

Racial Justice Education Study - Methods

This study was conducted as part of ACLU's Youth Activism Research Collaborative,¹ a partnership with ACLU and external scholars to better understand the experiences and needs of young change agents. The Collaborative also relies on a Youth Advisory Board,² comprised of recent high school and college student alumni of the ACLU's [National Advocacy Institute](#). Youth Advisory Board members assist with data collection, provide critical insights and interpretation throughout all stages of the research, and are compensated for their time.

The current study draws from survey responses from a broad sample of high school students and data from focus groups with youth participants in ACLU's National Advocacy Institute. We are grateful for the students who participated in this study, sharing their perspectives and experiences.

Survey

We used data from Wave 2 of the [Youth Impact Study](#), a survey of 1,271 youth (age 14-19) from across the U.S. conducted in April 2024. For this study, we used the subsample of high school students who completed the survey (N=696) and examined their responses to questions asking about exposure to racial and ethnic justice education and educational censorship.

Survey Items Used in This Study

Exposure to Racial and Ethnic Justice Topics in School (2 items): Respondents were asked how much they were taught this year in school about injustices related to 9 different types of topics: race, ethnicity, sex or gender, transgender or nonbinary experiences, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or questioning) or sexual orientation, disability, religion/spirituality, economic class, and immigration. For each topic, response options ranged from 1 to 4 (1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = a great deal). For this study we report on the responses to race and ethnicity items.

Educational Censorship (1 item): To understand whether schools had attempted or succeeded in enacting educational censorship policies, participants were asked about their school's efforts to ban or censor content during the past year, either attempted or succeeded efforts. Specifically, they were asked to check all that apply out of four types of bans or restrictions: removing or banning books from school libraries; prohibiting certain books or other reading materials in classes; limiting or prohibiting what is being taught by educators; limiting or prohibiting certain content from being discussed in

¹ Members of the Youth Activism Collaborative: Laura Wray-Lake, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); Elan Hope, Policy Research Associates (PRA); Carly Evich, Purdue University; Jerusha Conner, Villanova University; Emily Greytak, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). 2024-2025 affiliates include: Chris Wegemer (UCLA), Emily Maurin-Waters (UCLA), Lauren Kinnard (UCLA), Alejandra Arce (UC Riverside), Sham Habteselasse (ACLU), Jada Cheek (PRA). This specific study was conducted by Emily Greytak and Sham Habteselasse (ACLU), Laura Wray-Lake, UCLA; and Elan Hope, Policy Research Associates; former ACLU interns Jada Cheek and Sunny Sun, and members of the Youth Advisory Board: Alan Flores, Qin Kramer, Valery Lenti-Navarro, Alexandra Miranda, Julia Squitieri and Khadijah Zahid.

² Members of the Youth Advisory Board (2023-2025): Kristina Cồ-Đoàn, Alan Flores, Qin Kramer, Alexandra Miranda, Alexander Shuster, Theo Shuster, Julia Squitieri, Khadijah Zahid

classes. Participants also had the opportunity to identify and write in “another type of ban, censoring, or restriction.” Alternatively, participants could select “none of the above.”

Importance of Teaching racial/Ethnic History (1 item)³ : To understand personal beliefs on the prevalence of racism today and the role of education in addressing racial issues, respondents were asked about the importance of teaching the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities in school. Response ranged from 1 to 6 (1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree).

Focus Groups

For this study, we also draw from 12 focus groups conducted with 70 participants of ACLU’s [National Advocacy Institute](#) during the 2023 (6 groups, 39 participants) and 2024 (6 groups, 31 participants) Institutes. Participants were from across the United States and were diverse in race, gender, sexual orientation, and location. During the focus groups, youth were asked open-ended questions related to their own education and learning about social issues in schools, as well as any experiences with education censorship.

Focus groups lasted approximately 60 minutes and were facilitated by ACLU’s research staff and interns and members of the Youth Advisory Board. Participants who were at least 18 years old provided consent. Minors provided assent and parental/guardian consent was obtained prior to the group. Focus group participants received a \$20 gift card in appreciation for their time. Focus groups were recorded, transcriptions were de-identified and analyzed using thematic coding.

It is important to note that all focus group participants were attendees of the ACLU National Advocacy Institute, and thus the findings are not designed to be representative of all high school students. The youth in the sample may have a heightened awareness of social justice topics; in addition to participating in the Institute, many were already serving as advocates within their schools and communities. Because of this, we believed these students would be particularly attuned to how social justice topics are taught and be able to provide an in-depth, on-the-ground view of school practices.

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For more information about the methods used in this study or about the Youth Activism Research Collaborative, please contact ACLU Director of Research, Emily Greytak at egreytak@aclu.org.

³ This item was one item of the racial-ideology scale developed by Neville et al (2000). Although survey respondents were asked all items in the scale, this study used just one item. Neville, H. A., Lilly, R. L., Duran, G., Lee, R. M., & Browne, L. (2000). Construction and initial validation of the color-blind racial attitudes scale (CoBRAS). *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 47(1), 59.