



Now is the time to run and serve. It is an excellent time to be a woman running for office.

## OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS:

### Now is the Time for Women Candidates

In the months since Election Day 2016, political organizations across the ideological spectrum have been inundated with requests from potential new women candidates. These first-time candidates run the gamut from elementary school teachers, to small business owners, to veterans of our armed forces. They are campaigning from Alabama to California, in races spanning from the school board to the statehouse to the U.S. Senate.

Today, women running for office are motivated by a renewed sense of urgency, as well as optimism about their ability to compete at a moment when voters are thirsting for new ideas and fresh perspectives. Our data supports their instincts that now is the time to run and serve. Indeed, it is an excellent time to be a woman running for office. As Americans express frustration with the political status quo, the perception of women as “different” in a sea of male—mostly white—elected officials and candidates offers them a distinctive advantage in the eyes of voters. Voters tend to associate certain character traits more heavily with women, which can be an advantage or a disadvantage.

How voters perceive candidates is heavily influenced by the party of the candidate and the party affiliation of the voter. When evaluating candidates, voters have preconceived ideas about what Republicans and Democrats each bring to the table. While party has been a key driver of how people cast their vote, gender plays a role as well. And when party and gender are combined, women of both parties hold distinct advantages and new disadvantages. Democratic women candidates amplify traditional Democratic advantages on issues like health care and education, while Republican women have a gender advantage of their own and even overcome some of the traditional disadvantages that women candidates typically face on issues like national security.

Our findings provide new insights into what voters believe about women candidates and how they will evaluate hopefuls in 2018 and offers practical tips for women running for office on both sides of the aisle.

## “Different” Is a Good Thing for Women in Politics

As Americans remain frustrated with the political status quo, being perceived as “different” is an advantage for women. Voters who see women as different from men when they serve as elected officials are more likely to support women. However, when voters believe there is no difference between the two, women do not have an advantage over male opponents.

In our survey, four in ten voters say that women are a lot or somewhat different than men when they serve as elected officials. Women, seniors, strong Democrats, Democratic women, African American women, African Americans under 50, and Latinas are more likely to believe there are differences. To harness this advantage, women candidates and their supporters should highlight how women serve differently, by being in touch with voters and reaching across party lines to get results.

## Women on Both Sides of the Aisle Have Advantages

On general election ballots across the country, voters often choose between a Democratic candidate and a Republican candidate. We questioned: How does a Democratic woman stack up against a Republican man? A Republican woman against a Democratic man? We also explored a Democratic man against a Republican man as a control on the gender variable. When making these comparisons, we controlled for partisanship of likely 2018 voters.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

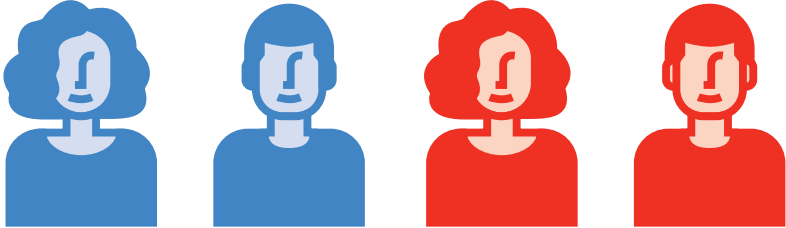
#### GENDER IMPACTS VOTERS’ DESCRIPTIONS OF CANDIDATES

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation has studied women candidates for nearly 20 years, and our research continues to show that voters perceive men and women candidates differently. In this round of research, we asked voters point blank: Who does this word or phrase better describe?

Democratic women have significant advantages over Republican men on being in touch with people, caring about people like you, working across party lines, taking on special interests, standing up for what is right, bringing about change, being honest, and having a vision. Republican women have a tremendous advantage over Democratic men on being perceived as political outsiders, as well as being confident and honest.

Women on both sides of the aisle still have some areas where they do not perform as well as men. Democratic women are not perceived as positively as Republican men on being a strong leader and being confident. Republican women are not perceived as positively as Democratic men on being a strong leader, getting results, or taking on special interests.

**Who does this best describe?**



Trait	Democratic Woman	Democratic Man	Republican Woman	Republican Man
A political outsider	0	-16	+23	+16
Confident	-9	-11	+9	+11
Honest	+11	+3	+7	-3
Knowledgeable	+3	+1	+4	-1
Has a vision	+8	+5	+3	-5
Stands up for what is right	+16	+7	+1	-7
Will work across party lines	+16	+8	+1	-8
In touch with people	+20	+16	0	-16
Cares about people like you	+19	+12	-1	-12
Will bring about change	+11	+4	-2	-4
Will take on special interests	+16	+8	-4	-8
Gets results	-3	-1	-5	+1
Strong leader	-10	-8	-5	+8

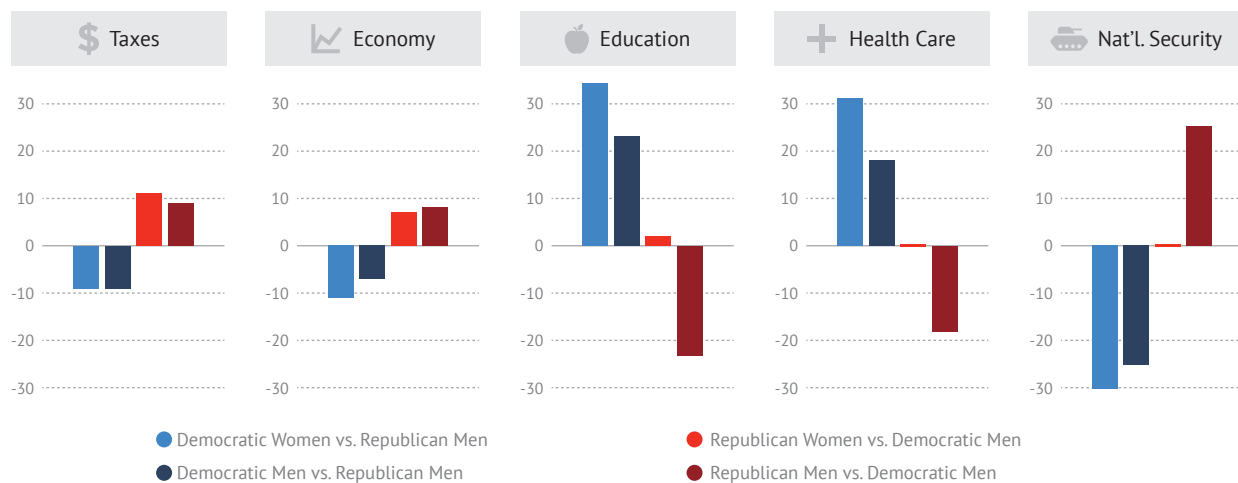
*The trait advantages data adjusted for partisanship of likely 2018 voters in this memo are the result of head to head matchups between different combinations of candidate gender and candidate partisanship. The columns represent the head to head matchup of a Democratic female and Republican male, Democratic male and Republican male, Republican female and Democratic male, and Republican male and Democratic male. For example, the Republican female candidate has a +23 advantage as a “political outsider” compared to a Democratic male; the Republican male candidate has a +16 advantage as a “political outsider” compared to a Democratic male.*

## FROM THE ECONOMY TO EDUCATION HOW VOTERS PERCEIVE WOMEN CANDIDATES ON THE ISSUES

Republican women have advantages over Democratic men on the economy and taxes. Traditionally, Republican candidates have a disadvantage in the eyes of voters on the issues of education and health care, but today a Republican woman can neutralize those disadvantages. Democratic women have a huge advantage, more than thirty points, over Republican men on health care and education

Democratic women are not seen as strong as Republican men on national security, the economy, or taxes. Republican officials tend to have an advantage on national security issues, although it is typically a weak issue for female candidates overall. In our research, Republican women perform as well as Democratic men on national security, meaning they overperform as women, but underperform as Republicans.

### Who would do a better job handling this issue?



*The issue advantages data adjusted for partisanship of likely 2018 voters in this memo are the result of head to head matchups between different combinations of candidate gender and candidate partisanship. The graph represents the head to head match up of a Democratic female and Republican male, Democratic male and Republican male, Republican female and Democratic male, and Republican male and Democratic male. For example, the Democratic female candidate has a +34 advantage on education compared to a Republican male; the Democratic male candidate has a +23 advantage on education compared to a Republican male.*

## Leadership Credentials Remain a Must-Have for Women

Even in this moment of opportunity for “outsider” women candidates, women still need to prove they can get things done. And even in 2017, it remains a challenge for women to prove they are strong leaders and can get results.

Our previous Barbara Lee Family Foundation research illustrates that demonstrating both likeability and qualifications is important for women candidates. We’ve repeatedly found women face a litmus test men do not: Voters will support a male candidate they do not like but who they think is qualified, but don’t apply the same standard to women. Women also have to do more to prove they are qualified. For men, their qualification is assumed.

It’s critical for women candidates to showcase a history of their accomplishments in the community. This demonstrates both likeability and qualifications to voters. Specifically, a woman candidate showing leadership in the community is very compelling.

When it comes to establishing qualifications and demonstrating likeability, it is better for women candidates, regardless of party, to highlight specific accomplishments rather than simply describe their background or status as an outsider. Illustrating achievements is more persuasive than simply focusing on a woman’s biography. For example, being a “business leader who created jobs” is twice as powerful as being a “small business owner.”

Republican voters are especially drawn to the experience of being a business owner who created jobs. Regardless of the party or race of the woman running, this accomplishment helps establish the candidate’s qualifications for Republican voters.

### Top Five Criteria That Help Demonstrate a Woman Candidate’s Likeability and Qualifications<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Remaining tested background criteria included: Is an entrepreneur or successful business leader; Is a veteran; Is a teacher; Is in law enforcement; Is a small business owner; Is a doctor, nurse, or social worker; Founded and ran a non-profit; Has never held elected office before

## Gender Isn't the Only Factor: A Look at Race and Ethnicity

Looking at gender alone does not give a complete picture of how women candidates can compete on the political playing field. Gender and race both impact voters' views, and these traits interact with each other. To understand more about how voters view women candidates, we surveyed the impact of race on voters' perceptions of both Democratic and Republican women candidates. We tested a generic African American Democratic woman candidate and a generic Latina Republican candidate<sup>2</sup> and found even more intense reactions to experiences women could have to show they are qualified and likeable.

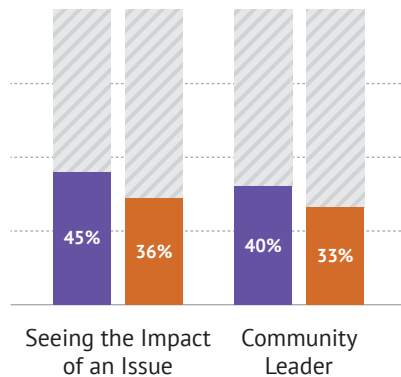
### AFRICAN AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC WOMAN CANDIDATE

For voters, the likeability and qualifications of an African American Democratic woman candidate are both strongly tied to two characteristics: Voters believe it is very important that the candidate is running because she saw the impact of an issue and that she is a community leader.

### LATINA REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE

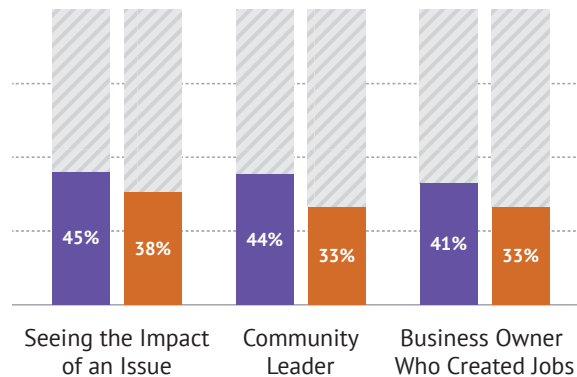
When asked about a Latina Republican candidate, voters connected "running because she saw the impact of an issue" most strongly with the candidate being qualified and likeable. This experience is followed by being a community leader or a business owner who created jobs.

**African American Democratic Woman Candidate**



● Shows Qualification ● Shows Likeability

**Latina Republican Candidate**



● Shows Qualification ● Shows Likeability

<sup>2</sup> This is an initial look at the intersection of race and gender, not a comprehensive examination of the topic. More research remains to be conducted, to gain a more in-depth understanding of the issue.

## A Closer Look at Voters

In addition to testing the race and backgrounds of candidates, we oversampled African American and Latino voters in hopes of learning more about establishing likeability and qualifications among these key voting blocs.

- Among African American voters, it is especially important that a Democratic woman have experience as a community leader and activist in her community, and that she is running because she saw the impact of an issue.
- When it comes to party lines, African American voters are warier of Republican candidates in general, but believe it is especially important for establishing qualifications and likeability that a Latina Republican show she is running because she saw the impact of an issue.
- Among the Latino electorate, it is very important for all women candidates to show they are running because they saw the impact of an issue.
- Whether considering qualifications or likeability, Latino voters are less likely to say it is very important that a woman candidate have experience as a business owner who created jobs.

## KEY TIPS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES

Our findings represent the current political moment and highlight strategies all women candidates can employ to be successful:

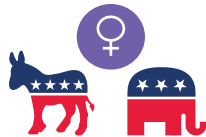
- **Know what advantages voters give you and what obstacles you have to overcome.** Republican or Democrat, all women candidates start off with advantages (and disadvantages) in the minds of voters. It's important for candidates to make the most of any opportunities voters give them while working to counteract any disadvantages.
- **Emphasize why it's different when women are at the table.** If a voter believes women are different than men when they serve as elected officials, that voter is more likely to support women candidates. Underscoring the differences, like women candidates being in touch with voters' lives, can help women harness this advantage.
- **Illustrate specific accomplishments and achievements.** Women candidates should be specific in order to highlight both likeability and qualifications to voters. Simply describing their professional backgrounds is not enough for women candidates.

## Looking Ahead: The Year Women Can Change Everything?

The uptick in political activity since the 2016 election offers perhaps the most compelling evidence yet that women are mobilized and ready to run for leadership positions at every level of government. Combine that with voters' current embrace of women and "outsider" candidates, and 2018 has the potential to bring more women into government than ever before.

For women candidates to succeed, regardless of party, they should be prepared to showcase their previous leadership accomplishments to voters, highlight their passion for a key campaign issue, and emphasize the unique contributions women can make when they serve as elected officials, like being in touch with voters and working across party lines to get results. Doing so will help accentuate their current advantages and demonstrate to voters that women are qualified and able to lead. Even women who haven't served in elected office, or have little experience with public service, have an opportunity to connect with voters.

Now is the time for women to take the leap and run for office!



### METHODOLOGY

*Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research designed and administered this survey that was conducted over the phone from August 29 - September 10, 2017. The survey reached a total of 1,500 likely 2018 voters nationwide (779 women, 721 men) with oversamples of 200 African American and 200 Latino voters. Telephone numbers were drawn from listed sample. The data were weighed slightly by age, party identification, and education to reflect attributes of the actual population. The margin of error for the total sample is +/-2.5% and 6.9% for oversample groups.*





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