



1893 Women's suffrage day

The Governor, Lord Glasgow, signed a new Electoral Act into law. As a result of this landmark legislation, New Zealand became the first self-governing country in the world to grant all women the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

The passing of the Electoral Act was the culmination of years of agitation by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and other organisations. As part of this campaign, a series of [massive petitions](#) – including one earlier in 1893 signed by almost one in four adult women in New Zealand – were presented to Parliament.

In most other democracies – notably Britain and the United States – women did not win the right to vote until after the First World War. New Zealand's world leadership in women's suffrage became a central part of our image as a trailblazing 'social laboratory'.

Even so, New Zealand women still had a long way to go to achieve political equality. They would not gain the right to stand for Parliament until 1919, and the [first female MP \(Elizabeth McCombs\) was not elected until 1933](#) – 40 years after the introduction of women's suffrage. The number of female MPs did not reach double figures until the mid-1980s, and at about 30% of MPs women remain under-represented in Parliament.

Image: ['The summit at last', suffrage cartoon](#)

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