



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 21, 2017

New Study: College Students Do Not Understand or Respect First Amendment

One out of five college students believe that violence is a justifiable response to free speech, and just over half of the students consider it acceptable to shout down speakers with whom they disagree, according to the frightening results of a new study by the Brookings Institution.

The web [survey](#) of 1,500 undergraduate students at U.S. four-year colleges and universities was conducted by John Villasenor, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and professor at the University of California at Los Angeles. The *Washington Post* reports that Villasenor was motivated to conduct the study by the “narrowing window of permissible topics” for discussion on campuses.



For the study, students were asked whether they believe that it is permissible to use violence to respond to a speaker they feel makes “offensive and hurtful statements.” Astonishingly, 19 percent of all students answered in the affirmative, of which 20 percent of students identified as Democrat and 22 percent identified as Republican.

The study also asked students whether it is acceptable to shout over controversial speakers so they cannot be heard. A whopping 51 percent of students agreed, of which 62 percent identified as Democrat and 39 percent as Republican.

When students were asked whether the First Amendment protects hate speech, just 39 percent answered in the affirmative. Again, party affiliation seemed to have very little influence on the answers, with 39 percent of the students identifying as Democrat and 44 percent as Republican. However, among males and females, those figures varied more significantly. Among the 39 percent, 31 percent were female and 51 percent were male.

Given the scenes taking place across college campuses in recent years, these responses may not come as a surprise; however, the results do underscore a failure on the part of the public school system to educate students on the Constitution. If the surveyed students truly understood the Constitution, they would know that there is no such thing as a “hate speech” exception to the First Amendment, and that speech is not violence, as has become the maxim of groups such as Antifa, who then argue that it is appropriate to respond to that violence with more violence.

The results also underscore that institutions of higher education are not only failing to instill in its students a reverence for civil liberties and free speech, but are in fact churning out hordes of hypersensitive snowflakes who need safe spaces to be protected from anything they perceive to be offensive rather than engage in healthy, intelligent debate. And sadly, as time progresses, the number



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of items considered offensive is growing at a startling rate.

The clearest evidence of this can be seen in the response to the final question of the survey.

If you had to choose one of the options below, which do you think it is more important for colleges to do?

Option 1: create a positive learning environment for all students by prohibiting certain speech or expression of viewpoints that are offensive or biased against certain groups of people

Option 2: create an open learning environment where students are exposed to all types of speech and viewpoints, even if it means allowing speech that is offensive or biased against certain groups of people?

Sadly, 53 percent of students selected the first option. Confusingly, 47 percent chose the second option, though based on the other results, it seems that these students are tolerant of only specific types of speech and viewpoints.

In its introduction to the study, the Brookings Institution wrote that college students' views of the First Amendment are profoundly important because campuses are expected to be places "where intellectual debate should flourish." The only way that can happen is if "campuses are places where viewpoint diversity is celebrated, and where the First Amendment is honored in practice and not only in theory." The results of this study reveal that this is no longer the reality.

What does come as a surprise, however, is the number of students on the Right who now seem to agree with the typical leftist response to allegedly controversial speech. Could this be a backlash against groups such as Antifa? Perhaps students on the Right are frustrated with the tolerance for violence against conservatives by many public officials and the mainstream media, and now believe that it is acceptable to use the Left's own tactics against them.

But while this line of thought may be understandable to some, it could indicate the beginning of a terrifying trend in which civility becomes nearly obsolete and people begin to devolve into their uncivilized selves. It is a modern-day *Lord of the Flies*, except, frighteningly, this is real life.

The Brookings Institution observes that the results of the study present a serious problem for the future of the United States:

Today's college students are tomorrow's attorneys, teachers, professors, policymakers, legislators, and judges. If, for example, a large fraction of college students believe, however incorrectly, that offensive speech is unprotected by the First Amendment, that view will inform the decisions they make as they move into positions of increasing authority later in their careers.

Chilling.

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