

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND YOUNG MEN

BOYS AND THE CULTURE THAT CORRODES THEM

By Gretchen Barton, Rose Hackman & Kirk Cheyfitz
April 2024



WORTHY
STRATEGY
GROUP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report was prepared by [Worthy Strategy Group](#) for Story Strategy Group with support provided by The JPB Foundation. The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation, interviewees, or the institutions where they work.

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Suggested APA citation:

Barton, G., Hackman, R., Cheyfitz, K. (2024). Political Violence and Young Men: Boys and the Culture that Corrodes Them. Worthy Strategy Group.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Over the course of the first three months of 2024, a team of researchers with Worthy Strategy Group, led by Gretchen Barton with research support from Rose Hackman and Kirk Cheyfitz, reviewed a variety of academic and applied research and interviewed subject matter experts to help answer the following:

Why and how are young men and boys in the United States susceptible for recruitment to political violence, and how might we reduce or eliminate their joining groups that promote ultranationalism and commit political violence?

These questions were posed within the context of mounting worries in the United States over the threat of political violence, an on-going so-called “crisis in masculinity,” combined with pre-existing insight and research [suggesting](#) that political violence has tended, historically, to be disproportionately committed by young men with “an autocratic political orientation.”

Consulting research across the fields of political science, sociology, history, criminology, psychology, marketing, neuroscience, and more, along with in-depth interviews with sixteen experts holding a wide variety of insight — from on-the-ground expertise in hate groups and young men and boys to data and policy analysts and those with relevant lived experience — we found informed answers to the questions posed that were both surprising and pressing and pointed to some very real problems in urgent need of being accurately confronted and addressed.

We have organized this report into three sections: **I) The Kindling**, which looks at how our culture is making boys and young men vulnerable to political violence; **II) The Lightning**, which looks at the ways white nationalist movements come after young men (in particular the narrative on-ramps they deploy); and **III) Fire Prevention**, hypothesizes for how we might reduce risk for young men. We outline seven specific ways in which our culture is making boys and young men vulnerable and seven ideas for how we might foster a healthier world for men to grow up and find themselves and that can also provide off-ramps for young men susceptible to messages of political violence and authoritarianism.

We offer all of our findings and analysis with the hopes that they will serve as useful points of exploration for practitioners seeking to conduct further work on these issues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. THE KINDLING

How our culture is making boys and young men vulnerable to calls for violence

II. THE LIGHTNING

How White Nationalist movements come after young men

III. FIRE PREVENTION

How we can reduce risks for boys and young men

I. THE KINDLING

How our culture is making boys and young men vulnerable to calls for violence

“We got half of the country telling men, specifically white men, that you are the cause of all the problems in society. Then we have the other half of the country telling those same men that none of your personal problems are your fault.

So on one side you're responsible for everything on a macroscale and the other side, they're telling them you're not responsible for anything on a microscale. So any personal problems or any lack of self-efficacy or the fact that you're watching 30 hours of porn and video games a week, ‘It's not your fault, man. You're a victim.’ And on the other side, they're being blamed for 240 years of oppression or discrimination or misogyny that they had nothing to fucking do with.

[O]n one end, the left is at their back pushing them towards authoritarian demagogues, and on the other end, the authoritarian demagogues are basically pulling them in. That's a huge problem.”

—Nick Carmody, Psychotherapist

WHAT'S MADE MEN **VULNERABLE TO CALLS FOR VIOLENCE** ?

Time and time again, in speaking with experts and men who work with young men, we were told about the unique position young men find themselves in today. **It's not that young men have changed, but everything around them has changed. Scripts of masculinity that center domination, aggression and self-sufficiency have remained fixed, even as they are increasingly denounced as harmful, while few new, compelling scripts offering meaning and belonging have emerged.**

WE HAVE A CULTURE THAT HAS:

1. Dismantled coming-of-age rituals of masculinity
2. Further isolated men and boys in need of connection through “group think” + siloes
3. Suppressed opportunities for men to feel like their contribution will be celebrated
4. Failed to delineate new, inspiring models of healthy masculinity
5. Leaders that fuel violent expressions of masculinity
6. Dehumanized men and encouraged men to dehumanize others
7. Been taken over by under-regulated technologies that thrive off division and anger

1

THE KINDLING: YOUNG MEN

We've Dismantled Rituals in Our Society

For the last century, the role of men has been relatively fixed, with men carved into a rigid mold of duty, stoicism, and accepted societal leadership, giving them a clear sense of purpose and role in society.

Paradoxically, women have gained in economic, social and political rights, and their roles have dramatically expanded, as have societal norms.

In part because of these changes, supportive rituals for male development including rites of passage, such as the draft, community rituals (community service, religious ceremonies, initiations), and marriage, have started to erode.

The conundrum presented is as follows: we are still requiring men to abide by rigid gender norms that cut them off from their own emotionality, locking them into a place of loneliness and supportlessness, but we have dismantled much of their support system, and spaces where they previously would have found celebration, acceptance and belonging.

“These types of ritualistic practices [rites of passage like marriage, fighting for the community] and ways of being embodied were stripped from our grandparents and great grandparents. And so I'm just looking towards ancestral lines to reinstate them.”

*- Brian Strahine,
Founder, Men's Sacred
Liberation*

We've Siloed Ourselves and Further Isolated our Men

"For young boys, rebelling against norms becomes a driver for much of their behavior. School, in particular, is very monolithically progressive, and many boys feel like there's no room for discussion or debate or disagreement. And anyone who crosses these imagined lines is at risk of being labeled: 'Oh, you're racist, or, oh, you disagree, therefore you're a capitalist or whatever.'

Not creating the space for discussion or open expression creates a backlash effect where young men move to the other side because they feel like they can express and discuss counter or oppositional views without fear of reprisal."

- Brian Boland, Co-Founder, Delta Fund

Modern developments — from gaming to tech to pandemic-induced remote work to dismantling of public spaces — have led to a culture of "loneliness."

These variables have exacerbated the effects already set in place by restrictive male cultural training that rewards so-called self-sufficiency, ultimately leading to widespread feelings of isolation.

After all, these factors — from social media to gaming to the pandemic, and public and private policies cracking down on communal gatherings — have meant that we're no longer meeting in person, in community. And social media, where people gather for virtual community, does not help solve loneliness, but exacerbates it.

Because online, our existing communities suppress open expression through online shaming or cancel culture, or don't moderate extreme expression, ultimately giving men the feeling that they cannot openly experiment with ideas.

3 We've Suppressed Opportunities for Men to Feel Like They're Contributing

Shifting norms that criticize traditional masculinity have not been replaced by new models that men can aspire to. While certainly one-off role models like [Travis and Jason Kelce exist](#), they are few and far between. And arguably, these two in particular are impossible for men to embody, given that they are professional athletes, wealthy, have won the genetic lottery and are coupled with high status female partners.

It is abundantly clear that we lack clear models of positive masculinity concerned with male self-actualization that are as solidly cemented in the cultural understanding as the masculinity of yesteryear.

In our culture, we talk about men in unfavorable ways and don't celebrate men's contributions or welcome male energy. At the same time, the reality of economic inequality and diminished [opportunities](#) for quality, high-paying jobs are especially challenging to men, who have been taught that their self-worth is tied to being a "provider" for themselves and their families.

"A guy can't just go and do a hard day's work and be a family provider anymore, so that increases the number of guys who feel without purpose. That's not feminists' fault. That's sort of capitalism or industrialization's fault... But what we need for those guys — you know, 'I don't work at a factory, I don't feel like I can be a man.' — we need that high-school educated person to have something that he feels ... gives him meaning — other than maybe joining the militia or just doing self-loathing and taking fentanyl."

*- Steve Baskin, Director,
Camp Champions*

“And a lot of men have not really experienced that kind of brotherhood connection, especially with an elder, which is something else that I think was stripped from our society is this experience of older men. If we think in terms of just age older men who are more experienced in life turning around and reaching out their hand in support of younger men, that just doesn't exist in our culture. It just doesn't exist.”

- Brian Strahine, Founder, Men's Sacred Liberation

“Boys' problems, at the very root, are not related to their biology or psychology but to a culture that refuses to see boys (and men, girls, and women) as more than a set of gender and, in the case of boys of color, racial stereotypes. Given the nature of these stereotypes, the very social and emotional skills that are necessary for boys to thrive are not fostered.”

- Niobe Way, Deep Secrets: Boys' Friendships and the Crisis of Connection

4

THE KINDLING: YOUNG MEN

We're Not Intentional About Healthy Masculinity Models

Even as we criticize traditional masculinity, a culture of male hypersexualization and dehumanization is still the norm. And anyone who deviates from traditional gender stereotypes and “approved” behavior is met with punishing [backlash](#). This leaves men adrift: they cannot follow a traditional model of masculinity that has been disavowed, but their behavior is heavily policed if they try to act in new ways. Furthermore, many report a lack of role models and mentors who can help them navigate this new world. With no template for health masculinity in place, men are often viewed with skepticism, reduced to stereotypes, and treated as inherently violent, dangerous, and controlled by anger or a supposedly insatiable sexual drive.

Further, we're not offering comprehensive sex education to men (or women) and do not teach them to respectfully and vulnerably connect to others. The prevalence of [regular male porn](#) use not only sets the [standards](#) for sexual scripts, it is also [associated with decreased ability](#) to successfully connect with in-person partners.

We went from a system of traditional patriarchy, upheld by institutions to half-heartedly dismantling it, but with little vision for the future, leading to confusion and an existential state of directionlessness.

5

THE KINDLING: YOUNG MEN

We've Empowered Leaders Who Are Inciting Violence

Studies suggest that leaders set the standard, and can be incredibly impactful in how citizenry behaves, especially when it comes to political violence. A Stanford study on strengthening democracy, in fact, showed that there only two ways in which politically violent actors will stand down — one, their perceived opposition is humanized and they are reminded that their opposition does not want to kill them, and two, their leaders ask them to stand down.

But, when it comes to our leadership today, more and more we are seeing leaders elected who are not tamping down but rather fanning the flames of violence across America.

Elected leaders are flauntingly promoting hostile sexism, aggression and endorsing violent behavior, harkening back to harmful models of masculinity, rather than modeling new ones.

“The part that you can't really predict in a national survey and really are not predictable much at all, are the triggers, which are these spontaneous acts like Donald Trump sending a tweet on December 19th, [2020], ‘to Washington. It will be wild.’ And then the second trigger is he gives that really incendiary speech and then just launches this whole stream off at the Capitol. Well, those events are really critical.”

- Robert A. Pape, Professor of Political Science, University of Chicago

“The thing they have in common is they're dehumanizing people, women particularly, but even the men in it, these online platforms, gaming platforms, dehumanize us, and then these chat rooms and internet kind of culture, it's removed from human interactions.”

- Sarah Johnson, Founder, *The Akin*

6

THE KINDLING: YOUNG MEN

We Dehumanize Each Other

Mirroring the dehumanization at the heart of traditional notions of masculinity that otherizes women for domination, we perpetuate dehumanization in our politics, fostering hostility and violence; and our culture continues to perpetuate misogyny, antisemitism, and conspiracies.

Misogyny is not necessarily worse today than it was fifty years ago — it's just taken on a new form, and with the feeling by some that the patriarchy is under threat, misogynistic content is being sent out online, where technology exacerbates pre-existing biases. Adding fuel to the fire, people are increasingly living online and don't see their online avatars or those they interact with as real people.

We Refuse to Meaningfully Regulate Tech

Our contemporary tech and media platforms have evolved into engines that thrive on the cultivation and amplification of destructive emotions, including anger, aggression, and partisanship.

Research has shown that the algorithms powering social media platforms prioritize engagement, often at the expense of accuracy and nuance. This pursuit of clicks and views has led to an onslaught of information, much of which is of questionable quality and intent.

Moreover, studies have shown how sensationalism dominates the digital landscape, with headlines crafted to provoke emotional response rather than foster genuine understanding or dialogue. This has given rise to echo chambers, where users are exposed to content that reinforces their existing biases while filtering out dissenting opinions.

And in this environment, the United States government does not regulate tech in a meaningful way, and instead allows it to run unmanaged so that it can do whatever it wants.

“The problem is we live in a society where the media is owned by these corporations that benefit from the status quo, and they're money-making operations and sensationalized media and anger and hatred sell.”

*- Michael German, Fellow,
Liberty and National Security,
Brennan Center for Justice
(former FBI Special Agent)*

II. THE LIGHTNING

How White
Nationalist
movements come
after young men

THE CLIMATE FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE IS LIKE **A POTENTIAL WILDFIRE – DRY KINDLING AND A STORM ON THE HORIZON.**

“It’s a wildfire model. The way we know we’re in wildfire season is because we can measure the size of the dry wood combustible material. But that really is only a piece of the puzzle. The part that you can’t really predict are the triggers, which are these spontaneous acts.

“Political violence is something that can happen more quickly than people might really realize. Because the matches or the triggers or the lightning strikes, those things can touch ‘em off more quickly, just like in a wildfire. And then it’s boom: ‘Oh my goodness, if only I had known it was going to get so big.’”

*- Robert A. Pape, Professor of Political Science,
University of Chicago*

HOW WHITE SUPREMACIST MOVEMENTS COME AFTER YOUNG MEN

“And so the site of recruitment, it's just fun. It's barbecues, it's bonfires. We went to another Proud Boy party in upstate New York that was just on somebody's land, and it was just a bonfire and it was just like, I make fun of these guys for drinking a lot of White Claws. How are you going to call yourself a tough guy drinking all this fizzy water, bro? But it was more White Claw than I've ever seen in my life and just lots of kids in their twenties and teenagers even.”

- Michael Premo, Filmmaker and Civic Engagement Strategist, Homegrown

AND THERE ARE MULTIPLE ON RAMPS TO RECRUIT VULNERABLE MEN

These narratives are used by various groups worldwide to frame their struggles positively and their opponents negatively, justify actions, and mobilize support. These narratives can be found in political speeches, propaganda, literature, and social media, but are also scattered across pop culture in games and stories.

ULTRANATIONALIST NARRATIVE

Romanticizes a past golden age, portraying the state as having deviated from its glorious path due to corruption or foreign influence, necessitating a violent rebirth or purification.

ETHNIC OR RACIAL SUPREMACY NARRATIVE

Claims superiority of one race or ethnicity over others, often calling for violence to cleanse or maintain purity.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Antisemitism within white supremacist ideology often revolves around conspiracy theories alleging Jewish control or manipulation of various societal institutions, such as banking, media, and politics.

RELIGIOUS OR APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVE

Uses religious texts or prophecies to justify violence as a divine command or part of an apocalyptic battle between good and evil.

ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION NARRATIVE

Centers on the struggle against economic inequality and exploitation, portraying violence as necessary to dismantle an unjust economic system that benefits a few at the expense of many.

WAITING IN LINE

You are waiting in a long line leading up a hill. You've waited a long time, worked hard, and the line is barely moving. You deserve to move forward a little faster, but later arrivals are cutting in line ahead of you.

REVOLUTIONARY JUSTICE NARRATIVE

Promotes the idea of overthrowing an unjust, oppressive system through violence to establish a new, fairer society.

TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

Misogyny within white supremacist ideology reinforces traditional gender roles, with women expected to conform to narrowly defined gender roles within the family and society, limiting their freedom and opportunities.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY NARRATIVE

Merges religious beliefs with political activism, advocating for the use of violence as a means to liberate the oppressed from social, economic, and political injustice.

“

The FBI says its primary objective is counter-terrorism — and they've recognized that white supremacists are the most active domestic terrorist group. And since 2016, they've said they're keeping domestic terrorism on the same plane as international terrorism as far as their attention. Although they'll admit that their resources are still sharply disproportionately addressing international terrorism. But they can't tell you how many people white supremacists killed last year or the year before that, or the year before that, or the year before that. And they don't have any current plan in place to collect information.

”

- Michael German, Fellow, Liberty and National Security, Brennan Center for Justice, (former FBI Special Agent)

IMPORTANT

WHITE SUPREMACY IS NOT JUST A WHITE MOVEMENT

It's important to note that while the phrase "[white supremacy](#)" undoubtedly immediately triggers images of white men, it is not the case that white supremacy is exclusively for them. In fact, by design, there are concerted efforts to attract and retain boys and men of color to these white supremacy movements, using existing biases against women, in particular, to bring them into the club.

One root cause is the concept of "multiracial whiteness," where non-white individuals seek to align themselves with the privileges and power associated with whiteness in America.

Another, is [shared antipathy towards marginalized groups](#), leading some individuals of color to adopt and push out racist beliefs. Furthermore, some conservative Hispanic Americans express disdain for immigrants, while some Black Americans look down upon others within their community. This targeting of marginalized groups allows some individuals to assert superiority over others, even within their own racial or ethnic group.

Radicalization of these men happens through various online platforms and places like Fox News, which push out messaging that fosters a sense of superiority and directs their hatred towards marginalized groups, immigrants, LGBTQ individuals, Jewish people, and very notably, women. Misogyny, we have found, is the [ultimate gateway drug](#) for all men to unite under the banner of white supremacy.

“

I know so many Black men who are very clear that, yo, we got to protect our sisters. We got to protect our community, our children, and we've got to protect all of them from these white boys and these Proud Boys and these people who want to hurt us, et cetera.

But in the same vein, are a little bit more open to listening to some rich Black person or comedian rail against migrants or some Black podcaster talk about how his dating life is screwed up by women who make too much money and talk too much, and who share videos with all manner of Black people parading around.

And so I think for me, **the more insidious type of political violence — that I believe is violence and that I'm most worried about — is the narrative, the endorsing, the kind of doublespeak that a lot of these Black podcasters and hip hop personalities and frankly, wealthy Black people, [speak].**

- Phillip Agnew, Co-Director, Black Men Build

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FIXING OUR VULNERABILITIES

What's made men vulnerable to calls for violence?	To fix these vulnerabilities, we need a culture in which:
1. We've dismantled rituals in our society	1. We create new rituals to celebrate the passage from boyhood to manhood , centering community and consent
2. We've siloed ourselves and further isolated our men	2. We cultivate healthy, safe, vulnerable, and loving community for boys and men
3. We've dismantled rituals in our society	3. We create opportunities for men to contribute and be celebrated
4. We're not intentional about healthy masculinity models	4. We cast connection and emotionality as central to all humans , including boys and men
5. We've empowered leaders who are inciting violence	5. We celebrate leaders and role models that exhibit strength through collaboration and de-escalation
6. We dehumanize each other	6. We foster and celebrate a less othering world where we recognize each other's humanity
7. We refuse to meaningfully regulate tech	7. We stand up against technologies that further create siloes and divides

III. FIRE PREVENTION

How we can reduce
risks for boys and
young men

“If you want to understand or be at the places these boys are at, you have to be there. You have to be in the Twitch and the Discord and be on these channels and hire people of the right age to actually navigate it for you.”

- Sarah Johnson, Founder, The Akin

1

FIRE PREVENTION: REDUCING RISKS

Restoring Rituals of Manhood

Creating new rituals to celebrate the transition from boyhood to manhood, focusing on community and consent to participate, is crucial for fostering inclusivity and respect.

Traditional rituals - like hazing - often perpetuate harmful stereotypes and exclude certain individuals. Involving the community in the ritual's design and execution promotes collective support and emphasizes that manhood is about more than individual achievement.

[Prioritizing consent](#) ensures that an individual's autonomy is respected throughout the process. This can include voluntary participation and activities aligned with each man's personal values. The specific elements of the ritual can vary widely based on cultural and personal preferences. By [centering community and consent](#), these rituals empower individuals to define masculinity on their own terms and break down harmful stereotypes.

“Every culture has an initiation to manhood. Previously, you had to prove that you were no longer a drain on the tribe. You had to be a net positive.

I did this ritual for young men — unreal transformative stuff — and it brought them to a place where they asked themselves ‘what are you going to be? How are you going to make a difference in this world? You've just gone through this so you know you're strong. Now what are you going to do with that strength?’

We don't have initiations into manhood anymore. What we have is a world full of 50-year-old boys having sex with who they want or buying the car they want or living an inner-directed rather than other-directed life and feeling sorry for themselves. There's a whole lot of different ways you can go off the rails. Young men need something to aspire to. It's motivating.”

- Steve Baskin, Director, Camp Champions

“I had low tolerance for bullies, and then [the anti-racist punk] subculture gave me an alternative. The mainstream of American society was just never for so many reasons my own. And the society was just never going to be that anchor for me. And so I think subcultures provide particularly for alienated folks, possible anchors and exits. The problem is we don't resource those influencers and subcultures in the way that the far right does.”

- Eric Ward, Executive Vice President, Race Forward

2

FIRE PREVENTION: REDUCING RISKS

Prioritizing healthy community for young men

Cultivating a healthy, safe, vulnerable, and loving community for boys and men is essential for their well-being and growth. Research suggests that strong social connections can have a significant impact on mental health and overall happiness. Initiatives like men's groups, support networks, and safe spaces provide opportunities for men to connect, share experiences, and express themselves authentically.

These communities can encourage vulnerability and emotional expression, challenging traditional notions of masculinity that discourage men from showing their feelings. By fostering an environment where boys and men feel accepted and supported, these communities help break down barriers to seeking help for mental health issues and promote healthier relationships.

Creating opportunities for contribution and celebration

Creating opportunities for men to contribute and be celebrated not only fosters a sense of purpose but also validates their importance within the community. Studies have shown that feeling valued and appreciated for one's contributions can significantly enhance self-esteem and overall well-being among men. By actively recognizing and celebrating male energy and achievements, societies can empower men to fully engage in meaningful endeavors and take pride in their roles.

Initiatives such as men's leadership programs, mentorship opportunities, and community service projects provide avenues for men to make positive impacts and receive acknowledgment for their efforts. Moreover, events and ceremonies that honor men's contributions help reinforce a culture of appreciation and inclusivity. Finally, policies that help enhance tangible economic opportunities for all humans, including men to be able to provide for themselves and their loved ones.

“I know right away what I would do is I'd create opportunities. Opportunities, always, because that's what men want. We want an opportunity to try, to be heard, to get an education. We just want opportunity, right?”

We also need to have opportunities for us to have open conversations about things without each other feeling under attack and closing off. If I am in a conversation about reproductive rights, just as an example, and I don't understand something, I should feel like I can ask and someone will explain it to me without judging me.”

- *Alex Berrios, Co-Founder, Mi Vecino*

“What we're saying is that the old ways of being a man, the old ways of manhood, the western ways of being a man...are cowardice. They are insufficient. They are death dealing. They are so stifling. They are suffocating ... We say that strength is in vulnerability. Strength is in intimacy. Strength is in knowing yourself and your interior world and being open to sharing that with other people in the world. And John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, David Hasselhoff, Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger are personifications of a deep insecurity, a deep lack of curiosity, and a lack of true knowledge of yourself. And in this case, Black, Latino, and Indigenous men...must be the midwives for new men to be born. These new men will usher in a new era of society where they will be able to connect deeper with themselves, with their partners, whomever they may be, with their communities, with their families, with their country.”

- Phillip Agnew, Black Men Build

4

FIRE PREVENTION: REDUCING RISKS

Teaching + modeling healthy masculinity

Reintroducing emotionality, connection, and vulnerability as integral aspects of masculinity is crucial for the holistic well-being of boys and men. Research suggests that emotional expression, connection and a [need for belonging](#) are fundamental human needs, regardless of gender, and suppressing these aspects can lead to adverse mental health outcomes. By challenging the stereotype that equates masculinity with emotional stoicism, societies can create more inclusive environments where boys and men feel comfortable expressing their feelings and forming meaningful connections.

Studies [have shown that](#) promoting emotional intelligence and fostering close relationships can enhance resilience and overall life satisfaction among men. Emphasizing emotional openness and vulnerability as strengths rather than weaknesses can contribute to healthier relationships and more fulfilling lives for individuals of all genders.

Getting better leaders who won't incite violence

A Stanford study entitled [Strengthening Democracy](#), found that leaders telling a population to not commit political violence, is one of the two effective ways to stop political violence. So too is humanizing the other side and reminding people that the other side isn't trying to hurt them.

Celebrating leaders and role models who exemplify strength through collaboration and de-escalation can significantly impact societal perceptions of masculinity.

In fact, by highlighting leaders who prioritize [dialogue and compromise over aggression](#), societies can challenge traditional notions of masculinity rooted in dominance and control.

Studies show that promoting collaborative leadership models encourages empathy and fosters a culture of respect and inclusivity. Moreover, recognizing individuals who excel in de-escalating conflicts can inspire others to adopt similar approaches, leading to more peaceful and productive interactions.

“So they're talking about survivalist training, sniper assassination training, things like that....groups that are moving in that militia group direction. I wouldn't be surprised if there new groups forming, but I don't think it's going to be so easy to know what they are. And the reason is because back to my wildfire analogy, a lot of this [political violence] turns on what the leaders call for. You see, it's not pure bottom up. It's a mix of bottom up and top down. And it's why you take a leader out.

That leader could be replaced, but it's really both. It's wildfire and lightning or wildfire and a cigar butt [as] a trigger. You need the combustible material.”

*- Robert A. Pape, Professor of Political Science,
University of Chicago*

“Rehumanizing outgroups stands at the heart of countless conflict resolution and coexistence programs worldwide.”

- *Joshua Ronald Gubler, Eran Halperin and Gilad Hirschberger, Humanizing the Outgroup in Contexts of Protracted Intergroup Conflict*

6

FIRE PREVENTION: REDUCING RISKS

Humanizing the other side

Fostering and celebrating a less othering world, where we acknowledge and respect each other's humanity, is essential for building inclusive and peaceful societies. Research underscores the detrimetal effects of demonizing or dehumanizing others, as it can escalate conflicts and contribute to violence. Addressing deep-rooted prejudices, such as misogyny, anti-semitism, and belief in conspiracies, requires concerted efforts at the cultural level.

Studies indicate that promoting empathy and understanding across diverse groups can mitigate the impact of cultural biases and reduce instances of discrimination and hostility. Additionally, fostering open dialogue and education about the harmful effects of stereotyping and scapegoating can help counteract divisive narratives and promote unity within communities.

7

FIRE PREVENTION: REDUCING RISKS

Regulating Tech

Expanding tech regulation is crucial to preventing political violence, as unregulated platforms can be breeding grounds for extremism and misinformation. Studies indicate that social media platforms [play a significant role](#) in the radicalization of individuals involved in political violence incidents. A lack of regulation allows hate speech and extremist content to proliferate unchecked, contributing to the polarization of societies and inciting violence. The Capitol riots in January 2021 highlighted the [real-world consequences of unchecked online activity](#), with many perpetrators organizing and communicating through social media platforms. Implementing stricter regulations on tech companies can help curb the spread of extremist content and disinformation, thereby reducing the risk of political violence. Transparency measures and oversight mechanisms can ensure accountability and protect democratic values in the digital age. Social media platforms are currently protected by so-called [Section 230](#) — in clear need for scrutiny and reform.

“I think digital gets a lot of blame for creating things, and I think it's more of the gasoline on the fire than the creation of the fire. I think it's a kind of situation where I would see digital and social media as the Santa Ana winds of California fires. **You can have small fires and somebody else is starting 'em, and they're not great, and they grow. But once you put the winds on those fires, you lose control completely.** And so are the winds responsible or is the person who lit the fire responsible? Well, they're kind of both playing a big role.”

*- Brian Boland, Co-Founder,
Delta Fund*

WHY YOU SHOULD WORRY

You only need a small portion of any given population to erupt into political violence.

Economic disenfranchisement.

This is not a movement led by them, but it's built for them.

Authoritarian movements are doing a better job at recruiting/ appealing to young men (through their grievances and biases). They are giving them a place where their emotional needs are met.

Young men have a very high lack of trust in institutions and are open to conspiracies ("do your own research" culture + high trust of the manosphere).

Feelings of loneliness, disconnection, etc. make young men vulnerable for extremist grooming.

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T

A lot of young men are just fine — playing games in their basement, living their lives. If anything, most of them are just apathetic to politics.

The economy is growing! Opportunity abounds!

But that doesn't mean it's turning them into politically violent actors. And leading indicators show that young men as a population are not as open to political violence as older people.

← **Yeah you should worry about that one.**

Purported values (e.g. lack of trust/belief in conspiracies) do not necessarily translate into actions.

Stage of life argument: everyone is a rebel/disillusioned at this age, but it passes.

RECOMMENDED READINGS & VIEWINGS

For those who wish to learn more about young men and political violence, we particularly recommend the following readings:

- England, Paula. “The Incomplete Gender Revolution,” *The Julius Silver, Roslyn S. Silver and Enid Silver Winslow Dialogues in Arts and Science*, New York University, 2010
https://as.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu-as/as/documents/silverdialogues/SilverDialogues_England.pdf
- Jones, S. “The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States,” November 7, 2018,
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-far-right-extremism-united-states>.
- Kleinfeld, Rachel. “Why Men Are Drifting to the Far Right.” *Why Men Are Drifting to the Far Right - by Rachel Kleinfeld*, Persuasion, 29 Jan. 2024,
www.persuasion.community/p/why-men-are-drifting-to-the-far-right?utm_campaign=email-post&r=7hh25&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email&mkt_tok=ODEzLVhZVS00MjIAAAGRRaycoExrzU3qV9Nfvoil4QQ4Q3yyUne1ooU9UxOIZrN0HbBAT7WXLauUYMj5Rs0MEkSeH7Pile_tXbbjEsAG6bcC3rlzLyEp2jGi4arqy8g.
- Oberg, T. et al., “‘Denial Is Not Our Friend’: Researchers Say Americans Need to ‘wake up’ in Time to Prevent Political Violence,” *NBC4 Washington* (blog), January 5, 2024,
<https://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/denial-is-not-our-friend-researchers-say-americans-need-to-wake-up-in-time-to-prevent-political-violence/3507720/>.
- Pape, Robert. “University of Chicago’s Robert Pape Says Political Violence ‘Moving into the Mainstream.’” *YouTube*, Face the Nation, 13 Aug. 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRB8yJKWQBU.
- Voelkel, Jan G, et al. “Megastudy Identifying Effective Interventions to Strengthen Americans’ Democratic Attitudes.” *Stanford University Strengthening Democracy Challenge*, Stanford University, Aug. 2022,
<https://www.strengtheningdemocracychallenge.org/paper>. Accessed 2024.

For those interested in a deeper dive, [here is a link to the full bibliography](#) of materials we consulted in preparing this report.