

## ASK A SCHOLAR: HOW DID WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IMPACT THE USA?

May 29, 2013 | Jonathan Bean



**Dear Ask a Scholar:**

**How has women's suffrage impacted the USA?**

*Answered by Jonathan Bean, professor of history at Southern Illinois University.*

Women's suffrage has had a profound impact on the USA. Indeed, when Gallup polled Americans at the end of the 20th century, the pollster asked respondents to list "one of the most important events of the century" - most important and important (but not most important). Women getting the vote was ranked SECOND only to World War II!

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/3427/most-important-events-century-from-viewpoint-people.aspx>

That same poll found that Americans rejected a woman as president of the US in the 1930s (when polling began) but nearly all accept that possibility today. Getting the vote made it possible for women (other than widows) to become familiar faces in elected office and thus transformed the way society views women.

On some issues, there have been profound gender differences. The constitutional amendment for women getting the vote followed along with a constitutional amendment to prohibit alcohol. The prohibition movement has been called "the first mass women's movement in US history" and prohibition was spurred by women getting the vote in many states before the national amendment took effect in 1920. And women backed prohibition more strongly than men.

Some of the predictions about its impact were off: suffragettes predicted that women would vote differently than men -- some evidence for this in recent years but, for the most part, the initial impact showed that women voted like their husbands or families. Also, once they got the vote the rate of voter participation for women was low for a very long time - much lower than men. Today of course that has changed.

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