

# 2025 College Free Speech Rankings

## Yale University

155

OVERALL  
RANK

SLIGHTLY  
BELOW  
AVERAGE

SPEECH  
CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT  
RATING



**FIRE**  
Foundation for Individual  
Rights and Expression

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# Executive Summary

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**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](https://rankings.thefire.org)) that allows for easy comparison between institutions.

Yale University was one of the 257 schools surveyed. Key findings from this school include:

- A ranking of 155, with an overall score of 44.04 and a “Slightly Below Average” speech climate.
- Yale was among the top 10 schools that rose in the rankings this year. Last year Yale had an overall score of 26.64 and ranked 234.
- Yale performs well on most of the tolerance components — ranking 11 on “Mean Tolerance,” 17 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” and 41 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers.”
- Yale performs well on “Openness” (28) and “Self-Censorship” (45), but only moderately well on “Comfort Expressing Ideas” (95).
- Yale performed poorly in “Administrative Support” (156) and terribly in “Disruptive Conduct” (208).
- More than three-quarters of Yale students (78%) say it is at least “rarely” acceptable to shout down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus, compared to 68% of students nationally.
- Yale was penalized for the outcomes of eight different speech controversies that have occurred since 2021, including the deplatforming of a student group event and multiple incidents in which scholars were sanctioned.
- Yale continues to maintain speech policies that earn it a “yellow light” rating from FIRE. If Yale revised these policies and earned a “green light” rating, it would have ranked 29 overall.

# Full Report

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**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.<sup>1</sup> Yale University, with a score of 44.04, has a “Slightly Below Average” speech climate and ranks 155 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings.

This represents a significant improvement from last year’s rankings, when Yale ranked 234.

Yale’s scores on a number of the survey-based components improved, resulting in a corresponding improvement in rankings. Its “Openness” ranking (28) noticeably improved from last year (47 out of 248). Yale additionally improved in “Comfort Expressing Ideas” (95 compared to 147 last year), “Administrative Support” (156 compared to 185 last year), “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” (17 compared to 29 last year), and “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” (41 compared to 76 last year). Its ranking on “Disruptive Conduct” (208) dropped slightly from last year (200). Students’ support for illiberal actions in response to controversial speech and middling administrative support remain serious issues.

As the only Ivy League school that ranks better than 200, Yale University out-performs its peers, coming in higher than Cornell University (215), Princeton University (223), Dartmouth College (224), Brown University (229), the University of Pennsylvania (248), Columbia University (250), and Harvard University (251).

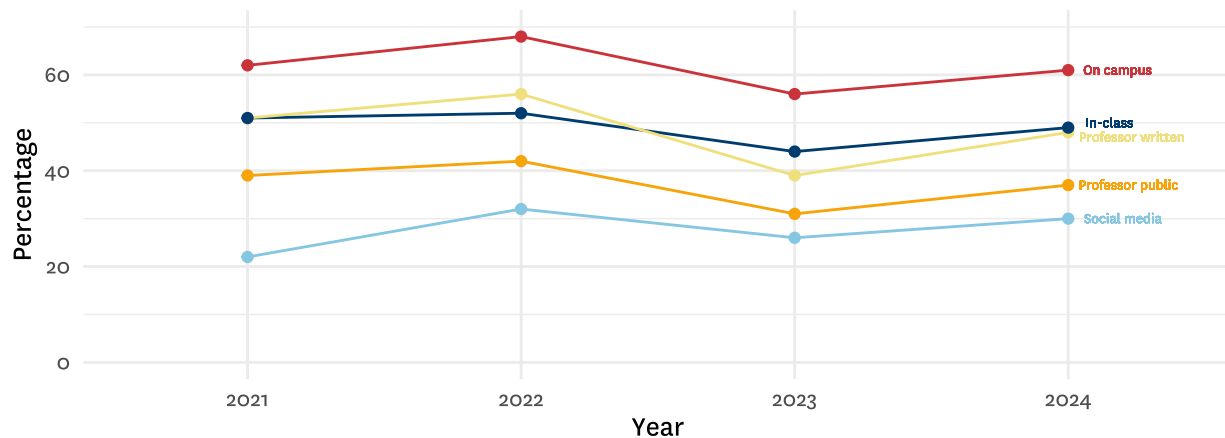
## HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YALE STUDENTS EXPRESSING THEIR VIEWS ON CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS?

Yale ranked 95 overall on the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component. This rank reflects positive movement in the proportion of Yale students reporting comfort expressing themselves in the various campus settings asked about. Specifically, as can be seen in Figure 1, the percentage of Yale students who responded that they were “somewhat” or “very” comfortable expressing themselves in different campus settings increased from the drop last year. There was improvement across all five scenarios.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 “Very” or “Somewhat” Comfortable Expressing Views by Context (%)



Compared to students nationally, similar percentages of Yale students report comfort expressing their ideas and views in all of these settings. Nationally, 39% of students were “somewhat” or “very” comfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic publicly with a professor, 50% in a written assignment, 47% during an in-class discussion, 50% to other students in a common campus space, and 34% to other students on social media.

## HOW OFTEN ARE YALE STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

Yale ranked 45 on the “Self-Censorship” component.

Before being presented with key questions on self-censorship, participants were provided with the following definition of self-censorship:

***“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.”***

This definition was then followed by three questions asking about self-censorship during conversations with other students on campus, conversations with professors, and self-censorship during classroom discussions. Yale students who self-censor “a couple of times a week” or more include:

- 22% during conversations with other students on campus compared to 24% of students nationally
- 19% during conversations with professors compared to 25% of students nationally
- 20% during classroom discussions compared to 26% of students nationally

Earlier in the survey, Yale students were provided with a general question of self-censorship without a definition and were asked: “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?” Responses to this question do not factor into the rankings but provide a point of comparison. On this, 14% of Yale students reported they self-censor “a couple of times a week” or more because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond compared to 17% of students nationally.

When considering the prevalence of self-censorship, it’s worth considering the political composition of Yale students. Among those sampled, 66% identified as liberal, 11% moderate, 15% conservative, and 7% something else. Narrowing in, 23% of the sample identified as “very liberal,” which outnumbers the total percentage of Yale students right of center, and nearly outnumbers the combined total of moderate and conservative Yale students. Across each of the four questions on self-censorship, substantially larger percentages of conservative students at Yale reported frequently self-censoring. For example, 49% of conservative Yale students reported self-censoring “a couple of times a week” or more during classroom discussions compared to 12% of liberal Yale students. Thus, while Yale does well on the “Self-Censorship” component, there appears to be substantial differences along ideological lines.

## WHAT TOPICS ARE DIFFICULT FOR YALE STUDENTS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT?

Yale’s ranking on the “Openness” component continued to rise, landing at 28, up from 47 last year, and 85 the year prior. On almost every topic, fewer Yale students expressed difficulty having an open and honest conversation about the topics assessed.

Similar to students nationwide, a large proportion of Yale students — 68% — identified the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a topic difficult to have an open and honest conversation about. Last year, a large proportion of Yale students (41%) already identified this as a difficult topic, which at the time was unusual. Even though this year a majority of students (55%) nationwide also identified this as a difficult topic, Yale continues to stand out given the even larger percentage of its students who indicated this.

No other topic at Yale was identified by a majority of students as difficult to have an open and honest conversation about. However, on three topics percentages did go up slightly. Specifically, last year 32% of Yale students expressed difficulty having an open and honest conversation about affirmative action, 19% about freedom of speech, and 20% about economic inequality. These numbers rose to 33%, 21%, and 27% respectively this year.

Similarly, the small percentages of Yale students expressing difficulty having an open and honest conversation about the assessed topics might be because a consensus already exists on campus about these topics, in large part due to the supermajority (66%) of Yale students identifying as liberal. Indeed, for every topic assessed, a larger percentage of conservative (compared to liberal) students expressed difficulty discussing the topic. Specifically, large percentages of conservative students expressed difficulty having an open and honest conversation about abortion (58%; 21% among liberals), racial inequality (55%; 23% among liberals), transgender rights (51%; 23% among liberals), affirmative action (42%; 32% among liberals), sexual assault (41%; 23% among liberals), gender inequality (38%; 14% among liberals), gun control (38%; 13% among liberals), and the presidential election (38%; 19% among liberals).

Overall, the findings on “Openness” are consistent with findings on the self-censorship questions: Yale students report generally being comfortable talking about most of the topics assessed. Only a minority report frequently self-censoring and not feeling comfortable expressing their views.

## WHICH SPEAKERS DO YALE STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

Yale students were fairly tolerant of allowing controversial speakers on campus, ranking 17 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” 41 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” and 11 on “Mean Tolerance.” At the same time, they displayed a heavy bias toward allowing controversial liberal speakers on campus compared to conservative ones, as evidenced by their ranking of 187 on the “Tolerance Difference” component.

Yale students were presented with eight different previously expressed ideas (three liberal, three conservative, and two related to Israel-Palestine which did not impact the rankings) in random order. The percentage of Yale students who said they would “probably” or “definitely” allow each of the three controversial liberal speakers ranged from 60% (“The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan”) to 74% (“Children should be able to transition without parental consent”). While majorities of students nationally supported allowing all three controversial liberal speakers on campus, they did not give the same level of support as Yale students — support by students nationally ranged from 47% (“The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan”) to 56% (“Children should be able to transition without parental consent”).

Similar to last year, Yale ranked relatively well on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” though conservative speakers were still met with more resistance. The percentage of Yale students who said they would “probably” or “definitely” allow each of the three controversial conservative speakers on campus ranged from 35% (“Transgender people have a mental disorder”) to 57% (“Abortion should be completely illegal”). Despite the lower percentages compared to tolerance for controversial liberal speakers, the relatively high ranking for tolerance for controversial conservative speakers is somewhat evident when comparing Yale students to students nationally, as larger proportions of Yale students would allow each of the controversial speakers.

The strong preference toward controversial liberal speakers over controversial conservative speakers is reflected in Yale’s poor ranking on the “Tolerance Difference” component, 187. The strong favoritism toward allowing controversial liberal speakers on campus compared to conservative ones might again stem from the ideological makeup of the Yale student body.

Finally, this year we also asked about tolerance toward two controversial speakers on Israeli-Palestinian conflict-related topics. For a speaker expressing that “collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security,” 54% of Yale students said they would “probably” or “definitely” allow this controversial speaker compared to 40% of students nationally. For a speaker expressing “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” 79% of Yale students said they would “probably” or “definitely” allow this speaker compared to 71% of students nationally.

## WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO YALE STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

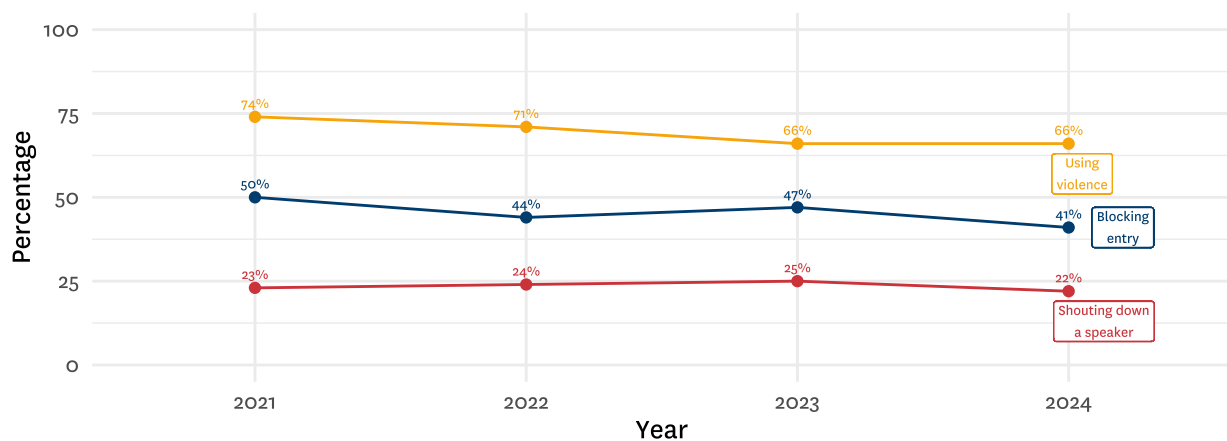
Yale ranked 208 on the “Disruptive Conduct” component. This component has consistently been Yale’s worst and has worsened over time (last year Yale was ranked 200).

As can be seen in the figure below, only 22% of Yale students said shoutdowns were “never” acceptable, while 25% said that last year. Similarly, 41% of Yale students said blocking entry to an event was “never” acceptable compared to 47% last year. For violence, the percentage of Yale students saying this was “never” acceptable held steady at 66%.

The lack of overwhelming opposition for these forms of illiberal protest (i.e. disruptive conduct) is perhaps reinforced by the fact that many of the notable campus controversies at Yale during the 2023-24 academic year involved students engaging in these sorts of illiberal forms of protest to disrupt speakers they found offensive.

Compared to students nationally, far fewer Yale students indicated these forms of disruptive conduct are “never” acceptable. Nationally, 32% of students said “shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus” is “never” acceptable, 48% said “blocking other students from attending a campus speech” is “never” acceptable, and 68% said “using violence to stop a campus speech” is “never” acceptable. Notably, all of these percentages for students nationally dropped since last year.

**FIGURE 2** Students Who Say Each Protest Tactic is “Never” Acceptable (%)



## HOW IS YALE’S ADMINISTRATIVE STANCE ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH PERCEIVED?

Yale ranked 156 on the “Administrative Support” component.

Thirty-four percent of Yale students say that the administration’s protection of free speech on campus is “very” or “extremely” clear, and another 37% say that it is “somewhat” clear. When it comes to whether the administration will defend a speaker’s rights during a controversy, 27% of Yale students say this is “very”



or “extremely” likely — an uptick from 20% last year — and another 44% say that it is “somewhat” likely. These low numbers reflect Yale students’ low confidence in the administration on their campus to protect and defend free speech.

## A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH A LOT OF CONTROVERSY

FIRE awards Yale’s regulations on student expression a “yellow light” rating, flagging five policies that earn that rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. These include four harassment policies that fail to sufficiently track the legal standard for peer harassment in an educational setting. Perhaps of greatest concern, however, is a broad, catch-all prohibition on any actions that “may imperil the integrity and values of the Yale community.” This manner of reserving authority for the university to discipline any behavior it wishes is ripe for administrative abuse and leaves students unsure what they can safely say without risking punishment. Yale must revise each of these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

Since 2021, Yale has been involved in eight different speech controversies, reacting in a speech-protective manner in only one. In 2022, law students protested a Federalist Society-organized panel discussion on civil liberties featuring progressive Monica Miller and conservative Kristen Waggoner because of Waggoner’s stance on LGBTQ issues. Student protesters disrupted the event throughout — heckling inside the hall as well as stomping, shouting, clapping, singing, and pounding the walls outside the room. The associate dean of the law school was present during the entire event and did not confront any protesters. Nearly three weeks later, the law school dean issued a statement that the protesters’ behavior was “unacceptable” but did not violate the school’s free expression policy.

On top of that, in each year since 2021, there has been at least one controversy surrounding a university scholar. In 2021, Professor Amy Chua was demoted following allegations that she hosted parties for and engaged inappropriately with students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor Chua denied the allegations, but Yale maintained its punishment. Also in 2021, Beverly Gage, in response to donors’ attempts to influence the course, resigned as director of Yale’s Grand Strategy program, a year-long statecraft and politics course that accepts about 20 undergraduate and graduate students. The donors tried to institute an advisory board to oversee the program that would have included conservative figures such as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The university did not publicly comment on the situation.

Then, in 2022, faculty signed a letter to the university defending School of Medicine Professor Haifan Lin, who was placed on involuntary administrative leave and abruptly cut off from his research group without legal charges or clear evidence of misconduct amid a Department of Justice investigation. The faculty claimed the investigation was likely because Lin is of Chinese descent.

The next year, students circulated a petition calling for Professor Zareena Grewal to be terminated after she posted on X condoning violence against Israel. The university responded by defending Grewal’s right to extramural speech, stating “Yale is committed to freedom of expression, and the comments posted on Professor Grewal’s personal accounts represent her own views.”

In 2024, Professor Timothy Snyder evacuated his “Hitler, Stalin, and Us” lecture after about 10 demonstrators with the Revolutionary Communist Party entered his classroom and refused to leave. The university announced an investigation after the fact.

Additionally, in 2021 there were two more incidents, involving students. First, law student Trent Colbert was investigated by the administration after sending an email inviting other students to a party at his fraternity house, which he called a “trap house.” After he was accused of being racist for using the term “trap house,” the Yale administration summoned Colbert to multiple meetings and encouraged him to release a university-written apology. Another student, Zach Austin, was also summoned to meet with administrators, who accused him of convincing Colbert to send out the email and host the party. Austin also claimed he was also pressured to issue a formal apology drafted by administrators.

The same year, two unnamed students filed suit against administrators for allegedly blocking job opportunities after they refused to make a statement against Professor Chua in an investigation into whether she violated an agreement to not socialize with students off campus. The students allege an administrator pressured them into making accusations out of a “moral obligation” to “future generations of students.”

For each of the eight controversies between 2021 to 2024, Yale was penalized for its response to each except the one surrounding Zareena Grewal, in which the university showed commitment to protecting expressive freedoms.

## HOW CAN YALE IMPROVE?

The easiest thing Yale can do to improve its ranking in next year’s College Free Speech Rankings is revising its “yellow light” speech policies. If Yale had revised them to “green light” policies this year Yale would rank 29 overall. 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 rankings.

Improving and publicizing the university policies could also be a helpful way to indicate to students what activities and behaviors are acceptable forms of protest and which are not, which could potentially lead to less campus disruptions and might change the culture of the university toward less acceptance of violence and shoutdowns. 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” and “Disruptive Conduct” rankings.

Additionally, to improve its ranking, Yale could increase its support for those involved in speech controversies. If Yale had responded to each speech controversy by defending free expression as it did in the case of Professor Zareena Grewal, then the university would have benefited from its responses rather than been penalized for them.

# Methodology

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**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 (IPF) 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.<sup>2</sup>
- **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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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 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/1ish8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/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.<sup>4</sup>
- Supporting students and student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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/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>.

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/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.

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.<sup>8</sup>

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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<sup>8</sup> 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.

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



# Topline Results

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	26	7
Not very clear	83	22
Somewhat clear	140	37
Very clear	110	29
Extremely clear	17	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	31	8
Not very likely	80	21
Somewhat likely	163	44
Very likely	79	21
Extremely likely	21	6

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	98	26
Somewhat uncomfortable	136	36
Somewhat comfortable	104	28
Very comfortable	36	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	63	17
Somewhat uncomfortable	132	35
Somewhat comfortable	121	32
Very comfortable	58	15

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	60	16
Somewhat uncomfortable	130	35
Somewhat comfortable	140	37
Very comfortable	45	12

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	37	10
Somewhat uncomfortable	111	30
Somewhat comfortable	151	40
Very comfortable	76	20

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	130	35
Somewhat uncomfortable	132	35
Somewhat comfortable	91	24
Very comfortable	21	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	45	12
Rarely	144	38
Occasionally, once or twice a month	134	36
Fairly often, a couple times a week	37	10
Very often, nearly every day	15	4

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	28	8
Rarely	149	40
Occasionally, once or twice a month	116	31
Fairly often, a couple times a week	67	18
Very often, nearly every day	14	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	45	12
Rarely	155	41
Occasionally, once or twice a month	103	27
Fairly often, a couple times a week	60	16
Very often, nearly every day	12	3

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	21	6
Rarely	166	44
Occasionally, once or twice a month	114	30
Fairly often, a couple times a week	61	16
Very often, nearly every day	13	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	40	11
Sometimes acceptable	130	35
Rarely acceptable	122	33
Never acceptable	83	22

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	21	6
Sometimes acceptable	72	19
Rarely acceptable	127	34
Never acceptable	155	41

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	11	3
Sometimes acceptable	40	11
Rarely acceptable	77	20
Never acceptable	247	66

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	136	36
Probably should not allow this speaker	106	28
Probably should allow this speaker	80	21
Definitely should allow this speaker	53	14

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	57	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	105	28
Probably should allow this speaker	137	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	77	20

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	109	29
Probably should not allow this speaker	117	31
Probably should allow this speaker	99	26
Definitely should allow this speaker	50	13

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	32	8
Probably should not allow this speaker	106	28
Probably should allow this speaker	158	42
Definitely should allow this speaker	79	21

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	42	11
Probably should not allow this speaker	109	29
Probably should allow this speaker	149	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	75	20

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	14	4
Probably should not allow this speaker	84	22
Probably should allow this speaker	168	45
Definitely should allow this speaker	109	29

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	56	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	117	31
Probably should allow this speaker	146	39
Definitely should allow this speaker	56	15

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	15	4
Probably should not allow this speaker	64	17
Probably should allow this speaker	180	48
Definitely should allow this speaker	115	31

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	267	71
Yes	105	28

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	248	66
Yes	124	33

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	331	88
Yes	41	11

## Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	342	91
Yes	30	8

## Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	315	84
Yes	57	15

## Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	272	73
Yes	100	27

## Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	293	78
Yes	79	21

## Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	327	87
Yes	45	12

## Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	307	82
Yes	65	17

## Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	309	82
Yes	63	17

## Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	287	77
Yes	85	23

## Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	303	81
Yes	69	18

## The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	118	31
Yes	254	68

## The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	294	79
Yes	77	21

## Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	287	76
Yes	85	23

## Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	268	72
Yes	104	28

## Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	299	80
Yes	73	20

## Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	280	75
Yes	92	25

## The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	334	89
Yes	38	10

## Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	263	70
Yes	109	29

## None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	340	91
Yes	32	9

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	83	22
Yes	288	77

## Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	85	23
Yes	287	76

## Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	73	19
Yes	299	80



## Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	154	41
Yes	217	58

## LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	83	22
Yes	289	77

## Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	93	25
Yes	279	74

## Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	89	24
Yes	282	75

## Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	91	24
Yes	280	75

## Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	89	24
Yes	282	75

## Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	107	29
Yes	264	70

## Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	114	30
Yes	258	69

## Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	101	27
Yes	271	72

## Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	108	29
Yes	264	70

## Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	105	28
Yes	266	71

## Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	103	27
Yes	269	72

## Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	150	40
Yes	222	59

## Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	121	32
Yes	251	67

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	163	43
Yes	209	56

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	340	91
Yes	32	8

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	135	36
Rarely	115	31
Occasionally	65	17
Fairly often, a couple times a week	43	12
Very often, nearly every day	13	4

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	52	14
No	319	85

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	44	12
About right	181	48
Too harsh	146	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	66	18
Rarely	197	53
Occasionally	79	21
Fairly often, a couple times a week	28	7
Very often, nearly every day	2	1

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	38	10
Palestinians	189	50
Both equally	72	19
Neither	13	3
Don't know	59	16

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	123	33
Hamas	99	26
Both equally	52	14
Don't know	97	26

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	158	42
Less than once a year	41	11
Once or twice a year	64	17
Several times a year	39	10
Once a month	7	2
2-3 times a month	8	2
About weekly	15	4
Weekly	27	7
Several times a week	12	3

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	7	2
No	363	97

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	4	1	1
No	366	98	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	11	3	11
Less than half the time	32	9	34
About half the time	27	7	28
Most of the time, nearly every day	17	5	18
Always	8	2	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	13	3	16
Less than half the time	44	12	56
About half the time	17	5	22
Most of the time, nearly every day	2	1	3
Always	2	1	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	9	2	14
Less than half the time	13	3	20
About half the time	26	7	41
Most of the time, nearly every day	14	4	22
Always	2	0	3

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	21	6	32
Less than half the time	26	7	40
About half the time	10	3	15
Most of the time, nearly every day	7	2	11
Always	2	0	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	3	1	5
Less than half the time	18	5	26
About half the time	22	6	32
Most of the time, nearly every day	21	6	31
Always	5	1	7



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