

# Gender stereotypes limit power of female presidents across cultures, study shows

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Female presidents have less power to shape policy and are held to higher standards in key policy areas than male presidents, according to a study led by a Georgia State political science researcher.

"On average, female leaders come into office with less support than

male leaders and their support erodes more quickly," said Ryan E. Carlin, an associate professor of political science and lead author of the study, which examined data from 18 Latin American and East Asian democracies. "Furthermore, the public strongly withdraws support from female leaders in the wake of policy failures in physical security and [public corruption](#).

"We measured the public popularity and perceptions of both male and female presidents in all of these countries," he said. "Female presidents proved to be less popular and were judged more harshly than male counterparts, in part, because of longstanding gender stereotypes that were prevalent across cultures."

Effective political leadership is generally associated with aggressiveness, ambition, forcefulness, [self-sufficiency](#), self-confidence – traits typically associated with men, Carlin said.

"Most people associate women with communal traits such as affection, compassion, kindness, helpfulness and gentleness," he said. "These [gender stereotypes](#) are remarkably widespread and durable and set up a perception for many that women presidents lack the qualities of leadership required."

Gender stereotypes also feed additional skepticism towards female presidents, creating a double standard whereby women are subjected to closer scrutiny and stricter demands than their male colleagues.

"Female leaders must outperform men to be considered equally competent," Carlin said. "Women's success in managerial roles is more often attributed to luck or effort than to ability. Yet their failures tend to be ascribed to lack of ability. For men, the logic is reversed. When men succeed, it is attributed to their ability, but when they fail it is chalked up to bad luck or lack of effort."

Carlin and research collaborators examined quarterly and yearly data from 1992 to 2016 from public and private polling firms for each country in the study: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, South Korea, Uruguay and Venezuela. The countries were selected in part because of their system of presidentialism, in which the executive branch is separate from the legislature, and presidents are elected by the public. Many countries that have had female prime ministers or heads of state, such as the United Kingdom and Scandinavian nations, were not part of the study.

The article, "Presidents' Sex and Popularity: Baselines, Dynamics and Policy Performance," is published by the *British Journal of Political Science*.

**More information:** Ryan E Carlin et al. Presidents' Sex and Popularity: Baselines, Dynamics and Policy Performance, *British Journal of Political Science* (2019). [DOI: 10.1017/S0007123418000364](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000364)

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