

KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE

*REPRESENTATION,
POLITICS AND MONEY:
A SCREENING GUIDE*



“I’m running because of Cori Bush. I’m running because of Paula Jean Swearengin. I’m running because everyday Americans deserve to be represented by everyday Americans.”

- Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez



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ABOUT THE FILM

Knock Down the House is the story of four working-class women who embraced the challenge of running for Congressional office in the 2018 midterm elections. They are four of the record numbers who organized grassroots campaigns, rejected corporate PAC money and challenged the notion that everyday people cannot run successful campaigns against sitting incumbents. Collectively these candidates herald a cultural and political shift to transform the process of running and electing our representatives. Such changes do not occur in a vacuum, nor are they about a singular issue. Rather they are about changing the attitudes, behaviors, terms, and outcomes of existing and entrenched norms and building towards a more inclusive and representative government.



A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY

KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE

MAY 1 | NETFLIX



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR, RACHEL LEARS

I've been making films about politics since the days of Occupy Wall Street. After having a baby in 2016, I thought I might take a break from political filmmaking—but the day after the election, I knew I had no choice. I wanted to tell a big story in this new political reality about people working across cultural and geographical divides to change American politics in big ways. That same day I contacted the progressive organizations Brand New Congress and Justice Democrats to propose a documentary project about their plan to forge a new path to Congress for “extraordinary ordinary” working people. That project has become *Knock Down the House*.

While I did not set out to make a film focusing on women running for Congress, during the casting process it became clear to me that the stories of Alexandria, Paula Jean, Cori, and Amy would resonate not only with the larger zeitgeist of women's empowerment, but also with deeply personal aspects of my own experience. As a woman, I identify strongly with these candidates' struggles to overcome self-doubt and the underestimation of others, and to turn adversity, pain, and loss into a new vision of leadership. As a mother of a young child, I have to believe that a better world is possible—and I'm deeply moved and inspired by the fierce drive of these four women to protect their children and their communities. And as a working mother who, at times in my life, has struggled to make ends meet, the issues our characters address such as access to affordable healthcare, child care, and housing have affected me directly in ways that have shaped my adult life.

For over a decade I've investigated the way power and social change work. Too often, communities operate separately in silos and their struggles end up pitted against one another in media narratives. We won't have systemic change until we overcome this. At this critical and volatile moment, *Knock Down the House* presents a story of people working tirelessly to unite the struggles of all Americans.

USING THE GUIDE



This guide is a tool to support house and community screenings of the acclaimed Netflix documentary *Knock Down the House*. The film, guide, and conversations it aims to foster are an opportunity for communities to have nonpartisan exchanges on what it takes to win an election, what it means to have transparent fundraising and campaigns, and, ultimately, how to elect a Congressional leadership that truly reflects all of America.



TIPS FOR LEADING CONVERSATIONS

Knock Down the House comes at a time when our nation feels deeply divided along party lines, and even within the major parties themselves. The hope is that the film and the conversations it will engender can galvanize people toward engagement in many ways, not for one end or any particular party, but in the interest of promoting democracy. Reviewing these guidelines beforehand will help you prepare for your event and lead a productive conversation.

SPOTLIGHT HOPE AND SOLUTIONS

The candidates in this film run for Congress against great odds. Their energy and motivations are an inspiration. Though not all of the candidates won, focusing on what they did well, what they achieved, and the different avenues to involvement their stories revealed will help your group carry the energy from the film into their own lives.

SHARE YOUR PASSION

As facilitator, your passion and energy will set the tone for the conversation. As you watch the film and read through this guide, consider what you hope your event will achieve and share that with your group.

ALLOW FOR DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

People at your screening event will likely arrive with varying feelings about the issues that are raised in the film. You can keep your conversation moving forward by focusing, as the film does, on the motivations of the individuals in the film and on the themes of representation, money, and political structures in elections. All of these issues are currently being questioned and explored across party lines.

FOCUS ON LISTENING

When different perspectives do come up, invite your group to see the conversation as one that is meant to create understanding, rather than change minds. In order to do that, ask them to focus on listening with the intention of understanding before responding with their own point of view.

INCORPORATE EXPERT AND COMMUNITY VOICES

Inviting a diverse panel of community stakeholders is a proven way to engage your group after a screening. Local activists, prior candidates, elected officials from the school board to the state legislature, community-based organizations, and academics focused on politics and elections are a great place to start when looking for panel participants.

PRE-SCREENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before starting any screening event it can be helpful to engage the group with opening questions to focus attention and seed their thinking with the topics you plan to return to following the film. Here are a few suggestions:

- What are three essential things candidates need to win an election today?
- Alternatively, what are three reasons why candidates do not win their election?
- What role do you think money plays in electing candidates today?
- What are the differences in tactics and strategies between a grassroots movement and the “machine” of a political party?

POST-SCREENING BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT



POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before delving more deeply into the specific topics of representation, money, and politics, consider posing some general questions for your group to share their immediate reflections.

- What did this film make you think about the future of the American Congress?
- Did the film change your ideas about what it takes to win an election today?
- What moments stood out to you in the film as new or surprising?
- What traits did you see in the candidates in this film that you'd like to see in your representative?
- What did you see in the film that made you skeptical or concerned about the current election process?
- What did you see that made you feel hopeful for the future?

Who Knocked in 2018?



The candidates we meet in *Knock Down the House* hope to change the U.S. Congress so that it looks more like the nation it serves. They are all women. They all come from working-class families. Two of them are women of color. In these ways, they are representative of many ways in which the 2018 election broke ground and broke records:¹

529

women ran for Congress. 255 in the general election. The previous record during 1992's "Year of the Woman" was 117.²

Voter turnout was higher than in any midterm (non-presidential) election since

1966

More **women, people of color, and LGBTQ people** were elected to Congress than ever in the history of the nation.

The youngest woman was elected to Congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, at age

29

AND THERE WERE SEVERAL FIRSTS:



The first **NATIVE AMERICAN** women elected to Congress



The first **MUSLIM** women elected to Congress.



The first openly **BISEXUAL** woman elected to Congress.

This interactive graphic shows how the 2018 elections increased the diversity of the House of Representatives in terms of race, age, gender and sexual orientation.

1. Grace Panetta, S. G. (2018, November 07). 12 records the 2018 midterm elections smashed. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/2018-midterm-election-records-early-voting-women-lgbt-candidates-2018-11>
2. Kamarck, E. (2018, November 08). 2018: Another 'Year of the Woman'. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/11/07/2018-another-year-of-the-woman/>

THE CANDIDATES – WHY THEY RAN



CORI BUSH
MISSOURI 1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

“I’m a registered nurse. I’m an ordained pastor, and I’m the mother of two teenagers. I wasn’t trying to become an activist. Didn’t set out to do that. This is the district where Mike Brown was murdered. I only live six minutes from Ferguson. It was like a battle zone at home. I took to the streets to lend a hand as a nurse. What I was wanting to see was justice happen. It didn’t happen so, I just kept going back again and again. This district was able to affect the entire world. Just regular everyday people.”



ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ
NEW YORK 14TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

“My Dad had passed away. Working in a non-profit just wasn’t enough for our family, because we were about to lose our home. You’re trying to make a three hundred dollar student loan bill here, and your foreclosure installment here... You just do your best to survive. That’s been the reality for millions of people in this country. That feel like they’re just hanging by a thread. And they feel like no one’s fighting for them, and everyone’s just in it for themselves.”



PAULA-JEAN SWEARENGIN
U.S. SENATE CANDIDATE FROM WEST VIRGINIA

“This was my house, where I raised my kids. My neighbor’s daughter ended up with a rare form of bone cancer. I know this lady had cancer. There’s a person in that house that has cancer. And our leadership’s not hearing us. They’re in bed with the industries.... If another country come in here, blew up our mountains and poisoned our water, we’d go to war. But industry can. My name is Paula Jean. I am a coal miner’s daughter, running for the U.S. Senate, and I am mad as hell.”

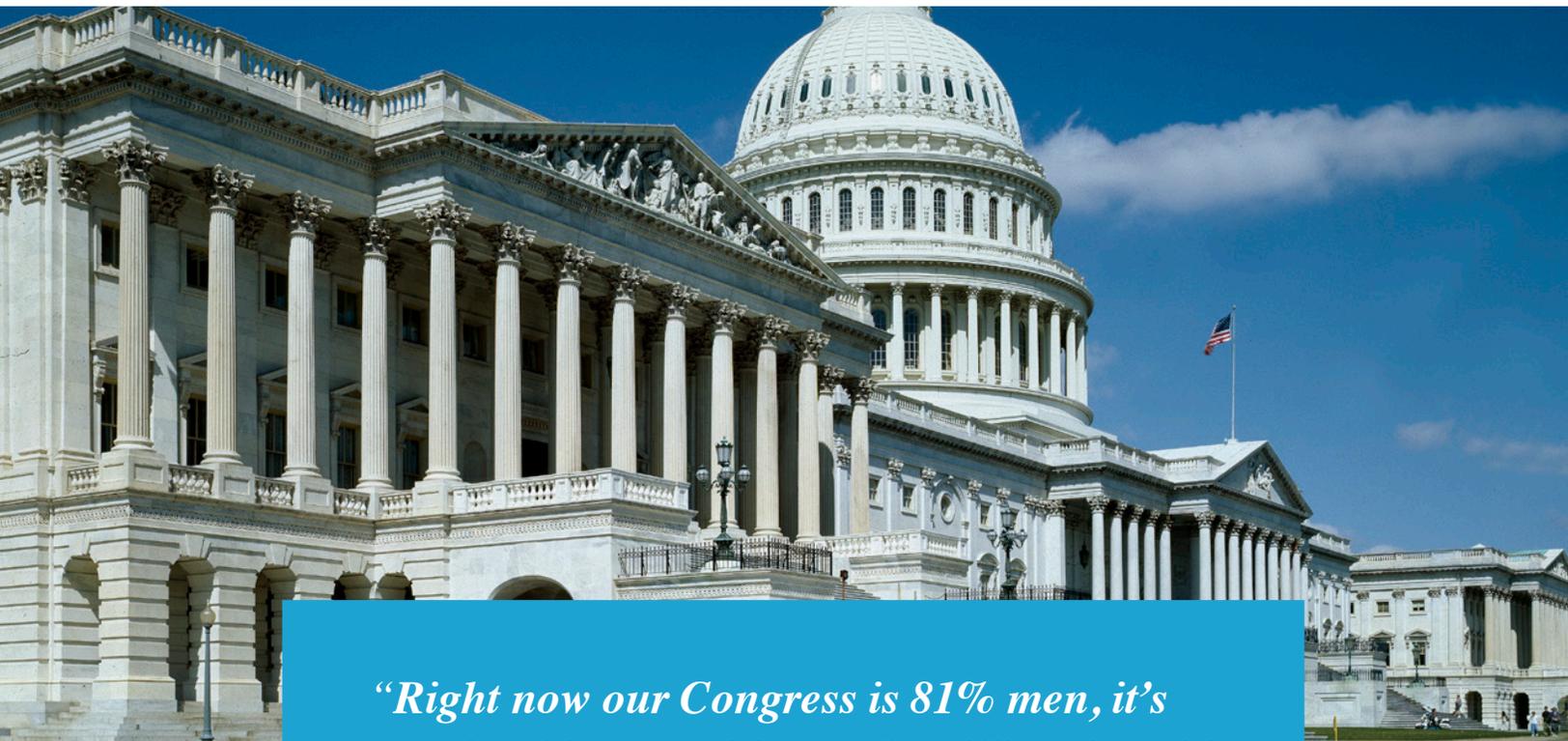


AMY VILELA
NEVADA 4TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

“It’s not just our family. It’s thirty thousand families a year. Thirty thousand of us... a year... that are losing loved ones because they don’t have insurance. No one in this great country should be dying because they don’t understand the intricate system of insurance. And why is it difficult? Because of algorithms, because of risk assessment, because the CFOs that work in that field are sitting there figuring out ways to make optimum profit for their shareholders. This is a commodity. My daughter’s life wasn’t.”

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What aspects of each candidate’s story did you find compelling?
- How would you describe each candidate’s motivations for running?
- Each of these candidates takes strong and specific stances on issues important to them like policing, Medicare-for-all, immigration, and environmental protections. What is the effect of taking these kinds of stances on controversial issues rather than more moderate, general or incremental approaches? What kind of policy proposition appeals most to you?



“Right now our Congress is 81% men, it’s mostly white men, it’s mostly millionaires, it’s mostly lawyers.”

- Corbin Trent, Justice Democrats

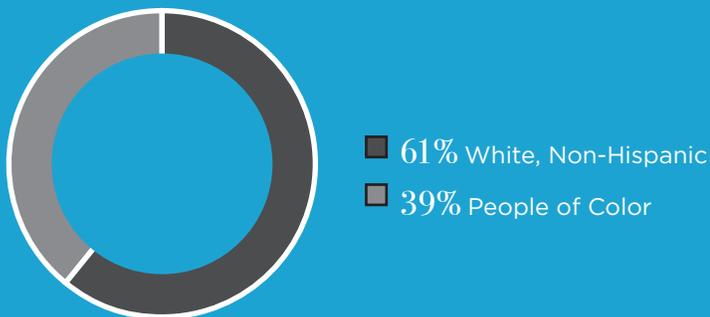
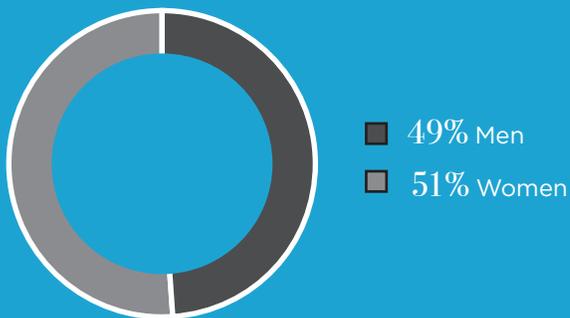
REPRESENTATION: WHO IS IN CONGRESS, AND WHY IT MATTERS

DEMOGRAPHICS

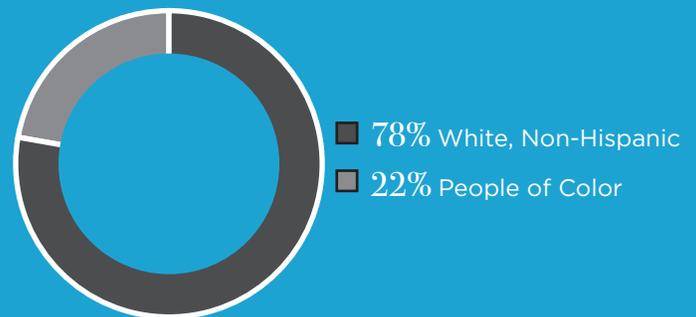
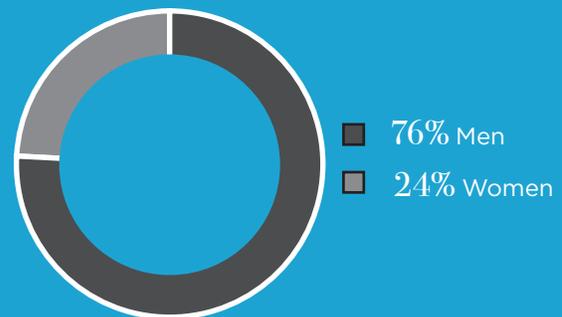
In the United States, candidates are elected by the people in the belief that each will represent the best interests of their constituents. It stands to reason, then, that the makeup of the legislative bodies would reflect the voting population. But that is not the case.



General Population



2019 Congress



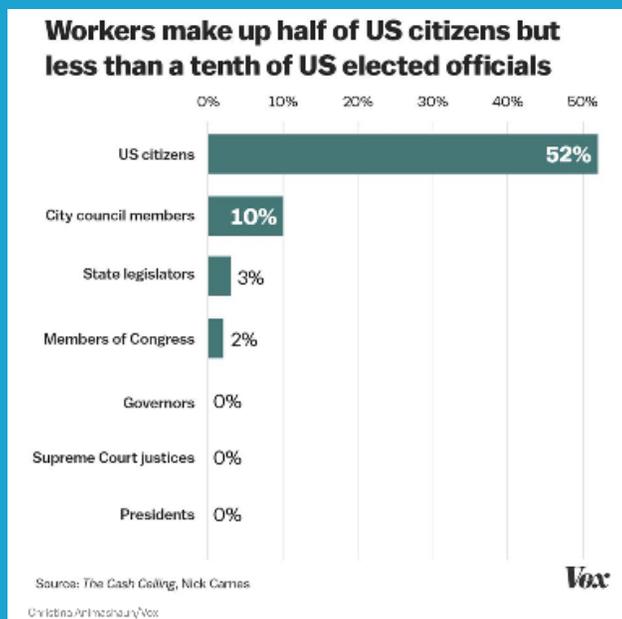
These disparities — though still pronounced — have changed over time. The 116th Congress sworn into office in 2019 includes more diversity in terms of race and class than any Congress in history. It was also more diverse in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, nation of origin, and religion.

3. U.S. and World Population Clock. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>
4. A Rising Tide? (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://wholeads.us/2018-report/>

INCOME

Despite these gains, issues of class and income remain major barriers to running for office and winning elections. More than half of the American economy is made up of working class people, which is defined as those employed in manual labor, the service industry or clerical jobs, and yet members of Congress who were working class prior to holding office only hold two percent of seats in Congress.

Overall in 2017, the median net worth of members in Congress was \$511,000, roughly five times higher than the average American's net worth of \$97,600.⁵



<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/24/18009856/working-class-income-inequality-randy-bryce-alexandria-ocasio-cortez>

Research shows that income is a major influence over how Congress members vote. Wealthier members of Congress tend to vote for policies that protect or promote the interests of wealthy people, so a rich Congress tends to govern in the interest of rich people. Yet, one of the biggest barriers to working class people running for Congress is campaigning itself. Working class people are less likely to be able to give up their jobs in order to run. They are also less likely to have social connections to major donors, party leadership, and other social networks that promote successful campaigns.⁶

“If it takes \$3 million to run a campaign, who’s going to have that \$3 million historically in our country? It’s not something you can easily do if you’re from a working class background or you’re not a self-financed millionaire or you don’t have a Rolodex of people. It’s not something that you can do easily if you’ve been historically disenfranchised. There’s a major wealth gap between communities of color and white Americans. There’s still a huge wealth gap between women and men in this country... And the same old same old is going to continue to win if we continue to function under this set system and regulations.”

— Shannon Thomas, Fundraising Director for Amy Vilela

⁵ Hawkings, D., & Hawkings, D. (2018, March 02). Wealth of Congress: Richer Than Ever, but Mostly at the Very Top. Retrieved from <https://www.rollcall.com/news/hawkings/congress-richer-ever-mostly-top>

⁶ Carnes, N. (2018, October 24). Working-class people are underrepresented in politics. The problem isn't voters. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/24/18009856/working-class-income-inequality-randy-bryce-alexandria-ocasio-cortez>

WHY DOES REPRESENTATION IN CONGRESS MATTER?

“Medicare-for-all is a great example [of why representation matters]. 64% of American voters [from all parties] want Medicare-for-all. And yet somewhere around 19% of Congress approves of Medicare-for-all. We shouldn’t have that disconnect between the will of voters and what Congress is doing.”

— Corbin Trent, Justice Democrats

Representation matters because it’s the heart of a representative democracy — the assurance that elected officials will represent all of their constituents’ interests. Though identities such as race, class, and gender do not have to be shared in order for an elected official to represent them — the total absence of those identities is deeply felt, especially for people whose interests have not traditionally been served by Congress.

“We don’t see people who represent us, whether that means your gender, your sexual orientation, your religion or your values. We don’t see those people running our government and we don’t have trust in the people who are running our government. So, young people like me, women like us, people of color, in many cases we’ve become apathetic. We don’t believe that one person means one vote. We don’t believe that we actually are empowered by our Constitution to take elected office.”

— Shannon Thomas, Fundraising Director for Amy Vilela

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What interests are your priorities?
- Who do you want to represent your interests?
- In what ways do you think Congress’ actions would change if members accurately reflected the percentage of the population in terms of gender, race, age, class, and other identities?
- What characteristics make an elected official an effective advocate for his or her constituents?
- Can you think of an example of a Congressman who is not from a historically marginalized group but effectively advocates for their interests? What successes and challenges have you noticed in their work?
- Do you think it’s more important for your candidate to represent some aspect of your identity, or some aspect of your political beliefs?



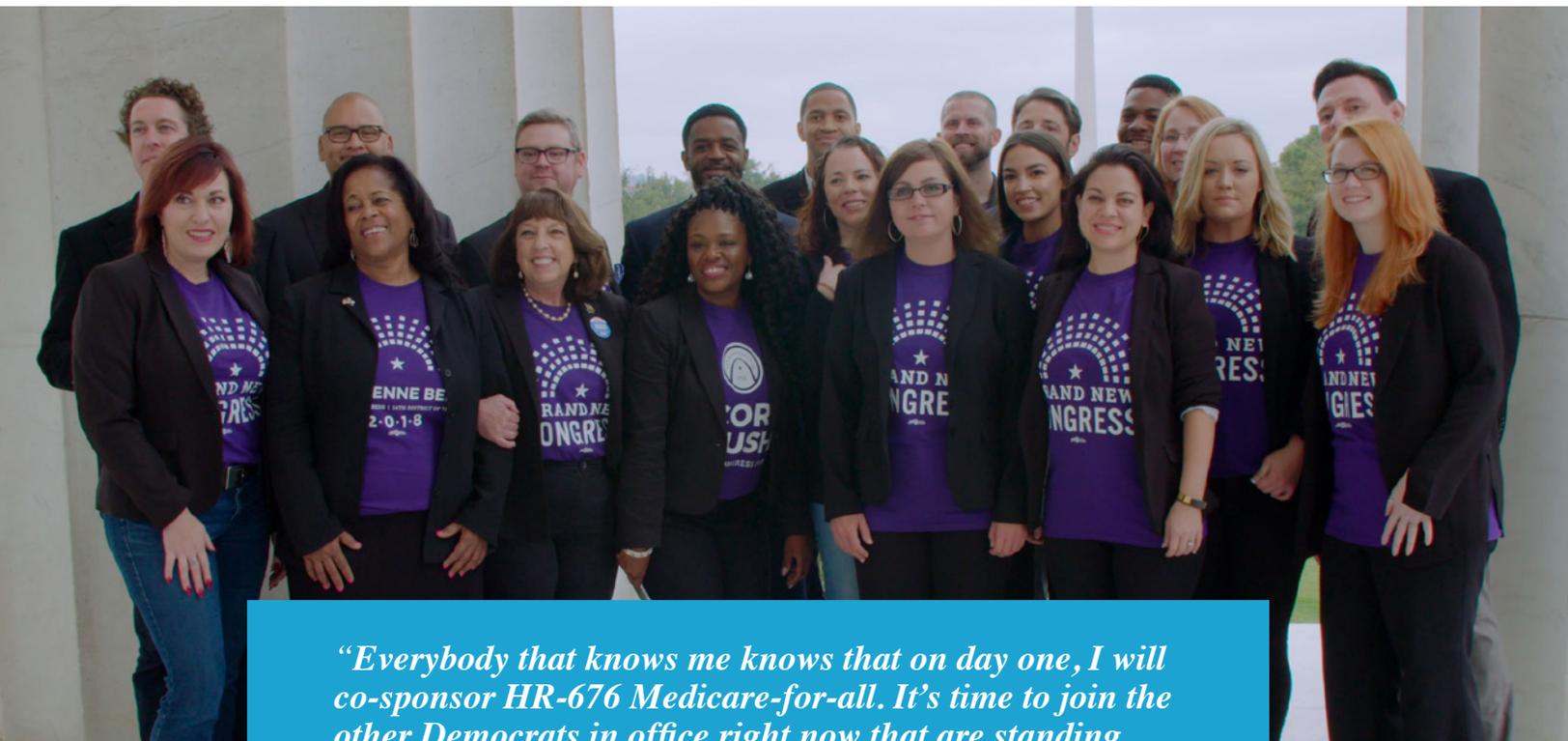
“I think rejecting corporate money is a pretty big signal ... and I think it’s stronger than the word ‘progressive.’”

- Saikat Chakrabarti, Justice Democrats

HOW MONEY WORKS IN ELECTIONS

Campaign finance laws currently allow for unlimited funding for political campaigns through anonymous channels. Known as “dark money,” those donations may come from wealthy individuals, private interest groups or others. Dark money spending increased tenfold from 2012 to 2016, when more than \$300 million was spent in the presidential elections.⁷ There is a strong perception that candidates who are elected with dark money are more likely to represent the interests of their large donors than the everyday people in their constituencies.

As a result, many who ran in 2018 announced they would reject corporate Political Action Committee (PAC) funding. Though corporate PACs are different than dark money, candidates who reject the corporate PACs want to bring attention to the influence of big money in politics and emphasize the importance of bringing in small donations from many individuals. Turning down money from corporate PACs became a shorthand way of saying that a candidate rejects the influence of big money, and is committed to the individuals and communities they represent.⁸



“Everybody that knows me knows that on day one, I will co-sponsor HR-676 Medicare-for-all. It’s time to join the other Democrats in office right now that are standing up and saying, “Enough is enough! We’re not gonna accept any more money from the hospitals, the insurance companies, and pharma, and we can have the people behind the party again.”

- Amy Vilela

7. The Center for Responsive Politics. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.opensecrets.org/darkmoney/dark-money-basics/shadow-infographic.php>

8. Godfrey, Elaine. (2018, August 23.) “Why So Many Democratic Candidates are Ditching Corporate PACs,” <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/08/why-so-many-democratic-candidates-are-ditching-corporate-pacs/568267/>

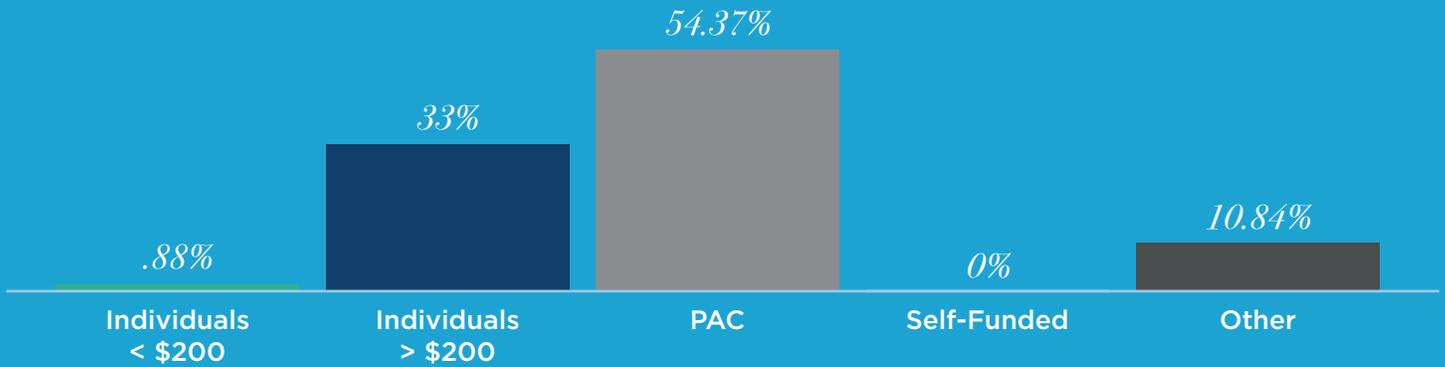
According to [The Center for Responsive Politics](#) the following amounts were raised by Joseph Crowley and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez during the 2018 campaign.

**These totals are not comparable because the funds were raised at different times in the election cycle, but it is interesting to note the candidates' reliance on different funding sources.*



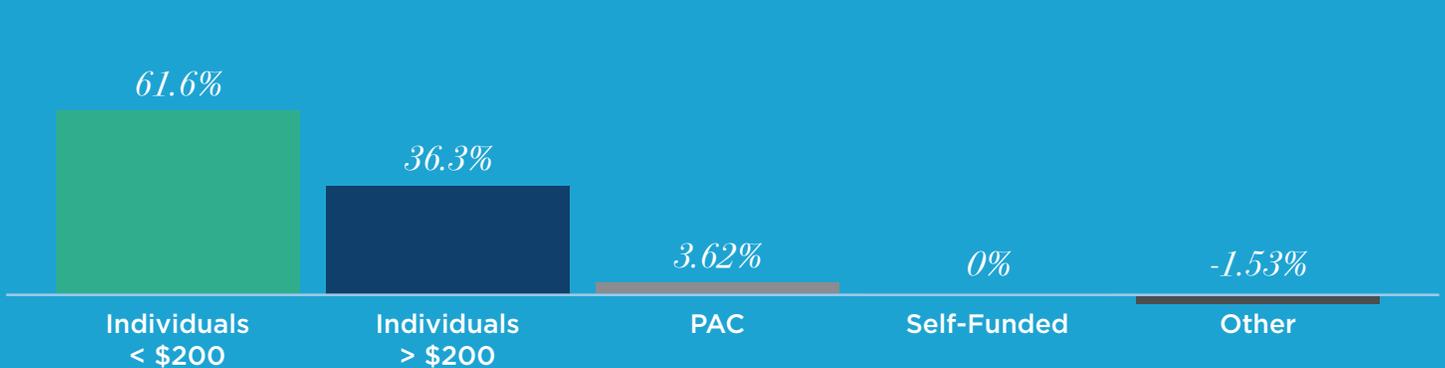
Joseph Crowley

TOTAL RAISED: **\$3,219,073**



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

TOTAL RAISED: **\$2,084,838**



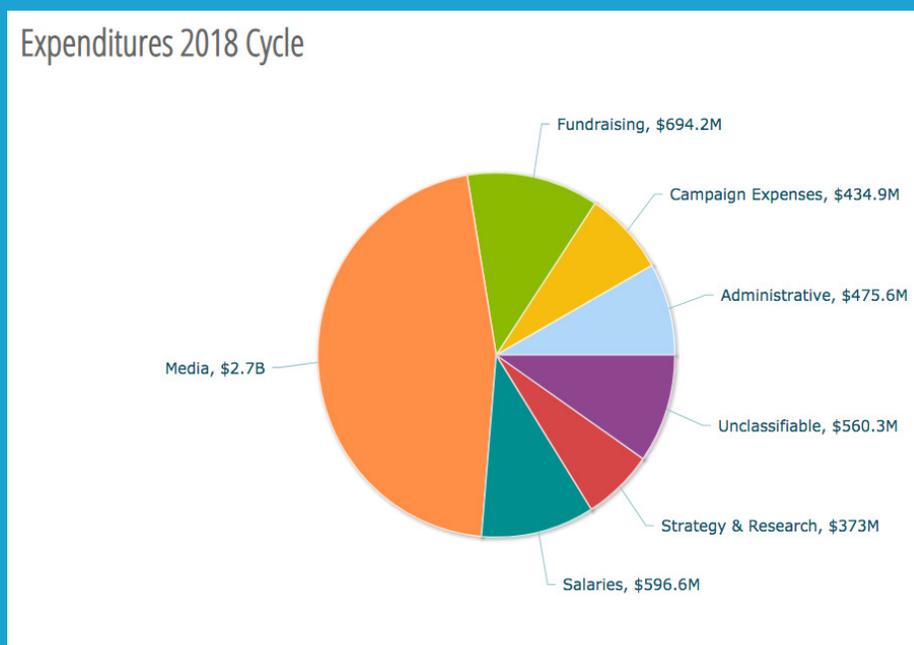
HOW DOES MONEY INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE CAMPAIGNS?

Research is conflicted about whether money invested in elections actually results in wins. There are some clear findings, however, that suggest that money matters a great deal:

1. From 2000-2016, between 85-90% of campaigns that raised the most money won the election. However, that may be not because money leads to votes, but rather a sign that big donors are more likely to invest in candidates they believe will win, an assessment they make based on dollars raised. Candidates are rarely measured by metrics like volunteer base, phone calls made and doors knocked, number of people donating, and other hallmarks of grassroots campaigning.
2. As the average amount of money spent on campaigns increases, the less likely it is that people who are not independently wealthy will run, meaning that lower or middle class people are less likely to be represented in the legislature.⁹

HOW DO CAMPAIGNS USE MONEY?

The Federal Elections Commission (FEC) tracks how campaigns spend the money they raise. In order to increase transparency, the FEC requires that candidates report every expenditure over \$200. OpenSecrets.org, a non-profit organization that tracks campaign fundraising and spending offers this breakdown of how campaigns spent money in 2018. These numbers do not include advertisements or mailers sent by political action committees (PACs), LLCs, or other groups (including dark money) not directly associated with campaigns.



<https://www.opensecrets.org/expends/index.php>

9. Koerth-Baker, Maggie. (2018, September 10). How Money Affects Elections. Retrieved from <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/money-and-elections-a-complicated-love-story/>
10. Borman, David. (Aug. 3, 2016) What can politicians do with unused campaign funds. Retrieved from https://ballotpedia.org/What_can_politicians_do_with_unused_campaign_funds%3F

When campaigns end, either because the candidate lost or the election is over, candidates are legally barred from using funds for personal use. They can return the money to contributors, roll it over for future elections, donate it to a nonprofit organization, contribute a limited amount to another campaign, or contribute an unlimited amount to national committee activities.¹⁰

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What do you think is the ideal way for candidates to raise funds?
- Discuss how the candidates in the film used money during their campaigns.
- What do you notice as you compare the fundraising sources of the incumbent candidate Joseph Crowley and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez?



“We’re running to organize. We’re running to redefine the political landscape in New York City. And here’s the best part about all of this... we’re not running to make a statement. We’re not running to pressure the incumbent to the left. We’re running to win.”

- Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

THE POLITICS OF ELECTIONS

Fair and free elections are an essential part of a representative democracy - where anyone who meets the requirements for office can run, and citizens elect representatives who are responsive to their interests. In the United States all Federal offices, except for the President of the United States, are decided by popular vote.

WHAT IS A PRIMARY?

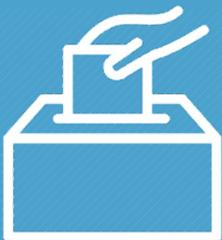
A primary election is the process by which voters select their preferred candidate for the general election. A primary may be closed (partisan), allowing only declared party members to vote, or open (general public), enabling all voters to choose which party's candidate they wish to vote for without having to declare any party affiliation. In *Knock Down the House* all four campaigns are in closed primaries.

COMPETITIVE AND ROBUST PRIMARIES ARE A CRITICAL AND HEALTHY PART OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

HERE'S WHY:

- A new candidate introduces themselves to their constituents;
- A robust exchange of policy and priorities are debated between candidates;
- It strengthens and prepares candidates for the general election;
- It ensures incumbents are responsive and held accountable as the risk of a primary is always present;
- If an incumbent has not been responsive, a primary is the time to endorse a new candidate;
- Ideally after a primary everyone in a party unites behind their nominee to see them through the general election.

The Importance of Midterm Elections



Midterm elections take place at the midpoint of a president's four-year term. The 2018 midterms elected:

435
House of Representative seats

35 out of 100
Senate seats

Midterm elections also include state-level seats including governor's races, seats in state legislature, ballot initiatives, or municipal and local elections.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO NEW CANDIDATES FACE WHEN CHALLENGING AN INCUMBENT?

“We’re a country that’s supposed to be set up where the people have the final say. What happens is those who are already entrenched select people. It’s going up against the establishment in a true sense of the word.”

— Joanne Whitehead, Community Organizer, Queens, NY

A new candidate navigates many dynamics when entering a Congressional race, especially when running against an incumbent. Some of the most common include competing against established funding sources, name recognition, tradition or loyalty to the candidate, history of low voter turnout, or fear for their job if it’s a term-dependent appointment. Despite these challenges, in 2018 a wave of midterm candidates across the political spectrum embraced the opportunity to challenge incumbents, take back their government, and ignite a wave of new energy and ideas into Congress.

2018 Results

87.1% of Congressional seats were up for reelection in 2018.

17% of U.S. Senate incumbents seeking reelection were defeated.

1.1% of U.S. House Democratic and **15.3%** of U.S. House Republican incumbents seeking reelection were defeated.

In total, **38** incumbents—two Democratic House incumbents, four Democratic senators, 31 Republican House incumbents, and one Republican senator—lost their reelection bids. (North Carolina’s 9th district faces a special election.)

“You look at the first Congressional district, where they’re #1 in murder per capita. We’re in the top three in African American poverty. We’re talking about mass incarceration. We’re talking about the African Americans who are almost 50% of the district. To have a black congressman as long as they have had and still have not made any significant gains? This is Cori Bush’s time.”

— Reverend Darryl Gray, Civil Rights Veteran



“Everybody in this room knows five to 10 people. And then those five to 10 people know another five to 10 people. Frankly, big money is very lonely, and we’ve got people on our side.”

- Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

WHAT IS A GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN?

In *Knock Down the House* each candidate relies on grassroots efforts to get elected and challenge the political establishment, or “the machine” of the Democratic Party. Grassroots work is both a philosophy to political organizing work and a strategy to achieve a goal. Regarding elections, grassroots campaigns prioritize and depend upon the local community to work on behalf of the candidate, including fundraising, get-out-the-vote efforts, staffing town hall meetings, and more. While leadership in grassroots campaigns varies, it can often be less hierarchical and more diffuse with decision making based upon a consensus model.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What observations can you make about the reactions of the incumbents to primary challengers from the film?
- What do we learn from the film about political strategies and tactics used in current campaigns?
- What distinctions do you make between a grassroots campaign and more traditional approaches to campaigning?
- In what way do you think the experience and political power of incumbents should be weighed against the fresh ideas of newcomers to politics?
- Where do you stand on the continuum of those who believe in supporting a candidate who seems likely to win over a candidate who truly represents your beliefs?

GET INVOLVED



KNOCK THE HOUSE DOWN

There are countless ways for every American to participate in our representative democracy — from voting in every election, to running for office, to writing letters to the editor, to engaging with a family member or neighbor who sees an issue differently from ourselves. This section of the guide offers a few recommendations for ways to get involved.

SHARE THE FILM

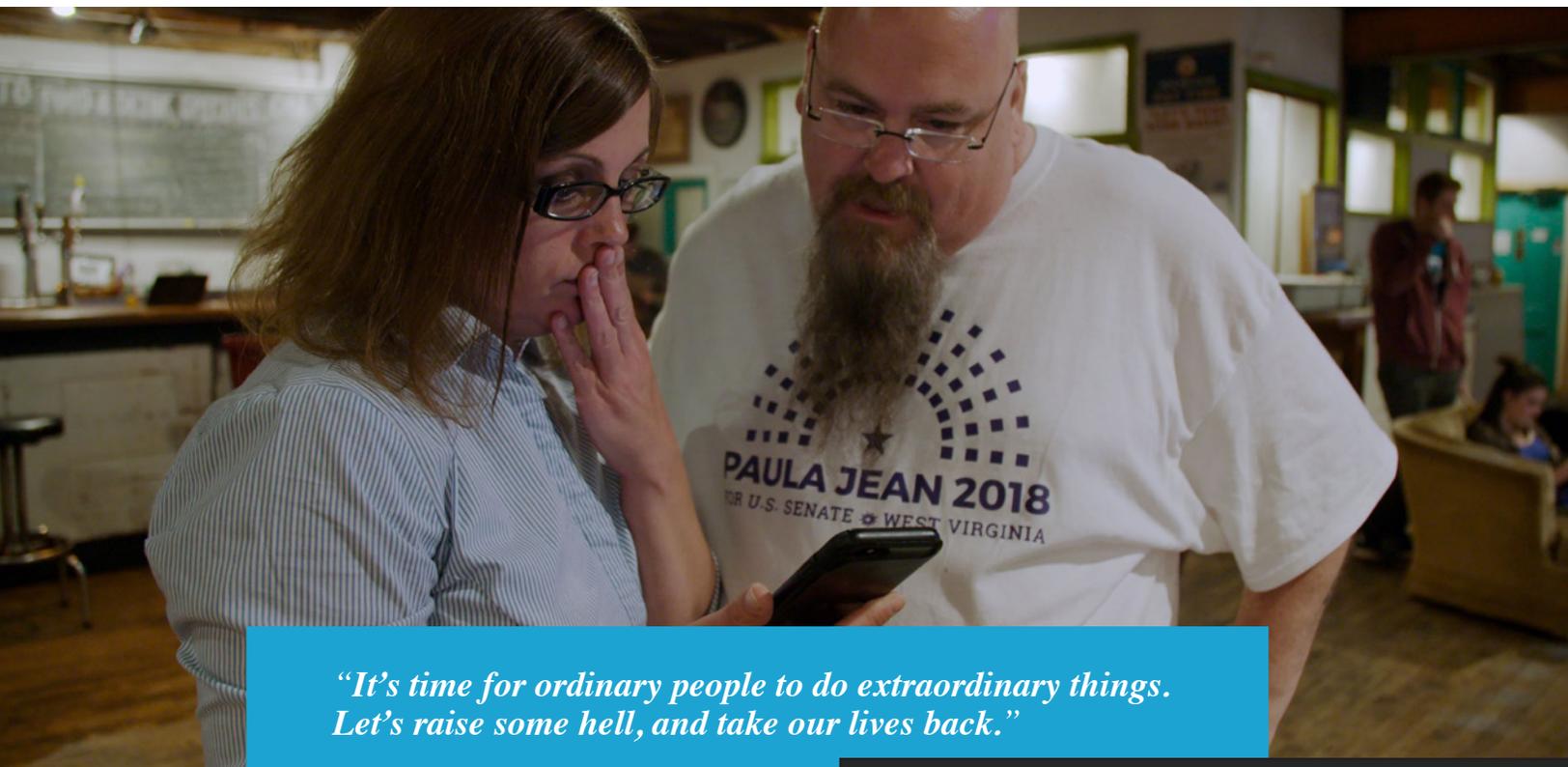
USE THE FILM

to spark conversations
across parties.

VOTE

and get out the vote.

SUPPORT A CANDIDATE



*“It’s time for ordinary people to do extraordinary things.
Let’s raise some hell, and take our lives back.”*

- Paula Jean Swearengin

SHARE THE FILM

Knock Down the House is a great tool to get conversations started about elections and our democracy with friends in your living room or at a community event. Beginning May 1, the film will be available for screenings worldwide via Netflix. Sign up to host a screening at knockdownthehouse.com

In order to screen the film, you must have a Netflix account. If you do not already have an account, you can sign up for a free, 30-day trial at netflix.com.

You have two options to access the film:

STREAM THE FILM ON NETFLIX

- In order to play from the Netflix platform, your home or venue must have an internet connection with at least 5 Mbps download speed. You can test the internet speed by visiting a site like fast.com. Learn more about [Netflix's internet speed recommendations](#).
- Allow the film to load before hitting play to improve playback.
- If you are hosting a community screening, don't forget to do a tech check at your venue, with the equipment and internet connection you plan to use for your screening—ideally a week before your event.
- Problems with streaming? Consult the [Netflix Help Center](#) to troubleshoot network connection issues.

DOWNLOAD THE FILM ON THE NETFLIX APP

- Using the Netflix app, you can download the film to play it offline. This feature is available for mobile phones (iPhones and Androids), tablets, and computers running Windows 10.
- If you are hosting a community screening, run a tech check at your venue after you download the film, using the equipment you will use during your screening—ideally a week before your event.
- Need help with the app? Learn more about the app on the [Netflix Help Center](#).



SPARK CONVERSATIONS ACROSS PARTIES

“It’s not about red state issues, it’s not about blue state issues, it’s about people issues.”

— Paula-Jean Swearengin Campaign Staffer

A screening of *Knock Down the House* is a great opportunity to bring people who hold different points of view together to create a constructive dialogue about how elections are run, the role of money in politics, and the state of our representative democracy across partisan lines.

Precisely because *Knock Down the House* is character-driven and tells the personal stories of the candidates and why they are running for Congress, it’s a useful tool for sparking conversation, notwithstanding personal political views. **Multiple studies show that arguments that rely on data, graphs, facts, and figures do not change minds, and may in fact cause people to dig deeper into their own beliefs.** Rather, what does change minds is personal understanding of a different point of view, deeply understanding not only what another person believes, but why it is important to them.¹¹

If you choose to host an event with people from across the aisle, you can encourage dialogue by inviting people to share not only what they believe, but why they hold the beliefs they do, and why it matters to them.

There are many resources available to help facilitate these discussions:

[In this 2016 article in *The New York Times*](#), the writer details the advice of the Dalai Lama for difficult cross-partisan conversation:

- Solutions begin with the individual, not the institution. We must change our own behavior and be willing to engage despite our differences before we demand the same of our institutions.
- Warmheartedness — being respectful and fair to those with whom we disagree.

[Better Angels](#) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that facilitates gatherings of cross-partisan dialogue across the nation.

The University of California at Berkeley hosts [these research-driven exercises](#) and tools for encouraging people to cross across divides.

11. Kolbert, E., & Kolbert, E. (2017, June 19). Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds>

VOTE AND GET OUT THE VOTE

“Voting is the foundation stone for political action.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Selma, AL, 1965

Voting is the foundation of a representative democracy. Though the turnout for the 2018 midterm elections was the highest since 1966, only 49.3 percent of eligible voters actually voted.

What is clear from the multiple very close races in 2018 is that every vote matters. Yours. Your neighbor's, the people in the park and across town. Every candidate that increases representation in Congress needs votes in order to get them there.

There are many non-partisan organizations actively seeking volunteers to help register voters and help get out the vote on and near election days:

[League of Women Voters](#)

[FairVote.org](#)

[RocktheVote.org](#)



“I’m not sorry. I’m not sorry that I’m here. I’m not sorry that we ran the campaign that we ran. The same reason that all of us are here, that hasn’t gone away. The Primary ended, the injustice has not. We have a lot of work left to do, and I for one am not gonna stop doing it until we fix some things.”

- Shannon Thomas, Amy Vilela’s Fundraising Director

SUPPORT A CANDIDATE

“We don’t care about party. We just want to get stuff done. If we elect working people, working people can have representation in Congress, we can change the way we see government, change the way we see politics in this country.”

— Isra Allison, Brand New Congress

There are a lot of ways to go about choosing a candidate to support, and many ways to support them. In a sea of social media and conflicting print media stories, getting to know candidates can be complicated. Here are some helpful questions to begin the process:

- What sources do you use to find out about candidates in your area? How can you expand your sources of information?
- What would you like to understand and explore about each candidate?
- Where do they stand on your priority issues?
- In this age of social media and conflicting stories in news sources, how will you decide which sources to trust?

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does gaining personal insight into a candidate influence your opinion of that person?
- Would you have voted (or did you vote) for the candidates in the film? Why or why not?
- What did you see in the film that you don’t normally get to understand about a candidate?

GET INVOLVED IN A CAMPAIGN

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any grassroots campaign. If there is a particular candidate you are interested in supporting, they will be happy to hear from you. From donating, to door-knocking, posting a yard sign or putting a sticker on your car, there are many ways to support a candidate you believe in.

Additionally, there are many organizations that train volunteers in grassroots skills like telling your story, public speaking, crowdsource fundraising, organizing and strategy, conflict management, and more. Many of these training organizations are funded through national parties or single-issue funding sources. [TrainingforChange.org](https://www.trainingforchange.org) is an example of a non-partisan training organization.

RUN FOR OFFICE

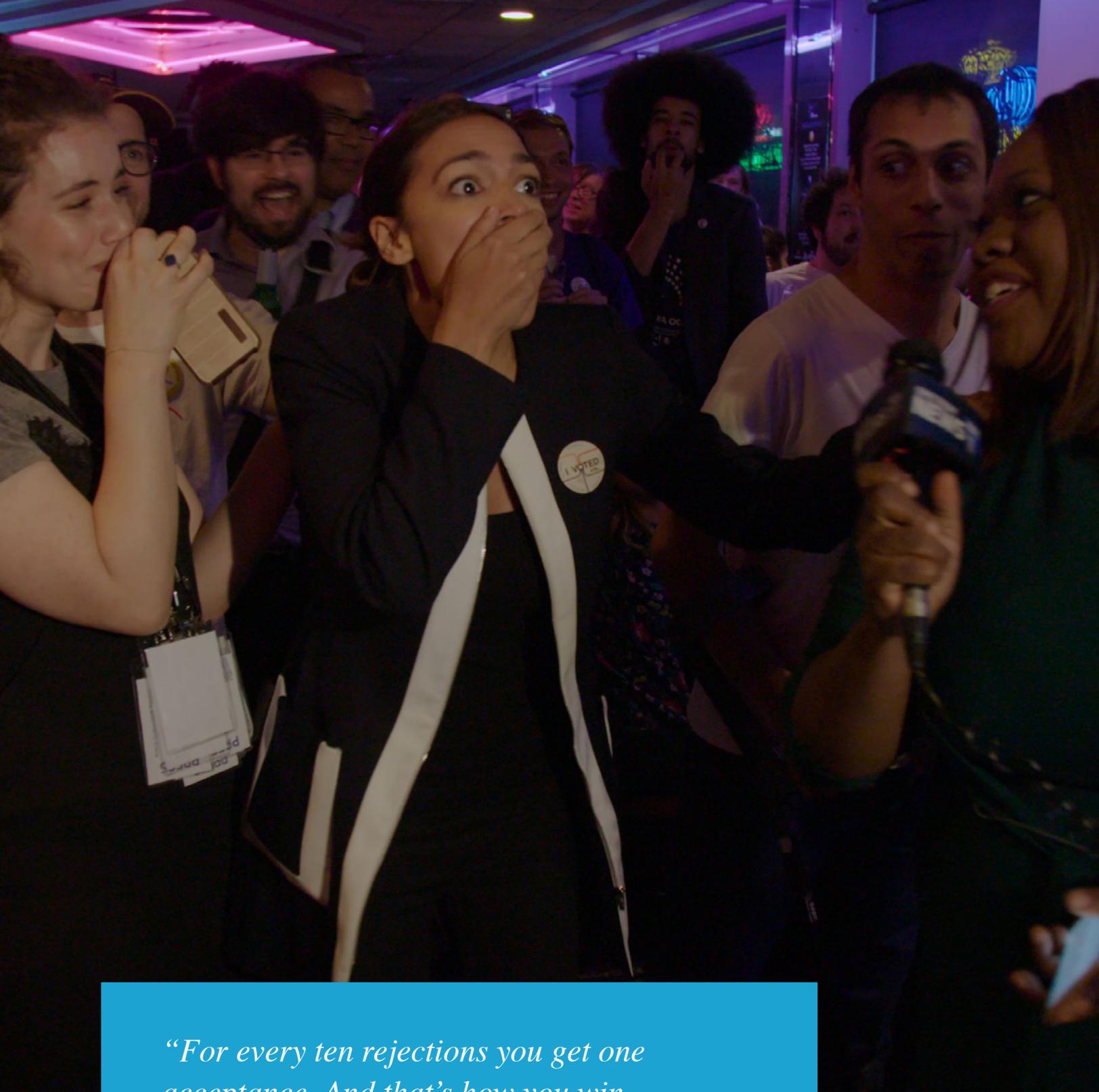
In his farewell speech in January 2017, President Barack Obama famously challenged Americans, “If you’re disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself.” There are thousands of offices to run for on the local, state and national levels.

Many organizations across the country are helping everyday people to run for office for the first time.

[Brand New Congress](https://www.brandnewcongress.org) and [Justice Democrats](https://www.justicedemocrats.org), who supported the candidates in the film, focus on electing working class people to Congress, and supporting candidates to run on a platform of rejecting corporate PAC money.

You can explore many organizations that support candidates in their own parties, or support women, LGBTQ people, immigrants, veterans or other specific groups. The following are general, non-partisan organizations supporting first-time candidates:

- [RunforOffice.org](https://www.runforoffice.org): A non-profit, nonpartisan resource to find offices to run for and the tools to help.
- [CrowdPac.com](https://www.crowdpac.com): A non-partisan crowd funding site with a feature that allows potential candidates to create a campaign website as a risk-free way to test your social network and your financial viability as a candidate.



“For every ten rejections you get one acceptance. And that’s how you win everything.”

- Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

2018 MIDTERM ELECTION ANALYSIS

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/08/the-2018-midterm-vote-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>

https://www.apmresearchlab.org/stories/2018/06/26/representing-us#h2.midterms_2018:_how_close_was_the_u.s._house_race?

REPRESENTATION IN CONGRESS

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/15/the-changing-face-of-congress/>

<https://wholeads.us/>

MONEY IN POLITICS

<https://indivisible.org/resource/how-states-can-fight-money-politics>

CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS

<https://www.opensecrets.org/>

POLITICS OF ELECTIONS

<https://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/votingresources/politicalparties.pdf>

GET INFORMED

<http://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/VotingResources/InformedVoting.pdf>



KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE

WWW.KNOCKDOWNTHEHOUSE.COM



Guide produced by BlueshiftEducation.com

