

EXPANDING VOTING RIGHTS

FAQ: Voting in the Early Republic

What did the Constitution as it was ratified in 1789 say about voting rights?

The original, un-amended United States Constitution said very little about who had the right to vote. It left that decision to the individual states.

Who could vote during the early Republic?

In most states, only property owners—usually only those who were white and male—could vote.

What restrictions did most early states put on voting?

States felt that people with a stake in society would vote responsibly and should be allowed to have a say in decisions. Thus, voting rights were generally restricted to these groups:

Property Owners

Leaders believed that only property owners were able to make independent decisions. In contrast, people who worked for others would be influenced to vote in a way that would please their bosses. Women, too, would be unable to vote independent of their husbands' wishes.

Taxpayers

Some states restricted voting rights to those who paid taxes. Remember the Revolution's rallying cry, "No taxation without representation!"

Military Veterans

Some states restricted voting rights to those who had served in the militia.