

Benenson Strategy Group conducted an online survey with 800 likely 2020 voters from July 10-15, 2019 to investigate what electability means to voters. Below are the top findings.



To voters, electability is about empathy, toughness, and substance.

Having a deep understanding of the challenges Americans face is the single biggest indicator of electability to voters. A strong debate showing, evidence of being able to go toe-to-toe against the opposition, and well-thought out policy proposals are close behind.

Indeed, for Democratic and Independent voters, debate performance and policy chops are on par with understanding challenges and going toe-to-toe with the opposing candidate.

The top signals of electability:

% who say candidate demonstrating this is *much* more likely to win

	Party Identification			
	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
Having a deep understanding of the challenges that average Americans face	55	56	46	63
Being able to go toe-to-toe with the opposing candidate in the general election	53	59	45	53
Showing they can hold their own against other candidates in a debate	48	53	46	46
Having many well-thought out policy proposals	47	48	45	47
Being good at connecting with people in large crowds or at rallies	46	47	43	47

Here are some different traits or personal experiences that a candidate for President might have. In your opinion, please indicate whether this particular trait would make someone more or less likely to win a presidential election. *Answer choices: Much more likely, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely, much less likely, or no impact*

By contrast, few voters consider the “beer test” or fundraising advantages when determining electability.

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Some of pundits’ favorite markers of electability – social affability and fundraising prowess – do not factor into many voters’ evaluations of which candidates they believe can win the White House. While news stories continue to be written about how likeable different candidates are, voters are looking more to candidates who get them and get their lives. While we saw ‘deep understanding of the challenges that average Americans face’ as the strongest indicator of electability, ‘someone you could get a drink or coffee with’ fell to the bottom tier.

Weak signals of electability:

% who say candidate demonstrating this is *much* more likely to win

	Party Identification			
	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
Seeming like the type of person you personally would like to get a drink or coffee with	29	28	25	34
Raising millions from small dollar donations	28	27	24	33
Raising more money than other candidates	24	24	24	25

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More than half of voters have heard the media talk about how *women* candidates are unelectable...

- 56% say they’ve heard the media talk about women candidates being unelectable
 - Though of course, 75% also heard them say the current President is unelectable.
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...But about 8 in 10 voters reject the idea that the country isn't ready to elect a female president.

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Voters look at the last few years and overwhelmingly conclude that we shouldn't listen to people who think they can predict which types of candidates are electable. When asked which they agree with more about what the last several years in America have shown us:

- 78% say “We can't predict what types of candidates are actually electable and shouldn't listen to people who say we can”
- Just 22% say “The country just isn't ready to elect a female president and that's not going to change in the next two years”

Among Democratic primary voters, 81% agree that “We can't predict what types of candidates are actually electable and shouldn't listen to people who say we can”

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Our research did reveal one way Democrats and Republicans are alike: both are more likely to think it's important to appeal to swing voters than the base.

- 35% of Democrats and 35% of Republicans say that “sharing the same views as the activists or ‘base’ of their party” makes a candidate much more likely to win a presidential election.
 - But almost half (47% of Democrats and 49% of Republicans) say that having the most appeal with general election swing voters makes a candidate much more likely to win.
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