

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-59743-2 - Votes without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970

Anna L. Harvey

Frontmatter

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## VOTES WITHOUT LEVERAGE

WOMEN IN AMERICAN ELECTORAL POLITICS, 1920–1970

*Votes without Leverage* reexamines a long-standing puzzle in women's electoral politics, namely why the increasing importance of women's votes throughout the 1920s did not imply increasing success for the lobbying efforts of women's organizations during the same period. Applying recent theoretical developments in the political economy of institutions and electoral behavior, Professor Harvey argues that female disfranchisement prior to 1920 created incentives for leaders of women's organizations to invest in the pursuit of suffrage as a first step to achieving other policy benefits for women. When the battle over the right to vote was finally won, those leaders then required time to adapt their organizations to pursue a broader legislative agenda through conventional electoral politics. During this time, however, the major party organizations were able to initiate their own electoral mobilization of women, giving the parties significant advantages in imperfectly competitive markets for women's electoral mobilization. Without women's votes, those organizations ceased to be able to win policy concessions from vote-minded legislators, a state of affairs that would not significantly change until the accelerated decline of the parties as mobilization organizations in the 1960s.

Anna L. Harvey is Assistant Professor of Politics at New York University.

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## *Series Editors' Preface*

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The Cambridge series on the Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions is built around attempts to answer two central questions: how do institutions evolve in response to individual incentives, strategies, and choices, and how do institutions affect the performance of political and economic systems? The scope of the series is comparative and historical rather than international or specifically American, and the focus is positive rather than normative.

Anna Harvey provides a fresh, thought-provoking perspective on women in American electoral politics in the half century after their enfranchisement. She artfully combines rational choice approaches to participation with careful historical analysis of social movements. Her explanation of the turnout of cohesive groups begins with the assumption that many eligible voters vote because they receive cues during an election campaign from others whose opinions matter to them. These cues indicate to them that voting in a particular way is required in order to be an accepted group member. Because of their previous electoral exclusion, newly enfranchised groups are more likely to be mobilized by parties, not by independent group organizations. Skeptical about the party elites' responsiveness to voters' policy preferences when parties mobilize voters, Harvey argues that a benefit-seeking organization pursuing an electoral strategy in return for policy concessions is a necessary but not sufficient condition for its obtaining group-specific policy benefits. In the historical cases she studies, benefit-seeking group entrepreneurs possessed both informational and organizational advantages that enabled them to be the first entrants into new markets for group electoral mobilization.

The goals were women's goals, and politicians' attitudes were the attitudes of men toward women. Nevertheless, Harvey shows how the rational strategy that men would have chosen in the same position, and the disadvantage they would have faced, would have been the same. In this way she offers an innovative theoretical and empirical analysis that transcends yet is still suffused with gender.

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Electoral markets are often characterized as economic markets used to be characterized: candidates offer policy positions for sale, and voters buy shares of a candidate's wares with their votes. Given any set of electoral laws and any distribution of voter preferences, election outcomes should be efficient: the victorious candidate wins because he promises to make more voters better off than do any of the losing candidates.

But scholars of economic institutions have cast doubt on whether economic markets can produce efficient outcomes under typical circumstances. Certain market institutions can encourage inefficient investment in information, organizations, and skills. And because in the real world searching out alternative information and creating new organizations is costly, leaders of economic organizations such as firms often have strong incentives to persist in inefficient practices. As a result, economic markets can produce inefficient outcomes for generations.

This study suggests that the same may be true of electoral markets as well. Efficiency in electoral markets is heavily dependent upon the existence of intermediary organizations that can coordinate individually insignificant votes into powerful voting blocs. Only then will voters exert any leverage over candidates. Like their counterparts in economic markets, leaders of such intermediary organizations are guided by electoral institutions to make investments in certain kinds of knowledge and organizations. Given an electoral institution that encourages some leaders to make investments in organizations that are inefficient from the standpoint of the larger electoral market, electoral markets can also produce inefficient outcomes for generations.

This study examines the effects of one such electoral institution, namely the laws prohibiting the participation of women in most electoral markets in the United States until 1920. But this study is not just about the effects of this institution on female voters. The unusual position of

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women in the U.S. electoral market after 1920 highlights the fragile conditions necessary for electoral markets to be efficient for any group.

It is an understatement to say that scholarly work is made more arduous in the absence of financial and intellectual support from others. The work for this project was made easier through financial support from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, through its programs for the Andrew W. Mellon Fellows and the Princeton Society of Fellows, the Graduate School of Princeton University, the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, and New York University. I have also benefited from the intellectual support of colleagues at both Princeton and New York Universities, as well as at numerous universities and conferences where this work has been presented, and from the press and series editorial support at Cambridge University Press. In particular I would like to acknowledge the help of Darwin Neher, Jennifer Hochschild, Larry Bartels, John Londregan, John DiIulio, Alan Ryan, Russell Hardin, Kristi Andersen, Nancy Burns, Jim Alt, and Alex Holzman. I thank all those who have sought to make this study a better work.



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## *Abbreviations*

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DNC	Democratic National Committee
DNEC	Democratic National Executive Committee
NAWSA	National American Woman Suffrage Association
NLWV	National League of Women Voters
NYT	<i>New York Times</i>
OWA	Office of Women's Activities
RNC	Republican National Committee
RNEC	Republican National Executive Committee
TWC	<i>The Woman Citizen</i>
TWV	<i>The Woman Voter</i>
WJCC	Women's Joint Congressional Committee
WSP	Woman Suffrage Party