

How to Elect More Working-Class Americans and Why It Matters

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do you define the working class?

There is no universal agreed-upon definition of the working class. With three exceptions, we define working-class jobs as those belonging to categories 400–900 in the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO): clerical support workers, service and sales workers, craft and related trades workers, skilled farm workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers, and workers in elementary occupations. ISCO provides detailed lists of specific jobs within each category. We make three exceptions: we do not count as working class 1) police officers, because of their formal education, specialized training, and stable salaried positions; 2) farm owners and farm managers, because those jobs entail running commercial enterprises, more like business owners and managers; and 3) small business owners in working-class trades, because owning a business usually requires significant training and capital.

What about other definitions of the working class based on characteristics like income, education, wealth, or parents' social class?

Research on politicians has found that their past occupations are stronger predictors of their behavior and the kinds of policies they support than traits like income, education, wealth, or the economic statuses of their parents.

Are working-class politicians disproportionately male or white?

No. Women and people of color are slightly overrepresented in working-class jobs and among politicians from working-class jobs.

Are working-class people less qualified to be politicians?

No. Other than meeting basic requirements, such as minimum age and compliance with election filing rules, there is no accepted standard that defines what makes someone qualified to hold office. Studies that have examined other qualifications have found no meaningful differences between people in working-class jobs and others.

Is a college degree required to be a politician?

No. There is no formal requirement that political candidates have a college degree. Research shows that politicians with and without college degrees tend to perform similarly in office.

Is the shortage of officeholders from working-class jobs caused by the decline of unions, the rising cost of elections, party polarization, or some other recent development?

No. Although broad trends like these may add additional obstacles that discourage working-class people from holding office, the near-absence of politicians from working-class jobs in the United States predates all of these phenomena.



For more information, please see *How To Elect More Working-Class Americans and Why It Matters*.