

Five Facts About Women's Suffrage

This week marks the centennial anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Here are five facts you should know about women's suffrage and the amendment:

1. The 19th Amendment doesn't directly mention women. The text states:

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.

In fact, the Constitution is a gender-neutral document. (As the [Heritage Guide to the Constitution notes](#), "The word 'male' did not even appear in the Constitution until the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in 1868.") Even before the amendment nothing in the original Constitution directly barred women from voting.

2. Women who were unmarried were allowed to vote in New Jersey from 1797 to 1807. But it wasn't until 1869, when the Wyoming territory became the first territorial government to allow women to vote. Wyoming likewise, upon obtaining statehood in 1890 became the first state to participate in federal elections. By the time the amendment was ratified (1920) [women enjoyed unrestricted suffrage](#) in 15 states, Presidential suffrage in 28, and varying degrees of local suffrage though most of the others.

3. The first attempt to offer a universal suffrage amendment in Congress occurred in 1868, [but it went nowhere](#). The next

attempt was in 1878 by California Senator Aaron A. Sargent. His bill was rejected but was introduced every year for the next 41 years. In 1919 the exact text of his bill was approved by Congress and ratified by three-fourths of the states in 1920.

4. Prior to the amendment, [nearly as many anti-suffrage groups](#) sprang up throughout the country as did pro-suffrage groups. Many women opposed suffrage for fear it would lead to detrimental social changes and cause a loss of status and privileges for their sex. One anti-suffrage group issued a pamphlet listing "[Ten Reasons Why The Great Majority of Women Do Not Want the Ballot](#)" that included: "Because in political activities there is constant strife, turmoil, contention and bitterness, producing conditions from which every normal woman naturally shrinks."

5. Several states waited [more than 40 years](#) to ratify the amendment: Maryland (1941), Virginia (1952), Alabama (1953), Florida (1969, though not certified until 1973), Georgia (1970), Louisiana (1970), North Carolina (1971), and Mississippi (1984).

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