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New Jerseyans Are More Concerned About Books Being Banned Than Inappropriate Content

Aside from bans, majority of adults polled think laws against LGBTQ and race issues in the classroom are politically driven

Note: This poll was conducted before NJ S2421 was introduced in the New Jersey State Senate.

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (February 26, 2024) – As debate over the “Freedom to Read” Act heats up, New Jersey has already taken sides, with a majority of adults in the state saying they are concerned about book bans and the political motivation behind it, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

When polled in December and asked to choose which concerns them more about schools today, 58 percent of residents say they are more concerned that some schools may ban books and censor topics that are educationally important, while 35 percent say they are more concerned that some schools may teach books and topics that some students or their parents feel are inappropriate or offensive; 8 percent are unsure.

The breakdown in views is similar when it comes to recent laws throughout the United States banning books or making it illegal for teachers to talk about LGBTQ or racial issues. Fifty-six percent believe these measures are mostly being driven by politicians to advance their careers, while 31 percent say they are mostly being driven by parents' concerns; 13 percent are unsure.

“When we assess views in a scientific and representative way, public opinion on this issue shows – like many other topics – that the loudest voices do not necessarily represent the majority,” said Ashley Koning, an assistant research professor and director of the [Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling \(ECHIP\)](#) at [Rutgers University–New Brunswick](#). “These results

are further proof following the 2023 legislative races that pro-book ban politics does not play well with a majority of New Jerseyans.”

More than half of every demographic is more concerned about book bans than inappropriate content, with the exception of 35- to 49-year-olds (50 percent), those who don't identify as or know someone who is transgender (50 percent) and Republicans (27 percent).

Self-identified Republicans are the only group where a majority is more concerned about content (67 percent) than censorship or banning books. Democrats, on the other hand, are especially concerned about banning books and topics that are educationally important (79 percent). Black residents (67 percent) and white residents (60 percent) are more likely than Hispanic or Latino residents (52 percent) to be concerned about book banning. Those who identify as LGBTQ+ (74 percent) and those who either are or know someone who is transgender (67 percent) are also more likely than their counterparts to express concern over banning educationally important books.

Views on whether laws banning books or legislation against LGBTQ and race issues in schools are politically motivated follow similar demographic patterns. Once again, more than half of every demographic believes these attempts are politically motivated, with the exception of Republicans. But on this particular question, Republicans are split: 44 percent feel they are politically motivated, while 43 percent believe these types of laws are being driven by real parental concern.

“Book banning proponents do not even have a solid plurality of Republicans on their side when it comes to whether book bans are motivated by real parental concern, indicating a weakness in strategy even among those who are most supportive of the concept,” said [Jessica Roman](#), a research associate at ECPIP.

Results are from a statewide poll of 1,657 adults contacted through multiple modes, including by live interviewer on landline and cell phone, MMS text invitation to web, and the probability-based [Rutgers-Eagleton/SSRS Garden State Panel](#) from Dec. 13 to Dec. 23. The full sample has a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points. The registered voter subsample contains 1,451 registered voters and has a margin of error of +/- 3.0 percentage points.

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Broadcast interviews: Rutgers University–New Brunswick has broadcast-quality television and radio studios available for remote live or taped interviews with Rutgers experts. For more information, contact Jessica Ronan-Frisch at jronan@eagleton.rutgers.edu.

ABOUT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY–NEW BRUNSWICK

Rutgers University–New Brunswick is where Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, began more than 250 years ago. Ranked among the world's top 60 universities, Rutgers's flagship university is a leading public research institution and a member of the prestigious Association of

American Universities. It is home to internationally acclaimed faculty and has 12 degree-granting schools and a Division I Athletics program. It is the Big Ten Conference's most diverse university. Through its community of teachers, scholars, artists, scientists and healers, Rutgers is equipped as never before to transform lives.

ABOUT THE EAGLETON CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEREST POLLING

Home of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling (ECPIP) was established in 1971 and is the oldest and one of the most respected university-based statewide polling operations in the United States. Now in its 52nd year and with the publication of over 200 polls, ECPIP's mission is to provide scientifically sound, nonpartisan information about public opinion. To read more about ECPIP and view all of our press releases, published research and data archive, please visit our website: eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu. You can also visit our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

ABOUT THE EAGLETON INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

The Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling is a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University–New Brunswick. The Eagleton Institute studies how American politics and government work and change, analyzes how the democracy might improve and promotes political participation and civic engagement. The Institute explores state and national politics through research, education and public service, linking the study of politics with its day-to-day practice. To learn more about Eagleton programs and expertise, visit eagleton.rutgers.edu.

ABOUT THE RUTGERS-EAGLETON/SSRS GARDEN STATE PANEL

[The Rutgers-Eagleton/SSRS Garden State Panel](#) is a probability-based panel of New Jersey adults age 18 or older. Members are recruited randomly based on statewide representative ABS (Address Based Sample) design. The ABS sample is drawn from the Delivery Sequence File (DSF) maintained by the U.S. Postal Service. Population coverage of the DSF is in the 98%-99% range. During the recruitment process, full demographic information on panelists is collected. This data is stored securely and used to determine eligibility for specific studies (if needed). The Rutgers-Eagleton/SSRS Garden State Panel is a multi-mode panel. Internet households participate via web while all non-internet households (including those who have internet but are unwilling to take surveys online) participate via phone. Panelists also have the option of taking surveys in their preferred language (English or Spanish).

QUESTIONS AND TABLES START ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Questions and Tables

The questions covered in this release are listed below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. Respondents are New Jersey adults; all percentages are of weighted results. Interpret groups with samples sizes under 100 with extreme caution.

L2 Which of these concerns you more about schools today? [ROTATE: That some schools may ban books and censor topics that are educationally important] or [that some schools may teach books and topics that some students or their parents feel are inappropriate or offensive]

Note: This question was part of a split sample in live phone interviewing ONLY. Half of phone respondents received L2 and half received L3. All other respondents received both questions. L2 and L3 rotated order in fielding for push-to-web and panel respondents.

Some schools may ban books and censor topics that are educationally important	58%
Some schools may teach books and topics that some students or their parents feel are inappropriate or offensive	35%
Don't know	8%
Unweighted N=	1360

	Party ID			Gender		Race or Ethnicity				Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Man	Woman	Wht	Blk	Hisp	Other	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Ban/censor educ	79%	55%	27%	56%	60%	60%	67%	52%	54%	63%	50%	56%	62%
Teach inappropriate	15%	35%	67%	37%	32%	35%	24%	39%	36%	29%	42%	36%	32%
DK	6%	10%	6%	7%	8%	5%	9%	9%	11%	8%	8%	8%	6%
Unwt N=	510	532	308	692	658	868	129	182	164	386	303	355	314

**Book Banning
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll**

	Income				Region					Education			
	<\$50K	\$50K- <\$100K	\$100K- <\$150K	\$150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/ South	Shore	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Grad work
Ban/censor educ	54%	56%	58%	65%	58%	57%	60%	56%	60%	55%	55%	63%	62%
Teach inappropriate	37%	36%	36%	32%	29%	35%	34%	36%	38%	37%	39%	29%	31%
DK	9%	8%	5%	3%	13%	8%	7%	8%	2%	9%	6%	8%	8%
Unwt N=	289	377	245	341	189	512	209	238	212	333	311	315	399

	Sexual Orientation		Identifies as Transgender or Knows Someone who Does	
	Straight/ heterosexual	LGBQ+	Yes	No/DK
Ban/censor educ	56%	74%	67%	50%
Teach inappropriate	37%	19%	28%	40%
DK	7%	7%	5%	10%
Unwt N=	1187	146	626	729

**Book Banning
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll**

L3 When it comes to recent laws across the US banning books or making it illegal for teachers to talk about LGBTQ or racial issues, which of the following is more accurate in your view, even if neither is exactly right? [ROTATE: They're mostly being driven by politicians to advance their careers] or [they're mostly being driven by parents' concerns]

Note: This question was part of a split sample in live phone interviewing ONLY. Half of phone respondents received L2 and half received L3. All other respondents received both questions. L2 and L3 rotated order in fielding for push-to-web and panel respondents.

They're mostly being driven by politicians to advance their careers	56%
They're mostly being driven by parents' concerns	31%
Don't know	13%
Unweighted N=	1417

	Party ID			Gender		Race or Ethnicity				Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Man	Woman	Wht	Blk	Hisp	Other	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Politicians	69%	52%	44%	58%	55%	58%	55%	55%	54%	52%	55%	59%	61%
Parents	22%	33%	43%	31%	31%	31%	29%	31%	31%	36%	29%	28%	29%
DK	9%	15%	13%	10%	15%	11%	16%	14%	15%	12%	16%	13%	10%
Unwt N=	510	565	335	721	685	913	130	196	161	405	309	374	327

	Income				Region					Education			
	<\$50K	\$50K- <\$100K	\$100K- <\$150K	\$150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/ South	Shore	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Grad work
Politicians	51%	57%	60%	61%	58%	58%	60%	54%	53%	52%	55%	61%	62%
Parents	31%	32%	31%	29%	29%	30%	26%	33%	38%	35%	32%	26%	28%
DK	17%	11%	9%	10%	14%	12%	14%	14%	9%	14%	13%	12%	11%
Unwt N=	305	387	256	348	199	520	218	252	228	341	333	345	396

**Book Banning
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll**

	Sexual Orientation		Identifies as Transgender or Knows Someone who Does	
	Straight/ heterosexual	LGBQ+	Yes	No/DK
Politicians	56%	63%	61%	52%
Parents	31%	30%	29%	33%
DK	13%	8%	10%	15%
Unwt N=	1234	156	668	747

Methodology

This Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted from December 13 to 23, 2023 with a scientifically selected random sample of 1,657 New Jersey adults, 18 or older. Three samples were used for this study – a dual-frame RDD landline and cell samples, a separate cell RDD sample, and sample from the [Rutgers-Eagleton/Garden State Panel](#).

The Rutgers-Eagleton/Garden State Panel is a probability-based panel of New Jersey adults age 18 or older. Members are recruited randomly based on statewide representative ABS (Address Based Sample) design. ABS sample is drawn from the Delivery Sequence File (DSF) maintained by the U.S. Postal Service. Population coverage of the DSF is in the 98%-99% range. During the recruitment process, full demographic information on panelists is collected. The Rutgers/SSRS Garden State Panel is a multi-mode panel. For this poll, only Internet households were invited to participate via web; non-internet households were not included.

This study employed three recruitment methods: calling with live interviewers (n=521), one-to-one push-to-web texting (n=532), and web recruitment (n=604). Distribution of recruitment method in this sample is:

Call	31%
Text-to-Web	22%
Web	37%

Each of the three samples was base weighted and calibrated separately. The three samples were also combined and calibrated together, overall and by form.

The data were weighted to be representative of the residential adult population of New Jersey. The weighting balances sample demographics to target population parameters. The sample is balanced, by form and overall, to match parameters for sex, age, education, race/ethnicity, region and phone use. The sex, age, education, race/ethnicity, and region parameters were derived from 2022 American Community Survey PUMS data. The phone use parameter was derived from estimates provided by the National Health Interview Survey Early Release Program.¹

The base weight for the dual-frame RDD sample corrects for different probabilities of selection across the telephone samples associated with the number of adults in each household and each respondent’s telephone usage patterns. This adjustment also accounts for the overlapping landline and cell sample frames and the relative sizes of each frame and each sample.²

Base weights for the Garden State Panel were the base weights associated with the initial recruitment sampling and the sampling from the panel for this particular data collection. The base weights for the RDD cell sample were set to 1.0.

The final stage of weighting calibrates sample demographics, overall and by form, to match target population benchmark distributions. This weighting was accomplished using SPSSINC RAKE, an SPSS

¹ NCHS, National Health Interview Survey, 2018–2020; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017–2019.

² Buskirk, T. D., & Best, J. (2012). Venn Diagrams, Probability 101 and Sampling Weights Computed for Dual Frame Telephone RDD Designs. *Journal of Statistics and Mathematics*, 15, 3696-3710.

extension module that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using the GENLOG procedure. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on survey estimates. The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target population.

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response. The total sample design effect for this survey is 1.39.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. Sampling error should be adjusted to recognize the effect of weighting the data to better match the population. In this poll, the simple sampling error for 1,657 New Jersey adults is +/-2.4 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence interval. The design effect³ is 1.39, making the adjusted margin of error +/- 2.8 percentage points. Thus, if 50 percent of New Jersey adults in this sample favor a particular position, we would be 95 percent sure that the true figure is between 47.2 and 52.8 percent (50 +/- 2.8) if all New Jersey adults had been interviewed, rather than just a sample.

Sampling error is only one possible source of error in a survey estimate. Sampling error does not consider other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as selection bias, non-response bias, question wording, context effects, or reporting accuracy, which may contribute additional error.

This Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was fielded by SSRS through the Rutgers-Eagleton/SSRS Garden State Panel, Braun Research, Inc., using live interviewers, and Response Now using one-to-one push-to-web texting. Sample was provided by Dynata. The questionnaire was developed and all data analyses were completed in house by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling (ECPIP). Jessica Roman assisted with analysis and preparation of this report. The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll is paid for and sponsored by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, a non-partisan academic center for the study of politics and the political process. Full questionnaires are available on request and can also be accessed through our archives at eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu. For more information, please contact poll@eagleton.rutgers.edu.

³ Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response.

**Weighted Demographics
1,657 New Jersey Adults 18+
Overall Margin of Error = +/- 2.8 percentage points**

Please note: Totals may equal slightly more or less than 100% due to rounding.

		deff	MOE			deff	MOE
Man	49%	1.38	+/- 3.9%	White	55%	1.34	+/- 3.5%
Woman	51%	1.39	+/- 4.1%	Black	12%	1.32	+/- 8.9%
18-34	27%	1.45	+/- 5.6%	Hispanic	20%	1.28	+/- 7.6%
35-49	24%	1.32	+/- 5.9%	Other	14%	1.28	+/- 8.3%
50-64	27%	1.39	+/- 5.4%	<50K	25%	1.38	+/- 6.3%
65+	22%	1.36	+/- 5.7%	50K-<100K	31%	1.42	+/- 5.5%
Democrat	36%	1.41	+/- 4.7%	100K-<150K	19%	1.37	+/- 6.7%
Independent	42%	1.37	+/- 4.5%	150K+	25%	1.35	+/- 5.5%
Republican	22%	1.38	+/- 5.9%	Urban	16%	1.36	+/- 7.6%
HS or Less	32%	1.27	+/- 5.7%	Suburb	35%	1.38	+/- 4.6%
Some College	26%	1.36	+/- 5.8%	Exurban	14%	1.39	+/- 7.2%
College Grad	20%	1.35	+/- 5.6%	Phil/South	18%	1.38	+/- 6.8%
Grad Work	22%	1.32	+/- 5.2%	Shore	17%	1.39	+/- 7.0%