



## FULL TIMELINE OF VOTING RIGHTS

**1788:** The founding fathers of the United States establish the Electoral College. The American people do not directly elect the President. Instead, the Electoral College elects the President. The Electoral College votes are divided among the states. Each state gets two votes for its two Senators and a vote for each of its Representatives in Congress. The number of congressional representatives varies from state to state depending on the state's population.

If a candidate wins the popular vote (a vote cast by a citizen) in a state, they win that state's Electoral College vote. It is possible, mathematically, to win the popular vote and lose the presidential election if the candidate does not win enough Electoral votes.

**1789:** The U.S. elects George Washington as its first President.

**1820–1830:** As states join the union they create their own state constitutions outlining who is allowed to vote. Eligible voters are mostly white males who own property. A small number of free black men are allowed to vote but no women either white or black.

**1840:** Women begin to organize to petition for **suffrage**, or the right to vote. (Find out more about women's suffrage with the [Scholastic Research Starter](#).) Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton are two of the most famous leaders of the Suffragette Movement.

**1848:** Wisconsin enters the union and has the most liberal voting laws. They allow people living here from other countries the right to vote if they had lived in Wisconsin for one year and plan to become citizens of the United States. But even in Wisconsin, women do not have the right to vote.

**1850:** Groups like the "No-Nothings" create literacy laws that state that those who wish to vote must pass a literacy test. Since many blacks and immigrants cannot read or write they are denied the right to vote. This was an attempt to keep the vote in the hands of the white male population.

**1860:** The Democratic party divides into Northern and Southern wings. South Carolina secedes from the United States after Abraham Lincoln is elected President.

**1861–1865:** The American Civil War

**1861:** Jefferson Davis is elected President of the Confederate States of America.

**1866:** The 14th Amendment to the Constitution is passed by Congress. It states that men age 21 and over who are residents of the United States have the right to vote. Any state preventing these rights will lose electors in the Electoral College. Women still do not have the right to vote.

**1869:** Congress passes the 15th Amendment to the Constitution. That amendment grants all men the right to vote regardless of race, color, or if they were formally slaves. The Amendment does not give women the right to vote.

In Wyoming Territory women are given the right to vote, and those rights continue after Wyoming becomes a state in 1890.

**1870:** Utah territory gives women the right to vote.

**1877:** After the presidential election of 1876, the Electoral Commission gives disputed Electoral votes to Rutherford B. Hayes, despite the fact that Samuel Tilden wins the popular vote.

**1878:** An act to amend the Constitution and give women the right to vote is introduced into Congress but does not pass.

**1890:** Many states begin to use secret ballots so that voters cannot be bullied into voting for candidates they do not support.

**1893:** New Zealand women receive the right to vote.

**1896:** Idaho grants women the right to vote.

**1911:** California gives women the right to vote.

**1917:** Canadian women receive the right to vote.

**1920:** On August 18, Congress passes the 19th Amendment to the Constitution giving women the right to vote.

**1928:** Women in the United Kingdom and Ireland receive the right to vote.

**1944:** Women in France receive the right to vote.

**1950:** Women in India receive the right to vote.

**1964:** On January 23 Congress passes the 24th Amendment to the Constitution outlawing poll taxes. **Poll taxes**, or tax fees for voting, have been used to discourage poor people from voting.

**1965:** The Voting Rights Act is signed by President Lyndon Johnson. The act enforces the 15th Amendment by explicitly stating that obstacles, such as literacy tests or complicated ballot instructions, are against federal law.

**1971:** On July 1, the 26th Amendment is passed by Congress lowering the voting age from 21 to 18. The law is meant to resolve the disparity that 18-year-old men are old enough to be drafted to fight in the Vietnam War, yet did not have the right to vote.

**1975:** Congress expands the Voting Rights Act to protect the voting rights of those people who do not speak or read English.

**1990:** The Soviet Union holds its first elections.

**1994:** First multiracial election in South Africa takes place. Until now, only white people have been allowed to vote.

**2000:** For the first time in United States history, in a close and controversial election, the President of the United States is chosen based on a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Al Gore wins the nation's popular vote, but George W. Bush has the lead in the Electoral College. The vote in Florida is too close to call and plagued with voting irregularities. Vice President and Democratic candidate for President, Al Gore, requests a recount. The recount must be done by the state's deadline to cast their Electoral College vote, so the Florida Supreme Court votes to extend the deadline. The U.S. Supreme Court suspends the recount and enforces the state's deadline. George W. Bush is declared President-elect on December 13, more than one month after the November 4 election.

## **SOURCES**

Graphic created by Mikka Kei Ito Macdonald

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