

Censorship Attitudes and Voting Preferences

Research Report: CUPES-005 | January 22, 2021

Research Question

This is the fifth report from the *Civil Unrest and Presidential Election Study* (CUPES). Here, we examine attitudes about censorship, in particular, peoples' level of support for freedom of speech and freedom of thought. Due to the politicized nature of this topic—especially in recent months as social media censorship has been debated in the halls of government and academia—we thought it would be relevant to consider how people's attitudes towards censorship varied with regard to their reported voting preference in the 2020 presidential election.

Methodology

Data Source

- Civil Unrest and Presidential Election Study (“CUPES,” collected in September/October 2020)

Participants

- 1337 adults in the United States from the CUPES dataset
- $M_{age} = 46.14$ Years ($SD = 17.23$ Years), 53% Female

Measures

- *Voting Preference*:
Was measured with the question, “If you had to vote in the 2020 election, who would you plan on voting for?” Participants could choose any option on the Presidential Election ticket. Only those who chose the Democratic or Republican options were included in this report.
- *Attitudes about Censorship*:
 1. *Freedom of Speech*: measured with the question, “People should be allowed to say whatever they want, even if others think those words are harmful.” Answer options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
 2. *Freedom of Thought*: measured with the question of, “People should be allowed to believe whatever they want, even if others think those beliefs are harmful.” Answer options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
- For additional information (e.g., statistical output, citations) not included in this document, view the supplemental page for this report located at skeptical.com/research-center/civil-unrest-presidential-election-study/

Summary of Findings

1. Our results suggest that, on average, both Trump and Biden voters support peoples' freedom to say and think what they believe, even if others find those beliefs and words harmful.
2. However, compared to those reporting an intention to vote for Trump, those reporting an intention to vote for Biden were significantly less likely, on average, to support peoples' freedom of speech and freedom of thought.
3. The overall lowest levels of support we found were for freedom of speech, particularly amongst those reporting an intention to vote for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

Take-home Messages

1. The freedom to say and believe what one thinks has been regarded as a cornerstone of liberal democracy (Mill [1859]1998). Symmetrically, desires to suppress the speech or thoughts of others have been a recurrent feature of autocratic and dictatorial regimes (Møller and Skaaning, 2013).
2. In especially politically polarized eras, people may come to believe that some ideas or forms of speech are beyond the “Overton window,” that is, beyond what ought to be socially or legally acceptable (Orazani et al., 2020).
3. In democracies, peoples' particular political alignments might influence the *degree* to which they support freedom of speech or thought, even if a majority of people support such freedoms.
 - Have an interpretation of this you want to share? Email it to research@skeptical.com

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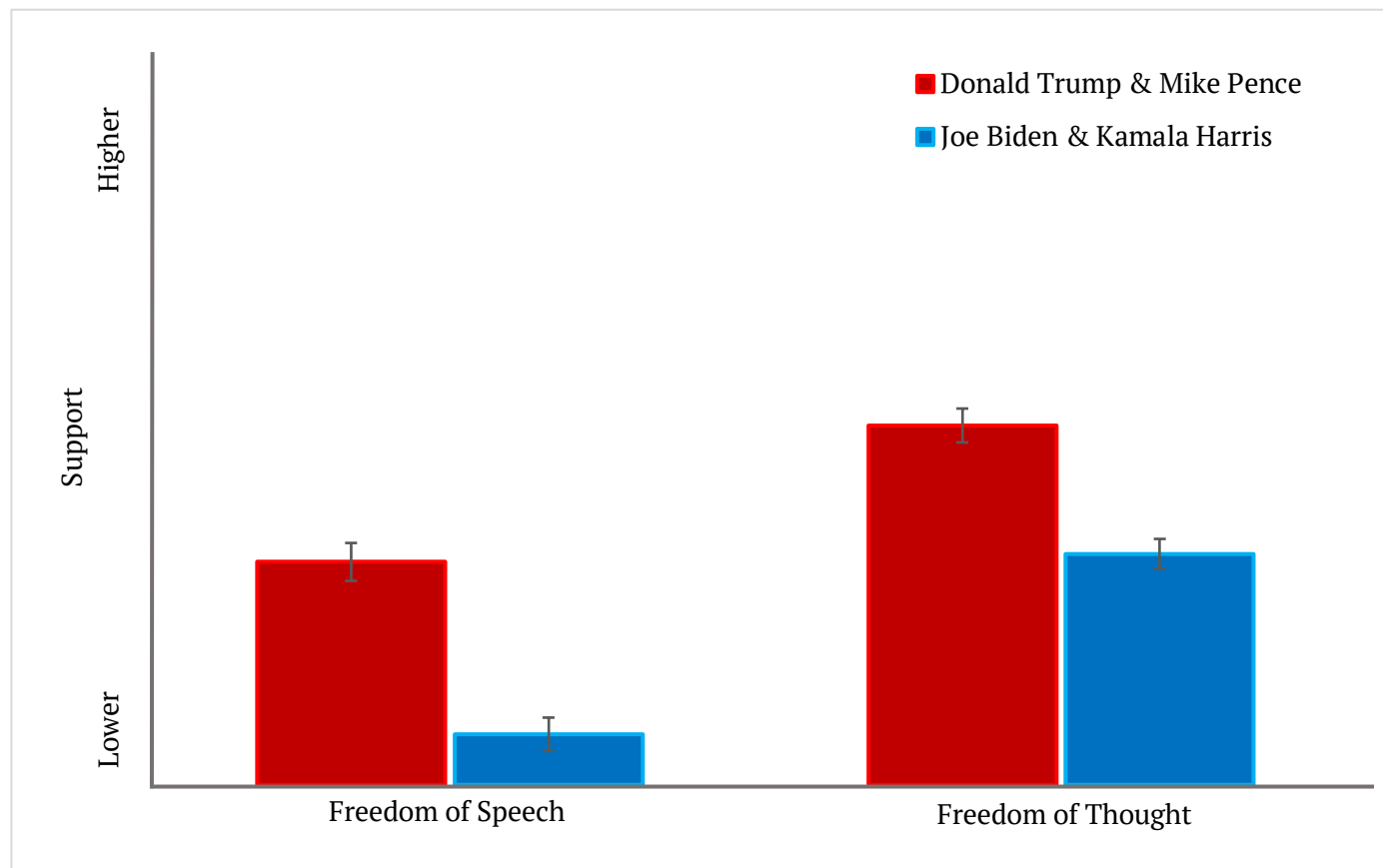
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Figure 1: Attitudes about censorship and voting preference



Note: Error bars represent standard error. Groups are significantly different at $p < .01$