



The Association Between Freedom of Speech and Differing Opinions Among Varying Contexts



Brooks Danile, Quantitative Analysis Center, Wesleyan University

Introduction

- Freedom of speech is considered essential for a healthy democracy, yet public support for it is often inconsistent.
- People endorse free expression in principle, but support declines when opinions become extreme, offensive, or politically sensitive—creating a “freedom gap.”
- Globally, 59% say free speech is very important, but only 31% feel speech is completely free where they live (Poushter), highlighting the gap between ideals and reality.
- Debates over hate speech, campus speech codes, and political polarization show how subjective and situational free-speech attitudes are, making it vital to understand why opinions change and how this affects democratic discourse.

Methods

Sample

- Individuals who live in the United States (n=4032). They were drawn from the General Social Survey (GSS)
- A portion of the survey (roughly a third) answered each question at random
- GSS is a nationally representative sample of cross-sectional interviews

Measures

- Participants were asked whether they supported five differing opinions being expressed via books
- The opinions being expressed included: pro-homosexuality, anti-black rhetoric, pro-communism, anti-religion, and pro-military dictatorship
- Support was measured in a binary option of yes or no
- Further the population was able to be isolated by race and degree received (education level)

Research Questions

- What is the association between people's support of freedom of speech and extremity of opinions?
- Is the association between people's support of freedom of speech and extremity of opinions subjective, based on individual's race and level of education?

Results

Univariate

- 75.87% of answers supported the opinion being expressed, while 24.13% did not among the five opinions
- 78.18% respondents were white, 11.64% were black, and 10.18% were other
- 9.29% of respondents hold an associate/junior college degree, 25.842% hold a Bachelors, 18.957% hold a High school degree, and 6.136% have no formal schooling

Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that **there is a significant difference between all opinions supported being expressed (via book), except for between anti-religion and pro-homosexuality**, $\chi^2=364.34$, 4 df, $p<.0001$.
- As expected, the **the opinion** being expressed was significantly associated with **support of the opinion being expressed**, $OR=Highest$ (anti-black) .67 and $Lowest$ (pro-homosexuality) .23.
- Chi-Square Analysis also shows there is significant association between race/degree (level of education) and support of divisive opinions being expressed

Multivariate

- The opinions of Anti-black, anti-religion, and pro-military dictatorship are still significantly associated with support of those opinions being expressed after controlling for Race.
- The interactions between white and black for anti-religion, between black and white for pro-homosexuality, and between white and black for pro-military dictatorship had significant interaction.
- When controlling for degree (level of education) there is no longer significant association between pro-homosexuality and support of that opinion being expressed
- There is significant interaction between Graduate level of education and all opinions being expressed being supported or not, but there is no significant interaction between High school + no formal education and the options being expressed being supported or not

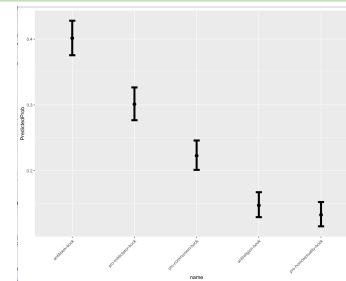


Figure 1: Odds Ratio between predictor

Multivariate (cont.)

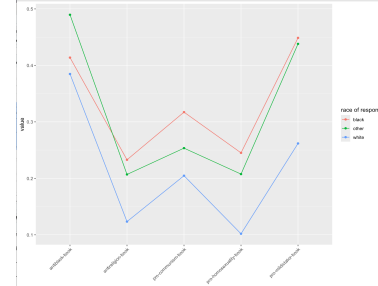


Figure 2: Interaction Plot measuring book banning and race of respondent

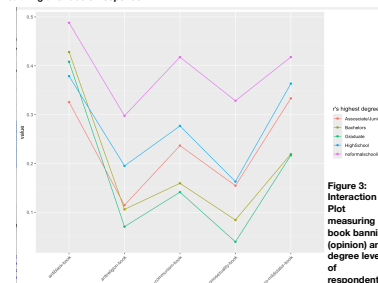


Figure 3: Interaction Plot measuring book banning (opinion) and degree level of respondent

Multivariate (cont.)

- Figure 2-** Through the graph there is evidence of an interaction effect between races black and other.
- Figure 3-** Through the graph there is evidence of a number interaction effects. First between Graduate and Associate/Junior College, second between graduate and high school, third between bachelor's and Associate/Junior College, and lastly between bachelor's and high school. Notably no interaction no interaction with no formal schooling

Discussion

- The option being expressed has significant influence on individuals supporting the freedom to express said opinion.
- Differing backgrounds, such as individual's race and level of education significantly affect whenever they support an option being expressed via book.
- Notably, the present findings are based on these opinions being expressed via book and not in other modes of expression. Also this research is limited to United States as the sample does not include international respondents
- Further research is needed to determine if differing modes of expression may change people's support of opinions being suppressed and what other background factors may affect their choices

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