

Madame President: Changing Attitudes about a Woman President

As the front runner in the Democratic primary, Hillary Clinton has already come closer than any other woman to becoming President of the United States. From the earliest days of public opinion research, polls have been documenting the country's shift from rejection to skepticism to acceptance of the idea of a woman president. Changing public attitudes on female candidates for president, from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research archive:

Public willingness to vote for a woman

In 1937, the first time the public was asked by Gallup about its willingness to vote for a female president, the question included the caveat “if she were qualified in every other respect.”

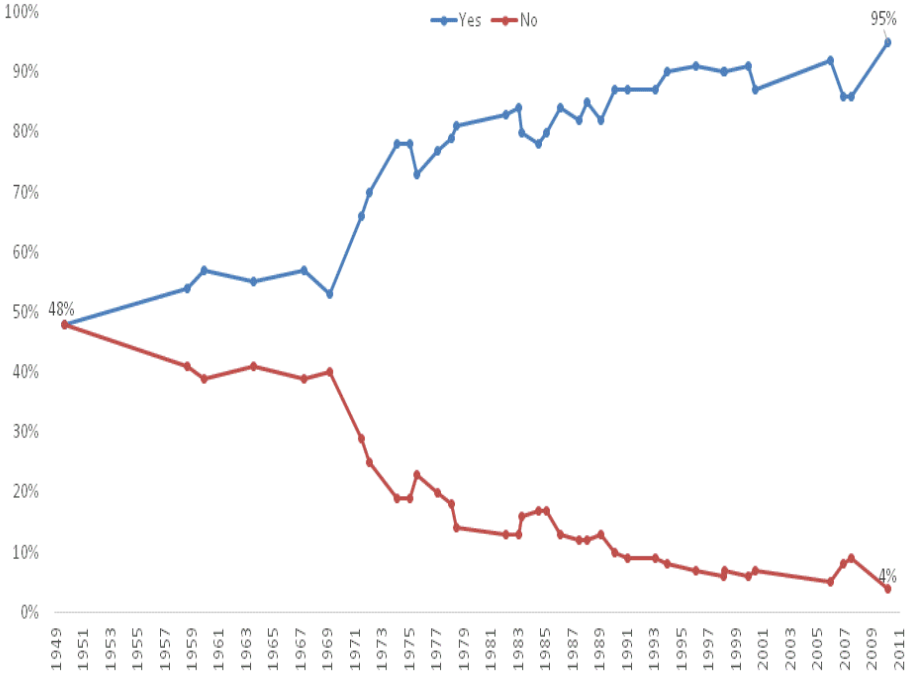
Gallup removed that phrase, with its implications, and tried a new version in 1945, asking, “If the party whose candidate you most often support nominated a woman for President of the United States, would you vote for her if she seemed best qualified for the job?” The results remained the same, with about one-third saying yes.

In 1948, the country was split on a new version of this question, which

identified the woman candidate as qualified, but not “best” qualified. The final wording became settled in 1958 and has been asked repeatedly since. Large gains were made over the 1970's and the proportion answering yes has continued to rise, reaching 95% in the most recent poll.

Vote for a Woman for President

If your party nominated a woman for president, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?*



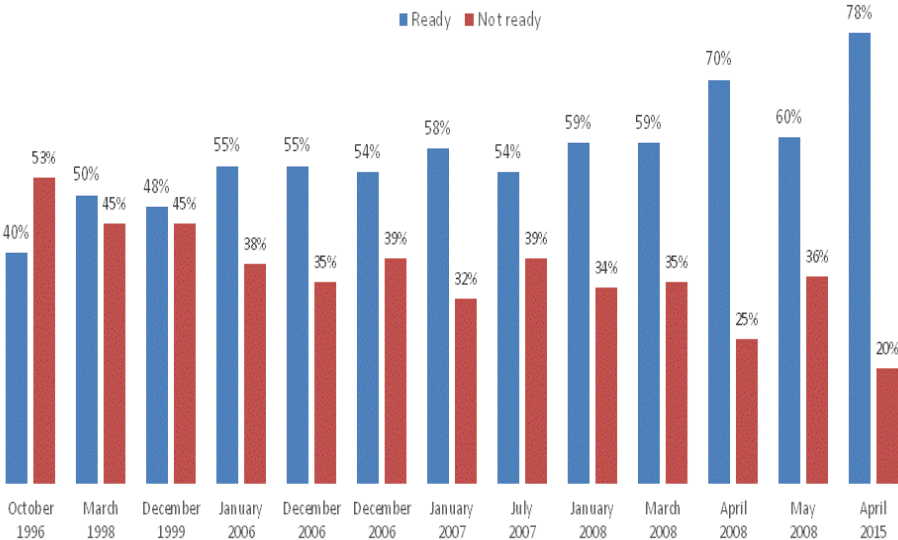
*1948: If the party whose candidate you most often support nominated a woman for President of the United States, would you vote for her if she seemed qualified for the job?

Roper Center data. Gallup 1949-1971, 1975, 1983, 1984, 1987; NORC 1972-1975, 1977, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1988-1991, 2010; Bureau of Social Science Research 1978; CBS 1998, 1999; NBC/WSJ 2000 (registered voters only); CBS/NYT 2006; PSRA/Newsweek 2006 (registered voters only), 2007.



Americans may say they are willing to vote for a woman, but when asked to assess the willingness of others, people have not been as optimistic about women's chances of winning the presidency. In 1984, when NBC asked likely voters if they were ready to elect a woman president, only 17% said yes. Substantial shares of the population have remained skeptical, though the most recent poll found the lowest proportion who believe the country is not yet ready.

Do you think the voters of this country are ready to elect a woman president, or don't you think so?



Erroneous expectations

The 20% saying the U.S. isn't ready to elect a woman president is similar to the proportion who said the same about an African-American president in an August 2008 Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll. Earlier polling indicated that a plurality of Americans once believed a female president was likely to be elected before a black president.

In a 1998 Shell poll asked Americans who they thought would be elected president of the United States first: a woman, a person under 40, a black, a Hispanic, or an Asian? Forty-one percent said a woman, 27% a person under 40, 22% a black, 4% a Hispanic,

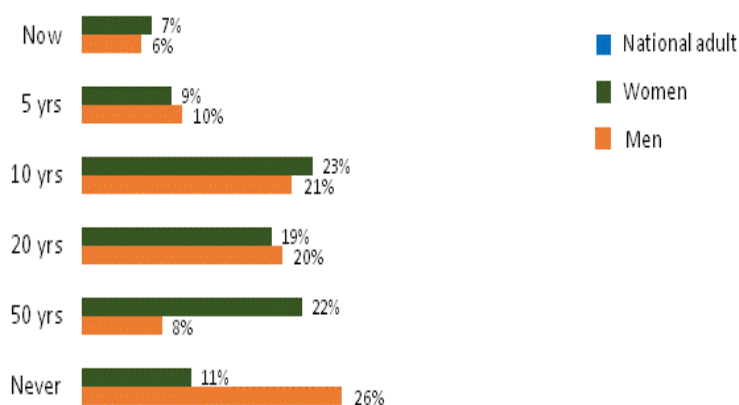
and 1% an Asian. A majority of the public has expected a woman president in the not-too-distant future since the 1970's.

When Will There Be a Woman President: Changing Expectations

Do you think a woman will be elected president of the United States at any time over the next 50 years? Gallup, 1949

Yes  31%

When do you think the country will be ready to elect a woman as president--now, in the next 5 years, in 10 years, in 20 years, 50 years, or never? Harris, 1971



Do you believe the voters will elect a woman president of the United States within the next 20 years or not? Gallup 1989

Yes  66%

I'm going to read some things that might or might not happen in the future. For each one, please tell me whether or not you expect it to happen in the next twenty-five years, that is, by 2025. How about...the country will have elected a woman president? Gallup 1998

Yes  46%

Overall, how long do you think it will be before a woman is elected president--within the next 10 years, within the next 25 years, within the next 100 years, sometime longer than that, or never? Gallup/CNN/USA Today, 2005

10 yrs  46%

25 yrs  41%

100 yrs  5%

Longer/never  7%

What do you think are the chances that a woman will be elected president in the next twenty years--excellent, good, not good or poor? CNN/ORC 2010

Excellent  27%

Good  54%

Not good  12%

Poor  75%



Questions asked during the 2008 primary season showed differing attitudes about the relative obstacles in becoming president. In a June 2008 CBS poll, 46% of registered voters said a woman faced greater obstacles than a black man, 32% said a black man did.

Willing – but not excited

Although the majority of Americans now say they are willing to vote for a woman, less than one-third express enthusiasm for doing so, and about one in seven people still express some reservations.

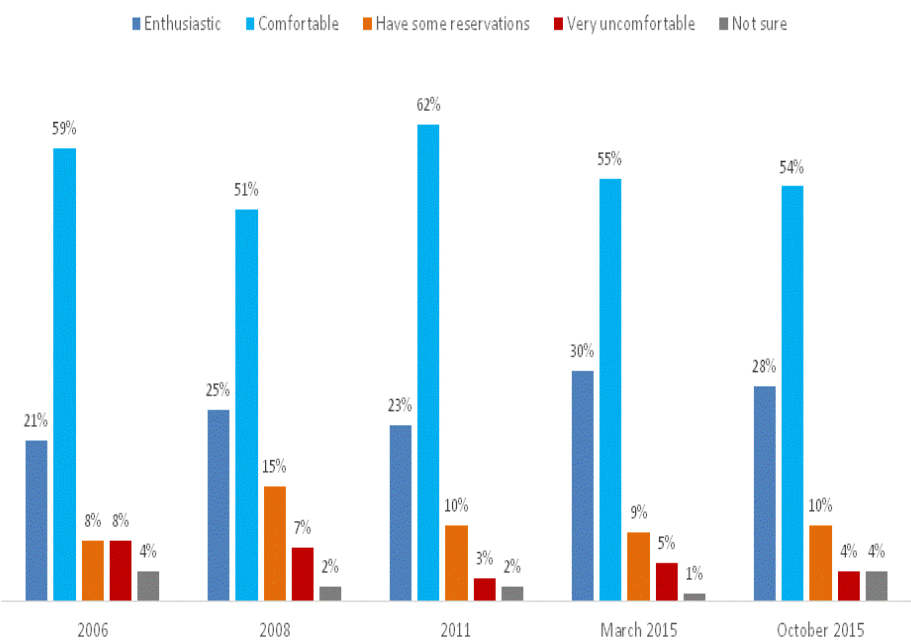
The potential to be the first female

president does not seem likely to help Hillary Clinton with voters. In an April 2015 Bloomberg poll, 12% of the public said the idea of electing the first woman president made them more inclined to vote for Clinton, and 4% said they were less inclined; 83% said it didn't matter much.

Enthusiasm for a Woman President?

Not thinking about any specific candidates, I'm going to list several types of people who might run for president. For each one, please tell me whether that type of candidate is someone you would be enthusiastic about, be comfortable with, have some reservations about, or be very uncomfortable with? A woman

% U.S. adults saying



Roper Center data. NBC/WSJ, Registered voters only 2006, 2008, 2015.

Women vs. men

Over the years, polls have tried to capture how Americans perceive gender differences in politics. In a 1971 poll, men and women largely agreed on how a female president might differ from a male president. Solid majorities of both expected that a woman president would be more sympathetic to the problems of the disadvantaged and do a better job of supporting arts and culture.

Smaller majorities agreed that a woman president might have a harder time dealing with crime and the economy. Roughly half thought the

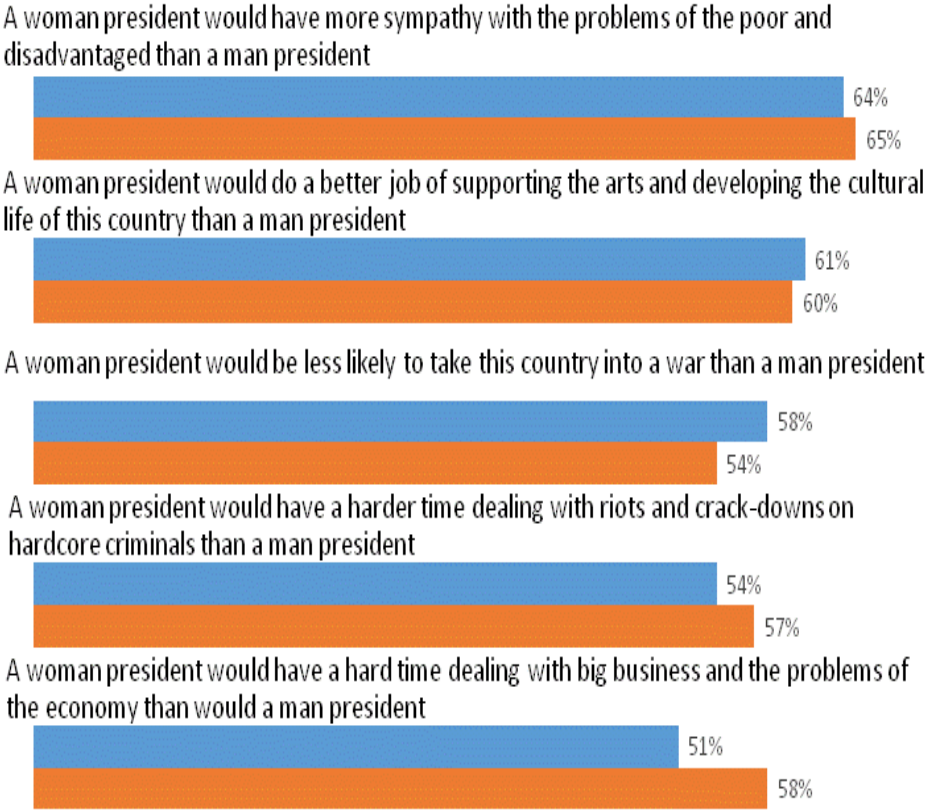
physical toll of the job might prove harder on a woman. Under four in ten thought a woman president would be more principled than her male counterpart.

Perceptions of a Woman President, 1971

I'm going to read you some statements people have made about what a woman president would be like. For each statement, would you tell me if you tend to agree or disagree.

% saying agree

■ Women ■ Men



The long hours and pressures of the presidency would wear a woman down more quickly than a man



A woman president would not be able to stand up to the Russians as well as a man president



A woman president would be less likely to compromise her ideals and principles than a man president



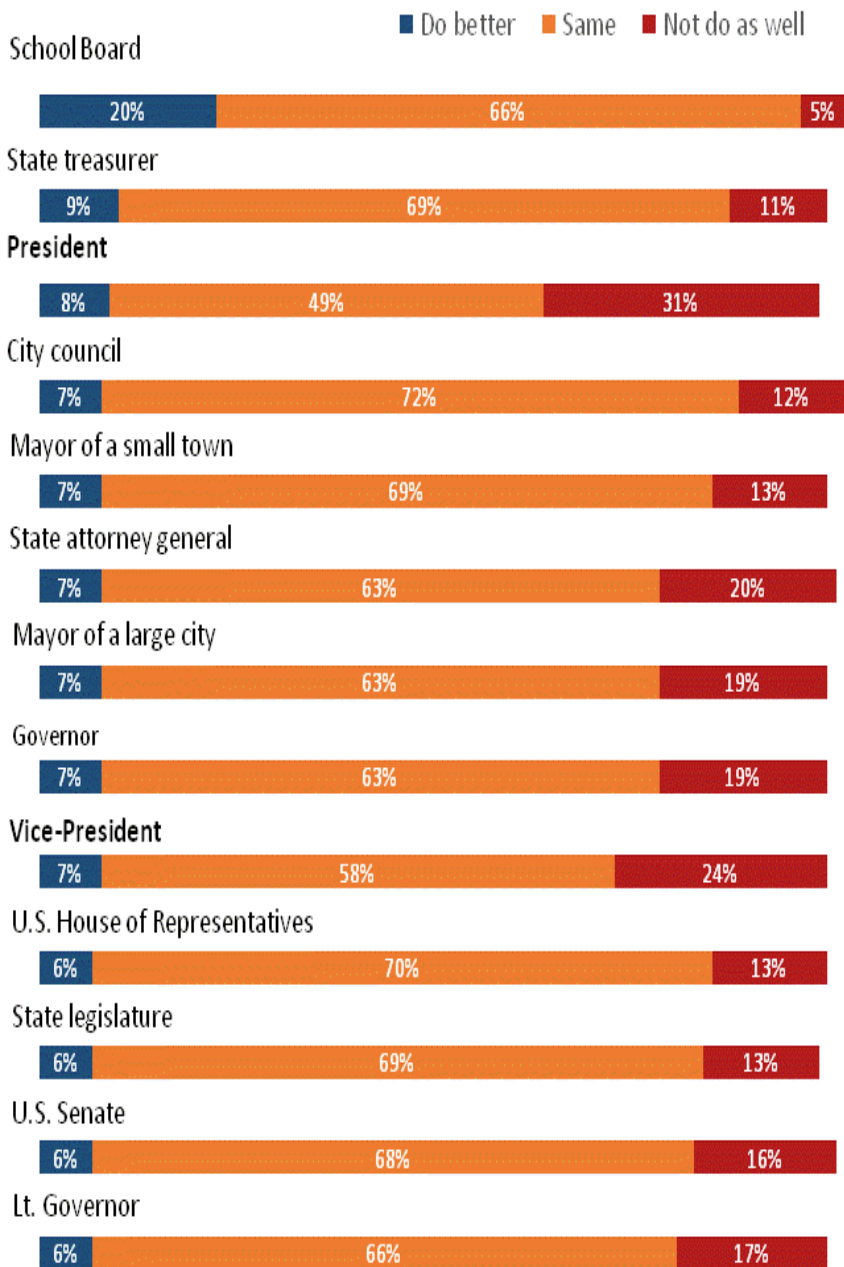
Roper Center data.
Virginia Slims/Louis Harris & Associates, 1971.



In 1987, solid majorities of Americans said that women would do an equally good or better job carrying out the responsibilities of political office from school board to U.S. Senate. But only 57% said so about the presidency, compared to 31% who said a woman would do a worse job, indicating that the presidency was still seen as substantially different from other political offices.

Perceptions of the Quality of the Job a Woman Would Do in Different Political Positions, 1987

As you know, people can run for different level political offices. As I read the following offices, think about the responsibilities of that office. Then tell me whether you think a woman would do a better job, the same job, or whether a woman would not do as well as a man at carrying out the responsibilities of that office



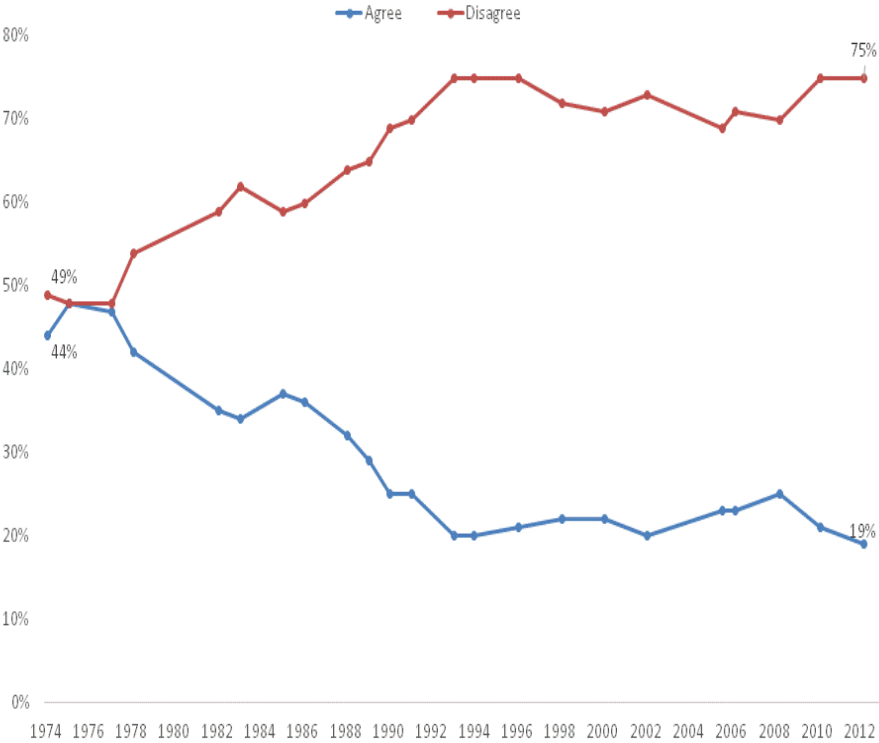
Roper Center data.
National Women's Political Caucus, 1987.



suitability for politics have changed over the decades that Americans have declared their willingness to vote for female candidates. Three-quarters of the public now disagree with the proposition that men are better suited for politics, while only 19% agree.

American Attitudes about Whether Women Are Emotionally Suited for Politics

Now I'd like to read you some statements people have made about women and politics. For each, would you tell me if you tend to agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly... Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women



Roper Center data NORC polls, 1974-2012



While the vast majority of Americans now say they would vote for a female candidate, ongoing perceptions about emotional suitability among a fifth of the public remain a significant obstacle. In presidential politics, where differences in enthusiasm translate to differences in turnout, and where small margins can make the difference between victory and defeat, lingering reservations about a woman president can have a profound impact.

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