



# FREE EXPRESSION ON CAMPUS: WHAT COLLEGE STUDENTS THINK ABOUT FIRST AMENDMENT ISSUES

A GALLUP/KNIGHT  
FOUNDATION SURVEY

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# **FREE EXPRESSION ON CAMPUS: WHAT COLLEGE STUDENTS THINK ABOUT FIRST AMENDMENT ISSUES**

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# INTRODUCTION

A GALLUP/KNIGHT FOUNDATION SURVEY

First Amendment freedoms continue to be tested on U.S. college campuses as higher education institutions strive to achieve goals that can occasionally come into conflict. These include encouraging the open discussion of ideas and exposing students to people of different backgrounds and viewpoints while making all students feel included and respected on campus.

In 2016, Gallup, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Newseum Institute conducted a landmark, nationally representative [study of college students](#). The survey found that students believed First Amendment freedoms were secure, and they generally preferred that campuses be open environments that encourage a wide range of expression. However, students supported restrictions on certain types of speech, such as hate speech, and many were sympathetic to students' attempts to deny the press access to campus protests, such as those that occurred over race-related issues in the 2015-16 school year.

The past year and a half saw tensions over free expression and inclusiveness escalate amid the contentious 2016 presidential election, student objections to invited commencement speakers, and a series of violent confrontations on college campuses when controversial speakers or groups expressed their views on campus.

In 2017, Gallup and the Knight Foundation partnered with the American Council on Education, the Charles Koch Foundation and the Stanton Foundation to update key trends from the 2016 survey and ask about new developments in First Amendment issues. The new survey probed whether college students ever consider violence or shouting down speakers acceptable, whether they believe certain groups of students can freely express their views on campus, and whether social media has displaced public areas of campus as the venue for discussing political and social issues.

The survey of 3,014 U.S. college students, including an oversample of 216 students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), was conducted Nov. 1-Dec. 10, 2017.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the methodology section at the end of the report for more details on the student sample and its characteristics.

Some of the key findings of the study include:

**Students value both free expression and inclusion, though their commitment to free expression may be stronger in the abstract than in reality.**

Majorities of students say protecting free speech rights (56%) and promoting a diverse and inclusive society (52%) are extremely important to democracy. Students continue to prefer — though not as widely as they did in 2016 — that campuses be open learning environments that allow for a wide range of views to be heard rather than environments that prohibit certain types of potentially harmful speech.

When asked whether protecting citizens' free speech rights or promoting an inclusive society that welcomes diverse groups is more important, students tilt toward inclusion, 53% to 46%. Students are as likely to favor campus speech codes (49%) as to oppose them (51%), and they overwhelmingly favor free speech zones on campus. Nearly two-thirds of students do not believe the U.S. Constitution should protect hate speech, and they continue to support campus policies that restrict both hate speech and wearing stereotypical costumes.

**Students have become more likely to think the climate on their campus prevents people from speaking their mind.**

More students now (61%) than in 2016 (54%) agree that the climate on their campus prevents some students from expressing their views because others might take offense. Although a majority of college students, 69%, believe political conservatives on campus are able to freely and openly express their views, many more believe political liberals (92%) and other campus groups are able to share their opinions freely.

**College students say campus expression has shifted online.**

More students say discussion of social and political issues mostly takes place on social media (57%) rather than in public areas of campus (43%). At the same time, an increasing percentage of college students agree that social media can stifle free expression because people fear being attacked or blocked by those who disagree with their views. Also, eight in 10 students agree that the internet has been responsible for a significant increase in hate speech.

**Extreme actions to prevent speakers from speaking are largely, but not universally, condemned.**

Ninety percent of college students say it is never acceptable to use violence to prevent someone from speaking, but 10% say is acceptable sometimes. Thirty-seven percent of college students also believe shouting down speakers is acceptable at least sometimes.

**College students continue to view First Amendment rights as secure rather than threatened but are less likely than in 2016 to say each right is secure.**

Sixty-four percent of college students say freedom of speech is secure in this country, down from 73% in the 2016 survey. Sixty percent, down from 81%, say freedom of the press is secure. College students continue to believe freedom of assembly is the least secure First Amendment freedom, with 57% (down from 66%) saying that right is secure.

These findings make clear that college students see the landscape for the First Amendment as continuing to evolve. And as those changes occur, college students, like the officials who oversee their campuses, sometimes struggle to reconcile the tensions that can occur between respecting individual freedoms and respecting individual differences.

# DETAILED FINDINGS

## COLLEGE STUDENTS' VIEWS OF FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS

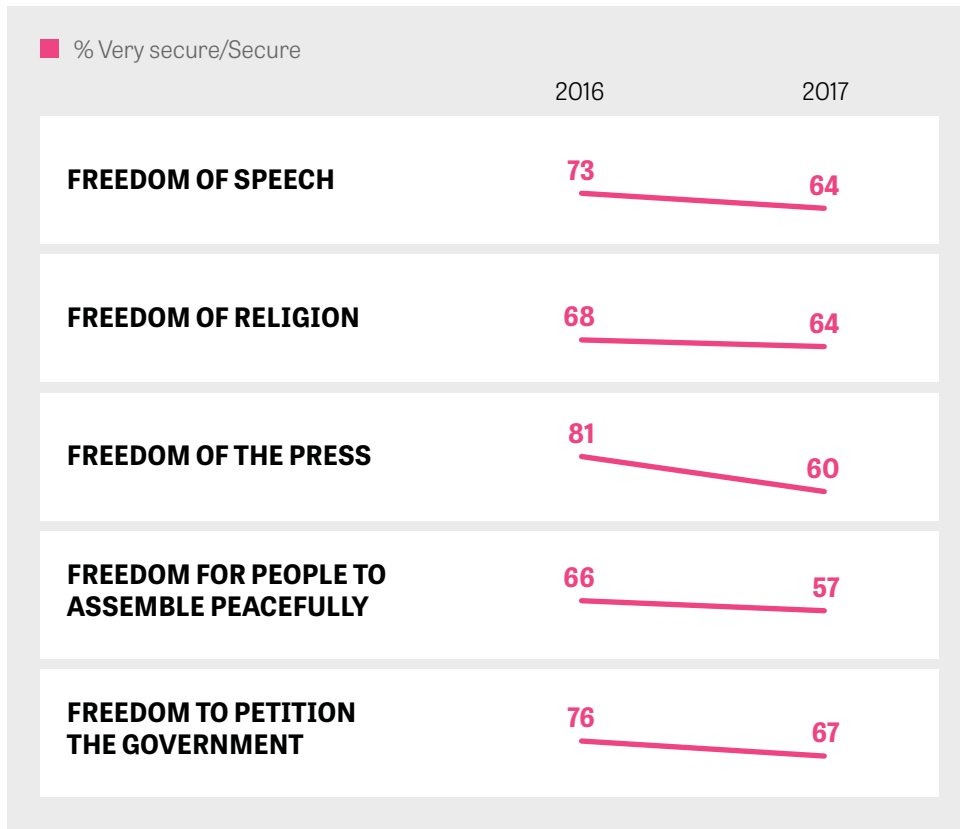
### COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE LESS LIKELY TO SEE FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS AS SECURE

As colleges across the country continue to grapple with the issue of free speech on campus, majorities of U.S. college students still feel the five freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution are secure in this country. However, they are less likely now than they were in 2016 to say each right is secure.

Compared with the 2016 survey, students now perceive the five freedoms as significantly less secure. This includes a 21-percentage-point decline in perceptions that freedom of the press is secure and nine-point declines for free speech, freedom of assembly and freedom to petition the government. Freedom of the press was viewed as the most secure right in 2016, but now it ranks only above freedom of assembly.

#### Students Believe All Five First Amendment Rights Are Less Secure

Do you think each of the following rights is very secure, secure, threatened or very threatened in the country today?



These changes in perceptions appear to be influenced by the way Democratic and Republican college students view the First Amendment guarantees. In 2016, when Barack Obama was president, Democrats and Republicans mostly held similar views about the security of First Amendment freedoms. Now, with Donald Trump in the Oval Office, Democratic students are much less likely than their Republican counterparts to believe that all five freedoms are secure. Independents also tend to see the freedoms as less secure than they did in 2016 — and less secure than Republicans currently do.

**Changes in College Students’ Perceived Security of First Amendment Rights, by Political Party**

Do you think each of the following rights is very secure, secure, threatened or very threatened in the country today?



The largest shift since 2016 among Democratic students is in their view of freedom of the press. It tumbled 35 points to 48% in one year’s time, while Republican students’ views remained fairly steady at 79%. Independents are also significantly less likely than they were in 2016 to believe freedom of the press is secure.

The percentages of Democratic college students who believe freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom to petition the government are secure have fallen more than 10 points. Republican students’ opinions about the five freedoms have generally not changed, although they are slightly more likely now than in 2016 to say freedom of speech and freedom of religion are secure.

The percentage of students at HBCUs who believe free speech rights are secure in this country has fallen below the majority level. Currently, 49% of HBCU students, down from 60% in 2016, view freedom of speech as secure. Less than a majority of HBCU students, 43%, believe the freedom to assemble peacefully is secure, compared with 40% in 2016.

Gender gaps in views of First Amendment rights have expanded, or emerged, since the last survey was conducted. While male/female differences on freedom of assembly and freedom of religion were apparent in 2016, male and female students did not differ in their perceived security of speech, the press and petitioning the government at that time.

On a relative basis, college students are most likely to believe the freedom to petition the government is secure, with 67% holding this view. Slightly fewer say freedom of speech (64%) and freedom of religion (64%) are secure. Six in 10 believe freedom of the press is secure, and 57% say the same about freedom of assembly.

Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to view the five First Amendment rights as secure. They differ most on freedom of the press and freedom of assembly, with less than half of Democrats, and more than seven in 10 Republicans, believing those rights are secure. Independents generally fall in between Republicans and Democrats but hold similar views to Republicans about the security of freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

**College Students' Views of the Security of the First Amendment Rights in the U.S.**

Figures are the percentages who say each right is very secure or secure

	<b>SPEECH</b>	<b>RELIGION</b>	<b>PRESS</b>	<b>ASSEMBLY</b>	<b>PETITION GOVERNMENT</b>
All	64	64	60	57	67
Men	70	75	63	68	77
Women	59	56	58	47	61
Whites	66	66	59	58	70
Blacks	54	53	58	40	54
Democrats	59	58	48	47	61
Independents	66	68	65	58	70
Republicans	71	71	79	74	80
HBCU students	49	60	57	43	51

Non-Hispanic black students believe all of the First Amendment freedoms are less secure than white students do, with the exception of freedom of the press, for which they hold similar views. White (58%) and black (40%) students differ most about whether assembly rights are secure.

HBCU students perceive that two First Amendment rights are threatened rather than secure — freedom of assembly (43% secure, 58% threatened) and freedom of speech (49% secure, 52% threatened). They are most positive about freedom of religion, with 60% believing that right is secure.

Women tend to be less likely than men to perceive all First Amendment guarantees as secure, especially freedom of assembly (47% to 68%) and freedom of religion (56% to 75%).

Campus events or policies that have implications for free speech, such as instituting speech codes or disinviting speakers, appear to matter little in how students view the security of free speech rights in this country. Students' opinions about how secure free speech is do not differ based on whether their college has a speech code or has disinvited a speaker.



## STUDENT TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA INCREASES

Ongoing tensions between Trump and the news media could be a factor in the changes in Democratic students' worsening view of the security of freedom of the press. As has occurred more generally among U.S. adults,<sup>2</sup> Democratic students express significantly more trust in the news media now (64%) than in 2016 (44%), while Republicans' trust remains low and unchanged.

Currently, 50% of all college students say they have “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of trust in the news media. That is up from 42% in 2016 and reflects the trend of increased media trust seen among national adults over the same time period.

### College Students' Trust in the News Media<sup>3</sup>

Next, turning to the news media, meaning reporters and journalists who cover the news, how much do you trust the news media to report the news accurately and fairly — a great deal, a fair amount, not much or not at all?

	% A GREAT DEAL	% A FAIR AMOUNT	% NOT MUCH	% NOT AT ALL
All	6	44	39	11
Men	8	45	34	13
Women	5	43	43	9
Whites	6	42	40	12
Blacks	5	45	40	10
Democrats	10	54	30	6
Independents	4	38	45	12
Republicans	2	32	47	18
HBCU students	6	39	41	13

<sup>2</sup> <http://news.gallup.com/poll/219824/democrats-confidence-mass-media-rises-sharply-2016.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> No opinion percentages are excluded from tables. As a result, percentages may not add to 100%.

# DETAILED FINDINGS

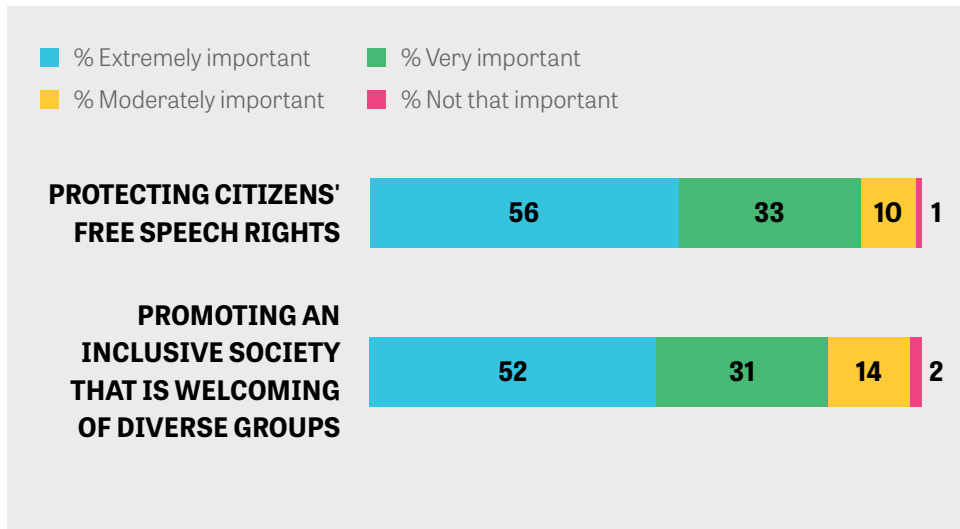
## TENSIONS BETWEEN FREE EXPRESSION AND INCLUSION

### MAJORITIES OF STUDENTS CONSIDER BOTH SPEECH AND INCLUSION TO BE IMPORTANT TO DEMOCRACY

For a democracy to thrive, citizens must be able to express their views on important issues to inform their elected leaders about what they want them to do. But all citizens, regardless of their background, should have the same opportunity to express their views — something that has not always been the reality in democratic societies, including the U.S. Students place a high value on protecting free speech rights in a democracy: 56% say it is “extremely important” to do so, and 33% say it is “very important.” Nearly as many say promoting an inclusive society that welcomes diverse groups is extremely (52%) or very (31%) important to democracy.

#### College Students Say Both Free Speech Rights, Inclusive Society Are Highly Important to Democracy

How important do you consider each of the following to be in our democracy?



While Democratic and Republican students are about equally likely to regard protecting free speech rights as important, Democrats are much more likely than Republicans are to say promoting an inclusive society is important. Only modest racial and gender differences exist for the perceived importance of an inclusive society that welcomes diverse groups.

**Importance of Free Speech and Inclusion to Democracy**

How important do you consider each of the following to be in our democracy — extremely important, very important, moderately important or not that important?

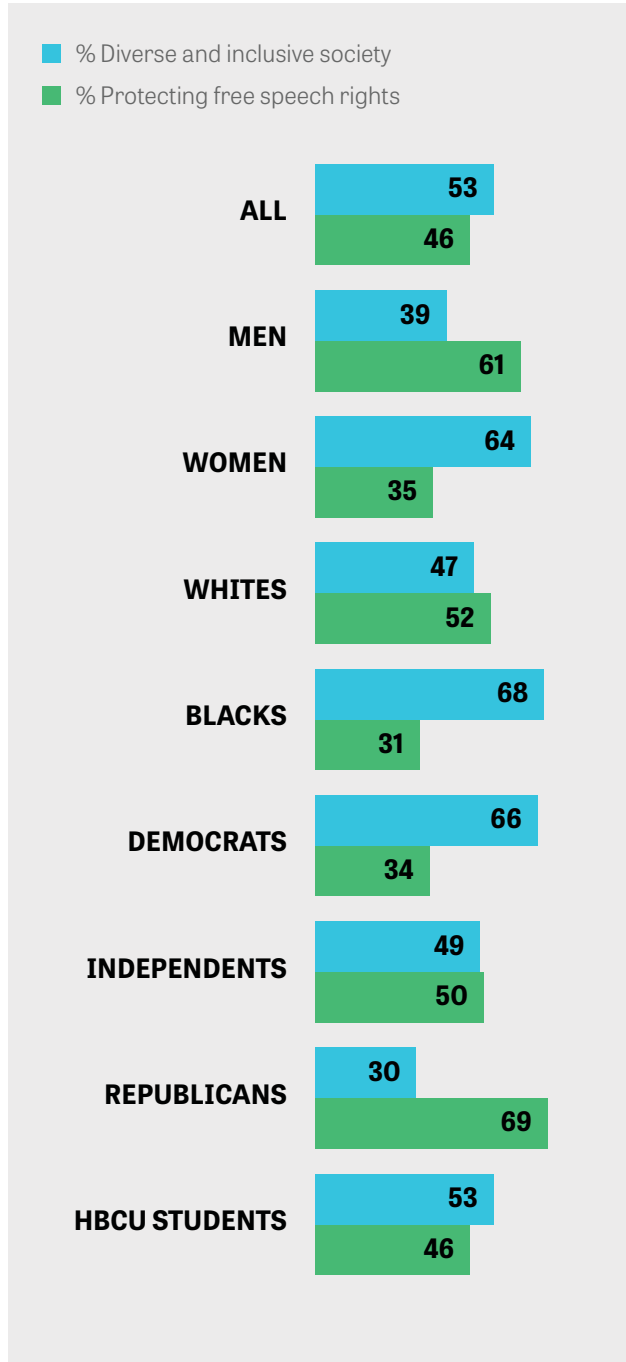
	% EXTREMELY IMPORTANT	% VERY IMPORTANT	% MODERATELY IMPORTANT	% NOT THAT IMPORTANT
<b>PROTECTING CITIZENS' FREE SPEECH RIGHTS</b>				
All	56	33	10	1
Men	62	31	7	1
Women	51	35	13	1
Whites	55	34	10	1
Blacks	57	30	12	1
Democrats	58	30	11	0
Independents	54	34	11	1
Republicans	54	37	8	1
HBCU students	58	30	11	1
<b>PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY THAT IS WELCOMING TO DIVERSE GROUPS</b>				
All	52	31	14	2
Men	48	32	17	3
Women	56	31	12	1
Whites	51	31	15	3
Blacks	59	28	11	2
Democrats	63	29	8	1
Independents	49	33	16	2
Republicans	37	32	26	5
HBCU students	62	24	13	1

**COLLEGE STUDENTS SEE BOTH PROTECTING CITIZENS' FREE SPEECH RIGHTS AND PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY AS VERY IMPORTANT FOR A DEMOCRACY. WHEN ASKED TO CHOOSE WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT, MORE SAY INCLUSION THAN FREE SPEECH.**

When asked to choose which objective is more important in a democracy, college students prioritize promoting an inclusive society that is welcoming of diverse groups over one that protects citizens' free speech rights, 53% to 46%. Women, blacks and Democrats are more likely than their counterparts to choose inclusion over free speech.

### Diversity and Inclusion vs. Free Speech

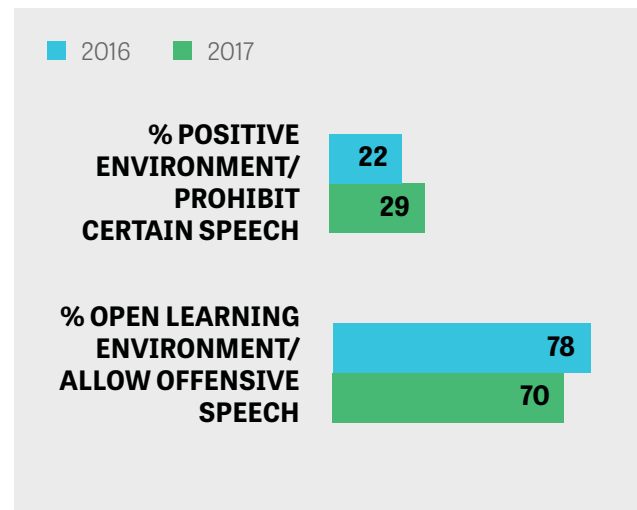
If you had to choose, which do you think is more important?



## COLLEGE STUDENTS STILL WIDELY FAVOR AN OPEN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON CAMPUS THAT ALLOWS ALL TYPES OF SPEECH

Recent debates on college campuses have centered on the trade-offs between promoting an open learning environment where students are exposed to all types of speech and ensuring that all students feel safe and respected. Achieving the latter objective could involve curtailing speech. Asked to choose, students — by an overwhelming 70% to 29% margin — favor an open environment over a positive one that puts limits on offensive speech. Opinions shifted slightly away from favoring an open environment since 2016 when the margin was 78% to 22%.<sup>4</sup>

### College Students' Preferred Type of Campus Environment, 2016 vs. 2017



<sup>4</sup> An alternate version of the question, asked for the first time in 2017 in an attempt to shorten and simplify the original question, found an even stronger tilt toward campuses allowing all types of speech, even if offensive, rather than protecting students by prohibiting certain speech — 82% to 18%. Full results and breakdowns for all questions in the survey are available for download or on request. The two versions of the open environment versus positive environment questions were asked of half samples. Each respondent was randomly selected to get one or the other version. This allowed for a test of whether the new (simpler) wording produced the same results as the 2016 wording, while still maintaining the ability to compare results from 2016 to 2017 on the old version.

Most major subgroups have become at least slightly less supportive of an open environment than they were in 2016. The exception is Republicans, who still overwhelmingly favor an open environment (86%). Democrats, blacks and women are among the major subgroups most likely to favor a positive environment that limits certain speech, but less than four in 10 do so. These findings do not exclude the possibility that further disaggregation among subgroups might identify some in which the majority would prefer a positive environment that prohibits certain speech.

### College Students' Preferred Campus Environment

If you had to choose, do you think it is more important for colleges to — [(responses rotated) create a positive learning environment for all students by prohibiting certain speech or expression of viewpoints that are offensive or biased against certain groups of people (or to) create an open learning environment, where students are exposed to all types of speech and viewpoints, even if it means allowing speech that is offensive or biased against certain groups of people]?

	<b>% POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT/ PROHIBIT CERTAIN SPEECH</b>	<b>% OPEN ENVIRONMENT/ ALLOW OFFENSIVE SPEECH</b>
All	29	70
Men	23	75
Women	33	66
Whites	25	74
Blacks	38	62
Democrats	38	61
Independents	26	73
Republicans	12	86
HBCU students	31	69

### STUDENTS SUPPORTIVE OF PROHIBITING HATE SPEECH

Although college students say they prefer an open learning environment and view free speech rights as important in theory, their desire for fostering inclusion is apparent in their support for restrictions on some forms of speech. In particular, students favor limits on intentionally hurtful or offensive speech.

Nearly two-thirds of students think hate speech should not be protected by the First Amendment. Court rulings have generally held that hate speech is a protected form of expression. Whereas 47% of Republican students think hate speech should be protected, only 25% of Democratic students agree.

### Most Students Do Not Think Hate Speech Should Be Protected by First Amendment

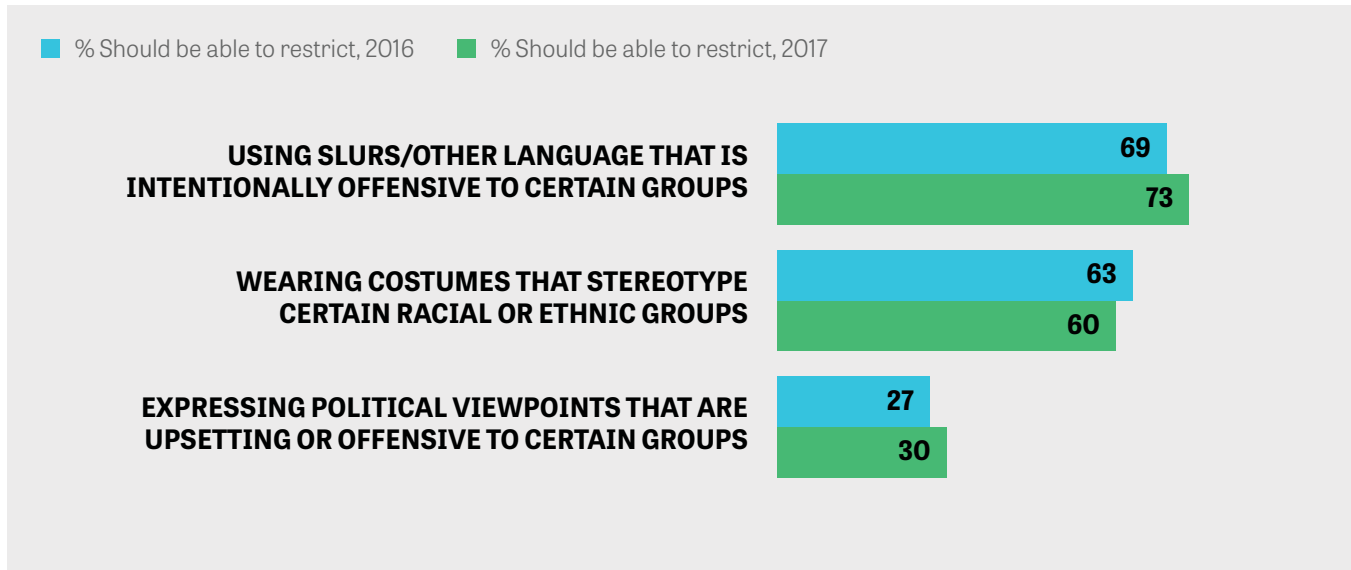
Do you think hate speech is a form of expression that should or should not be protected by the First Amendment?

	<b>% YES, SHOULD PROTECT</b>	<b>% NO, SHOULD NOT PROTECT</b>
All	35	64
Men	43	56
Women	29	71
Whites	36	64
Blacks	29	71
Democrats	25	75
Independents	40	59
Republicans	47	52
HBCU students	42	58

When asked about campus policies that restrict certain types of expression, nearly three-quarters of students (73%) think colleges should be able to restrict racial slurs, and 60% say the same about stereotypical costumes. However, 30% think the expression of offensive political views should be restricted on campus. These percentages are similar to those from the 2016 survey.

### Student Support for Campus Restrictions on Forms of Expression

Do you think colleges should or should not be able to establish policies that restrict each of the following types of speech or expression on campus?



Black students are more likely than white students to support campus policies that limit these types of expression. Nearly half of blacks, 46%, favor limits on political speech, while 28% of whites do. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to favor these restrictions.

### Student Support for Campus Restrictions on Forms of Expression

Figures are the percentages who say colleges should be able to restrict that form of expression

	SLURS	STEREOTYPICAL COSTUMES	POLITICAL SPEECH
All	73	60	30
Men	68	52	24
Women	78	66	34
Whites	74	61	28
Blacks	82	72	46
Democrats	80	67	34
Independents	71	58	28
Republicans	61	47	23
HBCU students	73	64	37

## COLLEGE STUDENTS SAY FIRST AMENDMENT APPLIES TO ANTHEM PROTESTS

During the fall of 2017, when the survey was conducted, professional athletes' protests during the playing of the national anthem became major national news that had clear implications for free expression rights. College students (81%) overall overwhelmingly agree that professional athletes have a First Amendment right to protest the national anthem.

The protests were designed to call attention to racial injustice in the U.S., and 94% of black college students say professional athletes have the right to protest the anthem. Fewer white students, 78%, say the same. President Trump was a prominent critic of the protests, and a substantial minority of college students who identify politically as Republican are sympathetic to his criticisms. A slim majority of Republican students, 53%, say professional athletes have the right to protest the national anthem, but 47% say they do not.

### College Students Say Professional Athletes Have Right to Protest National Anthem

Do you think professional athletes have the First Amendment right to protest during the playing of the national anthem, or not?

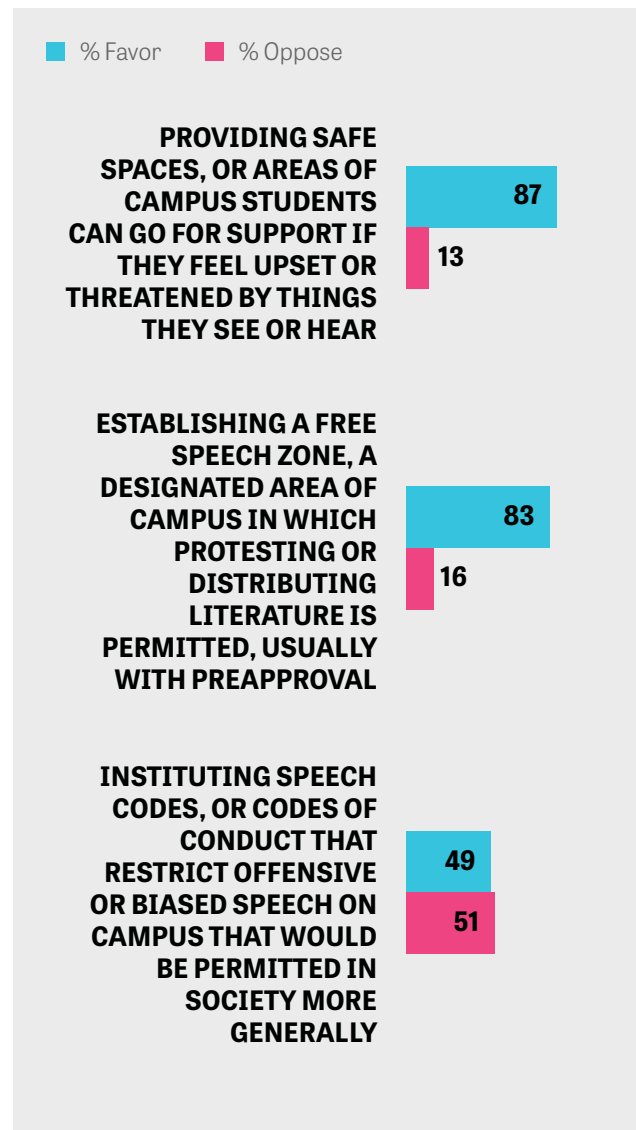
	% YES	% NO
All	81	19
Men	82	17
Women	79	20
Whites	78	21
Blacks	94	6
Democrats	91	8
Independents	80	19
Republicans	53	47
HBCU students	78	20

## STUDENTS DIVIDED ON SPEECH CODES, FAVOR FREE SPEECH ZONES AND SAFE SPACES

Colleges have instituted a variety of policies that could place limits on free speech. Speech codes, free speech zones and safe spaces are among some of the more common campus policies that have implications for speech. College students show widespread support for free speech zones and safe spaces but are divided on speech codes.

### Student Support for Campus Policies

Next, please say whether you favor or oppose each of the following actions taken by colleges.



Eighty-three percent of college students support free speech zones, areas of campus set aside for students to protest or distribute literature. While free speech zones guarantee space on campus for students to express their views, they have been criticized for putting too many restrictions on speech — with institutions determining where, when and how views can be expressed. Subgroup differences on support for free speech zones are fairly muted, though women favor them more than men do.

Eighty-seven percent of college students favor safe spaces, designated areas of campus where students can go to be assured they will not be confronted by offensive or hateful speech. Some critics of safe spaces oppose them because they believe safe spaces allow students to avoid hearing viewpoints with which they disagree — a form of protection that will not exist when they leave campus. Nevertheless, students may not see this subtle, potential downside of safe spaces.

Support for safe spaces is nearly universal among women and Democrats, both at 95%. Ninety-one percent of black students and 90% of HBCU students favor safe spaces. Republicans (70%) and men (77%) still widely support safe spaces but are less likely to do so than other subgroups.

The most controversial policy type among those tested in the survey is speech codes — students divide about evenly between support (49%) and opposition (51%). According to one estimate, a majority of colleges have some sort of speech code. These policies mostly intend to prohibit offensive speech on campuses even though that kind of speech would be permitted in society more generally.

Roughly six in 10 blacks, women, HBCU students and Democrats support speech codes. In addition, 56% of those who are highly active on social media to discuss current events — that is, they use it to get news, post links to stories and discuss issues<sup>5</sup> — say they favor speech codes.

Majorities of men, whites, Republicans and independents oppose speech codes. One left-leaning group that does not support speech codes is Jewish students, with 61% opposed.

**Student Support for Campus Policies**

Figures are the percentages in favor of the policy

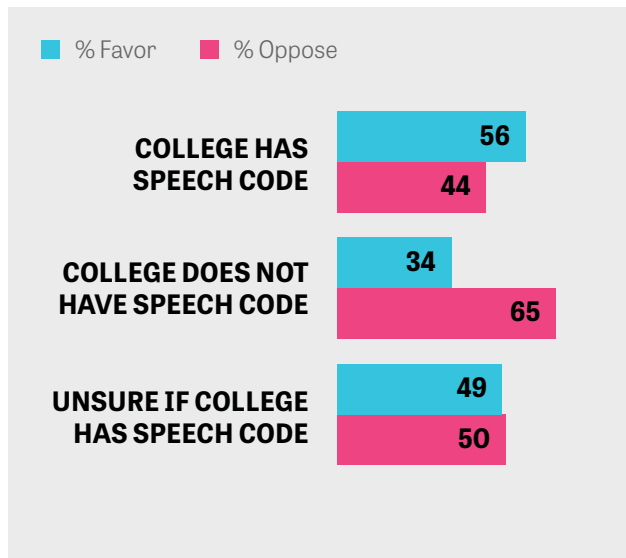
	<b>SAFE SPACES</b>	<b>FREE SPEECH ZONES</b>	<b>SPEECH CODES</b>
All	87	83	49
Men	77	75	37
Women	95	90	58
Whites	85	81	44
Blacks	91	85	61
Democrats	95	87	57
Independents	86	81	44
Republicans	70	79	39
HBCU students	90	76	58

<sup>5</sup> A scale for social media activity was created by summing responses for three items (use social media for news, post links to stories on social media, discuss current events on social media) rated on four-point scales (1: often, 2: sometimes, 3: hardly ever, 4: never), creating a scale ranging from 3 to 12. Those scoring from 3 to 6 on the scale were considered heavy users, scores of 7 and 8 were moderate users, and scores of 9 to 12 were nonusers.



Students' views of speech codes may be influenced by their college's official policy on the matter. Fifty-six percent of students who say their college has a speech code favor them, but 65% of those who say their college does not have a speech code oppose them.

### Support for Campus Speech Codes, by College Policy on Speech Codes



Students' own experiences appear to bear little relationship to their opinions about speech codes. Fifty percent of those who report they have felt uncomfortable on campus because of something they heard are in favor of speech codes, as are 48% of those who say they have never felt uncomfortable.

# DETAILED FINDINGS

## CAMPUS CLIMATE AND ITS EFFECT ON EXPRESSION

### STUDENTS INCREASINGLY SEE CHILLING EFFECT BECAUSE OF CAMPUS CLIMATE

Campus norms as well as official campus policies that discourage certain types of expression may make students reluctant to say things they believe. An increasing majority of college students perceive that the climate on their campus produces such a “chilling effect” on speech.

Sixty-one percent of students, up from 54% in the prior survey, strongly agree or agree that the climate on their campus prevents some people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive. The increase is evident among most key subgroups, with Republican students and Hispanics as the exceptions.

#### College Students’ Views of Whether the Climate on Their College Campus Deters Speech, 2016 vs. 2017

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement? “The climate on my campus prevents some people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive.”

Figures are the percentages who strongly agree or agree with the statement

	2016	2017	CHANGE
All college students	54	61	+7
Men	54	62	+8
Women	53	60	+7
White	51	59	+8
Black	50	64	+14
Hispanic	67	60	-7
Asian	61	68	+7
Democrat	54	63	+9
Independent	49	62	+13
Republican	62	53	-9
HBCU students	44	53	+9

**College Students' Views of Whether the Climate on College Campuses Prevents Some People From Saying Things They Believe Because Others Might Find Them Offensive, 2016 vs. 2017** *Cont'd.*

Figures are the percentages who strongly agree or agree with the statement

	2016	2017	CHANGE
Public college	53	61	+8
Private college	56	61	+5
Enrollment less than 10,000 students	48	56	+8
Enrollment 10,000+ students	56	65	+9

Democrats' increased belief and Republicans' reduced belief that the campus climate deters speech has led to a situation in which Democrats (63%) are now more likely than Republicans (53%) to hold this view. In 2016, Republicans were more likely to agree than Democrats were. The reasons for these shifts are not clear. One possibility is that Republican and Democratic students perceive the climate for speech is influenced by the party in the White House. As a result, supporters of the party out of power (Republicans in 2016 and Democrats in 2017) may feel the climate is less hospitable for their party.

Along with Republicans, HBCU students (53%) are among the subgroups least likely to see their campus climate as deterring speech. However, more HBCU students perceive a chilling effect on campus than did so in 2016, when 44% did.

There is no difference between private and public college students, but students at larger campuses are somewhat more likely than those at smaller campuses to agree the climate at their college prevents people from speaking their mind.

**POLITICAL CONSERVATIVES ARE SEEN AS LESS ABLE TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS**

Asked about the ability of various groups to exercise their free speech rights on campus, college students believe most groups are able to do so. However, college students are much less likely to believe that political conservatives can freely express themselves, compared with other groups. Sixty-nine percent of students think political conservatives are able to freely and openly express their views on campus — far lower than the 92% who say the same about political liberals.

**NINETY-TWO PERCENT OF COLLEGE STUDENTS SAY POLITICAL LIBERALS CAN FREELY AND OPENLY EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS ON THEIR CAMPUS; 69% SAY POLITICAL CONSERVATIVES CAN.**

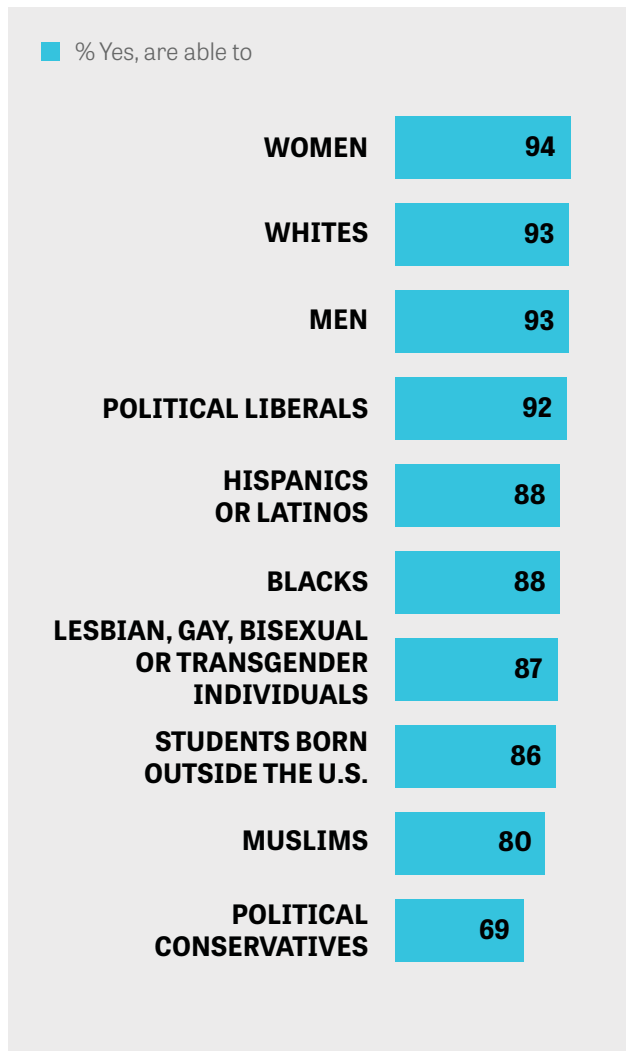
College students may see political conservatives as less able to express themselves because they believe they are a distinct minority on campus. Just 15% say their campus is “highly diverse” in party identification, compared with 25% who say the same about class and income, 32% for religion, and 38% for race and ethnicity.

Perceptions that campuses are not highly diverse politically are consistent with the prevailing partisanship among college students — 66% identify as Democrats or are Democratic-leaning independents, while 27% are Republicans or Republican-leaning independents, according to the survey.

Students rank political conservatives behind each of the other nine groups evaluated in the survey in terms of whether they can freely express themselves, including groups who have historically been subject to discrimination, such as blacks (88%); lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students (87%); and Muslims (80%). More than nine in 10 college students say political liberals, women, men and whites are able to freely and openly express their views. Eighty-six percent believe students born outside the U.S. can exercise freedom of speech rights unencumbered.

**Students’ Perceptions of Whether Groups on Campus Can Freely Express Their Views**

On your college’s campus, do you think members of each of the following groups are, or are not, able to freely and openly express their views?



There are few meaningful differences by subgroup in perceptions of whether certain groups are able to easily exercise their free speech rights on campus, including among members of the group being rated. For example, 63% of self-identified conservatives versus 66% of self-identified liberals say political conservatives can freely express their views on campus. Meanwhile, 94% of liberals and 90% of conservatives say political liberals are able to speak freely on campus. In addition, 87% of Hispanics versus 89% of non-Hispanics say Hispanics can express their views.<sup>6</sup>

**Perceptions of Whether Political Groups on Campus Can Freely Express Their Views**

Figures are the percentages who believe the group can freely express their views on campus

	POLITICAL LIBERALS	POLITICAL CONSERVATIVES
All	92	69
Men	93	68
Women	91	69
Whites	94	68
Blacks	89	74
Democrats	92	67
Independents	92	71
Republicans	93	68
HBCU students	83	70

6 It is not possible to evaluate how LGBT, international or Muslim students perceive the ability of their subgroup to exercise free expression on campus. LGBT identification and country of birth were not measured in the survey. Religious identification was measured, but Muslims represent too small a proportion of the student population (2%) to report reliable estimates for that subgroup.

### Perceptions of Whether Racial and Ethnic Groups on Campus Can Freely Express Their Views

Figures are the percentages who believe the group can freely express their views on campus

	WHITES	BLACKS	HISPANICS OR LATINOS
All	93	88	88
Men	91	92	93
Women	94	85	85
Whites	93	90	89
Blacks	92	85	86
Hispanics	92	84	87
Democrats	95	84	85
Independents	93	90	91
Republicans	87	94	92
HBCU students	75	88	84

### Perceptions of Whether Gender Groups on Campus Can Freely Express Their Views

Figures are the percentages who believe the group can freely express their views on campus

	MEN	WOMEN
All	93	94
Men	91	95
Women	94	93
Whites	93	94
Blacks	89	90
Democrats	94	92
Independents	92	95
Republicans	91	97
HBCU students	78	84

**Perceptions of Whether Groups on Campus Can Freely Express Their Views**

Figures are the percentages who believe the group can freely express their views on campus

	<b>LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL OR TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS</b>	<b>STUDENTS BORN OUTSIDE THE U.S.</b>	<b>MUSLIMS</b>
All	87	86	80
Men	90	89	85
Women	84	83	75
Whites	89	88	81
Blacks	82	79	76
Democrats	84	81	75
Independents	88	87	82
Republicans	90	94	85

HBCU students	80	82	85
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**ONE IN FOUR STUDENTS HAVE FELT UNCOMFORTABLE BECAUSE OF SOMETHING SAID ON CAMPUS**

Reporting on their own experiences, most college students say they have been unaffected by things they have heard on campus. One-quarter of students overall report feeling uncomfortable because of something that was said on campus about their race, ethnicity or religion, whether or not it was directed at them.

Black students (43%) are twice as likely as white students (21%) to say they have ever felt uncomfortable. The difference is mostly accounted for by the experiences of black students at non-HBCU colleges, among whom 45% report feeling uncomfortable at some point. That compares with 24% of HBCU students.

Hispanics (27%) and Asians (26%) are no more likely than students overall to say they have felt uncomfortable. However, women (28%) are slightly more likely than men (20%) to have felt uncomfortable because of something someone said.

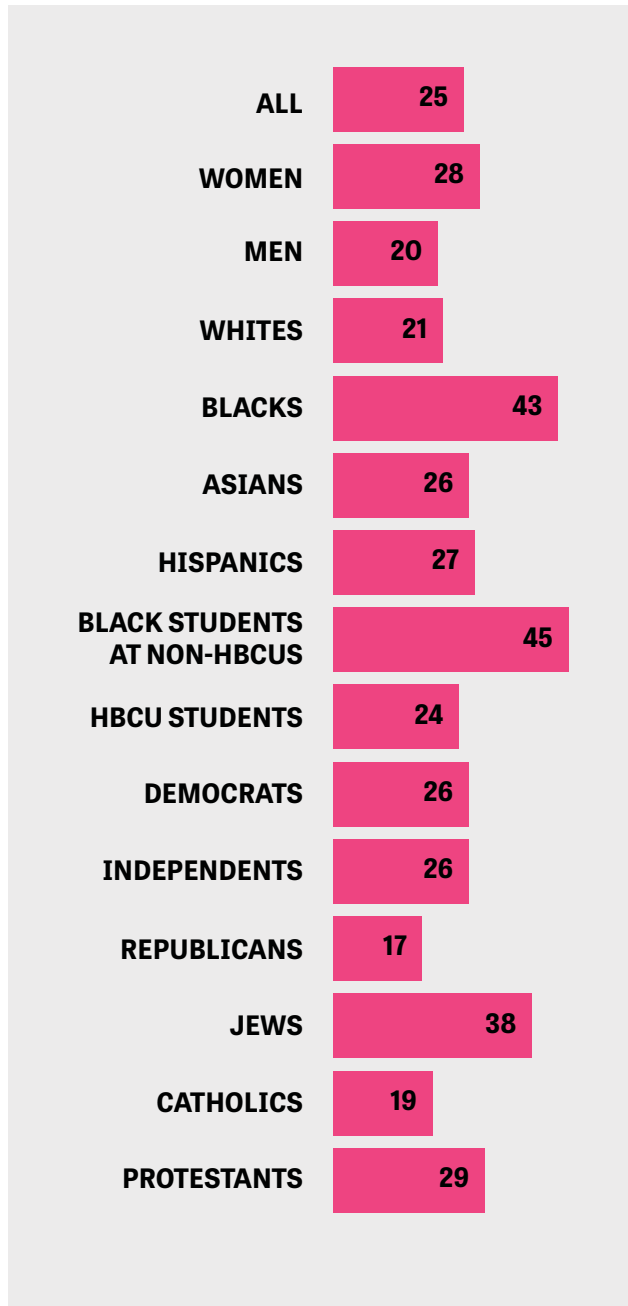
Among religious groups, Jewish students (38%) are significantly more likely than Protestants (29%), Catholics (19%) and those with no religion (22%) to have felt uncomfortable on campus because of some kind of ethnic, racial or religious comment.

The 17% of Republicans who say they have felt uncomfortable is one of the smallest percentages reported for any subgroup and is significantly smaller than the 26% of both independents and Democrats who report such an experience. The political differences on this question may be a function of typical patterns in Republican versus Democratic identification by race. For example, whites and men are more likely to identify as Republicans than women and blacks are.

**Black, Jewish Students Among Those Most Likely to Have Been Affected by Speech**

Have you, personally, ever felt uncomfortable in a class, living area, public space or other part of campus because of something someone said in reference to your race, ethnicity or religion, whether or not it was directed at you?

Thirty-eight percent of students who say their college is not racially and ethnically diverse report feeling uncomfortable on campus, compared with 22% who say their campus is highly or somewhat diverse.



# DETAILED FINDINGS

## ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CAMPUS

### STUDENTS SAY ISSUE DISCUSSION TAKES PLACE ONLINE RATHER THAN ON CAMPUS

Social media is commonly used by college students, so much so that students say that discussion of political and social issues at their college mostly takes place on social media (57%) rather than in public areas of campus (43%). It is not clear if students think such discussions should take place online rather than in public areas of campus. However, if they do see social media as the appropriate forum for expressing one's views, they may be less likely to oppose policies that restrict free expression on campus.

#### College Student Views of Where Discussion of Political or Social Ideas Takes Place

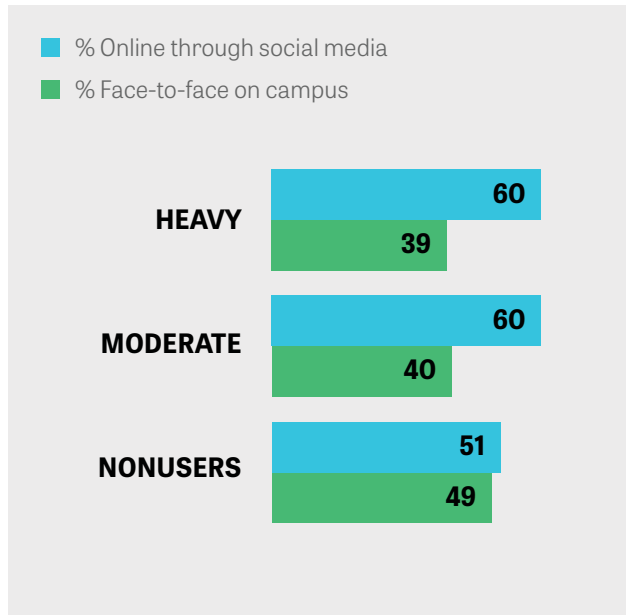
Where do you think most expression and discussion of political or social ideas among students at your college takes places these days — [(responses rotated:) face-to-face on campus in classrooms and public areas (or) online through social media]?

	% FACE-TO-FACE ON CAMPUS	% ONLINE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA
All	43	57
Men	44	55
Women	42	58
Whites	44	56
Blacks	39	59
Democrats	41	58
Independents	44	55
Republicans	43	57
HBCU students	44	56



Students' reports of where campus discussions of controversial issues take place are similar across demographic subgroups. However, those who do not use social media to discuss issues are more inclined than other subgroups to think discussion mostly occurs face-to-face on campus.

**Views of Where Discussion of Political or Social Ideas Takes Place at College, by Social Media Usage for Discussing Issues**



Students in their fourth or higher year of college (63%) are more likely than first-year students (51%) to say discussion about political and social ideas among students takes place online through social media. Large majorities of Jewish (69%) and Asian (64%) students say the same.

**MORE STUDENTS SAY DISCUSSION OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IDEAS AT THEIR COLLEGE TAKES PLACE ONLINE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA THAN FACE-TO-FACE IN PUBLIC AREAS OF CAMPUS.**

## STUDENTS INCREASINGLY SEE SOCIAL MEDIA HAVING NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS FOR EXPRESSION

While social media is an integral part of the lives of college students, most recognize it has negative as well as positive attributes. More than six in 10 students disagree that the dialogue that occurs on social media is usually civil, and more than eight in 10 agree that it is too easy for people to say things anonymously on social media.

Increasingly, they think social media can stifle expression because of a fear of being attacked (59%) or because people block those with whom they disagree (60%). Both percentages are up about 10 points from last year.

### College Students' Views of Social Media, 2016 vs. 2017

Figures are the percentages who strongly agree or agree with the statement

	2016	2017	CHANGE
The dialogue that occurs on social media is usually civil	41	37	-4
It is too easy for people to say things anonymously on social media	74	83	+9
Social media stifles free expression because too many people block views they disagree with	48	60	+12
Social media stifles free expression because people are afraid of being attacked or shamed by those who disagree with them	49	59	+10

Subgroup differences in views of social media are minor. There are also no meaningful differences in these attitudes according to social media usage.

**MORE COLLEGE STUDENTS NOW THAN IN 2016 AGREE THAT SOCIAL MEDIA STIFLES FREE EXPRESSION BECAUSE PEOPLE CAN BE ATTACKED OR BLOCKED BY THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITH THEM.**

### College Students' Opinions of Effects of Social Media on Expression

Thinking generally about how people interact on social media, do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.

	<b>% STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE</b>	<b>% STRONGLY DISAGREE/DISAGREE</b>
<b>THE DIALOGUE THAT OCCURS ON SOCIAL MEDIA IS USUALLY CIVIL</b>		
All	37	63
Men	36	64
Women	38	62
Whites	36	64
Blacks	39	61
Democrats	35	65
Independents	37	63
Republicans	43	57
HBCU students	45	55
<b>IT IS TOO EASY FOR PEOPLE TO SAY THINGS ANONYMOUSLY ON SOCIAL MEDIA</b>		
All	83	17
Men	79	20
Women	86	14
Whites	81	19
Blacks	86	14
Democrats	85	15
Independents	82	18
Republicans	82	18
HBCU students	77	23

<b>SOCIAL MEDIA STIFLES FREE EXPRESSION BECAUSE TOO MANY PEOPLE BLOCK VIEWS THEY DISAGREE WITH</b>		
All	59	40
Men	61	39
Women	58	42
Whites	57	43
Blacks	59	41
Democrats	57	43
Independents	61	38
Republicans	60	40
HBCU students	61	39

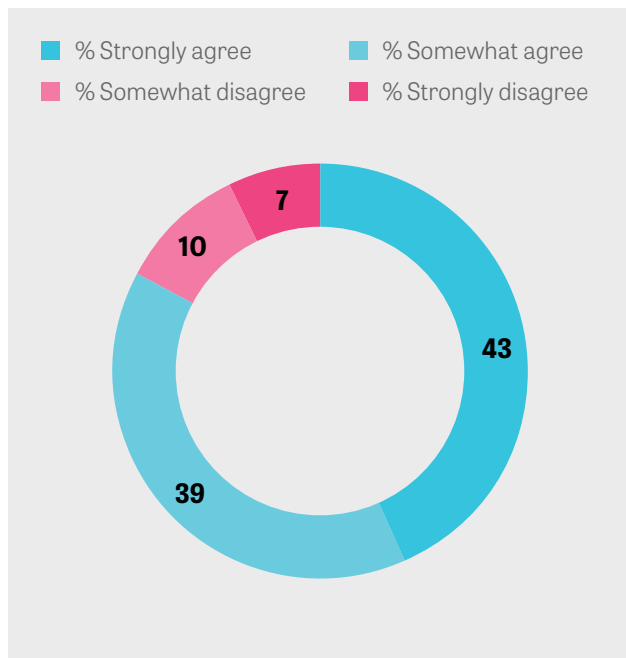
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA STIFLES FREE EXPRESSION BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF BEING ATTACKED OR SHAMED BY THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITH THEM</b>		
All	59	41
Men	59	40
Women	58	42
Whites	55	45
Blacks	62	38
Democrats	54	46
Independents	61	38
Republicans	62	38
HBCU students	64	36

## STUDENTS THINK SOCIAL MEDIA HAS FUELED AN INCREASE IN HATE SPEECH

Students exhibit a broad consensus across a wide range of demographic groups that social media is responsible for a significant increase in hate speech. Overall, more than eight in 10 students agree, either strongly (43%) or somewhat (39%), that this is the case.

### Students See Internet as Responsible for Increase in Hate Speech

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement? “The internet is responsible for a significant increase in hate speech.”



Asked how social media companies should deal with such hate speech, 68% of students strongly or somewhat agree that social media companies should be responsible for limiting it on their platforms. While 79% of Democrats hold this belief, 52% of Republicans do. Likewise, women are more likely than men to think social media companies should attempt to limit hate speech on their sites.

## Students Believe Social Media Companies Should Be Responsible for Limiting Hate Speech

Thinking generally about how people interact on social media, do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.

	% STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE	% STRONGLY DISAGREE/DISAGREE
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, LIKE FACEBOOK® AND TWITTER®, SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR LIMITING HATE SPEECH ON THEIR PLATFORMS</b>		
All	68	32
Men	61	39
Women	74	26
Whites	67	33
Blacks	74	26
Democrats	79	21
Independents	64	36
Republicans	52	48
HBCU students	71	29

Three-quarters of college students who heavily use social media to discuss political matters agree that social media platforms should try to limit hate speech on their platforms. That compares with 63% of moderate users and 64% of nonusers.

# DETAILED FINDINGS

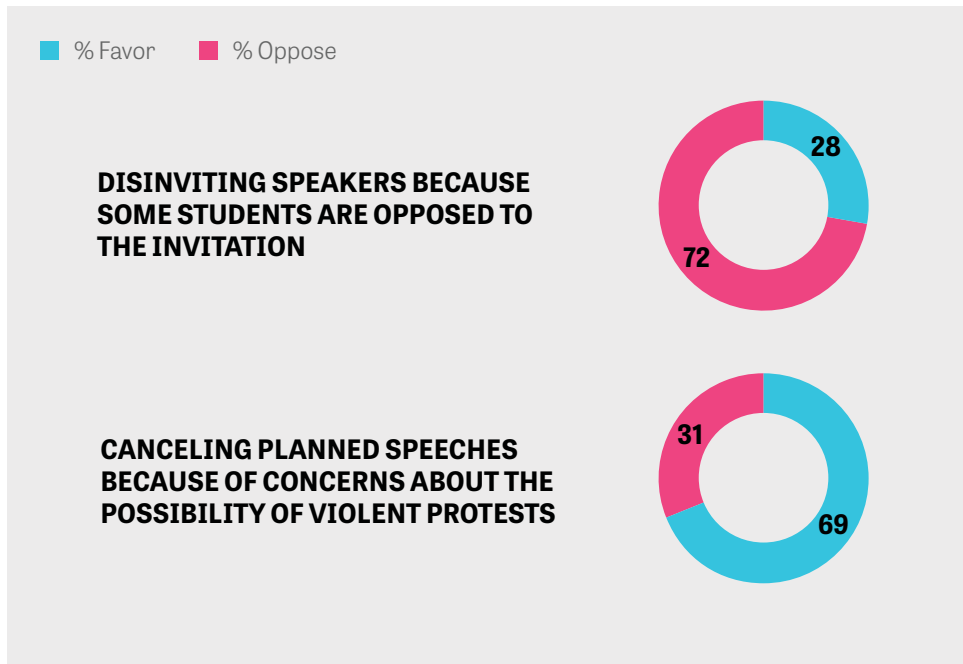
## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF ACTIONS TO LIMIT SPEECH

### STUDENTS SUPPORT CANCELING SCHEDULED SPEECHES IF THREAT OF VIOLENCE EXISTS

Colleges faced a number of controversies in the past year in which students pressured officials to disinvite certain speakers who were scheduled to deliver speeches or commencement addresses on campus. College students generally do not approve of disinviting speakers merely because of student opposition — 72% are opposed to this occurring, and 28% are in favor. However, 69% of students are in favor of canceling planned speeches because of concerns about the possibility of violent protests. Democratic students are much more inclined than Republican students to favor the cancellation of speeches for both reasons. Republicans are divided as to whether speeches should be canceled because of concerns about violence.

#### Student Opinions on Possible Actions Colleges Can Take Regarding Controversial Speakers

Next, please say whether you favor or oppose each of the following actions taken by colleges.



Democratic students are much more inclined than Republican students to favor the cancellation of speeches for both reasons. Republicans are divided as to whether speeches should be canceled because of concerns about violence.

### Student Support for Disinviting Controversial Speakers

Figures are the percentages who favor colleges disinviting speakers for each reason

	BECAUSE OF STUDENT OPPOSITION	BECAUSE OF CONCERNS ABOUT VIOLENCE
All	28	69
Men	21	58
Women	33	78
Whites	24	68
Blacks	38	75
Democrats	39	78
Independents	24	67
Republicans	11	52
HBCU students	38	76

Students' support for, or opposition to, efforts to cancel speeches are also related to their social media usage for news. Students more engaged with current events on social media are more likely to favor disinviting speakers or canceling speeches, regardless of the rationale, than are those less engaged on social media. Specifically, 38% of heavy social media users, 24% of moderate users and 20% of nonusers favor disinviting speakers because of student opposition. Likewise, 75% of heavy users of social media, 68% of moderate users and 64% of nonusers favor canceling planned speeches because of the possibility of violence.

### SOME STUDENTS SAY SHOUTING DOWN SPEAKERS AND USING VIOLENCE ARE SOMETIMES ACCEPTABLE

Colleges that allow controversial figures to give talks on their campus sometimes have to deal with attempts by students or others to prevent those speakers' views from being heard. College students generally do not condone some of the most aggressive actions that can prevent speakers from talking once they arrive on campus. These include shouting down speakers while they are attempting to talk or resorting to violence, as occurred in 2017 on the University of California, Berkeley; University of Virginia; and Middlebury College campuses.

Nine in 10 students say violence is “never acceptable,” although that does leave one in 10 students who say it is “sometimes acceptable” or “always acceptable.” The percentages who condone violence are similar by subgroup, offering little clue as to which kinds of students think violence can be an appropriate way to halt speech.

Sixty-two percent of students say shouting down speakers is never acceptable, although slightly more than one in three (34%) say it is sometimes acceptable. Three percent say it is always acceptable. Political subgroups differ on the appropriateness of such a response: Half of Democrats say shouting down speakers is always or sometimes acceptable, compared with 31% of independents and 21% of Republicans.

The vast majority of college students believe protesting against speakers is appropriate, including 36% who say it is always acceptable and 50% who say it is sometimes acceptable. Democrats (47%) are much more likely than independents (33%) and Republicans (18%) to say protesting against speakers is always acceptable.

### Student Views of Ways to Protest Speakers

Do you think each of the following actions that could be taken by college students are always acceptable, sometimes acceptable or never acceptable?

	% ALWAYS ACCEPTABLE	% SOMETIMES ACCEPTABLE	% NEVER ACCEPTABLE
<b>ENGAGING IN PROTESTS AGAINST SPEAKERS</b>			
All	36	50	14
Men	40	46	14
Women	34	53	13
Whites	39	48	13
Blacks	33	47	19
Democrats	47	44	9
Independents	33	52	15
Republicans	18	58	24
HBCU students	30	57	13
<b>SHOUTING DOWN SPEAKERS OR TRYING TO PREVENT THEM FROM TALKING</b>			
All	3	34	62
Men	3	30	67
Women	4	38	58
Whites	3	35	62
Blacks	4	32	63
Democrats	4	46	49
Independents	3	28	69
Republicans	2	19	78
HBCU students	6	36	58

<b>USING VIOLENCE TO STOP A SPEECH, PROTEST OR RALLY</b>			
All	1	9	90
Men	1	9	90
Women	1	9	90
Whites	1	8	91
Blacks	0	9	91
Democrats	1	9	90
Independents	1	10	89
Republicans	2	5	93
HBCU students	2	7	91

Other means of expressing dissent find varying levels of acceptance among college students. Ninety-four percent say distributing pamphlets or literature on controversial issues is acceptable at least sometimes, and 67% say the same about sit-ins or other attempts to disrupt campus operations.

Harkening back to the incidents surrounding campus protests on racial matters in the fall of 2015, 60% of college students say it is never acceptable to deny the press access to cover events on campus, while 39% say this is always or sometimes acceptable. As was the case in 2016, HBCU students show higher levels of support than other subgroups for denying press access to cover campus events. Currently, 56% of HBCU students say blocking the media from covering rallies or protests on campus is always (11%) or sometimes (45%) acceptable.

**Student Views of Forms of Protest**

Do you think each of the following actions that could be taken by college students are always acceptable, sometimes acceptable or never acceptable?

	% ALWAYS ACCEPTABLE	% SOMETIMES ACCEPTABLE	% NEVER ACCEPTABLE
<b>DISTRIBUTING PAMPHLETS OR LITERATURE ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES</b>			
All	53	41	5
Men	58	37	5
Women	50	45	5
Whites	58	38	4
Blacks	43	44	12
Democrats	53	42	5
Independents	53	41	6
Republicans	56	39	5
HBCU students	51	41	7

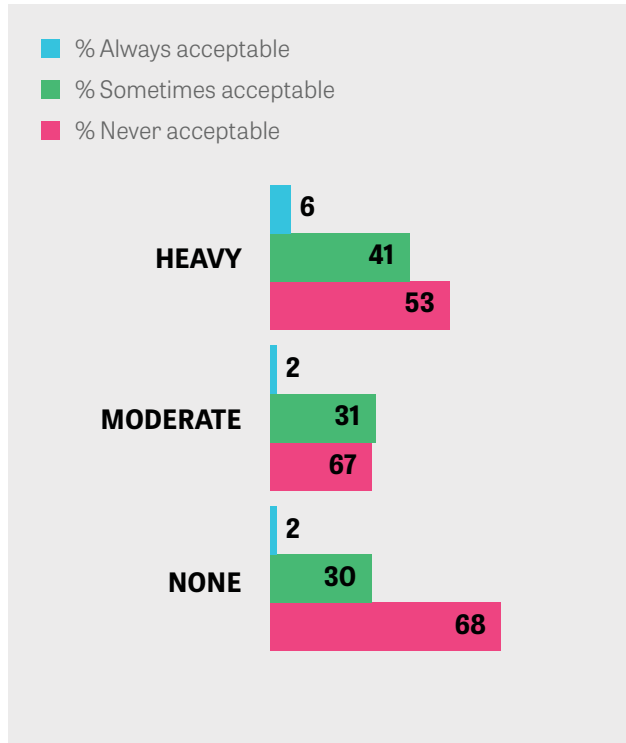
<b>ENGAGING IN SIT-INS OR SIMILAR ATTEMPTS TO DISRUPT OPERATIONS IN CAMPUS BUILDINGS</b>			
All	19	48	33
Men	15	49	36
Women	21	48	31
Whites	20	51	30
Blacks	24	41	34
Democrats	27	50	23
Independents	16	46	38
Republicans	5	51	44
HBCU students	25	39	36

<b>DENYING THE NEWS MEDIA ACCESS TO COVER A PROTEST OR RALLY ON CAMPUS</b>			
All	5	34	60
Men	5	27	68
Women	6	40	54
Whites	4	32	63
Blacks	7	34	58
Democrats	5	31	64
Independents	5	37	57
Republicans	7	36	56
HBCU students	11	45	43

Students who are more engaged with the news on social media are more likely than those who are less engaged to find shouting down speakers acceptable. Social media usage does not correlate with support for other practices that can prevent or promote speech.



### Opinions of Students Shouting Down Speakers, by Social Media Usage for Discussing Issues



### STUDENTS ARE NOT HIGHLY AWARE OF FREE SPEECH MATTERS ON CAMPUS

College students do not show a great deal of awareness about free speech issues or policies on their campus. Six in 10 students are unsure whether their college has a speech code, has a free speech zone, has disinvited a speaker because of student opposition or has canceled a planned speech because of concerns about violence. Most are aware of whether their campus has safe spaces — 62% say it does and 6% say it does not.

According to the reports of college students, 7% say their college has disinvited a speaker because of opposition from campus groups; 30% say this has not occurred at their college. Also, 5% say their college has canceled a planned speech because of concerns of violence; 35% say this has not happened.

Slightly more students report that their college has a speech code or a free speech zone than say it does not.

Awareness of campus policies or issues does not vary greatly by subgroup, although more Democrats than Republicans say their college has safe spaces.

### Student Awareness of Campus Policies

As far as you know, does your college have any of the following, or are you unsure?

	% YES	% NO	% UNSURE
<b>A FREE SPEECH ZONE</b>			
All	21	18	60
Men	20	20	60
Women	23	16	61
Whites	18	19	62
Blacks	24	21	55
Democrats	21	19	60
Independents	23	16	60
Republicans	18	20	62
HBCU students	37	18	45
<b>SAFE SPACES</b>			
All	62	6	32
Men	56	8	35
Women	67	5	29
Whites	62	7	31
Blacks	60	8	32
Democrats	68	6	26
Independents	60	5	34
Republicans	51	8	41
HBCU students	69	8	23

**Student Awareness of Campus Policies** *Cont'd.*

As far as you know, does your college have any of the following, or are you unsure?

	% YES	% NO	% UNSURE
<b>A SPEECH CODE</b>			
All	20	13	67
Men	24	15	61
Women	17	12	71
Whites	20	14	66
Blacks	14	13	72
Democrats	18	13	69
Independents	22	13	65
Republicans	20	14	66
HBCU students	22	12	66

**Student Awareness of Campus Actions on Controversial Speakers**

As far as you know, in the past year has your college ... or are you unsure?

	% YES	% NO	% UNSURE
<b>DISINVITED SPEAKERS BECAUSE SOME GROUPS OF STUDENTS WERE OPPOSED TO THE INVITATION</b>			
All	7	30	63
Men	8	33	58
Women	5	27	67
Whites	7	33	60
Blacks	4	26	70
Democrats	8	30	62
Independents	6	29	65
Republicans	5	32	63
HBCU students	5	30	65
<b>CANCELED A PLANNED SPEECH BECAUSE OF CONCERNS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF VIOLENT PROTESTS</b>			
All	5	35	60
Men	5	39	55
Women	4	32	64
Whites	4	39	57
Blacks	3	29	68
Democrats	6	36	58
Independents	4	33	63
Republicans	2	39	59
HBCU students	4	36	60

## STUDENTS MORE LIKELY TO PROTEST FOR DIVERSITY THAN FOR FREE SPEECH

College campuses have a long history of political activism. While participation in campus protests is relatively uncommon for students, 26% say they attended demonstrations or protests regarding issues of diversity and inclusion in the last 12 months. Far fewer attended a protest on free speech issues (12%) or against the appearance of a controversial speaker on campus (9%). Democrats were more likely to participate in all types of protests than Republicans were.

### Student Participation in Protest Activities

In the past year, have you personally attended demonstrations or protests on your campus for each of the following, or not?

	% YES, HAVE	% NO, HAVE NOT
<b>DEMONSTRATIONS OR PROTESTS REGARDING ISSUES OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION</b>		
All	26	74
Men	22	78
Women	29	71
Whites	25	75
Blacks	33	67
Democrats	36	64
Independents	22	78
Republicans	10	90
HBCU students	27	72

<b>DEMONSTRATIONS OR PROTESTS REGARDING FREE SPEECH</b>		
All	12	88
Men	12	88
Women	12	88
Whites	11	89
Blacks	19	81
Democrats	16	84
Independents	10	90
Republicans	6	94
HBCU students	24	76

<b>DEMONSTRATIONS OR PROTESTS AGAINST CONTROVERSIAL SPEAKERS</b>		
All	9	91
Men	8	92
Women	10	90
Whites	8	92
Blacks	11	89
Democrats	12	88
Independents	8	92
Republicans	4	96
HBCU students	15	85

Students who see their campus as lacking racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to report participating in protests about diversity and inclusion. Forty-one percent who describe their campus as “not very diverse” or “not diverse at all” say they attended protests on diversity and inclusion in the past year, compared with 22% of those who believe their campus is “highly diverse” or “somewhat diverse.”

Also, 39% of students who say they have ever felt uncomfortable on campus because of something they heard, versus 22% of those who have not felt uncomfortable, say they protested for diversity and inclusion in the past year.

Students who are aware that their campus had disinvited a speaker are far more likely to report protesting about free speech issues (30%) or against a controversial speaker (19%) than are those who say their campus had not revoked a speaking invitation (12% and 10%, respectively).

There are no meaningful differences in reports of protesting free speech issues according to whether a student’s campus does or does not have a speech code. In addition, students who regard free speech as more important to democracy than diversity and inclusion were no more likely to protest matters of free speech than were those who prioritize inclusion over free speech, 13% vs. 11%. However, students who prioritize diversity and inclusion are more likely to say they protested for inclusion (32%) than are those who prioritize free speech (19%).

## CONCLUSION

College students generally endorse First Amendment ideals in the abstract. The vast majority say free speech is important to democracy and favor an open learning environment that promotes the airing of a wide variety of ideas. However, the actions of some students in recent years — from milder actions such as claiming to be threatened by messages written in chalk promoting Trump’s candidacy to the most extreme acts of engaging in violence to stop attempted speeches — raise issues of just how committed college students are to upholding First Amendment ideals.

Most college students do not condone more aggressive actions to squelch speech, like violence and shouting down speakers, although there are some who do. However, students do support many policies or actions that place limits on speech, including free speech zones, speech codes and campus prohibitions on hate speech, suggesting that their commitment to free speech has limits. As one example, barely a majority think handing out literature on controversial issues is “always acceptable.”

Further, college students acknowledge that campus norms can act to deter speech — a larger majority than a year ago perceive that their campus climate prevents some people from expressing their ideas for fear of offending others. Also, students perceive that some groups on campus have a lesser ability to voice their opinions than other groups do.

Issues surrounding the First Amendment can present dilemmas for college officials, as they attempt to address student concerns about campus matters in a way that does not infringe on other students’ First Amendment rights. Some actions colleges have taken have been perceived by students, opinion leaders, public officials and the courts as going too far in restricting those rights.

Every year new controversies arise, driven by technological advances in communication, evolving social mores and new cohorts of students entering college who may have different understandings of what the Constitution guarantees its citizens. As such, colleges will need to continue to keep First Amendment considerations in mind when deciding on policies to meet these new challenges.

## METHODOLOGY

Results are based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 3,014 U.S. college students, aged 18 to 24, who are currently enrolled as full-time students at four-year colleges, including an oversample of 216 students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Gallup selected a random sample of 240 U.S. four-year colleges with enrollments of 500 students or more, which included 11 HBCUs, and an oversample of 23 additional HBCUs drawn from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Colleges were stratified by college enrollment size, public or private affiliation, and region of the country. Gallup then contacted each sampled college in an attempt to obtain a sample of its students. Thirty-nine colleges agreed to participate. The group of colleges included six HBCUs, 25 public and 14 private institutions, six from the East, 12 from the Midwest, 15 from the South and six from the West. Ten colleges had enrollments of 10,000 students or more, 12 had enrollments between 5,000 and 10,000 students, and 17 had enrollments of less than 5,000.

Gallup used random samples of 40% of each college's student body (70% for HBCUs), with one school providing a 20% sample, for its sample frame. The sample frame consisted of 93,164 college students from the 39 colleges. Gallup then emailed each sampled student to complete an internet survey to confirm his or her eligibility for the study. Gallup also requested a phone number where the student could be reached for a telephone interview. A total of 10,355 college students completed the web survey for a response rate of 11%. Of these, 9,409 students were eligible and provided a working phone number, and 6,702 of those phone numbers were attempted. Telephone interviews were conducted Nov. 1-Dec. 10, 2017. The response rate for the phone survey was 47% using the American Association for Public Opinion Research's RR-III calculation. The combined response rate for the web recruit and telephone surveys was 5%.

The college student sample was weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. It was also weighted to match the demographics of U.S. colleges on enrollment, public or private affiliation, region of the country, and HBCU status, based on statistics from the IPEDS database, to ensure the sample is nationally representative of U.S. college students. For results based on the total sample of college students, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 2$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For results based on the sample of HBCU students, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 9$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

Percentages in the tables and graphs may not total 100% due to rounding.

Not all questions asked in the survey are reported in this report. The full questionnaire, topline results, detailed cross tabulations and raw data may be obtained upon request.

**Sample Characteristics**

	<b>SAMPLE SIZE (UNWEIGHTED)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF WEIGHTED SAMPLE</b>
All college students	3,014	100
HBCU students	216	2
Black students, non-HBCU	193	8
Men	1,231	44
Women	1,781	56
Hispanic	492	14
Non-Hispanic white	1,758	63
Non-Hispanic black	351	9
Asian	367	12
Democrat	1,376	42
Independent	1,203	41
Republican	419	16
Democrat/Lean Democrat	2,116	66
Republican/Lean Republican	720	27
Protestant/Other Christian	894	28
Catholic	577	18

Jewish	126	5
Mormon	76	6
Muslim	83	2
No religion	1,096	36
Upper/Upper- middle class	916	32
Middle class	1,297	44
Lower/Working class	790	24
Big/Small city	852	27
Suburb	1,303	44
Town/Rural area	848	28
Liberal	1,392	43
Moderate	1,162	41
Conservative	433	15
Age 18	674	22
Age 19	617	20
Age 20	598	20
Age 21	618	20
Age 22+	507	18
First-year students	818	28
Second-year students	629	21
Third-year students	708	22
Fourth-year or higher students	854	28

**Sample Characteristics** *Cont'd.*

	<b>SAMPLE SIZE (UNWEIGHTED)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF WEIGHTED SAMPLE</b>
College located in East	406	21
College located in Midwest	1,209	24
College located in South	738	34
College located in West	661	21
Public college student	2,190	71
Private college student	824	29
Enrollment less than 10,000	1,115	41
Enrollment 10,000+	1,899	59



## ABOUT GALLUP

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

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## ABOUT THE JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION

The Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy.

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## ABOUT THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

Celebrating its centennial in 2018, ACE is the major coordinating body for all the nation's higher education institutions, representing nearly 1,800 college and university presidents and related associations. It provides leadership on key higher education issues and influences public policy through advocacy.

For more information, visit [www.acenet.edu](http://www.acenet.edu).

## ABOUT THE CHARLES KOCH FOUNDATION

More than 50 years ago, Charles G. Koch began supporting education in the belief that everyone has the ability to learn, contribute, and succeed if they have the freedom and opportunity to do so. The Charles Koch Foundation, founded in 1980, continues this work by funding research and education that helps people expand their horizons, develop their skills, and help others. Through grants to more than 350 colleges and universities nationwide and non-profit organizations, the Foundation connects scholars, students, and partners with the resources to explore diverse ideas and solutions that meet the challenges of our day.

For more information, visit [charleskochfoundation.org](https://charleskochfoundation.org).

## ABOUT THE STANTON FOUNDATION

The Stanton Foundation was created by Frank Stanton, who is widely regarded as one of the greatest executives in the history of electronic communications and one of the television industry's founding fathers. The Foundation's interests include classic and 21<sup>st</sup> century First Amendment issues, and the larger challenge of the creation of a better informed citizenry.

For more information, visit [thestantonfoundation.org](http://thestantonfoundation.org).

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