

Explain why women failed to gain the right to vote between 1900 and 1914?

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



At the beginning of the twentieth century British women were seen as second-class citizens. This started to change in 1900, as women desired the right to vote and they were prepared to do anything it required to obtain it. Their goal was prolonged because of the many hurdles along the way and they didn't get the vote for many years.

Many of the hurdles they faced were cultural. It was believed that women couldn't have their own views; they would only do as their husbands told them. Most people thought that women couldn't make political decisions as they weren't intelligent enough and they shouldn't because politics was 'a man's game'.

Another cultural barrier was the roles women played in the society. One on hand, due to poor education and limited opportunities working-class women had low status, low paid jobs. They had long working hours and didn't have sufficient time to get involved in the struggle for the vote. On the other hand, most middle and upper-class women felt that their duty was at home, and didn't want to get implicated.

A reason why women didn't get the vote was 'their own fault'. The women who wanted the vote were united in their aim but divided in approach. The main women's society groups had very different methods of getting what they wanted. Most people thought that if the women couldn't agree then perhaps they didn't deserve the vote.

The Suffragists were a peaceful group who believed that protests should be carried out without violence. They thought that the vote would come in due

time, after all New Zealand had already given the vote to women who had used their techniques. The second group, the Women's Freedom League accepted breaking the law as long as protests didn't become violent. A protest they organised was refusing to participate in a census. The final group, the Suffragettes, believed in law breaking and violent protests. An infamous protest they organised was when all members produced bricks and hammers from their handbags and broke windows in Oxford Street. It is often said that the Suffragettes were a main obstacle in getting the vote as the government refused to be perceived as succumbing to violence.

Many other hurdles in the path of success were the political situations. The conservative government came into power in 1900 and this was a major setback for the women's suffrage movement. This government was steadfast in its conviction that women should never get the vote. 1906 saw the liberal government come into power as the conservatives became old-fashioned. The contemporary government was in favour of women getting the vote but was reluctant to make this possible in case upper-class women voted conservative.

There were more pressing political issues to resolve than the issue of women's suffrage. The arms race with Germany was at its peak from 1908-1911 and the government had to make sure that Britain stayed ahead. The state of affairs in Ireland was a main concern; Ireland was on the brink of civil war. The government was in the process of laying down the foundations of the welfare state, this included benefits like old age pensions and national insurance.

The House of Lords could block any laws that it did not want, this needed to be changed before women's vote bill was put through as the conservative majority would veto it. In the 1911 Parliament Act the House of Lord's blocking power was stopped and they were permitted to delay laws by a maximum of two years. The House of Lords still managed to use the new law to their advantage and managed to delay the votes for women bill from 1912 to 1914.

In conclusion, there were many factors preventing women from getting the vote whether political or cultural. The most influential factors were the political as they prolonged the struggle for the vote for many years. But even though the political reasons were the most important, no individual factor could have caused women to abstain from receiving the vote without the others.