



Survey: Majority of Americans Afraid of Expressing Political Beliefs

Graham Piro

July 22, 2020

A majority of Americans say they are worried about facing social or professional consequences for their political views, a [new survey](#) from the Cato Institute found.

The survey, conducted by Cato in collaboration with YouGov, found 62 percent of Americans self-censor their political expression out of fear of offending others. Majorities across the political spectrum said they are worried about sharing their political opinions, including 52 percent of Democrats, 59 percent of independents, and 77 percent of Republicans.

Thirty-one percent of liberals, 30 percent of moderates, and 34 percent of conservatives said they are specifically worried about professional retribution for political speech. The only respondent group with a majority confident in sharing political opinions was the "strong liberal" group, 58 percent of whom said they were confident. Fifty-two percent of respondents who identified as "liberal" said the political climate prevents them from sharing some of their beliefs, while 64 percent of "moderate" respondents and 77 percent of "conservative" and "strongly conservative" respondents said the same.

Respondents with stronger ideological leanings expressed support for punishing business executives who engage in political speech, although the sentiment was higher for strong liberals than strong conservatives. Half of "strong liberals" and 36 percent of "strong conservatives" said they support punishing business executives who donate to the opposing party's presidential candidate.

A [Politico survey](#) found that more Americans are becoming aware of so-called cancel culture, a social trend in which views are regulated through public shaming and self-censorship. Almost half of respondents told the outlet cancel culture had "gone too far," and only a quarter of respondents said they were not familiar with or had no opinion on the matter.

Cancel culture has gained prominence as more private citizens have faced real-world consequences for controversies that grew online. Recent examples include a high school teacher and coach who [said](#) he was fired for writing that "Trump is our president" on social media, a power company worker falsely accused of flashing a "white-power" sign, and an [immigrant](#) owner of a catering company whose daughter had written offensive social media posts as a teenager.

New York Times opinion editor James Bennet resigned from the paper after the opinion section ran an op-ed from Sen. Tom Cotton (R., Ark.) that a group of staffers claimed put black *Times* employees "in danger." Opinion editor Bari Weiss also resigned from the paper, citing harassment she experienced from her colleagues, and Andrew Sullivan said he left *New York* magazine because he has "no idea what version of conservatism could ever be tolerated" in the future.

At the beginning of the month, an open letter in *Harper's Magazine* defending the free exchange of ideas roiled progressives online and caused three of the letter's signers to withdraw their signatures. A response letter argued that the Harper's letter was a "caustic reaction to a diversifying industry" and accused free speech advocates of using "nebulous concepts and coded language" to uphold institutional norms that protect bigotry.