

Module 02: Should Women Vote? The Politics of Suffrage

Introduction

Central to European politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the question, Should women vote? As elected governments expanded and gained power in many European countries, the right to vote, also known as "suffrage," became an important measure of citizenship. Proponents of women's equality maintained that the right to vote equaled full participation in the political system and thus provided women and their supporters with a means of acquiring additional rights. Political campaigns organized around women's suffrage aimed for a more even distribution of political power throughout society. Advocates argued that granting women the right to vote would promote stable and democratic developments in the future. Opponents, by contrast, claimed that women's suffrage would weaken the social order, create turmoil, and further undermine social and political development.

This module discusses the historical context, key beliefs, and leading figures of the various women's suffrage movements throughout Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The documents in the Evidence section use the case of Britain to explore public attitudes towards suffrage movements and to uncover the range of responses to the central question, Should women vote?