

TO: Third Way

FROM: HIT Strategies

DATE: March 19th, 2026

SUBJECT: Survey Findings Among Young Male Voters

Methodology

These findings are based on a national survey of 1,462 registered male voters ages 18 to 29, conducted by Third Way and HIT Strategies. The survey was conducted from December 8 to 22, 2025. Oversamples of approximately 200 young Black men and 300 young Latino men were included, with results weighted to reflect the national population of young male registered voters.

Key Findings

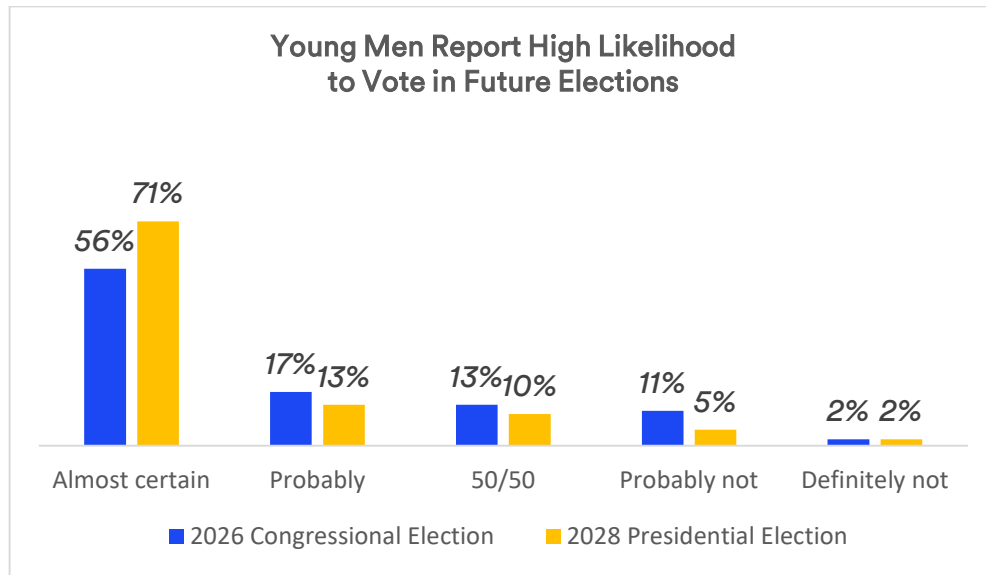
1. **Young Men Are Not Ideologically Conservative.** Despite a majority of young men voting for Trump in 2024, young men in 2025 do not identify as conservative. The largest share (33%) collectively identifies as socialist or progressive while 29% identify as moderate, compared to 18% who identify as traditional conservative. Only 6% of young men polled identified as MAGA.
2. **Young Men Overwhelmingly Want Republicans to Move to The Center But Are Split About What the Democrats Should Do.** A coalition of Democrats, Independents, and self-identified Republicans would like to see the Republican Party become less extreme. Self-identified moderates and Republicans want the Democratic Party to become more moderate, but young men who identify with or lean towards the Democratic Party are much more divided about the preferred direction of the party.
3. **Skepticism Toward Political Leaders Reflects Accountability Concerns, Not Right-Wing Ideology.** Young men express reservations about both parties driven primarily by affective concerns rather than specific policy choices. For Democrats, the top deterrents are being out of touch with the working class (39%) and appearing inauthentic or unrelatable (29%). For Republicans, the main deterrents are corruption (44%) and Trump's abuse of power (27%).
4. **Young Men's Priorities Align with Economic Accountability and Democratic Norms Rather Than Cultural Conservatism.** Across subgroups, young men place the highest importance on economic stability and independence, with 88% saying providing for their family is very important and 82% saying being financially independent is very important. Large majorities also express concern about threats to democratic norms, including actions such as defying court orders, expanding surveillance of citizens, restricting free speech, and profiting off the presidency—with concern levels consistently exceeding 65%.

Political Engagement and Ideology

Young men are likely to vote in upcoming elections. Eighty-four percent (84%) percent of young men say they probably or certainly will vote in the 2028 presidential election and 73% say they probably or certainly will vote in the 2026 elections—significantly higher than the voter turnout in 2024 among young men (per Catalist (49%) and AP VoteCast (64%) data).¹

¹ Catalist rate is derived from the quotient of the non-deceased active and inactive male voters aged 18-29 during the HIT Strategies/Third Way survey fielding time with recorded vote history in the 2024 general election (8,139,735) and the non-deceased active and inactive male voters aged 18-29 during the HIT Strategies/Third Way survey fielding time in total (16,587,539).

The AP VoteCast rate is derived from the weighted proportion of the LIKELYVOTER variable among voters aged 18-29 in the dataset.



A large swath of young men report they will sit out of the midterm elections—opting to wait to re-engage until the 2028 presidential elections. Some subgroups of young men reported being much less likely to vote in the midterms than in the next presidential elections. The subgroups with the most significant decline in vote likelihood between 2028 and 2026 are:

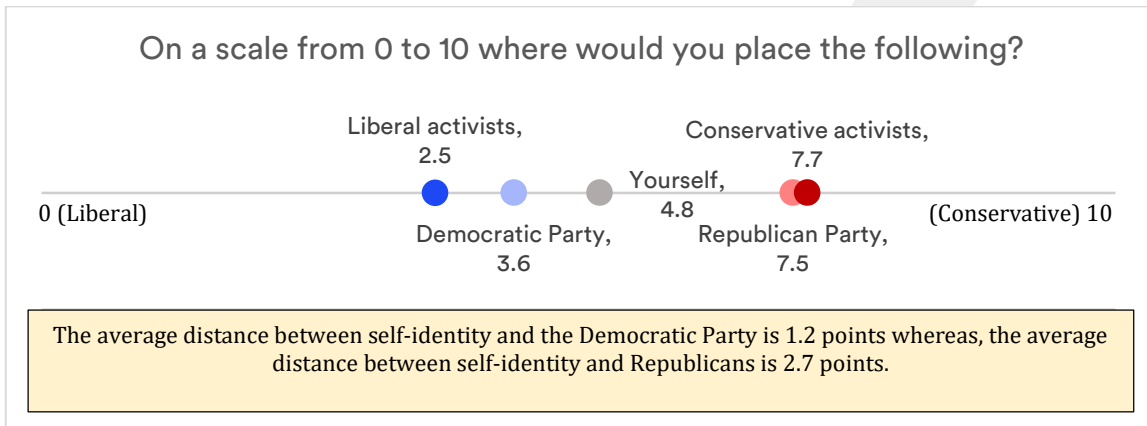
- White men (19 percentage point decline),
- younger non-college men (18 percentage point decline),
- those who did not vote in 2024 (21 percentage point decline),
- young Trump voters (22 percentage point decline),
- Trump voters of color (19 percentage point decline),
- rural young men (19 percentage point decline),
- and those who lean toward voting for Republicans in 2026 (16 percentage point decline).

This profile indicates that young men, specifically Trump 2024 voters and those who sat out the 2024 election, are opting to sit out the 2026 election. For some, this may be a disillusioned reaction to the first year of the Trump administration, leaving them unmotivated to endorse the Trump agenda through congressional races. When comparing 2024 voters to 2026 partisan leans, young men who voted for Trump were three times as likely (12%) to withhold support from Republicans in the congressional horserace than young men who voted for Harris were to support the Democrat (4%), and non-voters had just a 35% approval rating for Trump's job in office. For others, this may be indicative of the inability of any other federal candidate to mobilize the Trump coalition for non-Trump elections. This includes his own vice president: among the young men who voted for Trump in 2024, only 68% of young men would support a JD Vance run in 2028—indicating a significant erosion of the 2024 Trump coalition only a year-and-a-half into the administration.

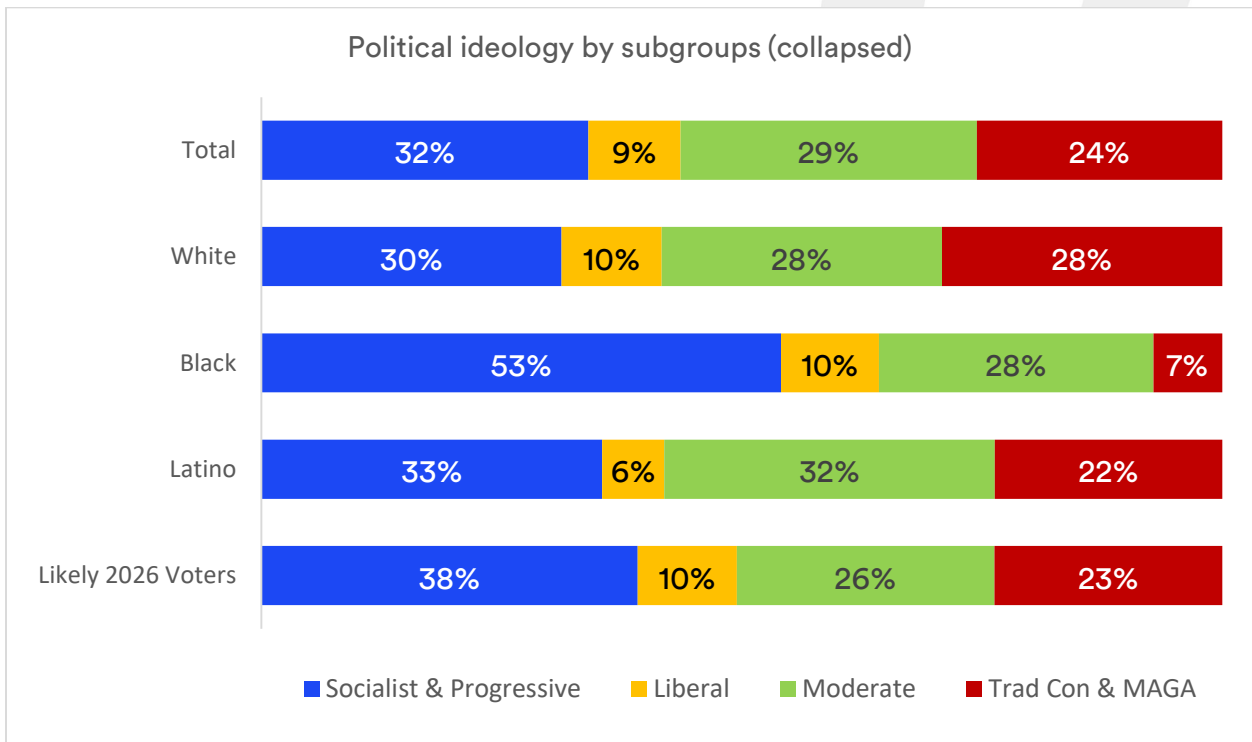
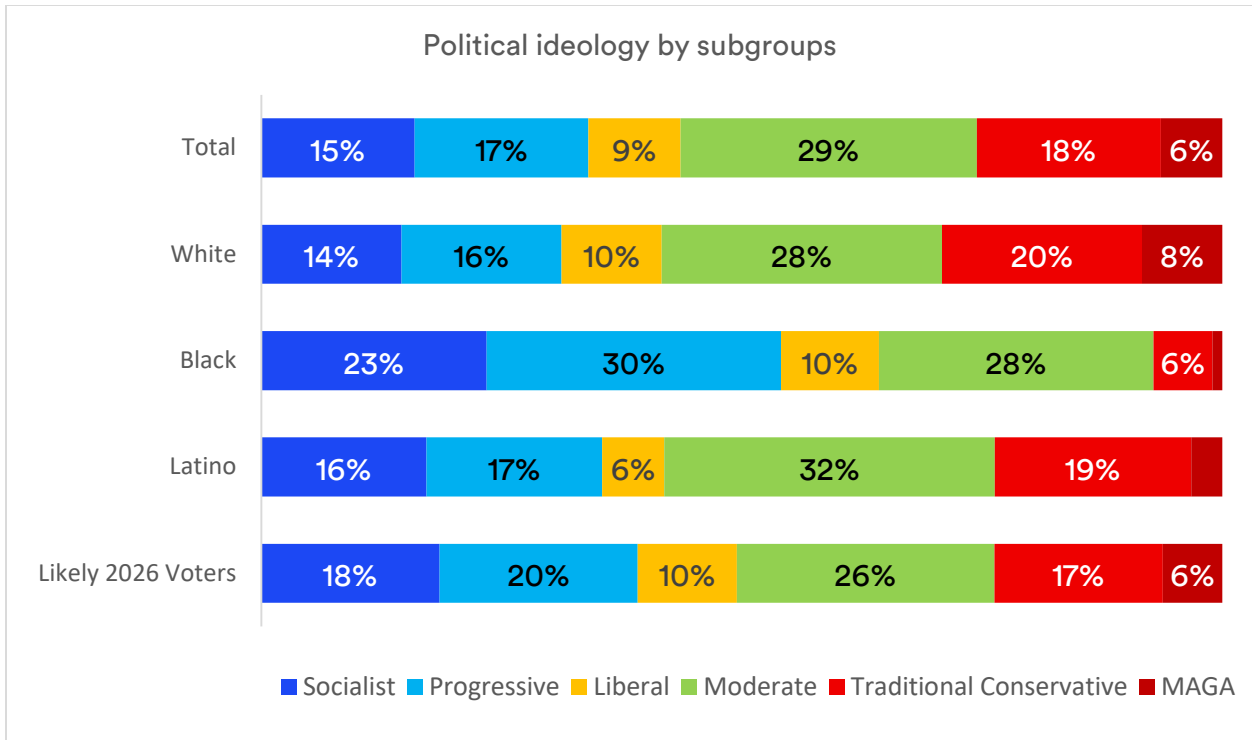
In the upcoming congressional elections, young men report that they lean more towards Democrats (54%) than Republicans (36%) with 11% undecided. That figure would represent a 6-point jump in

favor of Democrats as compared to the 2024 elections (as per AP VoteCast).² Across race, education, region, and personal success indicators, young men lean Democratic over Republican for upcoming elections. Ideological moderates are split between voting (21%) and leaning (27%) Democratic and voting (20%) or leaning (16%) Republican.

We asked young men to rate themselves and several political groups on a liberal to conservative scale, where 0 was the most liberal and 10 was the most conservative. Young men (average self-ID 4.8/10) identified closest with the Democratic Party (3.6/10), followed by liberal activists (2.5/10), then the Republican Party (7.5/10), then conservative activists (7.7/10). Young men see the Democratic Party as more moderate than liberal activists, while they see Republicans as closely aligned with conservative activists. A plurality of young men identified as socialists or progressives (33%), 9% identified as liberals, 29% identified as moderate, and 24% as right-of-center. This left-of-center tendency is more pronounced among young Black men and young men who are likely to vote in 2026.



² The AP VoteCast rate indicates 47.6% of men aged 18-29 voted for Kamala Harris and 46.5% voted for Donald Trump (the RACE0_VOTE variable).

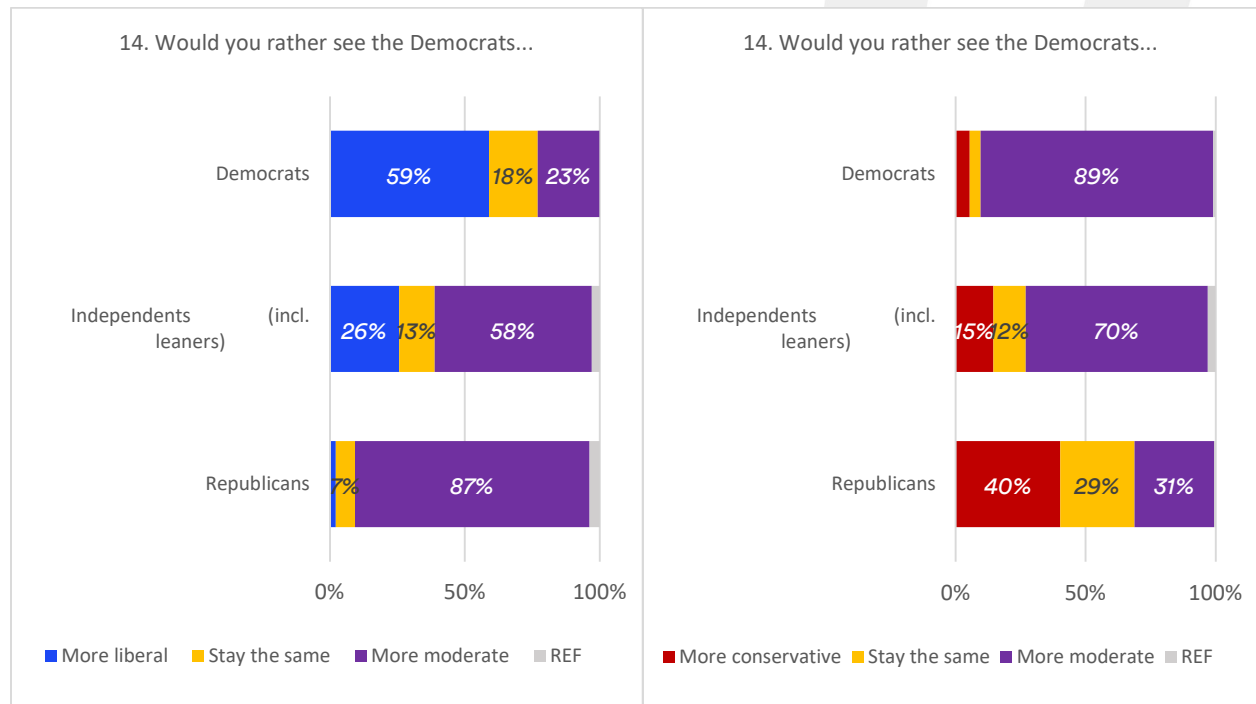


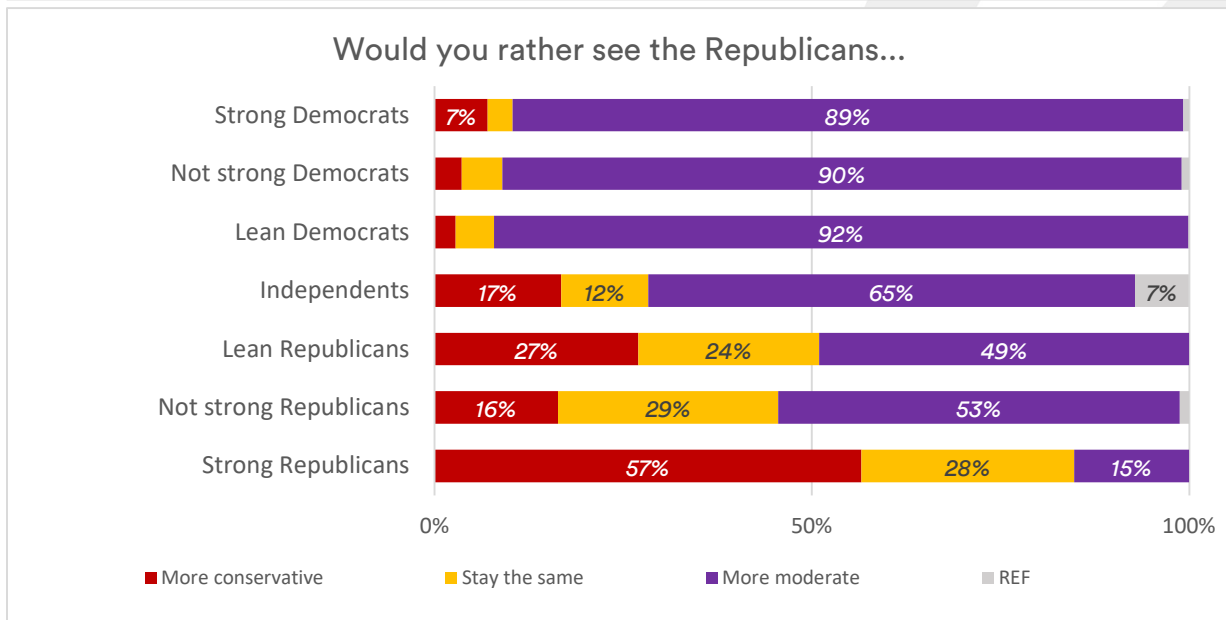
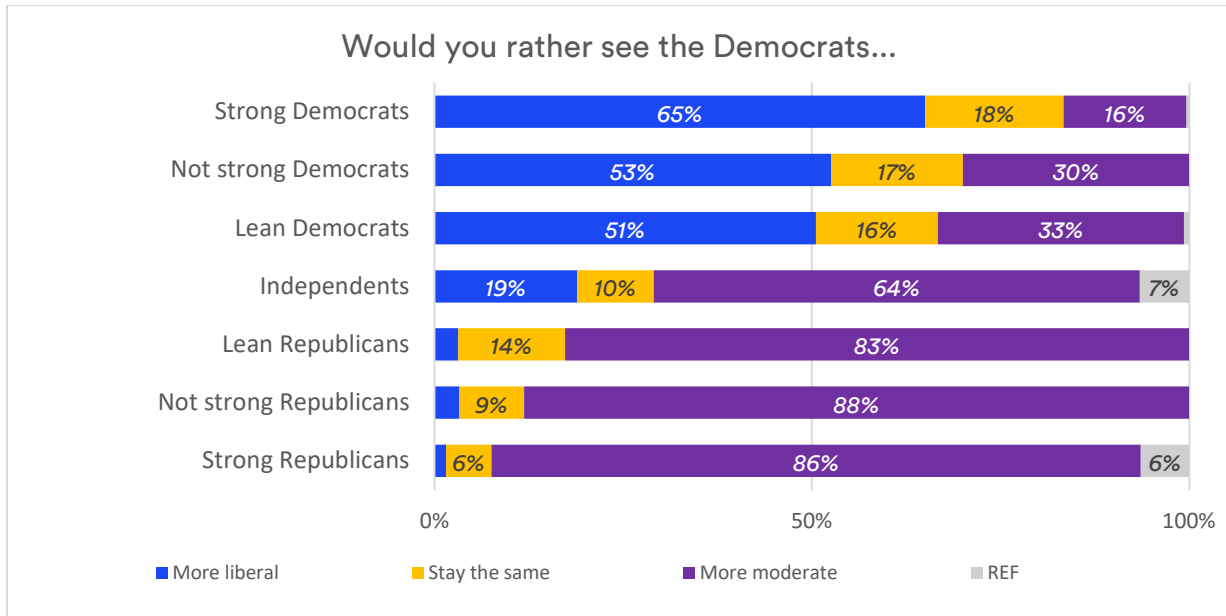
Diverging Preferences About Party Direction

Young men want both parties to change. We asked young men if how they wanted each party to move ideologically: become more conservative/liberal, stay the same, or become more moderate. Two thirds (67%) of young men want the Republican Party to become more moderate, compared to just 17% who want it to move further right. That preference cuts across party lines: 90% of Democrats, 65% of independents, and even 49% of Republican-leaning young men agree. It holds regardless of race, education, region, or income.

On the Democratic side, 55% of young men want the party to become more moderate, compared to 30% who want it to move further left. But that overall number masks a real internal split. Majorities of Democratic-leaning young men (51%), weak Democrats (53%), and even strong Democrats (65%) actually want the party to go further left. It is independents (64%) and Republicans (85%) who are pulling the moderate preference up. By ideology the picture is cleaner: socialists and progressives want a more left Democratic Party (70%), moderates want a more moderate Democratic Party (76%), and conservatives want more a moderate Democratic Party (86%). The only group without a clear answer is self-identified liberals, who are almost evenly split between wanting the party to become more liberal (35%), stay the same (32%), and go more moderate (28%).

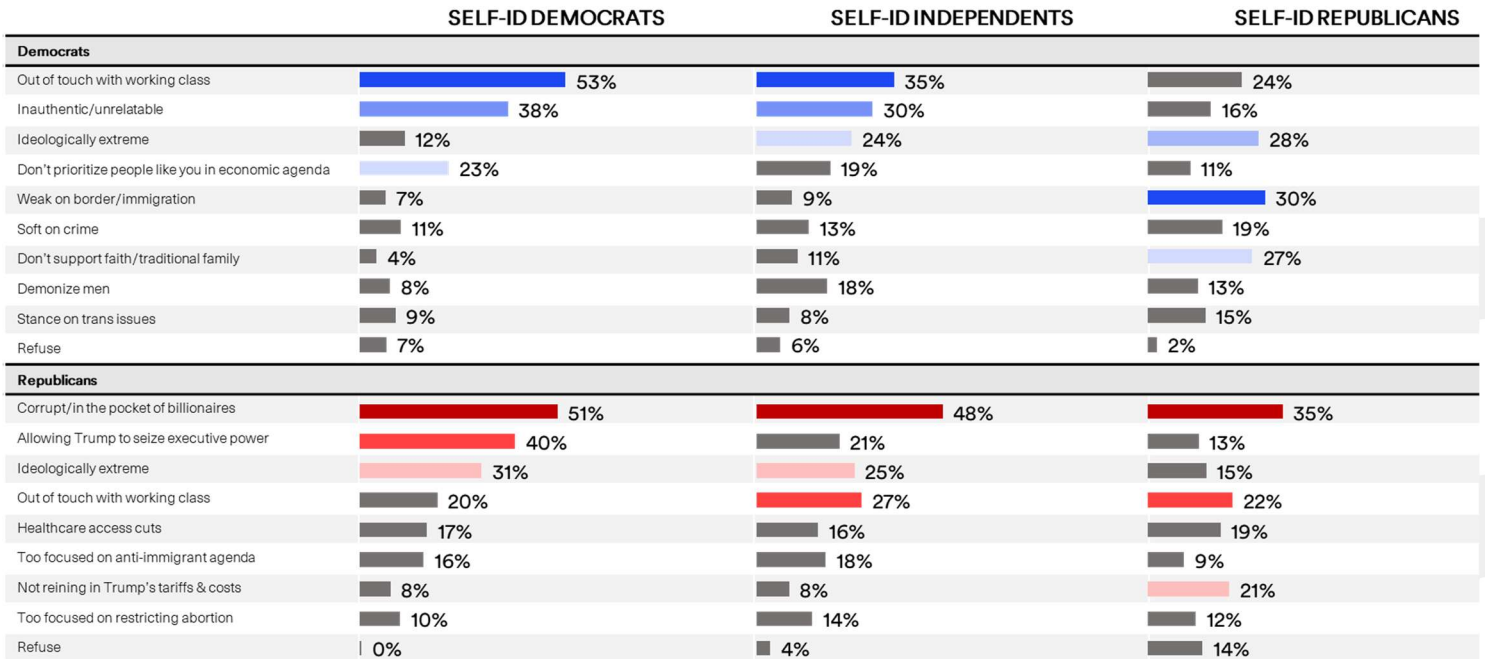
The one thing nearly everyone agrees on: standing still is not an option. Only 13% of young men want Democrats to stay the same, and only 13% want Republicans to stay the same.





When young men explain why they would not vote for a particular party, their reasons are more about feel than policy. For Democrats, the top deterrents are feeling out of touch with working people (39%) and coming across as inauthentic (29%), followed by being too ideologically extreme (20%) and not prioritizing people like them economically (18%). For Republicans, the concerns carry more weight: being corrupt and beholden to billionaires (44%), letting Trump accumulate unchecked power (27%), being too ideologically extreme (24%), and being out of touch (22%). In both cases, the emotional impression a party makes matters more than any specific position it holds.

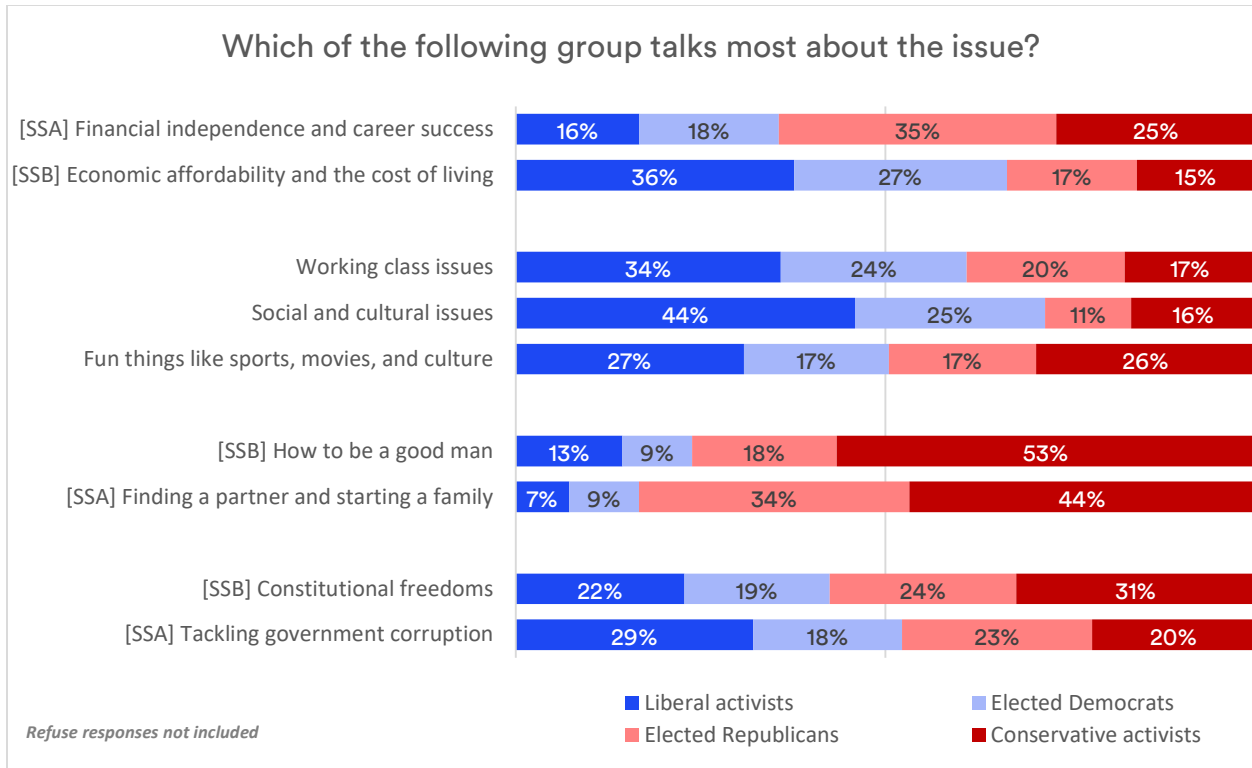
This is especially true among independents. For that group, the feeling that Democrats demean or dismiss men (18%) and that Republicans are singularly obsessed with immigration (18%) ranked higher than concrete policy disagreements. Young men, and independents in particular, are responding to how parties make them feel as much as what parties say they will do.



We presented young men with two questions asking their preference between two traits they would prefer in a presidential candidate. The first question asked if they would prefer a candidate who was “mainstream on cultural and social issues and will be critical of their own party when they are not in the mainstream” (42%) or one who “stands by their cultural and social beliefs, even if those beliefs are not mainstream” (55%). The second question asked if that candidate’s vision for the country focused on economic affordability in middle and working class if they would prefer a candidate who “wants to support capitalism with guardrails” (54%) or “wants to move towards socialism” (44%). These two questions revealed something consistent across nearly every subgroup of young men: they prefer a candidate who stands by their beliefs, even unpopular ones, over a candidate who plays it safe and stays in the mainstream. Authenticity mattered more than ideology, and this preference held regardless of race, income, or political background.

On economic policy, young men leaned toward a candidate who supports capitalism with guardrails (54%) over one moving toward socialism (44%), but that gap tells an incomplete story. Among young men who were getting by but couldn't save, the two options were essentially tied. Among those struggling financially, a majority preferred the candidate moving toward socialism (52% to 46%). Fifty-seven percent of young liberal men and 57% of young Black men preferred that candidate, as did 67% of young men who plan to vote Democratic in 2026. This points to real openness to economic alternatives among young men facing financial pressure, but the bigger finding is simpler: young men are more moved by how a candidate shows up than by any particular policy position.

That dynamic helps explain another striking result. When asked who is leading the conversation on issues they care about, young men did not point to elected Democrats on a single topic tested. On affordability, working class issues, and fighting corruption, young men credited liberal activists. On masculinity, family, financial independence, and constitutional freedoms, they pointed to Republicans and conservative activists. Elected Democrats only ranked as leading voices among people already in the Democratic base. For everyone else, Democrats were largely absent from the conversation, and that absence is likely a big part of why so many young men see the party as out of touch.



Young Men Unified in Success and Concern

Young men are deeply concerned by the actions of the Trump administration. A majority are very concerned about all nine Trump administration actions tested in this survey:

- Cutting \$1trillion in healthcare funding while giving \$1trillion in tax cuts to the rich (66% very concerning)
- Opposing the full release of the Epstein files (63% very concerning)
- Expanding immigration raids and arrests to anyone with a foreign accent/appearance (60% very concerning)
- Cracking down on free speech of comedians and news networks (56% very concerning)
- DOGE creating a centralized database of Americans’ personal information (56% very concerning)
- Using new surveillance tech to track US citizens on flights and on social media (55% very concerning)
- Defying court orders to deploy the National Guard to blue states (55% very concerning)
- Profiting from crypto schemes and foreign deals (54% very concerning)
- Implementing tariffs that raise costs for American consumers (50% very concerning)

Overall, Trump’s job approval sits at 32% among young men, only 37% think Trump is fulfilling his promise to put America first, and only 23% think Trump has had a positive impact on their personal financial outlook. Young men see Trump as a destabilizing force for the American economy and American democracy.

Conclusion

Young men are not the ideological bloc they are often made out to be. Despite voting for Trump in large numbers in 2024, most young men do not identify as conservative, do not support MAGA, and

are already showing signs of moving away from the Republican Party heading into the 2026 elections. What drives them is not a rigid set of political beliefs, but something more fundamental: they want stability, they want community, and they want leaders who are honest about fighting for ordinary people.

That desire for authenticity cuts across race, income, and geography. Young men are not looking for a party that tells them what to think. They are looking for one that shows up, speaks plainly, and treats their concerns as real. Right now, neither party fully meets that expectation, but Democrats have a particular visibility problem. On nearly every issue young men care about, from affordability to corruption to what it means to build a life in America today, elected Democrats are not seen as part of the conversation at all. The question is whether Democrats can move from being the party young men barely tolerate to the party young men trust.