

SPEAKING FREELY

What Students Think about Expression
at American Colleges





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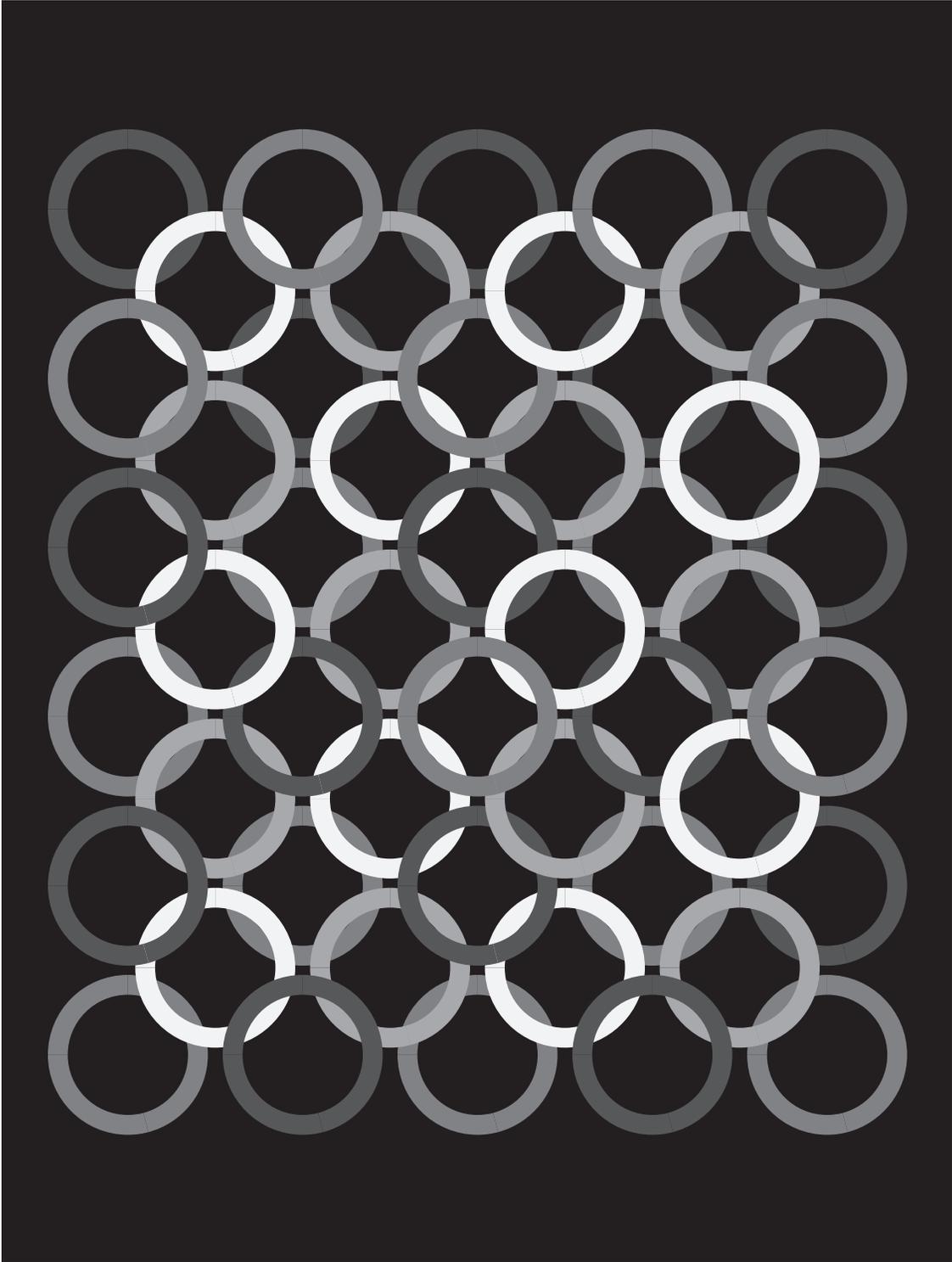
The topline and tabulations delivered to FIRE from YouGov (California) can be accessed at <https://www.thefire.org/publications/student-attitudes-free-speech-survey>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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SELF-EXPRESSION

A majority of students surveyed (87%) feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions in their college classrooms.

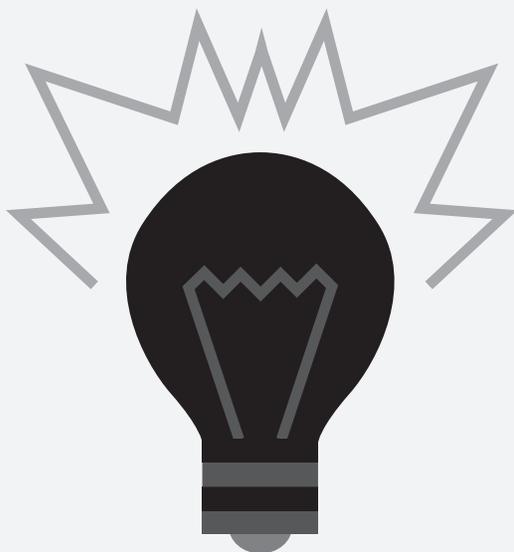
Very liberal students are 14 percentage points more likely to feel comfortable expressing their opinions in the classroom than their very conservative peers.

Half of students (54%) agree that they have stopped themselves from sharing an idea or opinion in class at some point since beginning college.

Almost one-third of students (30%) have self-censored in class because they thought their words might be considered offensive to their peers.

Almost one-third of students (29%) have self-censored on campus outside of class because they thought their ideas might be politically incorrect.

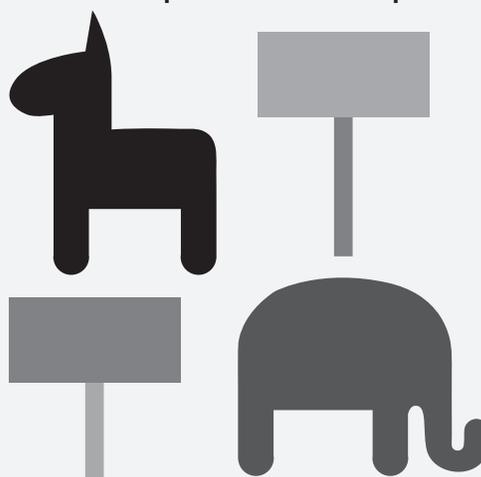
87% of students feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions in their college classrooms.



REACTIONS TO EXPRESSION

A majority of very liberal students (63%) and almost half of very conservative students (45%) agree that it is important to be part of a campus community where they are not exposed to intolerant or offensive ideas.

28% of Democrats and 60% of Republicans agree that they should not have to walk past student protests on campus.



There is a partisan divide of 32 percentage points in attitudes toward campus protest: 28% of Democrats and 60% of Republicans agree that they should not have to walk past student protests on campus.

Nearly three times as many students might try to understand the point of view of someone who makes a statement with which the student strongly disagrees (59%) than someone who makes a racist statement (21%).

Six times as many students might choose to talk to a campus employee about a racist statement than might choose to talk to a campus employee about a statement with which they strongly disagree.

GUEST SPEAKERS

A majority of students (93%) agree that their school should invite a variety of guest speakers to campus.

A majority of students (64%) agree to having changed an attitude or opinion about an issue after listening to a guest speaker.

Higher proportions of Democratic (68%) and very liberal students (57%) agree to changing an attitude or opinion after listening to a guest speaker than Republican (55%) or very conservative (45%) students.

Democratic students are 19 percentage points more likely than their Republican peers to agree that there are times a speaker should be disinvited.

Three-quarters of very liberal students (78%) and less than half of very conservative students (38%) support the withdrawal of a guest speaker’s invitation in some cases.

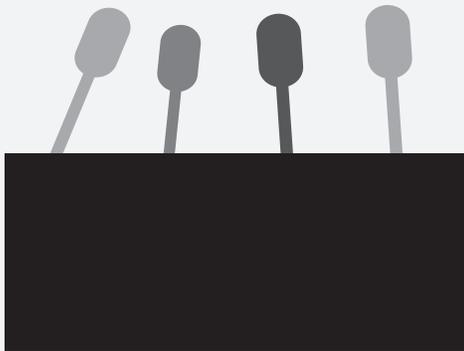
65% of students agree to having changed an attitude or opinion about an issue after listening to a guest speaker.



A majority of students (69%) who support disinvitations in some cases agree that a speaker’s invitation should be withdrawn if the speaker has made racist or hateful comments.

Very few students report that they might participate in actions that prevent a guest-speaker event from taking place, such as making noise during the event (2%), or using violent action to disrupt the event (1%).

93% of students agree that their school should invite a variety of guest speakers to campus.



Very few students would make noise (2%) or use violent action (1%) to disrupt a guest-speaker event.



HATE SPEECH

Almost half of students recognize that hate speech is protected by the First Amendment. Of the 46% of students who recognize this, 31% think hate speech should not be protected.

Just over one-third of students (35%) think hate speech should be protected by the First Amendment.

In open-ended questions, almost one-half of students (45%) identify speech with a racist component as hate speech, and 13% percent of students associate hate speech with violence.

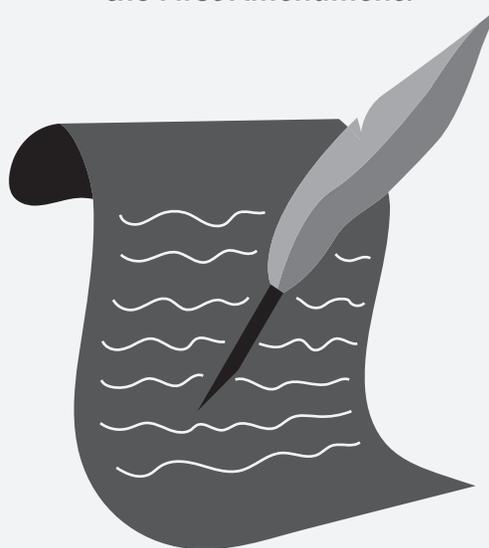
46% of students recognize that hate speech is protected by the First Amendment.



Of the 46% of students who recognize this, 31% think hate speech should not be protected.



35% of students think hate speech should be protected by the First Amendment.

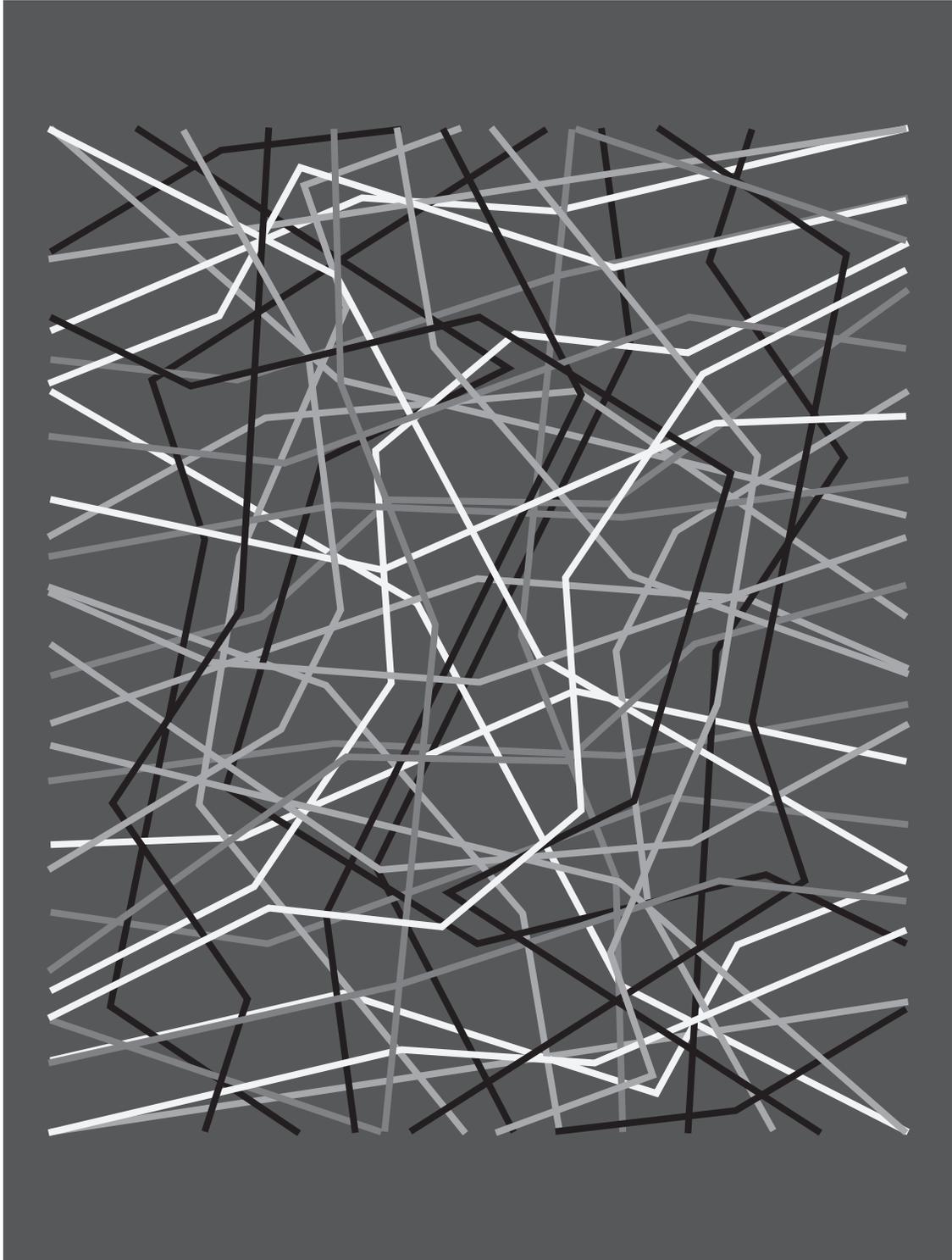


13% of students associate hate speech with violence.



METHODOLOGY

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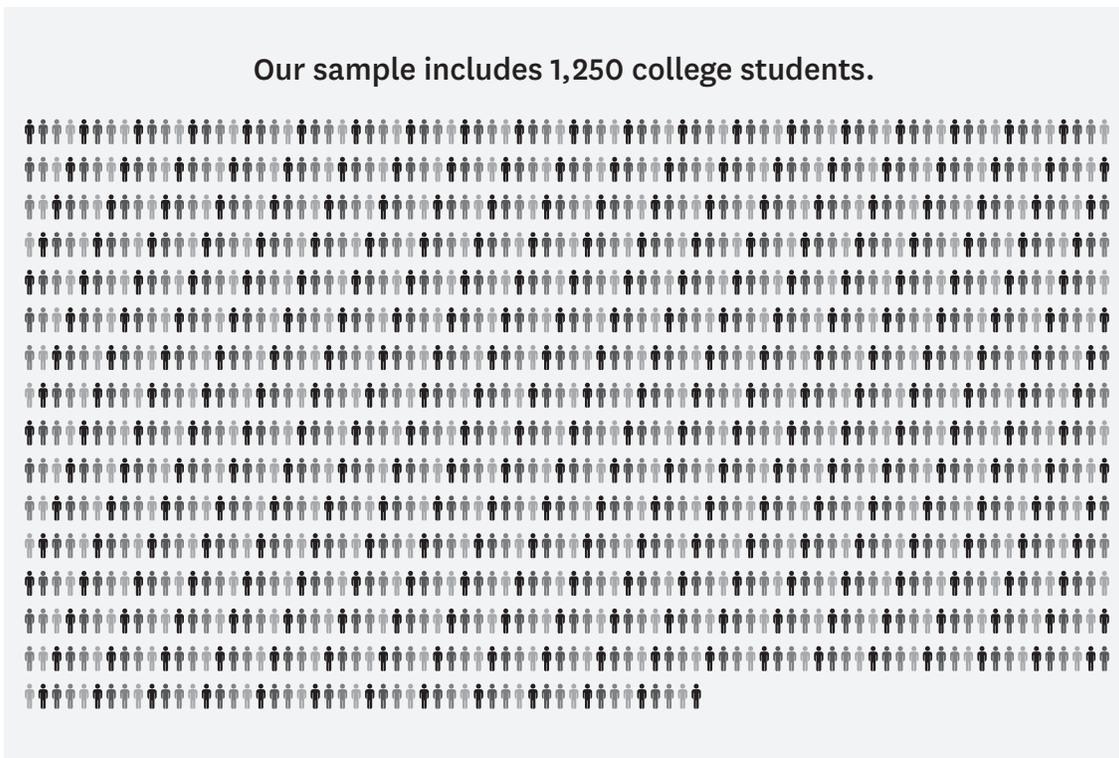
FIRE contracted with YouGov, a nonpartisan polling and research firm, to conduct a national online survey of 1,250 undergraduate students who currently attend a two- or four-year educational institution in the United States. Survey respondents were participants in YouGov's online, opt-in research panel, consisting of about 1.8 million individuals.

YouGov used an online survey to interview 1,395 undergraduate students between May 25, 2017, and June 8, 2017. Respondents were offered incentives from YouGov in exchange for completing the survey. The final dataset was created by matching responses down to a sample of 1,250 observations based on a sampling frame constructed using the 2013 American Community Survey. After the matching process, YouGov calculated weights for each response based on the respondent's gender, race, and age.

Tabulations from the final dataset have an estimated margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Tabulations taken from subgroups of the sample have a greater margin of error. All of the reported tabulations are weighted. The median amount of time it took a respondent to complete the survey was 20 minutes.

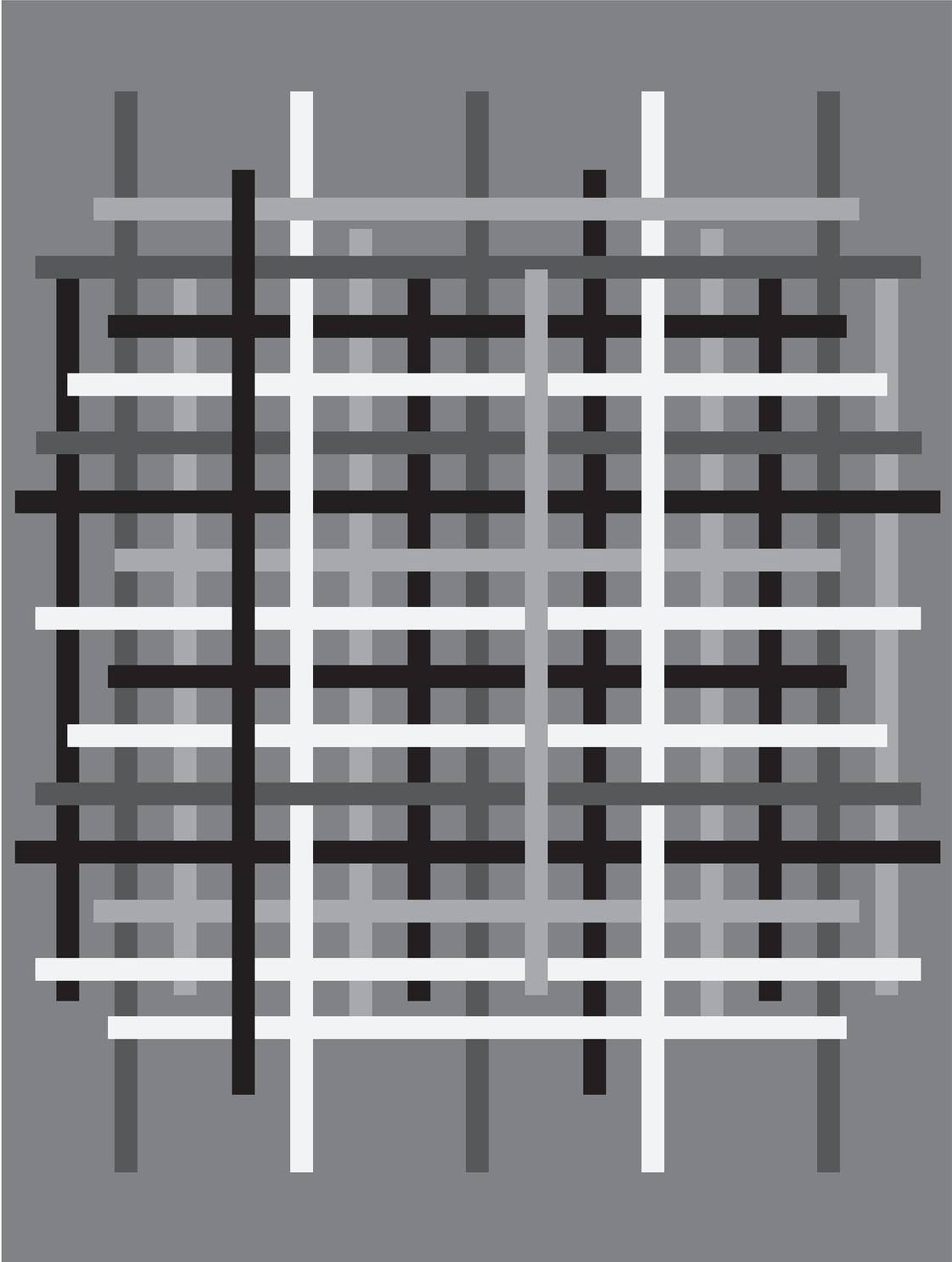
The aim at each stage of this survey project was to objectively understand the opinions and attitudes of college students.

Before publication, this report was externally reviewed by Wendy L. Watson, JD, PhD, and Angela C. Erickson to verify that the results are presented in a fair and honest way. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the following interpretations are accurate.



DETAILED RESULTS

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SELF-EXPRESSION

Students were asked to identify whether they feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions in their college classrooms. **Very liberal students are 14 percentage points more likely to feel comfortable expressing their opinions in the classroom than their very conservative peers (fig.1).**¹

However, most American students (87%) do feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions in their college classrooms. Whether or not students are comfortable sharing their opinions in the classroom does not vary by gender and varies only slightly by race, with a majority of White students (85%), Black students (93%), and Latino students (90%) feeling comfortable expressing themselves in the classroom. Democrats (90%) are slightly more comfortable sharing their opinions in the classroom than Republicans (83%).

Of the students who feel uncomfortable sharing their ideas and opinions in the classroom, a majority of them (56%) still do so.²

Most students (86%) also feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions on their college campuses when they spend time outside of class. As in the classroom, whether a student feels comfortable does not vary by gender, and a majority of White students (85%), Black students (88%), and Latino students (89%) are comfortable expressing their ideas on campus. Democrats (91%) are slightly more comfortable sharing their opinions on campus than Republicans (82%).

Unlike in the classroom setting, where there is a 14 percentage point difference, **there is a 21 percentage point difference between very liberal and very conservative students in the number of students that feel comfortable expressing opinions outside of the classroom while on campus (fig. 1).**

However, the evidence that students feel comfortable expressing themselves in the classroom and on campus does not necessarily imply that they always do so. **At least half of students (54%) agree that they have stopped themselves from sharing an idea or opinion in class at some point since beginning college.** The likelihood of self-censorship increases during a student's time at college. Slightly less than half of first-year students (47%) and somewhat more than half of fourth-year students (59%) have stopped themselves from expressing an idea or opinion in the classroom. Students have similar experiences outside of the classroom: almost half of students (44%) agree to stopping themselves from sharing an opinion on campus outside of the classroom, with greater frequency among fourth-year students (48%) than first-year students (35%).

It makes sense that students who have spent more time on campus will have had more opportunities to express an idea or opinion—and to stop themselves from expressing an idea or opinion. However, it is important to fully understand why students choose not to speak up when they have an idea or opinion during their time in college.

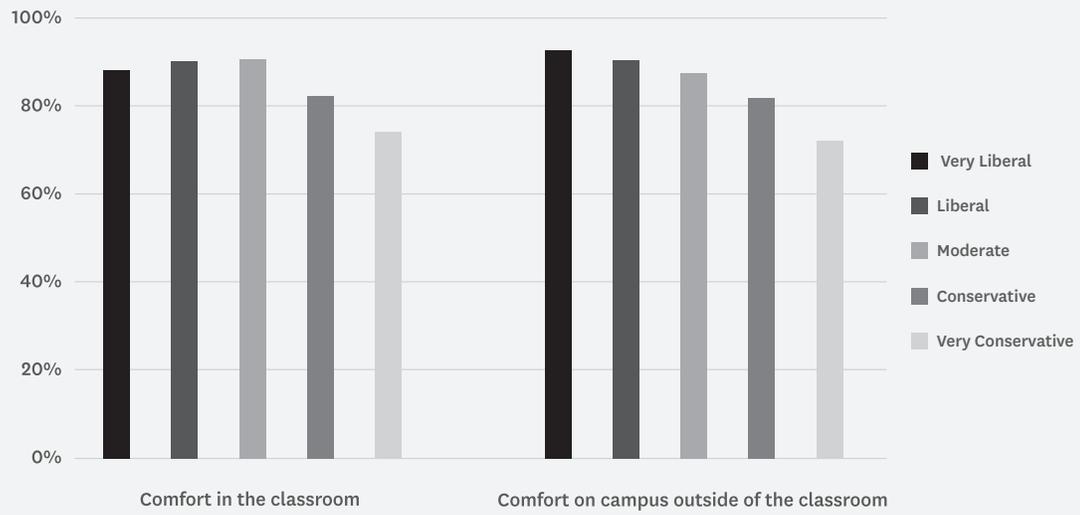
Students could choose multiple reasons for why they self-censor in the classroom. We find that more than one-quarter of students (27%) report self-censoring for three or more listed reasons. Among the listed reasons for not expressing themselves in the classroom, students most often selected that they thought they might be incorrect or mistaken (53%). **Almost half of students (48%) self-censored because they thought another student might judge them, and just under one-third of students (30%) did not speak up because they thought their peers might consider their words offensive.**

¹Two scales for partisan identification and one scale for ideological identification are used in this report. All three scales are based on self-identification, were provided by YouGov, and allowed respondents to choose a "not sure" option. The five-point ideological scale includes the following identifiers: very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, and very conservative. The three-point partisan scale includes the following identifiers: Democrat, Republican, and Independent. The seven-point partisan scale includes the following identifiers: strong Democrat, weak Democrat, lean Democrat, Independent, lean Republican, weak Republican, and strong Republican.

²Of the 1,250 total respondents, 13% (unweighted N = 167) feel uncomfortable sharing their ideas in the classroom. Of those 167 students, 56% (unweighted N = 96) agree that they "shar[e] an opinion even when [they are] uncomfortable doing so."

Figure 1. Ideology and comfort with expression

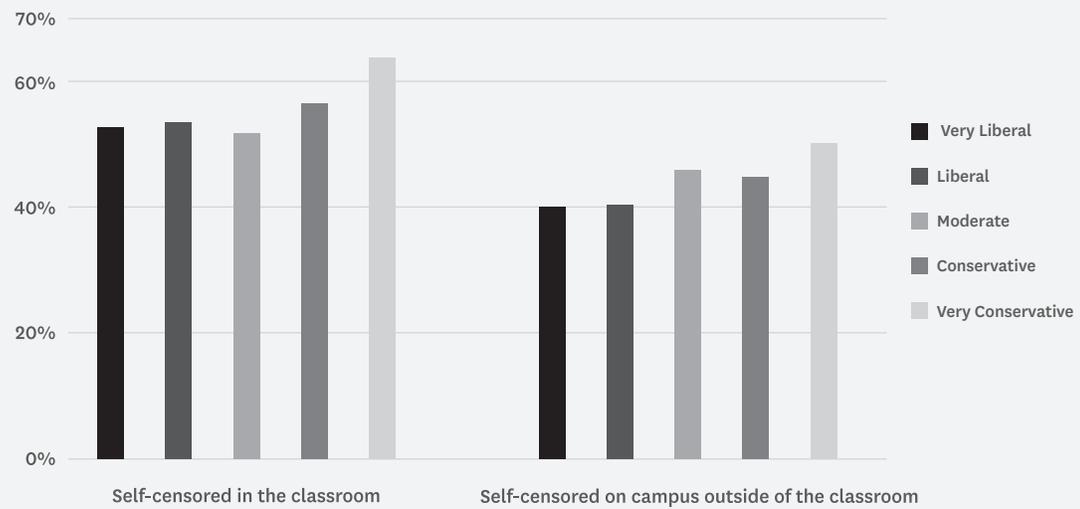
I feel comfortable sharing my own ideas and opinions



Note: Students who were “not sure” of their ideology are not represented in the figure.

Figure 2. Ideology and self-censorship

I have stopped myself from sharing my ideas or opinions



Note: Students who were “not sure” of their ideology are not represented in the figure.

The dynamic of self-censorship due to peer pressure is also evident on campus outside of the classroom. As in the question about self-censorship in the classroom, students could choose multiple reasons for why they self-censor on campus outside of the classroom. One-half of students (50%) report self-censoring for three or more of the listed reasons. Among the listed reasons for not expressing themselves outside of the classroom, just over one-third of students (39%) selected that they thought they might offend someone, 38% selected that they self-censored because another person might judge them, 34% because they might hurt someone's feelings, and 29% because they thought that their idea might be politically incorrect.

REACTIONS TO EXPRESSION

Almost all students (92%) agree that it is important to be part of a campus community where they are exposed to the ideas and opinions of other students. To gain a deeper understanding of students' attitudes toward the expression of their peers, we asked students what actions they might take in response to statements their classmates might make. Students were asked how they might respond when a classmate says something (1) with which the student strongly disagrees, (2) that the student finds offensive, (3) that the student finds hurtful, and (4) that the student finds racist.³ Students report being open to the ideas and opinions of others, but our findings show that if they interpret classmates' remarks to be offensive, hurtful, or racist, they are more likely to avoid the classmates who make those remarks.

When students hear their classmates say something with which they agree in class, almost three-quarters of them (72%) report that they might express their agreement with the statement. Other students might friend the

speaker on social media (17%) or might talk with the speaker outside of class (34%). When they agree with their peers' ideas, students report that they might choose to respond by further engaging with those ideas or by taking steps to make friends with the speaker. This is consistent with our finding that about one-quarter of students (28%) report that meeting people and developing friendships is one of the three most important things they want to gain from college.⁴

When students hear statements with which they strongly disagree in class, more than one-half of them report that they might try to understand their classmate's point of view (59%). Just under one-third of students (28%) might avoid interaction with the student in the future, but very few students (5%) might tell the other student not to voice that opinion.

Reactions to speech change, though, when students tell us how they respond to speech they find offensive. **Fewer students might try to understand the point of view of their peers when they hear an offensive statement (35%) than when they hear a statement with which they strongly disagree (59%)—a 17 percentage point difference.** As figure 4 shows, the proportion of students who might try to understand the point of view of a classmate decreases even further when the classmate says something that the student finds hurtful (28%), or racist (21%).

Nearly half of students (45%) might avoid interacting with a peer who makes an offensive statement, and one-half might avoid peers who make statements they find racist (50%).

These differences show that higher proportions of students do not want to engage with their peers when their peers say something offensive or hurtful, than when their peers say something with

³ Students were able to select as many actions as they might take in response to a classmate's statement as applied, from a given list of answer options.

⁴ Students reported that the three most important things they want to gain from college are: to "learn specific skills and knowledge for my future career"; to "explore career options for after college"; and to "meet people and develop friendships."

which they strongly disagree. Students especially do not want to engage with those who make racist statements. Substantially fewer students, at a difference of 38 percentage points, might try to understand the point of view of someone who makes a racist statement than someone who makes a statement with which the student strongly disagrees (fig. 4).

As shown in figure 3, some students report that they might talk to a campus employee about statements with which they strongly disagree (unweighted N = 32), offensive statements (unweighted N = 95), hurtful statements (unweighted N = 100), and racist statements (unweighted N = 192). **Almost twice as many students might discuss racist statements with campus employees than statements they found hurtful.**

Students report that they might discuss racist statements with a college administrator (unweighted N = 144), police officer (unweighted N = 58), or a member of a bias response team⁵ (unweighted N = 44) more often than they would speak with them about hurtful statements (fig. 3).⁶

Six times as many students might choose to talk to a campus employee about a racist statement than about a statement with which they strongly disagree.

More than half of students (58%) agree that it is important to be part of a campus community where they are not exposed to intolerant or offensive ideas. **A majority of Black (76%) and Latino students (69%) agree that it is important to be part of a campus community where they are not exposed to intolerant or offensive ideas, as opposed to one-half of White students (51% agree). Sixty-three percent of very liberal students and 45% of very conservative students agree that it is important to be part of a campus community where they are not exposed to intolerant or offensive ideas—an 18 percentage point difference.**

Students' attitudes toward the public presentation of student opinions vary by ideology as well as by partisanship. Few very liberal students (17%) agree with the idea that they should not have to walk past student protests on campus,

Figure 3. Students who might talk to a campus employee about their classmates' statements

	Strongly disagree	Offensive	Hurtful	Racist
Professor or faculty member	19	73	81	157
Athletic coach	3	11	10	19
Sorority or fraternity leadership	4	10	13	15
Residential life	6	20	28	45
Bias response team	8	13	18	44
College administration	13	51	58	144
Campus police	9	27	26	58
Other	3	4	3	5

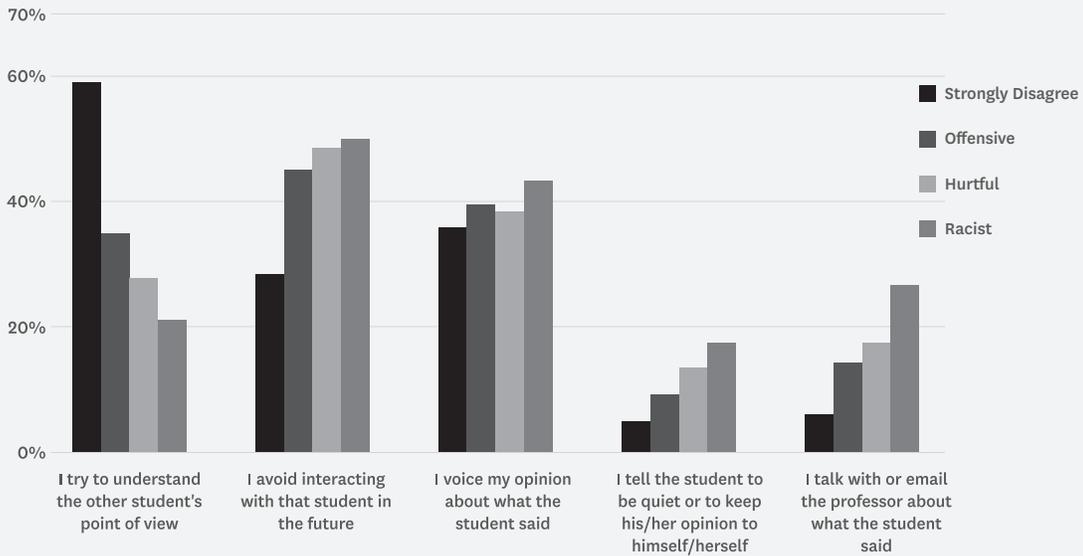
Note: Numbers are the unweighted number of observations. Students could select as many answers as applied.

⁵ We define a bias response team as "an administrative body at a college or university that solicits, responds to, and often investigates, reports of offensive or biased student and faculty speech. Reports of biased speech can often be made to these teams anonymously." (FIRE, *Bias Response Team Report 2017*, accessed September 12, 2017, <https://www.thefire.org/fire-guides/bias-response-team-report-2017/>.)

⁶ Students would talk to a college administrator (unweighted N = 58), a police officer (unweighted N = 26), or a member of a bias response team (unweighted N = 18) about a hurtful statement (fig. 3).

Figure 4. Students' reactions to their classmates' statements

In my college classes, when another student says: (1) something that I strongly disagree with, (2) something offensive, (3) something hurtful, or (4) something racist, I might respond in the following way(s):



Note: Not all answer options for the questions graphed here are represented in this figure. Students could select as many answers as applied.

whereas a majority of very conservative students (64%) agree. **There is a partisan divide of 32 percentage points in attitudes toward campus protest: 28% of Democrats and 60% of Republicans agree with the idea that they should not have to walk past student protests on campus.**

GUEST SPEAKERS

A majority of students (92%) agree that having guest speakers on campus is an important part of the college experience. Even if students strongly disagree with the point of view of a guest speaker, they feel the speaker should be able to talk on campus,⁷ and a majority of students (93%) agree that their schools should invite a variety of speakers to campus. Although students agree that inviting guest speakers to campus is important,

we find evidence that students also support the disinclination of guest speakers in some cases.

Student attitudes toward guest speakers are consistent with their reported behavior; most report that they have attended guest-speaker events on their campuses. A majority of students (85%) report having attended at least one guest-speaker event during their time on campus, and almost half of students (44%) report having attended at least three.

A majority of students (64%) agree to having changed an attitude or opinion about an issue after listening to a guest speaker. More students who participate in activist activities (74%)⁸ agree to having changed an attitude or opinion after listening to a guest speaker than students who do not participate in activist activities (60%). More

⁷ Ninety-three percent of students “strongly agree” or “agree” with the following statement: “Even if I disagree strongly with the point of view of a guest speaker, he/she should be able to talk about his/her ideas on my college campus.”

⁸ Activist students are those who report expressing themselves in one or more of the following ways on campus: using chalk to write on blackboards or sidewalks, handing out flyers or pamphlets, getting involved in a political campaign, writing for a campus publication or newspaper, attending or participating in a protest or rally, or organizing a protest or rally. Three hundred ninety-eight (or 31%) of respondents qualify as activist students under that definition.

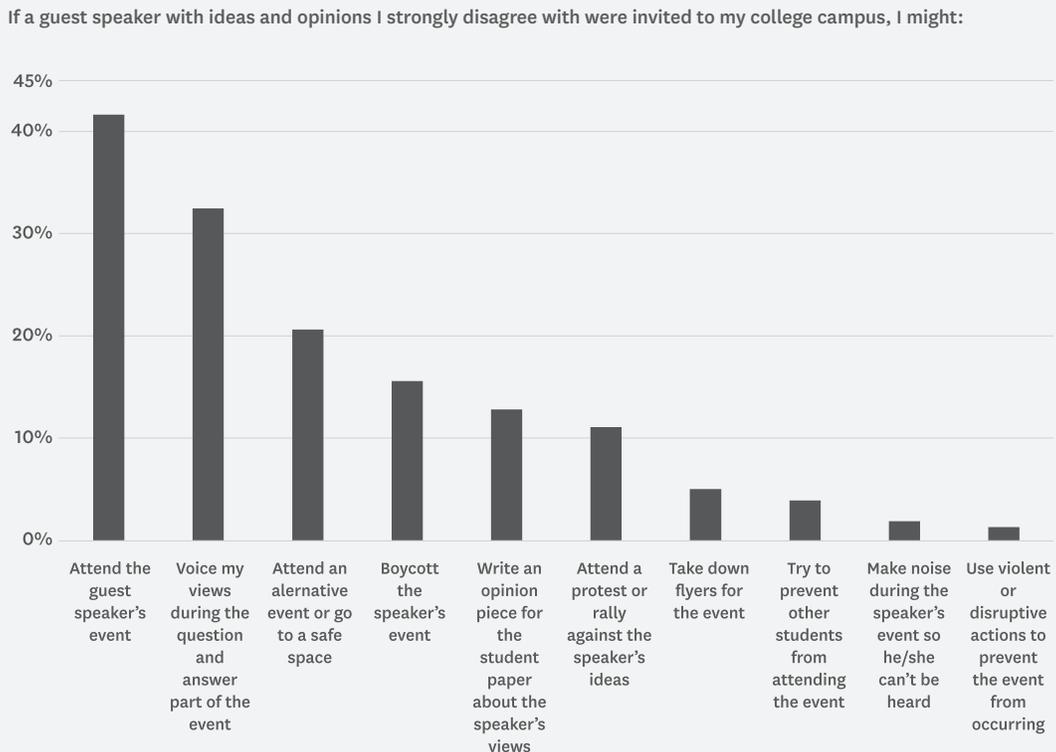
Black (77%) and Latino (72%) students agree to having changed an attitude or opinion after hearing a guest speaker than their White (58%) peers. **Higher proportions of Democratic (68%) and very liberal students (57%) agree to having changed an attitude or opinion after listening to a guest speaker than Republican (55%) or very conservative (45%) students.**

Consistent with our finding that a majority of students (93%) agree that their school should invite a variety of speakers to campus, almost one-half of students (42%) might attend a guest-speaker event when they strongly disagree with

the speaker’s opinions. As figure 5 shows, some students who disagree with guest speakers might boycott the event (16%), attend an alternative event (21%), or attend a protest against the speaker’s ideas (11%). Other students might choose to voice their views about the guest speaker’s ideas by writing an opinion piece for their student newspaper (13%), posting on social media about the speaker (15%), or speaking up during the question portion of the event (33%).

Very few students report that they might participate in actions that prevent a guest-speaker event from taking place. Five percent of

Figure 5. Student reactions to guest speakers with whom they strongly disagree



Note: Not all answer options for the question graphed here are represented in this figure. Students could select as many answers as applied.

students might take down flyers promoting the event, 4% might try to prevent other students from attending it, 2% might make noise during the event, and 1% of students might use violent action to disrupt it (fig. 5).

DISINVITATION OF GUEST SPEAKERS

A disinvitation occurs when a guest speaker has been invited to a campus to speak, but the college or university later withdraws the speaker's invitation. Although we find that most students (93%) agree that their school should invite a variety of speakers to campus, **more than half of students (56%) agree that there are times when a college or university should withdraw a guest speaker's invitation after the event has been announced.** Nearly two-thirds of activist students (65%) and slightly more than one-half of students who don't engage in activist activities (52%), agree that there are times when a college should withdraw a guest speaker's invitation in some cases.

We find evidence of a partisan divide in attitudes toward disinvitations. **Democratic students are 19 percentage points more likely than their Republican peers to agree that there are times a speaker should be disinvited.** Almost half of Republicans (47%) and two-thirds of Democrats (66%) support disinvitations in some instances. **There is a 40 percentage point ideological divide in attitudes toward disinvitations: 78% of very liberal students and 38% of very conservative students support the withdrawal of a guest speaker's invitation in some instances.**

There are a variety of reasons why a school might withdraw a guest speaker's invitation. A majority of students who support disinvitations in certain cases think a speaker's invitation should be withdrawn if the speaker has made racist or

hateful comments (69%) or if the speaker has participated in criminal activity or professional misconduct (66%). Some students think speakers should be disinvited if the university cannot provide adequate security for the event (45%), if protests are planned against the speaker (20%), or if a letter is written to the administration asking that the invitation be withdrawn (28%).

We gave students a list of 64 people (or types of people) who, if invited to speak at their school, students might want to disinvite. This list included names of real people, including Barack Obama and Sarah Palin. It also included adjectives that could describe a type of person, such as feminist, racist, or sexist.⁹ One-quarter of students (25%) indicated that they might not want any of these 64 individuals or types of people to be disinvited.¹⁰ More than one-third of students (38%) might want their school to disinvite a racist speaker, and 36% of students might want a sexist speaker to be disinvited.

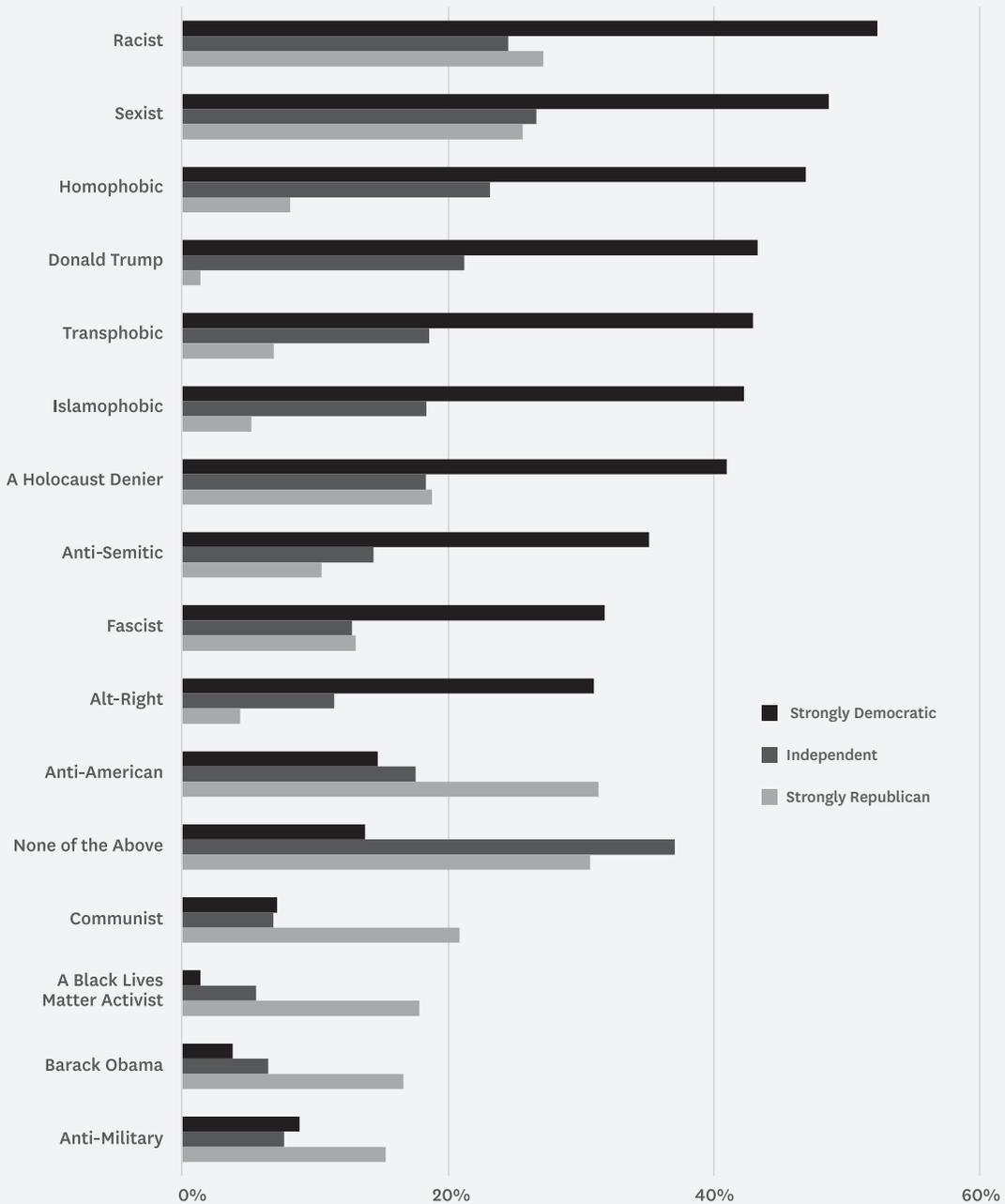
More strongly Democratic students might want their schools to disinvite a racist speaker (52%), a sexist speaker (49%), a homophobic speaker (47%), or President Trump (43%) more than any other speaker. Strongly Republican students might want their schools to disinvite an anti-American speaker (31%), an abortion provider (30%), or a racist speaker (27%) more than any other speaker. One-third of strongly Republican students (31%) might not want their school to disinvite a speaker at all, as opposed to 14% of strongly Democratic students (fig. 6).

⁹ The full list of speakers is provided in the *Survey Questionnaire* section at the end of this report.

¹⁰ Twenty-five percent of students answered "none of the above" when provided with a list of people they might want to be disinvited from speaking at their school.

Figure 6. Guest speakers students might want to disinvite by partisanship

Proportion of strongly Democratic, Independent, and strongly Republican students who may want their college or university to tell a guest speaker he/she is no longer invited to speak if the speaker is:



Note: Students who identified as weakly Democratic, lean Democratic, lean Republican, weakly Republican, or who were “not sure” of their partisanship are not represented in this figure. Not all answer options for the question graphed here are represented in this figure. Students could select as many answers as applied.

HATE SPEECH

ATTITUDES TOWARD HATE SPEECH

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects freedom of speech, including the right to express hateful and offensive opinions. The Supreme Court has not provided a legal definition of hate speech and has consistently rejected any hate-speech exceptions to the First Amendment.¹¹ This absence of a legal definition is reflected in the attitudes of students, where we find no clear consensus regarding how to define hate speech.

There is currently disagreement among students over whether hate speech should be protected and how, if at all, it should be defined. **Almost one-half of students (46%) recognize that hate speech is protected by the First Amendment, and one-third (31%) of these students think that it shouldn't be protected.**¹² Some American students consider some speech that is not protected by the First Amendment, such as unlawful discrimination and incitement, to be hate speech. Other students consider portions of constitutionally protected speech to be hate speech, while some consider a mix of unprotected and protected expression to be hate speech. Further complicating the debate on hate speech is the opinion held by some students that hate speech is a form of violence.

The topic of hate speech is currently being discussed on college campuses. These discussions may affect students' attitudes toward hate speech, and it is possible that students feel hate speech is a divisive or emotionally loaded topic. To account for this, when we asked students about their attitudes toward hate speech, we allowed them to report not having an opinion on hate-speech protections.¹³ **Seventeen percent of students report having no opinion on whether hate speech should be protected.**¹⁴

Just over one-third of students (35%) think hate speech should be protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Almost one-half of students (48%) think the First Amendment should not protect hate speech (fig. 8).

Whether a student thinks hate speech should be protected by the Constitution varies by the student's gender, and varies slightly by their race. More men (42%) than women (30%) think hate speech should be protected, and more students with reported family incomes of \$120 thousand or more support First Amendment protections for hate speech than students with lower reported family incomes.¹⁵

A student's partisanship and ideology are also important indicators of whether they think hate speech should be protected. **A majority of very conservative students (60%) and almost one-half of Republicans (46%) think hate speech should be protected. In contrast, the majority of both very liberal students (64%) and Democrats (57%) think hate speech should not be protected.**

DEFINITIONS OF HATE SPEECH

Students' attitudes toward hate-speech protection are only one portion of the current discourse surrounding hate speech on college campuses. To better understand how hate speech is being discussed on college campuses, we asked students a series of open-ended questions about their views toward hate speech.¹⁶ Because we asked students for text answers to these questions, a qualitative analysis of their responses was required. When there are quotations around text in the following discussion, it indicates that the text is a response from a respondent to an open-ended question on hate speech. These responses do not represent the opinions of FIRE or the authors of this report. The

¹¹ See, e.g., *Matal v. Tam*, 137 S. Ct. 1744, 1764 (2017); *Snyder v. Phelps*, 562 U.S. 443, 461 (2011); *R.A.V. v. St. Paul*, 505 U.S. 377, 393 (1992).

¹² One hundred seventy-one students recognized that hate speech is protected by the First Amendment, but think it should not be protected.

¹³ Respondents were able to skip any question in the survey, including questions in the section on hate speech.

¹⁴ Seventeen percent of students responded, "I don't know," when asked the following question: "In your opinion, should the First Amendment to the Constitution protect hate speech?"

¹⁵ Thirty-five percent of students with a family income under \$40 thousand, 36% of students with a family income of \$40–\$80 thousand, 32% of students with a family income of \$80–\$120 thousand, and 46% of students with a family income of \$120 thousand or more support First Amendment protections of hate speech.

¹⁶ We asked students the following three questions: When you think of hate speech, what comes to mind? In your opinion, what is an example of hate speech? How would you define hate speech?

statistics reported in the remainder of the report will not be found in the tabulations and topline provided by YouGov.

We find evidence of a group of students who suggest the identity of the speaker and listener is important when they define hate speech. **To these students, hate speech cannot take place between people of the same race or ethnicity, particularly when the words spoken have to do with race or ethnicity and have a negative connotation.** For example, one student wrote that hate speech is “a person calling someone of a different racial background horrible names and treating them as if they were inferior.” When asked for an example of hate speech, this group of students depicted a person from a particular racial or ethnic group using a racial slur or saying something derogatory about someone from another racial or ethnic group. **Almost one-half**

of students (45%) identify speech with a racist component as hate speech.¹⁷

A subset of the students who think the identity of the speaker and listener is important for understanding hate speech also think that the listener must belong to a minority group that has been targeted by discriminatory practices. One student responded that “hate speech intends to defame and slander a minority individual or group, and it is backed up by current oppressive policies within the government, society, or culture.” Another wrote that hate speech is “used to delegitimize the existence of individuals or groups of people [and] is targeted toward historically disenfranchised groups of people.” These students often used the words “dehumanizing” and “power” when describing hate speech.

Figure 7. Student knowledge of hate-speech protection

Does the First Amendment to the Constitution protect hate speech?

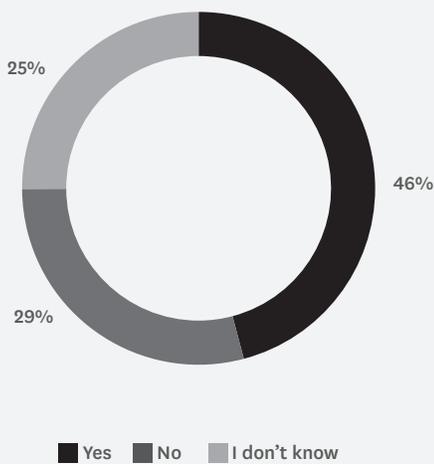
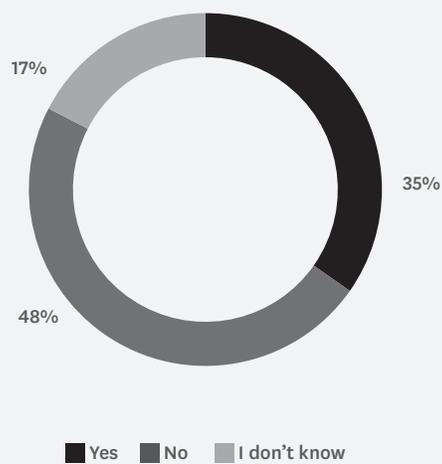


Figure 8. Student attitudes toward hate speech

Should the First Amendment to the Constitution protect hate speech?



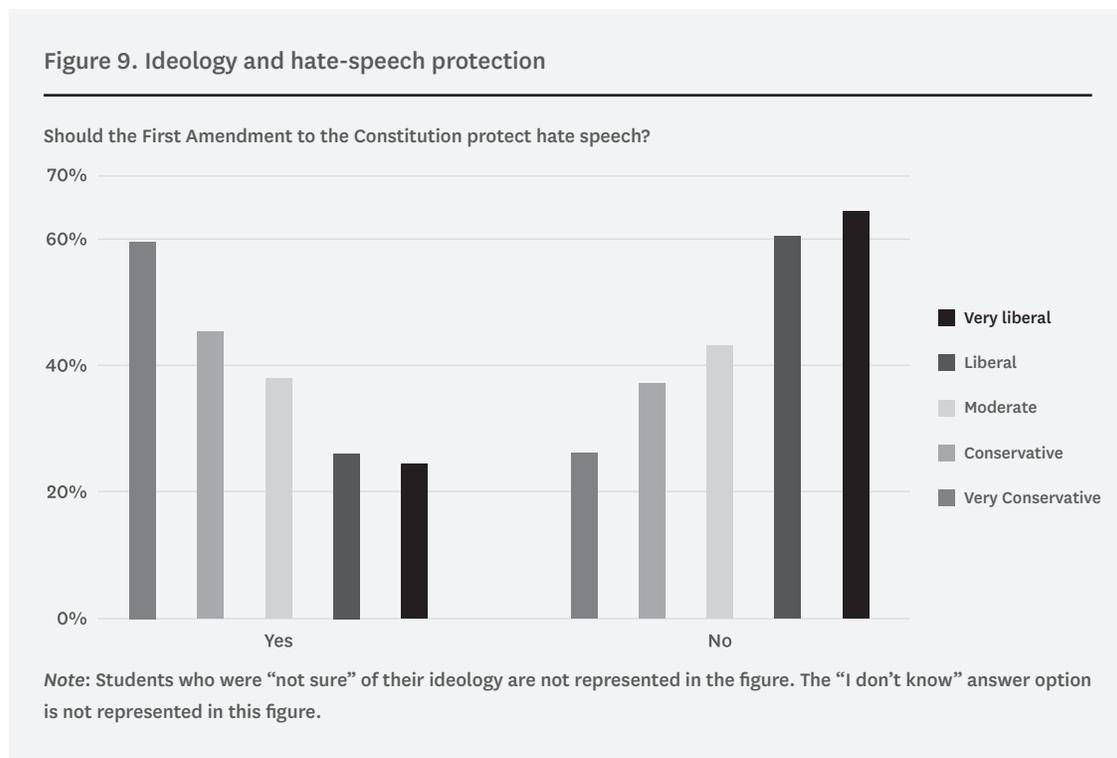
¹⁷ Five hundred seventy-nine students used the word “race,” “racial,” “racist,” or “racism” when defining hate speech in the open-ended questions.

A very small group of students (3%)¹⁸ identify hate speech as something very different from racist or dehumanizing remarks. These students suggest that hate speech is being used as a partisan tool to silence or censor individuals who identify as conservative or Republican, or who do not identify as progressive. Their responses indicate an attitude that hate speech is “something made up by the [political] left to counter what the [political] left does not want to hear,” or that it is a “meaningless term” that is “deliberately ambiguous, so that anyone can classify any opinion as hate speech.” Most of the students who defined hate speech in this way answered, “none of the above,” when asked which definition of hate speech most closely aligned with their own.¹⁹

Finally, responses to our open-ended questions point to yet another group of students who associate hate speech with violence.²⁰ **Of our total sample, 13% of students associated hate**

speech with violence. Most of these students write that hate speech “encourages” violence against a group or individual, but some write that this speech may “incite [or] glorify violence against a group.” A few students suggest that hate speech itself is actually a form of violence. One student wrote that hate speech “constitutes violence. It goes beyond voicing an opinion about an issue and instead threatens the existence of others.”

The conceptions of hate speech discussed here are not a comprehensive list of the responses we received, but they are representative of the main themes about which students wrote. Categorizing and analyzing these responses can help advance the national dialogue that is taking place on college campuses about hate speech. More research by organizations and scholars is necessary to gain a greater understanding of students’ attitudes toward hate speech.



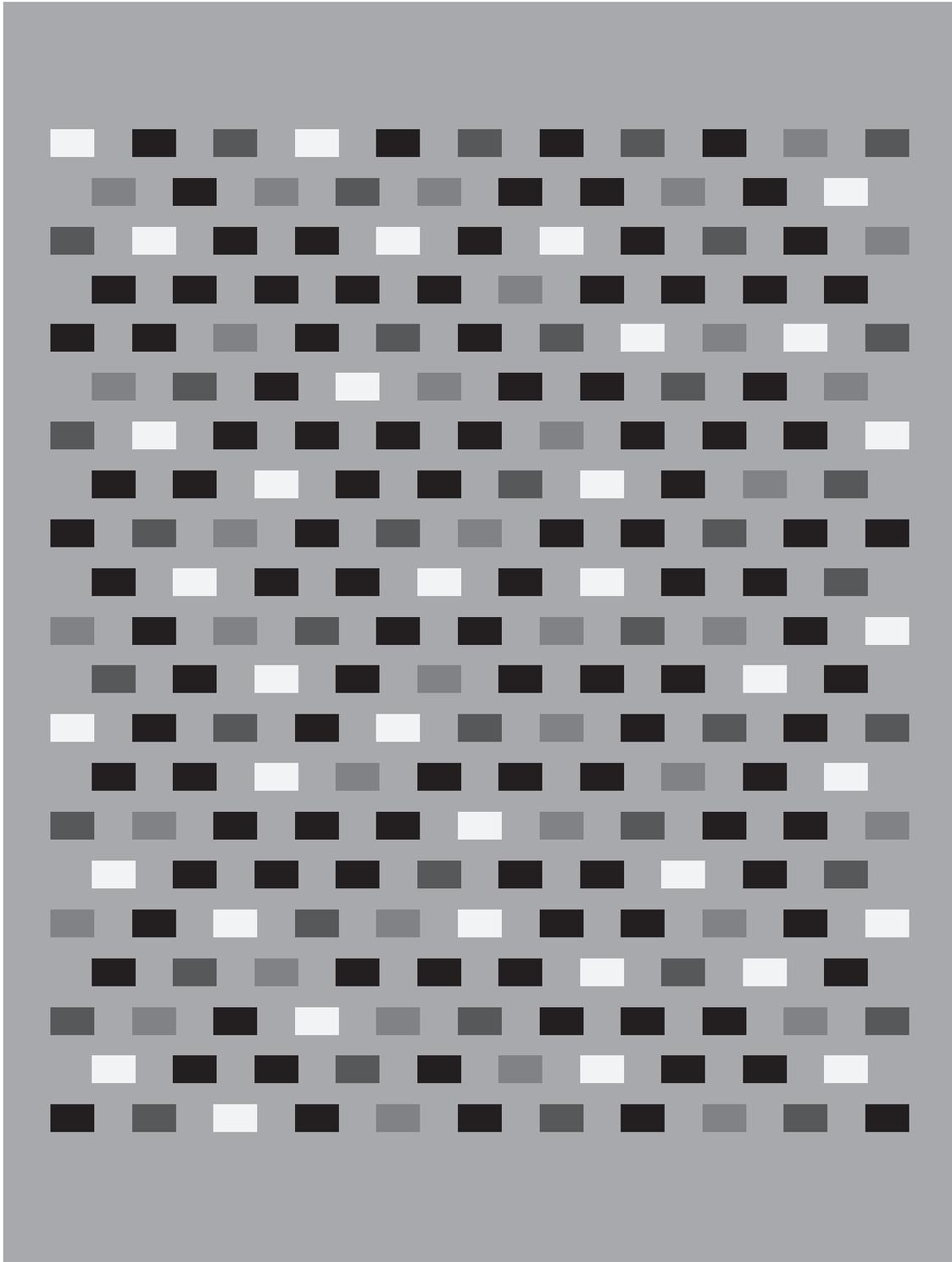
¹⁸ Thirty-eight students described hate speech in this way.

¹⁹ We asked, “Which of the following definitions most closely aligns with the definition of hate speech you just provided to us?” Respondents could choose from the following answer options: “racist speech that is intended to insult another person because they belong to a particular racial group”; “a term used to describe negative or controversial statements”; “powerful and negative speech that causes harm (ex: stress, exclusion, silence)”; “words directed toward a particular individual or group that characterizes the individual or group in a negative or stereotypical way”; “a phrase used to describe expression that someone else feels to be hateful”; or “none of the above.”

²⁰ One hundred seventy-eight students used the word “violence,” “violent,” or “harm” when defining hate speech in the open-ended questions.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

FOUNDATION FOR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS IN EDUCATION



In this survey we are going to ask you a variety of questions about your experience on your college campus, both inside and outside of class. There are no right or wrong answers to the following questions, and we thank you for your participation.

Q1 Overall, how satisfied are you with the experience you have had at your college or university?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied

Q2 Overall, how satisfied are you with the classes you have taken at your college or university?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied

Q3 Overall, how satisfied are you with the on-campus student activities at your college or university?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied

Q4 Which of the following are the three most important things you want to gain from your college education? I want to... [pick three] [randomize answer options]

- Belong to a campus community where my values are shared
- Explore controversial issues using evidence-based claims
- Grow and learn in a safe and comfortable environment
- Learn how to gather and thoughtfully use evidence to support my ideas
- Better understand how to value diversity
- Understand and evaluate the ideas of others, even when I disagree with them
- Learn how to turn controversial topics into meaningful dialogues
- Be encouraged to share my ideas openly
- Be exposed to diverse intellectual viewpoints
- Explore career options for after college
- Develop my personal identity

Learn specific skills and knowledge for my future career

Meet people and develop friendships

Become a better analytical writer

See the world from someone else's perspective

Q5 Which of the following are the three least important things you want to gain from your college education? I want to... [pick three] [randomize answer options in same order as Q4]

Belong to a campus community where my values are shared

Explore controversial issues using evidence-based claims

Grow and learn in a safe and comfortable environment

Learn how to gather and thoughtfully use evidence to support my ideas

Better understand how to value diversity

Understand and evaluate the ideas of others, even when I disagree with them

Learn how to turn controversial topics into meaningful dialogues

Be encouraged to share my ideas openly

Be exposed to diverse intellectual viewpoints

Explore career options for after college

Develop my personal identity

Learn specific skills and knowledge for my future career

Meet people and develop friendships

Become a better analytical writer

See the world from someone else's perspective

Q6 College classroom activities can provide many ways for you to express your ideas and opinions. In your college classes, how have you expressed your ideas and opinions? [check all that apply]

Class discussions

Presentations

Debates

Creative writing

Short papers or reports

- Research papers
- Small group work or group projects
- Discussion boards on class webpages
- Clicker questions or in-class electronic quizzes
- Other [open-ended]

Q7 In my college classes, I feel comfortable sharing my ideas and opinions.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q8 In my college classes, there are times when I share my ideas and opinions even when I am uncomfortable doing so. [asked only of respondents who answered “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to Q7]

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q9 Which of the following were reasons that you shared your ideas or opinions when you felt uncomfortable in class? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” to Q8]

- I needed to participate in class because it affects my grade
- I thought my idea or opinion was correct
- I thought my idea or opinion was important for others to hear
- No one else was sharing their ideas or opinions
- I wanted to point out a mistake that someone made
- I wanted to present a different viewpoint
- I disagreed with what others were saying
- I wanted to add support to my friend or classmate’s idea
- I wanted to stand up for another student who couldn’t speak up
- I wanted to stand up for people in my racial, ethnic, or cultural group
- Other [open-ended]

Q10 In my college classes, I have stopped myself from sharing my ideas or opinions.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q11 Which of the following were reasons that you stopped yourself from sharing your ideas or opinions in class? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered “strongly Agree” or “agree” to Q10]

- I thought I might be incorrect or mistaken
- I thought I would offend my classmates
- I thought that classmates would judge me
- I thought a classmate might report what I said to a campus employee
- I thought the professor would disagree with me
- I thought the professor would give me a lower grade
- I thought the professor might report what I said to a campus employee
- Other [open-ended]

Q12 Expressing your ideas and opinions is also something that occurs outside of the classroom on college campuses. On your college campus, how have you expressed your ideas and opinions outside of the classroom? [check all that apply]

- Discussing opinions or ideas with my classmates or friends
- Posting on social media about campus issues
- Joining a campus organization or student club
- Attending religious or spiritual events
- Using chalk to write on blackboards or sidewalks
- Creating or displaying artwork for an on-campus event
- Handing out flyers or pamphlets
- Getting involved in a political campaign
- Writing for a campus publication or newspaper
- Attending a speaker event or debate
- Attending or participating in a protest or rally
- Organizing a protest or rally
- Other [open-ended]

Q13 When I spend time on campus outside of my classes, I feel comfortable sharing my own ideas and opinions.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q14 When I spend time on campus outside of my classes, I have stopped myself from sharing my ideas or opinions.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q15 On your college campus, which of the following were reasons that you stopped yourself from sharing your ideas or opinions outside of the classroom? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered “strongly agree” or “agree” to Q14]

- I thought I might be incorrect or mistaken
- I thought I might hurt someone’s feelings
- I thought I might offend someone
- I thought my idea or opinion might be politically incorrect
- I thought someone would judge me
- I didn’t want to explain my opinion or idea
- I didn’t want to get into a debate, argument, or confrontation
- I didn’t want to lose my job or internship
- I thought someone might report what I said to a campus employee
- I thought I might get in trouble with a campus employee
- Other [open-ended]

Q16 Which campus office(s) or employee(s) did you think you would get in trouble with? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered “I thought I might get in trouble with a campus employee” to Q15]

- Professor or faculty member
- Athletic coach
- Sorority or fraternity leadership
- Residential life
- Bias response team
- College administration
- Campus police
- I thought I might get in trouble with the local police
- Other [open-ended]

Q17 It is important to be part of a campus community where I am not exposed to intolerant and offensive ideas.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q18 In my college classes, when another student says something that *I agree with*, I might respond in the following way(s): [check all that apply]

- I express my agreement with what the student said
- I friend or follow the student on social media
- I post about the experience on social media
- I ask the student questions about what he/she said
- I talk with or email the professor about what the student said
- I talk with my friends or classmates about what the student said
- I work with the student on future class projects or activities
- I talk with the student outside of class
- Other [open-ended]

Q19 In my college classes, when another student says something that *I strongly disagree with*, I might respond in the following way(s): [check all that apply]

- I avoid interacting with that student in the future
- I post about the experience on social media
- I voice my opinion about what the student said
- I try to understand the other student’s point of view
- I ask the student questions about what he/she said
- I tell the student to be quiet or to keep his/her opinion to himself/herself
- I talk with or email the professor about what the student said
- I talk with my friends or classmates about what the student said
- I leave the classroom
- I make class uncomfortable for the other student
- I discuss what the student said with a campus employee
- Other [open-ended]

Q20 What campus office(s) or employee(s) would you go to in order to discuss a statement that you *strongly disagree with*? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered “I discuss what the student said with a campus employee” to Q19]

- Professor or faculty member
- Athletic coach
- Sorority or fraternity leadership
- Residential life
- Bias response team
- College administration
- Campus police
- Other [open-ended]

Q21 In my college classes, when another student says something *offensive*, I might respond in the following way(s): [check all that apply]

- I avoid interacting with that student in the future
- I post about the experience on social media
- I voice my opinion about what the student said
- I try to understand the other student's point of view
- I ask the student questions about what he/she said
- I tell the student to be quiet or to keep his/her opinions to himself/herself
- I talk with or email the professor about what the student said
- I talk with my friends or classmates about what the student said
- I leave the classroom
- I make class uncomfortable for the other student
- I discuss what the student said with a campus employee
- Other [open-ended]

Q22 Which campus office(s) or employee(s) would you discuss a statement you find *offensive* with? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered "I discuss what the student said with a campus employee" to Q21]

- Professor or faculty member
- Athletic coach
- Sorority or fraternity leadership
- Residential life
- Bias response team
- College administration
- Campus police
- Other [open-ended]

Q23 In my college classes, when another student says something *hurtful*, I might respond in the following way(s): [check all that apply]

- I avoid interacting with that student in the future
- I post about the experience on social media
- I voice my opinion about what the student said
- I try to understand the other student's point of view
- I ask the student questions about what he/she said
- I tell the student to be quiet or to keep his/her opinions to himself/herself
- I talk with or email the professor about what the student said
- I talk with my friends or classmates about what the student said
- I leave the classroom

- I make class uncomfortable for the other student
- I discuss what the student said with a campus employee
- Other [open-ended]

Q24 Which campus office(s) or employee(s) would you discuss a statement you find *hurtful* with? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered "I discuss what the student said with a campus employee" to Q23]

- Professor or faculty member
- Athletic coach
- Sorority or fraternity leadership
- Residential life
- Bias response team
- College administration
- Campus police
- Other [open-ended]

Q25 In my college classes, when another student says something *racist*, I might respond in the following way(s): [check all that apply]

- I avoid interacting with that student in the future
- I post about the experience on social media
- I voice my opinion about what the student said
- I try to understand the other student's point of view
- I ask the student questions about what he/she said
- I tell the student to be quiet or to keep his/her opinions to himself/herself
- I talk with or email the professor about what the student said
- I talk with my friends or classmates about what the student said
- I leave the classroom
- I make class uncomfortable for the other student
- I discuss what the student said with a campus employee
- Other [open-ended]

Q26 Which campus office(s) or employee(s) would you discuss a statement you find *racist* with? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered "I discuss what the student said with a campus employee" to Q25]

- Professor or faculty member
- Athletic coach
- Sorority or fraternity leadership
- Residential life
- Bias response team

College administration
Campus police
Other [open-ended]

Q27 It is important to be part of a campus community where I am exposed to the ideas and opinions of other students, even if they are different from my own.

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

In the next section of the survey, we are going to ask you about guest speakers who are invited to campus by your college or university's administration, faculty, or student groups. Again, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, and we thank you for your participation.

Q28 It is an important part of the college experience to have guest speakers come to campus to share a wide variety of viewpoints on political, social, economic, and other contemporary issues.

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Q29 On your college campus, in which of the following environments have you listened to guest speakers talk about their ideas or opinions? [check all that apply]

Classroom lecture
Graduation or commencement ceremony
Speaker series hosted by my college or university
Event hosted by a club or student organization
University-sponsored event
Academic or professional conference
Athletic event
Other [open-ended]
I have not attended a guest speaker event since beginning college

Q30 Why haven't you attended a guest speaker event? [asked only of respondents who answered "I have not attended a guest speaker event since beginning college" to Q29]

I haven't been aware of any guest speakers on my campus
I haven't been able to attend because of my schedule

I haven't been interested in any guest speaker events
Other [open-ended]

Q31 After listening to a guest speaker talk on my college campus, I have changed at least one of my attitudes, perspectives, or opinions.

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Q32 Even if I disagree strongly with the point of view of a guest speaker, he/she should be able to talk about his/her ideas on my college campus.

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Q33 My college or university should invite speakers with a variety of ideas and opinions to campus, including speakers whose perspectives are very different from my own.

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Q34 If a guest speaker with ideas and opinions I strongly disagree with were invited to my college campus, I might do the following: [check all that apply]

Attend the guest speaker's event
Post on social media about the speaker or event
Voice my views during the question and answer part of the event
Write an opinion piece for the student paper about the speaker's views
Boycott the speaker's event
Take down flyers for the event
Attend an alternative event or go to a safe space
Attend a protest or rally against the speaker's ideas
Request or plan an event with a speaker whose views I do support
Report concerns to campus employee(s) about the speaker's event
Try to prevent other students from attending the event
Make noise during the speaker's event so he/she can't be heard

Use violent or disruptive actions to prevent the event from occurring
 Other [open-ended]

Q35 Which campus office(s) or employee(s) would you report your concerns to? [check all that apply] [asked only of respondents who answered “report concerns to campus employee(s) about the speaker’s event” to Q34]

Professor or faculty member
 Athletic coach
 Sorority or fraternity leadership
 Residential life
 Bias response team
 College administration
 Campus police
 Other [open-ended]

Q36 There are times when my college or university should tell a guest speaker he/she is no longer invited to speak at the school, even after the event was announced.

Strongly agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

Q37 What is a reason a college or university should tell a guest speaker he/she is no longer invited to speak? [check all that apply]

If the university is unable to provide enough security for the event
 If the speaker has made racist or hateful comments
 If the speaker has participated in criminal activity or professional misconduct
 If students plan protests against the speaker
 If students, faculty, or alumni write a letter requesting the invitation be withdrawn
 Other [open-ended]
 There is no reason a college or university should tell a guest speaker he/she is no longer invited to speak

Q38 I may want my college or university to tell a guest speaker he/she is no longer invited to speak if the speaker is: [check all that apply]

Ableist
 Al Gore
 Alt-right
 An abortion provider

An immigrant rights activist
 Ann Coulter
 Anti-American
 Anti-feminist
 Anti-immigration
 Anti-military
 Anti-Semitic
 Atheist
 Barack Obama
 Bernie Sanders
 Bill Maher
 A Black Lives Matter activist
 Buddhist
 Capitalist
 Christian
 A CNN reporter or show host
 Communist
 Conservative Republican
 A conspiracy theorist
 Dan Savage
 Donald Trump
 Evangelical Christian
 Fascist
 Feminist
 A Fox News reporter or show host
 A gay rights activist
 Glenn Beck
 Green Party
 A gun control activist
 A gun rights activist/A National Rifle Association (NRA) member
 Hillary Clinton
 A Holocaust denier
 Homophobic
 Islamophobic
 Jewish
 Keith Olbermann
 Laura Ingraham
 Liberal Democrat
 Libertarian
 Megyn Kelly
 Mormon
 Muslim
 An MSNBC reporter or show host
 Pro-choice
 Pro-Israel
 Pro-life
 Pro-military
 Pro-Palestine

Pro-police/Blue Lives Matter activist
 Pro-polygamy/polyamory
 Rachel Maddow
 Racist
 Rush Limbaugh
 Sarah Palin
 Sexist
 Socialist
 A Tea Party member
 Tomi Lahren
 Transgender
 Transphobic
 Other [open-ended]
 None of the above

Q39 It is important to be part of a campus community where I am exposed to the ideas and opinions of others, even if their ideas and opinions are different from my own.

Strongly agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

Q40 I should not have to walk past student protests on my college campus.

Strongly agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

Q41 My college campus is a place where students may protest, rally, and express themselves publicly.

Strongly agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

The next section asks you to rate how supportive your college or university is to various student groups on campus.

Q42 In your opinion, how supportive is your campus environment toward ... [grid format]

[rows]

African American students
 Asian students
 Hispanic/Latino students
 Native American students

White students
 International students
 Immigrant students
 [columns]
 Strongly supportive
 Supportive
 Neutral
 Unsupportive
 Strongly unsupportive

Q43 In your opinion, how supportive is your campus environment toward ... [grid format]

[rows]

Female students
 Male students
 Transgender students
 Gay students
 Lesbian students
 Bisexual students
 Queer students

[columns]

Strongly supportive
 Supportive
 Neutral
 Unsupportive
 Strongly unsupportive

Q44 In your opinion, how supportive is your campus environment toward ... [grid format]

[rows]

Christian students
 Jewish students
 Muslim students
 Buddhist students
 Hindu students
 Atheist or agnostic students
 Other non-Christian students

[columns]

Strongly supportive
 Supportive
 Neutral
 Unsupportive
 Strongly unsupportive

Q45 In your opinion, how supportive is your campus environment toward ... [grid format]

[rows]

- Republican students
- Democrat students
- Libertarian students
- Green party students
- Conservative students
- Liberal students
- Moderate or politically Independent students

[columns]

- Strongly supportive
- Supportive
- Neutral
- Unsupportive
- Strongly unsupportive

Q46 In your opinion, how supportive is your campus environment toward ... [grid format]

[rows]

- Students with a disability
- Students with a psychological health issue
- Students from poor- or working-class backgrounds
- Students from middle-class backgrounds
- Students from upper-class or wealthy backgrounds

[columns]

- Strongly supportive
- Supportive
- Neutral
- Unsupportive
- Strongly unsupportive

Q47 In your opinion, how supportive is your campus environment toward ... [grid format]

[rows]

- Non-traditional students (undergraduate students aged 25 or older)
- Students with children
- Students who are veterans

[columns]

- Strongly supportive
- Supportive
- Neutral
- Unsupportive
- Strongly unsupportive

Q48 In your opinion, how supportive is your campus environment toward ... [grid format]

[rows]

- Feminist students
- Men's-rights students
- Pro-choice students
- Pro-life students
- Communist students
- Socialist students
- Black Lives Matter supporting students
- Tea Party supporting students
- Pro-Israel students
- Pro-Palestine students

[columns]

- Strongly supportive
- Supportive
- Neutral
- Unsupportive
- Strongly unsupportive

For the last section of the survey we are going to ask you about hate speech. Again, there are no right or wrong answers, and we thank you for your participation.

Q49 Please take a minute to think about the next question before writing a response. When you think of hate speech, what comes to mind? [open-ended]

Q50 Please take a minute to think about the next question before writing a response. In your opinion, what is an example of hate speech? [open-ended]

Q51 Please take a minute to think about the next question before writing a response. How would you define hate speech? [open-ended]

Q52 Which of the following definitions most closely aligns with the definition of hate speech you just provided to us? [randomize answer options]

- Racist speech that is intended to insult another person because they belong to a particular racial group
- A term used to describe negative or controversial statements
- Powerful and negative speech that causes harm (ex: stress, exclusion, silence)
- Words directed toward a particular individual or

group that characterizes the individual or group in a negative or stereotypical way
A phrase used to describe expression that someone else feels to be hateful
None of the above

Q53 As you may already know, the First Amendment to the Constitution protects freedom of speech. Does the First Amendment protect hate speech?

Yes
No
I don't know

Q54 In your opinion, should the First Amendment to the Constitution protect hate speech?

Yes
No
I don't know

We're almost done—the following questions will help us to get to know you better and make sure that our survey is representative and inclusive. Thanks so much for taking our survey!

Q55 Do you consider yourself to be:

Male
Female
Transgender
Other [open-ended]

Q56 Do you consider yourself to be:

Heterosexual
Gay
Lesbian
Bisexual
Queer
Other [open-ended]

Q57 What is the name of the college or university that you attend? [open-ended]

Q58 Is the college or university you attend a public or private school?

Public
Private
I don't know

Q59 Is the college or university you attend affiliated with any religion or faith? [asked only of respondents who answered "private" to Q59]

Yes
No
I don't know

Q60 What is your current class standing?

First year (Freshman)
Second year (Sophomore)
Third year (Junior)
Fourth year (Senior)
Fifth year (Senior or more)
Graduate or professional student
Other

Q61 What is your major? [allow up to three responses]

Accounting
Administrative Science/Public Administration
Advertising
Agriculture/Horticulture
Anthropology
Architecture
Art History
Aviation/Aeronautics
Biology
Biostatistics
Business Administration
Chemistry
Child/ Human/Family Development
Classics
Communications
Communicative Disorders
Computer Science
Criminology/Criminal Justice
Dance
Dentistry
Economics
Education
Educational Administration
Electronics
Engineering
English
Environmental Science/Ecology
Ethnic Studies
Finance
Fine Arts
Food Science/ Nutrition/Culinary Arts

Foreign Language
 Forestry
 Gender/Women's/LGBTQ Studies
 General Studies/Interdisciplinary
 Geography
 Geology
 Health
 History
 Human Resources
 Human Services
 Humanities
 Industrial Science
 Information Technology
 Journalism
 Law
 Law Enforcement
 Liberal Arts
 Library Science
 Linguistics
 Literature
 Management
 Marketing
 Mathematics
 Mechanics/Machine Trade
 Medicine
 Music
 Nursing
 Optometry
 Parks and Recreation
 Pharmacy
 Philosophy
 Physical Education
 Physics
 Political Science/International Relations
 Psychology
 Public Relations
 Religion/Theology
 Social Sciences
 Social Work
 Sociology
 Special Education
 Sports Science/Kinesiology
 Statistics
 Television/Film
 Textiles
 Theater Arts
 Urban and Regional Planning
 Veterinary Medicine
 Visual Arts/Graphic Design/Design and Drafting

Writing
 Undeclared
 Other [open-ended]

Q62 Do you live on or off campus?

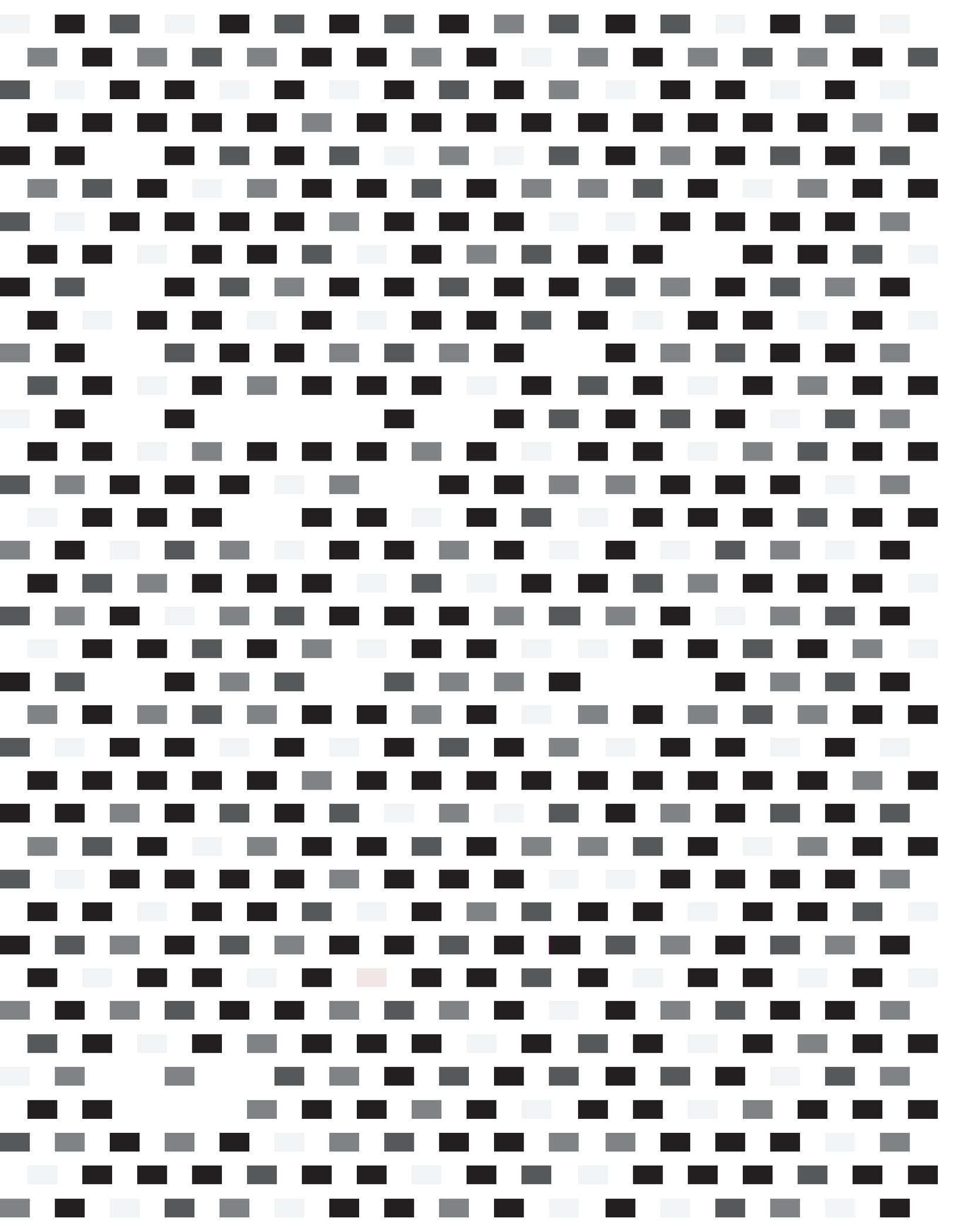
On
 Off
 I don't know

Q63 Did either of your parents attend college or receive a college degree?

Yes
 No
 I don't know

Q64 Have you received a Pell Grant as part of your college financial aid package?

Yes
 No
 I don't know



The mission of FIRE is to defend and sustain individual rights at America's colleges and universities. These rights include freedom of speech, legal equality, due process, religious liberty, and sanctity of conscience—the essential qualities of individual liberty and dignity. FIRE's core mission is to protect the unprotected and to educate the public and communities of concerned Americans about the threats to these rights on our campuses and about the means to preserve them.



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