

# [***Book bans are accelerating across the country amid right-wing pressure campaign***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BTN-HG81-JBSS-S02J-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Analysis by Oliver Darcy, CNN

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New York (CNN) &#8212; Editor's Note: A version of this article first appeared in the "Reliable Sources" newsletter. [*Sign up for the daily digest chronicling the evolving media landscape here.*](https://www.cnn.com/newsletters/reliable-sources?source=nl-acq_article)

America's right-wing forces would have you believe that they are the courageous entities standing up for free speech.

But, as they try to claim that mantle, many of those same forces in media and ***politics*** are behind a disturbing wave of book bans sweeping the nation.

PEN America, a non-profit organization committed to protecting free expression, [*published an alarming report*](https://pen.org/report/narrating-the-crisis/) Tuesday indicating that the "book ban crisis" is only getting worse. The bans are "speeding up," the organization warned in its report, a troublesome trend that is impacting public school systems from coast-to-coast.

"There were over 4,000 instances of book bans in the first half of this school year-more than all of last school year as a whole. This is a marked increase in comparison to the last spring semester, in which PEN America recorded 1,841 book bans," the group said in the report, aptly titled "Banned in the USA."

The bans started in haste in early 2021, birthed in the backlash to Nikole Hannah-Jones's 1619 Project at The New York Times. At the time, the concern among conservatives was that schools were using books to supposedly indoctrinate young students with critical race theory, an academic concept that became a culture war flashpoint and sparked hysteria in right-wing circles. Over time, the bans have grown to encompass other topics, notably gender ideology.

The censorship has been fueled by the right-wing media machine (which again, purports to be pro-free speech), with entities such as "Libs of TikTok" targeting specific school systems and effectively waging pressure campaigns against administrators to take certain works off the library shelves.

Some of the books removed from schools across the country include Margaret Atwood's acclaimed dystopian-novel**-**turned-Hulu-adaptation "The Handmaid's Tale," Amy Reed's novel "The Nowhere Girls," Rupi Kaur's NYT bestseller "Milk and Honey," Ta-Nehisi Coates's memoir "Between the World and Me" and others.

"Those who want to ban books are attempting to use obscenity law and hyperbolic rhetoric about 'porn in schools' to justify banning books about sexual violence and LGBTQ+ topics (and in particular, trans identities). In doing so, they have also disproportionately targeted books by women and nonbinary authors," PEN America said. "The movement to ban books also continues to focus on themes of race and racism by advancing rhetoric disparaging 'critical race theory,' 'woke ideology,' and efforts to ensure library collections are diverse and inclusive."

Such brazen book bans - unprecedented in modern American history - is at its worst in the red states of Florida and Texas. In Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a law last year that led to the removal of books from public school shelves, more than 5,100 books were banned between July 2021 and December 2023, according to PEN America. In Texas, the number was more than 1,500, the group said.

The bans have also led to harassment against the authors who suddenly find themselves hurled into the information wars. Abdi Nazemian, a gay Iranian-American author, said during a press call organized by PEN America on Tuesday that "nothing could have prepared" him for "the experience of having my book banned."

"First and foremost, a heartbreak over the message it sends to young queer kids who deserve love and support. But also just the fear over all the online threats I've received," Nazemian said. "I've been called a pedophile and a groomer. I've been called filthy, indecent, profane, shady, slimy."

PEN America said Tuesday that there is one glimmer of hope: growing resistance to the bans. Every major publisher is now **actively supporting a legal case** to halt book banning in Iowa. And, across the country, ordinary people are getting involved to put an end to the trend.

"We see students at the forefront, leading protests, read-ins, marching to oppose censorship and educational censorship in particular happening and plaguing their schools and school libraries," Kasey Meehan, the program director of PEN America's Freedom to Read, said Tuesday. "And, of course, we're joined by incredible voices of authors and parents and other advocates that are leading efforts to be as coordinated, as well resourced, and as organized as those efforts to remove books in the first place."

Analysis by Oliver Darcy, CNN

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