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Maryland Gov. Wes Moore's outreach to young men draws praise — and questions



Maryland Gov. Wes Moore speaks to reporters as Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., left, and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz look on at Clyburn's World Famous Fish, Friday, May 30, 2025, in Columbia, S.C. (AP Photo/Meg Kinnard)



By **KATHARINE WILSON** | kwilson@baltsun.com

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Young men drifted away from the Democratic Party in the 2024 election, but some party leaders see Maryland Gov. Wes Moore as a model for how to bring them back.

Moore, 46, an Army veteran and first-term governor, has asked his administration to find ways to better support young men and boys — groups he says are falling behind in education, economic mobility and mental health.

“For him, it’s not a show,” said Young Democrats of America President Quentin Wathum-Ocama. He’s “articulating a vision that shows young men ... here’s an opportunity for you to be a strong man, to be somebody who cares about their family, but also cares about community.”

Moore said Democrats need to stop treating young men as a voting bloc to recapture, and start treating them as people who need help. He cites his administration’s focus on reducing incarceration and economic insecurity as part of that focus.

“Once you’re losing people in elections, that’s not because you just started losing them,” Moore said in an interview with The Baltimore Sun. “It’s because you lost them a long time ago.”

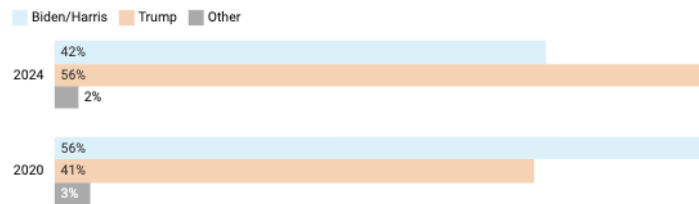
Nationally, Democrats have begun exploring similar outreach. California Gov. Gavin Newsom launched a podcast, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox created a task force focused on the well-being of boys and men, and New York Democrats appear to have nominated 33-year-old Zohran Mamdani for New York City mayor, who ran a heavily social-media-based campaign. Multiple political analysts and Democratic leaders told The Sun that Moore’s approach comes across as authentic, with policy ideas to back him up.

But Republicans in Maryland question whether Moore’s rhetoric has translated into measurable results.

Democrats losing ground with young men

Support for Democrats among young men fell sharply in 2024. Just 42% of men aged 18 to 29 voted Democratic, down from 56% in 2020, according to a Tufts University CIRCLE analysis.

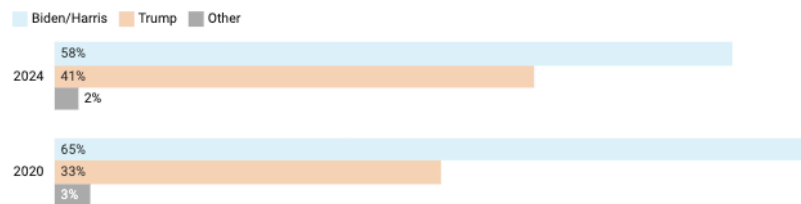
Male U.S. voters 18-29



Percentages are rounded.

Source: Tufts University Tisch College · CIRCLE analysis of AP VoteCast Survey · Created with Datawrapper

Female U.S. voters 18-29



Percentages are rounded.

Source: Tufts University Tisch College · CIRCLE analysis of AP VoteCast Survey · Created with Datawrapper

Political researcher John Della Volpe, who co-founded the “Speaking with American Men Project,” says many young men see Democrats as weak and out of touch. He attributes Donald Trump’s gains among this group more to personality than policy.

Young men largely feel betrayed by institutions, Della Volpe said. That feeling started during the pandemic and has been coupled with economic anxiety.

“It is deeply frustrating that so many young men still feel the same thing to this day,” Moore said.



Maryland Gov. Wes Moore at the Inauguration of Prince George's County Executive Aisha Braveboy, says he is trying to attract more young men to the party. (Kim Hairston/Staff)

A new model?

In his February State of the State address, Moore highlighted rising incarceration and suicide rates among young men, along with declining college enrollment and workforce participation. He asked state agencies to propose targeted solutions — such as promoting entrepreneurship, homeownership and job reintegration after prison.

These efforts build on earlier initiatives like mentorship programs, funding for county summer programs, a paid service year for high school graduates and mass pardons for low-level cannabis offenses.

“It’s not an election strategy for us,” Moore said. “It’s something we believe in.”

Sen. Cory McCray, a Baltimore Democrat, praised Moore’s job training efforts as a way to give young men “exposure and access” to role models and tools for success.

But Republicans remain skeptical.

“A lot of things ... with this administration, sounded real good,” said Senate Minority Whip Justin Ready. But he said he hasn’t seen “a lot of action” or concrete results.

Ready said many of the policies Moore touts don’t specifically target young men. Senate Minority Leader Steve Hershey added that Moore’s “priorities seem to shift with political headlines,” and said Marylanders deserve consistent, comprehensive leadership.

Moore also faced pushback from Democrats who have not been universally supportive of some of the governor’s recent actions, including policies they say could impact young men in the state. The governor recently vetoed a bill that would have created a commission to study reparations for descendants of enslaved people. Moore said he wanted policies that deliver results — not “another study.”

Is it working?

Moore has positioned himself as a results-oriented leader, often distancing himself from what he calls “needless debate,” which has helped people see him as a doer and addresses a common desire among younger people to change the status quo, Washington College associate professor Flavio Hickel said. In a speech in South Carolina this year, Moore called on his party to stop being the party of “no and slow.”

About 53% of 18- to 34-year-olds and 53% of men in Maryland approve of the job he’s doing, according to a March Gonzales Poll, the most recent one available.

Moore’s life story — which he describes as growing up in an over-policed neighborhood, serving in the military, leading an anti-poverty organization and becoming Maryland’s first Black governor — has also become part of his messaging pitch to young men.

“We hold him up as an icon of what can be done, showing these young men that there is a place in our coalition for them,” said Ilyse Hogue, co-founder of the American Men Project.

A party leader in a traditional early primary state agrees. “He worked very hard for everything that he got,” said New Hampshire Democratic Party Chair Raymond Buckley. “I think that connects with a lot of young folks that are going through some pretty anxious times.”

2028 and beyond

Although Moore told The Sun he is **not running** for president in 2028, he's held meetings with former Biden and Obama campaign advisors in **South Carolina** — a key primary state — and his name has appeared in early polls of potential Democratic contenders.

Nationally, Democrats are testing new approaches to reach young men online. The party recently launched a podcast and has eased its social media tone. But Wathum-Ocama, the Young Democrats of America president, said Democrats need more than a “magic bullet.” He described a party that needs authenticity.



Ruben Amaya is the president of Young Democrats of Maryland. (Kenneth K. Lam/Staff)

Ruben Amaya, president of the Young Democrats of Maryland and the third vice chair of the state party, said including young people in party messaging is critical. At age 21, Moore nominated him for state party leadership. Amaya, who's now 24, took the nomination as a symbol that Moore values young voices.

“Our jobs are not to be pundits,” Moore said about fellow politicians. “Your job is to actually care about the work, your job is to actually care about the people that you’re hoping to serve.”