

20 YEARS OF RESEARCH

What Women Candidates Need to Know



KEY TAKEAWAY 1:

Obstacles for Women Candidates



QUALIFICATIONS.

Voters expect women candidates to demonstrate their qualifications to the highest degree, something they don't expect from men.



LIKEABILITY.

Voters will support a male candidate they do not like but who they think is qualified, but the same cannot be said for women.

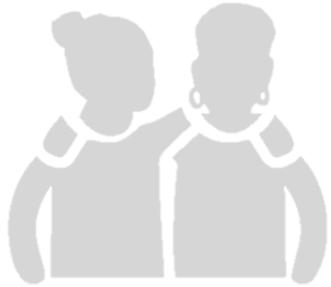


HONESTY + ETHICS.

Voters put women on a character pedestal, expecting women to be more trustworthy than men.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2:

Opportunities for Women Candidates



360-DEGREE CANDIDATE.

Women now have a broader range of opportunities to connect with voters. They can use the whole of their experiences.



STRENGTH V. TOUGHNESS.

It is more important to be a problem solver and show strength than to be “tough.”



SENSE OF HUMOR.

Voters like women candidates and officeholders who demonstrate a sense of humor and don't take themselves too seriously.

DEEP DIVE 1: Executive Leadership

Research shows 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.



HERE'S WHAT WORKS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES:

- **BE ACTION ORIENTED.** The top traits voters identify as important for electability at the executive office level are “can handle a crisis” and “gets results.”
- **REMEMBER THAT WORDS MATTER.** “Confident, organized, and knowledgeable” convey qualifications to voters, and should appear throughout campaign materials.
- **HIT THE GROUND RUNNING.** How the campaign is run is an opportunity for the candidate to show she has her act together, is a good leader, and an effective manager.

DEEP DIVE 2:

Discussing Family

Despite sweeping societal changes, traditional gender roles remain powerful, influencing what voters perceive to be acceptable and appropriate behavior for men and women.



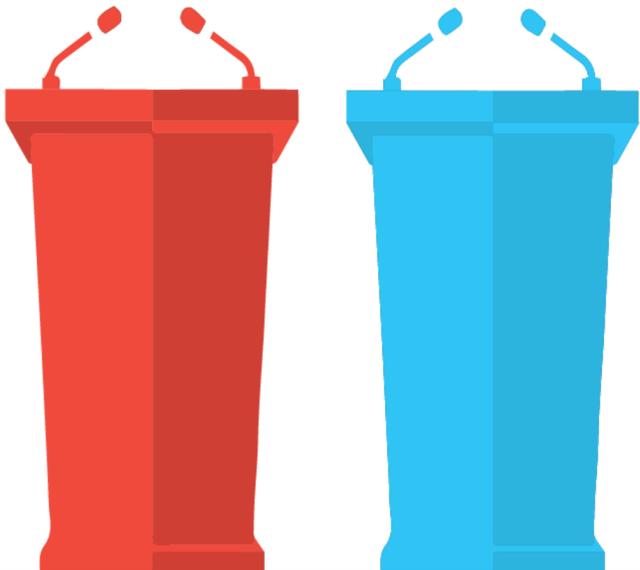
HERE'S WHAT WORKS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES:

- **BE MATTER-OF-FACT.** Address questions about family life directly and confidently without being defensive or using excuses.
- **STRIKE THE RIGHT BALANCE.** Sharing too much information hurts as much as sharing too little information. People need reassurance that you have your professional and personal life under control, rather than substantive examples of the tradeoffs made in order to manage both.
- **GET BACK TO THE ISSUES.** After sharing personal values and experiences related to family, show voters how you have and will continue to work on their behalf.

DEEP DIVE 3:

Economic credentials

This area is generally perceived as a weakness for women candidates, and voters want to know that a woman can handle budgets, taxes, and the economy.



HERE'S WHAT WORKS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES:

- **BE SPECIFIC.** Having a detailed economic plan and budget priorities that are in touch with their community help women candidates establish credibility.
- **WEAVE EXPERTISE INTO ALL COMMUNICATIONS.** Building private-public partnerships to create jobs and new businesses, having a written economic plan endorsed by businesses and labor, bringing state funding to the community, and being a business owner who created jobs and balanced budgets are all ways to convey that a woman candidate is very qualified and very likeable.
- **HIGHLIGHT ACCOMPLISHMENTS.** When it comes to less traditional financial experience, this can help level the playing field.

DEEP DIVE 4:

Losing a race

For voters, losing does not need to be the end of a woman's political career; it can be the beginning of the next chapter. Encouragingly for women who lose their races, voters did not give negative ratings to losing women candidates on their qualifications or their favorability.



HERE'S WHAT WORKS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES:

- **FOCUS YOUR MESSAGING ON VOTERS.** You can start launching your next campaign as soon as your concession speech or statement. Highlight listening to your community, continuing to fight for your ideals, and getting things done for voters.
- **BE FORWARD THINKING.** Don't dwell on the past - voters are sensitive to any perceived whining or blaming.
- **STAY ENGAGED IN THE COMMUNITY.** What a woman candidate chooses as her next step after losing an election matters. Work on an issue that was big in the campaign, build political skills, and network with other leaders.

FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES, ELECTABILITY IS ABOUT:

- **ESTABLISHING CREDENTIALS.** Experience, issue stance, and community engagement (including bringing people together and getting results) all tie into perceptions of how qualified a woman is.
- **BEING IN TOUCH.** Having a deep understanding of the challenges Americans face; voters want empathy, strength, and substance.
- **NAVIGATING PRECONCEPTIONS.** There's a distinctly male stereotype of what executive leadership looks like, but voters also have expectation for women on the trail based on feminine stereotypes. The need to juggle and somehow bring together often conflicting gender expectations is a struggle that defines many of the challenges women face on the campaign trail.



REMEMBER:

The idea that women candidates aren't as electable as their male counterparts is a myth.

Across candidate profiles tested, all of the hypothetical women candidates win or tie their head-to-head ballots against a straight white man of the opposite party.

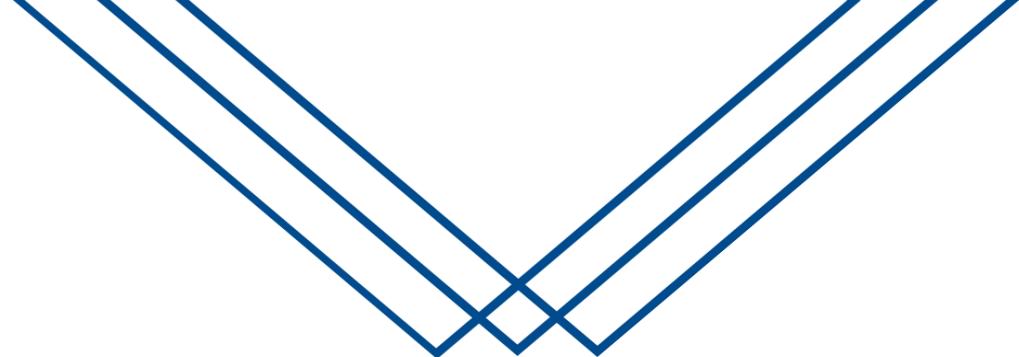
	% Voting for Woman	% Voting for Man	% Undecided	Margin
Deborah Williams, a Black woman and Republican	49	33	18	17
Teresa Garcia, a Latina and Republican	46	37	18	9
Cynthia Smith, a white woman and Democrat	47	39	14	8
Deborah Williams, a Black woman and Democrat	44	37	19	7
Sherry Lee, an Asian American woman and Democrat	46	40	13	6
Karen Davis, a lesbian white woman and Democrat	45	39	16	6
Cynthia Smith, a white woman and Republican	43	39	18	4
Sherry Lee, an Asian American woman and Republican	44	40	16	3
Teresa Garcia, a Latina and Democrat	42	40	18	2
Karen Davis, a lesbian white woman and Republican	34	34	31	0

PRE-CAMPAIGN CHECKLIST

- **DEVELOP A CANDIDATE BIO THAT LEADS WITH CREDENTIALS.** Always have someone else introduce your candidate with the bio you want them to use – and ensure they credential the candidate before she takes the stage. Best practices include using the word “qualified” in the bio, as well as action verbs to show she is a candidate who gets things done.
- **MAKE A FAMILY PLAN.** There is no recipe for how a family should or should not participate in a campaign – what matters is that there is an agreement between family members on what each person will (or will not) do, and that the campaign knows how to support that plan.
- **HIRE A DIVERSE STAFF THE CANDIDATE TRUSTS.** Gender balance and racial diversity are important. According to candidates and staff, the most effective and disciplined teams are diverse.
- **DEVELOP AN IMAGE LIBRARY.** When it comes to showcasing likeability, voters like informal photos of women candidates engaging with children and in their communities more than photos in formal settings. In photos and videos, be sure to show your candidate conversing with voters – listening to their concerns, not only talking to them.

PRE-CAMPAIGN CHECKLIST

- **LINE UP VALIDATORS.** Having outside validators is essential for women candidates, especially for support after a big mistake or during a policy announcement. It helps to boost your candidate's qualifications in the eyes of voters.
- **OVER-BUDGET FUNDRAISING TIME.** Your candidate should be prepared to convince donors that she is worth the investment, and that might take more time than it does with male candidates. Women may find they need to wage a “campaign of belief” with donors, highlighting their path to victory numerous times before securing a contribution.
- **DON'T JUMP THE GUN.** Women often announce their candidacies before they are ready. It's important to be able to create a constant drum beat of support once you start the ball rolling because voters punish women for perceived learning on the job.



QUESTIONS?