

Thirteen Percent of Americans Find Men Better Suited Emotionally than Most Women for Political Office, Says New Analysis from Georgetown University

People with higher levels of education show less bias against female politicians

(Washington, DC, April 16, 2019) A record number of women are competing for the presidential nomination in 2020, but gender bias stands to affect their chances of election. A new analysis from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW), *May the Best Woman Win?: Education and Bias against Women in American Politics*, shows that women who run for office start 13 percentage points behind men in judgments of whether they are emotionally suited for office. While this gap has narrowed in recent decades by 37 percentage points, it could be the decisive factor in elections.

The CEW researchers explored how sex, age, income, race, political affiliation, and education level might relate to opinions of women's emotional suitability to be president, and found that education level strongly predicts the degree of bias. Americans with less than a high school diploma are almost twice as likely as those with a bachelor's degree—and nearly three times as likely as those with a master's degree or higher—to doubt women's emotional suitability for politics. At the same time, since the 1970s, this doubt has decreased across all education levels.

“In a fair contest, the American ideal is that talent ought to rise to the top,” said Anthony P. Carnevale, director of CEW and lead author of the report. “But gender stereotyping could sway voters from electing the most capable and qualified leaders.”

Differences in bias by age were much smaller in 2018 than in the past, particularly when comparing older and younger women. In 1974, 55 percent of older women (over age 35) voiced bias against women in politics, compared to 34 percent of younger women (age 35 and below). In 2018, that gap had closed substantially, with 16 percent of older women and 13 percent of younger women indicating that men were better suited emotionally for politics.

Researchers found generally small and inconsistent differences by race. Since the 1970s, Blacks generally have been slightly more likely than Whites to say that men are better suited emotionally for politics than women. However, that hasn't always been true: Whites were more likely than Blacks to say men are more suited emotionally for politics than women as recently as the early 2000s.

“Men and women don't yet have a level playing field in politics, but a future in which a woman's suitability for political leadership is not called into question may be within reach” said Nicole Smith, chief economist at CEW and co-author of the report. “The correlation between lower levels of bias and higher levels of education suggests that education could play a role in further reducing intolerance.”

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Other Key Findings:

- Nineteen percent of Americans with less than a high school diploma said that men are generally better suited emotionally for politics than most women, compared to 7 percent of respondents who had a master's degree or higher.
- In the 1970s, older women (those over age 35) were the most likely to express bias against women in politics, followed by older men, then younger men (age 35 and below), and, finally, younger women—but the differences between groups have shrunk over time.
- Income level does not generally predict tolerance of women in politics. Those with annual family incomes below \$75,000 used to express more bias against women in politics than those with annual family incomes above \$75,000, but those differences have largely disappeared since about 2002.

For the full research brief, visit cew.georgetown.edu/womeninpolitics.

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