

What's Holding Women Back From Top Jobs?

Issues around gender discrimination in the workplace, in politics, in the military, in sports, and in other aspects of our national life in America have received widespread attention in recent years. Many women have experienced what has been called “the glass ceiling” in terms of leadership advancements. Pay inequality and the decline in women's rights are often cited as indications of the gender discrimination that continues to exist across many sectors of our society. Recent surveys about the perceptions of women in leadership roles, particularly in business and national politics, reveal some insights into what may be holding women back in terms of top corporate jobs and leadership roles in government.

Survey Findings- Public Says Women are Equally Qualified, but Barriers Persist

- Most Americans find women indistinguishable from men on key leadership traits such as intelligence and capacity for innovation, with many saying they're stronger than men in terms of being compassionate and organized leaders.
- Rather than having a lack of management skills or problems balancing life-work, topping the list of reasons, [about four-in-ten Americans point to a double standard for women seeking to climb to the highest levels of either politics or business, where they have to do more than their male counterparts to prove themselves.](#)
- Even in the face of advances women have made in the workplace, most men and women believe the imbalance in corporate America will not change in the foreseeable future.
- When it comes to characteristics that apply specifically to political and business leadership, most Americans don't distinguish between men and women. But among those who do draw distinctions, women are perceived to have a clear advantage over men in some key areas. Women are seen to have better ability to compromise while men are seen as being more risk takers and more decisive. Women are also seen as being more ethical in business dealings than men are.
- As the 114th Congress gets underway, a record number of women (104) will be serving in the House and Senate. Today women make up 19% of the Congress, about double the share from 20 years ago. Progress has been slower on the corporate front. Only 26 women are now serving as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies—roughly 5%. In 1995 there were none. Women are slightly better represented in corporate boardrooms than they are at the CEO level. As of 2013, about one-in-six board members of Fortune 500 companies (17%) were women, up from 10% in 1995
- The pipeline for female leaders seems to be widening. Women have made significant gains in educational attainment in recent decades, better positioning themselves not only for career success but also for leadership positions. Since the 1990s, women have outnumbered men in both college enrollment and college completion rates, reversing a trend that lasted through the 1960s and '70s. And women today are more likely than men to continue their education after college.
- For women, the issue of having more female leaders goes far beyond equality in the workplace. 38% of women say having more women in top leadership positions in business and government would do a lot to improve the quality of life for all women. Only 19% of men say having more women in top leadership positions would do a lot to improve all women's lives.
- When it comes to the barriers that may be holding women back from achieving greater representation in the top leadership ranks, women are much more likely than men to point to societal and institutional factors such as the country not being ready to elect more female political leaders and women being held to higher standards than men in business and in government. Patriarchal attitudes about the superiority of males that have been rooted for millennia in religion, social norms, and political life also represent barriers for women to be given leadership roles. The gender gaps in perceptions about political leadership are especially

sharp. Whether on compromise, honesty, backbone, persuasion or working for the benefit of all Americans, women are more likely than men to say female leaders do a better job. For their part, solid majorities of men say there aren't major differences between men and women men in these areas.

- Women are far more likely than men to see gender discrimination in today's society. [About two-thirds \(65%\) of women say their gender faces at least some discrimination in society today, compared with 48% of men who believe women face some discrimination.](#) A double-digit gender gap on perceptions of gender discrimination is evident across all generations as well as across partisan groups.
- Women and men are seen as equally good business leaders, but gender stereotypes persist. Most Americans (54%) say men would do a better job running a professional sports team, while just 8% say women would be better at this. But the public is two and a half times more likely to say a woman, rather than a man, would do a better job running a major hospital or a major retail chain.
- As of November 2014, 57% of women were in the labor force, only 12 percentage points lower than the share for men (69%). Women account for about half of the U.S. labor force (47% in November 2014). However, when it comes to leadership positions, women have made only modest progress in gaining top leadership positions in the business world. Today, 26 women are serving as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies (5.2%). The share serving as CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies is virtually the same (5.4%)
- Women have also made significant progress in traditionally male-dominated professional fields. Today, about one-in-three (34%) professionals in the legal field are women, and so are one-in-five partners in private law firms. Women also make up about a quarter of U.S. federal (24%) and state (27%) court judges. In addition, women account for 30% of the physician workforce in the country.
- Women continue to lag far behind men in the STEM industries of science, technology, engineering and math (only 13% of employed engineers). Young women are more likely than young men to graduate from college nowadays.
- Despite all the progress women have made in educational settings and the workplace, a [gender wage gap](#) persists. In 2012, the median hourly earnings for female workers 16 and older were 84% of men's earnings. The gap is much smaller among young workers ages 25 to 34; women in this age group made about 93% of what men in this age group made.

Some Solutions

- Sheryl Sandberg, CEO of Facebook and now single mother shared 3 challenges for women on her Ted Talk, "Why We Have Too Few Women Leaders".
 - ✓ Sit at the Table: Join the men at the conference table, raise your hand, lean in.
 - ✓ Make your partner a real partner: Life partners should be 50/50
(Women do twice the housework and 3x the childcare)
 - ✓ Don't leave before you leave : Keep your foot on the gas pedal. Don't make plans that hinder your advancement before you even have children. Most women back off way too early. To leave a child and go back to work you need a challenging job you love.

"If half of the countries and half of the companies were run by women it would be a better world."

Sheryl Sandberg

Data taken from Pew Research Center - www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/01/14/chapter-1-women-in-leadership/ January 14, 2015