

Women's suffrage

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Women's suffrage is the right of women to vote in elections. Historically, women rarely had the right to vote, even in ostensibly democratic systems of government. This shifted in the late 19th century when women's suffrage was accomplished in Australasia, then Europe, and then the Americas. By the middle of the 20th century, women's suffrage had been established as a norm of democratic governance. Extended political campaigns by women and their supporters played an important role in changing public attitudes, altering norms, and achieving legislation or constitutional amendments for women's suffrage. The first wave of women's suffrage took place 1893-1930, covering English-speaking countries, Scandinavian states, and some other parts of Europe. The experience of the First World War has been characterized as an important factor in shifting public support for women's suffrage. The second wave, 1930-1970, covered nearly all Latin-American countries, much of Sub-Saharan Africa and some European laggards (France, Spain, Belgium). Pitcairn Island allowed women to vote for its councils in 1838. Several instances occurred in recent centuries where women were selectively given, then stripped of, the right to vote. In Sweden, conditional women's suffrage was in effect during the Age of Liberty (1718–1772), as well as in Revolutionary and early-independence New Jersey (1776–1807) in the US. The Kingdom of Hawai'i, which originally had universal suffrage in 1840, rescinded this in 1852 and was subsequently annexed by the United States in 1898. In the years after 1869, a number of provinces held by the British and Russian empires conferred women's suffrage, and some of these became sovereign nations at a later point, like New Zealand, Australia, and Finland. Several states and territories of the United States, such as Wyoming (1869) and Utah (1870), also granted women the right to vote. Women who owned property gained the right to vote in the Isle of Man in 1881, and in 1893, women in the then self-governing British colony of New Zealand were granted the right to vote. In Australia, the colony of South Australia granted women the right to vote and stand for parliament in 1895 while the Australian Federal Parliament conferred the right to vote and stand for election in 1902 (although it allowed for the exclusion of "aboriginal natives"). Prior to independence, in the Russian Grand Duchy of Finland, women gained equal suffrage, with both the right to vote and to stand as candidates in 1906. National and international organizations formed to coordinate efforts towards women voting, especially the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (founded in 1904 in Berlin, Germany). Most major Western powers extended voting rights to women by the interwar period, including Canada (1917), Germany (1918), the United Kingdom (1918 for women over 30 who met certain property requirements, 1928 for all women), Austria, the Netherlands (1919) and the United States (1920). Notable exceptions in Europe were France, where women could not vote until 1944, Greece (equal voting rights for women did not exist there until 1952, although, since 1930, literate women were able to vote in local elections), and Switzerland (where, since 1971, women could vote at the federal level, and between 1959 and 1990, women got the right to vote at the local canton level). In many countries, limited suffrage for women was granted before universal suffrage for men; for instance, literate women or property owners were granted suffrage before all men received it. The United Nations encouraged women's suffrage in the years following World War II, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) identifies it as a basic right with 189 countries currently being parties to this convention.