

Book Ban / Censorship Messaging for Library Supporters

Voter Perceptions of Book Bans in the United States

The EveryLibrary Institute recently released the results of a nationwide poll that shows that 75% of Americans oppose book banning and are willing to consider book banning when going to the voters this November. Download the report at: everylibraryinstitute.org/bookbanpoll.

It is effective to make specific books emblematic of this issue as a whole. Of those tested, it's most effective to highlight children's books and classic novels.

- Children shouldn't have their education dictated by the whims of short-sighted politicians or a minority of loud extreme activists.
- If you don't like a book at a library, don't check it out. Other people shouldn't be able to control what me or my family can read. [Or: "Politicians shouldn't be able to control what YOU and your family should read. We trust parents to make those decisions.]
- Children's books are being 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.
- So many classic novels, such as "The Handmaid's Tale," "Of Mice and Men" and "To Kill a Mockingbird," are being banned. These are treasured classics one minute and banned the next.
- The possibility of charging library employees emerges as worrying among all demographics. We should talk about how this is happening around the country – (like Brooke Stephens filing police reports with Farmington Police Department and Davis County Sheriff's Office)
- Utahns trust professional teachers and librarians who have devoted their lives to education and public service, not short-sighted politicians looking to make culture war hay, to build library collections that support the success and health of students.

27-9-3 Messaging (27 words, 9 seconds, 3 key points)

- Literature prepares students for success in a complex world
Short-sighted politicians are banning books.
We trust librarians and parents to make those decisions for our kids.
- In America, we enjoy the freedom of choosing what we read
Extremists are banning classic novels and children's books
If you don't like it, don't read it.
- Children shouldn't have their education dictated by the whims of politicians
Do you trust politicians to make these decisions?
I trust parents to parent their own kids.
- As kids, we read these "banned books"
Treat kids like snowflakes and they won't be self-reliant or able to compete
We're limiting their opportunity for success.

Book Ban / Censorship Messaging for Library Supporters

Speak to Self-Direction and Liberty / Respect for Parent's Rights

- The Library, as an arm of the government, shouldn't be determining what people can/can't read. We offer the opportunity to select books and then get out of the way because we believe citizens can make reading decisions for themselves. We trust parents, not politicians to parent their children. We will never usurp that role of parents
- Parents tell us that they [or "As a parent, I] want to raise strong kids who will be able to compete and succeed in a diverse and global economy. It's important to them that their kids learn as much as they can about the world; the good, the bad, and the ugly, so they'll be well-prepared for career success and to be leaders in our community.

Speak to First Freedoms, American Values / Strength / Law and Order

- Library policies protect and preserve access to legally published materials. We are guided by a century of law, based on the First Freedoms of the Constitution of the United States. America's Founding Fathers believed that these bedrock freedoms, such as freedom of speech, association, and religion needed to be protected for America to thrive and prosper. We don't want to chip away at our the first freedoms enshrined in the first amendment

Speak to Children's Health and Safety

- Books that are being banned due to sexual content help kids explore the human condition, and human development, in a safe way - especially as compared to what they will find on the Internet or on social media. It can help them understand the dangers of sexual activity, as well as how to keep safe from, and speak to trusted family members about abuse.
- Banning books with LGBTQ themes harms LGBTQ kids and families in Utah- especially in light of the fact that LGBTQ+ youth are often bullied and are four times more likely to attempt suicide.

Speak to Student Success

- When we unnecessarily restrict students' access to literature that reflects the full range of human voices, perspectives, and experiences we put them at a significant competitive disadvantage and limit their ability to thrive, succeed, and lead in a complex and increasingly diverse global economy.

Book Ban / Censorship Messaging for Library Supporters

MESSAGING AGAINST BOOK RATINGS

- The MPAA rating is a 100% private, voluntary rating system self-adopted by an industry to improve their revenue in a for-profit marketplace. The government does not coerce, regulate, or force participation, nor enact penalties backed up by the power of the state.
- There are many levels of filtering and vetting to ensure that materials in school libraries are developmentally appropriate. Materials are vetted by editors, are selected for age-based publisher imprints, are professionally reviewed, and assigned “[lexile scores](#)” that help parents, educators, and librarians identify and select books by grade, interest, and reading complexity
- Books are selected by professional trained librarians who have training and expertise in youth brain development, literacy, and collection development. They select books with an understanding of state education standards, and local school district curriculum. They also select books with an understanding of the needs and developmental levels of the student body, and develop collections to serve a range of needs.
- No one book is going to be right or wrong for every student. But books that may be valuable to one student, should not be removed from the shelf because the book isn’t right for another student. Many of the books targeted for removal are books that students say support their mental health by helping them feel seen, or provide them with language or concepts that help them name and address an abusive situation.
- Librarians offer personalized one-on-one consulting with parents to assist with book selection based on the parent’s concerns, values, and preferences. Together librarians and parents can provide customized and developmentally appropriate book recommendations to students.
- There are many rating tools available to parents to help them understand the themes, content, and complexity of books. These sources range from Common Sense Media, and Novelist, to GoodReads reviews and other private rating systems. There is nothing preventing parents from accessing these existing resources for guidance.
- Requiring the application of a particular rating system in schools, especially if it is used to label, segregate, or restrict access, may stigmatize particular voices, perspectives, or beliefs, and may run afoul of the First Amendment. Learning is supported, and critical thinking is developed, by providing access to a range of developmentally appropriate materials
- Book rating systems don’t provide any insight into the books’ literary and educational value. They fail to evaluate the work as a whole, and wind up judging works of literature by a few “objectionable” elements which have been isolated and decontextualized from the larger meaning and value of the book.
- For instance, The Diary of Anne Frank has been challenged by some who think that sexual passages in the book will cause harm to students. But most parents are able to read those passages in context, and appreciate the great value the book has for their children. Do we start banning important works like Anne Frank’s Diary because a few people find references to sex offensive and inappropriate in ANY context.

Book Ban / Censorship Messaging for Library Supporters

MESSAGING THAT IS NOT EFFECTIVE

- Arguing that proponents are simply scared of anyone different is least convincing.
- Voters are receptive to describing politicians who support book banning as closed-minded, dangerous, extreme, and short-sighted BUT are less likely to use the terms “racist” or “homophobic”. So messaging that focuses on racism/homophobia will not be effective.
- Subject matter related to sexuality (including LGBTQ+/Gender), and to a lesser extent race and “CRT”, may weaken opposition to book-banning. Books related to sex/gender/sexual orientation are seen as not age-appropriate. Therefore, centering our arguments or key points in the areas of sex/lgbtq+/gender/race will activate support for book banning while weakening most peoples’ general impulse to NOT ban books.
- You may want to consider using the phrase, “book removal” instead of the phrase “book-banning” when offering legislative testimony, or having one-on-one conversations with legislators or other decision-makers who may have a negative reaction to the term. Using the phrase book-banning is advised when speaking to the media, or writing for petitions and supporters. Use your best judgment and use language that will help achieve the desired policy outcomes.

MESSAGING: AMERICANS PERCEPTIONS ABOUT BOOK BANNING

From [Deseret News / BYU "American Family Survey](#)

- Just 12% of Americans agree that books should be removed from libraries if a parent objects.
- Only 16% believe public school libraries include inappropriate books on their shelves.
- 65% said it was important for public school libraries to represent a variety of perspectives about controversial issues — even if it makes some people uncomfortable.
- “The public really doesn’t like book banning,” said Jeremy C. Pope, professor of political science at Brigham Young University and co-investigator for the survey.

From [EveryLibrary Institute’s Voter Perceptions of Book Banning](#)

- **Just 8% of voters think there are many books that are inappropriate and should be banned.**
- **Libraries and librarians are broadly favorably viewed.** American voters have a high regard for libraries, and are viewed twice as favorably as elected leaders of either party by a 2:1 margin.
- 3 in 4 voters say preventing book banning is important to how they decide to vote.

Book Ban / Censorship Messaging for Library Supporters

COMMON SENSE MEDIA REPORT ON WHERE KIDS ACCESS PORN

- Common Sense Media, the nation's leading media ratings organization for concerned parents, reported just last month that **0% of kids under 18 use the library to access pornography**. It's all on their phones.
- As Common Sense Media says in their new report "[Teens and Pornography](#)", "Today's teens have more options than previous generations, including generally **unfettered access to pornographic websites, social media, and other outlets**..."
- **Personal devices enable more pornography access** as well as easier sharing with peers, generally undetected by parents."
- Mainstream publishers don't print pornography & sell to libraries. Removing library books **does nothing to address the real problems** of children accessing pornography.

Download the EveryLibrary Institute Report
**Voter Perceptions of Book Bans
in the United States**
everylibraryinstitute.org/bookbanpoll