



Majority of college students believe in free speech, but don't want controversy

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A new study showing American trends and viewpoints regarding free speech, campus speech, religious liberty, and tolerance of political expression has been released by the Cato Institute. The [scientific poll](#) surveyed more than 2,500 U.S. adults and shows trends of both general Americans and college students.

Unsurprisingly, Americans say political correctness has silenced discussions that society needs to have. Only 28 percent of Americans believe that political correctness has done more to help people avoid offending others, while 71 percent find political correctness has had a negative impact on our nation's civil discourse.

Most admit they have views that they're afraid to share with others. Fifty-eight percent of Americans believe the political climate today prevents them from saying things they believe. While a slim majority, 53 percent, of Democrats do not feel the need to self-censor, strong majorities of Republicans, 73 percent, and independents, 58 percent, say they keep some political beliefs to themselves.

When it comes to college campuses, 66 percent of Americans believe they aren't doing enough to teach their students about the value of free speech. In fact, 65 percent believe colleges should "expose students to all types of viewpoints, even if they are offensive or biased against certain groups." Fifty-one percent of current college and graduate students tend to agree that more needs to be done.

The same amount, 51 percent, of current college and graduate students believe a person doesn't deserve the right of free speech if they don't respect other people — perhaps implying a value in civil discourse and a distaste for shouting others down.

Americans become less likely to support free speech as survey questioning moves from the abstract to the specific.

Cato reports, "An overwhelming share (81 percent) of respondents with college experience agree that campus speakers who advocate for violent protests shouldn't be allowed to speak at their university. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) oppose a speaker who would reveal the names and identities of unauthorized immigrants attending the college. A solid majority (57 percent) would also oppose allowing any speaker who says the Holocaust did not occur. About half would oppose allowing a speaker who says all white people are racist (51 percent), that Muslims

shouldn't be allowed to come to the U.S. (50 percent), that transgender people have a mental disorder (50 percent), or that gays and lesbians should receive conversion therapy (50 percent)."

This also extended to canceling a speaker who says all Christians are backward and brainwashed; publicly criticizes or disrespects the police; defends the police stopping African Americans at higher rates than other groups; suggests the average IQ of whites and Asians is higher than African Americans and Hispanics; all illegal immigrants should be deported; or that men, on average, are better at math than women.

In other words, approximately half of the country does not want a controversial or uncomfortable speech on campus. A greater amount of people does not want to see a speech turn physically violent.

The comprehensive survey also dives into how college students would hypothetically handle a racist speaker on their campus, how universities should discipline students who shut down invited speakers, whether Americans support a bias reporting system on campus, whether or not microaggressions are actually offensive to minorities, and if student newspapers should actually have freedom of the press. Some of the responses will surprise you.