

The Fight for Women's Right to Vote

I went with my mom as she went to cast her ballot in the election at our county public library, her voting precinct. I was thrilled to wear her "I voted!" sticker afterwards. Later that evening, we learned the results of the election online. This privilege was a hard won right for women that became ratified as the nineteenth amendment on August 18, 1920. Looking into this social change, I would like to explore the struggle to obtain the right for women to vote, how it affects women today, and where Latin American women are in this process.

After about a century, on August 18, 1920, women gained the right to vote, or women's suffrage. Before the Civil War, women participated in many social reform causes such as being against alcohol and slavery. The women began considering a new role in society. Before 1848, women were one with their husband and he received her wages or child custody in the event of divorce. In 1848, delegates to Seneca Falls agreed that men and women are made equal by their creator with the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. This included the right to vote. In 1890, the American Women's Suffrage society was formed with Elizabeth Cady Stanton as their president. They reversed their argument and now pushed the concept of women should have the right to vote because they were different from men and this would allow women voters to influence important causes to social reform and white middle class people gain power in an honest way. In the early 1900s, some states had granted women the right to vote, but others fought this change. The National Women's Party led by Alice Paul engaged in different tactics such as hunger strikes and picketing at the White House to gather

publicity. During World War I, the women's efforts were slowed due to war efforts; however, these dedicated efforts showed their patriotism and that they should have the same rights as male citizens. Before the 19th amendment was ratified, Frances Perkins was executive secretary to New York state's Commission of Public Safety and further rose under President Franklin Roosevelt to the position of Secretary of Labor. While initially resisting women's suffrage rights, President Wilson in 1918 told the Senate that the U.S. had fought for democracy, and "democracy means that women shall play their part in affairs alongside men and upon an equal footing with them... Shall we admit them only to a partnership of sacrifice and suffering and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?" By 1920, one tenth of all women were employed outside of the home. The 19th amendment granted women the right to vote, and reads: "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." On November 2, 1920, women voted in their first election. Mississippi was the last state to ratify the 19th amendment on March 22, 1944.

Today, the 19th amendment has continued to influence our country in women's rights and in the area of political leadership. An area of change is that previously women had to choose between either working outside the home or taking care of the home and their family and children. Now, women are expected to be homemakers and work outside of the home with seventy percent of working women having children under the age of eighteen. The first woman Supreme Court Justice selected was Sandra Day O'Connor in 1981; currently, we have three female Supreme Court judges. In the 2016 presidential election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, women tended to vote

more towards the democratic party by a fifteen point margin. In 2018, one hundred two women were elected to the United States House of Representatives while twenty-five percent of the Senate is female. In the 2020 election, the United States elected the first female Vice President, Kamala Harris. Some women have led the fight for equal pay regardless of gender and reproductive rights. Now, women's voting leagues help distribute materials about election campaigns and issues.

In Latin America, most democratic countries have laws which include women's voting rights and additionally use quotas to obtain more elected females in their legislatures. Ecuador was the first in allowing women to vote in 1929. Latin American countries have elected 11 female presidents since Nicaragua's first in 1990, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Latin American women's rights began during the Mexican Revolution when females fought alongside males. This led to expanding education and labor rights while also promoting a change in the first feminist congresses. Some of the main leaders from the First Feminist Congress included Paulina Luisi, Amanda Labarca, and Sara Just. While gains were made in women's voting rights, those who were illiterate were unable to vote until 1978. After a time of constraint of dictatorship followed by democracy, most Latin American countries have laws requiring thirty percent of its legislators are females. Today, Latin American women have a third of judicial appointments to highest court and legislative seats, less than a third of cabinet posts, and less than a fifth of mayoral positions. Some female leaders are elected while others have succeeded their husbands. These feminine leaders are generally local, white and wealthier. In most Latin American countries today, it is illegal to not vote.

Many women have worked and fought hard to obtain women's suffrage rights in the United States and Latin America. While some different views about voting and politics exist, everywhere women worked towards the goal of obtaining a voice in their country by voting and sometimes through campaigns and elected offices. It is good to see how other countries in Latin America are also recognizing women's suffrage rights. It was interesting to see how women's push for voting rights has included other issues important to women and their role in society and as a result now has female leaders in the United States and Latin American countries. I look forward to the day I will be able to register to vote when I am eighteen years old and vote in my first election.

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