

Limits to protest, speech and views on Holocaust Denial, in the United States

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Introduction and methodology

In the United States free speech is considered to be constitutionally protected by the first amendment. Americans acknowledge that there are lines not to be crossed and that, in effect, free speech is not absolute.

There are ongoing debates about where the lines should be drawn when it comes to racist views and/or the speech, public protests and Holocaust denial. A November 22-24 2024 survey of Americans was conducted by the firm Leger USA for the Metropolis Institute that identifies those lines as it reveals that Americans believe that free speech should be protected even when it involves the expression of overtly racist views but nonetheless support limits to free speech when it comes to hate speech targeting specific groups and do not consider Holocaust denial as free speech. A plurality of Americans (48%) do not believe that Holocaust denial should qualify as free speech. When it comes to public protests, most Americans (48%) do not believe that protesters should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces and the majority (67%) do not think that vandalism of public / commercial property is acceptable even if aims to send a political message.

There are however important generational differences when it comes to public protesting. While Americans over the age of 30 don't agree that people should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public, half the respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 support mask wearing for protesters. Younger Americans are also more likely to feel that there are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable. When it comes to free speech and Holocaust denial there are important differences between men and women with men more likely to agree that Holocaust denial should qualify as free speech and that even overtly racist views merit protection.

The survey was conducted by Leger USA for the Metropolis Institute with 1009 respondents over the period November 22-24, 2024 and has a probabilistic margin of error of $\pm 3.9\%$, 19 times out of 20

Americans believe that free speech should be protected even when it involves the expression of overtly racist views but draw the line when it comes to hate speech targeting specific groups and do not consider holocaust denial as free speech

	Free speech should be limited when it involves hate speech targeting specific groups	Free speech should be protected even when it expresses overtly racist views	Denying the Holocaust should be considered free speech
United States			
Yes	56%	43%	25%
No	28%	38%	48%
I don't know	16%	19%	27%

Americans are more likely than Canadians to say it's ok to hide one's face when engaging in a public protest though a near majority oppose the idea. Less than one in five americans and Canadians agree that there are circumstances under which politically motivated vandalism is acceptable

United States	There are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable	People should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public. -
Yes	18%	31%
No	67%	48%
I don't know	14%	21%

Americans aged 18-29 are far more likely than others to agree that people should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public

People should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public	Total	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65 +
Yes	31%	50%	37%	29%	25%	16%
No	48%	30%	38%	46%	53%	67%
I don't know	21%	19%	25%	25%	22%	17%

justifying vandalizing public property when issuing a political message; The majority of Americans over the age of 30 believe there is no such justification

There are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable.	Total	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65 +
Yes	18%	35%	27%	18%	12%	5%
No	67%	42%	57%	64%	79%	89%
I don't know	14%	23%	16%	17%	10%	7%

Americans are somewhat more likely to agree that free speech should be protected even when it expresses overtly racist views but there are important differences on the basis of gender with men far more likely to feel that way than women

Free speech should be protected even when it expresses overtly racist views.	Total	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65 +
Yes	43%	53%	34%	38%	45%	43%	48%	41%
No	38%	31%	45%	43%	39%	34%	36%	39%
I don't know	19%	15%	22%	19%	15%	22%	17%	20%

Americans do feel however that limits should be applied when it comes to the expression of hate targeting specific groups with women more likely to feel that way than men

Free speech should be limited when it involves hate speech targeting specific groups.	Total	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65 +
Yes	56%	51%	61%	52%	60%	59%	54%	58%
No	28%	36%	19%	30%	28%	24%	28%	27%
I don't know	16%	12%	20%	18%	13%	17%	18%	15%

Nearly Half of americans surveyed think Holocaust denial is not free speech

Denying the Holocaust should be considered free speech.	United States	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65 +
Yes	25%	35%	16%	27%	26%	24%	26%	23%
No	48%	43%	54%	46%	47%	45%	45%	58%
I don't know	26%	22%	30%	27%	28%	30%	29%	19%