Voter Perceptions of Book Bans and Censorship

EveryLibrary Institute

EMBOLD research

Methodology

The 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%**.

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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", 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
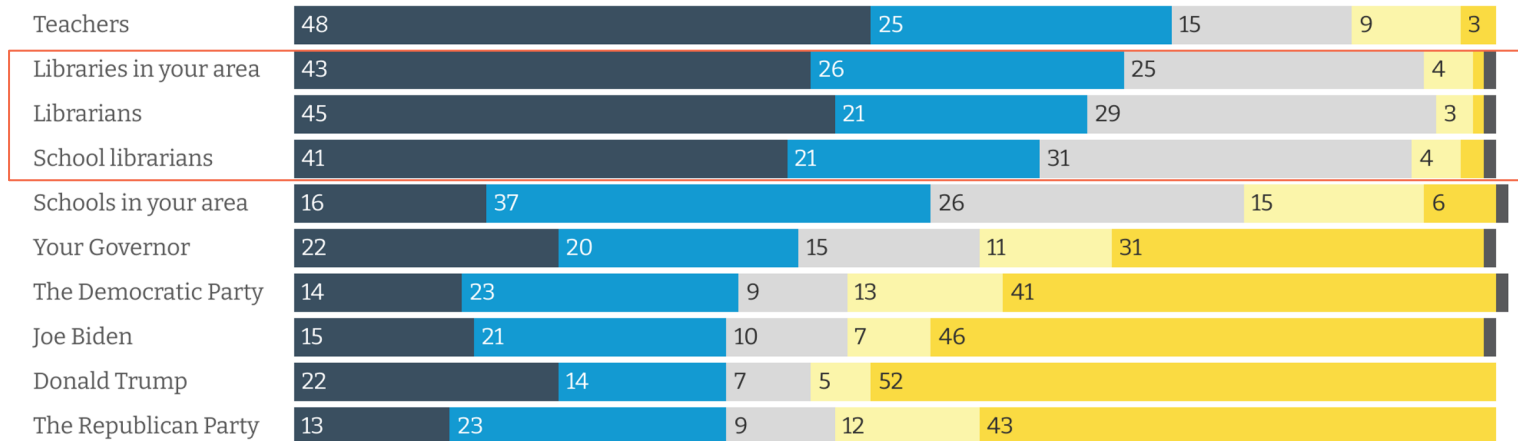
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Libraries and librarians are broadly favorably viewed

- 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?

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● Very favorable ● Somewhat favorable ○ Neutral ○ Somewhat unfavorable ○ Very unfavorable ● Never heard of them

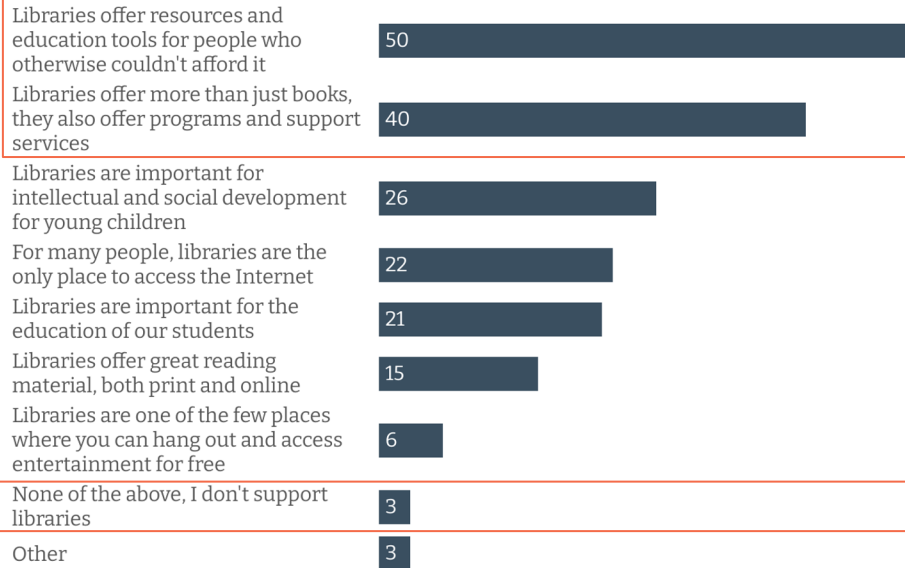|	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Neutral	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	Never heard of them
Teachers	48	25	15	9	3	
Libraries in your area	43	26	25	4		
Librarians	45	21	29	3		
School librarians	41	21	31	4		
Schools in your area	16	37	26	15	6	
Your Governor	22	20	15	11	31	
The Democratic Party	14	23	9	13	41	
Joe Biden	15	21	10	7	46	
Donald Trump	22	14	7	5	52	
The Republican Party	13	23	9	12	43	

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.
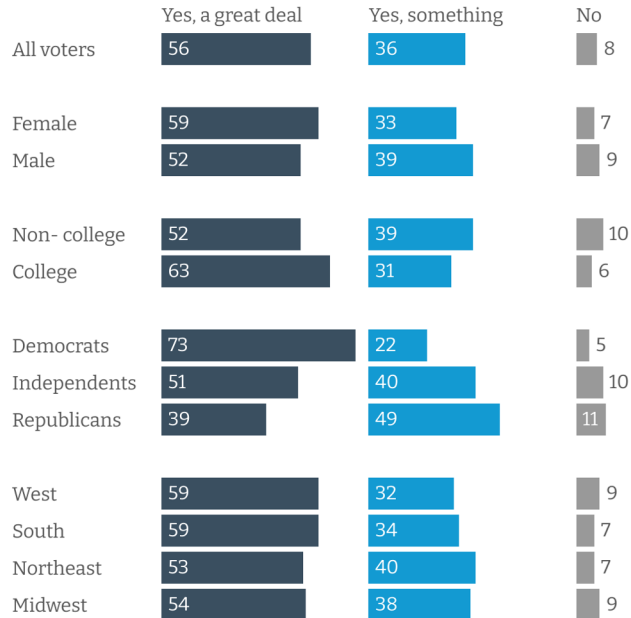
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Reason	Value
Libraries offer resources and education tools for people who otherwise couldn't afford it	50
Libraries offer more than just books, they also offer programs and support services	40
Libraries are important for intellectual and social development for young children	26
For many people, libraries are the only place to access the Internet	22
Libraries are important for the education of our students	21
Libraries offer great reading material, both print and online	15
Libraries are one of the few places where you can hang out and access entertainment for free	6
None of the above, I don't support libraries	3
Other	3

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

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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?

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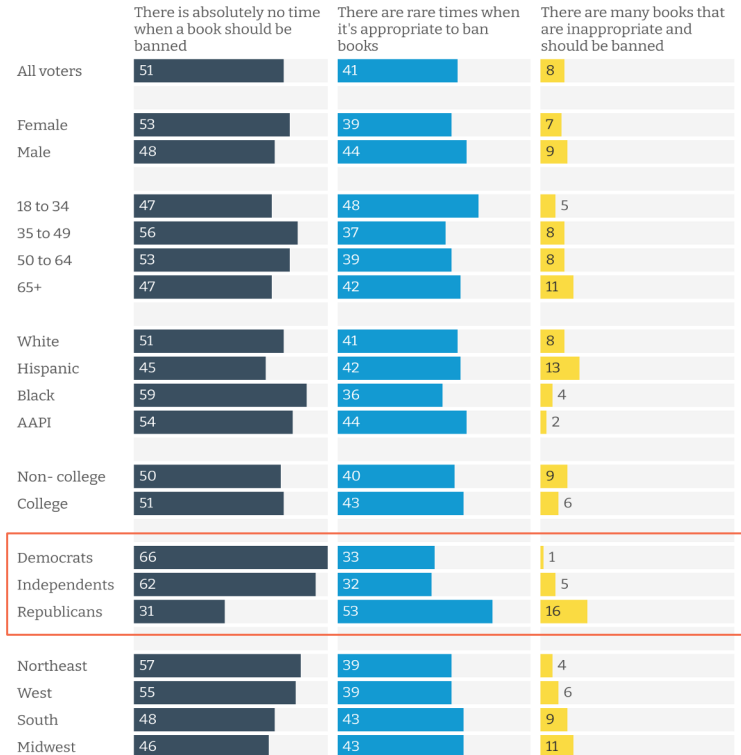|	Yes, a great deal	Yes, something	No
All voters	56	36	8
Female	59	33	7
Male	52	39	9
Non-college	52	39	10
College	63	31	6
Democrats	73	22	5
Independents	51	40	10
Republicans	39	49	11
West	59	32	9
South	59	34	7
Northeast	53	40	7
Midwest	54	38	9

- 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.

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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?

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	There is absolutely no time when a book should be banned	There are rare times when it's appropriate to ban books	There are many books that are inappropriate and should be banned
All voters	51	41	8
Female	53	39	7
Male	48	44	9
18 to 34	47	48	5
35 to 49	56	37	8
50 to 64	53	39	8
65+	47	42	11
White	51	41	8
Hispanic	45	42	13
Black	59	36	4
AAPI	54	44	2
Non-college	50	40	9
College	51	43	6
Democrats	66	33	1
Independents	62	32	5
Republicans	31	53	16
Northeast	57	39	4
West	55	39	6
South	48	43	9
Midwest	46	43	11

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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.

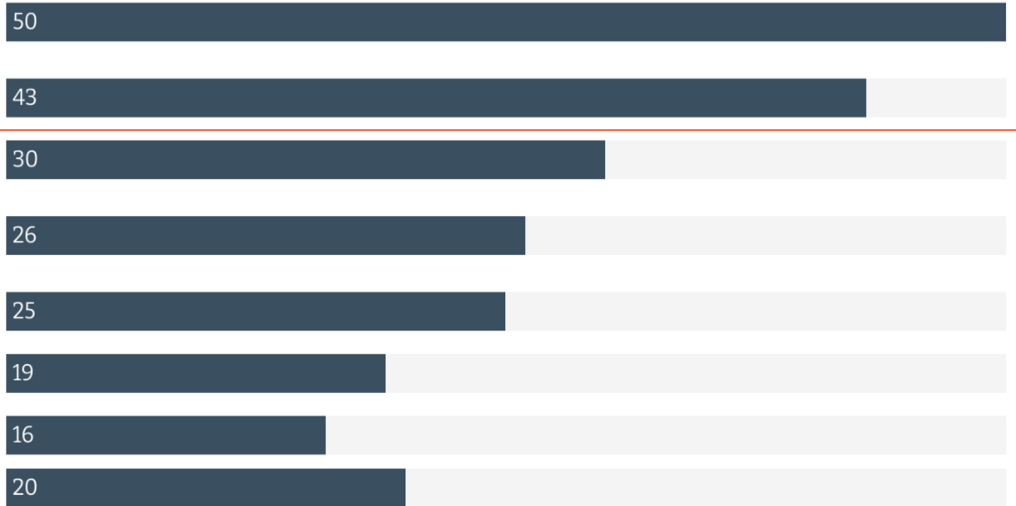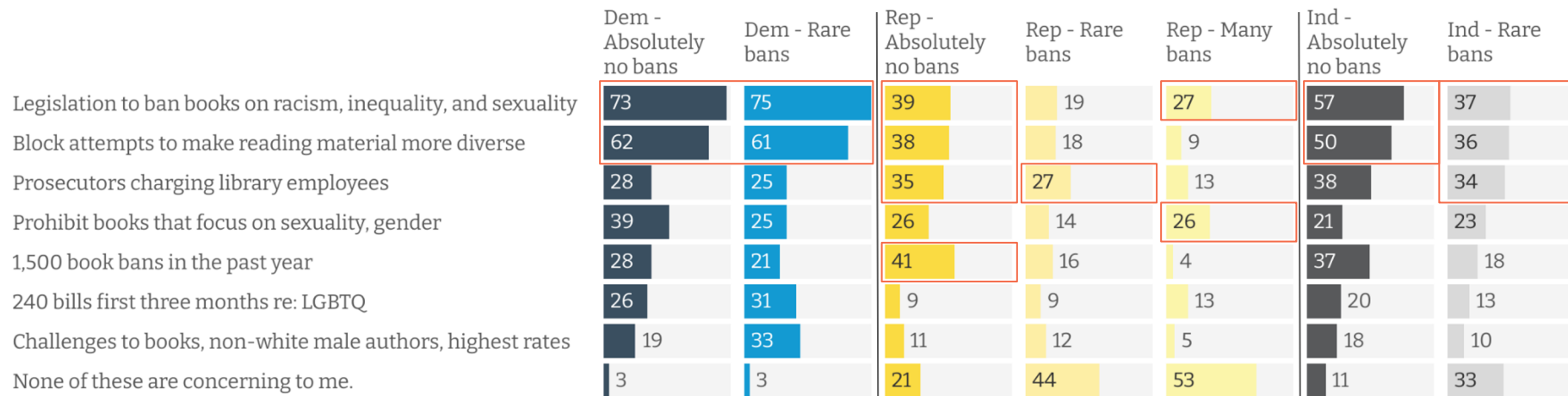|	
States are introducing legislation to ban certain books and/or the teaching of different topics, such as racism, inequality, and sexuality.	50
Politicians are trying to block attempts to make reading material more diverse and representative of the full picture of America.	43
In some states, prosecutors 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

Level of concern varies by both party ID and reflexive position on book banning

- Possibility of charging library employees emerges as worrying among Republicans and Independents.

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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	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?
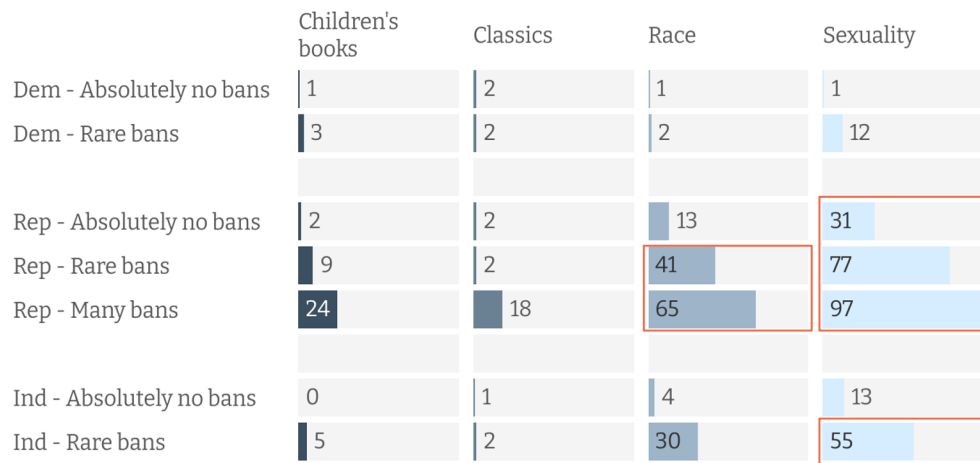
Subject matter related to race, and particularly sexuality, soften Republican opposition to banning books

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

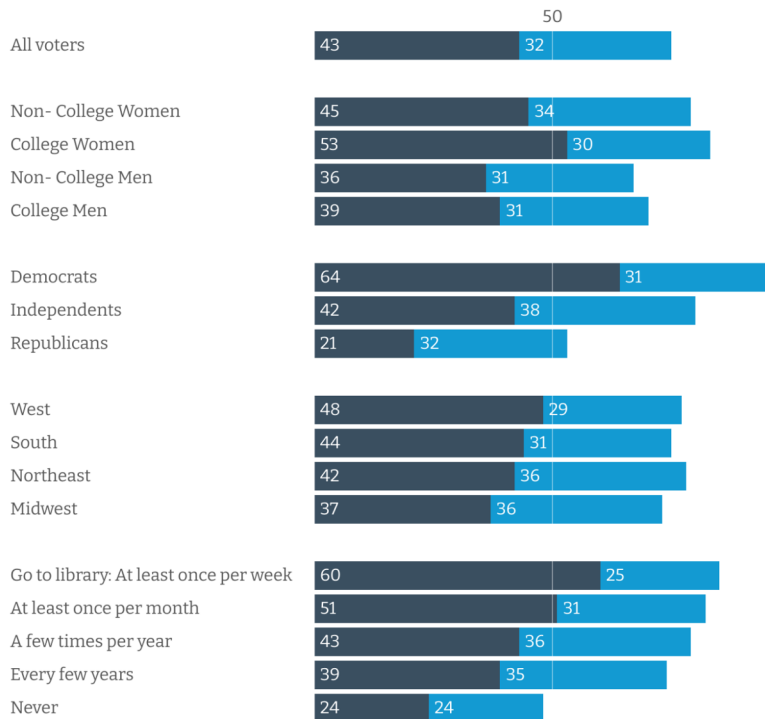|	Children's books	Classics	Race	Sexuality
Dem - Absolutely no bans	1	2	1	1
Dem - Rare bans	3	2	2	12
Rep - Absolutely no bans	2	2	13	31
Rep - Rare bans	9	2	41	77
Rep - Many bans	24	18	65	97
Ind - Absolutely no bans	0	1	4	13
Ind - Rare bans	5	2	30	55

- Even still, most of the 31% of Republicans who believe there is "absolutely no time when a book should be banned" - remain opposed regardless of which type of book tested.

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This is an important <u>voting</u> 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

		50
All voters	43	32
Non- College Women	45	34
College Women	53	30
Non- College Men	36	31
College Men	39	31
Democrats	64	31
Independents	42	38
Republicans	21	32
West	48	29
South	44	31
Northeast	42	36
Midwest	37	36
Go to library: At least once per week	60	25
At least once per month	51	31
A few times per year	43	36
Every few years	39	35
Never	24	24

- 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.

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