


CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ARTICLE

Lessons Learned from Black Women’s Resilience and the 2024 Election

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Vice President Kamala Harris became the Democratic presidential nominee on August 23, 2024. Her campaign was significantly different than others. As the sitting vice president to Joe Biden, Harris’s campaign was shortened. She had less than 90 days to mount a formal campaign after her endorsement from Biden. In this essay, I take an intersectional analytical framework — accounting for how power in society is shaped by multiple axes of social division, including race, class, and gender, and not a single axis of identity (Collins and Bilge 2020, 2). I seek to explain the racial and gendered dynamics during the campaign, the activism of Black women voters leading up to Election Day, and Black women’s activism in the aftermath of the 2024 election. This essay highlights the resilience of Black women, evident in their political behavior and political attitudes in the 2024 presidential election campaign and aftermath. In Black women’s support for the Democratic Party, Democratic ticket, and Vice President Harris, we better understand how this pivotal base influences electoral politics and how race-gendered identities influence American politics overall.

In 2020, for the first time, the vice presidential nominee was a Black woman with an immigrant heritage and a multiracial South Asian identity. Anecdotally, this symbolic first energized many non-white women voters, but especially Black women. Black women voters were a crucial base for the Biden-Harris ticket, and over 90% of Black women voted for them (CNN 2020). For Vice President Harris in 2024, Black women voters were expected to support her with the same zeal, uplifting her as the frontrunner after Joe Biden stepped aside.

This essay tries to accomplish two modest tasks. The first is to discuss Black women’s resilience before the November 2024 election. In my research, I examine the role of resilience in American politics through developing a novel eight-item measure of racial resilience (Slaughter 2021). In my research, I’ve found that

racial resilience is associated with political engagement for Black Americans. Generally, resilience is defined as a process of “bouncing back” from adversity, through the process of emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, a sense of purpose, and social support (Seery et al. 2013). Navigating and adapting to adversity, stress, or trauma is considered a resilience. Black women voters demonstrated resilience through their willingness to publicly support the Democratic ticket as Biden and Harris’s approval ratings lagged. Second, Black women also demonstrated resilience through their industriousness in supporting Vice President Harris and through different mobilization strategies leading up to the election. Finally, Vice President Harris demonstrated resilience by centering her campaign messages on *joy* and *freedom*, which are both agentic themes.

The second task is to characterize Black women’s resilience in the aftermath of the November 2024 election. Following the Democrats’ electoral defeat, there was much speculation as to what led to decreased support among women voters and decreased support among Black male and Latino voters as electoral blocs. Harris’s defeat occurred across a diverse electorate, including segments of that electorate holding racist and sexist attitudes (Robertson and Tesler 2024). Yet despite the racist and sexist language from Trump during the campaign, Harris’s concession speech utilized resilience through themes of joy, freedom, and perseverance. Looking at the road ahead, she says, “the light of optimism, of faith, of truth and service, may that work guide us, even in the face of setbacks toward the extraordinary promise of the United States of America” (Panetta 2024).

Vice President Harris’s speech reflects the key traits of resilience, such as perseverance and optimism, that foster a hopeful outlook even in the face of daunting challenges. Resilience, as a psychological resource, can aid individuals to remain engaged in politics to sustain engagement despite setbacks, and even to envision change when the odds seem insurmountable. Resilience requires strength and perseverance, especially when facing difficult circumstances. Black women demonstrated resilience. Many, including me, expected a closer electoral outcome; some of us were so optimistic that we thought she could win. Despite it all, Black women collectively celebrated the accomplishments of Black women’s gains in the US Senate, where in 2025 two Black women serve concurrently for the first time in the history of the United States. In the aftermath of the Harris loss, Black women political actors have made calls for rest, revisiting how Black women form the base of Democratic politics. This is important since most Black women have consistently supported the Democratic party. Centering the role of resilience in American politics can be transformational for understanding the political attitudes and behaviors of marginalized groups that are set to benefit the most from societal change and remain steadfast participants in politics.

Black Women Supported Democracy and Democratic Principles

Black women voters, political leaders, and organizers were supporters of President Joe Biden’s presidential run until he exited the race in July 2024 and endorsed Vice President Harris (Berry 2025). One way that Black women demonstrated their political voice in the 2024 election was through letters signaling support for Biden. Only two weeks before Biden stepped down, Black women

organizational leaders proclaimed that it was “undemocratic, unjust, and disrespectful” for a candidate who had already received votes in the primary election to step aside due to fears of failure (Berry 2025). Fear of a second Trump presidency made defeating Donald Trump a top concern among Black women leaders. The letter urged the party to “focus on defeating the real threat to our democracy, and that is Donald Trump” (Berry 2025). They also implied that if Harris was overlooked for the top-of-the-ticket in the event Biden dropped out, it would seem that the votes of the millions of Black women who voted in the Democratic primary did not matter. For some Black women, any post hoc change to the presidential ticket would undermine the democratic will of voters and reflect a not-so-distant time ago in which Black women lacked the ability to elect candidates of their choice.

The letter from Black women leaders distinguishes their support for Biden from that of other racial-gender groups, who were less vocal in supporting Biden before he exited the race in July 2024. Democratic representatives urged Biden to patriotically step aside to change the trajectory of the less enthusiastic campaign (Hubbard and Quinn 2024). The initial calls to step down were from representatives Lloyd Doggett of Texas (July 2, 2024), a white male Democrat; Angie Craig of Minnesota (July 6, 2024), the first female Democrat; and Mark Vessey of Texas (July 19, 2024), the first Black male Democrat. Overall, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) defended Biden’s campaign, and Vessey’s call included a nod to Vice President Harris as a potential replacement.

In contrast, no Black woman representative in the CBC publicly spoke out against Biden. Initially, the circuiting of the primary process was not democratic and disregarded the Black women who staunchly supported President Biden at that time. Eventually, practicality prevailed, as Harris was the most viable replacement. However, most Black women set aside the possibility of another Democratic primary as the party rallied around the vice president, and Kamala Harris accepted the nomination at the Democratic National Convention in August.

Black Women Leveraged Unique Mobilization Strategies

Political mobilization — including get-out-the-vote, canvassing, and other forms of voter contact — increases participation among lower propensity voters. Interest groups, candidates, parties, and campaign organizations reach out to potential voters to generate excitement about the upcoming election, share information about candidates, register new voters, and share information about casting a ballot. Over the last several elections, women of color (WoC) have organized community-led, sorority-led political education initiatives, political action committees, coalitions, and informal networks on social media (Bejarano and Smooth 2022).

One national organization, the Win With Black Women network, a WoC-led organization, met weekly after Kamala Harris was selected as the vice presidential candidate in 2020. The group gained more publicity and recognition the night that Harris announced she would seek the Democratic nomination in 2024, raising over 1.4 million dollars in small donations (Haines and Gerson 2024). Black women candidates lack the same funding streams and donations as white

women candidates and do not abide by the same norms around political donations, rendering this fundraising effort more meaningful (Sanbonmatsu 2015). Win With Black Women also met weekly to disseminate a consistent message about Harris's qualifications to Black women across various networks to combat the racist and sexist messages that proliferated throughout media channels.

The Democratic Party has not prioritized the issues concerning Black women, nor have they invested much into Black women candidates, leading many Black organizations to pivot away from partisan politics. Black women receive fewer campaign donations compared to white women candidates, and similarly, Black women, on average, have fewer financial resources to contribute to political campaigns (Sanbonmatsu 2015). These are examples of the industriousness of WoC organizations to develop and create resources when the party failed to target the most loyal base of the party directly.

Black Women Faced Barriers to the Ballot Box

Despite enthusiasm for Harris's name at the top of the ticket, Black women across the states faced myriad barriers to participation, including addressing challenges such as voter apathy, especially in state-level politics. All women face obstacles to political participation, which require resilience to overcome, and Black women encounter additional barriers in states that have higher costs of voting. In 2024, WoC-led organizations, such as the Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable, an affiliate of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, acted as catalysts to voter engagement training for Black women by building a pipeline of Black women organizers, candidates, poll workers, and civic educators (Power of the Sister Vote: Boot Camp – MSBWR 2024).

The 2024 "SisterVote" project of the Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable sought to increase Black women's political power in a state where Black women face the highest levels of financial poverty, have higher rates of incarceration, and face more restrictive policies to uplift families from financial poverty. Local, state, and national politics are linked, and efforts like SisterVote seek to bring attention from national politics into local politics. Mississippi, like other states, has purged voters from the rolls, increased costs of voter registration, drawn voting maps that dilute Black voting strength, shortened or eliminated the early voting period, and limited no-excuse absentee voting (Stripping Away the Power of a Vote in Mississippi 2023). These financial and administrative barriers can lead to psychological barriers that decrease willingness to participate in elections. The SisterVote initiative demonstrates the creativity of WoC-led organizations to build talent among under-resourced but under-mobilized communities that can become more efficacious with greater investment. With so much emphasis placed on turnout in competitive and battleground states, building this capacity at the local level in a non-competitive state demonstrates a long-term strategy for fostering civic engagement among voters. It's highly unlikely that these efforts will lead to a change in Mississippi statewide politics by the next election, but investing in the community today can lead to changes down the road. This long-term investment builds the steadfastness of Black women voters to envision societal change.

Black Women Advocated for Rest and Recovery After the Loss

How did Black women exhibit resilience after Harris's electoral defeat? Black women advocated for rest and recovery but demonstrated persistence in the fight. In Harris's concession speech at her alma mater, Howard University, she remarked to a large crowd of supporters, "The outcome of this election is not what we wanted, not what we fought for, not what we voted for, but hear me when I say the light of America's promise will always burn bright, as long as we never give up and as long as we keep fighting" (Panetta 2024). In front of a crowd of over two thousand supporters, Harris urged her supporters to stay steadfast, remain active in their local communities, and uphold democratic ideals — even if she would not be the one to lead the nation forward.

Black women have had to remain resilient in the face of adversity, including electoral losses, and this spans recent decades (Slaughter 2021). In my own work, I demonstrated the importance of racial resilience for Black political behavior. Messages of resilience and perseverance stand out to inspire voters in a political landscape that often focuses on negative attributes and has a deficit approach to political engagement, highlighting what one candidate lacks. This is important as Kamala Harris's campaign themes centered on joy and freedom. These themes have been political and cultural statements in the face of adversity.

During her rallies, Harris's "walk out" song was a chart-topping Beyoncé anthem for resistance, where she sings, "Hey! I'mma keep running / Cause a winner don't quit on themselves." Released on her 2016 *Lemonade* album, the song "Freedom" exudes themes of resistance and protest to injustices. Harris inserts into the song, "There are some people who think we should be a country of chaos, of fear, of hate. But us, we choose something different. We choose freedom" (Harris 2024). The choice to center freedom is intentional. Groups have to exhibit resilience when there are systemic barriers to equal rights and protection in society. Harris's campaign materials and other song selections at campaign rallies highlighted joy as a form of defiance, particularly for WoC and marginalized communities, as a counter to the divisive narratives set forth by the Trump campaign. Rather than promoting a divisive message, Harris emphasized themes of unity and inclusion in her remarks. Her campaign rallies included performers, laughter, line dancing, and other cultural references that sought to center voters' agency to fight back. The optimism was infectious and considered a newer political rhetoric against the negative partisanship and attack ads.

This joy and resilience continued after the inauguration. When Trump was inaugurated in 2017, many women and their allies mobilized in Washington, DC, and across the country to center a feminist narrative in a misogynist administration (Crowder 2023). However, the 2025 inauguration lacked such mobilization efforts. Black women voters reflected on the fractured Democratic coalitions that failed to elect Kamala Harris, including Black men. Black women resisted saving democracy once again when others failed to support Kamala Harris.

In fact, voting rights activist Latosha Brown of Black Voters Matter said, "I have no goals to be a martyr for a nation that cares nothing about me" (Hunter 2024). Similarly, Kadida Kenner of the New Pennsylvania Project said, "[Black women] can't be the protectors and defenders of all people all the time" (Lopez 2024). These were calls for Black women voters, leaders, and politicians to

reevaluate how they respond to the Trump administration. While 92% of Black women supported Kamala Harris, only 46% of white women, 38% of white men, and 77% of Black men supported Harris. Most Latinas (58%) supported Harris, but most Latino men (58%) supported Trump. Other voters of color supported Harris (49%) by a narrow margin compared to their support for Donald Trump (47%). These gaps show the necessity of a race-gendered analysis in progressive and Democratic politics (CNN 2024). Black women did not engage in widespread protest after the inauguration but focused on joy and recovery after the election season concluded.

Black Women Celebrated Other Symbolic Firsts

While not breaking the double pane glass ceiling, Black women did accomplish historic victories in the 2024 election. The election of Angela Alsobrooks from Maryland and Lisa Blunt Rochester from Delaware in 2024 marks a historic milestone: for the first time in American history, two Black women are serving simultaneously in the US Senate. Before Alsobrooks and Blunt Rochester, only three Black women — Carol Moseley Braun, Kamala Harris, and Laphonza Butler — had ever served in this capacity. These senators have pledged their support to address issues impacting Black women, including maternal mortality, the race-gender pay gap, and voting rights legislation. Black women in politics scholars have demonstrated that when Black women enter elected office, they advocate on behalf of the entire community, centering Black women's voices (Brown 2014). They also can advocate for policies that address Black women's material conditions, joining the chorus of Black women legislators that do so. Shattering these barriers in the US Senate may trickle down to other statewide victories for Black women candidates in future elections or inspire Black women's political ambition to higher elected offices.

Conclusion

Black women candidates and voters demonstrated resilience in the 2024 election, not just in their roles behind the scenes but also through their public support for the Democratic ticket. Black women relied on a variety of tactics to mobilize voters. Yet still, women voters face many obstacles to voting, undermining their full potential to be influential in American politics. Race and gender play both complex and simplistic roles in electoral American politics, which renders an intersectional analysis “a mess worth making” (Smooth 2006, pg. 403).

On the simplistic front, racist and sexist attitudes lead voters of various racial and ethnic backgrounds to vote for an authoritarian, racist, and sexist president who first attempted to overthrow the Capitol and has proven committed to undermining democracy even further in his second term (Geiger and Reny 2024). On the complex front, candidates from marginalized and underrepresented racial and gender identities face barriers in politics that are not all measured by social scientists, rendering the impact of these identities invisible. Lastly, at the margins of race and gender identities, Black women have to persistently demonstrate resilience to remain relevant and steer Americans to democratic politics.

This essay suggests that Black women's perseverance and tenacity in politics results from their support for democracy and democratic principles, their unique and culturally relevant mobilization strategies, electoral campaigns that center on joy and freedom, advocacy for rest and recovery in the aftermath of the Harris loss, and celebration of other symbolic firsts in congressional races. There are lessons that women, gender, and politics scholars can learn from Black women in the 2024 election, and there are lessons that race and politics scholars can learn from Black women in the 2024 election. Some of these lessons are well-known. Black women have had to find creative solutions to enter the political arena, find political networks, and center the needs of their community without isolating voters (Dowe 2020). When Black women lead and mobilize, they do so with the community in mind, and creatively, which brings more voters into the electorate that would have otherwise declined to participate. However, well-established networks of women must incorporate Black women to highlight their strengths in the electoral arena. Black women's political participation matters, perhaps now more than ever, and political apparatuses that bank on Black women's support must do more to thank them and then invest in their campaigns despite the outcome.

As we move beyond the 2024 election and continue to study the intersection of race and gender in politics, we must address the barriers that make participation difficult but also creative solutions that Black women organizers, activists, voters, and candidates bring into the electoral landscape. Even more important, we cannot lose sight of the accomplishments of Black women candidates, such as Lisa Blount Rochester of Delaware, and Angela Alsobrooks of Maryland, who were elected to the United States Senate. Kamala Harris had accomplishments during her shortened presidential run. Both race and gender shaped how Kamala Harris was evaluated and how she campaigned. However, both race and gender shaped how Black women voters and Black women-led organizations mobilized to support her. The 2024 Presidential election reminds us that Black women's resilience — as voters, organizers, and candidates — is a persistent force in American politics, even if it does not lead to victories of Democratic candidates.

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