

Surrogate Champions for the Poor

The poor, like all constituent groups, need strong advocates in Congress. They need legislators who will devote their time to issues related to poverty, and who will advance legislation to address poverty-relevant issues. Without these legislative champions, it is unlikely that the interests of the poor will be raised on Capitol Hill. Without this initial recognition, it is unlikely that the House will pursue policies intended to help the poor. As Williams writes, “before government can act in a manner that is responsive to the interest of individual citizens, those interest must be articulated by a representative in a decision-making body such as a legislature” (1998, 24). Therefore, this chapter identifies and discusses these “champions for the poor.”

The previous three chapters reveal that some poverty-related legislation is introduced in the House, and that certain legislators are more likely to offer such legislation. However, these chapters also make clear that the representation of the poor in Congress is not straightforward. To the extent that it occurs, it does not follow the classical paths of collective or dyadic representation. Put differently, the champions of the poor are not the usual suspects. In this chapter, I examine an alternate pathway of representation – surrogate representation – wherein a legislator represents constituents beyond his own district. I establish the role surrogate representatives play in giving the poor a political voice, and show that surrogate representation is central to how the poor are represented in Congress.

This focus on surrogate champions shifts attention to the activity of legislators throughout their careers in the House, rather than at one moment in time. My examination of nearly 1,400 House members

uncovers a group of thirty-five consistent champions of the poor, nearly all of whom serve as surrogate representatives, and many of whom are women and African Americans. These “consistent champions” of the poor are the strongest advocates for the poor, and can be counted on to introduce multiple bills related to poverty on a regular basis. This reliability distinguishes them from legislators who never or only periodically offer poverty legislation, and makes them essential to the representation of the poor. A closer analysis of these legislators reveals four types of consistent champions: Old-School Democrats, Democratic Women, Indigo Republicans, and Urban Black Democrats. Later in the chapter, I identify the champions in each group and detail the types of poverty-related legislation they offer.

I then consider another type of advocate on poverty issues, the “occasional champions.” These legislators exhibit significant activity on such issues, but are not as reliably active as the consistent champions. Expanding the definition of champions uncovers many similarities between the two groups, and suggests that some of the occasional champions could become an even stronger voice for the poor. It also reveals that many Latino legislators are part-time advocates on poverty issues, which is noteworthy given their shortage among consistent champions and the high rates of poverty within the Latino population. Lastly, I consider the “missing champions,” those legislators who have much in common with the champions, but have chosen not to be active on poverty-related issues. Their prevalence tempers the findings about how well the poor are being represented, and highlights both the importance of surrogate champions and how much more could be done on behalf of the poor.

SURROGATE REPRESENTATION OF THE POOR

The sparse evidence of dyadic representation does not necessarily mean that the poor go unrepresented, but simply that they do not receive the type of representation normally afforded constituents. Instead, they receive what Mansbridge (1999, 2003) has called “surrogate representation.” This type of representation occurs when a legislator represents constituents who reside outside his own district. Mansbridge argues that surrogate representation is common in the US Congress because of the use of single-member plurality districts, which leave constituents with minority interests looking for representation from legislators beyond their district. An inherent feature of surrogate representation is that there is

no electoral connection between the representative and the represented. Put differently, surrogate representation is an informal, or “noninstitutional arrangement,” in which the represented cannot hold the legislator accountable via elections (Mansbridge 2003, 523).

The idea that a legislator may act on behalf of constituents beyond his geographic district is rooted in Burke’s notion of virtual representation. He describes this as occurring when “there is a communion of interest and sympathy in feelings and desires between those who act in the name of any description of people and the people in whose name they act, although the trustees are not actually chosen by them.”¹ For Burke, virtual representation is an important complement to direct representation because it allows the substantive representation of constituencies whose grievances are not reflected in legislative deliberations.² Saward similarly claims that the primary benefit of surrogate representation is the ability to “bring into the legislative arena interests and perspectives that are widely held, but, due to formal territorial representation, do not have the political voice that their numbers or significance merit” (2010, 22). Thus, surrogate representation can enhance a legislature’s ability to provide deliberative representation to all constituents. This normative standard of deliberation does not rely on the representativeness of outcomes, but instead requires that “the perspectives most relevant to a decision [to be] represented in key decisions” (Mansbridge 2003, 524). Thus, deliberative representation for the poor would mean that their interests are represented by surrogate legislators, and are part of the dialog when Congress considers legislation that directly affects them.³

Particularly relevant for the poor is Mansbridge’s discussion of “descriptive surrogate representation” (1999, 651). Here she argues that legislators who are descriptive representatives on account of shared identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender) with constituents in their district, are also likely to serve as surrogate representatives for members of that identity group beyond the district. For instance, African American members of Congress are descriptive representatives for their own black constituents, but also serve as descriptive surrogate representatives for African Americans across the country (Mansbridge 1999, 2003). She similarly

¹ Burke, as quoted in Pitkin 1967, 173.

² See also Williams 1998.

³ Mansbridge also establishes “an aggregative criterion” for surrogate representation, which is that it promotes proportional representation of interests in the chamber as a whole (see Mansbridge 2003, 524, as well as the discussion in Mansbridge 2011).

notes that female and LGBT members of Congress serve a dual role as descriptive and surrogate representatives for women and members of the LGBT community, respectively. These legislators' sense of responsibility as a surrogate representative is enhanced further by group consciousness or linked fate, which has been identified as a critical element of the representation of underrepresented groups such as African Americans (e.g., Dawson 1995; Fenno 2003; Gamble 2007; Hall 1996; Hall and Heflin 1994; Minta 2011; Swain 1993; Tate 2003; Whitby 1997), Latinos (e.g., Bratton 2006; Minta 2011; Rouse 2013; Sanchez 2006; Welch and Hibbing 1984), and women (e.g., Bratton and Haynie 1999; Carroll 2002; Hall 1996; Hawkesworth 2003; Reingold 1992; Swers 2002a; Thomas 1994).

The absence of working class and poor members of Congress (e.g., Carnes 2012, 2013; Grumbach 2015) means that the poor are exceedingly unlikely to have such descriptive representatives in Congress. Therefore, legislators who act on behalf of the poor beyond their districts will not be *descriptive* surrogate representatives, because they do not share the experiences of poverty. According to Mansbridge, this means that these surrogate representatives will not have that strong sense of responsibility to the poor that comes with shared identity or group consciousness. In the absence of descriptive surrogate representatives for the poor, anyone can be a surrogate for the poor, since it is based on what legislators do on poverty-relevant issues, not who they are.

I argue that descriptive representatives of other underrepresented groups are particularly likely to be surrogates for the poor because their issues overlap. When the poor have shared policy interests with other types of constituents, there can be positive spillover that produces strong surrogate representation for the poor as well. Additionally, legislators who are already descriptive representatives for another underrepresented group are familiar with the idea of representing constituents beyond their own district, and being a surrogate for poor individuals across the country may easily be incorporated into how they see their role as a representative.

For instance, African American legislators' beliefs about linked fate produces a strong sense of responsibility to represent black constituents, especially on issues of concern to the black community. Many of these "black issues" overlap with poverty issues, such as welfare, education, housing, social services, and job training (e.g., Gamble 2007; Haynie 2005; Minta 2011). As a result, I argue that African American legislators are more likely to be active on poverty-relevant issues as well, which results in black legislators functioning as surrogate representatives of

the poor. Similarly, female legislators are descriptive surrogate representatives for women, and there is important overlap between so-called “women’s issues” and the interests of the poor, including on issues related to education, families, and hunger (e.g., Carroll 2002; Norton 2002; Swers 1998, 2002a, 2002b; Thomas 1994). As a result, I also expect that female legislators are more likely to be surrogate representatives for the poor, because their representative relationship to the poor is strengthened by their role as descriptive surrogates for women.

DEFINING CONSISTENT CHAMPIONS OF THE POOR

How do we identify the champions of the poor? Legislative champions are those who do much of the work necessary to advance policy proposals, beginning with introducing the legislation (e.g., Hall 1996; Kingdon 1984; Krutz 2005; Volden and Wiseman 2014; Wawro 2000; see also Schiller 1995). Introducing legislation is an important step, both because it brings the issue to the attention of Congress and it is the official beginning of the legislative process. If no member takes the initiative to offer legislation on a given issue, Congress will not consider it. Legislative champions also bring a commitment to the issue that ensures that it will not fade from congressional view. They reliably introduce poverty-related legislation from one term to the next. Thus, I argue that we need to consider the entirety of a legislator’s career, not just occasional moments of action. Moreover, because the poor cannot apply electoral pressure on their surrogates (since they do not come from the district), dependable champions are an especially valuable ally.

To identify the consistent champions of the poor, I examine the career of every legislator who served in the House of Representatives during the period from 1983 to 2014 (98th–113th Congress). There were 1,399 House members during this time, with a near equal number of Democrats (708) and Republicans (691). I examine each legislator’s history of sponsoring poverty-relevant bills during their tenure in the House. As detailed in Chapter 3, there are many types of legislation that are considered poverty-related, including bills addressing unemployment, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) or other tax-based programs, food assistance, education for low-income children, social welfare programs, and housing assistance, among others. Additionally, the bills sponsored could advance pilot programs, suggest revisions to existing programs, or propose new policies. Thus, the determination of champions is made using a wide-ranging measure of what it means to advocate for the poor.

TABLE 6.1 *List of consistent champions of the poor*

Rep. Mario Biaggi (D-NY)	Rep. Richard Ottinger (D-NY)
Rep. Matthew Cartwright (D-PA)	Rep. Leon Panetta (D-CA)
Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL)	Rep. Erik Paulsen (R-MN)
Rep. Joseph DioGuardi (D-NY)	Rep. Donald Payne, Jr. (D-NJ)
Rep. Robert Dold (R-IL)	Rep. Jared Polis (D-CO)
Rep. Gary Franks (R-CT)	Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY)
Rep. William Goodling (R-PA)	Rep. Tom Reed (R-NY)
Rep. Melissa Hart (R-PA)	Rep. Charles Schumer (D-NY)
Rep. Augustus Hawkins (D-CA)	Rep. Joe Sestak (D-PA)
Rep. Barbara Kennelly (D-CT)	Rep. Ronnie Shows (D-MS)
Rep. Rick Lazio (R-NY)	Rep. Marlin Stutzman (R-IN)
Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA)	Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV)
Rep. George Leland (D-TX)	Rep. Bruce Vento (D-MN)
Rep. Matthew Martinez (D-CA)	Rep. Theodore Weiss (D-NY)
Rep. David McKinley (R-WV)	Rep. John Williams (D-MT)
Rep. Patsy Mink (D-HI)	Rep. Frederica Wilson (D-FL)
Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI)	Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA)
Rep. William Orton (D-UT)	

I identify consistent champions based on whether a legislator sponsors an average of two or more poverty-related bills per term over their career in the House. This measure sets a relatively high threshold, and creates a definition that is strict enough to make the notion of “champions” meaningful. Yet, it is also flexible enough to include legislators with long careers who may have had a term or two in which they were less active than the rest of their career. Based on this definition, thirty-five legislators are identified as consistent champions for the poor (see Table 6.1).⁴

Figure 6.1 shows the distribution of all legislators on this average-sponsorship measure, and illustrates the distinctiveness of this group of consistent champions. The group of legislators who are reliably active on poverty-related issues (i.e., average two or more bill introductions) is set off at the far right of the figure from the hundreds of other legislators. Moreover, among those who do sponsor at least some poverty-related legislation, most legislators average less than half a bill each two-year term in Congress. Also notable is the fact that 698 House members, or nearly half of those who serve during this period, never sponsor a single poverty-related bill.

⁴ Legislators who serve only one term in the House are excluded from the definition of consistent champions.

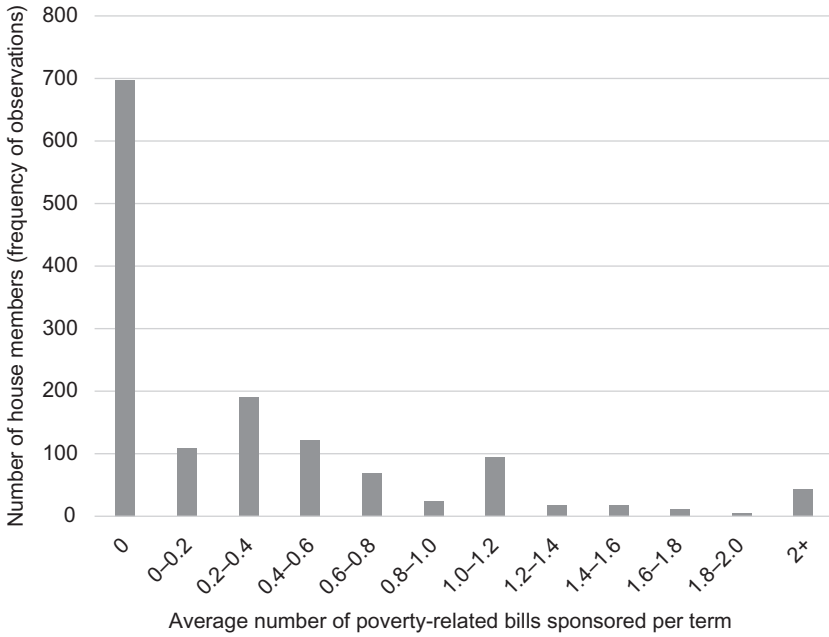


FIGURE 6.1 Distribution of poverty-related bill introductions

I first identify the basic characteristics of all of these champions before discussing the four types of consistent champions in detail. The previous chapter provides a valuable starting point, since it revealed that, in any given congress, Democrats, African Americans, and women were more likely to sponsor a bill. The question here is whether these features also explain sustained activity on poverty-related issues. Figure 6.2 illustrates how the consistent champions as a group compare on these and other variables to all House members. It shows that they are far from a representative cross-section of the full chamber.

As expected, Democrats, African Americans, and women are disproportionately represented among the consistent champions. The first comparison presented in Figure 6.2 reveals that 71 percent of the consistent champions for the poor are Democrats, despite making up only about half of all House members. Indeed, party remains an important factor when discussing the four types of consistent champions, all of which are defined, in part, by party identification. African American legislators also make up a much larger portion of the consistent champions (20%), as compared to their presence in the overall House membership (7%).

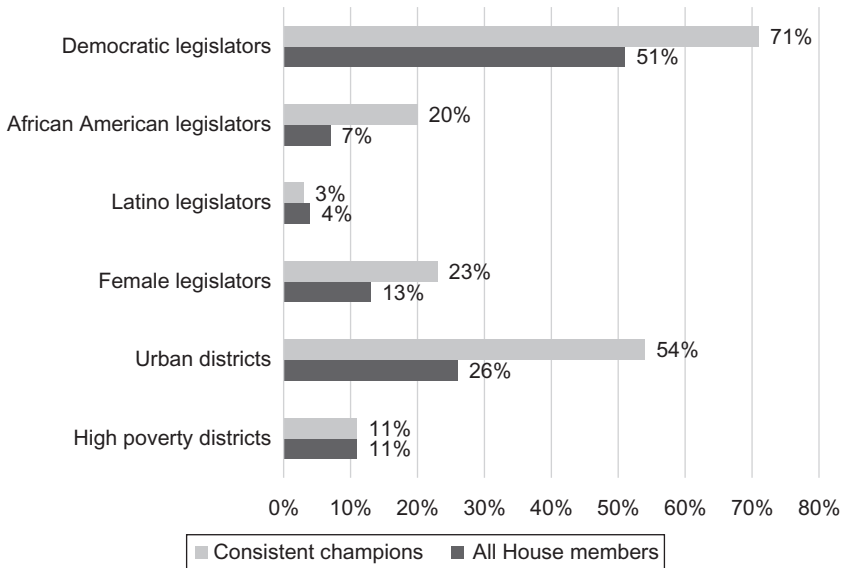


FIGURE 6.2 Average characteristics of consistent champions

Similarly, female legislators are almost twice as prominent among consistent champions of the poor as they are in the House as a whole, accounting for 23 percent of the champions, but only 13 percent of House members. In contrast, only one Latino legislator is identified as a consistent champion for the poor, a point to which I later return.

I also explore the nature of the district each legislator represents, considering first the urban (or rural) composition of each legislator's district. I take the average value of the variable over each legislator's career.⁵ Figure 6.2 reveals that consistent champions are more than twice as likely to come from urban districts as House members in general (54% vs 26%).⁶ The most notable pattern among the thirty-five

⁵ The variable measures the percentage of the district that is classified as urban. Since 1950, the US Census Bureau has defined urban areas as including large metro areas, cities, suburban areas, and also clusters of predominantly large towns. Based on this definition, the Census reports that the national population has been more than two-thirds urban since 1960.

⁶ Consistent with the US Census Bureau, "rural" and "mostly rural" populations are defined here as districts where less than 50 percent of residents live in urban or urbanized areas, "mostly urban" districts are defined as having 50–95 percent of the population residing in urban areas or urbanized clusters, and "urban" districts are defined by 95 percent or more of the residents living in urban or urbanized areas. Using this definition, approximately one quarter of House members come from districts that are

consistent champions is that they are overwhelmingly surrogate representatives, or legislators who do not come from high poverty districts. Figure 6.2 shows that consistent champions are no more likely to come from high poverty districts than the average House member. Only four (of thirty-five) consistent champions come from districts with very high poverty rates of 25 percent or more, which is the same proportion as found among all House members. In contrast, twenty-two consistent champions come from districts with less than 15 percent district poverty, including thirteen champions from districts with single-digit poverty rates. Thus, while a few consistent champions come from poor districts, there are many more champions from low and moderate poverty districts.

TYPOLOGIES OF CONSISTENT CHAMPIONS

Although the consistent champions can be described in terms of particular characteristics, when one steps back to look at the collection of thirty-five individuals, four types of champions for the poor emerge. These typologies reflect more than a single variable, and highlight the way that certain characteristics come together to provide a more complete picture of who are the champions for the poor. These groups of champions are the “Old-School Democrats,” “Democratic Women,” “Indigo Republicans,” and “Urban Black Democrats.” The types of poverty-related legislation offered by each of these archetypes varies, but all four groups of consistent champions illustrate the importance of surrogate representation for the representation of the poor.⁷

Old-School Democrats

The first type of consistent champion is the group of legislators I refer to as the “Old-School Democrats” (see Table 6.2). These eleven legislators are white, male Democrats who nearly all come from urban districts (ten of eleven). The majority of these champions come from northeastern states like New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Most importantly,

rural or mostly rural, one half of members come from districts that are mostly urban, and one quarter come from districts that are fully urban.

⁷ Nearly all thirty-five consistent champions fit well into these groups. Only two members, Rep. Ronnie Shows (D-MS) and Rep. Matthew Martinez (D-CA), do not fit into the typologies and, thus, are not listed in Tables 6.2–6.5.

TABLE 6.2 *List of Old-School Democrat champions*

Rep. Mario Biaggi	Rep. Charles (Chuck) Schumer
Rep. Matthew Cartwright	Rep. Joe Sestak
Rep. William Orton	Rep. Bruce Vento
Rep. Richard Ottinger	Rep. Theodore (Ted) Weiss
Rep. Leon Panetta	Rep. John (Pat) Williams
Rep. Jared Polis	

all represent districts with poverty rates of 15 percent or below, which means they are surrogate representatives.

Notably, the Old-School Democrats are primarily of an earlier generation of House members. Nearly three-quarters of these champions (eight of eleven) were first elected to the House in, or prior to, 1990.⁸ Thus, the Old-School Democrats began their careers during the long period of Democratic control of the House, and before the extreme partisan polarization and electoral competition of today (e.g., Lee 2016; Sinclair 2014). These legislators reflect an earlier era of Democratic politics, and their activity on behalf of the poor is shaped by that earlier period. Of particular relevance is that many Old-School Democrats predate the rise of the centrist New Democrats. This has implications for their behavior on poverty-relevant policy. The proposals offered by Old-School Democrats reflect the more traditional Democratic priorities of the New Deal and Great Society, rather than the Clinton-era “triangulation” approach to welfare and social policy, which positioned itself as a hybrid of Democratic and Republican approaches.⁹

Collectively, the Old-School Democrats introduce legislation focused primarily on issues such as housing policy and food assistance. These two topics, in fact, make up two-thirds of the bills introduced by these consistent champions. Many of the bills offered by Old-School Democrats focus on preserving and expanding housing assistance for poor citizens, including Rep. Bruce Vento’s (D-MN) proposal authorizing the Department of Housing and Urban Development to make grants to states to

⁸ In comparison, only half of the 707 Democrats who served in the House during this period were elected in, or prior to, 1990.

⁹ The “triangulation” approach to welfare pursued by President Bill Clinton is attributed to his advisor, Dick Morris, and entailed combining elements of Democratic proposals (e.g., provisions for food assistance and child care) with elements of Republican proposals (e.g., work requirements, time limits on benefits) to create a winning outcome. See Berman 2011.

preserve existing low-income housing (HR 4838, 105th Congress). Likewise, legislation from Rep. Richard Ottinger (D-NY) requests increased funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps the poor maintain basic heating and cooling (HR 2439, 98th Congress).

The Old-School Democrats are also particularly active on another core anti-poverty issue, hunger. This is best illustrated by the legislation introduced by Rep. Leon Panetta (D-CA) over his career in the House. Of the fourteen poverty-relevant bills he introduced, eleven of them addressed food assistance by calling for the expansion or increased funding of programs for low-income people and the unemployed. Another example of Old-School Democrats' attention to expanding food assistance programs is Rep. Mario Biaggi's (D-NY) proposal to facilitate the distribution of excess agricultural commodities through the school lunch and other food assistance programs (HR 1513, 98th Congress).

Representative Theodore (Ted) Weiss (D-NY) is an exemplary illustration of an Old-School Democrat, and the types of issues to which these consistent champions devote their efforts. Rep. Weiss was first elected to the US House of Representatives in 1976, to represent the west side of Manhattan. Rep. Weiss' own story provides context for his political beliefs about the role of government in helping the poor. As a child, Weiss had fled the Nazi invasion of Hungary and immigrated to the United States in 1938. After serving in the Army, he attended Syracuse University on the GI Bill and earned his bachelor's degree and a law degree. Weiss's political career began on the New York City Council (1962–1976) before replacing Bella S. Abzug in the House, where he served until his death in 1992.

Weiss was a liberal Democrat who saw the merits of an active government that was willing and able to help its citizens in need. As such, he believed in an active, socially conscious government that took its cue from the New Deal and Great Society programs. Indeed, Weiss greatly admired Eleanor Roosevelt, whose photograph he hung in his congressional office (Dao 1992). During his career in Congress, Weiss was known as a “liberal stalwart in the House,” “the conscience of the House,” and “a congressional crusader for social programs and human rights” (Dao 1992; “U.S. Rep. Ted Weiss, 64, Dies” 1992).

As a champion of liberal causes, Weiss focused much of his legislative energy on various programs fighting poverty and homelessness. He proposed and defended federal funding of poverty-related programs, even in the face of increasing budget and political pressures to reduce spending on

social services. Contrary to the political winds of the 1980s and 1990s that called for tighter restrictions on social welfare programs, Weiss worked to make federal poverty programs more accessible. He focused on practical ways to promote participation in existing programs, such as allowing children to receive food assistance without requiring all adults in a household to provide Social Security numbers, or allowing for child care costs to be deducted before determining food stamp eligibility. In addition to proposing such legislation, Weiss also used his committee position as “a forum for hearings that often called in government bureaucrats to account for inattentiveness to the victims of poverty, drugs, and other social conditions” (“U.S. Rep. Ted Weiss, 64, Dies” 1992). For instance, from his position on the Government Operations’ Subcommittee on Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations, Weiss commissioned a study and report on homelessness in 1985 (Fogel 1985).

Rep. Weiss also illustrates the surrogate nature of Old-School Democrats’ actions for the poor. Weiss came from a district that was not particularly poor, but it was liberal, and many of his constituents shared Weiss’ beliefs in the role of government in reducing poverty and homelessness. Indeed, his district was described as being made up of “New Yorkers of many races and ethnicities who still believe that government can – and should – work to promote social and economic equality” (Frazer 1992). Additionally, as an urban district in New York City, Rep. Weiss and his constituents likely were aware of the deeper poverty elsewhere in the city, which may have reinforced his commitment to poverty-relevant issues. As a surrogate champion and an Old-School Democrat, Rep. Weiss called attention to core issues related to poverty, and championed the poor outside his district.

Democratic Women

The second type of consistent champion that emerges is the “Democratic Women” (see Table 6.3). These female legislators make up 20 percent of the consistent champions for the poor, despite constituting only 9 percent of the overall House membership. The Democratic Women come from urban and mostly urban districts (six of seven legislators) and from a range of states outside the South. As discussed earlier, there is considerable overlap in the substance of women’s issues and poverty-relevant issues, which creates a subset of gendered poverty issues focused primarily around the traditional role of women as mothers and caregivers (e.g., Carroll 2002; Hawkesworth 2003; Kathlene 1994; Norton 2002;

TABLE 6.3 *List of Democratic Women champions*

Rep. Barbara Kennelly
Rep. Barbara Lee
Rep. Patsy Mink
Rep. Gwen Moore
Rep. Dina Titus
Rep. Frederica Wilson
Rep. Lynn Woolsey

Pearson and Dancy 2011; Shogan 2001; Swers 1998, 2002a, 2002b; Walsh 2002).¹⁰ The result of this intersection between gender and poverty is that the Democratic Women are particularly active on poverty issues related to child care and education and play a dual role as surrogates for both women and the poor.¹¹

Many of the poverty-related bills introduced by the Democratic Women highlight gendered issues relevant to poverty, including those affecting families. For example, Representative Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) introduced legislation to allow the loss of childcare to be included as a legitimate cause for a single parent quitting a job without losing assistance under welfare work requirements (HR 1615, 105th Congress). Given that children in single-parent households are nearly six times more likely to live only with their mother than their father (US Census Bureau 2016), this legislation addressed a problem faced primarily by poor women.¹² The role of women as caregivers is also reflected in legislation focused on children. For instance, Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV) proposed legislation to expand the school lunch program to provide food to at-risk children on holidays and weekends (HR 4249, 113th Congress).

Some of the proposals offered by Democratic women focus on poor women, but from a less family-oriented perspective. For instance,

¹⁰ Previous scholarship also shows that Democratic women are especially active on women's issues, and this partisan difference is also reflected in female legislators' activity on poverty-related issues. Only one female Republican legislator is identified as a consistent champion.

¹¹ On issues of intersectionality and the unique challenges of representation for groups who are underrepresented on multiple dimensions of identity, see Hawkesworth 2003 and Strolovitch 2006, 2007.

¹² "The Majority of Children Live with Two Parents, Census Bureau Reports." Press Release from the U.S. Census Bureau, CB16-192. November 17, 2016.

Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI) proposed legislation to require states to address domestic and sexual violence among individuals receiving support through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program (HR 4978, 111th Congress). Addressing the challenges that women face in (re)entering the work force, Rep. Barbara Kennelly (D-CT) proposed legislation that would give employers a tax credit for hiring displaced homemakers, who are disproportionately women (HR 2127, 98th Congress). These female champions not only add more voices calling attention to poverty-relevant issues in Congress, but they also emphasize different aspects of poverty. In this way, female champions contribute to a more multi-dimensional poverty focused agenda, and help to give voice to the perspective of poor women.

It is important to note that the nature of such representation by Democratic Women differs by race. The non-black women in this group of champions come from districts with an average poverty rate of 10 percent, and so their role is primarily as a surrogate representative for the poor.¹³ In comparison, the three African American female champions here, Representatives Barbara Lee (D-CA), Gwen Moore (D-WI) and Frederica Wilson (D-FL), come from districts with an average of 22 percent poverty.¹⁴ For these legislators, their activity on poverty-related issues reflects their dual roles as both dyadic and surrogate representatives of the poor.

To further illuminate the role of Democratic Women champions, particularly the ways in which their multiple representative roles come together on poverty-relevant issues, I turn to the career of Representative Patsy Mink of Hawaii. Like other minority members of Congress, she is at once a district representative, descriptive representative, and surrogate representative. In Rep. Mink's case, she was also the first Asian American woman to serve in Congress. Her advocacy on behalf of the poor reflects her commitment to poverty-related issues, as well as the overlap between her role as a surrogate for the poor and a descriptive surrogate for women.

Patsy Mink's elected political career began in state politics, and she served in the territorial government of Hawaii from 1956 to 1964. After a failed bid for the US House in 1959, Mink was elected to Congress in

¹³ Consistent champions who are white women come from districts with poverty rates ranging from 7.6 to 14.8 percent.

¹⁴ Consistent champions who are African American women come from districts with poverty rates ranging from 17.1 to 26.3 percent.

1964 when Hawaii gained a second congressional seat. She chose to retire in 1976 to pursue an unsuccessful bid for the US Senate. However, she then returned to the US House in 1990 by winning a special election, and served in the House until her death in September 2002. Upon her death, Mink was celebrated for her work on behalf of “the people of her state, and for the forgotten, the disenfranchised, the poor.”¹⁵

Throughout her career in the US Congress, Mink was a strong voice for women and for the poor. Although she served in the House during two very different periods, 1965–1976 and 1990–2002, her legislative priorities and how she approached her responsibilities as a representative remained constant. For Mink, issues related to poverty were largely national in scope, since her own district experienced relatively low poverty of approximately 10 percent. Indeed, Mink believed that members of Congress had a responsibility to be a voice for constituents nationwide: “You were not elected to Congress, in my interpretation of things, to represent your district, period. You are national legislators.”¹⁶ This conviction that a representative should speak both for her district and for broader constituencies guided Rep. Mink’s career.

Mink came to Washington as a strong supporter of President Johnson’s Great Society programs, and she continued to promote liberal causes and a role for government in addressing the country’s social problems. During her second turn in Congress, Rep. Mink remained a liberal activist, despite other Democrats’ quiet shift toward the political middle on social programs.¹⁷ Described as having an “unwavering commitment to social causes,”¹⁸ she fought against the welfare reform deal brokered by House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) and President Bill Clinton. She proposed substitute legislation that would have replaced the Republican proposal, and her legislation (H.Amdt. 328 to HR 4) was one of only two Democratic alternatives that received a vote on the House floor. When that failed, she became a leading voice urging President Clinton to veto the welfare reform legislation.¹⁹ In the aftermath of the welfare overhaul, Mink continued as a surrogate representative to help poor Americans within the structure of the new welfare system. For instance, she proposed legislation to increase job opportunities and training programs (HR 1250,

¹⁵ Norman Mineta, as quoted in “Hawai‘i, nation lose ‘a powerful voice’,” 2002.

¹⁶ Mink, as quoted in Davidson 1994.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Hawai‘i, nation lose a ‘powerful voice’,” 2002.

¹⁹ Library of Congress, Manuscript Reading Room, “Patsy T. Mink Papers.”

104th Congress), to allow welfare benefits earned based on employment to be treated as income for purposes of the EITC (HR 1045, 105th Congress), and to make changes to the requirements and penalties under TANF during its reauthorization (HR 3113, 107th Congress).

In addition to her support for social programs in general, Mink believed that many issues related to poverty were also women's issues. She provided a voice for poor women saying, "Women are the ones that are the most severely damaged by poverty, whether it's as single heads of households or mothers of dependent children, or as working women who belong to the very bottom of the wage scale. So women had a great stake in the success of the program."²⁰ During her later terms in the House, Mink proposed twenty-one poverty-relevant bills, the majority of which (eleven) addressed issues that affect poor women and children. For instance, during the 103rd Congress (1993–1994), Rep. Mink introduced legislation to greatly expand early childhood education programs, including through establishing model federal programs and providing staff development programs (HR 3201). Mink also authored multiple bills to increase federal support for childcare, increase benefits for poor children through Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and expand the school breakfast program. Mink also proposed legislation to protect individuals who leave a job due to sexual harassment from losing Food Stamps under the work requirements of TANF (HR 4487, 105th Congress).

As Rep. Mink's career illustrates, the Democratic Women champions bring together their roles as descriptive surrogate representatives for women, as well as surrogate representatives for the poor. They provide a unique perspective on certain aspects of poverty that affect women and families. The overlap between women's issues and poverty issues facilitates acting in this dual role. Rep. Mink's career also reveals an awareness of her role as a national, surrogate representative that is typical of many consistent champions.

Indigo Republicans

The third group of consistent champions are those I call the "Indigo Republicans." These are Republican House members from largely blue (Democratic) and occasionally purple (mixed party) states, who demonstrate a commitment to poverty-relevant issues through their regular

²⁰ Mink, as quoted in Davidson 1994, 145–6.

TABLE 6.4 *List of Indigo Republican champions*

Rep. Rodney Davis	Rep. Rick Lazio
Rep. Joseph DioGuardi	Rep. David McKinley
Rep. Robert Dold	Rep. Erik Paulsen
Rep. Gary Franks	Rep. Tom Reed
Rep. William Goodling	Rep. Marlin Stutzman
Rep. Melissa Hart	

introduction of related legislation. There are eleven Indigo Republicans, who together constitute just over 30 percent of all consistent champions (see Table 6.4). This is a smaller percentage than the general Republican composition of the House (49 percent), but, nevertheless, is larger than some might expect, based on perceptions of the two parties and the findings in Chapter 5.

Geographically, the Indigo Republicans largely hail from states such as New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. The member who comes from the furthest south is Rep. David McKinley, who represents the First District of West Virginia, which runs along the Pennsylvania border. In addition, Indigo Republicans are more likely than other Republicans to come from metropolitan areas, with all but one representing an urban or mostly urban district, including those around New York, Chicago, and Minneapolis.²¹

Notably, like the other types of champions discussed previously, Indigo Republicans function as surrogate representatives for the poor. These legislators do not come from districts with many poor residents – the average district poverty rate among them is 10.5 percent. Only three Republican champions come from districts where the poverty rate is greater than 15 percent, with none greater than 20 percent. Thus, the picture of the Indigo Republican champions is reminiscent of an earlier generation of Rockefeller Republicans, who were largely Northern moderates with fiscally conservative and socially progressive positions.

As compared to other types of constituent champions for the poor, Indigo Republicans have a distinctive approach to poverty-related issues. This reflects the underlying differences in the way that the two parties view the role of government, and the best policy tools for reducing

²¹ The 691 Republicans who served from 1983 to 2014 come from districts that are, on average, 67 percent urban, according to the US Census Bureau. In comparison, the eleven Republican consistent champions come from districts that average 76 percent urban.

poverty in the United States. These Republican surrogates tend to propose legislation that uses devices like the tax code to address issues related to poverty. For instance, Rep. Bill Goodling (R-PA) introduced legislation to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which helps low-income workers (HR 2637, 101st Congress). Rep. Bob Dold (R-IL), likewise, offered legislation to change the tax code to encourage employers to hire unemployed individuals (HR 2868, 112th Congress).

Indigo Republicans also favor policies that reduce the role of the federal government, in favor of either giving more power to states or to the private and nonprofit sectors to address poverty. For instance, legislation offered by Rep. Melissa Hart (R-PA) would have allowed states to extend the use of welfare block grants to support infant safe haven programs (HR 2018, 107th Congress). Another example is Rep. Tom Reed (R-IN)'s request for a revised formula to allocate Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) funds to the states (HR 3860, 113th Congress). Illustrating Republicans' preference for a larger non-government role, Rep. Erik Paulsen (R-MN) proposed allowing food stamps to be redeemed through nonprofit food purchasing and delivery services, as compared to traditional, welfare-approved retail stores (HR 3860, 111th Congress).

Indigo Republicans are also more likely than other consistent champions to take a more business-oriented approach, which is to be expected for Republican legislators. For instance, Rep. Joseph DioGuardi (R-NY) sponsored numerous bills addressing affordable housing, including bills addressing the calculation of fair market rates (HR 1499, 100th Congress) and providing for rent adjustments in low-income housing to reflect capital investments (HR 1501, 100th Congress). Other proposals focus on job training and the role of businesses and employers in helping low-income individuals. One example of this approach is Rep. Bill Goodling's (R-PA) proposal to develop a vocational training system and local skill centers (HR 5288, 102nd Congress).

In addition to these more distinctively Republican proposals, Indigo Republicans sometimes offer more general legislation bolstering and expanding poverty-relevant programs. Examples include Rep. DioGuardi's call for increased housing assistance and services for the homeless (HR 1502, 100th Congress) and Rep. Goodling's appeal for improvements to Head Start (HR 1528, 103rd Congress). While these types of proposals may be less distinctive as compared to proposals by other consistent champions, they set these Indigo Republicans apart from their party more generally.

TABLE 6.5 *List of Urban Black Democrat champions*

Rep. Augustus (Gus) Hawkins
Rep. Barbara Lee
Rep. George (Mickey) Leland
Rep. Gwen Moore
Rep. Donald Payne, Jr.
Rep. Charles Rangel
Rep. Frederica Wilson

As a whole, Indigo Republicans' unique contribution to the consistent champions is that they combine traditionally Republican policy approaches with a commitment to addressing issues related to poverty. These legislators' proposals complement those by the mostly Democratic consistent champions, and provide important diversity in the perspectives brought to policy conversations.

Urban Black Democrats

A smaller group, that I refer to as the "Urban Black Democrats," are the final subset of legislators that act as a consistent champion for the poor (see Table 6.5). Although African American legislators, in general, are more likely than other Democrats to represent urban districts (77 percent compared to 38 percent), every one of these seven consistent champions is from a heavily urban district, including ones in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Houston, and Milwaukee.²² Most notably, Urban Black Democrats come from districts with high levels of poverty, which means that, in addition to a surrogate role, they also engage in dyadic representation when they act on behalf of the poor. Thus, Urban Black Democrats reflect the ways in which race, poverty, and place are intertwined in the United States.

The surrogate role of Urban Black Democrats is complex, because they serve as representatives of two under-represented populations: African Americans and the poor. Their responsibilities to these two constituencies are facilitated by the overlap between "black issues" and issues relevant to the poor, such as welfare, education, housing, social services, and job

²² I consider heavily urban districts as those in which 95 percent of the residents live in urban areas.

training (e.g., Gamble 2007; Haynie 2005; Minta 2011). When Urban Black Democrats are active on these issues, they are able to act on behalf of both constituencies. However, unlike Democratic Women, whose legislative activity highlights a subset of gendered poverty issues, Urban Black Democrats sponsor a significant amount of general anti-poverty legislation. To the extent that general programs like the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) or tax incentives to promote employment also benefit poor minority constituents, these legislators are acting both as champions of the poor and also as “race representatives” (Haynie 2005).

Additionally, unlike the other consistent champions, Urban Black Democrats come from districts with substantial poverty; the average district poverty rate among Urban Black Democrats is 23 percent.²³ Thus, Urban Black Democrats are both district representatives for the poor in addition to being surrogates. One implication is that these legislators are electorally accountable to their poor constituents in a way that many other champions are not. The fact that poor constituents have the power to affect Urban Black Democrats’ electoral fortunes should make these legislators particularly attentive to the interests of the poor.

The bills they sponsor reflect this responsibility to represent a combination of their own constituents in the district, African Americans nationwide, and the poor nationwide. For instance, Rep. Frederica Wilson (D-FL) proposed legislation to address unemployment both locally in her Miami district and nationwide, including calling for a pilot program to give grants to local governments and community-based organizations to help create jobs (HR 2574, 112th Congress). Similarly, Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI) sponsored legislation to make grants to help low-income families gain access to affordable automobiles, which would not only help her Milwaukee-based district, but the many poor nationwide who live in areas with limited public transit (HR 3599, 110th Congress).

This overlap between their district and surrogate roles is also reflected in the bills Urban Black Democrats sponsor to address low-income housing. For instance, Representative Charlie Rangel (D-NY) represents part of New York City, and has sponsored multiple bills addressing affordable and public housing. This is an issue relevant to his own poor constituents, as well as to Americans living in poverty nationwide. Another illustration is Rep. Mickey Leland’s (D-TX) commitment to issues related to homelessness, which affected his Houston-area district,

²³ The lowest district poverty rate among Urban Black Democratic champions is 17.7 percent.

as well as districts across the country.²⁴ Throughout this period, Leland sponsored eighteen bills that proposed extending a variety of social services to the homeless, such as education, food assistance, and housing assistance.

A closer look at the career of Representative Augustus “Gus” Hawkins of California provides further insight into the unique role that Urban Black Democrats play in representing the poor in Congress. Hawkins was born in Louisiana in 1907, endured the Great Depression, and supported President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal programs. Indeed, decades later, Hawkins would still be described as “an old-fashioned New Deal liberal” (Eaton 1990). After nearly thirty years in the California Assembly, he was elected to represent a new majority black district in Los Angeles in 1962. Rep. Hawkins served in the US House representing Los Angeles from 1963 until his retirement in January 1991.

Rep. Hawkins was widely regarded as a committed advocate for the poor and disadvantaged, but also a pragmatic legislator (Trescott 1990). Hawkins preferred the behind-the-scenes work of legislating to the media limelight, and was willing to work with a range of colleagues, including Republicans, to accomplish policy goals. Although he helped to found the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), he often broke with its members over its more combative style (*Black Americans in Congress* 2008; Herszenhorn 2007). Indeed, colleagues called Hawkins the “Silent Warrior” (*Black Americans in Congress* 2008), which reflects his beliefs about effective representation: “the leadership belongs not to the loudest, not to those who beat the drum or blow the trumpets, but to those who day in and day out, in all seasons, work for the practical realization of a better world – those who have the stamina to persist and remain dedicated.”²⁵

A distinguishing feature of Rep. Hawkins’ long career – and of all Urban Black Democrats – is that they serve multiple representative roles when it comes to poverty issues. Rep. Hawkins is a district representative for the many poor, minority constituents in his central Los Angeles district, and also a surrogate representative for the poor (and African Americans) across the country. As a result, Rep. Hawkins addressed the needs of both his district and his national constituency through his actions

²⁴ Reports in the mid-1980s estimated that between 250,000 and 2 million Americans were homeless (Alter 1984).

²⁵ Rep. Gus Hawkins, *Congressional Record*, US House of Representatives, 101st Congress, 2nd session. October 27, 1990. As quoted in *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007*, 2008.

on poverty-related issues. Similarly, his activity in Congress reflected his commitment to represent both African Americans and the poor. In playing these multiple roles, Rep. Hawkins' efforts on behalf of the poor often did not have an explicit racial focus, but their effect was also to help poor minorities.

Two substantive areas – education and employment – are central to Rep. Hawkins' legislative career, including his position on the House Committee on Education and Labor, which he eventually chaired. In the area of education, Rep. Hawkins championed educational opportunities for disadvantaged children, which would help children both in his district and across the country. He was a noted proponent of the Head Start early education program from its inception as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs (Eaton 1990). Later in his career, he authored the Hawkins-Stafford Act of 1988, which provided funding to close the achievement gap between children from low-income families and children from middle- and upper-class households nationwide. President Ronald Reagan lauded the legislation at the White House signing ceremony, saying "It will extend programs for the disadvantaged and other students with special needs . . . and focus program benefits on those with the greatest need."²⁶ Rep. Hawkins also sponsored numerous bills calling for greater federal funding for education for disadvantaged children over his career, which again would benefit the children in his Los Angeles district as well as around the country. For instance, he proposed legislation to improve the educational opportunities of "educationally deprived children" that tied federal funding to localities based on the number of children living in poverty (HR 950, 100th Congress). Indeed, when Rep. Hawkins retired from Congress, he was praised by David Leiderman, the former executive director of the Child Welfare League of America: "When I think of Gus Hawkins, I think of the congressman who is the real champion of poor kids in this country" (Trescott 1990).

Rep. Hawkins' advocacy for the poor also extended to his work on issues of job training, employment, and discrimination. Early in his career, he helped to write the law barring discrimination in hiring and creating the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Once again, this national legislation

²⁶ President Ronald Reagan. "Remarks on Signing the Augustus F. Hawkins – Robert T. Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988." April 28, 1988. Accessed via The American Presidency Project, University of California-Santa Barbara. www.presidency.ucsbu.edu/ws/?pid=35745

also benefited those in his district, notably his many African American constituents who were likely to face discrimination in the workplace. Another major legislative success was the passage of the Humphrey-Hawkins Act in 1978 (also known as the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978), which proposed comprehensive efforts to reduce unemployment, including federal jobs programs. More generally, he offered many pieces of legislation over his career to provide job-training and employment opportunities, especially for families receiving public-assistance, which included many of his district constituents. For instance, Rep. Hawkins sponsored legislation focused on providing employment opportunities to long-term unemployed in high-unemployment areas, such as his own district, and called for these projects to involve renovating and repairing community facilities (HR 1036, 98th Congress). The local focus of this proposal – both in targeting high-unemployment communities and pinpointing projects that improve neighborhoods – captures the way in which Rep. Hawkins advocated for the poor in his own district, as well as his work as a surrogate representative for the poor nationwide.

THE OCCASIONAL CHAMPIONS

I now consider a different type of champion, one who has demonstrated a willingness to call attention to poverty issues, but who has not done so consistently over his career. I call these legislators “occasional champions,” which captures both their inclination to sponsor poverty-relevant bills, as well as the irregularity of their activity. This broader definition recognizes that there is more than one way to identify legislative champions, and the primary measure of consistent champions is somewhat restrictive. There is also value in knowing how similar the consistent champions and occasional champions are to one another. If both types of champions have many shared traits, then the occasional champions at some point may become more consistent champions. Finally, of particular interest is whether an expanded definition reveals heightened activity among Latino House members, since they were notably absent from the ranks of consistent champions.

Occasional champions include two types of legislators that are excluded from the list of consistent champions because their activity is either irregular or infrequent. First are legislators who have a burst of activity on poverty issues, but do not sustain this level of activity. In order to capture these legislators, I determine the maximum number of poverty-related bills each legislator sponsored in a single congress, and identify all

legislators who ever sponsored four or more bills in a single session.²⁷ Their inclusion recognizes the potential impact that legislators can have based on a flurry of activity.

Second are legislators who have introduced numerous but sporadic poverty-related bills over their careers. To identify these legislators, I look at the total number of poverty-relevant bills sponsored by each House member, and then select all legislators who sponsored a total of ten or more bills, regardless of how these proposals are distributed over their careers. This approach captures legislators who develop a portfolio of poverty-relevant legislation over time, even if they do not average two bills per congress or never have the type of burst captured by the previous measurement approach.²⁸ Combining these two new measures (and omitting any legislators who have already been identified as consistent champions) produces a list of forty-five “occasional champions” (see Table 6.6).

Figure 6.3 illustrates that, for the most part, these occasional champions have characteristics that are both very similar to the consistent champions, as well as quite distinct from the membership of the House as whole. For instance, both the occasional and consistent champions are overwhelmingly Democrats (73 percent and 71 percent, respectively), which contrasts with the near equal partisan split among all House members (see Figure 6.3). Female and African American legislators also comprise similarly-elevated proportions of the occasional and consistent champions as compared to the total House membership. Figure 6.3 also reveals that a large majority of occasional champions likewise come from urban districts (62 percent), which contrasts sharply with the mere 26 percent of House members who come from similarly urban districts. Lastly, occasional champions are not more likely to come from districts with very high poverty rates as compared to the House overall. Only five (of forty-five) occasional champions represent districts with poverty rates of 25 percent or more, while sixteen occasional champions come from districts where the poverty rate is in the single digits. Thus, the occasional champions for the poor are overwhelmingly surrogate representatives, with most coming from districts with low to moderate poverty.

²⁷ This produces a list of twenty-three new legislative champions, as well as twenty-seven legislators who are already identified as consistent champions.

²⁸ This measure identifies thirty-six new occasional champions, including sixteen House members that were previously identified as consistent champions.

TABLE 6.6 *List of occasional champions of the poor*

Rep. Robert Andrews (D-NJ)	Rep. James McDermott (D-WA)
Rep. Michael Bilirakis (R-FL)	Rep. Howard McKeon (R-CA)
Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE)	Rep. Bob Michel (R-IL)
Rep. Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Rep. George Miller (D-CA)
Rep. John Conyers (D-MI)	Rep. James Moran (D-VA)
Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)	Rep. Major Owens (D-NY)
Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN)	Rep. Carl Perkins (D-KY)
Rep. John Erlenborn (R-IL)	Rep. Thomas Petri (R-WI)
Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA)	Rep. Marge Roukema (R-NJ)
Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA)	Rep. Edward Roybal (D-CA)
Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ)	Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY)
Rep. Tony Hall (D-OH)	Rep. Christopher Shays (R-CT)
Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL)	Rep. Albio Sires (D-NJ)
Rep. Wally Herger (R-CA)	Rep. Hilda Solis (D-CA)
Rep. Andrew Jacobs Jr. (D-IN)	Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA)
Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-CT)	Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ)
Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH)	Rep. Edolphus Towns (D-NY)
Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI)	Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-NY)
Rep. Joseph Knollenberg (R-MI)	Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA)
Rep. John Lewis (D-GA)	Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-NY)
Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY)	Rep. Jerry Weller (R-IL)
Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY)	Rep. Ron Wyden (D-OR)
Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY)	

It is on the dimension of ethnicity, however, where an important substantive difference exists between the consistent and occasional champions. Although there was only one Latino member of Congress identified as a consistent champion, Representative Matthew Martinez (D-CA), six Latino legislators are found among the occasional champions: Representatives Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Edward Roybal (D-CA), Jose Serrano (D-NY), Albio Sires (D-NJ), Hilda Solis (D-CA), and Nydia Velazquez (D-NY). The addition of Latino occasional champions is important in part because Latino members of Congress have the potential to serve as both district representatives and surrogate representatives for the poor.

The fact that Latino legislators make up a greater proportion of the occasional champions than the consistent champions is in keeping with the more varied nature of “Latino issues” (see Swers and Rouse 2011). Whereas black issues and women’s issues are more clearly defined and exhibit considerable overlap with poverty-relevant issues, there is far less consensus as to what constitutes Latino issues. Moreover, the diversity of the Latino population further complicates the development of a clear

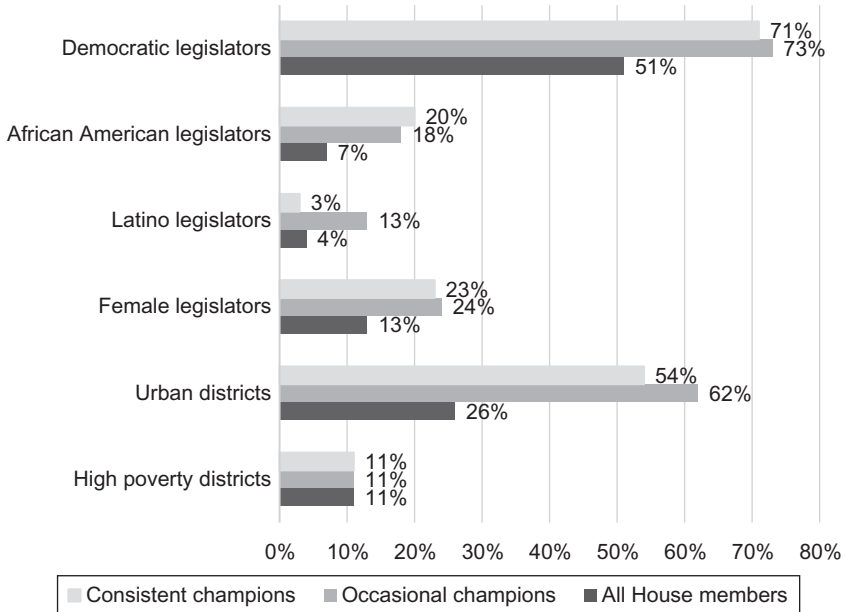


FIGURE 6.3 Average characteristics of occasional champions

Latino agenda (e.g., Rocca et al. 2008; Sanchez 2006). As a result, there is less synergy between Latino legislators' roles as district representatives, descriptive representatives for Latino constituents, and surrogate representatives for the poor. This, in turn, divides their legislative attention and makes them more likely to be occasional, rather than consistent, champions on poverty issues.

When they do offer poverty-relevant legislation, Latino occasional champions divide their efforts between issues that reflect certain interests of poor Latino constituents and more general poverty-related issues. First, like female legislative champions who focus on gendered poverty issues, Latino occasional champions tend to focus on issues that exist at the intersection of Latino issues and poverty-related issues. For instance, Rep. Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. Martinez (D-CA), and Rep. Solis (D-CA) all sponsored legislation addressing issues of dual language education in low-income communities, which is an issue of particular relevance to poor Latino constituents. Additionally, Rep. Velazquez (D-NY) sponsored legislation to encourage teachers of limited English speaking students by reducing their loan repayments (HR 2861, 110th Congress).

Moving from education to employment, Latino occasional champions again focus on policies that have a unique impact on Latinos living in poverty, as well as affecting the poor more generally. One such example is legislation authored by Rep. Grijalva (D-AZ) to foster job creation that explicitly targets border communities (HR 3049, 112th Congress). Rep. Grijalva is advocating on behalf of constituents in his own district, AZ-03, which includes 300 miles of the US–Mexico border, as well as the many unemployed Latinos who live in districts along the southern border.

However, Latino champions also sponsor general poverty-relevant legislation. For instance, Rep. Sires (D-NJ) sponsored legislation to increase funding for public housing, which is an issue that affects the poor across districts, and across race and ethnicity (HR 3521, 110th Congress). Similarly, Rep. Velazquez sponsored legislation to increase affordable housing for low-income families (HR 4218, 112th Congress) and provide financial counseling to families facing foreclosure (HR 5855, 110th Congress). Both of these proposals would benefit many poor constituents, not only Latino ones.

Overall, Latino occasional champions behave quite similarly to both African American champions and female champions. All of these groups must balance their roles as dyadic representatives, descriptive representatives, as well as surrogate representatives for the poor. However, the more fractured Latino political agenda means that there is less consistent overlap with poverty-related issues, which, in turn, requires that Latino House members divide their legislative activity between more issues.

THE MISSING CHAMPIONS

A final group that I investigate are the “missing champions” for the poor. These are the legislators who have much in common with the consistent and occasional champions, but who are not active on poverty-related issues. Their inaction is an essential part of understanding how Congress does, and does not, represent the poor. Recall that the champions of the poor, of either type, constitute just 6 percent of House members, and most of them are surrogates whose districts do not have high poverty. Thus, there are many legislators from districts with high poverty rates who are neither consistent nor occasional champions. Closer inspection reveals that 165 of the 183 House members (90 percent) who come from districts where at least 20 percent of residents live in poverty are neither consistent nor occasional champions.

Similar dynamics characterize findings about specific groups of champions. For instance, Urban Black Democrats comprise a significant number of consistent champions (six of thirty-five), but a more complete picture should also include the twenty-three African American House members from districts with very high poverty rates who are not champions of any type. Likewise, Latino House members make up 13 percent of the occasional champions (as compared to 4 percent of all House members), but these occasional champions are only a fraction of all Latinos in the House during this period. Indeed, forty-eight of fifty-five Latino House members are neither consistent champions nor occasional champions for poverty-relevant issues, including twenty-three Latino legislators who never offer any poverty focused legislation. Thus, some of the initial optimism about the role of legislative champions for the poor, including African American consistent champions and Latino occasional champions, is tempered by the reality that there are many more missing champions among each of these groups.

Perhaps the most important case of missing champions are Republican legislators who represent low-income areas. Most notably, none of the forty-four Republican House members who come from districts with poverty rates of 20 percent or more emerge as consistent or occasional champions of the poor. This is nothing short of astounding. These Republican legislators come from districts where at least one out of five of their constituents is living in poverty, but not a single one of them is sufficiently active on poverty-related issues to be identified by even the more relaxed criteria that defines occasional champions. Not only are these legislators neglecting their responsibility to represent their district constituents, but this also means that the burden for giving voice to the millions of poor who live in their districts is being passed on to surrogate representatives.

Digging deeper, there is a striking absence of activity by Republican legislators from rural districts. If one focuses on rural districts with high poverty rates in particular, none of the eighteen Republicans from these districts are legislative champions on poverty-related issues. In fact, thirteen of them did not sponsor a single poverty-relevant bill during their careers in the House, despite coming from districts with high poverty rates of 20 percent or more. More generally, there is a lack of action by nearly all rural Republican legislators. Of the 168 Republican House members from mostly or entirely rural districts, only two legislators are consistent or occasional champions: Representatives Bill Goodling (R-PA) and Thomas Petri (R-WI).

The silence of rural Republican legislators on issues relevant to poverty is significant because the rate of poverty in rural America consistently exceeds the poverty rate in urban areas.²⁹ Furthermore, Republicans are more likely to represent rural districts.³⁰ As a result, many rural poor constituents are left without a political voice.³¹ This is especially critical when it comes to poverty-related issues where the problems or policy solutions differ between rural and urban settings. For instance, the interests of the rural poor on housing assistance policy are quite different from those of the urban poor. Policies intended to address weaknesses in the provision of affordable housing, such as rent support or tax incentives for construction, have different real-world application in rural and urban settings where population density, land availability, and real estate investment differ starkly. Even programs with wide benefit to families living in poverty, such as expanding the school lunch program during the summer months, face challenges of transportation and access in rural communities. This means that fewer rural poor are able to participate in these programs. In addition, unique rural priorities, such as access to social services, rural economic development, and agricultural loans, are likely to be overlooked by policymakers (Salerno 2016). In short, the lack of legislative champions from rural districts means that, while the poor overall are underrepresented, the rural poor are particularly neglected.

CONCLUSION

This chapter shifts the focus to individual House members to explain who serves as a champion for the poor. Looking at their activity over their careers results in a more positive, albeit surrogate-based, portrayal of the congressional representation of the poor. There are thirty-five “consistent champions,” and an additional forty-five “occasional champions” who offer more than just the sporadic piece of poverty-related legislation. Moreover, most of these champions do not come from districts with

²⁹ The US Census Bureau reports that non-metro areas had a poverty rate of 17.7 percent, and metro areas had a poverty rate of 14.5 percent (2012 Census CPS).

³⁰ See Farrigan 2017. From 1983 to 2014, 56 percent of rural districts were represented by Republicans, and this increases to 66 percent when looking only at the last twenty years (since the 104th Congress, 1995–1996).

³¹ The lone Democratic consistent champion from a rural district with high poverty is Rep. Ronnie Shows (D-MS). The only Democratic occasional champion from a rural district with high poverty is Rep. Carl C. Perkins (D-KY).

high – or often even moderate – levels of district poverty. Instead, the majority of the champions of the poor are surrogate representatives.

Although the evidence of some representation is encouraging, there are two important limitations to consider. First, the extent to which one finds these eighty consistent and occasional champions reassuring depends on whether that number is put in its broader context. In isolation, eighty legislators regularly introducing poverty-related legislation over their careers sounds like quite a lot. However, there are 1399 legislators who served during this period, which means that these champions comprise only 6 percent of House members.

Second, there are limits to surrogate representation that should give one pause. Due to the lack of a district connection, surrogate representatives cannot be held electorally accountable – a point which Mansbridge (1999, 2003, 2011) emphasizes. In the absence of an electoral connection, she argues that monetary support can provide a means of holding the surrogate accountable (Mansbridge 2003; see also Gimpel, Lee, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2008). However, surrogate representation of the poor is not supported by financial contributions, because the poor do not have the resources to make campaign contributions. Instead, the poor receive “pure” surrogate representation wherein they depend on the legislator’s sense of responsibility as a surrogate (Mansbridge 2003). As shown in this chapter, for some legislators, a sense of group experience as women or minorities does foster increased activity on behalf of the poor. However, given that hardly any members of Congress are themselves working class or poor (e.g., Carnes 2012, 2013; Grumbach 2015), it is unlikely that legislators – even those identified as champions – have a sense of shared experience to strengthen their sense of responsibility to the poor.

Therefore, without an electoral connection to the poor, and without financial ties or shared identity to provide a stronger sense of responsibility, heavy reliance on surrogate representation carries risks for the poor. It is at best a tenuous representative relationship. This is important because accountability both allows constituents to remove a legislator, and also provides incentives for legislators to listen to the voices of their constituents. Without it, surrogate representation works only as long as the well-meaning legislators who are active on poverty-relevant issues decide to be active, and as long as these legislators “get it right.”

Despite these limitations, however, surrogate representation of the poor is preferable to no representation at all. This is particularly true,

in light of the very limited dyadic representation afforded the poor. The efforts of legislative champions are critically important in compelling the House to acknowledge the interests of the poor. In the next chapter, then, I examine whether the efforts of these legislative champions translate into successful legislation, and whether surrogate representation is also the means by which poverty legislation is passed.