

What Motivates Activism? Evaluating the American Prohibition Movement

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THE BIG PICTURE

The movement to prohibit alcohol in the late 19th and early 20th-century United States was spearheaded by women activists campaigning on the platform that alcohol consumption had especially negative consequences for women, children, and family life. Prior literature has suggested other motives for the enactment of prohibition laws, particularly racial and ethnic tension (Andrews and Seguin 2015). Are counties with a prohibition activist presence different from those without? Do the characteristics of prohibition counties change over time? Were the counties where women fared worse in social outcomes the ones that actually introduced temperance regulations?



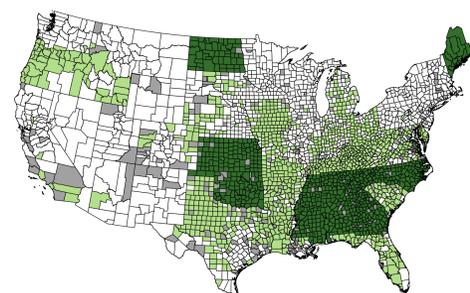
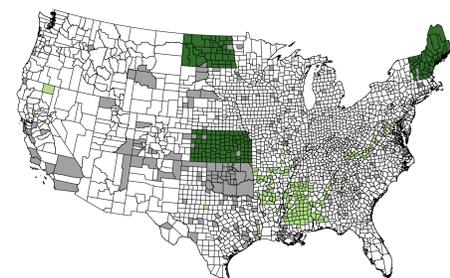
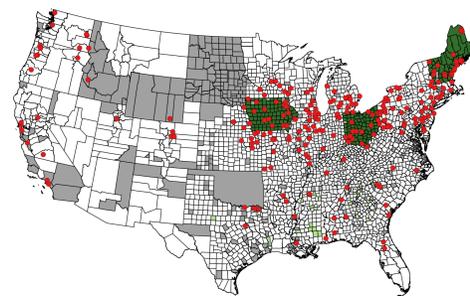
LITERATURE

- Andrews and Seguin (2015) – a county bordering another county with a different demographic background is more likely to adopt prohibition (“spatial threat”)
- Lewis (2008) – higher voter turnout for prohibition referenda in areas with more drinking establishments
- Luca, Owens, and Sharma (2015) – alcohol prohibition in India reduces crimes against women
- Jacks, Pendakur, and Shigeoka (NBER Working Paper No. 23372, 2017) – the repeal of federal prohibition led to a spike in infant mortality

DATA

- Sechrist (2012): Prohibition at the county and state level before the passage of the 18th Amendment
- U.S. Census, 1% and 5% samples (IPUMS database): Individual-level marriage outcomes for 1880, 1900, 1910
- Minutes of the National WCTU: 1884 county-level donations Women’s Christian Temperance Union for the World Fair

PROHIBITION, 1880 (top), 1900 (middle), and 1910 (bottom)



Key:
White: wet county
Light green: dry county
Dark green: dry state
Grey: Unmapped due to missing data or inconsistent border
1884 WCTU donations in red

	Dry by 1900	Wet in 1900	Dry by 1910	Wet in 1910
Mean 1870 Pop	13,778	16,422	12,109	21,899
1870 % Illiterate	21%	19%	25%	11%
1880 % Married	61%	61%	61%	62%
n	241	1905	1283	879

	Donation	No Donation
Mean 1870 Pop	42,406	13,790
1870 % Illiterate	8%	20%
1880 % Married	60%	61%
n	209	1979

METHODOLOGY AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

1. Can Women’s Marital Status Predict Prohibition Preferences?

$$Absent_{ic} = \alpha + \beta_0 Proh_c + \beta X_{ic} + \epsilon$$

where $Absent_{ic}$ is an indicator variable for “absent spouse” for woman i in county c , $Proh_c$ a measure of prohibition preference, and X_{ic} is a vector of county and individual characteristics (age, population, region-city size, urban vs. rural indicator, race, literacy*).

	Early Selection	Donations	Late Selection
All women	-0.020 (-0.67)	0.00003 (-0.00)	-0.174*** (-10.67)
n	1504776	1504776	1043507
mean	0.023	0.023	0.025
Illiterate women	0.057 (0.93)	-0.013 (-0.42)	-0.119* (-2.40)
n	297727	561716	102688
mean	0.031	0.031	0.034

Logit specification, $p < 0.01$ ***, 0.05**, 0.1*. Test statistics in parentheses.

Literacy control for first specification; illiterate women only for second.

Early: Selected into prohibition before 1898, when Prohibition movement led by WCTU (1880 outcomes)

Donations: Evidence of 1884 donations to WCTU (1880 outcomes)

Late: Selected into prohibition after 1898, when men in Anti-Saloon League played a bigger role (1900 outcomes)

Interpretation: Counties that select into Prohibition late have lower rates of absent husbands. Counties that show support during earlier era of female leadership do not have significantly different rates of absent spouses.

2. Difference in Means + OLS. Donation (vs. no donation) Counties and Early (vs. late) Counties

	Donation - No Donation	Early - Late	Early	Donation	Late
% white	0.094*** (5.94)	-0.229*** (-8.25)	-0.076*** (-3.21)	0.199 (1.27)	-0.04 (-0.15)
% black	-0.090*** (-5.72)	0.230*** (8.34)	0.116** (2.28)	0.298 (1.79)	-0.454 (-1.63)
% foreign	0.050*** (4.48)	-0.051*** (-3.59)	0.003 (0.20)	0.18* (2.27)	-0.799*** (-5.94)
% German	0.018*** (4.55)	-0.009*** (-3.36)	-0.053* (-2.13)	0.014 (0.06)	-1.435*** (-5.43)
% illiterate	-0.114*** (-9.71)	0.104*** (5.40)	-0.006 (-0.58)	-0.426*** (-4.26)	0.555*** (5.00)
% Catholic	0.008 (0.58)	-0.032* (-2.54)	-0.032* (-0.17)	-0.026 (-7.20)	-0.662*** (-9.60)
% Protestant	0.040* (2.48)	0.026 (0.98)	-0.025 (-2.08)	0.006 (-0.68)	-0.142* (-1.42)
% urban pop.	0.125*** (5.05)	-0.018 (-1.54)	-0.006 (1.24)	0.048 (0.21)	-0.081 (-2.42)
n	2290	2290			
constant			0.068 (-1.02)	-0.051 (1.03)	0.795 (-1.53)
R-squared			0.063	0.056	0.256

$p < 0.01$ ***, 0.05**, 0.1*. Test statistics in parentheses. Alternate specifications, including regional covariates + interactions, available upon request.

DISCUSSION

- The prohibition movement was built on a platform of improving outcomes for women, but we find no differential selection into support for prohibition based on average rate of spousal absenteeism for women during the period when the prohibition movement was led mostly by the WCTU. There is evidence for positive selection later, when men’s involvement grew.
- Counties that show early support for the temperance movement in the form of 1884 WCTU donations or early prohibition laws have higher average population shares of Germans and immigrants, while late prohibition adopters have lower shares.
- Counties that selected into prohibition late may better fit the profile described by Andrews and Seguin (2015) of prohibition support as a nativist platform.

NEXT STEPS

- Exploring outcomes: is there a causal impact of going dry on marriage and divorce rates or children’s educational attainment? (Plan to use linked full Census)
- How do outcomes under prohibition policies vary for different racial groups, or among native-born vs. non-native residents?
- What other political, economic, or social characteristics + interactions explain demand for prohibition laws?

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