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Trans Adults and Family Relationships: Tensions and Coping Following Trump's 2024 Campaign and Election

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ABSTRACT

A central pillar of Trump's 2024 presidential campaign was the elimination of legal protections for transgender (trans) individuals, operationalized through executive orders and administrative directives following his election, which contributed to a sociopolitical context that had the potential to amplify trans people's minority stress. Prior research indicates that (a) family support plays a critical role in trans adults' well-being, and (b) election cycles are associated with increased tensions for trans adults within the family context. This study examined how 302 trans adults experienced and navigated family dynamics following Trump's reelection. Participants completed an online survey in December 2024 that addressed preparation for a Trump presidency, responses to anti-trans legislation, coping strategies, social support, and hopes for the future. Chi-square tests examined sociodemographic differences in family-related experiences, including family tension and estrangement, as well as endorsement of themes identified through qualitative content analysis. Over one-third of participants reported increased family tension and distancing over the past year due to political differences. Qualitative content analysis, performed on a sub-sample of participants ($n=69$), revealed four themes: (1) *enduring connection amid disillusionment*; (2) *emotional labor and strategic silence*; (3) *resilience through selectivity*; and (4) *protective disconnection*. Findings reinforce the intimate reach of macro-level political hostility into trans adults' interpersonal and family lives and highlight the need for affirming family-based, community, clinical and policy-level supports to mitigate the harms of anti-trans legislation.

KEYWORDS

Transgender adults; minority stress; family relationships; ecological systems theory

One of the central pillars of Donald Trump's 2024 presidential campaign was the systematic erosion and eventual elimination of legal protections for transgender (trans) individuals (Goldberg & Sears, 2025). Trump's campaign reportedly devoted over \$200 million to political advertisements characterized by anti-trans messaging (Kemp, 2024). Importantly, Trump's anti-trans stance was communicated not only through such advertisements, but *via* vilifying and stigmatizing statements on the campaign trail. Trump vowed to put an end to "transgender insanity" and disseminated misinformation about gender-affirming care framing these issues as threats to national security (Alfonseca & Kim, 2024). The culmination of this rhetoric was observable in Trump's inaugural address, where he declared the U.S. government's official policy to recognize only two sexes, male and female (Wendling & Epstein, 2025).

Once in office, Trump swiftly implemented this declaration through a series of executive orders and administrative directives. These far-reaching measures included the erasure of trans, nonbinary, gender diverse, and intersex individuals from federal laws and policies (The White House, 2025a) and the rescission of protections set forth by the Biden administration, such as

those allowing trans individuals to serve in the military (The White House, 2025b). In practice, these measures have severely restricted access to healthcare, research funding, and federal agency communications as exemplified by the exclusion of gender-affirming care (GAC) from Affordable Care Act essential benefits, removal of statements promoting “gender ideology” from government agencies, and the rollback of gender equality and DEI-related research support (Goldberg & Sears, 2025). The Trump administration also supported state-level legislative efforts to further restrict trans people’s rights, including those that criminalized GAC for minors and limited the use of public facilities such as restrooms (Kim et al., 2025).

Given the numerous ways that Trump’s election cycle implicitly and explicitly invoked trans and gender nonconforming people (herein referred to as trans), and the implications of his legislative agenda on trans people, of interest is how trans people, and their relationships with others—such as family members—were impacted by the election. Indeed, families represent a key source of support for people in general and trans people specifically (Cramer et al., 2025; Lampis et al., 2023; Rastogi et al., 2025; Scandurra et al., 2019). Yet trans people often receive less support from their families of origin due to a confluence of protective fears, social stigma, and limited access to accurate information (Ryan, 2009), rendering them especially vulnerable in the context of escalating legislative, social, and political tensions and oppression (James et al., 2016). Thus, this study seeks to understand how the 2024 election and subsequent Trump administration policies have influenced the dynamics and quality of familial relationships among trans adults within a heightened anti-trans political climate.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is grounded in Meyer’s (2003) minority stress model, which asserts that mental health disparities among sexual and gender minority populations emerge from unique and chronic stressors tied to their marginalized social positions. From this perspective, hostile socio-political environments, shaped by policies and rhetoric that target or undermine these communities, operate as high-order distal stressors by legitimizing harmful attitudes and embedding exclusionary practices within societal norms and institutions. Other lower-level distal stressors include direct experiences of discrimination, rejection, or violence. Proximal stressors, in contrast, are internal stressors, such as internalized homophobia or transphobia, heightened vigilance, and concealment of one’s identity or opinions (Meyer, 2003; Price et al., 2021). Proximal stressors may be particularly insidious because they require ongoing cognitive and emotional effort, which can compound distress and stress over time (Meyer, 2003). Significantly, trans people face even higher levels of minority stress than sexual minority populations due to the complex nature of identity concealment and visibility, higher rates of victimization, and unique distal stressors such as non-affirmation of gender identity (Testa et al., 2015).

Also relevant to this study is Bronfenbrenner’s (1981) ecological systems framework, which posits that development unfolds within multiple, interacting contexts that range from distal structures to more proximal settings. More specifically, development is shaped by a set of nested environmental systems: the microsystem (immediate settings such as family), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (broader institutions that indirectly influence the individual), macrosystem (cultural values, laws, and political systems), and the chronosystem (changes across time). Within this framework, macro-level political shifts, such as those initiated by the Trump administration, exert powerful influence that cascades through such interconnected systems, reshaping community and institutional climates at the mesosystem level and altering lived experiences at the micro-level. For trans adults, these cascades can manifest as shifts in family communication patterns, increased community stigma, or changes in access to affirming services (Edwards et al., 2019). Further, when macro-level political hostility and community-level attitudes (mesosystems) converge, the combined effect can impact trans people’s well-being and family relationships (Cramer et al., 2025). Integrating the minority stress model and the ecological system framework allows for a comprehensive approach in exploring the ways in which

large-scale political actions reverberate across social contexts and may transform trans people's interpersonal (e.g., family) dynamics and well-being (Cramer et al., 2024).

Critically, in integrating minority stress and ecological systems frameworks, we aimed to view the individual through an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989), that is, to recognize that individuals occupy multiple, intersecting social positions within nested ecological systems that shape how they are perceived, the resources they can access, and the degree of protection afforded to them. These intersecting social positions exist such that individual-level identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity, political affiliation, age), family-level resources and constraints (e.g., family income, living situation), and broader community and political contexts (e.g., urbanicity, state political context, LGBTQ+ friendliness) jointly shape trans adults' exposure and vulnerability to stress, access to support, and the magnitude, form, and persistence of minority stress during periods of political hostility (Edwards et al., 2019; Wolf-Gould, 2025).

Trans Adults in the U.S.: Legal and Social Vulnerabilities in Context

In order to understand implications of the actions taken by the Trump administration, it is crucial to address the preexisting vulnerability of the trans population in the U.S. Nationally representative findings from the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS) indicate an alarming prevalence of suicidality, with 78% of respondents reporting lifetime suicidal ideation and 40% reporting at least one lifetime suicide attempt (Rastogi et al., 2025). The USTS further indicated that 44% met criteria for serious psychological distress, compared to 4% in the general population (Daniel et al., 2022). Crucially, experiences of pervasive discrimination were found to be strongly and consistently associated with elevated levels of psychological distress (Rastogi et al., 2025). National Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) statistics further corroborate the scale of this discrimination. In 2024 alone, there were 463 reported hate crimes motivated by gender identity bias, including 335 classified as anti-trans and 128 as anti-gender-nonconforming (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2025), unequivocally underscoring the persistence and severity of threats faced by this marginalized population.

These risks (e.g., suicidality, psychological distress, discrimination, hate crimes) are not experienced uniformly across trans individuals. Social stratification mechanisms, including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic context, compound exposure to structural stigma, marginalization, and institutional barriers (Edwards et al., 2019; Wolf-Gould, 2025). National surveys indicate higher rates of unemployment and suicide attempts among trans people of color compared to their White counterparts (James et al., 2016). Trans people of color may also experience intersectional invisibility and within-group marginalization, contributing to social isolation and reduced access to affirming support networks (Cyrus, 2017).

Gender identity further shapes vulnerability within these contexts. Compared to trans men and trans women, nonbinary and genderqueer people have reported lower feelings of belonging and social connectedness (Stacey et al., 2022), and less familial support (Gonçalves et al., 2025). Age also intersects with trans identity to shape power, autonomy, and access to resources (Edwards et al., 2019). Exosystemic barriers such as age-based insurance restrictions and the high financial costs associated with legal name and gender marker changes, may operate as structural disadvantages for younger trans individuals who lack financial independence (Katz-Wise et al., 2023). Conversely, older trans adults may face distinct vulnerabilities whereby historical lack of access to affirming care contributes to unique health risks and psychosocial stressors when pursuing transition later in life (Edwards et al., 2019).

More broadly, socioeconomic status impacts access to legal protections, healthcare, and geographic mobility such that lower levels of education, unstable employment, and limited income may constrain the ability to navigate legal systems for name or gender marker changes, secure private or affirming healthcare, or relocate in response to hostile political climates (Cramer et al., 2025). Relatedly, trans adults living in states with fewer legal protections, higher levels of anti-trans sentiment, or limited access to affirming services report greater psychological distress

and lower levels of outness and familial support (Cramer et al., 2025). Trans individuals who identify as politically conservative or Republican are not insulated from these dynamics; rather, they may experience unique mental health challenges, safety concerns, and social alienation within their own political environments, particularly as anti-trans legislation and party rhetoric intensify (Rummier, 2022). Beyond state political context, urbanicity also shapes exposure and risk, as trans adults residing in rural areas often face heightened visibility, limited access to specialized healthcare, and increased vulnerability to harassment (Wolf-Gould, 2025).

Consistent with these patterns, emerging data indicate that following Trump's 2024 election, trans people experienced an increasingly hostile sociopolitical environment, along with intense emotions of fear, worry, and anger (Goldberg & Sears, 2025). Goldberg and Sears (2025) found that 93% of trans adults surveyed after the election were concerned about what Trump's presidency might mean for their community, underscoring their understanding of how macro-level sociopolitical forces may exert influences on proximal contexts of daily life (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Trans adults described a wide range of concerns spanning from distal contexts (e.g., social structures, institutions, cultural forces) to more proximal settings (e.g., neighborhood, healthcare providers); in turn, amid fear of discrimination and threats to their well-being, 80% intended to alter their behavior or physical presentation to reduce their visibility as trans individuals (Goldberg & Sears, 2025). More broadly, in the context of concerns about legal protections, 42% of respondents had taken at least one proactive measure (e.g., changing or updating state IDs) to secure legal protections. Significantly, 42% of respondents expressed little to no hope about the future under Trump's presidency, underscoring the intense distress and fear that many trans people feel post-election (Goldberg & Sears, 2025).

The Impact of the 2016 Election Cycle on Trans Adults and Their Family Relationships

Prior work has examined trans people's experiences in the context of Trump's first presidential term. This work established family relationships as a key area of strain in the the 2016 election cycle, with LGBTQ+ individuals reporting both an exacerbation of existing tensions with family and the development of new divisions marked by sentiments of betrayal and a fundamental lack of shared values (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Price et al., 2021; Veldhuis et al., 2018). For example, some LGBTQ+ individuals described perceiving family members' voting decisions as a refusal to prioritize their wellbeing (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021), or as a failure to recognize the serious implications of those decisions for LGBTQ+ rights (Gonzalez et al., 2018). Others, though, described increased family cohesion shaped by bonding over shared opposition to the election results, concerted efforts to address safety concerns and provide robust support, and visible demonstrations of solidarity and advocacy (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Haas & Lannutti, 2024; Veldhuis et al., 2018).

These shifting familial dynamics were mediated by intersecting systems of race and class. Gonzalez et al. (2018) found that White LGBTQ+ people experienced particularly pronounced familial fracturing, in part because White non-Hispanic voters supported Donald Trump at substantially higher rates than voters from other racial and ethnic groups, increasing the likelihood of value-based conflict within White families. At the same time, individuals with higher income and educational attainment—who were disproportionately White and male—often described being able to disengage from or “retreat” from the political climate, drawing on economic and class privilege to buffer against both relational and material consequences of the election (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Pletta et al., 2022). High socioeconomic status, in particular, appeared to “lower the stakes” of political engagement, as these individuals felt insulated from the immediate harms of policy changes (e.g., threats to healthcare access) that more acutely affected lower-income and multiply marginalized families (Pletta et al., 2022).

Among trans individuals, many reported that family members repeatedly ignored, dismissed, or minimized their expressed concerns about LGBTQ+ rights and minority populations more

broadly, contributing to feelings of invalidation and isolation (Price et al., 2021). These varied familial responses underscore the multifaceted ways in which significant sociopolitical events can reverberate through interpersonal relationships, positioning family networks as sites of rupture and sources of resilience (Haas & Lannutti, 2024; Pletta et al., 2022).

The Current Study

In a recent large-scale national survey, 67% of adults described their immediate family as “supportive” or “very supportive” of their gender identity (James et al., 2024). On the other hand, 22% reported that their families were “neither supportive nor unsupportive,” and 8% said they were “unsupportive” (James et al., 2024). Prior work shows that family relationships are closely tied to well-being outcomes among trans individuals, with the potential to protect against psychological risks such as internalized transphobia, rejection sensitivity, depressive symptoms, and suicidality (Cramer et al., 2024; Lampis et al., 2023; Rastogi et al., 2025; Scandurra et al., 2019), and buffer the negative effects of discrimination on well-being (Price et al., 2021; Veldhuis et al., 2018). Conversely, familial rejection and conflict are key predictors of negative mental health outcomes, including increased risk of suicide attempts (Marquez-Velarde et al., 2023; McGregor et al., 2024; Pletta et al., 2022).

In the context of Trump’s second term and an increasingly hostile sociopolitical environment, trans adults are both vulnerable to negative mental health outcomes and in need of support—and may also be facing increased tensions within their families at the moment that they need them the most. Such family processes unfold within a set of nested ecological systems, such that individual identities, family-level resources and constraints, and broader community and political contexts jointly shape trans adults’ exposure to stress and access to support (Edwards et al., 2019). From an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989), trans adults occupy multiple, intersecting social positions (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status) that may intensify or mitigate vulnerability to political hostility and family strain. At the same time, families themselves are embedded within communities and sociopolitical environments that shape normative beliefs, institutional protections, and the availability of affirming resources.

Understanding trans adults’ family experiences during periods of political hostility requires attention to both intersecting individual-level marginalized statuses and the broader ecological contexts in which families are situated. Distal contextual factors such as state LGBTQ+ friendliness, urbanicity, and state political climate may intersect with family-level conditions (e.g., income, living arrangements) and individual identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity) to shape how political threat is perceived, negotiated, and absorbed within family systems. Such dynamics may influence not only family relationship quality, but trans adults’ emotional, social, and financial well-being, and strategies for coping and mobilization.

The present study focuses on a sample of trans adults in the U.S. who were surveyed following Trump’s 2024 election. Guided by minority stress and ecological systems frameworks, and informed by an intersectional lens, this study examines how trans adults experience changes in family relationships in response to the sociopolitical climate, how they cope with and mobilize in the face of family support or nonsupport, and how these processes vary across individual, family, and contextual dimensions. Specifically, we address the following research questions:

1. How do trans adults perceive changes in their relationships with family members in response to the sociopolitical climate surrounding and following the 2024 U.S. presidential election?
2. What relational and contextual factors within families contribute to perceived strengthening, strain, or disruption in these relationships?
 - a. How do trans adults experience and navigate family support, ambivalence, or rejection in the current sociopolitical climate?
 - b. How do these family experiences relate to trans adults’ emotional, social, and financial well-being?

3. What coping strategies and resources do trans adults utilize to manage challenges and opportunities within their familial relationships in the current political landscape?
4. How do intersecting individual, family, and broader contextual factors shape trans adults' experiences of family support, rejection, relational change, and well-being in the context of the 2024 U.S. presidential election?
 - a. How do intersecting individual-level social positions (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender identity, age) and family-level conditions (e.g., income, living situation) relate to variation in trans adults' experiences of family dynamics and minority stress during a period of heightened political hostility?
 - b. How do broader ecological contexts (e.g., state LGBTQ+ friendliness, urbanicity, and state-level political climate) intersect with individual- and family-level factors to condition how political hostility is experienced, negotiated, and absorbed within family systems?

Methods

Sample

Data come from 302 trans adults, who completed a mixed-methods anonymous survey (author citation). Sample demographic characteristics appear in [Table 1](#). Administered on Qualtrics between December 9th and December 31st, 2024, the survey investigated the perceptions of trans adults as they prepared for a Trump presidency. To be eligible, individuals had to self-identify as trans, reside in the U.S., and be 18 years or older.

Procedure

The study employed a two-fold recruitment strategy, with the goal of obtaining a rich and diverse sample across sociodemographic factors (e.g., gender identity, educational level, and income). Most participants ($n=215$, 71%) were drawn from Prolific and the remainder ($n=87$, 29%) were drawn *via* convenience sampling. The web-based research platform Prolific was employed because of its stringent safeguards, which ensured the integrity of data and mitigated the presence of automated bots and malicious users (Bradley, 2018; Lettman, 2018; Palan & Schitter, 2018). Participants recruited from Prolific received compensation for their involvement, and this group exhibited considerable economic and racial diversity, facilitating the inclusion of populations traditionally underrepresented in LGBTQ+ research (e.g., of color, lower income, lower educational attainment; Goldberg & Frost, 2025). Individuals recruited through convenience sampling, utilizing professional and personal networks, private communication channels, and listservs, did not receive compensation. This group tended to comprise more affluent and highly educated participants.

This study received approval from [university] Human Subjects Board. Before completing the online survey, all participants provided written informed consent. Prospective participants were informed that the survey was appropriate for individuals identifying as trans and/or nonbinary, or whose gender identity differed from their sex assigned at birth, and who resided in the U.S. Participants were eligible if they identified as transgender (“Do you consider yourself to be transgender, trans, nonbinary, or another gender that is different from the sex assigned to you at birth?”), were over 18, and resided in the U.S. Participants also reported their gender identity and sex assigned at birth, which were reviewed for consistency with the screening item. Cases in which responses were inconsistent (e.g., endorsement of a trans identity alongside concordant sex assigned at birth and gender identity without additional qualifying identities) were subjected to further review. Responses determined to reflect misunderstanding of eligibility criteria or invalid responding were excluded from the final sample.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample ($n = 302$).

Characteristic	n	%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	232	76.8
Asian	2	7.0
Black/African American	47	15.6
Latinx/Hispanic	29	9.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	14	4.6
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	0.7
Other	5	1.7
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual/Straight	15	5.0
Queer	81	26.8
Bisexual	81	26.8
Asexual	33	10.9
Pansexual	31	10.3
Lesbian	29	9.6
Gay	19	6.3
Two-spirit	2	0.7
Other	11	3.6
Gender Identity		
Man	33	10.9
Woman	35	11.6
Trans Man	43	14.2
Trans Woman	27	8.9
Nonbinary	140	46.4
Other	24	7.9
Employment		
Employed full-time	134	44.4
Employed part-time	54	17.9
Self-employed	40	13.2
Unemployed	38	12.6
Student	42	13.9
Disabled	31	10.3
Homemaker/Retired/Full-time parent	10	3.3
Other	3	1.0
Political Affiliation		
Republican	14	4.6
Democrat	173	57.3
Independent	68	22.5
Other	47	15.6
Education		
Less than high school	2	0.7
High school diploma/GED	52	17.2
Some college/associate's degree	77	25.5
Bachelor's degree	97	32.1
Master's degree	54	17.9
PhD/JD/MD	20	6.6
Age		
18–25	90	29.8
26–35	130	43.0
36–50	64	21.2
51–60	7	2.3
61+	11	3.7
Family Income		
No income	5	1.7
\$1,000–\$15,000	25	8.3
\$16,000–\$25,000	35	11.6
\$26,000–\$50,000	65	21.5
\$51,000–\$75,000	59	19.5
\$76,000–\$100,000	48	15.9
>\$100,000	65	21.5
Living Situation		
Partner/s	120	39.7
Children	35	11.6
Pets	134	44.4
Family of origin	87	28.8

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Characteristic	n	%
Roommates/housemates	50	16.6
	35	11.6
LGBTQ Friendly State	Friendly	53.3
	Not friendly	46.7
Urbanicity	Urban	40.7
	Suburban	41.7
	Rural	13.9
	Other	3.6
State Political Context	Blue state	58.9
	Red State	33.8
	Swing State	7.3

Note. Percentages reflect endorsement rates; for variables assessed using “select all that apply” response options, percentages may not sum to 100.

Participants were told that the survey would inquire about their preparations for a Trump presidency, concerns, experiences, and plans related to anti-trans legislation, and the sociopolitical climate in the U.S. They were also informed that the survey included questions regarding coping mechanisms, support networks, and future aspirations.

The survey itself was informed by our research questions, the relevant literature, our theoretical frameworks, and the input of multiple informants and scholars, including trans and nonbinary individuals with diverse professional backgrounds. The survey took approximately 20–25 min on average to complete. Data collection maintained participant anonymity, as researchers neither collected nor accessed identifying information.

Measures

The measures described below were drawn from the mixed-methods anonymous survey. The present analyses focus on family-related variables and sociodemographic characteristics. Guided by Bronfenbrenner’s (1981) ecological systems framework, sociodemographic variables were conceptualized as reflecting influences operating at multiple levels of individuals’ social environments. They were grouped into individual-level, family-level, and broader contextual domains to capture how proximal characteristics, immediate family contexts, and distal environments may jointly shape family dynamics during periods of political hostility.

Family Variables

The family-related variables described below served as the primary outcome variables in the present study. For clarity, these family-related outcomes are conceptually distinct from family-level sociodemographic variables (e.g., family income, living situation), which were examined as predictors and are described in the Demographic Variables section. The survey included closed- and open-ended questions assessing trans adults’ family relationships in the context of the 2024 U.S. presidential election. Closed-ended items assessed whether participants experienced increased family tension (“Did you experience increased tension with family during the 2024 election cycle?”) or had distanced themselves or become estranged from family members due to political differences (“Have you distanced yourself or become estranged from family members over the past year due to political differences?”).

Participants who endorsed estrangement were additionally asked to report the perceived impacts of this estrangement across multiple domains using a select-all-that-apply item (“How has this estrangement affected you?”). Response options included emotional, social, and financial impacts. For each endorsed domain, participants were asked to indicate whether the impact was negative, positive, or reflected no change.

A single open-ended item invited participants to elaborate on their responses to the closed-ended questions assessing increased family tension. They were prompted: “Feel free to elaborate on your response to the above question. With whom did you have tension, was this ‘new,’ and how did you handle it?” This prompt was intended to capture narrative accounts of changes in family relationships, experiences of support, ambivalence, or rejection, and coping strategies used to navigate family-related stressors in the current sociopolitical climate.

Demographic Variables

The survey contained a number of demographic items, including race, ethnicity, gender identity, family income, employment status, political affiliation, education level, age, living situation, and geographic context. Guided by an ecological framework distinguishing individual, family-level, and broader contextual influences, these were examined as predictors in relation to family-related outcome variables using Pearson’s chi-square tests of independence. Specifically, demographic variables were examined in relation to closed-ended family-related outcomes as well as the endorsement of themes derived from the open-ended family-related survey item.

Broader Context Variables

Broader context variables reflected community- and state-level sociopolitical contexts within which participants were embedded.

LGBTQ-Friendly State. Participants reported their state of residence, which was used as a proxy for state LGBTQ policy context. LGBTQ policy climate was operationalized using the Movement Advancement Project’s (MAP) gender identity policy tally (MAP, 2025), which assesses the extent to which state laws protect or restrict trans rights. Based on this tally, states are categorized based on the balance of protective and restrictive gender identity policies.

Participants were classified as living in an LGBTQ-friendly state if they resided in a state with a high or medium gender identity policy environment, and as living in a not LGBTQ-friendly state if they resided in a state with a fair, low, or negative policy environment. Using this classification, 161 participants (53.3%) lived in states with high or medium policy protections (e.g., high: California; medium: Nevada), whereas 141 (46.7%) lived in states with fair, low, or negative protections (e.g., fair: Pennsylvania; low: Utah; negative: Idaho). MAP assigns policy tallies based on the presence of laws that affirm or restrict gender identity, with high equality states offering the strongest protections and negative equality states having more laws that actively harm transgender individuals than laws that provide protection.

Urbanicity. Participants were asked to indicate the type of community in which they lived: urban, suburban, rural, or “something else (e.g., college town).” Most lived in suburban ($n=126$, 41.7%) or urban ($n=139$, 40.7%) communities, with a smaller proportion residing in rural areas ($n=42$, 13.9%). A minority of participants selected “something else” ($n=11$, 3.6%). Open-ended responses associated with this option primarily described college towns or small cities. Urbanicity was examined as a contextual indicator of geographic environment and access to resources relevant to family dynamics and exposure to sociopolitical stressors. Responses were categorized as urban, suburban, and rural/other, with responses of “something else” grouped with rural/other to capture non-urban and non-suburban living contexts.

State Political Context. Participants reported their state of residence, which was used to classify state political context based on results of the 2024 U.S. presidential election. States voting for the Democratic candidate were categorized as blue states, states voting for the Republican candidate were categorized as red states, and states with competitive or less stable partisan alignment were

categorized as swing states. Most participants resided in blue states ($n=178$, 58.9%), followed by red states ($n=102$, 33.8%) and swing states ($n=22$, 7.3%).

Family-Level Variables

Family-level variables captured immediate relational and economic contexts within which participants were embedded.

Family Income. Participants were asked: “What is your family/combined income, before taxes?” and selected from categorical income ranges. Five participants (1.7%) reported no income. Twenty-five participants (8.3%) reported annual family incomes between \$1K–\$15K, and 35 (11.6%) reported \$16K–\$25K, and 65 (21.5%) reported \$26K–\$50K. Among higher income brackets, 59 participants (19.5%) reported incomes between \$51K–\$75K, 48 (15.9%) reported \$76K–\$100K, and 65 participants (21.5%) reported incomes greater than \$100K.

Income responses were dichotomized to reflect socioeconomic position and to ensure adequate cell sizes. Participants were categorized as having household income below \$50,000 or at or above \$50,000. This cutoff was selected to distinguish those with comparatively fewer economic resources from those with greater financial stability.

Living Situation. Participants were asked: “Who do you live with? Check all that apply.” Endorsed living arrangements included living with partner(s) ($n=120$, 39.7%), pets ($n=134$, 44.4%), family of origin ($n=87$, 28.8%), roommates or housemates ($n=50$, 16.6%), and children ($n=35$, 11.6%). Additionally, 35 participants (11.6%) selected “someone else.”

Open-ended responses to “someone else” reflected a range of living arrangements, most commonly living alone, as well as living with extended or non-origin family members (e.g., parent, sibling, in-laws, partner’s parents), nontraditional households (e.g., family of non-origin), or residential settings (e.g., residential facility). Living situation was dichotomized to reflect whether participants lived with family of origin versus all other arrangements.

Individual-Level Variables

Individual-level variables captured personal characteristics shaping social positioning and exposure to sociopolitical stressors.

Race/Ethnicity. Participants were asked, “What is your race/ethnicity? Check all that apply.” Response options included White ($n=233$, 78.6%), Hispanic ($n=19$, 6.3%), Latino/a/x ($n=16$, 5.3%), Black/African American ($n=47$, 15.6%), Asian ($n=21$, 7.0%), American Indian or Alaska Native ($n=14$, 4.7%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ($n=2$, 0.7%), and “a race/ethnicity not listed above (please specify)” ($n=5$, 1.7%).

Race and ethnicity were operationalized in binary form (White vs. people of color; Hispanic or Latino vs. not Hispanic or Latino) due to limited cell sizes across specific racial and ethnic subgroups, which precluded statistically meaningful disaggregation. This approach was used to preserve analytic power and reduce the risk of unstable estimates, while acknowledging that such aggregation necessarily obscures within-group heterogeneity and should be interpreted as a methodological constraint rather than a conceptual statement about racial or ethnic similarity. Participants who selected only “White” and no other categories were classified as White, whereas all other participants, including those who selected any non-White category instead of or in addition to “White,” were classified as people of color. Ethnicity was examined separately, comparing participants who identified as Hispanic or Latino to those who did not.

Gender Identity. Participants were asked, “If you had to just choose ONE option to describe your gender, what would it be?” Response options included man ($n=33$, 10.9%), woman ($n=35$, 11.6%), trans man ($n=43$, 14.2%), trans woman ($n=27$, 8.9%), nonbinary ($n=140$, 46.4%), and “a gender

not listed (please specify)” ($n=24$, 7.9%; such responses included agender, genderfluid, genderqueer, genderless, demigirl, and transgender demiboy).

Gender identity was operationalized using three categories: trans men, trans women, and nonbinary/gender-diverse. Participants who selected man or woman were classified according to their trans identity (trans men or trans women), and those who selected nonbinary or provided a write-in gender identity were classified as nonbinary, gender-diverse, or gender-expansive.

Employment. Participants were asked “What is your employment status?” and asked to check all that apply. Almost half were employed full-time ($n=134$, 44.4%), followed by employed part-time ($n=54$, 17.9%) and self-employment ($n=40$, 13.2%). In addition, 38 (12.6%) reported being unemployed, 42 (13.9%) identified as students, and 31 (10.3%) reported being disabled. A smaller proportion reported being a homemaker, retired, or a full-time parent ($n=10$, 3.3%). Three participants (1.0%) selected “something else” (e.g., seasonal employment).

Employment was operationalized as a binary variable reflecting labor force participation. This binary structure obscures heterogeneity in non-employment experiences and should be interpreted as an indicator of paid labor force participation, not socioeconomic vulnerability. Participants who reported being employed full-time or part-time were classified as employed, whereas those who did not report full- or part-time employment were classified as not employed.

Political Affiliation. Political affiliation was assessed with the item: “What is your political affiliation?” Many identified as Democrat ($n=173$, 57.3%), followed by Independent ($n=68$, 22.5%), “Something else” ($n=47$, 15.6%), and Republican ($n=14$, 4.6%). Most of those who indicated “something else” aligned themselves with the political left, including anarchist, democratic socialist, socialist, leftist, progressive, Green Party, Working Families Party, and unaffiliated. Participants who identified as Independent or selected “Something else” were grouped into a combined Independent/Other category when examining sociodemographic differences. Participants who identified as Republican or Democrat were categorized as such.

Education. Educational attainment was assessed using the item: “What is your highest level of education?” Nearly one-third reported a college degree ($n=97$, 32.1%), followed by some college/ an associate’s degree ($n=77$, 25.5%), a master’s degree ($n=54$, 17.9%), a high school diploma or GED ($n=52$, 17.2%), or a PhD, MD, or JD ($n=20$, 6.6%). Few reported less than a high school education ($n=2$, 0.7%). Education was operationalized as a binary variable comparing participants with a college degree or higher to those with less than a college degree.

Age. Age was assessed using the item: “How old are you, in years?” Participants selected from categorical age ranges. Nearly one-third were between 18 and 25 years old ($n=90$, 29.8%). An additional 27.5% were 26–30 ($n=83$), 15.6% were 31–35 ($n=47$), and 12.9% were 36–40 ($n=39$). Smaller proportions were 41–45 ($n=18$, 6.0%), 46–60 ($n=7$, 2.3%), or over 50 ($n=18$, 6.0%). Age was operationalized as a binary variable comparing participants aged 25 or younger to those older than 25. This decision was informed by the categorical age ranges used in the survey, as well as the conceptualization of ages 18–25 as a distinct developmental period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2024). Additionally, this age range represented a substantial proportion of the sample, providing a logical point of comparison without imposing an artificial cutoff beyond the available response categories.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Data from all 302 participants were included in quantitative analyses. Chi square tests examined whether family-related outcomes varied across sociodemographic characteristics reflecting individual-level, family-level, and broader contextual influences. Outcomes included family tension, estrangement, perceived emotional, social, and financial impacts of family strain, as well as participants’ endorsement of themes derived from qualitative content analysis.

Sociodemographic variables were conceptualized in terms of ecological level. Individual-level variables included race (White vs. people of color), ethnicity (Hispanic or Latino vs. not Hispanic or Latino), gender identity (trans man, trans woman, nonbinary/gender-diverse), employment status (employed full- or part-time vs. not employed), political affiliation (Democrat, Republican, Independent/Other), education (college degree or higher vs. no college degree), and age (25 or younger vs. older than 25). Family-level variables included family income ($\leq$ \$50K vs. $>$ \$50K) and living situation (living with family of origin vs. other). Broader contextual variables included LGBTQ-friendly state (friendly vs. not friendly), state political context (blue, red, or swing state), and urbanicity of community (rural/other, suburban, urban).

Descriptive statistics and frequency counts were computed for all closed-ended survey items, as well as for the endorsement of themes derived from qualitative content analysis. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 31. To account for the risk of Type I error due to multiple comparisons, p-values were adjusted using the Benjamini–Hochberg false discovery rate (FDR) procedure (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). Given the exploratory nature of these analyses and the use of an existing dataset, an a priori power analysis was not conducted, as power estimation is most applicable to confirmatory designs with prespecified hypotheses (Wagenmakers et al., 2012). Consistent with recommendations cautioning against post hoc power estimation (Heinsberg & Weeks, 2022), we instead emphasize effect sizes when interpreting findings.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Of the full sample, 148 participants provided responses to the single open-ended survey item. Responses were reviewed for relevance and depth of content. A total of 79 responses (53.4%) were excluded because they did not address familial relationships or did not contain sufficient narrative detail to support qualitative analysis (e.g., brief or non-substantive responses). The remaining 69 responses (46.6%) provided full, meaningful narrative content and were therefore included in the qualitative analyses. Demographic characteristics of this qualitative subsample (22.8% of the full sample) are presented in Table 3.

For responses to the open-ended survey item, qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019) was utilized. This method is a widely accepted approach for examining open-ended data, enabling the generation of novel insights through the systematic identification, coding, and categorization of primary patterns and themes. By exploring and classifying the qualitative data, the textual information was condensed into a more concise set of content categories, from which a coding system was developed to organize the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of complex qualitative information by distilling it into manageable and interpretable themes, which in turn provided insights into participants' experiences in their own words as well as contextual depth to our quantitative findings.

The primary goals of our content analysis were to explore participants' family relationships and coping strategies in the context of Trump's 2024 campaign and presidency. The content analysis was guided by the study's overarching research questions and informed by sensitizing concepts identified in prior scholarship (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Given the importance of familial relationships to trans adults' well-being and the limited research in this area, theme development was guided by patterned meanings in participants' accounts that addressed the study's research questions regarding family relationship processes.

The analytic process began with the first author conducting a thorough reading of all open-ended responses to build familiarity with the data and to note initial impressions and potential patterns. Each response was then coded line by line, with attention to phrases and ideas related to familial relationships and the broader sociopolitical climate. Codes captured how family dynamics were impacted by the 2024 presidential election; factors that contributed to changes in relationships (e.g., political disagreement, empathy, communication patterns, shared values); experiences of family support or rejection and their consequences (e.g., feelings of safety, isolation, resilience); and coping strategies or resources used to navigate these challenges (e.g.,

seeking support from chosen family, setting boundaries, activism, withdrawing from unsupportive relatives). These initial codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories that reflected distinct but interrelated aspects of participants' experiences that were later refined and defined. For example, codes such as 'avoiding conflict,' 'managing emotions,' and 'self-silencing' were clustered under the broader theme of *emotional labor and strategic silence*.

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the second and third authors independently reviewed the open-ended responses. This served as a verification step for primary thematic identification and participant counts. Minor discrepancies were discussed and reconciled with the first author. In addition, the study incorporated triangulation across data sources, integrating closed-ended survey data, open-ended responses, and researcher-generated memos to contextualize and interpret findings. Throughout the analytic process, researchers engaged in reflexive consideration of how their own positionalities and assumptions might influence interpretation, consistent with best practices for ensuring qualitative rigor (Morrow, 2005). For example, we reflected upon how our disciplinary assumptions, age, family structure and composition, and gender identity necessarily impacted our attention and interpretation vis a vis the data. As cisgender authors, we were especially attuned to how our gender identity might be informing our analytic assumptions and the application of our interpretive frameworks, and thus we returned iteratively to the data and other accounts written by and about trans individuals as an additional check on our interpretations. Research memos and analytic notes were used to document decisions and maintain transparency throughout the process, creating an audit trail of analytic decisions, consistent with recommendations that qualitative rigor is best demonstrated through systematic documentation and transparency in analytic procedures (Goldberg & Allen, 2015).

Results

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative analyses addressed Research Questions 1, 2b, 4a, and 4b, examining the prevalence of family tension and political estrangement following the 2024 U.S. presidential election, the perceived emotional, social, and financial impacts of estrangement, and potential differences in rates of endorsement of these experiences across sociodemographic groups. Descriptive statistics were computed for all closed-ended items, and chi-square tests of independence were used to examine whether endorsement rates for family tension, estrangement, and estrangement-related impact domains differed across sociodemographic characteristics. Although the relational processes underlying these experiences are explored in greater depth in the qualitative findings, the quantitative results provide an overview of how family-related stressors and perceived impacts were distributed across the sample.

Elevated Family Tensions Following the 2024 Election

More than one-third of participants ($n=116$, 38.4%) reported experiencing increased tension with family members. Across demographic variables, chi-square analyses revealed no significant differences in endorsement of increased tension post-election (see Table 2), and effect sizes were uniformly small (ϕ or $V \leq .10$).

Estrangement and Its Emotional, Social, and Financial Impacts

More than one-third of participants ($n=120$, 39.7%) reported distancing themselves or becoming estranged from family members over the past year due to political differences. Among these participants, the majority reported no change in financial impacts ($n=90$, 75.0%), with slightly more than one-fifth reporting a negative financial impact ($n=26$, 21.7%) and a small proportion reporting a positive impact ($n=3$, 2.5%); one participant did not provide a response ($n=1$,

Table 2. Demographic subgroup percentages, chi-square statistics, and effect sizes for increased family-of-origin tension.

Variable	% Endorsed Tension	χ^2 (df)	Unadjusted p	Adjusted p ^a	Effect Size
INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL VARIABLES					
Race (White vs. POC)	White: 38.6% POC: 37.1%	0.06 (1)	.807	.807	$\phi = .01$
Ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino)	Hispanic/Latino: 51.7% Not Hispanic/Latino: 36.6%	2.53 (1)	.111	.190	$\phi = .09$
Gender (Trans men, Trans women, NB/GD)	Trans men: 34.2% Trans women: 35.5% NB/GD: 40.9%	1.20 (2)	.550	.660	$V = .06$
Employment (Employed vs. not)	Employed: 34.4% Not employed: 44.0%	2.77 (1)	.096	.190	$\phi = .10$
Political Affiliation (Dem, Rep, Ind/Other)	Dem: 37.0% Rep: 14.3% Ind/Other: 42.6%	4.45 (2)	.108	.190	$V = .12$
Education (College vs. No College)	<College: 42.0% College+: 35.1%	1.50 (1)	.221	.295	$\phi = .07$
Age (≤ 25 vs. > 25)	≤ 25 : 45.6% > 25 : 34.9%	3.04 (1)	.081	.190	$\phi = .10$
FAMILY-LEVEL VARIABLES					
Family Income ($< 50k$)	$< 50k$: 42.3% $\geq 50k$: 34.9%	1.73 (1)	.188	.282	$\phi = .08$
Living Situation (With family vs. not)	With family: 46.0% Not with family: 34.9%	3.23 (1)	.072	.190	$\phi = .10$
BROADER CONTEXT VARIABLES					
LGBTQ-Friendly State	Not friendly: 47.5% Friendly: 32.1%	7.22 (1)	.007	.054	$\phi = .16$
Urbanicity (Urban, Suburban, Rural/Other)	Urban: 28.5% Suburban: 42.1% Rural/Other: 50.9%	9.40 (2)	.009	.054	$V = .18$
State Political Context (Blue, Red, Swing)	Blue: 39.9% Red: 35.3% Swing: 36.4%	.610 (2)	.737	.804	$\phi = .05$

Note. χ^2 =chi-square test of independence. * $p < .05$. Effect sizes are reported as ϕ for 2×2 comparisons and Cramér's V for comparisons with more than two categories. Percentages reflect endorsement within each group. p^a values are adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini–Hochberg false discovery rate (FDR) procedure.

0.8%). Similarly, over half of participants endorsing estrangement reported no change in social impacts ($n=64$, 53.3%), while nearly one-third reported a negative impact ($n=37$, 30.8%), and the remainder reported a positive impact ($n=19$, 15.8%). In contrast, emotional impacts were more frequently negative, with nearly half of participants who endorsed estrangement reporting a negative emotional impact ($n=58$, 48.3%), nearly one-third reporting no change ($n=36$, 30.0%), and the remainder reporting a positive impact ($n=26$, 21.7%). No significant sociodemographic differences were observed in endorsement of estrangement or in reported financial, social, or emotional impacts (all $ps > .05$). The full results of these analyses are presented in [Appendix 1](#).

Representativeness of the Qualitative Subsample

To assess the representativeness of the qualitative subsample, chi-square analyses were conducted comparing participants included in the qualitative analyses ($n=69$) with the remainder ($n=233$) across key demographic variables. This revealed that subsample participants were less likely to have a college degree or higher, $\chi^2(1, N=302) = 7.76$, $p = .030$, $\phi = .16$. They were also more likely to live with their family of origin, $\chi^2(1, N=302) = 11.33$, $p = .012$, $\phi = .19$. No significant differences were observed for race, ethnicity, gender identity, political affiliation, age, family income, employment, LGBTQ-friendly state, urbanicity, or state political context ($p > .05$). Complete results of these analyses are provided in [Appendix 1](#).

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of the Sub-sample ($n = 69$).

Characteristic	n	%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	57	82.6
Asian	7	10.1
Black/African American	5	7.2
Latinx/Hispanic	5	7.2
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	4.3
Other	1	1.4
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual/Straight	6	8.7
Queer	14	20.3
Bisexual	16	23.2
Asexual	12	17.4
Pansexual	8	11.6
Lesbian	6	8.7
Gay	3	4.3
Other	4	5.8
Gender Identity		
Man	7	10.1
Woman	5	7.2
Trans Man	11	15.9
Trans Woman	4	5.8
Nonbinary	34	49.3
Other	8	11.6
Employment		
Employed full-time	23	33.3
Employed part-time	11	15.9
Self-employed	11	15.9
Unemployed	16	23.2
Student	9	13.0
Disabled	8	11.6
Homemaker/Retired/Full-time parent	5	7.2
Political Affiliation		
Republican	1	1.4
Democrat	43	62.3
Independent	13	18.8
Other	12	17.4
Education		
Less than high school	2	2.9
High school diploma/GED	16	23.2
Some college/associate's degree	22	31.9
Bachelor's degree	18	26.1
Master's degree	8	11.6
PhD/JD/MD	3	4.3
Age		
18–25	24	34.8
26–35	28	40.7
36–50	15	21.7
51–60	1	1.4
61+	1	1.4
Family Income		
No income	1	1.4
\$1,000–\$15,000	4	5.8
\$16,000–\$25,000	13	18.8
\$26,000–\$50,000	17	24.6
\$51,000–\$75,000	13	18.8
\$76,000–\$100,000	8	11.6
>\$100,000	13	18.8
Living Situation		
Partner/s	21	30.4
Child/ren	7	10.1
Pets	34	49.3
Family of origin	31	44.9
Roommates/housemates	11	15.9
Other	8	11.6

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

Characteristic		n	%
LGBTQ Friendly State	Friendly	37	46.4
	Not friendly	32	53.6
Urbanicity	Urban	20	29.0
	Suburban	36	52.2
	Rural	11	15.9
	Other	2	2.9
State Political Context	Blue state	40	58.0
	Red State	25	36.2
	Swing State	4	5.8

Note. Percentages reflect endorsement rates; for variables assessed using “select all that apply” response options, percentages may not sum to 100.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative analyses addressed Research Questions 2, 2a, 3, 4a, and 4b, examining the relational and contextual factors shaping trans adults’ experiences of family support, ambivalence, and rejection in the aftermath of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, as well as the coping strategies and resources that participants mobilized in response to these dynamics. Analysis of the open-ended responses provided insight into how participants described changes in family relationships, the meanings they ascribed to increased tension or estrangement, and the ways they navigated family-related stressors within the broader sociopolitical climate. Together, these analyses provide in-depth insight into the relational and coping processes underlying the quantitative patterns observed in family tension and estrangement, illuminating how trans adults interpreted and responded to family dynamics in the context of heightened political hostility.

From the full sample, 69 participants elaborated on their experiences with familial relationships following the 2024 presidential election. Demographic characteristics of this subsample appear in [Table 3](#). Participants’ responses reflected four central themes: (a) *enduring connection amid disillusionment*, (b) *emotional labor and strategic silence*, (c) *resilience through selectivity*, and (d) *protective disconnection*. The full results of all chi-square tests examining sociodemographic differences in theme endorsement are provided in [Appendix 1](#).

Enduring Connection Amid Disillusionment

A majority of trans adults in the qualitative subsample ($n = 50$, 72.5%) described maintaining ongoing, though increasingly strained, relationships with family members whose political or ideological views conflicted with their own. They frequently cited the 2024 election as a turning point that intensified long-standing divisions, bringing to the surface painful realizations about the limits of acceptance within their families. Although most ($n = 39$) emphasized that these conflicts were not new, they shared that the election served as a stark reminder of how fragile familial support could feel when confronted with ideological differences. As one participant articulated, “It wasn’t new, it just showed me how little my family and some people actually cared for women’s rights and healthcare” (P253), revealing a deep sense of disappointment and loss. Others described having to adjust expectations and minimize confrontation to preserve a semblance of connection, even as longstanding disagreements continued to deepen. One participant (P241) explained:

Not new, both better and worse than before. Better because they’ve become less inclined to argue/bring things up since I’ll just say my part and then not participate/not get riled up, so don’t really have to listen to them talk about people/policies. Worse because they’re believing more and more about massive amounts of illegal voting.

These accounts demonstrated that participants sought to remain connected to loved ones while accepting that their values and identities were unlikely to be either understood or authentically embraced. One participant (P263) captured this painful duality, feeling supported in name yet invalidated in practice, in describing their father: “He supports me being trans, and while it’s not new that he voted for Trump, it is so incredibly humiliating and embarrassing that he voted for someone who doesn’t see me as a human being.” Such narratives point to familial relationships sustained not by shared understanding and unconditional acceptance, but rather, by pragmatic attempts to tolerate one another in the face of undeniable ideological fracture.

Pearson’s chi-square tests of independence indicated that endorsement of this theme did not differ significantly across sociodemographic variables.

Emotional Labor and Strategic Silence

Fifteen trans adults ($n=15$, 21.7%) described carefully controlling the disclosure of personal or political information or monitoring their self-presentation in order to mitigate potential conflict and maintain familial harmony. This often involved the deliberate suppression of powerful emotions of disappointment and sadness. Relatedly, many refrained from engaging in political discourse or confronting family members’ views, silencing their true beliefs and sentiments in an effort to avoid the distress that might accompany confronting invalidating perspectives. In these instances, silence appeared to help trans adults maintain internal coherence in the face of implied rejection or hostility. As one participant explained, “It’s just listening to them talk that makes me scared of how people would react if they knew I was nonbinary and bisexual” (P81). Others echoed this sense of cautious management, describing efforts to limit exposure to interpersonal tension: “My father is a Trump supporter... I avoided the topic of politics... he knows I am liberal, but it is never openly discussed.” Similarly, another participant stated: “The only way I handle it is refusing to talk about such things, even when directly provoked” (P35). Several reflected feelings of resignation and emotional exhaustion: “Their simple comments of wanting Trump as president for the ‘economy’ lacks any thought to me, so I give up in changing their minds” (P71). Together, these accounts underscore how these participants used emotional regulation, self-monitoring, and withdrawal to preserve family ties while trying to protect their sense of safety and authenticity.

Pearson’s chi-square tests of independence indicated that endorsement of this theme did not differ significantly across sociodemographic variables.

Resilience Through Selectivity

Fourteen trans adults ($n=14$, 20.3%) described intentionally investing in relationships that fostered affirmation, safety, and mutual understanding. Rather than passively enduring strained familial ties, they emphasized the importance of discernment and boundary-setting, deliberately surrounding themselves with individuals who unequivocally supported their identities and values. As one participant powerfully reflected, “I have also carefully curated the people I spend time around...I will not associate with people who don’t support me, and that includes family members” (P1) underscoring a decisive commitment to self-preservation and authentic connection. For others, this selectivity was more flexible, extending beyond exclusion to a nuanced, strategic openness. Although this perspective was less commonly expressed, one participant (P39) described a more dialogic orientation explaining,

Thankfully my family, friends, and coworkers are generally progressive... I have not intentionally or explicitly cut off contact with any conservatives... I wish I knew more conservatives because I would like to talk to more people with different opinions and maybe help them better understand the trans issue.

This account reveals a sophisticated form of agency that balanced self-protection with an aspiration for dialogue. Collectively, these narratives show how participants asserted themselves to shape highly supportive social ecosystems, transforming experiences of familial strain into opportunities for personal empowerment, relational connection, and fortified community.

Pearson's chi-square tests of independence indicated that endorsement of this theme did not differ significantly across sociodemographic variables.

Protective Disconnection

Eight trans adults ($n=8$; 11.6%) described limiting or severing contact with family members following the 2024 presidential election. Often, these decisions were framed as necessary strategies for safeguarding mental health and well-being, with disconnection and disengagement functioning as a deliberate form of self-protection rather than rejection. Importantly, seven of these participants indicated that such distancing pre-dated the election. As one participant shared, "I have already cut any Trump supporters out of my life prior to this election" (P13). These participants' inclination toward estrangement was often articulated with strong conviction, reflecting firm boundary-setting and a committed, preemptive resistance to the perceived threat of wholesale devaluation, disrespect, and rejection: "I did not interact with people who have violent views towards people like myself and my family/friends. I cut these people out of my life entirely so there is no room for tension" (P228). Another participant explained, "This tension was with my birth family and no it was not new. My mother has been very into MAGA since 2018... I handled it by escaping their bigotry and abuse last year" (P12), suggesting that disconnection carried a sense of personal emancipation. The one participant who had not previously severed contact with family shared: "I was thinking about talking to my actual family about being NB since I wasn't 'out' with them, but then I learned by their social media that they had voted for Trump and have now gone no-contact" (P279), illustrating how, for some individuals, the 2024 election served as the final catalyst for disconnection. Together, these narratives highlight the 2024 election's decisive impact, either solidifying preexisting partitions or precipitating new ones.

Pearson's chi-square tests of independence indicated that endorsement of this theme did not differ significantly across sociodemographic variables.

Discussion

This study examined the ways in which familial relationships for trans adults have been impacted by the sociopolitical climate following the 2024 presidential election, a period marked by unprecedented political hostility and explicit anti-trans policy initiatives (Goldberg & Sears, 2025).

Sociopolitical Context and Shifting Family Dynamics

Quantitative analyses revealed limited sociodemographic differences following correction for multiple comparisons. Specifically, only education and living situation remained significantly associated with differences between the qualitative subsample and the full sample, whereas all other associations were non-significant. Over one-third of participants reported experiencing increased tension with family members, as well as distancing themselves or becoming estranged over the past year due to political differences. In the qualitative subsample, participants elaborated on how they navigated these shifts in the familial milieu, such as by sustaining connection despite disillusionment, engaging in emotional self-management to avoid conflict, turning toward affirming networks, and disengaging from unsupportive relatives.

Overall, the patterns observed in this study strongly mirror findings focused on the aftermath of the 2016 election, which similarly documented heightened tension and division within LGBTQ individuals' families of origin, as well as increased distancing and the severing of ties (Gabriele-Black

et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Price et al., 2021; Veldhuis et al., 2018). This study joins a robust literature illustrating how macro-level political shifts, such as presidential elections, reverberate through ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Ideological perspectives valorized by governing bodies do not lodge in the abstract or the distal; rather, they permeate through daily social interactions, infusing the proximal relationships that typically characterize safety and belonging: family. Through the lens of minority stress, sociopolitical hostility can reposition family relationships as proximal stressors, where chronic tension, emotional labor, and relational withdrawal emerge in response to distal political forces.

Relational Strain, Estrangement, and Developmental Context

Sociodemographic differences in endorsement of distancing or estrangement from family members due to political differences following the 2024 election did not emerge from our analyses, consistent with research on political polarization and value-based conflict showing that individuals across demographic groups may reduce contact or sever ties in relationships marked by ideological misalignment (Brandt et al., 2014). Indeed, recent polling by the American Psychiatric Association (2024) indicates that one in five Americans reports estrangement from a family member over political disagreements.

Interestingly, although age was not significantly associated with endorsement of *protective disconnection*—deliberate contact cutoff with family members—all eight individuals who endorsed this theme were over 25. Given that this theme was endorsed by a small number of individuals, this finding should be interpreted with caution. Research suggests that individuals who sever ties with family typically do so after the mid-20s, often following prolonged exposure to strained family relationships, such that cumulative relational stress contributes to decisions to disengage (Agllias, 2016, 2018). Research on emerging adulthood helps contextualize this pattern, indicating that emotional dependence on family, as well as financial and residential instability, tend to remain elevated through the mid-20s, with greater autonomy and reduced family reliance emerging later (Arnett, 2000, 2024). At the same time, these dynamics are likely relevant across the lifespan, and future research would benefit from examining how sociopolitical stressors shape familial relationships at earlier developmental stages, including during adolescence and childhood, when dependence on family systems and power dynamics may differently constrain or intensify these relational processes.

Negotiating Family Relationships: Coping, Connection, and Disconnection

The emergence of *protective disconnection* as a theme in our qualitative analysis is also consistent with research on the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election: across studies, many LGBTQ+ individuals explained that emotional responses surrounding the election outcome gave rise to significant friction and strain with family members, to the point where they felt the need to cut off contact to preserve their well-being (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2018). At the same time, these studies mostly described the 2016 presidential election as initiating an unfolding of familial severance, while in the current study, all but one participant who cut ties said that this choice pre-dated the 2024 election. Although Gonzalez et al. (2018) found that some LGBTQ+ individuals were already estranged from family before the 2016 election, these individuals typically cited general homophobia as the precipitating factor. In contrast, in our study, participants who described having already cut off contact prior to the 2024 election tended to explicitly specify allegiance to Trump or his administration as the precipitating factor. Therefore, it is possible that severance-related findings following the 2016 election largely represent a “first wave” of Trump’s disconnecting impact, with participants in the current study representing a “second wave” characterized by increased conviction to remain distant.

This progression illustrates how disconnection prevails as a coping mechanism for sexual and gender minorities facing chronic stress and threat (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al.,

2018; Veldhuis et al., 2018). By removing themselves from hostile microsystems, LGBTQ+ individuals attempt to reduce their exposure to the harm that pervades their surroundings at structural levels. Importantly, this strategy is not without potential consequences, as family presents a crucial resource for resilience (Meyer, 2003), with studies demonstrating its capacity to protect trans individuals against psychological risks (Cramer et al., 2024; Lampis et al., 2023; Rastogi et al., 2025; Scandurra et al., 2019).

However, even in the absence of family of origin, participants described drawing on well-documented sources of support for sexual and gender minorities, including community connectedness and families of choice (i.e., *resilience through selectivity*) (Galupo et al., 2014; Meyer, 2003). In this case, autonomy within ecological systems extended beyond exiting harmful microsystems as a strategy to mitigate stress. Instead, trans individuals actively tailored their microsystems to counteract stigma and buffer negative mental health consequences by leaning into progressive and queer-affirming ties, enhancing their sense of solidarity and identity pride (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Testa et al., 2015). This adaptive response was also observed in research with LGBTQ+ individuals following the 2016 election (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Price et al., 2021; Veldhuis et al., 2018).

Notably, participants in this study primarily centered their narratives on relationships with family of origin. This emphasis may reflect the salience of parental relationships in shaping trans individuals' well-being; however, it may also obscure the potential role of extended kin. Emerging research suggests that non-parental family members including aunts, cousins, and other relatives can serve as important sources of affirmation and identity validation for trans individuals (Stone et al., 2022). Such extended family members may function as "insider-outsiders" within family systems, offering support that reflects shared familial ties while diverging from dominant family norms. Future research can explore this possibility further.

Still, the majority of participants in our qualitative sample described enduring connection with family of origin, despite disillusionment, consistent with prior work showing that for many LGBTQ+ individuals, family relationships continued after the 2016 election even amidst challenging emotional and interpersonal experiences (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2018). However, while findings from both the 2016 and 2024 elections illuminate the ways in which trans adults navigate ongoing familial ambivalence, the emotional texture of responses appears to diverge in important ways. Findings following the 2016 election often highlighted high-arousal emotional manifestations, including feelings of betrayal and anger (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2018). Conversely, the current study revealed tempered responses that tended to present as low-arousal emotional manifestations, such as disappointment and resignation resulting from reminders or solidifiers of unmet hopes of ideological alignment. Specifically, as we observed in accounts surrounding the severance of familial ties, most of our participants who endorsed *enduring connection amid disillusionment* noted that conflict resulting from ideological differences pre-dated the 2024 election, pointing toward habituation exemplified by dulled expectations and resignation.

Essentially, while the 2016 election largely engendered shock and disbelief (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2018), the 2024 election demonstrated how long-standing conflict tempers emotional responses, shifting the narrative from acute rupture to chronic strain. This shift to muted responses aligns with minority stress research showing that long-term exposure to hostile sociopolitical climates can dampen emotional reactivity over time (Zvolensky et al., 2024) and illustrates how repeated macro-system threats work to recalibrate how individuals anticipate interpersonal tensions within their most intimate relational settings, such as anticipating conflict as normal rather than exceptional (Pletta et al., 2022).

Emotional Labor and Minority Stress

Several participants described engaging in emotional labor to manage chronic familial strain, primarily through employing silence as a strategy to circumvent conflict. This silence took the

form of suppressing or muting emotional responses as well as withholding political beliefs or aspects of identity, with the goal of managing the emotional climate within the family system. These behaviors explicitly demonstrate proximal minority stress processes. Withholding political beliefs or aspects of identity maps onto Meyer's (2003) conceptualization of concealment and self-silencing, while suppressing or muting emotional responses lends itself to hypervigilance (scanning for cues that conflict may arise) and anticipatory coping (preparing for or preemptively avoiding conflict). The family microsystem became a site where macrosystem political hostility was negotiated through ongoing efforts to self-regulate both internal and external authenticity.

Indeed, our theme of *emotional labor and strategic silence* has important implications for mental well-being in trans individuals. Minority stress research consistently demonstrates that concealment constitutes a unique form of stress, where restraining one's identity may lead to emotional exhaustion, increased anxiety and depression, and self-loathing (Meyer, 2003; Rood et al., 2017). Furthermore, the perceived necessity of constantly monitoring one's behavior, appearance, speech, and interests through hypervigilance and anticipatory coping may reinforce belief in one's difference and inferiority, resulting in chronic anxiety or feelings of being continually "on edge" (Meyer, 2003), as demonstrated in findings following the 2016 election (Price et al., 2021; Rood et al., 2017; Veldhuis et al., 2018). It is also crucial to consider how anticipatory coping may reflect the expectation of rejection (Meyer, 2003; Testa et al., 2015) which is positively associated with anxiety and depression (Lau et al., 2026; Rood et al., 2016) and harmful coping behaviors, such as substance abuse and suicidality (Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Rood et al., 2016).

In sum, our findings illuminate the multifaceted ways that trans adults negotiated relationships within the familial milieu amid the political hostility surrounding the 2024 presidential election, ranging from efforts to maintain ties through emotional labor to strategies of protective disconnection and the cultivation of affirming family ties. These relational pathways reinforce prior findings from the 2016 election, illustrating how sociopolitical hostility emerging from macro-level political shifts infuses proximal, micro-level relationships for trans individuals. At the same time, they reveal how the cumulative impact of sustained minority stress works to shift experiences from acute ruptures toward a landscape of chronic strain, habituation, and heightened emotional self-regulation. Together, findings point to the continuous burdens placed on trans individuals in the face of increasing sociopolitical hostility in the U.S., underscoring the need to attend to this population's well-being in ways that extend beyond the individual; to acknowledge how ecological systems hold the power to shape outcomes.

Implications

The current study has implications for clinicians, family practitioners, and policy advocates. Following a presidential campaign characterized by anti-trans messaging (Goldberg & Sears, 2025; Kemp, 2024), Trump has enacted a series of discriminatory executive orders and administrative directives (The White House, 2025a, 2025b), which have severely restricted access to healthcare, research funding, and federal agency communications (Goldberg & Sears, 2025). With these measures in mind, as well as the existing vulnerability of trans adults in the U.S. exemplified by nationally representative findings indicating an alarming prevalence of suicidality (e.g., 78% reporting lifetime suicidal ideation) (Rastogi et al., 2025), mental health, family, and education advocates across the U.S. must call attention to the marginalizing effects of the Trump administration's policies (Goldberg & Sears, 2025; Lau et al., 2026). Importantly, policy advocacy must work to address not only anti-trans legislation, but also broader community climates that exacerbate minority stress and erode relational support.

In their work with trans clients, clinicians should explicitly inquire about family political dynamics and election-related stress, with special attention to addressing the impact of coping mechanisms characterized by *emotional labor and strategic silence* (Rood et al., 2017) as well as

validating choices of *protective disconnection* without automatically pathologizing estrangement (Lau et al., 2026). Additionally, clinicians should work to support trans clients in building affirming networks, which may include channeling distress into sustainable political involvement, activism, or advocacy (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Lau et al., 2026). Similarly, our findings related to emotional labor and strategic silencing underscore the need for clinicians and advocates to recognize concealment and self-silencing as structurally induced coping strategies, rather than individual avoidance or maladjustment. Broadly, trans-affirming care must be grounded in ecological frameworks that locate sociopolitical distress in the material consequences of policy and public discourse rather than in individual hypersensitivity (Lau et al., 2026).

Relatedly, family practitioners should aim to increase awareness surrounding the potential impact of political behavior in family members of trans individuals, as family members may underestimate how their votes and political views are experienced by trans relatives (Lampis et al., 2023). In doing so, family practitioners should be sensitive to the limits of relational repair, recognizing that reconciliation may be possible in the context of genuine curiosity, but that for some trans individuals, disconnection may be necessary and protective (Lau et al., 2026). Additionally, our finding that *protective disconnection* was endorsed exclusively by adults over age 25 underscores the developmental reality that estrangement is more feasible later in adulthood, highlighting the need for family practitioners to tailor guidance according to clients' life stage, autonomy, and financial independence.

Future work might also direct attention toward the initiation of novel interventions that aim to assist families interested in better showing up for adult trans relatives during hostile political periods. Existing family intervention models typically focus on children and adolescents (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Pletta et al., 2022), necessitating the development of resources tailored to adult populations, including those above the age of 25. Along these lines, bolstering community-based interventions such as the Black Trans Advocacy Coalition and the National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (James et al., 2024) as well as peer-led supports such as local PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapters (Lichtman et al., 2014) may also be of interest, as they may serve as buffers against the adverse outcomes associated with sociopolitical hostility, especially in instances where familial intervention is not viable.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Although we employed a two-fold recruitment strategy with the goal of obtaining a rich and diverse sample across sociodemographic factors, nearly one-third of participants were drawn *via* convenience sampling utilizing professional and personal networks, private communication channels, and listservs, which may limit generalizability as this group comprised more educated, politically engaged, and community-connected individuals (Goldberg & Sears, 2025). The study also inquired about coping mechanisms, support networks, and future aspirations in the context of Trump's reelection, possibly encouraging participation by individuals with more critical views and experiences, and limiting insight into divergent accounts (e.g., more neutral or positive experiences).

Further, while the overall sample was highly diverse, with over one-third of participants identifying as people of color, the qualitative subsample was overwhelmingly White, limiting generalizability to the overall study sample in addition to the broader population. In addition, comparisons between participants included in the qualitative analyses and the remainder of the sample indicated that the qualitative subsample was less likely to have attained a college degree or higher, and more likely to be living with family of origin. These differences suggest that the qualitative findings may disproportionately reflect the experiences of trans adults with fewer economic resources and greater ongoing dependence on family systems, which may have shaped both the nature and salience of reported family tensions.

Additionally, several sociodemographic variables were operationalized in aggregated or dichotomized forms due to limited cell sizes across specific subgroups, which precluded more

fine-grained analyses. While this approach was necessary to preserve statistical power and reduce the risk of unstable estimates, it necessarily obscured within-group heterogeneity across race, ethnicity, gender identity, and other demographic characteristics. As such, findings related to sociodemographic differences should be interpreted cautiously.

It is also important to note that qualitative data were derived from a single open-ended survey item as opposed to in-depth interviews or focus groups, which might have yielded richer, more nuanced accounts regarding participants' lived experiences by way of follow-up probing, clarification, or relational nuance. It is also possible that analyzing an open-ended survey item may have disproportionately captured the experiences of participants who were motivated to write responses, which were optional. Also, all participants provided responses to the open-ended item, and among those who did, the depth and completeness of responses varied.

Future Directions

Future work should seek to investigate efforts made by individuals as well as relevant meso-level actors (e.g., agencies and organizations) to uplift and empower trans individuals (Goldberg & Sears, 2025). In doing so, it is imperative to highlight the significant resilience and strength of this population and to include the important contributions of the trans community itself, being careful to circumvent deficit frameworks that position trans individuals as existing in the absence of their own agency and unique contributions to advocacy efforts.

Similarly, longitudinal work centering the lived experiences of trans adults in the U.S. through the duration of Trump's second presidency should be pursued, with a continued emphasis on documenting how the associated impacts of the sociopolitical climate emerging from hostile policies and laws evolve over time (Goldberg & Sears, 2025). In particular, this work should aim to track how trans adults continue to negotiate relational strain, processes of disconnection or reconciliation, and the definition of "family." Future research with larger and more diverse samples, and sufficient power to retain more fine-grained sociodemographic distinctions, may detect differences in endorsement rates of family tension, estrangement, and estrangement-related impacts that were not observed following correction for multiple comparisons in the present study. It may also be of interest to investigate how family of origin members perceive these dynamics in order to elucidate the propensity for perspective-taking and cognitive flexibility in the face of ideological differences.

Conclusion

The current study revealed that trans adults are navigating relationships within the familial milieu in ways that reflect proximal minority stress processes, enduring connection, and adaptive coping through community connectedness and solidarity. These findings highlight a dialectic of both vulnerability and resilience amidst growing sociopolitical hostility driven by macro-level ecological systems. The chronic nature of these dynamics reinforces a need for intervention at the systemic level, with an emphasis on multi-level supports including affirming families, communities, and policies that safeguard trans lives.

Disclosure statement

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