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You're Cancelled: Political Differences in Participation in Cancel Culture

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“Cancel culture” is a prominent and controversial topic. Cancelling—that is, imposing real-world consequences and punishments on people who engage in offensive speech and behavior—is often presented as the province of the political left. The current studies examine this assumption, investigating the relationship between political ideology and the desire to punish offensive behavior. A nationally representative sample (total N = 720) read descriptions of real-world scenarios involving everyday (Study 1) and famous (Study 2) people being cancelled, rating the offensiveness of each behavior and the appropriateness of its consequences. Cancelling was defined as support for severe consequences, controlling for perceived offensiveness. Scenarios were pretested such that three scenarios in each study would offend liberals and three would offend conservatives. In Study 1, both liberals (β = .114, .185, and .294, all p < .05) and conservatives (β = -.144, -.189, and -.292, all p < .01) supported cancelling people who offended them. In Study 2, liberals supported cancelling (β = .213, .213, .389, all p < .001); conservatives were more likely to support cancelling Colin Kaepernick (β = -.110, p < .05) but not Tomi Lahren (whom liberals supported cancelling, β = .164, p < .001) or Liz Cheney (β = -.060 p = .260). Conservatives may be less likely to support punishing ingroup members (Lahren and Cheney, despite offending conservatives, are themselves conservative), or may identify the censure of celebrities as “cancel culture,” which they believe they oppose. We conclude that both sides of the political spectrum support cancel culture, although there are boundary conditions on this tendency.