2025 College Free Speech Rankings
Indiana University

243
OVERALL RANK

POOR

SPEECH CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT RATING

FIRE
Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

2025 College Free Speech Rankings
Indiana University

Executive Summary

FOR THE FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), a nonprofit organization committed to defending and sustaining the individual rights of all Americans to free speech and free thought, and College Pulse surveyed college undergraduates about their perceptions and experiences regarding free speech on their campuses.

This year's survey includes 58,807 student respondents from 257 colleges and universities. Students who were enrolled in four-year degree programs were surveyed via the College Pulse mobile app and web portal from January 25 through June 17, 2024.

The College Free Speech Rankings are available online and are presented in an interactive dashboard (**rankings.thefire.org**) that allows for easy comparison between institutions.

Indiana University (IU) was one of the 257 schools surveyed. Key findings from this school include:

- A ranking of 243 overall, with an overall score 24.67 and a "Poor" speech climate.

- Among other ranked schools in Indiana, IU was at the bottom, coming in behind Purdue University (30), DePauw University (36), and the University of Notre Dame (167).

- Other nearby public institutions also ranked above IU, including Kent State University (44), the University of Illinois, Chicago (77), the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (104), Southern Illinois, Carbondale (138), Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville (171), the University of Kentucky (172), and Ohio State University (174).

- IU performs poorly on "Administrative Support" (231), a performance that captures the long-term impact of four scholar sanctions, three student or student group sanctions, two deplatformings, and one attempted event disruption. It also captures the impact of how IU handled the student encampment protest on campus this past spring.

- IU also performs poorly on "Openness" (198) and "Comfort Expressing Ideas" (211).

- IU's overall score was penalized because of the outcomes of 10 different speech controversies that have occurred since 2021.

- Maintaining speech policies that earn it a "yellow light" rating from FIRE. If IU modified its speech policies to obtain a "green light" rating, it would rank 197 in this year's College Free Speech Rankings with an overall score of 39.67.

Full Report

IN 2020, FIRE, in collaboration with College Pulse and RealClearEducation, launched a first-of-its-kind tool to help high school students and their parents identify which colleges promote and protect the free exchange of ideas: the College Free Speech Rankings. The response to the rankings report and corresponding online tool was overwhelmingly positive.

This year FIRE and College Pulse surveyed 257 schools, ranking 251 of them.[1] Indiana University, with a score of 24.67, has a "Poor" speech climate and ranks 243 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings.

HOW COMFORTABLE ARE IU STUDENTS EXPRESSING THEIR VIEWS ON CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS?

IU ranks 211 on the "Comfort Expressing Ideas" component.

Less than half of IU students say they are "very" or "somewhat" comfortable expressing their views on controversial political topics in each of the five contexts asked about, and overall IU students report slightly less comfort expressing their views on controversial politics compared to students nationally.

- Almost half of IU students (46%) say they are "very" or "somewhat" comfortable disagreeing with a professor on a controversial political topic in a written assignment compared to half of students nationally.

- More than two-fifths of IU students say they are "very" or "somewhat" comfortable expressing their views in a common campus space, like a lounge (44%) or during an in-class discussion (43%) compared to 50% and 47% of students nationally, respectively.

- More than one-third of IU students (37%) say they are "very" or "somewhat" comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor on a controversial political topic compared to 39% of students nationally.

- About a quarter of IU students (26%) say they are "very" or "somewhat" comfortable expressing an unpopular political opinion to their fellow students on a social media account tied to their name compared to 34% of students nationally.

IU students report similar levels of comfort expressing controversial political views this year compared to last year. However, over the past four years comfort expressing controversial political views in four of the five contexts has declined considerably. The only exception to this is the percentage of IU students comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor over a controversial political topic, which has fluctuated between 35% and 38% since 2021.

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1 Six of the schools surveyed received a "Warning" rating from FIRE for their speech policies. An overall score was calculated separately for these schools, comparing them only to each other.
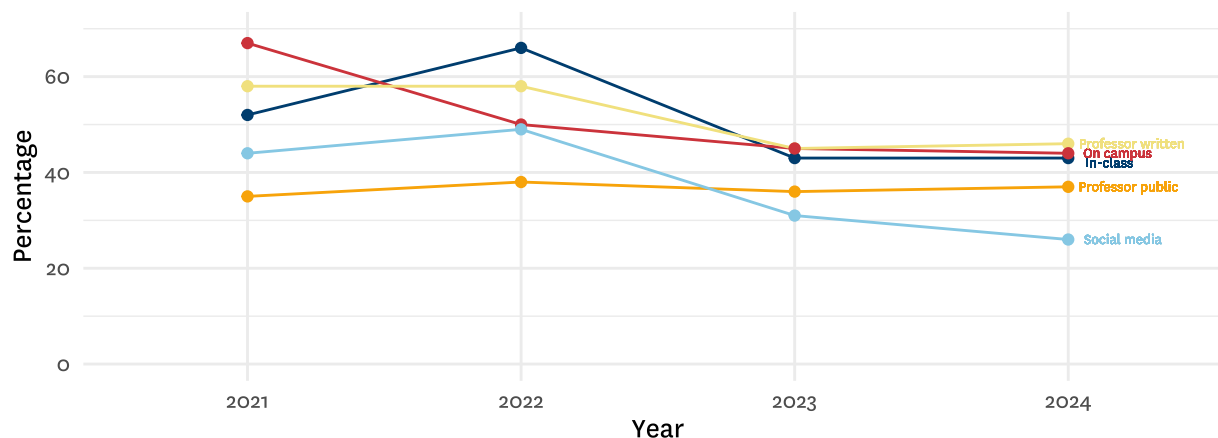
HOW OFTEN ARE IU STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

IU ranks 143 on the "Self-Censorship" component.

About a third of IU students report self-censoring during classroom discussions (31%), slightly more than the 26% of students who say they self-censor that frequently during classroom discussions nationally.

This year when asked how often they felt that they could not express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond, 22% of IU students say they self-censor "very" or "fairly" often. This is identical to the 22% who said this last year and similar to the 20% who said it two years ago.

WHAT TOPICS ARE DIFFICULT FOR IU STUDENTS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT?

IU ranks 198 on the "Openness" Component.

More than half of IU students say that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (59%) and abortion (52%) are difficult to have open and honest conversation about on campus. A substantial portion of IU students also say that transgender rights (47%) and gun control (44%) are difficult to discuss.

IU students consistently identify abortion, gun control, and transgender rights as topics difficult to discuss on campus, along with racial inequality, although difficulty discussing the latter has declined since its peak in 2021. In contrast, up until this year roughly a quarter of IU students have said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a difficult topic to discuss on campus.

FIGURE 2   Students Who Find These Topics Difficult to Talk About (%)
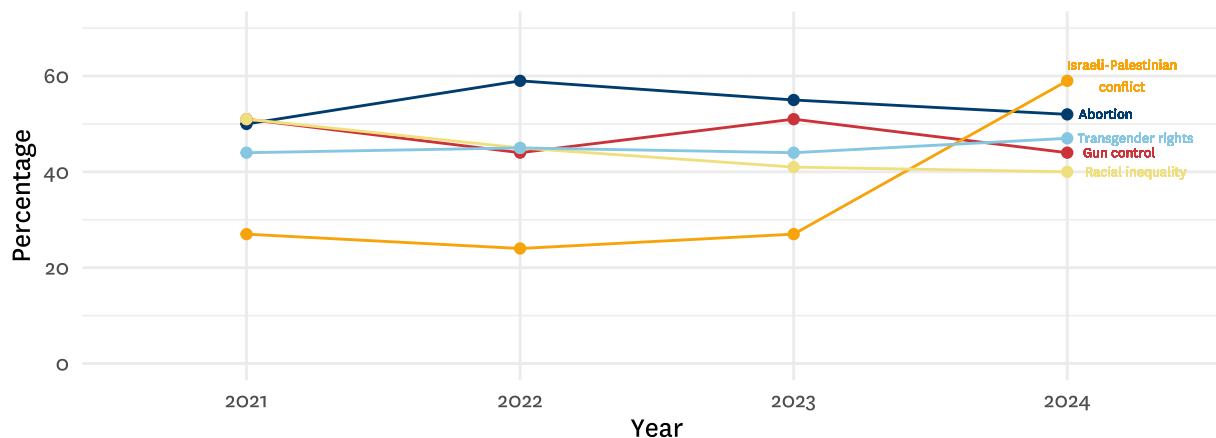
WHICH SPEAKERS DO IU STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

IU ranks 115 on the "Tolerance Difference" component, 124 on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers," 134 on "Mean Tolerance," and 142 on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers."

This mediocre performance masks the fact that IU students are not very tolerant of controversial speakers, regardless of whether they are conservative or liberal.

IU students were asked if eight different controversial speakers should or should not be allowed to speak on campus and a majority of IU students oppose allowing six of the eight speakers on campus:

- One-third of IU students say that a speaker who said "transgender people have a mental disorder" should "definitely" or "probably" be allowed on campus. The same percentage says this about a speaker who said "Black Lives Matter is a hate group."

- Roughly two-fifths of IU students (41%) say that a speaker who said "collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security" should "definitely" or "probably" be allowed on campus.

- Almost half of IU students (49%) say that a speaker who said "the Catholic church is a pedophilic institution" should "definitely" or "probably" be allowed on campus; 49% also say this about a speaker who said that abortion should be completely illegal; and 48% say this about a speaker who said that "the police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan."

The only two speakers that a majority of IU students say should "definitely" or "probably" be allowed on campus said either "children should be able to transition without parental consent" (58%) or "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" (71%).

WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO IU STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

IU ranks 110 on the "Disruptive Conduct" component.

IU students are similar to students nationally when considering what kinds of disruptive protest conduct they consider acceptable:

- Two-thirds of IU students say it is at least "rarely" acceptable for college students to shout down a speaker on campus compared to 68% of students nationally.

- Half of IU students say it is at least "rarely" acceptable for college students to block other students from attending a campus speech compared to 52% of students nationally.

- Roughly two-thirds of IU students (32%) say it is at least "rarely" acceptable for college students to use violence to stop a campus speech, the same percentage of students nationally say that the use of violence is at least "rarely" acceptable.

HOW IS IU'S ADMINISTRATIVE STANCE ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH PERCEIVED?

IU ranks 231 on the "Administrative Support" component.

Roughly a third of IU students (35%) say that it is "not at all" or "not very" clear that the IU's administration protects free speech on campus, compared to a quarter (26%) of IU students who say it was "extremely" or "very" clear. Worse, almost two-fifths of IU students (38%) say it is "not at all" or "not very" likely that IU's administration would defend a speaker's rights during a controversy, compared to 15% of IU students who say that it is "extremely" or "very" likely the IU administration would do so.

This performance is likely a result of how IU's administration has handled a number of recent speech controversies combined with how students reacted to IU's decision to revise its assembly ground policy in a midnight meeting so that when student protesters began setting up an encampment protest the next day, administrators called the police, who then dismantled it and arrested 33 students for trespassing. State police also confirmed that officers "with sniper capabilities" were positioned on rooftops overlooking the protesters.[2]

Schools were not penalized for how they handled the encampment protests. FIRE made this decision because of the messy nature of determining whether the school acted reasonably in every situation — most schools were faced with a combination of First Amendment-protected expression and disruptive conduct that is not protected speech. The government can impose reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions on expression, provided these restrictions are content-neutral, serve a significant government interest, and leave open an ample number of alternative channels for the expression.

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2   Knox, L. (April 30, 2024). Abrupt Changes to Protest Policies Raise Alarm: Indiana University changed a 55-year-old policy on student assembly hours before protesters set up an encampment. Free speech advocates are worried. Available online: **https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/free-speech/2024/04/30/indiana-protest-policy-change-raises-free-speech-concerns#**.

This means that the administration's response to the encampment is not directly factored into IU's overall score in this year's College Free Speech Rankings. However, a comparison of IU's "Administrative Support" score before the administration called the police to its "Administrative Support" score afterwards, or during the nationwide encampment protests, indicates that IU students reacted negatively to the administration's response.

Before the encampment protests began and, thus, before IU's administration called the police to campus who then positioned snipers on rooftops overlooking the protesters, 30% of IU students said it was "not at all" or "not very" clear that the IU's administration protects free speech on campus; during them, 41% of IU students felt this way. In a similar vein, before the encampment protest began, 35% of IU students said it was "not at all" or "not very" likely that IU's administration would defend a speaker's rights during a controversy; after the encampment began, 44% of IU students felt this way.

This increased lack of confidence shows up in IU's "Administrative Support" score. Before the encampment started it was 5.64, a score that would rank 212, an improvement on IU's current ranking of 231. After the police were called to campus however, IU's Administrative Support score dropped to 5.28, a score that would rank 244. This decline is statistically significant.[3]

A 'YELLOW LIGHT' SCHOOL WITH A LOT CONTROVERSY

FIRE awards IU's regulations on student expression a "yellow light" rating, flagging six policies that earn that rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. These include a chilling bias reporting policy that directs students to report hate incidents, three harassment policies that fail to track the Supreme Court's standard for peer harassment in the educational setting, and a residence hall policy that vaguely bans verbal or written abuse without defining that term. Perhaps of greatest concern is a policy from the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct that states that students who accept admission to IU agree to "behave in a manner that is respectful of the dignity of others, treating others with civility and understanding." Civility is a laudable goal for students to aspire to, but mandates on civility can all too easily be applied by administrators to punish disfavored speech. IU must revise these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

If IU modified its speech policies to obtain a "green light" rating, it would rank 197 in this year's College Free Speech Rankings with an overall score of 39.67.

Since 2021, FIRE has recorded two deplatformings of invited speakers, one attempted disruption of a speaking event, four incidents when scholars were sanctioned, and three incidents when students or student groups were sanctioned. All of these incidents negatively impacted IU's overall score.

Both deplatformings occurred in 2024. In December 2023, administrators canceled a retrospective art exhibit of paintings scheduled to open in the spring semester by Samia Halaby, a Palestinian-American painter, at the university's Eskenazi Museum of Art. This decision was reportedly made because employees of the art museum had concerns about Halaby's comments on social media in support of Palestinian causes, in which she expressed outrage at the violence occurring in Gaza and compared Israel's actions to

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3    $t(571) = 2.34$, $p = .02$, Cohen's d = 0.20.

genocide, although a university spokesperson later cited concerns about "guaranteeing the integrity of the exhibit for its duration."

Then in March, IU Hillel postponed Yousef's talk, "The Truth About Hamas and Israel," after multiple student groups, including the Palestine Solidarity Committee and the Middle Eastern Student Association, criticized the event and called Yousef "Islamophobic." A counterprotest was organized and a flier listed 30 buses leaving from eight different locations throughout the state. The university then informed Yousef that it was postponing the event because of "security threats involving the Muslim community and several white supremacist groups." Yousef's talk has yet to be rescheduled.

The attempted disruption also occurred in 2024. On the day before an event organized by the College Republicans featuring Chaya Raichick and Representative Jim Banks, a local Antifa group, Red Orchestra_ AFA, posted on X: "Indiana and fishers Indiana. Libs of TT homophobic bigot Chaya Raichik and far right bigot Jim banks will be speaking at 2 locations. You know what to do." On the day of the event, IU Alumni for Palestine posted an image on Instagram with an image of Raichick and Banks with their mouths covered and urged their supporters to stop "bigots on campus." At the event, protesters reportedly "pushed" and harassed attendees there to listen to the speakers and chanted "how many kids has she (Raichick) killed today?" Protesters also shouted that Raichick had "blood [on her] hands" and accused both speakers of supporting "genocide" and that they are "killing children." After several protesters were removed by police, the event resumed and was completed successfully.

IU has experienced four separate incidents that resulted in one or more scholar sanctions since 2020:

- In 2021, IU investigated Professor Steve Sanders by filing a public records request for Sanders' emails relating to the university's presidential search.

- In 2022, after several faculty leaders wrote a letter opposing proposed state abortion legislation and defending a colleague, the university system's administration sent them a warning that their actions were grounds for discipline for violating university policy on conveying a personal opinion without administrative approval.

- In 2023, Professor Albdulkader Sinno was suspended after the administration denied a room reservation to the Palestine Solidarity Committee, a group advised by Sinno. In response, 14 current and former faculty wrote a petition in defense of Sinno.

- In 2024, multiple faculty who were members of the group Friends of Kinsey asserted that an IU administrator violated their free speech rights by demanding the group move their table.

In 2022, IU censored the Indiana Daily Student by delaying or denying responses to public records requests by student journalists. Campus police also investigated the IP address used to post antisemitic comments on a non-university gossip forum, "Greek Rank," in an attempt to identify the student who posted the comments. In 2023, after students demanded IU take action against Hailey Toch for posting a controversial video on social media about her Palestinian neighbor, the Dean of Students Office and the IU Bias Response and Education team investigated the incident.

Finally, as noted above, schools were not penalized for how they handled the encampment protests. But IU still experienced a major speech controversy this past spring with how it handled students' initial attempts to establish an encampment in Dunn Meadow on campus protesting Israel's military operations in Gaza. After learning of students' plans to set up an encampment in Dunn Meadow the next morning,

administrators rushed to convene an ad hoc committee and amend the assembly ground policy overnight. The revised policy requires prior administrative approval before "temporary or permanent installation of outdoor structures" occurs. It also prohibits the use of any "signage" or "tents." The policy change was posted at Dunn Meadow on the morning of the planned protest and in a drop-down menu on the university website. When students began to set up the encampment, administrators called the police who then dismantled it and arrested 33 students for trespassing. State police also confirmed that officers "with sniper capabilities" were positioned on rooftops overlooking the protesters.[4]

This response differs starkly from how IU handled similar protests a few generations ago. In the spring of 1986, after the university's Board of Trustees voted multiple times against divesting from South Africa the prior fall, about 40 students began erecting an encampment, or a "shanty town," in Dunn Meadow on campus. The structures emulated the housing that many Blacks in South Africa lived in under apartheid. The university allowed the structures to remain through the end of the spring, throughout the summer, and into the fall semester. The protesters voluntarily dismantled the "shanty town" in December and moved their protest efforts indoors. As recently as 2014, volunteers at a homeless shelter camped in Dunn Meadow to raise awareness about homelessness and to collect donations.[5]

HOW CAN IU IMPROVE?

The easiest thing IU can do to improve its rating in next year's College Free Speech Rankings is revising its "yellow light" speech policies. Doing this publicly, with a push to make students aware of these changes, might signal that IU is starting a new chapter, one where it unequivocally supports freedom of speech and is poised to defend it when controversy arises. Such revisions might also be a helpful way to communicate what activities and behaviors are acceptable for protest and which are not.

However, obtaining a "green light" rating does not itself guarantee that a school actively supports free speech. Student perceptions of an administration's support for free speech on campus are just that — perceptions — which are subject to their own idiosyncrasies and could quickly change year-to-year due to the turnover in undergraduate students. The proof of whether a school truly supports free expression as a core value is revealed when that core value is inevitably tested by controversy.

Unfortunately, when tested this past year, IU repeatedly failed. Since January, IU has experienced the cancellation of a retrospective art exhibit of paintings by a Palestinian artist in January, the postponement of an Israeli speaker's talk, the attempted disruption of an event featuring a member of the House of Representatives, and the arrests of students setting up an encampment protest.

We find IU's response to the encampment protests troubling.

IU can of course place time, place, and manner restrictions on expression, provided these restrictions are content-neutral, serve a significant government interest, and leave open an ample number of alternative

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4 Knox, L. (April 30, 2024). Abrupt Changes to Protest Policies Raise Alarm: Indiana University changed a 55-year-old policy on student assembly hours before protesters set up an encampment. Free speech advocates are worried. Available online: **https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/free-speech/2024/04/30/indiana-protest-policy-change-raises-free-speech-concerns#**.

5 IDS Staff. (March 27, 2014). Winter shelter to close, volunteers raise awareness. Available online: **https://www.idsnews.com/article/2014/03/winter-shelter-to-close-volunteers-raise-awareness**.

channels for the expression.[6] These restrictions include limits on amplified sound, the number of people who can safely gather in a particular space, holding demonstrations early in the morning or late in the evening, the kinds of signs that can be placed on government property, erecting structures, and camping.[7]

Students in violation of reasonable, content-neutral rules risk arrest and/or disciplinary action. If punishment is viewpoint-neutral, proportional, and consistent with past practice, then it is not a violation of an individual's expressive rights. IU's revised policy allows them to remove an encampment on campus.

Regardless of whether IU's administration was within its rights to end the encampment protest, it is not surprising that the percentage of IU students who say it is clear that their administration protects free speech on campus and the percentage who say it is likely their administration will defend a speaker's rights during a controversy both declined after the arrests of the encampment protesters. The decisions administrators and other school leaders make in response to campus speech controversies are likely to have a more lasting influence on a school's expression climate than its policies or its students' perceptions of "Administrative Support." When a decision is made unequivocally in defense of free speech, it sends one kind of message to a school's students and faculty. When a response is tepid or, worse, violates someone's expressive rights, it sends a very different kind of message — one that usually chills the campus speech climate. In recent years IU's reactions to campus speech controversies have involved substantially more of the latter than the former. Defending the speech rights of students, scholars, and invited speakers on campus would provide IU with a boost, instead of a penalty, in the College Free Speech Rankings.

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6   Harris, S. (November 6, 2012). Misunderstanding 'Time, Place, and Manner' Restrictions. Available online: **https://www.thefire.org/news/misunderstanding-time-place-and-manner-restrictions**.

7   See *Clark v. Community for Creative Non-Violence*, 468 U.S. 288, 297 (Finding that a prohibition on sleeping overnight in a National Park was a reasonable time, place, or manner restriction).

Methodology

THE COLLEGE FREE SPEECH RANKINGS SURVEY was developed by FIRE and administered by College Pulse. No donors to the project took part in designing or conducting the survey. The survey was fielded from January 25 through June 17, 2024. These data come from a sample of 58,807 undergraduates who were then enrolled full-time in four-year degree programs at one of a list of 258 colleges and universities in the United States. The margin of error for the U.S. undergraduate population is +/- 0.4 of a percentage point, and the margin of error for college student sub-demographics ranges from 2-5 percentage points.

The initial sample was drawn from College Pulse's American College Student Panel™, which includes more than 850,000 verified undergraduate students and recent alumni from schools within a range of more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members were recruited by a number of methods to help ensure student diversity in the panel population. These methods include web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university-affiliated organizations. To ensure the panel reflects the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the American college population, College Pulse recruited panelists from a wide variety of institutions. The panel includes students attending large public universities, small private colleges, online universities, historically Black colleges such as Howard University, women's colleges such as Smith College, and religiously-affiliated colleges such as Brigham Young University.

College Pulse uses a two-stage validation process to ensure that all its surveys include only students currently enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges or universities. Students are required to provide an ".edu" email address to join the panel and, for this survey, had to acknowledge that they are currently enrolled full-time in a four-year degree program. All invitations to complete surveys were sent using the student's ".edu" email address or through a notification in the College Pulse app, available on iOS and Android platforms.

College Pulse applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The "weight" rebalances the sample based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IFP) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables to produce a representative sample of four year undergraduate students in the United States.

This year College Pulse introduced a similar post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The "school universe weight" rebalances the sample based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IFP) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables to produce a representative sample of four year undergraduate students from the 257 colleges and universities surveyed.

College Pulse also applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). This "school weight" rebalances the sample from each individual school surveyed based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IFP) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables to produce a representative sample of students at each individual school.

All weights are trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results and to ensure over-sampled population groups do not completely lose their voice.

The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target populations. Even with these adjustments, surveys may be subject to error or bias due to question wording, context, and order effects.

For further information, please see: **https://collegepulse.com/methodology**.

FREE SPEECH RANKINGS

The College Free Speech Rankings are based on a composite score of 14 components, seven of which assess student perceptions of different aspects of the speech climate on their campus. The other seven assess behavior by administrators, faculty, and students regarding free expression on campus. Higher scores indicate a better campus climate for free speech and expression.

Student Perceptions

The student perception components include:

- **Comfort Expressing Ideas:** Students were asked how comfortable they feel expressing their views on controversial topics in five different campus settings (e.g., "in class," or "in the dining hall"). Options ranged from "very uncomfortable" to "very comfortable." Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate greater comfort expressing ideas. The maximum number of points is 20.

- **Self-Censorship:** Students were provided with a definition of self-censorship and then asked how often they self-censored in three different settings on campus (e.g., "in a classroom discussion"). Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate self-censoring less often. The maximum number of points is 15.[8]

- **Tolerance for Liberal Speakers:** Students were asked whether three speakers espousing views potentially offensive to conservatives (e.g., "The police are just as racist as the Klu[*sic*] Klux Klan.") should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agree with the speaker's message. Options ranged from "definitely should not allow this speaker" to "definitely should allow

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8   The self-censorship component was introduced this year and is a composite score of responses to the three questions that are presented after self-censorship is defined. In previous years other questions were used to measure self-censorship and they were factored into the "Comfort Expressing Ideas" component.

this speaker" and were coded so that higher scores indicate more tolerance of the speaker (i.e., more support for allowing the speaker on campus). The maximum number of points is 12.

- **Tolerance for Conservative Speakers:** Students were also asked whether three speakers espousing views potentially offensive to liberals (e.g., "Black Lives Matter is a hate group") should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agree with the speaker's message. Scoring was performed in the same manner as it was for the "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" subcomponent, and the maximum number of points is 12.

- **Disruptive Conduct:** Students were asked how acceptable it is to engage in different methods of protest against a campus speaker, including "shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus," "blocking other students from attending a campus speech," and "using violence to stop a campus speech." Options ranged from "always acceptable" to "never acceptable" and were coded so that higher scores indicate less acceptance of disruptive conduct. The maximum number of points is 12.

- **Administrative Support:** Students were asked how clear it is their administration protects free speech on campus and how likely the administration would be to defend a speaker's right to express their views if a controversy over speech occurred on campus. For the administrative clarity question, options range from "not at all clear" to "extremely clear," and for the administrative controversy question, options range from "not at all likely" to "extremely likely." Options were coded so that higher scores indicate greater clarity and a greater likelihood of defending a speaker's rights. The maximum number of points is 10.

- **Openness:** Finally, students were asked which of 20 issues (e.g., "abortion," "freedom of speech," "gun control," and "racial inequality"), if any, are difficult to have open conversations about on campus. Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate fewer issues being selected. The maximum number of points is 20.

Two additional constructs, "Mean Tolerance" and "Tolerance Difference," were computed from the "Tolerance for Liberal/Conservative Speaker" components. "Tolerance Difference" was calculated by subtracting "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" from "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" and then taking the absolute value (so that a bias in favor of either side would be treated the same).

Campus Behavioral Metrics

Schools received bonus points — described in more detail below — for unequivocally supporting free expression in response to speech controversies by taking the following actions indicative of a positive campus climate for free speech:

- Supporting free expression during a deplatforming campaign, as recorded in FIRE's Campus Deplatforming database.[9]

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9   A full list of all the deplatforming incidents that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: **https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit? gid=1964386004#gid=1964386004**. The full Campus Deplatforming database is available on FIRE's website at **https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/campus-deplatforming-database**.

- Supporting a scholar whose speech rights were threatened during a free speech controversy, as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire database.[10]

- Supporting students and student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.[11]

Schools were penalized — described in more detail below — for taking the following actions indicative of poor campus climate for free speech:

- Successfully deplatforming a speaker, as recorded in FIRE's Campus Deplatforming database.

- Sanctioning a scholar (e.g., placing under investigation, suspending, or terminating a scholar), as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire database.

- Sanctioning a student or student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.

To be included in this year's rankings, an incident that resulted in a bonus or penalty had to have been recorded by June 15, 2024, and had to have been fully assessed by FIRE's research staff, who determined whether the incident warranted inclusion.

In response to the encampment protests, FIRE and College Pulse reopened the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings survey on any campus with an encampment. This allowed us to collect survey data from students while the encampments were taking place.[12] That means that this year's College Free Speech Rankings provide a treasure trove of data on the evolving state of free expression at American colleges and universities.

FIRE's Spotlight ratings — our ratings of the written policies governing student speech at nearly 500 institutions of higher education in the United States — also factored into each school's overall score. Three substantive ratings are possible: "red light," "yellow light," and "green light." A "red light" rating indicates that the institution has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech. A "yellow light" rating indicates that an institution maintains at least one policy that places a clear restriction on a more limited amount of protected expression, or one that, by virtue of vague wording, could too easily be used to restrict protected expression. A "green light" rating indicates that an institution maintains no policies that seriously threaten speech, although this rating does not indicate whether a college actively supports free expression.[13]

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10   A full list of all the scholar sanction attempts that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: **https:// docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=1204583933#gid=1204583933**. The full Scholars Under Fire database is available on FIRE's website at **https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/scholars-under-fire**.

11   All data reported in this section reflect the Students Under Fire database as of June 15, 2024. A full list of all the student sanction attempts that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: **https://docs.google.com/ spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=472255842#gid=472255842**. The full Students Under Fire database is currently internal to FIRE but will be released in full in early 2025.

12   Schools were not penalized for how they handled the encampment protests. As this report demonstrates, the impact of the encampment protests on the campus speech climate is captured by responses to survey questions that ask students about their confidence in that their college administration protects speech rights on campus; their comfort expressing controversial political views; and, their frequency of self-censorship. Deplatformings that occurred during the encampment protests were also still included in the calculation of the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings.

13   See: Using FIRE's Spotlight Database. Available online: **https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/using-fires-spotlight-database**.

Finally, a fourth rating, "Warning," is assigned to a private college or university when its policies clearly and consistently state that it prioritizes other values over a commitment to free speech. "Warning" schools, therefore, were not ranked, and their overall scores are presented separately in this report.[14]

For this year's rankings, the cutoff date for assessing a school's speech code policies was June 15, 2024. Any changes to a school's Spotlight rating that occurred since then will be reflected in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings.

Overall Score

To create an overall score for each college, we first summed the following student subcomponents: "Comfort Expressing Ideas," "Self-Censorship," "Mean Tolerance," "Disruptive Conduct," "Administrative Support," and "Openness." Then, we subtracted the "Tolerance Difference." By including the "Mean Tolerance" (as opposed to including "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" and "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" separately) and subtracting the "Tolerance Difference," the score accounted for the possibility that ideologically homogeneous student bodies may result in a campus that *appears* to have a strong culture of free expression but is actually hostile to the views of an ideological minority — whose views students may almost never encounter on campus.

Then, to further account for the speech climate on an individual campus, we incorporated behavioral components. A school earned two bonus points each time it unequivocally defended free expression during a campus speech controversy — a rating of "High Honors" for its public response to a speech controversy. For instance, when the student government at Arizona State University opposed a registered student group's invitation to Mohammed el-Kurd to speak on campus, and other members of the campus community petitioned the university to disinvite el-Kurd, a university spokesperson responded:

> *The university is committed to a safe environment where the free exchange of ideas can take place . . . As a public university, ASU adheres to the First Amendment and strives to ensure the fullest degree of intellectual freedom and free expression. All individuals and groups on campus have the right to express their opinions, whatever those opinions may be, as long as they do not violate the student code of conduct, student organization policies, and do not infringe on another student's individual rights.*

el-Kurd spoke successfully on campus, and we awarded ASU two bonus points.

A school earned one bonus point for responding to a speech controversy by making a public statement that strongly defends the First Amendment but is not as full-throated a defense as a "High Honors" statement. These statements received the rating of "Honors." For instance, at New York University, NYU Law Students for Palestine and Jewish Law Students for a Free Palestine called for the cancellation of an event featuring Robert Howse and Michal Cotler-Wunsh, because Cotler-Wunsh supports the occupation of Palestine. The event was co-sponsored by a student group, NYU's Jewish Law Students Association, as well as the president's office and the Bronfman Center for Jewish Life. NYU did not cancel the event, and protesters interrupted Cotler-Wunsh several times during his remarks before voluntarily leaving, allowing the event to resume and conclude successfully. The dean of the law school said the following in response:

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14   The Spotlight Database is available on FIRE's website: **https://www.thefire.org/resources/spotlight/**.

> *The principles of free speech and inquiry are complemented by debate, challenge and protest . . . While dissent may be vigorous, it must not interfere with the speaker's ability to communicate — which is exactly why, should those interrupters not have left on their own accord, they would be subject to discipline.*

We awarded one point for this response, which occurred in 2024, then we set this bonus to decrease by one-quarter of a point for each year that passes.

We also applied penalties when a school sanctioned a scholar, student, or student group, or deplatformed a speaker.

A school lost up to five points each time it sanctioned (e.g., investigated, suspended, or terminated) a scholar. When the sanction did not result in termination the school received a penalty of one point, which we set to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year: This meant penalizing a school a full point for sanctioning a scholar in 2024, three-quarters of a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2023, half a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2022, and one-quarter of a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2021. However, if the administration terminated the scholar, we subtracted three points, and if that scholar was tenured, we subtracted five points. We applied full penalties for termination for four years, then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year. So, a penalty for termination that occurred in 2020 has just now started to decay.

A school lost up to three points for sanctioning students or student groups. When the sanction did not result in expulsion, the revocation of acceptance, the denial or revoking of recognition, suspension, or termination of a student's campus employment (e.g, as a resident assistant) the school received a penalty of one point. Like with scholar sanctions that did not result in termination, we set these penalties to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. If a school suspended a student or terminated their campus employment, we penalized it two points. We also set these penalties to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. However, if a school denied or revoked a student group's recognition, expelled a student, or revoked their acceptance, it was penalized three points. We applied these penalties in full for four years, and then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year.

Regarding deplatforming attempts, a school was penalized one point if an invited speaker withdrew because of the controversy caused by their upcoming appearance on campus or if an event was postponed in response to a controversy. We set this penalty to decrease by a quarter of a point each year. Schools where an attempted disruption occurred received a penalty of two points. We applied this penalty for four years, then set it to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. Schools with deplatforming attempts that resulted in event cancellations, preemptive rejections of speakers, removal of artwork on display, the revocation of a speaker's invitation, or a substantial event disruption were penalized three points. We applied these penalties in full for four years, then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year.

After we applied bonuses and penalties, we standardized each school's score by group — "Warning" schools and other schools — making the average score in each group 50.00 and the standard deviation 10.00. Following standardization, we added one standard deviation to the final score of colleges who received a "green light" rating for their speech codes. We also subtracted half a standard deviation from the final score of colleges that received a "yellow light" rating, one standard deviation from the final score of schools that received a "red light" rating, and two standard deviations from schools that received a "Warning" rating.

$$Overall\ Score = (50 + (Z_{Raw\ Overall\ Score})(10)) + FIRE\ Rating$$

Topline Results

How clear is it to you that your college administration protects free speech on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	78	14
Not very clear	120	21
Somewhat clear	227	40
Very clear	120	21
Extremely clear	29	5

If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, how likely is it that the administration would defend the speaker's right to express their views?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all likely	77	13
Not very likely	144	25
Somewhat likely	266	47
Very likely	67	12
Extremely likely	19	3

How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? [Presented in randomized order]

Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	187	33
Somewhat uncomfortable	176	31
Somewhat comfortable	153	27
Very comfortable	56	10

Expressing disagreement with one of your professors about a controversial political topic in a written assignment.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	138	24
Somewhat uncomfortable	173	30
Somewhat comfortable	189	33
Very comfortable	73	13

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	138	24
Somewhat uncomfortable	189	33
Somewhat comfortable	183	32
Very comfortable	64	11

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic to other students during a discussion in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	120	21
Somewhat uncomfortable	200	35
Somewhat comfortable	160	28
Very comfortable	93	16

Expressing an unpopular political opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	216	38
Somewhat uncomfortable	207	36
Somewhat comfortable	104	18
Very comfortable	46	8

On your campus, how often have you felt that you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	95	17
Rarely	197	34
Occasionally, once or twice a month	158	28
Fairly often, a couple times a week	74	13
Very often, nearly every day	49	9

This next series of questions asks you about self-censorship in different settings. For the purpose of these questions, self-censorship is defined as follows:

Refraining from sharing certain views because you fear social (e.g., exclusion from social events), professional (e.g., losing job or promotion), legal (e.g., prosecution or fine), or violent (e.g., assault) consequences, whether in person or remotely (e.g., by phone or online), and whether the consequences come from state or non-state sources. [Presented in randomized order]

How often do you self-censor during conversations with other students on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	74	13
Rarely	173	30
Occasionally, once or twice a month	178	31
Fairly often, a couple times a week	103	18
Very often, nearly every day	46	8

How often do you self-censor during conversations with your professors?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	81	14
Rarely	181	32
Occasionally, once or twice a month	167	29
Fairly often, a couple times a week	97	17
Very often, nearly every day	46	8

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	64	11
Rarely	171	30
Occasionally, once or twice a month	160	28
Fairly often, a couple times a week	123	22
Very often, nearly every day	54	9

How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker? [Presented in randomized order]

Shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	48	8
Sometimes acceptable	142	25
Rarely acceptable	190	33
Never acceptable	193	34

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	37	6
Sometimes acceptable	81	14
Rarely acceptable	170	30
Never acceptable	285	50

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	21	4
Sometimes acceptable	61	11
Rarely acceptable	104	18
Never acceptable	388	68

Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school **ALLOW** or **NOT ALLOW** a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? [Presented in randomized order]

Transgender people have a mental disorder.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	202	35
Probably should not allow this speaker	176	31
Probably should allow this speaker	127	22
Definitely should allow this speaker	66	11

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	159	28
Probably should not allow this speaker	135	24
Probably should allow this speaker	198	35
Definitely should allow this speaker	78	14

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	222	39
Probably should not allow this speaker	164	29
Probably should allow this speaker	130	23
Definitely should allow this speaker	55	10

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	95	17
Probably should not allow this speaker	194	34
Probably should allow this speaker	208	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	75	13

The police are just as racist as the Klu Klux Klan.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	125	22
Probably should not allow this speaker	172	30
Probably should allow this speaker	204	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	68	12

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	108	19
Probably should not allow this speaker	133	23
Probably should allow this speaker	233	41
Definitely should allow this speaker	96	17

Collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	143	25
Probably should not allow this speaker	190	33
Probably should allow this speaker	179	31
Definitely should allow this speaker	59	10

From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	65	11
Probably should not allow this speaker	103	18
Probably should allow this speaker	244	43
Definitely should allow this speaker	161	28

Some students say it can be difficult to have conversations about certain issues on campus. Which of the following issues, if any, would you say are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on your campus? [Presented in randomized order with none of the above always listed last]

Abortion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	264	46
Yes	301	52

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	442	77
Yes	122	21

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	507	88
Yes	58	10

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	484	85
Yes	80	14

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	472	82
Yes	92	16

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	439	77
Yes	126	22

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	420	73
Yes	145	25

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	378	66
Yes	187	33

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	371	65
Yes	193	34

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	312	55
Yes	252	44

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	383	67
Yes	181	32

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	385	67
Yes	180	31

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	226	39
Yes	338	59

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	357	62
Yes	208	36

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	343	60
Yes	221	39

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	335	59
Yes	229	40

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	359	63
Yes	206	36

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	390	68
Yes	174	30

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	481	84
Yes	84	15

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	294	51
Yes	270	47

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	499	87
Yes	65	11

Which of the following groups on your campus should be able to register as student organizations and receive student activity fees? [Presented in randomized order with none of the above always listed last]

Asian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	171	30
Yes	388	68

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	178	31
Yes	380	66

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	189	33
Yes	369	64

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	237	41
Yes	322	56

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	193	34
Yes	366	64

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	208	36
Yes	351	61

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	195	34
Yes	364	63

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	201	35
Yes	358	63

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	203	35
Yes	356	62

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	250	44
Yes	309	54

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	262	46
Yes	297	52

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	247	43
Yes	311	54

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	266	46
Yes	292	51

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	262	46
Yes	297	52

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	225	39
Yes	334	58

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	331	58
Yes	227	40

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	278	49
Yes	281	49

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	299	52
Yes	259	45

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	486	85
Yes	73	13

How often, if at all, do you hide your political beliefs from your professors in an attempt to get a better grade?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	198	34
Rarely	156	27
Occasionally	96	17
Fairly often, a couple times a week	63	11
Very often, nearly every day	42	7

Have you ever been involved in publicly calling out, punishing, or "canceling" someone or a group for inappropriate statements or actions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	84	15
No	470	82

Thinking of the last incident where someone was publicly called out, punished, or "canceled" for their statements or actions, would you say the consequence or impact on the person was...

Response	Frequency	Percent
Too lenient	68	12
About right	274	48
Too harsh	210	37

How often, if ever, have you personally been offended by perspectives shared by peers or classmates when in the classroom?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	123	22
Rarely	248	43
Occasionally	126	22
Fairly often, a couple times a week	37	6
Very often, nearly every day	18	3

From what you know about the situation in the Middle East, do your sympathies lie more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israelis	63	11
Palestinians	229	40
Both equally	80	14
Neither	42	7
Don't know	138	24

Regardless of your overall feelings toward the Israelis and the Palestinians, who do you think is more responsible for the 2023 outbreak of violence in the Middle East: Israel or Hamas?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israel	143	25
Hamas	115	20
Both equally	76	13
Don't know	219	38

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	220	38
Less than once a year	43	8
Once or twice a year	73	13
Several times a year	93	16
Once a month	25	4
2-3 times a month	22	4
About weekly	26	5
Weekly	33	6
Several times a week	14	2

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	14	2
No	536	94

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	9	2	2
No	541	94	98

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	18	3	17
Less than half the time	29	5	27
About half the time	30	5	28
Most of the time, nearly every day	16	3	15
Always	13	2	12

How often would you say that you feel lonely or isolated?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	24	4	20
Less than half the time	50	9	41
About half the time	28	5	23
Most of the time, nearly every day	9	2	7
Always	10	2	8

How often would you say that you feel like you have no time for yourself?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	7	1	7
Less than half the time	24	4	23
About half the time	33	6	32
Most of the time, nearly every day	25	4	25
Always	14	2	14

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	29	5	24
Less than half the time	43	7	35
About half the time	30	5	25
Most of the time, nearly every day	10	2	8
Always	10	2	8

How often would you say that you feel stressed, frustrated, or overwhelmed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	7	1	7
Less than half the time	23	4	22
About half the time	32	6	30
Most of the time, nearly every day	32	6	30
Always	13	2	12

FIRE
Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

510 Walnut Street
Suite 900
Philadelphia, PA 19106
T: 215.717.3473
www.thefire.org

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