

# WILL A WOMAN EVER BE U.S. PRESIDENT?

By The New York Times

**O**n the arduous climb toward the “highest, hardest glass ceiling”, female presidential candidates persisted and resisted. They promised they were unbought and unbossed. Most of all, they believed the nation was ready for them. And, one by one, they were proved wrong.

The United States has been led by men for all of its 248 years, and that will continue for at least four more. On Wednesday, Vice-President Kamala Harris became the latest woman to fail to break the gender barrier to the presidency, and the second to be defeated by Donald Trump. Across the country, on text chains, during commutes, in offices, with friends and family, women were processing the sting of another loss. Mothers consoled their daughters. Others tried to figure out how to explain what it meant, to their loved ones and to themselves, that Harris had been defeated by a man like Trump – who had bragged about stripping away the rights of women, about grabbing them by their genitals, and who had been held liable for sexual abuse.

“I’m terrified by him, to be honest,” said Nicole Saylor, an independent voter in Hendersonville, North Carolina, who has voted Democratic in the past few elections. “I’m terrified that I live in a country where 51% of the people voted for someone bigoted and misogynistic. I’m terrified that half of the country thinks it’s okay.”

Harris’s loss brought many women a wave of sadness and pain, to be sure. But this time, there was another emotion. When Hillary Clinton lost to Trump in 2016, the anger and shock had been so palpable that it sparked a pink-hatted protest movement. Now, faced with the reality that Trump had been swept back into office with a broader electoral mandate than before, women across the country expressed grim resignation that their country was more welcoming to a second Trump term than to the idea of a female leader.

“It’s just nothingness in my head. I can’t look ahead,” said Abby Clark, 42, who does environmental advocacy work in Detroit. “I don’t know how to plan. I can’t picture the world we’ll be in and what it will really be like. I just know that it will be difficult and hard.”



Hillary Clinton

Delivering her concession speech on Wednesday at Howard University, Harris did not speak about her loss in terms of gender or race. Instead, Harris spoke directly to the young voters who had gathered to see her. “Don’t ever stop trying to make the world a better place, you have power,” Harris said. “And don’t you ever listen when anyone tells you something is impossible because it has never been done before.”

Throughout her 15-week campaign, Harris, a Black and South Asian woman, had tried to pivot away from questions about the historical significance of her candidacy to her desire to serve as a president for “all Americans” – a strategy that freed her to challenge Trump on matters of policy and character. By the time Election Day arrived, she had taken her gender and her opponent’s name out of her closing argument altogether, casting her fight as one about embracing a more united future.

Harris and her party had bet it all on appealing to women by attacking Trump’s character and reminding them that he was proud to have appointed three Supreme Court justices who helped overturn *Roe vs Wade*, ending the constitutional right to abortion. She showed clips of Trump’s bizarre behaviour at her political rallies and focused on his disparaging comments about women, minorities and political opponents in the final stretch. She invited women who had been harmed by





restrictive abortion bans to take the stage at her events. And she and her advisers had been hopeful that Trump's own rallies would be a reminder of his track record with women.

For his part, Trump made an aggressive play for male voters, and at times he used misogynistic language to describe Harris, insulting her intelligence and claiming she lacked the stamina to lead the country. At a rally in North Carolina, he chuckled at a remark shouted by a rallygoer that insinuated Harris had been a prostitute. "This place is amazing," he said. Some women who supported Trump argued that Harris's loss had little to do with gender. "I think America is ready for the right female president," said Fanchon Blythe, a Trump supporter who owns a nail salon in Lincoln, Nebraska. "Kamala was not the right one." She said former Democratic Rep Tulsi Gabbard, who became a Republican and endorsed Trump, would make a good one.

Christian Ramirez, 34, an executive assistant at Arizona State University who lives in Phoenix, said she had been a lifelong Democrat until the 2020 election, when she "jumped ship". "They were trying to make it, 'Oh, Trump's against women. Kamala's pro-women,'" she said. "But I don't think that's what it comes down to. It comes down to a lot more policies than just the abortion."

In the end, more than 105 years after the 19th Amendment was passed to bar states from denying women the right to vote, and 59 years after the Voting Rights Act was passed to ensure that all Black women and others could exercise that right, Americans again decided against sending a woman to the White House.



Harris had been deliberate in trying to get Americans to see her in the role. She stood beside President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine, checked up on people in states hit by hurricanes and delivered her campaign's closing argument in front of the White House.

As they parsed the results of an election that had shown a drift toward Trump among nearly every voter demographic group, Democrats were soul-searching, questioning how much Harris's gender factored into her loss. "I think it all mattered," said Jane Kleeb, the chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party. "Race, gender, city, rural, etc. We've run a battleground strategy for 20 years. It's not working."

The United States lags behind several other nations – Britain, Germany, Israel, India, Canada and, this year, Mexico – which have chosen women as leaders. Despite the long wait, America is far from alone. Men do still run the world, numerically. Only about a third of the countries in the United Nations have ever had a female head of the government. Just 13 of the body's 193-member countries are currently led by women, according to the Pew Research Center.

Eight years ago, Clinton, a former first lady, senator and secretary of state, won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College to Trump. In her concession speech, Clinton said she hoped that a woman would come along and shatter the glass ceiling "sooner than we might think right now." That wait continues. This time, the road ahead seems more uncertain. ■

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