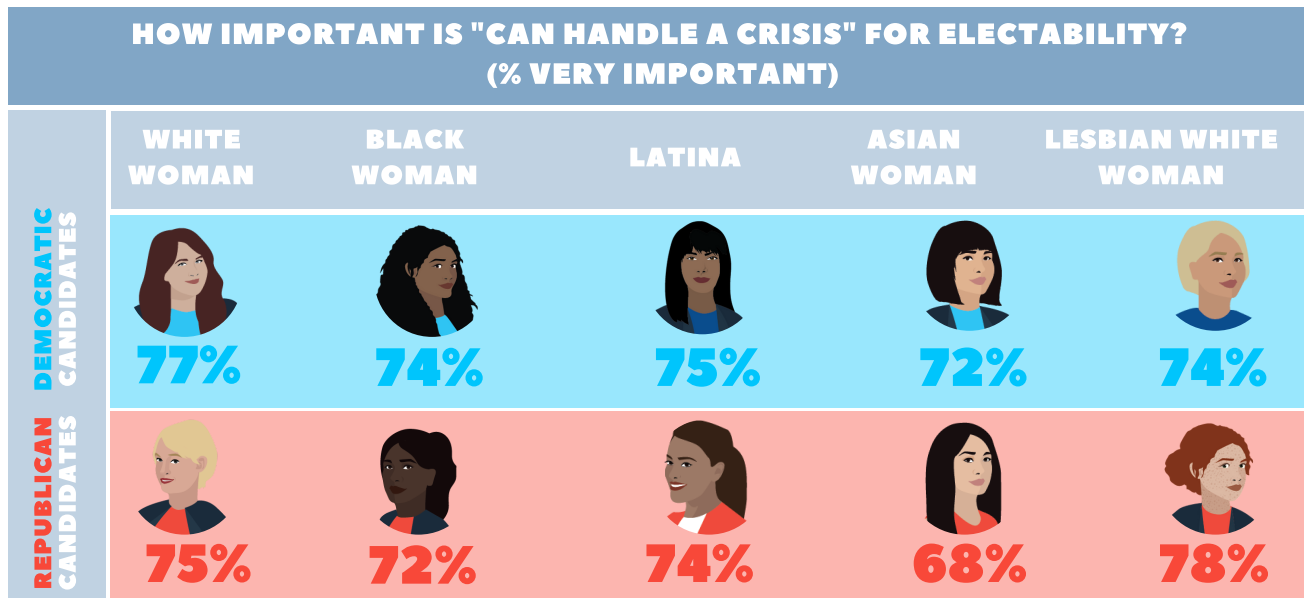


RISE TO THE OCCASION: HOW WOMEN LEADERS PROVE THEY CAN HANDLE A CRISIS



Seeing a candidate as able to handle a crisis is critically important to voters, especially when they're evaluating women candidates. Handling a crisis is a key component of being seen as qualified, a place where our research has consistently shown women are held to a higher standard. Recent Barbara Lee Family Foundation research also shows that a top indicator of electability for women candidates running for executive office is the ability to handle a crisis.



But what does “handling a crisis” mean to voters, and how do women show they’re up to the task? Our research explores these questions through the lens of asking about hypothetical women governors, providing advice and recommendations for women on how to talk to voters and show they are prepared to lead.

2020 CONTEXT

This research was performed during March and April 2020, as COVID-19 was impacting the lives of Americans and people around the world. The President’s response to the crisis has an impact on voter opinions, as do the responses of women governors and mayors who were suddenly in the national spotlight. While the influence of COVID-19 can certainly be seen throughout this research, proving they can handle a crisis has consistently been important for women candidates and will continue to be so in the years to come.

METHODOLOGY

Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research & Consulting conducted six focus groups and a national phone survey of 1,000 likely 2020 voters nationwide along with oversamples of 300 African American, 300 Latinx, 400 AAPI, 150 Millennial women, and 200 Millennial men likely voters. The findings from the survey presented in this memo are controlled for party identification. The full methodology is available at the end of the memo.

KEY FINDINGS

01

Voters know the type of leader they want in a crisis: someone with a 360-degree view who is in touch. The findings are consistent across different focus groups and subgroups of voters surveyed: voters want leaders who can develop and execute a plan that will deal with a crisis as it is happening, as well as prepare for any future crises. Rather than being laser focused on one component of a crisis, voters want a leader 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.

02

Communication is essential, and voters see it as a two-way street. It's not just about sharing information; voters want to know their leader is listening to and working with experts and other officials, and listening to people who are impacted by the crisis – all things voters believe women are better at doing.

03

Women have to do more to prove they can handle a crisis. Women still face a higher bar to demonstrate their qualifications and leadership. Voters worry that women won't be confident, strong, and decisive— important dimensions in times of crisis. While the majority of voters volunteer that they see no difference between men and women, when surveyed about their friends' and neighbors' attitudes, voters guessed people in their life think men would do a better job.

04

Gender and party stereotypes influence voters' attitudes, and there is an interaction between the two. A governor's party affiliation is a driving factor and impacts voters' views, and the governor's gender does as well: a woman and a man of the same party aren't perceived equally. Republican voters have key differences in their evaluations of Republican men and Republican women, and the same thing happens on the Democratic side.



WHAT DOES “HANDLE A CRISIS” MEAN?

There are so many types of crises — outbreaks or natural disasters, such as pandemics, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, or blizzards; and man-made disasters, such as mass shootings, industrial accidents and spills, infrastructure negligence, or the opioid epidemic — and the impact on each voter varies depending on their age, race, gender, geography, ability, and socioeconomic status. Still, voters have a clear idea of what it means to handle a crisis: developing, communicating, and decisively implementing a plan, both to deal with immediate needs and to prepare for future crises.

“Evaluate all sources of information, critically think through it, and make a decision that is best for all.”

*40 and Over
White Man,
Canton*



“Come up with an action or a plan to resolve a crisis within a reasonable timeframe.”

*Man of Color,
Charleston*



“You say okay, well what’s going on, what needs to be addressed first, what needs to be addressed next, and who needs to be contacted.”

*Under 40 Woman,
Charleston*



“Call the people and give them hope and outline a plan and action.”

*Under 40
Man, Phoenix*



“Being able to communicate with everyone, analyzing the ENTIRE situation and the impacts the crisis could have, and being able to form a productive plan that will help everyone affected.”

*Woman of
Color, Canton*



“Admit that there’s a problem, engage the experts, formulate a plan, execute, and communicate.”

*40 and Over
White Woman,
Phoenix*



Among focus group participants, when considering what it means to “handle a crisis,” the most frequently used verb was “plan,” and participants focus on “people, situations, information, decisions, problems,” and “action.”

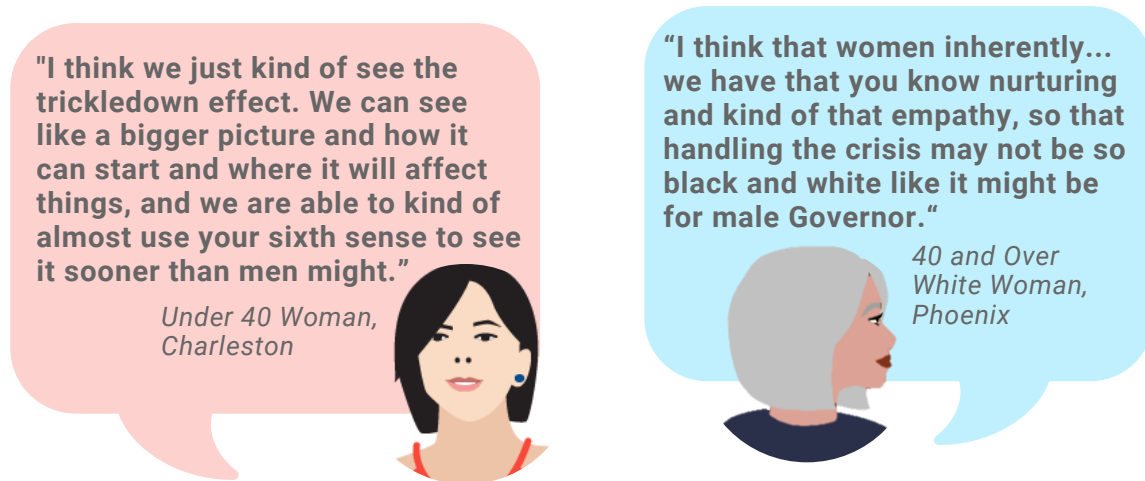


WHO DO VOTERS THINK IS BETTER AT HANDLING A CRISIS?

When considering who would be better at handling a crisis, over two-thirds of voters surveyed volunteer there would be no difference between a woman and a man. The remaining voters split between thinking a woman or man would be better.

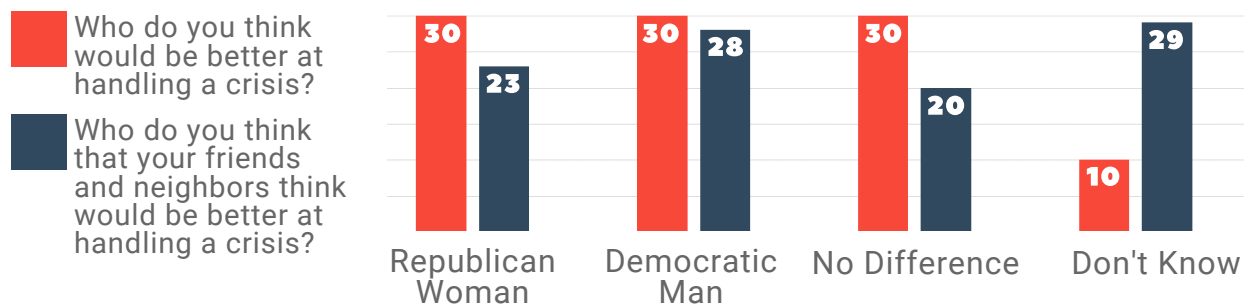
ASSUMING EQUAL QUALIFICATIONS, DO YOU THINK THAT A WOMAN GOVERNOR OR A MAN GOVERNOR WOULD BE BETTER AT HANDLING A CRISIS?					
	WOMAN	MAN	NET	NO. DIFF	ANALYSIS
All	13	13	0	69	There is a gender gap of 13 points between men and women voters.
Men	6	13	-7	76	
Women	19	13	+6	63	
Millennial Men	6	17	-11	76	Between Millennial men and women, the gender gap is even larger: 24 points.
Millennial Women	21	8	+13	65	
Democrat ID	20	7	+13	69	While Democrats and Independents think a woman would be better, Republicans prefer a man.
Independent ID	17	13	+4	65	
Republican ID	5	21	-16	68	
White	12	12	0	72	African American, Latinx, Asian-American/Pacific Islander, and white voters are essentially split.
African American	18	22	-4	55	
Latinx	18	20	-2	57	
AAPI	12	17	-5	68	

A number of focus group participants also said there is no difference based on gender, but some of the women participants thought a woman leader would better handle a crisis because they perceive women as able to see the full picture, consider different experiences, and react with more empathy.

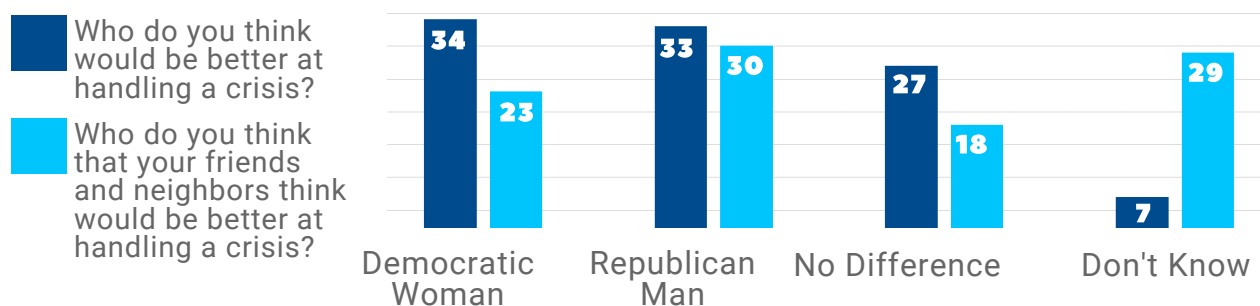


In head to head match-ups against men of the opposite party, both Democratic women and Republican women are equally as likely as their male opponents to be seen as up to the task. Voters split between whether a Democratic woman or a Republican man and a Republican woman or a Democratic man would be better at handling a crisis. **However, voters thought their friends and neighbors would prefer the male candidates. This is a more accurate way to measure the difference, suggesting that women candidates still need to do more to prove they're qualified to lead through a crisis.**

REPUBLICAN WOMAN GOVERNOR



DEMOCRATIC WOMAN GOVERNOR



Voters believe a Democratic woman would be significantly better than a Republican man at dealing with climate change (traditionally a progressive issue) or a teachers' strike (a profession with a high proportion of women), but worry more about her ability to handle a crisis that impacts businesses (an economic recession or an auto worker strike) or national security (terrorism) — both traditionally difficult issues for women in general and for Democrats in general, and even more difficult for Democratic women in particular. Democratic voters believe a Democratic woman would be better than or equal to a Democratic man at handling most crises, but still give the Democratic man the advantage on an auto worker strike and terrorism. For more in-depth data on this, please see Appendix A. [1]

Voters have more confidence in the Republican woman than in the Democratic woman when it comes to handling crises like terrorism or an economic recession, likely because national security and the economy are issues voters usually view as Republican strengths. Traditionally, handling the economy has been perceived as a weakness for women. Past Barbara Lee Family Foundation research shows that may be changing for Republican women, but still holds true for Democratic women. However, research shows that for women of both parties, underscoring their economic credentials is essential.

Voters believe a Republican woman and Democratic man would be equally adept at dealing with most types of crises. When comparing a Republican woman and a Republican man, Republican voters in particular give Republican women an advantage on handling a teachers' strike, but believe a Republican man would be better at handling most crises. [2] This makes sense: when asked whether a generic woman governor or generic male governor would be better at handling a crisis, Republican voters preferred the male governor by 16 points. For more in-depth data on this, please see Appendix B.

Among Independents, a Republican woman far outperforms a Republican man and a Democratic woman far outperforms a Democratic man on handling a teachers' strike (+42 points), climate change (+22), and to a lesser extent, a pandemic (+14), a man-made environmental disaster (+10), the opioid epidemic (+9), and a mass shooting (+8).

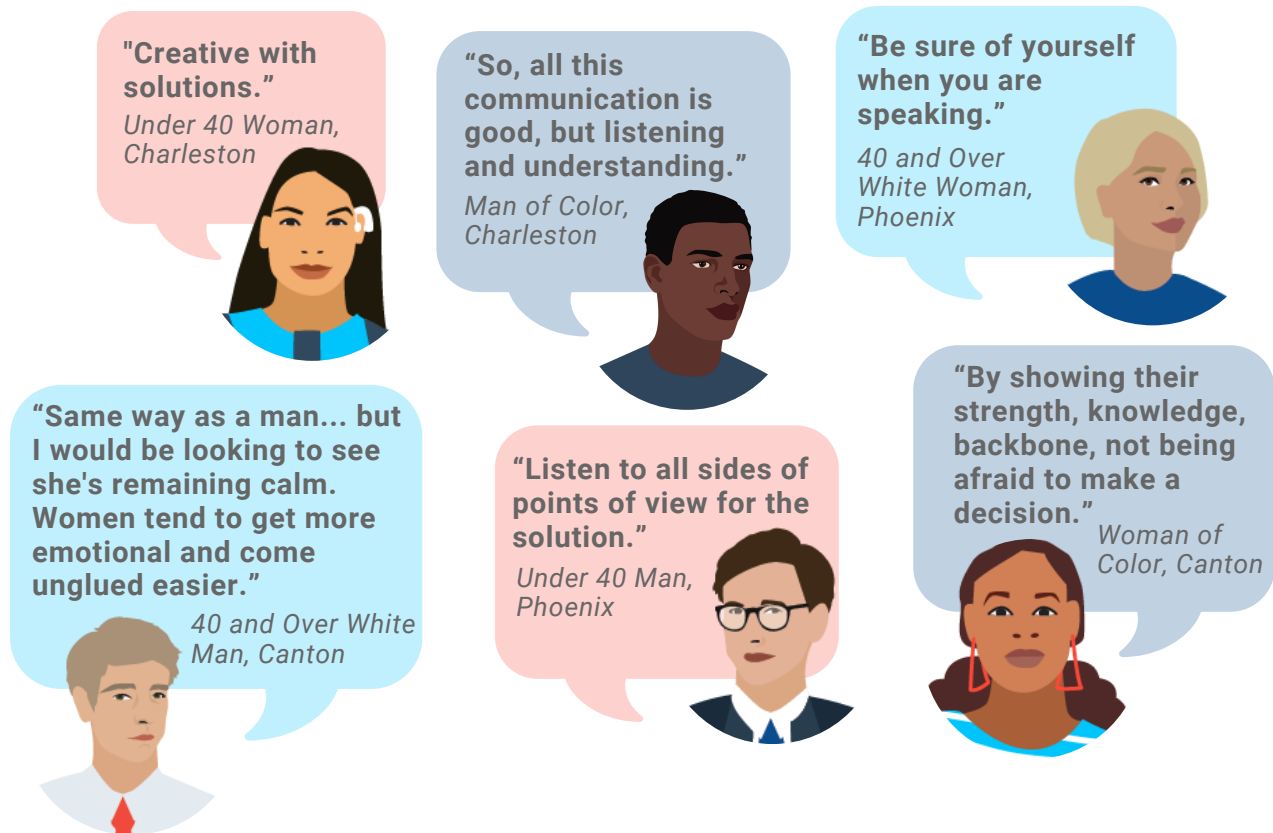
[1] This data is derived from comparing how a Democratic woman did against a Republican man and how a Democratic man did against a Republican woman.

[2] This data is derived from comparing how a Republican woman did against a Republican man and how a Republican man did against a Democratic woman.



WHAT TRAITS DO VOTERS THINK WOMAN LEADERS NEED TO HANDLE A CRISIS?

When considering traits, voters react to both what they think a woman will do and what they want in a leader. Across all focus groups, voters were consistent: in a crisis, they want a problem solver who is creative, realistic, strong, and decisive - someone who listens to others and projects calmness and confidence.



Voters surveyed identified "being a good communicator" as the most important trait. 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.



HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO YOU THAT A WOMAN GOVERNOR HAS THIS TRAIT BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A CRISIS?

% VERY IMPORTANT	ALL	GENDER		MILLENNIALS		RACE				PARTY ID		
		M	W	M	W	W	AA	L	AAPI	D	I	R
Good communicator	88	84	91	86	86	88	91	93	91	92	83	86
Listens to experts	83	81	85	87	79	84	80	85	89	89	79	81
Decisive	82	83	82	77	77	81	88	89	83	80	85	86
Confident	80	77	83	79	74	79	89	85	82	80	81	83
Calm	78	73	81	70	74	77	85	84	84	75	73	85
Brings people together	74	70	77	67	71	71	82	81	85	81	73	70
Transparent	73	76	71	74	66	72	77	85	78	79	63	72
Strong	73	71	76	66	67	70	78	85	76	76	69	73
Empathetic	63	57	69	60	66	66	76	79	79	73	70	53

Notably, empathy is the least important trait for a woman to exhibit, perhaps because of a built-in gender assumption that women are naturally empathetic, and is more important for a man to exhibit.

It is more important for a woman than a man to portray confidence. Confidence is essential to being seen as a leader but can be a difficult trait for women to project while still being seen as likeable, which past Barbara Lee Family Foundation [research](#) shows is a nonnegotiable for women candidates. Strength and decisiveness are also important, with decisiveness especially resonating with African Americans, Latinx voters, Independents, and Republicans. For more in-depth data on traits, please see Appendix C.

WHAT ACTIONS ARE IMPORTANT TO VOTERS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A CRISIS?

When communicating around a crisis, accountability is an important value to convey. In focus groups, voters were very attuned to messages where the woman governor is taking ownership of a crisis, while at the same time voters placed a high value on teamwork and listening to expert advice.

"She is on the ground and she went back a couple of times to make sure they were doing it."

Man of Color, Charleston

"I like the all hands on deck approach."

Woman of Color, Canton

"I like how she explains that it is a crisis and how she will seize the opportunity to initiate that full-scale mobilization. It is that she knows this is a crisis and will do something about it."

Under 40 Man, Phoenix

"She has a team and so she has experts in this matter."

Under 40 Woman, Charleston



Based on testing several messages, voters want leaders who:

- Indicate they are communicating with stakeholders, listening to those impacted as well as the experts.
- Prove they have a 360-degree view of the crisis by giving specific examples of the resources being provided.
- Show empathy, sorrow, and an understanding of the impact of the crisis.

TOP MESSAGES

Keeping up her trend of calm, confident daily briefings as her state has been facing a crisis, Governor Rebecca Page said, "I'm taking action today to ensure a culture of openness and trust. My administration and I have been working closely with mayors and cities to focus on issues affecting residents, and address challenges." In an effort to listen to people and keep them informed, Governor Rebecca Page has been going directly to impacted communities. She has created a widely shared crisis action plan with citizen and expert input.

With her state in day 3 of an ongoing crisis, Governor Lisa Anderson said, "The situation continues to change, and under my leadership our state's response to this crisis is evolving. I want people to know that our state government is doing everything possible to confront and contain this crisis. We know this is a stressful time for you and your family. We are getting things done, getting the information out, deploying immediate resources to the people who need them, and thinking ahead to plan out access to essentials like safety, food, shelter, and infrastructure."

After a crisis struck her state, Governor Tina Wolf said to reporters, "First, I want to thank the first responders and volunteers involved in the recovery effort. Words can't express the sadness I feel today. My heart breaks for our neighbors who are impacted, their families and the community." Pausing to compose herself after choking up momentarily, Governor Tina Wolf continued, "Since the state has been facing this crisis, it has been my priority to immediately get services out to the impacted areas and dispense aid and advice."

For complete data and the full text of all messages tested, please see Appendix D.

Voters want women leaders who are prepared and who work with others to get things done. During a crisis, voters are most concerned about having immediate needs met, and want to make sure there is a coordinated effort. At the same time, they want to make sure there is a plan in place for future crises. Of all the actions a woman governor may take before, during, and after a crisis, the three most important to voters are:

- Develop a plan to make sure there is access to utilities, food, water, people power, and other resources during a crisis (89% very important).
- Work with other elected and appointed leaders in the response to a crisis (84% very important).
- Develop a comprehensive plan in order to ensure her state is adequately prepared for emergencies and disasters of all types and sizes (84% very important).

Across subgroups, voters rate the same top actions as most important. For voters of color, having a woman leader listen to and get feedback from those affected by the crisis is also a top tier concern.



The next most important actions a woman governor can take include a range of activities that center on the needs of impacted people and businesses, mobilizing and coordinating with other leaders and businesses to address the crisis, and envisioning the subsequent phases of the crisis.

- Listen and get feedback from the people affected by the crisis (78% very important).
- Reduce the impact, particularly among vulnerable people (77% very important).
- Anticipate the next stage of the crisis (77% very important).
- Trust in the expertise of other leaders they work with during the response to a crisis (77% very important).
- Work with relevant businesses in response to a crisis (75% very important).
- Give attention to local businesses in the impacted community (74% very important).

For more in-depth data, please see Appendix E.

Among voters overall, both Republican and Democratic women are thought to be better than men of the opposite party at refraining from grabbing credit or hurling blame. This substantiates previous Barbara Lee Family Foundation research that suggests voters expect women to be above the political fray, and give women an edge when it comes to being “bridge builders.”

Beyond bridging divides, a Democratic woman has an advantage over a Republican man on reducing the impact, particularly among vulnerable people, listening and getting feedback from the people affected by the crisis, and bringing together different groups and overcoming disagreement. A Republican woman has an advantage over a Democratic man on working with relevant businesses in response to a crisis.

When comparing a Republican woman to a Republican man among Republican voters and a Democratic woman to a Democratic man among Democratic voters, both women candidates, by large margins, were seen as more likely to be better at: listening to people affected, bringing together different groups and overcoming disagreement, refraining from grabbing credit or hurling blame, and reducing the impact, particularly among the vulnerable. For more in-depth data, please see Appendix A for information about a Democratic woman and Appendix B for information about a Republican woman.

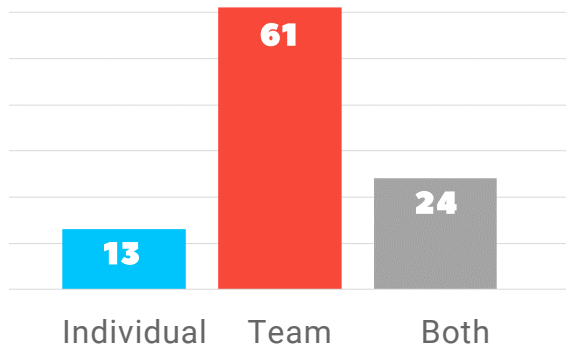
For all women, regardless of party, assembling a trusted team of involved stakeholders is critical. Voters want leaders to delegate and to take the advice of subject-matter experts seriously.



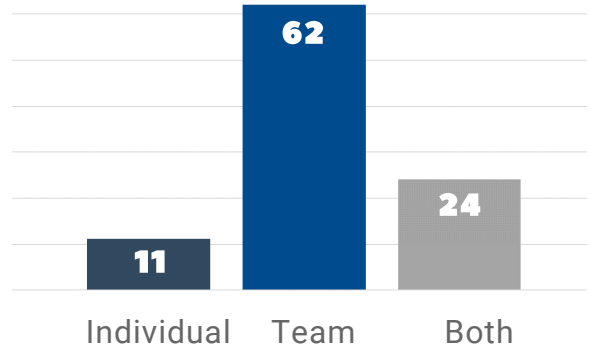
When given the choice of either a woman or a man governor showing individual leadership or working with a team, voters prefer, with a great deal of intensity, them working with a team. Voters are more likely to say they prefer a combination of both rather than a governor leading on their own.

BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A CRISIS, WOULD IT BE BETTER FOR A [WOMAN/MAN] GOVERNOR TO SHOW INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP OR WORK WITH A TEAM?

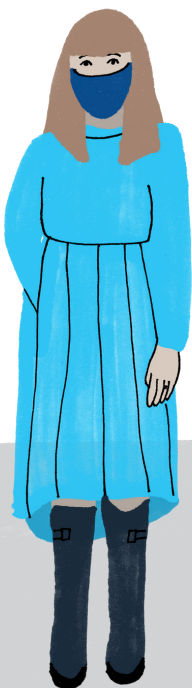
WOMAN:



MAN:



These findings emphasize how important it is for women to have their team by their side during a crisis. In focus groups, participants were critical of images of women who were by themselves without a team or with a team that looks unengaged, or who were doing something ceremonial or staged, like appearing on cable news. Participants responded positively to images featuring women leaders who were: engaged with first responders or community members, surveying the scene or planning the response to a crisis, and actively listening or communicating. In other words, they want to see a woman leader “in the trenches,” helping, taking action and problem solving, focusing on the community, and communicating.



KEY TIPS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES

01

Confidence is key. Confidence signals both qualifications and likeability, and is essential when it comes to showing you can handle a crisis. Voters have no patience for perceived on-the-job learning – the expectation is to show being prepared for leadership from day one. In past Barbara Lee Family Foundation [research](#), voters assessed a woman officeholder’s confidence in less than 30 seconds.

02

Showcase your ability to build – and execute – a plan that prepares for the future, taking a 360-degree view. Voters want to know you have the experience to not only develop a plan to ensure their communities have what they need during and after a time of crisis, but to prepare for different types of future crises. They want someone who is thinking about what needs to happen before, during, and after a crisis, and appreciate visual cues – such as maps and data visualizations – that demonstrate preparedness, knowledge of the facts, and action as a crisis evolves.

03

Highlight your track record as a problem-solver. For voters, problem solving is about mobilizing stakeholders, working on multiple fronts, listening to experts to find solutions, and showing that you can change the plan if need be. Voters want leaders who are nimble, flexible, and responsive during a crisis. Every crisis brings its own set of challenges, and it’s important to demonstrate that you know how to manage them – and how to be calm, confident, strong, and decisive while doing so.

04

Be a team captain. While voters expect you to be a leader, they also overwhelmingly want you to be part of a team. Show you can delegate, take the advice of issue experts seriously, and work with other elected officials.

05

Focus on community. Voters respond to leaders who take an authentic, proactive, and “in the trenches” approach when their community is experiencing a crisis; they are critical of any actions that seem staged or insincere.

06

Emphasize your communication and listening skills. Voters want to be able to count on you for timely, accurate, transparent information, while at the same time know you’re listening to stakeholders, including experts, other leaders, businesses, and people who are impacted.

07

Know that empathy is needed, but is not enough on its own. Traditionally, women have been penalized for showing emotion – that’s not the case here. It’s important to acknowledge the pain and sorrow that accompany crises, but what voters really want is for you to have a plan to address the fallout and move forward.

CONCLUSION

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. For women, planning, preparation, communication, and teamwork are the cornerstones of successfully showing voters they are ready to lead.

The odds are most elected officials will have to navigate a crisis while serving in office, but women are stepping up to meet the challenge, changing the face of leadership as they guide their communities through uncertain times.

METHODOLOGY

FOCUS GROUPS

Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting conducted 6 focus groups with men and women in March of 2020 segmented as follows:

CHARLESTON, SC MARCH 12	PHOENIX, AZ MARCH 16	CANTON, OH MARCH 18
Gen Z and Millennial women, mix of races	Gen X and Boomer white women	African American, Latinx, or Asian/Pacific Islander women
African American, Latinx, or Asian/Pacific Islander men	Gen Z and Millennial men, mix of races	Gen X and Boomer white men

Participants were recruited to reflect a mix of age, marital status, parental status, income, and education. Due to social distancing guidelines put into place in mid-March, the Canton, Ohio groups were conducted online. The Charleston and Phoenix groups were conducted in person.

SURVEY

Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting designed and administered this survey that was conducted over the phone from April 6 – April 13th, 2020. The survey reached a total of 1,000 likely 2020 voters nationwide along with oversamples of 300 African American, 300 Latinx, 400 AAPI, 150 Millennial women, and 200 Millennial men likely voters.

Telephone numbers were drawn from the TargetSmart voter file. Party ID was weighted to even Democrats and Republicans among the total sample, as well as among men and women, white, African American, Latinx, Asian/Pacific Islander voters, and Millennial men and Millennial women.

The base sample was weighted by region, age, race, education, and race by gender to reflect attributes of the actual population. The African American oversample was weighted by age, party ID, and education. The Latinx oversample was weighted by gender, age, and party ID. The AAPI oversample was weighted by gender, age, party ID, and education. The Millennial women oversample was weighted by race, party ID, and education. The Millennial men oversample was weighted by age, race, party ID, and education.

The margin of error for the base sample is +/-3.1%.