

The American Conservative

The Quiet Fury Of Americans

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July 28th, 2020

R. Reno has been on a roadtrip across the country. What stands out in his mind is the anger of the people. Excerpts:

I don't believe anecdotes predict elections. In any event, an election forecast was not the object of my travels. I wanted to get a sense of our national mood. I anticipated encountering heightened emotions. Most commentators have observed that our country is increasingly polarized. But I was taken aback by the intensity.

He says that he only spoke to people on the right, but that it is clear that the left too is angry. More:

When I asked about the election mood in their communities, they reported that political realities are increasingly hidden from view. One said, "Right now journalists seem ignorant of what most people are thinking, perhaps willfully so." When I pressed him about why that's the case, he replied, "In all fairness, most people won't say what they're thinking. It's too dangerous."

Of course it's too dangerous. Say anything that gets you on the wrong side of a leftist with access to social media, and that might well be the end of your career, or your good name.

This week the Cato Institute came out with a new survey, conducted for it by YouGov, showing that cancel culture is no phantom. Excerpts:

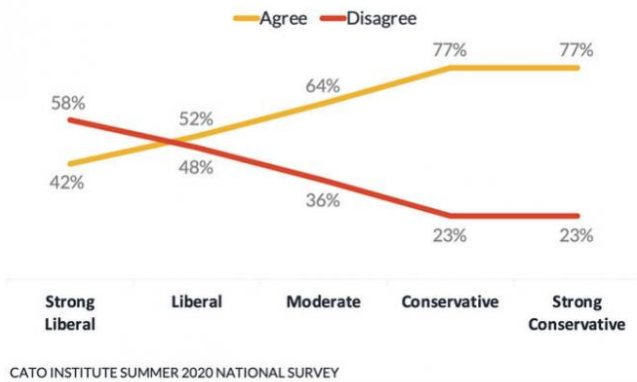
A new Cato national survey finds that self-censorship is on the rise in the United States. Nearly two-thirds—62%—of Americans say the political climate these days prevents them from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive. The share of Americans who self-censor has risen several points since 2017 when 58% of Americans agreed with this statement.

These fears cross partisan lines. Majorities of Democrats (52%), independents (59%) and Republicans (77%) all agree they have political opinions they are afraid to share.

Look at this: the only group in which a majority believe they can speak their minds in public is "strong liberals":

Staunch Liberals Stand Out as Only Group Who Feels They Can Share their Political Opinions

Agree/Disagree: The political climate these days prevents me from saying things I believe because others might find them offensive.



I completely understand this result. The left is so censorious, and in such a position of cultural power (especially in the media), that you'd have to be a fool not to fear for your livelihood and reputation by voicing an unwoke opinion. This is unsustainable. You cannot have a stable country in which so many people are afraid to speak their minds, unless it is a police state.

Here is where it gets even crazier (emphases mind):

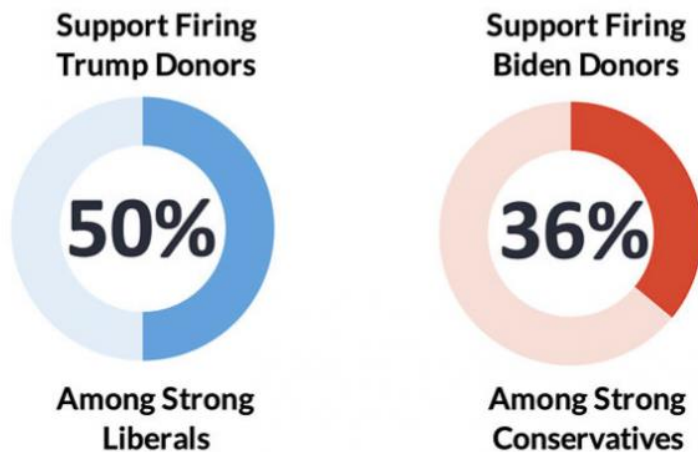
The survey found that many Americans think a person's private political donations should impact their employment. **Nearly a quarter (22%) of Americans would support firing a business executive who personally donates to Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's campaign. Even more, 31% support firing a business executive who donates to Donald Trump's re-election campaign.**

Support rises among political subgroups. Support increases to 50% of strong liberals who support firing executives who personally donate to Trump. And more than a third (36%) of strong conservatives support firing an executive for donating to Biden's presidential campaign.

Young Americans are also more likely than older Americans to support punishing people at work for personal donations to Trump. Forty-four percent (44%) of Americans under 30 support firing executives if they donate to Trump. This share declines to 22% among those over 55 years old—a 20-point difference. An age gap also exists for Biden donors, but is less pronounced. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of Americans under 30 support firing executives who donate to Biden compared to 20% of those over 55—a 7-point difference.

Firing people for donating to either a Republican or a Democratic presidential candidate! Making it impossible for them to earn bread for their families. What kind of sick country are these people — especially young people — creating for us all?

The only number I would feel comfortable with on either side is zero percent. But do note that far more strong liberals are willing to see someone fired for their political contributions than strong conservatives:



CATO INSTITUTE SUMMER 2020 NATIONAL SURVEY

If you are like me, and work in a profession or industry dominated by strong liberals, this is terrible news.

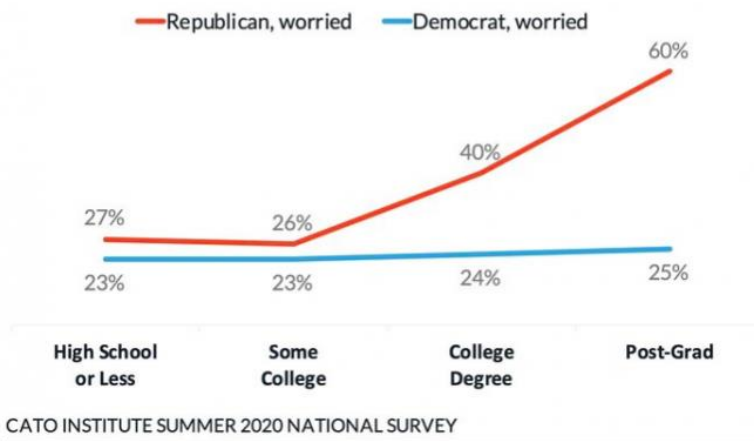
More:

Nearly a third (32%) of employed Americans say they personally are worried about missing out on career opportunities or losing their job if their political opinions became known. These results are particularly notable given that most personal campaign contributions to political candidates are public knowledge and can easily be found online.

And it's not just one side of the political spectrum: 31% of liberals, 30% of moderates and 34% of conservatives are worried their political views could get them fired or harm their career trajectory. This suggests that it's not necessarily just one particular set of views that has moved outside of acceptable public discourse. Instead these results are more consistent with a "walking on eggshells" thesis that people increasingly fear a wide range of political views could offend others or could negatively impact themselves.

And check this out — boy, do I relate:

Republicans With the Most Education Are Most Worried Their Political Views Could Harm Them at Work



One more quote:

These data suggest that a significant minority of Americans from all political persuasions and backgrounds—particularly younger people who have spent more time in America’s universities—are most likely to hide their views for fear of financial penalty.

A particularly surprising finding was that Americans who have these concerns are somewhat more likely to support the firing of Biden or Trump donors. A third (33%) among those who worry that their political views could harm their employment supported firing either Biden or Trump donors, compared to 24% of those who were not worried about their views impacting their jobs. This suggests that those who fear reprisal or economic penalty for their political views are not entirely distinct from those who seek the same for others.

[Read the whole survey.](#)

What is wrong with us? This is awful. I do not want to live in a country in which anybody, left or right, has to live in fear of losing his or her job because of their political contributions or opinions. Yes, the greater threat demonstrably comes from the “strong liberal” left, but there is nothing in this survey to make conservatives proud. What to make of the fact that so many people most afraid of being fired over their politics believe that the Other Guy should be fired over his politics?

Again: **this is not sustainable.** We cannot stay together as a democratic country if people are so damn afraid of each other, and of speaking their minds. The Cato survey shows that *these fears are by no means baseless*. It ought to appall each and every one of us that so many Americans are so afraid of either exercising free speech, or tolerating free speech.

I wish I could say that I see a way out of this in the near term. In fact, I believe it’s going to get worse. *Live Not By Lies* is based in part on the belief that the left within corporations and institutions (not limited to the state) is going to double down on surveillance of and punishment for wrongthink. We are going to have to learn how to defy it when we can, and work constantly to undermine the new order at every turn.

But yeah, anger? No wonder people are angry. They have a right to be — on the speech issues, especially those on the conservative side of the spectrum. But this passion is going to destroy us. It already is.