



#MeToo: An Issue that Transcends Party

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 on the campaign trail. For women candidates especially, there may be a gendered expectation that they are out front on this subject and, for some, shining a light on sexual harassment may be a personal priority.

This new research from the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, conducted in partnership with Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Consulting, shows that voters respond positively when women candidates on both sides of the aisle talk about sexual harassment in their candidate profiles, and provides insights about candidate messages supporting and questioning the #MeToo movement.

Candidate Profiles and 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 new 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 appendix A 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. 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. 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.



These findings illustrate that for both a Democratic woman candidate and a Republican woman candidate, embedding 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.

Messages About 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.¹

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.

¹ These messages were heard by survey participants after they heard statements that address the problem of sexual harassment.

Voters don't just think twice about a candidate who questions the #MeToo movement; they 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)

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.

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.

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.

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.

Woman Candidate	Male Candidate
87 (61)	85 (57)
83 (57)	84 (54)
83 (55)	88 (56)
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).

Conclusion

Communicating about sexual harassment may feel new to many candidates; it's an issue that hasn't been a large part of the conversation on the campaign trail since the Anita Hill hearings in 1991. Additionally, there has been much discussion about a potential "backlash" to the #MeToo movement, so candidates may feel hesitant to include a statement against sexual harassment in their initial introduction to voters. This new research from the Barbara Lee Family Foundation shows that voters are ready for candidates, particularly women candidates, to show that they are committed to fighting sexual harassment. Moreover, voters are skeptical of candidates who question the #MeToo movement and are convinced by messages about fighting sexual harassment. This further confirms previously released Barbara Lee Family Foundation research - *Voters, Candidates, and #MeToo* – which shows that the majority of voters look more favorably upon candidates who take a strong stance against sexual harassment. Considering these findings, addressing sexual harassment has the potential to be a deciding factor in a close race.



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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.

Appendix A: Fictional Candidate Profiles

Traditional profiles:

Democrat Kelly Wilson will be a tireless advocate for working families. She will fight for affordable health care for all, quality public K-12 education, ensuring students can get an education after high school without debt, and the right of working people to negotiate better wages and benefits, so that all families can make ends meet and get ahead. Wilson believes all women have the right to make their own personal health care decisions.

Republican Jennifer Miller supports lower taxes for all Americans, including middle class families, opposes unnecessary government regulations that have killed businesses, and slowed economic growth. She will work to make the federal government smaller and more accountable and cut entitlements to get deficits under control. Miller supports an “all of the above” energy strategy to lower prices and increase energy independence. She supports 2nd amendment rights and is pro-life.

Harassment as an issue:

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