

# STAYING POWER:

## STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN INCUMBENTS



blff.org | info@blff.org

Barbara Lee Family Foundation

# INTRODUCTION

---

More women are winning elections than ever before, but the governorships are still one of the most male-dominated offices in politics. Why? For one, because women who run for executive office [face challenges that men do not](#).

On the campaign trail, women are routinely judged by how they look and sound, how qualified and likeable they are, and how they balance their career with their family life. These sexist double standards persist after women are elected. For instance, voters' default image of a governor is a man—even when women governors run for reelection. This research shows that women incumbents are also held to higher standards than male candidates.

Despite these challenges, women incumbents can build staying power by effectively communicating with their constituents.

*STAYING POWER* indicates that voters want a woman running for reelection to showcase her specific achievements in office—they will not assume she is doing a good job, nor simply take her word for it. That's why it is particularly important for a woman incumbent to establish her record as a leader. Likewise, when opponents critique a woman candidate for the job she is doing, voters look for her to defend her record by delivering a decisive response. Beyond addressing the issues in question, voters want to see a woman incumbent handle criticism with strength and composure.

As record numbers of women serve in public office, we are learning strategies for women incumbents seeking reelection. This report shows how women incumbents can effectively connect with voters—during a close race and throughout their leadership.



# OUR PARTNERS

---

This research is focused on how voters respond to hypothetical women governors running for reelection. In focus groups and a survey, we tested hypothetical Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), Black, Latina, and white women candidates using various messaging tactics. When analyzing the data, the Barbara Lee Family Foundation consulted with our partners at Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, Higher Heights Leadership Fund, and Voto Latino.

Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting conducted ten focus groups with men and women in February and March of 2021, and administered an online dial survey from April 16th–April 26th, 2021. The survey reached a total of 2,000 likely 2022 voters nationwide along with oversamples of 200 African American, 200 AAPI, and 200 Latinx likely voters.



**APAICS**  
Asian Pacific American  
Institute for Congressional Studies



**HIGHER  
HEIGHTS**

**VOTOLATINO**★

**LRP** LAKE  
RESEARCH  
PARTNERS

Bellwether  
RESEARCH & CONSULTING

# KEY FINDINGS

## VOTERS RECOGNIZE THAT WOMEN AND WOMEN OF COLOR ARE HELD TO A DIFFERENT AND HIGHER STANDARD WHEN THEY RUN FOR OFFICE.

---

In focus groups, many, but not all, participants said that women governors and mayors are judged differently and more harshly, and treated differently than their male counterparts.

When it comes to a woman executive elected official and her record, voters don't just assume she is doing a good job. They want her to show them she has gotten results and helped people. This is in line with previous [Barbara Lee Family Foundation research](#) that found voters assume men are qualified but do not assume women are qualified. Previous data also shows that it is harder for women to establish their qualifications.

## WOMEN INCUMBENTS MUST SHOW, NOT TELL.

---

## VOTER PREFERENCES FOR HOW A WOMAN COMMUNICATES HER RECORD CAN VARY BASED ON HER RACE.

---

However, a successful strategy for communicating a woman incumbent's record was consistent for hypothetical women governors across race.

# KEY FINDINGS

## IF A WOMAN INCUMBENT DECIDES TO RESPOND TO CRITICISM, VOTERS WANT A TIMELY AND EFFECTIVE REPLY.

---

When a woman and her record are attacked, voters want to see how she handles the critique. Damage can be done when an attack lingers while a woman decides whether or how to reply. If the attack is substantive, she should reclaim the narrative about her record by responding with specifics about her accomplishments. A strong response is a leadership test women can pass.

The same actions that increased likeability of women candidates for voters in this research also increased their perceived effectiveness. Those actions include centering on families and small businesses, focusing on the outcomes of legislation for people, listening to residents about their priorities for the state, and having the values of hard work and responsibility. We know from previous [BLFF research](#) that likeability is a nonnegotiable for women candidates, and likeability and effectiveness are more strongly correlated now than ever before. Voters will vote for a man they do not like if they believe he is qualified, but will not do the same for a woman.

## A WOMAN'S RESPONSE TO ATTACKS ON HER RECORD CAN MAINTAIN AND IMPACT HER LIKEABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS.

---

# DO VOTERS PREFER A MAN OR A WOMAN GOVERNOR?

---

Women have made major strides toward equal representation in politics over the course of the last decade. In 2020, voters elected Kamala Harris as the country's first ever woman Vice President and sent a record number of women to Congress (surpassing even 2018's previous record). At the start of 2021, there were nine women serving as governor of a state—a tie for the record high.

With more women than ever serving in high-profile and visible elected roles today, *STAYING POWER* explored whether voters currently prefer a man or woman governor, if they have a preference at all. Voters were asked both whether they were more likely to support a woman or a man running for governor, and if they think their friends and neighbors would prefer a man or a woman candidate.

Overwhelmingly, most surveyed voters said there is no difference in their preference to vote for a man or a woman for governor. However, those who do have a preference lean toward a man.

When asked to guess if most of their friends and neighbors have a preference, voters guessed a man by a 20-point margin. Nearly every demographic and attitudinal subgroup thinks most of their friends and neighbors would prefer to vote for a man, with exceptions among Black women, college-educated Latinas, and moms of minor children.

**Based on this data, it is clear that the stereotype image of a governor in voters' minds remains stubbornly male.**




## WHAT ASSUMPTIONS DO VOTERS MAKE ABOUT WOMEN CANDIDATES?

Although voters still imagine a hypothetical governor to be a man, this research revealed a shift from prior data in how voters perceive party differences along gender lines. In the past, voters tended to assume that any woman


candidate was a Democrat; that was not necessarily the case in *STAYING POWER*, which found that voters are just as likely to imagine a white woman is a Republican. However, voters do tend to assume that a woman of color is a Democrat.

[Previous Barbara Lee Family Foundation research showed](#) that women and particularly women of color face different and higher standards when running for executive office such as governor or mayor. In focus groups for *STAYING POWER*, many participants still say that women governors and mayors are judged more harshly than men and treated differently.



"It seems as if a woman has to work twice or three times as hard as a man does to have the same kind of credibility, and then she has got to be more aggressive."


-Black Man



"When we come to politics, we look at our past presidents and most of them are white males and we look at our politics and we see them as white males, and that standard has just been set and ingrained in a lot of our culture, and bucking that trend is hard. It's different. And a lot of people don't like to adapt. A lot of people don't like difference."

- White Man

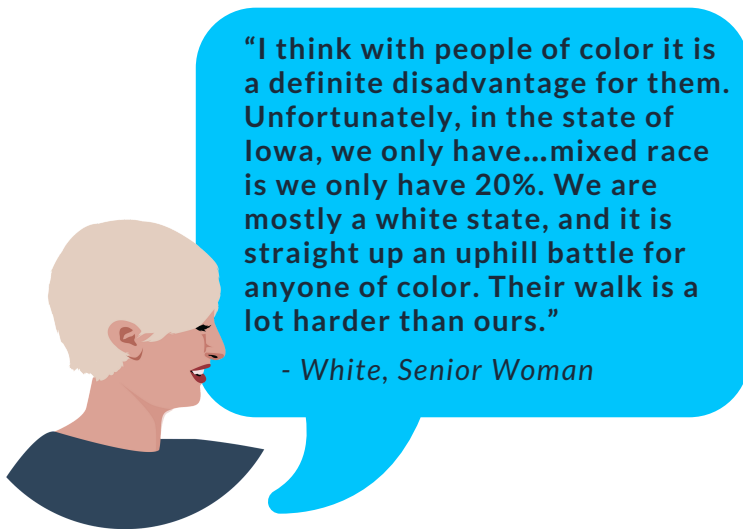
That said, not all focus group participants agree that gender determines how a candidate is treated:



"It don't matter if you're man or woman now. More women get more respect now... So, people need to quit using that as an excuse."

- White, Noncollege-Educated Woman

Similarly, some participants said they thought Black or Latinx leaders would face more judgment:



"I think with people of color it is a definite disadvantage for them. Unfortunately, in the state of Iowa, we only have...mixed race is we only have 20%. We are mostly a white state, and it is straight up an uphill battle for anyone of color. Their walk is a lot harder than ours."

- White, Senior Woman

Others in our focus groups said that race is a nonissue for them personally:



"I'll judge everybody the same based on whatever they do. Skin color doesn't really matter to me."

- Latino Man

## HOW DO VOTERS DETERMINE IF A GOVERNOR IS "GOOD" OR "BAD"?

STAYING POWER found that voters have well-defined, complex, and clear archetypes of a "good" governor who is performing well and a "bad" governor who is failing.

Previous [Barbara Lee Family Foundation research](#) found that communication and getting things done are key factors for a governor's success in the eyes of voters.

STAYING POWER focus group participants confirmed that communication is a big part of success. We found that voters believe a governor is doing a good job when she listens and reacts to constituents of all types, and when she is accountable, proactive, and able to create positive changes and results.







"I like to see results. So simple, just results and not just for one particular group of people. Overall, just seeing things being done, you know issues being handled. That's what gets it done for me. You have to be able to see results whether you are entry level into politics or you are right at the White House."

- Black Woman



"Be balanced and to really listen to all the levels of society....Rich or poor and PhD to GED to quit school to whatever. I don't care. You have to listen to them all to get a balanced approach to what your state wants or needs."

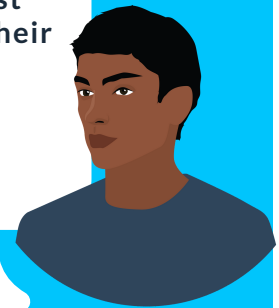
- White, Rural Woman, Age 50+

Conversely, voters believe a governor is doing a bad job leading her state if she fails to deliver on promises, doesn't listen to the community, uses the office for their own gain, avoids accountability and taking ownership, and is too divisive or too partisan.



"When they are campaigning and they promise all sorts of things and then as soon as they get elected none of those things happen or they do the complete opposite of what they said they were going to do."

- White, Independent Suburban Woman under 30



"They act in a very partisan way. They're not transparent. They're just trying to fit whatever their agenda is. They're not willing to make compromises."

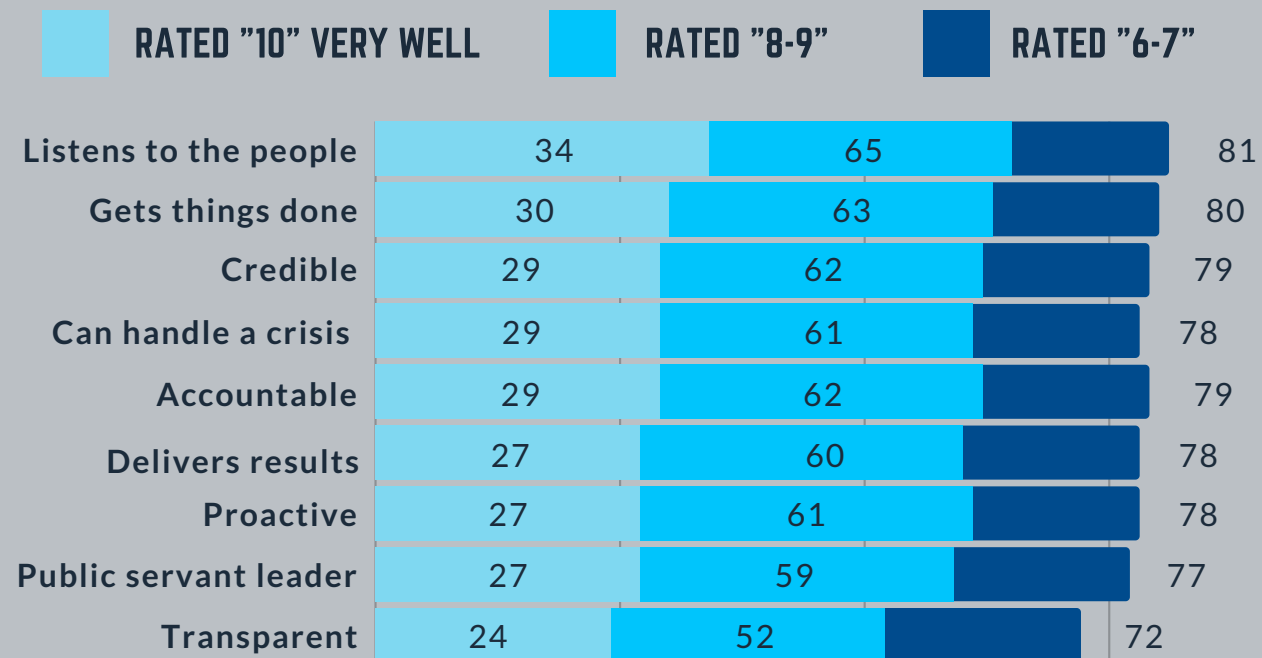
- Latino Man

## VOTERS ATTRIBUTE THE TRAITS THAT MAKE A "GOOD GOVERNOR" TO THE AVERAGE WOMAN INCUMBENT.

office—voters indicated that all of the positive traits apply, with listening to the people, getting things done, being credible, handling a crisis, and being accountable as most relevant. Voters are less likely to say that transparent describes most women running for reelection well, but over half still rate this trait as very well or quite well.

In focus groups for *STAYING POWER*, voters identified a range of traits that describe a "good governor." Our survey then tested how well voters believe those positive traits describe the average woman running for

ON A SCALE THAT GOES FROM 0 TO 10, WHERE 0 MEANS NOT WELL AT ALL AND 10 MEANS VERY WELL, HOW WELL DO THE FOLLOWING TRAITS DESCRIBE THE AVERAGE WOMAN WHO IS RUNNING FOR REELECTION FOR MAYOR OR GOVERNOR?



## WOMEN VOTERS AND DEMOCRATS ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO VIEW WOMEN GOVERNORS POSITIVELY.

Women voters are more likely than men to believe that the positive traits describe the average woman who is running for reelection well. This is especially true regarding the ability to handle a crisis (57% of men rated "can handle a crisis" as a highly apt trait for an average woman incumbent, compared to 64% of women).

In terms of party differences, *STAYING POWER* found that Democrats are very positive about women governors, followed by Republicans. Republican women were notably more positive toward women candidates on these attributes than Republican men. (Republican voters demonstrated the biggest gender difference among partisans across attributes in our research.) And because Republican women were often more positive than Independent women, Republicans as a whole rate women candidates more positively on attributes than do Independents as a whole. This is a new trend, happening in part because Republicans no longer assume that women candidates are Democrats. Independents tend to be less engaged and toughest on women incumbents.

# LISTEN. GIVE UPDATES. SHOW YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

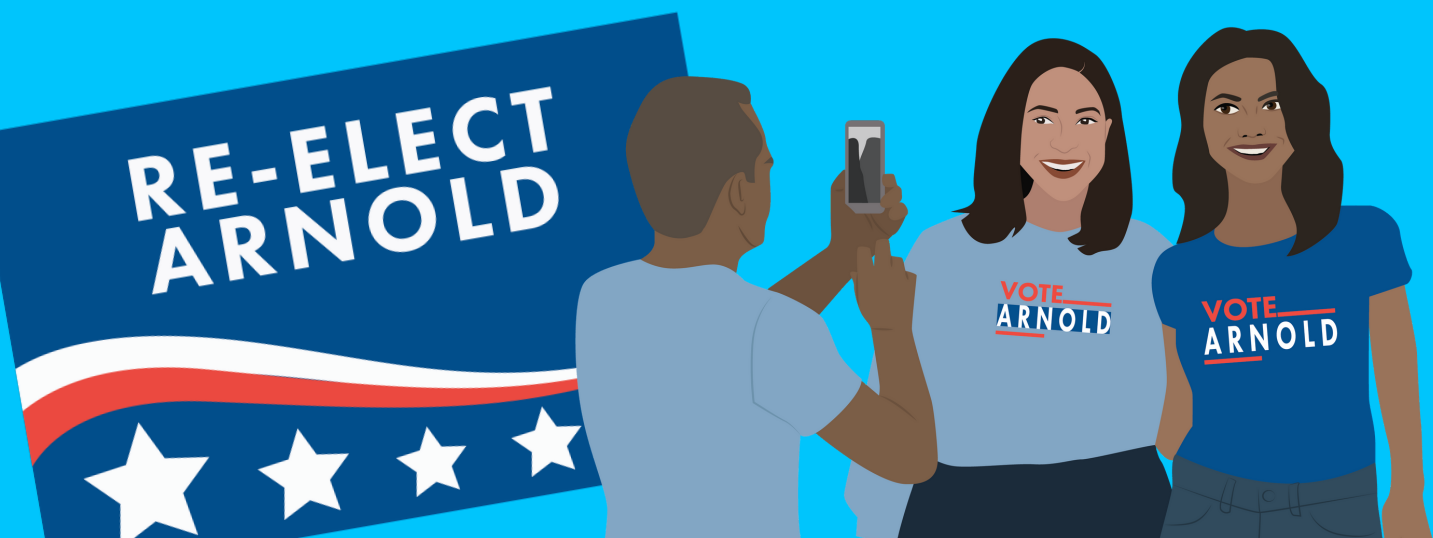
---

As a woman incumbent seeks reelection, it is important for her to proactively position what she has accomplished while in office. She will benefit with voters when she emphasizes her effectiveness as a leader. Voters are very sensitive to the language she uses when describing her accomplishments.

*STAYING POWER* found the key strategies a woman incumbent can use to position her accomplishments, both in terms of her tone, and the content of her messages. When it comes to tone, voters prefer a sensitive approach; they do not like anger or placing blame. They expect calm, confident leadership.

In terms of the content of a woman incumbent's messaging, this research found:

- As we have seen in [previous BLFF research](#), it is important for a woman incumbent to highlight how she listens to experts and to the community.
- Participants prefer statements about how a woman leader helped people in her community over her personal achievements.
- When describing accomplishments, voters respond well to specifics—facts, figures, and benchmarks. Otherwise, statements can seem too vague.
- Voters want to hear a woman leader highlight bringing Democrats, Independents, and Republicans together to get something done for the state, rather than using the word “bipartisan” or focusing on “bipartisanship.”
- Previous [BLFF research on likeability](#) found that voters respond well to a woman expressing a combination of taking credit and sharing credit. *STAYING POWER* confirms that it can be helpful to share credit with her team, or with Democrats, Independents, and Republicans in the legislature, but she needs to take solo credit at times, too.



## HOW DO VOTERS' PERCEPTIONS OF A WOMAN INCUMBENT'S RECORD CHANGE BASED ON HER RACE?



*STAYING POWER* tested the different postures a woman governor can take to outline her record by showing voters photos of four hypothetical governors: an Asian American/Pacific Islander woman, a Black woman, a Latina, and a white woman. Our findings reveal that some tactics for conveying accomplishments work for women across race—for example, including benchmarks and progress reports about accomplishments is stronger than excluding them. And, women governors across race and ethnicity benefit from including how they listen to residents and experts in their messaging.

Using a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 means not important at all and 10 means very important, voters were asked to rate how important it is that a woman governor do various actions to earn their vote when she runs for reelection. For all four hypothetical women governors, a message that highlighted signing a specific bill and working with the legislature to do so was the least important to convey to voters.

% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT"	WHITE WOMAN	BLACK WOMAN	LATINA WOMAN	ASIAN WOMAN
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real bipartisan effort to get this done	35	40	33	39

However, our research also found some differences in which messages voters prefer for women candidates of different races.

In terms of which messages to prioritize, the most important point for a white woman governor and a Black woman governor is what she accomplished in her first term. For an Asian American/Pacific Islander woman, it is most important to convey what she and her team accomplished. For a Latina, it is most important to outline her plan for the state with specific goals and benchmarks of achievement. The statements that most successfully convey accomplishments use these strategies:

- Use action-oriented verbs.
- Include specifics in terms of getting results, with statistics and progress reports.
- Focus on helping people.

% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS “VERY IMPORTANT”	WHITE WOMAN	BLACK WOMAN	LATINA WOMAN	ASIAN WOMAN
In my first term, I worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	65	64	56	57
In my first term, we worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	58	56	56	61
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs, and we hit 95% of that goal	58	56	61	59

*STAYING POWER* also found that voter preferences for how a woman balances taking solo credit versus sharing credit—again, an important consideration for all women governors—can vary according to a woman’s race. For a white woman and a Black woman, for example, solo credit is more important than shared credit; for an Asian American/Pacific Islander woman, shared credit is more important; for a Latina, these are equally important.



# THERE ARE MANY SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR A WOMEN GOVERNOR TO ESTABLISH HER RECORD WITH VOTERS:

---

- Centering messages around families and small businesses by supporting them, fighting for them, providing relief for them.
- Listening to residents about priorities for the state.
- Overcoming a barrier with diligence.
- Coming together at the negotiating table to deliver on a campaign promise.
- Acknowledging that accomplishments so far are only a down payment on the progress needed.
- Including the time period in which accomplishments were achieved.
- Communicating that there will be progress reports.
- Conveying that a woman governor initially ran for office as the result of seeing the impact of different issues on people in the state.
- Talking about specific issues like funding K-12 schools without tax increases or cuts to services, health care for children, growing small businesses, preventing a tax increase for the middle class, and improving public schools for special needs students.
- Meeting with constituents who are advocating for an issue and including the issue expert team.
- Identifying solutions.
- Remembering specific people whom the governor meets, and how the governor took action to help them and others like them.
- Male voters especially like to hear about economic successes, which they are skeptical about.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A PROGRESS REPORT

---

When a woman incumbent is conveying how she has delivered for her constituents, voters want to know details about what she has completed and what will come next. They respond to progress reports, which help reinforce what she has accomplished. Describing the concrete steps that are already underway to address any problems under the governor's purview, then later reporting back on the progress made addressing the problem will resonate with voters and show the governor takes accountability.

# MAINTAINING THE NARRATIVE WHEN ATTACKS COME.

---

Even when a woman incumbent proactively establishes her record, she will still experience attacks from her opponents. This research shows that voters are paying attention to how a woman responds to criticism of her record. If she decides to respond, it is most effective with voters if she can provide specific evidence of her accomplishments. Voters are looking for answers, and they know what types of responses they like and do not like. And in fact, voters make very different judgments about women incumbents based on their responses; our research found a nearly 20-point difference between how voters perceive the best and weakest responses.

## WHAT WORKS

---

- As we have seen in [previous BLFF research](#), a powerful strategy for women on the campaign trail is to lead with accomplishments and qualifications, then turn to her biography. *STAYING POWER* confirmed the effectiveness of that approach and showed that returning to statements about biography and values after demonstrating qualifications can boost a woman incumbent's response to attacks.
- The tone that a woman incumbent uses when responding to attacks on her record is incredibly important. Voters expect a sober, respectful, calm, and professional tone.
- Voters are sensitive to a woman governor sounding angry; being political, partisan, or divisive; or trying to justify actions.

## WHAT DOESN'T

---

- Voters want results, not excuses. Specifically, voters did not like hearing about the Covid-19 pandemic as a reason for failing to deliver on promises.
- Two hypothetical messages about accountability that a governor could give both tested lower with voters than others about accomplishments. Rather than a statement such as, "It is important for me to acknowledge that I didn't get everything done as governor that I originally hoped we would accomplish," focus on accomplishments. Voters want to know what a woman governor achieved, not what she failed to achieve.
- Voters rate statements lower when they exclude specifics, metrics, or benchmarks. The best strategy is *show don't tell*.
- When communicating with Independent and Republican voters, messages about being a community leader are less appealing.

## THE LIKEABILITY – EFFECTIVENESS LINK

---

When a woman governor responds to a critique of her record, the same messages that demonstrate her effectiveness to voters also demonstrate her likeability. The responses below are ranked according to how effective and likeable voters found the hypothetical women governors saying them to be.

### EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO ATTACKS (IN ORDER OF VOTER PREFERENCES):

**Focused on outcomes.** Responding to critics who say she is divisive and not getting things done, Governor Connor said, “My accomplishments speak for themselves. In almost everything I’ve done as governor, I have worked together with Republicans, Independents, and Democrats on legislation. Often this work was behind the scenes. We created 19,000 jobs, and I wasn’t worried whether my name was attached. You can get a lot done if you care more about the outcome for people in our state than about getting credit.”

**Socialist.** After being called a socialist by her opponents, Governor Taylor said, “I am a lifelong resident of the state. Born and raised in a blue-collar family, I put myself through college by waiting tables and other jobs. My parents instilled in me the values of hard work and responsibility, but there is a role for government to play, too. Most communities have people who need a little help, and we need to provide programs and support for people in need.”

**Responding to a crisis.\*** Responding to critics of her response to a statewide crisis, Governor Campbell said, “I want people to know that under my leadership, our state government is working to confront and contain this crisis. We know this is a stressful time. We are getting information out, listening to those impacted, as well as experts, deploying immediate resources to the people who need them, and planning out access to essentials like safety, food, shelter, and infrastructure.”

**Conciliatory.\*** In response to claims of mismanagement at a state-run program that impacted nearly 200 residents, Governor Williams said, “There is no question that there were problems in the Department, and I am upset, too. That is why I have taken swift steps to listen to those impacted, improve the systems, increase transparency, and hold those who are guilty responsible while dedicating funding to repair these problems. I have spoken with the community, and am working to assist the most vulnerable first.”



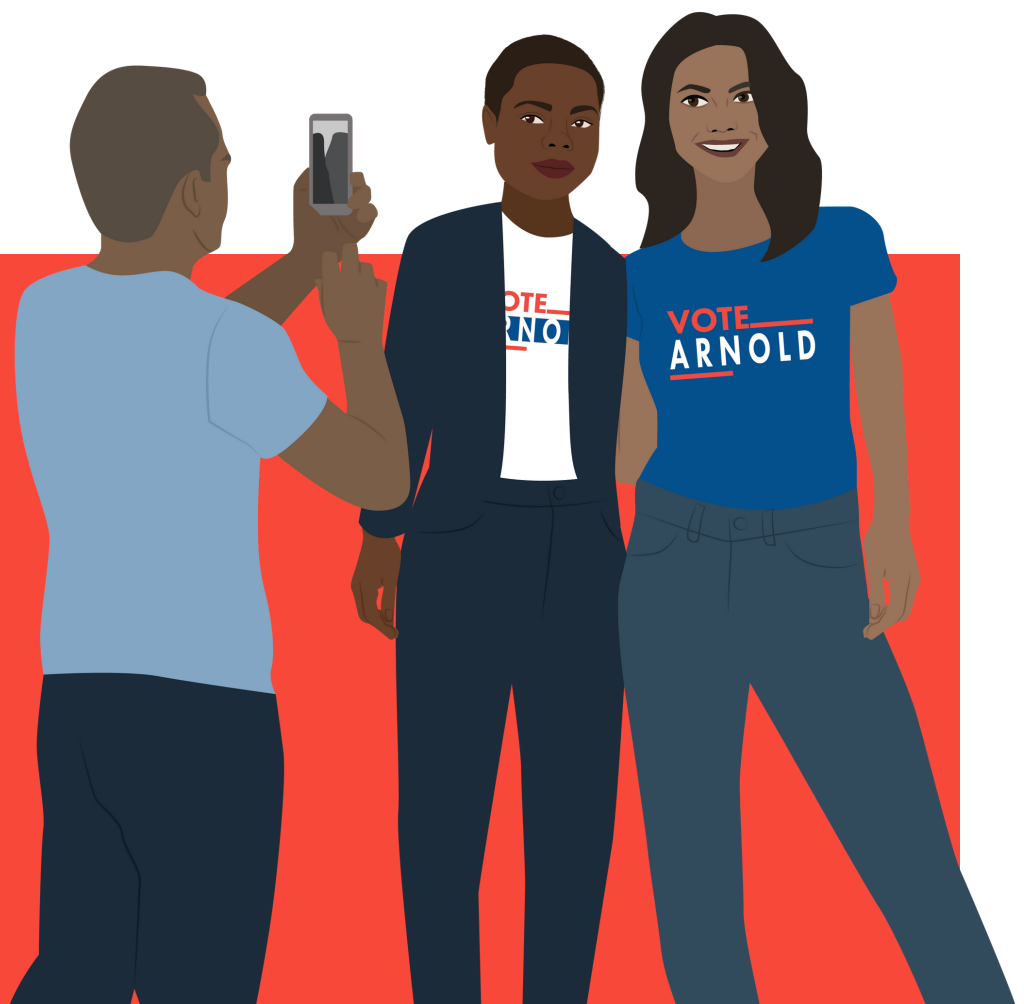
## LESS-EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO ATTACKS (IN ORDER OF VOTER PREFERENCES):

**Experts.\*** In response to critiques on the Department of Human Services, Governor Ellis said, “I have convened independent experts from universities and cities across the state as well as listened to the community affected to make changes to fix the problem. Their directive is to outline reasonable steps to restore trust and address serious issues that have been raised.” Governor Ellis said, “We will work each day toward a more fair state for everyone who lives here.”

**No experts and transparency.\*** In response to critiques on the Department of Human Services, Governor Ellis outlined the steps she has directed the Department to take in order to restore trust and address the serious issues. She promised to get to the root of the issues in the Department and report back to the public once a month on the progress made, saying, “We will work each day toward a more fair state for everyone who lives here.”

**Economy first.** Responding to criticism that she put profits ahead of people and that she had been reckless, Governor Ellis said, “In our state, we’ve taken responsible actions that have balanced keeping the economy going with people’s health. We trust the residents and business owners of our state to make good, responsible decisions that fit with their own personal and unique situations, without the heavy hand of the government telling them what they can and can’t do.”

*\*Half of the respondents responded to this message*



# TIPS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES

---

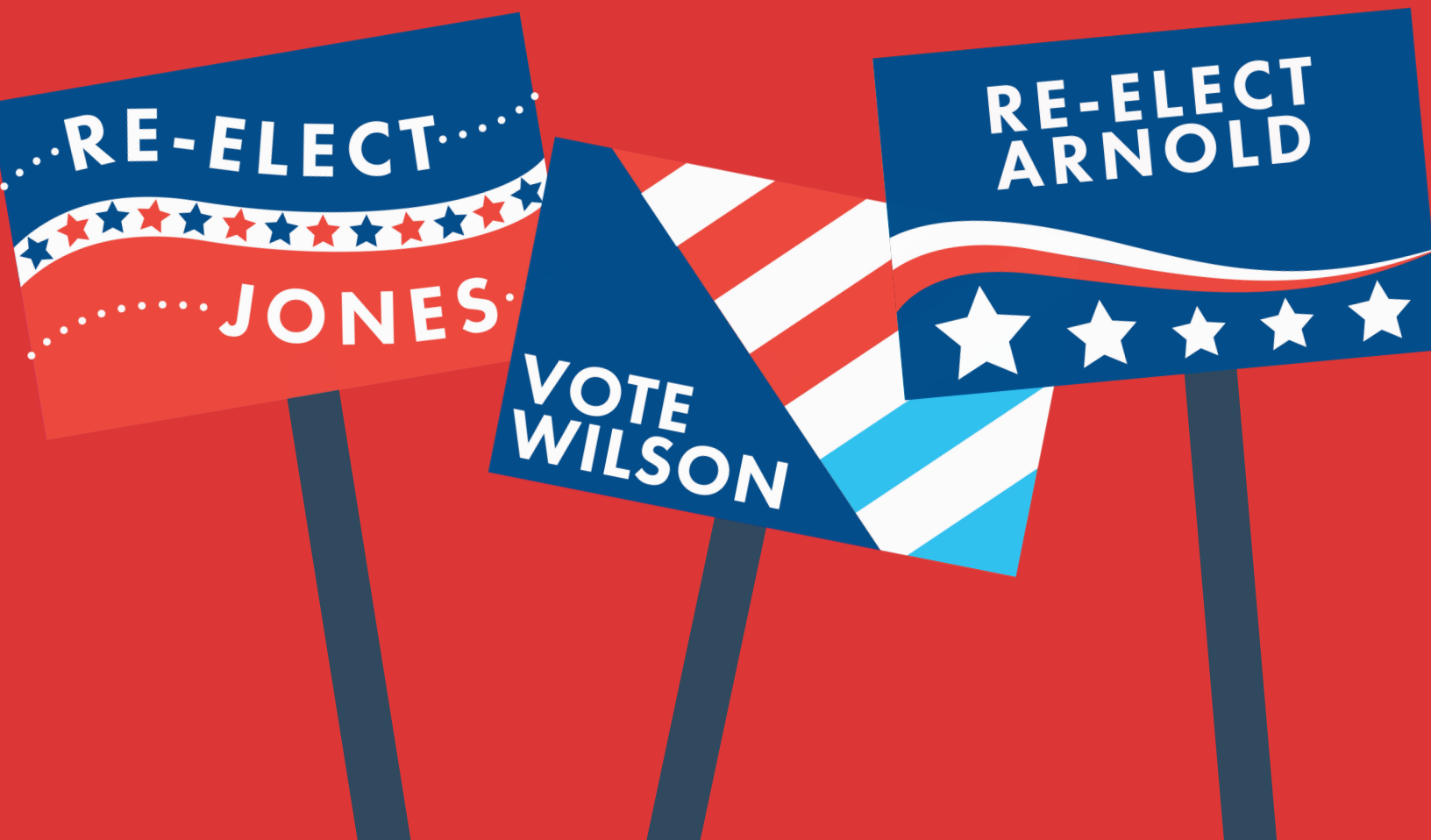
**Be proactive about communicating how you've made positive change.** Focus on the results you've achieved on behalf of communities, not on your personal accomplishments.

**When your record is attacked, respond in a way that demonstrates confidence and calm.** Voters want an answer from you when your record is critiqued, and they will make different judgements based on how you respond. The best responses demonstrate how you are taking steps to solve a problem.

**Use specifics when talking about what you have achieved.** Back up your claims with facts and figures, and use benchmarks to communicate progress with your ongoing efforts.

**Listen to your constituents and to experts.** As [demonstrated in previous BLFF research](#), listening is critical to show that you are tapped into what communities are facing.

**Convey positivity and results.** Statements that communicate positive change and results work better than statements that negate or deny a mistake.



# CANDIDATE PROFILES

---

*STAYING POWER* is clear that many voters believe mayors and governors who are Asian American/Pacific Islander, Black, or Latinx, are held to a different and more exacting standard when running for and holding office. Focus group participants expressed a belief that people of color and women need to prove their qualifications in a way that white men do not. Some noted that in a predominantly white state or city, it would be harder for a person of color than in a state or city with larger populations of Asian American/Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, or Native/Indigenous residents.

While many overall strategies for women incumbents on the campaign trail—establish accomplishments, listen to communities, be specific—were effective with voters in our research, there are differences in how hypothetical women candidates of different races are perceived by voters.





# ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER WOMAN

## INCUMBENT CANDIDATE PROFILE

### WHAT MESSAGES SHOULD SHE PRIORITIZE? SHOULD SHE EMPHASIZE SOLO OR SHARED CREDIT FOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

It is important to convey what she and her team accomplished, and shared credit is more important for this candidate than solo credit. Voters rated this statement most important for an AAPI woman candidate to convey in her messaging:

% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT"	WHITE WOMAN	BLACK WOMAN	LATINA WOMAN	ASIAN WOMAN
In my first term, <b>we</b> worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	58	56	56	61

The following statements are listed in terms of what is the next most important for an AAPI woman incumbent to convey:

STATEMENT	% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT" FOR HER TO CONVEY
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs, <u>and we hit 95% of that goal</u>	59
In my first term, <b>I</b> worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	57
To understand the priorities for our state, I have consulted with independent experts from universities and cities in all corners of the state <u>and I have listened to residents from communities across the state</u>	56
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs	46
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real effort at <u>bringing Democrats, Independents, and Republicans together</u> to get this done	46



These two messages were least effective for the AAPI woman incumbent. As is true for each hypothetical woman we tested, language about signing a bill after a bipartisan effort ranks lowest:

STATEMENT	% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT" FOR HER TO CONVEY
To understand the priorities for our state, I have consulted with independent experts from universities and cities in all corners of the state	39
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real <u>bipartisan effort</u> to get this done	39

## HOW DO HER MESSAGES RESONATE DIFFERENTLY ACROSS VOTER DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS?

- For an Asian American/Pacific Islander woman governor seeking reelection, the “we” achievement language tends to work better across many key subgroups: women and men, white voters, Democrats, and Independents.
- For Republicans, women, Independents, and Black voters, it is very important to share her plan with benchmarks; for Latinx voters it is important to share her plan but there is little difference with and without benchmarks.
- Women and Latinx voters also find it very important to listen to experts and residents.
- Black voters respond to bringing Democratic, Independent, and Republican state legislators together to pass a bill.





# BLACK WOMAN

## INCUMBENT CANDIDATE PROFILE

### WHAT MESSAGES SHOULD SHE PRIORITIZE? SHOULD SHE EMPHASIZE SOLO OR SHARED CREDIT FOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

The most important thing for a Black woman governor to convey is what she accomplished in her first term, and solo credit is more important than shared credit for a Black woman candidate. Voters rated this statement most important for a Black woman candidate to convey in her messaging:

% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT"	WHITE WOMAN	BLACK WOMAN	LATINA WOMAN	ASIAN WOMAN
In my first term, I worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	65	64	56	57

The following statements are listed in terms of what is the next most important for a Black woman incumbent to convey:

STATEMENT	% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT" FOR HER TO CONVEY
To understand the priorities for our state, I have consulted with independent experts from universities and cities in all corners of the state <u>and I have listened to residents from communities across the state</u>	57
In my first term, <u>we</u> worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	56
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs, <u>and we hit 95% of that goal</u>	56
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs	53
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real effort at <u>bringing Democrats, Independents, and Republicans together</u> to get this done	51



These two messages were least effective for the Black woman incumbent. As is true for each hypothetical woman we tested, language about signing a bill after a bipartisan effort ranks lowest:

STATEMENT	% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT" FOR HER TO CONVEY
To understand the priorities for our state, I have consulted with independent experts from universities and cities in all corners of the state	41
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real <u>bipartisan effort</u> to get this done	40

## HOW DO HER MESSAGES RESONATE DIFFERENTLY ACROSS VOTER DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS?

- For women voters, it is most important for a Black woman governor to take solo credit and explain what she accomplished for families with children, small business, and middle-class people.
- For men, they are tied on taking solo or team credit as long as she is lifting up what she achieved for families with children, small business, and middle-class people.
- Democrats find it important to take solo credit on her accomplishments for people and to listen to experts and residents.
- Independents are tied on taking solo or team credit and also like her having a plan with hard numbers and a progress report.
- Republicans find solo leadership tied to achievements for people the most important.
- Black voters respond to a Black woman governor saying she brings Democratic, Independent, and Republican state legislators together to pass a bill, listening to experts and residents from across the state, sharing what she accomplished with solo credit, and having a plan without the benchmark.
- Among Latinx voters, it is important that the Black woman governor acknowledge her team and what they did for families with children, small business, and middle class people.
- For Asian voters, it is important to convey the achievements with or without her team, that she listens to experts and communities, and her plans with or without benchmarks.



# LATINA

## INCUMBENT CANDIDATE PROFILE

---

### WHAT MESSAGES SHOULD SHE PRIORITIZE? SHOULD SHE EMPHASIZE SOLO OR SHARED CREDIT FOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

Having a plan with benchmarks is the most important statement for a Latina. For a Latina governor seeking reelection, it is equally important to take solo credit and to share credit.

% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT"	WHITE WOMAN	BLACK WOMAN	LATINA WOMAN	ASIAN WOMAN
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs, and we hit 95% of that goal	58	56	61	59

The following statements are listed in terms of what is the next most important for a Latina incumbent to convey:

STATEMENT	% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT" FOR HER TO CONVEY
In my first term, <u>we</u> worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	56
In my first term, <u>I</u> worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	56
To understand the priorities for our state, I have consulted with independent experts from universities and cities in all corners of the state <u>and I have listened to residents from communities across the state</u>	50
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs	47





These three messages were least effective for the Latina incumbent. As is true for each hypothetical woman we tested, language about signing a bill after a bipartisan effort ranks lowest:

STATEMENT	% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT" FOR HER TO CONVEY
To understand the priorities for our state, I have consulted with independent experts from universities and cities in all corners of the state	42
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real effort at <u>bringing Democrats, Independents, and Republicans together</u> to get this done	39
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real <u>bipartisan effort</u> to get this done	33

## HOW DO HER MESSAGES RESONATE DIFFERENTLY ACROSS VOTER DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS?

- Using “we” achievement language tends to work better for a Latina woman governor with many key subgroups.
- Women voters find it more important that a Latina woman governor has a plan with hard numbers and benchmarks, they also find team achievements important.
- Men also find a plan with benchmarks important, but they find solo leadership more important than team.
- Democrats are more equal on solo versus team and also find the plan with benchmarks important.
- Independents find solo and team leadership important, along with listening to experts and residents for their priorities, and having a plan with benchmarks.
- Republicans find the plan with benchmarks to be of paramount importance.
- Black voters think it is most important that a Latina governor have a plan with benchmarks and that she share solo or team credit for what she/they did for people and small businesses.
- For Latinx voters, the plan with benchmarks is the most important for a Latina governor.
- Asian voters find solo leadership to be most important.





# WHITE WOMAN

## INCUMBENT CANDIDATE PROFILE

### WHAT MESSAGES SHOULD SHE PRIORITIZE? SHOULD SHE EMPHASIZE SOLO OR SHARED CREDIT FOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

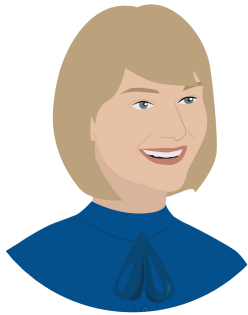
The most important thing for a white woman governor to convey is what she accomplished in her first term, and solo credit is more important than shared credit for a white woman candidate.

Voters rated this statement most important for a white woman candidate to convey in her messaging:

% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT"	WHITE WOMAN	BLACK WOMAN	LATINA WOMAN	ASIAN WOMAN
In my first term, I worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	65	64	56	57

The following statements are listed in terms of what is the next most important for a white woman incumbent to convey:

STATEMENT	% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT" FOR HER TO CONVEY
In my first term, <u>we</u> worked to expand health care for children, help grow small businesses, and prevent a tax increase for the middle class	58
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs, <u>and we hit 95% of that goal</u>	58
In my first term, my plan for the state was to provide small businesses with the incentives to create a combined 12,000 jobs	55
To understand the priorities for our state, I have consulted with independent experts from universities and cities in all corners of the state <u>and I have listened to residents from communities across the state</u>	53

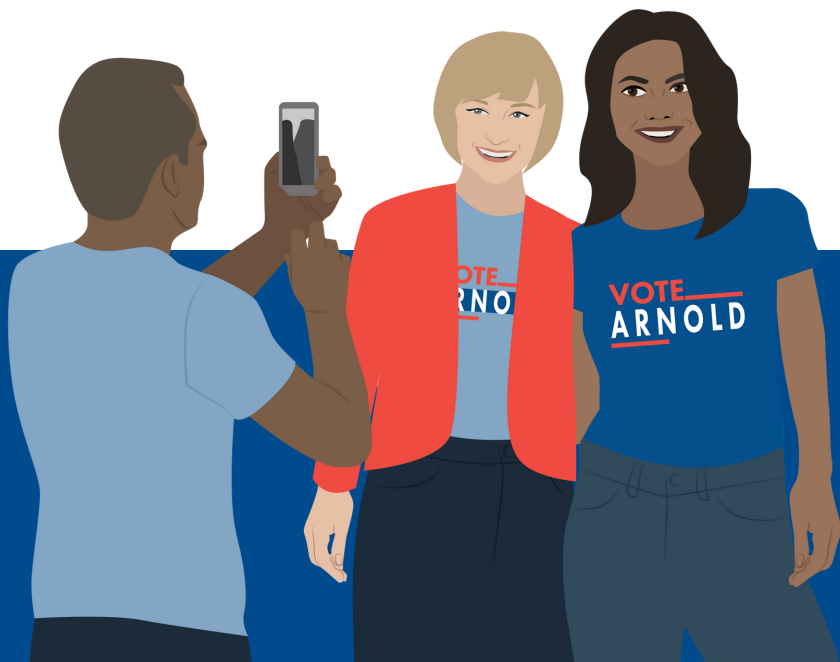


These three messages were least effective for the white woman incumbent. As is true for each hypothetical woman we tested, language about signing a bill after a bipartisan effort ranks lowest:

STATEMENT	% OF VOTERS WHO RATED THIS STATEMENT AS "VERY IMPORTANT" FOR HER TO CONVEY
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real effort <u>at bringing Democrats, Independents, and Republicans together</u> to get this done	44
To understand the priorities for our state, I have consulted with independent experts from universities and cities in all corners of the state	40
I'm thrilled to be here today to sign this bill and I want to thank our legislature for a real <u>bipartisan effort</u> to get this done	35

## HOW DO HER MESSAGES RESONATE DIFFERENTLY ACROSS VOTER DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS?

- For a white woman governor seeking reelection, the "I" achievement language works best with most key subgroups, except Asian American/Pacific Islander voters, who prefer "we."
- Black voters, Latinx voters, and Republican voters rate "I" and "we" the same. Independent voters prefer the "I" language.
- For men and Republicans, it is also important to convey her plan for the state with specific goals and benchmarks of achievement.
- Latinx voters also respond to consulting experts and listening to residents. Independents and Democrats really like to hear the issue agenda.





# CONCLUSION

---

Many facets of running for office and staying in office are the same for men and women, in part because voters prioritize party when choosing a candidate. That said, women experience some distinct challenges as first-time candidates. The same is true for women incumbents. Despite a variety of sexist double standards, voters recognize that women who run for reelection face specific obstacles. Against the conventional wisdom to “speak softly,” *STAYING POWER* shows that voters think highly of women who own their achievements and stand up to critics. In voters’ eyes, communication is a test of leadership—one that women can pass. By communicating clearly and effectively, women incumbents will build their staying power and help close the gender gap in executive office.