



Is Giving to Biden or Trump Grounds for Getting Fired? New Poll Finds a Disturbing Number of People Who Think It Should Be

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Poll finds self-censorship on the rise across political groups. A disturbingly high percentage of people polled earlier this month think private political donations should be grounds for getting fired. The number was especially high among respondents under age 30, with 44 percent of the youngest group saying business leaders who donate to Donald Trump should be fired and 27 percent saying the same for execs who give to Joe Biden. Meanwhile, 62 percent of all respondents said they're reluctant to share their political views for fear of offending others—up four points from when the same question was posed in 2017.

Those are a few of the findings in a new national poll conducted by the Cato Institute and YouGov.

When it comes to free expression, the "fears cross partisan lines," [writes](#) Cato Director of Polling Emily Ekins. "Majorities of Democrats (52%), independents (59%) and Republicans (77%) all agree they have political opinions they are afraid to share."

There are some differences of degree. A majority (58 percent) of people who categorized themselves as "very" liberal told pollsters they felt they could express themselves freely, while only 48 percent of "moderate" liberals said the same.

"Political expression is an issue that divides the Democratic coalition between centrist Democrats and their left flank," suggests Ekins.

The percentage of respondents who felt they could speak freely was even lower among those who labeled themselves "moderate" (36 percent), "conservative" (23 percent), or "very conservative" (23 percent).

Of course, the poll doesn't tell us how much people's perceptions on this front are true to life and how much they reflect distorted evaluations. Maybe staunch liberals feel they can speak more freely because cultural currents do indeed allow it; maybe they just don't realize when their free expression is offending or alienating people. Maybe it's a little of both, plus a lot of other reasons.

On the conservative side, the strong feeling of having to self-censor is likely somewhat rooted in a media and political culture that thrives on peddling its own marginalization. But there's also

statistical evidence that self-identification with conservatism and the Republican Party are on the decline, and no doubt that conservative ideas are sidelined in many elite institutions.

It's also hard to guess what people actually mean about their politics when they describe themselves as stronger or less-strong "liberals" or "conservatives" in an era where these meanings are mutable and often bizarre.

Ekins notes that even strong liberals are less confident in their ability to speak freely in 2020 than they were in 2017: "the share who feel pressured to self-censor rose 12 points from 30% in 2017 to 42% in 2020." At the same time,

The share of moderates who self-censor increased 7 points from 57% to 64%, and the share of conservatives rose 70% to 77%, also a 7-point increase. Strong conservatives are the only group with little change. They are about as likely now (77%) to say they hold back their views as in 2017 (76%).

Self-censorship is widespread across demographic groups as well. Nearly two-thirds of Latino Americans (65%) and White Americans (64%) and nearly half of African Americans (49%) have political views they are afraid to share. Majorities of men (65%) and women (59%), people with incomes over \$100,000 (60%) and people with incomes less than \$20,000 (58%), people under 35 (55%) and over 65 (66%), religious (71%) and non-religious (56%) all agree that the political climate prevents them from expressing their true beliefs.

Not all self-censorship is bad, of course. There are times and places for restraint. So it's hard to know quite how to interpret the results above.

Alas, another part of the study is much more unambiguously depressing: A large number of people think whether someone is employable ought to be tied to their personal politics.

"Nearly a quarter (22%) of Americans would support firing a business executive who personally donates to Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's campaign," notes Ekins. "Even more, 31% support firing a business executive who donates to Donald Trump's re-election campaign." And:

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.

Respondents also expressed fear that their own political opinions or donations would cost them a job or a career opportunity. "Younger people are also more concerned than older people, irrespective of political viewpoint," notes Ekins.

Examining all Americans under 65, 37% of those under 30 are worried their political opinions could harm their career trajectories, compared to 30% of 30–54 year-olds and 24% of 55–64 year-olds. But the age gap is more striking taking into account political views.

A slim majority (51%) of Republicans under 30 fear their views could harm their career prospects compared to 39% of 30–44 year-olds, 34% of 45–54 year-olds, and 28% of 55–64 year-old Republicans.

Democrats reflect a similar but less pronounced pattern. A third (33%) of Democrats under 30 worry they have views that could harm their current and future jobs, compared to 27% of 30–54 year-olds, and 19% of 55–64 year-old Democrats.

You can find the full survey—conducted July 1–6, 2020, with a national sample of 2,000 American adults—[here](#). The sections on political donations and self-censorship are [here](#). The margin of error is plus or minus 2.36 percentage points.