In the mid-1800s, public life was reserved for men

Upper class women were not expected to work. Women could not go to university, so they were excluded from professions such as law and medicine.

When a woman married, everything she owned automatically belonged to her husband. She no longer had a legal identity of her own.

The Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland was made up entirely of men, who were elected by men. Women began to realise that they only way they could change how the law treated them was by having a vote in parliamentary elections.

> After the Parliament of Ireland was abolished in 1800, Irish MPs sat in the British House of Commons.

During this time, many men did not have a vote either. It was reserved for men who owned a certain amount of property. A mass movement began to demand that all men, rich and poor, be given the vote.

The Government responded in 1866 by proposing a new law on who could vote. Some 1,500 women, including 25 Irish women, signed a petition asking for women to be included. The Second Reform Act of 1867 gave most working class men living in towns the vote, but gave nothing to women.

VOTES FOR WOMEN.

JOHN STUART MILL, PIONEER OF WOMEN'S FREEDOM.
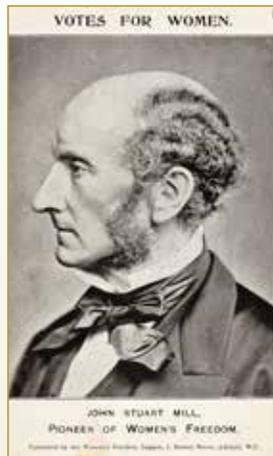
John Stuart Mill MP

Women began to form organisations to campaign for the vote

In Dublin, Anna Haslam, with her husband Thomas, founded the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association. In Belfast, Isabella Tod established the North of Ireland Society for Women's Suffrage. Many other suffrage organisations were formed all over Ireland.

Suffragists campaigned for women to be included in the next set of electoral reforms. They organised public and private meetings, invited speakers from England and wrote letters to politicians. However, the Third Reform Act of 1884 was passed without giving any voting rights to women.

The first women graduate from an Irish university

Women also campaigned, with more success, for other improvements in their rights. From the 1870s, married women were permitted to own property. Women who owned a certain amount of property could participate in local government. In 1878, schoolgirls were permitted to take public exams. Medical schools began to accept women and by the first decade of the 20th century women could go to university.

Thomas and Anna Haslam

> "I have always objected to female suffrage, as being contrary to what I believe is the manifest order of Nature".
>
> Mr. Beresford Hope MP, House of Commons, 12 June 1884.

The Irish suffrage campaign was complicated by the big issue that dominated Irish politics: Home Rule

Irish politicians had spent decades campaigning for a parliament in Ireland and female suffrage was an unwanted distraction.

In 1912, it looked like the Parliament was finally ready to accept a Home Rule Bill. Irish suffragists campaigned to get suffrage included in the Bill. However, with the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, and the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, firmly against it, the campaign failed.

Irish suffragists responded with militant action, breaking windows in Dublin Castle and other Government buildings in Dublin. They also destroyed mail by pouring liquid into post boxes. These women were inspired by the militant campaigners in England, who had been nicknamed suffragettes by the English press.

> "Until the women of Ireland are free, the men will not achieve emancipation."
>
> Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Bean na hÉireann, November 1909.

Led by Emmeline Pankhurst, the English suffragettes were disrupting political meetings, throwing stones at Government Ministers and smashing shop windows. Over the following two years, 27 suffragettes were imprisoned in Ireland for their disruptive actions. Once in prison, they demanded the privileges of political prisoners and some went on hunger strike.

## The tumultuous events of the 1910s overshadowed the suffrage movement

In 1914, war broke out in Europe. Some Irish suffragists kept campaigning for the vote, but many focused on the war effort. Other Irishwomen became involved in the fight for Irish independence. They aspired to become equal citizens in an independent Ireland.

When the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising signed the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, they addressed "Irishmen and Irishwomen" and pledged that Ireland's future national government would be "elected by the suffrages of all her men and women".

Meanwhile in Britain, the government decided to settle the matter by giving women the vote. In February 1918, the Representation of the People Act gave the vote to women aged 30 or older who were university graduates or owned a certain amount of property. The Act also gave the vote to all men aged at least 21, or 19 if they were on military service.

In November, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act was passed allowing women to become MPs.

In December, a general election was held in Britain and Ireland. Of the 17 women who stood for election, two of them stood in Ireland. One woman, Countess de Markievicz, was elected to the House of Commons. However, she never took her seat in Westminster. Instead, she joined the MPs who started a revolutionary parliament in Dublin and declared Ireland's independence.
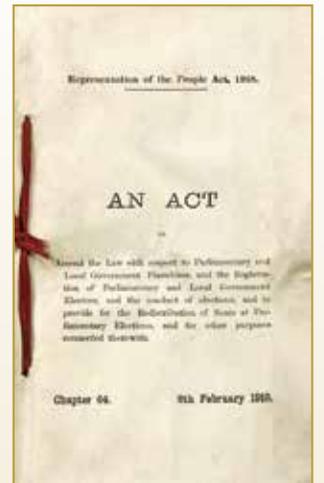
The 1918 election was the beginning of a new era

The number of voters in Ireland had increased from 700,000 in 1910 to almost 2 million. Women aged 30 or over who owned property could vote, but so could men who did not own property.

The Irish Parliamentary Party, which had held 74 seats in the House of Commons, won only six. The Sinn Féin party won 73 seats. Sinn Féin would have been the third largest party in the House of Commons. However, the Sinn Féin candidates had pledged not to take their seats in Westminster. Instead, they set up the first Dáil and declared Ireland's independence.

On the same day, two Royal Irish Constabulary constables were killed in an ambush, marking the start of the campaign for independence. A Truce in 1921 was followed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Treaty was ratified in 1922, establishing the Irish Free State.

The Constitution of the Irish Free State gave all citizens aged 21 and over the right to vote for and become members of Dáil Éireann. Irish women achieved full voting equality six years before British women.

The number of women elected to the Oireachtas has increased over time but remains well below 50%. In 2012, an Act was passed incentivising political parties to ensure at least 30% of the candidates they put forward for elections were women. In the 2016 general election, 35 women were elected to Dáil Éireann, an increase of 40% on the previous election. Women now make up 22% of the Dáil membership, the highest proportion in the history of the State.

47 of the Sinn Féin members elected, including Countess de Markievicz, were in jail at the time of the election.

Timeline

Year	Event (left)	Event (right)
1832	Great Reform Act restricts parliamentary vote to "male persons"	
1866	John Stuart Mill presents petition to Parliament asking for votes for women	25 Irish women sign the petition to Parliament
1867	Second Reform Act increases electorate but continues to exclude women	
1872		North of Ireland Society for Women's Suffrage established in Belfast
1876		Dublin Women's Suffrage Association established
1884	Third Reform Act increases electorate but continues to exclude women	The first women graduate from an Irish university
1898		Local Government (Ireland) Act allows women to vote and run in district council elections
1903	Women's Social and Political Union is established – militant campaign begins	
1908	Herbert Asquith becomes Prime Minister and blocks a Bill on women's suffrage	Irish Women's Franchise League established
1910	Black Friday - hundreds of women are injured when police attack a march on Parliament	
1911	Parliament Act revokes House of Lords veto	
1912	English suffragettes follow Asquith on his visit to Dublin and are imprisoned for acts of violence	Home Rule Bill introduced without including votes for women - militant campaign begins
1913	Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-health) Act, called the Cat and Mouse Act, introduced to tackle female hunger strikers	
1914	First World War begins	Cumann na mBan established
1916		Proclamation of the Irish Republic specifically includes Irish women
1918	Representation of the People Act enfranchises women aged at least 30 who own property Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act permits women to stand for election	Countess de Markievicz becomes first woman elected to House of Commons
1922		Constitution of the Irish Free State gives the Dáil vote to all citizens aged 21 and over "without distinction of sex"

Discover more about Irish women and the vote

Visit our website to
- learn out about the first female Members of the Dáil and Seanad
- discover the legacy of the Irish suffragists
- find out about the commemorative events hosted by the Houses of the Oireachtas

www.oireachtas.ie/votail100

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100 years of "Votes for Women"

1918 was the first time Irish women were permitted by law to vote and run in parliamentary elections.

1918

Countess de Markievicz

1918 was also the year in which the first woman was elected to the British Parliament at Westminster.

Irish Women's Franchise LEAGUE.
MISS CHRISTABEL PANKHURST, LL.B.,
ROTUNDA.
Friday, March 11th,
8 p.m.
Tickets, 2/- (Reserved) 1/- & 6d.
VOTES FOR WOMEN.

I.W. Votes for Women. F.L.

HISTORY REPEATING HERSELF.

Hanna Sheehy Skeffington

IRISH WOMENS FRANCHISE LEAGUE

2018

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