



Citation: Giuliani, M. (2025). Gender and race in Kamala Harris's defeat. A cross-state analysis of U.S. 2024 presidential election. *Quaderni dell'Osservatorio elettorale – Italian Journal of Electoral Studies*, Research Note 6: 1-10. doi: 10.36253/qoe-17135

Received: January 8, 2025

Accepted: May 18, 2025

Published: May 19, 2025

© 2025 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://www.fupress.com>) and distributed, except where otherwise noted, under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 License for content and CC0 1.0 Universal for metadata.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

ORCID:
MG: 0000-0002-6927-7177

Gender and race in Kamala Harris's defeat. A cross-state analysis of U.S. 2024 presidential election

MARCO GIULIANI

Department of Social and Political Sciences, Università degli studi di Milano Italy
E-mail: marco.giuliani@unimi.it

Abstract. This research note employs aggregate State level data to analyze the results of the 2024 US presidential election, and to explore the role played by gender and race in Kamala Harris's defeat. The Democratic party failed to capitalize on the characteristics of its presidential candidate and, compared to Biden's election, to expand its support in states with larger female and African American electorates, and faced systematic losses in those with more Hispanic voters. This note contributes to a cumulative macro-micro approach to the analysis of election results, and thus to overcoming both ecological and micrological fallacies.

Keywords: US presidential election, gender, race, cross-state analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that women running for president of the United States face a kind of Catch-22. To be seriously considered by the American voter, a woman candidate should first accumulate decades of political experience, and yet this very know-how can lead voters to reject more experienced candidates and favor newcomers in the exceptional circumstance of a “change” election, precisely the type of election in which the final glass ceiling of U.S. politics might be shattered. This “female presidentiality paradox” (Anderson, 2017), according to which every woman is the wrong woman, has been used to interpret Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump in 2016, and could potentially have contributed to Kamala Harris's defeat by the returning Republican candidate in 2024.

This research note does not aim to investigate the potential psychological and cultural roots of that paradox, which would likely require specific methodologies, but seeks to examine the strictly connected topic of the electoral prospects of the first black woman presidential candidate of the United States of America. In fact, during the last weeks of the electoral campaign, the credibility of a woman as president of the major global super-power, took an unexpectedly racial turn. We are not talking about the so-called “double disadvantage in politics”, that is, the necessity “to overcome the ills of both

sexism and racism” (Moncrief, Thompson, & Schuhmann, 1991; Smooth, 2018, pp. 178-179), but of the fact that part of the traditional electoral base of the Democrats started giving signals of defections. More specifically, Black and Hispanic men were, at best, lukewarm in their support for Kamala Harris, and some of them were apparently considering abstaining from voting or even voting for Donald Trump.

The issue was explicitly addressed by former president Barack Obama when speaking to some campaign volunteers: “You’re coming up with all kinds of reasons and excuses, I’ve got a problem with that. Because part of it makes me think – and I’m speaking to men directly – part of it makes me think that, well, you just aren’t feeling the idea of having a woman as president, and you’re coming up with other alternatives and other reasons for that”. Obama concluded his speech at Kamala Harris campaign rally by urging everyone to do their part: “Get off your couch and vote. Put down your phone and vote. Grab your friends and family and vote. Vote for Kamala Harris” (Pittsburgh 10 October 2024). The same concern, extended to the Latino community, was expressed to CNN by an interviewee close to Harris’s team, who said: “The concern is that the couch is going to win. We need to make sure that Black men, Hispanic men, don’t sit on the couch. Because if they don’t vote at all, that’s a vote for him”¹.

Typically, topics involving individual voting behavior are best addressed using individual-level data. The entire electoral campaign, both before and after Kamala Harris’s late entry into the race, has been extensively surveyed by pollsters and survey agencies, with gender and race being traditional categories routinely reported in their analyses. In fact, these reports already presented a varied, and not always coherent picture of the 2024 U.S. presidential election in this regard. Therefore, any further analysis in this direction would be better postponed until the release of the official 2024 dataset from the American National Election Study.

This research note, however, takes a different and less conventional approach. Instead of relying on individual self-reported information and perceptions, it chooses to explore the 2024 election results using official aggregate state-level data. This methodological choice, along with its justification and limitations, will be addressed in Section 3 of this note, immediately after presenting the empirical evidence collected so far in Section 2, along with our hypotheses and expecta-

tions. Section 4 introduces the data used with some preliminary analyses, and then presents and discusses our main results. In the conclusion, we will briefly assess the implications and limitations of this approach.

2. GENDER AND RACE IN THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

A research note is certainly not the place to summarize the extensive literature and empirical evidence on gender and racial issues affecting voting behavior and election outcomes. However, some context is necessary to introduce our work.

Despite significant progress, it remains far more challenging for a woman to become president than to become prime minister (Jalalzai, 2013). Among the various reasons for this difference, one is particularly relevant to the present study. Heads of government in parliamentary systems must indeed gain the approval and respect of their colleagues as they rise through the party ranks, but this process pales in comparison to overcoming stereotypes among the general public, whose trust must be won in a popular election. This happens also in the United States, in which the presidential election is mediated by an Electoral College determined by the state results. Relevant exceptions do exist, particularly in Latin America, but they are often explained by family ties and institutional factors such as fragmented party systems combined with majority electoral rules for the presidency.² Another reason could be related to the relative social homogeneity of the population, whereas the U.S. is characterized by an ethnically, religiously, and culturally divided electorate, whose majority is more difficult to appease.

Almost sixty years have passed since the first woman of color, Patsy Takemoto Mink, gained access to Capitol Hill, and more than fifty years since the first black woman seeking the presidential nomination from a major party, African American Congresswoman Shirley Anita Chisholm (Hardy-Fanta et al., 2016). Tellingly, when Chisholm left Washington, it is reported that she said: “When I ran for Congress, when I ran for president, I met more discrimination as a woman than for being black.

¹ G. Krieg, E.I. Doveve and E. McKend, *Obama tells Black men it’s ‘not acceptable’ to sit out election*, “CNN” 11.10.2024. See also, P. Cairo, *US Election 2024: The Latino male vote, Kamala Harris’s great challenge*, “El Pais” 16.10.2024

² “Virtually all women presidents issue from multiparty systems” (Jalalzai, 2013, p. 65). In those circumstances, a majority two-round electoral system means that agreements need to be made in the second round, something that reintroduce a role for party dynamics and bargaining similar to those happening during coalition formations in parliamentary systems. Some women presidents directly avoided the election during their first appointment, taken the place as vice-presidents of an impeached or died president.

Men are men”.³ Another decade passed before the first female vice-presidential nominee, Democrat Geraldine Ferraro, and another thirty years before the first woman, Hillary Rodham Clinton, was nominated in 2016 for president by a major political party, after having lost the 2008 primary campaign to Obama (Carroll & Fox, 2018).

Kamala Harris, the first female vice president of the United States, was thus not the first woman to attempt to be elected to the top position in U.S. politics. Certainly, her late entry into the race, following Joe Biden's withdrawal, did not help her gain the immediate support of the party machine or build a strong candidacy. However, the key question is whether her gender and race were a handicap in convincing the U.S. electorate. During the 2020 campaign, The New York Times commented that “reactions to her debate performance show not only the bias that women and people of color face, but the fact that for women of color, that bias is more than the sum of its parts”.⁴ In 2024, her gender and race were still considered to be issues, but at the time of her endorsement some commentators argued that there could also be “a flip side: Black voters could be galvanized if Harris is put at the top of the ticket, and women, including some who regret not voting for Clinton in 2016, would back her as well”.⁵

In prior presidential races, and contrary to the statement previously quoted from Chisholm, several studies have found race, rather than gender, to be a robust predictor of both turnout and voting behavior (Filindra & Fagan, 2022; Grose, Husser, & Yoshinaka, 2010; Kinder & Chudy, 2016; Mason, Wronski, & Kane, 2021; Thomas & Tesfai, 2019). While gender is central to most discussions about the difficulty of breaking the final glass ceiling in U.S. politics, and sexism was found to have influenced the Trump-Clinton competition (Glick, 2019), some recent experimental studies have found only limited effects of candidates' gender (Ono & Burden, 2019), if not no effect at all: “respondents indicated surprisingly low discomfort (in the abstract) with African American and female candidates” (Carmines & Schmidt, 2021, p. 30).

However, in the 2024 race, newspapers and polls seemed to tell a different story. It was not simply that having a female candidate was expected to undermine her overall credibility as Commander-in-Chief, but that certain sectors of the Democratic Party's traditional base – specifically African American and Hispanic males – threatened to abandon Kamala Harris, either by staying

Table 1. Votes and vote intentions for the Democratic candidate divided by race and gender.

	2016	2020	2024	
	Post*	Post*	Pre**	Exit***
Overall	48%	51%	49%	48%
Men	41%	48%	40%	45%
Women	54%	55%	57%	53%
Hispanic	66%	61%	57%	51%
Men	66%	57%	55%	44%
Women	67%	65%	58%	58%
Afro-American	91%	92%	77% #	86%
Men	81%	87%	73% #	77%
Women	98%	95%	79% #	92%

Note: * Self-reported votes post-elections; **Vote intentions before the election *** Exit polls.

The survey was conducted at a time in which R. Kennedy was still competing.

Source: Pew Research Center, except the overall 2024 percentages that are NBC Polls, and Exit polls that are CNN.

out of the competition or even voting for Donald Trump.⁶ Surveys, with some *caveat*, indicated significant gender gaps, which especially concerned the Democratic party.

Table 1 presents survey data for the last three U.S. presidential elections. Although the data were selected primarily from the same source, the Pew Research Center, the percentages are not entirely comparable. The first two columns reflect actual voting behavior, the third one reports vote intentions after Joe Biden's withdrawal, and the last one presents exit polls. In 2016 and 2024, the Democratic candidates were women – Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris – while in 2020, the candidate was a man – Joe Biden. The 2024 data on Black voter intentions were collected before Kennedy's withdrawal from the presidential race (in August), while the data on the Hispanic electorate were collected after his decisive retreat (in September). The overall data from the NBC poll refer to late October and early November.

Comparing only the two elections with a female candidate, we see that the gender gap is increasing both overall and within the Hispanic electorate, while the Black vote appears to be less divided than in the past, likely due to the presence in 2024 of a third-party candidate. In fact, exit polls also show a gender gap within the African American community that, though consist-

³ J. Barron, Shirley Chisholm, ‘unbossed’ pioneer in Congress, is dead at 80, “The New York Times” 3.1.2005.

⁴ M. Astor, Kamala Harris and the ‘Double Bind’ of Racism and Sexism, “The New York Times”, 9.10.2020.

⁵ J. Mason and B. Flowers, With Kamala Harris, Democrats would bet against US history of sexism, racism, “Reuters”, 22.7.2024.

⁶ J. Medina, R. Igielnik and J. Ulloa, Harris Struggles to Win Over Latinos, While Trump Holds His Grip, Poll Shows, “The New York Times”, 13.10.2024; J. Cobb, What the Polls Really Say About Black Men's Support for Kamala Harris, “The New Yorker”, 13.10.2024; M. Murray, Final NBC News poll: Harris-Trump race is neck and neck, with significant gender gap, “NBC News”, 3.11.2024.

ent, is nonetheless lesser than in previous elections. Even the final AP-NORC poll, which asked whether Kamala Harris would make a good president, confirmed the general perception of some risk of gender discrimination. It showed a 14-percentage-point gap in the Hispanic electorate (36-50), while the gap among Black voters was smaller than the prediction error (66-64).⁷

3. A CROSS-STATE ANALYSIS

The engagement of Obama and the launching of the “Hombres con Harris” initiative suggests that Harris’s campaign took racial and gender bias seriously. They hoped to leverage the gender issue in her favor, while still persuading Black and Hispanic males to support her.⁸

The relative success of these mobilization efforts can only be evaluated once the complete post-electoral ANES data are available. While standard pre-election and exit polls have been relatively more accurate than in the past, they are not well-equipped to disaggregate their predictions, especially when considering sub-categories like gender within ethnic divisions. In fact, the magnitude of the gender gap has been one of the most poorly predicted results.⁹ This is the first pragmatic reason why, in the meantime, it is worth exploring the results from a different perspective – that of a cross-state analysis.

A second reason is methodological, and pertains to the relative merits of individual self-reported data versus aggregated objective information. It cannot be overlooked that voting is an individual behavior, and the individual remains the most natural and appropriate level of analysis. However, survey respondents sometimes rationalize their behaviors, especially when their choices involve value-laden decisions, such as the decision to turn out in an election or to vote against the majority of one’s social group. The key point is that misreporting and rationalizing behaviors are not randomly distributed. Rather, they tend to be associated with relevant predictors of vote choice, including gender, education, and ethnicity (Dahlggaard et al., 2019; Sciarini & Goldberg, 2017; Selb & Munzert, 2013). Obviously, aggregated data are no substitute for individual information, but they

can still complement survey data, enhancing or challenging their robustness.

The final reason is substantive, though it also has a methodological justification derived from the economic vote theory. There is a well-known error in drawing conclusions about individual behavior from aggregate data: the so-called ecological fallacy.¹⁰ However, misalignments could also arise between the results obtained from individual and aggregate data due to the opposite risk, that of a “micrological fallacy (...), with the supposed individual economic vote effect not adding up to a national electoral effect after all” (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014, p. 372). The micrological fallacy is a sort of fallacy of composition, where what is not true for the parts may nonetheless be true for the whole, and vice versa. We are not suggesting that this necessarily occurred with regard to race and gender gaps in the 2024 U.S. election, but rather that, ultimately, what matters in an election is the aggregate result, not individual behaviors.

This research note follows these pragmatic, methodological and substantive advices, employing aggregate data at the state level. Consequently, our expectations should align with the language of this approach to avoid fallacies and insufficient causal attributions. If Kamala Harris’s candidacy could generate some surplus support among voters of her own gender, we would expect that, *ceteris paribus*:

Hp.1 The larger the share of women, the better the result for the Democratic ticket compared to the previous presidential election.

At the same time, if the soft spot of her campaign lies in the potential defection of part of the traditional base of her party, represented by African American and Hispanic (male) voters, we can also expect that, all other things being equal:

Hp. 2 The larger the share of the African American population, the worse the result for the Democratic ticket compared to the previous presidential election; and:

Hp. 3 The larger the share of the Hispanic population, the worse the result for the Democratic ticket compared to the previous presidential election.

⁷ The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Chicago, *More say Kamala Harris’ gender will hurt her chances of being elected compared with Hillary Clinton in 2016*, 26.9.2024; *Black voters trust Kamala Harris to handle the issues they care most about*, 8.10.2024; *Kamala Harris is viewed more positively by Hispanic voters than Donald Trump*, 11.10.2024

⁸ B. Debusmann and B. Drenon, *Harris courts black and Latino voters as polls suggest Trump gains*, “BBC News” 15.10.2024

⁹ M. Murray, *What the 2024 polls got right – and what they got wrong*, “NBC News”, 30.11.2024

¹⁰ An ecological fallacy is an inferential error that consists in attributing certain characteristics, preferences or behaviours to individuals simply because of the presence of some associations at an aggregate level. The misalignment between the two levels are highlighted in the U.S. context by Gelman et al. (2010), remarking that “the correlation of income with Republican voting is negative at the aggregate level and positive at the individual level” (Gelman, 2014, p. 28). “While it is theoretically possible for the two to be equal, [...] ecological correlations [cannot] validly be used as substitutes for individual correlations” (Robinson, 1950, p. 341).

Regarding the model specification, we run least squares regressions with robust standard errors, with observations collected at the level of the 50 states of the United States, plus the District of Columbia. Since our aim is to compare the support for Kamala Harris relative to the results obtained by Joe Biden four years earlier, the dependent variable used to test the three hypotheses above is the change in the percentage of votes obtained by the Democratic ticket in each state.¹¹ The covariates of interest for our three hypotheses are the percentage of women within the voting-age population, and the percentage of Black and Hispanic populations.

To control for spurious relationships and to check the robustness of our bivariate results, we have included a series of control variables. The first is the level of voter turnout, computed in terms of voting eligible population, to account for varying levels of mobilization. In fact, the Democratic Party traditionally performs better in states with higher electoral participation. Harris also relied on the fact that ten states held referenda aimed at protecting abortion rights, which were expected to bring more voters, especially women, to the polls. Therefore, we have included a dummy variable, coded as 1 for Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, and South Dakota, and 0 elsewhere. Another potentially confounding element was the differential intensity of the electoral campaign, that concentrated mostly on the seven more competitive states: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. We introduced a dummy variable to capture this factor.

To account for economic dynamics related to retrospective voting, which can either favor or damage the incumbent Democratic Party, we have used three standard indices of economic performance: growth, unemployment and inflation, all assessed at the state level and measured as usual in the year preceding the election (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2013; Nannestad & Paldam, 1994). Finally, we have also included in the right-hand side of the final equation a series of socio-economic characteristics traditionally associated with partisan preferences: average income per capita, the percentage of the older population, the level of education (meas-

ured as the percentage of the population with at least a Bachelor's degree), and the percentage of people living in urban areas. The precise definition of each variable, along with the sources used and some descriptive statistics, is provided in the online appendix.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Political parties are evolving organizations subject to constant changes, and the fact that they win or lose elections demonstrates, especially in a two-party system, that their electoral base is also changing (Gelman et al., 2010; Hilton, 2021). At the same time, certain elements of their demographic remain relatively constant (AA.VV., 2024). Before testing our hypotheses and checking if our macro-aggregate results correspond to the micro-individual behaviors described in the previous sections, we must first review some of these elements as they were at the time of the 2024 election.

Tables 2a and 2b present the results of simple preliminary analyses in which the support for the Democratic ticket in the last two presidential elections is regressed on our covariates of interest: gender and race. Columns 1 and 3 in both tables show the simple bivariate relationships, while columns 2 and 4 also include the respective turnout levels and, for 2024, the dummy relative to the most competitive states as control variables.

From these explorations we can confirm that the Democratic party is indeed "a women's party" (Table 2a). The coefficient for the percentage of women in the electorate is positively and systematically associated with support for the Democratic party in both elections, in line with evidence reported by the researchers of the Pew Research Center: "Women voters continue to align with the Democratic Party (by 51% to 44%)" (AA.VV., 2024, p. 6). This supports Kamala Harris's expectations, reflected in our first hypothesis, that her gender could help mobilize the electorate.

Individual surveys also confirm the second demographic characteristic at the center of our interest, namely, that "Hispanic (...) voters tilt more Democratic (and that) Black voters remain overwhelmingly Democratic" (AA.VV., 2024, p. 13). The coefficients of our cross-state regressions confirm the association between the presence of these two ethnic groups and the support for the Democratic presidential ticket. While there is a strong relationship between the size of the Hispanic community and the vote for Kamala Harris, in some models the statistical significance of the coefficient for the Afro-American community is more problematic. This could be just another case of micrological fallacy, with the mis-

¹¹ We run some diagnostic tests to check for outliers and heteroskedasticity problems, including a visualization of the residuals, Shapiro-Wilk W test, Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test and a White's test but, given our change dependent variable, we experienced no problem in this regard. In the online appendix we further replicated our analyses including a dummy for the District of Columbia, confirming our main results. We also employed Jackknife and Bootstrap resampling to address any abnormal leverage of specific cases and to cope with the relatively small number of observations, but our core results were not challenged by these conservative estimation techniques.

Table 2a. Gender and support for the Democratic party.

	(1) Dem pct 2020	(2) Dem pct 2020	(3) Dem pct 2024	(4) Dem pct 2024
Female VAP pct	5.24** (1.99)	5.50*** (1.88)	3.73* (1.92)	4.06** (1.99)
Turnout		0.89*** (0.28)		0.76** (0.31)
Competitive states				-3.35 (2.73)
Constant	-219.95** (101.61)	-293.22*** (104.01)	-143.82** (97.30)	-209.28* (109.58)
Observations	51	51	51	51
R-squared	0.21	0.39	0.13	0.27

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10.

Table 2b. Race and support for the Democratic party.

	(1) Dem pct 2020	(2) Dem pct 2020	(3) Dem pct 2024	(4) Dem pct 2024
Black pct	0.34 (0.26)	0.42* (0.14)	0.33 (0.26)	0.44 (0.26)
Hispanic pct	0.37*** (0.13)	0.43*** (0.14)	0.30** (0.12)	0.43*** (0.12)
Turnout		1.00*** (0.30)		0.97** (0.37)
Competitive states				-6.47** (3.08)
Constant	40.24*** (3.74)	-28.59 (22.67)	38.93*** (3.72)	-25.82 (26.44)
Observations	51	51	51	51
R-squared	0.16	0.38	0.14	0.35

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10.

alignment between aggregate and individual level correlations. However, once controlled for turnout levels and the competitiveness of the campaign in some states, the positive association becomes more systematic.¹²

Finally, before assessing our expectations, we need to evaluate the relevance of the demographic control variables designed to test the robustness of our hypotheses. Previous evidence based on individual data highlights a curvilinear relationship between income and support for the Democratic Party, which is, however, influenced by

¹² In 2020 it turns weakly significant, and in 2024, the 90% confidence intervals show that a 1-percentage point increase in the size of the black community boosts the vote for Kamala Harris between 0.00 and 0.88 percent.

Table 3. Other demographic control variables and Democratic support.

	(1) Dem pct 2024	(2) Dem pct 2024	(3) Dem pct 2024	(4) Dem pct 2024	(5) Dem pct 2024
Income pc (1000 \$)	0.59 (0.43)				-0.50*** (0.11)
Population over 65 pct		-0.04 (1.14)			0.88* (0.47)
Education attainment			1.36*** (0.11)		1.55*** (0.17)
Urban population pct				0.39** (0.16)	0.16** (0.07)
Constant	12.30 (24.12)	47.23** (21.36)	-1.24 (3.99)	17.84 (11.80)	-6.18 (12.51)
Observations	51	51	51	51	51
R-squared	0.11	0.00	0.71	0.26	0.81

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10.

education level. Voters with a college degree, and likely also relatively higher incomes, tend to vote disproportionately for the Democrats. Typically, younger generations and those living in urban areas also lean towards that party, although trends in partisanship among age cohorts have changed significantly over the last few decades (AA.VV., 2024; Igielnik, Keeter, & Hartig, 2021; Zacher, 2024).

Table 3 reflects, and largely confirms, the individual-level relationships reported above. We first run a series of bivariate analyses and then a complete model including all covariates. Richer states apparently tend to support the Democratic Party but, once controlled for other factors – particularly education and urban population – the systematic association is completely reversed. Initially, age is unrelated to partisan support, but it surprisingly turns out to be positively associated with the vote for Kamala Harris in the complete models. Finally, educational attainment and the percentage of urban population are confirmed as strong predictors of the Democratic vote in both the bivariate and multivariate models. Beyond the specific associations, model 5 is particularly relevant to our objectives, as it confirms the importance of including these variables in any test of our gender and race expectations.

Table 4 assesses our first hypothesis, which, however, turns out not to be confirmed. In fact, instead of further exploiting the gender factor, with a woman candidate increasing the mobilization capacity of an already wom-

Table 4. Gender and change in support for the Democratic party.

	(1) Change in Dem pct	(2) Change in Dem pct	(3) Change in Dem pct
Female VAP pct	-0.40*** (0.13)	-0.43*** (0.14)	-0.41*** (0.13)
Referendum		-0.52 (0.49)	-0.55 (0.47)
Competitive states		0.72* (0.39)	0.53 (0.41)
Turnout			0.03 (0.03)
Constant	18.03*** (6.71)	19.53*** (6.90)	16.86** (7.49)
Observations	51	51	51
R-squared	0.11	0.17	0.19

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10.

an-friendly party, Democrats suffered larger defeats precisely in states with larger female electorates. For each percentage point of women over 18, there was a decrease of almost half a point in the vote for the Democratic ticket. Admittedly, it was difficult to match Joe Biden's success in 2020, when there was a positive gender gap of 11 points between him and Donald Trump, but gender was expected to be one of the most valuable weapons at Kamala Harris's disposal. Not even states that held referenda aimed at protecting women's reproductive rights saw any surplus vote for Kamala Harris, with the corresponding regression coefficients being unexpectedly negative, though statistically insignificant.

Table 5 tests our second and third hypotheses concerning the risk that parts of the Black and Hispanic communities, traditionally supporting the Democratic party, could not show up on election day or even vote for Donald Trump. First, we include in the equations each ethnic group by itself, without and with the basic controls of turnout levels and competitive elections, and finally we add all the variables together in the last model.

In the state level results of models 1 and 2 there are no signs of a systematic defection of the African American electorate compared to the 2020 election. The coefficient is negative, but far from being statistically significant. On the contrary, models 3 and 4 confirm the desertion of Latinos in support of Kamala Harris and Tim Walz. The size of the coefficient is small, but its overall effect could top almost a 3% negative difference in New Mexico, the state with the highest concentration of the Hispanic community.

Model 5 additively includes all the previous covariates, and in this equation also the variable relative to the

Table 5. Race and change in support for the Democratic party

	(1) Change in Dem pct	(2) Change in Dem pct	(3) Change in Dem pct	(4) Change in Dem pct	(5) Change in Dem pct
Black pct	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)			-0.03** (0.01)
Hispanic pct			-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)
Competitive states		0.50 (0.42)		0.65* (0.35)	0.84** (0.38)
Turnout		0.03 (0.03)		0.02 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)
Constant	-1.90*** (0.25)	-3.87** (1.92)	-1.37*** (0.23)	-2.44 (1.89)	-1.33 (1.97)
Observations	51	51	51	51	51
R-squared	0.03	0.08	0.21	0.25	0.31

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10.

African Americans turns significant, apparently confirming both the second and third hypotheses. Interestingly, though Kamala Harris eventually lost the race in all of them, discounting the other effects, in the seven battleground states she managed to gain something relative to the previous election.

Finally, Table 6 checks the robustness of these findings by incorporating a series of relevant economic and demographic controls. Model 1 combines the gender and race variables of the two preceding tables with the standard control factors. Model 2 introduces the economic variables to account for any retrospective economic voting effects. Model 3 further includes the set of demographic correlates of the Democratic vote, whose relevance was previously highlighted.

To begin with our expectations, the gender hypothesis remains unconfirmed. However, the full set of controls mitigates the negative systematic effect observed in the direct analyses in Table 4, as well as in the first model of Table 6. Ultimately, gender was neither an asset nor a handicap in Kamala Harris's campaign. Regarding race, the null effect of the share of the African American population resurfaces in all models, while the systematic contribution of the Hispanic population's share to the Democratic losses remains significant. Considering the magnitude of the coefficient, in none of the seven swing states did this factor alone cause Kamala Harris's defeat. However, without this factor, in two of those states (Nevada and Wisconsin), Trump's victory margin would have been reduced by more than half; in three others (Arizona, Georgia, and Pennsylvania), it would have been cut by nearly one third; and in the remaining two states

Table 6. Gender, race and other controls on the change in Democratic vote

	(1) Change in Dem pct	(2) Change in Dem pct	(3) Change in Dem pct
Female VAP pct	-0.49* (0.25)	-0.13 (0.25)	0.24 (0.26)
Black pct	0.01 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)
Hispanic pct	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.07** (0.03)
Competitive states	0.72* (0.37)	0.91** (0.41)	1.07** (0.44)
Turnout	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Referendum	-0.27 (0.43)	-0.27 (0.41)	0.00 (0.39)
Growth		0.28*** (0.10)	0.25** (0.10)
Unemployment		-0.16 (0.28)	-0.24 (0.24)
Inflation		0.02 (0.10)	-0.10 (0.13)
Income pc (1000 \$)			0.01 (0.02)
Population over 65 pct			-0.26** (0.12)
Education attainment			-0.03 (0.03)
Urban population pct			-0.00 (0.02)
Constant	22.42* (12.61)	3.11 (13.48)	-9.82 (12.42)
Observations	51	51	51
R-squared	0.37	0.47	0.56

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10.

(Michigan and North Carolina), the gap would have been lowered by one-fourth and one-fifth, respectively.

Among the economic variables, growth is the only one that aligns with economic voting expectations, with more economically dynamic states contributing to the success, or at least the resilience, of the incumbent party. By contrast, unemployment and inflation are not associated with any voting dynamics. Finally, regarding the traditional correlates of the Democratic vote, the only systematic, but negative, association is with the share of the older population, which somewhat counterbalances the results shown in Table 3. All other things being equal, and relative to the 2020 election, “younger states” supported Kamala Harris more than Donald Trump.

5. CONCLUSION

It is time to summarize the findings of this research note. Two out of the three hypotheses were rejected, and one even risked being reversed. However, this should not be viewed as disappointing. First, null and negative results are valuable evidence in their own right. (Alrababa’h et al., 2023; van Witteloostuijn & van Hugten, 2022). Second, this study represents only an initial contribution to the cumulative knowledge that could emerge from comparing aggregate and individual-level results in future research on the 2024 U.S. election. The potential inconsistency between macro and micro evidence should not be considered a shortcoming of one of the two approaches, since the presence of micrological and ecological fallacies would provide important insights to enhance our understanding of the dynamics that shaped this election (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Kramer, 1983). It has already happened in the past in the study of the income effects on voting behaviors and results, realizing that “individual preferences and state averages are both important in considering politics and policy in [the United States]” (Gelman, 2014, p. 28).

Methodologically speaking, our data present a series of limitations, and it would have been certainly preferable to have more fine-grained information at the county level also to have a larger number of observations and run more sophisticated models. Unfortunately, apart from the immediate electoral results, we don’t have data on our independent and control variables at that level. In the online appendix we propose some replication mixing county and state-level data, and interestingly they seem to confirm all our cross-state results.

Substantively speaking, the Democrats were unable to fully capitalize on their assets. While they fielded a female candidate, they did not manage to expand the women’s electorate in their favor compared to when a male candidate was on the ticket. They had a Black candidate, but they failed to secure additional support from their traditional African American base compared to the time when Joe Biden led the party. Interestingly, states with larger Hispanic populations, one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the United States, were the ones that showed the most significant shift away from the Democratic ticket. Paradoxically, Latinos appeared to be more persuaded by Trump’s appeal than by Harris’s policies.

The positive macroeconomic results of Biden’s administration did not provide a significant boost, although even inflation failed to distinguish between states; its negative impact on voters’ finances was felt uniformly, ultimately contributing to the overall defeat of Kamala Harris. Having a Black woman as a candidate did not further

mobilize the liberal, urban, wealthier, and more educated segments of the population either (Zacher, 2024). In fact, it may have been more of a double disadvantage than a dual asset. However, the United States is much more than the relatively small segment represented by this electorate, and the inability to resonate with the majority of the population cannot solely be attributed to Kamala Harris's late entry into the race. The underlying sentiment, which should be confirmed by a more systematic analysis of survey data, is that, in the post-Obama era, the Democratic Party can no longer rely on the traditional ascriptive identities of its base. Instead, it must engage with a broader and more diverse electorate through its policies and proposals – a challenge that many other progressive parties have also faced (and failed) in various global contexts.

6. REFERENCES

- Alrababa'h, A., Williamson, S., Dillon, A., Hainmueller, J., Hangartner, D., Hotard, M., Laitin, D. D., Lawrence, D., & Weinstein, J. (2023). Learning from Null Effects: A Bottom-Up Approach. *Political Analysis*, 31(3), 448-456.
- Anderson, K. V. (2017). Every Woman Is the Wrong Woman: The Female Presidentiality Paradox. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40(2), 132-135.
- Carmines, E. G., & Schmidt, E. R. (2021). Prejudice and Tolerance in US Presidential Politics: Evidence from Eight List Experiments in 2008 and 2012. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 54(1), 24-32.
- Carroll, S. J., & Fox, R. L. (Eds.). (2018). *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dahlgaard, J. O., Hansen, J. H., Hansen, K. M., & Bhatti, Y. (2019). Bias in Self-reported Voting and How it Distorts Turnout Models: Disentangling Nonresponse Bias and Overreporting Among Danish Voters. *Political Analysis*, 27(4), 590-598.
- Dassonneville, R., & Lewis-Beck, M. S. (2014). Macroeconomics, economic crisis and electoral outcomes: A national European pool. *Acta Politica*, 49(4), 372-394.
- Filindra, A., & Fagan, E. J. (2022). Black, immigrant, or woman? The implicit influence of Kamala Harris' vice presidential nomination on support for Biden in 2020. *Social Science Quarterly*, 103(4), 892-906.
- Gelman, A. (2014). How Bayesian Analysis Cracked the Red-State, Blue-State Problem. *Statistical Science*, 29(1), 26-35.
- Gelman, A., Park, D., Shor, B., & Cortina, J. (2010). *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State. Why Americans vote the way they do*. Princeton University Press.
- Glick, P. (2019). Gender, sexism, and the election: did sexism help Trump more than it hurt Clinton? *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 7(3), 713-723.
- Grose, C. R., Husser, J., & Yoshinaka, A. (2010). Plus ça Change: Race, Gender, and Issue Retrospections in the 2008 US Presidential Election. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 20(2), 187-211.
- Hardy-Fanta, C., Lien, P.-t., Pinderhughes, D., & Sierra, C. M. (2016). *Contested Transformation. Race, Gender, and Political Leadership in 21st Century America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hilton, A. (2021). *True Blues. The Contentious Transformation of the Democratic Party*. The University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Igielnik, R., Keeter, S., & Hartig, H. (2021). *Behind Biden's 2020 Victory. An examination of the 2020 electorate, based on validated voters*. Pew Research Center.
- Jalalzai, F. (2013). *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact? Women and the Executive Glass Ceiling Worldwide*. Oxford University Press.
- Kinder, D., & Chudy, J. (2016). After Obama. *The Forum*, 14(1), 3-15.
- Kramer, G. H. (1983). The Ecological Fallacy Revisited: Aggregate- versus Individual-level Findings on Economics and Elections, and Sociotropic Voting. *The American Political Science Review*, 77(1), 92-111.
- Lewis-Beck, M. S., & Stegmaier, M. (2013). The VP-function revisited: a survey of the literature on vote and popularity functions after over 40 years. *Public Choice*, 157(3-4), 367-385.
- Mason, L., Wronski, J., & Kane, J. V. (2021). Activating Animus: The Uniquely Social Roots of Trump Support. *American Political Science Review*, 115(4), 1508-1516.
- Moncrief, G., Thompson, J., & Schuhmann, R. (1991). Gender, race, and the state legislature: A research note on the double disadvantage hypothesis. *The Social Science Journal*, 28(4), 481-487.
- Nannestad, P., & Paldam, M. (1994). The VP-function. A survey of the literature on vote and popularity functions after 25 years. *Public Choice*, 79(3-4), 213-245.
- Ono, Y., & Burden, B. C. (2019). The Contingent Effects of Candidate Sex on Voter Choice. *Political Behavior*, 41(3), 583-607.
- Pew Research Center. (2024, April 9). Changing partisan coalitions in a politically divided nation. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/04/09/changing-partisan-coalitions-in-a-politically-divided-nation/>
- Robinson, W. S. (1950). Ecological correlations and the behavior of individuals. *American Sociological Review*, 15(3), 351-357.

- Sciarini, P., & Goldberg, A. C. (2017). Lost on the Way: Nonresponse and its Influence on Turnout Bias in Postelection Surveys. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 29(2), 291-315.
- Selb, P., & Munzert, S. (2013). Voter overrepresentation, vote misreporting, and turnout bias in postelection surveys. *Electoral Studies*, 32(1), 186-196.
- Smooth, W. G. (2018). African American Women and Electoral Politics. The Core of the New American Electorate. In S. J. Carroll & R. L. Fox (Eds.), *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics* (pp. 171-197). Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, K. J. A., & Tesfai, R. (2019). Race, Ethnicity, the Political Incorporation of Black Immigrants: an Examination of Evidence from Presidential Elections Won by Barack Obama. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 20(1), 101-120.
- van Witteloostuijn, A., & van Hugten, J. (2022). The state of the art of hypothesis testing in the social sciences. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 6(1), 100314.
- Zacher, S. (2024). Polarization of the Rich: The New Democratic Allegiance of Affluent Americans and the Politics of Redistribution. *Perspectives on Politics*, 22(2), 338-356.