

Freedom of Thought:

Free speech, free minds, free people



our
AMERICA

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Executive Summary

Free speech is a foundational American right. Without the ability to talk about important issues that affect our lives, no progress can be made and no social justice can be achieved.

Yet, free speech is under attack - 55% of Americans feel they can't speak freely out of fear of retaliation¹. This is despite **91 % believing that "protecting free speech is an important part of American democracy"**².

Americans must be able to speak truth to power without the threat of censorship or retaliation. In America, there should be **no arbiter of truth**.

"Americans must be able to speak truth to power without the threat of censorship or retaliation."

To protect free speech Americans need to:



Embrace **academic diversity**



Stop **bias reporting systems**



Defund **institutions** that disregard the First Amendment

Reform #1

Embrace academic diversity

Summary

Students should be free to ask questions and speak truth to power. Yet, **schools have injected political biases into their lessons** – which has created toxic learning environments.

By embracing academic diversity, students can participate in the classroom knowing they are being judged by their merit and not their identity or beliefs.

A survey by Our America found that **89% of Americans want to get politics out of the classroom**. This was especially important to Hispanic and Black Americans, as 82% and 81% respectively want schools to focus on teaching the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as a non-partisan approach to civics.

Despite this, **many schools are choosing to force young children into polarizing debates**. For example, an elementary school in Washington State promoted a club for fifth graders which was open only to students of color³. Meanwhile, a Virginia School Board⁴ recently began treating students differently⁵ based on their race, ethnicity, or religious background.

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want schools to focus on teaching the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic

In higher education, many universities require students and faculty to sign **“Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” (DEI) pledges** in the hiring, promotion, and admissions process⁶.

DEI pledges are endorsed by 52% of faculty, but of those who support DEI statements, 68% were willing to restrict speech they found hateful, and a quarter of those were also willing to silence hateful speech even if it meant normal speech would also be silenced⁷.





When schools force students and teachers to deliver messages that go against their beliefs, they create a culture of fear.

52% of college students report **holding back expressing their views for fear of consequences.**



Civil discourse requires respect for diverse viewpoints. When schools force students and teachers to deliver messages that go against their beliefs, they create a culture of fear. In fact, 52% of college students⁸ report **holding back expressing their views for fear of consequences**⁹.

Opportunities for Reform

-  **Make DEI policies and learning material public** so parents and the public can see what their children are learning
-  **Adopt policies at schools that protect academic diversity** to ensure political agendas do not replace essential learning
-  **Remove race and gender requirements** so educational programs and grants are open to everyone – regardless of race or gender
-  **Ban mandatory DEI statements** so teachers, professors, and students can advance their education and career without sacrificing their beliefs

Reform #2

Stop bias reporting systems

Summary

Bias reporting systems allow people to report others for what they perceive to be bias. **There's no crime involved, just the subjective determination** that bias occurred. These systems are most often found on college campuses but have also been adopted by state and local governments.

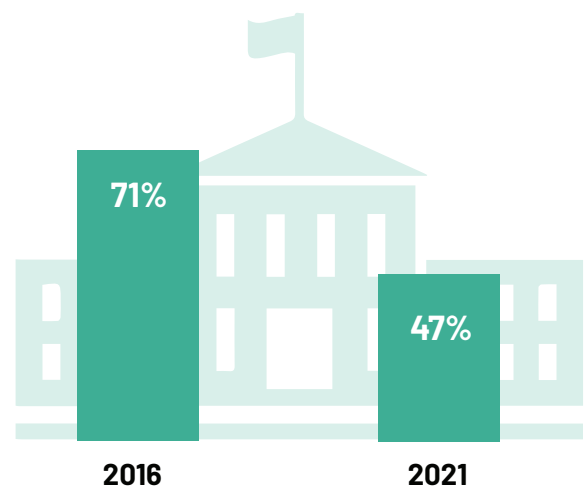
By removing bias reporting systems, free speech can thrive and help to build a more tolerant society.

In 2016, 71 % of students believed that free speech was secure on campus. That number quickly declined to 47 % by 2021¹⁰.

One reason for this decline is the **increasing number of "bias reporting systems"** which encourage students to report what they perceive to be "acts of hate and bias." A recent survey found that 456 out of 824 colleges and universities had some form of bias¹¹ reporting system in place¹².

Bias reporting systems are often used to **silence people with differing opinions**. In 2019, for example, a student at Michigan State University reported a Christian student for doing a door-to-door survey, while another reported his roommate for listening to a podcast he didn't like¹³.

Students believe less and less that free speech is secure on campus



Bias reporting systems create a toxic environment that can silence voices accused of nothing worse than having differing opinions.

These systems are also being adopted by governments in states like California where residents can report perceived “acts of bias¹⁴.” Similarly, in Virginia, Schools in Loudoun County have adopted reporting systems in which students can anonymously report incidents of bias and request formal investigations¹⁵.

Additionally, New York State requires businesses¹⁶ to report “hateful conduct” on their websites as well as publish their policy on how it will be combated. Failure to comply is met with a fine of \$1,000 per day.

Bias reporting systems create a **toxic environment that can silence voices** accused of nothing worse than having differing opinions.

2019 - Michigan State University



A Christian student was reported for doing a **door-to-door survey**



A student was reported by his roommate for **listening to a podcast** he didn't like

Opportunities for Reform



Get rid of “bias reporting systems” which unfairly punish free speech



Remove compelled speech requirements so businesses can focus on running their business instead of policing speech

Reform #3

Defund institutions that disregard the First Amendment

Summary

While colleges and universities are required to abide by the First Amendment, **many chose to turn a blind eye to – or even support – censorship.**

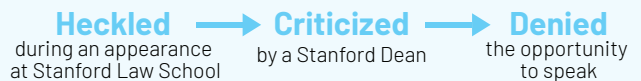
We can create stronger safeguards for free speech by defunding institutions and programs which are required to abide by the First Amendment but chose not to.

In 2023, Fifth Circuit Judge Kyle Duncan was heckled during an appearance at Stanford Law School¹⁷. A Stanford Dean then took the stage away from Judge Duncan and gave a speech criticizing the judge, **denying him the opportunity to speak.**

Many others have been denied the opportunity to speak before they even set foot on campus. In fact, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression lists **more than 500 planned events** that were **canceled ahead of time** due to the speaker's ideology¹⁸.

While Stanford University is a private school, an executive order requires private universities to **enforce their own speech codes** to receive federal

Fifth Circuit Judge Kyle Duncan



According to the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression



More than **500** planned events were cancelled due to the speaker's ideology



funding¹⁹. It also requires public schools to respect the First Amendment.

Despite the executive order, a 2023 survey of 486 universities found that 94 “clearly and substantially restrict free speech” and 324 “impose vague regulations on expression²⁰.” **Only 60 schools were found to respect the First Amendment.**

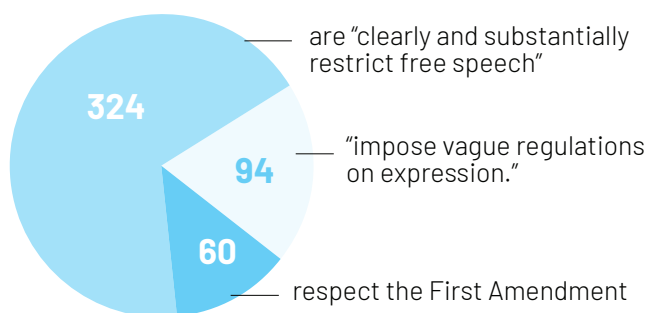
But attempts to censor speech go beyond higher education. Documents show that, since 2018, **the FBI has pressured social media companies** to censor certain views by labeling them as “disinformation²¹.”

The next administration tried doubling down on these efforts by creating the “**Disinformation Governance Board**” which would advise the Department of Homeland Security to combat what they deemed to be “disinformation.” This board was




shut down within months after public outcry and censorship concerns²².

While the program was ultimately shut down, **government efforts to censor speech** in the name of stopping disinformation **are dangerous** – and as old as free speech itself.

A 2023 survey of 486 universities found that...



Opportunities for Reform

-  **Deny and revoke federal funding from institutions** that refuse to protect free speech
-  **Expand Executive Order 13798 to include K-12** so younger students can benefit from free speech protections
-  **Defund government programs that try to censor speech** so ideas are not silenced in the name of combating “disinformation”



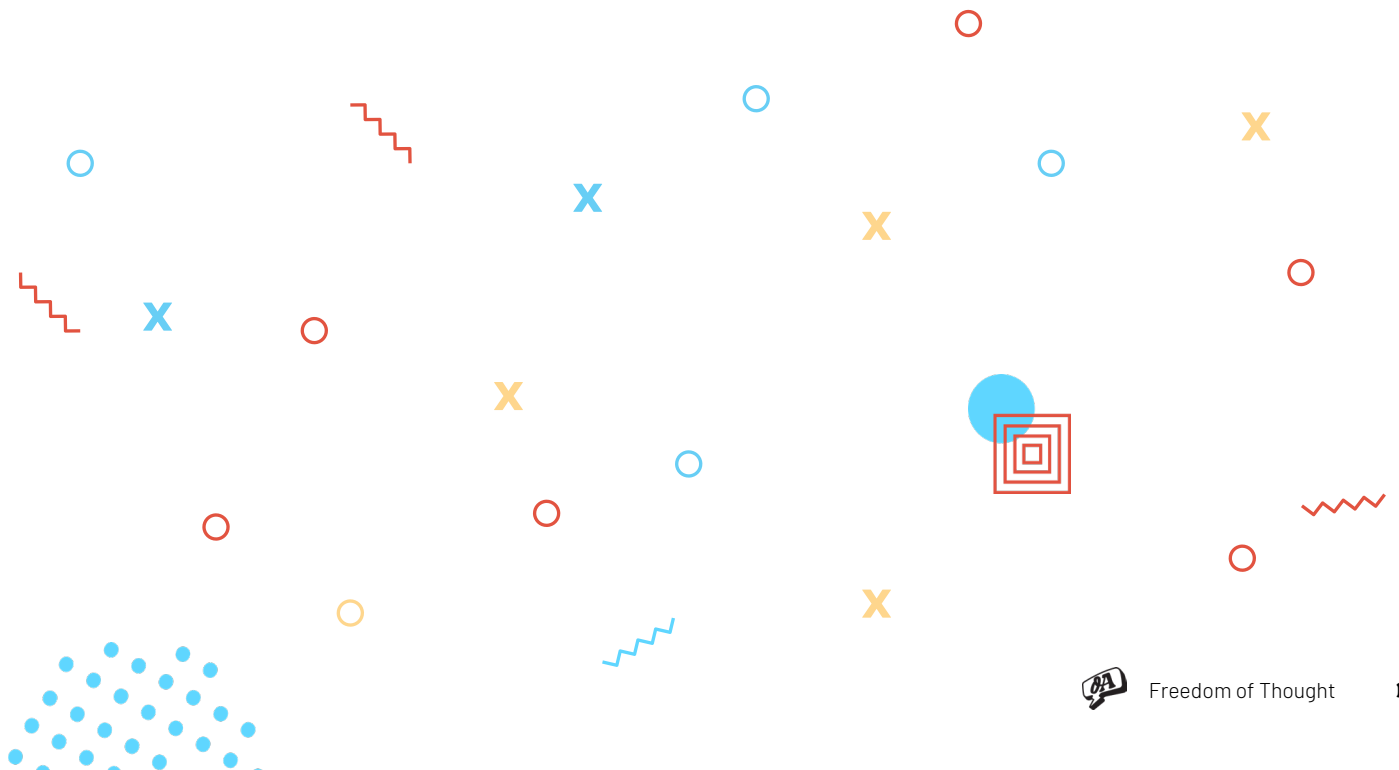
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