# A Hero for the Aged? The Townsend Movement, the Political Mediation Model, and U.S. Old-Age Policy, 1934–1950[1]

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During the Depression, the Townsend movement enjoyed varied success in seeking pensions for the aged. Social-movement models predict that success depends on the mobilization of resources or on collective action. Other theories predict that economic or political conditions cause the emergence of movements *and* changes in public spending. The political mediation model used here holds that, to succeed, a movement must reinforce political action with strong organization of members under favorable political conditions. This article defines "success" and employs various analytical and empirical strategies, including qualitative comparative analysis on state-level data, to appraise the models. Although each perspective has some support, the political mediation model offers the best explanation of the patterns of successes. The state and the political party system determine whether mobilization and action benefit a constituency and win acceptance for a movement organization.

Perhaps more than any other social protest movement of the Great Depression, the insurgency of the aged led by Francis E. Townsend has been credited with transforming public social provision in the United

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States. Its opponents such as Frances Perkins (1946) and Arthur Altmeyer (1966) have attested to its importance, as have social scientists ranging from Piven and Cloward (1971), to Quadagno (1988), to Weir, Orloff, and Skocpol (1988, p. 23). Yet such claims are paradoxical. The "Townsend plan"—$200 per month for those 60 years old or older who agreed not to work and to spend the money—failed, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt refused to meet Townsend. Holtzman's (1963) study dismisses the movement of the Townsendites (as its partisans often called themselves) as a failure. The question remains: Was Townsend a hero for the aged?

This dispute is paralleled by social science debates about the outcomes of mobilizations and what constitutes "success" for them (e.g., Gamson 1990, app. A; McAdam 1982; Jasper, Nelkin, and Poulsen 1990). Some researchers (e.g., Gamson 1990) discount the macrosociological context, assuming that resource mobilization or collective action will achieve results; others (e.g., Kitschelt 1986) argue that the political context will decide both the movement's form and the response to it. Yet they ignore an important question: Under what conditions do movements win benefits for constituents and recognition for the organization?

Our goal is to uncover the determinants of successes and failures. To do this we will first explore the Townsend movement's influence on the historical trajectories of old-age policy at the national level, examining the Social Security Act, the amendments to it in 1939 and 1950, and the wartime hiatus on social spending. Next we will use multiple regression techniques to analyze old-age assistance or "pensions" at the state level and we will analyze state "memorials" asking the national government to enact the Townsend plan—a form of acceptance. To examine the *conditions* under which the movement succeeded or failed we will employ Boolean, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), which locates combinations of conditions leading to qualitative outcomes (see Ragin 1987)—winning recognition, new advantages, and combinations of such victories and failures.

We argue that the political context mediates the impact of movement organization and action on its goals and sets the range of possible outcomes. Structural characteristics such as undemocratic political systems and patronage-based, traditional parties can deflect movement efforts. Middle-range influences of state bureaucracies and short-term political coalitions can intensify the impact of movements. To take advantage of openings, movements must back political action with organizational strength. We find that the movement helped the aged, but mainly through old-age assistance, on which the views of the Roosevelt administration and the Townsendites were not greatly in conflict. In some states the movement achieved high pensions and recognition, becoming in effect

a "member" of the polity, to use Tilly's (1978) terminology. Strength in organization and standard political action—in favorable political party and state climates—led to success. By contrast, the movement had only a minor effect at the national level in improving old-age assistance. Even this gain would have been unlikely without the existence of a moderately strong pro-spending coalition.

## TOWARD A POLITICAL MEDIATION MODEL OF PROTEST MOVEMENT OUTCOMES

Analyses of movement outcomes are hampered by two key problems. First, what is meant by success is rarely well defined and varies from analysis to analysis. Movement organizations usually attempt to influence the policies of the state to aid their members, but there is no standard way to assess benefits gained through these policies. Second, research on movement outcomes often does not take into account the causes of mobilization that might also influence outcomes (cf. Snyder and Kelly 1979; Isaac and Kelly 1981; Burstein 1981). This is a problem because movements often hope to effect changes in public spending policies, and the determinants of such policies are often similar to those of social-movement formation (see Skocpol and Amenta 1986; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988). Thus, analyses may exaggerate the effect of the movement on policy outcomes. To sustain a claim that a movement's actions are effective, a researcher must show that their influences are in addition to other causes of changes in policies.

### Success and the Social Movement

There are three levels of success for movements. The lowest is for the organization to achieve recognition from opponents or the state. Following Gamson (1990), we call recognition that does not win benefits "cooptation." At the highest level the challenger transforms itself into a member of the polity; that is, processes of government or interactions with opponents routinely favor the group (see fig. 1). A challenger's interests may be achieved through laws, state bureaus to enforce them, and the removal of the issue, favorably resolved, from the political agenda.[2]

At the middle level are gains in policies that aid the group. At this level, the movement organization can, at minimum, influence the thinking of the public or policymakers (Gusfield 1981). In the best case, the organization may have its own program enshrined in legislation. Many

[2] A revised version of Gamson's (1990, p. 29) typology, this figure is a static representation of outcomes; protest movements may move into different categories over time.

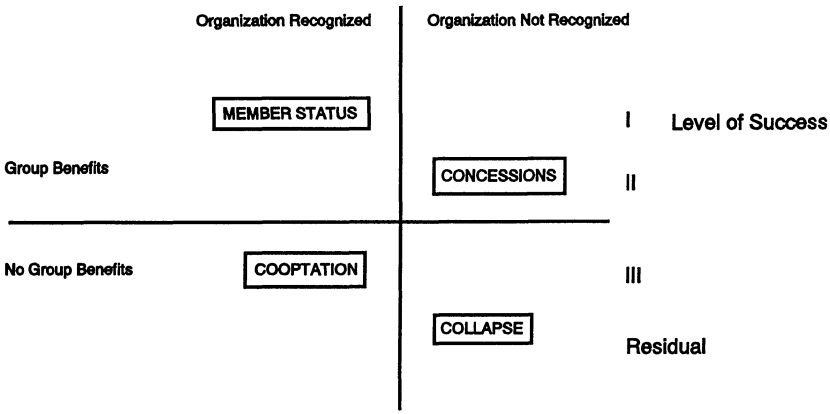


FIG. 1.—Levels of success for social movements

cases fall in the middle: the movement's activity may keep its issue on the political agenda, but without its opponents recognizing the movement organization. Sometimes new spending legislation benefiting the group results from such activity—what Gamson calls "preemption." We refer to these gains as "concessions," because the organization has aided the group and will seek to gain credit for it. Laws establishing group-based rights with bureaucratic and fiscal reinforcement move a group closer to polity membership than do short-term and discretionary spending laws.

## Theories of Movement Outcomes and Theories of Public Policy

Typically, theorists of movement outcomes focus on the structure and activity of movement organizations (e.g., Gamson 1990). Disputes center on the relative effectiveness of noninstitutional (Piven and Cloward 1971) and "assimilationist" (Lipsky 1968) means and on the optimal characteristics of the movement organization (Gamson 1990). Most agree that the movement's features matter most and that large movements engaged in coherent programs of collective action without displacement goals will typically succeed.

Others have argued that movements arise from individual responses to strains in the social fabric and are mainly ineffective (e.g., Smelser 1962). In this view, strains breed grievances, which lead to aggression, expressed partly in collective behavior. The goals of such movements are often labeled utopian. This view sees movements as correlating with policy change, but not causing it; instead, political institutions confront the strains that drive collective behavior. By resolving these strains—

perhaps by enacting public spending to address social needs—these institutions subdue the grievances uniting the movement.

Some economic theories of public spending have much in common with this grievance view of movements (see Skocpol and Amenta 1986, pp. 133–36; Quadagno 1987, pp. 111–17). One economic theory holds that industrialization causes social dislocations—such as destruction of the extended families who then no longer care for the aging population—that force political regimes to engage in public spending—such as old-age pensions. Some theories of capitalism argue that economic declines such as the Depression require public spending to legitimate the system. In both cases, economic conditions are the fundamental causes of both movements and public spending, and so movements have no independent effect.

Theories focusing on "political opportunity structures" (e.g., Kitschelt 1986) have similar implications for the outcomes of protest movements. In the strongest form of this argument, opportunity structures determine both movement formation and what may be perceived as gains won by the movement. A member of the polity may aid a movement in order to add to its coalition—perhaps by introducing a spending program favoring the challenger; the movement is an epiphenomenon—a sign that policies are changing, but not the cause of changes.

Some perspectives, focusing on party partisanship, the strength of organized labor, or on the state and political institutions, suggest that political conditions that influence spending policies may also spur movements. One view is that public spending programs are boosted when left or center political parties come into power (Shalev 1983; Myles 1984) or when labor movements are strong. These parties or the labor movement may also aid the mobilization of new groups. Others argue that state actors have distinct interests (Orloff and Skocpol 1984; Carruthers 1991) and may find it advantageous to encourage like-minded movements. Similarly, the policy framework of a polity may influence further innovations—and also movements (McCarthy, Britt, and Wolfson 1991).

## The Political Mediation Model of Movement Outcomes

We take theories of public spending policies into account by arguing that the outcomes of movement organization and action are mediated by the political context. Figure 2 highlights the differences between our political mediation perspective and other points of view. Unlike those using the standard social-movements models (arrows labeled "II"), we argue that mobilization and collective action are usually insufficient for policy changes; under some circumstances, however, mobilization and collective action may bring about changes. We avoid the strong view that the

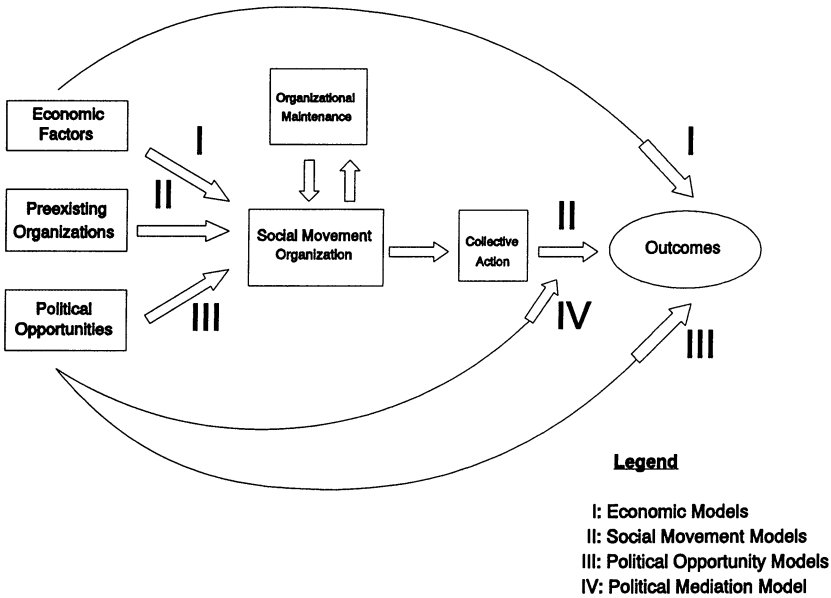


FIG. 2.—Models of social movement formation and outcomes. Legend: "I" represents economic models; "II" represents social movement models; "III" represents political opportunity models; "IV" represents political mediation models.

economy (arrows marked "I") or political opportunity structures (arrows marked "III") determine both movement formation and policy outcomes; we argue that movements can also influence outcomes, though no specific type of collective action is deemed the most efficacious. The political context mediates the relationship between action and outcomes (arrow IV).

Two key long-term aspects of the political context are the political system and the party systems. First, an undemocratic political system—indicated by restricted voting rights and a lack of choice between parties—discourages both social movements and public spending policies. Even where movements coalesce in such polities, they are unlikely to achieve their goals, symbolic or substantive.[3] Second, traditional or

[3] Referees argued that the model does not seem to fit the civil rights movement, which was based in the nondemocratic South. We disagree because the model of movement emergence is multicausal and does not rule out the possibility of movements arising in nondemocratic polities. Our model also implies that full success would be unlikely in nondemocratic polities. We believe this fits the case, as the civil rights movement

patronage-oriented parties regard movements as menaces and programmatic spending policies as threats to the individualistic rewards on which such parties thrive. If movements contend in such polities, traditional patronage parties are more likely to give *symbolic* benefits than to pass programmatic spending policies because discretionary and individualistic policies are the lifeblood of these parties. We expect that these structural blocks will also thwart the efforts of state actors and insurgents in the party system to enhance programmatic public spending.[4]

We also anticipate more than one political path to changes in public spending policies. Favorable middle-range and short-term party and state conditions can produce social-spending gains for many disadvantaged groups. Left-center parties and state-building officials can be forces behind public spending. However, movements can fill voids where such actors are insufficiently powerful. If the structure of a political system is conducive—a democratic polity with an open party system—and a movement is strong in organization and in standard politics, it can be successful even if it lacks state or party allies.

Moreover, for issue-oriented movements such as the Townsend movement, the existing policy framework is also important in accounting for the possibilities of success and failure. A movement devoted to a policy at odds with the established framework is unlikely to be recognized (see fig. 1). When the policy orientation of a movement conflicts with established policy frameworks and the plans of both the regime in power and state bureaucrats, a movement is unlikely to achieve full success (right side of fig. 1). The best possible outcome is to win concessions, the worst is to "collapse," because the movement is expected to go unrecognized. Polity members may attempt to woo away the organization's supporters by amending current programs benefiting the group, but without transforming the policy framework. When the plans of the movement and the policy framework of polity members do not conflict, the movement can achieve recognition, but must avoid co-optation, a level of success lower in our scheme than concessions (left side of fig. 1). The organization has a chance to win polity membership by possibly securing policies to aid its constituents. These chances depend not only on its collective action

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won its victories mainly through the actions of the federal government, whose officials were concerned with the voting behavior of African-Americans in the North, to bring recalcitrant Southern state legislatures in line (see McAdam 1982).

[4] Both conditions have mattered in American history (Amenta and Skocpol 1989). The democratization of the polity was early—there was almost universal white male suffrage by the 1830s—but uneven—the South constricted voting rights from the turn of the century until the 1960s. Traditional parties took hold in the 19th century and only gradually lost their grip on politics.

and organizational strength, but also on conducive state or party circumstances.

## THE FAILURE OF THE TOWNSEND PLAN AND THE RISE OF OLD-AGE SPENDING PROGRAMS

The Townsend movement was inspired by Townsend's September 1933 proposal: that all Americans over 60 years old be given $200 at the beginning of every month; everyone accepting this pension had to be retired and had to spend the sum by the end of the month. What was soon labeled the Townsend plan led in January 1934 to the not-for-profit "Old Age Revolving Pensions, Ltd." (OARP). The plan would end the economic woes of old age and solve unemployment, as the elderly would not compete with the young for jobs, and new spending would stimulate the economy; the mandatory spending provision would make old-age pensions change hands or "revolve" faster than other money. Also, the plan would not aggravate the deficit; it was to be funded by a "transactions tax," a multiple sales tax.

The plan, however, was criticized heavily. The political Left argued that the transactions tax was regressive. The Right feared that the tax would cut profits and the spending would undermine the incentive to work. Scholars and policy experts also disapproved. The tax was set at a seemingly low rate, but it implied much higher levies on finished goods. Many thought it unworkable to register farmers for the tax. Economists estimated that a 2% tax would have amassed only $4–$9 billion yearly (Twentieth-Century Fund Committee on Old Age Security 1936; National Industrial Conference Board 1936). No economist felt that the aged would spend faster than those taxed. Soon the Social Security Board (SSB) was orchestrating this criticism (Cates 1983, pp. 52–53).

Yet the plan was no utopian scheme. The aged would have the right to a large national pension, whose size would be determined by revenues from an earmarked tax. Such pensions would have been simpler to administer than the two-part system that won out. Even if the tax had netted only $6 billion per year, that would have meant pensions of approximately $50 per month, much higher than assistance. A national sales tax would have been regressive, but so was the tax on the payroll for social insurance.

In January 1935 a Townsend bill was introduced in Congress, and in April it was followed by an amended bill, taking into account many criticisms. But this bill was rejected handily in the House, in a standing vote mainly along partisan lines with Democrats in opposition, 206–56. The totals were low because many members, especially Western ones, wanted neither to support the bill nor to go on record as opposed. In

1939, another Townsend proposal passed through the Ways and Means Committee, but only because the movement's congressional supporters were joined by adversaries, who hoped to discredit the movement with a lopsided roll-call vote. The 1939 rejection, 302–95, was decisive—fewer members feared to go on record, with only 55 Republicans and 40 Democrats in favor. Although the movement remained active in the 1940s, no Townsend bill was ever again discharged from committee. The movement went unrecognized by its national-level opponents, and the plan failed to convince policymakers or the public.[5]

Despite these failures, innovations in old-age spending flourished. There were five main stages (see table 1). First, in the early 1930s states passed old-age pensions, and Congress promoted plans to aid these means-tested programs. Second, the administration saw through to enactment the old-age insurance and assistance titles of the 1935 Social Security Act. Third, assistance and insurance were advanced in 1939. Fourth, these programs suffered setbacks during wartime. Finally, at the end of the decade, old-age insurance was upgraded.

By 1934, 23 states had adopted old-age pension programs. Efforts by the national government followed. The Dill-Connery Bill, which called for national matching funds for pension programs, passed the House in 1933 and 1934 (Epstein [1938] 1968). Roosevelt's appointment of the Economic Security Committee in June 1934 led to the omnibus Economic Security Act (bill) of January 1935. This bill included old-age "assistance" providing matching payments of up to $15 per person per month for state-level, old-age pensions. It also included old-age insurance, a national program that provided benefits for those 65 years old and older who had qualified by paying a payroll tax levied on wage earners and employers on earnings up to $3000. This tax was to take effect in 1937; no benefits were to be paid until 1942. The bill became the Social Security Act in August 1935. In 1939 Congress expanded old-age spending. It added insurance for dependents and survivors, revised the formula to ensure larger payments at the beginning of the term, advanced the starting point for benefits to 1940 instead of 1942 and slowed scheduled increases in the payroll tax. Congress also increased the maximum benefits under old-age assistance to $20, allowing the states to increase them to a maximum of $40.

The next decade saw more downs than ups for old-age spending. In 1942, Congress froze previously legislated increases in the payroll tax

[5] In January 1939, an American Institute of Public Opinion poll found that, of those familiar with the Townsend plan, 35% were in favor and 53% opposed, the rest having no opinion. In July 1941, only 19% were in favor and 39% opposed, with 42% having no opinion (Cantril and Strunk 1951, p. 542).

TABLE 1

U.S. SOCIAL SPENDING POLICIES FOR THE AGED, 1930–50

| Period | Social Policy Developments |
|---|---|
| Recovery: The early depression and the first New Deal, 1930–35 | California adopts first compulsory old-age pensions legislation (1929). |
| | Dill-Connery bill (1933–34) to give federal support to state-level old-age pensions debated in Congress. |
| | Twenty-three states adopt compulsory old-age pensions by the end of 1934. |
| The "reform" era and the second New Deal, 1935–37 | Economic Security bill released, January 1935. The bill includes federal matching aid for old-age pensions, up to $15 per person. The bill also includes federal old-age benefits. A separate title includes a payroll tax; employers and employees each pay 1% of payrolls up to $3,000. The tax is scheduled to go into effect in 1937. |
| The late New Deal, 1937–40 | 1939 Social Security Act amendments provide insurance benefits for dependents and survivors, revise the benefit formula, advance benefits to begin in 1940, and hold employer/employee contribution rates to 1% through 1942. Matching payments for old-age assistance are increased to $20. |
| The prelude to war and the war years, 1940–45 | Proposed increases in employer/employee contribution rate denied by conservative Congress seven times. The payroll tax rate is frozen until 1950. |
| The immediate post-war period, 1946–51 | 1948 Social Security Act amendments narrow coverage by redefining "employee" and excluding certain quasi-self-employed occupational categories. |
| | The Social Security Act amendments survive Republican opposition in the House in 1949 and are passed by the Senate in August 1950. New standards extend old-age and survivors' coverage to new groups, liberalize eligibility requirements, increase benefits overall, and extend federal matching provisions for medical care for the aged. Payroll tax rates are scheduled to increase to 2.0% by 1953. |

SOURCES: Altmeyer (1966) and Amenta (1989).

(Leff 1988), and the middle war years were harsh for social spending generally (Amenta and Skocpol 1988). Moreover, Congress rejected President Harry S. Truman's bid to enact health insurance in 1946, and old-age insurance was amended in 1948 to exclude many previously covered workers. After the election of Truman and a Democratic Congress in 1948, however, a victorious bid to improve old-age and survivors' insurance began, culminating in August 1950. These amendments extended old-age and survivors' coverage to new groups, increased the level of benefits by about 67%, lowered eligibility requirements, and provided federal matching funds for care of the aged at medical institutions. The payroll tax was legislated to increase to 1.5% in 1950, and 2.0% in 1953 (Cohen and Myers 1950).

## THE IMPACT OF THE TOWNSEND MOVEMENT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: COMPARISONS OVER TIME

Were these old-age spending policies influenced by the Townsend movement? To answer this we analyze successful and unsuccessful episodes of national old-age policy-making and compare them with predictions based on the models. As noted above, national old-age laws were passed in 1935, 1939, and 1950, and failed during the war years. We contrast old-age assistance and old-age insurance and analyze roll-call votes. These four cases provide evidence that the movement had its greatest impact in 1939, when it was strong both in mobilization and in political action—and when the pro–social spending coalition was moderately large.

With 450,000 members in February 1935, the movement had made a great leap forward in the second half of 1935, as can be seen through its dues-based finances (see table 2). In the first three quarters of 1935, OARP had gathered about $555,000, but in the last quarter alone brought in about $350,000, an unprecedented sum. That summer OARP also spread beyond the West. The movement peaked in membership near the start of 1936. Membership probably reached about 1.5 million (Holtzman 1963)—more than 18% of all those 65 years old and older. In the spring of 1936, membership slumped, dropping to 613,000 in 1938—7.2% of the aged. Yet the movement showed a resurgence of strength in 1939, embracing about 8.7% of those 65 years old and older. Membership declined during the war, leveling off at about 2.5% of the aged. Afterwards it degenerated; by 1949 it had dropped to less than 0.5% of those 65 years old and older (see Amenta and Zylan 1991).

The movement's political action campaign lagged well behind the mobilization of members. Its political activity centered on endorsing candidates for Congress—Republicans and Democrats—who were in favor of

TABLE 2

TOWNSEND MEMBERSHIP, RECEIPTS, ENDORSEMENTS, AND THE STRENGTH OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRO-SPENDING COALITION, 1934–49

| Year | Paid Membership (in Thousands) | Gross Receipts (in Thousands of $) | Membership as % of Persons 65 and Over | Townsend-backed House Members Elected, in Actual Nos. and (% of Those Endorsed) | Democratic House Majority and Rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1934 | N.A. | 84 | N.A. | N.A. | 216, strong |
| 1935 | N.A. | 905 | N.A. | | |
| 1936 | N.A. | 562 | N.A. | 72 (28.8) | 242, strong |
| 1937 | N.A. | 369 | N.A. | | |
| 1938 | 612.5 | 453 | 7.20 | 147 (55.7) | 97, medium |
| 1939 | 761.6 | 622 | 8.69 | | |
| 1940 | 646.9 | 689 | 7.16 | 132 (58.1) | 106, medium |
| 1941 | 468.7 | 636 | 5.05 | | |
| 1942 | 297.6 | 486 | 3.11 | 172 (60.3) | 10, weak |
| 1943 | 271.8 | 424 | 2.75 | | |
| 1944 | 269.6 | 628 | 2.66 | 172 (75.1) | 52, medium/weak |
| 1945 | 234.8 | 512 | 2.23 | | |
| 1946 | 173.6 | 519 | 1.60 | 182 (66.2) | −57, weak |
| 1947 | 134.3 | 418 | 1.20 | | |
| 1948 | 92.7 | 353 | .80 | 135 (65.5) | 92, medium |
| 1949 | 52.8 | 328 | .44 | | |

SOURCES.—Holtzman (1963, pp. 48–49, 172), U.S. Bureau of the Census (1975, p. 10), *Congressional Quarterly* (1985), U.S. Congress, House of Representatives (1936), and Amenta (1989).

the plan.[6] Chosen by the movement's national leadership, the selections were publicized in the *Townsend National Weekly* (1938–50) and backed in rallies held by local clubs. Although the movement failed to endorse one-half of those voting for the plan in 1935 and running for reelection in 1936, in 1938 the endorsement policy worked, with 147 of its candidates winning. This was more than twice the number elected in 1936 and OARP's success rate had doubled to about 56%. The number of Townsend-endorsed House members averaged more than 150 in the 1940s, reaching a peak in the middle of the decade.

Other factors, however, especially the left-wing Democratic party coalition that took power in the 1930s, may have aided social spending. This pro-spending coalition is defined by the election of a president allied with the labor movement and other insurgent forces and a Democratic majority in Congress large enough to overwhelm Republicans and representatives of undemocratic regimes, who opposed spending (Amenta 1989). From 1933 to 1953, the White House was held by a reformist, labor-supported Democrat, and so the coalition depended on the size of the Democratic majority in Congress (see table 2). The largest pro-spending coalitions were in power from 1935 to 1939. From 1939 to 1943, the strength of the coalition was medium. From 1943 to 1945, the coalition was weak and did not regain its prewar level of health until 1949.

The political mediation model would expect that the movement would be most influential when it was strong in both membership and endorsements. Yet its influence would be magnified by a moderately strong Democratic coalition. We would expect that a very strong Democratic coalition by itself—as in the years from 1935 to 1938—would lead to widespread social-spending gains, including gains for the aged. A very weak coalition—as during the war period—would make any spending innovations impossible. For these reasons, we expect that the movement had its greatest impact in the late 1930s—when the movement was effective in both mobilizing membership and electing members of Congress and the Democratic coalition was moderately strong. The comparison of the legislative episodes of 1939 and 1949–50 is instructive because, although the Democratic margin was similar, the movement was stronger in 1939. In addition, we expect that the movement's endorsements would be more likely to convert Republicans than Southern Democrats because the latter were from nondemocratic political systems.[7]

[6] In 1938, 169 Republicans and 77 Democrats were endorsed. In 1942, 1946, 1950, and 1952, more Democrats than Republicans were supported. Endorsements ranged from 206 to 285 in biannual elections from 1936 to 1952.

[7] Examined separately, the movement's membership and its political action do not correspond to the ups and downs of public-spending policies in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Townsend movement had nothing to do with the earliest bids to enact old-age pensions in the states and little to do with the Social Security Act. As the Committee on Economic Security was constructing its proposals, the movement formed a political backdrop, putting pressure on the administration to propose something and on Congress to vote for something for the aged, accounting for some of the popularity of federal funds for old-age pensions. But the committee had planned at the outset to address economic insecurity due to old age, and the House had already passed matching funds for old-age pensions in 1933 and 1934. The movement was harmed by its incompetence in conventional politics. The first Townsend bill was poorly drawn up and amending the Economic Security bill was beyond its powers. The movement's regional isolation meant that only western representatives feared voting against it. The old-age spending programs that passed corresponded only marginally to the Townsend plan. Old-age assistance went only to the needy, and Congress, led by the Southern delegation, watered down the language concerning the adequacy of benefits (Quadango 1988). Old-age insurance began by collecting taxes without paying benefits. By contrast, the Townsend plan meant immediate, generous, and equal pensions to all of the aged as a right, in a pay-as-you-go manner. Old-age assistance was means tested and stingy; old-age insurance was to be given only to qualified recipients on the basis of previous wages. The movement opposed the *insurance* program—the administration's long-term solution—but could ally with those in favor of improving *assistance*—as the movement and the administration saw assistance as a short-term solution to poverty in old age.

One key circumstance was different during 1939. The movement had endorsed 147 winning House members including three on the important Ways and Means Committee (U.S. Congress, House of Representatives 1939). That year the SSB and the Advisory Council (U.S. Congress, House of Representatives 1939, pp. 3–43) proposed "variable grants" for old-age assistance, a program designed to appease southern Democrats that would keep pensions low in the South, place the fiscal burden on the federal government, and lower federal spending elsewhere (U.S. Congress, Senate 1939, pp. 95, 180). Instead, however, the maximum

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The movement came too late to influence the drive for old-age pensions and the Economic Security bill, taking off *after* the Social Security Act. Although the movement reached a recorded maximum of members in 1939, a year that old-age programs were upgraded, membership stabilized during the war, a poor period for social spending, and was minimal by 1950, when amendments passed. As for the political action, the movement did not make widespread endorsements until 1936, after the 1935 Economic Security bill. Moreover, the endorsement policy was successful during the war years—a dismal time for public spending.

federal matching payments for old-age assistance were increased from $15 per person to $20, and thus the issue was resolved in favor of the Townsend movement. Its influence was noted by Abraham Epstein: "If you keep the change to raise the Federal grant to $20 . . . you will merely inform all and sundry that all you have to do is to organize another crackpot group and Congress will raise it to $50, or $60, or $70, or $80. When are you going to stop this thing? Well, they will say 'It is Dr. Townsend that did the job,' and the Dr. Townsend movement will grow" (U.S. Congress, Senate 1939, p. 188).

In the wake of Townsend victories in the 1938 elections, Congress was anxious to give *something* to Townsend supporters. Because the Townsend plan and social insurance conflicted dramatically and the movement could not overwhelm administration forces, concessions were all the movement could hope to achieve.[8]

The war period, a third episode, demonstrates that a moderate level of movement strength in membership and political action was not enough to cause changes in spending, because when the political alignment in Congress is unfavorable, spending innovations and improvements are impossible. The Townsend movement kept its issue before Congress, in hearings led by Senator Sheridan Downey of California. Against its inclinations, the SSB drew up plans for a "double-decker" social insurance program, with each aged person receiving a flat amount while those who qualified received additional money according to previous earnings (Cates 1983, chap. 3). But the hearings were interrupted by the news from Pearl Harbor, and little was left of the pro-spending coalition by 1943. Old-age and survivors' insurance had its payroll tax cut instead.

In 1949, a Democratic coalition similar in size to that of 1939 came to power, and once again moderate changes in social spending occurred, though only in old-age insurance. Even with the collapse of its membership, the movement may have helped to elect representatives favorable not only to the Townsend plan, but to other old-age spending proposals. To determine the Townsend influence we analyze three key roll-call votes in the House. Our model expects two things: for the Townsend movement to influence the vote of members of Congress from states with voting rights, and for the movement to have only a marginal effect, as its membership had dropped severely by this point.

The pro-spending forces won two victories on rules forbidding floor amendments to the proposed bill. Republicans and conservative Democrats opposed the rule, which was intended to prevent crippling amend-

[8] Old-age insurance was amended to resemble more closely the Townsend plan's pay-as-you-go basis. These changes were proposed by the SSB and supported by administration Keynesians and business groups favoring reduced taxes (Leff 1988).

ments. On both votes, Townsend-endorsed Republicans were more likely to cross their party's line, while Townsend-endorsed Democrats were slightly less likely to cross theirs. On the second gag rule vote the differences were substantial—among Republicans. Townsend Republicans were six times as likely to defect from the party-line position as their party colleagues. On a third vote, to recommit the bill in favor of a weaker Republican substitute (the Mason amendment), the House voted the measure down, mainly along party lines. Townsend Republicans were nearly four times as likely to vote against their party as their colleagues. By contrast, the Townsend endorsement did not persuade Democrats from the South to vote for social spending. On the first two votes, Townsend Southern Democrats were actually more likely than their non-endorsed counterparts to vote against progressive social security measures. Only on the third vote, to decide on the adoption of the gag rule, were Townsend-supported Southern Democrats less likely than other Southern Democrats to cross over (8%–17%). The movement aided the cause, but did not have as strong an impact as in 1939.[9]

Overall, these episodes of national policy-making support our model. A lack of congressional support and feeble lobbying efforts during the deliberations over the Social Security Act minimized the influence of the movement. The movement had its greatest impact in 1939 when it was strong in both membership and political action. Yet the movement's influence required a specific political condition: a medium-sized, social-spending coalition. Although the movement was relatively strong in its endorsements during the war period, it was not enough to overcome a Congress opposed to social spending. The movement had some impact in 1950 through the long-term effects of the endorsement policy. But the lack of membership support meant that endorsed representatives who voted against old-age spending did not fear electoral reprisals. How endorsed members voted also provides support for our perspective. Townsend-endorsed Southern Democrats, who came from undemocratic political systems, were much less likely to dissent from the anti-spending line than Townsend Republicans. Moreover, the movement had its greatest success in old-age assistance, rather than old-age insurance. In assistance, the plans of the movement and those of the administration were not contradictory. Both groups could agree on the need for pensions. At

[9] On none of the votes did Townsend support tip the balance. On the first vote, Townsend influence was minimal, not enough to account for the 19-vote margin of victory. Although the Townsend influence was greater on the second vote, that one ran almost strictly according to party lines. The Mason amendment was defeated handily. For details, see the *Congressional Record,* 1949, vol. 95, pt. 10, pp. 13818–819, and pt. 11, pp. 13972–973.

the national level, however, the movement gained only a few new old-age benefits and was never fully accepted as a legitimate representative of the aged.

## THE IMPACT OF THE TOWNSEND MOVEMENT IN THE STATES: MULTIPLE-REGRESSION ANALYSES

Gauging the influence of the movement at the state level requires a focus on old-age assistance. By the end of 1938 each state had passed a program, but eligibility restrictions and benefit levels varied substantially (Amenta and Carruthers 1988). For instance, California was paying approximately $32 per month per person and Arkansas approximately $6—a disparity unwarranted by differences in incomes or costs of living.

Within the states the Townsend movement was at first concerned chiefly with the promotion of its national goals. Lobbying in state capitals often focused on passing legislative memorials to Congress entreating it to enact the Townsend plan. Many states passed such memorials, signaling that the movement was a force in state politics, but opening the way to the co-optation of the movement because memorials only gave recognition to the aged, but no advantages. The Townsend movement also pushed for improvements in old-age assistance (see, e.g., Putnam 1970, p. 122). In these bids the movement was able to coordinate with groups that opposed the national Townsend plan and wanted to work within the system defined by the Social Security Act. We first model the determinants of the *average old-age pension* per month at the end of 1940 (U.S. Social Security Administration 1950), a measure indicating generosity in old-age assistance. This measure was regressed against measures associated with socioeconomic and political theories of public spending policies. Many of these variables may have influenced the movement as well as policies, and so we control for these influences.

To capture socioeconomic approaches, the first measure is the percentage of *aged* people, those over 65 years old (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1935, pp. 36–37; 1941, pp. 5, 43). Also examined is the influence of the Depression. The measure *depression in manufacturing* operationalizes the degree of economic decline in industry and incorporates wage-earner employment in manufacturing at the Depression's low point in 1933 as a proportion of employment in 1929 (U.S. Bureau of Census 1938, pp. 765–69) and rate of unemployment from 1930 to 1933 (U.S. Social Security Board 1937, pp. 58–59) in a standardized index, which scores negatively for severe depressions; this figure is multiplied by a categorical variable for 20 industrialized states (Amenta and Carruthers 1988). Similarly, the measure *farming depression* is the average of gross farm income

in 1932, 1933, and 1934 divided by average gross farm income from 1924 through 1928 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1932, p. 608; 1935, p. 589).

Our first political measures concern long-term features of state and party systems. *Voting rights* is the natural logarithm of the percentage of eligible voters voting in the 1932 presidential election (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, pp. 1071–72). Moreover, in the 1930s many states were dominated by traditional, patronage parties (Shefter 1983). *Traditional party organization* strength ranges from a high of five in states where such organizations predominated to a low of one (Mayhew 1986, p. 196). To measure *administrative strength,* a middle-range characteristic, we score one for each year until 1929 that the labor commissioner had rule-making authority in the administration of safety laws (Brandeis 1935, p. 654). We expect that states with bureaus exercising such administrative powers would promote spending programs. In the shorter run, spending may have been encouraged where *Democrats in democratic political and open party systems* controlled the governments in the 1930s; such regimes would be likely to follow the lead of the national party. States with competitive parties, without dominant traditional party organizations, and with Democratic control of the government for four years or more during the 1930s are scored one; others zero (see Hansen 1983, p. 158). We also measure the timing of the *adoption of old-age pension* legislation, which scores states from one to 10 according to the number of years by 1939 that a state had passed a compulsory law (Epstein 1968, pp. 534–35; U.S. Social Security Board 1937, pp. 161–62; 1938), assuming that the earlier the program the greater the spending on it.

Movements, especially labor, and other organized groups may have also influenced pensions. *Union density* takes union members in 1939 as a percentage of the nonagricultural employed in 1940 (Troy and Sheflin 1985, p. 7-3; U.S. Bureau of Census 1948, pp. 194, 196). Next, we consider the per capita membership of the *Fraternal Order of Eagles* (1927, 1928, 1929, 1930), which began lobbying for old-age pensions in the 1920s. We calculated two measures of the strength of the Townsend movement and its collective action. *Townsend clubs* is the per capita number of clubs 1934–50 (Holtzman 1963, pp. 50–51). The overwhelming majority of these clubs were in existence by 1940, when the second wave of mobilization peaked. Examining the direct influence of clubs captures potential for disruptive activity and for sustaining other collective action, such as election endorsements. *Townsend-endorsed House members* is the percentage of a state's delegation won by Townsend candidates in the break-through election of 1938. This measure is an indirect gauge of influence on state-level elections; working for congressional candidates doubtless affected state politicians from overlapping districts.

Two measures are closely correlated (.73), and we enter the two measures separately in the models below.

We employed regression analysis separately on each of three theoretical groups: movements and interest groups; socioeconomic conditions; and political structures and circumstances. Using the results of this first round, we estimated models with indicators from all groups and then eliminated measures that proved insignificant. In each model we used as a control measure *per capita income,* initially computed for 1929 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, pp. 243–45). Most measures of social spending "efforts" take into account the income level of the state or country. Thus, we expect a strong and positive effect of this measure, but do not otherwise interpret it. The preliminary regressions (results not shown, but available on request) indicate that social-movement factors potentially had a great influence on old-age assistance. Yet standard socioeconomic and, especially, political models also do well in explaining average pensions. Are the effects of Townsend movement measures due to the relationship between socioeconomic and political conditions and group mobilizations?

To test this we estimated a model including the Townsend measures and socioeconomic and political factors. Even when we control for economic and political explanations of social spending, the Townsend movement has an independent influence (see table 3). In model 1, we used a stepwise procedure to eliminate the measures from initial regressions that did not aid the explanation. This model, which, with adjustments, explains about 74% of the variance, includes the control measure and measures of voting rights, patronage-party organization, administrative strength, open Democratic party rule, and the Townsend political action measure, which was significant at the .05 level. Model 2, which is similar but includes the measure of Townsend clubs, performed almost as well, explaining 72% of the variance, with adjustments. Here the Townsend indicator was not significant, however, at the .10 level.[10]

[10] A referee suggested that we examine the issue of spatial autocorrelation (see Anselin 1988; Doreian 1980, 1981). If this were a problem, it would make our OLS estimates less efficient. Because of the political autonomy of the U.S. states and mass media, we do not think there are strong theoretical grounds for it. However, we explored the issue, constructing a contiguity matrix with ones for states that spatially adjoin and zeros otherwise. We employed both "spatial effects" and "spatial disturbances" specifications (Doreian 1980), using the SPACESTAT statistical package (Anselin 1990). The OLS residuals for the models presented showed some evidence of spatial autocorrelation, but the substantive results changed very little when the spatial autocorrelation models were fitted (results not shown, but are available). The regression coefficients never changed sign, and significance levels changed only slightly. In no case did a coefficient for Townsend movement measure become less significant than in the OLS specification. Thus,the OLS results are not misleading.

TABLE 3

FOUR FULL MODELS OF THE SIZE OF OLD-AGE PENSIONS, 1940 AND 1946–48

| | 1940 | | 1946–48 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| INDEPENDENT MEASURES | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
| Movement model: | | | | |
| Townsend-endorsed House members, 1938 | .146** | . . . | .252** | . . . |
| | (1.68) | | (2.20) | |
| Per capita Townsend clubs, 1940 | . . . | .112 | . . . | .183* |
| | | (1.01) | | (1.49) |
| Political (opportunity) model: | | | | |
| Voting rights | .237** | .218** | .199* | .251** |
| | (2.32) | (1.86) | (1.55) | (1.94) |
| Traditional party organization | −.225*** | −.231** | −.180* | −.197* |
| | (−2.20) | (−2.08) | (−1.63) | (−1.66) |
| Administrative powers | .213** | .216** | .174** | .182** |
| | (2.38) | (2.36) | (1.87) | (1.91) |
| Democratic control in open, competitive system | .095 | .086 | .169** | .164* |
| | (1.07) | (0.95) | (1.77) | (1.67) |
| Control variable: | | | | |
| Per capita income | .557*** | .576*** | .456*** | .433*** |
| | (4.86) | (4.95) | (4.01) | (3.72) |
| $F$ | 22.76 | 21.56 | 18.53 | 17.08 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | .735 | .724 | .691 | .672 |

NOTE.—Coefficients are standardized and $t$-statistics are in parentheses. For definitions of measures, see text. $N = 48$.

* $P < .10$.

** $P < .05$.

*** $P < .01$.

In the 1940s the movement continued to elect members to Congress and to pressure state governments, which had two new incentives to raise assistance: the 1939 amendments, which increased the matching payments, and inflation due to war. To gauge the movement's influence we regressed the average monthly old-age pensions in 1946, 1947, and 1948 against indicators from the best-fitting models from previous trials. Because the measure of Townsend clubs gauges the movement *in 1940* its disruptive and other effects may not have registered by then. The movement also refined its endorsement policy, and we use the average Townsend-endorsed share of the House delegation in elections from 1938 through 1946. The results indicate that the movement had an effect independent of other factors. Model 3, which is similar to model 1, explains

69% of the variance, and the endorsements measure is significant at the .05 level. In model 4, which is similar to model 2, all measures are significant at the .10 level or better—including the measure of Townsend clubs—and the model explains about 67% of the variance.[11]

All in all, the movement and its political activities had a consistently positive effect on pensions in the 1930s and 1940s, despite strong influences of party and state. The findings also suggest that the political activity of the movement had a major impact on the initial size of pensions in 1940, but less of an effect in the next decade. By contrast the organizational strength of the movement had little impact on initial legislation, but was key to the improvement of old-age assistance in the 1940s. Organizational might and political action boosted old-age assistance, but in an uneven and historically contingent way.

Was the movement heard as a legitimate voice for the aged? To answer this, we employ the measure *Townsend memorials*—a sum of state resolutions demanding the national adoption of the Townsend plan (Holtzman 1963, p. 192)—as the best indicator of how politicians viewed the movement.[12] States with unresponsive political parties and systems might discourage memorials, although not as vehemently as they did pensions; state and party champions of high spending might not be as supportive of bids to validate the Townsend plan. We employ the same political model as before, analyzing memorials passed through 1939 and through 1945. The results (in table 4) indicate that the movement was crucial to the passage of memorials. The club measure predicts memorials in both periods. Traditional party organization has a consistently negative effect and administrative powers a positive one.

## SUCCESS AND THE TOWNSEND MOVEMENT: A QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

We want to know not only the determinants of pensions and the passage of memorials separately, but also combinations of these outcomes. In some states the movement approached membership in the polity: high

[11] In these models, the measures of voting rights and per capita income are also updated to 1940. When a lagged dependent measure is introduced, results indicate that the endorsement and club measures have effects on *changes* in pension levels from 1940 to the end of the decade (not shown, but available from authors).

[12] Our measure of recognition is a middle-level one, standing somewhere between "consultation" and "inclusion." Memorials validated the Townsend plan and the Townsend movement as a representative of the aged, but did not ensure full inclusion of the movement on all old-age policies. Thus, nowhere did the movement become a full member of the polity. Full membership would have entailed the passage of a state-level Townsend plan, with the movement involved in its implementation.

TABLE 4

FOUR MODELS OF TOWNSEND MEMORIALS, 1939 AND 1945

| INDEPENDENT MEASURES | 1939 | | 1945 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
| Movement model: | | | | |
| Townsend-endorsed House members | . . . | . . . | .442*** | . . . |
| | | | (3.51) | |
| Per capita Townsend clubs, 1940 | . . . | .525*** | . . . | .469*** |
| | | (4.38) | | (3.66) |
| Political model: | | | | |
| Voting rights | .249** | . . . | . . . | . . . |
| | (1.94) | | | |
| Traditional party organization | −.415*** | −.151* | −.203* | −.167* |
| | (−3.36) | (−1.32) | (−1.68) | (−1.36) |
| Administrative powers | .306** | .255** | .252** | .245** |
| | (2.40) | (2.34) | (2.14) | (2.10) |
| $F$ | 8.68 | 16.22 | 11.86 | 12.34 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | .329 | .493 | .409 | .420 |

NOTE.—Coefficients are standardized and $t$-statistics are in parentheses. For definitions of measures, see text. $N = 48$.

* $P < .10$.

** $P < .05$.

*** $P < .01$

old-age pensions and the acceptance of the movement; elsewhere it was rejected, and old-age assistance remained stingy. Some states gave concessions, as was true at the national level; at the state level, there were instances of co-optation—the movement was recognized, but pensions were low. In appraising combinational arguments, multiple regression can be marred by multicollinearity and the exhaustion of degrees of freedom (Ragin 1987, p. 162).

To address these issues, we employ qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). This examines many combinations of potential causes and generates the simplest combination of them leading to outcomes of interest (Ragin and Drass 1988). We argue that there is more than one path to public spending and that QCA can locate these paths. Yet QCA can employ only a limited number of (categorical) measures. One guide is to use measures from multiple-regression analyses (Griffin et al. 1991). We employ the two movement measures and the political measures of voting rights, traditional parties, administrative capacities, and Democratic party rule. Although these measures imply 64 combinations, many did

not exist. For instance, no state lacking voting rights had patronage parties or administrative powers or Townsend clubs. We assume that nonexistent combinations would not have resulted in high pensions or memorials because this would mean that all *logical* possibilities were *socially* possible—too strong an assumption.

To determine which states had high pensions, we take the standardized residuals from the regression of old-age pensions on per capita income, the control measure. Those states with large, positive residuals had the strongest programs because, relative to the state's income level, pensioners were doing better; we do not discount the possibility of poor states having generous old-age assistance. We categorize 17 states as having "high" pensions.[13]

One also must decide how to evaluate "contradictory" cases—a combination of potential causes that sometimes leads to the outcome in question, sometimes not. To code these contradictions as "positive" outcomes is to examine the conditions under which the outcome at hand was *possible*. To consider contradictions as "negative" instances is to locate combinations that *always* led to the outcome. We rely on a third procedure: recoding contradictions by their main tendencies, counting them as positive if more than half of the instances lead to the outcome, negative otherwise, and then reanalyzing the data (see Ragin 1987, pp. 113–18).

Although the mediation model predicts more than one route to high pensions, it also anticipates roadblocks: a lack of voting rights *or* the presence of traditional parties will prevent high pensions. One route implies social movements; in states with voting rights and open parties—where the movement was strong in *both* organization and political action—pensions should also be strong. Generous pensions are also implied by states with open and democratic politics and either Democratic party rule or administrative powers, or both.

The initial analyses locate three possible roads to high pensions (see chart 1). As expected voting rights *and* open parties were necessary for high pensions; alternatively, a nondemocratic political *or* a traditional party system prevented high pensions. Otherwise, one of the routes to

[13] Our decisions in constructing the six independent measures were determined mainly by theoretical considerations, partly by breaks in the data. For voting rights we took a strong view, discounting only the lowest nine states—all former states of the Confederacy. We counted a state as having traditional parties if it scored three, four, or five on Mayhew's (1986) five-point scale, 13 states qualifying. The 15 states whose labor commissions won rule-making authority before 1920 were scored as having administrative powers. We used a relatively inclusive strategy for the movement: for organization (clubs), the cutoff was 10 clubs for 10,000 persons, with 23 states qualifying. For Townsend-backed House members (endorsements), the standard was 53% of the delegation, a natural break in the data that included 19 states.

CHART 1

PATHS TO HIGH OLD-AGE PENSIONS, 1946–48, QCA ANALYSES

**Step 1. An Analysis of Cases in which High Old-Age Pensions Were Possible**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VOTING RIGHTS*traditional parties*DEM RULE*endorsements + | | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 3 | 33% | Raw Terms: | 3 13% |
| Contradictory | *TT* Terms: | 1 | 11% | Raw Terms: | 2 9% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*traditional parties*ADMINISTRATIVE POWERS*DEM RULE + | | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 3 | 33% | Raw Terms: | 3 13% |
| Contradictory | *TT* Terms: | 1 | 11% | Raw Terms: | 3 13% |
| VOTING RIGHTS* traditional parties*ENDORSEMENTS*CLUBS | | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 0 | 0% | Raw Terms: | 0 0% |
| Contradictory | *TT* Terms: | 4 | 44% | Raw Terms: | 17 74% |

**Step 2. An Analysis of Cases in which High Old-Age Pensions Were Certain**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VOTING RIGHTS*traditional parties*DEM RULE*endorsements*CLUBS + | | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 | 50% | Raw Terms: | 2 50% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*traditional parties*ADMINISTRATIVE POWERS*DEM RULE*clubs | | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 | 50% | Raw Terms: | 2 50% |

**Step 3. Three Routes to High Old-Age Pensions, with Contradictions Resolved**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VOTING RIGHTS*traditional parties*ADMINISTRATIVE POWERS*DEM RULE + | | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 4 | 50% | Raw Terms: | 5 31% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*traditional parties*DEM RULE*CLUBS + | | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 4 | 50% | Raw Terms: | 8 50% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*traditional parties*ENDORSEMENTS*CLUBS | | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 4 | 50% | Raw Terms: | 12 75% |

NOTE.—A measure in all capital letters indicates its presence; a measure in lower case indicates its absence.

"*TT*" refers to "truth table"; "Raw" refers to the number of actual cases adhering to the combination; DEM RULE refers to Democratic party control. An asterisk (*) indicates *and* in Boolean analysis; a plus sign (+) indicates *or* in Boolean analysis.

high pensions is suggested by political models—a combination of administrative capacities and Democratic party rule. A second is expected by the social-movement model—the presence of organizational strength of the movement *and* success in endorsements.

When the contradictions are recoded, the mediation model is greatly supported. The analysis indicates three routes, each requiring voting rights and an open party system. First there is a "standard political" route through Democratic party rule in the context of administrative powers. Next there is a "movement model" in which both the movement's organizational strength and successful endorsements are required for high pensions. Finally, there is the combination of Democratic party rule and the presence of Townsend clubs.

Although they might discourage the passage of memorials, traditional parties are not expected to preclude them by their presence. After all, memorials cost nothing and might appease the movement. There are three main routes to memorials when contradictions are replaced by main tendencies and only voting rights is necessary in each (results not shown). The first route requires strength in Townsend clubs and endorsements and also Democratic party control and a lack of administrative capacities. The other two require open-party systems and administrative capacities; in one of these, Townsend club strength is also required, indicating that this influenced memorials more than endorsements did.

In the best case for the Townsend movement, a state would have high old-age pensions and would have recognized the movement through the passage of memorials—this was as close as the movement came to becoming a member of the polity. The case of concessions would include a strong assistance program but no memorials. The case of co-optation is the opposite; the movement was recognized through memorials, but assistance was not generous. Finally, in some states the movement failed to be recognized, and pensions were low. "New benefits" means being categorized as having high pensions, and "recognizing" the movement means passing one or more memorials. All told, the movement achieved something like membership in the polity in 12 states (see chart 2). In five states the movement won concessions, while 10 states were cases of co-optation, and in 21 states the movement failed completely. Movement strength in organization and endorsements correlates with the level of success achieved, but does not entirely explain it.

In the analysis of membership, when the contradictions are replaced with their main propensities, QCA supports the mediation model (see chart 3). Polity membership results from movement power in both dimensions, in the context of favorable political conditions. Two paths, which include the bulk of the cases, require both aspects of movement strength, organizationally and through political action. Yet movement strength is not sufficient; one route requires administrative capacities and the second requires Democratic party control. The third path is through Democratic party control and administrative powers, but without Townsend endorsements. A movement can appear to succeed without having put out much effort—the case suggested by the strong form of the opportunity model.

We expect concessions, the more favorable of the partially successful outcomes, to occur where generous pensions do not derive from movement strength in both dimensions, and this is what we find. The two paths to concessions work through democratic political systems, without traditional parties—and both imply Democratic party control. However, the influence of the movement is only partial in each case. One route requires success in endorsements, but weakness in organization; the

CHART 2

TOWNSEND MEMBERSHIP IN THE POLITY, CONCESSIONS, CO-OPTATION, COLLAPSE

**Level 1: Twelve States Where the Townsend Movement Approached Polity Membership**

1. Colorado*
2. Washington*
3. Oklahoma
4. Arizona*
5. North Dakota*
6. Idaho
7. Wyoming*
8. California*
9. Massachusetts
10. Minnesota*
11. Oregon*
12. South Dakota*

**Level 2: Five States Where the Townsend Movement Received Concessions**

1. Utah
2. Nebraska*
3. Kansas*
4. Iowa*
5. New Mexico

**Level 3: Ten States Where the Townsend Movement Was Co-opted**

1. Florida*
2. Montana*
3. New Hampshire
4. Wisconsin*
5. Nevada
6. Michigan
7. Illinois
8. Indiana*
9 Arkansas
10. Georgia

**Residual: Twenty-one States Where the Townsend Movement's Prospects Collapsed**

1. Louisiana
2. New York
3. Ohio
4. Maine*
5. Missouri
6. Connecticut
7. Rhode Island
8. Texas
9. Vermont*
10. Pennsylvania
11. New Jersey
12. Tennessee
13. Mississippi
14. Alabama
15. South Carolina
16. Maryland
17. North Carolina
18. West Virginia
19. Kentucky
20. Virginia
21. Delaware

NOTE.—For definitions of the three levels of success, see text.
* States where the movement scored high on both membership and endorsements.

other, the opposite. Partial movement strength under favorable political conditions brought benefits but not recognition.

By contrast, we expect that, in the context of favorable circumstances, movement strength in organization only might lead to co-optation. A context of traditional political parties, regardless of movement efforts, can also lead to this minimal level of success. This point of view is supported (see chart 3). One route works through traditional parties and movement strength in both dimensions. Under pressure, patronage parties recognized the movement, but did not pass high pensions. A second route works through strong movement organization, in an open party system with voting rights, but without Democratic party rule or adminis-

CHART 3

PATHS TO "MEMBERSHIP," "CONCESSIONS," "CO-OPTATION," AND "COLLAPSE"

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Three Routes to Polity Membership for the Townsend Movement** | | | | |
| VOTING RIGHTS*trad parties*ADMIN POWERS*ENDORSEMENTS*CLUBS + | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 40% | Raw Terms. | 5 50% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*trad parties*DEM RULE*ENDORSEMENTS*CLUBS + | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 40% | Raw Terms: | 5 50% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*trad parties*ADMIN POWERS*DEM RULE*endorsements | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 40% | Raw Terms: | 2 20% |
| **Two Routes Leading to Concessions for the Townsend Movement** | | | | |
| VOTING RIGHTS*trad parties*admin powers*DEM RULE*endorsements*CLUBS + | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 1 50% | Raw Terms | 1 50% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*trad parties*ADMIN POWERS*DEM RULE*ENDORSEMENTS*clubs | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 1 50% | Raw Terms: | 1 50% |
| **Three Routes Leading to the Co-optation of the Townsend Movement** | | | | |
| VOTING RIGHTS*TRAD PARTIES*admin powers*DEM RULE*ENDORSEMENTS*CLUBS + | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 1 25% | Raw Terms: | 1 25% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*trad parties*ADMIN POWERS*dem rule*endorsement + | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 50% | Raw Terms: | 2 50% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*trad parties*dem rule*endorsements* CLUBS | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 50% | Raw Terms: | 2 50% |
| **Three Routes Leading to the Collapse of the Townsend Movement** | | | | |
| voting rights*trad parties*admin powers*DEM RULE*endorsements*clubs + | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 1 20% | Raw Terms: | 7 39% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*TRAD PARTIES*admin powers*endorsements*clubs + | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 40% | Raw Terms: | 8 44% |
| VOTING RIGHTS*TRAD PARTIES*ADMIN POWERS*dem rule*endorsements | | | | |
| Positive | *TT* Terms: | 2 40% | Raw Terms: | 3 17% |

NOTE.—All results are with contradictions resolved into their main tendencies (see text). A measure in all capital letters indicates its presence; a measure in lower case indicates its absence.

*"TT"* refers to "truth table"; "Raw" refers to the number of actual cases adhering to the combination; DEM RULE refers to Democratic party control. An asterisk (*) indicates *and* in Boolean analysis; a plus sign (+) indicates *or* in Boolean analysis.

trative capacities. Although the third route—administrative powers in the context of a democratic political and open party system—is difficult to appraise, overall the analysis of co-optation provides support for the mediation model. The causes of movement collapse mainly parallel those of membership. The QCA locates two routes through traditional parties and a failure of endorsements. The third route involves the absence of

voting rights, traditional parties, administrative capacities, both movement dimensions, *and* the presence of Democratic party rule—the typical Southern state.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Using several comparative strategies can help to make theoretical sense of a case study (Amenta 1991). Comparisons over time and across policies and states helped to answer different questions about the influence of the movement. Our approach also suggests that studies of the influence of movements need to take into account the determinants of movements as well as their organization and actions. These determinants may influence what seem to be successes won by the movement. More than that, however, studies of the development of public spending policies need to pay attention to the different routes to them (Therborn 1989). States could reach high old-age spending not only by standard statist and party ways, but also through routes paved by the Townsend movement.

For state bureaucracies and left-center parties to aid a movement, its constituency needs to be electorally desirable, and the movement cannot have "displacement" goals (Gamson 1990, app. A). The aged were a desirable constituency, but the Townsend plan sought to displace the administration's programs, limiting its influence. Although the movement made some notable gains, it never won membership in the polity and did not survive postwar prosperity. Old-age insurance, the program that preempted the name "social security," has perhaps raised the aged to a status where legislation and bureaucratic and fiscal practices combine to enforce their interests, but different forces won these victories (Derthick 1979). The movement aided those outside the system—those in the generation of the movement's activists—by upgrading old-age *assistance,* the main form of public social provision for the aged until 1950.

Analyzing the causes of social-spending policies, we find some support for economic, political, and movement models. Our analyses also indicate that the American experience can be examined with models based on European cases. With respect to social movements, this article provides evidence that movements need to be strong both organizationally and in standard politics to gain recognition and benefits for their supporters. Endorsements need organizational backing to make them effective, and organizations without political support are vulnerable. Strategic and tactical diversity can only aid a movement.

Yet the impact of social movements is mediated strongly by political conditions. Nowhere was the movement able to achieve both new benefits and recognition without favorable conditions in the polity. Among long-term political circumstances, democratic rights and open parties had

gatekeeping roles. The key middle-range condition concerned state bureaus promoting public protection, and the main short-term condition concerned the rule of a Democratic party that in the 1930s and 1940s was almost a functional equivalent of a labor party on the European model (Greenstone 1969). Both facilitated movement gains. In states where the political or party system thwarted the goals of the movement, people contributing to the movement got little for their dues. By contrast, in states where politics were democratic, parties were open, and state or party sponsors were available, the movement did win advantages. Townsend was a hero for the aged but only on some issues, and his movement required help.

The results also question the degree to which the American political system has been "open" to the influence of social movements (Kitschelt 1986). As a system, it was simultaneously open and closed. Some parts of the system encouraged movements and helped them to succeed. Other parts—those without voting rights and open party systems—discouraged movements and prevented them from succeeding. Representatives of national-level nondemocratic political systems and traditional party systems made it difficult for movements to achieve more than partial victories. Multiple points of entry into the system make it seem more open to influence than it has been. The extension of voting rights throughout the nation and the decline of the traditional party organizations have opened the system more. Yet the expanding role of campaign money in American politics in the past two decades may have a similar discouraging and dampening effect on the efforts of movements (Edsall 1984).

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