From Women's Suffrage to Reproduction Rights?
Cross-national Considerations

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ABSTRACT

While women's suffrage has become completely institutionalized around the world, liberalized abortion is one indicator of the status of women that remains contested. Moreover, abortion rights differ fundamentally from women's suffrage in that they are not derivative of rights originally extended to men. In this article, we summarize and compare the results of prior studies that assess the effects of independence era, international linkages, modernization, state activism, and status of women on the rate of the adoption of women's suffrage and reproduction rights. We argue that world cultural models of progress and justice foster expanded models of political citizenship; these then provide more compelling rationales for further women’s rights.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES of social inequality increasingly include research on the status of women. Much of this literature presupposes that women are naturally citizens and persons, and proceeds to compare their life chances relative to those of men. The persistence of inequalities is an empirical generalization frequently reported in these studies and this generalization is in turn explained through some variant of patriarchal reproduction theory. Overlooked in this discourse is the degree to which egalitarian standards are now routinely invoked in assessing the status of women. The historical rise and elaboration of these standards facilitate the discovery of inequalities between men and women qua citizens and persons and the legal and moral classification of these inequalities as inequities. Egalitarian standards can and are activated by the more egalitarian social movements that are transforming the status of women throughout the world.

This paper reflects on two aspects of the changing status of women: the attainment of the franchise and the codification of reproduction rights. The right to vote and to seek public office is but one dimension of citizenship, a necessary albeit insufficient condition for its realization (Walby, 1994; Katzenstein, 1984). The
right to terminate a pregnancy or choose motherhood further adds to the citizenship status of women. The franchise is the classic example of a political right (Marshall, 1964); reproduction rights are best conceptualized as civil rights justified on privacy grounds. However, reproduction rights, and in particular, the liberalization of abortion laws, differ from franchise rights in that the former uniquely apply to women and are not derivative from rights earlier extended to men.

Both sets of rights, though, involve universalistic aspirations and claims carried by increasingly international forces. By universalistic we mean that advocates and critics alike invoke standards that apply to women worldwide. The rights of women, not just the rights of these women in this country, are debated and the debates are not limited by local or even national boundaries. Here, we address both the similarities and differences in these citizenship acquisition processes. We use these comparisons to highlight commonalities predicted by world culture theories and to discuss differences between more institutionalized versus more contested domains in the transformation of the status of women.

This paper examines worldwide patterns of both women's suffrage acquisition and the liberalization of abortion laws. The paper also highlights key findings from prior cross-national analyses of both women's suffrage acquisition (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan, forthcoming) and the liberalization of abortion laws (McEneaney and Ramirez, 1996). In both sections we emphasize the changing and more inclusive models of political citizenship and the increasingly international character of the franchise and abortion rights movements. We conclude by reiterating the general world culture argument to further interpret the comparative evidence.

**World Culture and the Political Incorporation of Women**

**Citizenship and Women**

There is an enormous literature on the political incorporation of the working class through the extension of the franchise (Marshall, 1964; Bendix, 1964; Lipset, 1963; Rokkan, 1970). Contemporary sensibilities cannot but hear the theoretical silence regarding the disenfranchised status of women throughout this work. The situation of the latter was known but not considered relevant. Thus, Rokkan (1970) provides information as to the dates of early female franchise acquisition but only men enter into his explanatory schema. Whether in the realm of civil, political, or social rights, the incorporated actors were imagined to be men (Orloff, 1993) or women related to men solely as mothers or widows (Skocpol, 1992). The historical construction of gendered boundaries between the state and civil society or between the public and the familial domains is thus ignored.

The gendered character of the state and citizenship preoccupies feminist scholars but some have dismissed the franchise as irrelevant, or worse as negatively co-optive