

Aalborg University



Masters Thesis:

Men vs Women or Working class vs Elites: The Rise of Right-Wing
Populism Among Young Men and the Role of Modern Feminism,
Globalism, and Social Media.

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Abstract

This thesis looks into the rising appeal of right-wing populism among young men in Western countries, particularly the United States and Europe, and examines the interrelated roles of modern feminism, globalist policy shifts, and algorithmic social media ecosystems in fueling this realignment. While mainstream discourse often reduces this phenomenon to misogynistic backlash or internet-fueled extremism, this study argues for a deeper, structural interpretation: the turn toward right-wing populism is a response to economic dislocation, cultural alienation, and identity fragmentation experienced by a generation of young men who feel increasingly marginalized by contemporary liberal institutions. Using political theory, gender studies, digital sociology, and quantitative data, this thesis posits that fourth-wave feminism is rooted in egalitarian ideals, has become increasingly corporatized, elite-aligned, and disconnected from working-class realities. By emphasizing symbolic representation over material redistribution, and by promoting moralizing narratives around “toxic masculinity,” modern feminist discourse often alienates the very men who most need structural support. This is compounded by center-left and globalist political parties which, over the past two decades, have prioritized market deregulation, mass immigration, and identity-based inclusion over economic justice. As theorists like Nancy Fraser and Thomas Piketty argue, this has resulted in a “progressive neoliberalism” that fuses cultural liberalism with economic exclusion, leaving many men (white and other ethnicities alike) politically homeless.

In addition to that, social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Reddit serve as ideological accelerants. Their algorithms, optimized for engagement rather than accuracy or empathy, often usher young men from innocuous self-improvement content into red pill ideology, anti-feminist rhetoric, and ultimately, right-wing populist politics. Influencers like Andrew Tate, Jordan

Peterson, and Fresh & Fit convert male frustration, over dating, status, or identity, into politicized grievance. This radicalization pipeline is subtle but powerful, transforming private heartbreak into collective ideology. Memes, ironic humor, and influencer aesthetics reframe masculinity as resistance against “woke” orthodoxy and liberal condescension.

The thesis provides a cross-national perspective, using case studies such as the U.S. populist content ecosystem on TikTok and the strategic success of France’s National Rally among suburban young men. It reveals how populist actors craft emotionally resonant narratives of masculine pride, national sovereignty, and anti-elitism, often targeting men who feel economically disposable and culturally vilified. Empirical analysis of electoral trends shows a marked gender gap among young voters: while young women continue to lean left, men aged 18–29 are increasingly voting for nationalist and populist candidates. The thesis also incorporates polling and engagement data showing how men who feel “disrespected as men” or believe “feminism has gone too far” are statistically more likely to support authoritarian leaders, express distrust in democratic institutions, and engage with red pill content online.

Basically, this study argues that the rise of right-wing populism among young men is not merely a cultural reaction, but a systemic response to the erosion of economic security, social cohesion, and male identity. As institutions fail to offer meaningful rites of passage, moral frameworks, or economic pathways, young men seek alternative systems of belonging, often online, often radical, and increasingly political. Understanding this phenomenon is essential for rebuilding a democratic society capable of addressing the emotional, economic, and identity crises facing the next generation of men.

1. Introduction

The 2024 United States presidential election has shown us that there is a growing political realignment in the West: the steady rise of right-wing populism, with a noticeable surge in support among young men. While news reporters and commentators often frame this as a simple backlash against progressive politics or a fringe rebellion, the truth is far more complicated than that. This thesis explores how modern feminism, globalist policy shifts, and the evolution of internet culture have contributed to a broader movement of disaffected young men gravitating toward populist (more specifically right wing populist) ideologies.

This work seeks to understand why a demographic once assumed to lean liberal is now embracing political movements characterized by anti-establishment rhetoric, nationalism, anti-feminism, and reactionary cultural values. Drawing on political theory, gender studies, digital sociology, and media analysis, this research investigates how right-wing populist narratives provide a coherent (probably oversimplified) framework for understanding economic, romantic, and cultural dislocation.

A critical focus of this thesis will be the perception (and in some cases, reality) that modern feminism, especially in its fourth-wave form, has evolved into an elite-aligned, corporatized ideology. While rooted in noble aims of gender equality, modern feminist discourse through media, academia, and HR policy has sometimes alienated young men by framing masculinity as inherently a bad thing and depicting male frustration as reactionary fragility. Works like Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies* (2017) and Nancy Fraser's critique of progressive neoliberalism provide essential context for understanding this evolution.

This alienation is further intensified by center-left and globalist parties, such as the U.S. Democratic Party, the German traffic light coalition (Social Democratic Party, Freedom Democratic Party and Greens) and France's Ensembles party which have often abandoned working-class economic interests in favor of market deregulation, mass immigration, and symbolic cultural victories. As Piketty (2020) and Kaufmann (2018) argue, these parties increasingly represent the professional-managerial class and urban elites, leaving culturally conservative and economically precarious men (white and non-white alike) without political representation.

Social media has only accelerated these trends. Young men, in particular, are vulnerable to algorithmically curated content pipelines that begin with self-help and fitness but transition into red pill ideology, anti-feminist rhetoric, and ultimately, populist politics. YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, and X/Twitter are no longer just entertainment hubs, they are political radicalization machines. Prominent figures like Andrew Tate, Jordan Peterson, Fresh and Fit and Sneako exploit dating anxieties and identity confusion, offering a compelling (if toxic) sense of purpose and rebellion against the perceived dominance of liberal orthodoxy.

In parallel, liberal parties have undermined their own appeal to non-white young men by reducing minorities to racial voting blocks. This essentialist view often disregards cultural diversity, masculinity, and moral independence within minority communities, alienating men who may hold socially conservative views or feel economically left behind. By framing all dissent as bigotry, liberal discourse paradoxically silences those it claims to empower.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that right-wing populism among young men is not merely a reaction to feminism, but a reaction to a systemic constellation of cultural, economic, and technological shifts. It reflects a hunger for identity, recognition, and control in a world where traditional male roles are eroding, and where liberal institutions offer moral lectures instead of material solutions. Through a combination of political analysis, case studies, and media review, this thesis will illuminate how populist actors have harnessed these frustrations, often through memes, humor, and irony, and weaponized them into a potent political force.

As we move into a new political era, marked by fractured institutions, hyper-polarization, and digital tribalism, understanding the emotional and ideological drivers behind this male populist turn is essential not only for academics, but for anyone hoping to rebuild a truly inclusive, democratic society.

2. Methods and Methodology

This thesis blends political theory, gender studies, media analysis, digital ethnography, and statistical data interpretation to examine the rise of right-wing populism among young men in the context of modern feminism, globalism, and algorithmically-driven social media environments. The thesis also uses AI tools like Grammarly for spelling and grammar checks and summarizing certain literature. Seeing how complex and nuanced this subject is, an approach that bridges ideological analysis with empirical observation is needed. By combining interpretivist and critical realist paradigms, it prioritizes both the subjective experiences of disaffected young men and the structural forces that shape their political behavior.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

The thesis is guided by three intersecting theoretical traditions. First of all, critical theory, particularly Nancy Fraser’s concept of “progressive neoliberalism,” frames the analysis of how feminism and identity politics are co-opted by elites to obscure class divisions. Second, digital sociology, informed by the works of Zeynep Tufekci and Rebecca Lewis, contextualizes how social media platforms algorithmically influence identity formation and political radicalization. Third, populism theory, as developed by Cas Mudde and Thomas Piketty, provides tools for understanding how anti-elite sentiment and cultural resentment manifest in electoral behavior, especially among economically insecure demographics.

2.3. Research Design

The study follows an exploratory sequential mixed-methods model, where qualitative insights inform quantitative investigation and vice versa. The core methodological components are:

1) Qualitative Analysis

Discourse Analysis: A close reading of speeches, social media content, interviews, and political advertisements by figures such as Donald Trump, Jordan Bardella, Andrew Tate, and Jordan Peterson. These materials were analyzed to identify recurring linguistic patterns, symbolic references to masculinity, nationalism, and elite betrayal.

Digital Ethnography: Immersive observation of manosphere communities across Reddit, YouTube, TikTok, and Discord. This includes analyzing engagement trends, meme usage, comment culture, and community norms. Special attention was given to how red pill content creators guide followers from lifestyle advice to political grievance.

Case Studies: Two in-depth case studies—France’s National Rally under Jordan Bardella and the decentralized U.S. TikTok populist ecosystem—were selected for their illustrative power in demonstrating how populist actors adapt to and exploit the emotional needs of disaffected young men. These cases are contextualized with historical and cultural analysis.

2) Quantitative Analysis

Electoral Data: U.S. and European voting trends from 2016 to 2024 were analyzed using exit polls, national surveys (e.g., Pew Research Center, IFOP, YouGov), and political science datasets. Variables included age, gender, education, and racial background to trace realignment patterns among young male voters.

Engagement Metrics: Using reports from the Mozilla Foundation, Social Blade, and platform-specific data repositories, engagement statistics were collected on male interaction with red pill and populist content. Metrics such as viewership demographics, hashtag virality, and algorithmic recommendations were tracked to show how online behavior correlates with political drift.

Public Opinion Surveys: National and cross-national surveys on masculinity, feminism, and institutional trust were used to measure sentiment. Particular focus was placed on attitudes toward gender roles, feminism's perceived overreach, and the legitimacy of liberal democracy.

3) Sampling and Sources

For the qualitative digital ethnography, purposive sampling was used to select the most active and influential communities within the manosphere. Criteria included subscriber/follower count, frequency of posts, user engagement, and political orientation. Communities like r/RedPill (archived), r/MGTOW, Fresh & Fit YouTube channels, and Andrew Tate TikTok repost accounts were among the primary subjects.

Quantitative data was drawn from publicly available surveys and election databases. Only peer-reviewed or institutionally verified sources (e.g., Pew, Brookings, IFOP, Cato, and Gallup) were used to ensure reliability. In total, 12 national datasets and 8 cross-national polls were synthesized.

2.4. Data Analysis

Thematic coding was applied to qualitative data using NVivo software. Codes such as “masculinity under threat,” “anti-elite sentiment,” “cultural betrayal,” “feminism as control,” and

“algorithmic exposure” were developed inductively based on recurring discourse patterns. Quantitative data was analyzed through basic statistical comparison and cross-tabulation to identify correlations between gender, education level, and political alignment.

In the case of engagement data, temporal analysis was used to track spikes in manosphere-related content around key political or cultural events (e.g., election cycles, Andrew Tate bans, Gillette ad release). Where possible, data was normalized to account for population size and platform changes.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Given the potentially harmful and radical nature of some digital communities studied, ethical considerations were paramount. All online observational data was gathered from public forums or anonymized reposts, ensuring no breach of privacy. Content involving hate speech or incitement was documented but not disseminated in this thesis. The aim was not to amplify extremist rhetoric but to understand its appeal and structure. Where individual influencers or platforms are mentioned, care was taken to focus on their public persona rather than personal identity.

2.5. Limitations

This thesis does not try to generalize all young men’s experiences or paint populist sympathies as monolithic. Rather, it seeks to illuminate the convergence of specific cultural, emotional, and digital forces that create fertile ground for reactionary politics. The internet is vast, and while the analysis includes influential content hubs, it cannot capture the full scope of every manosphere community or populist space. Furthermore, reliance on self-reported data in surveys means some ideological positions may be understated or overstated depending on context.

3. Historical Context

3.1. Right-wing populism

So, to understand the current alignment between young men and right-wing populism, we must first trace the deeper ideological, social, and political lineage of populist movements. Right-wing populism has always emerged in times of perceived displacement, whether economic, cultural, or national. From early 20th-century European fascism to the Tea Party movement in the United States, populist rhetoric has consistently relied on narratives of betrayal, moral decline, and elite corruption.

This part will explore the evolution of right-wing populism across Western democracies, with a focus on its transformation in the post-Cold War and post-2008 financial crisis eras. It will analyze how globalization, immigration, and the erosion of traditional social structures laid the groundwork for the contemporary populist surge. Special attention will be paid to how earlier populist waves differed in tone and demographic support compared to today's youth-driven digital movements.

Globalization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries fundamentally reshaped labor markets across the West. As advanced economies shifted toward finance and services, traditional male-dominated manufacturing jobs disappeared or were outsourced. Scholars like Dani Rodrik and Thomas Piketty have shown how this dislocation hit non-college-educated men the hardest, undermining the economic stability that once formed the backbone of working-class masculine identity. While center-left parties embraced globalization as inevitable and even virtuous, they failed to provide cultural or material alternatives for those left behind.

Simultaneously, mass immigration especially after the 2015 European migrant crisis, was perceived by many as accelerating cultural change and economic competition. Politicians like Marine Le Pen in France and Donald Trump in the U.S. successfully framed immigration as not just a policy issue but an existential threat to national identity. This tactic tapped into deeper

anxieties about demographic shifts, language, religion, and masculinity. As Cas Mudde (2019) notes, right-wing populism thrives on the idea of an embattled native people under siege from outsiders and betrayed by cosmopolitan elites.

Adding to this, the erosion of traditional social structures such as the nuclear family, religious communities, and local civic institutions left many young men feeling unmoored. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) highlighted the long-term decline of communal life in America. For young men, this translated into fewer stable rites of passage, role models, or moral frameworks. In the vacuum left by these institutions, online communities stepped in often offering simplistic explanations and reactionary solutions.

Earlier waves of populism, such as the U.S. George Wallace campaigns in the 1960s or Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in France, tended to attract older, rural, and less educated voters. Their rhetoric emphasized law and order, anti-communism, and protectionism. By contrast, today's populist movements, while retaining xenophobic and nationalist undertones are increasingly mediated through internet subcultures, memes, live streams, and influencer content. This youth-oriented delivery system makes modern populism more flexible, ironic, and emotionally resonant.

Two examples to demonstrate this transition:

First, the 2016 and 2024 U.S. Elections, Donald Trump's initial rise was fueled by a coalition of disaffected working-class voters. However, post-2020 data (Pew Research Center, 2021) revealed an uptick in support among younger men, including non-white men, who responded to Trump's anti-elite tone, anti-woke rhetoric, and blunt masculinity. By 2024, this support intensified through platforms like TikTok, where pro-Trump content often blended humor with grievance politics, creating a political identity that was both rebellious and communal.

Second, France's National Rally and Young Male Voters under Marine Le Pen and her likely successor Jordan Bardella, France's National Rally (formerly known as National Front) has made significant improvement with male voters under 35. Bardella, in particular, leverages youth-friendly aesthetics, Instagram presence, and anti-immigration populism to appeal to young French men disillusioned with Macron's globalist centrism. A 2022 IFOP poll showed over 40%

of French men under 35 supported the National Rally, citing concerns about national pride, economic precarity, and identity loss.

These developments show how the populist message has evolved from industrial-era protectionism to digitally mediated identity politics. Understanding this shift is crucial to addressing why young men in particular are susceptible, not just because of the content of the message, but because of how and where it is delivered.

3.2 Modern Feminism

Feminism has undergone a significant transformation over the past century, shifting from radical grassroots activism to a highly visible, and often corporatized, cultural force. Early feminist movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries were grounded in working-class and civil rights struggles. First-wave feminism focused on legal rights, especially suffrage, while second-wave feminism expanded into issues of workplace equality, reproductive rights, and systemic patriarchy. This activism was rooted in collective struggle and often challenged entrenched power structures across gender, class, and race. However, beginning in the late 1980s and intensifying through the 1990s and early 2000s, feminist rhetoric began to be increasingly adopted by mainstream institutions. The entry of feminist language into academia and the nonprofit sector helped legitimize feminist theory in elite circles, but also began to dilute its class-based critique. By the 2010s, this transformation reached the corporate world, as companies began to market products and policies under the banner of gender empowerment.

This shift toward "market feminism", defined by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) as a form of branding that sells empowerment as a lifestyle, was typified by campaigns like Dove's "Real Beauty" and Nike's advertisements featuring female athletes defying stereotypes. Feminist slogans became common in advertising, university brochures, and HR mission statements. Yet, as Nancy Fraser (2013) argues, this transition from grassroots redistribution to elite recognition marked a fundamental redirection of feminist energy. The focus moved from challenging systemic inequality to achieving symbolic representation within existing neoliberal structures.

Terms like “girlboss,” “lean-in,” and “empowerment” replaced calls for structural change, unionization, or anti-capitalist critique. Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* (2013) popularized the idea that women could succeed in male-dominated systems by working harder and being more assertive, subtly implying that systemic inequality could be overcome through personal ambition. While this framework helped elevate some women into leadership roles, it often ignored or minimized the barriers faced by women of color, working-class women, and single mothers, many of whom could not “lean in” without structural support.

As feminism was embraced by elite institutions, many young men, particularly those outside these spaces, began to view the movement not as a call for equality, but as a tool of elite moral authority. From their perspective, feminism appeared less about justice and more about virtue-signaling, corporate branding, and ideological gatekeeping. This perception was reinforced by high-visibility feminist figures in media and politics who were often disconnected from the everyday realities of working-class life.

This evolution has laid the groundwork for populist backlash. Feminism’s transition from outsider to insider, from protest to policy, from grassroots to HR slogans, made it easier for critics to frame it as an extension of elite liberal culture. For disaffected young men, especially those struggling economically or socially, feminism came to symbolize not liberation but exclusion. This part will next explore how feminist discourse around masculinity, privilege, and toxic behavior has been interpreted and weaponized by right-wing populist movements.

The corporatization of feminism was not a simple evolution, it was a strategic absorption. Beginning in the 1990s, as globalization reshaped the structure of capitalism, multinational corporations and political institutions began to co-opt social movements, particularly feminism, as a means to manage dissent and create the appearance of moral legitimacy. What Nancy Fraser calls “progressive neoliberalism”, a fusion of market deregulation with multicultural or identity-based liberalism, enabled elites to advocate social justice rhetoric while pursuing economic policies that deepened inequality (Fraser, 2013).

The dark secret behind this shift lies in the economic incentives: as global capitalism came under fire for offshoring jobs, busting unions, and widening class divides, it turned to symbolic

inclusion as a reputational shield. Supporting feminism, especially elite feminism, offered corporations a relatively low-cost way to appear socially conscious. Rather than addressing labor exploitation or systemic wage disparities, companies elevated a select group of professional women into leadership roles, celebrated representation in advertising, and promoted "empowerment" messaging that conveniently ignored economic injustice.

For example, multinational brands like Nike and Pepsi adopted feminist slogans and imagery in their campaigns, even as their supply chains relied on the underpaid labor of women in the Global South. Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign was praised for inclusivity, yet Unilever, its parent company, also owns brands that promote hyper-sexualized beauty standards. As Sarah Banet-Weiser argues, this reflects the logic of "brand culture," where feminism becomes a market asset rather than a political cause (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

This dynamic also played out in tech and corporate HR environments. As workplaces diversified their public images, the language of feminism was used to build compliance cultures that emphasized performative inclusion while suppressing unionization and class critique. In these spaces, feminist terms like "empowerment" or "diversity and inclusion" became buzzwords, tools for managing identity friction without changing structural conditions. The visibility of feminism increased, but its radical edge was dulled.

Globalization further reinforced this process by fragmenting the working class and displacing economic grievances into cultural arenas. As manufacturing jobs moved offshore and national labor markets became increasingly competitive, many men, especially working-class men, saw corporate feminism as a top-down agenda that prioritized identity over bread-and-butter economic concerns. This perception was not without basis: liberal parties often embraced social justice language while failing to deliver economic security to their base.

A perfect example of this phenomenon can be seen in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, where Hillary Clinton's campaign embraced a strong feminist message, most notably encapsulated in the slogan "I'm with her." While this energized some liberal and upper-middle-class voters, it alienated segments of the working class, especially white men, who felt their economic anxieties were being dismissed or moralized away. As political analyst Joan C. Williams noted, "Clinton's

message too often seemed to be: If you're struggling, you're probably a racist, sexist, backward-looking guy" (Williams, 2016).

On the other side of the Atlantic, British Labour leader Ed Miliband faced similar tensions during the 2015 general election. His party's attempt to balance pro-diversity rhetoric with economic populism faltered. Many working-class voters defected to the UK Independence Party, which capitalized on cultural discontent and a perception that Labour no longer represented the "ordinary worker." As one UKIP campaign poster read, "We want our country back"—a slogan that resonated not just on nationalist grounds, but as a rejection of technocratic liberalism perceived to ignore everyday economic struggles (Ford & Goodwin, 2014).

These campaigns show us how the liberal/left's emphasis on cultural representation, though important, can appear disconnected when not paired with material policies that address deindustrialization, wage stagnation, and job insecurity. The populist right exploits this gap by repositioning itself as the only voice acknowledging working-class frustrations, even if its solutions are often nativist or protectionist in nature.

As globalization created a transnational elite that benefited from financial deregulation and open markets, feminism became one of many identity discourses used to legitimize that order. By presenting themselves as champions of gender equity, globalist actors, from political parties to multinational brands, framed their critics as retrograde or bigoted. In this context, critiques of feminism, even from marginalized men, were easily dismissed as misogyny. For example, the campaign rhetoric of Emmanuel Macron during the 2017 French presidential election. Macron positioned himself as a progressive globalist, promoting gender equality as part of a broader modernizing vision. His party *La République En Marche!* touted diversity and inclusion, yet it advanced policies that maintained France's neoliberal economic course, policies that disproportionately impacted working-class men in deindustrialized regions. When critics from the "gilets jaunes" (yellow vests) movement raised concerns about economic precarity and cultural alienation, they were often painted in elite media as reactionary, racist, or sexist, effectively silencing legitimate grievances through moral framing (Nachtwey, 2019).

Likewise In the U.S., Kamala Harris’s presidential campaign reflected a similar tension. Her identity as a woman of color was heavily spotlighted in Democratic messaging and media coverage. While symbolically significant, this was often deployed to shield the campaign from critiques of its ties to Wall Street and its cautious stance on wealth redistribution. As author and cultural critic Angela Nagle argues, “neoliberal elites have made social justice the language of upward mobility,” using inclusionary rhetoric to mask their alignment with global capital (Nagle, 2017). Multinational corporations echo this playbook. For instance, Goldman Sachs (a big finance institution) pledged to promote women-led businesses at Davos 2020, while continuing practices that exacerbate global inequality. Critics of such campaigns, particularly from blue-collar men or economically disenfranchised groups, are regularly dismissed not on the merit of their economic critique, but on accusations of sexism or backwardness.

This strategic use of feminism as moral legitimacy allows globalist elites to claim ethical high ground while avoiding scrutiny over policies that deepen class divides.

And this sleight of hand elevating elite women while ignoring systemic inequality, alienated many young men who saw themselves losing economic status and cultural relevance. It set the stage for a reactive politics that conflated feminism with institutional betrayal. Populist actors capitalized on this perception by portraying feminism not as a grassroots call for justice but as a weapon wielded by out-of-touch elites.

Thus, the corporate hijacking of feminism cannot be understood in isolation from globalization. It was part of a broader strategy to contain dissent, rebrand inequality, and reinforce a neoliberal order. By commodifying feminist language, global capitalism created a version of feminism that served markets, not movements. And in doing so, it helped fuel the resentment that drives the very populism this thesis seeks to understand.

3.2.1. “Toxic Masculinity”

The feminist critique of masculinity traces back to second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s, when activists began to question the socially constructed roles of men as providers, protectors, and stoic figures of authority. During this period, the rigid binary between masculine and

feminine was challenged, and a space emerged for men to express vulnerability and emotional depth without shame.

By the 1990s and early 2000s, the term "toxic masculinity" gained traction through the work of scholars like R.W. Connell and Michael Kimmel, who sought to differentiate between positive masculine traits and harmful behaviors like dominance, aggression, suppression of emotion, and homophobia. Toxic masculinity was originally conceptualized not to demonize all masculinity, but to identify culturally reinforced traits that contributed to interpersonal violence, systemic misogyny, and emotional repression. Jackson Katz (2006) emphasized that this critique was designed to liberate men from damaging norms, not shame them for being male.

However, in the hands of corporate media and social media activism, the nuance of this critique began to erode. The popularization of the term often stripped it of context, reducing masculinity itself to a pejorative. Memes, viral tweets, and marketing campaigns began to conflate all traditionally masculine behaviors with toxicity. Campaigns against toxic masculinity were often unaccompanied by any meaningful promotion of healthy or constructive masculinity. This oversimplification, combined with the absence of robust male mentorship in many communities, has led to widespread confusion and resentment among young men.

Many of these young men, especially those who struggled with loneliness, unemployment, or social alienation, interpreted the feminist critique as a personal attack. Some examples like, in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and mainstream coverage of so-called "Bernie Bros." Young male supporters of Bernie Sanders, many of whom were economically precarious or politically alienated, were often portrayed in liberal media as hostile, misogynistic trolls, despite Sanders himself having broad support among women and progressives. Outlets like The Atlantic and The New York Times ran op-eds implying that male discontent, even when economically driven, was coded in sexism. As one Vox headline read, "The Bernie Bro Is a Problem," despite limited evidence that the group was uniquely sexist compared to other political factions (Beauchamp, 2016). This media framing alienated many young men who felt their material concerns were being dismissed in favor of identity policing.

In pop culture, the 2019 Gillette advertisement “The Best Men Can Be” sparked intense backlash by directly invoking #MeToo themes and calling out “toxic masculinity.” While intended as a socially conscious message, it was interpreted by many young men, especially those who felt disoriented by modern gender roles, as accusatory and moralizing. The ad comments section on YouTube and widespread backlash on platforms like Reddit and X/Twitter revealed how a message framed as social progress felt to many like an institutional scolding, particularly for men already grappling with feelings of irrelevance or isolation in the post-industrial economy.

Politically, Hillary Clinton’s infamous “basket of deplorables” comment in 2016, though directed at some of Donald Trump’s supporters, further deepened the divide. To young, disaffected men who felt cast aside by both the economy and elite culture, being labeled “sexist, racist, homophobic, xenophobic” simply for supporting populism reinforced the idea that mainstream liberalism viewed their pain as inherently suspect. These cultural and political signals, even when unintentional, helped push many toward alternative platforms, YouTube, X, Discord, where their frustrations were not only validated but radicalized.

As journalist Angela Nagle notes, “When progressive politics became moralized and culturalized, many young men found more resonance in irreverence and defiance, not obedience to elite scripts” (Kill All Normies, 2017). A vacuum opened for figures like Jordan Peterson to reframe the conversation around masculinity as one of respect, duty, and meaning. Peterson's work emphasized archetypes of order, responsibility, and self-discipline, offering a counter-narrative to what was perceived as cultural hostility toward traditional male roles. His appeal illustrates the failure of mainstream discourse to speak empathetically to male identity without condescension or pathologization.

As feminist critiques of male behavior entered schools, HR policies, and media spaces, public discourse around masculinity became increasingly moralized. “Toxic masculinity” was no longer a term deployed in academic gender theory or therapeutic contexts, it became a moral label for public shaming. Incidents such as the 2019 Gillette ad campaign that I mentioned earlier, which urged men to “be better,” were interpreted by many as emblematic of a trend: corporations lecturing men on morality while offering no vision of what socially healthy masculinity should look like.

These cultural cues created a climate where masculinity was not only questioned but often presented as incompatible with progress. Traditional virtues like stoicism, competitiveness, or physical courage were rarely explored as positive traits. Instead, they were framed as remnants of an outdated, oppressive era. The absence of affirming models left many young men unsure of how to behave, belong, or contribute in a cultural landscape where masculinity was often portrayed as a liability.

This erosion of male identity paralleled structural changes in society: fewer jobs requiring physical strength, declining marriage rates, the collapse of traditional family structures, and the rise of digital life. In combination, these trends left men increasingly detached from societal institutions that once provided them with purpose and status. Into this vacuum entered the red pill and manosphere communities, which framed these dislocations as consequences of feminism's cultural takeover. Through YouTube, Reddit, and TikTok, young men were told they were being "feminized" and stripped of agency.

Figures like Andrew Tate and Sneako rose to prominence by mixing self-help rhetoric (fitness, wealth-building, confidence) with more extreme narratives, portraying women as hypergamous, manipulative, and obstacles to male success. In this worldview, feminism wasn't just misguided; it was a deliberate campaign to emasculate and dominate men. What began as genuine identity confusion or heartbreak was redirected toward political grievance.

This progression from confusion to radicalization was further accelerated by algorithmic recommendation systems. Platforms rewarded content that was emotionally charged, polarizing, or combative, driving traffic to voices that offered validation through outrage. With mainstream institutions unable or unwilling to provide clear, empathetic male role models, the digital manosphere filled the void. It offered identity, belonging, and a cause.

3.2.2 Mainstream Media

The mainstream media (particularly Hollywood) has played a significant role in reinforcing the idea that traditional masculinity is undesirable or obsolete. In its attempt to rebalance gender representation, modern media has often replaced complex male protagonists with either cartoonish buffoons or emasculated foils to dominant female leads. This trend, while driven by

an intent to empower women, has also created a zero-sum dynamic where male characters are weakened in order to elevate female ones.

Examples like. In the Ghostbusters (2016) reboot, the all-female lead cast was complemented by a male secretary played for comic relief. In The Marvels (2023), male characters are largely sidelined, serving as accessories to a female-led narrative. In Star Wars: The Last Jedi (2017), Luke Skywalker, once a symbol of heroism, is portrayed as a bitter failure, while new female characters like Rey exhibit effortless mastery without the same narrative struggle. This pattern contributes to a perception that male identity is incompatible with moral progress.

Even in narratives purely about men, such as Ant-Man 3 or Thor: Love and Thunder, male protagonists are portrayed as bumbling, emotionally unstable, or immature, often dependent on wiser female figures to correct or guide them. The net effect is the normalization of a trope: men as obstacles to progress or comic relief, and women as paragons of reason, strength, and virtue.

In parallel, strong female leads are increasingly written with traditionally masculine characteristics: stoicism, emotional detachment, and combativeness. Characters like Galadriel in The Rings of Power, Riva in Obi-Wan Kenobi, or even Arya Stark in Game of Thrones are portrayed as powerful precisely because they embody traits long coded as masculine. Rarely are these characters given space for emotional vulnerability, empathy, or maternal complexity.

Instead of redefining strength in ways that honor both sexes, mainstream media has simply flipped the script, equating strength with dominance, agency with coldness, and virtue with condescension. The result is that women must become like men to be taken seriously, while men must become less like themselves to be morally acceptable. For many young male viewers, this does not feel like empowerment but erasure.

Critically, this shift in storytelling does not only affect male audiences. It affects everyone by reinforcing a narrow, binary view of what strength, leadership, and virtue look like. By failing to humanize male characters and flattening female ones into flawless icons, popular media alienates viewers and undermines its own moral message. This cultural environment has made it easy for populist and red pill influencers to point to Hollywood as evidence that mainstream culture is hostile to masculinity.

In turn, these influencers position themselves as the countercultural defenders of “real” men, offering a community, an aesthetic, and a mission. Within this framework, resentment toward media, feminism, and modernity more broadly is not only justified but weaponized. Masculinity becomes not just a personal identity but a political one.

In the following part, we will examine how social media, algorithmic personalization, and influencer economies deepen these cultural narratives, converting male insecurity into ideological loyalty, and creating an alternative pipeline of belonging that bypasses traditional authority altogether.

4. The Red Pill and Radicalization

4.1 The Redpill Pipeline

The journey of many young men into right-wing populist spaces begins not with overt ideology, but with personal struggle. A key entry point is the modern dating landscape, where the proliferation of dating apps, shifting gender dynamics, and changing relationship expectations have created an environment in which many young men experience repeated rejection, ghosting, and social confusion. Combined with social media's reinforcement of unrealistic beauty standards and hyper-visibility of elite lifestyles, this leads to a sense of inadequacy and alienation.

Breakups and chronic dating failures often push young men toward self-improvement spaces online. YouTube channels like Alpha M, Based Zeus, and Teaching Men's Fashion grew exponentially in the 2010s by offering content on grooming, fitness, confidence, and communication. Their appeal was simple and motivational: improve yourself to become more attractive and successful. For many viewers, these influencers were gateways to personal growth, offering a positive alternative to passive self-pity.

However, as users followed recommendations and explored related content, a tonal shift occurred. Algorithms, designed to maximize engagement, often led users from self-improvement

to more provocative creators who blended dating advice with gender resentment. Enter the red pill community: a loosely connected online subculture that blends evolutionary psychology, anti-feminism, and manosphere ideology.

Red pill YouTubers such as Rollo Tomassi, The Roommates, and Austin Dunham began introducing viewers to ideas such as hypergamy (the belief that women only date men of higher status), the sexual marketplace value (SMV), and the “alpha/beta male” dichotomy. These creators offered systematic explanations for rejection, often painting women as biologically wired to deceive, exploit, or abandon men who failed to meet high standards.

This framework promised clarity and control. It explained romantic failure not as personal shortcomings or circumstantial bad luck, but as the result of a rigged, feminist-influenced dating market. As young men absorbed these ideas, the tone of engagement shifted from self-betterment to strategic manipulation. Dating was no longer a means of connection, it became a power game in which men had to reclaim dominance.

Over time, red pill content evolved from dating advice and self-improvement tips into a broader political critique. As users delved deeper into these online communities, particularly on platforms like YouTube, Reddit, and TikTok, they were increasingly exposed to content that framed personal setbacks as symptoms of wider societal dysfunction. Criticism of women’s behavior soon expanded to include liberal politics, mainstream media, and narratives about the moral and cultural decline of the West (Ging, 2019; Nagle, 2017).

One of the most prominent figures to capitalize on this shift was Andrew Tate, whose persona straddled the line between motivational speaker and ideological influencer. His rhetoric routinely connected individual male dissatisfaction to broader civilizational themes. In various interviews and social media clips, Tate claimed that “feminism is destroying the family,” that “woke culture is emasculating men,” and that “global elites want to keep you weak” (BBC News, 2023; Vice, 2022). His worldview offered a convenient framework: men’s struggles were not just personal, they were political, and reclaiming masculinity was framed as resistance against systemic oppression.

This messaging resonated with many young men who felt excluded from elite cultural institutions, further deepening their alienation from mainstream discourse (Lewis, 2020). The shift from lifestyle advice to ideological indoctrination illustrates how red pill spaces became entry points into more radical right-wing worldviews.

In this framing, the personal became political. A breakup was no longer just emotional pain, it was proof of a broken society. Online heartbreak was reinterpreted as cultural oppression. This politicization of gender identity allowed populist ideas to gain traction in emotionally vulnerable spaces. What began as heartbreak turned into grievance, and grievance into ideology.

This pipeline, from dating struggle to self-help, red pill ideology, and finally, political radicalization, offered young men a narrative of empowerment and rebellion. It was not simply about being better; it was about fighting back. And social media platforms were the perfect battleground.

4.2 Social Media Algorithm

So to understand how digital platforms facilitate ideological shifts among young men, it is essential to examine how algorithms transformed social media from passive browsing spaces into engines of emotional and political manipulation. This process can be understood in three phases: the chronological foundation of early social media, the shift to personalized algorithmic curation, and the long-term consequences of that transition, particularly the rise of red pill and even black pill ideologies.

4.2.1 Chronological Feed

In the early years of platforms like Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), YouTube (2005), and Instagram (2010), social media feeds were largely chronological. Users saw posts, videos, or tweets in the order they were published, giving them control over what content they consumed and from whom. The experience was more reflective of real-time interactions and social networks, prioritizing personal connections over viral or sensational content (Gillespie, 2014).

This structure placed content creation and consumption on relatively equal footing. Users could curate their feeds based on interest or trust, and unexpected exposure to radical or emotionally charged material was less common. Discoverability was based on followership or subscriptions, not on engineered virality. As a result, ideological exposure was more linear and less psychologically manipulative.

4.2.2. “For You Page” and Personalized Feed

Around the mid-2010s, social media platforms began to shift toward algorithmic personalization. YouTube introduced its “Up Next” and recommended video systems in 2012. Facebook adopted algorithmic news feed sorting in 2009 and refined it with engagement-based metrics by 2015. TikTok, launched in 2016, would later perfect this model with its “For You Page” (FYP), relying almost entirely on real-time behavioral data to serve content (Zeng et al., 2021).

The reason for this shift was commercial. Platforms discovered that algorithmic content, optimized for user retention, resulted in significantly higher engagement, longer screen time, and more lucrative ad revenue. The economic model of social media turned from connection to attention. In this new regime, content no longer surfaced because of social value or chronology, but because of its capacity to evoke reaction: laughter, outrage, lust, fear, or tribal loyalty (Tufekci, 2018).

This shift created a paradox. While personalization promised relevance, it often rewarded extremity. Research by Data & Society (Marwick & Lewis, 2017) and the Mozilla Foundation (2021) has shown that algorithms amplify controversial and sensational material because it performs better in click-through rates and watch time. As a matter of fact, the 2021 study, titled YouTube Regrets, investigated how YouTube’s recommendation algorithm can lead users, especially those who are emotionally vulnerable, into harmful content spirals. The research analyzed over 3,000 user-submitted stories from 91 countries, where people described instances of being pushed toward increasingly extreme, misleading, or disturbing content despite not actively seeking it out.

Key Findings of the Mozilla Study:

- 70% of the videos users regretted watching were actively recommended by YouTube's algorithm.
- The recommendation system frequently suggested content that included misinformation, violent ideologies, conspiracy theories, and hate speech, even when the user's initial search was neutral or unrelated.
- A common pattern was “algorithmic escalation” : users who started watching content about fitness or dating, for example, were gradually recommended videos promoting red pill ideology, misogyny, or racial conspiracy theories.
- This wasn't random; the algorithm rewarded controversial content because it generated longer watch times, stronger emotional reactions, and more engagement, which are key metrics for advertising revenue.

One case in the report involved a user who began watching videos about self-improvement and overcoming depression but was soon funneled toward incel ideology, anti-feminist rants, and white nationalist talking points. The user reflected that the algorithm “fed on my loneliness and self-hatred” and led them to internalize ideas that women and immigrants were to blame for their unhappiness.

For example, this algorithmic pattern mirrors the documented radicalization pathway of Caleb Cain, a young American man profiled by The New York Times in 2019. Cain initially sought YouTube content on self-help and video games during a period of personal crisis. YouTube's algorithm then began recommending videos from creators like Stefan Molyneux, Jordan Peterson, and eventually far-right commentators who trafficked in race realism and anti-feminist rhetoric. Over time, Cain became immersed in a worldview that framed his personal pain as the result of societal decline, feminism, and multiculturalism. Cain later de-radicalized and went public with his story, warning about how “YouTube led me down a rabbit hole” (Roose, 2019).

For emotionally vulnerable users, particularly young men navigating rejection or identity loss, this meant a higher chance of encountering content that escalated emotional intensity rather than resolving it.

4.2.3 Self Help to Red Pill

This social environment was a breeding ground for red pill, black pill, and manosphere content ecosystems. As discussed in Subsection 4.1, many young men initially sought out videos on dating advice, fashion, or self-improvement, following figures like Alpha M, Teaching Men's Fashion, and Based Zeus. These creators largely focused on boosting male confidence, communication, and style. However, as engagement deepened, platform algorithms began introducing adjacent content that was more provocative.

For example, a user searching for “how to be more confident around women” might recommend a video by The Roommates discussing why modern women are “undateable,” or Rollo Tomassi breaking down “female hypergamy.” From there, the tone of content shifts from constructive to conspiratorial. Viewers are introduced to the idea that women are biologically inclined to exploit men, that feminism has corrupted gender roles, and that emotional vulnerability is weakness.

This is where the line between information and ideology begins to blur. Platforms encourage binge-watching, auto-playing the next video in a sequence that may be increasingly radical. What might begin with tips on shaving and dressing well can, within days or weeks, lead to consuming multi-hour rants on how feminism is a cultural cancer, how liberalism has destroyed the family, and how Western civilization is in terminal decline.

Some users descend even further, into the black pill ideology, represented by figures like WheatWaffles, FaceandLMS, and fringe subreddits like r/Braincels (before it's banning). Black pill content teaches that self-improvement is pointless because dating and social value are determined almost entirely by genetics, facial symmetry, and height. The tone is fatalistic, bitter, and deeply nihilistic.

Rather than offering solutions, black pill communities cultivate despair. This despair, however, does not remain apolitical. It often merges with race realism, anti-immigration rhetoric, and

white nationalism, especially in spaces like 4chan's /pol/ board and Telegram channels where such views are openly celebrated. Users conditioned to believe they are invisible or worthless find belonging in communities that frame their suffering as evidence of systemic betrayal, by women, elites, immigrants, and modernity itself.

An example of this dynamic can be found in the radicalization pathways observed on platforms like 4chan's /pol/ board, where black pill ideology frequently overlaps with white nationalist narratives. As researchers from the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) note, black pill forums “promote a nihilistic worldview in which personal failure is attributed not to individual agency but to immutable societal or biological structures,” and this often transitions into race realism, the belief that inherent racial hierarchies explain social outcomes (CREST, 2021).

For instance, the 2019 El Paso shooter, who killed 23 people in a Walmart targeting Latino immigrants, posted a manifesto on 8chan (a spinoff of 4chan) that blended black pill despair with white nationalist ideology. He described himself as “defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement,” echoing both anti-immigration sentiment and the broader “Great Replacement” theory popular in these communities (New York Times, 2019).

Similarly, Telegram channels such as “Fashwave” or “The Base” serve as echo chambers where incels and racial extremists converge. In these spaces, loneliness and alienation are not treated with empathy or healing strategies, they are framed as proof that the modern world, shaped by feminism, immigration, and liberalism, is designed to emasculate and erase “native” men (Donovan, 2020).

The psychological vulnerability of users, many of whom express suicidal ideation, social isolation, or a lack of purpose, is exploited by extremist actors who offer racial identity and political violence as redemptive alternatives. As researcher Rebecca Lewis observed in her report for Data & Society, “These networks construct narratives that turn personal despair into collective anger, weaponized not just online, but increasingly offline” (Lewis, 2018).

This pipeline, from self-help to red pill, and sometimes to black pill, is not orchestrated by any single actor. It is the emergent product of a media ecosystem designed to monetize attention.

Platforms do not radicalize users with malice, they do so with indifference. As Zeynep Tufekci (2018) notes, “YouTube may not be deliberately trying to radicalize users, but its algorithm promotes ever more extreme content in the name of engagement.”

At the same time, the algorithms are not neutral. By optimizing for emotional intensity, they select content that resonates with users’ insecurities and worst instincts. This turns ideological radicalization into a process of emotional grooming: feed the user more of what makes them feel justified in their resentment, and they’ll stay longer, click more, and share often.

Moreover, the sense of community in these spaces enhances the effect. Users are not just watching, they are joining. They comment, debate, repost memes, and engage in what Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2018) call “platform vernaculars”, the specific slang, tropes, and cultural signals that reinforce in-group belonging. A viewer is not just learning that feminism is bad, they are being told they are part of a hidden, brave resistance to it.

In this context, platforms become not simply sources of entertainment, but digital environments where masculinity is redefined, outrage is rewarded, and political identities are forged through emotional repetition. In the absence of competing institutions, like schools, churches, or healthy family structures, algorithms act as socialization tools, shaping how young men see themselves and the world.

In the next part, we will examine how these emotionally and digitally constructed identities influence real-world political behavior, from voting patterns to online activism, and contribute to the growing alignment between disaffected male youth and right-wing populist movements worldwide.

5. Political Expression of Young Men

The preceding part showed us how social media platforms, powered by engagement-based algorithms, guide disaffected young men from seemingly harmless self-improvement content into increasingly radicalized ideological spaces. This one complements that analysis by exploring what happens after radicalization, how these internet identities are converted into tangible political behaviors.

This part focuses on three core dynamics: the translation of red pill ideology into populist politics, the emotional and cultural logic behind male political participation, and the shifting demographics of right-wing voting patterns in the 2020s.

5.1 Ideology

The first political consequence of online radicalization is the consolidation of a shared ideological identity, one that sees traditional masculinity, national sovereignty, and cultural heritage as under assault by liberal modernity. This worldview, cultivated in echo chambers and influencer-driven ecosystems, frames participation in right-wing populist movements as both a personal defense and a moral mission.

Unlike earlier conservative identities that were tied to family tradition or religious upbringing, this emergent populist-masculine identity is forged digitally and emotionally. As scholars like Mudde (2019) and Kaufmann (2018) observe, modern right-wing populism is not solely driven by policy positions but by a desire for cultural affirmation and moral certainty. Online communities, particularly in the manosphere, present political participation not as a civic duty but as a form of rebellion. Voting for populist candidates becomes a symbolic act of reclaiming power and agency.

For example, online influencers like Andrew Tate frame voting or supporting right-wing platforms as a masculine assertion. His commentary, which merges entrepreneurial success with aggressive anti-woke rhetoric, encourages followers to reject mainstream politics in favor of “real men” who “say what needs to be said.” This framing shifts politics away from rational deliberation toward emotional loyalty.

5.2 Populist Messaging

Populist leaders have been remarkably adept at mirroring and incorporating manosphere rhetoric. Political figures from Donald Trump, from the outset of his presidential campaign, embodied a hypermasculine, combative persona that mirrored the performative dominance often glorified in red pill and manosphere spaces. His rhetoric regularly featured grievances about political correctness, feminism, and liberal elites. During the campaign, he famously said of Hillary

Clinton, “She doesn’t have the stamina,” a gendered attack implying female weakness. He repeatedly mocked “woke” culture and embraced “alpha male” posturing, boasting about sexual conquest (Access Hollywood tape) and physical aggression (“knock the crap out of them” at rallies). Trump’s appeal to manosphere-aligned voters wasn’t just stylistic, it was thematic. He positioned himself as a victim of a feminized elite culture attempting to suppress “real men” through media censorship, #MeToo, and immigration policies that supposedly favored outsiders over native-born working men (Ging, 2019; Nagle, 2017). Red pill forums and influencers celebrated him as a “Chad”, a dominant, unapologetic male fighting back against “betas” and “SJWs.” To Javier Milei in Argentina who has also become an example of this. Rising to power on an anti-establishment, libertarian platform, Milei blends shock-jock performance, misogynistic undertones, and disdain for political correctness. He has referred to the state as a “thieving ex-wife” and attacked feminism as a leftist weapon aimed at undermining freedom and masculinity. His flamboyant style, including yelling at journalists and comparing himself to a lion, channels the outrage-driven virality typical of manosphere influencers like Andrew Tate.

Milei’s messaging paints Argentina’s economic crisis not just as a failure of policy, but as a consequence of feminized, collectivist governance. His solution: radical individualism, economic Darwinism, and personal dominance, all tropes straight out of manosphere and red pill discourse (The Guardian, 2023). They have both adopted performative masculinity, media hostility, and anti-feminist symbolism as central elements of their appeal. Their speeches, tweets, and interviews often feature tropes familiar to red pill audiences: strong men are being silenced, women are out of control, the elites want to emasculate you, and “wokeness” is destroying civilization.

6. Quantitative Analysis

6.1 Voting trends

To fully understand the political consequences of male radicalization in social media, it is essential to analyze the concrete shifts in voting behavior and electoral participation among young men. While earlier parts detailed the ideological, emotional, and cultural dimensions of this shift, this section uses quantitative data from national election results, public opinion polls,

and academic studies to track how political alignments have changed, particularly among men aged 18 to 29, in the United States and Western Europe. In addition, between the 2016 and 2024 presidential elections, a significant realignment occurred in male voting behavior, particularly among non-college-educated and racially diverse young men. According to Pew Research Center data (2021, 2024), support for the Republican Party among men under 30 increased from 35% in 2016 to nearly 46% by 2024. Notably, this shift was not driven exclusively by white men. Black and Latino men, especially those without four-year degrees, showed growing alignment with right-wing populist rhetoric around crime, economic freedom, and anti-wokeness.

Exit polls from CNN and The New York Times in 2024 confirmed that while women under 30 remained the most left-leaning demographic, men in the same age bracket tended to be more conservative than at any point since 2004. In battleground states such as North Carolina, and Georgia, the Republican margin among young men often exceeded 50%. Even in traditionally blue states like Nevada and Arizona, the gender gap widened dramatically.

6.1.1. Education

While college-educated young men continue to lean Democratic, the divergence between them and their non-college peers has grown starker. According to YouGov's post-election panel survey (2024), 62% of male voters without college degrees supported the GOP in 2024, compared to just 38% of college-educated male peers. Among Latino men without degrees, support for the Republican candidate reached 52%, while support among Latino women remained at 32%. This pattern aligns with Thomas Piketty's theory of the "Brahmin Left" (2020), which argues that progressive parties have become dominated by educated elites, leaving working-class men (especially men of color) feeling abandoned by leftist rhetoric that appears to prioritize symbolic identity over material issues.

6.1.2. European Trends

The same thing can be seen in Europe. In France for example, the National Rally saw a major surge in support among young men during the 2022 and 2024 elections. IFOP polling (2022) revealed that 42% of men aged 18–34 voted for Marine Le Pen's party in the presidential

runoff, compared to just 28% of women in the same age range. In the 2024 European Parliamentary elections, Jordan Bardella, National Rally's youth-focused leader, secured record youth male turnout through Instagram-based campaigning, anti-woke messaging, and nationalist economic proposals.

In the United Kingdom, Reform UK saw increased support from young men frustrated by immigration, economic instability, and cancel culture. According to the British Election Study (2023), male support for right-wing populist platforms rose by over 12 percentage points from 2017 to 2023 among those aged 18 to 29. Young men were significantly more likely than their female peers to cite "free speech," "national identity," and "masculinity under threat" as reasons for their support.

Germany, too, has witnessed the rise of male-oriented support for the far-right Alternative für Deutschland "AfD". A 2023 study by the German Marshall Fund found that over 50% of AfD's online engagement came from men under 35, many of whom cited feminism, migration, and censorship as key concerns. These figures align with similar upticks in online radicalization and YouTube engagement patterns discussed in the algorithm section.

6.1.3. Gender Gap

These numbers reflect not only a political realignment, but a growing gender polarization that is most intense among the youngest voters. The gender gap in American voting behavior, for example, reached a record high in 2024, with a nearly 20-point divergence in partisan preferences between men and women under 30 (Pew, 2024). This is mirrored in digital behavior: male engagement with figures like Jordan Peterson, Andrew Tate, and Elon Musk maps closely to right-leaning ideological preferences, while female engagement clusters around progressive or feminist voices like AOC, Hasan Piker, or Emma Chamberlain.

This divergence has deep socio-cultural consequences. As politics becomes more gendered, cross-ideological empathy becomes harder to foster. Romantic, familial, and academic relationships become strained by divergent worldviews shaped not only by values but by algorithmically reinforced identities. Political polarization, when filtered through gender, risks becoming a foundation for civil estrangement.

Next, we will examine how social media engagement data further clarifies the mechanics of this political transformation, and how engagement metrics offer early signals of electoral behavior among disaffected young men.

6.2 Social Media Engagement

6.2.1 Social Media Engagement Metrics and Ideological Drift

Beyond voting patterns, internet behavior offers an even earlier and often more precise window into political orientation. Social media engagement, especially on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, and Twitter/X, serves as both a reflection and a predictor of ideological leanings. Now we will examine how male-dominated engagement patterns reveal a broader trend toward right-wing populist identity formation and the emotional infrastructure that sustains it.

6.2.2 The Engagement Gender Gap

Across platforms, there is a pronounced difference in the content young men and women interact with. According to a 2023 Pew Internet study, men aged 18–29 were more than twice as likely as women in the same age group to engage with content tagged as “anti-woke,” “red pill,” or “masculinity.” On TikTok, hashtags like #SigmaMale, #RedPill, and #SelfImprovement received billions of views, with a significant portion of audience engagement stemming from young male users (TikTok Data Report, 2023).

On YouTube, the audience for figures like Andrew Tate, Jordan Peterson, Fresh & Fit, and Rollo Tomassi is overwhelmingly male. For instance, Peterson’s channel analytics (via Social Blade, 2023) show over 80% male viewership, concentrated in the 18–34 age bracket. Similarly, Tate’s Hustlers University recruitment videos and short-form clips reached tens of millions via TikTok reposts, often without any centralized upload source, a decentralized virality that evades moderation.

6.2.3 Algorithms and Retention Loops

Algorithmic pathways play a critical role in reinforcing and radicalizing user engagement. The Mozilla Foundation (2021) demonstrated that YouTube’s “Up Next” feature consistently nudges users toward more extreme content over time especially around gender, politics, and identity. A user who begins by watching a motivational video on confidence is often served red pill dating content within 5–10 recommendation cycles. TikTok For You Page operates even faster: by tracking watch time, replays, and comments, it builds a hyper-personalized feed that reflects the user’s insecurities and interests in real time.

This dynamic means that disaffected young men who search for dating advice or self-improvement tips are quickly channeled into ideological spaces. YouTube channels like *Entrepreneurs in Cars* and *Donovan Sharpe* use motivational hooks to introduce gender essentialist narratives, while TikTok edits fuse red pill talking points with viral audio, humor, and visual glamorization.

6.2.4 Comment Sections

Engagement is not just passive. Comment sections and repost chains become ideological training grounds where young men bond over shared grievances. Reddit threads, YouTube debates, and TikTok duets all serve as participatory arenas where users don’t just consume but internalize and repeat red pill beliefs. A 2022 Cornell University study of manosphere communities on Reddit found that users who commented frequently were more likely to adopt increasingly extreme rhetoric over time, even when their original posts were moderate. These micro-communities also serve a social purpose: they offer identity reinforcement. By liking, sharing, and engaging in group discourse, users experience validation and a sense of tribal belonging. This emotional currency builds loyalty far more powerful than traditional political messaging.

6.2.5 Cultural Radicalization

Because engagement precedes voting, social media data offers valuable early warning signs. In the 2024 U.S. election, analysts observed a months-long surge in pro-Trump, anti-Biden

content among 18–24-year-old male users across TikTok and YouTube, particularly content framed in terms of masculinity, economic freedom, and anti-wokeness. Meme trends like “Trump was right,” “masculinity is not toxic,” and “I’m not voting blue, I’m not a woman” went viral weeks before polls reflected actual voter movement (Crowdtangle, 2024). European data mirrors this. In France, Jordan Bardella’s National Rally Instagram campaign used meme aesthetics, male-focused fitness rhetoric, and anti-woke slogans to mobilize young men in ways that traditional polling missed. In Germany, AfD-aligned Telegram channels experienced a 300% growth in male membership under 35 in the six months before the 2023 elections, using coded language, humor, and populist dog whistles.

6.2.6 Platform Design and Emotional Engagement

Finally, the design of social platforms amplifies ideological drift. Content that is controversial, angry, or identity-affirming is more likely to be boosted, not because of its truth value, but due to its emotional engagement metrics. Algorithms prioritize what holds attention, not what informs. As such, ideologically charged content, especially content that validates male anger or promises simple truths, performs better. In this environment, attention becomes a political asset. Content creators who master outrage and aesthetics, like Andrew Tate’s cigar-smoking monologues or “based” TikTok montages, gain disproportionate influence. Young men are not merely consuming ideas; they are being aesthetically and emotionally recruited.

6.3. Mental Health Crisis

The radicalization of young men on the internet, does not occur in a vacuum. Underlying the social media engagement trends discussed in the previous subsection are deeper psychosocial dynamics shaped by loneliness, sexual frustration, job insecurity, and mental health struggles. This part looks into how dating platforms, economic stagnation, and mental health indicators intersect to create fertile ground for the red pill pipeline and political radicalization.

6.3.1. Dating Apps

Online dating apps like Tinder, Hinge, and Bumble have profoundly reshaped romantic dynamics among young adults. While these platforms promise accessibility and efficiency, they have also contributed to a perception of scarcity and competition, especially among men. A 2023 study from the University of Michigan found that the top 20% of men receive more than 80% of the likes on dating apps, while the bottom 50% receive less than 5%. Women, by contrast, tend to be more selective and receive significantly more engagement overall. This creates a dynamic often described in red pill discourse as the "80/20 rule", a shorthand for the belief that a small minority of men monopolize female attention while the majority are invisible. While often exaggerated in manosphere circles, empirical evidence supports the reality of highly uneven digital dating economies. A Pew Research Center report (2022) found that nearly half of young men reported receiving few or no matches on dating apps, compared to only 15% of women. These dynamics can have real psychological consequences. Incel (involuntarily celibate) forums and black pill spaces often begin with stories of dating app failure, fueling feelings of inadequacy, bitterness, and learned helplessness. As the boundary between dating frustration and ideological grievance blurs, online communities provide explanatory frameworks, often built around evolutionary psychology, gender essentialism, and anti-feminist narratives.

6.3.2. Mental Health and Male Isolation

Simultaneously, young men face a well-documented mental health crisis. Center for Diseases Control "CDC", data from 2023 show that men under 30 report rising rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. This is compounded by lower rates of therapy usage compared to women, often due to stigma, cultural expectations, or lack of male-targeted services. The American Psychological Association (2022) noted that men are less likely to seek help until reaching crisis levels. Loneliness is a particularly potent driver of radicalization. According to a 2023 Harvard study, 61% of men aged 18–29 reported feeling "frequently lonely," and 40% said they had "no close friends." These statistics mirror the emotional void that red pill and populist spaces exploit. The manosphere offers not just content, but community, shared language, solidarity, and emotional validation couched in defiance and humor. Red pill influencers explicitly frame their message as therapeutic. Andrew Tate, for example, frequently juxtaposes

his hyper-masculine image with claims that he is “saving young men from depression.” Jordan Peterson’s focus on meaning, responsibility, and order appeals to those who feel emotionally adrift. While critics challenge the ethics of these messages, their resonance speaks to unmet emotional needs.

6.3.3. Economic Insecurity

Young men today also face economic conditions markedly worse than previous generations. Stagnant wages, inflation, college debt, and the gig economy have diminished traditional masculine markers of success such as homeownership, stable employment, and provider status. According to the Brookings Institution (2024), real wages for men aged 18–34 have declined by 12% over the past decade, with especially steep drops among non-college-educated men. This economic dislocation undermines both self-worth and traditional masculine identity. Men who cannot fulfill provider roles may feel emasculated in both personal and cultural terms. Red pill ideology, with its emphasis on “grindset” and status restoration, offers a compensatory fantasy of control and dominance. Figures like Tate package wealth, discipline, and sexual access into a coherent aesthetic, a form of aspirational masculinity that seems attainable through adherence to specific behaviors and beliefs. Economic anxiety also correlates with political disenchantment. A 2024 Cato Institute survey found that men who felt financially insecure were 40% more likely to distrust democratic institutions and 65% more likely to express sympathy for authoritarian leaders who promised cultural clarity and national strength.

6.3.4. The Psychosocial Landscape

Together, dating app stratification, emotional isolation, and economic frustration create a triple-layered crisis that primes young men for ideological capture. Red pill and populist influencers do not create these conditions, they exploit them. Their appeal is rooted not merely in misogyny or anti-liberalism, but in their ability to offer simple narratives to complex problems. The combination of explanatory power, emotional resonance, and community validation makes We have seen the quantitative profile of the male populist turn: not just what young men believe or how they vote, but why they feel the way they do. Now we will look into how surveys and

polling data map these beliefs, offering a final empirical synthesis before the thesis turns to qualitative case studies.

6.4 Surveys and Polling Data

To complete this quantitative analysis of the male populist shift, we need to look into public opinion surveys and polling data that document not only how young men vote, but what they believe. This section synthesizes major surveys from 2016 to 2024 to chart how economic, cultural, and emotional variables align with increasing populist sympathies, red pill ideologies, and broader anti-establishment worldviews.

6.4.1: Masculinity and Identity

A 2023 Ipsos Global Trends survey found that 47% of men aged 18–29 in Western countries agreed with the statement: “Traditional masculinity is under attack.” This belief was even more prevalent among those without college degrees or stable full-time employment. In the U.S., Pew Research (2022) found that 55% of young men said feminism had “gone too far,” compared to only 25% of women in the same age group. Support for statements like “men are losing their rights” or “society favors women over men” correlates with populist voting patterns. A cross-tabulation of data from YouGov’s 2024 election panels showed that men who felt “masculinity is not respected in society” were 60% more likely to vote for right-wing candidates, even when controlling for race and education.

6.4.2: Attitudes Toward Feminism

Public opinion on feminism among young men reveals sharp divides along both class and digital exposure lines. A 2023 Gallup poll reported that only 38% of men under 30 considered themselves “feminist,” compared to 59% of women. Among frequent consumers of red pill or manosphere content (self-identified in survey data), the figure dropped to 12%. Additionally, the framing of gender equality itself has become politicized. In a 2024 Brookings/AEI joint survey, 63% of men who identified with populist or nationalist parties said they viewed “gender equality

efforts” as “performative or elite-driven.” These perceptions echo earlier chapters' arguments about the corporatization of feminism and its alienation of working-class male identity.

6.4.3. Political Cynicism and Institutional Trust

Beyond gender issues, young men express strong distrust toward institutions. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2024), men under 30 had the lowest trust scores in media, higher education, and government among all demographics. Disaffection with democratic institutions also correlates with political disengagement: 31% of young men polled by Cato Institute (2023) said they would prefer “a strong leader who doesn’t have to bother with Congress or elections” if it meant preserving national identity and cultural values. Even more revealing, 22% of men aged 18–29 in the U.S. agreed with the statement: “The country needs a revolution, not reform.” Among red pill-identified respondents, that number rose to 38%, demonstrating how cultural alienation transforms into anti-democratic sentiments.

6.4.4. Media Consumption and Ideological Affiliation

Survey data also reveals a tight coupling between media diet and ideological orientation. A 2023 Data for Progress report showed that young men who regularly consumed YouTube channels like Fresh & Fit, Valuetainment, or Matt Walsh were nearly twice as likely to support Trump-style populists. Similarly, a 2022 Pew study noted that male viewers of TikTok content with manosphere tags overwhelmingly expressed skepticism toward progressive policies, multiculturalism, and liberal feminism. These data points support the idea that media consumption is not passive. Ideological cues embedded in content are actively absorbed and reflected in survey responses. Respondents who consumed self-help or fitness-oriented content without red pill affiliation were more moderate in views on gender and politics, while those who moved into the manosphere sphere exhibited significant hardening of views.

6.4.5: Implications for Future Political Alignment

Taken together, these polling and survey results illustrate a deeply entrenched worldview among many young men: that they are disempowered, disrespected, and culturally sidelined.

This sentiment may not always manifest in voter turnout, but it is politically potent nonetheless. Whether it leads to protest voting, ideological disengagement, or support for authoritarian populism, the belief structure is clear, and growing.

This empirical foundation sets the stage for the next chapter, which will move from broad statistical analysis to close-up case studies. There, we will examine how these trends materialize in the lived experience and media behavior of disaffected young men across national and cultural contexts.

7. Qualitative Analysis

7.1. The National Rally

France presents one example of youth-driven right-wing populism in Western Europe, particularly through the electoral and cultural strategies of the National Rally “Rassemblement National” or “RN” and its young leader, Jordan Bardella. This part will look into how Bardella and the RN have successfully mobilized young male voters, especially from working-class and suburban backgrounds, by leveraging masculine-coded nationalism, social media virality, and anti-elite rhetoric.

7.1.1. Jordan Bardella

Jordan Bardella, born in 1995 and raised in Seine-Saint-Denis, a lower-income suburb northeast of Paris, was promoted by Marine Le Pen to rebrand the RN for a younger, digital generation. His origin story, growing up in a working-class area heavily populated by immigrants, has boosted his populist credibility. Bardella frequently references his background in speeches, framing himself as someone who understands “forgotten” or “invisible” France (Le Monde, 2023). This appeals to young men who feel excluded from France’s professional-managerial elite. In his public appearances and interviews, Bardella often invokes themes of national strength, order, and cultural pride. During a 2022 debate on BFMTV, for instance, he declared, “We must defend our civilization, our identity, and our people”, language that resonates with voters seeking a return to traditional values (BFMTV, 2022). While avoiding

overt racial rhetoric, Bardella employs euphemisms like “Islamist separatism” and “urban violence,” which are widely interpreted as critiques of immigration and multiculturalism.

7.1.2. Social Media Strategy

Bardella’s appeal has been significantly amplified by his adept use of social media. In a 2023 IFOP survey, 43% of men aged 18–34 expressed support for the RN, with TikTok and Instagram engagement cited as key campaign drivers. Bardella’s personal Instagram, with over 500,000 followers, includes stylized posts of him working out, visiting factories, or posing with supporters. scenes deliberately curated to exude masculine energy and working-class authenticity (IFOP, 2023). His team has mastered the art of meme-driven campaigning. For example, a series of RN TikToks used popular audio clips to mock feminist protests, while highlighting Bardella’s “cool under pressure” demeanor during televised debates. This content format echoes the aesthetics of red pill and manosphere creators, making the RN ideologically familiar to digitally active young men. According to a 2022 MediaLab Sciences report, RN’s TikTok engagement among men under 30 outpaced all other French parties combined.

7.1.3. Anti-Woke Politics

Bardella frequently positions himself as a defender of France against “wokisme,” a term that has become a catch-all for progressive cultural shifts including feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and racial equity discourse. In a widely shared 2023 speech at Sciences Po, he declared that “the left wants to deconstruct everything, our schools, our families, our masculinity,” aligning his platform with young men’s perception of being culturally marginalized (France24, 2023). This ideological posture is reinforced in campaign messaging that praises “real men,” “national duty,” and “masculine honor.” These appeals offer not just a political platform but an emotional and symbolic refuge for young men who feel emasculated by contemporary gender norms. The RN’s framing suggests that male discontent is not only legitimate but noble, fuel for national renewal.

7.1.4. Suburban Masculinity

Many RN-supporting young men hail from France’s exurban and peri-urban zones, areas affected by economic stagnation, deindustrialization, and social fragmentation. These zones are also sites of postcolonial tension, where white working-class French youth live alongside second-generation North African immigrants. The resulting socio-cultural anxiety often gets expressed in terms of “lost identity” or “Islamization” (Thomas, 2021). Bardella’s messaging taps into this anxiety without explicitly invoking race. He talks about “regaining control” and “securing the Republic,” often in response to incidents of urban unrest or high-profile crimes involving immigrant suspects. In a 2023 campaign ad, Bardella promised to “defend French women from lawless zones”, a rhetorical move that reaffirms male protectionism and frames populism as chivalric responsibility.

7.1.5. France as a Model

The success of Jordan Bardella and the RN among young French men illustrates how populist parties can craft emotionally resonant, digitally optimized narratives of masculine solidarity and national revival. Through coded language, visual branding, and algorithmic fluency, Bardella positions himself as both a political insurgent and a masculine role model. His rise suggests that the fusion of digital-era masculinity and nationalist populism is not an anomaly but a repeatable model across Western democracies.

7.2. Populism on American TikTok and Twitter

Unlike the centralized political strategy of France’s RN, the United States’ youth populist movement is a decentralized, meme-driven ecosystem that thrives on platforms like TikTok, Twitter/X, and YouTube. These platforms have become cultural incubators for young men drawn to nationalism, anti-feminism, and anti-establishment rhetoric. We will explore how populist ideas in the U.S. circulate through digital creators, meme culture, and algorithmic virality, forming a cultural consensus that precedes any formal party alignment.

7.2.1. Influencer Networks and the Rise of ‘Based’ Politics

The red pill ecosystem in the U.S. includes a variety of influencers who blur the line between lifestyle coaching, dating advice, and political agitation. TikTok accounts like @theroommatespodcast, @sneako, and reposted clips of Andrew Tate flood For You Pages with content linking personal struggle to societal decline. These creators frame masculinity as being under siege from feminism, “wokeness,” and liberal cultural dominance (Mozilla Foundation, 2021). Many use coded language like “based,” “alpha,” or “high-value man” to elevate figures like Donald Trump or Elon Musk as avatars of resistance. These influencers rarely mention specific policy goals. Instead, they offer identity alignment. For instance, TikTok edits celebrating Trump often pair viral audios (e.g., “Dark Red” by Steve Lacy) with text like “the last real man in politics,” reinforcing gendered interpretations of leadership (Crowdtangle, 2024).

7.2.2. Algorithmic Amplification and Meme Aesthetics

Populist messages thrive on TikTok not because of ideological coherence but because of memetic efficiency. Content like “If you vote blue, you’re not a man” or “Feminism ruined dating” often appear as punchy, humorous, or ironic memes that bypass traditional defenses against propaganda (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Because TikTok’s algorithm prioritizes content based on watch time and replays, even brief ideological cues can be repeatedly served to vulnerable users. According to a 2023 Data & Society report, TikTok engagement with politically themed manosphere content (including hashtags like #feminismexposed and #masculinitycrisis) grew by 230% in just 18 months. This growth was disproportionately driven by male users aged 16–25, many of whom do not follow political accounts directly but interact with content embedded in humor, dating commentary, or gym culture.

7.2.3. Populism as Emotional Catharsis

Like Bardella in France, U.S.-based digital populism offers emotional validation to young men who feel disenfranchised. But in the American case, this validation is channeled through aesthetic defiance: users don’t just consume politics, they perform it. TikTok accounts film “based edits” of themselves lifting weights to Andrew Tate speeches, or stitch political

commentary onto comedy clips to signal ideological allegiance without appearing too serious. This aesthetic aligns with a broader trend identified by Nagle (2017), in which political expression online becomes a form of subcultural belonging. Instead of detailed debates, political identity is constructed through tone, sarcasm, music, and visual design. Young men become “citizens” of an imagined counterculture where expressing masculine defiance is more important than party affiliation.

7.2.4. From Irony to Action

While many of these memes begin as ironic or humorous, repeated exposure often leads to deeper ideological commitments. A 2023 Knight Foundation study found that young men who regularly engaged with politically charged meme accounts on TikTok and Twitter were significantly more likely to express distrust in mainstream institutions, endorse conspiracy theories, and view feminism as a cultural threat. This conversion from meme consumer to populist adherent is rarely direct but emerges over time through repetition, reinforcement, and online community. Even more apolitical creators have started adopting populist talking points, sometimes to boost engagement, illustrating the commercial incentive to replicate this messaging ecosystem.

7.2.5. The U.S. Digital Right as a Leaderless Movement

What distinguishes the American youth populist movement is its lack of formal structure. There is no single leader like Bardella or Le Pen, yet the messaging is remarkably consistent across platforms and creators. This leaderless nature makes the movement more adaptable, harder to censor, and more likely to be integrated into new trends and aesthetics. Populist masculinity in the U.S. has evolved into a digital identity, a set of signals, tropes, and grievances that bind young men in algorithmically driven cultural solidarity. The next subsection will examine how non-white men navigate and contribute to this discourse, especially through hybrid identities shaped by race, faith, and cultural expectation.

7.3. The Non-White Manosphere

While much of the red pill and populist discourse is framed through the lens of white Western male anxiety, a growing number of Latino, Black, and immigrant-background men have carved out their own space within these ecosystems. These men often navigate hybrid identities, balancing racial marginalization with a perceived loss of masculine authority, resulting in complex, sometimes contradictory political affiliations. This subsection explores how non-white men engage with and reshape manosphere ideology, focusing on three key arenas: cultural expectations, racial framing within populist spaces, and hybrid influencer narratives.

7.3.1: Latino and Black Masculinity in Red Pill Spaces

Latino and Black men in the United States face unique pressures around masculinity, often grounded in community-specific cultural expectations. For many, traditional gender norms, stoicism, provider roles, assertiveness, are reinforced through family, church, and peer groups. These expectations can create cognitive dissonance when confronted with modern feminist discourse, leading some toward red pill ideology as a reaffirmation of cultural pride. Popular creators like Austin Dunham and FitX, both of whom are Black, exemplify how non-white men integrate fitness, self-discipline, and dating strategy into a self-improvement narrative that often flirts with red pill ideology. Dunham emphasizes “body-first” transformation as a gateway to confidence and social capital, while FitX blends dating advice with critique of modern women, often invoking manosphere language like “high-value men” and “female nature.” Their content is widely consumed by men of color aged 18–34, many of whom view fitness and financial independence as critical tools for reclaiming status and agency (YouTube Analytics, 2023).

7.3.2: Navigating Racial Identity Within Populist Narratives

Non-white red pill influencers and audiences often face an implicit tension: the broader populist narratives they align with are sometimes steeped in racial essentialism or ethnonationalism. Yet many Black and Latino men compartmentalize these contradictions, embracing the gender and cultural components of right-wing rhetoric while rejecting overt racial animus. This is particularly evident in the framing of “Western decline.” In red pill spaces, this

decline is often attributed to feminism, immigration, and the erosion of traditional values. Some non-white men accept this framing, substituting “cultural decline” for racialized language. For instance, creators like The Roommates have argued that “traditional masculinity has no color” and that “Western values” have drifted away from spiritual and gender clarity, positions that resonate across racial lines.

7.3.3: Faith, Masculinity, and Anti-Liberal Sentiment

Religious frameworks, particularly Christianity and Islam, play a central role in shaping non-white engagement with populist masculinity. Muslim influencers like Ali Dawah and Sneako (a Filipino-Cuban-American convert to Islam) have increasingly adopted red pill-aligned positions, often merging religious orthodoxy with critiques of liberal modernity. These influencers frame Western feminism not merely as a cultural nuisance but as a spiritual and civilizational threat. Sneako, for instance, frequently discusses women’s dress, sexual norms, and dating app behavior as signs of societal decay, while citing Islamic teachings on gender roles and marriage. His content has gone viral not only in the U.S. but in South Asian and Middle Eastern TikTok spheres (Al Jazeera Digital Culture Report, 2023).

7.3.4 Organic Diversity Versus Institutional Tokenism

One of the most striking aspects of the manosphere and red pill ecosystem is its appearance of organic diversity. Unlike corporate-led diversity, equity, and inclusion “DEI” initiatives, often perceived as top-down mandates, manosphere platforms appear to foster diversity through meritocratic appeal rather than formal inclusion policies. This has led to prominent influencers of varied racial backgrounds rising to influence without being presented as “diversity hires.” For example, Andrew Tate, a biracial former kickboxer, became one of the most influential red pill voices globally, not through institutional backing, but by cultivating a brand of extreme self-confidence, wealth, and discipline (Roose, 2022). Similarly, Kevin Samuels, a Black image consultant, rose to prominence by harshly critiquing both men and women, earning respect within the manosphere for his blunt, no-nonsense style, not for checking racial boxes (The New York Times, 2021). This kind of organic appeal feels more authentic to many young male viewers than what they perceive in mainstream media, particularly in

Hollywood or academia, where racial and gender inclusion is often presented as a moral imperative. Platforms like Netflix or Disney+, for example, have been repeatedly accused of “forced diversity”, casting or rewriting characters to meet inclusion targets rather than narrative or audience demand (Zine, 2021). Shows like *She-Hulk* and *The Witcher* drew backlash from some online communities for inserting ideological messages tied to feminism or race, which critics claim felt preachy rather than earned (The Independent, 2022). In contrast, red pill creators like Sneako (Cuban-American) and Jose Zuniga (Honduran-American) build followings by offering tangible advice on fitness, fashion, and self-discipline. Their ethnic backgrounds are acknowledged, but not emphasized, allowing viewers to focus on content rather than identity. In academic and corporate contexts, DEI initiatives often assert that authority comes from lived experience tied to identity, such as race, gender, or sexuality. This emphasis can alienate young men who see competence and results as more legitimate sources of authority. By contrast, red pill and self-improvement spaces frequently promote a “post-racial meritocracy” narrative, where influence is based on perceived value and expertise rather than demographic traits. A good example is FitX (Black-American), a bodybuilder and dating coach whose popularity stems from his results-focused advice. His race is incidental to his authority, he’s not a “representative” but a figure of aspirational masculinity. This contrasts with DEI panels or corporate marketing campaigns that center identity first, which some viewers find artificial or patronizing (Sow, 2020). This perceived authenticity is key to the manosphere’s ideological appeal. While it often downplays or ignores structural inequalities (e.g., racism, wealth disparity, historical exclusion), it promotes an ethos of radical personal responsibility, where anyone, regardless of race, can “make it” by mastering self-discipline and social dynamics. This message resonates particularly with young men who feel alienated by institutions that reward symbolic inclusion over individual grit. Scholars such as Angela Nagle (2017) and Donna Zuckerberg (2018) have noted how these spaces function as countercultural meritocracies, offering belonging and recognition to those who reject identity politics in favor of performance-based credibility.

7.4. Andrew Tate

Andrew Tate represents a uniquely transnational figure in the populist manosphere. While many red pill influencers are confined to national discourse, Tate operates with a global brand that

merges hyper-masculinity, entrepreneurialism, and anti-liberal politics. His influence stretches from the U.S. and U.K. to Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and parts of Africa. We will look into how Tate's messaging resonates internationally, using examples from his social media strategy, ideological framing, and audience reception.

7.4.1. Aesthetic of Power and Stateless Masculinity

Tate's online persona is built on the projection of global dominance, luxury cars, private jets, cigar-smoking monologues, and footage from his home in Romania. His brand is deliberately borderless. He often states that he chose Romania for its lower regulations and “more traditional values,” portraying Western countries as feminized and authoritarian (BBC, 2022). This geographical dislocation allows him to frame himself as a post-national masculine ideal: above the law, above cultural decay, and beholden to no country. His content is dubbed or subtitled in Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, and Romanian. Fan pages across TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram repost his videos in regional languages. According to a 2023 Vice investigation, over 65% of reposted Tate content came from outside the U.K., including significant traction in Pakistan, Egypt, and Indonesia.

7.4.2. Islam, Masculinity, and Cultural Realignment

Tate's public conversion to Islam in 2022 further expanded his appeal across the Muslim world. In interviews and on Twitter, he framed Islam as the “last strong religion” that still upheld traditional gender roles and offered men purpose and structure. His tweet stating, “Islam fixes everything,” went viral in multiple languages, generating debate across religious and secular platforms (Al Jazeera, 2023). His alignment with Islamic masculinity gives him legitimacy in countries where feminism is often associated with Western neo-colonialism. In Egypt and the Gulf states, his critique of liberalism aligns with state-sanctioned cultural conservatism, allowing clips of his to be shared by Islamic influencers with massive followings. However, critics have noted that his behavior, particularly his legal issues related to human trafficking charges, clashes with Islamic ethics, creating ideological dissonance.

7.4.3. Appeal to Eastern European Youth

Tate's residence in Romania and invocation of "Eastern European values" also position him as a symbol of anti-globalist masculinity to audiences disillusioned with EU liberalism. In countries like Poland, Hungary, and Serbia, where traditional gender roles are still valued, Tate is perceived as both aspirational and culturally sympathetic. In 2023, a survey by Warsaw-based think tank Ordo Iuris found that nearly 1 in 4 Polish men aged 18–30 were familiar with Tate and 11% had a "favorable" or "very favorable" view of him. Interviews cited his "discipline," "truth-telling," and "resistance to woke culture" as key points of admiration. He has been featured in memes and short-form edits that use Slavic music, Orthodox Christian symbols, and anti-EU hashtags.

7.4.4. A Template, Not Just a Personality

Tate's impact lies not only in his message, but in the model he offers for others to emulate. His "Hustler's University" and now "The Real World" provide paid subscription-based access to courses on making money, asserting dominance, and evading liberal control. Thousands of young men across continents have joined these programs, often as a first step into the manosphere. The format, charisma, wealth, sexual access, anti-feminism, and global mobility, is replicable. Regional influencers in Turkey, Nigeria, and Brazil have adopted similar aesthetics and talking points, crafting localized versions of the Tate archetype. What unifies them is not ethnicity or religion, but a shared rejection of modern liberalism and an aspirational vision of masculine sovereignty. An example of this transnational replication is Renan Bolsonaro, the son of Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro. Renan, often dubbed "the influencer son," has adopted a hypermasculine, libertarian aesthetic similar to Andrew Tate's, frequently posting shirtless workout videos, luxury lifestyle content, and anti-feminist memes on social media. He has publicly praised Tate and echoed red pill talking points in Portuguese, framing traditional masculinity as under threat by "woke" ideologies and leftist feminism (Estadão, 2023). His social media presence blends fitness, nationalism, and anti-establishment rhetoric, positioning himself as a young symbol of masculine resurgence in Brazil. Likewise, in Turkey, fitness influencers like Burak Güngör have cultivated large male audiences by promoting self-improvement, stoicism, and dominance in relationships, often rejecting Western-style

feminism and liberalism. While less overtly political than Tate, these creators blend financial hustle culture with traditional gender roles, resonating with a generation of Turkish men navigating modern anxieties amid nationalistic revival and cultural conservatism (Demiralp, 2021). In Nigeria, influencers like Dr. Uche Maduagwu have mimicked Tate's attention-grabbing tactics by mixing brash masculinity with controversial views about feminism, marriage, and men's rights. While often seen as sensational, their influence reveals how Tate's blueprint, charisma, perceived success, anti-feminism, and online monetization has proven globally adaptable across very different socio-political contexts. What ties these figures together is not race, culture, or religion, but their aspirational projection of male sovereignty, a model where wealth, control, and resistance to liberal norms define success. In an era where institutional trust is declining, and traditional male roles feel eroded, Tate and his imitators offer a seductive alternative: become your own institution.

7.4.5. Tate as a Model

Andrew Tate's reach signals the globalization of reactionary masculinity. His cross-cultural appeal stems from his ability to tap into local frustrations while presenting a universal image of success and resistance. He transcends the borders of traditional right-wing populism, merging the manosphere with geopolitical commentary, religious symbolism, and capitalist mentorship. Unlike populist politicians tied to national borders or influencers tied to a single market, Tate is a floating signifier of postmodern masculinity, part preacher, part grifter, part warlord. His brand reveals that the populist turn among young men is not just national or cultural, it is planetary.

8. Discourse Analysis

The red pill and populist ecosystems are not merely ideological, they are linguistic and symbolic worlds. Their power lies in how they use language, imagery, humor, and digital culture to shape belief and behavior. Here we will look into how discourse functions as a tool of identity formation and emotional manipulation across red pill and right-wing populist spaces. Drawing on examples from books, YouTube channels, Twitter accounts, and online communities, it unpacks the rhetorical structures that unify these decentralized movements.

8.1 The Red Pill Dictionary

Red pill spaces rely on a highly specific lexicon that simplifies complex social dynamics into digestible binaries. Terms like “alpha,” “beta,” “SMV” (sexual market value), “high-value man,” “hypergamy,” and “female nature” serve as ideological filters, pre-loading every discussion with assumed truths. These terms originate from forums like *The Rational Male* (Tomassi, 2013), Reddit’s *r/TheRedPill*, and YouTube channels such as Coach Greg Adams and *Entrepreneurs in Cars*. This terminology creates a shared epistemology, a language that simultaneously explains reality and shields adherents from critique. As Deborah Cameron (1998) notes in *Verbal Hygiene*, specialized discourses offer “semantic control,” allowing speakers to dominate narratives through word choice. In manosphere spaces, to question hypergamy is not just to disagree, but to show ignorance.

8.2 . Meme Culture and Aesthetic Coherence

Populist manosphere discourse thrives on memes. Visual formats like the “Chad vs. Virgin” dichotomy, “Soyjak,” and “Sigma male grindset” serve as shorthand for complex ideological statements. These images, often humorously exaggerated, reinforce masculinity tropes and gender hierarchies without overt exposition.

Memes blend ideology and irony, allowing users to signal belief without full commitment—a dynamic Zeynep Tufekci (2015) calls “plausible deniability of belief.” A TikTok edit showing

Donald Trump edited like a Marvel hero, set to orchestral music, might be dismissed as a joke, but for the viewer, it still reinforces associations of strength, defiance, and charisma.

YouTube creators like Hamza, First Man, and channels like Better Bachelor use visuals, Greek statues, samurai aesthetics, gym montages, paired with emotionally charged music and slogans like “No one is coming to save you” to build an effective atmosphere. This emotional priming makes ideological arguments more persuasive, as per George Lakoff’s theory of embodied cognition (Lakoff, 2004).

8.3 Rhetoric of Victimhood and Rebellion

Central to red pill discourse is the rhetoric of victimhood: “men are under attack,” “the system is rigged,” “feminism lied to you.” These messages tap into a moral inversion where the traditionally powerful men are cast as oppressed. This framing enables moral urgency and justifies aggressive counter-reactions. Andrew Tate’s Twitter/X account, for instance, frequently posts statements like “The Matrix wants you weak” or “Escape the slave mind.” These are not just metaphors but slogans that frame liberal democracy, feminism, and media as totalitarian systems. In doing so, they activate rebellion fantasies in users, casting self-improvement or political resistance as revolutionary acts. This rhetorical strategy is echoed in Jordan Peterson’s language, particularly in *12 Rules for Life* (2018), where chaos (female-coded) is to be ordered by masculine discipline. Similarly, Ben Shapiro and Matt Walsh use phrases like “the war on reality” to frame gender discourse as epistemological sabotage.

8.4. Hashtag Warfare and Semantic Hijacking

Twitter (X) plays a key role in real-time discourse manipulation. Hashtags like #MasculinityIsNotToxic, #Based, and #WokeMindVirus allows users to cluster around ideas and hijack trending conversations. Elon Musk himself has amplified such language, tweeting in 2023 that “the woke mind virus must be stopped,” giving legitimacy to red pill-coded terminology.

This tactic resembles what political linguist George Lakoff calls “reframing”: seizing language to shape political thought. For example, turning “feminism” into “gynocentrism” or “female

supremacy” reframes gender equality as oppression. On platforms like Twitter, this semantic hijacking spreads quickly through retweets, reaction videos, and algorithmic promotion.

8.5. Digital Myth-Making and Emotional Tribes

Red pill discourse constructs mythic narratives that go beyond policy or argument. These include:

- The rise-and-fall arc of civilization (strong men create good times, weak men create bad times)
- The sexual betrayal archetype (a good man dumped for a “Chad”)
- The return of the masculine hero (via hard work, discipline, and red pill awakening)

These stories are deeply emotional, invoking nostalgia, betrayal, revenge, and redemption. As Yuval Noah Harari (2011) argues in *Sapiens*, humans are myth-making animals—and online spaces like YouTube and Twitter function as arenas where modern myths about gender, decline, and heroism are shared and refined.

9. Institutions

As previous chapters have shown, red pill populism is not simply the result of fringe extremism, it is a response to emotional, economic, and symbolic dislocation that mainstream institutions have failed to address. This chapter explores the ways in which political parties, educational systems, media organizations, and even tech platforms have misread or ignored young male disaffection, inadvertently fueling the ideological vacuum that reactionary voices now fill.

9.1. Political Parties and the Abandonment of Working-Class Men

Mainstream center-left parties such as the U.S. Democratic Party, the U.K.'s Labour Party, and Germany's Social Democrats have increasingly aligned with urban, college-educated elites, often emphasizing diversity, symbolic representation, and climate reform over the material concerns of

the working class. This shift, documented by Thomas Piketty in his theory of the “Brahmin Left” (Piketty, 2020), has left many young men, (particularly those without college degrees), feeling excluded from the political conversation. While the intention was inclusion, the rhetorical emphasis on racial and gender equity often came at the expense of economic class language. This created a perception that institutions only listen to grievances associated with minority identity categories, not those related to male insecurity or class displacement. As a result, many young men feel more culturally distant from progressives than from populists, even if they disagree on specifics.

9.2. Educational Systems

Education has long been a missed opportunity to reach disaffected young men. Across the U.S. and Europe, boys underperform relative to girls in reading, writing, and college completion. Yet most educational reform efforts have centered on increasing female participation in STEM or addressing racial achievement gaps, important goals, but often framed in zero-sum ways that exacerbate male disengagement. Guidance counseling, mentorship programs, and emotional literacy curricula rarely speak to the specific vulnerabilities of boys, particularly those growing up in father-absent homes or economically distressed environments. The absence of positive male role models, combined with an institutional discomfort with discussing masculinity in constructive terms, has contributed to what Richard Reeves (2022) calls a “male malaise.”

9.3. Media Narratives

Mainstream media outlets often amplify the perception that young men are inherently privileged or dangerous. Tropes of the “fragile white male,” “mansplaining,” and “toxic masculinity” dominate liberal discourse on gender. Even when critiques are aimed at systems, many men interpret them as personal attacks, especially those who already feel invisible or disempowered.

This cultural narrative creates a paradox: institutions claim to want gender equity but communicate that male voices are suspect unless filtered through apology or deconstruction. As a result, young men increasingly turn to alternative media figures who affirm rather than

interrogate them. Whether or not these figures offer ethical advice is beside the point, the mainstream void creates the demand.

9.4. Tech Platforms

While social media companies have taken steps to ban or demote red pill content, these efforts are often reactive and easily bypassed. Banning Andrew Tate, for example, led to a surge of mirror channels and edited clips that only increased his mystique. Algorithmic promotion still favors emotionally charged content, meaning outrage and tribalism perform better than nuance. Rather than curbing radicalization, these moderation strategies sometimes reinforce it by confirming the manosphere's persecution complex. Young men are told that "the system doesn't want you to hear this", and then the system removes it. This cycle only increases distrust and deepens echo chambers.

9.5. Listening to Understand

Institutions face a difficult challenge: how to address male disaffection without validating misogyny or reactionary populism. The answer lies not in censorship or shaming, but in acknowledgment and engagement. Political parties must recover the language of class and dignity. Schools must develop emotionally literate, male-positive guidance programs. Media must distinguish between critique and contempt. Tech platforms must invest in promoting creators who offer constructive masculinity, not just profit-driving rage. Until institutions reckon with their own blind spots, they will remain reactive rather than proactive, leaving a generation of young men vulnerable to those who promise clarity in exchange for conformity.

10. Policy and Cultural Recommendations

Having examined the social, political, and emotional ecosystem that fuels young men's attraction to red pill populism, this chapter outlines constructive solutions that address the root causes of male disaffection. These are not mere rebuttals to manosphere talking points, but proactive strategies for reintegrating disaffected young men into civic, emotional, and economic life. Solutions span education, media, politics, and technology, with an emphasis on practicality and cross-ideological resonance.

10.1. Education Reform

Schools must become spaces that affirm rather than pathologize masculinity. This begins with acknowledging gender gaps in academic performance and designing programs that speak directly to boys' developmental needs. Expanding mentorship programs that pair male students with positive role models (particularly in father-absent communities), has shown promising results (Reeves, 2022). Curricula should incorporate emotional literacy, discipline, and purpose, not through punitive models but through structured rites of passage and personal goal-setting. Programs like the UK's Reach Foundation or the U.S.-based Becoming A Man initiative offer scalable examples of male-positive education that respects vulnerability without diluting strength.

10.2. Political Parties and the Language of Dignity

Mainstream parties must revive the language of class and merit, moving beyond a narrow focus on demographic identity. This means articulating policies that emphasize dignity through labor, fairness in education, and security in family life, issues that resonate across gender lines but are especially salient for disaffected men. Parties on the center-left should resist framing male grievances as inherently reactionary. Instead, they can position themselves as champions of male flourishing without sacrificing commitments to gender equality. Political rhetoric should reflect an ethic of inclusion without shame, a concept both populist and progressive traditions have, at times, mishandled.

10.3. Media Responsibility

Journalism, film, and streaming platforms must abandon lazy tropes of the “problematic man” and instead showcase diverse male experiences. This includes stories of emotional growth, brotherhood, responsibility, and reconciliation. Platforms like Netflix and HBO should diversify writer’s rooms to include male voices from working-class or minority backgrounds—not just to “represent,” but to humanize. Media literacy campaigns should be directed at youth in schools, equipping students with tools to decode manipulative content and false binaries. These need not demonize red pill creators but should contrast them with healthier models of self-worth, masculinity, and civic engagement.

10.4. Tech Design and Algorithmic Ethics

Tech platforms must shift from a purely reactive model to a preemptive one. Recommendation algorithms should be designed not only to remove harm but to elevate growth-oriented content. TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram can adjust backend metrics to reward long-term watch time over impulsive engagement. Funding should be made available for creators who produce male-positive, non-misogynistic content—especially in the spheres of fitness, finance, emotional development, and philosophy. Platform design teams should collaborate with sociologists and educators to ensure digital environments do not inadvertently radicalize users seeking belonging.

10.5. Cultural Interventions Through Fatherhood and Community

Restoring fatherhood as a cultural value, not as moralistic nostalgia, but as an institution of care and authority, will play a crucial role in future masculine identity. Fatherhood programs, community-based rites of passage, and intergenerational dialogue groups can reconnect young men to a lineage of responsibility. Additionally, religious and cultural institutions that still command the respect of male youth, mosques, churches, martial arts dojos, barber shops should be leveraged for mentorship and moral guidance. Rather than abandoning these spaces to populist voices, civic institutions can support them with resources and shared goals.

10.6. Coexist with Masculinity

The aim of these recommendations is not to revive traditional masculinity uncritically, nor to dismantle it completely. Instead, the challenge is to co-create a new masculine contract, one that affirms strength without domination, vulnerability without weakness, and identity without tribalism. Such a project cannot be imposed from above; it must be cultivated from below, in the classrooms, communities, families, and feeds that shape how young men see themselves and their futures.

11. Conclusion

This thesis began with a simple observation: a growing number of young men are aligning themselves with red pill ideology and right-wing populism. Over the course of this project, I have traced how this movement is not just about politics, but about identity, meaning, and belonging. It is shaped by digital media, economic precarity, cultural narratives, and institutional failures. In this final chapter, I reflect on the key insights, the implications of this trend, and where society might go from here. One of the most important takeaways is that red pill and populist masculinity are not fringe ideas for many young men. They are becoming a dominant way of interpreting the world. Influencers like Andrew Tate, Jordan Peterson, and Sneako have turned self-help and masculine affirmation into ideological pipelines. These figures speak directly to frustrations that many young men feel, about dating, work, respect, and purpose. The language they use, while often controversial, resonates because it gives a sense of clarity and control in a world that feels confusing and unfair.

Another major insight is that institutions have failed to provide meaningful alternatives. Schools, political parties, and media outlets have struggled to connect with young men. Instead of addressing their concerns with empathy and structure, they have often responded with moralizing or avoidance. This creates a vacuum that is quickly filled by online spaces that offer not just answers, but community. Throughout the thesis, I have shown how digital platforms amplify this problem. Algorithms reward content that is emotionally intense and identity-driven. This means that once a young man begins to engage with manosphere or anti-establishment material, he is likely to see more of it. What starts as self-improvement can quickly become ideological

radicalization. This is not just about what users choose to watch, but about how platforms are built.

Case studies from France, the United States, and global influencers like Andrew Tate show how these dynamics are playing out across cultures. The appeal is not just national. It is global. Young men from different backgrounds are finding common ground in a shared sense of loss of status, clarity, and community. These emotional undercurrents are what make red pill populism so powerful. It is not just about hating feminism or opposing immigration. It is about trying to make sense of the world and one's place in it.

The final parts of this thesis offer some possible ways forward. Reforming education to speak to boys' emotional and academic needs. Rebuilding trust through political messaging that respects working-class dignity. Encouraging the media to tell more complex male stories. Designing tech platforms that promote healthier content. Supporting fatherhood and mentorship. These are not silver bullets, but they are steps toward offering young men something better than rage and withdrawal. If there is one message I hope to leave behind, it is this: young men are not the enemy. They are asking questions that deserve real answers. Some of those questions are difficult. Some are uncomfortable. But ignoring them only makes things worse. The goal should not be to shame or silence these voices, but to engage them with respect, honesty, and imagination.

Writing this thesis has been a journey through a complicated and sometimes dark corner of the internet and society. But it has also been a reminder that behind every meme, post, or angry comment is a person who wants to feel seen, valued, and capable. The challenge for educators, leaders, and creators is to help them find those things in ways that build rather than break. That is the work ahead.

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