

“Why is the United States among the Last Countries to Have a Woman as Head of State?”

A 1910 headline in the Kansas newspaper *The Meade County News*, read, “Mere Man Faces Danger of a Woman Being President of the United States.”

A century ago, male writers looked upon the prospect of a woman president with trepidation.

In 1916, *The Washington Times* imagined what a female president would be like. It described a “disgusting loud-voiced woman, in trousers, with her hair cut short.”

In 1920, three weeks after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, a writer in *The New York Times* predicted that a woman would be elected president in 1924 or 1928. “With the voting power in the hands of anywhere from ten to fifteen million women of voting age,” wrote Benjamin De Casseres, “what is more probable than the formation of a woman’s national party with a candidate for President of their own in the field?” He observed that, “With the ratification by Tennessee of the Nineteenth Amendment man in America has become a mere remnant.”

In 1928, a writer in *The Los Angeles Times* predicted that by 1975, the United States would be transformed into a matriarchal society led by “a lady President of the United States with a lady Cabinet and a lady Senate. Men will have been relegated to the status of other domestic animals.”

In fact, women proved to be the one group of Americans who divided over the issue of whether women should receive the vote. A substantial bloc of women opposed woman suffrage.

The first woman to serve as head of state was Sirimavo Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka then known as Ceylon in 1960.

Since then, more than seventy nations have been led by a woman. The United States is not one of them.

In fact, the Chicago-born Janet Rosenberg Jagan, became president of Guyana in 1997.

In 2016, women led eighteen of 193 nations, including Germany and Britain.

Why not the United States?

Many of the earlier women presidents or prime ministers gained office as a result of family relationships. For example, the father of Indira Gandhi of India was one of the nation’s leaders. Some were chosen via parliamentary deal-making, not direct elections. Others were initially tapped as temporary leaders.

Attitudes toward the role of government may make a difference. Whereas in Europe, government is seen primarily as a provider of social welfare benefits, the U.S. president is viewed, first and foremost, as commander-in-chief.

It may also be that women in the United States have felt discouraged from pursuing high office.

There can be no doubt that the pipeline is expanding. Today, about 23 percent of all legislators are women worldwide, compared to 11 percent two decades earlier.

Do women govern differently? Some research suggests that the answer is yes. According to some scholars, women in politics tend to be more collaborative and bipartisan, and to focus on social issues more than men. In a new analysis of the 151,824 public bills introduced in the House between 1973 and 2014, to be published in print in *Political Science Research and Methods*, researchers found that women were significantly more likely than men to sponsor bills in areas like civil rights, health and education. But these bills are also more likely to die, perhaps because of gender bias.

Yet when women are in executive positions, the opposite is true: they are more hawkish than men. That could be in part because of a need to overcome stereotypes of women as weak.