

# 25 Controversial Topics to Help You Start Your Research

 [thebestschools.org/magazine/controversial-topics-research-starter](https://thebestschools.org/magazine/controversial-topics-research-starter)

October 4, 2018

Apr 15, 2020 TBS Staff



## Gun Control +

The gun control debate hinges on how we interpret and wield the Second Amendment. The Second Amendment of the United States Constitution reads, in its entirety: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

One view is that the “right of the people to keep and bear arms” is an individual right, not to be infringed upon by government regulation. Many advocates of this view stand in opposition to any laws that would impact the ability to buy, carry, or accessorize any and all firearms.

Gun control advocates, by contrast, emphasize the first clause of the Second Amendment, which is said to imply that gun rights are meant to be “well regulated” by local, state, and federal legislative bodies. Those who argue in favor of stronger gun

control laws may push for more extensive background checks, restrictions on who can buy a gun, restrictions on the kinds of guns that can be purchased, or even a total prohibition on the sale and purchase of firearms in the U.S.

Today, the debate centers on the permeation of gun violence in the United States, particularly in light of the rising frequency of mass and school shootings as well as issues relating to the sale of assault rifles, background checks for gun buyers, and the connection between gun violence and mental illness.

### Gun Control Groups

- [Brady Campaign](#)
- [Coalition to Stop Gun Violence](#)
- [Mayors Against Illegal Guns](#)
- [States United to Prevent Gun Violence](#)
- [Violence Policy Center](#)
- [Third Way](#)

### Second Amendment Groups

- [National Rifle Association](#)
- [Women Against Gun Control](#)
- [Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms](#)
- [Firearms & Liberty](#)
- [Gun Owners of America](#)
- [Second Amendment Foundation](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in criminal justice or law.](#)

## Abortion +

---

At the center of the abortion debate is a fundamental disagreement over a pregnant person's right to choose to terminate a pregnancy. Those who identify as pro-choice view this choice as a pregnant individual's right, not to be regulated by the government. Those who identify as pro-life view abortion as morally wrong and argue that it should therefore be subject to government regulation.

Pro-choice advocates view the right to seek an abortion as a personal decision that amounts to retaining control over one's body. Pro-choice advocates oppose the establishment of federal, state, or local laws that restrict access, impede funding, or create legal obstacles for those who choose to have an abortion.

By contrast, pro-life advocates take the position that abortion is morally wrong under most circumstances (perhaps with some exceptions, such as rape and incest, or to save the life of the mother). Many pro-life advocates take the view that life begins at the

moment of conception. To this view, abortion is tantamount to murder. For pro-life advocates, this position justifies—and to some, even demands—government intervention.

The debate over abortion often pits questions of faith and religious belief against privacy and women's rights.

#### Pro-Choice Groups

- [Planned Parenthood](#)
- [National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws](#)
- [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

#### Pro-Life Groups

- [National Organization for Women](#)
- [National Right to Life](#)
- [Operation Rescue](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in social work!](#)

## Religious Freedom +

---

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Simply stated, this amendment protects every American's religious freedom.

However, there is often significant and impassioned disagreement over how that freedom can and should be expressed in public spaces. On one end of the debate, some individuals of faith view this freedom as all-encompassing, which provides for the protection of any and all forms of religious expression, regardless of context or company.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who advocate for strong separation of church and state. This concept of separation is intended to protect individuals from being imposed upon by the religious views of others. The implications are that institutions such as public schools, post offices, and government agencies are not to espouse the views of a particular religious ideology nor should these institutions espouse any views that disparage a particular religious ideology.

Disagreements between the two sides often escalate into philosophical and legal challenges regarding either the use of public spaces for religious expression or the restriction thereof. These differing viewpoints have clashed over subjects such as the mention of God in the Pledge of Allegiance, the display of the Ten Commandments in public spaces, and the right of businesses to deny service to others on the basis of religious beliefs.

## Freedom-from-Religion Advocates

- [American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#)
- [Americans United for Separation of Church and State](#)
- [Freedom from Religion Foundation](#)
- [American Atheists](#)
- [Atheist Alliance International](#)
- [Council for Secular Humanism](#)

## Freedom-of-religion Advocates

- [American Center for Law and Justice \(ACLJ\)](#)
- [Alliance Defending Freedom](#)
- [Thomas More Law Center](#)
- [Manhattan Declaration](#)
- [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)
- [Acton Institute](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in criminal justice or law!](#)

## Animal Rights +

---

This debate concerns the sometimes conflicting priorities of protecting animal rights and furthering human interests. On one side, strong animal rights advocates believe animals deserve similar or equal rights to human beings, and therefore believe, in addition to freedom from abuse and captivity, no animals should be used for human consumption, labor, or research. This belief also extends to protections from the destruction of wildlife habitats. This view also encompasses the question over animal "personhood"—that is, whether or not the rights and protections of personhood afforded humans should extend to all species.

On the opposite side are those who believe, as the dominant species, human beings are entitled to make relatively unfettered use of animals for the purposes of achieving survival and advancing civilization.

The debate over animal rights is a nuanced one. Many individuals fall somewhere between these two views. There are many who would view themselves as supporting animal rights while still eating meat, or those who would be repulsed by animal abuse but who view animal laboratory testing as essential to saving human lives. Many on both sides also view compromise as impossible.

This debate touches on a number of current issues, including pharmaceutical testing on lab animals, the displacement of wildlife through industrial development, and the pet industry's use of puppy mills and other underground breeding operations.

## Animal Rights Advocates

- [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals \(PETA\)](#)
- [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#)

#### Human Dominion Advocates

- [The Humane Society of the U.S.](#)
- [Center for Human Exceptionalism](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in biology.](#)

## Vaccines +

---

The debate over vaccines has surged in visibility over recent years. On one side of this controversy are those who see vaccines as essential preventive medicine that saves lives and guards the public health. On the other end are those who view vaccines as carrying dangerous side effects and health consequences about which research has either been limited or suppressed.

This is a sensitive issue for individuals on both sides of the debate, largely because it involves the health and safety of our children. This is an element which can lead to a particularly emotional tenor of debate on the subject, as well as a deluge of disinformation.

Vaccination advocates view it as the responsibility of all parents to comply with medical advice on the administration of vaccines. Pro-vaccination groups and individuals argue that parents are obligated to the health of their children—and those who come into contact with them—by taking steps to prevent the development of dangerous or deadly communicable diseases.

Vaccination opponents argue that vaccines can be dangerous, may contain hazardous or poorly-researched substances, and create vaccination risks that outweigh the benefits. Some anti-vaccination groups argue that the medical community suppresses evidence of the connection between vaccinations and serious long-term health consequences.

Central questions surrounding this debate concern parental responsibility to the public health, the recent outbreaks of measles and other nearly eradicated diseases, and the alleged connection between vaccinations and autism.

#### Pro-Vaccination Groups

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Quackwatch](#)
- [American Pharmacists Association](#)
- [Autism Science Foundation](#)

#### Anti-vaccination Groups

- [VaxTruth](#)
- [Age of Autism](#)
- [Natural News](#)
- [Joseph Mercola](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in nursing](#).

## Privacy Rights +

---

The debate over privacy rights concerns the sometimes conflicting priorities of individual privacy and public safety. The U.S. government's growing capacity to conduct surveillance on its own citizens is based on the idea that to ensure our safety, we must sacrifice some of our personal privacy.

Privacy rights advocates argue that government surveillance violates the Fourth Amendment, which prohibits unreasonable search and seizures. Rapidly advancing technology and current legal conditions have given the U.S. government a previously unprecedented power to see into the lives of Americans. Privacy advocates also express concerns about the behavior and security practices of private enterprises with the capacity to gather and store massive amounts of personal data.

Advocates for the public safety argue that, in a society plagued by mass shootings and terrorism, both domestic and foreign, our government is responsible for keeping us safe. Some argue that this accords the government the right to gather information that can protect us through whatever means it views as necessary.

The issue is only further complicated by the role of social media in our privacy. With so much personal information voluntarily given to tech giants like Google, Facebook and Amazon, privacy advocates would argue that many have willingly traded privacy for convenience.

At the center of this debate is the government's right to surveillance, the rising omniscience of online social media and e-commerce giants, and the limits we place on our own privacy through social media.

### Security First Groups

- [National Security Agency/Central Security Service \(NSA\)](#)
- [Central Intelligence Agency \(CIA\)](#)
- [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency \(DARPA\)](#)

### Privacy Rights Groups

- [Cato Institute](#)
- [Electronic Frontier Foundation \(EFF\)](#)
- [Electronic Privacy Information Center \(EPIC\)](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, find out what you can do with a degree in computer science.

## Free Market Capitalism +

---

The debate over free market capitalism generally pits those in favor of economic regulation against those who believe markets are strongest when left to function without regulatory intervention.

On one side of the debate, regulatory advocates believe that free markets are inherently unstable, unequal, and prone to the traditional “business cycle” of booms and busts. Known as Keynesians in economic circles, these individuals believe that free markets need to be controlled by the government in the form of fiscal policy (taxing, borrowing, and spending) and monetary policy (printing money and setting the interest rate), in order to soften the impact of the business cycle and prevent painful recessions.

On the other end of the spectrum, free market economists argue that government interference in the economy is what causes the business cycle in the first place. These free market economists argue that, by misallocating resources towards ventures that do not answer real demand or are not sustainable over the long term, intervening regulators tend to create rather than soften market instability. According to this theory, a healthy economy—one with maximum long-term growth and a minimum business cycle—may best be achieved by minimizing government interference with the free market.

In practical terms, this debate also pits those who believe the government is best suited to distribute economic resources through social programs and infrastructure projects against those who believe that unregulated private enterprises are best suited to stimulate progress and wealth growth. Central issues within this debate include the privatization of public resources or utilities, the legislative push and pull over regulatory oversight, and the outsize role that money plays in our political system.

### Regulatory Advocacy Groups

- [Levy Economics Institute](#) (Bard College)
- [Economic Policy Institute](#)
- [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#)
- [Securities and Exchange Commission](#)
- [The Federal Reserve](#)

### Free-Market Capitalists

- [The Ludwig von Mises Institute](#)
- [Cafe Hayek](#)
- [Library of Economics and Liberty](#) (Liberty Fund initiative)
- [Mercatus Center](#) (at George Mason University)

- [Universidad Francisco Marroquin](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in economics](#).

## **Global Climate Change +**

---

The debate over global climate change centers on a series of questions:

- Is global warming real?
- If global warming is real, is it caused mainly by human activity?
- If global warming is real, how harmful is it likely to be?
- If global warming is real, caused mainly by human activity, and likely to be very harmful, what can we do about it?

Environmental groups argue that global warming is very real, that it has been caused by human activity, and that we've already begun to see the consequences through higher sea levels, severe weather events, and growing food scarcity. This group argues that we have a moral obligation to adapt regulations, consumer practices, and lifestyle decisions to reverse these trends. These groups also argue that our current path could lead to yet more catastrophic weather events, ecological disasters, and resource shortages, all of which would negatively impact the prospects for human survival on Earth.

Skeptics argue that these dangers have been exaggerated and are not supported by scientific data. There are others in this demographic that take the position that while global warming may be occurring, there is no evidence to suggest these patterns are connected to human activity. This position also rejects a credible environmental need for regulatory limits on human activity—commercial, industrial, recreational, or otherwise.

This latter position means that the debate over global climate change is often inextricably connected to economic and political beliefs. Notable subtopics within this debate include the role of governments in regulating corporations, the political suppression of scientific findings, and the prevalence of international compacts such as the Paris Climate Agreements.

### **Environmental Groups**

- [Environmental Defense Fund](#)
- [Earth Institute](#)
- [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#)
- [Climate Science Watch](#)
- [Skeptical Science](#)

### **Climate Change Skeptics**

- [Heartland Institute](#)



- [Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change](#)
- [Science and Public Policy Institute](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in chemistry.](#)

## Evolution +

---

The evolution debate is highly complex. In the simplest terms, it divides those who believe that human beings evolved from lower forms of primate and those who believe that, as beings created in God's image, humans could not have descended from, nor shared a common ancestor with, apes.

The evolutionary debate has many stripes: on one end of the spectrum are those who share Charles Darwin's belief in the occurrence of natural selection, or those who share Darwin's belief in evolution while taking a different scientific path to explaining its occurrence.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who reject either the idea of natural selection, or the idea of evolution, or both, often on the basis of religious belief. For those known as "creationists," the theory of evolution is altogether incompatible with the telling of human history as contained in the Bible, and is therefore impossible. Others believe in a concept called intelligent design, which seeks to reconcile the scientific probability of evolution with questions of faith and theology.

This disagreement is particularly consequential within education. Many Evangelical Christian groups resist teaching evolution in science classes because Darwin's ideas conflict with their worldview. This has contributed to some heated public debate pitting science against religion and vice versa.

### Evolutionary Biologists

- [National Center for Science Education](#)
- [The Richard Dawkins Foundation](#)
- [Digital Evolution Lab](#)

### Intelligent Design Advocates

- [Discovery Institute's Center for Science & Culture](#)
- [Bio-Complexity](#)
- [Evolutionary Informatics Lab](#)

### Creationism Advocates

- [Institute for Creation Research](#)
- [Answers in Genesis](#)
- [Creation Museum](#)

- [Creation Research Society](#)
- [Creation Ministries International](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in biology.](#)

## **Marijuana Legalization +**

---

The debate over the legalization of marijuana centers on two primary and related questions:

- Is marijuana a legitimate medicine that should be decriminalized to help alleviate certain ailments?
- Should people have the same freedom to consume marijuana as they do alcohol and nicotine?

Marijuana is increasingly being made legal for medicinal and/or recreational purposes in states and cities through the U.S. This spotlights the divergent view of marijuana advocates and marijuana prohibitionists. Advocates view cannabis use as a personal choice and argue that laws infringing upon that choice infringe upon personal liberties. Advocates also argue that prohibition prevents those in need from receiving valid medical treatment and that enforcement often targets minorities and other at-risk populations unfairly.

Those who argue for the continued prohibition of marijuana question the validity of its medical use and believe that the risks to public health, safety, and civic order outweigh any potential benefits. Those who oppose the legalization of marijuana contend that chronic usage undermines physical and psychological health, and that legalization for recreational purposes would burden the health care and insurance systems while also leading to the use of harder and more hazardous substances.

Today, key subtopics within this debate include the use of our prison system to retain nonviolent offenders, the impact of marijuana arrests in minority communities, the potential of marijuana to help stem epidemic opioid use, and the economic importance of marijuana cultivation in certain agricultural communities.

### **Marijuana Legalization Advocates**

- [NORML](#)
- [U.S. Marijuana Party](#)
- [Libertarian Party](#)
- [Green Party](#)
- [California Medical Association](#)

### **Marijuana Prohibition Advocates**

- [Veterans for Medical Marijuana Access](#)

- [Citizens Against Legalizing Marijuana](#)
- [The American Society of Addiction Medicine](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in political science.](#)

## **Capital Punishment +**

---

The debate over capital punishment concerns the right and/or responsibility of the state to carry out the punishment of persons deemed, through due process, to have committed criminal acts so heinous as to justify their execution.

Those who support the use of capital punishment believe the government does have this right, and that certain criminals are too dangerous or deserving of punishment for their crimes to be rehabilitated or kept incarcerated. Advocates of capital punishment believe the existence of the death penalty serves as a deterrent against would-be criminals and that it provides a sense of justice for victims, survivors and their families.

Those who oppose the use of capital punishment argue the government should not be vested with the authority to determine who has a right to live or die. Opponents argue the sanctity of human life is too consequential a matter to be left in the hands of the government, and that this also gives the government the arbitrary power to determine which offenses justify use of the death penalty and which do not.

Among the key subtopics within this debate are questions over claims that the death penalty is a criminal deterrent, concerns that racial and socioeconomic inequalities in the justice system make certain groups more likely to face the death penalty, and consideration that carrying out the death penalty may be just as costly to taxpayers as life imprisonment.

### **Capital Punishment Opponents**

- [National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty](#)
- [Amnesty International USA](#)
- [Equal Justice USA](#)
- [Witness to Innocence](#)

### **Capital Punishment Advocates**

- [Justice For All](#)
- [Clark County Prosecutor](#)
- [Heritage Foundation](#)
- [LONANG Institute](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in criminal justice or law.](#)

## Marriage Equality +

---

Marriage equality refers to the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals to be legally married throughout the United States. In 2015, the Marriage Equality Act was passed into the law, making same-sex marriage legal anywhere in the U.S. The topic, nonetheless, continues to generate strenuous ideological disagreement between demographics with differing beliefs regarding marriage. Competing views on the marital rights of LGBTQ+ individuals extend from the ideological division between those who view marriage only as a union between a man and a woman, and those who view marriage as an opportunity that should be afforded to all, regardless of who they love.

Supporters of Marriage Equality believe that gender and sexual orientation should not play a part in whether two people are entitled to be married before the eyes of the law. Marriage equality advocates argue that couples who do not fit the mold of a traditional marriage—a union between a man and a woman—should still have access to the same recognition, legal rights, and tax benefits as do traditional couples.

Opponents of Marriage Equality argue that only a marriage between a man and a woman should be sanctioned by the law and that allowing any other type of union to occur would be to undermine the very institution of marriage. Many opponents of marriage equality also take the faith-based view that nontraditional romantic relationships contradict the words of the Bible and are therefore inherently sinful. To some in this demographic, the government has a moral responsibility to protect traditional marriage by creating laws to prevent what opponents of marriage equality view as deviant or immoral. Those who hold this view are likely to cite moral objection to current federal laws recognizing gay marriage.

The debate over marriage equality pits the ongoing movement for LGBTQ+ rights against groups who oppose the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights, and specifically equal marital rights, often on the grounds of religious belief.

### Marriage Equality Advocates

- [Marriage Equality](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign Marriage Resources](#)
- [Amnesty International USA](#)

### Traditional Marriage Advocates

- [Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family](#)
- [Manhattan Declaration](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in criminal justice or law.](#)

## Immigration Reform +

---

Immigration reform centers around the laws impacting the arrival of newcomers to the United States from around the world, as well as the conditions required for the attainment of citizenship. As an issue which is highly connected to competing political ideologies, policy approaches toward immigration often shift sharply depending on the policy orientation of reigning political leadership.

On one side of the immigration reform debate, there are those who view the United States as a nation built on the hard work of immigrants from all over the world, and who generally take the view that the United States should continue to welcome individuals who come in search of opportunity, freedom, and a better life. Individuals who take this view tend to favor policy reform toward more accessible legal pathways to entry, citizenship, and inclusion for immigrant groups.

Those on the other side of the immigration reform debate express frustration over the high rate of illegal entry into the United States, especially from the southern border shared between the U.S. and Mexico. This issue has only been magnified as gang activity, drug violence, and human trafficking have escalated in parts of Latin America, pressing large groups of refugees to seek entry into the United States. As newcomers seek pathways into the U.S., those opposed to their entry have called for more restrictive immigration policies, stricter borders, and greater enforcement effort aimed at preventing illegal immigration.

Today, the debate centers on the civil rights of immigrant populations, as well as the role and responsibility of the United States in welcoming newcomers, as these priorities contrast the view that less restrictive immigration policies represent an economic and security threat to the United States.

#### Immigration Advocacy Groups

- [The American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#)
- [Immigration Advocates Network](#)
- [The Action Network's Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services \(RAICES\)](#)
- [Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights](#)
- [Women's Refugee Committee](#)

#### Immigration Enforcement Groups

- [Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project](#)
- [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#)
- [Minuteman Project](#)
- [U.S. Border Patrol](#)
- [We Build The Wall](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [check out our resources for undocumented and immigrant students.](#)

## The Trump Presidency +

---

Whether you support or oppose him, Donald Trump's presidency has been a constant source of controversy, to the extent that his emergence and leadership warrants inclusion as a category of controversy unto itself. Donald Trump's methods and behavior in office differ dramatically from those of his predecessors, completely separate from his party affiliation or policy priorities. From his unprecedented use of Twitter as his primary platform for engagement to his embrace of ideologies and theories previously relegated to the fringes of American politics; from his adversarial relationship with the mainstream press, conventional American allies, and even vocal celebrity critics to his stated admiration for leaders in non-democratic nations, Donald Trump has altered the nature and state of the presidency, the White House, and the United States as a whole.

Those who support President Trump typically espouse a set of policies that include stronger restrictions and enforcement on immigration, reduced corporate regulation, strong 2nd Amendment protections, global economic isolationism, and nationalist identity politics. Many of Trump's supporters view the president as a political outsider whose unconventional style and behavior represent a needed disruption of Washington "politics as usual."

Those who oppose Donald Trump and his presidency tend to advocate for more progressive policy ideals including humane immigration reform, enhancing environmental protection, stronger gun control laws, advocacy for global democratic movements, social justice, and more inclusive domestic policy. Critics of Trump view his presidency as a dangerous deviation from normative American values relating to Constitutional law, executive authority, democratic rule, and general political civility.

While history will tell the fuller story of Trump's presidency, in the present day, the administration provides daily fodder for controversy. At the center of this debate is Donald Trump's dramatic transformation of the presidency, which provides the basis for debate about essential subjects in American public discourse from economic policy, immigration reform and gun violence to healthcare, climate change, and race relations.

### Pro-Trump Groups

- [The Republican National Committee](#)
- [Students for Trump](#)
- [Great America PAC](#)
- [Committee to Defend the President](#)
- [Great America Committee](#)

### Anti-Trump Groups

- [Indivisible](#)
- [Need to Impeach](#)

- [Antifa](#)
- [Swing Left](#)

If you want to learn more about the political process and how you can participate, [find out what you can do with a degree in Political Science](#).

## **The Opioid Crisis +**

---

The Opioid Crisis refers to the recent and historically significant rise in the number of drug related deaths in the U.S. over the last 20 years. This drug crisis is distinct because it is widely evidenced to be rooted in prescription drug practices, especially as they relate to pain management. Opioids refer to a class of powerful pain medications such as Oxycotin, and contain some of the same active ingredients found in heroin. The widespread use of these drugs for pain management in mainstream medical settings is now believed to be connected to the rise in addiction to painkillers as well as addiction to, and fatality by, heroin, which is often more accessible and affordable to users than are prescription opioids.

On one side of the opioid discussion are those who have advocated for more stringent regulations on the prescription of opioids including far greater restraint on their mainstream availability. Included in this demographic are public health advocates, addiction specialists, families impacted by addiction and loss, and public office-holders who have worked to limit the impact of pharmaceutical company lobby groups.

On the other side of the opioid discussion are, most notably, pharmaceutical companies that have not only profited significantly from the sale of prescription drugs but which also dispute claims of the danger posed by opioids. Also on this side of the discussion are healthcare advocates who view opioids as an essential form of pain management for those coping with injury, surgery, recovery, or intractable pain.

Today, the debate centers around calls to address the growing epidemic of opioid addiction and overdose, and the counterpoint that opioids can provide a meaningful pain therapy option and a profitable commodity for the pharmaceutical industry.

### **Addiction and Outreach Groups**

- [Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation](#)
- [American Nurses Association](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [American Association of Nurse Anesthetists](#)
- [Addiction Center](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

### **Opioid Advocates**

- [American Chronic Pain Association](#)
- [Purdue Pharmaceutical](#)

- [Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers of America](#)
- [Johnson & Johnson](#)

If you want to provide support to those struggling with opioid addiction, [find out what you can do with a degree in Addiction Recovery](#).

## Transgender Rights +

---

Transgender Rights refers to the growing visibility, advocacy and protection of individuals who identify with a gender that is different from the one assigned to them at birth. This is an issue that impacts individuals identifying as transgender, as well as those identifying as gender non-binary, intersex, or who otherwise do not conform with binary male or female gender identities. As mainstream awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights continues to expand—especially among younger generations—public discourse has widened to include improved understanding of transgender and gender non-binary individuals, as well as the issues impacting these demographics. According to the [Human Rights Campaign](#), conservative estimates count the transgender population as 3.5% of the LGBTQ+ population and .03% of the total U.S. population.

Those who support Transgender Rights recognize and support the expansion of protections for individuals identifying as transgender. One of the chief issues concerns the right to use public restrooms and other public facilities conforming with one's gender identity rather than one's assigned birth gender. Advocates of Transgender Rights oppose restrictions on bathroom use based on assigned gender. Advocates also generally support the passage of anti-discrimination legislation impacting members of the trans community, including protection from workplace discrimination, discrimination in public spaces, and hate crimes. Many supporters view transgender rights as an extension of protections and rights for all members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Opponents of Transgender Rights oppose the idea that individuals should have the right to identify as a gender other than their assigned birth gender. This view is commonly paired with support for laws restricting use of bathrooms and public facilities in conformity with gender assignment. Opponents of Transgender Rights may also object to anti-discrimination laws for transgender individuals, particularly if they view these laws as violating the right to freedom of religion, freedom of expression, or freedom of commercial entities to refuse service. For many opponents, transgender rights are seen through the lens of certain religious belief systems which hold that biological gender assignment can only be defined by divine power.

At the center of this ongoing public debate are the issues of public visibility, acceptance and protection against discrimination for trans individuals as these conflict with certain legal, religious, and moral belief systems.

Transgender Rights and Advocacy Groups



- [Trans Student Educational Resources](#)
- [Transgender Law Center](#)
- [GLAAD](#)
- [National Center for Transgender Equality](#)

#### Anti-Trans Rights Groups

- [PFLAG](#)
- [The American Family Association](#)
- [Center for Family & Human Rights](#)
- [The Kelsey Coalition](#)

If you want to learn more about the issues impacting transgender individuals, [check out our resources for LGBTQ+ students](#).

## Mandating a Federal Livable Wage +

---

A livable wage is defined as the minimum hourly pay that Americans require to afford the basic standard of living in the United States. Currently, the federal minimum wage sets a standard, minimum hourly pay that employers must provide to employees; the goal behind this is to ensure that U.S. workers are paid a fair and livable wage. As of 2019, the federal minimum wage stands at \$7.25 per hour. The last time the federal rate was raised was 2009. The ongoing debate over minimum wage proceeds from the argument that this rate has not kept pace with inflation or the rising cost of living. From the very beginning of its history as a piece of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, the federal minimum wage has faced opposition, particularly from those in the business community who viewed the federal minimum wage as undue regulatory intervention. However, since its permanent establishment in 1938, the federal minimum wage remains the law of the land.

Supporters of a livable wage include labor advocates, union groups, and social justice groups, who would largely make the case that the current federal minimum wage is not a sufficient living wage and that, in most cases, individuals subsisting on the current minimum wage are living in poverty. This is the basic case in support of raising the minimum wage. On the policy level, some have called for the standard to be raised to as high as \$15 per hour, and have also called for an end to exemptions which allow employees earning tips—such as those in the food services industries—to be paid an even lower hourly wage. Some advocates have called for federal minimum wage to be linked directly to the rate of inflation, an approach which has already elevated the minimum wage in 17 U.S. states.

Opponents of a higher minimum wage typically include corporate entities with business models reliant upon low-wage workers, as well as small businesses concerned about sustaining elevated labor costs. Lobby groups and think tanks for industries such as fast-food, big-box retail, and manual services are often active in opposing legislation that would raise the federal minimum wage. Those opposing a higher minimum wage

often argue that the regulations would impose economic hardship on large-scale corporate employers and potentially even spell economic doom for some small businesses.

Today, the debate centers, on one side, on labor rights, the right to a livable wage, as well as the racial and ethnic inequality often closely connected to subsistence wages and, on the other side, opposition to government intervention in the operation of private enterprises and small businesses.

#### Advocates for a Livable Wage

- [Fight for \\$15](#)
- [National Employment Law Project](#)
- [Economic Policy Institute](#)
- [Political Economy Research Institute](#)
- [Brennan Center for Justice](#)

#### Opponents of a Livable Wage

- [AFL-CIO](#)
- [Employment Policies Institute](#)
- [The CATO Institute](#)
- [Foundation for Economic Education](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in Economics](#).

## The Rise of White Nationalism in America +

---

Recent decades have seen a rise in the visibility, organization, and violent action of individuals and groups that are formally or informally associated with the philosophy of white nationalism. White nationalism is a political and racial ideology which holds that the United States is a culturally white nation, and that this culture requires protection against the perceived threats posed by people of color and immigrants, as well as certain religious groups including those of the Jewish and Muslim faith. In recent years, white nationalism has gained political traction in the United States, even at the highest levels of government representation, sparking widespread debate and magnifying racial division in America.

Supporters of the White Nationalist movement may have ties to KKK, neo-Nazi, or other white supremacist groups, or may simply be individuals who hold racist views and philosophies about the preservation of white American culture. In some cases, members of the American white nationalist movement may affiliate with even broader international networks whose members support white, Aryan, or Euro-centric culture and identity in their respective nations. While many within the white nationalist community identify explicitly as hate groups, there are also many who either support or

espouse the philosophies of white nationalism without explicit connection to known hate groups. Some in the conservative and right-leaning political community—including elected officials—have outwardly recognized their support of white nationalist values while resisting the label of white supremacy.

Opponents of the white nationalist movement include civil rights advocates, anti-discrimination groups, pro-immigration groups, and those in both political office and the mainstream who hold an inclusive view of American culture. Those who oppose white nationalism will typically advocate for stronger hate crime laws, open immigration reform, protection against racial or religious discrimination, and argue that there is a direct link between the white nationalist movement and the majority of mass gun violence incidences in the United States. There also remains an ongoing political debate over how to classify white nationalist violence and activities, with opponents of the white nationalist movement calling for such activities to be classified as domestic terrorism.

At the center of this issue is the rise of the white nationalist movement and of white nationalist ideologies, with those in support advocating for the preservation of white, Eurocentric culture against a perceived threat of immigrants and people of color, and opponents supporting stronger legal enforcement against hate-based activities, opposition of political leaders with ties to white nationalism, and preventative measures aimed against violent white nationalist actors.

### White Nationalist Groups

- [American Freedom Party](#)
- [Identity Evropa](#)
- [Patriot Front](#)
- [Stormfront](#)
- [The Right Stuff](#)

### Anti-Hate Groups

- [Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- [Anti-Defamation League](#)
- [Partners Against Hate](#)
- [Erase the Hate](#)
- [The Leadership Conference Education Fund](#)

If you'd like a better understanding of this issue, check out [The Best Degrees for Fighting Racism](#).

## **The Green New Deal +**

---

The Green New Deal refers to several pieces of proposed legislation that, while not passed by U.S. Congress, have gained conceptual traction among progressive politicians

as a strategy for confronting global climate change and environmental inequality. Among its initiatives, the Green New Deal would include steps to curb emissions, improve regulations on corporate activities, and support meaningful exploration of alternative fuel methods. The controversy surrounding the global climate change debate permeates the political discourse over the Green New Deal

Supporters of the Green New Deal view global climate change as a real threat to plant, animal and human life on Earth. Advocates for the Green New Deal include conservationists, environmental experts, those with education in the natural sciences, and many progressive political leaders. Supporters view the Green New Deal as an aggressive pathway to restructuring our lifestyle, economy and job-market around more sustainable, fair, and environmentally sound policies and initiatives.

Opponents of the Green New Deal may view global climate change as a phenomenon unrelated to human activity, or alternately may view the dire predictions around climate change with skepticism. Most notable are those who oppose legislation around climate change for its perceived impact on economic activities. Opponents often include corporate leaders, business lobbyists, and especially those in the fossil fuel industries, who argue that fears over global climate change—whether demonstrably true or false—do not justify government imposition that might curtail business activities or lead to economic decline. There are also some who, while supporting efforts to confront global climate change, have expressed concern that the Green New Deal's ambitious aims may not be realistic.

At the center of the debate over the Green New Deal is the view that the United States must take legislative and policy action to confront global climate change, and the conflicting view that global change is either out of our control or that it is a necessary sacrifice in the interests of preserving economic growth.

#### Advocates of the Green New Deal

- [Sunrise Movement](#)
- [The Green Party](#)
- [The Sierra Club](#)
- [Greenpeace](#)

#### Opponents of the Green New Deal

- [Americans for Carbon Dividends](#)
- [The Western Energy Alliance](#)
- [Climate Leadership Council](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [consider a degree in Public Policy](#).

## Abolishing the Electoral College +

Two of America's last four presidents—Donald Trump and George W. Bush—were elected to public office in spite of losing the popular vote. They were able to do so because of the Electoral College—an elaborate state-by-state delegate system which connects each state's overall population to the number of electoral votes available to each presidential candidate. With 538 electoral votes up for grabs, each state awards votes in a winner-take-all statewide vote, which means a candidate needs only to win the majority of the state's popular votes in order to win all of its electoral votes. The electoral system has generated significant controversy in recent years, especially as it has differed from and superseded the nationwide popular vote.

Supporters of the electoral college argue that this process is a foundational part of representative democracy as set forth by the Constitution, and that it includes the important function of retaining individual states' rights for representation on a broad national scale. The use of an electoral system means that smaller and less populous states can make an impact on federal representation by contributing meaningful individual votes. Its intended purpose was to protect these smaller state constituencies from being disenfranchised from national politics. Over time, this strategy has also served to forge close and long-standing affiliations between states or regions and their broader political affiliations.

Opponents of the electoral college would argue that it has had the impact of impeding on the popular will. Those in opposition would also argue that the original goals of the electoral college have been undermined by the effects of something called gerrymandering—an intentional re-drawing of district maps aimed at tilting voter outcomes in certain directions. Especially in cases where the electoral college vote and the popular vote have differed, opponents would argue that there is tangible evidence to suggest that the electoral college is not effectively delivering on the electoral outcomes desired by the voting public. Many in this demographic have called for the elimination of the electoral college altogether, while others have focused their efforts on undoing what they view as deceptive gerrymandering efforts.

At the center of this issue is the fact that the electoral college vote is given precedence over the popular vote, a reality which opponents would argue undermines a fair democratic electoral process and which supporters would argue is necessary to preserve independent state's rights in the face of federal disenfranchisement.

#### Defenders of the Electoral College

[American Enterprise Institute](#)

#### Detractors of the Electoral College

- [National Popular Vote](#)
- [FairVote](#)

If you want to learn more about the political process and how you can participate, [find out what you can do with a degree in Political Science](#).

## Black Lives Matter vs. Blue Lives Matter +

---

The Black Lives Matter movement began as a coordinated political movement to resist police brutality against people of color. The Blue Lives Matter movement emerged as a response to this movement, and aimed to foster public solidarity behind law enforcement. This issue stems from ongoing tensions and violence between members of law enforcement and predominantly black communities, issues which have been repeatedly magnified by incidents in which unarmed black individuals have been fatally wounded by police officers. In many of these incidents, the perceived absence of legal or professional consequences for officers in question has heightened tensions.

To activists in the Black Lives Matter movement as well as supporters of both the movement and its central aims, police brutality represents a real and ongoing danger to people of color, and contributes directly to legal, judicial, and socioeconomic inequality. Moreover, participants and supporters of the movement believe the failure of the judicial system to hold offending officers accountable sends a message that black lives have lesser value than white lives. The Black Lives Matter movement aims for reform of law enforcement tactics, accountability for those guilty of racial bias and brutality, and reform of root racial inequalities in American judicial and incarceration policies.

Critics of the Black Lives Matter movement often view its advocates as being hostile toward law enforcement and undermining the ability of officers to do their jobs under dangerous circumstances. The Blue Lives Matter slogan emerged to denote that officers put their lives on the line every day to serve and protect. To individuals in strong pro-law enforcement families and communities, the Black Lives Matter movement is seen as endangering the lives of police officers by reducing public support, silencing positive community relations, and actively impeding the ability of officers to enforce the law.

At the center for this issue is the tense relationship that often persists between law enforcement and communities of color, as well as the perceived need for improved accountability of law enforcement, particularly as this need conflicts with the perceived need for a strong and competent law enforcement presence.

[Black Lives Matter](#)

[Blue Lives Matter](#)

If you'd like a better understanding of this issue, check out [The Best Degrees for Fighting Racism](#).

## Cancel Culture +

---

The internet and social media have given increased power to private individuals, online influencers, and organized online groups to make an impact on public impression, reputation, and viability. In fact, this power has grown great enough that it has become

possible for such entities to use the web as a platform for dismantling the public standing of celebrities, public office holders, and media figures. This dismantling has been referred to as cancel culture, the act of "cancelling" the visibility, influence, and career of individuals perceived to have acted improperly from their public position. Individuals perceived as guilty of certain offenses—from hateful language or indecent public behavior to sexual assault or other violent crimes—may find themselves at the center of either organic or coordinated online attacks through social media, blog formats, and even through aggressive tactics like doxing (public release of private information) and death threats. The goal is essentially to shame, intimidate and professionally destroy an individual to the end of being "cancelled."

Cancel culture may be seen as a catch-all for movements aimed at capturing social justice by using the tools for campaigning, communication and organization made possible online. For advocates, these tools are seen as ways of being empowered to resist long-standing forms of abuse and prejudice. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the sweeping #MeToo movement, which employed the hashtag to empower women victimized by sexual abuse, sexual assault, and rape to tell their stories. This, in turn, led to revelations of numerous individuals in positions of power who were guilty of such offenses, and in turn, made them among the first notable public figures to be "cancelled." Advocates for various strategies that might be termed "cancel culture" see their actions as redressing historical inequalities and bringing greater accountability to the behavior of individuals in positions of power.

Those who oppose cancel culture may view its tactics as an assault on the right to privacy and a way of trying individuals publicly for offenses without any meaningful "due process." Some critics have likened cancel culture to a witch hunt in which public figures are targeted for various personal, political, and ideological reasons. To its opponents, cancel culture is coordinated internet trolling aimed at destroying reputations and livelihoods without the substantiation of evidence. Some corporate leaders, political figures, and celebrities have expressed concern or fear over meeting what they see as changing expectations of public figures.

At the center of the cancel culture issue is the unrestrained power of groups, organizations, and communities to use their voice both to elevate and dismantle public reputations as well as a shifting understanding of power dynamics and the behavior expected of those in positions of power.

### Cancel Culture Groups

- [me too](#)
- [Anonymous](#)

### Critics of Cancel Culture

#### [National Review](#)

If you'd like a better understanding of the issues at the heart of cancel culture, [find out](#)

what you can do with a degree in Communications.

## **The Student Loan Crisis +**

---

The student loan crisis concerns the large sum of total student loan debt held by Americans. At the time of writing, that sum is roughly \$1.5 trillion, and includes a large number of individuals who never graduated, as well as those who have defaulted on their loans. With the average student graduating with more than \$38,000 in debt—many with much much more—there are growing questions about the structure of the student loan program, the fairness of repayment terms, the realities associated with skyrocketing tuition costs, and whether or not borrowers are really getting their money's worth from a college education.

Critics of the current student loan system object to high interest rates, onerous repayment terms, the rising cost of college, and inconsistencies in the quality and value of some degrees. Those calling for reform of the student loan system—including student advocacy groups, educators, and economists—see a system that sends students into a challenging labor economy already saddled with debt. In addition to questioning the strategies surrounding this system, some have called for an increasing emphasis on income-driven repayment strategies, expanded loan forgiveness programs, and even the total forgiveness of all student loan debt in America.

Advocates of the current student loan system see the current arrangement as the best way to create and advance opportunities for students who might not otherwise have access to higher education. Included among advocates may be banks and other lending organizations, colleges and universities, and—just as there are among critics of the student loan system—student advocacy groups (distinguished in this case as those who see the current system as the best likely way to advancing higher education prospects for low-income candidates).

At the center of this issue are the expense and debt associated with a college education, a reality that is distinctly severe in the United States as compared to other developed nations, and whether, as well as how, the current system should be reformed.

### **Loan Reform Groups**

- [Student Loan Justice](#)
- [The Debt Collective](#)
- [Strike Debt!](#)

### **Student Lenders**

- [Nelnet](#)
- [Sallie Mae](#)

If you want to learn more about student loans and student debt, check out [The Student Financial Aid Source](#).



## The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict +

---

While the role of the U.S. in world affairs is itself a much debated topic, there are few specific geopolitical topics which have as profound an impact on U.S. politics, and which provoke such passionately emotional responses, as does the ongoing conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian people. At the heart of this issue are various conflicting historical claims to a strategically central piece of land at the heart of the Middle East. A holy land to the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths, it also has massive political, military, and economic implications to the broader global community. At the center of ongoing controversy is Israel's extremely close relationship with the United States, the conflicting claims of Israelis and Palestinians to certain lands, the lack of independent political determination for the Palestinians, the employment of violent tactics in seeking that determination, Israel's use of military occupation to control Palestinian populations, and countless other sticking points make this an exceedingly complex issue.

Indeed, the issue is complex enough that viewpoints defy simple classification. However, in the simplest terms, those who support strong American-Israeli relations are often sympathetic to Israel's right to self-preservation, to the protection of its borders, and to the tactics it deems necessary to preserve its own security. Support among observant Jewish and Christian groups in America for the Jewish national state is particularly high, as is support among conservative political groups, who often view Israel as a critical democratic partner in a region of Islamic theocracies.

On the other side of this issue are those who believe that Israel is guilty of human rights violations, particularly in its occupation and treatment of the Palestinian people, its expansion of Jewish settlements into the Palestinian territories, and its marginalization of Arab and Muslim populations in its domestic politics. Critics include global human rights watch groups, Muslim groups, and progressive political leaders who believe America has a responsibility as Israel's ally to make it accountable for its actions. There are also many who are sympathetic to Israel's right to survival but who may characterize its current policies toward the Palestinians as counter-productive to a lasting peace.

At the center of this issue are both the rights of the Israelis and the Palestinians to independence and self-determination, and how conflicting historical claims to the holy land bring these perceived rights into regular conflict with one another.

### Pro-Israel Groups

- [American Israeli Public Affairs Committee](#)
- [J Street](#)
- [Birthright Israel](#)

### Critics of Israeli Policy

- [BDS Movement](#)

- [If Not Now](#)
- [Jewish Voice for Peace](#)
- [Amnesty International](#)

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, [find out what you can do with a degree in Negotiation and Conflict Management](#).

## Universal Healthcare +

---

At the center of this issue is the pressing need for reform in America's healthcare system. While groups and individuals on all sides of the issue agree that there is an urgent need for change to the system, there is widespread disagreement on how to control high insurance costs, bureaucratic treatment obstacles, and deep socioeconomic inequalities around access to quality treatment. One of the most frequently debated ideas is that of universal healthcare, driven by the belief that all citizens deserve access to affordable, quality healthcare regardless of their income or financial resources. Advocates of this approach must often face claims that such a policy is unrealistic and would lead to widespread invasion of government entities into the private and medical affairs of all Americans.

Those who support universal healthcare argue that access to affordable quality healthcare is a right that should be available to all Americans. Universal healthcare describes a system in which public funding helps to support healthcare costs, particularly for those who otherwise might not be able to afford treatment. Advocates believe this would largely supplant the highly stratified and economically unequal insurance system with a more fair, accessible, and efficient healthcare system. Advocates for universal healthcare argue that there is evidence of the system's viability in various countries from the developed sphere.

Those who oppose universal healthcare argue that it would invite undue government involvement in the administration of healthcare, ultimately leading to greater systemic inefficiencies. Corporate leaders in the insurance, healthcare, and pharmaceutical sectors typically oppose universal healthcare under the premise that it would interfere with profitability and free-market enterprise within the healthcare industry.

At the center of this issue is the pressing demand for systemic reform of America's healthcare system and the widely variant perspectives on how to achieve this reform in ways that lower costs, improve accessibility, and produce positive health outcomes.

### Supporters of Universal Healthcare

- [Universal Healthcare Action Network](#)
- [Healthcare-Now!](#)
- [American Medical Student Association](#)
- [Campaign For Guaranteed Healthcare](#)

## Opponents of Universal Healthcare

- Republican Liberty Caucus
- The Heritage Foundation
- Tea Party Patriots
- House Freedom Caucus

If you want to be an active part of resolving this debate, find out what you can do with a degree in Healthcare Administration.