

# Americans favor women politicians over men, says study

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As midterm elections approach with an unprecedented number of women candidates running for Congress, researchers at Stevens Institute of Technology reveal that both women and men prefer female politicians, with men rating women politicians significantly higher than male politicians.

"These results came as a real surprise," says Lindsey Cormack, who co-led the work. "It could signal a backlash given the current political environment, in the sense that there is a rebalancing in favor of [women](#)."

Using a nationally diverse sample of 1,400 voting-age Americans, Cormack and fellow Stevens political science professor Kristyn Karl unveiled the findings at the American Political Science Association's annual meeting in Boston on August 30.

In their survey, Cormack and Karl presented articles about politicians making sorrowful or angry appeals in response to fictitious policy failures or concerns, on topics ranging from education to defense. They then asked the respondents to score how favorably they viewed the politicians and to evaluate their leadership, competence, intelligence, compassion and sincerity (on a scale from 1 to 4). The gender of the politicians, their appeals, and the issues varied across articles.

The survey was distributed by Survey Sampling International, the world's leading provider of market research, to U.S. citizens aged 18 years or older. The sample was designed to mirror U.S. census benchmarks in

terms of gender, age, race and political affiliation.

The work shows that both men and women favor women politicians, but men repeatedly rate them significantly higher, regardless of tone or topic they addressed in the article. Specifically, Democratic men assess women politicians significantly more favorable than male politicians. Republican men and women, on the other hand, evaluate men and women politicians similarly.

In addition to the overall preference for women over men in politics, Cormack and Karl found that male politicians faced the steepest penalties when communicating about defense issues in emotional ways when they conveyed sorrow.

"We expected that women politicians would be viewed negatively for violating gender norms about emotionality but in reality, it was men who were punished most severely," says Karl. "While women politicians were not clearly punished for expressing anger or sadness, men politicians who talked about masculine topics—such as defense policy—in an 'unmanly' way—with sadness—faced significantly more negative evaluations."

Some urge caution in evaluating these elections as evidence of a sea change. Indeed, the "pink wave" is also very blue, as Democrats make up a large share of women candidates this cycle. But instead of attributing success to individual candidates or district conditions, the work suggests that the public may simply be ready for women to lead.

Provided by Stevens Institute of Technology

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