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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE USA AND UK

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ABSTRACT

Despite significant legal and social advancements over the past century, women remain underrepresented in political institutions across the United States and the United Kingdom. This article examines the patterns, barriers, and evolving dynamics of women's political participation in both nations through a comparative lens. Drawing on electoral data, parliamentary records, and survey research from the past three decades, the study analyzes women's representation in legislative bodies, executive offices, and grassroots political activism. The findings reveal that while both countries have made measurable progress—evidenced by increasing female candidacies and the election of women to the highest offices—structural barriers, including electoral systems, party gatekeeping, media framing, and intersecting inequalities of race and class, continue to constrain women's full political inclusion. The article argues that the UK's adoption of gender quotas and proportional representation has accelerated women's legislative representation relative to the USA's candidate-centered system. Yet, both nations face common challenges in achieving gender parity. By situating contemporary developments within historical trajectories of suffrage and feminist movements, this research contributes to broader debates on democratic legitimacy, political equality, and the institutional mechanisms that facilitate or impede women's access to power.

Kew Words: Women's political participation, Gender representation, Comparative politics, United States, United Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

Before the Nineteenth Amendment allowed women the right to vote in 1920, women had long been active in politics and public life, but their political involvement really took off in the 1960s. While there hasn't yet been a female president of the United States, women have made significant contributions to American politics at all levels. Some are elected authorities and

popular figures, while others provide essential power in the background¹. The country will commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of women having the vote. Women were given the right to cast their votes by the Nineteenth Amendment, which was approved on August 18, 1920, and recognised as an element of the United States Constitution on August 26, 1920². In reality, many women, especially Black women in the South, were unable to cast a ballot until decades later.

Voting, joining a political party, and running for office were the long-standing, highly conventional definitions of politics. Feminist scholars observed that women had actually played a variety of positions within governance and the public sphere throughout all of American history, significantly influencing movements for social justice, civic life, the administration of non-profit organizations, and the improvement of society, among other consequences. This realization gave rise to a study of women's history of politics. How did they manage to accomplish this before they received the vote? They did this by founding non-profit groups, lobbying, planning petition campaigns, collecting funds, and engaging in a variety of other activities that brought them into direct contact with the public.

Historical Progress of Women in Politics in the USA

Unknown to many, women have an extensive background in political parties that preceded their victory for suffrage in 1920. In the provinces of Wyoming and Utah, women cast their first votes in general elections in 1870. In some places, women have gained the opportunity to cast ballots in municipal or school board elections. Women also formed other organizations, including the populist, socialist, and liberal parties, as well as auxiliary organizations to the main political parties. A total of three generations of female political activism were tapped into throughout the seventy-two-year campaign for women's suffrage, which was first announced at Seneca Falls in 1848. It provided a single topic around which a large constituency of women could unite, particularly in its latter phases. In contrast, when suffrage was achieved, women lost their collective political favoured and diverted it to a variety of causes, not all of which directly advanced women's standing. There could have been no doubt that women would remain in elections. While males competed for office and oversaw national parties and

¹ Lynne E. Ford, *Encyclopedia of Women and American Politics* 130, (Facts on File, Incorporated, 2010)

² Joslyn N. Barnhart, Robbert F. Tranger, et.al., "Women's Suffrage and the Democratic Peace: Female Voters Slow the March to War" *Foreign Affairs*, August 18, 2020, Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-08-18/womens-suffrage-and-democratic-peace>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

organizations all over the 20th century, women handled the dirty labour of the majority of political initiatives, such as ringing doors, scraping documents, and keeping an eye over the polls. Despite the fact that their efforts were neglected, many women were pleased to have the opportunity to participate in politics. The accomplishments of the past fifty years were significantly conditioned by this developing feeling of interactive engagement. Despite the fact that males still made up the vast majority of political contenders, persistent women did run for and get elected to government. A widow's succession, or nomination to finish her dead the husband's term, became one of the first avenues for a woman to join politics. Some women simply completed their terms, while others, like Hattie Caraway of Arkansas and Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, utilized the position of widow's succession as a springboard for their own political careers. Smith, who was for a long time the sole female senator, even made a genuine, though ultimately symbolic, bid for the president in 1964 as a Republican. In 1972, Shirley Chisholm of New York and Patsy Mink of Hawaii also ran in the Democratic primary, following Smith's example. Chisholm made history as the first female African American candidate, while Mink made history as the first Asian American to run for president. More women campaigned for election and won it thanks in part to the resurgence of feminists in the decades between the 1960s and the 1970s, while the number of them were still rather modest, particularly on the national stage³. Since its inception in 1971, the National Caucus of Women in Politics has worked to increase the representation of women in politics at all levels. Working inside both the Democratic and Republican structures of power, women activists sought to have an impact on the electoral process, yet they discovered that the main parties weren't always accepting of them or the concerns women came up. Republican women who considered themselves to be feminists had a difficult climate as the movement went to the extreme right from the 1970s onwards. Gaining support for the platform for the Equal Rights Amendment and gender equality proved particularly contentious. Democratic women established in 1985 to support supportive of choice politicians with an emphasis on electing women to Congress, while Republican women followed in 1993. A different path to political influence was via appointed positions; starting in the 1930s, women served in the Cabinet and diplomatic corps. Even yet, the Supreme Court was all-male until Sandra Day O'Connor was appointed in 1981. Either they considered themselves explicitly feminist or not, the majority of female politicians in the decades that followed played a significant role as messengers for the growing positions of women in American culture. Women within politics have been more visible thanks to

³ Lee Ann Banaszak and Heather L Ondercin, "Explaining the Dynamics between the Women's Movement and the Conservative Movement in the United States" 70 *Oxford University Press* 383 (2016)

members like Bella Abzug (New York), Millicent Fenwick (New Jersey), Shirley Chisholm (New York), Patricia Schroeder (Colorado), and Patsy Mink (Hawaii), as well as governors like Ella Grasso (Connecticut) and Madeleine Kunin (Vermont), who excelled at the level of the state. The choice of Geraldine Ferraro as Walter Mondale's running partner for the 1984 presidential election was a significant turning point. She was the first woman to represent a major party on the national ticket. Ferraro, a working-class, mainly ethnic district representative for Queens who was the daughter of Italian immigrants, inspired a lot of female voters. Her inclusion on the Democratic ticket was generally seen as ushering in an era of opportunity for women in politics. Increased awareness of female voting power, symbolised through the newly coined term gender disparity, which refers to the distinction between men's and women's voting tendencies, was one reason for Ferraro's historic nomination. Women's voting rates caught up to men's in 1980 after years of being behind, indicating that there had been more female voters than before. Women generally voted in various ways, particularly when it came to the subjects of fairness and the use of power, which could include war or overseas operations, which together generally favoured the Democrats. Yet white males voted Republican more often on the opposite side of the gender divide. The gender disparity had been too narrow to have a significant effect in a sweep election like the one in 1984, where Ronald Reagan received 59 percent of the popular vote, which comprises the vast majority of votes from women. Politicians now understand that it is dangerous to disregard female votes. In 1991 and 1992, a brand-new topic sexual harassment entered the political sphere. Anita Hill, a professor of law at the University of Oklahoma, alleged that Clarence Thomas, a conservative black jurist, harassed her sexually while she performed at the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission and the Department of Education in the 1980s, during the Senate confirmation process for Thomas' appointment to the Supreme Court. Thomas passionately refuted the allegations, and the nation disagreed over whom to believe—not necessarily strictly along racial and gender lines. In the end, Thomas barely prevailed in becoming confirmed, while Hill rose to fame as a feminist hero for her bravery and composure under pressure.

The congressional hearings not only sparked a nationwide debate about sexual harassment, but they also helped propagate the idea that Congress needs more women in positions of authority. An all-time high number of women sought public office in 1992, outraged by the coverage Hill was receiving on Capitol Hill and in the media. This had tangible effects: women made significant gains in both chambers of Congress as well as in state and municipal races throughout the nation. Following the "Decade of Women," several of the women from the

“Year of the Woman” had amassed the requisite seniority to become significant figures in politics 20 years later. When Nancy Pelosi was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives in 2007, she became the nation’s highest-ranking female politician. The 1992 election for president introduced Americans to Hillary Rodham Clinton, the wife of contender Bill Clinton, who would go on to establish herself as one of the most widely admired as well as most divisive personalities in contemporary American society⁴. Hillary Clinton, who is obviously not your typical First Lady, played a key role in her husband's failed healthcare effort and then supported him when he faced impeachment in 1998 for lying about his relationship with a teenage intern. After surviving that crisis, Hillary Clinton became the U.S. senator for New York while her husband left office and began to focus on becoming president of the United States.

Sarah Palin, the governor of Alaska, was selected as John McCain's opponent in the 2008 Republican presidential primary. Alaskans responded well to Palin's captivating social demeanour and conservative economic and social principles, but like numerous other female candidates, she struggled to persuade the electorate of her rightful claim to political power. The Democratic primaries presented an identical obstacle for Hillary Rodham Clinton. Although many feminists supported her campaign, many more were attracted to Barack Obama's message of change and optimism for America. In this election, issues of race and gender were heated and even unpredictable. Hillary Rodham Clinton was chosen by Barack Obama to serve as his secretary of state after she won the Democratic primary and the general election.

Almost eight years later, when Obama was getting ready for his departure from office, Hillary Rodham Clinton once again put up a strong campaign for the president and was successful in getting the nomination for the Democratic Party. But the United States was not going to choose a female leader in 2016, unlike other nations across the globe. Despite Donald Trump, a Republican, winning the Electoral College, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote. On the day following Trump's inauguration, there was a female march in Washington, as well as marches in 80 other nations and around 400 sister marches in communities all throughout the United States in reaction to the election results. With estimates ranging from 2.5 to 5 million participants, the demonstrations on January 21, 2017, were the largest single day nationwide demonstration in American history.

⁴ Constitution Daily, “the History of Women in Politics” *National Constitutional Daily*, May 11, 2016, Available at: <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-history-of-women-in-politics>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

Democratic presidential candidate Joseph Biden and his running mate, Senator Kamala Harris, who was previously attorney general of California, defeated Republican incumbent President Donald Trump in the presidential election as a whole and the electoral college election in the month of November 2020, when the nation was commemorating the centenary of the 19th Amendment and the 55th anniversary of the passage of the Voting Rights Act. The first woman to be elected as vice president of the United States, Kamala Devi Harris was born in Oakland to an Indian mother and a Jamaican father. She was also the second African-American woman and the first South Asian-American to serve in the U.S. Senate. Harris said in her victory speech, “While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last, because every little girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities.” While political participation has improved for many women throughout the last fifty years, Kamala Harris' campaign and success show that preconceptions and unfair treatment still affect women in politics and prevent gender equality. The task at hand is to channel the enthusiasm shown in the most recently held elections towards the inclusivity and social justice ideals of feminism. Women's responsibilities in public life are still undergoing a revolution, like so many other things.

The refusal of political representation to women was the initial way that female oppression may result in anti-American terrorism. Political liberties for women include a number of several of the globally recognised entitlements, such as the freedoms to vote, seek public office, hold public office, organise political organisations, and protest the government.

The obstruction of a “feminine approach” to leadership and the suppression of the open exchange of ideas are both ways in which the rejection of this particular right could contribute to the emergence of terrorism. Initially, some have suggested that since women naturally favour conversation, collaboration, equality, peace-making, and non-militarism (but not always), they act differently in their opinions about politics than men⁵.

Voters and candidates are both supply-side and demand-side consequences of demographic change on congressional representation. The makeup of Congress will continue to diversify, even if gradually, as a result of rising racial and cultural diversity in the general population and

⁵ Nilay Saiya, Tasneem Zaihra and Joshua Fidler, “Testing the Hillary Doctrine: Women’s Rights and Ant-American Terrorism” 70 *Sage Publications* 423 (2017)

other socioeconomic developments. Change inside Congress is likely to move more slowly than change outside of Congress because of racial differences in candidate emergence and patterns of political socialization, the naturalization and assimilation process, and other institutional and political barriers for people of colour. These factors, along with the general attraction of incumbency, also suggest this⁶. Political justifications centre on how welcoming the electoral process is to women, social-structural justifications on the population of eligible women, and philosophical considerations on perceptions of women in democracy and their potential as politicians and leaders.

Only the political and structural reasons continue to receive support in international statistical examinations, despite robust theory implying the significance of all three components. Examples and qualitative data, however, point to the importance of ideology in understanding the poor state of representation of women in politics⁷

In the USA, Democratic Values in the Life of Women's

Democratic rights were first solely enjoyed by white male property owners in the United States and other European nations like Britain; they were only subsequently extended to women and the rest of the male population. Women have played a crucial role in the shift from authoritarianism to democracy in various regions of the globe, where the advancement of women's rights has coincided with the formation of democracy. A prime example is the experience of Latin America, particularly in the situations of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Through efforts for women's rights, participation, and personal freedom in Turkey in the 1980s, when civil society was tightly under military control, the new Turkish feminist movement contributed to bringing in democracy⁸.

And modernizing women are now the main drivers of democracy and cultural transformation in Iran, the Arab world, and other countries in the region. The campaigns for democracy and women's rights have mostly developed concurrently. The future of democracy is tied to the future of women's rights, and vice versa. These processes are intimately connected and, in fact,

⁶ Kathryn Pearson, "Demographic Change and the Future of Congress" 43 *Cambridge University Press* 236 (2010)

⁷ Pamela Paxton and Sheri Kunovich, "Women's Political Representation: The Importance of Ideology" 82 *Oxford University Press* 88 (2003)

⁸ Valentine M. Moghadam, "The Gender of the Democracy: The Link Between Women's Rights and Democratization in the Middle East" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 20, 2008, Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/21226>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

mutually dependent. Separating the two is both theoretically and politically risky. This is due to the fact that when a democratic process is started without robust institutions, without well-established principles of equality, and without respecting the rights of all people, women may suffer a hefty price. In such circumstances, a party founded on patriarchal standards may win free elections to power and proceed to treat women as second-class citizens.

The achievement of gender equality and the advancement of women are essential to democracy. In the same way as it is about political parties, elections, and balance of power, democracy is also about the rights of people, their involvement, and their inclusion in it. The degree to which various social groups engage in these institutions affects the quality of democracy in addition to how these institutions are structured. The gender of democracy is quite important in this respect. A “male democracy” an inadequate and severely skewed type of democracy occurs when women are absent from the political sphere. The organizational and social framework of democracy is determined by the Constitution, constitutional discussion, and constitutional law. This is referred to as the constitutional order of the United States. The phrase “We, the People,” is the first word of the Constitution. incredibly a term that simultaneously generates and presupposes a group of politicians at the national level. In order to create “a more perfect union,” this new society sets up a national governing body. The Constitution is a detailed institutional blueprint for the creation of a federal government. It is a lot more than that, however.

It establishes a national political movement and makes a point about how the populace and the government interact. Most notably, the Bill of Rights, the Reconstruction Amendments, and the other suffrage amendments make this link the clearest and most evident. However, the Constitution as a whole contains it. Therefore, the core of this constitutional system is citizenship, inasmuch as it refers to the reciprocal connection between the people and the government. Therefore, the growth of the constitutional order would be heavily influenced by changes to the form and makeup of American citizenship⁹. The suffragists felt that granting women the right to vote would guarantee them the same rights as men by enhancing their civic standing and enabling them to voice their opinions on politics. But in numerous ways, the period right before the 19th Amendment’s enactment was better for women politically

⁹ Richard Sobel and Robert Ellis Smith, “Voter-ID Laws Discouraging Participation, particularly among Minorities, and Trigger a Constitutional Remedy in Lost Representation” 42 *American Political Science Association* 480 (2009)

compared to the years following. Furthermore, despite their newfound position as citizens with the power to vote, they had few legal rights that they could assert before tribunals and legislatures. It is still unclear why women's citizenship did not change as a result of suffrage. The majority of political science research focuses on how the 19th Amendment affects electoral politics. The Democracy Initiative takes people on an adventure throughout the earliest of the 527 historic days that the city of New York served as the country's first capital during the revolutionary era. The Constitution and the rights of all citizens of this country were in jeopardy; the administration had just taken office, but the dispute over the slave trade continued. Alexander McGillivray, the Muscogee (Creek) Chief, maneuvers to protect his nation's land by committing to the initial international agreement with the United States; George Washington is having trouble defining his presidency; Ona Judge, who was a woman held as a slave by Martha Washington, sees when a Quaker appeals to end the slave trade. James Madison additionally introduces the Bill of Rights. The Democracy Project, a musical that includes original songs, explores the history of Federal Hall on Wall Street while investigating the decisions made by our Founders and how those decisions continue to affect America decades after "We the People"¹⁰. In truth, there is a rise in the representation of women in the United States. Women currently make up 27% of Congress members, an increase of 50% from ten years earlier. Soon, there will probably be four women justices on the Supreme Court, including two women of colour. Kamala Harris, the vice president, is the first woman and person of colour to hold the position. At the state level, women make up 31% of lawmakers and more than 30% of elected executives¹¹. These raw figures, however, are not an adequate indicator. In comparison to most of the rest of the world, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions in the United States¹². And the data, particularly for women of colour, are a long way from being robust and meaningfully represented. A Black woman has never held the office of state governor, and there are currently no Black women serving in the Senate. The United States likewise scores pitifully in terms of prerequisites for women's political engagement. For instance, rates of maternal mortality are still rising in the United States despite a worldwide decline of 43 percent in the previous three decades. Right now, we are ranked 46th

¹⁰ The Democracy Project at Federal Hall, *Federal Hall*, July 22, 2026, Available at: <https://federalhall.org/the-democracy-project/>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

¹¹ Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, "Women's Rights and Democratic Are Inextricably Linked" *Brennan Centre for Justice*, March 16, 2022, Available at: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/womens-rights-and-democracy-are-inextricably-linked>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

¹² Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Ruth Igielnik, "A Century After Women Gained the Right to Vote, Majority of Americans See Work to Do on Gender Equality" *Pew Research Centre*, July 07, 2020, Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/07/a-century-after-women-gained-the-right-to-vote-majority-of-americans-see-work-to-do-on-gender-equality/>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

in the globe. Black women in America are three times more likely than white women to die during pregnancy and delivery, making the situation especially severe for them. Paid maternity leave lasts, on average, 29 weeks worldwide. We are the only affluent country out of just six without any kind of national paid leave.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the Equal Rights Amendment is now being ratified after a century-long battle, the United States remains an exception in terms of constitutional equality. Eighty-five percent of the countries that are members of the UN have clear constitutional clauses that prohibit sexism and/or gender discrimination. All nations whose constitutions were ratified after 2000 do this; France is one of those that altered its earlier, more established constitution to recognize equality. Too many reports of savage treatment of women and girls, including those who are imprisoned or detained by the government being sterilized without their consent, shackled during childbirth, or denied menstrual products, are reported across domestic agencies, and there are too few safeguards against abusive institutional practices. The list keeps on. These issues go beyond the effects of a failing democracy. Instead, they also create a downward spiral that may eventually result in increased inequality and participation disparities, creating a vicious cycle.

As previously said, America's place in the world's reproductive system provides a current indication of what to anticipate from our decline. While most of the world has increased access to abortion over the last 20 years, the United States has deliberately rolled back rights for women, along with Nicaragua and Poland. Despite the fact that the majority of Americans want legal abortion, clearly unconstitutional measures have recently been passed by state legislators and greeted with the judges' astounding apathy. The *Roe v. Wade* precedent will be completely destroyed if the Supreme Court rules in favour of the 15-week limit in *Dobbs v. Jackson*¹³ In a significant ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court determined that there is no right to an abortion under the U.S. Constitution. Both *Roe v. Wade*¹⁴ and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*¹⁵ were overturned by the court's ruling, giving individual states the authority to control any part of abortion that is not covered by federal law. Women's Health Organization later this spring. All of this has led to even more extreme measures, such as a Missouri law that would let anyone sue anybody who tries to assist someone in getting an abortion outside of their state.

¹³ (2022) 597 US

¹⁴ 410 US 113 (1973)

¹⁵ 505 US 833 (1992)

Despite the complexity behind the ebb and flow of abortion rights, a straightforward formula holds surprisingly often, as the Times writer above observes. The only really universal majority and majoritarianism are inexorably intertwined. When one changes, the other does too. But if we don't start with gender parity, we can't hope to gauge the ups and downs of a genuinely inclusive democracy. It is not a case of the chicken and the egg, but rather where we must begin and stop the investigation. The canary has always been in the coal mine when it comes to women's rights.

Voting Rights of Women in the USA

After President John F. Kennedy was killed in November 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson became president. Johnson utilised his authority during his presidency in 1964 to advocate for legislation he thought would enhance the American way of life, including stricter voting rights laws. Johnson won the election by a wide margin of victory. Following the Civil War, states were forbidden by the 15th Amendment, which was enacted in 1870, from denying male citizens the right to vote on the grounds of "race, colour, or previous condition of servitude." However, over the years, a number of discriminatory tactics were employed to deny African Americans, particularly those in the South, the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. Voting rights advocates in the South experienced many sorts of abuse and violence during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. On March 7, 1965, participants in a nonviolent Selma to Montgomery march for voting rights were greeted by Alabama state police who assaulted them with nightsticks, tear gas and whips after they refused to turn back. This incident angered many Americans.

Others fled for their life while others were badly battered and left bleeding. The event was shown on public television. Johnson advocated for broad voting rights legislation after the terrible occurrence. On March 15, 1965, the president detailed the sneaky methods that election officials had been denying African Americans the right to vote in an address to a joint session of Congress¹⁶. Supervisors of elections often informed black persons who tried to cast their votes that their identities had entered the date, time, or polling site erroneously, that they had appropriate reading abilities, or that they had completed an application wrongly. Black people were often forced to take literacy exams, which they occasionally rejected because of the high

¹⁶ Brian Duignan, "Voting Rights Act, United States (1965)" *Britannica*, March 15, 2026, Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Voting-Rights-Act>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

prevalence of illiteracy among their community as a result of centuries of tyranny and deprivation. On May 26, 1965, the U.S. Senate voted 77-19 to approve the voting rights measure. The U.S. House of Representatives enacted the legislation on July 9 by a vote of 333–85, following over a month of debate. On August 6, 1965, Johnson officially signed the Voting Rights Act into law. Martin Luther King Jr. and other prominent civil rights figures were there. The legislation prohibited the use of assessments of literacy, established federal monitoring of voter registration in regions where less than 50% of the non-white population had registered to vote, and gave the U.S. attorney general the authority to look into the use of poll taxes in state and municipal elections¹⁷.

The Voting Rights Act has been updated since it was first passed to include provisions like safeguarding American citizens who don't speak English as their first language. Additionally, it was walked back. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court determined, 5-4, that restrictions on certain states and federal oversight of state voting practices were no longer appropriate. Following the *Shelby County v. Holder*¹⁸ ruling, numerous states passed legislation restricting voter access, including ID requirements, early voting restrictions, mail-in voting restrictions, and more. Women were granted the opportunity to vote by the 19th Amendment; however, certain women in New Jersey had this power as early as 1776. All colonists of legal age who were valued at pounds and had lived in the county over a full year were granted the right to vote under New Jersey's first constitution, which was adopted in 1776. He or she was added to the legislation in 1790 to make it clear that both men and women could vote. However, married women were prohibited from owning property; therefore, only unmarried women could vote. Even so, many single women cast ballots in New Jersey throughout the 1790s and early 1800s. If they complied with the residence and property criteria, African Americans in the state were eligible to vote. In 1797, the New Jersey government mandated that citizens be free to vote in the state were eligible to vote. In 1797, the New Jersey government mandated that citizens be free to vote. Although the property requirements made it improbable that enslaved African Americans would cast ballots prior to the passage of this statute, no law directly forbade them from doing so.

In 1807, the state legislature limited the right to vote (suffrage) to tax-paying, white male

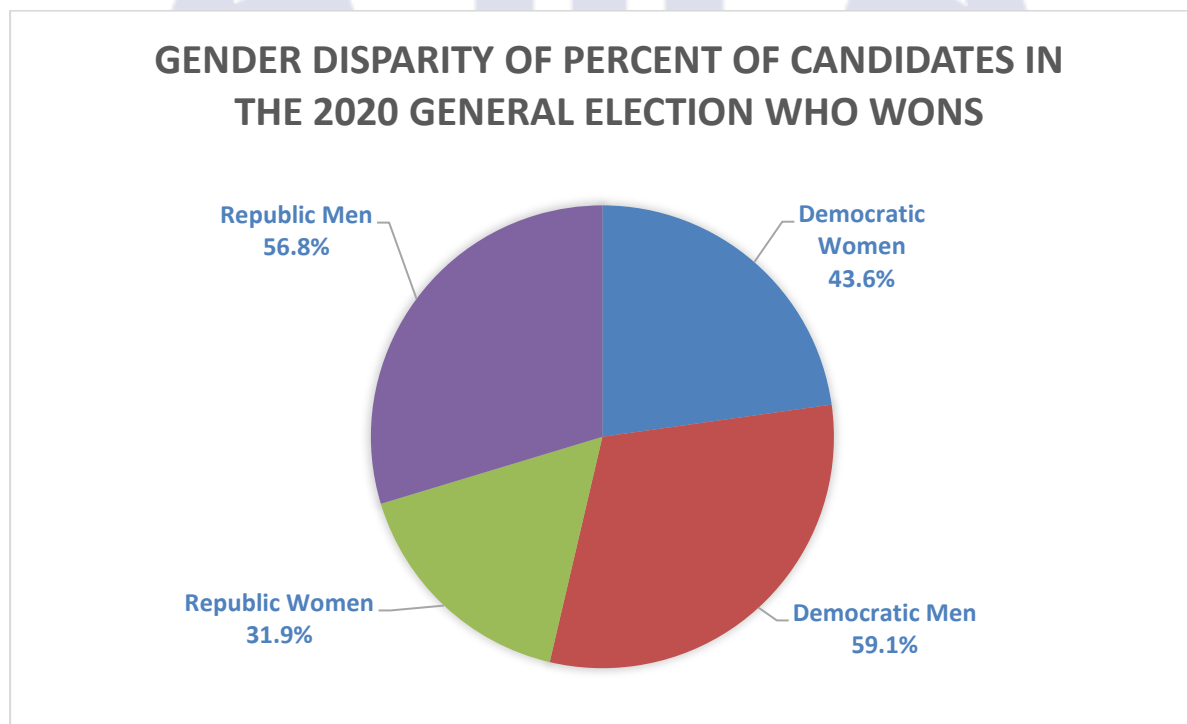
¹⁷ History.Com Editors, "Voting Rights of 1967" *History*, January 10, 2026, Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/voting-rights-act>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

¹⁸ (2013) 570 US 529

residents. To give the Democratic-Republican Party a lead in the 1808 presidential election, this had to be done. Removing female voting privileges benefited the Democratic-Republicans since women often supported the opposition Federalist Party. African Americans also lost their right to vote as a result of this statute.

Around the start of the 1800s, New Jersey was not the only state that first gave women and African Americans the right to vote before taking it away. The Constitution's 15th Amendment was adopted in 1870. According to the constitution, "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 race, colour, or previous condition of servitude." But it didn't include women or anyone who was regarded as a non-citizen at the time. The Constitution's 19th Amendment was approved in 1920. It gave women the right to vote by stating that "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." Despite these constitutional amendments, African Americans were often unable to cast ballots until the Civil Rights Act of 1965, which made voting for them guaranteed¹⁹.

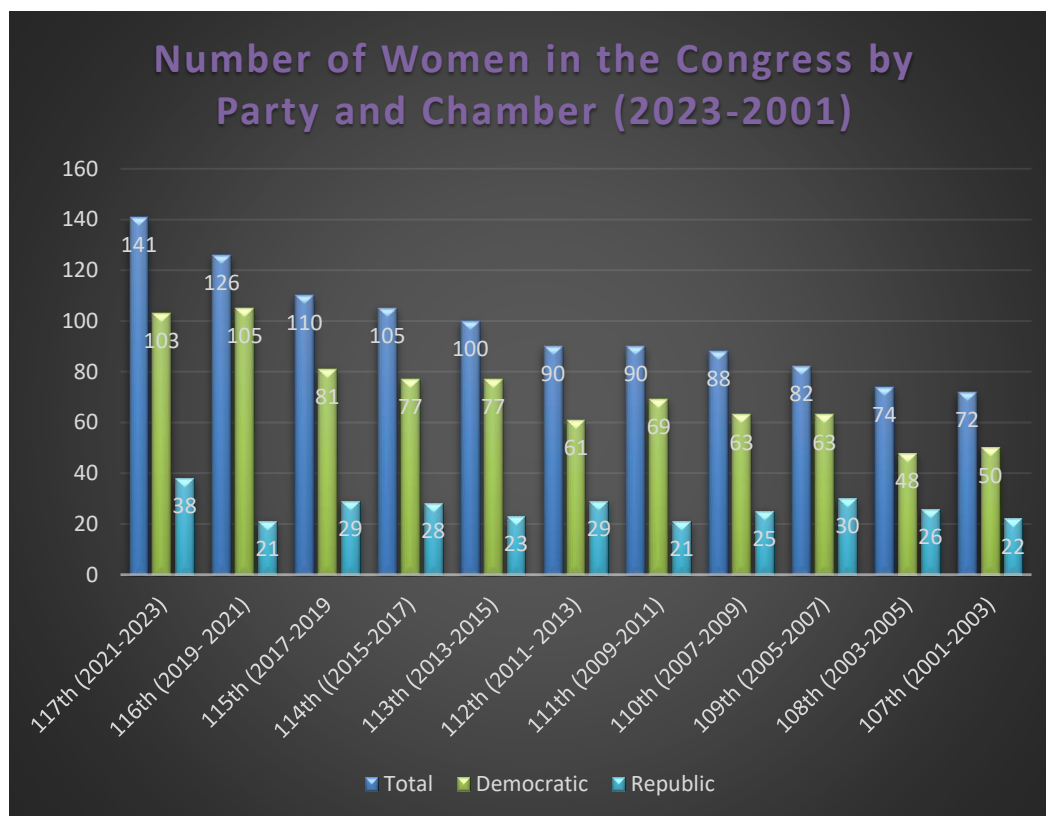
Table- 2020 U.S. House General Election Victory Rates²⁰



¹⁹ Case Study New Jersey, "Did you Know: Women and African Americans Could Vote in NJ before the 15th and 19th Amendment" *National Park Service*, Available at: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/voting-rights-in-nj-before-the-15th-and-19th.htm>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

²⁰ Measuring Success Women in 2020 Legislative Elections, *Rutgers*, Available at: <https://womenrun.rutgers.edu/2020-report/by-the-numbers/>, (last visited on May 17, 2026)

Table 107th -117th Congress (Women)²¹



Constitutional and Other Laws of the USA and Women's Rights

The absence of the term's "women" or "sex" from the Constitution illustrates how limited the original Founding Fathers' conception of women as equal citizens was. The idea of equitable treatment under legislation has been reserved in the Constitution for the exclusive benefit of its creators and their wealthy peers since it was created exclusively for and by white males with wealth. Due to their sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity, persons of colour and other groups were publicly seen as being less than complete citizens and were thus denied numerous legal rights. The majority of the legal safeguards that work to advance women's equality and equal treatment across the sexual orientation spectrum are based on the Constitution's equality principles and an updated perspective of equality that transcends antiquated biases and preconceived notions, even though the Constitution does not mention sex explicitly. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which makes sure "equal protection of the laws," has been interpreted by a strong majority of the U.S. Supreme Court to include safeguards against discrimination based on sexual orientation. This was first established in the 1971 landmark

²¹ Janie Boschma, Simona Pathe, et.al., "A record Number of Women Will Serve in the Next Congress," *CNN Politics*, January 02, 2026, Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/23/politics/election-2022-record-women-in-congress/index.html>, (last visited on May 16, 2026)

decision *Reed v. Reed* and then in other cases like *Frontiero v. Richardson*²², which was brought by future Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Despite this widespread agreement, certain conservative intellectuals and theorists, including Justice Antonin Scalia, have rejected a reading of the 14th Amendment to cover sex, contending that such arguments are flimsy because they fail to capture the founding fathers' original purpose²³. Arguments against sexism anchored in the 14th Amendment are in jeopardy in the face of a federal court that is becoming more conservative, and current safeguards are susceptible to being eliminated²⁴.

It is time to advocate for a constitutional modification that clearly guarantees equal rights for all people, irrespective of gender, 100 years before women won the right to vote. Additionally, more and more women are entering employment, occupying positions of power, and seeking election for president. According to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States of America or by any state on account of sex." An early awareness that the U.S. Constitution's affirmation of equality was not able to be completely realised due to a lack of an express, substantive commitment to equality despite sex led to early attempts to adopt the ERA²⁵. The present fight for the ERA is an ongoing warning that empty language and partial solutions purporting to promote and empower women and people throughout all categories of gender are wholly insufficient at this point, when women and people throughout the female range are confronting escalating assaults on their rights and autonomy²⁶.

Women's place in American culture was frequently viewed as inferior to men's at the time the ERA was drafted. Women were confined to certain specified zones and not considered complete citizens due to legal limitations such as bans on suffrage and ownership of property, as well as entrenched preconceptions about women's responsibilities. The combined consequences of ingrained racial, ethnic, and gender prejudices, in particular, severely

²² 404 US 71 (1971)

²³ Ben Cardin and Lisa Murkowski, "The US Constitution Does Not Guarantee Women Equality: We Intend to Change That," *CNN*, March 26, 2022, Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/26/opinions/equal-rights-amendment-constitution-murkowski-cardin/index.html>, (last visited on May 17, 2026)

²⁴ Sam Berger, "Conservative Court Packing" *Centre for American Progress*, April 03, 2019, Available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/conservative-court-packing/>, (last visited on May 17, 2026)

²⁵ Margot Wallstrom, "Still Waiting for U. S. Constitutional Equality?" *Ms.*, March 20, 2026, Available at: <https://msmagazine.com/2026/03/20/women-constitution-equality-era/>, (last visited on May 17, 2026)

²⁶ "The Complex History of the Women's Suffrage Movement" *New York Times*, August 15, 2019, Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/15/arts/design/the-complex-history-of-the-womens-suffrage-movement.html>, (last visited on May 17, 2026)

restricted many women of colour, creating a social hierarchy in which they were ranked lower than white women. Despite the ERA's continued exclusion from the Constitution, many of the beliefs and behaviours that gave rise to its original proposal have long since been discredited.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which was first enacted in 1994²⁷, is a significant piece of legislation that aims to prevent gender-based violence by providing survivors with a foundational network of governmental and social support. On three occasions, in 2000, 2005, and 2013, VAWA was renewed; however, in 2018, a unanimous majority in the House of Representatives approved an extension measure that has since been blocked in the Senate. Although VAWA has significantly increased resources and supports and reduced GBV, there is still room for growth and a demand for wider safeguards. It is essential that VAWA be immediately extended and reauthorized by Congress.

Adopting the ERA might also guarantee that current and future safeguards are as robust as feasible for victims seeking legal redress. Whenever VAWA was initially established, it contained a clause allowing survivors to file a lawsuit against their assailants in federal court in order to receive compensation or other redress. Later, a split Supreme Court invalidated the clause, concluding that Congress did not have the right to control behaviour that was not related to trade between states. Ratifying the ERA might open the door to re-examining and restoring this crucial clause by strengthening the case for Congress' constitutional power and providing over fifty million victims with a new legal avenue²⁸.

As a result, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 mandates that schools obtaining federal funds take appropriate action in the event of sexual assault or harassment on their premises or campuses. This law forbids sex discrimination in educational programs or events. Because the administration of Donald Trump undermined current safeguards against sex discrimination under Title IX, those who survived sexual abuse or harassment, whether at the college, secondary, or primary level, are particularly in danger. Over twenty prohibition of discrimination policy recommendations from the administration of Barack Obama have been revoked, suggesting the administration's intention to restrict implementation. Betsy DeVos has also proposed detrimental regulations that will make it more difficult for women to report and

²⁷ Violence Against Women Act, *Policy Centre*, Available at: <https://nnedv.org/content/violence-against-women-act/>, (last visited on May 17, 2026)

²⁸ *US v. Morrison* 529 U.S. 598 (2000)

address sexual assault. In circumstances where the government is being opposed and its attempts to penalize survivors and weaken crucial rights that recognize, respect, and protect them are being contested, the ERA may provide extra legal assistance²⁹.

The ERA will clearly encompass governmental and state acts but not specifically target those in the private sector, like earlier constitutional amendments. The amendment needs to be seen as only one crucial component of the struggle for equality between men and women; it adds an additional layer of safeguarding that could help halt strong unlawful discrimination. In order to secure equality and sufficient safeguards for women and individuals of all genders, legislators must take decisive action to fight all types of prejudice. This does not replace their crucial role in doing so. In order to fully comprehend how a confluence of elements, such as racial as well as gender prejudices, might create particular discriminatory obstacles, this study must be done with a profound grasp of the overlapping perspectives of women of colour as well as gender minorities³⁰.

WOMEN'S POSITION IN UNITED KINGDOM

Many Women do not come in politics because of sexual harassment and many other reasons. As in the British Parliament many women had made allegations on MPs and Secretaries. Since the Conservative Party continues to try to handle the escalating crisis concerning sexual harassment at Westminster, Michael Fallon has resigned as defence secretary, saying that his attitude towards women in the past has “fallen short³¹”. Gender, race, and socioeconomic class, as well as existing patriarchal views, institutionalised discrimination, and pervasive sexism, are contributing factors to power inequalities in the workplace. The book takes into account the UK Government's approach to attacking the root of the sexual harassment issue in this setting³². The history of the UK's women was not good in the Parliament. The primary causes of this condition include widespread institutionalized gender discrimination, poverty, early marriage, violence against women, especially sexual violence, discriminatory cultural and

²⁹ Jeannie Suk Gersen, “Assessing Betsy Devos's Proposed Rules on Title IX and Sexual Assault,” *The New Yorker*, February 19, 2019, Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/assessing-betsy-devos-proposed-rules-on-title-ix-and-sexual-assault>, (last visited on May 17, 2026)

³⁰ Robin Bleiweis, “The Equal Rights Amendment: What You Need to Know” *Centre for American Progress*, January 29, 2020, Available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/equal-rights-amendment-need-know/>, (last visited on May 17, 2026)

³¹ Heather Stewart and Rowena Mason, “Michael Fallon Quits as Defence Secretary, Saying His Behaviours Has ‘Fallen Short’” *The Guardian*, November 01, 2017

³² Christina Julios, *Sexual Harassment in the UK Parliament, Lesson from the MeToo Era 4* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022)

religious practices, conflict, and emergency circumstances, among others³³.

In order to understand the obstacles that prevent women from participating in the democratic mechanisms of power in politics, feminist political science first looked at institutional issues and gender-biased both formal and informal laws. Political institutions used the same strategy that was used in equal employment opportunity initiatives for women in employment on the rationale that women deserved an equal opportunity to hold political office. Feminist investigate began producing fresh information about these obstacles in the early 1970s, which includes official and informal party rules as well as the results of electoral procedures³⁴.

After identifying the obstacles to women entering parliament, research was started to determine what impact women's presence had on politics and if being a significant minority would influence political goals and procedures. The arguments for genuine equality for women, which went much beyond the justice grounds for their inclusion, were first studied by feminist political analysts³⁵.

The idea that British politics changed when women were allowed to serve as MPs in the House of Commons starting in 1918 is not hyperbole³⁶. Notwithstanding the fact that there are only 220 female MPs in the UK Parliament (a record 34% of seats in the Commons as of the 2019 parliamentary election), women MPs have been successful in elevating the perspectives of women to the centre of public life and politics. In honour of International Women's Day on March 6, 2020, the names of 100 women slain by males in 2019 were read aloud in Parliament. Would that have taken place in the absence of female MPs? Would Parliament have been able to approve the 2020 Domestic Abuse Bill?

Centenaries frequently present occasions for commemoration and contemplation. Such events included the first female MP's election and the 100th anniversaries of the Representation of the People Act (1918). The release of Rachel Reeves' Women of Westminster is timed to support and expand this analysis of how women's roles have changed in politics. In order to

³³ Walter Leal Filho and Luciana Brandli, et.al., *Gender Equality*, 2 (Springer Reference, 2021)

³⁴ Marian Sawer and Keryn Baker, (eds.), *Gender Innovation in Political Science, New Norms, new Knowledge* 16 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Jessica Brain, "Votes for Women", Available at: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Votes-For-Women/>, (last visited on May 18, 2026)

convey the tale of the 491 women who were elected to Parliament throughout the course of the previous century, *Women of Westminster* aims to map an uprising in Westminster. Reeves herself belongs to this group because she represents Leeds West as an MP. Reeves pledges to show how female MPs helped pass laws that improved the lives and possibilities of women, how they changed the political climate, how they defied stereotypes, and how they improved the position of women as a result³⁷.

After the 1918 Parliament (Qualification) of Women Act was passed, the windows of Parliament were forced open to let women inside. Nine months after allowing women older than thirty who satisfied the property requirements to vote in parliament, this change was put into place. The Act made it possible for women to run for office at any age above 21. Constance Markievicz, running for the Irish republican party Sinn Féin, was one of 17 female candidates in that year's December election, making her the first woman to be elected to the British Parliament. She rejected to accept her position because she is a republican and will not swear loyalty to the monarch³⁸. The House of Commons Speaker, James William Lowther, presided over an electoral change conference in 1916–1917 that supported restricted women's suffrage. The House of Commons Speaker, James William Lowther, presided over an electoral change conference in 1916–1917 that supported restricted women's suffrage.

Prior to 1918, just over fifty percent of adult males were entitled to vote. The fact that simply males who had been citizens of the nation for 12 months before to a general election were eligible to vote, along with the suffrage movement and the expansion of the Labour Party, was a significant factor. This essentially deprived a sizable contingent of soldiers who had been fighting overseas of their citizenship. Politicians were finally convinced to provide the right to vote to all males and some women since a national election was coming up. The Representation of the People Act 1918, which was established in 1918, granted the right to vote to women over 30 who satisfied certain property requirements. Even though 8.5 million women fit this description, they made up just around 2/3 of all women in the UK. The same law also made almost all males above the age of 21 eligible to vote and repealed property and other limitations on men. Men in the military may vote starting at the age of 19 as well. Even though the number

³⁷ Francesca Morphakis, "Women of Westminster: The MPs Who Changed Politics, By Rachel Reeves" 31 *Twentieth Century of British History* 282-383 (2020)

³⁸ Catriona Beaumont, "The Women in Parliament from 1918-2020" October 23, 2020, Available at: <https://www.bl.uk/womens-rights/articles/women-in-parliament-1918-2020#footnote1>, (last visited on May 18, 2026)

of voters rose from eight to twenty-one million, there was still a significant gender gap³⁹.

The study was commissioned by the British Council to examine the gains made for women's political involvement, power, and leadership across the four nations that make up the UK, to identify ongoing issues and objectives, and to take into account views from other nations. In addition to focusing on how many women are represented in parliament, the concept of women's political involvement, power, and governance also considers how women impact the processes of decision-making and structures of power, as well as how women participate in politics in various spheres of their lives⁴⁰.

The European Convention on Human Rights was formally adopted into national law in 1998. Gender law is monitored and upheld by organizations like the Equality and Human Rights Commission for Britain (EHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. In particular, the affirmative obligation to advance equality (including sex equality) in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010 in Britain, and the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 are viewed as shining examples of best practises throughout the world. A collection of national criteria for Wales' implementation of the SDGs is provided by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015⁴¹. The third woman prime minister of the United Kingdom, after Theresa May as a member of parliament (2016–2019) and Baroness Thatcher (1979–1990), was Liz Truss as a member of parliament in 2022. As of this writing, 31% of legislators are women. The House of Commons has 225 female MPs, while the House of Lords has 237. At 35% and 29%, respectively, there are somewhat more women in the Commons than the Lords. The proportion of female MPs has increased. 220 women became MPs following the 2019 general election. This was a record-high 34%. Up until a spike in 1997, the percentage of women increased gradually. 561 different women were chosen to serve in the House of Commons between 1918 and 2023; 31% were Conservatives and 55% were Labour MPs. Women make up 43% of the Welsh Parliament's members, 46% of the Scottish Parliament, and 37% of the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively. In England, there are

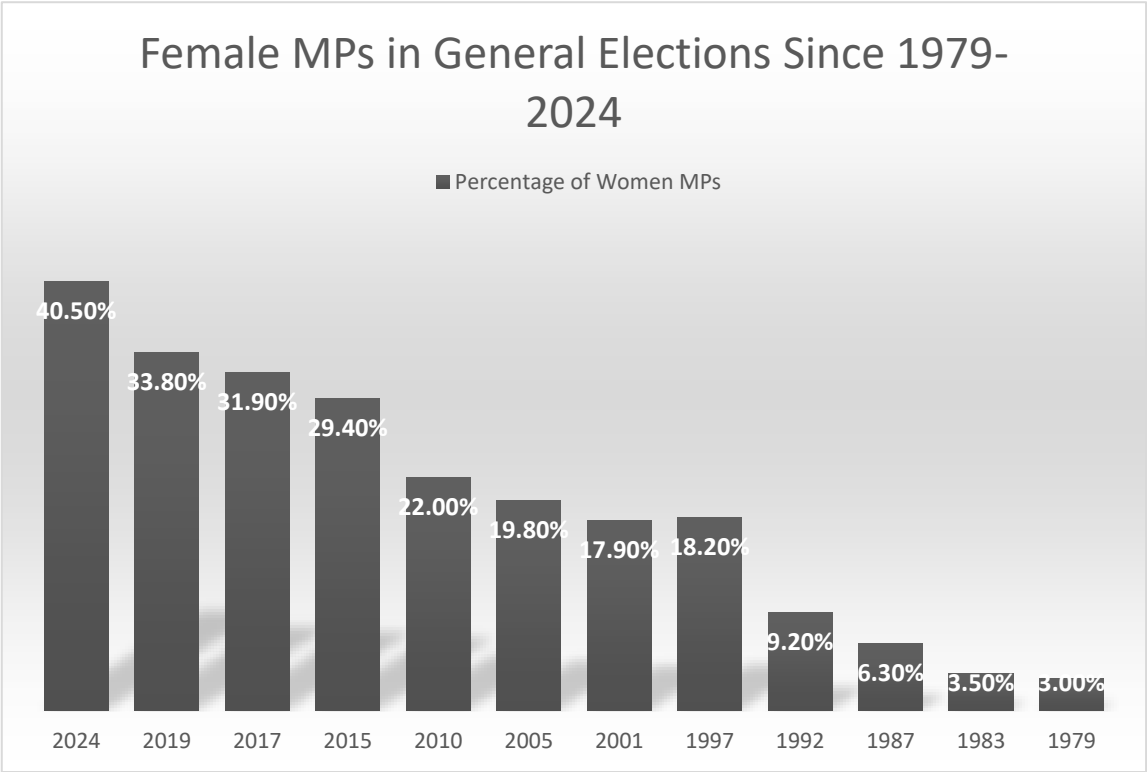
³⁹ UK Parliament, "Women Get the Vote", Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/thevote/>, (last visited on May 18, 2026)

⁴⁰ British Council, "Women, Power and Politics in the UK: What's Changed in 100 Years? A Study Commemorating 100 Years of Women's right to Vote", Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/womens-and-girls-empowerment/research-reports/women-power-politics-100>, (last visited on May 18, 2026)

⁴¹ British Council, "Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls in the UK", Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/womens-and-girls-empowerment/gender-equality-uk>, (last visited on May 18, 2026)

about 41% more women than males serving on local councils. Around 26% of councillors in Northern Ireland, 35% in Scotland, and 28% in Wales are female. Women make up 52% of the London Assembly's membership. The London Assembly has 52% female members⁴².

Table- Women MPs in UK Parliament



CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of women's political participation in the United States and the United Kingdom yields several important conclusions about the nature of gendered political inclusion in established democracies.

First, the research confirms that electoral systems matter significantly. The UK's first-past-the-post system, when combined with proactive party mechanisms such as all-women shortlists, has proven more effective at accelerating women's legislative representation than the decentralized candidate selection processes prevalent in the United States. However, the American system's federal structure creates multiple entry points, enabling women to build political careers at the local and state levels that can eventually translate into national

⁴² Elise Uberoi and Zoe Mansfield, "Women in Politics and Public Life" *House of Commons Library*, March 06, 2026, Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01250/>, (last visited on May 18, 2026)

prominence a pathway less readily available in the UK's more centralized political architecture. Second, both countries continue to exhibit what scholars term the "glass ceiling" phenomenon in executive and high-visibility offices. While women have achieved notable successes including female Prime Ministers in the UK and a female Vice President in the USA the highest executive offices remain stubbornly male-dominated. This suggests that visibility and symbolic representation, while culturally significant, do not automatically translate into structural shifts in power distribution.

Third, intersectionality emerges as a critical variable often overlooked in aggregate analyses. Women of colour, working-class women, and women from minority religious backgrounds face compounded barriers in both political systems. The data indicates that diversity among women officeholders remains limited, particularly in the UK Parliament and the US Congress, pointing to the need for intersectional approaches to candidate recruitment and support.

Fourth, the study finds that informal institutions party culture, networking practices, fundraising expectations, and media coverage often prove more resistant to change than formal rules. Even where legal barriers have been removed, the "masculine default" of political life continues to disadvantage women candidates, particularly in campaign financing and media portrayal.

Finally, the comparative evidence suggests that incremental progress, while real, is insufficient to achieve gender parity within a reasonable timeframe. Both democracies require sustained institutional innovation, including gender quotas, public funding mechanisms that reduce financial barriers, and media accountability frameworks that challenge sexist coverage norms. In sum, the experiences of the USA and UK demonstrate that democratic maturity does not guarantee gender equality in political life. The unfinished project of women's full political participation demands not only the protection of hard-won rights but also the active redesign of political institutions to reflect the diversity of the societies they claim to represent. Without such reforms, both nations risk perpetuating democratic deficits that undermine the legitimacy and representativeness of their governance structures.