

Book banning in the US: The right-wing effort to inoculate the population against critical thought

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The American Library Association (ALA) has come out with its annual report on the State of America's Libraries, and it is an appalling document. It brings out how far and how deeply the attacks on democratic rights and freedom of thought and expression have gone and how determined the right-wing, fascistic elements are to suppress truth on various fronts.

The ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) tracked 4,235 unique titles challenged in 2025, the second highest ever documented by ALA. The highest ever documented was 4,240 in 2023. As one of the essays included in the State of America's Libraries points out, "These numbers stand far from the baseline of 273, which was the average annual number between 2001 and 2020."

This is not the result of some sudden upsurge in public morality or even prudishness. This is a concerted, organized campaign driven by ultra-right elements dedicated to forcing their anti-democratic and unpopular views on a largely unsuspecting public. It is part of the preemptive assault on popular consciousness, driven by fear of the growing radicalization materialized in the "No Kings" demonstrations of millions and other indications of public hostility to the entire political establishment.

Along these lines, one of the "key findings" of the ALA in regard to the "censorship landscape" bears on the identity of the "intellectual freedom challengers."

The State of America's Libraries observes:

Contrary to common narratives suggesting that book challenges originate primarily from concerned parents, our data shows otherwise.

Approximately 91.7% of titles challenged in 2025 were targeted by pressure groups (20.8%) and government decision makers (70.9%). By comparison, *only 2.7% of challenges came from parents, and 1.4% came from individual library users*. This represents a dramatic shift from previous years. In the past, pressure groups and government officials accounted for roughly 12.9% of book challenges, averaging about 46 titles per year. [Emphasis added.]

The 91.7 percent figure is divided up approximately like this: 40 percent local boards or administrations, 31 percent elected officials or governments and 21 percent right-wing pressure groups.

The report goes on to explain that in 2025 "those same actors targeted 7,884 books. That number includes 4,235 unique titles, which means that many titles were targeted multiple times."

This duplication reflects a large-scale, coordinated effort. Today's censorship campaigns are not spontaneous expressions of community concern; they are organized initiatives driven by political actors and well-funded book banning movements.

There were 713 distinct censorship incidents in 2025, 68 percent involving books, 13 percent over library access (closures, funding cuts, bomb threats), 5 percent concerning displays, 4 percent about library programs

and 2 percent the result of hate crimes. Public libraries came under attack 51 percent of the time and school libraries 37 percent. School curricula and higher education make up the rest.

Significantly, these efforts were rewarded with unprecedented success. “Some two-thirds of the challenged books, or about 5,668, went on to be banned, and an additional 920 titles were restricted in some way. That’s the highest number of titles censored in a single year and highest rate of censorship recorded between 1990 and 2025,” reports *K-12 Dive*.

The claim by the censorship zealots that they are “protecting children” is hypocritical, cynical drivel. The right-wing forces so worried about the young are the same ones in favor of slashing budgets, social programs and benefits, resulting in the impoverishment of millions of children and families.

The most targeted books in 2025 included *Sold* by Patricia McCormick, a 2006 novel about a girl from Nepal sold into sexual slavery in India. The book was adapted as a film in 2014, with Emma Thompson as one of the executive producers. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) by Stephen Chbosky is also highly targeted. That novel too was made into a film, in 2012.

Two fantasy novels by Sarah J. Maas (*Empire of Storms* [2016] and *A Court of Thorns and Roses* [2015]), and another by Jennifer L. Armentrout (*Storm and Fury*, 2019) are on the list, as is Anthony Burgess’ dystopian 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange*!

Also on the 2025 list, John Green’s 2005 young adult novel, *Looking for Alaska*, was the fourth-most challenged book in the US between 2010 and 2019, with profanity and a sexually explicit scene identified as objectionable. When the Marion County (Kentucky) High School considered removing the book from the library and senior English curriculum, it created a genuine controversy, with considerable public support for the book. The teacher who wanted to use Green’s novel received more than 500 encouraging emails, half of them written by teenagers who had read it.

Tricks (2009) by Ellen Hopkins was another title under attack in 2025, in this case for its treatment of drugs and adolescent sexuality, as was her *Identical* (2013). *Gender Queer: A Memoir* (2019) by Maia Kobabe and *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* (2021) by Malinda Lo were singled out for attack because of their gay sexual themes.

Beyond the list of the most targeted, the ALA reports that of the titles targeted in 2025, 1,671 deal with LGBTQ and black or indigenous themes. The fascistic book banners consider these subjects “low-hanging fruit,” appealing to the most backward elements in the population. And anti-gay bigotry and racism are real driving forces in these quarters.

However, the wider aim is to chloroform or stunt public consciousness, to criminalize investigations of social inequality and poverty, slavery and the crimes committed against Native Americans, the violence of the class struggle and, more generally, the history and blood-soaked character of American capitalism.

This is along the lines of the Nazi-like effort to “synchronize” institutions and culture behind American chauvinism, militarism and social reaction. Donald Trump’s January 29, 2025 executive order, “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling,” for example, asserted that parents expected US schools “to instill a patriotic admiration for our incredible Nation and the values for which we stand.” This was to be coordinated with the Department of Defense.



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