

# [***FACT CHECK: Have There Been 3,000 Book Bans In The 2022-2023 School Year?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BKY-2R01-DXXD-703S-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Daily Caller

March 15, 2024 Friday 04:20 PM EST

Copyright 2024 The Daily Caller, Inc. All Rights Reserved

**Section:** ***POLITICS***

**Length:** 1052 words

**Byline:** Elias Atienza, Senior Reporter, [*elias@dailycaller.com*](mailto:elias@dailycaller.com)

**Body**

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GettyImages-1743689703-scaled-e1707176878744.jpg)

60 Minutes [*claimed*](https://twitter.com/60Minutes/status/1764274527524016263?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) that there have been 3,000 book bans throughout the 2022-2023 academic school year.

There were over 3,000 book bans in U.S. schools last year. That rise is inspired, in part, by the conservative group Moms for Liberty. Sunday, 60 Minutes follows how one conservative school district navigated the book ban debate. [*https://t.co/mEN4CWeXMW*](https://t.co/mEN4CWeXMW) [*pic.twitter.com/K2zi3vdsjk*](https://t.co/K2zi3vdsjk)

- 60 Minutes (@60Minutes) [*March 3, 2024*](https://twitter.com/60Minutes/status/1764274527524016263?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

**Verdict: Unsubstantiated**

The data is from PEN America. Their definition of what a book ban is has been challenged by the American Enterprise Institute and others.

**Fact Check:**

CBS News' 60 Minutes ran a March 3 segment about attempts to ban books. Their online report [*reads*](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/beaufort-south-carolina-schools-return-most-books-to-shelves-after-attempt-to-ban-97-60-minutes-transcript/), “With election season upon us, the forces of ***politics*** are pulling us apart and among the sharpest battles recently is a campaign to ban certain books from public schools. There were more than 3,000 book bans in schools last year, a thousand more than the year before.”

This claim, though, is unsubstantiated, as there are conflicting definitions of what constitutes a book ban and whether or not these books are actually banned.

The 3,000 book ban number comes from PEN America, a free speech advocacy group. Suzanne Trimel, a spokesperson for PEN America, told Check Your Fact that “PEN America's documentation of book bans in public K-12 schools for the 2022-23 school year recorded 3,362 instances of books banned, an increase of 33 percent from the 2021-22 school year.”

“PEN America defines a school book ban as any action taken against a book based on its content and as a result of parent or community challenges, administrative decisions, or in response to direct or threatened action by lawmakers or other governmental officials, that leads to a previously accessible book being either completely removed from availability to students, or where access to a book is restricted or diminished,” the organization's website [*reads*](https://pen.org/2023-banned-book-list/). [***(RELATED: Houthi Rebels Claim To Hit U.S. Warship In Red Sea)***](https://checkyourfact.com/2024/01/26/fact-check-houthi-us-warship-red-sea/)

Pen America's definition of a book ban, though, has been challenged by others. The Washington Post [*reported*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/12/23/school-book-challenges-shelves-lgbtq-authors/) that a

“[*2023 report*](https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-book-ban-mirage/) from the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute found that 74% of the books tracked as banned by Pen America in the 2021-2022 academic school year remain available in libraries, per public schools' online library catalogues.”

“Having conducted as generous of an analysis as possible on the data presented by PEN America in its work on 'book bans,' we conclude that there are few actual book removals and they are overwhelmingly based on parental objections to sexually explicit content,” the report reads.

[*Jay Greene*](https://www.heritage.org/staff/jay-p-greene-phd), a co-author of the report and a senior research fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation's Center for Education Policy, told Check Your Fact that the “Pen America definition” of a book ban “is much more expansive than most people have in mind.”

“It counts as 'banned' any book that is removed from the shelf, even for a day, so that its content can be reviewed. It also counts as banned any book where access is restricted in any way, like needing parental permission or having to ask the librarian for it. By this incredibly expansive definition, R movies are banned for people under 17 because they need parental permission. Or 10 year old children are banned from airplanes because they must be accompanied by an adult or with parental permission,” Greene said.

[*Neal McCluskey*](https://www.cato.org/people/neal-mccluskey), director of the libertarian Cato Institute's Center for Freedom, says he doesn't “think 'banned' is an accurate term” as defined by Pen America, though did note that 3,000 books being challenged is likely accurate.

“Pen America includes books that have been temporarily challenged and may have been taken off the stacks while it's being reviewed to see if it's appropriate. 'Banned' is too loaded a term for what's been challenged in school libraries. The connotation of 'banned' is illegal or prohibited to access a book. So, if you say, you've 'banned' books you're saying no one is allowed to access books,” McCluskey said.

“That [phrase] restricted or diminished' is the most important part. A review process isn't the same as a ban. The review can result in the book being kept off the shelves or returned to shelves. Schools have a finite amount of space on their shelves. They also have to keep in mind what age groups they serve and if the book being challenged is the right book to use their finite resources on,” he added.

Greene further said that the 3,000 book bans number is “ridiculous...” [***(RELATED: Fact-Checking Trump's Claim He's He's Been Indicted More Times Than Al Capone)***](https://checkyourfact.com/2024/02/22/fact-checking-trumps-claim-that-hes-been-indicted-more-times-than-al-capone/)

“The 3,000 figure that Pen America offers is ridiculous because according to our analysis of card catalogs from school libraries, 74% of books that Pen lists as banned could be found as available in those same libraries. We don't know how much of this discrepancy is caused by Pen's loose definition and how much might be caused by Pen sloppiness in collecting their information,” Greene said.

Shawnda Hines, a spokesperson for the American Library Association (ALA), told Check Your Fact that the organization “distinguishes between a book ban and a book challenge.”

“A book challenge is an attempt to restrict materials, based on the objections of a person or group. A banning is removal of those materials. While we do follow up on cases reported to us, we don't always hear the outcomes. Additionally, local media don't always document the results of challenges,” Hines said.

Hines also said that the ALA's “data stems primarily from two sources: confidential reports made directly to our office and information we discover through local reporting.”

“In short, ALA does not report specific numbers of book bans because, while they do happen, we do not know the outcome of the books challenged. Furthermore, most attempts to censor materials go unreported, so we present our figures as a snapshot of book censorship throughout the year,” Hines said.

Hines also pointed to Check Your Fact to the ALA's [*findings*](https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2023/09/american-library-association-releases-preliminary-data-2023-book-challenges) that there were a “reported 695 attempts to censor library materials and services and documented challenges to 1,915 unique titles” between January 1, 2023 and August 31, 2023.

Check Your Fact reached out to CBS News for comment.

Christine Sellers contributed to this report.

**Graphic**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA - OCTOBER 18: MoveOn Political Actions Banned Book Mobile stops for an event with local authors and teachers on October 18, 2023 in Charlottesville, Virginia. The MoveOn Banned Book Mobile handed out frequently banned books for free to anyone who attended the event. (Photo by Leigh Vogel/Getty Images for MoveOn)

**Load-Date:** March 21, 2024

**End of Document**