

# Indira Gandhi

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Indira Gandhi was the first female prime minister in India, elected in 1966. Born to an influential family in Allahabad, India, she held the office of prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 until her assassination in 1984.

Born November 19, 1917, Indira Priyadarshini Nehru was the daughter and only child of Jawaharlal Nehru. From childhood the country's politics played a great part in her life. Her grandfather was a leader in India's fight for independence from Britain, and her father was India's first prime minister from 1947 to 1964. She graduated from Visva-Bharati University in Bengal and studied at Oxford University in England. In 1942 she married a lawyer, Feroze Gandhi (no relation to the Indian freedom leader, Mohandas Gandhi). Shortly after their marriage, the couple spent thirteen months in prison for their part in India's Independence Party, which sought freedom from Britain. Feroze Gandhi died in 1960.



When India became independent and Gandhi's father took office as prime minister, she served as his official hostess and as one of his advisors. She also accompanied him on trips. In 1955 Gandhi was elected to the executive body of the Indian National Congress party and in 1959 became its president.

After her father's death in 1964, Gandhi became India's minister of information and broadcasting under prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. When Shastri died in 1966, Indira Gandhi succeeded him. The following year she was elected to the office of prime minister by the Congress party. In 1971 she led her party to a landslide victory.

In June of 1975, a court found Gandhi guilty of illegal campaign practices during the 1971 election. Many called for her resignation. Gandhi responded by declaring a state of emergency two weeks after the ruling, arresting many of her opponents and censoring the press. In 1977 she called for a new election, which she hoped would demonstrate popular support for her regime. The Congress party suffered a sweeping defeat, and she was voted out of office. However, she made a comeback in the elections held in January of 1980 and formed a new majority government.

In 1984 Gandhi moved to suppress Sikh insurgents. The capture of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the headquarters of the Sikh religious faction, outraged many of the groups, members. October 31, 1984, two Sikh members of her security guard shot her at very close range, killing her.

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## Suggested Activities

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**Assassination** Many world leaders of the twentieth century were assassinated. Learn who they were and why they were assassinated. Also find out about failed assassination attempts.

**Politics** Politics in India in the twentieth century have changed dramatically, largely due to the freedom the nation gained from Britain in the 1940s. Find out about India's political history over the last century.