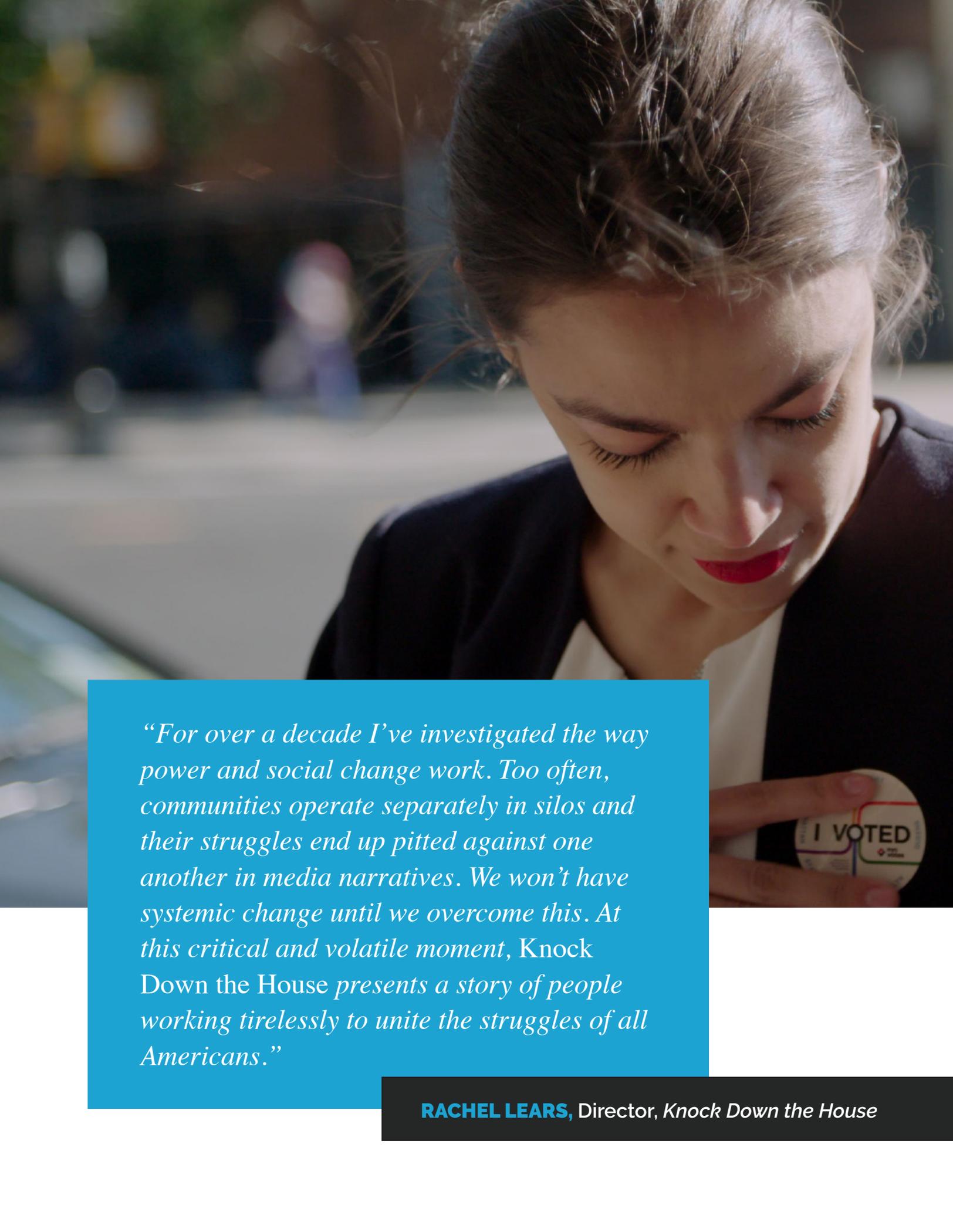


KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE

*TEACHING GUIDE
& CURRICULUM*



“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.”

RACHEL LEARS, Director, *Knock Down the House*

OVERVIEW FOR EDUCATORS

ABOUT THE FILM

Knock Down the House is the story of four working-class women who embraced the challenge to run for Congressional office in the midterm elections of 2018. They are four of the record numbers who organized grassroots campaigns, rejected corporate PAC money and challenged the notion that everyday people can't 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.



ABOUT THE CURRICULUM

The candidates in *Knock Down the House* are inspiring examples of civic engagement, leadership, and public service. Against many odds, each sought to use their voices as citizens, as women, and as everyday working people to represent their communities and make a difference. Bringing their stories into your classroom offers an unvarnished glimpse into the passion, commitment and conviction it takes to run for Congress.

The *Knock Down the House* curriculum can be easily incorporated for middle and high school Social Studies (U.S. History, Civics) and English Language Arts classrooms. Used together, these resources can support active, critical, and nonpartisan conversations in classrooms on issues of equity, representation, political strategy, and the role of money in elections. As a result students will be informed and inspired across the political spectrum to invest, participate, and strengthen our democratic process.

The lessons and the final role play are based on the assumption that students have watched the full 90 minute documentary prior to the lesson. Several lessons do incorporate short film clips from the documentary to frame a particular lesson topic.



LESSON OBJECTIVE

- To inspire young people to understand and get involved in the political process
- To empower all students to be civically engaged by using their voices
- To examine issues of equity and representation in Congress
- To celebrate women in elected office and understand the obstacles that remain for equal representation across the sectors of public service and political engagement



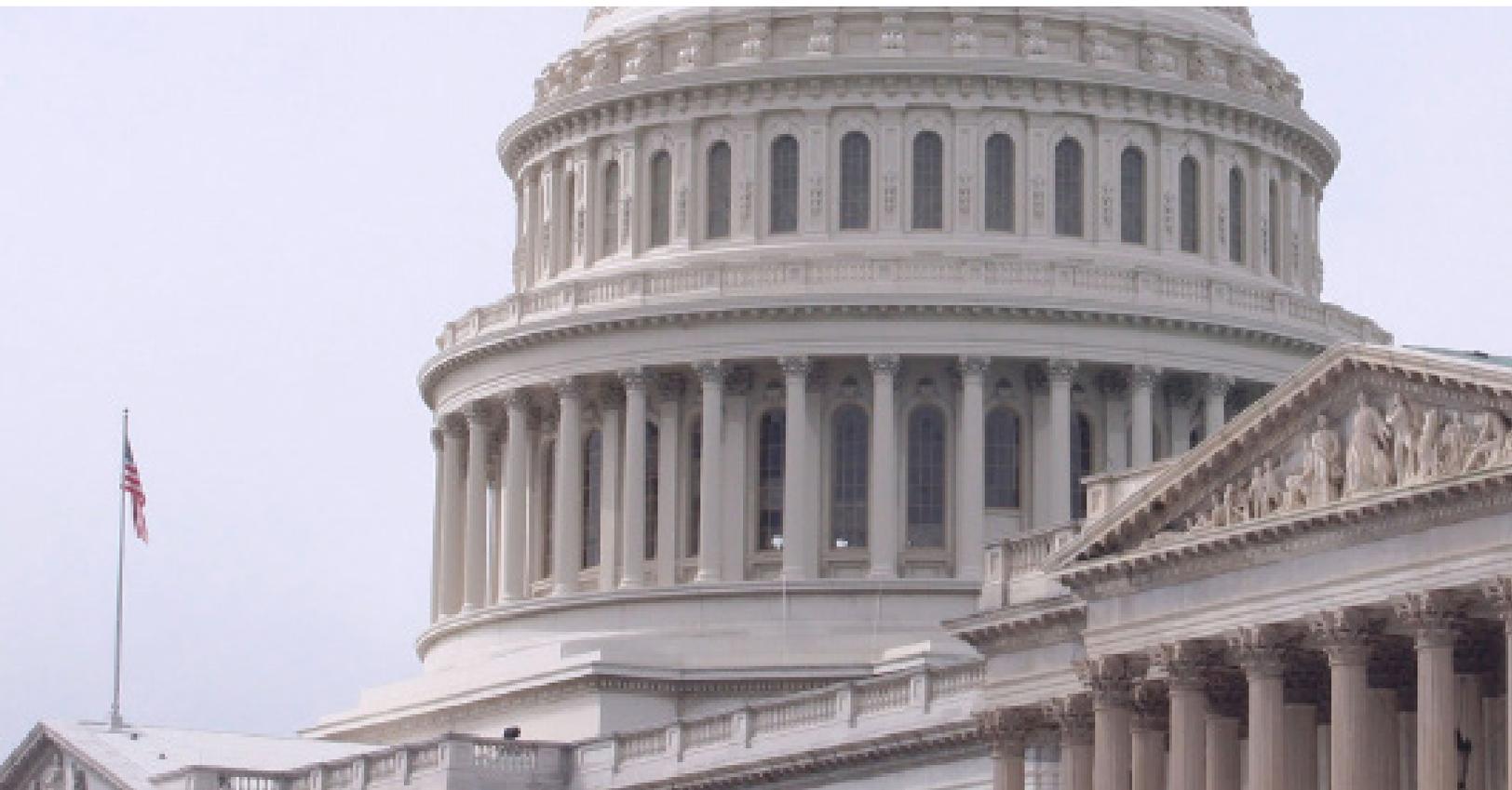
GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What does it take to run for a Congressional seat in the United States today?
- How do we elect a Congress that represents all of America?
- What are the obstacles to equal representation in elected office across identities such as gender, race, and economic status?
- How do you choose a candidate that reflects your values and priorities?
- How are campaigns financed?
- How do young people today influence our political process?



LENGTH

Used together the film and lessons can be two-week unit. Alternatively each lesson can stand alone be used throughout existing units.



LESSON TOPICS

The documentary lays the groundwork for the six unique lessons and for the culminating class role-play activity.

Strategies and Tactics of Political Organizing introduces students to the strategies and tactics used by the candidates during their Congressional campaigns in *Knock Down the House*.

Women Are Political Leaders has students identify leadership qualities and skills of the women candidates in *Knock Down the House* and connect them to their own personal leadership qualities.

Representation and Politics engages students in a critical examination of Congressional demographics and how factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status may influence the way legislators lead.

Getting Money Out of Politics allows students to gain a clear understanding of funding a political campaign, including accepting or rejecting corporate PAC (political action committee) money.

How Do You Choose a Candidate? Students critically reflect their criteria for choosing political candidates and what sources of information they rely on to learn about candidates.

How Do Young People Influence our Political Process? Students will learn about other young people who have played a role in shaping and influencing the political process in the United States.

Assessment: What Does it Take to Run for Office? A Political Campaign Role Play allows students to run a hypothetical political campaign applying their learning in a fun and engaging way.

STANDARDS AND CONTENT CONNECTIONS

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) defines the purpose of Social Studies to enable young people to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. Educating students who are committed to the ideas and values of a democracy is necessary in order to maintain and enable our democratic institutions to flourish.

Alongside developing civic competencies within Social Studies, *Knock Down the House* offers first-person narratives of four women with diverse experiences running for political office within the divisive political climate of the 2018 midterm elections in America. Documentary film is “text” and a powerful form of storytelling resource for critical media literacy and for applying other skills of literary analysis such as point of view and bias. Combined the stories and the skills learned can be held up as models for students to connect and advocate for important issues in their lives, in their own community, and with the world around them.

CONTENT CONNECTIONS

The documentary lays the groundwork for the six unique lessons and for the culminating class role-play activity.

Civics/Strategies of Organizing: Engage in activities that are important for candidates to run a campaign including public speaking, fundraising, and grass-roots organizing

Civics/Political Process: What we learn about the political process through the 2018 midterm election

English/Language Arts: Connecting to personal stories and understanding the techniques of storytelling that and character development

Each lesson lists the alignment with Common Core in English and Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies

RECOMMENDED FILM VIEWING

Depending upon your learning objectives and class time, there are several ways to incorporate the documentary *Knock Down the House*.

Full Film Viewing: Netflix has generously offered any classroom who would like to view the entire film one free week of film viewing. This will enable any classroom to screen *Knock Down the House* in its entirety. To receive your free code, contact KDTHTScreeningRequest@netflix.com. The film is rated PG and is appropriate for student viewing for grades 6 -12.

If helpful, here is a sample script to introduce the film for your class:

“Knock Down the House is an inspiring story chronicling the experiences of four working-class women who ran for Congress in 2018. They are everyday people who didn’t see themselves, or their needs, represented in our government. In 2018, they did something about it. We are going to watch the film as a group, take a break and then reconvene for our lesson.”

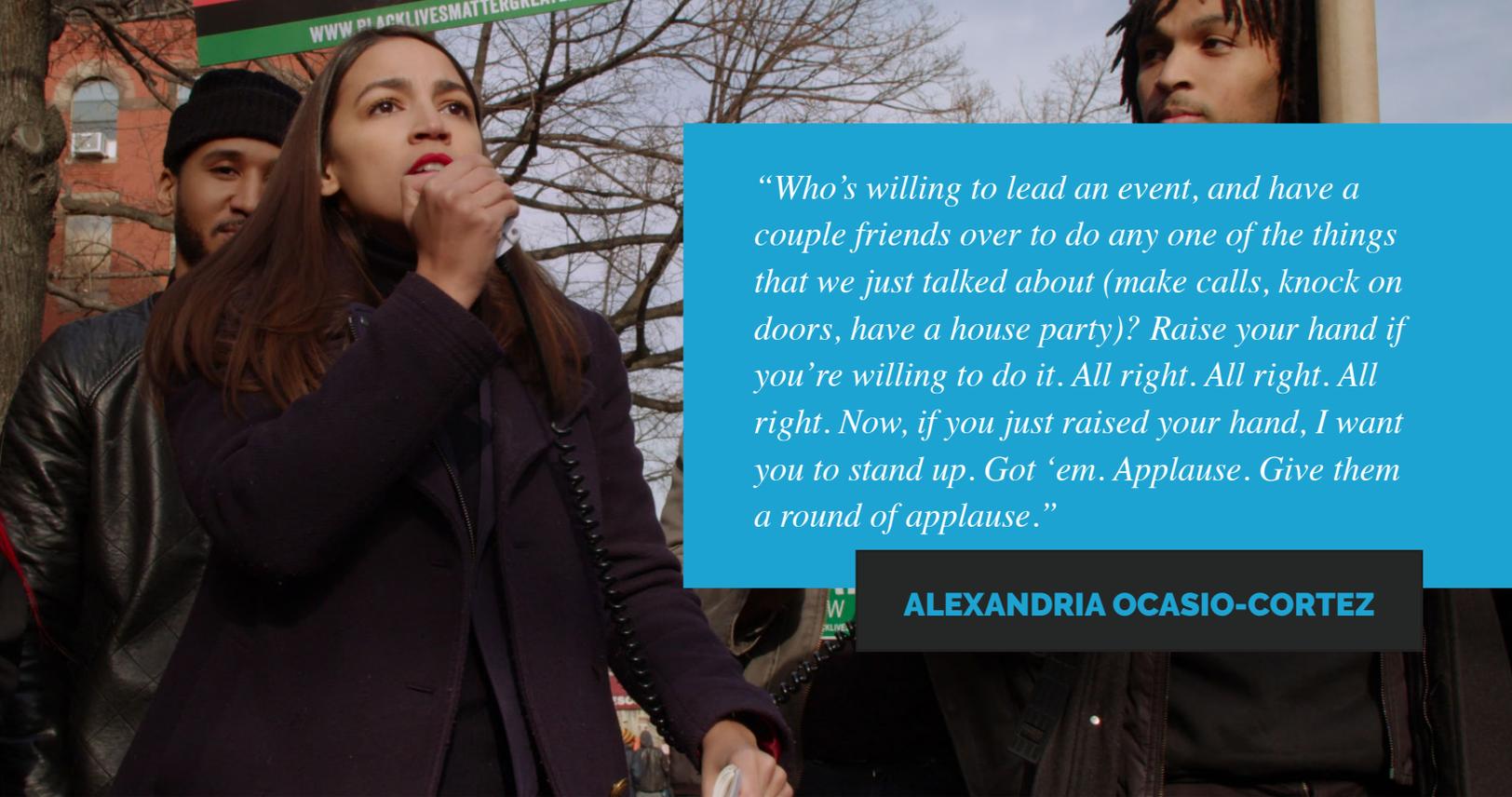
Using Classroom Clips: Alongside the opportunity to watch the full feature documentary, each lesson includes a recommended segment and the timecode from the film that connects to each lesson topic.

Flipped Classroom: This strategy relies on students having access to Netflix at home, but it may be desirable to have students watch the full film, or the curated classroom clips, at home so classroom time can be spent in discussion, research or other kinds of engagement work.

LESSON

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF POLITICAL ORGANIZING





“Who’s willing to lead an event, and have a couple friends over to do any one of the things that we just talked about (make calls, knock on doors, have a house party)? Raise your hand if you’re willing to do it. All right. All right. All right. Now, if you just raised your hand, I want you to stand up. Got ‘em. Applause. Give them a round of applause.”

ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ



LESSON OBJECTIVE

This workshop introduces several of the strategies and tactics used by the candidates during their Congressional campaigns in *Knock Down the House*.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are campaign organizing strategies? What are tactics?
- What considerations are important when selecting organizing strategies and tactics for a political campaign?
- What does it take to win a Congressional election in the United States today?



LENGTH

One 50 minute class period for lesson. This does not include watching the



MATERIALS

- Equipment to screen the film which can be accessed on Netflix [here](#)
- Copies of Note Catcher and Handout One for each student

ACTIVITY: EXAMINING POLITICAL STRATEGIES AND TACTICS IN *KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE*

1 Step One: Introduce Political Strategies and Tactics

- 1 Brainstorm the definition of what is a strategy and what is a tactic.

Use these definitions to get started:

- > **Strategy:** A plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim
- > **Tactic:** Specific actions that are short-term steps toward a larger goal

- 2 Next, ask the group to brainstorm examples of organizing strategies and tactics in relation to political candidates or campaigns. Begin with an example such as their community wanting to open a public park. A strategy might be to appeal to a political candidate for support, and a tactic might be making calls to their office or setting a town hall meeting for all to share their viewpoints.

2 Step Two: Watch *Knock Down the House* on Netflix

Handout Note Catcher, one per student. Ask the group to pay particular attention to the political strategies and tactics used by each candidate throughout the documentary. Explain that after the film you will spend time in small groups debriefing what strategies and tactics were used by each candidate.

3 Step Three: Small Group Work

Organize the class into small groups of no more than four.

- > Distribute **Handout - Political Organizing and *Knock Down the House***. Discuss the different examples outlined and discuss questions.

4 Step Four: Closing

Bring the workshop to a close by sharing out the scenes the groups identified as illustrating the organizing strategy. If time permits, brainstorm other strategies that could be used in the political arena or that students have seen or experienced before.

NOTE CATCHER: POLITICAL STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Directions: As you watch *Knock Down the House*, document details you observe and about the political organizing strategies and tactics used by each candidate. For example, a strategy for each of the candidates is to appeal to a grass-roots constituency and one of the many tactics employed was to reject Corporate PAC money.

CORI BUSH

STRATEGY

TACTIC



ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ

STRATEGY

TACTIC



PAULA-JEAN SWEARENGIN

STRATEGY

TACTIC



AMY VILELA

STRATEGY

TACTIC



POLITICAL ORGANIZING AND *KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE*

Directions: As a small group, read each example of a political organizing strategy or tactic and discuss examples of when it was used in the documentary. After each example, discuss different examples your group observed from the candidates and their campaigns.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

...is a democratic strategy of building power through involving a constituency, often the local community, in identifying shared problems and thinking through solutions to address and reach the desired solution.



DISCUSS

- How is community organizing exemplified in the documentary?
- How does a community organizing approach impact everyday people?
- How do you know if it is effective?
- What are the challenges of community organizing?

SOCIAL MEDIA

... is a central tool in any current political campaign. Social networking sites have also emerged as a source of news and information, and as a public platform for political debate, discussion, and of political discord.



DISCUSS

- How was social media used as a political organizing strategy/tactic in the documentary?
- Was it effective?
- What are the advantages and limitations of using social media in a political campaign?
- If you were to run a campaign, would you use social media? Why or why not?
- How do students view regulating political advertising on social media? It may be helpful to reference Facebook's recent statement that posting political ads that include false information is a 1st Amendment right, compared to Twitter's decision to ban political ads altogether.²

² See <https://www.vox.com/recode/2019/11/5/20943751/twitter-political-ads-ban-facebook-strategists-acronym-democrats-trump>, <https://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-twitter-election-shouldnt-have-power-to-regulate-political-ads-2019-11>, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/03/facebook-and-twitter-get-it-wrong-when-it-comes-to-political-ads.html>

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

... is a bottom-up approach to decision making, leadership, and organizing from within the community rather than a top-down or hierarchical structure. A grassroots movement is one that uses community organizing to further political and economic changes.



DISCUSS

- What was an example of grassroots organizing as a political strategy?
- Who benefits from grassroots organizing? How do you know?
- How do you think grassroots organizing enhances our democracy?

CANVASSING

...for a political issue or candidates is face-to-face conversations with individuals in the community to solicit support. Canvassing often entails going door-to-door, introducing yourself and/or an issue you are supporting, and actively listening to the needs and concerns of your community.



DISCUSS

- What was an example of canvassing as a tactic used in *Knock Down the House*?
- What is the value of canvassing? How does it enhance democracy and civic participation?
- What are the advantages and limitations of canvassing?

POLITICAL RALLY

... is an organized gathering of people who come together in solidarity to support, or to voice their opposition to a candidate or issue. A rally is customarily held in a public place in order to attract media attention and build momentum for an issue. Historically, rallies have emerged out of social movements and served as important catalysts for change.



DISCUSS

- What was an example of a political rally in *Knock Down the House*?
- How does a political rally advance an important social issue?
- Who are the intended audiences of the political rallies in the film?
- Why are the rallies an important tool of expression for the communities featured in the film?

OTHER POLITICAL STRATEGIES?

LESSON

WOMEN ARE POLITICAL LEADERS





“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



LESSON OBJECTIVE

Students will identify the leadership qualities and skills of the women candidates in *Knock Down the House* and connect them to their own personal leadership



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What leadership qualities do you want to see in your elected representative?
- What barriers continue to exist for women to have equal representation in elected office?
- How do we elect a Congress that represents all of America?



LENGTH

Two 50 minute class periods. This does not include watching the documentary.



MATERIALS

- Equipment to screen the film which can be accessed on Netflix [here](#)
- Copies of the Handout for the group
- Art supplies on hand for the leadership self-portrait

ACTIVITY: WOMEN ARE POLITICAL LEADERS

1 Step One: Leadership Word Wall

- 1 Distribute Handout One and have students complete the questions under Before the Film.
 - > Write down three qualities they want their leaders to practice.
 - > Write down three leadership qualities they see in themselves.
- 2 Create a word wall of leadership qualities by having the group share their answers and document and record them on a white board or easel paper.

2 Step Two: Watch *Knock Down the House* on [Netflix](#)

Introduce the film to your group using this sample script:

“Knock Down the House is an inspiring story chronicling the experiences of four working-class women who ran for Congress in 2018. They are everyday people who didn’t see themselves, or their needs, represented in our government. In 2018, they did something about it. We are going to watch the film as a group, take a break and then reconvene for our lesson.”

3 Step Three: Women and Leadership

- 1 After the film ends, have students complete the After the Film question.
 - > Write down three qualities that describe the leadership qualities they observed of the candidates in *Knock Down the House*.
- 2 Next, organize the group into pairs or small discussion groups, and have students share the candidates’ leadership qualities they observed. After discussing, turn to Handout Two, read the quotes from the candidates and answer the questions in small groups:
 - > What words or phrases in these quotes evoke a strong reaction? Why?
 - > What do the candidates share about the challenges of running for office as women? Did you hear notice the candidates who are women of color share additional challenges?
 - > What leadership qualities are reflected in these quotes?

4 Step Four: Create a Leadership Self-Portrait

Using the words on the leadership word wall, and their reflections from the small group discussion, have participants choose the leadership qualities they see in themselves and create a leadership self portrait. The portrait can be a visual piece of art, written words, or a combination of both.

Here are some questions students can consider to inspire their self-portrait:

- When you are asked to be a leader in your family, school, or community, what qualities do you bring to the task?
- What are common qualities associated with being a leader? What are leadership qualities that are less recognized?
- When you think of yourself as a leader, what qualities come to mind?
- What leadership qualities would you like to develop in yourself?

5 Step Five: Closing

As an elected Congresswoman, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) may be the most well known of the four featured in the film. With over 5.7 million followers on Twitter, and as one of the leading progressive representatives in Congress today, AOC continues to be an influential voice and legislator. Each of the women as candidates in the 2018 midterm elections confronted the challenges and overcame obstacles that remain for women candidates today.

Discuss as a class, or assign as homework, the following prompt:

- Reflect on all that has transpired since the 2018 midterm election regarding the role of women as political leaders. Create a headline that reflects your point of view and be prepared to share it the next day in class.

BEFORE THE FILM

Write down three leadership qualities you want your leaders to practice.

1.

2.

3.

Write down three leadership qualities you see in yourself.

1.

2.

3.

AFTER THE FILM

Write down three qualities that describe the leadership qualities you observed of the candidates in *Knock Down the House*.

1.

2.

3.

FILM QUOTES

Small Group Discussion Prompts

- What words or phrases in these quotes evoke a strong reaction? Why?
- What do the candidates share about the challenges of running for office as women? Did you notice any additional challenges for the candidates who are women of color?
- What leadership qualities are reflected in these quotes?



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

“You shouldn’t show your emotion because women are considered fragile, if you do. And you need to be more of a bitch. . . And when you go to the people in West Virginia and you tell ‘em you’re serving them, you need to tell them that you’re their bitch.” I said, “I’m not a dog.” We work harder in these races... Just ‘cause we’re women. We’re not rich white dudes in suits.”



CORI BUSH
MISSOURI 1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

“I’m a registered nurse. I’m an ordained pastor, and I’m a mother of two teenagers. I was not 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. People are now waking up to see that the problems that we have in our district, are problems that we ourselves can fix.”



ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ
NEW YORK 14TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

“Women like me aren’t supposed to run for office. I wasn’t born into a rich or powerful family. My dad died when I was a teenager. I’ve waitressed my way through hard times and dealt with disappointment. The dress I’m wearing is from a thrift shop. The ring on my hand is my mother’s - a reminder of every floor she’s mopped so that her daughter could have a chance. I have been told to wait my turn; that I’m not savvy enough, connected enough, experienced enough; that I say too much for a political candidate. I don’t sugar-coat, spin, or filter. I try to keep things as real as possible, because I believe that’s what people deserve and that honesty is a highest form of respect.”



AMY VILELA
NEVADA 4TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

“It’s not about any one of us, individually. It’s about the whole movement.”

LESSON

REPRESENTATION AND POLITICS





“Right now our Congress is eighty-one percent men, it’s mostly white men, it’s mostly millionaires, it’s mostly lawyers.”

CORBIN TRENT,
Justice Democrats,
Knock Down the House



LESSON OBJECTIVE

Students will critically examine how the makeup of Congress compares demographically to the overall U.S. population. Students will research how race, gender and class may influence the way legislators lead and make decisions. This lesson will begin with a short film clip from the full documentary to frame the lesson.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is the benefit of having diverse political representation in Congress?
- How do we elect a Congress that represents all of America?
- What obstacles remain for equal representation in elected office across gender, race, sexual identity and economic status?
- When you envision America 50 years from now, how do you envision Congress?



LENGTH

Two 50 minute class periods. This does not include watching the documentary.



MATERIALS

- Equipment to screen the film which can be accessed on Netflix [here](#)
- Film Segment: (7:30 - 11:04, runtime: 3:34 min)
Clip begins with Narrative Card “National grassroots groups Justice Democrats and Brand New Congress are recruiting outsider candidates to run against established politicians.” Ends with Rev. Darryl Gray, “...our future is in this room.”
- Copies of Handouts:
 - Handout One - Who is in the 116th Congress?
 - Handout Two - Who Knocked in 2018?
 - Handout Three - Representation

ACTIVITY: REPRESENTATION AND POLITICS

1 Step One: Interview Classmates - Does Congress reflect America?

- 1 Do you feel represented by your leaders in Congress? Why or why not?
- 2 How do you know whether your Congressional leaders represent you?
- 3 How can we ensure that the makeup of Congress steadily represents the diversity of the American public?
- 4 Are there groups of people who are yet to be included? Who, in your opinion, should always have voting power?

2 Step Two: Watch the film clip

Film Segment information (7:30-11:04, run time: 3:34 min)

This clip occurs near the beginning of the film and introduces the political action groups Justice Democrats and Brand New Congress, the organizations that support the campaigns of each of the women in the film.

Brief discussion questions:

- > What did you hear the staffers at Justice Democrats and Brand New Congress state as the problem with representation in Congress?
- > How is their perspective similar to or different from your own?

3 Step Three: Small Group Work - Demographic Analysis of the U.S. Congress

Pose this question to the class to discuss before organizing students into small discussion groups. "How does the 116th Congress (the current Congress) Compare to the U.S. Population?"

Distribute Handouts One, Two and Three to each small group

Have small groups read through each handout, analyze the information, and discuss the Small Group Discussion Questions at the top of Handout One. Select a facilitator, notetaker, and presenter in your group who will then share out the summary of the group discussion.

4 Step Four: Closing

Have students reflect on these questions in writing:

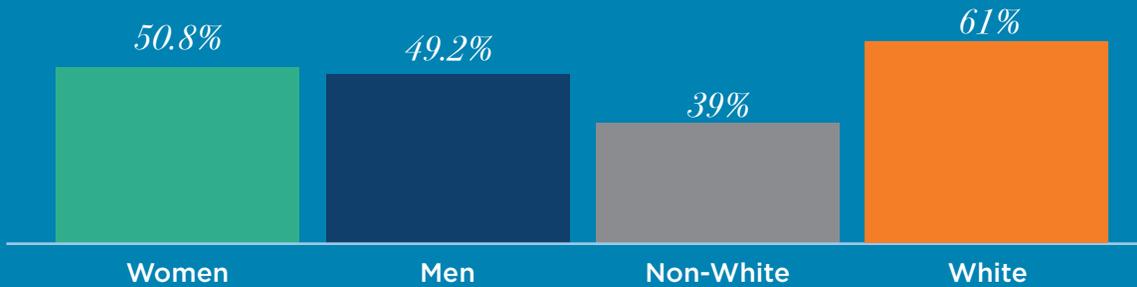
- > How do we elect a Congress that represents all of America?
- > What obstacles that remain for equal representation in elected office?
- > Is it important to have Congressional leaders that demographically reflect the U.S. population?

116TH CONGRESS

Small Group Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about this data?
- After looking at this data, what questions remain?
- What is missing from this data?
- Do you think gender, race, income and age influence the way Congress legislates? Why or why not?

U.S. Population



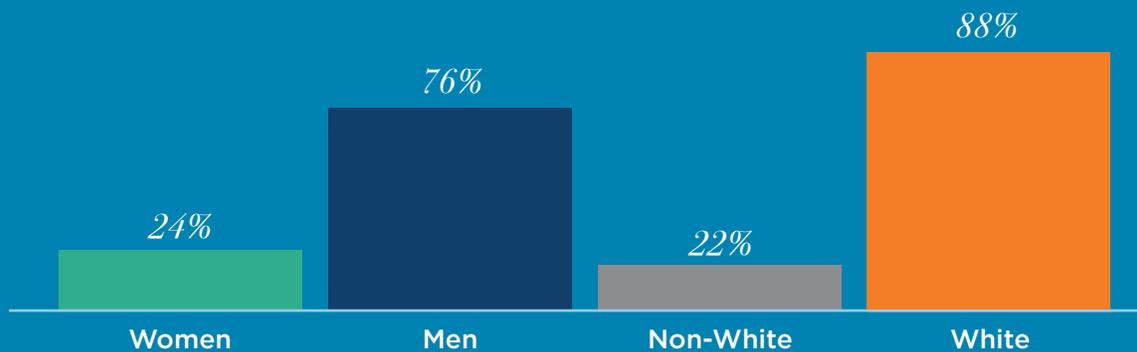
\$60,336

Median Household Income

Age

24%
under 18 years old
47%
19-54 years old
29%
over 55 years old

116th Congress (2019-2020)



\$1.2 million

Median Household Income

Age

57.6 years old
House: average
(must be 25 to be elected)
62.9 years old
Senate: average
(must be 30 to be elected)

Data sources: U.S. Census and the Congressional Research Service, Vox, Kaiser Family Foundation

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.

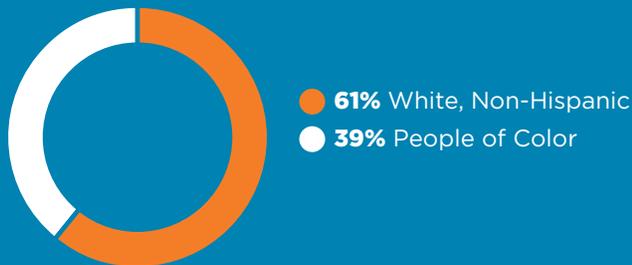
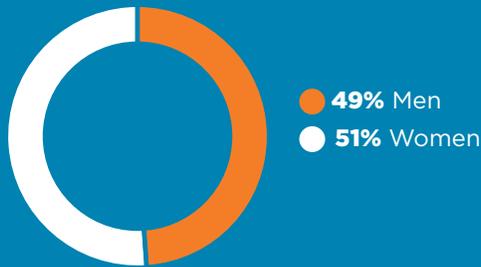
1. Grace Panetta, S. G. (2018, November 07). 12 records the 2018 midterm elections smashed. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/2018-midterm-election-records-early-voting-women-lgbt-candidates-2018-11>
 2. Kamarck, E. (2018, November 08). 2018: Another 'Year of the Woman'. Retrieved from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

REPRESENTATION

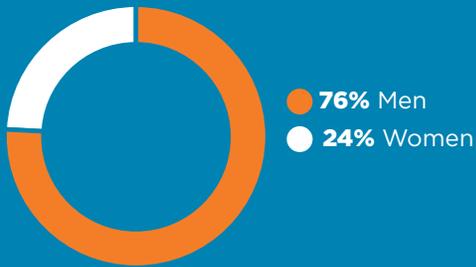
In the United States, candidates are elected by the people in the belief that each will represent the best interests of their constituents. It stands to reason, then, that the makeup of the legislative bodies would reflect the voting population. But that is not the case.



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/>

EXTENDED LEARNING

DOES A CONGRESSPERSON'S IDENTITY INFLUENCE HOW THEY LEAD?

Studies demonstrate that identity does matter in the way that individuals legislate. In the podcast, [Does Diversity in Congress Translate to Representation](#), (runtime 36:00) host Matt Grossman interviews two researchers who found:

- Older representatives are more likely to introduce bills that address issues important to seniors.
- Representatives who are women, people of color, and veterans are more likely to intervene on behalf of people who are served by federal agencies.

In small groups, have students listen to the podcast or study the [transcript](#), or conduct independent research to on the concept that identity influences how legislators vote.

LESSON

GETTING MONEY OUT OF POLITICS





“It is time to join the other Democrats in office right now that are standing up and saying, “Enough is enough! We’re not going to accept any more money from the hospitals, the insurance companies and pharma, and we can have the people behind the party again.”

AMY VILELA



LESSON OBJECTIVE

In *Knock Down the House* each of the candidates rejected corporate PAC money for their campaign. In this lesson students will gain a clear understanding of funding a political campaign, including accepting or rejecting corporate PAC money, and be able to articulate their viewpoint on accepting or rejecting these funds.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How much does it cost to run for Congress today?
- What are the different political and strategic decisions a candidate must make when financing their campaign?
- How do financing decisions reflect the values and policies of a candidate for Congress?



LENGTH

One 50 minute class period for lesson. This does not include watching the documentary.



MATERIALS

- Equipment to screen the film which can be accessed on Netflix [here](#)
- Copies of Handout
- Access to the internet, paper and pens

ACTIVITY: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF MONEY IN CAMPAIGNS

1 Step One: Watch *Knock Down the House*

Introduce the film to your class using this sample script:

“Knock Down the House is an inspiring story chronicling the experiences of four working-class women who ran for Congress in 2018. They are everyday people who didn’t see themselves, or their needs, represented in our government. In 2018, they did something about it. We are going to watch the film as a group, take a break and then reconvene for our lesson.”

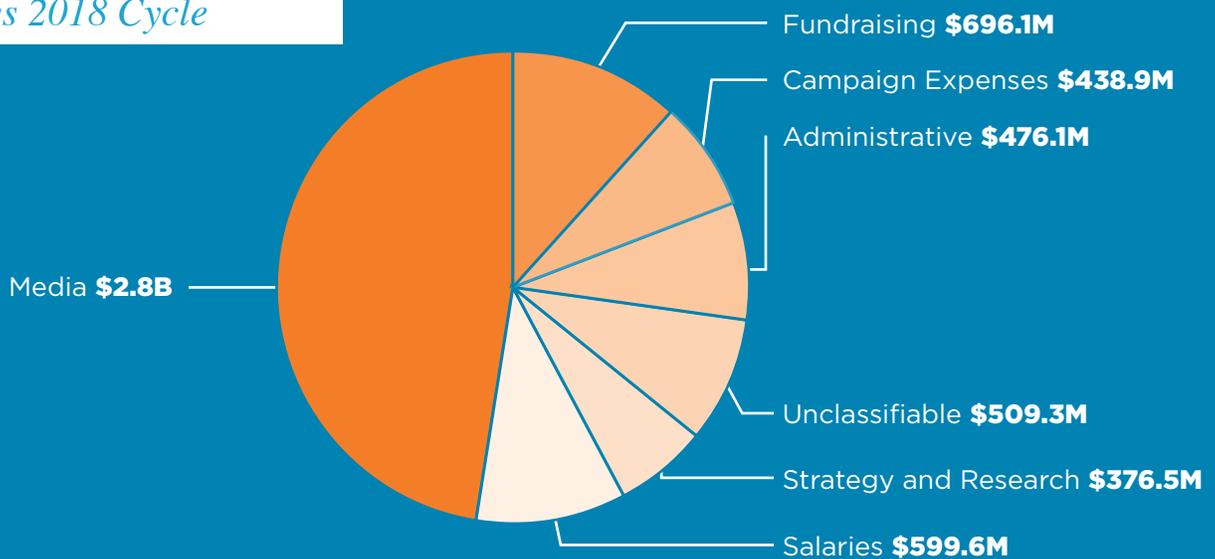
2 Step Two: Lay of the Land

1 Depending upon the background knowledge of your students’ understanding of the role of money in political campaigns can be confusing and some aspects may appear less transparent than others. You may want to begin by asking a few of these questions to transition into the workshop session.

- > What are the activities related to running for office that cost money? Can you name five?
- > How expensive is it to run for office?
- > Why does it cost so much?
- > What are the different sources for raising money?
- > What are the ways that money can influence a political campaign or candidate?

2 Have students analyze the information on the Expenditures for the 2018 Cycle pie chart. What story does this chart tell about campaign expenses?

Expenditures 2018 Cycle



3 Even if the group is well versed in campaign finance terminology and structure, it may be helpful to do a refresh. Here are several helpful resources to access:

- Watch this [Campaign Finance Video](#) produced by Khan Academy. You may also want to print out the transcript for the group to follow along.
- Read “[The Top 10 Things Every Voter Should Know About Money-In-Politics](#)” from OpenSecrets.org.

Note: Advanced Placement Government and Constitutional Law students may know a great deal more about campaign finance than 9th grade Government students so adjust how much time you spend on background knowledge before delving into this lesson

3 Step Three: Research a Current Political Candidate

- 1** Participants will choose a candidate from the film, from their area, or from a current campaign and use the Center for Responsive Politics’ website OpenSecrets.org to track and assess donations to the candidate of their choice.
- 2** Using the information on that website, participants will gather information and answer the questions outlined on Handout One before discussing their findings as a large group.
- 3** In small groups have participants share what they discovered about their candidate and discuss their findings.

4 Step Four: Closing

Bring the lesson to a close by collecting observations and questions about campaign finance and what it costs to run for office.

- Ask students to share their observations about what it costs to run for office.
- Do they believe the current structure is fair and equitable? What would they change?

GETTING MONEY OUT OF POLITICS

GO TO: [OpenSecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org)

TO RESEARCH current Congressional Candidates/Representatives go to: <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/>

TO RESEARCH past Presidential campaigns go to: <https://www.opensecrets.org/pres16/>
To get an Overview of the 2020 election cycle reporting go to: <https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/index.php?cycle=2020&display=T&type=A>

1. Where do their donations come from?
2. How was the funding used?
3. What can you learn about the candidate from your review?

LESSON

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A CANDIDATE?





“It’s time for ordinary people to do extraordinary things.”

PAULA JEAN SWEARENGIN



LESSON OBJECTIVE

Students will reflect on their personal criteria for choosing political candidates to support and think critically about the sources of information they rely on to learn about candidates.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How do you choose a candidate that reflects your values and priorities?
- During elections, what are the main factors that influence voters’ decisions?
- Where does the information that voters learn about come from?
- How can voters find trustworthy information about candidates?



LENGTH

One 50 minute class period for lesson. This does not include watching the documentary.



MATERIALS

- Equipment to screen the film which can be accessed on Netflix [here](#)

IDENTIFYING CANDIDATES AND ISSUES

1 Step One: Watch *Knock Down the House*

Have students complete these Sentence Stems, or some variation, to introduce the lesson.

- 1 The most important political issue(s) that will determine who I vote for is _____.
- 2 I choose to vote for a candidate (or will choose a candidate) because _____.

2 Step Two: Prioritizing Characteristics

Transition from the film to having students brainstorm all the information, qualities, and characteristics... they want to know about a candidate and ones they think they should know about a candidate. (If helpful, here are a few to start)

- Party affiliation
- Are they an incumbent?
- Where they stand on issues of importance such as climate change, abortion rights, immigration, and others.
- How they characterize the larger worldview of the candidate such as conservative or progressive.
- Race, ethnicity, national origin?
- Who is financing their campaign?
- Where they are from?
- What is their personal story?
- Professional background?
- Their previous voting record, if applicable.
- Their previous work in community organizing or civic engagement.
- Community, faith, or other organizational affiliations.

Once the class is satisfied with the list, have students prioritize their top three. Write the vote totals for each characteristic as you go.

As a group, discuss the order of priorities you generated together and ask for volunteers to explain their votes.

3 Step Three: Watch the Film Clips from *Knock Down the House*

Distribute **Handout One: Note Catcher, How do You Choose a Candidate?**

Watch the two selected film clips from *Knock Down the House* and have students write their reflections on Handout One. As needed, offer a few moments after the clips for students to complete their reflections.

Film Clip One: (23:01 - 30:41, runtime: 7:30 min)

Begins with “Well we have a lot of work to get done.” Ends with older man saying to Cori Bush “... I ain't really seen no Democrat with the guts to go up against the Clays in a long time.”

Film Clip Two: (36:32 - 43:04, runtime: 7:12 min)

Begins with Shannon Thomas “Right now we could really use your help...” Ends with AOC “I’m running to represent the Bronx. I’m a third generation Bronxite. I’m a Latina, I’m a Boricua, I’m a descendant of Taino Indians. I am a descendant of African slaves. I am proud to be an American! But we have to rise to that promise.”

After the film clips are finished, discuss these questions as a large group:

- > What new qualities or characteristics came up from the clips that you didn't discuss in the opening exercise?
- > Did anything you saw or heard in this clip make you change how you would prioritize your list of qualities you consider as you choose your candidates? If so, explain the quality and why you think it is important.

4 Step Four: Group research project

- 1 Split the class into small groups. Have each group select one current political race of interest. It can be a Congressional seat, the Presidential election, their state Governor, or local elections such as school board, city council, or other representatives in a municipal election.
- 2 Groups will conduct online research of their candidate and create a summary profile using Handout Two for this lesson.

Remind students that they must use multiple sources to corroborate what they find out. For example, they can draw information from a candidate’s website, but must also use information from their party affiliation websites, newspapers, or other credible sources to test the accuracy of the information they cited. If groups are able to obtain campaign literature, it is critical to research who is paying for the publication.

Sources they might consider:

- > The candidate’s website
 - > Voters guides printed by the elections bureaus
 - > Published and recognized news sources
 - > Independent non-profit voter education groups, like the [League of Women Voters](#) and their site [Vote411](#), [BallotReady.org](#), or [HeadCount.org](#)
 - > Non-partisan sites focusing on election and candidate coverage such as [Politifact](#), [FactCheck.org](#)
 - > Non-partisan site on campaign funding: [OpenSecrets.org](#)
- 3 Have groups report back on their research, and share the candidate profiles they created.

5 Step Five: Closing

As a class, discuss the process of researching a candidate and how it will inform selecting a candidate in future elections.

- > What questions still remain?
- > What was challenging about this investigation?
- > How do they know which media sources to trust? What is their criteria?

NOTE CATCHER: HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A CANDIDATE?

Directions: As you watch the film clips, write down words, characteristics, and qualities the film suggests are reasons people may choose to support a particular candidate.

***Candidates are listed in the order in which they are mentioned in the clips*

JOSEPH CROWLEY

CORI BUSH

ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ

AMY VILELA

PAULA-JEAN SWEARENGIN

CANDIDATE PROFILE

Name:

Political Experience:

Party Affiliation:

Incumbent (Yes/No)

If Incumbent, how many years in office:

What are the priority issues for the candidate?

Choose one of the issues and explain in your own words their position.

How are they financing their campaign:

Important/Interesting details on the candidate's biography;

LESSON

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE INFLUENCE OUR POLITICAL PROCESS?





“You want me to tell the kids organizing from Ferguson to Parkland, who are at the forefront of every existential threat to this country, from gun violence prevention to climate change— thanks for your activism, we applaud your sweat equity, but you don’t have the right to cast a ballot?”

REPRESENTATIVE AYANNA PRESSLEY, 7th Congressional District, Massachusetts



LESSON OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the role that young people have played in shaping and influencing the political process in the United States, and explore ways they can get involved through a [Philosophical Chairs Discussion](#).



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What has been the role of young people in championing important social issues in America? What examples come to mind?
- How does the political process impact the lives of young people?
- What are ways that young people can participate in politics, even before they can vote?



LENGTH

Two 50 minute class periods for the lesson.
Day One for student research; Day Two for the Philosophical Chairs Discussion.



MATERIALS

- Equipment to screen the film which can be accessed on Netflix [here](#)

ACTIVITY: RESEARCHING YOUTH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

1 DAY ONE

1. Read this statement to the class and explain that it will be the basis for a [Philosophical Chairs Discussion](#) the following day in class. Students will need to take a position.

Statement: **Young people under the age of 18 (should/should not) take an interest in the political process.** (A student can also take an undecided position but will need to defend this position with clear evidence.)

2. Students will spend one class period researching their position on this statement. The following list of websites and resources are reliable sources for students to begin formulating their position. If more time is needed, students are expected to complete their research at home and be prepared on Day Two to present their position.

Resources

- The New York Times Article, "[7 Times in History When Students Turned to Activism](#)"
- [Pew Research Center: The Generation Gap in American Politics](#)
- [Ten Questions for Young Changemakers](#)
- [The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement](#), Tufts University
- The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, [CIRCLE](#)
- [Tufts University, "Youth Voter Turnout Analysis - Midterm 2018"](#)
- [Teen Vogue: Lowering the voting age to 16](#)
- [Students Interviewing Candidates](#)
- [Mobilizing the Youth Vote](#)
- [PBS NewsHour: Turning Out the Youth Vote](#)

2 DAY TWO

When students arrive in class on Day Two, they will be prepared to engage in a [Philosophical Chairs Discussion](#) taking a position on the statement provided. The following instruction can be adapted for the particularities of your class:

- The teacher or a student presents a statement for the class to consider;
- All students spend three minutes writing their ideas about the statement;
- They decide which position they'll take on the statement (yes, no, undecided);
- They discuss their ideas and positions for about 10 to 15 minutes; and
- They write a reflection that includes the comment that most challenged their thinking; whether they changed their mind or not; and how open-minded they were at the start of the conversation.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO RUN FOR OFFICE? A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ROLE PLAY





“That’s why I’m running. Because it shouldn’t be about one person being a king, or being like, kiss my ring. It’s not about that. Because we don’t get help that way. It’s gotta be about us. It’s gotta be about us thinking about us, caring about us, speaking about us. Not being afraid.”

CORI BUSH

BACKGROUND FOR EDUCATOR

The 2018 midterm elections featured hundreds of congressional, state, and local elections. There are examples across the country where newcomers to politics upset incumbents who had held their offices - in some cases for decades. While it is not unprecedented for Congress to change party control in a midterm election - since 1856 it has happened approximately 1/3 of the time - the 2018 Congressional election has been described as groundbreaking in both the number of newcomers who were elected, the communities and identities they represented, and how they were elected.



LESSON OBJECTIVE

Students will explore what it takes to run for a Congressional office through a role-play activity of running a hypothetical political campaign and reporting out their work in a “Morning Staff Meeting.”



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ▶ What does it take to run for a Congressional office in the United States?



LENGTH

At least three 50 minute class periods. This does not include screening the entire documentary.

- Day One: Introduction to Lesson.
- Day Two: Set up Role Play
- Day Three: Present Staff Meeting (role play)

Note: If students have not yet done so, we recommend watching the full documentary before this lesson, which adds an additional 90 minutes. If time is limited, the five minute film segment can adequately frame the role play.

FILM CONTEXT

Recommended Film Segment: (Opening of film - 4:55: Runtime 4:55)

- This clip begins with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) getting ready for an event, and then introduces each of the other three candidates. It ends with AOC saying "Americans aren't asking for a lot...they are asking for politicians to help them get by."



MATERIALS

- Equipment to screen the film which can be accessed on Netflix [here](#)
- Copies of the Handout for the group.

ACTIVITY: WHAT IT TAKES TO RUN A CAMPAIGN?

1 Step One

Read the opening quote from Cori Bush. Spend a few minutes discussing her statement.

“That’s why I’m running. Because it shouldn’t be about one person being a king, or being like, kiss my ring. It’s not about that. Because we don’t get help that way. It’s gotta be about us. It’s gotta be about us thinking about us, caring about us, speaking about us. Not being afraid.”

2 Step Two

Watch the full documentary - runtime 90 minutes on Netflix
Or the recommended film clip - Opening of film - 4:55: Runtime 4:55

3 Step Three: Debrief film segment

In the opening of the film we learn the following:

“In 2018 a record number of women, people of color and political outsiders set out to transform Congress. Many established Democrats face primary elections from other Democrats running for the first time.”

Discuss as a class:

- Using your background knowledge, why is it significant that women, people of color and political outsiders are seeking to “transform Congress?”
- What is a primary? Why is it significant that “established Democrats face primary elections from other Democrats?”
- After watching the film segment, or the full documentary, what qualities and or attributes do the candidates possess?
- What challenges did you see the candidates face?
- Was there anything you saw about running for office that surprised you?

4 Step Four: Organize Role Play

1. Choose a person in the room to run for a hypothetical office.
2. Give Handout One to the candidate. They will then leave the group for a short period of time to complete their assignment.

3. Meanwhile, the rest of the group will also receive Handout One once the candidate has left the room. They will organize themselves into the various campaign roles and familiarize themselves with their job responsibilities.
4. After a few minutes, the candidate will return to the group and share their candidate profile and the current stage of the campaign for the role play. Based upon this presentation, the committees will get to work and prepare for the staff meeting that culminates the role play.
5. Acting as campaign consultants, each committee will map out one day of the candidate's schedule including strategy, public appearances, fundraising efforts and other activities and select one representative to present at the "Morning Staff Meeting."

5 Step Five: Morning Staff Meeting

Each committee will select a representative to share an update of the work they were tasked to complete.

- What questions still remain?
- What was challenging about this investigation?
- How do they know which media sources to trust? What is their criteria?

6 Step Six: Debrief the Activity

- What was fun?
- What was challenging?
- What did they learn about the process of running a campaign?

ROLE PLAY: WHAT IT TAKES TO RUN FOR OFFICE

Directions:

1. Print one copy of this handout for every workshop participant.
2. Discuss the roles and responsibilities and, as a group, identify who would like to hold the various positions in the role-play activity.
3. Once in groups, map out one day of the candidate's schedule based upon your committee.

THE CANDIDATE (ONE PERSON)

As the candidate, you have two immediate responsibilities:

- Write a brief candidate profile identifying your constituency, stating your priority issues and how they are responsive to your community's needs.
- Decide on the stage of your campaign, in other words is this the beginning, middle, or the final leg of the campaign and identify three main priority issues. Once you share these ideas with your campaign, circulate amongst each committee during the workshop to support their needs and requests.

CAMPAIGN MANAGER (ONE PERSON)

Sets the tone, researches and manages all aspects of the campaign, including the candidate's position on issues, talking points and strategy. This person will interview the candidate, and design a series of talking points on one agreed-upon issue for an upcoming event.

FIELD OPERATIONS (ONE DIRECTOR, 2-5 ASSISTANT DIRECTORS)

Field Operations Director maintains all day-to-day operations of the candidate including oversight of all other committees, organizing volunteers (and hiring), and coordinating all voter contact in the field. The Director and their staff are the inner circle of the candidate and their jobs include:

- Deciding on the candidate's schedule
- Organizing events
- Prioritizing where the candidate will speak and/or participate in a community activity
- Coordinating volunteers to canvass, make phone calls, send texts, and drop literature door to door

FUNDRAISING MANAGER (ONE DIRECTOR, ONE EVENT MANAGER, TWO OR MORE FUNDRAISING ASSISTANTS.)

You will raise all the necessary funds to run the campaign including:

- Organizing fundraisers
- Soliciting donations
- Paying staff
- Taking care of overhead costs
- Creating a list of items you'll need and budget for their cost (eg. travel, gas, posters)
- After interviewing the candidate about how they are planning to raise funds for their campaign (eg, taking Corporate PAC money or not), this committee will create a fundraising plan for the campaign. It is important to keep in mind if you are on this committee that money itself does not guarantee a candidate will win.

Richard Lau, Professor of Politics at Rutgers, explains the dynamic very clearly, “Money doesn’t cause a candidate to win, but winning does attract money.” More money means that a campaign can afford to hire more staff, purchase more advertising, and receive unpaid advertising (news coverage) for raising the most money. Advertising is often where candidates spend the majority of the funds they raise because it leads to more visibility and name recognition.

COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA (ONE DIRECTOR, ENDLESS COMMUNICATIONS/SOCIAL MEDIA ASSISTANTS.)

- Communications committee works on attracting and communicating with the press.
- This committee also crafts the campaign website, communicates on social media channels, and through direct mail and other outreach materials.
- Where possible, work with fundraising committee to buy and place social media, radio, and television ads.
- Your committee will come up with several ideas of campaign slogans and social media posts to send out announcing the candidate’s position on an agreed upon issue.

OTHER SUGGESTED ASSESSMENTS

BEING A CANDIDATE

Each student is a candidate running for Congress and creates a candidacy platform that includes the following elements:

1. Write a platform detailing position their position on one issue
2. Outline a fundraising strategy
3. Write a stump speech for a rally
4. Create an ad/pamphlet for a *Get Out the Vote* effort
5. Outline a social media strategy

WRITE AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

Pick a political issue you are passionate about and write a well articulated essay to persuade your audience toward your point of view.

POLITICAL FORUM RESEARCH PROJECT

Choose a topic that is connected to any one of the five lesson topics for *Knock Down the House*

- Strategies and Tactics for Political Organizing
- > Women Are Political Leaders
- > Applying a Representation Lens
- > Youth and Civic Engagement
- > Identifying Candidates and Issues

Students will compose a research question related to their chosen topic and prepare to present their argument in a class structured political forum. Each student will present their question and evidence in a small group format. It is important for students to use a range of source material and to cite all research accordingly.

GLOSSARY FOR TEACHING *KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE*

Unless otherwise noted, definitions adapted from [usa.gov/voting-and-election-definitions](https://www.usa.gov/voting-and-election-definitions)

District: Geographic area represented by an elected official.

Down ballot: Refers to party candidates on a hierarchical structure where the President is the top of the ballot, followed by Congress members, then state officials, then municipal offices at the lowest level, or “down ballot.”

Establishment: In the political context, refers to the traditional party structures of national committees and their hierarchies.

Grassroots Campaign: Refers to the organizational nature of a campaign being led and/or contributed to by many individuals and not a “top-down” model where one leader, like an incumbent or party official, chooses or endorses a candidate and expects party members to support that person.

Incumbent: A person currently holding an elected office.

Non-Partisan: Idea, policy, or person not associated with a particular political party.

Organizer: A person who takes action to make social change.

Partisan: Idea, policy, or person associated with a political party.

Party Committees: The official organizations that establish the platform and hierarchies of each of the national parties. Committees offer endorsements and financial support to candidates.

Political Action Committee²: A group organized to support a particular candidate, policy, or political cause. There are several kinds of PACs that the Federal Election Committee regulates, and that are allowed to contribute specific amounts of money and offer campaign support in different ways:

- **Connected PACs:** PACs that represent unions, corporations, health organizations or other membership groups where members can contribute unlimited money to the PAC, which in turn can contribute money and/or other kinds of campaign support. PACs can give \$5000 annually to any campaign, \$15,000 to a party committee, and \$5000 to other PACs. Corporate PACs are a kind of connected PAC where shareholders and/or employees of the corporation, industry association or business entity contribute to the PAC. Corporate PACs can contribute a maximum of \$5,000 annually to any one campaign.
- **Non-Connected PACs:** Groups that convene to support a specific cause, policy or candidate, to which anyone can contribute, which in turn contribute donations to campaigns.
- **Leadership PACs:** Candidates or current office holders convene Leadership PACs to support other candidates. Contributions are unlimited as long as they do not use the funds to support a candidate that is not endorsed by the parties.
- **Super PACs:** Groups who can raise unlimited funds that do not go directly to candidates, but rather to purchase advertisements, mailers or other kinds of indirect support for candidates.

Primary Election: An election held to determine which candidate will represent a party in the general election.



KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE

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