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Women's Suffrage | Indiana

Policy Deep Dive and Discussion Guide

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Overview

On Aug. 26, 1920, Hoosier women won the right to vote. It is a simple enough statement, but the real story goes much deeper.

In Indiana, almost seventy years passed between the first calls for women's voting rights and the passage of the 19th Amendment. Although momentous, 1920 is a single milestone in a long and ongoing journey; access to the voting booth is just one part of what it means to be an equal participant in the democratic process.

Although this brief examines historical events, the women's suffrage movement (in Indiana and nationally), lays the foundation for women's participation in politics and policy in the present. The goals, strategies and tactics that suffragists used in the nearly seventy years to achieve the right to vote provide a model of organization and persistence that speak to us a century later. It's also true that some of the barriers and many of the arguments women encountered in the fight for suffrage are still leveled against women in public life today. This policy brief is designed to help women understand key aspects of the suffrage movement in Indiana and to discuss the enduring questions about citizenship and civic participation raised by this dynamic history.

Why it Matters

- Today, women's suffrage seems like an obvious component of democracy. One hundred years ago, it was a controversial idea that even some women opposed. Championing it required courage, perseverance and organized activism.
- The centennial of women's suffrage is an opportunity to honor the Hoosiers who played a role in the suffrage movement.
- Like all social movements, suffrage was an imperfect process. Activists disagreed over strategy and tactics, and women of color and working-class women didn't always have a seat at the table. One of the lessons is that forming "a more perfect union" is and always has been messy.

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- While the 19th Amendment gave women access to the voting booth, the struggle for full equality continues. Today, we can all learn from the women who fought for the vote as we fight to ensure equality for all.
- As we acknowledge the impact suffrage had on women, we also should consider where our laws, culture and institutions might be keeping others from fully engaging in our democracy.
- The role of Hoosiers in the suffrage movement is a story that isn't fully known or told. This is Indiana's opportunity to delve into that history and capture it for future generations.

Key Ideas

> Indiana had one of the earliest—if not the earliest—state suffrage movements, starting with the first women's rights convention in 1851, only three years after the Seneca Falls Convention.

For those who know Indiana history, it's not surprising that the first calls for women's right to vote emerged from the Quaker community. Quakers, who were active in many reform movements in the 19th century, organized the first women's rights convention in Dublin, Indiana on Oct. 14-15, 1851. Delegates called for a number of reforms in addition to the right to vote, including equal pay for equal work, more access to education for girls and women, and increased legal rights. The following year, in Richmond, the Indiana Woman's Rights Association was founded. It is believed to be one of the first, if not the first, state-based suffrage organizations in the nation. In 1853, convention delegates called for full equality for women in all political rights and functions.

In 1859, more than 1,000 Hoosiers signed a petition to the state legislature asking that all laws that made distinctions on the basis of gender be eliminated. That year, Dr. Mary Thomas, one of the state's first female doctors, a Quaker and an organizer of the 1851 convention, became the first woman to speak before the Indiana General Assembly on the question of women's equal rights.

The Indiana Woman's Rights Association met annually until 1859, when, as happened nationally, women and their allies turned their attention to the Civil War.

> The Indiana women's suffrage movement was a diverse coalition with national and international outreach.

After the Civil War, the national suffrage movement split over the questions about black men and women's suffrage. In other states, especially in the former Confederacy, state-based suffrage associations were sharply segregated. But in Indiana, historical records indicate the suffrage movement was integrated and diverse. African American women attended the early women's rights conventions. Indeed, at an early convention, newspapers report an African American woman in attendance asked delegates if her rights, too, were being spoken for by suffragist activists—and she was told yes, the delegates were asking for full rights to vote for black as well as

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white women in Indiana. Later, in the early 1910s, several African American branches of the Equal Suffrage Society formed in Indianapolis, Marion and elsewhere.

Indiana suffragists were not just racially diverse. Hoosiers suffragists were religiously, socio-economically and politically diverse, and their ranks included not just the upper-class white women whose image we can so easily conjure, but also working-class women, immigrants, Jewish women, political radicals and women of color. This in part reflected the importance of women's clubs, no matter their issue or their members, and their ability to take up the question of suffrage among their activities.

Women won—and lost—the right to vote twice before 1920.

Women's attempts to secure the vote "were continually hampered by the Indiana Constitution itself. Its structure made it difficult for women to gain the vote through the state legislative process. Any amendment to the state constitution had to be approved by two separate legislative sessions—yet the state legislature convened only every other year. Therefore, it took at least two years to amend the constitution, making the challenge steeper for suffragists and giving their opponents more time to organize and kill any proposed suffrage law or amendment.

"This challenge reared its head in 1881, when Indiana legislators approved an amendment granting Hoosier women the right to vote. But when the Indiana General Assembly reconvened in 1883, it was discovered that the 1881 law had mysteriously not been recorded in the official legislative record from the previous session. Thus, according to the Indiana Constitution, the suffrage amendment couldn't be voted on a second time because it officially didn't exist" (Morgan).

The 1881-1883 proved a dispiriting setback—the first generation of suffragists was aging and it appeared that a legislative approach wasn't getting anywhere. The Hoosier suffrage movement entered a long period of quiet, until a new generation of leaders, armed with new grassroots techniques, once again pushed suffrage the forefront of state politics.

When the U.S. entered World War I, like most of their counterparts across the nation, "the majority of Hoosier suffragists answered the call to support the Great War. But they learned a lesson from the suffrage movement during the Civil War. This time, they made suffrage a part of the plan to "make the world safe for democracy." Suffragists knitted socks for soldiers, raised money for Liberty Loans and spoke in support of the war to various civic groups. But unlike during the 1860s, they participated in these efforts while also agitating for suffrage. Activists cannily connected their cause to the surge of wartime patriotism and rhetoric around the idea of "duty."

"Given the increasing power of the suffrage movement and the heightened expectations raised by World War I, progress appeared favorable in 1917. Thanks to continued and increasing agitation in Indiana and nationally, the Indiana General Assembly actually passed three laws favored by suffragists during the 1917 session. The first called for a convention to be held in September, for the purpose of drafting a new state constitution (with the hopes that the new constitution would include women's suffrage). The second law amended the current state constitution to allow for

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women's suffrage (which in order to become effective would have to be passed again by the 1919 legislature and approved by a majority of voters—though the passage of the constitutional convention bill and the prospects of a new state constitution appeared to make this law moot). The third law offered Indiana women partial suffrage, giving them the right to vote for presidential electors, for some state offices and in municipal elections that very year. Just as important, it also gave them the right to vote for delegates to the upcoming constitutional convention and for ratification of the new constitution.

"Imagine the scene: Thousands of Indiana women celebrating their victories, rushing out to register to vote over the course of the summer of 1917. Women in their eighties and nineties joined younger women at clerks' offices around the state. The first women to vote in the state were in Warren County...In Columbus, two African American women were the first to register. "There was a boom Tuesday afternoon in the matter of registration…when a long file of women entered the courthouse," remembered Natalie Parker, the president of the Porter County Woman's Franchise League; by the end of the summer, 80 percent of all registered voters in Porter County were women.

"Then came the next setback, which for Indiana women was possibly even more difficult to endure than the 1881–83 debacle. Men who opposed women's suffrage challenged both the constitutional convention law and the partial suffrage law, and in separate rulings the Indiana Supreme Court found them to be unconstitutional. There would be no opportunity to introduce suffrage in a new state constitution, and women were stripped of their partial suffrage rights effective October 26, 1917. The constitutional amendment law still stood, but that meant restarting a long, slow process. The defeat of the 1917 state legislation heightened the importance of a federal amendment—and so Hoosier suffragists turned their attention to this project" (Morgan).

Indiana women shaped politics and policy even before they officially had the right to vote.

Indiana women organized powerful groups including the Woman's Franchise League, the Legislative Council, and the Indianapolis Equal Suffrage Society. Grace Julian Clarke, the daughter and granddaughter of abolitionists and a life-long reformer, realized the potential of women to advocate on all kinds of issues, not only suffrage. An early successful example was advocacy on education and schools. Clarke organized a Woman's School Commission in Indianapolis, which successfully worked to elect women to the school board—a case where women were holding elected office without officially having the right to vote! This organization eventually spread to 60 branches across the state and morphed into the Woman's Franchise League, thus demonstrating the ways that the battle for suffrage was related to and inextricable from other reform efforts, and that women applied their hard-won advocacy and activist skills to new policy issues over time.

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The Legislative Council of Indiana, also founded by Clarke, even managed to secure offices in the State House so that advocates could drop in on General Assembly members at a moment's notice—a remarkable feat during a time when women did not actually have the right to vote.

Key Dates

1848	The first women's rights convention in America, organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, takes place in Seneca Falls, New York. Stanton issues the Declaration of Sentiments, modeled on the Declaration of Independence, which is the first document to call for women's right to vote.
1851	The first Indiana women's rights convention, organized by Randolph County's Amanda Way, a Quaker reformer, is held in Dublin. Women ask for many rights, including suffrage. The next year they form the Indiana Woman's Rights Association.
1868-1869	Following the Civil War, the 14th and 15th Amendments, guaranteeing citizenship and equal protection to those born in the U.S., and universal male suffrage, are passed. Suffragists split over support for the 15th Amendment, with some arguing that white women deserved the right to vote before black men, while others withheld support because the 15th Amendment inserted language about gender and rights into the Constitution for the first time.
1878	The Indianapolis Equal Suffrage Society is founded by May Wright Sewall of Indianapolis. The IESS works with the Indiana Woman's Suffrage Association to target Indiana General Assembly members and urge them to take up the "suffrage question."
1881	The Indiana General Assembly passes a women's suffrage bill. To ensure it passes again in the 1883 session, as required by state law, Hoosier women organize letter-writing campaigns and other efforts to pressure legislators.
1883	The General Assembly fails to pass the 1881 suffrage bill after it mysteriously disappears from the legislative records of the previous session. Thus, the bill fails.
1897	Susan B. Anthony speaks before the Indiana General Assembly, urging them to grant women the right to vote: "Make the brain under the bonnet count for as much as the brain under the hat."

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1909	The Equal Suffrage Association is revived in Logansport and what would eventually become the Woman's Franchise League is founded in Indianapolis by Grace Julian Clarke and Dr. Amelia Keller. Clarke, seeing that 60+ years of direct appeals to legislators hadn't worked, pushes instead for direct action, organizing motor car rallies, parades, and other high-profile activities to build mass support for women's suffrage.
1914	Clarke founds a powerful lobbying group, the Legislative Council of Indiana, representing 50,000 women from across the state who lobby legislators for suffrage and other reforms even though women do not yet have the vote.
1917	The Indiana General Assembly passes the Maston-McKinley Partial Suffrage Act, in addition to a bill calling for a suffrage amendment to the state constitution. Thousands of women across the state rush out to register to vote. However, two men opposed to suffrage bring lawsuits, claiming that the extra poll workers and separate ballot boxes to accommodate women voters and the cost of a special convention would constitute an undue burden to taxpayers. The Indiana Supreme Court agrees and Hoosier women lose the right to vote just a few days before the 1917 municipal elections.
1918	The U.S. House of Representatives approves the 19th Amendment, guaranteeing that women have the right to vote. Indiana representative Henry Barnhart is carried from his hospital bed in order to vote in favor in the close vote.
1919	In June, the U.S. Senate passes the 19th Amendment. Indiana suffragists ask for a special session of the General Assembly in order to ratify the Amendment but Gov. Goodrich resists.
1920	Jan. 3: The Woman's Franchise League again calls for a special session; this time 2/3 of Indiana legislators agree and the session is called. Jan. 16: The Indiana General Assembly ratifies the 19th Amendment Aug. 26: The final paperwork needed to put the suffrage amendment into effect is completed in Congress. Nov. 2: Indiana women turn out to vote in elections across the state for the first time.
1920-1922	Julia Nelson (R-Delaware County) replaced a deceased nominee on a special election ballot just days before women got the right to vote in 1920, and so became the first

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	woman elected to the General Assembly. Two years later, in 1922, Elizabeth Rainey (R-Marion County) was the first woman to win a general election for the state legislature.
1921	The Equal Rights Amendment, barring discrimination based on gender, is first introduced.
1942	Arcada Balz (R-Marion County) becomes the first woman elected to the Indiana Senate. Changing gender roles during World War II helped propel her to victory.
1965	The U.S. Congress passes the Voting Rights Act, which eliminates many race-based barriers to voting that had been in place in states, including poll taxes, literacy tests and other measures to depress African Americans' access to the ballot.
1972	The first African American women, Julia Carson (D-Marion County) and Katie Hall (D-Lake County) are elected to the Indiana General Assembly. It's also the first year that women reached double-digits in the state legislature. The Equal Rights Amendment is passed by both chambers of the U.S. Congress and is sent out to the states for ratification. Indiana Senator Birch Bayh is the champion for the ERA in the Senate; he also champions other significant women's legislation, including Title IX. The following year, Hoosiers for the Equal Rights Amendment is formed to lobby for its ratification.
1977	After a long and canny political battle, Indiana ratifies the Equal Rights Amendment. Hoosier ERA supporters from both political parties lead a two-pronged approach of convincing some legislators to support the amendment and targeting intractable opponents by running alternate candidates—and winning. However, Indiana is the last state to ratify the ERA before the deadline set by Congress expires and the Amendment fails to be enacted.
1988	The first year that at least 20 women were elected to the Indiana General Assembly, out of 150 seats.
2008	The first year that at least 30 women were elected to the Indiana General Assembly.

Thought Leaders

Indiana women were leaders in the national suffrage movement and were involved in many international causes as well. The leading historian of suffrage in Indiana, Dr. Anita Morgan, notes that one of her particular disappointments is that the influence of Hoosier women in the national story has largely been forgotten. There are many examples of Indiana women's influence at the forefront and behind the scenes of the national movement. Countless Indiana women participated in the suffrage movement here and around the country. Indeed, one reason to mark the suffrage

centennial is to ensure that their stories are more widely known. Here are a few key leaders in the long fight for suffrage in Indiana:

Grace Julian Clarke, of Indianapolis, the daughter and granddaughter of abolitionists and Congressman George W. Julian, was a reformer through and through. She led the Indiana Federation of Clubs, the Legislative Council, and the Women's School Commission of Indiana, which became the Indiana Woman's Franchise League during the years of intense suffrage activity. A brilliant strategist and lobbyist, she organized motor tours and rallies to build support for women's suffrages and to keep up pressure on the General Assembly on a variety of issues that impacted women.

Marie Stuart Edwards, of Peru, was active in various women's clubs and in suffrage groups. She not only led the suffrage movement in Indiana in the 1910s but also toured the country in support of ratification. She served as president of the Woman's Franchise League of Indiana from 1917 to 1919, an intense period that saw the passage and repeal of partial suffrage laws in Indiana and the final push for the ratification of the 19th Amendment. After suffrage, Edwards served as founding vice president of the national League of Women Voters.

Helen Gougar, of Lafayette, one of the first women lawyers in the country, was a fierce advocate for suffrage and temperance. She gained notoriety for attempting to vote in 1894 and was the first woman to argue before the Indiana Supreme Court in 1897.

Ida Husted Harper, of Terre Haute, was a columnist and Susan B. Anthony's handpicked biographer. Harper initially focused her columns on the need for women's economic independence and the right of women to work, and later turned her attention to the right to vote. With Anthony, she wrote the earliest histories of the suffrage movement in order to educate younger women joining the suffrage movement in the 1880s and 1890s.

Carrie Barnes Ross, an African American Indianapolis public school teacher, served as the president of Branch No. 7, the first African American women's suffrage organization in Indianapolis, formed in 1912 at the home of Madame C.J. Walker. She also led another suffrage group, the Women's Council. She spoke at a mass meeting of labor union members who were in favor of suffrage. Ross moved to Boston in 1916 where she was active in the local NAACP.

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May Wright Sewall, of Indianapolis, was an avid reformer who advocated for women's equal education as well as suffrage. She was also a leader of the national and international women's club movement, which brought together women of different races, social classes, political viewpoints and religions to focus on women's rights. She was chairwoman of the National Woman's Suffrage Association, president of the National Council of Women of the United States, and president of the International Council of Women. She organized the World's Congress of Representative Women at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Dr. Mary Thomas, of Richmond, was not only one of the first female doctors in Indiana, she was also helped to organize the state's first women's rights conventions in the 1850s and edited the Lily, a women's rights newspaper. In 1859, Thomas became the first woman to speak before the Indiana General Assembly, calling for a married women's property law and the right to vote.

Who are the stakeholders?

All Americans have a stake in women's full participation in society, and the suffrage movement was the result of activism and organization by both women and men. Crucially, women and their male allies had to convince male legislators at the state and federal levels to enact new laws and eventually a Constitutional amendment to grant women the right to vote.

But certainly women led the way. Over nearly 80 years, women suffragists made claims for themselves based on their roles as citizens, as tax-payers, as mothers, as workers, as thinkers—in short, they saw the right to vote as intimately linked to the many roles women occupied in society.

In doing so, they encountered resistance from men and women who opposed the idea that women should take up matters outside the home; who claimed that women did not have the intellectual capacity to make informed, independent choices about candidates and policy; and who feared the larger social changes, including temperance, child labor laws, and other reforms, that women did and might push to the forefront of American politics. Indeed, it's a testament to how entrenched ideas about gender roles and political power were that it took so long for women to achieve the right to vote.

In Indiana and nationally, a number of organizations formed over the years to push for suffrage. Some were homegrown, others were state or local branches of national organizations. Suffragists disagreed over strategy and tactics (Should suffragists pursue a state-based strategy or a federal amendment? Should suffragists support African American voting rights or not? Should suffragists stay genteel and polite or employ more radical, aggressive tactics?) and different organizations reflect the diversity of women's views and the complexity of making political change. Suffrage activists also allied with non-suffrage clubs and reform groups to build and mobilize support across lines of social class, race, religion and geography.

Women used leadership and advocacy skills gained through their participation in other reform movements. After 1920, they employed these skills and mobilized in order to address other issues. The right to vote was one of a number of changes that moved women into public life in new and

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enduring ways, including as workers and breadwinners, as thinkers and shapers of culture, and as policy makers.

Today, we can look back to the suffrage movement and discover any number of relevant lessons. The sheer persistence and hard-nosed tactical organizing can inspire anyone looking to make change in their communities. The movement-building and allyship that suffrage advocates participated in, as well as the ways they failed to be inclusive, may provide a roadmap for what and what not to do today. And it's certainly true, and more than a little dispiriting, that women in public life today may encounter similar arguments as those made 100 years ago about their proper roles—and therefore may draw strength from how women navigated and countered resistance in the long march to the 19th Amendment.

Perhaps more than anything, the suffrage movement challenges us on the key questions of our democracy: What does full citizenship mean? What are our rights and responsibilities as citizens? How do we work today to ensure our democracy is healthy and thrives into the future?

Current Challenges and Reform

There are many contemporary implications of the suffrage movement, but two issues are of ongoing concern:

- **Who Votes?** The franchise is still hotly contested today. While the right to vote is guaranteed in the 15th (universal male suffrage) 19th (women's right to vote) and 26th (universal suffrage over the age of 18) Amendments—in other words, at the federal level—states control the process: how and what documentation is needed to register and to vote on Election Day; when and where poll locations are open; whether and under what conditions, such as felony conviction, the right to vote can be taken away. Like many aspects of American government, it's a system that tries to balance federal and state power. But some argue this "federalist" system creates confusion or inequality among citizens in different states, as well as makes it possible for lawmakers to tinker with voting access for partisan gain.

- **Women in Elected Office:** Indiana is one of only eight states never to have elected a woman to either governor or the U.S. Senate, the highest offices elected by the whole state. The state's largest city, Indianapolis, has also never elected a woman mayor. While Hoosier women are now well represented in the judiciary and other parts of state government, women still constitute less than a quarter of the General Assembly. And when women do run, they still face other barriers, including extra scrutiny on their appearance, difficulty accessing fundraising networks, and coded and outright speculation about their ability to balance roles as mothers and wives with the ability to serve in government. When they do make it into office, even the question of what committees women get appointed to (ways and means vs. education, for instance) and what issues they should focus on (like "traditional women's issues" perceived by society) reflect the extent of women's power in government.

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What Can You Do?

1. Vote and get active. Claim your rightful place in the voting booth. Advocate for issues you care about and contact your elected officials to make your voice heard.
2. Read all about it. Delve into the history of the women's suffrage movement in Indiana by attending events, visiting exhibits and reading Dr. Anita Morgan's forthcoming book, "*We Must Be Fearless*": The Woman Suffrage Movement in Indiana.
3. Teach your children. Share what you've learned about women's suffrage with younger generations, even young men, and encourage them to carry the legacy forward. Talk to your kids' teachers to make sure this important suffrage history is being taught in schools.

Links to more in-depth information and resources

- "An Act of Tardy Justice: The Story of Women's Suffrage in Indiana" by Dr. Anita Morgan (article)
- "*We Must Be Fearless*": The Woman Suffrage Movement in Indiana by Dr. Anita Morgan (book, forthcoming from Indiana Historical Society Press)
- From the Vault: Board of Commissioners v. Knight | Indiana Archives and Records Administration (short video)
- "Marie Stuart Edwards: Suffragist and Social Reformer" | Indiana State Library (blog post)
- "Taking It to the Streets: Hoosier Women's Suffrage Automobile Tour" | Indiana Historical Bureau (blog post)
- "A Brief History of Indiana's Female Legislators" | Capitol & Washington (blog post)
- "The Legacy of Daisy Lloyd: A Brief History of Black Hoosier Women in Office" | Capitol & Washington (blog post)
- Fighting for Equality: A Life of May Wright Sewall by Ray E. Boomhower (book)
- The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote by Elaine Weiss (book)
- 2020 Women's Vote Centennial Initiative (website)
- www.IndianaSuffrage100.org (website)

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Questions for Policy Circle discussion

- Is voting a right or a privilege?
- How did suffrage advocates' strategies shift over the years, and why? How would they be different today – strategy, engagement from minority populations, etc.
- What arguments did suffragists make for why they should have the right to vote?
- What arguments were made against women gaining the vote? To what extent are similar arguments made against women in public life today?
- How did Hoosier women's activism on "the suffrage question" intersect with other reform movements? And do they today?
- What is the role of state vs. federal government in guaranteeing citizens' rights? What does the history of the suffrage movement suggest?
- How have women worked to make change through and in spite of barriers to participation in elected government?
- When women enter politics, how does the political arena change? Are there changes in the way work gets done, the ways arguments get made, or the issues that get raised?
- How can we combat the "traditional women's issue" topic (education, abortion, social welfare programs) and educate everyone that "every issue is a women's issue."
- What role are you going to play in our "continued" suffrage movement – access to voting and political/policy participation?

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