In most of the countries surveyed, a majority of the public agrees or strongly agrees that men make better political leaders than women.

![Figure 4.2](image-url)

**Figure 4.2** In most of the countries surveyed, a majority of the public agrees or strongly agrees that men make better political leaders than women.

Three reasons women politicians are likely to approach politics differently

**Women’s motivation for entering politics is often different from that of men.** In the IPU survey, 40 per cent of the respondents stated that they had entered politics as a result of their interests in social work and 34 per cent through non-governmental organizations, as opposed to the more ‘conventional’ path of party politics often embraced by men. This finding accurately reflects a well-established tendency among women to engage in civil society as a way of promoting projects that support their families, and to focus their energies at the local level.

**Women are often exposed to different patterns of socialization and have different life experiences than men and are likely to bring their experience and expertise to bear on their political decisions.** While impar- tant changes have been taking place over the past few decades, in most countries, women still bear the main caregiving responsibilities for their families, including children and the elderly.

**Women are more likely to see themselves as representatives of women.** A study of legislators in the United States, for example, found that women feel a special responsibility to represent other women and consider themselves more capable of representing their interests. In Northern Ireland, for example, almost one third of women who vote thought a woman would better represent their interests. Why are there still so few women in politics? Given their potential contribution to the political process, an obvious ques- tion arises: Why then are there still so few women participating in politics? The answer is multifaceted and differs across countries, societies and communities. But several common threads are outlined below.

**Women are unlikely to run for political office.** While exact numbers are difficult to come by, existing studies indicate that women are less likely than men to run for office. In the United States, for example, men are at least 50 per cent more likely to have investigated how to place their name on the ballot, or to have dis- cussed running with potential donors, party or community leaders, family members or friends.

**Double burden of public and private responsibilities:** As the preceding chapters have shown, women’s work burdens are generally much heavier than men’s, leaving less time and energy for involvement in political life. In the United States, evidence shows that as women’s responsibili- ties for household tasks and care- giving decrease, their interest in running for office increases.

**A culture of exclusion:** In many countries, political and financial networks are controlled by men. Cultural practices that serve to nur- ture and consolidate bonds of male solidarity within these networks, such as drinking, smoking or golf- ing, are key stepping stones on the path to political office. A study in Thailand found that men typically dominate recruitment committees and tend to bypass women candi- dates, both in order to retain a structure they are familiar with and because they are more likely to know the male candidates personally.

**Higher participation in education:** Those women who run for office successfully, especially in develop- ing countries, tend to be educated to tertiary level at least. Out of the 187 women from 66 countries sur- veyed by the IPU in 1999, 73 per cent held an undergraduate degree and 14 per cent also held graduate degrees. The lack of women educated to tertiary levels in many countries can therefore act as a barrier to their par- ticipation in politics and government.

Women face an uphill struggle to win over public opinion. There are very few statistics about how many women run but fail to get elected.

Voter perceptions, however, can offer an instructive indication. On average, more than half the people surveyed in East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa agreed or strongly agreed that men make better political leaders than women, with three quarters sharing that view in the Middle East and North Africa. However, in other parts of the world, the evidence is more positive. For example, two of every five respondents worldwide thought that women could be a good prime minister.

Why are there still so few women in politics?

**Myth 1: Every woman will make a difference for women and for chil- dren.** Just because a legislator is a woman does not mean she will automatically promote legislation that matically promote legislation that advances the interests of women and children. Women in politics are individuals who can fall anywhere on a wide spectrum of personality and ideology. Women legislators are accountable to constituencies that represent a wide variety of back- grounds and interests, and may also blamed them for the inadequate quality of services outside of their jurisdiction. Perhaps unsurprisingly, about half of the respondents said they would not run again. In Afghanistan, women candidates in the 2005 elec- tion were subject to violence and, in some instances, death threats.

**Myths about women in politics**

Myths about women in politics, both positive and negative, abound. Because such myths rely on unreal- istic assumptions about women and politics, they can easily perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination. Two such myths are discussed below.

**Myth 2: Women are unsuited to the ‘hard’ jobs.** A 2005 IPU tally of min- isterial portfolios shows women counted 858 women ministers in 183 countries. The distribution of portfolios, however, is striking. While almost a third of all ministeri- al jobs held by women fell in the area of family, children, youth and social affairs or women’s affairs and education, women accounted for only 13 ministers of defence and 9 ministers of the economy worldwide (or 1.5 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively).

See References, page 88.