



## **Perceptions of Gender and Political Leadership in Canada** *Exploring Obstacles to More Equal Representation*

**REPORT**  
**SEPTEMBER 6, 2019**

### **Overview**

Women currently make up fewer than a third of the members of the House of Commons. New survey data collected by the Environics Institute suggest that one obstacle to recruiting more female candidates for public office is the difference in the degree to which men and women see themselves as qualified to run for election, and the extent of the encouragement that they receive to do so. A majority of younger men feel qualified to hold an elected office, compared to only one in three younger women. And younger men are twice as likely as younger women to say they have been personally encouraged to become a candidate. The survey also shows that younger Canadians (and younger men in particular) are more likely than their parents or grandparents to think that men make better political leaders than women. More will need to be done to promote gender equality than simply waiting for change to come with the passage of generations over time.

### **Background**

Every summer, the country's provincial and territorial premiers meet to try to focus the public's attention on the many things they are doing right and a few of the things they believe the federal government is doing wrong. The most talked about aspect of this year's meeting, however, had nothing to do with the issues the premiers discussed or communiqués they published. For many, what stood out was the fact that, for the first time in over a decade, the premiers were all men.

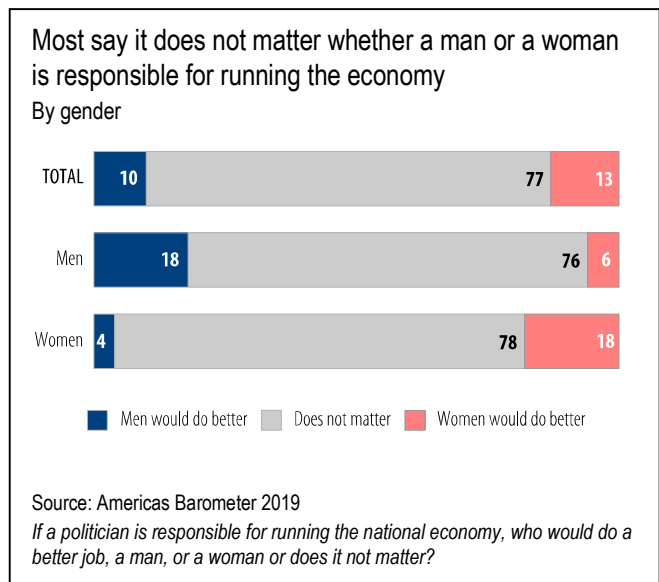
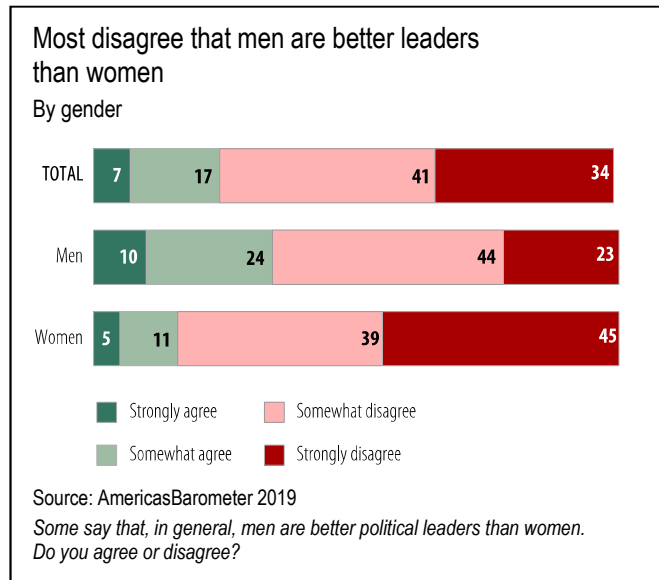
The absence of any women among the country's first ministers serves to highlight the more general and persistent challenge of recruiting more women to run for public office. Despite having achieved gender balance within the federal cabinet, women continue to be under-represented in legislatures across the country at every level of government. On the eve of the federal election, women currently make up fewer than a third of the members of the House of Commons.

New survey data collected by the Environics Institute as part of the AmericasBarometer project provide some evidence about the obstacles to greater gender parity in our political institutions.

## Perceptions of Gender and Political Leadership

At first glance, the problem does not seem to be one of general resistance to the idea of having women as political leaders.

- Three in four (76%) Canadians *disagree* with the proposition that, in general, men are better political leaders than women.
- A similar proportion (77%) thinks that it makes no difference whether a man or a woman is responsible for running the national economy. Only 10 percent think that a man would do a better job running the economy than a woman, which is slightly lower than the 13 percent who say a woman would do a better job than a man.
- While most Canadians (71%) see no difference between men and women politicians in terms of their likelihood of engaging in corruption, one in four (24%) say that a man would be more likely to be corrupt than a woman. Only four percent think that a female leader is more likely to be corrupt.



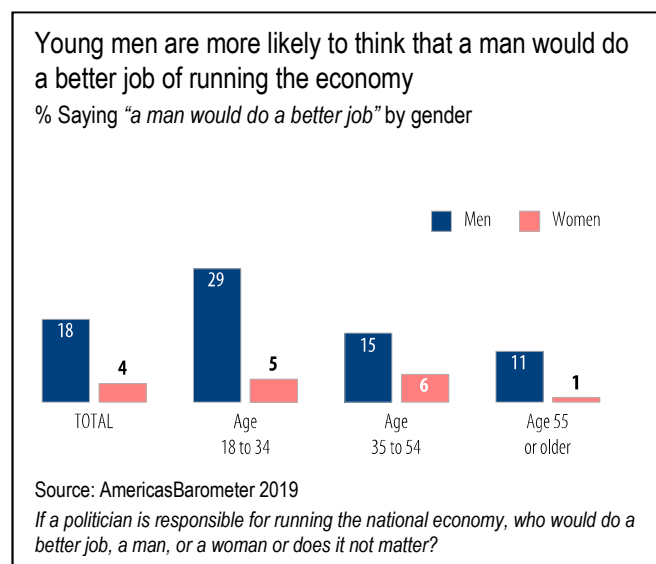
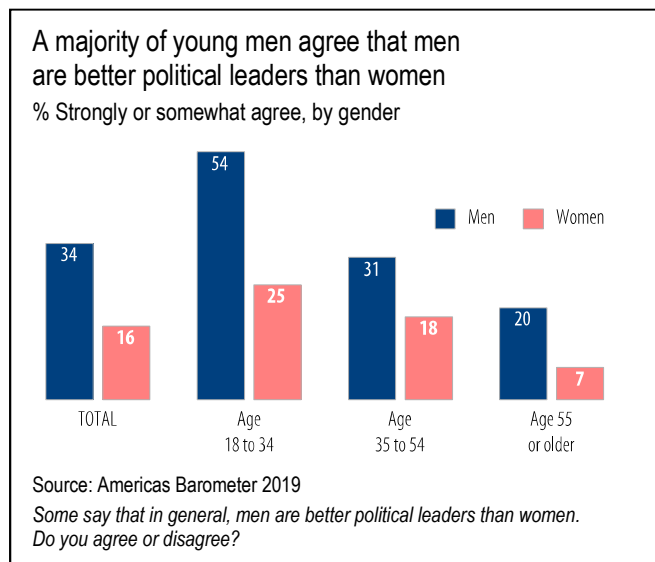
Disagreement with the proposition that men are better political leaders than women is, not surprisingly, stronger among women, at 84 percent. But two in three (66%) men also disagree. When it comes to running the national economy, only 18 percent of men think that a man would do a better job, which is identical to the proportion of women who say that a woman would do a better job.

It may surprise some, however, to find that the belief in gender equality increases with age: younger Canadians are less likely than their parents or grandparents to disagree with the idea that men are better political leaders than women.

- Disagreement among those between the ages of 18 and 34 is at 60 percent, compared to 75 percent for 35 to 54-year-olds, and 87 percent for those aged 55 and over.
- A majority (54%) of younger men (those between the ages of 18 and 34) *agree* with the idea that men make better leaders than women.

The view that men and women make equally good political leaders is also more prevalent among those born in Canada (77%) than among immigrants (69%). The difference between immigrants and non-immigrants on this question, however, is only really evident among women, especially younger women. Among men age 18 to 34, for instance, just over one in two of both immigrants (54%) and non-immigrants (55%) agree that men make better political leaders than women. But among women in this age group, immigrants (43%) are twice as likely as non-immigrants (21%) to agree (see Appendix Table, on the last page).

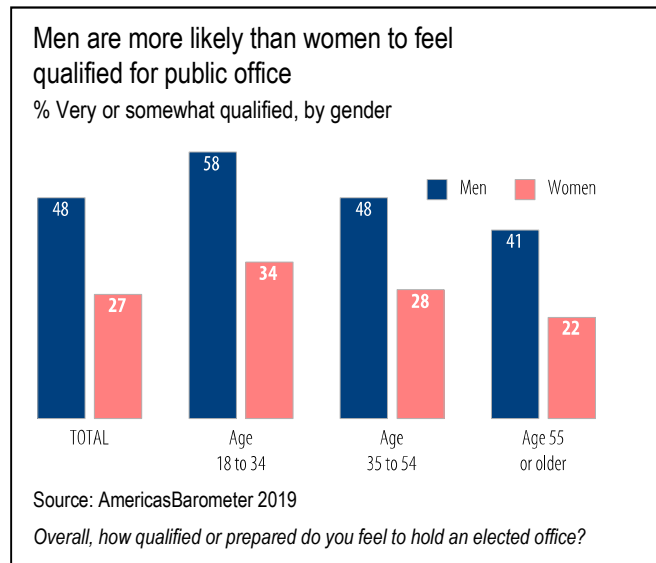
To recap, while most Canadians see no difference between male and female politicians, younger Canadians, and especially younger men, are less likely than their older counterparts to see male and female political leaders as equally qualified. To those seeking gender parity in politics, these findings suggest that it will not suffice to simply wait for change to come with the passage of generations over time.



## Self-Confidence and Encouragement

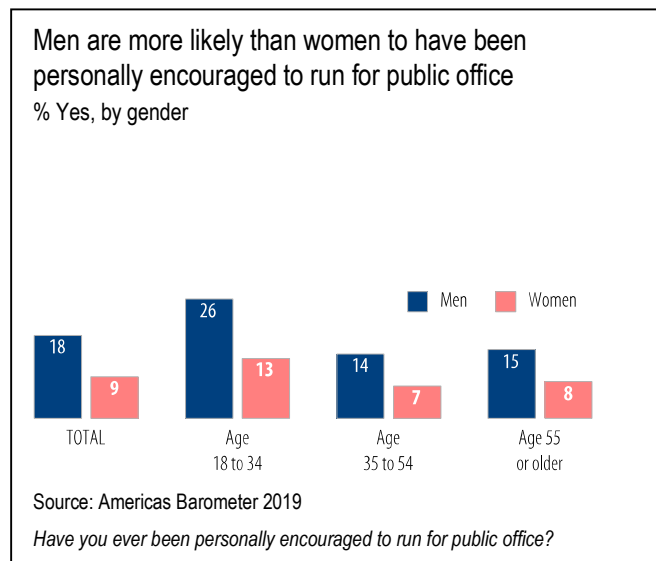
That said, the main obstacle to recruiting more female candidates for public office is likely not the public's general attitudes toward male and female politicians, but rather the differences in how men and women perceive themselves.

- Asked about how qualified or prepared they feel to hold an elected office (for example, as a member of parliament, mayor or city council member), men in Canada are more or less evenly divided: 48 percent feel very or somewhat qualified, while 51 percent feel only a little or not at all qualified.
- Women, on the other hand, are much less confident: only 27 percent see themselves as very or somewhat qualified, compared to 72 percent who feel only a little or not at all qualified.
- A majority (58%) of younger men (between the ages of 18 and 34) feel very or somewhat qualified to hold elected office. This compares to only one in three (34%) younger women.



Not only are men more confident in their own abilities, but they are also more likely than women to have been encouraged by somebody else to run for public office.

- Overall, only 13 percent of Canadians say they have been personally encouraged to run for public office.
- Men (18%) are twice as likely as women (9%) to have been encouraged to stand for election.
- Younger men (26%) – between the ages of 18 and 34 – are also twice as likely as younger women (13%) to say they have been personally encouraged to run for public office.



Those who have been encouraged to run are most likely to say that they received this encouragement from family, friends or colleagues; from community or political leaders; or from their employers. The survey data suggest that there is ample scope for all of these actors to direct more of their encouragement toward potential female candidates. The data also confirm that there is a strong relationship between being personally encouraged to run for public office,

and feeling qualified. Four in five (79%) of those who have been encouraged to run say they feel qualified or prepared to hold an elected office, compared to 31 percent of those who have not been encouraged.

Finally, the survey asked Canadians how concerned they would be about the possibility of losing their income or work while they ran for office. Overall, just over one in two (53%) would be extremely or seriously concerned, which is slightly higher than the proportion that would be somewhat or not concerned (47%). But there is no significant difference in the views of men and women on this question: 52 percent of men would be extremely or seriously concerned, as would 55 percent of women.

The personal economic trade-offs involved in the decision to run for office are an obstacle for many potential candidates, but the survey data do not point to this as a major factor in explaining the gender gap in our political leadership.

## Toward Gender Equality

By the end of October of this year, Canadians will have elected a new group of MPs – a group that will likely include more women than ever before. If we are going to achieve gender parity in our legislatures, however, more will need to be done to encourage women, particularly younger women, to see themselves as qualified for elected office, and to make the decision to run. Men are twice as likely to be personally encouraged to become candidates in elections in Canada; and as long as this is the case, it should come as no surprise that they are more likely than women to picture themselves as qualified to hold public office. At the same time, while most Canadians think that men are no better than women when it comes to political leadership, the attitudes of young men stand out as an exception – one that underscores the need to continue the public discussion about gender equality.

## Data Source

*The survey was conducted in Canada by the Environics Institute, in English and French, using an established online panel with a representative sample of 1,508 Canadians (aged 18 and over) between June 27 and July 10, 2019. The sample was weighted by region, age and gender to match the country's population, based on the 2016 Census. These data constitute the Canadian component of the larger AmericasBarometer 2019 survey, which covers 23 countries spanning the western hemisphere.*

## Appendix Table

| <b><i>Some say that in general, men are better political leaders than women. Do you strongly [agree/disagree]?</i></b> |           |                           |                 |              |                 |              |                 |
|--|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
|  |           | <b>Both Men and Women</b> |                 | <b>Men</b>   |                 | <b>Women</b> |                 |
|  |           | <b>Agree</b>              | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> |
| Born in Canada   | All ages  | 23                        | 77              | 34           | 67              | 14           | 86              |
| Born outside of Canada   | All ages  | 31                        | 69              | 36           | 65              | 27           | 73              |
| Born in Canada   | Age 18-34 | 38                        | 62              | 55           | 45              | 21           | 78              |
| Born outside of Canada   | Age 18-34 | 48                        | 52              | 54           | 46              | 43           | 57              |
| Born in Canada   | Age 35-54 | 23                        | 77              | 31           | 69              | 16           | 84              |
| Born outside of Canada   | Age 35-54 | 32                        | 68              | 33           | 67              | 32           | 68              |
| Born in Canada   | Age 55+   | 13                        | 88              | 19           | 81              | 7            | 94              |
| Born outside of Canada   | Age 55+   | 14                        | 86              | 19           | 81              | 10           | 90              |

