

Young Men in America Today

**New Research on Their Opinions,
Media, Challenges, and How
Progressives Can Win them Back**



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1

Introduction

2

About SAM

3

Executive Summary

7

The Politics

15

The Voices We're Not Hearing

INTRODUCTION

In the 2024 election, young men (18-29) shifted toward Donald Trump by a striking 12-point margin from four years earlier, the biggest shift of any demographic group. This shift to the right is not just about how young men vote in presidential elections: it can be seen in increased religiosity, declining support for climate change action and same sex relationships; and declining support for women's equality at home and in the workplace. These are big and worrisome trends. But our research shows that young men are not fundamentally "conservative" in any traditional political or policy understanding of the term.

Both before the election and since, there has been an ongoing conversation among the pundit class about why this shift happened. Some of the debate has been driven by anger at the election outcome, rather than analysis, dismissing young men who supported Trump as irredeemable incels and racists. Others have focused on media figures, resulting in a bookshelf of profiles of podcasters and influencers like Joe Rogan, Charlie Kirk, Hasan Piker and Theo Von.

But there has been a scarcity of rigorous research exploring what this cohort's core beliefs, what they care about and want from their lives, and how to reach them. Most public polling, if it shares crosstabs of demographics at all, displays age and gender separately, with the effect of obscuring some major divisions within those groups, particularly the exploding gender divide. And while there are pollsters who focus on youth, which allows for very useful comparison of young men to young women, it still remains impossible to understand how race, geography, education and other factors influence the opinions and behaviors of young men in America.

This report, the first product of Speaking with American Men, is the largest and most thorough research to date focused on young American men, what drives them and how to reach them.

HOW WE DID THE RESEARCH

The SAM team has worked on separate initiatives for years focused on youth opinion, online user journeys and mapping the right's influence. For this study specifically:

Front Row Insights and Strategy, working with Edison Research, conducted 1127 interviews with men 18-29 from 3/6/25 through 3/31/25. Respondents were randomly sampled from L2 voter files, and all respondents were currently registered to vote. Those indicating they do not vote in elections were excluded from the study. Potential respondents were contacted via email, text, or both and invited to participate in an online survey.

SocialSphere conducted 30 focus groups between April and May 2025. Focus groups were among 18-29 year old men, with each group consisting of a unique audience composition, based on region, race, and professional/economic characteristics, in addition to behavioral and attitudinal factors. Each group seated approximately 8-10 participants per session and were moderated by John Della Volpe and his team at SocialSphere.

ABOUT SAM

Speaking with American Men seeks to deeply understand the values, frustrations, and motivations driving the political shifts among young men ages 18 to 29. Through in-depth research, engagement, and content creation, the SAM project will ensure that future progressive messaging and policy is rooted in what young men are telling us they actually need. By addressing economic realities, acknowledging cultural concerns without pandering, and meeting young men where they are, we can reverse the current trend and build a durable cultural and political alignment.

SAM WILL FOCUS ON THREE KEY AREAS:

- 1. A Research Hub:** We're doing the most in-depth research of young men the left has ever done: focus groups, survey research, media research, social listening and more.
- 2. Engaging in media and community ecosystems:** The right has been engaging in many of the spaces—both digital and offline—that young men inhabit for years. Engaging and building meaningful relationships can't be done in the month before an election in communities where trust and authenticity are paramount. But, if the best time to start was a decade ago, the second best time is today.
- 3. Compelling and continual engagement:** We want to find out what works! In terms of policy, tactics, language and culture. We plan to test content that motivates and persuades, and put that into action.

Young men have real challenges, too often unacknowledged by progressives, relating to their economic and emotional well-being. And we do see some concerning trends in their opinions, like declining support for gender and marriage equality. But we shouldn't be surprised by those when progressives have failed to engage, and to persuade, this demographic. Young men largely align with core progressive values such as health care access and reproductive rights. SAM aims to engage them on the issues where we agree and persuade them where we don't, not by lecturing but by listening and competing for their support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young men are facing challenges in education, employment, and social mobility, while also navigating evolving societal expectations around masculinity. Many feel sidelined by progressive narratives that do not fully acknowledge their struggles or aspirations. Progressives' failure to engage them—by assuming that young men are progressive, not investing in the media ecosystems where they reside, and not including them as a specific cohort in engagement and outreach—has allowed conservative influencers to dominate the conversation, offering them a sense of identity and purpose that progressives have neglected.

However, these voters are not lost. In fact, many share core progressive priorities, like affordable housing and good paying jobs. To win them back, progressives must engage young men where they are, addressing their concerns with authenticity, and offer a compelling vision of belonging and empowerment. Above all, we must shift from a moralizing tone to an aspirational and inclusive message that positions progressives as champions of opportunity, resilience, and economic justice. Only then can we counter right-wing narratives and reestablish trust with this critical voter bloc.

WHAT THE DATA SAYS ABOUT THEIR MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND THEIR INTERESTS

News Sources

- YouTube is by far the most widely used source for news among Men 18-29. It also has the largest daily and weekly reach by a wide margin.
- When looking at weekly usage for news among Men 18-29, the closest competitors to YouTube are X, Instagram and Newspapers (Online or print)
- About half of young male voters read a newspaper (online or paper) at least monthly. The most widely read publication is The New York Times at 29%, far more than any of the other national newspapers tested in the study.

Digital Media Platforms

- YouTube reaches almost 100% of young male voters and is also the most frequently used digital platform. Instagram distantly follows in daily users. Reddit also has broad reach, but its users tend to be weekly rather than daily. TikTok is lower than all of them, with less than half of young men saying they use it in a month.
- On YouTube, young male voters primarily watch gaming videos. Learning, music, and news are also popular.

Podcasts

- More than 4 out of 5 young male voters listen to podcasts. The most popular podcasts among those on the list are The Joe Rogan Experience followed by This Past Weekend with Theo Von, The Tucker Carlson Show, and The Ben Shapiro Show.

Gaming

- Most young male voters play video games. Console games have the broadest reach, attracting 3 out of 4 young male voters.
- Most young male voters watch or listen to streamed gaming content and commentary. Almost all of them choose YouTube for that type of content.

WHAT WE'RE HEARING FROM THEM

Economic Insecurity Cuts Across Income and Identity

- Men are overwhelmed by the cost of living, the instability of work, and the distance between what was promised and what's real.
- No matter their background or paycheck, many feel like they're falling behind—and blaming themselves for it.
- Pressure to provide hasn't gone away, but the tools to meet it feel broken.

Social Media Isn't Just Content—It's Conditioning

- Videos of hyper-masculine influencers and political extremism are unavoidable
- Platforms shape identity in the background, long before elections are on the horizon, and especially in moments of loneliness, heartbreak, or stress.
- Algorithms fill the silence when no one else is listening, reinforcing ideas about manhood, power, and worth before they've had a chance to define it for themselves.

Strength vs. Weakness is a Consistent Theme

- Differences between the parties aren't ideological—they're emotional and cultural.
- They want leadership that signals strength, clarity, and the ability to follow-through on promises—especially in a world that feels unstable and demanding.
- For many young men navigating real pressure, the party that looks willing to take hits and keep standing earns more credibility—regardless of platform.

They Have an Ambivalent Relationship to Democracy

- There is a generational tolerance for authoritarian tendencies.
- Institutions feel slow and self-protective. The system feels procedural, not personal.
- Disengagement doesn't mean disinterest. This cohort—like many—are not interested in a defense of the status quo; they want a democracy that can evolve to fight modern fights.

Political Affiliations

- While opinions of both parties are low among Men 18-29, the Republican Party has much higher favorable ratings than the Democratic Party. Young men approve of the Republican party by 43% compared to only 27% for the Democratic party.
- Young male voters have an overwhelmingly negative view of the economy. Almost none says that it is excellent, and only 1 in 4 says that it is good.
- Among Trump's policies, immigration elicits the most approval, while the economy and laying off government workers are the least popular.

EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE & INSTITUTIONAL BREAKDOWN

Mental Health Is a Crisis Hiding in Plain Sight

- They described intense feelings of isolation, suppressed vulnerability, emotional exhaustion.
- Many know they're struggling, but they feel like they have to keep it to themselves.
- Therapy is often delayed, vulnerability is stigmatized, and the expectation to stay composed only deepens the silence.

Institutions Failed Them—And They Know It

- They feel let down by politics, education, law enforcement, and labor systems.
- They don't believe Democrats fight for them, but many don't think Republicans care either.
- They've learned to expect neglect, not support.

Masculinity Is a Burden, Not a Blueprint

- Young men are trying to navigate a culture that tells them to be emotionally open, but mocks them when they try.
- Some want new definitions; others double down on old ones.

Shame Is the Silent Force Shaping Their Lives

- Young men carry shame about emotions, income, identity, and their role in society.
- They feel ashamed to ask for help; and ashamed to not feel able to provide for their families.
- Men describe shame tied to their identity, especially in progressive spaces.

INITIAL INSIGHTS

1. Don't Concede the Support, or Cultural Spaces, of Young Men to the Right; This Only Assures They Will Further Align With the Right

Young men agree with many progressive positions and priorities. They are not adhered to the right or to conservatism. Their challenges mirror that of other Americans. They need to see themselves as included in coalitions in order to join them. But understanding that culture is upstream from politics must be a core tenet of this outreach—progressives need an ongoing effort to interpret current events through this cultural prism, just as the right does. If progressives make an effort to engage young men, fight for their support and call out inaccuracies in right-wing media, there's a lot of opportunity for movement.

2. Reach Young Men in the Media They're Consuming

YouTube is far and away the most important platform to be on, for both traditional news and cultural media consumption. Beyond YouTube, young men consume a variety of ad-supported media, including radio. Engage with cultural content, particularly gaming, sports, and learning. This requires both investment and long-term relationship-building. It also requires getting comfortable with a different style of communication. It does not require creating a "Joe Rogan of the left." Much of the appeal is that these are malleable spaces, where both hosts and guests are willing to change their minds. By not engaging in these spaces we are losing out.

3. Speak to the Real Challenges Young Men are Facing, Especially Loneliness, and Don't Engage in Caricatures

Too often, young men who consume right-wing media or use language unwelcome on a college campus are dismissed by progressives as irredeemable sexists or incels. We found this sentiment to be both categorically untrue and also counterproductive. Young men speak about not being welcome in progressive spaces, and there is a real loneliness crisis and mental health challenges. Our civic and cultural institutions need to address rebuilding our civic connections and addressing the loneliness crisis in ways that are relevant and welcoming to this demographic.

4. Rebrand Progressive Ideals With Young Men

Young men are repelled by much of what they feel has come to symbolize progressivism, even as they agree with many progressive ideals and positions. Progressives need to prove they are not simply impotent scolds or elites.

Indeed, progressive ideals strongly align with masculine ideals, particularly providing for and protecting those who are in need. Rather than dismissing the desire of so many young men to serve that role, let's consider how we can call them in to build and support their communities.

5. Develop a Policy Agenda for Men that Centers them And Seeks their Success

Young men's top concerns are inflation, affordability and housing—which are the same priorities as all Americans—although as people starting out in life, they are even harder hit by them. Young men are generally not expecting to be billionaires, but they have a vision of success that includes autonomy and being able to care for those they love. They are looking for education and health systems that work better for them. Progressive leaders should develop solutions that prioritize housing affordability, skill-based training, and both physical and mental health. Those are legitimate complaints, with real policy implications and potential solutions. Let's show empathy and develop those solutions, and talk about them in ways specific to young men.

Young men are tech optimists, which extends to high rates of crypto investment and AI adoption, although they are not unaware of the danger they may pose. Progressives should consider embracing issues surrounding tech, including automation, crypto, AI and nuclear power.

6. Continue to Listen and Engage

This report is the first product of SAM. In a dynamic media environment with constantly changing policy announcements, the media consumption and opinions of this swing demographic are evolving rapidly. We need to continue to listen, learn and engage this audience in the coming years.

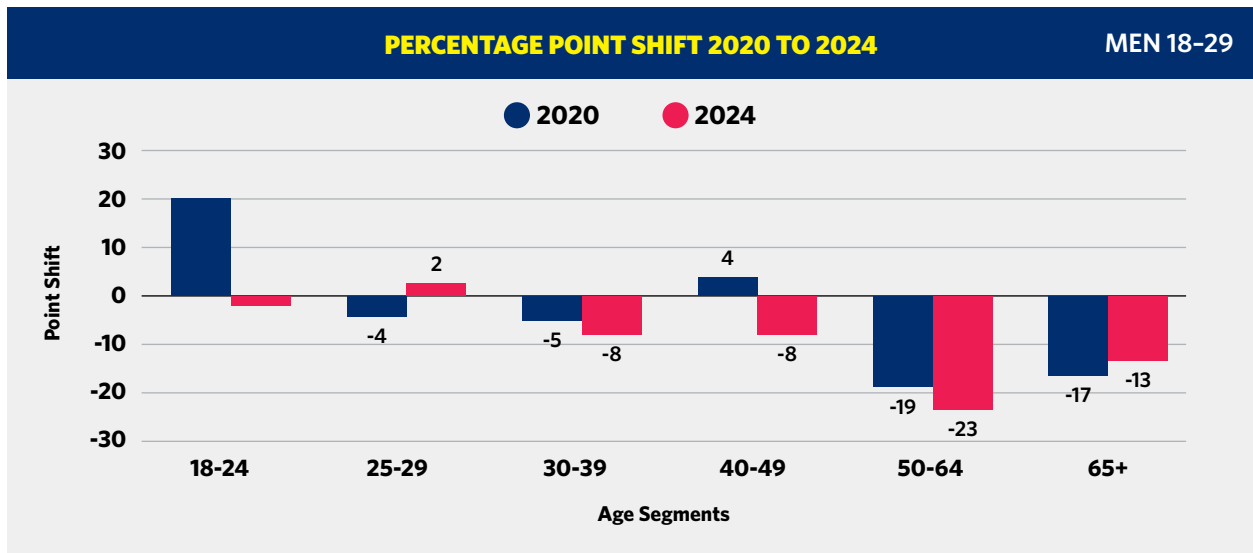
"Your side was not acknowledging the crisis that young people were experiencing. And not just one. This is the first time in America's history that a 30-year old is going to have it worse off than their parents. It's a breakdown of the social compact...We saw this as an opportunity and it got ridiculed a lot by the press."

—CHARLIE KIRK

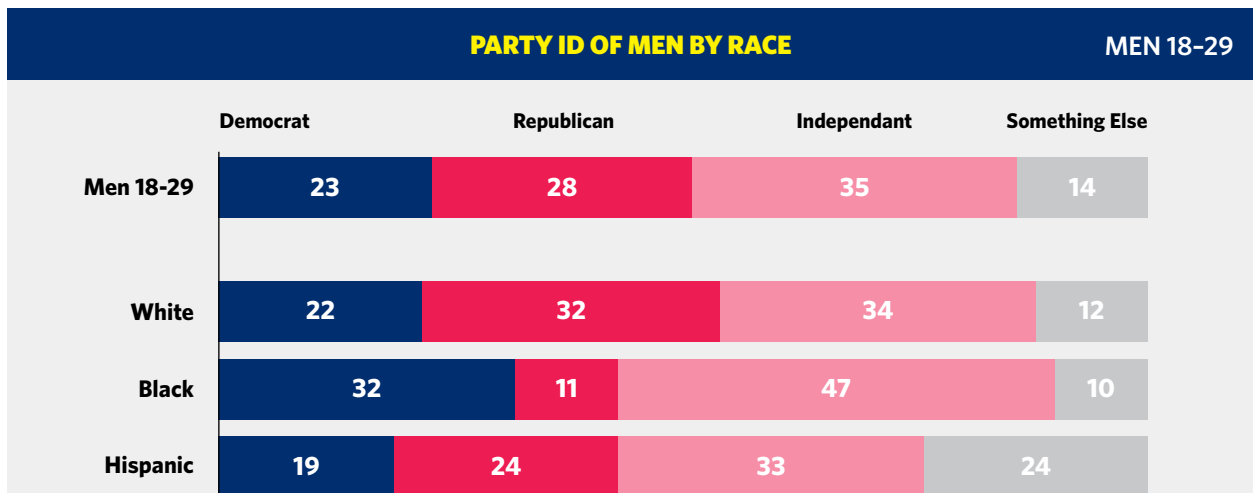
THE POLITICS

YOUNG MEN SHIFTED DRAMATICALLY TO REPUBLICANS IN 2024

National Exit Polls indicated a 12-point shift toward Republicans among men ages 18-29 over the last four years. A demographic that Biden carried by 11 points in 2020 swung to Trump by one point this past November. This shift of young men spanned sub-demographics: young men of all races and educational levels preferred Trump.

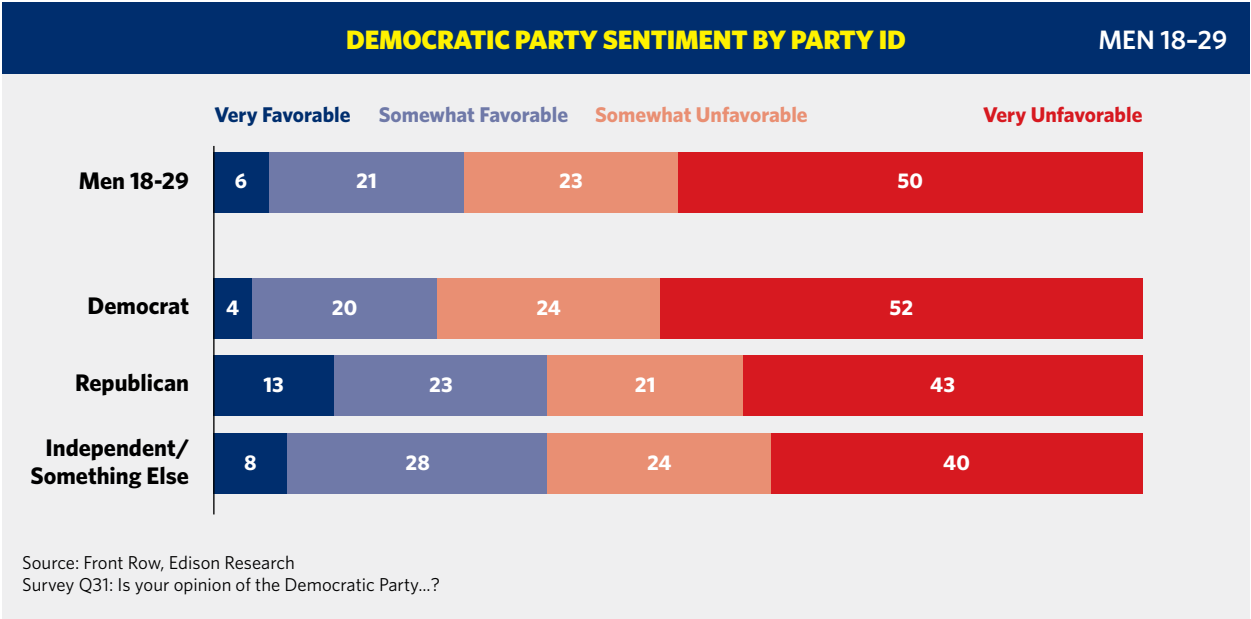


Republicans Have a Slight Registration Advantage Over Democrats Among Young Men, But Independents are the Majority

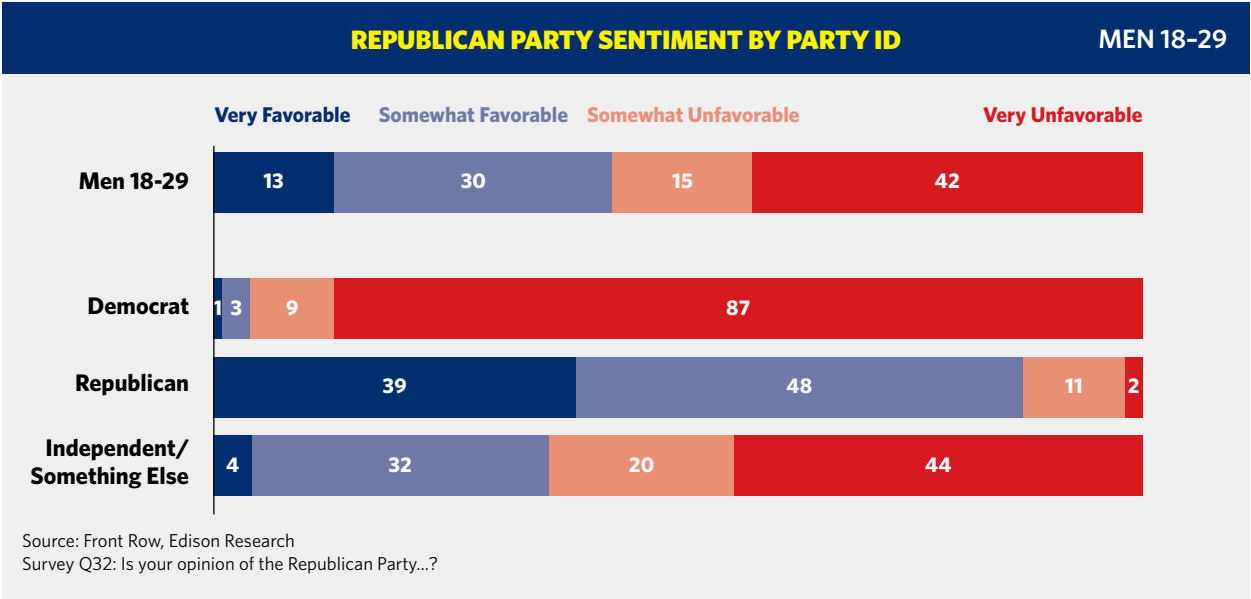


Source: Front Row, Edison Research
Survey Q37: No matter how you vote, do you usually think of yourself as a...?

The Democratic Brand is Extremely Weak with Young Men



But The Republican Party Has No Great Appeal Either



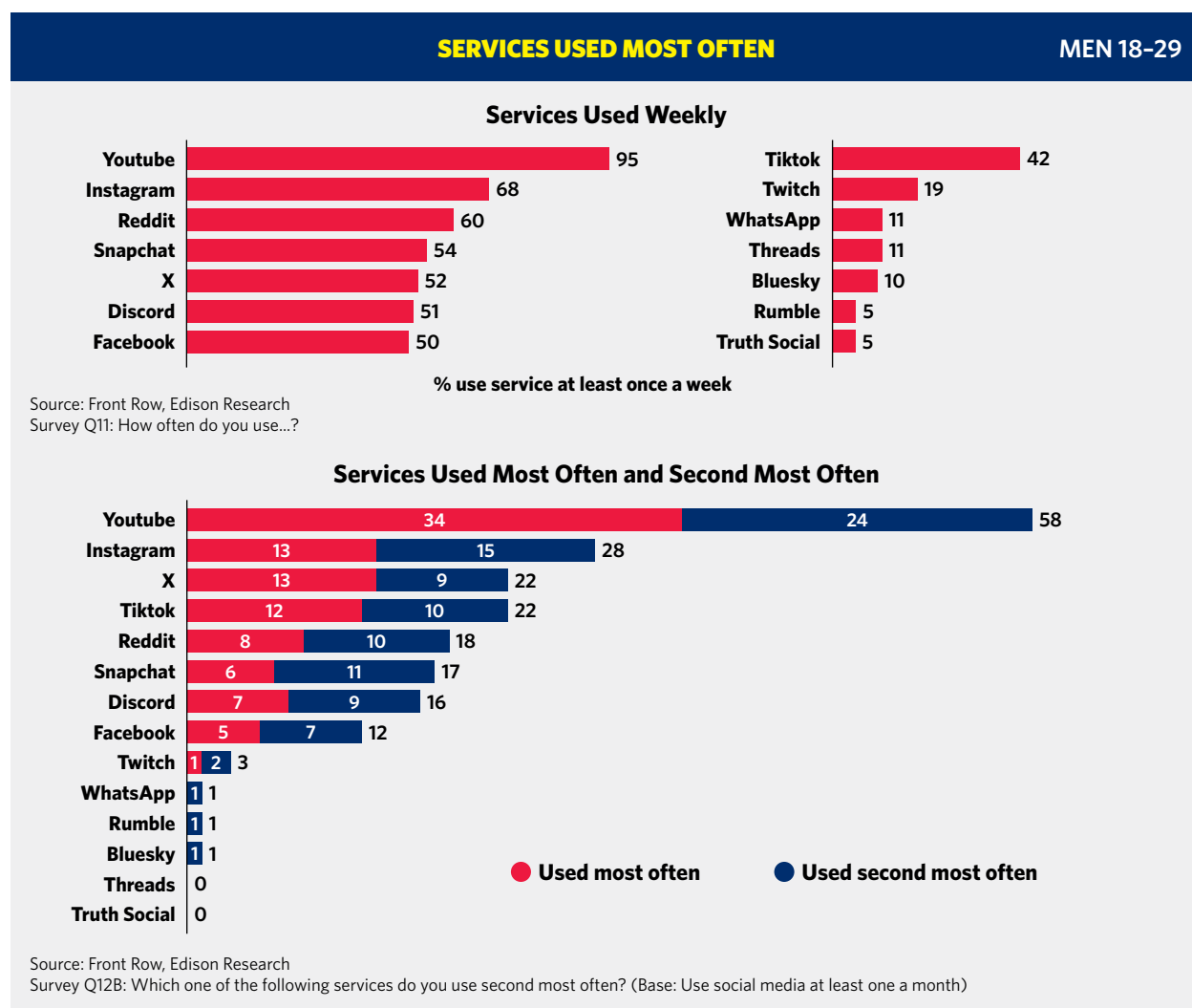
YOUNG MEN ARE CONSUMING A LOT OF MEDIA, AND PROGRESSIVES CAN REACH THEM, IF WE COMPETE

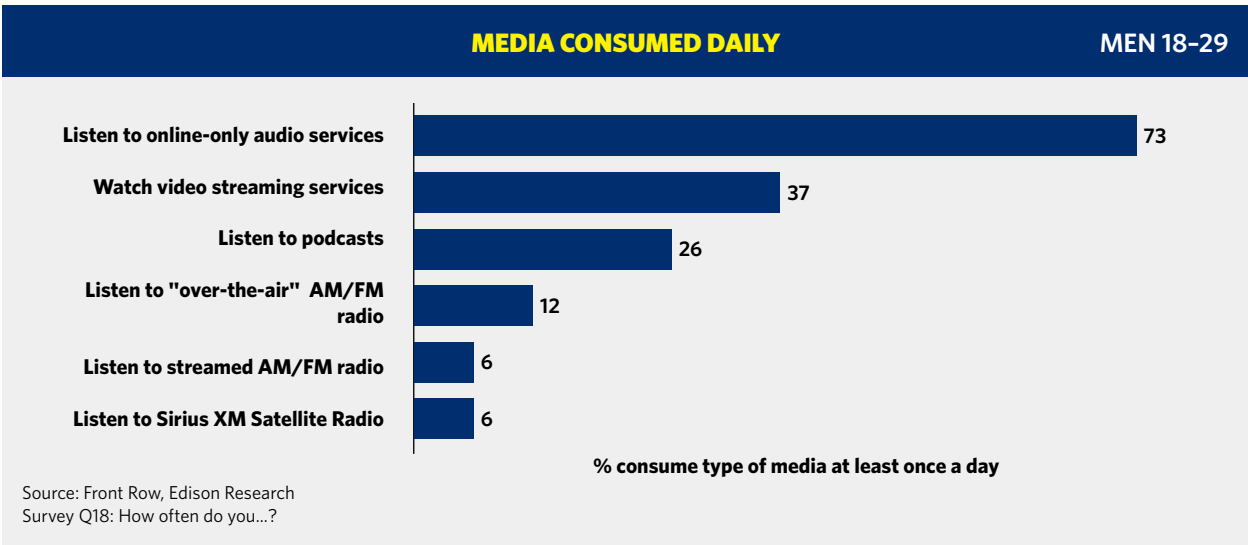
Young men are consuming a tremendous amount of media that looks different from that consumed by older generations and their female peers, but there are some main takeaways:

- Young men are using YouTube for everything, including podcasts as well as videos, but consuming a lot of other media sources as well, including a lot of audio, and other online platforms
- Young men are also consuming many types of content. Contrary to the stereotypes that they're all into sports, they also watch a lot of how-tos and cooking videos
- They are consuming news, although it often isn't the same as older news consumers'. They rely on different outlets than older news consumers, but their current events awareness is high.
- Young men are troubled by much of what they're seeing from the Trump administration.

Young Men Use Many Platforms, But YouTube is King

It cannot be over-emphasized enough that YouTube is the dominant platform in young men's lives, with near-universal (95%) weekly usage, which is 27 points higher than the next platform, Instagram. The difference is even more stark when asked what platform they use most or second most: young men answer YouTube at 58%, more than twice as much as Instagram's 28%.

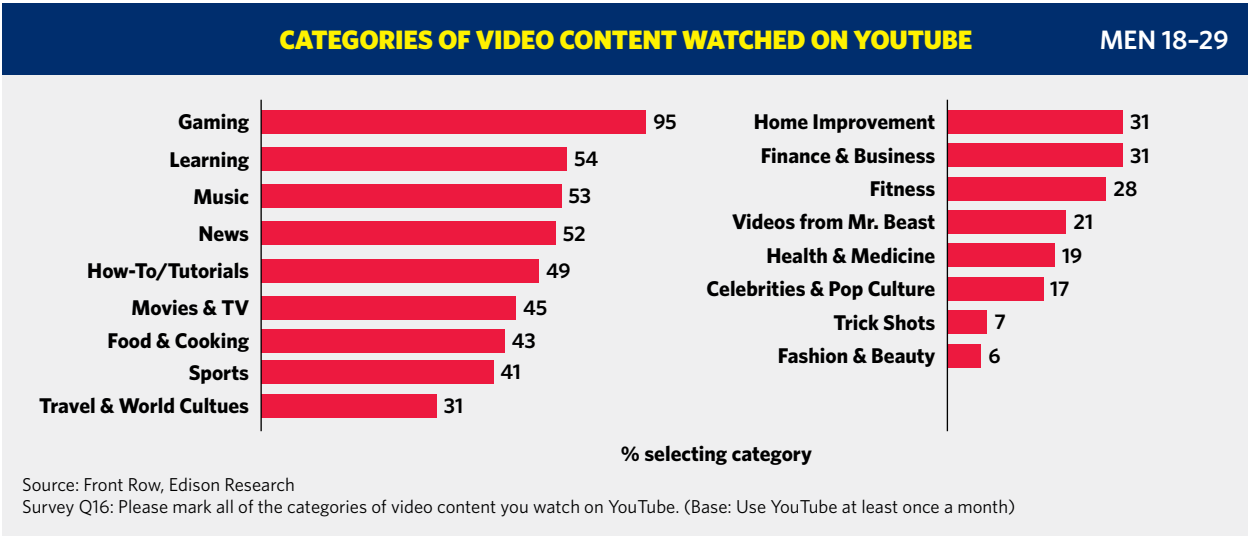




**Young Men Consume a Lot of Types of Content,
And Progressives are Not Engaging in Enough of it**

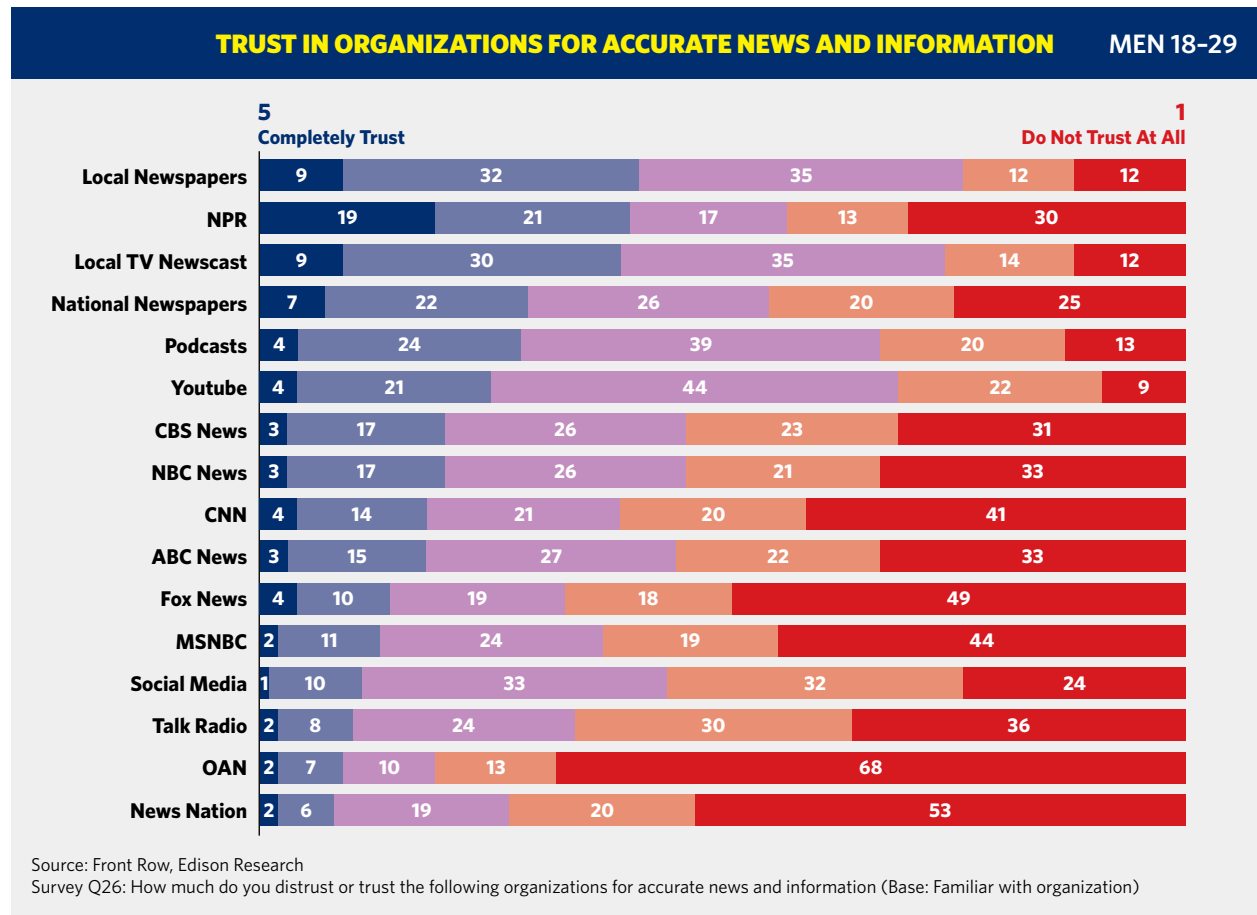
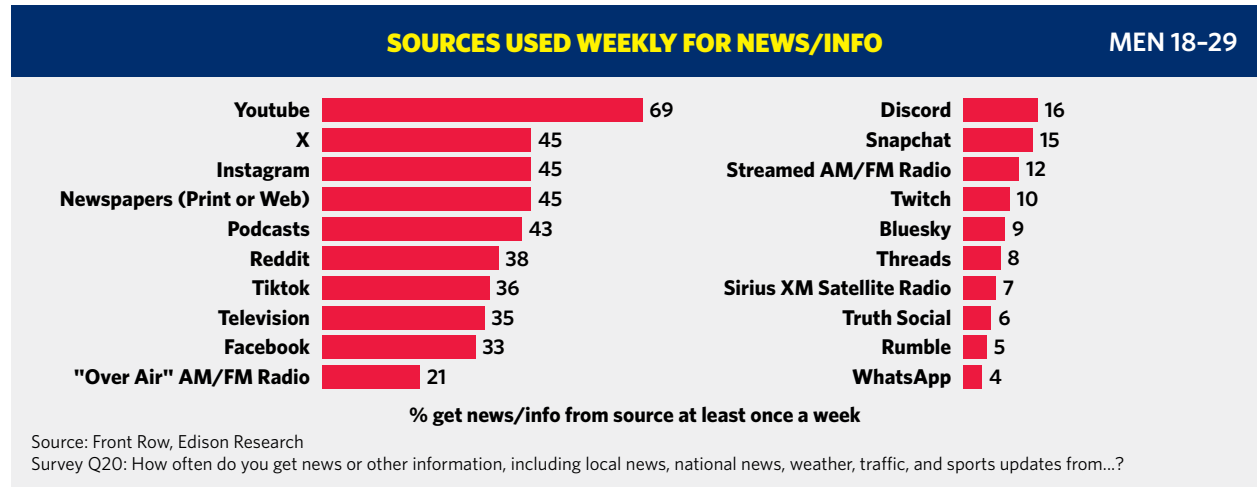
Young men’s top content categories on YouTube are Gaming and Learning. These highlight two overlooked areas for engagement with this audience. Young men aren’t just playing games, they’re watching others play and talk about gaming. President Trump famously appeared with Twitch streamer Adin Ross in the leadup to the 2024 election. Even more surprising is “Learning”--presumably channels like Armchair Historian or Oversimplified, or TED Talks. Engaging these powerful creators could help shape not only men’s views in short term elections, but their long term views on equality and society more broadly as well.

In this “for you” era, content is delivered by constantly-evolving algorithms, without requiring viewers to “like” or “follow” a creator. Progressives can and must leverage those feeds with progressive content, engage with existing shows, and lift up our own influencers. Progressives can’t be successful with just one strategy. We need all of the above.

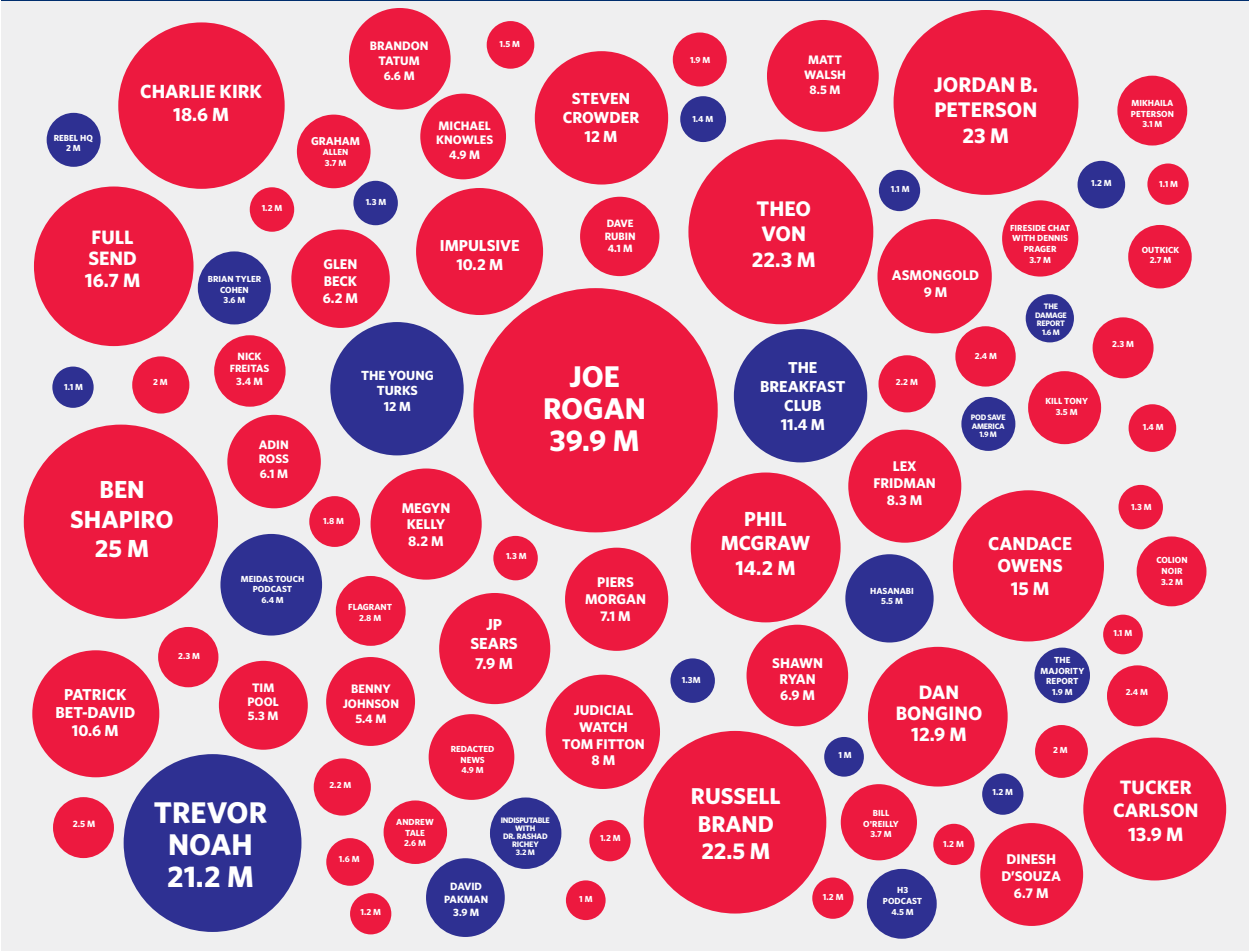


These Men are Consuming News, But It Looks Different

The conversation about young men has often assumed that their opinions are entirely based on vibes. But observers might be surprised to see how much news men are consuming, although it may not be with the traditional methods. Again, their top source for news was YouTube, at 69%, but Twitter, Instagram and Newspapers were tied for second at 45% of young men using them weekly. Crucially, the most trusted sources of news were local newspapers and news, as well as NPR. But we know that much of their news knowledge is being absorbed from news creators who overwhelmingly lean right.



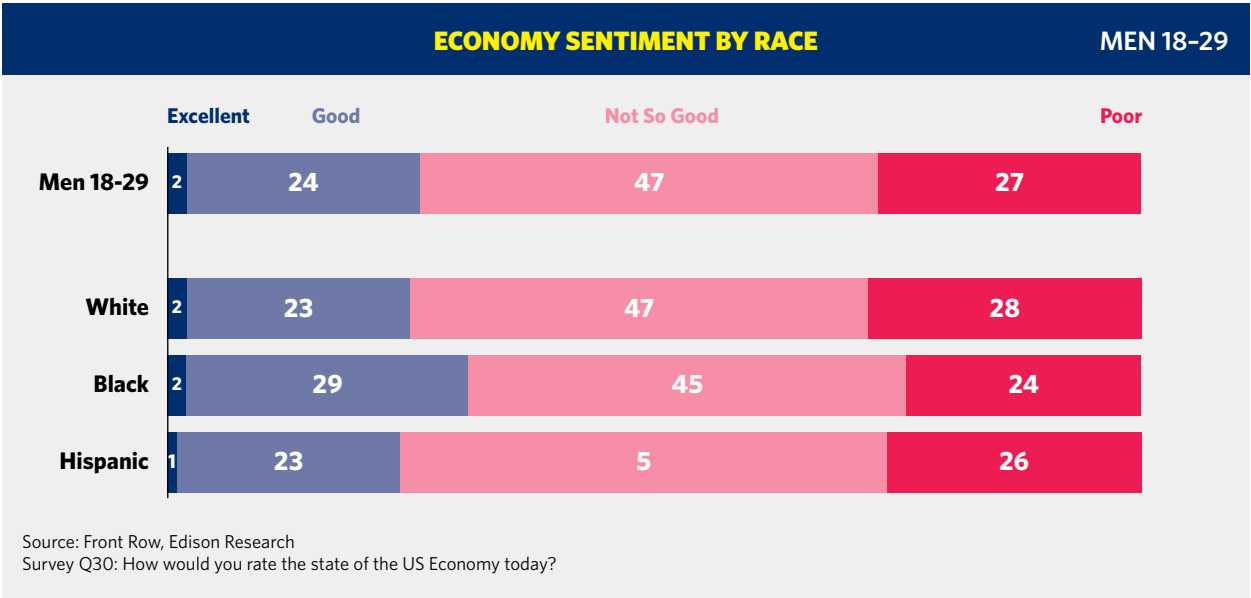
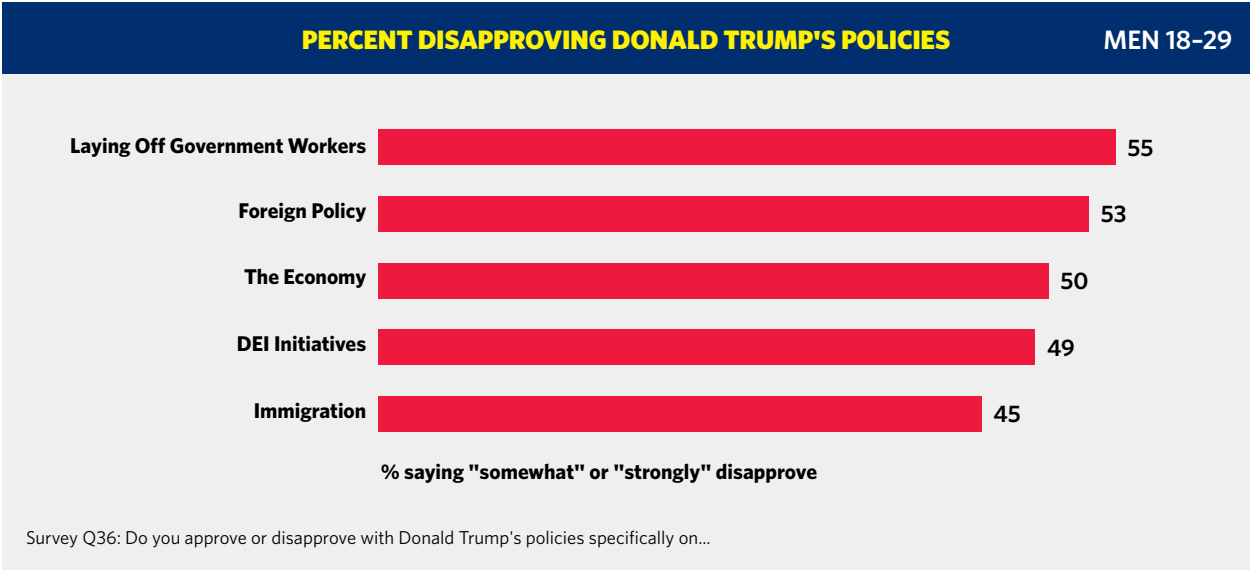
TOTAL FOLLOWING OF TOP RIGHT-LEANING AND LEFT-LEANING ONLINE SHOWS



From a study of 320 online shows with a right-leaning or left-leaning ideological bent. Each circle represents a show with a total following more than 1 million, with circle size proportional to total following as determined with subscriber and follower data collected on February 3, 2025, from YouTube, Spotify, Rumble, Twitch, Kick, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

Young Men are Closely Following, And Disturbed by, Many Trump Administration Actions

Young men are keenly following the news of President Trump’s tariffs and government layoffs, and are able to articulate how they are being affected directly or indirectly by them. The #1 issue they disapproved of Trump’s policies on was laying off federal workers.



THE VOICES WE'RE NOT HEARING

YOUNG MEN AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

by SocialSphere, Inc.

This pivotal moment of what it means to be a man today – which some view as a crisis – is not unprecedented in American history. Previous generations faced similar challenges during the Industrial Revolution, Great Depression, and post-World War II transitions. What distinguishes today's moment is the convergence of multiple simultaneous disruptions – economic anxiety, cultural transformation, technological displacement, and social isolation – occurring at unprecedented speed without institutional support systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these trends, forcing young men into digital isolation during critical years of identity formation. To understand how this generation is navigating these challenges and how it shapes their politics, we conducted 30 in-depth focus groups across diverse geographic regions, encompassing diverse racial, economic, and educational backgrounds. We discovered a generation united by shared pain but divided by how that pain is expressed.

Today's young men are not weak or entitled – they're responding rationally to structural changes that have made basic milestones like homeownership economically inaccessible while cultural expectations have shifted faster than economic realities. Their grandfathers could support families on single incomes without college degrees. Today's young men face an economy demanding more credentials for less stability, with housing costs often consuming 40-50% of income, even for college graduates. And, for those without college degrees, the picture is even grimmer: many tell us they cannot afford a doctor when sick, have no ability to cover unexpected emergencies, and increasingly face homelessness, or near homelessness. At the same time, they grapple with cultural messages simultaneously demanding emotional vulnerability and traditional breadwinning while providing neither the economic foundation nor social permission to fulfill either role successfully.

This helps explain the 2024 election results, where young men increasingly chose Donald Trump – not because they embraced his rhetoric, but because he promised to tear down a system they believe has betrayed them. When every major institution feels rigged against their success, disruption becomes more appealing than preservation. They're choosing someone who promises to dismantle what they see as a rigged game.

This is not a story about ideology or partisanship. It's a story about institutions that failed them, hidden shame, and the human cost of a political system that treats young men's struggles as secondary concerns.

The central finding is this: Young men still believe in democracy – but not in today's version of it. They haven't abandoned civic engagement; they've been abandoned by civic institutions.

This dynamic extends beyond any single candidate or election cycle. When the “normal” political process produces leaders who sound scripted and offer solutions that don't address their lived reality, candidates who promise systemic change earn credibility – even when those promises come with significant democratic risks.

This represents both an urgent political challenge and one of the greatest opportunities of our time. The party, or movement, that learns to speak authentically to the reality of young men, acknowledges their pain without judgment, and offers them a meaningful role in building solutions will earn not just their votes, but potentially their sustained support. Conversely, continued neglect will cause further political fragmentation and greater willingness to embrace anti-establishment approaches that may undermine democratic norms.

THE CRISIS BEHIND THE CRISIS

Institutions Have Failed Them – And They Know It

The most universal finding across all 30 focus groups was institutional betrayal. Young men across every region and racial group feel deeply let down by politics, education, law enforcement, and labor systems. This does not signal naivety but informed disillusionment based on lived experience.

“Neither party has our back,” said a politically engaged Black man in Atlanta, capturing a sentiment echoed from Detroit to Phoenix to Las Vegas. A White man from Appalachia described politicians as wearing “really bad clothes when they come into the bar. But underneath, they have, like, a five-piece suit that’s well tailored... publicly, they’ll say, ‘Hey, let’s help out this group and this group.’ But then, privately, they have all this money, and they truly don’t wanna help society.”

What young men crave isn’t just representation – it’s protection. They’ve learned to expect neglect, not support. When every system seems designed to extract more than it gives, self-reliance stops feeling like strength and starts feeling like the only option left. “I don’t think the government necessarily cares about any of us at all,” said a young Detroit father bluntly.

Shame Is the Silent Force Shaping Young Men's Lives

Perhaps the most powerful yet hidden finding was the pervasive nature of shame among young men. Across every background, they carry shame about emotions, income, identity, and their role in society. It’s rarely offered directly and without probing, but it’s everywhere – and it drives silence, withdrawal, and political retreat.

They feel ashamed to ask for help. Ashamed not to provide enough. Ashamed to cry, to fail, or to fall short of expectations – whether old or new. Even White men describe shame tied to their identity, especially in progressive spaces: “I’m ashamed because I’m a White man, because there are some old White guys... It feels like, you know, sometimes I feel like I shouldn’t have a say in things.”

This shame shapes what men share, how they see themselves, and what they’re willing to believe in – politically and personally. It’s the invisible hand pushing them away from institutions that make them feel smaller rather than stronger. A Hispanic man described the vulnerability trap: “Some women will be like: ‘I want a man that’s vulnerable.’ But the second a guy starts talking about well, you know, ‘This happened when I was a kid,’ or, you know, ‘I’m just not having a good day.’ It’s like, you’re a guy. You’re not supposed to be like this.”

Masculinity Is a Burden, Not a Blueprint

Seemingly every man we spoke with is trying to navigate a culture that tells them to be emotionally open – but mocks them when they try. Some want new definitions of masculinity. Others double down on old ones. All feel caught in what they feel is an impossible bind.

“You have to be a monster, but...it’s about controlling that monster,” said a White tech worker. “If you show weakness, it’s over,” said a Black father. Masculinity has become a performance with contradictory scripts, and the silence around this confusion is hurting them.

A Las Vegas service worker captured the provider paradox: “I feel like nowadays, being a traditional man like, you get considered old school. Like, having your wife at home... To me, I feel like I’m providing, I’m taking care of [her] and my daughter. But to other people, it could seem like I’m holding her back.”

The result is a no-win situation around the meaning of “a man” – young men feel they can’t win regardless of which path they choose. Traditional masculinity is criticized as outdated; non-traditional masculinity is questioned as weak.

THE SHARED EXPERIENCE

What They Carry Looks Different – But Feels the Same

This may be the most politically significant finding: while the specific expressions vary by race and background, the core emotional experience is remarkably consistent. In Atlanta, White men voiced resentment about DEI and lost opportunity. In Detroit, Black men talked about impossible expectations from partners and employers. In Las Vegas, Hispanic men described doubling down on traditional masculinity in response to cultural pressure.

But underneath these different narratives lies the same fundamental pain: not belonging, not being heard, and not making it despite putting in the work. Each group describes the same weight – economic pressure, emotional isolation, and identity strain – shaped by different lived experiences but creating identical feelings of being unseen and tired of pretending otherwise.

A Detroit Black skilled trades worker described impossible expectations: “They want a thug that graduated from college, that goes to church every Sunday, that can handle himself in the streets, that owns a business, that still sells drugs, that gives her all the money. It’s too much.”

A White small business owner echoed similar pressure from a different angle: “My wife’s a stay-at-home mom, and we just don’t tell people because it’s always an issue... This is just what she wants to do, and I wanna give her that opportunity. I don’t know why people get upset about it.”

The words change, the context shifts, but the core feeling remains: they’re carrying burdens that feel impossible to bear and impossible to discuss.

Mental Health Is a Crisis Hiding in Plain Sight

Behind every other struggle lies a mental health crisis that young men are largely navigating alone. The pressure to appear strong, combined with limited emotional outlets and pervasive shame, creates what one participant called being “on islands” – isolated men struggling with identical problems but unable to help each other.

“I feel like I’m on an island sometimes when it comes to providing,” said a White suburban father from Metro Atlanta. “And I have buddies who feel the same way, but they’re on islands themselves. I can’t help them with those problems. They can’t help me with mine, and we have to deal with it individually as men.”

A Black community college student described the racial dimension: “As Black men, we’re supposed to be strong. We’re supposed to be super strong and hold everything together, but it’s draining. Like, it’s honestly draining... you’re putting other people before you’re putting yourself.” The coping mechanisms they describe – drinking, smoking, emotional withdrawal – aren’t solutions but symptoms of a support system that has failed them. “They go home, and then they just spark up their marijuana. They’re gonna get a bottle of Henny, and that’s how we’ve been trained to mentally take in everything. Just to drink it or smoke it away,” said a politically engaged Black man in Atlanta.

Economic Insecurity Cuts Across Income and Identity

From hospitality workers to engineers, men are overwhelmed by economic realities that make traditional milestones feel impossible. Critically, this isn’t just about low wages – it’s about the distance between expectations and reality at every income level.

“Even with a six-figure salary, I feel poor,” said an Asian American professional. “I work three jobs – and I’m still behind,” said a White father. The American Dream isn’t dead for this generation – it’s been moved out of reach while they were told it was getting easier to achieve.

A Black urban professional captured the generational shift: “My grandfather was working for the trash company for the city and got a house for his five kids, and was good. I can’t buy a house right now. I mean, I could, but it would take a lot, a lot more than what it did for my grandfather.”

The pressure to provide hasn’t disappeared, but the tools to meet that expectation feel broken. A Hispanic hospitality worker described the timeline compression: “I think when dad had me, he was married and had a house by the time he was 21, 22. And here I am, 29, living in a buddy’s spare room.”

For many, the economic struggle has become existential: “Kinda doomed to, like, hustle, especially Black men... It’s a never-ending struggle. It’s a never-ending hustle... We all just live off of survival, and it’s like, it makes me feel like I wanna say, like, it’s depressing.”

DIGITAL AND POLITICAL REALITIES

Social Media Isn't Just Content – It's Conditioning

Whether or not they seek it, algorithmic content finds young men during their most vulnerable moments. “Against my will, I see so many Andrew Tate videos,” said a White educator, describing how hyper-masculine and extremist content reaches them without their conscious choice.

The timing matters. Algorithms push problematic content precisely when young men are dealing with breakups, job loss, or emotional struggles. “I recently got out of a really long-term relationship last year,” one participant explained. “And after that, my social media feed, it seemed like it instantly realized that I was single, and I was barraged with workout content, pseudo-philosophical content, religious content, all aimed at, like, you wanna be a better man.”

This represents passive radicalization – young men aren't seeking extremist content, but extremist content is finding them when they're most susceptible. As one participant noted, “It's the wild, wild west... You can start a brand new account on a computer that's never been used. And if you happen to click on a video that is political in any way, the YouTube algorithm... will, somewhat quickly, get you in from, let's say, Fox News to Ben Shapiro to someone more extreme than that to even Nick Fuentes.” The platforms are shaping identity in the background, reinforcing ideas about manhood, power, and worth before young men have had a chance to define these concepts for themselves.

The Authenticity Gap and How Political Image Shapes Trust

To many young men, the differences between parties aren't ideological – they're emotional and aesthetic. Republicans are seen as confident, direct, and unafraid to offend. Charlie Kirk, for example, is lauded for showing up to what is perceived as hostile environments and unafraid to take questions from anyone. Democrats, in contrast, come off as elite, scripted, cautious, and uncertain of themselves. Even when young men align with Democratic policies, they often don't trust that they can or even know how to deliver.

“Democrats tend to embrace more of, like, the fluid masculinity of being, like, empathetic and sensitive,” said a young Asian American professional. “Republicans are more like, the traditional masculinity of a provider, strong, and the machismo type.”

For many young men fighting to survive, the party that seems willing to take hits and keep standing earns more credibility – regardless of policy platform. “They both play the same game,” said a Detroit father. “One (Republicans) just does it a little better than the other.”

This perception creates a fundamental challenge: young men want leadership that signals strength, clarity, and follow-through, especially in an unstable world. The party that appears tentative or overly managed loses credibility before policy discussions even begin.

Start With What's Real – But Don't Stop There

What matters most immediately to young men are the pressures they feel right now: the cost of rent, the challenge of affording healthcare, the weight of mental health struggles they're expected to manage alone. But there's also a deeper anxiety about technological change and future relevance that political leaders largely ignore.

They're not asking for canned messaging about innovation or disruption. They want to know: Will I still matter in a world increasingly built around machines? Will I be replaced, ignored, or locked out of economic opportunity? Will the skills and values I'm developing today have any relevance tomorrow?

“A lot of jobs that used to exist just don't anymore,” said a White urban professional. “Manufacturing has been declining for a while, but all sorts of customer service and white collar jobs are being outsourced, or there is a big push to just replace everything with AI.”

As one Las Vegas gig worker noted about political appeal: “I think young men, especially me, we like a warrior, someone who deals with a lot of problems and still gets through it.” They want leaders who understand both current struggles and future challenges – who can speak to what's broken now while showing they grasp what's coming next.

TEN VOICES: UNDERSTANDING YOUNG MEN'S EXPERIENCES

While young men share remarkably similar struggles – economic insecurity, emotional isolation, institutional distrust – they're not a monolith. They speak in many voices. Each voice reflects the men we met along our journey, their real experiences shaped by unique circumstances and pressures.

Our research highlights ten distinct voices among Gen Z men. They are fluid, not fixed – and each one represents an opportunity to engage genuinely, whether it's "the Provider" struggling to support his family, "the Scroller" quietly pulled toward radicalization by algorithms, or "the Outsider," deeply alienated and frustrated. These voices aren't lost – they're waiting for someone to hear them clearly and respond genuinely.

Core Voices

Widely expressed, and central to engagement

THE PROVIDER

- Often White, Hispanic or Latino, non-college, family-focused.
- "It's on me... we just can't do it right now."
- Feels abandoned and moving toward populism.
- Honor his role, center economic security, use respect-based language.

THE SKEPTIC

- Black, Hispanic or Latino, civic-minded, distrusts systems.
- "Neither party has our back."
- Believes in fairness but may tune out if leadership feels performative.
- Show up consistently, act authentically, invest in community over optics.

THE STOIC

- Across races, emotionally repressed, duty-driven.
- "Correct your posture... keep walking."
- Suppresses struggle, avoids vulnerability frames.
- Reframe strength as endurance, use peer-modeled support.

THE WORKER

- All races, college-educated, economically anxious.
- "Even with a six-figure salary, I feel poor."
- Feels scammed by the system, drifting toward resentment.
- Call out the betrayal, offer real economic wins, reject vague optimism.

THE ANCHOR

- Across races, often spiritual, quietly resilient.
- "I still try to be there for people. That's how I know I'm doing something right."
- May feel invisible because he isn't loud or angry.
- Uplift his voice as a model of grounded strength and quiet leadership.

Emerging Voices

Important, nuanced experiences requiring tailored engagement

THE PROTECTOR

- White, Hispanic, Latino, or Asian American; values family, faith, structure.
- "Being a traditional man...feels backwards now."
- Feels judged by cultural messaging, may lean "right" defensively.
- Respect tradition; frame policies as tools to protect loved ones.

THE SCROLLER

- Digitally isolated, algorithmically shaped.
- "Against my will, I see so many Andrew Tate videos."
- Consuming extremist content passively, may not realize the drift.
- Use credible peers to disrupt feeds; replace rather than scold.

THE SILENCED

- Primarily White, highly educated or elite.
- "I'm ashamed because I'm a White man..."
- Quiet resentment festering in progressive spaces.
- Offer belonging without blame; ground in shared pain, not guilt.

THE BUILDER

- Often Black, Hispanic, Latino, or Asian American; entrepreneurial, independent.
- "I don't trust the system—that's why I'm building my own thing."
- May fully detach if unrecognized.
- Support his leadership, elevate his story, connect him to others like him.

THE OUTSIDER

- Across races, angry, alienated, blunt.
- "At least they're saying something real—even if it's offensive."
- Not hateful, just unheard—but ready to embrace extremism.
- Speak plainly, validate pain, stop trying to impress, listen first.

THE PATH FORWARD

The voices in this report represent real men navigating structural challenges with remarkable resilience. They haven't abandoned hope in America's promise, but their faith in American institutions hangs by a thread. This generation still wants to be part of the solution – they're waiting for leaders who will treat them as partners rather than problems. The opportunity for genuine engagement remains, but the window is narrowing. The choice facing American leadership is clear: listen now, or continue to lose them to movements that will.



Speaking with American Men