Democratic-Republicans as the country’s sole major party and allowing Monroe to run unopposed in that year’s presidential election. Henry ClayHenry Clay, mezzotint by H.S. Sadd, after a painting by J.W. Dodge, 1843.During the 1820s new states entered the union, voting laws were relaxed, and several states passed legislation that provided for the direct election of presidential electors by voters (electors had previously been appointed by state legislatures). These changes split the Democratic-Republicans into factions, each of which nominated its own candidate in the presidential election of 1824. The party’s congressional caucus nominated William H. Crawford of Georgia, but Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams, the leaders of the party’s two largest factions, also sought the presidency; Henry Clay, the speaker of the House of Representatives, was nominated by the Kentucky and Tennessee legislatures. Jackson won the most popular and electoral votes, but no candidate received the necessary majority in the electoral college. When the election went to the House of Representatives (as stipulated in the Constitution), Clay—who had finished fourth and was thus eliminated from consideration—threw his support to Adams, who won the House vote and subsequently appointed Clay secretary of state. All-American History Quiz Andrew JacksonAndrew Jackson, oil on canvas by Asher B. Durand, 1800. Under Jackson, the Democratic Party held its first national convention in 1832.Despite Adams’s victory, differences between the Adams and the Jackson factions persisted. Adams’s supporters, representing Eastern interests, called themselves the National Republicans. Jackson, whose strength lay in the South and West, referred to his followers simply as Democrats (or as Jacksonian Democrats). Jackson defeated Adams in the 1828 presidential election. In 1832 in Baltimore, Maryland, at one of the country’s first national political conventions (the first convention had been held the previous year by the Anti-Masonic Movement), the Democrats nominated Jackson for president, drafted a party platform, and established a rule that required party presidential and vice presidential nominees to receive the votes of at least two-thirds of the national convention delegates. This rule, which was not repealed until 1936, effectively ceded veto power in the selection process to minority factions, and it often required conventions to hold dozens of ballots to determine a presidential nominee. (The party’s presidential candidate in 1924, John W. Davis, needed more than 100 ballots to secure the nomination.) Jackson easily won reelection in 1832, but his various opponents—who derisively referred to him as “King Andrew”—joined with former National Republicans to form the Whig Party, named for the English political faction that had opposed absolute monarchy in the 17th century (see Whig and Tory). From 1828 to 1856 the Democrats won all but two presidential elections (1840 and 1848). During the 1840s and ’50s, however, the Democratic Party, as it officially named itself in 1844, suffered serious internal strains over the issue of extending slavery to the Western territories. Southern Democrats, led by Jefferson Davis, wanted to allow slavery in all the territories, while Northern Democrats, led by Stephen A. Douglas, proposed that each territory should decide the question for itself through referendum. The issue split the Democrats at their 1860 presidential convention, where Southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckinridge and Northern Democrats nominated Douglas. The 1860 election also included John Bell, the nominee of the Constitutional Union Party, and Abraham Lincoln, the candidate of the newly established (1854) antislavery Republican Party (which was unrelated to Jefferson’s Republican Party of decades earlier). With the Democrats hopelessly split, Lincoln was elected president with only about 40 percent of the national vote; in contrast, Douglas and Breckinridge won 29 percent and 18 percent of the vote, respectively. The election of 1860 is regarded by most political observers as the first of the country’s three “critical” elections—contests that produced sharp yet enduring changes in party loyalties across the country. (Some scholars also identify the 1824 election as a critical election.) It established the Democratic and Republican parties as the major parties in what was ostensibly a two-party system. In federal elections from the 1870s to the 1890s, the parties were in rough balance—except in the South, where the Democrats dominated because most whites blamed the Republican Party for both the American Civil War (1861–65) and the Reconstruction (1865–77) that followed; the two parties controlled Congress for almost equal periods through the rest of the 19th century, though the Democratic Party held the presidency only during the two terms of Grover Cleveland (1885–89 and 1893–97). Repressive legislation and physical intimidation designed to prevent newly enfranchised African Americans from voting—despite passage of the Fifteenth Amendment—ensured that the South would remain staunchly Democratic for nearly a century (see black code). During Cleveland’s second term, however, the United States sank into an economic depression. The party at this time was basically conservative and agrarian-oriented, opposing the interests of big business (especially protective tariffs) and favoring cheap-money policies, which were aimed at maintaining low interest rates. Hear William Jennings Bryan deliver his “Cross of Gold” speech at the Democratic National ConventionWilliam Jennings Bryan's “Cross of Gold” speech, given at the Democratic National Convention, Chicago, July 8, 1896.See all videos for this articleIn the country’s second critical election, in 1896, the Democrats split disastrously over the free-silver and Populist program of their presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan. Bryan lost by a wide margin to Republican William McKinley, a conservative who supported high tariffs and money based only on gold. From 1896 to 1932 the Democrats held the presidency only during the two terms of Woodrow Wilson (1913–21), and even Wilson’s presidency was considered somewhat of a fluke. Wilson won in 1912 because the Republican vote was divided between President William Howard Taft (the official party nominee) and former Republican president Theodore Roosevelt, the candidate of the new Bull Moose Party. Wilson championed various progressive economic reforms, including the breaking up of business monopolies and broader federal regulation of banking and industry. Although he led the United States into World War I to make the world “safe for democracy,” Wilson’s brand of idealism and internationalism proved less attractive to voters during the spectacular prosperity of the 1920s than the Republicans’ frank embrace of big business. The Democrats lost decisively the presidential elections of 1920, 1924, and 1928. The country’s third critical election, in 1932, took place in the wake of the stock market crash of 1929 and in the midst of the Great Depression. Led by Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democrats not only regained the presidency but also replaced the Republicans as the majority party throughout the country—in the North as well as the South. Through his political skills and his sweeping New Deal social programs, such as social security and the statutory minimum wage, Roosevelt forged a broad coalition—including small farmers, Northern city dwellers, organized labor, European immigrants, liberals, intellectuals, and reformers—that enabled the Democratic Party to retain the presidency until 1952 and to control both houses of Congress for most of the period from the 1930s to the mid-1990s. Roosevelt was reelected in 1936, 1940, and 1944; he was the only president to be elected to more than two terms. Upon his death in 1945 he was succeeded by his vice president, Harry S. Truman, who was narrowly elected in 1948. Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme Allied commander during World War II, won overwhelming victories against Democrat Adlai E. Stevenson in the presidential elections of 1952 and 1956. The Democrats regained the White House in the election of 1960, when John F. Kennedy narrowly defeated Eisenhower’s vice president, Richard M. Nixon. The Democrats’ championing of civil rights and racial desegregation under Truman, Kennedy, and especially Lyndon B. Johnson—who secured passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—cost the party the traditional allegiance of many of its Southern supporters. Moreover, the pursuit of civil rights legislation dramatically split the party’s legislators along regional lines in the 1950s and ’60s, with Southern senators famously conducting a protracted filibuster in an ultimately futile attempt to block passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Although Johnson defeated Republican Barry M. Goldwater by a landslide in 1964, his national support waned because of bitter opposition to the Vietnam War, and he chose not to run for reelection. Following the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy in 1968, the party nominated Johnson’s vice president, Hubert H. Humphrey, at a fractious convention in Chicago that was marred by violence outside the hall between police and protesters. Meanwhile, many Southern Democrats supported the candidacy of Alabama Governor George C. Wallace, an opponent of federally mandated racial integration. In the 1968 election Humphrey was soundly defeated by Nixon in the electoral college (among Southern states Humphrey carried only Texas), though he lost the popular vote by only a narrow margin. Anwar Sadat, Jimmy Carter, and Menachem Begin(From left) Egyptian Pres. Anwar Sadat, U.S. Pres. Jimmy Carter, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin signing the Camp David Accords at the White House, Washington, D.C., September 17, 1978.From 1972 to 1988 the Democrats lost four of five presidential elections. In 1972 the party nominated antiwar candidate George S. McGovern, who lost to Nixon in one of the biggest landslides in U.S. electoral history. Two years later the Watergate scandal forced Nixon’s resignation, enabling Jimmy Carter, then the Democratic governor of Georgia, to defeat Gerald R. Ford, Nixon’s successor, in 1976. Although Carter orchestrated the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, his presidency was plagued by a sluggish economy and by the crisis over the kidnapping and prolonged captivity of U.S. diplomats in Iran following the Islamic revolution there in 1979. Carter was defeated in 1980 by conservative Republican Ronald W. Reagan, who was easily reelected in 1984 against Carter’s vice president, Walter F. Mondale. Mondale’s running mate, Geraldine A. Ferraro, was the first female candidate on a major-party ticket. Reagan’s vice president, George Bush, defeated Massachusetts Governor Michael S. Dukakis in 1988. Despite its losses in the presidential elections of the 1970s and ’80s, the Democratic Party continued to control both houses of Congress for most of the period (although the Republicans controlled the Senate from 1981 to 1987). In 1992 Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton recaptured the White House for the Democrats by defeating Bush and third-party candidate Ross Perot. Clinton’s support of international trade agreements (e.g., the North American Free Trade Agreement) and his willingness to cut spending on social programs to reduce budget deficits alienated the left wing of his party and many traditional supporters in organized labor. In 1994 the Democrats lost control of both houses of Congress, in part because of public disenchantment with Clinton’s health care plan. During Clinton’s second term the country experienced a period of prosperity not seen since the 1920s, but a scandal involving Clinton’s relationship with a White House intern led to his impeachment by the House of Representatives in 1998; he was acquitted by the Senate in 1999. Al Gore, Clinton’s vice president, easily won the Democratic presidential nomination in 2000. In the general election, Gore won 500,000 more popular votes than Republican George W. Bush but narrowly lost in the electoral college after the Supreme Court of the United States ordered a halt to the manual recounting of disputed ballots in Florida. The party’s nominee in 2004, John Kerry, was narrowly defeated by Bush in the popular and electoral vote. Aided by the growing opposition to the Iraq War (2003–11), the Democrats regained control of the Senate and the House following the 2006 midterm elections. This marked the first time in some 12 years that the Democrats held a majority in both houses of Congress. In the general election of 2008 the party’s presidential nominee, Barack Obama, defeated Republican John McCain, thereby becoming the first African American to be elected president of the United States. The Democrats also increased their majority in the Senate and the House. The party scored another victory in mid-2009, when an eight-month legal battle over one of Minnesota’s Senate seats concluded with the election of Al Franken, a member of the state’s Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. With Franken in office, Democrats in the Senate (supported by the chamber’s two independents) would be able to exercise a filibuster-proof 60–40 majority. In January 2010 the Democrats lost this filibuster-proof majority when the Democratic candidate lost the special election to fill the unexpired term of Ted Kennedy following his death. What is a midterm election?Situated two years into a presidential term in the United States, midterm elections determine who serves in many congressional seats.See all videos for this articleThe Democrats’ dominance of Congress proved short-lived, as a swing of some 60 seats (the largest since 1948) returned control of the House to the Republicans in the 2010 midterm election. The Democrats held on to their majority in the Senate, though that majority also was dramatically reduced. Many of the Democrats who had come into office in the 2006 and 2010 elections were defeated, but so too were a number of longtime officeholders; incumbents felt the sting of an electorate that was anxious about the struggling economy and high unemployment. The election also was widely seen as a referendum on the policies of the Obama administration, which were vehemently opposed by a populist upsurge in and around the Republican Party known as the Tea Party movement. The Democratic Party fared better in the 2012 general election, with Obama defeating his Republican opponent, Mitt Romney. The 2012 election did not significantly change the distribution of power between the two main parties in Congress. While the Democrats retained their majority in the Senate, they were unable to retake the House of Representatives. The Republicans retook the Senate during the 2014 midterm elections. Hillary ClintonHillary Clinton at a campaign rally, 2016.In the 2016 presidential race, Democrats selected Hillary Clinton as their nominee, the first time a major party in the United States had a woman at the top of its presidential ticket. Despite winning the popular vote by almost three million ballots, Clinton failed to take enough states in the electoral college, and the presidency was won by Republican Donald J. Trump in one of the largest upsets in U.S. electoral history. Moreover, the Republican Party maintained control of both chambers of Congress in the 2016 election. In the midterms two years later, however, Democrats retook the House in what some described as a “blue wave.” Despite being conducted during the coronavirus global pandemic, the 2020 federal election generated the largest voter turnout in American history, with more 150 million ballots cast. Democrats—who voted early and by mail more often than Republicans did—handed Obama’s former vice president, Joe Biden, a victory over the incumbent, Trump, in the presidential election. Biden won the popular vote by some five million votes and triumphed in the electoral college vote by holding on to the states captured by Clinton in the previous presidential contest and winning back the “blue wall” states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin that had been lost to Trump in 2016. The Democrats’ attempt to retake control of the Senate hinged on two runoff elections to be held in Georgia in January 2021. The party held on to control of the House of Representatives, but its majority shrank significantly. Democrats who will run for president in 2028 are already quietly, and not so quietly, making moves. They’re visiting early primary states, workshopping material and formulating plans. This week, it’s Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear in South Carolina. Last week, it was California Gov. Gavin Newsom. CNN’s Edward-Isaac Dovere is closely watching all of it. We talked in DC about the list of potential candidates, their strengths and weaknesses, and what are the signs they’re actually serious about stepping in the ring. The conversation, edited for length, is below. WOLF: The next general election isn’t until 2028. Why are we paying attention to this right now? DOVERE: First of all, because some people want us to be paying attention. Gavin Newsom didn’t go to South Carolina just as any state to go to. He picked a state — a presidential primary state — so that we talk about it, as others have done. JB Pritzker was in New Hampshire at the end of April; Pete Buttigieg went to Iowa, even though it’s not quite a presidential state anymore. This is an ongoing process of the candidates trying to get people to pay attention and to workshop some of their material. But you also see among a lot of Democrats a deep desire to get past the Donald Trump era, even though the Trump era is still very new. One of the things even that Newsom was saying in South Carolina was, ‘We can put an end to this in 18 months.’ He’s talking about the midterms, but it’s that thought that Democrats don’t need to just wallow in the horror and misery that they’ve been in since Election Day of 2024. WOLF: Biden forced a lot of changes in the primary process for Democrats, including Iowa not really being an early state for them anymore. What’s the early map going to look like? DOVERE: Biden did push through some changes, especially making South Carolina first. But some of the other changes, particularly moving Iowa off of the early-state calendar, were very much supported by a lot of other people in the Democratic National Coalition. We’ll see what the calendar ends up looking like. The chances that Iowa gets back to a primary position seem very low. That said, the chances that New Hampshire gets back to the first-in-the-nation spot that actually is required by New Hampshire state law seem much higher. We won’t know the full answer on the calendar until at least sometime in 2026, and there is a lot of wrangling and back-and-forth among the states and among the DNC members. What is definitely true, though, is that no matter what arrangement will come, it seems that New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada will remain early. Where exactly they are is a little bit unclear. WOLF: Why could he win and why would he have trouble? DOVERE: Newsom had a real breakout moment over the response to what was going on in Los Angeles a couple weeks ago, and that very quickly identified him in people’s minds as the face of the actual resistance to what Trump was doing, rather than just talking about it. He is a very skilled retail campaigner and speaker. But there are obstacles he’ll have to overcome — people who think that he’s maybe too California. He was the mayor of San Francisco, too liberal in some people’s minds. Too slick. Just having a California air to him — all that stuff is what he needs to overcome. Other than Kamala Harris, there’s never been a Democratic nominee from the West Coast. WOLF: OK, Kamala Harris. Could she do it again in a crowded primary? DOVERE: She’s obviously thinking about running for governor of California, and I’ve done reporting that says that she’s leaning in that direction. What is also clear is that she and her closest advisers realize that it’s one or the other — you can’t run for governor and then turn around and run for president right away. WOLF: Unless your name is Richard Nixon. DOVERE: Well, he ran for governor in 1962, lost, and then didn’t end up running for president again until 1968. Her goal, if she runs, would be to win and not repeat the Nixon thing. WOLF: Moving east, in the middle of the country, there’s JB Pritzker and Rahm Emanuel in Illinois; there’s new Michigan resident Pete Buttigieg and Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. Let’s start with Buttigieg, someone who actually won an early contest in 2020. DOVERE: The Bernie Sanders folks would still protest this, but Buttigieg did win the Iowa caucuses, and he came in a healthy second in the New Hampshire primary. He has spent the first six months of Trump’s second presidency doing a lot of podcasts and outreach to what would be classified these days as the ‘manosphere,’ or the Republican-leaning or low-propensity voters. He regularly is embraced by Democrats for the way that he’s able to break down Democratic arguments and break apart Republican arguments. That said, his jobs leading up to now have been to be the mayor of a pretty small city — South Bend, Indiana. And then he was transportation secretary. But part of his theory from when he was running in 2019, and he and I talked about it then, was that we are living in an age of Donald Trump’s politics, where it’s more about what you’re able to do and how you’re able to communicate what you’re doing than about exactly what job you’ve had in government. Maybe that’s an opening for him. I think that most people assume that he would be a reasonably strong contender, at least if he runs. WOLF: Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is an obvious choice, but she’s said she’s not running. DOVERE: A lot of people say they won’t run for president until they do. Barack Obama insisted he wasn’t running. Whitmer has a lot of strength in Michigan, obviously a key state for Democrats. She’s won two tough races there by, in the end, pretty comfortable margins. She is quite popular in Michigan, as far as one can be in these polarized times. And she has, in these first six months of Trump, taken a different route than a lot of other Democrats. She’s tried to find ways to work with Trump, and she feels like that is a good way of being the governor and also delivering for swing areas of the state. Of course, that has frustrated a lot of Democrats who feel like she’s been used by Trump and turned into a prop by him, whether it was at the Oval Office when they had that meeting a couple months ago, or when he then flew to Michigan to announce this new shipbuilding investment and had her come to the podium. She would say she did get the investment, and it makes a big difference for Michigan shipbuilding. WOLF: Let’s go across the lake to Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, the only billionaire on the list, yes. Would the democratic socialist wing of the Democratic Party go for a billionaire? DOVERE: I sat in New Hampshire at the end of April when Pritzker was there to speak to the big Democratic dinner there, and I asked him that exact question. When there was such a push among a lot of Democrats against the wealthy and oligarchs and all that, how would they vote for a billionaire? He said to me, it’s about values, and he feels like he’s been pushing the values. He’s not apologetic about his family wealth. In fact, he says that he has used it toward helping other Democrats win, and through his personal political donations and a PAC he has put quite a few dollars into everything from state parties to specific campaigns to ballot initiative efforts. His strength would be that he’s running for reelection now to a third term. A lot of things that he has done as governor fall into the category of Trump-proofing the state, and some fall into the category of just trying to make the state a center-left laboratory for all sorts of things. WOLF: There is a former mayor of Chicago who is clearly trying to set up the idea that he would run. Is Rahm Emanuel (a CNN contributor, former White House chief of staff, former ambassador and former congressman) actually serious? DOVERE: He is talking about running more in terms of the concept of what he would bring to the argument, or to the debate of how Democrats should be moderate and how they should talk about things in a different way than in the normal way of a potential candidate. WOLF: Moving South, what about a moderate governor from an otherwise-red state? DOVERE: That’s Andy Beshear’s argument: that he’s won, and won comfortably, among the types of voters that most Democrats have given up even trying to appeal to, and done it in a state — Kentucky — that hasn’t had a Democrat other than him and his father competitive statewide for years. He’s done it while not shying away from Democratic positions on issues like abortion rights and even trans kids, but as he also spends some time in South Carolina this week, he’s unabashedly starting to test how much appetite there is for his lower key — in both positions and personality — approach. WOLF: Let’s go to the mid-Atlantic. Let’s talk about Wes Moore (governor of Maryland), and then Josh Shapiro (governor of Pennsylvania). DOVERE: Wes Moore is clearly a very charismatic, appealing figure who has caught the eye of a lot of the Democratic intelligentsia for having a motivational, optimistic approach to how he speaks. He does not have as much of a legislative record as some of the other governors, which is notable in that Democrats have full control of the legislature in Maryland. So there may be some questions about what he has done and what he has been able to actually make happen when he’s up against other governors, although he has also said he’s not running for president. WOLF: Josh Shapiro clearly is somebody that everybody is watching. Will he run? DOVERE: We don’t even have an official announcement that he’s running for a second term as governor, although he obviously will. What he has managed to do, from when he was attorney general through when he was running for governor, through three years as governor, is have extremely high popularity ratings in Pennsylvania. That’s among Democrats and Republicans, and in a state that has become such a swing state. For someone who is an unabashed Democrat to have that kind of reception is really a demonstration of the way that he approaches his governing and his outreach to the state. He has been very low-profile in terms of national politics over the course of these first six months of the Trump term. Most people probably haven’t heard from him at all, other than that terrible incident with the arson of the governor’s mansion when he was there with his family on the first night of Passover. That is a deliberate effort for him to stay focused on Pennsylvania. One of the questions over the next year or two, as he runs through reelection, is how much does he start to pop onto the national radar? WOLF: Usually a list like this is full of senators. Who could be on it? DOVERE: I would put Cory Booker from New Jersey, Chris Murphy from Connecticut, Mark Kelly from Arizona and Ruben Gallego from Arizona. WOLF: We’ve had Bernie Sanders as a very popular alternative in recent elections. He must be too old at this point. Who inherits his mantle? DOVERE: Who are we to say who is too old? He will turn 87 by Election Day 2028 — that would make him by far the oldest president that we’ve ever had, even outdoing the Biden and Trump records. Most people do not expect that he will be running for president again. The question of who inherits his mantle is a big one, and most people would put their money on Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who is going to have some decisions coming up about whether she sets her eyes on running for president or running for Senate. There’s an election in 2028 — that is Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer’s seat, whether he decides to run, or she runs against him, or whether she just builds up her power by gaining seniority in the House. She’s obviously quite young, and she has done more with her House seat already than almost anybody ever has in that amount of time. If not her, then I think there is a big open question about who it would be. Rep. Ro Khanna, the congressman from California who was a co-chair of Sanders’ campaign in 2020, has been making clear that he is exploring a presidential run and hoping to have some of that support. If she doesn’t run and he doesn’t get that kind of support, then I think there would be a question of whether there’s someone else that could be the right vessel for that, or whether it would diffuse between multiple candidates. WOLF: What about a complete outsider? There’s a boomlet of interest in the ESPN analyst Stephen A. Smith. Is there room for a wild card? DOVERE: Trump is the first person in history to be president without having served in a military or government role beforehand. So who knows. There are a lot of people who you could see thinking that they would be that person. There was some reporting four years ago that Bob Iger, the Disney CEO, talked about maybe he should run. Whether it would be businesspeople or celebrities, Trump has made it clear that you could come from outside the political scene and do it. Other people who have thought about it have turned away because they have not wanted to have their lives picked over the way that we do to political candidates. There’s even a new movie in which John Cena plays the president of the United States, and the gimmick is that he is an action hero who then just gets elected because of that. WOLF: Arnold Schwarzenegger, if he’d been born in the US. Or the Rock. DOVERE: Who was born in the US. WOLF: What sets off your spidey sense that somebody is getting serious about a run? DOVERE: The early state visits. If they start talking about national politics a lot more. Shapiro is a good example of somebody who gets talked about a lot but doesn’t actually discuss national politics that much. If, all of a sudden, he’s talking about Donald Trump a lot more, or what Democrats should stand for, that would be a reason to start thinking about him or whoever else is starting to do it. Then there are the things that happen behind the scenes — starting to reach out to interested donors or the sort of Democratic elders, brain trust, whatever you want to call it. As we get closer to 2027, when people will start launching their campaigns, there’ll be outreach to staff and things and quiet invitations to reporters to come and meet the candidate. WOLF: So when you have an interview with one of these guys, we know that they’re running. DOVERE: When I was sitting with Pritzker in New Hampshire, we were talking and at the end of the interview I said so can we just fast-forward through this and to say like you’re running for president? He said, no, not yet. Town Halls Find an upcoming town hall near you. Leadership Learn more about current party leadership. The Issues Read more about the critical issues at stake this election year. Contact Share your questions and comments about the Democratic Party. Democrats’ political jockeying for the 2028 presidential contest appears to be playing out earlier, with more frequency and with less pretense than ever before. It’s only 2025, but several potential candidates are already taking steps to get to know voters in the states that will matter most in the nomination process. And with no clear Democratic front-runner, upwards of 30 high-profile Democrats could ultimately enter the 2028 primary.Here are highlights from The Associated Press’ reporting on possible hopefuls’ moves in traditional early voting states: South Carolina hot in JulyOver the span of 10 days this month, three Democratic presidential prospects are scheduled to campaign in South Carolina. The state is expected to host the Democratic Party’s opening presidential primary contest in early 2028, although the calendar hasn’t been finalized.California Gov. Gavin Newsom was referred to as a presidential candidate at one stop last week, although he insisted he was there simply to strengthen the party for the midterms.Term-limited Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, who acknowledges he’s considering a 2028 bid, will spend two days touring South Carolina later this week. He’ll focus on the state’s Black community, while drawing an implicit contrast with Newsom on cultural issues. California Rep. Ro Khanna, a progressive aligned with the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party, will target union members and Black voters when he’s in the state a few days later. And former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel is having private conversations about a potential run with key South Carolina Democrats, including Rep. Jim Clyburn. A Kentucky Democrat up nextBeshear, Kentucky’s 47-year-old two-term governor, is scheduled to make multiple appearances in South Carolina on Wednesday and Thursday in what will be his first visit to the state on political grounds. He’ll highlight his appeal among red-state moderates and Black voters in a Thursday speech hosted by the Georgetown County Democrats in a region that voted three times for Trump and has a large African American population.“Democrats have a huge opportunity to seize the middle and win back the voters who have been increasingly skeptical of the Democratic brand. But it’s going to take focus and discipline,” he will say, according to speech excerpts obtained by the AP. Already a sense of urgency Texas Rep. Jasmine Crockett, a rising star in the Democratic party, told the AP that presidential prospects “need to be more visible earlier” as Democrats work to recover from their disastrous performance in the 2024 election. “What freaks most Democrats out is not really understanding who’s up next. Like, who’s got next?” she said. “And I think that that is really what people want most; they want their presidential nominee now.”Voters and local officials in key states tend to agree.Jody Gaulin, the Democratic chair in South Carolina’s deep-red Oconee County, hopes the energy that comes along with potential presidential hopefuls could boost her party’s ranks.“This is exactly what we’ve been waiting for,” Gaulin said. In New Hampshire, 46-year-old Democrat Jane Lescynski was eager to answer when asked to what extent she’s thinking about the 2028 presidential election.“I can’t wait,” she said.Clyburn the kingmaker?Clyburn, South Carolina’s only Democratic congressman, told the AP he’s had direct contact with Emanuel, Beshear and Khanna. He also appeared with Newsom last week and Maryland Gov. Wes Moore in May.Clyburn said he doesn’t have an early favorite in the 2028 Democratic nomination contest and may not endorse at all in what he expects to be a very large field.“It can be Gavin Newsom, it can be Wes Moore, Andy Beshear, Ro Khanna, whoever it is, I think they’re going to have a very good reception amongst the voters,” Clyburn told the AP. “I feel good about Democrats in general.” Don’t sleep on New Hampshire and IowaNew Hampshire Democratic leaders are privately encouraging 2028 prospects to visit the state. Unlike South Carolina, New Hampshire features two competitive House races and a top-tier Senate race in next year’s midterms. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, campaigned Friday in the state with Rep. Chris Pappas, who is expected to represent Democrats on the Senate ballot next fall. She insisted her only purpose in visiting was backing Pappas’ campaign.Illinois Gov. Pritzker headlined a key state fundraiser in May. And while Iowa may have lost its top spot on the Democrats’ primary calendar, with at least two competitive House races it will almost certainly be a top draw for ambitious Democrats.Pete Buttigieg, a former Biden Cabinet member and a 2020 presidential candidate, hosted a town hall in Iowa in May.Others are moving more cautiously.Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro has avoided any early state travel this year, focusing instead on his 2026 reelection. Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has also focused largely on her day job. Both would be top-tier presidential candidates should they decide to run.

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