



**FREE SPEECH
AND RACIAL
JUSTICE**

**CONVERSATION
★ GUIDE ★**

**VOTE YOUR
★ RIGHTS ★**

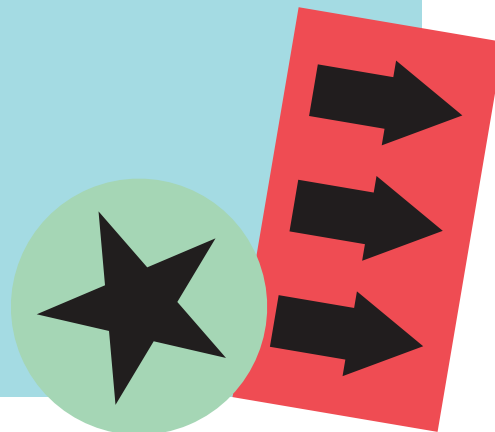


ACLU

ACLU 2026 Election Free Speech and Racial Justice Conversation Guide

As this year's election ramps up, many of us would like to talk about the impact on free speech in this election but don't know where to start. So we want to make it easy for you. But we need your help to ensure everyone votes for their right to free speech.

Just a simple conversation with your friends and family can activate your community during this election. In fact, having a conversation with your network has shown to increase voter turnout. With free speech on the ballot, the ACLU is here to help you navigate those conversations.



Below you'll find information about the free speech that matters to everyone. We've also included responses to some frequently asked questions, and conversation starters that can help kick-start a dialogue.

In addition, here are some helpful tips to keep in mind when engaging in a conversation:

Helpful Tips

- ★ Create a safe space - A safe conversation is one in which everyone feels comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings. Offer mutual respect and make the most of common ground.
- ★ Listen - Be interested in what others have experienced and acknowledge their point of view.
- ★ Advocate - Inform yourself about the issues that matter to you, so that you can share the facts. Sharing personal stories can also show what's at stake.



FREE SPEECH AND RACIAL JUSTICE



Key Points

- 1** We have a First Amendment right to read and learn free from censorship and discrimination. This means the government can't ban books or censor classroom discussions about race and gender just because they disagree with them.
- 2** Since 2021, dozens of states have introduced or passed classroom censorship bills that restrict students and teachers from discussing race, gender, and sexuality in public schools. At the same time, politicians and school boards across the country are moving to ban books — predominantly those by Black and LGBTQ authors — from public schools and libraries.
- 3** Last year, the American Library Association recorded 1,247 book ban challenges targeting 4,240 unique book titles — the highest number since the organization began recording data in 2000.

FAQ

Q: What is “critical race theory,” or CRT, and why has it come under fire?

A: Critical race theory, or CRT, is a framework developed by legal academics that is focused on how racism is deeply ingrained in and shapes American institutions and society. The term “critical race theory” has been co-opted by conservative activists as a catch-all term to apply broadly to progressive ideas about race and racism, gender identity, sexuality, and sexism. At their core, anti-CRT laws are thinly veiled attempts to silence disfavored views about race, gender, and sexuality amongst students and educators. These laws suppress free speech and deny people the right to an accurate, complete, and inclusive learning environment.

Q: Is banning books a violation of the First Amendment?

A: The First Amendment protects our right to receive information and share ideas free from viewpoint-based censorship. The government can't ban books in public schools or libraries just because it dislikes the ideas contained in those books, nor may it do so for partisan, political, or viewpoint-based reasons. That is a violation of the First Amendment.

Q: How are banning books in schools and libraries, and classroom censorship racial justice issues?

A: The majority of recent book bans target books by Black and LGBTQ authors. These books are being targeted because they specifically discuss race, gender, and/or sexual identity from the viewpoint of an author or character who is a person of color, an immigrant, queer, or otherwise from a marginalized community.

Q: Why is it important to defend the right to learn and read free from censorship?

A: Having the freedom to read what we want, explore new ideas, and encounter a variety of perspectives ensures that we all have the ability to read, learn, and form our own opinions. This includes having the opportunity to engage with the history, experiences, and viewpoints of our diverse communities, both inside and outside of school. All young people deserve to see themselves and the issues that impact them reflected in their classroom curricula and libraries. They also deserve to be given the tools and space to develop their own critical thinking skills.

Conversation Starters

- ★ Imagine being in a classroom where your history teacher, because of classroom censorship laws, is prohibited from teaching and even talking about critical pieces of U.S. history, including our country's history of slavery and how it continues to impact Black communities today.
- ★ The book "All Boys Aren't Blue," by George Johnson, in which the author talks about their experience growing up Black and queer in the book, is being targeted for removal in at least 14 states.

Time to Fight for Your Rights

This November let's remind our elected officials that they don't have the final say when it comes to our rights — we do. We know you're ready to vote and take action, make sure your friends and family are ready too.

To find out how each elected official plays a key role in defending our rights, visit:

[aclu.org/vote](https://www.aclu.org/vote)

Share this guide with others so that they can engage their circles too.



The ACLU dares to create a more perfect union — beyond one person, party, or side. Our mission is to realize this promise of the United States Constitution for all and expand the reach of its guarantees.