

INDIANA DAILY STUDENT

The sorry state of free speech in the US

November 6, 2017

A survey recently released by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, revealed the harrowing state of free expression in the United States.

The survey, which asked participants questions ranging from whether hate speech should be illegal to whether football players should be fired for kneeling during the national anthem, revealed that both liberals and conservatives are not too fond of some First Amendment rights.

Americans need to rekindle their love for free speech and expression – it is the backbone of a peaceful, democratic society.

Despite what far-right news outlets like Breitbart might have you believe, modern Republicans are not die-hard First Amendment advocates.

Some of the survey's results seem almost unbelievable. Fifty-three percent of self-identified Republicans want to strip people who burn the American flag of their citizenship. This would run counter to the 1990 Supreme Court decision, *United States v. Eichman*, which ruled that flag burning is protected under the First Amendment.

Sixty-three percent of Republicans reportedly think that journalists are an “enemy of the American people.” That equates to roughly 55 million registered, right-leaning voters who believe journalists are antagonizing the United States.

Right-leaning respondents were not the only ones with troubling answers. Liberals struggle with freedom of expression as well.

Almost two-thirds of those who voted for Hillary Clinton find it hard to be friends with Trump voters. If we want to have a society more open to debate and ideas, people need to foster friendships with those who do not share the same political views.

We will not grow any closer to understanding those across the aisle if we cannot even be friends.

Fifty-two percent of Democrats favor the government banning hate speech and 66 percent believe that hate speech is a form of violence. While these views are likely rooted in good intentions, the best way to destroy a bad idea is to argue against it, not make it illegal.

Giving the government the power to tell us what is and is not acceptable to say is a dangerous path to start down.

Maybe part of the problem is that people do not know what is protected under the First Amendment.

A survey from the Brookings Institution, a nonpartisan think tank, found that 62 percent of undergraduates think universities are legally required under the First Amendment to have someone present counterpoints to a controversial speaker. This is not the case.

The survey also found that most students do not know that the First Amendment does, in fact, protect most hate speech.

It will be hard to have serious discussions about the future of free expression if people do not know what their rights are.

The Editorial Board encourages our readers to first read up on what exactly falls under First Amendment protections, and then advocate for those rights to be upheld.

Free speech should not be a partisan issue. Americans from all political backgrounds should be able to speak their minds without fear of violence, and conservatives and liberals alike should fight tooth and nail to preserve this right.

Speech – even speech we find disrespectful or abhorrent – must be kept free.