

2026 College Free Speech Rankings
New York University

250

OVERALL
RANK

F

SPEECH
CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT
RATING

Executive Summary

THE COLLEGE FREE SPEECH RANKINGS are the most comprehensive comparison of free speech climates at U.S. colleges and universities. Developed by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, the rankings combine student survey data, written speech policies, and school responses to recent speech-related controversies to evaluate how well institutions uphold free expression. Schools earn higher scores when they protect open debate and viewpoint diversity and lose points when they restrict it.

To understand the student experience of free speech on campus, our survey partner, College Pulse, surveyed 68,510 student respondents from 257 colleges and universities from Jan. 3 through June 5, 2025. The College Free Speech Rankings are available online (rankings.thefire.org) for easy comparison between institutions.

We surveyed 313 New York University undergraduates. Key findings include:

- NYU ranks 250 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 48.18, an F speech climate grade.
- 7 in 10 students indicated that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was difficult to discuss. This reflects NYU's highest-ranked survey component, "Openness," which was middling (149). No component placed NYU in the top 50, leaving the university without any clear strength.
- The university ranks a dismal second to last for "Self-Censorship" (256) and is among the bottom 50 for "Comfort Expressing Ideas," meaning that NYU students frequently self-censor and are uncomfortable on campus.
- In addition, many NYU students opposed allowing controversial speakers on campus, believed disrupting a speaker through shouting down or even violence can be acceptable, and didn't believe that the administration would protect a speaker's rights. This is reflected in the university's poor rankings on the "Political Tolerance" (212), "Disruptive Conduct" (242), and "Administrative Support" (240) components.
- The university was penalized for three free speech incidents since 2023.
- NYU continues to maintain speech policies that earn it a "yellow light" rating from FIRE. If the university revised these five policies and earned a "green light" rating, it would have ranked 113 overall.

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New York University ranks 250 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 48.18, an F speech climate grade.¹ The university dropped one spot and 3.9 points since last year. It was also penalized for three speech controversies since 2023.

The following report highlights one survey area where NYU is middling, and five areas where NYU is among the 50 worst in the nation. In addition, it discusses NYU's speech policies, controversies, and what the university can do to improve its free speech climate.

NYU STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

7 in 10 students find the Israeli-Palestinian conflict difficult to discuss

“The israel-palestine situation here has been very hot. Expressing any opinion at all feels risky”

New York University ranks 149 on the “Openness” component after finishing 140 last year.

Students were presented with a list of 20 topics and asked which, if any, were difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus. Some big swings occurred since last year, with a percentage shift of 10 or more points for five topics: immigration (+16 points), climate change (+14 points), hate speech (-14 points), transgender rights (-12 points), and sexual assault (-10 points).

What didn't change, however, was the topic most frequently identified as being difficult to discuss: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Once again, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the topic most frequently identified among both NYU students and students nationally. And once again, the gap between the two groups of students was large. Among students nationally, 53% said the topic was difficult to discuss, whereas 69% NYU students said the same.

This wasn't the only topic for which NYU diverged from students nationally. In fact, NYU students identified nine topics more frequently (by an average of 8 points) and 10 topics less frequently (by an average of -6 points). One topic was identified equally as frequently.

¹ The detailed methodology can be found at rankings.thefire.org/methodology.

FIGURE 1: Topics Identified as Difficult to Have an Open and Honest Conversation About (%)

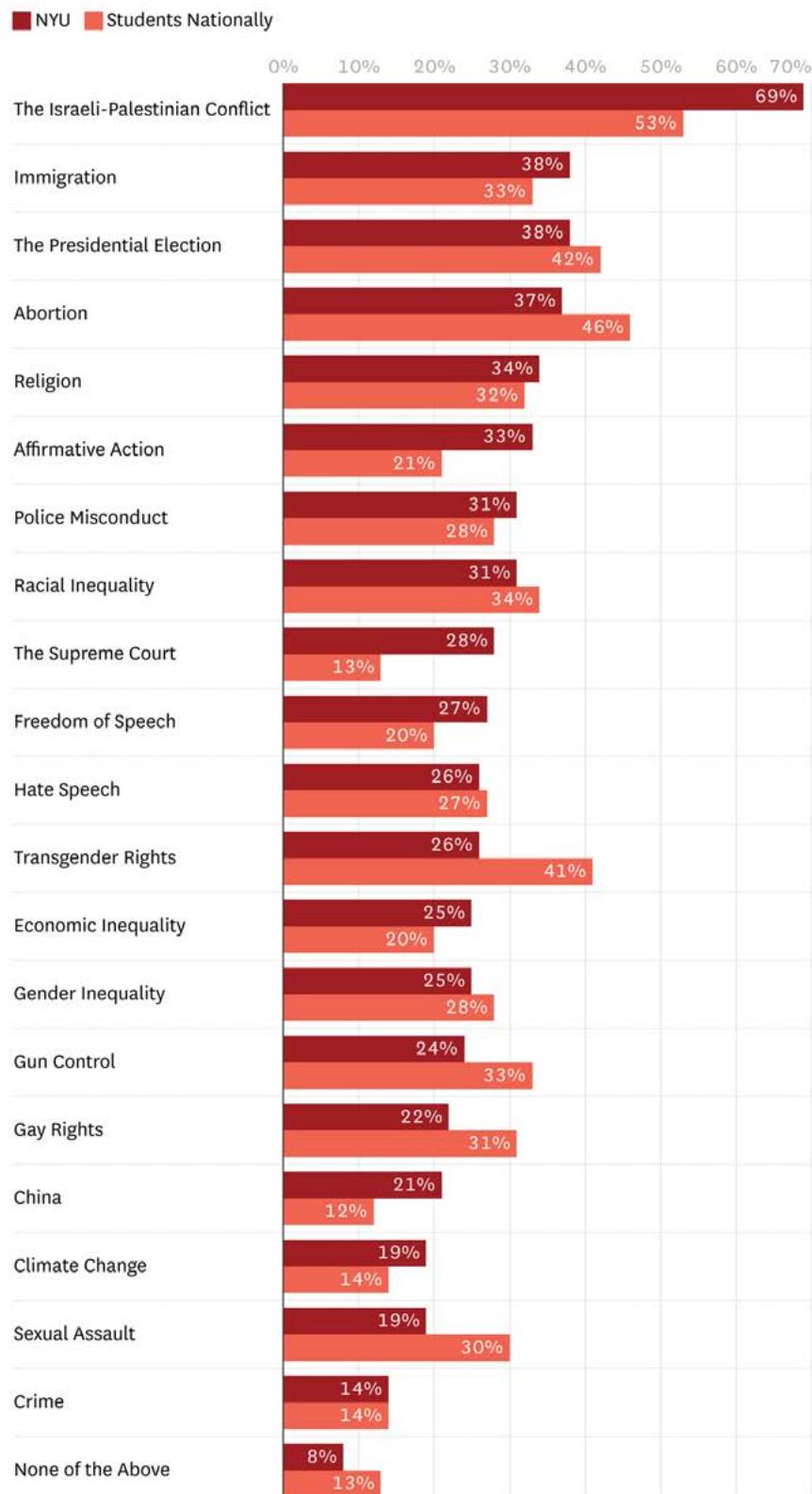


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Students don't think the administration protects free speech

| “My university has demonstrated they do not stand up for student speech.”

New York University ranks 240 on “Administrative Support.”

Only 26% of NYU students said it was either “very” or “extremely” clear that the administration protects free speech on campus, compared to 36% of students nationally. Conversely, 42% of NYU students said it was either “not very” or “not at all” clear – double what was reported by students nationally. The rest said it was only “somewhat” clear.

Additionally, only 17% of NYU students said it was either “very” or “extremely” likely that the administration would defend a speaker’s expressive rights in the face of controversy, compared to 24% of students nationally. Conversely, 45% said it was either “not very” or “not at all” likely, whereas only 27% of students nationally said the same. The rest said it was only “somewhat” likely.

Students self-censor and are uncomfortable on campus

| “every day in school I tend to censor myself”

New York University ranks second to last on the “Self-Censorship” (256) component after finishing 239 last year.

Students were presented 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.*”

They were then asked about the frequency with which they self-censor in three campus contexts. The percentage of NYU students who said they self-censored at least “a couple of times a week” has changed little for each context since last year. But when compared to students nationally, more NYU students reported self-censoring, particularly in conversations with other students.

- 34% – during conversations with other students on campus (24% among students nationally).
- 32% – during conversations with their professors (27% among students nationally).
- 34% – during classroom discussions (28% among students nationally).

NYU students also expressed greater discomfort on campus than students nationally, with the university coming in at 210 on the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component after finishing 173 last year.

Students were asked how comfortable they would be expressing views on a controversial political topic in five different campus settings. For each setting, discomfort was greater among NYU students than students nationally, with a majority of NYU students feeling either “somewhat” or “very” uncomfortable

in each. Depending on the setting, discomfort levels ranged from 54% to 72%, whereas four years ago levels ranged from 33% to 54%.

FIGURE 2: Students Who Felt At Least Somewhat Uncomfortable by Context (%)

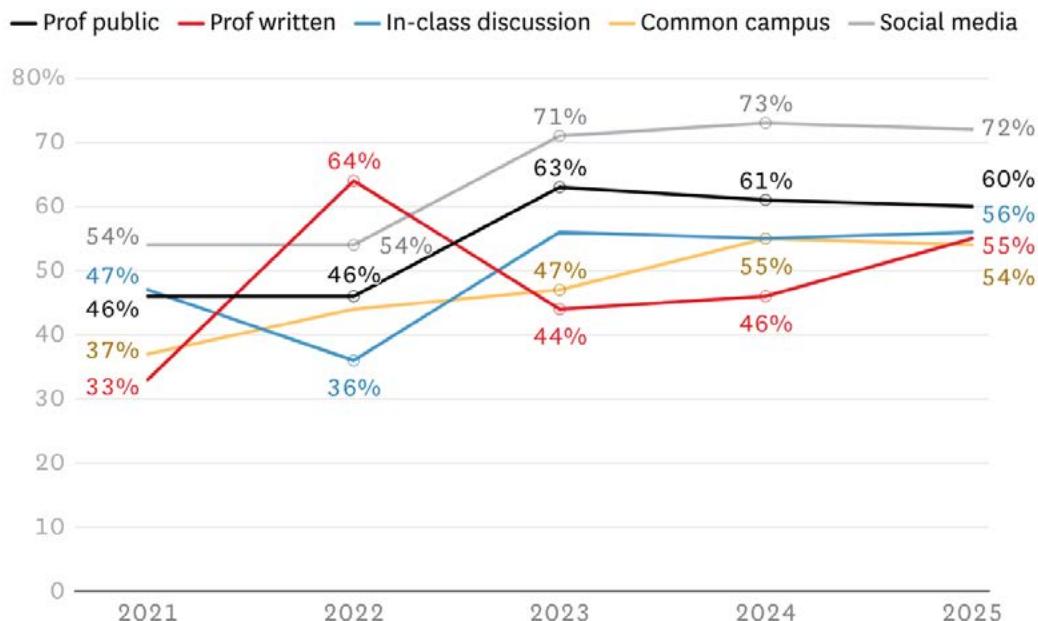


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Students' discomfort levels were reinforced by responses to three questions which did not factor into NYU's ranking. Compared to 14% of students nationally, 22% of NYU students reported hiding their political beliefs from their professors "at least a couple of times a week" in an attempt to get a better grade. But students didn't perceive professors to be immune to retaliation from students. On the contrary, 38% of NYU students said it was either "likely" or "very likely" that a professor would be reported to the administration by a student on campus for saying something controversial (compared to 32% among students nationally). Additionally, 43% said it was either "likely" or "very likely" that a student on campus would be reported to the administration by another student for the same reason (compared to 26% among students nationally).

Students don't want controversial speakers on campus and find disruption acceptable

New York University ranks 212 on "Political Tolerance."

Students were asked whether six speakers (three liberal, three conservative) who had previously expressed controversial opinions should be allowed to give a campus speech. The "Political Tolerance" component was influenced by four subcomponents: "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" (94), "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" (196), "Mean Tolerance" (154), and "Tolerance Difference" (207).

A majority of NYU students said the university “probably” or “definitely” should not allow five of the six speakers, the lone exception being one of the liberal speakers. Overall, opposition was greater toward the conservative speakers (61% to 76%) than the liberal speakers (45% to 61%).

- 79% – Transgender people have a mental disorder.
- 64% – Abortion should be completely illegal.
- 76% – Black Lives Matter is a hate group.
- 61% – The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.
- 56% – The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan.
- 45% – Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

But even if controversial speakers were allowed to come to campus, NYU students expressed alarming levels of acceptance toward disruption, with the university ranking 242 on the “Disruptive Conduct” component.

Three quarters (77%) of NYU students said it was at least “rarely” acceptable to shout down a speaker, and two thirds (64%) said the same about blocking other students from attending. Most troubling is that nearly half of students (44%) said it was at least “rarely” acceptable to use violence to stop a campus speech – up from 31% last year.

FIGURE 3: Students Who Said Disruptive Conduct Was at Least Rarely Acceptable (%)

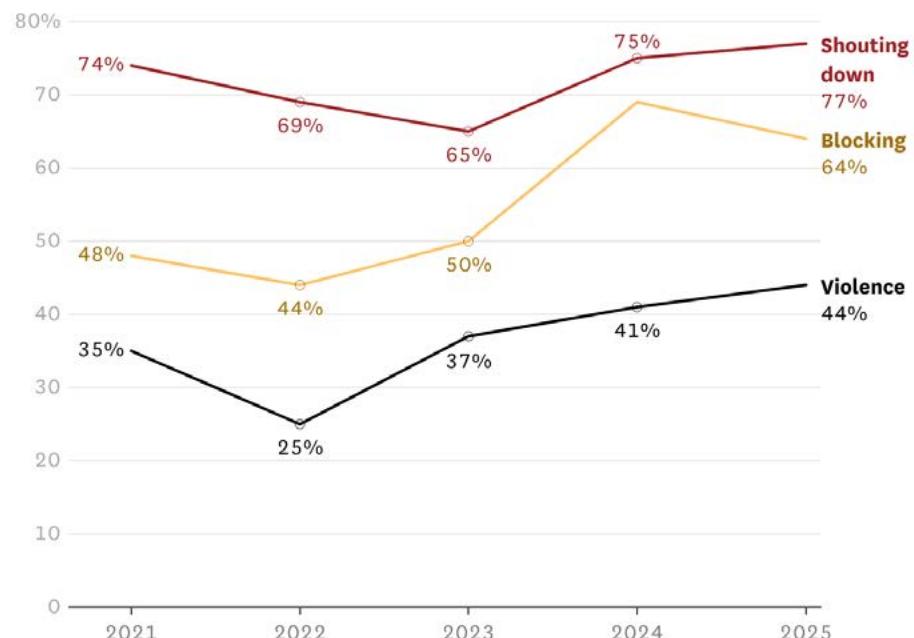


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL

FIRE awards New York University’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.

NYU earns an overall yellow light rating for its written policies governing student expression. The university maintains five yellow light policies and three “green light” policies. Two of the university’s three harassment policies fail to meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an educational setting, putting protected speech that does not reach that threshold at risk. The university also encourages students to use its “Bias Response Line” to report instances of bias. Rather than soliciting reports of biased expression based on subjective perceptions, the administration should direct its resources towards addressing reports of discrimination and harassment.

Similarly, NYU broadly defines bullying, opening up a wide range of protected speech to punishment. Any expression the university wishes to prohibit under the “bullying” banner would best be categorized as hostile environmental harassment and governed under those policies.

Finally, the institution mandates civility when using university computers and networks. Civility may indeed be a laudable goal for students to aspire to, but mandates on civility can all too easily be applied by administrators to punish disfavored speech.

NYU’S SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

New York University was penalized for three speech controversies.

The most recent incident occurred in spring of 2025. After being barred from campus for their participation in a disruptive sit-in protest months earlier, 31 pro-Palestinian students were permitted to return to take exams on the condition that they sign a “Use of Space Agreement” which stated that they “may not participate in any protest activity or disruptive activity on Law School property.” By distinguishing “protest activity” from “disruptive activity,” the university imposed prior restraint upon non-disruptive, protected protest.

Another incident occurred last year, when the campus chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) invited Rashid Khalidi, a professor at Columbia, to discuss his book, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine* and the current conflict in Gaza with Sinan Antoon, an NYU professor. When first scheduled, the event was open only to those with an NYU affiliation. SJP asked the university to open the event to the public, but the administration rejected the request due to concerns about “contentious speakers.” The event was held privately, as originally scheduled.

The final incident occurred in 2023. The university told organizers of a planned teach-in featuring Mohammed el-Kurd not to hold the event on campus. In a letter to the organizers, the university cited “a lack of transparency” regarding the event’s location as well as “significant safety concerns” as reasons for this directive. Organizers alleged that another student group, Students Supporting Israel, had repeatedly complained about the event beforehand, and that the administration was using these concerns as pretext to prohibit the teach-in from occurring on campus. Ultimately the event took place at an off-campus venue.

HOW CAN NYU IMPROVE?

New York University can improve its ranking by reforming its “yellow light” speech policies to earn a “green light” rating. If NYU earned a green light rating this year it would rank 113 instead of 250. In addition to improved speech policies, we encourage the university to adopt the Chicago Statement and make an official commitment to institutional neutrality. Paired with green light policies, these commitments would have placed NYU 45 in this year’s College Free Speech Rankings.

But policy changes alone do not change a campus’ free speech culture. Administrators need to communicate policy changes directly to students in a way that emphasizes NYU’s commitment to free expression. And they would need to live up to their own promises by defending students’ and speakers’ expressive rights rather than restricting them in the face of controversy.

Because disturbing percentages of students believe it is at least “rarely” acceptable to shout down a speaker (77%), block other students from attending (64%), or use violence to stop a campus speech (44%), the university should also implement free speech training that clearly explains what sorts of behaviors and forms of protest are and are not acceptable.

Finally, the university should also implement a civil dialogue program. A majority of students report feeling either “somewhat” or “very” uncomfortable within five campus settings, and 43% said it was either “likely” or “very likely” that a student on campus would be reported to administrators for saying something controversial. Such a program could help teach students how to have difficult conversations, respect one another’s differences, and handle disagreements themselves.

New York University’s 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	NEW YORK UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	9.18	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	11.03	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	14.53	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	9.70	11.32	2	20
Openness	7.11	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	5.60	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	0	-	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	0	-	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-5 (Yellow)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	-3	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	-1	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	48.18	58.67		

Topline Results

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	48	15
Not very clear	84	27
Somewhat clear	103	33
Very clear	55	18
Extremely clear	24	8

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	34	11
Not very likely	105	34
Somewhat likely	119	38
Very likely	38	12
Extremely likely	16	5

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	70	22
Somewhat uncomfortable	119	38
Somewhat comfortable	97	31
Very comfortable	26	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	54	17
Somewhat uncomfortable	120	38
Somewhat comfortable	107	34
Very comfortable	31	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	75	24
Somewhat uncomfortable	100	32
Somewhat comfortable	107	34
Very comfortable	31	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	55	18
Somewhat uncomfortable	113	36
Somewhat comfortable	106	34
Very comfortable	39	13

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	128	41
Somewhat uncomfortable	98	31
Somewhat comfortable	64	21
Very comfortable	23	7

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	16	5
Rarely	81	26
Occasionally, once or twice a month	109	35
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	88	28
Very often, nearly every day	20	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	11	3
Rarely	75	24
Occasionally, once or twice a month	128	41
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	54	17
Very often, nearly every day	46	15

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	11	4
Rarely	83	26
Occasionally, once or twice a month	114	37
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	65	21
Very often, nearly every day	39	13

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	24	8
Sometimes acceptable	119	38
Rarely acceptable	96	31
Never acceptable	73	23

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	9	3
Sometimes acceptable	80	26
Rarely acceptable	111	35
Never acceptable	112	36

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	12	4
Sometimes acceptable	39	13
Rarely acceptable	83	27
Never acceptable	178	57

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	149	48
Probably should not allow this speaker	96	31
Probably should allow this speaker	43	14
Definitely should allow this speaker	24	8

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	118	38
Probably should not allow this speaker	82	26
Probably should allow this speaker	85	27
Definitely should allow this speaker	28	9

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	160	51
Probably should not allow this speaker	78	25
Probably should allow this speaker	52	16
Definitely should allow this speaker	23	7

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	74	24
Probably should not allow this speaker	117	37
Probably should allow this speaker	86	28
Definitely should allow this speaker	36	12

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	70	22
Probably should not allow this speaker	107	34
Probably should allow this speaker	97	31
Definitely should allow this speaker	39	12

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	48	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	93	30
Probably should allow this speaker	119	38
Definitely should allow this speaker	53	17

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	198	63
Yes	114	37

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	210	67
Yes	103	33

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	248	79
Yes	65	21

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	253	81
Yes	59	19

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	268	86
Yes	44	14

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	233	75
Yes	79	25

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	228	73
Yes	85	27

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	245	78
Yes	68	22

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	234	75
Yes	78	25

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	236	76
Yes	76	24

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	232	74
Yes	81	26

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	195	62
Yes	118	38

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	98	31
Yes	214	69

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	195	62
Yes	118	38

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	214	69
Yes	98	31

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	217	69
Yes	96	31

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	207	66
Yes	106	34

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	253	81
Yes	59	19

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	256	82
Yes	57	18

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	231	74
Yes	82	26

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	289	92
Yes	24	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	41	13
Rarely	86	28
Occasionally, once or twice a month	102	33
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	61	19
Very often, nearly every day	23	7

Have you ever been disciplined by your college's administration for expression on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I have been disciplined.	11	4
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	27	9
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	275	88

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	84	27
Rarely	98	31
Occasionally, once or twice a month	62	20
Fairly often, a couple times a week	51	16
Very often, nearly every day	17	6

How likely or unlikely is it that a student on campus would be reported to the administration by another student for saying something controversial?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very unlikely	12	4
Unlikely	59	19
Neither likely or unlikely	107	34
Likely	111	35
Very likely	24	8

How likely or unlikely is it that a professor on campus would be reported to the administration by a student for saying something controversial?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very unlikely	10	3
Unlikely	57	18
Neither likely or unlikely	126	40
Likely	91	29
Very likely	28	9

Have you or anyone you know filed a Title IX complaint?

Response	Frequency	Percent
I have filed a Title IX complaint.	14	5
I both know someone who has and have myself filed a Title IX complaint.	16	5
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	46	15
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	236	76

Has a Title IX complaint ever been filed against you or someone you know?

Response	Frequency	Percent
A Title IX complaint was filed against me.	1	0
A Title IX complaint was filed against me and someone I know.	9	3
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	48	15
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	255	82

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	90	29
Less than once a year	36	12
Once or twice a year	60	19
Several times a year	39	13
Once a month	26	8
2-3 times a month	19	6
About weekly	19	6
Weekly	19	6
Several times a week	4	1

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	1
No	309	99

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	3	1	1
No	310	99	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	6
Less than half the time	34	11	47
About half the time	15	5	21
Most of the time, nearly every day	16	5	22
Always	3	1	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	11	4	17
Less than half the time	23	7	35
About half the time	20	7	31
Most of the time, nearly every day	10	3	15
Always	1	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	7
Less than half the time	28	9	48
About half the time	18	6	30
Most of the time, nearly every day	5	2	9
Always	4	1	6

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	10	3	16
Less than half the time	30	10	49
About half the time	19	6	32
Most of the time, nearly every day	1	0	2
Always	1	0	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	3	1	6
Less than half the time	16	5	30
About half the time	18	6	33
Most of the time, nearly every day	8	3	15
Always	9	3	17



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