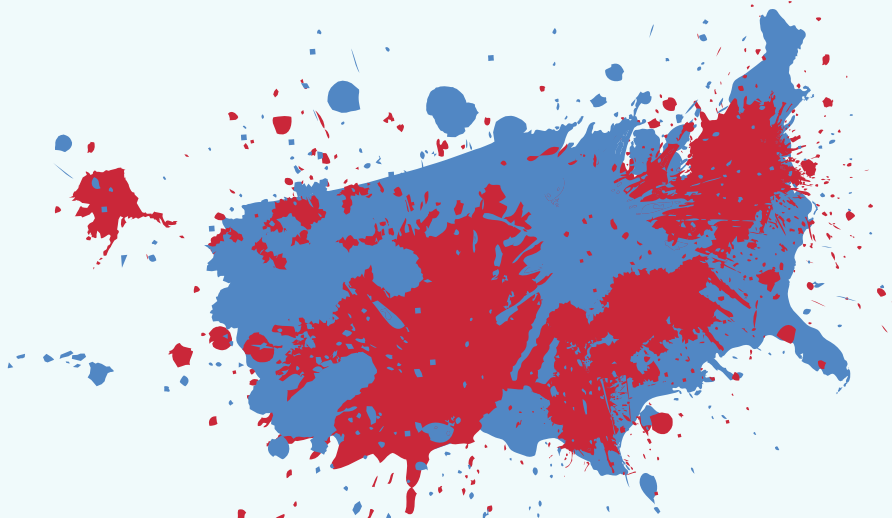


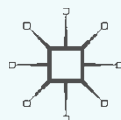
Edited by
Sean D. Foreman, Marcia L. Godwin
& Walter Clark Wilson

Foreword by
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen



THE ROADS TO CONGRESS 2018

**American Elections in the
Trump Era**



The Roads to Congress 2018

Sean D. Foreman
Marcia L. Godwin • Walter Clark Wilson
Editors

The Roads to Congress 2018

American Elections in the Trump Era

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This work is dedicated to those who continue to raise and examine intriguing questions about election dynamics and trends, and to enduring democracy in America.

FOREWORD

Like most institutions, Congress has changed over the course of the past few decades. In the almost three decades that I walked those halls—voting, meeting with constituents, and representing the voice of my South Florida community—I was, and will always be, in awe of this great nation and the privilege it afforded me to be a part of this enduring body.

On September 3, 1989, I was sworn in as the first Hispanic woman and first Cuban American in Congress. My background was in education. I had been a public and private school teacher, as well as principal, of a small private bilingual school in Hialeah, a working-class area of South Florida. I had served in the Florida House of Representatives and Florida Senate. I was one of only 32 women, 18 Democrat and 14 Republican, in the US Congress when I arrived. The current Congress now boasts 131 women, the largest female delegation to serve in the institution, including 25 in the Senate and 102 members plus 3 Delegates and the Resident Commissioner in the House.

The make-up of Congress has changed and will continue to change. The framers of the Constitution created the People's House and, in order to represent the diversity of our country, so must those who are elected to represent the people be diverse. I always say I was glad to have been the first Latina elected to Congress but even more joyful that I was not the last. It is important to maintain that diversity because it brings new perspectives, new points of view, and new ways in which to tackle the nation's problems.

As a freshman and a Hispanic woman, I faced challenges in securing a seat at the table where some of the most crucial and important decisions

regarding our country are made. My goal was to be on the Foreign Affairs Committee because in my home and my community, foreign affairs were domestic affairs. The fight for a free and democratic Cuba, my native homeland, and the importance of human rights around the globe were daily issues where I came from.

Congressman Dante Fascell, a respected long-serving Democratic member from South Florida who was the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, helped me and persuaded his majority party to increase the number of members from the minority to add me to the committee. They added a small desk that looked like it was for an intern, but that did not dissuade me and I knew that being a part of this committee would allow me to represent the most important issues of my constituency.

In time, I became Ranking Member and then became the first woman to chair the Foreign Affairs Committee. That opportunity, originally facilitated by a member of the opposite party, allowed me to craft crucial legislation to protect the United States and our interests.

When I arrived in Congress, bipartisanship and compromise were not only the practice but the pursuit. Unfortunately, and sadly, much has changed. The partisan polarization of our elected leaders has eroded the public's faith in Congress. Today, working in a bipartisan manner and seeking compromise are scarce traits. With 435 members from diverse backgrounds, educational and socioeconomic status, the collegiality that I enjoyed for many years is lacking and should be brought back to the People's House.

However, one shared objective remains: constituent service. This should be the top priority for any Member of Congress. It is important to write and vote for meaningful legislation that impacts the lives of many but, at home in the district, constituents and their case should be a priority. By helping that grandmother with her Social Security benefits, or that veteran to recuperate lost service medals or obtain services at the VA (US Department of Veterans Affairs), or simply helping constituents to navigate the complex federal system, representatives make a difference that voters often most remember. This aspect of public service is the one factor that every Member, Republican or Democrat, can agree on and can excel at during their time in office.

Running for elected office always requires raising money to ensure that candidates can get their message out to the voters. Campaign rallies, mail pieces, media announcements, and so many components of a successful campaign are dependent on a candidate's ability to raise money. I ran 15

congressional campaigns and was blessed that the voters saw fit to continue to allow me to represent them in Congress. The past few years have witnessed the skyrocketing costs of congressional campaigns. Millions of dollars are spent by candidates, as well as outside groups, in any given race. Unfortunately, due to the cost, campaigning and fundraising have become a constant for any member who seeks reelection.

Campaigns have evolved from traditional mail and media to utilize every modern communication tool, such as social media and text messages. This immediacy of information helps a candidate or incumbent to quickly and efficiently communicate with the voters and the community as a whole. Voters who are engaged in the process have access to not only receive information on what their candidate or Member is doing, but also to communicate to each one their needs, opinions, and views on any given subject. This two-way communication between voter and candidate or constituent and Member has served to make that relationship closer.

Every congressional district has its nuances and they cannot be swept together. A strategy that may work in one district may not be successful in another. For example, the South Florida district which I represented for nearly three decades went through several redistricting changes but always maintained a diverse community and voter registration numbers that were more favorable to Democrats. The large number of independents registered in my district also tended to vote for more Democrats. I was not dissuaded. I worked hard for the people of my community, both in Washington and in the district, and this, time and again, proved to be a winning strategy for me.

My experience, however, is not commonplace. As districts have been drawn and redrawn, gerrymandering has afforded secure seats on either side of the aisle. This makes many congressional races less competitive. Both parties become entrenched in certain districts where the lines are drawn to favor one party. Complacency, however, is the enemy of any incumbent. Many, as recent as 2018, lost primary elections as new and fringe voices came into play in both political parties.

When I was first elected nearly three decades ago, the GOP was very much viewed as a minority party. The Democratic Party had controlled the House for over four decades. Many were therefore surprised in 1995 when the GOP became the majority party. In 2007, a comparatively short 12 years later, the House flipped back to Democratic control. Four years later, the GOP was back in control. Fluctuating numbers for several years maintained a GOP majority in the House, but in 2018, it flipped again to Democratic control.¹ The balance of power can truly shift in one election cycle.

An individual contemplating a run for Congress may be dismayed by the financial cost to run, as well as the pressure of performing efficiently and effectively in DC and in the district, but I can tell you: do not hesitate if your heart is in it and you are willing to work hard for your community. If serving the needs of your community is important, then elected office will allow you to help one case at a time and also help pass legislation that impacts around the nation.

I encourage more women, more Hispanics and, more individuals of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities to consider representing their communities, promoting their diversity of thought and contributing to the fabric of our nation by serving in this esteemed body. Though Congress as a whole may struggle to keep the faith and support of the American public, each member can cultivate their own legacy of service for their congressional district.

The road to becoming a member of Congress may have potholes and obstacles, but with tenacity and a desire to serve our communities and our nation, a candidate can be successful. The *Roads to Congress 2018* provides an in-depth look at the midterm elections that, once again, flipped control of the U.S. House, while maintaining a majority for the GOP in the Senate. Many Members were unseated in primaries and general elections across the country. Despite the challenges that both parties continue to face, I have faith in our democratic system and hope, for the sake of my grandchildren and for generations to come, that this current atmosphere of polarization, extremism, and lack of cooperation comes to an end. Instead, I hope for the return of collegiality, bipartisanship, negotiation, and compromise to this legislative body, that it can be as it once was, many years ago.

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NOTE

1. US House of Representatives, *Party Divisions of the House of Representatives, 1789 to Present*, House.gov. <https://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/>

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PART I

Congress in Transition



CHAPTER 1

The 2018 Midterm Elections and the Changing Congress

Sean D. Foreman

CHANGING FACES IN CONGRESS

The roads to Congress were particularly tumultuous in 2018. Both the Democratic and Republican parties continued their internal battles, while also increasing their partisan attacks. It was the first midterm election since President Donald Trump was elected in 2016 to the surprise of many academics and analysts. Heading into the November 2018 elections, many expected a referendum on Trump that would result in Democratic gains in the House of Representatives. At the same time, most saw the Senate as up for grabs and each party with a narrow margin for error to gain majority control in the upper chamber. Ultimately, Democrats won 40 additional seats in the House, a form of the anticipated “blue wave,” but also lost a net of two seats in the Senate.

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) announced in April 2018 that he would not run for reelection, relinquishing the Speaker’s gavel. Ryan, 48, had served in Congress since elected in 1998 and had witnessed his career goal of tax reform achieved with Trump’s signature on the Tax Cuts and

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Jobs Act of 2017. Yet, Ryan's term as Speaker resembled that of his predecessor, John Boehner (R-OH), who served in the House from 1991 to 2015. Both were frustrated in the position by intra-partisan disagreements between moderate Republican members and more conservative and Freedom Caucus members. Ryan's anticipated departure led Republicans to jockey for positioning in leadership, creating an odd dynamic for a majority party in election season.

Most analysts agreed that Democrats were quite likely to gain the majority and thus control of the speakership. On the Democratic side, minority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was poised to be speaker for the second time, based on the projections. But, along the campaign path, numerous Democratic congressional nominees refused to lend their support, when asked if they would vote for Pelosi for speaker. After some concessions made and new alliances formed, Pelosi secured the votes to become speaker in the 116th Congress.

Those concessions, made mostly by moderate Democrats, were facilitated by the need to balance a coalition of new members led by Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, a progressive Democrat who defeated 20-year incumbent Joe Crowley in a June primary in New York's 14th Congressional District.¹ It was a stunning idea that a powerful and respected incumbent who served as Democratic Caucus Chair would lose a primary. But primary voters saw him as out of touch with the district and Ocasio-Cortez spoke with a new voice in American politics that was unabashedly socialist and visionary. The outcome of the race was reminiscent of the 2010 primary upset of then Republican Minority Leader Eric Cantor by economics professor David Brat.²

The win by Ocasio-Cortez was followed by Ayanna Pressley's primary defeat of longtime Democratic representative Mike Capuano in Massachusetts' 7th District. Pressley ran to the left of the otherwise liberal progressive Capuano³ and went on to become the first African American female from Massachusetts to serve in the House. The primary wins by Ocasio-Cortez and Pressley, followed by several other female and more liberal candidates across the country, showed that the Democratic Party would be pulled to the left with their new majority. Like Brat's defeat of Cantor in 2010, the nomination of more ideologically liberal Democrats provided signs that primary voters can be more concerned about the representation of activist attitudes within their districts than the power and seniority of their representatives in Washington, DC.

MIXED RESULTS FOR INCUMBENTS

Though five Republican incumbents also lost in primaries, and reelection rates were lower than average, sitting office holders still fared well. U.S. House incumbents won at a rate of 91 percent in the general election—substantial, but still the lowest House reelection rate since the 2010 midterm when 85 percent of incumbents won.⁴ The 2016 reelection rate of 97 percent and 2014 midterm reelection rate of 95 percent are more in line with the norm so far in the twenty-first century. Two House members and Trump allies, Chris Collins (R-NY) and Duncan D. Hunter (R-CA), won reelection while under indictment, Collins for insider trading and Hunter for abuse of campaign finance laws.

In the Senate, the incumbency reelection rate was 84 percent in 2018, the same as in 2010. This compares to a 93 percent Senate incumbent reelection rate in 2016 and an 82 percent rate in 2014. Senate reelection rates are typically lower than those in the House because these competitive, highly coveted Senate seats draw tougher challengers, more resources, and play out in more diverse and less predictable jurisdictions. The five states where Senate incumbents lost were Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Nevada, and North Dakota. Four were Democrats running in states won by Trump in 2016 while, in Nevada, the Republican candidate lost in a state won by Clinton.

Of course, the incumbent reelection rate does not reflect the number of retirements or members running for different offices. Beyond Speaker Ryan, an unusually high number of Republicans—many of them moderates—either retired or resigned. There were also some high profile Democrats who were forced to resign. Among them were Representative John Conyers Jr. (D-MI), who faced ethics charges and health issues, and Senator Al Franken (D-MN), who resigned under pressure from both Democrats and Republicans after a photo emerged of him on a USO tour posing as if he were fondling the breasts of a female colleague and other allegations of inappropriate behavior. Senators Bob Corker (R-TN) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ) announced they were retiring because of their disgust with Washington politics and became openly critical of President Trump in their public comments in their waning months in office.

Thad Cochran (R-MS), elected to the Senate seven times since 1978, resigned for health reasons. This led to a special election in Mississippi and the selection of Cindy Hyde-Smith as the first female senator from that southern state. John McCain (R-AZ), elected six times to the upper chamber and the 2008 Republican nominee for president, died from a

brain tumor—but not before returning to the Senate to cast the deciding vote against the full repeal of the Affordable Care Act. McCain gave a speech and then famously gave a thumbs-down as he voted against the repeal of Obamacare, defeating the eight-year dream of Republicans and campaign promises of many of them—also to the disgust of President Trump who had campaigned on ending the law and who continued to disparage McCain long after his death.

There were 25 Republican House members elected in districts that Clinton won in 2016. Eight of those incumbent Republicans decided not to seek reelection. Democrats won 22 of the 25 districts won by Clinton. Only three Republicans in those districts were reelected: John Katko (NY-24), Brian Fitzpatrick (PA-1), and Will Hurd (TX-23).⁵

Republican Dave Reichert (R-WA) had won in 2004 and 2008 in a district carried by Democratic presidential candidates John Kerry and Barack Obama, and again won reelection in 2012 and 2016 as his district was carried by Obama and Clinton. He retired rather than face a tough race given his lack of support for the president and a district electorate that was trending Democratic. Though he favored repealing the Affordable Care Act, Reichert was one of 20 Republicans to vote against the American Health Care Act, sometimes called Trumpcare. That vote, along with representing a suburban district, helped to drive this representative off the road to reelection.⁶

Despite the discussion of a blue wave by much of the media, President Trump and Republicans did not do too poorly compared to historical standard for midterms. The 40 lost House seats were only 12 more than the average midterm loss of 28 House seats for a president's party for the period of 1978–2018. Republicans gained a net of two seats in the U.S. Senate in 2018, while the average is a loss of two to three seats. In this respect, the midterm elections were a bit anomalous in terms of their outcomes, which are usually more damaging to the president's party (Table 1.1).

One of the Republican Senate gains was in Florida, where Governor Rick Scott defeated incumbent Senator Bill Nelson after a statutorily mandated recount. Republicans also flipped Indiana, Missouri, and North Dakota, while Democrats picked up seats in Arizona and Nevada.

HIGHER VOTER TURNOUT

One clear takeaway is that civic participation was high for both candidates and voters in 2018. There was record primary election participation across the country with more than 46 million people casting midterm ballots.

Table 1.1 Congressional results for president's party in first-term midterm election, 1978–2018

<i>Year</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>House result</i>	<i>Senate result</i>
1978	Jimmy Carter	Democrat	–15	–2
1982	Ronald Reagan	Republican	–26	0
1990	George H.W. Bush	Republican	–8	–1
1994	Bill Clinton	Democrat	–54	–9
2002	George W. Bush	Republican	+8	+1
2010	Barack Obama	Democrat	–63	–9
2018	Donald Trump	Republican	–40	+2
<i>Average</i>		<i>(4 R, 3 D)</i>	–28	–2.5

Although primary turnout was still just 20 percent nationally, that was higher than the 14 percent in 2014 and 18 percent in 2010.⁷ It was also the first time in more than a decade when voters cast more ballots for Democratic than Republican candidates in primaries. There were increases in voting on both sides, but a more dramatic spike in Democratic support. This was due to the high level of energy and interest, especially among liberal and suburban women. Part of the increase in voter turnout was also driven by more primary races in 2018, with 471 contested House primaries, (274 Democratic and 152 Republican), a dramatic increase from the 152 contested Democratic House primaries in 2014.⁸

Turnout also increased in the general election. Estimates are that more than 47 percent of the eligible population voted, with about 110 million Americans casting a ballot in the 2018 midterms. The midterm turnout was the highest since the 49 percent rate achieved in 1966 and higher than the 37 percent in 2014 and 41 percent in 2010.⁹ Many groups and organizations mobilized and engaged in electioneering activities in 2018. Pop star Taylor Swift posted on Instagram her views about the Senate candidates in her home state of Tennessee; there was a significant spike in voter registrations in the days immediately following the post, although Swift's preferred candidate lost.¹⁰ Billionaire Tom Steyer's group, NextGen America, was also active in voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts in a number of contested regions. Several analyses showed that more Democrats voted than Republicans but that should not be a complete surprise, given that people more often vote against the president's party in midterm elections.

The 2018 congressional campaigns also witnessed the most money raised ever for a midterm election. Record amounts of money were raised

and spent for and against candidates and for and against President Trump and his policy positions. It was done through individual contributions, political party support, and outside groups that are not subject to individual limits on political activities. This increase in candidate and outside campaign spending, along with the strong emotions about President Trump and his rhetoric and policies across the country, led to uneven and sometimes uncharted roads for political parties and their nominees.

THE ROAD AHEAD

This book examines the changes in Congress as a result of the 2018 elections and provides case studies of key campaigns from across the country in four sections. The first section, Congress in Transition, focuses on evolving changes in American politics. The remarkable increase in female and minority candidacy and success is the topic of Chap. 2. While the diversification of congressional membership has reached historical levels, there are warning signs associated with the partisan nature of that diversification. Chapter 3 provides an examination of the use of Twitter by candidates for Congress. The authors test the roles that partisanship, gender, and incumbency play in shaping Twitter habits. An analysis of the battles being waged within and between the political parties is provided in Chap. 4. The partisanship of the current era increasingly appears out of sync with historical patterns in American politics. Chapter 5 examines the effect of President Trump's relationship to the success of House Republican incumbents. The President's rhetoric about the importance of his support aside, it appears that his "embrace" was not always necessary or helpful to his fellow partisans.

The second section provides case studies on several House of Representatives races, and section three contains cases examining key Senate elections. Our authors discuss ten House races in six chapters. California's 48th Congressional District race is profiled in Chap. 6. This southern California district was reliably "Reagan Republican" and represented by Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) for decades, but was flipped by the Democrats in 2018 along with six other California districts. Chapter 7 examines races in Florida's 26th and 27th Districts, two of the 25 districts that elected a Republican representative in 2016 while being carried by Hillary Clinton. Both were targeted for takeover by Democrats from the outset of the campaign.

Chapter 8 provides analysis on a Republican held seat that Democrats flipped due to a retirement and anti-Trump backlash in southeastern Michigan's District 11. By contrast, Chap. 9 looks at two of just three House districts that went from Democrat to Republican hands in 2016: Minnesota's 1st and 8th Districts. Chapter 10 examines a high-water mark for the Democratic wave in New York, the flipping of the 19th and 22nd Districts after lengthy representation by Republicans.

Chapter 11 profiles the rise of Conor Lamb, a conservative Democrat who won a special election in western Pennsylvania and then defeated Keith Rothfus (R-PA) in the only incumbent versus incumbent matchup nationally. The matchup was prompted by a mid-decade court-ordered redistricting plan that consolidated parts of their districts.

The third section contains case studies on seven Senate campaigns across the country. Chapter 12 details the "right turn" taken by North Dakota voters. They sent Republican Kevin Cramer to the Senate and ousted incumbent Democrat Heidi Heitkamp. In Chap. 13, the authors provide an overview of the tri-state region of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Each state had a Democratic incumbent senator and each state was won by Donald Trump in 2016. Each incumbent held on to his seat, but for different reasons. Chapter 14 examines the campaign to replace retiring Republican Sen. Bob Corker. Archconservative Republican "congressman," Rep. Marsha Blackburn defeated former Democratic Governor Phil Bredesen in that race to become that state's first female senator. The meteoric rise of Beto O'Rourke, a Democratic representative, and his challenge to another archconservative incumbent Ted Cruz is considered in Chap. 15.

The fourth section provides an assessment of the 2018 midterm elections. The concluding chapter examines the themes and lessons learned from the case studies and research about the campaigns. In addition to discussing major issues and fundraising patterns that animated the campaign, the chapter anticipates the prospects for cooperation and policy-making by the 116th Congress and looks forward to the probable dynamics of the 2020 election. While some anticipated that the 2018 midterm election would provide definitive answers about the direction of American politics in the Trump era, its results have proven to be more a way station than destination. For better or worse, the roads to Congress and toward a new American political future continue to be beyond the horizon.

NOTES

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CHAPTER 2

Toward a More Inclusive Union? Examining the Increased Diversity of Candidates and Members of Congress

Walter Clark Wilson and Marcia L. Godwin

The 2018 elections were historic for producing the most diverse congressional delegation in history. Record numbers of women and nonwhite candidates ran and won, moving both houses of Congress toward greater descriptive representation of the American population. Although increasingly diverse, Congress remains a relatively elite institution. The pathways that lead to greater diversity also reflect a growing divergence in the roads Democrats and Republicans take to Congress. The increasingly representative institution thus constitutes a major democratic achievement, but one that stands alongside a troubling and perhaps deepening partisan divide.

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One of the more remarkable aspects of the 2018 midterm elections is that, even in elections leading up to the 116th Congress, there were a number of “firsts” among those elected to office. The first two Muslim women, Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN), were elected to the House of Representatives. The first two Native American women, Sharice Davids (D-KS) and Deb Haaland (D-NM), were also elected. Davids is also the first lesbian Native American representative. There were several other firsts for individual states. One of the most startling was that Texas, with 36 congressional districts and the second largest Hispanic/Latino population in the country, elected its first Latinas, Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia, to Congress.¹ Other firsts were more amusing than substantive, such as the election of two Katies, when Southern California Democrats Katie Hill and Katie Porter each defeated Republican incumbents.²

We examine different dimensions of diversity and representation in this chapter. We then present an original analysis of candidacy and success in the 2018 election, focusing on women and persons of color. The analysis of female candidacies includes primary election candidates, which continues to be an understudied area of scholarship. We also address characteristics like religious affiliation and sexual orientation, which appear to be of decreasing importance to voters. On the other hand, the continued rise in partisan polarization appears to be driving a substantial and increasing demographic divergence between the parties—with Republicans trailing Democrats in gender and racial/ethnic diversity. We conclude with a discussion about whether the 2018 election results are consistent with established electoral and societal trends or whether the outcomes have added significance for our democracy.

Congress, like many American institutions, is often characterized as being dominated by socioeconomic elites. C. Wright Mills’s seminal 1956 book, *The Power Elite*, popularized this view. Mills categorized Congress as part of the “political directorate” with relatively moderate power compared to what Mills saw as the more powerful executive branch.³ Mills identified the Congress of the 1950s as consisting disproportionately of Protestants, lawyers, well-educated professionals, and veterans.⁴ Thomas Dye’s long-running series, *Who’s Running America*, has provided updates on the continued dominance of elites in congressional leadership positions.⁵ Richard Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff have provided much more detailed examinations of the characteristics of elites in their *Diversity in the Power Elite* series, questioning whether emerging leaders come from more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds than traditional

white males.⁶ Viewed from this perspective, increased *demographic* diversification may mask underlying *socioeconomic* divisions that continue to make Congress an elite institution—one that falls short of truly representing the diverse American public.

Other scholars approach diversity from the perspective of progress made by traditionally underrepresented groups to gain elected office and influence. Congress itself aggregates profile information on each two-year session and archives individual biographical directories. The Congressional Research Service notes that much of its information relies upon self-reporting and outside sources, such as *CQ Member Profiles* and research from the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life.⁷ Scholars must conduct original research in order to examine such topics as candidate pipelines, legislative style, and policymaking. In addition, diversity research can be fragmented; many studies focus just on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Fortunately, studies on the intersectionality of characteristics are becoming more prevalent. In general, studies cumulatively show that increased diversity is important for building public trust and legitimacy through symbolic representation *and* in the agenda setting and negotiation stages of policymaking when there are distinct group interests.⁸

CONGRESS: STILL A POWER ELITE?

Wealth

Wealth and income ought to be easy measures for gauging whether members of Congress are part of a socioeconomic elite. Yet, members are required to report their holdings only in broad dollar ranges and are allowed to omit residences. Nevertheless, *CQ's Roll Call* compiles a list of the wealthiest members; Congress does not include this characteristic in its own summary profiles. About 8 percent of members in the 115th Congress (2017–2018) were not just upper class, but part of the top 1 percent. More troubling, wealthy members grew their net wealth 20 percent from 2015 to 2017, double stock market gains during the same period, thereby widening their gap with the population as a whole.⁹

There is a stratification of members by wealth. The top tier, consisting of close to 10 percent of the membership or 50 members, are the super-rich—worth over \$10 million. The rise of new industries and the high-tech economy has meant that fewer members come from so-called old