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# The history of women's right to vote

Voting is a right that most of the population takes for granted nowadays, but for centuries women were not able to do so. Women's suffrage has been a consequence of their activism throughout the planet.

Citizens' right to vote has been closely linked to property since the dawn of democracy. Since in the past women did not have the right to own land, they were excluded from elections and voting. We had to wait until the end of the 19th century for several territories and countries to begin granting women the right to vote.



In the fight for women's suffrage, the role of the British suffragettes was a key point. It was not an easy road. They suffered attacks, received insults in the street, and were stoned for demonstrating.

Initially, the word 'suffragettes' was used in a derogatory way to describe women who were disrupting local meetings and spitting on policemen, who were getting arrested and going on hunger strikes in prison. In one case, in 1914, a suffragette even attacked with a butcher's knife the famous painting by Diego Velazquez of Venus admiring herself in a mirror, which happened to be hanging in London's National Gallery.

The word was mocked like this in an October 1906 New York Times article containing fake "definitions" from Oxford: A "Suffragette" (*Strix flagitans*) is a woman who ought to have more sense. *Strix flagitans* is Latin that roughly corresponds to "demanding screecher."



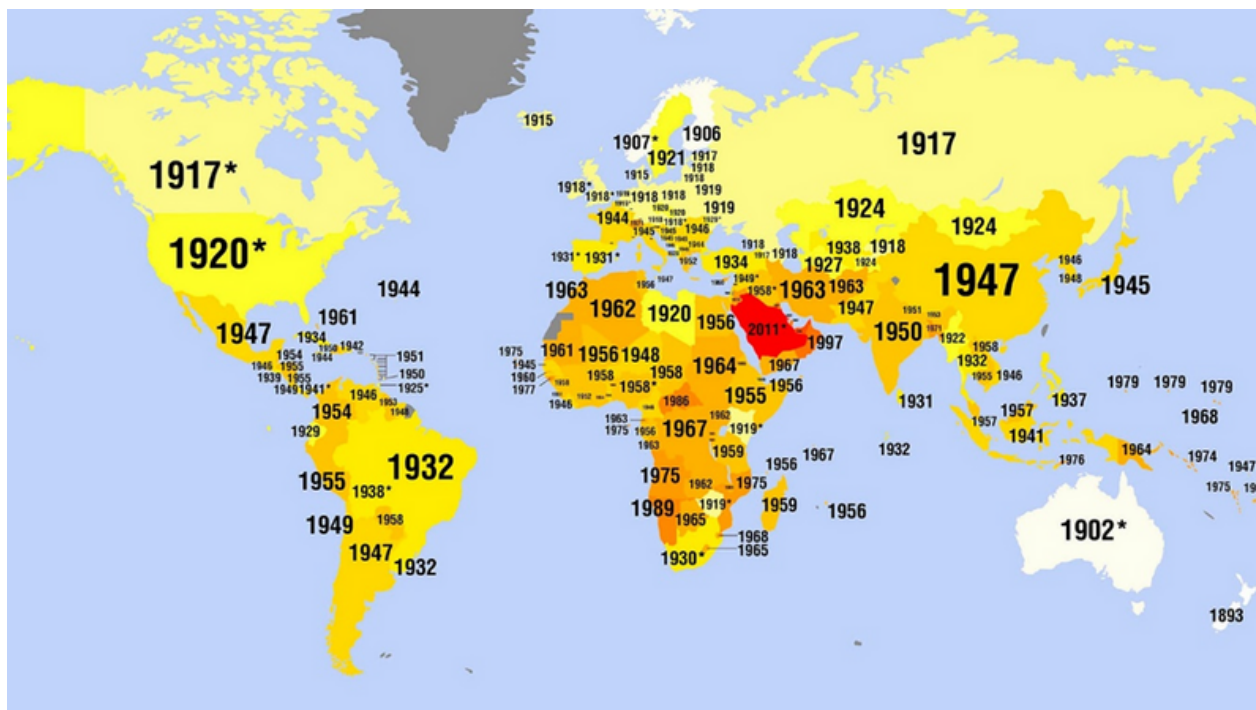
The women's suffragette events were boycotted and many women suffered violence and arbitrary arrests for their protests and ideas. Marion Wallace Dunlop was the first suffragist to go on a hunger strike in 1909 after being arrested for carving the British Declaration of Rights on a wall of Parliament. She endured 91 hours of fasting until she was released due to her poor health.

Many suffragettes followed her example and were force-fed in prison, something that today is considered a form of torture. The force-feeding of suffragette prisoners on hunger strikes between 1909 and 1914 was an abuse of women's bodies.

The prisoner was kept on a bed by the guards or tied to a chair that the guards later removed. Two male doctors performed the operation, pouring a mixture of milk, bread, and brandy through a rubber tube which they inserted through the nose or mouth and pushed down the throat into the stomach.

The most painful method was through the mouth, as a steel gag was inserted into the mouth and screwed so that it opened as much as possible. The tissues of the nose and throat were almost always torn. Sometimes the tube was accidentally inserted into the windpipe, causing food to enter the lungs and endanger life.

## Map historical chronology of the countries that approved the vote for women



The end of these tortures, arbitrary detentions, and violence came with the First World War when this king granted amnesty to the suffragettes for what was thought to be a purely practical issue: women had to replace the men who went to war in the workplace.

The final goal of the British suffragettes, the right to vote for women, came shortly before the end of the First World War, in 1918. Only those over 30 years of age and who met certain minimum property requirements in the United Kingdom could vote for the first time. Ten years later this right was extended to those over 21 years of age.

Two great tragedies boosted women's suffrage in Europe and elsewhere. Following the loss of life during the First and Second World Wars, women were allowed to participate in rebuilding the society they had been caring for while their sons, husbands, and fathers fought on the front lines.

After 1945 there were only a handful of European countries that still did not allow women to vote: Switzerland was among them, despite several requests made to the Government, which rejected them in 1886 and 1929.

After this great fight for women's rights, it is important to remind ourselves how important it is to maintain them and not allow the human rights we have already achieved to be taken away. As citizens, it is extremely important to be aware of the tragedies and bad times that past generations have had to face, so that today, we can have, among other things, universal women's suffrage, in most countries in the world. We have the responsibility to maintain the rights already achieved and to fight to continue making our societies friendlier and more livable places, where democracy is something non-negotiable and genuine.

