

STATE OF
American
Men 2026

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Young Men Research Project

Acknowledgments

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Headlines at a Glance

1. Young men long for the economy and society of a past America.

Despite decades of technological, scientific, and social progress, a plurality of young men believe that the country is worse off today than it was 50 years ago. Fundamentally, this wistfulness is rooted in a yearning for the perceived economic stability of past generations and the sense that community ties have frayed. Those most bereft of financial capital and optimism for the future are the ones most likely to glance backward with longing.

2. Financial stability feels elusive right now, but young men still believe it's coming—some groups more than others.

Sixty-nine percent of young men say they constantly worry about their financial future, and many are trepidatious about job security. This economic distress hasn't abated since the last State of American Men (2025), particularly for those who are unemployed or lack a college degree. There is some solace in that a majority of young men still believe the American Dream is attainable for them personally, and that they can achieve success through hard work. Yet that optimism is most concentrated among the young men who have college degrees, and reap the economic and social rewards that come with them.

3. Pockets of young men are turning to speculative economies.

Gambling is nothing new in the American zeitgeist, but policymakers and the public cannot keep pace with its rapidly expanding forms and accessibility. Prediction markets have entered the mix, allowing individuals to wager on political events and other real-world outcomes. Boosted by the colossal sums poured into advertising and marketing, 35 percent of young men say they've placed money on platforms like Kalshi or Polymarket. This so-called grift economy¹ now extends beyond gambling. Influencers whom young men follow and trust profit by selling supplements, investment academies, personalized coaching, and similar products to this very audience.

1 Reset Tech and Equipundo, "The Grift Economy: How Young Men Are Being Sold Fake Belonging and Fake Wealth Online," 2026, <https://www.equipundo.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/The-Grift-Economy.pdf>.

4. Young men see opportunity in artificial intelligence (AI), but not all are convinced.

Just as social media molded Gen Z's social and biological development, AI technologies are becoming enmeshed in young men's work, schooling, entertainment, and even romantic lives. Most young men approach these technologies from a place of cautious optimism and individual bias, confident that they'll be less harmed by AI than society as a whole. Yet there are accruing worries around privacy violations, the mushrooming of AI-generated "slop," environmental damage, and the otherwise deleterious ways these technologies might transform work and life to feel less human. At the same time, women and minors now are at heightened risk of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and nonconsensual deepfake pornography driven by AI.

5. Young men are digitally immersed. But their purpose is shaped more by in-person connection, which is downstream of economic opportunity.

Young men's digital and in-person lives are not binary: most spend hours each day online, connecting with friends they already know while sparking new relationships. Today, young men's sense of purpose has less to do with their digital presence and more to do with their economic and geographic position—whether or not they went to college.

6. Young men believe society unfairly burdens men and more have bought into "Man Box" ideals.²

Narrow ideas about manhood, such as belief in traditional gender roles or self-sufficiency, have taken hold over the past decade. Compared to the [2023](#) and [2025](#) State of American Men surveys, young men increasingly hold constricted standards of how "real men" and "real women" should look and behave. For many, these Man Box ideas offer a kind of false consolation amid economic precarity. Interestingly, while young men most associate manhood with being a father, they most define success by financial stability.

² The "Man Box"—a term first used by Paul Kivel of the Oakland Men's Project and Tony Porter of A Call to Men—is used to refer to a restrictive set of masculine norms that demand emotional stoicism, dominance, and self-reliance.

7. Young men’s commitment to democracy is unstable—and largely shaped by online voices that are not overtly political.

At a time of corrosive mistrust in American election systems and weakened faith in democracy, young men still say elections and voting matter. Yet support collapses when a “strong-man” approach and “tear it all down” rhetoric are offered as an alternative. In examining the voices that shape how young men think about these systems and tenets, it is rarely the most political or partisan figures vying for the day’s headlines. More often, it is the streamers, YouTubers, and content creators who only occasionally talk about politics—but often fan the flames of mistrust in American institutions and leaders when they do.

8. Young men want political change built on the promise of upward mobility and institutional fairness.

Most are optimistic about their individual power to construct a better life in the years ahead, yet this confidence doesn’t extend to the systems and structures intended to help get them there. Unsurprisingly, then, young men across backgrounds and ideological lines are receptive to reforms intended to bolster opportunity and instill much-needed trust in U.S. institutions and leaders.

Introduction

Since Equimundo launched the State of American Men in [2023](#), our research has consistently affirmed that men in the United States yearn to be seen and supported in ways that recognize their complexities, vulnerabilities, and humanness. The inaugural report found that two-thirds of young men agreed that “no one really knows me,” a longing that Equimundo interpreted as a call for more honest, connected, and meaningful lives. The Young Men Research Project (YMRP), through its own polling, has arrived at a complementary insight: young men’s daily lived experiences are diverse and ever-changing, and men are neither a homogeneous nor a passive group. Together, both bodies of work point to the same conclusion—young men actively shape the culture around them even as they are shaped by it, and their views are highly fluid.

The State of American Men 2026 arrives at an important moment. Never before has the conversation about young men been so firmly embedded in the dominant national narrative, and never have they been so widely cast as the demographic that will decide the country’s political future. It is against this backdrop that Equimundo, YMRP, and YouGov embarked on a mixed-method study on topics that are most important to young men today.

In 2026, young people in America have inherited political, public, and civic institutions in dire need of repair. The social spaces where they might have once gathered are disappearing. Economic mobility has declined, and the political system reserves outsized rewards for a select few. Meanwhile, a growing and largely unchecked industry of online spaces and influencers is profiting from young men’s insecurities. Predictably, many young men long for the country of a bygone era. Yet they have not abandoned belief in the power of individual agency and optimism for the future. At a moment of profound uncertainty, they are finding new ways to connect and create meaning, on their own terms. And, despite the headlines, the majority continue to believe in the American Dream and are receptive to a renewed social contract that will help them attain it.

Methodology

Survey: Designed by Equimundo/YMRP and fielded by YouGov, a nationally representative survey of 1,000 young men and 500 young women (ages 18 to 29) in the United States asked respondents about economic concerns, civic engagement, social views, gambling habits, sentiments toward and behaviors around AI, trusted influencers, online communities, and in-person connections. Weighting targets were assembled using YouGov’s custom sampling frame that combines data from the Census/American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey, and voter files, as well as additional vote propensity and vote history targets provided by the research firm Catalist, which specializes in estimating these key statistics. YouGov’s dedicated panel quality teams provided multiple checks to ensure high-quality responses.

Focus Groups: Complementing the survey’s quantitative findings, YouGov members conducted four focus groups in spring 2026: three groups of young men and one group of young women. All respondents were ages 18 to 29 and living in the United States. Participants represented a mix of racial/ethnic backgrounds, geographies, incomes, and political views. Questions generally aligned with those laid out in the survey.

Social Listening: Using open-source tools, YMRP gathered posts from 10 popular subreddits frequented by young men. YMRP selected the subreddits using public data on the most popular communities overall, as well as YMRP polling that asked young men which subreddits they have joined. For each community, YMRP collected a dataset of roughly 500 of the most popular posts—determined by upvote count as of the collection date—published between January 1, 2025, and May 31, 2026. Each post was coded for recurring themes, including but not limited to nostalgia, censorship, community, economic frustration or optimism, politics, and institutional fairness. Additionally, YMRP analyzed the transcripts from the same time period of seven popular podcasts among young men—determined from Edison Podcast Metrics’ data—to connect key points of discussion to the themes identified in this report.

Sample Characteristics: Table 1 shows that the sample skews slightly older for both men and women—25- to 29-year-old participants outnumber 18- to 24-year-old participants. The sample is predominantly White (59–60 percent), with smaller and similar shares identifying as Black, Hispanic, or another race/ethnicity, aligned with the demographics of the United States. A large proportion of women and men participants have not completed college, though more women report college attainment than men. Family income is wide-ranging. A significant proportion of participants reside in the South, followed by the West, Midwest, and Northeast in similar proportions across genders.

Table 1

Survey Respondent Characteristics

	Men (in %)	Women (in %)
Age		
18–24 years	39	45
25–29 years	61	55
Race		
White	60	59
Black	16	16
Hispanic	14	15
Other	10	10
Education		
Less than college	78	72
College educated	22	28
Family Income		
Less than \$30,000	31	22
\$30,000–\$59,999	22	21
\$60,000–\$99,999	20	21
\$100,000–\$149,999	11	9
\$150,000+	7	8
Prefer not to say	9	19
Region		
Northeast	17	17
South	39	38
Midwest	21	21
West	23	24

Young men long for the economy and society of a past America.

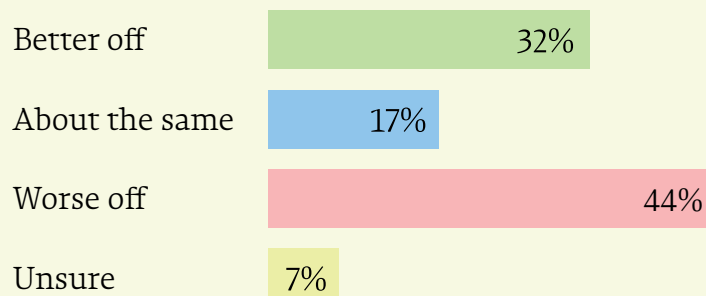
Nostalgia is nothing new. Nor is it limited to young men. But at this moment of economic and political flux, young men in the United States—with variations by social class and ethnicity, as shown in Table 2 (on page 12)—are hungry for the perceived guarantees of the past. Above all, this revolves around material conditions. **Young men want clearer pathways to financial stability and more affordable housing. However, this nostalgia is not limited to monetary concerns. Young men wish for a less atomized society, one they associate with eras of American life they never experienced.**

Young men are often portrayed as pining for the days when “men could be men.” Yet what this generation really wants has less to do

with turning back the clock on gender roles, and more to do with earning a living wage, housing their family, and spending time with the people they love. Harvard economist Raj Chetty’s work indicates that young people’s perception of diminished economic mobility compared with past generations is well-founded. His research finds that Americans born in the 1940s had a 92 percent chance of earning more than their parents, yet for those born more recently, it’s closer to a coin flip.³ With that in mind, it is not surprising that in this sample, 44 percent of men think that the country is worse off now than it was 50 years ago, compared to 32 percent who say the United States is better off (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Generally speaking, do you think that things are [better off/about the same/worse off] for America as a country now than they were 50 years ago?



³ R. Chetty et al., “The Fading American Dream: Trends in Absolute Income Mobility Since 1940,” *Science* 356, no. 6336 (2017): 398-406.

Men who believe in traditional ideals of manhood or are in the Man Box are two times more likely to agree with this sentiment.

This “nostalgia” might be an alternative way of expressing dissatisfaction with the present, irrespective of specific beliefs about life 50 years ago—especially given that economic growth of their grandparents’ generation, while not equitable, offered a more assured path to upward mobility.

The young men most concerned about their family’s financial position are more likely to be enchanted by the perceived stability of the past, whether that means more structured pathways to economic security,

or neighborhoods where people know each other’s names. This same wistfulness is true for many young men who lack a sense of belonging and those who doubt they are capable of being loved. These are the young men who most see America today as inferior to the America of the past.

But this pessimism is not immutable cynicism. Young men are finding meaning in novel ways today, and most have not forsaken faith in their individual capacity to create a life worth living. They are receptive to political and economic proposals intended to alter the status quo. **While faith in the American Dream has dissipated, young men have not discarded it.**

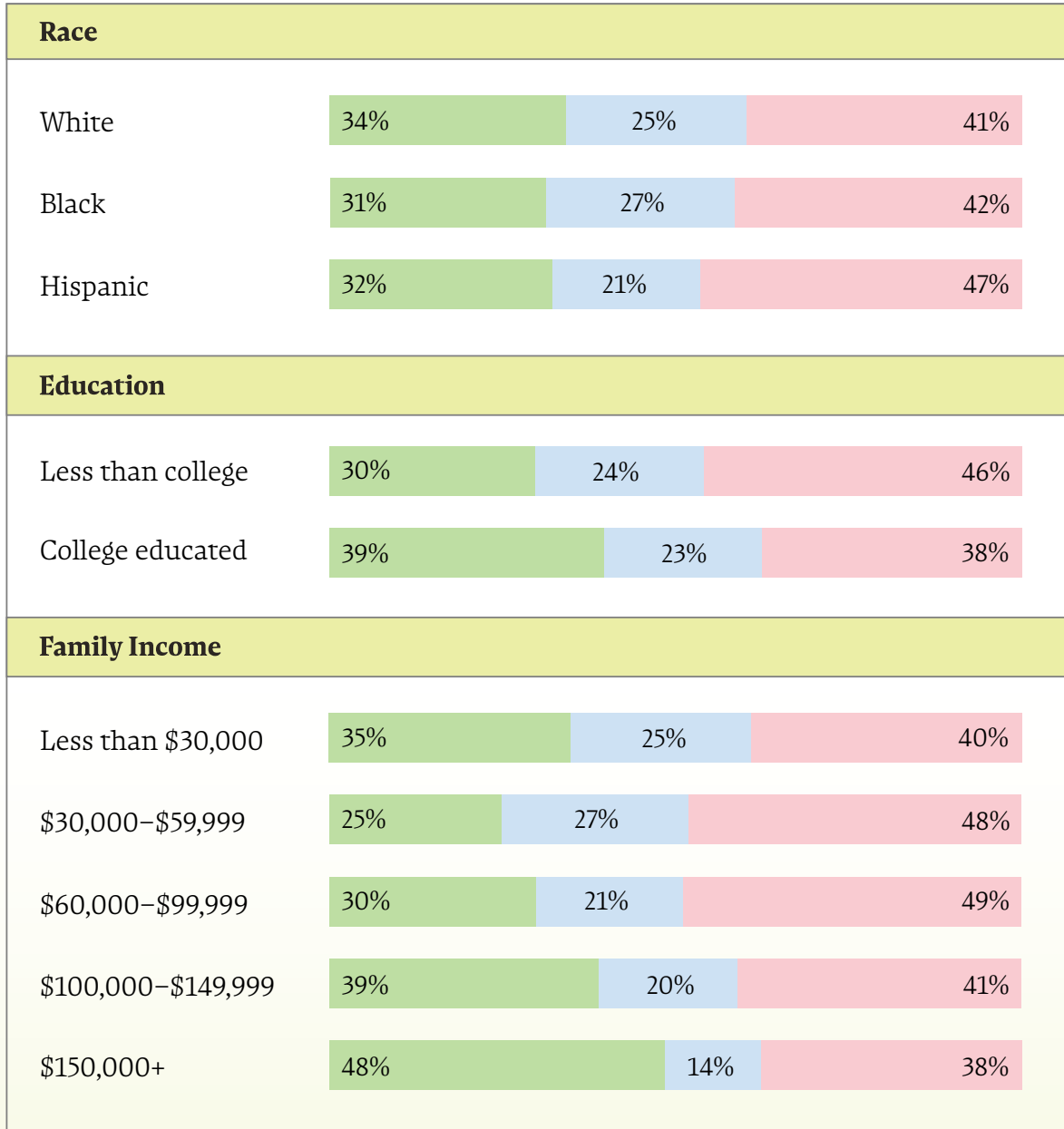
“My grandfather and my parents talk a lot about this... there’s such a thing as company loyalty, and what that meant was that it was two-way back then. My grandfather was able to retire from a company; he worked there long enough, retired from it, and the retirement has maintained him for 35 years... there are a lot of benefits that are being removed that their generations fought hard for that just aren’t present or are greatly reduced.”

—28-year-old White man from Kentucky

Table 2

Men's Perceptions of "Things Are Better or Worse Off" by Race, Education and Family Income

■ Better off
 ■ About the same/Unsure
 ■ Worse off



Young men have reached near consensus that previous generations had a smoother economic ride, an assessment that matches economic data.

While confidence in the present and future waxes and wanes among different slices of young men, most are united in feeling shortchanged compared to the men who came before them. About three in four young men (74 percent) agree that it is “much harder for my generation to feel financially secure than my father’s generation.” This sense of loss is a feature of young adulthood today.

“When they were able to buy houses for two pennies and a dime, the houses were cheap back then, so they’re lucky to [be] able to have those down, because now the value of those houses [is] in the millions versus how cheap they bought them back then.”

— 23-year-old Black man from Virginia

Survey results shown in Table 2 suggest that White respondents are more inclined than Black or Hispanic young men to say the United States is better off. College-educated young men are evenly split. Income shows a near-linear trend: with the exception of those in the lowest income bracket, belief that the current state of the country is better than 50 years ago tends to rise with higher income groups.

Affordable homeownership is essential to what young men feel they’ve lost.

Sixty-nine percent of young men say the affordability of housing was “generally better” in the past, compared to just 20 percent who say it was “generally worse.” This translates into strong support for policies that might ease the burden on buyers: for example, 64 percent of young men support banning private equity firms from buying single-family homes. Housing alone isn’t the full story; there is a larger economic trend at play. Despite the proliferation of new careers spawned in recent decades, about three in five young men (58 percent) agree that access to well-paying jobs was “generally better” in the past.

Young men wish to reclaim the sense of community they perceive America once had—not outdated gender roles.

“Before there was social media, you had to think about the deeper things ... more time with yourself, more time with others and family, even just simple gestures like holding the door for somebody.”

— 25-year-old Hispanic man from Massachusetts

As seen in Figure 2, 60 percent of young men say individuals’ connection to their community was “generally better” in the past, outstripping the 21 percent who say it was “generally worse,” an impression that matches sociological research.⁴

Alongside stronger social bonds is the sense that life once moved at a more manageable pace. **Many also believe that the quality of music and entertainment was higher—a sign that this generation pines for a different time altogether.** Regression analysis finds that the older segment of young men is more satisfied with the country’s progress compared to younger cohorts: 25- to 29-year-old men are 1.3 times more likely than men aged 18–24 to believe that the country is better now than it was 50 years ago.

Contrary to popular belief, only 43 percent of young men agree that the “role of men in society” was generally better in the past. This trails well behind the share that envies the economic mobility or social connection of prior generations. However, there are stark differences based on political persuasion—56 percent of young men who voted for Donald Trump in the 2024 election agree that men’s status was better in the past, compared to 35 percent of Harris voters and 39 percent of nonvoters.

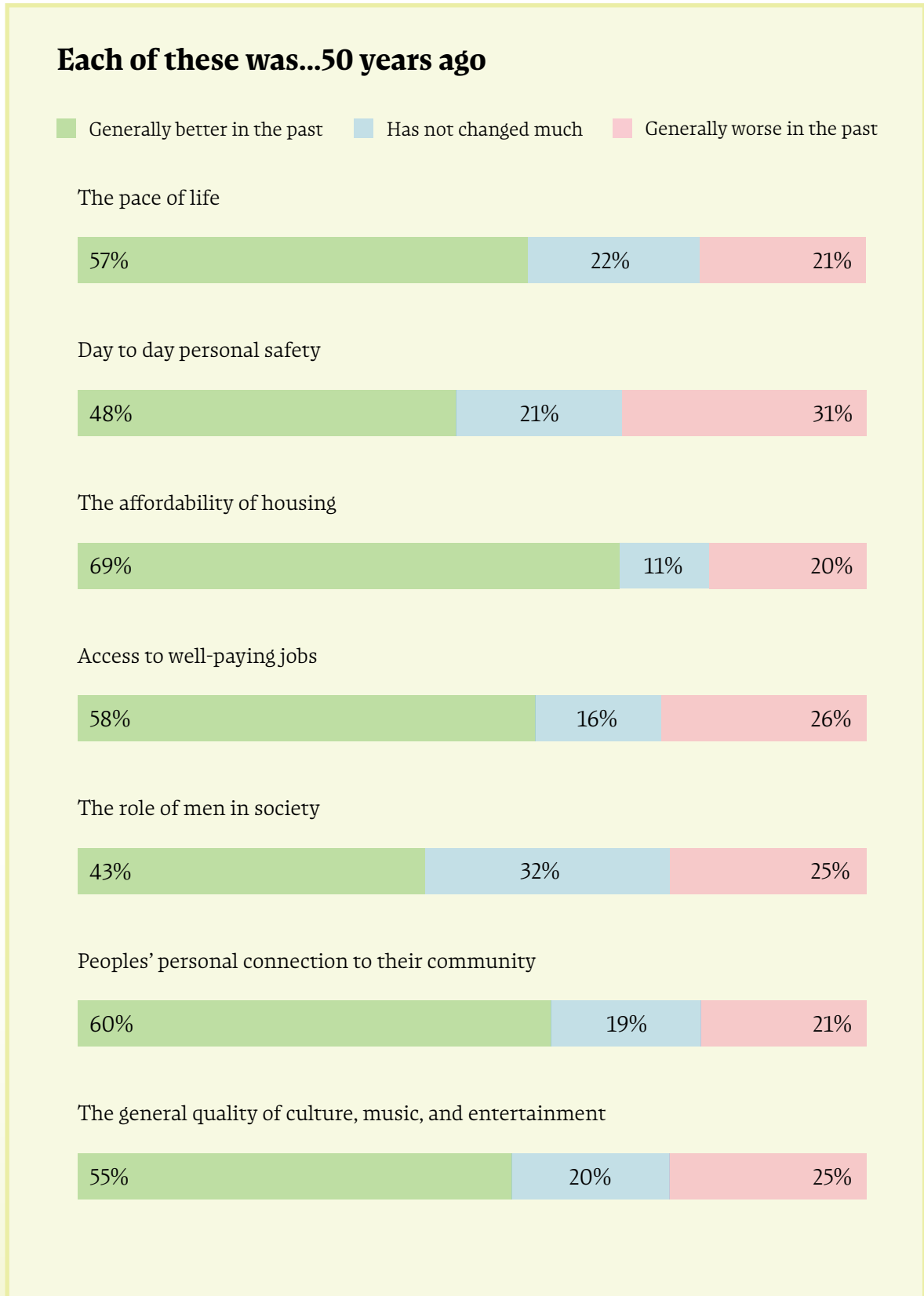
The least economically secure young men are the most nostalgic.

Not everyone feels the same nostalgia. Those who report greater assuredness in their financial footing and future prospects are less prone to envy America’s past.

Young men in the highest income group are 1.44 times more likely, and college-educated men 1.5 times more likely, to agree that the country is better off. Young men who see today’s economy as rigged, rather than a level playing field, are less likely to say America is better off than 50 years ago.

⁴ R. D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995): 65–78.

Figure 2



HEADLINE 1

Those who believe the American Dream is personally attainable are more likely to say the country is overall better off today: 42 percent agree, and 32 percent disagree. Conversely, just 18 percent of young men who think the American Dream is not achievable choose today's America, trounced by the 68 percent who favor the past. This same dynamic plays out when contrasting the young men who are confident versus pessimistic about their romantic prospects, as well as in other domains pertaining to optimism.

“Ever since COVID, I feel like social isolation and just connection with people has been on the decline, and that’s kind of pushed individualism a little bit more than it has in previous generations.”

—27-year-old Black man from Georgia

Social Listening

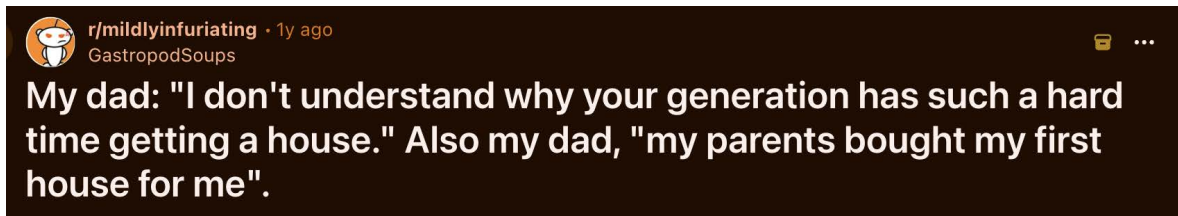


Image 1: Screenshot from Reddit post

“This was a conversation we recently had. I expressed annoyance at the inability to find a reasonably priced home...my dad decided that was the time to tell me he already had a house at my age...I asked him how he paid for it and he said his parents (my grandparents) bought him his first house. And no, he saw zero irony when I brought it up.”

— 49,805 upvotes in [r/mildlyinfuriating](https://www.reddit.com/r/mildlyinfuriating)

Want to “mildly infuriate” a Zoomer? Ask them why they haven’t purchased a house or attained a stable job yet and then add that it was easy enough for generations past to do so. Young men aren’t just living with high housing prices in a post-COVID world and wages that have stagnated for those not at the tippy-top; they’re also hearing about the days of yore, a period free from the constant bombardment of grim news and inflammatory content on social media, when connection and calm came more naturally.

Financial stability feels elusive right now, but young men still believe it's coming—some groups more than others.

Young men wish for the assurances they think their fathers and grandfathers had. They look at the homes a middle-class household could once afford and see prices out of reach even for those in stable, well-paying fields. They scoff at the advice often still proffered to simply hand in a resume and extend a firm handshake, knowing the brutal reality that dozens, if not hundreds, of applications may never earn so much as a follow-up email.

So, it is no surprise that terms like “financial nihilism” or “quiet quitting” have become shorthand for Gen Z’s felt malaise toward the modern economy. Young people today are contending with the profound disruption brought on by AI, and the lingering aftereffects of a pandemic that has altered the structure and meaning of work, community, and the housing market. “Cut off from our collective project,” “tossed aside and thrown into the wind”—this is the type of story heard about young Americans today.

This story has justifiable origins. As detailed in the [2025 State of American Men](#), financial angst undergirds young men’s day-to-day outlook, and that did not change in the 2026 updated data. Young men fear losing their jobs if they are able to land one at all. They dread a

hiring process that is automated and inhuman. They are less certain about which career paths to pursue, as even the brightest experts lack a consensus on what the future holds.

The spillover effects of economic dislocation are well-documented, but bear repeating.

Precarity does not just make groceries harder to afford and rent harder to pay. It diminishes one’s sense of self. In-person community becomes harder to find and sustain. It is linked to anti-democratic attitudes, higher suicidal ideation, and other consequences across physical and mental health.

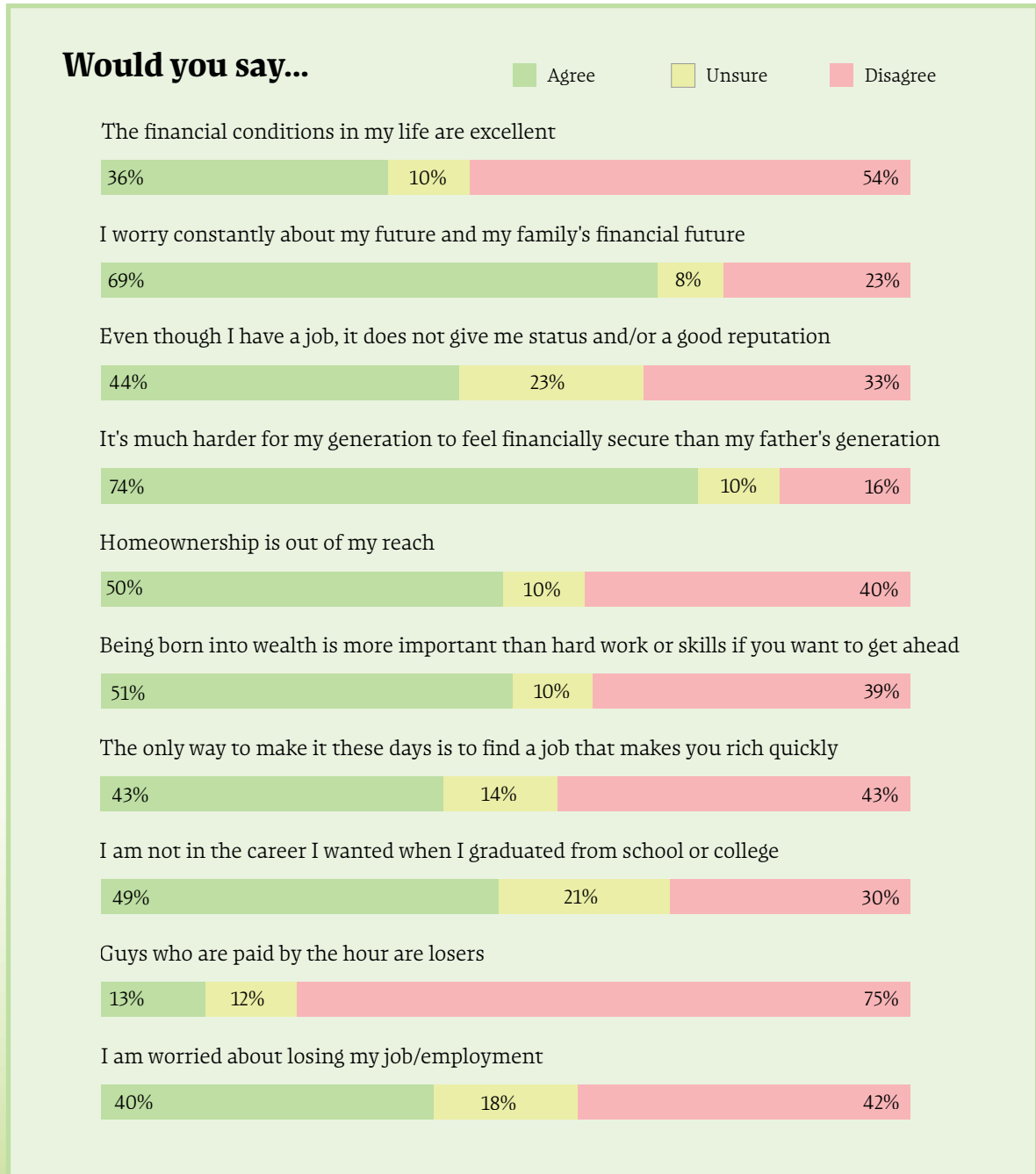
For all the justified despair, one must not mistake present frustration for outright despondency. As detailed later in this headline, most young men still believe in the American Dream. Most still cherish the markers that have historically defined it: homeownership, marriage, and children. Most say their work is fulfilling.

Yet not all feel this optimism. Young men who are already a step ahead—those who are employed full-time, those who have finished their college education, those who come from environments that more visibly offer upward mobility—are more likely to believe better days lie ahead. For the rest, the way forward looks more treacherous.

Young men are anxious about their financial present.

Economic precarity was the anchoring theme of the 2025 State of American Men report, and this year's data point in the same direction. While young men's confidence in the future is a different matter, present-day distress is palpable (see Figure 3). Sixty-nine percent of young men today say they constantly worry about their individual and family's financial futures, and two in five worry about losing their job.

Figure 3



These worries are felt across racial groups, though Black young men report the highest levels. Not surprisingly, young men who have a college degree or who are better employed express a stronger sense of security. About half (46 percent) of full-time employed young men say the financial conditions in their lives are “excellent,” notably higher than part-time employed young men (31 percent) or unemployed young men (27 percent). Those who feel economically precarious are 2.87 times more likely to experience thoughts of suicide.

“What happens if I go and take out this car loan or, say, you go buy a house and all of a sudden your job is replaced, or they no longer need you, or they fire you or whatever the heck? Already, Amazon has already laid off 30,000 employees. So, it makes your decisions so much more... scary, anxious.”

—25-year-old Hispanic man from Massachusetts

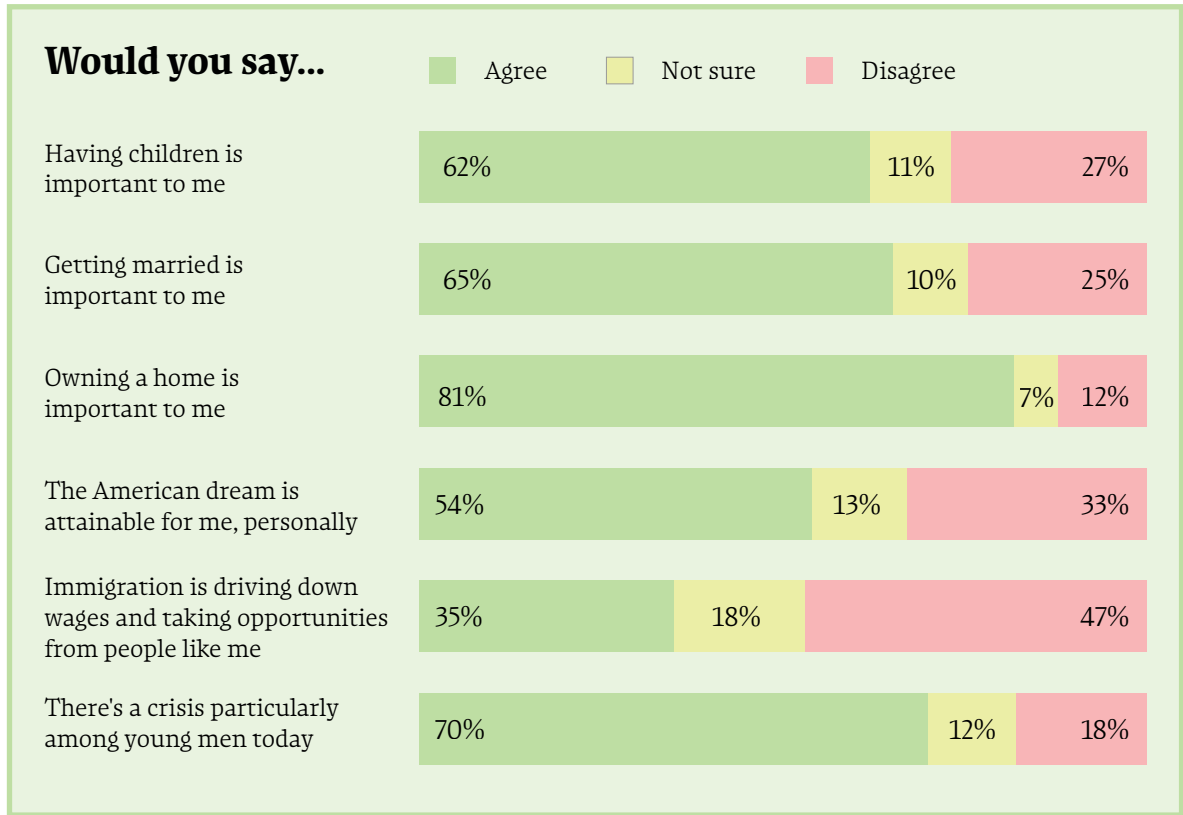
More encouragingly, this financial anxiety does not mean estrangement from work. Sixty-three percent of young men agree their job offers them a sense of purpose or fulfillment, well above the 22 percent who disagree. But here, too, young men with a full-time role feel more rewarded than those working part-time (77 percent versus 66 percent).

Young men haven’t entirely lost faith in the American Dream, especially those already ahead.

Young men find it hard to get by today. Nearly everyone agrees that something in America went astray, and that the path to comfort, or even just firm footing, is far more burdensome than it once was (see Figure 4). But this present frustration is not nihilism. A majority of young men (54 percent) believe that the American Dream is personally attainable, compared to one in three who do not.

This optimism is more pervasive in some corners than others. Young men who feel the most economically precarious are also less likely to hold onto faith, even controlling for employment status and family income. Logistic regression shows that race is not significantly associated with believing that the American Dream is attainable—that is, all races/ethnicities think similarly about the attainability of the American Dream. 55 percent of White men agree that the American Dream is attainable, 55 percent of Black men, and 54 percent of Hispanic men.

Figure 4



In outlook, too, the gaps by education, employment, and place are significant. As seen in Figure 5, college graduates are considerably more hopeful about attaining the American Dream compared to young men with a high school diploma or less (67 percent versus 51 percent). The same applies to young men who are employed full-time (64 percent) compared to those employed part-time (53 percent) or unemployed (47 percent), as noted in Figure 6. Additionally, city-dwellers are more confident than young men from rural areas (61 percent versus 39 percent). Those with more economic and social capital today are simply more likely to believe they will have more of it tomorrow.

In line with Equipundo's previous reports, regression analysis finds that men who believe in the Man Box are 2.3 times more likely to say that the American Dream is attainable, perhaps since Man Box ideals often promote success and provision as core tenets of manhood. Social support is a key factor: men who report having close friends are 1.1 times more likely to believe that the American Dream is attainable.

“Would love a family, I really want that, but that is a hard sell. Having a house alone to raise a family is now not anywhere close to a guarantee.”

—24-year-old White man from Missouri

Figure 5

**Belief that the American dream is attainable,
by education (% agreement)**

College graduates

67%

High school or less

51%

Figure 6

**Belief that the American dream is attainable,
by employment status (% agreement)**

64%

Full-time

53%

Part-time

47%

Unemployed

Social Listening

[r/UFC](#): Title: “Just HOW are insurance companies allowed to do this?? You’re forced to pay insurance and when you need them they just deny you.” (13.5k upvotes)

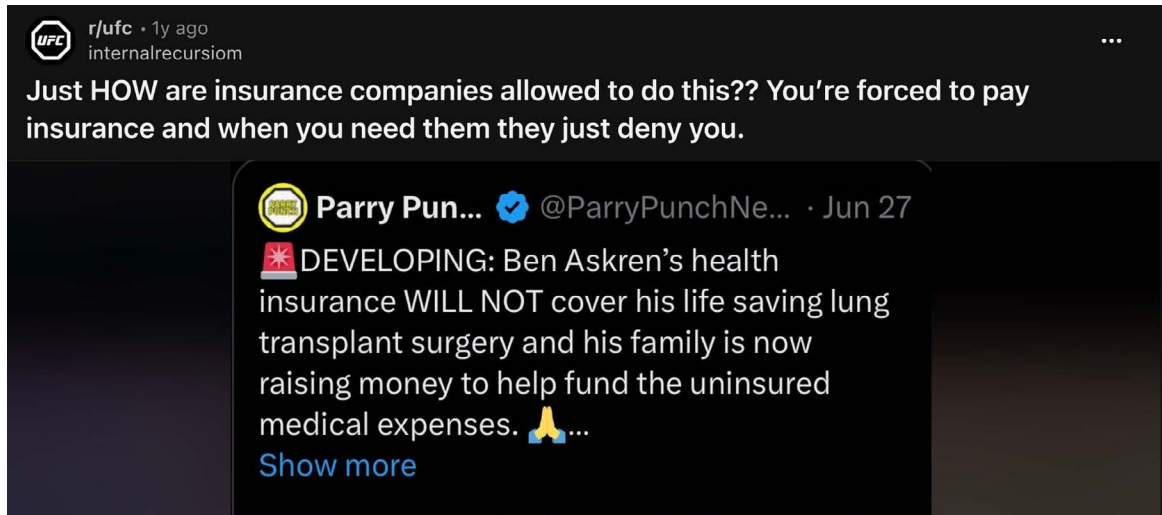


Image 2: Screenshot from Reddit post

Top Comment: “Paying insurance premiums for years, only to have them deny you coverage when you actually need it. Typical.”

[r/FortniteBR](#): Speaking about Tim Sweeney, the CEO of Epic Games, Title: “He rised the price of vbucks, fewer vbucks in the pass, reduces the vbucks that the crew gives, announced AI-generated skins, fired MORE THAN 1,000 EMPLOYEES all this in a single month”

Within nominally nonpolitical subreddits, those that heavily censor political posts, these primarily young male users routinely vent about corporate greed and exploitation, and express a general backlash against the “elites” and gatekeepers of the systems they hold responsible for degrading their experience as users or fans. In r/UFC, users will contrast the low fighter pay and benefits with those of the sport’s leadership and other professional sports leagues. On r/FortniteBR, users express resentment over the impact of mass layoffs on the game’s quality. Even in spaces focused on entertainment, pocketbook grievances and billionaire animus are more the norm than the exception.

Pockets of young men are turning to speculative economies.

Gambling is everywhere you look. The World Cup’s LED perimeter boards, NBA Finals broadcasts, billboards along the highway—and increasingly, the endorsements come from America’s most revered athletes and entertainers.

The dangers to young men’s financial and mental health are substantial, and the ways that impulsive wagers can devastate bank accounts and relationships are well-documented. Per this survey, about half of young men report gambling at some capacity, and about one in five do so daily.

As gambling’s tactics for recruiting young men evolve, so does the medium. Prediction markets have entered the scene, expanding the scope of what is considered socially acceptable for wagering. These platforms, patronized disproportionately by young men, let users gamble not just on the next UFC fight, but also on the outcome of Senate elections or the scale of destruction from a natural disaster. The long-term vision of this industry is to make anything and everything ripe for betting.

Despite frequent assumptions and caricatures of the most committed gamblers, this activity is concentrated among young men

who are more employed and more financially secure. And there is a clear linkage to cryptocurrency: gamblers are more likely to be invested in cryptocurrency, and crypto traders are more likely to gamble.

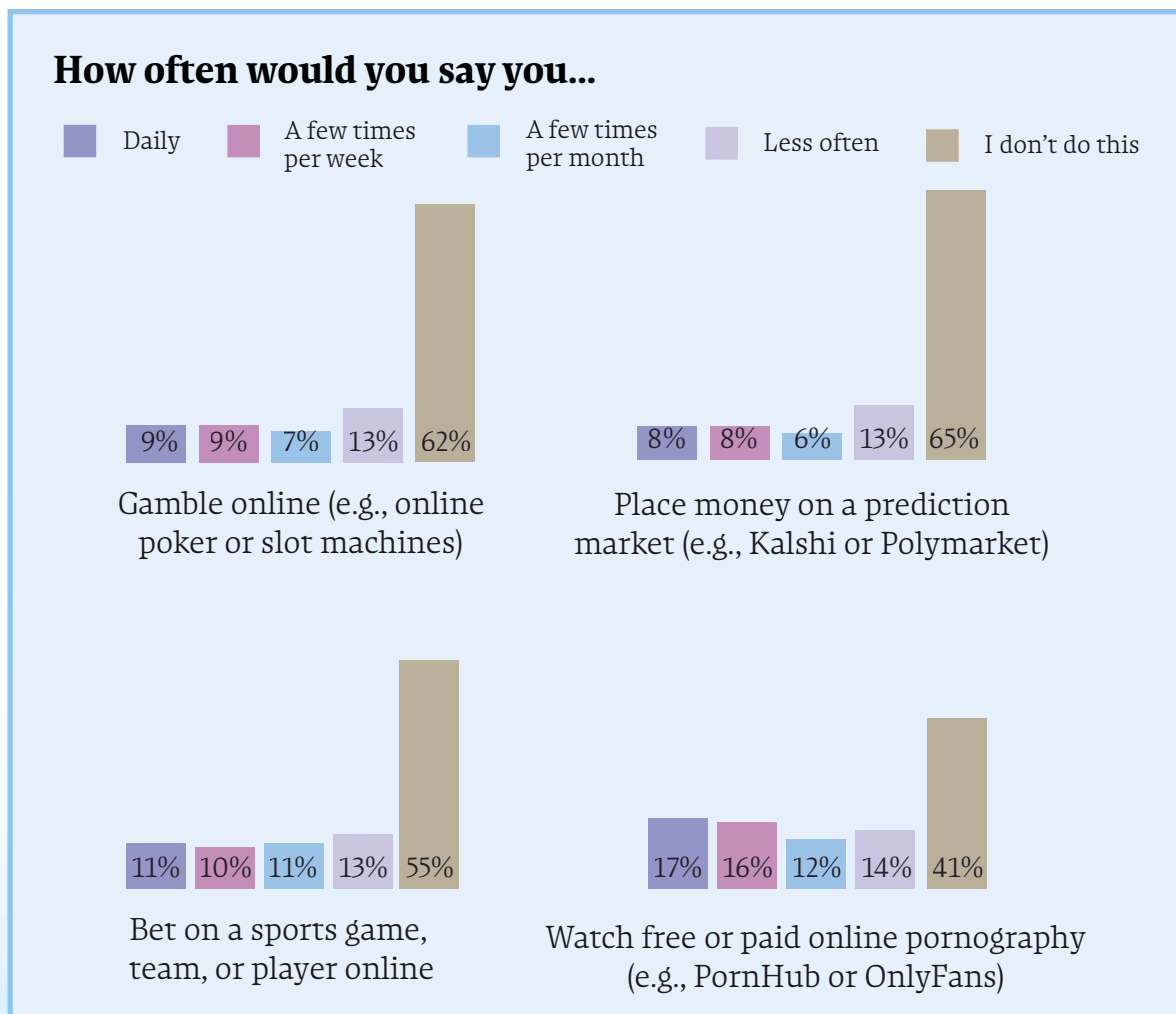
Those with this same risk-taking temperament are the target consumers of the burgeoning “**grift economy**.” The market for products promoted by influencers—investment advice, self-improvement courses, supplements, and other goods—is most concentrated among the segment of young men already predisposed to risk-taking and those who are better employed, though it is not confined to them. Just under half of young men overall have purchased a product from someone they follow online.

As new forms of gambling gain social legitimacy, both their individual costs and their broader impact on how society allocates value warrant scrutiny. Sports have already been swallowed up; cultural moments and current events are next in line. Young men are on the fence about the ethics of these platforms, but most are open—right now—to restricting what should and should not be available to bet on. This window, however, will likely not stay open forever.

Gambling is rampant among young men, and prediction markets are the newest addition to the rising pile of speculative bets. But only a small share of young men accounts for most of the wagers.

Young men are speculating their money in myriad ways (see Figure 7). About half (51 percent) gamble at any frequency — whether through online poker, sports betting, or prediction markets — and nearly one in five (17 percent) participate daily. Signs suggest that prediction markets are now capturing a growing share of young men: 16 percent reported using one of these platforms in the past week, and 35 percent said they have used them at any point. Compared with polling from winter 2026,⁵ as well as the accumulating volume of documented trades, these platforms appear to be entrenching themselves within the mainstream.

Figure 7



5 J. D. Cohen, “Most Americans See Prediction Markets as Gambling, Not Investing,” American Institute for Boys and Men, March 17, 2026, <https://aibm.org/research/most-americans-see-prediction-markets-as-more-like-gambling-than-investing-new-aibm-ipsos-poll-finds/>.

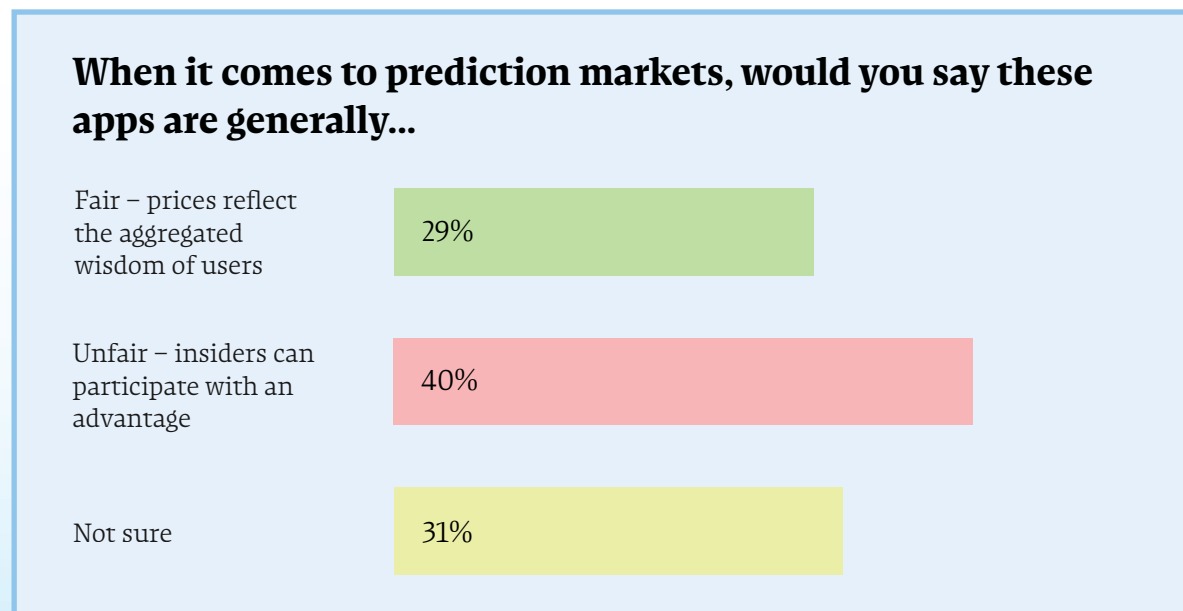
While about half of young men gamble at any capacity, that activity is concentrated among those who are better employed and more confident in their financial standing. For example, 60 percent of full-time employed young men report having bet on sports online, compared to 45 percent of part-time employed young men, and 30 percent of unemployed young men. In fact, employed men are three times more likely to gamble and use prediction markets than those who are not employed. After controlling for race, family income, and employment, lower-middle-class, working-class, and poorer⁶ men are significantly less likely to gamble or use prediction markets than upper-class and upper-middle-class men.

Differences in daily gambling are marginal between college graduates and young men without a degree: about 17 percent for both groups. This tracks with YMRP’s fall 2025 survey, which found that gambling was about equally common across race, education, and other demographics. The strongest differentiating factor for high-frequency activity appears to be income and employment.

Young men have mixed views on prediction markets but tend to have a self-serving bias. Most are also opposed to gambling regulations.

When asked about the collective impact of prediction markets on society, young men are more likely to label them negative (45 percent) than positive (31 percent). They’re also more inclined to say these apps are “unfair” for the average user, rather than fair (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

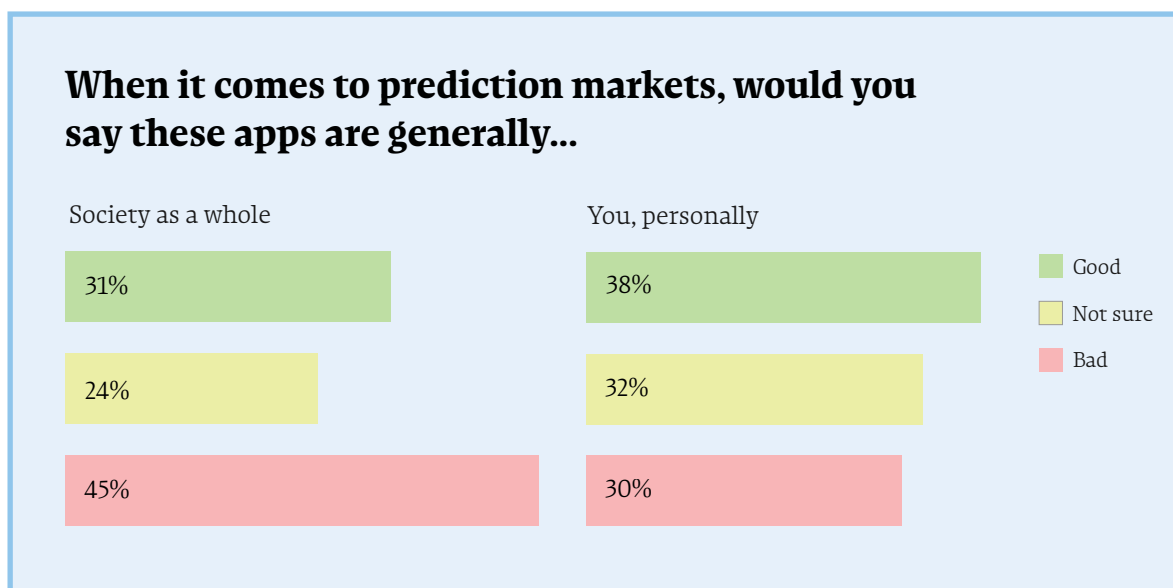


⁶ This categorization is based on self-identification. Respondents were asked how they identify as: upper-class, upper-middle class, middle class, lower-middle class, working class, poor, do not think they belong to a “class,” and not sure. This categorization is different from family income.

But when asked whether these are good for “you, personally,” young men are more likely to agree than disagree (see Figure 9). This bias also manifests when asked about the impact of AI on the individual versus society, based on YMRP’s previous research.⁷

Accounting for differences in race, college education, and employment, men who gamble or use prediction markets are four times more likely to agree that prediction markets benefit society and benefit them personally. Men with a college education are less likely to agree that these apps are beneficial to them than those without a college degree, whereas employed men are 1.8 times more likely to agree that prediction markets are beneficial to them.

Figure 9



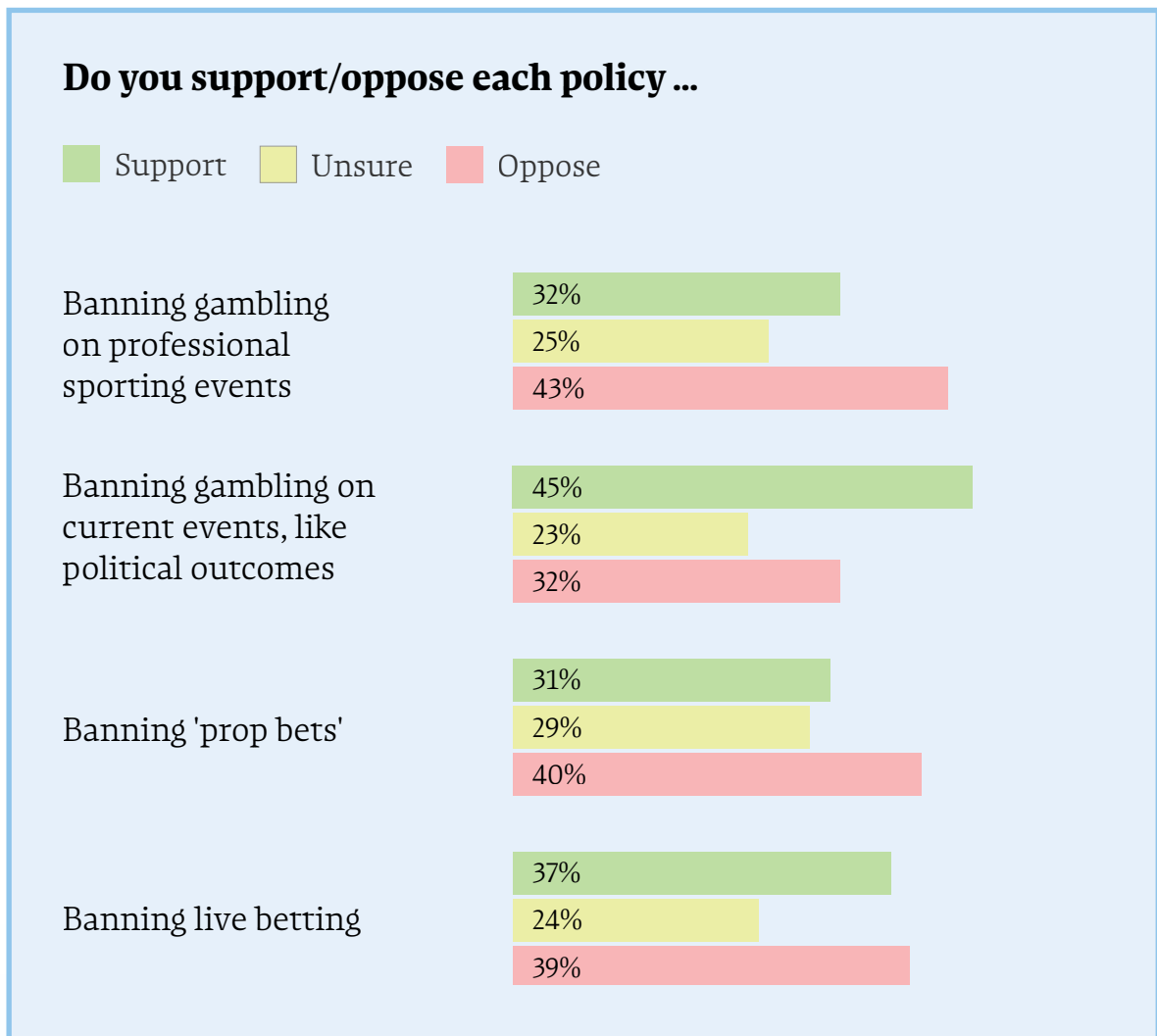
Young men are generally opposed to gambling regulations, but these views are not strongly held. When polled on banning wagers on current events, young men are more receptive than not: 45 percent support such regulations while 32 percent oppose them (see Figure 10).

Young men are buying into the gift economy.

Just as gambling and risky financial bets are more accessible than ever, so is the opportunity for influencers to profit from parasocial relationships. Just fewer than half of young men say they have purchased a product from someone they follow online, including self-improvement courses, supplements or nutritional products, financial advice, recommended cryptocurrency or stocks, and personalized coaching (see Figure 11). Of these, the most common purchase is supplements or nutritional products: 30 percent of young men say they have purchased these from someone they follow.

⁷ Young Men Research Project, Fall 2025 Survey Toplines, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/682624879442926a5204ee2d/t/6931f7bd99f19923bd619249/1764882365170/YMRI_Oct_2025_Base_toplines_updated.pdf.

Figure 10



Young men who gamble report buying these products at significantly higher rates, suggesting that speculative behavior extends across domains and is tied to the same influences promoting products on the same platforms. Young men are being sold these products on purpose, and there is a massive industry profiting from it (see Box 1, page 32).

Regarding employment and partisanship, there are pronounced differences in the consumer base of the gift economy (see Figures 12 and 13 for detailed breakdowns). As with gambling, those who are better employed show higher involvement: 55 percent of full-time employed young men have purchased any of the listed products, compared to 48 percent of part-time employed and 34 percent of unemployed young men. Segmenting by political behavior, 63 percent of Trump voters have bought one of these products compared to 42 percent of Harris voters.

Figure 11

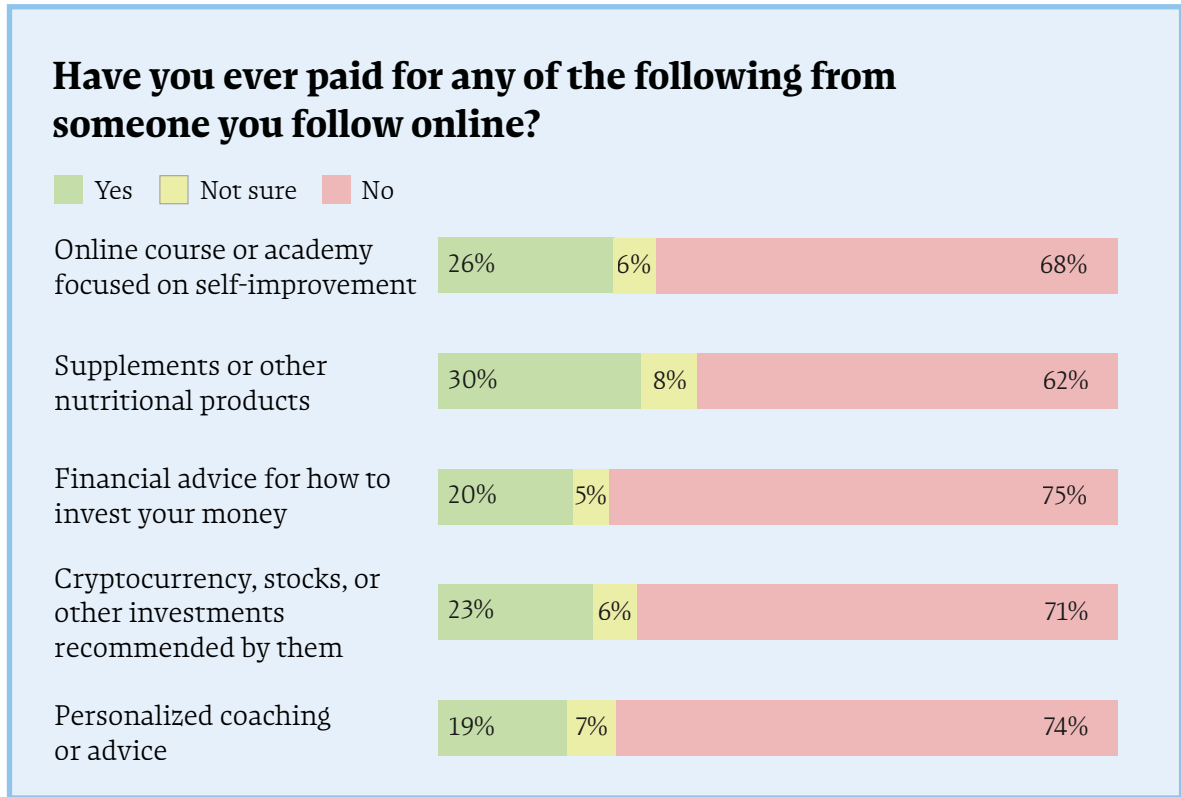


Figure 12

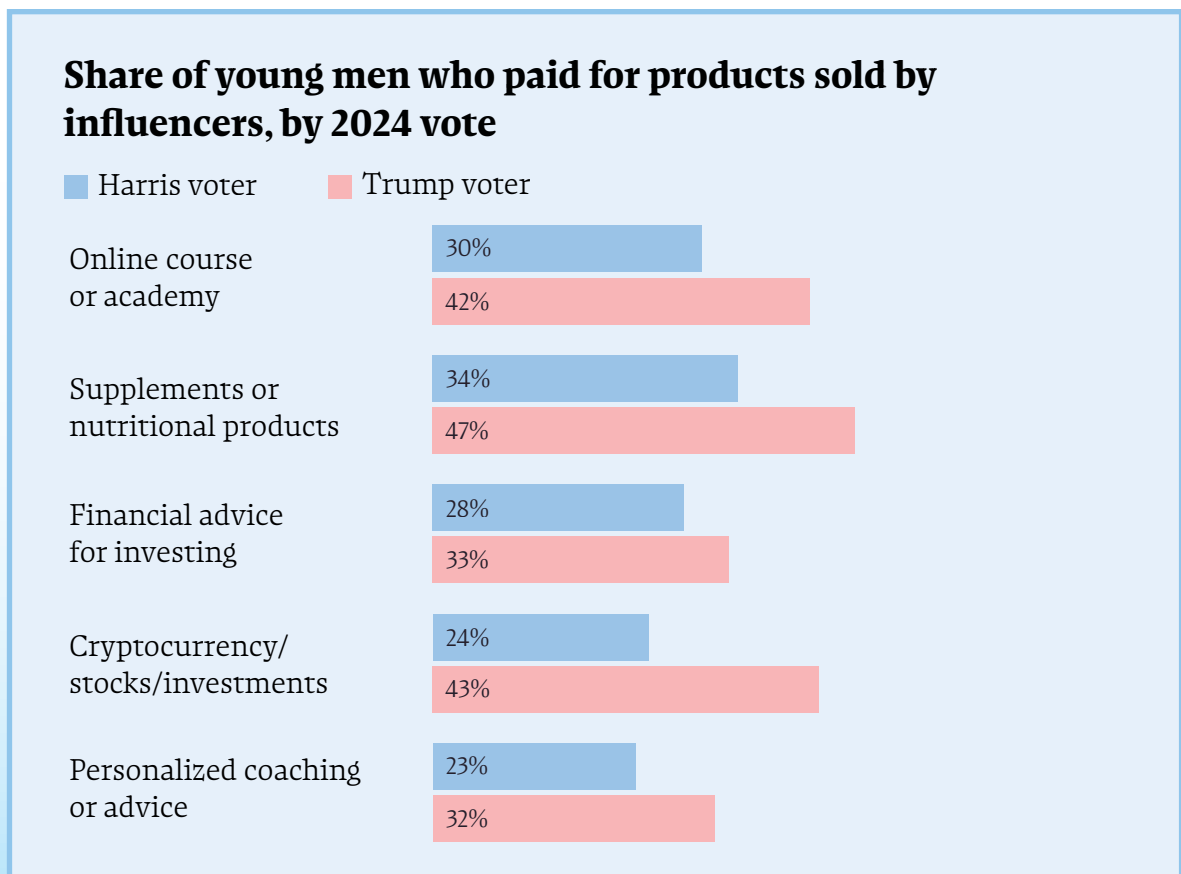
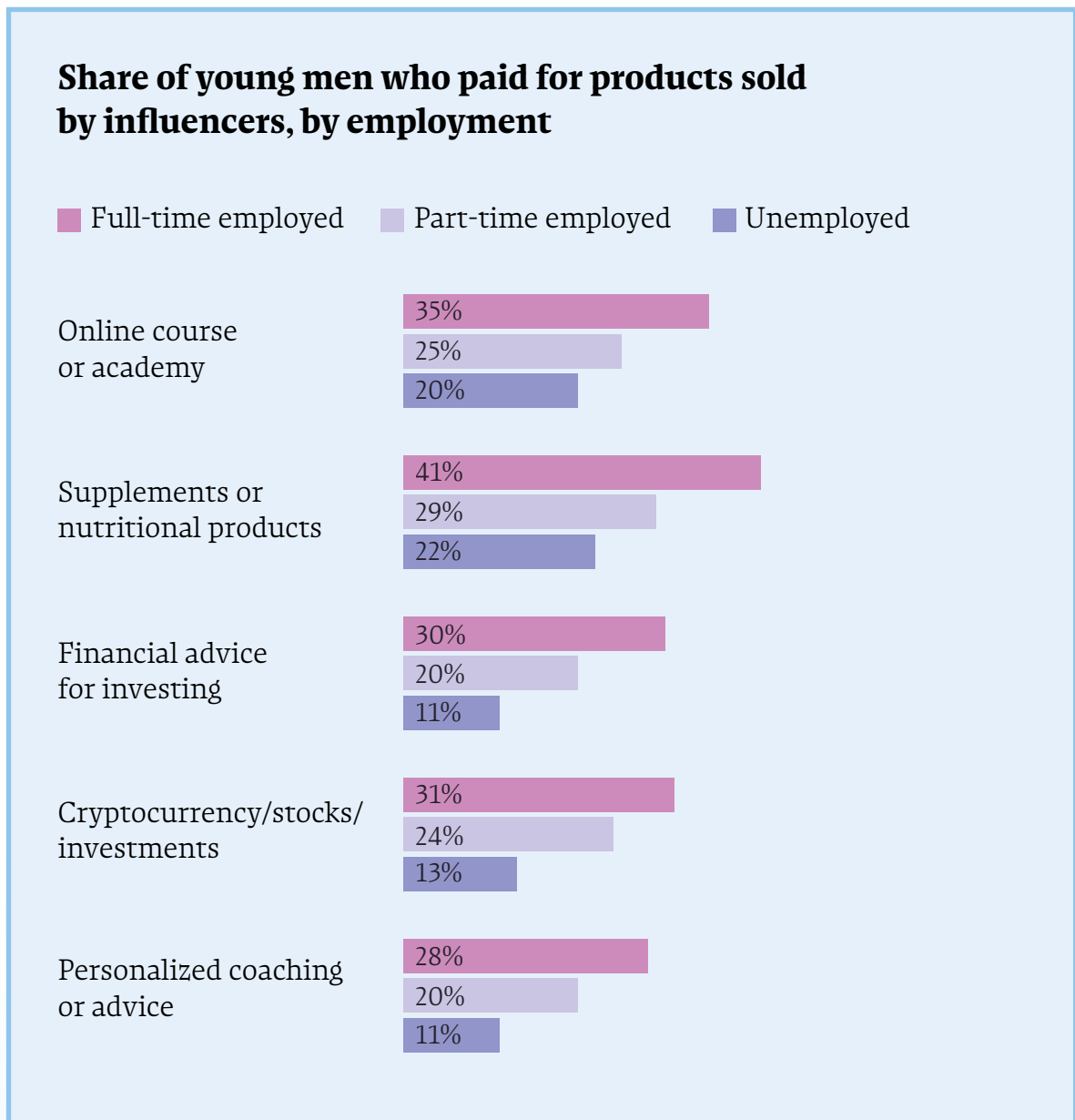


Figure 13



The Grift Economy: How Men Are Being Sold Fake Belonging and Fake Wealth Online

A report by Reset Tech and Equimundo

The dominant public discourse about men and their social media engagement tends to be framed in one of two ways, both inadequate. The first treats young men primarily as a threat—as radicalization subjects, as vectors of misogyny, and as a political problem to be managed. The second treats them primarily as a constituency to be won, which can mean fueling their grievances against, for instance, women or seeing them as poorly informed voters rather than a constituency with real needs and valid concerns.

Reset Tech and Equimundo conducted a study on the grift economy that concludes that young men are, in many cases, consumers being defrauded. The study affirms that there is a multi-billion-dollar industry that benefits from the loneliness, economic anxiety, and identity confusion of men. Who keeps those profits varies: YouTube keeps 45 percent of ad revenue and pays creators 55 percent; Kick keeps only 5 percent and pays streamers 95 percent. The various platforms and influencers market themselves as a movement, a brotherhood, and a path to success. They present themselves as the antidote to a society that has failed men. In doing so, they sell them the very things that keep them isolated, financially drained, and psychologically dependent.

Recognizing that young men are all too often victims of fraud requires a fresh set of solutions. Above all, this means holding platforms accountable for the design choices, algorithmic systems, and advertising infrastructure that determine what content reaches which users at scale. Reset Tech's Clickbait Cures investigation found 2,164 active Facebook ads targeting Canadian users with peptides—in clear violation of existing advertising policy—with 324 showing explicit injection markers. Enforcement does not fail here because platforms cannot identify this material; it fails because removing it costs more revenue than keeping it.

In sum, there is an industry that actively feeds misinformation to young men for profit. Platforms must be held accountable for this fraud rather than shifting blame to the consumers, that is, telling young men they are making the wrong choices.

Social Listening

[r/wallstreetbets:](#)

"I lost everything. Lost all I have. I never felt this broken.

Yes, I shorted the market, because we are at war. Trump comes out LYING, and saves it. Iran denied his claims, and I thought, naturally, the market would reverse back down. I will never win in this game. Technicals, fundamentals, they mean nothing, because our leaders can simply lie and change the narrative. I'm so sick of this. With all seriousness, trading has destroyed my life, my body, my soul. I'm unable to sleep anymore. I lost 100k between Webull and Robinhood, and I'm currently \$20,000 in debt. My life is literally over. I hate everything about the market, everyone and everything who guided me to trading. I could've used the 100k I lost to start a life: buy a house and get married. Now it's all gone. I'm sick and been wanting to see a doctor but I don't even have health insurance. This is America, the land of the corrupt."

-10k upvotes

Speculation is consuming society and, for too many young men, bank accounts as well. Scroll through the popular stock market or crypto forums, or those dedicated to gambling and prediction markets, and you will find a spigot of cautionary tales and heart-breaking stories of how one bad decision—or a series of them—culminated in ruin. This post is one of many that speak to a culture that makes it easy for young adults to take extreme risks and watch their financial futures crumble before their eyes.

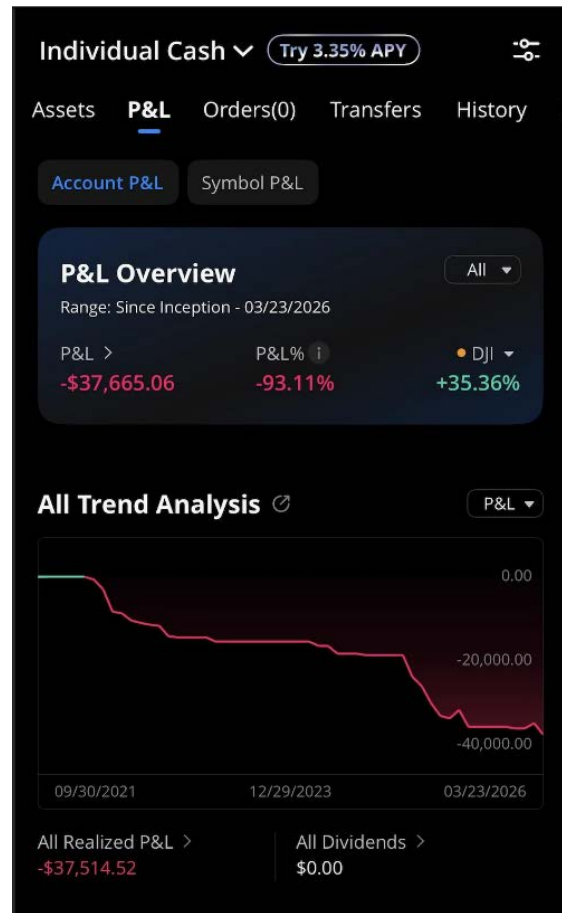


Image 3: Screenshot from Reddit post

Young men see opportunity in AI, but not all are convinced.

AI has firmly secured itself within the American lexicon. Like the Internet for millennials, or social media for Gen Z, young people coming of age today will hardly remember a world without AI. These technologies have propelled economic growth, spurred scientific breakthroughs, thrown students' career trajectories into question, and raised larger questions about humanity's future. Most young men today look at AI with excitement and a curiosity for its novel applications.

This survey found that young men and women use AI at about the same rate but see it through different lenses. **Young women tend to view these technologies with greater concern for their collective impact, while young men tend to treat AI with cautious optimism.** Most young men believe these tools have simplified learning, and most say they have not meaningfully affected their career prospects. Among those who do, they are more likely to say it has helped rather than hurt them.

Yet there are clear warning signs in some of the ways these technologies are being

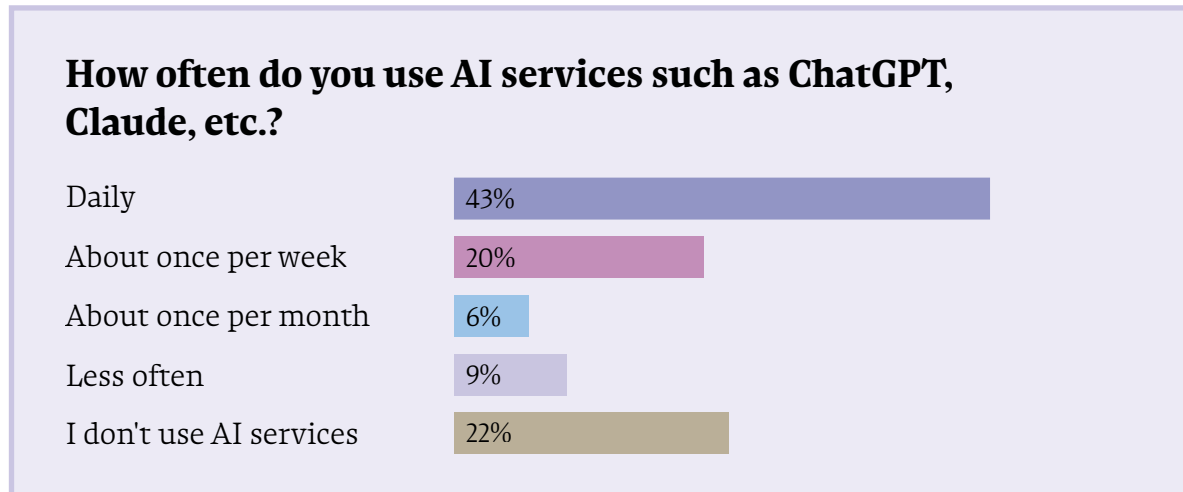
used in young men's lives. About one in three young men say they have used AI to complete significant school or work tasks with little to no input from themselves. Meanwhile, young men are seeking out intimacy in AI—whether through the fulfillment of sexual fantasies or the embrace of digital romantic companionship—as these technologies simultaneously enable new forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and deepfake pornography.

This research suggests that young men are not oblivious to the risks. Many are wary of the proliferation of AI-generated content on social media, uneasy about the staggering amounts of data collected by technology companies, and unsettled by more automated hiring processes. Further, the optimism is not distributed equally. Young men with higher education, those who are already employed, and those with greater social capital more broadly are most inclined to believe that AI has worked to their advantage, and that it will continue to do so.

AI usage is becoming the norm, for some groups more than others.

Seventy-eight percent of young men report using AI, and most users do so daily (see Figure 14). Adoption is higher among young men who are more highly educated and those with the highest family incomes. The overall usage rate is similar between young men and women, though men are more frequent consumers: 43 percent of young men report using AI daily, compared to 32 percent of young women. Other segmented results include the following:

Figure 14



The study found varied and nuanced feelings about AI:

- Fifty-five percent of college-educated young men use AI daily, compared to 38 percent of young men with a high school diploma or less.
- For daily usage, young men from cities use AI much more (54 percent) than those from rural areas (27 percent). Young men in the suburbs land roughly in between these two groups (38 percent daily usage).

Young men are mostly hopeful about AI's impact on their futures.

Only a small share of young men say that AI has negatively affected their career prospects; about two-thirds collectively believe these technologies have either had no impact (34 percent) or a positive one (32 percent), as seen in Figure 15. Three in five young men also think AI has generally made learning easier (see Figure 16), compared to 49 percent of young women.

Asked who stands to benefit most, young men are most likely to point to employees in the technology and engineering fields, followed by large corporations and politicians (see Figure 17). Just seven percent say that no one stands to benefit from AI's development. Men who are 24 to 29 years old, men with college degrees, Black men, and those who report more financial security are more likely to be optimistic about AI.

HEADLINE 4

- Fifty-one percent of young men college graduates say AI has had a positive impact on their career prospects, compared to 27 percent of noncollege young men.
- Forty-one percent of young men say people in the technology and engineering fields will benefit from AI; 32 percent say young people; and 23 percent say people in creative industries.
- When it comes to jobs, those men who believe that the system is rigged in favor of certain individuals and groups are three times more likely to agree that AI has negatively impacted their employment and career prospects, controlling for age, education, and race.
- Young men who report a sense of economic precarity are also 1.85 times more likely to agree that AI has negatively impacted their employment and career prospects.

Figure 15

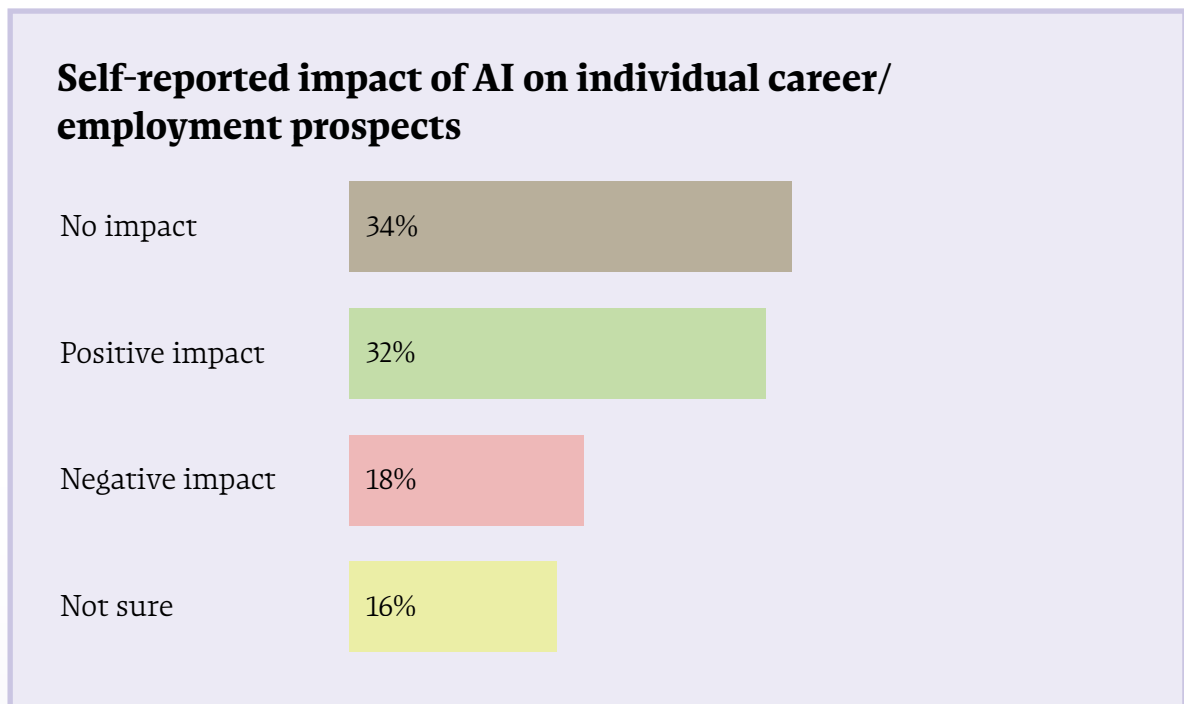


Figure 16

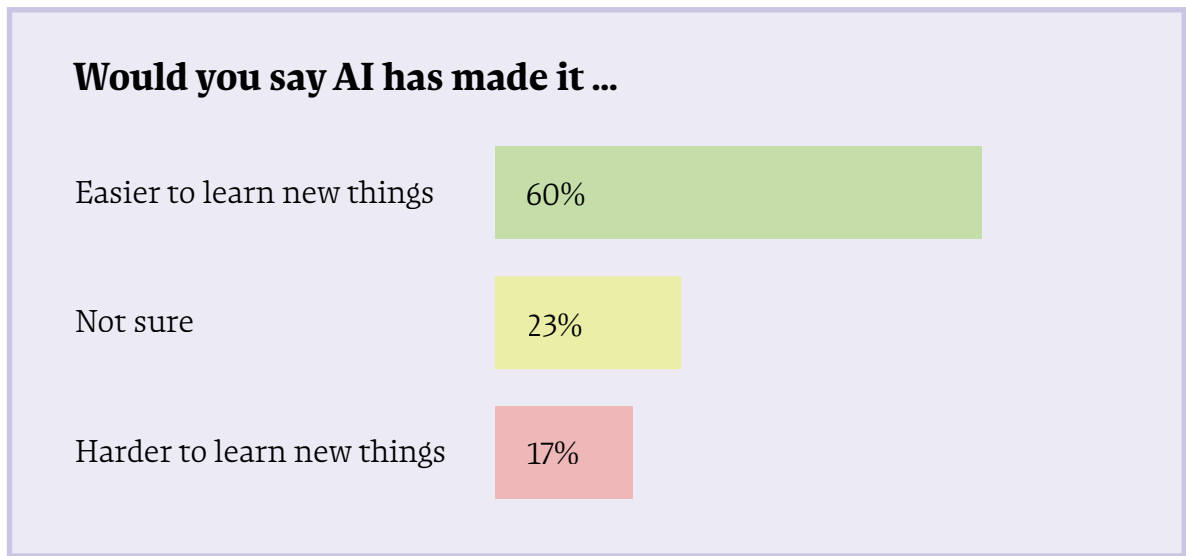
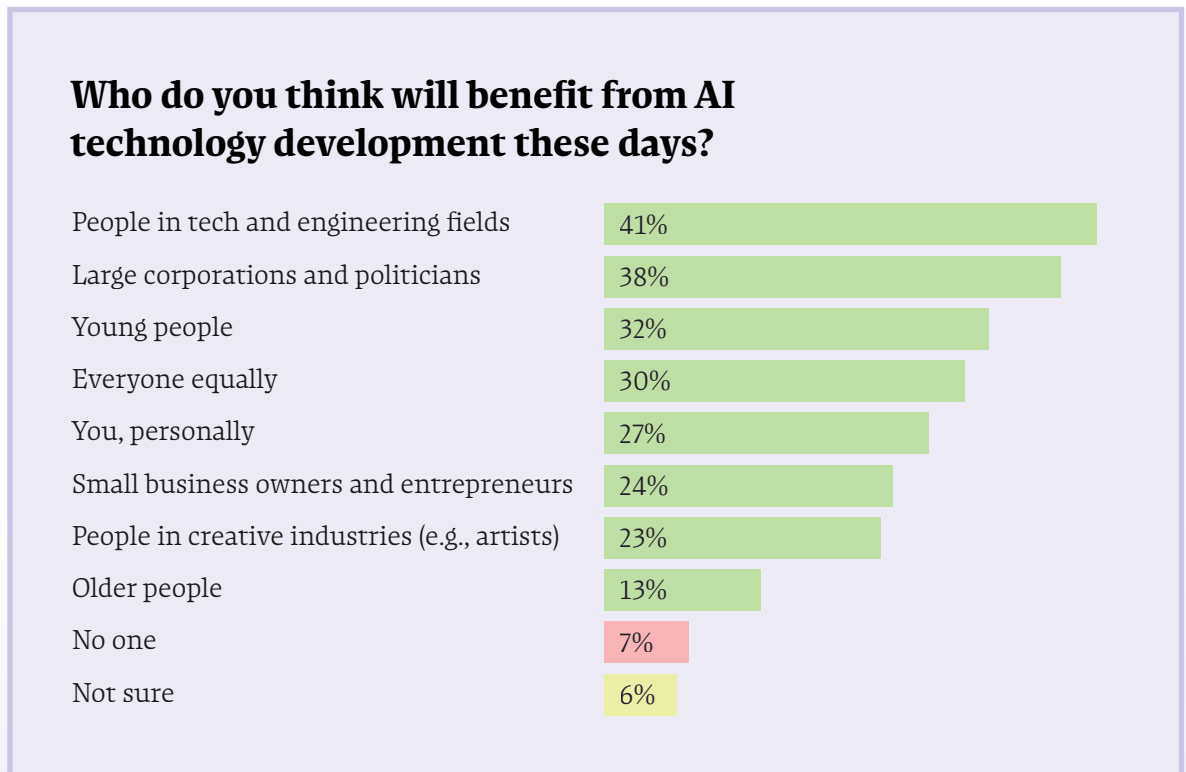


Figure 17

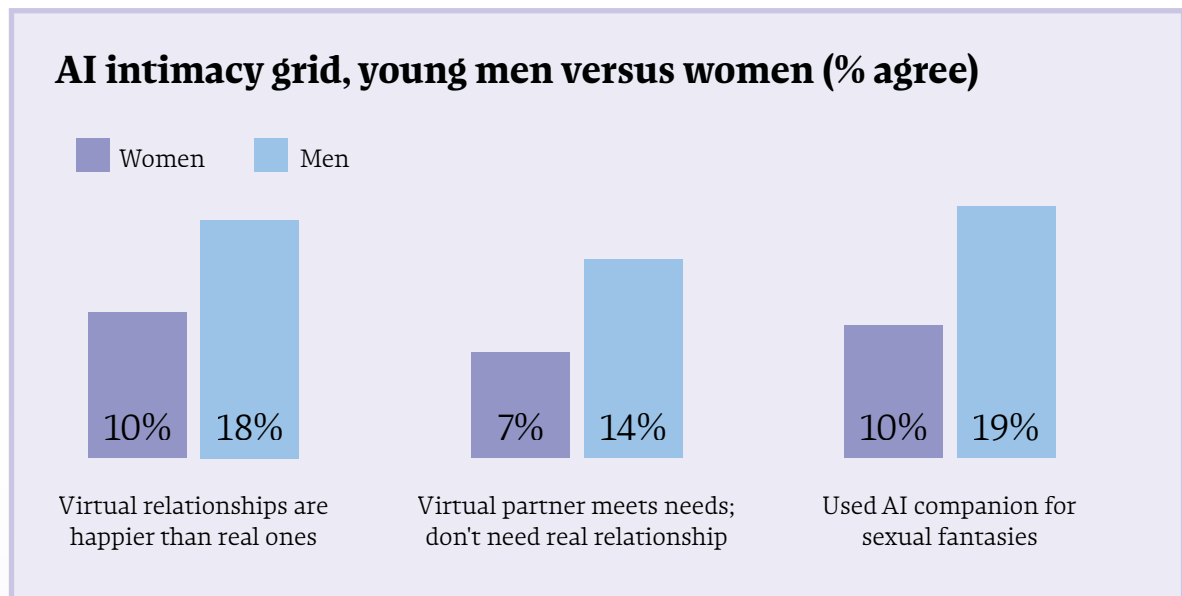


AI is creeping into young men’s dating and romantic lives and posing new threats to women and minors.

Over the past year, AI has expanded its reach into myriad markets for intimate online relationships, including emotional support, romantic companionship, and pornography. Young men have followed suit, adopting these technologies for diverse purposes outside of education and work. This uptick in usage is not limited to the youngest of young men—rates of AI relationships and other forms of AI-based intimacy are generally consistent between men born between 1996 and 2001 and those born between 2002 and 2008.

While young men and women report comparable rates of using AI for emotional support or help crafting their dating profiles, young men report higher rates of digital-based companionship and satisfaction from these services (see Figure 18).

Figure 18



As AI becomes a feature of young men’s intimate lives and digital worlds, it also risks deepening already rampant problems: technology-facilitated gender-based violence and deepfake pornography.⁸ Niche and mainstream tools alike have opened new fronts for the proliferation of nonconsensual deepfake images and videos, as evidenced by the recent Grok case.⁹

8 K. Mingeirou, Y. Osman, and R. Rafin, “The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Violence Against Women and Girls,” Stimson Center, February 26, 2026, <https://www.stimson.org/2026/the-impact-of-artificial-intelligence-on-violence-against-women-and-girls/>.

9 European Parliament, FEMM Committee, “AI, Gender-Based Violence Including Sexual Images of Women and Children: The Case of Grok,” May 5, 2026, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/gender-based-violence-the-grok-case-/product-details/20260423CHE14082>.

Survey statistics on AI, dating, and romance:

- Nineteen percent of young men have used AI for emotional support or relationship advice.
- Sixteen percent have used AI to write or improve messages to a romantic interest.
- Nineteen percent of young men have used AI to fulfill sexual fantasies, compared to 10 percent of young women.
- Men who believe that “no one can fall in love with them” are almost twice (1.84 times) as likely to use AI for romantic relationships.

For the young men concerned about AI’s individual and societal impact, the fear is palpable.

The share of young men who say AI has hampered their career prospects is smaller (18 percent) than those who believe it has helped (32 percent) or had no impact (34 percent). In tune with these findings, YMRP’s fall 2025 survey found the terms young men most associate with these technologies are “excited” and “hopeful.”

But for those troubled by the long-term consequences of AI, the fear is visceral. Concerns over privacy, less human hiring processes, career automation, environmental degradation, and the proliferation of deepfake content on social media are bubbling to the surface. Furthermore, young men are growing bitter about the integration of AI “slop” in entertainment, whether that be music, art, film, or their Instagram feeds.

“I’m about to graduate so I’m thinking, ‘Should I go into this career? Will AI take over? Will I still have a job?’”

—20-year-old Asian man from Georgia

“It’s scary how much data they’re [AI companies] collecting.”

—27-year-old Black man from Georgia

“The hardest thing about applying for new jobs right now is trying to get through AI filters, trying to work through AI interviews, AI HR systems. Everything is integrated away from having an actual human experience.”

—26-year-old Hispanic man from New York

“I just feel like there needs to be a lot more resistance to AI and how it’s being used. It’s scary to see a lot of these videos sometimes on social media. It looks so real. I don’t even know sometimes if it’s real or if it’s false. And it’s scary.”

—29-year-old Latino man from Texas

Social Listening

“A year ago, everybody in the comments would go, ‘if you’re not into AI you’re gonna get left behind.’ And that’s totally flipped now....[P]eople are like, ‘what is this AI slop?’”

—Steel Beans (aka Jeremy DeBardi) on Bad Friends.¹⁰

Young men are mostly neutral or optimistic about AI’s impact on their careers and the future of work, yet such positivity does not apply to lazily produced art and content. The supplanting of creative works by cheap, tasteless AI-generated products is often met with outrage and even disrespect.

¹⁰ B. Lee and A. Santino, “Heated Rivalry w/Rick Glassman,” *Bad Friends*, 17:04–17:13, YouTube, February 2, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1q_s5xFfJg.

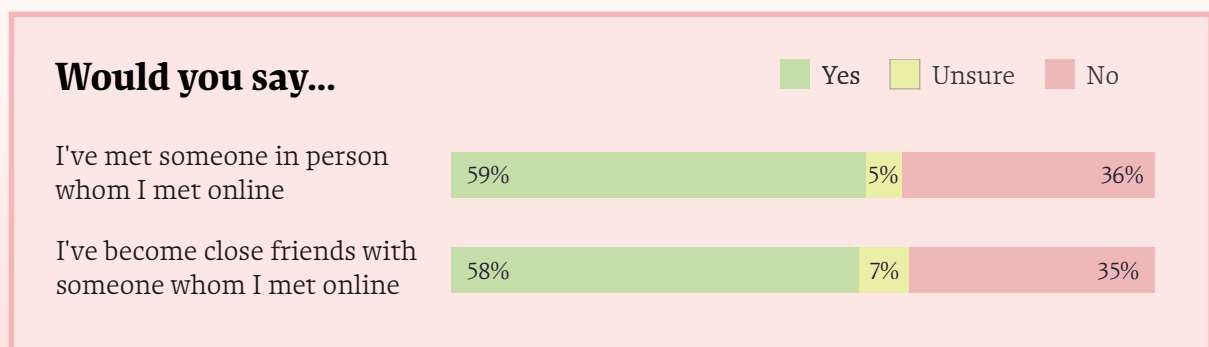
Young men are digitally immersed. But purpose is shaped more by in-person connection, which is downstream of economic opportunity.

As in-person spaces wither and the social distance between people widens, young men are seeking out alternatives to fulfill the human need for connection. As others seek to support young men, they must first recognize that the line between online and offline communities has collapsed—they are no longer two distinct realms. Young men are plugged in, and the digital spaces they inhabit function as mediums to connect with their in-person network while also sparking new friendships. What drives young men’s self-reported purpose and sense of mooring today has less to do with how “online” they are. Rather, the quantity and quality of offline friends, often derived from full-time employment or enrollment in university or training, are important determinants of purpose and

wellbeing. Equimundo/YMRP’s data show that the young men who report a lack of meaning are spending plenty of time on screens. But so are the young men who report a strong sense of meaning. The outliers today are not the young men glued to YouTube or their consoles for hours on end; they’re the ones who aren’t. Figure 19 describes how **more than half of the sample describes their online life as interwoven with their offline lives.**

Our qualitative research finds that young men’s in-real-life social connection drops precipitously when they leave high school. Whether they rebuild connection after that becomes largely a function of circumstances and opportunity. Connection is more accessible when they have the social and financial capital that comes with a college education.

Figure 19



Fulfillment comes from, for instance, having co-workers with whom to go to happy hour or to exchange memes over Slack. Finding meaning in life is about connection, and, today, young men's economic realities most influence their social connections.

Building more connected and caring communities for young American men today requires work within the systems and spaces this generation has inherited, as well as those they are now creating on their own terms. Based on survey findings and

focus group data, there is no consensus on how digital spaces should be designed, but encouragingly, most young men prefer a moderated experience where users present as themselves. These venues are fungible and ripe for opportunity, but also vulnerable to harm.

Box 2 presents a study carried out by Equimundo and Harmony Labs about men, their media diets, and ways in which that content can influence them.

The Many Masculinities: What Media Use Patterns Tell Us About American Men

To understand how men in the United States experience media, identity, and well-being, Equimundo partnered with Harmony Labs on a large mixed-methods [study of men's online lives](#)—mapping how men of all adult ages participate in media cultures, relate to different ideas of masculinity, and see themselves, their relationships, and their communities. Fielded largely in 2025, the study asked not just what men watch, but also how their media diets connect to their values and their sense of flourishing.

Harmony Labs' approach sorts men by values rather than demographics using its respondent-level data infrastructure, the Narrative Observatory. For this study, it segmented men along an x-axis of collective to individualistic values—that is, from “we” to “me”—and a y-axis of creativity and innovation to stability and tradition values—that is, from “strive and create” to “protect and preserve.” The result is five value-distinct audiences of men.

- 1 **Hold the Line** (29 percent of men) is the largest group: providers and protectors rooted in faith and family, older, more religious than average, and more likely to be Republican-identified. They believe men and women have fundamentally different strengths, and their unmet need is connection and mutuality. This group's streaming media preferences include wounded, isolated professionals pulled into someone else's crisis. It taps into their desire to protect the vulnerable in order to give them a sense of purpose. Examples include *Landman*, *Blacklist*, *Blue Bloods*, *Jynxzi Live*, and *Oompaville*.
- 2 **Locked In** (23 percent of men) is younger, more secular, single, and the most racially diverse audience: self-reliant strivers competing to build something real. They are the most likely to feel that men have it harder than women, and their biggest gap in flourishing lies in closeness. This group likes to stream media that has a character cast out or estranged who overcomes their trauma and embraces their singularity. Examples include *Bob's Burgers*, *House of the Dragon*, *Brooklyn 99*, *Kai Cenat*, *Dead Meat*, and *penguinz0*.
- 3 **In It Together** (21 percent of men) is community-oriented and empathetic, college-educated, secular, and left-leaning; rejecting the idea that men have it harder is the single strongest predictor of belonging to a community, though they can struggle with their own agency and resilience. *In It Together* tends to stream media where a character constrained by systems is able to shift power dynamics and overcome obstacles by leveraging their community. Examples include *Modern Family*, *The Bear*, *The Arena*, and *Dude Perfect*.

Box 2 continues →

- 4 **Mr. Fixit** (16 percent of men) is adaptive and problem-solving, thriving at work and home, most likely to attend church, and gravitates toward conservative and local media; their one flourishing gap is bridging across differences. This group tends to stream media where a skilled, capable loner is drawn back into action by necessity, finding purpose by protecting others. Examples include NCIS, Heartland, Cleetus McFarland, Call Me Kevin, and Trading Lab.
- 5 **Sacred Duty** (11 percent of men), the smallest group, is faith-anchored and service-driven—older, lower-income, and already flourishing across nearly every dimension measured. This group streams media of highly capable individuals in crisis who find purpose by fighting corruption or protecting the vulnerable. Examples include Everybody Hates Chris, David Pakman, and The First 48.

The study also tested how media content influences each audience's beliefs on flourishing and on narrowing and broadening emotions, via randomized control trial tests with 10,000 men. Content that includes some feature of building, competing, exploring or coaching broadens emotions, whereas content that puts users inside the 'action' is categorized as not moving emotion. Content referencing masculinity—even inside of comedy—zeros out broadening emotions and raises narrowing emotions. Thirty-two videos were tested, drawing from the full range of content that engages men—including fitness, firearms, philosophy, comedy, and explainers. The videos that worked successfully increased broadening emotions, decreased narrowing emotions, and increased agreement with flourishing beliefs (agency, resilience, bridging, connection, and mutuality).

The most effective media in this testing suggested a set of design principles for content and online interventions. The first principle is to not overtly critique masculinity, but instead to feature men being men in ways that suit them best and align with flourishing beliefs and broadening emotions. Second, solo rants and reactions can significantly increase narrowing emotions, while content featuring two or more men in any social activity that engages curiosity and skill is generally broadening. Finally, the research found that content that was lecturing or positioned the viewer as a voyeur generally suppressed connection, whereas content that creates the feeling of the viewer being inside the action—whether through a dynamic situation, locations, camera work, or savvy editing—lifts broadening emotions.

“I would definitely say the bond that I have with my online friends are a lot stronger than the ones that I have with my friends in person ... A lot of my friends are split up ... hopping on the game with my friends is definitely top three things I’ve experienced in all of my life.”

—22-year-old Black man from Georgia

Young men move seamlessly between online and offline worlds.

Most young men find connection from a *mixture* of online and offline interactions: 58 percent say they have become close friends with someone they originally met online, and about the same share have connected in person with someone they met online. Gaming is the predominant digital arena where young men spend hours interacting and collaborating with others; according to this survey, 75 percent of young men spend at least an hour daily playing games on their phone or a console, and about one in four plays daily for four hours or more.

Interestingly, young men who adhere to the Man Box are two times more likely to agree that their closest friends are those they met online, accounting for differences in education and marital status. This could owe to the self-sorting ideological mechanisms at play online, or a paucity of deep, emotionally fulfilling in-person connections. Men who experience economic precarity are two times more likely to have closer friends online than offline and are more likely to believe in rigid ideas about manhood. College-educated men are less likely to agree that their closest friends are people they met online compared to those with no college degree.

“I don’t know why, but it feels like there can be deeper bonds [online]... in the online spaces you already have to trust people, and so it’s a faster, sort of like, ‘Hey, we’ve got something in common.’”

—28-year-old White man from Kentucky

Most young men report a high sense of meaning in their lives. What separates those who do from those who don't is largely about class, opportunity, and location.

Contrary to popular narrative, most young men feel a firm sense of purpose in life. On a five-point scale ranging from “without meaning or purpose” (1) to “full of meaning and purpose” (5), roughly two in three young men land on the upper end (a 4 or 5), while just 13 percent fall on the lower end (1 or 2). Just four percent of young men say their life is entirely lacking meaning or purpose.

The divisions in these results are not revealed when comparing young men with online friendships and those with offline ones—many have both. For example, statistically equal shares of young men who agree they “generally feel accepted by others” play multiple hours of video games per day as young men who generally “feel like an outsider.”

What is revealing is economic circumstance and geography, as well as the educational attainment that often shapes the two preceding factors. Young men with a strong sense of purpose have more close friends, on average, than those who report low purpose (4.3 versus 2.6), affirming a wide body of research that the presence of a close social circle is crucial for flourishing. But this gap alone is not the full story. Forty-two percent of young men who report low meaning have a family income of under \$30,000 per year, compared with 27 percent of those with high meaning. There is a much higher rate of unemployment among young men with a low sense of purpose than their peers with a high sense of purpose (44 percent versus 18 percent), and the former group is less likely to possess a college degree.

Men who report a higher sense of purpose also hang out at local venues more frequently, in part because their neighborhoods have more of them. They visit the gym at more than twice the weekly rate as men who score low on this scale. The same trend holds for parks and green spaces (38 percent versus 22 percent) and restaurants and nightlife (28 percent versus 11 percent). These results and their likely relationship invite further investigation.

The gap in meaning scores is tightly linked to confidence in the future. Among young men who report a high sense of purpose, 66 percent believe the American Dream is personally attainable, compared to 28 percent who report a low sense of purpose. About half (47 percent) of young men in the high-purpose group believe homeownership is within reach, compared to 21 percent of young men in the low-purpose group. The former is also significantly more likely to believe they are capable of finding love. Causation is not clear here, but the story is intuitive: hope and purpose today beget hope and purpose tomorrow.

Young men disagree on what they value in online spaces, but for many, it's where they feel most free to be themselves.

Young men lack consensus on how they want online spaces designed (see Figures 20, 21, 22, and 23). Most prefer environments where individuals use their real identity (63 percent) over anonymous ones (37 percent), and most favor a moderated experience (68 percent) over an “anything goes” environment (32 percent). Yet they are evenly split on the purpose of these spaces: whether they should connect them to the in-person communities they have already built or offer an escape from them.

Figure 20

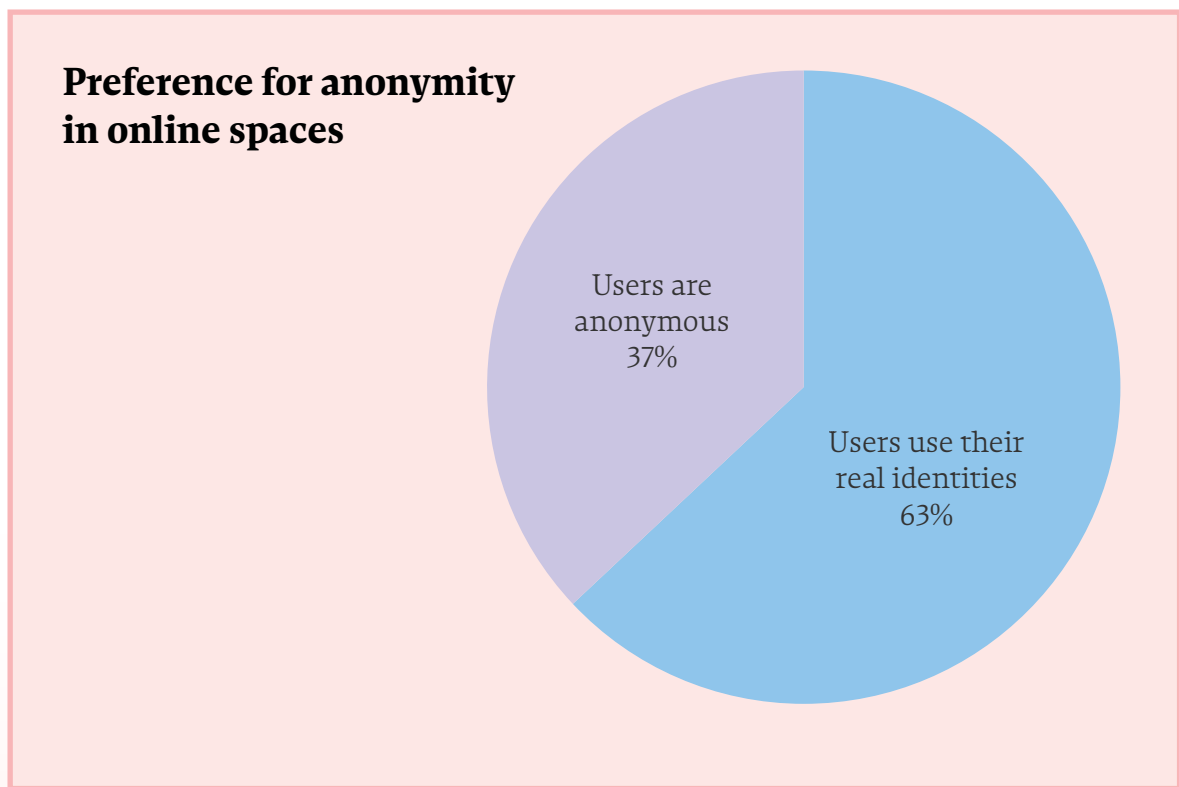


Figure 21

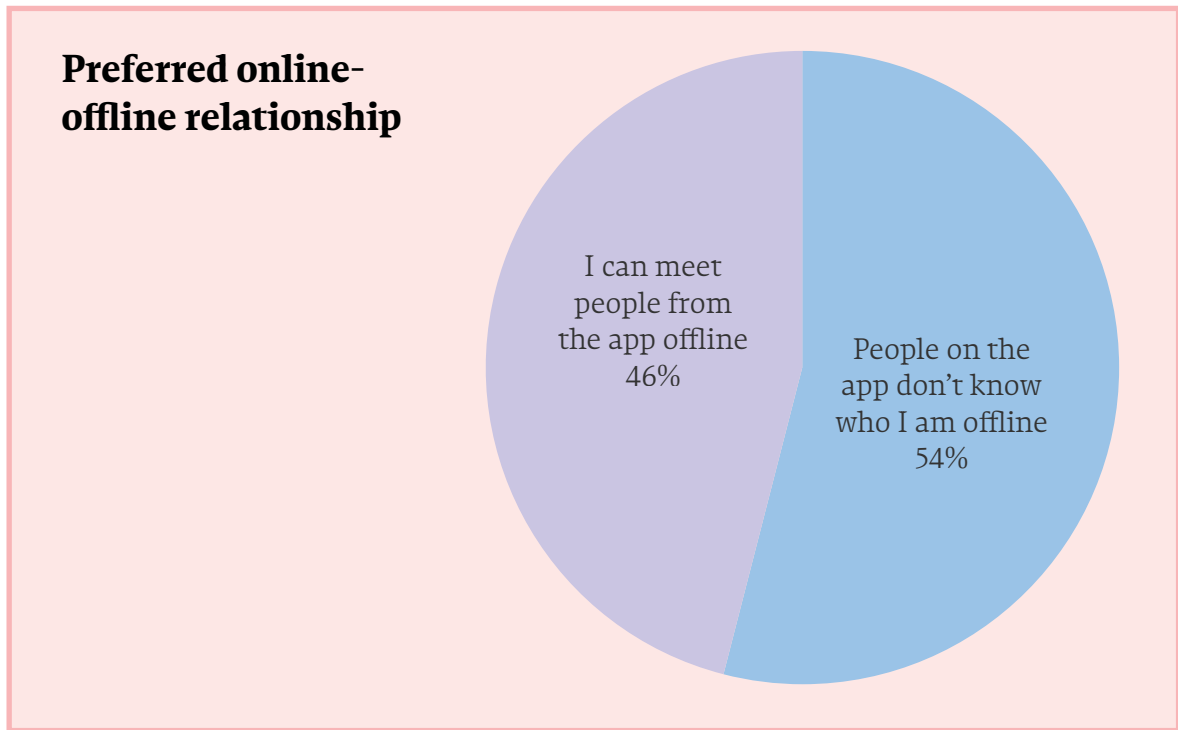


Figure 22

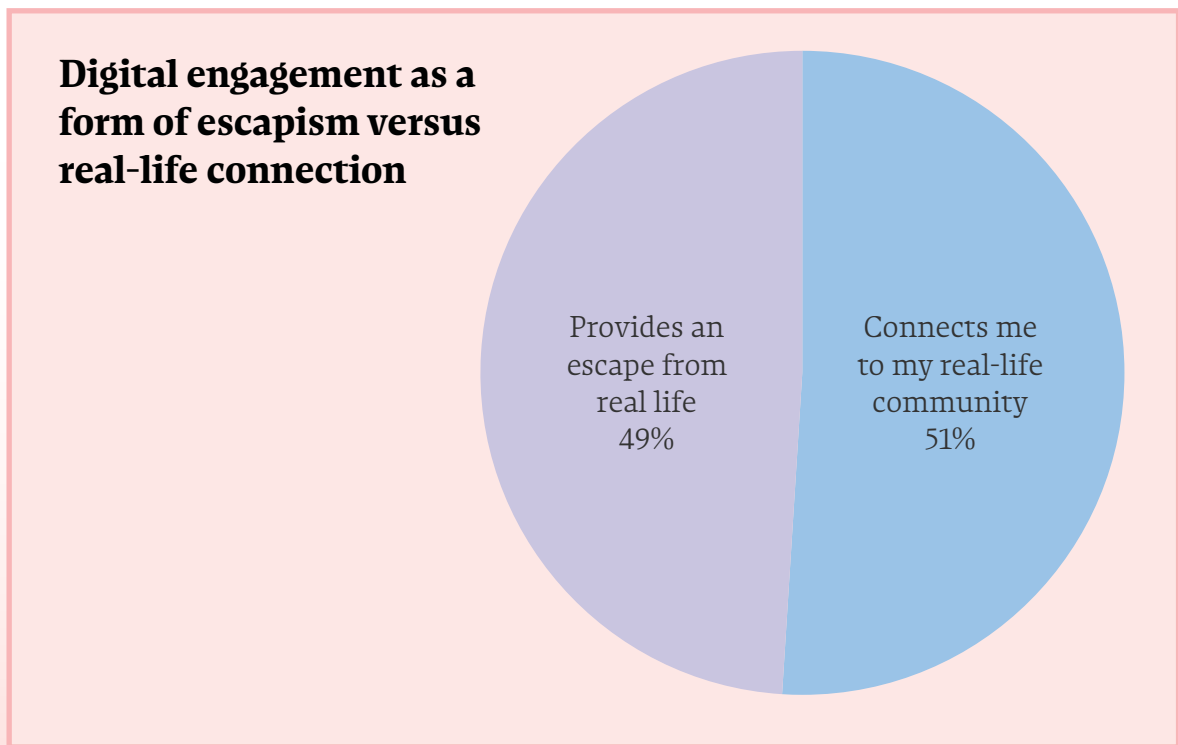
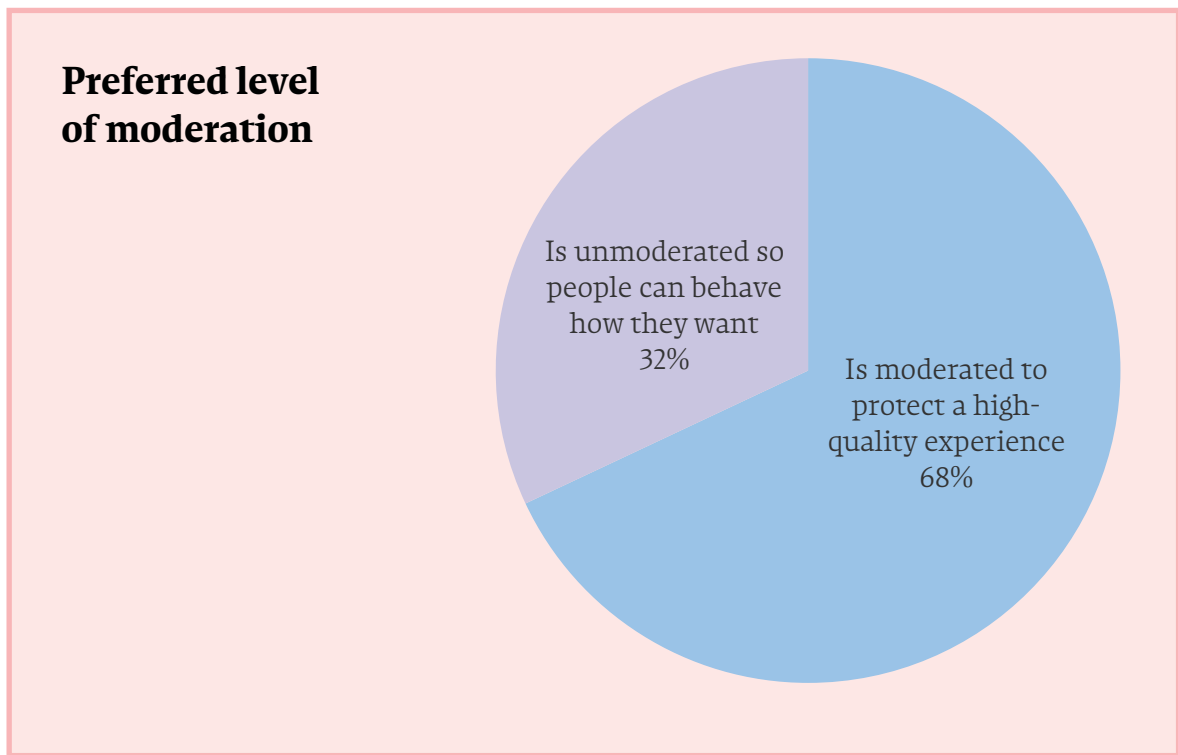


Figure 23



Despite these differences, it's clear that young men feel less constrained expressing their thoughts online than offline, whether that means opining on political news or divulging more private details of their lives. This likely owes to a mix of anonymity and the perception of reduced social consequences. Fifty-four percent of young men say they are more comfortable sharing their personal life online when others do not know their name or identity, compared to 37 percent who disagree. There is a similar gap around social or political opinions, where **young men are more willing to open up online than offline. In a moment of intense polarization, diminishing trust, and the continued perception among men that they have a high risk of “cancellation,” online spaces are where many feel safest voicing themselves.**

Research from Surgo Health¹¹ speaks to the innovative ways young men seek support online. Among men aged 18–24, 76 percent have used social media to learn about mental health or connect with others, and 54 percent have used mental health apps—yet just 43 percent found either approach to be useful. Look at in-person conversations with friends or peers, however, and a much higher share (73 percent) found these to be fruitful.

Not everyone sees the same benefit: 64 percent of Black men aged 18–24 who used mental health apps found them helpful, noticeably above Hispanic men (51 percent) and White men (35 percent).

11 Surgo Health (2026). Youth Mental Health Tracker. <https://www.trackyouthmentalhealth.com/>

Social Listening

*“That’s why authenticity, that’s why like streamers are the biggest stars in the world right now. Because they share the struggles, they share the anxiety, they share the depression, they share the substance, they share all that ... people love the idea that they’re like, oh sh**, he’s just like me.”*

—Mike Majlak on *IMPAULSIVE*.¹²

What young men most covet from their friendships and communities is connecting with people who are true to themselves and genuine with others, who build each other up rather than tear each other down. While gamesmanship and attention-seeking at others’ expense can metastasize in young men’s online and offline spaces, these posts speak to the hunger for basic goodness and empathy that young men both want and are capable of embracing, even if it goes against traditional norms of “masculinity” itself. This again suggests that belief in Man Box norms is often tenuous, often fed by voices online rather than speaking to what young men really want.



Image 4: Screenshot from YouTube podcast episode

12 L. Paul and M. Majlak, “Lil Yachty on Losing XXXTentacion & Juice WRLD, TRASHES Logan’s Unreleased Song, PISSED About Cena,” *IMPAULSIVE*, 45:38–46:04, YouTube, January 20, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G14ocG42ING>.

Young men believe society unfairly burdens men and more have bought into “Man Box” ideals.

Nearly a decade ago, Equimundo built on Paul Kivel and Tony Porter’s work to quantify the concept of the “Man Box.” Equimundo developed an attitude scale with seven pillars of traditional manhood values: self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, adhering to rigid gender roles, heterosexuality, sexual prowess, and the use of aggression to solve conflicts. That research found that men who adhere to Man Box values are more likely to use violence against women, bully, consider suicide, binge drink, and experience depressive symptoms. Since the first Equimundo Man Box surveys in 2017, it has replicated the surveys with young men in 2023, 2025, and 2026. The findings affirm that young men are increasingly supporting Man Box beliefs, that is, traditional and restrictive norms about what it means to be a man.

This finding does mask young men’s complicated relationship with ideas about manhood. For the 2026 survey, Equimundo

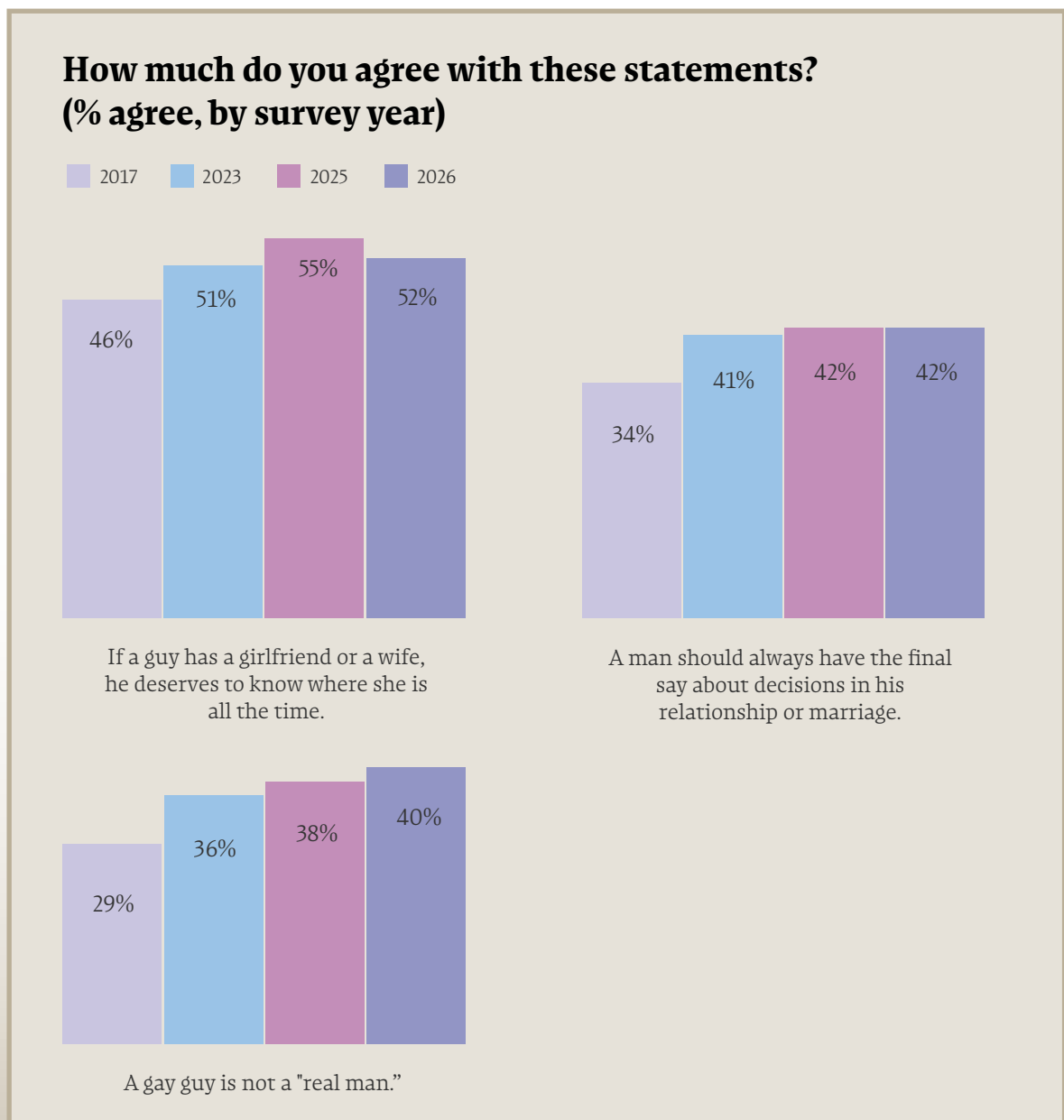
asked young men about their definitions of manhood and, separately, their definitions of success. **When asked about success, young men are more likely to think about financial security, the pursuit of wealth, homeownership, and other markers of material provision. But when asked about what *manhood* means to them, fatherhood becomes the North Star, and economic concerns become less salient.**

As with any demographic, young men must not be treated as a monolith, particularly when it comes to the Man Box. Young men who feel a sense of status threat pertaining to their manhood are more likely to tie their purpose to fatherhood, career success, wealth accumulation, and fame compared to those who do not share this sense of threat.

Man Box attitudes have risen over time.

Young men in the United States, on average but not universally, continue to adopt rigid, dominance-based views about manhood. Based on Equimundo’s longitudinal polling, these attitudes have generally expanded over the past decade: belief that a man should have final say in his relationships or marriage has risen from 34 percent to 42 percent between 2017 and 2026, and agreement that a “gay man is not a real man” has jumped from 29 percent in 2017 to 40 percent today (see Figure 24). Black young men are 1.5 times more likely to adhere to Man Box attitudes and to perceive men as marginalized in society today. This is also true for employed young men.

Figure 24



“My next-door neighbor, we were best friends our whole lives, but then he went through a really rough breakup, COVID, lost his job. He’s been struggling for the past five years ... I tried my best to get him out of these echo chambers, but now he blames every single problem he has on just women, minority groups. He’s a minority himself, but he blames it on specific ethnic groups, on women in general.”

—26-year-old Hispanic man from New York

“In the modern environment, everything’s your fault ... there’s an expectation that I respond in certain ways because I’m male ... when it comes to toxic masculinity, if you want to talk [about] those specific influencers, fine ... but that’s not how most guys live out their lives.”

—28-year-old White man from Kentucky

Young men associate success with material attainment, but masculinity with fatherhood.

Succeeding in life and satisfying the perceived markers of manhood are not synonymous for young men (see Figure 25). When asked to select up to three terms that “best describe what success looks like to you,” young men turn to financial achievement: 58 percent selected financial stability, followed by “emotional stability” (32 percent) and “living a healthy lifestyle” (31 percent). Just 15 percent identified fatherhood as a defining trait.

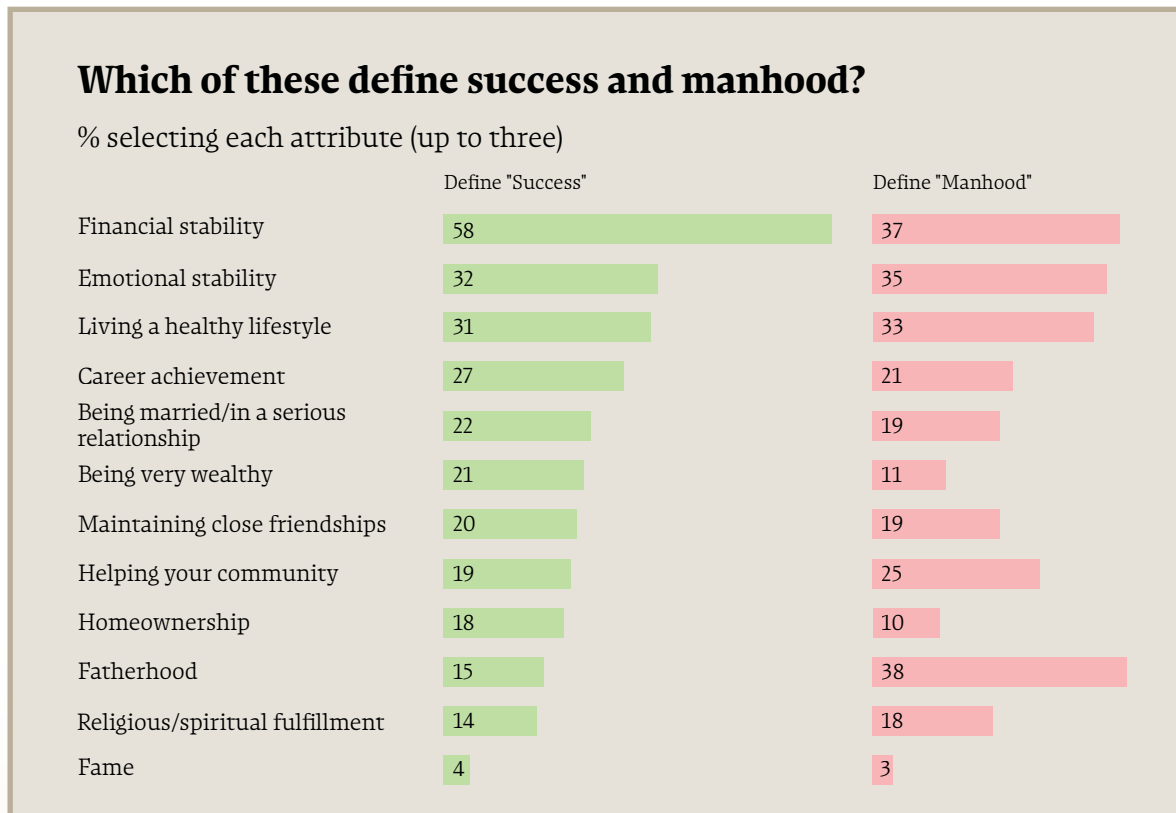
When asked what *manhood* means, however, fatherhood rises to the top of the pile, moving from 15 percent in the “success” category to 38 percent in the “manhood” category. Financial stability, meanwhile, drops from 58 percent to 37 percent.

Those who agree that men “have it harder than women when it comes to finding new opportunities” hold a drastically different outlook toward success and masculinity than those who do not share this perception. Fatherhood is more foundational to this aggrieved cohort’s conception of both: 49 percent identify fatherhood as one of the most important traits of manhood, compared to 31 percent of those who do not see men as disadvantaged. Similarly, young men look at wealth and fame from dramatically different perspectives: 36 percent of young men who agree men are disadvantaged cite “being very wealthy” as important to success, versus 12 percent of young men who disagree that men have it harder.

“Being a father, I’d say that’s my biggest goal or biggest role that I see myself having in 10 years’ time.”

—29-year-old White man from Minnesota

Figure 25



Asked what matters most in close friendships, young men place authenticity at the top of the list: 40 percent say this is one of the three most important traits.

Kindness (35 percent) and being there during hard times (34 percent) aren’t far behind. Conversely, just 16 percent say that they particularly value “successful or ambitious” friends, and the same share prioritizes friends who “have similar life goals as me.”

What young men look for in their closest peers is not so different from what they look for in their leaders, mentors, and even themselves—people who are genuine and show up when it counts. As Box 3 shows, young men are craving trust, connection, and physical spaces—not macho influencers.

Social Connection in Physical Spaces Among Non-College-Going Young Men: A Forthcoming Qualitative Study

As noted earlier, this research finds that young men's social connection drops significantly when they leave high school and becomes particularly tenuous for those who do not enroll in college or other training programs. To probe social connection among non-college-going young men, Equimundo partnered with three researchers on two waves (November 2025 and April 2026) of qualitative interviews with 50 men across four cities: Flint, Michigan; Yakima and Ellensburg, Washington; Jackson, Mississippi; and Shreveport, Louisiana. Participants were roughly 18 to 30 years old. Six patterns recurred across all four geographies, despite different economies, racial compositions, and histories.

- **Becoming a man happens too early.** Provider identity arrived in childhood or adolescence, not adulthood. Responsibility landed before support did, and asking for help came to feel expensive. Keelan, in Flint, reported: "I have nobody I can fall back on."
- **Trust is dangerous.** Trust was not absent; it is slow to come—rationed after specific betrayals rather than withheld on principle. Joshua said, "A lot of people take kindness for weakness."
- **Closeness is costly.** These men were not avoiding people; they were protecting hard-won stability. "Others are a liability to me right now" is a risk calculation, not misanthropy.
- **Connection is desired, but safe venues to make them are scarce.** Music, basketball, prayer, gaming, the junkyard, the gym—the outlets were physical and indirect rather than verbal and open. Angel: "I talk it out with the weights."
- **Increasing connection must not be built by shaming men.** Build for return, not graduation: allow for easy re-entry, no shame, a standing role held open.
- **One committed adult connection makes a significant difference.** This was the single strongest signal in the data. Men who had mentors had a different trajectory. And what made mentorship work was sacrifice, similarity, and consistency. As Coach Charles (a mentor) said: "I have to extend grace because I probably did something worse than you."

Box 3 continues →

In April 2026, the research team carried out follow-up interviews with five of the original respondents—**Willie** (Shreveport), **Keelan** (Flint), **Ray** (Yakima), **Ioha** (Ellensburg), and **Charles** (Flint). Over the course of the six months between interviews, these examples revealed that social connection and purpose for these most vulnerable young men often happen in informal social spaces.

- **Willie** was the most isolated man we met in November, spending most of his days in his room. By April he was playing drums at church every Sunday, finding something that he deemed to matter—a role people counted on, and an example he was consciously setting for his son.
- **Keelan** changed positively. In November, he was living in a condemned building. By April he was enrolled in college and living in a dorm—with housing, structure, and intense focus arriving at once.
- **Ray** left rehab, became homeless, got a few jobs, and then lost them all. What brought him back was not a program but a household: his best friend’s parents took him in and gave him a place to be accountable. In another visit with him in early July, he had broken up with his girlfriend and used a government program to lease a home with his friend.
- **Ioha** acted in a healthy way and paid for it. Having left his gang, he then lost his job and had to move into a trailer at his father’s house—which was stable but isolating.
- **Charles’s** mother was shot in the months between the two conversations, and his family pulled hard toward retaliation, which he refused. In the same stretch, he leaned into the Hive, a holistic and healing space, and his music and photography.

Overall, this research indicates that young men need three things, most powerful when concurrent:

- People (friendships with room to develop, mentors who model and materially help them, and teams and pairs that make commitment easier).
- Places (safe and trusted, walkable or bus-accessible, and access to nature with a view of something vast).
- Progress (fun and competitive, income-generating, purposeful, productive, and predictable).

Source: Rachel Lehrer, Ross Morales Rocketto, and JD Myers. 2025–2026. “Somebody: the Retreat from Friendship and Community and How Men are Solving their Isolation.” Unpublished raw data and summary in partnership with Equimundo. These findings are further analyzed and developed in the forthcoming book by Michael Reichert and Gary Barker, “No One Really Knows Me: Helping Young Men Find Purpose, Connection and Love,” forthcoming, University of Chicago Press, 2027.

Social Listening

“Masculinity is demonized here for some strange reason over the last couple of decades.”

—Joe Rogan on *The Joe Rogan Experience*.¹³

Masculinity, feminism, manhood, and similar terms are rarely discussed explicitly among the voices and within the online spaces young men frequent most. But when they do surface, as in this exchange on *The Joe Rogan Experience*, young men often hear skepticism about modern conceptions of manhood and feminism. Such conversations rarely take the form of concrete prescriptions for how men should embody masculinity; rather, ideas about manhood are often folded within conversations about success, relationships, or an ideal society. Here, the pillars of the Man Box flourish, scarcely challenged by the one holding the microphone or the person sitting across from him.



Image 5: Screenshot from YouTube podcast episode

13 J. Rogan, “Joe Rogan Experience #2456 - Michael Jai White,” *The Joe Rogan Experience*, 2:01:03–2:01:08, YouTube, February 18, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbh7ymCkjuM>.

Young men's commitment to democracy is unstable—and largely shaped by online voices that are not overtly political.

Whatever the commentary suggests, young men still believe voting matters. Most say elections are important, and that the country would be worse off without them. But this support is not ironclad. Young men today doubt U.S. institutions are working for them and aren't convinced they're designed to. It is not surprising, then, that commitment to democracy is less durable when presented with the alternative of a strongman who will go it alone, promising to "tear it all down." For the young men most aligned with rigid views of manhood and hostility toward feminism—those in the Man Box—commitment to democracy is particularly weak.

The most extreme and partisan figures in digital discourse are unlikely to be those from whom most young men are forming their political views. **The online voices that young men trust are more likely to be gaming streamers than political pundits or voices who define themselves in partisan terms.**

Young men have not discarded democracy, but they are losing faith in what it can provide. The more broken things look—and the more threatened young men feel in society today—the more tempting radical solutions become.

"Growing up when I was younger, I used to be involved because I felt like my voice mattered. I don't really feel like we have proper representation in what American people desire and what we need."

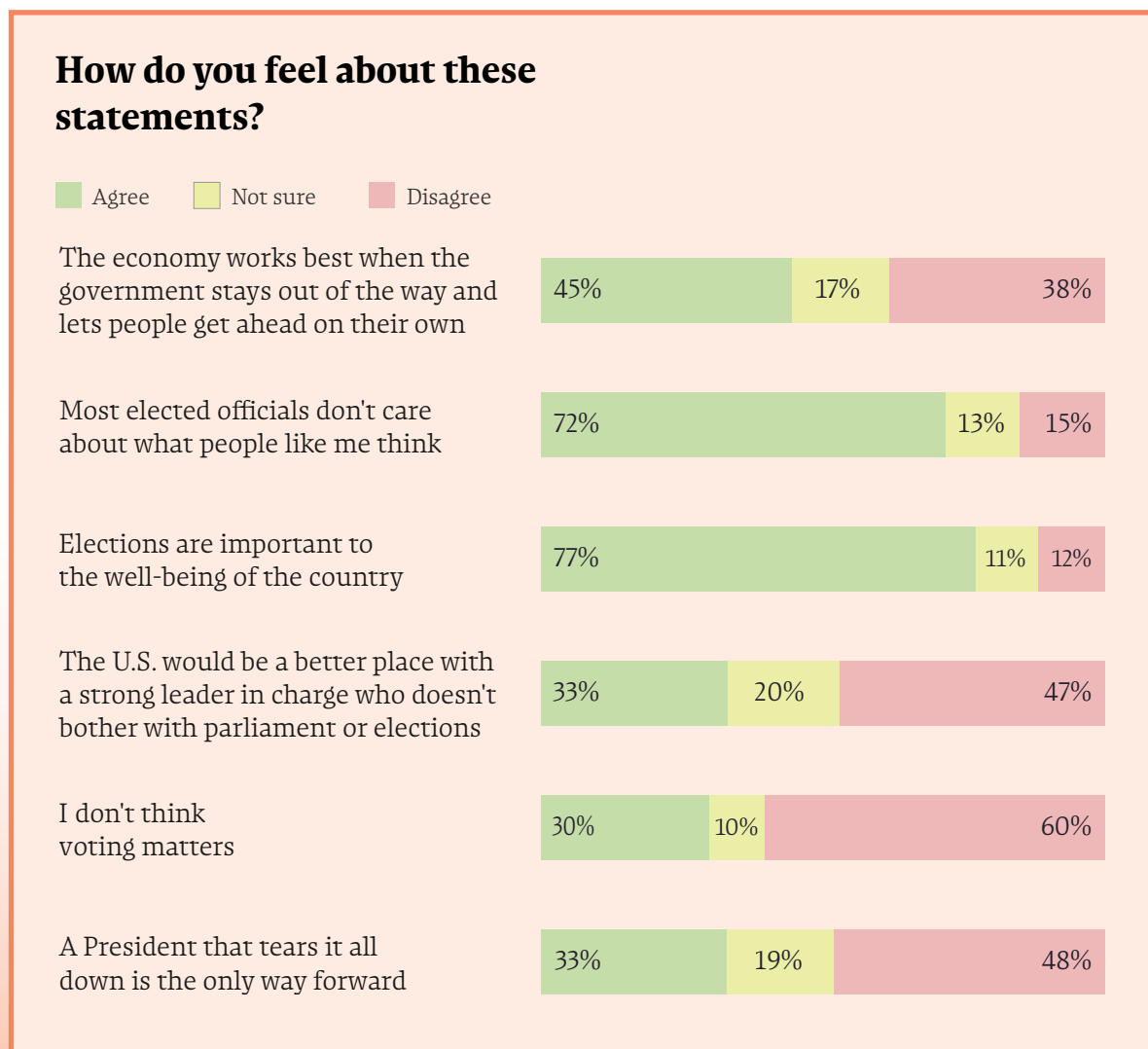
—27-year-old Black man from Georgia

Young men support voting but are susceptible to strongman framing.

Seventy-seven percent of young men say elections are important to the wellbeing of the United States. Belief that voting matters outweighs opposition by a two-to-one margin (see Figure 26). But this democratic credence shrinks when young men are offered the idea of a strongman who will disrupt the system. And as YMRP has consistently found in its polling, “democracy” and related terms simply are not priorities for young men, ranking well below economic concerns.

Less overtly political influencers tend to outperform explicitly partisan figures in trust and influence. Among all popular figures surveyed, the Pope was the most respected.

Figure 26



Contrary to the steady drumbeat of headlines about the most extreme figures dominating young men’s media diets, the individuals young men most trust are rarely overtly political—and the ones they’re most skeptical of tend to be the most political. Asked to judge 16 prominent individuals, Pope Leo rose to the top: among those familiar with him, 39 percent said they “liked and trusted him,” the highest overall. Druski and MrBeast, two of the most famous streamers, were close behind. At the bottom of the list sat Clavicular, Nick Fuentes, and Tucker Carlson (see Figures 27 and 28). Young men are susceptible to grievance-based messaging, but most seem to prefer that politics not be delivered overtly or in over-the-top fashion.

Figure 27

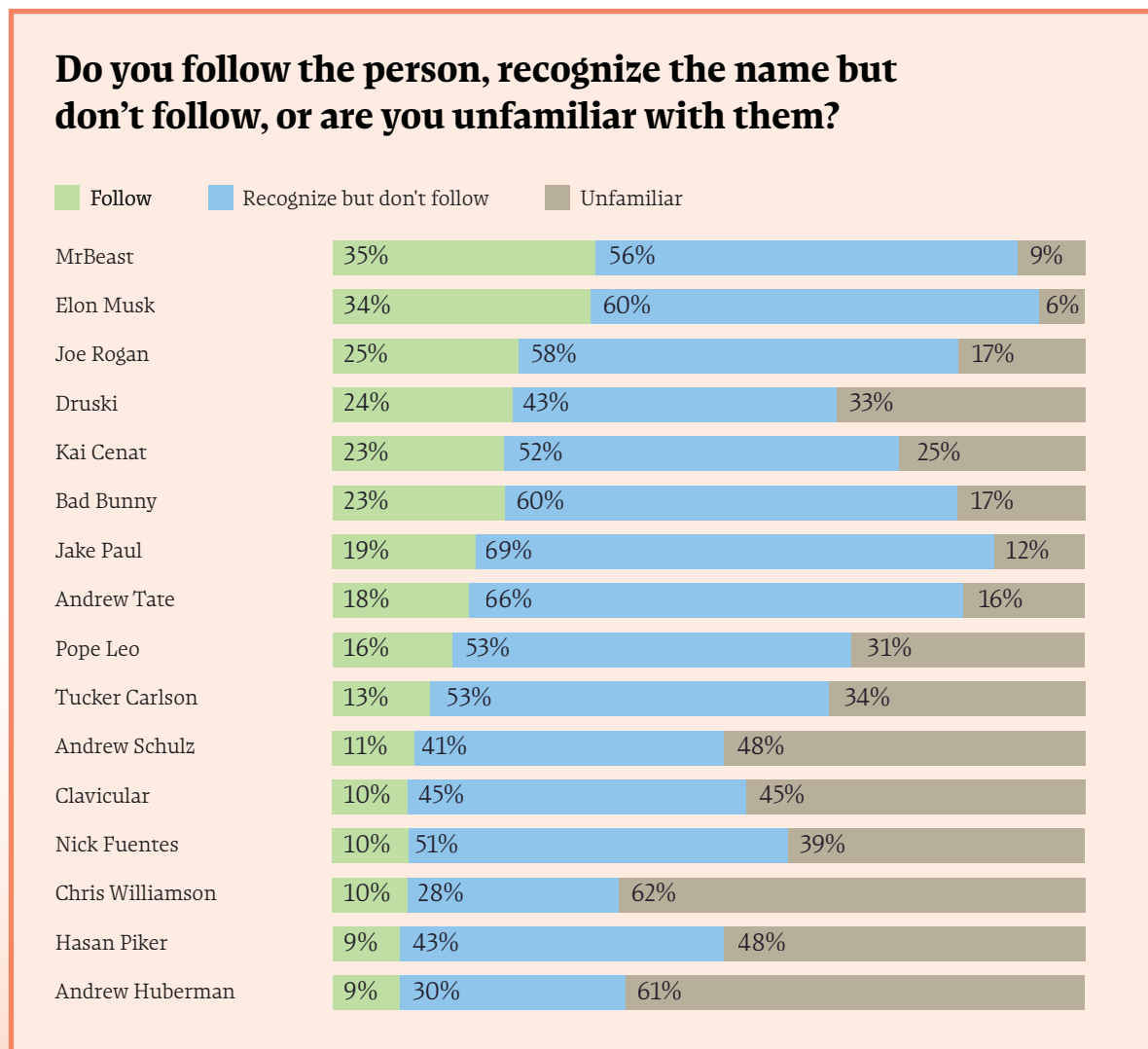
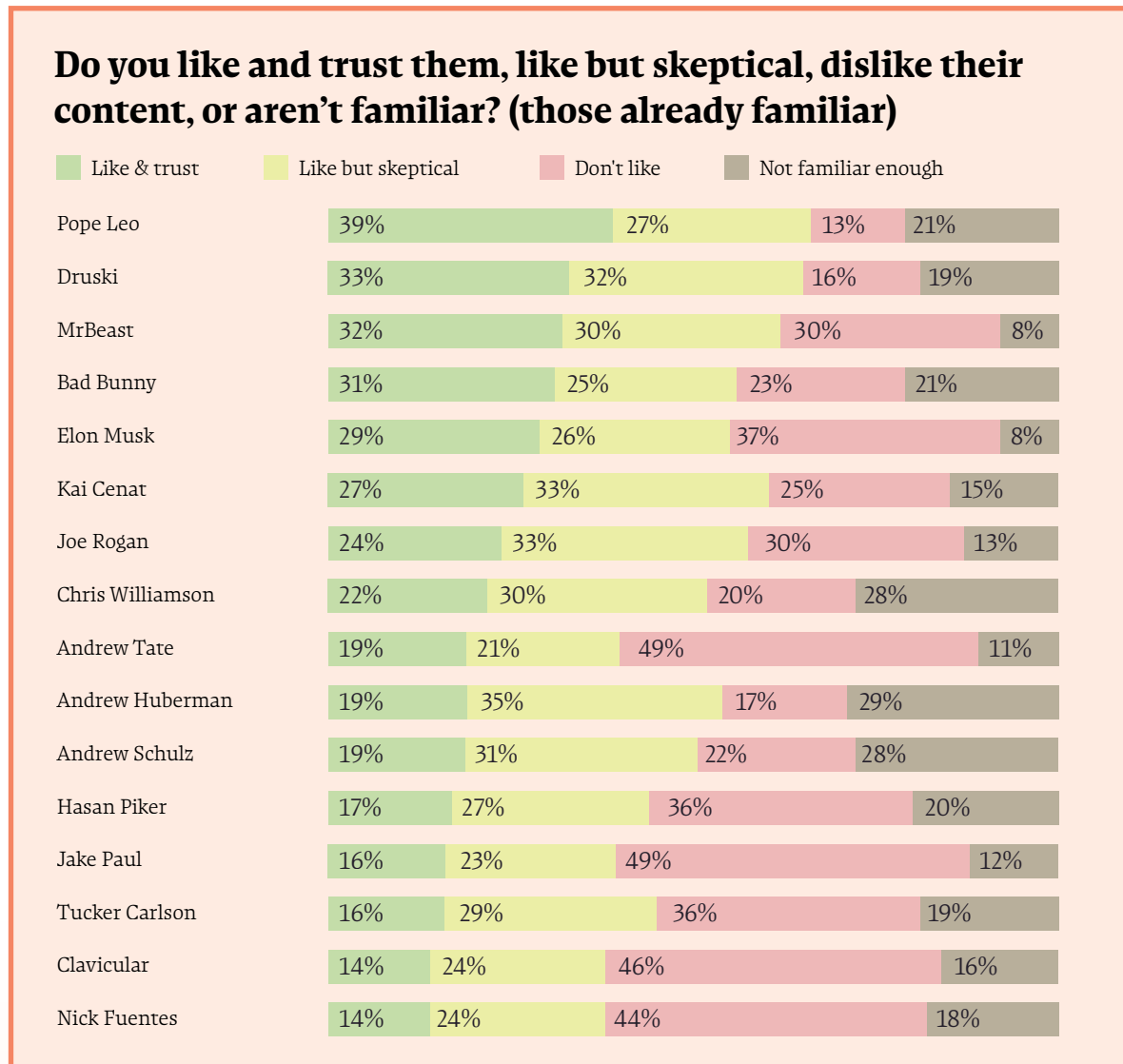


Figure 28



Young men who hold the most restrictive views of manhood are more likely to support authoritarian leaders.

In line with Equimundo’s recent State of American Men reports, young men who hold rigid beliefs about masculinity and gender roles, and who feel a sense of threatened manhood, are particularly responsive to authoritarian attitudes. Among young men who believe feminism disadvantages men (49 percent overall), a majority agree that the United States would be better off with a president who “tears it all down.” Similarly, 51 percent of young men who believe men have it “much harder when it comes to new opportunities” agree the country would be better off with a strong leader who disregards elections. This relationship likely moves in two directions: men who feel threatened and precarious gravitate toward Man Box norms, while strongman political figures and their online supporters openly endorse and reinforce these norms to attract that segment of the population.

Manufactured Inadequacy: How Looksmaxxing Is Engineering Body Dysmorphia—and Reaching Billions

A research note from Reset Tech and Equipundo, released as part of The Grift Economy: How Men Are Being Sold Fake Belonging and Fake Wealth Online

Looksmaxxing is promoted as self-improvement. In practice, its promoters advocate a graduated set of physical interventions that escalate from benign to dangerous, organized around the premise that a man's face and body are fundamentally inadequate and must be optimized for social acceptance and sexual viability. What makes this particularly revealing is who is setting the standards. The body ideals promoted in looksmaxxing communities are not derived from what women say they find attractive. They are set by men, for other men.

The first systematic cross-platform quantification of looksmaxxing reach shows that body-image pressure is not incidental to what young men see online. It is being engineered for and sold to them.

Reset Tech tracked posts explicitly using looksmaxxing-related keywords to track trends and the reach across TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Combined, 216 influencers are responsible for 14.6 billion views of looksmaxxing material (12.8 billion views on TikTok, 1.5 billion on Instagram, and 300 million on Facebook).

The platform migration pattern is clear: visible on TikTok beginning in July 2024, it did not surface on Instagram/Facebook until December 2025—an 18-month lag consistent with harmful trends migrating to other platforms once the commercial opportunity is proven out.

The real-world harm is documented: bone smashing-related emergency room visits for facial fractures; at least one influencer hospitalized on livestream; boys as young as 13 posting to PSL rating forums where scores below 3 are labeled “subhuman” and sometimes paired with suicide suggestions; adolescents going silent or consuming liquid only at school to hold a “mewing” position purported to reshape jawlines with no dental association support for its efficacy. The PSL rating scale historically originated from the incel communities PUAHate, SlutHate and Lookism. Concurrently, there is a rise in male cosmetic surgery: the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reports that cosmetic surgical procedures on men worldwide rose about 28 percent between 2018 and 2024, to more than 2.8 million procedures a year.

Despite 14.6 billion documented views and real physical harm, no major platform has a looksmaxxing-specific policy—while comparably harmful pro-eating-disorder content at least has policies (albeit weakly enforced) on platform books.

“A big issue is just radicalization online ... a lot of people, young men my age, have fallen into alt-right pipelines from online groups, they seek them out because they’re lonely ... They offer themselves as a support mechanism, but they end up just consuming the person ... it’s pretty concerning how many people, men my age, are being affected by it.”

—21-year-old White man from Washington

Social Listening

“I don’t even know how many politicians I’ve had sit across from me... And man, I can’t think of a single one of ‘em that got in there and did what they said they were going to do.”

—Shawn Ryan on The Shawn Ryan Show.¹⁴

“If you don’t hate the government, I think you’re not paying attention.”

— Joe Rogan on The Joe Rogan Experience.¹⁵

In the top podcasts and online spaces where young men spend time, politicians and the political system are rarely looked at fondly. The audience already tends to believe the status quo is broken, and the hosts and creators they are tuned into often deepen this mistrust. This skepticism easily veers into conspiracy, yet it reflects the deep alienation that young men feel from institutions, and the belief that democracy is not fulfilling its intended purpose. Such anti-establishment fervor is pervasive, and it helps explain why the political figures and commentators frequently invited to these spaces and who find success within them feed and inflame such resentments.

14 S. Ryan, “#271 Ro Khanna - The Internal Failures Undermining America’s Institutions,” *The Shawn Ryan Show*, 1:17:50-1:18:02, Apple Podcasts, January 15, 2026, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/271-ro-khanna-the-internal-failures-undermining/id1492492083?i=1000745277376>.

15 J. Rogan, “Joe Rogan Experience #2473 - Bill Thompson,” *The Joe Rogan Experience*, 58:28-58:31, YouTube, March 25, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIRHECIUNg>.

Young men want political change built on the promise of upward mobility and institutional fairness.

Young people are hungry for change. They're angry at the mess they've inherited. They're angry at the vicious polarization. They're angry at the sense of unpredictability that carries from one day to the next. They're angry that in times of lightning-fast change, U.S. leaders move sluggishly.

Young Americans think the country's course has taken the wrong trajectory. They are not so sure public servants are truly there to serve. They feel alienated, unseen in the process, and for young men especially, left to fend for themselves. The American Dream is changing shape, and, for many, feels like it is slipping away. But young men still believe

it is worth fighting for and still believe it is possible to achieve. Young men know exactly what hurdles stand in their way and are still eager to make the jump.

What they want is a government and society fighting alongside them. For this very reason, **young men are receptive to messages about shaking up the system and rooting out what they believe is pushing this dream further out of view—ensuring the wealthy pay their fair share, that the private sector is working in the public interest, and that U.S. leaders lead.**

Most young men are not tuned out. They know what is at stake and are looking for a voice in the process.

Young men are angry but not apathetic.

Young men are fed up. Few would welcome a perpetuation of the status quo in American politics, the American economy, and American society. But this anger should not be mistaken for an epidemic of apathy or resignation. Most young men recognize the significance of the moment—what giving up means for themselves and for the country. They are searching for scaffolding that supports what matters most to them: making life feel more stable and manageable.

“The fact that most people ... don’t put in the effort to look into [political events] or understand it, it makes me feel like I have to be engaged.”

—28-year-old White man from Kentucky

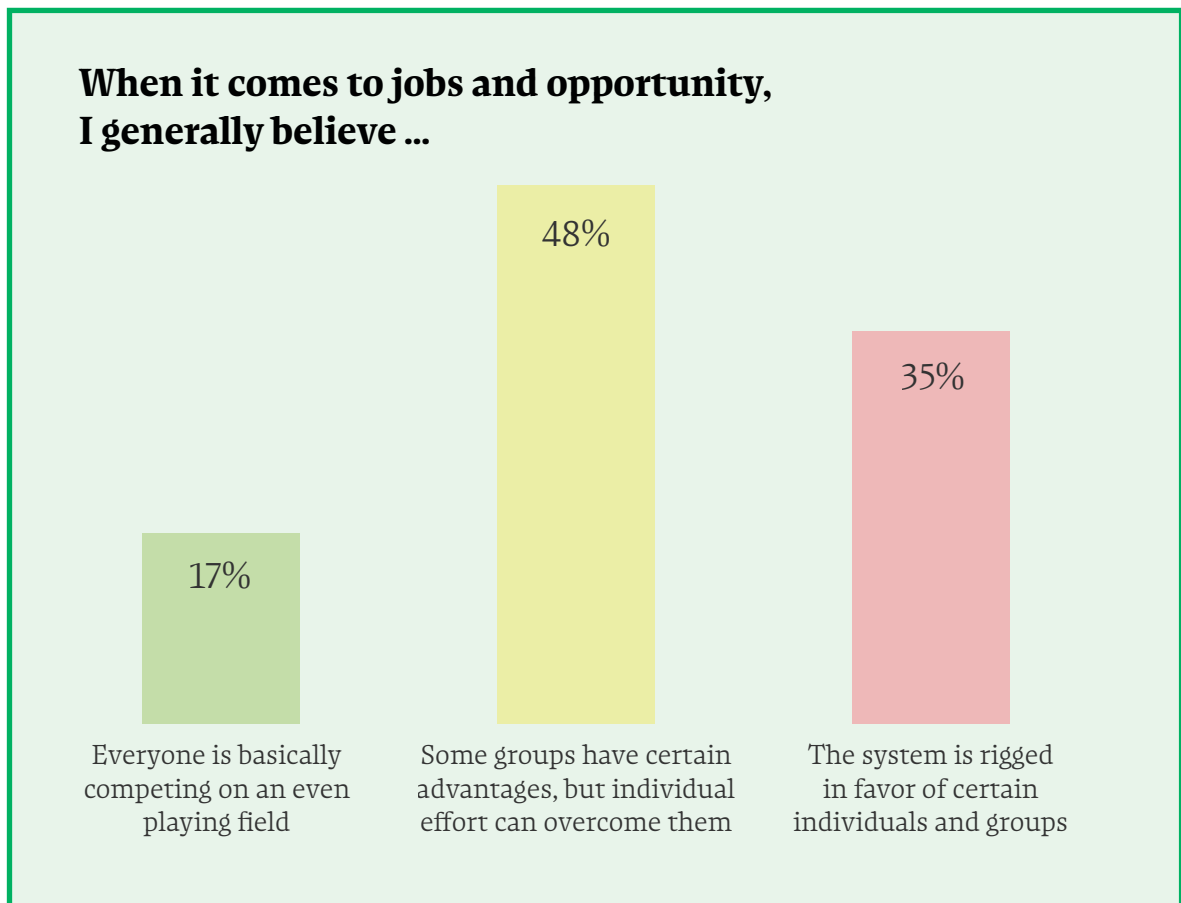
“I feel completely disenfranchised, and the system doesn’t work. But I always have an interest in politics.”

—26-year-old Asian man from New Jersey

Young men still believe that hard work pays off.

Young men are frustrated with U.S. institutions and leaders. A sizable minority (35 percent) say the playing field is altogether rigged in favor of certain groups or individuals (see Figure 29). Yet most do not see these disparities in access and opportunity as insurmountable. The most common belief is that while “some groups have certain advantages,” individual effort still counts most (48 percent agreement). Though skeptical of the capacity for political and economic systems to support them, young men retain confidence in their own ability to create a better life.

Figure 29



“About three years ago, I just took the chance and invested [in] myself. I started my little business, and it has been growing little by little... It motivates me to keep going and keep pushing myself to do a little bit more.”

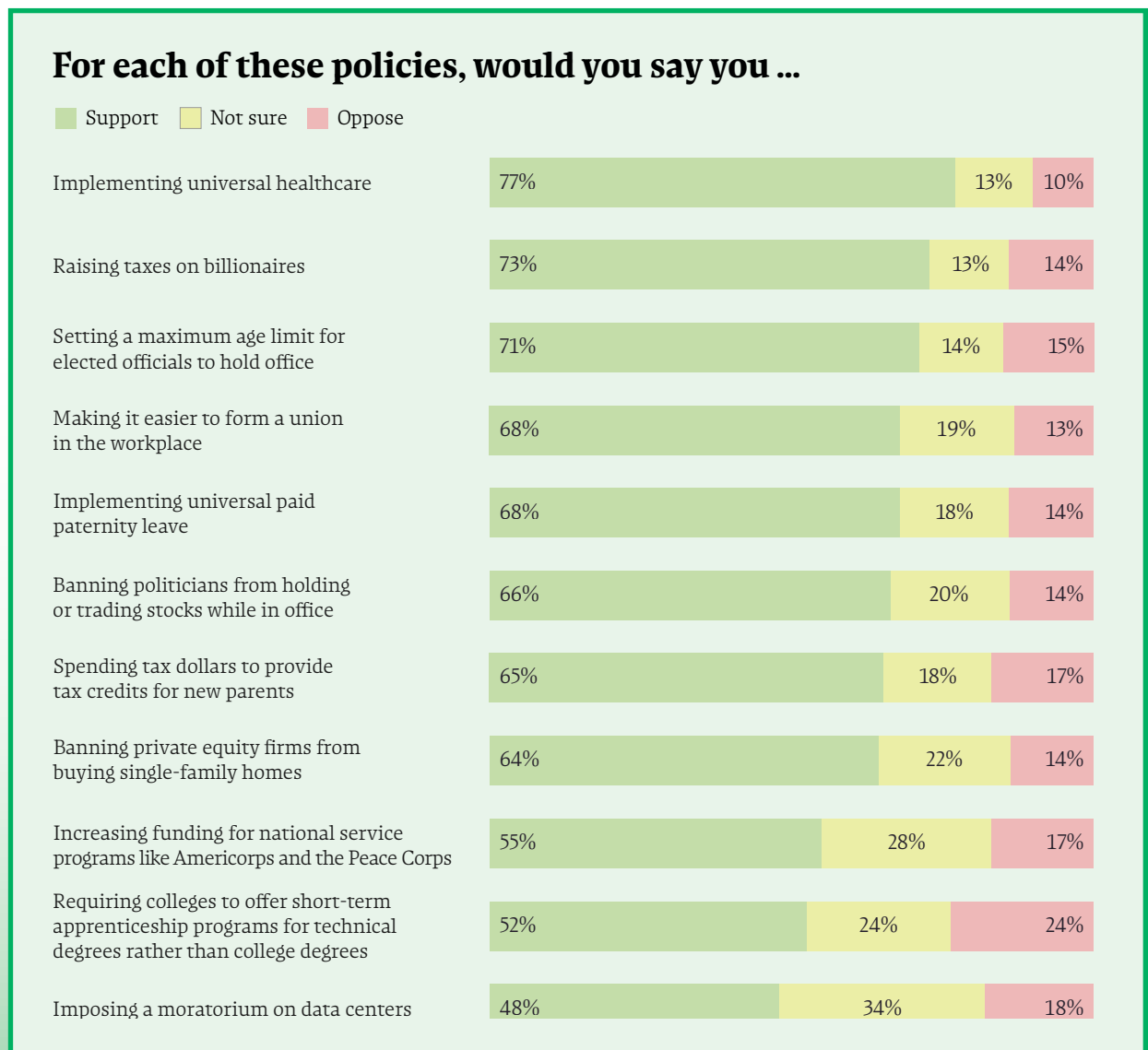
—29-year-old Latino man from Texas

Young men want structural change and expansive social welfare policies, not small fixes.

Young men do not trust the average politician to look out for them or serve their interests. They see and feel the astounding wealth gaps that define the United States today. Their nostalgia for the housing market of the past is justified. Accordingly, most young men are receptive to sweeping political change, enacted through robust social welfare policy (see Figure 30).

This appetite spans class and ideology. Significant majorities support universal healthcare (77 percent), raising taxes on billionaires (73 percent), and setting an age limit for elected officials to hold office (71 percent). About two in three young men also support banning private equity firms from buying single-family homes and banning politicians from holding or trading stocks while in office.

Figure 30



“On a national scale, it’s like whatever the lobbyists or whatever, whoever’s pocket the government is in is what they’re going to follow.”

—27-year-old Black man from Georgia

“The average member of Congress is more beholden to corporations and special interests than their actual constituents... it’s really reduced the power of the average person to really enact change.”

—21-year-old White man from Washington

Social Listening

[r/mildlyinfuriating](#): “Recently had surgery and \$40 of my bill is for having a blanket put on me in the recovery room (I was unconscious and did not, obviously, keep the blanket)” (59k upvotes)

Andrew Schulz on FLAGRANT: “It’s horrible when we see, you know, Trump’s family make hundreds of millions of dollars on f***ing meme coins. It’s horrible when you see Pelosi do it, it’s horrible with the nepo baby sh** ... for whatever reason we’re almost like desensitized to it because we are so used to it happening.”¹⁶

Young men, and the voices they listen to, routinely juxtapose visible political corruption—typically framed as intrinsic to the system and both parties—against their own financial distress and social standing. They demand the same fairness and accountability from those in power that is expected of themselves, which is why stories of elected officials profiting from their positions arouse such anger. And it is why young men of all political stripes gravitate toward policies that they believe will course correct for these failings.

16 A. Schulz, A. Singh, AlexxMedia (A. Garcia), and M. Gagnon, “Minnesota ICE Killings is the Breaking Point: Flagrant Ep 689,” FLAGRANT, 42:54–43:08, YouTube, January 28, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkw_Uo5yUxs.

The Path Forward

These solutions are intended for policymakers, philanthropists, mental health practitioners, movement leaders, parents, and anyone else who seeks a more connected and caring world. Equimundo and YMRP believe that action must be grounded in research, and research matters little if not put to use. For examples of how Equimundo is closing the loop between research and action in its quest for caring manhood, check out the MenCare campaign, Global Boyhood Initiative, and other initiatives on [Equimundo.org](https://equimundo.org).

Pass legislation that offers young men reason to believe public servants are truly there to serve the public.

These policies should address present economic distress while reinforcing young men's hope for the future. America's leaders must rebuild trust, beginning with common-sense stock trading bans, paid paternity leave, ensuring the wealthy pay their fair share, more accessible health care, and other measures that speak directly to the priorities young men have affirmed.

Young men collectively stand to benefit from these measures. But as this report makes clear, there is a particular need to support those unable to pursue—or who choose not to pursue—a four-year university degree. These are the young men most deprived of purpose, least likely to be employed or have a strong in-person network, and most likely to hold a cynical view of the future. While there are other challenges, policymakers can start by increasing funding for alternative career pipelines, while working at a grassroots level to revitalize community infrastructures that have been depleted over the years.

Legislators can also follow the lead of Senator Mark Kelly, whose newly introduced *Educators for America Act*¹⁷ and *Building Community in America Act*¹⁸ seek to boost male participation in the education workforce and expand service opportunities for young men. These bills follow Governor Gavin Newsom's statewide initiative to address the high rate of loneliness among young men and promote volunteerism and mentorship.¹⁹

17 U.S. Senate, *Educators for America Act*, S. 5029, 119th Cong., 2nd sess., introduced in Senate July 16, 2026, <https://www.kelly.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ROM26279-Educators-for-America-Act.pdf>.

18 U.S. Senate, *Building Community in America Act*, S. 5031, 119th Cong., 2nd sess., introduced in Senate July 16, 2026, <https://www.kelly.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/WIL26346-Building-Community-in-America-Act.pdf>.

19 Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, "Governor Newsom Issues Executive Order to Support Young Men and Boys, Address Suicide Rates," July 30, 2025, <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/07/30/governor-newsom-issues-executive-order-to-support-young-men-and-boys-address-suicide-rates/>.

Stop treating young men’s digital worlds as monolithic and altogether radicalizing.

Amplify the voices already fighting the uphill algorithmic battle, while investing in new talent to model care and connection. Furthermore, collaborate with moderators to build online spaces conducive to support and antagonistic to name-calling or scapegoating by any means. As our data show, young men’s most trusted voices are rarely the most extreme ones; accordingly, partnering with streamers and influencers with existing platforms and a primarily apolitical bent will deliver the highest return on investment.

Push policymakers to hold gambling companies accountable, to restrict wagering on current events, and to ensure platforms are enforcing their stated advertising policies. The rapid ascension of prediction markets and their platforms is changing Americans’ notion of what’s considered acceptable to bet on, adding another layer to the ascending sports betting and online gambling industries. Guardrails on gambling are not top political concerns for young men, but action is needed to regulate the advertising and schemes engineered to hook young men. We must also embolden the voices who speak out against gambling culture and hold accountable the high-profile figures cashing in on sponsorship deals with these companies.

Further, apply accountability to the social media platforms that have enabled and facilitated the “grift economy.” These companies have let misinformation run wild, often ignoring the influx of dangerous health and financial advertising targeted at young men. Promote the adoption of a transparent algorithmic design that thwarts the spread of this content, along with a more moderated environment overall.

Encourage organizations, leaders, activists, and other engaged citizens to educate parents about the risks and opportunities of AI.

Among the innumerable hazards of these technologies, AI romantic companions are enticing an alarming share of young men, and AI now risks exacerbating technology-facilitated, gender-based violence and deepfake pornography. As a society, we are far from fully reckoning with the individual and collective implications of these tools. Accordingly, we must support the organizations and individuals working to inform parents of these realities and equip them with proactive strategies to guide their children.

Urge parents, teachers, coaches, and other adult mentors to engage school-aged boys in conversations and curricula that normalize and celebrate care.

Flood et. al. (2026) report how care permeates—that is, how embodying care in one domain spreads to others.²⁰ The implications here extend to reducing gender-based violence and to allowing boys and men to embrace more authentic expressions of self. In-class exercises and storytelling that treat care as something to be valued and cherished offer boys lasting guiding tools and principles. That young men prize fatherhood and view it as an invaluable life milestone indicates that caring manhood is already close at hand. These lessons and conversations can help.

Support the construction of third spaces and new venues for in-person connection, particularly in underserved areas and for young men outside of university settings.

Men used to have somewhere to go. Churches, union halls, lodges, and a YMCA that was the center of town. Many of those institutions have thinned out or aged past the point of serving young men, and nothing has replaced them. Brick by Brick, a chain of gyms designed by Ross Morales Rocketto and Rachel Lehrer that offers social services, social programming, and small group fitness, is a model for how we can rebuild community around what men value. Men do not make friends by trying to make friends; they make them shoulder-to-shoulder doing something else. Give men what they want, then give them what they need.

20 M. Flood, G. Barker, G. Lauro, and T. Gupta, *What If We Lead with Compassion, Care and Accountability?* (Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice, 2026), <https://www.equimundo.org/resources/what-if-we-led-with-compassion-care-and-accountability/>.

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