

“To the Men Who Love Us”

The Reframing of Reproductive Rights during Kamala Harris’s 2024 Presidential Campaign

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ABSTRACT

Women’s reproductive rights were one of the central issues in the run-up to the 2024 US presidential election. Kamala Harris ran on the issue as she and her supporters on the campaign trail emphasized the importance of access to all reproductive healthcare services, which, depending on individual state laws, had been severely curtailed since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. However, to Harris’s detriment, the gender gap in the 2024 election was projected to be profound (Pellish), and Donald Trump did retain a firm hold over men’s votes, with 53% of men aged 18 to 44 and 57% of men votes aged 45 and up voting for him (“Interactive”). The Trump campaign was evasive about reproductive issues and, instead, aggressively promoted hypermasculine images by campaigning with Hulk Hogan and enlisting the support of conservative pundits, including Joe Rogan and Charlie Kirk (founder of the conservative activist organization Turning Point USA) (Kellman). Amanda Friesen and Kate Hunt’s observation that movements like #MeToo have further alienated men from women’s issues complicated the Harris campaign’s efforts to make inroads with male voters and actively engage them in the ongoing debates. This essay will show that the Harris campaign set out to win votes by reframing their rhetoric to position reproductive rights in the context of other fundamental American freedoms and convey that men have a stake in preserving access to reproductive healthcare. Michelle Obama’s powerful campaign rally speech on October 26, 2024, in Michigan (accessible on Kamala Harris’s

YouTube channel) was the most conspicuous example of this strategy. Taking the stage in a camouflage-patterned blazer, Obama, not long into her speech, began a sentence with “[t]o the men who love us . . .” (Kamala Harris, “Michelle Obama”). The former first lady’s argument was in part an impassioned plea that forcefully explained to men how another Trump presidency and concomitant healthcare restrictions would hurt the women they loved and, ultimately, themselves. Thus, I will argue that Obama’s speech strikes a delicate balance between prompting men to “step up” for reproductive freedom on its merits and appealing to masculine gender scripts, reminiscent of “protective paternalism” (Leaper and Gutierrez), to suggest that voting Harris is a way to fulfill their “duty” to “protect” women, which is a political strategy that nevertheless somewhat weakens emancipatory discourses of bodily autonomy.

KEYWORDS

Reproductive Freedoms, Michelle Obama, 2024 Presidential Election, Benevolent Sexism, Protective Paternalism

Introduction

Throughout Kamala Harris’s abridged 2024 presidential campaign, Beyoncé’s “Freedom” – according to Emmett G. Price III “a bonafide anthem for an end to discrimination, prejudice, racism, and the various forms of human-on-human oppression and trauma” (Parys) – rang out when the then vice president took the stage. The song from the 2016 album *Lemonade*, featuring Kendrick Lamar, set the tone for Harris’s campaign program, which centered on fighting for and reclaiming democratic freedoms central to US-American life. At a campaign rally in Atlanta, GA, on July 30, 2024, Harris listed the persistent conservative efforts to restrict freedoms, saying:

Across our nation, we are witnessing a full-on assault on hard-fought, hard-won freedoms and rights: the freedom to vote . . . , the freedom to be safe from gun violence . . . , the freedom to live without fear of bigotry and hate . . . , the freedom to love who you love openly and with pride . . . , the freedom to learn and acknowledge our true and full history . . . , and the freedom of a woman to make decisions about

her own body. . . and not have her government tell her what to do . . .
(Ganesan)

In reaction to Harris's speech, the audience repeatedly chanted, "We are not going back", signaling a rejection of another Trump presidency, which threatened to undo progress made on civil rights issues during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in summer 2022 starkly reminds us that, in George Lakoff's words, "freedom isn't free" (255) and that even well-established freedoms (i.e., hard-won civil rights) can be revoked. In *Pregnancy and Power* (2019), Rickie Solinger notes that "reproductive politics [...] remains so difficult" because it involves "the most bitterly contested, unresolved issues [...] [including] questions about female sexuality, gender identity, women's rights, racism, racial equality and white supremacy, immigration, citizenship eligibility, religious freedom, scientific integrity, the causes of poverty, health care, environmental quality, numerous population issues, and the human rights of all persons" (3). *Roe* protected abortion as a constitutional right under the Fourteenth Amendment. Its reversal in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* transferred legislative power over abortion to the states. Many Republican-led states enacted strict abortion bans, exacerbating existing inequities and curtailing access to vital reproductive healthcare services, while also contemplating criminalizing providers and pregnant people and restricting access to assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) and medication abortion.

The effect of these sweeping legislative changes is most evident in reports of pregnant girls, women, and people experiencing serious and life-threatening complications as they are unable to obtain gynecological, contraceptive, preventative, reproductive, prenatal, postnatal, maternal, and abortion care. Such reports have also galvanized public opinion (Doherty et al.) and made abortion rights a winning issue in 2022 and 2023 (Nash and Ephross; Forouzan and Guarnieri). Accordingly, the Harris campaign made "restor[ing] and protect[ing] reproductive freedoms"

(“A New Way Forward”¹) one of their central themes. In contrast to Joe Biden, a devout Catholic, who only reluctantly addressed these issues or even said the word “abortion” (Sherman), Harris had already established a track record of advocating for bodily and reproductive autonomy as a Democratic Senator for California (2017-2021)² and Vice President (2020-2024) before entering the race for the White House. Thus, her campaign chose a specific communicative approach to situate reproductive rights in the larger context of fundamental American freedoms and reframe them as a non-partisan issue that voters, including moderate Republicans, Independents, undecided voters, as well as the sought-after but historically Republican-leaning demographic of male voters, could rally around.

Doing so, as I will try to show, entailed invoking a more traditionally Republican rhetoric of freedom and redirecting voters’ attention onto the broader yet preventable reproductive healthcare crisis triggered by “Trump abortion bans” (Fox7Austin). It further involved enlisting support from well-known public figures, like former First Lady Michelle Obama. Obama’s powerful campaign rally speech on October 26, 2024, in Michigan was the most conspicuous example of the Harris campaign’s strategy to illustrate that all men have a stake in preserving reproductive freedoms. Not long into her speech, still accessible on Kamala Harris’s *YouTube* channel, Obama began a sentence with “[t]o the men who love us . . .” (Kamala Harris, “Michelle Obama”³) and turned her argument into an impassioned plea that forcefully explained to men how continued reproductive healthcare restrictions would hurt their loved ones. Thus, I will argue that Obama struck a delicate balance between prompting men to “step up” for access to reproductive healthcare on its merits and appealing to traditional masculine gender scripts. The latter is a politically sophisticated approach yet somewhat weakens emancipatory discourses

¹ The author accessed the campaign website in December 2024. As of January 2025, it is no longer available.

² One notable example was an exchange between Harris and Brett Kavanaugh at his 2018 Supreme Court confirmation hearing. Harris’s line of questioning had Kavanaugh admit that he was unable to “think of any laws that give the government the power to make decisions about the male body” (“Senator Harris”) and went viral.

³ For readability this citation will henceforth appear shortened to “M.O.”

of bodily autonomy as it plays on “protective paternalism” (Leaper and Gutierrez) to suggest that voting for Harris is a way for men to “protect” women.

Reproductive Rights and the Rhetoric of Freedom

Evoking the elusive concept of freedom in “the land of the free” is still an effective and affective strategy to appeal to voters because, according to Orlando Patterson and Ethan Fosse, it is “one of America’s most cherished values” (26). However, they also show that people’s “perception of high levels of freedom is not a universal experience” but is highly contingent on income, material resources, race, and historical inequalities (30-31). Whereas many white people, particularly conservatives, troublingly perceive a decline in their freedom during periods of social and racial progress, increased surveillance, policing, and economic inequality disproportionately erode the sense of freedom among financially disadvantaged, Black, Indigenous Americans, and Americans of color (30-31). These disparities necessitate distinguishing between perceived freedom and freedom as a foundational ideal. Accordingly, Cheryl E. Matias and Peter M. Newlove assert that the latter has always been and is

tainted with historical amnesia, hypocrisy, and inhumanity [because] its idealizations of opportunities, freedom, and liberty [are set] against the haunting backdrop of African American slavery, Native American genocide, Asian American [incarceration], gender discrimination, and restrictions against gender identity. In this disturbing revelation, many Americans are left to wonder whether they truly have freedom or, instead, only the illusion of freedom. (316)

Freedom has nevertheless been upheld as a core value in US politics and used as a political football. W. B. Gallie identifies it as an “essentially contested concept” (169), and George Lakoff argues that manifold interpretations preclude a shared understanding (25). Lakoff also explains that “the most basic assumption of simple freedom is that *being free does not make you free*

to interfere with the freedom of others" (41; emphasis original). However, what amounts to interference and justifies overriding it remains debatable (41). Invoking certain freedoms, Democrats and Republicans introduce policies that affect how constituencies can or cannot exercise them. Their differing definitions explain contrasting views on governance: Democrats emphasize the government's role in addressing inequalities, establishing safety nets, protecting the environment, and ensuring education, healthcare, and diplomacy. According to Ronald Brownstein, Republicans "have marketed themselves as the party of freedom" for decades and, thus, favor limited government, economic deregulation, states' rights, Second Amendment rights, individual responsibility, traditional family values, military strength, tough-on-crime and strict immigration policies, and national sovereignty.

The Republican Party's messaging around freedom became more personalized and combative with Donald Trump's election and first term (2016-2020). Trump's speeches during the 2024 campaign used exclusionary rhetoric, emotional appeals, nationalist ideals, populist messaging, and misinformation to claim that migrants were threatening American freedom and security. For example, at a rally in Wilmington, NC, on September 21, 2024, he falsely claimed that "migrants [were] attacking villages and cities all throughout the Midwest" (qtd. in Anderson). Dannagal G. Young et al. argue that the COVID-19 pandemic also allowed conservatives to instrumentalize freedom discourse to allege that vaccines and masking guidelines were "a threat to personal freedom" (1). On his show in 2021, Tucker Carlson even jibed that "[t]he Biden administration has decided it owns your body." However, the credibility of conservatives' emphasis on (personal and bodily) freedom was pushed to the breaking point in the aftermath of *Roe*'s overturning, when many states enacted laws that immediately (partially or totally) banned abortion. Such trigger laws and restrictions are an unequivocal reminder that many Republicans, conservative legislators, and religious "pro-life" advocates do not consider or are dismissive of reproductive rights as an encroachment on personal freedom.

Seizing on this selective interpretation of freedom, the Harris campaign,

aware of the broad public support for abortion rights,⁴ highlighted reproductive issues to appeal to moderate Republicans, Independents, and undecided voters. During a speech marking the 51st anniversary of *Roe*, Harris argued that “[f]reedom . . . is fundamental to the promise of America . . . And that includes the freedom to make decisions about one’s own body . . . not the government telling you what to do” (“Vice President”). Speaking about reproductive *freedoms* rather than *rights* allowed Democrats to invoke the fundamental promise of freedom in the American imagination and (re)connect reproductive matters to privacy, personal autonomy, and minimal government intervention as *Roe* had done. In short, Democrats were pushing to return to the status quo under *Roe* and presented reproductive debates in terms designed to persuade a broader spectrum of voters, including more men, to oppose further restrictions on American freedoms and vote for Harris.

As US reproductive debates are closely intertwined with religious beliefs, particularly Christian fundamentalism, the campaign also sought to address moderates within these electoral groups. Therefore, Harris continued to state, “one does not have to abandon their faith or deeply held beliefs to agree the government should not be telling [a woman] what to do with her body” (Fox7Austin). Seeking to appeal to individuals who are on the fence about abortion but oppose governmental interference in private matters, Harris’s campaign for freedoms enlisted support from several (former) Republicans. At the 2024 Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago, Adam Kinzinger, former Representative from Illinois, accused “Donald Trump [of having suffocated] the soul of the Republican Party” (Cortellessa), while Olivia Troye, former advisor to Vice President Mike Pence, said she was supporting Harris “not because [they] agree on every issue but because [they] agree on the most important issue: protecting freedom” (Graham). Notably, former Representative from

⁴ In their 2022 Pew Research Center report, Elizabeth Nash and Peter Ephross show that ballot initiatives supporting abortion rights passed in six states (California, Michigan, Vermont, Kansas, Kentucky, and Montana). Compiling a similar report in 2023, Kimya Forouzan and Isabel Guarnieri summarize that Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio, and Oregon also enshrined abortion rights in their state constitutions, while “a record number [129] of state-level abortion protections” were passed.

Wyoming, Liz Cheney, who is expressly “anti-abortion, . . . pro-life [and] supported *Roe v. Wade* being overturned,” also endorsed Harris, calling the current reproductive care landscape “simply . . . unsustainable” (Tapper). Her support signaled a recognition of the threat a second Trump term posed to reproductive freedom and healthcare, especially given the former president’s ominous promise to protect women “whether [they] like it or not” (Padilla).

Unifying Americans around a Healthcare Crisis

In the run-up to the election, Democrats frequently reminded Americans of the first Trump administration’s role in overturning *Roe*. Harris emphasized that Trump appointed three conservative justices – Neil M. Gorsuch (2017), Brett Kavanaugh (2018), and Amy Coney Barrett (2020) – to the Supreme Court, making him “the architect” of “a healthcare crisis” (“A New Way Forward”). Meanwhile, Trump professes to be proud of facilitating the overturning (Blumenthal), and his choice of staffers and running mates reflects a broader pronatalist agenda. For instance, Mike Pence is fervently pro-life and fiercely advocated for defunding Planned Parenthood (Redden), while Vice President JD Vance claimed that the US needed “more babies” (LiveNOW) at the 2025 March for Life. Endorsing activists’ pro-life stance, he implicitly rubberstamped their efforts to restrict reproductive autonomy further. In stark contrast, Liz Cheney asserted that extreme pro-life stances did not protect but put “life... at stake” (The View) and, to that end, Elizabeth Beck et al. argue that “the laws and judicial decisions against bodily autonomy constitute a form of state-sanctioned violence, determining who lives and who dies” (555).

The Democratic campaign, therefore, sought to assure voters that Harris would “never allow a national abortion ban” (“A New Way Forward”), while trying to contextualize the divisive issue as *one* integral component of many vital gynecological, preventative, sexual, gender-affirming, obstetric, reproductive, and maternal healthcare services. Concurring, the Center for Reproductive Rights asserts that “Black, Indigenous and people of color, . . . those living in rural communities and with lower incomes, are

disproportionately harmed when health care is inaccessible”⁵ and point out that while “most US maternal deaths are preventable,” maternal mortality “is more than three times the rate of most other high-income countries” (“United States”). More attuned to the current reproductive healthcare landscape, Democrats campaigning for Harris discussed states’ restrictions as an issue that widened preexisting care gaps, exacerbated racial, gendered, and financial health inequities due to a lack of access and resources, and ultimately put lives at risk.

Instead of simply presenting statistics, the campaign invited Americans to share their stories (in TV ads and on stage), highlighting the harm caused by abortion bans. Among them were Amanda and Josh Zurawski, Kaitlyn Joshua, and Hadley Duvall, who spoke at the DNC. The Zurawskis, a white Texan couple, revealed their fetus had no chance of survival, but Amanda only received care after developing sepsis, which impacted her fertility. Joshua, a Black woman from Louisiana, miscarried and was similarly denied care until she became critically ill. Duvall, a white woman from Kentucky, remarked that Trump calls abortion bans a “beautiful thing” but talking about her stepfather’s abuse and the abortion she needed at the age of twelve, she asserts that there is no beauty in “a child having to carry her parent’s child” (NBCNews). All stories emphasize abortion care as essential. However, the choice of stories signals that the Democratic Party’s approach emphasizes the necessity of abortion care after complications or extreme circumstances rather than someone’s legitimate decision to “just” have an abortion. Nevertheless, as Jennifer Aaker states that personal “stories are remembered up to twenty-two times more than facts alone,” enlisting storytellers effectively demonstrated the need for comprehensive reproductive healthcare to voters.

Given that gendered voting patterns from 1992 to 2024,⁶ as analyzed

⁵ The Center specifies that “Black women in the US are almost three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women” (“United States”), while Shameka Poetry Thomas argues that “[s]tructural racism perpetuates the decentering of Black health experiences” (19) to their detriment.

⁶ The CAWP also illustrates that race, ethnicity, religion, age, and education factor into voting decisions. The analysis shows, for example, that nine out of ten Black women voted for Harris/Walz, whereas the majority of white women have predominately cast their votes

by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), show that women favor Democrats and men lean Republican,⁷ persuading more men to support Harris and Tim Walz was crucial. Reproductive healthcare issues were used to appeal to male voters by portraying Harris as a defender of reproductive freedom, which would benefit women *and* entire families. Josh Zurawski's appearance beside Amanda exemplified the strategy of involving men. Visibly distraught, Josh recounted how he could not protect his wife and had to watch helplessly until she received basic abortion care. With this in mind, he concluded that "the fight for reproductive rights isn't just a woman's fight. This is about fighting . . . for our families and, as Kamala Harris says, our future" (NBCNews). Meanwhile, Walz, a former football coach, openly discussed his and his wife's fertility struggles and the importance of ARTs (Han). The overall tenor of the men's stories refocused the messaging from a more direct intersectional reproductive rights and justice framing to a no less valid but moderated argument that catered to men, who might view reproductive matters as a "women's issue."

Making men fear that a second Trump administration could impose a national abortion ban affecting the women in their lives was a potentially powerful tool to mobilize their votes. As Arit John et al. observed, Democrats aimed not "to persuade large swaths of men but to broaden the range of people who see reproductive rights as an issue that touches their own lives," hoping that "small gains . . . could make a difference in states . . . likely [to] be decided by a razor-thin margin." Despite Trump's win, expanding support for reproductive freedoms among Republicans, Independents, and undecided male voters can be considered a hallmark of Kamala Harris's presidential campaign, best illustrated by Michelle Obama's campaign speech, during which she made a direct appeal...

for Republicans since 2004.

⁷ When Hillary Clinton campaigned against Donald Trump in 2016, there was an 11-point gender gap (54% of women and 41% of men voted for Clinton) (CAWP). In 2020, when Joe Biden challenged Trump, the gap amounted to 12 points (57% of women and 45% of men voted for Biden) (CAWP). In 2024, there was ultimately a gender gap of 10 points with 53% of women and 43% of men voting for Harris (CAWP).

... **“To the Men Who Love Us”**

“So, let me take a minute to help folks, especially the men in our lives, to get a better sense of what could happen, if we keep dismantling parts of our reproductive care system piece by piece as Trump intends to do. I want folks to understand the chilling effect not just on critical abortion care but on the entirety of women’s health” (“M.O.”), begins Obama on stage in Kalamazoo, MI, on October 26, 2024. Her speech aligns with the criteria Richard M. Perloff outlines to create a persuasive narrative, as it “contains a structure that can be easily comprehended and has clearly defined protagonists and antagonists, a coherent storyline, a moral lesson, and rich metaphors . . .” (262). From the outset, Obama’s purpose is clear; she aims to engage men by evoking emotional responses, while also presenting essential facts, and conjuring alarming pictures of women’s lives without reproductive healthcare:

To the men who love us: let me just try to paint a picture of what it will feel like if America, the wealthiest nation on earth, keeps revoking basic care from its women and how it will affect every single woman in your life. Your girlfriend could be the one in legal jeopardy if she needs a pill from out of state or overseas, or if she has to travel across state lines because the local clinic closed up. Your wife or mother could be the ones at higher risk of dying from undiagnosed cervical cancer because they have no access to regular gynecological care. Your daughter could be the one too terrified to call the doctor if she’s bleeding during an unexpected pregnancy. Your niece could be the one miscarrying in her bathtub after the hospital turned her away. And this will not just affect women, it will affect you and your sons. (“M.O.”)

Here, Obama emphasizes that men are inevitably affected by debates about reproductive freedoms and speaks earnestly about “the chilling effects” (“M.O.”) restrictions have. The passage includes visceral descriptions of distressing scenarios designed to evoke fear, urgency, and protective feelings in (male) listeners. The former First Lady uses familiar roles – girlfriend, wife, and daughter – to make men envision the women they may have in

their lives and forge a personal connection to the issues at hand. However, the speech also does not lose sight of the bigger picture, as Obama asserts that “every single woman” (“M.O.”) will suffer the dire consequences of restrictive reproductive policies. In short, the speech persuasively argues that women will face considerable harm if Trump wins reelection.

“To the men who love us” marks a pivotal rhetorical moment in the speech, acting as both an appeal and a challenge. The phrase inextricably connects the private with the political, transforming men from passive observers into active stakeholders in the fight for access to reproductive healthcare. It also indicates men’s moral responsibility, suggesting that love requires action. The implicit challenge to defend women strategically invokes “protective paternalism,” which Leaper Campbell and Brenda C. Gutierrez argue is an aspect of benevolent sexism and constitutes a “set of patronizing attitudes,” precisely “chivalrous expectations that men provide safety for women” (5). To encourage more conservative men to see reproductive healthcare as relevant to them, the implicit suggestion that voting for Harris will protect women was likely intentionally crafted to resonate with those holding more traditional views of masculinity and gender roles.

Obama’s speech carefully insinuates that not voting for Harris and Walz, who have vowed to defend reproductive freedom, amounts to men’s failure to protect women. Switching from the conditional to the indicative mood, Obama explains how reproductive emergencies will affect men, while women face life-threatening situations:

If you and your partner are expecting a child, you will be right by her side at the checkups, terrified if her blood pressure is too high or if there’s an issue with the placenta or if the ultrasound shows that the embryo was implanted in the wrong place and the doctors aren’t sure that they can intervene to keep the woman you love safe. If your wife is shivering and bleeding on the operating room table during a routine delivery gone bad. Her pressure dropping as she loses more and more blood or some unforeseen infection spreads, and her doctors aren’t sure if they can act. You will be the one praying that it’s not too late . . . And then there is the tragic but very real possibility that in

the worst-case scenario, you just might be the one holding flowers at the funeral. ("M.O.")

This passage makes generous use of so-called fear appeals to describe relatively common complications during pregnancy, which, if restrictive laws do not prohibit it, are treatable and preventable. Melanie B. Tannenbaum et al. note that the effectiveness of fear appeals depends on the degree of "depicted susceptibility and severity" (5) and showing personal risk and the harmful effects of inaction (5). They also argue that fear appeals are most persuasive when paired with "self-efficacy" or "response-efficacy" messages that assure the audience they can take action for positive outcomes (4). Similarly, Robin L. Nabi and Jessica Gall Myrick find that "feelings of hope in response to fear appeals contribute to their persuasive success" (463). Consequently, Obama presented her audience with frightening, high-stakes scenarios but also offered a solution in voting for Harris. Obama uses logical appeals – specifically, cause-and-effect reasoning – to illustrate the impact of restrictive policies. She explains how abortion bans cause clinic closures, the relocation of medical staff, and the emergence of healthcare deserts, which can lead to increased "undiagnosed medical issues such as cervical and uterine cancers" ("M.O."). Her argument effectively redirects attention from abortion, which Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling argue "[c]onservatives have made a negative public issue" (77), to the reality of a more extensive public healthcare crisis.

Obama's speech employs accessible language and typical rhetorical devices to engage, activate, and persuade her audience. With the use of personal pronouns, primarily "we" and "you," and the occasional "y'all," she strikes a balance between creating a community among listeners and still speaking to each audience member. Accordingly, Norman Fairclough argues that personal pronouns give speeches "relational value" (185-86), and that "synthetic personalization" is a technique that helps "give the impression of treating each of the people 'handled' en masse as an individual" (89). Fairclough also stresses the significance of "visual language" (60) – gestures, facial expressions, movement, and postures – accompanying verbal texts. Obama's straight posture, minimal body movement, and serious facial expression help convey the gravity of the

issue. Meanwhile, Obama relied on hand gestures, like placing her hand over her heart, to appeal to the audience, show emotion, or express genuine concern. Finally, taking the stage in a camouflage-patterned blazer should also be considered strategic. The associations with combat reify the *fight* for reproductive healthcare, and, for some audience members, it might even recall the US Army's motto –, “This We’ll Defend” – which emphasizes a commitment to defend the country and its foundational principles – freedom among them.

Overall, the speech aligns with Democratic talking points and contributes to Harris's campaign to emphasize the fight against reproductive healthcare restrictions. While Obama sought to bring men into the fold, she did not shy away from challenging the legitimacy of male-dominated political decision-making on reproductive rights and legislative abuses enabled under Trump. She reinforced Harris's message that Democrats “trust women” (6abcPhiladelphia) but, notably, did not speak about reproductive freedoms. Instead, Obama underscored that “the only people who have standing to make these decisions are women with the advice of their doctors” (“M.O.”). However, in closing, she returned to men and reminded them “to take [women’s] lives seriously” (“M.O.”). She ended with a final plea to “not put our lives in the hands of politicians, mostly men, who have no clue or do not care what we as women are going through . . . Please, please do not hand our fates over to the likes of Trump, who knows nothing about us, who has shown deep contempt for us because a vote for him is a vote against us. Against our health. Against our work” (“M.O.”). Thus, Obama leaves (male) listeners with the clear message that preserving reproductive rights and protecting women's health is a moral responsibility and in everyone's best interest.

Conclusion: Reproductive Rights “Win,” Democrats Lose?

Although Donald Trump won the 2024 presidential election, the Harris campaign's reframing of reproductive rights into freedoms to cater to a broader electorate warrants close attention. The rhetorical shift allowed Democrats to try to contextualize the politically divisive and gendered

issue within the larger context of foundational freedoms that US-Americans hold dear. Purposefully emphasizing that abortion care is one among many other vital forms of reproductive healthcare further assisted in directing voters' attention toward a larger healthcare crisis. Michelle Obama's speech in Michigan is a crucial example of the campaign's efforts to communicate the importance of reproductive rights and healthcare to male voters. She notably blended her reasoned argument with fear appeals that purposefully leveraged traditional gender roles and, especially, protective paternalism, to appeal to and challenge men to take a stand for women's health in the election.

The success of ballot measures protecting abortion rights during the 2024 presidential election shows that Harris's focus on reproductive *freedoms* may indeed have influenced voters. Isabel Guarneri and Krystal Leaphart from the Guttmacher Institute report that abortion rights measures were passed in seven of ten states. Arizona, Colorado, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, and New York. While New York added protections against discrimination based on ethnicity, age, disability, pregnancy, reproductive health, sexual orientation, and gender identity. However, Florida's measure missed the 60% threshold by 3% and South Dakota and Nebraska's measures also failed. Ballot measures are vital for protecting access to reproductive healthcare, and their overall success underscores the potential for mobilization. However, the 2024 election showed a disconnect between supporting reproductive rights and voting for Harris, potentially also exposing a gender bias in voting for the first Black and South Asian woman running for president.

So far, Trump's second presidency has tested democratic institutions as the White House has flooded the zone (Broadwater) with executive orders affecting gender diversity, identity, trans rights, and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Programs (NPR Staff). Additionally, there are concerns about another substantial crackdown on reproductive rights and the advancement of an aggressively pronatalist agenda, not least because Robert F. Kennedy Jr, Trump's Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), has recently announced a review of mifepristone, a drug used in medication abortions (Rinkunas). The White House has also ominously suspended several government websites, including www.

reproductiverights.gov, and removed contraceptive information from the CDC website (Cooper), depriving Americans of an official sources of information, which echoes the concerns about the further dismantling of reproductive freedoms raised by Democrats, the Harris campaign, and Michelle Obama in the run-up to the election.

AUTHOR'S BIONOTE

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