



## Scholar Exchange: Nineteenth Amendment Briefing Document

### INTERACTIVE CONSTITUTION RESOURCES

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- [Resources for the 19th Amendment](#)

### BIG QUESTIONS

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- What did the [Nineteenth Amendment](#) say, and who were some of the key figures who made it a reality?
- What was the Seneca Falls Convention? What was the Declaration of Sentiments? And what did this key moment suggest about the roots of the women’s rights movement in the mid-1800s?
- What were the constitutional arguments advanced by those supporting the women’s vote and those advanced by those opposing it?
- How was the Nineteenth Amendment story an example of federalism in action?
- What did the Nineteenth Amendment settle when it was ratified, and what work remained in the decades ahead?

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, [United States v. Virginia](#) (1996):

**“Our Nation has had a long and unfortunate history of sex discrimination.’ . . . Women did not count among the voters composing ‘We the People’; not until 1920 did women gain a constitutional right to the franchise.”**

Carrie Chapman Catt (1923):

**“To get the word male . . . out of the constitution cost the women of the country fifty-two years of pauseless campaigning. . . . During that time they were forced to conduct:**

**56 campaigns of referenda to male voters;  
480 campaigns to urge Legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters;  
47 campaigns to induce State constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into State constitutions;  
277 campaigns to persuade State party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms;  
and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses.”**

**Big Idea:** With the Nineteenth Amendment, women won the right to vote. This Amendment grew out of decades of advocacy by the suffragists and their allies. Women’s suffrage began out West in the late 1800s and eventually spread to the rest of the nation—culminating in the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Even so, it would take many more years—and the hard work of the Civil Rights Movement—to extend voting rights on the ground to all women, including women of color.

### A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AMENDMENT

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1 | <https://constitutioncenter.org/>

Before turning to the [Nineteenth Amendment](#) itself, it's important to place this Amendment in the context of the whole Constitution.

Remember, the [Original Constitution](#) left elections and voting largely to the states. But over time, the American people added a series of constitutional amendments that extended voting rights protections to new groups—for instance, based on race ([15<sup>th</sup> Amendment](#)) and age ([26<sup>th</sup> Amendment](#)). The Nineteenth Amendment is a key part of this larger constitutional story—banning sex discrimination in voting. So, while the states still play a central role in elections, various amendments—including the Nineteenth Amendment—established an increased role for the national government in some contexts.

So, with that background information in mind, let's begin, as we always do when interpreting the Constitution, with the Constitution's text:

**“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”**

**“Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”**

This powerful text transformed the Constitution—banning gender discrimination in voting.

Suffragists modeled this amendment's language after the [Fifteenth Amendment](#)—which was ratified after the Civil War and banned *racial* discrimination in voting. The opening language parallels the Fifteenth Amendment—beginning with a powerful reference to a U.S. citizen's **“right . . . to vote.”** From there, it changed the Fifteenth Amendment's reference to **“race, color, or previous condition of servitude”** into its own reference to **“sex.”** So, rather than banning racial discrimination in voting, the Nineteenth Amendment focused squarely on sex. Finally, while the original Constitution left voting primarily to the states, the Nineteenth Amendment (like the Fifteenth) gave Congress new powers to enforce voting rights—this time, to prevent sex discrimination at the ballot box.

The suffragists settled on this language in 1878—over forty years before the eventual ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. And this proposal—known as the “Susan B. Anthony Amendment”—was introduced in each Congress (unchanged) for the next four decades. Congress finally approved it on June 4, 1919. And it was ratified by three-fourths of the states in August 1920.

## HISTORY OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

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### 1776 – 1820s: Early Restrictions on Suffrage

So, let's begin with the Founding generation.

America declares its independence, and states begin to write new constitutions. A little over a decade later, the [U.S. Constitution](#) is ratified—leaving issues of elections and voting primarily to the states. Most states establish property requirements for voters. So, during this period, voting is generally restricted to white male property owners. (But many states, particularly in the North, allowed free African American property owners to vote as well, and Vermont and Pennsylvania had more universal white male voting.)

Early Americans thought that men served as the heads of their households, representing the views of their wives, daughters, etc., in public life. Society trusted these men to vote using their independent judgment. At the same time, society excluded women from the vote for the same reason that it excluded other groups like the poor and those without property. They were viewed as dependent—economically, politically, and legally—on other people.

### Early Suffrage in New Jersey

But even then, there *was* a notable exception—**New Jersey**. There, unmarried female landowners voted in state and local elections from 1776-1807. However, in 1807, New Jersey closed off this brief period of women’s suffrage—limiting the vote to “**free, white male citizens.**”

### 1820s – 1830s: Age of Jacksonian Democracy

Now, let’s skip ahead to the 1820s and 1830s. This is the Age of Jacksonian Democracy. We see massive changes to American democracy during this period.

For instance, we see a move towards universal white male suffrage. States abolish property requirements. (All but South Carolina.) Poor white men are now able to vote throughout most of the country. (That wasn’t the case at the Founding—but it is the case by the 1830s.)

### Early Women’s Rights Movement (for Married Women’s Rights)

But we still see restrictions for many other groups, including women. (Restrictions on African American and immigrant voting grow as well, in both the North and South.) Even so, by the mid-1800s, women are already beginning to push back. Reformers are organizing conventions and lectures, circulating ideas in newspapers, and petitioning state governments to recognize women’s rights. Of course, the early women’s movement was about far more than the vote. The first formal women’s rights convention focused primarily on obtaining rights for married women.

Under existing law throughout the nation, married women couldn’t hold property on their own. They couldn’t enter into contracts. They couldn’t sue or be sued. And they couldn’t vote. (The legal doctrine was known as “**coverture**”—meaning that husbands assumed the legal rights and obligations of their wives when they became married.) During this period, society didn’t view women as equal and autonomous individuals, but instead as part of a family governed by a male head of household. The husband represented his wife and children in public life and voted on behalf of their interests. On this view, women’s suffrage was unnecessary because husbands already represented their wives. (This was known as “**virtual representation.**”) And women’s suffrage was viewed by many as dangerous because it threatened family harmony and women’s traditional domestic roles. Early suffragists rejected this male dominance, pushing for their right to **self-representation**.

### Seneca Falls Convention

Most famously, in 1848, abolitionists **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** and **Lucretia Mott** organized a convention to discuss women’s issues in Seneca Falls, New York. (Stanton had just helped secure a victory months earlier—securing New York’s Married Women’s Property Act of 1848. This was the culmination of a years-long effort.) The local gathering attracted nearly 300 people. Stanton prepared a manifesto (The Declaration of Sentiments)—literally, a rewriting of the Declaration of Independence—to draw attention to the inequalities and oppressive laws that women endured. Signed

by 68 women and 32 men, the Declaration of Sentiments included a suffrage resolution. However, women’s voting rights was only one demand among many. Again, the burning issues of the day centered on married women—their right to contract, own property, and sue or be sued. As news of the convention circulated, some voiced their support, while others criticized the reformers for operating outside of their traditional duties as mothers and wives inside the home.

#### Declaration of Sentiments:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal.” Isn’t that great? Stanton used the Declaration of Independence as a model—invoking the **natural law** principles of the American Revolution to **guarantee equal liberty** for women. Instead of listing **grievances** against the British king, she included a list of complaints against *men*. Her Declaration closed with **12 demands**, including equal education, equal pay, property rights, and the “**sacred right to the elective franchise.**” (Interestingly, Mott wanted to remove the suffrage language.)

After Seneca Falls, the first national women’s convention met in Massachusetts and drew 1,000 attendees. Furthermore, in the 1850s, more and more African American women joined the fight by attending—and speaking at—various conventions.

### HISTORY OF WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

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After the Civil War, many women focused on voting rights as *the* way to secure reform.

The post-war transformation of American society—beginning with the abolition of slavery—opened up discussions about the reach of equality. Women petitioned Congress to be included in this moment of change. At first, suffragists joined with other traditional allies to advance a vision of universal rights—pushing for suffrage for *both women and* African American men.

#### 1865 – 1870s: Reconstruction Era Movements for Equality

Following the Civil War (in a period known as Reconstruction), the Republican Party—the Party of Lincoln and of Union—pushed a series of constitutional amendments. During this period, Congress debated the reach of equality and the definition of citizenship. The goal was to **set new constitutional baselines for post-Civil War America.**

This effort led to the ratification of the [Thirteenth Amendment](#) (abolishing slavery), the [Fourteenth Amendment](#) (writing promises of freedom and equality into the Constitution), and the [Fifteenth Amendment](#) (banning racial discrimination in voting).

Women—long active in the fight to abolish slavery—fought to be included in this period of constitutional transformation. Women participated in the anti-slavery movement before and during the Civil War. And many suffragists—including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—played a central role. While publicly speaking out against slavery, women also petitioned Congress. The abolitionist movement helped to sustain the early women’s movement—enabling women to learn the art of political protest. It also offered a constitutional vision of universal rights that inspired the push for equality during Reconstruction.

Building on their experience battling slavery, the suffragists and their allies advanced a powerful vision of **universal voting rights**—linking this cause to the plight of African Americans. The post-war emphasis on universal equality made women’s suffrage seem politically possible. If Americans could use the national government to abolish slavery, why not

use it to secure suffrage for all? This vision united African American and white reformers. And during Reconstruction, the suffragists and their abolitionist allies continued to work together—this time, to promote universal voting rights for all citizens.

They adopted constitutional arguments at the core of the anti-slavery cause—drawing on the Constitution’s “guarantee” of a “Republican Form of Government” and its protection of the “Privileges and Immunities of Citizens.” **For these reformers, the push for voting rights wasn’t about race or sex. It was about post-Civil War America’s commitment to universal rights.**

#### Petition for Universal Suffrage (1866):

**“As you are now amending the Constitution, and, in harmony with advancing civilization, placing new safeguards around the individual rights of four million of emancipated ex-slaves, we ask that you extend the right of Suffrage to Woman.”**

#### Frances Harper

A key figure in this fight was **Frances Harper**. Harper was an African American—born free and educated in Baltimore. In 1852, she left the South to participate in the abolitionist speaker circuit. As a poet and outspoken reformer, she spoke at the National Woman’s Rights Convention in May 1866, the convention that founded the American Equal Rights Association. There, she advanced a vision of universal rights:

**“We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving a curse in its own soul.”**

#### Evolution of the Movement Toward Universal Rights

During this period, biracial coalitions of women and men worked for universal suffrage. For instance, they flooded Congress with petitions. Even so, many politicians believed that it wasn’t the right time to discuss women’s suffrage. Many Members of Congress embraced the traditional role of women in the home—not in politics.

Although the [Fourteenth Amendment](#) ultimately protected equal citizenship, it explicitly promoted “male” voting—introducing the word “male” into the Constitution for the first time in Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment. The section sought to protect the voting rights of African American males against discrimination in Southern states by allowing Congress to punish such states with the loss of representation. Suffragists fought to remove this discriminatory language from the proposed amendment, but they did not succeed.

And with the [Fifteenth Amendment](#), Republicans and their allies prioritized African American male voting rights—not universal suffrage. With the Republican Party prioritizing the rights of African American men over those of *all* women, tensions soon grew over race and tactics—fracturing the women’s suffrage movement for decades. Many prominent suffragists denounced the Fifteenth Amendment because they viewed it as a new barrier to women’s rights—splitting the longstanding alliance between abolitionists and suffragists. While the post-war women’s movement had unified around a vision of universal rights, some white women—appalled by their exclusion from the Fifteenth Amendment—refused to support the new amendment. Others embraced it.

As racist arguments seeped into the discourse around voting, the universalist movement (and its leading organization, the **American Equal Rights Association**) split into two organizations.

1. The **National Woman Suffrage Association**, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, opposed the Amendment. They chose to fight exclusively for women’s suffrage first—particularly, *national* women’s suffrage through a separate constitutional amendment. This group turned away from the Republican Party, broke with its longtime abolitionist allies, and worked to create an independent women’s suffrage movement.
2. At the same time, the **American Woman Suffrage Association**, led by Lucy Stone and Henry Browne Blackwell, supported the new amendment. They sided with the Republican Party, prioritized African American rights, rallied around the Fifteenth Amendment, and remained committed to a vision of universal rights.

Finally, even as the suffragists lost this battle over the framing of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, they didn’t give up on the newly amended Constitution—laying claim to the Constitution’s text, especially the Fourteenth Amendment, in their push for women’s suffrage.

1. **Some suffragists focused on Congress.** The Fourteenth Amendment gave Congress the power to pass new laws to enforce the “privileges or immunities” of U.S. citizenship. In 1871, **Victoria Woodhull**—a leading suffragist—petitioned Congress to pass a new law recognizing women’s suffrage as a “privilege” of U.S. citizenship under the 14th Amendment. Woodhull (1871): “**I do now claim that I am, equally with men, possessed of the right to vote.**” Woodhull appeared before a House committee to present her argument—the first woman to do so.
2. **Other suffragists used the Reconstruction Amendments to vote.** This was a key strategy of a movement known as the “**New Departure.**” In 1868, women in Vineland, New Jersey, set up their own voting tables on Election Day. Nearly 200 women cast mock ballots—including four African American women—to exercise their political voice even though their votes wouldn’t count. Suffragist leaders soon developed a plan that relied on the Constitution’s text to get women to the polls. Like Woodhull, they argued that under the Fourteenth Amendment, voting was a “privilege” of U.S. citizenship. (They also suggested that voting was part of the natural right to representation under the Constitution and that the Fourteenth Amendment made them full citizens entitled to the right to vote. Some even suggested that the Fifteenth Amendment was not merely about race, but extended the vote to those previously kept from full citizenship in a state of slavery—women and African-Americans.) From 1868 to 1875, hundreds of women—both African American and white—embraced this argument. Some women successfully voted, while most were turned away, arrested, and/or fined. For instance, in 1872, Susan B. Anthony, her three sisters, and eleven other women tried to vote in a New York election. Thanks to the help of local Republican Party officials, Anthony registered to vote. To Anthony’s surprise, she was even permitted to cast her vote, but her victory was short-lived. Two weeks later, she was arrested. Despite her Fourteenth Amendment argument at trial, she was found guilty for voting illegally. However, she refused to pay the fine and was never punished.

### ***Minor v. Happersett (1875)***

Interestingly, the Supreme Court’s first important voting rights case involved a woman fighting for the right to vote as part of the “New Departure”—in a case called [\*Minor v. Happersett\* \(1875\)](#).

There, Virginia Minor challenged a St. Louis registrar’s decision to block her from registering to vote. A pioneer of the New Departure, Minor argued that women were U.S. citizens and that voting was a “privilege” of national citizenship protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. In fact, at the 1869 Women’s Suffrage Convention in St. Louis, Virginia Minor argued that **“the Constitution of the United States gives me every right and privilege to which every other citizen is entitled.”** Minor and her husband Francis, a leading suffragist lawyer, Minor wrote a nationally published set of arguments in support of their claim.

The Supreme Court rejected Minor’s claim—and with it, one of the New Departure’s core arguments. In a unanimous decision written by Chief Justice Morrison Waite, the Court agreed that women were U.S. citizens, but **concluded that voting was not a right of national citizenship protected by the Fourteenth Amendment.** Instead, the Court left the question of women’s suffrage to the states. Waite wrote, “[I]f the courts can consider any question settled, this is one. For nearly ninety years the people have acted upon the idea that the Constitution, when it conferred citizenship, did not necessarily confer the right of suffrage. . . . Our province is to decide what the law is, not to declare what it should be.”

While the suffragists lost this battle, their work was just getting started.

## FINAL PUSH FOR THE WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE AMENDMENT

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### 1870s – 1919: Late Women’s Rights Movement and World War I

Following the New Departure, women turned their attention to two strategies: **(1) securing suffrage in the states** and **(2) pushing for a constitutional amendment.** During this period, suffragists embraced a broad range of tactics. And although their efforts often followed separate tracks—some national and some state-by-state—they all fed into one **common goal: national voting rights for women.**

By the early 1900s, women from all walks of life supported women’s suffrage. While expanding support among all classes and building coalitions with the labor movement, suffrage organizations **continued to divide over the issue of race.** Parts of the movement grew increasingly exclusionary. At the same time, African American women organized into clubs and continued to push for the vote to secure social and economic change within their own communities. Other women of color, including Native Americans, lobbied for their citizenship to be recognized.

### Anti-Suffragist Movement Grows

During this same period, anti-suffragists began to organize. In **1911, the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage** formed. The anti-suffragists voiced a range of arguments against the women’s vote.

- **Virtual Representation:** Husbands already represented their wives at the ballot box and within the government. Therefore, women did not need the vote.
- **States’ Rights:** Voting should be a state matter because it involves voting and the family. Until the Fifteenth Amendment banned racial discrimination in voting, states pretty much exclusively determined voter qualifications. That authority should remain with the states.

- **Destruction of the Traditional Family/Gender Roles:** Women’s suffrage threatened to corrupt women, create marital conflict, and disrupt family life by drawing women away from their traditional responsibilities at home.
- **Opposition to African American Voting:** A national amendment would also enfranchise African American women—at a time when African American male voters faced violent backlash. White Southerners feared that this would renew efforts to protect *all* African American voters and enforce the Fifteenth Amendment.
- **Educated Suffrage:** Racial prejudice led many to push for an educational qualification as a way to exclude African American women, as well as immigrants and the poor, from the ballot box.
- **Lack of Interest:** Women had no desire for suffrage. Few women needed or wanted this responsibility.

### Suffrage Movement Progressed on a State Level

So, what can the Nineteenth Amendment story teach us about constitutional reform—more broadly? Viewed one way, the Nineteenth Amendment story is a great example of the states functioning as Justice Louis Brandeis famously envisioned—as “**laboratories of democracy.**” In this view, state governments often lead the way in trying out new laws and policies. And when those ideas work out well, they can spread to other states and even bubble up to the national level—changing the way that things work all across the nation. So, ideas that are tested out as state laws sometimes lead to larger changes in how our country works as a whole. How does this relate to the story of the Nineteenth Amendment? Women worked at the state and local levels to extend suffrage—and used the states as testing grounds for the idea. The theory?: If enough states allowed women to vote, national change might follow.

With some early successes, women’s suffrage expanded out West first—and then moved East. So, women began voting in Western states long before the Nineteenth Amendment—with women’s suffrage expanding throughout much of the West from the late 1800s through the early 1900s. **The first win came in 1869 with the Wyoming Territory.** In 1889, suffrage came to Wyoming, as a state. In the 1890s: Colorado, Idaho, and Utah. This experiment worked out so well that other states extended voting rights to women, as well—including (eventually) large states like New York and Michigan. So, even as the women’s suffrage movement stalled for a while in the late 1800s and early 1900s—and we see no new women’s suffrage states between 1896 and 1909—we see a new wave of success for the women’s suffrage movement beginning in 1910. This push included full women’s voting rights in Washington (1910), California (1911), Arizona (1912), Kansas (1912), Oregon (1912), Montana (1914), Nevada (1914), New York (a big one!) (1917), and Michigan (1918).

**By 1919, fifteen states permitted full women’s suffrage.**

And even many states that *didn’t* provide full suffrage still granted women some sort of **partial suffrage**—for instance, covering presidential elections and school boards elections.

Finally, this experiment culminated in the Nineteenth Amendment—banning gender discrimination in voting.



### Suffrage Movement Progressed on a National Level

So, that's one important part of the Nineteenth Amendment story. But there were other factors at play in the push for women's suffrage. While some suffragists pushed for reform at the state level, others focused on applying pressure on *national* leaders. So, as momentum built at the state level, a new generation of suffragist leaders brought more aggressive tactics to the movement. These suffragists took to the streets to revive the national amendment strategy and grab the public's attention—relying on key First Amendment rights like speech, press, assembly, and petition.

For instance, consider the **Women Suffrage Procession in Washington, D.C.** On March 3, 1913—the day before Woodrow Wilson's presidential inauguration—an estimated 5,000 women from across the nation gathered in Washington, D.C. The route for the first national suffrage parade started at the Capitol and continued to Pennsylvania Avenue, where angry crowds blocked the way. Violence erupted. Roughly 100 women ended up in the hospital. Wilson's inauguration now shared headlines with shocking news of the parade and the attacks—causing public sympathies to soar.

Women of color joined their fellow suffragists in this parade, but they met resistance from other members of the movement. Parade organizers gave in to Southern white prejudice—and their own notions of racial hierarchy—by asking many African American women to march in the back. Ultimately, at least four states marched with integrated delegations. And civil rights crusader **Ida B. Wells-Barnett** refused to march in the back. When the parade began, she broke ranks and joined her Illinois delegation.

In the final few years of the fight for the Nineteenth Amendment, momentum continued to grow—driven by a mix of state-level victories, persistent lobbying, and militant protest tactics. These strategies, combined with the nation's entry into World War I, turned the tide in favor of a national amendment for women's suffrage. President Woodrow Wilson declared war against Germany in 1917.

- Some suffragists turned their attention to the war effort, demonstrating their loyalty and desire to support democracy.
- Militant suffragists continued their work—publicly criticizing the President for embracing democracy abroad while leaving half of the population without the vote at home. For instance, **Alice Paul** and her allies in the **National Woman's Party** (like Lucy Burns) began protesting in front of the White House in 1917—placing pressure on Wilson to take action on a national amendment. (**This was the first ever protest at the White House.**) After Woodrow Wilson's reelection, in 1916, Paul called for members of the National Women's Party to picket the White House to put pressure on Senators to vote for the Nineteenth Amendment. They held up banners that drew on the language of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution. For instance, one read: "**Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.**" These protests continued for an entire year. Initially, the picketers were mostly left alone, and President Wilson would even wave to them. But after the U.S. entry into World War I, things changed. And police began arresting women outside the white House. But women kept protesting. And these arrests stirred public opinion.
- At the same time, other suffragists continued to pursue more conventional lobbying campaigns—applying sustained pressure on Congress and the President.

And President Wilson eventually relented, giving his support to the Nineteenth Amendment in January 1918 and declaring it a vital war measure.

## Passage and Ratification Battle of the Nineteenth Amendment

Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment in 1919 following several failed votes—sending it along to the states for ratification.

Suffragists faced one final hurdle: *ratifying* the 19th Amendment. After 70 years—and a 15-month ratification battle—women finally secured the women’s suffrage amendment. In the end, the push for women’s suffrage can teach us important lessons about **(at least) four different pathways of constitutional change**. The suffragists used *all four* of them.

1. **Amend the Constitution:** Advocate for amendments through the formal process outlined in Article V of the Constitution. (Think: the Nineteenth Amendment itself.)
2. **Lobby and Petition Congress:** Pursue new laws to enforce the Constitution’s existing promises. (Think Victoria Woodhull’s push.)
3. **Use the Courts:** Use the Constitution’s existing text to advance constitutional arguments inside the courts. (Think: the New Departure.)
4. **Pursue State Reform:** Test new ideas out at the state level that could potentially lead to nationwide reform. (Think the state-by-state push for women’s suffrage—changing state laws and state constitutions—beginning out West.)

## STORY OF WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE AFTER RATIFICATION

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### First Presidential Election Featuring National Suffrage (1920)

In November 1920, many women across the country voted under the 19th Amendment. With support from female voters, the Republican candidate Warren G. Harding won in a landslide. He captured 60% of the popular vote.

### The Voting Rights Act of 1965

At the same time, for millions of women, the fight for suffrage was not over. Before and after the ratification of the 19th Amendment, voters of color were disproportionately targeted by voter discrimination practices.

As many suffragist leaders debated whether to unify around another cause, many of these white leaders left behind women of color, who often continued their suffrage activism alone. For instance, millions of African American women fought against their continued disenfranchisement in the South.

For decades, they fought to remove these barriers—leading to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (“VRA”).

- This landmark law empowered the national government to protect voting rights for all people of color and attack state voter discrimination efforts.

- Congress was granted this enforcement power in 1870 with the 15th Amendment. (Reinforced by the Nineteenth Amendment’s *own* enforcement clause.)
- And the Supreme Court upheld the VRA in *South Carolina v. Katzenbach*.
- The VRA itself was a massive success. Following its passage, women of color began voting in huge numbers for the first time.

### The League of Women Voters and the Equal Rights Amendment

Finally, with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, two key suffrage organizations reassessed their purpose.

Carrie Chapmen Catt’s National American Woman Suffrage Association restructured as the League of Women Voters to educate voters about elections and issues.

The National Woman’s Party—led by Alice Paul—pursued the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Drafted by Alice Paul, the ERA was first proposed in Congress in 1923.

Original ERA drafted by Alice Paul (1923): **“Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction.”**

The proposed amendment enjoyed widespread support in the 1970s. Both Houses of Congress passed it in 1972—after being introduced in every Congress for 49 years. By 1977, the ERA had been ratified by 35 states.

Congress extended the deadline for ratifying the amendment for another five years, but no new states ratified it before 1982. In the last few years, supporters of the ERA revival adopted a “three-state strategy” to get enough states to ratify.

Since then, Nevada, Illinois, and Virginia have voted in favor of the amendment—meaning that 38 states *have* ratified the ERA (the three-fourths required by the Constitution).

However, there are key questions that will need to be answered to determine the validity of the ERA:

- Can Congress impose a deadline on ratifying an amendment proposal?
- And if the time limit is valid, can a future Congress extend that deadline?
- Can a state rescind its ratification? (Between 1973 and 1979, five state legislatures voted to rescind their ratifications.)

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