

3.2 How and why did women try to win the right to vote?

How should citizens campaign for something they believe in?

SOURCE 1

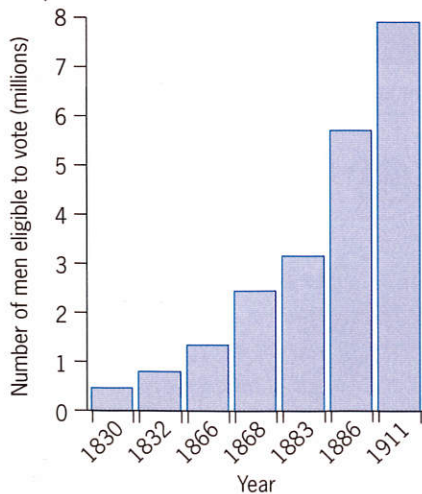


Newspaper headlines from 18 June 1913.

FACTFILE

Voting changes, 1800–1900

- ★ In 1800 very few people could vote. To vote was not seen as a 'human right' for all citizens. Only the rich were allowed to vote.
- ★ There was a property qualification for voting (that is, you had to own a certain amount of wealth or property before you were allowed to vote). It was thought that if you owned property then you were a respectable and responsible person who would use the vote properly.
- ★ There was also a gender qualification – only men could vote in general elections.
- ★ Electoral Reform Acts were passed in 1832, 1867 and 1884. Each of these reforms reduced the property qualification and so increased the number of men who could vote – as you can see from the graph below.
- ★ By 1900, most working men could vote in general elections if they had a permanent address.



Extension of the male franchise, 1830–1911.

Compare Sources 1A and 1B. Both events happened on the same day. Both were part of the campaign to win the vote for women – or female suffrage (suffrage means the right to vote).

One protest was staged by the suffragists, who believed in peaceful, law-abiding protest, and the other by the suffragettes, who used violent methods to get their views across. Both groups had the same aim but different methods. Over the next eight pages you will be exploring the reasons for these protests and comparing the effectiveness of the two campaigns.

What were the arguments for and against female suffrage?

In the nineteenth century, new job opportunities emerged for women as teachers, as shop workers or as clerks and secretaries in offices. Many able girls from working-class backgrounds achieved better -paid jobs with higher status than those of their parents.

Women gained greater opportunities in education. A few middle-class women won the chance to go to university, to become doctors, for example.

A series of laws between 1839 and 1886 gave married women greater legal rights. However, they could not vote in general elections.

The number of men who could vote had gradually increased during the nineteenth century (see the Factfile). Some people thought that women should be allowed to vote too. Others disagreed. But the debate was not, as you might think, simply a case of men versus women. Any of the arguments that you see on page 59 might have been advanced by a woman or by a man.

FOCUS TASK

What were the arguments for and against women's suffrage?

Use the information and sources on the opposite page to produce a leaflet presenting the arguments either for or against women's suffrage. Your audience should be MPs who are undecided about whether women should have the vote.