

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The ERA's Failure

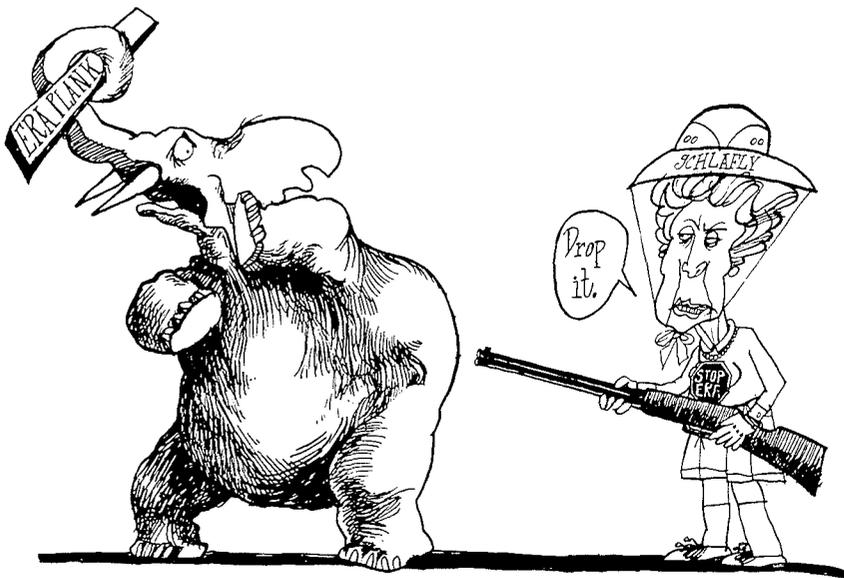
"The Equal Rights Amendment, Public Opinion, & American Constitutionalism" by Louis Bolce, Gerald De Maio, and Douglas Muzzio, in *Polity* (Summer 1987), Northeastern Political Science Association, Whitmore Hall, Amherst, Mass. 01003.

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has had a stormy history. Submitted by Congress to the states in 1972, the amendment had been approved by 33 state legislatures by 1974. Progress was slow thereafter. The ERA finally died on June 30, 1982, three states short of the 38 needed for ratification.

Bolce, De Maio, and Muzzio, all political scientists at Baruch College, find that public support for the ERA fell steadily during the decade that it was considered for ratification by the states.

Surveys by the Center for Political Studies show that 73 percent of the public supported the ERA in 1976, but that in states whose legislatures *rejected* the amendment, this support fell 27 percentage points from 1976 to 1980. Although black support for the ERA remained essentially constant (never falling below 60 percent in rejecting states), whites were "less supportive and considerably more volatile." In 1976 almost 60 percent of whites in states that rejected the ERA supported the amendment, but two years later their support had fallen below 40 percent.

In 1976 female supporters outnumbered female opponents by two and a half to one in nonratifying states. Yet after 1978, ERA support among women in these hostile states had dropped below 40 percent.



Conservative Phyllis Schlafly was a formidable foe of the Equal Rights Amendment during the 1970s, linking ERA to abortion, divorce.

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Further, ERA foes in nonratifying states were more knowledgeable, more passionate, and more interested in the amendment than proponents were. The dissenting voices were louder, since more opponents were registered to vote, and had voted in a previous election. While 38 percent of ERA opponents in 1976 knew whether their state legislatures had acted on the amendment, only 21 percent of supporters knew this.

The ERA failed, the authors contend, because "the largest shifts in public opinion, which often precede policy innovations, went *against* ERA," and by 1980, the majority supporting ERA had "vanished entirely." After the federal amendment died, many states that ratified the ERA in the early 1970s—such as New York and Wisconsin—later reflected this collapse of popular support by rejecting state ERA's of their own. Public opinion in the states that rejected ERA, the authors conclude, "seems unlikely to shift in favor of the amendment in the near future."

Ike the Diplomat

"Ike and Hiroshima: Did He Oppose It?" by Barton J. Bernstein, in *The Journal of Strategic Studies* (Sept. 1987), Gainsborough House, Gainsborough Road, London E11 1RS, United Kingdom.

In his 1963 memoir *Mandate for Change*, Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969), recalling his "grave misgivings" about atomic weapons, contended that he had warned Secretary of War Henry Stimson in 1945 against using the bomb. "It was my belief," Eisenhower asserted, "that Japan was, at the very moment, seeking to surrender."

But did Eisenhower really warn Stimson? Bernstein, a historian at Stanford University, thinks not. "Strong circumstantial evidence" suggests that Eisenhower did not, in 1945, question the atomic bomb's use.

Consider Henry Stimson's diary. Stimson mentions discussing the A-bomb on many occasions; but the bomb is not mentioned in the two discussions he records having had with Eisenhower in July of 1945. (Far from a warning, Stimson writes in his entry for July 20, 1945, that he had a "pleasant chat" with Eisenhower.) Both Manhattan Project director Gen. Leslie Groves and Stimson aide Col. William Kyle say that it would have been "out of character" for Eisenhower to dissent from the opinions of his superiors in Washington. Eisenhower, Bernstein contends, "was not likely to tell the Secretary of War what Stimson did not want to hear."

Moreover, memoirs by contemporaries supporting Eisenhower's claim fail to stand up to rigorous scrutiny. Eisenhower's son John, in his memoir *Strictly Personal* (1974), wrote that his father was depressed by his meetings with Stimson, but he did not suggest that his father felt the atomic bomb's use was wrong. A statement from Eisenhower in Gen. Omar Bradley's 1983 memoir *A General's Life*, which supports "Eisenhower's own post-war recollections," was inserted after Bradley's death by ghostwriter Clay Blair. Blair admits that he did not solicit Bradley's opinions before writing the passage.

The "only supporting evidence" that Eisenhower opposed the bomb in