

Voter Perceptions of Book Bans and Censorship

EMBOLD RESEARCH

ABSTRACT

This report publishes the results of a public opinion poll of American voters undertaken to understand political support and opposition to book banning. Commissioned by EveryLibrary Institute the poll surveyed registered voters from August 31 to September 3, 2022. Results show that most voters oppose banning books based on race, sexuality, and other concerns. They also oppose legislation that bans books.

Methodology

EveryLibrary Institute commissioned Embold Research to survey 1223 registered voters nationally from Aug 31-Sep 3, 2022. Respondents were recruited via dynamic online sampling to obtain a sample reflective of the population. Post-stratification weighting was performed on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and 2020 presidential vote. The modeled margin of error is 3.4%.

Key Findings

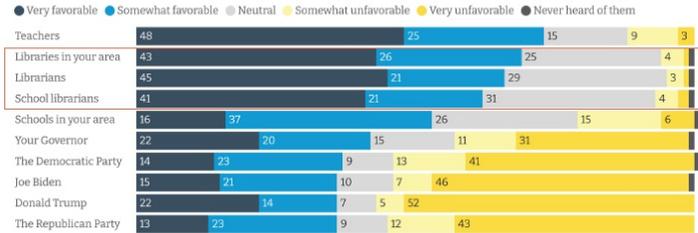
- Nearly all American voters (92%) have heard at least something about book banning.
- Half of voters believe there is "absolutely no time when a book should be banned," and 41% think "there are rare times when it's appropriate to ban books," and just 8% think "there are many books that are inappropriate and should be banned."
- At the outset, this issue transcends partisanship - 31% of Republicans think there is absolutely no time when a book should be banned.
- Voters are most offended by the idea that children and classic books are being banned.
- Only 34% of voters support banning books about sexuality.
- At least 75% of voters will consider book banning when voting in November.

Originally published September 2022 at EveryLibrary Institute: <https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/bookbanpoll>

Libraries and librarians are broadly favorably viewed

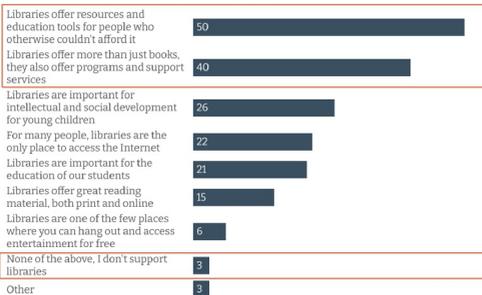
- Impressions are comparable to teachers, better than for local schools, and vastly superior to any of the politicians or political parties tested.

How favorable are your feelings about each of the following? **EMBOLD** research



Provision of free education resources and programs/support services are top “brand” attributes

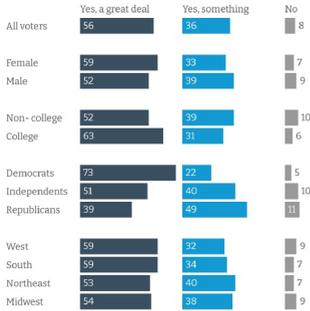
What do you think are the most important reasons to support libraries in your area? Select your top 2. **EMBOLD** research



- Just 3% of voters say they can't find a reason to support libraries.

Nearly all voters have heard about efforts to ban books in school and public libraries

Have you heard about efforts to ban certain books in school and public libraries? EMBOLD.....



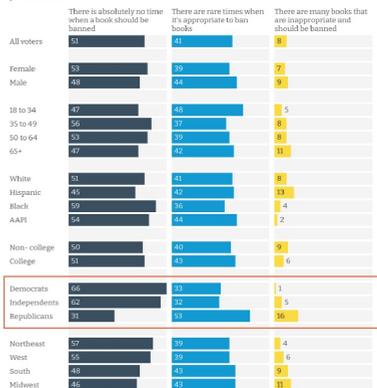
- More than half (56%) have “heard a great deal” about this issue.
- Women, college-educated voters, and Democrats are most likely to have heard a great deal about this.
- Any regional differences are slight.



Voters are divided on the appropriateness of banning books

- Half of voters believe there is “absolutely no time when a book should be banned”.
 - This includes a sizeable portion (31%) of Republicans. This has great potential as a wedge issue.
- 41% choose a middle position - “there are rare times when it’s appropriate to ban books”.
- Just 8% of voters think there are many books that are inappropriate and should be banned.

Which statement best describes your opinion about banning books in school and public libraries? EMBOLD.....

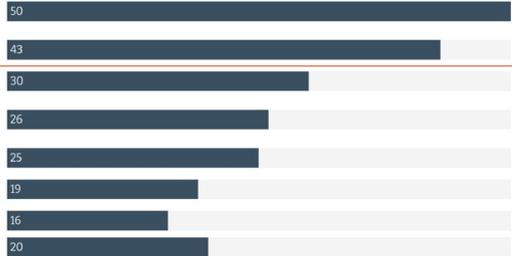


Evidence related to state bans of certain books and blocking attempts at diversity are most worrying

Below is some information about the increase in book banning across the United States. Which are most concerning to you? Select your top 3.

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- States are introducing legislation to ban certain books and/or the teaching of different topics, such as racism, inequality, and sexuality. **50**
- Politicians are trying to block attempts to make reading material more diverse and representative of the full picture of America. **43**
- In some states, prosecutors are considering charging library employees for stocking certain books. **30**
- Bills have been introduced that would prohibit public school libraries and public libraries from keeping books on hand that focus on sexual activity, sexual identity or gender identity. **26**
- More than 1,500 book bans have been established in US school districts and public libraries in the past year. **25**
- Nearly 240 bills were introduced in the first three months of 2022 targeting books about LGBTQ issues. **19**
- Challenges to books, specifically books by non-white male authors, are happening at the highest rates we've ever seen. **16**
- None of these are concerning to me. **20**



Below is some information about the increase in book banning across the United States. Which are most concerning to you? Select your top 3.

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- Legislation to ban books on racism, inequality, and sexuality **73**
- Block attempts to make reading material more diverse **62**
- Prosecutors charging library employees **28**
- Prohibit books that focus on sexuality, gender **39**
- 1,500 book bans in the past year **28**
- 240 bills first three months re: LGBTQ **26**
- Challenges to books, non-white male authors, highest rates **19**
- None of these are concerning to me. **3**

	Dem - Absolutely no bans	Dem - Rare bans	Rep - Absolutely no bans	Rep - Rare bans	Rep - Many bans	Ind - Absolutely no bans	Ind - Rare bans
Legislation to ban books on racism, inequality, and sexuality	73	75	39	19	27	57	37
Block attempts to make reading material more diverse	62	61	38	18	9	50	36
Prosecutors charging library employees	28	25	35	27	13	38	34
Prohibit books that focus on sexuality, gender	39	25	26	14	26	21	23
1,500 book bans in the past year	28	21	41	16	4	37	18
240 bills first three months re: LGBTQ	26	31	9	9	13	20	13
Challenges to books, non-white male authors, highest rates	19	33	11	12	5	18	10
None of these are concerning to me.	3	3	21	44	53	11	33

Type of book influences how book bans are received

- Banning classic novels and children's books are nearly universally opposed.
- Only 18% of voters support book banning on issues of race/CRT and only one third of voters support bans for books that discuss sexuality.

Classic novels, such as "The Handmaid's Tale," "Of Mice and Men" and "To Kill a Mockingbird," have been banned because of their depiction of violence and/or race.

**Support: 3%
Oppose: 93%**

Children's Books have been banned for random reasons. For example, The Lorax was banned because a school board member was a logger, and Walter the Farting Dog was banned because it has the word "farting" in it.

**Support: 4%
Oppose: 91%**

There have been many efforts to ban books that focus on **race** and slavery, such as "The 1619 Project," because some people feel they are "racially divisive".

**Support: 18%
Oppose: 72%**

Many politicians and activists are trying to ban books that focus on **sexuality**, such as Maia Kobabe's "Gender Queer" and Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," because some people feel it's too explicit.

**Support: 34%
Oppose: 59%**

Q. Below are some examples of the types of books that have been banned and the reasons why. Do you support or oppose banning each type of book?

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Total Support

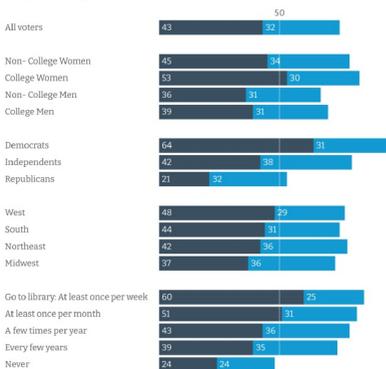
	Children's books	Classics	Race	Sexuality
Dem - Absolutely no bans	1	2	1	1
Dem - Rare bans	3	2	2	12
Rep - Absolutely no bans	2	2	13	31
Rep - Rare bans	9	2	41	77
Rep - Many bans	24	18	65	97
Ind - Absolutely no bans	0	1	4	13
Ind - Rare bans	5	2	30	55

This is an important voting issue for 3 in 4 voters

How important is preventing book banning to how you decide to vote?

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● Very important ● Somewhat important



- It is especially mobilizing for college-educated women, Democrats, and those who frequently go to a library.
- Preventing book banning is also “very important” to 1 in 5 Republicans, and 42% of Independents.

Which statement best describes your opinion about banning books in school and public libraries?

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