



**BARBARA LEE**  
**FAMILY FOUNDATION**

# Press Kit



# Barbara Lee Family Foundation



The Barbara Lee Family Foundation (BLFF) advances women’s equality and representation in American politics and in the field of contemporary art. Our work in both program areas is guided by the core belief that women’s voices strengthen our democracy and enrich our culture.



We achieve our overall mission through our nonpartisan political research program, strategic partnerships, grants, and endowments:

- **Political research:** For over 20 years, political, practitioners, and press have used our research to understand the obstacles and opportunities for women running for office. We have studied and published research about every woman’s gubernatorial race since 1998. We have shared our findings with thousands of women candidates and officeholders at all levels and across parties, giving women essential knowledge and tools.
- **Strategic partnerships:** We build strategic, nonpartisan partnerships to help women succeed in American politics and make women contemporary artists more visible to the public. BLFF partners with the Women & Politics Institute at American University for Gender on the Ballot, a nonpartisan project to examine and contextualize gender dynamics in politics. Gender on the Ballot contributes to the national dialogue on gender and politics through accessible content from experts and practitioners.
- **Grants and endowments:** BLFF is committed to building the capacity and ensuring the long-term viability of select partner organizations through grants and endowments.

Learn more about BLFF at [www.barbaraleefoundation.org](http://www.barbaraleefoundation.org) and follow us on social media:



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Foundation

We welcome press inquiries. To request information or an interview, please contact:

**JENNIFER HENRY**

Senior Communications Manager  
jhenry@blff.org  
617.362.3123

**IMANI LUCKEY**

Communications Associate  
iluckey@blff.org  
617.234.0351

# Research Highlights



Barbara Lee Family Foundation research shows that women have some disadvantages, as well as some advantages, when running for office.



## OBSTACLES.

- **Likeability Litmus Test:** Voters have to consider a woman candidate both qualified and likeable before voting for her, but are willing to support a male candidate they do not like but who they think is qualified. In other words, men don't need to be liked to be elected, but women have to show both competency and likeability.
- **Proving Qualifications:** Voters continue to have high standards for what they consider a "qualified" woman candidate. While men can simply list positions of leadership and service to show their qualifications, women need to tout their specific accomplishments. Women must show their credentials, whereas men can just tell.
- **Personal Presentation:** Voters decide whether a woman candidate is ready to lead, in part, based on her personal presentation. Although all candidates are judged on these attributes to some degree, women have a steeper climb in convincing voters to judge them on their merits. Voters notice a woman's looks, makeup, hair, clothing, race, and voice when judging her likeability, and what they notice often mirrors gender stereotypes.
- **Family Life:** Voters continue to judge women on their families and personal lives. In the minds of voters, the ideal woman candidate is a well-educated, married 55-year old with previous experience in office but, in reality, America doesn't look like a 1950s sitcom. Voters express concerns about the ability of women candidates to balance the competing priorities of their families and constituents. Voters recognize that moms face different expectations, but actively and consciously participate in this double standard.
- **Contrasting with Opponents:** Women candidates pay a higher price for "going negative" even though it's an essential part of campaigning -- women candidates must show how they differ from their opponents. Voters expect more from women candidates. They feel that, by engaging in negative campaigning, a woman is reduced to the status of a "typical" politician.

# Research Highlights



## OPPORTUNITIES.

- **The 360-Degree Candidate:** By using all of their experiences and expertise, women have a broader range of opportunities to connect with voters. Women candidates can effectively use storytelling from their lives or others' lives to communicate credentials while also connecting with voters. Relatability has evolved, with voters being more willing to take into account less traditional experience in their decision making.
- **In Touch:** In the current political environment, the perception that women candidates are more in touch than male candidates is a huge asset. To motivate voters to vote for women candidates, it works to focus on how women elected officials understand what people are experiencing -- and that they're in touch with real-life.
- **Ethical Pedestal:** Voters historically awarded women candidates a "virtue" advantage, seeing them as more honest and ethical than men. While this perception remains, there are significant partisan differences, with Democratic women running against Republican men being most likely to enjoy an advantage on perceptions of honesty and ethics. Voters who see women as offering unique traits like honesty are more likely to support a woman candidate.
- **"Women's" Issues:** Voters are adamant that a woman elected official would be more likely to protect women's health issues, such as birth control and reproductive health. Being good on education and healthcare can, in turn, help women candidates be seen as good on the economy.

## AS FEATURED ON:

The Boston Globe

Los Angeles Times



The Washington Post



# Research Highlights



## Our latest BLFF research topics:

### **Second in Command: The Challenges and Opportunities Facing Women Lieutenant Governors (2023)**

With little knowledge among voters about Lt. governors, the role is a blank slate. Our research found that voters do not have strong opinions about lieutenant governors. This creates both an awareness obstacle, and an opportunity to define the role of lieutenant governor, for women in this position. The research provides an unprecedented look at how voters perceive women running for or serving as lieutenant governor.

### **Shared Hurdles: How Political Races Change (2022)**

Research on gender dynamics in politics has seldom studied races between two women candidates. Shared Hurdles shows that in an election between two women candidates, gender biases are still prevalent, and voters hold both women to a higher standard than they hold male candidates. Shared Hurdles is a timely update on how gender shapes politics, and it provides a framework for women candidates who are campaigning against other women.

### **Staying Power: Strategies for Women Incumbents (2021)**

Women incumbents face specific challenges when running for reelection. Against the conventional wisdom to “speak softly,” Staying Power shows that voters think highly of women who own their achievements and stand up to critics. With clear, specific communication about their records, women incumbents can connect with voters and help close the gender gap in political office.

### **Putting Sexism in its Place on the Campaign Trail (2021)**

Sexism in politics can take many forms, from double standards for women candidates, to undue criticisms of their appearance, voice, or clothing. The decisions of whether and how to address sexism can be complex to navigate for women candidates. In this research, a majority of voters said they believed that women face sexism while campaigning, and they indicated broad support for women candidates speaking out about sexist situations. Voters expressed a clear preference for a calm, confident, and professional response—vs. retaliatory—from a woman candidate in response to sexism.

Our complete list of research memos can be found at  
**[www.BarbaraLeeFoundation.org/politics/all-research](http://www.BarbaraLeeFoundation.org/politics/all-research)**

## Research Highlights



### More of our timely BLFF research topics:

#### **Rising to the Occasion: How Women Leaders Prove They Can Handle a Crisis (2020)**

In our previous research, voters consistently rated “can handle a crisis” as a top trait when assessing a woman’s electability. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of crisis management, but it has been and will continue to be important for women candidates. “Handling a crisis” may seem like a vague concept, but our research shows voters have very concrete ideas about what makes a woman leader equipped to do so. Voters want a leader with a 360-degree view who is in touch with their lives, who listens and learns from others, and who knows how to work with a team.

#### **Keys to Elected Office (2021): The Essential Guide for Women**

For over 20 years, the Barbara Lee Family Foundation has studied every woman’s campaign for governor on both sides of the aisle, including real-time polling on voters’ views and post-election interviews with candidates and campaign staff. This nonpartisan guide offers the most direct, must-know advice we’ve gleaned for women elected officials and candidates running for office.

#### **Ready, Willing, & Electable: Women Running for Executive Office (2019)**

When running for executive office, women face obstacles that men running simply do not. Our research has consistently found that voters are more comfortable seeing women serve as members of a legislature than they have been electing them to executive offices—positions where they will have sole decision-making authority. This research, which asks about hypothetical Asian Pacific Islander American, Black, Latina, white, and lesbian women candidates of the two major political parties, comprehensively examines what it takes for a woman to prove to voters she is ready to serve in executive office.

#### **Relaunch: Resilience and Rebuilding for Women Candidates After an Electoral Loss (2018)**

Some women candidates may be hesitant to run again because they know that the barriers for women running for office are higher than they are for men – why should the standard after a loss be any different? This research shows that voters think women who have lost their elections are still qualified and likeable (two must-haves for women candidates), and that losing an election can be a good moment for a powerful launch of a woman candidate’s next campaign.

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# Leadership Team



## **Barbara Lee**

### Founder & President

Barbara Lee is a national leader in advancing women's equality and representation in American politics and in the field of contemporary art. She founded and leads the Barbara Lee Family Foundation.

Inspired by her grandmother's stories of suffragists marching on New York City's Fifth Avenue in the early 1900s, Barbara has worked to educate the public about gender disparities in government since 1998.

Today, through the Foundation's nonpartisan research, Barbara gives women candidates, elected officials, and other leaders at all levels essential knowledge to meet the challenges of campaigning.

Through the Foundation, Barbara spearheaded Presidential Gender Watch 2016, a nonpartisan project with the Center for American Women and Politics to track, analyze, and illuminate the gender dynamics of the 2016 presidential election. She has also endowed a nonpartisan training program for women at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and an internship program at the Massachusetts State House for students at Simmons College in Boston.

Barbara is an advocate for Boston's cultural life and for public access to contemporary art. Boston Magazine has included Barbara among "Boston's Most Powerful Thought Leaders," "The 100 People Who Run This Town" and is listed among their "50 most powerful women" in Boston. Women's eNews ranks her among the "21 Leaders for the 21st Century."

Barbara earned a Master's degree from the Boston University School of Social Work and her Bachelor's degree from Simmons College.

## **Amanda Hunter**

### Executive Director

As Executive Director, Amanda Hunter leads the Foundation's nonpartisan efforts to advance women's political equality and increase women's representation. With extensive communications experience, Amanda brings her strategic insight to the Foundation's work, including over three years on Barbara Lee's senior leadership team.

Prior to becoming Executive Director, Amanda was the Foundation's Research and Communications Director. In this role, she was responsible for promoting our mission to advance women's representation in American politics by leading all research and communications efforts. Amanda has covered the Foundation's research on gender in politics on PBS NewsHour, NPR, and CNN, as well as in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Politico.

Previously, Amanda served as Director of Marketing and Communications at The Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, America's first museum of modern art, and as Senior Press Representative at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, leading media relations efforts on events like The Kennedy Center Honors. She also served as Deputy Communications Director at the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), the trade association for record companies. Amanda graduated Summa Cum Laude with a B.A. in English and Communications from St. Joseph's College of Maine.

