

RACIAL HEALING

The Power of Collectivism: Racial Healing and Black Women's Political Leadership

Shonna Tillman

This article presents an integrative literature review supported by illustrative survey data to examine how Black women's political leadership development is shaped through grassroots political training programs. Drawing on public administration, Black feminist thought, and political science, the analysis explores how such programs cultivate leadership practices grounded in collectivism, community accountability, and care while operating within political systems structured by individualistic norms. Survey data from 88 participants are used illustratively to contextualize patterns in political ambition, candidacy consideration, and inspiration from other Black women leaders, rather than to test causal relationships. Taken together, the article advances a conceptual argument that collectivist leadership frameworks provide a lens for examining alternative approaches to leadership development and democratic practice in public administration, while underscoring the need for future empirical research to more explicitly examine governance outcomes associated with these approaches.

Keywords

Black women's political leadership, racial healing, collectivism, grassroots political training, public administration

The evolving landscape of public administration has intensified scholarly attention to equity, representation, and inclusion in leadership and governance. Yet despite these shifts, Black women remain significantly underrepresented in elected office and senior administrative roles in the United States (Brown 2015; Center for American Women and Politics 2023). This underrepresentation is not adequately explained by deficits in political ambition or civic engagement. Rather, it reflects enduring structural barriers related to recruitment, campaign financing, access to political networks, and institutional legitimacy that constrain pathways to political power (Dittmar 2015; Jenkins 2007; Sanbonmatsu 2006). Within this context, leadership development becomes not only a question of individual preparation but also of how political and administrative institutions recognize, cultivate, and sustain alternative forms of leadership.

Public administration scholarship has traditionally privileged leadership models rooted in individual achievement, administrative neutrality, and professional expertise. While these frameworks have shaped dominant understandings of effective governance, scholars have increasingly ques-

tioned their capacity to address racial inequality and democratic exclusion (Frederickson 1990; Irizarry et al. 2025). Such models often obscure the relational, collective, and care-based dimensions of leadership that have long characterized political engagement within Black communities. As a result, leadership practices that do not conform to individualistic norms may be undervalued or rendered less legitimate within formal governance structures.

Within this scholarly landscape, collectivism offers an alternative framework for understanding leadership development and governance. Collectivism, broadly defined as an orientation emphasizing interdependence, shared responsibility, and communal well-being, stands in contrast to leadership models centered on individual advancement and competition (Markus and Kitayama 1991). In Black political traditions, collectivism has functioned not merely as a cultural value but as a political strategy for survival and resistance, emerging through churches, grassroots organizations, mutual aid networks, and movement-based leadership (Carruthers 2018). Despite its centrality to Black political life, collectivism remains under-theorized within public administration leadership scholarship, which has

tended to prioritize efficiency, neutrality, and individualized performance over relational and community-centered approaches (Bearfield et al. 2023).

Scholarship on Black women's political leadership further illustrates how collectivist orientations shape leadership practices in contexts of exclusion and marginalization. Rather than emphasizing individual advancement alone, scholars note that many Black women leaders foreground shared accountability, coalition-building, and community well-being as important components of political engagement (Collins 2000; Harris-Perry 2011). These practices should not be interpreted as a singular or inherent leadership style but rather as strategies that emerge from social and political conditions shaped by exclusion and collective survival (Dawson 1994; Morris 1984). Leadership is frequently expressed through care work, movement-based organizing, and relational governance rather than hierarchical authority or individual recognition (Robnett 1997). Although such practices align closely with collectivist frameworks, they remain undervalued within political and administrative systems structured by individualistic norms.

In response to these structural constraints, grassroots political training programs have emerged as key sites of leadership development for women considering public office. Programs such as Emerge, Higher Heights, and She Should Run seek to equip participants with campaign skills, mentorship, and professional networks while addressing gender-based barriers in electoral politics. For Black women in particular, many of these programs incorporate identity-affirming and community-centered practices that foreground collective responsibility, care, and accountability. These features distinguish grassroots training from traditional leadership pipelines that emphasize technical competence and individual advancement alone, positioning training environments as spaces where collectivist leadership orientations may be cultivated.

Illustrative examples, including Representative Cori Bush's movement-to-policy trajectory and Mayor Tishaura Jones's equity-driven municipal reforms (both of Missouri), demonstrate how leadership grounded in community engagement can inform institutional governance without constituting a singular or firm model of Black women's leadership (Office of the Mayor 2022; Slodysko and Salter 2021). These examples are presented not as evidence of universal outcomes, but as illustrations of how collectivist approaches rooted in shared account-

ability and relational governance may operate within political institutions shaped by inequality and exclusion.

This article examines how grassroots political training programs create conditions under which collectivist leadership orientations may emerge and be sustained within political systems structured by individualistic norms. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship from public administration, Black feminist thought, and political science, this article advances a conceptual argument that collectivism functions not merely as a leadership style but as a framework for understanding leadership development, governance, and democratic practice. Illustrative survey data from 88 Black women who participated in political training programs are incorporated to contextualize patterns in political ambition, consideration of candidacy, and inspiration from other Black women leaders. These data are not used to test causal relationships or evaluate program effectiveness, but rather to ground the conceptual discussion in self-reported political experiences. By advancing collectivism as a framework for interpreting leadership development among Black women in political training environments, this article contributes to public administration scholarship by highlighting how relational leadership practices intersect with institutional structures that shape democratic participation and representation. By situating leadership development within debates about individualism, collectivism, and racial healing, this article contributes to ongoing efforts to expand how leadership, legitimacy, and democratic participation are theorized and practiced within public administration.

Literature Review

Individualistic Models of Leadership in Public Administration

Leadership scholarship within public administration has historically emphasized individual achievement, hierarchical authority, and managerial efficiency as central indicators of effective governance. Traditional leadership models often privilege individual expertise, positional authority, and bureaucratic control, reinforcing an understanding of leadership as a primarily individual pursuit within administrative institutions. While these frameworks have shaped much of the public administration literature, scholars increasingly recognize that such approaches may obscure how structural inequality,

institutional barriers, and social context influence leadership opportunities and governance outcomes (Ehrich and Fenwick 2024). Recent scholarship in public administration has therefore called for greater attention to social equity, representation, and the lived experiences of historically marginalized communities when evaluating leadership and governance practices (Gooden 2014; McCandless and Blessett 2022; McKinney 2026).

Within the social equity tradition, scholars argue that public administration must move beyond technocratic models of leadership to consider how structural inequality shapes access to political and administrative power. Blessett and McCandless (2021) emphasize that centering social equity requires examining whose leadership is recognized within institutions and whose experiences remain marginalized within traditional governance frameworks. This shift encourages scholars to analyze leadership not solely as an individual attribute, but as a relational process embedded within broader social, political, and institutional contexts, one that accounts for the structural barriers historically marginalized communities face when seeking entry into political and administrative power.

Collectivism as an Alternative Leadership Framework

Collectivism offers an alternative framework for understanding leadership and governance by emphasizing interdependence, shared responsibility, and collective well-being rather than individual achievement as the primary driver of leadership emergence (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Within collectivist frameworks, leadership is understood as relational and embedded within networks of collaboration, mutual aid, and shared accountability. These traditions emphasize the collective processes through which communities cultivate leadership capacity and mobilize political action.

Within Black political traditions, collectivism has historically functioned not simply as a cultural orientation but as a strategy of survival and resistance. Black communities have long relied on collective institutions such as churches, mutual aid societies, civic organizations, and grassroots movements to mobilize political participation and sustain leadership development in contexts where formal political power was limited or inaccessible (Dawson 1994; Greer 2013; Morris 1984), illustrating how collective networks have historically

functioned as pathways for political mobilization and leadership formation. These institutions have provided structures that were inaccessible or exclusionary. Through collective organizing and shared responsibility, these networks have enabled leadership to emerge through relational practices rather than through hierarchical authority alone.

Black Women's Leadership and Collectivist Traditions

Scholarship on Black women's political leadership offers an important lens for reconsidering traditional assumptions about leadership and governance. Black feminist scholars have long emphasized that Black women's leadership practices emerge from histories of collective struggle, community care, and grassroots organizing rather than from individual advancement alone. Recent research on minority women's political representation further demonstrates how Black women navigate overlapping systems of race and gender when entering political institutions, shaping distinct leadership pathways that challenge traditional models of political participation (Brown and Gershon 2016). Collins (2000) describes how Black feminist thought centers collective responsibility, mutual support, and relational leadership as critical components of political engagement within Black communities. Similarly, Harris-Perry (2011) highlights how Black women's political leadership is often shaped by community accountability and the need to navigate overlapping systems of racialized and gendered marginalization.

These leadership practices should not be interpreted as a singular or universal leadership style but rather as strategies that emerge within specific historical and institutional contexts. Scholars note that many Black women leaders foreground shared accountability, coalition-building, and community well-being as important components of political engagement (Collins 2000; Harris-Perry 2011). Such practices reflect longstanding traditions of mutual aid, grassroots mobilization, and community-based leadership that have historically sustained political activism within Black communities.

Individualism vs. Collectivism in Contemporary Political Leadership

The tension between individualism and collectivism

provides an important framework for understanding how these leadership practices operate within contemporary governance structures. Hofstede's (1980) conceptualization of individualism emphasizes personal autonomy, competition, and individual achievement, values that have historically shaped leadership development and electoral politics within the United States. Within this framework, political success is often understood as the product of personal ambition and individual capability, reinforcing narratives that obscure the structural barriers many leaders face when seeking entry into political institutions.

In contrast, collectivism emphasizes interdependence, shared accountability, and communal well-being (Markus and Kitayama 1991). For many marginalized communities, collectivism has historically functioned as a strategy of political survival rather than simply a cultural orientation. Dawson (1994) demonstrates how Black political participation has often been guided by group-based political interests rooted in shared experiences of discrimination and structural inequality. Similarly, Morris (1984) illustrates how collective organizations, within the Civil Rights Movement, relied on networks of churches, community organizations, and grassroots mobilization to challenge institutional power.

These collectivist traditions continue to shape contemporary political leadership, particularly in contexts where individuals must navigate systems that were not originally designed to accommodate their participation. Emerging scholarship in public administration further suggests that leadership practices rooted in community engagement, relational accountability, and collective responsibility may offer important pathways to advancing social equity within governance institutions (Bearfield et al. 2023; Blessett et al. 2019). Rather than focusing solely on individual advancement, these frameworks highlight how leadership can serve as a mechanism to strengthen democratic participation and address systemic inequality.

At the same time, the institutional structures of electoral politics often reinforce individualistic incentives that may conflict with collectivist leadership traditions. Competitive elections, limited campaign resources, and institutional gatekeeping mechanisms can create environments in which collaboration becomes difficult to sustain. Scholars examining leadership within equity-focused governance frameworks therefore emphasize the need to better understand how leadership development programs, mentorship networks, and political training

initiatives can help cultivate collective leadership practice within systems historically structured around individual competition (Gooden et al. 2023).

Together, this body of scholarship suggests that leadership within public administration cannot be fully understood through individualistic models alone. By examining how collectivist traditions intersect with leadership development, this article contributes to ongoing conversations within public administration about how equity-centered leadership practices may reshape governance, strengthen democratic participation, and challenge traditional assumptions about political leadership.

Methodology

This article employs a qualitative-descriptive approach designed to support conceptual analysis rather than to test causal relationships or evaluate program effectiveness. The methodological choices reflect the article's primary objective: to advance a theoretical framework for understanding collectivist leadership development among Black women within grassroots political training contexts, while grounding that framework in empirical experiences reported by participants. This article is therefore best understood as a conceptual contribution grounded in illustrative empirical data rather than as a hypothesis-testing empirical study.

The illustrative survey data used in this analysis were collected to capture self-reported experiences related to political ambition, leadership development, and consideration for candidacy among Black women who participated in grassroots political training programs in the Deep South. For the purposes of this article, these data are used selectively to provide empirical context for the conceptual arguments advanced, rather than to validate theoretical claims or produce generalizable findings. This approach aligns with scholarship that integrates empirical insight into theory-building without positing data as evidentiary proof.

Survey respondents (N = 88) were Black women who had participated in political training programs across Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Although the programs varied in size, scope, and structure, they shared a common emphasis on preparing participants for engagement in electoral politics through skills training, mentorship, and network-building. Participants represented a range of political experiences, including individuals who had considered running for office,

those who had pursued candidacy, and those who had not sought elected office. This range of experience allows the analysis to reflect multiple leadership trajectories without privileging electoral success as the sole indicator of leadership development.

The survey instrument included both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to capture participants' perceptions of leadership readiness, sources of political inspiration, and perceived barriers to political participation. Questions addressed whether respondents have considered or pursued candidacy, the perceived influence of political training on their readiness to engage politically, and the challenges encountered when navigating political institutions. Open-ended responses invited participants to reflect on the aspects of training they found most impactful and the constraints they faced. The full survey instrument is provided in Appendix A to enhance transparency.

Analytically, descriptive statistics were used to summarize patterns in responses to closed-ended items, including consideration of candidacy, inspiration from other Black women leaders, and perceptions of the influence of training. Associations among select variables were explored to identify relational patterns in the data; however, these associations are presented illustratively and should not be interpreted as evidence of causality. Open-ended responses were reviewed to identify recurring themes related to leadership development, mentorship, collective support, and structural barriers. These themes are used to contextualize the literature-based discussion of individualism and collectivism rather than to generate new theory.

Several strategies were employed to enhance the analysis's trustworthiness. The use of mixed question formats allowed for triangulation between structured survey responses and participant narratives. Positional awareness informed the analytic process, acknowledging the author's engagement as a scholar working on Black women's political leadership. Finally, the scope of inference is intentionally bounded. The findings presented do not claim representativeness or generalizability; instead, they provide empirical grounding for a conceptual argument about leadership development within specific political training contexts. By centering participant experiences as illustrative, this methodological approach supports the article's broader aim of examining how collectivist leadership orientations are articulated, sustained, and constrained within political systems shaped by individualistic norms.

Findings

The findings presented here describe patterns in political ambition, leadership development experiences, and candidacy decisions among 88 Black women who participated in grassroots political training programs. Descriptive summary tables corresponding to these findings are provided in Appendix B. The survey data are used illustratively to provide empirical context for the conceptual arguments advanced in this article, rather than to test hypotheses or establish causal relationships.

Participation in political training programs was associated with high levels of political interest and ambition, though this did not consistently translate into electoral candidacy. Of the 88 respondents, 31.8% ($n = 28$) reported running for local political office after completing a political training program, while 68.2% ($n = 60$) reported not running. These patterns suggest that exposure to political training may broaden awareness of political pathways and leadership possibilities without necessarily resulting in individual candidacy, underscoring the distinction between leadership development and electoral participation.

Respondents frequently described leadership readiness as shaped through collective environments rather than individual preparation alone. Many participants reported increased confidence, greater familiarity with campaign processes, and improved understanding of fundraising, messaging, and voter engagement as a result of participating in training programs. These perceived gains were described across respondents regardless of whether they pursued candidacy, indicating that leadership development extended beyond electoral outcomes and was not solely contingent upon running for office.

Access to support emerged as uneven across respondents and appeared to influence how participants navigated political opportunities. Slightly more than half of respondents (54.6%, $n = 48$) reported receiving some form of support when considering a run for office, while 45.4% ($n = 40$) reported receiving no support. Support was described broadly and included mentorship, organizational encouragement, informational resources, and informal networks. Even among those who reported increased preparedness through training, limited access to sustained support remained a commonly cited challenge.

Inspiration from other Black women serving in elected office was a recurring pattern in participant re-

sponses. Many respondents indicated that seeing Black women in political leadership roles contributed to their willingness to consider leadership positions themselves. Analysis of the broader dataset indicates that a descriptive cross-tabulation of the survey data suggests a relationship between inspiration drawn from Black women leaders and political engagement outcomes, including willingness to consider candidacy and perceptions of support. These patterns reflect relational dimensions of leadership development described by participants rather than evidence of direct causal influence.

Despite reported gains in confidence and preparedness, respondents consistently identified structural barriers that constrained political participation. Financial limitations, difficulty securing endorsements, and reduced access to mentorship were frequently cited challenges. Several respondents who pursued candidacy described diminished organizational support once electoral competition began, suggesting that collective networks may become strained within political environments structured by scarcity and individual advancement.

Taken together, these findings illustrate how grassroots political training programs operate within a broader political context shaped by both collective leadership development and individualistic electoral norms. The data highlight a pattern in which leadership readiness and political ambition are widely cultivated, while access to sustained support and institutional resources remains uneven. These dynamics provide empirical context for understanding how Black women navigate leadership development within public administration and electoral politics and set the stage for the interpretive discussion that follows. These patterns provide empirical context for understanding how collectivist leadership orientations emerge, operate, and encounter institutional constraints within contemporary political training environments.

Discussion

The findings illustrate how grassroots political training programs operate within a broader tension between individualistic norms of political leadership and collectivist traditions rooted in Black political life. While a substantial proportion of respondents reported increased confidence, readiness, and inspiration following participation in training programs, only 31.8% of re-

spondents ultimately pursued candidacy. This pattern highlights an important distinction between leadership development and electoral participation, suggesting that political training programs may cultivate leadership capacity without necessarily translating into immediate decisions about candidacy. Rather than indicating a lack of political ambition, these findings suggest that leadership emergence is shaped by both relational motivations and structural constraints operating within electoral systems.

Interpreted through a collectivist leadership framework, these findings indicate that leadership development among Black women participants is frequently relational rather than purely individual. Respondents frequently described political inspiration arising from exposure to other Black women leaders, mentorship relationships, and shared experiences in training environments. These dynamics highlight the importance of examining not only who is trained to lead, but also how institutional structures shape which forms of leadership are recognized, legitimized, and sustained within political systems (Collins 2000; Dawson 1994).

At the same time, the uneven distribution of support reported by respondents reveals the structural limitations that collectivist leadership practices encounter within electoral systems organized around competition and resource scarcity. Nearly half of the respondents reported receiving no meaningful support when considering a run for office, even after participating in training programs designed to expand political opportunity. Several participants described diminished access to mentorship or organizational backing once candidacy became competitive. These experiences illustrate how collectivist leadership orientations may be cultivated within training environments while simultaneously constrained by institutional structures that reward individual advancement (Alexander 2012; Brown 2015).

Black feminist thought further clarifies these dynamics. As Blessett (2023) and Collins (2000) argue, Black women's leadership often centers care work, coalition-building, and community accountability while remaining institutionally marginalized. The findings reflect this paradox: respondents describe leadership as a shared responsibility and collective endeavor yet navigate systems that privilege individual visibility and resource accumulation. Intersectional pressures, as articulated by Crenshaw (1991), intensify this tension, positioning Black women at the convergence of racial-

ized and gendered expectations that complicate both leadership enactment and institutional recognition.

Importantly, the findings do not establish that collectivist leadership frameworks guarantee electoral success or institutional transformation. Rather, they illuminate how collectivist orientations are articulated, sustained, and constrained within specific political training environments. The coexistence of expanded political ambition and persistent structural barriers suggests that leadership development programs may cultivate collective capacity while remaining embedded within systems that reward individual competition. This tension does not negate the value of collectivist frameworks; instead, it highlights the need to examine how institutional design either supports or undermines relational forms of governance.

While the findings illuminate how collectivist leadership orientations are cultivated and constrained within electoral systems, they also raise broader questions about how institutions might be structured to better sustain relational forms of governance. Rather than prescribing universal solutions, the patterns identified here suggest areas where public administration practice, organizational design, and future research may more intentionally engage collectivist leadership frameworks.

Practice Recommendation

These findings generate several implications for policy and practice within public administration. First, leadership development initiatives that seek to expand political representation among historically marginalized communities may benefit from examining how their structures either reinforce or mitigate competitive, individualistic norms. While training programs often emphasize skill-building and campaign readiness, the findings suggest that sustained mentorship and relational support beyond the preparatory phase may be equally important. Institutional design that prioritizes long-term collective infrastructure over episodic preparation tied to electoral cycles may better sustain collectivist leadership orientations.

Second, organizational practices within political training environments warrant closer attention. The uneven distribution of support reported by respondents, particularly once candidacy became competitive, suggests that relational networks can weaken under conditions of resource scarcity and institutional pres-

sure. Public administration practitioners and program designers might therefore consider how accountability structures, resource allocation, and mentorship models can be intentionally structured to prevent collective fragmentation once competition begins. Such considerations are especially relevant for programs operating in contexts marked by racial and gendered exclusion, where collective networks function not only as professional resources but as sites of affirmation and resilience.

Research Recommendation

Finally, these findings underscore the need for more explicit empirical inquiry into collectivist leadership frameworks within public administration scholarship. While this article advances a conceptual argument grounded in illustrative data, future research should more systematically examine how collectivist orientations influence governance outcomes, organizational effectiveness, and policy responsiveness. Comparative studies across leadership development models, institutional contexts, and demographic groups would further clarify whether collectivist approaches produce distinct administrative practices or decision-making patterns. By expanding empirical engagement with collectivism as a leadership framework, scholars can more rigorously assess its potential contributions to democratic governance.

Taken together, the findings contribute to public administration scholarship by illustrating how leadership development processes intersect with broader debates between individualistic institutional norms and collectivist traditions rooted in Black political life. By foregrounding the relational dimensions of political ambition and the structural constraints that shape candidacy decisions, this article extends leadership theory beyond trait-based or purely individualistic models. In doing so, it invites further empirical inquiry into how governance institutions might better accommodate collectivist leadership orientations without reproducing the competitive dynamics that limit their sustainability.

Conclusion

This article advances collectivism as a framework for understanding leadership development among Black women navigating political training environments and electoral systems structured by individualistic norms.

By integrating public administration scholarship, Black feminist thought, and illustrative survey data, the analysis repositions leadership development as a relational process shaped by collective networks, shared accountability, and community engagement rather than solely by individual ambition or technical preparation. In doing so, the article contributes to ongoing debates in public administration about how leadership, relationships, and democratic participation are conceptualized within institutions that have historically been shaped by exclusion.

The findings illuminate a central tension: grassroots political training programs appear to cultivate confidence, readiness, and relational motivation, yet these gains unfold within institutional contexts that reward competition and resource concentration. Leadership development, as respondents described it, frequently emerges through collective environments characterized by mentorship, visibility, and shared affirmation among Black women participants. At the same time, structural constraints, including uneven access to support, financial limitations, and institutional pressures, limit the translation of collective capacity into sustained political representation. These dynamics highlight the importance of examining not only who is trained to lead, but also how institutional structures shape which forms of leadership are recognized, supported, and sustained within political systems.

Importantly, this article does not claim that collectivist leadership guarantees electoral success or institutional transformation. Rather, it argues that collectivism offers a critical analytic lens for understanding leadership development in contexts marked by racialized and gendered barriers to political participation. By foregrounding relational ambition and collective infrastructure, this framework expands how public administration scholars conceptualize political participation, governance, and legitimacy.

Future research should build upon this conceptual framework by examining how collectivist leadership practices influence governance outcomes, organizational decision-making, and policy responsiveness within public institutions. Empirical research is particularly needed to test how collectivist leadership dynamics operate within electoral and administrative environments and whether these practices produce measurable differences in governance outcomes. Comparative studies across leadership development programs, institutional contexts, and geographic regions would further illuminate whether collectivist leadership orientations produce dis-

tinct administrative practices or democratic outcomes. Such research would deepen scholarly understanding of how relational leadership models interact with institutional design and democratic governance.

As public administration continues to grapple with questions of equity, representation, and democratic renewal, greater attention to collectivist leadership frameworks may prove essential. Centering collectivism not as a cultural abstraction but as a lived political practice allows scholars and practitioners to better understand how leadership emerges within communities historically excluded from formal political power. In doing so, this article contributes to broader efforts to reimagine leadership development and democratic governance within an evolving institutional landscape.

References

- Alexander, Michelle. 2012. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The New Press.
- Bearfield, Domonic A., Nicole Humphrey, Shannon Portillo, and Norma M. Riccucci. 2023. "Dismantling Institutional and Structural Racism: Implementation Strategies Across the United States." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 1 (1): 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v1i1.4837>
- Blessett, Brandi. 2023. "Black Women Been Knew: Understanding Intersectionality to Advance Justice." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 1 (2): 42–50. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v1i2.5034>
- Blessett, Brandi, Jennifer Dodge, Beverly Edmond, Holly T. Goerdel, Susan T. Gooden, Andrea M. Headley, Norma M. Riccucci, and Brian N. Williams. 2019. "Social Equity in Public Administration: A Call to Action." *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance* 2 (4): 283–299. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppmgov/gvz016>
- Brown, Nadia E. 2015. *Sisters in the Statehouse: Black Women and Legislative Decision Making*. Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Nadia E., and Sarah Allen Gershon, eds. 2023. *Distinct Identities: Minority Women in U.S. Politics*. Second edition. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003297031>
- Carruthers, Charlene A. 2018. *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*. Beacon Press.
- Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP). 2023. *Women in Elective Office 2023*. New Rutgers University. <https://cawp.rutgers.edu>

- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203900055>
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Dawson, Michael C. 1994. *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Dittmar, Kelly. 2015. *Navigating Gendered Terrain: Stereotypes and Strategy in Political Campaigns*. Temple University Press.
- Ehrlich, Lisa C., and Walter English Fenwick. 2024. "Re-Imagining Leadership Roles beyond the Shadow of Bureaucracy." *Education Sciences* 14 (3): 331. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14030331>
- Frederickson, H. George. 1990. *The Public Administration Theory Primer*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Gooden, Susan T. 2014. *Race and Social Equity: A Nervous Area of Government*. Routledge.
- Gooden, Susan T., Richard Gregory Johnson III, Sean McCandless, and RaJade Berry-James. 2023. "The Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration: From Vision to Victory." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 1 (1): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v1i1.4770>
- Greer, Christina M. 2013. *Black Ethnics: Race, Immigration, and the Pursuit of the American Dream*. Oxford University Press.
- Harris-Perry, Melissa V. 2011. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. Yale University Press.
- Hofstede, Geert. 1980. *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Sage.
- Irizarry, José Luis, RaJade M. Berry-James, Duchess D. Humphrey, Rachel Emas, Bruce D. McDonald III, James Nordin, Michael Lee, Lindsey L. Evans, Anthony M. Starke, Jr., and Jay M. Grosflam. 2025. "Threats to Democracy: A Danger to Social Justice for All." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 3 (2):309–319. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v3i2.6796>
- Jenkins, Shannon. 2007. "Women, Political Ambition, and the Decision to Run for Office." *Political Research Quarterly* 60 (2): 235–248.
- Markus, Hazel Rose, and Shinobu Kitayama. 1991. "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation." *Psychological Review* 98 (2): 224–253.
- McCandless, Sean, and Brandi Blessett. 2022. "Dismantling Racism and White Supremacy in Public Service Institutions and Society." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 44 (2): 91–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2022.2043071>
- McKinney, Mark. 2026. "Rebuilding Trust in Public Institutions: A Path Toward Racial Healing for African Americans." *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* 4 (1): 98–105. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jsepa.v4i1.7025>
- Morris, Aldon D. 1984. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. Free Press.
- Office of the Mayor, City of St. Louis. 2022. "Mayor Tishaura O. Jones Signs Executive Order Establishing Reparations Commission." December 8. <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/mayor/news/reparations-commission.cfm>
- Robnett, Belinda. 1997. *How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*. Oxford University Press.
- Sanbonmatsu, Kira. 2006. *Where Women Run: Gender and Party in the American States*. University of Michigan Press.
- Slodysko, Brian, and Jim Salter. 2021. "She Once Lived Out of Her Car. For This Congresswoman, the Eviction Fight Is Personal." *Los Angeles Times*, August 4. <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-08-04/misouri-congresswoman-eviction-moratorium-fight>

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

The survey instrument included closed- and open-ended questions designed to capture political ambition, training experiences, and perceptions of leadership pathways among Black women. Questions included the following:

Section I: Personal Information

1. Are you
 - a. Single
 - b. Married
 - c. Other (please state): _____
2. In which state do you currently reside?
 - a. Mississippi
 - b. Alabama
 - c. Georgia
 - d. Florida
 - e. Arkansas
3. What is your age group?
 - a. 20–30 years old
 - b. 31–40 years old
 - c. 41–50 years old
 - d. 51 years or older
4. What is your highest level of education?
 - a. High school diploma
 - b. Some college
 - c. Completed college
 - d. Some graduate school
 - e. Completed graduate school
 - f. Doctorate
5. What is your current occupation?

Section II: Political Engagement

6. Are you interested in running for local government?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Which political leadership development program have you completed?
8. Prior to enrolling in the program, what was your degree of political knowledge?
 - a. Very Low
 - b. Low
 - c. Moderate
 - d. High
 - e. Very High

9. Before entering the political leadership training program, did you participate in any political organizations?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. If yes, which organization?
10. Have you run for political office since completion of the program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. If you did run for political office, did you win your election?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - i. If yes, which office were you elected to?
 - ii. If no, will you continue to pursue a political career?
12. If you did run for political office, what challenges and barriers did you face?
13. Did you apply to the political training program because you are interested in running for political office?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. If no, please explain why you applied to the program.
14. Do you know anyone else who has attended this program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
15. In your opinion, and based on your experiences as a Black woman, have your political aspirations been helped?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
16. If yes, please explain:
17. Did you vote in your most recent local elections?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
18. Do you have any Black women political role models?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. If yes, who are they?
19. Are you motivated to run for political office when you see a Black woman in a political role?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Section III: Program Assessment

20. Was the political training program you attended virtual or in person?
 - a. Virtual
 - b. In person
 - c. A mixture of both
21. What skills did you hope to learn during the course of the political leadership training program? (Please check all that apply)
 - a. How to run a political campaign
 - b. How to run for public office
 - c. How to be an effective public speaker
 - d. How to fundraise for a campaign
 - e. Establish potential networks
22. After completing the program, did you feel supported by your fellow cohorts?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix B: Descriptive Summary Tables

This appendix provides descriptive summary tables corresponding to the survey findings discussed in the article. The tables are included to enhance transparency and provide additional context for readers. The data are descriptive and illustrative and are not intended to support causal inference or hypothesis testing.

Table B1. Candidacy Outcomes Among Survey Respondents (N = 88)

Candidacy outcome	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Ran for local office	28	31.8
Did not run for office	60	68.2
Total	88	100.00

Table B2. Reported Support When Considering Candidacy (N=88)

Reported support	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Received some form of support	48	54.6
Received no support	40	45.4
Total	88	100.0

Note: Support included mentorship, organizational encouragement, informational resources, and informal networks, as reported by respondents.

Table B3. Inspiration from Other Black Women Leaders (N = 88)

Reported inspiration	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Inspired by other Black women leaders	61	69.3
Not inspired by other Black women leaders	27	30.7
Total	88	100.0

Table B4. Intersection of Inspiration and Candidacy (Descriptive Cross-Tabulation)

Inspiration from Black Women Leaders	Ran for Office (n)	Did not Run (n)	Total (n)
Yes	22	39	61
No	6	21	27
Total	28	60	88

Dr. Shonna Tillman (she/her) (ast82@msstate.edu) is a Public Policy and Administration scholar whose research focuses on Black women's political representation and rural leadership. Her expertise spans youth engagement, curriculum design, and coalition building, with a focus on Black-led communities. She is a professor committed to advancing equity through teaching and advocacy.