



RIGHT TO READ

**THE
FREEDOM
TO READ**

**WHO DECIDES WHAT YOU
CAN READ?**

WHAT IS MI RIGHT TO READ?



RIGHT TO READ

- Initiative of the Michigan Library Association (MLA)
 - Advocacy, education and engagement on behalf of all Michigan libraries
 - Lead by MLA's Intellectual Freedom Task Force
- Intellectual freedom is core value of librarianship
- Right to read is a First Amendment right
- Education and access to information are foundational to democracy



HOW ARE LIBRARY MATERIALS SELECTED?

LIBRARY POLICIES

- No library has room for every book
- **Collection Development policies** provide guidance and state goals for collection
- **Request for Reconsideration procedures** allow users to request removal of an item
- Policies are approved by the governing board

WHAT IS A BOARD?

- School and library policies are generally set by a governing board
 - The board has the legal responsibility for library operations
 - Day-to-day library functions are delegated to staff
- A board is made up of community members who may be appointed or elected, depending on the type of organization
- Often board members must reside in the organization's service area

RESPONSIBILITIES

- A library board:
 - Appoints and manages the director or administrator
 - Adopts written policies and rules that govern operation and use of the library
 - Studies community needs and approve a strategic plan
 - Approves the budget, examines expenditures, and amends the budget as needed
 - Participates in continuing education and provides orientation for new trustees
 - Adopts a collection development policy
 - Addresses formal patron comments and complaints
 - Advocates for the library in the community
- The director/administrator:
 - Hires and evaluates library staff
 - Proposes policies and carries out approved policies
 - Manages day-to-day operations of the library
 - Delegates library functions to staff members
 - Prepares and submits a budget request and maintains complete and accurate financial records
 - Participates in continuing education and encourages staff to do the same
 - Selects and orders books and other library materials or delegates this task to staff members
 - Advocates for the library in the community

COMMON CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

- Demonstrated and anticipated needs of library users
 - Local interest
- Reputation, authority, and literary skills of the author
- Timeliness of topic
- Positive reviews in reputable professional journals such as *School Library Journal*
- Existing holdings in subject area
- Budget and physical space
- Availability through interlibrary loan

CONTROVERSIAL MATERIALS

- Representation of a diversity of views and expression is a major goal of library collections
- Materials are not restricted due to frankness of language or content
- Parents and legal guardians are responsible for what their children are reading
- Materials may be routinely removed due to physical damage, outdated content, and lack of checkouts, not controversy

FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

- Protects against government attempts to suppress speech and publishing
- Courts have held that the “right to receive information” is essential to freedom of speech
- Unprotected speech includes obscenity, child pornography, defamatory speech, false advertising, true threats, and fighting words



CENSORSHIP AT THE LIBRARY

WHAT IS CENSORSHIP?

- Limiting access to information
- Can happen:
 - During the selection process
 - Through removal from the collection
 - By restricting access to materials within the collection
- Choosing not to purchase, choosing to remove, or choosing to restrict access to a title because of personal opposition to the content or the belief it is inflammatory is censoring that title.

HOW ARE BOOKS BANNED?

- Formal challenges
 - Procedure set by library policy
 - Increasingly performative, organized at a national level
 - Targeted lists of books circulated
 - Coaching and advising provided
- “Shadow banning” or “soft censorship”
 - ALA estimates 90% of book challenges go unreported

FORMS OF CENSORSHIP

- Relocating
 - Moving an item from its current location to a different one
 - Putting an item in an inappropriate area makes it less accessible to the intended audience
 - Fundamentally removes privacy
 - Example: a children's book is moved to the adult nonfiction; a book is kept behind a desk and must be requested
- Removing
 - An item is completely removed from the library
 - The message is that this material and its themes are dangerous and should not be accessible to the public
 - Example: a young adult book is removed from the collection because of a patron's interpretation of its message

“SOFT” CENSORSHIP

- The library side

- Restricting circulation to specific groups of patrons
- Moving or removing items that have not received a formal challenge or before the reconsideration process is complete
- Placing an item in the collection in a way that makes it more difficult to find
- Not promoting or displaying a book due to potential controversy

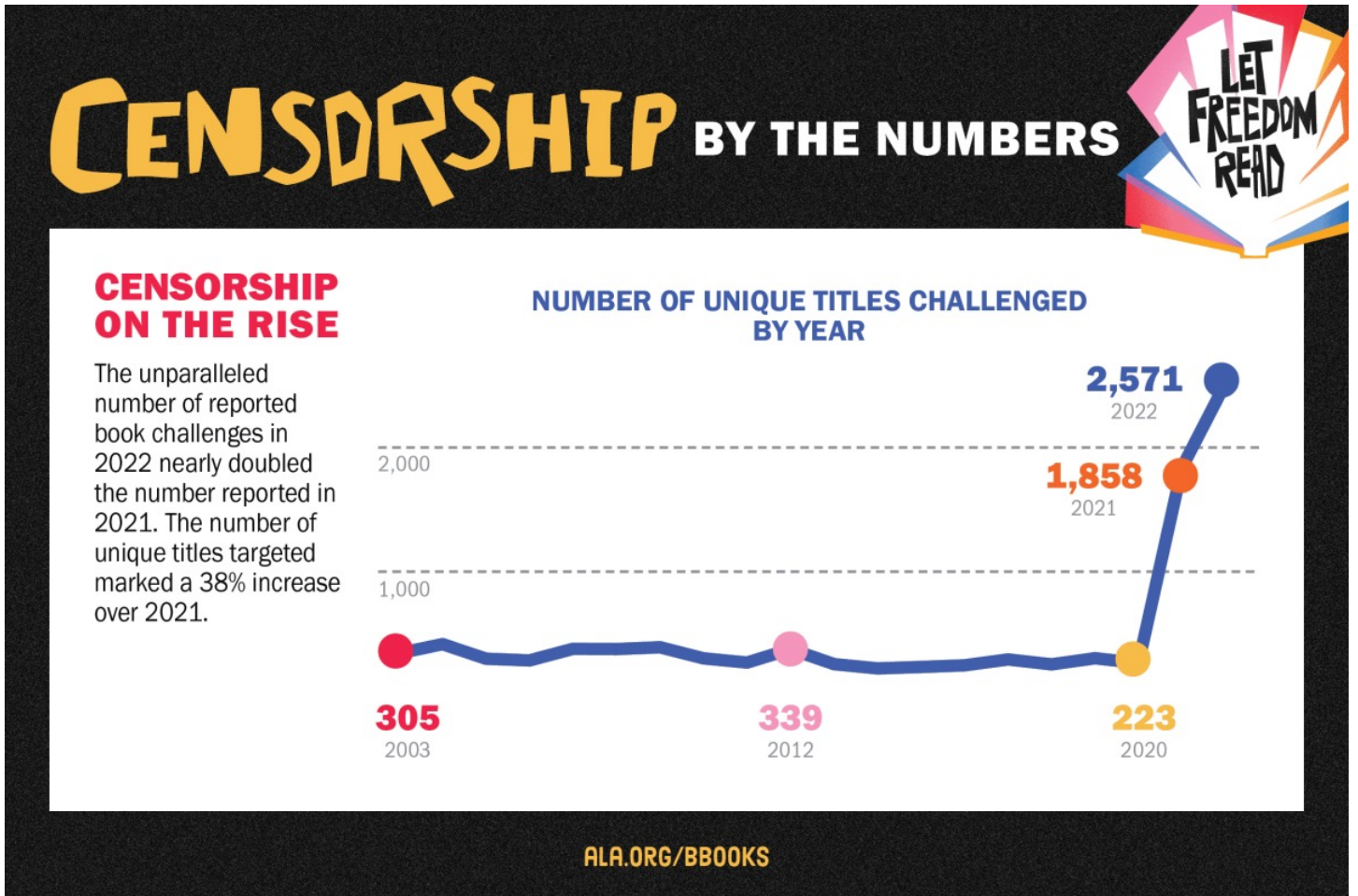
- The patron side

- Hiding an item in the collection, such as behind a shelf or in the wrong section
- Checking out items specifically to restrict others' access
- Deliberately damaging an item
- Stealing

CENSORSHIP IS ON THE RISE

More censorship attempts documented by the American Library Association in 2021 than any year since tracking began

ALA estimates 80-90% of challenges go unreported

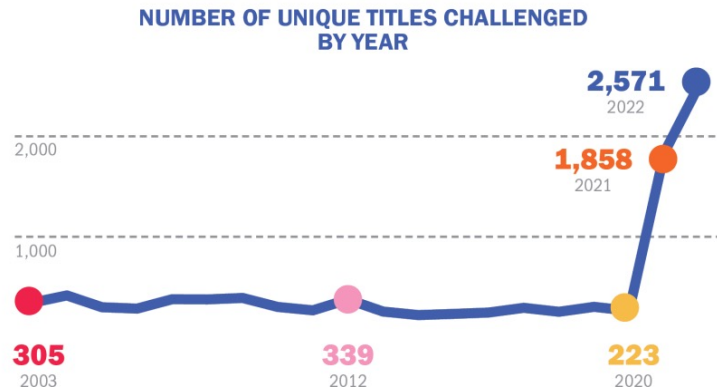


CENSORSHIP BY THE NUMBERS



CENSORSHIP ON THE RISE

The unparalleled number of reported book challenges in 2022 nearly doubled the number reported in 2021. The number of unique titles targeted marked a 38% increase over 2021.



WHERE DO CHALLENGES TAKE PLACE?

In 2022, nearly 51% of the demands to censor books targeted books, programs, displays, and other materials in school libraries and schools; 48% of book challenges targeted materials in public libraries.



48%
Public libraries



41%
School libraries



10%
Schools



1%
Higher education libraries and other institutions

Statistics based on 1,264 cases with known locations.

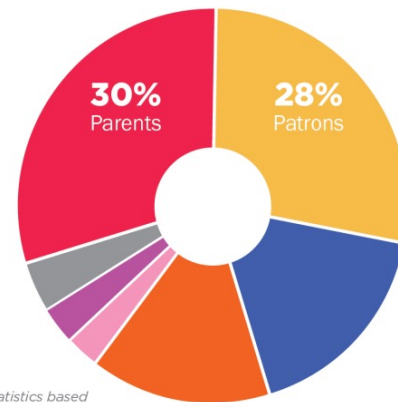
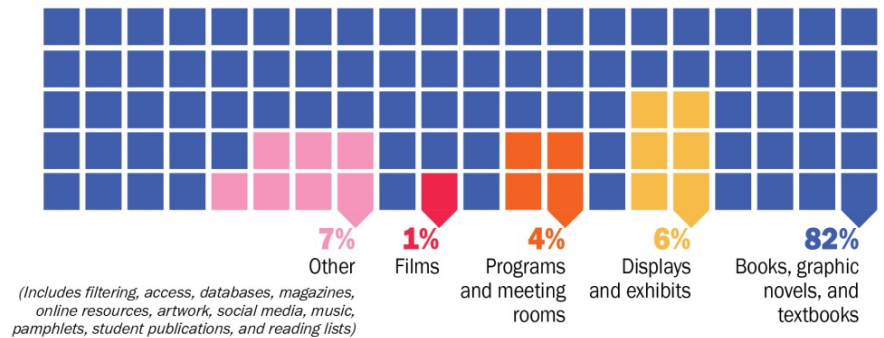
ALA.ORG/BBOOKS

CENSORSHIP BY THE NUMBERS



BOOKS AND BEYOND

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked 1,269 challenges in 2022. Here's the breakdown:



Statistics based on 1,207 cases with known initiators.

In 2022, 90% of reported challenge attempts targeted multiple titles, the work of a well-organized movement that distributes book lists used to initiate mass challenges that can empty the shelves of a library.

WHO INITIATES CHALLENGES?

- 17%** Political/religious groups
- 15%** Board/administration
- 3%** Librarians/teachers
- 3%** Elected officials
- 4%** Other
(Includes non-custodial relatives, nonresidents, community members without library cards, etc.)

ALA.ORG/BBOOKS

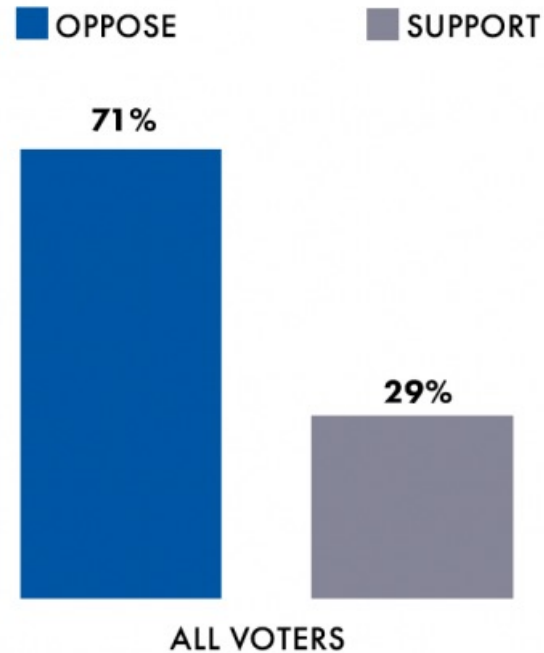
BANNING BOOKS IS BAD FOR COMMUNITIES

- Prevents individuals, especially young people, from accessing critical information
- Takes away opportunities for young people to see themselves reflected in literature
- Lost opportunities to build mutual understanding
- Freedom to read is a Constitutional right

MOST AMERICANS OPPOSE BOOK BANNING

- 71% of voters oppose efforts to remove books from public libraries
- 67% of voters oppose efforts to remove books from school libraries

Full poll results and key findings available via the American Library Association. ([Link](#))



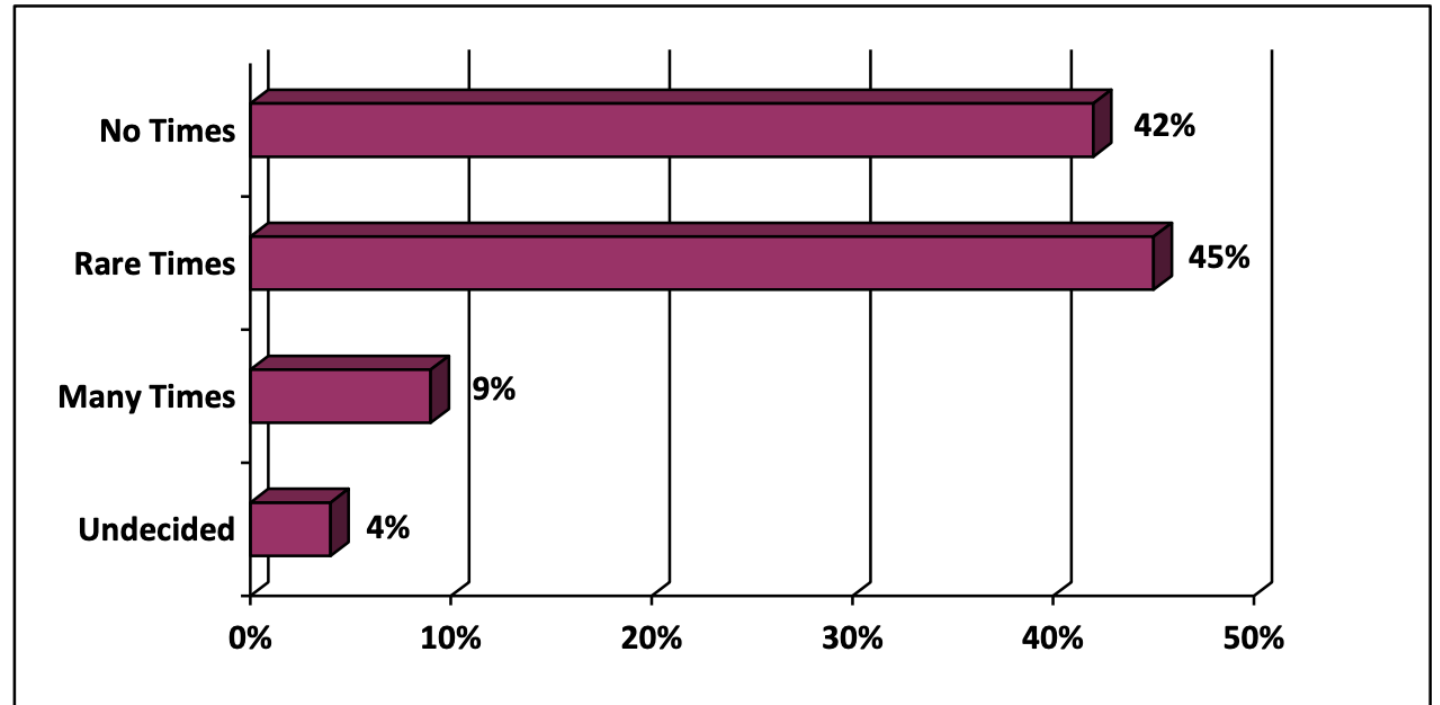
	Oppose	Support
Democrats	75%	25%
Independents	58%	42%
Republicans	70%	30%

MOST MICHIGANDERS OPPOSE BOOK BANNING

- 87% of Michigan voters said there are no times or rare times when books should be banned, including:
 - 97% of Democrats
 - 93% of Independents
 - 76% of Republicans

Poll commissioned by the Michigan Library Association and conducted by EPIC-MRA. ([Link](#))

When should books be banned?

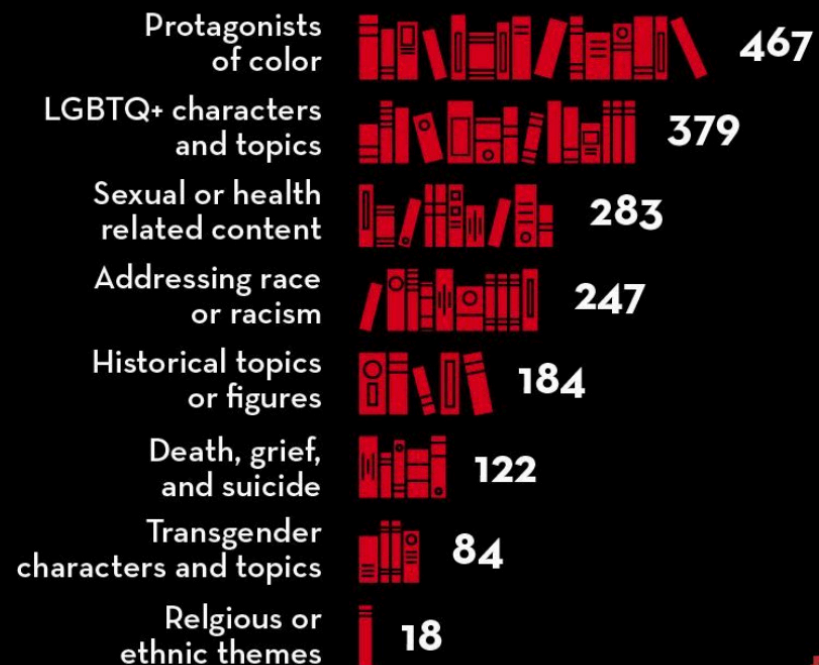


IMPACT ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS

- Less content is purchased when “controversial” topics are avoided
- Goes against the purpose of collection development, which is to produce a well-rounded collection that is meant to be used
- Providing a resource to someone who needs it is always the goal

Which stories have been banned?

*Many of these categories overlap



Based on PEN America's Index of Book Bans, which documents decisions to ban books in school libraries and classrooms in the United States from July 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022.



HOW ARE CHALLENGES HANDLED?

- A Request for Reconsideration or similar form and accompanying procedure should be approved by the library or school board
- Reconsideration Committee formed to review challenged material
 - Includes librarians, administration, educators, board members, or other stakeholders
- Challenged materials should remain accessible during reconsideration process
- Appeal procedure is included in policy



RIGHT TO READ

THANK YOU

Contact MI Right to Read at <https://www.mirighttoread.com/contact-us>

Learn more and join the coalition at <https://www.mirighttoread.com/take-action>