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VOTES FOR WOMEN:
AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S ENFRANCHISEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 officially granted voting rights to women across the United States. However, many states extended full or partial suffrage to women before the federal amendment. In this paper, we discuss the history of women's enfranchisement using an economic lens. We examine the demand-side, discussing the rise of the women's movement and its alliances with other social movements, and describe how suffragists put pressure on legislators. On the supply side, we draw from theoretical models of suffrage extension to explain why men shared the right to vote with women. Finally, we review empirical studies that attempt to distinguish between competing explanations. We find that no single theory can explain women's suffrage in the US, and note that while the Nineteenth Amendment extended the franchise to women, state-level barriers to voting limited the ability of black women to exercise that right until the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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On August 18, 1920, the United States granted women suffrage when the Tennessee House of Representatives voted to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution—by a margin of one vote. The ratification of the “Susan B. Anthony” amendment marked the end of a nearly 80-year struggle on the part of women to gain the right to vote. Along the way, there had been some successes. The territory of Wyoming gave full suffrage to women in 1869, followed by territory of Utah in 1870. By the time the US Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment, 15 states had granted women full suffrage, with 13 of these in the West. Many more had given women partial suffrage, allowing them to vote in municipal or school elections and, in some cases, US presidential elections.

Economists, sociologists, political scientists, and others have long sought to explain the factors underlying the timing and the success of the women’s suffrage movement. An extension of voting rights can fundamentally affect the distribution of resources in a society. Theories of suffrage extension seek to explain why groups in power would choose to share this power with the disenfranchised. All of these theories predict that men extend the franchise to women when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs, but they differ in the benefits and costs they consider. In the next section, we discuss the history of women's suffrage in the United States, emphasizing the ways in which the movement for women’s suffrage was intertwined with other historical episodes, movements, and shifting political and social landscapes. For example, we recount the rise of the women’s rights movement and its relationship to the anti-slavery movement in the first half of the 19th century, and discuss the impact of the decision to grant voting rights to black men, but not to women, after the US Civil War. We also examine the development of economic rights for women and explain why these rights evolved differently than voting rights. We describe the efforts of women’s suffrage organizations to build support for the movement and put

pressure on state and federal legislators to enact suffrage legislation. Finally, we discuss the forces leading to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Throughout this narrative, we review the various theories that seek to explain why men in power chose to enfranchise women. Some of these models are based on competition among political elites and the desire to promote a particular policy agenda; others emphasize patterns of coalition-building; while still others stress how suffragists worked to create a greater demand for change. In the final section, we examine the empirical studies that use variation in the timing of suffrage across the states to distinguish between these theories. Perhaps unsurprisingly, no single factor or model can universally explain women's enfranchisement.

An Historical Overview of Women's Suffrage in the United States

Voting Rights in the Early Republic

The US Constitution as originally ratified in 1787 made no mention of gender, and left the determination of voting rights to the states. However, the Constitution linked voter eligibility for the US House of Representatives to the qualifications required to vote for the “most numerous branch” of a state’s legislature. Voting for presidential elections was even less well-defined: Article II, Section I specifies only that each state is allowed “to appoint, in such manner as the legislature thereof may direct, a number of electors.”¹

Early on, most states had statutes or constitutional provisions restricting suffrage to males, and states tied the right to vote to property ownership or payment of taxes. Southern states

¹ Under the original provisions of the Constitution, state legislatures selected members of the US Senate. This changed in 1913 with the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment that specified that senators be selected by popular vote.

further restricted suffrage to white males. Only New Jersey allowed women to vote; however, because married women were not allowed to own property, the state's property ownership restriction essentially limited voting to wealthy single women and widows. Nonetheless, women did participate in early elections, and political parties even recruited women voters to swing the vote in contested districts (Klinghoffer and Elkins 1992, 176).

In 1807, women in New Jersey lost the vote when the state legislature enacted a statute that restricted voting to white, male taxpaying citizens. The political dynamic within the Republican Party, divided between liberals in the North and moderates in the South, drove this change. Although the liberal Northerners had the upper hand, they knew they needed a united party to face the Federalists in the next presidential election. Moderate Republicans wanted to exclude non-taxpayers from voting, and growing nationalism within the party led to the exclusion of non-citizens. These two groups, however, traditionally voted Republican, so to balance the scales, single women and blacks, who traditionally voted for the Federalists, lost the franchise as well (Klinghoffer and Elkins 1992, 188).

New Jersey was not unique in narrowing voting rights in this period. Over the nineteenth century, states contracted as well as extended voting rights. These changes were politically motivated and reflected competition between parties and changing voter sentiments. As new states entered the Union without property ownership restrictions, some older states dropped such restrictions, too. However, states tended to establish or retain requirements that voters must be taxpayers (McConaughy 2013, 21), and many states enacted restrictions that took voting rights

away from racial minorities, immigrants, and individuals who were illiterate or had criminal histories.²

Abolition, Seneca Falls, and the Women's Rights Movement before the Civil War

The women's rights movement grew out of the broader reform movements of the 1830s. As women activists fought for the rights of others, they began to recognize and elucidate the constraints placed on them because of their sex (DuBois 1987, 837). Female abolitionists, in particular, were criticized for intruding on men's affairs and not following social conventions. As the antislavery movement debated whether women should be allowed leadership positions, women activists began to articulate some parallels between their situation and that of enslaved persons. In an 1837 piece published in the weekly abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, Sarah Grimké wrote that women also experienced the "irrepressible desire for mental and spiritual freedom which glows in the breast of many who hardly dare speak the sentiments..." (as quoted in Buhle and Buhle 2005, 6). Such statements were met with rebukes from men and women alike. Catharine Beecher, sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, sharply criticized "those who are bewailing themselves over the fancied wrongs and injuries of women in this nation." She argued that women and men occupied "separate spheres" and women's role was to care for the home and children (DuBois 1987, 838). By the end of the 1840s, many women abolitionists recognized they needed to use the political system to secure equal rights for women as well.

In July 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott called a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, "to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman." Almost 300 people attended the convention, many of whom were men (Keyssar 2009, 240).

² For a history of voting rights in the United States, see Keyssar (2009).

Stanton drafted the Declaration of Sentiments to summarize the resolutions coming out of the convention, framing it to mirror the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Sentiments asserts that “all men and women are created equal,” and then goes on to enumerate the “repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman,” with the first grievance listed as, “He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise,” followed by, “He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.” The list of further complaints includes the restrictions on women’s economic activities and the imbalance of power in marriage (Buhle and Buhle 2005, 95–96).

Of the rights demanded for women, suffrage was the most radical. In their *History of Woman Suffrage*, Anthony and Stanton noted that the resolution encouraging women to fight for suffrage was the only one *not* unanimously adopted at Seneca Falls. Some convention-goers feared that including suffrage would lead to more opposition to their other demands for equality in marriage and economic pursuits “and make the whole movement ridiculous” (Buhle and Buhle 2005, 97). Stanton and the prominent abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, won the day by countering that “the power to choose ruler and make law, was the right by which all others could be secured” (97).

While the Seneca Falls Convention is often identified as the start of the women’s suffrage movement, there were actually many meetings organized during the late 1840s and early 1850s to promote the rights of women. Seneca Falls looms large in popular memory in part because Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony wrote the first history of the movement (Keyssar 2009, 142), in which they asserted the primacy of the Seneca Falls convention and preserved a

record of its proceedings for future generations.³ By the early 1850s, suffrage had become the centerpiece of the women's rights agenda. At the Second National Woman's Rights Convention held in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1851, the first resolution made explicit why suffrage was the primary goal: "Resolved, That while we would not undervalue other methods, the Right of Suffrage for Women is, in our opinion, the corner-stone of this enterprise, since we do not seek to protect woman, but rather to place her in a position to protect herself" (Buhle and Buhle 2005, 112). The justification for women's suffrage was based on the republican notion of equal rights for all. Activists argued that women were entitled to the same political rights as men; women, like men, were subject to the decisions made by the government so they too should have a direct voice in who governed (DuBois 1987, 841).

The Advancement of Economic Rights for Women

Despite the focus on gaining the vote, the early legislative successes of the women's movement were in eliminating coverture and securing the rights of married women to own property, to control their earnings, and to enter into contracts. Figure 1 presents data on the timing of laws that granted married women control over property. In most states, these property laws preceded, or were enacted in conjunction with, laws granting married women control over their earnings and laws allowing women to engage in contracts or business without their husbands' consent, often referred to as "sole trader" laws (Khan 1996, 362-4). Maine,

³ In 1876, Stanton and Anthony decided to write a history of the movement. They planned to spend four months and produce a pamphlet of a few hundred pages. By 1886, they had produced three volumes, each about 1,000 pages, under the title *History of Woman Suffrage*. These volumes contained a mix of written accounts of events and primary documents like speeches, letters, newspaper articles, and reports. Anthony worked with Ida Husted Harper to edit a fourth volume published in 1902 that documented the history from 1883 to 1900. Harper edited two more volumes, both published in 1922, that documented the movement from 1900 to 1920. As Buhle and Buhle (2005, xix) argue, the *History of Woman Suffrage* "presents a defensive and highly partisan portrait of their own National Woman Association (NWSA)." They gave little space to their rival organization, the American Woman Suffrage Association, and other reform organizations involved in the women's suffrage cause.

Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island granted married women property rights in the 1840s, and other states in the Northeast and the Midwest followed in the 1850s and early 1860s. Most of the states in the West and South enacted these laws in the 1870s. The successful reforms in economic rights occurred in part because the increased focus on political equality broadened, rather than narrowed, the scope of the women's movement to include these areas. DuBois (1987, 842-843) notes that the idea that women deserved greater political voice naturally connected to the idea that women should have greater independence in other spheres, particularly in marriage.

Changes to property rights altered the relationship between men and women within marriage. Therefore, these changes must be discussed in terms of how the allocation of property rights within marriage affects household decisions. One theoretical approach asserts that women place a higher value on children's welfare than men, and men recognize that giving women more economic power will increase investments in children's education (Doepke and Tertilt 2009). When the returns to human capital are low, as they were in the pre-industrial, mostly agricultural economy in the early nineteenth century, the benefits to men of being able to control their wives' property outweigh any benefits from investing more in children's education. As the returns to human capital increase, the scale tips toward more education for children, and men are more likely to grant women greater economic power.

An alternative, yet complementary, approach emphasizes how coverture reduces married women's incentives to pursue economic opportunities, and hence, reduces household earnings and wealth (Geddes and Lueck 2002). The costs to households of these disincentives grow as the economy develops and women have more opportunities in the formal labor market. Eventually, these costs lead men to grant women property rights. An empirical examination of the timing of

the enactment of married women's property laws across states finds that the early movers were states with larger urban populations, higher female school enrollment, and higher wealth per capita, results that are consistent with both models (Geddes and Lueck 2002). Women's economic opportunities and the returns to human capital would have been greater in urban than rural areas, and the higher rates of female school enrollment indicate increased investments in expectation of these returns. Further supporting these theories, the enactment of married women's property laws also led to increases in women's patenting of inventions. Once women had the legal right to control their property and earnings in marriage, they were more willing to engage in commercial activities (Khan 1996).

What is striking about the geographic diffusion displayed in Figure 1 is how different it is from that of women's suffrage. As we will discuss below, the early movers in granting married women property rights were slow to grant women the vote; many early movers did not grant women access to the ballot until the Nineteenth Amendment, demonstrating that the politics of these two dimensions of women's empowerment were quite different. While changes to property rights altered the relationship between men and women within marriage, they did not change political institutions directly.

Reconstruction and the Defeat of Universal Suffrage

The aftermath of the Civil War generated a broad discussion of political rights. Women's groups played a key role in organizing popular support for the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery. As the discussion turned to Constitutional remedies to ensure the rights of the former enslaved population, women's rights advocates believed that such remedies should also extend to them. They argued that women, like the former enslaved, deserved the vote not because of their special status, but because they were human beings endowed with natural rights.

As one activist put it, race and sex were just “two accidents of the body” unworthy of constitutional recognition (DuBois 1987, 845-6).

However, even radicals and abolitionists who had previously advocated for universal suffrage retreated when it became clear that opposition to women’s enfranchisement could lead to the defeat of suffrage for black men (Keyssar 2009, 144). The Republican Party leadership sought to separate black men’s suffrage from women’s enfranchisement, and prioritized gaining voting rights for black men. Prior to the ratification of the Fourteenth amendment, abolitionists Wendell Phillips and Theodore Tilton, suggested they focus on enfranchising blacks first and women later. At this, Susan B. Anthony became angry and declared that “she would sooner cut off her right hand than ask for the ballot for the black man and not for woman”(as quoted in Harper 2005, 261). Anthony and other prominent suffragists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton vocally denounced the wording of the Fourteenth Amendment. In contrast, Frederick Douglass, a supporter of women’s suffrage since the convention in Seneca Falls, famously stated in a debate at the American Equal Rights Association Meeting in 1869 that when women “are dragged from their houses and hung upon lamp-posts... then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own” (Buhle and Buhle 2005, 258).

Republicans also anticipated political gains from giving black men the vote: it would give them a solid base of support in the South, as well as help their political strength in the North. McConaughy (2013, pp. 34-37) calls this “strategic enfranchisement” – when political actors seek new supporters from the disenfranchised. As Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner asked his fellow Republicans (as quoted in Keyssar 2009, 74):

You need votes in Connecticut, do you not? There are three thousand fellow-citizens in that state ready at the call of Congress to take their place at the ballot box. You need them also in Pennsylvania, do you not? There are at least fifteen thousand in that great state

waiting for your summons...be assured they will all vote for those who stand by them in the assertion of Equal Rights.

In contrast, giving women access to the ballot was not expected to yield the same returns.

Politicians viewed women as encompassing too much variation for their votes to be viewed as a bloc; many believed they would vote as their husbands, so the vote would just be doubled (McConnaughy 2013, 252).

The ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment dealt another serious blow to the movement to advance women's rights by specifying that the basis for a state's Congressional representation was its number of male citizens. This was the first Constitutional provision to discriminate explicitly based on sex, and it undermined women's claims to suffrage. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, delivered a second setback when it prohibited limiting a citizen's right to vote "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," but notably *not* on account of sex.

Changing Directions for the Women's Suffrage Movement

The defeat of universal suffrage during Reconstruction led to profound changes in the women's suffrage movement. Disagreement over strategy split the leadership of the movement into two separate organizations in 1869: the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA), led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and the American Woman's Suffrage Association (AWSA) led by Lucy Stone and her husband, Henry Blackwell. Stanton and Anthony, embittered by the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, sought a federal amendment and focused on lobbying Congress. In contrast, Stone and Blackwell had supported the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. Although disappointed by the exclusion of women, Stone noted: "I will be thankful in my soul if *any* body can get out of the terrible pit" (Stanton et

al. 1881, 2: 384). She and Blackwell believed the most productive strategy would to work state by state to secure women the vote (Keyssar 2009, 149).

The arguments used to advance women's suffrage also began to shift. Although advocates continued to argue for women's enfranchisement in terms of women deserving the same rights as men, some began to argue women should be given the vote because of the ways in which they differed from men. These arguments built on the theory of "separate spheres." Previously, separate spheres had been used to oppose the expansion of rights for women by claiming that their focus on matters of the home made them unfit for political life. But now, suffrage supporters used these arguments to claim instead that women's distinct experiences and perspectives would bring morality and virtue to politics and promote reform (DuBois 1987, 848-9; McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith 2004).

A few arguments for women's suffrage also appealed to the deeply-seated racism of American society; proponents for women's suffrage criticized the Fifteenth Amendment for giving the vote to the "lowest classes of manhood" over "the higher classes of women" (DuBois 1987, 850). Stanton, Anthony, and other leaders of the women's movement are on record making explicitly racist arguments for women's suffrage. Some supporters of women's suffrage in the South argued that giving women the vote would counter the influence of black male voters (Buhle and Buhle 2005, xxv). Others drew on racist arguments to oppose women's suffrage, arguing that giving black women the vote would pose a threat to white supremacy (McConaughy 2013, 171-72).

Led by Stanton and Cady, the National Woman's Suffrage Association tried to leverage the reform sentiment that generated the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to secure a federal amendment granting women the vote. In 1869, Radical Republican George Julian of Indiana

proposed a Constitutional amendment linking the right to vote to citizenship. This provision would have taken away the power of states to define voting rights, and hence it met with strong opposition. Susan B. Anthony drafted an amendment with a narrower scope: prohibiting discrimination in voting rights “on account of sex.” In 1878, Senator Aaron A. Sargent of California introduced this amendment to Congress, and in 1882, committees from both houses recommended passage of the amendment. In 1887, the proposal was brought forward for a floor vote in the Senate, but the outcome devastated women’s suffrage supporters: 16 yeas, 34 nays, and 26 abstentions. In every subsequent session of Congress, supporters reintroduced the amendment, but it did not again come to a floor vote until 1914 (Keyssar 2009, 150).

Partial Suffrage

The women's suffrage movement did make some gains at the state-level in the 1800s; many states granted voting rights to women in some, but not all elections. For instance, as early as 1838, Kentucky legislators granted widows and single women with property the right to vote in elections involving school taxes. As shown in Figure 2, many states granted women partial suffrage by giving them the right to vote in school elections. The real push for school suffrage came in the decades after the Civil War. Legislators justified this type of partial extension of suffrage using a version of the separate spheres argument: Women, as mothers, should be able to vote in elections that affected the welfare of children (Keyssar 2009, 150).

The extension of school suffrage to women, however, was also a legislative tactic to promote particular policy agendas for public education systems. In most states, changes in school suffrage were enacted as part of legislation defining the public provision of education (Nicholas 2018, 461-8). This connection between bringing in new voters and enacting new policy fits well with economic models that explain the expansion of voting rights as the outcome of political

competition between the groups in power (Llavador and Oxoby 2005; Lizzeri and Persico 2004). These models suggest that if women have different policy preferences than men – or at least a different distribution of policy preferences than men – then political actors may extend the vote to women in order to promote their policy agenda. State political leaders believed that allowing women to vote in school elections would help to advance their goals for public education.

In addition to limiting women's political influence to particular policy issues, school suffrage and other forms of partial suffrage, such as giving women rights to vote in municipal elections, preceded the full enfranchisement of women in part because of the greater legislative costs associated with broader voting rights. Partial suffrage was procedurally easier to enact than changes to voting laws that affected offices named in state constitutions (Keyssar 2009, 150). Only in Delaware could a simple legislative vote change full voting rights. All other states required at least a referendum, and others even more action. For example, in Illinois, full voting rights could only be changed with a positive legislative vote, followed by a favorable vote at a constitutional convention (which occurred only every 20 years), and a subsequent referendum.

However, US territories could enact suffrage with only a single legislative vote. This relative procedural ease may explain why a number of territories fully enfranchised women before states: when pro-suffrage groups managed to bring bills to the floor, they had a higher chance of being enacted (McCammon and Campbell 2001, 65). The territory of Wyoming gave women full suffrage in 1869, followed by the territory of Utah in 1870. Despite these early victories, the push for full suffrage stalled. In the 1880s, only the territories of Washington and Montana extended women full suffrage. But then, Utah repealed suffrage under the Edmunds-

Tucker Act in 1887, and did not restore it until 1895. Washington enacted and revoked suffrage several times from 1887 to 1910.⁴

These limited and sometimes temporary victories mask the enormous efforts made by pro-suffrage organizations during this period. Pro-suffrage groups launched numerous campaigns and a number of states held referenda in the 1870s and 1880s. Although most of these initiatives met with defeat, many men voted for them. And, as Keyssar (2009, 151) notes, in states where the question of women's suffrage did not come to a referendum, "suffrage organizations were active, state legislators were obligated to vote on suffrage bills year after year, and support...often cut across party lines."

Increased Efforts for State-level Change, 1890-1912

In 1890, frustrated by the lack of progress on broader suffrage for women, the National Woman's Suffrage Association and the American Woman's Suffrage Association merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The new organization stepped up the pressure on the states to enact women's suffrage. Between 1890 and 1920, the NAWSA engaged in hundreds of campaigns to promote women's suffrage (McDonagh and Price 1985, 416).

Women's suffrage organizations pursued the usual channels to effect policy change; they set up political lobbies and campaigned for political candidates who supported women's suffrage. These efforts forced state legislatures to take notice; in the states in which the organizations engaged in these political activities, more suffrage bills were introduced in

⁴ In 1887, the Washington Territorial Supreme Court revoked suffrage for women. The legislature then passed a new law granting women suffrage in 1888, which became nullified when the court ruled on a second suffrage suit later that same year. After achieving statehood in 1889, supporters worked to amend the Washington Constitution to give women the right to vote in 1898, and 1906 before finally succeeding in 1910.

legislative sessions and more of these bills were put to roll call votes, even if they were never passed into law (King, Cornwall, and Dahlin 2005).

Women's suffrage organizations also worked to broaden support for their cause by forming coalitions with other social movements. These coalitions generated more support for women's suffrage not only among women but also among men, who could use their votes to make policymakers pay attention. Unlike the post-Civil War extension of suffrage to black males that promised to add new voters to the Republican Party, the extension of the vote to women did not offer clear benefits to either of the major political parties. By forming alliances with other social movements, women's suffrage organizations were able to create greater electoral pressure for enfranchising women. This strategy was particularly effective when political contests were close and when a third party threatened to upset the balance of power between the two major parties (McConnaughy 2013, 34-7). Of course, these alliances could also generate more opposition as well.

The women's suffrage movement found powerful allies in labor and farm organizations. In 1870, just under 13 million women, or 14.8 percent of females aged 10 or older, were in the labor force. By 1900, these numbers had increased to 29 million women, or 18.3 percent of females aged 10 or older (Hooks 1947, 34). As their workforce participation increased, women became increasingly involved in the labor movement. Some independent unions admitted women before 1870, and the Knights of Labor allowed women to be members beginning in 1881. By the 1890s, the larger labor unions began to endorse women's suffrage (McConnaughy 2013, 140). The Women's Trade Union League was founded in 1903, and the first significant strike of women workers occurred in 1909-1910 among the shirtwaist makers in New York and Philadelphia (Flexner and Fitzpatrick 1996, 234).

The alliance of women's suffrage organizations with labor and farming interests played particularly important roles in some state battles. For instance, in Illinois, the Farmers' Alliance paved the way for women's access to school ballots in 1891 – the first successful suffrage reform in the state. As described by McConaughy (2013, 146-148), the Alliance won three seats in the Illinois General Assembly, which gave them the legislative leverage to swing votes for or against the two major parties. This political power was key to winning women the right to vote in school elections.

The women's suffrage movement also found allies in the prohibition movement. The connection between women's suffrage and temperance was long-standing and preceded the movement's link to prohibition. A lack of economic rights placed married women at the mercy of their husbands. If husbands were heavy drinkers, their wives and children could be reduced to destitution with no redress. Many suffrage leaders were temperance workers before they became suffragists, including Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Lucy Stone. The leadership between the two movements often overlapped, although not all suffragists and supporters were in favor of the temperance and prohibition movements (Flexner and Fitzpatrick 1996, 174; McDonagh and Price 1985, 432).

Many of the women in the prohibition movement were conservative and embraced women's traditional roles in the household and society. However, over time, these women came to realize that they could not effect change without the vote. In this way, they also were drawn to the separate spheres argument for women's suffrage. This argument, rather than challenging women's traditional roles, made those roles the justification for giving women the vote (McCammon and Campbell 2002, 232)

An important conduit for the alliances of the two movements was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. The WCTU spearheaded the fight for prohibition and had extensive reach; by the end of the nineteenth century, it had branch organizations in every state and was the largest women's organization in the United States (McCammon and Campbell 2002, 232). Between 1874 and 1919, the WCTU formed coalitions with suffrage organizations in all but four states. In many instances, these coalitions formed shortly after the defeat of a prohibition measure, and in almost all cases, the collaboration took the form of the WCTU mobilizing its resources to promote women's suffrage rather than the women's suffrage organization working to promote prohibition. The women of the WCTU recognized that to achieve their objectives, they needed to have the vote (McCammon and Campbell 2002).

The link to the prohibition movement brought greater attention and support to the women's suffrage movement. But, this link proved to be a liability at times because it mobilized the opposition of well-funded liquor interests. A case in point is the defeat of a referendum on women's suffrage in California in 1896. Both the Populist and Republican parties supported the referendum, but ten days before the vote, representatives from the Liquor Dealer's League met in San Francisco and "resolved 'to take such steps as were necessary to protect their interests'" (Flexner and Fitzpatrick 1996, 216). The League sent letters to barkeepers, hotel owners, grocery proprietors and others, urging them to vote against the amendment. When the vote was tallied, women's suffrage was carried in all counties except San Francisco and Alameda, where the opposition was strong enough to defeat the amendment.

On balance, it is not clear whether the alliance with prohibition interests was a net benefit or liability for the suffrage movement. The alliance clearly motivated "wet" interests to mobilize their resources to fight women's suffrage. However, it also expanded the base of support for

women's suffrage, and expanding the base of support was key to propelling the movement forward.

After a flurry of successes in the early 1890s, the legislative progress of the suffrage movement had stalled, leading to a period often referred to as the "the doldrums." Suffrage leaders adopted new strategies to strengthen the movement's organizational structure and extend its outreach. They followed the model of successful political machines, setting up operations in towns across the country and at the ward-level in major cities, and going door-to-door to distribute pamphlets and broadcast their message (Keyssar 2009, 162). Their most attention grabbing tactics involved taking the movement's message to the streets – literally. One tactic was "street speaking" in which suffrage advocates stood on soapboxes on street corners or on the backs of automobiles and argued their case to whoever was walking by. Suffrage parades proved even more effective, though, for getting the suffrage message to the broader public. Suffragists, all dressed in white, marched in formation carrying banners and signs calling for "votes for women!" In 1908, between 200 and 300 women marched in the first suffrage parade in Oakland, California. The women marched down the streets to the convention of the California's Republican Party to demand support for women's suffrage. Other suffrage organizations built from this model, staging even larger suffrage parades. The suffrage parade in New York City in 1915 involved an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 women, including 74 women on horseback; 57 marching bands; and 145 decorated automobiles (McCammon 2003, 791). These parades brought together suffrage supporters from across the political and economic spectrum, and put this diversity on display to the public. The scale and spectacle of the parades led to coverage by the press, greatly expanding public awareness of the movement.

The doldrums of the suffrage movement ended in 1910 when Washington State granted women full suffrage. California followed in 1911, and Arizona, Kansas, and Oregon followed in 1912. The victory in California reflected in part the improved organizational structure of the movement. Suffrage supporters focused on organizing in small towns and rural areas, where they knew they had stronger support. They also hired detectives and guards to prevent liquor interests from sabotaging ballot boxes. While they were strongly defeated in urban areas, the referendum won by 3,587 votes, “an average majority of one vote in every voting precinct in the state” (Flexner and Fitzpatrick 1996, 249).

The Move to a Federal Amendment

With the exception of New Mexico, all of the states west of the Rocky Mountains extended full voting rights to women by 1914. In contrast, east of the Rockies, only Kansas enacted full women's suffrage before 1914. Yet, the national political landscape began to change in 1912, when divisions in the Republican Party led to the birth of the Progressive “Bull Moose” Party, led by the former president, Theodore Roosevelt. Endorsing women’s suffrage fit well with the reform platform of the Progressive Party, and also helped the party appeal to labor interests. Roosevelt even presented the party’s case for women’s suffrage in terms of the need of workingwomen to have the ballot just like workingmen. By supporting women’s suffrage, the Progressive Party was also able to tap into the organizational structure of the suffrage movement as it hurriedly staged its campaign for the November 1912 presidential election (McConaughy 2013, 238-9).

Roosevelt won 27 percent of the vote in that election, forcing the two major parties to take note and creating an opening for a renewed drive for a federal women's suffrage amendment. Progressive Party candidates also won seats in state legislatures, giving the

women's suffrage movement renewed leverage for state-level legislative change. In Illinois, for example, the Progressives won 26 seats in the state House and two in the state Senate. The defection from the Republican Party had also led to the Democratic candidate winning the gubernatorial race in Illinois (McConnaughy 2013, 157). The challenges of pursuing an amendment to the state constitution led the Progressives to develop an ingenious plan: granting women presidential suffrage. The US Constitution only specified that states were "to appoint, in such manner as the legislature thereof may direct" electors for presidential elections. This meant that unlike voting for the US Congress, there were no links between who could vote in presidential elections and state-level elections. Presidential suffrage, therefore, could be granted by an act of the state legislature alone (McDonagh and Price 1985, 417). In 1913, Illinois became the first state to grant women presidential suffrage. Sixteen states followed before 1920, including Texas and Tennessee (Keyssar 2009, 367).

The federal amendment came to a floor vote in the Senate in 1914 and the House of Representatives in 1915. Although the tallies of both votes went against the amendment, support did not split along party lines. In both the Senate and the House, legislators from states where women had the vote were much more likely to support the amendment than legislators from other states (Jones 1991; McConnaughy 2013, 243). In the House, support was also positively correlated with the share of the Progressive Party in the 1912 presidential election and the ratio of men to women in a legislator's state, and negatively correlated with the size of the liquor industry (Jones 1991, 430).

World War I created another shift in the political landscape. Under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, the National American Woman Suffrage Association suspended its lobbying for women's suffrage in order to support the war effort. However, a splinter group, the

National Woman's Party, led by Alice Paul, intensified its campaign for a federal amendment by picketing the White House. Paul and many of her fellow Woman's Party activists were arrested and imprisoned. They responded by conducting hunger strikes and were force-fed, much to the shock of the American public. The differing approaches during the war of the two major wings of the women's suffrage movement served to keep women's suffrage in the public attention, while also reinforcing the ways women contributed to the nation's defense (Keyssar 2009, 172-3).

The roles women played during World War I served to shift sentiment for women's suffrage in their favor. As the House of Representatives debated the resolution that would ultimately become the Nineteenth Amendment, Congressman John MacCrate (R, NY) stated:

...whether you consider the franchise a right or a privilege, the women of America deserve the right, or they have earned the privilege. Everywhere you went during the past two years you saw women in uniform... in the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, the Knights of Columbus, the Young Men's Christian Association, Young Men's Hebrew Association, and other allied war activities...I submit to your judgement that the women of America have been as potential soldiers during the past war as have been the men of America (58 Cong. Rec. 84, May 21, 1919).

The fact that many other countries had already granted suffrage to women may have also played a role in convincing lawmakers to vote for the Nineteenth Amendment. On the eve of the US vote in 1918 and 1919, several European countries, including Austria, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden enfranchised women, while many others had granted women suffrage much earlier (Bertocchi 2011).⁵ Just prior to the vote in which the Nineteenth Amendment passed

⁵ New Zealand granted full suffrage to women in 1893, followed by Australia, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Canada. England granted suffrage to select women over the age of 30 in 1918, but did not give all women suffrage until 1930 (Bertocchi 2011).

the House of Representatives on May 21, 1919, Congressman John Raker (D, CA) asked his colleagues:

...should we be the last of the civilized countries of the world to extend this right – we who boast that we stand for giving men the opportunity to express their voice in our Government, that we might have a Government of the people, not by heredity, but that the people might express their will and desire as to what their Government should be? Is it right that we should be the last? (58 Cong. Rec. 82, May 21, 1919).

Once again, legislators from states with some full or presidential of women's suffrage were more likely to support the amendment in the House, which passed the amendment on May 21, 1919. Given the success of the state-level legislative initiatives between 1915 and 1919, this amounted to many more votes in 1919 than it had in 1915. Support was also still higher from states with a greater ratio of men to women. But, with the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol, the size of the liquor industry no longer had an effect on voting patterns. In the Senate, which passed the measure on June 4, 1919, the key predictors of votes were the share of Progressive Party voters in 1912 and the ratio of men to women in the state (Jones 1991, 430-433).

To take effect, 36 states had to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. The last state to ratify the amendment was Tennessee. Despite Tennessee having just enacted a presidential suffrage law in 1919, the fight for ratification was fierce. Weiss (2018) provides a very engaging account of the battle for ratification in Tennessee. Some state legislators who had voted in favor of presidential suffrage in 1919 opposed the amendment, claiming it violated states' rights. In the end, the Tennessee legislature voted to ratify the amendment by a single vote on August 18, 1920.

Empirical Analyses of the Diffusion of Women's Suffrage

As the narrative above highlights, many factors were at play in the struggle to extend the vote to women. Some of these factors, like competition between political parties and the opposition of liquor interests, could be classified as “supply side” in that they influenced the willingness of male legislators and male voters to grant women suffrage. On the “demand side” were the actions taken by women’s suffrage organizations to generate support for their cause. A number of studies have leveraged the geographic variation in the timing of women’s suffrage to identify empirically the relative importance of these different factors. Figure 3 presents a map showing the dates that women were granted full or presidential suffrage prior to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. The Western states were the leaders in giving women the vote. All of the states that had granted full suffrage to women before World War I were east of the Mississippi River. This geographic pattern is very different than that displayed in the map in Figure 1 that shows the timing of laws granting married women property rights. Many of the urban, industrialized states of the Northeast that had moved early to extend women’s economic rights did not extend voting rights to women prior to the Nineteenth Amendment.

Scholars have long debated why the Western states moved first to give women full suffrage. In 1967, the historian Alan Grimes argued that Western politicians, believing women could counter “frontier rowdiness,” granted them access to the ballot in order to promote a respect for law and order and impose the “Puritan ethic” as the norm for community behavior (Grimes 1967, 76–77). Grimes’ hypothesis anticipated the economic models described above that attribute the expansion of suffrage to the desire of one group in the political elite to promote a particular policy agenda (Llavador and Oxoby 2005; Lizzeri and Persico 2004).

McCammon and Campbell (2001) propose that it was the strength and strategies of women’s suffrage organizations that led to the leadership of the West in women’s suffrage. In an

event-history analysis of the timing of full suffrage, they find no relationship between suffrage and the number of saloon-keepers per capita, which they interpret as evidence against Grimes' Puritan ethic hypothesis. However, the number of saloon-keepers per capita could also be interpreted as a measure of the opposition to prohibition, which as discussed above, was strongly linked to women's suffrage. McCammon and Campbell do find that suffrage passed earlier in states where suffrage organizations presented what they call "expediency" arguments for women's suffrage. These arguments, built on the philosophy of separate spheres, claimed that women would bring "special 'womanly' skills to politics to address public issues related to morality" (p.69). This finding does not refute the Puritan ethic hypothesis; rather, it suggests that women's suffrage organizations were key in the promoting this justification for women's suffrage in the Western frontier states.

Braun and Kvasnicka (2013) offer a complementary political explanation for the leadership of the West: the relative scarcity of females in the West simply made it less costly for Western politicians to extend the franchise to women. Giving women the vote posed little risk to political stability since men greatly outnumbered women. Further, politicians may have viewed granting women suffrage as a means to attract more women to their states. Braun and Kvasnicka do find, consistent with their hypothesis, that the strongest predictor of the timing of full or presidential suffrage for women is the male-to-female ratio. They also find that states with higher percentages of females in the labor force enacted suffrage earlier, and states with higher fractions of non-whites enfranchised women later. Unlike McCammon and Campbell, Braun and Kvasnicka do not include controls for the strength and strategies of suffrage organizations across states, nor do they control for state-level prohibition laws. Braun and Kvasnicka discount the

possible role for women's suffrage organizations by arguing that West was "far less than [other regions] organized in terms of coordinated activities for securing the ballot" (408).

McCammon et al. (2001) expand on McCammon and Campbell (2001) to look at presidential as well as full suffrage, and to consider a more extensive set of political and societal variables. McCammon et al. focus on how the strength and strategies of women's suffrage organizations varied across states, but they also point out that the success of these organizations' efforts depended on the willingness of political decision-makers to support the change in voting rights. This willingness was influenced by the potential political gains from extending suffrage to women, as well as attitudes about women in society. They find that states where women's suffrage organizations used separate spheres arguments, asserting that women would bring greater morality and reform to the political process, enacted suffrage earlier. States with a greater share of women in professions and attending college, both of which may indicate more progressive attitudes towards women, also enfranchised women sooner. Finally, states that had nullified liquor interest opposition by passing early prohibition laws were also more likely to enact suffrage earlier.

McConaughy (2013) focuses on the role of political competition in the enactment of women's suffrage by the states. She finds that the extension of women's suffrage was more likely when there was a threat of third party competition, as measured by the share of the vote received by third party gubernatorial candidates and the share of third party legislators in the state house (pp. 223-4).

Like Braun and Kvasnicka, McConaughy finds that states with higher fractions of nonwhites were less likely to extend suffrage to women, perhaps because legislators in states with large percentages of nonwhites feared that enfranchising black women would erode white

power. This race-based fear was evident during political debate about the Nineteenth Amendment. On June 4, 1919, the day the Senate voted to extend the right of suffrage to women, Senator Ellison D. Smith (D, SC) stated:

Those of us from the South, where the preponderance of the Negro vote jeopardized our civilization, have maintained that the fifteenth amendment was a crime against our civilization. Now, when a southern man votes for the Susan B. Anthony amendment he votes to enfranchise the other half of that race, and ratifies, not in a moment of heat and passion, what we have claimed was a crime, but in a moment of profound calmness and sectional amity he votes to ratify the fifteenth amendment and give the lie to every protestation that we have heretofore have made that the enfranchisement of the Negro men, unlimited, was a crime against white civilization (58 Cong. Rec. 618, June 4, 1919).

While the empirical examinations of the timing of women's suffrage across the states do not produce a consensus explanation, none of them fully tests the competing hypotheses against each other. The general picture that emerges from these studies is that the extension of women's suffrage was the outcome of a political process. Male legislators and voters weighed the costs versus benefits of women's suffrage, and women's suffrage organizations took actions to increase the political benefits of supporting suffrage.

Conclusion

Economic theories of suffrage extension suggest that groups in power extend voting rights to promote their policy agendas or to capture votes from political rivals. Each of these factors played a role in the women's suffrage movement in the United States, although not necessarily at the same time and in the same way. Women's suffrage organizations sought to influence these political processes. Although some economists have discounted their contributions, these organizations were key to the success of the movement. They formed coalitions with other social movements and built a base a support that created electoral pressure

to extend the vote to women. The empirical evidence also suggests that women were more likely to get the vote when men and other groups (such as liquor interests) had less to lose, or when elections were close.

How did women having the vote change the political process? A number of scholars have taken advantage of the geographic variation in the timing of women's suffrage to look at the impact on public policy. Lott, Jr. and Kenny (1999) and Miller (2008) both find a positive relationship between suffrage extension and public goods expenditures. Miller (2008) further shows that women gaining the vote led to reductions in child mortality, indicating that the increased public goods expenditures were being allocated in ways that improved child health. Moehling and Thomasson (2012) find that the timing of women's suffrage had a statistically significant impact on states' decisions to participate in the Sheppard-Towner program, which provided federal funds for public health education for mothers in the 1920s. States that were late-enactors of women's suffrage engaged more fully in this program perhaps because policymakers in these states sought to court the new women voters. Carruthers and Wanamaker (2015) find that suffrage led to an increase in public school expenditures.

Assessments of the longer-term impact of the Nineteenth Amendment suggest that, despite generating a tremendous expansion in the electorate, the 1920 election did not lead to a seismic change in the political structure. Rather than revolution, the outcome of the election was a return to "normalcy" (Keyssar 2009, 175). Some politicians initially feared that women would vote as a bloc, but by the mid-1920s, it was clear that women's political interests were as varied as those of men. Moehling and Thomasson (2012) argue that the fate of the Sheppard-Towner program reflected this evolution of politicians' views on women's voting power. Politicians voted for the program in 1921 wanting to demonstrate their support for a "woman's issue." But

by 1926, when the program came up for renewal, politicians no longer were worried about losing women's votes and the program was repealed rather than renewed. The long-term legacy of the Nineteenth Amendment is discussed in the companion paper in this symposium by Cascio and Shenhav.

The Nineteenth Amendment also failed to provide universal suffrage for black women. The Southern states blocked black women from voting by using Jim Crow laws, just as they had long done to black men. Women's suffrage organizations refused to take up this cause, a stance consistent with the ways black women had been marginalized in the women's suffrage movement. As black women sought to join national women's organizations, they had been continually rebuffed. Suffrage supporters at a women's rights convention in Ohio in 1851 only very reluctantly let abolitionist Sojourner Truth take the floor to deliver her now-famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech, worrying that she would harm their cause (Buhle and Buhle 2005, 104-105). Even in the North, blacks were second-class citizens who were routinely excluded by whites. In an 1895 speech in which she exhorted black women to take leadership, suffragist Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin (1895) called on white women to join with them, stating, "[W]e are not drawing the color line; we are women, American women, as intensely interested in all that pertains to us as such as all other American women; we are not alienating or withdrawing, we are only coming to the front, willing to join any others in the same work and cordially inviting and welcoming any others to join us" (Ruffin 1895).

While whites mostly ignored Ruffin's appeal, new clubs for black women formed. Mary Church Terrell served as the first president of the National Association of Colored Women in 1896 (Flexner and Fitzpatrick 1996, 183). She was one of the few blacks allowed to speak at the segregated National American Women's Suffrage Association Convention in 1903, where she

urged white women to “stand up not only for the oppressed sex, but also for the oppressed race” (Stanton et al. 1881, 5; 106). In the first national suffrage parade held by the National American Woman Suffrage Association in Washington, D.C. in 1913, Terrell, along with Ida B. Wells, was forced to march with other blacks in the back, so as not to upset Southern delegates, which Wells famously refused to do (Terborg-Penn 1998, 122–23).

After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, prominent women’s suffrage organizations continued to refuse to fight for the rights of black women to vote when those rights were curtailed by Jim Crow laws like poll taxes and literacy tests. In 1921, Alice Paul refused to let Mary C. Talbert, the president of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, speak on black voting rights at the National Woman’s Party convention. Paul defended her decision by asserting that this was about race, not women’s rights (Cott 1984, 50–54). It would not be until 1965, with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, that *all* women could be said to have the right to vote.

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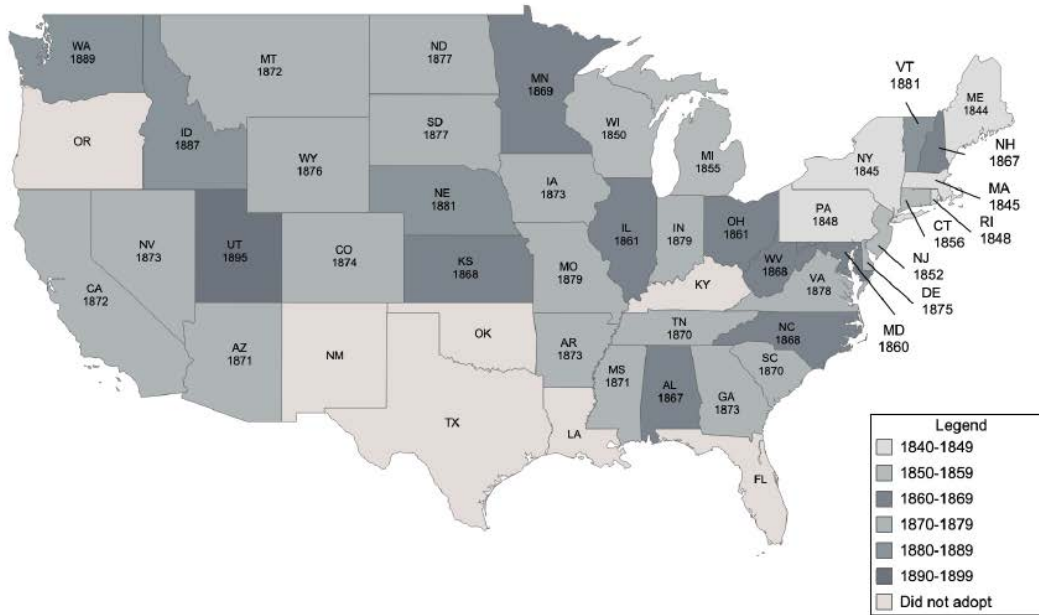
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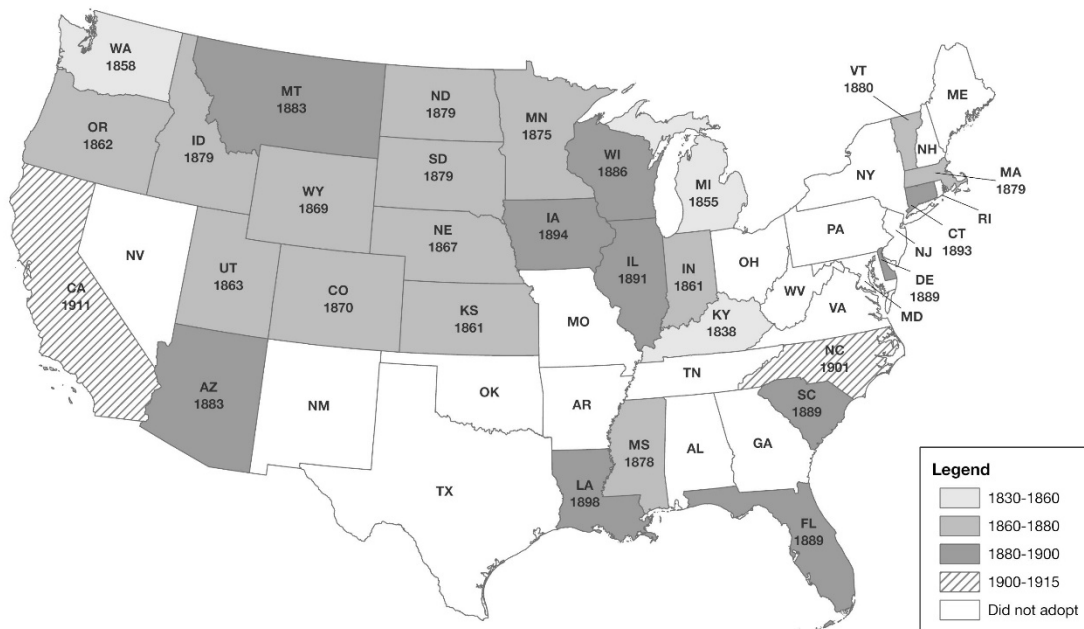
Figure 1: Married Women's Property Laws Enacted Prior to 1900



Source: Khan (1996), Table 1, pp. 363-4.

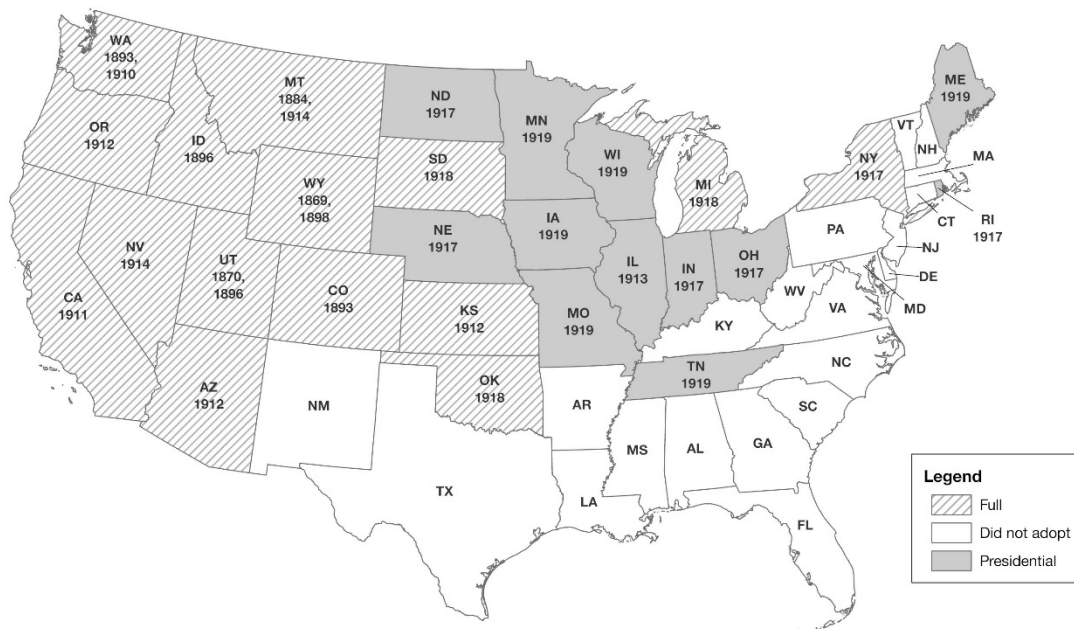
Notes: The data displayed refer to the enactment of laws granting married women control over property. Khan (1996) also provides the dates of laws giving married women control of their earnings and the right to engage in contracts and business without husband's consent.

Figure 2: Women's School Suffrage Prior to Nineteenth Amendment



Source: Nicholas (2018), Table 1, pp. 463-7.

Figure 3: Women's Full and Presidential Suffrage Prior to the Nineteenth Amendment



Sources: Keyssar (2009), Table A.20, p. 368; McDonagh and Price (1985), Table 1, p. 417.