

 IndependentWomen®

THE WAR
★ ★ ★ ON ★ ★ ★
AMERICA'S MIND
THE NEW BATTLEFIELD IS YOU

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WITH ANNA PINGEL



***“FREEDOM IS A FRAGILE THING AND IT’S
NEVER MORE THAN ONE GENERATION
AWAY FROM EXTINCTION.”***

**RONALD REAGAN
1967 INAUGURAL ADDRESS**



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FOREWORD



Anthropic's September 2026 threat-intelligence report, "Detecting and Countering Misuse of AI," should put to rest any illusion that the war for the American mind is theoretical.¹ The report extensively documents Russia using AI to industrialize propaganda, manufacture false verification loops, and disguise Kremlin narratives as independent reporting; Iran building influence networks that launder regime messaging through supposedly independent voices and even falsely attribute claims to respected Western institutions; and the People's Republic of China (PRC) integrating AI across surveillance, intelligence collection, cyber operations, military development, and efforts to acquire America's frontier-AI capabilities.

These adversaries are not all doing the same thing, but the trajectory is unmistakable: **AI is allowing hostile states to operate faster, cheaper, at greater scale, and increasingly against the most consequential terrain of all—what people see, what they believe, whom they trust, and how they act.**

This threat-intelligence report represents one of the most comprehensive public examinations yet of how state-aligned and other malicious actors are operationalizing frontier AI, not simply for cyberattacks, but for influence operations, surveillance, weapons development, and the manipulation of information environments.

But the behavior is not new. In October 2024, researchers at Fudan University in Shanghai, China, revealed that the team had collected more than 171 million public posts from nearly ten million Americans on X.²

From those digital traces, they inferred age, sex, race, ideology, and party affiliation, then built a simulated electorate of more than one million modeled American voters. They called it ElectionSim. It could run the presidential election state by state. It could sort people by type. It could assemble synthetic focus groups and ask modeled Americans how they might think, vote, and respond.

The Americans inside the model never knew they were participants.

For most of modern history, propaganda was crude by comparison; it was also costly and time-consuming. There was also no guarantee it would work. Now, people can be reached intimately, constantly, and cheaply, and the audience can be studied even prior to the information being deployed.

Our habits, fears, loyalties, grievances, identities, and emotional reflexes can be inferred from what we post, pause on, replay, share, and ignore. The question is no longer simply whether an adversary can place a message in front of us. It is whether that adversary can learn us well enough to know which message is most likely to move us before we even see it.

And for women, that question is especially urgent. The modern battlefield does not always look like a battlefield. It looks like a video that makes you cry before you know the facts. A story that tells you who the victim is and who the villain is before you have time to ask. A feed that learns what frightens you; what enrages you; what makes you feel compassionate, righteous, ashamed, or alone; then quietly serves you more of it.

The danger is not that women care too much. The danger is that someone else can learn how to aim that care with remarkable precision.

PROLOGUE: *THE BATTLEFIELD IN HER HAND*



The first requirement of national defense is recognizing when your people are under attack. This report argues that Americans, and American women and girls in particular, are already being targeted in a new kind of conflict. It is being fought through the technology we carry with us every day, exploiting the way people form their identities, decide what they believe, and determine where their loyalties lie.

The war is real and documented, and it is old. The intelligence services in Soviet Russia understood something we are only beginning to relearn: You do not have to make people believe a lie to defeat them. You only have to make them doubt what is true, distrust one another, and eventually lose confidence in the institutions, history, and shared identity that bind them together.

Yes, we should be careful about casually calling everything “war.” But we should be equally careful about refusing to recognize an attack simply because the weapon is not a missile, a tank, or a bomb.



Today, an adversary can reach directly into the phones in our hands, shape what we see, amplify what angers or frightens us, and slowly influence how we understand ourselves, our country, and one another.

Throughout the 20th century, Soviet intelligence built an entire system around this called *dezinformatsiya*.³ This effort used front groups, forged documents, propaganda, and trusted voices to quietly shape public opinion. But the deeper goal was not simply to convince people of something false. It was to shape the information around them so carefully that they would make the decision their adversary wanted, while believing the decision was entirely their own.

That strategy did not disappear with the fall of the Soviet Union. Today, Russia treats information warfare as something that continues even in supposed peacetime.⁴ China is doing the same, and its military openly studies how to gain advantage by influencing how people think, perceive, and decide.⁵ NATO has increasingly recognized that the human mind itself is a battlefield.⁶

Their strategic objective is often division and demoralization, not conversion. An American woman does not need to wave a foreign flag to become useful to a foreign adversary. She needs only to conclude that her country is not worth defending, her institutions are illegitimate, her fellow citizens are enemies, and nothing she does matters.

NATO has increasingly recognized that the human mind itself is a battlefield.

A mistake is believing adversaries create their own content from scratch. They practice opportunistic amplification: They find existing psychological vulnerabilities, social cleavages, and organic movements, then introduce, distort, accelerate, or redirect them, and let domestic actors, engagement algorithms, influencers, activists, journalists, and ordinary users do the distribution.

Tragically, America weakened its own defenses. After 2016, parts of the political Left, the media, academia, and the technology sector badly overreached. A legitimate concern about foreign influence was expanded into something much broader, especially during COVID when government authorities policed domestic speech,⁷ suppressed disputed claims,⁸ and treated dissent from elite consensus as evidence of “misinformation.”⁹

This taught millions of Americans that mis- and disinformation did not necessarily mean a foreign lie. It could mean information that powerful institutions found inconvenient, politically damaging, or simply outside the accepted consensus.

Trust is part of our national security infrastructure. The institutions meant to distinguish genuine foreign manipulation from ordinary political disagreement squandered much of that trust themselves. And adversaries did not have to create the resulting cynicism.

Democracy requires skepticism. But when institutional overreach turns skepticism into cynicism, Russia, China, and other hostile actors inherit a far easier battlefield. And women occupy strategic terrain in this contest.

National security analysis too often treats the information environment as though men and women encounter it through interchangeable minds. They do not. Men and women differ in meaningful psychological patterns, in how they process risk, social information, status, belonging, and threat. This is known to every serious persuader: From advertisers to psychological operations officers, they understand that persuasion works by finding and exploiting those differences.

Too often, women's natural compassion has become a weapon in this fight. If you can manipulate who a woman believes is suffering, you can manipulate what she is willing to defend, condemn, and ultimately believe. The objective of this report is not to argue for less compassionate women. It is to arm women with knowledge, because we know what women believe travels into families, classrooms, communities, and the next generation.

Data shows that 97% of older teenage girls own or have access to a smartphone,¹⁰ and teenage girls are more likely than teenage boys to engage in daily social media use.¹¹ The battlefield is not somewhere over there—it's in her hand.



This war, not yet been named, has produced casualties—as we will highlight in this report. We need to find ways to protect ourselves and our country against these new weapons. But the answer cannot be to try to slow down technological innovation, gut our First Amendment, or create a Ministry of Truth. A free society that defends itself by controlling what its citizens may think has destroyed the thing it was defending.

So our objective is manipulation resistance rather than information purity. We advocate for more information to fight disinformation. The public has a right to know where content came from—so they can judge with that context. Foreign agents and bots should be unmasked. We should require technology platforms to protect minors, and empower and enlist parents, schools, and others to do more to protect children. We must prioritize greater historical and civic literacy and restore deep reading in our schools and from our media.

A civilization that loses the women who transmit its values may discover it has lost the future before it ever loses a hot war. Traditional sovereignty asks who controls your territory. Cognitive sovereignty asks who controls what you notice, what feels urgent, and what your children fear.

Borders matter, but so do brains.





THE FIGHT FOR OUR LIVES



In 1838, a twenty-eight-year-old Abraham Lincoln stood before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield and dismissed the possibility that any foreign army could ever take the Ohio River or make a track on the Blue Ridge. The danger, he warned, lay elsewhere: "If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide."¹²

Lincoln understood something that America's adversaries have since turned into an official strategy. A great power is rarely destroyed from the outside before it is hollowed from within. Military strength, economic output, and technological advantage all matter, but they rest on a deeper foundation: a citizenry that knows what it is, values what it has, and believes it is worth defending. Erode that foundation and everything built upon it becomes fragile and negotiable.

For most of human history, an adversary who wanted to weaken that foundation faced a hard intelligence problem. Understanding a foreign population required spies, polling, intercepted mail, defectors, and years of patient guesswork. Today the problem has been solved by the targets themselves. Americans voluntarily produce an extraordinary psychological dataset every hour. The device that collects all of this is in our hands, and it is a mistake to think of it just as a phone.

For millions of Americans, and for young women most of all, it is the primary mediator of belonging, status, moral approval, friendship, outrage, and purpose.

It is where a 17-year-old learns, in real time, what her peers will reward and what they will punish. A device with that portfolio is an identity engine, and everything it learns, someone else can study.

A generation of young Americans entered this digital environment while parents, schools, lawmakers, and national security institutions saw it more narrowly as entertainment, communication, or commerce. But rapidly, adversaries and ideological entrepreneurs understood it as something else: a battlespace.



Young people on these platforms thought they were just consuming content. In the background, they were studied, segmented, emotionally activated, and in the worst cases isolated, recruited, and remade. The attacks never announced themselves as persuasion or propaganda. They arrived as humor, beauty advice, grievance, compassion, political education, therapeutic language, community, liberation, certainty, and social justice.

The smartphone gave us access to the world, but it also gave the world access to us.

To be clear, war is not disagreement. It is not rudeness online, and it is not the existence of opinions one dislikes. A society that calls every unpleasant argument a war has emptied the word of meaning, and phrases like “misinformation ecosystem” and “problematic content” commit the opposite sin—they sanitize deliberate adversarial state action against our citizens. Both habits disarm us.

Persuasion, even sharp-elbowed persuasion, is the ordinary business of free societies: open, attributable advocacy aimed at a citizen’s judgment. It becomes something else when a state deliberately and covertly employs intelligence services, state media, cyber units, propaganda organizations, bot networks, data

science, and now artificial intelligence to alter the perceptions and behavior of another country's population for strategic advantage, all while hiding its hand. That is not reasonable debate or public discourse. **It must be understood as an operation, conducted by governments, against civilians, in pursuit of strategic effect.** The accurate name for it is information warfare, and its ultimate goal is manipulation—not just persuasion.

None of this is new, and Americans who believe disinformation was invented by political activists after 2016 have the history wrong. One clear example was the Soviet KGB-led Operation Denver launched in the 1980s.¹³

This operation seeded the claim that the United States had engineered the AIDS virus. The claim began in an obscure Indian newspaper and traveled through African and European media for years until American audiences encountered it as an ordinary controversy rather than a Soviet product.¹⁴

It was so effective that, decades later in 2005, an NBC News report on survey findings within the African American community showed how deeply HIV-related conspiracy theories had taken hold—nearly half of respondents believed the virus had been deliberately created, more than a quarter suspected it originated in a government laboratory, and 12% believed the CIA had intentionally spread it.¹⁵

That trajectory, from proxy outlet to peripheral press to mainstream discourse to sincere domestic belief, is the forebearer of nearly every mechanism this report outlines.

The smartphone gave us access to the world, but it also gave the world access to us.

But this began even before the 1980s. In the 1960s, the mathematician Vladimir Lefebvre developed “reflexive control,” which American analyst Timothy Thomas has described as conveying to an opponent specially prepared information that inclines her to make, voluntarily, the decision the initiator wanted.¹⁶

This is done by presenting the intended target with a curated reality that slowly pushes the consumer down a path in which a desired conclusion comes about due to her own reasoning based on the false constructs. In the end, she never experiences the manipulation as manipulation, because she is not being forced to act against her will. In short, her perceptions have been so shaped that the choice feels like her own.

The U.S. military currently treats this pathway of belief modification as a live, active element of adversarial strategy.¹⁷

But the target of a sophisticated influence operation is rarely simply cognitive. It is meant to shape behavior. When done effectively, it can compel a woman to act against her own interest, fail to act when action is required, or lead to an overreaction.

And, sometimes, the main objective is to get her to do absolutely nothing. A paralyzed population that cannot decide anything together is one that has been neutralized.



WHAT DISINFORMATION ACTUALLY MEANS, AND HOW WE BROKE THE WORD



Unfortunately, our ability to have productive conversations around concepts like disinformation was thoroughly damaged due to the explosion of post-2016 fact-checkers, driven by ideology more than truth.

So before this report can use the word disinformation effectively, it must repair the word by clearly defining it.

Disinformation is intentionally false or misleading information, deliberately disseminated to deceive or manipulate. Misinformation is false or misleading information passed along by people who do not know it is false.

The difference is intent, and intent is everything.

A Russian intelligence-linked operation that manufactures a false narrative and inserts it into American discourse is conducting disinformation. The American who sincerely believes the claim and shares it is spreading misinformation; malice cannot be automatically attributed to her. She is not an agent. She is a citizen who was lied to.

Now follow the claim downstream, because this is where modern influence operations live. Other Americans share it. Influencers pick it up. Legitimate organizations repeat it. Journalists report on the controversy, which spreads it further. By the time the claim is embedded in ordinary discourse, its foreign origin

has become almost impossible to see, and every subsequent carrier is acting in good faith.

This is called attribution decay. The deeper a foreign narrative travels through authentic domestic networks, the harder it becomes to identify where manipulation ended, and genuine belief began. Attribution decay is increasingly the design objective of our enemies.

Now, with the definitions clearly restored and the process outlined, some recent history must be told honestly, because what happened after 2016 is a case study in how a nation disarms itself.

After the 2016 election, the American Left badly overreached on Russia.¹⁸ Legitimate concerns about Russian interference were inflated into sweeping claims of Trump-Kremlin collusion that were often presented as established fact, absent evidence to support it. When the Mueller investigation ultimately failed to establish a criminal conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russia, the damage had already been done.



That overreach had disastrous consequences. By using Russia as a domestic political weapon, Democratic officials, sympathetic media, and parts of the national security establishment helped convince millions of Americans that warnings about Moscow were simply another form of partisan manipulation.

What followed was that many on the Right stopped distinguishing between exaggerated claims about Trump and the very real threat posed by Russia itself. In the Left's use of Russia to damage a political opponent, they helped create an American audience increasingly inclined to dismiss Russia's malign activity altogether.

And Russia did attempt to interfere, but to date, there is no credible basis for confidently claiming that it was to the benefit of any particular candidate, nor is there any evidence that Russia's social media influence altered enough votes to determine the 2016 outcome. The most rigorous study to date, published in "Nature Communications," found that exposure to Russian troll content on Twitter was extraordinarily concentrated, with 1% of users receiving 70% of exposures;

that the exposed were overwhelmingly already strong partisans; that the Russian content was dwarfed by domestic political media; and that there was “no evidence of a meaningful relationship” between exposure and changes in attitudes or voting.¹⁹ But genuine counterintelligence concerns surrounding individual campaign figures were real and were analytically separate from any claim about the election’s legitimacy.

In the end, political incentives caused both sides to overstate some evidence and bury others. A serious country must be able to say that Russia attacked our information environment without implying the election result was illegitimate, and it must be able to say the result was legitimate without implying the attack was imaginary. For nearly a decade, America could say neither.

Two later episodes completed the damage. In October 2020, when reporting surfaced on Hunter Biden’s laptop, major platforms throttled the story, one locking the reporting newspaper out of its own account, and fifty-one former intelligence officials declared that the material had “all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation.”²⁰

No evidence of Russian fabrication ever emerged. The FBI had possessed and substantially authenticated the device since 2019, and by 2024, federal prosecutors were entering its contents into evidence in a criminal trial.²¹ Not every allegation attached to the laptop was true; but the true point is narrower and worse—authentic material was preemptively branded a foreign operation by exactly the type of officials whose future warnings about real foreign operations the country most needs to believe.



The pandemic supplied the second episode. For a period in 2020 and 2021, the hypothesis that the virus emerged from a laboratory was treated, in much of the information ecosystem, as beyond respectable debate. Facebook removed posts asserting a man-made origin before reversing the policy in May 2021 as official investigations opened.²² A legitimately contestable hypothesis was treated as disinformation. When the intelligence community itself later gave the hypothesis weight, millions of Americans drew the conclusion that disinformation means information powerful institutions do not want discussed.

For a democracy facing genuine foreign influence campaigns, that conclusion is catastrophic. The credibility of those calling the shots is itself national security infrastructure, and America's so-called experts in this arena spent a decade demolishing their own credibility and created a generation of cynics.

The skeptic asks: How do you know? Show me the evidence.

The cynic says: Everyone is lying; nothing can be known.

Every censorship error, every premature label, every suppressed idea later vindicated manufactures cynics at scale. For years, we were doing the adversary's work with our own hands.

A sophisticated propaganda campaign does not always require the target population to believe the adversary. Sometimes it is enough to make citizens incapable of believing in their own society. There is a word for that condition, and it is the oldest word in the active-measures space: demoralization.

Democracy needs skeptics; it cannot function without them. America's adversaries need cynics, because a population that believes government lies, media lies, scientists lie, elections lie, and everything they read is false cannot be mobilized toward any collective purpose at all.



STRATEGIC TERRAIN: WHY POPULATIONS ARE THE TARGET



Internal fragmentation has brought down powers far stronger than their enemies. When the Peloponnesian War began in 431 B.C., Athens led a wealthy maritime empire, commanded the Greek world's most powerful navy, and possessed resources its rival Sparta could not match. But a catastrophic invasion of Sicily, demagogues who weaponized public anger, political purges, and oligarchic coups steadily hollowed out Athenian power. By the time Athens surrendered in 404 B.C., Sparta, financed by Persia, was capitalizing on wounds Athens had largely inflicted upon itself.²³ The pattern repeats across eras and systems, and its lesson lands uncomfortably here at home where a majority of Americans believe a civil war is possible again.²⁴

America's adversaries have read the same history and polls, and drawn the operational conclusion. If you cannot defeat the American military, you go around it, to the society underneath, and to the foundational beliefs of that society. This is why the objective of modern influence operations is so widely misunderstood.

The crude model assumes the adversary wants Americans to admire Moscow or Beijing. The documented model is different, and far cheaper. Foreign propaganda rarely needs to argue that Russia is good. A far easier set of beliefs will do—America is evil. Nothing is true. Everyone is corrupt. Your fellow citizens are your enemies. The entire system is illegitimate.



A citizen who believes any of those things needs no further instruction, because she will now do the adversary's work herself—distrusting every institution, despising half her countrymen, withdrawing her loyalty, and teaching her children to do the same.

The strategic resources under attack are therefore the soft ones no defense budget line captures: attachment to country, confidence in institutions, patriotism, family formation and stability, trust between men and women, confidence in Western civilization itself, social cohesion, willingness to defend the nation, and the settled belief that America is fundamentally worth preserving.

Degrade those, and every hard capability degrades alongside them—military recruiting, alliance politics, industrial mobilization, deterrence, and the simple capacity of a self-governing people to act together. A country whose citizens no longer believe it deserves to survive has surrendered enormous strategic terrain before an enemy fires a shot.

Populations, then, are the target. The good strategists ask which segments of a population carry the most influence over the whole, and which are most reachable through the available machinery.

IV

WHY WOMEN MATTER



As mentioned previously, national security discussions routinely proceed as though the information environment were psychologically gender-neutral. It is not, and pretending otherwise leaves the most consequential half of the population unanalyzed and undefended.

Our adversaries will not voluntarily decline to use what is known about sex differences, developmental psychology, personality, and emotion merely because American institutions have struggled to even define biological sex.²⁵

Here, we must refuse two opposing errors at the outset. The first is to deny that sex differences exist. The second is to inflate them into caricature. Nothing here describes any individual woman, and nothing here suggests women are less rational, less capable, or more gullible than men.

Both sexes possess psychological vulnerabilities, and sophisticated influence actors segment audiences accordingly. Messaging built on humiliation, status, resentment, masculinity, sexual grievance, betrayal, and power finds one kind of terrain; the pipelines that radicalize young men run through exactly those channels.

Messaging built on children, safety, compassion, belonging, care, social exclusion, fairness, interpersonal harm, and moral responsibility finds another. The point is not superiority or inferiority. Different psychological terrain requires different messages, and both fields are under fire.

What is known about women's vulnerabilities is worth stating clearly. On average, and across cultures, women place greater value than men on social connection and relational harmony.



Research collected in the National Library of Medicine indicates that women score higher on measures of empathy, attend more closely to verbal and nonverbal social cues, and prefer social stimuli from a strikingly young age.²⁶ Women rely more heavily on social support for well-being,²⁷ and they engage more in social comparison online.²⁸

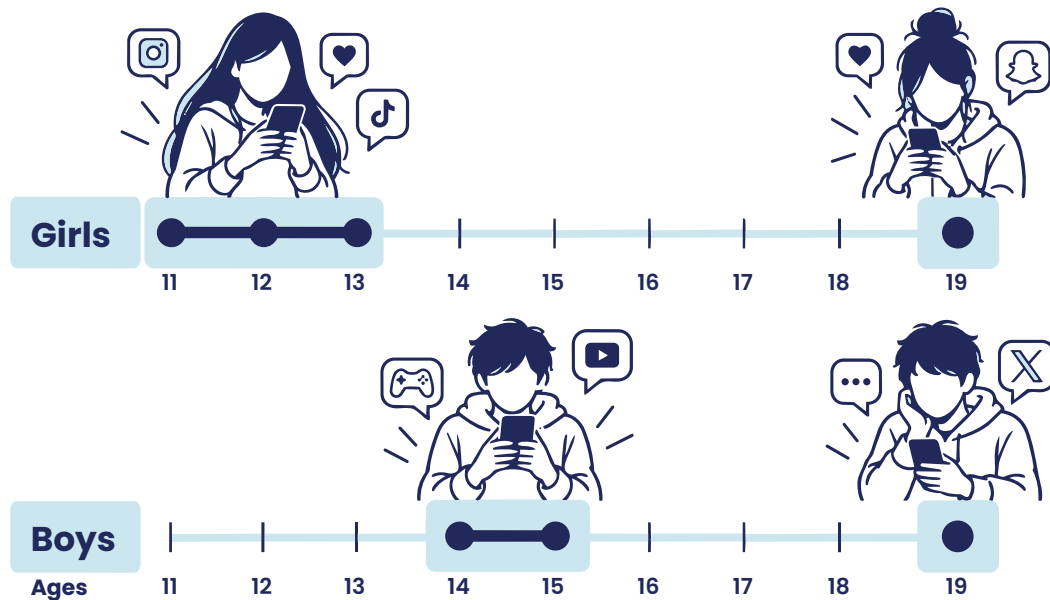
Girls also tend to carry emotional distress differently. Boys are more likely to act it out; girls are more likely to turn it inward through anxiety, depression, overthinking, and sometimes self-harm. They are often highly attuned to social cues, exclusion, and what others think of them. That makes social media, a system built around constant comparison, approval, rejection, and judgment, especially powerful.

These traits are not defects. The other side of such traits is wondrous—compassion, empathy, sensitivity to suffering, concern for the vulnerable, and the instinct toward protection and connection. These are enormously valuable. They are among the deepest reasons women have always been indispensable to families, communities, and institutions. Empathy binds communities and neighborhoods. Sensitivity to social feedback is what makes norms enforceable and cooperation possible. Concern for the perceived victim is the moral reflex upon which every humane society depends.

But the same qualities that make girls socially perceptive and emotionally attuned can also make them vulnerable to manipulation, especially during adolescence when identity, belonging, and self-worth are still taking shape. Girls enter this window earlier than boys, and it appears to be exactly when the machine bites hardest.

In an analysis of more than 84,000 British participants published in “Nature Communications,” the authors identified distinct developmental windows in which heavier social media use predicts lower life satisfaction a year later: ages eleven to thirteen for girls, fourteen to fifteen for boys, and nineteen for both.²⁹

Windows When Heavier Social Media Use Leads to Lower Life Satisfaction A Year Later



Source: Amy Orben, Andrew K. Przybylski, Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, and Rogier A.Kievit. "Windows of developmental sensitivity to social media." *Nature Communications*, Mar. 28, 2022, 13:1649. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-29296-3>.

The years in which a girl is most sensitive to this environment are the years in which she is least equipped to understand it, and they are the years in which many American girls now receive their first smartphone.

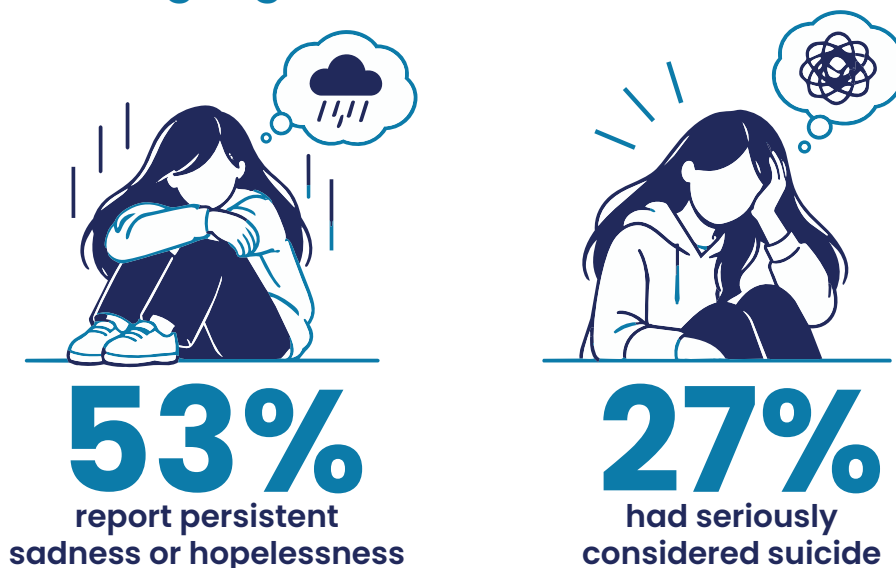
A 2025 systematic review found that heavy social media use, particularly when driven by constant comparison, is associated with greater identity confusion and distress.³⁰ That matters because adversaries are not simply trying to change what people think. They are exploiting uncertainty to shape who people believe they are.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina found that adolescents who habitually checked social media showed changes in the development of brain regions governing reward and social feedback.³¹ The "like" that may or may not come, the comment thread that may ignite or die—this unpredictability produces the same intermittent reinforcement that makes a slot machine harder to walk away from than a vending machine. Add social comparison, status, and the need to belong, and ideas become social currency. For a young woman, abandoning an idea may then feel like abandoning her community.

What is worse, the platforms have known how harmful their products are to adolescent girls. Internal Meta research leaked to The Wall Street Journal in 2021

included a researcher's slide stating flatly: "We make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls."³² Meta responded that the finding described one in three of the girls who already reported body image struggles, and that on most issues studied, more teens said the app helped than hurt.³³ Simply put, by Meta's own preferred reading, its product worsened the body image of a third of the girls who came to it already hurting.

Sadness and Consideration of Suicide Among High School Girls



Source: "2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results." *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)*, Sept. 29, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbbs/results/2023-yrbbs-results.html>.

CDC figures show that American women are roughly twice as likely as men to take antidepressants, with use climbing steadily over the past decade.³⁴ The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 53% of American high school girls reported persistent sadness or hopelessness, with 27% reporting they had seriously considered suicide, roughly double the rate among boys and far above the levels of a decade earlier.³⁵

Correlation is not causation, and serious researchers still contest how much of the deterioration is attributable to the platforms. But when the mental health of an entire demographic collapses in lockstep with its immersion in an environment engineered around its deepest psychological vulnerabilities, when the developmental windows of harm align with the ages of heaviest use, and when the manufacturer's own research exposes a level of harm, the burden of proof belongs to those who insist the machine is innocent.

Now ask the targeter's question. Which segment of a population carries the most influence over the whole? Women disproportionately influence families, children, culture, education, consumption, social norms, civic participation, and electoral outcomes. Women dominate the teaching professions, anchor the friendship networks and congregations through which norms actually move, and conduct most of the earliest moral instruction a human being ever receives.

Shape what women believe is moral, compassionate, respectable, or socially acceptable, and you shape far more than one voter. You shape the moral vocabulary of a society, and through it, everything that society will later be able to say, honor, and defend.

A woman who is taught to resent the values that underpinned her civilization will not transmit those values. She may transmit its comforts, its technologies, and its entitlements, but she will not transmit its stories, the account of why it exists, what it costs, and why it is worth the cost.

Capture a woman's moral imagination, and you influence everything she teaches, everyone she raises, and every institution her convictions touch for the next 50 years. A serious adversary does not attack where a society is weak and worthless. It attacks where a society is strong but undefended.



This is why the collapse in girls' mental health and the foreign influence threat cannot remain in separate policy silos. Anxiety, compulsive comparison, fear of exclusion, and dependence on social approval are not merely private struggles when they are occurring inside an information environment that hostile actors can study and manipulate at scale.

What arrives as compassion may be propaganda; what appears to be moral consensus may be an engineered illusion; and what feels like an independent conclusion may have been socially conditioned through thousands of invisible rewards and punishments. The contest is not simply over what girls believe about one war, one candidate, or one country. It is over whether they retain the psychological independence to judge clearly, withstand social pressure, and recognize when their finest instincts are being used against them.





THE WEAPONIZATION OF COMPASSION



A few months ago, the teenage daughter of one of the authors began sobbing after watching a YouTube short of a high school walkout protesting ICE and the deaths of Renée Good and Alex Pretti. The footage was intense, the music was deliberately emotional, and layered over it was a rewritten version of Martin Niemöller's "First They Came," recast for immigration enforcement.³⁶ By the time she came to her mother, she was not really asking what had happened. The video had already told her what to think about it. It took days of patient discussion and positive engagement to dissuade her of these newfound beliefs.

I am not suggesting the video was foreign propaganda. An American teenager who sincerely believed every frame of it almost certainly made the video. Yet, irrespective of the creator, the outcome is the same.

Before a young teenage girl had time to ask what actually happened, what the investigations showed, what laws and authorities were involved, whether the historical analogy was sound, or what someone on the other side might say, the moral conclusion was cleanly— and cleverly—delivered. It took less than a minute for her to conclude the actions by ICE were fascism. Good people opposed them. And silence on the issue was Nazi-like.

Almost all of social media engages in a form of emotional preemption. The point is not to persuade through a sequence of facts and arguments, but to create a feeling strong enough that the conclusion arrives first. Music, imagery, identity,

historical analogy, victimhood, and moral urgency are assembled so that by the time analytical reasoning begins, the emotional position is already occupied. Reason is no longer being asked to determine what is true. It is being asked to justify **what the viewer has already been made to feel is true.**

This is not about one video, one teenager, or one political cause. It describes a broader feature of modern political communication. Advertising learned long ago that people do not make decisions through reason alone. Pair a product with an emotion often enough, and the association begins to do the work that argument cannot.

Today, political persuasion and information warfare draw on the same psychology, except the product is no longer a car, a perfume, or a pair of shoes. It is fear, outrage, belonging, identity, guilt, compassion, or moral urgency. And no one is too educated or sophisticated to be immune.

That matters because compassion, one of our best instincts, is also one of the easiest to manipulate. Compassion responds to suffering, but it responds to the suffering we are shown. Which child appears on the screen? Which victim receives a name and a face? Which atrocity is replayed endlessly and which one disappears? What happened before the clip began? What context is missing? Who tells the viewer what the image means before she has had time to decide for herself?

Control those variables, and there is often no need to change a woman's values at all. Her values may be exactly what is being used. If she is compassionate, show her suffering. If she is protective, give her someone to protect. If she is sensitive to injustice, tell her who the oppressor is. If she wants to be a good person, surround her with signals about what good people are expected to believe. Her own conscience can then carry the message the rest of the way.



The pattern becomes familiar. A victim is selected, context is stripped away, emotionally powerful imagery is elevated, and the issue is reduced to a simple

moral binary in which one side represents innocence and the other cruelty. Disagreement itself is then framed as evidence of moral failure, making it harder to ask basic questions without appearing callous. The outrage, guilt, or compassion that follows can then be directed toward a political conclusion that feels entirely self-generated.

Compassion itself can become a point of manipulation.

Acting with compassion can also activate the brain's reward circuitry.³⁷ Social media can exploit that impulse through intermittent reinforcement—the same unpredictable cycle of emotional stimulation and reward that keeps users returning to the platform described above.³⁸ The result is that compassion itself can become a point of manipulation: users are repeatedly presented with distress, rewarded for responding, and gradually conditioned to equate continued engagement with moral action.

Over time, this can produce compulsive use, compassion fatigue, distorted threat perception, and allegiance to whichever community most consistently validates the user's sense of being caring and righteous.

This is where Gad Saad's concept of "suicidal empathy" provides a useful framework, and one we explore in our previous report, "Women and the West."³⁹ It captures an important feature of contemporary Western politics: Compassion can become destructive when people are taught that every boundary is cruelty, every act of self-protection is selfishness, and every demand for limits is evidence of moral failure.

The inversion is visible across a range of debates. Sympathy is extended outward almost without limit, while suspicion is increasingly directed inward. The aggressor is contextualized, the extremist is explained, the hostile ideology is treated with extraordinary delicacy, while the country attempting to enforce its laws, defend its borders, protect its citizens, or preserve its institutions is asked to justify its very right to do so.

This does not usually happen through a single dramatic conversion. It happens through accumulation. Compassion for a sympathetic victim becomes anger at whoever is said to have harmed that victim. Anger becomes suspicion of the institution behind the alleged harm. Suspicion becomes contempt for the larger system, and, with striking regularity, the system she is eventually taught to distrust is her own country. From the inside, this progression rarely feels like radicalization. Instead, it feels like profound moral growth.

And today, the machinery can learn with extraordinary precision. Platforms can see which images stop a scroll, which stories produce outrage, which framings generate guilt, which grievances trigger action, and which social cues make a belief feel morally mandatory. These questions were once answered through crude trial and error. Now they are tested constantly across millions of users, and artificial intelligence is making that process still more individualized.

***But the answer is not to make women colder.
It is to make us harder to manipulate.***

A woman can care deeply about suffering and still ask who created it, who benefits from the story being told about it, what information is missing, and whether the proposed solution will actually make things better. She can extend mercy without surrendering judgment; recognize injustice without assuming every claim of victimhood is true; respect other cultures without pretending every culture, regime, or ideology is morally equivalent; and love humanity without being taught that love of her own country is somehow shameful. Tenderness needs a spine.

The information war depends on convincing women that compassion and self-preservation are in conflict, that to be kind they must suspend judgment, and that to defend their own society is somehow to betray their values. That is a false choice, and women must reject it.

This is also where foreign influence becomes especially difficult to recognize. America already contains real divisions, real injustices, real political movements, real anger, and sincere activists who genuinely believe in their causes. A foreign actor does not need to create those movements to benefit from them. It only needs to identify the fracture, amplify the most divisive narratives, elevate the most extreme voices, and widen the distance between Americans.

That distinction is critical. There is a difference between creating a grievance and finding one that can be weaponized. Creating one is difficult, risky, and detectable. Finding one is cheap, deniable, and endlessly renewable.

The most effective propaganda often begins with something real. The grievance may be American. The activists may be American. The argument may be American. The hand turning up the volume on the outrage often is not.

VI

MANUFACTURED REALITY: SOCIAL PROOF, BOTS, AND THE LAUNDERING OF NARRATIVES



The early internet rested on the assumption that if you give people access to more information, the truth will ultimately defeat falsehood. The marketplace of ideas would sort it out. That assumption was never guaranteed, but it was reasonable in a world where information was scarce, and distribution was slow. Social media inverted the terms. Information is now infinite and free. Attention is the scarce resource, and the marketplace reorganized around capturing it.

This is the hinge on which the 21st century turns: Truth may perform well in a marketplace organized around deliberation. It does not automatically win in a marketplace whose currency is engagement. The information most capable of capturing attention is frequently not the most accurate. It is the frightening, the morally outrageous, the humiliating, the identity-affirming, the emotionally vivid, the simple, and the socially contagious.

In short, a system optimizing for engagement is, in practice, optimizing for tribal hostility and moral outrage, because that is what retains engagement.⁴⁰ The algorithm itself believes nothing. Its objective is to keep the user looking, and if outrage outperforms moderation, the architecture privileges outrage without a single human conspirator.

The consequence for influence operations is enormous. A 20th-century propagandist often faced a distribution problem. He needed broadcasters, front groups, and trusted messengers; every one of those had a cost, carried a delay,

and risked exposure. Today, an adversary can introduce psychologically compelling material into the network and let the platform's engagement system distribute it.

TikTok perfected this model. Facebook was built around people you already knew. Twitter was built around people you chose to follow. TikTok's Western version was built around one question—what will keep you watching—while China's domestic version was engineered with far greater emphasis on education, social utility, and limits.⁴¹

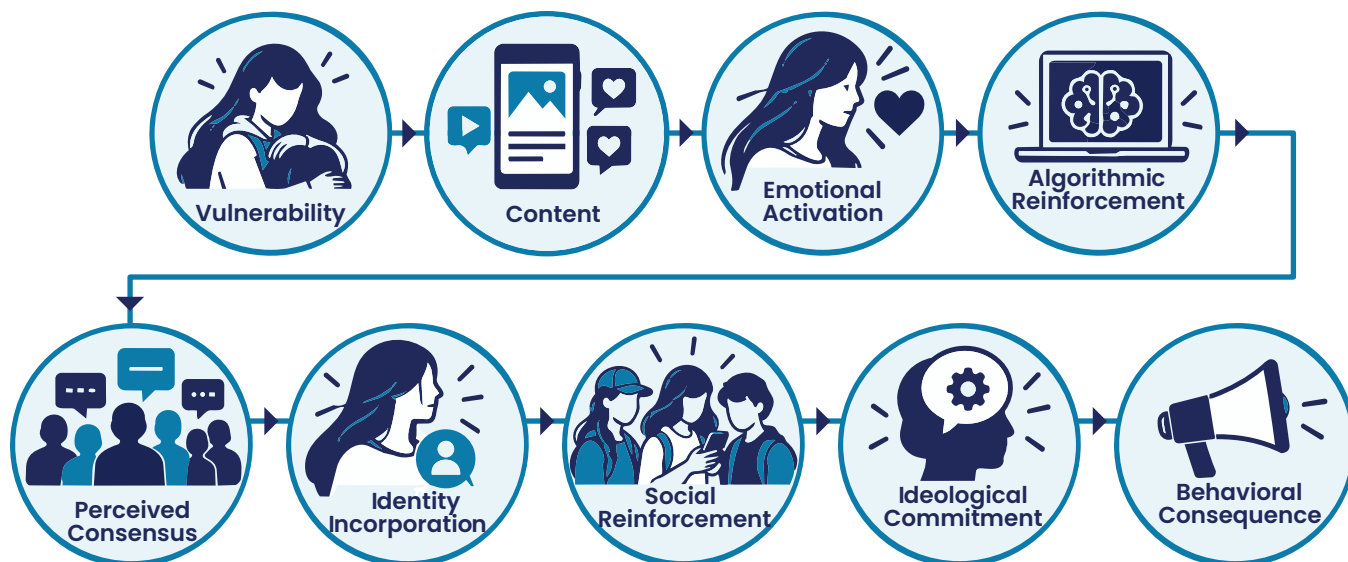
On older platforms, users largely built their own information world by choosing friends, pages, or accounts to follow. TikTok's algorithm does much more of that choosing for them. It can place almost any video in front of almost any user, whether or not she has ever searched for the topic or expressed an interest in it.



The system learns from behavior: what she stops to watch, what she skips, what she watches twice, and how long she lingers. It adjusts in real time, becoming better at predicting what will capture her attention. Instagram has increasingly adopted the same discovery-driven model.

That is why the question of who controls TikTok is about much more than privacy. Whoever influences the recommendation system has potential influence over what millions of American children repeatedly see, feel, and come to believe is important.

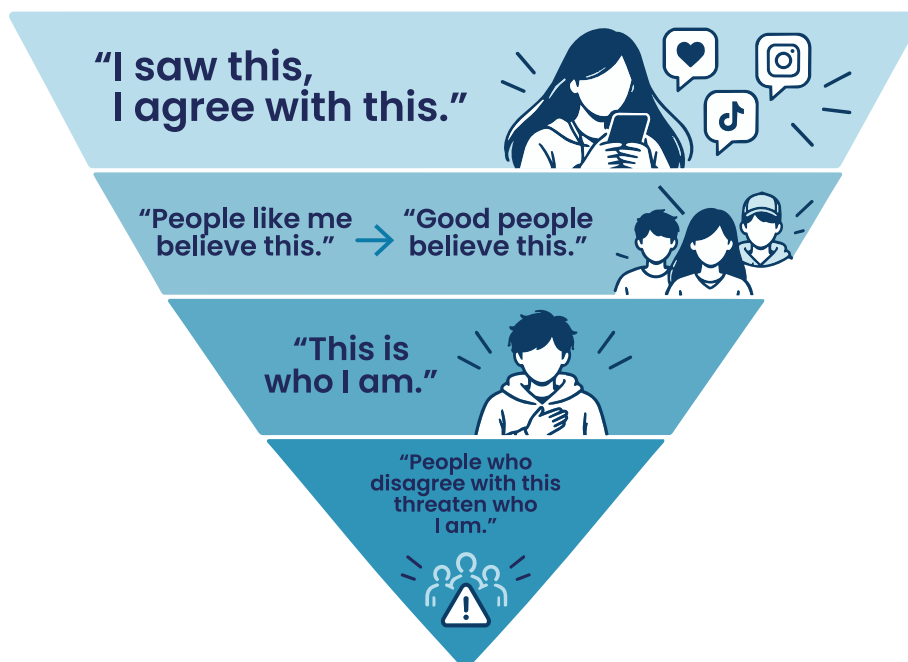
Strip away the branding of any platform, ideology, or adversary, and the machinery underneath runs one effective sequence. It can be stated as a model:



The entry point for any form of radicalization is almost always legitimate: loneliness, insecurity, discomfort in a changing body, anger at a real injustice, compassion for genuine suffering, status anxiety, conflict at home, a search for moral meaning.

It bears repeating: The strongest influence operations do not invent vulnerabilities; they find existing ones and amplify the content most likely to activate them.

As the system learns what provokes the strongest reaction, the feed becomes narrower and more emotionally charged. The user is shown more of the same claims, more people who appear to share them, and fewer competing interpretations. What begins as algorithmic selection gradually hardens into perceived consensus—and eventually, into a version of reality that feels self-evident. Then the claim migrates by familiar steps: I saw this. I agree with this. People like me believe this. Good people believe this. This is who I am. People who disagree with this threaten who I am. At the final step, the proposition has left cognition and taken up residence in identity, where factual rebuttal can backfire, confirming that the challenger, like a parent, is in fact the enemy.



Everything described so far would be alarming enough if every account online were human and every wave of outrage were organic. They are not.

Human beings look to other people to understand what is normal, true, popular, or morally acceptable. We ask, often without realizing it: *What does everyone else think?* That instinct once helped us navigate communities we could

actually see. Online, it can now be manufactured. A relatively small network of coordinated accounts can make an issue look enormous; journalists notice that it is suddenly “everywhere,” politicians respond, real people join in, and an artificial signal becomes a real political force. The original outrage may have been manufactured. Everything that follows can be completely genuine.

AI makes this much easier. Fake personas can now be given faces, histories, voices, political identities, grievances, and emotional stories at enormous scale. They can pose as activists, victims, experts, mothers, teenagers, or ordinary Americans. State-backed influence networks have already used generative AI to produce this kind of content.⁴² The important change is not simply that propaganda is becoming more convincing. It is becoming cheaper, faster, and available to far more actors than intelligence services alone.



The manipulation can also travel through real people without those people knowing where it began. **A foreign actor seeds a narrative. An anonymous account repeats it. An influencer picks it up. An activist amplifies it. A journalist reports on it. A politician responds.** By the end of the chain, the original source has disappeared, and the story feels authentically American. This is how foreign narratives can be washed through trusted domestic voices until almost no one recognizes them as foreign.

Even opposition can help. Sharing a lie to condemn it still spreads the lie. Debunking a fringe narrative can introduce it to millions of people who would never have seen it. The algorithm does not care whether you are furious, supportive, or horrified. It cares that you are engaged. That means sincerity offers no protection. A woman can believe she is fighting propaganda while helping distribute it.

And the next stage is more consequential still. Social platforms already learn what frightens us, angers us, makes us pause, makes us jealous, gives us belonging, or makes us feel wronged. We disclose these things constantly through behavior we barely notice: what we watch, skip, replay, share, and linger over. AI adds something new to that system: the ability not only to study us, but increasingly to simulate how people like us may respond before a message ever reaches the real world.

For women and girls, the danger is especially personal. A teenage girl has always looked to her peers to understand what is normal, admirable, shameful, or worth believing. Increasingly, some of the “peers” shaping that judgment may not be people at all. They may be synthetic accounts designed to look, speak, hurt, celebrate, and believe exactly as girls her age do. She may think she is responding to a community when she is actually responding to a constructed environment.

That is why virality should never be confused with consensus. Ten thousand accounts repeating the same thing do not necessarily represent ten thousand people. Online popularity can be purchased, automated, coordinated, or simulated. The most important habit in this new environment may be: Before asking what everyone seems to believe, ask whether “everyone” is real.



VII

THE THREE BIGGEST ADVERSARIES



Russia, China, and Iran have different histories, different capabilities, and different objectives, but they share an interest in the same end state: a fragmented, demoralized, low-trust United States. The 2025 and 2026 Annual Threat Assessments from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) identify foreign malign influence as an ongoing and escalating threat and name all three.⁴³ As stated previously, oftentimes these adversaries largely do not invent America's divisions. They find them, fund them, amplify them, and steer them.

Russia

Russia does what Russia has always done, with better tools. The 2025 ODNI assessment is blunt: Moscow uses influence operations to stoke political discord in the West, sow doubt in democratic processes, degrade support for Ukraine, and amplify preferred narratives, working through sanctioned organizations such as the Social Design Agency and ANO Dialog and through the state outlet RT, “while hiding Russia’s hand.”⁴⁴ The assessment judges these activities will almost certainly increase in sophistication and volume.



One example is the Doppelganger operation.⁴⁵ Run since 2022, it built networks of fake personas and spoofed news sites to erode American support for Ukraine and inflame domestic argument. Its companion effort, Operation Overload, tricked fact-checking organizations, already ripe for coercion, into amplifying fabricated content more than 250 times.⁴⁶ OpenAI has since documented Doppelganger-linked accounts using its models to mass-produce the content.⁴⁷ Lacking China's technological scale, Russia compensates with intermediaries: proxy outlets, local partnerships, journalist cultivation, and heavy investment in information ecosystems across Africa and the Global South, where Western attention is thin, and the anti-colonial frame is ready to hand. They are willing to be patient, waiting for new narratives to be seeded, watered, grown, and then exported.

China

China's ambition is broader and more infrastructural. Russia contests the content of the conversation. China increasingly seeks a position within the architecture through which information itself is created and distributed: platforms, telecommunications, undersea cable and data infrastructure, AI systems and the language models built on them, global media partnerships, content-sharing agreements, and the training of foreign journalists.



The covert layer exists as well. The 2025 assessment states that the PRC will expand coercive and subversive influence activity to weaken the United States internally, and notes that pro-China actors have deployed AI-generated news anchors and AI-generated personas to inflame Americans on already-sensitive topics including drug use, immigration, and abortion.⁴⁸ The flagship network, Spamouflage, is active since at least 2017 across more than 50 platforms to sway American voters.⁴⁹ In 2024, the analytics firm Graphika identified its accounts posing as American citizens, voters, soldiers, and media outlets, pushing content at both Republican and Democratic audiences on guns, race, Israel, immigration, and abortion.⁵⁰ Pushing at both sides is the ultimate tell. The objective is not the victory of either.

Then there is TikTok, a foreign-linked company that possesses one of the most powerful individualized attention-allocation systems ever built; outsiders have limited visibility into how that system ranks, suppresses, accelerates, or learns from political and cultural content. ByteDance's Chinese sibling Douyin places

users under 14 in a mandatory youth mode where they receive 40 minutes a day of curated educational content with a hard overnight curfew,⁵¹ while the American product ships unrationed to the same developing brains.

Congress judged the structure intolerable; the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the divest-or-ban statute;⁵² a restructuring agreement placed U.S. operations under majority-American ownership in early 2026;⁵³ but litigation continues over whether the arrangement truly severs the recommendation algorithm from ByteDance.⁵⁴

Influence also travels through money into authentic American movements. CODEPINK, a self-styled feminist antiwar organization with more than a million followers, spent its early years criticizing, among others, Chinese human rights abuses.⁵⁵ In 2017, its co-founder married Neville Roy Singham, a wealthy tech entrepreneur whom the New York Times identified as the financier of a lavishly funded global network working closely with the Chinese government's media machine.⁵⁶ Singham-linked money now accounts for a substantial share of CODEPINK's funding, and the organization subsequently launched its "China Is Not Our Enemy" campaign.

Iran

Iran lacks both Russia's tradecraft depth and China's infrastructural reach, and compensates with audacity and impersonation. Its operators have posed as American extremists to threaten American voters, run cyber-enabled influence campaigns, and built social media operations aimed at inflaming existing domestic divisions. The 2026 ODNI assessment describes how Islamist influence networks have reached younger audiences by abandoning ideological scholarship for emotionally evocative, grievance-based short-form content, building close-knit online communities that frame perceived grievances within a larger story of oppression and define identity in opposition to Western freedom itself.⁵⁷



Within 24 hours of the outbreak of military operations in Iran, the IRGC activated an online campaign that pushed anti-American and anti-Israel content—much of it AI-generated and some photorealistic—to millions of American viewers.⁵⁸



VIII

THE SYSTEM DOES NOT NEED A CONSPIRACY



As was said before, it would be simpler if this were only about foreign enemies. American women are being shaped by a mix of forces at once: real domestic grievances, ideological movements, social media algorithms, commercial incentives, foreign influence operations, and now AI.

Importantly, the point is that these forces do not need to coordinate to produce the same effect. The platforms built the terrain. Their business model rewards whatever keeps us watching, and what keeps us watching is often outrage, fear, grievance, comparison, and tribal conflict. No foreign adversary had to invent that system. The market did it for them. The unsettling part is that a business using an algorithm to try to maximize attention often discovers the same emotional pressure points that an intelligence service would try to exploit deliberately. One does it for profit. The other does it for power. The result can look remarkably similar.

Domestic ideology matters too. Over decades, ideas deeply skeptical of America and the West moved from the academic margins into universities, media, nonprofits, and other institutions that shape culture. Many of the people advancing those ideas are Americans, not foreign agents.

The real danger is the interaction. Domestic actors create grievances. Algorithms reward it. Foreign adversaries amplify it. Platforms profit from it. Ordinary people spread it because they believe it. No secret meeting is required.



That is why it is a mistake to assume every radical idea in America was planted by Russia, China, or Iran. Most were not.

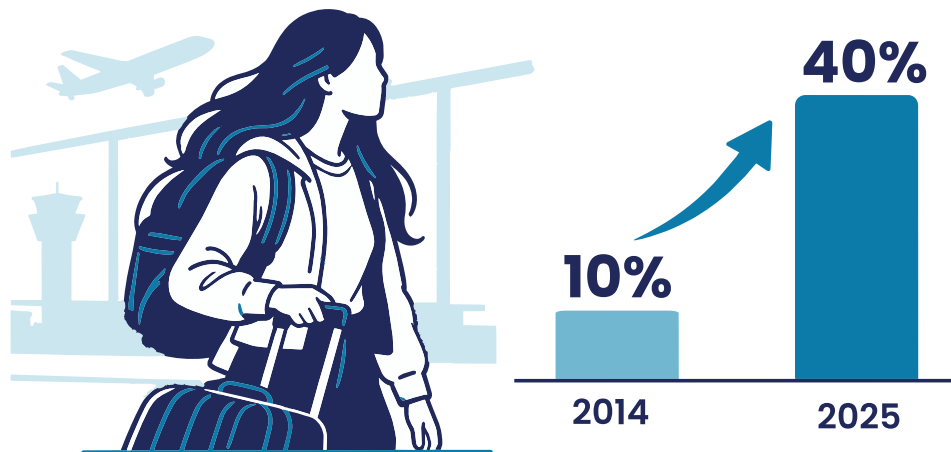
An American can be moved into strategically useful alienation without ever meeting a foreign national, receiving a dollar, or knowing that anyone wanted her moved. She merely has to marinate, for years, in an environment whose commercial physics reward grievance, whose loudest domestic voices indict her civilization, and whose foreign participants quietly amplify whichever notes serve them.

Gallup found that liberal identification among women aged 18 to 29 surged from 28% in the early 2000s to 40%.⁵⁹ Young men held steady near 25%. The 15-point sex gap is without precedent in the polling record, with Gallup's issue-level analysis finding sex itself, more than education, predicting the shift, and the movement accelerating during exactly the years young women's social lives moved onto social media.⁶⁰

More damning is women's attachment to our country itself. In 2014, just 10% of American women under 45 told Gallup they would leave the United States permanently if they could. By 2025, that number had reached 40%.⁶¹ Young women

are now dramatically more likely than young men (19%) to imagine their futures somewhere other than America, while simultaneously showing the sharpest decline in confidence in the country's institutions. It was also the largest gender gap Gallup had recorded on this question, in any country it surveyed. Something deeper than ordinary partisan dissatisfaction is happening. A generation of American women is becoming increasingly alienated from the country they inherited.

Women Under 45 Wanting to Leave U.S. Permanently



Source: Benedict Vigers and Julie Ray. "Record Numbers of Younger Women Want to Leave the U.S." *Gallup*, Nov. 13, 2025. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/697382/record-numbers-younger-women-leave.aspx>.

Do these facts prove foreign manipulation? Not necessarily; a young woman may reach any of these convictions by reading, experience, or genuine dissatisfaction with her circumstance. Organic political change is real, and treating every ideological movement as foreign-made is precisely the trap this report exists to avoid. Political movements enter this analysis as indicators of change requiring explanation, never as automatic evidence of foreign hands.

The tradwife phenomenon illustrates why the analysis must never become partisan, because the machine is not. Set the two messages side by side. One side tells women that traditional family life is inherently oppressive, that motherhood is a diminishment, that domesticity is a trap. The other tells women that professional and civic life is irredeemably unfulfilling and that they should withdraw entirely into a romanticized domestic sphere with endless sourdough starter. Both are engagement-optimized. Both flourish. Both pull women away from a shared civic identity in which family life and public responsibility coexist, which is where most American women actually live.

An adversary running centrifugal operations does not care which extreme dominates because it benefits from the polarization itself. Russia, in particular, has a documented history of amplifying opposing sides of the same social conflict simultaneously.⁶²

***Pull hard enough on both ends and the middle,
where a society governs itself, disappears.***

American power rests on capable Americans. A society characterized by poor physical health,⁶³ declining mental resilience,⁶⁴ weak literacy,⁶⁵ low social trust,⁶⁶ reduced family formation,⁶⁷ diminished civic participation,⁶⁸ low military eligibility,⁶⁹ low agency, political fanaticism, and social fragmentation is objectively less powerful,⁷⁰ whatever the cause.

It fields fewer soldiers,⁷¹ invents fewer things, mobilizes more slowly, and sustains less. An intelligent adversary therefore has a strategic reason to identify and exploit whatever contributes to those conditions, and to leave alone whatever strengthens them. It requires no conspiracy, and it explains why the health of American girls is a national security metric.

IX

THE DEMORALIZED CITIZEN: HELPLESSNESS, CYNICISM, AND THE CONTEST FOR AGENCY



Psychology has studied the destruction of agency for 60 years under the name learned helplessness. In the classic experiments, animals subjected to aversive events they could not control eventually stopped trying to escape even when escape became possible. Simply, they had learned that nothing they did mattered. Fifty years of neuroscience produced a revision: When people are exposed to stress they cannot control, passivity is not something they have to learn.⁷² It is the default. What has to be learned is the opposite: the belief that what you do matters.

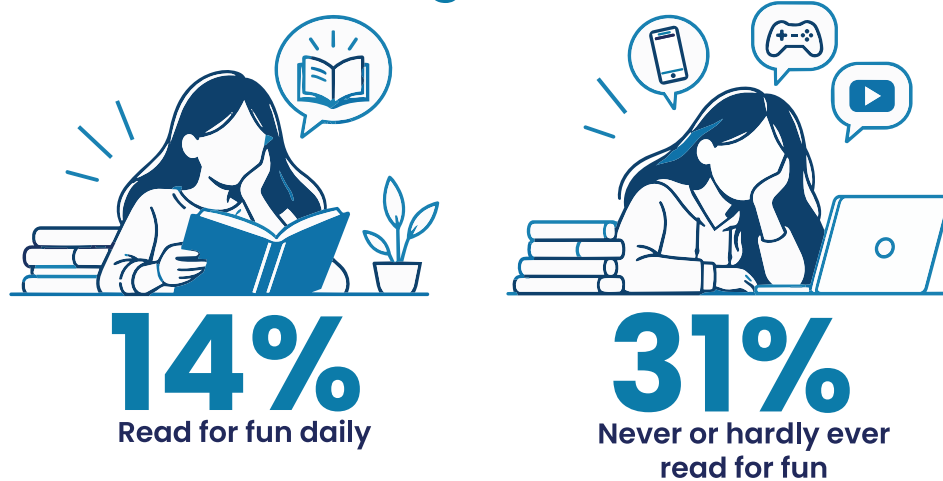
That belief comes from repeated experiences of having some control and seeing that your actions can change an outcome. Without it, people become more likely to withdraw, give up, and stop trying. When applied to the modern information environment, the implication is important. Agency is not automatic. It has to be built and reinforced. A constant stream of crisis, outrage, helplessness, and problems that feel too large to influence can slowly erode the sense that individual action matters at all.

Now inventory the daily social media feed and traditional media output delivered. Democracy is dying. Racism permeates everything. Men can be women. The economy is impossible. America is evil. An adversary has every incentive to amplify whatever reduces individual and collective agency, and the environment amplifies it for free.

More concerning is that the cognitive substrate is eroding alongside the emotional one, and it deserves its own discussion. Liberal democracy quietly assumes citizens capable of sustained attention, deep reading, historical memory, abstraction, the weighing of competing evidence, tolerance of ambiguity, and delayed judgment.

Algorithmic short-form media rewards the opposite set: speed, certainty, emotion, simplicity, novelty, and conflict. The data on what this is doing to the reading brain are grim. Only 14% of American students now read for fun daily, down 13 points since 2012, with nearly a third essentially never reading.⁷³ Professors across higher education report that students arrive unable to sustain attention through whole books, and reading assessments have plummeted.⁷⁴

American Students Leisure Reading Habits



Source: Lexi Lonas Cochran. "Reading for fun plunges to 'crisis' level for US students." *The Hill*, Jul. 13, 2025. <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/4093843-reading-for-fun-plunges-to-crisis-level-for-us-students/>.

A citizen who cannot read through a judicial opinion, a budget, a serious article, or a historical argument does not stop having opinions about courts, budgets, and history. She becomes dependent on someone else to interpret reality for her, and the interpreter will be whoever owns the feed. A citizen may remain technically literate while becoming functionally illiterate, stripped of the cognitive habits self-government assumes.

A quieter theft is also underway, prior to any persuasion: the theft of attention itself. Whoever determines what millions of citizens spend 4.8 hours a day engaged on exerts enormous influence over what feels threatening, what feels important, what feels normal, and what never comes to mind at all.⁷⁵ Agenda-setting has always been power; editors and producers held it for a century.

What is new is agenda-setting at an individual scale—continuous, personalized, and optimized, exercised by systems whose owners and objectives the citizen cannot see. Cognitive warfare begins before the first false claim, at the allocation of attention, and a person whose attention is not her own has already ceded the terrain on which every later battle will be fought.

Technology always has the potential to leave people helpless without it. The Army still teaches map reading and how to use a compass, not because GPS fails often, but because dependency is vulnerability, and a soldier who cannot navigate without the satellite is fragile in exactly the moment fragility kills.

Similarly, AI and digital systems are extraordinary tools, and this report proposes abandoning none of them. But a resilient citizenry must retain its analog capacities—to read deeply, reason without a machine, write, calculate, remember, find a primary source, detect manipulation, sit with uncertainty, and construct an argument from evidence. The principle is not nostalgia. It is a resilience doctrine, and it can be stated simply. Never surrender a fundamental human capability entirely to technology.

A generation trained to outsource memory, navigation, judgment, and now composition itself is a generation that has pre-positioned its own dependence, and dependence is the condition every adversary in this report is counting on.

A resilient citizen believes she can understand the world, distinguish evidence from propaganda, make choices that matter, disagree without hating, and improve institutions that are flawed without being irredeemable. A degraded information environment teaches the opposite—nothing is knowable, everyone lies, you are powerless, every system is corrupt, your identity is your destiny, your opponents are evil, and destruction is more meaningful than construction. The first citizen can be governed by consent and mobilized in a crisis. The second can only be managed, medicated, or manipulated, and she is available to whoever supplies the next totalizing explanation. Between those two citizens runs the real front line of the information war.







CASUALTIES OF THE INFLUENCE WAR



Meta just recently agreed to pay up to \$17.1 billion to settle the claims of 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and two territories, the largest state consumer protection settlement in American history outside the tobacco settlements of the 1990s.⁷⁶ The company also agreed to hard daily time limits for children, overnight shutoffs, real age assurance, and parental controls it had spent a decade insisting were unnecessary. The bipartisan investigation behind the case found that Meta engineered Instagram's features to addict children while internally documenting the resulting mental health harms and telling parents something else.

Nations do not extract sums like that from corporations over a difference of opinion about screen time. They extract them when there are casualties, and when the casualties can be traced to a decision someone made in a conference room. That said, we are not proposing banning social media platforms or their overregulation. Parents need to be educated on the risks that such platforms pose to their children to be empowered to make the best decisions for their families. But they can't make good decisions with deliberately withheld information.

This report has purposefully used militarized words, like "war" and "battlefield." Similarly, we intentionally used the word "casualty." In the military, a casualty is any service member who is lost to their unit and unable to perform their duties due to death, injury, illness, capture, or being missing. There have already been casualties in the war on the American mind.



Most of the people described in it were not the targets of a Russian or Chinese operation. But the machinery that harms them is the same machinery our adversaries exploit. Algorithms, ideological movements, commercial incentives, extremist networks, and foreign intelligence services have radically different motives and compete on identical terrain: human attention, identity, emotion, and belonging. When the same terrain is contested by many actors, the people standing on it take fire from all of them. Meanwhile, most of them never know they have enlisted.

The Harmed

In 2022, a British coroner concluded a two-week inquest into the death of fourteen-year-old Molly Russell and found that she died from an act of self-harm while suffering from depression and the negative effects of online content.⁷⁷ A court of law, examining evidence under oath, formally recognized what her father had been screaming into a void for five years—material delivered to a child by a recommendation system had contributed to her death.

Molly is not an anomaly. The U.S. Surgeon General has concluded that social media presents a profound risk of harm to young people and that the available evidence is not sufficient to call it safe for children, citing research that adolescents who spend more than three hours a day on these platforms face roughly double the risk of depression and anxiety symptoms—at a moment when the average American teenager's hours spent is three and a half.⁷⁸

The same advisory finds that social media use may perpetuate body dissatisfaction, disordered eating behaviors, social comparison, and low self-esteem, *especially among adolescent girls*, and that 46% of adolescents say the platforms make them feel worse about their bodies.

The mechanism of capture is the previously described model used by adversaries, but running on a child. A girl arrives with an ordinary vulnerability, the kind every

Impact of Social Media on Body Image in Adolescents Aged 13–17



Source: "Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>.

adolescent girl in human history has had. She encounters content that gives the vulnerability a vocabulary and an aesthetic. The system learns that she slows down for it and brings her more. Repetition begins to feel like recognition, and recognition like community. She begins to believe—*everyone here understands me*. The struggle becomes an identity, the identity acquires an audience that rewards it, and eventually the identity instructs the body. At no point does anyone decide to hurt her. The machine has no opinion about whether she lives or dies.

But we care. Girls are dying. Others are not dying but are being disfigured in slower ways: starved, cut, medicated, convinced at 13 that their face requires correction, taught that their pain is their personality, or their body an enemy.

The Radicalized

Radicalization has no partisan home. Jihadist recruiters, white supremacists and accelerationists, violent misogynists, revolutionary extremists, and conspiratorial movements differ profoundly in doctrine and converge almost exactly in method: grievance, alienation, belonging, escalating content, moral certainty, an enemy, and eventually permission to commit violent acts. The FBI has repeatedly warned that violent extremists radicalize online and use social platforms for propaganda, recruitment, target selection, and incitement,⁷⁹ and its recent assessments describe online self-radicalization as a central feature of the domestic terrorism

threat, with a rising share of the radicalized being minors.⁸⁰ Europol reports the same phenomenon in Europe: Young people embedded in online communities that normalize violence, where narratives from incompatible ideological traditions flourish side by side because the platform rewards intensity rather than coherence.⁸¹ These are the casualties a country recognizes most readily, because eventually someone bleeds in public.

The assassination of Charlie Kirk is a particularly unsettling example of what modern radicalization may look like because, at least from the evidence publicly available so far, Tyler Robinson does not fit neatly into the old model of an extremist.⁸²



No known terrorist organization recruited him. No public evidence has established that a handler gave him instructions. No manifesto has surfaced laying out a disciplined revolutionary doctrine. Instead, investigators encountered something increasingly familiar and dangerous—a young man whose politics reportedly changed significantly, whose life became deeply immersed in online culture, and whose violence emerged from an ecosystem where ideology, extreme sexual belief around trans identity, grievance, memes, gaming references, irony, and political hatred had become grossly intertwined.⁸³

According to Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, Robinson had once been a high-achieving student who earned excellent grades and briefly attended Utah State University.⁸⁴ People who knew him described a noticeable change after exposure to online forums.⁸⁵ Cox said investigators and friends reported that Robinson had gone deeply into what he called the “dark internet,” including Reddit culture, gaming communities, and other online spaces. His family separately told investigators that his political beliefs had increasingly diverged from those of his conservative household and that he had become substantially more political.⁸⁶

The ammunition used to kill Charlie contained a mixture of political slogans, gaming references, memes, and deliberately ironic language. To an older model of extremism analysis, some of it can look incoherent. Today, this is called salad bar extremism, because it is now recognized that the internet does not require a person to adopt a clean ideology to become radicalized.

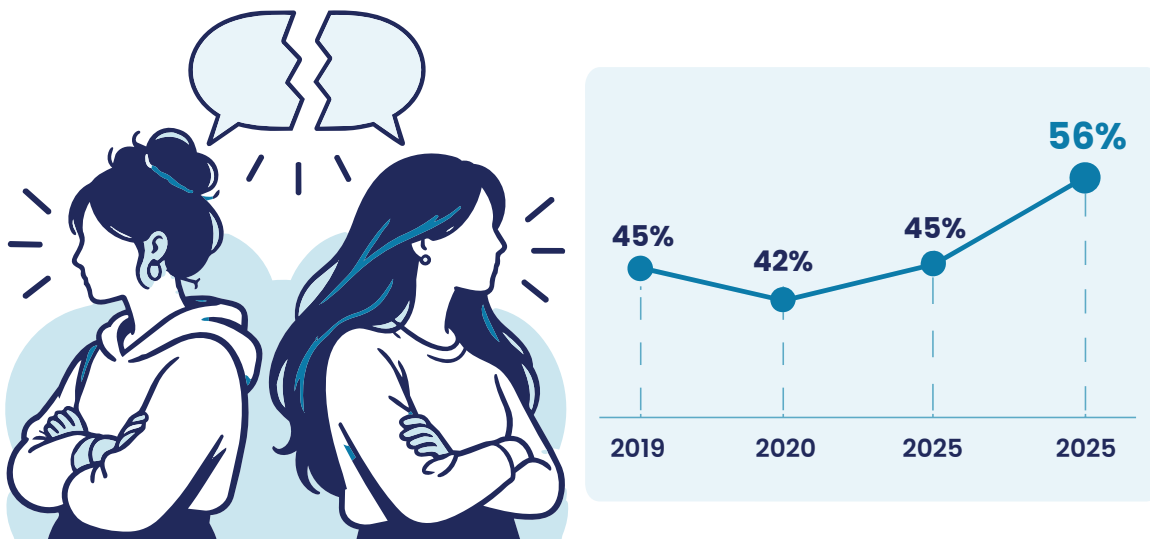
There is now also a clear, measurable association between radical gender ideology and left-wing authoritarianism—not merely partisan overlap, but a relationship that persists even when political identity is taken into account. That matters because the same authoritarian disposition is increasingly associated with coercion and a greater willingness to rationalize political violence.⁸⁷ Congressional and intelligence reviews of the Internet Research Agency found that Russian operations deliberately amplified divisive social issues across the ideological spectrum, explicitly including “LGBT matters,” alongside race, immigration, and gun rights, with the broader objective of increasing polarization and social discord in the United States.⁸⁸

The Severed

This is slightly more difficult to measure because this looks at bonds, not bodies. Political identity has now reached into friendships, marriages, congregations, workplaces, and families with a totality that is alarming. In 2025, 56% of American adults told Pew they had stopped talking to someone about political or election news because of something that person said, up from 45% the year before.⁸⁹ Roughly a third of adults report that politics has strained relationships within their own families, and a comparable share say they limit time with relatives who do not share their values. Not every estrangement is the internet’s doing, but it creates an atmosphere ripe for breeding moral absolutism.

The share of Americans who have stopped talking to someone about political news has grown

% of U.S. adults who say they have ever stopped talking to someone about political or election news, whether in person or online, because of something that person said



Source: Kristen Eddy, Michael Lipka, Keterina Eva Masta, Christopher St. Aubin, and Elisa Shearer. “Why Americans discuss the news – or don’t – with others.” *Pew Research Center*, Feb. 11, 2026. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2026/02/11/why-americans-discuss-the-news-or-dont-with-others/>.

Women feel this acutely and disproportionately, because women disproportionately maintain the relational infrastructure that absolutism destroys—family invitations, the holidays, the phone calls, and the effort of keeping a family speaking to itself. When a mother and daughter stop speaking over politics, something more than a relationship has been lost. A transmission line has been cut, and it often impacts broad family groups.

In August of 2026, more than 138,000 TikTok videos promoted cutting off or going low-contact with parents. The overwhelming majority were posted by women, with the intended audience being other women.⁹⁰ This is an algorithmic environment that normalizes estrangement as a default response to ordinary conflict. Family bonds are a major source of social support, obligation, identity, and resilience. Research finds estrangement is associated with poorer well-being for many parents, including greater loneliness, depressive symptoms, and reduced sense of purpose.⁹¹ This is the war on the American mind at its most intimate: Weaken the family, weaken the community, and eventually weaken the country.



A society is held together by relationships long before it is held together by the government. The dinner table, the neighborhood, the congregation, and the friendship are national infrastructure, and they are being degraded in plain sight. As we've said before, an adversary interested in fracture does not need Americans to admire Moscow or Beijing—the dissolution of the American family would be a clear victory.

The Alienated From Country

This may be the largest strategic casualty class, because it strikes directly at what an information adversary ultimately wants to weaken—love and attachment to the nation of one's birth. As previously mentioned, women increasingly desire to leave America. It is so catastrophic that American women's desire to leave now sits in the same range as women in Zambia and Malta, except that in those countries the men feel the same way.⁹² Here, only the women do.

Four in ten young American women reporting that they would leave their own country if they could is not an opinion about an administration.⁹³ It is a verdict on belonging, and it has been rising through Democratic and Republican presidencies alike.

You cannot pass on what you have been taught to resent.

How does a young woman arrive there? Not through any single post but across years and thousands of iterations, a version of her country in which it appears principally as oppressor, hypocrite, colonizer, aggressor, or crime scene. Patriotism is coded as unsophisticated and national self-defense as cruelty. No one taught her to hate her country. Instead, she finds an environment that taught her that loving it would embarrass her.



Criticism of America is not anti-Americanism, and a free country should generate relentless criticism of itself. That capacity is the West's actual distinction, but a rising generation taught only how to indict its inheritance and never why it might be worth keeping will not defend it, reform it, or transmit it. And the transmission is the part that matters, because these are the women who will raise the next Americans. Remember, you cannot pass on what you have been taught to resent.

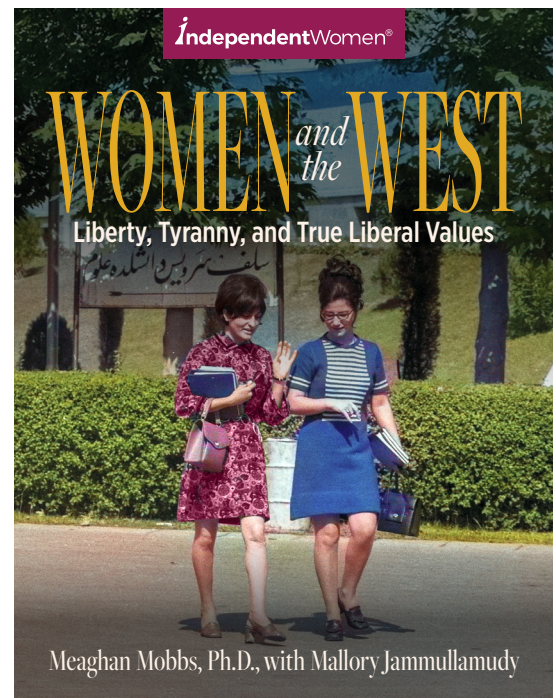


XI

WOMEN AND THE WEST, REVISITED



This center's "Women and the West" report argued that women are the canary in the coal mine of civilization—their status, security, and aspirations reveal where a society is going before its political institutions register the change.⁹⁴ Where women are free, educated, safe, and equal before the law, civilization is functioning; where they are subjugated, silenced, or erased, it is failing. That finding stands, and this report has taken it one step further. Women are no longer only the canary. They are part of the contested terrain. "Women and the West" examined the vulnerability. This report has examined the weapon. What remains is to say, affirmatively, what the weapon is aimed at, because a defense that cannot articulate what it defends will not hold.



A defense of the West that begins by denying its sins will persuade no one. Western nations practiced slavery, conquest, and exclusion. American history contains such things. But many women and girls learn little else. The affirmative

case does not require forgetting. It requires proportion, and proportion begins with a question the West-hating frame never asks: Compared to what?

Every civilization in recorded history practiced slavery. The West abolished it, at enormous cost, and then used its power to pressure the rest of the world to do the same. Every civilization has known injustice. The West did something rarer: It wrote principles of liberty and human equality into its political tradition so clearly that its own dissidents could use those principles to expose its failures and force reform.

That is the West's actual distinction—not sinlessness, which no human society has possessed, but the extraordinary ability of self-correction, free speech, free inquiry, independent courts, elections, and a moral tradition that holds power answerable to principles above it.

Frederick Douglass, who had better cause than any modern-day critic to condemn America, saw the design clearly. The Constitution and Declaration, he said, give us a platform “broad enough, and strong enough, to support the most comprehensive plans for the freedom and elevation of all the people of this country, without regard to color, class, or clime.”⁹⁵ Douglass did not mistake the gap between promise and practice for the absence of the promise. He used the promise as a tool to make the country better.

Everything a modern Western woman takes as the natural way of life is, historically, a rare and recent achievement of Western civilization.

Individual legal identity, the vote, property in her own name, education to the limit of her talent, religious liberty, freedom of speech, the right to choose her work, her husband, her convictions, and her life shape are rare. These freedoms are not the human norm.

Across most of the world, they do not exist, and in the nations now beaming content into American women's feeds—Russia, China, Iran—they largely do not exist today. A young American woman has been taught to itemize her civilization's debts to her. She is rarely shown the other column of the ledger—no civilization ever built has offered her more.

She is also rarely taught what freedom is for. The modern account of liberty is almost entirely negative: freedom from constraint, from tradition, from

expectation, from judgment. But a freedom that is only “freedom-from” is a bare room, the furniture removed.

The Western tradition at its best understood liberty as freedom *for*: freedom to love, to build, to worship, to marry, to raise children, to serve, to pursue excellence, to form communities, to speak, to dissent, and to sacrifice voluntarily for something larger than the self.

Strip away the affirmative vision, and it creates a vacuum. This becomes a strategic vulnerability, and by now it should be understood that human beings will find meaning somewhere; online ideological communities flourish because they feed the hunger. Much of what this report has described as the exploitation of women is, at bottom, the exploitation of an emptiness the culture created when it stopped articulating what its freedom was for.



Here, finally, the tension at the heart of “Women and the West” returns: the tension between compassion and civilizational self-preservation. It is a false choice, and refusing it is the moral center of this report.

Tenderness has a spine. A woman can be deeply empathetic without surrendering judgment. Compassion does not oblige her to pretend that every culture, regime, and ideology is morally equivalent; tolerance does not oblige her to tolerate forces openly committed to destroying tolerance; and mercy toward the world does not require contempt for her own home.

The influence war runs on the opposite proposition, that a good woman must choose between her heart and her civilization. She must refuse the choice. Her heart, properly armed, is her civilization’s best defense. Patriotism does not require historical amnesia. It requires the maturity to hold gratitude and criticism in the same hand, and the confidence to conclude that a civilization capable of producing its own reformers is worth handing on. That war can be won. But it is currently being forfeited, mostly by default, in the feeds of the women who would otherwise help wage it.



XII

COGNITIVE SOVEREIGNTY



The objective is not information purity. It is manipulation resistance—citizens who remain capable of independent judgment despite deliberate efforts to manipulate them. Traditional sovereignty asks who controls your territory, your borders, your laws, your military. Digital sovereignty asks who controls your networks and your data. Cognitive sovereignty asks a further set of questions; they are the ones this report has been asking throughout. Who controls what you notice? Who determines what feels urgent? Who shapes what your children fear? Who decides which narratives repeatedly enter their minds, and which disappear? Who understands their psychological vulnerabilities better than they do? Who can predict, and potentially alter, their behavior?

A country may defend its physical borders impeccably while permitting its population's cognitive environment to be shaped by foreign, commercial, ideological, and opaque systems. That is incomplete sovereignty.

One structural obstacle must be named before the measures, because it explains why we are perpetually late. The pattern has been consistent: invent, deploy globally, monetize, discover the psychological consequences, and debate the ethics afterward. Social media ran that sequence over 15 years. AI is running it in three. Systems capable of influencing cognition at population scale are being deployed before societies have established transparency rules, research access, child protections, provenance standards, algorithmic accountability, norms for

synthetic media, or safeguards against foreign manipulation. The answer is not to halt the technology, which would be neither possible nor wise. It is to close the gap between capability and governance, in a manner a free society can live with.

Mind Your Mind Campaign

So what can we do to fight back?

Political leaders can start by developing a national digital inoculation campaign to promote cognitive public health. The goal is to help Americans recognize manipulation before it succeeds. The model is similar to the anti-smoking campaigns that taught Americans how an industry engineered addiction and changed behavior by exposing the tactics behind the product. A modern campaign should teach citizens how recommendation systems exploit attention, how outrage and fear are rewarded, how bots and coordinated networks manufacture consensus, how real images can be stripped of context, and how generative AI can fabricate people, evidence, and apparent popularity. The governing principle should be simple: Do not tell Americans what to think; teach them how others may be trying to make them think.



The campaign should rely on prebunking and psychological inoculation, exposing people to recognizable manipulation techniques before they encounter them in the wild. Short, memorable content delivered through TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, schools, parent networks, military communities, and other trusted institutions could teach a handful of durable reflexes: Pause before sharing emotionally provocative content; identify the source; search outside the feed; distinguish skepticism from cynicism; and ask who benefits from the

reaction being provoked. AI literacy must be part of this effort from the beginning. Americans should understand that voices can be cloned, images fabricated, online personas manufactured, and persuasion increasingly personalized at scale. The goal is not withdrawal from technology, but to develop greater agency within it.

Any such initiative must also contain a clear firewall against political abuse. It should not determine acceptable beliefs, maintain ideological blacklists, pressure platforms to suppress lawful speech, or convert disagreement into “disinformation.” Its purpose would be to teach methods of manipulation, not political conclusions.

Provenance and Transparency

The First Amendment protects Americans' speech. It does not oblige America to let hostile intelligence services speak through rented American mouths in the dark. Paid speech is not free speech when the payer is hidden. Congress should modernize the Foreign Agents Registration Act for the influencer economy, requiring disclosure when creators receive direct or laundered foreign state funding, with penalties that make the Tenet Media model unprofitable. Platforms should label state-affiliated media and disclose the provenance of political advertising. Nonprofits engaged in political advocacy should face meaningful foreign-funding disclosure. And AI-generated media should carry cryptographic content credentials as a condition of distribution at scale, so that provenance travels with the artifact. Every American woman has a right to know who is speaking to her, and who paid for the introduction.

Authentication: Defend the Reality of Consensus

Perceived consensus is the lynchpin of capture, and that consensus is now manufacturable by machines on an internet where automated traffic exceeds human traffic. Authentication of human presence is therefore a core security function. Platforms should be required to detect, label, and disclose automated and synthetic accounts, and to publish the scale and character of the coordinated inauthentic networks they remove. Coordinated inauthentic behavior conducted on behalf of foreign states should carry statutory penalties, and the manufacture of synthetic consensus, bot networks built to simulate grassroots opinion, should be recognized in law as the fraud it is. None of this restricts what any human may say. All of it defends what conformity research shows humans actually rely on: an accurate picture of what other humans believe.

Algorithmic Accountability and the Formative Years

Recommendation systems that shape the psychological development of millions of minors should not be beyond public inspection, and platforms answerable to foreign intelligence law must be brought fully under American jurisdiction, with the TikTok divestiture enforced to the letter, including genuine severance of the recommendation algorithm. Design features that exploit developmental vulnerability, infinite scroll, variable-reward notification, and engagement optimization aimed at minors are legitimate objects of regulation exactly as advertising to children already is. And the developmental evidence sets the schedule—the windows in which the machine measurably bites, 11 to 13 for girls, are the ages the law should guard most fiercely. Florida bars accounts under 14; a majority of Americans support the same, with more than eight in ten backing parental consent, age verification, and time limits.⁹⁶

Our schools and universities should roll back technologies that serve no clear educational purpose and restore phone-free classrooms as the default. That must begin far earlier than adolescence. Endless tablet use for kindergarteners is not educational innovation, and putting children on computers before they have learned to read, write, concentrate, and interact with one another mistakes exposure to technology for learning.

Young children need books, pencils, physical play, conversation, and the patient development of attention.

Devices should be introduced deliberately, at developmentally appropriate ages, and only when they demonstrably improve instruction.

Children cannot develop sustained attention, intellectual independence, or durable human relationships while continuously tethered to systems engineered to interrupt them. Parents remain the first line of defense, but they cannot reasonably be expected to defeat, household by household, products refined through billions of data points and deployed at industrial scale.

Teachers also have a role to play. They do not need to wait for a principal, school board, or state mandate to restore meaningful learning. They can assign the handwritten essay, conduct paper-based exams, require students to annotate physical texts, and ask them to defend their reasoning aloud. These simple practices make it far harder to outsource thought and far easier to see whether genuine learning has occurred.

Schools should prohibit AI-generated grading for substantive assignments and require teachers to personally evaluate the work that matters most. Digital platforms may reduce administrative burdens, but convenience cannot become the purpose of education. Technology has made it easier for students to simulate learning and for institutions to simulate teaching; policy should reward neither shortcut. Teachers must be given the time, authority, and expectation to know how their students think.

Intelligence, Attribution, and Cost

Influence operations continue because they are cheap, deniable, and unpunished, and each of those conditions is a policy choice. The Tenet and Doppelganger actions prove that indictment, seizure, and exposure work; they should be a standing capability, not an episodic one. Treasury should sanction the builders of these operations, including commercial cutouts and knowing AI service providers.

The intelligence community should be resourced to attribute operations publicly and fast. Strategic communication should be funded as the instrument of national defense it has become, on the free-expression model Secretary Rubio's State Department has articulated rather than the content-suppression model that discredited earlier efforts.⁹⁷ And influence warfare should be priced into every bilateral file with Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran.

Restoring the Referee

No technical measure will matter if Americans do not believe the people warning them. Rebuilding that credibility is itself a national security program, and its requirements are unglamorous. Institutions should sharply separate counterintelligence claims, which concern foreign manipulation and require evidence, from content judgments, which concern truth and taste and belong to citizens. They should restore “we do not know yet” as a respectable public category, and use it. They should publish their errors as prominently as their warnings, because an institution that has visibly corrected itself is far harder for an adversary to discredit than one that never admits error. And officials should stop lending the authority of the intelligence community to claims the intelligence does not support.



Education: A Parent's Role

Parents cannot outsource the formation of a child's mind. Just as we teach children to look both ways before crossing the street, we now have to teach them how to move safely through an information environment designed to capture their attention, shape their emotions, and influence their behavior. We must give them the confidence and skills to judge for themselves.

Parents should delay smartphones and social media as long as feasible and say why. Children should understand, in age-appropriate ways, how recommendation systems decide what they see; how outrage, fear, grievance, and belonging keep people engaged; how influence operations manufacture the appearance of consensus; how bots and inauthentic accounts behave; and how platforms, influencers, political movements, and foreign adversaries can all benefit from capturing attention and directing emotion. They should learn to recognize what manipulation feels like from the inside, especially the moment when repetition and popularity begin to feel like truth and proof.



But digital literacy alone is not enough. A child cannot evaluate whether a claim about America, history, democracy, war, or human nature is true if she has never been taught enough history to recognize what is missing. Media literacy without historical and civic knowledge risks producing cynicism rather than judgment. Parents should insist that children know the inheritance they are being asked to evaluate—its achievements, its failures, its principles, and the long human struggle that produced it.

We should also reclaim deep reading as a form of cognitive strength. A child who can sit with a difficult book, follow an argument across many pages, tolerate ambiguity, and resist the impulse for constant stimulation possesses something extraordinarily valuable in an age of algorithmic persuasion: control over her own attention. Attention is not merely an academic skill. It is part of human agency.

And families should deliberately preserve the basic capabilities technology increasingly offers to perform for us. Read. Reason. Write. Calculate. Navigate. Remember. Find the primary source. Compare competing accounts. Sit with uncertainty. Build an argument. Change your mind when the evidence demands it.

Use technology. Learn it. Master it. But never surrender a fundamental human capability entirely to a machine. The goal is not to raise children who are afraid of the digital world. It is to raise children who are difficult to manipulate within it.

This is one of the oldest responsibilities of parenthood: preparing a child to enter the world with enough knowledge, judgment, courage, and independence to remain the author of her own mind.

Family, Community, and the Woman Herself

The woman herself is the last and most important layer, because she is the one the adversary must get past. The habits are teachable, and none requires a government. Ask of every piece of content who benefits from your believing it. Notice when a feed is escalating your emotion, and treat the escalation itself as data. Remember that your compassion can be exploited and your outrage engineered. When something makes you certain within ten seconds, slow down. Keep friendships that cross political lines, because they are the living refutation of the enemy's central claim. And anchor identity in things no algorithm can adjudicate: family, faith, competence, service, and the affections of real life. A woman who does these things is armed.

CONCLUSION: ***SHE KEEPS THE REPUBLIC***



Strip away the doctrine, the indictments, the simulations, and the acronyms, and what remains is a very old question that every generation of free people has had to answer: Is this worth keeping?

No arsenal answers it. No economy answers it. A free society survives because enough of its people, in the quiet of their own convictions, answer yes, and then teach the answer to their children. That teaching has never been evenly distributed. It has always run disproportionately through women, through mothers and teachers and the keepers of a thousand ordinary communities, through the people who decide, long before any ballot is cast, what a household reveres and what it ridicules. Men have died for the Republic in every generation. Women, in every generation, have determined whether anyone was raised to think it worth dying for.

The danger this report describes is not that Americans will all begin believing Russian propaganda. That is an unsophisticated understanding of the threat, and it was never the objective. The danger is that enough Americans become unable to distinguish truth from manipulation, unable to trust one another, incapable of sustained attention, psychologically exhausted, consumed by grievance, detached from any common identity, convinced their society is irredeemable, and increasingly dependent on opaque technologies to interpret reality for them. At that point, an adversary has achieved something more valuable than persuasion.

It has degraded our capacity for collective action, the capacity every other national power depends on. A free society cannot survive on territorial sovereignty alone. It also requires cognitive sovereignty: citizens capable of governing their own attention, exercising judgment, resisting manipulation, and deciding for themselves what is true and what is worth defending.

Our adversaries have understood this with a clarity we have not. They cannot defeat the American military, so they went looking for the belief beneath it, and they found their way, through the most intimate technology ever built, to the formation of the American woman's identity. They study her in datasets she generates for free. They learn which images move her, which grievances hold her, which voices she trusts. Some of them are building copies of her to practice on. They do this because they know what too many American strategists have forgotten: The fight is not finally over what she thinks of a policy, a politician, a war, or a party. It is over what she loves, what she trusts, what she teaches, what she forgives, what she condemns, and what she believes deserves to endure. Change those, and you have changed the country without firing a shot. Defend those, and the country becomes very hard to break.

So the message to the women reading this is not fear, nor blame. You are being targeted because you matter. Because women shape families, transmit values, influence norms, raise children, form communities, vote, and determine which causes receive moral legitimacy. Because women are enormously influential in deciding what a society believes is worth preserving. That makes women strategic terrain. But terrain can be held. Awareness, discernment, resilience, agency, and an informed patriotism capable of surviving manipulation are not consolation prizes—they are the actual weapons of this war, and they are already in her hands.

She needs no rescuing, and this report has proposed none. She needs the truth about who is reaching for her mind, the tools to see the reaching, an honest count of the war's casualties, institutions that deserve her trust, and a civilization willing to say plainly what it is for. Given those, she has never yet failed the Republic. She built its homes, schooled its children, filled its churches, staffed its wars, and carried its grief. She was keeping the Republic before anyone thought to write it down.

The battlefield is in her hand, quite literally, in the device she will pick up minutes from now, engineered by people who have studied what she loves in order to use it against what she has, and populated, in part, by things that are not people at all. She deserves to know that.

Borders matter. Brains matter. She must keep the Republic.

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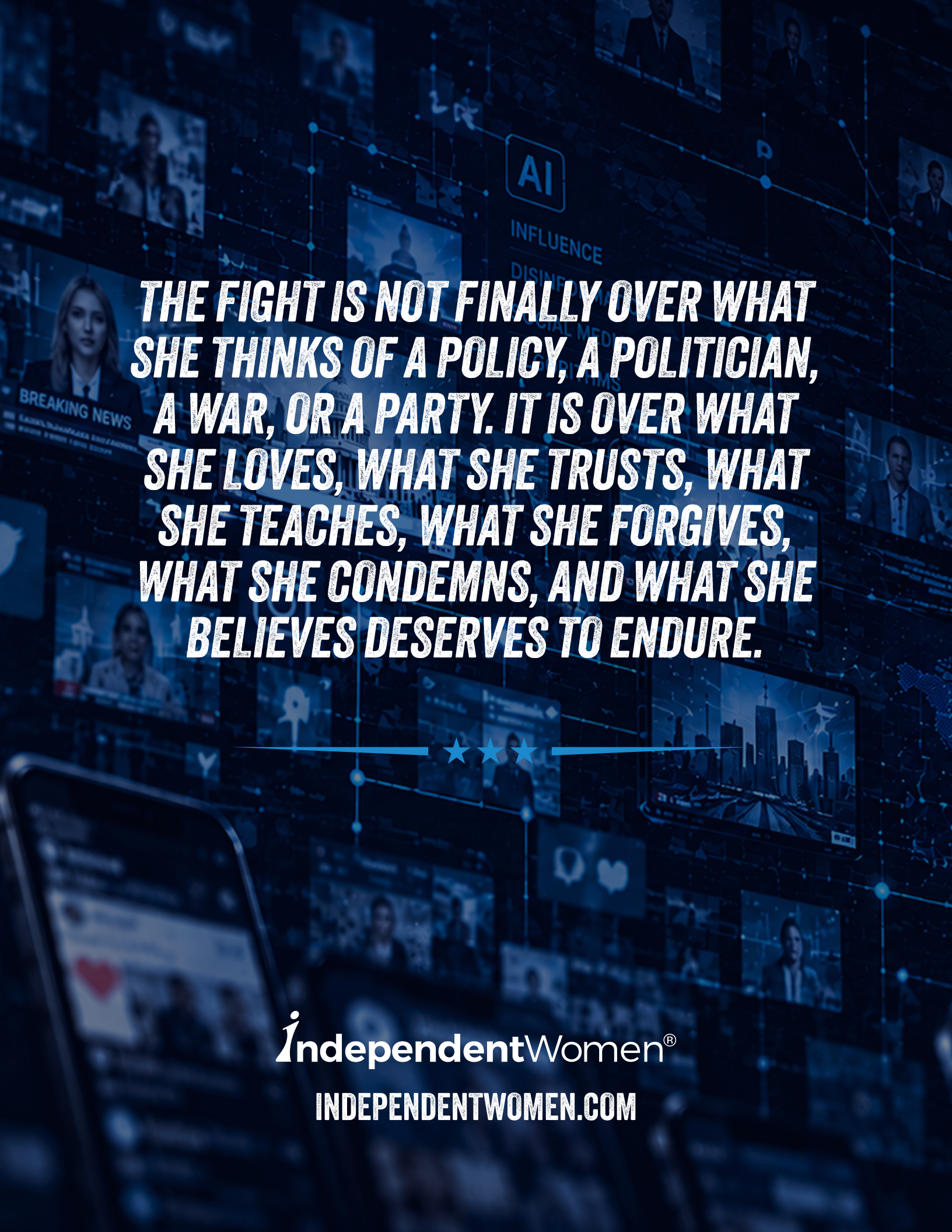
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