

**Free speech shocks in the marketplace of ideas:
How speaker deplatforming incidents affect American college students**

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Abstract: Theorists in law and economics have suggested that increased liability for speech could deter expression, resulting in a “chilling effect.” This paper explores whether the same phenomenon is true of *social* liability for speech, using attempts to disinvite or disrupt the events of conservative speakers on American college campuses as quasi-experimental shocks. Cross-sectional data on college students in 2022 and 2023 collected by the Foundation for Individual Right and Expression (FIRE) allows me to compare students within the same school and semester before and after a shock. Using a stacked difference-in-differences method, I find that a shock, on average, makes conservative students 11 percentage points less comfortable discussing a controversial political topic in an in-class discussion relative to liberal students, and (when one outlier school is omitted) increases self-censorship among conservative students by 8 percentage points in absolute terms. Effects are considerably heterogeneous by school, however, and depend on the details of the shock. I also examine student attitudes towards college administrators and find that, after a deplatforming incident, liberal students are 8 percentage points more likely to think their administrators would defend a speaker in a controversy over offensive speech, but are *not* more likely to think their administrators clearly protect free speech.