
Book Reviews

Walter Clark Wilson. *From Inclusion to Influence: Latino Representation in Congress and Latino Political Incorporation in America*, Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2017. 296 pp. (\$75.00 Hardcover).

With its title, *From Inclusion to Influence: Latino Representation in Congress and Latino Political Incorporation in America*, there's no doubt what this book is about – Latinos, Congress and the contours of the Latino voice in this institution. But because this work stems out of a year of the author's soaking and poking on the Hill, thanks to the American Political Science Association Congressional Fellowship, it is also a lovely ode to Dick Fenno and an interesting analysis of the institution of Congress 40 some odd years removed from Home Style.

The protagonist in the book is the Latino member of Congress, but with a strong supporting role by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC). The CHC is a collective of most Latino members of Congress and as such a prism through which to view the national Latino policy landscape. Throughout the book, Wilson weaves in vignettes based on the CHC's legislative work and advocacy. These vignettes provide a nice illustrative piece on the team nature of the sport of politics.

The driving question of the research is determining how ethnicity shapes representative action. Relatedly Wilson asks how Latino representatives matter. The latter question is more difficult to quantify and thus answer than the latter. Given the numerical minority of Latino members of Congress (and their near absence in party leadership), an easy default answer is that Latino members do not matter a whole heck of a lot. But because Wilson's emphasis on the question of how descriptive representation influences representative action beyond mere committee assignments or sponsoring of successful bills the reader's attention is shifted to a Home Style story arc.

The secondary question to how ethnicity shapes representative action is whether Latinos provide more substantive representation. The first part of the book spends a significant amount of time on considering descriptive versus substantive representation in a Hannah Pitkin infused discussion. Spoiler alert—Wilson finds the interests of Latinos within plurality or majority Latino districts are best served by co-ethnics. This is not surprising given the literature on the subject over the last two decades. However, throughout the book Wilson argues as if this were a highly contested finding.

Yes, descriptive representation compliments substantive representation (as he and others find). Where Wilson misses the boat is in considering the macro implications of descriptive representation, namely what happens to the general nature of our political environment when ultra-safe districts are drawn, either Republican or Democratic. The author does not discuss the hyper-partisan byproduct of ultra-safe districts, majority-minority districts included. The creation of highly homogenous partisan districts, which usually means majority-minority

districts, is an important question in and of itself which the author should have noted in his ledger of pros and cons of descriptive representation.

That bone to pick aside, Wilson does a very good job of considering the nature of “upstream” representational work—congressional speeches, constituency services, committee participation, and coalition building. Voting on roll call votes is the bare minimum job requirement of members of Congress. Where members earn their keep is in their constituent work and long-game political coalition building, here is where Wilson is at his best. Through a focus on upstream representation, the second part of the book teases out how Latinos as a constituency have gone from inclusion in our democratic system to exerting influence, via members of Congress, within the American political system.

The first analytical chapter zeroes in on the representative constituent relationship. Wilson relies on interviews, observational data and painstaking content analysis of member websites to test his hypotheses of whether co-ethnic representatives better amplify the needs of the community as well as providing more robust lines of communication with the district. The findings illustrate that Latino members of Congress provide a distinct Latino perspective through which they view the entirety of their role, “Latino representatives generally recognize a national Latino constituency and see many if not most issues from a Latino perspective” (126). In turn, this lens allows for what Fenno termed “soft” policy connections, where the representative can better cultivate relationships and support in the district. However, in terms of outreach and casework, less of a differential was found between co-ethnic and non co-ethnic representatives and their Latino districts.

The following chapter digs into agenda setting via bill sponsorship and committee hearings. Overall, Latino members of Congress do not sponsor as much legislation as their non-Latino colleagues however Latino representatives disproportionately sponsor Latino interest issue legislation. In the realm of committees (and subcommittees) Latino chairs were found to provide a more robust forum for the Latino perspective, “This occurred through their emphasis on Latino concerns in statements and questioning as well as in testimony...” (167). Wilson is upfront about the limitation of his committee analysis given the dearth of Latinos serving as chairs, but as he notes it is an important piece to the puzzle of understanding Latino influence within Congress.

In the aptly titled, “Speaking for Latinos,” chapter Wilson analyzes the content of floor speeches and “Dear Colleague” letters. The focus here is on how Latino representatives amplify Latino voices beyond that of their non-Latino congressional colleagues. This amplification serves the purpose of getting Latino concerns on the political radar (and keeping them there) which then ties into the process of coalition building to ultimately influence legislative decisions.

The final analytical chapter highlights the need for a long-game and collective action when it comes to Congressional politics. A series of mini-case studies of how the CHC played the role of advocate and defender illustrated how Latino influence is hard won (and also

sometimes lost). One example is how a big push by the CHC in the 110th Congress saw increased support for Hispanic Serving Institutions, a cause that had been previously stalled.

Wilson ends on the big picture notion of coalition building and collective action. But he also ties in the upstream representational work that allows Latino members to collectively keep moving the Latino policy ball forward. The take home message is that policy making, especially Latino relevant policy making, is not easy and it does not happen overnight. Within this tough landscape, Wilson walks through this process and answers his initial question of how Latino representatives shape representative action and forcefully posits that a Latino congressional voice matters for the quality of that action.

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