

# A more tolerant America?

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As the nation's headlines turn more and more to issues of tolerance—race, religion, free speech, same sex marriage—research by San Diego State University Psychology Professor Jean M. Twenge shows that Americans are actually more tolerant than ever before.

In a paper released this month by the journal *Social Forces*, Twenge, along with Nathan T. Carter and Keith Campbell from the University of Georgia, found that Americans are now more likely to believe that people with different views and lifestyles can and should have the same rights as others, such as giving a speech or teaching at a college.

"When old social rules disappear, people have more freedom to live their

lives as they want to, and Americans are increasingly tolerant of those choices," said Twenge, who is also the author of "Generation Me."

"This goes beyond well-known trends such as the increasing support for gay marriage. People are increasingly saying that it's OK for those who are different to fully participate in the community and influence everyone else."

## **Tolerance for different views**

The researchers used data from the General Social Survey, a nationally representative survey of adult Americans conducted from 1972 to 2012. The survey includes a series of questions related to [tolerance](#) of people with controversial views or lifestyles including homosexuals, atheists, militarists, communists and racists.

Only tolerance for racists has decreased over time, showing people today are less tolerant of the intolerant.

So why have recent incidents of racism on college campuses garnered so much attention? "A few decades ago, racism would barely have been noticed—it might have even been rewarded," Twenge said. "Now it's noticed, and the consequences can be swift. It shows how much things have changed."

## **Tolerance by generations**

The study showed that the biggest generational shift in tolerance was between the Silent generation and the Baby Boomers who followed them. Generation X and Millennials continued the trend toward tolerance.

"American culture has become more individualistic, which has some negative consequences such as overconfidence and social disconnection. This study shows the upside of treating people as individuals: More tolerance for those who are different," Twenge said.

Previous research has shown that Millennials (called "Generation Me" by Twenge), are less empathic and more dismissive than previous generations, so it may be surprising to some that they are also more tolerant than past generations.

"Tolerance and empathy are not the same thing," Twenge said. "Millennials believe that everyone can live their lives as they want to—thus, they are tolerant—but that doesn't always extend to taking someone else's perspective or feeling empathy."

**More information:** *Social Forces*, [sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/.../03/10/sf.sov050.full](https://sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/.../03/10/sf.sov050.full)

Provided by San Diego State University

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