

NEW SURVEY FROM AP-NORC, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO FINDS 68% OF ADULTS FEEL STATE GOVERNMENTS SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO RESTRICT WHAT IS TAUGHT AT STATE-FUNDED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

Public perceptions of freedom of expression on university campuses paints a complex picture with most respondents supporting several restrictions on faculty and student expression on college campuses in the United States.

Chicago, IL, October 2, 2023 – Ahead of the launch of The University of Chicago’s [Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression](#) on October 5, a new study from the University of Chicago and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) sheds light on the complex balance between placing limits on offensive speech and upholding the principles of free speech on college campuses.

Americans feel state governments should not be allowed to restrict what is taught at state-funded colleges and universities, and most do not want university administrators interfering with what professors are teaching in the classroom. However, the public still favors limitations on what professors should be allowed to express in the classroom.

“The public holds a nuanced set of expectations for how free expression should play out on university campuses,” said Tony Banout, the Executive Director of the University of Chicago Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression. “For example, the majority do not believe that students or professors should be allowed to express racist, sexist, and anti-LGBTQ+ views, but the majority also do not believe that colleges should be able to fire a tenured professor for using offensive speech.”

The study also finds the public perceives unequal freedom of expression for different groups on college campuses and believes that colleges and universities vary in their effectiveness in creating respectful and inclusive environments for different groups. People are least likely to believe conservatives can freely express themselves or be included and respected on campuses. Opinions among adults are almost evenly divided regarding whether people being allowed to say harmful or misleading things or people being prevented from saying what they want is a bigger problem on college and university campuses these days.

People are more supportive of freedom of expression across several scenarios for students compared to faculty. Nearly all adults are supportive of students engaging in peaceful and non-disruptive protests, but less than 20% support disruptive protest tactics that prevent the speaker from communicating to the audience or prevent audience attendance.

“People view a great deal of inequity when it comes to who is able to speak freely on university campuses,” said Jennifer Benz, deputy director of The AP-NORC Center. “For example, nearly half the public thinks white people have a lot of latitude to speak their minds freely on campus, but just 3 in 10 believe Hispanic or Asian people are able to do the same. Similarly, people are more than twice as likely to say liberals can speak their minds freely compared to conservatives.”

When it comes to the primary purposes of universities, people most often cite functions like preparing students for careers, advancing knowledge and innovation, and teaching critical thinking as their major roles. Roughly two-thirds of the public also consider fostering respectful learning environments and supporting the free exchange of ideas as primary purposes. Advancing equity and inclusion as well as fostering a sense of community rank lowest among what people see as higher education's primary purpose.

The Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression at the University will launch on October 5 with an event featuring a series of discussions among leading thinkers across diverse fields who will examine issues around free expression. All the daytime events will be webcast on the Chicago Forum website. Learn more at: <https://thechicagoforum.uchicago.edu/launch-event>.

About the Study

This survey, funded by the University of Chicago, was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and the University of Chicago Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Survey Methodology

The nationwide poll was conducted in English between September 7 and 11, 2023, using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Online and telephone interviews using landline and cell phones were conducted with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia; 1,095 completed the survey—1,060 via the web and 35 via telephone. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0 percentage points.

For more information, please visit www.apnorc.org.

About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

www.apnorc.org

The Associated Press is an independent global news organization dedicated to factual reporting. Founded in 1846, AP today remains the most trusted source of fast, accurate, unbiased news in all formats and the essential provider of the technology and services vital to the news business. More than half the world's population sees AP journalism every day.

www.ap.org

NORC at the University of Chicago conducts research and analysis that decision-makers trust. As a nonpartisan research organization and a pioneer in measuring and understanding the world, we have studied almost every aspect of the human experience and every major news event for more than eight decades. Today, we partner with government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world to provide the objectivity and expertise necessary to inform the critical decisions facing society.

www.norc.org

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more.

About the Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression at the University of Chicago

The University of Chicago's Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression, launching in October 2023, aims to promote the understanding, practice and advancement of free and open discourse. It builds on UChicago's historic commitment, since its founding in 1890, to the principles of free speech and academic freedom, and their importance to rigorous and open scholarly inquiry. Since that time, UChicago has continued to be a leading global advocate for the advancement of free expression, including developing the Chicago Principles, a statement outlining the importance of free expression and academic freedom that has been adopted by universities and colleges across the country. More information is available on the Chicago Forum's website: <https://thechicagoforum.uchicago.edu>

###

For more information: Contact Eric Young for NORC at young-eric@norc.org or (703) 217-6814 (cell).

Contact Nicole Meir for AP at nmeir@ap.org or (212) 621-7536.

Contact Colleen Mastony for UChicago at cmastony@uchicago.edu or (773) 844-5853.