

Conservatives are increasingly hostile to higher ed. Who can blame them?



58% of polled republicans say colleges have a negative effect on the United States. Aidan Kelly has more. Buzz60

The collapse of GOP support coincides with the popularization of a militant brand of liberal political activism that gestates on college campuses.

The [Pew Research Center](#) has a new survey confirming that, as you'd expect, Republicans have little love for institutions such as media and labor unions. What's surprising, however, is the extent to which Republicans have grown hostile toward colleges and universities, and how quickly their attitudes have changed.

Pew found that 58% of self-identified Republicans and Republican-leaning independents believe that colleges and universities have a negative effect on “the way things are going in the country.” Only 36% disagreed. As recently as 2010, [55% of the GOP](#) viewed colleges positively.

The shift Pew observed is too uniform to be random. This is a response to external conditions. The collapse of Republican support for colleges and universities coincides with the popularization of a militant brand of liberal political activism that gestates on campuses. Take, for example, the [University of Missouri-Columbia](#).

In 2015, Mizzou students sparked a firestorm by rallying in defense of a student who claimed that the campus was plagued by people in pickups chanting racist slurs. That accusation reopened the still festering wounds resulting from clashes that had erupted between peaceful protesters, rioters and police in Ferguson just months earlier. The popular narrative in the news media and on the left — that a righteous protest against injustice had been summarily crushed by the heavy hand of law enforcement — led to disruptions across the country in 2015.

As *The New York Times* observed, the protests soon became typified by the Marxist ideal of “[intersectionality](#),” which contends that all discrimination is rooted in class, gender and race and is therefore linked. The demonstrations swelled, a series of administrators resigned, and the intersectional student movement appeared victorious.

It was, however, a video featuring communications [professor Melissa Click](#) that turned the campus controversy into a national story. She was filmed attempting to prevent a student journalist from taking pictures of the protests and calling for “some muscle” to be deployed.

“In the minds of many, her outburst and the resignations became symbols of a hair-trigger protest culture lacking any adult control,” the [Times reported](#). It said freshman enrollment at the state system’s flagship campus has fallen off by an astounding 35% since 2015.

The Missouri story is indicative of the broader crisis at many American colleges. Increasingly, the evidence shows, they are places of strictly enforced intellectual, cultural and [political homogeneity](#). That rigid conformity

might be enforced from below by energetic activists, but it finds succor and rationalizations for its conduct from above.

A study of “[Faculty voter registration](#) in economics, history, journalism, law and psychology,” published in *Econ Journal Watch* last fall, found that at 40 leading universities, registered Republicans were outnumbered by their Democratic counterparts by a ratio of 11.5-1. This disparity isn't new, but it has been exacerbated as identity politics polarizes the academy.

The Heritage Foundation’s Kim Holmes, author of [The Closing of the Liberal Mind](#), blames the rise of multicultural studies departments. “If you’re going to have a Gender Studies Department, or something like that, the [progressive assumptions](#) are built into the very idea of the department, so you’re not going to hire any conservative professors,” Holmes said. If conservatives self-select out of programs like these, it follows that those who emerge from these programs will consider conservative ideas alien and threatening.

A [2015 survey](#) by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA found that nearly 71% of freshmen believed that colleges should “prohibit racist/sexist speech,” and that 43% of incoming freshmen agreed colleges should “have the right to ban extreme speakers” from campus. This represents a spike in anti-free speech sentiment among students from earlier this decade.

These censorious impulses didn’t arise in a vacuum. [The institute's 2010-11 survey](#) of college administrators, professors and staff found that nearly 70% of female college faculty believed that colleges should “prohibit” speech deemed racist or sexist. Nearly half of their male counterparts agreed.

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Occasionally, an authoritarian impulse to restrict free expression is encouraged by college administrators. In an April op-ed for *The Times*, [New York University Vice Provost](#) Ulrich Baer praised “snowflakes” for recognizing

that "alt-right demagogues" were a threat to "the rights, both legal and cultural, of minorities to participate in public discourse."

But this "no platforming" movement isn't strategic or thoughtful. It's more like a mob. Occasionally, genuinely controversial speakers such as Milo Yiannopoulos or Charles Murray are successfully "no-platformed" off campuses amid property destruction and physical violence. But other conservatives who have been run off — including Ben Shapiro, Condoleezza Rice, Jason Riley, Christina Hoff Sommers and Ayaan Hirsi Ali — suggest that Baer's snowflakes have a grotesquely distorted view of what constitutes alt-right demagoguery.

Republicans have also noticed how campuses incubate perpetual adolescents. They are institutions typified by "safe spaces" — areas where uncomfortable topics, and those who'd challenge fragile preconceptions, are forbidden. They are establishments in which challenging subject matter is not broached absent a "trigger warning," the academic equivalent of content ratings guidelines.

They are places where lecturers are [compelled to resign](#) for failing to protect college-age adults from the sight of a provocative Halloween costume. They are places where racial, religious and political segregation is finding new purchase, if only so that students can enjoy a break from what Northwestern University President Morton Schapiro called the "[uncomfortable learning](#)" associated with heterogeneity.

The intellectual cloistering that typifies colleges today has trickled down from faculty member to student. The product these schools now turn out is a stultified, juvenile creature. Graduates are [less prepared for the real world](#) than they were four years and a quarter-million dollars ago. It's hardly conservatives' fault for gazing at this Garden of Earthly Delights and recoiling.

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