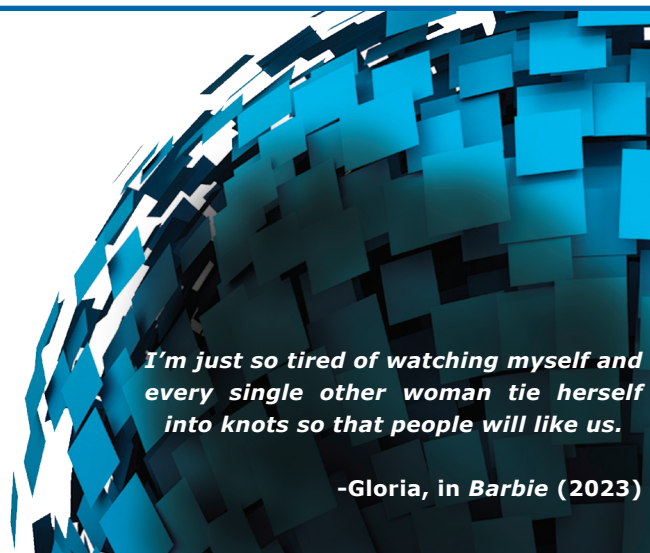


# WOMEN ARE TAKING THE LEAD?

## MEN AND WOMEN AND THE ZERO-SUM GAME



### CONTEXT & DYNAMICS

**Women are showing more initiative than men** along a spectrum of societal measurements, from children being prepared for grade school to single adults buying homes. "Girl power" is being expressed in the fashion and music industries, as well as in education and law. Why is this happening now? Men have dropped out of the workforce and are dying "deaths of despair" in greater numbers than women. Tensions between men and women have increased, with men seeing the economy as a zero-sum game and women seeing more opportunities before them. These contrasting worldviews are illustrated by the presidential campaign of Donald Trump and the musical success of Taylor Swift. The social conflict between men and women can be found in the writing of Jordan Peterson, a psychologist, and the movie *Barbie*. As more and more women see themselves moving up, many men see their career arc – and, indeed, their personal arc – trending downward. The era of limits, which we have written is just starting, with its diminishing supplies of things from water to food and from workers to critical minerals, will make the men's position about living in a zero-sum game more attractive.

### IMPLICATIONS

- Liberal perspectives will benefit from more women joining their causes.
- Conservative perspectives will benefit from more men joining their causes.
- Single women will continue to be more critical than single men in the home-buying market.
- Women-owned businesses will continue to increase in number and will benefit from the support of other women.
- As the economy enters an era of limits, conflicts between men and women over the shrinking economic pie will increase.
- Violence against women will increase.
- Conservatism and its male adherents' belief in a zero-sum game will spread.
- Women will continue to account for the larger portion of college enrollment.
- Political parties will try to speak to men about shrinking opportunities and to women about increasing opportunities creating confusion in their messaging.



## What's Going On?

"Girl power, basically" – that is how Collina Strada's creative director, Hillary Taymour, described her fashion line at New York Fashion Week. The entire collection featured women looking strong and even included a "pumped" model, an extreme rarity in the thinness-obsessed fashion world. Many runways featured women in their forties and fifties, some without makeup, suggesting power is not exclusive to the young. Taymour was not alone in her focus on connecting power with women. Carolina Herrera's creative director, Wes Gordon, sat backstage as his women's collection moved down the runway and said, simply, "Power," a word also used by Michael Kors, who featured "power suits" in his collection. Gabriela Hearst used the phrase "strength and independence" as a mantra for her runway show. Wes Gordon contributed context for the widespread fashion-industry display of women and power: "I think it's very important that beauty and strength are not considered antonyms." (*New York Times*, 2/18/24; *Wall Street Journal*, 2/22/24)

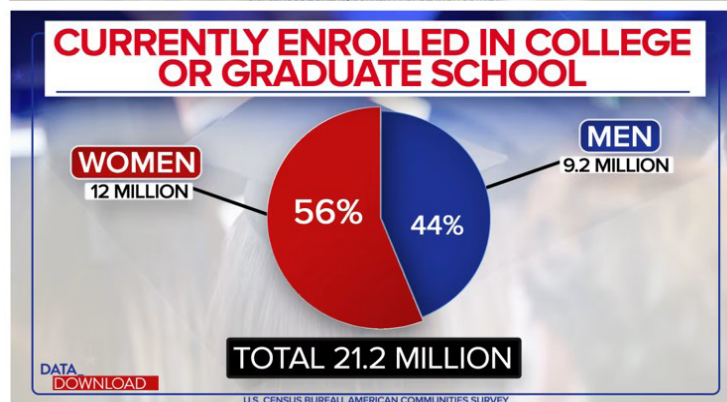
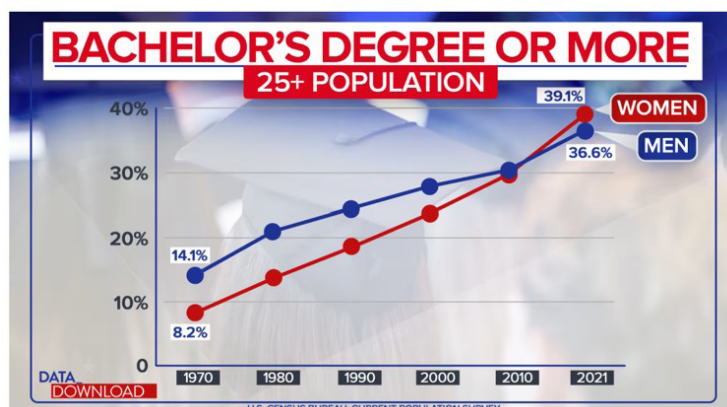


Thom Browne imprisons a man with an oversized coat, while women parade in new styles.  
*New York Times*, 2/16/24

Are women taking over? Women have been moving from society's wings to center stage for several years.

If power means appeal, then power made an appearance on this year's Grammy Awards broadcast. Every category on the show was won by a female: Record of the Year (Miley Cyrus); Best Solo Pop Performance (Miley Cyrus); Best New Artist (Victoria Monét); Album of the Year (Taylor Swift); Song of the Year (Billie Eilish); Best Alternative Music Album (boygenius, an all-female group); Best Country Album (Lainey Wilson); Best Progressive R&B Album (SZA); and Best R&B Album (Victoria Monét). While men won many awards, the presentation of their trophies took place earlier and was not televised. (*New York Times*, 2/6/24)

What is happening? Are women taking over? Women have been moving from society's wings to center stage for several years. Back in 2014, an NPR story highlighted the fact that college enrollment had become unbalanced in terms of gender, with more women attending college than men, an inversion of the unbalanced enrollment of 1962, comprising 65 percent men and 43 percent women. (*NPR*, 6/23/14)



Sallie Krawcheck, founder of Ellevest, an investment house started by women to serve women, offered her opinion in a January interview at the New York Stock Exchange. She claimed that women had kept the U.S. economy from going into recession in 2023, despite the near-universal prediction of recession by professional economists. "Why didn't we go into a recession in 2023? The answer," Krawcheck insisted, "is women. It's women . . . stepping into their financial and economic power and having fun. Going to see *Barbie* at the movie theater, seeing Beyoncé, seeing Taylor Swift, and in doing so, spending money and unleashing economic power." (*The Street*, 2/17/24)

We have written before about "women as leading indicator," when women's actions suggested society's new values and direction. So, is this latest push of "girl power" indicative of something wider and more encompassing than a casual glance at women's issues might suggest? Are women really driving the economy? The fashion and music industries have provided their answers. A closer look at some recent observations might provide insight into whether women will be the force moving society (and perhaps the economy) forward (see [IF 1334](#)).

In 2020, at the top 16 American law schools, all of the flagship law reviews' editors in chief were women.



*"Any other strengths?"*

## A Few Facts

A jarring but effective way to launch the topic of the latest battle of the sexes is simply to list some facts about women in today's world.

◆ American girls are 14 percentage points more likely to be "school ready" than boys at age five.

◆ In high schools today, two-thirds of the students in the top 10 percent of their classes ranked by grade point average (GPA) are girls, while two-thirds of the lowest decile are boys.

◆ In 2020, at the top 16 American law schools, all of the flagship law reviews' editors in chief were women.

◆ In April 2023, the job participation rate for prime working-age women (ages 25 to 54) reached 77.5 percent, **the highest percent on record**. Meanwhile, 7.2 million men have dropped out of the workforce.

◆ Ticket prices for women headliners in the top 25 concert tours of 2023 increased more than 400 percent over 2022.

◆ Among the top 50 musical acts globally in 2023, the average ticket price for female artists was \$660 while that for male artists was \$245.

◆ Seventeen of the top 25 best-selling books of 2023 were written by women.

◆ In the U.S., single women own 10.95 million homes, while single men own 8.24 million homes.

(*New York Times*, 9/29/23; *Investor's Business Daily*, 8/7/23; *People*, 8/5/23)





Females leading males in social arenas from kindergarten preparation to homeownership has exacerbated tension between women and men, and that has led more and more men to see social and economic participation as a zero-sum game. If women are moving ahead, this perspective suggests, then they must be doing so at the expense of men, whose anger about their status is driving political campaigns and is currently contributing to three out of every four "deaths of despair" being male.

The term "manosphere" was coined around 2013 to signal that men were suffering because of feminism. Messages circulating across Reddit and other online forums frequently spoke in a terminology of red pill/blue pill, a metaphorical color choice first used in the film *Matrix* (1999): Take the blue pill and fall into a lull of illusion and complacency, or take the red pill and experience "reality." For the manosphere, red-pill rhetoric provides a way for men to talk about how they can see the hurdles they face being harmed by women's advancement. (*Business Insider*, 2/1/24)

◆ Imane Anys, better known as Pokimane, one of the most popular streamers on Twitch, announced she was leaving the platform, lamenting the male-dominated mindset that had taken over. Twitch, she insisted, had "regressed a lot," especially with "the rise of so much manosphere, red-pill bullshit."

◆ Thirty-three percent of women under age 35 say they have been sexually harassed online, compared to 11 percent of men of the same age.

◆ A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revealed that 20 percent of women had been cyberbullied online, compared to 11 percent of men.

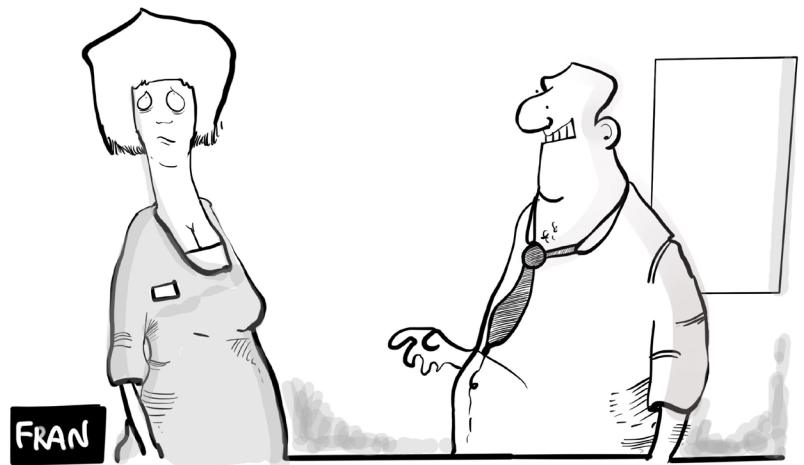
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"manosphere" was  
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to signal that men  
were suffering  
because  
of feminism.

◆ One in four women has experienced rape or attempted rape, compared to one in 26 men.

(*Eurogamer*, 2/1/24; *Forbes*, 3/8/23; *New York Times*, 5/10/23; CDC, 6/22/22)

Last year, Goldman Sachs resolved a lawsuit against it for gender discrimination with a settlement that was the largest in history. The 13-year suit claimed that the company paid women vice presidents 20 percent less than male VPs and uncovered a

management policy that favored men. The firm will pay \$215 million to 2,800 women (minus legal fees). (*Robinhood*, 5/11/23)



But my dear girl we don't discriminate against you because you're a WOMAN,  
we discriminate against you because we're MEN!

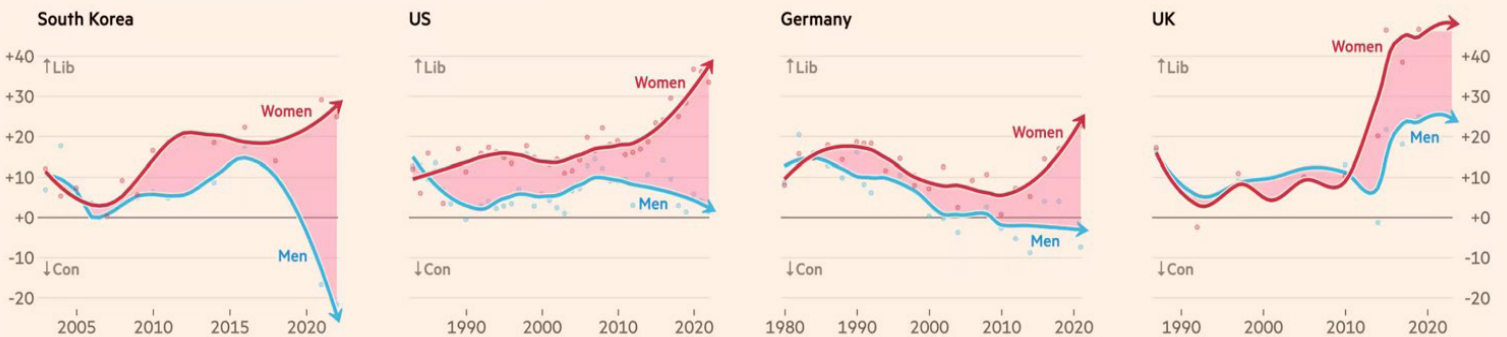
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## A Political Force Emerges

Conflicts between what women consider good and what men consider good have spilled into the political arena, with women becoming increasingly liberal and men becoming increasingly conservative. While the correlation between sex and political view is hardly universal, it is strong and divergent enough to warrant attention.

## A wide ideology gap is opening up between young men and women in countries across the world

Political ideology of 18-29s (% liberal minus % conservative), by sex



Sources: Daniel Cox, Survey Center on American Life; Gallup Poll Social Series; FT analysis of General Social Surveys of Korea, Germany & US and the British Election Study. US data is respondent's stated ideology. Other countries show support for liberal and conservative parties. All figures are adjusted for time trend in the overall population. FT graphic: John Burn-Murdoch / @burnmurdoch © FT

◆ After decades in which men and women between the ages of 18 and 30 were mostly spread evenly across the political spectrum, women are now 30 percentage points more liberal than men. That spread opened in the past six years.

◆ An American Enterprise Institute (AEI) study found that 46 percent of white Gen-Z women are liberal, compared to 28 percent of white Gen-Z men.

◆ A survey of women by Change Research found that the biggest red flag for women starting to date a man was his being a "MAGA Republican."

◆ A survey of college students revealed that 71 percent of Democrats would not date someone with opposing political views.

◆ Half of all men support the #MeToo movement, while nearly three-quarters of women support that cause. (*Washington Post*, 11/22/23; *Atlantic*, 6/11/23; *CNBC*, 11/25/23; *Business Insider*, 2/1/24)

These facts outline gender divisions that reflect U.S. society's wide schism between extreme positions on the left and right. Those divisions are partially driving the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump, the first U.S. president without either political or military experience, and the global popularity of Taylor Swift, the first person to win four Grammys for Album of the Year. Swift was *Time* magazine's Person of the Year for 2023 - the first

The man sees a zero-sum game, where the opposition's success is perceived as a loss for him, and the woman sees expanding opportunities, from music to merchandise, and even the NFL.

person from the arts to be so named; Trump was so designated in 2016. They both know how to send messages directly to their constituencies and fans. They know what to say and how to say it. Trump embodies the victimized male, now a defendant being unfairly harassed by opponents in what amounts to a zero-sum game, again meaning there are only winners and losers. Meanwhile, Swift's message is that people should be kind and respectful to one another. Trump speaks of how his "two greatest assets have been mental stability and being

like, really smart," while Swift is often self-deprecating, noting that she is "the type of person who has to study to get an A on a test." Both speak of things that are on their fans' minds, both focusing on being cheated or mistreated. Both likely subscribe to what Swift once said: "I'm intimidated by the fear of being average." Both have their platforms – online and broadcast media for Trump and music and social media for Swift. They both have merchandise to sell, both have loyal followers, and both have their battles with "the system." In a sense, they give voice to the feelings of the males and females who support them.

Yet the former president and the music star are on opposite sides of the male-female divide, the man facing 91 felony counts while winning primary elections, and the woman coming off a world tour that made more than one billion dollars and a movie of the tour that made

another quarter of a billion dollars. The male is aggrieved but fighting, while the woman is hurt but canny. The man sees a zero-sum game, where the opposition's success is perceived as a loss for him, and the woman sees expanding opportunities, from music to merchandise, and even the NFL.



**“Women Supporting Women!”**

## Into the Media

The movie *Barbie* (2023) captures the sexual schism by raising the issue of patriarchy, a word derived from the Greek meaning “rule of the father.” In essence, a patriarchy is a society with men in control. The film’s opening sequence gives expression to the perspective that power – in the form of a large black obelisk reminiscent of the one in the opening sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) – holds sway over society, and the phallic nature of the erect image further suggests that it is men who possess that power.

Such an interpretation of how power is to be distributed is a reflection of the views held by Jordan Peterson, a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto and so-called “custodian of patriarchy.” To Peterson, order is masculine, chaos is feminine and

hierarchical authorities are the natural order of the world, which means men should control the hierarchies. He encapsulated that perspective in one of his books, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (2018). In that book, he expresses concern over the “feminizing” of young boys by parents who “overprotect” them and claims that inequality between the sexes is natural. (*Axios*, 4/27/23; *New York Times*, 5/18/18)



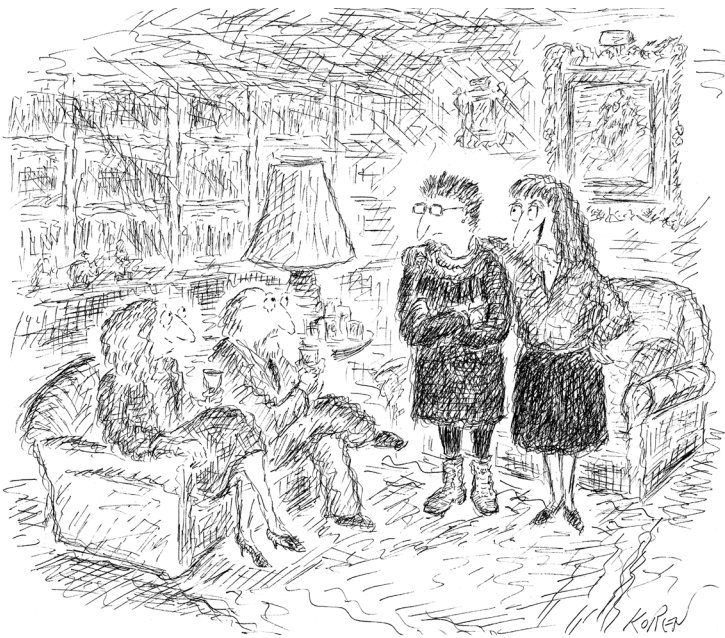
**"Oh, I don't know — Tell Adam  
to try patriarchy for awhile  
and we'll see how it works out."**

Barbie Land, the world depicted in *Barbie*, is matriarchal, meaning that women are in control of the doll-world order. In this realm, men like Ken are seen as accessories to be set aside and play the role of “just Ken.” Through several plot twists, Ken, during the dolls’ excursion into the world of actual humans, learns of patriarchy and sets about establishing a male-structured hierarchy in the doll-world realm once led by Barbie. But, contrary to Peterson, that patriarchy is chaotic, and women, using the wiles of the hierarchical male’s stereotype of women, easily pose a counterrevolution to regain control. As the movie winds down, Barbie chooses to reenter the seemingly confusing world of human beings, where authority and power are up for grabs. (*Guardian*, 8/4/23)

Before she makes that move back into the scary and confusing realm of human beings, however, Barbie gets a lesson about women’s lives in that world from a harried housewife, Gloria, who tells her: “It is literally impossible to be a woman.” Gloria then rattles off a series of contradictions forced on women, including this: “You have to answer for men’s bad behavior, which is insane, but if you point that out, you’re accused of complaining.”



And this: "You have to never get old, never be rude, never show off, never be selfish, never, never fail, never show fear, never get out of line. . . . But never forget that the system is rigged. So, find a way to acknowledge that but also always be grateful." (*Town & Country*, 8/5/23)



"I'm really proud of my daughter. She's a thorn in the side of the patriarchy."

Cartoonist.com

The movie attracted more than \$1.44 billion in box-office receipts globally. Meanwhile, Peterson's book *12 Rules for Life*, sold more than a million copies in its first five months in print. So, interest in the men-women dynamic is quite high. Sides are being chosen, and that is reflected in the political leanings of men and women cited earlier in this *Briefing*.

Women today are moving ahead because many of them seem to have a stronger motivation than some men. Males, however, still dominate positions of power. Indeed, as of last year, only 41 companies in the S&P 500 had women as chief executives, and of the 535 positions in the U.S. Congress, women currently hold just 151, despite being more than 50 percent of the adult U.S. population. And, of course, no woman has ever been president of the U.S., although, as an aside, the Barbie doll did announce her candidacy for president in 1992, 2000, 2004, 2008 and so on. A President Barbie, it should be noted, did appear in her namesake movie.

Aside from the top jobs in the political and large-

corporation hierarchies belonging to men, women-owned companies, between 2012 and 2019, grew by 16.7 percent, while men-owned firms grew by 5.7 percent. During the pandemic, women-owned businesses outgrew those of men in terms of the number of new companies opened, by **94 percent**; in terms of the number of employees, by **252.8 percent**; and in terms of revenue, by **82 percent**. During the pandemic, women-owned businesses added 1.4 million jobs. (*Wells Fargo Newsroom*, 1/9/24; *NPR*, 7/27/23; *Hollywood Reporter*, 12/1/23)



"MY WIFE AND I ARE EQUAL PARTNERS IN EVERYTHING EXCEPT THE THREE COMPANIES SHE OWNS."

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Questions arise: What does this male-female breakdown suggest? What is behind the conflicts today between two political candidates facing off in an election? What underlies the culture wars being fought by left and right? And what is only hinted at by the divergence between males and females? The real issue is more basic and more essential to all those conflicts. The core question is: Who or what has power? Historically, power has been masculine, which brought

about the phenomenon of a patriarchy, and was defined by physical prowess and strength, whether by military, by muscle-bound physiques or by simply holding a gun. Can power ever reside in those who are self-deprecating, respectful, more diligent, more approachable, more honest and more open? We have people yelling at each other, trying by force of volume to demonstrate their power. Yet as Taylor Swift observed: "If you're yelling, you're the one who's lost control of the conversation." Has power measured by force lost control? Is "girl power," as designer Hillary Taymour offered, becoming more appealing? Where will new power reside?

The facts cited earlier – the performance of females in school, the number of women in college, the prices being paid to see and hear women entertainers, the number of women novelists on best-seller lists and the number of single women owning homes – provide a sense that women are exhibiting a different kind of power that appeals to larger and larger segments of society. More and more women are acquiring education, experience and skills faster than many men, and that reality suggests that in the not-too-distant future, a headline might read: *Women Are Taking the Lead.*



**"I've just never worked anyplace where  
the 'alpha male' was a woman."**



**Some of our previous looks at this topic:**

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**IF 4401** Settling Down: Society Gradually Shifts From Extremes To Moderation, 1/3/23

**inF 1211** Women: Stronger Together, 11/29/17

**IF 3322** Women As Leading Indicator: Balance And Moderation After An Era Of The Extreme, 10/19/12

**IF 1334** Women And The Next Point Of View, 11/6/92