

*Social Movements as Interest Groups:  
The Case of the Women's Movement*

ANNE N. COSTAIN

Traditional measures of interest group influence frequently fail to capture the impact social movements have on legislation. During the 1960s and 1970s, many of the legislative breakthroughs in Congress occurred in areas of intense concern to politically active social movements. With relatively little fanfare, Congress enacted sweeping new protection for the environment, including the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. An unprecedented array of laws was passed safeguarding the rights of women, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with its amendment prohibiting sex discrimination in employment; the Education Amendments Act of 1972, barring discrimination in federally funded education programs; and the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which passed in Congress in 1972. At the same time, with much more publicity, Congress agreed to expand civil rights laws for racial minorities and created a new body of federal laws protecting consumers. The environmental, consumer, civil rights, and women's movements, as well as other movements of the period, publicized and pressed for major changes in existing public policies and succeeded in transforming the national political agenda as a result. In general Americans now have cleaner air and water, greater social equality, and more laws protecting consumers, but it remains unclear how these interests achieved such sweeping victories.

The apparent degree of influence exercised by social movements is particularly surprising in light of traditional interest group theory. Traditional measures of group influence include powerful constituents, interests that are strategically placed in a number of key congressional districts, and plentiful economic resources to invest in lobbying, yet social movements typically possess few of these characteristics. The features that identify and define social movements are efforts by "excluded groups to mobilize

From:

MARK P. PETRACCA, ed., THE POLITICS OF

INTERESTS: INTEREST GROUPS TRANSFORMED

(BOULDER, CO: WESTVIEW PRESS, 1992.

sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through non-institutionalized means" (McAdam 1982:37). For black civil rights groups in the 1960s, that meant boycotts of segregated transportation systems, sit-ins at white lunch counters in the South, mass marches, and freedom rides to draw public attention and support for their cause. In addition to these noninstitutionalized actions, civil rights groups also engaged in political acts, including voter registration drives, court challenges, and legislative lobbying. The civil rights movement had to employ a mixture of confrontational and conventional tactics to open the political system to its issues because its chief constituents were outside the political process, often lacking even the right to vote. Other social movements, like the environmental movement, had advocates with votes and greater personal resources than most participants in the civil rights movement, but environmentalists still had to persuade these followers to mobilize. This was accomplished through a mixture of events like the first Earth Day in 1970 and protest demonstrations against the killing of whales for commercial purposes. These actions attracted the attention of the media and brought people together to achieve environmental goals. Use of the courts and legislative lobbying gave added focus to efforts to change public policy.

To use Roger Cobb and Charles Elder's (1983:88-93) term, interests such as civil rights and the environment, which have been excluded from the political process in the past, lack the clout necessary to "channel" legislation onto the political agenda. Because most of the legislative agenda is taken up either with routine items (such as annual appropriations), recurrent ones (such as tax reform, farm subsidies, or Social Security increases), or crisis items (such as responses to political change in Eastern Europe or African famines), intense competition exists to add new topics, especially of the kind most social movements champion. Social movements have to compete with groups controlling far more resources and access to policymakers in order to achieve a place on the agenda. That social movements seek collective goods, those which cannot be given selectively to individuals, weakens their case still further. As Olson's (1965) theory of collective action explains, interests pursuing collective goods have difficulty attracting and keeping members. Why should rational individuals pay dues and join an environmental group, for example, when a cleaner environment, new national parks, or improved animal habitat will be available to them, if achieved, whether or not they participated as individuals? Because one person's contribution is unlikely to make a difference in the political outcome, individuals tend to abstain from political activity.

Finally, social movements use noninstitutionalized means, frequently including mass marches, protests, and acts of civil disobedience to build support for their causes. These activities would traditionally put them outside the boundaries of accepted and therefore acceptable ways to pro-

mote change in a pluralist, democratic state (Cobb and Elder 1983; Gamson 1975; Lowi 1971). How can we explain the relative success of social movements in influencing Congress, given their representation of political outsiders, their quest for goods everyone can share, and their refusal to limit themselves to conventional politics? Perhaps traditional interest group theory is wrong, or at least incomplete.

#### SUCCESSFUL MOVEMENTS: TWO COMPETING VIEWS

Sociologists assume that successful social movements such as those mentioned above must have many of the characteristics that would give them clout in Congress. Like political scientists, they have focused on two major problems movements face: getting started and attracting and retaining members. The sociological theory of *resource mobilization* incorporates many of Robert Salisbury's (1969) ideas of exchange as a basis for interest group formation. As Salisbury notes, entrepreneurs/organizers of new groups invest capital in a set of benefits they then offer prospective members for the price of membership. Material benefits, such as cut-rate insurance, a glossy magazine, or travel discounts, are typically offered first. Solidary benefits of friendship and a sense of being part of a worthwhile group typically come later. These are often accompanied by purposive incentives that come from the feeling of having contributed to an important cause (Wilson 1973). Resource mobilization theory similarly suggests that entrepreneurial individuals and external sponsors are necessary for the organization of excluded interests, such as the farmworkers in California and racial minorities (see Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McCarthy and Zald 1977).

If outside resources are needed to get the movement started, once the movement has begun, good organization is essential to retain members, who may otherwise stop contributing to the attainment of collective goods. Strong organization helps the interest deploy resources effectively, directing as much pressure as possible to achieve change. If these traditional interest group scholars and resource mobilization theorists are correct, we should be able to trace a flow of external resources into a successful movement—such as the women's, environmental, consumer, or civil rights movements—especially in its early years. We should also see either talented leadership, effective organization, or both guiding a new movement toward political power and legislative effectiveness.

Because resource mobilization theory and conventional measures of interest group effectiveness are largely complementary in identifying which variables are most important in determining the legislative access of social movements, it is possible to test them together. The influx of resources, frequently from outside sponsors, combined with entrepreneurial leader-

ship and strategic access to Congress, would identify a social movement capable of influencing Congress.

However, there is also an alternative sociological explanation of social movement effectiveness that challenges many of these assumptions. *Political process theory* suggests that the presence of leadership and resources (particularly those provided by external groups) is less important in determining movement success than the structure of political opportunity faced by the movement (see McAdam 1982). Government reaction to the movement, not resources, is most important. When government is willing to tolerate, or even facilitate, a new movement, that movement is most likely to form and achieve political influence. According to this perspective, the relative balance of power between parts of the government and a new movement is likely to determine whether the movement is politically successful.

President Nixon's willingness to declare the 1970s "the decade of the environment" as well as his creation of the Environmental Protection Agency by executive order were more important to the success of the environmental movement, from this point of view, than the influx of new external resources. By contrast, government repression makes movement achievements very unlikely. Political process theory allocates a role to resources but finds internally generated resources as valuable as external sponsors. Similarly, process theory draws attention to the psychological readiness of potential group members, who begin to recognize their discontent as collective and to accept the possibility of a political solution (see Piven and Cloward 1979). Traditional interest group and resource mobilization theories suggest tracing the resources entering a movement, whereas political process theory leads us to examine the attitude of government officials with greater care.

### THE STUDY

To test these alternative theories, I developed two data sets based on the contemporary women's movement. The first traces congressional action on legislation addressing women as a group.<sup>1</sup> The second consists of events data, showing the degree of agitation on behalf of women's rights in the United States based on *New York Times* coverage.<sup>2</sup> Through these two data sets, covering the period from 1950 to 1986, it is possible to test the relative explanatory power of a traditional interest group/resource mobilization theory versus political process theory in accounting for the legislative impact of social movements. I chose the women's movement primarily because it is one of the movements that achieved a surprising degree of legislative influence in the 1960s and 1970s but also because of its strong parallels, as a civil rights-based movement, to the black civil rights move-

ment, which has been studied using a similar method (see Jenkins and Eckert 1986; McAdam 1982, 1983).

If process theory provides a better explanation of the influence movements exercise in Congress than does traditional interest group theory, this suggests the need to consider the state as a possible initiating actor rather than just a passive recipient of group pressure. It also means that the timing of movement emergence in the political process may be more critical in determining its political influence than either external sponsorship or new resources. By contrast, if leadership, outside groups, or the accumulation of resources is crucial, interest group theory is correct.

To examine congressional activity, a team of scholars using *U.S. Statutes at Large* and the *Congressional Record* as sources analyzed bills that addressed women as a group. The period selected, from 1950 to 1986, spans the time from the very early stirrings of a contemporary women's movement in the United States to its peak of activity and through its current decline. Bills were content-coded according to subject matter, then their percentage as part of the total congressional agenda for the year was calculated. This measure of legislative impact is a variant of that used by Benjamin Ginsberg (1976) to measure the impact of elections on Congress. Ginsberg employed a count of laws passed by Congress, justifying his measure as the most systematic way to gauge congressional policy output. Although numeric categorization of laws minimizes important questions about their significance and long-term impact, it is hard to conceive of another procedure capable of coding laws according to their importance over a long period of time. Laws build on one another. When an important law passes, there will usually be an appropriation and often substantive amendments in the years to follow. There are very few landmark "stand-alone" bills. By using the percentages of bills rather than absolute numbers, as Ginsberg did, fluctuations due to congressional rules changes or sessional variability are minimized.<sup>3</sup> A less biased measure of their importance relative to other subjects of legislation results from examining "women's" bills and laws as a *share* of the congressional agenda each year.

To examine the degree of agitation on behalf of women's rights during this time, a companion data set from the *New York Times Index* was compiled consisting of all events related to women's rights that were reported between 1950 and 1986. These data show the types of actions, subjects, initiators, and targets of women's rights and anti-women's rights activity in these years. They also indicate both the flow of resources into the movement as well as government support for and opposition to the movement. Although events data of this type have frequently been used to trace the onset and subsequent development of other social movements of this period, it is important to recognize what they can and cannot reveal. There is widespread agreement that, at the minimum, "The data are

sufficient for gross comparisons; the more detailed the quantitative comparisons and conclusions based upon them . . . the greater the need for caution and independent verification" (see Gurr 1972:34).<sup>4</sup>

By comparing the timing of resource accumulation and other types of external aid with the pattern of government involvement on women's issues, including congressional action, we find that the source of movement success in influencing Congress becomes clearer. On the one hand, if resources flow into the movement close to its formative period and legislative victories follow, this is persuasive evidence that traditional interest group theory is correct. On the other hand, if government assistance precedes either an influx of resources or significant political impact, political process theory probably provides a more accurate explanation of social movement success.

#### RESOURCES AS AN EXPLANATION FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Most current analyses of the legislative success of the women's movement employ a variant of traditional interest group/resource mobilization theory. It is clear, however, that neither theory in its pure form fits the case of the women's movement. The women's movement purposely, and often painfully, rejected the idea of entrepreneurial leadership (see Freeman 1973 and 1975). Early women's activists felt that this pattern was too close to a model of male hierarchical domination, with one leader and many followers. Although for the women's movement the national leader would most likely be a woman, this would still leave the majority of women without a voice to communicate their own interests. Also, aside from women's organizations, there were few outside patrons who contributed money to the women's movement (see Freeman 1975 and Harrison 1988).

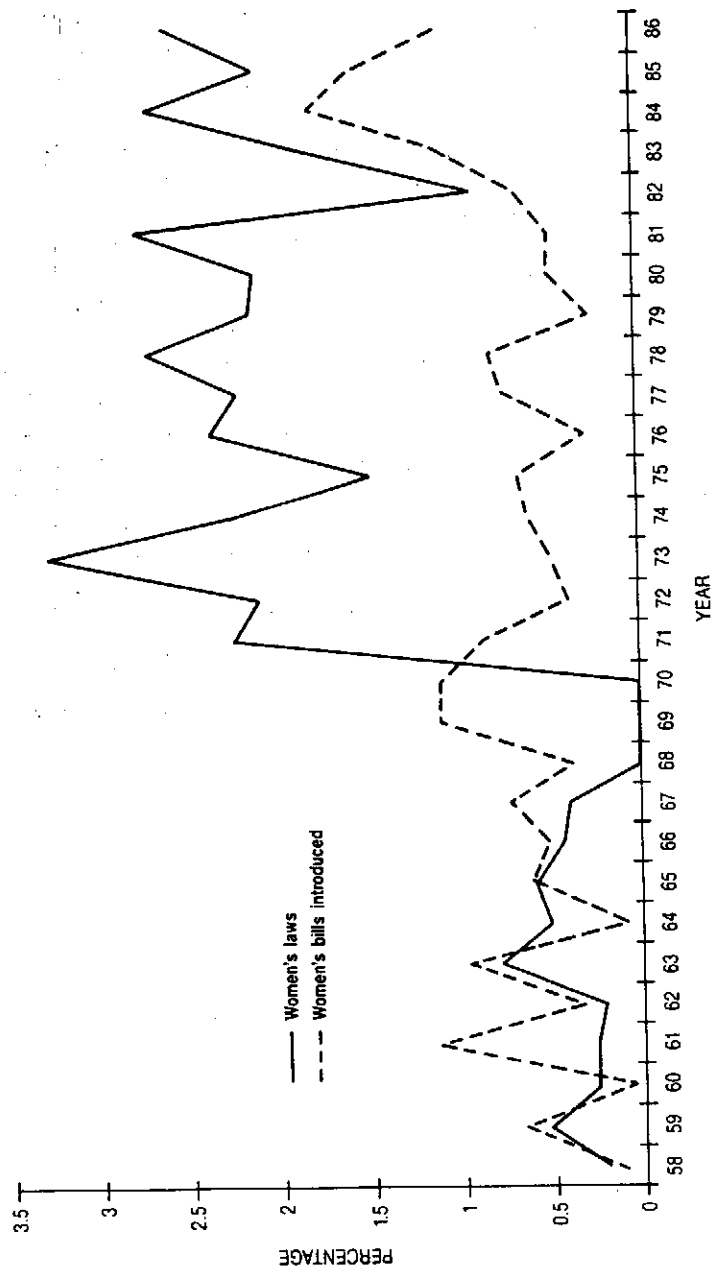
The best-known accounts of the women's movement, including those by Joyce Gelb and Marian Palley (1987) and Jane J. Mansbridge (1986), stress the movement's ability to use issues to stretch tight resources. Both analyses argue how important it was for the women's movement to frame gender issues in terms of role equity (extending equal treatment to women) rather than role change (either opening new opportunities to women, such as a right to have an abortion, or threatening to change women's accepted role, such as allowing them to fill combat positions in the military). By this reasoning, Americans were ready to grant women equal pay for equal work but not to vote for a woman for president. An emphasis on role equity created a tactical environment in which the movement could coax change from government with existing resources by limiting the extent to which it challenged the status quo. Consequently, resources and support networks that were already available to women became sufficient to bring

about political change. In *Why We Lost the ERA*, Mansbridge (1986) points out a problem created by this tactic: By arguing that the ERA would have such a limited impact, it was hard to energize supporters to work long enough to win its ratification.

The issue-based view of women's movement success is reflected in the timing of congressional activity on women's issues (Figure 13.1). By 1961, women's issues, for the first time since the end of World War II, composed more than 1 percent of the bills introduced in Congress. Most of these legislative introductions were versions of the Equal Rights Amendment, which began to emerge quite early in Congress, at least, as the premier women's issue. By contrast, the passage of laws addressing women as a group was slower. It was not until 1971 that the percentage of new laws with women as their subject jumped markedly. This legislative activity clearly preceded any large increase in movement resources. Figure 13.2 shows that fund-raising among women's groups started to pick up in 1971, but it was not until 1975 that there were regular reports of outside resources flowing into the women's movement. These data clearly confirm the suppositions of Gelb and Palley and Mansbridge that there were few external resources available to ease the start of a new women's movement.

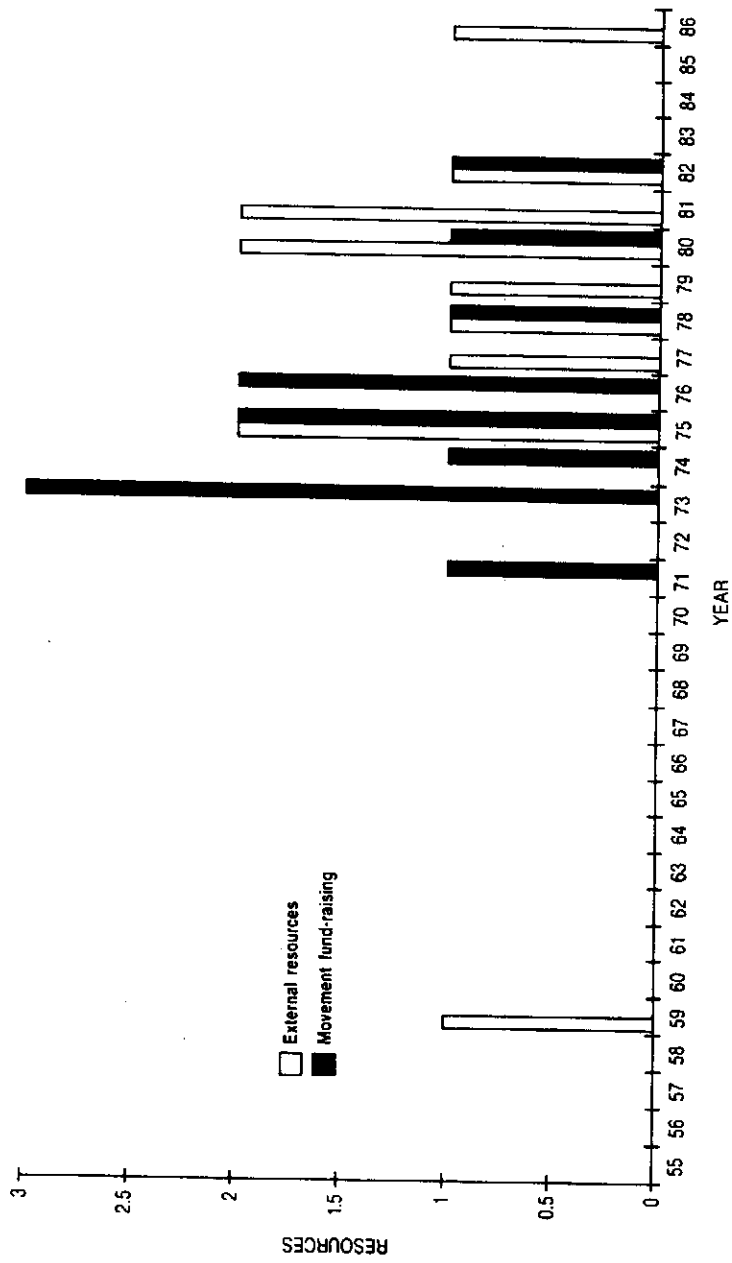
However, problems remain in applying any version of traditional interest group theory to this particular case. First, the historical chronology is not consistent with the theory. Supportive governmental action preceded any appreciable increase in resources available to women, as well as the earliest efforts to organize a movement. It is not only the case that bill introductions in Congress rose in 1961 and 1962 (particularly for the ERA), but President Kennedy in late 1961 followed the advice of his party along with organized labor and appointed the first President's Commission on the Status of Women. Democratic party and labor union leaders opposed the ERA and were afraid that if the president did not seize the initiative on women's issues, Congress might go ahead and pass the ERA (see Harrison 1988). Although the presidential commission on women was established in large part to thwart the ERA, under the leadership of Esther Peterson it unearthed sufficient evidence of discontent among women, and of social, legal, and economic discrimination against women, to play an important role in shaping the early agenda of the women's movement (see Duerst-Lahti 1989). In 1963, at the mid-October ceremony where he accepted the commission's report, Kennedy remarked that civilization could be judged on its opportunities for women. He issued an executive order stating, "Enhancement of the quality of American life, as envisioned by the Commission's report, can be accomplished only through concerted action within the Federal Government, and through action by States, communities, educational institutions, voluntary organizations, employers, unions, and individual citizens" (quoted in Harrison 1988:164-165).

FIGURE 13.1  
Congressional Agenda Space Taken by Women's Issues, 1958-1986



Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the Congressional Record Index and U.S. Statutes at Large.

FIGURE 13.2  
Reports of New Resources Entering the Women's Movement, 1955-1986



Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the New York Times Index.

This language might well be considered a call to the next twenty years of agitation and progress on women's rights in the United States.

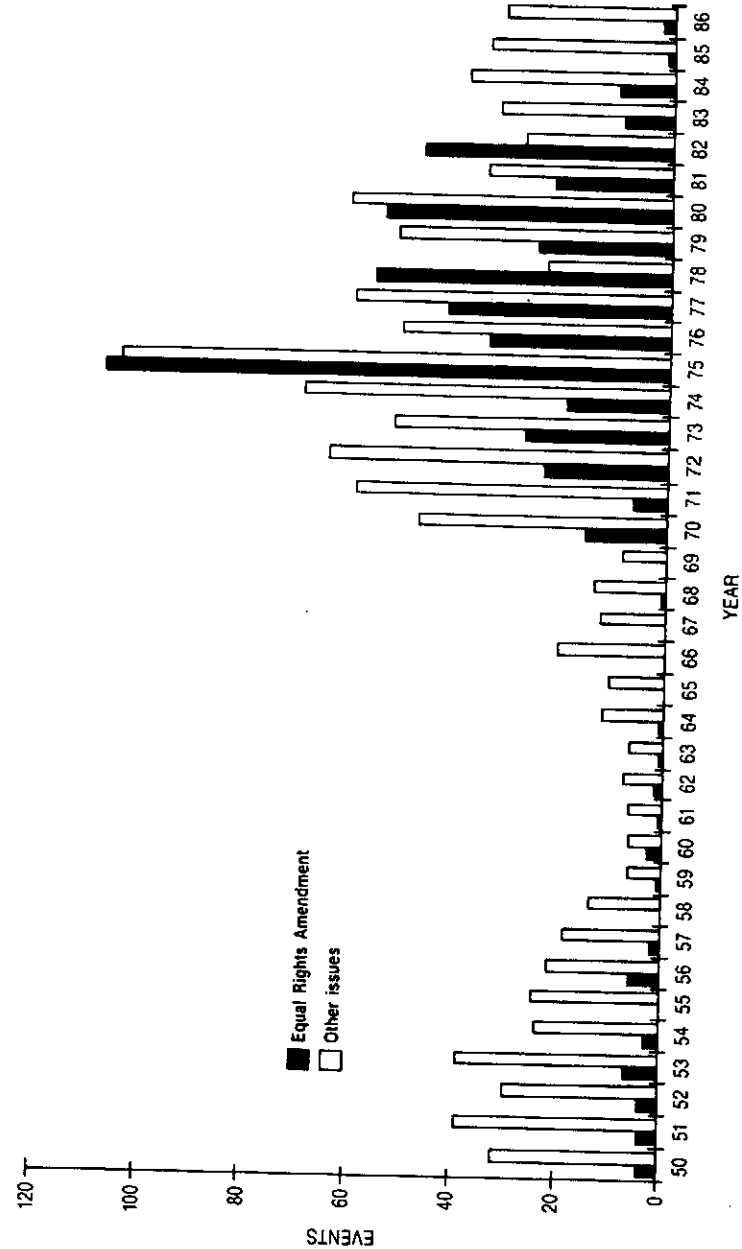
These early actions are notable in and of themselves, given the lack of new resources going to women's groups in this period. But they become still more surprising when considered in light of the fact that the first women's group in the contemporary women's movement, the National Organization for Women did not form until 1966. Most of the other second-wave feminist groups were organized in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The applications of traditional group theory by Gelb and Palley and Mansbridge suggest that it is the tactical power of an idea—stressing role equity—that made the new movement conceivable. Thus it is possible that a vanguard of activists went to Washington early, or was given a forum by the mass media, and used it to persuade the political elite in Congress and the White House to act. Because ERA was the key women's issue from a very early point for both Congress and the president, Figure 13.3 shows the numbers of ERA and other women's issues covered in the *New York Times*. It is clear from this chart that coverage of the ERA in the *Times* came after congressional involvement with the issue, not before it. Stories on the Equal Rights Amendment began to rise in 1970, when Congress started to hold public hearings on the ERA and sex discrimination, and are scant before this.

Examining the overall coverage of women's rights and women's issues generally in the 1960s provides limited evidence that a new perspective on women's issues was being communicated to the public or to elites. Figure 13.4 breaks the stories down into categories: equality and discrimination, reports about the women's movement, politics, jobs and employment, and all others ("general"). During the 1960s, the "general" category is the largest, with reports on the overall plight of women dominating the category.<sup>5</sup> The early generality of concerns changes among women, as among all actors, in the 1970s, as issues involving legal equality increasingly come to dominate the agenda. Women's issues developed through government in a focused way, emphasizing equal rights very early and, in the media, through a slower, more diffuse process of sensitizing the public to existing conditions among American women. There is little evidence of a sea change in handling women's issues until the emergence of the ERA and issues of legal equality in the 1970s (Freeman 1975).

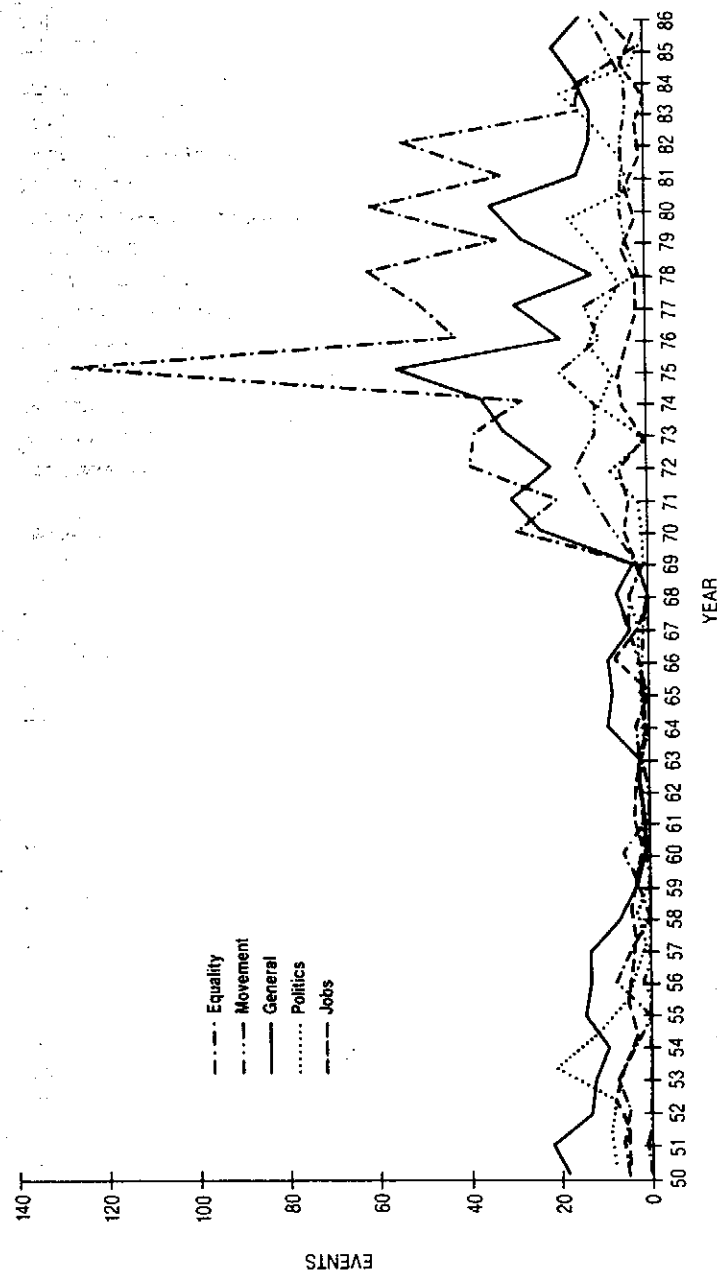
Another explanation that would still accord with a traditional interest group perspective is that *public opinion* pushed both the Congress and the president to act. In this view, the women's movement, even if it did not create this new opinion, at least interpreted it correctly and heightened its political influence. Paul Burstein (1985:40-56) has analyzed the repeated measures of attitudes toward women that extend back into this period. They consist of two questions that have been asked frequently from 1946

FIGURE 13.3  
Women's Issues Covered in the *New York Times*, 1950-1986



Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the *New York Times Index*.

FIGURE 13.4  
New York Times Coverage of Women's Issues, 1950-1986



Sources: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the New York Times Index.

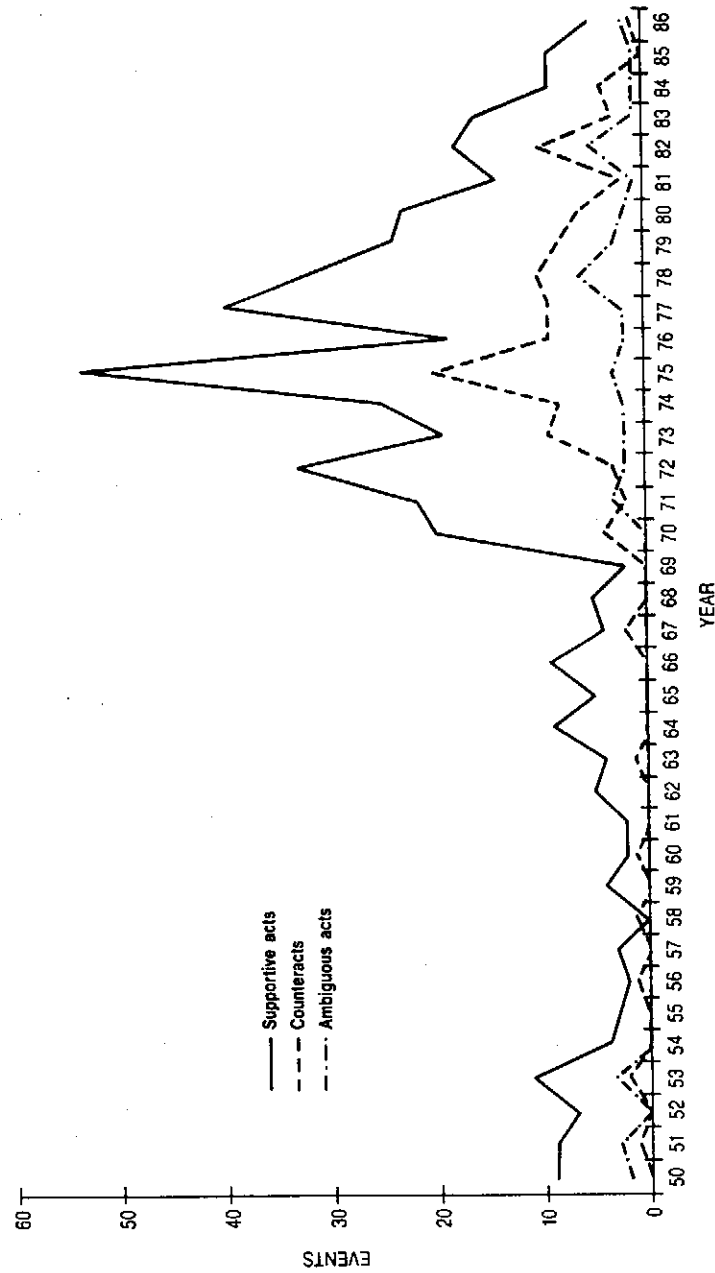
through the 1980s, with relatively minor variations in wording: "Do you approve of a married woman working in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?" and "Would you vote for a qualified woman for president?" From 1946 to 1969, there was an exceedingly slow rate of change in public responses to both issues. The labor force question became more favorable at the rate of seven-tenths of 1 percent per year. The willingness to vote for a qualified woman for president increased even more slowly, at a rate of three-tenths of 1 percent per year. By contrast, from 1969 to 1975, the pace of change on both issues quickened measurably. Support for married women in the labor force rose 1.9 percent per year, and willingness to vote for a woman president was up 2.8 percent per year. This suggests that Congress and the president, by their actions in support of women's rights, may have been at the forefront of change rather than responding to others who were the vanguard.

To summarize briefly, there is little evidence from these data that either traditional interest group theory or resource mobilization theory adequately explains the legislative impact of the women's movement. There was no influx of resources into the movement either prior to or coincident with the movement's emergence. Similarly, there is no evidence that the issues emphasized by women and women's groups changed in these early years. When a shift did finally occur, toward an emphasis on equal rights and the Equal Rights Amendment, it seemed to be more a result of governmental emphasis than an initiative from the movement.

#### POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Political process theory emphasizes a change in *government behavior* toward women and women's issues as an important precursor to the appearance of a new movement. Government actions could shift from harassment or oppression of women as a group to neutrality. Or government neutrality could change to facilitation of the group's political aspirations. Figure 13.5 shows the number of favorable, unfavorable, and neutral events (as reported by the *New York Times*) that were initiated on women's issues by *all levels* of government. This figure suggests that increased support of women's issues is linked to the rise of the women's movement. Favorable governmental actions toward women increased in the early 1960s (Figure 13.5) during the period leading up to the founding of the National Organization for Women in 1966. It is also noteworthy how few negative governmentally sponsored acts there were in this same period. However, there is the confounding appearance of *more* supportive government acts relating to women in 1951 and 1953, when no movement was organized, than in the early 1960s, when it was. During the 1950s, the

FIGURE 13.5  
Events Initiated by All Levels of Government



Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the *New York Times Index*.

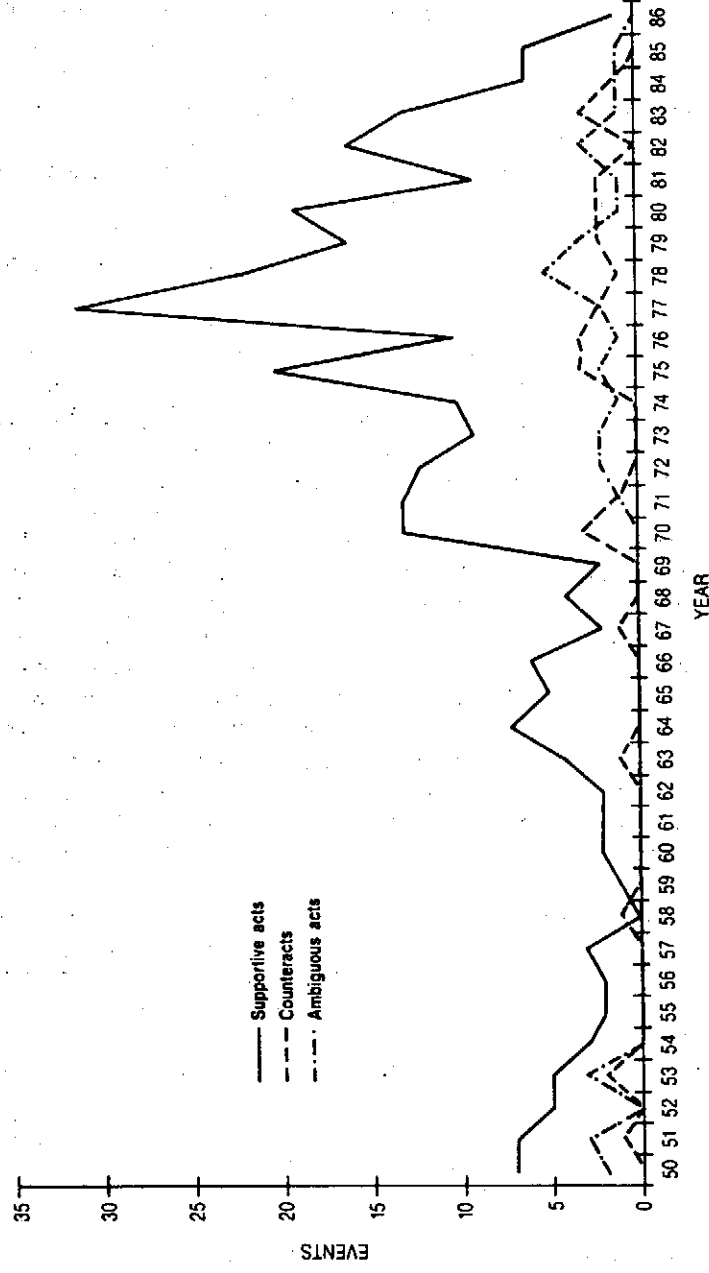
government also initiated more negative and ambiguous activities related to women than it did in the previous decade. Separating the actions of the federal government from state and local governments clarifies the picture. As we can tell from Figure 13.6, the federal government initiated as many positive acts as negative or ambiguous ones on women's issues in the 1950s. But by the early 1960s, the actions of the national government were almost uniformly supportive of women's rights. The shift from a friendly but somewhat ambiguous relationship between government and women in the 1950s to unalloyed support at the federal level in the 1960s seems promising as an explanation for the timing of the women's movement. Strong signals that government would help facilitate the movement's growth might have been all that was needed to spur formation of the movement.

At the same time, according to political process theory, the group itself should be better organized. A perceptible psychological shift should take place as group members begin to see their difficulties as amenable to political solutions. In the case of women, one should observe an increase in mutual cooperation, as diverse women's groups start to pool money, membership, and leadership, creating enough resources to apply pressure on government. Figure 13.7 shows some evidence that women's groups were initiating an increasing number of events supportive of women's rights in the 1960s, yet more such activity took place in the early 1950s. Figure 13.8, however, gives a somewhat different slant on women's activities. In the 1960s, individual feminists and groups of women met together, held conferences, and began to organize the underpinnings of a new women's movement. This did not happen to any notable extent in the decade before. Still, the overall number of reported events remains surprisingly small. There are two explanations for this. First, internal meetings at the start of a new social movement are rarely well covered in the press. Most journalists are probably unaware that a new movement is in the offing. The individuals and groups active in starting the new movement are unlikely to welcome press attention at this time, as they struggle to unite over goals, tactics, and issues. In the case of the women's movement, this natural reticence is intensified by the historical link to the bitter struggles among factions within women's groups, left over from the days of the suffrage movement. Efforts to reconcile these differences (which chiefly involved disagreement over the desirability of adding an equal rights amendment to the constitution) remained particularly problematic in the case of women's groups and were conducted as quietly as possible (see Cott 1987 and Harrison 1988).

Although there is more evidence supporting the view that government aided the emergence of the women's movement than the traditional perspective that new resources or tactics led to the movement's success, ambiguity remains about why parts of the government would *want* to

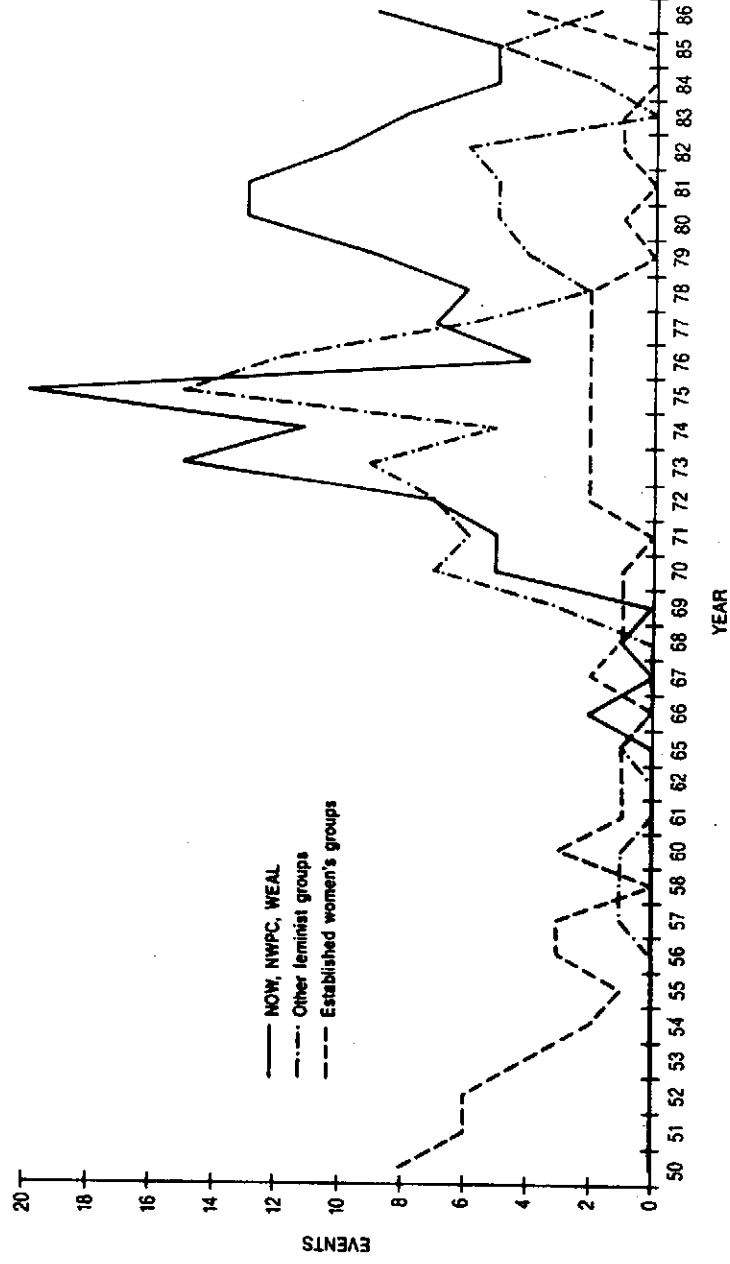


FIGURE 13.6  
Events Initiated by the Federal Government



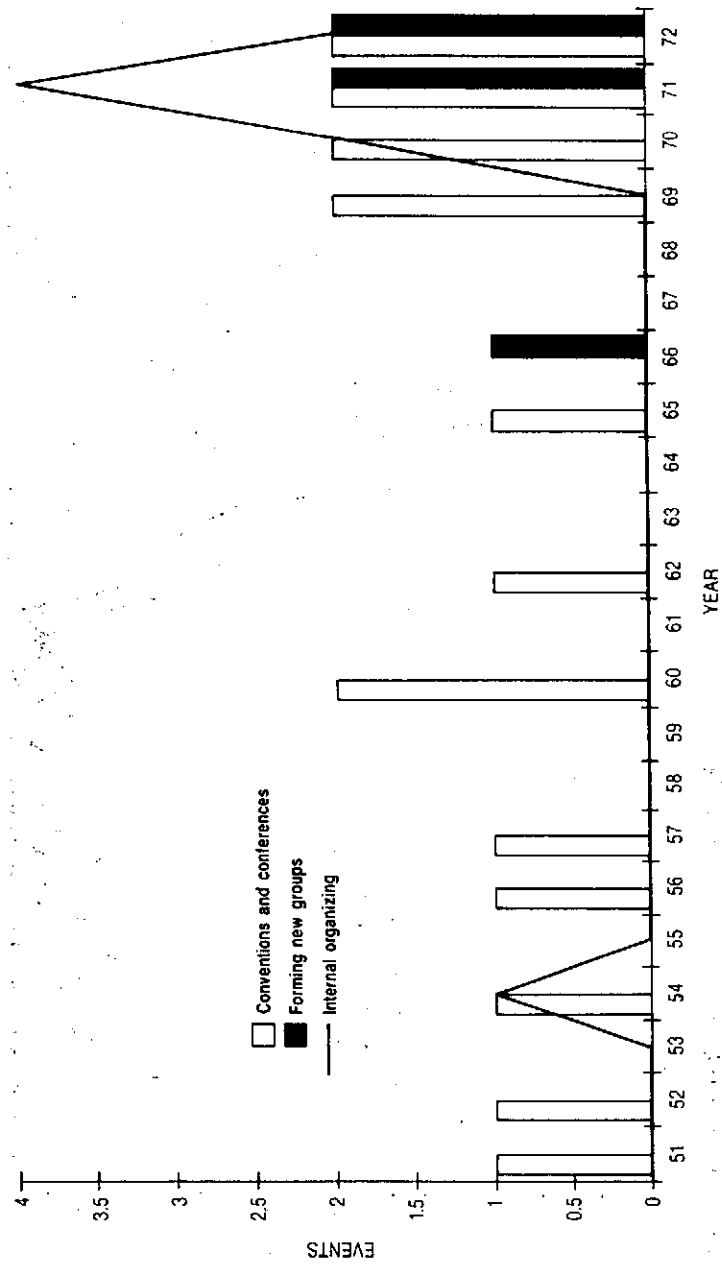
Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the New York Times Index.

FIGURE 13.7  
Positive Women's Rights Events Initiated by Women's Groups



Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the New York Times Index.

FIGURE 13.8  
Organizing and Resource Accumulation in the Women's Movement, 1955-1972



Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the *New York Times Index*.

facilitate the emergence of a women's movement. One reason is the instability of political alignments in the 1960s and 1970s (Cloward and Piven 1983; Piven and Cloward 1979; Tarrow 1988). Because neither political party had a firm governing majority, both parties and politicians were openly searching for large blocs of votes to stabilize a winning coalition. A potential bloc of votes as large as women would be difficult to ignore even if there was not yet evidence that women were voting as a bloc. Social movements are recognized as having the potential to produce this kind of bloc voting. It is not unknown for political parties as well as candidates to position themselves so that they can profit from an electoral shift when it takes place. The public papers of presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy, in particular, reveal an awareness of the significance of women as a potential voting bloc (see *Public Papers* 1956:1004; Harrison 1988:73-81).

Kennedy won the presidency by a razor-thin margin over Nixon in 1960. Kennedy (in contrast to Eisenhower) did not benefit from a gender gap in this election (Kenski 1988:50), and by many accounts, upon his taking office, his advisers urged him to take steps to gain more support from women and women's groups (see Harrison 1988:73-81). Although in his public remarks Kennedy did not talk specifically about a women's vote, there is evidence that he understood the women's issues that were emerging better than did his predecessors or successors. In an interview responding to a question from former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt about the contribution of educated women to American society, Kennedy answered,

Well, I think when you look at Radcliffe College, that the curve of academic excellence at Radcliffe is higher than it is at Harvard. And therefore you assume that this is really the most highly developed student body. What happens to those girls 2 or 3 years later? They get married, many of them become housewives, and all that talent is used in this family life but is not used outside. . . . But I wonder whether they have the full opportunity to develop their talents. As the Greeks said, the definition of happiness is full use of your powers along lines of excellence, and I wonder whether they have that opportunity. (*Public Papers* 1963:342-343)

Beyond politicians searching for an electoral majority, it is increasingly being recognized that subgroups in government routinely act independently under certain conditions (for example, see Wilson 1980 and McFarland 1987). In the case of the women's movement in particular, it has long been understood that there are a number of "woodwork" feminists in elective and appointive offices of government and in the career civil service (Freeman 1975). These are people who, given external backing, would push a feminist position. Among the most visible in Washington in the 1960s and 1970s were representatives Martha Griffiths (D-Mich.),

Shirley Chisholm (D-N.Y.), Margaret Heckler (R-Mass.), Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.), and Charles Rose (D-N.C.) and senators Margaret Chase Smith (R-Maine) and Birch Bayh (D-Ind.). Members of the civil service who played important roles in advancing the cause of women's rights included Mary Eastwood, Catherine East, Marguerite Rawalt, and Richard Graham. In addition to these feminists, there were individuals within government agencies such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission whose ability to make independent decisions would increase by mobilizing a new group that would, to a degree, counter pressure from established groups (see Hole and Levine 1971:82). By introducing a new interest with somewhat different priorities from those of the black civil rights groups, which were applying a great deal of pressure on the EEOC, the commissioners had more room for independent judgment. Countervailing pressure from women's groups allowed the EEOC to pursue a sex discrimination case against the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) that resulted in the largest single monetary settlement ever awarded in a discrimination case in the United States (Freeman 1975:188-190).

Government undoubtedly contained individuals with a variety of motives for facilitating the emergence of a women's movement. Some members of government could potentially benefit from an electoral gender gap. Others held principled beliefs that women should have more say politically. Finally, there were those who welcomed the extent to which women, as new participants in the political process, might dilute the power of existing groups in specific areas of policymaking, thereby increasing the autonomy of government decisionmakers. All these members of the government would have sufficient reasons to facilitate the formation of a new women's movement.

### CONCLUSION

There is little evidence that the women's movement achieved the legislative impact that it did through amassing new resources, allies, or more effective political tactics. Instead, the data available suggest that government's position moved from positive neutrality on women's issues to facilitation. This was the result of a variety of factors ranging from the instability of electoral alignments and the recognition of the potential significance of a "woman's vote," to "woodwork" feminists already inside government. Added to these factors were the people within government agencies who looked forward to the time when women as a group would start to compete with other interests, such as promilitary groups, big business, and minorities. This added competition would result in some agencies' acquiring greater latitude to pursue their own policy agendas.

The case of the women's movement then raises questions about the usefulness of traditional emphases on resource accumulation and tactical strength as major determinants of legislative success for social movements. If this case is typical of movement politics, and there is evidence that it is (see Mueller 1987), shifting relationships between potential movements and government are a stronger signal of future movement influence than more traditional measures of outside patrons or early resource accumulation. The decline of hostile actions by government provides a special opportunity for movements to emerge and makes rapid gains in policy possible.

If this is the pattern followed by the contemporary women's movement, it has several important implications for women and the study of interest group politics. First, women's groups do not need to wait for external sponsors or feminist entrepreneurs to raise new resources. They have sufficient resources already if they can work toward common goals. Second, it is time to question the view that women made the gains they did by asking for small changes within the parameters of role equity rather than by emphasizing more sweeping political change under the banner of role change. We know statistically that women's lives were changing. More women were entering the work force, heading families, and having fewer children (see Klein 1984:32-93). Movement activists may have fared better arguing that the ERA would assist women in coping with these changes instead of emphasizing achievement of absolute equality with men. Along these lines, more of the lobbying by women's movement groups might productively have gone into examining the changes in women's roles that had already occurred and searching for legislative solutions to ease the period of transition. These might have included heightened emphasis on proposals for government-subsidized and -regulated daycare, maternal leave programs, reforms to Social Security, employment rights for women, and education. The assumption seems to have been made that the American public was more comfortable with fairness toward women, within traditional legal boundaries, than with changes in the condition of women. Although this is undoubtedly true to a degree, it is easy to overestimate. If we look at public attitudes toward voting for a woman for president, we see an abrupt shift in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when, in a relatively brief time, this willingness jumps from just over half to 80 percent of the public. This suggests that a less cautious women's movement may have achieved more than did the movement that ultimately developed. Finally, this type of analysis indicates that future women's movements are likely to be dependent on opportunities opened to them by government. If potential movements continue to reject entrepreneurial leadership as a way to "buy" their way into the political system, they will need to be very conscious of periods when politicians, government agencies, and the executive branch

are receptive to changing the existing political balance by including women as a new interest.

The women's, environmental, civil rights, and consumer movements should be recognized as lingering presences within American politics. When political conditions are right, any and all of these movements have the potential to emerge and alter the established power balances within political institutions. Their indigenous resources, accumulated to a large extent during the peaks of their earlier mobilizations, give them the ability to successfully challenge more resource-laden conventional interests. It is government as an actor that helps determine when and in what form these recurrent movements will reappear.<sup>6</sup>

### NOTES

I would particularly like to thank Douglas Costain, Evonne Okonski, Cynthia Pieropan, Oneida Mascarenas, and Steve Majstorovic, who assisted me in coding this data. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Council on Teaching of the University of Colorado, which provided funding and a forum to try out some of these ideas.

1. To count bills, we searched the following headings in the *Congressional Record Index* and *U.S. Statutes at Large*: "Woman/women/women's," "Sex discrimination," and "Civil rights." We also looked at cross references to additional headings, including in our data set only legislation that explicitly mentioned gender. Although women as a majority of the population are affected by nearly all legislation, this data set is designed to single out bills that acknowledge women as a group rather than measuring the impact of specific laws on women.

2. These events data were gathered using the *New York Times Annual Index*, following a procedure similar to the one employed by Doug McAdams in his work on the civil rights movement (see McAdams 1982, 1983). The purpose of this code is to record all events contained in the synopses of the annual *Times* index that reflect agitation over women's rights in the period studied. All story synopses under the headings "Women: General" and "Women: United States" were read. All events that were selected were coded twice, once by me and once by either Evonne Okonski or Oneida Mascarenas, both graduate students. We resolved coding discrepancies through discussion and, in some cases, through reference to the complete story in the *Times*. For the years 1950 to 1986, intercoder reliability was above 90 percent. More complete information about coding categories and procedures is in the codebook available from the author.

3. There have been rules changes in this period in the number of legislators who are permitted to cosponsor a bill. There have also been sessional and cross-time fluctuations in the numbers of laws passed by Congress. Typically, more bills are introduced in the first session of Congress, and more laws are passed in the second session. During some periods, Congress has passed more bills than in others. In 1981, for example, Congress passed just 145 new laws, whereas in 1970 Congress passed 505 laws.

4. For example, it is valid to conclude that the amount of women's rights activity more than doubled in a two-year period when the number of events increases from twenty-five to sixty. If there are two protest events the first year and four the second, however, it is unwise to conclude that the frequency of protest doubled. The numbers are too small and the method both of coding and determining newspaper coverage too imprecise to permit this fine-grained analysis. The onset and the end of the movement alike are likely to be underreported, as, in

the first instance, reporters may not yet recognize that these events are newsworthy and, at the other end of the coverage, a waning "issue attention cycle" may lead newspapers to underreport continuing movement activities (Downs 1972; Jenkins and Eckert 1986).

A number of problems leading to possible inconsistencies in coding results have been identified, but empirical efforts to show *systematic* bias in *New York Times* coverage of social movement activity have generally failed (Burstein and Monaghan 1986; Johnson 1987). McAdams (1982) reports that 83 percent of all dated events between 1955 and 1962 on the black civil rights movement mentioned in nine qualitative accounts of the movement were covered in the *New York Times*. Jenkins and Perrow (1972) compared *New York Times* coverage of farmworkers' movement events with the coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. There was no evidence that the *New York Times* emphasized different stories than the other papers, but the *Times* did pick up more stories than either of the other sources. *Times* reporting has also been shown to cover more "hard" news, including demonstrations, riots, and meetings of national organizations, than "soft" news, such as speeches and internal movement debates over tactics (Snyder and Kelly 1977).

5. If we consider only those *Times* stories initiated by women, we see a similar pattern. In the 1960s, women, like the other actors who raised women's issues, were unlikely to focus on specific complaints.

6. In the case of the women's movement, it appears that electoral instability and candidates' searching for a new majority coalition identified women as a potentially important voting bloc. By fashioning a political agenda that included equal rights for women (to win more support from women), the president and Congress helped mobilize a new feminist movement in the United States.