

# **U.S. Women's Groups in National Policy Debates, 1880-2000**

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When the United States enacted a constitutional amendment guaranteeing female suffrage in 1920, many observers believed women would declare victory and retire from the political struggle. Suffrage leaders insisted that, on the contrary, the “woman movement” was just getting started, with new modes of collective action and an ambitious policy agenda. There was nothing particularly “wonderful in being able to put some marks on a piece of paper and drop it into a box three or four times a year,” said one leading women’s advocate. “We thought of the ballot as a tool with which great things were to be done” (Stuhler 2003: 111-112).

On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment’s ratification, this chapter examines whether women working together after suffrage indeed did try to get great things done. Early assessments of suffrage insisted that it had been a dud: Women hadn’t fully embraced their new right to take part in the nation’s governance. However, the findings here suggest that such gloomy assessments were mistaken. The amendment had a significant, long-term impact on American democracy by emboldening women’s organizations to advance ambitious, wide-ranging policy agendas. What is more, the most interesting developments after suffrage may not have been at the polls but rather in the halls of the U.S. Congress, where women’s groups helped lawmakers to imagine and build the modern American state.

The case of suffrage is interesting and important in its own right, but it also raises larger theoretical questions about the relationship between civic inclusion and civic participation. Suffrage expanded women's rights, but so did legislation enacted during the so-called second-wave women's movement nearly 50 years later. Did the two movements and their policy successes bequeath similar patterns in women's collective engagement on important public issues? Does more inclusion necessarily spell more participation? This study considers these questions. The suffrage case also calls our attention to what a "women's issue" is. How does the expansion of women's political incorporation shape the policy agendas that women's organizational representatives pursue? This study offers a suggestive answer.

This chapter focuses on the rich legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment on women's collective action. The chapter charts the long rise and ultimate decline of national-level policy engagement by U.S. women's organizations from roughly 1880, four decades before suffrage, through 2000. As a measure of policy engagement, I consider women's organizations' testimony before the U.S. Congress. The appearances were compiled by hand from the Congressional Information Service's *CIS Index*, a series of hard-bound volumes that catalogue Congressional hearings (by subject matter and witnesses) going back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. These entries were then cross-checked with the online hearings database maintained by Lexis-Nexis (now Proquest). The present dataset contains every appearance by a women's organization from 1873 to 2000 – nearly 10,500 appearances by some 2,100 groups testifying across nearly 200 policy domains.

Women's groups were those that fell into at least one of four categories: organizations whose name included a word or suffix connoting female membership (i.e., League of *Women* Voters, Alpha Kappa Alpha *Sorority*, American National *Cowbelles*; American Legion *Auxiliary*); unions and professional associations representing overwhelmingly female

employment categories (nurses, secretaries, garment workers, etc.); voluntary associations whose priorities represented disproportionately female concerns and whose leaders were women (i.e., playground associations in the Progressive Era; breast-cancer organizations in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century); and, citizens' groups working for abortion rights and family planning.

For interest groups seeking a voice in American democracy, appearing before Congress is a coveted means of political engagement. Testimony also serves as a reliable measure, over time, of the groups that Congress considers to be the key players in a policy debate – that is, which groups have the policy authority and political clout to warrant an invitation to appear. Note that the dataset will not capture certain types of women's organizational work, including advocacy on purely local or state issues, institutional building, litigation, administrative advocacy, election involvement, or service provision. What the data do provide, however, is a window into how women's civic place evolved over time.

To tell the story, I first provide a brief theoretical perspective on women's civic identities and how suffrage provided a platform for organizing around them. I then lay out conventional narratives surrounding two key decades – the 1920s and the 1950s – in which women's activism is said to have stalled. Next, I assess those narratives empirically, demonstrating that by three measures – the number of times that women's groups testified at congressional hearings, the number of women's organizations that appeared, and the breadth of issues to which the groups spoke – these groups' policy engagement actually expanded in the four decades after suffrage. Then I show that by these same measures, women's engagement surprisingly declined after the “second wave” women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. I evaluate promising yet unsatisfying explanations for this inverted-U pattern and lay out an account centered on the role of public policy. Specifically, I argue that the discursive and tangible resources provided by

policy helped structure and direct the organization of women's interests. For the first two-thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, interests were oriented around both women's group rights *and* women's civic responsibility; for the last third of the century, the focus was on group rights almost exclusively. This evolution had implications for both the volume of women's voices in American democracy and the range of issues on which they were heard.

## <2>The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment and Women's Civic Roles

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment conveyed two powerful ideas about women's relationship with the state. The first idea was that women were entitled to equal treatment with men; if a man could vote, the state should not deny the right to a similarly situated woman. The second idea was that women's voices were important in democratic governance. Thus, the amendment simultaneously validated women's rights *and* expanded their civic responsibilities. These concepts of rights and responsibilities course through American history, with its strains of liberalism and civic republicanism.

The rights-responsibilities dichotomy roughly maps onto a dichotomy long used to understand gender relations: the sameness-difference dichotomy. While a vast oversimplification, the sameness-difference dyad has served as the foundation for much fruitful theorizing about women's roles in American public life. The idea behind gender sameness is that, to the extent possible, women are not, or should not, be considered "different" from men. Sameness arguments often underlie women's rights claims, such as the right to equal treatment under law and to equal access to economic, social, and political institutions. The idea behind gender "difference" is that women as a group have distinctive experiences and perspectives and that these differences help direct women's patterns of public engagement. Difference rationales sometimes fuel rights claims (i.e., only women get pregnant, so employment laws must protect

women from discrimination). But more commonly women's groups have deployed difference arguments in connection with civic responsibilities. The idea that women are different from men – more caring, more public spirited – has served as the rationale for robust participation in policy debates extending far beyond women's rights (Goss 2014; Goss 2003). While sameness rationales have served women-oriented interests, difference rationales often have served other-oriented interests.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment created a political and rhetorical space for both types of citizenship: the rights-oriented variant focused on the interests of women as a group and the responsibility-oriented variant focused on the interests of other groups and the public at large. The robust definition of women's citizenship envisioned by the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment – a definition that validated equality claims against the state *and* invited participation in the state – helped to fuel a burst of women's collective engagement that lasted for decades. The suffrage amendment didn't create women's political engagement – indeed, the amendment was a product of a protracted, well-organized, nation-spanning movement. But the amendment did provide both external validation for women's role in governance and an unprecedented political opportunity for continued wide-scale civic education and organizing.

### <1>Women's Organizing After Suffrage

For at least four decades after suffrage – roughly until the second-wave women's movement began in the mid-1960s – the conventional wisdom holds that American women were politically disengaged. Women of the 1920s were flirty flappers, exercising their liberation by wearing shortened skirts, not by storming the ballot box. Women of the 1940s tended to matters at home while the boys were away at war – they were “Rosie the Riveters” out of necessity

rather than choice. Women of the 1950s happily returned to their wifely and motherly duties – like June Cleaver, the archetypal middle-American matriarch in the popular family television series “Leave It to Beaver.” Do these iconic images accurately portray women’s public engagement? Is it right that nothing much happened of interest between suffrage and the second-wave movement? Scholarly answers to these questions have differed over the years; the Congressional data help us sort them out.

Predictions that women’s political engagement and influence would drop with enfranchisement began even before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified. Antisuffragists argued that enfranchising women would actually undermine their efforts to mobilize collectively for social reform by eliminating the separate, nonpartisan sphere in which women found the moral and organizational grounding for their public work (Jablonsky 1994; Marshall 1997). The concern was that women would be absorbed into the political parties and their demands would be diluted and dismissed (Kraditor 1971).

Many contemporary historians picked up this theme, arguing that 1920 marked the beginning of a gradual downward spiral in women’s capacity to organize and speak with a collective voice. Barbara Ryan (1992: 37) concludes that there “was no clear direction after the suffrage victory.” By “adopting formerly male values and behavior,” newly enfranchised women “lost the basis for a separate political culture,” leaving them without uniquely “women’s issues” around which to organize and prompting their political fragmentation (Baker 1984: 644-45). Women’s organizations were not tooled to conduct successful lobbying campaigns among newly enfranchised females (Harvey 1998), and the political climate of the 1920s “proved to be bad for women’s organizing” (Banaszak 2006: 6). By 1924, just four years after universal suffrage, “little remained of a nationally organized women’s movement” (Ferree and Hess 2000: 1). By

1930, women had “ceased to engage in autonomous political action on behalf of expanded state responsibility” (Sklar 1993). In sum, the “woman movement as a whole was dead” (O’Neill 1971: 263).

While elements of the decline narrative are plausible, skeptical historians have taken issue with the portrait of post-suffrage women as civic laggards. For example, Nancy Cott (1992) has argued that there was a great deal of continuity in the scope and volume of women’s collective engagement in the decades after 1920. That year the National American Woman Suffrage Association transformed itself into the National League of Women Voters to provide women with a civic education, lobby for causes on which women were expert, and unify “the country’s woman power into a new force for the humanizing of government.”<sup>1</sup> Women’s groups including the League formed the Women’s Joint Congressional Committee, which by 1924 included 21 organizations with a combined membership of 12 million women (Doolittle 2007: 21). In his 1928 book, *Group Representation Before Congress*, Pendleton Herring observed that women’s lobbies were the second most common form of interest group, after trade associations.<sup>2</sup> Women’s groups also were active on the state level, racking up numerous policy victories that belie the conventional story of women’s waning influence (Andersen 1996; McCammon 2012).

#### <1>The 1950s: Another Story of Decline?

After a brief mobilization to support the troops, women of the 1950s are often portrayed as gratefully embracing domesticity. Wifely and maternal obligations are said to have distracted women from fully exercising their rights and assuming the responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Betty Friedan’s groundbreaking work, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), described a world in which mid-century homemakers fixated on family and femininity while shunning

positions of leadership in voluntary associations and other roles in the public sphere (Friedan 1963). Indeed, politically engaged women's voluntary associations of the sort featured in the present study barely figured into Friedan's book – and then more as forums for dissatisfaction than as vehicles for political empowerment (Friedan 1963).

Later scholars picked up this line, arguing that the conservative political climate of the 1950s “combined with a serious constriction of opportunities for women in education and the professions to severely limit the context in which women's organizations could function” (Levine 1995: 83). Perhaps as a result, “thoughts of political power...had no place in the 1950s' American housewife and mother image” (Ryan 1992: 36). A few accounts of “pockets” of women's political resistance notwithstanding, most histories of the 1950s “stress the postwar domestic ideal, the reassertion of a traditional sexual division of labor, and the formal and informal barriers that prevented women from fully participating in the public realm” (Meyerowitz 1994: 3). One scholar of the second-wave movement declared the 1950s “stifling for women” (Davis 1999: 9). Another suggested that, after three decades dominated by the “mythical ideal” of traditional family relations, “[m]ost people never even knew there had been a women's movement” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ryan 1992: 36).

And yet, as with the 1920s, there is evidence that women were more active in the 1950s than the standard “Leave it to Beaver” narrative of female domesticity would suggest. Robert Putnam (2000) saw the 1950s as the apex of 20<sup>th</sup> century civic engagement, with women occupying a central role as civic caretakers. The League of Women Voters, whose membership grew by 44% from 1950-1958, created myriad opportunities for women to engage in local, state, and national policy advocacy and to prepare themselves for elective office in later life (Young 1989; Ware 1992). In a study of interest groups at mid-century, David Truman (1951: 100)



reported that women's associations were "both influential and numerous," while Ethel Klein (1984: 18) argued that mid-century women constituted an "established lobby" with "greater political sophistication" than had been present during more outwardly activist periods.

Thus, for both the 1920s and 1950s, there is some evidence challenging the prevailing view that women's activism crashed after suffrage. And yet, the narrative of women's retreat from politics has a powerful hold on the imagination. The Congressional hearings data allow us to assess these competing accounts of women's policy engagement. Obviously, public testimony is only one form of political activity, but it is an important form. If women's groups were being invited to offer their analysis to the nation's most powerful policymaking body, one might reasonably infer that women did not pass into political obsolescence after winning the right to vote. After all, congressional testimony is an important indicator of who matters in Washington.

#### <2>What Happened? Women's Policy Advocacy on Capitol Hill, 1920-1959

From the 1920s through 1960, the federal government grew in both the depth and range of its policy endeavors. So, too, did American women's organizations. Contrary to narratives of decline after suffrage, women's organizations enlarged their engagement in national policy debates. This impressive growth shows up in several ways. I focus on three measures, all of which tell basically the same story. These measures are 1) the number of times women's groups appeared as witnesses before Congressional committees and subcommittees; 2) the number of different women's groups testifying; and 3) the range of policy domains in which women's collective voices were heard.

Figure 1 presents the simplest snapshot of the periods before and after suffrage: total appearances before Congress, as well as the number of appearances adjusted for the number of hearings that Congressional committees and subcommittees held. The two patterns tell a broadly

similar story: a steady yet punctuated rise in women's appearances, peaking in the second half of the 1940s.

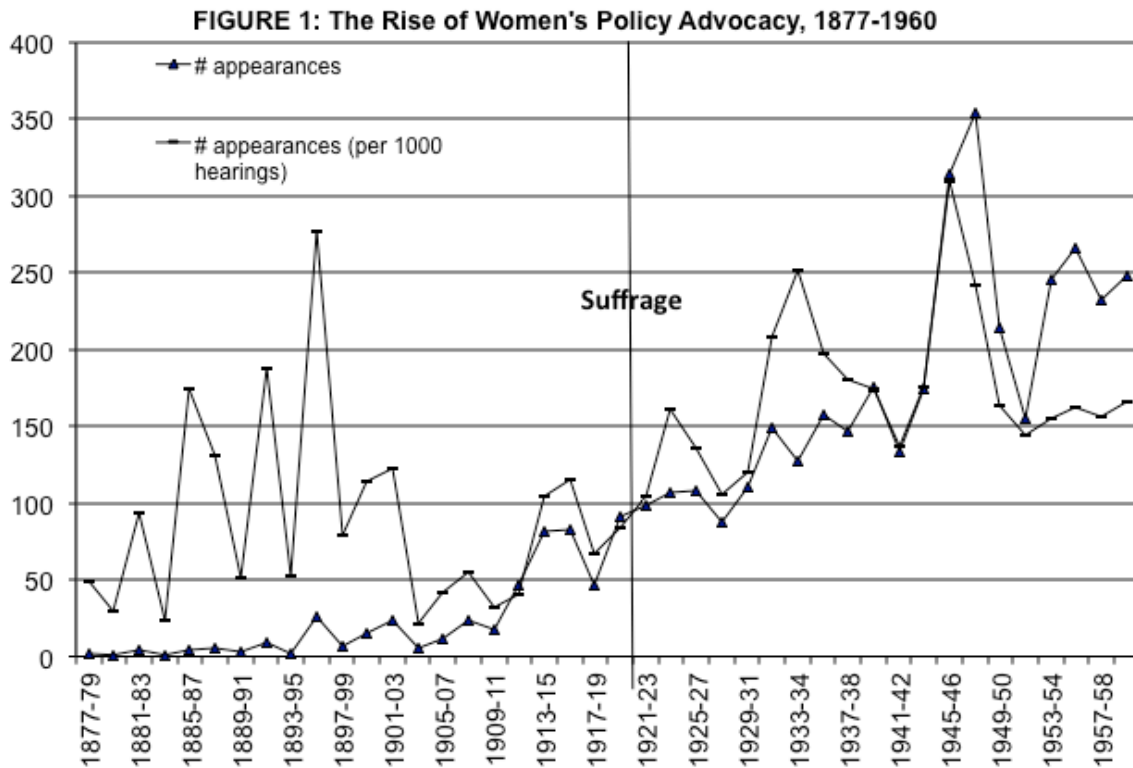


Figure 8.1 The Rise of Women's Policy Advocacy, 1877-1960 Credit:

As the figure shows, the peak came in the period from 1945-48, when women's groups were working on, and Congress was considering, a wide range of issues, including health insurance, foreign aid, European reconstruction, post-war housing, and the Equal Rights Amendment. Congress sought policy input and political intelligence on all these matters, and women's organizations were well prepared to provide it. Whether one does or does not adjust for number of hearings, the data make clear that these organizations did not fade away after suffrage. Rather, they continued to press their claims at a rate of roughly 1.5-3 times the pre-suffrage levels.<sup>3</sup>

As I show in my book (Goss 2013), much the same pattern appears when one considers women's organizations' participation in hearings on particularly significant legislation. Congress took the women's lobby so seriously that its representatives were invited to testify on more than 40% of the nation's most important policy questions in the 1940s, and 34% in the 1950s – eras when women are often portrayed more as domestic helpmates than as authoritative political actors.

Figure 2 offers yet another way of evaluating the pattern of women's national policy engagement before and after suffrage: the number of groups testifying on Capitol Hill. Between the 1910s and the 1950s, the number of women's organizations appearing at Congressional hearings grew by 135% – and by close to 75% from the 1920s.

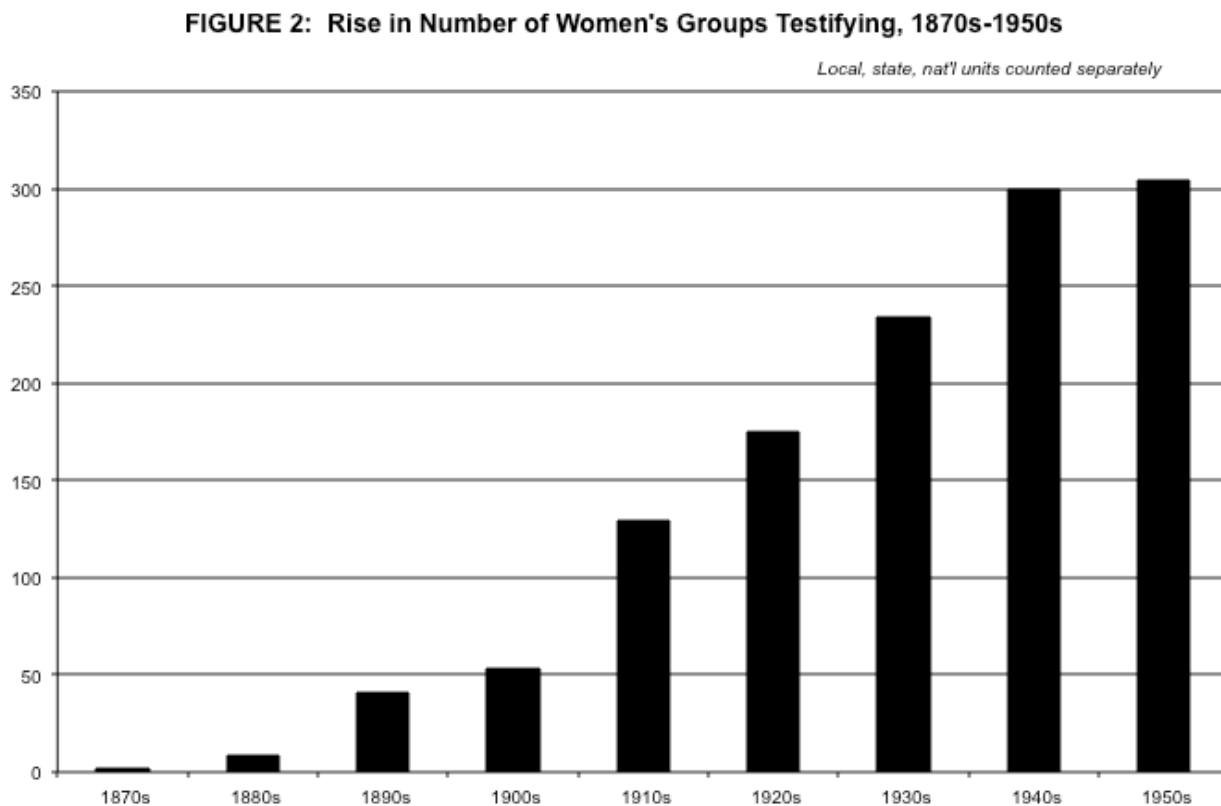


Figure 8.2 Rise in the Number of Women's Groups Testifying, 1870s-1950s Credit:

These findings underscore the observation that the 1940s and 1950s saw the emergence of “an experienced women’s lobby” that “provided an organizational context for maintaining or increasing pressure for women’s rights in the future” (Klein 1984: 18). Compared to the pre-suffrage era, Congress by mid-century was hearing from a broad array of federated organizations and their state and local chapters – such as the League of Women Voters – as well as from a growing number of women’s occupational groups. Growth in the number of hearings held no doubt contributed to the diversity of women’s groups that were able to appear. But even so, the evidence challenges the conventional wisdom that women were home baking cookies during the supposedly placid 1950s.

A third and very important measure of women’s policy engagement is the range of policy questions on which they were invited to testify. Figure 3 charts the rise in issue domains in which a women’s group appeared at least once.

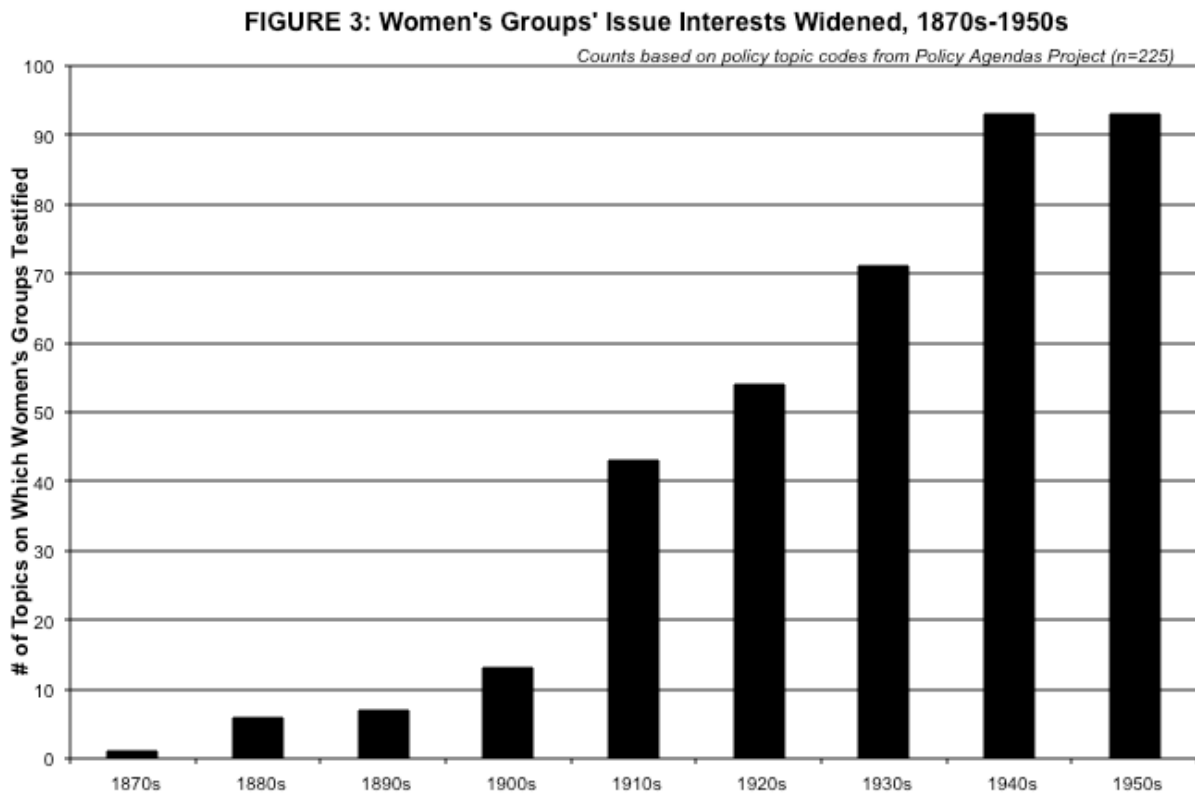


Figure 8.3 Women's Groups' Issue Interest Widened, 1870s-1950s Credit:

In the 1910s, women's groups were testifying on legislation spanning 43 issue domains, a figure that ballooned to 93 issue domains by mid-century. Congress in the 1950s held hearings in 197 policy domains, meaning that women had a voice in nearly half of them. The steady widening of these policy engagements reflects the federal government's expansion into social and economic life and the relevance of women's voices to those debates. As Congress expanded its engagement, it sought the counsel of women's groups – especially in areas of longstanding concern to them, such as social welfare (especially relating to children, labor issues, and seniors) and international cooperation and aid. In addition, women's groups were insisting on having a voice in perennial concerns, such as foreign trade, nominations and appointments to high-level government positions, and relations among different branches of government.

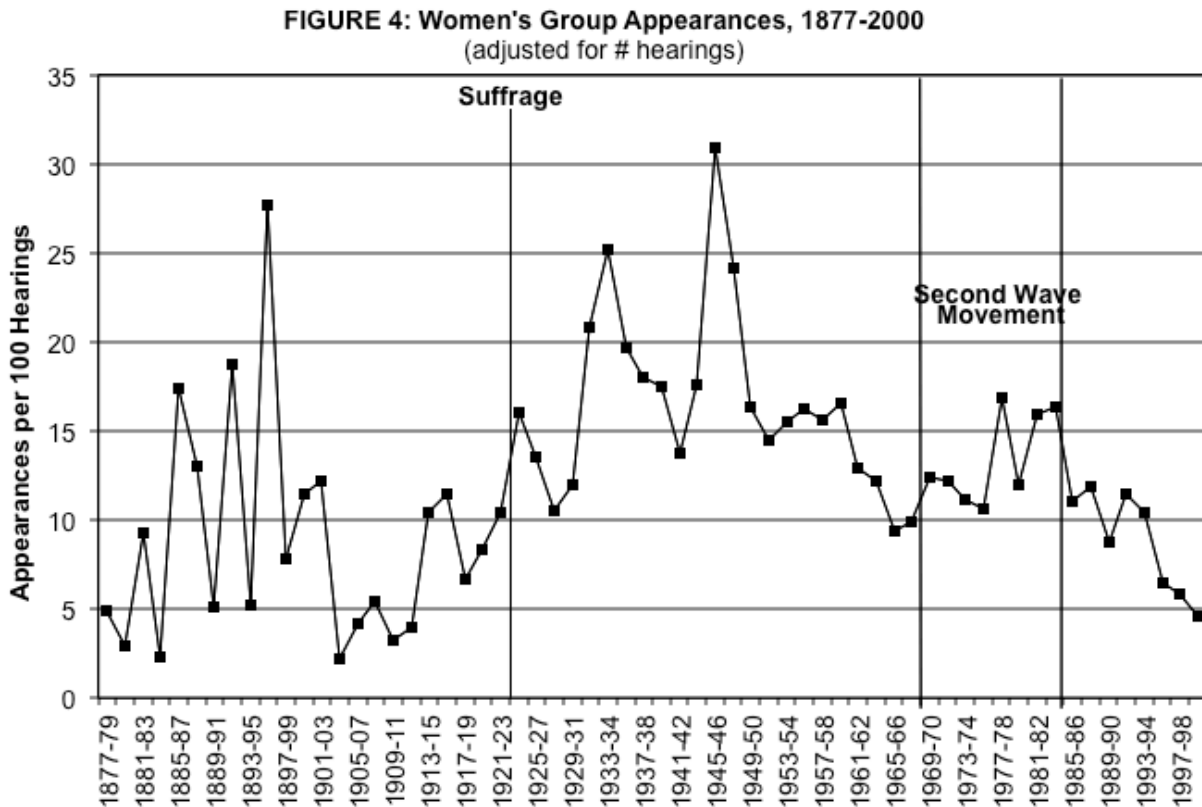
## <1>Women's Organizations After the "Second Wave"

Just as the period from the late 1870s through the 1950s encapsulated a major women's movement, so too did the period from 1960-2000. The second wave took root in the mid-1960s, reached its heyday in the 1970s, and, depending on the account, either petered out or was institutionalized by the early 1980s. The second-wave movement coalesced around policies to protect women from institutionalized discrimination and to facilitate their access to nontraditional gender roles. As in the suffrage era, the second wave produced a lively debate about whether policy victories would have lasting effects on women's voice in public affairs.

Not surprisingly, as was the case with the post-suffrage era, historians disagree about what happened to second-wave feminism. Early popular assessments, in the news media and in some scholarly works, proclaimed that the movement had died by the 1980s – and some went so far as to claim that feminism itself, as an identity frame for collective action, had likewise fallen into disrepute (Hawkesworth 2004). By these accounts, the wave crashed. More recently, however, scholars have argued that feminism as a movement and an identity did not fade away but merely changed forms (Disney and Gelb 2000; Wolbrecht 2000; Costain and Costain 1987). The wave rolled on; it just looked different. Again, women's organizational presence on Capitol Hill helps us make sense of these differing accounts.

Figure 4 shows women's group appearances, per 100 hearings, over the length of the period of study. By bringing in the pre-second-wave era, this graph affords a panoramic view of women's public engagement on Capitol Hill. Women's engagement grew rapidly after suffrage, peaked at mid-century, then plunged in the 1960s. While the feminist movement brought women's engagement back from the doldrums for a brief period, the downward spiral began again in the early 1980s, never to recover. By the late 1990s, women's groups were less

prominent on Capitol Hill than they had been in the years immediately preceding suffrage, when women were still formally disenfranchised.



Note that Congressional hearings became shorter in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which could raise questions about the trend line that adjusts for number of hearings per Congress. However, the decline in women's appearances is not simply an artifact of shorter hearings or other changes in Congressional treatment of outside interests. Further analysis shows that appearances by women's groups declined relative to those by other interest groups and all types of witnesses.

Specifically, I assembled a dataset that counts and categorizes different types of witnesses in a random sample of hearings at five-Congress intervals from the 45<sup>th</sup> Congress (1877-79) through the 95<sup>th</sup> Congress (1997-98). The dataset includes 1,680 hearings and

testimony from nearly 20,000 interest groups, corporations, governmental agencies, and private citizens.<sup>4</sup> The data suggest that the “rise and fall” pattern of women’s groups’ participation generally tracks that of interest groups more broadly. However, women’s groups’ rise after suffrage and fall in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is more pronounced than is that of other interest groups or of Congressional witnesses generally (Goss 2013). In other words, even after adjusting for any changes in lawmakers’ appetite for policy input, the distinctive rise-and-fall pattern among women’s groups remains.

The story of women’s organizational weakening is evident, though later and less pronounced, in the count of women’s groups appearing on Capitol Hill. As the feminism-in-decline narrative was taking hold in the 1980s – and as the number of women’s group appearances was falling – the number of groups testifying actually rose a bit, before falling in the 1990s (Goss 2013). The same pattern is true for the range of policy issues on which women’s groups testified (Goss 2013). These findings lend credence to assertions that women’s groups indeed proliferated and specialized during the 1980s. Yet many of the groups weren’t the large, politically influential interests likely to be called again and again to testify on a wide range of issues.

In sum, women’s organizational engagement rose and fell over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The pattern is most pronounced in the volume of these groups’ appearances at Congressional hearings, but it is also evident in the number of groups that testified and the range of issues on which they appeared. The pattern presents obvious puzzles: Women’s collective action in the halls of Congress was rising when popular accounts tell us that women were retreating into domesticity, and it was falling in an era when women had never enjoyed more social, political, and economic status. How might we make sense of these perplexing patterns?



Below I briefly review intriguing yet ultimately unsatisfying possibilities and then lay out a more compelling explanation that puts public policy at the center.

### <1>Assessing the “Obvious” Explanations

Scholarly theories and popular wisdom propose three categories of explanations for the rise and fall of women’s organizations on Capitol Hill: those focused on Congress (changes in lawmakers’ tastes and practices); those focused on women (changes in their roles and perspectives); and those focused on the pressure groups system (changes in the system’s composition, in organizational strategies, or in funding availability). I consider these in turn.

#### <2>Congress-related explanations.

One possibility is that the evolution of women’s national policy engagement is less about women’s groups per se than about Congress. A closer examination of the evidence casts doubt on four possible, Congress-centered explanations. First, this is not a story of partisan favor: Access to women’s groups did not wax and wane depending upon which party was in charge of Congress. Second, this is not a story of gains in female representation in Congress rendering women’s groups obsolete: The decline in women’s groups’ testimony preceded large increases in female members of Congress, and in any event, studies show that strong women’s groups and female lawmakers are complements, not substitutes (Thomas 1994; Reingold 1992). Third, this is not a story about Congress’s shifting away from women’s concerns: Congress actually *increased* its attention to issues that had been historically of women’s concern, such as gender equality, international affairs, social legislation, and this shift happened at the same time that women’s groups’ presence was on the decline (Baumgartner and Mahoney 2005; Wolbrecht 2000; Costain 1988). Finally this is not a story about Congress’s taste for input from interest groups generally: Women’s groups gained and then lost ground both in an absolute sense *and*

relative to other types of interest groups and Congressional witnesses. In sum, changes in Congress do not explain the pattern of women's collective engagement over the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### <2>Gender-related explanations.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American women's lives were transformed as females moved into the paid labor force and negotiated changes in their personal and family lives. Although these changes may have led to some changes in American women's political engagement, they do not fully account for the observed patterns. This story is not fundamentally about women going to work. Women's labor force participation increased more or less monotonically throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while their organizational engagement experienced rises and falls. And studies show that labor force participation is typically correlated with more engagement, not less, which would be consistent with the pre-1960 pattern but not with the post-1980 trend. Nor is it the case that women lost their sense of sisterhood and the impulse for gender-based organizing. Even as the media were heralding the "death of feminism," individual women continued to have high levels of solidarity and believe that collective action was important, at least on women's rights issues (Tolleson Rinehart 1992). Although such findings are ambiguous for post-Baby Boom women, the patterns observed in my data would have preceded this generation's coming of age. In sum, changes in women's lifestyles and tastes do not seem to be the primary forces behind the evolution of women's organizations.

#### <2>Organizational explanations.

Nor were the trends driven primarily by two seemingly plausible organization-level possibilities. I examined whether the data simply reflect a shift among women's groups away from Congress as a focus of policy pressure and toward other institutions, such as the courts or administrative agencies. Evidence compiled by others suggests that women's groups were not

shifting strategies; Congress remained their top target (Grossmann 2012). Another possibility is that women's groups' strength varied with the availability of patronage funding, and here the evidence paints a complicated story. Funding remained available and by some measures grew, meaning that women's groups did not fade from the Congressional scene because they lacked money (Goss 2013). However, funders may have influenced women's groups' more specialized agenda (Goss 2007). I show below that focusing and specialization *are* related to the presence of women's groups on Capitol Hill.

The most compelling organizational-level explanation pertains to evolution of the interest group universe itself. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women's groups played a major role in creating the pluralist, group-based politics that we see today (Cott 1987), and they were central to sustaining it for decades. But women's groups also may have fallen victim to their own success. With the "advocacy explosion" that began in the 1960s and accelerated in the 1970s (Berry 1997), specialized pressure groups began colonizing issue niches previously dominated by women's multipurpose, mass-membership groups. These developments provided incentives for women's groups to define policy interests narrowly to attract money from donors and recognition from political elites. The proliferation of interest groups coincided with feminist pressures to repeal discriminatory laws, enact legislation that would empower women, and end sexist practices in the social and market spheres. Thus, as women's groups were facing competition in their traditional policy niches, they were also getting pressure to focus on women's rights and status. As we shall see, changes in the interest group environment worked hand-in-hand with policy changes operating on women's groups to produce dramatic changes in women's collective representation in debates over national issues.

<1>What Explains the Evolution: A Two-Level Theory

It is always difficult to explain major social transformations that unfold over long periods of time. Thus, no single factor can account for the rise-and-fall – and the widening and narrowing – of women’s organizational engagement over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many forces contributed to these developments, some of which I already have mentioned. Here I offer a layered account that incorporates those factors and introduces a larger, fundamental driver – policy itself. First, I introduce the proximate causes of the observed patterns in women’s organizational engagement: (1) changes in the types of groups that represented women; and (2) changes in these groups’ policy agendas. Next, I drill down to examine what drove these two interrelated changes. In so doing, I offer an explanation rooted in policy itself. Not only did women’s groups seek to influence policy, but policy also influenced women’s groups by providing incentives to organize in certain ways and focus on certain issues.

### <2>Changes in the Types of Organizations Speaking for Women

Theda Skocpol (2003; 1999; 1992) has argued that federated voluntary organizations – those with national, state, and local affiliates – played a critical role in the development of democratic citizens and in the construction of the early welfare state in America. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these groups began to decline as thriving hubs of civic activity for everyday citizens, only to be replaced by professionally staffed expert advocacy groups based in Washington. Skocpol (2003) has aptly described this pattern as the shift from “membership to management.” This shift profoundly affected women’s political representation by reducing the volume of women’s public voice and narrowing the range of issues on which women were heard.

Consider appearances by the seven traditional federated women’s associations, all formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, that testified the most over the course of the dataset.<sup>5</sup> In the

1950s, these seven groups were responsible for 50% of all women's group appearances; by the 1990s, this fraction was just 8%. A similar pattern holds in the absolute number of appearances. These seven groups appeared five times as often in the 1950s compared to the 1990s, even though Congress held fewer hearings in the earlier decade.<sup>6</sup>

These findings in part reflect the declining memberships of these groups. Data assembled by Robert Putnam show that 8 out of 10 large, traditional women's groups suffered significant membership losses – generally from 60-90 percent in population-adjusted terms – between 1966 and 1996 (Goss and Skocpol 2006).<sup>7</sup> The groups that lost ground included such historically prominent associations as the Federation of Business and Professional Women (-84%, in terms of the fraction of the relevant population who belonged); the American Association of University Women (-80%); the General Federation of Women's Clubs (-73%); the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (-91%); and the League of Women Voters (-63%).

As these general-purpose organizations declined, several categories of groups enjoyed increasing prominence in Washington, but none grew prominent enough to offset the declines in women's mass membership federations.

Occupationally based associations – such as labor unions, farm and agricultural organizations, professional associations, and occupational support entities – constituted roughly 10-25% of women's groups' appearances until the 1970s. With the second-wave movement and women's advancement in white-collar professions, occupational groups proliferated, constituting nearly 60% of all appearances by women's groups in the 1990s. However, these groups tended to be specialized along industry lines and were typically called to testify only when issues in their industry domains came before Congress.

Another sector of the women's group universe that posted growth in the 1960-1990 period is the feminist sector. Between 1966, when the National Organization for Women (NOW) was established, and 2000, more than 600 newly formed feminist groups appeared before Congress. These included national advocacy groups and their local affiliates, such as the National Women's Political Caucus and the Lincoln, Neb., chapter of the Older Women's League; state organizations, such as the Pennsylvania Breast Cancer Coalition; local service providers, such as the Minneapolis Women's Center; and women's occupational groups, such as the Massachusetts Women's Bar Association. Contrary to the stereotype of the second wave as an elite women's movement, many of the groups appearing on Capitol Hill represented disadvantaged sub-populations: older women, blue-collar women, victims of domestic or sexual violence, and minority women.

While the leading feminist groups were visible on Capitol Hill, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they never reached anywhere near the same prominence as did traditional mass-membership associations. Most of these new groups testified just once. Only 25 of them (4%) testified more than 10 times, and only 2 (NOW and the Women's Equity Action League) testified more than 100 times. The combined membership in feminist groups was only a small fraction of membership in the "old fashioned" women's organizations. Gelb and Palley (1996) found four prominent feminist groups had a combined membership of just 250,000 in 1978; by contrast, the four largest "traditional" women's groups had about 10.7 million members that year, or 43 times as many (Goss and Skocpol 2006).

The feminist movement spawned a backlash by conservative women, but again, these groups did not become an especially large and versatile advocacy force. Three prominent conservative women's groups appeared with some regularity on Capitol Hill in the 1980s and

1990s: the Eagle Forum, founded by Phyllis Schlafly in 1972; Concerned Women for America, founded by Beverly LaHaye in 1979; and the Independent Women's Forum, founded by three conservative women in 1992 in response to the controversy involving Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. These 3 groups appeared 57 times between 1979 and 2000 – or roughly 5 times per Congress. To put this in perspective, the 3 most prolific feminist groups – NOW, the Women's Legal Defense Fund, and the National Women's Political Caucus – appeared roughly 5 times as often in that time frame. Thus, while conservative women's groups brought important new perspectives to national debates, their prominence on Capitol Hill should not be overstated.

Groups representing women of color also made strong gains in the era of women's rights, but their growth was constrained by natural demographic limits. The 1970s-1980s witnessed the birth of a wide range of feminist organizations specializing in advancing the interests of African-American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian-American women. Yet just one organization – the National Council of Negro Women – was responsible for 43% of all appearances by minority women's groups. Issues on which the Council testified included the minimum wage, housing, elderly assistance, juvenile delinquency, child care, pay discrimination, the status of black males, and television violence. With only three exceptions, minority women's groups never constituted more than 4% of all women's group appearances in any given Congress. What is more, minority women's groups seemed to follow the same downward trajectory seen with other women's groups during the 1980s and 1990s, with the exception of a brief uptick in the 1993-94 Congressional session.

The changing fortunes of different types of groups, particularly the large multi-issue, mass membership federations, affected both the range of issues on which women's groups testified and, in turn, their prominence on Capitol Hill. The big federations declined in

prominence from the 1970s onward, but no other types of groups – second-wave feminist groups, conservative groups, women-of-color groups, occupational organizations – ever grew large or numerous enough to equal the traditional organizations’ prominence on Capitol Hill.

Indeed, the decline in the big women’s associations drove much of the decline we observe in women’s organizational representation in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Figure 5 shows the observed pattern compared to what it would have been if (a) traditional organizations had continued to testify at their peak levels; and (b) if second-wave feminist groups had done the same.

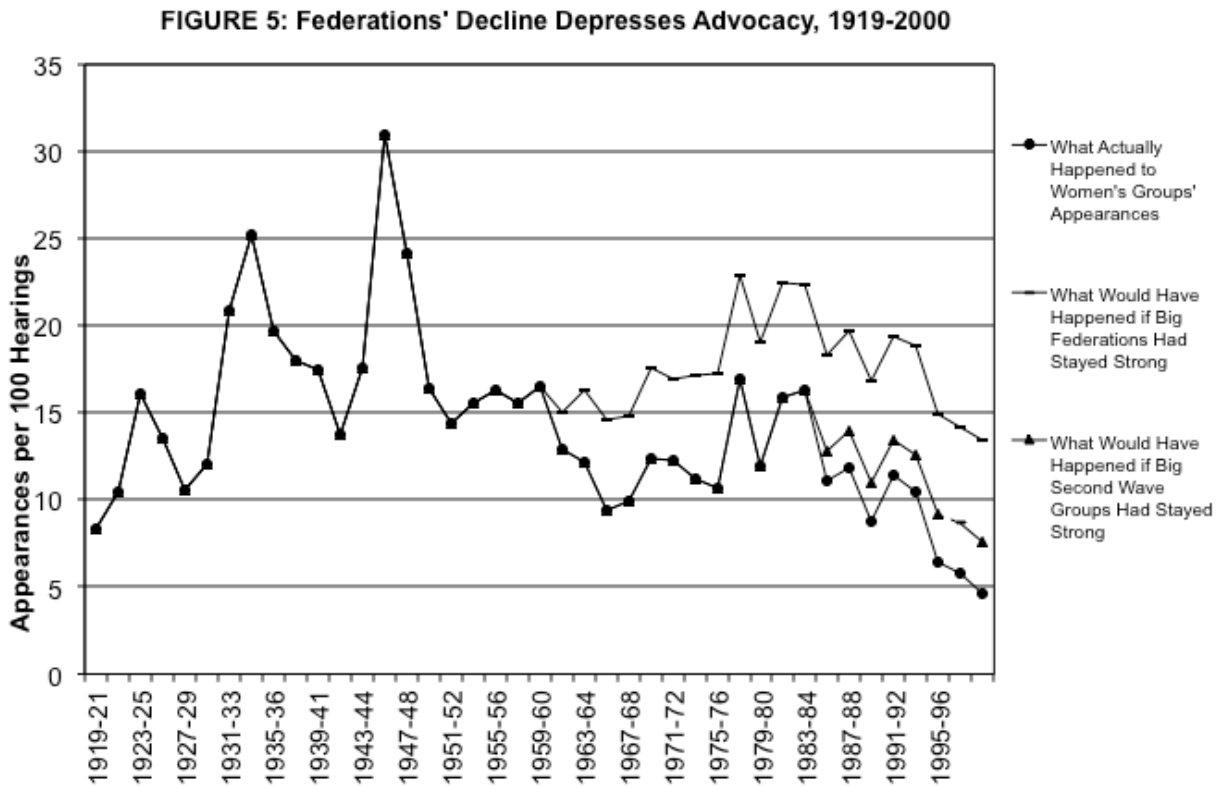


Figure 8.5<sup>8</sup> Federations’ Decline Depresses Advocacy, 1919-2000 Credit:



As the figure shows, if traditional women's groups had held their own, women's organizational representation would have dipped very little after its midcentury height. While the feminist movement clearly did elevate women's voice in Congress, the decline of those groups contributed little to the overall decline in women's collective representation.

## <2>Types of issues

The fading away of multipurpose federations had important consequences. It reduced the breadth of issues around which women's groups were actively engaged and as a result reduced the number of times that Congress called those groups to testify. As multi-issue groups declined, the women's organizational universe came to be dominated by smaller, more specialized groups dedicated to various aspects of women's rights, status, and well-being. Furthermore, as the types of groups speaking for women shifted, the range of issues on which women's voices were heard narrowed, and the scope of women's advocacy declined.

From suffrage through mid-century, women's groups appeared before Congress on a wide array of policy matters. Issue domains in which women's groups testified regularly included agriculture, alcohol abuse, child health, consumer safety, District of Columbia affairs, drug regulation, education, foreign aid, gender discrimination, government operations, housing, immigration, juvenile justice, labor, military manpower, national parks, price controls, tax policy – the list goes on (Goss 2013). Women's groups believed – and Congress evidently agreed – that virtually any issue was a women's issue.

With the advent of the second-wave women's movement, the range of issue domains remained broad – even expanded. Women's groups continued to testify at hearings focused on social welfare, health care, tax policy, and so forth. However, the *dimensions* of these multifaceted policies that women's groups addressed narrowed. To illustrate, I coded each of the

roughly 10,500 appearances according to whether, within a broad policy domain, a women's organization was primarily advocating for *women's* interests. I defined such interests as women's legal rights, professional status, economic well-being, or physical welfare. Note that such issues are often feminist issues, but they need not be. Conservative groups might have taken positions – for example, against suffrage, legalized abortion, or the Equal Rights Amendment – because they saw the policies as antithetical to women's well-being.

The story of women's issue interests after suffrage looks much like the story of women's presence on Capitol Hill. After 1920, women's groups expanded their role, moving assertively into a broader range of social, economic, and foreign policy debates. Women's groups continued to press for women's rights, status, and well-being, but a growing share of their testimony concerned non-feminist issues, specifically relating to disadvantaged groups, the diffuse public interest, and the national interest. However, from the 1970s onward, women's organizations fundamentally reoriented their energies. In the middle decades, women's groups had advocated for women's rights, status, and well-being roughly 10-20% of the time; by the 1980s and 1990s, it was closer to 70-80% of the time.

Figure 6 shows the relationship between how broad women's policy interests were and how prominent these groups were on Capitol Hill. Reflecting policy breadth, the figure charts the percentage of appearances in which women's groups testified primarily on general (e.g., non-women-centric) issues. Reflecting prominence, the figure charts the number of hearing-adjusted appearances by these groups. (To facilitate presentation, these measures have been converted into standard units reflecting variation around their means; thus, readers are invited to pay attention to the patterns of the lines more than to the absolute numbers.) A visual inspection reveals that the two lines run strikingly in tandem: The more wide-ranging the agendas of

women's groups, the more frequently Congress summoned them to share their political intelligence and policy expertise.

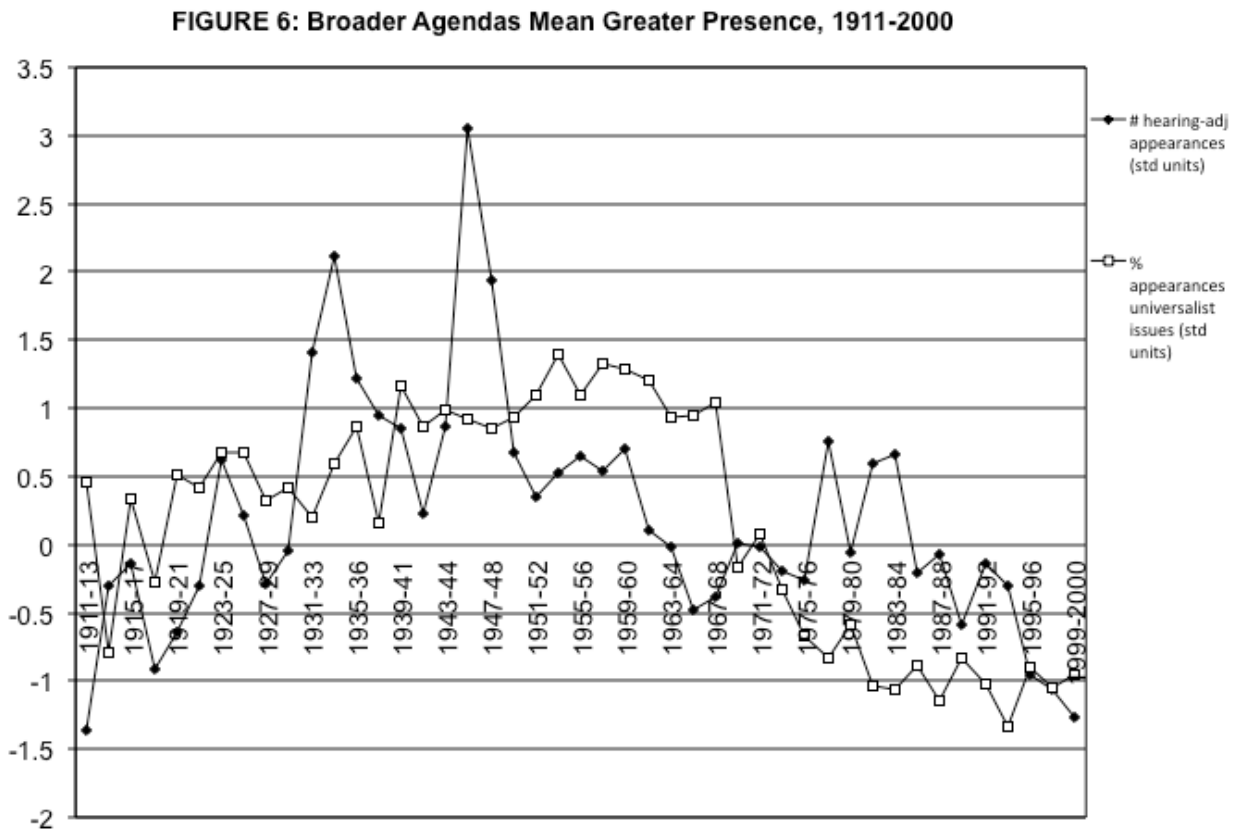


Figure 8.6<sup>9</sup> Broader Agendas Mean Greater Presence, 1911-2000 Credit:

Thus, we have a paradox. As women's groups moved away from other-oriented causes, they were able to provide expert knowledge and an intensive focus on women's equality. Feminist groups scrutinized existing laws and regulations across the policy spectrum to undo provisions that treated women unfavorably. Feminist organizations also advocated for important new policies to redress historic inequities and advance women's priorities. At the same time by going deeper on feminist concerns, women's groups sacrificed the breadth of policy engagement for which they had long been known. A particular casualty was foreign affairs, a policy domain in which women's groups were quite active in the early and middle 20<sup>th</sup> century (Goss 2009).

The data show that by the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women had become a collection of specialized interests. Their days as a public interest lobby were largely behind them.

### <1>What Was Behind Women's Group Specialization?

Political participation shapes public policy. Movements of politically engaged women brought suffrage in 1920 and women's rights advances in the 1970s. However, public policy also has the power to "feed back" and shape participation (Mettler and Soss 2004; Skocpol 1992). Feedback effects may be direct or indirect. In the case of American women, direct feedback effects include the increase in voting brought about by the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the rise in jury service facilitated by state laws and court rulings (McCammon 2012; Kerber 1998). Indirectly, policies can influence participation by altering resources available to constituencies and by changing their interpretations of their civic roles (Pierson 1993). Resource effects refer to endowments, such as money and educational access, that increase individuals' capacity to engage politically. Interpretive effects relate to citizens' "perceptions of their role in the community, their status in relation to other citizens and government, and the extent to which a policy affected their lives" (Mettler 2002: 352). When people feel more included, and experience greater status as citizens, their participation should be expected to grow. The political and economic incorporation of women over the last century makes them an ideal case for examining feedback effects on civic engagement.

Consistent with feedback theory, laws advancing women had both resource and interpretive effects that directed female collective action toward certain types of policy claims and away from others. However, policy feedbacks did not operate the same way over time. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment yielded an expansion in women's engagement, while the gender-equality laws of the 1960s and 1970s laid the groundwork for the narrowing of women's agendas and the

eventual decline of their presence on Capitol Hill. What accounts for these different trajectories? Why in one era do inclusionary policies give way to greater participation, while in the next era inclusionary policies are followed by more constrained participation? One logical answer is that feedback effects are contingent: They depend on policy design.

### <1>The Legacy of Suffrage: Rights *and* Responsibility

Suffrage was a public policy with the potential for broad feedback effects. Ratified in 1920, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment reads: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” The amendment embodies the duality of American citizenship, which encompasses both rights (to ballot access) and responsibilities (to take part in collective decision-making). The amendment also embodied the parallel constructs in women’s political history: women’s claims to the same political status as men, as derived from natural law, and women’s difference from men, as derived from maternal caregiving roles. Suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt captured women’s understanding that the amendment provide a flexible and expansive platform for women to exercise both their equality rights and their caregiving responsibilities:

The vote is the emblem of your equality, women of America, the guaranty of your liberty..... The vote is a power, a weapon of offense and defense, and a prayer. Understand what it means and what it can do for your country. Use it intelligently, conscientiously, prayerfully. No soldier in the great suffrage army has labored and suffered to get a “place” for you. Their motive has been the hope women would aim higher than their own selfish ambitions, that they would serve the common good.<sup>10</sup>

Women's organizations took up this charge. Groups emphasizing the "rights/sameness" perspective used the amendment as a launch pad for their efforts to secure the next step in women's political inclusion: an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. The groups embracing this important item on the equality agenda included the National Woman's Party, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the National Association of Women Lawyers, and the American Medical Woman's Association (Rupp and Taylor 1987). At the same time, women's groups emphasizing the "responsibilities/difference" perspective saw the amendment as a potent new way for women to bring their distinctive sensibilities to bear on issues such as world peace and children's well-being. Women's assertion of a "duty to serve society as women" resonated as government increasingly assumed caregiving roles by initiating social welfare programs (Kraditor 1971: 52-53). Groups emphasizing women's public responsibilities of care included the National Consumers League, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the American Association of University Women. These organizations and others formed the Women's Joint Congressional Committee, whose policy agenda throughout the 1920s included passage of a child and maternal health bill, a constitutional amendment giving Congress the power to regulate child labor, and two bills regulating food safety (Wilson 2007). The agenda reflected the maternal orientation of women's mass membership groups and their desire for the state to assume and facilitate caregiving roles occupied by wives and mothers.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment's joint expression of women's sameness (rights) and difference (responsibility) created the context for a third, hybrid identity to emerge: one oriented around women as good citizens (Goss 2013). The good-citizen perspective shared with the difference perspective the idea that women are distinct in their concern for others' well-being and in

transcending the self-interestedness of partisan politics. The good-citizen perspective shared with the sameness perspective the belief that women could and should participate on the same footing as men. Exponents of the good-citizen frame believed that the explicit invocation of gender difference, except in the context of discrimination, was unhelpful or even counterproductive to women's influence. This interpretation was developed and carried forth most prominently by the League of Women Voters, the top-testifying women's organization in American history. In 1949, the League's President summarized the sex-segregated group's orientation by averring that members "think of themselves as citizens first and as women incidentally" (Rupp and Taylor 1987: 49). This hybrid identity allowed women to be both equal to men, in their gutsy claims to authority across a broad range of salient issues, and different from men in their public performance of the civic virtues traditionally associated with and assigned to women. The frame took advantage of beliefs about sex difference but did not articulate them. It was implicitly, but not explicitly, gendered.

In sum, by embodying both women's sameness and women's difference, the amendment allowed women's groups regardless of their beliefs about women's nature to claim it as the moral foundation for policy advocacy. In advancing both rights and responsibilities for women, the amendment provided an expansive, flexible platform for women's collective action, allowing them to be the same as men, different from them, or some nimble combination of the two. In speaking to multiple identities, the amendment allowed women's groups to claim any issue as a women's issue.

<1>1960-1980: How Rights Came to Eclipse Responsibility

As the major women's policy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, suffrage conferred rights on individual women as well as conveying to them a responsibility for the commonweal. It legitimated women's advocacy for further policies benefiting women as a group, while at the same time providing a rationale for women's advocacy on behalf of other groups or the public at large. By contrast, the major women's policies of the 1960s-1970s, which were focused on women's legal equality, provided a less expansive platform for women's collective engagement down the line. Three significant policy enactments are of particular importance: the President's Commission on the Status of Women, formed in 1961, which quickly spawned two additional federal equal-rights committees and commissions in all 50 states; the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which began the process of incorporating women as full participants in economic life; and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which barred gender discrimination in employment. While these early-1960s policy innovations were not the product of a women's movement, they laid the groundwork for one. Both the Equal Pay Act and Title VII enshrined gender equality as a central orienting principle of women's collective action, directing women – in particular elite women – toward an agenda of dismantling institutionalized inequalities. The President's Commission pointed women's activists to where the problems were and provided authoritative evidence of their scope. These three policies created both a discursive context and a government apparatus for women to pursue the same rights that men had. In short, they created a context for women's groups to view their mission primarily as redressing inequities.

Policies can feed back into politics by providing resources and structures for collective engagement (Mettler and Soss 2004). Exemplifying such feedback effects, two government institutions created by lawmakers – the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and the President's Commission on the Status of Women – catalyzed the creation of the flagship



organization of the second-wave movement, the National Organization for Women. NOW's founding Statement of Purpose held that "the time has come for a new movement toward true equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes" (Carabillo, Meuli, and Csida 1993: 159). NOW's purpose was "to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men" (Carabillo, Meuli, and Csida 1993: 159). Within a few years of NOW's creation, a host of feminist advocacy groups sprang up, including the Women's Equity Action League (1968), Federally Employed Women (1968), the National Coalition of American Nuns and Church Women United (1969), the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union (1971), the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (1971), the National Women's Political Caucus (1971), the Women's Legal Defense Fund (1971), the Network for Economic Rights (1971), the Women's Lobby (1972), Equal Rights Advocates (1972), and the Center for Law and Social Policy's Women's Rights Project (1972), which in 1981 would become the National Women's Law Center (Rosenberg 1993). These organizations relied on a mix of educational, advocacy, and litigation strategies, but they were united in their pursuit of equality claims.

#### <1>Second-wave Feminism: Policy Feedbacks on Women's Group Resources

Besides working through the identity mechanism, policy feedbacks encouraged egalitarian feminism by conferring resources on, and enlarging the capacities of, feminist groups. Most directly, the President's Commission on the Status of Women provided resources, networks, legitimacy, and a political opportunity for the emergence of the second-wave movement (Costain 1992; Davis 1999; Klein 1984). After the commission had completed its

work, it successfully urged President Kennedy to create the Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women (made up in part of commission members). He also established the Interdepartmental Committee on the Status of Women, a Cabinet-level body composed of administration officials (Davis 1999). The two national status-of-women entities began holding national conferences of state commissions in 1964. These meetings brought together hundreds of feminist leaders from around the country to share information – and grievances – with one another and with sympathetic government officials, including feminists within the executive and legislative branches. Attendance nearly quintupled from the first to the second meeting, which Cabinet members and President Johnson attended (Carabillo, Meuli, and Csida 1993). These conferences galvanized women, who were “mingling in workshops and expanding their knowledge beyond the boundaries of their individual states,” providing “a forum for an expression of women’s rising expectations for correcting injustices” (Carabillo, Meuli, and Csida 1993: 12).

With success at the national level, and at the urging of the Federation of Business and Professional Women, all 50 states and many counties created their own women’s commissions, providing a platform for information-sharing, networking, and policy advocacy at the subnational level (Carabillo, Meuli, and Csida 1993; Davis 1999). State commissions, working with a newly energized base of women’s organizations, were very successful in lobbying for policy changes. Between 1963 and 1965, state legislatures enacted a slew of laws to remove barriers to women’s employment, jury service, and property rights. Thus, the President’s Commission defined the problems and spun off organizations at the national and state levels that fed the broader movement and its lobbying groups. At the 1966 meeting of state commissions, grievances reached a boiling point, and NOW and the second-wave movement were born.

## <1>How the Equality Orientation Affected Women's Collective Engagement

A core assumption of democratic theory and practice is that more civic inclusion leads to more civic participation. After suffrage the assumption indeed held true. The women's lobby (or lobbies) grew in prominence on Capitol Hill and represented women's interests and perspectives on an ever-widening range of domestic and international policy issues (Goss 2013; Wilson 2007; Cott 1992). Yet, the raft of policy victories of the 1960s and 1970s gave way to a decline in women's groups' prominence and a focusing of their policy interests. Why would two sets of policies, both so important to women's inclusion and status, have left such different patterns of democratic participation in their wake? Below I offer four answers that illuminate the complex interactions between policy, as a set of ideas and incentive structures, and organizational participation as an adaptive response to these ideas and incentives.

First, though suffrage and the equal-rights policies of the 1960s and 1970s were both about inclusion, they were about fundamentally different kinds of inclusion. Suffrage was about *political* inclusion: the right to take part in democratic decision-making. The landmark Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act – along with later successes such as Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972), the Women's Educational Equity Act (1974), the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (1974), and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978) – were about *economic* inclusion, the right to reap the full rewards of one's effort and talent. Both types of inclusion are important, but only the first – political inclusion – conveys an expectation of responsibility to participate in matters of public concern. Economic inclusion provides incentives to participate, but around a much narrower set of questions bearing on access to and treatment in

paid employment. Suffrage, as a policy encompassing both rights claims and expectations of civic duty, provided a platform for a more expansive policy agenda.

Second, the platform provided by suffrage was perfectly suited to multi-issue mass membership groups, which flourished in the decades after the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment won ratification. Groups such as the League of Women Voters (“an everywoman’s organization”) and the General Federation of Women’s Clubs created a space where civic-minded women with different policy interests could find a home (Mathews-Gardner 2005; Stuhler 2003; Ware 1992). The broad policy agendas pursued by these multi-issue groups paralleled the government’s agenda, meaning that women were poised to jump into virtually any policy debate that arose. The League of Women Voters, for example, has positions on more than 40 issues at the national level and hundreds more at the state and local levels (League of Women Voters 2015). As I have shown, the downward trajectory of women’s engagement at Congressional hearings would not have been nearly as steep had these multi-issue groups maintained their strength. Suffrage also left room for groups that wanted to mobilize around specific female identities – mothers, feminists, and so forth. Thus, the suffrage amendment’s invitation to pursue both group rights and social responsibilities allowed women to pursue a wide range of policy agendas, both within multi-issue federations and through specialized groups speaking to particular civic orientations.

On the other hand, the policy context of the 1960s and 1970s, coupled with larger political shifts, encouraged women’s groups to think less expansively about their policy agendas. A raft of policymaking at the federal level, combined with the availability of patronage resources, encouraged new interest groups to proliferate (Skocpol 2003; Berry 1997; Walker 1991). The interest group universe came to be dominated by specialized, niche-seeking organizations (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Browne 1990). These new groups displaced

multipurpose women's organizations that in an earlier era had been active across issue domains, from the environment, to international relations, to social welfare (Goss 2013). At the same time, equal-rights policies enacted in the early 1960s provided new resources, networks, and ideational justification for women's groups to defend and build upon those gains – that is, to think of women's issues as feminist issues (Goss 2013). These laws also reinforced a liberal feminist ideology that viewed social caretaking rooted in gender difference as anathema to women's equality. As Nancy Fraser (1997: 99) has noted:

Equality feminists saw gender difference as an instrument and artifact of male dominance.... [T]o stress gender difference is to harm women. It is to reinforce our confinement to an inferior domestic role, hence to marginalize or exclude us from all those activities that promote true human self-realization, such as politics, employment, art, the life of the mind and the exercise of legitimate authority.

Third, the focus on feminist issues advantaged certain types of groups, namely those speaking the language of gender rights. These groups fared well in the era when working women were coming up against laws and public policies that clearly discriminated against or otherwise disadvantaged them. However, once policy reforms had been enacted in the 1960s-1980s, women's groups were left to defend against rare threats to the antidiscrimination laws and to seek the few protectionist policies that feminists were comfortable supporting (such as policies to protect women from violence and provide family and medical leave). By the 2000s, a growing chorus of feminists had come to believe that the second wave's unfinished business lay in marital bargaining over work and family (Sandberg 2013; Hirshman 2007; Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004), in the failure of society to embrace diversity in all of its complex and intersecting forms (Henry

2004), and in the cultural treatment of sexual expression (Baumgardner and Richards 2000). Such priorities do not easily lend themselves to Congressional hearings or lawmaking.

Finally, feminism's policy victories created the conditions under which gender-based organizing became problematic. These triumphs helped make women better off in education, employment, credit markets, and government programs. In addressing women's unequal treatment under law, these policies weakened grievance claims that had served a basis for feminist mobilization. At the same time, the maternalist and civic-woman frameworks of the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century had yet to stage a comeback (Goss 2013). While surveys suggested that women maintained a high level of collective identity and continued to believe in collective action, it had become harder to identify an agenda or even collective action frame around which women's civic passions could coalesce.

## <2>The Foreshortened Legacy of Suffrage

From the 1870s, when this study begins, through 2000, when it ends, the U.S. underwent profound changes in its economic, political, and social organization. The interest group universe that women had played a central role in building was fundamentally reconfigured, with broad, mass-membership federations losing clout to professional lobbies with niche agendas, including feminist issues. With advocacy by women's groups, the national welfare and regulatory state was "invented" and then expanded to encompass a broad array of policies – from health care research, to income support and pensions, to worker protections – that affected women's lives in profound and intimate ways. In key respects, women embody the evolving relationship between Americans and the state.

The case of American women raises important questions about what these changes have wrought. On the positive side, the dismantling of discriminatory laws and antiquated belief

systems has helped to free women to pursue their dreams and deploy their talents to their highest and best ends, both for the benefit of the woman herself and for the benefit of others. At the same time, women have suffered a loss in representation on Capitol Hill. The organizations that once served as their voice appear less often, and on a narrower range of issues, than they did during the supposedly docile 1950s.

To be sure, 21<sup>st</sup> century women continue to exercise political voice as individuals in the voting booth, where they participate at higher rates than men, and through lawmaking bodies and policy agencies, where they exercise considerable power to shape agendas. Nevertheless, the fading of women's collective action outside the state is cause for concern. Women continue to hold different policy preferences from men on key issues, and yet the U.S. is not even close to gender parity in positions of political leadership, whether in Congress or policy advocacy groups (Goss 2013). Women's groups may help redress these issues by cultivating female leadership and magnifying women's voice (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). Indeed, research suggests that female political leaders are most responsive and effective when women's groups are strong (Keiser 1997; Weldon 2002).

After 2000, when this study ended, innovative female leaders began reinvigorating women's historic role as defenders and promoters of the public good, while not surrendering women's status as equal-rights-bearing citizens (Goss and Heaney 2010). If history is any guide, these groups' fortunes will depend powerfully upon both the policy context and the ways that women's leaders interpret and respond to it.

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<sup>1</sup> “Why Join the League of Women Voters?” 1921, reproduced in Stuhler 2003: 37.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Truman 1951: 100.

<sup>3</sup> One might reasonably ask whether women’s organizational activities increased after suffrage – or simply Congressional recognition of women’s organizations. The data don’t allow us to say definitively, but circumstantial evidence (including organizational censuses) suggests that the upward trend was driven by women themselves. Supporting that conclusion is the fact that there was no sudden jump in women’s appearances after 1920, which we might have expected if Congress had suddenly become solicitous of newly enfranchised women’s views. I thank Nancy MacLean for raising this important question.

<sup>4</sup> A total of 19,732 witnesses appeared. Some of these witnesses may be double counted if they appeared at more than one hearing in the dataset.

<sup>5</sup> The seven traditional groups are the League of Women Voters and affiliates (990 appearances); the General Federation of Women's Clubs and affiliates (524), the National Congress of Mothers/PTA and affiliates (508); the American Association of University Women and affiliates (303); the National Council of Jewish Women and affiliates (264); the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and affiliates (220); and the YWCA and affiliates (166).

<sup>6</sup> According to the Policy Agendas Project, Congress held 16,344 hearings in the 1990s, compared to 11,526 in the 1950s.

<sup>7</sup> I thank Professor Putnam for making these data available for the Goss and Skocpol chapter cited here.

<sup>8</sup> Big Federations are the American Association of University Women, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the League of Women Voters, the National Council of Jewish Women, the

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PTA, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the YWCA. Big Second Wave groups are the National Organization for Women, the National Women's Law Center, the National Women's Political Caucus, the Older Women's League, the Women's Equity Action League, the Women's Legal Defense Fund, and the Women's Lobby.

<sup>9</sup> Because the two measures are on different scales, the data have been converted into standard units representing each data point's deviation from its respective mean. Putting the two data sources into comparable units allows the patterns to be viewed side-by-side.

<sup>10</sup> *The Woman Citizen*, September 4, 1920, reprinted in part in Stuhler 2003: 26.