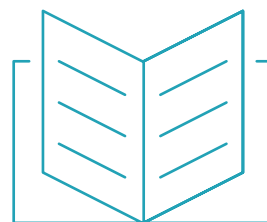
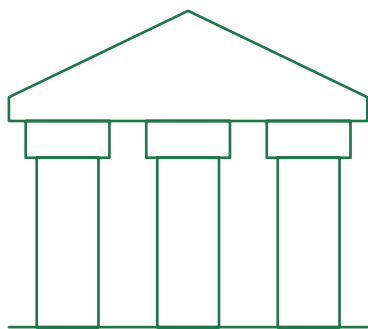
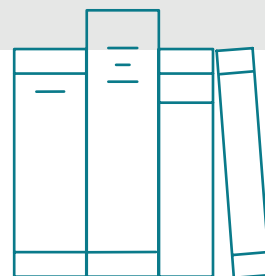


Americans' Views on Book Restrictions in U.S. Public Schools

Supplement to the Main Report



A study from the Knight Free Expression
Research Series

August 2024





Table of Contents

This document provides appendices to the main report of the Knight Foundation's 2024 Book Restrictions study. See the report at <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/americans-views-on-book-restrictions-in-u-s-public-schools-2024/>.

Appendix A

3

Topline data report

Appendix B

17

Methodology

Appendix C

22

Desk review



Appendix A

Topline Data Report

Topline survey results follow. In the tables below, “Skipped” refers to respondents who did not answer the question when there were no “don’t know” or “neutral/no opinion” response options provided on screen. Asterisks indicate results <0.5 percent.

1. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the public schools in your community?

| | Better | | | | Worse | | | |
|----------|--------|-----------|-----------|------|-------|-------------|------|---------|
| | NET | Excellent | Very good | Good | NET | Not so good | Poor | Skipped |
| 3/10/24* | 40 | 9 | 31 | 41 | 17 | 14 | 3 | 1 |

2. How responsive do you think the public schools in your community are to the concerns of parents?

| | More responsive | | | | Less responsive | | |
|---------|-----------------|------|----------|-----|-----------------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | Skipped |
| 3/10/24 | 78 | 19 | 59 | 20 | 16 | 4 | 2 |

3. As far as you are aware, how would you rate the professional judgment of each of these groups in your community?

| | Excellent/very good | | | | Not good/poor | | | |
|--|---------------------|-----------|-----------|------|---------------|-------------|------|------------|
| | NET | Excellent | Very good | Good | NET | Not so good | Poor | Don't know |
| a. Public school teachers | 42 | 11 | 31 | 37 | 9 | 7 | 3 | 12 |
| b. Public school librarians | 41 | 13 | 27 | 32 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 22 |
| c. Public school administrators (e.g., principals and superintendents) | 30 | 8 | 22 | 37 | 19 | 14 | 6 | 14 |
| d. Members of the district's school board | 21 | 5 | 16 | 35 | 25 | 17 | 8 | 19 |

*Indicates the final date of the survey field period.



3a. [ASK IF DON'T KNOW] If you had to choose, how would you rate the professional judgment of each of these groups?

| | Excellent/very good | | | Good | Not good/poor | | | Skipped |
|--|---------------------|-----------|-----------|------|---------------|-------------|------|---------|
| | NET | Excellent | Very good | | NET | Not so good | Poor | |
| a. Public school teachers | 14 | 2 | 12 | 60 | 15 | 13 | 2 | 11 |
| b. Public school librarians | 19 | 3 | 15 | 61 | 11 | 10 | 2 | 9 |
| c. Public school administrators (e.g., principals and superintendents) | 10 | 1 | 9 | 62 | 17 | 14 | 3 | 12 |
| d. Members of the district's school board | 8 | 1 | 7 | 61 | 22 | 18 | 4 | 10 |

Q3/Q3a NET table:

| | Excellent/very good | | | Good | Not good/poor | | | Q3a Skipped |
|--|---------------------|-----------|-----------|------|---------------|-------------|------|-------------|
| | NET | Excellent | Very good | | NET | Not so good | Poor | |
| a. Public school teachers | 44 | 11 | 32 | 44 | 11 | 8 | 3 | 1 |
| b. Public school librarians | 45 | 14 | 30 | 45 | 8 | 7 | 2 | 2 |
| c. Public school administrators (e.g., principals and superintendents) | 31 | 8 | 23 | 45 | 22 | 16 | 6 | 2 |
| d. Members of the district's school board | 22 | 5 | 18 | 47 | 29 | 20 | 8 | 2 |

4. Public schools provide students with access to books that are selected by teachers and school librarians. How confident are you that your community's public schools select books that are appropriate for the students there to read?

| | More confident | | | Less confident | | | Skipped |
|---------|----------------|------|----------|----------------|--------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | |
| 3/10/24 | 78 | 33 | 45 | 21 | 15 | 5 | 2 |

5. [ASK K-12 PARENTS] As far as you are aware, [has your child/have any of your children] ever read a book from their school that you thought was inappropriate for their age?

| | Yes | No | Don't know |
|---------|-----|----|------------|
| 3/10/24 | 7 | 82 | 11 |

6. [ASK PRE-K-12 PARENTS] How concerned are you about the chance that [your child/any of your children] might read a book from their school that you think is inappropriate for their age?

| | More concerned | | | Less concerned | | | Skipped |
|---------|----------------|------|----------|----------------|--------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | |
| 3/10/24 | 26 | 9 | 17 | 74 | 38 | 36 | * |



7. There have been debates recently about whether or not to restrict students' access to some books that currently are available in public schools, based on their content. How informed do you feel about this topic?

| | More informed | | | Less informed | | | |
|---------|---------------|------|----------|---------------|--------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | Skipped |
| 3/10/24 | 61 | 18 | 43 | 38 | 25 | 13 | 1 |

8. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose efforts to restrict students' access to some books that currently are available in public schools?

| | Support | | | | Oppose | | |
|---------|---------|----------|----------|--------------------|--------|----------|----------|
| | NET | Strongly | Somewhat | Neutral/No opinion | NET | Somewhat | Strongly |
| 3/10/24 | 27 | 12 | 15 | 23 | 50 | 16 | 34 |

8a. [ASK IF NEUTRAL/NO OPINION] Do you lean toward supporting or opposing restricting students' access to some books that currently are available in public schools?

| | Lean toward supporting restricting access | Lean toward opposing restricting access | Skipped |
|---------|---|---|---------|
| 3/10/24 | 31 | 64 | 5 |

Q8/Q8a NET table:

| | Support | | | Oppose | | | |
|---------|---------|----------|------------------|--------|------------------|----------|-------------|
| | NET | Strongly | Somewhat/leaning | NET | Somewhat/leaning | Strongly | Skipped Q8a |
| 3/10/24 | 34 | 12 | 22 | 65 | 30 | 34 | 1 |

9. Briefly, in a few words, when you hear about efforts to restrict students' access to some books that currently are available in public schools, what, if anything, comes to mind?

See open-end results at <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/americans-views-on-book-restrictions-in-u-s-public-schools-2024/>

10. Do you think each of the following is or is not a legitimate reason to restrict students' access to a book that currently is available at their school?

| | Legitimate reason | Not a legitimate reason | Neutral/No opinion |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| a. A parent complains that the book contradicts their moral values | 28 | 54 | 17 |
| b. A parent complains that the book contradicts their religious beliefs | 21 | 61 | 17 |
| c. A parent complains that the book contradicts their political views | 9 | 76 | 15 |
| d. A parent complains that the book is not age-appropriate | 52 | 28 | 19 |



10a. [ASK IF NEUTRAL/NO OPINION] Do you lean toward thinking that each of these is or is not a legitimate reason to restrict students' access to a book that currently is available at their school?

| | Legitimate reason | Not a legitimate reason | Skipped |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| a. A parent complains that the book contradicts their moral values | 39 | 55 | 6 |
| b. A parent complains that the book contradicts their religious beliefs | 36 | 59 | 6 |
| c. A parent complains that the book contradicts their political views | 23 | 71 | 6 |
| d. A parent complains that the book is not age-appropriate | 42 | 54 | 4 |

Q10/Q10a NET table:

| | Legitimate reason | Not a legitimate reason | Skipped Q10a |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| a. A parent complains that the book contradicts their moral values | 35 | 64 | 1 |
| b. A parent complains that the book contradicts their religious beliefs | 28 | 71 | 1 |
| c. A parent complains that the book contradicts their political views | 12 | 87 | 1 |
| d. A parent complains that the book is not age-appropriate | 61 | 39 | 1 |

11. How important to you personally is the issue of public school students' access to books?

| | More important | | | | Less important | | | |
|---------|----------------|-----------|------|----------|----------------|--------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Extremely | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | Skipped |
| 3/10/24 | 62 | 30 | 33 | 23 | 13 | 9 | 4 | 1 |

12. Do you support or oppose states enacting laws on what content is and is not allowed in books that are available to students in public schools?

| | Support | | | Oppose | | | |
|---------|---------|----------|----------|--------|----------|----------|---------|
| | NET | Strongly | Somewhat | NET | Somewhat | Strongly | Skipped |
| 3/10/24 | 36 | 11 | 26 | 62 | 25 | 37 | 2 |

13. As far as you are aware, have there been any efforts to restrict the availability of books in the public schools in your community?

| | Yes | No | Skipped |
|---------|-----|----|---------|
| 3/10/24 | 23 | 74 | 3 |



14. [ASK IF YES IN Q13] When did that last happen, as far as you recall?

| | Within the last year | 1-3 years ago | 4-10 years ago | More than 10 years ago | Skipped |
|---------|----------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------------|---------|
| 3/10/24 | 54 | 37 | 4 | 3 | 1 |

Q13/Q14 NET table:

| | Not aware of any | NET | Aware of efforts to restrict availability of books | | | | Skipped Q14 | Skipped Q13 |
|---------|------------------|-----|--|---------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | | Within the last year | 1-3 years ago | 4-10 years ago | More than 10 years ago | | |
| 3/10/24 | 74 | 23 | 13 | 9 | 1 | 1 | * | 3 |

15. [ASK IF YES IN Q13] As far as you are aware, have any efforts to restrict the availability of books in the public schools in your community resulted in students' access to books being restricted, or not?

| | Yes | No | Skipped |
|---------|-----|----|---------|
| 3/10/24 | 55 | 42 | 3 |

Q13/Q15 NET table:

| | 3/10/24 |
|--|---------|
| Not aware of any efforts to restrict the availability of books | 74 |
| Aware of efforts to restrict the availability of books | 23 |
| Yes, efforts have resulted in books being restricted | 13 |
| No, efforts have not resulted in books being restricted | 10 |
| Skipped Q14 (whether books restricted) | 1 |
| Skipped Q13 (awareness) | 3 |

16. [ASK IF YES IN Q13] Have you ever personally participated in trying to (maintain) or (restrict) students' access to a book in the public schools in your community? This could include calling in or writing a complaint, signing a petition, or attending a meeting, among other actions.

| | Yes | No | Skipped |
|---------|-----|----|---------|
| 3/10/24 | 13 | 87 | * |

Q13/Q16 NET table:

| | 3/10/24 |
|--|---------|
| Not aware of any efforts to restrict the availability of books | 74 |
| Aware of efforts to restrict the availability of books | 23 |
| Yes, personally participated in trying to maintain or restrict | 3 |
| No, has not participated in trying to maintain or restrict | 20 |
| Skipped Q16 (whether participated) | * |
| Skipped Q13 (awareness) | 3 |



17. [ASK IF YES IN Q16] What was your goal?

| | 3/10/24 |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Maintaining students' book access | 71 |
| Restricting students' book access | 28 |
| Skipped | 1 |

Q13/Q16/Q17 NET table:

| | 3/10/24 |
|--|---------|
| Not aware of any efforts to restrict the availability of books | 74 |
| Aware of efforts to restrict the availability of books | 23 |
| Yes, personally participated in trying to maintain or restrict | 3 |
| Goal was maintaining students' book access | 2 |
| Goal was restricting students' book access | 1 |
| Skipped Q17 (goal) | * |
| No, has not participated in trying to maintain or restrict | 20 |
| Skipped Q16 (whether participated) | * |
| Skipped Q13 (awareness) | 3 |

18. Do you think books that are available in the public schools in your community adequately represent these political views, or not?

| | Adequately | Not adequately | Skipped |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------------|---------|
| a. Liberal political views | 63 | 28 | 9 |
| b. Conservative political views | 53 | 38 | 9 |

In the next questions, “elementary school” refers to grades pre-K-5; “middle school” refers to grades 6-8 and “high school” refers to grades 9-12.

19. Which of these do you think is a bigger concern:

| | 3/10/24 |
|--|---------|
| Elementary schools in your community giving their students access to books that are inappropriate for their age | 45 |
| Elementary schools in your community restricting their students' access to books that have educational value | 52 |
| Skipped | 3 |



20. Which of these do you think is a bigger concern:

3/10/24

| | |
|---|----|
| Middle schools in your community giving their students access to books that may be inappropriate for their age | 38 |
| Middle schools in your community restricting their students' access to books that have educational value | 59 |
| Skipped | 3 |

21. Which of these do you think is a bigger concern:

3/10/24

| | |
|---|----|
| High schools in your community giving their students access to books that may be inappropriate for their age | 29 |
| High schools in your community restricting their students' access to books that have educational value | 68 |
| Skipped | 3 |

[Note: Q19-Q20-Q21 were rotated.]

22. How confident are you in the public schools in your community to handle each of these subjects appropriately?

| | More confident | | | Less confident | | | Skipped |
|---|----------------|------|----------|----------------|--------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | |
| a. How the history of racism affects America today | 53 | 14 | 39 | 44 | 29 | 15 | 3 |
| b. Issues related to gender and sexuality | 47 | 11 | 36 | 50 | 29 | 20 | 3 |
| c. Civics (citizenship, democracy, the role of government in society) | 63 | 17 | 46 | 35 | 24 | 11 | 3 |
| d. Acceptance of differences among people | 65 | 19 | 46 | 32 | 22 | 10 | 3 |
| e. Political views | 49 | 10 | 39 | 48 | 33 | 15 | 3 |
| f. Moral values | 58 | 14 | 45 | 39 | 26 | 13 | 3 |
| g. Religious beliefs | 51 | 12 | 40 | 46 | 29 | 17 | 3 |



23. Say the following books have been selected by educators in your community's public schools to be available to **elementary school students**, but some community members object to them because of their content. Do you think these books should or should not be available to elementary school students?

| | Should be | Should not be | Skipped |
|---|-----------|---------------|---------|
| a. A book that talks about gender identities that may not be traditionally male or female | 43 | 55 | 2 |
| b. A book that talks about sexual orientation | 42 | 56 | 2 |
| c. A book that mentions sexual intercourse | 26 | 71 | 2 |
| d. A book that includes portrayals of racism | 61 | 36 | 2 |

24. Say the following books have been selected by educators in your community's public schools to be available to **middle school students**, but some community members object to them because of their content. Do you think these books should or should not be available to middle school students?

| | Should be | Should not be | Skipped |
|---|-----------|---------------|---------|
| a. A book that talks about gender identities that may not be traditionally male or female | 56 | 42 | 2 |
| b. A book that talks about sexual orientation | 59 | 39 | 2 |
| c. A book that mentions sexual intercourse | 52 | 45 | 3 |
| d. A book that includes portrayals of racism | 74 | 24 | 2 |

25. Say the following books have been selected by educators in your community's public schools to be available to **high school students**, but some community members object to them because of their content. Do you think these books should or should not be available to high school students?

| | Should be | Should not be | Skipped |
|---|-----------|---------------|---------|
| a. A book that talks about gender identities that may not be traditionally male or female | 64 | 34 | 2 |
| b. A book that talks about sexual orientation | 70 | 27 | 2 |
| c. A book that mentions sexual intercourse | 72 | 26 | 2 |
| d. A book that includes portrayals of racism | 80 | 18 | 2 |

[Note: Q23-Q24-Q25 were rotated.]



26. Would you support or oppose each of the following books being available in a public school library in your community?

| | Support | | | Oppose | | | Skipped |
|---|---------|----------|----------|--------|----------|----------|---------|
| | NET | Strongly | Somewhat | NET | Somewhat | Strongly | |
| a. A book suggesting it is normal for people to have gender identities that may not be traditionally male or female | 53 | 26 | 27 | 44 | 18 | 26 | 3 |
| b. A book suggesting it is abnormal for people to have gender identities that may not be traditionally male or female | 41 | 17 | 24 | 56 | 25 | 31 | 3 |
| c. A book suggesting that Western culture is superior to others | 30 | 10 | 21 | 67 | 32 | 35 | 3 |
| d. A book suggesting that no culture is superior to others | 83 | 54 | 29 | 15 | 9 | 6 | 3 |
| e. A book advancing Christian religious beliefs | 61 | 25 | 37 | 35 | 20 | 15 | 3 |
| f. A book questioning the existence of God | 57 | 25 | 32 | 40 | 19 | 21 | 3 |

27. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the freedom of speech as protected in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution includes the “right to receive publications,” although “age appropriateness” is a valid reason to restrict access to books. How much do you trust each of these to decide what books are age-appropriate for students in your community’s public schools?

| | More | | | Less | | | Skipped |
|---|------|--------------|---------------|------|----------|------------|---------|
| | NET | A great deal | A good amount | NET | Somewhat | Not at all | |
| a. The state government | 21 | 5 | 16 | 76 | 34 | 42 | 3 |
| b. The school board in your school district | 32 | 8 | 25 | 64 | 40 | 24 | 3 |
| c. The superintendent and other district-level administrators in your school district | 34 | 9 | 25 | 62 | 40 | 22 | 3 |
| d. Public school principals in your school district | 41 | 12 | 29 | 56 | 38 | 17 | 3 |
| e. Public school librarians in your school district | 53 | 23 | 31 | 44 | 30 | 13 | 3 |



| | More | | | Less | | | |
|--|------|--------------|---------------|------|----------|------------|---------|
| | NET | A great deal | A good amount | NET | Somewhat | Not at all | Skipped |
| f. Public school teachers in your school district | 50 | 18 | 32 | 47 | 33 | 14 | 3 |
| g. Parents of public school students in your school district | 39 | 13 | 25 | 58 | 37 | 21 | 3 |
| h. Community members who are not parents of public school students in your school district | 21 | 5 | 16 | 76 | 36 | 40 | 3 |

28. Public school districts are required to investigate complaints about books that are available in their district schools. Who should be able to submit a complaint of this type?

| | Should be | Should not be | Skipped |
|--|-----------|---------------|---------|
| a. Any parent with a child enrolled in a public school there | 91 | 7 | 2 |
| b. Any resident of the school district | 51 | 46 | 3 |
| c. Any resident of the state | 40 | 58 | 3 |

29. Should a school district investigate whether or not to restrict students' access to a book after receiving one complaint about that book, or only after receiving multiple complaints about that book?

| | 3/10/24 |
|---------------------|---------|
| One complaint | 24 |
| Multiple complaints | 74 |
| Skipped | 2 |

30. [ASK IF MULTIPLE COMPLAINTS] How many complaints about a book should it take before a school board initiates an investigation?

| | 2-5 | 6-10 | 11-25 | 26-100 | 101-500 | 501-1,000 | >1,000 | Mean* | Median | Skipped |
|---------|-----|------|-------|--------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|---------|
| 3/10/24 | 43 | 20 | 10 | 11 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 142 | 6 | 12 |

*Mean includes n=28 cases with the maximum response, 10,000.

31. Some school districts say that the time they spend investigating book complaints takes resources away from their educational mission. Do you think this is or is not an adequate reason to limit the number of book investigations that a school district conducts?

| | 3/10/24 |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Is an adequate reason | 46 |
| Is not an adequate reason | 51 |
| Skipped | 3 |



32. How concerned are you that public school districts in your community may not purchase books that have educational value out of fear there will be complaints about the books they select because of their content?

| | More concerned | | | Less concerned | | | |
|---------|----------------|------|----------|----------------|--------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | Skipped |
| 3/10/24 | 62 | 21 | 41 | 35 | 26 | 9 | 3 |

33. Do you think that people who bring complaints about books that are available in public schools are more interested in (protecting children from inappropriate content) or more interested in (pursuing a political agenda)?

| | 3/10/24 |
|---|---------|
| More interested in protecting children from inappropriate content | 41 |
| More interested in pursuing a political agenda | 55 |
| Skipped | 3 |

34. How much of a say should each of these groups have in deciding what books should be available to students in your community's public schools?

| | More | | | Less | | | |
|--|------|--------------|---------------|------|------|-------------|---------|
| | NET | A great deal | A good amount | NET | Some | Little/none | Skipped |
| a. The state government | 22 | 6 | 16 | 76 | 34 | 42 | 3 |
| b. The school board in your school district | 44 | 13 | 31 | 53 | 38 | 15 | 3 |
| c. The superintendent and other district-level administrators in your school district | 45 | 13 | 32 | 52 | 38 | 14 | 3 |
| d. Public school principals in your school district | 53 | 16 | 38 | 43 | 33 | 11 | 3 |
| e. Public school librarians in your school district | 64 | 31 | 33 | 33 | 24 | 9 | 3 |
| f. Public school teachers in your school district | 65 | 28 | 38 | 32 | 24 | 8 | 3 |
| g. Parents of public school students in your school district | 57 | 29 | 28 | 40 | 28 | 12 | 3 |
| h. Community members who are not parents of public school students in your school district | 21 | 7 | 14 | 76 | 29 | 46 | 3 |



35. After a complaint is made, which one of these should have the final say about whether or not a book should be available to students in your community's public schools?

3/10/24

| | |
|--|----|
| The state government | 15 |
| The school board in your school district | 82 |
| Skipped | 3 |

36. Do you think efforts to restrict students' access to books threaten the freedom of expression of these groups, or not?

| | Threatens | Does not threaten | Skipped |
|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------|
| a. Authors | 52 | 44 | 3 |
| b. School librarians | 45 | 51 | 3 |
| c. Teachers | 48 | 49 | 3 |
| d. Students | 53 | 44 | 3 |

37. How important is it to you that the public schools in your community have a mix of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds?

| | More important | | | | Less important | | | |
|---------|----------------|-----------|------|----------|----------------|--------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Extremely | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | Skipped |
| 3/10/24 | 59 | 33 | 26 | 22 | 16 | 8 | 8 | 2 |

38. All in all, in each of these areas, do you think it is more important for a child to (adopt their parents' point of view), or to (develop their own point of view)?

| | Adopt their parents' | Develop their own | Skipped |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------|
| a. Political opinions | 9 | 88 | 3 |
| b. Moral values | 26 | 71 | 3 |
| c. Religious beliefs | 18 | 79 | 3 |

39. How close of a personal connection, if any, do you feel with your community's public schools?

| | More close | | | | Less close | | |
|---------|------------|------|----------|-----|------------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | Skipped |
| 3/10/24 | 34 | 7 | 26 | 65 | 34 | 31 | 2 |



40. In the past three years, have you done any of the following related to your local public schools? Check all that apply.

| | 3/10/24 |
|--|---------|
| Vote in a local school board election | 33 |
| Attend a local school board meeting | 7 |
| Donate money or supplies | 21 |
| Participate in a parent organization, such as the school's PTA | 8 |
| Attend a school event (i.e., sports, performing arts, book fair, ceremonies) | 33 |
| Volunteer at a school event | 13 |
| Other (please write in)^ | 2 |
| None of the above | 43 |
| Skipped | 2 |

^See open-end results at <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/americans-views-on-book-restrictions-in-u-s-public-schools-2024/>

41. Please select all that apply.

| | 3/10/24 |
|---|---------|
| I am working or have worked as a public school teacher | 5 |
| I am working or have worked in a public school, not as a teacher | 7 |
| A family member or close friend is working, or has worked, in a public school | 37 |
| None of the above | 55 |
| Skipped | 1 |

42. [ASK IF CHILDREN AGE 18 OR YOUNGER, NOT HOMESCHOOLED] Have you ever considered homeschooling [your child/ any of your children], or not?

| | Yes | No | Skipped |
|---------|-----|----|---------|
| 3/10/24 | 32 | 68 | * |

43. What kind of K-12 school did you attend (or mainly attend) as a child?

| | 3/10/24 |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Public school | 83 |
| Public "charter" school | 2 |
| Private non-religious school | 3 |
| Private religious school | 10 |
| Homeschooled | 2 |
| Skipped | 1 |



44. How often, if at all, do you read part of a book or e-book or listen to an audio book for pleasure?

3/10/24

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Every day | 20 |
| A few times a week | 20 |
| A few times a month | 19 |
| Sometimes but less often | 25 |
| Never | 15 |
| Skipped | 1 |

45. How closely do you follow these?

| 3/10/24 | More closely | | | Less closely | | | Skipped |
|------------------|--------------|------|----------|--------------|--------|------------|---------|
| | NET | Very | Somewhat | NET | Not so | Not at all | |
| a. Local news | 63 | 24 | 40 | 36 | 24 | 12 | 1 |
| b. National news | 67 | 28 | 39 | 32 | 21 | 11 | 1 |

46. Which of these is your main source of news?

3/10/24

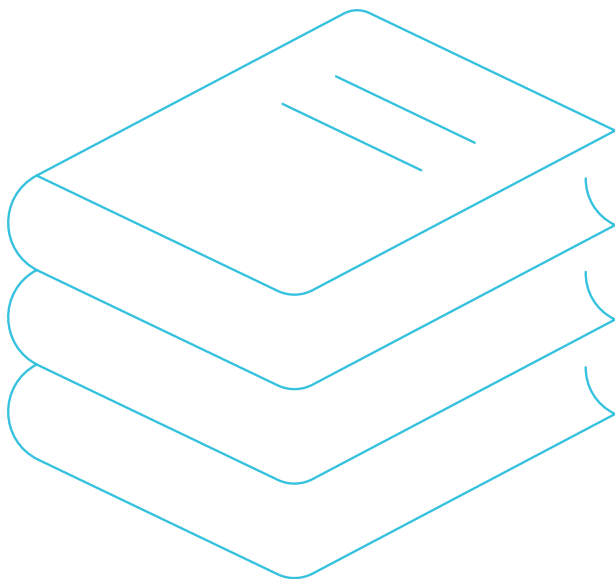
| | |
|--|----|
| Social media | 22 |
| Other sources | 76 |
| TV news (including TV news websites) | 42 |
| Radio news (including radio news websites) | 8 |
| A newspaper or newspaper website | 14 |
| Another news website | 14 |
| Skipped | 2 |

47. [ASK IF LEANED REPUBLICAN/LEANED DEMOCRAT] How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be with a child of yours marrying someone who is a...

| | Comfortable | | | | Uncomfortable | | | | Skipped |
|---------------|-------------|----------|--------|----------|---------------|----------|--------|----------|---------|
| | NET | Entirely | Mostly | Somewhat | NET | Somewhat | Mostly | Entirely | |
| a. Democrat | 81 | 45 | 20 | 16 | 17 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| b. Republican | 73 | 38 | 18 | 17 | 25 | 11 | 7 | 7 | 2 |

Methodology

This survey was produced for the Knight Foundation by [Langer Research Associates](#). Data collection was conducted via the nationally representative Ipsos KnowledgePanel®, in which participants are randomly recruited via address-based sampling to respond to survey questionnaires online. Households without internet connections are provided with a web-enabled device and service.



The survey was designed to include approximately 4,000 adults from the general population and oversamples to at least 150 Asian pre-K-12 parents, 150 Black pre-K-12 parents and 150 Hispanic pre-K-12 parents.

The questionnaire, in English and Spanish, was pretested Feb. 23-26, 2024, and field work was conducted Feb. 29-March 10. After initial invitations, reminder emails were sent on the fourth and seventh days of the field period. Out of 7,165 panel members invited to participate, 4,622 responded. Participants completed the survey in a median time of 18 minutes.

Quality control flagged respondents who skipped all questions (9), and, of the remainder, who completed the survey in the 1 percent fastest times (46). Fifty-five cases were removed from the dataset, resulting in a final sample of 4,567 adults, including 1,413 parents of children age 18 or younger.

Data were weighted via iterative proportional fitting to the following benchmark distributions of general population adults from the U.S. Census Bureau's March 2023 Current Population Survey (language proficiency among Hispanics is from the 2022 American Community Survey):

- Sex (male, female) by age (18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+)
- Education (less than high school, high school, some college, bachelor's or higher)
- Census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West) by metropolitan status (metro, non-metro)
- Language dominance within Hispanics (English dominant Hispanic, bilingual Hispanic, Spanish dominant Hispanic, non-Hispanic)
- Household income (under \$25K, \$25K-\$49,999, \$50K-\$74,999, \$75K-\$99,999, \$100K-\$149,999, \$150K and over)
- Marital status (married, not married)
- Hispanic nativity (U.S.-born Hispanic, non-U.S.-born Hispanic, non-Hispanic)
- Parental status (children 0-18) (yes, no) by race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, non-Hispanic 2+ races)
- Parental status (children 0-18) (yes, no) by sex (male, female)
- Parental status (children 0-18) (yes, no) by age (18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50+)

- Parental status (children 0-18) (yes, no) by education (some college or below, Bachelor's or higher)
- Race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic white/other/2+ races, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic) by sex (male, female)
- Race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic white/other/2+ races, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic) by age (18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50+)
- Race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic white/other/2+ races, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic) by education (some college or below, bachelor's or higher)

General population weights were trimmed at 0.3 percent and 99.7 percent and scaled from their starting weight to add up to the total number of respondents. The survey has a design effect of 1.19 and a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 1.6 percentage points for the full sample, with error margins larger for subgroups. Sampling error is not the only source of differences in survey results.

In terms of partisan and ideological differences, 33 percent of survey respondents identified themselves as Democrats, 27 percent as Republicans and 38 percent as independents or something else. These almost exactly match KF's 2022 Free Expression survey (fielded in summer 2021), which had 33 percent Democrats, 26 percent Republicans and 40 percent independents/other. Also in the present study, 27 percent of respondents identified themselves as liberals, 41 percent as moderates and 29 percent as conservatives. This question was not asked in the 2021 survey.



Tables of unweighted, weighted and benchmark distributions follow.

| | Unweighted (%) | Weighted (%) | Benchmark (%) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 18-29 male | 6.57 | 10.22 | 10.28 |
| 18-29 female | 7.62 | 9.91 | 9.97 |
| 30-39 male | 6.98 | 8.86 | 8.86 |
| 30-39 female | 7.84 | 8.72 | 8.71 |
| 40-49 male | 8.98 | 7.91 | 7.90 |
| 40-49 female | 8.67 | 7.95 | 7.94 |
| 50-59 male | 9.59 | 7.83 | 7.81 |
| 50-59 female | 7.97 | 8.03 | 8.02 |
| 60-69 male | 8.50 | 7.32 | 7.31 |
| 60-69 female | 9.77 | 7.98 | 7.96 |
| 70+ male | 8.63 | 6.85 | 6.84 |
| 70+ female | 8.89 | 8.42 | 8.41 |
| Less than high school | 6.61 | 9.37 | 9.37 |
| High school graduate | 25.99 | 28.82 | 28.83 |
| Some college, no degree | 25.95 | 26.35 | 26.40 |
| Bachelor's or higher | 41.45 | 35.45 | 35.39 |
| Northeast, non-metro | 1.55 | 1.33 | 1.33 |
| Northeast, metro | 16.33 | 16.04 | 16.02 |
| Midwest, non-metro | 4.75 | 4.19 | 4.19 |
| Midwest, metro | 16.58 | 16.28 | 16.28 |
| South, non-metro | 5.87 | 5.70 | 5.69 |
| South, metro | 31.25 | 32.87 | 32.88 |
| West, non-metro | 1.58 | 2.17 | 2.22 |
| West, metro | 22.09 | 21.42 | 21.41 |
| English-dominant Hispanic | 3.88 | 5.13 | 4.78 |
| Bilingual Hispanic | 6.74 | 9.31 | 9.12 |
| Spanish-dominant Hispanic | 2.26 | 3.06 | 3.30 |
| Non-Hispanic | 87.13 | 82.49 | 82.80 |



Demographic comparison of survey data and weighting benchmarks (cont'd.)

| | Unweighted (%) | | Weighted (%) | | Benchmark (%) | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Less than \$25,000 | 9.88 | | 11.05 | | 11.09 | |
| \$25,000-\$49,999 | 14.34 | | 15.36 | | 15.35 | |
| \$50,000-\$74,999 | 15.41 | | 15.46 | | 15.44 | |
| \$75,000-\$99,999 | 13.25 | | 12.95 | | 12.97 | |
| \$100,000-\$149,999 | 19.93 | | 18.90 | | 18.88 | |
| \$150,000 or more | 27.20 | | 26.28 | | 26.28 | |
| Married | 57.39 | | 51.68 | | 51.60 | |
| Not married | 42.61 | | 48.32 | | 48.40 | |
| U.S.-born Hispanic | 6.94 | | 8.44 | | 8.43 | |
| Not U.S.-born Hispanic | 5.93 | | 9.07 | | 9.07 | |
| Non-Hispanic | 87.13 | | 82.49 | | 82.51 | |
| | Non-parent, unweighted | Non-parent, weighted | Non-parent, benchmark | Parent, unweighted | Parent, weighted | Parent, benchmark |
| Non-Hispanic white | 71.37 | 63.04 | 62.91 | 51.59 | 56.48 | 56.50 |
| Non-Hispanic Black | 9.58 | 12.31 | 12.28 | 15.57 | 11.51 | 11.48 |
| Non-Hispanic Asian/ Pacific Islander | 3.55 | 6.27 | 6.46 | 13.31 | 8.19 | 8.20 |
| Hispanic | 11.51 | 16.10 | 16.09 | 15.92 | 21.65 | 21.65 |
| Non-Hispanic, 2+ races | 3.99 | 2.27 | 2.27 | 3.61 | 2.18 | 2.18 |
| Male | 50.35 | 50.36 | 50.36 | 46.78 | 44.93 | 44.92 |
| Female | 49.65 | 49.64 | 49.64 | 53.22 | 55.07 | 55.08 |
| Age 18-29 | 14.87 | 23.15 | 23.30 | 12.67 | 11.25 | 11.25 |
| Age 30-39 | 9.13 | 11.31 | 11.30 | 27.53 | 36.05 | 36.07 |
| Age 40-49 | 8.34 | 9.06 | 9.04 | 38.43 | 35.89 | 35.90 |
| Age 50+ | 67.66 | 56.48 | 56.36 | 21.37 | 16.81 | 16.78 |
| Some college or below | 61.60 | 67.10 | 67.17 | 51.73 | 57.03 | 57.04 |
| Bachelor's or higher | 38.40 | 32.90 | 32.83 | 48.27 | 42.97 | 42.96 |



Demographic comparison of survey data and weighting benchmarks (cont'd.)

| | Non-Hispanic White/ Other/2+ Races | Non-Hispanic Black | Non-Hispanic Asian/ Pacific Islander | Hispanic |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|----------|
| Unweighted | | | | |
| Male | 49.64 | 46.93 | 49.33 | 49.15 |
| Female | 50.36 | 53.07 | 50.67 | 50.85 |
| Age 18-29 | 12.92 | 16.48 | 8.33 | 21.94 |
| Age 30-39 | 13.37 | 18.39 | 22.33 | 15.65 |
| Age 40-49 | 15.36 | 18.58 | 34.33 | 20.58 |
| Age 50+ | 58.35 | 46.55 | 35.00 | 41.84 |
| Some college or below | 57.05 | 67.24 | 21.67 | 77.72 |
| Bachelor's or higher | 42.95 | 32.76 | 78.33 | 22.28 |
| Weighted | | | | |
| Male | 49.23 | 46.43 | 47.79 | 50.33 |
| Female | 50.77 | 53.57 | 52.21 | 49.67 |
| Age 18-29 | 17.70 | 23.13 | 19.16 | 27.32 |
| Age 30-39 | 15.92 | 19.27 | 21.36 | 20.98 |
| Age 40-49 | 14.66 | 16.39 | 18.59 | 18.79 |
| Age 50+ | 51.73 | 41.21 | 40.88 | 32.91 |
| Some college or below | 60.76 | 73.67 | 41.76 | 80.79 |
| Bachelor's or higher | 39.24 | 26.33 | 58.24 | 19.21 |
| Benchmark | | | | |
| Male | 49.23 | 46.41 | 47.81 | 50.37 |
| Female | 50.77 | 53.59 | 52.19 | 49.63 |
| Age 18-29 | 17.70 | 23.14 | 20.71 | 27.36 |
| Age 30-39 | 15.92 | 19.28 | 21.07 | 20.98 |
| Age 40-49 | 14.66 | 16.41 | 18.20 | 18.78 |
| Age 50+ | 51.73 | 41.17 | 40.02 | 32.88 |
| Some college or below | 60.76 | 73.72 | 42.98 | 80.81 |
| Bachelor's or higher | 39.24 | 26.28 | 57.02 | 19.19 |



Desk Review

Note: This desk review of survey-based research was produced by [Langer Research Associates](#) in December 2023 to inform the direction of the 2024 Knight Foundation Book Restrictions study.

A review of publicly available, probability-based surveys on challenges to book access in the United States yielded eight studies in the past 22 months and six others from 1981 to 2005. These surveys lend insights on public awareness, perceptions and policy preferences on the issue, while also indicating avenues for further investigation. Although the present study pursued many such avenues, it is not exhaustive; opportunities for further research remain.

Past studies agree on a key finding of broad public opposition to book bans, but also, in one data point, muted support for a law prohibiting them. Most do not define what is meant by book bans, an approach that may miss nuance in views on outright bans vs. restricted access.

Surveys also haven't consistently differentiated between restrictions in K-12 schools vs. those in public libraries, or, within schools, by grade level. Nor have they measured views about specific book content that people may or may not see as objectionable, or the level of importance that Americans place on the issue, including any attitudinal differences among higher and lower issue-salience groups – a potentially relevant factor in motivation to take action.

In terms of prevalence, counts by two organizations show a sharp rise in book challenges in recent years, largely concentrated in a few states. Their counts differ, however, and a third organization challenges the higher estimate (from PEN America) and its use of the term “book ban,” saying this exaggerates reality.

Academic scholarship details the disproportionate targeting of diverse books in book challenges and discusses the prevailing strategies these challenges use. Other work covers court challenges to book bans and posits that courts may increasingly defer to local school officials' decisions about censorship.

A review of book challenge prevalence data, survey results and scholarship follows, along with conclusions and a summary of avenues for further research.

I. STATE OF BOOK-RESTRICTION ACTIVITIES

An agreed-upon estimate of the prevalence of book-restriction activities in the United States appears to be lacking, reflecting both definitional and methodological differences in counting them.¹ Nonetheless, two sources report a sharp rise in such activities.

¹ For our purposes, challenges are instances of efforts to restrict or ban books. “Restrictions” are limitations that are imposed as a result, which may or may not include a full-scale ban. A ban is the most severe form of restriction.



PEN America

PEN America, a free-expression advocacy organization, has identified 3,362 “book bans” targeting 1,557 unique titles in K-12 public school classrooms and school libraries during the July 2022-June 2023 school year, a 33 percent increase from July 2021-June 2022 (Meehan et al., 2023; Friedman and Johnson, 2022). (PEN America has not reported data prior to July 2021.) As detailed below, it counts restrictions, including temporary ones, as bans. Six states accounted for 88 percent of cases in the past school year, with differing trajectories: Florida (1,406, up from 566 the previous school year), Texas (625, down from 801), Missouri (333, up from 27), Utah (281, up from 12), Pennsylvania (186, down from 456) and South Carolina (127, up from one). Twenty-seven states had one to 75 cases apiece; 17 states had none. PEN America [defines](#) a ban as any instance in which students’ access to a book that had been openly available is limited or restricted in any way, including temporarily:

School book bans take varied forms, and can include prohibitions on books in libraries or classrooms, as well as a range of other restrictions, some of which may be temporary. For example, if a book that was previously available to all now requires parental permission, or is restricted to a higher grade level than educators initially determined, that is a ban. In some cases, books are removed from shelves for “review,” but not returned for a weeks or months. If students cannot access the book, that is a ban.²

Notably, and to its credit, PEN America makes its underlying data publicly available. The American Library Association, discussed next, does not.

Book Bans* in K-12 Public Schools

| | Recorded book bans* | Unique titles banned* |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| July 2022-June 2023 | 3,362 | 1,557 |
| July 2021-June 2022 | 2,532 | 1,643 |

*as defined by PEN America

Source: *PEN America*

American Library Association

The American Library Association also reports a sharp rise in attempts to ban or restrict access to materials and services in school, public and academic libraries, albeit with a much lower count than PEN America’s, apparently reflecting a less extensive approach to data collection.³

2 PEN America [notes](#) that its tabulation of book bans is “primarily sourced from local journalists, school district websites, and school board minutes, as well as organizational partners. Local efforts from district employees and advocacy partners supplement our data collection efforts.” Given the inability to track “quiet removals” of books by teachers and librarians, the organization views its tabulations as a minimum count.

3 ALA data are compiled from news stories and from incidents reported to the association by library professionals. As with PEN America, the ALA presents these as conservative or partial estimates, as not all book challenges are reported or receive media coverage.



It reports 156 such attempts in calendar 2020, rising to 1,269 in 2022. It preliminarily counted 696 as of August 2023, raising the question of whether such cases will be down this year in its count, albeit still sharply higher than in 2020.

In the ALA count, the number of unique titles challenged rose from 223 in 2020 to 2,571 in 2022; it was 1,915 in the first eight months of 2023 (Book Ban Data, 2023).

Attempted Book Bans and Restrictions

| | Recorded attempts to ban or restrict library materials or services | Unique titles challenged |
|-------|--|--------------------------|
| 2023* | 695 | 1,915 |
| 2022 | 1,269 | 2,571 |
| 2021 | 729 | 1,858 |
| 2020 | 156 | 223 |

*Preliminary and partial data, Jan. 1 to Aug. 31.

Source: American Library Association

Educational Freedom Institute

The Educational Freedom Institute, a nonprofit think tank that advocates for banning books with sexually explicit content from school libraries (among other activities), disputes PEN America's definition of book bans, contending that it sharply exaggerates their frequency by including books whose access is restricted rather than prohibited, including temporarily. EFI argues that such titles are not "banned."

If a book was temporarily removed from library shelves and returned after a review, then by PEN's definition, that book has been banned. If a book is removed from a school library but is still assigned in English class, then by PEN's definition, that book has been banned. If a book is made unavailable in a middle school library but is still available in a high school library, then by PEN's definition, that book has been banned. If a book is moved to a special section of the library or to a school counselor's office, then by PEN's definition, that book has been banned. If a book is removed from the assigned curriculum or an optional additional reading list but is still available in the school library, then by PEN's definition, that book has been banned. It is also impossible to discern from PEN's data files whether a book listed as "banned" was ever available in the school library at all.

In PEN America's 2021-2022 count of 2,532 titles it described as banned, EFI excluded 664 that it was unable to verify. Of the remaining 1,868, it found 74 percent listed as available in online card catalogs within the districts in which PEN America identified them as banned (Greene, Eden, and Marino, 2023). At the same time, EFI has not disputed the rise in cases documented by PEN America. PEN America appears not to have responded publicly to EFI's criticism.

Historical parallel

The present debate on book bans and challenges echoes conflicts from the early 1980s, when Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority led an effort to ban books and remove curriculum that didn't conform with its agenda (Mitgang, 1982; Pincus, 2022). At that time, the American Library Association chronicled a similar rise in challenges – most of which involved pressure to remove or restrict books at public and school libraries alike – from 300 reported incidents in 1980 to nearly 1,000 in 1982 (Mitgang, 1982).



Recent legislation

While a detailed review of recent book-restriction legislation is beyond the scope of this review, PEN America has compiled a report on 392 “educational intimidation” bills proposed in state legislatures from 2021 to June 2023, 39 of which have become law, as well as an additional nine implemented by executive action. (Only state legislation, not local initiatives, are included.) Among them, 20 include provisions on library inspection or removal, 13 expand definitions of what is harmful to minors and 12 include enhanced curriculum inspection provisions.

The report suggests that such laws encourage self-censorship by librarians and educators seeking to avoid controversy, undermine professional education, marginalize some students and over-empower individual parents. It also notes the politicization of book-content debates, e.g., in misrepresentations concerning critical race theory and use of the term “parental rights” (Friedman, LaFrance, and Meehan, 2023).

PEN America says book-restriction legislation generally targets education relating to race, sex, gender and history. It identifies legislative provisions across 12 domains; these include “library inspection” and “teacher inspection” measures, definitions of “harm to minors” and obscenity, explicitly anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-DEI provisions and mechanisms for parental complaint processes and state oversight, among others.

There is, at the same time, a “book sanctuary” response, in which some cities and libraries have declared commitments to the availability of books free from censorship. [Initiated](#) by the city of Chicago and the Chicago Public Library in September 2022, book sanctuaries are [called on](#) to do at least one of the following: collect and protect endangered books, make them accessible, host book talks and events and educate others on the history of book banning. [Stamford, CT](#), [Hoboken, NJ](#), [Northbrook, IL](#) and [Arlington County, VA](#) have declared themselves book sanctuaries, as have [libraries](#) in these and other communities.

II. FINDINGS FROM PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

Awareness

Fifty-seven percent of adults in early May were very (24 percent) or somewhat (34 percent) familiar with “schools banning books from classrooms and school libraries.” (Results were similar among K-12 parents) (NPR/Ipsos 5/23). Similarly, 54 percent of adults in August were very (22 percent) or somewhat (32 percent) familiar with “political groups protesting the use of certain books or curriculum content in schools” (WeBelieve/Ipsos 8/23).⁴

Awareness of specific policies lagged. Thirty-nine percent were very (15 percent) or somewhat (23 percent) familiar with “school boards allowing any person in the community to object to books used in schools.” Essentially as many, 37, percent were very (14 percent) or somewhat (23 percent) familiar with “states passing laws allowing any person in the community to object to books used in schools.” (Results again were similar among K-12 parents.) Familiarity was highest among Democrats and lowest among political independents (WeBelieve/Ipsos 8/23).

In the NPR/Ipsos survey, 18 percent of adults said “schools banning books from classrooms and school libraries” had recently occurred in K-12 public schools in their community. In the WeBelieve/Ipsos survey, 23 percent said “books being banned in public schools” had happened in their community (essentially the same as in 2022). The 5-point difference may reflect use of the word “recently” by NPR/Ipsos.

⁴ WeBelieve, a project of a nonprofit called ParentsTogether, is a family-oriented news and information service.



A difference among parents was apparent in the NPR/Ipsos study; K-12 parents were 10 points more apt than adults overall to say book bans had not recently happened in their community, and 11 points less apt to be unsure. This result was not replicated in the WeBelieve/Ipsos study (which had a smaller sample of parents).

Beyond schools, 19 percent overall in the WeBelieve/Ipsos study, and 18 percent of parents, were aware of “new policies limiting what books are available or on display in public libraries” in their community.

Awareness in these polls was higher than in a 1981 survey. At that time, 10 percent of parents of children in public high school reported that “films, books or other learning materials” used at their child’s school had “been removed because of objections from the community” in the past year or two (ABC News/Washington Post 9/81).

Six percent in that ABC/Post survey said they had personally objected to such materials at their child’s school. In a parallel survey, 7 percent of high school principals reported that such materials had been removed because of community objections.

Perceptions

A Quinnipiac University poll in May noted that “efforts to ban certain books in schools and libraries are spreading in the United States.” Seven in 10 thought this was more about politics than about the content of the books, down 10 points from February 2022 (Quinnipiac University 5/23).

At the same time, the number saying it was about the content of the books rose by 10 points, to 25 percent. That included a 22-point increase among Republicans (doubling to 45 percent) and a 10-point increase among independents (to 25 percent), while staying essentially unchanged among Democrats, at 9 percent.

Last year, 71 percent of adults completely (21 percent) or mostly (51 percent) trusted “the schools in your district to make good choices” on “ensuring books in school libraries are appropriate for students.” That included 79 percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents and 67 percent of Republicans and GOP leaners (Grinnell College 3/22).

In another study, 61 percent overall were more concerned “that some schools may ban books and censor topics that are educationally important,” while 36 were more concerned “that some schools may teach books and topics that some students or their parents feel are inappropriate or offensive” (WSJ/NORC 3/23).

Policy preferences

In March, 76 percent opposed “state governments passing laws that ban certain books from school classrooms and libraries.” This included 86 percent of Democrats, 78 percent of independents and 66 percent of Republicans. Twenty-one percent supported such action (USA Today/Ipsos 3/23).

Similarly, 78 percent in another study reported being less likely rather than more likely to support a candidate who “supports book bans” (WeBelieve/Ipsos 8/23).

Compared with these results, opposition to book bans was somewhat lower, 69 percent, in a question asking about “state lawmakers passing laws to ban certain books and remove them from classrooms and school libraries.” Seventeen percent were in support (NPR/Ipsos 5/23). Unlike the other studies, this survey offered an explicit “don’t know” option, chosen by 12 percent. Also, it specified bans in “school” libraries, while the others did not.

The NPR/Ipsos survey found modestly lower opposition to local action: Sixty-four percent opposed “individual school boards banning certain books and removing them from classrooms and school libraries in their district.” Twenty-one percent were in support, with 13 percent taking the “don’t know” option.

Strength of sentiment can be an important factor in public attitudes; people tend to be more motivated to take action on views they hold strongly on issues they see as important. In the USA Today/Ipsos survey, 56 percent strongly opposed book bans, with an additional 20 percent somewhat opposed. Strong opposition reached 70 percent among Democrats, 56 percent among independents and 44 percent among Republicans. By contrast, strong support peaked at just 13 percent of Republicans, falling to 4 percent of independents and 3 percent of Democrats.

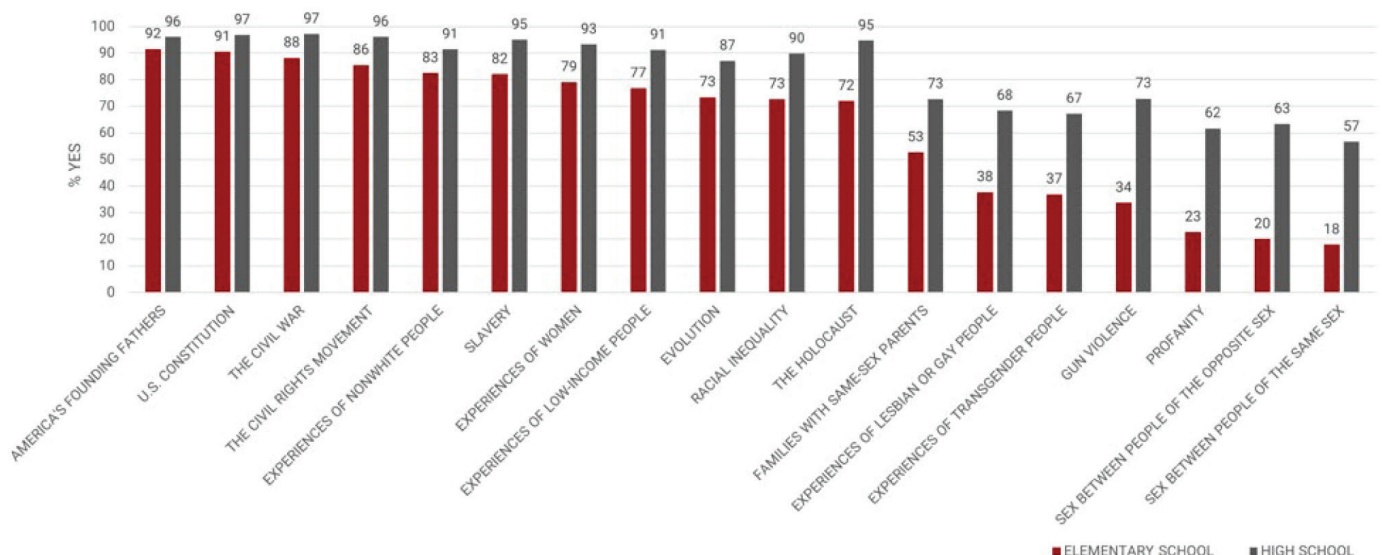
In the NPR/Ipsos survey, 50 percent overall strongly opposed state lawmakers passing bans while just 5 percent strongly supported them. On individual school boards banning books, 45 percent were strongly opposed vs. 6 percent strongly supportive.

While clear majorities in these studies opposed book bans, another found lower support for “a state passing a law that prohibits book-banning” – in the WeBelieve/Ipsos survey in August, 53 percent strongly (33 percent) or somewhat (21 percent) supported such a measure; 33 percent strongly (19 percent) or somewhat (13 percent) opposed it and 13 percent weren’t sure. The question did not specify whether this was about books in schools, public libraries, or both.

Results on a state prohibition on book bans were similar among parents. Politically, support was 63 percent among Democrats, declining to 47 percent among Republicans and 46 percent among independents.

In another approach to policy, in a 2022 survey, majorities thought high school students should “have books about/depicting” each of 18 potentially controversial topics “available to read (e.g., in the school library),” including racial inequality (90 percent), families with same-sex parents (73 percent), experiences of lesbian or gay people (68 percent) and experiences of transgender people (67 percent) (USC UAS 9/22).

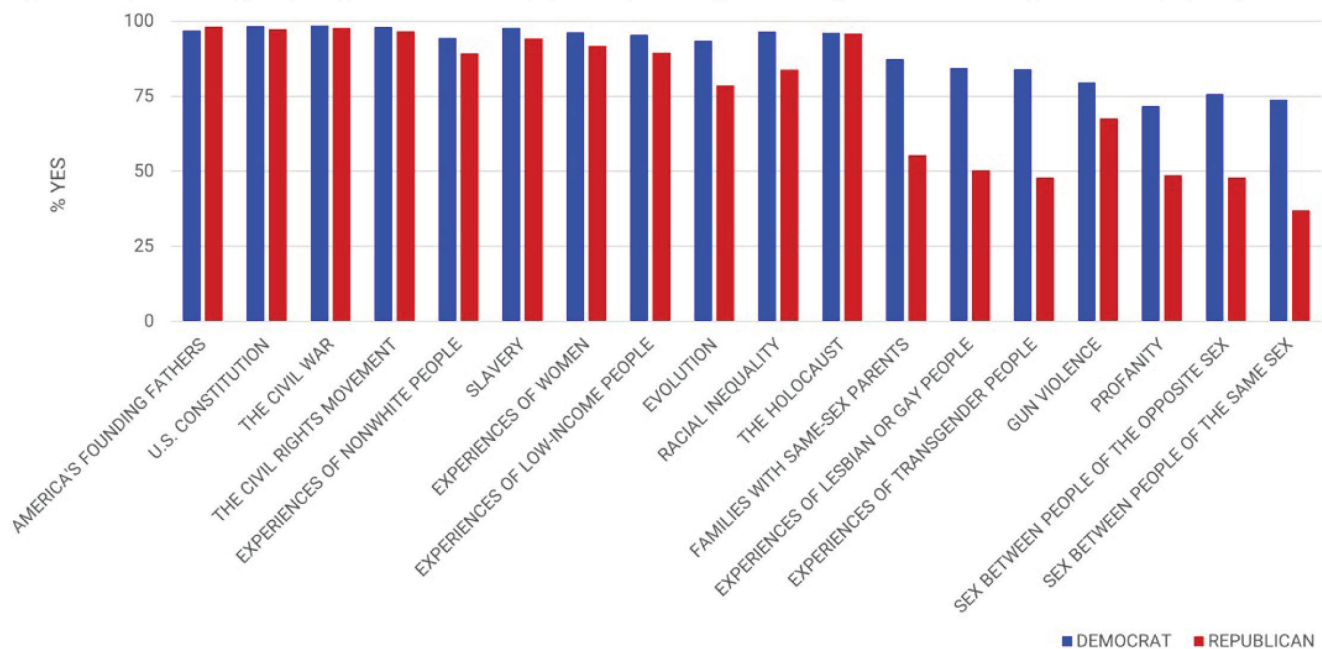
Figure 13: Adults think high school students should have access to books across controversial topics, with mixed support for elementary school students



Support for access by elementary school students was lower, with six not reaching majority support: books depicting experiences of lesbian or gay people (38 percent), experiences of transgender people (37 percent), gun violence (34 percent), profanity (23 percent) and sex between people of the opposite sex (20 percent) and of the same sex (18 percent). (The survey did not ask about middle school students.)

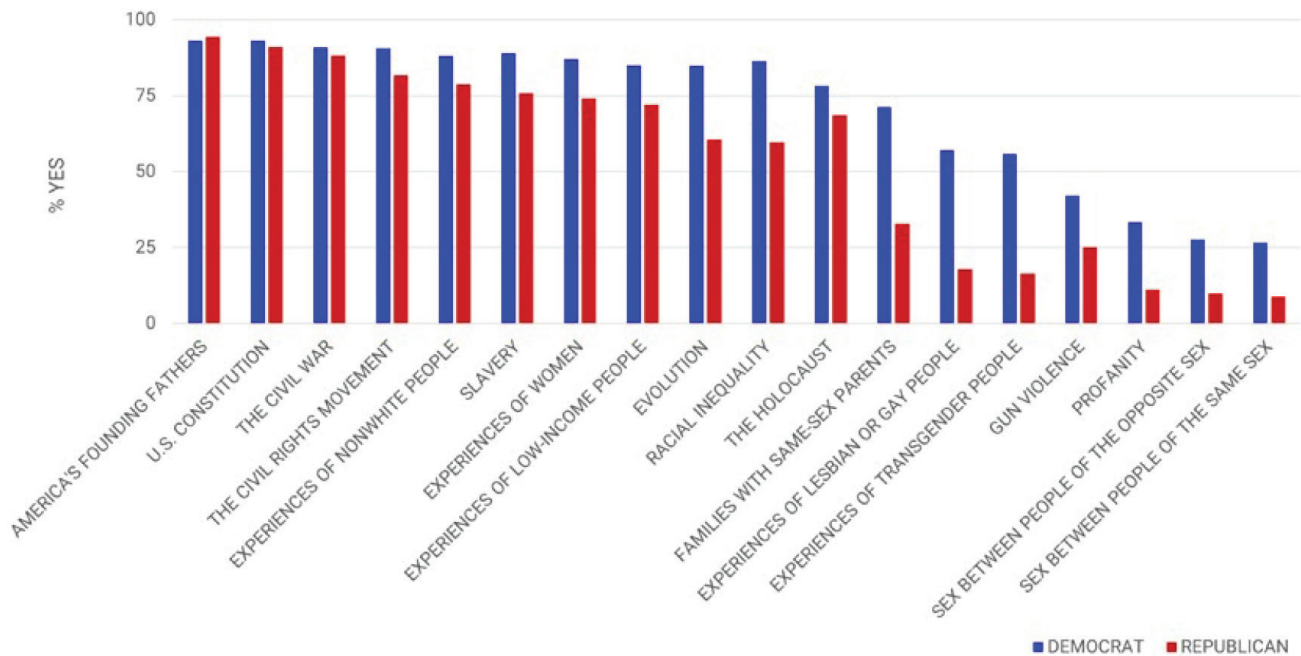
Majorities of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents supported access by high school students in each case. Majorities of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents supported access by high schoolers in 14 of the 18 cases (although GOP support trailed Democratic support in 13 of the 18). Republican support for high school access fell below a majority on books including profanity (49 percent), experiences of transgender people (48 percent) and depictions of sex between people of the opposite sex (48 percent) and of the same sex (37 percent).

Figure 16: Bipartisan support for high school availability of book topics, though with disagreement about transgender issues, profanity, and sex.



Support for access by elementary school students fell below majorities of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents on four items (gun violence, profanity, sex between people of the opposite sex and sex between people of the same sex) and below majorities of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents on these plus three others (experiences of transgender people and of lesbian or gay people and depictions of families with same-sex parents). Political gaps on those three were particularly wide.

Figure 15: Mostly bipartisan agreement about which book topics elementary school students should have available.



In deciding what books or materials are taught in the classroom, nine in 10 adults in the WeBelieve/Ipsos survey said “K-12 public schools should consider feedback from multiple sources – such as curriculum experts, trained teachers, school board members, students and parents – when deciding what books or materials are taught in the classroom” as opposed to allowing such “to be removed at the objection of an individual parent.”

The question's use of the terms “experts” and “trained” teachers may have contributed to the lopsided result. Regardless, the question of book removals based on a single parent's objection seems worth testing. Such a provision is included in Florida's recently enacted restrictions.⁵

Asked another way in 2022, 60 percent of adults thought the views of parents and of teachers/school officials should be equally important “in determining school policies” on “which books are on the shelves in school libraries.” Twenty-three percent said the views of teachers/school officials should be more important; 12 percent, parents' views (CNN 2/22).

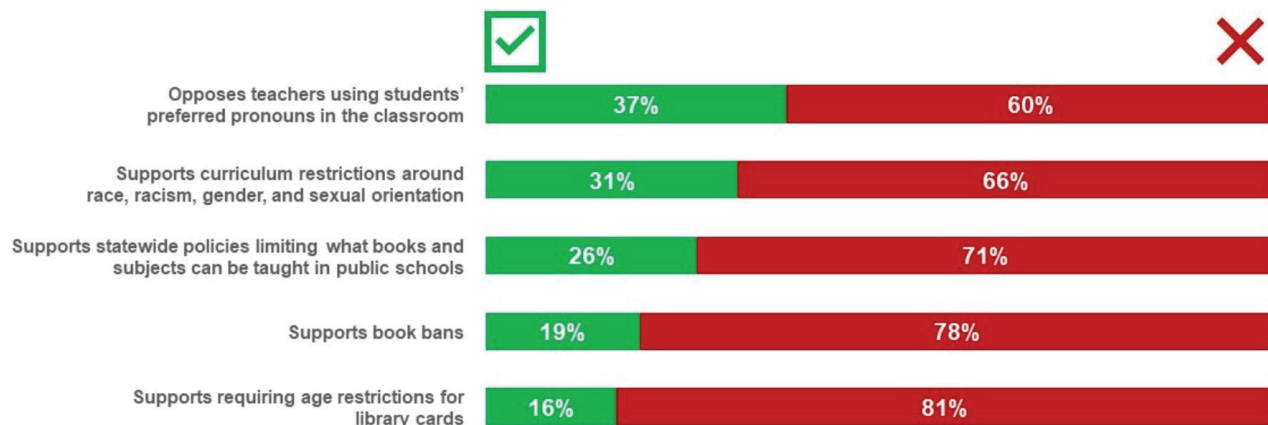
To note, studies covered in this review are those focused explicitly on book restrictions. Others have focused on determinations of school curriculum more broadly. Among examples, in an ABC News/Washington Post survey in November 2021, 48 percent of Americans said parents should have “a lot” of say in what their child's school teaches (ABC News/Washington Post 11/21). In a June 2023 study for the educators' association Phi Delta Kappa, 33 percent said the governor and state legislature should have a great deal or good amount of say in what is taught in their local public schools; it was 41 percent for local residents. These compare with 56 percent for the local school board and 66 percent for public school teachers (Phi Delta Kappa 6/23).

⁵ See <https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/BillSummaries/2023/html/3159>

In an election context, broad majorities in the WeBelieve/Ipsos survey of August 2023 reported being less likely to support a candidate “in the 2024 election” (office not specified) who supports “requiring age restrictions for library cards” (81 percent), “book bans” (78 percent, as mentioned) and “statewide policies limiting what books and subjects can be taught in public schools” (71 percent). Again, results were similar among parents (WeBelieve/Ipsos 8/23).

In the 2024 election, are you more or less likely to support a candidate who does the following?

% selecting ■ More Likely ■ Less Likely



Source: Ipsos poll conducted on behalf of We Believe, a project of ParentsTogether, between August 18-21, 2023
Base: All respondents (n=1,115)



While surely indicative of preferences, there are limits to the utility of this measurement in an election context. Respondents were not afforded an opportunity to say a candidate's position on these issues would make no difference in their choice, and strength of sentiment was not measured, nor was the relative importance of these issues compared with others.

In partisan terms, 91 to 95 percent of Democrats and 70 to 80 percent of independents said they were less likely rather than more likely to support candidates in these cases.

Among Republicans, majorities were less likely to support candidates who backed age restrictions for library cards (70 percent) or book bans (62 percent). That fell to half of Republicans in terms of limiting what books and subjects can be taught in public schools (WeBelieve/Ipsos 8/23).

Earlier surveys

Surveys in the early 1980s found that majorities favored deference to librarian and teacher decisions about book challenges, with a role for parental input.

Asked to whom school officials should pay more attention “in choosing books and curriculum material for public schools,” 53 percent of adults said teachers and librarians, while 32 percent said parents. Nine percent said both and 6 percent weren't sure (NBC News/Associated Press 10/81).



Posed another way, in the same study, 62 percent thought librarians and teachers should “have final say about what books are available” while 28 percent thought “school boards should be able to ban controversial books from public school libraries and classes.” Ten percent weren’t sure.

That said, 55 percent of parents with a child in public high school in 1981 thought “parents should advise and help make decisions for schools on what textbooks are used.” An identical 55 percent of high school principals said the same (ABC News/Washington Post 9/81).

When posed as a community’s collective “right” in 1982, a survey of women age 18-65 found that 45 percent strongly (23 percent) or slightly (22 percent) agreed that “a community has the right to ban books from public school libraries.” Fifty-two percent strongly (37 percent) or slightly (15 percent) disagreed (Glamour Magazine 9/82).

In a 1999 survey, a quarter of adults favored linking book objections to public funds, either strongly (15 percent) or mildly (11 percent) agreeing that “government should be able to cut funding to libraries that have books which are offensive to others” (Freedom Forum First Amendment Center/University of Connecticut 9/99).

Somewhat more recently, a 2005 survey asked: “Sometimes teachers might assign materials at school that parents feel conflict with their values or the way they are trying to raise their child. If a teacher assigned a book or used other educational materials that you found objectionable, which of the following would you do?” Forty-two percent said they’d “try to get the materials removed from the curriculum,” including 27 percent very certain of this and 15 percent somewhat certain (Religion and Ethics Newsweekly 8/05).

III. ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP

Academic scholarship lends further insight on the nature and scope of book challenges in the United States.

Oltmann, Peterson and Knox (2017) found few challenges to materials in public schools and libraries in Alabama from 2003-2013. Just 14 institutions – two school districts and 12 public libraries – reported 38 challenges, with most materials ultimately retained.

The authors suggest that the low number of reported challenges may reflect librarians keeping items out of their collections pre-emptively to avoid controversy, citing Whelan 2009.⁶ (The authors also raise the possibility of nonresponse bias, noting that fewer than half of the institutions they contacted, 169 out of 351, returned substantive responses.)

Reviewing legal challenges to book bans in public school libraries, Kim (2022) cites motive as a key factor in whether bans are upheld. In *Island Trees Union Free School District v. Pico* (1982), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public schools could ban library books for vulgarity, lack of age appropriateness or lack of educational suitability, but not to censor a viewpoint because they dislike it or to establish orthodoxy. While *Pico* set precedent for subsequent cases, Kim posits that as bans increase, courts may increasingly defer to schools’ censorship decisions.

Book challenges disproportionately target diverse books (Knox, 2020; Book Bans, 2023) – that is, those “by and about ‘LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities’” (Book Bans, 2023) – even as few books in the United States are in fact diverse in this way (Knox, 2019).

⁶ Seventy percent of respondents in the Whelan [study](#) reported self-censoring collections to avoid controversy. This appears to not be a representative, probability-based survey of librarians; rather, it is based on responses by subscribers to School Library Journal at slj.com.



Knox explains two problems with book challengers' use of the age appropriateness objection. First, it becomes impossible to address topics essential to diverse identities. In two examples, Knox asks what it means "to have a book that discusses slavery in the U.S. but not its more horrific aspects" and notes that it is "impossible for a book on LGBTQ topics not to discuss human sexuality in some respects because, by definition, this is an integral part of the LGBTQ – if not the T – experience."

Second, book challengers use the age appropriateness objection to singularize the experiences of people with non-dominant identities – for example, implying that "any story about someone who has a non-dominant identity will suffice" or that "the African American experience is a single story." In one book objection, a challenger proposes that Dr. Ben Carson's *Gifted Hands* could be taught in place of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* as a book about "the good things [African Americans] have done" (Knox, 2019).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Setting aside the definition of a book ban, it is undisputed that book-restriction activities have increased sharply in recent years. Yet we find few recent surveys gauging corresponding public attitudes in a comprehensive way. Terms are not always clear or consistent, underlying attitudes are not well established, salience is not tested and differentiating factors are not fully explored.

It seems logical, for example, that views on book restrictions would be tied up in attitudes toward First Amendment rights and openness to diversity, on one hand, and personal (including religious) values and views of age appropriateness or educational appropriateness on the other. These are among the open areas for exploration in the Knight Foundation's Book Restrictions Study.

Others also are apparent, including views on bans vs. various restrictions; issue importance and motivation to engage on the topic; clarity on preferred approaches in elementary and secondary public school classrooms vs. school libraries vs. colleges vs. public libraries; and, critically, the preferred process by which objections are raised, discussed and adjudicated. General trust and confidence in schools and libraries also can be measured.

Given the disproportionate targeting of diverse books, further study also should cover attitudes among historically marginalized groups, as well as views of discrimination against such groups. Further, in addition to K-12 parents vs. non-parents, results can be disaggregated among more- and less-avid readers; more- and less-frequent library users; and residents of states with more or less book-restriction activity, as well as customary demographic and political groups.



V. REFERENCES

- ABC News/Washington Post. (1981). ABC News/The Washington Post poll: Education (General Population), September 14-18, 1981. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. doi:10.25940/ROPER-31086611
- ABC News/Washington Post. (1981). ABC News/The Washington Post poll: Education (High School Principals), September 14-20, 1981. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. doi:10.25940/ROPER-31086610
- ABC News/Washington Post. (2021). ABC News/The Washington Post poll: Politics and the 2021 midterms, November 7-10, 2021. Retrieved from <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/economic-discontent-criticisms-biden-lift-gop-record-early-story?id=81095146>
- Associated Press/NBC News. (1981). NBC News/Associated Press poll: October 25-26, 1981. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. doi:10.25940/ROPER-31094617
- Book ban data*. (2023). American Library Association. Retrieved Dec. 8, 2023, from <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/book-ban-data>
- Book bans: Examining how censorship limits liberty and literature: Hearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary*, 118th Cong. (2023) (testimony of Emily Knox).
- CNN. (2022). CNN poll, January 10-February 6, 2022. Retrieved from <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/21202887/cnn-poll-economy-and-education-will-shape-how-americans-vote-in-2022.pdf>
- Eden, M., Greene, J., & Marino, M. (2023). *The book ban mirage*. Education Freedom Institute. <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-book-ban-mirage/>
- Freedom Forum First Amendment Center/University of Connecticut. (1999). Freedom Forum First Amendment Center poll: September 29-30, 1999. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. doi:10.25940/ROPER-31108041
- Friedman, J., & Johnson, N. F. (2022). *Banned in the USA: The growing movement to censor books in schools*. PEN America. <https://pen.org/report/banned-usa-growing-movement-to-censor-books-in-schools/>
- Friedman, J., LaFrance, S., & Meehan, K. (2023). *Educational intimidation*. PEN America. <https://pen.org/report/educational-intimidation/>
- Glamour Magazine. (1982). Glamour Magazine Poll: September 7-16, 1982. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. doi:10.25940/ROPER-31103713
- Grinnell College. (2022). Grinnell College poll, March 15-20, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.grinnell.edu/news/grinnell-poll-education-march-22>
- Kim, R. (2022). Banning books: Unlawful censorship or within a school's discretion? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 103(7), 62-64. <https://kappanonline.org/banning-books-unlawful-censorship-discretion-kim/>



- Knox, E. (2019). Silencing stories: Challenges to diverse books. *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, 3(2), 24-39. <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v3i2.32592>
- Knox, E. (2020). Books, censorship, and anti-intellectualism in schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 101(7). <https://kappanonline.org/books-censorship-anti-intellectualism-schools-knox/>
- Meehan, K., Friedman, J., Baêta, S., & Magnusson, T. (2023). *Banned in the USA: The mounting pressure to censor*. PEN America. <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>
- Mitgang, H. (1981, September 7). Groups aim to counter book bans. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/07/books/groups-aim-to-counter-book-bans.html>
- NPR/Ipsos. (2023). NPR/Ipsos poll on education, May 5-11, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/americans-trust-teachers-some-still-want-parents-be-primary-voices-whats-taught>
- Oltmann, S., Peterson, C., & Knox, E. (2017). Analyzing Challenges to Library Materials: An Incomplete Picture. *Public Library Quarterly*, 36(4), 274-292. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1324233>
- Phi Delta Kappa. (2023). PDK poll, June 16-25, 2023. Retrieved from <https://pdkpoll.org/2023-pdk-poll-results/>
- Pincus, F. (2022, March 7). *Battles over book bans reflect conflicts from the 1980s*. UMBC Magazine. <https://umbc.edu/stories/battles-over-book-bans-reflect-conflicts-from-the-1980s/>
- Quinnipiac University. (2023). Quinnipiac University poll, May 18-22, 2023. Retrieved from https://poll.qu.edu/images/polling/us/us05242023_ufab25.pdf
- Religion and Ethics Newsweekly. (2005). Religion and Ethics Newsweekly poll: July 25-August 7, 2005. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. doi:10.25940/ROPER-31110208
- USA Today/Ipsos. (2023). USA Today/Ipsos poll, March 3-5, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-03/USAT%20Ipsos%20Woke%20Topline%20FINAL%203.7.23%20PDF.pdf>
- USC UAS. (2022). USC Understanding America Study 479, August 15-September 12, 2022. Retrieved from <https://uasdata.usc.edu/survey/UAS+479>
- WeBelieve/Ipsos. (2023). WeBelieve/Ipsos poll on curriculum restrictions and book bans, August 18-21, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/we-believe-education-poll-2023>
- Whelan, D. L. (2009). A dirty little secret: Self-censorship. *School Library Journal*, 55(2), 26-30. <https://www.slj.com/story/a-dirty-little-secret-self-censorship>
- WSJ/NORC. (2023). WSJ/NORC poll, March 1-13, 2023. Retrieved from https://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/WSJ_NORC_ToplineMarc_2023.pdf