

The Male Electorate

SEEN, NOT SPOKEN TO.

A narrative report on young men, the new swing voters and what it will take to reach them.



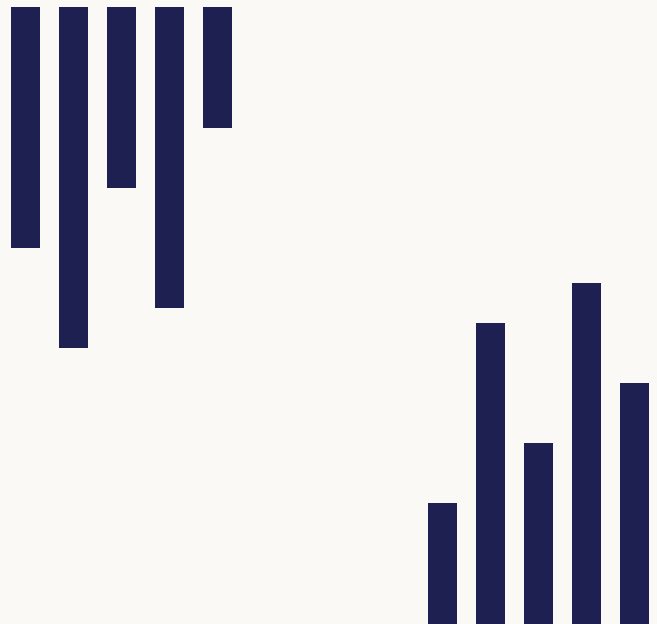
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No group fits the “swing voter” archetype better than young men.

Since 2024, [HIT Strategies](#) has conducted over a dozen studies on young men. The data keeps insisting to us that no group better fits the archetype of a “swing voter” than young men, especially young men of color. Contrary to the popular prevailing narrative, young men aren't moving to the right: socialists and progressives make up the largest bloc, followed by moderates, and progressive measures win with young men at the ballot box.

Our research— along with data from Catalist and AP VoteCast — shows young men's distance from Democrats is not about the party being too far to the left. Instead, the Democratic Party is too out of touch, inauthentic, unrelatable, and weak for young men. Winning young men means meeting them where they are, embodying the values they ask for, naming their material conditions, and offering a tangible plan. The policies that progressives champion are popular with young men, but the candidates on the Democratic ballot haven't been. This report maps the gap and what it will take to close it.

“The numbers weren't wrong — but the story built on top of them did more work than the numbers could carry.”



IN THIS REPORT

Why the typical ideology / identity / grievances autopsies missed the mark and what over a dozen HIT Strategies projects actually reveal when young men are asked directly. Included is a playbook for reaching them without abandoning the progressive base. Note: We define “young” men as Millennials and Gen Z unless otherwise specified.



LET'S NAME THE PROBLEM

Three autopsies, one wrong conclusion.

Young men have always been a puzzling part of the American political conversation, but after Harris' 2024 loss, theories to explain what happened spread fast. Most of them started in the same place, that the younger generation of men had walked away from the Democratic coalition. Three prominent arguments were put forth as to why: [ideology](#), [identity](#), and [grievances](#). Ultimately these three arguments came to rhyming conclusions—a narrative about how a left-leaning, progressive Democratic Party had alienated young men. The numbers weren't wrong, but the story built on top of them did more work than the numbers could carry. First, let's recap the main arguments coming out of 2024.

Ideology

Most commentators' analysis was ideological: young men moved rightward and rejected the left. At a glance, the data seemed to back this up:

- The 2024 election had the largest youth gender gap on [record](#) (Trump +14 among young men, Harris +17 among young women).
- Men under 50 [shifted](#) from Biden +10 in 2020 to a near-even split in 2024.
- Young men and young women were [further apart](#) on ideology than at any point in the last 30 years.

This narrative suggests that Democrats were at a crossroads between progressive politics and winning the votes of young men.

Identity

Others argued the drift had more to do with young men lacking an affirmative identity in the modern era. The argument goes that with the rise of fourth-wave feminism, young men were told all the ways masculinity was toxic and harmful, isolating them from an affirmative identity for themselves while the historical touchstones to manhood became unachievable.

- The longstanding indicators of what it means to be a successful man are moving further and further out of reach for young men—and no institution pays attention.
- Democrats explicitly showed their [commitment](#) to being a party for women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ communities—but not a party for young men or for masculinity.

This narrative paints the Democrats as a hostile political home for young men and argues for the party to drop identity-based framing or expand the coalition to explicitly include masculinity.



LET'S NAME THE PROBLEM

Grievances

Alongside the identity and ideology cases, people argued that young men chose not to vote based on their interests, but rather they voted their resentments toward women, elites, and a decade of change that left them behind.

- Forty percent of Trump-supporting men under 50 believe women's gains have come at men's expense.
- Unlike Millennials before them, a majority of Gen Z men do not identify as feminist.
- The manosphere — an alternative media ecosystem that frames progressive values as a threat and explicitly frames men as the victims of the advancement of women's rights — has boomed in popularity among young men.

This narrative argues that no matter the Democratic platform, policy won't reach young men; a massive tonal shift might give Democrats a shot of not being punished as the party which stole their birthright.

The conclusion from these arguments converges to this, young men had been alienated by a progressive politics that treated them as a problem, and Democrats should win them back by softening the cultural commitments that supposedly drove them off. That prescription, not just the diagnosis, is what this report sets out to correct. Strategies built on post-2024 panic have pursued young men where commentators say they are, rather than

where they actually are. Pulling from more than a dozen HIT Strategies projects since 2024 — including one of the largest recent studies of Black men, in partnership with Black Men Vote — what emerges when young men are directly asked the right questions diverges sharply from the portrait electoral retrospectives alone have produced.

Our research finds these men are not lost to the couch or to the right. If Democrats engage with young men earnestly, actually listen to their needs, and treat them like swing voters that need to be fought for — Democrats can make gains among young men without abandoning progressive positions or their other key constituencies.

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THE DATA

Young men are the new swing voters.

Using the 2024 AP VoteCast data — one of the most comprehensive nonpartisan surveys of voters and non-voters¹ — we do see that men under 30 were the least likely group to vote for Harris in 2024. But looking at this result alongside prior elections tells a different story than the post-election autopsies suggest. Young men haven't developed a sudden affinity for Trump. They've been swinging between Republicans, Democrats, and not voting at all since 2008, at increasing rates. Over the last four presidential cycles, no group is more emblematic of “swing voter” than young men.

What we saw in 2024

Three phenomena distinguished young men in 2024 from other groups:

- The percentage of Biden-to-Trump voters was highest among young men — double the Trump-to-Harris rate — and this conversion gap was widest among young men across all races.
- Among young white men, Biden-leaners who sat 2020 out were just as likely to break for Trump in 2024 as Trump-leaning non-voters in 2020 were to break for Harris in 2024— the only demo besides older white men where Harris didn't clearly outperform Trump.
- Young men saw the sharpest registration and turnout declines of any group: down 2.2% in registration and 5% in turnout between 2020 and 2024 — 506,000 fewer voters, 122,000 fewer registrants.

Young men were the most mobile group in the last election, not just between parties, but on whether to vote at all. That mobility cuts both ways. There's an opening for Democrats to win back the young men who voted for Trump. But that mobility is also a warning: Democrats will lose even more young men if the underlying problems go unaddressed.

5%

TURNOUT DECLINE
AMONG YOUNG MEN
2020→2024

506K

FEWER YOUNG MALE
VOTERS BETWEEN
2020 AND 2024

122K

FEWER YOUNG
REGISTRANTS
OVER THE SAME
PERIOD

Racial nuances within young men

When we look under the hood, we see that these national trends look different across racial lines. Young white men largely tracked broader white male trends while young men of color diverged from their racial cohorts.

- The non-voter patterns that favored Trump among young white men favored Harris among young Black & Latino men.
- Young Latino men saw the steepest Biden-to-Trump conversion — even steeper than young white men.
- While turnout and registration were down for all young men, young Asian men saw by far the largest drops.
- Despite double-digit erosion in Democratic support, young men of color still voted for Harris at higher rates than any white age-gender group.



THE DATA

- Young men of color were late deciders—with less than half knowing who they would vote for from the start of the election (compared to nearly 70% of white voters and 72% of young white men).

The takeaway from these findings isn't that young men of color are trending MAGA — that's overblown — it's that they're no longer reliable Democratic votes, and reaching them takes a different playbook than reaching young white men and other voters of color.

A longstanding trend and a looming crisis

This decline in Democratic support among young men of color is not new. Since 2012, Democratic vote share has held steady among white voters, including young white men, while eroding sharply among voters of color — most sharply among young men of color specifically: down 19 points among young Black men, 19 among young AAPI men, 24 among young Latino men. The data ahead also point to a looming crisis for young men's political participation.

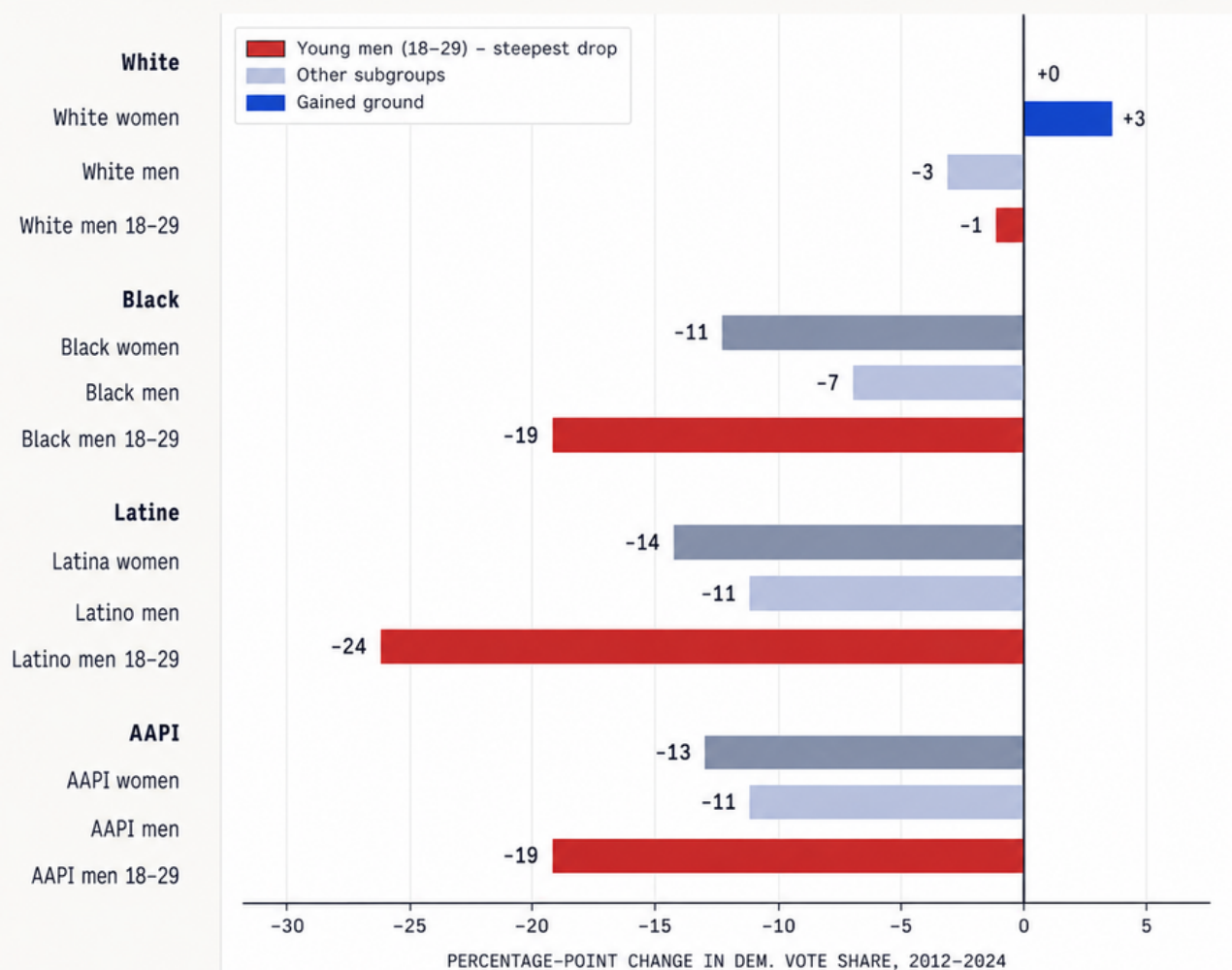


FIG. 1 — Democratic vote share by demographic, 2012 versus 2024. Young men (18-29) saw the steepest declines of each of their respective racial cohorts with the exception of white young men. Source: Catalist, *What Happened in 2024*, May 2025.

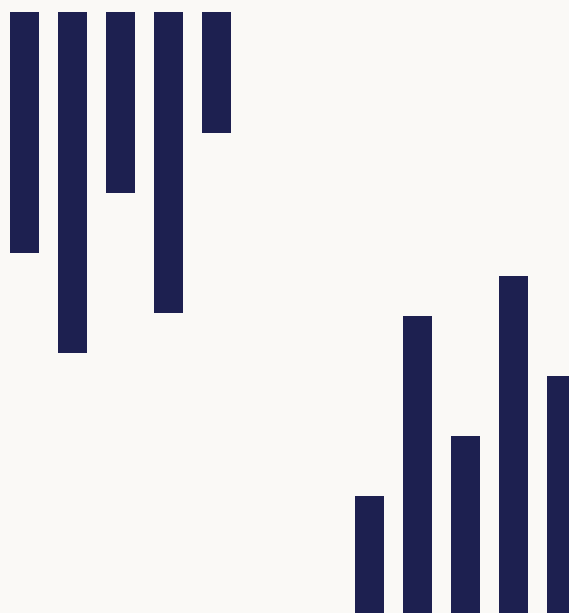


THE DATA

- Youth registration in the midterms lags compared to presidential years, and over 30% of young men currently say they plan to sit out 2026—meaning even fewer young men registering and voting.
- When asked the top barriers to voting for young men, "My vote doesn't matter" was the top reason cited—showing that disillusionment is driving the drops in participation.
- From our focus groups, the habits which keep people voting are far less present among young participants than older ones, which may explain why the drop-off keeps compounding as disillusionment deepens.

Left unaddressed, this creates a feedback loop where campaigns focus resources on habitual voters, while disillusioned young men disengage further. The challenge isn't just winning young men who vote — it's mobilizing the ones who've stopped believing their vote counts. As Republican gerrymandering and the gutting of the Voting Rights Act disenfranchise other constituencies of the Democratic base, a strategy to win back swing coalitions will be ever more important. As Congressional power shifts southward, the importance of winning young men specifically will matter more, not less in the coming decade — young men under 35 in the South are the fastest-growing demographic bloc in the country.

These voting trends seem dire. The hemorrhaging of Democratic support from young men is framed in most autopsies as a rejection of the supposed left-progressive ideology of the Democrats. The now infamous words of the ad "Kamala is for they/them, Trump is for you" serve as a shorthand that Democrats have left young men behind on identity and ideology and their rhetoric and policies push them towards a politics of resentment. Many groups now call for the Democrats to go back on their defense of other groups and abandon left and woke positions—moderating to meet young men where they are. Our research contends that this strategy will fail to swing young men back into the Democratic coalition for two main reasons: young men are not a conservative group and the so-called Democratic drag is about their vibes, not progressive policies.





IDEOLOGY

Young men are not an ideologically conservative bloc.

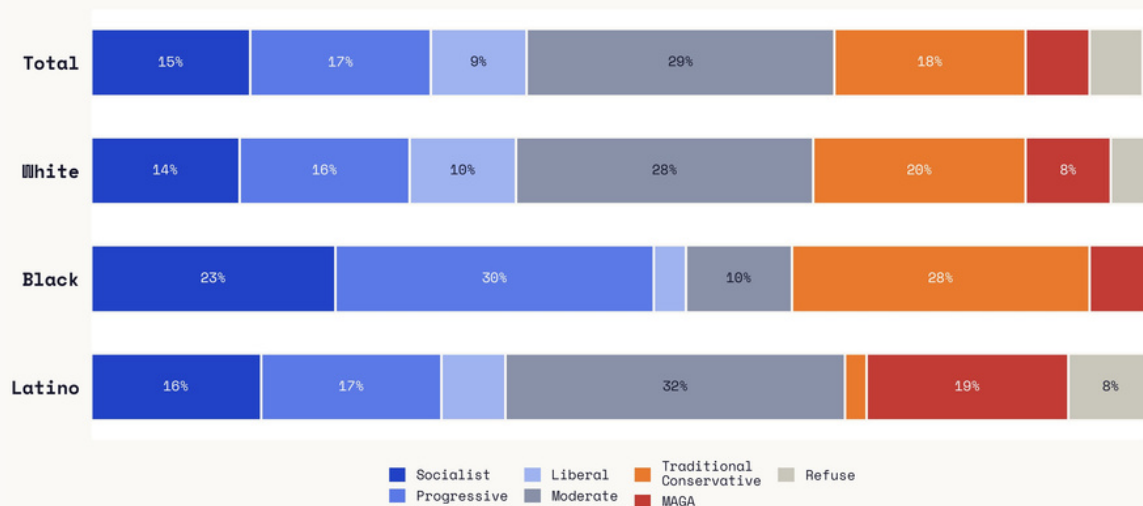


FIG. 2 – Young men's ideological self-identification, by race. Source: HIT Poll, conducted December 2025.

In both the AP VoteCast data and our own polling, we see that young men are not an ideologically conservative bloc. In fact, men under 30 are at least as likely to identify as liberal as they are to identify as conservative. Using a wider ideological spectrum, we see that socialists and progressives are the largest ideological bloc among young men. Conservatives combine for just 24%, with only 6% of young men identifying as MAGA. Young men aren't moving rightward ideologically — their votes and their self-identification have simply come apart.

That gets sharper when you talk to Black men directly. Far from drifting right, they're the most progressive bloc of young men in the country. In one of our largest studies of young Black men:

- Two-thirds (66%) of Black men 18 - 45 see themselves as left of center.
- Just 6% of them identified as mainstream conservative or MAGA.

- When ranking personal priorities, "becoming a more masculine man" came in last for both Harris voters (4%) and Trump voters (10%).

The narrative that Black men are prioritizing being an alpha male more than ever, which dominates the public discourse, is not borne out by the data — even the ones who voted for Trump. So, what draws young Black men towards conservatives, if not ideology or masculinity?

Some Black Americans call themselves conservative on surveys while remaining among the most reliable Democratic voters in the country, so the political label is tracking something other than partisanship. Among young Black Trump voters, that something has a name:

“Family Values Conservative”²



IDEOLOGY

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VIBES, NOT IDEOLOGY

The Democratic Party loses young men on feel, not policy.

One of the major narratives coming out of 2024 was that the Democratic policies had moved too far to the left for young men. There are two main reasons why this claim fails in the face of data. First, progressive policies were popular with young men—with progressive ballot measures over-performing Democrats across the board in 2024. Second, young men don't see Democratic candidates through their policy agenda, and their top deterrents from the Democratic ballot line are not policy-based.

In 2024, progressive ballot measures outperformed the Harris campaign by an average of 6 points nationally, and 13 points in states Trump won. Across 10 states where AP VoteCast data tracked progressive ballot measures, not only did young men vote for the progressive side of every ballot measure at higher rates than the general electorate, but higher percentages of young men voted for the

The data from young men makes the point concrete: young men identify more as on the left than on the right. Among young white men, conservative aligns with conventional understandings. But for young men of color, “conservative” often maps onto very different priorities and beliefs. Even among these conservatives—pursuing masculinity is not a driving force in their lives. That's not an ideological base — it's the Republican coalition finding inroads despite ideological differences with young men. The question for Democrats is where they lose young men to Republicans despite the ideological advantage.

ballot measures than they did for Harris and any of the statewide Democrats except Jon Tester in Montana. This includes many ballot measures for women's rights, including abortion, showing that young men are not taking a grievance-based approach on ballot measures.

Young men don't see Democrats through the lens of policy—firstly because in our research policy is not how young men are processing politics—but also because young men don't see Democrats as leaders on any policy.

- From our research, young men's first-order political processing is through vibes, not ideology. Rather than starting from values and finding candidates who reflect them, young men often react first to how a politician or message makes them feel and attach values to that reaction afterward.



VIBES, NOT IDEOLOGY

- On the issues, from affordability, working-class concerns, cultural questions, to what it means to be a good man, elected Democrats aren't seen as leading the conversation on any of them—trailing Republicans, conservative activists, and liberal activists.
- Word associations about the Democratic Party rarely ever are tied to policy or ideology—instead they focus on perceptions of being weak, out of touch, and divided.

It's not that the Democratic policy agenda fails to land, it's that young men don't experience Democrats through their policy at all. Young men first experience Democrats through other elements.

In fact, young men openly rate themselves as closer to Democrats, but still have a worse opinion of Democrats (-12 net) than they do of Republicans (+3 net). Young men of color have the lowest Democratic favorability among all voters of color and young white men have the second lowest of any demographic (-28 net). Across the board — including young men who voted for neither Harris nor Trump — young men see the Democrats as a party that isn't genuine, doesn't talk to them, and doesn't include them.

- The top reasons young men say they don't vote for Democrats is because they are out of touch with the working class (39%), and inauthentic and unrelatable (29%)—this goes for young men of all races.
- Policy objections such as crime, immigration, trans issues, and border security ranked near the bottom across almost all cross-sections of young men.
- Young men want politicians to be more transparent, accountable, and authentic, and they often see that more in Republicans than in Democrats.

This is a problem which will continue to erode young men's support for Democrats: among young men who voted for Harris in 2024, but are uncertain about voting in 2026, seven in ten said their top reasons not to support Dems is that they are out of touch (75%) and inauthentic (71%). Unlike the prevailing narrative, it's the Democratic brand that drags down progressive policies, not the other way around. That means both the technocratic model and the populist "move right to win back trust" approaches fail to close that gap; if anything, they read as further confirmation that Democrats don't know or represent young men. Young men don't dislike Democrats because of unpopular policy positions — they dislike Democrats because to them the party stands for nothing, fights for no one, and doesn't even bother to try to reach them.

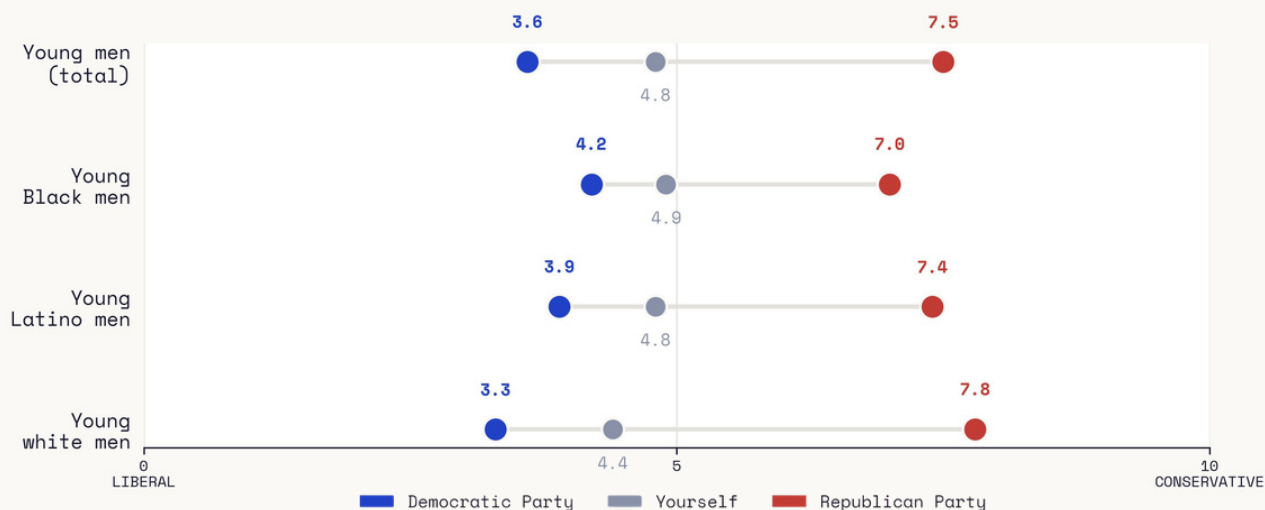


FIG. 3 – Young men rated themselves and each party on a 0 (liberal) to 10 (conservative) scale. Source: HIT Poll, conducted December 2025.



THE PLAYBOOK

How can we better reach young men?

Name their conditions and offer a plan.

Values alone aren't enough. Young men want to know what a candidate's policy agenda does to their rent, wages, and commute, not abstract commitments. Universal frames (i.e., college debt, being priced out of homeownership, cost-of-living strain) land better than identity-coded ones, because young men see themselves in them without needing to be convinced they belong. In [our polling](#), abortion messaging tested stronger with young men when framed around government overreach and freedom rather than as a women's issue — the same logic that makes universal framing work generally. Winning young men starts with overcoming their distrust through demonstrated action, not policy negotiation. Democrats can make this case without abandoning the positions that drive turnout among the base — by connecting the same agenda to universal categories young men see themselves in rather than group-specific framing that reads as "for someone else."

Meet them in their digital landscapes.

The next step is taking this message to the places young men get their information — they're actually reachable, just not where most campaigns look.

- Among [young Black men](#), 90% are on YouTube weekly and 79% are on multiple times daily.
- Sixty-percent of young Black men use Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter at least weekly.
- YouTube led as the top source for breaking political news in every state surveyed.

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Conditions vary by community.

While universal frames are good to integrate young men of all stripes into the fold, community-specific considerations are important to demonstrate that you are actually listening and caring about these people specifically.

- Young Black men prioritize issues of wage stagnation, housing, and structural inequity.
- Young Latino men prioritize protecting immigrants and economic stability.
- Young white men prioritize issues of downward mobility and broken promises.

For young men of color, the solutions embedded in messaging have to speak to mobility and meaning, not cost of living alone. Getting on the ground and actually listening to and solutions-building with these groups of young men is the first step in breaking through their cynicism and proving that Democrats care about them too.

The recommended strategy for 2026: show up in venues where young men are, embody the values they're asking for, name their conditions, and offer a plan which spells out how they benefit. Candidates who do this won't need to win young men back — they'll be who young men were waiting for.



FOOTNOTES

¹ AP VoteCast is the Associated Press's nationwide survey of the American electorate, conducted with NORC at the University of Chicago. Unlike traditional exit polls, it surveys both early and Election Day voters and includes detailed demographic crosstabs. The 2024 survey covered more than 120,000 voters across all 50 states.

² In our research, we offer respondents a seven-point ideological scale. Family Values Conservative captures respondents whose conservatism is rooted in commitments to family, faith, and community rather than in partisan policy preferences. Traditional Conservative captures respondents who align with longstanding Republican commitments around small government, free markets, and social conservatism. MAGA Conservative captures respondents who identify primarily with the political coalition built around Donald Trump and prioritize loyalty to that coalition over traditional conservative policy positions.