

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

A Civics In Real Life Series

FEMALE FIRSTS

The Right To Vote



As one of the earliest voices for women's rights, Abigail Adams wrote a [letter](#) to her husband, John Adams, in March 1776 while he was serving in the [Continental Congress](#). In her letter, she famously encouraged him to "remember the ladies" as the framework for the newly independent nation was being laid. Despite Abigail's urging, the U.S. Constitution, as originally ratified, would not extend all political rights to women. In fact, almost 150 years passed between Abigail's advocacy and women formally receiving one of the most important political rights, the right to vote. The road to women's [suffrage](#) was long and difficult. Women around the country organized campaigns to [push for the right to vote](#) beginning in the early 1800s. Known as suffragists, these women used many tactics and strategies to try and achieve their goals. They organized marches, and hunger strikes, wrote pamphlets, gave lectures, and engaged in acts of civil disobedience. One successful tactic involved pursuing suffrage legislation at the [state/territory level](#). In 1869, Wyoming became the first territory to grant women the right to vote. By 1912, eight other states/territories followed. By 1920, the total was up to twenty states/territories. However, following [WWI](#), support for a constitutional amendment grew. Even though this was not Congress' first attempt at passing a constitutional amendment on women's suffrage ([1878](#)), in 1919, the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate proposed the [19th Amendment](#), which, if ratified by the states, would legally guarantee women the right to vote under the U.S. Constitution. It took a little more than a year for it to be ratified, but on August 18, 1920, the State of Tennessee became the needed 36th state to ratify the amendment. With the amendment's passage, 26 million women were immediately added to the electorate. The first presidential election held after the passage of the 19th Amendment was on [November 2, 1920](#), between Republican candidate Warren G. Harding and Democratic candidate James Cox. Not all women would find the right to vote [easy to exercise](#), as many still faced discriminatory laws and practices at the state level. In fact, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina prohibited women from voting in the 1920 presidential election because ratification of the 19th Amendment took place after their respective state deadlines for registration and the paying of poll taxes. But despite this, historical data shows that 37% of all registered voters who voted in the 1920 election were women. [Susan B. Anthony](#) said, "If I could live another century! I do so want to see the fruition of the work for women in the past century. There is so much yet to be done, I see so many things I would like to do and say, but I must leave it for the younger generation. We old fighters have prepared the way, and it is easier than it was fifty years ago when I first got into the harness. The young blood, fresh with enthusiasm and with all the enlightenment of the twentieth century, must carry on the work." Countless women, old and young, took part in the long fight for women's suffrage. Their efforts changed the way women were viewed in society and in the realm of politics. Through their persistence, the barriers to their participation would be eliminated, and doors would be opened for other "female firsts" in the world of politics and government.

Civics Challenge: Search & Learn

Year Your State Granted Women The Right To Vote:	
Year Your State Ratified The 19th Amendment:	
Voter Turnout By Gender For The Last Presidential Election:	



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