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Academic Freedom, Speech and
Collective Responsibility
in Canada

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September 2026



Introduction

This survey examines Canadians' views on the limits of academic freedom and acceptable expression, with particular attention to political advocacy in the classroom, religious and ethnic prejudice, historical denial and collective responsibility. The findings come from a Leger survey of 1,538 Canadians conducted for the Association for Canadian Studies from September 4 to 6, 2026.

Six in ten Canadians believe academic freedom should not protect professors who use class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught. Younger adults are less certain about where to draw this boundary. Respondents who support such protection are also considerably more likely to regard the justification of terrorism, the denial of documented atrocities and the minimization of their victims as acceptable.

Most Canadians reject statements that portray religious or ethnic communities as inherently untrustworthy, attribute harmful beliefs to an entire religion or hold members of a religious group collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government. Nevertheless, younger respondents are consistently more likely to consider such statements acceptable, including one-third of those under 25 who say it is acceptable to question whether a well-documented historical atrocity occurred.

The findings also examine whether Muslims should be expected to denounce terrorism committed in the name of Islam, Jewish Canadians to condemn actions of the Israeli government and Russian Canadians to denounce actions of the Russian government. These expectations are not symmetrical: criticism of an elected government's policies or military actions is not comparable to condemning terrorism. The comparison nevertheless reveals a common tendency to require members of religious or national-origin communities to answer publicly for conduct over which they have no individual control or responsibility.

Methodology

The findings arise from a survey of Canadians conducted by the firm Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies between September 4-6, 2026. The survey was conducted with 1538 respondents in Canada. A margin of error cannot be associated with a non-probability sample in a panel survey for comparison purposes. A probability sample of 1538 respondents would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.5\%$, 19 times out of 20.

Some 60% of Canadians say academic freedom should not protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught. Those 18-24 are less much less certain as 32% say it should be protected while 38% are unsure

Academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught									
	Total	Male	Female	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
Yes	17%	23%	12%	32%	22%	17%	18%	11%	11%
No	60%	59%	60%	38%	51%	51%	60%	70%	73%
I don't know	23%	18%	28%	30%	27%	32%	21%	19%	16%

Amongst those who believe that academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught, some one in four think acts of terrorism can sometimes be justified compared with 5%of those who don't support such protections that feel otherwise

Acts of terrorism can sometimes be justified.	Academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught	
	Yes	No
Yes	24.0%	4.8%
No	67.3%	91.2%
I don't know	8.7%	4.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Majority of Canadians disagree that a person’s religion or ethnicity, by itself, should be used by government agencies combatting terrorism as a reason for greater scrutiny

A person’s religion or ethnicity, by itself, should be used by government agencies combatting terrorism as a reason for greater scrutiny	Total	Male	Female	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
Yes	23%	29%	17%	23%	28%	17%	20%	23%	26%
No	55%	55%	55%	59%	52%	61%	54%	52%	54%
I don’t know	22%	17%	28%	18%	21%	23%	26%	25%	20%

Nearly seven in ten Canadians find it unacceptable to say that members of a specific ethnic or religious group cannot be trusted. Over four in ten between 18 and 24 think it acceptable

Saying that members of a specific ethnic or religious group cannot be trusted.	Total	Male	Female	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
(NET) ACCEPTABLE	31%	39%	23%	42%	35%	34%	29%	30%	24%
Very acceptable	11%	15%	7%	12%	12%	7%	11%	13%	10%
Somewhat acceptable	20%	24%	17%	30%	23%	27%	18%	17%	14%
(NET) NOT ACCEPTABLE	69%	61%	77%	58%	65%	66%	71%	70%	76%
Not very acceptable	32%	31%	33%	29%	26%	31%	35%	35%	34%
Not at all acceptable	37%	30%	44%	29%	39%	35%	36%	35%	42%

A majority of Canadians find it unacceptable to say that a particular religion has harmful beliefs though a majority under 25 say otherwise

Saying that a particular religion has harmful beliefs.	Total	Male	Female	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
(NET) ACCEPTABLE	43%	51%	36%	56%	47%	47%	45%	37%	37%
Very acceptable	15%	20%	10%	14%	13%	14%	15%	19%	14%
Somewhat acceptable	29%	31%	26%	42%	34%	33%	30%	18%	23%
(NET) NOT ACCEPTABLE	57%	49%	64%	44%	53%	53%	55%	63%	63%
Not very acceptable	33%	28%	37%	35%	32%	30%	32%	37%	32%
Not at all acceptable	24%	21%	27%	9%	21%	23%	23%	26%	32%

Four in five Canadians say that it is unacceptable to say that a well-documented historical atrocity might not have occurred. Amongst those under 25 one in three say it is acceptable

Saying that a well-documented historical atrocity might not have occurred.	Total	Male	Female	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
(NET) ACCEPTABLE	20%	26%	15%	33%	27%	22%	22%	17%	9%
Very acceptable	6%	7%	4%	5%	11%	6%	3%	6%	3%
Somewhat acceptable	15%	19%	11%	28%	16%	16%	20%	11%	6%
(NET) NOT ACCEPTABLE	80%	74%	85%	67%	73%	78%	78%	83%	91%
Not very acceptable	27%	28%	25%	29%	26%	32%	26%	28%	22%
Not at all acceptable	53%	46%	60%	38%	47%	46%	52%	54%	69%

Eighty-five percent of Canadians say it is unacceptable to exaggerate or minimize the number of victims of historical atrocities. Some one in four under 35 say it is acceptable

Exaggerating or minimizing the number of victims of historical atrocities									
	Total	Male	Female	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
(NET) ACCEPTABLE	15%	19%	11%	28%	24%	17%	17%	9%	5%
Very acceptable	4%	5%	3%	5%	6%	2%	6%	3%	3%
Somewhat acceptable	11%	14%	8%	23%	18%	15%	11%	5%	2%
(NET) NOT ACCEPTABLE	85%	81%	89%	72%	76%	83%	83%	91%	95%
Not very acceptable	29%	32%	26%	33%	25%	36%	28%	28%	26%
Not at all acceptable	56%	50%	62%	38%	51%	47%	56%	63%	69%

Collective Responsibility

Three in four Canadians find it unacceptable to say that members of a religious group are collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government. Some thirty percent under 55 find it acceptable

Saying that members of a religious group are collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government.	Total	Male	Female	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
(NET) ACCEPTABLE	25%	35%	16%	32%	30%	25%	31%	21%	17%
Very acceptable	7%	12%	3%	8%	12%	3%	10%	7%	5%
Somewhat acceptable	18%	23%	13%	24%	18%	22%	21%	14%	12%
(NET) NOT ACCEPTABLE	75%	65%	84%	68%	70%	75%	69%	79%	83%
Not very acceptable	35%	33%	37%	36%	30%	36%	33%	38%	38%
Not at all acceptable	40%	32%	47%	32%	40%	39%	36%	41%	45%

Canadians most likely to think that Muslims should be expected to publicly condemn terrorist acts carried out in the name of Islam

	Muslim Canadians should be expected to publicly condemn terrorist acts carried out in the name of Islam	Russian Canadians should be expected to publicly condemn actions of the Russian government with which they disagree.	Jewish Canadians should be expected to publicly condemn actions of the Israeli government with which they disagree
Yes	43%	36%	32%
No	29%	33%	36%
I don't know	28%	31%	32%

Amongst those Canadians who agree Academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught, one third think it acceptable to say that members of a religious group are collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government.

Saying that members of a religious group are collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government.	Academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught	
	Yes	No
Very acceptable	12.6%	7.3%
Somewhat acceptable	24.8%	15.9%
Not very acceptable	34.4%	35.1%
Not at all acceptable	28.2%	41.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Amongst those Canadians who agree Academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught, some 40% believe it is acceptable to say that a well-documented historical atrocity might not have occurred

Saying that a well-documented historical atrocity might not have occurred. -	Academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught.	
	Yes	No
Very acceptable	11.8%	5.4%
Somewhat acceptable	27.8%	10.2%
Not very acceptable	28.1%	24.4%
Not at all acceptable	32.3%	60.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Amongst those Canadians who agree Academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught, over one third say it is acceptable to exaggerate or minimize the number of victims of historical atrocities

Exaggerating or minimizing the number of victims of historical atrocities	Academic freedom should protect a professor who uses class time to advocate political views unrelated to the subject being taught.	
	Yes	No
Very acceptable	14.4%	2.4%
Somewhat acceptable	22.1%	6.6%
Not very acceptable	28.1%	27.6%
Not at all acceptable	35.4%	63.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Those most likely to say that members of a religious group are collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government, are most likely to agree that Muslim Canadians should be expected to publicly condemn terrorist acts carried out in the name of Islam

Muslim Canadians should be expected to publicly condemn terrorist acts carried out in the name of Islam	Saying that members of a religious group are collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government.			
	Very acceptable	Somewhat acceptable	Not very acceptable	Not at all acceptable
Yes	73.2%	54.0%	40.3%	35.1%
No	17.0%	24.6%	27.0%	34.8%
I don't know	9.8%	21.3%	32.7%	30.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Those most likely to say that members of a religious group are collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government, are most likely to agree that Jewish Canadians should be expected to publicly condemn actions of the Israeli government with which they disagree

Jewish Canadians should be expected to publicly condemn actions of the Israeli government with which they disagree. -	Saying that members of a religious group are collectively responsible for the actions of a foreign government.			
	Very acceptable	Somewhat acceptable	Not very acceptable	Not at all acceptable
Yes	52.7%	38.2%	27.1%	30.1%
No	33.9%	34.9%	33.1%	38.5%
I don't know	13.4%	26.8%	39.8%	31.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

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