

#MeToo on the Campaign Trail: What Women Candidates Need to Know

In Spring 2018, the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, in partnership with Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Consulting, released two research memos on sexual harassment, the #MeToo movement, and the campaign trail. [*Voters, Candidates, and #MeToo*](#) reveals what voters think about the #MeToo movement and how their thoughts might translate into voting decisions. [*#MeToo: An Issue that Transcends Party*](#) provides insights about candidate messages supporting and questioning the #MeToo movement. This new guide for candidates builds on prior memos with key tips for women candidates to keep in mind when talking about this important and timely issue.

Key Stats: What Voters Think About Sexual Harassment



Voters Agree: Sexual Harassment Is a Serious Problem that Needs to Be Addressed.

- 81% of voters see sexual harassment in the workplace as a serious problem, with 44% saying it is a very serious problem.
- The majority of voters agree that the current attention on sexual harassment is about right (42%) or hasn't gone far enough (25%).
- 87% of voters agree that it needs to be easier for women to safely report sexual harassment in the workplace.

Voters Are Willing to Make Sexual Harassment an Issue at the Ballot Box.

- 52% of voters agree that they would never vote for a person accused of sexual harassment.
- 51% of voters agree they would never vote for someone who didn't make addressing sexual harassment a priority.
- 30% of voters say that current events regarding sexual harassment make them more likely to vote for women candidates, with the majority of voters saying it makes no difference.

Millennial Women Are Especially Likely to Connect Sexual Harassment to Voting Decisions.

- 86% of millennial women voters see sexual harassment in the workplace as a serious problem, with 57% saying it is a very serious problem.
- 73% of millennial women agree that they would never vote for a person accused of sexual harassment, with 57% strongly agreeing.
- 65% of millennial women agree that they would never vote for someone who didn't make addressing sexual harassment a priority, with 31% strongly agreeing.
- 50% of millennial women say that current events regarding sexual harassment make them more likely to vote for women candidates, with 27% saying it makes them much more likely.

Men Want to Fight Sexual Harassment, Too.

- 79% of men say that sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious problem. Only 5% of men say sexual harassment in the workplace is not at all serious.
- 53% of men agree that they would never vote for a person accused of sexual harassment.
- 84% of men agree that it needs to be easier for women to safely report sexual harassment in the workplace.



Voters Support Women Candidates **Who Advocate for Change**

An overwhelming majority of voters agree that sexual harassment is a problem, and they prefer when women candidates take a hardline stance against sexual harassment while advocating for change. Voters also feel more favorably towards a male candidate who speaks out on the issue of sexual harassment – male candidates should feel empowered to use their voices.

The statements below make voters across gender, age, partisanship, and race feel much more favorably towards a woman candidate. Percentages are of voters who rate each statement a “10” on a 0-10 scale where 0 means “much less favorable” and 10 means “much more favorable” towards that woman candidate.

- Sexual harassment is unacceptable and should not be tolerated anywhere in our society. (72%)
- Congress needs to get rid of the hush money fund that uses taxpayer money to protect sexual predators. (69%)
- There is no excuse for sexual harassment. (61%)
- Perpetrators of sexual misconduct have no place in public office. (59%)
- We must fight every day to make sure that little girls grow up in a world where they never have to say #MeToo. (58%)
- We need to require all employers to conduct sexual harassment training, including Congress. (54%)

Voters also respond well to a candidate who delivers positive messages about taking proactive steps to address sexual harassment. While positive messages are convincing to voters regardless of the gender of the candidate saying them, some are stronger when delivered by a woman candidate. The strongest candidate messages anchor on values, are non-partisan, and refer to the economic consequences women suffer as a result of sexual harassment in the workplace.

MESSAGES THAT ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

% CONVINCING TO VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE (% VERY CONVINCING)

	Woman Candidate	Male Candidate
VALUES We must work together to end sexual harassment. We have seen that when women come forward and find their voice to speak out, change is possible and people are held accountable. It is only right to show our daughters how to be empowered and tell them to never be silent, and to teach our sons to treat girls and women with respect.	87 (61)	85 (57)
NON-PARTISAN/PERSONAL My harasser never once stopped to ask me whether I was a Democrat, Republican, or something else. Sexual harassment can happen to anyone, regardless of party, industry, or job title. In Congress, I will fight harassment of all forms. I will work with anyone who supports this goal and oppose anyone who stands in the way, even if they come from my own party. This is too important of an issue to put party over country.	83 (57)	84 (54)
ECONOMIC Women should be able to go to work and provide for their families without having to deal with sexual harassment. Women can't just walk away and leave a job where they face sexual harassment because they have bills to pay and people depending on them. That's why I will fight for protections against sexual harassment to protect the economic security of all working families.	83 (55)	88 (56)
NON-PARTISAN Sexual harassers don't care if you're a Democrat, Republican, or something else. Harassment can happen to anyone, regardless of party, industry, or job title. In Congress, I will fight harassment of all forms. I will work with anyone who supports this mission and oppose anyone who stands in the way, even if they come from my own party. This is too important of an issue to put party over country.	83 (54)	85 (51)

A solid majority of both men and women voters find these statements that address the problem of sexual harassment convincing to vote for the woman candidate. However, women voters are more likely than men voters to find the statements very convincing. When it comes to women candidates, the top statements among women voters are *Values* (69% very convincing) and *Economic* (66% very convincing). The top statements among men voters are *Non-Partisan/Personal* (56% very convincing) and *Values* (51% very convincing).

Voters Think Twice About Candidates Who Question the #MeToo Movement

Statements criticizing the #MeToo movement have been commonplace since the movement's revitalization in October 2017. The question remains: how will voters respond to such critiques? This research finds that when a candidate questions the #MeToo movement and the relevance of sexual harassment, it raises doubts about that candidate for a majority of voters and serious doubts about that candidate for a quarter to a third of voters.

MESSAGES THAT QUESTION THE RELEVANCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

% DOUBTS ABOUT THE CANDIDATE (% SERIOUS DOUBTS)

LOW PRIORITY

Addressing sexual harassment is important, but there are too many other things that need to be addressed first. We're at risk of war with North Korea, the opioid crisis is getting worse, millions are losing health care, and nearly one hundred million Americans still don't have jobs. Once we take care of these big issues, then we can deal with things like sexual harassment.

64
(36)

TOO FAR

The #MeToo movement is out of control. Now, we're criminalizing bad dates and calling rape when someone has engaged in consensual sex but regretted it later. Pretending that these actions are on the same level as sexual assault is not only unfair for the men who are accused, but it takes away from real assault victims and creates a more hostile environment for their #MeToo stories.

59
(34)

WASTE OF TIME

Sexual harassment has been around forever and there's no reason to think it will ever go away. Women have encountered discrimination and unwanted advances from male coworkers from the first day they entered the workforce. Speaking up now won't amount to real change. Instead of confronting harassers, we will make more progress hiring and mentoring the next generation of women and fighting for policies like paid leave that are good for women and their families.

60
(31)

SETTLEMENTS

I supported the #MeToo movement when it first began, but now it's snowballing into criminalizing bad dates, celebrities seeking publicity, and people looking to make money with exaggerated claims and secret monetary settlements. Men are becoming afraid to interact with women at all for fear of their innocent actions being labeled as harassment or worse. There has to be a better way to deal with real sexual harassment.

55
(27)

Women and men respond similarly to each other, while drop-off voters, millennial women, and unmarried women respond with more doubts about a candidate who makes these statements.

Candidate Profiles Are an Opportunity to Talk About Fighting Sexual Harassment

When candidates are introduced to voters in a profile or a statement, they must make a decision about what issues to include; after all, a profile is a first glimpse into a candidate's priority issues. Traditionally, women candidates have needed to be especially careful when choosing what to incorporate – previous Barbara Lee Family Foundation [research](#) has found that women candidates continue to face higher standards than their male counterparts, and that women are punished if they fail to hit the ground running in their campaigns. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, women candidates may be wondering whether to highlight sexual harassment as one of the issues in their profiles.

In this survey, voters heard sample profiles of fictional Democratic and Republican women candidates, including a control profile that does not mention the issue of sexual harassment at all and a profile that includes sexual harassment as an issue the candidate will address (see [MeToo: An Issue that Transcends Party](#) for profiles used). Notably, for both Democratic and Republican women candidates, a profile that pledges to fight sexual harassment is stronger with voters than one that discloses that a candidate feels compelled from personal experience to tackle the issue.

When it comes to voter support on a sample ballot, partisanship remains significant, but it doesn't tell the whole story. Overall, the coalition of voters more likely to support a Republican woman candidate when her profile references sexual harassment is made up of groups that traditionally lean more Republican, and the coalition more likely to support a Democratic woman whose profile mentions sexual harassment is made up of groups that traditionally lean more Democratic. In other words, compared to a control profile that does not mention the issue of sexual harassment, when a woman candidate of either party includes language about fighting sexual harassment in her profile, it increases support among many voting groups who are more inclined to vote for her in the first place. Also, while partisanship is important for many groups, swing Independent women, Latinx voters, and unmarried women are more likely to vote for both the Democratic woman and the Republican woman when their profiles reference fighting sexual harassment.



The Democratic woman candidate and the Republican woman candidate each have a slight advantage in favorability when compared to their male opponents after the control profiles that do not mention sexual harassment. Including a phrase about fighting sexual harassment in the women candidates' profiles increases voters' positive perceptions of both the Democratic woman and the Republican woman.

DEMOCRATIC WOMEN

SEE INCREASED FAVORABILITY AMONG:

Democratic women
Independent women
College educated women
Latinx voters
Women under 40

REPUBLICAN WOMEN

SEE INCREASED FAVORABILITY AMONG:

Republican women
Independent women
College educated men
Married women
White voters
Non-college educated women

These findings illustrate that for both a Democratic woman candidate and a Republican woman candidate, including a commitment to fight against sexual harassment in the candidate's profile improves her performance in the horserace and increases voters' positive feelings towards her.

Looking Ahead: What This Means for Women Candidates in 2018

As the national conversation about sexual harassment continues to dominate headlines across the country, it is important that candidates be prepared for questions about this issue. Communicating about sexual harassment may feel new to many candidates; it hasn't been a large part of the conversation on the campaign trail since the Anita Hill hearings in 1991. Voters recognize that more women are running for office in 2018 and, for women candidates especially, there may be a gendered expectation that they are out front on this subject. For some, shining a light on sexual harassment may be a personal priority. The latest Barbara Lee Family Foundation findings offer key insights into how women candidates can best prepare to address sexual harassment on the campaign trail.

KEY TIPS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES

- **Discuss your commitment to fighting sexual harassment – it will resonate with voters.** While some have feared a backlash against the #MeToo movement, the majority of voters say they would never vote for someone who did not make fighting sexual harassment a priority. Voters across parties look more favorably upon women candidates who take a strong stance against sexual harassment. Male voters also take this issue seriously.
- **Remember this is not a Democratic or Republican issue.** No political party has a monopoly on fighting sexual harassment – for women candidates of both parties, including a line about fighting sexual harassment in their candidate profiles increases support among many voting groups more inclined to vote for them in the first place. Voters also respond to messaging about putting country over party.
- **Consider what you want to highlight when you speak about sexual harassment.** Sexual harassment impacts people in many different ways, which gives women candidates the opportunity to approach the issue from different angles. Whether talking about the importance of the next generation, change and reform in politics, or the economic implications for women, remember to think about what message feels authentic to you.



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METHODOLOGY

Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research designed and administered this survey that was conducted over the phone from February 14 – 25, 2018. The survey reached a total of 1,000 likely 2018 voters nationwide with oversamples of 200 drop-off voters, 100 Millennial women, 100 unmarried women, 100 married women, and an additional 450 sample of likely 2018 voters who received the profile questions (to boost up the sample size hearing the profiles) and demographics. Telephone numbers were drawn from listed voter file Catalist sample. The data were weighed slightly by gender, age, region, party identification, and education to reflect attributes of the actual population. The Millennial, unmarried, and married women oversamples were weighted down into the base to reflect their natural proportion of the electorate. The margin of error for the total sample is +/-3.1% and 6.9% for the drop-off voter sample.