

NEW RESEARCH ON GENDER & THE 2020 ELECTION

How outdated notions about gender and leadership are shaping the 2020 presidential race

About this survey

LeanIn.Org surveyed 2,052 registered voters using the Ipsos KnowledgePanel.¹

The survey was conducted from August 7 to 12, 2019, and uses a probability sample of registered voters in the United States, which is considered the gold standard in survey research. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. For more information on the survey methodology, refer to page 18.

We conducted this survey to examine if and how gender dynamics are playing out in the 2020 presidential election. We're sharing these findings to raise awareness of underlying factors that may be influencing voters' perceptions of the candidates.

¹ For more information on the Ipsos KnowledgePanel, see page 19.

**American voters are ready for a woman president.
(We just don't know we are.)**

**Now we need to set aside outdated notions that
women are not as presidential or electable.**

Section 1

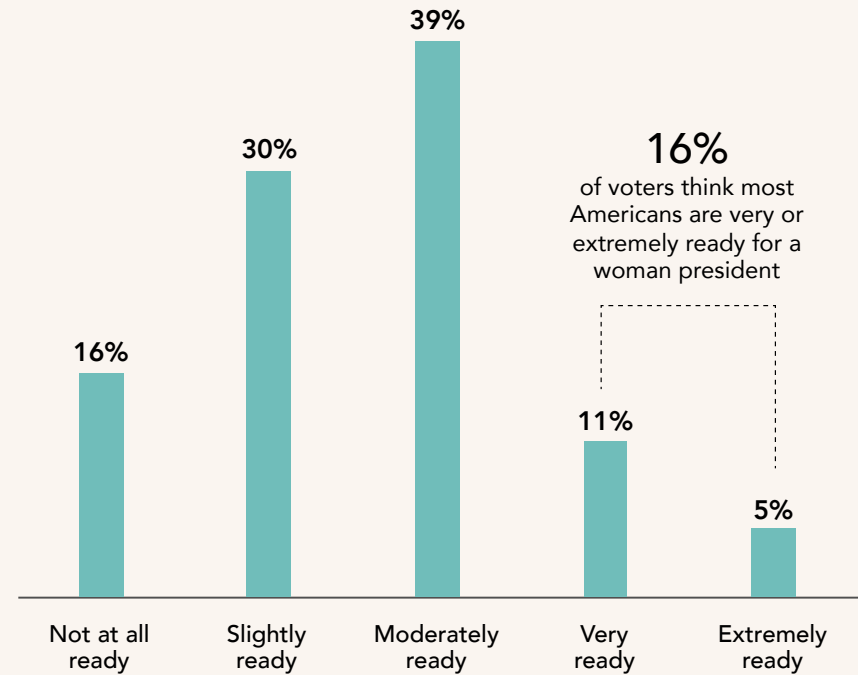
How ready are we for a woman president?

In this section, the term “voters” refers to registered voters in the United States.

Voters don't think America is ready for a woman president.²

Only 16% of voters believe most Americans are "very ready" or "extremely ready" for a woman president.

HOW READY VOTERS THINK MOST AMERICANS ARE FOR A WOMAN PRESIDENT*



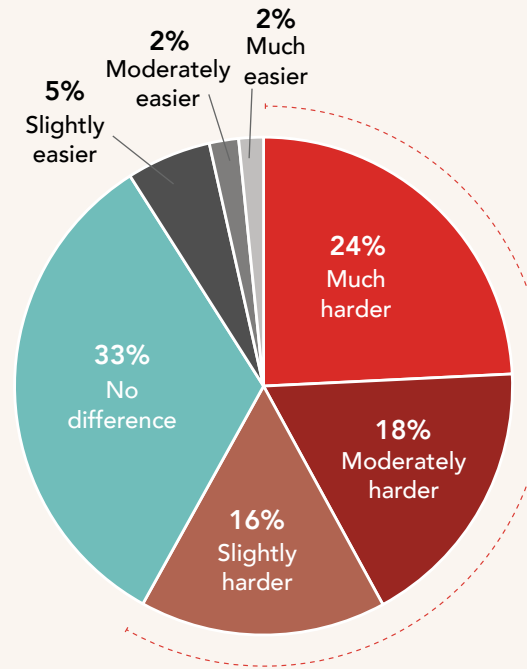
* Survey question: How ready are most Americans for a woman president?

² America's "readiness for a woman to be president" is defined as the share of registered voters who reported that most Americans are "very ready" or "extremely ready" for a woman to be president.

So voters think it will be harder for a woman to win.

A majority of voters think it will be harder for a woman to win the 2020 presidential election. And 88% of voters who think this say it's because "many Americans aren't ready to elect a woman president."

BELIEF IT WILL BE HARDER / EASIER FOR A WOMAN TO WIN THE 2020 ELECTION*



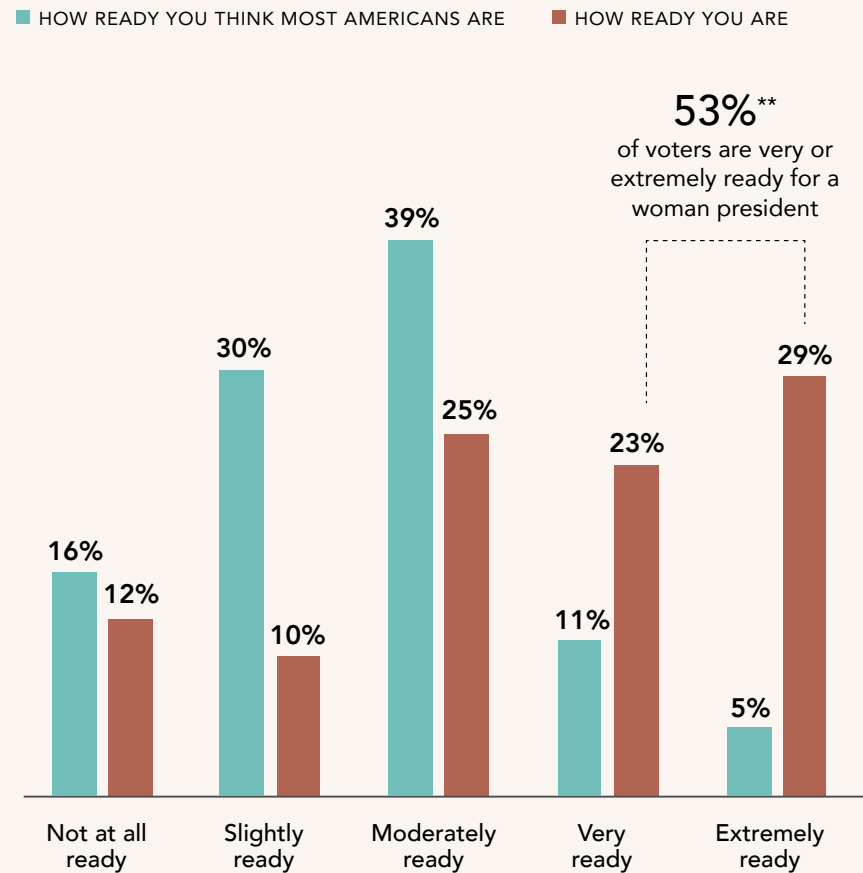
58%
of voters think it will be harder for a woman to win

* Survey question: Do you think it will be harder or easier for a woman to win the 2020 election against President Trump, compared to a man?

But voters are getting it wrong: America is ready.

In actuality, a majority of voters say they are “very ready” or “extremely ready” for a woman president. They just don’t realize that other voters are ready, too.

HOW READY VOTERS ARE FOR A WOMAN PRESIDENT*



* Survey question: How ready are [you/most Americans] for a woman to be president?

** Numbers do not sum to 53% due to rounding.

For a breakdown of which demographics of voters are most ready for a woman president, see page 15.

Section 2

What does it mean to be “presidential” and “electable”?

In this section, our analysis focuses on registered voters who identified as Democrats or Independents and their perceptions of the candidates running in the Democratic primary.

Who voters see as “presidential” and “electable” matters.

Two of the biggest predictors of whether Democratic and Independent voters intend to vote for a man or a woman in the Democratic primary:

→ **How presidential they think the candidates are**

→ **How electable they think the candidates are**³

Almost half of these voters think the men candidates are more presidential and electable. And very few voters see it the other way—less than 15% rate the women candidates higher on these traits.⁴

³ For more information on the analysis used here, see page 18. ⁴ For this analysis, “running for president” refers to the candidates running in the Democratic Party presidential primary.

The problem is that “presidential” and “electable” are outdated notions that tend to favor men and disadvantage women.

The likeability effect:

Democratic and Independent voters are more likely to think candidates are presidential and electable if they see them as likeable—and voters think the men in the race are more likeable than the women. In fact, “likeability” is the attribute that most strongly predicts whether a candidate is viewed as presidential as well as electable.

These findings track closely to social science research that shows we tend to dislike women leaders. Because we expect women to be kind and communal, we sometimes like them less when they’re assertive or forceful. In contrast, we expect men to act like this, so they don’t face the same pushback.⁵

This “likeability penalty” may be particularly damaging to the women running for president, who need to be bold and ambitious to campaign effectively—but risk seeming unlikeable when they do.⁶

⁵ Madeline Heilman, “Gender Stereotypes and Workplace Bias,” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 32 (December 2012): 113–35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2012.11.003>; L. A. Rudman, C. A. Moss-Racusin, P. Glick, and J. E. Phelan, “Reactions to Vanguards: Advances in Backlash Theory,” in P. Devine and A. Plant, eds., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 45 (San Diego: Academic Press, 2012), 167–227, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-394286-9.00004-4>; Madeline E. Heilman, Aaron S. Wallen, Daniella Fuchs, and Melinda M. Tamkins, “Penalties for Success: Reactions to Women Who Succeed at Male Gender-Typed Tasks,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, no. 3 (2004): 416–27, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.3.416>. ⁶ Laurie A. Rudman, “Self-Promotion as a Risk Factor for Women: The Costs and Benefits of Counterstereotypical Impression Management,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 3 (1998): 629–45, http://search.committee.module.rutgers.edu/pdf/Rudman_self_promoing.pdf; Corinne A. Moss-Racusin and Laurie A. Rudman, “Disruptions in Women’s Self-Promotion: The Backlash Avoidance Model,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (June 2010): 186–202, doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2010.01561; Heilman, “Gender Stereotypes and Workplace Bias”; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, and Phelan, “Reactions to Vanguards”; Victoria L. Brescoll and Tyler Okimoto, “The Price of Power: Power-Seeking and Backlash Against Female Politicians,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36, no. 7 (2010): 923–36, doi: 10.1037/e506052012-245; Monica C. Schneider and Angela L. Bos, “Measuring Stereotypes of Female Politicians,” *Political Psychology* 35, no. 2 (2014): 259–262, doi: 10.1111/pops.12040.

What presidential has always looked like:

Since all of our U.S. presidents have been men, it may be harder for voters to see a woman as presidential—and therefore harder to believe that a woman can win.⁷

There is also a common stereotype that men are better leaders than women. As a result, women candidates may need to work harder to “prove” they are presidential.⁸

ALL U.S. PRESIDENTS HAVE BEEN MEN



⁷ Kira Sanbonmatsu, “Why Not a Woman of Color?” Oxford Handbooks Online, September 10, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.43>; Jessi L. Smith et al., “No Place for a Woman: Evidence for Gender Bias in Evaluations of Presidential Candidates,” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 29, no. 3 (2007): 225–33, doi: 10.1080/01973530701503069.com/document/d/184r7gZGi4FmH0D3n7ODROs0ZTaaad-5i9LNlbFmDGA/edit?ts=5d437b38; Monica C. Schneider and Angela L. Bos, “The Application of Social Role Theory to the Study of Gender in Politics,” *Advances in Political Psychology* 40, suppl. 1 (2019), doi: 10.1111/pops.12573. ⁸ Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, and Phelan, “Reactions to Vanguard”; A. M. Koenig et al., “Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms,” *Psychological Bulletin* 137, no. 4 (2011): 616–42, doi: 10.1037/a0023557; Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know* (New York: NYU Press, 2014); Schneider and Bos, “The Application of Social Role Theory to the Study of Gender in Politics.”

The electability conundrum:

One of the main reasons voters say it will be harder for a woman to win in 2020 is because they don’t think Americans are ready for a woman president. But Americans are ready—across demographics, a majority of voters say they are “very ready” or “extremely ready.”

This false belief may also influence how people vote: the less ready Democratic and Independent voters think other Americans are, the less likely they are to choose a woman as their top candidate.

In contrast, voters are far more enthusiastic about voting for a woman when they rightly think Americans are ready.⁹



2x as likely to vote for a woman

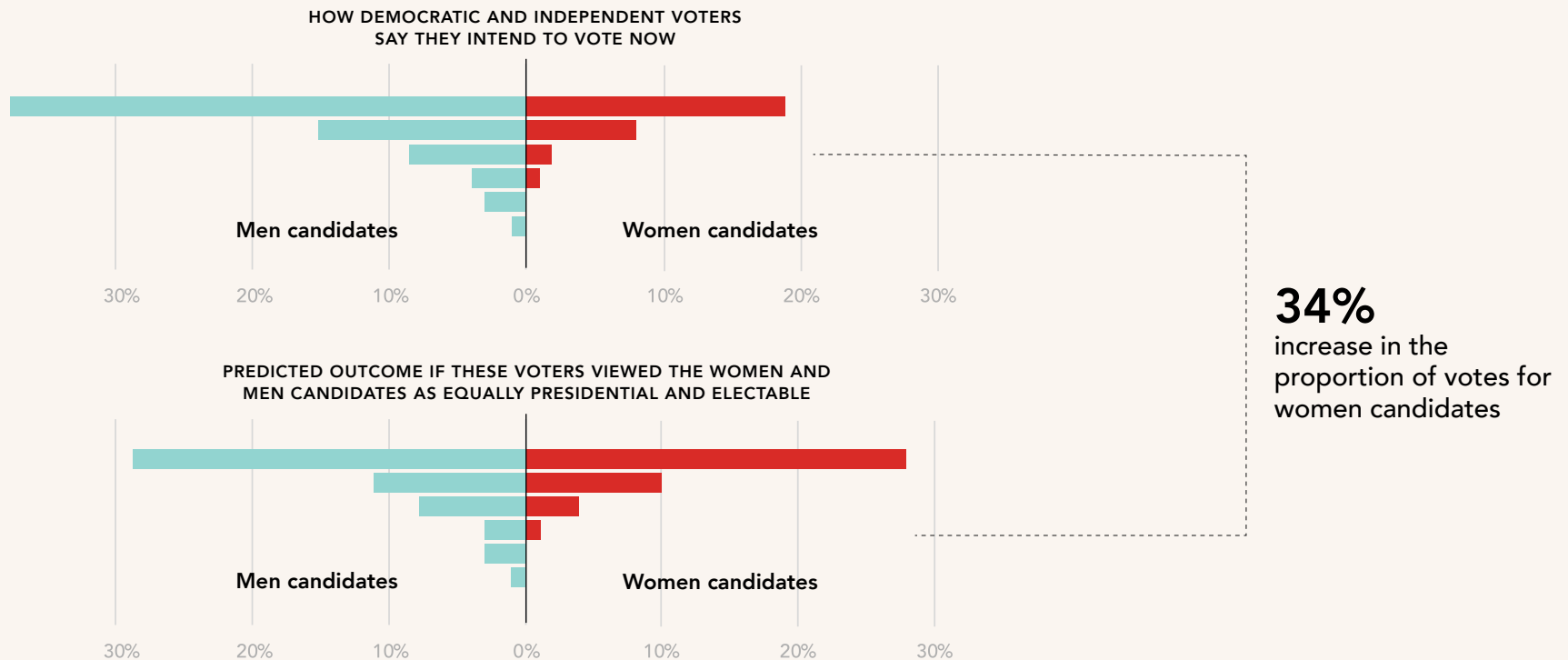
Democratic and Independent voters are almost twice as likely to vote for a woman in the primary when they think Americans are ready for a woman president.¹⁰

⁹ “More enthusiastic about voting for a woman” is defined as more likely to indicate that you would vote for one of the women candidates in the Democratic primary. ¹⁰ Forty percent of Democratic and Independent voters say they’ll vote for a woman in the Democratic primary when they think most Americans are “very ready” or “extremely ready” for a woman president, compared to 22% of Democratic and Independent voters who say they’ll vote for a woman in the Democratic primary when they think most Americans are “not at all ready” or “slightly ready” for a woman president.

If we set aside these outdated notions, we can level the playing field.

What if voters set aside their outdated notions of what it means to be presidential and electable? If the men and women candidates were seen as equally presidential and electable, we could level the playing field. The share of votes going to the women would increase substantially—and the women and men front-runners would be neck and neck in the Democratic primary.¹¹

WHAT IF THE MEN CANDIDATES AND WOMEN CANDIDATES WERE VIEWED AS EQUALLY ELECTABLE AND PRESIDENTIAL?*



* This analysis is based on modelled results.

¹¹ Based on our statistical model, if we close the gaps between how “presidential” and “electable” voters perceive the men and women vying for the Democratic nomination to be, the outcome changes substantially: Democratic and Independent voters go from being significantly more likely to vote for the men to about as likely to vote for the women and men front-runners in the race. This hypothetical model points to the importance of these two factors in voters’ decision-making and the benefits of setting these notions aside when we evaluate the 2020 presidential candidates.

Section 3

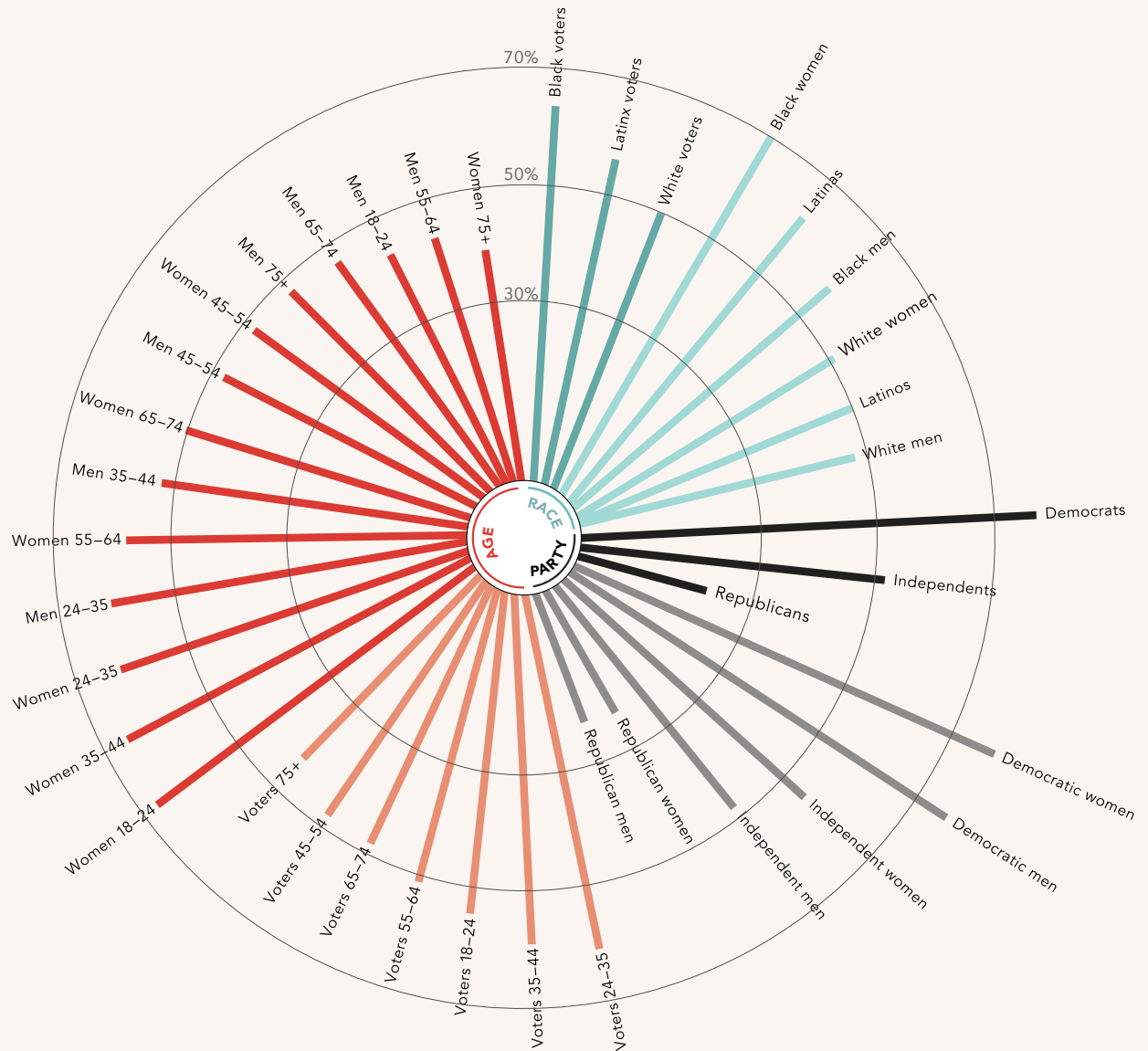
A closer look at what voters think

HOW READY DIFFERENT GROUPS OF VOTERS ARE FOR A WOMAN PRESIDENT*

% OF VOTERS WHO SAY THEY'RE "VERY READY" OR "EXTREMELY READY"

More on how ready voters are for a woman president:

When you look at which American voters are most enthusiastic about a woman president, the demographic trends align with patterns we have seen before. Democrats are far more ready for a woman president than Republicans. Black women are more ready than white men. And younger voters are more ready than older voters.^{12, 13}



¹² "Most ready" refers to the group of voters where the highest proportion indicated that they are "very ready" or "extremely ready" for a woman president. "Least ready" refers to the group where the smallest share of voters indicated that they are "very ready" or "extremely ready" for a woman president. The same general patterns hold if we look at the groups where the highest share of voters selected "not at all ready" or "slightly ready." ¹³ "Younger" refers to voters age 18-34. "Older" refers to voters 65+.

* Survey question: How ready are you for a woman president?

More on why voters think it will be harder for a woman to win:

Voters who think it will be harder for a woman to win the 2020 presidential election cite two primary reasons: “many Americans aren’t ready to elect a woman president” and “women who run for president have to do more to prove themselves than men.”^{14, 15}

Both themes also show up frequently in survey participants’ open-ended explanations for why women will have a more difficult time getting votes.¹⁶

¹⁴ Eighty-seven percent of voters who think it will be harder for a woman to win in 2020 believe it is because “women candidates need to work harder to prove themselves.” ¹⁵ Respondents were asked to choose from a list of reasons why it might be harder for a woman candidate to win in 2020. The top two reasons respondents selected were “many Americans aren’t ready to elect a woman president” and “women who run for president have to do more to prove themselves than men.” Respondents were asked to choose from a list of reasons for why it might be harder. ¹⁶ Mentioned 603 times out of 910 usable responses.

A BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANTS’ WRITTEN COMMENTS BY TOPIC*



“Sexism is deeply ingrained in our society.”

“A woman has to prove herself more than a man does.”

“There is a bias against women, from both the media and the voter.”

* These categories reflect the most common response categories. One hundred eighteen comments across a broad range of topics were excluded because they did not fit into one of these categories.

How voters think aspects of a candidate's identity will affect his or her chances of winning:

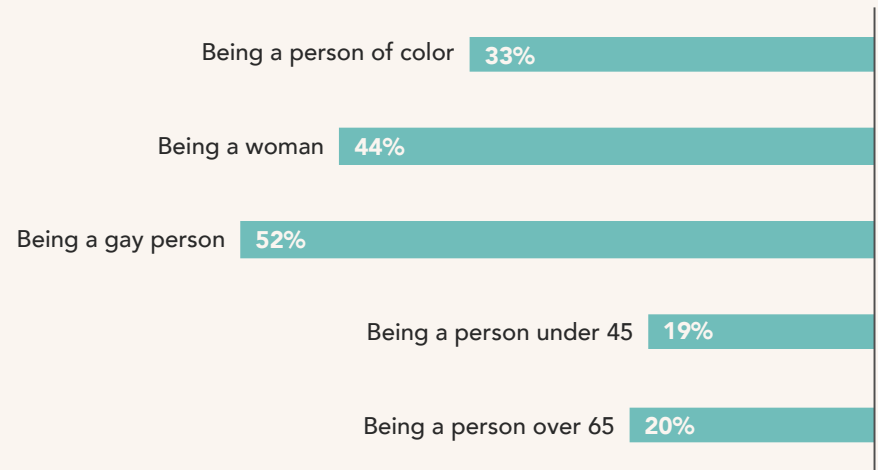
A third of American voters think it will be harder for a person of color to win the presidential election in 2020. Close to half think it will be harder for a woman to win. And more than half of voters think it will be harder for a gay candidate to win.

This makes sense, given what Americans have previously seen: A Black man served two terms as president. A woman ran for president as her party's nominee. Yet an openly gay candidate has never been a major party nominee.

Interestingly, age is not an issue for most American voters—only about 20% think being younger or older will impact a candidate's ability to win. Perhaps voters are less concerned about age because we've seen presidents across the age spectrum.

ASPECTS OF A CANDIDATE'S IDENTITY THAT MAY MAKE IT HARDER TO WIN*

% OF VOTERS WHO THINK THESE ASPECTS OF IDENTITY MAKE IT HARDER



* Survey question: Please indicate which of these would make it harder for a candidate to win in 2020.

About Our Approach

We surveyed a probability sample of 2,052 registered voters in the United States, with an oversample of Black and Latinx voters. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

We examined a broad range of attributes that are commonly used to evaluate presidential candidates, from the ability to stand up to adversaries to intelligence. All respondents, regardless of political party, rated the two top-polling Democratic men (Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders) and the two top-polling Democratic women (Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris). If respondents indicated they would not vote for one of these four candidates in the Democratic primary, they also rated the attributes of their preferred candidate from a list of six other top-polling candidates at the time (Cory Booker, Pete Buttigieg, Julián Castro, Kirsten Gillibrand, Amy Klobuchar, and Beto O'Rourke). If a respondent indicated that he or she would vote for President Trump in the 2020 general election, he or she also rated him on the same attributes. Each respondent ended up rating between four and six candidates.

We conducted an analysis to examine if and how voters' assessments of the candidates differ depending on the gender of the candidate. We looked at Democratic and Independent voters who say they intend to vote in the Democratic primary and calculated the gap in how they rate their top-rated man and top-rated woman on each attribute. We then assessed which gaps best predict voters' intentions to vote for a woman or a man in the primary. Based on our analysis, these factors stand out as the strongest predictors:

- How presidential voters think the candidates are
- How electable voters think the candidates are
- How strong a leader voters think the candidates are
- The extent to which voters think the candidates represent them and their interests

Given that the presidency is a position historically held by men and the significant public attention paid to the topic of electability among the Democratic candidates, we focused our research efforts on how presidential and how electable voters rated the candidates and what attributes predict these ratings. When we discuss the factors that may shape voters' perceptions of "presidential" and "electable," we draw on findings from this survey and social science research.

Based on our analysis, if we close the gaps between how "presidential" and "electable" voters perceive the men and women vying for the Democratic nomination to be, the outcome changes substantially: Democratic and Independent voters go from being significantly more likely to vote for the men to about as likely to vote for the women and men front-runners in the race. This hypothetical model points to the importance of these two factors in voters' decision-making and the benefits of setting these notions aside when we evaluate the 2020 presidential candidates.

About the Ipsos KnowledgePanel

This survey was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel. For those who agree to participate but do not already have internet access, Ipsos provides a laptop/netbook and ISP connection at no cost. People who already have computers and internet service are permitted to participate using their own equipment. Panelists then receive unique log-in information for accessing surveys online and are sent emails throughout each month inviting them to participate in research.

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