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## Polls on Political Correctness

In the 1980s there was much discussion in the academic world about political correctness, but the pollsters did not ask the public about it until the early 1990s.\* There are only a handful of questions from the 1990s, most of which are shown on this page. The pollsters returned to the subject a few years ago, and there are new questions on political correctness and President Trump's comments about it.

On pages 5–7 of this issue of *Political Report*, we review the results of surveys on public willingness to let people with ideas “considered bad or dangerous by other people” speak in their communities, teach at colleges or universities, or have a book they wrote in a public library. NORC began asking the questions we show in the 1970s, and they are still being asked today.

At the end of this issue, we also display questions from surveys of young people on university policies with regard to controversial speakers and offensive speech.

### Questions from the 1990s

*Q: Have you ever heard of the phrase “politically correct?”*

#### Heard of the phrase



Note: In the 1991 Time Mirror poll, the 48 percent who had heard the phrase were asked what it means. Fourteen percent of those gave answers the pollsters described as “being sensitive to political and social conventions or controversy about free speech on college campuses.” Fifty percent gave other answers.

Source: Times Mirror, May 1991; CBS News/*New York Times*, November 1993.

*Q: In general do you think being “politically correct” is a good or a bad thing?*



Note: Asked of those who had heard of the phrase “politically correct” (76 percent).

Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, November 1993.

*Q: In recent years, do you feel you . . . ?*

*Q: (Asked of those who do feel this way) Does it bother you that you have to do this . . . ?*



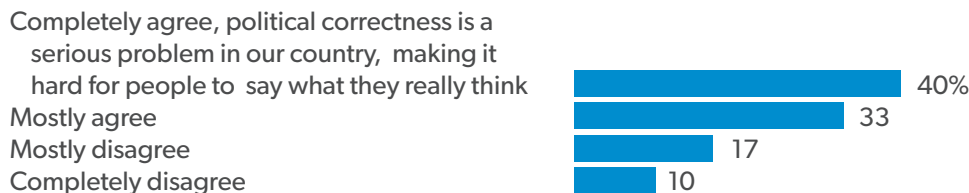
Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, November 1993.

\*We used the Roper Center's iPoll database to make this determination.

## Contemporary Attitudes about Political Correctness

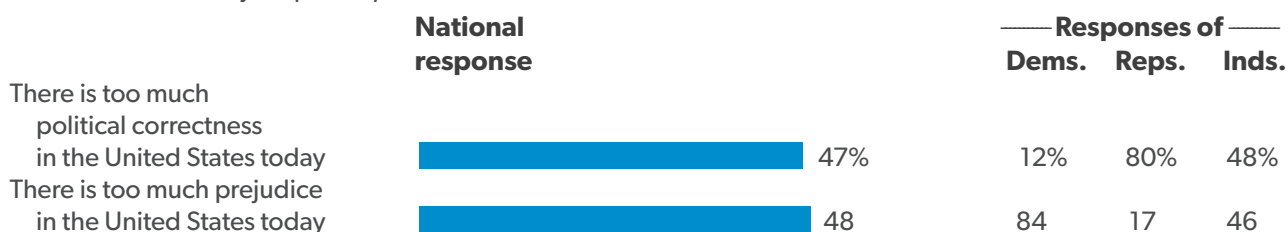
Pollsters have used different wordings to understand attitudes about political correctness today. Most polls show that solid majorities want more frank talk about controversial issues and problems. As with so many other issues, deep partisan divisions exist. When Quinnipiac frames the issue in terms of “too much prejudice” versus “too much political correctness,” people are split, with strong partisan differences. A February Harvard/Harris poll shows that 61 percent feel free to express unpopular views. On this question, there are smaller partisan differences.

*Q: Now I want you to consider some additional things some people are saying about our country. For each one, please tell me whether you . . . ?*



Source: The Gallup Organization/2016 Survey of American Political Culture/University of Virginia, August 2016.

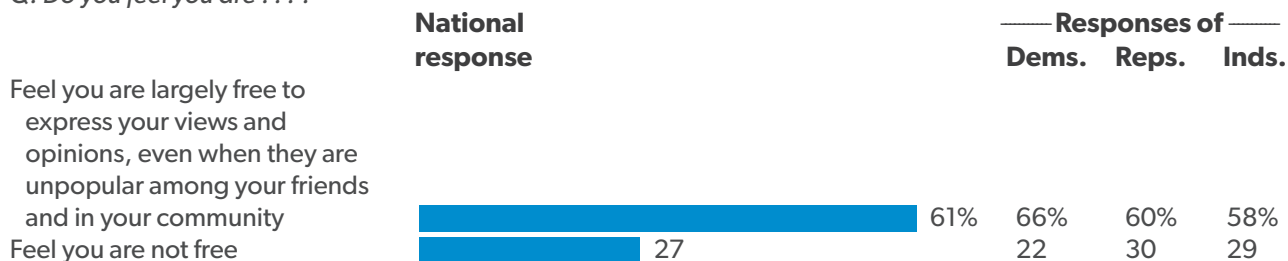
*Q: Which is closer to your point of view . . . ?*



Note: Sample is registered voters. Quinnipiac also asked this question in June 2016, and the responses of registered voters were 51 percent “too much political correctness” and 44 percent “too much prejudice.”

Source: Quinnipiac University, November 2016.

*Q: Do you feel you are . . . ?*



Note: Online survey. Sample is registered voters.

Source: Harvard Center for American Political Studies, Harris Insights, February 2017.

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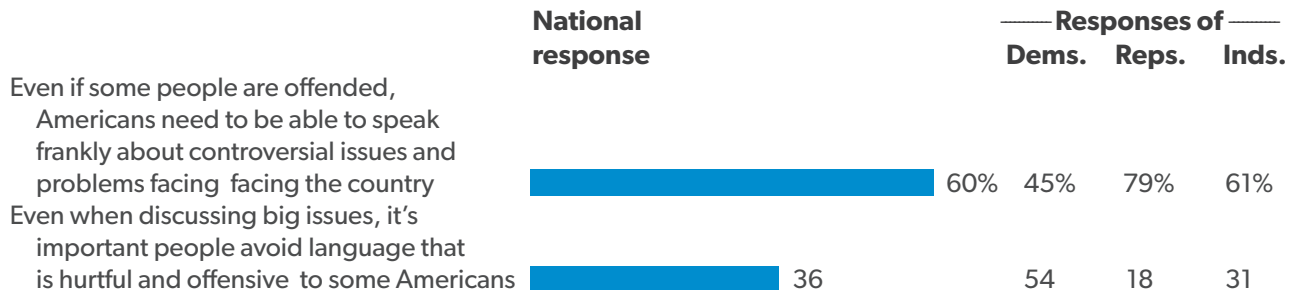
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*The survey results reported here were obtained in part from searches of the AEI poll archive, the iPoll Databank, and other resources provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University.*

*The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization and does not take institutional positions on any issues. The views expressed here are those of the author[s].*

Nuances in question wording produce different responses as the questions below show. The general impression from these questions is that around six in ten believe speaking frankly is important, while around four in ten are more sensitive to offending others.

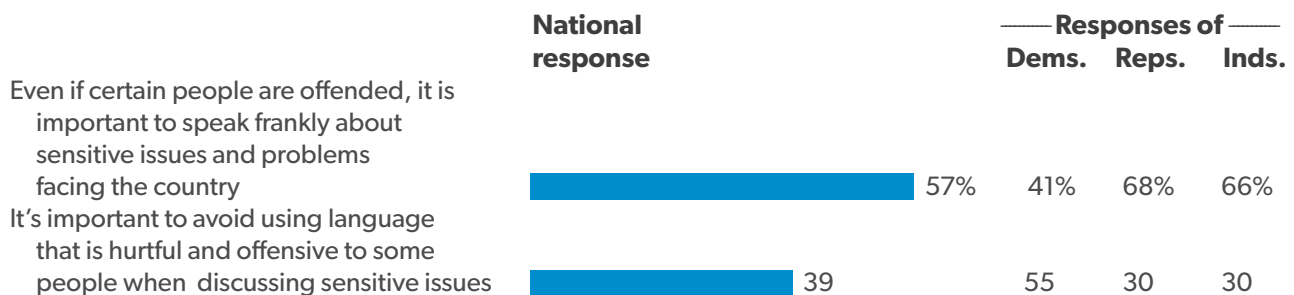
*Q: Which of the following best describes your view?*



Note: Sample is registered voters.

Source: Fox News, May 2016.

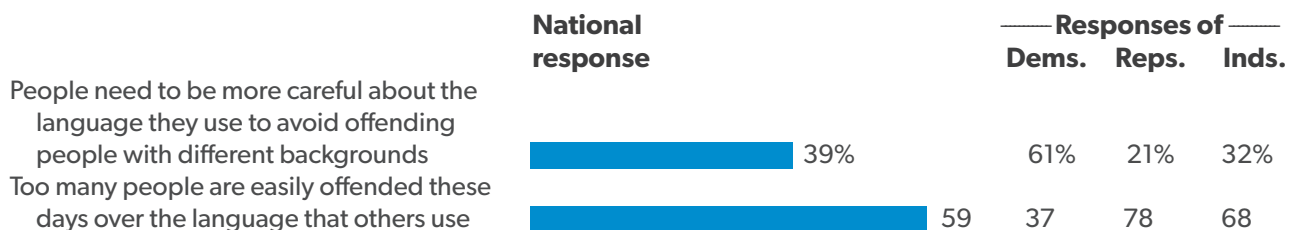
*Q: Which of the following statements comes closest to your own view—even is neither is exactly right?*



Note: AmeriSpeak panel survey.

Source: Public Religion Research Institute, September 2016.

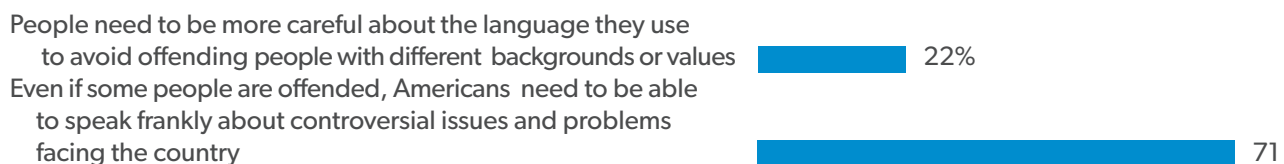
*Q: Which comes close to your own views – even if neither is exactly right?*



Note: American Trends Panel survey.

Source: Pew Research Center, June–July 2016.

*Q: Which comes closest to your view, even if neither is exactly right?*



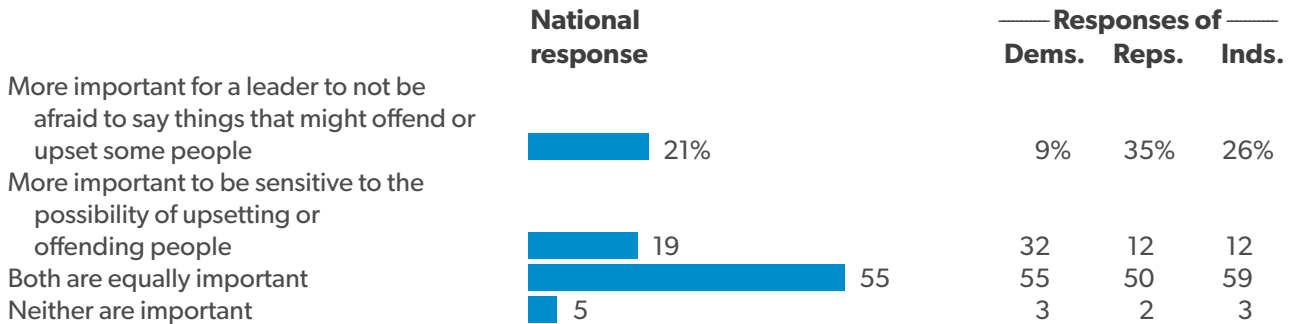
Note: Online survey.

Source: YouGov/George Washington University, November–December 2016.

## Political Leaders, Donald Trump, and Political Correctness

While Americans want their leaders to say what is on their minds, they also believe being sensitive to upsetting or offending people is important. Fifty-seven percent believe Donald Trump goes too far in criticizing people and groups; 42 percent say he “tells it like it is.”

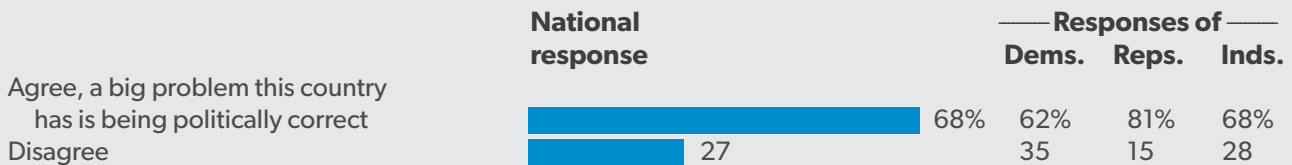
*Q: Which of the following do you think is more important for a leader to do?*



Note: AmeriSpeak panel survey.

Source: Associated Press-NORC, March 2016.

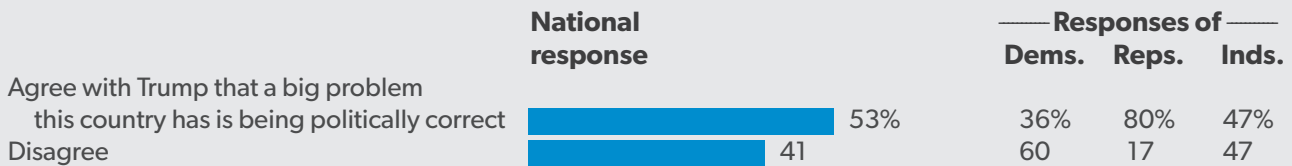
*Q: Please tell me if you agree or disagree. . . .*



Note: Asked of a half sample.

Source: Fairleigh Dickinson University, October 2015.

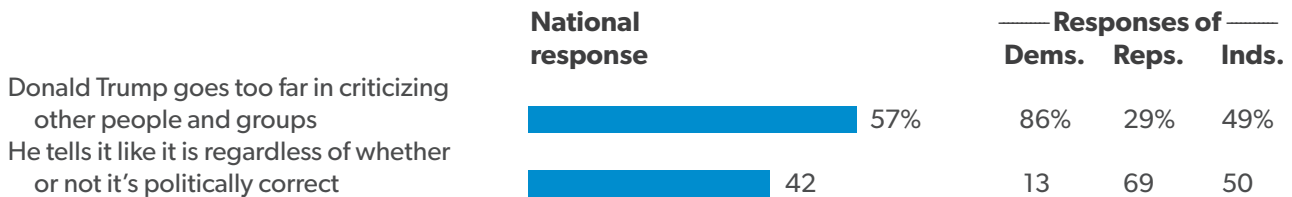
*Q: Donald Trump said recently, “A big problem this country has is being politically correct.” Do you agree or disagree with him?*



Note: Asked of a half sample.

Source: Fairleigh Dickinson University, October 2015.

*Q: Which better describes Donald Trump in your opinion . . . ?*

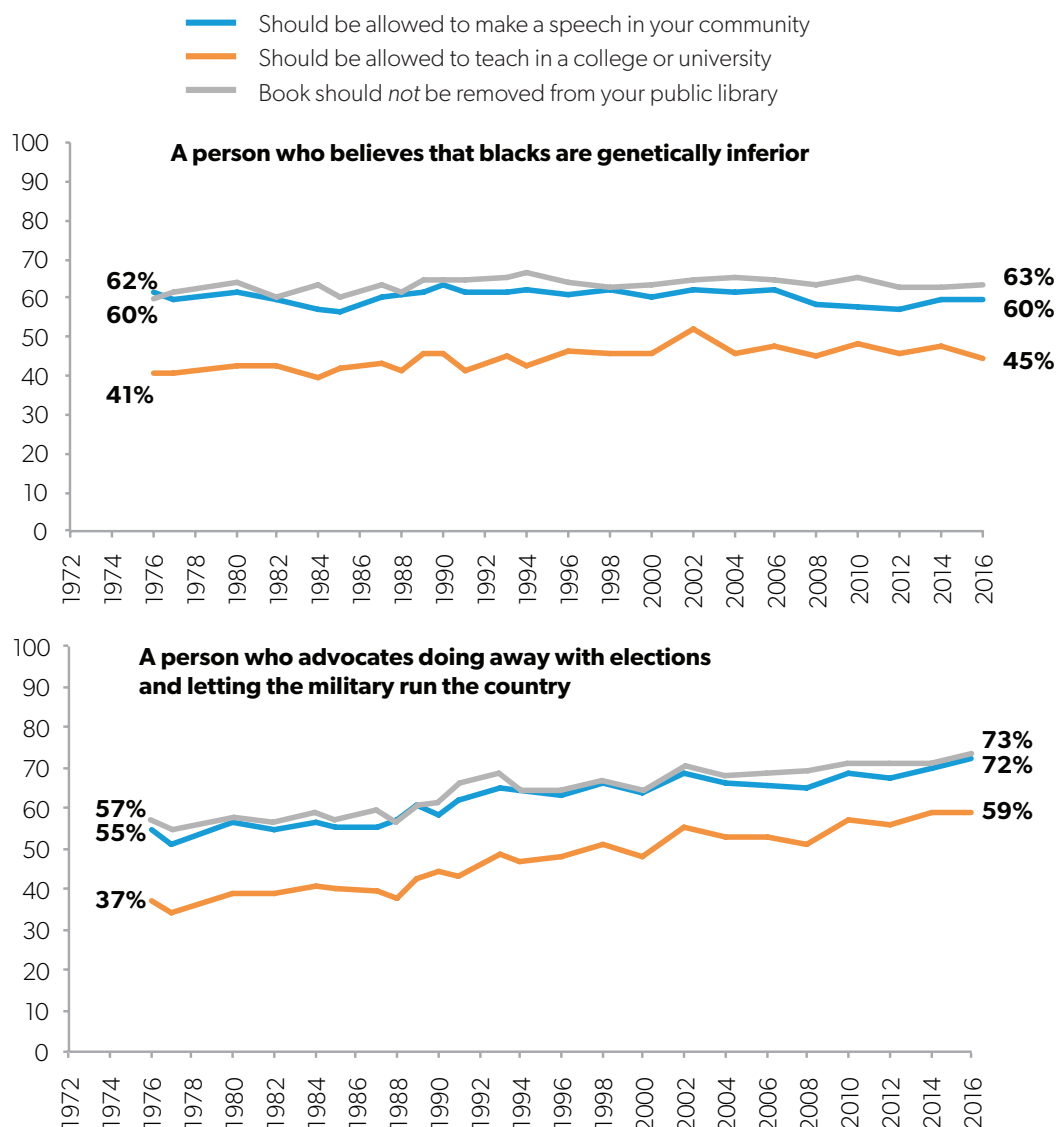


Source: ABC News/Washington Post, August 2016.

## Controversial Speech: Trends Over Time

In 1955, Samuel Stouffer published a now classic study on public willingness to allow Communists and anti-religionists to speak or hold certain kinds of jobs. In 1972, NORC began to include several of his questions and broader ones on their General Social Survey. These questions are still being asked, and we show some of the results in the next three pages. Americans are generally supportive of free expression, even offensive speech, but are less accepting when the speech is perceived as a palpable potential threat, such as a Communist during the Cold War, or more recently, a Muslim clergyman preaching hatred of the US.

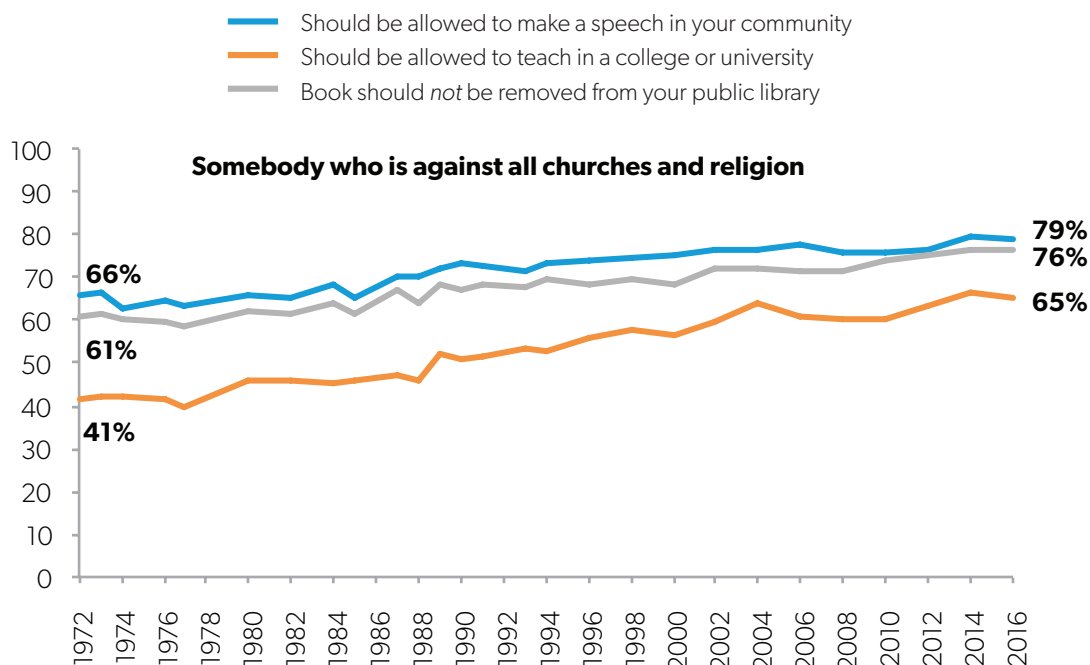
*Q: There are always some people whose ideas are considered bad or dangerous by other people. Consider \_\_\_\_\_ . . . If such a person wanted to make a speech in your community, should he be allowed to speak, or not? Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not? If some people in your community suggested that a book he wrote should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing this book, or not?\**



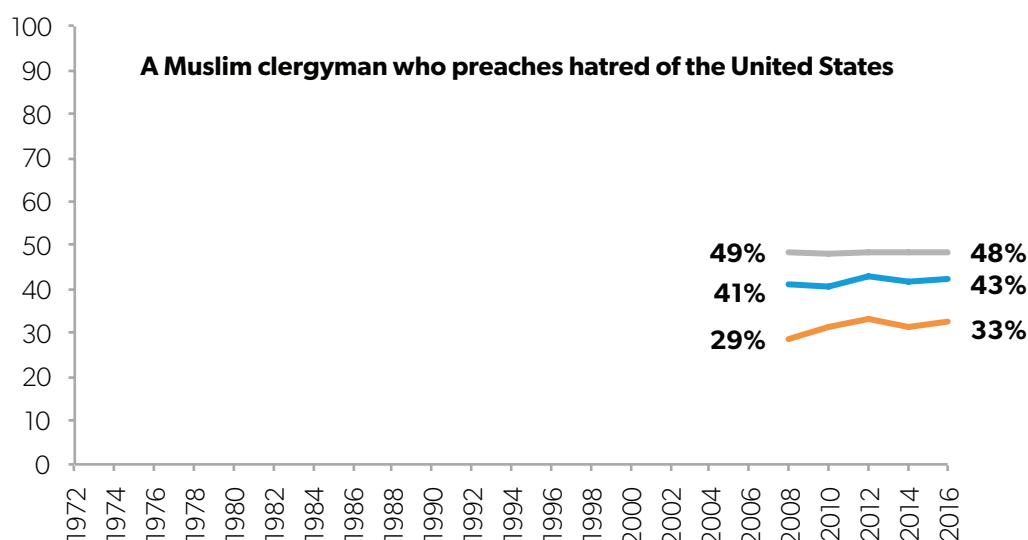
Note: \*Question wording varied over time.

Source for pages 5–7: General Social Survey, NORC, latest that of 2016.

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In Stouffer's 1954 survey, 37 percent said a person against all churches and religion should be allowed to make a speech in their city/town/community. A mere 12 percent said such a person should be allowed to teach in a college or university, and a majority (60 percent) said they would be in favor of removing such a person's book from their public library (35 percent said the book should not be removed).



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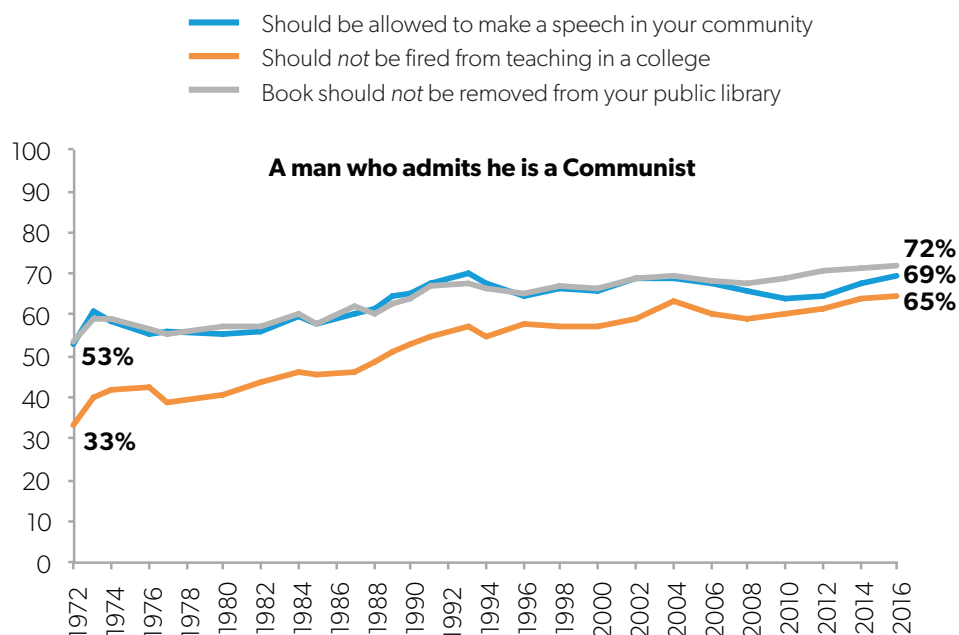
In 1938, although almost all Americans said they believed in free speech (96 percent), over half did not believe that freedom should be extended to Communists in their community. This was the earliest question we found in the polls that tested the public's willingness to allow Communists to express their views. In 1954, near the height of the Cold War, most people were opposed to allowing an admitted Communist make a speech in their community, teach at a university, and have a book in a public library. As concern faded into the post-Cold War era, Americans became more supportive of allowing Communists' freedom of expression, just as they had for a brief period during WWII when we were allied with the Soviet Union.

*Q: Do you believe in freedom of speech? Q: (Asked of those who believe in freedom of speech) Do you believe in it to the extent of allowing Communists to hold meetings and express their views in this community?*



Note: Asked of a half sample. For comparison, when asked whether they believed in freedom of speech to the extent of allowing fascists to hold meetings and express their views in this community, 34 percent said yes, 55 percent no.  
Source: The Gallup Organization, June 1938.

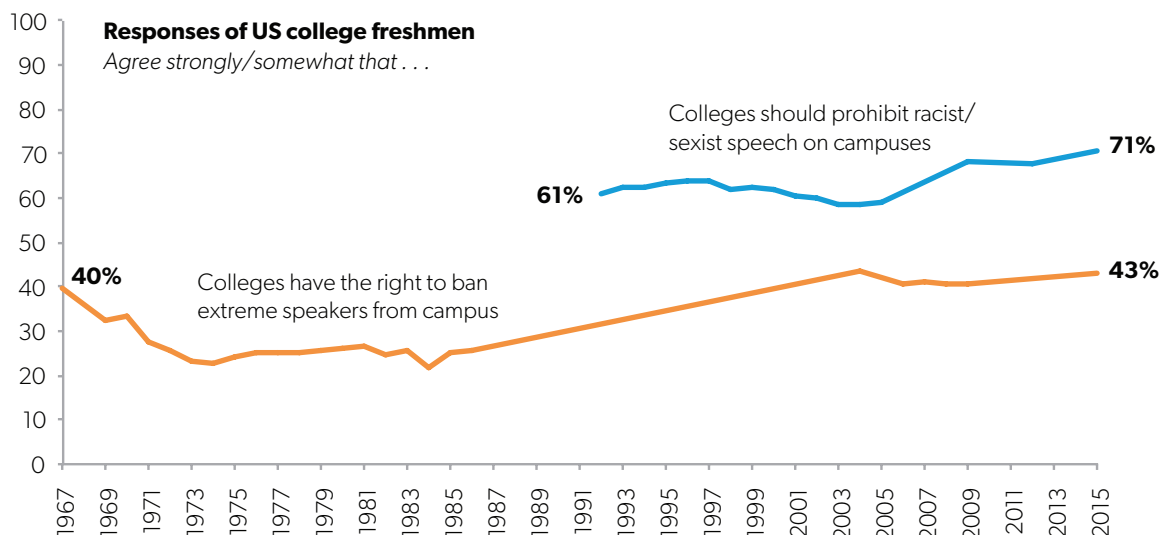
*Q: There are always some people whose ideas are considered dangerous by other people. Now, I should like to ask you some questions about a man who admits he is a Communist . . . Suppose this admitted Communist wanted to make a speech in your community. Should he be allowed to speak, or not? Suppose he is teaching in a college. Should he be fired, or not? Suppose he wrote a book which is in your public library. Somebody in your community suggests that the book should be removed from the library. Would you favor removing it, or not?*



In Stouffer's 1954 survey, 27 percent said an admitted Communist should be allowed to make a speech in their community. Eighty-nine percent said a Communist teaching in a college should be fired (6 percent said he should not), and only 27 percent said such a person's book should *not* be removed from their public library.

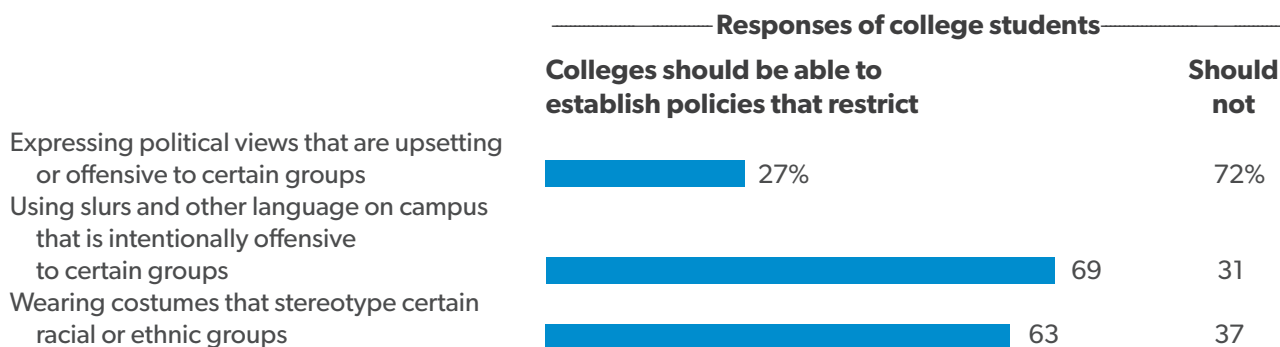
## The Atmosphere on Campus

In the next two pages, we look at views on restrictions on speech on college campuses. The long trend from UCLA shows that around 40 percent of college freshmen believe colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers. Seven in ten in their 2015 survey say colleges should prohibit racist or sexist speech on campus. A question from a Knight Foundation/Newseum/Gallup poll of college students shows strong opposition to restrictions on expression of political views that are upsetting and offensive, and strong support for restrictions on using intentionally offensive language.



Source: *The American Freshman: National Norms*, latest that of 2015. This survey is administered by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program for the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.

**Q: Do you think colleges should or should not be able to establish policies that restrict each of the following types of speech or expression on campus?**



Source: Knight Foundation/Newseum Institute/The Gallup Organization, March 2016.

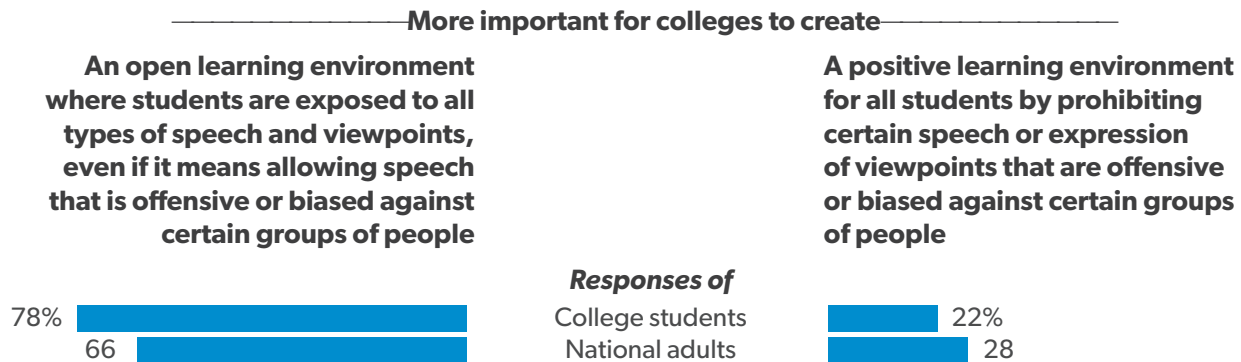




## Young and Old in General Agreement

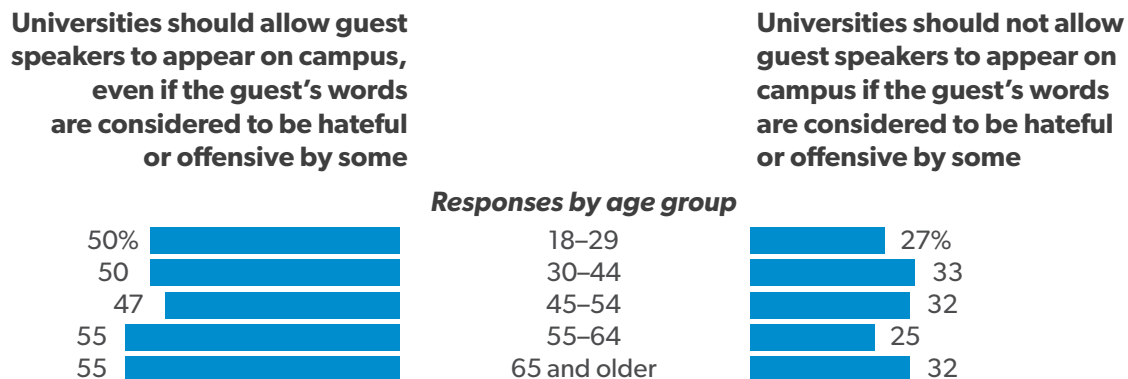
The data on this page show general agreement between young and old and college students and national adults on campus speech policies. As always, question wording and nuance affects responses.

*Q: If you had to choose, do you think it is more important for colleges to create . . . ?*



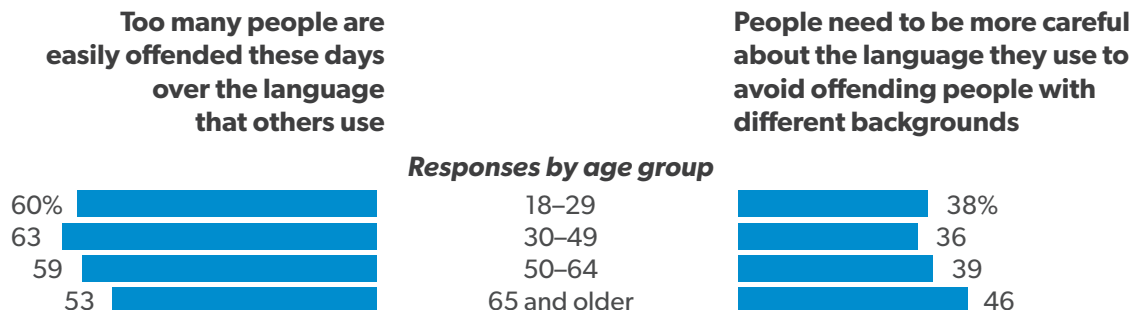
Source: Knight Foundation/Newseum Institute/The Gallup Organization, March 2016.

*Q: Which of the following statements comes closest to your view, even if neither is exactly right?*



Note: Online survey. Sample is registered voters.  
Source: Morning Consult/*Politico*, April 2017.

*Q: Which comes close to your own views—even if neither is exactly right?*

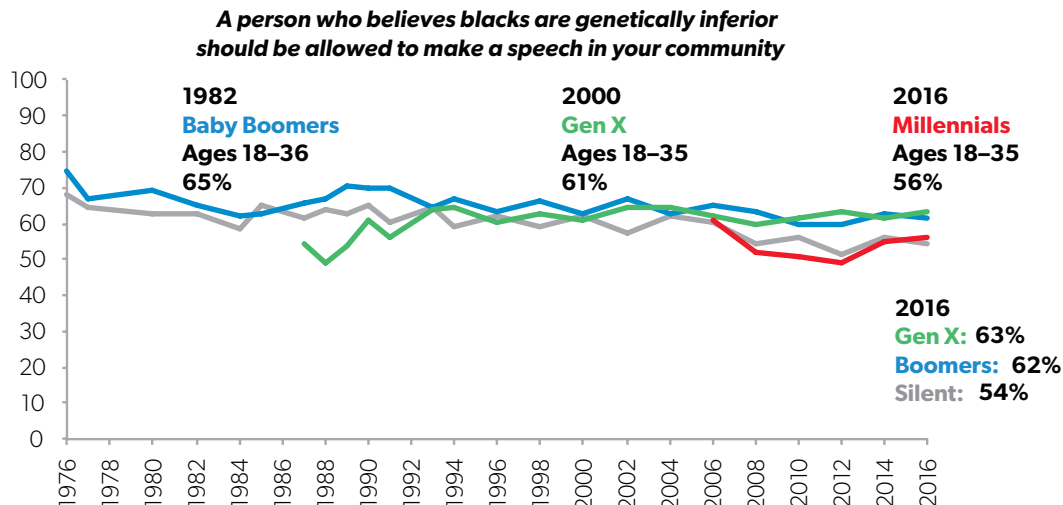


Note: American Trends Panel survey.  
Source: Pew Research Center, June–July 2016.

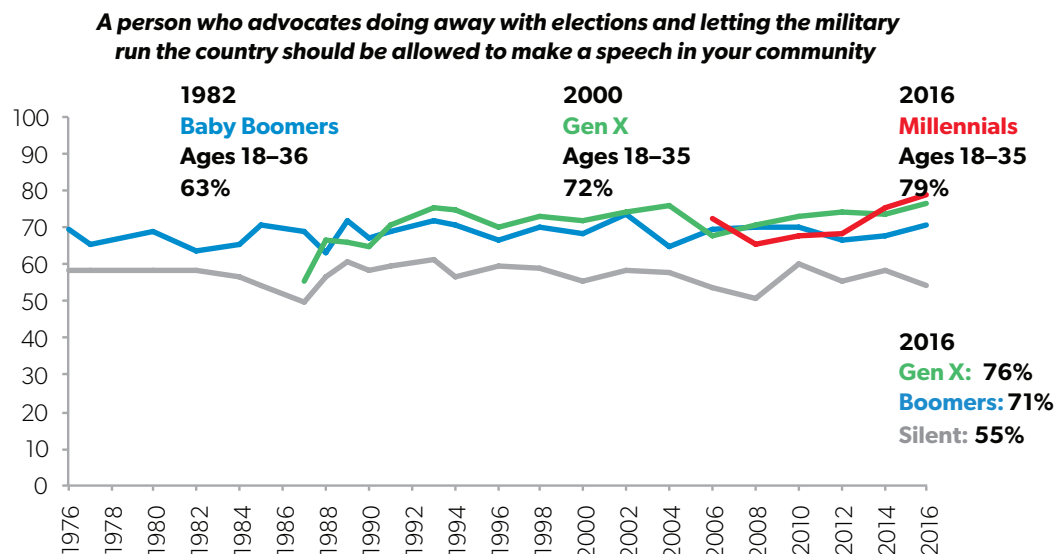
# Millennials Compared to Older Generations

Trends from NORC's General Social Survey show that Millennials do not differ significantly from older generations in terms of their willingness to allow people to express views that might be offensive or controversial. Neither are they less supportive of freedom of expression than previous generations were when they were young.

*Q: There are always some people whose ideas are considered dangerous by other people. Consider a person who believes that blacks are genetically inferior . . . If such a person wanted to make a speech in your community claiming that blacks are inferior, should he be allowed to speak, or not?*



*Q: There are always some people whose ideas are considered dangerous by other people. Consider a person who advocates doing away with elections and letting the military run the country . . . If such a person wanted to make a speech in your community, should he be allowed to speak, or not?*



Note: The Millennial generation is defined as people born in 1981 or later, Generation X as those born in 1965–1980, the Baby Boom generation as those born in 1946–1964, and the Silent Generation as those born in 1928–1945.

Source: General Social Survey, NORC, latest that of 2016.