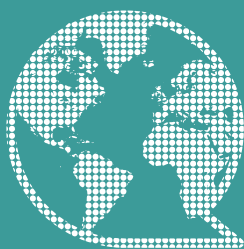


WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

Findings from a Global Survey



MARCH 2025



**THE
FUTURE
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SPEECH**

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About The Future of Free Speech

The Future of Free Speech is an independent, non-partisan think tank located at Vanderbilt University. We seek to reaffirm freedom of expression as the bedrock of free and thriving societies through actionable research, empowering tools, and principled advocacy. We envision a world where everyone's right to freedom of expression is protected by law and reinforced by a culture that tolerates diverse viewpoints.

Who In The World Supports Free Speech was written by Svend-Erik Skaaning and Suthan Krishnarajan (both professors of political science at Aarhus University, Denmark). In the process, they received external feedback on early drafts from John Geer, Jørgen Møller, and Kristian Frederiksen. They also received internal input from Jacob Mchangama and Justin Hayes.

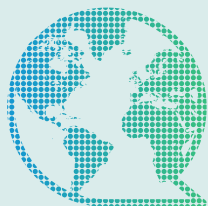
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Who in The World Supports Free Speech?

Findings from a Global Survey

Laws alone cannot secure freedom of expression; in order that every man may present his views without penalty, there must be a spirit of tolerance in the entire population.

—Albert Einstein

Free speech is a cornerstone of democracy, a fundamental right that empowers individuals to express their opinions, challenge authority, and engage in open debate. The world benefits from the free flow of ideas and information because suppressing speech not only harms those who are silenced but also weakens society overall since free speech fosters individual autonomy, creativity, and innovation. Moreover, as emphasized by Nelson Mandela, “No single person, no body of opinion, no political or religious doctrine, no political party or government can claim to have a monopoly on truth.”¹

In the past decade, the number of countries experiencing increased repression of free speech has far outnumbered those demonstrating substantial improvements, and the share of countries with strong free speech protections has declined significantly.² Although speech restrictions have increased globally – often referred to as a ‘free speech recession’³ – new laws and judicial rulings alone do not fully explain the growing skepticism toward free speech. As John Stuart Mill, Albert Einstein, George Orwell, and many other political thinkers and public intellectuals throughout history have understood, a culture that values diverse viewpoints and the ability to express those views is necessary for free speech to truly thrive.⁴

But how much do people around the world facing various types and levels of restrictions support free speech? And beyond the abstract principle of free speech, what specific issues do they think people should be allowed to discuss and criticize openly? This report seeks to answer these questions based on data from surveys⁵ of individuals from 33 countries from different regions of the world. The surveys were developed by The Future of Free Speech and implemented by YouGov and some of its international partners in October 2024 (see the Appendix for details on survey methodology, the specific formulation of questions, and the distribution of answers). It builds on and extends the findings of a previous report – *Who Cares about Free Speech?* – published in 2021. The present report offers updated findings on free speech issues: Three questions about the rejection of censorship concerning private speech, media, and the internet, five questions about the willingness to allow sensitive types of statements that are critical of the government, offensive to religion, offensive to minority groups, support homosexual relationships, or insult the national flag, and two questions about preference for free speech vis-à-vis national security and economic stability. It also includes findings based on novel survey questions related to the use and regulation of generative AI.

The key findings from the survey shed light on some important challenges and opportunities facing free speech in the 21st century. Controversies surrounding hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation have raised pressing questions about the value and future of this principle. Traditional media, social media, and AI content generators play



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pivotal roles in shaping public discourse and raising concerns about free speech. While offering information, spaces for deliberation, and inspiration, they can also spread and amplify radical and misleading content.

This has sparked intense debates about the limits and responsibilities of free speech. Central to these discussions is the complicated challenge of balancing the protection of free expression with the need to maintain a respectful and informed media landscape and access to valuable digital tools. Governments and platforms have increasingly turned to content moderation and censorship to combat issues like fake news and hate speech. However, such measures often provoke criticism for infringing on free speech, highlighting the tension between maintaining open expression – a fundamental human right – and addressing harmful behavior. Understanding public opinion about free speech is essential for navigating these debates.



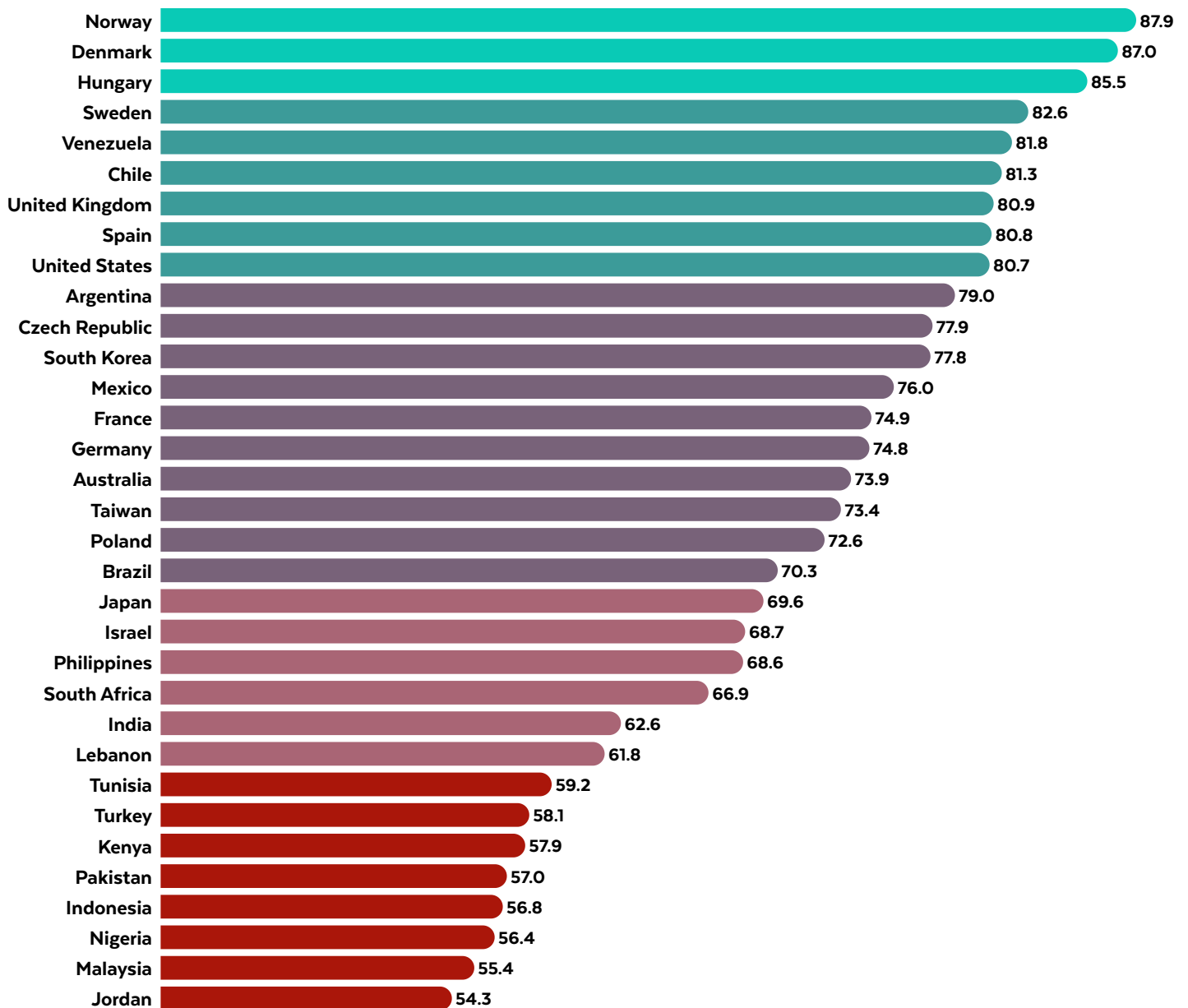
Summary of Findings

1. Majorities in all 33 countries express general support for free speech (on average, across multiple issues). However, there is significant variation across countries – ranging between 54% and 88% – and within countries between different social groups.
2. Scandinavian countries (Norway, Denmark, and Sweden) and two democratic backsliders (Hungary and Venezuela) show the highest levels of support for free speech. Muslim-majority countries and the Global South show the lowest levels of support.
3. Support for free speech shows a strong co-variation with the actual level of freedom of expression, but in India, Hungary, and Venezuela, the actual level of free speech is relatively low compared to the popular demand.
4. Japan, Israel, and the United States show the biggest drops in support since 2021. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan have shown the most improvement but still rank among the lowest in free speech support.
5. There is widespread skepticism regarding the use of AI tools to generate offensive content. The strongest skepticism concerns the use of AI to construct deepfakes of politicians.
6. There is strong support for governments and tech companies to restrict the use of generative AI tools. This pattern is different from preferences concerning the regulation of social media platforms, where larger shares favor no regulation and only regulation by the social media companies rather than (exclusively or supplementary) by the government.
7. Most nations show high levels of support for free speech in the abstract, but support is lower and more divided when it comes to statements that are offensive to minorities or one’s own religion, supportive of homosexual relationships, or insulting to the national flag.
8. The tolerance of sensitive statements has remained stable in most nations on most issues since 2021. However, there has been an increase in the willingness to let the government prevent criticism of someone’s own religion (e.g., in Sweden, Poland, France, Japan, and Israel) and approvals of homosexual relationships (e.g., in India, Lebanon, South Africa, the United States, and Mexico). By contrast, the willingness to tradeoff free speech for national security or the economy has decreased in several countries, including Malaysia, Tunisia, Pakistan, Kenya, and Taiwan.
9. Women generally express lower levels of support for the right to express offensive statements related to minorities, someone’s own religion, and the national flag, but higher tolerance of statements that approve of homosexual relationships. Older citizens tend to be more tolerant of criticism of government policies, but also less tolerant of insults to the national flag and information that can harm national security.
10. In the US, men, as well as the young and the middle-aged, show declining support for free speech across different kinds of sensitive issues, including lower tolerance of statements that support homosexual relationships and insults to the American flag.

1. Global ranking

Figure 1 illustrates global variations in The Future of Free Speech Index. Norway ranks highest in support for free speech, followed closely by Denmark and Sweden. Interestingly, Hungary and Venezuela – despite experiencing democratic decline – exhibit high levels of support for free speech. Meanwhile, the United States and Australia, both with strong free speech traditions, rank 9th and 16th, respectively, among the 33 surveyed countries.

Figure 1: Global Variation in The Future of Free Speech Index



The index is based on answers to three general questions about the rejection of censorship of private speech, media, and the internet and five more concrete questions about the willingness to allow sensitive types of statements that are critical of the government, offensive to religion, offensive to minority groups, support homosexual relationships, or insulting the national flag. These items tap into a common theoretical and empirical dimension that reflects general



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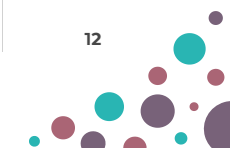
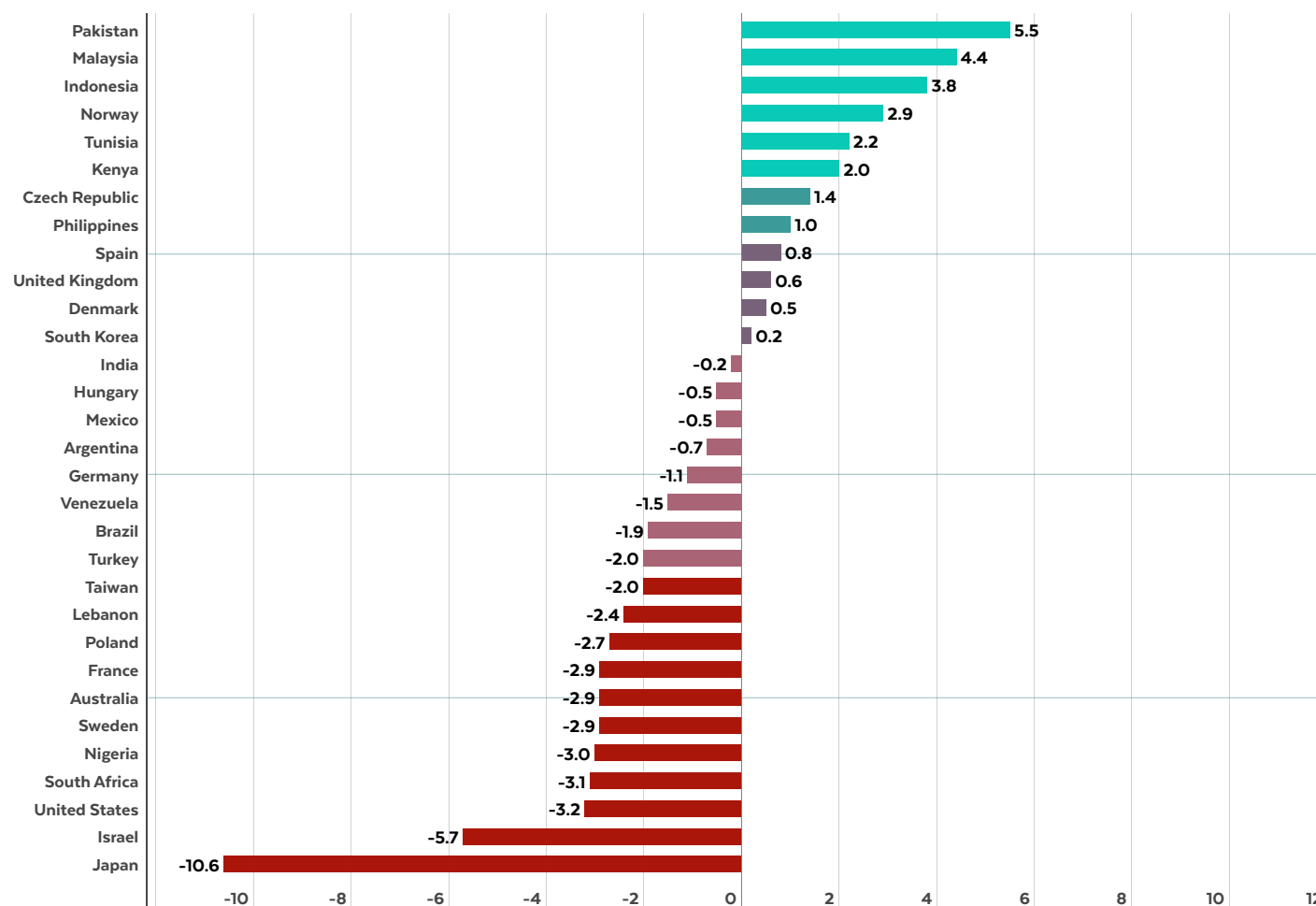
support for free speech. High values reflect high, general support for free speech, while low values on the index reflect low support. Intermediate values indicate either that citizens show diverse support for different free speech issues or are only partly committed to the overarching principle.⁶

People living in the Western world, including Latin America, express high levels of support for free speech. In the middle of the ranking are a diverse set of nations, such as Taiwan, Poland, Brazil, Japan, and Israel. Among the countries with the lowest index scores, we find many Muslim-majority nations (Jordan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Tunisia, and Lebanon) and countries from the Global South (Nigeria, Kenya, India, and South Africa). It is interesting to note, though, that even in the countries with the lowest support for free speech, the average is higher than 50. This means that, on average, all populations in our sample show more support than not in favor of free speech, even though many of their governments carry out severe repression.

2. More countries with regressions than improvements in general support for free speech

Since 2021, twice as many countries have experienced substantial decreases in support for free speech than increases (12 vs 6) as indicated by changes of at least two percentage points.

Figure 2: Change in support for free speech since 2021



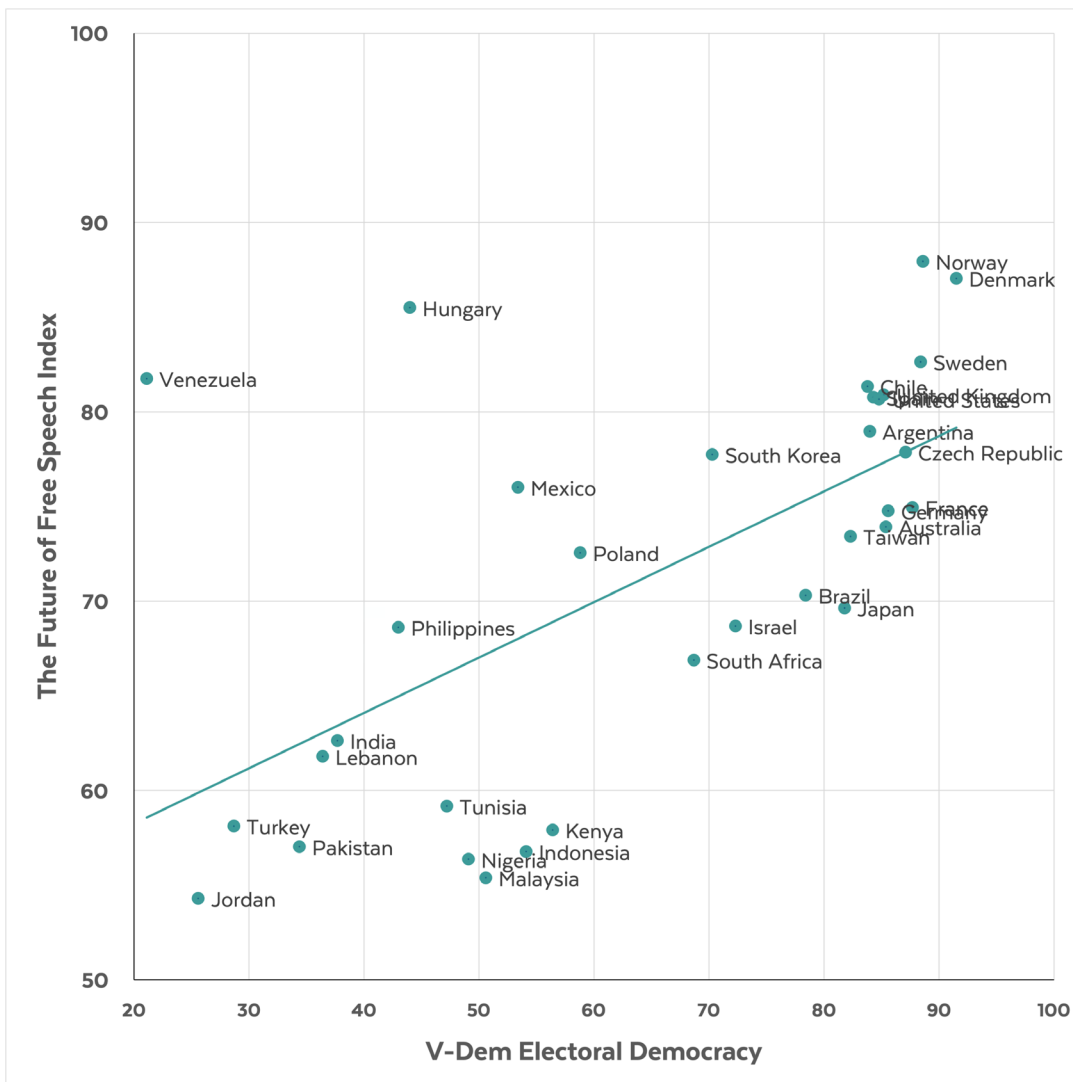
Japan, Israel, and the United States show the largest drops in their index scores. Among these, Japan has witnessed the most substantial decline with a drop of 10.6. The negative trend in Israel overlaps with the ongoing violent conflict between Israelis and Palestinians since Hamas’ attack on October 7th, 2023, while the United States is characterized by deep and intensified affective polarization, with different camps accusing each other of wokeism and bigotry.

Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia show the biggest gains, but despite these changes, they remain at the low end of the ranking. Overall, there have not been many fundamental changes to the ranking of countries since 2021, and most countries do not show major changes in support for free speech.

3. More support for free speech in democratic and rich countries

Countries with high levels of democracy generally show higher levels of support for free speech with Hungary and Venezuela representing stark deviations from the general pattern (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Level of democracy and support for free speech



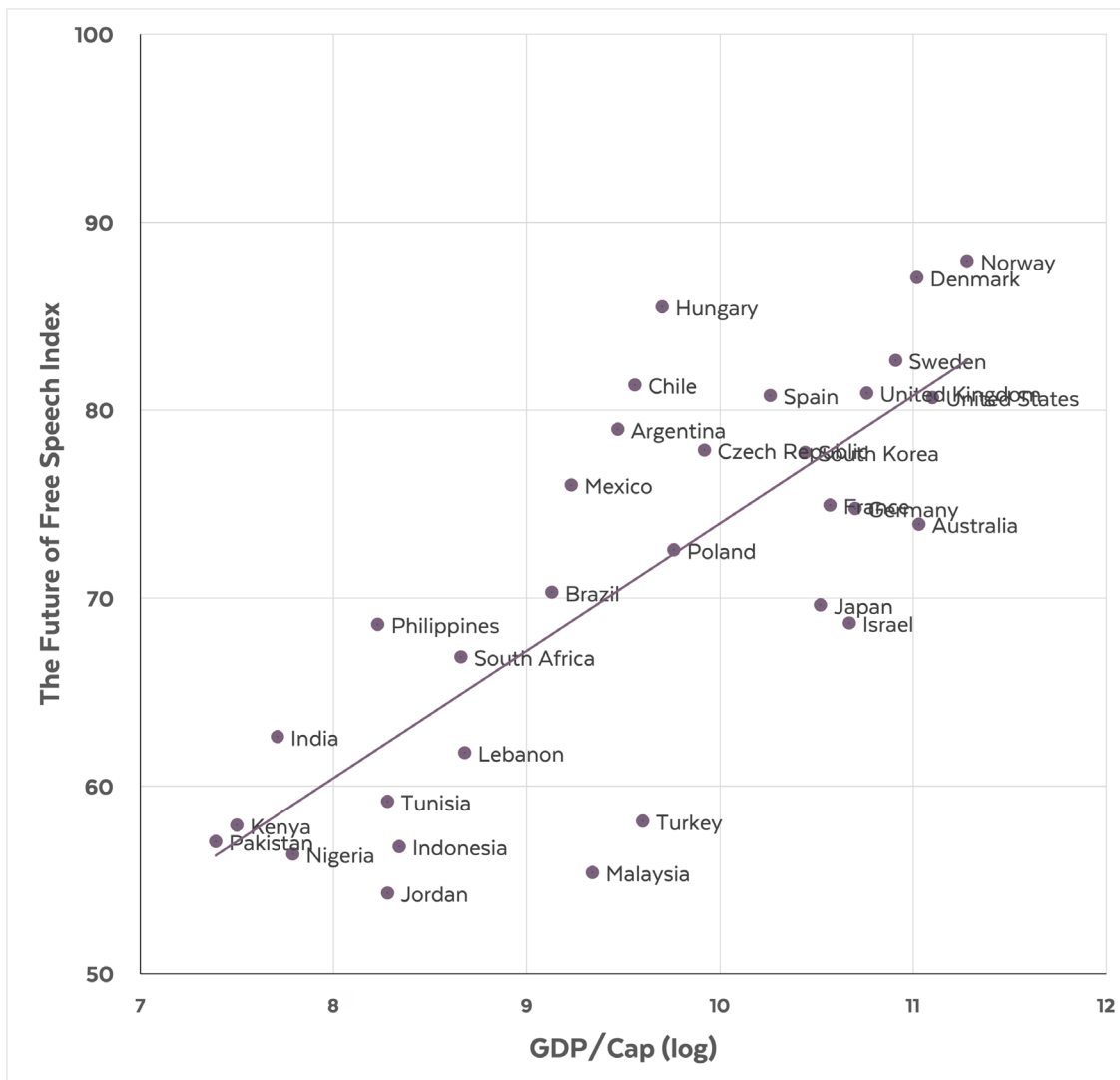


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Several factors might contribute to the striking correlation ($r = .60$).⁷ Democracies often establish legal frameworks that protect civil liberties, allowing individuals to express themselves without fear of government retaliation and enabling them to hold leaders and public institutions accountable. Moreover, the emphasis on pluralism in democratic societies tends to encourage tolerance for diverse viewpoints, making freedom of expression a cornerstone of social and political life. However, these relationships are only suggestive as we cannot tell with certainty whether the level of democracy influences support for free speech or vice versa – or whether the high level of co-variation is due to other factors determining both.

Countries with higher levels of economic development (as measured by GDP per capita) also tend to exhibit greater public support for free speech (see Figure 4).⁸ Once again, we cannot say anything conclusive about whether the association is causal and – if so – what direction the relationship goes. Yet, the strong correlation ($r = .77$) is interesting and indicates interconnections between developmental pathways and political culture.

Figure 4: Level of economic development and support for free speech

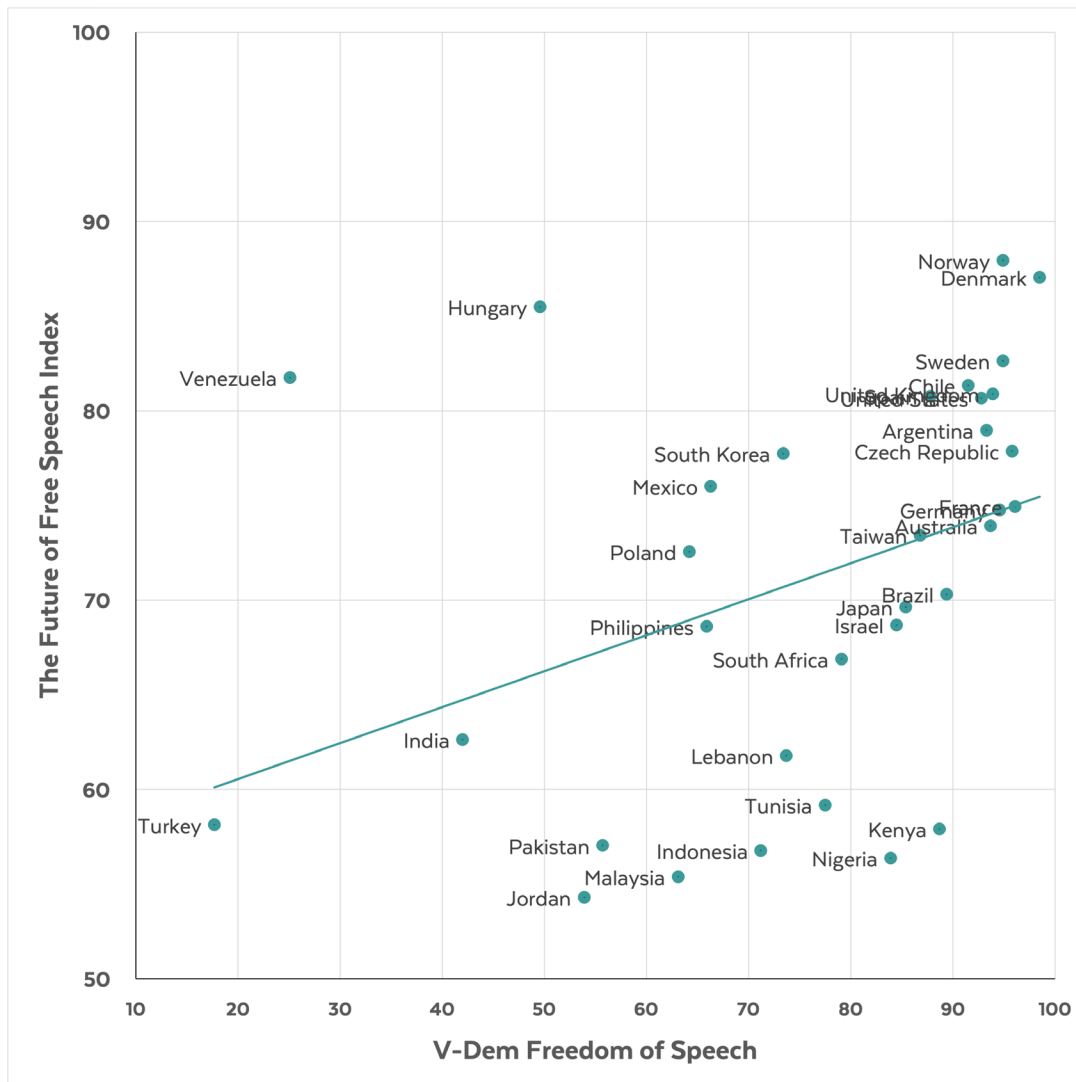


It has been suggested that when societies become wealthier and more educated, people shift their focus from survival values (prioritizing security and order) to emancipative values (prioritizing autonomy and freedom).⁹ However, it has also been proposed that exposure to such values shifts makes large parts of the population feel alienated and stimulates a backlash in the form of support for anti-pluralist ideas and concerns about harmful effects of too much freedom of expression.¹⁰

4. Disconnects between public support and protection of free speech

There is a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.31$) between public support (“demand”) for free speech and its actual protection (“supply”), suggesting that nations with stronger safeguards tend to have more supportive populations.¹¹ This is clear when we compare The Future of Free Speech Index scores with country scores from V-Dem’s Freedom of Expression Index, capturing the extent to which the government respects press and media freedom, ordinary people can discuss political matters at home and in the public sphere, and free academic and cultural expression is permitted (see Figure 5).¹² However, despite the correlation, we cannot determine causation from these data alone.

Figure 5: Support of free speech versus enjoyment of free speech





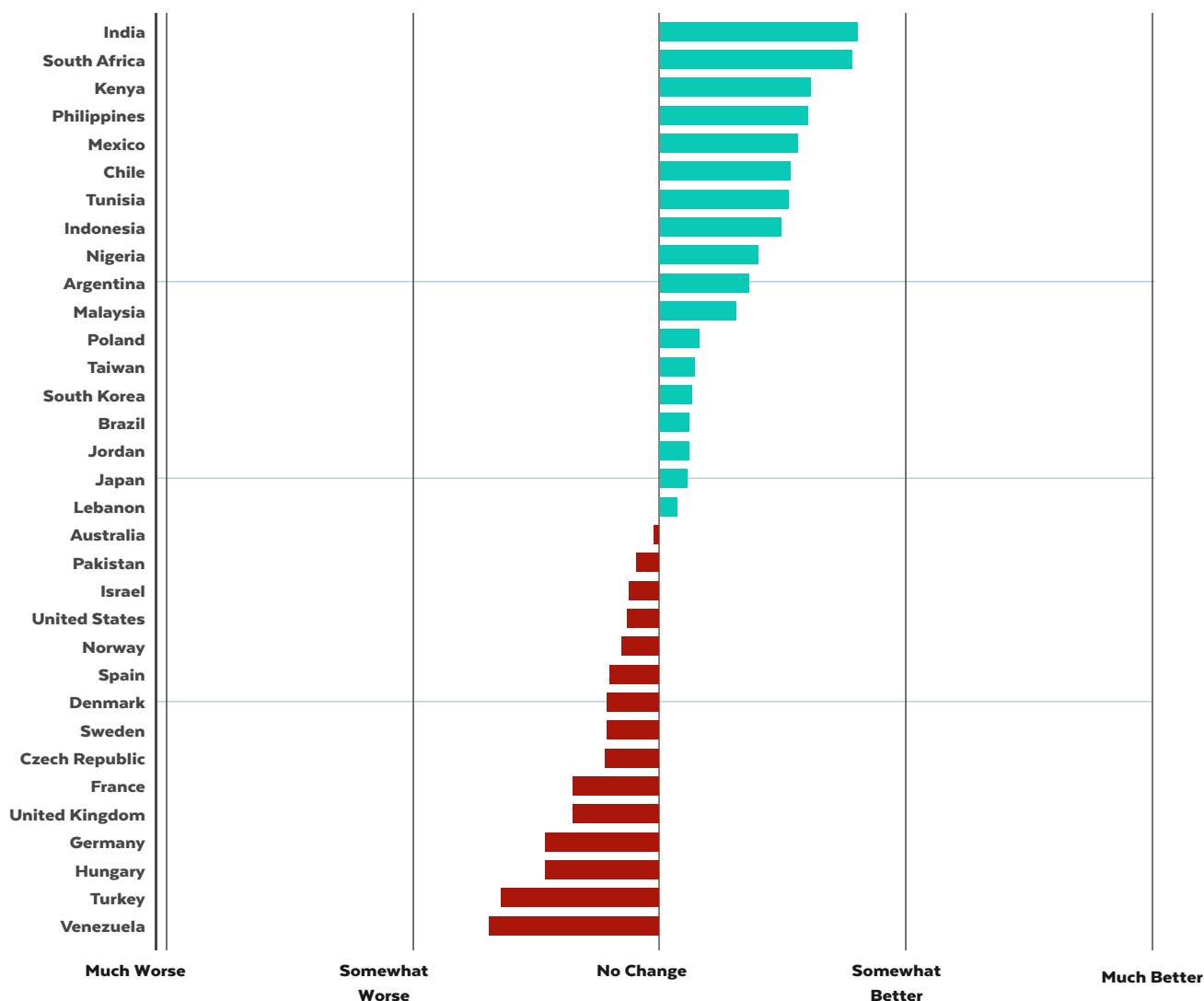
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This means that nations that are more supportive of free speech tend to enjoy more freedom of expression in practice and vice versa. For instance, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Lebanon score relatively low on both support and practice, while Argentina and Spain score high on both accounts. However, there are also apparent deviations from this tendency. The line in Figure 5 expresses the overall co-variation. Countries above the line enjoy relatively high values of actual free speech compared to the public support for this right, while the opposite is the case for countries below the line.

However, there are also some clear examples of deviation. The most substantial disconnects from the general pattern are represented by India, Hungary, and Venezuela where the actual protection of free speech is very low compared to the popular support. These are all cases of democratic backsliding in countries that previously demonstrated high levels of respect for political liberties, including freedom of expression. In contrast, the citizens of Nigeria and Kenya express relatively lukewarm and inconsistent support toward free speech, but they only face relatively few restrictions in practice.

When asked whether their ability to speak freely about political matters has improved or worsened over the past year, responses reveal that roughly as many nations report declines in freedom of expression as report improvements (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Perceived change in the ability to speak freely



Indians and South Africans believe that they have undergone the most significant progress, although observers and rankings tend to agree that the situation in India has become worse, if anything.¹³ In contrast, Turks, Venezuelans, and Hungarians perceive the greatest decline in their right to speak freely. These perceptions are more in line with the general impression among rankings and human rights defenders as these countries have time and again been flagged as examples where free speech has faced increasing pressure.¹⁴ Notably, many Germans and French citizens also feel their freedom of expression has significantly deteriorated.

5. Skepticism about (mis)use of generative AI and strong support for dual regulation

The rise of generative AI is reshaping the landscape of free speech, raising urgent questions about the balance between innovation and safety. Just as the printing press revolutionized knowledge dissemination, AI now enables speech at an unprecedented scale—empowering billions to generate and access information instantly. But this transformation spurs concerns: Will AI bolster creativity and critical thinking, or will it amplify misinformation and censorship? Will the companies behind AI platforms allow users wide latitude to generate content within the bounds of the law or erect strict guardrails to prevent users from generating controversial ideas? As policymakers worldwide rush to regulate AI's impact, the fundamental right to access information remains at the heart of free expression.

The debate about whether people should be allowed to use generative AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT and Copilot, to create controversial content revolves around issues of free speech, societal harm, legal accountability, and ethics.¹⁵ Proponents argue that restricting AI use for such purposes infringes on free speech rights, emphasizing the importance of individuals' liberty to express dissent or critique, even if it is provocative. They also contend that AI is a neutral tool, and misuse reflects human intent rather than the technology itself, making a ban on its use unfairly stigmatizing. Critics, however, highlight the significant potential for harm, noting that AI can amplify defamation, hate speech, and false information, causing damage to reputations, inciting violence, or destabilizing communities. Moreover, AI-generated content can complicate accountability by obscuring the identity of the creator, and the proliferation of deceptive content might erode public trust in information and institutions.

This debate closely mirrors discussions on social media content and regulation. But what do people think that one should be allowed to use AI chatbots for – in general, and relative to similar content generated in conventional ways? Are their views on the regulation of generative AI different from their views on social media regulation?

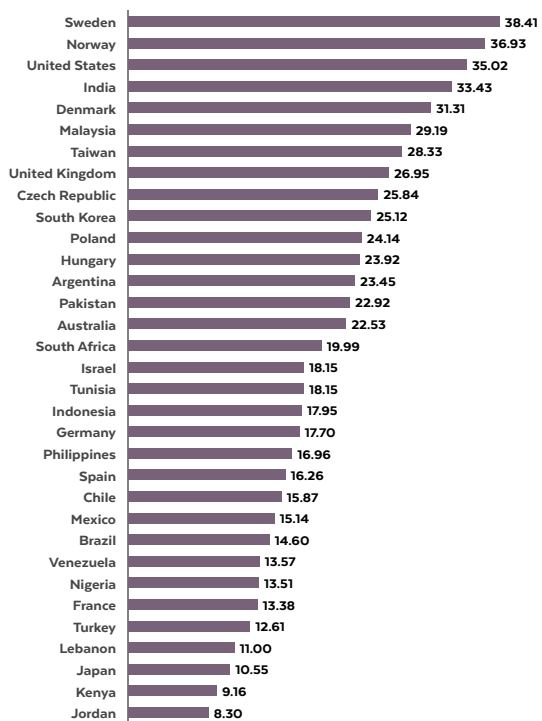
Among those respondents familiar with generative AI, no country shows majority support for allowing such tools to generate sensitive content (see Figure 7). This finding concerns content that is offensive to the national flag, minority groups, and one's own religion, as well as deepfakes of politicians. Skepticism is highest regarding deepfakes of politicians and content that is offensive to minority groups, whereas people are generally more tolerant regarding content that is considered offensive to the national flag or one's own religion.

The ranking of countries is quite similar across three issues and compared to the ranking associated with The Future of Free Speech Index. However, Japan and Venezuela have significantly lower positions in the ranking, while India, Pakistan, and South Africa have higher positions. Interestingly, the rankings are fundamentally different when we

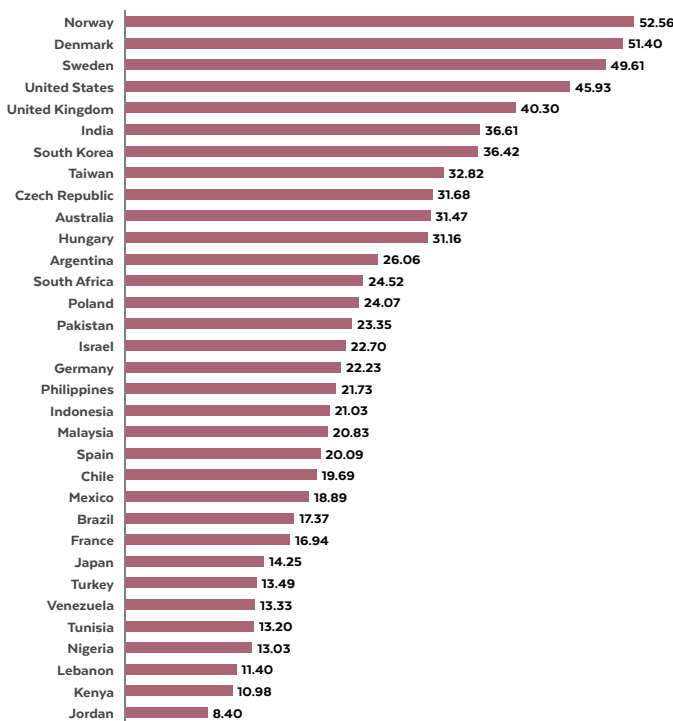
look at the willingness to allow deepfakes of politicians: Citizens of India, Hungary, Indonesia, Taiwan, and South Korea are the most tolerant, whereas citizens of Venezuela, Chile, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany are among the least tolerant. Opinions about deepfakes thus seem to reflect a different logic.

Figure 7: Tolerance for AI-generated sensitive content

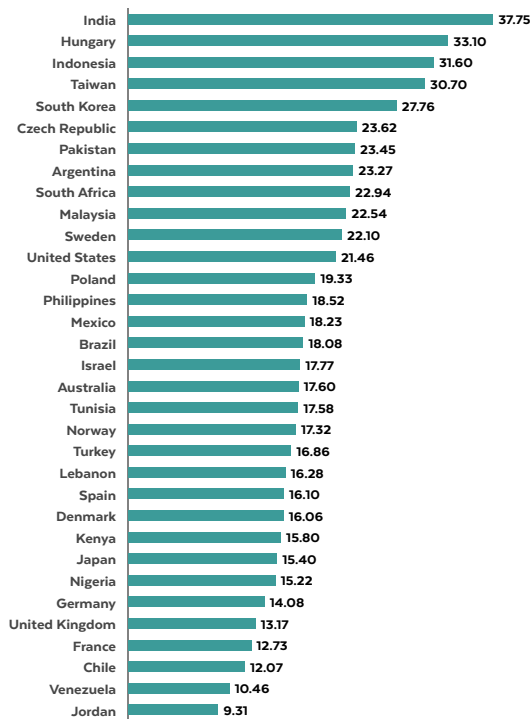
Allow AI: Offensive to Minority Groups



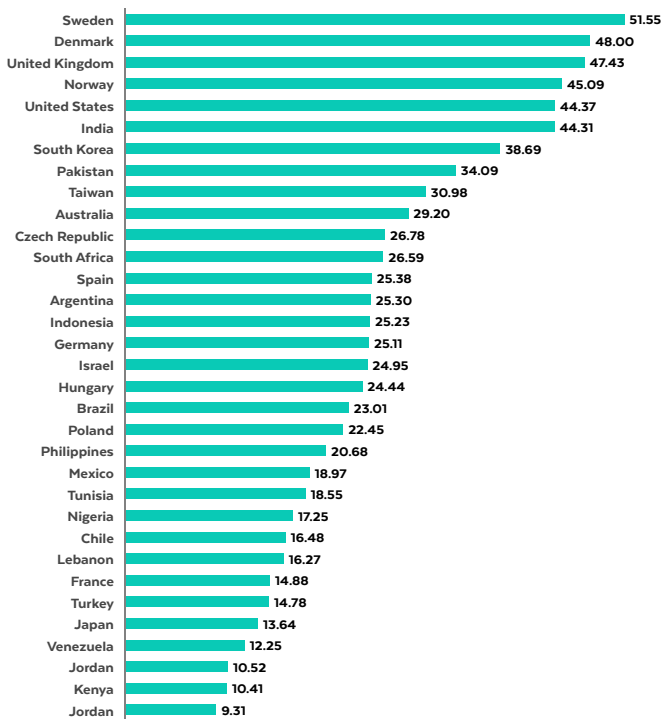
Allow AI: Offensive to Religion



Allow AI: Deepfakes of Politicians

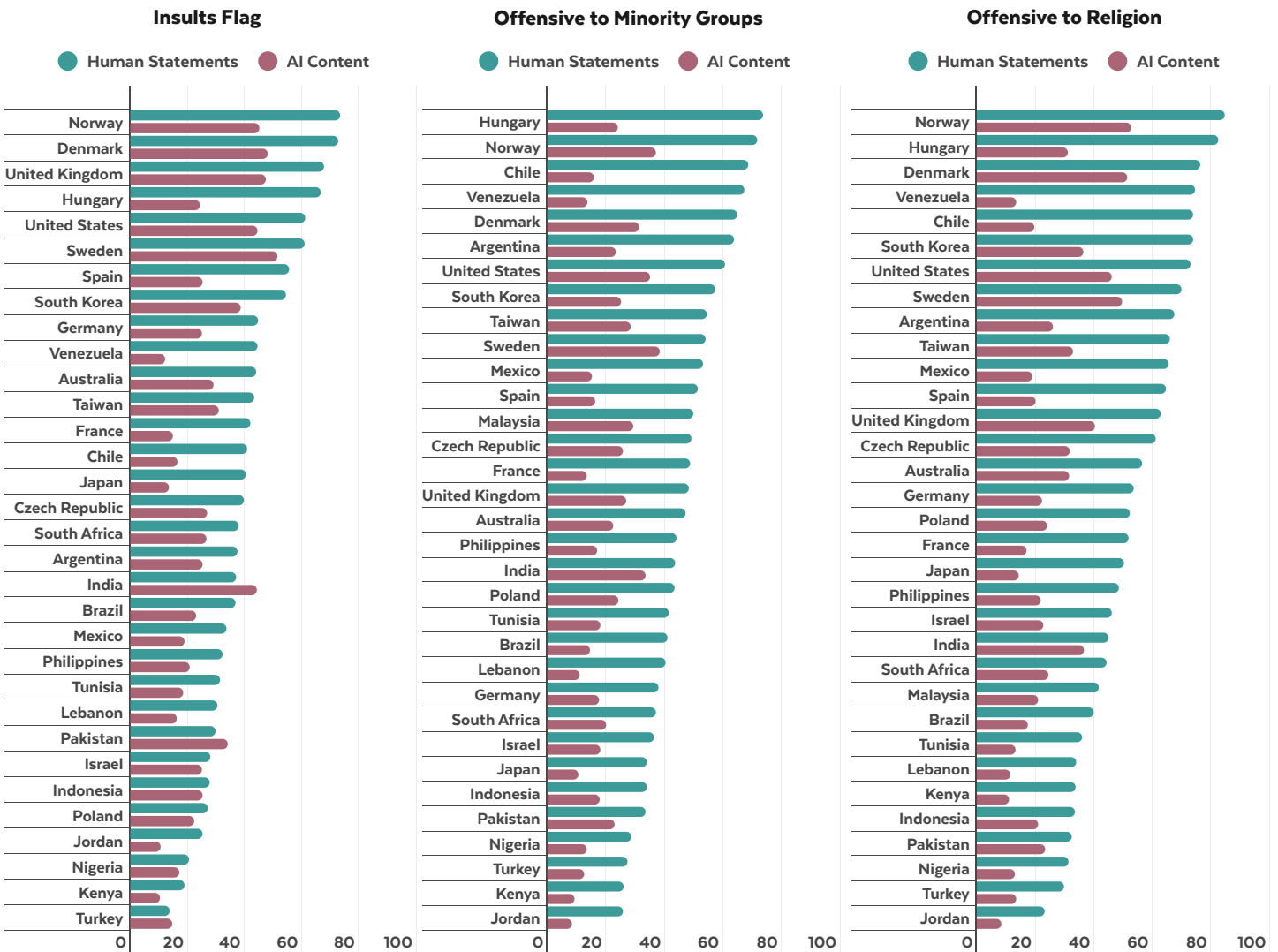


Allow AI: Insult The Flag



Likewise, people tend to think differently about content generated by AI compared to ordinary statements by individuals and the media, as illustrated in Figure 8. In almost all cases, tolerance is remarkably higher concerning the latter across all the sensitive issues that refer to the national flag, minorities, and someone’s religion and beliefs. This is particularly the case for the Spanish-speaking nations, Hungary, France, and Japan. The discrepancies are least pronounced in Sweden, the United Kingdom, India, and Pakistan.

Figure 8: Tolerance of AI-generated versus ordinary content



Note: The green bars refer to statements by ordinary people, and the red bars refer to AI-generated content.

The debate about whether the content generated by generative AI should be regulated and – if so – who should be responsible for doing so has become increasingly relevant and intense. On one hand, hate speech, conspiracy theories, misinformation, disinformation, and other potentially problematic material can be created and disseminated using generative AI. On the other hand, restrictions imposed by governments or AI developers may be biased and arbitrary and significantly restrict free speech and access to information. Regulation inherently limits individual autonomy and the free exchange of information and ideas, which could undermine the ability to hold governments accountable and diminish opportunities for generating and sharing valuable insights that facilitate human progress.

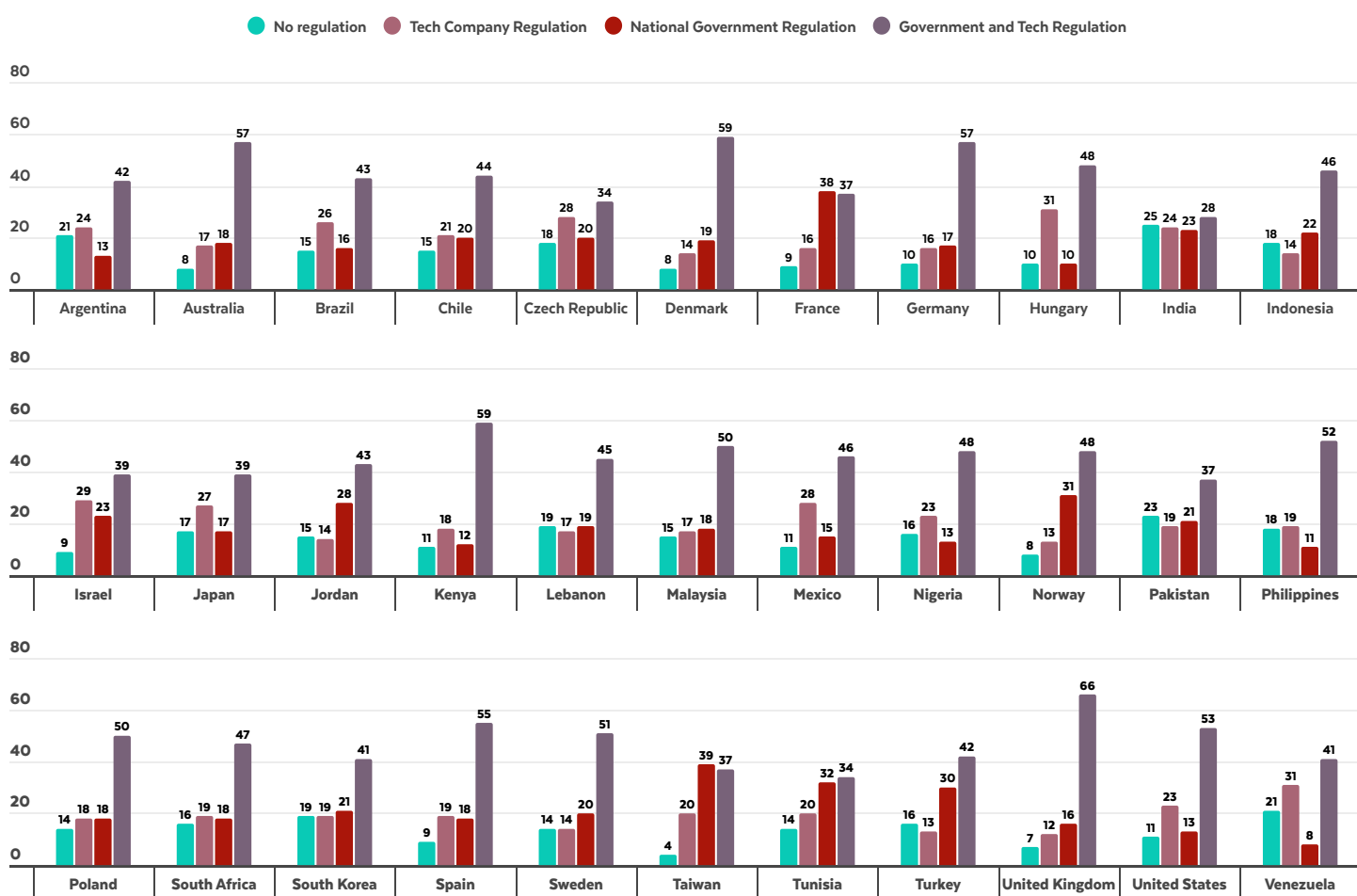
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In all countries apart from France and Taiwan, pluralities are in favor of generative AI being subjected to dual regulation, that is, regulated by both the tech companies providing these tools and the national government (see Figure 9). Our sample has no country with a plurality in favor of no regulation. Most opposition to regulation exists in India, Pakistan, and Venezuela, and the least opposition is found in a number of developed democracies, such as Australia, Denmark, Norway, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom.

Among those with a preference for only one enforcer of regulations, there are approximately an equal number of countries where more prefer tech companies to be responsible, where more like the government to be responsible, and where the two groups have approximately the same size.

Figure 9: Preferences for who - if any - should regulate generative AI



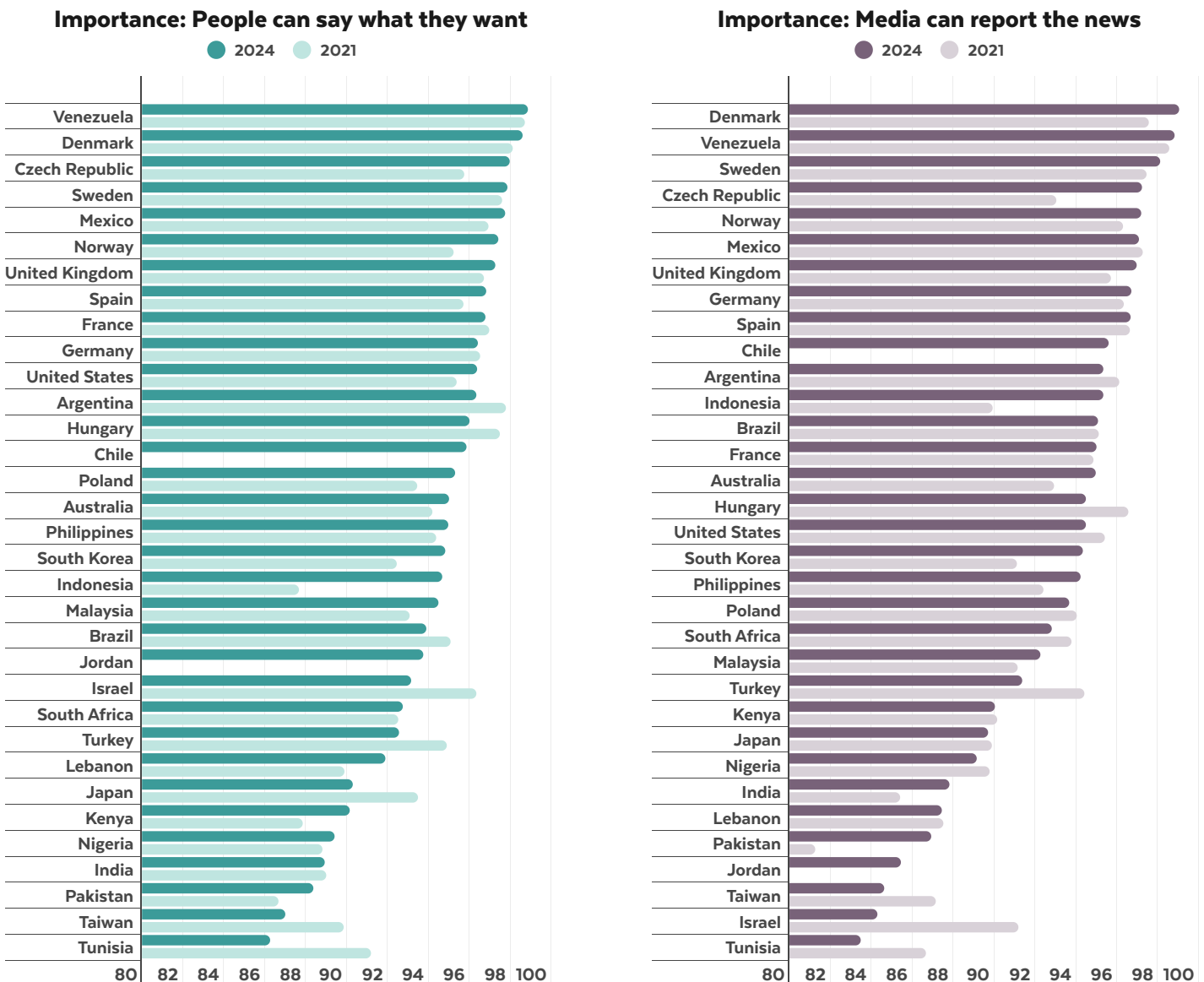
This picture is different from the preferences regarding the regulation of social media platforms (such as Facebook, X, YouTube, and Instagram) revealed in the 2021 report. Back then, more people supported some form of regulation rather than the idea that there should be no regulation. Moreover, among those who favored social media regulation, most preferred that social media companies take sole responsibility rather than governments. However, compared to the opinions about the regulation of generative AI, larger shares favored no regulation, and more people preferred only to allow regulation by the companies behind the social media rather than - exclusively or supplementary - government regulation. This means that people are generally more skeptical of AI tools concerning the generation and spread of sensitive content and more willing to allow governments to regulate their use.

6. Importance of free speech around the world

Responding to a question about “How important is it that people can say what they want”, “that media can report the news without government censorship”, and “that people can use the internet without government censorship”, supermajorities in all the surveyed countries express that these opportunities are either very important or important (see Figure 10). Across all countries, the median support is 93-95% concerning these three issues, basically identical to the levels in 2021.

Nonetheless, there is significant variation between nations. In the Americas and Europe, more people think that it is important to prohibit government censorship. Among these are high-quality democracies (e.g., Denmark, Sweden, and the Czech Republic) and recent democratic backsliders (Venezuela, Hungary, and Mexico).

Figure 10: Importance of free speech

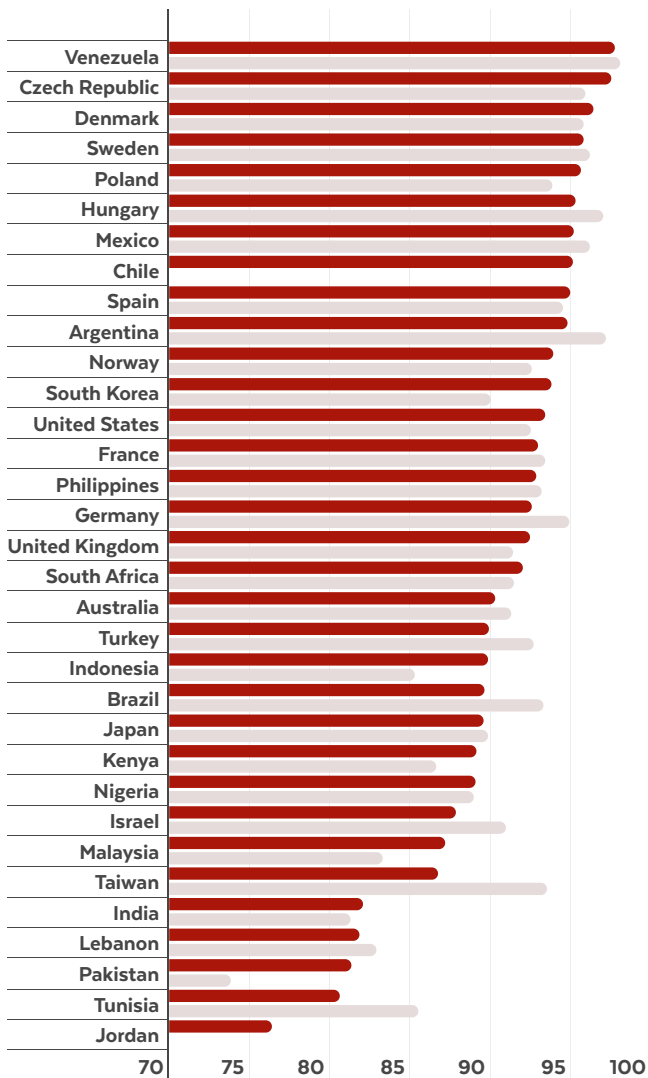




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Importance: People can use the Internet

● 2024 ● 2021





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The importance assigned to free speech issues is generally the lowest in Muslim-majority and Global South countries. However, many Taiwanese and Israelis also do not outright reject government censorship. Their status is likely affected by severely challenged security situations. Israel has experienced a large-scale deadly terrorist attack and, since then, has been in open conflict with Hamas in Gaza (and Hezbollah in Lebanon), causing a rise in insecurity and “rally-around-flag” effects besides many civilian and military casualties. In Taiwan, intensified aggressive rhetoric by the Chinese government and fear that China will copy Russia’s attack on Ukraine might have increased support for government censorship.¹⁶ The relevance of these current events is supported by the fact that Israel and Taiwan have witnessed some of the largest declines. Support for the idea that free speech is important has also decreased substantively regarding at least one of the three issues in Japan, Tunisia, and Turkey; the biggest increases are represented by Pakistan and Indonesia with respect to media freedom and freedom on the internet.

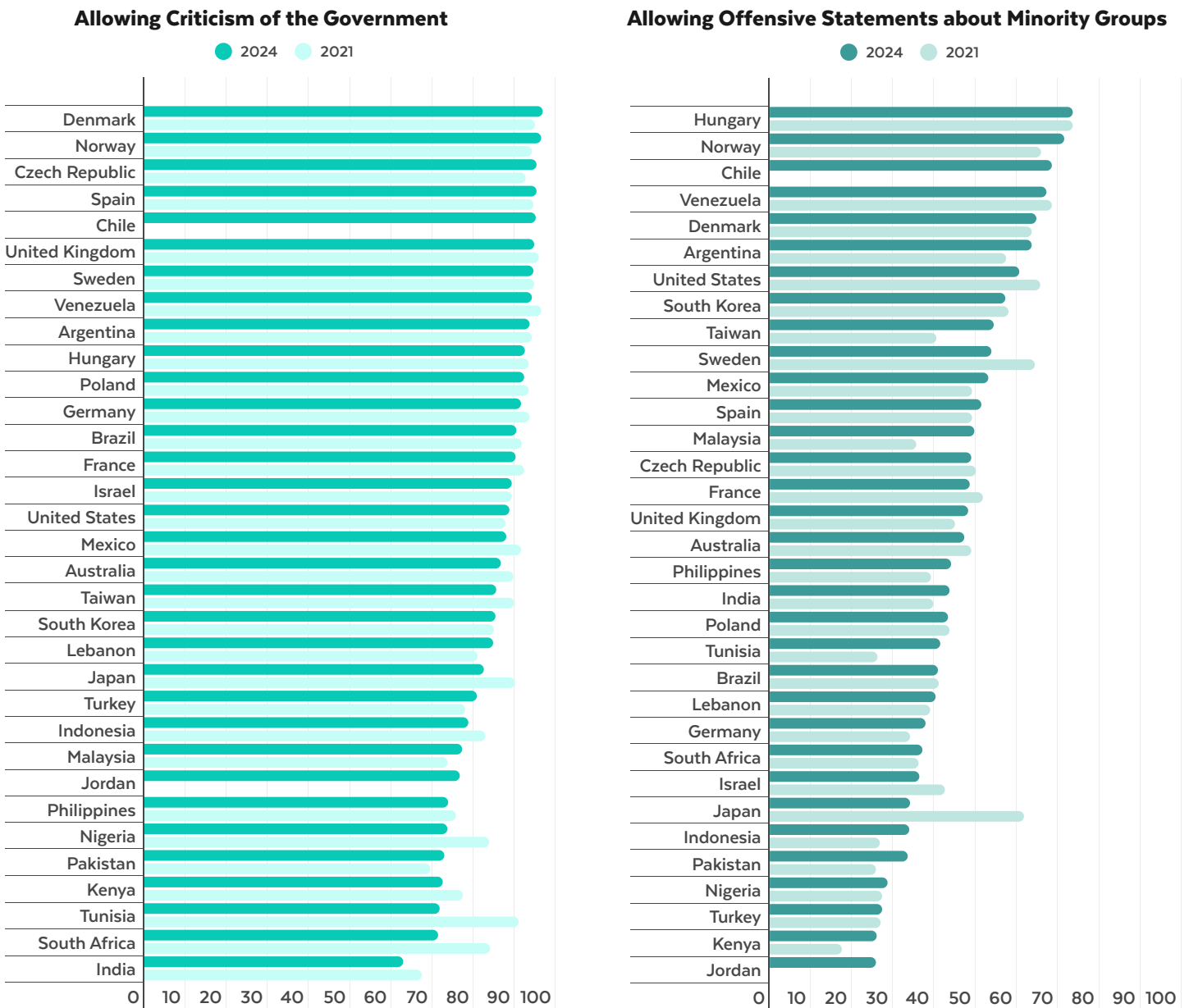
7. Moderate support for the expression of sensitive and costly statements

Saying that an abstract principle is important is one thing. Supporting free expression on sensitive issues or issues directly linked to (perceived) high costs for society is another. To shed light on the degree and type of such reservations, we have included seven questions in the survey: “Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly, OR should the government be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?” Five of these questions refer to statements that either criticize government policies, are offensive to minority groups, are offensive to the respondent’s religion or beliefs, are supportive of homosexual relationships, or are insulting the national flag.

People generally favor allowing criticism of the government; the median support across all countries is 90%. This is crucial for the ability and willingness to hold governments accountable. Only in India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and the four African countries in the sample, less than 75% of the population think the government should be allowed to prevent criticism. It should be considered that some respondents might be afraid to answer honestly to this survey question (despite promises of anonymity) due to overt or covert suppression of dissent, which takes place in several of these cases. That said, the differences between most countries on this issue measure are relatively modest.

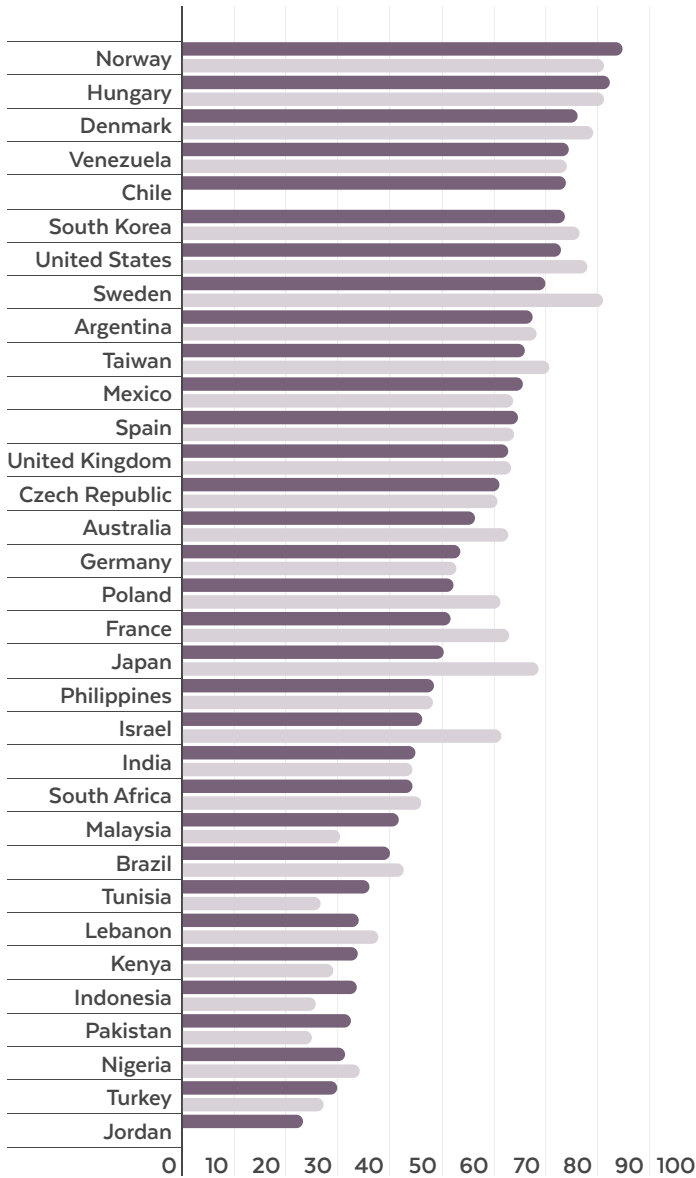
Nonetheless, Figure 11 shows that when statements concern sensitive issues, that is, minority groups, religion, homosexuals, and the national flag, the tolerance levels are considerably more limited and vary much more cross-nationally.

Figure 11: Tolerance of sensitive statements



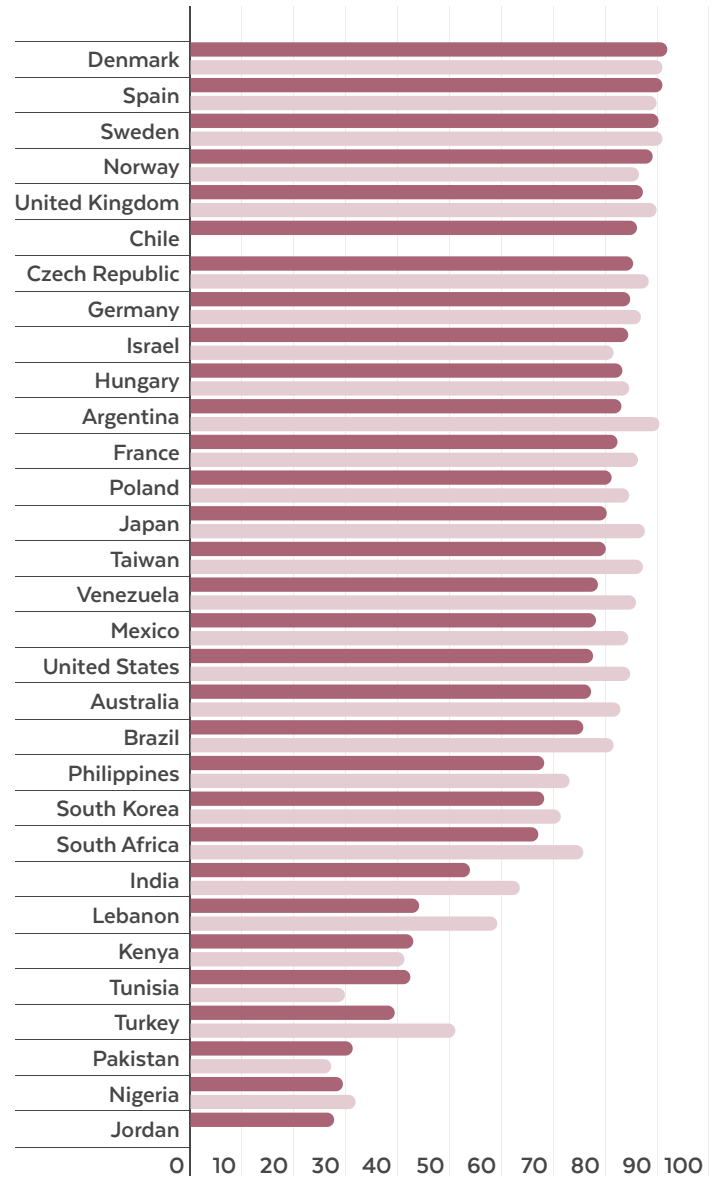
Allowing Offenses of Religion

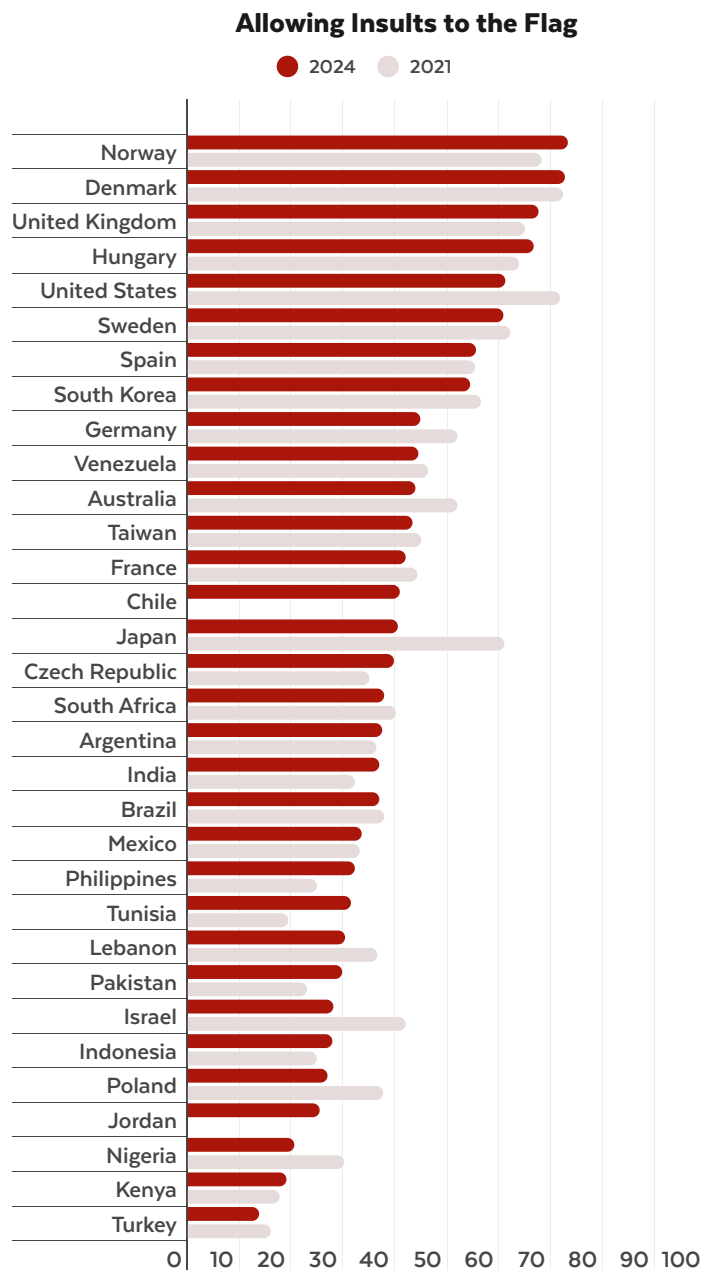
● 2024 ● 2021



Allowing Support for Homosexuality

● 2024 ● 2021





The shares of people who think that one should be able to offend minority groups on the one hand and insult the national flag on the other hand are quite similar, showing median support levels of 44% and 41%, respectively. In the cases in which there is a substantial difference in responses to these two questions, people are generally more tolerant of statements offensive to minority groups in Latin American countries and the Philippines, Poland, and Taiwan, while they are more tolerant of insults to the national flag in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

There is less than 50% support for free speech with respect to statements offensive to minority groups in 20 of the 33 countries, with the lowest support levels found in Jordan, Kenya, and Turkey at around 26%. Concerning insulting statements about the national flag, an even higher number of populations are generally disapproving (23 out of 33) – out of which less than 30% of the citizens in Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Nigeria, Poland, and Turkey are willing to allow such speech.



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The tolerance is somewhat higher concerning statements offensive to the respondent's religion and beliefs (median 64%) and much higher concerning statements supportive of homosexual relationships (median 84%). Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey are the only nations where less than 40% are willing to allow both kinds of statements.¹⁷

Overall, there is widespread acceptance of government restrictions on free speech regarding sensitive issues that may be interpreted as blasphemous, insulting, pejorative, or discriminatory. In four countries (Denmark, Hungary, Norway, and the United States), at least 60% believe that people should be able to make each kind of statement addressed above rather than allowing the government to prevent people from doing so in some circumstances.

It is also interesting to note that none of the global median values have changed since 2021. However, there are some noteworthy developments in individual countries. For instance, the Japanese have become remarkably less tolerant, particularly concerning statements that insult the national flag or are offensive toward minority groups or a respondent's religion. Tunisians have become less tolerant of criticism of the government, but seemingly more tolerant of the other types of statements.

Our survey includes responses to two additional issues that shed light on whether support for free speech is conditional on the circumstances. The respondents were asked the following question: "Do you think media organizations should be able to publish information about these types of things [a) information that might destabilize your country's economy; b) information that concerns sensitive issues related to national security] OR that the government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these types of things in some circumstances?"

Figure 12 demonstrates that, overall, people are more concerned about information that can harm national security (median value 46%) compared to information that can destabilize the economy (median value 69%). Among the surveyed countries, the difference in responses is relatively large in all but Brazil, Nigeria, and Venezuela. Moreover, the country rankings differ significantly from those we have discussed above concerning general principles and critical and offensive statements. This is particularly the case with respect to information that can undermine national security. All the Latin American countries are at the top, whereas Israel (likely due to the enduring conflict with its neighbors) and the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, and Australia are at the bottom. This shows that support for free speech is not unconditional, even in long-established liberal democracies. However, it is unclear why the citizens of these countries demonstrate more hesitation towards the publication of sensitive information than elsewhere. Concerning information that might destabilize the economy, Chileans, Germans, and Argentinians express the highest level of tolerance.

Figure 12: Tolerance of costly statements



Compared to 2021, Poles are leaning more towards letting the government prevent the publication of security-sensitive information. The war in neighboring Ukraine is a possible explanation for this change. Contrasting trends are identifiable in Malaysia, Kenya, Tunisia, and Pakistan. The populations of these countries – together with the Taiwanese – have also become more tolerant of information with the potential to destabilize the economy.

8. Systematic differences in support for speech between social groups

While national averages provide insight into speech support, they often obscure significant differences among demographic groups. This is evident in our findings. Notable disparities exist between men and women and between young, middle-aged, and older individuals.

However, consistent patterns across countries are rare. The groups expressing the most substantial support for free speech vary significantly from one country to another on many of the evaluated issues. Nonetheless, there are some interesting exceptions. Older generations tend to be less tolerant of statements that insult the national flag or pose national security risks but more accepting of government criticism (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Support for free speech among different age groups

Allow Statements: Criticize Government's Policies

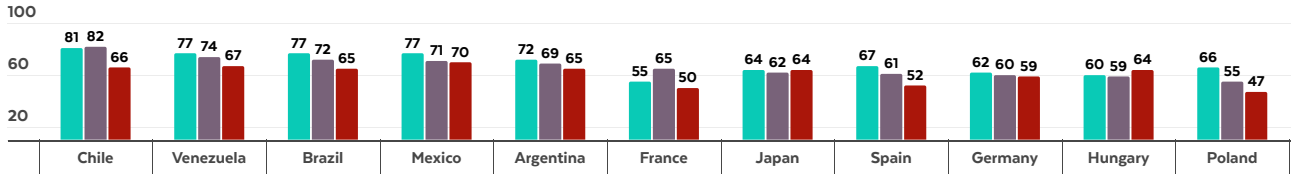


WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

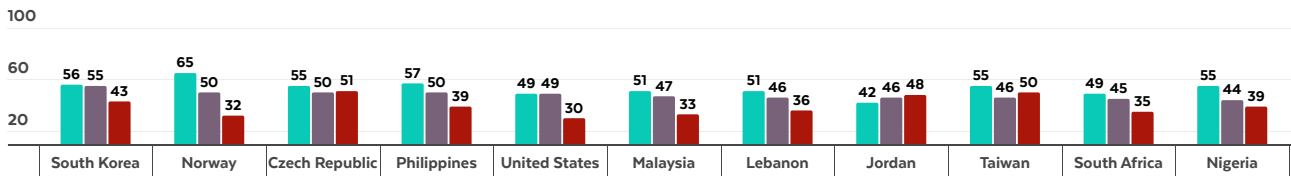


Allow Media: National Security

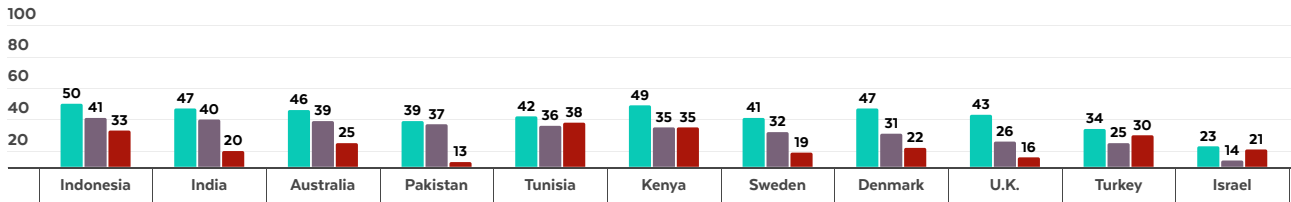
18-34 35-55 55+



18-34 35-55 55+

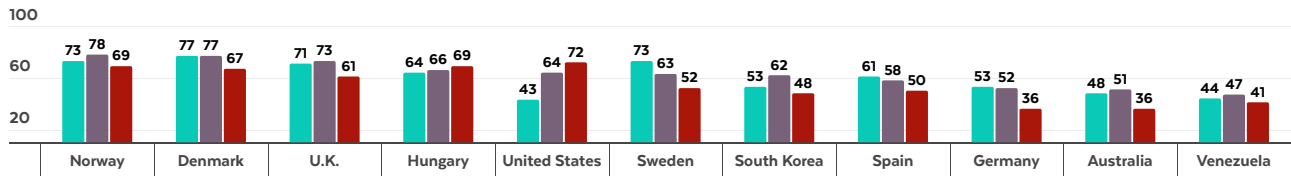


18-34 35-55 55+

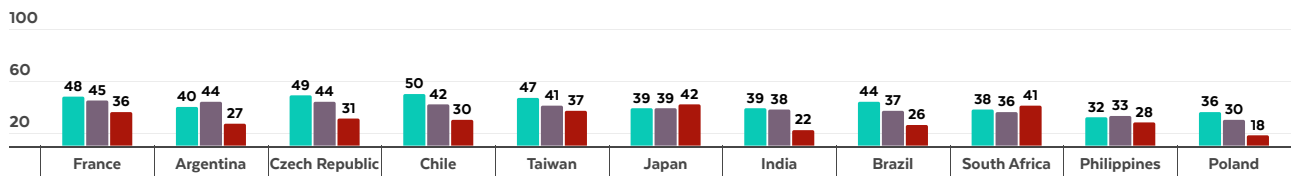


Allow Statements: Insult The National Flag

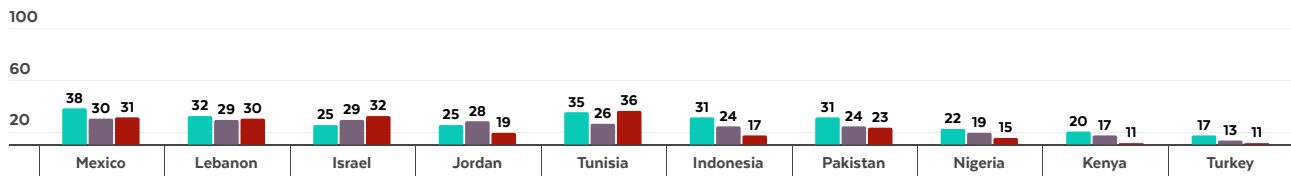
18-34 35-55 55+



18-34 35-55 55+



18-34 35-55 55+



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

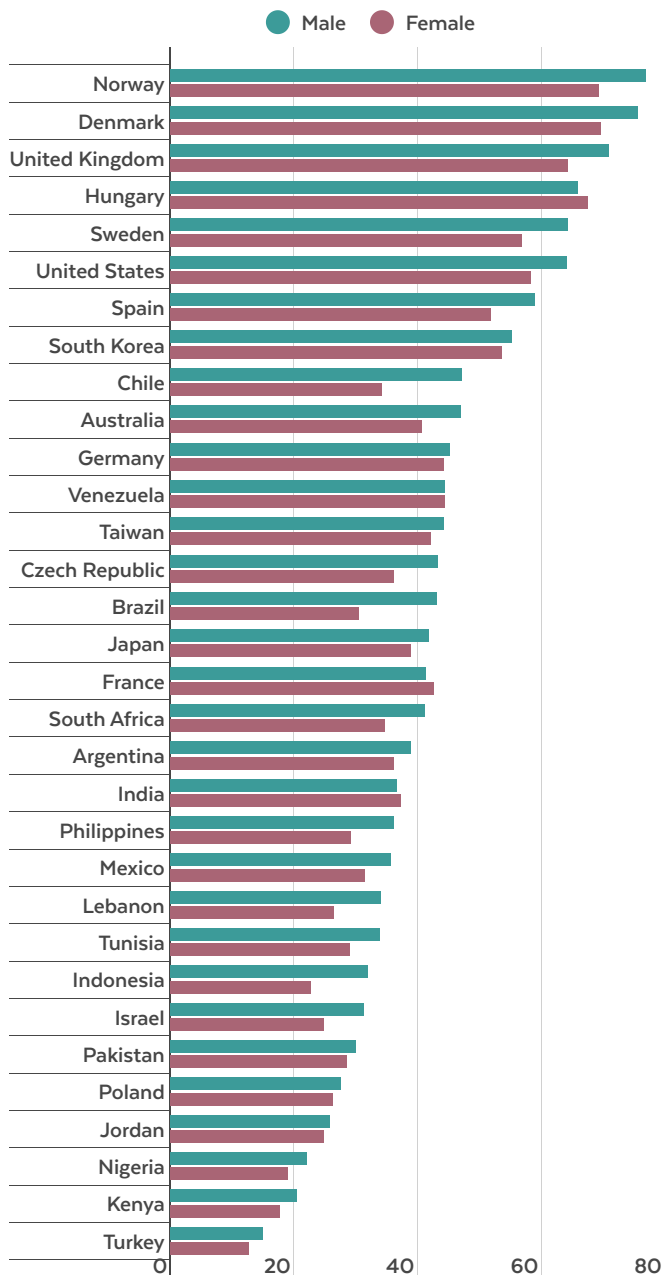


Only Tunisia (government criticism) and the United States (insult of the national flag) show patterns that deviate substantially from these general tendencies. Some of the largest differences between age groups are found in Australia, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, and the United States (government criticism); Brazil, India, Argentina, and Chile (insult of the national flag); and the Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia (national security).

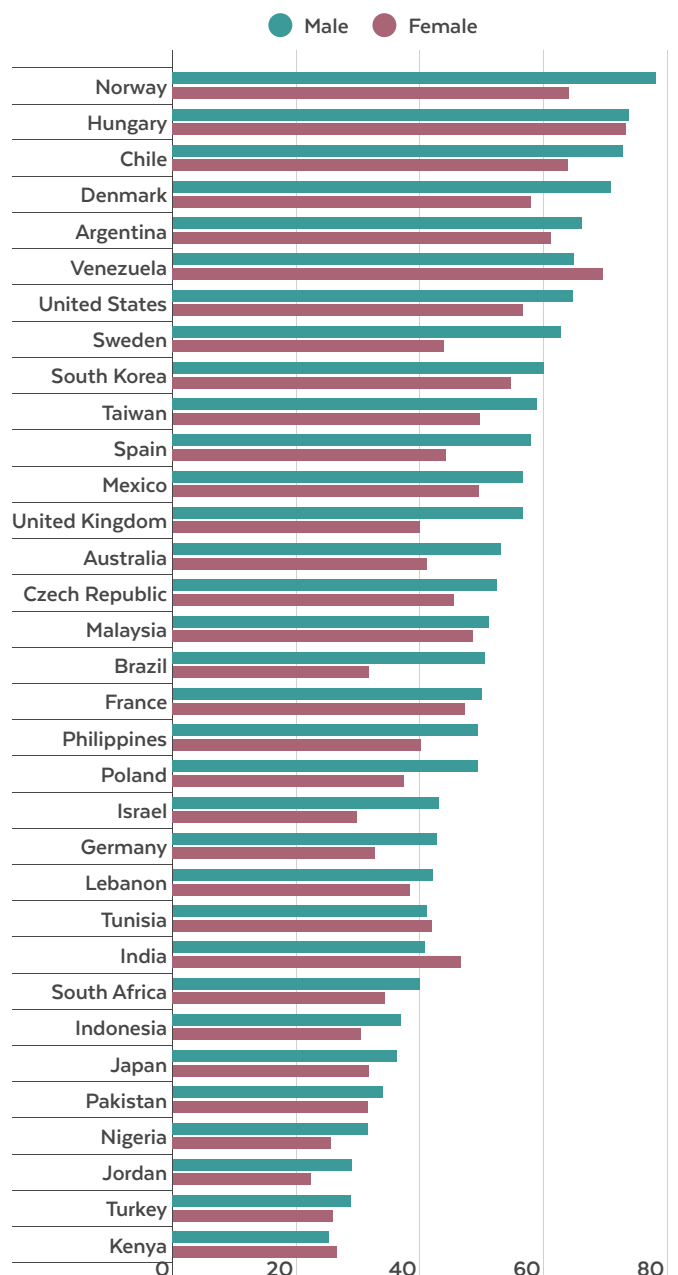
Similar group discrepancies appear when we disaggregate the findings by gender, as shown in Figure 14. There are many differences within countries and several consistent patterns between countries. With only few exceptions, women are, on average, more supportive of government restrictions on statements that are offensive to minority groups, their own religion or beliefs, or the national flag. However, they are more tolerant toward statements that support homosexual relationships.

Figure 14: Support for allowing sensitive statements by gender

Allow Statements: Insult the national flag



Allow Statements: Offensive to minority groups

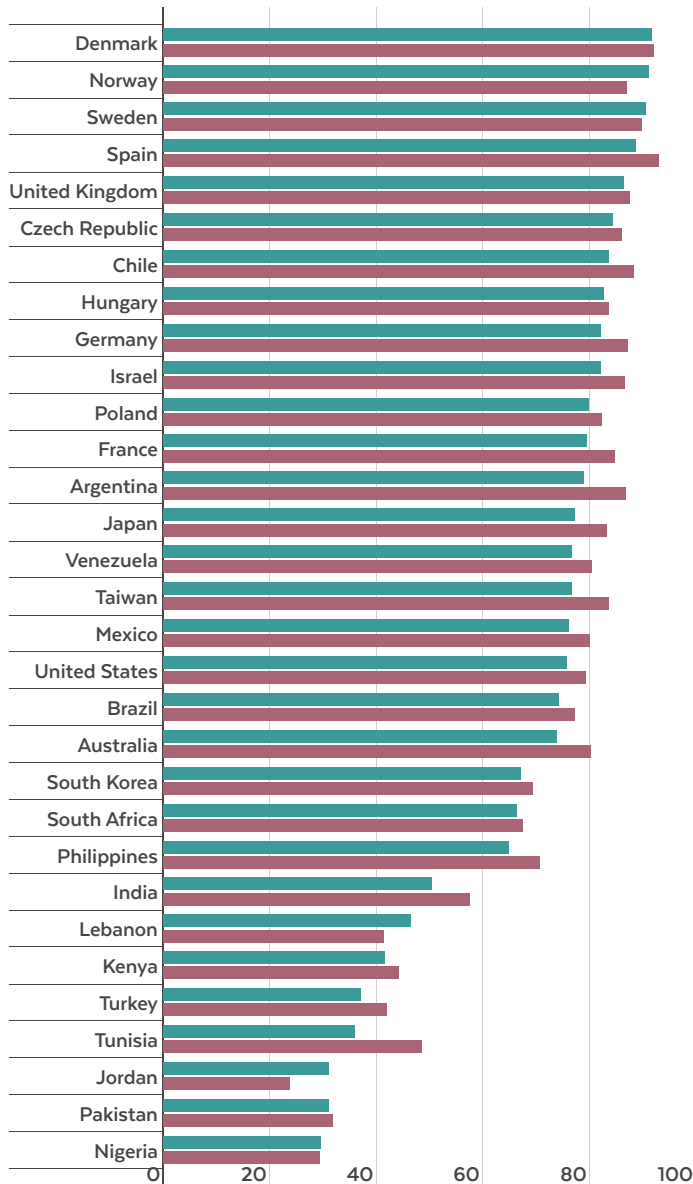


WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?



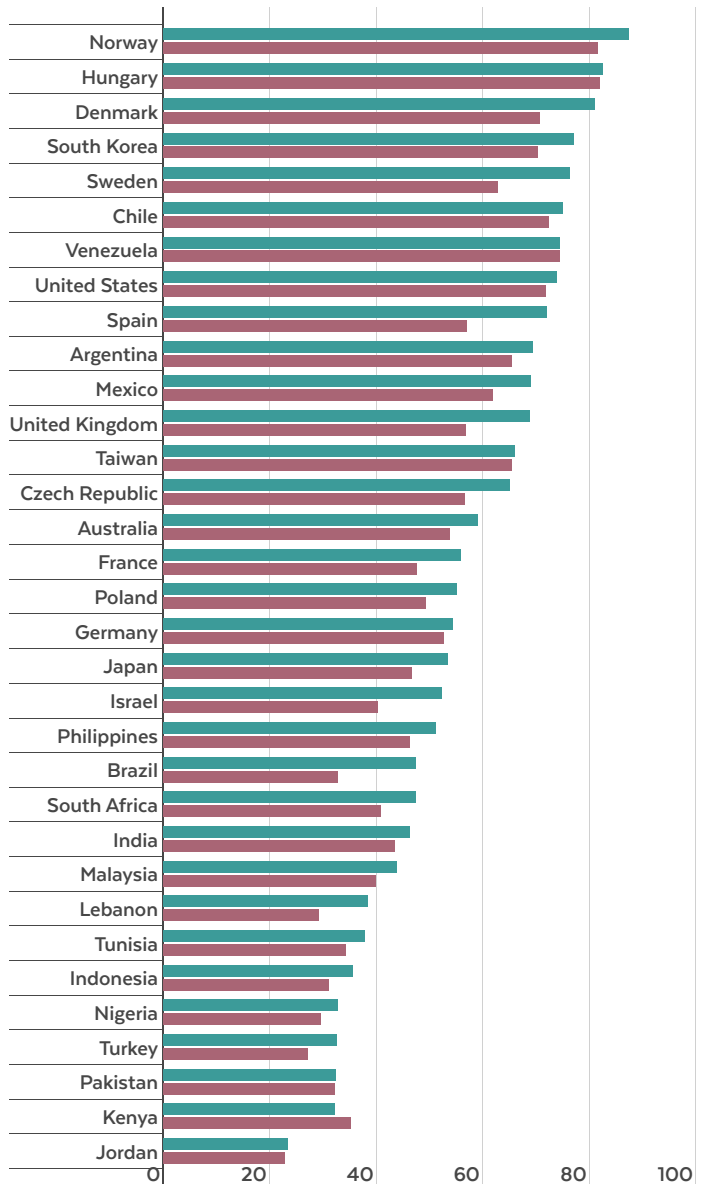
Allow Statements: Support for homosexual relationships

● Male ● Female



Allow Statements: Offensive to religion

● Male ● Female



Taken together, women tend to assign more weight than men to being inclusive and preventing statements offensive to various groups even when this comes at the expense of free speech. But this difference does not apply to criticism of the government (not depicted), where the levels tend to be quite similar for woman and men within the individual countries. The only major exceptions are Jordan, and particularly Tunisia, where men show stronger support for the right to criticize the government.

9. In the US, men, the young, and college graduates show the steepest declines in support for free speech

The United States has a strong historical tradition of protecting free speech, rooted in the First Amendment of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to express opinions without government interference. This tradition is currently under pressure, and the boundaries of free speech are continually tested and debated by the legal system and politicians and activists from all parts of the political spectrum. Threats about hardening libel laws and stripping the broadcast license from critical media accused of airing fake news, government requests to remove controversial content (about Covid) from social media, laws targeting the wholesale removal of social media apps like TikTok, continued infights about formal and informal regulation of hate speech, and the banning of books from public libraries are just a few examples illustrating that free speech is no longer a given in the US context.¹⁸

The country rankings presented above show that Americans do not express the highest level of support for free speech on any of the issues covered in this report. The closest is fifth place (among 33) concerning tolerance of insulting the national flag. The United States is generally placed in the upper third (9th out of 33 on The Future of Free Speech Index). This means that it is not totally off track compared to the other developed Western democracies. However, the general support has decreased third-most (after Japan and Israel), and regarding the tolerance of statements that praise homosexual relationships, the United States is ranked 18th. These findings beg several questions. Which groups in American society are more willing to let the government prevent people from making particular kinds of statements? To what degree have these tendencies changed since our previous survey in 2021?

The distribution of answers across various categories presented in Table 1 reveals some interesting differences between groups and issues. Like women in other parts of the world, American women express levels of support for the ability to criticize the government publicly that are not significantly different from American men. But they are less willing to allow statements that are offensive to minority groups, offensive to their religion, or insult the national flag, and more willing to allow statements supportive of homosexual relationships. Since 2021, American women only show a substantial decline of more than five percentage points in their acceptance of insults to the American flag, while American men have decreased their free speech support on all issues but criticism of the government.

Table 1: Support for different types of free speech among different groups of Americans

		Critical of government policies	Offensive to minority groups	Offensive to your religion and beliefs	Support homosexual relationships	Insult the national flag
Gender	Female	89 (-2)	57 (-1)	72 (-2)	79 (-4)	58 (-9)
	Male	89 (-1)	65 (-8)	74 (-8)	76 (-10)	64 (-13)
Age	18-34	78 (-3)	47 (-12)	57 (-14)	59 (-20)	43 (-28)
	35-54	89 (-2)	60 (-9)	72 (-8)	80 (-7)	64 (-10)
	55+	96 (-3)	70 (+1)	84 (-2)	88 (0)	72 (-1)
Education	High school or less	86 (+2)	59 (-5)	68 (-6)	72 (-7)	54 (-10)
	College, 2 years	91 (+3)	62 (-3)	75 (-3)	82 (-5)	64 (-9)
	College, 4 years	87 (-5)	61 (-10)	73 (-11)	76 (-13)	64 (-17)
	Post-graduate	94 (-2)	61 (-8)	82 (-3)	87 (-4)	70 (-12)

Note: The numbers in brackets indicate change since 2021.

Compared to Americans above 55, young Americans between 18 and 34 are less tolerant of all kinds of statements, with middle-aged placed somewhere in between. The overall share of young Americans tolerating sensitive statements remains relatively high. However, there have been steep increases since 2021 in willingness to let the government prevent insults to the national flag and statements that are offensive to one’s own religion and beliefs or supportive of homosexual relationships. The numbers indicate that previous trends of rising tolerance and open-mindedness have been reversed or at least put to a halt.¹⁹ It might be that the current political climate with strong disputes over “liberal political correctness” means that intolerant respondents now feel less subjected to so-called social desirability bias than in 2021, meaning that the expressed level of toleration in the previous survey was inflated. Moreover, one should consider that the division into subgroups with relatively few respondents in each makes the results more uncertain.

Nonetheless, this finding speaks to the debate about democratic commitments of young people and to what extent the difference reflects a life cycle effect (young people will grow more supportive when they come of age) or a generational effect (those young today will continue being less tolerant than previous cohorts).²⁰ If the generational effect is dominant, the patterns do not bode well for free speech (and democracy) in the future, but we cannot tell for sure which effect drives the difference based on the available evidence. Related to this question, it is important to note that the toleration of offensive statements has declined drastically among the middle-aged, and the young in particular.

Americans with higher levels of educational achievement generally express higher levels of support for free speech across different kinds of statements. The only exception is statements offensive to minority groups, where there is hardly any difference. Moreover, it does not seem to make much of a difference for opinions about free speech whether Americans have 2-year or 4-year college degrees. Looking at the trends since 2021, all educational groups

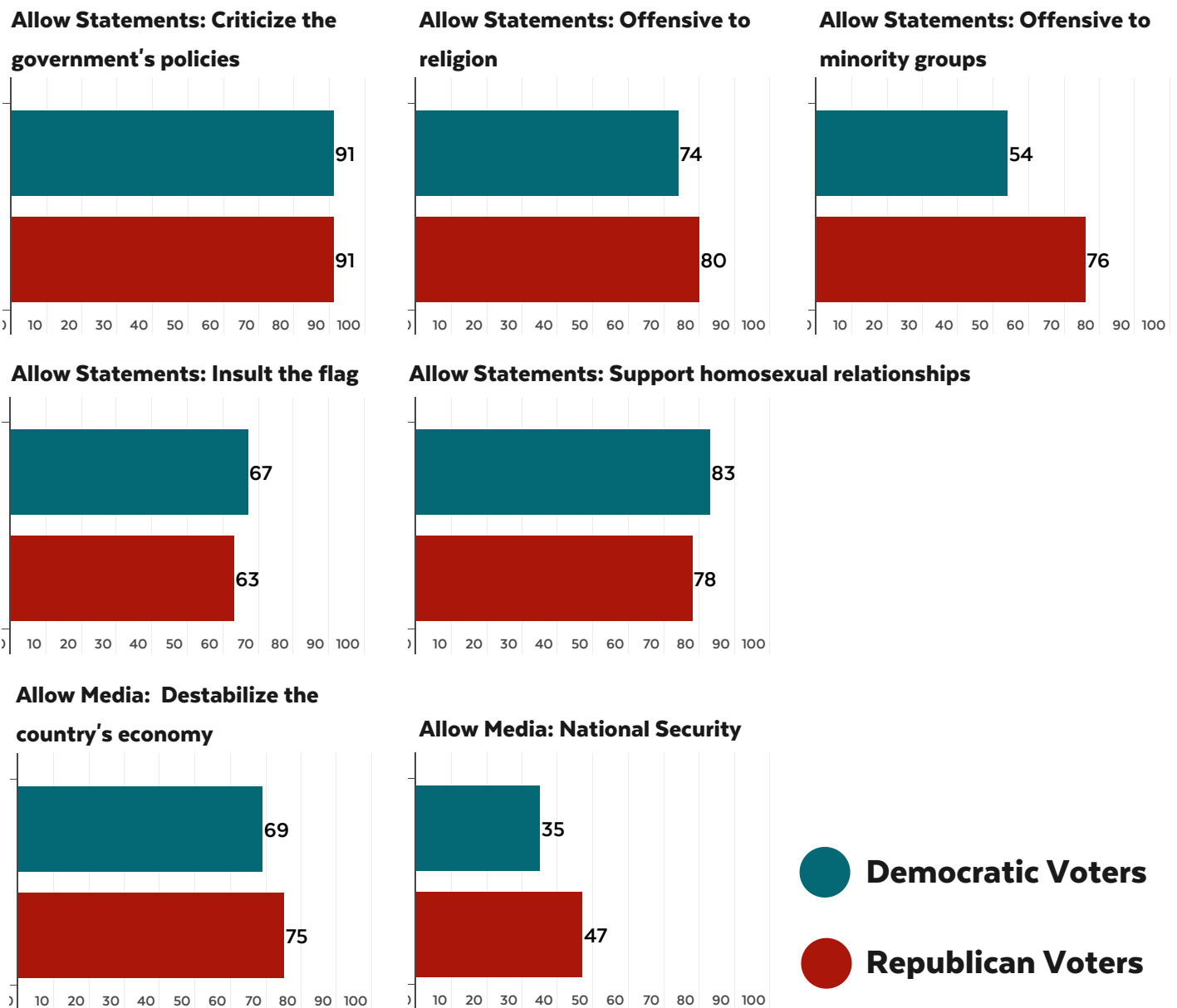


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express a higher willingness to let the government prevent sensitive statements. In particular, people with four years of college have decreased their support for free speech, and insults to the US flag are now tolerated much less across all levels of education.

Trump supporters and Harris supporters are equally willing to let people criticize the government²¹ and tolerate insults to the national flag (see Figure 15). However, Trump voters express higher support for free speech in relation to offensive statements concerning a respondent’s own religion and beliefs, and in particular minorities, whereas Biden/Harris supporters show more willingness to let people express support of homosexual relationships.²² Interestingly, Trump voters also, to a higher degree, think that free speech should be prioritized in connection to information that might harm national security or destabilize the economy. This indicates that their support for free speech is relatively deeply rooted and less conditional than some might expect.²³

Figure 15: Opinions on free speech issues by presidential vote



10. Conclusion

This report highlights both widespread support for free speech and significant cross-national and demographic differences. While majorities in nearly all nations surveyed affirm the importance of free speech, this support is often conditional, particularly when it comes to sensitive topics. Scandinavian countries, including Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, along with democratic backsliders such as Hungary and Venezuela, exhibit the highest levels of endorsement. In contrast, Muslim-majority nations and countries in the Global South generally show lower support.

A key finding has been the decline in free speech support in several countries, most notably Japan, Israel, and the United States. Although some nations, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have seen slight increases, these gains are marginal and do not alter their lower rankings in overall support. The report has also identified a growing skepticism toward the use of generative AI in producing controversial content. Concerns are particularly strong regarding AI-generated deepfakes of politicians. There is widespread agreement across most countries that generative AI should be subject to dual regulation by both governments and tech companies. This stands in contrast to preferences regarding social media regulation, where a larger share of people favor self-regulation by the platforms themselves.

Support for free speech varies significantly depending on the type of speech in question. While there is broad agreement on the right to criticize the government, tolerance declines when speech involves statements offensive to minorities, religious beliefs, or national symbols. The willingness to allow criticism of religion has declined in countries such as Sweden, Poland, France, Japan, and Israel, while tolerance of statements endorsing homosexual relationships has decreased in India, Lebanon, South Africa, the United States, and Mexico.

Demographic differences also shape attitudes toward free speech. Women generally express lower tolerance for offensive speech but show higher support for statements that approve of homosexual relationships. Older individuals tend to be more tolerant of criticism of government policies but less tolerant of statements that insult national symbols or pose potential threats to national security.

In the United States, declining support for free speech is particularly pronounced among men, younger individuals, and college graduates. The shift is especially notable in decreasing tolerance for statements endorsing homosexual relationships and insults to the national flag.

These findings raise critical questions about the future of free speech amid shifting societal norms, rising political polarization, and rapid technological advancement. As societies grapple with balancing freedom of expression with concerns over misinformation, hate speech, and social stability, the report underscores the need for nuanced discussions and policies that protect fundamental rights while addressing emerging challenges in the digital age.

Appendix

Survey methodology

Surveys were collected in October 2024 by YouGov and their worldwide network of survey partners. All survey answers were collected online from voluntary participants who were already part of YouGov’s online survey panel (or YouGov partners’ online survey panel). All participants were recruited based on informed consent and were completely anonymous. The survey adheres to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which regulates how personal data is collected, processed, stored, and shared. Moreover, the survey has received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval by Aarhus University’s Research Ethics Committee, ensuring that the study complies with ethical guidelines to protect participants from harm and ensure informed consent. The sampling relied on census-based quotas referring to age, gender, and region (and education and ethnicity in some countries). The survey methodology, including many questions, is similar to the methodology used in our previous report (Who Cares about Free Speech?) based on data collected in 2021, which we employ to identify trends. The only significant differences are that two countries have been replaced (Chile and Jordan have been included, while Egypt and Russia have been excluded due to legal challenges associated with data collection), and this time around, we have included some questions on generative AI rather than social media.

Survey collection in 33 countries

	Number of respondents	Representativeness and weighting
United States	1628	Gender; Age; Region; Ethnicity
United Kingdom	1614	Gender; Age; Region; Education; Social grade
France	1613	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Germany	1651	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Spain	1609	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Denmark	1630	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Norway	1640	Gender; Age; Region
Sweden	1632	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Poland	1614	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Hungary	1628	Gender; Age; Region; Education



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

Czech Republic	1623	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Turkey	1630	Gender; Age; Region
Argentina	1641	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Brazil	1618	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Mexico	1613	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Venezuela	1628	Gender; Age; Region
Chile	1635	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Pakistan	1622	Gender; Age
India	1609	Gender; Age; Region; City tier; Education
Japan	1618	Gender; Age; Region; Education
South Korea	1607	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Taiwan	1638	Gender; Age; Region
Indonesia	1618	Gender; Age; Region
Philippines	1619	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Malaysia	1610	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Australia	1612	Gender; Age; Region; Education
Tunisia	1632	Gender; Age
Lebanon	871	Gender; Age
Israel	1644	Gender; Age; Region
Jordan	1656	Gender; Age
Nigeria	1611	Gender; Age; Region
Kenya	1601	Gender; Age; Region
South Africa	1656	Gender; Age; Region



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?



Survey responses

How important is it that people can say what they want without government censorship in our country?

Country	Not important at all	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important
United States	1	3	26	70
United Kingdom	0	2	31	66
France	1	3	30	67
Germany	1	3	22	75
Spain	0	3	14	83
Denmark	0	1	24	74
Norway	1	2	19	79
Sweden	0	2	13	85
Poland	1	4	27	69
Hungary	1	3	16	80
Czech Republic	0	2	21	77
Turkey	2	5	23	69
Argentina	1	2	10	86
Brazil	2	4	13	80
Mexico	0	2	15	83
Venezuela	0	1	13	86
Chile	1	3	11	85
Pakistan	4	8	35	54
India	3	8	32	57
Japan	2	7	34	57
South Korea	1	5	41	54
Taiwan	1	12	40	47
Indonesia	1	4	32	63
Philippines	1	4	33	62
Malaysia	1	4	44	50
Australia	1	4	36	59
Tunisia	2	12	37	50
Lebanon	2	6	34	58
Israel	1	5	41	52
Jordan	1	5	43	51
Nigeria	2	8	25	65
Kenya	4	6	22	68
South Africa	2	5	23	69



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

How important is it that the media can report the news without government censorship in our country?

Country	Not important at all	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important
United States	1	4	22	72
United Kingdom	1	2	23	74
France	1	4	30	65
Germany	1	2	21	76
Spain	1	3	10	87
Denmark	0	1	19	80
Norway	1	2	13	84
Sweden	0	2	9	89
Poland	1	5	25	68
Hungary	2	3	17	78
Czech Republic	0	2	20	77
Turkey	3	6	24	67
Argentina	1	4	14	82
Brazil	2	3	14	81
Mexico	0	3	13	84
Venezuela	0	1	16	83
Chile	1	3	11	84
Pakistan	4	9	30	57
India	3	9	34	54
Japan	2	9	36	53
South Korea	1	5	38	57
Taiwan	2	13	43	41
Indonesia	1	4	31	64
Philippines	1	5	29	66
Malaysia	2	6	42	50
Australia	1	4	31	64
Tunisia	6	11	40	44
Lebanon	5	7	37	51
Israel	6	10	41	43
Jordan	6	9	42	44
Nigeria	3	8	25	64
Kenya	3	7	19	71
South Africa	2	5	23	70





WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

How important is it that people can use the internet without government censorship in our country?

Country	Not important at all	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important
United States	1	5	29	64
United Kingdom	2	6	35	57
France	1	6	30	63
Germany	2	6	28	65
Spain	1	4	20	75
Denmark	0	3	29	67
Norway	2	4	23	71
Sweden	1	4	15	81
Poland	1	3	26	70
Hungary	1	4	15	80
Czech Republic	0	2	20	78
Turkey	4	6	27	63
Argentina	1	4	13	82
Brazil	4	7	17	72
Mexico	1	4	19	76
Venezuela	1	2	22	75
Chile	2	3	12	83
Pakistan	7	12	29	52
India	6	12	34	48
Japan	2	9	31	58
South Korea	1	5	33	60
Taiwan	2	11	37	49
Indonesia	2	8	36	54
Philippines	1	6	34	59
Malaysia	2	11	43	45
Australia	3	7	39	52
Tunisia	6	14	41	40
Lebanon	7	11	37	45
Israel	4	8	35	53
Jordan	9	15	41	36
Nigeria	4	7	27	62
Kenya	4	7	23	66
South Africa	2	6	24	68



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?



Please indicate who - if any - should be responsible for regulating content created by generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT):

Country	There should be no regulation	The companies should regulate content	The national government should regulate	Both companies and the national government should regulate
United States	11	23	13	53
United Kingdom	7	12	16	66
France	9	16	38	37
Germany	10	16	17	57
Spain	9	19	18	55
Denmark	8	14	19	59
Norway	8	13	31	48
Sweden	14	14	20	51
Poland	14	18	18	50
Hungary	10	31	10	48
Czech Republic	18	28	20	34
Turkey	16	13	30	42
Argentina	21	24	13	42
Brazil	15	26	16	43
Mexico	11	28	15	46
Venezuela	21	31	8	41
Chile	15	21	20	44
Pakistan	23	19	21	37
India	25	24	23	28
Japan	17	27	17	39
South Korea	19	19	21	41
Taiwan	4	20	39	37
Indonesia	18	14	22	46
Philippines	18	19	11	52
Malaysia	15	17	18	50
Australia	8	17	18	57
Tunisia	14	20	32	34
Lebanon	19	17	19	45
Israel	9	29	23	39
Jordan	15	14	28	43
Nigeria	16	23	13	48
Kenya	11	18	12	59
South Africa	16	19	18	47

WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?



Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that your ability to speak freely about political matters in this country has ... ?

Country	Worsened a lot	Worsened somewhat	Stayed the same	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
United States	13	19	44	16	8
United Kingdom	14	21	55	7	4
France	17	22	46	9	6
Germany	20	22	47	8	4
Spain	14	15	54	10	7
Denmark	5	16	75	3	1
Norway	5	15	72	5	3
Sweden	8	17	66	6	3
Poland	11	11	42	21	14
Hungary	26	16	43	10	6
Czech Republic	13	14	59	9	5
Turkey	39	16	26	11	8
Argentina	11	14	28	23	25
Brazil	18	14	28	19	21
Mexico	6	10	33	26	26
Venezuela	39	18	25	10	8
Chile	4	8	40	24	23
Pakistan	25	15	21	20	19
India	4	9	25	29	33
Japan	4	8	67	17	4
South Korea	17	13	26	26	18
Taiwan	5	10	57	23	6
Indonesia	5	11	32	32	19
Philippines	3	7	37	35	19
Malaysia	6	12	42	26	14
Australia	9	15	55	13	9
Tunisia	6	14	28	27	25
Lebanon	8	16	47	19	10
Israel	8	21	52	12	7
Jordan	9	12	47	22	10
Nigeria	9	17	26	21	27
Kenya	9	18	12	24	37
South Africa	3	7	31	26	33



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?

Statements that criticize the government's policies

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	89	11
United Kingdom	95	5
France	90	10
Germany	92	8
Spain	95	5
Denmark	97	3
Norway	96	4
Sweden	95	5
Poland	92	8
Hungary	92	8
Czech Republic	95	5
Turkey	81	19
Argentina	94	6
Brazil	90	10
Mexico	88	12
Venezuela	94	6
Chile	95	5
Pakistan	73	27
India	63	37
Japan	82	18
South Korea	85	15
Taiwan	85	15
Indonesia	79	21
Philippines	74	26
Malaysia	77	23
Australia	87	13
Tunisia	72	28
Lebanon	85	15
Israel	89	11
Jordan	77	23
Nigeria	74	26
Kenya	72	28
South Africa	71	29



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?



Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?

Statements that are offensive to minority groups

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	61	39
United Kingdom	48	52
France	49	51
Germany	38	62
Spain	51	49
Denmark	65	35
Norway	72	28
Sweden	54	46
Poland	43	57
Hungary	74	26
Czech Republic	49	51
Turkey	27	73
Argentina	64	36
Brazil	41	59
Mexico	53	47
Venezuela	67	33
Chile	68	32
Pakistan	33	67
India	44	56
Japan	34	66
South Korea	57	43
Taiwan	54	46
Indonesia	34	66
Philippines	44	56
Malaysia	50	50
Australia	47	53
Tunisia	41	59
Lebanon	40	60
Israel	36	64
Jordan	26	74
Nigeria	29	71
Kenya	26	74
South Africa	37	63



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?

Statements that are offensive to your religion and beliefs

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	73	27
United Kingdom	63	37
France	52	48
Germany	54	46
Spain	65	35
Denmark	76	24
Norway	85	15
Sweden	70	30
Poland	52	48
Hungary	82	18
Czech Republic	61	39
Turkey	30	70
Argentina	68	32
Brazil	40	60
Mexico	65	35
Venezuela	74	26
Chile	74	26
Pakistan	32	68
India	45	55
Japan	50	50
South Korea	74	26
Taiwan	66	34
Indonesia	34	66
Philippines	48	52
Malaysia	42	58
Australia	56	44
Tunisia	36	64
Lebanon	34	66
Israel	46	54
Jordan	23	77
Nigeria	31	69
Kenya	34	66
South Africa	44	56



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?



Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?

Statements that support homosexual relationships

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	78	22
United Kingdom	87	13
France	82	18
Germany	85	15
Spain	91	9
Denmark	92	8
Norway	89	11
Sweden	90	10
Poland	81	19
Hungary	83	17
Czech Republic	85	15
Turkey	39	61
Argentina	83	17
Brazil	76	24
Mexico	78	22
Venezuela	79	21
Chile	86	14
Pakistan	31	69
India	54	46
Japan	80	20
South Korea	68	32
Taiwan	80	20
Indonesia	NA	NA
Philippines	68	32
Malaysia	NA	NA
Australia	77	23
Tunisia	42	58
Lebanon	44	56
Israel	84	16
Jordan	28	72
Nigeria	29	71
Kenya	43	57
South Africa	67	33



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

Do you think people should be able to say these types of things publicly OR the government should be able to prevent people from saying these things in some circumstances?

Statements that insult the national flag

Country	People should be able to say these things publicly	Government should be able to prevent people from saying these things
United States	61	39
United Kingdom	68	32
France	42	58
Germany	45	55
Spain	56	44
Denmark	73	27
Norway	73	27
Sweden	61	39
Poland	27	73
Hungary	67	33
Czech Republic	40	60
Turkey	14	86
Argentina	37	63
Brazil	37	63
Mexico	34	66
Venezuela	44	56
Chile	41	59
Pakistan	30	70
India	37	63
Japan	40	60
South Korea	54	46
Taiwan	43	57
Indonesia	28	72
Philippines	32	68
Malaysia	NA	NA
Australia	44	56
Tunisia	31	69
Lebanon	30	70
Israel	28	72
Jordan	25	75
Nigeria	20	80
Kenya	19	81
South Africa	38	62



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?



Do you think media organizations should be able to publish information about these types of things OR that the government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these types of things in some circumstances?

Economic issues that might destabilize the country's economy

Country	Media organizations should be able to publish information about these things	Government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these things
United States	70	30
United Kingdom	68	32
France	69	31
Germany	80	20
Spain	73	27
Denmark	71	29
Norway	73	27
Sweden	64	36
Poland	78	22
Hungary	80	20
Czech Republic	68	32
Turkey	62	38
Argentina	79	21
Brazil	73	27
Mexico	77	23
Venezuela	76	24
Chile	90	10
Pakistan	57	43
India	56	44
Japan	71	29
South Korea	69	31
Taiwan	68	32
Indonesia	54	46
Philippines	64	36
Malaysia	69	31
Australia	63	37
Tunisia	58	42
Lebanon	69	31
Israel	60	40
Jordan	64	36
Nigeria	51	49



WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

Kenya	63	37
South Africa	62	38

Do you think media organizations should be able to publish information about these types of things OR that the government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these types of things in some circumstances?

Sensitive issues related to national security

Country	Media organizations should be able to publish information about these things	Government should be able to prevent media organizations from publishing information about these things
United States	41	59
United Kingdom	26	74
France	56	44
Germany	60	40
Spain	58	42
Denmark	31	69
Norway	47	53
Sweden	29	71
Poland	55	45
Hungary	61	39
Czech Republic	52	48
Turkey	29	71
Argentina	69	31
Brazil	72	28
Mexico	73	27
Venezuela	74	26
Chile	77	23
Pakistan	38	62
India	41	59
Japan	63	37
South Korea	51	49
Taiwan	51	49
Indonesia	46	54
Philippines	54	46
Malaysia	49	51





WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

Australia	36	64
Tunisia	39	61
Lebanon	47	53
Israel	19	81
Jordan	45	55
Nigeria	51	49
Kenya	44	56
South Africa	45	55





WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

The Future of Free Speech Index

Constructed by calculating the country average of those who agree that:

- (1) It is important that people can say what they want without government censorship
- (2) It is important that media can report the news without government censorship
- (3) It is important that people can use the internet without government censorship
- (4) People should be able to express statements that criticize the government's policies
- (5) People should be able to express statements that are offensive to minority groups
- (6) People should be able to express statements that are offensive to your religion and beliefs
- (7) People should be able to express statements that support homosexual relationships
- (8) People should be able to express statements that insult the national flag.

Country	Score
United States	81
United Kingdom	81
France	75
Germany	75
Spain	81
Denmark	87
Norway	88
Sweden	83
Poland	73
Hungary	86
Czech Republic	78
Turkey	58
Argentina	79
Brazil	70
Mexico	76
Venezuela	82
Chile	81
Pakistan	57
India	63
Japan	70





WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?

South Korea	78
Taiwan	73
Indonesia	57
Philippines	69
Malaysia	55
Australia	74
Tunisia	59
Lebanon	62
Israel	69
Jordan	54
Nigeria	56
Kenya	58
South Africa	67

Note: We were not allowed to ask respondents about support for homosexuality in Indonesia or Malaysia and support for insulting the flag in Malaysia. For these missing values, we inserted the average country scores of similar neighboring countries. This equals 31 for the homosexual question in Indonesia and Malaysia and 30 for the flag question in Malaysia.



Endnotes

WHO IN THE WORLD SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH?



- 1 See, e.g., John Stuart Mill (2007). *On Liberty*. New York: Pearson Longman; Amartya Sen (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1994/940214_press.htm
- 2 See the annual reports by V-Dem (2025), Freedom House (2025), and Reporters without Borders (2024). <https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>; <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>; <https://rsf.org/en/index>
- 3 <https://futurefreespeech.org/the-free-speech-recession-hits-home/>; <https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry>
- 4 <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-17-02-0202>; <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/freedom-of-the-park/>; https://inters.org/Albert_Einstein_on_freedom.
- 5 Samples are generally representative of age, gender, and region (and education and ethnicity in some countries). This reliance on census-based quotas rather than pure random selection means that the survey is not fully representative.
- 6 The index is constructed by calculating the weighted country average of those who agree that 1) it is important that people can say what they want without government censorship; 2) it is important that media can report the news without government censorship; 3) it is important people can use the internet without government censorship; 4) people should be able to express statements that criticize the government's policies; 5) people should be able to express statements that are offensive to minority groups, 6) people should be able to express statements that are offensive to your religion and beliefs, 7) people should be able to express statements that support homosexual relationships, and 8) people should be able to express statements that insult the national flag. The items are assigned equal weight in the index construction. See the appendix for more details. Note that the list of survey items used to construct this version of The Future of Free Speech Index are not fully identical to those used to construct the index published in the previous report. This is partly because we have discontinued a list experiment that was used to construct the original index and partly because we reevaluated the questions capturing tradeoffs related to material costs (security and economic stability) and found them to be more context-sensitive than the other questions, they demonstrate different empirical patterns, indicating that they tap into distinct features. Moreover, we only use questions that have been asked in both surveys rounds, meaning that we also do not make use of the items related to generative AI. The eight items used to construct the index have been selected due to their theoretical coherence and high empirical co-variations (ranging between .49 and .88). This supports that they reflect a common latent trait that we interpret as general support for free speech. A calculation of Cronbach's Alpha values lends further support to the selection as they strongly indicate the selected items can be combined into a strong, reliable, and scalable scale. The overall alpha value is .949 (indicating excellent scalability) and the value is not improved by removing any of the selected items. For the sake of comparing scores across time, we have recalculated the 2021-scores based on the new index items.
- 7 The correlation without Venezuela is 0,73. All reported bivariate correlation coefficients refer to Pearson's r.
- 8 Data on GDP per capita is taken from the World Bank Indicators. Note that the World Bank does not offer estimates for Venezuela in recent years, which is why it is not included in the graph. If reliable data had been available, Venezuela would be a likely outlier to the general pattern, showing relatively high level of support for free speech vis-à-vis the GDP per capita level.
- 9 See Christian Welzel (2013). *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

10 See Ronald Inglehart & Pippa Norris (2019). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

11 The correlation without Venezuela is 0.49.

12 The V-Dem Freedom of Expression Index is based on scores for six indicators based on the assessments by multiple experts for each country. See; https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/4e/1c/4e1c47ae-4800-436a-bbf1-c5fb50798bd3/methodology_v111.pdf. We use V-Dem (v14) data for 2023 in the comparison.

13 See, e.g., <https://freespeechcollective.in/crossing-the-line18th-lok-sabha-elections-and-free-speech-in-india/>; <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2024/06/fears-of-censorship-grow-as-modi-begins-third-term/> India's score on Freedom House's Freedom of Expression and Belief subindex dropped from 9 in 2023 to 8 in 2024, while South Africa's score was 15 in both years. India's score on the Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders dropped from 36.62 in 2023 to 31.28 in 2024 on a 0-100-points scale. South Africa's score on this index declined from 78.60 in 2023 to 73.73 in 2024.

14 <https://rsf.org/en/t%C3%BCrkiye-ten-years-state-hostility-towards-press-under-president-erdogan>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/13/hungary-media-curbs-harm-rule-law>; <https://rsf.org/en/venezuela-new-report-rsf-and-partner-organisations-condemns-fear-intimidation-and-self-censorship>. Hungary's score on Freedom House's Freedom of Expression and Belief subindex was 10 in both 2023 and 2024, Turkey's was 5 for both years, while Venezuela's score dropped from 6 in 2023 to 5 in 2024. Hungary's score on the Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders dropped from 62.96 in 2023 and 62.98 in 2024; Turkey's score was 33.97 in 2023 and 31.60 in 2024; and Venezuela's score was 36.99 in 2023 and 33.06 in 2024.

15 See, e.g., Nahema Marchal & Rachel Xu (2024). *Mapping the Misuse of Generative AI*, <https://deepmind.google/discover/blog/mapping-the-misuse-of-generative-ai/>

16 Jacob Mchangama (2024). *How to Fight Misinformation without Censorship*, <https://www.persuasion.community/p/how-to-fight-misinformation-without>

17 Note in that respect that we were not allowed to ask about opinions to statements about homosexual relationships in Malaysia and Indonesia.

18 <https://www.persuasion.community/p/a-new-threat-to-the-freedom-of-the>; <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/22/media/trump-strip-tv-station-licenses-punish-media/index.html>; <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/24/1246663779/biden-ban-tiktok-us>; <https://www.sfchronicle.com/politics/article/x-lawsuit-content-moderation-19743186.php>; <https://pen.org/report/banned-in-the-usa-state-laws-supercharge-book-suppression-in-schools/>

19 Findings from other studies have indicated a similar trend. On the question about how important tolerance for others is to people, the WSJ/NORC Poll identified a drop from 80% in 2019 to 58% in 2023 among Americans. <https://www.atlasofwars.com/the-unpopular-american-patriotism/> Moreover, in 2023 the American Values Atlas showed, for the first time since 2015, falling support for key policies regarding LGBTQ rights as backing for same sex marriage dropped two percentage points, support for non-discrimination protections dropped four points, and opposition to people refusing services based on religious grounds dropped five points. The drops are substantial concerning Republicans, while the numbers for Democrats have been steady. Moreover, the survey showed that whereas older Americans are less supportive of same-sex marriage than younger Americans, support among young Americans (between 18 and 29 years old) has seen a gradual decline since 2018 (from 79% to 71%). <https://www.prrri.org/research/views-on-lgbtq-rights-in-all-50-states/>

20 See Roberto S. Foa & Yasha Mounk (2017). “Signs of Deconsolidation.” *Journal of Democracy* 28(1): 5-16; Erik Voeten (2018). Are People Really Turning Away from Democracy? https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Journal-of-Democracy-Web-Exchange-Voeten_0.pdf; Kristian Frederiksen (2024). “Young People Punish Undemocratic Behavior Less Than Older People.” *British Journal of Political Science* 54(3): 1014-1022; Wüttke, Alexander; Konstantin Gavras & Harald Schoen (2021). “Have Europeans Grown Tired of Democracy? New Evidence from 18 Consolidated Democracies, 1981-2018.” *British Journal of Political Science* 52(1): 416-428.

21 Note, though, that both the data collection in 2021 and 2024 took place when Biden was in power. The results may have looked different if the data collection has taken place in one of Trump’s periods in office.

22 The results based on vote intention in the 2024 presidential election are similar to the results we get when categorizing respondents by their presidential vote in 2016 (Trump versus Biden).

23 This finding aligns with results from PEW surveys showing that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support interventions by the US government or technology companies in moderating false information online and to favor the prevention of misinformation versus protecting press freedom. See <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/23/most-americans-say-a-free-press-is-highly-important-to-society/>; <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/07/20/most-americans-favor-restrictions-on-false-information-violent-content-online/> A study published by the Knight Foundation has also shown that Republicans are more permissive of speech when it is presented as an abstract concept and in connection to the 2020 election protests and online misinformation compared to Democrats, but they to a lower degree think that kneeling during the national anthem and the racial injustice protests of 2020 were legitimate. See https://knightfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/KF_Free_Expression_2022.pdf