

# Outside of Politics, What Else Predicts Attitudes Towards Censorship?

Research Report: CUPES-006 | February 5, 2021

## Research Question

This is the sixth report from the *Civil Unrest and Presidential Election Study* (CUPES). In the last report, we examined peoples' support for freedom of speech by voting preferences. However, given the recent politicization of this topic associated with social media bans, it is worth considering how other variables might influence peoples' support for free speech. Here, as a follow-up, we report the strongest correlates of peoples' support for free speech that we found in our most recent dataset (CUPES).

## Methodology

### Data Source

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

### Participants

- 1401 adults in the United States from the CUPES dataset
- $M_{age} = 45.64$  Years ( $SD = 17.24$  Years), 54% Female

### Measures

- *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.
- *Behavioral Autonomy*: measured with the question, “People should be allowed to do whatever they want, even if others think those behaviors are harmful.” Answer options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
- *Indicators of Wellbeing*:
  1. *Happiness*: Measured with the question of “In general, how happy do you usually feel?” Answers ranged from “extremely unhappy” (1) to “extremely happy” (10).
  2. *Social Disconnectedness*: measured with a 6-item loneliness scale (e.g., “I lack companionship”). Answers ranged from “strongly disagree” (0) to “strongly agree” (5).
  3. *Household Income*: measured with the question of “what was your household income last year (in 2019)?” Answers ranged from “\$0 – \$24,999” (1) to “\$200,000 or more” (7).
- *Demographic Characteristics*
  1. *Gender*: measured with the question of which gender they identify with. The 5 people that chose “other” were not included in those analyses (“female” = 0, “male” = 1)
  2. *Race*: measured with the question of which race they most closely identify with (grouped by “non-white” = 0, “white” = 1).

## Summary of Findings

1. Our results suggest that the strongest correlate of peoples' attitude towards free speech is, perhaps unsurprisingly, their attitude toward freedom of behavior.
2. Of the demographic correlates we found, gender was the strongest, with males reporting greater agreement that people should be allowed to say whatever they want, even if others find those words harmful.
3. Of the wellbeing correlates we found, social disconnectedness was the strongest, with lonelier respondents reporting greater agreement that people should be allowed to say whatever they want despite others' possible disapproval.

### Take-home Messages

1. Taken together, males, whites, those with greater household income, greater reported happiness, greater reported social disconnectedness and, especially, those who most agreed that they should be allowed to behave as they wish, expressed greater support for freedom of speech. However, all but the latter were *small* correlations.
2. Self-reported loneliness was a significant predictor of attitudes towards free speech but, interestingly, so too was self-reported happiness.
  - Have an interpretation of this you want to share? Email it to [research@skeptic.com](mailto:research@skeptic.com)

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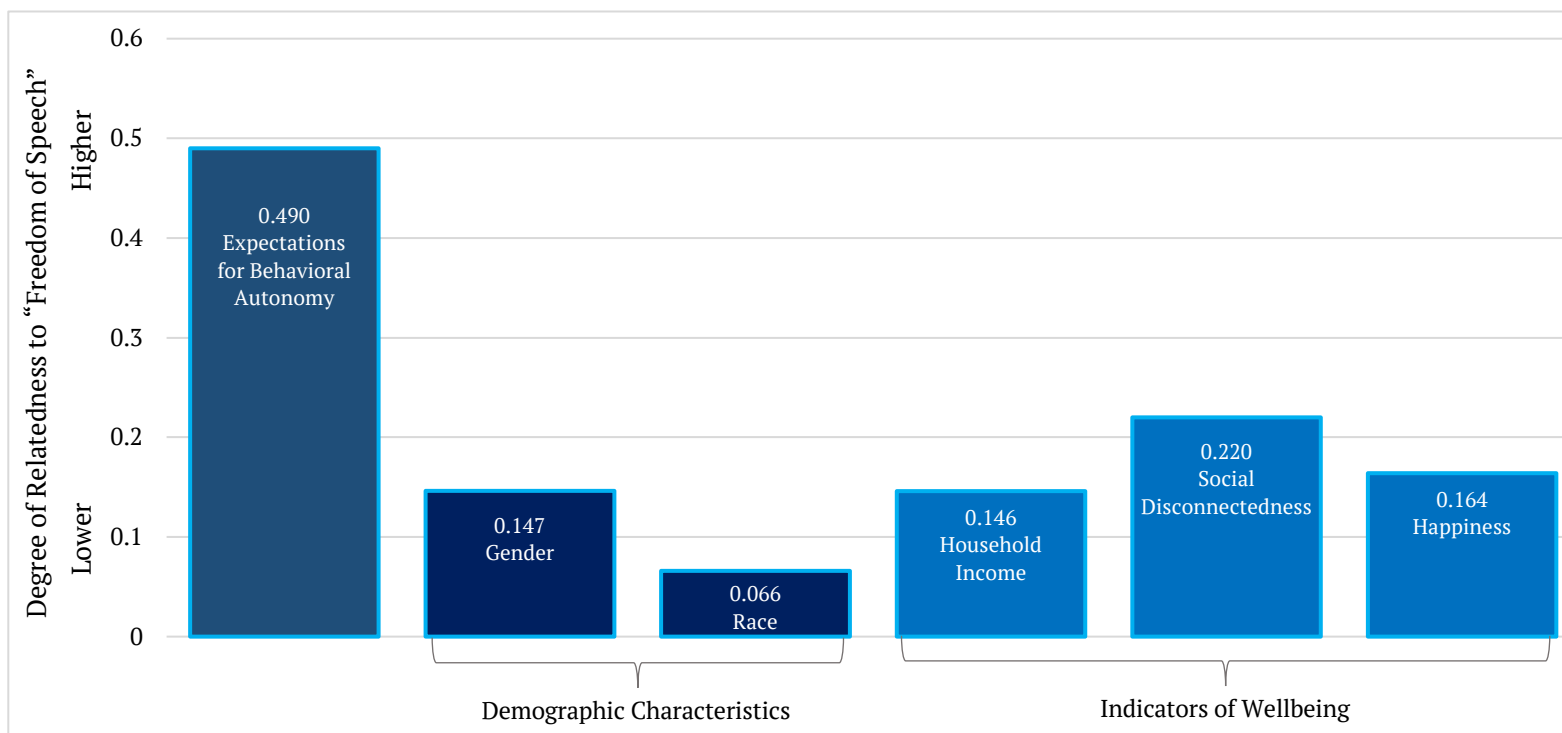
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Figure 1



All of these correlations were significant at  $p < .05$ . For specific statistical information (e.g., p-value, test type), please see the supplemental document.

### What is a correlation?

Correlation coefficients, like the ones reported above, vary from 0 to 1. Though the mathematics of correlations are more complex than this, you can fruitfully think of correlations in the following way: a correlation of “0” would indicate that knowing how people responded to one question/variable would not help you predict responses given to a second question/variable any better than chance. Conversely, a correlation of “1” would indicate that knowing how people responded to one question/variable would enable you to perfectly predict how people responded to a second question/variable. The correlation strength in figure 1 above, varied between .066 (peoples’ response to a question about their racial identification) to .490 (peoples’ response to a question about their level of agreement with the statement, “People should be allowed to do whatever they want, even if others think those behaviors are harmful”).