

# HOT AIR

## Poll: Americans Say Cancel Culture Has Had A Negative Impact On Balance, 27/49

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This is interesting and encouraging, but you come away wondering if it all boils down to how each person defines “cancel culture” for themselves. Is it just a byword for “political correctness” for most people?

When Trump fantasized a few years ago about NFL owners firing players who kneel during the national anthem, was that “cancel culture”? It’s not an example most people would think of when the term is used, I expect, because it represents right-wing orthodoxy, not left-wing orthodoxy. And it’s left-wing orthodoxy most Americans think of when they think of political correctness and the increasingly draconian ways in which it’s informally enforced.

But Trump did in fact want guys like Colin Kaepernick canceled, i.e. unemployed, because of how they chose to protest. So what does “cancel culture” mean?

The good news is that, however it’s defined, Americans seem to believe that sanctioning people for their “incorrect” beliefs has gone too far. Asked if cancel culture has gone too far or not far enough, respondents split 46/10. (Who are the 10 percent who think we should be canceling more people?) Also:

Twenty-seven percent of voters said cancel culture had a somewhat positive or very positive impact on society, but almost half (49%) said it had a somewhat negative or very negative impact...

The poll also suggests that the public at large is more forgiving than the gladiators on social media. When asked about controversial or offensive statements from public figures, the longer ago the comment was made the less likely it mattered. Fifty-four percent said that a problematic statement made a year ago was likely to “completely” or “somewhat” change their opinion of the person, versus 29% who said it would “change a little bit” or “not change at all.”

For statements as far back as 15 years ago the results were almost reversed: 26% said there would be a change versus 53% who said there would be little or no change.

More than half of younger adults say they’ve participated in cancel culture versus a third of senior citizens who say so. It could be that that’s a pure function of social-media demographics:

“Cancel culture” is a subset of the garbage online culture of Twitter and Facebook, which thrives on outrage. We have more younger adults than older adults using social media so go figure that we have more younger adults than older adults practicing “cancel culture.” More optimistically, though, it’s possible that older adults are simply a bit wiser than younger ones about how one’s views can evolve over time. Maybe some subset of older social-media users are less prone to be judgmental about the thoughtcrimes of others because they used to believe some weird stuff too before reconsidering. No one is as completely assured of their righteousness as a naif.

Here’s why it’s hard to find today’s results too encouraging, though. Check this out:

A majority of Americans are fine with imposing “social consequences” for unpopular views. Actually, 100 percent of Americans are fine with it depending on how we define “social consequences.” All of us find certain political views repulsive enough that we wouldn’t want to have beers with people who hold them — but not so repulsive that we’d want to see them lose their jobs and have their lives ruined because of them. In extreme cases, though, there *are* views so outlandish that we’d tolerate even a penalty as ruthless as that on the theory that a business shouldn’t be forced to employ someone so obnoxious that their presence might scare customers away. The question is simply defining the threshold of which views are so “offensive” that penalties should kick in. “What we’re seeing described as cancel culture isn’t so much a new kind of behavior but a new set of actors in our political discourse who get to say what isn’t ok — young people, African Americans, transgender people,” said TNR writer Osita Nwanevu to Politico. “They now have the power to have their voices heard. Everyone thinks there are lines. The question is where are those lines and who gets to draw them.”

Precisely. What we’re arguing about when we argue about “cancel culture” is who gets to decide where the Overton window is set. At the New York Times, the wokesters have amassed enough institutional power that even a perfectly mainstream centrist liberal [like Bari Weiss](#) is now outside the window. That also helps explain why the partisan splits in the table above are what they are. A plurality of Republicans (48/37) say there shouldn’t ever be social consequences for outlandish opinions whereas a strong majority of Democrats (18/68) say there should be. The momentum on setting the Overton window is leftward. Naturally Democrats have less to fear from it than Republicans do.

If you want a poll that’ll sober you up about cancel culture, skip Politico’s and go skim the results from the [Cato Institute’s](#) new survey on free speech and intimidation. Who would have guessed that only “strong liberals” feel perfectly free to state their beliefs publicly without fear of repercussions?

Overall 62 percent say they feel prevented from stating their beliefs for fear that others might find them offensive. That number has increased in all five ideological groups listed in the graph above since 2017 — and most interestingly, it’s increased by the widest margin among “strong liberals,” the one group that feels safe-ish in saying what they think. Which makes a certain sense. If you’re conservative, you’ve always assumed that the woke brigades will gripe if you speak up too much. But if you’re part of the woke brigades yourself, it must be disorienting trying to navigate the ever-changing orthodoxy. Until yesterday Margaret Sanger was a revered figure celebrated by Planned Parenthood for her role in mainstreaming birth control. Today she’s [canceled due to her support for eugenics](#). If you’re a progressive who moves in progressive circles, you never know when you might discover that one of your own beliefs has suddenly become double-plus-ungood.

You should read Cato's entire report but here's one more fascinating result:

Others have made the point that cancel culture is really a species of elite culture. No one's trying to get the local Walmart cashier canceled for her views; cancellation is chiefly reserved for those "who should know better," members of the educated upper-middle-class populated by media types and other professionals who have the numbers to insist upon an Overton window that skews decidedly left. You're seeing a reflection of that in the graph above. Which may also explain why a huge chunk of people in Politico's poll had no opinion about cancel culture or didn't know much about it: Someone who's blue-collar naturally wouldn't devote as much energy to focusing on an internecine dispute among self-important white-collar jerkoffs.

Just to bring this post full circle, Fox News's latest poll finds that public opinion on whether kneeling during the anthem is appropriate or inappropriate has moved from 32/61 in 2016 to 44/52 in 2017 to 48/44 now — plurality support. Trump's own effort at cancel culture has been, er, cancelled.