

2026 AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT FREEDOM, PROGRESS AND FLOURISHING SURVEY

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Introduction

American colleges and universities play a vital role in shaping future political, cultural, and business leaders. However, there are growing concerns among the American public regarding the current state and direction of higher education and its influence on society. This survey, conducted in collaboration with College Pulse, aims to enhance our understanding how students' experiences in higher education influence their thoughts about the current and future state of the world and their place in it.

This survey, our sixth annual survey since 2021, is divided into three sections. The first section examines student perceptions of viewpoint diversity in the classroom, as well as student attitudes toward regulating speech in the classroom and on campus. The second section examines student perceptions of how their college education is shaping their views on the world, the United States, their futures, and their ability to contribute to society. The last section examines students' views on capitalism and socialism and the ways that these views have been shaped by the college experience.

Methodology

The 2026 survey was conducted in collaboration with College Pulse between July 6th and August 19th, 2026, with a sample size of 1,999 students currently enrolled in 439 four-year U.S. colleges and universities.ⁱ The sample is 64 percent female, 31 percent male, and 5 percent other/non-identified. It is 40 percent white, 26 percent Asian, 13 percent Hispanic/Latino, 8 percent black, 6 percent two or more races, 2 percent Middle Eastern, and 5 percent reporting other/prefer not to say. 69 percent of participants are attending public colleges, and 31 percent are attending private colleges. Concerning political ideology, 49 percent report being slightly, somewhat, or very liberal; 24 percent report being slightly, somewhat, or very conservative; and 27 percent report being neither liberal nor conservative (independent) or not having thought much about politics (apolitical).ⁱⁱ

In addition to reporting results for all students, we report results by political ideology and gender. Moreover, we examine changes in results over the six years of the survey. The next section highlights survey findings regarding students' comfort level in discussing controversial topics on campus, their attitudes about free speech, and their willingness to take actions that shield them from opinions and points of view that they disagree with or are uncomfortable with.

Section 1: Campus Free Speech and Viewpoint Diversity

Given growing concerns about free speech and the lack of viewpoint diversity in higher education, we ask students a range of questions regarding their attitudes and experiences navigating diverse viewpoints and potentially controversial or sensitive topics. These questions assess student comfort level in sharing opinions on controversial or sensitive topics in class and their attitudes toward preventing or reporting others for speech that could be viewed as controversial or offensive.

We report these attitudes overall, as well as by political ideology and by gender. Moreover, we examine changes in these attitudes over the six years that we have conducted the survey.

As universities aim to enhance students' critical thinking skills and advance scientific knowledge, academic freedom and an ability to engage in a competition of ideas are essential to their missions. Our overall results suggest higher education is not as open to unpopular and controversial views as one might expect.

We find that three-quarters of students feel at least somewhat comfortable sharing their opinions on controversial or sensitive topics in class – an increase over 71 percent who felt comfortable last year. However, among students who say they are comfortable sharing their opinions, 44 percent say the reason they feel comfortable sharing their opinion is that they believe their views align with most other students and professors. While comfort in sharing opinions on controversial or sensitive topics might be an indicator of a climate open to diverse views, it isn't for those students who state alignment of their views with others as the reason for their comfort. Among students who say they are not comfortable sharing their opinions, 56 percent say it is because they believe their opinion wouldn't be acceptable by other students and 20 percent say they are worried about their reputation. One other notable finding related to comfort level in sharing opinions is that liberal students (82 percent) are more likely to feel at least somewhat comfortable sharing their opinions than conservative (71 percent) and independent (72 percent) students. They are also less likely to feel 'not at all comfortable' in sharing their opinion (2 percent) in comparison to independent (6 percent) and conservative (7 percent) students.

When surveying students on their attitudes toward withdrawing invitations to speakers who have controversial views and dropping class readings that make students feel uncomfortable, there is agreement among roughly one-third of students that these actions should be taken. About a quarter of students believe that class discussions that make students feel uncomfortable should be dropped. When examining student attitudes toward disinviting speakers, dropping readings, and dropping discussion topics that make students uncomfortable, there are some significant differences among students by political ideology and gender. Liberal students are more in favor of disinviting controversial speakers (40 percent) than independent (27 percent) and conservative (21 percent) students, while independent students (38 percent) and conservative students (31 percent) are more in favor of dropping readings that make students feel uncomfortable than liberal students (28 percent). 38 percent of female students and 35 percent of students with gender of unknown/other are in favor of disinviting controversial speakers, compared to 24 percent of male students. Female students are also more in favor of dropping readings and discussion topics (36 percent and 29 percent respectively) in comparison to male students (27 percent and 23 percent) and students with unknown/other gender (25 percent and 17 percent).

Although student tolerance as measured by willingness to disinvite controversial speakers, drop readings that make students uncomfortable, and drop discussions that make students uncomfortable improved

last year relative to the previous two years, it deteriorated this year in comparison to last year. This year 32 percent say the university should withdraw controversial speaker invitations and drop readings that make students uncomfortable, compared to 28 percent who agreed with these last year. In addition, this year 26 percent say class discussions that make students uncomfortable should be dropped, compared to 23 percent last year.

Other findings provide stronger evidence of a lack of student tolerance for diverse points of view. 73 percent of students say they are in favor of reporting professors to the university if they say something that students deem offensive (this is similar to last year's 72 percent). As in previous years of the survey, there are significant differences among students by political ideology and gender in how they answer this question. 82 percent of liberal students and 72 percent of independent students are in favor of reporting professors, compared to 55 percent of conservative students (Figure 1). By gender, female (83 percent) and unknown/other students (69 percent) are more in favor of reporting professors than male (61 percent) students. Over time, the percentage of students in favor of reporting professors has remained between 68 percent and 74 percent since 2021.

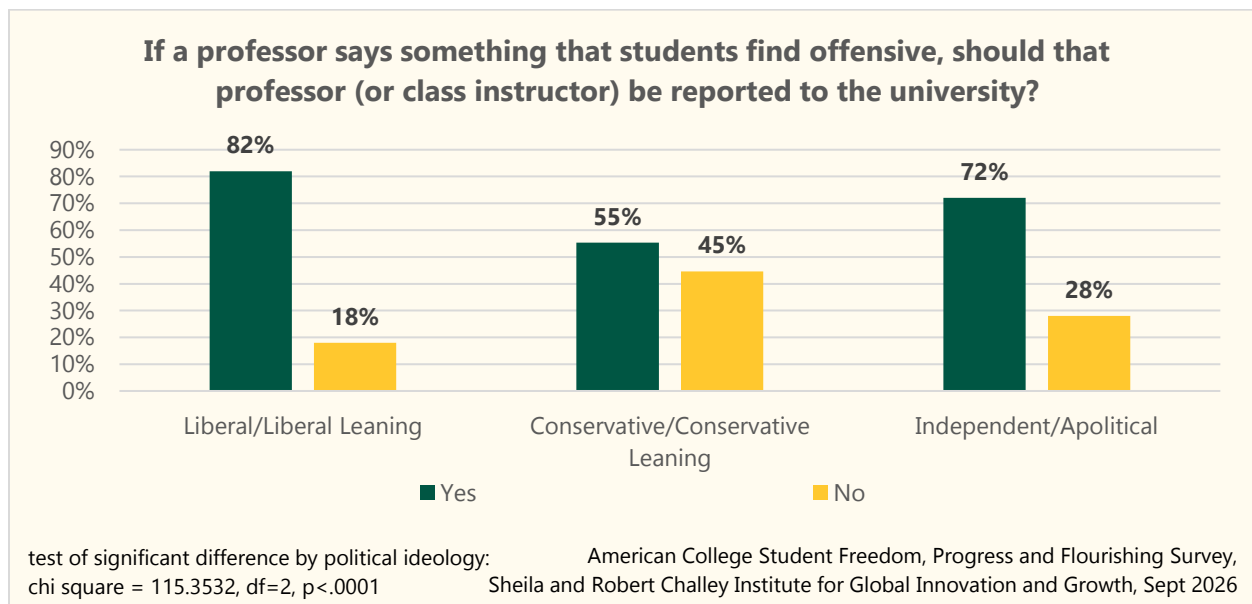


Figure 1: Percent of students in favor of reporting professors for making comments deemed offensive

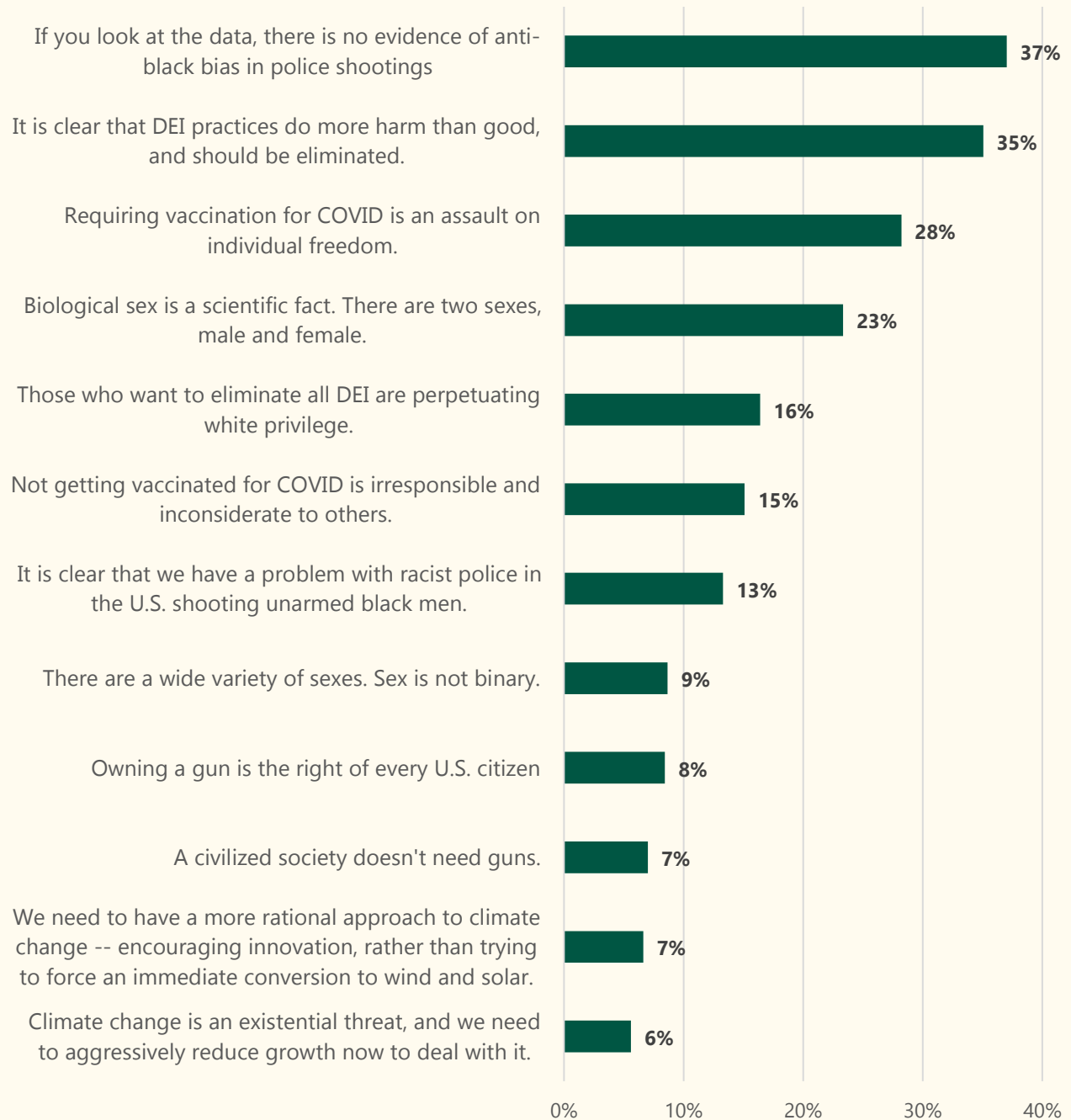
In an attempt to identify whether students are in favor of reporting professors for stating opinions and/or facts that students may disagree with, or whether they are only in favor of reporting professors for things like racial slurs, sexual harassment, and personal attacks, we ask students who answered “yes” to the previous question, which of the following statements professors should be reported for:

- Statement 1: “It is clear that DEI practices do more harm than good, and should be eliminated.”
- Statement 2: “We need to have a more rational approach to dealing with climate change – encouraging innovation, rather than trying to force an immediate conversion to wind and solar.”
- Statement 3: “If you look at the data, there is no evidence of anti-black bias in police shootings.”
- Statement 4: “Owning a gun is the right of every U.S. citizen.”
- Statement 5: “Biological sex is a scientific fact. There are two sexes, male and female.”
- Statement 6: “Requiring vaccination for COVID is an assault on individual freedom.”

- Statement 7: “Those who want to eliminate all DEI are perpetuating white privilege.”
- Statement 8: “Climate change is an existential threat, and we need to aggressively reduce growth now to deal with it.”
- Statement 9: “It is clear that we have a problem with racist police in the U.S. shooting unarmed black men.”
- Statement 10: “A civilized society doesn’t need guns.”
- Statement 11: “There are a wide variety of sexes. Sex is not binary.”
- Statement 12: “Not getting vaccinated for COVID is irresponsible and inconsiderate to others.”

We find that most students who are in favor of reporting professors are in favor of reporting them for stating opinions and/or facts that they disagree with. 67 percent of all students say they are in favor of reporting professors to the university for making one or more of the 12 statements above (see Figure 2 below for percentages of students in favor of reporting professors for various statements)

Which of the following statements should a professor (or class instructor) be reported for? (67 percent say one or more)



American College Student Freedom, Progress and Flourishing Survey,
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Figure 2: Percent of all students who are in favor of reporting professors for one or more of the above statements.

These also vary significantly by political ideology and gender. 77 percent of liberal students and 65 percent of independent students are in favor of reporting professors for one or more of these statements, compared to 48 percent of conservative students. 77 percent of female students and 59 percent of unknown/other students are in favor of reporting professors for one or more of these statements, compared to 55 percent of male students.

A majority of students (56 percent) are also in favor of reporting other students who make statements that other students deem offensive. This is approximately the same as last year (56 percent). The percent of students who are in favor of reporting other students also varies significantly by political ideology (liberal 65 percent, independent 57 percent, conservative 37 percent) and gender (female 65 percent, unknown/other 64 percent, male 46 percent).

In addition to asking students about attitudes toward disinviting speakers, dropping readings and discussion topics, and reporting professors and other students, we ask students about the acceptability of various methods to prevent a speaker from presenting a controversial view related to police shootings, vaccines, and sex/gender. When asking students whether it is acceptable to shout down a speaker presenting one of 6 views, 58 percent say shouting down the speaker is acceptable for one or more of the views. Figure 3 shows the percent who say it is acceptable to shout down the speaker for any one view.

The perceived acceptability of shouting down the speakers vary significantly by political ideology and gender. 68 percent of liberal students say it is acceptable to shout down a speaker for presenting one or more of these views, compared to 54 percent of independent students, and 43 percent of conservative students.

In asking students whether it is acceptable to block a speaker from entering the auditorium to present one of these same 6 views, we find that 42 percent say it is. This also varies by political ideology and gender. 30 percent of conservative students say blocking the speaker is acceptable, compared to 40 percent of independent students and 48 percent of liberal students.

Much fewer students say it is acceptable to use violence to stop a speaker from presenting one of the same 6 views, with 13 percent saying it is acceptable. 17 percent of conservative students say it is acceptable, compared to 15 percent of independent students and 10 percent of liberal students. 21 percent of students with gender unknown/other say violence is acceptable, compared to 16 percent of male students and 11 percent of female students.

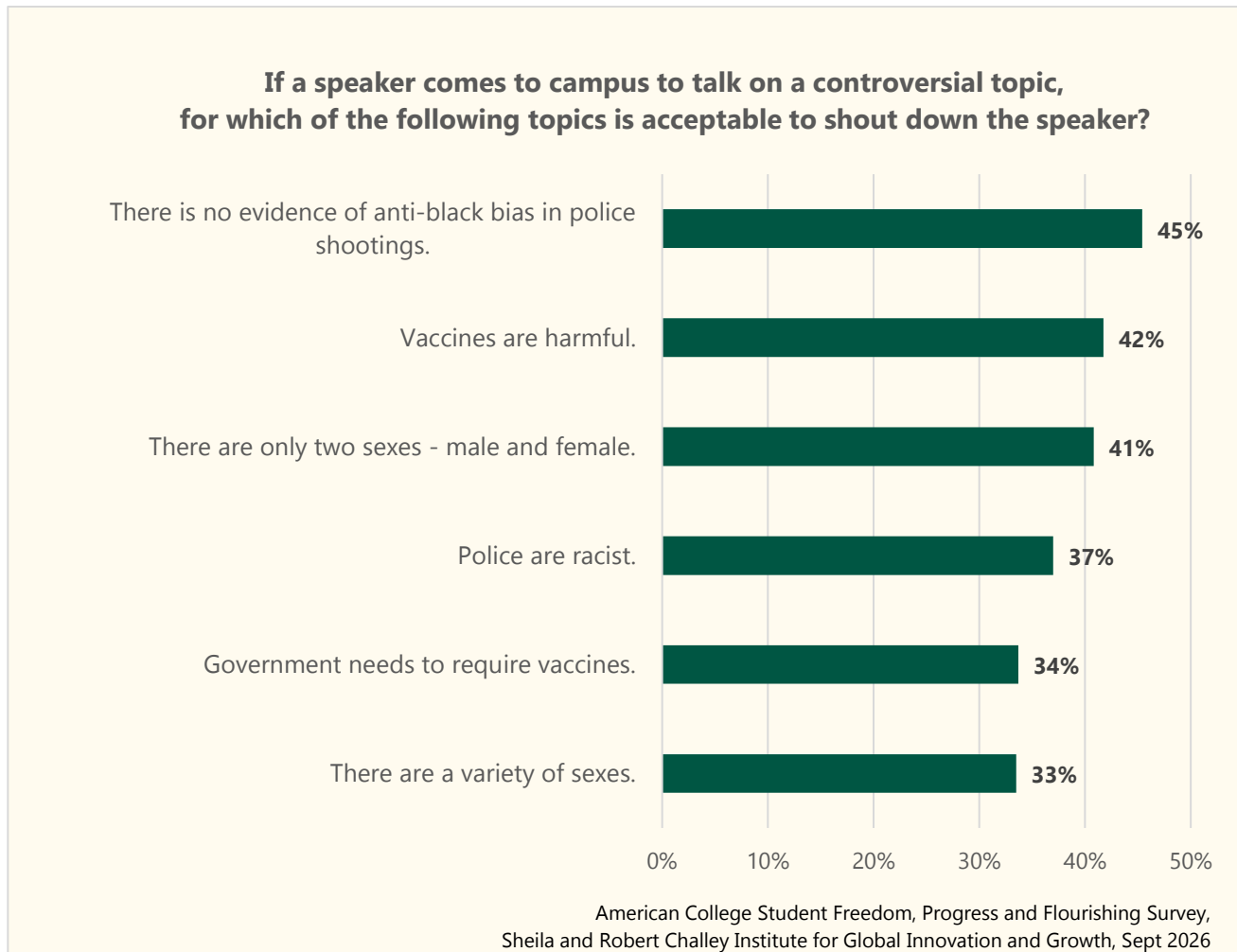


Figure 3: Percent of students who believe it is acceptable to shout down speakers who are making the arguments above.

Last, in answering whether protecting free speech or ensuring everyone is comfortable is more important, students express strong support for free speech. 66 percent of students (and in excess of 60 percent of students from any political ideology) say protecting free speech is more important than ensuring nobody feels uncomfortable. While this may sound like students are very tolerant of different points of view, their answers to many of the previous questions contradict this.

To explore this contradiction further – students say they value free speech more than comfort, but they are also willing to take actions that prevent others from speaking – we examine student attitudes toward the various actions preventing others from speaking for those students who say free speech is more important than comfort. Among those students, 27 percent are in favor of withdrawing speaker invitations for controversial speakers, 25 percent are in favor of dropping readings that make students uncomfortable, 21 percent are in favor of dropping class discussion topics that make students uncomfortable, 69 percent are in favor of reporting professors who say something deemed offensive, 62 percent are in favor of reporting professors for opinions they disagree with, 50 percent are in favor of

reporting other students who say something deemed offensive, 53 percent say it is acceptable to shout down a speaker, 34 percent say it is acceptable to block a speaker, and 9 percent say it is acceptable to use violence to prevent a speaker from speaking. Although these numbers are slightly smaller than for all students, many of the students who say they value free speech more than comfort contradict this with their attitudes toward preventing others from speaking.

As this section of our survey shows, a significant number of students are intolerant of points of view that they disagree with. Many students are comfortable sharing opinions on controversial or sensitive topics in class, but a large portion are comfortable because they believe others agree with them. Moreover, there is a persistence in student willingness to report professors for disfavored opinions and report other students, a majority say it is acceptable to shout down speakers, and over 40 percent say it is acceptable to block speakers from an auditorium. While two-thirds of students say free speech is more important than comfort, those same students largely agree with other students in their beliefs on the legitimacy of preventing others from speaking. The next section of the report examines student beliefs about human progress and its foundations, student optimism, and student patriotism.

Section 2: Human Progress, Attitudes About the Future, and National Pride

Despite large improvements in a wide range of indicators such as life expectancy, literacy, poverty, access to food, and access to education, many people believe things have gotten worse. As shown in our previous surveys, this may be especially true among students. To gain a better understanding of students' views in this area and how they are being shaped by college, we ask students about their perceptions on how the world and the U.S. have changed and why; their optimism about the future of the world, the U.S., and their own future; and their pride in being American. We also report their answers by political ideology and gender, and over time.

We find that a minority of students believe the world and U.S. have improved. Only 38 percent of students think the world has improved over the last 50 years in terms of extreme poverty, life expectancy, hunger, and literacy, while 50 percent think the world has gotten worse and 12 percent think it hasn't changed. 39 percent of students think the U.S. has improved in terms of life expectancy, per capita income, and education level over the last 50 years, compared to 51 percent and 10 percent who think it has gotten worse or not changed.

Among students who think the world and the U.S. have improved the top reason given for the improvement is freedom and the private sector, while among those who think things have declined the top reason given is not enough government and rules. For students who think the world and the U.S. have improved, 46 percent attribute world improvement to increased economic and political freedom and 52 percent attribute U.S. improvement to a dynamic marketplace where entrepreneurs and others innovate to solve problems (see Figure 4). These compare to 22 percent and 20 percent who think the improvement in the world and the U.S. are due to increased government rules, regulation, and redistribution.

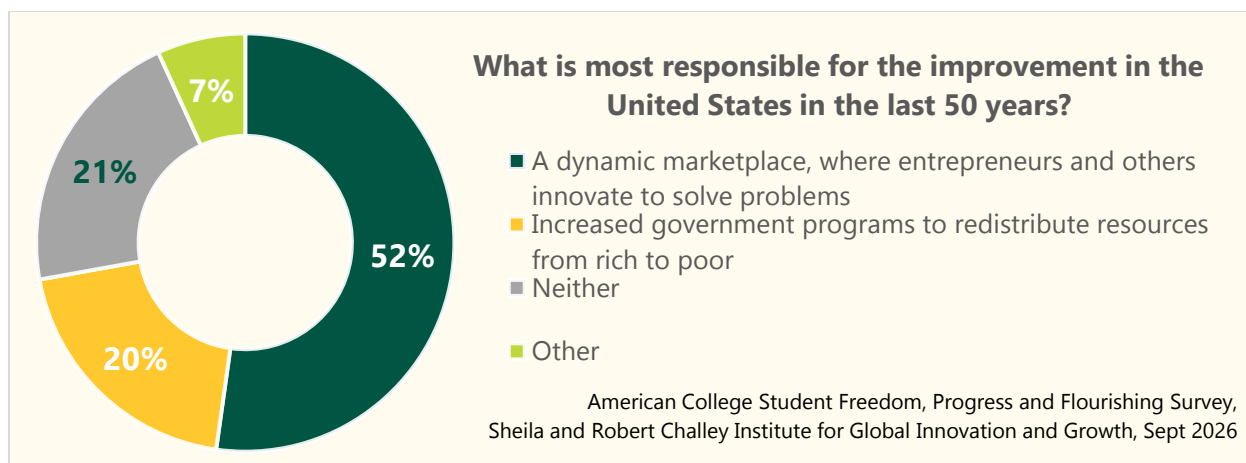


Figure 4: Perceptions for why the U.S. has improved among students who think it has improved

Students who think the world and the U.S. have declined largely blame the decline on a lack of government. 33 percent attribute a perceived decline in the world to not enough government rules, regulations, and abilities to distribute resources, and 53 percent attribute a perceived decline in the U.S. to not enough government programs to make sure resources are used wisely (see Figure 5).

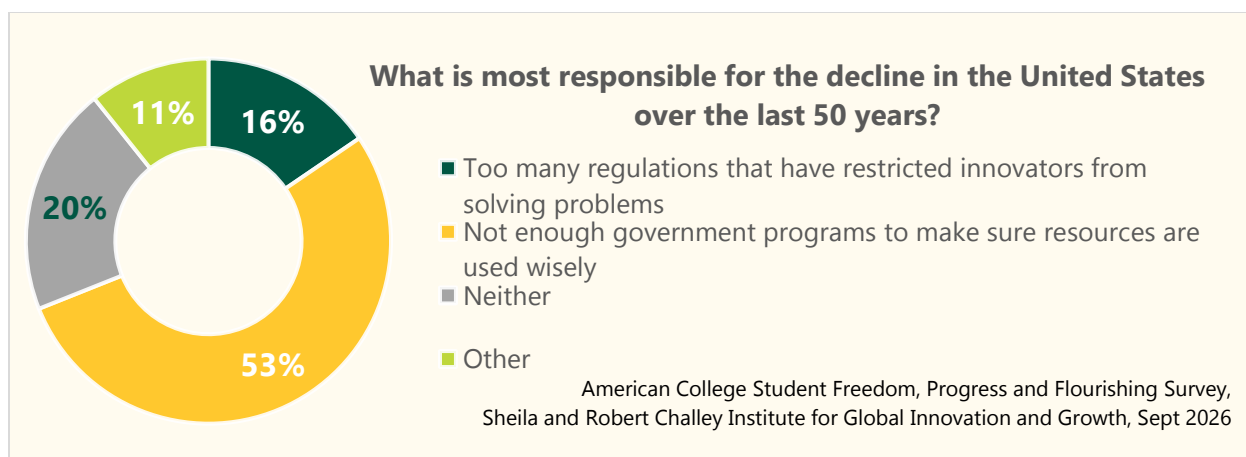


Figure 5: Attribution for a perceived decline in the U.S. for students who think it has gotten worse

Not surprisingly, with the lack of perceived progress there is a lack of optimism among students. Only 27 percent of students are optimistic about the future of the world and 26 percent about the future of the U.S., and just over half of students are optimistic about their own future (55 percent) and about their ability to make a difference in the world (54 percent).

In examining student views of progress and their optimism, there are notable differences by political ideology and gender. Conservative students are more likely to believe the U.S. has improved over the last 50 years, be optimistic about the future of the world and the U.S., and be optimistic about their own futures and their ability to make a difference in the world in comparison to liberal and independent students. Similarly, male students are more likely to believe the world and the U.S. have improved over the last 50 years, and be optimistic about the future of the world and the U.S. in comparison to female and unknown/other students.

There have been some notable changes in perceptions of progress and optimism over time. Student belief of whether the world has improved over the last 50 years is at a low for our survey at 38 percent. It has consistently declined from its high of 47 percent in 2023. Similarly, the percent of students who believe the U.S. has improved over the last 50 years has also declined, though the change has not been as large. Surprisingly, while perceptions about improvement in the world and U.S. have declined, optimism has increased somewhat. Optimism about the future of the world, the U.S., and students' own futures all increased from last year, though they the percent of students optimistic is similar to previous years. Notably, optimism about students' ability to make a difference in the world is at an all-time high for our survey (54 percent versus 49 percent last year).

Last, we ask students how proud they are to be American. 61 percent of American students express that they are very proud (24 percent) or somewhat proud (37 percent) to be American. As Figure 6 shows, 83 percent of conservative students are very proud (56 percent) or somewhat proud (27 percent) compared to 62 percent of independent students (24 percent very proud, 38 percent somewhat proud) and 50 percent of liberal students (8 percent very proud, 42 percent somewhat proud). A higher percentage of male students (70 percent) also report being very proud or somewhat proud to be American in comparison to female (56 percent) and unknown/other (41 percent) students. Pride in being American has ranged between 54 percent of students and 64 percent of students since 2021.

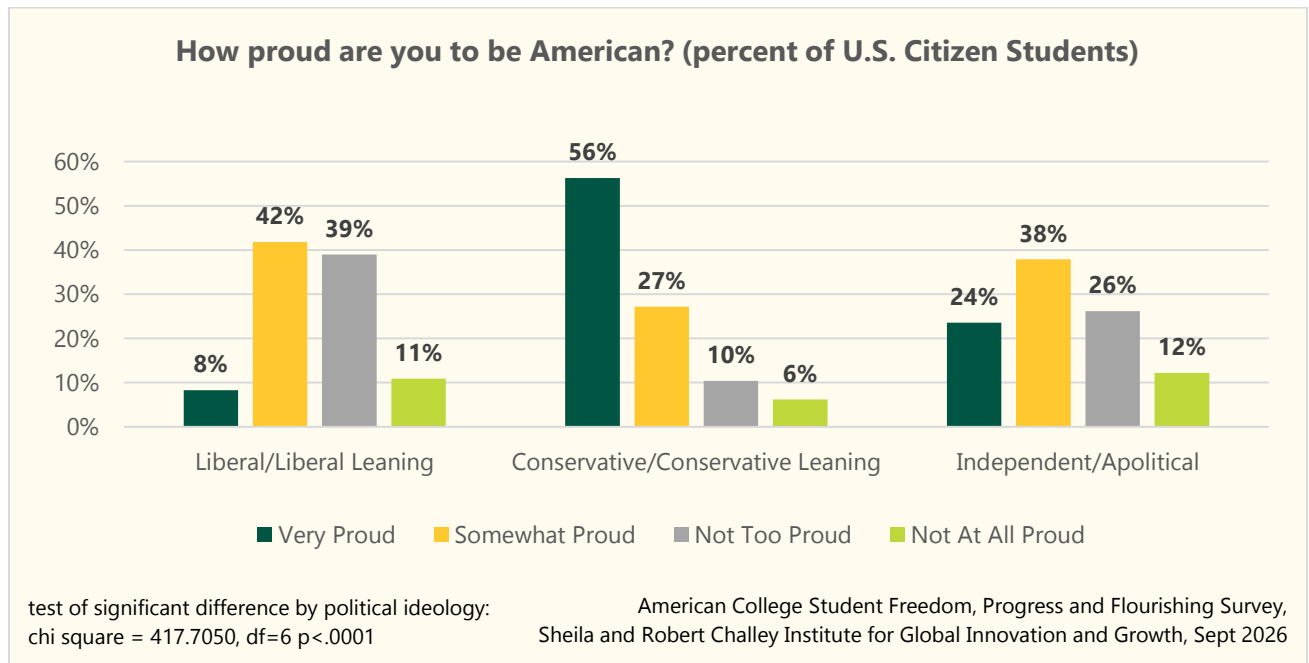


Figure 6: Pride in being American by political ideology

This section of the survey shows the widespread misunderstanding of progress by college students. A majority of students believe the world and the U.S. have declined in measures such as extreme poverty, life expectancy, and literacy over the last 50 years. Yet, these measures have all improved markedly. In 1981, 47 percent of the world lived in extreme poverty compared to 10 percent today, global life expectancy was 60.9 years compared to 73.2 years today, 68 percent of the world's population was

literate compared to 88 percent today, and larger percentages of people were undernourished than today.ⁱⁱⁱ Large improvements have also been seen in the U.S.

As previous research has shown, this lack of awareness of progress likely leads to the lack of optimism displayed by students.^{iv} There is also some evidence that this lack of optimism may be related to a lack of national pride, with only 61 percent of American college students being very proud or somewhat proud to be American.^v The next section aims to understand students' economic beliefs and understanding.

Section 3: Capitalism and Socialism

Because of the importance of economic systems in influencing economic opportunity and societal flourishing, we ask students a number of questions related to their understanding of economic systems, their favorability toward them, and the ways they have been influenced by college. Unlike studies that just ask about whether people view capitalism or socialism favorably, our survey asks students about definitions – finding that definitions matter a lot in whether students view the economic system favorably or unfavorably. As in previous sections, we report findings by political ideology, gender, and over time.

When presented with two different definitions of capitalism—one reflecting free market capitalism and one describing cronyism—55 percent of the students select the free market definition, 26 percent choose cronyism, 16 percent are unsure, and 3 percent say other. Most students do not view capitalism positively (with only 24 percent having a positive view of capitalism), but student views on capitalism vary widely depending on how students define it. For students who define capitalism as free market capitalism, nearly twice as many have a positive view as a negative view (37 percent versus 20 percent), while nearly seven times as many students defining capitalism as cronyism have a negative view than a positive view (61 percent versus 9 percent).

Student views on capitalism vary widely by political ideology and gender. Conservative students (66 percent) are more likely to define capitalism using the free market definition in comparison to liberal (55 percent) and independent students (44 percent), and more likely to have a positive view of capitalism (53 percent) compared to liberal (14 percent) and independent (17 percent) students (see Figure 7). Similarly, male students (63 percent) are more likely than female (49 percent) students or unknown/other (43 percent) students to define capitalism with a free market definition, and are more likely (36 percent) to have a positive view of capitalism in comparison to female (14 percent) and other/unknown (21 percent) students.

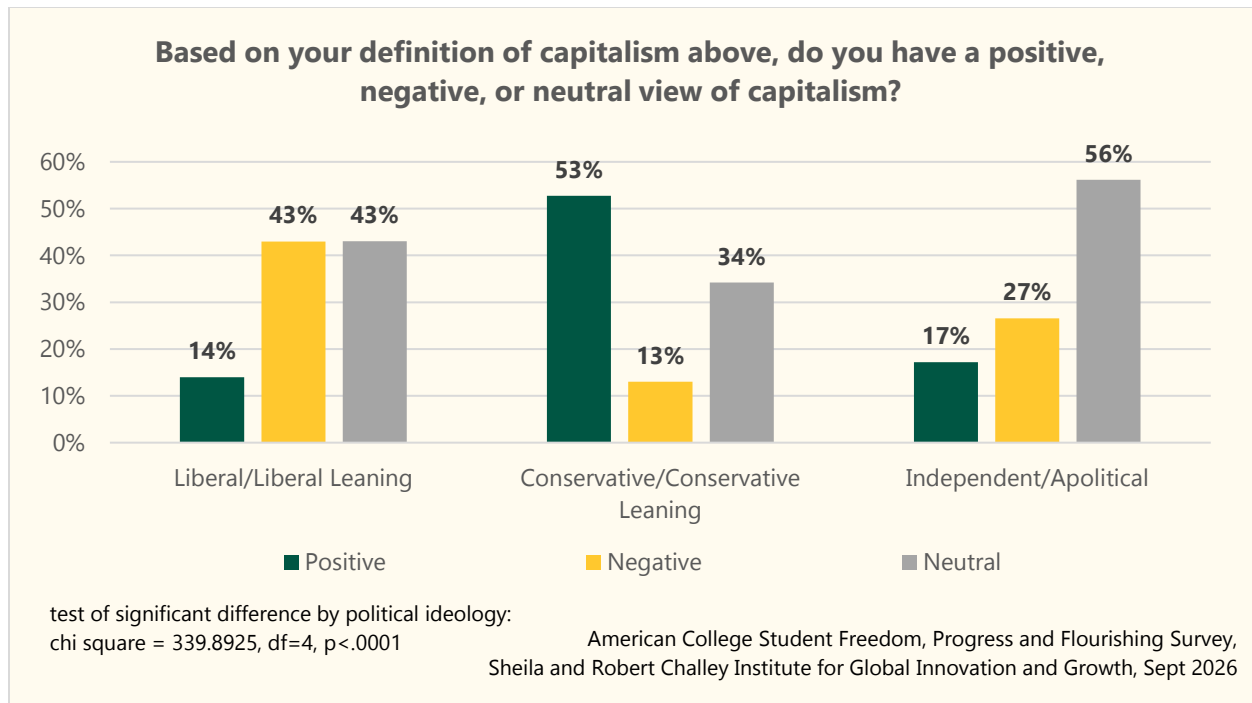


Figure 7: Student attitudes toward capitalism by political ideology

The percent of students viewing capitalism positively has dropped some since 2025, when it was 27 percent. However, it is in line with the percent who viewed capitalism positively in 2021-2024 (all between 23 percent and 25 percent).

Of the students who define capitalism either with the free market definition or the cronyism definition, the percent who choose the free market definition is 68 percent in 2026. This is similar to the 69 percent in 2025.

As with capitalism, there is disagreement among students on how socialism is defined. When presented with two definitions of socialism, students were more likely to select the definition focused on redistribution and active government (48 percent) than the definition of central planning and the collective ownership of property (31 percent). 27 percent of students have a positive view of socialism, though their opinion of socialism varies as a function of how they define it. For those who define socialism as heavy redistribution and active government, 43 percent have a positive view and 17 percent have a negative view of socialism, while for those who define socialism as central planning and the collective ownership of property, 16 percent have a positive view and 47 percent have a negative view of socialism.

Just like with capitalism, student views on socialism vary widely by political ideology and gender. Liberal students (58 percent) are more likely to define socialism as redistribution and active government in comparison to conservative (40 percent) or independent (38 percent) students, and liberal students (38 percent) are more likely to have a positive view of socialism in comparison to independent (19 percent) or conservative (13 percent) students. Unknown/other (60 percent) students are more likely to define socialism as redistribution and active government in comparison to female (50 percent) and male (45 percent) students, and unknown/other (46 percent) students are more likely to have a favorable view of socialism than female (26 percent) or male (26 percent) students.

Despite a decline in the percent of students defining socialism using the central planning definition since a peak in 2022, the percent in favor of socialism has not changed much. Among students who selected either the central-planning or redistribution definition, 40% selected central planning in 2026. This was a decline from 46 percent in 2022. 27 percent of students (2 percent more than last year) have a positive view of socialism.

Most students say that college hasn't influenced their opinion of capitalism or socialism. For those who say it has, 11 percent say college has given them a more positive view and 23 percent say college has given them a more negative view of capitalism, while 18 percent say it has given them a more positive view and 13 percent a more negative view of socialism.

Similarly, most students say their professors have not expressed their views on capitalism and socialism. When they have, 18 percent say professor attitudes toward capitalism have been positive and 22 percent say negative, while 17 percent say professor views toward socialism have been positive and 15 percent negative. While there is no discernable pattern in expressed views of professors toward socialism, student reports suggest professor views have become more favorable toward capitalism (increasing from 33 percent of views expressed on capitalism in 2021 to 45 percent in 2025 and 2026).

To gain additional insights into the attractiveness to students of elements of traditional socialism (state ownership and central planning) and/or of the heavy government involvement and redistribution definition of socialism, we ask a number of other questions related to universal healthcare and free higher education, rent freezes on apartments, government-owned grocery stores, government ownership in strategic sectors of the economy, minimum wage, the existence of billionaires, and a wealth tax.

When asked whether they would be in favor of universal healthcare and free higher education if funded by a wealth tax on the top one percent, 76 percent say yes (about the same as last year – 78 percent). Similarly, 73 percent (71 percent last year) say they would be in favor of these things if funded by increasing income taxes to the top 10 percent. In particular, liberal and independent students are in favor of these things funded in this way (See Figure 8).

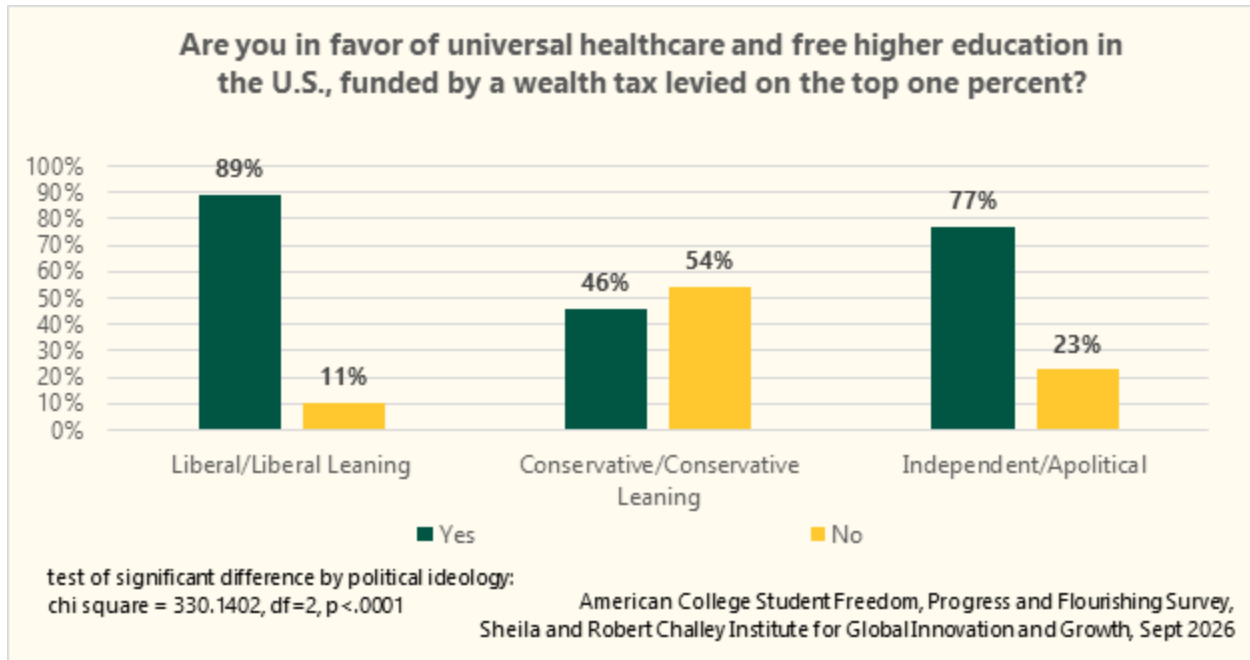


Figure 8: Percent of students with different political ideologies who are in favor of universal healthcare and free higher education funded by a wealth tax on the top one percent

In contrast, when students are asked whether they would be in favor of universal healthcare and free higher education if funded by higher income taxes on most workers, only 42 percent say yes. If funded by a universal consumption tax, 49 percent of students say yes. Figure 9 shows percentages in favor of universal healthcare and free higher education funded by higher income taxes on most workers for students who have different political ideologies.

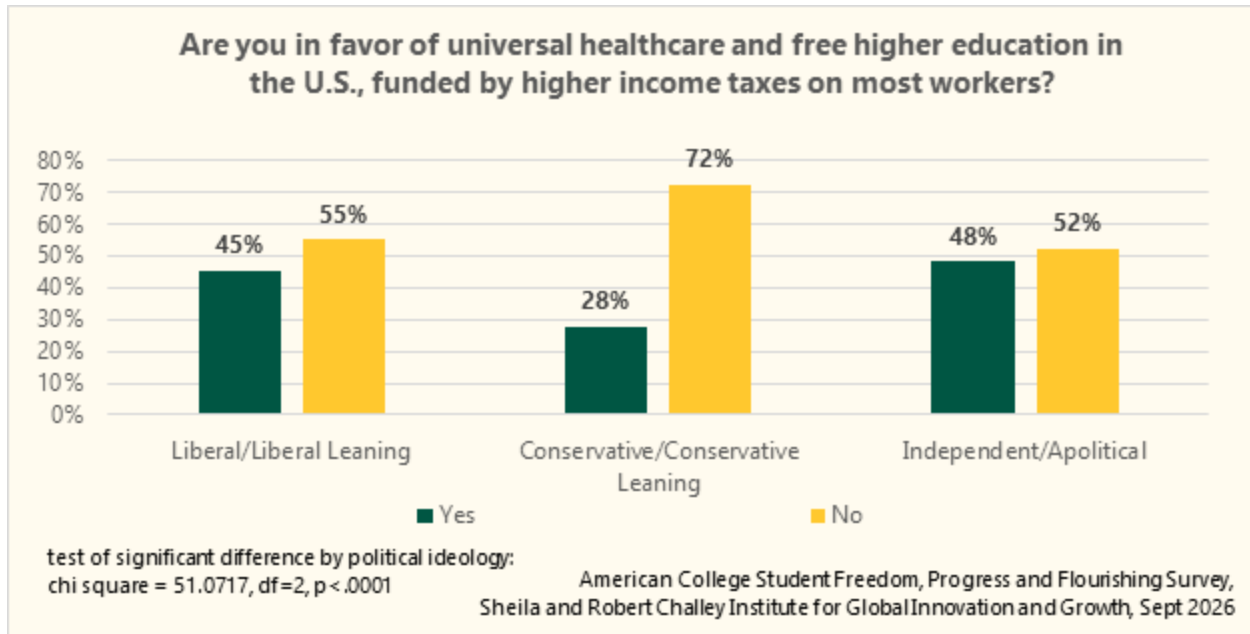


Figure 9: Percent of students with different political ideologies who are in favor of universal healthcare and free higher education funded by higher income taxes on most workers

When students are asked about rent freezes on apartments, 72 percent are in favor. The percent of students in favor of rent freezes varies significantly by political ideology and gender. 86 percent of liberal students are in favor of rent freezes compared to 74 percent of independent and 40 percent of conservative students. 80 percent of unknown/other students and 79 percent of female students are in favor of rent freezes, compared to 62 percent of male students.

Similarly, 62 percent of students are in favor of a \$30 minimum wage, with significant differences by political ideology and gender. 73 percent of liberal students and 67 percent of independent students are in favor of a \$30 minimum wage compared to 35 percent of conservative students. 77 percent of unknown/other students and 70 percent of female students are in favor of a \$30 minimum wage compared to 51 percent of male students.

Interestingly, students have contrasting opinions on government ownership of business – an element that is central to the classic definition of socialism. On the one hand, two-thirds of students are in favor of government owned grocery stores, while on the other hand one-third are in favor of ownership in strategic sectors like artificial intelligence and steel companies. The percentage of students in favor of government-owned grocery stores also vary significantly by political ideology and gender. 79 percent of liberal students and 69 percent of independent students are in favor of government-owned grocery stores, compared to 39 percent of conservative students. Female (74 percent) and unknown/other (74 percent) students are also more in favor of government-owned grocery stores than male (57 percent students). However, while differences in favorability toward government ownership in strategic sectors are large by gender, they are not very large by political ideology. 36 percent and 35 percent of independent and liberal students are in favor of ownership in strategic industries compared to 30 percent of conservative students.

The last two questions in this section ask about whether students think billionaires should exist and whether they are in favor a wealth tax. Only 41 percent of students believe that billionaires should exist, with large differences in beliefs by political ideology and gender. As Figure 10 shows, 71 percent of conservative students believe billionaires should exist, compared to 45 percent of independent students and 24 percent of liberal students (see Figure 10). 56 percent of male students, 31 percent of female students, and 17 percent of unknown/other students believe billionaires should exist. More than three quarters of all students believe a wealth tax should be implemented in the U.S. (92 percent of liberal students, 73 percent of independent students, and 45 percent of conservative students).

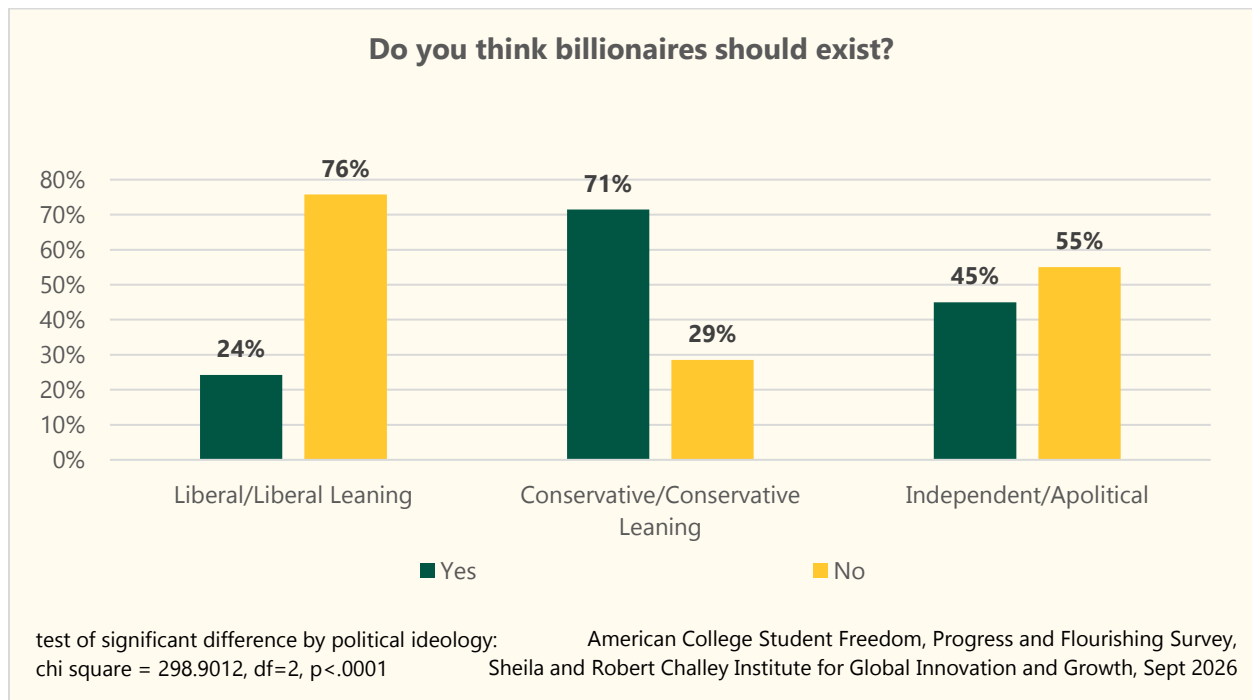


Figure 10: Percent of students who believe billionaires should exist, by political ideology.

This section shows divergent views on the meanings of capitalism and socialism among students, as well as on whether they are positive or negative systems. Significant percentages of students confuse capitalism with cronyism, and large percentages associate socialism with active redistribution by government.

Many students are attracted to various elements of the different definitions of socialism. Many are in favor of large redistribution as illustrated by large percentages in favor of universal healthcare and higher education when it is primarily paid for by the wealthy. They are also in favor of economic policies like rent freezes and government-owned grocery stores that claim to help those with lower incomes. Many students are also in favor of wealth taxes, and a majority believe billionaires shouldn't exist. Interestingly, they hold contradictory views on two different versions of an important element of the traditional definition of socialism (government ownership of the means of production). Two-thirds are in favor of government-owned grocery stores, while two-thirds are opposed to government ownership in strategic sectors like AI and steel.

Summary

The 2026 version of the American College Student Freedom, Progress and Flourishing Survey contains many important and interesting results. As in previous years of the survey, we find that students are not very tolerant of points of view that they disagree with. Although a majority of students are comfortable sharing their opinions on controversial or sensitive topics in class, 44 percent of those who are comfortable are comfortable because their views align with others. We find that two-thirds of students are in favor of reporting professors for opinions or statements of fact they disagree with, that 58 percent say shouting down a speaker to prevent a disfavored opinion from presenting is acceptable, and more than 40 percent saying it is acceptable to block a speaker from an auditorium for the same reason. While 66 percent of students say free speech is more important than comfort, students who say this are only slightly less in favor of censoring speech than other students (for example, 62 percent of these students are in favor of reporting professors for opinions or statements of fact they disagree with). These findings do not suggest a campus environment open to the free inquiry and debate needed to advance knowledge and teach critical thinking.

We also find that students are unaware of progress, with minorities of students believing the world and the U.S. have improved over the last 50 years in terms of objective measures of poverty, education, and life expectancy. Moreover, the unawareness of this progress seems to be related to a misunderstanding of how progress occurs. Students who believe the world and the U.S. have not improved attribute the lack of improvement to not enough government rules and redistribution, while those who believe they have improved attribute the improvement to an increase in freedom.

The lack of awareness of progress is also related to a lack of optimism for the future and a lack of national pride. Just over a quarter of students are optimistic about the future of the world and the U.S., and slightly more than half are optimistic about their own future and their ability to make a difference in the world. Only 61 percent of American students are at least somewhat proud to be American.

Students have divergent views on capitalism and socialism, with many confusing capitalism with cronyism and many defining socialism as heavy redistribution and active government. However, there has been a significant improvement in understanding of capitalism since 2021.

Few students view capitalism (24 percent) or socialism (27 percent) favorably, but their opinions of both depend heavily on how they define them. Students who define capitalism as free market capitalism have a much more favorable view of capitalism than those who define it as cronyism. Similarly, students who define socialism as redistribution have a much more favorable view of socialism than those who define it as central planning.

To gain insights into the attractiveness to students of traditional socialism and to heavy government involvement and redistribution, we ask questions about universal healthcare and free higher education, rent freezes on apartments, government-owned grocery stores, government ownership in strategic sectors, a \$30 minimum wage, the existence of billionaires, and a wealth tax. A majority of students are in favor of universal healthcare and free higher education when it is paid for by the wealthy, rent freezes on apartments, a \$30 minimum wage, and a wealth tax. They hold contrasting views on government ownership; in favor of government-owned grocery stores, but opposed to government ownership in strategic sectors like AI and steel. The majority of students do not believe billionaires should exist.

Charts showing all survey results follow in an appendix. They show overall results, results by political ideology, and results over time.

ⁱ The sample was drawn from College Pulse's American College Student Panel™ that includes over 850,000 verified students representing more than 1500 different colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members are recruited by a number of methods to help ensure diversity in the panel population, including web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university organizations. To reduce the effects of any non-response bias, a post-stratification adjustment was applied based on demographic distributions of the four-year undergraduate population, derived from the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS), the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the 2019-20 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The post-stratification weight rebalanced the sample based on the following benchmarks: gender, race and ethnicity, class year, voter registration and financial aid status. The sample weighting was accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IPF) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results.

ⁱⁱ The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.8 percentage points for the full sample. When breaking it down by political ideology and gender, or in questions where the number of respondents is limited based on their response to a previous question, the margin of error is larger. Margins of error are typically calculated on probability-based samples and are not technically correct for non-probability online samples. We supply them here to provide a general assessment of error ranges that may be associated with the data.

ⁱⁱⁱ Extreme poverty statistics are from the World Bank (<https://pip.worldbank.org/poverty-calculator>), and other statistics are from our world in data (<https://ourworldindata.org>).

^{iv} <https://www.ndsu.edu/challeyinstitute/research/briefs/202102>.

^v https://www.ndsu.edu/challeyinstitute/research/publications/patriotic_progress.