2025 College Free Speech Rankings
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

164
OVERALL RANK

SLIGHTLY BELOW AVERAGE

SPEECH CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT RATING

FIRE
Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

2025 College Free Speech Rankings
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was one of the 257 schools surveyed. Key findings from this school include:

- A ranking of 164 overall, with an overall score of 43.32 and a "Slightly Below Average" speech climate.

- A good performance on "Self-Censorship" (21), "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" (23), "Mean Tolerance" (28), "Openness (29)", and "Disruptive Conduct" (55).

- A mediocre performance on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers," ranking 103.

- A poor performance on "Tolerance Difference" (201), "Administrative Support" (220), and "Comfort Expressing Ideas" (243).

- Failed to adequately defend free expression in the face of two speech controversies.

- Compared with its peer institutions, MIT ranked near the middle.

- Maintains speech policies that earn it a "yellow light" rating from FIRE. If MIT had a "green light" rating from FIRE its overall score would be 58.32, and it would rank 31 overall.

Full Report

This past year FIRE and College Pulse surveyed 257 schools, ranking 251 of them.[1] The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with a score of 43.32, has a "Slightly Below Average" speech climate and ranks 164 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings.

Compared with its peer institutions, MIT ranks near the middle. It ranks better than Stanford University (218), University of Pennsylvania (248), and Harvard University (251). However, it comes in behind Carnegie Mellon University (41), California Institute of Technology (111), Johns Hopkins University (119), and Yale University (155).

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

MIT ranks 243 on the "Comfort Expressing Ideas" component.

More students at MIT feel comfortable expressing their 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 (44%) than in other settings. In 2021, this percentage was 61%.

Fewer students feel comfortable when expressing an unpopular political opinion to their fellow students on a social media account tied to their name (18%), publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic (25%), expressing their views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion (36%), and expressing disagreement with one of their professors about a controversial political topic in a written assignment (39%). These numbers have decreased since 2021 (from 26%, 30%, 49%, and 46%, respectively).

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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."

FIGURE 1 Students Who Feel Somewhat Comfortable by Context (%)
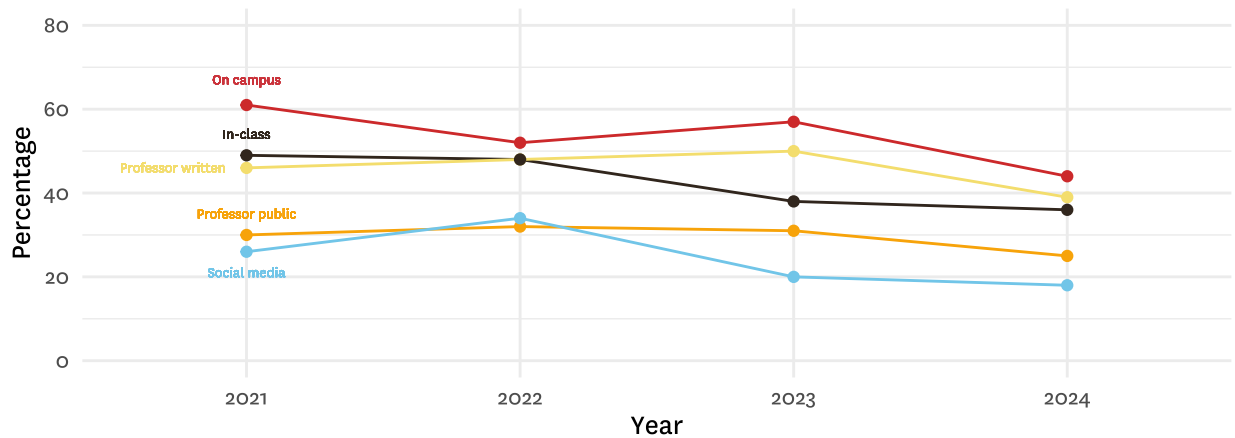
HOW OFTEN ARE MIT STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

MIT ranks 21 on the "Self-Censorship" component.

MIT students report self-censoring in conversations with professors and peers less often than students nationally.

- 18% report self-censoring either "fairly" or "very" often during classroom discussions compared to 26% of students nationally.

- 19% report self-censoring either "fairly" or "very" often during conversations with professors compared to 25% of students nationally.

- 20% report self-censoring either "fairly" or "very" often during conversations with other students on campus compared to 24% of students nationally.

Self-censorship among MIT students remains relatively steady since 2021. Three years ago, when asked how often they could not express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond, 17% of students felt that way "very" or "fairly" often. This percentage decreased in 2022 to 13% before increasing to 17% the next year and 20% this year.

FIGURE 2 Students Who Self-Censor Fairly or Very Often (%)
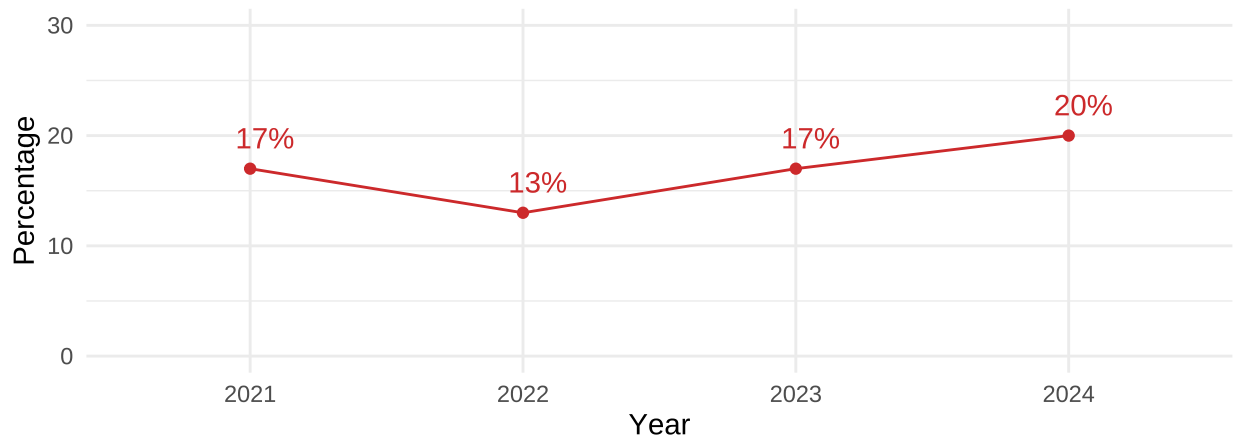
WHAT TOPICS ARE DIFFICULT FOR MIT STUDENTS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT?

MIT ranks 29 on the "Openness" component.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is identified most frequently as a topic that is difficult for students to have an open and honest conversation about on MIT's campus (77%). In 2022, 39% of MIT students reported having difficulty having an open and honest conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on their campus. This percentage decreased in 2023 to 33%.

The second most frequently identified topic this year is affirmative action (46%). In 2022, 46% of MIT students reported having difficulty having an open and honest conversation about affirmative action. This percentage decreased in 2023 to 32%.

The topics identified least frequently this year are climate change and crime (both 10%).

FIGURE 3 Students Who Have Difficulty Talking About Each Topic (%)
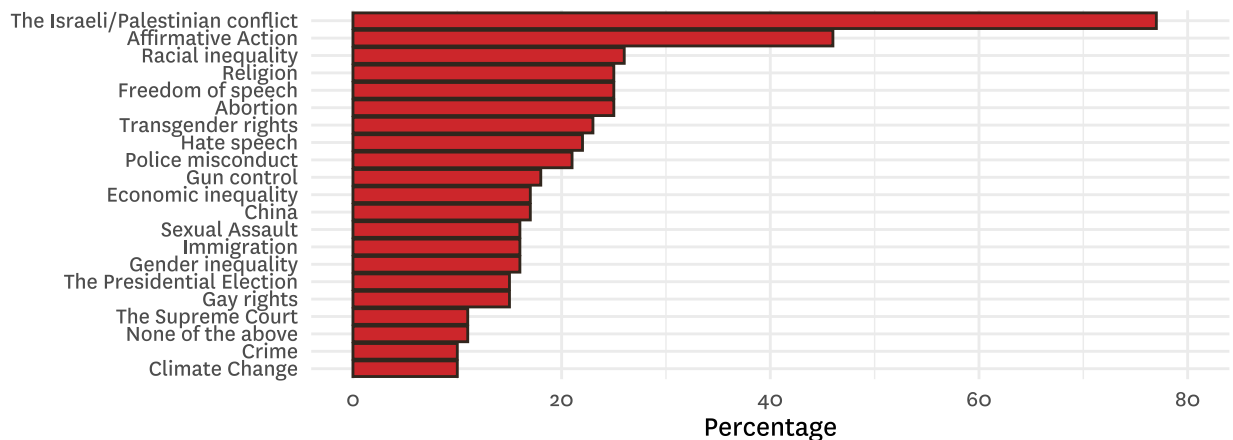
WHICH SPEAKERS DO MIT STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

MIT ranks 23 on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers," 28 on "Mean Tolerance," 103 on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers," and 201 on "Tolerance Difference."

When it comes to allowing controversial liberal speakers on campus, MIT students are tolerant. Over half (53%) would allow a speaker on campus who said that "the Catholic church is a pedophilic institution" and an equal percentage of students would allow a speaker on campus who said that "the police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan." Students were most supportive of allowing a speaker who said that "children should be able to transition without parental consent" (78%).

Conservative speakers, on the other hand, are not as tolerated by MIT students. Twenty-eight percent of students would allow a speaker on campus who said that "transgender people have a mental disorder"; 32% would allow someone who said that "Black Lives Matter is a hate group"; and 46% would allow someone who said that "abortion should be completely illegal."

FIGURE 4 Students Who Would Allow Each Conservative Speaker on Campus (%)
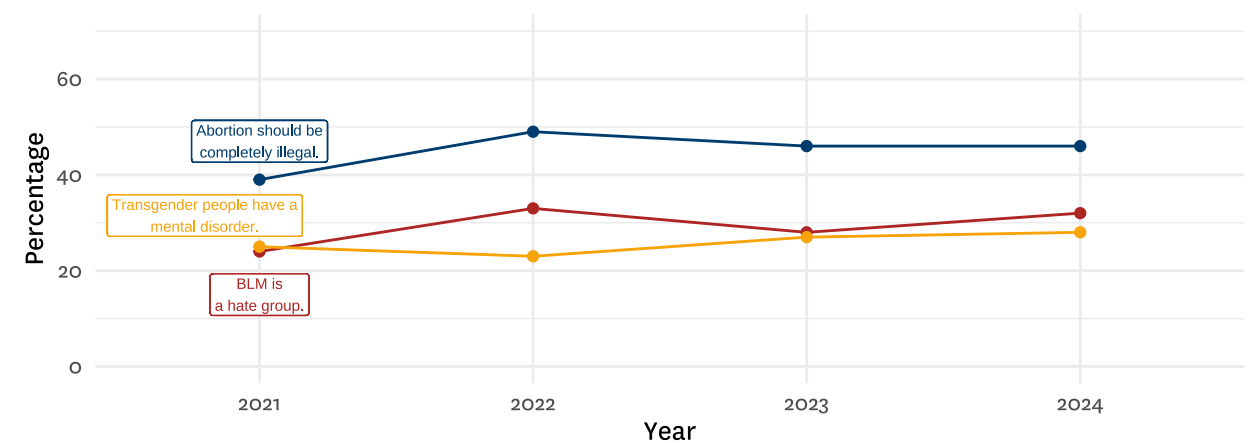
Additionally, this year's survey asked about two speakers relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though responses did not affect rankings. Forty-eight percent report that a speaker who said that "collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security" should be allowed on campus while 78% report that a speaker who said that "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" should be allowed on campus.

WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO MIT STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

MIT ranks 55 on the "Disruptive Conduct" component.

When compared to students nationally, MIT students are slightly more likely to say that students using disruptive conduct to stop a campus speech is acceptable to some degree. Specifically, 73% of MIT students find shouting down a speaker at least "rarely" acceptable compared to 69% of students nationally, and 57% deem blocking other students from attending a campus speech to be at least "rarely" acceptable compared to 52% of students nationally. However, 24% of MIT students view violence to stop a speech as at least "rarely" acceptable compared to 32% of students nationally.

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

MIT ranks 220 on the "Administrative Support" component.

Eighteen percent of MIT students find the administration either "very" or "extremely" clear in protecting freedom of speech, with an additional 45% considering it "somewhat" clear. In terms of the administration's willingness to defend a speaker's rights during controversies, 17% of MIT students believe this is either "very" or "extremely" likely, while 48% see it as "somewhat" likely. These percentages have declined since last year.

FIGURE 5 Student Perceptions of the Administration

Legend:
- Extremely or very clear that the administration protects free speech on campus.
- Extremely or very likely that the administration would defend the speakers right to express their views.
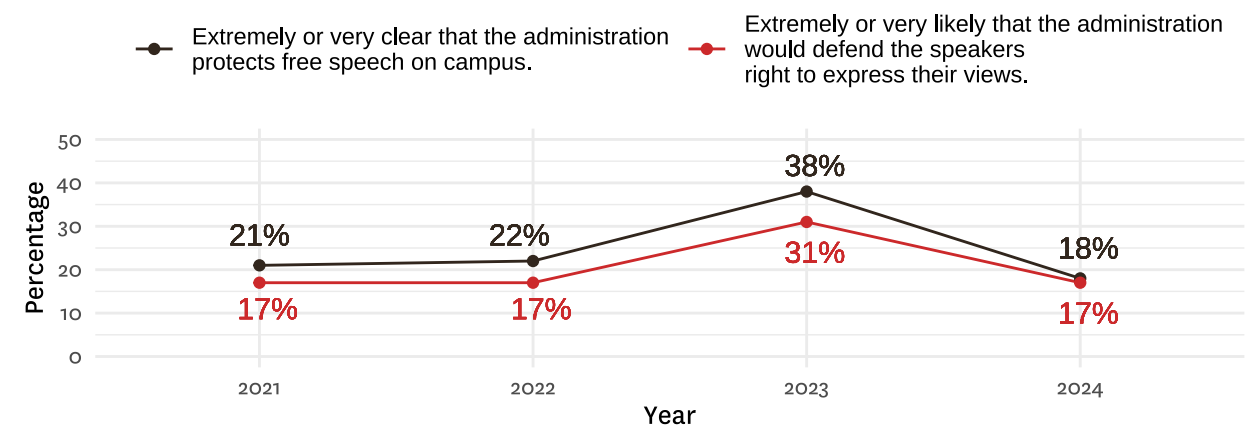
Prior to the encampments, the percentage of students who thought it was "very" or "extremely" clear that the administration protects freedom of speech was at 15%; this perception increased to 27% after the encampments started.

FIGURE 6   Student Perceptions That the Administration Protects Free Speech
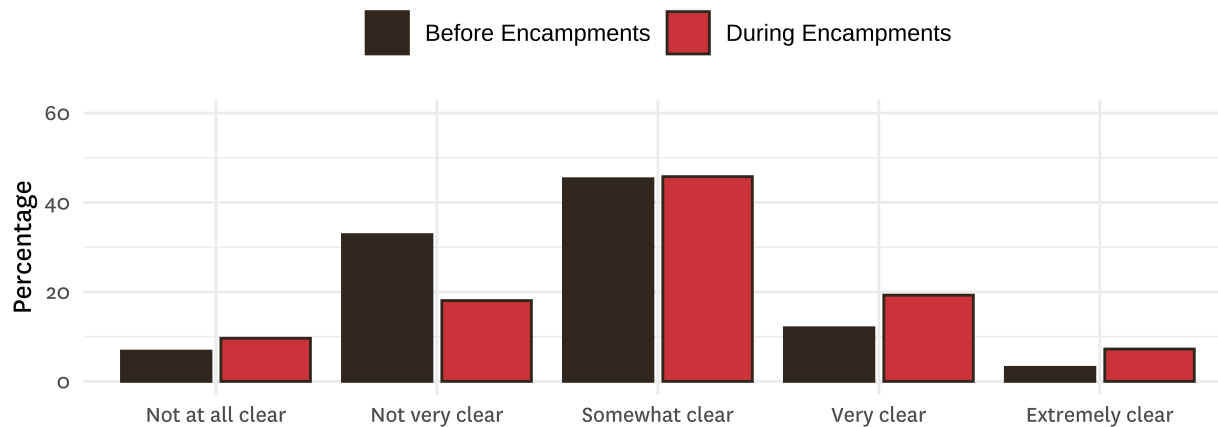
Likewise, fewer students thought it was "very" or "extremely" likely the administration would protect speakers' rights (16%) after the encampments started (19%).

FIGURE 7   Student Perceptions That the Administration Protects Speakers' Rights
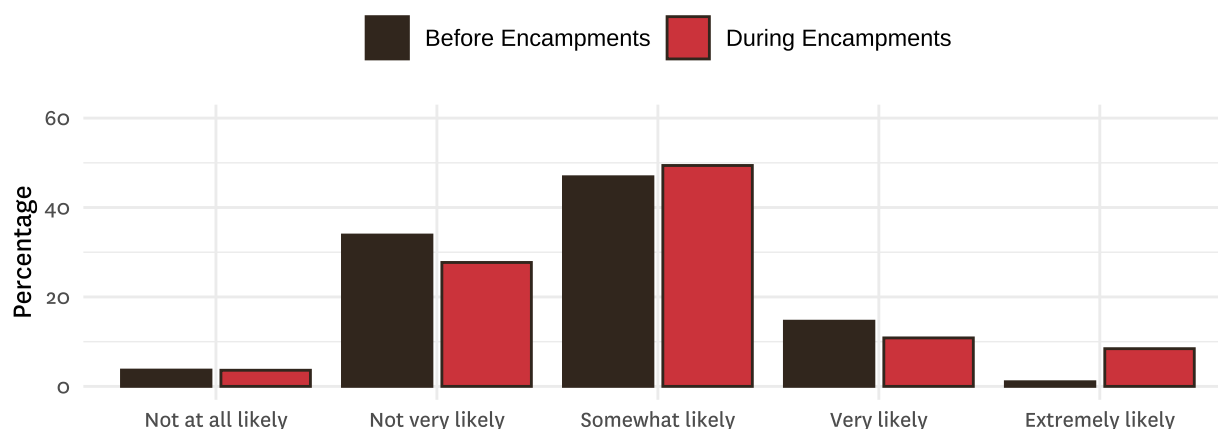
A 'YELLOW LIGHT' SCHOOL WITH SOME CONTROVERSY

FIRE awards MIT's regulations on student expression a "yellow light" rating, flagging eight policies that earn that rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. These include two harassment policies that fail to sufficiently track the legal standard for peer harassment in an educational setting, two policies regulating who can post flyers and what the content of those flyers can be, an overly vague internet use policy, and two policies encouraging students to report individuals who "have offended others by their manner of expression" or engaged in "racist conduct." Perhaps of greatest concern, however, is a policy that only permits demonstrations on the MIT campus when they have been organized by a recognized student organization and have received prior approval from Institute

Events or the Campus Activities Complex at least three business days in advance of their demonstrations. Such a restrictive policy prohibits spontaneous demonstrations and expressive activity by individual students who want to make their voices heard on a common issue but haven't created a recognized student organization. MIT must revise this and each of these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

Since 2020, MIT has been involved in two speech controversies, both of which negatively impacted the university's ranking. In 2021, the science department that had invited Dorian Abbot, a geophysicist and professor at the University of Chicago, to deliver a campus lecture disinvited him following criticism of his invitation. Faculty, students, and online critics called for the disinvitation because of Abbot's views on affirmative action, particularly that such programs treat "people as members of a group rather than as individuals, repeating the mistake that made possible the atrocities of the 20th century." The university's statement indicated that the "controversy" had caused "great distress for many members of our community." It additionally defended the disinvitation, noting that the head of the organizing department "could not host an effective public outreach event centered around Professor Abbot" and thus decided to disinvite him "deliberately to preserve the opportunity for free dialogue and open scientific exchange."

Then, in 2023, student David Spicer was upset when the administration released a statement in support of free expression, as he believes "free expression does not come freely." Spicer and other students, aiming to see "where can, and should, the line between free expression and other moral values and legal obligations be drawn," chalked and put up posters around campus containing intentionally inflammatory statements, including anti-LGBTQ comments, as an act of protest. The university removed some of the posters and chalking. After the students responsible for the controversial speech were reported to MIT's Bias Response Team, the university investigated the students, including Spicer, for their speech. The university released a statement to the MIT community announcing that it was addressing "these specific incidents."

Because MIT did not act in support of free expression on either occasion, the university was penalized for its responses, negatively impacting its ranking.

HOW CAN MIT IMPROVE?

The easiest thing MIT can do to improve its ranking in next year's College Free Speech Rankings is to revise its yellow light speech policies. Publicizing its policy changes, specifically to students, could also increase students' trust in the administration's support of free expression on campus. This could, in turn, improve the university's support survey ranking, which is currently one of its worst components in the rankings.

Improving and publicizing the university policies could also be a helpful way to indicate to students which activities and behaviors are acceptable forms of protest and which are not, which could potentially lead to fewer campus disruptions and might move the culture of the university toward less acceptance of violence and shutdowns. The university can also teach students more directly that disruptions will not be tolerated or why disruptions are bad for free expression to improve its "Administrative Support" ranking. This, along with publicizing improved university policies, could improve the culture on campus and work toward improving the university's worst ranking, "Comfort Expressing Ideas."

Additionally, to improve its ranking, MIT could increase its support for those involved in speech controversies. If MIT had supported each individual or group targeted in a speech controversy by defending free expression without expressing disagreement with the viewpoint expressed, then the university would have benefited from its responses rather than been penalized for them.

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.[2]

- **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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2   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.[3]

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3   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/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/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.[4]

- Supporting students and student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.[5]

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.[6] 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.[7]

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4   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/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/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**.

5   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/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/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.

6   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.

7   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.[8]

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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8   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	21	8
Not very clear	78	28
Somewhat clear	125	45
Very clear	39	14
Extremely clear	12	4

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	10	3
Not very likely	88	32
Somewhat likely	131	48
Very likely	37	14
Extremely likely	9	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	105	38
Somewhat uncomfortable	102	37
Somewhat comfortable	51	19
Very comfortable	17	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	67	24
Somewhat uncomfortable	99	36
Somewhat comfortable	78	28
Very comfortable	31	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	71	26
Somewhat uncomfortable	106	39
Somewhat comfortable	80	29
Very comfortable	18	7

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	55	20
Somewhat uncomfortable	101	37
Somewhat comfortable	76	28
Very comfortable	43	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	115	42
Somewhat uncomfortable	110	40
Somewhat comfortable	33	12
Very comfortable	16	6

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	59	22
Rarely	91	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	70	25
Fairly often, a couple times a week	37	14
Very often, nearly every day	17	6

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	35	13
Rarely	97	35
Occasionally, once or twice a month	87	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	47	17
Very often, nearly every day	9	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	44	16
Rarely	107	39
Occasionally, once or twice a month	71	26
Fairly often, a couple times a week	40	15
Very often, nearly every day	12	4

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	36	13
Rarely	92	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	99	36
Fairly often, a couple times a week	40	15
Very often, nearly every day	7	3

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	10	4
Sometimes acceptable	82	30
Rarely acceptable	108	39
Never acceptable	75	27

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	5	2
Sometimes acceptable	36	13
Rarely acceptable	117	42
Never acceptable	117	42

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	2	1
Sometimes acceptable	12	4
Rarely acceptable	53	19
Never acceptable	209	76

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	112	41
Probably should not allow this speaker	85	31
Probably should allow this speaker	55	20
Definitely should allow this speaker	22	8

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	48	17
Probably should not allow this speaker	98	36
Probably should allow this speaker	78	28
Definitely should allow this speaker	50	18

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	74	27
Probably should not allow this speaker	112	41
Probably should allow this speaker	54	20
Definitely should allow this speaker	33	12

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	22	8
Probably should not allow this speaker	106	39
Probably should allow this speaker	98	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	47	17

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	24	9
Probably should not allow this speaker	104	38
Probably should allow this speaker	101	37
Definitely should allow this speaker	44	16

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	7	2
Probably should not allow this speaker	52	19
Probably should allow this speaker	146	53
Definitely should allow this speaker	69	25

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	48	17
Probably should not allow this speaker	92	34
Probably should allow this speaker	89	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	45	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	10	4
Probably should not allow this speaker	50	18
Probably should allow this speaker	135	49
Definitely should allow this speaker	80	29

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	203	74
Yes	70	25

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	147	53
Yes	126	46

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	225	82
Yes	47	17

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	246	89
Yes	27	10

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	245	89
Yes	27	10

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	226	82
Yes	47	17

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	204	74
Yes	69	25

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	232	84
Yes	41	15

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	227	83
Yes	45	16

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	222	81
Yes	51	18

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	211	77
Yes	62	22

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	227	83
Yes	45	16

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	62	23
Yes	210	77

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	230	84
Yes	43	15

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	215	78
Yes	57	21

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	200	73
Yes	72	26

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	204	74
Yes	69	25

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	228	83
Yes	45	16

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	243	88
Yes	29	11

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	210	77
Yes	62	23

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	243	88
Yes	29	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	45	16
Yes	227	83

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	45	16
Yes	227	83

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	46	17
Yes	226	82

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	55	20
Yes	217	79

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	47	17
Yes	225	82

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	52	19
Yes	220	80

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	52	19
Yes	220	80

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	48	18
Yes	224	81

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	49	18
Yes	223	81

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	57	21
Yes	215	78

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	60	22
Yes	212	77

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	58	21
Yes	214	78

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	70	26
Yes	202	73

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	65	24
Yes	207	75

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	57	21
Yes	215	78

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	81	29
Yes	191	70

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	73	26
Yes	199	72

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	101	37
Yes	171	62

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	248	90
Yes	24	9

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	125	46
Rarely	88	32
Occasionally	34	12
Fairly often, a couple times a week	17	6
Very often, nearly every day	7	3

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	30	11
No	241	88

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	33	12
About right	130	47
Too harsh	107	39

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	52	19
Rarely	139	50
Occasionally	60	22
Fairly often, a couple times a week	15	5
Very often, nearly every day	6	2

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	24	9
Palestinians	139	50
Both equally	41	15
Neither	16	6
Don't know	51	19

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	64	23
Hamas	68	25
Both equally	60	22
Don't know	81	29

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	138	50
Less than once a year	23	8
Once or twice a year	31	11
Several times a year	17	6
Once a month	8	3
2-3 times a month	12	4
About weekly	7	2
Weekly	20	7
Several times a week	9	3

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	1
No	262	95

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	2	1	1
No	262	95	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	6	2	11
Less than half the time	19	7	34
About half the time	15	5	26
Most of the time, nearly every day	15	6	27
Always	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	10	3	16
Less than half the time	31	11	51
About half the time	15	6	26
Most of the time, nearly every day	2	1	3
Always	2	1	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	0	2
Less than half the time	10	4	21
About half the time	16	6	34
Most of the time, nearly every day	18	6	38
Always	3	1	6

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	17	6	26
Less than half the time	37	13	58
About half the time	6	2	10
Most of the time, nearly every day	2	1	3
Always	1	0	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	0	1
Less than half the time	8	3	18
About half the time	15	5	32
Most of the time, nearly every day	19	7	42
Always	3	1	6

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