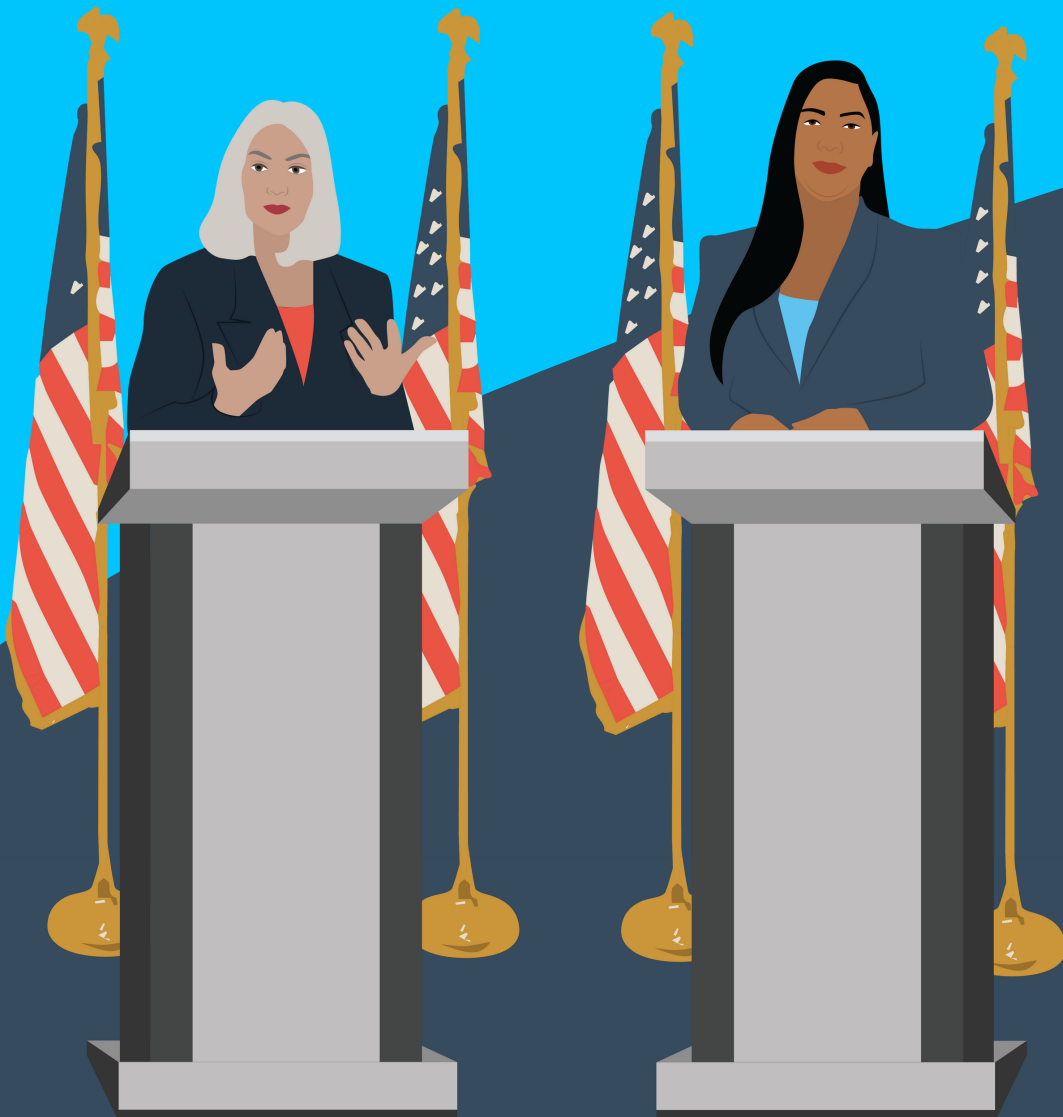


# SHARED HURDLES

**HOW POLITICAL RACES CHANGE WHEN  
TWO WOMEN COMPETE**



# INTRODUCTION

A record number of women have been elected to public office over the past ten years. More than a quarter of Congress is made up of women, a 50% increase over the past decade. Nine women currently serve as governor, a national record. Across the country, women have made incredible strides in state and local politics — leading almost a third of our most populous cities as mayor. Due to these recent victories, voters no longer see a woman running for office as a novelty. As more women aspire to higher office, more will run against each other.

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation (BLFF) has historically analyzed gender dynamics in politics by studying hypothetical races between a man and a woman. This new research breaks that mold. In *Shared Hurdles*, we show that gender biases against women politicians do not disappear nor do they cancel out when both candidates are women. Though most respondents agreed that gender does not affect candidates' abilities to govern, voters still hold women to a higher standard than men — even with no men in the race.

This research reveals how candidates' race, political party, and gender interact to influence voter opinion when more than one woman is on the ballot. And it shows a path forward for women running against each other. Women candidates can take preemptive steps to counteract voters' biases — by highlighting their qualifications, establishing a strong positive message, and demonstrating their deep knowledge of important issues. Most crucially, they can center on voters in their platforms and policymaking, building close connections with their communities and demonstrating their proactive leadership style.

This report offers a critical new dimension and a key update to our understanding of gender dynamics in politics. It lays the framework for how women candidates can go the distance when competing against other women for the same position.



# OUR PARTNERS

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This research is focused on hypothetical women candidates running for governor. In focus groups and a survey, we tested hypothetical Women vs. Women races featuring profiles of Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), Black, Latina, LGBTQ, and white women candidates. When designing focus groups and when analyzing the data, the Barbara Lee Family Foundation consulted with partners at Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, Higher Heights Leadership Fund, Victory Institute, and Voto Latino Foundation.



Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research & Consulting designed and administered this dial survey that was conducted online from December 9 to December 17, 2021. The survey reached 2,000 likely 2022 voters nationwide, with oversamples of 250 Black, 250 Latino, 250 AAPI, and 150 Indigenous likely 2022 voters.

Note: Responses may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

# FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research & Consulting conducted ten focus groups with men and women in October and November 2021, segmented as follows:

Date	Locations	Demographics
Oct. 18	AZ, GA, IA, MA, ME, MI, OR	White Republican Suburban Women
Oct. 19	GA or MI	Black Men
Oct. 21	AZ, GA, MA	Latino Men
Oct. 26	AZ, GA, IA, MA, ME, MI, OR	White Senior Women
Oct. 27	AZ, GA, IA, MA, ME, MI, OR	White Ticket-Splitting Women
Oct. 28	AZ, GA, IA, MA, ME, MI, OR	White Ticket-Splitting Men
Nov. 1	GA or MI	Black Women
Nov. 3	AZ, GA, MA, MI, OR	Latina and AAPI Women
Nov. 4	AZ, GA, IA, MA, ME, MI, OR	Weak Dem Men Unfavorable to Many Women Elected Officials

Participants were recruited to reflect a mix of age, marital status, parental status, income, and education.

This report uses the term “participants” in reference to the participants of the ten focus groups.

Note: Responses may not add up to 100 due to rounding.





# KEY FINDINGS

## **1 Voters no longer see women as a novelty on the campaign trail.**

In 2017, [BLFF research](#) found that voters saw women as outsider candidates. Five years later, voters no longer see it as notable for a woman from either party to run for office. However, voters reported that they have not seen many campaigns with women running against other women.

## **2 There are significant racial, gender, and partisan differences when it comes to beliefs about the importance of electing women and people of color.**

This aligns with [previous Barbara Lee Family Foundation research](#). The base of support for women candidates and people of color candidates are Democrats; younger voters; and Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), Latino, Black, and Indigenous voters.

## **3 Voters broadly say they do not believe that gender impacts a candidate's ability to govern, but about half of voters think women are different from men when they serve as elected officials.**

AAPI voters, Black women, Indigenous women, and Gen Z are the most likely to say that women are a lot different than men when they serve as elected officials. As we found in [previous BLFF research](#), believing men and women lead differently is an important predictor of voting for a woman candidate.

# KEY FINDINGS

**Voters demand to know why a woman candidate is qualified for office, and she must balance qualifications with likeability.**

Previous BLFF research found that voters assume men are qualified, but women must prove their qualifications—and voters often see a woman as qualified or likeable, but not both. *Shared Hurdles* shows that although voters view women candidates across race and party affiliation favorably, the qualifications barrier is not eliminated when women run against each other. Instead, both women have to show they are qualified and contend with the likeability-qualifications double bind.

4

**Knowledge of issues and experience are more important than a candidate's personal story.**

Voters primarily want to see that a woman candidate has knowledge of the issues and that she is qualified. In a shift from BLFF's 2017 research, candidates' personal lives appear to be less important. Voters see a woman's record as more important than her personal story, which is partially a response to the numerous challenges our country is facing at this time.

5

**Messages resonate most when they center on the voter's life.**

A woman candidate's credentials, experiences, and endorsements from third parties are most meaningful when it is clear how they relate to voters. Voters want to see how a woman candidate's experiences prove that she can make a positive impact for them personally.

6

**In woman vs. woman races, party makes a difference.**

Partisanship influences decisions. Whether a woman candidate is a Democrat or Republican makes a significant difference in voters' attitudes toward her when she runs against another woman. Democratic and Republican women candidates each have advantages on different issues and on their personal traits in the eyes of voters. There is also an interaction of gender and party, as women are rated somewhat differently than men even within the same party.

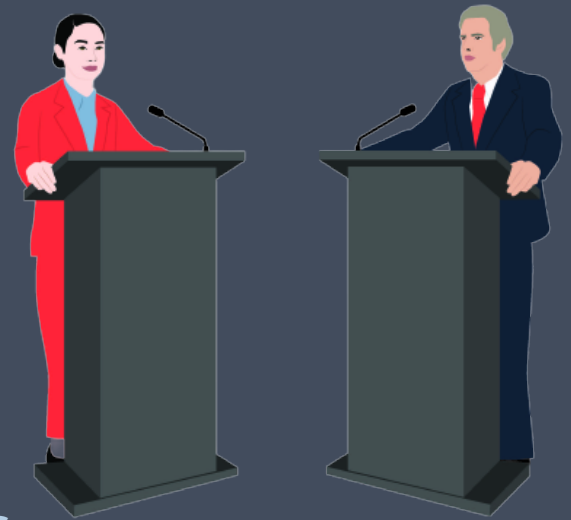
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# DO MEN AND WOMEN LEAD DIFFERENTLY?

## Women leaders have become more commonplace in politics.

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Participants in our focus groups did not find it odd or novel to see a woman run for office. However, a race where both candidates are women is still unfamiliar to voters.



## About half of voters view women as underrepresented in elected office.

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Voters are split about whether it is important to have more women in elected office or not. A fifth say it is not important, three-in-ten are neutral or unsure, and about half say it is important. College-educated women, Democrats, younger voters, Black, Latino, AAPI, and Indigenous voters believe it is important to have more women in elected office.

## Women are seen as equal to men in terms of their ability to govern, and half of voters do not believe that men and women serve differently in office.

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Voters overall say they do not believe that gender impacts a candidate's ability to lead. However, voters also acknowledge that many stereotypes exist for women. In focus groups, the participants' assumptions and judgments affirmed that they buy into these stereotypes, despite saying otherwise. As we have seen in our previous research, participants also say they believe many of their friends and family buy into stereotypes about men and women, even if the participants themselves do not.



"In my opinion, it doesn't matter if it's a man or woman or what age or what race."

-Latina/AAPI Woman

"I don't really see a difference as long as they're doing their job, whether it be man, woman, different skin color than mine. I think as long as they're doing their job that shouldn't be an issue."



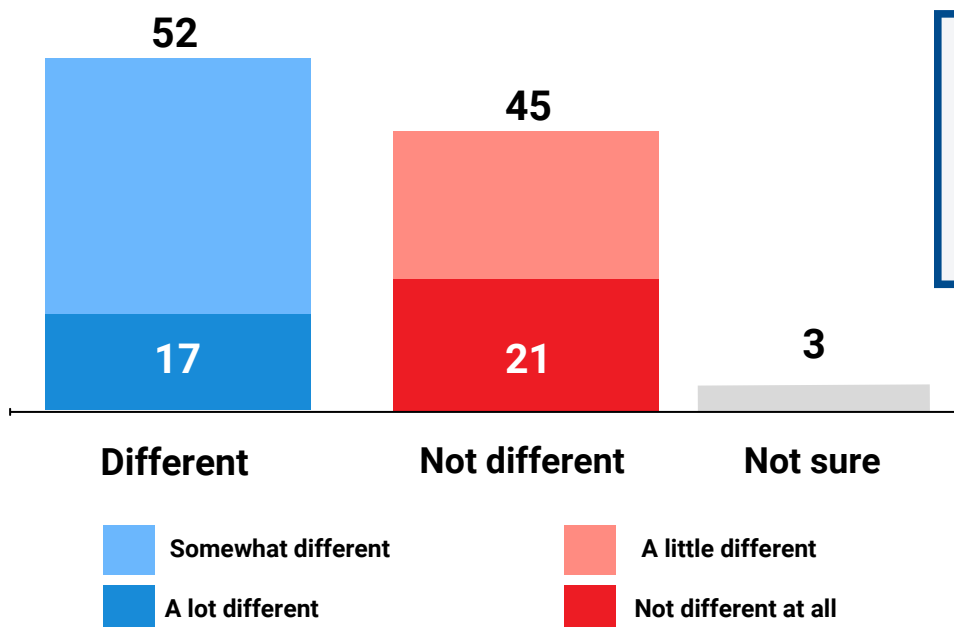
-White Ticket-Splitting Man



"Females in powerful positions often have to kind of be that b\*tchy bullheaded in order to work with the men. Men are not receptive to working with women; they think they can plow over them."

-White Republican Suburban Woman

Believing that men and women are different when they serve in elected office has been one of the strongest predictors that someone will vote for a woman. In *Shared Hurdles*, 45% of respondents to our survey say that men and women are not different, and about half say they are.



**Most Likely to Say A Lot Different**

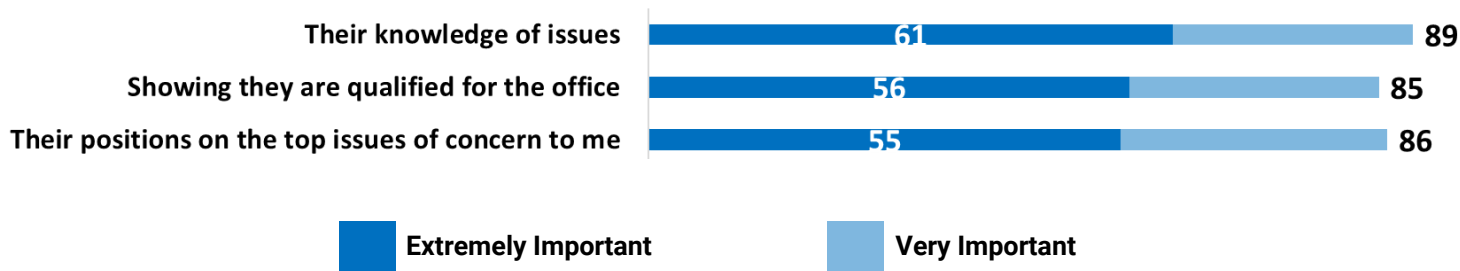
- AAPI Voters—34%
- Black Women—32%
- Indigenous women—34%
- Gen Z—29%

# THE IMPORTANCE OF A CANDIDATE'S QUALIFICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ISSUES

Regardless of a candidate's gender or party affiliation, voters say the most important factor is the candidate's knowledge of issues.

When two women run against each other, the second and third most important factors are candidates illustrating their qualifications and their positions on the issues that are of top concern for voters.

**When deciding between a Republican woman candidate and a Democratic woman candidate running against each other in an election to be governor, how important are the following to you?**



In races with at least one male candidate, it is still important that women candidates show they are qualified for office. And in a hypothetical race between a Democratic woman and a Republican man, the woman emphasizing her qualifications is only slightly more important to voters than in a race with two women candidates, but it is still a major strategic imperative. Focus group participants emphasized that in a race between two women candidates, it is important for both candidates to display and prove their qualifications.

# QUALIFICATIONS-LIKEABILITY: A PERSISTENT DOUBLE BIND

In past BLFF studies of races between a man and a woman, we found that voters tended to view women as either likeable or qualified, but not both. *Shared Hurdles* shows that this double bind still exists for women even in races without men.

Voters make a big distinction between a woman candidate being knowledgeable about an issue and having experience with it as an elected official—and they prefer that she has direct experience. A woman candidate’s personal story of her values, education, work, and community involvement as well as her personal story of marriage, children, and caregiving for parents or aging relatives is less important than her record in office.

## WHAT VOTERS MEAN BY “QUALIFICATIONS”

This research found that voters have nuanced opinions about what does and does not convey qualification for office. Often voters are looking for a woman candidate to prove she is qualified with a combination of issue expertise, qualifications, and plans for her work in office.



# MESSAGES THAT RESONATE

When introducing themselves to voters, women candidates must prioritize which information is most important to share.

Voters primarily need to know why a woman is qualified for office. Specifically, voters need to know about her personal and professional experience and how it relates to her role as an elected official. It is important for a woman candidate to articulate how her background helps her be an informed and compassionate leader for different constituencies. For example, if she shares that she has worked in a small business, she needs to explain how that will translate to her leading and delivering for people in her state on the economy.

In the current environment, voters respond most to a woman connecting what she says and what she has done to how she will help voters and the community. Even more so than we have seen in past research, women must relate their achievements to the impacts they will have on voters' lives.



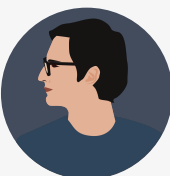
"What stood out to me is she named every ethnic group in her area. She didn't just say, well, I am going to go help the people. She named them. She knows who is in her community. That's what got it for me."

**-Black Woman**



"They, [the candidates], definitely need to involve themselves with the individuals who are in the community so that they can see what each individual community needs as well for the entire state."

**-Democratic-Leaning Man**



# THE IMPACT OF THIRD PARTIES

In this study, we found that endorsements can help demonstrate a woman candidate's qualifications and that some demographics of voters respond positively to hearing who is endorsing a woman candidate. Prominent validators helped reinforce the credibility of a woman candidate's plan, such as her economic plan. Endorsements are more important for women candidates than for men.

However, as women candidates prioritize what information to share with voters during a campaign, endorsements from validators should come after they have laid out their qualifications, knowledge of issues, and priorities.



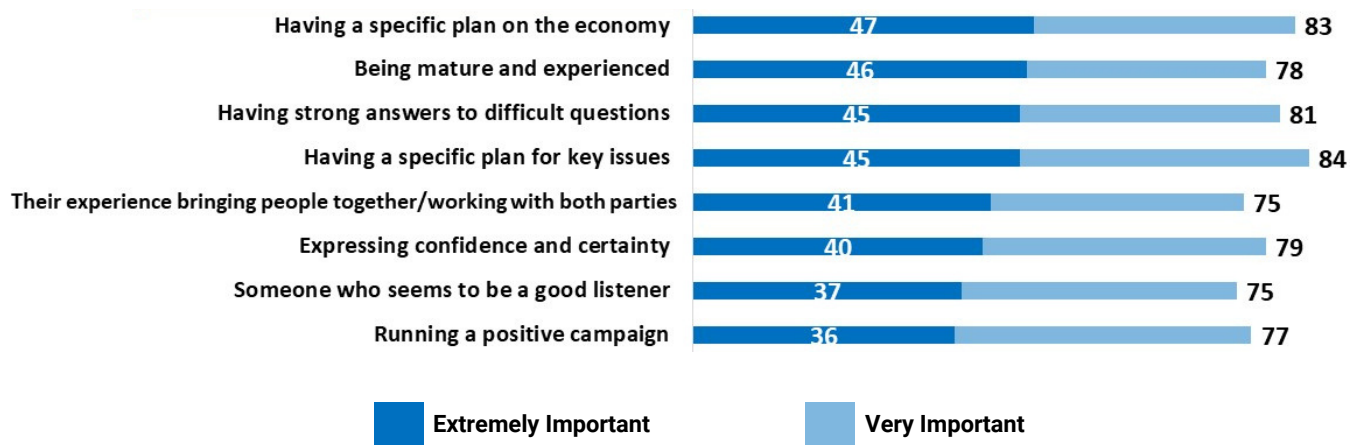


# FACTORS FOR VOTERS

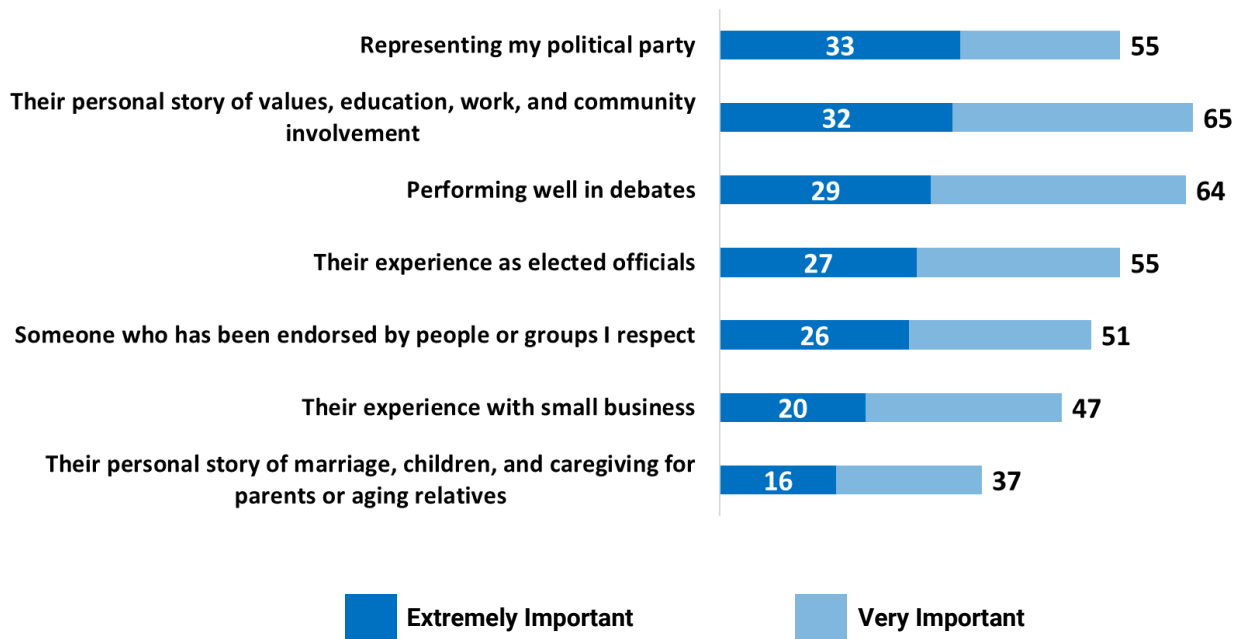
Other factors that are less important to prioritize, but still resonate with voters in a woman vs. woman race.

## NEXT TIER OF IMPORTANCE:

When deciding between a Republican woman candidate and a Democratic woman candidate running against each other in an election to be governor, how important are the following to you?



## FINAL TIER OF IMPORTANCE:



# HOW DOES A WOMAN CANDIDATE'S PARTY IMPACT VOTER PERCEPTIONS?

Voters ascribe different strengths to a woman candidate based on whether she is a Democrat or Republican. In *Shared Hurdles*, we determined that voters give women on both sides of the aisle different advantages on common issues and traits.

## ISSUE ADVANTAGES

Democratic Woman Candidate	Republican Woman Candidate
Dealing with issues of race	The state budget
Healthcare	The economy
Housing	Crime
COVID-19	Taxes
	Immigration
Education (when running against a Republican man but not a Republican woman)	Education (when running against a Democratic man but not a Democratic woman)
Abortion (when running against a Republican man, but not a Republican woman)	Abortion (when running against a Democratic man but not a Democratic woman)

# ISSUE ADVANTAGES VARY BY GENDER

While Democratic and Republican candidates are traditionally seen as stronger on specific issues, the gender of the candidate is also part of the equation.

**Democratic candidates** have large advantages over Republican opponents on dealing with issues of race, health care, housing, and COVID-19, no matter the gender of the two candidates. Additionally, Democratic women have large advantages on the issues of education and abortion when their opponent is a man. However, Democratic candidates have deficits on the issues of taxes, crime, the economy, and the state budget. The largest deficit is a woman/man match-up on crime.

**Republican men and women** have significant issue advantages on the state budget, the economy, crime, taxes, and immigration. Republican women are more competitive than a Republican man against a Democratic man on education and abortion, and on issues that are typically advantages for Democrats such as housing, health care, and dealing with issues of race.



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE ECONOMY

Previous BLFF research has shown that voters perceive the economy as a weakness for women candidates. *Shared Hurdles* found that establishing an economic plan is important for women candidates. Women candidates of all races can address the need to show economic savvy by messaging their economic plan early in their campaigns. Republican women can amplify the advantage they have on the economy with voters. Democratic women can overcome the disadvantage they have by being proactive on economic plans and messages.

# TRAIT ADVANTAGES

Voters rate hypothetical Republican and Democratic women candidates very similarly on positive traits like sharing voters' values, having the right priorities, and getting things done, and also on negative traits like divisiveness and partisanship.

When a Democratic woman and a Republican woman run against each other, voters give the Democrat an advantage in terms of working across party lines, bringing about change, and listening to people. Republican women do not have advantages with voters on these traits.

*Shared Hurdles* found that voters' perceptions of positive traits based on party shift depending on whether a woman candidate is running against a man or another woman of the opposite party.

## TRAITS ADVANTAGES VARY BY GENDER

When facing a Democratic man, a **Republican woman** has trait advantages on "getting things done" and "listening to people." She does not have those advantages against a Democratic woman. Republican men do not have the same advantages over Democratic men.

A **Democratic woman** has advantages against a Republican man on "having the right priorities" and "sharing voters' values," but voters do not give her those advantages against a Republican woman.

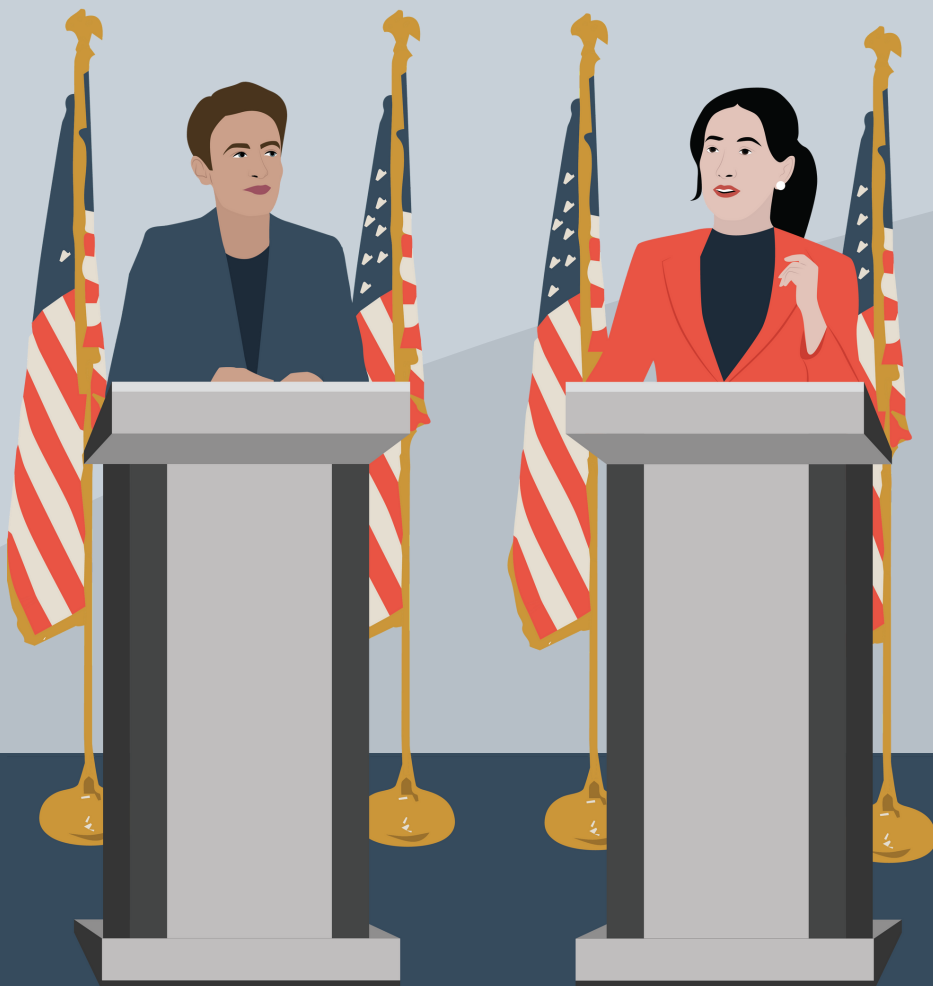
## ● SNAPSHOT: INDEPENDENT VOTERS

- Independent voters are not particularly inclined to vote for women. They tend to think it's not as important to have elected women in office, and they don't tend to perceive the way women govern as different than men, which is a major predictor of voting for women.
- Independent voters rate knowledge of issues as a top factor for candidates to show, regardless of the candidate's party or gender.
- Among Independent voters in a woman vs. woman race, Democratic women candidates are perceived as having positive traits: bringing about change, listening to voters, bipartisanship, and getting things done. Republican women have a few trait advantages with Independent voters.
- A Republican woman performs much better with Independent voters when she runs against a Democratic man than a Democratic woman.
- Importantly, among Independents, a Republican woman does better against a Democratic man than a Democratic woman on abortion, education, and immigration.

# GOING NEGATIVE

Previous BLFF research found that women candidates often pay a higher price with voters for “going negative” than male candidates, and it can jeopardize a candidate’s likeability, which is a must-have for women. Candidates must draw contrasts with their opponents to succeed at the ballot box. However, for women candidates, drawing a contrast without turning voters off can be complicated.

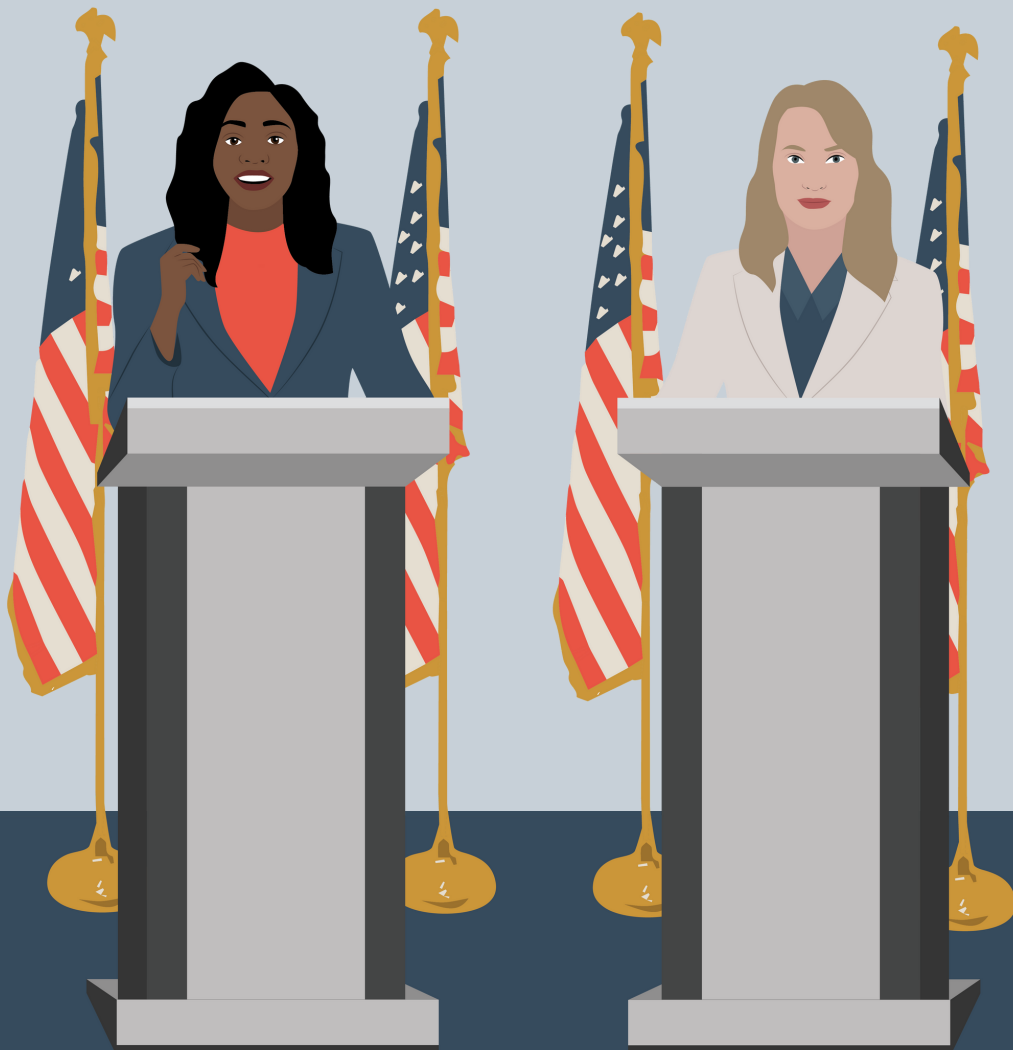
In *Shared Hurdles*, voters assumed a race between two women would be less negative overall, and they pushed back on negative attacks delivered by one of the candidates. As a result, the first woman to express a negative rebuttal against her opponent may have a disadvantage, making it difficult to maintain likeability with voters.



# DEBATES

In this research, voters were more sensitive about whether a woman candidate's message was about voters' lives or the candidate's life.

In debates between two women candidates, voters had clear preferences for how women communicate about their candidacies. We tested three scenarios with common messaging from women candidates in debates: **ties to the community vs. overcoming a challenge**, **being hands-on vs. using data**, **voting for a bill vs. voting against a bill**.



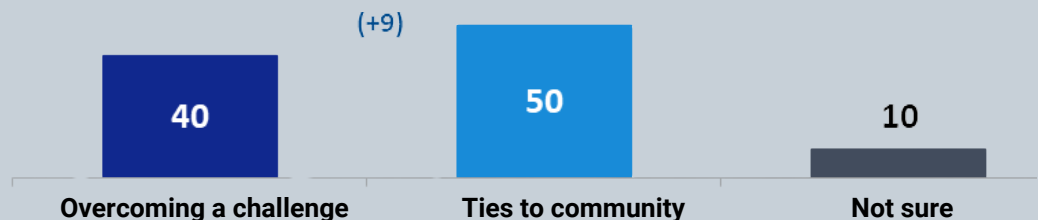
# TIES TO THE COMMUNITY VS. OVERCOMING A CHALLENGE

Voters tend to prefer the candidate who talks about ties to her community over the candidate who talks about overcoming a challenge on three measures: they feel more positive about the candidate, she seems more qualified, and they prefer her tone. Across party lines and among white voters, voters feel more positive about and believe a candidate who talks about her ties to the community is more qualified than a candidate who talks about overcoming a challenge. However, Black, Latino, AAPI, and Indigenous voters split between the two candidates.

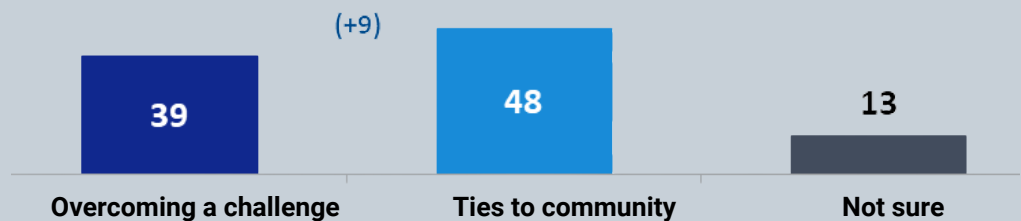
**Overcoming a challenge** – After a serious accident in my childhood, I realized that my calling in life is to help people. And I did that, first volunteering for the Red Cross, and later passing laws as a state senator. I will never give up on serving my community. That tenacity, that grit, that resilience is not my story alone, it is the story of countless people that I meet every single day. I will use that same spirit as governor to work for you.

**Ties to community** – I grew up in a small town with a Democratic father and a Republican mother, and owned a small business, and that is where I learned to listen to good ideas and that people want to solve the big problems we face. I took those lessons to the state senate where I worked with Republicans and Democrats on important issues. I know that we're not going to agree on every issue, but I promise as your governor to find common ground.

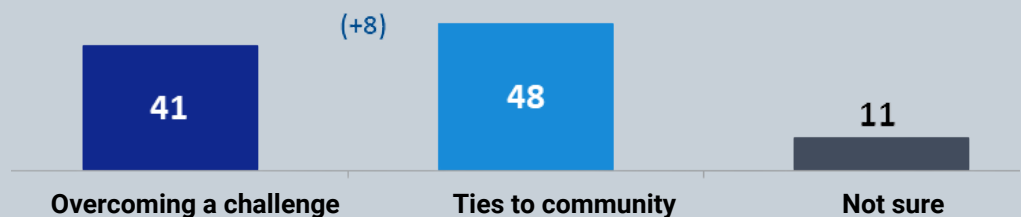
Which candidate do you feel more positive about?



Which candidate seems more qualified?



Which candidate has the better tone to her campaign?



# BEING HANDS-ON VS. USING DATA

The majority of all voters far prefer the candidate who is hands-on over the candidate who focuses on data.

**Data** – I'll give you an example. In school district five right now, 82% of kids go to underperforming schools. In school district seven, 0% of students are in an underperforming school. If I am elected governor, I will focus the state's investments on school districts like district five. We need to reinvest the communities that need us most, and data is telling that story, and I can't wait to get to work.

**Hands-on** – There are areas in our state that have been consistently left out of the equation. If I am elected, I will be a hands-on leader. My plan is to look at those specific underperforming school districts and focus on them. And you won't hear me spouting statistics. You're going to see me hands-on in the community, listening to the people who are impacted and working with the teachers, parents, and students.

Which candidate do you feel more positive about?



Which candidate seems more qualified?



Which candidate has the better tone to her campaign?





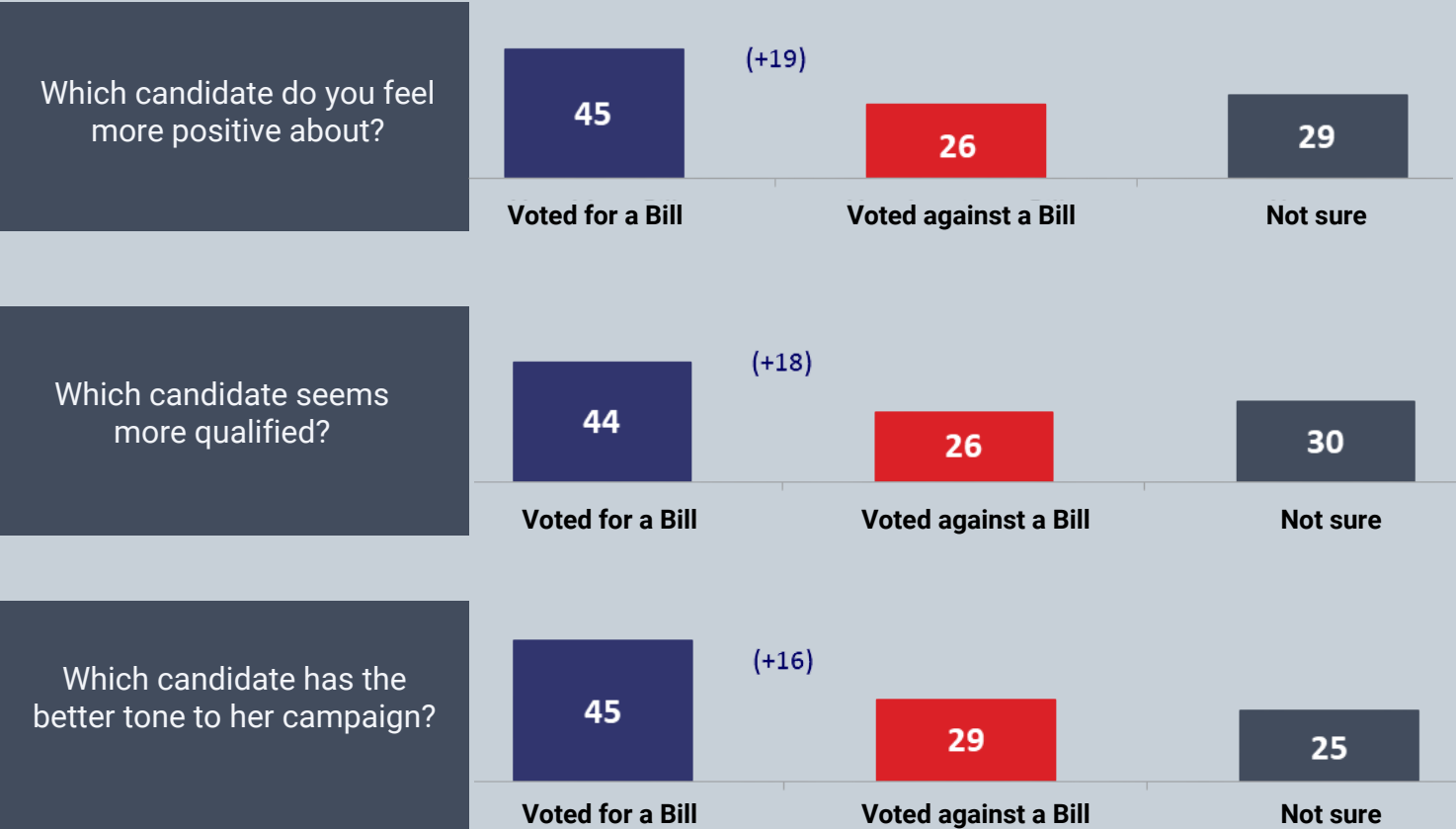
# VOTING FOR A BILL VS. VOTING AGAINST A BILL

Voters prefer a woman candidate who talks about her positive vision, even in a debate response. So voters prefer the candidate who “voted for a bill” and is critiquing her opponent, over the candidate who “voted against a bill” and is responding to the critique.

This debate pairing is most polarizing based on voter party. Democrats respond to the candidate making the critique, and Republicans respond more to the candidate responding to a critique.

**Voted For a Bill** – I’m proud to have voted for an investment in affordable housing and rental relief for 50 million dollars because it is keeping people in their homes. We helped 3,400 households, and 70% have a young child at home. It is disappointing to hear anyone on this stage disagree with this bill, especially from someone whose family benefits from a real estate company that the *Gazette* newspaper reports routinely evicts people across the state.

**Voted Against a Bill** – I had real concerns with the bill my opponent is talking about, and I did vote against it at the urging of my constituents because it was too much spending and would raise taxes, which my opponent favors. I’m disappointed that my opponent thinks it is appropriate to bring up my family and their business. I am concerned about the families in this state. That is why I’m looking to serve as governor.



# FOCUS ON APPEARANCE

We have consistently found in [previous BLFF research](#) that voters scrutinize a woman candidate's appearance at a much higher level than they scrutinize male candidates. *Shared Hurdles* focus groups, when asked to react to photos of fictional women candidates, immediately made judgments of women regarding their race, their clothing, and appearance, including traits like hair, posture, and clothing. How the candidates looked caused participants to craft their own developed narratives about the candidates' agendas and political parties.

Participants paid close attention to body language and – in a major shift from prior research – found women who crossed their arms to be out of touch or stubborn.

It is important in campaign materials to look polished and neat. While voters rated women of various races, ages, and sexual orientations as likeable and qualified, they responded more negatively if a woman's appearance was even slightly disheveled. A rumpled collar or flyaway hair imbued different meanings about the woman candidate, depending on if it was an official campaign image or a photo of a candidate moving about her day. As long as women looked put together, voters had complimentary things to say about candidates in casual and formal attire.





"I find that she looks confident but maybe not friendly. That was my comment. I don't know. It appears, and we can't see her arms, but it appears that her arms are crossed with her body language. So, for me, her body language just looks a little more closed off, and kind of like, she's pretty self-assured but isn't necessarily open to hearing from anybody."



**-White Ticket-Splitting Woman**

"I think that what kind of took away from this particular candidate in this picture is that her shirt is all disheveled. You know, what I'm saying? It's like she didn't take the time to make sure that her appearance was professional."



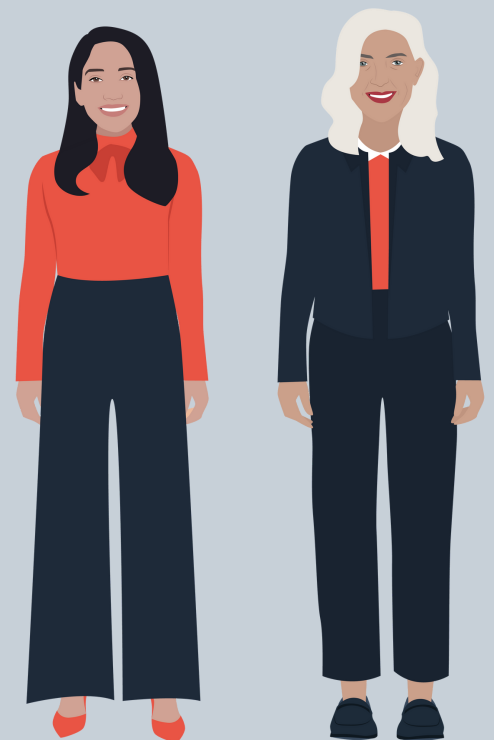
**-Democratic Man**



Participants also inferred meaning into every element of an image. They regarded settings and objects in photos, such as computers, as intentional and symbolic choices for women. Having people in the background for example, can convey that a candidate has many supporters. One male Latino participant said of a hypothetical candidate, "the Republican is sitting there on a computer, for her it's all about the data... And not the people."

## VOTERS' PERCEPTIONS OF AGE

Participants cared about the ages of women candidates and many preferred those who look older in these troubled times. Voters connect age to experience and other positive traits such as polish, knowledge, and pragmatism. Voters want women to be old enough to look experienced but not "too old that they should step aside for younger candidates."



# LGBTQ WOMEN



Voters tend to associate a short hairstyle and “masculine” clothing with an LGBTQ woman candidate. When a woman has a more traditionally feminine style, it is not as obvious to voters that she may be an LGBTQ woman candidate. Some participants struggled to accept that LGBTQ woman candidates could be Republicans, finding it unrealistic.

Participants wanted a candidate to disclose that she is an LGBTQ woman, but not when discussing coming out appears to be a calculated political strategy. Participants preferred when this information was included as personal information (such as “she lives with her wife”) that would come after her other qualifications and experiences.

# TIPS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES

**Lead with qualifications.** When introducing yourself to voters, first share your record and résumé—what did you do before you ran for office? What is your record as a leader, and what have you achieved on behalf of voters? Issue expertise, accomplishments, and plans can all signal qualifications to voters. Showing you are qualified is one of the most important factors to voters who are deciding between two women candidates.

**Demonstrate issue knowledge.** Voters say that your knowledge of issues is the most important consideration in an election. A total of 89% of respondents in *Shared Hurdles* said that issue knowledge was either "very" or "extremely important."

**Center your messages on voters.** Voters respond most when you connect what you say and what you have done to how you would help them and the community. Even more so than we have seen in the past, voters want you to relate your record and your achievements to the impact they have had on voters' lives.

**Appearance matters.** In formal campaign materials and at events, be sure to look put together with tailored, ironed clothing. Make sure you appear polished and neat. Use inviting body language and avoid crossed arms or closed off poses.

**Be mindful of your electorate.** *Shared Hurdles* found that political party — a candidate's party and the voters' party — plays a substantial role in voters' perceptions. Voters will give you advantages based on whether you are running as a Democrat or Republican. Voters continue to view women elected officials differently depending on the voter's political ideology.



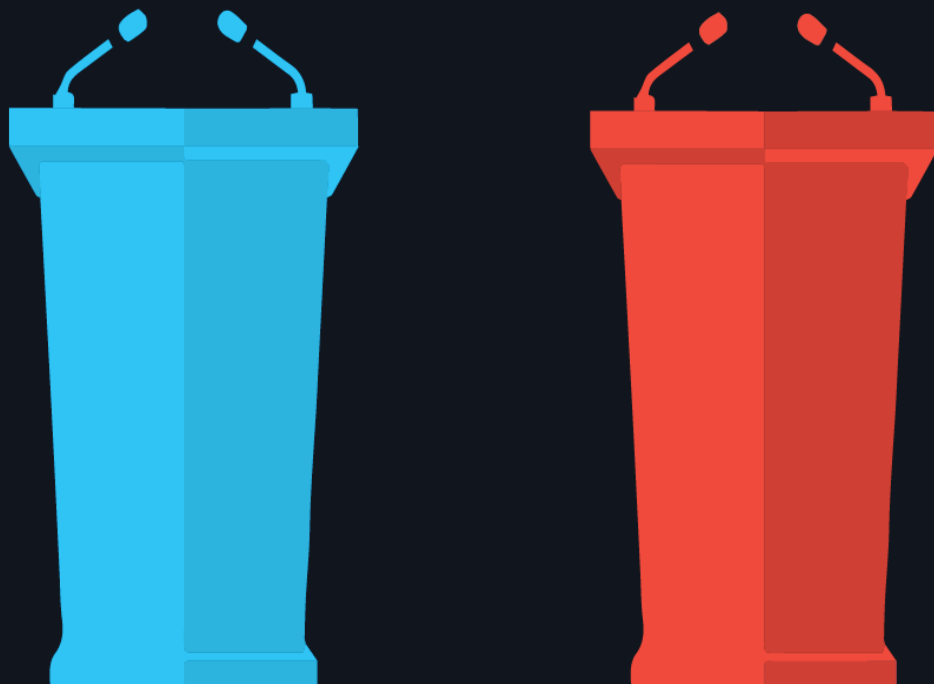
# CONCLUSION

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The Barbara Lee Family Foundation has consistently found over the years that voters hold women to higher standards than men. Unfortunately, that burden remains when women run against each other. When two women run against each other, both women face gender bias. Although voters increasingly see women candidates as the norm, an “imagination barrier” persists — making a man the default image of what an executive leader looks like, and setting persistent gendered biases against women candidates, regardless of who they run against.

Nevertheless, *Shared Hurdles* shows that voters’ perceptions of women candidates are changing for the better. Half of voters believe it’s past time to elect more women to public office. Women of color have made great progress in polling, regardless of political party. And in races between women, both candidates now possess the tools to win: highlighting their accomplishments, demonstrating their engagement with key issues, and standing up for voters at every turn.

No matter their opponent, seeing woman in politics normalizes women’s leadership in our nation. As more women run for office and more women win, — a new generation will be motivated to follow in their footsteps.















# CANDIDATE PROFILES

Race and political party, of both voters and women candidates, are influential factors when voters are forming opinions about women candidates.

In *Shared Hurdles*, we tested two messages with voters — one describing “Democrat Joan Smith” and one describing “Republican Kathy Green.” We paired the messages with photos of ten hypothetical candidates of different races to gain a nuanced understanding of what women of varying identities and political affiliations face on the campaign trail. In testing these multiple matchups between women of different races, we used more than one hypothetical white woman candidate as a control.

While we found that candidates across race and party affiliation can generally be seen favorably by voters, and convey that they are qualified, voters form distinct attitudes based on a woman’s race and party. A woman’s race and party impact the language and messaging voters prefer to hear from her, and the distinct strengths and weaknesses they ascribe to her.

	White Dem, White Rep	Black Dem, White Rep	Latina Dem, White Rep	AAPI Dem, White Rep	White Dem, Latina Rep	White Dem, AAPI Rep
Democratic Woman						
Republican Woman						



# PROFILE #1

**Democrat Joan Smith** is a three-term state Senator. She grew up in a working-class neighborhood, the daughter of a police officer and a teacher, where she learned the value of hard work and discipline. She attended a prestigious state university and graduated at the top of her class.

Senator Joan Smith is known in the state legislature for successfully passing a number of bills to expand health care for children, help grow small business, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class. She began her political career as a county supervisor prior to serving in the state Senate. She has held leadership positions and is on the Finance Committee, Health Committee, and the Special Committee on Substance Abuse in the state Senate. She is endorsed by the Teachers' Union and the Small Business Alliance.





# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## ASIAN AMERICAN/ PACIFIC ISLANDER DEMOCRATIC WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- People like her working-class roots and that she graduated at the top of her class.
- People like her issue portfolio and accomplishments.
- It is strong to share what she did prior to serving in the state Senate.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- The fact that voters responded more positively in the second half demonstrates that highlighting a candidate's record is more effective than leading with a candidate's biography.
- Independents and Republicans dial down when the profile mentions her higher education experience and being on the Special Committee on Substance Abuse. Men also dial down sharply on the committee\*.

*\*In this and other public opinion research, voters have been responding negatively to elected officials' participation on committees and task forces. Voters want action, and they do not see committees or task forces creating positive change.*

Across race, party, and gender, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. Latino voters rate her higher on favorability than qualifications. She wins the ballot among Democrats, Independents, voters of color, and women, but loses Republicans, white voters, and men.

### WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Voters dial up on the phrase that acknowledges the elected roles the AAPI Democratic woman had prior to serving in the state Senate.
- Men voters dial higher than women voters only for this combination of profile and photo.

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## BLACK DEMOCRATIC WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- People like her working-class roots.
- People like her issue portfolio and accomplishments.
- It is strong to share she was a county supervisor prior to serving in the state Senate.
- Endorsements: Voters like that she is endorsed by the Teachers' Union and the Small Business Alliance.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Independents and Republicans dial down when the profile mentions her role on the Committee on Substance Abuse.\*

*\*In this and other public opinion research, voters have been responding negatively to elected officials' participation on committees and task forces. Voters want action, and they do not see committees or task forces creating positive change.*

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified, and they rate the two dimensions similarly. She wins the ballot among every key subgroup except for Republicans.

In previous BLFF research, focus group participants liked an image of a Black woman with natural hair. To them, this emanated genuine confidence, and gave off the impression that she is putting in the work for her constituents. Others said she looked like she could get things going and is no-nonsense.

### WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Democrats dial up really quickly.
- Black voters really like the parts about her background, family, and family values.
- It is strong to share she was a county supervisor and has held leadership positions.
- In the ballot, she wins white voters.

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## LATINA DEMOCRATIC WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- People like her working-class roots.
- People like her issue portfolio and accomplishments.
- It is helpful to share that she was a county supervisor prior to serving the in the state Senate.
- Her profile ends on a strong note with her endorsements.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Independents and Republicans dialed down when the profile mentions attending a state school and her role on the Committee on Substance Abuse.
- Men also dial down on the Committee on Substance Abuse.\*

*\*In this and other public opinion research, voters have been responding negatively to elected officials' participation on committees and task forces. Voters want action, and they do not see committees or task forces creating positive change.*

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. Black and Latino voters rate her higher on favorability than qualifications; AAPI voters rate her higher on qualifications. In the ballot, she only loses Republicans and splits the vote among white voters.

### WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Voters across racial and ethnic subgroups dial similarly
- Latino voters notice she is on the Finance Committee and the Health Committee

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## WHITE DEMOCRATIC WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- People like her working-class roots.
- People like her issue portfolio and accomplishments.
- Independents dial up sharply on graduating at the top of her class.
- The profile ends on a strong note with her endorsements.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Independents and Republicans dial down when the profile mentions attending a state school, and her role on the Committee on Substance Abuse.\*

*\*In this and other public opinion research, voters have been responding negatively to elected officials' participation on committees and task forces. Voters want action, and they do not see committees or task forces creating positive change.*

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. Republicans, white, and AAPI voters rate her higher on qualifications than favorability. In the ballot, she only loses Republicans and splits the vote among white and AAPI voters.

### ● WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Independent Voters reacted more positively after the profile highlighted that she graduated at the top of her class than for the Democratic women candidates.
- Democratic voters notice she is on the Finance Committee and the Health Committee.

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## WHITE DEMOCRATIC WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- No significant valleys/language that causes people to dial down.
- People like her working-class roots.
- People like her work on children's issues and her accomplishments.
- It is helpful to share she was a county supervisor prior to serving in the state Senate.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Slow takeoff for Independents.
- Republicans dial down when the profile mentions her role on the Committee on Substance Abuse.\*

*\*In this and other public opinion research, voters have been responding negatively to elected officials' participation on committees and task forces. Voters want action, and they do not see committees or task forces creating positive change.*

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. Latino voters rate her higher on favorability than qualifications. In the ballot, she only loses Republicans and splits the vote among white voters and men.

### WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Democratic voters dialed up, consistently responding positively to the profile.
- AAPI voters dial up upon hearing she has held leadership positions and committee and task force assignments.

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## WHITE DEMOCRATIC WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- People like her working-class roots.
- Independents dial up sharply on her legislative accomplishments and her issue portfolio.
- It is helpful to share she has held leadership positions.
- Her profile ends on a strong note with her endorsements.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Independents, Republicans, and men dial down when the profile mentions her role on the Committee on Substance Abuse.\*

*\*In this and other public opinion research, voters have been responding negatively to elected officials' participation on committees and task forces. Voters want action, and they do not see committees or task forces creating positive change.*

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. Independents, Republicans, white voters, and Latino voters rate her higher on qualifications than favorability. On the ballot, she only loses Republicans and Latino voters and splits the vote among white voters.

### WHAT IS UNIQUE:





























- It was helpful with white voters, Democrats, Independents, and women to mention that she has held leadership positions.
- Men voters and Independents notice she graduated at the top of her class.



# STRATEGIES FOR DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES

## KEY FINDINGS: LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE THAT WORKS

PROFILE LANGUAGE	CANDIDATES
She grew up in a working-class neighborhood, the daughter of a police officer and a teacher, where she learned the value of hard work and discipline	     
Graduated at the top of her class	    
Successfully passing a number of bills	    
Prior to serving in the state Senate	
She is endorsed by	  
She has held leadership positions	 
To expand healthcare for children, help grow small business	   
To expand healthcare for children	 

LANGUAGE THAT BACKFIRES	
Attended a prestigious state university	 
Special Committee on Substance Abuse	     

# PROFILE #2

**Republican Kathy Green** is a three-term state Senator. She is a native of the state. She grew up in the suburbs of Fairview, where her parents opened and built a small business. Throughout high school, Kathy worked at the family business with her brothers. She is a member of her church, married, and the mother of two grown children.

Senator Green has a record of delivering in the state legislature. This includes leading efforts to create 19,000 new jobs, hitting 95% of that goal. She began her political career on the city council. Currently, she serves as a ranking member of the Finance Committee, as well as on the Governor's Economic Task Force to create jobs. She is endorsed by the Chamber of Commerce and Moms for Liberty.





# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## WHITE REPUBLICAN WOMAN\*



### WHAT WORKS:

- People, especially Independents, like that she is a native of the state.
- People like her middle-class suburban and small business roots.
- People like her leadership role to create 19,000 jobs.
- People like her record of delivering.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Independents and Democrats dial down on her religiosity.
- People dial down when the profile mentions her endorsements.

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. Democrats, Latino voters, and AAPI voters rate her higher on qualifications than favorability. In the ballot, she only wins Republicans and splits white and AAPI voters.

### ● WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- **Republicans and AAPI voters notice and like that her parents opened and built a small business.**
- **Latino voters have a really sharp peak on creating 19,000 jobs.**
- When this candidate mentions her endorsements, voters dial down only for this candidate. Democrats and male voters drive the downturn.

\*This candidate was tested against a white Democratic woman (see page 26).

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## WHITE REPUBLICAN WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- People like that she is a native of the state and has small business roots.
- Independents like that she is a married mother.
- People like her leadership role in creating 19,000 jobs, and as the ranking member of the Finance Committee.
- It is strong with women voters to end on her endorsements. Men reacted negatively.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Democrats dial down when the profile mentions her religiosity.
- Independents dial down on being part of an economic task force. Showcasing specific accomplishments is more powerful than sitting on a task force.

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. Democrats, Latino voters, and AAPI voters rate her higher on qualifications than favorability. In the ballot, she only wins Republicans and splits white and AAPI voters.

### ● WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Republican voters have an incredibly fast takeoff at the beginning of the profile.
- When the profile focuses on her suburban and small business childhood, her marriage and family, and her record of delivering, AAPI voters dial higher than any other racial or ethnic group. Typically, white voters dial the highest.

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## WHITE REPUBLICAN WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- Republicans dial up steadily for the first  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the profile.
- People, especially Independents, like that she is a native of the state.
- People like that she has led efforts to create 19,000 jobs.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Republicans have a slower takeoff.
- Democrats dial down on being married.

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. On the ballot, she only wins Republicans and splits white voters and men.

### ● WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Unlike other Republican women, across race, voters dial very similarly.

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## ASIAN AMERICAN/ PACIFIC ISLANDER REPUBLICAN WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- Independents and Republicans dial up on her religiosity.
- People, especially Independents, like that she is a native of the state.
- People dial up sharply on leading efforts to create 19,000 jobs.
- Independents dial up when the profile mentions her endorsements and her role as the ranking member of the Finance Committee.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Republicans have a slower takeoff.
- Independents dial down on being part of the Governor's Economic Task Force. Showcasing specific accomplishments is stronger than sitting on a task force.

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. On the ballot, she only wins Republicans and splits white voters and men.

### ● WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Latino voters dial higher than any other racial and ethnic subgroup after hearing about her working at the family business and throughout the rest of the statement.
- Black voters like that she began her career on the city council.
- Men dial higher than women on leading efforts to create jobs.
- Similar to the profile for the Latina Republican candidate, Independents and Republicans dialed up on her religiosity.

# CANDIDATE PROFILE:

## LATINA REPUBLICAN WOMAN



### WHAT WORKS:

- Independents and Republicans dial up on her religiosity.
- People, especially Independents, like that she is a native of the state.
- Republicans dial up sharply upon hearing that she worked at the family business with her brothers.
- People like that she is a married mother.
- People dial up sharply on leading efforts to create 19,000 jobs.
- People dial up when the profile mentions her role as the ranking member of the Finance Committee.

### WHAT FALLS SHORT:

- Independents flatten during her political experiences and endorsements toward the end of the profile.

Across race and party, voters feel favorably and believe she is qualified. Democrats and white voters see her as more qualified than favorable. On the ballot, she only wins Republicans and Latino voters and splits white voters.

























### ● WHAT IS UNIQUE:

- Republicans have a robust takeoff.
- Democrats and Black voters like that she is married and the mother of two grown children.
- **AAPI voters rate her very similarly to white and Latino voters.**

# STRATEGIES FOR REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES:

## KEY FINDINGS: LANGUAGE

While the narrative of the Republican profile is the main driver of voters' responses across different candidates tested, there are some nuances based on the candidate's image.

LANGUAGE THAT WORKS	PROFILE LANGUAGE	CANDIDATES
	Married, and the mother of...	     
	This includes leading efforts to create 19,000 new jobs	     
	Her parents opened and built a small business	    
	Grew up in the suburbs	
LANGUAGE THAT BACKFIRES	She is a member of her church*	  
	She began her political career	  
	Finance Committee	
	Economic Task Force to create jobs	 

\*The valley is driven by Democratic voters; Republican voters like or are neutral toward this language



= against a white woman



= against a Black woman



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Advancing women's equality and representation in  
American politics for over 20 years.



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