

# Call for ‘masculine’ tech workforce raises alarm among experts

Some worry ‘bro culture’ puts equity gains at risk

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USA TODAY

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Women make up just 35% of the tech workforce and hold only 11% of executive roles. The industry has long been a prime example for the workforce’s gender gap, but according to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, 'masculine energy' is being sucked from the workforce, and corporations need to bring that 'aggression' back.

'I think a lot of the corporate world is pretty culturally neutered,' Zuckerberg said on a Joe Rogan podcast appearance on Jan. 10. 'It’s one thing to say we want to be kind of, like, welcoming and make a good environment for everyone, and I think it’s another to basically say that ‘masculinity is bad.’'



## Zuckerberg

'I think having a culture that celebrates the aggression a bit more has its own merits that are really positive,' he added.

But gender studies and economics experts warn that Zuckerberg’s rhetoric can push women and marginalized voices out of the workforce by championing outdated gender roles and stereotypes.

## ‘Silencing effect’

Zuckerberg’s remarks reflect the rising backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

These rollbacks can have a 'silencing effect' on women in professional settings, according to Susan L. Averett, a professor of economics at Lafayette College.

'Women and men have distinct communication styles,' she said. 'A shift toward a more traditionally masculine workplace culture risks marginalizing women's voices.'

These environments can become so unwelcoming to women, she said, that women step away from male-dominated fields such as economics and STEM.

In Meta's 2022 diversity report, the company flaunted its advancements in gender equity, highlighting that from 2019 to 2022, it doubled the number of women in its global workforce.

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## **Increase in 'bro culture'**

The 'Trump bro' became a vital player in the 2024 election. On Election Day, 49% of Gen Z men voted for Donald Trump, whereas only 41% of men ages 18 to 29 voted for him in 2020.

During his campaign, Trump appeared on the Nelk Boys' 'Full Send Podcast,' the comedy podcast 'This Past Weekend w/Theo Von' and the long-form show 'The Joe Rogan Experience.' He also livestreamed with game influencer Adin Ross.

Trump's appearances with these influencers also sent a clear message, said Alex Bruesewitz, a 27-year-old Trump campaign adviser: that 'it's OK to be a guy.'

Zuckerberg may be attempting to appeal to Trump and this increase in 'bro culture,' Williams said. But in doing so, he is 'reducing decades of feminist and LGBTQ+

activism into a culture war.'

## Effects at work

Zuckberg's rhetoric is likely to make traditionally masculine men feel more secure at work while marginalizing any employee who doesn't fit into a narrow definition of masculinity, which can lower morale and hamper collaboration, Frake said.

'Corporate cultures that double down on 'masculine' norms risk sliding into 'bro culture,'" Frake said, 'which has been linked to lower retention of women and gender-nonconforming employees.'

*Contributing: Charles Trepany, USA TODAY*

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