

Assessing the Politics, Culture, & Beliefs Influencing Young Men in Fraternities

During the 2024 Presidential Election

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the 2020 presidential election, Joe Biden maintained a 25-point advantage over Donald Trump nationally among young voters (ages 18-29). In the 2024 presidential election, Kamala Harris saw that advantage drop to just 4 points¹. In the key swing state of Michigan, where Biden won young voters by over 20 points in 2020, Trump *won* among these voters just four years later². This shift represents a broader change in what was once thought to be a reliable and strong voting bloc for the Democratic party.

It has become clear that young men were a large factor in this drop-off, with Trump boasting a 14-point advantage among the subgroup this time around¹. While Trump saw improvements among young black and Latino men, further chipping off reliable Democratic voting populations, this dramatic shift occurred most powerfully among young white men, who turned out in droves for the former president. Despite Biden's 6% advantage among this group just four years prior, in 2024, Trump managed an incredible 34-point swing turnaround in his favor, securing a telling 28-point advantage among the population.

While support for the Republican party among white males is not necessarily a new phenomenon, the extent to which it was seen in the 2024 election is uncharacteristic among this demographic below the age of 30, who historically lean somewhat more liberal than their older counterparts. This dramatic reversal underscores the fragility of the Democratic coalition which used to include these young, white men.

This study seeks to examine the factors that caused this significant shift among young—particularly white—men toward Donald Trump and the Republican party. In this study, I analyze the context and statistical data I obtained from 44 in-depth interviews with young men within a fraternity at the University of Oklahoma. As a member of this same fraternity, I find

myself in the unique position to ask questions and receive answers that, in my opinion, are more realistic and give a truer sense of how these young men feel compared to data that would otherwise be obtained from an outside interviewer with no common ground to have these discussions on. All interviews took place prior to the 2024 November election.

I find that, among this sample, young men voting for Trump showed greater enthusiasm and loyalty than young men voting for Harris. Additionally, I find that Harris voters are more likely to describe their vote as a vote against the opposition, rather than a vote for their preferred candidate. In simplified terms, I find that Harris voters are more likely to be motivated by anti-Trump sentiments than Trump voters are to be motivated by anti-Harris sentiments. I find this pattern of expressing one's vote as a rejection of the opposing candidate still prevalent among Trump-voting young men, but at half the rate. Trump voters were twice as likely to express their vote as support for their preferred candidate than Harris voters were.

Furthermore, I find that young men voting for Harris are more affected by scandal and policy change. Trump supporters, on the other hand, are consistently less reactive to these events. I find that they average higher feelings of loyalty and thus are more willing to continue to give their support to their preferred candidate amidst scandal or policy change. In short, Harris voters are quicker to "jump ship" at the first sign of danger. In a low-turnout election, this may have been a contributing factor to the Harris campaign's defeat.

Additionally, I find that these young men attribute equal conservative and liberal pressures, respectively, to their experiences during their time within the fraternity and at the university. However, I find fraternity political discussions to occur at nearly double the frequency within the fraternity than they do on campus. Furthermore, I find political discussions within the fraternity to be self-described as having considerably less tension compared to those that occur

on campus. I also find that many of these young men—particularly due to their membership within a fraternity as well as their attending a college campus that they claim maintains a pressure to conform to liberal values—feel that they are the victims of a cultural backlash that stifles their ability to express their true political viewpoints. In this way, many feel that they can relate to President Trump—a man who regularly refers to himself as a victim of today’s liberal society. All of these factors contribute to a space where conservative discussion can thrive.

The data collected additionally shows that, in 2024, young men prioritized three core political issues when deciding which presidential candidate they were going to cast their ballot for:

1. The economy/inflation - Trump wins overwhelmingly on this issue, not just among young men, but among a majority of Americans.
2. Immigration - Similarly, a majority of not just young men, but Americans overall, believe Donald Trump will be more effective at solving this issue.
3. Foreign Policy - This issue is uniquely prioritized among this voting bloc. I find that the young men in this sample, regardless of party, share some degree of overlap on this issue. While these men are split on ideological lines over American support for Ukraine in their ongoing war against Russia, a majority of them, regardless of party, find consensus in the belief that the United States should no longer continue to financially support Israel in its war with Hamas. I find that increased isolationist tendencies among young men have turned many toward Donald Trump and away from the Democratic party.

Lastly, I seek to find areas where the Democratic party can plug some of the holes in their metaphorical sinking ship. These include: promoting candidates with a primary focus on support for the actual candidate, rather than on a dislike for the opposing candidate; establishing a sense of loyalty to these candidates themselves, rather than just a loyalty to only their policies; tapping into populist and “outsider” rhetoric; and establishing small-scale venues to facilitate more intimate, effective liberal discussions.

Through this study, I seek to gain a better understanding of the dramatic political shift that is occurring within such a large subset of the American populace. I seek to analyze the causes and attitudes behind this shift, as well as provide unique viewpoints and perspectives regarding this exodus of young—particularly white—male voters away from the Democratic party and toward Donald Trump in 2024.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite a large and extensive collection of research and data on the driving factors of voting trends for young men and women, specific research on the patterns and motivations of young men in fraternities is limited. Though this may be the case, the findings in this study are intended to be of use to those who want to better understand the voting habits and motivations of young men with increasingly conservative views, regardless of what collegiate organizations they may be a part of. In that sense, the literature I analyze will largely be in reference to these trends among young, American men in general. I believe this operates as an addition to my research, rather than a hindrance, as it is important to acknowledge the fact that those represented in my sample, being members of a collegiate fraternity, do not represent the majority of

young—even white—men across the country. The literature I cite helps provide some coverage for these broader trends that are not necessarily represented in my sample.

Low levels of voter turnout among young Americans are well documented throughout the last 50 years. In Thom File's scholarly article, "Young-Adult Voting: An Analysis of Presidential Elections, 1964-2012," he writes that "overall, America's youngest voters have moved towards less engagement over time, as 18- through 24-year-olds' voting rates dropped from 50.9 percent in 1964 to 38.0 percent in 2012."³ Within that nearly 50-year period, voting rates for young Americans significantly declined. It is worth noting that, according to File, "18 through 24 have consistently voted at lower rates than all other age groups."³ Though one might assume that these voting trends have always been age-related, File remarks that "it was not until 1996 that the oldest voting rates surpassed those of all other age groups, a development that has remained consistent in every presidential election since."³ In that sense, standardized, age-related voting patterns—where older populations consistently vote at higher rates than younger populations—have been a fairly recent development. Through this, we gain a better understanding of young voters throughout American history—though other generations of Americans have not historically voted at similar rates throughout the decades, young voters have consistently been the least engaged in the last 50 years.

Because of these lower turnout trends, it may have been easier for Donald Trump to make gains within this demographic. As I discuss later in this study, low rates of turnout may have substantially harmed the Democratic party in this most recent election cycle. It may very well be that Trump, having improved so dramatically among young voters, was not able to flip these voters, so much as he was able to turn out new voters and maintain support among loyal voters even amidst the drop-off in turnout.

This is further discussed in the scholarly article, “Voter Turnout Among Young Men and Women,” where authors Lopez, Kirby, and Sagoff note distinct occurrences regarding gender-related turnout. They write: “although in the 1972 general election men and women were equally likely to go to the polls, over the past thirty years the gap between male and female turnout in presidential elections has widened considerably.”⁴ This gender gap regarding political participation, according to the data presented in the study, most dramatically impacted younger Americans. Furthermore, both young African American and Latina women were voting at higher rates than their male counterparts. Following an election where Donald Trump made historic gains among African American and Latino men, it may be that Trump was able to turn out a large subset of voters who previously had remained largely apathetic to voting.

A 2005 study conducted by Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, and Scullion, reveals a strong distrust of the government and dislike for politicians among young voters. They found that “the majority disagreed that ‘most politicians are trustworthy’ (57 per cent) and with the statement ‘I trust the intentions of the Prime Minister to always do what is right’ (51 per cent). Their judgements surrounding ‘MPs keeping their promises’ were more mixed, with approximately half agreeing and half disagreeing. With respect to their cynicism, their level of agreement with ‘politicians lying to the media and public’ (71 per cent) and ‘candidates are interested in votes not opinions’ (67 per cent) are particularly high.”⁵ This may help to indicate one of the main appeals of Donald Trump among this voting bloc. Despite having already been president, he is still seen by many young Americans as an “outsider.” His populist and outsider rhetoric (specifically in the case of his isolationist foreign policy positions, as I will describe later) is in line with the ideologies of many of these young men, who feel the need for a newcomer to “clean up the mess” in Washington.

Donald Trump, having made gains among young white men, was able to turn out a segment of the populace that is historically apathetic. The words “young” and “male” are not necessarily synonymous with political engagement. It may be that Donald Trump was able to make such large strides among these voting blocs, not because he flipped those who had previously voted against him, but rather because he was able to energize and excite a subgroup of non-traditional voters. Additionally, his populist and outsider rhetoric may have appealed to this group of voters who are growing increasingly distrustful of government.

The literature review here highlights the complex dynamics of voting trends among young voters, specifically men, who have maintained a distinct lack of engagement in regard to voting participation within the last few decades. While research on specific subsets, such as fraternity members, remains limited, broader studies provide valuable insights into patterns of turnout, gender disparities, and the role of political cynicism fueling this shift. Declining turnout rates among younger voters, significant differences in gender-based participation, and perceptions of political trustworthiness underscore the unique opportunities that Donald Trump was able to successfully capitalize on during his 2024 campaign. By connecting these broader trends with the specific motivations and behaviors observed in this study, I aim to offer a more nuanced understanding of how young men, including those in fraternities, navigate the political landscape and what factors specifically motivated their overall shift rightward in the 2024 presidential election.

III. METHODS & LIMITATIONS

The mechanism for which I conducted this study involved in-person interviews with 44 social fraternity members at the University of Oklahoma. All interviewees, and myself, belong to

the same fraternity. This should be taken into account when furthering this area of study. It may be beneficial for future exploration on the subject to involve a multitude of different fraternities and types (social, multicultural, business, etc.). It should also be noted that I, as a member of the fraternity myself, have a unique opportunity regarding the methods of conducting this study. My positionality as both a researcher and acquaintance presents both advantages and limitations. My status as a known friend and member of the fraternity likely facilitated a level of trust and openness during the interviews, as participants may have felt more comfortable discussing sensitive topics related to their political views with someone they are familiar with. However, it must be noted that this same familiarity introduces potential biases in both data collection and interpretation. For instance, participants might have tailored their responses based on their knowledge of my own beliefs or experiences, whether consciously or subconsciously. To mitigate this bias, I took several steps to ensure that the data collection process remained as objective as possible. These included:

- Developing a standardized interview guide with consistent, open-ended questions designed to minimize leading or suggestive phrasing.
- Noting before each interview that subjects should be open and honest and would receive zero judgment regarding their answers.
- Establishing neutral curiosity following answers I seek elaboration on.

While this study provides valuable insights into political and social views within one individual fraternity, these findings are not necessarily generalizable to other fraternities across the country and have distinct limitations when applying the data as a sample for young men in general. Future research should aim to include a broader sample that incorporates multiple fraternities across different categories, including multicultural, business, and academic

fraternities, to capture a more diverse range of perspectives. Even then, there are limitations to generalizing the attitudes of young American men solely based on subjects within fraternities. The data collected here is merely a subgroup of the populace this study intends to account for and should not be taken as a perfect representation. Finally, it should be noted that future research may benefit from the incorporation of external researchers who are not affiliated with the respondents, as this may help to reduce potential biases that, knowingly or unknowingly could occur in data interpretation.

The depth of each interview depended on the necessity of the respondent. There were no time constraints, and each interview lasted as long as the subject kept talking. I engaged in this process with a “yes and” mindset, trying to get the respondent to speak as openly and honestly as possible with neutral encouragement. These interviews lasted anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes, taking place in various locations around the fraternity house. Interviews were conducted between October 1st and November 4th, 2024.

The interview process involved four distinct sections of questioning:

1. General Information - Respondents are asked general questions such as race, political affiliation, whether they will be voting (the interview is scrapped if not), which candidate the respondent plans on voting for, etc. Notably, this section includes a pair of open-ended questions. First, the subject is asked if they can imagine any hypothetical scenario where they do not vote for their preferred candidate and, if so, what that situation might look like. Second, the subject is asked if they can imagine any hypothetical scenario where they switch their vote to the opposing candidate and, if so, what that would look like.

2. Scandal & Policy Change - Participants are presented with a multitude of hypothetical scenarios involving their preferred candidate and the opposing candidate. These scenarios range from “your preferred candidate is diagnosed with a physical disability that severely limits their movement,” to “your candidate expresses their belief that the Earth is flat.” Following these hypotheticals, participants are asked to decide whether they would still vote for their preferred candidate, change their vote to the opposing candidate, or vote for neither candidate.
3. Fraternity & College Experience - Respondents are asked a range of questions regarding their experiences within the fraternity and college in general. They are asked to describe political attitudes on campus and within the fraternity and whether these attitudes and relationships affect their decision-making at the ballot box. Furthermore, they are asked to describe how their political views have developed from these experiences. It was notable that most respondents preferred this section and were the most talkative and engaged during its duration.
4. Political Priorities - Participants are asked to list up to five of the most important issues that will affect their decision-making when it comes time to cast their ballot. From there, respondents are led through individualized, open-ended questioning regarding the issues/policy areas mentioned in order to gain a better understanding of their perspective regarding each subject.

By employing these methods, this study seeks to capture a nuanced understanding of the political views held by young—particularly white—men as shown through the perspectives of

members of a single social fraternity. While the structure of the interviews allowed for depth and adaptability to individual respondents, the study's design is inherently constrained by its scope and context. The findings provide a snapshot of political attitudes within one specific fraternity but should be interpreted with caution when applying the findings to a general population of young men. Nevertheless, the insights gained highlight the interplay between fraternity membership, social experiences, and political perspectives, offering a foundation for further research on the political attitudes of this specific voting bloc. Future studies that expand beyond a single fraternity, include diverse fraternity types, and employ methodologies that further mitigate researcher bias will be crucial in building a more comprehensive understanding of how fraternity culture intersects with political behavior among young men.

IV. FINDINGS

Demographic and Political Overview

To understand the results of this study, it is crucial to be familiar with the population that makes up the sample. Through preliminary questions asked to the respondents, the following data regarding the demographic and political makeup of the sample is as follows:

Race: 86% White, 5% Black, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% Native

Political Affiliation: 57% Republican, 23% Democrat, 20% Other

Voting Decision: 66% Trump, 27% Harris, 7% Other/Undecided

When using this sample as a basis to analyze the larger trends among young men, it is important to note some key differences in these demographics. Clearly, this data is not entirely consistent with the demographic and political makeup of young men nationally. There is a clear bias toward young, white men and an underrepresentation of minority populations. Additionally,

there may be an overrepresentation of Trump-aligned voters. It is important to note that this study took place within a fraternity at the University of Oklahoma, residing in a state that is predominantly more white and conservative than most in the nation. Future research should analyze data from a majority of states with diverse backgrounds more representative of young men nationally.

On the other hand, while the demographic and political makeup of the sample in this study may not fully mirror that of young men nationwide, much of the data remains valid and offers valuable insights. While there is a notable overrepresentation of white individuals and Republican-affiliated voters in this study, this sample is still reflective of a common demographic in certain regions of the U.S., particularly in conservative states like Oklahoma. The data captures the political leanings of young men in these areas, which is an important subset of the broader national picture, especially at a time when regional political divides are increasingly pronounced.

Confidence & Driving Factors Among Voters

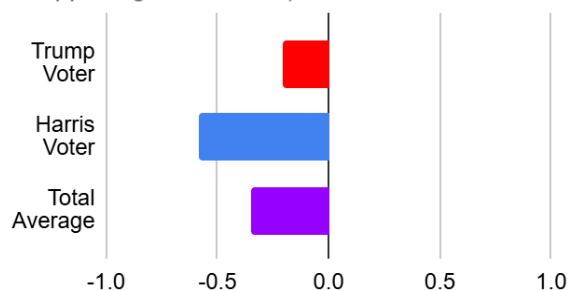
I found that this election cycle, among this sample, young men voting for Trump tended to have more assurance and confidence in their decision. When respondents were asked to assess their confidence of whether they will vote for their preferred candidate come election day on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not confident at all and 5 being completely confident), Trump voters averaged a higher score than their Harris-voting counterparts.

	Trump Voter	Harris Voter	Average
Average Confidence in Vote (1-5)	4.34	3.75	3.98

Among Trump voters, there was an average confidence score of 4.34. Among Harris voters, there was an average confidence score of 3.75. While the difference in confidence between Trump and Harris voters is not a dramatic disparity, it is notable. This difference could be attributed to a variety of factors, but I find larger shares of excitement and loyalty to be the most probable. Consistently throughout these discussions, it was clear that Trump voters had a higher level of excitement and enthusiasm than Harris voters. When asked to describe a hypothetical scenario where they could see themselves not voting for their preferred candidate, oftentimes Trump voters could not fathom such a situation. While this could be due to conservative pressures within the fraternity (as noted later in the study), there is substantial additional data to prove that the degree of excitement among young men voting for Harris was not comparable to that of Trump supporters.

In fact, when asked whether they attributed their vote as support for their preferred candidate (assigned a score of 1) or as opposition against the other candidate (assigned a score of -1), Harris voters consistently said their vote was more anti-Trump than pro-Harris. In this category, Harris voters maintained an average score of -0.58 compared to Trump voters' average of -0.21, indicating that Harris voters were more likely to express their vote as a reaction to frustration with the opposition candidate rather than a strong endorsement of their own candidate.

Voter Motivations (Pro-Preferred Candidate or Anti-Opposing Candidate?)



This trend suggests that Harris voters tended to be more primarily motivated by a desire to prevent Trump from securing another term, rather than by being motivated by their support for Harris herself. While both sets of voters expressed that, on average, their vote was generally in protest of the other candidate, Donald Trump had significantly higher levels of supporters voting for him because they believed in his candidacy, rather than because they opposed a Harris presidency. This trend is critical in understanding the excitement and confidence factors that led to a Trump victory.

It is very well possible that an emphasis on Donald Trump's defeat rather than a highlighting of Kamala Harris herself directly translated to lower turnout among Democrats. For many Harris supporters, the main motivating sentiments appear to be anti-Trump and not pro-Harris. It may be that this was a key factor in Harris' defeat, especially during a low-turnout election. Even with fewer voters this time around, Trump outperformed himself in 2020 by 2.8 million votes, compared to Harris' underperformance of Biden in the same year by 6.8 million.⁷ It may be that this strategy of emphasizing anti-Trump sentiments proved less motivating and less sticky than many Democrats anticipated

Effects of Scandal & Policy Change

In the second section of the interview, I assess the effects of scandal and policy change on voting decisions among this sample group. I find that few scandals or policy changes have significant effects on the way these respondents make their voting decisions. If there is any significant negative effect, the young men sampled are more inclined to disengage entirely rather than switch their allegiance to the opposing candidate. Scandals or policy changes that might severely diminish their support for their preferred candidate tend to result in a loss of enthusiasm

or motivation to participate in the election, rather than a reevaluation of the opposing candidate as a viable option. This finding suggests that their political preferences are deeply rooted in identity, ideology, and partisan loyalty, creating a barrier to considering the alternative candidate seriously.

I find that Harris voters, among the sample, are less “loyal” in this sense. On average, they are more easily affected by these scandals and policy changes than their Trump-voting counterparts. Averaging the 13 hypothetical scenarios listed, Harris voters are consistently more reactive, with higher rates of changing their vote or disengaging entirely as a result of the stated premise. On an averaged scale, ranging from -1 (“I will switch my vote to the opposing candidate”) to 1 (“I will continue to vote for my preferred candidate”), with increased distance from 1 representing increased volatility to the listed scenarios, Harris voters averaged a score of 0.54. This is a more reactionary score than the average Trump voter’s score of 0.68.

	Trump Voter	Harris Voter	Average Voter
Average Loyalty Score (-1 to 1)	0.68	0.54	0.62

While this difference is not entirely lopsided, it further represents a brand of loyalty and commitment that Donald Trump maintained among his voters during this election cycle. Among the top hypotheticals that resulted in disparities between Trump/Harris voters’ willingness to change their vote were:

1. “Your preferred candidate claims that the Earth is flat.”
 - Trump Voter Average: 0.47
 - Harris Voter Average: -0.09
 - Difference: 0.56

2. “Your preferred candidate is accused of sexual harassment.”
 - Trump Voter Average: 0.90
 - Harris Voter Average: 0.45
 - Difference: 0.45

3. “The opposing candidate’s political views become more moderate.”
 - Trump Voter Average: 0.77
 - Harris Voter Average: 0.36
 - Difference: 0.41

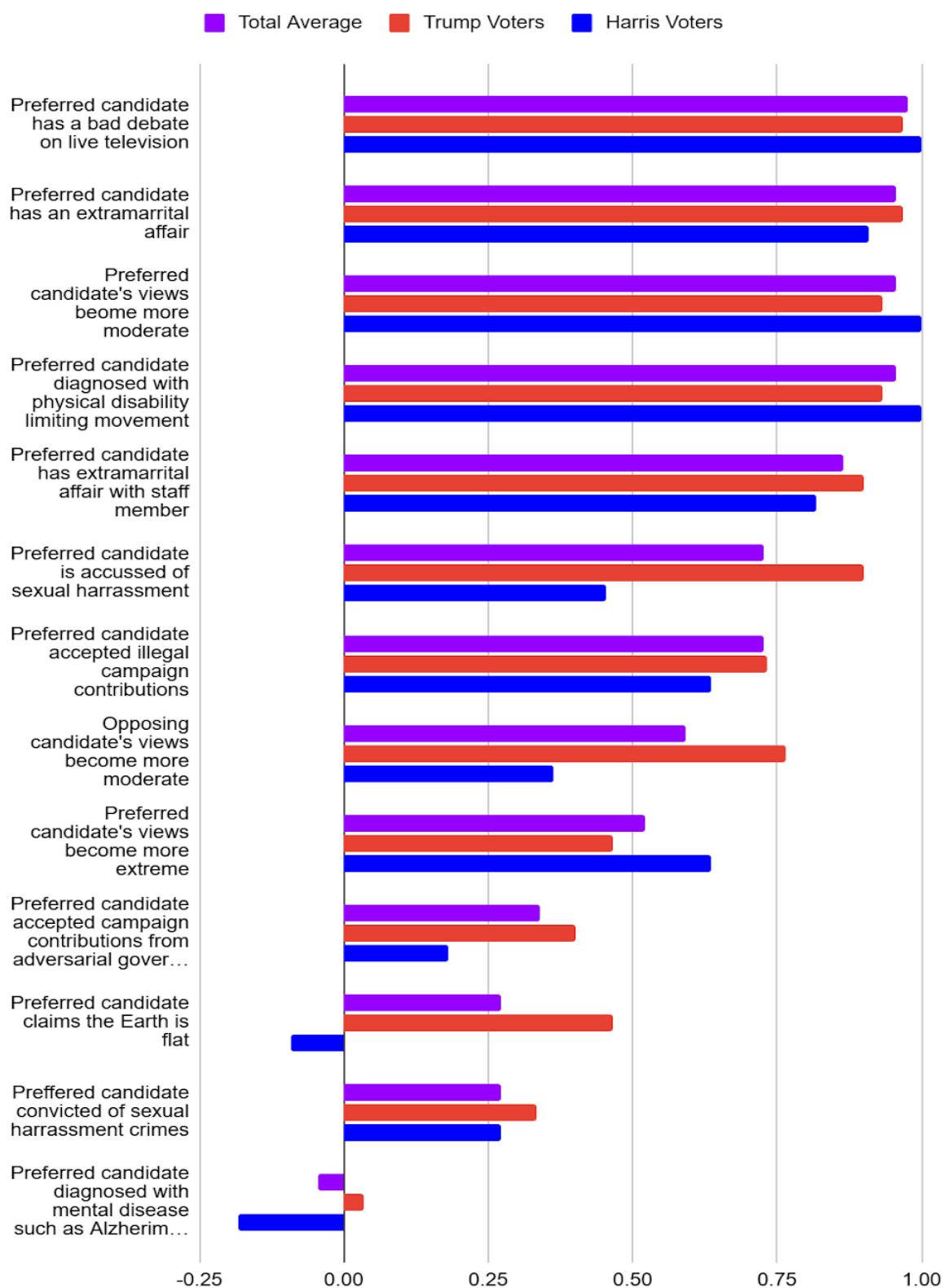
Consistently, across the board, Trump voters are less willing to change their vote and more loyal to their preferred candidate (note: 3 of the 13 scenarios show Trump voters being more willing to change their vote than Harris voters, however, in all three scenarios the difference is less than 0.1 and likely due to random chance).

Trump, himself having gone through countless scandals within the last 8 years, has built up a sort of immunity to these types of situations. His base, many within it having supported him throughout it all, has become thoroughly loyal and committed to the candidate. This kind of loyalty to a particular candidate seems unparalleled in modern politics. Trump’s famous 2016 quote, “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose any voters”⁸ seems increasingly true upon a look at the data.

On the other hand, young men voting for Harris are much more quick to “jump ship” at the first sign of danger. They react more quickly to scandal and, compared to young men voting for Trump, are twice as likely to change their vote to the opposing candidate were they to become more moderate. This shows a serious loyalty and unity problem within the Democratic

party. These voters, at least within this subgroup, are consistently less likely to stay committed come election day and are far more reactive to scandal or policy changes. If this effect continues, it could have severe consequences for the Democrat's success at maintaining a large and engaged coalition in future elections.

Voter Loyalty By Hypothetical Scenario

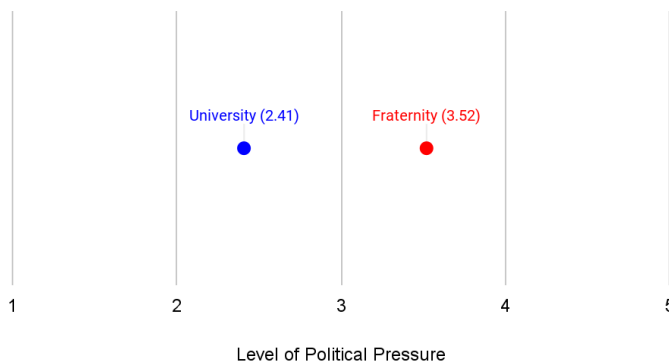


Political Pressures & Developments

The third section of the interview sought to analyze the social pressures that may have been present and the development of political opinions that may have occurred during the respondents' time in college and as a part of the fraternity. When asked whether or not they felt there were certain pressures to vote one way or another within the University and within their fraternity, the data shows that these young men, regardless of party, view pressures within their university and fraternity as leaning more liberal and conservative, respectively.

In the chart below, a score closer to 1 indicates a strong pressure to vote liberal. A score closer to 5 indicates a strong pressure to vote conservative:

Political Pressure in Fraternity vs. at University



The data shows that these young men feel about equal pressure to vote conservative within the fraternity and vote liberal within the University in general. These opposing pressures may result in a complex dynamic where respondents navigate differing political expectations depending on their social context. Further discussion revealed that while some respondents expressed indifference to these pressures, others acknowledged that they might be more cautious about openly discussing their political leanings depending on the setting.

Many of the self-identifying conservative respondents mentioned feeling that they could not accurately express their political beliefs without facing judgment or backlash on campus. It may be that this creates a sense of isolation among these individuals, where they only feel comfortable sharing their beliefs within close-knit groups such as their fraternity. In fact, the data shows that, on average, these young men talk about politics at significantly higher rates within the fraternity than they do on campus in general (1 being never discuss, 4 being often discuss):

	On Campus	Within Fraternity
Frequency of Political Discussions (1-4)	1.93	2.73

This effect emphasizes further the ongoing trend of individuals becoming more politically entrenched within one ideological bubble. In a space where it may seem that everyone is telling you that you are wrong, it may only take one group to tell you that you are right to confirm your ideology. Additionally, many self-identifying liberal respondents claimed that they felt that they had grown more moderate and conservative in their ideology since joining the fraternity. Though there may be pressures to vote liberal on college campuses, these pressures seem irrelevant when the frequency of political discussions within some of these conservative-leaning groups occur at almost double the rate.

Furthermore, the data shows that these young men view these small-scale, in-house conversations as being less tense compared to general, on-campus political discussions, even among Harris voters. Respondents were asked whether tensions during political discussions within the fraternity were higher, lower, or equal compared to political discussions on campus (-1 representing lower tensions and 1 representing higher tensions). The average response among

these men was -0.34. Not only are these men having a higher frequency of conversations within this conservative-leaning organization, but they are also having more productive, less tense conversations. All of these factors may contribute to an increased likelihood to vote conservative.

Finally, many conservative respondents expressed their dislike of what they view as pressures to vote liberal throughout the university. It may be that a college campus, being much larger than a social fraternity, is less intimate and therefore less effective in its “pressures.” Furthermore, it may create a negative effect and actually push students to become more conservative, as they may feel an urge to “go against the system.” This trend was common among discussions with Trump voters within the study. Often, they expressed feelings of pressure from elites, media, and other entities to vote liberal. It may be that this only strengthened their resolve to vote for Donald Trump. It also may be a reason why Trump voters show consistently higher loyalty ratings as discussed earlier—they are less likely to be affected by scandals since those scandals are reported by the very media they distrust. Furthermore, some respondents expressed feelings of being victims of targeting by campus administration. On more than one occasion the idea of Greek life and fraternities being “canceled” was discussed. This victim mindset may play a role in the appeal of Donald Trump, as he often refers to himself in that very same way. These young men, whether the sentiment is accurate or not, may see some similarities between themselves and Trump—thus an additional factor contributing to his support among their population.

Issue Priorities

The final section of the interviews is dedicated to discussing the issue priorities among these young men. Respondents were asked to name up to five of the most important issues driving their voting decision this presidential election. From there, discussions were held at varying lengths, depending on how responsive and open the individual was. This allowed for a deeper understanding of their motivations and highlighted key concerns regarding specific issues that might influence their political behavior. This open-ended format encouraged participants to share their perspectives candidly and in detail.

I find that there were 3 distinct issues on the minds of this population of voters in 2024:

1. Economy/Inflation (mentioned 75% of the time)
2. Foreign Policy (mentioned 66% of the time)
3. Immigration (mentioned 62% of the time)

With these three issues holding priority among this sample, Trump appears at an immediate advantage. Throughout the lead-up to the election, Trump consistently performed better in the opinions of voters on the economy and immigration.⁹ Furthermore, in almost every national poll, it was clear that these two issues were priorities among Americans in general.¹¹

What is different about this specific population is their emphasis on the importance of foreign policy. Compared to most polling, the average American does not share the same prioritizing sentiments that this sample does.¹⁰ I find additional takeaways from this issue as well. Not only does it have an outsized importance within this population, but there appears to be some consensus on the specifics of the issue across party lines.

While support for Ukraine in its war against Russia was split along ideological lines, there was consensus among both Republicans and Democrats that the United States should stop supporting Israel in its war against Hamas. Nearly every Democrat and over half of Republicans who listed foreign policy as a top issue, when asked, supported cutting off funding for Israel in this war. This shows an increased support for isolationist foreign policy among this voting bloc. More than once, respondents expressed that they “did not want to get drafted.” It may be that increased foreign disputes and conflicts throughout the world have led to a younger male population that is more hesitant to support American involvement in these conflicts.

This increased support for isolationist policies does not appear to have helped Kamala Harris. Although Harris appeared to be more sympathetic to Palestinians in the conflict, it does not appear that her support was clear enough to draw a contrast from Trump. In fact, when asked if they could list any hypothetical scenarios that would cause them to vote for Trump, more than one Harris voter mentioned that they would vote for Trump if he came forward with a more critical stance on Israel. While it does not appear that this happened, it does reflect weak loyalties among Harris voters on this specific issue and in general. Furthermore, many respondents expressed their dislike of the Biden administration's handling of foreign affairs. Even if Harris was more sympathetic to Palestinians in Gaza, it may be that voters believed Trump would be more effective at ending the conflict, since Biden (and by extension Harris) had not been able to at that point.

It should also be noted that the issue of “maintaining democracy” did not appear within the top 15 issues. Representing only 2% of responses, it may be that the existential concept of “democracy” is not tangible enough to resonate with this voting bloc. This finding is largely at odds with national polling that frequently has the issue as a top priority for the average

American.¹⁰ It may be that since my questioning was formatted in a way that does not give respondents the option to pick from select issues, but rather requires them to articulate their beliefs open-endedly, abstract concepts like "democracy" did not emerge as a primary focus. Instead, the young men surveyed seemed to prioritize issues that appeared more immediately relevant, such as economic stability. This difference highlights a potential disconnect between how national pollsters frame priority issues and the actual opinions of the electorate. When voters show up to the ballot box, there is no list of issues to help assist their decision; they simply choose based on their personal knowledge of the issues that come to mind. In this sense, it may be that the issue of "maintaining democracy," a frequent staple of the Harris campaign, was not as effective (at least among this voting bloc) as previously thought.

Finally, reproductive rights, mentioned with 23% frequency, placed directly below the "big three" issues (economy, foreign policy, immigration). In fact, a majority of Republicans who mentioned the issue, when asked, described themselves as pro-choice. This represents yet another area of consensus among this voting bloc, however, it does not appear that the issue was important enough to get these men to switch their vote to Harris. Issues like immigration, foreign policy, and the economy were three times as likely to be mentioned. Even if these men agreed with Harris on some other issues, Trump dominated the fundamental "big three" issues, and thus, captured their vote.

Issue	Frequency Mentioned (Dem.)	Frequency Mentioned (Rep.)	Frequency Mentioned (Other)	Frequency Mentioned (Total)
Economy/Inflation	70%	76%	78%	75%
Foreign Policy	50%	64%	89%	66%
Immigration	30%	72%	78%	64%
Climate/Environment	60%	12%	11%	23%
Reproductive Rights	40%	12%	33%	23%
Education	20%	16%	0%	14%
Increased Oil Drilling	0%	8%	22%	9%
2nd Amendment	0%	12%	0%	7%
Healthcare	20%	0%	11%	7%
Gun Control	20%	4%	0%	7%
Legalizing Marijuana	0%	8%	11%	7%
Cost of Housing	10%	4%	11%	7%
Criminal Justice Reform	10%	4%	0%	5%
Rooting Out Corruption	10%	4%	0%	5%
Social Security	0%	4%	11%	5%

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

I find that, among this sample, Trump-voting men tended to be much more confident in their vote compared to young men voting for Harris. Additionally, I find that Harris voters were twice as likely to express their vote as a vote against Donald Trump than Trump voters were to express their vote as a vote against Kamala Harris. In a low turnout election (compared to 2020), it may be that the energy surrounding the Harris campaign, primarily one emphasizing the rejection of Donald Trump rather than the promotion of Kamala Harris herself, did not turn into a motivating factor like many Democrats had hoped.

In addition to this, I find that respondents voting for Trump consistently showed higher rates of loyalty and immovability compared to those voting for Harris. Trump voters were, on average, less likely to change their vote due to scandal or policy change. In contrast, I find Harris voters to be more likely to switch their vote to Trump or to not vote entirely as a result of scandal or policy change. This dynamic highlights the contrasting voter bases of the two candidates. Trump's support appears to be bolstered by a deeply entrenched and loyal core, less susceptible to external factors like scandal or policy change. Consequently, Trump's voter base was likely less vulnerable to drops in turnout, maintaining a higher level of engagement even amid controversy and a low-turnout election. Harris's voter base, on the other hand, may reflect a coalition less unified by enthusiasm for the candidate herself and more driven by their opposition to a second Trump term. This opposition-based support can be inherently less stable, as it lacks the strong emotional or ideological alignment that typically drives voter loyalty. This higher risk of disengagement among Harris voters may have been a contributing factor to her ultimate defeat in November.

In the days leading up to the election, CNN senior political commentator Van Jones, in reference to Trump and Harris remarked that: "he gets to be lawless; she has to be flawless."¹¹ In a way, the results of this study emphasize that. Consistently and across the board, Harris voters (at least among this population) proved to be more likely to "jump ship" at the first sign of danger. The fact is, there was a sharp contrast in voter loyalty and energy surrounding both candidates. In what ended up being a low-turnout race, this contrast may have made all the difference in favor of Donald Trump.

I also find that, among many young men, conservative-leaning groups such as social fraternities are viewed as rare areas on college campuses where conservative students will not be

judged for their beliefs. This feeling of being victimized by college institutions, as well as by elites and the media, has seemingly driven many young men toward Donald Trump—a figure who often refers to himself as a victim in the same way. Furthermore, though the fraternity and University appear to have equal political pressures, conservative and liberal, respectively, political discussions occur at nearly double the rate within the fraternity, than they do on campus. Additionally, these conversations are likely to be viewed as less tense and more easy-going. It may be that these higher levels of frequency and comfort within fraternity political discussions lead to more effective conversations that, in an organization with self-described conservative pressures, result in a greater likelihood of its members being swayed toward the Republican party and Donald Trump.

I find that these respondents prioritized three top issues this election cycle: the economy, foreign policy, and immigration. While the economy and immigration consistently ranked among the highest priorities for American voters, foreign policy was unique among this sample. The data suggests that young men, though disagreeing on ideological lines over American support for Ukraine in its war against Russia, find consensus across party lines that the U.S. should stop supporting to Israel in its war with Hamas. This represents an increasingly pro-isolationist stance within this voting bloc. It may be that these young men, being eligible for the draft, are more critical of U.S. involvement in foreign conflicts. This view may contribute to this population's increasing support for Donald Trump, who often refer to his time in office as a period of relative peace worldwide. This stands in stark contrast to the numerous major international conflicts that, whether their fault or not, occurred during the Biden/Harris administration.

Additionally, issues like democracy and reproductive rights did not prove to be motivating factors for this population. When respondents were not given a list of top issues to

choose from, the issue of “democracy” did not appear within the top 15 most frequently mentioned. This may indicate a disconnect between voters’ real priorities and the answers they give pollsters who provide them with set issues to select from. Furthermore, while even a majority of both Trump voters who said that reproductive rights were their top priority described themselves as pro-choice, the issue did not prove to be substantive enough to get them to switch their vote to Kamala Harris. This indicates that the “big three” issues (economy, foreign policy, and immigration), which Trump consistently polled better on, proved to be too motivating to be affected by any support these young men may have had for reproductive rights or concerns over democracy.

It must be said that in 2024 the Democratic Party was running with the wind blowing against them. With an unpopular incumbent president, an economy most Americans were not confident in, and an unfavorable Senate cycle, there were countless unalterable factors that contributed to losses across the board for the Party. That being said, when it comes to the young men in my sample, there are some key lessons Democrats may do well learning from:

1. Promote candidates on the basis of support for the candidate themselves, not on the basis of a disliking of the opposition candidate.
2. Create a brand of loyalty around the actual candidate themselves, not just a commitment to their policies.
3. Address perceptions of anti-conservative bias within the media and other elite institutions.
4. Lean into populist, outsider rhetoric more often.
5. Establish smaller-scale venues for liberal thought, rather than large-scale institutions that lack the familiarity and comfortability to have effective discussions.

6. If the election is framed around issues that are favorable to Republicans, seek policy stances that stand in sharper contrast, rather than conceding ground and trying to conform on the issue.

Much has been suggested regarding Democrats' emphasis on identity politics having led to their downfall this election cycle. However, the data from this sample does not match this hypothesis. While this kind of rhetoric and emphasis may not have had a positive effect on moving voters leftward, it most likely did not have a negative one either. Within these interviews, there were no mentions of Democrats' highlighting of identity politics. The main factors turning this population away from the Party were disagreements over policy. These young men did not vote for Trump because they were turned off by Democrats talking about electing the first African American, Asian, and female president. Rather, they voted for Trump because they felt he was a better fit for handling a struggling economy, a worsening immigration crisis, and a world brimming with international conflict. To reduce Democrats' nationwide defeats to something so minute as their emphasis on identity politics is a misguided oversimplification.

It is important to remember that this study has multiple limitations when using the sample as a generalization for young, American men. Having taken place strictly among members of a social fraternity in the state of Oklahoma, this sample is prone to overrepresenting whites and conservatives. Future studies should obtain a diverse set of sample groups, including multicultural, business, and academic fraternities at large, medium, and small institutions, in both conservative and liberal states. Even then, there are limitations to strictly studying this population among fraternity members. Furthermore, though this study was effective at engaging and conversing deeply with its respondents, this kind of intentionality resulted in a smaller

sample size. Future efforts on the subject may want to consider larger samples to ensure a more representative outcome.

This study sought to analyze the motivating factors pushing young men toward the Republican party and Donald Trump in 2024. It is clear that these factors—whether related to policy, specific candidates, broader sentiments, or other—represent a complex string of contributions moving this voting bloc rightward. Such factors must be analyzed further to fully understand this phenomenon and whether it will continue. For these reasons, more advanced research must be done to better explain the motivations and reasonings behind such a dramatic shift among this section of the American populace.

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