

# RIISING TO THE OCCASION: HOW WOMEN LEADERS PROVE THEY CAN HANDLE A CRISIS

In previous Barbara Lee Family Foundation research, voters rated “can handle a crisis” as a top trait when assessing a woman’s electability - but what does “handling a crisis” mean to voters, and how do women show they’re up to the task?



This research explores those questions, providing advice and recommendations for women on how to talk to voters and show they are prepared to lead.

There are so many types of crises, and the impact on each voter varies depending on their age, race, gender, geography, ability, and socioeconomic status. While “handling a crisis” may seem to be a vague concept, voters have very concrete ideas about what makes a woman leader equipped to do so.

- **Voters know the type of leader they want in a crisis.** The findings are consistent across different focus groups and subgroups of voters surveyed: voters want leaders who can develop and execute a plan to not only to deal with a crisis as it’s happening, but to prepare for any future crises. They want someone who is thinking about what needs to happen before, during, and after a crisis, and believe women are better at taking that 360-degree view.
- **Communication is essential, and voters see it as a two-way street.** For voters, communicating isn’t just about conveying information; it’s also about listening to and learning from experts, stakeholders, and those impacted. There are two sides of gathering information - from the people impacted and from the experts - and people think that women will be better at both.
- **Confidence is key.** Confidence signals both likeability and qualifications, and is essential when it comes to showing a woman can handle a crisis. There is no such thing as on the job learning – the expectation is prepared leadership from day one. In past Barbara Lee Family Foundation research, voters assessed a woman officeholder’s confidence in less than 30 seconds.
- **Voters want their leaders to be team captains during times of crisis.** When given the choice of either a woman or a man governor leading on their own or working with a team, voters overwhelmingly prefer them working with a team. Voters are more likely to say they prefer a combination of both rather than a governor leading on their own. This means delegating, taking the advice of issue experts seriously, and working with other elected officials, while ultimately holding themselves accountable.