



A RAIA profile on: **US Congresswoman**

## **Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez**

Second part of a five series on climate leaders ahead of the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference

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## Introduction

In the realm of US American politics, few figures have emerged as dynamic and impassioned as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, popularly known as AOC. She has swiftly risen to prominence as a formidable political force, captivating the nation's attention with her advocacy for combating climate change and rectifying social injustice. As the youngest woman to ever hold office in Congress, her policies and ideology have shaped her identity as a climate leader. The progressive and left-leaning positions she has taken on issues like Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, and a higher minimum wage have made Ocasio-Cortez well-recognised. She has been an outspoken opponent of economic inequality and corporate involvement in politics and is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America.

AOC's advocacy for climate change presents itself most evidently in The Green New Deal, a set of proposed laws meant to address both economic injustice and climate change as part of a 10-year plan. Ocasio-Cortez believes addressing the climate issue urgently requires a comprehensive strategy that involves switching to only clean and renewable energy in the US, investing in sustainable infrastructure, generating green jobs, and ensuring a just transition for impacted areas.<sup>1</sup> She contends that combating climate change is an opportunity to solve systemic injustices and create a more just and sustainable future and that it is also a moral obligation to protect the environment. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has been challenging the political status quo in the United States through her progressive ideals, outspoken campaigning, and grassroots approach. Her controversial advocacy constantly mirrors her passion for justice. As she has expressed, "Justice is about making sure that being polite is not the same thing as being quiet. In fact, the most righteous thing you can do is shake the table."<sup>2</sup> Since her victory over Joe Crowley in 2018 for New York's 14th congressional district, AOC has shaken the US political scene and become a voice for the voiceless.

This report is an elucidation of the climate advocate and constraint challenger in the United States' political landscape: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Her enduring scrutiny in advertising key issues, engaging the youth, and protesting against systemic issues—including climate change—makes her a captivating character for RAI's analysis.

First, this report introduces Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's background and upbringing, followed by her ideological beliefs encompassed in the ideological outlook. The second section focuses on why Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez proposed the ultimate solution solving climatic injustice concurrently solving systemic injustice. Her solution is known as the Green New Deal. The third section will highlight the defining moment when AOC became an abbreviation known

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Climate (Alexandria Ocasio Cortez Platform, 2022)

<sup>2</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ (Proquest, 2020)



globally. In the fourth section, the report examines AOC's policy outlook, meaning how she progressively tackles the aforementioned issues. The final section, section five, is a cohesive assessment of AOC's impact through her bill proposals, bill passings, and progressive advocacy.

### **An Unyielding Path to Leadership in the Climate Crisis: A Biographical Exploration**

Born in 1989 in The Bronx, New York, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was raised by a Puerto Rican mother and a US American father. At an early age, Alexandria was exposed to the substantial disparities in educational opportunities offered to her and her cousins in the US educational system. The Bronx had the highest rates of poverty and violence in New York City in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> This made a lasting impression on her and sparked a passion for social equality. AOC then majored in Economics and International Relations at Boston University in 2011. During her studies, she interned in the office of former Senator Ted Kennedy. Through this internship, she was able to give a firsthand account of the hardship families went through after being separated by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

After graduating, Ocasio-Cortez began work at the National Hispanic Institute. In her role as an educational director, she assisted Americans and undocumented youth in developing community leadership skills and college readiness. Her father's passing in 2008 during the financial crisis left her family in a difficult financial position. Alexandria supported her family through a bartender job whilst also deepening her commitment to issues faced by the working class. As a political identity, AOC caught the media and the political scene's attention in 2016 when she volunteered for Bernie Sanders in his presidential election campaign. Not long after, Alexandria found herself inspired by the indigenous community demonstrations at Standing Rock.<sup>4</sup> After joining them, she discovered her calling for public service. In June 2018, AOC launched her first campaign for Congress that, despite all odds, got her a seat in Congress, defeating incumbent Joe Crowley with 57.13 per cent of the vote.<sup>5</sup> Her campaign was driven by donations and a grassroots strategy. On the 3rd of January 2019, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez became the youngest woman and Latina to ever serve in Congress, in which women account for 23.7% of members.<sup>6</sup> Upon entering office, her first and most notable piece of legislation was the Green New Deal resolution, positioning her as an environmental policy-maker.

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<sup>3</sup> Kirsten Anderson and Who Hq, *Who Is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez?* (Penguin, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Jones, Brenda, and Krishan Trotman, *Queens of the Resistance: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: A Biography.* (Penguin, 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Cannon, Jasmine Daria, *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez* (National Women's History Museum, 2022)

<sup>6</sup> Kelly Dittmar, *ADVANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL POWER IN THE NEXT CENTURY* (Boston University, 2020)



## Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Stake

AOC, a democratic socialist, follows an ideology that acknowledges that "in a modern, moral and wealthy society, no person in America should be too poor to live." She supports socialist economic policies and a democratic political system to address problems including climate change, income inequality, access to affordable healthcare, and criminal justice reform. Following her ideology, AOC aims to challenge existing power structures and advocate for a more equitable and inclusive society through her drive to combat climate change. Ocasio-Cortez's commitment to social and economic fairness is the foundation of her political philosophy. She argues that the nation's current economic structure exacerbates income disparity and makes it difficult for many Americans from the working class to make ends meet.<sup>7</sup> AOC has consistently emphasised how marginalised populations are disproportionately affected by climate change, specifically, groups she identifies with e.g.: families with lower incomes or families with an immigration background. Climate change makes already existing inequalities worse and can make these communities more financially vulnerable.<sup>8</sup> Some of the key challenges the US is currently facing due to climate change are magnifying the country's social inequality and have consequently shaped the way Ocasio-Cortez is addressing climate change.

## Main Challenges Faced by AOC

The US faces multiple environmental challenges across various sectors. Air pollution is a significant issue, with high emissions from the energy and transportation industries affecting millions of Americans. Agricultural activities contribute to water pollution in rivers, streams, and lakes, particularly in drought-prone areas like California, where contaminated water poses health risks.<sup>9</sup> Globally, water pollution has negative effects on biodiversity and human health. Droughts have severe economic impacts, with states such as California, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas experiencing significant losses. Crop failures and water scarcity are direct consequences of prolonged drought conditions, highlighting the urgent need to address water scarcity issues. Climate change has extended fire seasons in the US, leading to more frequent and intense wildfires. Despite efforts to mitigate wildfire risks, climate change remains a pressing concern. Food waste is a growing problem, with the US wasting a significant portion of its food supply. This contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and water waste, while millions of Americans continue to face food insecurity. Plastic pollution is another critical environmental issue in the US, the country generates the highest amount of plastic waste globally. Inadequate

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<sup>7</sup> AOC: Key Issues (Publication: AOC's Platform)

<sup>8</sup> John Winkel, Nazrul Islam, Climate Change and Social Inequality (Publication: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017)

<sup>9</sup> Niall McCarthy, Americans' Biggest Environmental Concerns (Publication: Statista, 2021)



recycling infrastructure leads to environmental leakage; plastic bans and extended producer responsibility laws are being implemented to address this problem.<sup>10</sup> In order to maintain the environment, ensure public health, and lessen the effects of climate change, these environmental concerns demand comprehensive solutions and coordinated efforts from several stakeholders.

## **Climate Justice**

AOC hopes to solve these issues of environmental justice and prevent the unfair burden of climate change from falling on already marginalised groups by promoting climate policies. She believes that although climate change has a detrimental effect on everyone, less privileged sectors of society are facing stronger consequences. The US Environmental Protection Agency has found that people with low incomes are 25% more likely to reside in regions with significant labour-hour losses as a result of 2°C global warming. Additionally, there is a 15% greater likelihood for socially vulnerable populations to reside in places affected by sea level rise, increased diagnoses of childhood asthma, and climate-driven air pollution. Likewise, the hazards to socially vulnerable populations are typically expected to remain roughly the same or increase as sea levels rise and global warming worsens.<sup>11</sup>

## **Social Justice**

Social Justice has held the spotlight on AOC's political identity. She has consistently advocated for an American society in which no one should be too poor to live. Justice in terms of how resources, opportunities, and advantages are shared among members of a society is very present in AOC's battle against the environmental problems her country faces. The congresswoman believes that in order to address the issue of climate, the most vulnerable communities should be met with the advocacy needed to shield and improve them.

Ocasio-Cortez has been a highly active sponsor of legislation in the 116th Congress. She had already sponsored 11 measures in the House by the year 2020, which amply demonstrates the range of political topics she had become involved with.<sup>12</sup> We may single out the environment as being her top concern, along with housing, a just society, economic injustice, immigration, healthcare, and criminal justice reform. Ocasio-Cortez seeks to address issues like economic inequality and racial injustice by giving priority to historically marginalised communities, such as minority groups in terms of race, ability differences, or class.

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<sup>10</sup> Igini, Martina, Top 6 Environmental Issues the US Is Facing in 2023. (Earth.Org, 2023)

<sup>11</sup> EPA, Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impacts. (Publication: U.S Environmental Protection Agency, 2021)

<sup>12</sup> Rubio, Antonio, and Isabel Martinez Conesa, CONGRESSWOMAN ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ: A GREEN NEW DEAL OUTRIDER (Raudem, December 20, 2022)



## Grassroots Movements

The importance AOC places on community organisation and grassroots engagement is one significant component of her political philosophy. Grassroots campaigns are a fundamental strategy that adheres to the fundamentals, raising awareness of the issues that your organisation champions and clearly articulating your primary objective. Grassroots support can be obtained in many different ways, including petitions, calls to action, volunteer opportunities, events, and donation options.<sup>13</sup> Ocasio-Cortez held more than 280 campaign events in the year prior to her primary victory, in addition to debates and town hall meetings. The eastern Bronx and a portion of north-central Queens are included in the 14th Congressional District of New York, in which events were organised by over 1,000 volunteers.<sup>14</sup> AOC has engaged her supporters and included them in the political process by using her activism platform. Ocasio-Cortez has called for a more participatory democracy that incorporates a variety of views and viewpoints because she believes that collective action has the capacity to bring about genuine change.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has been a keen advocate for climate change policy since the beginning of her political career. As a democratic socialist representing New York's 14th District, the communities AOC caters to as a policy-maker make it essential for her to address climate justice and do so in a progressive and left-leaning manner.

## AOC's Defining Moment: From Bartender to Congresswoman

In a blaze of political fervour, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez propelled herself into the national spotlight, igniting waves of intrigue before, during, and after her historic election. This section recounts how a young woman, with an immigration background from Puerto Rico,<sup>15</sup> became the loudest political voice for climate action and social justice in the United States. The journey starts with a young woman encumbered with student debt and working as a bartender, who challenged a powerful incumbent Democrat in the race for Congress just eight years after graduation and went on to sit in one of the highest legislative chambers in the country.

AOC's resounding reach started growing during her studies at Boston University. Witnessing the struggles of ordinary people like herself and recognising deep-rooted social stratification fueled AOC with a passion for change. She completed an internship with Senator Ted Kennedy, where she witnessed the separations of families by ICE, inspiring her to organise "Latinx Youth" in the Bronx

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<sup>13</sup> John Cassibry, *Creating a Grassroots Strategy* (Publication: NP Strategy, 2022)

<sup>14</sup> Clarisa Diaz, *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Hopes Her Grassroots Strategy Will Build A Movement Beyond Midterms* (Publication: Gothamist, 2018)

<sup>15</sup> Team AOC, *About* (Publication: Representative Ocasio-Cortez, 2021)



and start a career as an Educational Director at the National Hispanic Institute.<sup>16</sup> Her activism emerged from volunteering campaigns in grassroots activism and campaigns, including the Democrat Senator Bernie Sanders.<sup>17</sup> AOC passionately advocated for Bernie Sanders' perspective on economic justice and grassroots mobilisation. Her connection with diverse communities facilitated Sanders' campaign and expanded the reach of the Democratic Party's progressive wing.

In 2018, AOC announced her candidacy for the Democratic primary in New York's 14th congressional district, representing the Bronx and Queens. The democratic incumbent, Joseph Crowley, had been in office for almost two decades, having established significant support. The progressive energy and grassroots movement AOC experienced during her volunteering for Bernie Sanders demanded change within the Democratic Party. Her conquest is attributed to her social media focus and other non-traditional news outlets. Appealing to underrepresented constituencies, including Latinos and younger voters, gained her widespread support. Her victory was seen as a major upset and a clear sign of a changing political landscape.<sup>18</sup> AOC's charisma, authenticity, and ability to connect with the concerns of everyday Americans propelled her to victory.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's stunning victory in the elections challenged and defied media expectations. Her campaign not only inspired hope and optimism among the youth and diverse populations in Queens and the Bronx but also saw strong support from gentrifying neighbourhoods, drawing parallels to the fervent backing seen for Bernie Sanders during the 2016 presidential campaign. A key factor behind Ocasio-Cortez's triumph was her campaign's astute recognition of the untapped potential of drop-off voters in the district. Armed with this insight, her team executed a targeted strategy to mobilise and engage these potential supporters, a move that ultimately played a decisive role in securing her electoral success.<sup>19</sup>

Crucial to her victory were the bold policy proposals she championed, including a single-payer health care system and tuition-free college. Additionally, Ocasio-Cortez's collaboration with Saikat Chakrabarti's Justice Democrats proved instrumental. By tapping into Chakrabarti's organisation, which predominantly comprised individuals who had previously organised for Bernie Sanders, her campaign gained a powerful grassroots force that worked tirelessly to rally support for her candidacy. Complementing these efforts was a sophisticated data operation that targeted potential voters through digital ads and door-knocking. This meticulous approach established direct and personalised connections with

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<sup>16</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, About (Publication: Representative Ocasio-Cortez, 2021)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> Charlotte Alter, Change Is Closer Than We Think. Inside Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Unlikely Rise (Publication: New York Times, 2019)

<sup>19</sup> Cat Haseman, @AOC is Live Now: How Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez can steer local political engagement (Publication: The Georgetown Voice, 2021)





voters, building trust and further solidifying her appeal. AOC's remarkable triumph was an amalgamation of factors, including inspiring ideas, strategic collaboration, and data-driven campaigning. Her victory stands as a testament to the changing dynamics of political campaigns, emphasising the importance of connecting with diverse constituencies and mobilising grassroots efforts to achieve electoral success.<sup>20</sup>

A young migrant woman winning over the long-time incumbent male representative brought AOC into the national spotlight. She became an influential voice within the Democratic Party, advocating for progressive policies such as the Green New Deal and Medicare for All. AOC's ability to articulate complex policy issues comprehensively and her commitment to systemic inequalities garnered her a colossal social media following and made her a leading youth voice nationally. AOC continued to champion her progressive agenda as a congresswoman, challenging the status quo and pushing for transformative change.

AOC's defining moment as the underdog who triumphed against the odds launched her political career and inspired a new generation of progressive leaders. In a country, where global warming is a debatable occurrence, AOC has consistently confronted the US American society, becoming a prominent Congresswoman and climate change advocate. Her story is a testament to the power of grassroots organising, authentic representation, and the potential for change when people challenge the establishment.

## **Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Solutions**

The political outlook gives a spectrum of AOC's political engagement on how to combat Global Warming and how to do so with the Green New Deal. This section will assess the motivation and the thought of implementation behind H.Res.332 — 117th Congress (2021-2022).

### **Combining the combat of climate change and social justice into one ACT**

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a champion of progressive values, presents a platform rooted in empathy and equality, where she addresses a wide range of pressing issues that affect everyday Americans. Her vision encompasses a comprehensive set of policies aimed at cultivating a socially equitable society, wherein everyone is accorded the same rights and opportunities. This platform is firmly grounded in her core ideals and morals as a person, which accumulated through her ethnic background, her family upbringing, and her educational pathway. Central to AOC's campaign are the six pillars that underpin her policy objectives: ensuring universal access to healthcare through Medicare for all, recognising housing as

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<sup>20</sup> Zaid Jilani and Ryan Grim, Data suggest that gentrifying neighbourhoods powered Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's victory. (Publication: The Intercept, 2018)



an essential human right, reimagining public safety, advocating for dignified immigration policies, fostering Puerto Rico's recovery from natural disasters, and elevating the standard of public education.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, her goal of igniting the Green New Deal, which originates from the Environmentalist Conference back in 2003, is a 10-year national mobilisation plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid the worst consequences of climate change while also trying to fix societal problems like economic inequality and racial injustice.<sup>22</sup>

### **AOC's intrinsic motivation**

As a young woman with a cultural heritage in Puerto Rico and growing up in the Bronx, AOC identifies with systemic inequality and the consequences of experiencing the perceived threat of climate change. Addressing the climate crisis in the United States, AOC aims to mitigate the catastrophic impacts of climate change both for the environment and human communities - especially those who can protect themselves the least. Embracing a progressive approach, AOC espouses the twin pillars of environmental justice and economic equality, endeavouring to forge an equitable society intertwined with a sustainable economy.<sup>23</sup> This is realised through the creation of green economy jobs, investments in sustainable infrastructure, and the pursuit of a just transition toward a future that harmoniously coexists with the natural world while prioritising the needs of marginalised communities.<sup>24</sup> By propelling this long-term solution, AOC aspires to reduce America's dependence on fossil fuels, thereby minimising the nation's exposure to geopolitical risks and advancing its national security.

### **What does H.Res.332 – 117th Congress (2021-2022) really mean?**

Theoretically speaking, AOC envisioned implementing landmark legislation nationwide, where the public sector helped to finance a transition into a green economy, primarily by retooling the economy to renewable energy.<sup>25</sup> The multifaceted transition encompasses the fortification of climate resilience, the revitalization of US infrastructure, and the ambitious objective of meeting 100% of the nation's power demand through the agency of clean, renewable, and zero-emission energy sources.<sup>26</sup> The Green New Deal aims to address climate change through a set of goals and projects. These goals and projects include building energy-efficient power grids, promoting affordable access to electricity,

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<sup>21</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ocasio 2020: Vote June 23rd (Publication: AOC's Platform, 2020)

<sup>22</sup> Lisa Friedman, What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained (Publication: New York Times, 2019)

<sup>23</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, About (Publication: Representative Ocasio-Cortez, 2021)

<sup>24</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ocasio 2020: Vote June 23rd (Publication: AOC's Platform, 2020)

<sup>25</sup> Zoya Teirstein, How Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal Is Being Built (Publication: Grist, 2019)

<sup>26</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal (Publication: House of Representatives, 2019)



upgrading buildings for maximum energy efficiency and sustainability, and promoting clean manufacturing.<sup>27</sup> The bill also promotes sustainable land-use practices and building a sustainable food system, as well as overhauling transportation systems to reduce emissions.<sup>28</sup> Beyond these endeavours, the document further advances the cause of sustainable land-use practices and the creation of a resilient food system, while propelling an extensive overhaul of transportation systems to effectively mitigate emissions.<sup>29</sup>

The progressive proposal places paramount importance on human security, striving to eliminate pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from farming while ensuring access to healthy food and universal healthcare for all Americans. The plan also seeks to safeguard basic human rights, ensuring clean air, clean water, and healthy food while combating all forms of oppression.<sup>30</sup> The outcome of the federal investment is to incentivise domestic production, such as greener steel manufacturing and jumpstarting the decarbonisation of American industry.<sup>31</sup> Via several pieces of legislation, the Green New Deal will likewise include universal health care and a guarantee of federal jobs.<sup>32</sup>

Focusing on energy security, the Green New Deal envisions an extensive transformation, aiming to upgrade all existing buildings for energy efficiency and shift the country's electricity sourcing to 100 per cent renewable and zero-emissions power. The plan includes digitising the power grid and investing in electric vehicles and high-speed rail to revolutionise the transportation system.<sup>33</sup> Promoting economic stability, the Green New Deal proposes overhauling transportation systems to reduce emissions and foster electric car manufacturing and charging station expansion, diminishing the necessity for air travel.

Moreover, the Green New Deal emphasises social cohesion, prioritising vulnerable groups disproportionately impacted by significant transitions. By guaranteeing family-sustaining wages, family and medical leave, paid vacations, and retirement security, the plan aims to provide economic security to all citizens of the United States.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, it seeks to ensure communities of colour are no longer adversely affected by climate change.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal (Publication: House of Representatives, 2019)

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Lisa Friedman, What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained (Publication: New York Times, 2019)

<sup>31</sup> Zoya Teirstein, How Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal Is Being Built (Publication: Grist, 2019)

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Lisa Friedman, What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained (Publication: New York Times, 2019)

<sup>34</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, (House of Representatives, 2019)

<sup>35</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, (AOC's Platform, 2020)



## Continuous Efforts to Combat Global Warming after a failed Green New Deal

However in practice, the Green New Deal is on the one side a non-binding agreement and on the other has not been ratified. Nevertheless, there are other pieces of legislation that have passed in the House of Representatives since AOC's first term. The "Clean Economy Jobs and Innovation Act" of September 2020 aims to promote specifically the aforementioned green jobs and research for sustainable development.<sup>36</sup> "The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act" from November 2021 is another example of legislation that promotes clean transportation, broadband expansion, and resilience to climate change impacts in infrastructure projects.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Ocasio-Cortez's support and advocacy in the most significant climate law in US history signifies how, although the Green New Deal itself failed, the overall idea of enabling climate justice in the US continues. The "Inflation Reduction Act" of 2021 aims to combat climate change, reduce healthcare costs, and make the wealthiest in society contribute more taxes to finance this. The legislation includes the highest funding for climate initiatives in US history (US \$396 billion), lower healthcare expenses, and measures targeting wealthier individuals and corporations.<sup>38</sup> The legislation allows funding over US \$55 billion including investments in rural and Tribal communities.<sup>39</sup> More importantly, the IRA amended the Clean Air Act, essentially giving the EPA—a federal agency—stronger power to regulate corporate carbon emissions in the United States.<sup>40,41</sup>

Though the Green New Deal faces criticism for its loose framework and perceived high costs, seen as too radical and infeasible in the proposed timeline, its impact remains subject to regulatory challenges and conservative opposition.<sup>42</sup>

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's policy outlook and the Green New Deal represent a bold and transformative vision for addressing the pressing challenges of our time. By promoting renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, and job creation, AOC's platform seeks to build a greener, more resilient future while ensuring that all Americans have access to clean air, clean water, and quality healthcare.

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<sup>36</sup> 116th Congress (2019-2020), H.R.4447 - Clean Economy Jobs and Innovation Act (Publication: Congress, 2020)

<sup>37</sup> White House, Fact Sheet: The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal (Publication: White House, 2021)

<sup>38</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Explained: The Inflation Reduction Act (Publication: AOC's Platform, 2023)

<sup>39</sup> CleanEnergy.gov, Building a clean Energy Economy: A Guidebook to the inflation reduction act's investments in clean energy and climate action (Publication: CleanEnergy.gov, 2022)

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan D. Brightbill and Madalyn Brown Feiger, "Winston's Environmental Law Update," (Winston & Strawn)

<sup>41</sup> "The Inflation Reduction Act Strengthens EPA's Future Abilities," (Giving Compass)

<sup>42</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, (House of Representatives, 2019)



## Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Impact

The Green New Deal, AOC's leading policy addressing climate change, will be carefully analysed in order to determine its impact. The extent to which it was implemented, its effects, and the degree to which AOC's involvement is productive in the environmental fight for action will be evaluated.

### National Impact

The Green New Deal was Ocasio-Cortez's debut piece of legislation in 2019, and she reintroduced it every Congress after. It lays out a plan for ensuring that new initiatives support its broad objectives of generating well-paying employment, advancing social justice, and addressing climate change with the urgency and scope required by scientific evidence. Despite her multiple attempts, The Green New Deal has yet to pass through legislation at the federal level. Faced with strong opposition from the Republican side of Congress, it has been widely criticised for being an expensive and overly ambitious plan that offers rugged solutions to the problem of global warming. The lack of bipartisan support and cost concerns regarding implementing new infrastructure, renewable energy, and social programs have stalled the Green New Deal from becoming law, thus, reaching its full potential. Reaching a conclusive policy that can tackle the growing environmental problem has become a battle between political parties in which the focus has turned to the opposition rather than the rapidly growing issue of global warming.<sup>43</sup> Although the Green New Deal has been legislated, it is essential to mention its effect on the conversation and policy-making regarding climate change. Although the comprehensive plan to reform the energy, transportation, and other sectors was recently rejected by the Senate, it continues to be a political flashpoint. AOC has been successful in bringing up significant issues and promoting progressive change. Her promotion of the Green New Deal has created a national conversation on the pressing need to combat climate change and transition to a clean energy economy.

AOC's contentious advocacy and consistent constraint challenges have made her a target for the media and opposition. Despite attaining widespread attention across the political spectrum, AOC's policy agenda has come under fire for being overly ambitious and needing more workable implementation strategies. Opponents claim that ideas like Medicare for All and a federal employment guarantee would need significant tax increases, present difficulties in funding, and be impractical on a large scale. These worries have increased scepticism and opposition from individuals who think her proposals are idealistic or impractical from an economic standpoint. Public opinion has periodically become divided due to AOC's assertive and aggressive style. As of April 2021, 45% of Democrats

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<sup>43</sup> Rob Jordan, "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Green New Deal." (Publication: Stanford News, 2019)



strongly supported the Green New Deal, while only 10% of Republicans did and 36% strongly opposed it.<sup>44</sup> She has drawn criticism from conservatives for being loud and active on social media, which has increased scrutiny and negative media attention.

The Green New Deal was received with joyful scorn by the GOP, who even mocked it with a right-wing alternative known as the Green Real Deal. According to Republican reasoning, the concept was so absurd that continuing to discuss it would only hurt Democrats. President Trump tweeted in February of last year, "I think it is very important for the Democrats to press forward with their Green New Deal."

Bipartisan cooperation has been hampered by this division, which may have also reduced the likelihood of her initiatives being implemented successfully. However, in a study of respondents conducted in July 2019, the Green New Deal received a better approval rating than a wealth tax, a prohibition on semi-automatic assault weapons, and free college tuition. The proposal's unexpected political reach compelled Republicans to start formulating their own strategy.

"What the Green New Deal did is bring the issue of climate change to greater prominence," said Carlos Curbelo, a Republican who opposed climate change and lost his House seat in South Florida to Democrats in the 2018 midterm elections.<sup>45</sup> Thus, it became more difficult for conservatives to dismiss the problem.

### **State/local impact**

The triple objectives of promoting climate action, improving economic opportunity, and advancing social fairness are shared by Green New Deal policy proposals. This multifaceted strategy acknowledges the need for social, economic, and environmental reform to reduce the harms and costs of climate change and advance toward a more just society. A new generation of frameworks for addressing climate change that goes beyond cost-based, efficiency-focused economic approaches to more holistic frameworks that connect renewable energy development with financial support for frontline communities and social justice has emerged.<sup>46</sup>

Following this approach to climate change, Green New Deal-inspired policies have emerged throughout the country. Despite not becoming federal law, many American cities and states have made substantial efforts to combat climate

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<sup>44</sup> Danielle Deiseroth; Lew Blank, Voters Overwhelmingly Support the Green New Deal (Publication: Data for Progress, 2021)

<sup>45</sup> Zoya Teirstein, How the Green New Deal lit a fire under the GOP (Publication: Grist, 2020)

<sup>46</sup> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for congress: Green New Deal (Publication: AOC's platform, 2020)



change and develop green jobs through a Green New Deal approach.<sup>47</sup> Broad local coalitions of labour, environmental, and racial justice groups are securing state and local level laws that have helped lay the groundwork for a potential federal Green New Deal. Building retrofitting, boosting the use of renewable energy, promoting clean manufacturing, and switching to clean electricity sources are some of the initiatives. These regulations support job growth in the renewable energy and green infrastructure industries while reducing climate pollution, enhancing air quality, and advancing environmental justice.

Some of the states that have implemented Green New Deal-inspired policies include Maine, Los Angeles, Illinois and California.<sup>48</sup> Maine passed a “Green New Deal” law to attain 80% renewable energy by 2040, generate jobs in manufacturing and renewable energy, and offer low-income households access to inexpensive solar electricity. “L.A.’s Green New Deal” to support clean energy jobs, improve the city’s dismal air quality and meet challenging climate targets. The Future Energy Jobs Act in Illinois gives low-income families priority access to solar energy, creates jobs in solar installation, and establishes energy-efficiency standards to cut down on pollution and lower energy prices. And California, where the state pledged to use only clean energy and enacted the Buy Clean programme, promoting clean production and financially supporting products that protect the environment.

As an addition to the local-level impact of the Green New Deal, on April 2023, Senator Markey and Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez reintroduced a Green New Deal resolution.<sup>49</sup> The resolution aims to help municipalities make the most of the grant opportunities in the Inflation Reduction Act, the largest government investment in climate change to date. The lawmakers produced an implementation guide on the fourth anniversary of the Green New Deal.

## **International Impact**

The Green New Deal has already changed how climate policy is implemented at various levels of government in numerous nations worldwide. Growing momentum for policies that simultaneously address climate change’s economic, social, and environmental aspects has been a direct consequence of introducing the Green New Deal. AOC is well known for supporting harsh climate policies that have influenced the US conversation on climate change. Her influence can be seen in the Biden administration’s increased focus on global warming. In order to address both economic injustice and climate change, AOC’s support for aggressive climate goals, such as net-zero emissions by 2030, led the

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<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Grunby, State and local governments offer their own New Deal policy solutions (Publication: USGBC)

<sup>48</sup> A Green New Deal Is Already Underway in States and Cities (Publication: Sierra Club, 2023)

<sup>49</sup> Markey and Ocasio-Cortez Reintroduce Green New Deal Resolution (Publication: AOC’s Platform, 2023)



Democratic Party and Biden to set even more aggressive objectives, as demonstrated in their vows to reduce emissions and observing the Paris Agreement.<sup>50</sup>

The importance of the climate crisis was increased for the Democratic Party and the Biden administration by AOC's persistent climate advocacy. Her capacity to energise the public and enlist young activists propelled climate policy to the fore and influenced policies in other industries.<sup>51</sup> AOC enhanced climate advocacy by working with grassroots movements, and the government recognised this by engaging with and incorporating their demands. AOC's outspoken participation in public forums and in Congress has aided in opening up the conversation about climate change. This has raised public awareness and affected public opinion, which has made the Biden administration more likely to act in a climate-conscious environment.<sup>52</sup>

AOC's climate activism essentially served as a catalyst for increased activism within the Biden administration, guiding policy conversations, goal-setting, urgency, grassroots involvement, and legislative initiatives, all of which increased the importance of climate change on a national scale.

### **Systemic Challenges to the Green New Deal**

The Green New Deal is starting a crucial and essential discussion about the necessity of addressing climate change. It catalyses a strategy to speed up meeting climate justice with social justice, from proposing different strategies, such as a carbon price that encourages businesses to cut emissions and unleash market forces to propel the most effective solutions to scale; to increasing research funding, maintaining policies that promote energy efficiency, and protecting marginalised and indigenous communities from the alarming consequences of climate change.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, the Green New Deal as a policy faces too many barriers to be implemented.

### **Inflation Reduction Act**

Despite the legislative challenges around the implementation of the Green New Deal, AOC has managed to implement various elements of the Green New Deal into other pieces of legislation. Most notably, Ocasio-Cortez's support for the most significant climate law in US history, the Inflation Reduction Act, positioned her as an advocate for climate justice in the US.

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<sup>50</sup> Grace Segers, Green New Deal advocates see imprint on Biden's climate agenda (Publication: CBS News)

<sup>51</sup> Sahil Kapur, AOC joins Biden's climate policy panel (Publication: NBC News)

<sup>52</sup> John Parkinson, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, expanded 'Squad' demand Biden deliver on Green New Deal (Publication: ABC News)

<sup>53</sup> Lisa Friedman, What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained (Publication: New York Times, 2019)





The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which aims to reduce inflation and solve a variety of issues, was signed into law by President Biden, and AOC managed to secure some elements of her Green New Deal in the bill. The IRA, like AOC's proposal, emphasises the need to decarbonise the nation in order to meet the Paris Agreement targets. In order to increase consumer access to renewable energy sources, the measure provides a number of tax credits and other financial incentives, with a concentration on lower- to middle-income consumers. These advantages include supporting and boosting the affordability of heat pumps and other electric-powered residential infrastructure.

The IRA not only shares the Green New Deal's objective of reducing the nation's carbon footprint, but it also shares the objective of doing so while providing for low-income consumers. Some measures taken in the IRA that mirror the Green New Deal include lowering energy costs and reducing carbon emissions by 40% before 2030. The IRA does not only focus on the problem of climate change but on the problem of economic inequality as well. This is demonstrated in measures such as allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices and lowering ACA healthcare premiums. The Green New Deal is also present in the ways in which the IRA aims to take the burden of combating climate change from financially vulnerable communities. Some examples of how they are taking this approach include addressing tax loopholes and upholding the tax code by making the largest corporations and the highest income groups pay their fair share while preventing extra taxes on families earning \$400,000 or less and small businesses.<sup>54</sup>

AOC's success with embedding climate legislation into the Inflation Reduction Act shows her to be a shrewd politician, able to adapt to the constraints of the policy-making environment to fulfil her political agenda through other means than her landmark policy proposal. Indeed, with the Green New Deal unlikely to pass through Congress in the near future due to political dissent, it will be key for AOC to implement her policy proposals through various other legislative means. As such, AOC is not only a prominent voice with ambitious ideas in support of climate justice but is also displaying growth in her ability to transition from activist to politician, capable of passing meaningful pieces of legislation at the federal level.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a climate leader as she has successfully challenged the status quo in the United States by driving environmental awareness through implementing elements of the Green New Deal in local communities with grassroots policy implementation, at the state level through other legislative acts, and at the international level by becoming the leading voice out of America.

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<sup>54</sup> Summary: The inflation Reduction Act 2022 (Publication: U.S Senate)



Although she did not implement the Green New Deal through ratification at the federal level, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has implemented the idea of a green future in the progressive heads of America and likewise initiated primary legislative acts to commence this transformative endeavour. Further, than policy implementation, AOC's impact rests in her success in raising climate and environmental awareness in the United States, which cannot be quantified in a policy sense but rather through the evolution of climate change being discussed in American television, the amount of manifestations across America, and the number of climate battling NGO's rising in her wake.

Initially, the topic of climate change was sporadically discussed, often relegated to specialised scientific or environmental programs. However, with the increasing recognition of the urgency and severity of the climate crisis, climate change has become a more prominent and mainstream subject on television. AOC's influence has played a pivotal role in bolstering the climate activism ecosystem and encouraging the establishment of new NGOs dedicated to combating the climate crisis.

For Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to reach her full potential in climate advocacy, she would have to implement the Green New Deal on a legislative basis. Therefore, she would be required to build up a bipartisan consensus, since passing such transformative legislation would require cooperation and consensus-building across party lines. Furthermore, the loose framework criticised throughout the bill would require a redrafted detailed legislative roadmap and would have to overcome the special interests of certain industry groups. Lastly, gaining support in Congress would require for AOC to be on top of lobbying and persuasive argumentation, and to be ready to compromise on her agenda for its final implementation.



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