

SIGNALS OR MIXED SIGNALS: WHY OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOBILIZATION ARE NOT OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY REFORM*

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Drawing on political opportunity theory, the theory of legislative logic, and political mediation theory, we hypothesize differential effects of the political environment on the actions of challengers (suffragists) and state actors (legislators) in the women's suffrage movement. We use sequential logistic regression to assess the effects of explanatory variables on two intermediate stages of mobilization and policy change. In the case of challengers, we estimate the likelihood a state-level organization is present in any given legislative year. In the case of state actors, we estimate the likelihood a bill passes one legislative house given the presence of a state-level suffrage organization and that a bill has been introduced. Mixed signals are apparent in that challengers and legislators respond to the same environmental factors differently. Challengers respond to perceived opportunities for change. Legislators seek to enhance their political careers and are responsive to the demands of challengers when they perceive challengers as politically powerful or when social and cultural change signals a demand for policy reform. Legislators, in the end, are much more conservative in their response to the political context.

In the study of how movements matter, much of the scholarship is centered on political opportunity, movement mobilization, and outcomes. Though many scholars remain critical of political opportunity theory (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996), a large body of research (including the work of both political process and institutional politics theorists) assumes that groups receive signals from their immediate policy environment (Tarrow 1996: 42). These signals are not necessarily formal or permanent but “provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow 1994: 85). While some researchers have explored the extent to which signals differentially influence protest, organization, and policy outcomes (Meyer and Minkoff 2004), most have assumed that the same factors that stimulate protest also affect movement mobilization as well as policy outcomes (for example, Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni 1995; McCammon, Campbell, Granberg, and Mowery 2001; Soule, McAdam, McCarthy, and Su 1999; Tarrow 1994).

In this article, we draw from three disparate approaches to theorize and test the differential effects of the political environment on movement mobilization and on the policy change process. We focus on two outcomes as indicators of the actions of challengers (suffragists) and state actors (legislators). In the case of challengers, we estimate the likelihood a state-level suffrage organization exists because state-level organizing is an

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institutionalized and assertive strategy available to challengers (Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005; McAdam 1999). In the case of state actors, we select bill passage in one legislative house because it is an intermediate and consequential stage in the political process (Andrews 2001; King, Cornwall, and Dahlin 2005; Soule and King 2006). We draw on political opportunity theory, the theory of legislative logic, and political mediation theory to posit why challengers and state actors respond differentially to signals in their environment. In doing so, we theorize mixed signals. Mixed signals are apparent in the differential responses of challengers who organize to pursue policy change and state actors who may ignore, resist, or cooperate with challengers depending upon the political context (Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005). Mixed signals arise to the extent that challengers perceive opportunities for mobilization that, in the end, are not opportunities for success.

Most recently political opportunity theorists have suggested a conceptualization that takes into account the effects of opportunity structures and signals from the political environment as differentially providing opportunities for mobilization and opportunities for influence. Noting that scholars conflate opportunities for social mobilization and opportunities for policy change, Meyer and Minkoff (2004) disaggregated across different outcomes (protest, social movement mobilization, and policy reform). They found that social movement organization (SMO) formation was linked to signals from the environment, but policy reform was not. Activists and legislators, it would seem, make different decisions about “when to capitalize on political change and when to be cautious” (Meyer and Minkoff 2004: 1484).

While scholars studying political opportunity structure (POS) have assumed that signals from the environment may be similarly interpreted by challengers and actors, the theory of legislative logic suggests otherwise (King, et al. 2005). Focusing more specifically on stages of the policy process, policymaking is conceptualized as a sequential process that conditions the influence of social movements at different stages. The influence of challengers is mediated by a fragmented legislative process. At more consequential stages in the policy reform process (more consequential for the legislator because his or her actions are public and subject to scrutiny, and more consequential for policy reform because the legislation under consideration has passed another hurdle in the reform process), legislators are less responsive to challengers. Moreover, at the least consequential stages (bill introduction), legislators are likely to give only symbolic support, decoupling their support from any real intent to help challengers succeed. Further empirical support for differential effects has since been provided by Soule and King (2006) in a study of the differential effects of POS, social movements, and public opinion.

Political mediation theory also notes that politicians may respond symbolically, but suggests that response is most likely in states with traditional patronage parties (Amenta, Carruthers, and Zylan 1992). More importantly, the theory suggests that a combination of favorable political contexts and the mobilization of challengers are required to bring about major state policy change initiatives. Challengers must exert sufficient influence to change the “calculations of relevant institutional political actors.” Even so, they will not always be able to influence policy outcomes because political conditions influence the *relationship* between challengers’ mobilization and the policy outcome (Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005: 519-520). Medium and short-term political contexts (for example, the presence of a new political regime set on creating new coalitions in order to assure survival) and long-term political contexts (for example, highly democratized polity and the absence of a patronage-based political party) influence challengers’ successes; either the influence of challengers on state actors is amplified and state actors are more likely to respond in concert, or the political context lessens the likelihood that state actors will be swayed.

In combination, these theories suggest a differential effect of the environment on challengers and state actors. First, the political environment shapes challengers’ sense of political efficacy, which in turn instigates action (Tarrow 1994, 1996). Activists seek confirmation that group goals are within reach and accomplishable through collective action

(Ennis and Schreuer 1987; Klandermans 1984; Schussman and Soule 2005) and mobilize or demobilize based on their perceptions of environmental opportunities or obstacles (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Staggenborg 1986). The “small victories” generated by past legislation can be emotionally transforming and instigate new efforts at mobilization (Aminzade and McAdam 2001; King and Cornwall 2005). Such conceptualizations see challengers as cognizant, strategic, and savvy (Tarrow 1994, 1996). Challengers, moreover, are typically focused on long term movement goals, considering different strategies, weighing tactics, and determining the appropriate sequence of actions towards the end goal.

Second, state actors are motivated by challengers but interpret signals in the POS more conservatively. Rather than reacting to signals as opportunities for change (as do activists), legislators interpret signals as *demands for change*. Therefore, legislators are most likely to respond to signals when they represent threats to their political careers. In the most ideal circumstances, as elected officials, legislators see themselves as responsible to the “will of the people.” As Burstein and his colleagues argue, lawmakers must attend to shifts in public opinion in order to maintain their legislative seats. Legislators’ response to challengers always occurs in this electoral context (Burstein and Linton 2002). The restraining force of public opinion, especially when it is not directly known, makes legislators inherently more conservative in their policy change efforts. As suggested by the theory of legislative logic, rather than take direct action in favor of a social movements’ goals, lawmakers may search for ways to symbolically appease activists or initiate partial solutions to perceived problems (King et al. 2005). At the more consequential stages of the policy reform process, legislators will be more sensitive to public opinion and less responsive to challengers’ claims (Soule and King 2006).

According to political mediation theory, legislators will also be more responsive to challengers in non-patronage-oriented party systems and in states where new political regimes dominate. The presence of a highly democratized polity and the availability of meaningful choices among parties should make legislators more sensitive to the demands of challengers, but only to the extent that challengers can demonstrate the support of the broader public.

We evaluate the differential responses of challengers and state actors to the political environment by examining two *intermediate* outcomes. We begin with SMO presence, modeling the likelihood that a state-level suffrage organization exists in any given legislative year. McCammon et al. (2001) already have explored the relationship between the POS and suffrage organizing using event history analysis. Their analysis focused on factors that influence the *rate* of organizational founding—what accounts for early or late state-level movement emergence. We ask a different question. What features of the environment account for the presence of a state-level suffrage organization in any given legislative year?

We then ask what factors influence intermediate success in the policy reform process (bill passage in one legislative house). We focus at the intermediate stage because this stage will be less subject to symbolic gestures on the part of legislators and because a roll call vote is more consequential for the policy change process compared to the bill introduction stage. At this stage of the policy change process, legislators must weigh support for challengers as well as other factors in the political environment.¹ This study is distinctive in that we investigate the effects of the political context on policy change, *given some degree of activist mobilization*. Doing so allows us to assess how the POS influences legislative decision-making when pressed by social movements to initiate some sort of change. We explore what features of the environment account for bill passage, *given the presence of a state-level suffrage organization and that a bill has been introduced*.

Our purpose is theoretical and methodological. We are less interested in explaining the particular case of woman suffrage legislative success than we are in examining the possibility of a disjuncture between features of the environment that may signal for mobilization, but have little or no effect on the legislative process. We are interested in exploring whether conceptualizations of POS are so specifically focused on the emergence of protest movements

and SMOs that they are ineffective in accounting for shifts in policy. More specifically, we address the *lack of congruence* between opportunities for mobilization and opportunities for policy reform.

We use sequential logistic regression to assess the effects of explanatory variables on mobilization and policy change. This method has been used in the past by other social movement scholars studying policy change (Johnson, Agnone, and McCarthy 2006; King et al. 2005; Soule and King 2006). By conditioning an outcome on success at a previous stage we isolate stage-specific effects that would be confounded if the analysis examined only a single dichotomous outcome. Specifically, in this set of regressions we isolate the determinants of policy change in only those circumstances where activists mobilized for change. Our analysis isolates only those cases where legislators were, in fact, responding to activists and not initiating change proposals for other reasons.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

The woman suffrage movement is a useful case study for estimating the effects of a changing political environment on mobilization and legislative success. During the 70-plus years of the movement much of the activity occurred at the state level. Of the three avenues for success (legislating an amendment followed by a referendum, constitutional conventions, or direct democratic means such as the citizen initiative), the most common and most successful path was through the legislature. Twenty-four state legislatures passed suffrage amendments to state constitutions (some did so more than once) and 11 of the subsequent referenda were successful.

Opportunities for success varied across states and over time. Movement gains and political and cultural change continually altered the calculus for success. States altered their constitutions and changed the rules by which amendments were passed. The enfranchisement of women in some states made success more likely in others (McCammon et al. 2001). As new states were formed, woman suffrage was debated in the founding state constitutional conventions. In other states, democratic reforms were introduced that seemed to make success more likely (see Clemens 1997).

Using data from the woman suffrage movement of the nineteenth and twentieth century, we model how the political and social context affects *activist organizing* (operationalized as the presence of a state-level suffrage organization). State-level suffrage organizations emerged as early as 1867, but these state-level organizations did not always remain in operation. Discouraged by unsuccessful attempts, some organizations disbanded only to be reinstated as the political climate improved or additional resources became available (King and Cornwall 2005).

We then model how the political and social context affects legislative success (operationalized as bill passage in one legislative house), *given that a state-level organization exists and a bill has been introduced*. If legislators respond similarly to signals from the POS, we would expect to find the same pattern of effects in the SMO and the bill passage model. We hypothesize, however, that challengers will be much more sensitive to signals from the environment than will legislators. Legislator support for social movement challenges will be mediated by stage of the policy change process as well as the political context.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

We test the effects of three sets of POS variables in the two models: *structural features* (statehood founding date, legislative size, and procedural rules), *political context* (average number of bills introduced previous five years, party support, party competition, and

democratic reforms), and *institutional change* (issue-specific intrastate movement gains, interstate movement successes, and socio-demographic change).

Structural Features

Structural features of the POS are defined as “formal changes in rules and policies affecting political access, as well as the changed practices that follow from them” (Meyer and Minkoff 2004: 1468). State constitutions stipulate the political process by which change is possible (Immergut 1998). We consider the effects of *statehood year*, *legislative size*, and *procedural rules* (*constitutional majority*, *sessions required*). In a federalist system activists will strategize about where they may be most successful and are most likely to mobilize in states they perceive as more open to change and where procedural difficulty is low (Marilley 1996; McCammon 2001). According to political mediation theory, challengers must be more assertive in states where the political system works against challengers (Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005). Because organizing is more necessary in states where political coalitions are well established and long-standing precedents serve as strong normative standards, we hypothesize that activists were more likely to organize in *older*, more established states. We also expect to find state-level organizing in states with larger legislatures. Activist organizing would be more likely in such states because coordination demands are higher. Activists, however, would be less likely to organize in states where procedural rules may have signaled success was unlikely (constitutional majorities ranged from .51 to .75 and some states required that the bill pass two consecutive sessions of the legislature).

Legislator response in support of suffragist challengers, on the other hand, may be more likely in *younger* states where new political regimes are interested in establishing coalitions with political actors who will then lend support for their political agendas. Moreover, a bill would have been more likely to pass in states with fewer legislators,² and given the stringency of rules in a roll call vote, bill passage is less likely in states with high constitutional majorities (three-fifths, two-thirds, or three-fourths) or in states that require that a bill pass in more than one legislative session.

Political Context

POS theories focus specifically on the political context, the openness of structures for citizen participation and the impact of changing political institutions (for example, development of mass party systems and more direct electoral processes) that provide routine avenues of influence (Eisinger 1973; Tilly 1995). Favorable party systems and sympathetic allies affect mobilization and policy outcomes (Amenta and Zylan 1991; Cress and Snow 2000). Challengers are more willing to invest in movement organizing to the extent that the political context signals opportunity for influence (Meyer and Minkoff 2004).

Previous success in bill introduction may be taken as a sign that suffragists were able to influence legislative agendas (Banaszak 1996). As stated, small victories would have encouraged suffragists to believe that a state suffrage amendment was possible; therefore, such successes likely encouraged suffragists to maintain their state-level organizations (King and Cornwall 2005). Yet because previous bill introductions may have involved symbolic gestures on the part of individual legislators, previous bill introductions are less likely to encourage legislators to pass suffrage bills.

Signals of support from the party system should encourage state-level organizing. Woman suffrage research has previously demonstrated that political party support—no matter which party—facilitated suffrage success, influencing bill introduction and state suffrage adoption (King et al. 2005; McCammon et al. 2001). Party support may also influence legislators to pass a bill, unless party support was primarily a symbolic gesture to appease suffragists.

POS and political mediation theories suggest that electoral competition signals to activists the opportunity for influence—an opportunity that would require an institutionalized response such as state level organizing (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Moreover, when electoral competition is high and legislators are most concerned about losing seats, they may be more responsive to activists (Soule and Olzak 2004; Soule and King 2006). Our measure of *party competition* is similar to Holbrook and Van Dunk's (1993) measure of electoral competition.³

Democratic reform may have signaled political openness and encouraged suffragists to mobilize as well. Political openness can be conceptualized as a latent cultural willingness to expand democratic rights (Clemens 1997). We might expect suffragists to mobilize in states with expanded voter rights. The presence of the initiative and referenda in some states may have signaled to suffragists the opportunity for policy reform.⁴ Moreover, according to Amenta's political mediation theory, the presence of democratic reforms and the initiative and referenda should also facilitate bill passage. That is, the degree to which the political system formally institutes democratic institutions by extending citizens the opportunity to assemble, discuss issues, and directly participate in democratic processes influences the effectiveness of challengers. *Democratic reform* is a time-varying variable measuring the presence of two democratic reforms: the secret ballot and the direct primary. *Initiative and referenda* is a time-varying variable indicating whether the state has passed the initiative and referenda.

Institutional Change

We consider three distinct dimensions of institutional change: (1) issue-specific intrastate movement gains; (2) interstate movement gains; and (3) socio-demographic change.

Issue-specific intrastate movement gains. Asking political opportunity for whom, POS research posits that issue-specific factors may be more likely to signal opportunity than the general elements of the political system (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). We include two variables measuring issue-specific movement gains. *Sole trader* is a time-varying variable coded 1 for every year after a *femme sole* or *sole trader* law was passed; *school suffrage* is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for every year after the year school suffrage was passed.

Beginning in 1838, states passed legislation to protect women's property from their husbands' creditors (Zeigler 1996); many states also passed *femme sole* or *sole trader* laws that recognized that married women have the right to engage in business, make contractual agreements, and file lawsuits on the same basis as single women (Kahn 1996). Historians generally believe these economic rights "triggered the demands for female suffrage" (Rabkin 1980: 12). But statutes were often narrowly defined and ambiguous. Courts often interpreted them conservatively (Chused 1985), and there is little evidence that the presence of such laws dramatically changed the way men viewed women's economic rights. Such laws may have signaled opportunity for suffrage success and encouraged suffragists to mobilize.

The first voting rights victories for women were *school suffrage* victories where women were given the right to vote in school board elections. Some suffragists believed that if school suffrage was well received in a state, it might facilitate further gains (Masel-Walters 1980). Still, women's participation in school elections "fit into the responsibilities of republican mothers" (Marilley 1996: 91). School suffrage challenged traditional notions that women should be excluded from politics altogether, but also reinforced women's traditional role as mother and the primary caregiver of children. School suffrage granted women access to the political process while upholding the logic of separate spheres. The passage of school suffrage may have signaled opportunity and encouraged suffragists. But would the presence of *femme sole* and school suffrage laws have encouraged legislators to pass a suffrage law? Not necessarily. First, legislators passed such laws in response to challengers, but primarily as a means to pacify the demands of the women's movement. Legislators, having mollified (they believed) the challengers, were essentially done with the issue. Second, legislators are, in a sense, inoculated from passing further laws until challengers can present sufficient evidence

for re-opening the question. We, therefore, hypothesize no effect of the presence of either *femme sole* or school suffrage laws on the likelihood legislators will pass a bill.

Interstate suffrage success. Scholars studying policy adoptions have found that policy makers tend to mimic the actions of proximate legislatures (Strang and Soule 1998). Thus, success in neighboring states encouraged greater acceptance of suffrage rights and may have constituted a gendered opportunity (McCammon et al. 2001). Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan (1997) suggest the possibility of a “general contagion” effect. In the case of woman suffrage adoption across nation states, the logic of political citizenship changed normatively as more countries adopted suffrage. We include two variables: *near neighbor success* is the percent of neighboring states that have passed suffrage; *interstate success* is the total number of states that have passed suffrage in the previous three years. We hypothesize that activists were more likely to mobilize as the proportion of interstate successes increased, particularly if several states had experienced success in rapid succession. Assuming isomorphic tendencies (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), *near neighbor success* and *interstate success* will be positively associated with both the presence of a state-level organization and bill passage.

Socio-demographic change. POS scholars do not always consider socio-demographic change a significant feature of the political environment. Some have demonstrated the usefulness of considering the effects of social-demographic changes (Giugni 1999; van Dyke and Soule 2002) and scholars of the women’s movement have found that the presence of women in higher education and in the work force generally has a significant effect on movement mobilization (Chavetz and Dworkin 1986; Costain 1992). More specifically, McCammon et al. (2001) argued that the “rise of the new woman” (the increasing presence of women in the previously male sphere of higher education and in the male occupations of law and medicine, and the increasing number of women’s charitable and political organizations) encouraged early ratification of woman suffrage.

Job growth in factory work, public schools, and clerical work between 1870 and 1920 was dramatic (Hill 1929). For activists, women’s employment and participation in the public sphere offered evidence of a growing need for women’s participation in the political process and provided new framing opportunities (Einwohner, Hollander, and Olson 2000; Marshall 1997; McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith 2004). Women’s employment in professional occupations would provide additional resources to mobilize a constituency (Chavetz and Dworkin 1986); women’s exposure to the organizational repertoires of public life (a set of distinctive forms of action) enabled the innovation of new organizational forms that facilitated mobilization as well as success (Clemens 1997). We hypothesize that women’s labor force participation signaled opportunity for mobilization. McCammon et al. (2001) suggests, in addition, that women’s presence in the public sphere may have changed the calculus by which legislators determined their support for woman suffrage legislation. Thus, new gender logics and cultural cognitive changes may be powerful environmental factors that signal opportunities for change to activists and legislators alike.

Women’s occupational gains are measured with two different variables in the hopes of capturing both the changing institutional logics about women’s place in the public sphere and the availability of resources for mobilization. *Percentage of women in non-agricultural employment* measures the extent to which women are employed in the occupational and public sphere. *Women employed in professional occupations as a percentage of women in non-agricultural employment* measures the extent to which women are employed in higher-status, more autonomous jobs.⁵

MODELING MOVEMENT ORGANIZING AND LEGISLATIVE SUCCESS

The unit of analysis is state legislative session year. All session years were prior to adoption of full woman suffrage in each state. Although the first suffrage bill was introduced in 1854,

we exclude cases before 1866 due to missing data for some of the variables. Only session years through 1918 are analyzed so the effects of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment do not confound the results. Only full suffrage bills are considered in the analysis. Partial suffrage (presidential, primary, municipal, etc.) are excluded from the analysis because they do not grant women full voting rights with men. The information on bills and their outcomes was collected from primary sources. Secondary histories are not a reliable source of information about bill introduction, especially in the West.⁶ Both dependent variables are dichotomous and coded 0 or 1, indicating the presence of a state-level organization and bill passage in one legislative house.

We use a random effects logit model that takes into account panel-level variance and adjusts standard errors appropriately (Powers and Xie 2000). Estimation techniques must also take into account the time invariant unobserved characteristics of cases that affect the dependent variable and lead to correlation of errors within states over time (Stimson 1985). Random effects models treat unobserved time invariant heterogeneity across states as a random variable (Petersen 1993). We assessed all models with variance inflation factors (VIF) to detect multicollinearity in the data.

In a sequential model, cases are only included in the analysis if they succeeded at previous stages. First, we estimate the likelihood that a state suffrage organization is present in the state ($n=1,293$). Then we select for all session years in which a state-level organization exists and a bill has been introduced ($n=297$), estimating the likelihood that a bill will pass in one legislative house.⁷

Because movement organizing and bill passage all occurred within a broader historical context, we control for a set of decade dummy variables. We also control for movement activism in the bill passage model. King et al. (2005) found that the presence of a political lobby (lobbying, letter writing, and speeches to legislators) was one of the more significant social movement variables affecting legislative success, especially in the early stages of the legislative process. We include *political lobby* as a control variable in the bill passage models.⁸

RESULTS

The results of two logistic regression models are presented in Table 1. The first model estimates the likelihood a state-level organization exists; the second model estimates the likelihood a bill passed one legislative house given the presence of a state level suffrage organization and that a bill was introduced. Although we find no effects for statehood founding in the state-level organization model, legislatures in states founded after 1888 were much more likely to pass a bill once it was introduced.

As expected, we did find that legislative size and constitutional majority signaled opportunity for state-level organizing. Legislative size and constitutional majority had no significant effect on bill passage. While the average number of bills introduced in previous years and party support influenced state-level organizing, bill passage was most likely in states that had instituted democratic reforms such as the direct primary and the secret ballot. Both the presence of sole trader laws and school suffrage was associated with the presence of a state-level organization. We found no effect for these two variables in the bill passage model. Near neighbor success has no effect on presence of a state-level organization or bill passage; however, national success influences state-level organizing as well as bill passage. Women's employment variables have a positive effect in both models.

Comparing effects across stages is somewhat problematic because the lack of significance at a later stage could merely be due to loss of statistical power in the next model. Following the example of earlier sequential models of this type (King et al. 2005; Soule and King 2006), we compare the size of the coefficient in the second model with the confidence interval of the first model (with a larger N) to assess whether the lack of significance is due to

Table 1. State Suffrage Organization and Bill Passed in One House

	Model 1		Model 2	
	State Suffrage Organization		Bill Passage One Legislative House	
Controls				
Constant	-2.536 (2.710)		-6.505 (2.632)	
1876 to 1885	-.283 (.347)		1.043 (.701)	
1886 to 1895	.856 (.439) ^t		.128 (.745)	
1896 to 1905	1.374 (.571) *		-2.163 (.877) *	
1906 to 1918	.270 (.697)		-1.705 (.879) ^t	
Political lobby			.019 (.389)	
Structural features				
Statehood (1848 to 1888)	-.365 (.951)		.530 (.490)	
Statehood (1889 to 1918)	-1.969 (1.290)		1.630 (.724) *	
Legislative size	.016 (.006) **		-.006 (.004)	
Constitutional Majority	-.074 (.035) *		.023 (.027)	
Sessions Required	-.818 (.509)		.534 (.440)	
Political context				
Average # bills previous five years	2.112 (.614) ***		.606 (.376)	
Party support	1.276 (.487) **		1.005 (.356)	
Party competition	.151 (.203)		.179 (.217)	
Democratic Reforms	.446 (.367)		1.005 (.357) **	
Initiative/Referenda	.241 (.646)		.115 (.423)	
Institutional change				
<i>Issue-specific intrastate movement gains</i>				
Sole Trader	.873 (.349) *		-.452 (.491)	
School Suffrage	1.292 (.508) *		-.594 (.372)	
<i>Interstate movement successes</i>				
% near neighbors passed suffrage	-.000 (.016)		-.008 (.010)	
Suffrage states previous three years	.801 (.143) ***		.200 (.111) ^t	
<i>Socio-demographic change</i>				
Women's employment in non-agricultural occupations	.114 (.061) ^t		.168 (.055) **	
Women employed in professional occupations	0.251 (.063) ***		0.086 (.053)	
Cases	1293		297	
States	45		44	
Model Log Likelihood	-396.037		-162.841	

*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ^t p<.10 Standard errors in parentheses.

loss of statistical power and whether the size of coefficients across models are significantly different. Table 2 reports the results of this comparison. Full cells indicate a significantly different effect from the previous stage. The “+” indicates a significantly more positive coefficient than that of the previous stage (the coefficient falls outside the 95% confidence interval of the coefficient in the previous model); the “-” indicates a significantly more negative coefficient.⁹ For example, the effect of legislative size in the state-level organization model is positive and significant (.016). The effect in the bill passage model is negative and is not significant. Because the lack of significance in the bill passage model may be due to the reduction in sample size from 1,293 cases to 297 cases, it is useful to consider both the level of significance in the model and the size of the coefficient relative to the confidence interval in the previous model. The coefficient in the bill passage model is outside the confidence level of the coefficient in the organization model (.005 to .027); that is, more negative. As reported in Table 2, in the majority of cases across the two models, the effects are reduced in the bill passage model compared to the organization model. These results provide support for the differential response of activists and legislators. Structural features, political context, and institutional changes signaled openness to policy reform, but opportunity for mobilization rarely meant opportunity for influence.

Table 2. Comparisons of coefficient size across state suffrage organization model and bill passed models

	Bill Passage vs. State Suffrage Organization
Structural features	
Statehood (1848 to 1888)	
Statehood (1889 to 1918)	+
Legislative size	-
Constitutional Majority	+
Sessions Required	
Political context	
Average # of bills previous five years	-
Party support	-
Party competition	
Democratic Reforms	
Initiative/Referenda	
Institutional Change	
<i>Issue-specific intrastate movement gains</i>	
Sole Trader	-
School Suffrage	-
<i>Interstate movement successes</i>	
% near neighbors passed suffrage	
Suffrage states previous three years	-
<i>Socio-demographic change</i>	
Women’s employment in non-agricultural occupations	
Professional women as percent of women employed in non-agricultural occupations	-

Note: Full cells indicate that the coefficient was significantly different from that of earlier stage, using the 95% confidence interval as criteria. “+” indicates that the coefficient was more *positive*, while “-” indicates that the coefficient was more *negative*.

DISCUSSION

The pattern of effects is consistent with our hypotheses in most instances. In new states where new political regimes were being established, legislators were more likely to support woman suffrage at this intermediary stage in the legislative process. Larger legislatures and less stringent majority rules signaled both opportunity and the necessity of organizing but had no influence on legislators' response to the challengers. Previous bill introductions and party support signaled opportunity to activists, but given the tendency for symbolic gestures on the part of legislators and party officials, the signals were mixed. The lack of effect in either model for party competition is somewhat surprising and contrary to what we might expect according to the theory of legislative logic. The unique nature of the woman suffrage movement, however, may explain the lack of effect. As women were not enfranchised in some states, concern over satisfying a female constituency was minimized. The strong positive effect of democratic reforms is, however, consistent with political mediation theory. One of our most interesting findings is the differential effect of issue-specific intrastate movement gains. Consistent with previous studies issue-specific gains signaled for mobilization among challengers, but we find that legislators were not as keen to interpret such gains as a sign for additional policy reform. Issue-specific movement gains (property rights and school suffrage) did not produce success at the bill passed stage. What encourages activists raises caution among legislators. Issue-specific institutional gains may be interpreted as the end goal by legislators (as a means to pacify activists); activists are more likely to see intermediate policy reform as a steppingstone to further change.

We find only moderate support for the isomorphic tendencies suggested by diffusion studies. Near neighbor successes did not seem to matter for either the suffragists or the legislators. We did find, however, a positive effect for national suffrage success across the two models. In years following a succession of national successes, suffragists were more likely to have state-level organizations. In contrast, legislators were more likely to be influenced by the political context of their own state, which is consistent with the idea that legislators respond to signals that represent direct threats to their political fortunes.

The positive effect of women's employment across models suggests that changing logics about women's place in the public sphere signaled to suffragists and legislators alike. The results may be a verification of McCammon's suggestion that changing gender relations altered the "political calculus on which decision-makers based their actions" (McCammon et al. 2001: 50-51). The effect of women employed in professional occupations in the organization model is perhaps a resource effect. But the rather consistent effect of women employed in non-agricultural activities across models suggests socio-demographic change influenced both suffragists and legislators alike—encouraging and perhaps facilitating mobilization on the one hand and signaling legislators for a change in their gender logics on the other (see McCammon et. al. 2001). In the pre-pollster era of American politics, legislators may have used other cultural trends, such as changing patterns of employment, as a signal of the changing public attitude toward women's involvement in politics.

Ironically, the lack of consistent effects of the political environment on policy outcomes may benefit movement organizers. That is, signals to activists effectively maintained mobilization in the face of little or no progress. As long as activists do not experience major defeats (King and Cornwall 2005), they remain mobilized and continue their efforts, interpreting small successes as sufficient progress and remaining committed to the end goal. But legislators did not view these incremental changes in the same light; lawmakers viewed each legislative success as real and final solutions to public agitation.

We find support for POS assumptions that activists are sensitive to signals in the environment, but our findings reinforce the question of "political opportunity for what?" We found it fruitful to differentiate between opportunity for mobilization and opportunity for

influence (Meyer 2004), but POS theory offered little theoretical insights into the causal mechanisms that might account for the lack of response by state actors. Instead, the theory of legislative logic and political mediation theory were much more useful in theorizing the differential response of legislators.

Social movement scholars have recognized that specifying movement outcomes remains one of the more thorny issues in the effort to link movement activities with movement success (Amenta, Carruthers, and Zylan 1992; Gamson 1990; Giugni 1999, 2007). Some have even suggested that studying policy change may be easier to conceptualize and measure than social and cultural changes (Giugni 1999). The theory of legislative logic, however, challenges the typical conceptualization of policy reform as best studied at the end stage, arguing instead the relative effect of POS, social movements, and public opinion across stages of the policy process (King, Cornwall, and Dahlin 2005; Soule and King 2006). In this analysis, we demonstrate the usefulness of linking stages of movement mobilization with stages of the policy process, in order to discover how features of the political environment differentially influence activists and legislators.

We found political mediation theory most useful in accounting for the lack of responsiveness of legislators to the mobilization of activists. The presence of a new political regime and democratic reforms, as suggested by the openness of legislators in young states and in states that had instituted the democratic reforms of secret ballots and direct primaries, encouraged legislators to be more responsive to the suffragists. We also found evidence of symbolic gestures on the part of both legislators and political parties that encouraged mobilization without much real intent.

We provide a partial explanation for why social movements may have little or no impact on policy reform, even when accounting for the joint effects of social movements, political allies, and public opinion (Giugni 2007). The question is not simply whether protest groups can effectively influence the political system; rather, scholars must more fully explore how influence operates at each stage of the reform process, how intermediate successes open up or close down opportunities for more influence at a later time, and how the political context mediates the changing relationship between challengers and social actors. State actors may falsely signal openness to change in order to appease challengers. Intermediate success may change the calculus for success on the part of challengers and state actors alike. Social movements may succeed at intermediary stages only to find that legislators are unwilling to consider further change. At a minimum, political openness is not a singular event. Not only are doors and windows opening and closing at different points in the political process signals indicating openness in the political environment may be mixed signals. Opportunities for mobilization are not always opportunities for policy reform.

CONCLUSION

We have explored the nuanced ways in which features of the political environment may signal for mobilization but not necessarily for policy reform. Using a sequential analysis, we theorized mixed signals. We began by theorizing a differential effect of the political environment on challengers and state actors. Using POS theories, we assumed that suffragists would be sensitive to aspects of the environment interpreted as signals of imminent change and would consequently mobilize, as suggested by the presence of a state-level organization. Drawing on the theory of legislative logic and political mediation theory, we assumed that legislators would respond differentially to the political environment, taking action when the environment signaled demands for change that might be used in a politically opportunistic fashion. Legislators' responses were indicated by passage of legislation in at least one legislative house. We began by suggesting that while social movement scholars have theorized the extent to which activists are sensitive to changes in the political environment,

they have been less successful in theorizing whether legislators will respond to challenges. We found the features of the political environment which encouraged state-level organization were not the same features that accounted for legislative success. Activists and legislators respond differently to institutional change.

The POS paradigm, as currently framed, is in need of a more nuanced approach that recognizes differential responses to the environment. Only by drawing on the theory of legislative logic and political mediation theory were we able to adequately theorize when legislators would be responsive to the challenges of suffragists. The POS paradigm, by itself, is ineffective in accounting for the lack of congruence between opportunities for mobilization and opportunities for reform. At the same time, political mediation theory, focused primarily on party systems and democratization also is insufficient when it comes to theorizing the differential effects across stages of the policy process.

We would argue against a conceptualization of political opportunity as a straightforward structural opening. The relationship between political opportunity, movement mobilization, and policy reform is interactive rather than unidirectional. Previous considerations as to why opportunity for mobilization does not always translate into opportunity for policy reform have focused on either mobilization or the policy reform process. On the one hand, Meyer (2004) has theorized that mobilization is more likely in the face of unwelcome changes to policy and, therefore, mobilization is most likely when the opportunity for influence is low. On the other hand, scholars who focus on policy reform have suggested that activists are more influential in agenda setting, and that public opinion and cultural change have a stronger influence at later stages in the policy process (Soule and King 2006). In this analysis, we find that the disjuncture between opportunities for mobilization and opportunities for policy reform may be embedded in both the policy change process and in the political context. Policy reform structured by the logic of legislative process creates mixed signals; signals for mobilization at the agenda setting stage may not constitute signals for policy reform. Mixed signals also arise from the political context, which mediates the extent to which challengers will influence legislators. In the end, however, mixed signals serve activists well—encouraging them to remain mobilized despite the lack of opportunity for influence.

NOTES

¹ We do not model each of the subsequent stages because the primary purpose of the analysis is to demonstrate the differential effects of the environment on challengers and state actors. See King, Cornwall, and Dahlin (2005) for a test of social movement and political context variables on each stage of the legislative process.

² Concerned with the cost of government and the power of legislators, some states in the West established smaller legislatures (Bakken 1987). At statehood in 1870, Colorado had 26 Representatives in the House and 13 Senators. By comparison, in the 1900s New York had 150 Representatives and 50 Senators.

³ *Party competition* is based on voting patterns in the previous gubernatorial election. The variable is coded one if 67% or more of gubernatorial votes went to one candidate and coded two if votes were distributed across only two party candidates. An election was coded as a three or four party election if the third or fourth party carried at least 5% (each) of the votes.

⁴ We include the initiative and referenda because the initiative is considered a democratizing reform (Clemens 1997) that enabled suffragists to seek alternative paths to suffrage success and because others have tested the effects of a citizen's initiative on policy reform (Soule 2004).

⁵ These higher status jobs extended beyond the traditional male professions of doctor and lawyer and included teachers, librarians, social workers, scientists, and writers. Both of these variables were collected from the census reports of 1870 to 1920. They are linearly interpolated to fill in measurement gaps.

⁶ A total of 582 bills were introduced in territorial and state legislatures between 1848 and 1918. Banaszak (1996) culled 418 full suffrage bills from historical records of the suffrage movement.

⁷ A bill was introduced in 46 legislative years even though no state-level suffrage organization existed. We exclude these legislative years from the analysis in order to focus on those legislative years in which legislators were pressed to initiate change. More importantly, this is necessary in a sequential analysis as it allows for a comparison of effects across the sequential models. An analysis of the factors affecting bill passage that includes all legislative years is available from the authors. For the most part the effects are similar to that reported in Table 1.

⁸ Summary table of independent variables and measurement is available from the correspondence author.

⁹ We only consider the differential effects across models for variables in which a significant effect is demonstrated in one or the other model. That is, we recognize this comparison is only applicable given the possibility that the lack of significance in the second model is due to loss of statistical power.

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