

Rate of Self-Censorship in Democratic-Leaning vs. Republican-Leaning Americans

Do political beliefs affect the levels at which Americans censor their speech?

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Introduction

Freedom of speech including the lack of self-censorship is vital in stimulating participation in a representational democracy. The era of polarized politics and greater cultural competency has redefined this freedom of speech: an individual on one side of polarization is able to state their opinions without censorship on the other side of the aisle. During the confirmation hearings for Judge Ketanji Brown-Jackson, several Republican Senators voiced criticism of this idea of "censorship" in the language now considered politically incorrect. Conversely, several state and federal Republican lawmakers have proposed bills censoring more inclusive language in public schools (e.g., Florida's HB 1557 law). I was curious if this contrast within Republican leadership was shared among individual party members. I inquire, are those with which the Republican party resonates self-censoring more than those who align their politics with the Democratic party? Do political beliefs affect the levels at which Americans self-censor their speech?

Variables

Independent Variable: Taken prior to the 2020 election, Does the respondent think of self as a Democrat, Republican, or an Independent?

Survey question asked: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as [a Democrat, a Republican / a Republican, a Democrat], an independent, or what?

Dependent Variable: Taken prior to the 2020 election, How often do people self censor?

Survey question asked: How often do you stop yourself from saying something because you think someone might call you a racist, a sexist, or otherwise a bad person?

Controlled Variables: Race of Respondent, Religion of Respondent, Socioeconomic Status of Respondent, Sex of Respondent, Age of Respondent

Hypothesis

A cornerstone of the Republican party is persisting with more traditional views, rejecting invasive government ordinances over the free speech of the "forgotten" American. In a comparison of Americans, those who identify with the Republican party are more likely to report higher instances of self-censorship than those who identify with the Democratic party.

Literature Review

In her dissertation, Anna Boch found:

- Republicans were more "tolerant" of controversial left-leaning speech than Democrats were of right-leaning speech.
- Republicans were less likely to censor controversial speech -- regardless of whether it concerned liberal or conservative opinions.
- Whites are more "tolerant" of controversial speech than Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Mixed-Race individuals (Boch. (2021). Freedom of Speech in a Partisan Age: Political Tolerance, Hate Speech, and Public Opinion. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing., 23)

Bibliography

Boch. (2021). Freedom of Speech in a Partisan Age: Political Tolerance, Hate Speech, and Public Opinion. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Teresa M Bejan. (2019). Two Concepts of Freedom (of Speech) 1. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 163(2), 95–107.

Political Party	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly Often	Very often
Democratic Party	0.244	0.403	0.273	0.049	0.031
Republican Party	0.198	0.331	0.343	0.089	0.038
Independent	0.220	0.364	0.311	0.071	0.034

Figure 1: Two Way Comparison of Rate of Self-Censorship Based on Political Party

Political Party	Sex	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly Often	Very Often
Democratic Party	Male	24.2	38.1	28.7	5.35	3.45
Democratic Party	Female	23.3	40.6	27.4	4.55	4.18
Republican Party	Male	20.6	33.7	33.8	8.23	3.7
Republican Party	Female	19.2	32.3	33.7	10.2	4.63
Independent Party	Male	20.5	36.2	30.7	8.78	3.83
Independent Party	Female	22.9	35.5	31.9	6.95	2.83

Figure 2: Comparison of Rate of Self-Censorship Based on Political Party, Controlling for Sex

Findings

- Though the respondents, regardless of political party, selected "Very Likely" at a similar rate, Republicans reported the highest percentage of self-censoring "Fairly Often" (See Figure 1) with 8.9% of the Respondents. Despite the low percentage of Respondents selecting "Very Often," with 3.8% of the group selecting "Very Often," Republicans were still the most likely to self-censor at that rate. Furthermore, 24% of the Democrats surveyed responded they "Never" self-censor (See Figure 1); thus, Democrats would be the least likely to self-censor due to fears of being considered racist or sexist, while Republicans would be the most likely to do so.
- When controlling for Race, White Democrats are still less likely to self-censor at higher rates (e.g., "Fairly Often" or "Very Often") than White Republicans are. The pattern displayed by the two-way comparison of Political Party and Self-censorship continues among white respondents (See gray highlighted areas in Figure 5). However, among Hispanic, Asian, and Native American Democrats, the rates of self-censoring "Fairly Often" increase (See yellow highlighted areas in Figure 5), and among Black and Hispanic Democrats, the rates of self-censoring "Very Often" increases. Thus, among Democrats, the relationship between party identification and race is interactive: a Democrat who is also a racial minority is more likely to self-censor more often, while still self-censoring less than Republican whites.
- Within the Republican party, being a racial minority has the opposite effect: Black, Hispanic, and Native American Republicans report lower levels of self-censoring "Fairly Often". However, Asian Republicans reported the highest level of self-censoring "Fairly Often" (23.7) and Hispanic and Native American Republicans reported higher levels of self-censorship than white Republicans (5.31 and 9.18 respectively).
- The pattern displayed in the two-way comparison of Political Party and Self-censorship is mirrored when controlling for Respondent's sex. Among Republican females, however, the rate of self-censoring "Fairly Often" and "Very Often" rises to 10.2 and 4.63 respectively, suggesting their sex compounds upon their political party (See gray highlighted sections of Figure 2)
- When controlling for socioeconomic class, lower, middle, and upper-class Republicans still cite higher rates of self-censoring "Occasionally" and "Fairly Often" then lower, middle, and upper-class Democrats (See gray highlighted section of Figure 3). However, lower class Democrats cited the highest rates of self-censoring "Very Often" with 5.49 (See yellow highlighted section of Figure 3).

Political Party	Socioeconomic Class	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly Often	Very Often
Democratic party	Lower Class	21.5	41.0	28.9	3.18	5.49
Democratic party	Middle Class	21.8	44.9	27.0	3.71	2.61
Democratic party	Upper Class	20.7	51.9	22.1	1.91	3.37
Republican party	Lower Class	22.0	27.0	36.7	11.8	2.44
Republican party	Middle Class	18.9	37.6	30.7	9.52	3.23
Republican party	Upper Class	16.8	33.8	34.2	11.9	3.36
Independent	Lower Class	18.1	37.7	33.9	6.36	3.88
Independent	Middle Class	21.2	38.6	33.3	5.66	1.21
Independent	Upper Class	19.9	40.1	29.1	8.04	2.86

Figure 3: Comparison of Rate of Self-Censorship Based on Political Party, Controlling for socioeconomic class

Political Party	Race	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Fairly Often	Very Often
Democratic party	White	20.4	45.1	28.7	4.05	1.76
Democratic party	Black	30.9	29.5	28.9	3.81	6.92
Democratic party	Hispanic	25.9	38.9	21.1	6.93	7.22
Democratic party	Asian	16.9	36.2	38.4	7.72	0.873
Democratic party	Native American	19.8	40.1	30.1	10.1	0
Republican Party	White	19.6	32.8	34.3	9.11	4.13
Republican Party	Black	26.7	36.6	29.9	6.93	0
Republican Party	Hispanic	22.6	34.1	29.1	8.87	5.31
Republican Party	Asian	15.1	37.9	20.4	23.7	2.86
Republican Party	Native American	19.6	23.9	43.2	4.06	9.18
Independent	White	19.9	36.7	32.7	7.46	3.27
Independent	Black	32.9	32.8	21.1	9.27	4.00
Independent	Hispanic	23.8	34.4	27.3	10.4	4.04
Independent	Asian	17.6	22.4	53.1	5.73	1.24
Independent	Native American	30.2	33.0	32.1	3.54	1.16

Figure 4: Comparison of Rate of Self-Censorship Based on Political Party, Controlling for Race

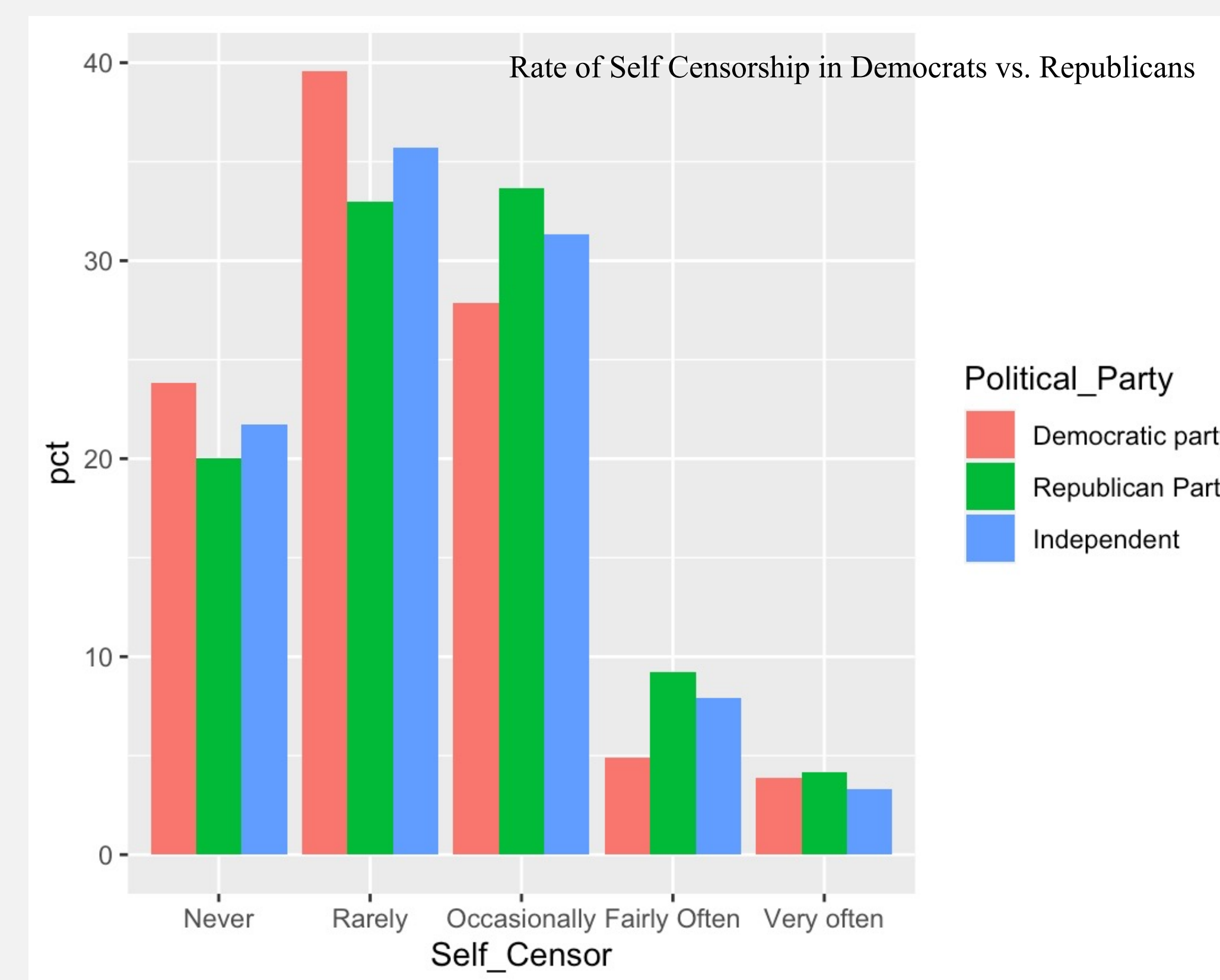


Figure 5: Graph of the Rate of Self-Censorship based on Political Party.

Findings and Conclusions

While more data is required to make a definitive declaration of the relationship between political party and rates of self-censorship, the data demonstrates a causal relationship between one's political party and the likelihood that they might censor their language. When controlling for Race, Sex, Religion, Socioeconomic Status, and Age, Republicans (regardless of other identities) still showed higher rates of self-censoring "Occasionally," "Fairly Often," and "Very Often" than comparable Democrats. This data supports the hypothesis that Republicans will self-censor more often than Democrats will. To further this research, one should investigate individual beliefs on certain controversial topics concerning race and sex to understand the interactive relationship between Race and Political party among Democrats. Why were they so concerned with being labelled racist, sexist or otherwise bad people?

Looking at the survey question asked can help explain why such large numbers of Republicans cited high levels of self-censorship: "How often do you stop yourself from saying something because you think someone might call you a racist, a sexist, or an otherwise bad person?" Of the respondents surveyed in the 2020 ANES Dataset, the group which identified with the Democratic party included a far more diverse spread of individuals -- across all Rival Variables. Thus, this group would be less likely to worry of being labelled racist or sexist, as they represent the disenfranchised identities affected by racism and sexism. Furthermore, cancel culture in the era of a revived Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements has left many Americans fearful that their political beliefs can be colluded with bigotry (Boch. (2021). Freedom of Speech in a Partisan Age: Political Tolerance, Hate Speech, and Public Opinion. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). The way conservative groups and politics interact with political correctness renders conservatives especially aware of the consequences of their language, as seen through Middlebury's Speaker Scandal (Boch. (2021). Freedom of Speech in a Partisan Age: Political Tolerance, Hate Speech, and Public Opinion. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.). My original interest in this process of self-censorship was sparked by Florida's HB 1557, also known as the Don't Say Gay Bill. Ironically, while Republican lawmakers work to censor more inclusive language in public schools, Republican individuals across the nation are acutely concerned with the new threat of being perceived as exclusive.

Sources and Methods

For my data analysis, I used the American National Election Studies 2020 Data Set. This data set is a survey conducted to explain "public opinion and voting behavior" during a United States presidential election. The data set includes individuals who were interviewed previously during the 2016 election as well as new respondents taken from the General Social Survey (GSS). Split into two random sample groups, the data set reflects 8,280 interviews pre-election and 7,449 interviews post-election. Furthermore, the data set is the joint effort of Stanford University and the University of Michigan; the research is funded by the National Science Foundation. (American National Election Studies. 2021. ANES 2020 Time Series Study Full Release [dataset and documentation]. July 19, 2021 Version.

www.electionstudies.org

To analyze the 2020 ANES dataset, I used R and R Studio. This statistical method allowed me to recode, cross-tabulate, and refine my Independent and Dependent variables while controlling for certain Rival variables (Race, Religion, Socioeconomic Status, Sex, and Age).