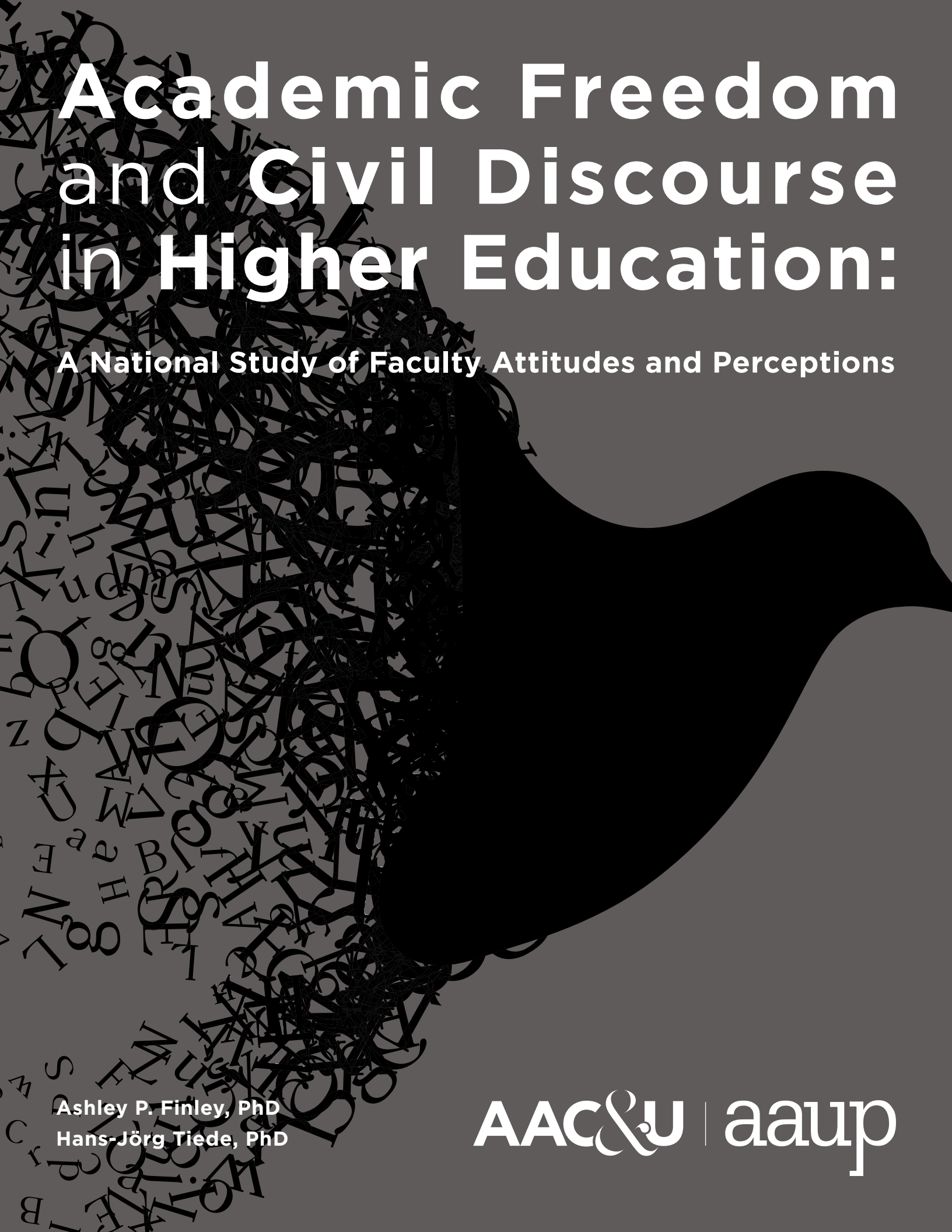
Academic Freedom and Civil Discourse in Higher Education:

A National Study of Faculty Attitudes and Perceptions



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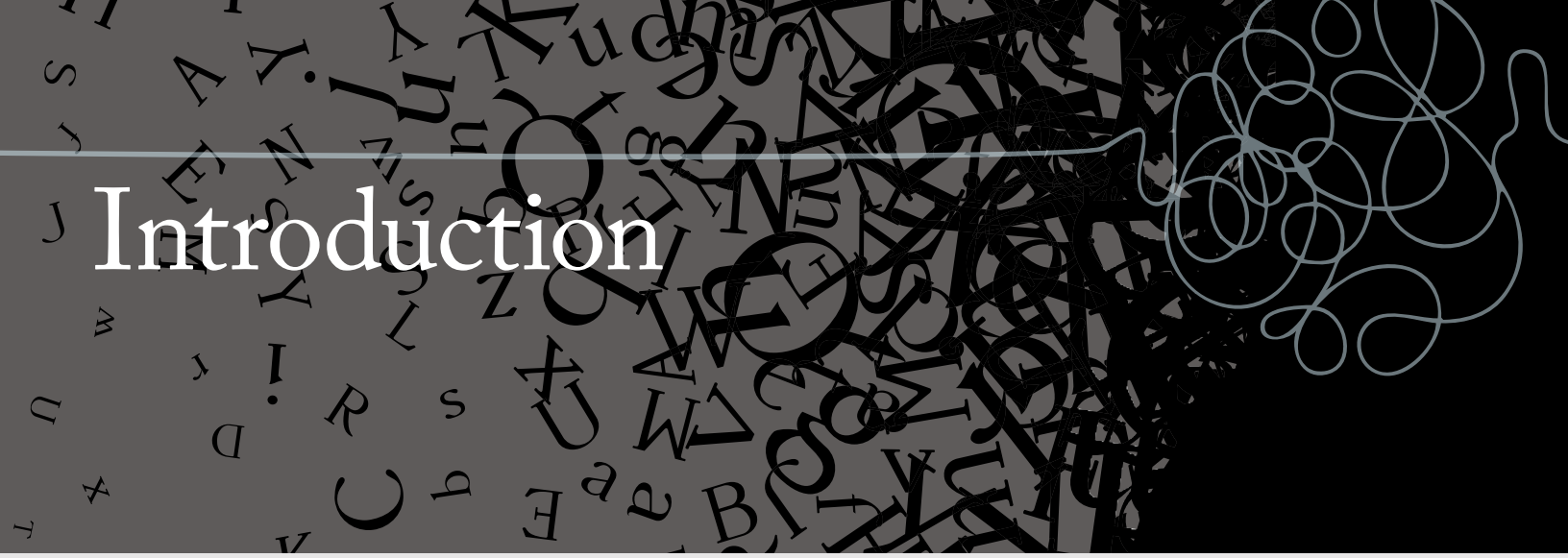


Introduction

The depth and pervasiveness of the ideological differences that animate the political and social climate within the United States have exceeded the language of merely being a "divide." The notion of a divide implies separation but not necessarily distance. Perhaps the viewpoint most shared by Americans is just how wide the gulf between ideological differences has become. The growing breadth of these differences was spurred by the 2016 and 2020 elections and further catalyzed by responses to COVID-19, renewed recognition of racial violence and injustice, and economic fragility. A handful of fraught topics have commonly defined degrees of polarization in the United States. Second Amendment rights, capital punishment, and access to abortion have long been the substance of debates—both formal and informal. But today's contested terrain now includes challenges to bedrock beliefs, such as the integrity of elections, journalistic authority, and the legitimacy of "facts," that were thought to be unassailable. The relatively new questioning of core touchstones of democracy has not only eroded the precious middle ground needed for civil discourse in the United States but has also recentered discussions of the public purposes of American education, at all levels.

While primary and secondary education in the United States provides essential curricula for building knowledge and skills for understanding civic and democratic processes, American higher education has historically been situated as an arbiter for democratic sustainability. As such, colleges and universities fulfill their public purpose, in part, by developing students' abilities to envision and engage their role as civic actors, to critically interrogate the rights and ideals of citizenship, and to define the local, national, and global parameters that shape communities.[1] This is perhaps why people with college degrees are more likely to vote and volunteer in their communities. "The link between education and political engagement is among the most replicated and cited findings in political science. If scholars could use only one variable to predict voting, contacting public officials, signing a petition, or talking with others about public affairs, it would be the level of education."[2] There is also a robust association of students' engagement in a range of community-based and civic activities in college, regardless of sector, with an expansive set of outcomes, including the development of civic skills, such as civic mindedness, openness to diversity, and a greater understanding of ethical and moral responsibility.[3]

Despite core civic missions and the provision of enriching community-based experiences, colleges and universities are also political lightning rods. Campuses have long served as the literal and figurative grounds for free expression and social activism. The ideological foundation of the protests and collective action across US college and universities can be traced to a single educational philosophy widely shared across US postsecondary institutions—liberal education. Drawn from the Latin root *liber*, a *liberal* education is an education intended to free one's mind and to empower students to think for themselves. It is a viewpoint that animates the democratic

underpinnings of curricula, pedagogy, and much of campus life. The essence of a liberal education is achieved through providing exposure to a spectrum of ways of thinking, knowing, and being across the college journey, from general education to a student's chosen major. The opposite of a liberal education, therefore, is not an education that is conservative, nor one that is progressive—it is one that is *illiberal*.[4] An illiberal education is one that indoctrinates thinking by closing the mind to alternative viewpoints and suppressing individual reckoning and reasoning.

As such, colleges and universities have been uniquely positioned in the maelstrom of the country's wider political and social turmoil. Specifically, higher education institutions are bearing considerable public scrutiny for being viewed as not just advancing liberal ideologies but also doing so while suppressing conservative viewpoints.[5] The culminating effects of these public perceptions have been borne out through a steady wave of state legislation aimed at ensuring colleges and universities are inclusive of conservative perspectives and/or constrained in their ability to address topics often aligned with liberal agendas (e.g., critical race theory, transgender identity, LGBTQ+ rights).

Although colleges and universities have long been focal points in culture wars, the invocation of constraints on academic freedom have been lobbed on both sides of the political spectrum. There is little doubt that the focus on academic freedom and civil discourse has intensified substantially since the 2016 presidential election. The remarkable influence of legislative action on campus policies and procedures at postsecondary institutions across the country has drawn comparisons to McCarthyism. At the time, Paul Lazarsfeld, a sociologist and founder of Columbia University's Bureau of Social Research, conducted a groundbreaking study on faculty attitudes regarding academic freedom. Although the sample consisted only of sociologists at four-year institutions, the study was, at the time, the most rigorous investigation of faculty perspectives specifically on aspects of academic freedom, such as apprehension to express ideas, permissiveness of diverse viewpoints, and inclination toward self-censorship. The results of the study informed the book *The Academic Mind: Social Scientists in a Time of Crisis*.[6]

The parallel of today's intertwined political and educational milieu with McCarthyism more than a half century ago encouraged us to revisit Lazarsfeld's work in constructing the study that follows. Our process for questionnaire construction began, for example, by examining Lazarsfeld's original 1955 survey instrument. We then invited a group of national scholars working in the areas of academic freedom, constitutional law, free expression, and civil discourse to weigh in on how those foundational questions should be modified, expanded, and excluded—and what was missing, given today's social and political contexts. This approach provided us with methodological and inferential reference points for designing the current study. Although much has changed in nearly seventy years, it is sobering that a number of Lazarsfeld's original questions still ring true. Even as the internet, demographic diversity, and institutional diversification (Lazarsfeld's study arrived just ahead of the major expansion of community colleges) have dramatically altered the landscape of higher education today, our results suggest that just as things have changed, much has stayed the same. Our hope for these findings is that they may inform a range of conversations, within and beyond higher education, that lead to greater awareness of the assumptions we hold, greater will to communicate across differences, and better understanding of where we can find common ground.

PART I:

Methodological Overview

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP),[7] with funding from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, partnered on the conceptualization and implementation of this study. NORC at the University of Chicago collaborated with AAC&U and AAUP to provide research support with regard to development of the survey instrument, item testing, survey administration, data analysis, and reporting.

The methodological overview outlines key study methodologies, while the information in this report's Methodological Appendix provides detailed descriptions of all methodologies employed during each phase of the study.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument used to collect data for the study (Appendix) was informed by an instrument developed by Paul Lazarsfeld in 1955.[8] This earlier study collected information about the experiences and perspectives related to academic freedom among social science faculty within US colleges and universities during the McCarthy era. Our research team, with input from the national advisory group, adapted Lazarsfeld's original instrument, added items, and tested the final instrument with a sample of faculty (see Appendix for detailed descriptions of the instrument development and cognitive testing processes). The final survey instrument included a total of 128 items.

Study Population and Sampling

This study was conducted to understand the experiences, views, and characteristics of faculty at US colleges and universities related to aspects of academic freedom, freedom of expression, and civil discourse. The population under study involved individuals who, between December 2022 and December 2023 (i.e., the twelve-month period that preceded the study), had any instructional duties and/or served in a faculty role at any two- or four-year public or private US college or university.[9]

The study's sample was derived from an email contact list provided by MDR.[10] The final sample file included 164,815 individuals. To ensure that the study's sample included an adequate number of individuals from diverse geographical and institutional contexts, nine sampling segments (or strata) were identified using the following characteristics:

- **Location of institution:** Three groups of states (plus Washington, DC) according to the status of legislative restrictions on postsecondary educational activities as of December 2023: 1) legislation not introduced (seventeen states plus Washington, DC), 2) legislation introduced but not passed (twenty-four states), and 3) legislation passed (nine states)[11]

- **Institutional control and level:** Three groups of institutions according to: 1) public four-year, 2) private four-year, and 3) public and private two-year institutions

Table 1: Overview of Sampling Segments (or Strata) Used for Weighting Data

Sample Segment	Sample Segment	Public/Private	2-Year or 4-year
Segment 1	Legislation introduced but not passed	Public	4-year
Segment 2	Legislation introduced but not passed	Private	4-year
Segment 3	Legislation introduced but not passed	Public and Private	2-year
Segment 4	Legislation passed	Public	4-year
Segment 5	Legislation passed	Private	4-year
Segment 6	Legislation passed	Public and Private	2-year
Segment 7	Legislation not introduced	Public	4-year
Segment 8	Legislation not introduced	Private	4-year
Segment 9	Legislation not introduced	Public and Private	2-year

Survey Administration and Final Dataset

NORC administered a web-based survey programmed in Voxco survey software. Data collection began on December 7, 2023, and concluded on February 12, 2024. The final sample distribution list (N = 164,815) was emailed a personalized invitation to participate in the survey. The invitation and all subsequent reminder email messages included a survey link unique for each prospective participant. After the initial survey invitation, seven reminder email messages were sent between December 13, 2023, and February 8, 2024, to the remaining survey nonrespondents.[12]

Once data collection concluded, a review was performed across all response cases (see Appendix for a detailed description of the data quality review process). This review led to the removal of 1,213 cases with high skip rates (i.e., respondents who skipped more than half of the items reviewed) and the removal of an additional 183 cases in which the respondent completed the survey in less than one-third of the median survey completion time of six minutes. A total of 8,458 cases were determined to be complete and were statistically weighted to the US higher education faculty population of 1,060,483. The average response rate across weighted segments was 4.8 percent.

Table 2 summarizes response rates by sample segment for the study's final analytic dataset (N = 8,458). Prior to data analyses, open-ended responses were reviewed and back-coded using the survey's existing response options or using a new response category (e.g., another degree, another race or ethnicity). A statistical weighting method, referred to as "raking," was implemented to adjust the sample to represent the known population characteristics across nine sampling strata defined by demographic and employment variables (see Appendix for detailed descriptions of the back-coding and statistical weighting procedures).[13]

Table 2: Final Segment Sample Sizes and Response Rates (N = 8,458)

Sample Segment	Legislative Action of State Where Institution Is Located	Public/Private	2-Year or 4-year	Segment-Specific Sample Size	Unweighted Response Rate
Segment 1	Legislation introduced but not passed	Public	4-year	1,701	5.7%
Segment 2	Legislation introduced but not passed	Private	4-year	1,685	5.6%
Segment 3	Legislation introduced but not passed	Public and Private	2-year	508	3.3%
Segment 4	Legislation passed	Public	4-year	1,033	5.9%
Segment 5	Legislation passed	Private	4-year	373	5.3%
Segment 6	Legislation passed	Public and Private	2-year	175	3.3%
Segment 7	Legislation not introduced	Public	4-year	1,449	5.6%
Segment 8	Legislation not introduced	Private	4-year	1,092	5.5%
Segment 9	Legislation not introduced	Public and Private	2-year	442	3.2%

Table 3 shows the unweighted case counts and weighted population estimates for the analytic dataset by key characteristics.

Table 3: Final Sample Sizes Used for Analysis by Key Characteristics

Key Characteristics	Unweighted Cases		Weighted Population Estimates	
	Count	% [a]	Count	% [a]
Overall	**8,458**	**100.0%**	**1,060,483**	**100.0%**
Institution Type				
2-year [b]	911	10.8%	194,999	18.4%
4-year public	4,327	51.2%	528,632	50.0%
4-year private	3,194	37.8%	333,431	31.5%
Academic Rank or Title				
Professor	3,260	38.5%	242,131	22.8%
Associate professor	1,984	23.5%	199,058	18.8%
Assistant professor	1,101	13.0%	203,561	19.2%
Instructor	778	9.2%	174,281	16.4%
Lecturer	585	6.9%	73,705	7.0%
Another rank/title	686	8.1%	153,452	14.5%
Tenure Status				
Tenured	4,590	54.3%	350,763	33.1%
On tenure track but not tenured	871	10.3%	143,368	13.5%
Not on tenure track, but institution has a tenure system	2,307	27.3%	417,170	39.3%
No tenure system at institution	626	7.4%	128,886	12.2%

Note: Excludes missing values, so percentages do not sum to 100%.
Note: For all 2-year institutions in the sample, the highest degree offered only includes associate degrees (i.e., there are no 2-year institutions in our data file that are classified by IPEDS as 2-year institution types that offer bachelor's degrees as the highest degree offered).

Approach to Data Analyses

The circumstances, and even consequences, pertaining to how faculty experience and engage with academic freedom and civil discourse are not uniform. As such, two specific considerations were taken into account in examining the findings: 1) legislative context and 2) the intersectionality of identities that influence a faculty member's positional security and influence at their institution.

Legislative Context Regarding the Passage of Divisive Concepts

The polarized political climate in the United States has led to significant variation in the number of types of legislative actions targeted at restricting the degree to which certain topics or issues can be raised or discussed within postsecondary institutions. Respondents were grouped into three categories based on whether such legislation—often broadly referred to as "divisive concepts" legislation—had been **passed**, **introduced but not passed**, or **not proposed**.

Table 4 summarizes the states (plus Washington, DC) falling into these three categories as of December 2023, when the survey for this study was first administered.

Table 4: Legislative Restrictions on Postsecondary Educational Activities by State

Legislative Restriction Status (as of December 2023)	States
Legislation not introduced (17 states + Washington, DC)	California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Washington, DC
Legislation introduced but not passed (24 states)	Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming
Legislation passed (9 states)	Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas

Note: The study team worked with PEN America to confirm lists of states by legislative restriction status in December 2023 and used the above categorization to ask respondents about their awareness of current state-level legislative restrictions as well as their perceptions related to any such restrictions. Between January 2024 and April 2024, legislation has since passed in three states: Alabama (March 2024), Indiana (March 2024), and Utah (January 2024).

Examination of Intersectional Power Differentials among Faculty

An underexamined element of discussion of academic freedom and civil discourse is the acknowledgment that social inequities are reproduced within faculty ranks and in academia more broadly. Specifically, a faculty member's ability to reject, ignore, condemn, or acquiesce to institutional or governmental forces related to academic freedom and/or civil discourse is likely to be influenced by a number of demographic and occupational characteristics associated with varying levels of advantage, privilege, and power, such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, and tenure status.[14] Thus, an analytical approach, referred to as latent class analysis (LCA), was used to identify groups of faculty based on intersecting characteristics that theoretically influence power inequities among faculty (i.e., academic and demographic characteristics). Both academic (i.e., tenure status, academic rank, institution type, academic discipline, and highest degree earned) and demographic characteristics (i.e., race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, and age) were used to identify distinct groups of faculty. Through this procedure, each faculty respondent was assigned to a distinct intersectional group allowing for the examination of associations between group membership and responses to other survey items (i.e., faculty attitudes and experiences).

The approach to examining intersectional power differences among faculty followed three steps:

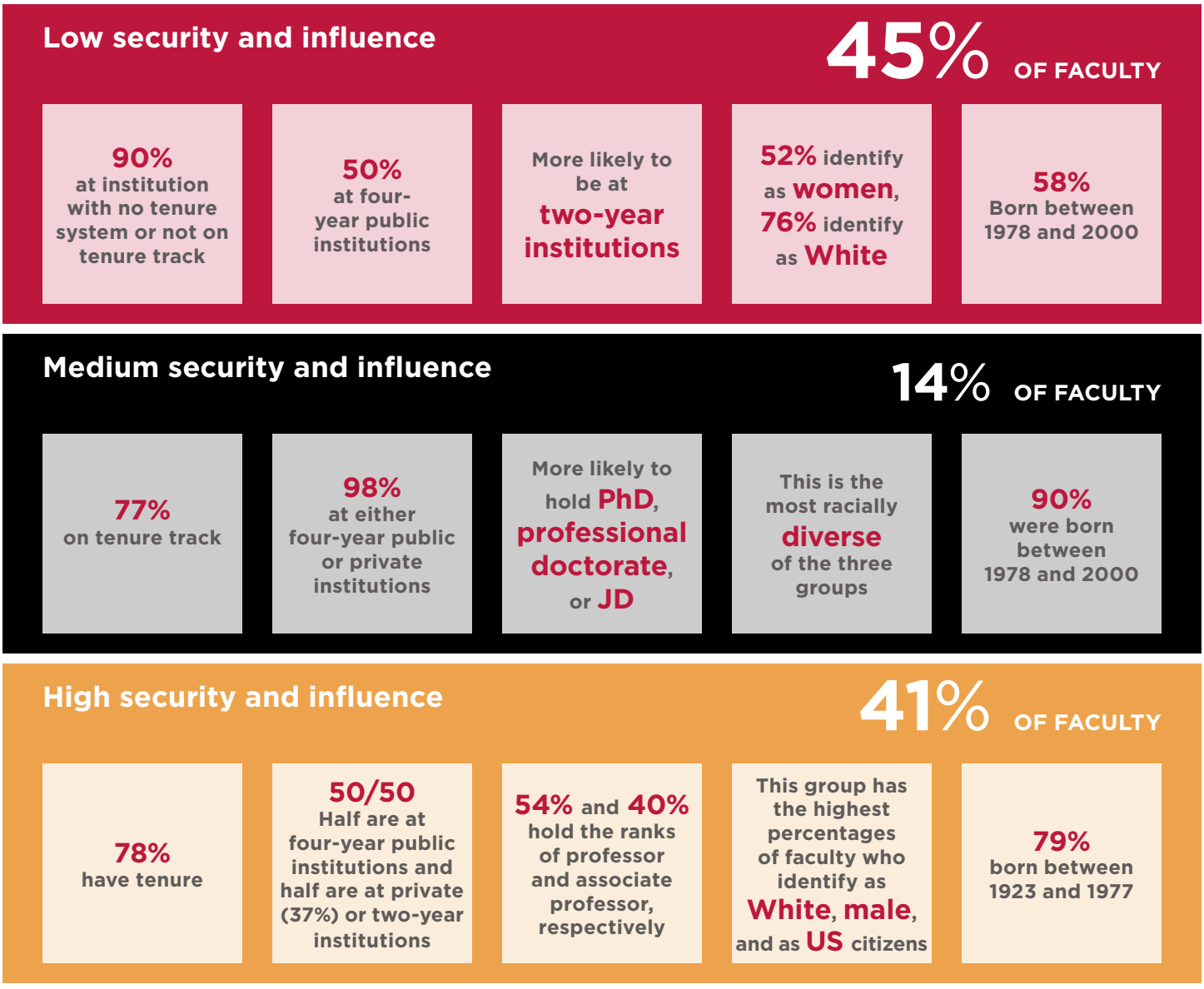
1. Identifying Groups of Faculty: Faculty respondents were sorted into distinct groups based solely on similar responses to ten of the survey's demographic items: academic characteristics (i.e., tenure status, academic rank, institution type, academic discipline, and highest degree earned) as well as demographic characteristics (i.e., race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, and age). In

other words, intersectional groups were formed independently from faculty responses to any of the other survey items.

2. Characterizing the Groups of Faculty: Once the groups were identified, weighted cross-tabulations were analyzed to characterize the groups of faculty in terms of differences in their academic and demographic characteristics. A post-hoc review of these groupings revealed that intersectional power differentials could be characterized as related to relative levels of positional security (e.g., possessing the social, political, or educational capital to believe one will persist in their position with little fear of impunity) and influence (e.g., the social, political, or educational capital to have a voice at the institution). As such, the three groups are broadly labeled as faculty possessing "low security/low influence," "medium security/medium influence," and "high security/high influence." See Figure 1 for intersection group characteristics associated with each label.

3. Cross-Group Statistical Comparisons: Using these intersectional groupings, a series of statistical analyses were performed to determine whether a faculty member's group membership was associated with differences in survey responses (see Appendix for detailed descriptions of the intersectional groups as well as these cross-group statistical comparisons).

Figure 1: Characteristics of Intersectional Groups Related to Positional Security and Influence Among Faculty



Note: The percentages reported within each group represent weighted percentages and therefore reflect population estimates of faculty within each group.

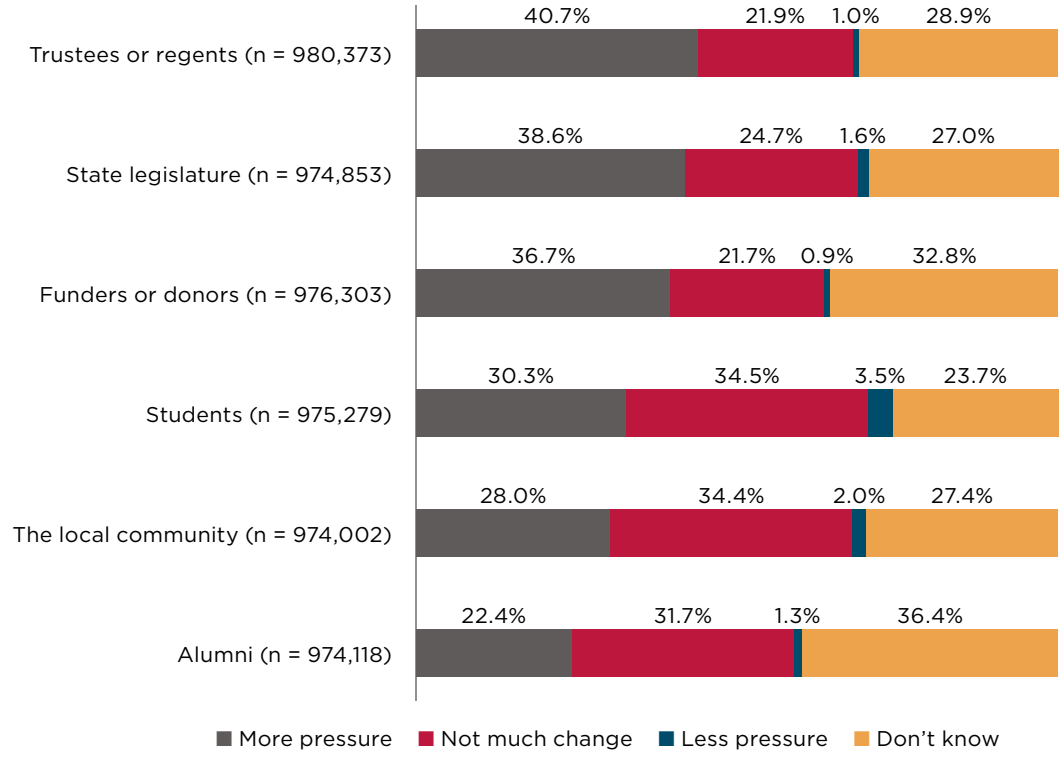
PART II:

Findings

Faculty Views on Institutional Pressure and Levels of Support Regarding Academic Freedom

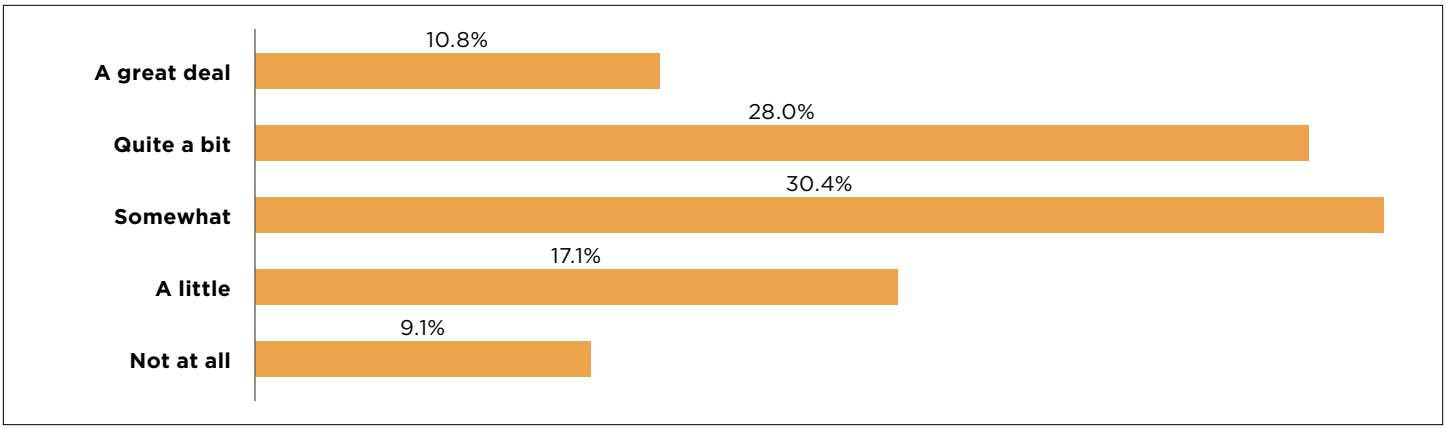
About a third of faculty, on average, believe that there is now more pressure from a range of stakeholders, such as trustees/regents, state legislators, and funders, to avoid negative publicity. More than half of faculty believe administrators are, at best, only "somewhat" publicly supportive of academic freedom at their institution. Chief academic officers are viewed by faculty as the stakeholder group with the most influence in protecting academic freedom at their institution.

Figure 2: Is it your impression that your institution's administration is under more or less pressure right now from each of the following groups to avoid negative publicity, or has there not been a noticeable change?



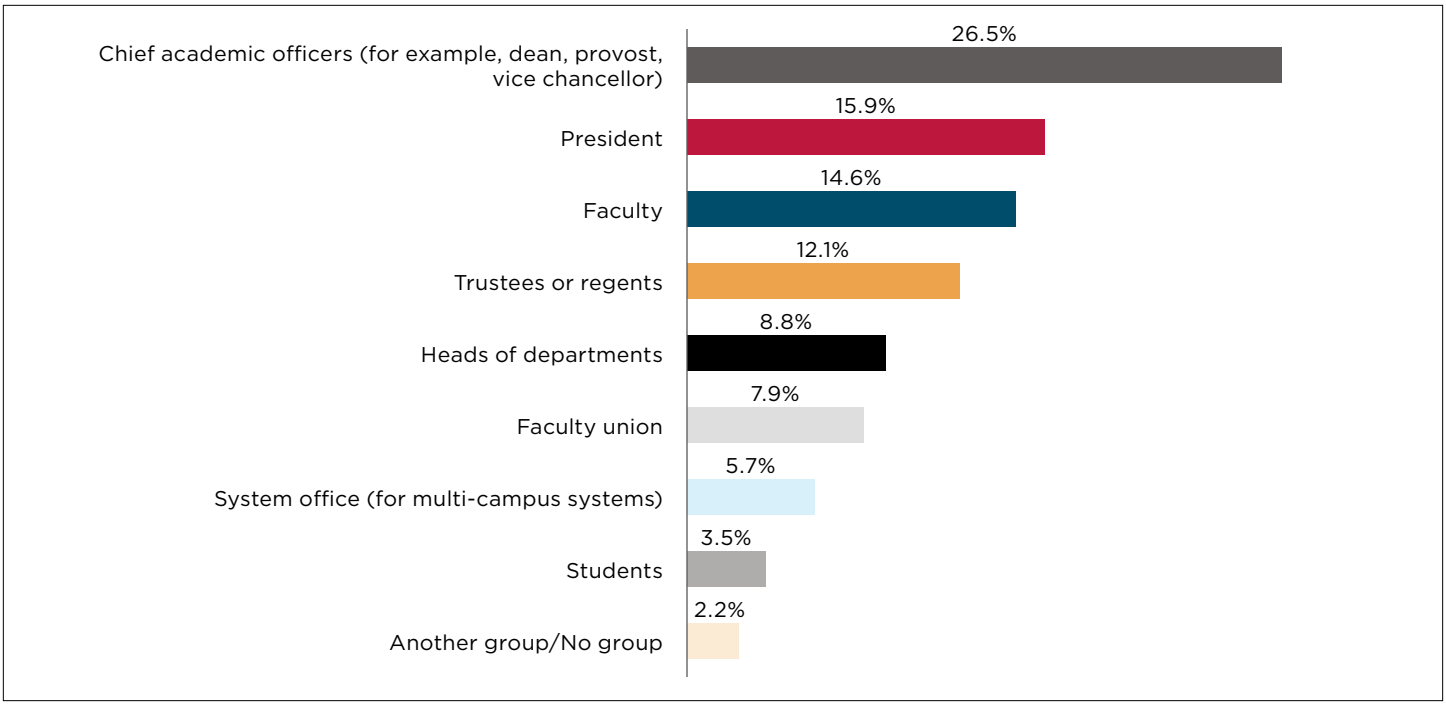
More than one out of three faculty believe their institution's administration is under *more pressure* from trustees or regents, the state legislature, and funders and donors to avoid negative publicity. Additionally, nearly a third (30 percent) of faculty think their institution's administration is under more pressure to avoid negative publicity from students. A significantly larger proportion (36 percent) of high security/high influence faculty report this increased pressure to avoid negative publicity from students, compared with medium security/medium influence faculty (28 percent). Overall, about a quarter of faculty, on average, think their administration is under more pressure to avoid negative publicity from the local community (28 percent) and alumni (22.4 percent; see Figure 3).

Figure 3: To what extent is your administration publicly supportive of academic freedom at your institution?



More than a quarter (27 percent) of faculty believe that chief academic officers (e.g., provosts, vice chancellors, deans) are the institutional stakeholders with the most influence in determining protections for academic freedom at their institution, followed by presidents (16 percent), faculty (15 percent), and trustees or regents (12 percent; see Figure 4).

Figure 4: If you had to choose, which single group has the most influence in determining the extent to which academic freedom is protected at your institution?



Nearly a quarter of faculty feel at least some pressure to conform their political views to align with those of the administration and other faculty members at their institution. Fewer than two out of five faculty believe that "most" administrators would support their right to academic freedom should they say or write something that causes controversy.

Faculty with high levels of positional security and influence (19 percent) were significantly more likely to believe that faculty had the most influence in protecting academic freedom, compared with faculty with lower levels of positional power (12 percent, on average, across medium and low levels). Additionally, a significantly larger proportion of faculty with medium levels of security and influence (19 percent) reported that trustees or regents have the most influence on academic freedom, compared with faculty with high levels of security and influence (13 percent) or those with low security and influence (10 percent).

Figure 5: Do you feel any type of pressure to conform your political views to align with the following groups?[16]

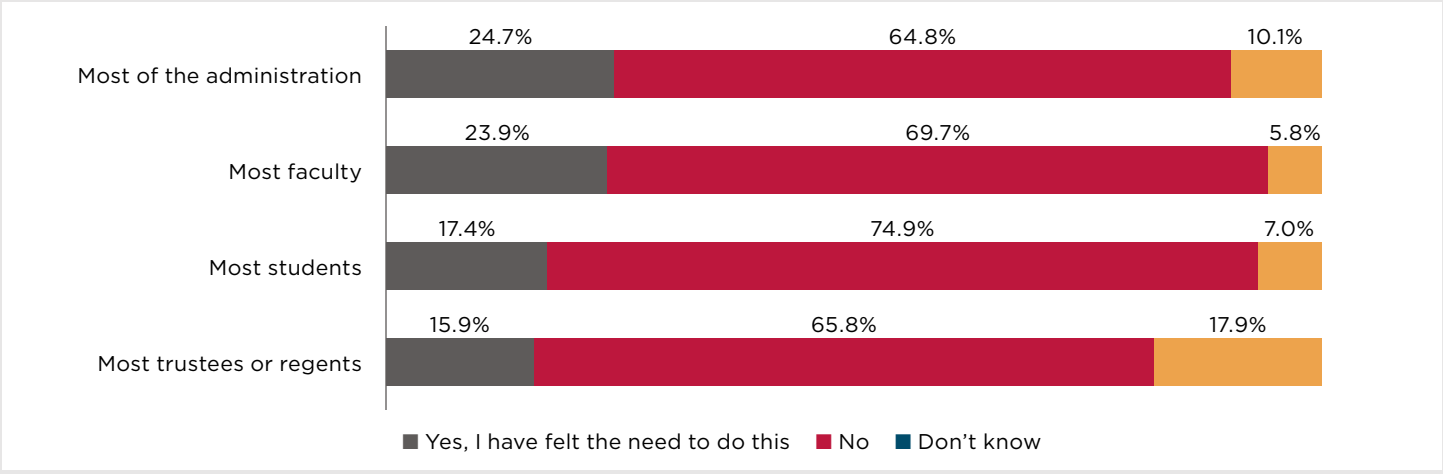
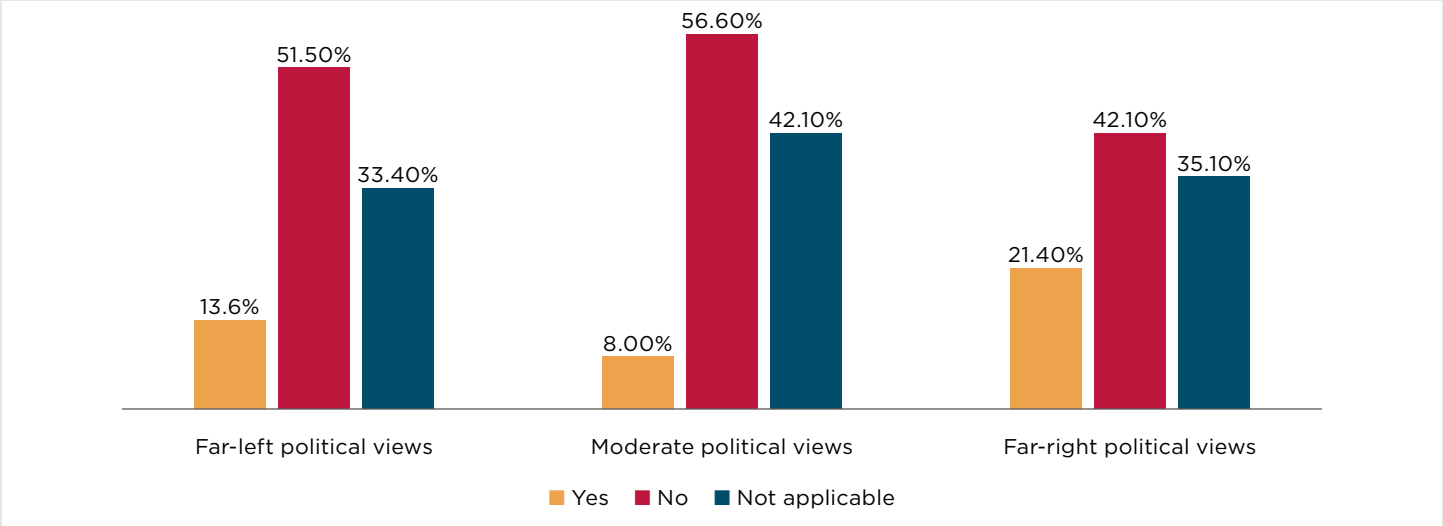


Figure 6: When teaching, do you feel the need to explain that you do not hold the following political views?



Additionally, faculty with low and medium levels of positional security and influence (36.5 percent, respectively) are significantly more likely to report feeling that they need to explain that they do not hold far-right political views, compared with faculty with high positional security and influence (30 percent; see Table 5).

Table 5: Perceived Self-Censorship Across Different Political Views

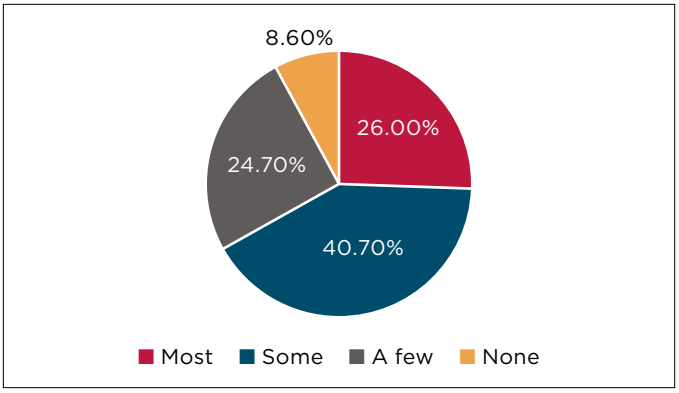
When teaching, do you feel the need to explain that you do not hold the following political views?

Response option	Far-left political views			Moderate political views			Far-right political views		
	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Yes	20.3% a	21.5% a	21.2% a	12.3% a	11.4% a	12.8% a	36.5% a	36.5% a	30.0% b
No	79.7% a	78.5% a	78.8% a	87.7% a	88.6% a	87.2% a	63.5% a	63.5% a	70.0% b

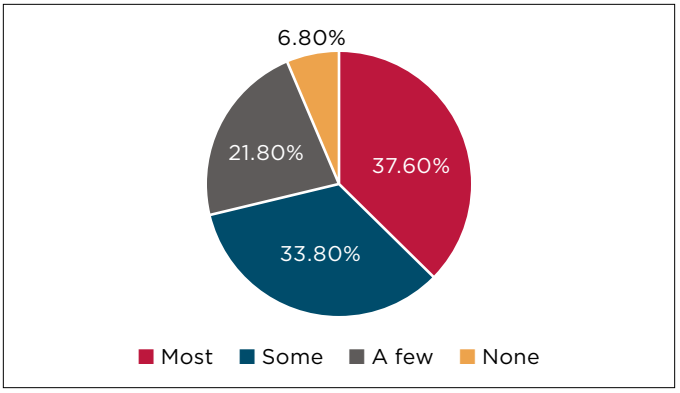
Note: Excludes any "not applicable" responses. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Figure 7: If something you said or wrote were to attract controversy outside of your institution, to what degree do you think the following groups would support your right to academic freedom?

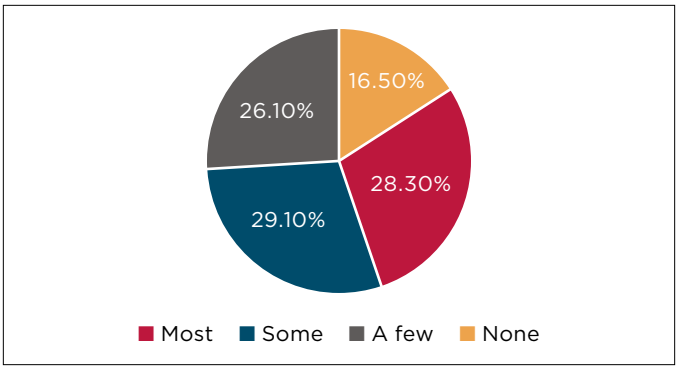
Students:



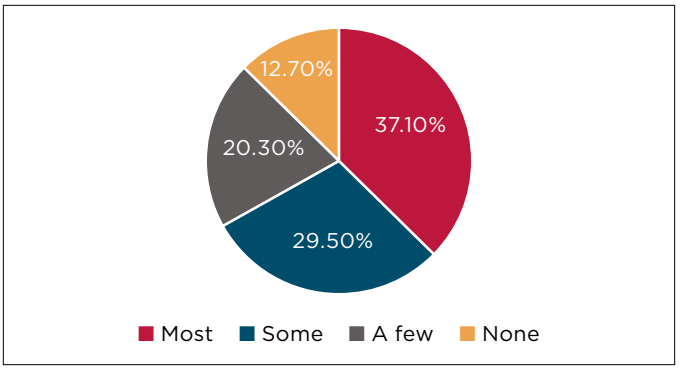
Faculty at institution:



The administration:



Members of your disciplinary society or association:



More than one out of three faculty report that they feel more constrained, compared with six or seven years ago, in their ability to speak freely, whether that is in the context of teaching course content, participating in institutional governance, or as a citizen. Faculty who have been in their positions since or before 2017, and those with higher levels of positional security and influence, are more likely to report feeling that faculty now have less academic freedom, compared with six or seven years ago.

Faculty were asked about the degree of academic freedom at their institutions compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at their institution). Participants were asked to respond to four elements of academic freedom: 1) teaching content without any interference, 2) investigating and publishing research findings without interference, 3) speaking freely when participating in institutional governance, and 4) speaking freely as a citizen (see Figure 8).[17]

Compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at their institution), nearly two out of five faculty (37 percent) of faculty report that they perceive *less* academic freedom for faculty at their institution with regard to the ability to speak freely on campus, either in the classroom or when participating in institutional governance. More than a third of faculty also report that there is greater constraint on the ability of faculty to express their point of view as free citizens. Though only about one out of five faculty report that faculty at their institution have less academic freedom with regard to publishing and conducting scholarship without interference, a far higher percentage of faculty also indicate they "do not know" about constraints on academic freedom in this area (22 percent).

Figure 8: Compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at your institution), is there less, more, or about the same degree of academic freedom for faculty at your institution with respect to the following?

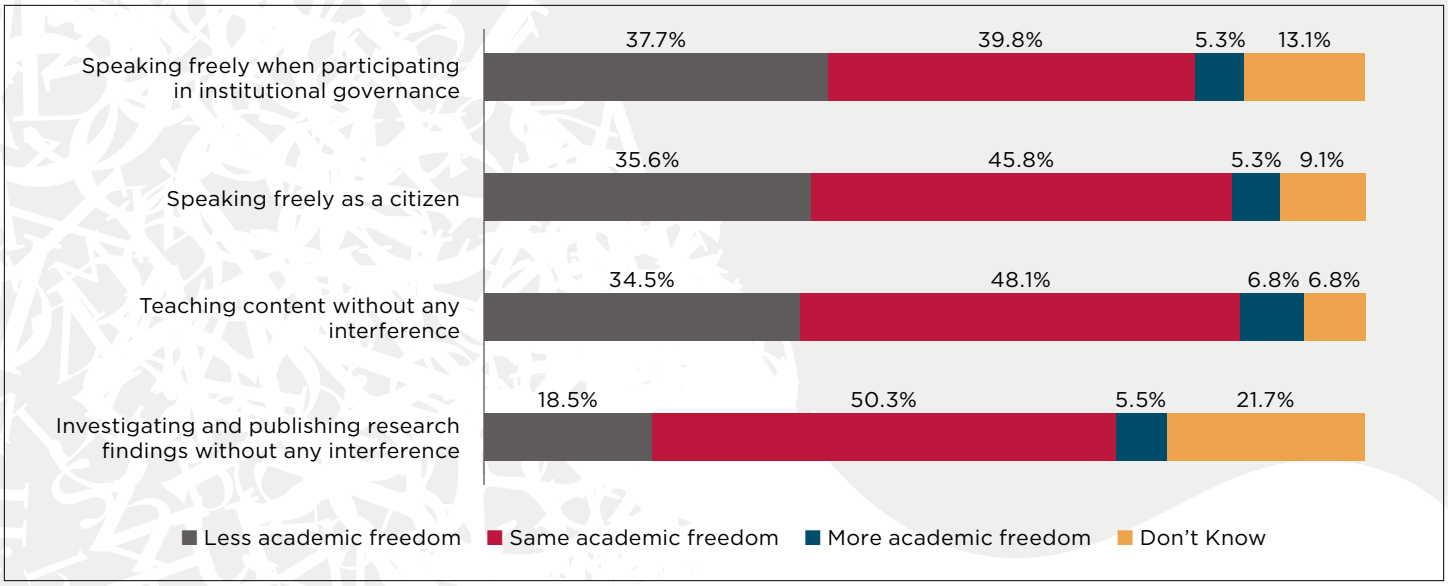


Figure 9: Comparison of Faculty, by Length of Time at Their Institution, Who Perceive Less Academic Freedom in the Following Areas:[18]

Table 6: Perceptions of How Restrictions Regarding Types of Academic Freedom Have Changed over Time

Compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at your institution), is it your impression that there is less, more, or about the same degree of academic freedom for faculty at your institution with respect to the following:

Speaking freely when participating in institutional governance

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less academic freedom	39.3%	34.7% a	32.0% a	46.8% b
About the same academic freedom	41.5%	36.5% a	51.7% b	43.3% c
More academic freedom	5.6%	6.9% a	5.5% a	4.2% a
Don't know	13.6%	22.0% a	10.9% b	5.7% c

Speaking freely as a citizen

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less academic freedom	37.2%	33.9% a	29.1% a	43.3% b
About the same academic freedom	47.8%	45.4% a	54.8% b	48.0% a, b
More academic freedom	5.5%	8.0% a	4.5% b	3.2% b
Don't know	9.5%	12.7% a	11.6% a	5.5% b

Teaching content without any interference

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less academic freedom	35.8%	31.6% a	28.6% a	42.9% b
About the same academic freedom	50.2%	48.6% a	57.6% b	49.1% a
More academic freedom	7.0%	9.0% a	9.0% a	4.3% b
Don't know	7.0%	10.8% a	4.8% b	3.8% b

Investigating and publishing research findings without any interference

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less academic freedom	19.3%	16.8% a	12.8% a	24.1% b
About the same academic freedom	52.4%	39.2% a	67.6% b	61.3% b
More academic freedom	5.7%	7.8% a	7.5% a	2.9% b
Don't know	22.6%	36.1% a	12.1% b	11.7% b

Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Compared with six or seven years ago, two-thirds of faculty believe students express their political views "about the same" or "more" in class discussions and with faculty outside of class. By comparison, a third to one half of faculty believe their faculty colleagues are more careful when revising curricula, more worried about being the target of online harassment, and less willing to express views in class, on social media, or at professional conferences. Faculty with high levels of positional security and influence are especially likely to perceive such restrictions, relative to faculty with lower levels of positional power and influence.

Nearly half of faculty thought that students' expression of political beliefs in conversations with faculty outside of class (48 percent) and in class discussions (45 percent) has stayed about the same over the past six or seven years (or since starting at their institution more recently). Nearly a quarter (23 percent) of faculty think that students express their political beliefs less often in course discussions, and 15 percent believe that students express their political belief less often in conversations with faculty outside of class (see Table 7).[19]

Table 7: Perceptions of How Students' Ability to Express Their Political Beliefs Have Changed over Time

Is it your impression that over the past six or seven years (or since starting at your institution), students express their political beliefs less, more, or about the same in:

Class discussions

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less	22.7%	22.0% a	22.2% a	23.6% a
About the same	45.0%	45.0% a	48.9% a	43.6% a
More	20.8%	22.3% a	15.5% a	21.1% a
Don't know	11.5%	10.7% a	13.4% a	11.7% a

Conversations with faculty outside of class

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less	15.4%	14.5% a	13.8% a	16.9% a
About the same	47.7%	47.7% a	48.3% a	47.5% a
More	19.8%	18.2% a	21.7% a	20.9% a
Don't know	17.1%	19.6% a	16.3% a	14.6% a

Informal conversations with other students outside of class

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less	12.5%	11.1% a	12.5% a	11.5% a
About the same	33.1%	33.9% a	33.1% a	30.1% a
More	20.7%	25.2% a	20.7% a	20.5% a
Don't know	33.7%	29.8% a	33.7% a, b	38.0% b

Table 8: Perceptions of How the Carefulness of Colleagues to Avoid Controversial Topics Have Changed over Time

Compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at your institution), is it your impression that colleagues at your institution are less careful or more careful to avoid controversial topics when revising curricula (e.g., academic programs including majors, minors, and general education), or has there been no change?

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less careful	2.4%	2.7% a	1.6% a	2.5% a
No change	26.4%	24.4% a	34.2% b	25.9% a
More careful	50.5%	48.8% a	42.4% a	55.1% b
Don't know	20.7%	24.2% a	21.9% a, b	16.6% b

Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

A significantly larger proportion (55 percent) of faculty with high positional security and influence reported that colleagues at their institution are more careful to avoid controversial topics when revising curricula compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at their institution more recently), relative to faculty with lower levels of positional security and influence.

Similarly, a significantly larger proportion (61 percent) of faculty with high positional security and influence than faculty with lower levels of positional security and influence reported that their faculty colleagues are more worried about experiencing online targeted harassment due to their beliefs or activities as faculty members, compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at their institution more recently; see Table 9).

Table 9: Perceptions of How Worry among Colleagues of Being the Target of Online Harassment Have Changed over Time

Compared with six or seven years ago, is it your impression that faculty colleagues at your institution are less worried, more worried, or feel about the same level of worry about online targeted harassment toward them based on their beliefs or activities as a faculty member?

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less worried	2.2%	3.4% a	1.9% a, b	1.0% b
Not much change	22.1%	21.4% a, b	27.9% a	20.8% b
More worried	52.7%	48.1% a	43.4% a	60.5% b
Don't know	23.0%	27.0% a	26.8% a	17.6% b

Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Faculty with high positional security and influence are also more likely to report that colleagues in their own academic department or program are less willing, compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at their institution more recently), to express controversial views in their courses (45 percent), online through social media (43 percent), or at professional conferences (34 percent), or to serve as faculty advisors for student groups that might advocate controversial causes (32 percent) than faculty with lower positional security and influence (see Table 10).

Table 10: Perceptions of How Views among Faculty in One's Own Academic Program or Department Have Changed over Time

Compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at your institution), is it your impression that faculty colleagues in your own academic program or department have become less willing, more willing, or are about as willing to:

Express controversial views in their courses

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less willing	38.9%	35.1% $_{a}$	32.0% $_{a}$	45.2% $_{b}$
Not much change	39.5%	38.8% $_{a}$	48.9% $_{b}$	37.0% $_{a}$
More willing	6.6%	6.8% $_{a}$	4.2% $_{a}$	7.2% $_{a}$
Don't know	15.0%	19.2% $_{a}$	15.0% $_{a, b}$	10.6% $_{b}$

Express controversial views online through social media

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less willing	38.1%	35.1% $_{a}$	34.5% $_{a}$	42.5% $_{b}$
Not much change	28.4%	28.8% $_{a}$	32.4% $_{a}$	26.7% $_{a}$
More willing	4.9%	5.1% $_{a}$	1.5% $_{b}$	5.8% $_{a}$
Don't know	28.6%	31.0% $_{a}$	31.6% $_{a, b}$	25.0% $_{b}$

Express controversial views at professional conferences

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less willing	29.8%	28.0% $_{a}$	22.5% $_{a}$	34.2% $_{b}$
Not much change	34.5%	28.7% $_{a}$	43.3% $_{b}$	37.5% $_{b}$
More willing	4.3%	5.0% $_{a}$	1.7% $_{b}$	4.5% $_{a}$
Don't know	31.4%	38.3% $_{a}$	32.5% $_{a}$	23.8% $_{b}$

Serve as faculty advisors to student groups that might advocate controversial causes

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less willing	27.6%	25.2% $_{a}$	21.8% $_{a}$	32.0% $_{b}$
Not much change	36.7%	32.3% $_{a}$	43.6% $_{b}$	38.8% $_{b}$
More willing	4.9%	5.6% $_{a}$	2.8% $_{a}$	4.9% $_{a}$
Don't know	30.9%	36.8% $_{a}$	31.9% $_{a}$	24.3% $_{b}$

Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

In summary, compared with faculty with relatively less positional power, faculty with high positional security and influence tend to believe that faculty colleagues have *less academic freedom*, are *less willing* to express controversial views, are *more worried* about avoiding controversial topics when revising curricula, and are *more worried* about being the target of online harassment due to their political beliefs or activities.

Nearly half of faculty believe there is now more concern within the local community surrounding their college or university about the teaching of divisive topics by college faculty, compared with six or seven years ago. Moreover, more than three out of five faculty believe these increased concerns have caused harmful effects on the climate for academic freedom at their institution.

Nearly half (46 percent) of faculty perceive that the local communities surrounding their institution have become *more concerned* about faculty teaching divisive topics teaching (e.g., systemic racism, gender identity, sexual orientation), compared with six or seven years ago (or since starting at their institution; see Table 11).

Table 11: Perceptions of How Local Community Concerns Regarding Divisive Topics Have Changed over Time

Is it your impression that over the past six or seven years (or since starting at your institution), the local community surrounding your current institution has become more or less concerned about faculty teaching divisive topics (e.g., race, American history, gender identity, and sexual orientation), or has there been no change?

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Less concerned	3.1%	3.9% $_{a}$	4.0% $_{a}$	1.9% $_{a}$
No change	51.3%	49.2% $_{a}$	59.6% $_{b}$	50.5% $_{a}$
More concerned	45.7%	46.9% $_{a}$	36.3% $_{b}$	47.6% $_{a}$

For respondents who indicated "more concerned," which of the following comes closest to your view?

Response option	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
This greater concern on the part of the institution's local community *has caused* harmful effects on the climate of academic freedom at the institution.	62.1%	60.9% $_{a}$	63.3% $_{a}$	63.1% $_{a}$
This greater concern on the part of the institution's local community *has not caused* harmful effects on the climate of academic freedom at the institution.	37.9%	39.1% $_{a}$	36.7% $_{a}$	36.9% $_{a}$

Note: Table excludes any missing values. The last item only includes "more concerned" responses (n = 3,501) for the item above, so overall n and class-specific n values for this last item reflect this. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Significantly larger proportions of faculty with low positional security and influence (47 percent) and high positional security and influence (48 percent) reported that their local communities are *more concerned*, compared with faculty with medium positional security and influence (36 percent).

Of the faculty who feel that the local community surrounding their institution is now *more concerned* about college faculty teaching divisive topics, more than three out of five (62 percent) also feel that those increased concerns have caused harmful effects on the climate for academic freedom at their institution.[20]

How Perceptions of Academic Freedom Are Shaped by Legislative Context

Compared with faculty in states where divisive concepts legislation has been introduced (but not passed) or has not been introduced, faculty who work in states where divisive concepts legislation has been passed tend to have more accurate knowledge of legislative action; they are more likely to discuss this legislation "often," and are more likely to be considering seeking employment at an institution in another state. However, variation in legislative action has neither large nor consistent effects on faculty perceptions of constraint. A quarter to one-third of faculty, regardless of the state they work in, report feeling at *least occasionally* restricted in what they can say on social media, in faculty or committee meetings, or in the content they can choose for courses.

To understand the degree to which different legislative contexts affect how faculty teach, conduct scholarship, and navigate campus life, we wanted to assess various aspects of faculty awareness of legislative actions. We did this by first asking faculty whether action regarding divisive concepts legislation (defined as bills either passed or under consideration by state legislatures to restrict teaching about topics such as race, American history, gender, and LGBTQ+ identities in higher education) had been passed, introduced, or not introduced in their state. Responses were assessed for accuracy against whether such laws (at the time of the survey) had *actually* been passed, introduced, or not introduced. Second, faculty were asked about the degree to which they follow media regarding academic freedom and legislative actions.

Nearly *all* faculty in states *with* legislative restrictions accurately identified that legislation had either been passed (95 percent) or introduced (96.8 percent) in their state, compared with an accuracy rate of 62.9 percent among faculty in states where no legislative restrictions existed at the time of the survey (see Table 12). On average, about a quarter (26.6 percent) of faculty indicated they did not know whether state-level legislative restrictions had been introduced or passed in their state.

Table 12: Accuracy of Respondents' Knowledge of Whether Legislative Restrictions Exist in Their State[21]

Has divisive concepts legislation been introduced (but not necessarily passed) in your state?		
Response Accuracy	**Faculty in States with Legislative Restrictions[b]**	**Faculty in States with No State Legislative Restrictions[b]**
Accurate Response	**96.8%**	**60.2%**
Inaccurate Response	**3.2%**	**39.8%**
Has divisive concepts legislation been passed in your state?		
Response Accuracy	**Faculty in States with Legislative Restrictions[b]**	**Faculty in States with No State Legislative Restrictions[b]**
Accurate Response	**95.0%**	**65.6%**
Inaccurate Response	**5.0%**	**34.4%**

Although a majority of faculty (54.1 percent), on average, report that they follow media about divisive concepts legislation "as much as other media topics," nearly three out of five faculty report that they find themselves discussing divisive concepts legislation either "occasionally" or "often."

Table 13: Faculty Engagement with Media Regarding State-Level Legislative Restrictions

How closely do you follow media about divisive concepts legislation?

Response Option	Faculty in States with Legislative Restrictions Not Introduced in State	Faculty in States with Legislative Restrictions Introduced, Not Passed in State	Faculty in States with Legislative Restrictions Passed in State
Not as much as other media topics	18.0% a	23.1% b	20.4% c
As much as other media topics	55.9% a	52.8% b	53.7% c
More than most other media topics	26.1% a	24.2% b	25.9% a

Note The survey included the phrase "divisive concepts" legislation in introductory definitions and item phrasing.
Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Faculty in states where divisive concepts legislation has passed are significantly more likely to report discussing such legislation "often" (19.8 percent), compared with colleagues in states where legislation has only been introduced or not introduced (see Table 14).

Table 14: How Often Faculty Discuss State-Level Legislative Restrictions

How often do you find yourself discussing divisive concepts legislation?

Response Option	Faculty in States with Legislative Restrictions Not Introduced in State	Faculty in States with Legislative Restrictions Introduced, Not Passed in State	Faculty in States with Legislative Restrictions Passed in State
Never	10.9% a	12.8% b	9.7% c
Rarely	30.9% a	29.5% b	30.7% a
Occasionally	42.5% a	43.5% b	39.9% c
Often	15.7% a	14.1% b	19.8% c

Note The survey included the phrase "divisive concepts" legislation in introductory definitions and item phrasing.
Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

A third of faculty, on average, feel that they are *at least occasionally* restricted in terms of what they can say on social media or in faculty and department meetings. About a quarter of faculty (24.1 percent) feel *at least occasionally* limited in the content they can choose for courses. And nearly one in five faculty (18.8 percent) reported feeling *at least occasionally* restricted with regard to the content they can include in public or professional presentations. In contrast, only about 8 percent of faculty report feeling restricted in terms of the states they can travel to using professional development funds or which academic or higher education conferences they can attend (see Figure 10).[22]

Figure 10: In the past few years (or since starting at your institution), how often have you felt restricted or unable to do what you want related to the following:

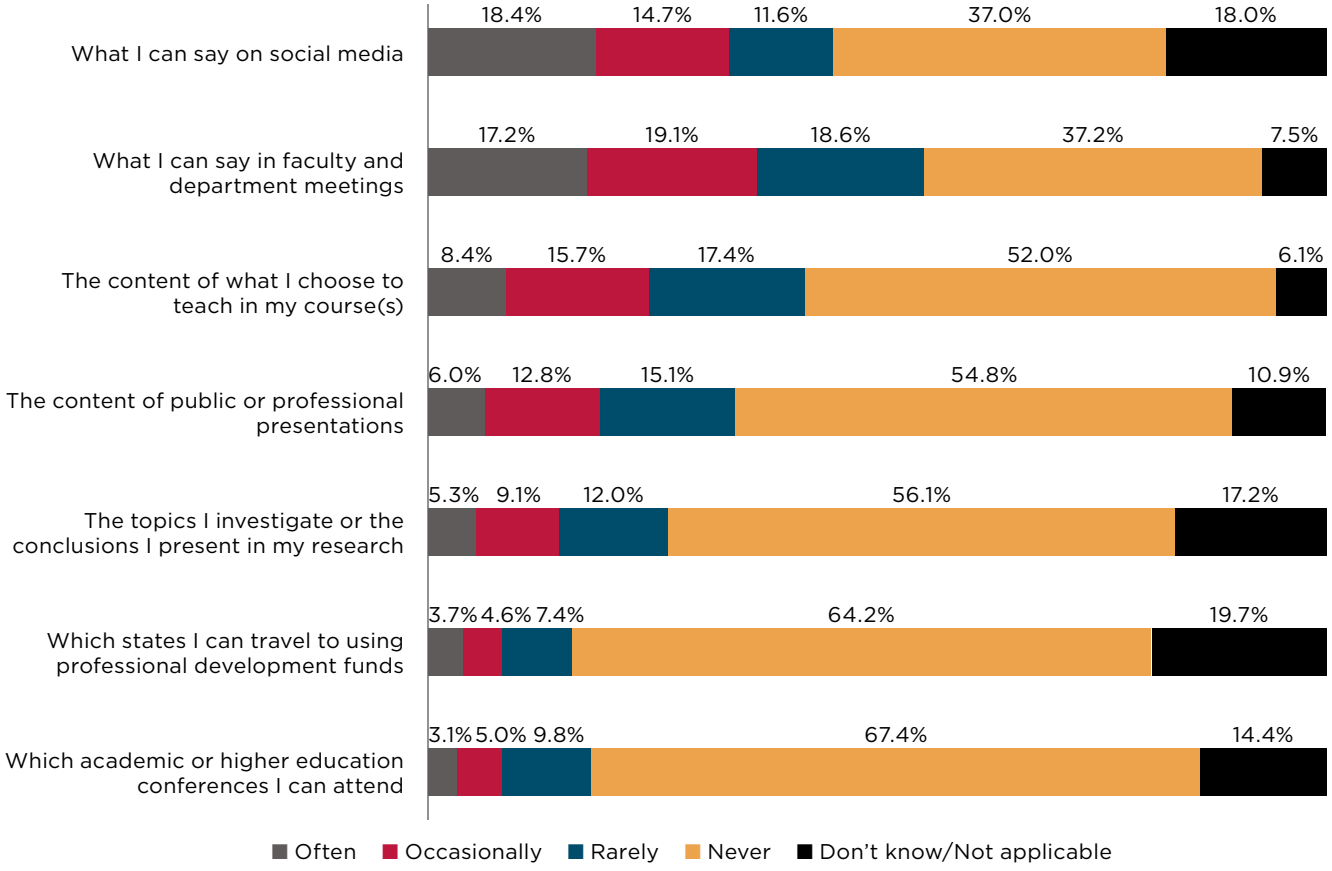
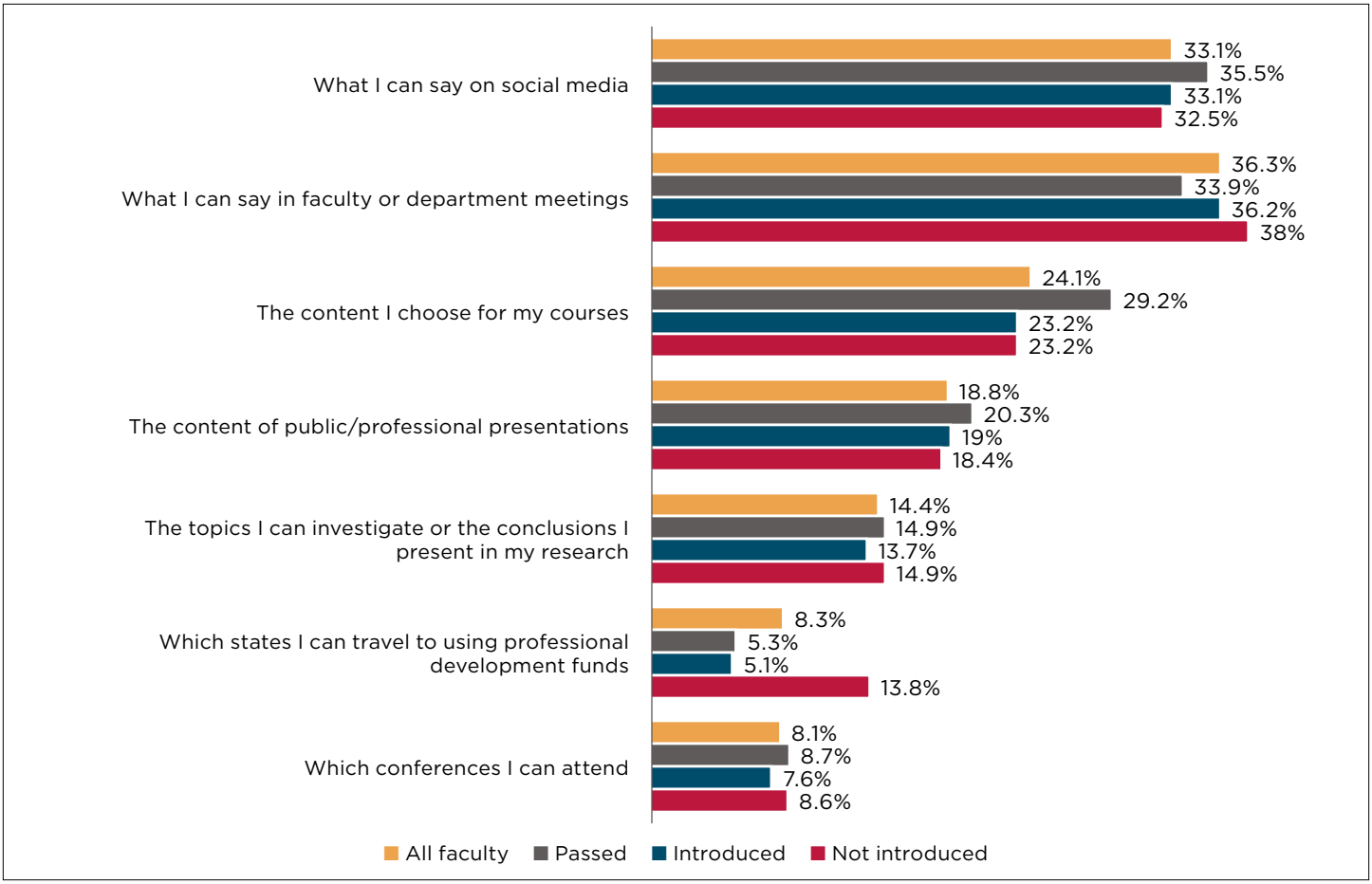


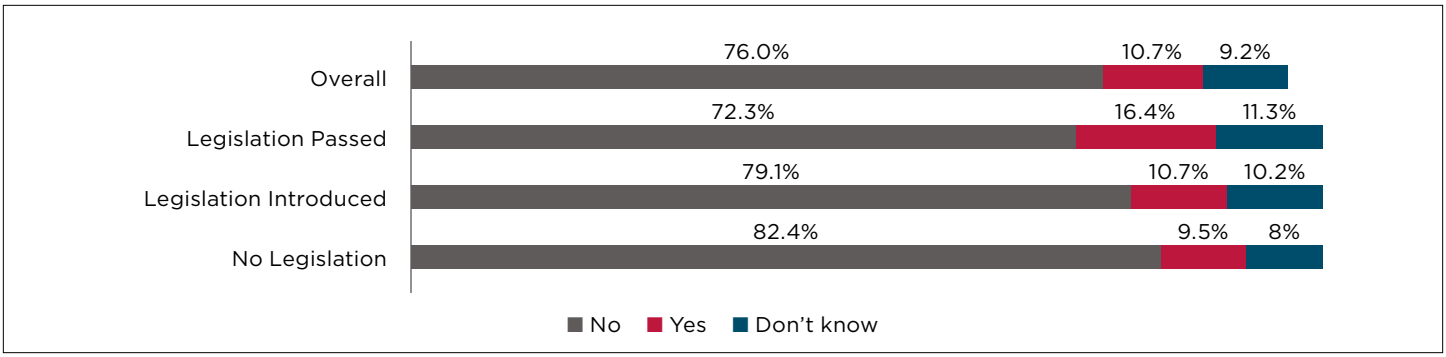
Figure 11: Percent of Faculty Who Feel "Occasionally" or "Often" Restricted or Unable to Do What They Want by Legislative Restrictions*



*Percents show reflect aggregate percentages for "occasionally" and "often."

Most faculty, overall (76 percent), indicate that they are *not* considering seeking employment elsewhere, regardless of the climate for academic freedom in their state. However, compared with faculty in states without legislative restrictions, a significantly larger proportion (16 percent) of faculty in states where legislative restrictions have passed *are* considering seeking employment at a different college or university, compared with faculty in states where such legislation has been introduced, but not passed (11 percent) and in states where such legislation has not been introduced (10 percent; see Figure 12).[23]

Figure 12: Percent of Faculty Considering Seeking Employment at Another College or University Given the Climate for Academic Freedom in Their State



Faculty Apprehension and Self-Censorship

In this section, we examine the extent to which faculty have found themselves refraining from, avoiding, or modifying behaviors or speech with colleagues, students, and other stakeholders due to the climate of academic freedom at their institution over the past few years (or since starting their position).[24]

On average, about 50 percent of faculty report feeling concerned about being able to express statements they, as scholars, believe to be true and that they have refrained from expressing opinions or engaging in activities for fear of drawing negative attention. More than one out of two faculty say they have intentionally altered language to avoid controversy. More than half of faculty report that they *at least occasionally* modify or refrain from using particular terms or words because they fear offending campus colleagues or students.

A majority of faculty (52 percent, on average) report *at least occasionally* being concerned about the ability to express what they believe, as scholars, to be correct statements about the world and that they have altered language in something they have written because they were worried it might cause controversy. Just under half (45.3 percent) of faculty say they have *at least occasionally* refrained from expressing an opinion or engaging in an activity that would draw negative attention from external stakeholders. Nearly three out of ten faculty (29 percent) feel *at least occasionally* concerned about being the target of online harassment because of views they have expressed either online or in public. About one out of five faculty (20.8 percent) report they have avoided using an institutionally issued computer to visit particular sources or websites because of the political content on those sites (see Figure 13).[25]

Figure 13: How frequently, if at all, have the following happened to you in the past few years or since starting your position?

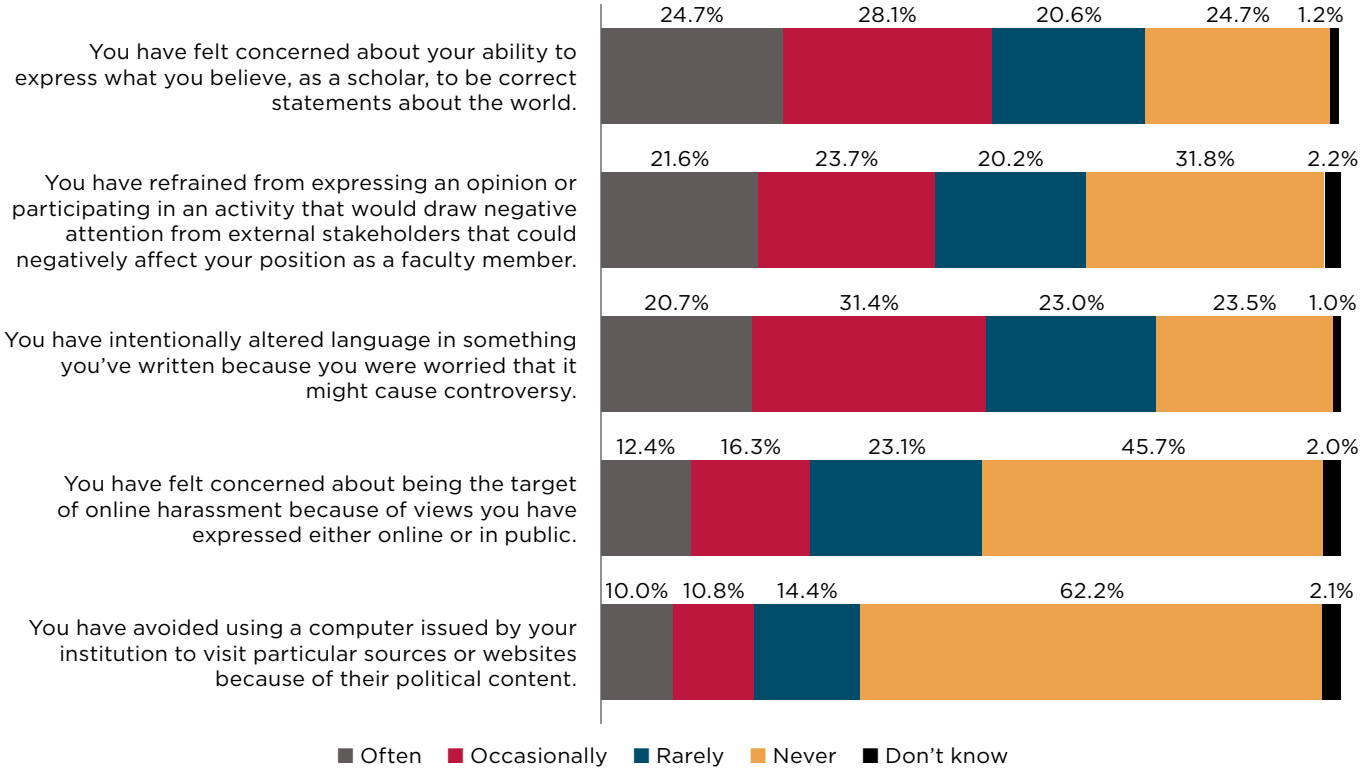
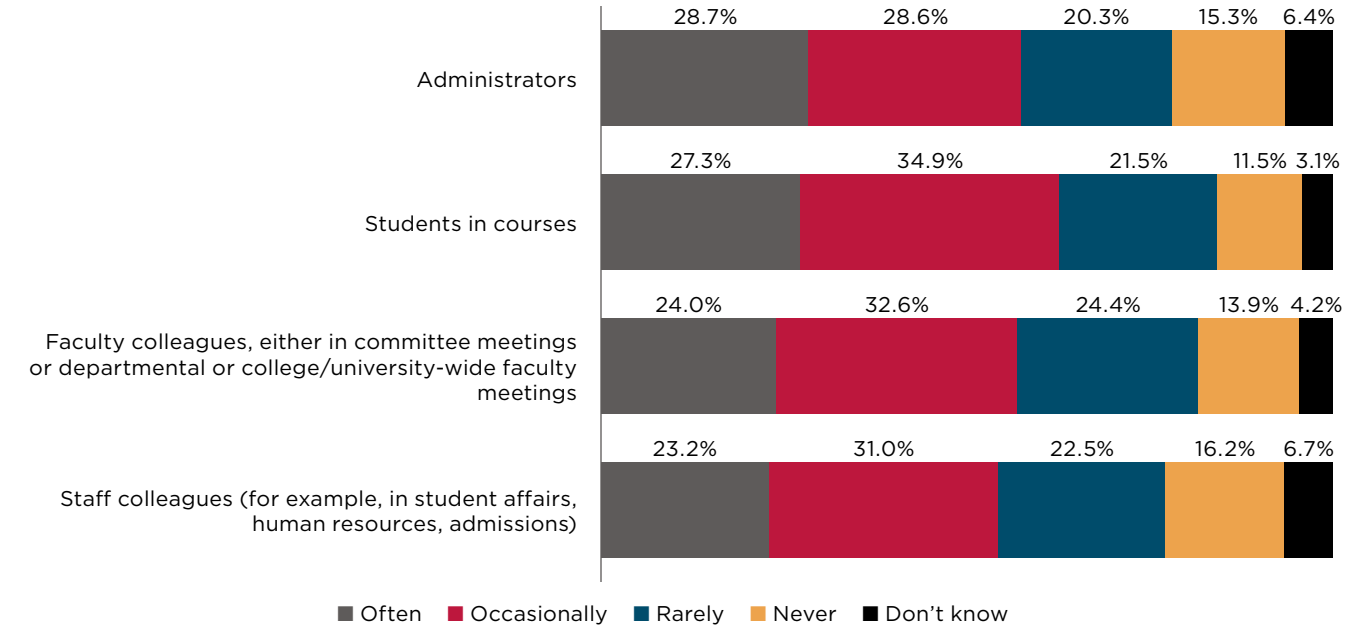


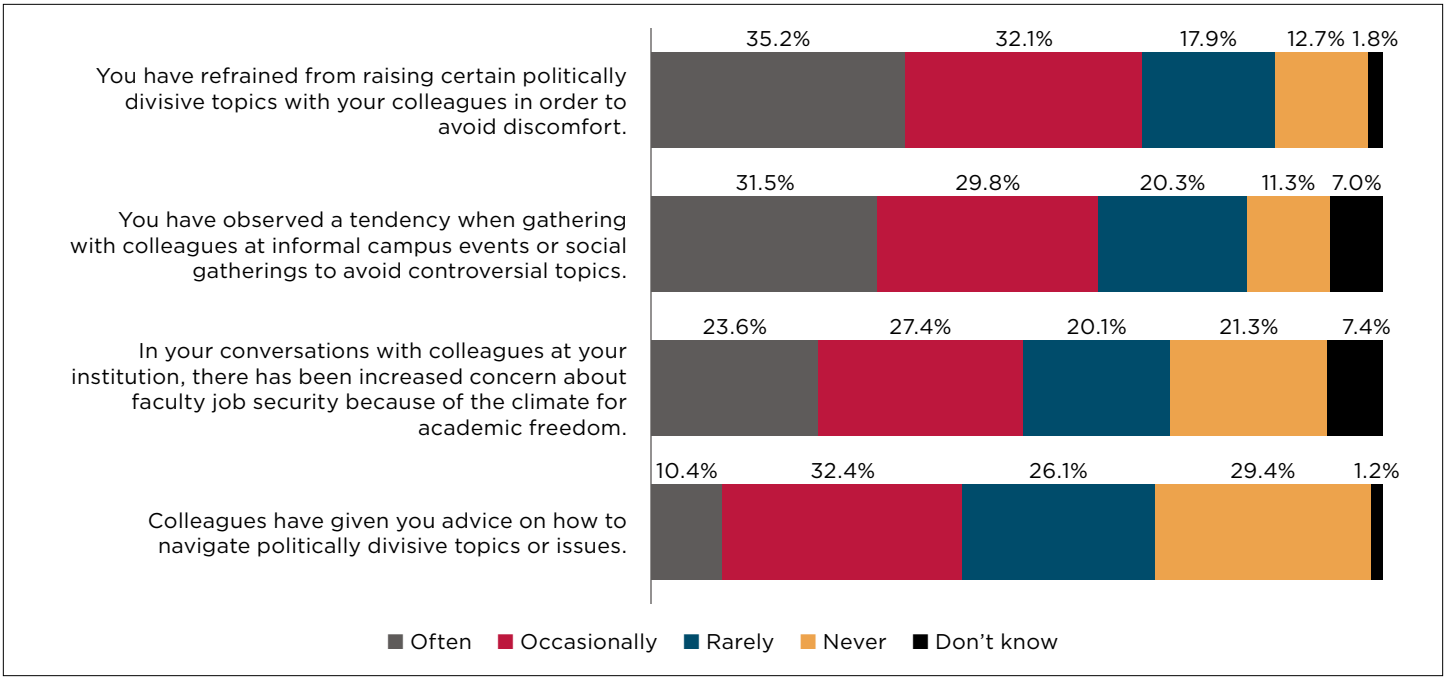
Figure 14: How frequently do you modify or refrain from using particular terms or words because you think that others will perceive these as offensive when you are interacting with:



More than three out of five faculty express that they have *at least occasionally* refrained from raising politically divisive topics with colleagues and that they have observed a tendency among colleagues to avoid controversial topics at informal campus events or social gatherings.

On average, about two out of three faculty report either "often" or "occasionally" refraining from raising certain politically divisive topics with colleagues to avoid discomfort (67.3 percent) or say they "often" or "occasionally" (61.3 percent) observe a tendency among their faculty colleagues to avoid controversial topics when at informal campus or social events (see Figure 15). Half of faculty (51 percent) report they either "often" or "occasionally" feel increased concern around job security because of the climate for academic freedom at their institution. Finally, 43 percent of faculty report that colleagues have given them advice *at least occasionally* on how to navigate politically divisive topics or issues (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: How frequently, if at all, have the following happened to you in the past few years or since starting your position?



Although two-thirds of faculty believe they should be able to express their views when teaching, nearly half of faculty are worried students will share ideas or statements from their courses out of context. A third of faculty are concerned that students will record lectures without their consent, or that ideas they express while teaching will negatively impact their standing as faculty members.

Overall, two-thirds (66.7 percent) of faculty believe that when teaching, faculty should be able to express their personal views on issues. A significantly larger percent (36.3 percent) of faculty with low positional security and influence reported that faculty should *not* express their own personal views when teaching, compared with faculty with medium (27.6 percent) and high positional security and influence (31.9 percent; see Table 15).

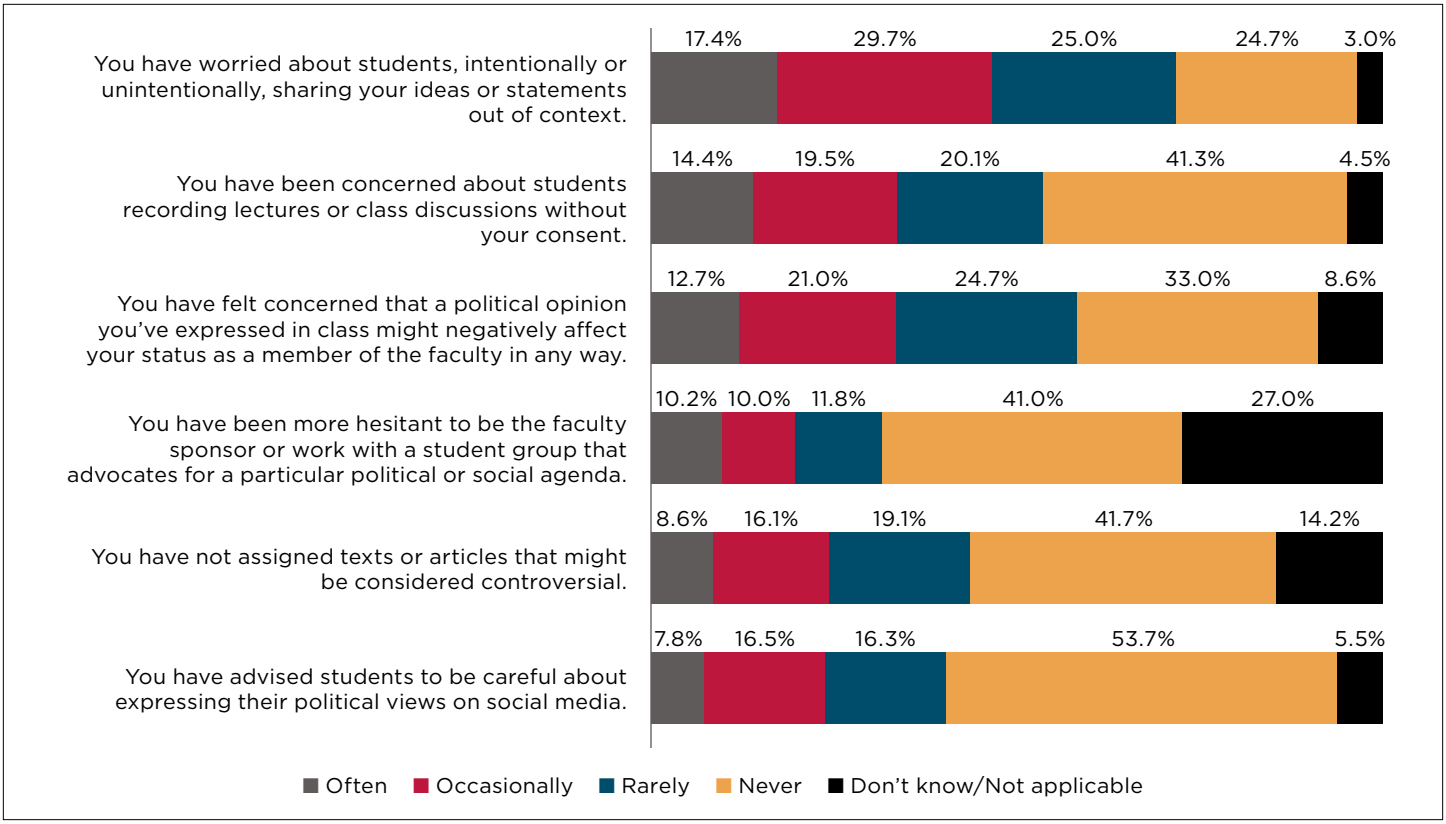
Table 15: Which of the following statements most closely represents your thinking?

	Overall	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Faculty *should* be able to express their own personal views on issues when teaching.	**66.7%**	63.7% a	72.4% b	68.1% a, b
Faculty *should not* express their own personal views on issues when teaching.	**33.3%**	36.3% a	27.6% b	31.9% a, b

Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Nearly half of faculty (47.1 percent) report being "often" or "occasionally" worried that students, intentionally or unintentionally, will share their ideas or statements as an instructor out of context. About a third (34 percent) of faculty have *at least occasionally* felt concerned that a political opinion they have expressed in class might negatively affect their status as a faculty member or that students will record lectures or class discussions without their consent. Approximately a quarter of faculty report that they have *at least occasionally* been hesitant to work with a student group that advocates for a particular political or social agenda. A similar percent (24.3 percent) report that they have advised students to be careful about expressing their political views on social media (see Figure 16).[26]

Figure 16: Levels of Apprehension or Self-Censorship around Students over the Past Few Years or Since Starting Position



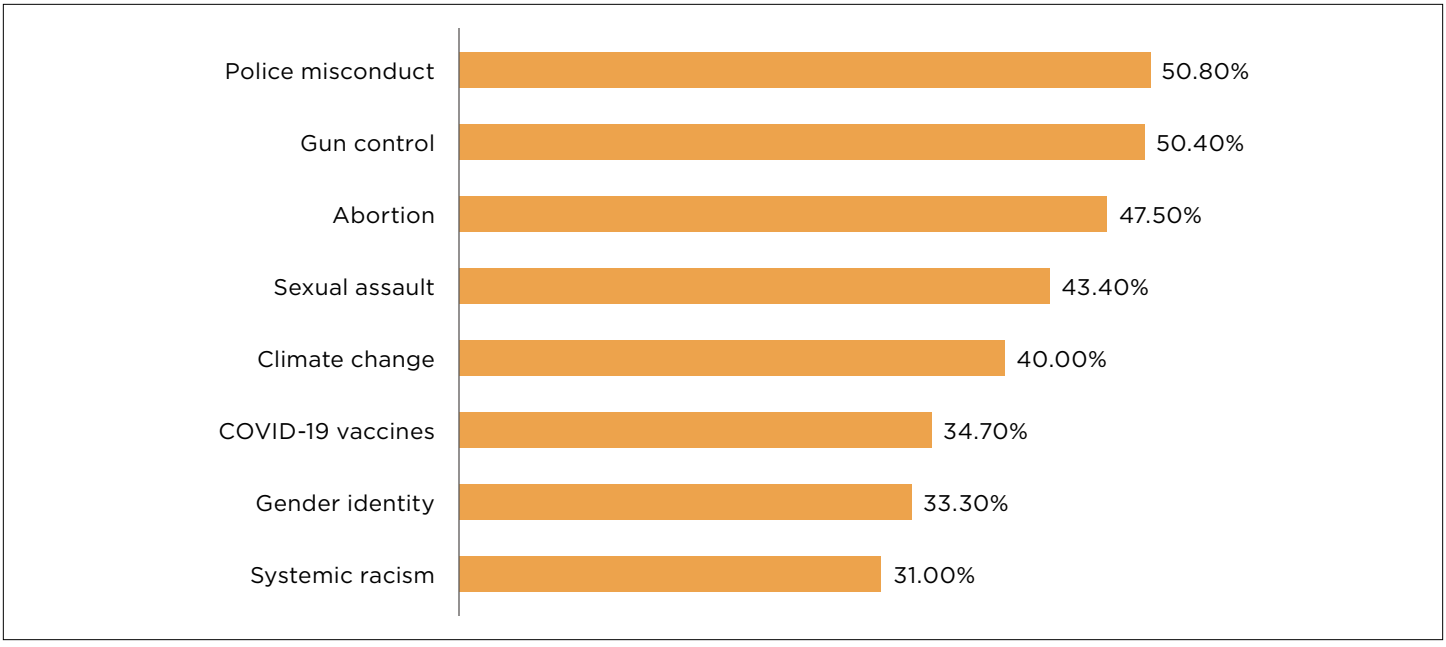
On average, 57.8 percent of faculty report that they have *at least occasionally* modified or refrained from using particular terms or words with administrators, students, faculty colleagues, and staff colleagues. Across a range of stakeholder groups, faculty reported the greatest inclination to censor their use of language with students. More than three out of five faculty (62.2 percent) say they "often" or "occasionally" modify or refrain from using particular terms or words with students in courses (see Figure 16).[27]

Faculty Openness to Diverse Viewpoints and Promotion of Civil Discourse, In and Beyond the Classroom

More than half of faculty believe that the discussion of controversial topics should be encouraged in courses. However, two out of five faculty, on average, report that many controversial topics are *not applicable* to the courses they teach at all, particularly police misconduct and gun control. When certain controversial topics are viewed as applicable, faculty are not likely to require the discussion of these issues.

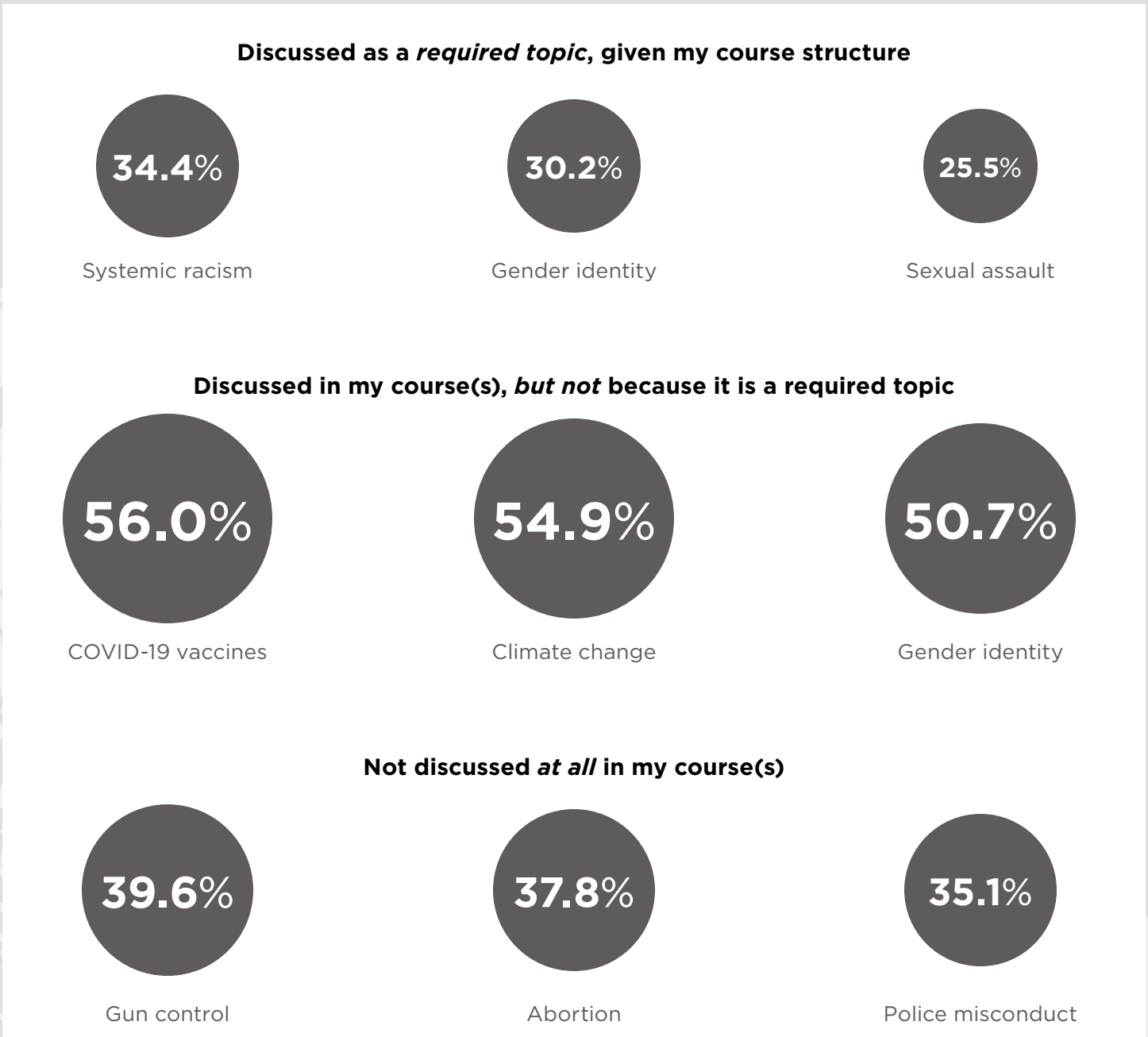
This section examines the degree to which faculty promote and support the expression of diverse viewpoints within the classroom and at their institutions. Because civil discourse depends upon the expression of controversial topics, we wanted to first understand if and how faculty view controversial topics as applicable to their courses, and when applicable, if they are required topics of conversation (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Percent of Faculty Who Report Controversial Topics or Issues Are Not Applicable to Their Courses



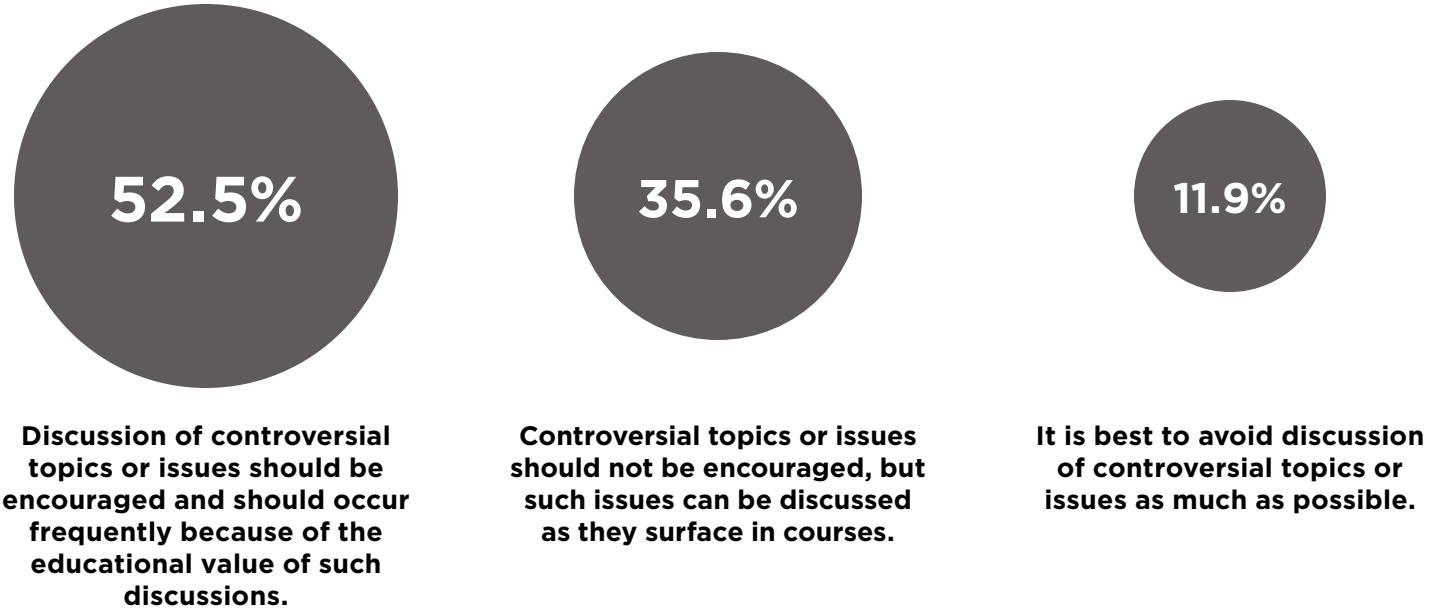
Of the faculty who reported that various controversial topics are applicable to their courses, an average of 49.8 percent say these topics are discussed, but not because they are required. Additionally, despite indicating certain controversial topics or issues are applicable within courses, more than a quarter of faculty (27.8 percent), on average, report that these topics are not addressed at all in their courses (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: Top Three Topics That Faculty Report Discussing as Either *Required Content*, *Not as Required Content*, or *Not at All* (even though they are applicable to the course)



A majority of faculty (52.5 percent) report that the discussion of controversial topics or issues *should be encouraged* and should occur frequently because of the educational value of such discussions (Figure 19). More than a third of faculty (35 percent), however, said they believe controversial topics or issues *should not be encouraged*, but such issues can be discussed as they surface in courses.[28]

Figure 19: Top Three Topics That Faculty Report Discussing as Either *Required Content*, *Not as Required Content*, or *Not at All* (even though they are applicable to the course)



Two-thirds of faculty report that they have "always held this point of view" about how to address controversial topics.[29]

Faculty Views on the Expression of Diverse Perspectives in Courses and Curricula

More than nine out of ten faculty agree that faculty should be intentional about inviting student perspectives from all sides of an issue while teaching. Fifty-six percent of faculty report that they invite mutually respectful disagreement either *a great deal* or *quite a bit*. Nearly three out of ten faculty, however, report that the level of respectful disagreement in their courses is *not enough*.

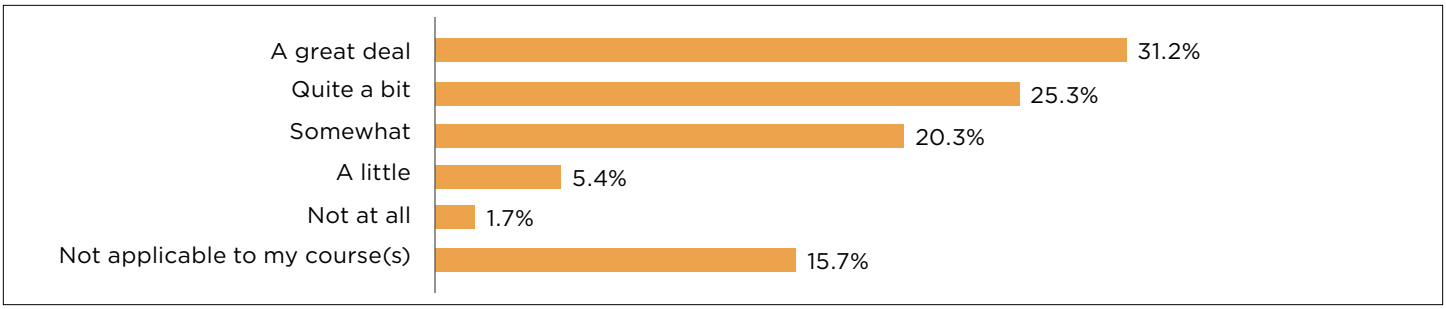
When it comes to the inclusion of diverse viewpoints in courses, nearly all faculty (93.1 percent), regardless of their relative levels of positional security and influence, agree that faculty *should* be intentional about inviting student perspectives from all sides of an issue while teaching (see Table 16).

Table 16: Which of the following statements most closely represents your thinking?

	Overall	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Faculty *should be* intentional about inviting student perspectives from all sides of an issue when teaching.	**93.1%**	93.5% $_a$	94.6% $_a$	93.1% $_a$
Faculty *should not* invite student perspectives from all sides of an issue when teaching.	**6.9%**	6.5% $_a$	5.4% $_a$	7.9% $_a$

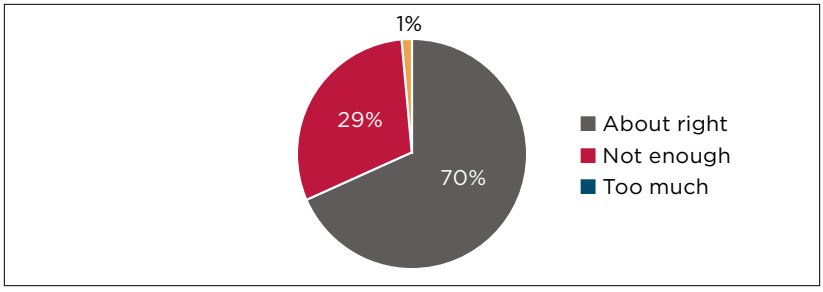
Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Figure 20: To what extent do you encourage mutually respectful disagreement among students in your course(s)?[30]



More than two-thirds of faculty (70 percent) believe that the level at which students engage in mutually respectful disagreement in their courses *feels about right*. Just under a third (29 percent) of faculty reported the level of mutually respectful disagreement was *not enough*, and only 1 percent of faculty felt it was *too much* (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: Faculty Views on Whether the Level of Mutually Respectful Disagreement in Their Courses Is Just Right, Not Enough, or Too Much



Faculty Openness to the Expression of Diverse Political Perspectives by Other Faculty and Public Speakers

Faculty openness to diverse political perspectives is similar whether those views are expressed by a fellow faculty member or an invited campus speaker. Faculty report the least amount of permissiveness of views that challenge the integrity of elections.

To examine the degree to which faculty are accepting or permissive of the expression of diverse viewpoints, we asked faculty to respond to several political statements that are commonly viewed as polarizing.[31] Although levels of permissiveness varied between statements, faculty were similarly permissive regardless of whether the statement was being made by a fellow faculty member teaching undergraduate students or by someone who was giving a public talk on campus. Faculty reported the highest level of permissiveness (80.5 percent) of the viewpoint that "abortion is an inherent right for all people who give birth, with no exceptions or limits," either by a professor teaching undergraduate students or by an individual who is giving a public talk on campus. By contrast, faculty are least permissive of a professor (47.6 percent) or someone giving a public talk (53.9 percent) who expresses the viewpoint that "due to widespread voter fraud, election results generally cannot be trusted." For each viewpoint surveyed, faculty with low positional security and influence were significantly less permissive of such views than faculty with medium or high positional security and influence.

Table 17: Percent of Faculty Who Are Permissive of Diverse Political Perspectives Being Held by Fellow Faculty or Campus Speakers

	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
For each of the following views, should a professor who holds such a view be allowed to teach undergraduate students?				
	% Who Believe Should Be Allowed	% Who Believe Should Be Allowed	% Who Believe Should Be Allowed	% Who Believe Should Be Allowed
Belief that abortion is an inherent right for all people who give birth, with no exceptions or limits	**80.5%**	75.9% a	84.1% b	84.1% b
Support for Palestinian liberation	**75.2%**	70.2% a	79.7% b	78.8% b
Belief that efforts to redress racial inequalities represent anti-White racism or disadvantage White individuals	**58.9%**	54.1% a	57.7% a, b	64.2% b
Belief that due to widespread voter fraud, election results generally cannot be trusted	**47.6%**	44.7% a	49.0% a	50.1% a

Table 17 (continued): Percent of Faculty Who Are Permissive of Diverse Political Perspectives Being Held by Fellow Faculty or Campus Speakers

	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
For each of the following views, should an individual who holds such a view be allowed to give a public talk at your institution?				
	% Who Believe Should Be Allowed	% Who Believe Should Be Allowed	% Who Believe Should Be Allowed	% Who Believe Should Be Allowed
Belief that abortion is an inherent right for all people who give birth, with no exceptions or limits	**80.5%**	76.3% a	83.3% b	83.8% b
Support for Palestinian liberation	**76.1%**	71.7% a	79.6% b	79.5% b
Belief that efforts to redress racial inequalities represent anti-White racism or disadvantage White individuals	**63.3%**	57.7% a	60.9% a	69.9% b
Belief that due to widespread voter fraud, election results generally cannot be trusted	**53.9%**	50.4% a	53.6% a, b	57.7% b

Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

The clearest effect with regard to positional security and influence is that faculty with low positional security and influence were significantly less permissive of allowing either a professor or public speaker to express such viewpoints within classrooms or on campus than faculty with higher levels of positional security and influence. This differential was most pronounced, however, regarding the openness to allowing professors to teach undergraduate students. On average—across all four viewpoints—69.3 percent and 67.6 percent of faculty with high and medium positional security and influence, respectively, would allow a professor who holds such perspectives to teach undergraduates, compared with only 43.5 percent of faculty with low positional security and influence, an average difference of 25 percentage points. By contrast, although the same difference by positional power was observed with regard to allowing a speaker to give a public talk, the disparity between levels of positional security was significantly less pronounced. On average, 64 percent of faculty with low positional security and influence would allow a public talk by a speaker with such perspectives, compared with 72.7 percent and 69.3 percent of faculty with high and medium positional security and influence, respectively, an average difference of 7 percentage points (see Table 17).

Additionally, we found that a faculty member's own political ideology influences their willingness to support diverse political perspectives. As part of the survey's demographic questions, respondents were asked to place themselves on a seven-point political ideology scale, from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative," by responding to a series of items regarding their views about various social policies. Significantly larger percentages of faculty who identify as "conservative" or "extremely conservative" (61 percent and 78 percent, respectively) are more likely than faculty who identify as "liberal" or "extremely liberal" (37 percent and 65 percent, respectively) to report that professors who believe that "efforts to redress racial inequalities represent anti-White racism or disadvantage White individuals" and "due to widespread voter fraud, election results generally cannot be trusted" should be allowed to teach undergraduates. Similarly, significantly larger percentages of faculty who identify as "liberal" or "extremely liberal" (77 percent and 95 percent, respectively) were more likely than faculty who identify as "conservative" or "extremely conservative" (51 percent and 68 percent, respectively) to report that professors who believe in "support for Palestinian liberation" and that "abortion is an inherent right for all people who give birth, with no exceptions or limits" should be allowed to teach undergraduates. The same pattern was observed with regard to the influence of political ideology on a faculty member's openness to allowing individuals to give public talks at their institution.

Faculty Views on Mitigating Feelings of Harm Caused by Material, Topics, or Comments in Courses

When posed with the possibility of students' perceived harm due to views raised through course material, by peers or by instructors, faculty generally lean toward allowing students to consider challenging material or comments rather than withdrawing a reading or assignment, or limiting speech. If a statement, either by an instructor or a fellow student, is perceived to cause harm to certain groups of people, about half of faculty, on average, believe students should *not* report the instructor or student to the administration.

Table 18: Faculty Views on Mitigating Harm for Students in Certain Scenarios

	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Scenario 1: If a required class reading or assignment includes views that some students feel causes harm to certain groups of people, do you think that the instructor should drop or retain the required reading or assignment, or provide an alternative?				
Retain the original reading or assignment	**43.2%**	38.7% $_{a}$	41.3% $_{a, b}$	48.5% $_{b}$
Provide an alternative reading or assignment	**36.5%**	39.5% $_{a}$	32.1% $_{a}$	34.9% $_{a}$
Drop the original reading or assignment	**5.1%**	5.6% $_{a}$	7.4% $_{a}$	3.8% $_{a}$
Don't know	**15.3%**	16.2% $_{a, b}$	19.3% $_{a}$	12.9% $_{b}$
Scenario 2: If a student says something in class that some students feel causes harm to certain groups of people, do you think that the instructor should stop that student from talking?				
No	**52.9%**	50.0% $_{a}$	49.6% $_{a, b}$	57.0% $_{b}$
Yes	**22.9%**	27.4% $_{a}$	19.1% $_{b}$	19.7% $_{b}$
Don't know	**24.2%**	22.6% $_{a}$	31.3% $_{b}$	23.3% $_{a, b}$
Scenario 3: If a topic being discussed in a class includes views that some students feel causes harm to certain groups of people, do you think that the class should stop discussing the topic?				
No	**68.2%**	65.8% $_{a}$	65.6% $_{a, b}$	71.5% $_{b}$
Yes	**12.4%**	13.7% $_{a}$	10.0% $_{a}$	11.9% $_{a}$
Don't know	**19.4%**	20.5% $_{a, b}$	24.5% $_{a}$	16.5% $_{b}$

Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Table 18 (continued): Faculty Views on Mitigating Harm for Students in Certain Scenarios

	All Faculty	Low Security/ Low Influence Faculty	Medium Security/ Medium Influence Faculty	High Security/ High Influence Faculty
Scenario 4: If an instructor says something in class that some students feel causes harm to certain groups of people, do you think that the students should report the instructor to university administrators?				
No	**43.8%**	38.6% a	40.0% a	50.5% b
Yes	**28.1%**	33.4% a	24.3% b	23.8% b
Don't know	**28.2%**	28.0% a	35.7% a	25.6% b
Scenario 5: If a student says something in class that some students feel causes harm to certain groups of people, do you think that the students should report that student to university administrators?				
No	**54.2%**	48.7% a	49.9% a	61.5% b
Yes	**20.3%**	25.8% a	17.9% b	15.4% b
Don't know	**25.5%**	25.5% a, b	32.2% a	23.1% b

Note: Table excludes any missing values. For statistical comparisons, within each row, values that don't share a subscript are significantly different (or values that do share a subscript are not significantly different).

Across all scenarios offered, faculty with high levels of positional security and influence are more likely than faculty with lower levels of positional power to say the original reading or assignment should be retained and that views should be allowed to be expressed (see Table 18). Although one out of five faculty (20 percent) report that students *should* report a fellow student to university administrators for saying something in class that causes harm to certain groups of people, more than a quarter of faculty (28 percent) think that students should report an *instructor* for doing the same. In both instances, significantly larger proportions of faculty with low positional security and influence than faculty with higher levels of positional security and influence think reporting should occur, whether for an instructor (33.4 percent) or a student (25.8 percent) who says something harmful (see Table 18).

PART III:

Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

"Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition."[32]

The promise of academic freedom in higher education is more than whether faculty can articulate their viewpoints as scholars or explore the questions they wish to investigate. At its core, academic freedom is about the ability of colleges and universities to serve their public purpose and to advance the common good. We have taken care in this study to not conflate principles of academic freedom—intended to ensure the unfettered pursuit of knowledge within educational spheres—with the right of freedom of expression or speech that protects the ability to put forth ideas within the public sphere. Yet, while the concepts of academic freedom and freedom of expression or speech should be understood as distinct, there is also reason to see them as related. The pursuit of knowledge does not happen apart from communities; it happens within them, alongside public spheres and the private lives of community members. How then should higher education consider the distance between knowledge creation and the ability to express ideas? How far is the commitment to expanding our academic minds from our freedoms as civic participants?

The conclusions and recommendations put forth from this study have been developed in the spirit of inviting reflections on those questions. They are offered in recognition that colleges and universities, and the faculty—of all ranks, labels, and statuses—who serve within them, contribute to the common good by virtue of fostering more, not less, information. This contribution, now more than ever, extends well beyond the communities in which institutions are situated to an expansive network of locally, nationally, and globally interconnected locales. Through this lens, it would be a mistake to compartmentalize academic freedom within the legislative action of a single state. Academic freedom is, in actuality, a single node within a web of individual rights and privileges through which independent thoughts shape the ideas and beliefs of the communities we share.

At the nexus of academic freedom and the common good lies civil discourse. The promise of civil discourse is to hone, rather than hamper, independent thought through collective intelligence and communal empathy. It is the belief that communities thrive with more information rather than less, with more dialogue rather than silence, and with greater connection rather than separation. There is little consolation in saying, "We've been here before" when the challenges of political polarization, incivility, and misinformation feel especially timely and acute. Higher education's role in addressing today's democratic problems demands modern actions that are guided by a vision not to "fix" the democracy we have but to build a foundation for the democracy we want. The following recommendations are offered to catalyze those actions.

Recommendation 1: Institutional commitments to supporting academic freedom and civil discourse come with the opportunity to consider what it means to engage each well.

With every institutional initiative or commitment, there comes a point for the consideration of breadth and depth. The consideration of breadth (or scale) pertains to what areas of the institution will be reached by the initiative, whereas the consideration of depth (or scope) refers to how the institution will execute the initiative or commitment. The same is true for academic freedom and civil discourse. Each institution has the opportunity to consider the ways in which faculty, staff, administrators, students, community partners, and even trustees will engage the complexities of these commitments. For example, to what degree are the ethical and democratic nuances of these topics related to curricular design? How will students engage these concepts beyond the curriculum—and with whom? How might partnerships, particularly with community partners and employers, offer valuable opportunities for real-world meaning-making and perspective-taking?

A starting point for considering what it means for a college or university to fully engage academic freedom and civil discourse is to first consider the institutional assets, including the recognition of internal expertise, that can be brought to bear on these matters to promote learning across stakeholders. "The decentralized nature of higher education makes it difficult for institutions to fully understand the expertise within their campus, as most colleges and universities have people, disciplines, and departments with formal expertise in debate, dialogue, and deliberation."[33] Every college or university has the ability to center commitments to academic freedom and civil discourse in its own unique institutional mission, culture, and assets.

Recommendation 2: Definitions for academic freedom and civil discourse are necessary but not sufficient. Colleges and universities also need to create spaces for discussing how those definitions are practically applied and nuanced.

In his book *Bill of Obligations: Ten Habits of Good Citizens*,[34] Richard Haass addresses the idea that individual rights,[35] while created as a counterbalance to centralized federal power, are not all that is needed in a democracy. Because the application of rights is problematized by the effects of time, circumstance, and ambiguity of scope, Haass posits the need for individual rights to be accompanied by a set of shared obligations that would effectively enable Americans, as civic agents, to respectfully navigate the changing contexts and circumstances that alter their perceptions of how rights are applied—in essence, how they conceptualize what is just.

As important as it is for colleges and universities to explore the meaning and application of academic freedom and civil discourse, it is equally important to reinforce the collective obligation to assess how meaning is situated in time and across environments. What are the scenarios in which academic freedom and civil discourse are understood within the curriculum or across high-impact experiences? In what ways are the viewpoints of diverse stakeholders taken into consideration? Should all viewpoints bear equal weight? Only through the shared obligation to complicate the definitions and applications for academic freedom and civil discourse do we, as higher education leaders, scholars, and practitioners, gain a full understanding of these concepts.

Recommendation 3: Promoting students' ability to engage in civil discourse is an opportunity to connect the dots between their democratic skill-building and professional success.

Civil discourse is more than a technique for bridging political and ideological differences. The ability to listen and dialogue across differences and to engage in respectful disagreement is also a foundational skill for collaborative problem-solving and teamwork. That skill helps to foster strong communities, whether those communities are part of a locale, a campus, or a workplace. According to AAC&U's most recent research on employer attitudes, conducted in 2023, nearly four out of five employers identified "the ability to work with people from different backgrounds" as very important for career success.[36] In 2023, AAC&U also found that nearly seven out of ten employers (69 percent) identified "empathy for others" as very important for career success, and two-thirds said the same for the ability to "engage in thoughtful debate."[37]

Too often, conversations about what it takes to be a good community actor or civic participant are isolated from conversations about what it takes to be a good professional. The reality is that the skills of one sphere benefit the other. The workplace could use greater civility and ethical reasoning, just as civic participation could use more information literacy and teamwork. Students, faculty, and institutions only stand to gain when we emphasize the integration of skills across domains of life rather than operating as if they work in isolation.

Recommendation 4: In addressing academic freedom and civil discourse, colleges and universities must also consider the ways in which social and positional power differentially affect the ability of faculty to exercise such freedoms and support spaces for exchange.

This study employed a unique analytical approach to address something long known within academia—diversity among faculty creates and reinforces differences in power, voice, and influence. A study of any kind centered in the perceptions of individuals (in this case, faculty) must take into account that a person's perceptions are informed by how they observe and experience their daily life. Although we did not find an overwhelming pattern of difference among faculty using a statistical technique to assess intersectionality, this area of analysis deserves continued exploration.

Given the ways in which higher education reflects and reinforces stratification, a collective understanding of faculty experience requires recognition that demographic characteristics and positional differences matter. These differences influence whose voice is heard, how policies are perceived and applied, and who suffers from a lack of visibility. This recognition will require more than statistical techniques. It will take posing different questions about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice as independent concepts, and also in relationship to each other. D-L Stewart offers instructive guidance on this approach, including the following example: *"Diversity asks: 'Who's in the room?'; Equity responds: 'Who is trying to get in the room but can't? Whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure?'"*[38]

Recommendation 5: Even as legislative actions and the mercurial nature of politics may feel beyond institutional control, colleges and universities must find ways to support faculty mental health.

Broadly summarized, the findings of this study reinforce the sense that this is a fraught time for faculty, regardless of where they live or work. For any one question asked in this study, between 20 and 50 percent of faculty report feeling restricted, apprehensive, or inclined to self-censor across a range of behaviors and types of interactions. But does that signal a crisis for faculty or institutions of higher education? What percentage points define the threshold for collective concern or action?

Perhaps the more useful question is: What do any range of percentages suggest about the broader climate of collegiality, relationship-building, and support within colleges and universities? Taken together, the findings from this report suggest that regardless of how faculty feel about any one element of academic freedom or civil discourse, the circumstance of teaching, conducting research, and serving institutions in these times of political unrest and ideological polarization is likely a persistent drain on faculty well-being. This recognition should invite institutions to consider ways in which they can uniquely address faculty mental health, particularly as part of wider institutional commitments to well-being.

Methodological Appendix[39]

Survey Instrument

Instrument development: The survey instrument used to collect data for the study was informed by the instrument developed by Paul Lazarsfeld in 1955.[40] Lazarsfeld's study collected information about the experiences and perspectives related to academic freedom among social science faculty within US colleges and universities during the McCarthy era. The research team worked collaboratively to adapt the original instrument in three ways.[41]

First, in order to situate the nearly seventy-year-old instrument within the current political and social climate, AAC&U researchers assembled an advisory board of nine educators, practitioners, and scholars with expertise in academic freedom, constitutional law, free expression, and civil discourse to review Lazarsfeld's 1955 survey. The advisory board worked synchronously and asynchronously to review, refine, and augment the original instrument (i.e., identifying items from the original instrument to keep, modify, or omit). The study team then refined and added items to fit contemporary language and the postsecondary educational and political contexts in which today's faculty work. In most cases, this took the form of item rephrasing and adjustment of response options. This study also focused on addressing the issue of civil discourse. Although Lazarsfeld's study did not specifically identify this construct, several of the original survey items provided foundational language from which items could be further developed with input from advisory board members with specific expertise in this area.

Instrument testing: After drafting the survey instrument, NORC researchers reviewed the instrument for alignment with current survey methodologies (e.g., used a survey response process model[42] to review instructions, item phrasing, and response options and mitigated the potential for order effects). NORC researchers also subjected the final instrument to cognitive testing to optimize respondents' comprehension and interpretation of questions to ensure responses provided were as accurate as possible. Cognitive testing took the form of in-depth interviews conducted with a sample of four faculty who varied in their institutional contexts, faculty ranks, and disciplines. The average job tenure among the four cognitive testing interviewees in their current faculty position was twelve years. NORC developed the cognitive interview protocol, which was then approved by the study's primary investigators at AAC&U and AAUP. After reviewing and synthesizing findings from the cognitive interviews, NORC suggested modest wording revisions to the survey instrument regarding instructions, item, and response categories.

Study Population and Sampling

The population under study involved individuals who, between December 2022 and December 2023 (i.e., the twelve-month period that preceded the study), had any instructional duties and/or served in a faculty role at any two- or four-year public or private US college or university.[43]

The sample was derived from an email contact list provided by MDR.[44] To ensure the study's sample included an adequate number of individuals from diverse geographical and institutional contexts, nine sampling segments (or strata) were identified using the following characteristics:

- **Location of institution:** Three groups of states (plus Washington, DC) according to the status

of legislative restrictions on postsecondary educational activities as of December 2023: 1) legislation not introduced (seventeen states plus Washington, DC), 2) legislation introduced but not passed (twenty-four states), and 3) legislation passed (nine states).[45]

- **Institutional control and level:** Three groups of institutions according to: 1) public four-year, 2) private four-year, and 3) public and private two-year institutions.

The original sample file from MDR included a non-probability, stratified convenience sample of 170,001 individuals. Following review and cleaning of the file, a total of 5,186 email contacts (3 percent) were removed from the original file[46] resulting in a final sample file of 164,815 individuals, stratified based on the nine sample segments (or strata) identified above.

Survey Administration

NORC administered the web-based survey using Voxco survey software. Data collection began on December 7, 2023, and was closed on February 12, 2024. The faculty in the final sample distribution list (N = 164,815) were sent via email a personalized invitation to participate in the survey. Invitations and all subsequent reminders included a unique survey link for each prospective participant. After this initial email invitation, a total of seven email reminders were sent between December 13, 2023, and February 8, 2024, to individuals who initially were invited but had not yet completed the survey.[47]

Data Quality Review

Once the survey closed, a total of 9,854 cases were reviewed for completeness after removing those that did not consent to participate and those that were ineligible based on responses to the three-item eligibility criteria. Cases were reviewed using two criteria[48] to determine survey completeness:

- **Speeding:** The median survey completion time was nineteen minutes. After reviewing the distribution of cases across survey completion time, NORC determined that the threshold for quality survey responses was at least one-third of the median survey completion time (or 6.25 minutes). A total of 183 cases that completed the survey in less than six minutes were removed from the analytic dataset.

- **High refusal rates:** NORC also reviewed cases in which more than half of the survey's 102 eligible items were skipped. These 102 items excluded demographic- and employment-related items or items that not all respondents received, such as non-required "other/specify" write-in items and items with response-specific logic. A total of 1,213 cases in which the respondent skipped more than half of the 102 items reviewed were removed from the analytic dataset.

A total of 8,458 of the reviewed 9,854 cases were determined to be complete and were included in the statistical weighting and data analyses.

Analytic Dataset

The Methodological Overview section summarizes key characteristics of this final analytic dataset (*N* = 8,458), including response rates by sample segment as well as key characteristics.

Back-Coding Survey Responses

Seven items pertaining to demographic and employment characteristics included "other/specify" response options in order to capture a full range of possible response options. For these items, respondents were given the option to write in responses. All write-in responses were reviewed and back-coded using the survey's existing response options or using a new category (e.g., another degree, another race or ethnicity). Back-coded write-in responses were implemented for: 1) US political party affiliation (688 responses), 2) faculty rank (590 responses), 3) disciplinary affiliation (549 responses), 4) highest degree earned (251 responses), 5) race and ethnicity (220 responses), 6) sexual orientation (60 responses), and 7) gender (20 responses).

Statistical Weighting Procedures

Statistical raking is a weighting method used in survey research to adjust the weights of survey responses that are underrepresented or overrepresented in a dataset to match the known characteristics of a population. The statistical weighting procedures implemented consisted of adjusting sample representation to known population characteristics across the nine demographic and employment variables specified in Table A.1.

Table A.1: Variables Used in the Statistical Weighting Procedure

Variable	Description	Source for Weighting Parameters
Sample segment	• Location of institution (according to the status of legislative restrictions on postsecondary educational activities as of December 2023) • Institutional control and level (public four-year; private four-year; public and private two-year institutions)	Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)
Faculty rank	• Professor; associate professor; assistant professor; instructor, lecturer, emeritus faculty, visiting faculty, and other; part-time; graduate teaching assistant	
Tenure status	• Tenured; on tenure track but not tenured; not on tenure track, but institution has a tenure system; no tenure system at institution; part-time; graduate teaching assistant	
Sex assigned at birth and employment status	• Male, full-time; female, full-time; male, part-time; female, part-time	
Disciplinary affiliation	• Arts, communications, history, humanities; business; education, library science; engineering, architecture; health; law, criminal justice, social work; life sciences; math, computer science; physical sciences; social sciences; another area	US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)
Educational attainment	• Associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, professional degree beyond bachelor's degree, doctorate degree	US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)
Race and ethnicity	• Hispanic; Non-Hispanic White alone; Non-Hispanic Black/African American alone; Non-Hispanic AANHPI alone; Non-Hispanic, other	
Age	• 24 to 39, 40 to 49, 50 to 59, 60 to 69, 70 and older	
US citizenship status	• US citizen, not a US citizen	

The weight calibration procedures ensure that the sum of weights in each cell is made as close as possible to population-level information included in the 1) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS; for segment, tenure, rank, and part- or full-time employment status combined and sex assigned at birth variables), 2) US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS; disciplinary affiliation variable), and 3) US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS; race, ethnicity, age, US citizenship, and highest degree earned variables).[49]

Data Analyses

All survey data included in the analytic dataset were cleaned and prepared (i.e., transformed and recoded variables, coded missing data).

Descriptive statistics and statistical comparisons: Initial descriptive and inferential analyses followed three steps:

1. Respondent Profile: All demographic and employment items in the survey were analyzed. Unweighted counts and weighted percentages for all response options were calculated for the aggregate analytic dataset as well as for three comparison groups: 1) two-year institutions, 2) four-year public institutions, and 3) four-year private institutions to determine the survey's respondent profile.

2. Item Frequencies: Unweighted counts and weighted percentages for the response options of all remaining items (excluding demographic

and employment items) were calculated for the aggregate analytic dataset as well as for three comparison groups: 1) two-year institutions, 2) four-year public institutions, and 3) four-year private institutions.

3. Statistical Comparisons: Item-by-item weighted statistical comparisons across respondents from two-year, four-year public, and four-year private institutions were conducted.[50] For both types of statistical comparisons, we reported effect sizes (i.e., the practical significance of any statistically significant differences).[51]

Latent Class Analysis

In undertaking this study, researchers reasoned that faculty attitudes and behaviors with regard to perceived constraints on academic freedom and/or the ability to engage in civil discourse are likely to be mitigated by an individual's positionality vis-à-vis other social constructions of power. Specifically, a faculty member's ability or desire to reject, ignore, condemn, or acquiesce to institutional or governmental forces impacting academic freedom may be correlated with certain demographic characteristics that are also social markers of varying levels of advantage, privilege, and power (e.g., race, tenure status, and/or gender). Informed by Audre Lorde's concept of the mythical norm as a framework for envisioning social dimensions of power and typologies of "othering" within dominant systems,[52] we undertook an analysis to understand which combinations of faculty characteristics prevailed as lenses of relative power and privilege that might influence attitudinal and behavioral differences.

A latent class analysis (LCA) was conducted to address this analytical approach. LCA is used to identify hidden (or latent) groups of survey respondents based on a specified a priori set of shared characteristics. This analytical approach was used to identify groups of faculty based explicitly on characteristics related to power inequities in academia (e.g., academic rank, tenure status, institution type, race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation) and to examine whether such power variations relate to different experiences, views, and characteristics associated with aspects of academic freedom and civil discourse addressed in the survey.

NORC conducted weighted LCA using MPlus statistical software (version 8.1). The LCA and subsequent analyses followed three steps:

1. Identifying Groups of Faculty: The LCA grouped faculty respondents into distinct groups based solely on their similar responses to ten of the survey's items: academic characteristics (i.e., tenure status, academic rank, institution type, academic discipline, and highest degree earned) as well as demographic characteristics (i.e., race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, and age). In other words, latent classes (or groups) were formed independently from faculty responses to any of the other survey items.

2. Characterizing the Groups of Faculty: Once these latent classes (or groups) were identified, weighted cross-tabulations were analyzed to characterize the groups of faculty in terms of differences in their academic and demographic characteristics.

3. Cross-Group Statistical Comparisons: Using the LCA grouping variable (which included three distinct latent groups derived from the LCAs), NORC conducted a series of statistical analyses to determine whether latent group membership was associated with differences in survey responses. As an example, these analyses help determine whether there is a significantly larger proportion (or percentage) of faculty in one group (compared with the other groups) who reported often modifying or refraining from using particular terms or words because they think students in their courses will perceive these as offensive. To determine this for each survey item, weighted chi-square tests were conducted to determine any significant association between group membership and survey responses. For each item examined, statistical significance was determined by a significant weighted chi-square test statistic ($p < .05$). A significant chi-square test statistic indicates there is *some* association between group membership and particular survey responses. However, additional post hoc testing is required to determine between which of the three groups the significant differences exist. For all statistically significant chi-square test results, NORC conducted post hoc pairwise z tests to understand where statistically significant differences existed between the proportions (or percentages) of responses in each of the three groups.[53] Throughout the report, findings explain survey responses for the aggregate analytic dataset (as weighted percentages) as well as any group-specific differences that were observed.

Notes

1. William R. Doyle and Benjamin T. Skinner, "Does Postsecondary Education Result in Civic Benefits?," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 88(6) (2017): 863-893.

2. Claire Willeck and Tali Mendelberg, "Education and Political Participation," *Annual Review of Political Science* 25, no. 1 (May 2022): 89–110, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051120-014235.

3. Jessica R. Chittum, Kathryn A. E. Enke, and Ashley P. Finley, *The Effects of Community-Based and Civic Engagement in Higher Education: What We Know and the Questions That Remain* (Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022).

4. Association of American Colleges and Universities, *What Liberal Education Looks Like: What It Is, Who It's for, and Where It Happens* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2020), https://www.aacu.org/trending-topics/what-is-liberal-education#:~:text=Liberal%20education%20is%20an%20approach,work%2C%20citizenship%2C%20and%20life.

5. Neil Gross, *Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

6. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Wagner Thielens Jr., *The Academic Mind: Social Scientists in a Time of Crisis* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958).

7. At the outset of this study, Hans-Jörg Tiede was director of the Department of Research at AAUP. He is now a senior fellow in the Office of Research and Public Purpose at AAC&U.

8. See Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Wagner Thielens Jr., *The Academic Mind* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958) for a comprehensive overview of this original study's background, methodologies, and findings.

9. Adapted from the *2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*, NORC's definition of instructional duties is teaching credit or noncredit courses, advising or supervising students' academic activities, serving on undergraduate or graduate thesis or dissertation committees, supervising independent study, or instructing students one-on-one. NORC defined faculty roles as positions that could be permanent, temporary, adjunct, visiting, or acting appointments; tenured, non-tenured but on a tenure track, or non-tenured and not on a tenure track; and on paid sabbatical leave.

10. MDR uses web scraping to access college and university website and course catalog information for faculty names and email contacts and uses school websites to update department chairs, librarians, and other key leadership roles.

11. The study team worked with PEN America to confirm lists of states by legislative restriction status in both December 2023 (to inform developing sample segments) and April 2024 (to inform any updates for reporting purposes).

12. NORC sent email reminders on December 13, 2023; December 21, 2023; January 4, 2024; January 17, 2024; January 25, 2024; February 6, 2024; and February 8, 2024.

13. Statistical raking is a weighting method used in survey research to adjust the weights of survey responses that are underrepresented or overrepresented in a dataset to match the known characteristics of a population.

14. This approach is informed by Audre Lorde's concept of the "mythical norm" as a framework for envisioning social dimensions of power and typologies of "othering" within dominant systems. See Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984).

15. We recognize that labels in any form are reductionist. The labels used for this analysis are employed primarily for the sake of narrative. Because this is a new analytical approach to examining academic freedom and civil discourse, we consider these findings to be exploratory and will benefit from future research.

16. No cross-group differences related to faculty positional security and influence were found.

17. According to AAUP, "Academic freedom is the freedom of a teacher or researcher in higher education to investigate and discuss the issues in his or her academic field, and to teach or publish findings without interference from political figures, boards of trustees, donors, or other entities. Academic freedom also protects the right of a faculty member to speak freely when participating in institutional governance, as well as to speak freely as a citizen." (See https://www.aaup.org/programs/academic-freedom/faqs-academic-freedom.)

18. Ibid.

19. No significant differences were found with regard to positional security or influence.

20. No significant differences regarding positional security or influence were observed for this finding, however.

21. The survey included the phrase "divisive concepts" legislation in introductory definitions and item phrasing. Accurate and inaccurate percentages exclude "don't know" and missing responses.

22. No cross-group differences regarding faculty positional security and influence were found.

23. A small but significantly larger proportion of faculty at four-year public schools (13 percent) reported that they are considering seeking employment at a different institution, compared with faculty at four-year private (10 percent) and two-year institutions (8 percent).

24. For responses to the question, *"In what year did you begin your instructional duties or faculty role at your current primary institution?"* that were in 2022 or before, participants were asked about these items relative to "the past few years." If responses were in 2023 or after, participants were asked about these items relative to "since starting your faculty or instructional position at your institution."

25. No significant cross-group differences related to faculty positional security and influence were found.

26. No significant cross-group differences related to faculty positional security and influence were found.

27. No significant cross-group differences related to faculty positional security and influence were found with regard to these perceptions.

28. No significant differences with regard to positional security or influence were observed.

29. Faculty with high levels of positional security and influence are more likely to state that they have "always held this point of view" than faculty with lower levels of positional security and influence.

30. No significant cross-group differences related to faculty positional security and influence were found.

31. The survey included four hypothetical items about both professors who teach undergraduates and individuals who give public talks at their institution. In both sets of items, two items included perspectives about current political issues typically associated with right-leaning views (i.e., belief that due to widespread voter fraud, election results generally cannot be trusted; belief that efforts to redress racial inequalities represent anti-White racism or disadvantage White individuals), while two items included perspectives about current political issues typically associated with left-leaning views (i.e., belief that abortion is an inherent right for all people who give birth with no exceptions or limits; support for Palestinian liberation).

32. 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments, https://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20Statement.pdf.

33. Sara Drury et al., *Better Discourse: A Guide for Bridging Campus Divides in Challenging Times* (Washington, DC: Campus Compact, 2024), p. 4. https://compact.org/resources/better-discourse-a-guide-for-bridging-campus-divides-in-challenging-times#full.

34. Richard Haass, *Bill of Obligations: Ten Habits of Good Citizens* (New York: Penguin Books, 2023).

35. "Individual rights" are intended to refer to the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the US Constitution.

36. See Ashley P. Finley, *The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About the Difference College Makes* (Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2023).

37. Ibid.

38. Davina-Lazarus Stewart, "Language of Appeasement," *Inside Higher Education* (March 29, 2017), https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/03/30/colleges-need-language-shift-not-one-you-think-essay.

39. Lisa Davidson and Richard Smith of NORC served as lead authors for the Appendix. Questions regarding the Appendix or specific methodological or analytical procedures may be directed to them.

40. For a comprehensive overview of the study's background, see Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Wagner Thielens Jr., *The Academic Mind* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958).

41. In addition to the key adaptations described, AAUP's definition of academic freedom was used to clearly define this for survey participants and to refine or develop items to measure specific elements of academic freedom. As such, participants were provided with the explanation that academic freedom is the freedom of instructors or researchers in higher education to: 1) investigate and discuss the issues in their academic field; 2) teach or publish findings without interference from political figures, boards of trustees, donors, or other entities; 3) speak freely when participating in institutional governance; and 4) speak freely as citizens without institutional censorship or discipline. See https://www.aaup.org/programs/academic-freedom/faqs-academic-freedom.

42. For the model used, see Roger Tourangeau, Lance J. Rips, and Kenneth Rasinski, *The Psychology of Survey Response* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

43. Adapted from the *2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*, NORC's definition of *instructional duties* is teaching credit or noncredit courses, advising or supervising students' academic activities, serving on undergraduate or graduate thesis or dissertation committees, supervising independent study, or instructing students one-on-one. NORC defined *faculty roles* as positions that could be permanent, temporary, adjunct, visiting, or acting appointments; tenured, non-tenured but on a tenure track, or non-tenured and not on a tenure track; and on paid sabbatical leave.

44. MDR employs web scraping to access college and university website and course catalog information for faculty names and email contacts and uses school websites to update department chairs, librarians, and other key leadership roles. MDR prequalifies every email using a two-step process before initially adding it to its database, validates email addresses through an email cleaning vendor, then deploys each new email address in a Welcome to MDR's Database message, informing contacts about MDR and offering an opt-out.

45. The study's cosponsors and the NORC principal investigator worked with PEN America to confirm lists of states by legislative restriction status in both December 2023 (to inform developing sample segments) and April 2024 (to inform any updates for reporting purposes).

46. NORC removed a total of 5,186 individuals from the original sample file because of invalid email accounts (3,457), duplicate emails (1,212), invalid email domains (514), and full inboxes (3).

47. NORC sent email reminders on December 13, 2023; December 21, 2023; January 4, 2024; January 17, 2024; January 25, 2024; February 6, 2024; and February 8, 2024.

48. After closely reviewing the survey's fifteen grid item questions for the potential for straightlining, NORC decided not to apply this criterion to this data quality review. While we expected sample-level variability with these grid items, we determined that it could be plausible that there could be no respondent-level variability with twelve of the fifteen grid item questions (i.e., quality responses could look like straightlining, making it difficult or impossible to discern).

49. The weights include a multiplicity correction for the number of institutions at which respondents teach. This was applied toward the dimensions whose control totals come from the IPEDS and BLS, where individuals employed at multiple institutions are counted multiple times. Cell sizes for each of the weighting cells were required to be at least fifty-one respondents. The weights were constrained to be in the range of 2.49 to 1091.13. The Kish design effect was 4.03. The Kish design effect is a measure used in survey sampling to assess the efficiency of a particular sampling design. It quantifies the degree to which the variance of estimates obtained from a complex sample design deviates from what would be expected under simple random sampling. A Kish design effect of 4 means that the variance of estimates obtained from the survey design is four times larger than what would be expected under simple random sampling.

50. First, we indicated statistically significant differences in group means for ordinal variables; we used results from analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Tukey's WSD post hoc statistical tests to identify statistically significant mean values across the three institution types. Second, we indicated statistically significant differences in observed and expected values for nominal variables; we used results from chi-square tests and post hoc pairwise z tests for proportions for these variables. A Bonferroni correction was applied to lower the p-value threshold for statistical significance given the number of concurrent statistical comparisons.

51. Effect sizes for ANOVA tests use eta squared values ($\eta 2 = .01$ indicates a small effect; $\eta 2 = .06$ indicates a medium effect; $\eta 2 = .14$ indicates a large effect). Effect sizes for chi-square tests use Cramér's V ($V < .20$ indicates a weak association; V between .20 and.40 indicates a moderate association; $V > .40$ indicates a strong association). See Jacob Cohen, *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 1988).

52. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984).

53. A Bonferroni correction was applied to lower the p-value threshold for statistical significance given the number of concurrent statistical comparisons.

About AAC&U

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is a global membership organization dedicated to advancing the democratic purposes of higher education by promoting equity, innovation, and excellence in liberal education. Through our programs and events, publications and research, public advocacy, and campus-based projects, AAC&U serves as a catalyst and facilitator for innovations that improve educational quality and equity and that support the success of all students. In addition to accredited public and private, two-year, and four-year colleges and universities and state higher education systems and agencies throughout the United States, our membership includes degree-granting higher education institutions around the world as well as other organizations and individuals. To learn more, visit www.aacu.org.

About the AAUP

The mission of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) is to advance academic freedom and shared governance; to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education; to promote the economic security of faculty, academic professionals, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and all those engaged in teaching and research in higher education; to help the higher education community organize to make our goals a reality; and to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good. Founded in 1915, the AAUP has helped to shape American higher education by developing the standards and procedures that maintain quality in education and academic freedom in this country's colleges and universities.

About NORC

NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) conducts research and analysis that decision-makers trust. As a nonpartisan research organization and a pioneer in measuring and understanding the world, we have studied almost every aspect of the human experience and every major news event for more than eight decades. Today, we partner with government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world to provide the objectivity and expertise necessary to inform the critical decisions facing society.

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