BWR
BLACK WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE

FROM DISCONTENT TO DETERMINATION

Black Women in the Economy and on the 2026 Midterm Elections

A Special Report of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Black Women's Roundtable
September 2026

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THE NATIONAL
Coalition on Black
Civic Participation

BLACK WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE

A signature program of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Oxfam America and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) for their generous support of the 10th Annual Black Women's Roundtable Power of the Sister Vote Poll. We also acknowledge the incredible work of Sojourn Strategies for conducting the survey of 1,000 Black women registered voters who shared their experiences, their judgments, and their expectations with us.

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Executive Summary

The 10th Annual Black Women's Roundtable Power of the Sister Vote Poll, a national survey of 1,000 Black women registered voters, finds an electorate under severe economic strain, deep institutional distrust — and more determined to vote than at any point this series has measured. Black women have absorbed the brunt of a federal agenda that hollowed out the federal workforce, dismantled diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, and weakened civil rights enforcement. They have not responded by withdrawing. They have responded by sharpening their demand and leaning into their power. ***The story of 2026 is not disengagement. It is discontent channeled into righteous determination.***

Pushed Out: Black Women in the Workforce

- Federal employment, long a dependable pathway into the Black middle class, fell by 277,000 jobs (9.2%) between January and December 2025 and has continued to decline in 2026.
- In August 2026, women filled 158,000 of the 162,000 jobs added nationally — roughly 98%. Black women did not share in the gains: their unemployment rate rose from 5.4% to 5.6%, nearly twice the 3.0% rate for White women.
- Between May and August 2026, roughly 242,000 Black women left the labor force altogether. Black women's unemployment rates alone fail to reflect those disappearing from the workforce altogether as a result of not finding work.
- Nearly half of Black women (47%) report being paid less than a coworker for the same job, and 88% are concerned about unequal pay. More than eight in ten (84%) are concerned about DEI cuts, and 43% say those cuts have already affected them or someone close to them.

The Daily Math of Getting By

- Nearly eight in ten (78%) say economic conditions are getting worse, a 22-point jump from 56% in the 2024 survey. More than four in ten (44%) cut back on groceries in just the past three months.
- To get by over the past year, 37% borrowed from family or friends, 32% used up most or all of their savings, 29% relied on a food bank or church pantry, and 24% skipped meals so others could eat.
- Young women carry the heaviest load: 56% of Gen Z borrowed from family, and 36% skipped meals. About a third of Gen Z (34%) and Millennial (33%) women rate their mental health as only fair or poor, against 13% of Boomers.
- A degree changes the shape of hardship, not whether it arrives. College graduates report more pay discrimination (53% vs. 43%) and more debt for basics (37% vs. 25%); women without a degree report deeper subsistence hardship, including food bank reliance (35% vs. 16%).

Distrustful, but Not Disengaged

- Dissatisfaction with the country's direction climbed from 65% in the 2024 survey to 83%. Just 12% approve of the President's job performance, and congressional approval collapsed from 40% to 15%.
- Three in four Black women (75%) distrust the presidency, 67% distrust Congress, and 60% distrust the Supreme Court. Only 36% trust elected officials to look out for Black women — falling to 21% among college graduates.
- Engagement moved in the opposite direction. Seventy percent now say their vote has real power to create change, up 20 points from the 2024 survey, while the share who feel powerless was cut in half, from 30% to 15%.
- Black women are ideologically varied: 48% call themselves moderate, 35% progressive, and 17% conservative. Among progressives, 42% would consider themselves Democratic Socialists, rising to 51% among Gen Z progressives, the highest share of any generation.

The Ballot Under Siege AND Under Watch

- Following the U. S. Supreme Court's April 2026 decision in *Louisiana v. Callais* weakening Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, 85% of Black women are concerned and 65% are very concerned — a level of intensity matched by almost nothing else in the survey. Interestingly, concern is highest among Gen Z Black women (90%).
- Alarm about the ruling sits alongside a strong belief that voting works, across every generation. Recognizing the vote as the target has not pushed Black women away from it.
- In primaries held after *Callais*, majority-Black counties in four Southern states turned out at 32.0%, nearly six points above the 26.1% statewide average.

What Black Women Want

- Protecting the social safety net is now the single top priority, more than doubling from 21% in the 2024 survey to 47% and climbing from fourth place to first.
- Concern is broad and consistent: protecting Social Security and Medicare (92%), reducing the cost of living (91%), fighting discrimination and racism (91%), healthcare and prescription costs (91%), protecting voting rights (90%), and reducing Black maternal deaths (89%).
- Black women are more likely to support a candidate committed to lowering the cost of living (89%), racial justice (86%), voting rights (86%), restoring DEI (79%), and abortion rights (70%). Affordability alone is not enough.

Determination at the Polls

- Sixty-nine percent say they will definitely vote, up from 56% in the 2024 survey, and 67% are extremely motivated, up from 47%.

- The gap is generational, not attitudinal: 81% of Boomers will definitely vote, against 56% of Gen Z — though Gen Z believes in the power of their vote nearly as strongly (64% vs. 73%) and is the most hopeful generation of all.

Recommendations

- **Restore and enforce civil rights protections in the workplace.** Ensure the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces rather than undermines federal antidiscrimination law, including restoring demographic data reporting. Employers should audit hiring practices, including AI-driven screening tools, for bias.
- **Protect and strengthen the social safety net.** Reverse the cuts to Medicaid and SNAP enacted under H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, and defend Social Security and Medicare against erosion.
- **Make equal pay more than a promise.** Advance salary transparency, strengthen pay equity enforcement, and protect the right to organize and bargain collectively.
- **Invest in the workers this economy pushed out.** Provide guaranteed paid leave, affordable child care, workforce training, and student debt relief, and lift the new caps on graduate student borrowing.
- **Protect the ballot.** Restore the full strength of the Voting Rights Act; ensure mail ballots are processed fairly and polling places remain free of intimidation; and fund voter-protection infrastructure now, not in October.
- **Invest in Black Women's Voting Power.** Stop treating Black women as an afterthought. Instead, invest early and directly in Black women voters, especially Gen Z and Millennial women, and speak to the full breadth of Black women's policy concerns across the ideological and generational spectrum.

Introduction

In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper declared that when and where Black women enter, the whole race enters with her. It is a claim that has echoed through every generation since: that the fate of Black women and the fate of the whole community rise and fall together. More than 130 years later, her genius still rings true. When doors are opened for us, doors are opened for all. Conversely, where Black women are pushed out, the rest of the economy is not far behind. In this way, Black women remain the canary in the coal mine. And for the better part of two years, we have been sounding the alarm.

Since January 2025, Black women have absorbed the full force of a federal agenda that has hollowed out the federal workforce, dismantled Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs across the public and private sectors, and weakened the very civil rights enforcement meant to protect workers from discrimination. The consequences have been swift, measurable, and severe. Roughly 600,000 Black women have lost their jobs (IWPR, 2026). Many more have watched their paychecks stretch thinner while the cost of simply getting by has climbed higher. But if the architects of this disruption expected Black women to simply quietly absorb this devastating blow, they thought wrong. Black women have felt the attack, and now, they are ready to fight back.

This report brings together findings from the 10th Annual Black Women's Roundtable Power of the Sister Vote Poll, a national survey of 1,000 Black women registered voters commissioned by the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP) and its Black Women's Roundtable (BWR) and conducted by Sojourn Strategies in partnership with Oxfam America and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The poll's findings were released in two phases: the first on Black Women's Equal Pay Day, July 21, 2026, and the second on August 6, the 61st anniversary of the signing of the Voting Rights Act. Here, we place those findings in conversation with the latest labor market data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and ask a simple question with enormous stakes: What happens when the women hit hardest by this economy walk into the voting booth this November?

The answer is a portrait of contradiction and of clarity. Black women are more economically squeezed, more distrustful of federal institutions, and more pessimistic about the direction of the country than at any point this poll has measured. They are also more convinced of the power of their vote, and more determined to use it, than ever before. **The story of 2026 is not disengagement. Instead, it is discontent channeled into determination.**

CHAPTER ONE

Pushed Out: Black Women in the Workforce

The federal workforce, historically one of the most dependable pathways into the Black middle class and a sector in which Black women have long been overrepresented, was among the first casualties under the Trump Administration. According to the BLS, federal government employment fell by 277,000, or 9.2 percent, between its January 2025 peak and the end of that year, amid cuts driven in part by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), and it has continued to decline in 2026. The damage did not stay in Washington. An analysis of BLS data by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) found that Black women lost more than 251,000 jobs between January and August of 2025 alone, with more than 600,000 Black women having been pushed out of the labor market since the start of 2025 (Haidara, 2026).

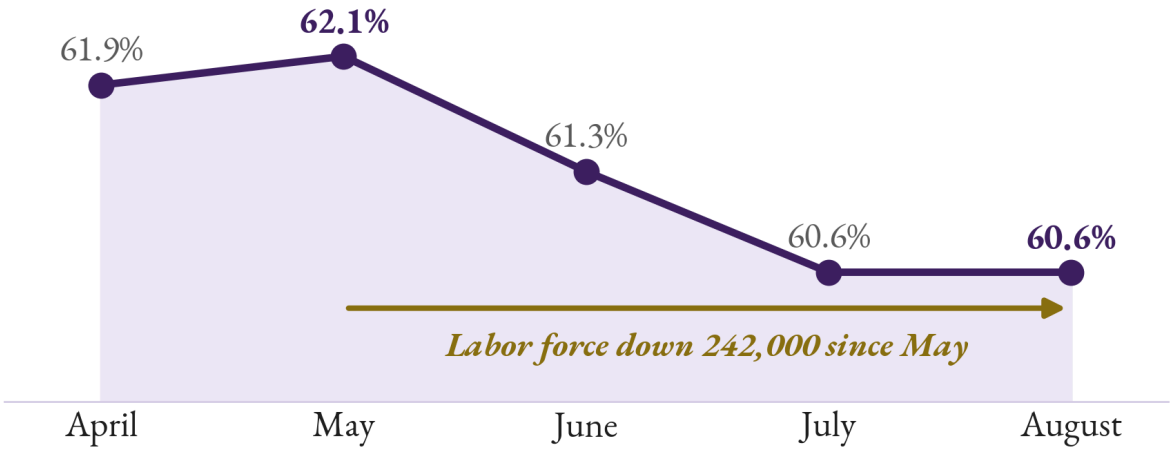
And by all indicators, this economic blow has remained entrenched. According to the latest jobs data, in August 2026, employers added 162,000 jobs, with women filling 158,000 of them, roughly 98 percent. However, this gain for "women" in general left Black women behind. While other women regained their jobs footing in August, the unemployment rate for Black women rose from 5.4 percent in July to 5.6 percent in August, even as the rate for White women fell from 3.2 percent to 3.0 percent. As a result, today Black women are unemployed at nearly twice the rate of White women, and by all indicators, seem to be falling further and further behind.

98%	**5.4% → 5.6%**	**−242,000**
of the 162,000 jobs added in August went to women	Black women's unemployment rate, July to August	drop in Black women's labor force, May to August

The unemployment rate, as troubling as it is, tells only part of the story. Black women's unemployment is lower today than it was a year ago, but not because Black women found work. Between May and August 2026, the number of Black women in the labor force fell by roughly 242,000, as their labor force participation rate dropped from 62.1 percent to 60.6 percent. Over those same three months, the number of employed Black women fell by about 235,000. As a result, for the first time in over three decades, and just the second time in history, Black women now no longer lead all women in labor force participation. This is critical because when women stop looking for work, they are no longer counted as unemployed. They simply disappear from the count. **Even in a month when women filled nearly every new job in America, Black women were still left waiting at the door ... and far too many were pushed out of the count altogether.**

Figure 1. Black Women's Labor Force Participation Rate, 2026

Share of Black women ages 20 and older in the labor force, seasonally adjusted



Black women's labor force participation fell 1.5 points between May and August 2026. Source: BLS, The Employment Situation — August 2026, Table A-2 (Black women ages 20 and older, seasonally adjusted).

Black women are heavily concentrated in health care and professional occupations, among the sectors with the most job openings in the nation. They have the credentials. They are in the right fields. And still, the door does not open. Black women do not lack qualifications for the current makeup of the labor force, instead it seems, they face systemic discriminatory barriers that keep them locked out of opportunity.

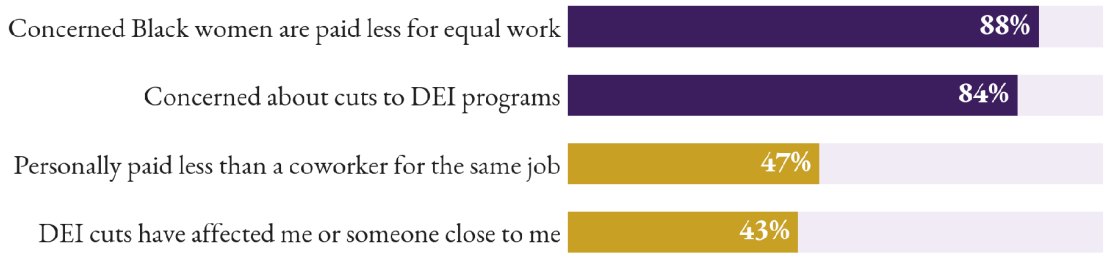
This is not a skills gap. It is an opportunity barrier.

The BWR Power of the Sister Vote Poll tells this story from the ground up. Nearly half of Black women (47%) say they have personally been paid less than a coworker for doing the same job, rising to 53% among college graduates. Fully 88% are concerned that Black women are paid less than White men and women for equal work, including 71% who are very concerned. More than eight in ten (84%) are concerned about cuts to DEI programs, and 43% say those cuts have already affected them or someone close to them, a share that climbs to 55% among Gen Z. Among respondents who were unemployed at the time of the survey, nearly one in three (31%) had lost a job to a layoff or termination within the past two years. They named the elimination of DEI programs, race-related discrimination, and DOGE or other federal cuts right alongside conventional downsizing as the reasons why.

The rollback is no longer a policy debate happening at a distance. **It is showing up as real-life consequences in the lives of Black women and the families who depend on them to survive..**

Figure 2. Black Women's Experience of Pay Inequity and DEI Cuts, 2026

Share of Black women registered voters



Nearly half of Black women report being paid less than a coworker for the same job. Source: NCBCP/BWR 10th Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll, 2026 (n=1,000); 2024 NCBCP/Essence/BWR Black Women's Issues Poll (n=800).

CHAPTER TWO

The Daily Math of Getting By

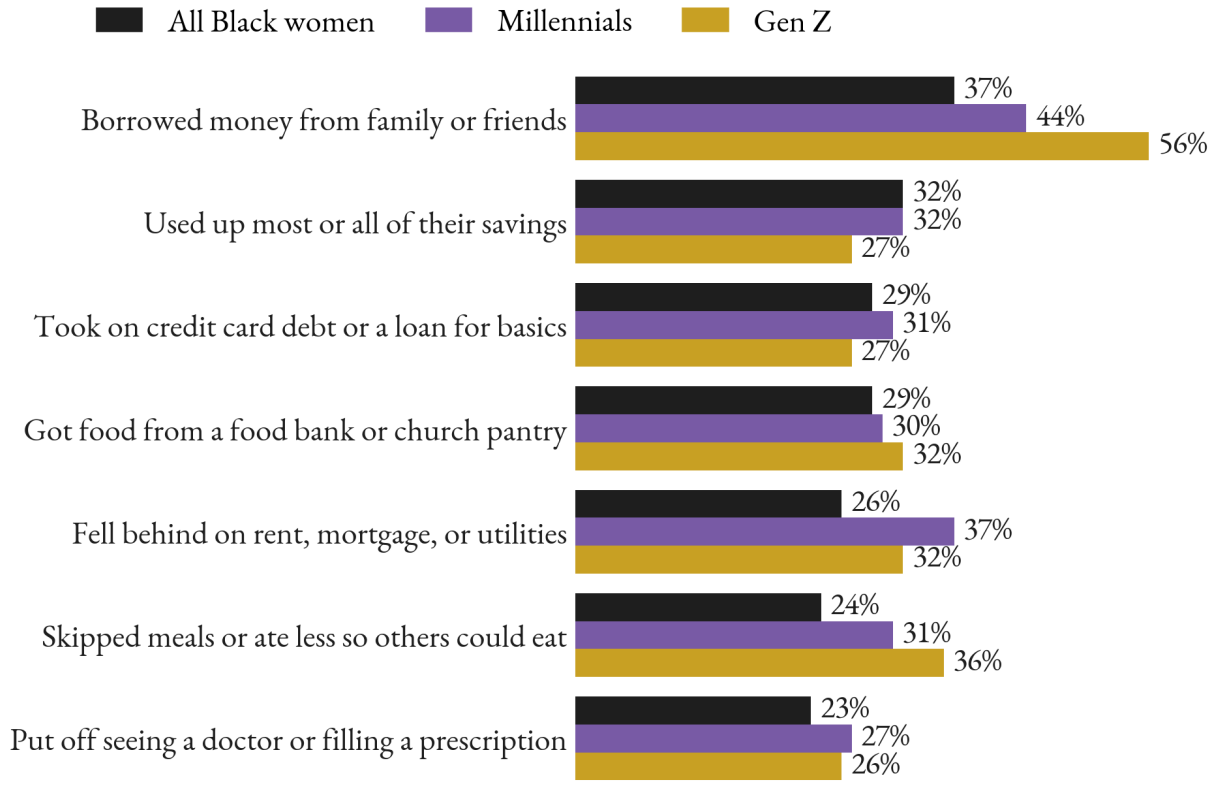
What does it look like when an entire community absorbs a shock of this magnitude? It looks like a grocery cart with fewer items. It looks like a prescription left unfilled, a utility bill paid late, and a call to a sister to borrow just enough to make it to the first of the month.

Economic pessimism has surged. Nearly eight in ten Black women (78%) now say economic conditions are getting worse, a 22-point jump from 56% in the 2024 survey, and almost half (47%) say their household budget got much worse over the past year. More than four in ten (44%) have cut back on groceries or bought cheaper food in just the last three months. Only 11% say their pay is keeping them ahead of the cost of living, while 38% say it is falling behind.

To get by, Black women have done what they have always done. They've made a way out of no way.

Figure 3. How Black Women Made Ends Meet, 2026

In the past 12 months, because money was tight...



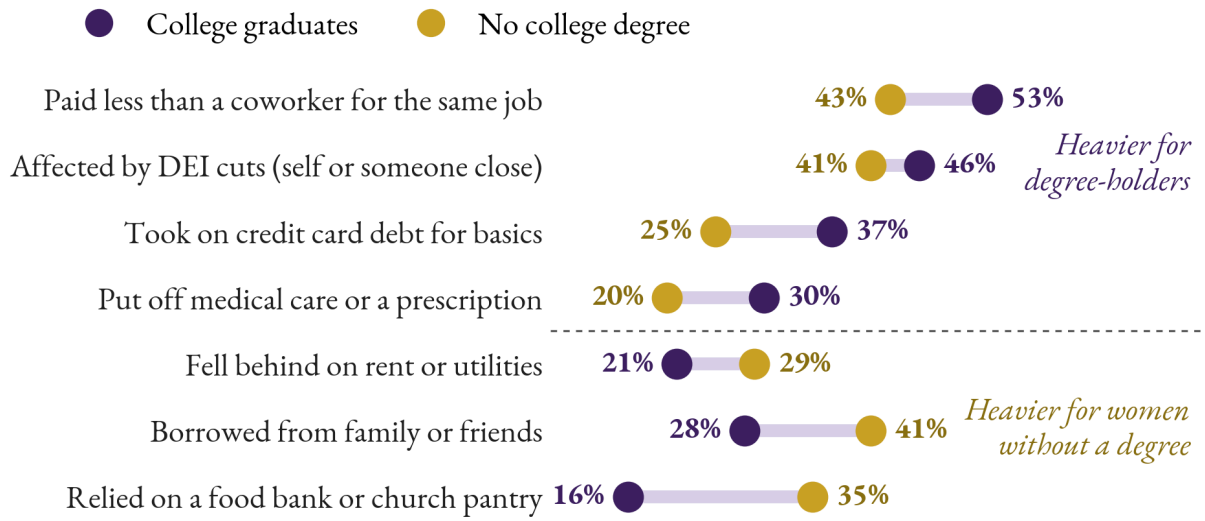
Borrowing, depleted savings, and debt for basic needs are widespread, and young Black women carry the heaviest load. Source: NCBCP/BWR 10th Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll, 2026 (n=1,000); 2024 NCBCP/Essence/BWR Black Women's Issues Poll (n=800).

Those burdens fall heaviest on the young. Millennials and Gen Z report the highest rates of falling behind on rent (37% and 32%), skipping meals so others could eat (31% and 36%), and unemployment (19% and 15%). More than half of Gen Z Black women (56%) borrowed money from family or friends in the past year. And the strain is not only financial. About a third of Gen Z (34%) and Millennial (33%) Black women rate their mental health as only fair or poor, compared with 13% of Boomers.

Education also has proven to be no shield from hardship. College-educated Black women report more personal pay discrimination than women without a degree (53% vs. 43%), more exposure to DEI cuts (46% vs. 41%), and greater reliance on credit card debt for basic needs (37% vs. 25%). Women without a degree, meanwhile, face deeper subsistence hardship. They are more than twice as likely to rely on a food bank or church pantry (35% vs. 16%) and are far more likely to borrow from family or friends (41% vs. 28%) just to get by.

Figure 4. Economic Hardship Among Black Women, by Education

A degree changes the shape of the hardship — not whether it arrives



College graduates report more pay discrimination and debt; women without a degree report deeper subsistence hardship. Source: NCBCP/BWR 10th Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll, 2026 (n=1,000); 2024 NCBCP/Essence/BWR Black Women's Issues Poll (n=800).

While a degree may change the shape of hardship, it does not stop it from arriving at all. Whether the pressure shows up as debt or as hunger … it shows up. It's born at disturbing levels across the educational and generational divides.

CHAPTER THREE

Distrustful, but Not Disengaged

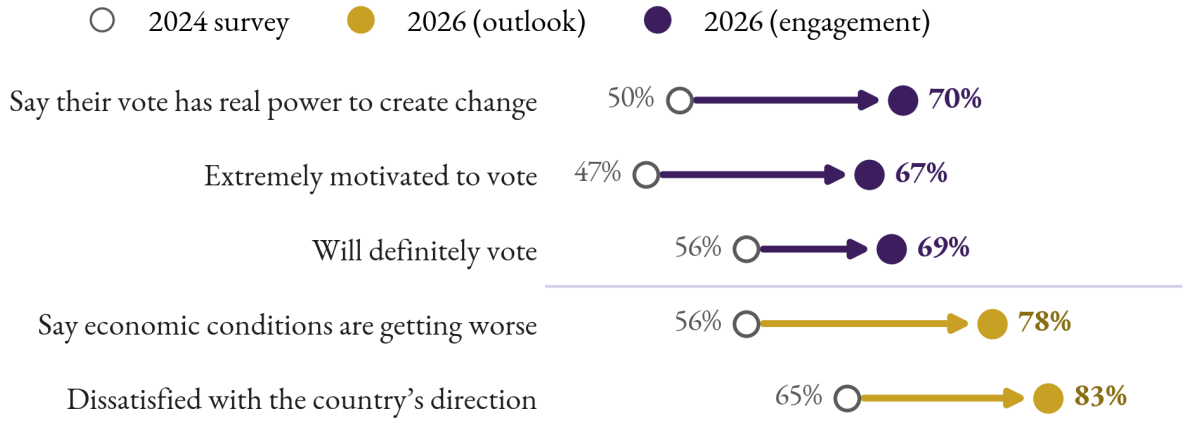
If economic hardship alone predicted political withdrawal, Black women would have long since headed for the political exits. But instead, in the midst of adversity, they resolve political engagement has gone nowhere but up. More than eight in ten Black women (83%) have indicated that they are dissatisfied with the direction of the country, up from 65% in the 2024 survey, and the share who are *very* dissatisfied more than doubled, from 18% to 47%. Just 12% approve of the President's job performance, with 76% strongly disapproving, and congressional approval has collapsed from 40% in the 2024 survey to 15%.

Trust in federal institutions has worn dangerously thin. Three in four Black women (75%) distrust the presidency, 67% distrust Congress, and 60% distrust the U.S. Supreme Court. Only local (58%) and state (53%) government still earn majority trust. Perhaps most telling, just 36% trust elected officials to look out for Black women, a figure that falls to 21% among college graduates. The share who describe themselves as hopeful about the elections has fallen, too, from 43% in the 2024 survey to 28%.

And yet where has fallen, belief in their own ability to create change has skyrocketed.

Figure 5. Black Women's Outlook and Engagement, 2024 and 2026

Share of Black women registered voters



As discontent deepened between the 2024 and 2026 surveys, Black women's engagement and sense of political efficacy rose just as sharply. Source: NCBCP/BWR 10th Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll, 2026 (n=1,000); 2024 NCBCP/Essence/BWR Black Women's Issues Poll (n=800).

This is the central finding of the 2026 poll, and it deserves to be stated plainly: **the worse conditions became, the harder Black women leaned into creating change.** Seventy percent now say their vote has real power to create change, up 20 points from the 2024 survey, while the share who say their vote

is powerless was cut in half, from 30% to 15%. Two-thirds (67%) say the same of the Black community's collective power.

Even the widely discussed decision by many Black women to "rest" after the 2024 election has not become a retreat. Only one in five (20%) say they have tuned out of politics for their own peace of mind, and that share is lowest among Boomers (14%). Another 30% say they considered stepping away but decided the stakes are simply too high.

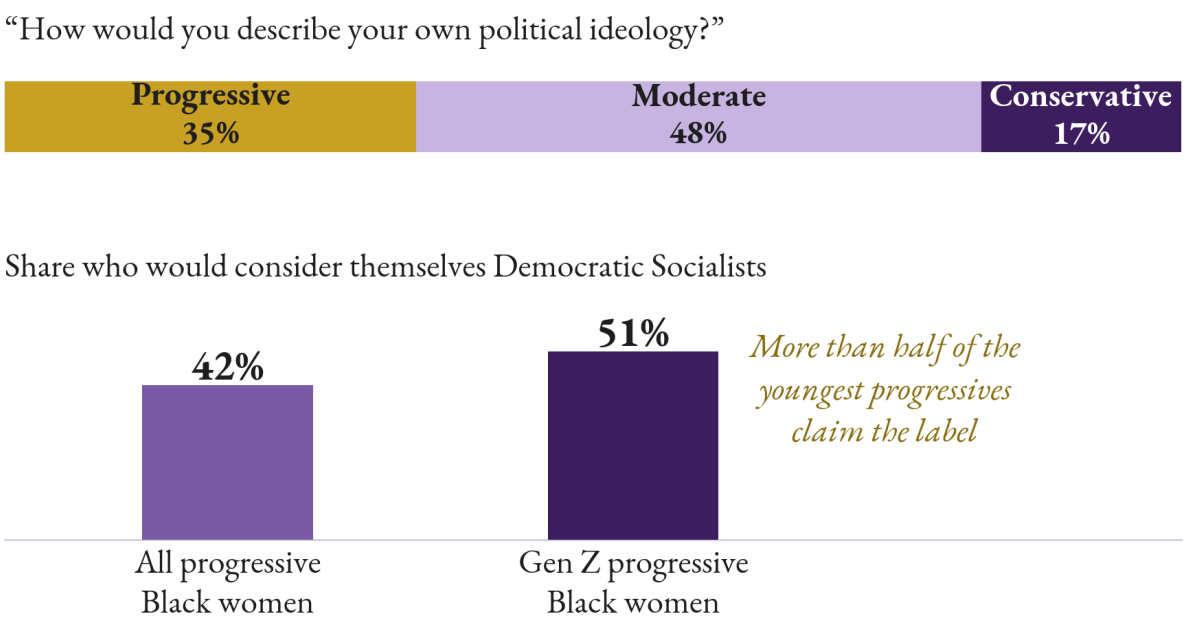
Black women's partisan attachment has hardened as well. Measured against the 2024 survey, strong Democratic identification climbed 17 points, from 40% to 57%, while the share identifying as independent fell by half, from 14% to 7%. But make no mistake: this is consolidation without contentment. It is loyalty under protest, not a blank check.

That loyalty, however, should never be mistaken for uniformity. Black women are the most reliably Democratic bloc in the American electorate, and they are also one of the most ideologically varied. Asked to describe their own politics, just under half (48%) call themselves moderate, 35% identify as progressive, and 17% as conservative. The distribution alone should retire the habit of treating Black women as a single political mind. It is a coalition, not a monolith — and like any coalition, it comes with diverse perspectives, especially across generations.

Progressive identification reaches 42% among Gen Z and 44% among college graduates, against roughly 29% to 30% among Gen X and Boomers. And among progressives, 42% say they would consider themselves Democratic Socialists, while more than half of Gen Z progressive Black women (51%) claim the Democratic Socialist label, the highest share of any generation.

Figure 6. Ideological Diversity Among Black Women, 2026

Black women's politics are neither uniform nor easily labeled



Black women's politics span a wide ideological range, and the youngest progressives are the most likely to claim the Democratic Socialist label. Source: NCBCP/BWR 10th Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll, 2026 (n=1,000). The Democratic Socialist item was asked only of self-identified progressives (n ≈ 350); generational breakouts rest on smaller bases and are directional.

Read alongside the economic findings in the first two chapters, the shift is less surprising than it may first appear. These are the same women reporting the deepest insecurity in this survey: the highest rates of skipping meals, of falling behind on rent, of borrowing from family to get to the first of the month. A generation that has watched degrees fail to deliver stability and full-time work fail to cover groceries is not drifting toward a label. It is reaching for a politics that speaks to what it is living. **The economic conversation inside this electorate is moving faster than many of the people who count on its votes have noticed.**

None of this points toward defection. It points toward expectation. Black women are consolidating behind a party while openly pulling that party in the direction of their choosing. This tension is a sign of a healthy political community rather than a fracturing one. Campaigns that address Black women as a single, settled constituency will find themselves speaking past the very voters whose turnout they are counting on to win.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Ballot Under Siege… and Under Watch

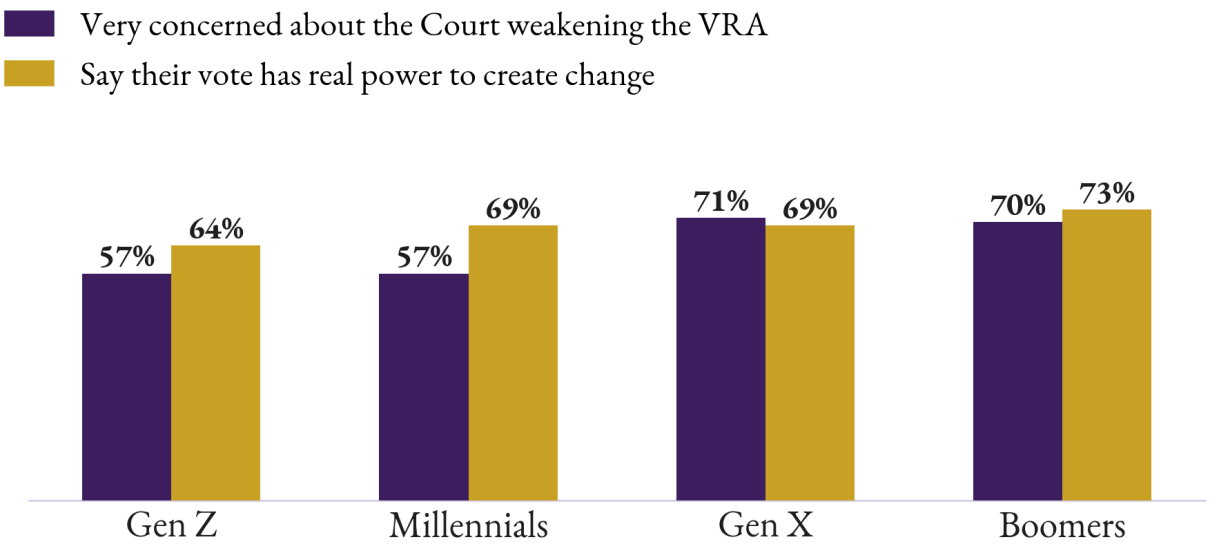
Black women enter these midterms under conditions that would have seemed unthinkable a generation ago. On April 29, 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Louisiana v. Callais* weakened Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, the provision that for decades protected Black voters from having their political power diluted through discriminatory maps. Republican-led legislatures across the South moved quickly to redraw majority-Black districts.

Black women noticed. Eighty-five percent are concerned about the Court weakening a key part of the Voting Rights Act, and 65% are *very* concerned, a level of intensity matched by almost nothing else in the survey. Concern is highest of all among Gen Z (90%). Protecting voting rights more than doubled as a top election priority, from 12% in the 2024 survey to 27%, and 86% say they are more likely to support a candidate committed to protecting it. Asked what worries them most about casting a ballot this fall, Black women named mail ballots being rejected or delayed (36%) and the presence of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents at polling places (35%), a concern that rises to 42% among Gen Z.

What makes that concern politically consequential is what sits beside it. Black women do not experience the weakening of the Voting Rights Act as a distant legal development. They experience it as an attack on their own political power, and the survey shows that this attack has not diminished their belief in that power. If anything, it has sharpened it. Gen X and Boomers register the most intense alarm about the Court's ruling, with roughly seven in ten very concerned, and they are also among the most convinced that their vote can change things. Gen Z and Millennial women express their alarm in somewhat cooler terms, yet Gen Z remains the most concerned generation overall, at 90%.

Figure 7. Voting Rights Concern and Belief in the Vote, 2026

Share of Black women registered voters, by generation



Across every generation, alarm about the Court's ruling sits alongside a strong belief that voting works. Source: NCBCP/BWR 10th Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll, 2026 (n=1,000); 2024 NCBCP/Essence/BWR Black Women's Issues Poll (n=800).

That pairing is the finding that should give strategists pause. A voter who believed her ballot was meaningless would have little reason to be alarmed when that ballot is threatened. Alarm on this scale is evidence of the opposite conviction. Black women understand precisely what is being taken, because they understand precisely what it is worth. **Recognizing the vote as the target has not made Black women retreat from it. It has made them determined to defend it.**

Those who rushed to redraw the maps may have expected a demoralized electorate. They got the opposite. A VoteHub analysis of primaries held after *Callais* in Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia found that majority-Black counties turned out at an average of 32.0%, nearly six points above the statewide average of 26.1%, a turnout advantage more than five times larger than in Black Belt primaries held before the ruling. In Louisiana, the very state at the center of the case, Black voters made up 35.7% of the primary electorate while comprising roughly 32.1% of the population.

Suppression, it seems, has a way of backfiring. Primary turnout is not general election turnout, of course. But what those primaries previewed, the attitudes captured in this poll suggests is poised to carry into November.

CHAPTER FIVE

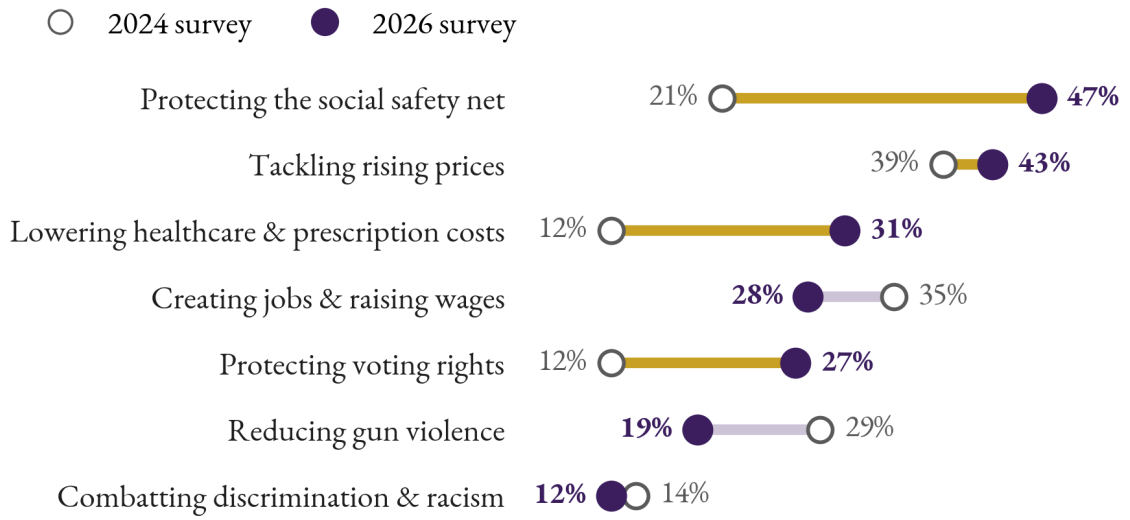
What Black Women Want

Black women are not asking for the moon. They are asking that what little protection remains not be taken away. Nowhere is that clearer than in the dramatic reordering of their policy priorities.

Protecting the social safety net, including Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicare, and Social Security, has overtaken rising prices as Black women's single top priority, more than doubling from 21% in the 2024 survey to 47% in 2026 and climbing from fourth place to first. Measured against the 2024 survey, lowering healthcare and prescription costs rose from 12% to 31%, and protecting voting rights more than doubled. Meanwhile, creating jobs and raising wages slipped from 35% to 28%, and reducing gun violence fell from 29% to 19%.

Figure 8. Black Women's Top Priorities for the Federal Government

% naming each as a top priority, 2024 and 2026



Protecting the safety net moved from fourth place to first. Respondents selected two priorities in the 2024 survey and three in 2026, so read these as shifts in relative rank and salience rather than raw point change. Source: NCBCP/BWR 10th Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll, 2026 (n=1,000); 2024 NCBCP/Essence/BWR Black Women's Issues Poll (n=800).

The generational picture adds important nuance. Safety-net protection is the runaway top priority for Boomers (57%) and Gen X (50%). Millennials (39%) and Gen Z (38%), still fighting for a foothold in a hostile labor market, weigh it almost evenly against creating jobs and raising wages (37% each). New to the 2026 survey, more than one in five (22%) name stopping the erasure of Black history and culture as a top priority.

When asked to rate specific issues, Black women's concern is broad, urgent, and remarkably consistent. Protecting Social Security and Medicare tops the list (92% high concern), followed closely by reducing the cost of living (91%), fighting discrimination and racism (91%), bringing down healthcare and prescription costs (91%), protecting voting rights (90%), and reducing Black maternal deaths in childbirth (89%). And what moves a Black woman's vote tells the very same story.

More likely to support a candidate committed to ...

89%	**86%**	**86%**	**79%**	**70%**
Bringing down the cost of living	Supporting racial justice	Protecting voting rights	Restoring DEI programs	Protecting abortion rights

Read together, the message could not be clearer. **For Black women, affordability alone is not enough.** A candidate who promises lower grocery bills but stays silent on voting rights, or who champions racial justice but has nothing to say about Social Security, is speaking to only part of the woman standing in front of them. Black women have never had the luxury of separating their economic lives from the realities of race and gender. Their politics do not separate them either.

CHAPTER SIX

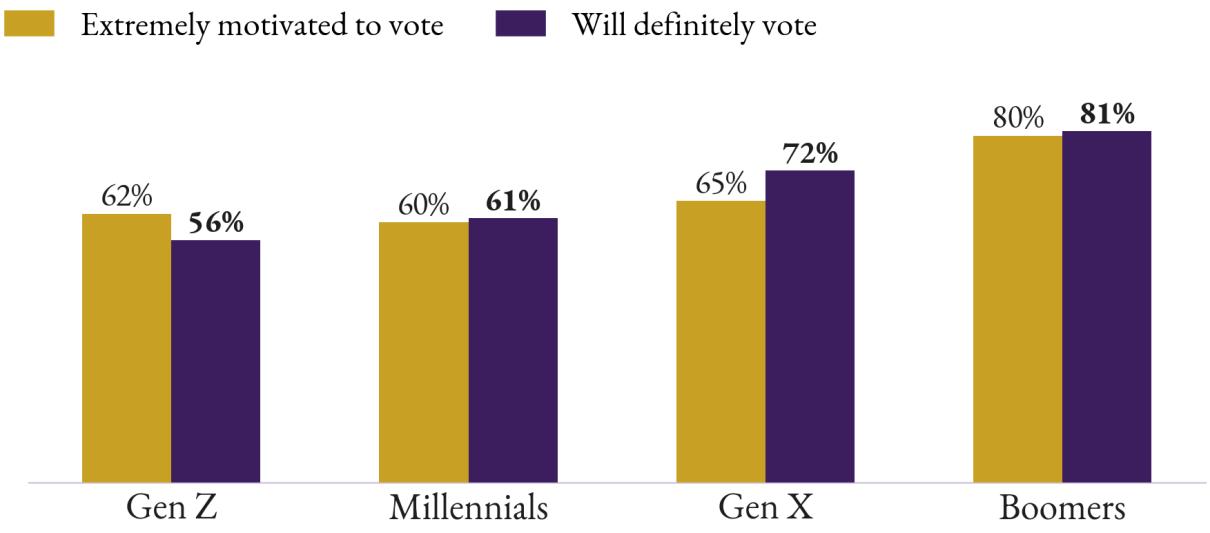
Determined for November

So what should the nation expect on November 3? Sixty-nine percent of Black women say they will definitely vote, up from 56% in the 2024 survey. Two-thirds (67%) describe themselves as extremely motivated to vote, a 20-point jump from 47% in the 2024 survey. Nearly all (94%) report having voted in 2024. By any measure, this is an electorate preparing to show up.

But the aggregate conceals a challenge that campaigns, parties, and funders ignore at their peril.

Figure 9. Voting Intent and Motivation, by Generation, 2026

Share of Black women registered voters



Turnout intent climbs steeply with age, leaving Gen Z 25 points behind Boomers. Source: NCBCP/BWR 10th Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll, 2026 (n=1,000); 2024 NCBCP/Essence/BWR Black Women's Issues Poll (n=800).

Eighty-one percent of Boomers say they will definitely vote. Among Gen Z, it is 56%. That 25-point gap is not a gap in belief. As Chapter Four showed, Gen Z Black women believe in the power of their vote nearly as much as their elders do (64% vs. 73%). Belief and turnout intent track closely together among older women, where 73% of Boomers say their vote has real power and 81% say they will definitely vote. Among Gen Z, that link breaks: conviction is nearly as high, but it has not yet been converted into a plan to cast a ballot. They are the most concerned about voting rights (90%), the most likely to have been touched by DEI cuts (55%), and, remarkably, the most hopeful generation of all, with 32% describing themselves as very hopeful about the future compared with just 11% of the oldest respondents. The mobilization gap, then, is generational, not attitudinal. Young Black women do not

need to be persuaded that voting matters. They need direct, sustained engagement that converts conviction into turnout. Their hope should be read by policymakers as expectation … not patience.

CHAPTER SEVEN

What Must Happen Now

The data make plain what Black women need. Meeting those needs will require action from policymakers, employers, political parties, and philanthropy alike. The following recommendations represent steps toward that end.

Restore and Enforce Civil Rights Protections in the Workplace

Congress must use its full oversight authority to ensure that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces, rather than undermines, federal antidiscrimination law, including restoring the demographic data reporting that holds employers accountable. Employers, for their part, should audit their hiring practices, including AI-driven screening tools, for racial and gender bias.

Protect and Strengthen the Social Safety Net

Black women have named the safety net their single top priority. Policymakers should reverse the cuts to Medicaid and SNAP enacted under H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, defend Social Security and Medicare against erosion, and recognize these programs for what they have become for families pushed out of work: the last line of defense between hardship and catastrophe.

Make Equal Pay More Than a Promise

With nearly half of Black women reporting that they have been paid less than a coworker for the same job, federal and state policymakers should advance salary transparency, strengthen pay equity enforcement, and protect workers' right to organize and bargain collectively, which research shows promotes racial equity on the job.

Invest in the Workers This Economy Pushed Out

Displaced federal workers and young Black women locked out of entry-level opportunity need real pathways back in: guaranteed paid leave, affordable child care, workforce training, and relief from student debt, where Black women already carry the highest average balances of any borrowers. Congress should also lift the new caps on graduate student borrowing that threaten to narrow those pathways even further.

Protect the Ballot

Congress must act to restore the full strength of the Voting Rights Act. In the meantime, states and localities must ensure that mail ballots are processed fairly and promptly and that polling places remain free of intimidation, including from federal immigration enforcement. Philanthropy should invest now, not in October, in the voter protection infrastructure that Black women-led organizations have built.

Invest in Black Women's Voting Power

Parties and campaigns must invest early and directly in Black women voters, particularly Gen Z and Millennial women, whose conviction is high but whose turnout intent lags. That means speaking to the full breadth of their agenda, across the generations and class distinctions–from the cost of living to jobs to racial justice, voting rights, and more, treating Black women as a voting bloc to be activated in the final weeks of a campaign is shortsighted. Instead, this is a constituency whose trust must be earned and who should be wooed directly in the course of any successful campaign.

CHAPTER EIGHT

What's At Stake in November 2026

Black women have always found a way. We have made a way out of no way when the job disappeared, when the savings ran dry, when the maps were redrawn, and when the courts looked away.

Yet, with all of the challenges we have faced, the women who's perspectives have been shared in this report, are not discouraged; they are determined to show up in November as their way of fighting back. They are not voting because they are hopeful. Many are not. They are voting because they know exactly what is at stake, and exactly what they need: protect the safety net, pay us fairly, guard the vote, and keep our mothers alive. Every one of those demands will be won or lost, in part, at the ballot box this Fall.

The question for November is not whether Black women will show up. We will. **The question is whether those asking for our votes will show up for us.**

About the Data

The 10th BWR Annual Power of the Sister Vote Poll is a national survey of 1,000 Black women registered voters, designed by Avis A. Jones-DeWeever, Ph.D., and Katrina Gamble, Ph.D., and conducted by Sojourn Strategies for NCBCP and BWR, in partnership with Oxfam America and SEIU. The survey was fielded July 8–17, 2026. Results are weighted, and the margin of error is ±3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Trend comparisons draw on the 2024 NCBCP/Essence/BWR National Black Women's Issues Poll, fielded by HIT Strategies February 16–21, 2024, among 800 Black women registered voters (margin of error ±3.77). Respondents selected two top priorities in 2024 and three in 2026, and the 2026 emotions item offered more response options than in 2024; comparisons on those items are directional. The Democratic Socialist item was asked only of respondents who identified as progressive (approximately 35% of the sample); at that base the margin of error is roughly ±5 points, and generational breakouts rest on smaller bases still and should be read as directional. Labor market figures for Black and White women refer to women ages 20 and older in the BLS household survey, seasonally adjusted. Monthly estimates for demographic groups are subject to sampling variability, and because BLS updates household survey population controls each January, comparisons of employment and labor force levels are limited to months within 2026.

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