Turning Votes into Power:
New Women Voters and Access to Local Governance

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Word count: 10,200 (including references)

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Voting rights represent a core axis of political contestation throughout American history. Groups seek access to the ballot both because voting rights are important on their own (Schuit and Rogowski 2017a; Olson 2025; Cahill 2020; Keele, Cubbison, and White 2021; Wasow 2020) and because the right to choose political representatives can achieve other political goals, such as inclusion, representation, and influence over policymaking (Teele 2018b; Guinier 1991; Shah, Marschall, and Ruhil 2013; Grofman and Handley 1991). In particular, the extension of access to the ballot often implies that those granted rights will now be able to take part in government decisions and shape public policy. But whether and when access to the ballot translates into access to governing, especially via representation in positions of power, remains an open question.

In this paper, we argue for local politics as a key arena for evaluating the consequences of voting rights in the United States. We theorize that the connection between voting rights and governance depends on both *bottom-up* and *top-down* factors. Specifically, voting rights are more likely to translate into governing power when (1) the presence, representation, and opportunities afforded by group organizations push new voting groups into governance via a *bottom-up* process, and/or (2) ideologically-aligned ruling political elite pull members of the new electorate into power via a *top-down* process.

We test our theory using the case of women's suffrage and descriptive representation in the United States. The struggle for women's suffrage concerned not only women's right to vote but their position in politics more generally (Andersen 1996). Women's exclusion from formal political institutions meant that their preferences and

interests often went unrepresented in policy decisions; suffrage advocates sought the ballot as a means to remedy this exclusion (Teele 2018a; Banaszak 1996). However, women's representation in elected office developed at a glacial pace following suffrage (Cox 1996); indeed, women still lack equal representation in American politics.

The conventional account is that women's enfranchisement had little impact on American politics: Women did not vote at anywhere near the numbers as men, and when they did vote, they voted as their husband's did, and thus failed to impact election results or policy-making (Wolbrecht and Corder 2020). After some initial national-level policy change—most notably the Shepard-Towner (1921) and Cable (1922) Acts pertaining to maternity/infant care and women's independent citizenship, respectively—politicians concluded that such policies were not mobilizing for women voters and abandoned these efforts; it is often noted, for example, that Congress failed to reauthorize Sheppard-Towner in 1929. Recent scholarship, however, challenges this view, showing the enactment of women's suffrage is associated with an expansion of social welfare spending (Bolzendahl and Brooks 2007), improved educational attainment and employment outcomes for the economically disadvantaged, including black Southerners (Kose, Kuka, and Shenhav 2018a), and dramatic declines in child mortality in those states (Miller 2008).

But what about the impact of suffrage on women's descriptive representation and direct access to governing power? We propose a new lens for examining descriptive representation: appointments to local boards.[1] Such boards were (and are) a common tool for local governments to engage in specific forms of policymaking, from planning

[1] These local political units go by many names, including board, commission, and committee. For the sake of parsimony, we refer to all such bodies as boards.

and zoning to hospitals, libraries, and pensions (Dahl 1961; Lucas 2016; Holman 2025). At the time that white women gained access to the vote, local governments were the primary arena for policy making and the provision of public goods in the United States (Erie 1992; Stone 1996; Trounstine 2008). The representation of women on boards thus indicates access to substantial and consequential governance power. Moreover, board members are typically appointed by elected office holders, a sign that those in power saw the newly-enfranchised as worthy of political capital.

To test our theory, we introduce a new database of women's representation among more than 30,000 local board members (Holman, Iyer, and Wolbrecht 2025). We combine these data with information on municipal regime type and thousands of local organizations in Boston, Chicago, Denver, and Los Angeles during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Variation, both across and within cities, in date of women's suffrage, level of women's organizing, and local political regimes provides the opportunity to test our theory of organizational bottom-up push and an ideological top-down pull.

We find that women were granted greater access to governing power after suffrage, but only when women ideologically align with those in power. When a Progressive mayor is present (the *top-down* process), women's access to membership on boards accelerates after suffrage. The strength of women's organizing (the *bottom-up* process), in comparison, is generally associated with greater women's representation on boards before, but not after, suffrage. We then examine board type, showing that women's representational gains were limited; ideologically-aligned political regimes increased women's representation largely within the narrow remit of boards that align with what were understood as women's interests.

Our work contributes to our understanding of women's suffrage, women's activism, and political contestation in urban America. We join an emerging literature which reveals, contrary to longstanding conventional wisdom, that women's suffrage had important impacts on elections, representation, and policy outcomes (Teele 2023; Morgan-Collins 2021; Kinsey 2024). Thus far, this work has focused less on questions of representation or the urban political arena (Brie and Teele 2023 is an exception). Scholars have long recognized the consequences of women's heightened civic and political organization at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries (Baker 1984; Holman 2015; Teele 2018b), but less attention has been paid to how suffrage accelerated or interrupted these patterns. Work on urban politics in this period highlights how parties, organizations, and political contestation shaped the form and function of cities into the present day (Anzia and Trounstine 2024; Trounstine 2008; 2018). But this work has generally not considered the role of women's access to political power in urban development. We connect these bodies of work and point to the consequences of voting rights, women's activism, and urban political regimes for democracy and representation.

A theory of voting rights and descriptive representation

Our central hypothesis is that voting rights should translate into access to governance power in the form of descriptive representation. Descriptive representation, or the embodied presence of members of a group in a governing body (Pitkin 1967), is a common goal of political movements (Hughes 2011; Barnes and Burchard 2013; Schuit and Rogowski 2017b). Both activists and scholars theorize that descriptive representation can increase attention on the interests of marginalized groups in particular, as well as demonstrate the political capacity of the group and enhance democratic legitimacy

(Mansbridge 1999). Voting rights aid descriptive representation by allowing the group to present a credible threat: that the group could vote in response to, among other things, being denied or granted access to power (Benjamin 2017b; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Burns 2006; Schuit and Rogowski 2017a; Teele 2018b). Movements from abolition and civil rights to women's suffrage have sought descriptive representation as a desired consequence of voting rights (Guinier 1991; Williams 2000).

Theories of access to power in local politics also point to the importance of voting rights. For example, Stone's (1989, 239) influential theory of regimes in urban governance articulates: "Since democracy rests on the principle of equal voting power, it would seem that all groups do share in the capacity to be a part of the governing regime." Pluralist views of local power also point to the importance of "equal access" for groups to those in power (Dahl 1961). And empirical studies document how obtaining actual access to the ballot via the Voting Rights Act increased Black and Latino descriptive representation in local government (Shah, Marschall, and Ruhil 2013; Marschall and Rutherford 2016).

But women's access to the ballot did not immediately or directly translate into descriptive representation, or at least not in ways previous scholars have measured. More than 100 years after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, women continued to be underrepresented in the U.S. Congress, in state legislatures, and in local elected office (Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018; Hansen and Clark 2020; Holman 2017).

We argue that public boards represent an important opportunity to understand the link between voting rights and representation. As Arnstein (1969, 216) wrote in her treatise on representation on boards: "Citizen participation … is the redistribution of power that enables have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future." From civil rights activists arguing for

the inclusion of Black representatives on boards (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984) to federal requirements about the creation and staffing of boards (Bachrach and Baratz 1962) to concerns about women's representation on boards today (Hannigan and Larimer 2017), these government bodies provide a key arena for descriptive representation demands (Holman 2025).

Candidates and office-holders respond to those demands. At the state and national level, candidates routinely appeal to voters by committing to appoint representatives of racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, and gender groups to courts and cabinets (Annesley, Beckwith, and Franceschet 2019; Armstrong et al. 2022; Barnes and O'Brien 2018). Elected officials are particularly likely to commit to appoint members of traditionally marginalized groups, including through the adoption of gender quotas (Weeks et al. 2023; Weeks 2018). Suffrage made women into an electoral constituency, and we thus hypothesize that *suffrage rights will be associated with higher levels of descriptive representation* (Hypothesis 1).

We further expect that the degree to which voting rights translate into representation is highly contingent on two factors: a *bottom-up* process driven by the group's ability to communicate demands and expertise (measured via the organizational strength of the group locally), and a *top-down* process, or the establishment's incentives to bring group members into governance (measured via the ideological alignment between the group and those in power).

The *bottom-up* process: civic organization and local politics

Organized groups have long been central to city governance (Benjamin 2017a; 2017b; Sahn 2024; Stone 1989) and provide a means by which groups can effectively express political preferences and priorities to those in power (Anzia 2022). Organization

also imbues some group members with political networks, leadership experience, expertise, and recognition as a group representative (Warren 1998; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Anzia and Trounstine 2024; Prillaman 2023b). The power from organization could be particularly powerful when coupled with voting rights, as the group can now present a legitimate challenge via the ballot box (Morgan-Collins 2021). We hypothesize that *organizational strength translates into governing power* (Hypothesis 2a)*, and at significantly higher rates following access to voting rights* (Hypothesis 2b).

The *top-down* process: ideological alignment with ruling elites

Local politics in the United States is a story of informal relationships and organized interests. Because local governments face chronic deficits in funds and power (Peterson 1981; Molotch 1976), local political leaders seek out alternative, local resources to accomplish their policy aims, to shore up their political power, and to cut off resources from potential political opponents. One such mechanism is what Stone (1989) called urban regimes, or informal coalitions between public and private actors who seek to create policies that advantages the members of the regime. These urban regimes vary in who belongs to the coalition and their goals, but generally persist over long periods, and engage in a wide set of institutional and informal activities to pursue their aims (Mossberger and Stoker 2001; Erie 1992).

We expect that accessing governing power after the grant of voting rights is also contingent on the relative reception of the regime to the group's demands. Political elites win local elections by building coalitions of groups who offer support with their votes, resources, and influence. Such coalitions are most successful when each group seeks similar aims as the elites. Coalition members are rewarded with policy and patronage. In particular, governing regimes can support group members as candidates or appoint group

members to positions of power (Haas 1988). At the very minimum, elected officials do not want to advance the political careers of members of groups who are ideologically opposed to their goals and coalition. We thus hypothesize that *ideological alignment between a regime and a group will increase the group's access to governing power* (Hypothesis 3a), *and at a significantly higher rate following the expansion of voting rights* (Hypothesis 3b).

Our case: women's suffrage and local boards

We test our expectations with an examination of the impact of women's suffrage on women's descriptive representation in local governance. Many would consider women's suffrage a hard case for our hypotheses. For most of the previous century, the conventional wisdom was that women's suffrage did *not* translate into changes in policy-making or governance, although that claim is increasingly challenged by more recent research. The dominant narrative was that women failed to form a cohesive voting bloc, and without a clear signal of women's preferences at the ballot box, policy makers saw no need to appeal to the group with policy positions or further power sharing (see Corder and Wolbrecht 2016 for a summary).

Indeed, at the national level, women's suffrage had little immediate impact on descriptive representation. As late as 1980—60 years after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified—no more than 19 women had ever served in the U.S. House at any one time (4%). It would be another 10 years before more than two women served in the U.S. Senate at the same time. While women ran for (and occasionally won) local offices before suffrage, many large US cities have never had a woman mayor or only elected their first

after the year 2000 (Holman 2017). The national story is similar for appointed office. Only two women served in a presidential cabinet in the first 50 years of women's suffrage.

However, descriptive representation at the national level is a remarkably high bar (Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006; Hughes 2011). Access to local politics was likely more accessible and plausible for marginalized groups. Women's suffrage was characterized by important subnational variation in both electoral (Corder and Wolbrecht 2006; Morgan-Collins 2021; Teele 2022) and policy outcomes (Teele 2023; Abou-Chadi and Orlowski 2015; Kose, Kuka, and Shenhav 2018b). We contribute to this literature by examining how subnational variations in women's organizing and ideological alignment with political elites explain the link between suffrage and governance.

Descriptive representation and governing power on local boards

Why focus on descriptive representation on local boards? American cities have used boards to facilitate governance since before the founding. With the dramatic changes to the size and nature of American cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, local leaders increasingly established boards to address and manage complex policy concerns. They were often a locus of political power in cities, making key decisions about economic development, public health, funding for the arts, parks, and other public spaces, and the distribution of other key resources (Dahl 1961; Erie 1992). Boards also served as key mechanisms for managing and enforcing white supremacy and racial segregation in cities (Holman 2025).

Appointed boards offer an easier path than elected office for women to translate their new voting power into governing power, for several reasons. The general aversion to women as political actors did not disappear upon enfranchisement (Andersen 1996): only a few women were candidates for or elected to mayoral or city council offices in the

decades following women's enfranchisement (Holman 2015; Flammang 1985; Deutsch 2000). But appointed office is different: appointment powers let local elites reward and recognize electoral constituencies without putting women up for consideration by the broader electorate, which remained the domain of men. Appointed positions offer a broader set of opportunities: cities had far more appointed board seats (sometimes hundreds more) than elected positions. And these boards often created policy in areas where women had deep histories of activism in these cities, making women's involvement on specific boards more acceptable (Sivulka 1999; Baker 1984; Holman 2015). The appointment of women to boards is among the places we are most likely to see suffrage translate to governance.

Women's organizing and *bottom-up* efforts to increase women's power

Women's organizing in the local context provides an ideal opportunity to test our hypotheses. The period following the Civil War was characterized by an immense flourishing of civic organization in the U.S. in general, and particularly for women (Evans 1989; Skocpol 2003; Clemens 1997). The scale of participation was impressive and consequential; for example, the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), founded in 1890, boasted 150,000 "clubwomen" by 1900 and more than a million members by the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 (Evans 1989).

While many women's clubs focused on social activities, a large subset were explicitly *civic* organizations. These organizations provided opportunities for women to develop political expertise, networks, and experience (Baker 1984; Holman 2015; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000). Associational work often required women to become proficient in public speaking, writing, and organizing meetings, navigate public bureaucracies, lobby officials, and appeal to the public. Founding and running public

libraries and food kitchens, for example, require permits and budgets, and thus political support or at least acquiescence (see O'Neill 1971; Skocpol 2003).[2]

Anecdotal evidence supports the connection we expect to see between women's organizational activism and appointment to boards. For example, Isabel Hyams co-founded Boston's Louisa May Alcott Club. The women's club focused first on celebrating the author's work, but Hyams began nutrition and hygiene programs, eventually piloting a "penny lunch" program that would give poor children nutritious meals and hygiene education (Hyams 1910). Eventually, Hyams' work garnered her an appointment as a Consumptives' Hospital Trustee, where she served for more than a decade and published academic research about the board's work. She later founded the East Boston Social Centers Council, which continues to fulfill its original mission of welcoming and supporting immigrant families to this day. In Chicago, May H. DeMoney, a member (and eventual Vice President) of the West Chicago Parks Commission, emerged from leadership in the state's P.E.O. chapter, a woman's organization focused on education.

We argue that the density of women's organizing serves as a proxy for the degree to which women in the community might be pushed into positions with governance power via these *bottom-up* organizational efforts. We have evidence that women's organizations explicitly worked to increase women's appointments to city boards; for example, the Boston Women's Municipal League targeted appointments as a key tool for women to change local policy (Deutsch 2000) and in Los Angeles, the Friday Morning Club, the premier women's club, had reserved seats on the city's planning board (Holman 2025).

[2] Women's organizations are certainly not limited to this time period or to American municipal contexts; for example, in other country settings, the strength of women's organizing has been shown as key to promoting women's political power (Prillaman 2023a) and advocating for efforts to protect women against gender-based violence (Htun and Weldon 2012).

Even without purposeful efforts, organizational activism helped women gain expertise, networks, and reputation that made them strong candidates for board appointment. While women's organizing broadly increased (and then decreased) from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s, the degree to which women were organized varied considerably across time and place (Gamm and Putnam 1999; Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen 2004). Consequently, we can use variations in women's organizing across time and space to test hypothesis 2a and 2b.

Local political regimes and a *top-down* approach to women accessing power

The period around women's suffrage also offers substantial variation in local political regimes. Major social, economic, demographic, and political changes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries placed pressure on city political leaders to address a wide set of social ills. Initially, many cities failed to meet these challenges, struggling to provide even basic public goods and services like clean water, sewerage, and public health (Capers 1938; Melosi 2008; Oestreicher 1989; Trounstine 2018).

Two types of local political regimes emerged in cities in the late 1800s and early 1900s in response to these changing conditions. The first are political machines, or political organizations that traded non-ideological resources for votes and often used corrupt and violent methods to retain monopoly control of government policymaking apparatuses (Trounstine 2008). In many cities, political machines came to power by cultivating relationships with ethnic communities and offering financial, physical, and psychological incentives to immigrants, the poor, and the exploited in exchange for loyal support from these groups at the ballot box (Trounstine 2008; DiGaetano 1991).

The second movement responded to the first: the Progressive movement emerged out of an interest in limiting the power of political machines and accomplishing a variety

of changes to how government operated (Kuipers and Sahn 2023; Carreri, Payson, and Thompson 2023). Progressives sought to control power in cities through institutional reforms that would facilitate the dilution of the power of political machines and immigrant voters,[3] while also providing their ideal citizens with input into policymaking (Pincetl 2003; Bridges 1999; Buenker 1973).

Both machines and Progressives strategically rewarded their followers and punished their opponents (Trounstine 2008; Haveman, Rao, and Paruchuri 2007). Winning elections meant access to a wide set of governance powers and resources that advanced and consolidated power. Machines and Progressives sought to consolidate power through a variety of levers of control, including creating new political institutions, such as boards (Haas 1988; Tyler 2009; Holman 2025). One key difference, however, were the groups the machines and Progressives saw as deserving of power and rewards. While machines recruited primarily from ethnic, immigrant, Catholic, and low-income groups, Progressives targeted white residents, Protestants, college graduates, and nativists.

Progressive city regimes provide a clear case of ideological alignment with newly-enfranchised women. The policy interests of many women's organizations aligned with Progressive policy goals, including service provision, reform, and the expansion of government as a tool for improving society. Women also served as the movement's foot soldiers, marching, writing, rallying, and electioneering (Haveman, Rao, and Paruchuri 2007; Bridges 1999). Progressive parties had been early supporters of women's suffrage. Progressive mayors and political organizations appointed women as block captains for

[3] Or the "crowd of illiterate peasants," so named by Andrew White, a progressive activist and first president of Cornell University (Judd 1979).

voter turnout efforts and coordinated with women's organizations to facilitate support for policy changes (Bridges 1999).

In contrast, machine city regimes were ideologically unaligned with women in the electorate. Party machines viewed women as disruptive to their political organization and did not recognize women's groups in the way that they recognized racial, ethnic, and religious groups (Andersen 1996; Connolly 1998). Women, according to political machines, were naturally flighty and changeable and thus not capable of the steadfast party loyalty on which the machines depended.[4] The efforts of women activists to prohibit alcohol, fight corruption, and improve transparency in local governments all ran counter to the interests of political machines (Edwards 1997; Corder and Wolbrecht 2016). That many party machine leaders embraced an ethos of political masculinity furthered the distance between machines and women (Edwards 1997; Lewis 2011).[5] Women activists and appointees recognized this reality. Dr. Mary Barker Bates, who served on the appointed school board in Denver and worked for the national women's suffrage campaign, noted that "We have learned in politics that we must have a machine, only it should be a machine for good government, not corruption" (Anthony and Harper 2017, 146).[6]

The variation between how machine and Progressive mayors view their alignment with women as a constituency offers an opportunity to test how *top-down* factors shape

[4] Alternatively, a story about women's suffrage in the *New York Evening World* highlighted women voters' greater "independence of judgment which makes them difficult of control by political machines" (quoted in Andersen 1996, 100).
[5] For example, one of the campaign slogans for John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, machine boss in Boston (and John F. Kennedy's grandfather) was "Manhood against Masculinity" that drew on the "practical masculinity" of the working class (Connolly 1998).
[6] Dr. Barker Bates was one of the first white women doctors in the American West, established several hospitals, and served as a doctor for Brigham Young and his family (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 2025).

women's access to governing power following suffrage. While the machine movement generally preceded Progressives, the two groups grappled for power in many cities, often trading wins from election to election (with unaffiliated mayors occasionally taking power). We take advantage of these shifts to test hypotheses 3a and 3b.

Data and methods

We test our hypotheses with data from the late 1800s and early 1900s in Boston, Chicago, Denver, and Los Angeles. In addition to regional variation, these cities offer useful variation (both across and within cities) in women's board membership, level of women's organizing, and regime ideology. The states in which our cases are located also provide variation in dates of suffrage: Colorado in 1893, California in 1911, Illinois in 1913, and Massachusetts with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Board appointments

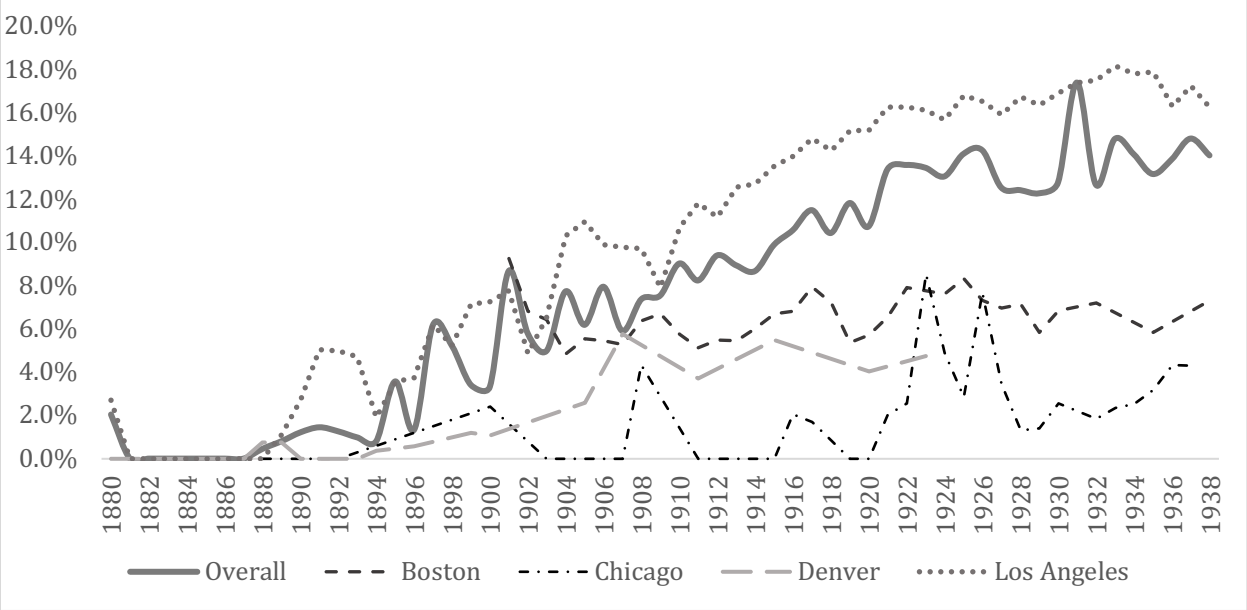
Our dependent variable is women's descriptive representation on local boards. Using archival sources, including city directories and other records, we collected information on the full roster of board members for all appointed boards in our four cities during this period (details in Appendix A). We used two gender assignment programs, as well as manual examination and internet searches, to assign a gender to all board members. In many cases, women are explicitly identified by titles such as Mrs. and Miss or easily identified as prominent local women through internet searches; for example, Kay Bogendorfer, who considered herself "a professional volunteer," is easily identified as the longtime member of the Los Angeles Civil Service Commission and the first woman post-master of Van Nuys via her obituary in the Los Angeles Times (1991). This is not limited

to Los Angeles: more than 75% of women in our database of Denver board appointments have Wikipedia pages.

Because the number of boards and seats on boards varies considerably within and across time and cities, our main dependent variable is the share of board members who are women. Across our cities, an average of 7.9% of the members of each board are women, only 24% of boards report having any woman member, and out of over 27,000 individual appointments, just under 10% of the individual appointments are women (see Table D1 for detailed summary statistics).

Figure 1 reports the patterns of women's representation on boards for each of our four cities (dashed lines) as well as the overall share of women appointees (solid line). The level of women's representation varies across cities and time, with Denver and Los Angeles showing a general upward trajectory, and Chicago and Boston characterized by stagnation across time. Across these five decades, women's representation increases from less than 4% of all boards to a max of 16% in the 1930s. Los Angeles consistently boasts the highest levels of women's representation, while Chicago is typically at the bottom.

Figure 1: The share of women on local boards, 1880-1938



Women's organization

We use city directories to generate a count of all local organizations (including clubs, societies, associations, fraternal organizations, and unions) in each city over time.[7] We code as a women's organization any organization that explicitly identifies women as members (e.g., ladies' auxiliaries, women's clubs, sisterhoods) or that lists women in top leadership positions such as president, secretary, or treasurer (see examples in Appendix B). To gauge the relative presence and visibility of women's public engagement, we calculate the share of all organizations that are women's organizations. This measure varies considerably across cities: women's organizations formed 17% of all organizations in Boston, 21% in Chicago, 8% in Denver and 16% in Los Angeles. We also observe

[7] We gather these data for one year in each decade and interpolate values for in-between years. Appendix Table A1 provides the years of data availability.

temporal variance: the women's organizations were less than 5% of local organizations in the 1880s, and more than 20% in the 1920s.

The ideology of urban regimes

Regime ideology—Progressive versus machine—varies temporally and geographically in urban American in the late 1800s and early 1900s as well. We code each mayoral election in each city into one of three exclusive categories: party machine, Progressive, or unaffiliated. For example, in Denver, political machines battled Progressives for control of the city's politics from the 1900s to the 1920s, with each side winning and losing mayoral elections across our time period (Mitchell 1972; West 1972). In comparison, in Los Angeles, a weak political machine emerged in the late 1800s, to be replaced by Progressive leaders in the early 1900s; the Progressives would then move in and out of power for the next several decades (Erie 1990).

Specifically, *party machine* mayors are those whom scholars and archival news sources identify as active in machine politics or who clearly align with machine goals, particularly incentive-based exchanges of resources for votes and the mobilization of immigrant voters (Trounstine 2006; 2008). *Progressive* mayors are those associated with attempts to engage in Progressive efforts, such as shifts to governance structures (e.g., implementing a council-manager form of government) and anti-corruption campaigns (Hays 1964; Anzia 2012; Carreri, Payson, and Thompson 2023). *Unaffiliated* mayors are those we could not definitively classify as either reform or machine; the majority of these served in the early years of our dataset. We discuss these cases and examples in detail in Appendix C. A Progressive mayor held office in 9% of the years in our dataset in Boston, 25% in Chicago, 30% in Denver and 39% in Los Angeles.

Model specification

To examine the effect of suffrage, we use ordinary least squares regression to examine whether the presence of women on boards is higher after suffrage, controlling for a lagged rate of women on boards and secular trends over time using period fixed effects. We use the following specification:

$$Y_{bct} = \alpha + \beta * Suff_{c,t-1} + \Sigma \gamma_t * Decade_t + e_{bct} \quad \text{(Model I)}$$

where Y_{bct} measures the share of women on board b of city c in year t and $Suff_{c,t-1}$ is an indicator that equals 1 if city c has women's suffrage before year t; we use a lagged variable since suffrage may not translate into women's board presence in the same year. Our coefficient of interest β measures the change in women's board share after suffrage. Since this share could increase over time due to factors unrelated to suffrage, we include indicator variables $Decade_t$ for each decade to account for such (potentially non-linear) changes over time. To examine the role of women's organization and alignment with political elites, we run two augmented specifications:

$$Y_{bct} = \alpha + \beta * Suff_{c,t-1} + \phi * WomOrg_{c,t-1} + \delta * Progressive_{c,t-1} + \Sigma \gamma_t * Decade_t + e_{bct} \quad \text{(Model II)}$$

$$Y_{bct} = \alpha + \beta * Suff_{c,t-1} + \phi_1 * WomOrg_{c,t-1} + \phi_2 * Suffrage_{c,t-1} * WomOrg_{c,t-1} + \delta_1 * Progressive_{c,t-1} + \delta_2 * Suffrage_{c,t-1} * Progressive_{c,t-1} + \Sigma \gamma_t * Decade_t + e_{bct} \quad \text{(Model III)}$$

where $WomOrg_{ct}$ is a measure of women's organizational presence in the city (the share of organizations that are primarily for women or have women leaders) and $Progressive_{ct}$ is an indicator for city c having a Progressive administration at time t (this is our main measure of alignment with political elites, as described in the previous section). Model II examines how the bottom-up and top-down factors affect women's presence on boards

on average, while Model III examines how the role of these factors changes before and after suffrage. Standard errors in all models are adjusted for heteroskedasticity.

The impact of women's suffrage on board representation

Women's suffrage increased the share of women on city boards, with substantively meaningful growth. The share of women on city boards increases by 1.8 percentage points in the years after suffrage is enacted (Table 1, Model I); this estimate is statistically significant and large when compared to the average share of 7.9%. When examining the role of bottom-up and top-down factors, we find that the presence of a Progressive mayor increases the share of women on city boards, while, contrary to our expectations, a greater share of women's organizations in the city is negatively associated with their representation on city boards (Table 1, Model II). While the latter result is somewhat puzzling, we find below that the relationship is different in periods before and after suffrage.

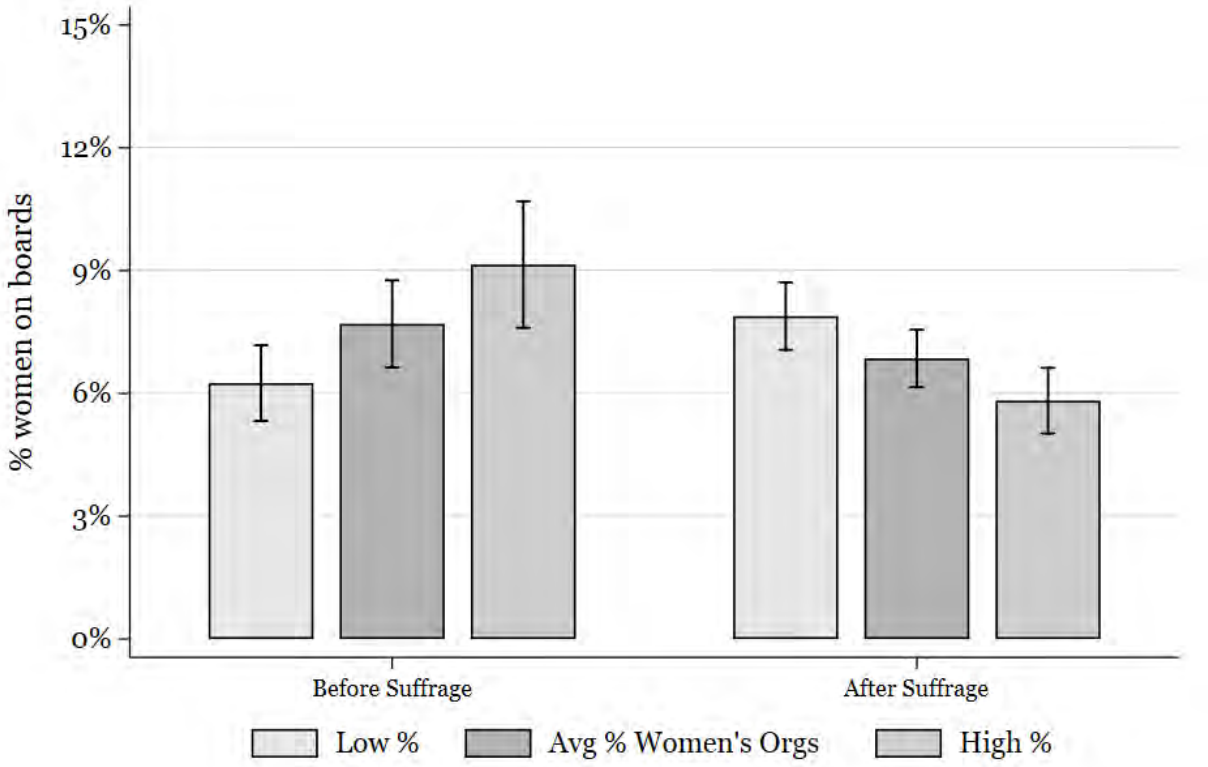
Table 1: The role of suffrage, women's organizations and political alignment in shaping women's representation on boards

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Suffrage	0.018*	-0.009	0.056*
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.013)
Progressive mayor		0.055*	0.004
		(0.006)	(0.009)
Share of women's organizations		-0.210*	0.362*
		(0.050)	(0.089)
Suffrage * Progressive mayor			0.073*
			(0.012)
Suffrage * Women's org share			-0.620*
			(0.095)
Observations	3219	3219	3219
R-squared	0.038	0.073	0.090

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; * indicates significance at 5% level. All regressions control for decade dummies. All independent variables are lagged. Full model results are shown in Appendix Table D4.

Our initial analysis thus offers partial support hypothesis 2a, but not hypothesis 2b: Women's organizations are generally associated with a decrease in women's representation on boards (Table 1, Model II), and this effect arises primarily from the post-suffrage period (Table 1, Model III). To ease the interpretation of interactions, Figure 2 shows the predicted rate of women on boards by the relative strength of women's organizations before suffrage (left set of bars) and after suffrage (right set of bars). Before suffrage, moving from below the 25th percentile (or when women's organizations make up 11% of all organizations in the city) to above the 75th percentile (19% of all organizations) increases women's representation on boards pre-suffrage by 5 percentage points. In contrast, we see a much lower association between women's organizational strength and board representation in the post-suffrage period, with no difference between the high and low values of women's organizing. So, women's organizations do have a bottom-up effect on women's representation on boards (hypothesis 2a), but only in the pre-suffrage period. Contrary to hypothesis 2b, the effect does not accelerate after suffrage; rather, it disappears.

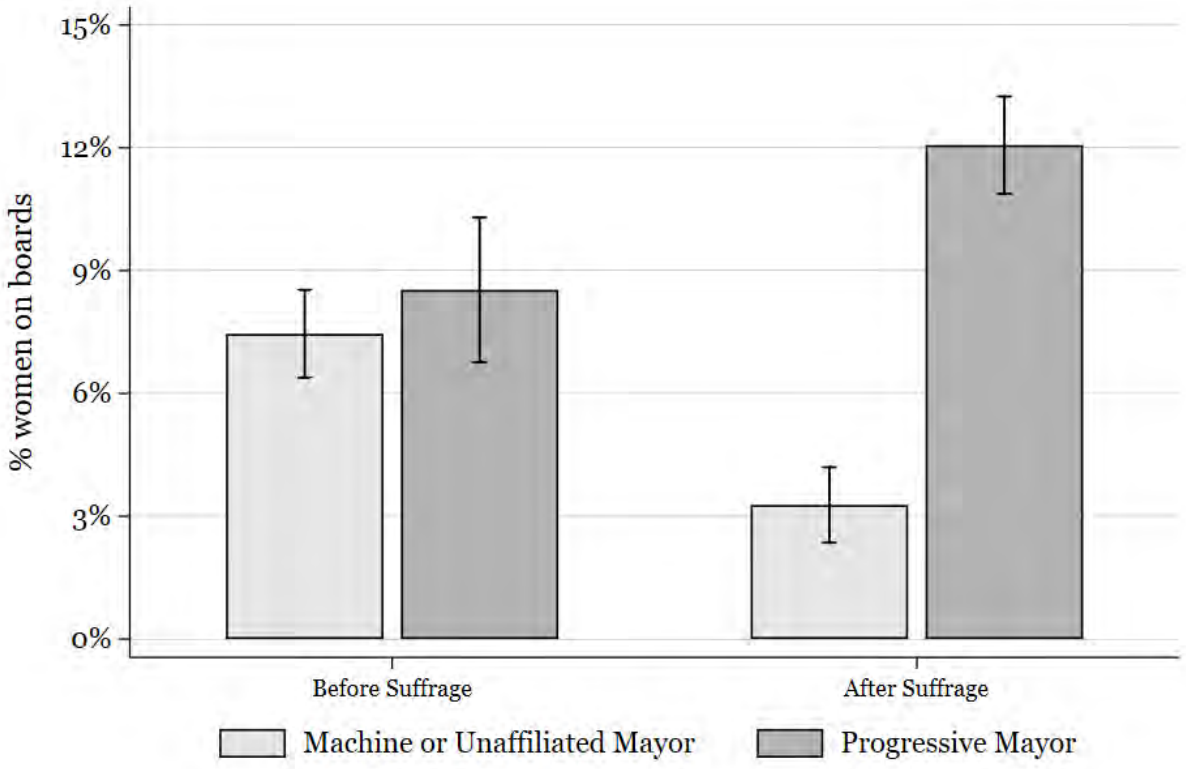
Figure 2: Women's organizations increase descriptive representation, but only before suffrage



Note: post-hoc predicted values generated from Table 1, Model III. Low = at the twenty-fifth percentile (11%); Avg % = at the fiftieth percentile (16%); High = at seventy-fifth percentile (19%).

In comparison, the results offer strong support for both hypothesis 3a and 3b: we see that Progressive mayors are generally associated with increases in women's representation (Table 1, Model II), and the effect is concentrated after suffrage (Table 1, model III). The substantive effects, which we display in Figure 3, are quite large: prior to suffrage, women's share of board positions during Progressive regimes was statistically indistinguishable from machine or unaffiliated regimes. Following suffrage, Progressive regimes are associated with 8 percentage points more women on boards compared to other urban regime types.

Figure 3: Suffrage increases women's representation in Progressive cities after suffrage



Note: Post-hoc predicted values generated from Table 1, Model III.

We verify that the results of Model III are robust to a variety of changes in the regression model (Appendix Table D2). In columns 1-3, we conduct the following checks: controlling for five-year period indicators rather than decade indicators, controlling for city population, and controlling for the number of seats on each board. We find that our main results remain quite robust: suffrage results in increased women's representation on boards, the presence of a Progressive mayor significantly boosts this post-suffrage representation advantage, while a greater share of women's organizations is associated with more women board members before suffrage but not after. In column 4, we measure political alignment using the presence of a machine (rather than Progressive)

administration. As expected, we see that the presence of a Machine mayor results in a post-suffrage decline in women's board membership. Column 5 finds our results to be robust to using contemporaneous values of suffrage, women's organizations, and political alignment. Since our bottom-up and top-down factors are measured at the city-year (rather than board-city-year) level, we also adjust our standard errors for clustering at the city-year level: the statistical significance of our bottom-up and top-down factors is unaffected (Appendix Table D2, column 6).

We examine an alternative dependent variable, namely whether there is any woman on the board; only 24% of boards in our data have a woman. As with the women's share of board members, we find that suffrage results in 3.9 percentage point increase in the probability of the board having at least one woman (Appendix Table D3, Model I). Our bottom-up and top-down factors play a similar role as in Table 1: a Progressive mayor significantly increases the probability of having at least one woman on a board in the post-suffrage period, while the presence of women's organizations is positively related to women's board presence in the pre-suffrage period and negatively related in the post-suffrage period (Model III).

Examining forms of power

Our findings so far demonstrate that voting rights can secure greater access to governing power and that the local political environment is important in translating suffrage into descriptive representation. But not all descriptive representation is equally as impactful; research on women's legislative and appointed representation points to women's segregation in less powerful committees and remits, for example (Armstrong et al. 2022; Barnes and O'Brien 2018; Payson, Fouirnaies, and Hall 2023; Bolzendahl 2014).

We expect that common expectations about women's interests and expertise shaped where women were appointed. The idea that women's place is in the home helped justify suffrage exclusion and remained widely-held even after the vote was won (Andersen 1996). Politicians generally assumed that women's interests were tied to their roles as mothers and homemakers (Corder and Wolbrecht 2016). Women's organizations often focused on issues related to education, arts and recreation, and health policy, consistent with this expectation. Women's involvement in the Progressive movement, where women successfully lobbied political leaders to create policy in areas such as public education, health, and poor relief, furthered this connection. Boards associated with such issues were generally less powerful and boasted fewer resources, limiting competition for seats from ambitious men. More powerful committees, such as those associated with economic development, taxation, and public safety, were likely in higher demand. As a result, we expect that women's increased access to governing power was limited, such that the accelerative effects of suffrage on women's representation will be concentrated on boards that address issues typically associated with women.

To test our expectation, we code whether a board handled three broad areas that represent women's activism in the early 20th century, and that previous research finds are common remits for women (Holman 2015; Krook and O'Brien 2012): children, arts, and welfare.[8] We find that while women were 4% of all board members before suffrage, they constituted 10% of children, arts, and welfare board members. After suffrage,

[8] We include boards those that handle issues associated with children, education, health, the library, affordable housing, the arts, parks and playgrounds, and social services All other boards include those that address development, zoning, planning, policing and public safety, economics (including pensions, taxes, and budgets), engineering, transportation, and various emergencies. To code boards into these categories, each of the coauthors independently coded boards into one of several categories, based on work by Holman (2025). Any differences in evaluation were reconciled by a discussion between the coauthors.

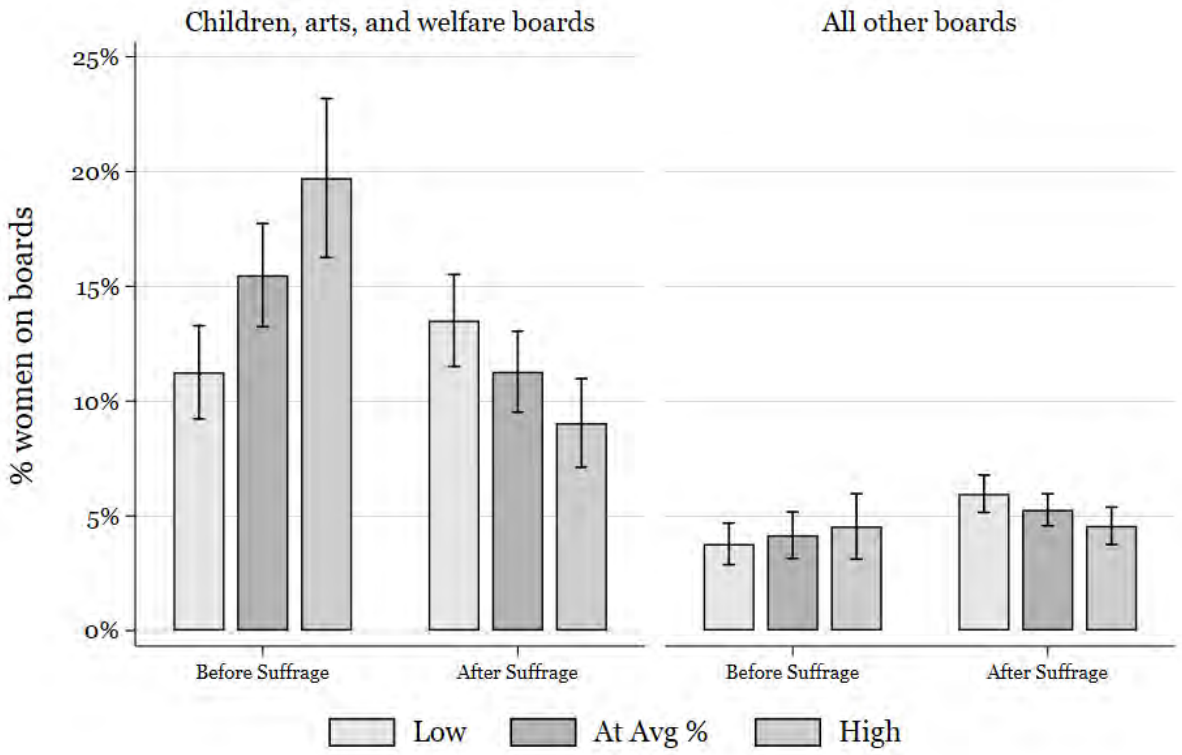
women's representation increases substantially in both cases, to 9% overall and to 15% on children, arts, and welfare boards. These patterns would suggest that suffrage did not increase women's representation on these kinds of boards specifically or only, but instead broadly increased women's representation. Similarly, a simple bivariate model suggests that suffrage alone is *not* associated with an increase in women's representation on children, arts, and welfare boards. Using the regression specification of Model I, the coefficient on suffrage fails to reach statistical significance for these boards, while suffrage is associated with a statistically significant increase in women's representation on all other boards (Table 2, columns 1 and 3).

Table 2: Context and the impact of women's suffrage on different board types

	Children, arts and welfare boards		All other boards	
	Model I	Model III	Model I	Model III
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Suffrage	0.003	0.147*	0.031*	0.031*
	(0.015)	(0.035)	(0.006)	(0.012)
Progressive mayor		0.001		0.006
		(0.018)		(0.008)
Share of women's organizations		1.058*		0.095
		(0.220)		(0.080)
Suffrage * Progressive mayor		0.150*		0.050*
		(0.025)		(0.011)
Suffrage * Women's org share		-1.616*		-0.270*
		(0.233)		(0.088)
Observations	926	926	2293	2293
R-squared	0.050	0.197	0.042	0.078

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; * indicates significance at 5% level. All regressions control for decade dummies. All independent variables are lagged. Full model results are shown in Appendix Table D5.

Figure 4: Women's organizational density substantively increases women's representation on children, arts, and welfare boards, but only before suffrage

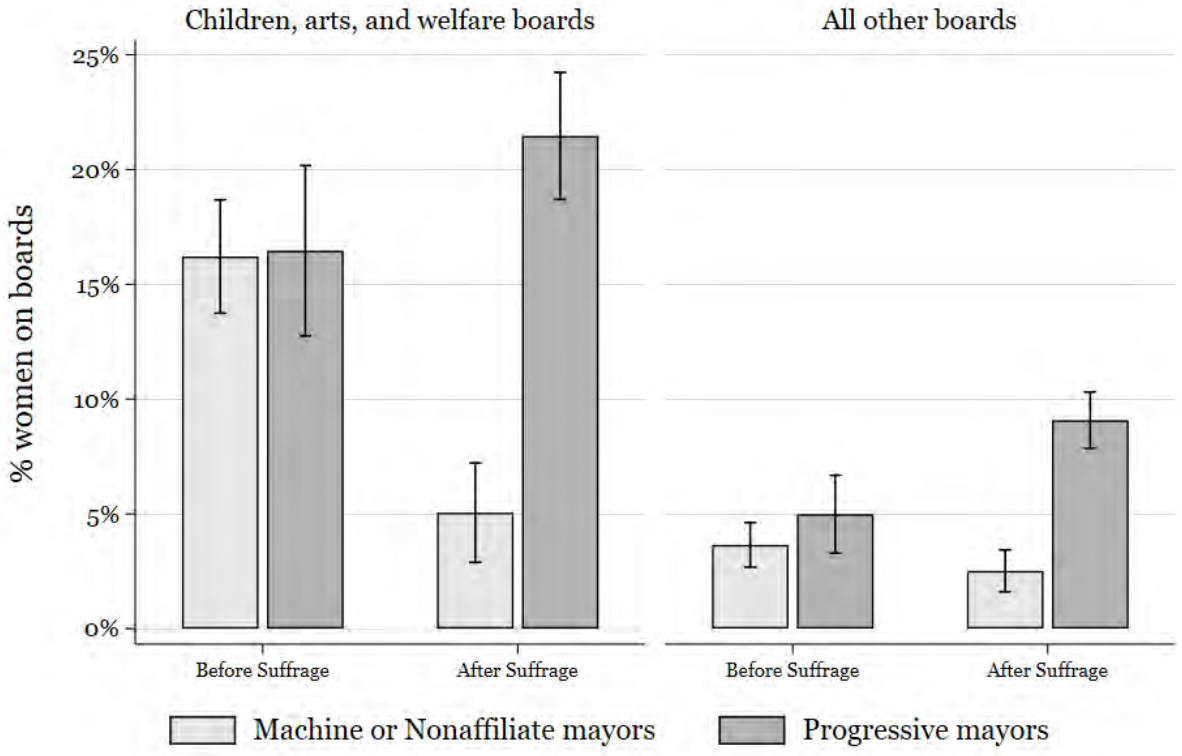


Note: post-hoc predicted values generated from Table 2, Model III estimates. Low % = at the twenty-fifth percentile (11%); Avg % = at the fiftieth percentile (16%); High % = at seventy-fifth percentile (19%).

We expect that the bottom-up impact of women's organizations and the top-down pull of political regimes will each interact with suffrage to shape women's representation across different kinds of boards, as indicated by the inclusion of interaction terms in these models. Examining the Model III regression specification, we find that the relative strength of women's organizing in the city increases women's representation on both children, arts, and welfare boards and all other boards, but the effect is larger for the former in the pre-suffrage period. In the post-suffrage period, women's organizational strength has little association with board representation on both types of boards (Table 2, columns 2 and 4). The substantive effects are illustrated in Figure 4: as the comparative

presence of women's organizations grows, we observe substantively large increases in women's representation on children, arts and welfare boards in the pre-suffrage period. But we do not see that suffrage increases this effect; if anything, there is a substantive decrease in the effect of women's organizations on representation on children, arts, and welfare boards, particularly in places with high levels of women's organizational strength.

Figure 5: Progressive mayors appoint more women to all boards, especially after suffrage; machine mayors do not



Note: Post-hoc predicted values from Table 2, Model III estimates.

Progressive mayors are associated with increases in women's representation across all kinds of boards in the post-suffrage period (see Model III coefficients in Table 2, columns 2 and 4), while there is no association between Progressive mayors and women's representation on either type of board in the pre-suffrage period. However, the

effects of Progressive mayors are substantively larger for the appointment of women to boards that are consistent with women's traditional interests, or more accurately, the regime's stereotypes about women's interests. Figure 5 shows this clearly: the increase in women's appointments after suffrage is much higher in children, arts and welfare boards, particularly for Progressive mayors.

Conclusions and future research directions

Our study examines how suffrage changed women's representation on local boards across four major cities, enlarging our understanding of the biggest expansion of the electorate in American history. Using newly collected archival data on women's board representation, the strength of women's organizations, and urban political regimes, we find that women's suffrage did result in greater descriptive representation for women, but only where the ideology of the regime was aligned with the perceived interests of women. The Progressive movement was strongly associated with women, both through associated organizations and in the activism of thousands of women for Progressive causes like temperance, social reform, clean government, and social welfare. As a result, many women activists were in social and political networks with Progressive leaders, and Progressive leaders had good reason to expect that potential women appointees shared their goals and values. When women had the power of the ballot—the power to reward or punish elected officials—Progressive leaders appointed women to local boards of all kinds at substantially higher levels than before suffrage.

The story is different for women's organizational strength. We expected that women's participation in organizations helped them developed the skills, expertise, and networks that increased their likelihood of appointment to local office, consistent with

the role of women's organizations in other settings (Prillaman 2023a; 2023b). And our data confirms this: the greater the presence of women's organizations, the greater the percentage of women on local boards. Unlike the case for regime affiliation, however, suffrage does not accelerate this effect. On the contrary, women's organizational strength has no association with board representation in the post-suffrage period. Future research might consider the ways that women's organizations adapted and changed their approaches following suffrage.

Our work also reaffirms a long strain of research that finds that women's access to representative bodies may not be sufficient to ensure that women's voices are present in all the spaces where important decisions are made. We find that the increase in women's representation following suffrage is much greater on boards that handled issues associated with the home and women's "appropriate" policy activism. However, boards in this category tend to have limited policy impacts and often limited authority, in comparison to boards that handle issues like zoning, planning, and taxes, which all have more substantial powers. Thus, our work shows that findings around women's access to particular remits on cabinets or committee appointments (Krook and O'Brien 2012; Barnes and O'Brien 2018; Payson, Fouirnaies, and Hall 2023) also apply to local government. Scholars interested in representation and policymaking might consider the degree to which gender segregation in local power replicated itself over time.

Our work is the examination of white women's access to power. While state-level suffrage and the Nineteenth Amendment offered de jure power to all women, the de facto reality was that white women were the primary recipients of these policy changes. Local boards were themselves the sites of white supremacy, used as tools to enforce racial segregation and retain power in the hands of white residents. For example,

Holman (2025) details how the Los Angeles Playground commission was the source of segregation of public facilities in the city and resisted integration even after elected leaders supported it. While we did not systematically collect data on race, the women board members we examine here are most assuredly majority white. Future research might consider the ways that the Voting Rights Act increased the representation of people of color on boards, leading to Browning, Marshall, and Tabb's (1984) observation of board membership serving as a key training group for the first elected leaders of color in local politics in the 1970s and 1980s.

Writing in 1926, feminist Suzanne La Follette lamented, "It is a misfortune for the women's movement that it has succeeded in securing political rights for women at the very period when political rights are worth less than they have been at any time since the eighteenth century" (Cott 1990, 160). La Follette, like many other suffragists, was expressing frustration that women's gains in electoral rights were not translating into public policy; that is, into influence over governance. This central question—under what conditions do voting powers translate into governance powers—remains highly salient in our politics today. Our research suggests that for the vote to translate into increased access to governing power requires a governing coalition aligned to the group's interests. Even after they gained the power of the vote, women's access to governance power depended on the preferences of the established male elite.

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Turning Votes into Power: New Women Voters and Access to Local Governing Power

Appendix A: Historical city boards and commissions data

Today, most American cities make information about the membership of their local boards and commissions available on their public websites. Locating this information for any year prior to the present, however, is a challenge, and that challenge only grows as we move further back in history. Such record-keeping was simply not a priority for over-burdened and under-resourced city governments. We draw from sourced identified by Holman, Iyer, and Wolbrecht (2025) for data on which boards exist, their members, and the gender of their members. Table A1 below provides a list of the years that we have data for each city, for board membership as well as women's organizing and political ideology (described in detail in Appendices B and C).

Table A1: Data on board membership, women's organizations and political ideology

Variable	City	Years available
Board membership	Boston	1901-1930; 1932; 1935; 1938
	Chicago	1888; 1889; 1892; 1900; 1903; 1907; 1908; 1911; 1913-1930; 1932-1937
	Denver	1880-1882; 1884-1894; 1896; 1899; 1900; 1905; 1907; 1911; 1915; 1920; 1923
	Los Angeles	1880-1938
Women's organizations	Boston	1879; 1891; 1900; 1911; 1922; 1935; 1941
	Chicago	1903; 1913; 1923; 1932
	Denver	1882; 1892; 1906; 1914; 1921
	Los Angeles	1891; 1901; 1911; 1921; 1931
Mayoral ideology coded	Boston	1901-1938
	Chicago	1879-1937

Denver	1878-1930
Los Angeles	1880-1938

The city of Los Angeles provides an electronic database of all public officials, both elected and appointed.[1] We downloaded these data for all elections held between 1850 and 2017. For each board member appointed in each of these years, the data indicate the date when their term starts and when their term ends. Figure A1 below provides a screen shot of what this data looks like from the database, with the addition of our gender coding.

Figure A1: Los Angeles Board Data

	city	officeyear	name	gender	board
3012	Los Angeles	1878	Hester, R. A.	female	Industrial Development Authority
3013	Los Angeles	1878	McKee, William	male	Board Of Education (Elected)
3014	Los Angeles	1878	Carrillo, Juan J.	male	Board Of Police Commissioners
3015	Los Angeles	1878	Bobenreith, John	male	Board of Health Commissioners
3016	Los Angeles	1878	Beaudry, Prudent	male	Board of Public Works
3017	Los Angeles	1878	Cohn, Bernard	male	Board of Public Works Commissioners
3018	Los Angeles	1878	Beck, Samuel J.	male	City Council
3019	Los Angeles	1878	Osborn, John	male	City Council, 3rd District
3020	Los Angeles	1878	Easton, James H.	male	City of Los Angeles (Appointed)
3021	Los Angeles	1878	Bilderrain, Refugio	male	City of Los Angeles (Elected)

After assembling the full dataset, we discarded elected officials (for example, city council and elected board of education in Figure A1), and created the board composition of each board in each year, and subsequently the fraction of women in a given year on a given board.[2] We estimated the gender of board members in Los Angeles using two different gender assignment algorithms to assign gender.[3] Both of these rely on

[1] https://cityclerk.lacity.org/chronola/index.cfm?fuseaction=app.Organization

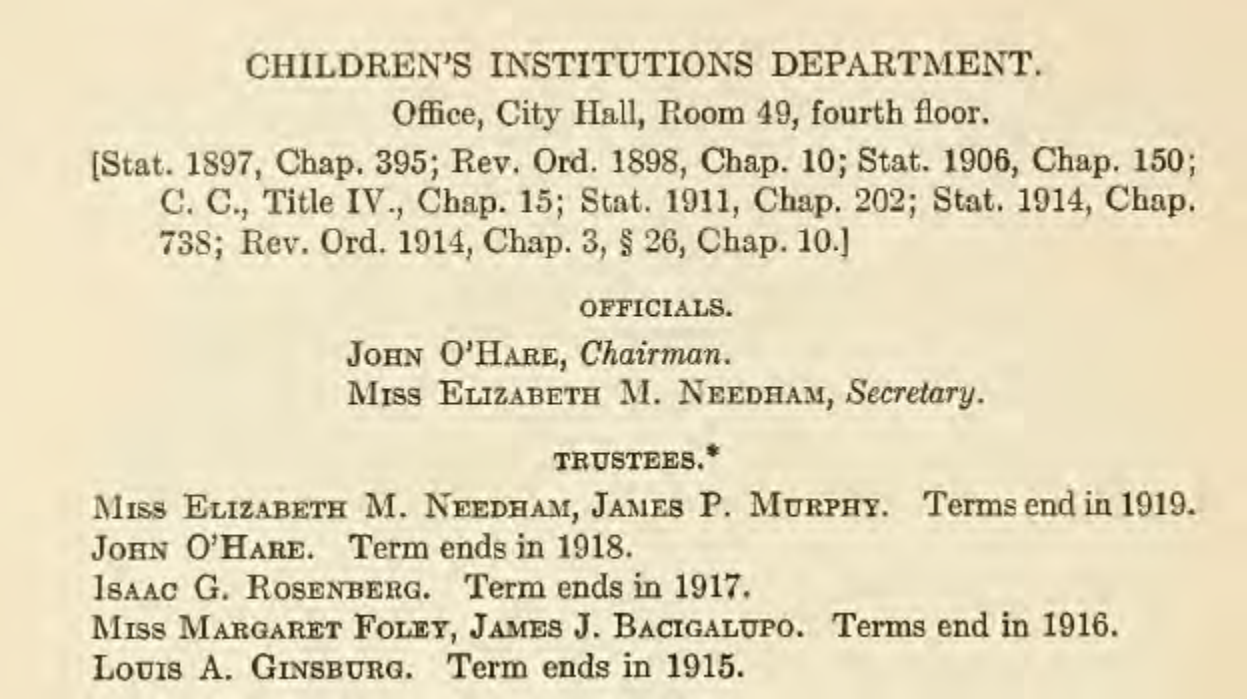
[2] Since some board members were in office only for part of the year, we constructed the fraction of women members as follows: we assign weights equal to the fraction of the year the member was in office (e.g., if a member was in office from October to December of a given year, that appointment is given a weight of 0.25). We then calculate the weighted number of women in office in a given year, as well as the weighted total number of board members, and calculate the ratio of the two.

[3] We use hand coding and genderize and genderdata, both R packages containing historical datasets about gender from the Social Security Administration.

databases from the U.S. census microdata (IPUMS) as well as databases of the Social Security Administration. These algorithms agree on the gender assignment of more than 95% of the names in our downloaded data; the remaining names were manually assigned a gender by the authors based on observation as well as internet searches for details on the specific board member.

Boston produced (and still produces) an annual municipal register that lists all members of "Officials in charge of executive departments," which includes all board members and officials appointed by the mayor and "various city, county, and state officials" who are appointed by the mayor or other local and state officials. We created a database of all appointments from these lists directly from the municipal registers. This draft is based upon data collected from Boston from 1901 to 1935 (except for 1933 and 1934). The authors or trained research assistants assigned gender during the data input process; in most cases, women members were identified in the records by a prefix of "Miss" or "Mrs." An example of this from 1915 is available in Figure A2.

Figure A2: Board information from the Boston Municipal Register



CHILDREN'S INSTITUTIONS DEPARTMENT.

Office, City Hall, Room 49, fourth floor.

[Stat. 1897, Chap. 395; Rev. Ord. 1898, Chap. 10; Stat. 1906, Chap. 150; C. C., Title IV., Chap. 15; Stat. 1911, Chap. 202; Stat. 1914, Chap. 738; Rev. Ord. 1914, Chap. 3, § 26, Chap. 10.]

OFFICIALS.

JOHN O'HARE, *Chairman.*
MISS ELIZABETH M. NEEDHAM, *Secretary.*

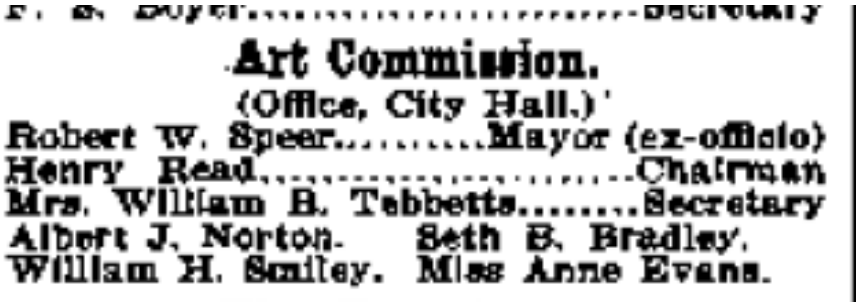
TRUSTEES.*

MISS ELIZABETH M. NEEDHAM, JAMES P. MURPHY. Terms end in 1919.
JOHN O'HARE. Term ends in 1918.
ISAAC G. ROSENBERG. Term ends in 1917.
MISS MARGARET FOLEY, JAMES J. BACIGALUPO. Terms end in 1916.
LOUIS A. GINSBURG. Term ends in 1915.

In Denver, Colorado, Corbett, Hoye, and Co (a private publishing company) produced a city directory that included a full accounting of all elected and appointed officials, as well as all businesses and individuals in the city and details on their locations. We are able to extract information about appointed boards from this directory for most years between 1880 and 1924. Denver's political and demographic characteristics change dramatically over this time period, including several charter reforms (notable, the establishment of a home rule charter in 1901) with a population that moves from five thousand residents in 1870 to more than 250,000 in 1920. The city and its boards and commissions reflect these changes. As such, the name, number, and size of boards changes across our time of interest. Like with Boston, the authors or a trained research assistant assigned gender to the board members as the data was extracted from the archival files (with women often identified as "Miss or Mrs"), with

information confirmed using internet searches. Figure A3 provides an example of a board from Denver.

Figure A3: Denver Board Membership from Corbett, Hoye, and Co



F. S. Hoyt.....Secretary

Art Commission.

(Office, City Hall.)

Robert W. Speer.....Mayor (ex-officio)
Henry Read.....Chairman
Mrs. William B. Tebbetts.....Secretary
Albert J. Norton. Seth B. Bradley.
William H. Smiley. Miss Anne Evans.

In Chicago, the annual Chicago Daily News Almanac and Yearbook reports on the membership of local boards and commissions in the City of Chicago and for Cook County. Because the organization of the Chicago Daily News Almanac and Yearbook changed each year, one of the authors went through each available year of the Almanac and listed out all the boards and commissions in the document. A trained research assistant then filled in the names of the board members for each of those boards; an example of what these board memberships look like is provided in Figure A4.

Figure A4: Chicago Daily News Almanac and Yearbook reports of Chicago leadership, including board presidents

482 CHICAGO DAILY NEWS ALMANAC AND YEAR-BOOK FOR 1911.

CHICAGO CITY OFFICIALS.

Photo by Cox.
E. J. BRUNDAGE,
Corporation Counsel.

Dana Hull Studio.
WALTER H. WILSON,
Comptroller.

Matzene Photo.
FRANCIS D. CONNERY,
City Clerk.

Walinger Photo, Chicago.
ISAAC N. POWELL,
City Treasurer.

HARRY OLSON,
C. J. Municipal Court.

Walinger Photo.
DR. W. A. EVANS,
Health Commissioner.

Moffett Photo.
B. J. MULLANEY,
Public Works Commiss'r.

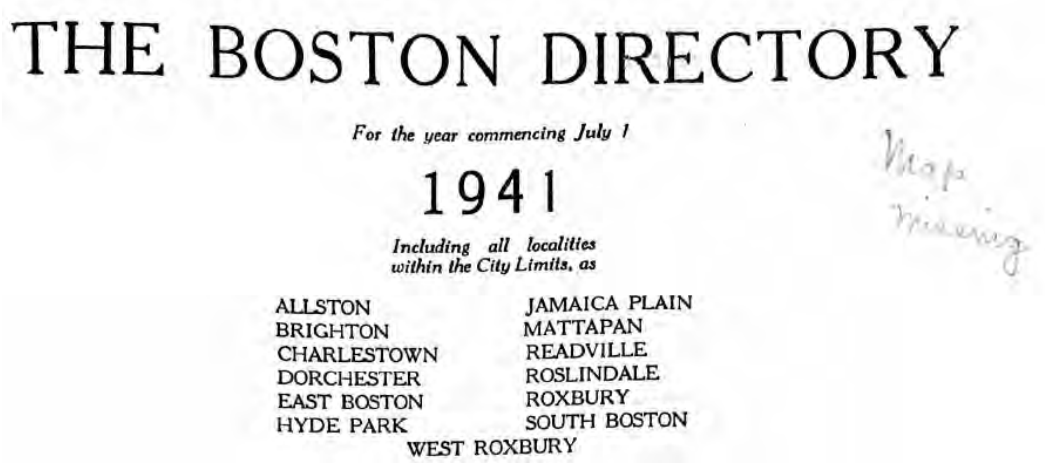
Coover Photo.
FRED A. BUSSE,
Mayor.

E. J. MAGERSTADT,
City Collector.

Appendix B: Women's organizational capacity

We collected counts of organizations related to women's interests and organizations with women as leaders by counting the presence of these organizations in city directories in each year. We draw on city directories, published on an off from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. In each city, we chose the earliest city directory available in each decade.

Figure B1: Example of city directory from Boston, 1941



THE BOSTON DIRECTORY

For the year commencing July 1

1941

Including all localities within the City Limits, as

Map missing

ALLSTON
BRIGHTON
CHARLESTOWN
DORCHESTER
EAST BOSTON
HYDE PARK
JAMAICA PLAIN
MATTAPAN
READVILLE
ROSLINDALE
ROXBURY
SOUTH BOSTON
WEST ROXBURY

For each year/decade, we identified the sections of the directory most relevant to local associations, clubs, societies, and so on. In each city, these fell into categories like a) societies and associations, b) clubs and clubhouses, c) secret and fraternal societies, d) civic and commercial association, and e) trades and labor organizations. Categories shifted across years and cities.

Figure B2: Category example from Los Angeles, 1931

Societies

Alianza Hispano Americano

Alianza Hispano Americano No 52 1605½ S Main
Joaquin S Serrano, Organizador General 3725 Whittier blvd
Logia Concordia No 88 1605½ S Main
Logia Suprema No 87 1605½ S Main
Sociedad Espanola de B M 936 W Washn

American Legion

Belvedere Garden Post No 323—5105 Whittier blvd
Down Town Post No 336—246 S Hill
Hollywood Post No 43—2035 N Hollywood av

American Woodmen

Camp No 1 (colored) 1209½ S Central av
Camp No 2 1209½ S Central av
Camp No 5 1209½ S Central av

Ancient Order of Foresters (Colored)

Court Solomon No 8877 776½ Wall
Pride of the West Circle No 207 (ladies) 776½ Wall
Rose of Los Angeles Circle 776½ Wall
Ruth Circle 776½ Wall

Ancient Order of Hibernians

Division No 1, Sons of Herman Hall 25th and Main
Division No 1 (ladies) Catholic Womens Club 927 Menlo av
Dillon Chapter No 2, 1024 S Grand av

Ancient Order of United Workmen

Los Angeles Lodge No 1, 1828 Oak office 117 W 9th R610

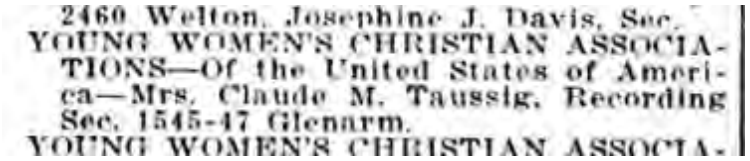
Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks

Los Angeles Lodge No 99, 607 S Park View

In each city, we collected the following, once a decade (see Table A1 for years collected in each city):

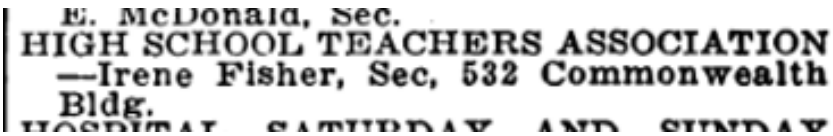
1. **Total number**. The total number of clubs in each category, to serve as denominator for the total level of organizing in the city.
2. **Number of women's clubs**. We identified these through the use of terms like ladies, sisters, women's, and names like Rebekah and Ruth (see Figure B3).
3. **Number of clubs with women leaders**. Most, but not all, club entries include a name or a few names in various leadership positions (see Figure B4).
4. **Count of any club** that falls into 2 or 3.

Figure B3: Example of a women's club:



2460 Welton, Josephine J. Davis, Sec.
YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS—Of the United States of America—Mrs. Claude M. Taussig, Recording Sec. 1545-47 Glenarm.
YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIA-

Figure B4: Example of a club with woman leader:



E. McDonald, Sec.
HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS ASSOCIATION —Irene Fisher, Sec, 532 Commonwealth Bldg.
HOSPITAL SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

Appendix C: Ideological alignment

We use primary and secondary sources to code whether each mayoral election in our time period of interest lead to a progressive, machine, or unaffiliated mayor being elected. For example, in our evaluation of the mayors of Los Angeles, we depend on scholarship that evaluates progressive and machine politics to classify some mayors (Schiesl 1975; Viehe 1988) and newspaper and biographical accounts to classify other mayors. We discuss the general political trajectory of each city below, focusing on the presence of Progressive and Machine regimes.

C1. Boston, MA

Boston, one of the first large American cities, underwent dramatic demographic changes in the 1800s and early 1900s. Of particular importance for Boston politics and life, the city was a primary destination for emigrating Irish, fleeing the potato famines of the 1800s (1845-1852). This, coupled with a general move towards urban life, led to a six-fold growth in the city's population from 1850 (130,000 residents) to 1920 (748,060). The Puritans who formed the majority of the political elites in the city, reacted with violence and nativism, including the growth of the anti-Catholic Know Nothing movement (Quinn 2010; Haynes 1897). Eventually, the Irish Catholics, through voting numbers, corruption, and scheming by machine leaders, gained political power in the city.

Boston is also the story of political machines and their power in America. By the turn of the century, the city would become a traditional machine city, where ward bosses and a political apparatus dedicated to trading incentives for political power thrived with power from Irish immigrant support (Erie 1990). Hugh O'Brien took office in 1885, marking the official start of Democratic Irish political power in the city. Although O'Brien would only serve for four one-year terms, his election kicked off more than seventy years

of Irish Catholic political power in the city, despite robust opposition from Republican Protestant "Yankees," who briefly captures the mayoral office in the early 1900s but generally were shut out of power by the machine for the first half of the 1900s. The machine's reign ended with James Michael Curley, the most famous of the Irish machine bosses, who took office in 1914 and held political control in the city until his defeat in 1949.

All the Irish machine mayors used Boston's board structure as a mechanism for power consolidation and patronage. By 1887, two years into his administration, O'Brien had installed Irish Catholics as the city clerk, the chairman of the Boston School Committee, and as representatives on a wide set of other powerful boards and commissions (O'Connor 1998). He also removed three members of the Park Commission and replaced them with loyal Irish Catholic Democrats, a move decried by a local newspaper (Blodgett 1976).

Under O'Brien, the city of Boston enacted a city charter reform. One of the primary targets of the reform was a ward system where councilors (12 in total) and aldermen (73 in total) engaged in a wide set of corrupt acts[4] (including how they managed boards[5]) and the mayor served as an "ornamental figurehead." This changed significantly under the new charter, which "placed in the hands of the Mayor the entire charge of and responsibility for the conduct of the executive business of the city."[6] This included shifting

[4] A local newspaper celebrated the change, noting that policy would no longer be made "by practically irresponsible committees of aldermen or councilmen, or both ... be placed under the charge of competent chiefs, each accountable directly and solely to the mayor, and he to the people, so that the humblest citizen may know in every case whom to seek, whom to blame and whom to praise at City Hall." *The Boston Transcript,* Jan 23, 1885

[5] In 1887, the *Boston Post* proclaimed that John H. Lee, chairman of the Committee on Sewers, "for the good of the entire city as well as the credit of the district. . . should be beaten, and badly beaten, too." *Post*, Aug. 18, 1885

[6] *Boston Transcript*, June 1, 1885, as quoted in Galvin (1977).

a broader set of appointments to the mayor.[7] O'Brien and subsequent machine mayors would take full advantage of this change. By the time Curley was elected in 1914, appointments were seen as a routine form of power granted to the mayor.[8]

C2. Chicago, IL

Chicago stands out as a representation of the growth and challenges of cities during this time period. Moving from a population of less than half a million in 1880 to more than 3 million in 1930, politics and policymaking were dominated by immigration, industrialization, and political corruption. The Great Chicago Fire had decimated the quickly growing city in 1871. And yet, even as the fire killed hundreds and left more than 100,000 residents without homes, the city and its government rebounded quickly. Aid following the fire, coordinated by the Chicago Relief and Aid Society, slowly became institutionalized by the city, resulting in the creation of a variety of boards in the 1870s and 1880s (Skarbek 2014).[9] In the decades that followed, organized charity efforts would play an essential role in the political development of the city (Kusmer 1973; Jentz and Schneirov 2012).

While Chicago would eventually become known as the home to the powerful Daley political machine, early attempts to control the city's diverse politically active population largely failed (Schneirov 2019). While mayors engaged in a variety of deeply corrupt behavior, fighting *between* those who wished to control public resources meant frequent

[7] Republicans in the state legislature repeatedly attempted to introduce additional changes that would reduce the power of the Irish Catholic machine, including passing legislation in 1903, 1904, and 1906 that changed the size and composition of the Board of Aldermen. The machine adapted and were able to elect Democratic and Irish Catholic representatives on the new Board of Aldermen after each attempt (Zolot 1975).

[8] Later in Curley's tenure, the city council would try to reign in Curley through the control of the Financial Committee (or FinCom) and "Curley's first move was to seek abolition of the FinCom through legislation. When that failed, he tried to bribe members of with plum jobs in return for resignations" (G. O'Neill 2012, 89).

[9] Kathleen McCarthy, the historian of the society, would note that "Most of Chicago's gilded age millionaires would serve on the board at some point in the careers" (as quoted in Jentz and Schneirov 2012, 49).

changes to who held power in the city. Adding in conflicts at the Cook County level and a powerful and large board of elected Aldermen, and Chicago's local government offered lots of opportunities to try to change politics and policy, most of them dead ends.

Chicago politics—and thus board creation and staffing—were dominated by fights over resources and corruption. Organized groups, including a powerful labor community, would regularly vie for important appointments, viewed as key "for distributing patronage" (Green and Holli 2013, 76). Early boards in Chicago included a powerful Police Board, an appointed Board of Education, and a variety of powerful culturally related boards, including parks, libraries, and the Art Institute. The fractious nature of Chicago politics led to the creation and sunsetting of boards at a rapid rate in the late 1800s.

The presence of specific boards and the rules governing appointments stabilized after the Chicago Charter convention of 1906-1907. The convention, aimed at drafting a home rule charter that would "consolidate Chicago's fragmented government" (Finegold 1995, 145). All members of the city council, county level elected officials, the library board, the board of education (still appointed), parks boards, and the sanitary board members participated in the convention. One consequence of the charter reform was a designation of a permanent set of appointed boards in the city. Substantial overlap between board members and influential individuals who sat on civic associations was common in Chicago, with many appointed positions—particularly cultural and park boards—seen as a key signal of an individual's social power in the city.

C3. Denver, CO

The city of Denver underwent dramatic changes in the size and politics of the city across the late 1800s and early 1900s. In 1870, the city had a population of 4,759 and was

largely just a stop for cattle trains moving across the state. But the construction of railroad lines into the city, the designation of the city as the state's capital, and a silver boom in surrounding areas drove the population up to over 35,000 by 1880, over 100,000 by 1900, and over a quarter of a million residents by 1920. In the early days of explosive growth, the city was largely governed by a criminal mob that was vaguely interested in politics. Mob bosses like Lou Blonger and Soapy Smith engaged in broad racketeering and corruption to run gambling and prostitution, and enforced those enterprises with violence (Spude 2012).

Soon, however (largely spurred by the 1893 depression and a collapse of the silver market), efforts at reform wrested control from these forces and lay the groundwork for first populist then Progressive reformers to control local politics. The 1893 market collapse also set off a variety of violence racist and nativist movements in Denver, eventually cumulating in the election of KKK members as the mayor of Denver in 1923 and the Governor of Colorado in 1925.

A variety of state and local crises and corruption prompted the emergence of an *Efficiency Movement* locally in Denver in the late 1890s. In 1902, Progressive reformers in the city successfully lobbied for the merging of the city and the county of Denver together, along with a comprehensive reform of the city's charter and political organization. These changes were accompanied by an alignment of the city government with economic forces in the city, who advocated for the creation of a broad set of appointed boards and commissions (King 1911).

Still, Progressives would not fully capture political control of the city until the 1910s, when they successfully elected a slate of local candidates to the mayor and city council. The Progressives quickly enacted a full commission style government, whereby

voters directly elected the heads of various agencies in the city (Mitchell 1966). Unter the "Galveston-Des Moines" commission form of government, cities elect no mayor or council, just a board of representatives, each of whom served as the chief executive of a city policy area like a streets, water, or civil service department (Sahn 2023; Rice 2014; Mitchell 1972). Denver Progressives were following other progressive reformers, who saw a commission plan as an opportunity to create structural changes that would "do more than tinker with charters or elect short-lived reform administrations" (Rice 2014, xvi).

Despite the enthusiasm for this "efficient" style of government, the Denver experiment quickly failed as commission heads could not agree on budgeting, cooperation, or get employees to perform basic operations in the city (Mitchell 1966). Reformers lost the next election, with a return to a standard strong mayor system of government. The local political machine and reformers traded election victories over the next twenty years, each desperate to erase the previous administration's work. While the number, form, and focus of boards and commissions shifted across this time, the stochastic nature of changes evens out, with a lasting legacy from both machine and Progressive administrations on which boards exist and who is appointed to these boards.

C4. Los Angeles, CA

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the population of Los Angeles exploded from 5,000 residents in 1870 to more than a million residents in 1930. With these population increases came political changes, including the creation of a much more stable local government (with a major charter revision in the 1920s) and a wide set of conflicts over political resources. A weak political machine emerged in the late 1800s but was quickly overrun by Progressive reformers, who held power in the city throughout the early

1900s. As Erie (1990, 521) notes, early interventions by the business community into politics in Los Angeles "had an ad hoc and episodic quality."

The rapid population growth in Los Angeles was accompanied by a great deal of scrambling to provide local services. Initially, the city produced policy through a variety of ad hoc boards and commissions; by 1870, there were more than 80 ad hoc boards in the city. Moving into the later decades of the 1800s, the total number of boards declined, but the ones in existence became more stable and powerful. The late 1800s thus saw the creation of boards still in operation in Los Angeles today like the Parks Board (1871), the Planning Commission (1880), the Public Works Board (1871), and the Board of the Public Library (1890). Los Angeles created an additional set of powerful boards, often due to the maneuvering of a strong Progressive movement, including Civil Service (1902), Housing (1904), and Efficiency (1913).

Progressive reformers in the city successfully lobbied for a full-scale revision of the city's charter by the state of California in 1925. The new charter created a broad set of new boards (many of which still operate today) and greatly expanded the power of specific boards that the Progressives believed would accomplish their goals of helping the city grow, encouraging business, and protecting white supremacy (Erie 1992).[10]

[10] The Los Angeles Progressives were also interested in any work that reduce the power of political machines. For example, George Alexander's attempts at mayor's attempts to produce a "real business administration" (Schiesl 1975) included the re-creation of a police commission that would have "the freedom in the administration of public affairs from the dictation of political bosses and influence of political considerations" (*Pacific Outlook* 1909).

Appendix D: Supplementary analyses

Table D1: Summary statistics of key variables

	N	Mean	s.d.	Min	Max
Panel A: Dependent variables (city-board-year level)					
Share of women on board	3,738	0.079	0.170	0	1
Whether board has any woman	3,738	0.242	0.429	0	1
Panel B: Explanatory variables (city-year level)					
State suffrage granted (indicator)	147	0.524	0.501	0	1
Women's organizations as a share of total organizations	117	0.159	0.070	0.011	0.347
City had a progressive mayor	147	0.279	0.450	0	1
City had a machine mayor	147	0.565	0.498	0	1
City had an unaffiliated mayor	147	0.156	0.365	0	1

Table D2: Suffrage and women's board representation: Robustness checks

Dependent variable: Women's share of board members

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	5-year period effects	City pop	#board seats	Machine mayors	Contemporaneous variables	Clustered standard errors
Suffrage (lag)	0.062*	0.030*	0.054*	0.107*	0.047*	0.056
	(0.019)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.030)
Progressive mayor (lag)	0.008	0.006	0.002		0.009	0.004
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.009)		(0.010)	(0.009)
Suffrage * Progressive (lag)	0.068*	0.064*	0.069*		0.070*	0.073*
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)		(0.012)	(0.016)
Share of women's organizations (lag)	0.385*	0.255*	0.359*	0.295*	0.303*	0.362*
	(0.114)	(0.089)	(0.089)	(0.090)	(0.095)	(0.133)
Suffrage * Women's org share (lag)	-0.654*	-0.395*	-0.603*	-0.539*	-0.570*	-0.620*
	(0.121)	(0.100)	(0.095)	(0.097)	(0.101)	(0.156)
100k population		-0.026*				
		(0.003)				
# seats on board			0.001*			
			(0.000)			
Machine mayor (lag)				-0.010		
				(0.007)		
Suffrage * Machine mayor (lag)				-0.066*		
				(0.010)		
Observations	3219	3219	3219	3219	3189	3219
R-squared	0.093	0.102	0.096	0.088	0.096	0.090

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; * indicates significance at 5% level. All regressions control for decade dummies, except when otherwise indicated.

Table D3: Suffrage and women's presence on boards

Dependent variable: Whether the board has any woman

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Suffrage (lag)	0.039*	-0.034	0.119*
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.041)
Progressive mayor (lag)		0.148*	0.007
		(0.016)	(0.027)
Share of women's organizations (lag)		-0.445*	0.983*
		(0.141)	(0.255)
Suffrage * Progressive mayor (lag)			0.202*
			(0.033)
Suffrage * Women's org share (lag)			-1.535*
			(0.273)
Observations	3219	3219	3219
R-squared	0.048	0.080	0.097

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; * indicates significance at 5% level. All regressions control for decade dummies.

Table D4: Full model results for Table 1

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Suffrage (lag)	0.018*	-0.009	0.056*
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.013)
Progressive mayor (lag)		0.055*	0.004
		(0.006)	(0.009)
Share of women's organizations (lag)		-0.210*	0.362*
		(0.050)	(0.089)
Suffrage * Progressive mayor (lag)			0.073*
			(0.012)
Suffrage * Women's org share (lag)			-0.620*
			(0.095)
Decade of 1890-1899	0.012*	0.016*	-0.021*
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Decade of 1900-1909	0.048*	0.059*	0.002
	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.010)
Decade of 1910-1919	0.063*	0.079*	0.022
	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.011)
Decade of 1920-1929	0.076*	0.111*	0.062*
	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Decade of 1930-1938	0.086*	0.120*	0.072*
	(0.013)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Constant	0.004	0.010*	-0.008*
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Observations	3219	3219	3219
R-squared	0.038	0.073	0.090

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; * indicates significance at 5% level.

Table D5: Full model results for Table 2

	Children, arts and welfare boards		All other boards	
	Model I	Model III	Model I	Model III
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Suffrage (lag)	0.003	0.147*	0.031*	0.031*
	(0.015)	(0.035)	(0.006)	(0.012)
Progressive mayor (lag)		0.001		0.006
		(0.018)		(0.008)
Share of women's organizations (lag)		1.058*		0.095
		(0.220)		(0.080)
Suffrage * Progressive mayor (lag)		0.150*		0.050*
		(0.025)		(0.011)
Suffrage * Women's org share (lag)		-1.616*		-0.270*
		(0.233)		(0.088)
Decade of 1890-1899	0.071*	-0.024	-0.010*	-0.020*
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.004)	(0.007)
Decade of 1900-1909	0.102*	-0.022	0.022*	0.007
	(0.011)	(0.025)	(0.007)	(0.009)
Decade of 1910-1919	0.119*	-0.004	0.033*	0.023*
	(0.011)	(0.028)	(0.005)	(0.011)
Decade of 1920-1929	0.167*	0.097*	0.036*	0.045*
	(0.019)	(0.032)	(0.009)	(0.013)
Decade of 1930-1938	0.183*	0.123*	0.043*	0.050*
	(0.029)	(0.036)	(0.013)	(0.016)
Constant	0.000	-0.033*	0.005	0.002
	(.)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Observations	926	926	2293	2293
R-squared	0.050	0.197	0.042	0.078

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; * indicates significance at 5% level.

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