

Women's Political Involvement in the 100 Years since the Nineteenth Amendment

Introduction to Women's Political Involvement in the 100 Years since the Nineteenth Amendment

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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.
— Nineteenth Amendment, US Constitution

August 19, 2020, marks the centennial of ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which guaranteed that the right to vote could not be denied on the basis of sex. The Nineteenth Amendment did not radically transform women's political activism; rather, it was a *product* of women's political activism. Women won the franchise in a 72-year battle fought at both the state and national levels. By the time the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, women had been voting for almost 50 years in localities where they already had secured the right to vote.¹ The 100th anniversary is an opportune time to reflect on women's continued involvement in politics.

In the past century, women in politics have traversed many different pathways and passed many landmarks. Women comprised 55% of the electorate in the 2016 presidential election (Pew Research Center 2018). On average, 54% of women voted for Hillary Clinton compared to only 41% of men. Women of color overwhelming supported Clinton. Compared to only 45% of white women, 98% of black women and 67% of Latinas voted for Clinton (Pew Research Center 2018). In January 2017, an estimated 4.5 million people around the world participated in the Women's March to advocate for women's rights. Marches took place in more than 654 different cities and represented the largest protest event in US history

(Berry and Chenoweth 2018). The 2018 midterm elections produced a record number of women running for elected office, resulting in women's representation in the US Congress reaching 24%. However, 106 of the 127 women serving in the US House of Representatives are Democratic women (Center for American Women and Politics 2019). The nomination of Hillary Clinton represents the first time a woman has been nominated for the presidency by a major party. Six women from the Democratic Party had declared their candidacy for president in 2020; however, as we go to press, only one still remains in the race.

For this symposium, we compiled a selection of articles tracing the progress of women's involvement in politics after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. The articles span a wide variety of topics, including the voting rights of women of color and transgender people, women's political participation at the ballot box and in the streets, transformation of women's political organizations relative to the political parties, and gendered political socialization. These articles also highlight limitations of the Nineteenth Amendment and barriers that still exist today, especially for women of color and people with nonbinary gender identities. We view this collection of articles as a reflection on the status of women in politics as well as a reflection of the research on gender and American politics. Despite the breadth of the articles, we recognize that they represent only a fraction of the ways that women influence politics and the research on gender and politics. This introduction to the symposium places the articles in relation to both the Nineteenth Amendment and the ever-growing body of research on gender and American politics.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women's organizations facilitated women's political participation before suffrage (Boylan 2002). Whereas initially these organizations focused on helping individual women, by the 1830s, many had adopted more radical agendas geared toward ending alcoholism, prostitution, and slavery. Although unable to vote, women engaged in partisan politics. Diary entries from antebellum New England demonstrate that women were interested and informed about politics, expressed partisan preferences, and engaged in independent political thinking (Zboray and Zboray 2010). During the height of partisan politics in the Jacksonian Era, women cheered in torchlight parades and attended political speeches (Zboray and Zboray

2010). Women's influence in social movements made suffrage electorally salient for the parties and was critical to women securing the right to vote (McConaughy 2013; Teele 2018).

By the 1920s, the social movements that facilitated women's participation began to fade. Some of the progressive reforms that women helped to bring about contributed to the weakening of the political parties. Nevertheless, women's organizations and political parties continued to be important vehicles for women's mobilization into the political system. After securing the right to vote, two prominent suffrage

disparities between the parties in the supply of potential candidates (Crowder-Meyer and Lauderdale 2014), and donor networks (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Thomsen and Swers 2017). The increasingly polarized partisan environment has proven particularly difficult for Republican women (Thomsen 2017). In the first article of this symposium, Cooperman and Crowder-Meyer trace the evolution of women's political fundraising, linking the gap in partisan fundraising to the disproportionate success of women Democratic candidates relative to their Republican counterparts.

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organizations went through a "rebranding" and reorganization. The National American Women's Suffrage Association focused on civics education of women voters under the name of the League of Women Voters. Alice Paul's Women's Party turned its attention to passage of an equal rights amendment. Passage of the Nineteenth Amendment expanded the opportunities for women's organizations to engage in national policy debates on a wide variety of topics (Goss 2013).

A resurgence of women's activism in the 1960s and 1970s—referred to as the Second Wave of the women's movement in the United States—created divisions between the political parties on gender issues. Early activism by the liberal branch of the Second Wave was often bipartisan or nonpartisan. In the mid to late 1970s, a well-organized conservative counter-movement emerged to resist and turn back gains made by the feminist movement (Banaszak and Ondercin 2016; Spruill 2017). Women's rights became a partisan issue, with feminists finding a home in the Democratic Party and antifeminists fitting better into the Republican Party (Freeman 1986).

Engaging in a more inclusive political agenda, Third Wave feminists challenged the essentializing concept of womanhood in the 1990s (Whittier 2006). In recent years, we have witnessed a resurgence of liberal women's activism. Some of that activism has centered around the political identity of motherhood, such as the work of Moms Demand Action to press for gun control (Greenlee 2014; Langner, Greenlee, and

Politics has long been defined by men and masculinity. Voters are not sure what to make of women candidates (Schneider and Bos 2014), holding them to higher standards (Bauer 2020). When national security is threatened, voters express a preference for men candidates (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016). Once in office, women candidates are changing our perceptions of politics. Greater representation of women in the US Senate has led to more women emerging as candidates (Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018). Greater numbers of women candidates have increased adolescent girls' likelihood of political participation (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006); however, these role-model effects are limited to new and viable candidates (Wolbrecht and Campbell 2017). As Bos, Holman, Greenlee, Oxley, and Lay discuss in the second article, despite the gains women have made in politics, political socialization remains gendered, with girls expressing less excitement and interest in politics than boys.

INTRAGROUP DIFFERENCES

The Nineteenth Amendment initially was seen as a failure when women did not rush to the polls and vote in lockstep. However, in 1920, there was no reason to think that women would form a cohesive voting bloc. Racial, economic, religious, and regional identities created differences among women then as they continue to do today. The 1980 presidential election is

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Deason 2017). Activism also occurred on a massive scale around various issues and identities, such as the 2017 Women's March, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo (Berry and Chenoweth 2018; Bunyasi and Smith 2019). Conservative women also have been extensively engaged in activism, playing a critical role in the Tea Party movement (Deckman 2016).

A growing body of research investigates how political party mediates the ambition and success of women candidates. Local party leaders' preferences shape the likelihood that they will recruit women candidates (Crowder-Meyer 2013),

viewed as a turning point for women in politics in the United States, marking the start of women consistently favoring the Democratic candidate in presidential elections (Ondercin 2017; 2018). Until recently, the attention to mean differences between men and women overshadowed our understanding of differences among women.

Scholars have just begun to unpack the differences among women. White women are more likely to identify and vote for the Republican Party than women of color; however, white women Republicans tend to hold more moderate policy

positions than Republican white men (Barnes and Cassese 2017; Lizotte 2017). Junn (2017) argued that we should view white women as second to white men in terms of gender but first in terms of racial hierarchies. In the third symposium article, Wolbrecht and Corder explore the effect of *de jure* impediments to voting. States varied in their willingness to extend the franchise to all women, resulting in differential turnout between women and men but also among racial groups.

Women were seeking not only the right to vote when advocating for the Nineteenth Amendment; they also were seeking full and equal civic membership in the US political system.

Intersectionality has become the common framework for analyzing multiple identities shaped by interrelated systems of oppression, helping us to better understand the behavior of women of color (Brown and Gershon 2016; Crenshaw 1989). Work on intersectionality moves the gender and politics literature away from comparisons between men and women, providing guidance for understanding divisions among women. Women's suffrage has always been entwined with race in the United States, highlighting the need to approach the study of gender and politics from an intersectional framework. After passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, a movement focusing specifically on women's rights emerged. Moreover, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments failed to address the rights of black women, whose rights are shaped by both race and gender. In their pursuit for the vote, many white suffragists used racist tactics, arguing that white women need the vote to counter the influence of black men to bolster the racial hierarchy threatened by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

Applying an intersectional framework to political participation, Brown (2014) found that women of color do not follow the same pathways to political participation formed by differences in race and ethnicity. Popular theories (e.g., the resource model) fail to adequately explain women of color's political participation (Holman 2016). Work also is being done to understand differences within particular groups of women. Among black women, ethnic identities (i.e., African American compared to immigrant American) influence levels of racial consciousness and policy preferences (Capers and Smith 2016; Smith 2013). Latinas' participation, partisanship, and policy attitudes also are shaped by country of origin and generation (Bejarano 2013).

The importance of intersectional analysis is the focus of the fourth and fifth articles in the symposium. Montoya explores how race and gender shape contemporary voting rights. When multiple forms of inequality interact, registration, turnout, and perceptions of voting eligibility are affected. In the sixth article of this symposium, Smith and Crowder study the extent to which participants in the 2017 Women's March exhibited intersectional solidarity—that is, concern for groups that face multiple forms of oppression due to intersecting identities. Of the responses exhibiting intersectional solidarity, many were made by black women. Even among liberal, politically active

protesters, intersectionally marginalized individuals continue to be the primary advocates for including the interests of historically marginalized groups. Women were seeking not only the right to vote when advocating for the Nineteenth Amendment; they also were seeking full and equal civic membership in the US political system. After ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, the courts interpreted it in the narrowest possible terms (Ritter 2006). One hundred years

later, equal protection under the law on the basis of sex is incomplete. Much of the gender and politics scholarship has focused on sex or cis-gender identities. In the final article in this symposium, Caldwell surveys the past four decades of transgender-rights rulings to establish the judicial system's difficulties in separating sex from gender in the law.

A century after ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women continue to transform the US political system. In the next century, we hope that sex, gender, and race will be fundamental to understanding all politics rather than the subject matter of marginalized subfields. We also recommend that future researchers consider nonbinary gender identities to provide a more complete understanding of how gender shapes the US political system and the behavior of individuals and groups within it. ■

NOTE


1. More accurately, women re-secured the vote in 1920. Native American women experienced gender equity and the vote as part of the Iroquois Confederacy. Property-owning white women also voted in colonial times (Wagner 2019).

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