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Examining Online Post-Election Discourse Amongst Young Black Women

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Abstract

This study examines Black women's responses to Kamala Harris's defeat in the 2024 presidential election through analysis of TikTok discourse. Drawing on Black feminist theory, the research explores how Black women process electoral disappointment online while navigating expectations of political labor. Content analysis of TikTok videos reveals three key themes: strategic disengagement from advocacy roles, reclamation of emotional vulnerability against "Strong Black Woman" expectations, and prioritization of community building over national politics. These responses represent not political apathy but deliberate resistance against unreciprocated labor and marginalization within democratic processes. The findings demonstrate how digital platforms function as safe spaces where young Black women articulate political identities outside institutional structures. This research contributes to understanding intersectional political behavior by highlighting how stepping back can function as resistance against exploitative expectations. Policy implications include developing more sustainable political engagement models that recognize Black women's contributions without relying on their self-sacrifice.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Historical Context of Black Women’s Political Participation	6
Contemporary Black Women Political Participation and Partisanship	9
Black Feminist Theoretical Framework	15
Methods.....	17
Findings	27
Discussion	24
Policy Recommendations	41
Conclusion	46
References	49
Appendix A.1 Dataset Summary.....	56
Appendix A.2 Codebook.....	57

Introduction

In the United States, Black women are often deemed the backbone of the Democratic Party, a sentiment echoed by Kamala Harris in her first speech as Vice President–elect, where she acknowledged Black women as “too often overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy” (Garrett, 2020; Cargile, 2020). In light of the recent 2024 U.S. presidential election, the topic of post-election sentiments of Black women has become increasingly salient. The inclusion of Kamala Harris on the Democratic ticket marked the first time that a Black identifying woman ran as the nominee for president for a major party in the U.S. This was particularly motivating for Black women. Having a Black woman as a nominee marked the potential for Black women’s needs to finally be met in federal politics. Harris’ loss despite strong turnout from Black women evoked strong responses. This raises the questions: *Has Kamala Harris’s loss in the 2024 presidential election shaped the attitudes of Black women regarding themselves, as a voter group, and if so how? Are principles of Black feminist theory evident in the way Black women talk about the electoral loss of Kamala Harris online?* This research explores how principles of Black feminist theory manifest in societal attitudes and public discourse, with a particular focus on Black women’s experiences in political contexts. I aim to examine the intersection of stereotypes and political engagement for Black women, specifically as it relates to post-election sentiments and attitudes.

Post-election periods frequently provide opportunities to observe nuanced patterns in how voters are discussed and understood. While many Americans may experience intense emotions in post-election periods, I argue that Black women in particular have experienced a notable degree of distress and disappointment as a result of the 2024 presidential election as evidenced by the online discourse surrounding the results of the election. The post-election analysis of the voter

demographic breakdown captured much attention as it revealed that the Black females had the highest proportion of voters for vice president Kamala Harris (NBC News, 2024). My research aims to better understand how the feelings of Black women manifested following this election where there was a particularly strong connection to the candidate as a Black woman. Moreover, Black women have historically been deemed as central social and political movements or politics, while simultaneously having to navigate remaining “marginal and peripheral to the political and social order” and being subjected to harmful rhetoric that reinforces negative images of Black women. (Locke 2000, p. 377; Locke 2016; Garrett 2020). Both narratives, while seemingly disparate, can function to constrain Black women’s agency and diminish their diverse experiences. By exploring these narratives, I aim to investigate how political participation and its aftermath are framed for and by Black women, as well as how these frames affect their political engagement and sense of empowerment or disillusionment.

To examine Black women's responses to Kamala Harris's defeat in the 2024 presidential election, I draw on Black feminist theory to explore how Black women have managed electoral disappointment online while navigating expectations of political labor. National elections offer a key space where narratives about Black women’s political loyalty, strength, and sacrifice are most amplified. Through discourse and content analysis of 15 TikTok videos reveals three key themes: strategic disengagement from advocacy roles, reclamation of emotional vulnerability against "Strong Black Woman" expectations, and prioritization of community building over national politics. These responses represent not political apathy but deliberate resistance against unreciprocated labor and marginalization within democratic processes. The findings demonstrate how digital platforms function as safe spaces where Black women articulate political identities outside institutional structures. Relating these findings back to Black feminist theory allows for

the further expansion of the field in the political context, examining how common beliefs and stereotypes of Black women are reinforced, challenged, or broken down by political behavior. This research contributes to understanding intersectional political behavior by highlighting how stepping back can function as resistance against exploitative expectations. Policy implications include developing more sustainable political engagement models that recognize Black women's contributions without relying on their self-sacrifice.

Historical Context of Black Women's Political Participation

Black women have long played a central yet under-recognized role in U.S. politics. Their contributions to major social and political movements, including the Women's Movement, the Abolitionist Movement, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panther Party (BPP), laid the groundwork for a distinct tradition of political engagement rooted in community care, strategic leadership, and intersectional resistance. Since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 secured their formal right to vote, Black women have participated in electoral politics with increasing visibility and influence (Ezie, 2021). However, their political labor has historically operated under conditions of both racial and gendered marginalization.

Bridge Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement

In the Civil Rights Movement, figures such as Ella Baker and Septima Clark helped sustain grassroots mobilization efforts, though they rarely received the same recognition as male leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. Baker, in particular, was committed to “grassroots activism, mass mobilization, and democratic change, and wherever she saw signs of movement in that community direction she was eager to lend her support, expertise, and pass” (Ransby, 2003, p. 210). Throughout Baker's extensive career, she continued to remain a proponent of community

mobilizing and “sought to create a bridge through the development of SNCC” (Robnett, 1996, p. 1678). Belinda Robnett conceptualizes this phenomenon as “bridge leadership,” referring to the informal yet essential roles that many Black women assumed in mobilizing communities and translating movement ideologies into actionable practices. These forms of leadership were not always codified within formal hierarchies but were critical to movement sustainability and success. The concept of bridge leadership not only offers a corrective to male-centered historical narratives but also provides a framework for understanding how Black women continue to influence political culture in ways that are often obscured by traditional models of political participation. This tension between recognition and labor is a recurring theme — one that informs how Black women interpret and respond to contemporary political events, including elections that promise progress but fail to deliver tangible change.

Women in the Black Panther Party

The tension between participation and labor carried into the Black Panther Party. Although Huey P. Newton claimed that gender equality was a foundational principle — stating that roles between men and women were “exactly the same” (Varda, 1968) — women’s experiences within the party revealed the persistence of patriarchal norms. Women comprised a significant portion of BPP membership with contributions spanning the entire spectrum of organizational activities. Scholars note that despite these vital contributions, gendered power hierarchies remained (Spencer, 2008; Alameen-Shavers, 2016), requiring women to navigate both external oppression and internal patriarchy.

Elaine Brown, as Chairman from 1974-1977, achieved the highest formal leadership position in the party, yet her authority—granted by Newton during his exile—remained

conditionally legitimized and faced resistance from male Panthers (Alameen-Shavers, 2016). As Communications Secretary and the first woman on the Central Committee, Kathleen Cleaver shaped the party's public image and ideology while bridging internal leadership with external constituencies. In her words: "I organized demonstrations, wrote leaflets, held press conferences, attended court hearings, designed posters, appeared on television programs, spoke at rallies" (Cleaver, 1999, p. 2). Ericka Huggins directed the Oakland Community School, managing its operations and developing curriculum that translated revolutionary principles into educational practice (Huggins, 2016). Meanwhile, Assata Shakur's leadership of the Harlem chapter demonstrated women's participation in militant activities, though she notably had to adopt what she described as an "arrogant kind of macho style in order to be heard" (Freyberg, 2021; Matthews, 2001)—revealing how women's authority often required performing masculinity in ways not expected of male leaders. The leadership experiences of Elaine Brown, Kathleen Cleaver, Ericka Huggins, and Assata Shakur suggest that during the time of the BPP, formal authority became increasingly accessible to women, yet they still had to navigate challenges within these roles on the basis of their gendered identity.

Together, these historical accounts demonstrate that Black women's political engagement has always been shaped by the intersection of race, gender, and power. Their political labor — often rendered invisible — is not only about representation but about transformation. This legacy of being instrumental yet under acknowledged continues today, informing how Black women assess and describe their political participation today. Young Black women perceive elections not solely in isolation, but rather in relation to systemic neglect, symbolic inclusion, and the expectation of being a reliable voter bloc (Wilkerson, Entress, Walker, & Samuels, 2025), a dynamic that echoes historical patterns of political marginalization. Understanding this historical

continuity is crucial for analyzing how Black women responded to recent electoral cycles, and whether they perceive political solidarity from Black men and white women as real or rhetorical.

Contemporary Black Women Political Participation and Partisanship

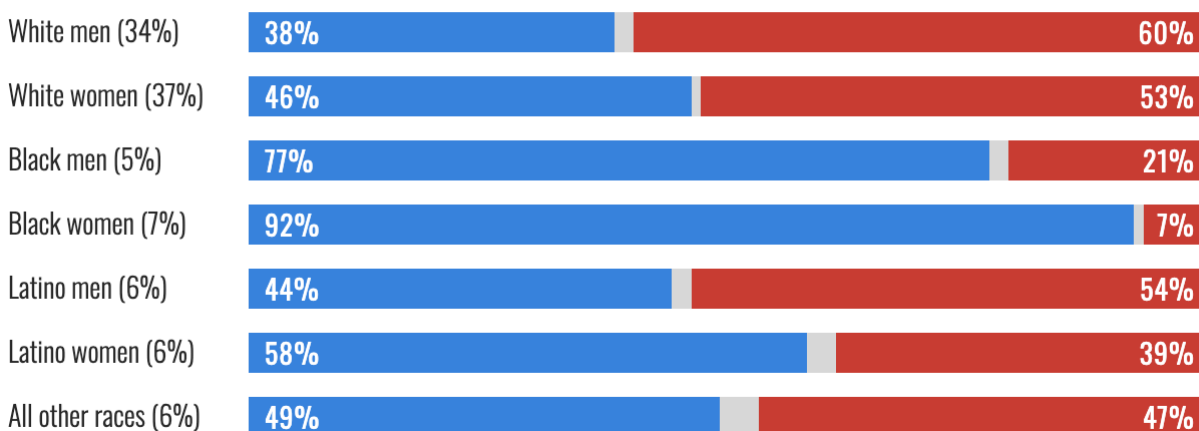
In the aftermath of the 2024 election, the political landscape has continued to elucidate the pivotal role of Black women as a stable Democratic voting bloc. The political participation of Black women has been a critical area of study, particularly in understanding their role as this stable Democratic voting bloc. Multiple scholars have contributed significant insights to this phenomenon, with recent research building upon historical patterns and contemporary developments. Brown's (2014) intersectional analysis in the *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* reveals that Black women have historically demonstrated higher levels of political engagement compared to their male counterparts and other minority groups, particularly in traditional forms of political participation such as voting (see table 1.2). This engagement is significantly influenced by factors such as political interest, education, and the concept of linked fate—the belief that their personal well-being is tied to the well-being of their racial group. The study found that linked fate serves as a strong predictor of political participation among Black women, underscoring their collective approach to political engagement.

Building upon this foundation, Slaughter, Crowder, and Greer (2024) emphasize that Black women's political participation is notably driven by a profound sense of civic duty rather than mere partisan loyalty or being undermined by candidate favorability. Their research indicates that this demographic's overwhelming support for Democratic candidates, as evidenced by Black women's majority support for the Democratic candidate in elections spanning decades in the past, demonstrates their critical influence in shaping electoral outcomes. This pattern of

engagement persisted through the most recent presidential election, where Black women continued to demonstrate their stability as a Democratic voting bloc, with 92% of Black women voting for Harris in 2024 (see table 1.1) (NBC News, 2024). Furthermore, their findings indicate that Black women perceive voting as a more effective means of having their voice heard compared to other means of political participation such as protesting, also serving as strong motivation to exercise this right (Locke, 2000; Gillespie, 2019; Ezie, 2021). Black women’s perception of voting as an efficient mode of political participation is likely to more profoundly impact their reactions to election results if they have more trust in this mode of political participation.

Table 1.1 2024 Election Exit Polls (Sex by Race)

Sex by race



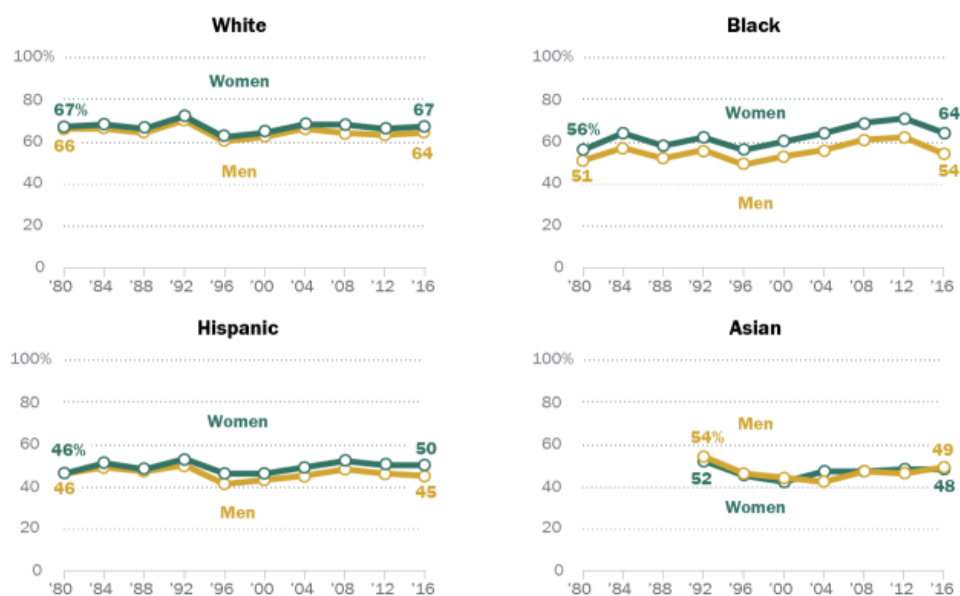
Source: “National Exit Polls: Election 2024 Results.” NBCNews.com, December 2, 2024.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-elections/exit-polls>.

Today, Black women remain politically active, taking on leadership roles in electoral politics, continuing to be active voters, spearheading and engaging grassroots organizations and issue-based advocacy. In contemporary US politics, Black women’s voter turnout has

consistently been one of the highest compared to other demographic groups (Igielnik, 2020; Ezie, 2021). For decades, Black women have demonstrated the sharpest partisan loyalty of any demographic group, often aligning with Democratic candidates and causes. Their votes are shown to be influential and in some instances have determined the results of elections. In both the 2008 and 2012 elections, they posted the highest voter turnout rates of any demographic group with a turnout rate of 68.8% being the highest overall in 2008, and similarly having the strongest turnout of 70.1% for the 2012 election (Lopez, 2009; Harris, 2014). Black women's high voter turnouts played a critical role in electing and reelecting President Barack Obama. In 2018, their mobilization efforts were identified as a major force behind the Democratic gains in the U.S. House of Representatives (Gidlow, 2020). They are also credited with helping to secure President Joe Biden's presidential win in 2020, a result of both their high voter turnout and notable organizing efforts such as those of Stacy Abrahms who is recognized for turning Georgia blue (Bailey, 2020; Cenzky, 2021). Black women's political participation also extends to community and grassroots organizing with movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) rapidly growing and gaining traction within the past decade. Founded by three Black queer female organizers, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, BLM has developed into an expansive movement dedicated to combating institutional injustice and police brutality (Black Lives Matter).

Black women play a central role in shaping American politics through voting, organizing, and leading movements. Their sustained engagement reflects a deep investment in transforming policies and institutions that affect their lives and communities. Yet, despite their critical influence, Black women's political labor is often overlooked in scholarship, revealing a gap in how their contributions and the burdens they carry are understood.

Table 1.2 Voter turnout by race and gender (1980 - 2016)

The gender gap in voter turnout varies significantly by race/ethnicity*% of eligible voters who say they voted, by gender and race/ethnicity*

Note: Eligible voters are U.S. citizens ages 18 and older. Prior to 1996, the CPS did not collect information on citizenship in a uniform way. Estimates for voter turnout prior to 1996 should be interpreted with caution, as they are not directly comparable to estimates from 1996 and after. White, Black and Asian adults include those who are not Hispanic. Hispanic adults are of any race. Data for non-Hispanic Asian adults was not available before 1992.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 1980-2016 Current Population Survey November Supplement.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Igielnik, R. (2020, August 18). *Men and women in the U.S. continue to differ in voter turnout rate, party identification*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/08/18/men-and-women-in-the-u-s-continue-to-differ-in-voter-turnout-rate-party-identification/>

Linked Fate

Scholars have long noted that Black Americans often demonstrate political behaviors shaped not solely by individual interest but by a sense of linked fate — the belief that their personal well-being is inextricably tied to the outcomes of their racial group (Dawson, 1994). Black women, in particular, tend to exhibit strong patterns linked fate (Campi & Junn, 2019; Carey & Lizotte, 2023), providing a framework for understanding political behavior and motivations amongst Black women across movements and electoral cycles. The bridge leadership roles taken on by Black women in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements

reflect an early form of linked fate—women mobilized others not simply out of personal interest, but from a belief that advocating for Black empowerment as a whole would have positive impacts on them individuals. Their activism, often unpaid and underrecognized, was a political expression rooted in communal uplift. Linked fate helps explain why Black women turned out in record numbers for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 and continued to vote overwhelmingly Democratic in 2016 and 2020, despite facing political disillusionment. Their support was less about personal alignment with candidates and more about protecting community interests in the face of structural harm (Philpot, 2017; Smooth, 2006). I argue that even in digital spaces, linked fate surfaces in discourse. For example, through viral hashtags like #BlackWomenVote or collective calls to “protect Black women.” Social media thus becomes a space where linked fate ideology manifests itself, as it is within these spaces that Black women are now making their calls to action towards the betterment of the black community, recognizing that their individual fates are linked to the advancement of the larger community.

Symbolic Representation

Symbolic representation refers to the psychological and emotional effects that the presence of minority or female candidates can have on constituents who share their identity. Within the literature on race and political behavior, scholars have consistently shown that the presence of African American and Latino candidates increases political efficacy and participation among those groups (Barreto et al., 2005; Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Tate, 1991). This dynamic—often described as minority empowerment—suggests that representation itself can serve as a motivational force. In the case of women, symbolic representation has been defined as “the attitudinal and behavioral effects that women’s presence in positions of political power might confer to women citizens” (Lawless, 2004 p. 81). The visibility of female candidates

signals inclusion in spaces where women were once excluded (Carroll, 1994), affirms the legitimacy of women's political engagement (Burrell, 1998), and provides role models who are perceived to advocate for gender-specific issues (Burns et al., 2001).

Symbolic representation, therefore, is closely tied to descriptive representation—the notion that shared identity and experiences between elected officials and constituents fosters a deeper sense of political belonging and responsiveness (Pitkin, 1967). In a political system where women, particularly women of color, remain underrepresented, the presence of such candidates can carry both emotional weight and political consequence. Accordingly, the loss of a Black female candidate in a major election can feel especially disempowering to Black women, who may view such outcomes as a setback not only in policy representation but also in the symbolic affirmation of their place in American democracy.

Electoral Capture

Despite their consistent political engagement and loyalty to the Democratic Party, Black women often find themselves in what scholars describe as a “trapped constituency” or “electoral capture” (Frymer, 1995; Ezie, 2021; Slaughter et al., 2024). Due to the racial and ideological polarization of America's two-party system, Black women lack viable political alternatives. With the Republican Party widely viewed as hostile to their interests, and third-party options largely inaccessible, Black women are effectively confined to supporting Democratic candidates, even when their specific policy needs are deprioritized. This dynamic allows Democratic party elites to rely on their votes without necessarily delivering on substantive political commitments in return. As a result, Black women's political loyalty paradoxically leads to their marginalization: they are essential to electoral victories, yet their policy demands are frequently overshadowed by

efforts to appeal to a wider voter base. Because black women have voted so consistently for democrats, this is not a demographic that policymakers feel the need to address when trying to win votes. Democratic candidates already expect to win the votes of Black women, and Republican voters, recognizing these trends as well, choose to focus their efforts on other demographics rather than try to win over the Black women from the Democratic party. This contradiction highlights a paradox that Black women must face, that their votes are indispensable, yet their political power remains constrained.

Black Feminist Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality

The theory of intersectionality most often identified with Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a valuable framework for which to examine Black women's unique position in the political arena. Intersectionality recognizes that Black women face overlapping and simultaneous oppressions based on their race, gender, and often class positions (Crenshaw, 1991). This theoretical approach helps explain why Black women's activism frequently addressed multiple forms of oppression simultaneously rather than prioritizing race over gender or vice versa. Patricia Hill Collins' concept of "outsider within" status, which describes Black Women's position "between groups of unequal power" (Collins, 2000) further highlights Black women's unique standpoint within revolutionary organizations. As Black women in a predominantly Black masculine space, female Panthers occupied a position that granted them insider knowledge of both racial oppression and gender subordination. This standpoint potentially allowed them to offer critical perspectives on internal contradictions within the movement itself.

The intersection of race and gender creates a unique set of motivations and barriers that influence Black women's political behavior, extending beyond traditional socioeconomic status (SES) factors. While education and income play a role, political scientist, Nadia E. Brown's research suggests that Black women's political participation is motivated by a complex interplay of individual political interests and a deep-seated commitment to advancing community interests (2014). This finding aligns with Slaughter et al.'s observations about Black women's sustained commitment to the Democratic Party, which they attribute to a belief in voting as an effective tool for social change and democratic engagement.

The Strong Black Woman

Melissa Harris-Perry's book *Sister Citizen* offers a critical examination of the "strong Black woman" myth and its cultural, emotional, and political consequences for African American women. This ideal characterizes Black women as exceptionally resilient, self-reliant, and emotionally invulnerable, often celebrated as a source of empowerment and pride. Harris-Perry frames this myth of the strong Black woman as a concept differing from controlling images, observing that "the image of black women as unassailable, tough, and independent is nurtured within black communities" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 184). While scholar Patricia Hill Collins describes controlling images as stereotypes, namely the Mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire, which are applied to Black American women to sustain their oppression and the dominant ideology (1999). The key difference between these images and what Harris-Perry refers to as the "self-construction" of the strong Black women, is that this myth is not socially or ideologically imposed like controlling images are. There is a sense of agency that Black women subscribe or embrace this narrative. It is however noted that the strong Black woman bears similarities to both the Mammy and Jezebel. The communal loyalty associated with this myth relays similarities to

the Mammy, while the strong Black women parallels the Jezebel with a non-reliance on “physical or economic protection from men”(p. 187). Harris-Perry argues that these expectations create a “prison of strength,” where expressions of vulnerability or need are framed as personal failings rather than natural human responses to adversity.

Internalizing this myth can lead to emotional strain, diminished life satisfaction, and negative health outcomes, as Black women may feel pressure to constantly perform strength without rest or support. Politically, the myth also reinforces individualist narratives of success and failure, encouraging Black women to judge others harshly for not meeting similarly high standards. As a result, this framing can shift attention away from systemic inequities toward personal responsibility, weakening support for structural or communal policy interventions. In the context of electoral politics, these dynamics complicate how Black women interpret both their own political engagement and the failures or losses of others, potentially contributing to feelings of disillusionment or isolation following election outcomes. These feelings work in direct opposition to linked-fate and ideas about communal liberation by creating scenarios in which the individual no longer feels connected to the larger community, thus undermining the extent to which one feels that the outcomes of the collective will affect them personally. These internalized expectations of strength do not remain confined to personal identity, they have tangible effects on the types of labor Black women are expected to perform, especially in political spaces. The emotional resilience demanded by the strong Black woman myth bleeds into the unpaid, often invisible work Black women take on to sustain their communities and movements. In this way, the myth not only informs how Black women see themselves but also structures the types of labor they are asked to provide, introducing a critical link to the concept of emotional labor.

Emotional Labor

Building on the strong Black woman archetype, emotional labor offers a framework for understanding how these ideals translate into action. While the strong Black woman myth valorizes stoicism and self-sacrifice, emotional labor captures the toll this performance exacts, particularly when Black women are called upon to soothe, support, and sustain political and communal life without adequate acknowledgment or relief. Originally coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983), emotional labor refers to the process of managing one's emotions to meet the expectations of a role, often in service to others. While Hochschild's initial framework focused on workplace interactions, particularly in service industries, the concept has since been expanded to encompass broader sociocultural dynamics—including those that disproportionately affect Black women (Guy & Newman, 2004). For Black women, emotional labor is not confined to professional spaces but is deeply embedded in the everyday politics of care, survival, and resistance (Harris-Perry, 2011).

Black women frequently shoulder the responsibility of tending to the emotional needs of their families, communities, and political movements, often while suppressing their own vulnerabilities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). In activist and organizing spaces, their roles extend beyond strategizing and mobilizing to include mentoring, conflict mediation, and the invisible work of holding collectives together (Hobson, 2016). This labor, while essential, is often unrecognized and unreciprocated, contributing to exhaustion and emotional depletion. Moreover, stereotypes such as the "strong Black woman" myth (Harris-Perry, 2011) perpetuate the expectation that Black women are naturally resilient and self-sacrificing, making it harder for them to express emotional needs or seek support without judgment (Watson & Hunter, 2016).

While emotional labor has been widely studied in the context of service industries and caregiving professions and more recently through the lens of race and gender there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding Black women's emotional labor in political spaces. Scholarship has increasingly recognized Black women's central role in political mobilization, voter engagement, and community organizing, yet little attention has been paid to the emotional demands that accompany this labor. Instances of emotional labor may manifest in the form of expectations placed on Black women to consistently show up, advocate, and support causes which might pose an emotional burden, particularly if this work is not reciprocated or compensated. Recognizing emotional labor as a key facet of their political engagement allows for a more holistic understanding of both the burdens and brilliance Black women bring to the ongoing fight for justice. For Black women, political participation can be particularly taxing. When their high levels of participation are met with undesirable outcomes, this can lead to further disillusionment due to the high cost of participation brought about by these additional roles that Black women take during periods of political participation.

Self-Care

In recent years, scholars and activists have reclaimed self-care as a radical act, particularly for marginalized communities whose labor is often demanded yet devalued. In general self-care refers to activities performed by individuals to improve or promote overall health and well-being (Ampadu & Wyatt, 2021). For Black women, self-care functions as both a survival strategy and a political stance. It resists the expectation that Black women must always show up, save democracy, and bear the emotional burden of socio political crises.

Contemporary conceptions of self-care having been applied in the context of the Black community as a mechanism to help deal with various stressors. These points of stress might consist of navigating systems of oppression such as racism and discrimination, along with the repercussions that arise from dealing with those systems (Ampadu & Wyatt, 2021). A prevailing understanding of self-care puts a particular emphasis on the mental and social emotional well-being in regards to self-care. Existing literature interprets the practice of self-care to include centering elements of recharging, restoring and healing. Furthermore, mainstream self-care is associated with the activities to promote wellbeing that are targeted at the individual. In contrast to a more individualistic approach, self-care can also take a more collective and communal approach. A more collective-oriented approach is brought up in conversations of self-care in the Black community. Looking to radical self-care specifically, which is rooted in Black feminist ideologies, radical self-care is a political act of resistance against oppression and marginalization. Radical self-care deviates from an individualistic framework and rather looks at the individual in relation to its community (Nicol & Yee, 2017; Ampadu & Wyatt, 2021). Additionally, radical self-care is deemed as inherently political as it “challenges historical notions and assumptions that Black people lack the capacity to care for themselves” (Ampadu & Wyatt, 2021 p. 214). Nicol and Yee (2017) conceptualize radical self-care as a set of intentional practices aimed at preserving physical and mental health, fostering self-reflection, encouraging growth, and aligning one's actions with personal values. At its core, radical self-care is about reclaiming control—choosing how, when, and with whom to engage, while remaining authentic in environments that often demand conformity (p. 134). In this way, radical self-care becomes a political act—one that counters the historical devaluation of Black women’s labor and humanity. As Black women continue to sustain movements and communities, carving out space for

wellness is not just restorative, but essential to resisting burnout and maintaining long-term engagement in political struggle.

Safe Spaces

Safe spaces are environments where individuals can express themselves without fear of judgment or harm. For Black women, these spaces are critical sites of resistance—places where they can speak freely, challenge dominant narratives, and practice self-definition. Self-definition as characterized by Patricia Hill Collins is the power to name one’s own reality and serves as a tool to challenge controlling images, and acts as a mechanism in shaping counter-narratives to dominant stereotypes during critical moments (2000). While domination may shape broader society, it loses its grip in spaces where Black women gather—such as families, churches, and community organizations—to reflect, heal, and strategize, as Collins observes that “By advancing Black women’s empowerment through self-definition, these safe spaces help Black women resist the dominant ideology promulgated not only outside Black civil society but within African-American institutions” (Collins, 2000, p. 101) As O’Neale (1986) notes, these are spaces where Black women live with authenticity and joy, shaping their identities around community-based role models rather than destructive societal ideals (Collins, 2000).

Although Black feminist scholarship has long recognized the value of these physical spaces, there is comparatively little research on how safe spaces operate in digital environments. While there is emerging literature regarding virtual communities as safe spaces (Mino-Puigcercós et. al, 2019; Clark-Parsons, 2018), the existing body of research concerning online safe spaces in relation to Black women in particular, remains understudied. As online platforms become increasingly central to political expression and identity formation,

understanding how Black women carve out virtual spaces for solidarity and self-definition remains an urgent and underexplored area.

Black women have established significant presence across digital platforms, from early Black feminist blogging communities to contemporary engagement on social media platforms. On Facebook, Black women have strategically created supportive communities focused on well-being and identity affirmation through groups (Bradford, 2017; Erigha & Crooks-Allen, 2020). Similarly on Twitter, Black women have demonstrated digital innovation through hashtag movements that address issues directly affecting their mental health and social experiences. These communities formed on various social media platforms act as channels that allow Black women “to speak to each other across borders and boundaries, provide visibility to their perspectives, and offer them a voice” (Stanton et al., 2017, p. 467). The creation of these digital communities has also given way to hashtags which serve as a means for Black users to unify and navigate their online community. Through hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic and #SayHerName, Black women have carved out spaces for community support, political organization, and counter-narratives to mainstream media representations (Stanton et al., 2017; Erigha & Crooks-Allen, 2020). As online platforms become increasingly central to political expression and identity formation, understanding how Black women strategically create and maintain digital safe spaces amid these contradictory dynamics remains an urgent research priority.

Methods

In this paper, I focus my analysis on the content produced by Black women in reaction to the 2024 presidential election. I conducted a social media content analysis of such content in order to interrogate Black women’s reactions to the 2024 presidential election results. Both during and within the two weeks following the election, there was a noticeable wave of discourse

of reactions in response to the election on various social media platforms including TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram. Among these platforms, I selected TikTok as my primary site of data collection due to the richness of discourse and the unique characteristics of its short-form video format. TikTok also provided access to candid, emotionally resonant, and often highly personal reflections in the form of monologues, stitched content (responses to other users), and storytelling. These qualities made it an ideal platform for examining how Black women articulated their political disillusionment, community-building efforts, and emotional processing in the wake of the election. Compared to platforms like X, where anonymity is more easily preserved, TikTok allows for greater visual and verbal identity cues, which facilitated the confirmation of the speakers' self-identification as Black women which was essential for accurately targeting the demographic under study. To facilitate this analysis, I collected TikTok videos made by Black women content creators in response to the election. I then transcribed and coded these videos for analysis. My focus on Black women reaction to the 2024 election was informed by both theoretical commitments (e.g., Black feminist theory) and empirical gaps in the literature on digital safe spaces and post-election discourse.

Data collection process

For the initial data collection process, a new TikTok account was created for this project in order to avoid any algorithmic bias that might arise with a pre-existing personal account. Data was then collected by selecting TikTok videos posted through purposive sampling, using keyword searches such as “Black women election,” “Black women reactions 2024,” and “Black women voting discourse.” These searches yielded a broad set of content, from which videos were selected based on several criteria: the recency of the post (within two weeks of the election date), relatively high engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments, saves), relevant content (i.e.,

electoral/political) and the apparent identity of the speaker. Only creators that presented as Black and woman-identifying were considered, which was typically confirmed by a creator addressing fellow Black women or self-identification. Given the considerable population of young creators on social media platforms, the data primarily consisted of young Black women, presumed to be millennials or a part of Gen Z.

An additional round of data collection and analysis was conducted. This secondary round, aimed to collect data on online discourse as we entered into the Trump administration in order to determine whether discourse was sustained or had evolved. The timeframe for this supplementary dataset was established from January 20th, 2025 (Inauguration Day) and onward with data collection concluding on by April 5th, 2025. The exclusion criteria remained constant as videos were selected. It should however be noted that the videos collected for this second wave of discourse were primarily addressed to a broader audience, whereas many of the initial videos might've been addressed to a Black or Black female audience. Furthermore, the Black female creators of these videos had the tendency to focus more on the Black community as a whole rather than narrowing in on the Black women demographic.

Videos that were originally identified as relevant and were used for reference but not analyzed were excluded due to a narrowing of scope in terms of content, deviating from a monologue format, or was not determined to be substantially salient. Some of the content that was deemed as not relevant was not found to directly relate to the aftermath or reactions to the election. The second wave of data collection was of particular note regarding a series of videos published from different creators that focused on discussions of boycotts. These discussions took place in response to companies rolling back Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI) policies in accordance with the Trump administration initiatives (Murray & Bohannon, 2025). While the

discourse of boycotts amongst Black women is conducive to the body of literature as a whole, the scope of this research does not extensively encompass this topic. Additionally, another component of exclusion criteria entails that videos embody a more monologue type of format. This necessitates that the selected posts include a primary speaking format as opposed to using another audio clip, as well as generally taking the form of the user informally speaking to the camera. Throughout this content analysis process, a total of 42 videos were accumulated and used for reference. Amongst this collection of videos, 15 were used from 14 unique TikTok users to produce transcripts and were later coded. The videos varied in length, ranging from 32 seconds to 6 minutes, 21 seconds.

Coding Process

To analyze Black women's post-election sentiments on TikTok, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of user-generated videos, systematically coding the data to identify recurring patterns and themes such as ideas of advocacy, engagement or disillusionment in response to the election. While social media video posts provide several points for analysis, for the scope of this research only the substance of what was said was taken into account while components such as visual aspects, user-comments, and additional viewer engagement did not serve as the primary point for analysis. After selecting videos for data collection, they were then downloaded and then imported to either MAXQDA or Otter.AI to produce transcripts. These transcripts were then imported onto the MAXQDA qualitative software for coding. I employed an inductive coding approach, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data rather than imposing pre-existing frameworks. During the second round of data collection and analysis, these transcripts were deductively coded based on the pre-existing themes. A combination of split and en vivo coding were utilized, in order to optimally capture the nuance of these transcripts and to account for

moments when most useful to document users' exact words. The initial stage involved open coding, where I identified specific recurring ideas, such as Black women's disengagement, frustrations with allyship, and the embracing community. Through an iterative process, I refined these codes into broader categories and ultimately distilled them into overarching themes. The coding process resulted in 121 unique codes, which were then grouped into 8 main categories which were then grouped into 3 main broader themes:

1. Black women's disengagement from advocacy and labor
2. Reclaiming vulnerability and emotional well-being
3. Shifting Priorities: From National Politics to Community Building

These themes reflect not only the dominant patterns in the content, but also the emotional, political, and relational dynamics that shape Black women's responses to political events. The resulting analysis provides insight into how online spaces can serve both as platforms for critique and as digital safe spaces. The same process was applied to the second wave of data, producing 80 additional unique codes, resulting in a total of 201 codes which were then categorized into the preexisting themes from the initial round of coding.

Researcher Positionality

As a Black woman researcher, my positionality deeply shaped the approach and interpretation of this study. My shared cultural background with the content creators allowed for a more nuanced understanding of linguistic markers, affective expressions, and culturally specific references (e.g., the use of African American Vernacular English, communal language, and visual styling). This insider knowledge facilitated more accurate interpretation of meaning that might be misread or flattened by those unfamiliar with Black digital culture. However, I also

recognize that my perspective is not monolithic, and I aimed to approach each video with an open and unbiased viewpoint, acknowledging the diversity within Black women's experiences and political views. Throughout the research process, I engaged in critical self-reflection to mitigate bias and remain attentive to voices that challenged or complicated my own assumptions.

Findings

Disengagement as Resistance

During the initial wave of data collection, many Black women articulated a deliberate retreat from forms of political labor. Rather than signaling apathy, their disengagement reflects an intentional response to over extension racialized betrayal and emotional fatigue. Users often alluded to “opting out” or “standing down” regarding future advocacy and political work. These sentiments appear to stem from a feeling of frustration and disillusionment with the way Americans voted. There is a collective sentiment amongst the content creators and intended audience that they, Black women, played their part while other demographic groups failed to adequately do so, alluding to voting for Vice President Kamala Harris. This is reminiscent of scholarship pertaining to emotional and political labor, particularly as it relates to uncompensated and unreciprocated labor. One user notes that “Black women as a whole [will] be taking a step back” (@theofficialsungoddess, 2024), and suggests that Black women will not go out of their way to help and intervene for non-Black people. She implies that this is a shift in the status quo of Black women normally advocating for others, and will be notable once no longer there. This sentiment reflects a broader trend of withdrawal not as attachment, but as resistance. Black Women's disengagement, then emerges as a refusal to be perpetually tasked with continually carrying the burden of investing so much energy and political labor that is either underappreciated or unreciprocated.

Upon the second wave of content analysis, this understanding of disengagement amongst the Black community seemed to have evolved from how it was originally positioned in online discourse. As we transitioned into the new Trump administration, users reiterated ideas of Black women and people decreasing their political engagement and support, with this position stemming from resentment from the election results. One user, presumably addressing non-Black people, notes how “they’ve been coming for us, this is not new to us. What’s different is that we were warning y’all that they were not only coming for us, but we’re coming for y’all too [...] y’all thought it wasn’t going to touch you” (@kikiaereal, 2025). In this brief testimony, this content creator’s thoughts suggest that Black people were aware of the threat that the incoming administration posed, noting a history of this community facing similar harms. The “they,” that she refers to is ambiguous, but seems to be indicative of a force broader than the Trump administration, but more so of conservative America as a whole. In any case, she goes on to express frustration with people’s current aversion to the actions of the Trump administration because people were already warned, but suggests an apathetic sentiment regarding the danger of the administration because voter’s didn’t anticipate being affected. In the weeks following the election, exasperation with people that refused to vote for Kamala Harris was still prevalent due to frustration of Black people’s forewarnings not being taken seriously. This fueled a desire to lessen one’s political support and action for non-Black people.

Later discourse also shed more light on the extent Black women wanted to disengage. Contextually, this component of discourse seemed to be in response to the series of executive orders imposed by the Trump administration, as well as protests and rallies taking place as a result. The sentiment of disengagement was consistent, but was also imbued with apprehension of the danger that physical political engagement would pose. An additional component that was

found within this conversation of modes of engagement was this persistent recognition of protest as a site of anti-Black violence. Creators consistently emphasized the physical and emotional risks Black people, especially Black women, assume when engaging in public protest. Citing both historical and contemporary instances—from the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter—users described mass mobilization as an act that disproportionately invites state-sanctioned retaliation.

Phrases such as “every single time that we go outside and use our bodies as forms of protest” and references to “mass assassinations” highlight deep-rooted fears that protest participation could result in death, injury, or psychological trauma. The speculation of President Donald Trump imposing martial law, intensified policing, and militarized responses was cited as justification for rejecting traditional protest tactics. This portion of the data reveals that self-preservation and protection acted as an underlying reason to disengage politically, more specifically to disengage from physical forms of protest in which Black people are endangered. In place of going out to protest, users did support other modes of political resistance such as boycotting. One creator points out that she has “encouraged multiple times on [her] platform for Black people to boycott with their dollars,” demonstrating endorsement of using economic means to show a message.

In addition to pivoting to safer forms of political protest, the discourse in my data also revealed a sentiment of no longer wanting to be at the forefront of political action. Many users articulated a shift in responsibility for political resistance, arguing that it is time for non-Black people—particularly white allies—to “get their hands dirty.” This reflects a rejection of the historical over-reliance on Black bodies as the engine of American democratic progress. One user addressed non-Black people, telling them to go fight for America and put themselves at the

forefront, indicating that Black political disengagement was not synonymous with apathy but rather a strategic redistribution of risk and responsibility. This call to action is still not absent of Black political labor as she notes that “we have given y’all and supplied y’all with enough resources and with enough examples as to how to get the job done” (@kikiaereal, 2025). Rather than viewing disengagement as betrayal, participants positioned it as a form of critical resistance, especially in light of expectations that Black women continuously rescue a country that dehumanizes them. Post-election online discourse ultimately reveals that Black women perceive that they have been the crux of political action, but now feel that this burden of resistance should be redistributed to their white counterparts.

This discourse of disengagement was not met without opposition from other users. A few weeks into the new administration, a creator responding to the conversation circulating on FAFO, which stands for “F*ck around, and find out,” which was contextually co-opted to indicate the chaos President Trump would ensue (Christopher, 2024). This creator acknowledges potential frustration and anger that her fellow Black people may be experiencing, noting that “they voted for this and you didn’t,” but advises them to overcome this sentiment and realize that “what is bad for them is also bad for you” (@jordxn.simone, 2025). She suggests that her peers need to take the administration more seriously and realize that they are just as susceptible to harm from the administration. She makes a retort to those that don’t feel threatened by H.R 22, the SAVE act which seeks to instate more voter restrictions having direct implications for married women or people that have changed their names (Howard, 2025). This user reprimands “the amount of women I see who are like, Well, I still get to vote in 2028 even though my super conservative neighbor doesn’t get to because she changed her last name” (@jordxn.simone, 2025). It is unclear how abundant these sorts of remarks were, but she is evidently averse to the sentiment

that people got what they deserved or voted for because they are not the only ones at stake. This creator critiques those that aren't empathetic to those that may have regretted their voting choice after the Trump administration entered office, suggesting that everyone is still vulnerable to harm from the administration.

Reclaiming Vulnerability and Emotional Well-being

Within this theme rest was positioned as an intentional and necessary response to political exhaustion. Rest took on a nuanced interpretation, as something that serves as both necessary to the emotional well-being of Black women as well as positing rest as an “act of resistance [and] rebellion.” Participants discussed the importance of stepping back, acknowledging grief, and rejecting the expectation that Black women must always be strong. Many expressed the sentiment that Black women should be allowed to experience sadness without immediately returning to advocacy work. One user remarks: “I am okay today to not be strong. I am okay today to cry. (..) It's like y'all ain't never seen a sad Black woman before. (..) Black women cry” (@shatondra_, 2024) Her video posts suggest a subversion of the expectation that Black women are supposed to be strong and not cry, while simultaneously validating the absence of strength. This demonstrates a confrontation of the aforementioned strong Black woman myth. This user along with others acted to reaffirm their own as well as fellow Black women's feelings of sadness, disappointment and hopelessness. Furthermore, the affirmation of Black women's identity emerged as another key component to this theme of emotional reclamation. Users emphasized the need for recognition, strength, and validation of Black women's experiences.

Additionally, the concepts of rest and self-care, which were used in tandem with each other, were framed as a form of resistance against societal demands for constant resilience. Users advised fellow Black women to embrace forms of self-care. This conception of self-care

primarily consisted of putting energy into things that bring them happiness and redirecting attention and energy to oneself. One of the users comments that “you do not have to make content based around anything other than yourself [...]t is time to wrap up these silk presses in our beautiful silk bonnets and protect ourselves”(@theasiafrances, 2024) This post targeted towards Black women particularly with the reference to silk presses (a popular hairstyle amongst Black women, and Kamala Harris frequently wears), seeking to liberate them from any obligation they may feel to be of use to others. Rest and self-care were meant to serve a purpose beyond emotional rehabilitation as creators encouraged Black women to “to self-govern because those microaggressions are about to get real macro”(@theasiafrances, 2024), as well as strongly urging peers to rest in order to organize for the community. Rest is discussed as something that Black women are entitled to, but also act as a source of utility to brace Black women for heightened political and racial tensions as well as to develop strength to dedicate towards community building.

During the second round of data collection, this embrace of rest and self-care remained prevalent. Amid broader political tensions, users expressed a refusal to sacrifice their emotional and physical well-being for a country that continues to disregard them. The recurring invocation of terms like “soft girl era,” “resting era,” and “rejuvenation era” were not merely aesthetic but functioned as an ideological claim: that rest, joy, and self-care are legitimate and radical forms of resistance. One user argued that “getting up each day is a protest,” framing daily survival as a meaningful political act. Others offered reassurance to fellow Black women, affirming that they are “doing enough” and deserve to prioritize themselves. This rhetoric pushes back against narratives that equate worth with suffering or usefulness to broader movements, especially when those movements fail to center or protect Black women.

Shifting Priorities from National Politics to Community Building

The final major theme that arose from this initial assessment of social media discourse, was a shifting of priorities from national politics to more community building and support. This theme encompassed a prioritizing of fellow Black women, recognizing Black women's self-governance and autonomy, and reassessing political relationships and Non-Black perceptions. Participants frequently mentioned a shift away from national political efforts toward community-focused organizing. Many expressed disillusionment with the lack of support for Black women within U.S. democracy and emphasized the importance of prioritizing Black women's well-being through localized efforts. Some also discussed the need to redirect energy into collective solidarity among Black women to foster stronger community bonds. Black women's ability to strongly support former Vice President Kamala Harris, sparked discourse of ways to reuse this potential:

So 95% [previous exit poll estimate of Black women that voted democrat] of Black women came together last night and decided that we was gonna support one Black woman. 95% of us came together to support one Black woman. So if 95% of us can come together to support *one* Black woman, 95% of us can come together to support all Black women like it really just opened my eyes to know that as a community, we don't need nobody else. We literally can change the trajectory of our own lives. (@jusreen, 2024)

Ideas of Black women's autonomy and governance emerged, capturing discussions around Black women's ability to advocate for themselves without reliance on external groups. Many participants emphasized the necessity of self-support and the importance of building independent Black women-led communities. Additionally, there was a rejection of dependence on Black male support, with a focus on self-protection and collective empowerment. In addition

to putting more energy into the Black women community, users also discussed reevaluating personal and political relationships in response to post-election discourse. Some emphasized the importance of redirecting energy into self-care and personal fulfillment rather than political labor. Additionally, there was strong criticism of gender politics within the Black community and frustration with non-Black individuals who had historically dismissed Black women's voices. Many expressed that they no longer felt obligated to provide labor for those who had not supported them.

Discussion

Reproduction of The Strong Black woman

Online discourse proved to both reproduce rhetoric of the Strong Black Woman, while also actively subverting and resisting this image. To reiterate, Melissa Harris-Perry characterized the Strong Black woman as self-construction that idealizes Black women as motivated, independent, hard working people “who suppress their emotional needs while anticipating those of others,” which is “nurtured within black communities” (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 184). Part of the online discourse reaffirmed this notion of the Strong Black woman when speaking to fellow Black women saying “you are strong, brilliant, beautiful, soft, feminine, encouraging, vivacious, resilient, fearless, bold.” These sorts of affirmations serve to reinforce an idealized strength and resilience of Black women, while simultaneously affirming Black femininity which reinforces this narrative while also positioning Black women to have more depth than their strength.

Recontextualizing these comments with the outcome of the election, we can observe that this discourse is consistent with the strong Black woman acting as a constructive role model. Harris-Perry notes that this narrative allows for Black women to harness encouragement and self-assurance in order to “overcome great obstacles.” In this case, Kamala Harris's loss is posed

as a source of adversity, and reproducing or subscribing to Black women's strength serves as a tool to help overcome this adversity. Another point to the strong Black woman narrative is an inherent “devotion to racial community” which “may leave sisters without the room to organize for themselves” (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 187). Even though Black women feel that there is a strong connection to themselves and the larger Black community, adhering only to the needs of the greater community may overlook the unique needs of Black women as an intersectional identity. This expectation of Black women to devote themselves to the Black community was also reproduced in instances of creators encouraging one another to “show up” at family functions, for kids and for work. Through reactive online discourse, the strong Black woman narrative is reaffirmed as a means to overcome the loss of the presidential election and encouraging Black women to dedicate themselves to the welfare of their Black community.

While a subset of online discourse works to reproduce the idea of the Strong Black Woman, many users actively resisted this image in favor of emotional vulnerability. Creators instead assert their right to grieve, rest, and express emotional vulnerability. Codes such as “Today we are not strong” and “Black women can be sad and cry” indicate a collective push to reject societal expectations of constant resilience. This suggests that these women feel external pressures to be strong and persist. This concerted effort to subvert these expectations is consistent with Patricia Hill Collins’ self-definition. Discourse encouraging emotional vulnerability serves as a means of self-definition as it actively works to rewrite the narrative that Black women should be strong in these times and resist this prevailing narrative. These discourses also serve to connect the power held by Black women to the betterment of the Black community as a whole, both by being present and by taking care of themselves as necessary.

Therefore, the wellbeing of Black women is directly linked to their ability to continue advocating for the needs of the Black community at large.

Linked Fate and Black Women's Stake and Connection to the Candidate

The sentiments expressed in this discourse appeared to be particularly charged, as users identified this election to be especially hard to process. These findings can be articulated through both scholarship on linked fate and symbolic representation. Because Black women share a high degree of linked fate within their community, Kamala Harris's success would have been reflected as a victory for all Black women. By this same token however, her defeat in 2024 was seen as a defeat for the whole community, especially since such a large majority of Black women voted for Harris. What a victory for Kamala Harris would have represented is a step towards having the interests of Black women properly represented and advocated for in the federal government. Whether or not this would have happened, Harris's loss and the re-election of Donald Trump represented a continuation of the current status quo, that being the needs of Black women continuing to be overlooked by policymakers hoping to gain reelection by focusing on more volatile voter bases. Harris's loss was perceived as a loss for all Black women, as evidenced by the impassioned responses by these women online.

Additionally, the concept of symbolic representation further elucidates why Black women felt significantly affected by the election results. For many Black women, seeing someone who shares their race and gender contend for the highest levels of political power carried deep significance—not just as a matter of optics, but as a reflection of possibility and societal recognition. To experience this electoral loss for a symbolically important candidate appears to amplify the way it's experienced. Online discourse demonstrated Black women processing the election results in a deeply affective and psychological manner.

The findings of this content analysis reveal a nuanced discourse surrounding Black women's political engagement and disengagement post-election. Their withdrawal serves as both a political statement and an act of self-preservation, disrupting long-held assumptions about their role in activism. Additionally, the rejection of the "Strong Black Woman" narrative signals a broader cultural shift toward prioritizing Black women's emotional well-being. Future research should further explore how this disengagement manifests in political participation rates, social movements, and broader cultural narratives. Additionally, examining the responses of non-Black individuals to this disengagement could provide further insight into shifting expectations regarding Black women's labor in political and social spheres. Future directions for this particular research project consist of continuing a social media content analysis and pairing this online discourse with in person findings through a focus group.

Shifting Priorities: From National Politics to Community Building

Despite the frustrations and emotional toll of political engagement, the data also highlighted the significance of community solidarity among Black women. Codes such as "importance of community" and "Black women uniting for collective action" suggest that while individual disengagement was a response to exhaustion, there remained a strong belief in intra-group solidarity. This sentiment is particularly intriguing as it relays similarities to the expectation of the strong Black woman to serve her community, but narrows this community to Black women specifically, acting to partially subvert this expectation. In addition, narrowing the focus to Black women specifically further demonstrates how ideas of linked fate manifested, as Black women focus more on serving other Black women, a strength is accumulated that can be used to continue the fight for Black women's political power in the future. Several users expressed disillusionment with the U.S. political system and emphasized a focus on supporting

Black women specifically which seemingly strengthened feelings of unity and interconnectedness. Rather than expending energy on broader political movements that failed to center the needs of Black women, they feel inclined to direct their energy to fellow Black women. This also seems to have developed in response to the collective support that Black women had for Harris, demonstrating the potential for collective action. This suggests a potential restructuring of Black women's political engagement toward self-governance and autonomy, and this restructuring on a large scale is able to take place due to the platforms themselves, which have provided Black women a place to share and discuss.

Virtual Safe Spaces

Looking at the post-election discourse that has taken place on TikTok as a whole, it is clear that Black women were drawn to this platform and have utilized it as a safe space. Black female creators frequently framed their videos to address their fellow Black female peers, establishing predominantly Black female online spaces and networks of discourse. These findings are consistent with the Black feminist thought conception of safe space, in that Black women used TikTok to optimize their agency and make a concerted effort to resist prevailing narratives regarding Black women and rewrite the expectations for themselves and their communities.

However, while these creators often centered Black women as their primary audience, TikTok remains a public platform, and the wide visibility of this content raises valid questions about the sustainability of such spaces as truly "safe." The broader audience, which may include individuals outside the intended community, has the potential to compromise this safety through misinterpretation. Yet, the deliberate framing of language, in-group cultural references, and affective expressions still work to create an atmosphere of solidarity and shared understanding

among Black women even if not fully private. These waves of discourse also support contemporary scholarships positing virtual communities as safe spaces, while also expanding upon this literature to shed more light on ways in which Black women are able to carve out these safe spaces online.

Disengagement as a means to preserve political and emotional labor

The culmination of the observed discourse was a unified push for Black women's strategic disengagement from advocacy roles following the election. Participants articulated that this withdrawal was not a sign of indifference but rather a response to the lack of reciprocal support from other political and social groups. Codes such as "Black women no longer engaging in advocacy" and "Black women's absence will highlight their societal contributions" illustrate how their disengagement serves as both a form of resistance and a means of self-preservation. Additionally, the discourse surrounding this disengagement reflects a tension between expectation and agency—many participants noted that non-Black people were upset about losing Black women as a political resource, highlighting the transactional nature of previous interactions. The frustration voiced by non-Black individuals about Black women's absence demonstrates the extent to which their labor has been taken for granted.

In the context of this election, this specific sort of political labor may consist of voting, helping and encouraging others to vote, being a resource for information, organizing and helping to raise money. Emotional labor stems from this political labor as a result of investing into the welfare of not just themselves, but also what they perceive to be the welfare of their fellow Americans, specifically Black Americans, an attitude that represents the extension of linked-fate. This type of work might feel particularly taxing when it is underacknowledged, or unreciprocated in the sense that other demographic groups are not able to demonstrate as support

for Harris, leading to a desire to politically disengage. Furthermore, this theme encompassed discussions about the disproportionate amount of advocacy and labor Black women engage in, often without reciprocal support. Many participants emphasized that Black women's efforts benefit broader society, predicting that their withdrawal from these roles would have significant national and global consequences. Additionally, there was a heightened awareness of Black women's historical contributions to societal progress, with participants highlighting that their civic duties had been fulfilled.

Adding to this perceived need for disengagement was the pressure of expectations that Black women faced to engage and present themselves as an educational resource. Respondents brought up that there is an assumption that Black women should continuously educate others on issues of race, gender, and politics. Several participants expressed frustration that their intellectual labor was being exploited, with codes such as “non-Black people losing Black people as a teaching resource” and “Black people won't be there to curate information” pointing to this sentiment. Essentially Black women felt burdened by expectations levied upon them to support and overextend themselves, encompassing emotional and intellectual labor. Moreover, users emphasized that the burden extends beyond national politics—Black women's advocacy and organizing efforts on international travesties were also being abandoned, demonstrating a broader withdrawal from unreciprocated labor. Several TikTok users expressed relief at shedding this responsibility, demonstrating the cumulative exhaustion of political labor.

These findings align with scholarship on emotional labor, which reveals that Black women are often expected to show up, speak up, and hold it together in both personal and public spaces, particularly in political contexts. This labor is intensified during election cycles, when they are cast as saviors of democracy and asked to support candidates or causes without

assurance of reciprocal care or policy investment. As participants in this study noted feelings of exhaustion and disillusionment post-election, it becomes clear that their emotional investments are not infinite. The emotional labor they perform—motivating others, processing collective disappointment, masking fatigue—is rarely acknowledged or supported. This exhaustion speaks to a broader pattern of burnout that demands not just recognition but reprioritization. Rest and emotional restoration, then, are not luxuries, but necessities—and potentially, radical refusals of systems that rely on Black women's unreciprocated labor.

Towards structural change

The discourses identified in this study, particularly those surrounding disengagement, political exhaustion, and the rejection of reductive tropes like the Strong Black Woman, are not merely cultural critiques; they are reflections of deeper structural neglect. When Black women withdraw from political participation or resist being positioned as tireless agents of change, they are also signaling the inadequacy of existing institutional responses to their needs. As such, any attempt to address the root causes of this disengagement must extend beyond symbolic recognition or narrative shifts. It must include structural policy reforms that explicitly account for the unique intersectional realities Black women face. What follows are recommendations that build directly on the insights surfaced through this content analysis.

Policy Recommendations

Black women occupy a unique space in the political environment that is often overlooked. Their consistent political turnout and activism have the adverse effect of placing them into the category of a “captured constituency,” where, because of their consistency in voting for the Democratic Party, the particular needs of the group are often pushed to the side in favor of more politically volatile demographics where politicians must work to win over parts of

the electorate. While addressing this discrepancy in political action from elected representatives should not be an issue, the reality is that the specific needs of Black women continue to be ignored. While policies and reforms aimed at women as a constituency or towards the Black community as a whole do provide some support, as has been demonstrated, policies addressing “women” are typically addressed primarily to “white women,” and policies aimed at providing support to the Black community are aimed toward Black men. Rather than continue to ignore the unique experiences and challenges of Black women in America, these are ways that their needs can begin to be addressed.

Adapting Intersectional Analysis in Policy Development

Traditional policy analysis often fails to capture how multiple forms of discrimination interact to create unique challenges for specific populations. Given Black women's position at the intersection of both racial and gender marginalization, those engaged in policy development should make a concerted effort to include intersectional impact assessments for all major legislation, with particular attention to how proposed policies on wages, healthcare, housing, and reproductive rights might disproportionately affect Black women. These assessments should precede policy implementation and involve consultation with affected communities.

Additionally, government entities should develop and apply data-driven equity metrics that disaggregate outcomes by both race and gender simultaneously, rather than examining these categories in isolation. Comprehensive intersectional data collection is necessary to establish baselines and track disparities over time. To ensure accountability, regular reporting on whether policies effectively reduce intersectional inequalities should be required, incorporating both quantitative measures and qualitative assessments from affected communities. Furthermore,

funding should be allocated specifically for research examining how policies impact communities at various intersections of identity, with priority given to research led by scholars from affected communities.

Increased Explicit Representation and Output

As demonstrated in this study's findings, symbolic representation alone fails to address Black women's political disillusionment. Meaningful representation requires the formation of intersectional advisory councils composed of Black women leaders, activists, scholars, and community members across generations and geographic regions to provide structured input on major policy decisions at federal, state, and local levels. Formal feedback mechanisms should be created to allow Black women's grassroots organizations direct access to policymakers, with transparent processes for incorporating their recommendations. Investment in leadership development programs specifically designed to support Black women's political advancement beyond voting is essential, including campaign training, appointment to regulatory bodies, and pathways to elected office. Additionally, accountability structures must be implemented to track whether Black women's policy priorities receive substantive attention rather than merely symbolic acknowledgment during election cycles.

Addressing Political and Emotional Burnout

This research highlights the significant emotional labor performed by Black women in political spaces, often leading to burnout, disillusionment, and withdrawal. To support sustainable political engagement, accessibility to culturally responsive mental health resources should be expanded in both clinical settings and community-based contexts, with particular attention to addressing election or political-related stress. Federally or state-funded wellness

programs specifically tailored to politically active Black women should be established, including stress management resources, community healing spaces, and respite opportunities.

Organizations should provide support for bridge leaders who, as demonstrated in this research and previous scholarship, often shoulder disproportionate responsibility for mobilizing communities while receiving inadequate recognition or compensation. Trauma-informed approaches to civic engagement must be developed that acknowledge the emotional impact of repeated political disappointments and provide resources for resilience without expectation of continued self-sacrifice.

Reforming Political Party Engagement Practices

The findings of this research suggest that mainstream political parties, particularly the Democratic Party, must transform their approach to Black women constituents. Political parties should move beyond transactional outreach that intensifies during election cycles but diminishes between elections by establishing permanent structures for ongoing dialogue with Black women's organizations. Parties must prioritize Black women's policy concerns in platforms and legislative agendas, particularly economic justice, reproductive rights, criminal justice reform, and educational equity—issues identified as priorities in this study. Concerns about "electoral capture" should be addressed by demonstrating substantive commitment to the needs and priorities of Black women rather than assuming continued support regardless of policy outcomes. Investment in local organizing infrastructure in Black communities between major elections is crucial, recognizing that sustained engagement requires resource commitment beyond campaign mobilization.

Digital Space Considerations

Given the importance of digital spaces in Black women's political discourse, as evidenced in this study and many other studies, digital platforms should implement stronger protection against harassment through enhanced policies and legal frameworks specifically addressing the intersectional nature of online abuse targeted at Black women engaged in political discourse. Support should be provided for digital organizing infrastructures created and led by Black women, including funding for independent media platforms that center Black women's political perspectives. Digital literacy and security programs designed to enhance Black women's capacity to engage politically online while minimizing vulnerability to disinformation and harassment are necessary. Additionally, research funding should be allocated for studies examining both the benefits and costs of Black women's digital political labor, with particular attention to developing sustainable models of engagement.

These recommendations recognize that meaningful change requires multi-level approaches including federal policy changes, state and local initiatives, institutional transformations, and community-based approaches. By moving beyond symbolic gestures toward structural change, these measures could help transform political systems in ways that honor Black women's contributions while reducing the burdens disproportionately placed on this vital democratic constituency. Implementing these recommendations would represent a significant step toward addressing the complex dynamics revealed in this study about Black women's political participation, emotional labor, and post-election processing.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a complex landscape of Black women's post-election responses following the 2024 presidential election. Through analysis of TikTok discourse, three distinct yet interconnected themes emerged: strategic disengagement from political labor, reclamation of emotional vulnerability, and a shift from national politics toward community-focused priorities. These patterns demonstrate that Black women's political participation extends beyond mere voting behavior—it encompasses calculated decisions about where to invest their emotional and political labor based on perceived reciprocity and support.

The strategic disengagement observed in this research should not be misinterpreted as political apathy. Rather, it represents a deliberate response to what many Black women perceive as unreciprocated political labor and emotional investment. By withdrawing from advocacy roles that have historically been expected of them, Black women are asserting boundaries and demanding recognition of their contributions. This disengagement evolved throughout the early Trump administration, with discourse shifting from initial expressions of withdrawal to more nuanced considerations of alternative forms of political resistance that prioritize safety and self-preservation.

Simultaneously, the rejection of the "Strong Black Woman" myth in favor of emotional vulnerability represents a significant act of self-definition. By publicly affirming their right to grieve, rest, and experience disappointment, Black women on TikTok created digital safe spaces that challenge longstanding expectations of resilience and stoicism. This reclamation of vulnerability serves as both personal healing and political resistance against narratives that dehumanize Black women by denying them the full range of emotional expression.

Perhaps most significantly, the shift toward community-building among Black women signals a reimagining of political engagement that centers their collective needs and experiences. Rather than continuing to invest in broader political systems that have repeatedly marginalized their concerns, many expressed commitments to strengthening intra-community bonds and developing autonomous support networks. This reorientation suggests that traditional metrics of political participation fail to capture the full spectrum of Black women's civic engagement, particularly when conventional political channels have proven unsatisfactory.

These findings contribute to scholarly understanding of political behavior by highlighting how intersectional identities shape responses to electoral outcomes. They challenge conventional frameworks that equate disengagement with disinterest, revealing instead how stepping back can function as a form of resistance against exploitative expectations. Further, the study demonstrates the importance of digital platforms as sites where Black women can articulate political identities and build community outside formal institutional structures.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this analysis offers valuable insights into the post-election political sentiments of Black women on TikTok, the findings are not widely generalizable to the broader population. The study relies on self-selected social media posts, which inherently introduces a participation bias—only individuals who felt compelled to share their perspectives publicly on this platform are represented. This may skew the dataset toward more vocal, digitally literate, or politically engaged users, potentially omitting the views of those who do not use TikTok or who choose to remain silent online. Additionally, TikTok's algorithmic amplification and the nature of performative digital culture may influence how users craft and present their political opinions, further shaping the type of discourse that becomes visible.

Future research would benefit from triangulating online discourse with in-person methods such as focus groups or interviews to capture a wider spectrum of Black women's political perceptions, particularly among those who do not use or engage with platforms like TikTok. These more intimate settings may reveal nuanced thoughts that are less visible in public digital spaces, offering richer context for interpreting feelings of solidarity, disillusionment, or political fatigue. Further studies might also examine the role of intersecting factors—such as age, region, class, or education—in shaping post-election reactions. Comparing TikTok discourse with commentary from other social platforms, such as Twitter or Instagram, could also illuminate platform-specific dynamics in how political attitudes are expressed and shared.

Policy implications from this research point toward the need for more substantive recognition of Black women's political labor, development of intersectional approaches to policy analysis, and creation of sustainable engagement practices that do not rely on Black women's self-sacrifice. Political institutions, particularly the Democratic Party, must move beyond transactional relationships with Black women voters and demonstrate meaningful commitment to their policy priorities.

Ultimately, this research illuminates how Black women navigate the contradiction of being simultaneously essential to and marginalized within American democracy. Their post-election discourse reveals not just disappointment with an electoral outcome, but a profound renegotiation of the terms of their political participation—one that prioritizes their autonomy, well-being, and community. As American politics continues to evolve, understanding these dynamics will be crucial for any meaningful engagement with this vital constituency.

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Appendix A.1 Dataset Summary

TikTok username	View count	Like count	Date Published	Date Accessed	Link
@theofficialsuningoddes	195.5 K	44K	11/8/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP8617JKj/
@chanteecreates	93.7K	16.9K	11/16/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP861oB8D/
@kamoin18	72.1K	4.86K	11/9/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP861GtYS/
@shatondra_	16K	3.0K	11/6/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP861CBuG/
@thrivebycrystal	70.1 K	10.7K	11/8/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP861QkSp/
@jusreeen	122.3K	24.3K	11/6/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP861w9A9/
@kikimccrayway	12.4K	1.0K	11/8/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86JAXgr/
@verniqueesther	35.1K	131.4K	11/6/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86JLHRm/
@theasiafrances	39.6K	10.2K	11/6/2024	2/2/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86JdCNw/
@badgalsavvv	7K	1.7K	3/31/2025	4/5/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86JJceE/
@iamhannahhasan	394.8K	86.9K	1/19/2025	4/5/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86JMEvB/
@kikiraereal	4.8K	26.2K	3/28/2025	4/5/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86JyWBn/
@jordxn.simone	34.2K	8.0K	2/12/2025	4/5/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86J89jR/
@mercuriallur	7.2K	1.6K	3/31/2025	4/5/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86JFwrW/
@mercuriallur	11.9K	1.4K	4/1/2025	4/5/2025	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZP86JLL4E/

Appendix A.2 Codebook

Themes	Categories	Subcategories	Thematic Descriptions	Exemplar Codes
Black women's disengagement from advocacy and labor	Black Women's Disengagement	advocacy, labor, political	This theme encompassed discourse on the desire and consequences of Black women limiting their political, emotional and intellectual engagement. This sentiment of disengagement was often associated with an exhaustion or burnout stemming from over exerting oneself or unreciprocated labor.	Black women no longer engaging in de-escalation
	The Burden of labor	emotional, intellectual, political		emphasizing BW's constant advocacy despite not receiving reciprocal support

Reclaiming vulnerability and emotional well-being	Rest and Emotional Processing as Resistance		This theme encompassed ideas of emotional vulnerability and rehabilitation. Users called for a need for Black women to feel their emotions and vulnerability rather than suppressing them. Black women were also encouraged to take time to process and emotions they may feel in reaction to the election results.	"now time to rest"
	Affirmation of Black Female Identity and Emotional Needs			putting energy into things that bring you happiness
Shifting Priorities: From National Politics to Community Building	Prioritizing Black female community		This theme consists of discourse on redirecting energy towards the Black community or more narrowly to supporting the Black women community. Users talked about recognizing the potential and capability of Black women as well as	Proposing Black women communities

			reassessing their political ally ships with non-Black women.	
	Black Women's Self-Governance and Autonomy			Black women can represent themselves
	Reassessing Political Relationships and Non-Black Perceptions			non-Black women have showed that Black women voice or presence doesn't matter