

IN CONTEXT

PRIMARY QUOTE
Christabel Pankhurst, 1908

KEY FIGURES
Millicent Fawcett, Emmeline Pankhurst, Sylvia Pankhurst, Christabel Pankhurst, Mary Leigh, Emily Davison

BEFORE
1832 The Great Reform Act excludes women from voting in parliamentary elections.

1851 The Sheffield Female Political Association is formed, the first women's suffrage group in the UK.

AFTER
1918 Women of property and over the age of 30 are granted the vote. At the same time, male suffrage is extended to all males over 21.

1928 British women gain the same voting rights as men.

Of all the developments that advanced the cause of feminism in the 20th century, the suffragette movement can be singled out for its effective use of political violence in helping to secure voting rights for women in Great Britain and Ireland. Led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, the suffragettes gripped the public's attention because the women involved—mostly middle and upper class—were prepared to risk arrest, injury, and even death for their cause.

The suffragettes stood for two principles. One was that women should have the right to vote in public elections on the same terms as men—a proposal advocated by the women's suffrage movement that had emerged in the mid-19th century. The second was that any action justified achieving this end, a precept embodied in the mantra of "deeds not words." It was the adoption of militant protest tactics that set the suffragettes apart from the suffragists, who used strictly peaceful means to achieve their goals.

Campaigning for the right of women to vote was not a new phenomenon—women's suffrage had been on the agenda in several nations since the early to mid-19th century, and in Sweden from the 18th century. In the US, the topic of women's suffrage emerged around the same time as calls for the abolition of slavery began to gather strength in the 1840s. In the UK, the first women's suffrage petition had been presented to parliament by women's rights activist Mary Smith in 1832. There was some progress toward the goal of extending the vote to women but it was slow.

Gaining momentum
In 1867, John Stuart Mill, MP for the City of Westminster, proposed a bill to the British parliament that would have given women the same political rights as men. Soundly defeated, the failed bill was the catalyst for the formation of suffrage societies around the country, 17 of which amalgamated in 1897 as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). By pooling resources and acting with a united front, the suffragists hoped to gain momentum for what they called "The Cause"—political equality for women, which was most clearly symbolized in the vote.

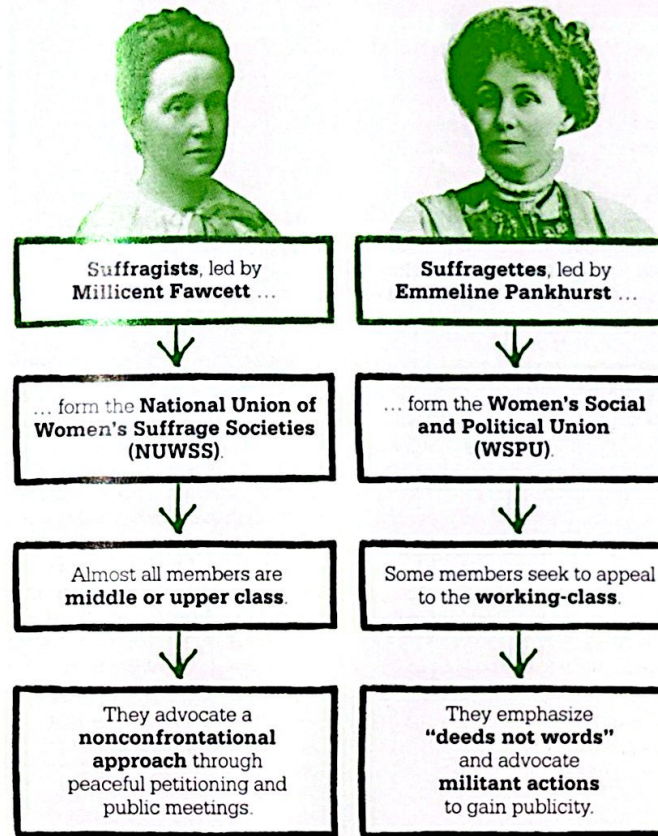
Within a few years, Millicent Fawcett, the wife and daughter of prominent political radicals, had taken on the role of leader and spokesperson. The suffragists had a middle-class focus, and this was reflected in their aims—to secure the vote for women who owned

Suffragettes march in support of fellow activists released from Holloway prison in August 1908. The women had been jailed for throwing stones at the prime minister's windows.



See also: The birth of the suffrage movement 56–63 • The global suffrage movement 94–97

Suffragists v. Suffragettes



property. Their activities were legal and constitutional, and included writing letters to MPs and holding rallies and marches.

A different strategy
Like Fawcett, fellow suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst was middle class, but where Fawcett could be considered liberal-conservative,

Pankhurst was socialist, and her strategy for achieving political equality for women was very different. Where Fawcett's suffragists pursued peaceful means, Pankhurst advocated militant action. Despite being an active member of the NUWSS, in 1903 Pankhurst was compelled to form her own breakaway group, the

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The difference between a Suffragist and a Suffragette ... the Suffragist just wants the vote, while the Suffragette means to get it.
The Suffragette
(1914)
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Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), when her local branch of the Independent Labour Party repeatedly refused to put the vote for women on its agenda. This breakaway was significant, since the party had worked alongside the NUWSS in investigating social inequality and proposing reforms to the British parliament.

Emmeline Pankhurst's daughters Sylvia, Christabel, and Adela were also founding members of the WSPU. Eventually the family members would fall out over Sylvia's increasing conviction that working-class women should be included in the union's agenda, but for the first years of the WSPU the family was united in its efforts. Mrs. Pankhurst, as Emmeline became known in the media, had been active in the cause of women's suffrage since 1880 and over the course of more than 20 years had come to the conclusion that votes for women would never be won through conventional political channels. A radical approach was needed that »

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I had to get a close-hand view of the misery and unhappiness of a man-made world, before I could ... successfully revolt against it.

Emmeline Pankhurst

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would force the government to pay attention and take the vote for women seriously. Drawing on the militant tactics of Russian revolutionaries, Pankhurst and her band of followers devised a strategy of civil disobedience and terrorism aimed at compelling parliament to pass legislation that would give women electoral voting rights.

This extremism highlighted the difference between Fawcett's suffragists of the NUWSS and the Pankhurst-led suffragettes of the WSPU. In fact, the WSPU stood in direct opposition to the NUWSS,

Emmeline Pankhurst



Born in Manchester, England, in 1858, Emmeline Gouldern was raised in a family with radical views. In 1879, she married Richard Pankhurst, a lawyer and suffrage supporter who had written the UK's Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. Among her achievements were the formation of the Women's Franchise League in 1889 and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. She was imprisoned seven times for civil disobedience yet she was fiercely patriotic and encouraged women's contribution to Britain's war effort

which it refused to join. The term suffragettes was adopted by the WSPU in 1906, after the name was coined in an article in the *Daily Mail* newspaper. The editor intentionally added the diminutive suffix "ettes" as an insult, implying that these women were merely an imitation of the real thing. The WSPU's clever response to the *Daily Mail*'s wit was to adopt the term as a badge of honor.

Inspiration and tactics

From a young age, Emmeline Pankhurst had heard stories about civil unrest in Russia as its citizens fought for freedom under the Czar. Her family had welcomed Russian exiles to gatherings at their home in London's Russell Square. Pankhurst almost certainly knew about the trial of Vera Zasulich, charged with attempting to assassinate Governor Trepov in St. Petersburg in 1878. Found not guilty, Zasulich had proudly declared that she was not a murderer, she was a terrorist. She was acting for the Russian anarchist group Narodnaya Volya (the People's Will), a political organization fighting for equality

in Russian society. Women were active participants in the group's acts of political violence, including the assassination of the Czar.

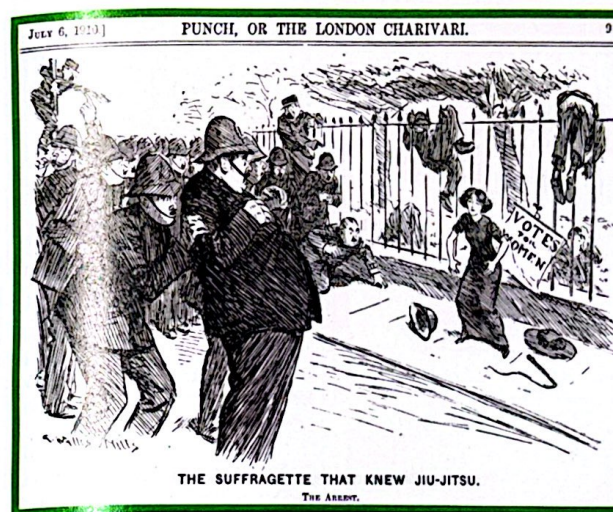
Informed in part by these women who had risked everything in the quest for equality, Emmeline Pankhurst decided that the most effective way to gather support for the suffragette movement was through the publicity that would result from imprisonment. Arson, bombing, destruction of property, and the act of chaining themselves to public buildings were part of the suffragette's arsenal.

Breaking windows was introduced as a tactic in the summer of 1908. Suffragettes staged a march to Downing Street on June 30 and threw stones through the windows of the prime minister's residence. Among the 27 women arrested at the scene and incarcerated at Holloway Prison was former schoolteacher Mary Leigh, who had joined the WSPU in 1906. In October that year, Leigh was arrested again and sentenced to three months in prison for grabbing the bridle of a police horse during a demonstration outside the House of Commons.

from 1915. She later disowned her daughter Sylvia for her socialist and pacifist politics. In 1926, Emmeline joined the Conservative Party, and shortly before her death in 1928 she became its candidate for an East London constituency.

Key works

January 10, 1913 A letter to members of the WSPU outlining the case for militancy.
November 13, 1913 "Freedom or death" speech, delivered in Hartford, Connecticut.



Emmeline Pankhurst's daughter Christabel emerged as the suffragettes' creative strategist, orchestrating many of the events that garnered media attention. She organized a Women's Parliament in 1908, for example, and a massive rally of up to 500,000 women in London's Hyde Park. Her rationale was inspired in part by a comment made by Liberal MP Herbert Asquith, widely tipped to be the next prime minister, that if he could be convinced that women really wanted the vote, he would withdraw opposition to the move.

In 1910, when parliament was on the verge of granting women the vote in the form of the Conciliation Bill, Asquith, now prime minister, intervened to stop the bill before its second reading. Of the 300 or so women who subsequently marched on parliament to protest on November 18, 1910—what became known as Black Friday—119 were arrested, two women died, and many complained of being knocked down or assaulted by policemen or male hecklers.

From the start, the WSPU's acts of civil disobedience came with reports of manhandling, violence, and sexual indecency perpetrated by police and male members of the public. Black Friday now proved a turning point for the women of the WSPU, and they geared up to protect themselves. Some began wearing cardboard vests under their clothing to protect their ribs, but Emmeline Pankhurst proposed that the most effective means of self-defense was jujitsu, the martial art that was mandatory in police training. The popular media relished the vision of militant middle-class women practicing martial arts, and it was not long before the term "suffrajitsu" entered into common use. In a speech in 1913, Sylvia Pankhurst urged all suffragettes to learn self-defense.

Clashes with police intensified as the suffragettes ramped up their activities with midnight arson and bombing attacks on MPs' houses, churches, post offices, and railway stations. As a result, the women increasingly found themselves

A *Punch* cartoon from 1910 depicts the intimidation of London's policemen by a suffragette who has been taught jujitsu. Edith Garrud, a jujitsu expert, ran classes for fellow suffragettes and penned articles with self-defense tips in the WSPU newspaper.

behind bars. Music hall star Kitty Marion, a strident WSPU activist since joining in 1908, was arrested on several occasions for breaking windows and for arson attacks. She set fire to the houses of MPs who opposed women having the vote, including the home being built for David Lloyd George, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Punishment

Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia were among the most arrested suffragettes. The women went on hunger strikes while in prison to highlight their protest, which prompted a controversial policy of force-feeding. The brutal practice of forcibly thrusting feeding tubes down the women's throats commonly resulted in internal injuries to the women, Emmeline included. Suffragettes were outraged by the treatment of their leader. »

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I nor any of the women have ... any recognized methods of getting redress ... except the methods of revolution and violence.

Emmeline Pankhurst

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Force-feeding

One of the most controversial aspects of the government's handling of imprisoned suffragettes was the policy of force feeding, which was introduced to prevent the suffragettes from dying on hunger strike and becoming martyrs. Press reports stoked public disquiet over the practice. One account detailed the torment suffered by Kitty Marion, who was force fed more than 230 times.

Suffragette Mary Leigh's account of being force fed with a nasal tube that was "two yards long, with a funnel at the end and a glass junction in the middle to see if the liquid is passing" was published while she was still in prison. The resulting public uproar led to her release.

In response to the persistent hunger striking, parliament introduced the so-called Cat and Mouse Act in 1913. This legislation allowed the release of hunger strikers until they were well enough to be rearrested and returned to prison.

in particular, prompting one member, Mary Richardson, to slash *The Rokeby Venus*, a much-loved painting by Velázquez, on display at the National Gallery. She declared: "I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government for destroying Mrs. Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history."

The members of the WSPU were determined to protect Emmeline Pankhurst from further arrests and imprisonment, and so Edith Garrud selected and trained a core group of around 30 women who became known as The Bodyguard. They accompanied Pankhurst to key appearances to prevent her being grabbed by police. Armed with clubs hidden in their dresses, the members of The Bodyguard were prepared to use any means to protect their leader, but they also employed decoys and other tricks to help her evade capture by the police.

One suffragette who captured the nation's attention in the most horrific way was Emily Davison. On June 13, 1913, she threw herself under the king's horse at the Epsom

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From the moment that women had consented to prison, hunger-strikes, and forcible feeding as the price of the vote, the vote really was theirs.

Christabel Pankhurst

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Emmeline Pankhurst is arrested during a demonstration that turned violent outside Buckingham Palace on May 21, 1914. Pankhurst had organized a march to petition George V to support female suffrage.

Derby, a horse race attended by the king himself. Davison's death, which some historians think may have been simply an attempt to seize the horse's bridle, and therefore accidental, was caught on newsreel cameras.

Male support

Despite their reputation for radicalism and their portrayal in the media as violent, the WSPU garnered support among some high profile male figures who were prepared to risk their reputations in order to further the goals of the WSPU. The Labour politicians Keir Hardie and George Lansbury spoke in the House of Commons to bolster the suffrage movement and went to WSPU rallies. The retailer Henry Gordon Selfridge flew the flag of the WSPU above his department store on Oxford Street in London, as a sign of solidarity.

Disarmed by war

What really swayed both the public and politicians in favor of the vote for women was the outbreak of World War I in 1914. With Britain engulfed in the war, the WSPU was forced to reconsider its militant

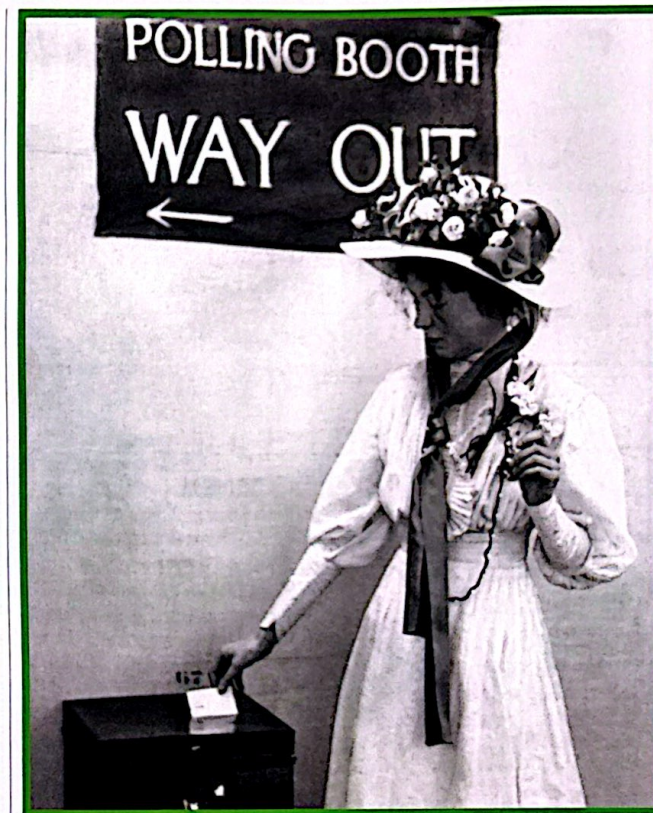
stance. In support of the war, Emmeline Pankhurst suspended the activities of the WSPU. According to fellow suffragette Ethel Smyth, "Mrs. Pankhurst declared that it was not a question of Votes for Women, but of having any country left to vote in."

Emmeline Pankhurst argued that since peaceful argument for women's freedom was futile, the Union was better off diverting its energies into supporting the war effort. This decision proved a turning point that would eventually help the organization achieve its long-term goal of votes for women. As part of its effort to support the war, the WSPU renamed *The Suffragette* newspaper *Britannia* and worked alongside Lloyd George, who replaced Lord Asquith as prime minister in 1916, in support of the National Register. In preparation for national service, this listed the personal details of everybody in Britain, including women, many of whom worked in munitions factories during the war. The WSPU used the war to show that women were capable of contributing equally to society and had therefore earned the right to vote. Some members supported the White Feather Campaign, in which women gave white feathers symbolizing cowardice to men dressed in civilian clothes.

Votes at last

The suffragette war effort did not go unnoticed, and helped engender the support of those previously unmoved by the cause of women's suffrage. Even before the close of the war in November 1918, women were on the road to getting the national vote.

On February 6, 1918, the Representation of the People Act granted property-owning women



over the age of 30 the right to vote in Great Britain and Ireland. Around 8.4 million women, or 40 percent of the UK's female population, were now newly entitled to vote. This was a milestone in the fight for women's suffrage, yet it excluded women between the ages of 21 and 30, and those who did not own property, essentially working-class women.

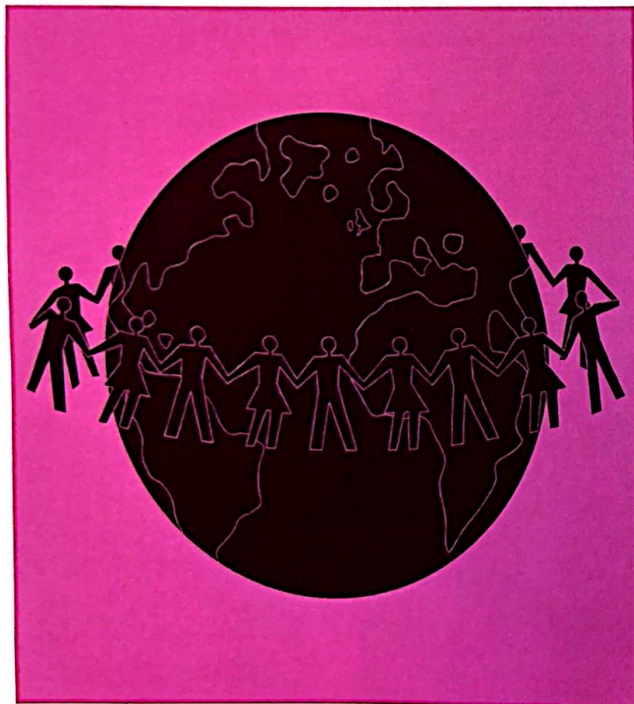
Men also benefited from the act, which extended voting rights to males who did not own a property, typically from the working class, and those aged 21 and above, thus increasing inequality between the sexes. The 1918 Act took the total

Christabel Pankhurst casts her vote in a polling booth in 1910, in one of her many publicity stunts. Like her mother, she was a motivational leader and the WSPU's key strategist, who knew how to draw the attention of the press.

number of voters in the British electorate from 8 million to 21 million. It would take another 10 years before the Conservative government extended voting rights to all British women over the age of 21. The Equal Franchise Act of 1928, which almost doubled the number of women who could vote, became law a few weeks after Emmeline Pankhurst died on June 14. ■

LET US HAVE THE RIGHTS WE DESERVE

THE GLOBAL SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT



IN CONTEXT

PRIMARY QUOTE
Alice Paul, 1923

KEY FIGURES
**Kate Sheppard,
Jessie Street, Alice Paul,
Clara Campoamor**

BEFORE
1793 In France, Olympe de Gouges, author of *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, is sent to the guillotine.

1862–1863 Swedish women who pay taxes gain voting rights in local elections.

1881 Female property owners in Scotland are permitted to vote in local elections.

AFTER
2015 Women in Saudi Arabia vote in municipal elections for the first time.

In the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, women around the world began lobbying their governments for enfranchisement. Their methods for achieving this, and the arguments they put forward, were not identical. Women's suffrage organizations were often affiliated to pressure groups that had other agendas such as racial equality or self-determination. In New Zealand, which would become the first self-governing nation in the world to give women, including Maori women, parliamentary voting rights in 1893, activist Kate Sheppard and her peers were founding members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). They argued that

See also: The birth of the suffrage movement 56–63 • Feminism in Japan 82–83 • Political equality in Britain 84–91 • Early Arab feminism 104–105



Indian suffragists were among the 60,000 women who joined the Women's Coronation Procession, a march for suffrage held in London before King George V's coronation in 1911. Women came from across the British Empire.

women needed political power in order to control the country's liquor laws and curtail men's drunken tyranny at home. The New Zealand women presented the government with suffrage petitions in 1891, 1892, and 1893. The final petition had nearly 32,000 signatures.

Mutual encouragement

Sheppard had taken inspiration from the American WCTU and British feminists of the time; in turn, her victory in New Zealand inspired suffragists in the US and the UK. Her visits to both countries, along with newspaper reports of her achievements, breathed new life into their suffrage movements, especially in Britain. International connections such as this were key to the global suffrage movement. When Finland won the vote for

women in 1906, as part of the socialist uprising against the Russian Empire, it was the result of mass demonstrations and the threat of a general strike, inspired in part by Russian revolutionaries. As one journal of the day declared, "We [women] have to shout to the world that we are demanding the right to vote and to stand for election, and that we are not going to settle for anything less. Now is not the time for compromises."

In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, women's suffrage, granted in 1918, was also embedded in the nationalist struggle against the Russian Empire. In Ireland, female suffrage was linked to Irish independence from Britain.

The British suffragettes' willingness to die for their cause attracted many admirers around the world. In Australia, Jessie Street, who became a leading campaigner in the country's suffrage movement, had first become interested in suffrage while visiting relatives in the UK. The Quaker activist Alice Paul in »



Alice Paul

The daughter of a suffragist mother and a businessman, Alice Paul was born in Moorestown, New Jersey in 1885. After graduating from what is now Columbia University with a master's degree in sociology, she traveled to the UK in 1910 to study social work. There she met fellow American Lucy Stone and joined the suffrage movement. Returning to the US, Paul formed the National Women's Party to lobby Congress for constitutional reform. Her persistence led to the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920, granting women suffrage at state and federal levels.

Paul spent the following years campaigning for equal rights in divorce, property, and employment. Although passed by 35 states in the 1970s, her Equal Rights Amendment was never ratified. Paul died in 1977, aged 92.

Key works

1923 *Equal Rights Amendment*
1976 *Conversations with Alice Paul: Woman Suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment*



Clara Campoamor

Born in the Masalaña district of Madrid, Spain, in 1888, Clara Campoamor was shaped by her working-class roots. After the death of her father when she was 13, she left school to help her seamstress mother support the family. Within a few years she was working as a secretary for various organizations, including the liberal political newspaper *La Tribune*, where she began to take an interest in women's rights.

Motivated by a growing political fervor, she studied law at the University of Madrid, graduating at the age of 36 to become the first female lawyer in the Spanish Supreme Court. In 1931, she became a member of the National Constituent Assembly, formed to write the country's new constitution. She ensured that universal suffrage was included, though the Fascist dictator General Franco later cancelled this.

After the rise of Fascism, Campoamor fled Spain and went to live in exile. She was banned by Franco from ever returning to Spain and she died in Switzerland in 1972.

the US, frustrated by the slow progress of Congress to make suffrage a priority, formed the National Women's Party in 1913, inspired by the militant tactics of Britain's suffragettes. On the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration as president in March 1913, she organized a march of around 8,000 women, marking the start of a sustained campaign against Wilson's administration for blocking changes to the Constitution that would enfranchise women. She and a team of women picketed the White House for 18 months.

Paul's strategy eventually wore down Wilson's resistance, and by 1917 he started to support Paul's aims—the same year that the state of New York gave women the vote. On June 4, 1919, the 19th Amendment granted American women the right to vote at state and federal levels. It was a major milestone on the road to women's equality.

Local first

Up until World War I, only New Zealand, Australia (excluding indigenous women), Finland, Norway, and 11 US states had full voting rights for women. Despite pressure from suffragists, Britain was slow to grant women the vote other than in local elections. In line with the "separate spheres" tradition of gender relationships, it was considered acceptable for British women to vote on local issues such as education provision but not on national matters. The

The Women Are Persons monument in Ottawa, Canada, depicts The Famous Five, who overturned a rule preventing women from running for the Senate. The statue of one of them, Nelly McClung, holds up news of their victory.

governments of Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, and Romania also ascribed to this distinction.

World War I

For many countries, World War I was a turning point in the suffrage movement. The suffragettes, led by Emmeline Pankhurst, actively supported the British war effort, and hundreds of thousands of British women worked in munitions factories, overturning traditional arguments that women could not vote because they did not participate in war, the ultimate tool of government. British women's loyalty was rewarded with a partial concession in 1918, when property-owning women over the age of 30—around 40 percent of the adult female population—were enfranchised. It would be another decade before all adult women in Britain became eligible to vote.

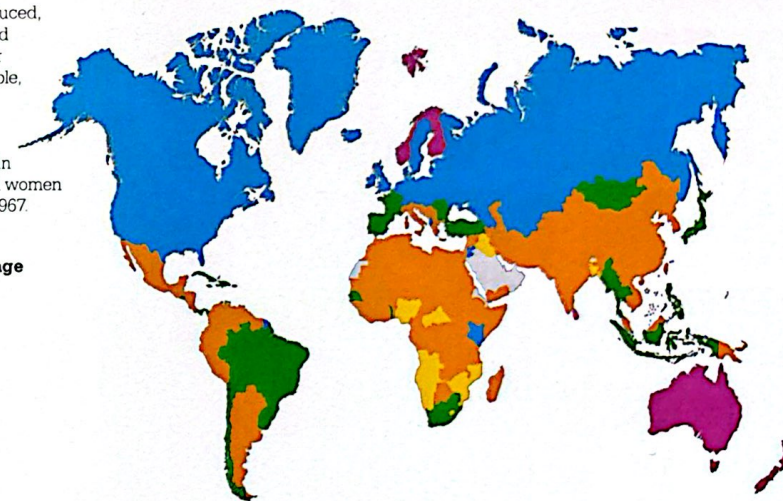
Other countries prioritized working women who paid taxes, or more educated women. Such limitations were often supported by middle-class suffragists. In Canada, women had won the vote in 1918



Even after female suffrage was introduced, it was often restricted by class, age, race, or education. For example, in Britain, suffrage was initially limited to property-owning women over 30, and in Australia, Aboriginal women could not vote until 1967.

Date female suffrage at national level is introduced

- Pre-1914
- 1914-1920
- 1921-1945
- 1946-1970
- 1971 and later
- No national suffrage



(excluding those in the province of Quebec), but their struggle was not over. Although they became eligible to run for election to the country's House of Commons in 1919, the Senate was still out of bounds, due to the wording of a law that deemed only "qualified persons" could be appointed. The Canadian government insisted that this meant men, not women. In 1929, five prominent women activists, known as "The Famous Five," successfully challenged this.

Late voters

Some countries were surprisingly slow in granting female suffrage. In France, the seat of revolution in 1789, women could not vote until 1944; in Belgium, it was 1948. Sometimes such delay was because the ruling parties feared the political alliances that enfranchised women might make.

Women's suffrage

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This is an experiment so large and bold that it ought to be tried by some other country first.
Viscount Bryce
British politician
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For example, communists, who wanted to limit the powers of the Church, thought women were more likely than men to support conservative Catholic values that opposed communism. At the same time, the Church in many Catholic countries was opposed to female

suffrage on the grounds that it would undermine marriage and the family, important pillars of the Church.

After World War II, few countries wishing to be seen as modern democracies could deny female suffrage, but delays in achieving democracy or independence slowed change in former colonies. Fascist dictatorships also hindered progress. Portuguese women, for example could not vote until 1975, the year after the Estado Novo dictatorship fell, and Spain did not gain full suffrage until after the death of Fascist dictator General Franco in 1976. Franco, who had reversed the progress on women's suffrage made by the lawyer and activist Clara Campoamor in 1931, had prohibited contraception, divorce, and abortion, and restricted women's access to employment and property. His death liberated Spanish women socially, economically, and politically. ■