



SSN Forum on White-Collar Government

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Does it matter that elites dominate Congress and other U.S. legislatures? Nicholas Carnes says yes, and five SSNers discuss his new book. Tom Mann, Jeff Stonecash, Myra Marx Ferree, Michael Javen Fortner, and Paul Pierson probe electoral counter-pressures and highlight the effects of elite beliefs, career aspirations, and ties to Wall Street.

Our forum focuses on the [newly-published](#) *White-Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policy Making* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Author [Nicholas Carnes](#) is Assistant Professor of Public Policy at the Sanford School, Duke University, and he serves as the Co-Director of the Research Triangle SSN chapter. His main findings are encapsulated in an [SSN brief on "How Government by the Privileged Distorts Economic Policy."](#)

Forum contributors tackle head on the arguments and evidence presented in *White-Collar Government* – and point to additional forces that amplify or modify the upward class skew of U.S. governance. To read all five SSN Scholars' contributions on a single page, [click here](#).

[**A Case for Broadening the Class Origins of Legislators**](#)

Thomas E. Mann, Brookings Institution

"Democratic team play to push back on Republican efforts that benefit the wealthy can... do more to improve the representation of blue-collar values and need than sprinkling Congress with a few more representatives from working class backgrounds."

[**Districts and Voter Mobilization Matter More**](#)

Jeffrey M. Stonecash, Maxwell School, Syracuse University

"U.S. politics may not be as liberal or as generous toward the less affluent as Carnes might wish. But there is plenty of evidence that elected representatives rely on much more than their own personal job experiences to make decisions about policies to push and support."

[**The Class Background of Legislators Counts, But It is Not the Basic Problem**](#)

Myra Marx Ferree, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"Representatives need to do more than just reflect or promote the views of constituents... The issues that politics deals with are not all economic, and even economic concerns bump up against nativist, sexist and anti-intellectual biases that are not infrequently mobilized for political advantage."

[**Whites, Blacks, and the Morality of the Privileged**](#)

Michael Javen Fortner, Rutgers University-Camden

"Analysts must probe not just occupational experiences, but also the moral understandings attached to privileged statuses and the impact – or perhaps increasing ineffectiveness – of societal institutions that can cultivate and reinforce ethical norms and social values."

Life Experiences and Public Possibilities

Paul Pierson, University of California, Berkeley

"Elected officials are surrounded at all times by immense wealth. They raise most of their money from the wealthy, and spend more and more of their time doing that. They hear much more frequently from those advocating for the wealthy... How can this lived experience not influence the way public officials behave?"