National Speech Index: October 2026 Topline Results

When it comes to whether people are able to freely express their views do you think things in America are heading in the RIGHT or WRONG direction?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Heading in the RIGHT direction	267	27
Heading in the WRONG direction	733	73

When it comes to whether people are able to freely express their views, which of the following, if any, are reasons you think things in America are "[insert answer choice from prior question]"? (select all that apply)

Note: Data presented are the percentage of respondents who chose each option by their response to the RIGHT or WRONG direction question. Percentages do not sum to 100%.

Reason	Heading in the RIGHT direction (N = 267)	Heading in the WRONG direction (N = 733)
The current presidential administration	29%	59%
Political polarization	9%	52%
How people react to speech they find offensive	22%	51%
Political violence against public figures	11%	46%
Fairness of news coverage	26%	46%
White House access for news outlets	21%	39%
The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), such as the targeting and suspension of Jimmy Kimmel	18%	44%
Lawsuits by government officials against the press	18%	42%
Surveillance technology (e.g., Flock cameras)	11%	48%
Social media regulation	26%	29%
The climate for speech on college and university campuses	17%	35%
Treatment of non-citizens' political speech	12%	29%
Treatment of protests and protesters	17%	45%
Court rulings on free speech	31%	26%
Something else (open-ended)	5%	5%
None of the above	25%	5%

The First Amendment became part of the U.S. Constitution more than 225 years ago. This is what it says:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Based on your own thoughts about the First Amendment, can you tell us what you think about the following statement: "The First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees."

Response	Frequency	Percent
Does not describe my thoughts at all	565	56
Slightly describes my thoughts	86	9
Somewhat describes my thoughts	132	13
Mostly describes my thoughts	124	12
Describes my thoughts completely	92	9

How secure do you think the right to freedom of speech is in America today?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all secure	143	14
Not very secure	312	31
Somewhat secure	372	37
Very secure	137	14
Completely secure	37	4

How worried, if at all, are you about losing your job because someone complains about something you have said?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all worried	393	39
Not too worried	240	24
Slightly worried	178	18
Somewhat worried	120	12
Very worried	69	7

Think specifically about your life and all the interactions you have had in the past month. How often have you watched what you said – that is, possibly censored your comments, questions, or words?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	213	21
Rarely, once or twice	233	23
Occasionally, a handful of times	320	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	129	13
Very often, nearly every day	104	10

How often, if at all, have you used AI for each of the following? (topics presented in randomized order)

A medical issue

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	520	52
Rarely, once or twice	187	19
Occasionally, a handful of times	214	21
Fairly often, a couple times a week	63	6
Very often, nearly every day	15	2

A legal issue

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	700	70
Rarely, once or twice	133	13
Occasionally, a handful of times	117	12
Fairly often, a couple times a week	36	4
Very often, nearly every day	15	1

A mental health issue

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	731	73
Rarely, once or twice	123	12
Occasionally, a handful of times	98	10
Fairly often, a couple times a week	33	3
Very often, nearly every day	15	2

A political issue

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	726	73
Rarely, once or twice	99	10
Occasionally, a handful of times	111	11
Fairly often, a couple times a week	45	5
Very often, nearly every day	20	2

Dating

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	861	86
Rarely, once or twice	58	6
Occasionally, a handful of times	48	5
Fairly often, a couple times a week	22	2
Very often, nearly every day	10	1

Sports betting

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	884	88
Rarely, once or twice	35	3
Occasionally, a handful of times	33	3
Fairly often, a couple times a week	26	3
Very often, nearly every day	22	2

How helpful, or harmful, have AI responses been when used for a medical issue? (presented to respondents who did not answer "never" for "a medical issue")

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very harmful	4	0
Somewhat harmful	45	4
Neither helpful nor harmful	131	13
Somewhat helpful	239	24
Very helpful	61	6
(Missing)	520	52

How helpful, or harmful, have AI responses been when used for a legal issue? (presented to respondents who did not answer "never" for "a legal issue")

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very harmful	5	1
Somewhat harmful	17	2
Neither helpful nor harmful	86	9
Somewhat helpful	141	14
Very helpful	52	5
(Missing)	700	70

How important, if at all, is it for Americans to be able to loudly criticize the following? (groups presented in randomized order)

The police

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not important at all	48	5
Not that important	87	9
Somewhat important	273	27
Very important	253	25
Extremely important	340	34

Politicians

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not important at all	38	4
Not that important	41	4
Somewhat important	209	21
Very important	262	26
Extremely important	450	45

Government officials

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not important at all	31	3
Not that important	48	5
Somewhat important	235	24
Very important	248	25
Extremely important	437	44

Judges

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not important at all	40	4
Not that important	62	6
Somewhat important	284	28
Very important	265	27
Extremely important	349	35

Public figures

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not important at all	41	4
Not that important	44	4
Somewhat important	296	30
Very important	251	25
Extremely important	368	37

Religious leaders

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not important at all	78	8
Not that important	103	10
Somewhat important	271	27
Very important	215	22
Extremely important	333	33

How much confidence, if any, do you have that each of the following will protect your First Amendment rights? (groups and individual presented in random order)

The Democratic Party

Response	Frequency	Percent
No confidence at all	295	30
Very little confidence	184	18
Some confidence	263	26
Quite a lot of confidence	167	17
My full confidence	92	9

The Republican Party

Response	Frequency	Percent
No confidence at all	371	37
Very little confidence	217	22
Some confidence	189	19
Quite a lot of confidence	118	12
My full confidence	104	10

Donald Trump

Response	Frequency	Percent
No confidence at all	513	51
Very little confidence	101	10
Some confidence	141	14
Quite a lot of confidence	96	10
My full confidence	149	15