Women's suffrage

Definition: **women's suffrage** from *Collins English Dictionary*

1 the right of women to vote
See also suffragette

Summary Article: **woman suffrage**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

The right of women to vote. Throughout the latter part of the 19th cent. the issue of women’s voting rights was an important phase of feminism.

**In the United States**

It was first seriously proposed in the United States at Seneca Falls, N.Y., July 19, 1848, in a general declaration of the rights of women prepared by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and several others. The early leaders of the movement in the United States—Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Abby Kelley Foster, Angelina Grimké, Sarah Grimké, and others—were usually also advocates of temperance and of the abolition of slavery. When, however, after the close of the Civil War, the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) gave the franchise to newly emancipated African-American men but not to the women who had helped win it for them, the suffragists for the most part confined their efforts to the struggle for the vote.

The National Woman Suffrage Association, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was formed in 1869 to agitate for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Another organization, the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone, was organized the same year to work through the state legislatures. These differing approaches—i.e., whether to seek a federal amendment or to work for state amendments—kept the woman-suffrage movement divided until 1890, when the two societies were united as the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Later leaders included Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt.

Several of the states and territories (with Wyoming first, 1869) granted suffrage to the women within their borders; when in 1913 there were 12 of these, the National Woman's party, under the leadership of Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and others, resolved to use the voting power of the enfranchised women to force a suffrage resolution through Congress and secure ratification from the state legislatures. In 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution granted nation-wide suffrage to women.

**In Great Britain**

The movement in Great Britain began with Chartism, but it was not until 1851 that a resolution in favor of female suffrage was presented in the House of Lords by the earl of Carlyle. John Stuart Mill was the most influential of the British advocates; his *Subjection of Women* (1869) is one of the earliest, as well as most famous, arguments for the right of women to vote. Among the leaders in the early British suffrage movement were Lydia Becker, Barbara Bodichon, Emily Davies, and Dr. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson; Jacob Bright presented a bill for woman suffrage in the House of Commons in 1870. In 1881 the Isle of Man granted the vote to women who owned property. Local British societies united in 1897...
into the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, of which Millicent Garrett Fawcett was president until 1919.

In 1903 a militant suffrage movement emerged under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters; their organization was the Women's Social and Political Union. The militant suffragists were determined to keep their objective prominent in the minds of both legislators and the public, which they did by heckling political speakers, by street meetings, and in many other ways. The leaders were frequently imprisoned for inciting riot; many of them used the hunger strike. When World War I broke out, the suffragists ceased all militant activity and devoted their powerful organization to the service of the government. After the war a limited suffrage was granted; in 1928 voting rights for men and women were equalized.

In Other Countries
On the European mainland, Finland (1906) and Norway (1913) were the first to grant woman suffrage; in France, women voted in the first election (1945) after World War II. Belgium granted suffrage to women in 1946. In Switzerland, however, women were denied the vote in federal elections until 1971. Among the Commonwealth nations, New Zealand granted suffrage in 1893, Australia in 1902, Canada in 1917 (except in Quebec, where it was postponed until 1940). In Latin American countries, woman suffrage was granted in Brazil (1934), Salvador (1939), the Dominican Republic (1942), Guatemala (1945), and Argentina and Mexico (1946). In the Philippines women have voted since 1937, in Japan since 1945, in mainland China since 1947, and in the Soviet Union and Russia since 1917. Women have been enfranchised in most of the countries of the Middle East where men can vote, with the exception of Saudi Arabia. In Africa, women were often enfranchised at the same time as men—e.g., in Liberia (1947), in Uganda (1958), and in Nigeria (1960). One of the first aims of the United Nations was to extend suffrage rights to the women of member nations, and in 1952 the General Assembly adopted a resolution urging such action; by the 1970s, most member nations were in compliance with it.

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