DEMOCRACY AND SOCIETY 10.07.2026 | Samantha Elia

Did you take the red pill yet?

The manosphere is no longer fringe. Backed by algorithms and money, it is reshaping politics one grievance at a time

In 2020, Elon Musk posted a tweet asking people to 'Take the red pill.' Two years later, he bought Twitter, the platform now known as X. What followed was one of the most dramatic restructurings in the platform's history. In the first weeks after this acquisition, Musk laid off around half the staff, significantly reduced content moderation capacity, rewired the algorithm to push rage-driven content to the top of timelines and reinstated thousands of banned accounts, among them Andrew Tate, Donald Trump and Jordan Peterson, giving these men renewed access to a mainstream platform and audience.

Their return belonged to a broader pattern, one that has expanded what is known as 'the manosphere'. Fewer constraints and a far wider audience meant this movement no longer needed the margins it once relied on, its infrastructure now aligned with a major mainstream platform. What is often dismissed as a fringe subculture had, by then, become something else: an organised political ecosystem, with its own economy and an increasing foothold in regions far from where it first took shape.

The birth and rise of the manosphere

Before it got its name, the manosphere was a set of spaces where men blogged, gamed and discussed their concerns. It is as old as the open internet itself, born in the early forums and chat groups. Today, however, the term refers to a more explicitly misogynistic version, organised around sexist, anti-feminist ideas and encompassing subcultures that engage in digital, and in some cases offline, violence against women.

What we now call the manosphere is a vast, loosely connected but ideologically coherent ecosystem of online channels, forums and communities, built on the premise that feminism has corrupted the natural order and men are its primary victims. Much of it runs on a crude social Darwinism that sorts men into 'alphas' and 'betas', dominant winners and discarded losers, and treats women simultaneously as the prize and the problem. It contains multiple subcultures, each with its

own answer to this perceived crisis: Red Pillers 'returning to reality' by reclaiming male dominance, Incels resenting women's sexual autonomy, MGTOW ('Men Going Their Own Way') withdrawing from women altogether and Pickup Artists drilling seduction as technique. Their prescriptions diverge, but their assumptions, adversaries and audiences increasingly converge.

The manosphere recognises a genuine crisis of social reproduction and economic insecurity, but offers a distorted diagnosis.

The manosphere's rise reflects a broader transformation, the institutionalisation of anti-feminist politics and its migration from fragmented online spaces into coordinated transnational networks with legal strategies, dedicated funding and explicit political ambition. The manosphere has followed the same path, consolidating into a broader ecosystem of male-centred and anti-feminist movements shaped by platform dynamics and algorithmic amplification. The discourse within these spaces has grown more extreme over time, and platforms that reward engagement carry it far beyond the forums that produced it, reaching audiences its early forums never could.

Ideology alone cannot explain the manosphere's influence. It is also an attention and revenue economy built around monetising male grievances. Andrew Tate built his entire empire by selling coaching programmes as well as his 'Hustlers University' to young men being told that their frustrations were the fault of feminism and that he held the path to 'success'. Around him emerged a broader economy of subscription services and self-improvement products built on the same promise, where free content on platforms like X, YouTube and TikTok functions as a recruitment and conversion funnel into paid communities, courses or coaching programmes.

That funnel works because it meets a real crisis. Young men today are increasingly delayed from reaching the markers of adult life their fathers took for granted. Real wages have stagnated, housing has become unaffordable, and a growing share of young adults remain in their parents' homes well into their late twenties and thirties. This is the product of a neoliberal order that has turned secure work into precarity and housing into a financial asset rather than a place to live, the same order under which women's work, paid and unpaid, formal and informal, expanded within those narrow conditions.

The manosphere thus recognises a genuine crisis of social reproduction

and economic insecurity, but it offers a distorted diagnosis. Rather than locating men's frustrations within broader transformations in labour markets, housing systems and welfare retrenchment, it personalises and genders these anxieties. Women become the visible target onto which structural failures are projected, and the result is a politics that channels economic discontent away from institutions and systems of power and toward women themselves.

The political project

Over the past decade, the manosphere has increasingly converged with a broader anti-gender movement that operates through advocacy organisations, legal campaigns, political lobbying, think tanks and religious conservative networks. The two are not identical; the manosphere mobilises through culture, identity and online communities while the anti-gender movement mobilises through institutions, funding structures and political power. But they increasingly reinforce one another, and the convergence is visible in the money: Between 2013 and 2017, anti-gender actors received more than three times the funding directed to feminist and queer movements.

From there, the politics follow. The manosphere has become a reliable artery into right-wing and far-right movements, and its narratives now surface openly in electoral politics. Far-right parties have absorbed the same framing, casting feminism and 'gender ideology' as threats to nation and family. Online resentment has hardened into a political constituency, actively mobilised rather than merely observed.

Research mapping manosphere subcultures across Arabic-speaking online spaces shows how far this development reaches beyond the Western world, and how the global infrastructure shapes local content. This is visible in platform and search trends: 'Arabic Red Pill' searches on Google peaked sharply after 2022, the year of Musk's acquisition of Twitter. The YouTube channel Red Pill Arabic grew from 2 060 subscribers in June 2022 to 111 000 by mid-2026. Once they subscribe, users are immediately recommended a cluster of other channels with names like 'Women's Stupidity' and 'Feminism Unmasked'.

Arab manosphere influencers are deeply shaped by their Western counterparts. The Jordanian creator behind Red Pill Arabic has hosted joint streams with global manosphere figures including Rollo Tomassi, author of *The Rational Male*, one of the movement's foundational texts. That same traffic ran in both directions when Andrew Tate's conversion to Islam was actively embraced by Arab creators, who saw in it a bridge between Red Pill ideology and Islamic frameworks of gender hierarchy.

The result is a transnational ecosystem in which infrastructures circulate globally, even as the grievances they mobilise remain locally rooted.

What comes next

The path forward depends on how progressive and democratic movements respond to an ecosystem that is organised, well resourced, and increasingly embedded in both digital and institutional power. Musk has told AfD supporters in Germany that the party is the country's best hope, urged his followers to vote for it, and lent his platform and his voice to other hard right movements across Europe, from Reform UK to Meloni's government in Italy. Tate has done the same for Trump, repeatedly urging his followers to vote for him while attacking his opponents in explicitly gendered terms, part of a manosphere mobilisation now widely credited with helping win him the young male vote. What began as online grievance now runs directly into ballot boxes, and the line between the two has effectively disappeared.

An ecosystem this embedded in electoral politics requires a response applied with the same rigour regardless of language or region. That means moderation that does not treat some audiences as a lower priority than others. It means closing the funding gap, rather than treating it as an afterthought to decisions made elsewhere. And it means the same cross-border coordination this movement has already built for itself.

The manosphere grew through investment, coordination and years of deliberate political strategy — and because those in power let it. Closing that gap will take the same investment, the same coordination and the same refusal to treat this as marginal. What was built deliberately will only be undone deliberately. Letting it grow unchallenged is not neutral; it is a political choice with high costs, not only for women around the world but for social justice as a whole.



Samantha Elia
Beirut

Samantha Elia is a feminist researcher and trainer currently working as a Senior Programme Manager for Political Feminism in the MENA region at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Her focus areas include reproductive labour, the social construction of sexuality, and integrating feminist and decolonial methodologies into development programmes.