



Title:	Young Men In 2025: Not Sold On Trump, Alienated By Democrats
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Donald Trump made significant inroads with young men in 2024. According to the data firm Catalist, Democratic support among young men, 18-to-29-years-old, dropped from 55% in 2020 to 46% in 2024, an 18-point net swing towards Trump, with even more acute swings among young men of color going back to 2012. To truly understand these trends and begin winning these voters back, Democrats must engage in difficult but necessary conversations about what has caused this chasm to open between young men and the Democratic Party on the economy, culture, and identity.

In focus groups from last fall, Biden 2020-Trump 2024 voting young men told pollsters that they felt that Trump “doesn’t hate people like me...whereas the Democratic Party has somehow become the anti-male party,” and that “the Harris campaign kind of abandoned young men.” This sentiment isn’t simply an economic-driven argument, nor is it explicitly sexist—believing that it ignores an underlying problem with how young men perceive Democrats today. To further analyze why young men have moved away from Democrats and what they must do to win them back, Third Way and HIT Strategies conducted three focus groups with soft Trump supporting young Black, Latino, and non-college white men, 18-to-29-years-old, from the seven presidential battleground states. These young men were overwhelmingly less ideological, lower propensity and low political news consumption voters. The findings should give pause to anyone who wants to beat back the MAGA forces.

1. What Got Us Here

For many, the 2024 election was the perfect storm of economic pain, cultural alienation, and distrust in the Democratic Party building up and converging at once—this was especially true for young men.

Economic Pain & Expectations: Above all else, the young men in our focus groups have been feeling an economic burden that has not been meaningfully addressed—affording everyday life, getting a good-paying job to provide for their family, and being able to do better than their parents. They feel economic expectations are stacked against them as young men, especially as fewer men enroll in college compared with women—something they attribute to a lack of support from their families and communities, which often pushes them into blue collar work. Those circumstances and expectations have led to feelings of resentment and hopelessness.

“It should be equal, but it’s not. There’s higher expectations on us as men, and you can’t really just slip up. Nobody has your back.” – Young Black Man

“Five years ago, if I was making the type of money I make today, I’d probably be able to move and have my own place...but now I’m having to find ways to make even more money to do and live.” – Young Black Man

“There’s this kind of crazy standard, especially pushed online that you have to be making, like, \$100k every year, \$10k each month, and you have to work nonstop.” – Young Latino Man

“I’ve done...everything from factory warehouse jobs to, like, office jobs...the expectation for men is to work no matter what...I’ve been in a relationship where I’ve supported someone their whole time while they were going to school...they didn’t have to do much financially as an adult. And whereas, like, I get critiqued as an adult all the time. Like, I need to do more, do more, do more.” – Young White Man

“A lot more women are going to college rather than men like me. Maybe I dropped out, and we’re just forced to kinda, like, go into blue collar work, which isn’t bad or anything, but I just feel like women probably have more opportunities to get into certain things.” – Young Black Man

Affordability and Being a Provider: Additionally, the stress over their day-to-day economic circumstances caused some of the young men in our focus groups to feel they were less viable partners when dating—not being able to afford the cost of nice dates—and, among those who had families, it created an added stress and frustration about not being able to fulfill their roles as the traditional head of their household.

“Most women look at us as... a provider or somebody that can protect them. So, when you do go out, I’m not saying all women, but most women are looking at what you can afford. And with [the] rising price of things, it’s not as easy to afford.” – Young Latino Man

“I joined the union to be a plumber. That was almost a year ago. I still haven’t been... I’m a caretaker because of that. Like, I had to go into a different field of work...I’m a married man. I have a son. Like, I have people to support.” – Young Black Man

Masculinity In the Parties: When asked which party they felt best represented men’s priorities, these men overwhelmingly pointed to the Republican Party. And when they were asked to describe what those priorities were, it became readily clear that these young men view masculinity through a prism of their faith, financial independence, and a commitment to upholding family values—protecting, leading, and supporting a family—none of which they saw represented in the current Democratic Party. Each of the groups struggled to name masculine leaders within the Democratic Party, outside of Barack Obama.

*"I think **being a masculine leader is, like, outlawed in the Democratic Party right now.**" – Young White Man*

*"The [Republican] party generally tends to put itself, towards supporting the **nuclear family**. And I mean, like I said, I'm a **father**. I'm a **husband**...you really can't get better at leadership and integrity than having to raise a family. And the Republican party does do that very well." – Young Black Man*

*"[Republicans prioritize] **capitalism, financial independence, being prolific with your careers...** Democrats bring up handouts, they're gonna bring up welfare." – Young Latino Man*

*"[Republican] values primarily revolve around, you know, **wanting stable jobs for the community** a lot of the time. And a lot of times, **it has to do with God or religion**...that ties into family and tradition and culture." – Young White Man*

Perceptions of Vice President Harris and Democrats: Most importantly, these young men don't feel that Democrats understand or speak about their economic concerns. Few of the young men in these groups could name a policy that Kamala Harris ran on last year or describe what her vision for the country was. However, what did stick with them were Trump's attacks on transgender issues and immigration, and a perception that the Democratic Party is culturally alienating and failing to address their economic struggles. The groups widely shared the belief that Democrats are out of the mainstream on social and cultural issues, and they felt that when they share their opinions on these issues, they are pushed away and looked down upon by those on the left—a sentiment that has been shared by former Democratic voters who lean more culturally moderate and conservative.

*"[Democrats] pick a lot of dumb hills to die on that **really ostracizes a lot of people**. And then **if you don't agree with them, you're this, you're that, and I think that just turns a lot of people off.**" – Young White Man*

*"[Harris] talked a lot about the whole cultural thing...but **she didn't really address...the prices of everything going up that was actually going to change my day-to-day life...** too much focus on cultural inclusivity and not [making] our lives as civilians a bit more tolerable." – Young Black Man*

*"I think the biggest turnoff with me was the whole **transgender** thing. It's kinda like **they were, like, forcing you to accept it.**" – Young Latino Man*

*"I am pro-immigration, but **I don't believe that open borders is a***

solution.” – Young Latino Man

President Trump’s Vision: The young men in these groups found that Trump and his vision for the country was above all else focused on their key issues, namely the economy. Every group brought up “no taxes on tips,” highlighting the salience of the economic policy with a concise slogan. Several participants found Trump to be more palatable than in prior election cycles, with many seeing his cultural rhetoric coded as “family values.” The young Black men were generally positive about Trump’s vision and name checked several of Trump’s economic promises, including no taxes on tips and tariffs, as did the young Latino men who were supportive of Trump closing the border and deporting undocumented immigrants.

*“[Trump’s vision] was kinda just **getting us back to the values** that we promoted and held as a country maybe in, like, the nineties, early two thousands, like, that era, kinda just getting back to that kind of culture.” – Young White Man*

“Run America as a business.” – Young Black Man

“Getting immigrants out.” – Young Latino Man

Information Ecosystem: When asked about their news sources and digital consumption habits, and how that may have influenced their votes, it became readily clear that Democrats simply failed to reach many of these young men in digital spaces where they were more open to receiving information. When they did see ads on Harris, they didn’t find them to be persuasive and immediately tuned them out—expressing a sentiment that they heard more from the campaign via an endless avalanche of commercials than they did from Harris herself.

Interestingly, when we gauged the groups about where they would place several notable podcasters on a conservative-liberal ideological scale, most of the young men placed Joe Rogan and Theo Von in the moderate category, while clearly distinguishing other streamers, such as Adin Ross, as explicitly conservative. And while these groups were generally less trusting of any one podcaster or news source, some admitted that they were more likely to believe seemingly organic content on social media merely because of how often they would see it in their feeds.

*“Literally every time I opened up anything, whether it be Instagram or YouTube, the majority was YouTube, it’s just Kamala Harris. Fifteen seconds, Kamala Harris. Another thirty seconds, Kamala Harris. **It was just being forced.**” – Young Black Man*

“I respect Joe Rogan and Theo Von, but I don’t necessarily think they should be the only source.” – Young Latino Man

*“The ads were on YouTube or on TV or pretty much anywhere...**I was happy when I saw a Burger King commercial over a political ad.** Like, that’s how much it was. It was ridiculous.” – Young White Man*

“The more you see something [on social media], it’s kinda like the more you believe it.” – Young Latino Man

Pandering: The Black and Latino young men brought up how they felt that the Harris campaign, and Democrats at large, have become pandering to their communities while not actually addressing their real-life concerns.

“There was just a level of pandering I felt that was going on...they brought out, like, rappers and stuff. And it’s, you know, nothing against rappers, but it’s like, what does that do for me?” – Young Black Man

“The general consensus is that Latinos lean left, that they vote almost no matter what, but that’s clearly not the case anymore. And part of it, at least from my point of view, is [Democrats] have taken the Latino vote for granted, and kind of forgotten who supports them.” – Young Latino Man

2. Current Landscape on Trump’s Performance

While the young men in our focus groups did indeed vote for Donald Trump, their support for him in this moment is lukewarm, with serious concerns about Trump’s handling of the economy and tariffs.

Tariffs and Manufacturing: Many of the young men feel that Trump is following through on tariffs as a campaign promise, but they’re unhappy with how he has gone about implementing them and failing to bring prices down. Several are feeling the pain in their day-to-day lives, but most of the young men across the groups are willing to take a wait-and-see approach to see how Trump’s policies pan out. Interestingly, almost none of these young men could see themselves working the manufacturing jobs that Trump sought to bring back with tariffs, but they supported efforts to re-introduce those male-coded jobs.

“[Tariffs are] causing a lot of aches and pains that I personally feel could be approached in a more methodical manner.” – Young Latino Man

“[Tariffs] upped the prices of stuff that we need, especially from places like China...like everyday things. So I guess you have to see how that plays out, but that was a big backlashing point from what I saw.” – Young White Man

“I think when he dropped those tariffs, he expected a lot of the other countries to go, oh, shoot... Let’s come back to the United States. And I think he expected that to happen quicker, and it did not happen quicker. And we’re seeing a lot of that pain and that pressure come down to us.” – Young Black Man

Deportations & Due Process: Many of the young men in these groups were particularly uncomfortable with Trump's deportation of immigrants without due process to El Salvadoran prisons. Others deflected that several of Trump's measures are necessitated from a broken immigration system perpetuated by both parties. Even though these groups were conducted before more aggressive ICE raids began in early June, there was already notable concern about the federal government deporting non-violent immigrants who had been in their communities for years and mistakenly deporting innocent people without due process and a proper trial.

"I don't think you should just ship them off to the El Salvador prison because that prison's known for killing them in there. They don't ever leave, so they do die in that prison. So, sending just random people is terrible." — Young White Man

"If you allow people to be deported without, like, checking them for their nationality or whatever they did or, you know, if they have their paper, then they'll deport people who have a nationality or people who belong here, and that wouldn't be fair." — Young Black Man

"I think that it's unsettling when cases like that dude that got, you know, sent to El Salvador but had no affiliation with [the gang]... it's kind of been a slippery slope..." — Young Latino Man

3. Looking Forward

The final component of these groups sought to understand what young men are looking for in their leaders and if they could ever see themselves voting for a Democratic presidential candidate in future elections.

Leadership Qualities: Similar to what these young men found appealing about Donald Trump, they described wanting leaders who are authentic, straight-shooting, and unafraid to take risks—not reading off of talking points or playing it safe.

"A straight talker, you know, someone that's not, like, beating around the bush...somebody that just is not afraid to say what they feel. That's a very masculine trait." — Young Black Man

"I think it's someone who is honest, unafraid to take risk...you need to be bold in, taking risks, trying new things, seeing what works, what doesn't, stuff like that." — Young Latino Man

Future Democratic Leaders: The groups were shown clips of Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro speaking with Stephen A. Smith about his administration's efforts to hire government employees who do not have a college degree; Maryland Governor Wes Moore discussing the importance of investing in men and boys and the challenges they've faced in recent years; and former Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg speaking with Andrew Schultz about the

cultural dynamic of Democrats needing to be tolerant of those with differing views in order to persuade them.

The participants gravitated towards each of the clips for distinct reasons: Shapiro's focus on non-college employee opportunities; Moore's genuine care and interest in creating economic opportunity for young men; Buttigieg's authenticity and his approach to having a decent civil discourse with conservatives. However, there was doubt among the participants that the Democratic Party's base would ever tolerate some of these approaches, particularly Shapiro's policy on non-college workers and Buttigieg's heterodoxic approach to expanding the tent.

Shapiro: *"So being from Pennsylvania, born and raised in Philly, that actually helped my sister... She works at the county assistance office now. You used to need a college degree for that. Now you don't. So personally, I feel as though that's a hundred percent a plus." — Young Black Man*

Moore: *"He's up front about it. He's like genuinely wondering what's happened to young men. Like he genuinely cares." — Young Latino Man*

Buttigieg: *"[Buttigieg's perspective] is a great thing in concept but good luck getting the whole party to agree with that. A lot of people want something to be mad at." — Young White Man*

Conclusion & Guidance

To retake power, Democrats need a long-term plan to rebrand the party as one that is trusted to handle voters' highest priority issues, that is mainstream on culture, and that is laser focused on implementing an aspirational economic agenda. Democrats continue to have a significant challenge on their hands to reverse their slippage with young men, but there are real and tangible actions that they can take to be proactive in the leadup to 2026 and 2028:

Offer an Aspirational Working-Class Economic Agenda: It became readily clear across each of these groups that these young men are looking for Democratic leaders who are zeroed in on economic policy and getting the party focused on representing working-class people. They felt that their economic concerns were especially heard when young men's struggles were addressed directly and in an authentic manner, particularly when it came to being providers for their families. Ultimately, young men are looking for an aspirational working-class economic agenda that is clear, concise, and does not get bogged down in policy wonkiness (three-word slogans have proven to resonate cycle after cycle).

Aim Mainstream On Culture: Republicans will continue to weaponize immigration and LGBT issues in future elections to push culturally-moderate young men away from Democrats, whether for personal or religious reasons—and there is a cross section of voters where this component will be just as salient as any economic vision that Democrats offer. Sidestepping and being silent on these cultural wedge issues guarantees political disaster when the GOP's attacks come. Candidates would do well to get out ahead of GOP attacks, and they can do so without throwing anyone under the proverbial bus (for instance, we have written extensively on how Democrats can take mainstream approaches on transgender issues and immigration). Equally as important is approaching conversations on culture with openness and less judgement, as this

breaks the perception of a ‘typical Democrat’ in the minds of many young men.

Take Advantage of Trump’s Lapses: While some of these young men are still drawn to Trump and the Republican Party, most are persuadable swing voters who dislike significant aspects of Trump’s actions so far in his second term. Continuing to highlight the most unpopular aspects of Trump’s and the Republican Party’s agenda is crucial to chipping away at the GOP’s support with young men, including the chaos around tariffs, failing to lower costs, and the Trump administration’s radical actions on immigration.