

# Representing the People: Diversity and Elections

*Compelling Question: In what ways does a diverse representation of elected officials impact society?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45–60 Minutes	Reading: R1, R9 Writing: W2, W3, W6 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL3 Language: L4, L6
MS	8-12		



## Web Related Connections

### Lessons

- [Debate Watching Teaching Guide](#)
- [Let's Talk about the Presidential Election](#)
- [Shirley Chisholm: Unbought, Unbossed and Unforgotten](#)

### Other Resources

- [9 Ways to Teach about the Election: A Social Justice Approach](#)
- [Teaching about Elections](#)
- [The Election is Over... Now What?](#)

## Key Words

activists  
barriers  
campaign  
candidate  
chaos  
electability  
galvanize  
inclusive  
midterm election  
shoehorned  
trailblazing  
vulnerability

## LESSON OVERVIEW

As our nation becomes more diverse in a variety of ways, our national politics is starting to catch up to those demographics. The 2018 midterm elections broke records and barriers in terms of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other aspects of identity. The incoming House of Representatives (116th Congress) is the most diverse class in history. Along the same lines, the slate of 2020 Presidential hopefuls in the Democratic party included more diversity than we have seen previously, including women, people of color and gay candidates. In the 2020 election, Kamala Harris was elected the first woman, first Black woman and first South Asian woman as Vice President of the U.S.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the current landscape of elected officials and Presidential hopefuls, explore what this means in terms of diversity and representation and research one elected official in depth.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the 2018 midterm election that broke records and barriers regarding diversity.
- Students will reflect on their own points of view regarding diversity and political representation.
- Students will gain in depth knowledge about one elected official by engaging in a research project.

## MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Create five signs with the following words: (1) STRONGLY AGREE, (2) STRONGLY DISAGREE, (3) AGREE, (4) IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE and (5) DISAGREE. Post the signs prior to conducting this lesson as instructed in step 1 of the “Here I Stand Activity.”
- “Midterm elections add roster of diversity to Congress, governorships” (one copy for half the class)
- “Diversity of Democratic presidential field symbolic of vision for 2020” (one copy for half the class)

## PROCEDURES



### Information Sharing

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *Have you observed anything lately about the diversity of elected officials? Do you notice anything different about the 2020 Presidential candidates?*
2. Share some or all of the following background information:
  - The 2018 midterm elections broke records and barriers in terms of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other aspects of identity. The incoming House of Representatives (116th Congress) is the most diverse class in history. A few examples include: (1) for the first time, two Native American women were elected to Congress, (2) several states have their first women Senators and black female members of Congress, (3) for the first time, two Muslim women were elected to Congress, (4) the first bisexual woman was elected Senator, (5) overall, the percentage of women in Congress is the highest in U.S. history, and (6) in the current Congress, at least 13% of lawmakers are immigrants or children of immigrants.
  - As of April 2019, in the nation's 100 largest cities, **ten women of color** current serve as Mayors. Seven are African-American, two are Asian Pacific-Islander and one is Latina.”
  - For the 2020 Presidential election on the Democratic side, there is greater candidate diversity than we have seen previously. Five women have already announced their candidacy. (In 2016 Hillary Clinton was the first female candidate ever at the top of a major party ticket; several, but not many, other women have run over the years including Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to Congress.) Also noteworthy are that four candidates of color have announced so far. In addition, the first openly gay candidate announced his intention to run.
  - During the 2016 Presidential election, the Republican party candidates included three candidates of color, which was the most diverse field ever for Republican candidates.
  - In the 2020 election, Kamala Harris was elected the first woman, first Black woman and first South Asian woman as Vice President of the U.S. Nine LGBTQ candidates won seats in Congress. Two of them, Ritchie Torres and Mondaire Jones, are the first openly gay Black men to win election to Congress. The 117th Congress will have a record number of Native American women lawmakers after voters elected three to the House of Representatives. They are Democrats Deb Haaland (New Mexico) and Sharice Davids (Kansas), who were both re-elected, and Republican Yvette Herrell (New Mexico) who won a Congressional seat in 2020.
3. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking:
  - Was any of this information a surprise to you? If so, what?
  - How do you feel knowing this information?
  - What do you think the impact is of having more diverse elected officials in our country?

### Here I Stand Activity

1. Prior to conducting this lesson, select a large open space on a wall to indicate the position of an imaginary line. At the farthest left point post the STRONGLY AGREE sign and at the farthest right point post the STRONGLY DISAGREE sign. In between, post the AGREE, IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, AND DISAGREE signs along the continuum.
2. Explain to students that they are going to do an activity where they listen to some statements related to diversity and political representation and will then consider to what extent they agree or disagree with each statement. Students will indicate their opinion about each statement by positioning themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon how strongly they agree or disagree with each of the statements.
3. Read some or all of the statements below—one at a time—requesting that students take a few minutes to decide where they stand in the continuum and have them walk silently to that place and observe where others choose to stand. Explain that these statements are all about people's opinions on diversity and political representation.

Following each statement, after everyone has chosen their spot, have students spend 2–3 minutes talking with the other students who chose to stand in the same area (based on their opinions).

- I look forward to being able to vote in elections.
  - The identity of elected officials doesn't matter to me; I vote solely on their positions and political records.
  - I think candidates who are members of certain identity groups (e.g., people of color, LGBTQ people, etc.) are inclined to advocate more on issues important to that identity group.
  - I don't think the only elected officials who can represent me and my issues are those who share aspects of my identity.
  - A more diverse representation of elected officials better represents the country.
  - Having people in office who share my identity group makes me feel good about myself.
  - Because we live in a multicultural and diverse country, our elected officials should represent that diversity.
4. After the activity, lead a whole group discussion using the following questions:
- How did you make the decision about where to stand?
  - Were some statements easier for you to decide where to stand and some more difficult? How so?
  - Did you ever decide to change your position when you saw you did not agree with a majority of the group, or after hearing others' points of view?
  - Did this activity cause you to change your point of view about something or make you feel more strongly about your position? Please explain.
  - Did you notice any patterns in how the class as a whole responded to the statements? Please explain
  - What did you learn about people's points of view about diversity and political representation?

### Reading Activity

1. Have students count off by 2s (1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2...) and give a copy of Article #1 to all the #1s and a copy of Article #2 to all the #2s. Give students 10–15 minutes to read the article silently. Allow students to take notes or highlight items they want to remember.
  - Article #1: "[Midterm elections add roster of diversity to Congress, governorships](#)"
  - Article #2: "[Diversity of Democratic presidential field symbolic of vision for 2020](#)"

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**NOTE:** The two articles are from [Newsela](#), which publishes high-interest news articles daily at different reading levels. Both of the articles above are at a 9th grade reading level. They are also available at grades 3, 5, 7 and 12th grade levels. For access to the other grade leveled articles you can register for free.
2. After reading the articles, have students pair up; each pair should include a student who read Article #1 and a student who read Article #2. In their pairs, have students share with their partner what they learned and any other reflections they had while reading their article.
3. Engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
  - What does "historical significance" mean in the context of the 2018 midterms and the 2020 Presidential election?
  - Why do you think this shift in diversity is taking place?
  - What impact do you think the increased diversity will have on our country?
  - To what extent do you think it's important to have our elected officials represent the diversity of our country?

- In what ways is it helpful to have an elected official who represents aspects of your identity? In what ways is it not helpful?
- Do elected officials have to share aspects of your identity in order to represent you well?
- How can we achieve greater diversity and especially for groups that are under-represented?



### Research Activity: Politician Profiles

1. Explain to students that now they are going to engage in a research project to explore one elected official or candidate in depth. First, brainstorm—based on the readings and prior knowledge—a list of possible politicians whose identity represents an aspect of diversity. Then have students select one elected official and/or candidate (i.e., a member of Congress, a local elected official, a 2020 Presidential candidate or local candidates). They should conduct research using online information, books, social media, etc. Their research should include responses to most of the questions below and anything else that interests them.
  - When and where were they born?
  - Where did they grow up?
  - What experiences shaped their thinking and who they are today?
  - What have been their major achievements and/or accomplishments to date?
  - What are some of their political positions and how have they worked to enact them?
  - What are their hobbies and other interests?
  - How have aspects of their identity and/or diversity shaped who they are, or not?
  - What are some quotes that reflect their thinking and actions?
  - How will their identity shape their advocacy?
2. Give students several days or weeks to complete their research and provide them with several options to present what they learned, including the following:
  - Essay
  - Portrait of the person with extended caption
  - Timeline of their life
  - Journal entries (at least five) that illustrate important moments in their life
  - Picture book for children about the person
3. Have students share their projects with the rest of the class and consider ways to share with the rest of the school and/or community using technology.

### Closing

Have students do a go-round and share aloud who they chose to focus on for their research project and why.

### ADDITIONAL READING

- [“10 demographic trends shaping the U.S. and the world in 2017”](#) (Pew Research Center, April 27, 2017)
- [“2020 presidential rollouts diverse as the candidates”](#) (NBC News, February 4, 2019)
- [“A record number of women will be serving in the new Congress”](#) (Pew Research Center, December 18, 2018)
- [“Congress's incoming class is younger, bluer, and more diverse than ever”](#) (Politico, January 7, 2019)

- “In 116th Congress, at least 13% of lawmakers are immigrants or the children of immigrants” (Pew Research Center, January 24, 2019)
- This graphic shows how much more diverse the House of Representatives is getting (Business Insider, January 12, 2019)
- “Who will run in 2020? The full list of Democrats vying to take on Trump” (*The Guardian*, January 18, 2019)

## Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Writing
W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
W3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
W6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL3: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.



## Midterm Elections Add Roster of Diversity to Congress, Governorships

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.09.18  
 Reprinted with permission from <https://newsela.com/read/midterms-historic-firsts/id/47351/>.

Word Count **644**  
 Level **1230L**



These newly elected members of Congress all made history. (Top, from left) Ilhan Omar, Deb Haaland and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez; (bottom from left) Veronica Escobar, Ayanna Pressley and Sharice Davids. Photos from AP

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The United States elected a new Congress on November 6. When the new lawmakers take office in January, it will be the most diverse Congress ever, featuring lawmakers from many different backgrounds.

For the first time, a pair of Native American congresswomen are headed to the House of Representatives in addition to two Muslim congresswomen.

Massachusetts and Connecticut will also send black women to Congress as firsts for their states, while Arizona and Tennessee are getting their first female senators.

### Midterms Breaking Records

The high-profile midterm election cycle produced a record number of women contenders and candidates of color, this means a number of winners will take office as trailblazers. Kimberly Peeler-Allen is a leader of Higher Heights for America, a national organization focused on encouraging black women to vote and electing black women as

candidates. The election victories for women and people of color are a good sign for future election cycles, Peeler-Allen said.

"This is going to be a long process to get us to a point of proportionate representation, but tonight is a giant step forward for what leadership can and will eventually look like in this country," Peeler-Allen said. She added that even women of color who were unsuccessful will inspire a new group of candidates, similar to the white women encouraged to run after Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential election loss.

Some of the election's black female pioneers, like Illinois nurse and Democrat Lauren Underwood, and Connecticut teacher and Democrat Jahana Hayes, were first-time candidates. Others, like Massachusetts' Ayanna Pressley, were political veterans. Most were considered long shots.

Several will represent districts that are majority white and that have been historically conservative. These candidates' victories are a rejection of common ideas about who is electable and who is not. It also goes against a common practice in which electoral districts are shaped so that elected officials of color are assigned to represent minority communities.

Pressley, a Democrat and Boston city councilwoman, will represent Massachusetts' 7th Congressional District in the next Congress. Pressley stunned the political establishment in September, defeating a 10-term incumbent in the Democratic primary, and ran unopposed in the general election.

"None of us ran to make history," Pressley told supporters in her acceptance speech on November 6. "We ran to make change. However, the historical significance of this evening is not lost on me. The significance of history is not lost on me."

### Since Shirley Chisholm

Half a century ago, New York's Shirley Chisholm was elected the first black woman in Congress. Several of the black women elected on November 6 have said their campaigns were inspired by her example.

Also in the House, Democrats Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan will be the first Muslim women to serve in Congress. New Mexico Democrat Deb Haaland and Kansas Democrat Sharice Davids were elected the first two Native American women to serve in Congress.

Democrat Mike Espy will face Mississippi Republican Representative Cindy Hyde-Smith in a December runoff election. Espy could become the state's first black senator since the Reconstruction era of the 1860s and 1870s.

Regardless of who wins in Arizona's competitive Senate race, the state will elect either Republican Martha McSally or Democrat Kyrsten Sinema as the state's first woman to serve in the Senate. Also in the Senate, Republican Marsha Blackburn will become Tennessee's first woman senator.

Georgia candidate Stacey Abrams, a Democrat, was in a fierce battle to become America's first black woman governor, while Democrat Andrew Gillum narrowly lost his bid to become the first black governor of Florida. Abrams addressed supporters early Wednesday, saying votes were still being counted. The race remained too close to call.

Meanwhile, Idaho gubernatorial candidate Paulette Jordan lost her race to become the country's first Native American governor.

In Colorado, Jared Polis will be the country's first openly gay man elected governor.

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Reprinted with permission from "Midterm Elections Add Roster of Diversity to Congress," Newsela, November 9, 2018, <https://newsela.com/read/midterms-historic-firsts/id/47351/>.





## Diversity of Democratic Presidential Field Symbolic of Vision for 2020

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.01.19

Reprinted with permission from <https://newsela.com/read/2020-democratic-candidates/id/49126/>.

Word Count **983**

Level **1220L**



Democratic senators and presidential hopefuls Kamala Harris (left) and Kirsten Gillibrand are pictured on the lawn of the Capitol in Washington, D.C., October 4, 2018. Photo by: Andrew Lichtenstein/Corbis via Getty Images

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The early days of the Democratic primary campaign are highlighting the party's members from many different backgrounds.

The Democrats are seeking a nominee who can build enough support to take on President Donald Trump in 2020. The primary elections help a political party narrow down several candidates to one nominee for president.

### Riding The Blue Wave Of 2018

Of the more than half dozen Democrats who have either moved toward a campaign or declared their candidacy, four are women: Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Senator Kamala Harris of California, Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Representative Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii. Harris is also African-American. A member of President Barack Obama's Cabinet, Julian Castro, who is Latino, has also joined the race.

On January 23, Democrat Pete Buttigieg, the 37-year-old mayor of South Bend, Indiana, jumped into the campaign. If he wins the Democratic nomination, he'd be the first openly gay presidential nominee from a major political party. He'd also be the youngest person to ever become president if he wins the general election.

The field taking shape follows a successful midterm election in which Democrats elected a class of politicians to Congress with more women and people of color than in the past. It's a pattern they'd like to repeat on the presidential scale.

Neera Tanden is president of the liberal Center for American Progress Action Fund. She hailed the Democrats' trailblazing candidates for reflecting that "the central opposition to Trump is around a vision of the country that's inclusive of all Americans."

"A lot of different people are going to see that they can be part of the Democratic Party" thanks to a field that showcases women, candidates of color, and the first potential LGBT nominee, Tanden said. She likened it to the high number of voters who engaged in the 2008 Democratic primary. That year featured a possible female nominee, Hillary Clinton, and the man who would become the first black president, Obama.

### Candidates Outline Their 2020 Platforms

The array of backgrounds was on display when Buttigieg spoke in personal terms about his marriage.

"The most important thing in my life — my marriage to Chasten — is something that exists by the grace of a single vote on the U.S. Supreme Court," Buttigieg told reporters. The Supreme Court voted to uphold same-sex marriages in 2015.

Gillibrand has put her identity as a mother at the core of her campaign. Harris launched her campaign on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, a nod to her bid to become the first black woman elected president.

A number of high-profile candidates remained on the sidelines, including two who would further bolster the diversity of the 2020 field. This included Senators Cory Booker of New Jersey, who is black, and Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota. Booker joined the presidential fray by announcing his candidacy February 1. He recently visited the important early voting state of South Carolina for public events honoring King and private meetings with local activists.

Klobuchar was set to speak at the University of Pennsylvania soon about her work on the Senate Judiciary Committee, where Booker and Harris are also members. The affable Midwesterner recently said her family "is on board" if she opts to run in 2020 but hasn't officially announced a decision.

Klobuchar would be the fifth major female candidate in the Democratic primary. However, female candidates shouldn't be shoehorned into a "narrative" dominated by the fact they are women, said Virginia Kase, CEO of the League of Women Voters.

Kase wants people to support them based on the policies they champion. In a recent interview, she said "every year is the year of the woman — the reality is that we've always been major contributors" in the electoral process.

Rashad Robinson, executive director of the civil rights-focused group Color of Change, said the wide cultural range of people in the Democratic field is "a great thing and we should celebrate it." He added, "Our work is always about changing the rules — changing the rules of who can run and who can rule and who can lead."

In addition to those "unwritten rules," Robinson pointed to the urgency of changing the "written rules" of American life. He said having candidates from different cultures "does not mean structures and policies and practices that have held so many back will change" overnight.

### Sanders, Biden Still On The Sidelines

Meanwhile, three white male candidates could scramble the race. Former Vice President Joe Biden, Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and former Texas Representative Beto O'Rourke are still weighing their presidential

plans. Biden recently addressed a key vulnerability in his potential candidacy by publicly expressing regret about his support for a 1994 crime law that's had particularly harsh effects on African-American communities. Meanwhile, Sanders built his own new connections to black voters during a trip to South Carolina.

Biden's allies have been sending supporters a memo that could serve as a rationale for a campaign. The memo hails Biden's long track record in politics and argues that, at a time of "political chaos" during Trump's administration, he'd offer "trustworthy, compassionate leadership."

O'Rourke continues to evaluate his own future amid political experts' criticism about recent blog posts. The 46-year-old Texan acknowledged he's been "in and out of a funk" following his departure from Congress. He narrowly lost a high-profile Senate race in November.

### Republicans Stand By Their Man

As the Democratic field is poised to include people of many backgrounds, Republicans say they have their candidate. Trump will run for re-election.

"The American people are better off now than they were two years ago because of President Trump's policies," said Republican National Committee spokeswoman Blair Ellis. She pointed to the success of the economy, including the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures the goods and services produced.

"GDP and wages are up, unemployment has hit record lows, and industries across this country are thriving," she said.

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Reprinted with permission from "Diversity of Democratic Presidential Field Symbolic of Vision for 2020," Newsela, February 1, 2019, <https://newsela.com/read/2020-democratic-candidates/id/49126/>.

