

“Rather than focusing on the activities and perspectives of women’s rights activists, McConnaughey asks what strategic considerations might be involved in convincing legislators to expand the suffrage when such an expansion affects the probability of their own reelection. This book is an important contribution to the areas of gender and politics, race and politics, and social movements, and to our understanding of how policy is created.”

– Lee Ann Banaszak, Pennsylvania State University

“McConnaughey provides a compelling and innovative explanation of why some women were able to win voting rights in their states while others had to wait for the federal amendment. This historically rich volume reveals that when male voters, particularly union members and organized farmers, supported woman suffrage, male lawmakers were willing to do so as well. This work nicely complements studies centered on the suffragists themselves. McConnaughey shifts the focus to the neglected but pivotal role of male political actors in gaining votes for women.”

– Holly McCammon, Vanderbilt University

“This smart, discerning book provides new insight into an old story – in the lead up to the adoption of the nineteenth amendment in 1920, why were some states willing to extend voting rights to women while others were not? In an account that goes beyond the usual focus on women’s political activism, Corrine M. McConnaughey offers a refreshing take on a key set of puzzles about the timing and geography of the state suffrage efforts. Focusing on partisan dynamics within state legislatures she reveals that certain conditions, including the presence of third parties and higher levels of electoral competition, favored democratic expansion while others, including racial divisions and the desire to protect white voting rights, did not. This book not only makes an excellent contribution to our understanding of women’s rights and American political development, but it is also a must-read for those seeking insight into the battles over voting rights occurring today.”

– Gretchen Ritter, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Cornell University

“The strategic, partisan incentives of legislators drive Corrine McConnaughey’s sophisticated, multimethod treatment of how, why, and when women won suffrage in the states prior to federal adoption. The book reorients suffrage scholarship with a supply-side, programmatic enfranchisement model focused on existing voters and the coalitions that suffragists forged within states. By establishing the partisan incentives that shaped state legislator decisions, McConnaughey contributes to current debates about parties and democracy. The book also offers a fresh perspective on how and why race shaped opportunities for suffrage success and failure in the states, and throws light on the role of party politics in the battle for the federal suffrage amendment.”

– Kira Sanbonmatsu, Senior Scholar at the Center for American Women and Politics and Professor of Political Science, Rutgers University

“McConnaughey is to be commended for addressing an important question, for rightly focusing attention on the state-level campaigns where so much of the suffrage fight was won and lost, and for articulating a nuanced and original theory to explain variation in suffrage success. McConnaughey’s explanation resolves puzzles left unanswered by previous research and is

simultaneously theoretically sophisticated and based in a deep understanding of ‘real’ politics on the ground.”

– Christina Wolbrecht, University of Notre Dame

The Woman Suffrage Movement in America

A Reassessment

CORRINE M. McCONNAUGHY

Ohio State University, Columbus



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Contents

<i>Lift of Abbreviations</i>	page ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction: On States and Suffrage	i
1 Bringing Politics Back In: Suffrage Supply and Demand	19
2 Political Meaning for Woman Suffrage	50
3 Programmatic Enfranchisement: Coalitional Strategies for Voting Rights	91
4 Strong Leverage: Third-Party Support	137
5 Coalitional Impossibilities: Race, Class, and Failure	170
6 The National Story	207
7 From the Outside In	251
Appendix: Additional Notes on Measures and Analyses	263
<i>Index</i>	269

List of Abbreviations

AFL – American Federation of Labor
AWSA – American Woman Suffrage Association
CBA – Clara B. Arthur
CIO – Congress of Industrial Organizations
CSESA – Colorado State Equal Suffrage Association
CU – Congressional Union or National Woman’s Party
CWSA – Colorado Woman Suffrage Association
HWS – *The History of Woman Suffrage*
IESA – Illinois Equal Suffrage Association
IWSA – Illinois Woman Suffrage Association
LSSA – Louisiana State Suffrage Association
MESA – Michigan Equal Suffrage Association
MSWSA – Michigan State Woman Suffrage Association
NAWSA – National American Woman Suffrage Association
NWSA – National Woman Suffrage Association
SSWSC – Southern States Woman Suffrage Conference
WCTU – Woman’s Christian Temperance Union
WSPL – Woman Suffrage Party of Louisiana
WTUL – Women’s Trade Union League

Introduction

On States and Suffrage

“I don’t know the exact number of States we shall have to have, but I do know that there will come a day when that number will automatically and resistlessly act on the Congress of the United States to compel the submission of a federal suffrage amendment.”

– Susan B. Anthony

As their Women’s Rights Convention assembled in Seneca Falls, New York, in the summer of 1848, organizers Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott dissented on the prudence of one agenda item. Stanton had revised their Declaration of Sentiments – a document regarding women’s rights modeled after the Declaration of Independence – to include a resolution in favor of women’s voting rights. Mott balked. She worried the woman suffrage proposal was too far before its time; such extremity could threaten the viability of their broader women’s rights agenda. Having her ideas about woman’s place labeled as “too radical” even among fellow women’s rights activists was hardly an uncommon experience for Stanton. She would, in fact, later become alienated from the organized woman suffrage movement over taking another radical position: her indictment of organized religion as an oppressor of women, the core of which she set down in a treatise entitled *The Woman’s Bible*. This time, however, Stanton found an ally in convention delegate and eminent abolitionist Frederick Douglass. With Douglass introducing the suffrage appeal to the convention, Stanton managed to retain its inclusion. The Declaration, with Stanton’s call for women to actively pursue the right to vote, was ultimately signed by a third of the convention attendees. Sixty-eight women and thirty-two men had put their names to the document that scholars have labeled the beginning of the struggle for women’s enfranchisement in the United States.¹

¹ The chapter’s opening quotation of Susan B. Anthony appears in Catt, Carrie Chapman and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement*

The end of the woman suffrage struggle came, of course, with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, which barred discrimination based on sex in voter qualifications. That the struggle to realize the goal of woman suffrage spanned more than seventy years seems, perhaps, to validate Mott's worry that the idea of women's voting rights was still too radical for her time. Indeed, a proposal for a constitutional amendment did not appear in Congress until 1878, would not be voted upon until 1887, and seemed to stand no chance of passing until the second decade of the twentieth century. Yet, beneath the surface of the long wait for a federal woman suffrage amendment was a much more dynamic story of the politics of women's voting rights in the states. Woman suffrage measures were considered and adopted by states through legislative enactment, constitutional conventions, and popularly initiated referendums; the earliest of these extensions came in 1837, the latest during the push for ratification of the federal amendment in 1920. Some of these state-level measures provided for purely local electoral rights, enabling women to vote on local tax issues, school matters, or for municipal officers. Other measures provided women with limited suffrage rights in statewide elections, such as allowing them to vote only in presidential elections. And some states endowed women with truly full voting rights – as early as 1890.

Leaders of the national woman suffrage movement certainly noticed the story of the states, at least to the extent that they engaged the question of whether state-level adoption of woman suffrage would enhance the viability of their goal of a federal amendment. Although notable suffrage activists disagreed on the answer to that question, the state strategy – aiming to win the woman suffrage battle at the federal level by first accumulating a sufficient number of state-level victories such that Congress, the President, and the national party organizations would find support of a national amendment the only politically expedient option – ultimately became the dominant approach of the major national organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). When the U.S. Constitution was finally amended, more than half of the states already had adopted measures giving women voting rights in at least some statewide elections, and fully three-fourths of the states had instituted some form of voting rights for women. In turn, the argument that gains at the state level were key to effecting change at the federal level infused suffrage activists' accounts of their final victory. Carrie Chapman Catt, who lobbied Congress in her role as president of NAWSA, referred to the adoption of the state level suffrage measures as no less than “the most persuasive of

(New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1926), 227. For a general outline of the history of the national movement, including the Stanton and Mott exchange, see Flexner, Eleanor, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1959). See also suffragists' own accounts in Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Ida Husted Harper, ed. *History of Woman Suffrage* (Salem, 1985 (reprint)).

Introduction

3

all arguments for extending full suffrage to women” at her disposal.² I will ultimately agree with Catt’s conclusion, but demonstrate that progress at the state level mattered for political reasons well beyond any sense of accountability to women in the electorate.

Changes in women’s voting rights in the states may have been essential to the achievement of a national commitment to sex equity in electoral qualifications, but the state and local politics of woman suffrage were also something more than mere stepping-stones to a federal amendment, even if nationally prominent suffrage activists viewed and treated them as if they were not. The states were filled with women who desired voting rights for their own sets of reasons, and who had their own ideas about how to attain those rights. Each state, moreover, presented a different political and social environment to be negotiated. These realities often led to clashes between “local” and “national” suffragists over state-level activism. There were disagreements about whose support should be sought, what type of suffrage legislation should be proposed, and when it was the right time for a public campaign. And the national suffrage organizations were quite regularly in the wrong. As women in Colorado, for example, mounted a campaign for a woman suffrage amendment to their state constitution in the summer of 1893, they found themselves defending their choice to act to the NAWSA leadership. Wrote one Colorado suffragist to Chapman Catt, then the NAWSA organizer appointed to her state: “You say you have talked with ‘no one who feels the slightest hope of success in Colorado,’ are you sure you have talked with anyone who understands the situation here?”³ Colorado women were enfranchised in November of that year.

It is also true that the pursuit of women’s voting rights was at times carried out in the states (and territories) without any intervention or assistance from the national organizations. Indeed, state lawmakers were considering the idea of woman suffrage before there was any national organization of which to speak. In states that were moving, in the score of years before the Fifteenth Amendment materialized, to dispose of clauses in their constitutions that defined voters in terms of race, removal of the sex barrier was not an uncommon digression in the debate. Michigan state legislators first contemplated female suffrage in this way in 1849 – just one year after Stanton met resistance to her women’s voting rights proposal at a women’s rights convention.⁴ And yet a national organization dedicated to the goal of woman suffrage would not emerge until 1869.

² Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage*, 340. I am attributing a passage of the text to Catt, which seems justified by Catt’s role in the lobbying practices of the NAWSA, and Shuler’s absence therefrom.

³ Letter from Ellis Stansbury (Meredith) to Carrie Chapman Catt, June 30, 1893 (Ellis Meredith Collection, Colorado Historical Society).

⁴ *Documents Accompanying the Journal of the Senate of the State of Michigan at the Annual Session of 1849* (Lansing: Munger & Pattison), 32–69.

Fixating on the story of the Nineteenth Amendment, then, or even taking a broader view by chronicling the woman suffrage issue from the vantage point of those in the national suffrage organizations, eschews important pieces of the history of woman suffrage in the United States. That prominent suffrage activists were convinced state-level developments were key to winning the federal amendment is certainly one reason to seek an explanation of state action – and inaction – on women’s voting rights. That the states varied so widely, across time and geography, in their treatment of the issue is another. Simply put, it begs the question of why. Why did woman suffrage become a political reality in some states and not others? Why were women enfranchised at particular moments in their states’ histories?

To offer an explanation of the states’ treatment of the issue of women’s voting rights will involve addressing the fundamental question about democratic development at the heart of the woman suffrage story: why would politicians *ever* decide to expand the electorate to which they are accountable? The aim of this book is to develop a general framework for understanding why politicians act to widen the democratic circle, and to use that framework to explain the politics of woman suffrage. Building this account of electoral expansion entails drawing on insights about the decision-making process of the legislators who control the supply of new voting rights, including how and when political parties structure the environments in which legislators make their decisions.⁵ Centering the focus on partisan politics does not imply that suffrage activism is unimportant in the process of electoral expansion. Indeed, I argue that activism powerfully shapes the incentives of the supply-side actors in the enfranchisement equation. Yet previous accounts of voting rights extension that have focused almost exclusively on the demand-side actors have had difficulty explaining *how* activism influenced policy outcomes. By accounting for partisan politicians’ motivations to expand the electorate, I gain new leverage on that question.

Why Woman Suffrage – What We Know So Far

Explanations for the extension of voting rights to women were first offered by suffrage activists themselves. NAWSA, the largest and longest-standing national suffrage organization, which emerged in 1890 as the reunification of the feuding National Woman Suffrage Association and American Woman Suffrage Association, published its own six-volume account of the movement – from start to finish and across state and federal levels. This *History of Woman Suffrage* allowed leaders from each state to write their own reports of state action; what was done by suffrage organizers, what legislation was introduced and

⁵ In the category “legislators” I am including delegates to constitutional conventions, as well as members of regular state and territorial legislatures. Delegates do not have reelection goals per se, but are usually interested in legislative or other political careers after the convention. I deal with consequences of exceptions to this rule in later chapters.

Introduction

5

how it was treated, and the characterization of “public opinion” in the state were all chronicled. NAWSA also kept copious records, for at least part of its existence, which were later deposited for public study. The Congressional Union/National Woman’s Party (CU), which splintered off from NAWSA in 1914, also left behind a lengthy paper trail. And in both 1926 and 1940, NAWSA leaders authored book-length treatments on how woman suffrage was won.⁶

Despite the abundance of evidence left behind by suffragists, scholars were slow to come to the task of documenting and explaining the American experience with woman suffrage politics. Eleanor Flexner’s *Century of Struggle*, considered the groundbreaking history of the American movement for women’s rights by many contemporary scholars, did not appear until 1959. Flexner, and the scholarly literature on woman suffrage that followed, while cognizant of suffragists’ lack of objectivity in documenting their efforts, nevertheless unapologetically concentrated on telling the woman’s rights story from women’s perspectives. Women as political actors had been missing from historical scholarship, and the line of research that emerged endeavored to redress that omission. As a result, what we know so far about woman suffrage is mostly about the suffragists themselves: the arguments they invoked, the ways they organized, and how they presented their cause. The cost for this tendency in research on woman suffrage, however, has been a relative paucity of work meant to address directly the question of outcomes.

To the extent that there are accounts about what determined woman suffrage successes or failures, they are developed from the vantage point of the movement. Indeed, most existing explanations of women’s voting rights outcomes are found inside narratives meant to address other questions about the development of the suffrage movement. The consequence is a list of possible influences on the decisions made on the question of woman suffrage, but not clear answers to questions about how, when, and why each translated into the political behavior that produced voting rights policy outcomes.

Some scholars have identified changing ideologies as the primary mover of suffrage laws. In essence, the argument is that women were granted voting rights when and where the idea of their enfranchisement was no longer a radical one. Changing ideas about gender roles and the capacity of women, in particular, are often highlighted as the most important ideological shifts for facilitating woman suffrage success. The pattern of suffrage successes is thus fitted with two distinct societal developments that enabled women to establish legitimate claims to participation in electoral politics. First, early success in

⁶ The Library of Congress (Washington, DC) and The Schlesinger Library (Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts) each house extensive collections of papers from the national suffrage associations. Books by NAWSA leaders: Catt, Carrie Chapman and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement* (New York, C. Scribner’s Sons, 1926); The National American Woman Suffrage Association, *Victory: How Women Won It* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company).

the American West is attributed to the changes in gender roles demanded by the frontier experience. Second, changes in women's levels of education and increases in their participation in both the workplace and the public sphere – what some have termed the “rise of the new woman” – are used to explain the increased success of demands for women's voting rights in the later years of the movement.⁷

Others have looked to variations in the organizational capacity of the suffrage movement to explain the pattern of its successes and failures. In these narratives, leveraging positive outcomes for the movement depends most on the development of sufficient resources or appropriate tactics. Developments of this sort deemed influential are generally those that map onto moments of increasing suffrage success. Inside this category are scholars who argue that success came when suffragists dropped principled arguments for extending voting rights to women – that is, appeals to issues of republican ideals and legal justice – and instead turned to arguments defined by political expediency. The key to success, then, was to find an argument for suffrage rights that fit into ongoing political debates, promising that enfranchised women might contribute to the victory of one side over another. Development of more sophisticated lobbying strategies over the course of the movement, particularly in the later years, has also been forwarded as an explanation for suffragists' patterns of success. A number of scholars explicitly credit the execution of Carrie Chapman Catt's “winning plan” strategy, which funneled NAWSA resources to a combination of key state campaigns and Congressional lobbying activities, as the determining factor in the increased generation of successes for the movement in the final decade before the federal amendment was ratified. With equal conviction, however, others have pointed to the explanatory power of the introduction of more militant tactics, such as confrontational White House pickets, employed by the CU in the same time period.⁸

⁷ Baker, Paula, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920.” *The American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 620–47; Beeton, Beverly, *Women Vote in the West: The Woman Suffrage Movement, 1869–1896* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986); Grimes, Alan P., *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Mead, Rebecca J., *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the United States, 1868–1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); McCammon, Holly J., Karen E. Campbell, Ellen M. Granberg, and Christine Mowery, “How Movements Win: Gendered Opportunity Structures and U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements, 1866 to 1919.” *American Sociological Review* 66 (Feb., 2001): 49–70.

⁸ On the idea of the importance of politically expedient arguments for suffrage, see Marilley, Suzanne M., *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). For arguments about the influence of tactics, see Buechler, Steven, *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement: The Case of Illinois, 1850–1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Ford, Linda, “Alice Paul and the Triumph of Militancy” in *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*, ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, 277–94 (Troutdale, OR: New Sage Press, 1995).

Introduction

7

Yet another set of accounts of woman suffrage outcomes is focused on factors that might explain delay or failure, implying that voting rights gains were achieved by somehow disabling opponents. Indeed, suffragists themselves were inclined to single out malicious opponents, such as liquor industry interests, “ignorant” immigrant men, and well-heeled women organized as anti-suffragists, as the key impediments to the adoption of women’s voting rights. A fear of pro-prohibition voting by women was said to have driven the liquor lobby to campaign actively, and perhaps deviously, against woman suffrage. Vehement protection of traditional gender roles was the supposed motivation of immigrant men and the organized anti-suffragists. In this same vein, Southern resistance, tied to interests in keeping the “Negro question” closed by avoiding all discussions of voting rights, also has been implicated in the political stalling of woman suffrage.⁹

Finally, some scholars have looked to the political conditions under which women became eligible voters to explain suffrage success. Researchers have noticed that woman suffrage was often welcome on the platforms of minor political parties, including those of the Populists, Socialists, and Progressives. That woman suffrage was adopted in a number of states at moments when these third parties were actually having some electoral success is seen as evidence of their influence on the issue. In addition, scholars studying the Western suffrage successes have ascribed importance to the “unsettled” nature of partisan politics there, seeing in it a tendency toward political experimentation from which woman suffrage benefited. These are ultimately explanations about political opportunities – cracks in the system of politics as usual that might make space for the admission of new voters.¹⁰

Yet even as stories of partisan politics and political opportunities enter accounts of woman suffrage, lawmakers remain on the periphery, and their

⁹ Green, Elna C., *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Wheeler, Marjorie Spruill, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 100–32; Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), esp. 203–24; Kraditor, Aileen S. “Tactical Problems of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in the South” in *History of Women in the United States: Historical Articles on Women’s Lives and Activities*, v. 19, ed. Nancy F. Cott (Munich: KG Saur, 1992), 272–90; Marshall, Susan E., *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Banaszak, Lee Ann, *Why Movements Succeed or Fail: Opportunity, Culture, and the Struggle for Woman Suffrage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); McCammon, Holly J. and Karen Campbell, “Winning the Vote in the West: The Political Successes of the Women’s Suffrage Movements, 1866–1919.” *Gender and Society* 15 (2001): 55–82. For an exceptional work that considers legislators’ incentives, see McDonagh, Eileen, “Constituency Influence on House Roll-Call Votes in the Progressive Era, 1913–1915.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 18 (1993): 185–210.

incentives for making decisions on women's enfranchisement largely unexamined. Historian Aileen Kraditor observed in the preface of the 1981 edition of her book on the national movement that the effect of suffragist activity on Congressmen's votes was conspicuously missing from her own work, and that, "If someone tabulated the votes of all those Members of Congress who voted both when the amendment lost and later when it passed, and then searched the papers of those who changed their votes, we might know why they did so."¹¹ Systematic examinations of legislators' votes need not take on the form that Kraditor suggested – indeed, there are many other ways to get leverage on the reasons for legislative outcomes – but it is true that we won't understand why woman suffrage became law where it did and when it did without rigorous investigations of lawmakers' decisions on the issue.

Putting partisan politics and legislative decision making at the center of the woman suffrage story does not imply dismissal of the importance of the organized movement. Rather, it is the only approach that enables us to determine when and how suffrage activism – or any other factor – influenced state decisions on women's voting rights. As I show in later chapters, building legislative and partisan politics into the narrative of woman suffrage helps resolve empirical and theoretical difficulties in existing accounts of women's voting rights. For instance, while it is not incredible that opposition played a role in shaping political action on women's voting rights, the question remains of why the opposition would have been victorious initially and yet eventually overcome. Similarly, if ideological shifts pegged to changes in women's place drove suffrage outcomes, how can we explain why some frontier states held out longer than others, and why so many states in the Northeast, the region where the "new woman" was most common, never adopted woman suffrage? It is also unclear just how third parties could have delivered woman suffrage if they never controlled even a single state legislature. What is missing from all these accounts of woman suffrage, still concentrated on telling the woman's rights story from women's perspectives, is the mechanism by which each influence changed the minds of some lawmakers – and not others.

Suffrage through a Partisan Politics Lens: The Argument in Brief

Understanding what motivates politicians to work toward changing the makeup of the electorates to which they are accountable involves attending to their location in legislative institutions and partisan electoral environments. Legislators must be central to an account of electoral expansion because of their institutional power to grant or rescind voting rights. Changing voter qualifications, in fact, involves significant legislative work and institutional capacity: changes must be ushered past multiple legislative hurdles, usually

¹¹ Kraditor, Aileen S., *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), vii.

Introduction

9

involving supermajority floor vote requirements, often in two successive sessions of the legislature. In many states, changes to voter qualifications made by the legislature must also be ratified by the existing electorate through a referendum. Such a long and complex path from proposal to policy implies that legislation for new voting rights is particularly vulnerable to defeat by neglect, delay, or procedural technicality. Ensuring success for the idea of new voting rights thus depends critically on whether the policy becomes not only an acceptable idea to a sufficient number of lawmakers, but an important one as well – one that legislators will expend their time and resources to advance.

Parties enter the account of voting rights extension not only as the political institutions centrally concerned with organizing and controlling electoral outcomes – and thus, with obvious interest in the definition of the electorate – but also as organizers of legislative bodies. Partisan interest in the extension of voting rights may thus provide the issue importance essential to ensuring its success inside legislative institutions. Given their central concern with electoral outcomes, a political party convinced that there is an electoral benefit for them in the enfranchisement of the new group would prefer to change electoral qualifications, and the more they need those new votes to win control of the government, the more important such a change should be. Conversely, if a political party sees more cost than gain in the enfranchisement of new voters, it should work to stymie the proposed change.

In defining the potential for success of a proposal for suffrage extension, then, the first question to answer is what the addition of new voters will mean for party politicians. How do they expect the group that might be enfranchised will behave as voters? From where do they draw those expectations? I argue that political identities – shaped by the influences of political comprehensions of race, class, and gender – are key to shaping partisans' expectations of likely voter behavior. It is possible that partisans might understand a disenfranchised group as likely to be supportive of a particular political party; common understandings of the political homogeneity of groups defined by their social location may credibly signal probable partisan benefit. In this case, the party expecting to reap the electoral rewards of enfranchising these new voters should be the only party interested in extending suffrage rights to the group. This simple partisan story of suffrage extension is what I term *strategic enfranchisement*. Importance of the suffrage issue, in this case, derives from a combination of a party's level of need for more support in the electorate and the would-be voters' (perceived) political tendencies. In other words, this is a story of parties seeking new sources of electoral support, finding in a disfranchised group the promise of a new voting bloc, and hence pushing suffrage changes through the legislative (and perhaps referendum) process.

It is also possible, however, that the future voting behavior of a disenfranchised group may be quite difficult to predict. Or the expectation may be that the group would be unlikely to exhibit any singular partisan pattern. That is, a proposed change in voter qualifications may not neatly map onto a politically

cohesive group. What then? The change in the qualifications of voters must derive its political meaning and importance from some factor other than the promise of a new partisan voting bloc. In this case – when new voters are enfranchised not for the sake of the votes they themselves offer – new voting rights must somehow be distinguished as a real constituent demand, one for which unresponsiveness on the part of elected politicians and political parties would likely translate into real electoral consequences. Suffrage extension in an accommodation of the interests of existing voters in these new voting rights is what I term *programmatically enfranchisement*. The programmatic enfranchisement account takes on a level of complexity in how politicians come to perceive the importance of action the suffrage issue; there are several political conditions that help suggest such importance, which I discuss in more detail in the following chapter. Essential to programmatic enfranchisement, however, is a credible pro-suffrage coalition to which elected politicians are already accountable.

Key Insights and Predictions for the Case of Woman Suffrage

My main argument about outcomes for the woman suffrage movement is that the *successful* path to enfranchisement for women was programmatic. This argument rests on the understanding that although gendered arguments for woman suffrage were common, real *political* essentialism of the category “women” was not. That is, politicians saw as much political diversity in “women” as they saw in “men,” thus making women poor candidates for strategic enfranchisement. This argument does not imply that attempts at a strategic enfranchisement strategy never emerged. Rather, it asserts that the fundamental incentive structure of the strategic enfranchisement model was not realized; that where and when voting rights for women were actually delivered, it was through the coalitional politics of the programmatic enfranchisement model. To argue that woman suffrage was delivered through programmatic enfranchisement adds far clearer definitions of the relevant political opportunities, political barriers, movement resources, and activism strategies than previous accounts of the movement have managed to offer. In so doing, it also clarifies and even changes our understanding of how several of the oft-cited influences on the woman suffrage cause shaped the movement’s potential, most notably race, third parties, political machines, and suffrage opponents like the liquor industry.

In arguing that women were not likely candidates for strategic enfranchisement, I am not arguing that expectations of women voting to support a particular cause or party were absent from the politics of woman suffrage. The groups that ultimately partnered with the suffrage cause likely wanted women sympathetic to their cause to add to the organization’s electoral leverage once they became voters. It is easy to conflate the idea, however, that suffrage supporters expected that *certain groups* of women would be electorally supportive of their cause – such as those women that were locally active in the organized suffrage

Introduction

11

movement or those that were active within their issue organizations – with the idea that supporters believed “women” *in general or more than men* would support them. That distinction, however, is an important one, and one that helps explain why woman suffrage was not the result of strategic enfranchisement. And certainly some individuals or groups at some moments might have thought that they would get “women” on their side by working for suffrage. My argument, however, is that the dominant information defining the meaning of woman suffrage made such a calculation uncommon and unfounded – and, hence, prevented it from being the general incentive for supporting the suffrage cause. This information derived first from notions of gender and later from the policy feedback from the early adopters of woman suffrage provisions.

Perhaps ironically, both dominant contemporary notions of gender and woman suffrage activists’ own feminist arguments about women’s place in electoral politics worked against the possibility of strategic enfranchisement for women. Common notions of male leadership in the household and women’s subservience made male politicians – party leaders, lawmakers, and interest group leaders alike – likely to expect women to “double the existing vote.” This expectation that women would, generally speaking, vote the same way as the men to which they were related did is ubiquitous in the historical record and often called the “family vote” argument in the woman suffrage literature. For an entirely different gendered reason, suffrage movement leaders went to great lengths to emphasize that women would make electoral choices based on criteria other than their status as “women.” Suffrage leaders were emphasizing the feminist notion that women were just as capable of “doing politics” in exactly the same way men did. If such feminist arguments were at all successful, however, their implication for the expectation of the partisan outcome of women’s voting behavior was essentially the same: women promised no new voting bloc on account of their sex.

Not only did logics of gender push against the possibility of women becoming targets of a strategic enfranchisement approach, but so too did the information feedback from the early adopting states. When women were enfranchised, they did not turn partisan tides. This fact, as I highlight in Chapter 2, was one that politicians were quick to observe and underscore. Neither did suffrage states display a pattern of policy outcomes consistent with women electorally forcing a significant change in policy areas that were – at least rhetorically – linked to “female interests.” Notably, suffrage states did not, as a rule, become dry states.

If women were unlikely candidates for strategic enfranchisement, then the fate of the woman suffrage movement rested on successful navigation of the politics of the programmatic enfranchisement model. Applying the programmatic enfranchisement model to woman suffrage specifies a key set of conditions that define what “political opportunity” was for the woman suffrage movement. It implies that women’s voting rights should have been more likely when and where elections were competitive, politicians were electorally beholden to

organized constituent groups, and those groups could be engaged in the suffrage cause. Importantly, the programmatic model highlights that the suffrage movement's ability to engage politically important coalitional partners was key to its success. Thus, resources that would help attract political partners, such as politically skilled movement workers, were the important ones for the movement to accumulate. Also helpful in executing a successful coalitional strategy were overlapping interests and social networks that defined a common interest between women working for suffrage and interest groups wielding electoral leverage. In essence, it was particularly useful to have suffragists working from within other organizations to push for support for the suffrage cause. Farmers' interest groups, for example, the organizational roots of which were often fraternal organizations whose ranks were populated by women as well as men, could thus be engaged meaningfully through the demands of their own memberships. On the other hand, some factors pushed against suffragists' willingness and capacity to build the necessary coalitions, particularly the constraints of race and class. The organized movement was in many places dominated by middle-class, white, urban women who had difficulty seeing and establishing the necessary political common ground for successful coalitional politics. Opportunities for promising partnerships with, for example, organized labor were often missed or even, as I demonstrate with evidence from the case of Illinois in Chapter 3, actively undone.

Adopting the programmatic enfranchisement model not only offers a general explanation for the outcomes of the woman suffrage movement in the United States, but also explains the influence of a number of the factors that repeatedly enter the literature on the movement as ones relevant to the movement's failures or successes. First among these is the role that third parties played in delivering successes for the suffrage movement. It is the confluence of conditions that define a political opportunity under the programmatic enfranchisement model, I argue, that meant third parties stood as particularly promising coalitional partners. When a third party took notable vote shares, it not only increased political competition, but offered an unmatched level of certainty about the electoral costs of failing to meet the demands of its constituent supporters. Moreover, the leverage of third-party support could be heightened when their vote shares represented the bolting of constituent groups that had been key to previous winning coalitions and resulted in the overturn of previous partisan control of the government.

Just as important as explaining political opportunities is explaining the conditions that frustrated the suffrage movement. Simply put, the key barriers were those that constrained politics in a way that prevented the relevant political opportunities from opening. Arguably, the strongest of these was race. Contrary to most existing accounts of woman suffrage, however, my argument is not that the key barrier built by race was the resistance of black belt Southerners to the idea of reopening the "Negro question" by considering the extension of voting rights. Instead, I argue that the most important impediment to woman

Introduction

13

suffrage forged by race was that race politics built political institutions that made movement for change difficult: ballot access laws, registration laws, and constitutional amendment procedures all had consequences for suffrage politics. The dominant story of race and woman suffrage was that a constrained one-party system built on ideals of white supremacy – which described most of the South – offered none of the electoral competition necessary for incentivizing partisan politicians to consider extending the franchise and few, if any, electorally consequential organizations with whom to partner. And even laws meant to protect the voting rights of racial minorities had implications for suffragists' ability to build sufficient political support for their desired change in state voter qualifications. Notably, unbendable electoral laws meant for the protection of racial minorities' rights could make the coalition required to win a change in women's voting rights an effectively impossible threshold. Of course, suffragists' own racial identities could also be part of the barriers built by race, ruling out some partnerships that were successful in states where racial interests were less central.

Political machines were another feature of the partisan politics environment that had consequences for the woman suffrage movement, often standing as a steadfast and powerful barrier to women's voting rights. Machines are in many ways the simplest of party organizations, functioning off of the notion of building a winning coalition through patronage and other tangible rewards for supporters. Suffrage extension, then, threatens a particular burden on machines: doing politics is literally expected to be more expensive with more voters to entice in this way. Machines would also be threatened by any movement tied to interests in increasing government transparency, increasing its efficiency, its reliance on expertise, and the like. All of these are threats to the machine's ability to use the apparatus of the state to entice its supporters. Any call for new voting rights packaged with calls for government accountability and reform, as woman suffrage typically was, would therefore meet with machine resistance. And because machines are particularly cohesive political structures, machine leaders stood well positioned to mobilize opposition to suffrage – both within government and in the electorate. This incentive and capacity for machine resistance, coupled the historical tendency for America's urban machines to count among their bases of support significant immigrant populations, helps explain the common refrain from suffragists that their efforts were stymied by “ignorant immigrant male voters.” While suffrage measures that went to the polls undoubtedly encountered resistance that could be linked to immigrant voters, the suffragists' rhetoric missed the key role that machine politics played in ensuring such outcomes.

Finally, in a more general way, adopting the programmatic enfranchisement model as the framework for understanding the politics of woman suffrage helps explain the actions and leverage of alleged opponents, such as the liquor industry. An important part of the difficulty in understanding the role of suffrage opponents is explaining why opponents could have been so effective in

staving off suffrage for so long, and yet could also be overridden in rather short order. Here, both the details of the programmatic model and the underlying observations about the institutional hurdles through which suffrage measures needed to pass are relevant. Given that the political institutions that must be cleared to change suffrage laws are designed to make change hard, there is an inherent inequality in the costs and benefits for opposition and support of new suffrage laws. Real efforts to change suffrage qualifications are always costly, and thus require strong electoral incentives to take on. In contrast, in a cost-benefit analysis, sometimes opposition is worth mounting based on even slight notions that the new voters might not be friendly. Effective opposition to woman suffrage, for example, might only require influencing a few lawmakers on the relevant legislative committee to keep a measure from being introduced into the legislative chamber. And because effective opposition can be relatively cheap, it might be mounted by interests like the liquor industry even if they only perceived small risks to their interests if women were enfranchised – in other words, they need not realistically fear imminent prohibition. When electoral incentives vest a partisan interest in effectively delivering a change in suffrage laws, however, opposition becomes much more expensive, because suffrage opponents would need to mount a campaign against the party organization. And because electoral tides can and did turn quite quickly, the relative advantage of opponents could quickly disappear.

Evaluating the Theory: A Mixed-Methods Approach

This book is motivated by two goals: evaluating the general theoretical argument I offer about suffrage politics and explaining the outcomes of the woman suffrage movement, in particular. Both of these aims are served by a research design that engages enough historical detail and captures enough variance in political circumstances to parse out the effects of demand-side and supply-side factors on the political fate of the issue of new voting rights. The design I offer, then, is one that begins with detailed investigations in five case study states, then tests the conclusions from the case study states with relevant data from all forty-eight states, and then finally turns to analysis of the politics of woman suffrage at the federal level. I rely on both qualitative historical work and quantitative statistical analyses in what some call a mixed-methods approach, where qualitative and quantitative data are employed in tandem. The underlying logic of this approach is that a deep familiarity with the on-the-ground details derived from the rich qualitative data enables the appropriate use of quantitative models to test my argument and its implications. The qualitative work is used to help determine the specification of what belongs in the quantitative models, how to interpret their results, and how to think about and defend quantitative models where, by necessity of the historical record, proxies rather than ideal measures must be employed. In sum, neither the qualitative

Introduction

15

nor the quantitative evidence is meant to stand on its own; both are to be taken up and interpreted together.¹²

To begin, I selected a sample of five states for which I track the development of the issue of woman suffrage over time, from its earliest mention in the public sphere in that state until the adoption of woman suffrage in that state – either through its own policy change or the ratification of the federal amendment. Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, and New Mexico are the central cases. These states were chosen as a set in order to capture not only significant variation on the key explanatory factor – the character and competitiveness of the partisan politics environment – but with attention to variation that would allow for investigation into the roles of state political institutional and demographic differences in this partisan process. The set, then, includes party environments marked by one-party dominance, two-party competitiveness, and significant third-party successes. Also represented is a range of racial and ethnic demographics; the set purposely includes states to account for differences in party politics and political institutions where populations of blacks, Spanish Americans, and/or new immigrants were significant. These demographic differences were deemed important not only because race and ethnicity are oft-cited factors in existing accounts of woman suffrage outcomes, but moreover because my argument about their role in defining the chances is quite different from those existing accounts. Thus, having empirical leverage on these factors is particularly important. Additionally, with an assortment of industrial and agricultural bases to the economies of these states, and with North, South, and West represented in the case set, the issue of woman suffrage can be traced across a range of distinct backdrops of interest arrangements in state politics.¹³

The primary goal of the qualitative historical work in the book is to map out what organizations and political figures were involved in the politics of woman suffrage over time in each state, the positions they took, and the actions they undertook. This work enables me to shed light on the building of the programmatic enfranchisement strategy by suffrage activists where it did emerge, illuminating when and how pro-suffrage coalitions developed. This mapping,

¹² For more information and arguments about the unique empirical leverage and validity of this sort of approach, see Brady, Henry E. and David Collier, eds., *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004.).

¹³ It may be noted that there is no Northeastern state in the set. This choice was deliberately made in part because so much of the existing literature focuses on Northeastern states, particularly New York and Massachusetts. This fact is likely attributable in part to the ease of availability of the historical record as well as the fact that the Northeast was home to some of the most famous of the national activists. As such, it is possible to turn to other secondary sources for some comparison of the Northeastern state politics to the politics of the Southern, Western, and Midwestern states included here. Doing so suggests that suffrage activists in the Northeast were likely frustrated in their efforts by the Republican Party dominance in that section of the country, a point I highlight in the cross-state analyses in Chapter 6.

in turn, enables appropriate statistical analysis of the decisions taken by state lawmakers on the issue of woman suffrage. I track every legislative consideration of woman suffrage in each state and test, where some sort of vote makes doing so possible, the effectiveness of the particular suffrage coalition that existed in that state at that moment on the outcome. The assessment of state legislators' decisions on the issue includes not only decisions on final roll call votes once woman suffrage measures reached the floor of the legislature, but also decisions on whether to push these measures through the legislative process at all. Paying attention to the entire legislative process is particularly important in revealing the interests and leverage of the party organizations on the issue. To piece together the histories in each state, I combed through national, state, and local suffrage organization documents; personal correspondences of suffrage activists; documents of coalitional partners; state legislative records; and papers of state political parties and individual state politicians. The state-specific data on which I rely to specify the statistical analyses come from the records of state legislatures, suffrage organizations, political parties, state election returns, and the U.S. Census. These sources allow me to account for the roles of suffrage activists, interest groups, political parties, and even the average voter in the politics of women's voting rights, and to show how and when each influenced state action or inaction on the issue.

Delving into local histories in five states across some of the major geopolitical divides of the United States enables the illustration of important nuances to the general explanation of suffrage politics. Each of the state case studies offers some unique insight, and the case studies are presented separately across chapters that highlight what piece of the politics that each case is particularly useful in unpacking. Commonalities across the case studies, however, demonstrate that indeed one framework can help us understand the suffrage story in markedly different sociopolitical environments. Put another way, the comparison is evidence that there is, indeed, a general story of woman suffrage to tell. This generality is also more rigorously tested in the penultimate chapter of the book, where statistical analysis on the timing of woman suffrage adoption across all forty-eight relevant states is presented. It is the work of the case studies that enables specification of the appropriate model across all the states. And it is the cumulation of the lessons from the state-level politics that provides the framework for understanding the national story of woman suffrage, including the analysis of the actions of the national political party organizations and the U.S. Congress, which is also presented in the penultimate chapter of the book.

What Is To Come

In the next chapter, I place the story of woman suffrage inside my general account of suffrage extension. Doing so involves first a brief review of the decisions that have been made over the course of American history about the qualifications of electors. The chapter then turns to developing, in greater detail,

Introduction

17

the general theoretical framework for explaining decisions to expand the electorate. Strategic enfranchisement and programmatic enfranchisement incentive structures are elaborated, including the crucial role of political identity in defining which type of enfranchisement is possible for previously excluded groups. Finally, I engage the question of whether woman suffrage should be considered an exceptional case of suffrage extension. I contend that it should not by highlighting the general lessons the case of the politics of woman suffrage offers about the interplay of political identities and partisan incentives in shaping electoral qualifications.

Chapter 2 engages the argument that the *successful* path to enfranchisement for women was programmatic. Using the case of Colorado, the first state in which male voters ratified a legislative decision to grant women the right to vote and a common example in other states' discussions of woman suffrage, I show how this early success for woman suffrage congealed the partisan understanding of woman suffrage in a way that defined out strategic enfranchisement. I also show that suffragists began to learn how it was that electoral partisan incentives could nonetheless secure women's voting rights – to learn the basics of programmatic enfranchisement politics.

The next two chapters illuminate both the difficulties of negotiating the coalitional politics of programmatic enfranchisement and how it was that those coalitions paid dividends. In Chapter 3 I take up the case of Michigan to explain how suffragists made and capitalized on connections to influential interest groups, and how they floundered in legislative politics without them. In Chapter 4 I explain how and when woman suffrage was linked to third-party movements, and, using the case of Illinois, demonstrate the particular leverage such connections brought the issue in state politics.

Finally, Chapter 5 investigates the significant barriers to woman suffrage constructed by issues of racial – and class – interests in state politics. The evidence for this chapter comes from Louisiana and New Mexico. Louisiana demonstrates suffragists' difficulty finding political leverage in a constrained, one-party environment. Tensions between protection of Spanish-American men's rights and an Anglo-run woman suffrage movement are explored with the case of New Mexico.

Although I argue that understanding the state and local politics that delivered state woman suffrage victories is central to explaining the historic change of women's place in American politics resulting from the woman suffrage movement, answering the question of the national outcome is still an underlying goal. Thus, in Chapter 6 I return to the national story of woman suffrage, and approach explanation in two ways. First, to ensure that the state-by-state account I build in Chapters 2 through 5 is not particular to the small set of states I study in detail, I offer a test of the general explanatory framework's applicability to woman suffrage across all forty-eight states between the start of the woman suffrage movement in 1848 and the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Statistical analysis of data on all the states across these

years is marshaled as evidence for the role of partisan incentives in decisions about the expansion of the electorate. Second, I revisit the decisions of members of the U.S. Congress on the Nineteenth Amendment to show how the framework can help us understand the long wait for federal action, as well as the final relenting.

As I draw conclusions about the particular case of woman suffrage in the final chapter of the book, I also revisit the question of what contribution this work makes to our general understanding of American politics. Most obvious is a set of lessons that change our understanding of how and why voting rights have changed and continue to develop; a discussion of new thinking about black voting rights provides an example. There are connections to other realms of political inquiry, too. Retelling the woman suffrage story in this partisan way holds insights for our thinking about gender in politics, particularly for the growing literature on the place of “women” and “women’s issues” in the political parties. The accounts of states’ experiences with woman suffrage also speak to just how significant third parties have been in the development of American politics, even if they show up only intermittently and primarily at the state level. In the end, I also hope the reader will find that these state stories of the struggle for women’s voting rights underscore the reality that much more than the effort of the few famous suffragists that Americans now remember was necessary to enfranchise “one half the people.”¹⁴

¹⁴ “One half the people” is the terminology of Anne Firor Scott.