

# GENDER AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT MAYORAL CANDIDATES

Municipal politics is viewed as being more open to women, but **gender imbalance persists** even at this level of office. Female candidates receive no benefit from their perceived competence in feminine policy areas, and voters are significantly more likely to dislike female candidates' traits and issues priorities than those of male candidates.



## EXPLANATION

Trait stereotypes capture candidates' perceived qualities, while issue stereotypes relate to the policies voters believe candidates will prioritize. Municipal government may be stereotyped as more feminine, but leadership is stereotyped as masculine. As a result, female mayoral candidates are disadvantaged by gendered trait and issue stereotypes even when they run at the level of office perceived to be most open to them.

## METHOD

This research is based on the Canadian Municipal Election Study, which surveyed 14,438 voters in eight Canadian cities during municipal elections in 2017 and 2018. Respondents were asked an open-ended question about what they liked and disliked about the mayoral candidates running in their city. These responses were coded and analyzed to understand how gendered stereotypes influence voters' assessments of mayoral candidates' traits and issue priorities.

## RESULTS

The differences are small, but respondents give **more positive trait and issue evaluations to male candidates** than female candidates.

Overall, **female mayoral candidates are more likely to receive negative comments** about traits and issues.

Voters are more likely to use **feminine trait descriptors** to evaluate female candidates than male candidates.

Female candidates receive **fewer positive** comments about **feminine policy issues** and **more negative** comments about **masculine policy issues** than their male counterparts.

Respondents who **dislike** female candidates describe them negatively using **more masculine terms**.



## IMPLICATIONS

Feminine traits do not explicitly disadvantage female mayoral candidates, but they also **do not offer a boost**. Women face a **backlash** when they demonstrate more masculine trait and issue competencies, and they gain **no competitive edge** from their assumed competence in more feminine policy areas.

**Why?** Voters rely on feminine trait descriptors to evaluate female mayoral candidates. This linkage is often positive but offers **little advantage** in mayoral contests because leadership is synonymous with masculine traits.

On both traits and issues, female mayoral candidates are waging an uphill battle. There is **little evidence** gendered stereotypes about municipal politics **benefit women candidates** running for mayor.

## REFERENCES

Erin Tolley, Andrea Lawlor, and Alexandre Fortier-Chouinard. 2022. 'Whiny, Fake, and I Don't Like Her Hair': Gendered Assessments of Mayoral Candidates. Urban Affairs Review, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874221090874>  
<https://erintolley.ca/gendered-perceptions-mayoral-candidates/>  
Infographic by Michelle Liang

