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# The Demography of Censorship: Examining Correlations Between Community Demographics and Materials Challenges in Canadian Libraries

## La démographie de la censure : examination des corrélations entre la démographie communautaire et les documents contestés dans les bibliothèques canadiennes

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Résumé de l'article

Cette enquête examine les documents contestés dans les bibliothèques canadiennes tels que compilés par la Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (FCAB) dans le but d'identifier les tendances démographiques dans les comportements de contestation des usagers. En croisant les données de la FCAB avec cinq champs démographiques du Recensement de la population canadienne 2016 (âge médian, taille de la ville, niveau d'éducation, revenu médian et représentation politique), l'enquête vise à déterminer si les contestations d'une certaine nature sont plus susceptibles de se produire dans les communautés ayant certains profils démographiques. L'enquête identifie 22 catégories de contestation dérivées des plaintes des usagers et trois alignements idéologiques de ces contestations qui sont basés sur des normes idéologiques politiques fondées sur la théorie de la fondation morale. Bien que l'échantillon disponible soit trop petit pour tirer des conclusions définitives, certaines tendances fortes sont apparentes. Les types de contestation les plus communs - des contestations de contenus racistes ou de contenus sexuels - sont assez homogènes dans les groupes démographiques, toutefois des corrélations notables ont été observées entre les profils démographiques et les contestations liées aux enjeux LGBTQIA+ (lesbien, gai, bisexuel, transgenre, queer, intersexe, asexuel et autres). Les communautés à tendance progressiste étaient plus enclines de contester les documents homophobes ou transphobes tandis que les communautés à tendances conservatrice contestaient davantage les ouvrages positifs sur les communautés LGBTQIA+. D'un point de vue idéologique, les jeunes communautés ont tendance à être plus progressistes dans leur comportement de contestation tandis que les communautés ayant un faible niveau d'éducation ont tendance à être les plus conservatrices dans leur comportement de contestation.

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## **The demography of censorship: Examining correlations between community demographics and materials challenges in Canadian libraries**

## **La démographie de la censure : examination des corrélations entre la démographie communautaire et les documents contestés dans les bibliothèques canadiennes**

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### ***Abstract / Résumé***

This study examines materials challenges in Canadian libraries as compiled by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) with the intention of identifying demographic trends in patron challenge behaviour. By cross-referencing the CFLA data with five demographic fields from the 2016 Canadian Census of Population (median age, city size, educational attainment level, median income, and political representation), the study aims to determine whether challenges of a certain nature are more likely to occur in communities with certain demographic profiles. The study identifies twenty-two challenge categories derived from user complaints and three ideological alignments of challenges based on the political ideology standards set by moral foundations theory. Though the available sample is too small to draw any definitive conclusions, some strong trends were apparent. The most common challenge types—challenges to racist content and sexual content—are fairly consistent throughout demographic groupings, but notable correlations were found between demographic profiles and challenges related to LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and more) issues. Progressive-leaning communities were far more likely to challenge homophobic/transphobic materials while conservative-leaning communities challenged more LGBTQIA+-positive works. From an ideological standpoint, young communities tend to be the most progressive in their challenge

behaviour, while communities with a low level of educational attainment tend to be the most conservative in their challenge behaviour.

Cette enquête examine les documents contestés dans les bibliothèques canadiennes tels que compilés par la Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (FCAB) dans le but d'identifier les tendances démographiques dans les comportements de contestation des usagers. En croisant les données de la FCAB avec cinq champs démographiques du Recensement de la population canadienne 2016 (âge médian, taille de la ville, niveau d'éducation, revenu médian et représentation politique), l'enquête vise à déterminer si les contestations d'une certaine nature sont plus susceptibles de se produire dans les communautés ayant certains profils démographiques. L'enquête identifie 22 catégories de contestation dérivées des plaintes des usagers et trois alignements idéologiques de ces contestations qui sont basés sur des normes idéologiques politiques fondées sur la théorie de la fondation morale. Bien que l'échantillon disponible soit trop petit pour tirer des conclusions définitives, certaines tendances fortes sont apparentes. Les types de contestation les plus communs - des contestations de contenus racistes ou de contenus sexuels - sont assez homogènes dans les groupes démographiques, toutefois des corrélations notables ont été observées entre les profils démographiques et les contestations liées aux enjeux LGBTQIA+ (lesbien, gai, bisexuel, transgenre, queer, intersexe, asexuel et autres). Les communautés à tendance progressiste étaient plus enclines de contester les documents homophobes ou transphobes tandis que les communautés à tendances conservatrice contestaient davantage les ouvrages positifs sur les communautés LGBTQIA+. D'un point de vue idéologique, les jeunes communautés ont tendance à être plus progressistes dans leur comportement de contestation tandis que les communautés ayant un faible niveau d'éducation ont tendance à être les plus conservatrices dans leur comportement de contestation.

### ***Keywords / Mots-clés***

public libraries, censorship, intellectual freedom, challenged books, CFLA, demographics

bibliothèques publiques, censure, liberté intellectuelle, livres contestés, FCAB, démographie

### ***Background***

Canadian library organizations have been collecting data on library materials challenges for many decades. Through the efforts of the Books and Periodicals Council (BPC) and the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA), researchers can view information on book challenges dating as early as 1960 (BPC, 2021). In 2007, the Canadian Library Association (the predecessor to the CFLA) began collecting challenge data directly from libraries through the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey, a voluntary online survey disseminated to all Canadian public and school libraries. The data collected by this survey supports the BPC's Freedom to Read Week, an annual

promotional event highlighting challenged works and issues surrounding intellectual freedom and censorship attempts in Canadian libraries and educational institutions.

Each year, the CFLA publishes an aggregated and anonymized list of challenged works and patron complaints. The information in the annual publication provides some insight into challenges across the country, but the decontextualized nature of the public data only tells half of the story. A more detailed frame of reference can show how both community demographics and social currents are reflected in challenge trends. In order to provide further context, the CFLA makes the complete survey microdata available to researchers upon approval (CFLA 2015-2021). This is the first study to be granted access to the complete microdata.

### ***Purpose of the study***

This study aims to determine if the demographic attributes of a community are correlated in any way with the frequency of certain types of challenges or challenges that align with a particular political ideology. Challenges in this study are categorized as “conservative”, “progressive”, or “ideologically neutral” based on sets of values defined by research on moral foundations theory. The study is conducted with the hypothesis that more progressive challenges will be present in younger, more highly educated, and higher income communities, larger cities, and areas with liberal or left-of-centre representation in federal Parliament. Conversely, older, lower income, and less highly educated communities, smaller cities, and areas with conservative or right-of-centre representation will likely yield more challenges of a conservative nature.

Knowledge of trends in materials challenges may better prepare practitioners for challenges they may face in their own communities. Furthermore, an overabundance of certain types of challenges in communities matching a demographic profile may help to identify at-risk user groups. This knowledge may assist library practitioners in developing collections and programs that better support their most vulnerable patrons.

### ***Literature review***

Although LIS research on censorship and intellectual freedom is plentiful, quantitative research on materials challenges is relatively scant. Emily J. M. Knox, a leading voice on the topic, notes that much of the research in this area focuses not on the challenges themselves, but on institutional responses to challenges. Much of this research primarily consists of case studies and reflective essays (Knox, 2014a).

Among the more comprehensive studies, there have been several attempts to better understand the worldview of challengers. Knox (2014c) found several broad worldview categories used to justify challenges. These worldviews include beliefs that challenged materials contribute to the moral decay of society, that the library’s collections inaccurately represent the community, and that the inclusion of challenged materials contradicts common sense. Additional research has attempted to determine if any demographic or institutional factors contribute to challenges but (perhaps due to a

limited geographic focus) no conclusions could be drawn (Oltmann et al., 2017). Saltman's (2016) research on challenges to children's books in Canada differentiated between challenges stemming from a liberal or conservative worldview. Saltman determined that liberal complaints include "texts deemed racist, ageist, sexist, containing interpretations of socio-political identity, or cultural appropriation" while conservative complaints "apply to the presence of sexuality (particularly homosexuality), nudity, non-traditional families, negative or anti-authoritarian moral values, poor role models, violence, magic, occultism, religion, and blasphemy" (p. 103).

Data supplied by the American Library Association (ALA) have allowed for research into challenge trends in the United States. Aucoin (2021) found the most common reasons for challenges are LGBTQIA+ content, sexual content, and vulgarity. Anderson (2014) focused on the classifications of challenged works and found that the young adult fiction classification contained the most challenged titles. Akers (2012) found that contemporary works are more likely to be challenged than classics, but that classics are far more likely to be challenged for racism.

Two Canadian studies based on voluntary questionnaires found some notable geographic differences in challenge behaviour. Jenkinson (1986) tallied challenges in the province of Manitoba and compared the results of urban and rural areas. Profanity was the most common challenge type among rural libraries while "immaturity of readers"—a category denoting works in which the subject matter was deemed too mature for the target audience—was the leading challenge type in urban areas. Schrader (1995) found that larger library systems were more likely to stock a larger number of controversial works that were likely to receive challenges than smaller library systems. Unsurprisingly, larger library systems also experienced a higher absolute number of challenges.

Many of these studies indirectly address the research questions of this study, but since Schrader (1995), no comprehensive nationwide examination of challenges in Canada has been undertaken. This study aims to fill this hole in the literature and hopefully provide insight to future researchers interested in library materials challenges.

## ***Methodology***

### **Survey results**

The study derives its data from two sources: the Intellectual Freedom Challenges Surveys conducted by the CFLA between 2015 and 2021 and the 2016 Canadian Census of Population. The Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey is a voluntary ongoing survey available to all Canadian libraries, including public libraries, school libraries, and academic libraries. The 2016 and 2017 surveys were conducted via SurveyMonkey while the surveys from 2018 through 2021 were conducted via SimpleSurvey. Challenges manifest in a variety of forms, including formal written complaints, informal verbal complaints, comments or messages on social media, and many others. The survey allows for the documentation of any incident that the library defines as a challenge. Responding libraries could report challenges not only to books,

but also to a variety of media and events, including but not limited to challenges and complaints concerning library policies, guest speakers, reading lists, or events not affiliated with the library which take place on library grounds. However, the large majority of responses were focused on book challenges.

All surveys ask for information pertinent to this research, including the nature of the challenge and the library's postal code. Surveys from 2016–2017 and 2020–2021 include a "Challenge Category" field in which the reporting library can select from a list of predefined categories including but not limited to "animal cruelty", "cultural appropriation", "inaccurate information", "promotes hatred", "sexually explicit", and "racism". This field was not included in the 2018–2019 surveys. Because of the difference in categorization over the reference period, these categories were not used. Instead, a qualitative analysis of each challenge's description of complainant concerns was used to generate a set of twenty-two specific types of challenges. A small number (less than 10%) of challenges included no description of the nature of the complaint. In these instances, reviews and synopses of each work were consulted in order to discern the likely motivation for the challenge.

The raw data contained 317 unique challenges, but some entries were excluded from the study. Three were excluded because the respondents declined to identify the name of the library or postal code. Eight concerning library policy that were not relevant to the study were also excluded. Examples of challenges excluded for this reason include such things as a complaint regarding the presence of advertising flyers on library premises and a complaint about the library's fee-based event space booking policy. One challenge was excluded due to a vague and general description of the complaint. After the data was parsed and ineligible challenges were eliminated from the useable data, a total of 305 challenges to 280 unique works remained.

Each challenge was subject to two forms of classification. First, each challenge was assigned a specific challenge category (see Table 1 for categories and definitions). Second, the challenge categories were divided into three groups based on the presumed political ideology behind the challenge.

Several complaints used language pertaining to more than one challenge category. In these instances, the challenge was assigned to the challenge type category that was more prevalent in the complaint. For instance, a challenge to a DVD included the language "Total gay porn - entire film frontal nudity - graphic scenes of gay sex...explicit language". This complaint could qualify for one of three challenge type categories: depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ themes, sexual content, or vulgarity. However, sexual content is mentioned three times while concerns about the film's language are only mentioned once. Furthermore, due to the repetition of the adjective "gay", it seems the complainant is not concerned that the film portrays sexual activity, but specifically that the sexual activity is homosexual in nature. This challenge was assigned to the "depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ themes" category.

Challenges in each type category were tallied and eight high-frequency challenge types were selected for further analysis. Any challenge type with fifteen or more entries qualified as high-frequency types. The eight selected challenge types are depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ content ( $n = 22$ ), general hate speech ( $n = 16$ ), homophobic/transphobic content ( $n = 24$ ), inaccurate/false information ( $n = 18$ ), inappropriate for target audience ( $n = 24$ ), racist content ( $n = 51$ ), sexual content ( $n = 48$ ), and violent content ( $n = 15$ ). 218 total challenges occurred within the high-frequency categories.

### **Ideological determinations**

Challenge types were divided into three ideological categories based on the best-fitting ideological alignment of the challenge. The ideological categories are based on a unidimensional conservative/neutral/progressive conception of political ideology. Ideologies that do not fit on the unidimensional ideological scale, such as libertarian or anarchist, were not considered for the purposes of the study. Two components were used to justify the placement of each challenge type into an ideological category. The first component is the categorization used by Saltman (2016), who described challenges to materials “deemed racist, ageist, sexist, containing interpretations of socio-political identity, or cultural appropriation” to fall on the liberal or progressive end of the spectrum while conservatives challenges “apply to the presence of sexuality (particularly homosexuality), nudity, non-traditional families, negative or anti-authoritarian moral values, poor role models, violence, magic, occultism, religion, and blasphemy” (p. 103).

The second component is the application of moral foundations theory to political ideology. This theory postulates that an individual’s moral decision-making is based on the valuation of five psychological “foundations” of moral thought: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Haidt & Graham, 2007). From an ideological perspective, those who identify as left-leaning/progressive/liberal tend to highly value the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations while not placing as much value on the remaining three (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Those who identify as right-leaning/conservative tend to place lower value on the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations, but assign equal importance to all five foundations (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Graham et al., 2009). From a more practical standpoint, Haidt & Graham (2007) summarize the left-leaning perspective as concern for “issues related to justice, fairness, equality, and victimization”—values connected to the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations—and apathy or even antipathy toward values connected to the remaining three foundations such as patriotic displays (ingroup/loyalty), respect for authority (authority/respect), or chastity (purity/sanctity), as such issues may evoke “movements that limit the autonomy and free expression of the individual” (p. 99). In comparison, conservatives, preferring the stable, familiar, and predictable, seek to preserve the present social order, therefore placing more value on the ingroup/loyalty and purity/sanctity foundations. Furthermore, conservatives may be more prone to authoritarianism and thus more willing to limit liberties to any group perceived as a threat to the social order—epitomizing the authority/respect foundation (Graham et al., 2009). Moral foundations-related research concentrating on issues

germane to this study were used to further justify or adjust Saltman's initial categorizations.

With 51 total entries, challenges to racist content were the most numerous challenge type. Utilizing Graham et al.'s Moral Foundations Dictionary, Faulkner and Bliuc (2018) found that racist language correlates strongly with high valuation of purity/sanctity and authority/respect, while anti-racist language centres strongly on fairness/reciprocity. Thus, challenges to racist material (including Islamophobic and anti-Semitic materials) were categorized as progressive.

Attitudes on sex, including sex outside of marriage and pornography, tend to be highly correlated with valuation of the purity/sanctity foundation (Koleva et al., 2012; Barnett et al., 2013). Accordingly, challenges due to sexual content are deemed conservative. The value placed on purity/sanctity is also predictive of attitudes towards homosexuality (Kaur & Sasahara, 2016; Koleva et al., 2012). Cox et al. (2021) found emphases on both purity/sanctity and authority/respect are predictive of hostile views toward the transgender community within the context of bathroom bills. Additionally, support for transgender rights (contextually represented by opposition to bathroom bills) is closely correlated with emphasis on the care/harm foundation. Similarly, Wendell and Tatalovich (2020) found that language in support of gay rights (contextually represented by support for same-sex marriage) is correlated with both the care/harm and fairness/reciprocity foundations. Thus, all challenges due to homophobic/transphobic content are deemed progressive, while challenges to materials containing LGBTQIA+ themes are deemed conservative.

One area in which this study differs from Saltman's categorization concerns the ideology behind challenges to violent content. Saltman placed challenges of this nature in the conservative column, but Bowman et al. (2012) argue that aversion to violence in media may be connected with both the care/harm and purity/sanctity foundations—the latter applies particularly to graphic violence depicting blood and gore. This phenomenon was observed in the complainant concerns, some of which contained language referring to the graphic nature of the violent content, while others simply objected to the presence of violence itself. As there is no clear evidence that opposition to the portrayal of violence is characteristic of either progressive or conservative ideology, challenges due to violent content were designated neutral.

There were several categories that were not addressed in Saltman's study. The first was the sexism/feminism dichotomy. The CFLA data contains seven challenges to materials that convey sexist beliefs, and at least one challenge due to the feminist ideals espoused by the creator. Challenges due to sexism and/or objectification of women were deemed progressive, while challenges due to the feminist nature of materials were deemed conservative. While it may seem intuitive that feminism aligns more closely with progressive ideology, there is research based on moral foundations theory to justify the categorization. Precopio and Ramsey (2017) found the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations were positively correlated with feminist beliefs and negatively correlated with both antifeminist and sexist beliefs among men. Furthermore, the study



also found the foundations associated with conservative ideology were reliable predictors of antifeminist and sexist beliefs.

Challenges to animal cruelty were initially considered to fall under a neutral ideology, but upon review of moral foundations literature, there seems to be clear evidence that a high value on authority/respect tends to lead to more acceptance of violence towards animals, while the converse is true in individuals who place a high value on harm/care (Potocka, 2022; Keefer et al., 2021). Ultimately, the six reported challenges based on animal cruelty were placed in the progressive category.

A number of challenge types, such as the aforementioned violent content challenges, could not be defined by political or moral ideology according to the tenets of moral foundations theory, and thus were deemed neutral. Among these were challenges to inaccurate or false information, depictions of sexual violence (differentiated from general violence), depictions of suicide/euthanasia, inappropriate classification (or the belief that the library has classified the book under the wrong subject heading or located in the wrong section), sensitive foreign political content, and a miscellaneous catch-all for remaining challenges of a unique or nearly unique and non-political nature. The data also contained a number of challenges to materials perceived to be inappropriate for the author's intended target audience. Nearly all of these challenges were to children's materials. For these challenges, a reading of the description of the challenger's complaint informed the decision to file each individual challenge into a more appropriately descriptive challenge type. For instance, a challenge to a work perceived to be inappropriate for children due to "crude" language and humour was reclassified as a vulgarity challenge, and placed in the conservative ideology category. Conversely, materials challenged for apolitical issues perceived to be inappropriate for children, e.g., a work that may instill doubt as to the existence of the Easter Bunny, were left categorized as "inappropriate for target audience" challenges and deemed neutral.

**Table 1**

*Challenge type categories, their ideological alignments, and their definitions. "P" represents a progressive ideology, "C" conservative, and "N" ideologically neutral. Bold text indicates high-frequency category.*

Challenge Type	Ideology	Challenge Definition	Quantity
Animal Cruelty	P	Depictions of animal abuse	6
Blasphemy/Offense to Religion	C	Phrases, images, or implications the challenger found blasphemous or offensive to their own religion	8
<b>Depictions of Homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ Content</b>	C	Depictions of non-heterosexual sexual activity and/or LGBTQIA+ characters or themes	<b>22</b>

Depictions of Sexual Violence	N	Depictions of sexual violence including but not limited to rape, paedophilia, and sexual assault	12
Depictions of Suicide/ Euthanasia	N	Depictions of suicide or euthanasia and/or the discussion of suicide or euthanasia	2
Feminist Content	C	Content espousing feminist values and/or ideals	1
<b>Hate Speech (general)</b>	P	Non-specific hate speech or hate speech directed at several identities	<b>16</b>
<b>Homophobic/ Transphobic Content</b>	P	Content hateful to or prejudiced against the LGBTQIA+ community	<b>24</b>
<b>Inaccurate/False Information</b>	N	Content containing falsehoods, inaccuracies, misinformation, or disinformation	<b>18</b>
Inappropriate Classification	N	Belief that the library classified the material incorrectly	12
<b>Inappropriate for Target Audience</b>	N	Content perceived to be inappropriate for the audience for which it is written	<b>24</b>
Islamic Content	C	Presence of information about Islam or the practice of Islam	1
Low-Quality Material	N	Exceedingly low-quality content, including but not limited to typos and grammatical inaccuracies, poorly edited videos, and amateurish content	5
Miscellaneous	N	Specific non-ideological reasons that do not fit into any other category	8
Objectification of Women/ Sexist Content	P	Language hateful to or prejudiced against women, and/or the perceived objectification of women, not including overtly sexual content	7
Overtly Conservative Political Content	P	Perceived conservative bias in the content	6
Overtly Progressive Political Content	C	Perceived liberal/progressive bias in the content	4

<b>Racist Content</b>	P	Images or language hateful to or prejudiced against any ethnic or racial minority group, including instances of inappropriate cultural appropriation	<b>51</b>
Sensitive Foreign Political Content	N	Content perceived to be politically sensitive, divisive, or inflammatory within a country other than Canada	5
<b>Sexual Content</b>	C	Depictions of sexual activity	<b>48</b>
<b>Violent Content</b>	N	Depictions of violence and/or carnage	<b>15</b>
Vulgarity	C	Language perceived to be vulgar or explicit	10

### Census data

Each reporting library's postal code was cross-referenced with the 2016 Canadian Census of Population to determine the library's aggregate dissemination area (ADA). ADAs are geographical divisions created for the census that consist of areas with populations ranging between 5,000 and 15,000 individuals (Statistics Canada, 2016). After accounting for all reporting libraries, 84 unique ADAs were present in the data. After the twelve ineligible challenges were removed from the data, 79 unique ADAs remained.

The profiles for each individual ADA were consulted and the median household income and educational attainment rate were recorded. The census fields selected for these data fields were "Median total income of households in 2015 (\$)" for income and "Total - Highest certificate, diploma or degree for the population aged 25 to 64 years in private households - 25% sample data: University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above" for education. These fields were then divided into roughly equal terciles. Income level 1 ADAs are defined as ADAs with median household incomes less than or equal to \$49,999. Income level 2 ADAs are defined as ADAs with median household incomes ranging from \$50,000 to \$99,999. Income level 3 ADAs are defined as ADAs with medium household incomes greater than or equal to \$100,000. Low-education ADAs are defined as ADAs in which no more than 19% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or above. Medium-education ADAs are defined as ADAs in which between 19.1% and 33.3% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or above. High-education ADAs are defined as ADAs in which over 33.3% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or above.

The income terciles divide all Canadian households into roughly equal thirds. According to the 2016 census, 34.7% of Canadian households fall within income level 1, 32.8% fall within income level 2, and 32.4% fall within income level 3. Determining the educational attainment terciles was not as straightforward. Unlike income, the census does not track

population rates that fall within a certain range of educational attainment. In order to find rough terciles for educational attainment, the educational attainment rates of a random sampling of 360 ADAs were recorded. According to Statistics Canada (2017), 28.5% of Canadians have received a bachelor's degree or above. The average for the same field in the random sample was 28.8%. The ADAs in the sample were divided into equal thirds and the attainment rates for each third were used to determine the educational attainment levels applied to ADAs in the study.

ADAs were divided into three equal terciles based on median age. The median age of the Canadian population on the whole is 41.2. Coincidentally, the median age among the ADAs of all reporting libraries in the data was 41.3. Equal terciles centred around this median were initially created, but after the twelve ineligible challenges were removed from the data and the total number of unique ADAs was reduced to 79 the final grouping sizes were not equal. Ultimately, 28 ADAs appeared in the youngest tercile, 27 ADAs in the middle tercile, and 24 in the oldest tercile. Median age within the youngest tercile ranged from 27.2 to 38.5, the middle tercile ranged from 38.6 to 43.1, and the oldest tercile ranged between 43.2 and 57.7.

The population of each reporting library's municipality was recorded. The municipal populations were then split into three groupings. Municipalities with populations of fewer than 50,000 inhabitants were grouped together as small cities. Municipalities with populations ranging from 50,000 to 399,999 inhabitants were grouped together as medium cities. The large city category contains municipalities with populations of 400,000 or greater.

Lastly, each ADA's federal electoral district was referenced in order to record the party affiliation of the member of parliament for each ADA at the time of the 2016 census. Three parties are represented in the data: the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), and the New Democratic Party (NDP). Of the three parties present in the data, the CPC is the most conservative/right-wing party, the LPC sits on the centre-left of the ideological spectrum, and the NDP is the most progressive/left-wing party (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 2021).

Through this process, five demographic variables were created: median age, educational attainment level, income level, city size, and political representation. These variables were combined with the challenge-specific variables (challenge type, challenge ideology) with the intention of identifying possible correlations.

Results for each demographic criterion are displayed in two sets of tables. The first tables for each criterion (tables 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10) incorporate all 305 challenges across all twenty-two challenge categories in order to show the distribution of ideologically-driven challenges. The second tables for each criterion (tables 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11) deal only with the eight high-frequency challenge categories and the 218 challenges contained therein. These tables are designed to show the prevalence of certain types of challenges within various demographic categories, and the inclusion of low-frequency challenge types within these tables would likely showcase outliers and anomalies.

Ideological results are expressed using ratios of progressive to conservative challenges within each demographic grouping. Ratios are expressed as  $x:1$  in which  $x$  represents the number of progressive challenges that occurred for every individual conservative challenge within a demographic category. By using this form of expression, differences in challenge behaviour can be illustrated without being muddied by differences in demographic sample size, and ratio sizes are comparatively clear. When discussing frequencies of specific challenge categories, results are expressed using variance from expected distribution, in which the expected distribution of challenges is equal to the proportion of all challenges held by the demographic grouping in question. For example, if demographic group A accounts for 30% of total challenges, the expected distribution of any one particular challenge category for that group would also be 30%. Variances from expected distribution are expressed in terms of percentage points. Simplified ratios and percentages were calculated via Excel formulas.

### ***Limitations***

Although CFLA's online survey provides greater scope and detail than any other available dataset, the method is not perfect. Response rates are subject to individual library system policies as well as the behaviour of individual librarians. Many challenges go unreported if no clear guidelines on reporting are provided to library workers (Lynch, 2011; Rea, 2022). Thus, the survey can produce geographically inconsistent results and a limited sample size. Library organizations have no clear way of knowing exactly how many challenges actually occur, but it is generally accepted that reported challenges represent a small fraction of total challenges. The ALA estimates between 82 and 97% of challenges go unreported (Doyle, 2017). Accompanying the smaller-than-ideal total sample size are extremely small samples of certain challenge type categories and demographic groupings. The incidence of several interesting challenge types, such as challenges to feminist content or Islamic content, cannot be properly analyzed due to their limited presence within the data. Similarly, it is impossible to confidently draw conclusions about the behaviour or views of a demographic grouping based on a small number of individual actions.

The response behaviour of libraries can affect the geographic distribution of reported challenges. Certain public library systems were significantly more proactive in reporting challenges than others. This phenomenon results in a disproportionate number of responses from certain ADAs, leading to an overrepresentation in the data of some geographic areas.

Lastly, the determinations made regarding political ideology are neither conclusive nor entirely free from bias. While ideological challenge types were categorized based on the expectation that the challenge type is consistent with a specific ideological worldview, that does not necessarily mean that every ideological challenge originated from someone who shares this worldview. In other words, it is not likely that every library patron who objects to racist content holds a liberal or progressive worldview, or that every challenger objecting to vulgarity holds a conservative worldview. These

ideological classifications are intended to demonstrate tendencies rather than absolutes.

## Results

### Results by median age level

**Table 2**

*Incidence and rates of challenges among age groupings*

	Median Age Level		
	Young	Medium	Old
Total challenges	77	120	108
Percentage share (expected distribution)	25.2%	39.3%	35.4%
Conservative challenges	17	43	36
Neutral challenges	26	31	42
Progressive challenges	34	46	30
Conservative percentage share within grouping	22.1%	35.8%	33.3%
Neutral percentage share within grouping	33.8%	25.8%	38.9%
Progressive percentage share within grouping	44.2%	38.3%	27.8%
Progressive to conservative ratio	2:1	1.07:1	0.83:1

Challenges among median age groupings were the most equally distributed of all demographic groupings. Out of the entire dataset, 25.2% of challenges ( $n = 77$ ) were produced by the youngest tercile, 39.5% ( $n = 120$ ) by the middle tercile, and 35.3% ( $n = 108$ ) by the oldest tercile.

The hypothesis that the youngest tercile would be the most progressive and the oldest the most conservative was mostly supported by the data, but unexpected results were found in the middle tercile. The youngest tercile leaned progressive by a 2 to 1 progressive-to-conservative challenge ratio. The middle tercile was fairly ideologically ambivalent with a 1.07 to 1 ratio. The oldest tercile was the only grouping to lean conservative with a 0.83 to 1 ratio.

**Table 3**

*Incidence and rates of high-frequency challenge types within age groupings. Numbers in italics indicate percentage point change from expected distribution.*

Challenge Type	Total	Y	M	O	Y%	M%	O%
Depictions of Homosexuality/ LGBTQIA+ Content	<b>22</b>	1	14	7	4.5% <i>-20.7</i>	63.6% <i>+24.3</i>	31.8% <i>-3.6</i>
Hate Speech (general)	<b>16</b>	3	9	4	18.8% <i>-6.4</i>	56.3% <i>+17</i>	25.0% <i>-10.4</i>
Homophobic/Transphobic Content	<b>24</b>	13	6	5	54.2% <i>+29</i>	25.0% <i>-14.3</i>	20.8% <i>-14.6</i>
Inaccurate/False Information	<b>18</b>	5	6	7	27.8% <i>+2.6</i>	33.3% <i>-6</i>	38.9% <i>+3.5</i>
Inappropriate for Target Audience	<b>24</b>	6	6	12	25.0% <i>-0.2</i>	25.0% <i>-14.3</i>	50.0% <i>+14.6</i>
Racist Content	<b>51</b>	12	22	17	23.5% <i>-1.7</i>	43.1% <i>+3.8</i>	33.3% <i>-2.1</i>
Sexual Content	<b>48</b>	7	18	23	14.6% <i>-10.6</i>	37.5% <i>-1.8</i>	47.9% <i>+12.5</i>
Violent Content	<b>15</b>	5	2	8	33.3% <i>+8.1</i>	13.3% <i>-26</i>	53.3% <i>+17.9</i>

The data seem to suggest that challenges to sexual content are influenced by a community's median age. The oldest tercile overperformed expectations in this category by a margin of 12.5 percentage points while the youngest tercile fell below expectations by 10.6 percentage points. The middle tercile came within two percentage points of the expected distribution in this challenge category. Challenges to racist content are fairly evenly distributed across age terciles, but there appears to be a large discrepancy in how age groups view LGBTQIA+ themes. With just over half of all challenges to homophobic/transphobic content ( $n = 13$ ), young ADAs fell above expected distribution in this category by 29 percentage points. Both the middle and oldest terciles fell below expected distribution by 14.3 and 14.6 percentage points respectively. The middle tercile produced the majority ( $n = 14$ ) of challenges to depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ themes, outperforming expectations by 24.3 percentage points. The oldest tercile fell fairly close to expected distribution in this category with 31.8% of challenges, or 3.6 percentage points under expectations. The youngest tercile generated only one challenge of this nature, accounting for 4.5% of the total, 20.7 percentage points under expected distribution.

## Results by city size

**Table 4**

*Incidence and rates of challenges among city size groupings*

	City Size		
	Small	Medium	Large
Total challenges	36	109	160
Percentage share (expected distribution)	11.8%	35.7%	52.5%
Conservative challenges	20	36	40
Neutral challenges	6	42	51
Progressive challenges	10	31	69
Conservative percentage share within grouping	55.6%	33.0%	25.0%
Neutral percentage share within grouping	16.7%	38.5%	31.9%
Progressive percentage share within grouping	27.8%	28.4%	43.1%
Progressive to conservative ratio	0.5:1	0.86:1	1.73:1

The initial hypothesis that small cities would skew more conservative in challenge behaviour while larger cities would skew more progressive was borne out by the data. However, it must be noted that the data includes a regrettably small number of samples from small cities while large cities are heavily overrepresented. Nevertheless, the differences in challenge behaviour between city sizes is fairly dramatic.

Ideologically, large cities were the only tercile to lean progressive, with a ratio of 1.73 progressive challenges for every conservative challenge. Medium cities produced 0.86 progressive challenges for every conservative challenge while small cities produced exactly twice as many conservative challenges as progressive challenges.



**Table 5**

*Incidence and rates of high-frequency challenge types within city size groupings. Numbers in italics indicate percentage point change from expected distribution.*

Challenge Type	Total	S	M	L	S%	M%	L%
Depictions of Homosexuality/ LGBTQIA+ Content	<b>22</b>	8	8	6	36.4% <i>+24.6</i>	36.4% <i>+0.7</i>	27.3% <i>-25.2</i>
Hate Speech (general)	<b>16</b>	0	6	10	0.0% <i>-11.8</i>	37.5% <i>+1.8</i>	62.5% <i>+10</i>
Homophobic/Transphobic Content	<b>24</b>	0	7	17	0.0% <i>-11.8</i>	29.2% <i>-6.5</i>	70.8% <i>+18.3</i>
Inaccurate/False Information	<b>18</b>	1	3	14	5.6% <i>-6.2</i>	16.7% <i>-19</i>	77.8% <i>+25.3</i>
Inappropriate for Target Audience	<b>24</b>	2	14	8	8.3% <i>-3.5</i>	58.3% <i>+22.6</i>	33.3% <i>-19.2</i>
Racist Content	<b>51</b>	9	12	30	17.6% <i>+5.8</i>	23.5% <i>-12.2</i>	58.8% <i>+6.3</i>
Sexual Content	<b>48</b>	7	18	23	14.6% <i>+2.8</i>	37.5% <i>+1.8</i>	47.9% <i>-4.6</i>
Violent Content	<b>15</b>	2	4	9	13.3% <i>+1.5</i>	26.7% <i>-9</i>	60.0% <i>+7.5</i>

The two most common categories, racist content and sexual content, are fairly evenly distributed among most groupings. This suggests that neither city size nor a community's age have much influence over a library patron's likelihood to challenge overtly sexual content or perceived racism. On the other hand, a community's tendency to challenge works concerning LGBTQIA+ issues does appear to be correlated with a city's size. Small cities accounted for over a third of all challenges in the depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ issues category, despite accounting for only 11.8% of the total sample, translating to a +24.6 percentage point variance from expected distribution. Large cities fell below expectations in this category by a similar margin (-25.2 points). Large cities produced the large majority of challenges to homophobic/transphobic content ( $n = 17$ ), but no challenges of this nature came from small cities. Nor did small cities produce a single hate speech challenge, though the smaller sample size for both small cities and the general hate speech category may be partially to blame. Medium cities fall not far from their expected distribution for both these challenge types, accounting for 29.2% of total challenges to homophobic/transphobic content ( $n = 7$ ) and 37.5% of challenges to general hate speech ( $n = 6$ ) while accounting for 35.9% of the total sample.

Among ideologically neutral challenge types, the extremely uneven distribution of challenges to inaccurate/false information is notable. Large cities accounted for 77.8% of all challenges of this nature ( $n = 14$ ) while accounting for 52.3% of the entire sample, for a variance of +25.3 points. Small cities only fell under expectations in this category by 6.2 points, but the sizeable variance of -19 points by medium cities is notable. No significant variance from expectations was found in challenges to inaccurate/false information among the three median age groups. Medium cities accounted for over half of all challenges to material deemed inappropriate for the target audience ( $n = 14$ ), a +22.4 point discrepancy from the expected distribution. Large cities were underrepresented in the same challenge type with only 33.3% of challenges ( $n = 8$ ), a variance -19 points. Small cities fared close to the expected outcome with 8.3% of total challenges of this type ( $n = 2$ ), a small -3.5 point variance.

## Results by education level

**Table 6**

*Incidence and rates of challenges among education level groupings*

	Education level		
	Low	Medium	High
Total challenges	46	58	201
Percentage share	15.1%	19.0%	65.9%
Conservative challenges	25	19	52
Neutral challenges	9	20	70
Progressive challenges	12	19	79
Conservative percentage share within grouping	54.3%	32.8%	25.9%
Neutral percentage share within grouping	19.6%	34.5%	34.8%
Progressive percentage share within grouping	26.1%	32.8%	39.3%
Progressive to conservative ratio	0.48:1	1:1	1.52:1

The sample is extremely skewed toward ADAs with a high level of educational attainment. Of the total challenges, 201 (65.9%) originate from high-education ADAs, 58 (19%) originate from medium-education ADAs, and low-education ADAs account for 46 challenges (15.1%). Nevertheless, the initial hypothesis that higher levels of educational attainment would correlate with more progressive challenges held true. Low-education

ADAs created over twice as many conservative challenges as progressive challenges, with a progressive-to-conservative ratio of 0.48 to 1. Medium-education ADAs produced exactly the same number of progressive and conservative challenges ( $n = 19$ ) for a 1 to 1 progressive-to-conservative ratio. High-education ADAs produced nearly 50% more progressive challenges than conservative challenges for a 1.52 to 1 progressive-to-conservative ratio. An interesting facet of these results is that while low- and high-education ADAs did meet expectations in their political leanings, low-education ADAs leaned notably *more* conservative than high-education ADAs leaned progressive.

**Table 7**

*Incidence and rates of high-frequency challenge types within education level groupings. Numbers in italics indicate percentage point change from expected distribution.*

Challenge Type	Total	L	M	H	L%	M%	H%
Depictions of Homosexuality/ LGBTQIA+ Content	<b>22</b>	8	3	11	36.4% <i>+21.3</i>	13.6% <i>-5.4</i>	50.0% <i>-15.9</i>
Hate Speech (general)	<b>16</b>	3	2	11	18.8% <i>+3.7</i>	12.5% <i>-6.5</i>	68.8% <i>+2.9</i>
Homophobic/Transphobic Content	<b>24</b>	1	3	20	4.2% <i>-10.9</i>	12.5% <i>-6.5</i>	83.3% <i>+17.4</i>
Inaccurate/False Information	<b>18</b>	1	2	15	5.6% <i>-9.5</i>	11.1% <i>-7.9</i>	83.3% <i>+17.4</i>
Inappropriate for Target Audience	<b>24</b>	5	5	14	20.8% <i>+5.7</i>	20.8% <i>+1.8</i>	58.3% <i>-7.6</i>
Racist Content	<b>51</b>	7	10	34	13.7% <i>-1.4</i>	19.6% <i>+0.6</i>	66.7% <i>+0.8</i>
Sexual Content	<b>48</b>	10	12	26	20.8% <i>+5.7</i>	25.0% <i>+6</i>	54.2% <i>-11.7</i>
Violent Content	<b>15</b>	0	5	10	0.0% <i>-15.1</i>	33.3% <i>+14.3</i>	66.7% <i>+0.8</i>

Challenges to racist content and sexual content, the two most common challenge types, are once again fairly evenly distributed among the three education levels, but challenges concerning LGBTQIA+ issues seem to be influenced by education level. High-education ADAs were more likely to produce challenges to homophobic/transphobic materials while low-education ADAs were more likely to produce challenges to content depicting homosexuality or LGBTQIA+ content. Despite producing only 15% of total challenges, low-education ADAs produced 36.4% ( $n = 8$ ) of challenges to depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ themes, a variance of +21.3 percentage points

from expected distribution. Low-education ADAs produced only 4.2% of challenges to homophobic/transphobic content ( $n = 1$ ), translating to a variance of -10.9 percentage points from expected distribution. High-education ADAs, while comprising 66% of total challenges, produced 83.3% of challenges to homophobic/transphobic content ( $n = 20$ ), and 50% of challenges to depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ themes ( $n = 11$ ). In other words, high-education ADAs overproduced challenges to homophobic/transphobic content by a margin of 17.4 percentage points and underproduced challenges to depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ themes by a margin of 15.9 percentage points. Medium-education ADAs produced slightly fewer challenges than expected from both categories but only varied from the expected distribution by a 5.4–6.5% margin.

Among non-ideological challenges, a notable discrepancy was again seen among challenges to inaccurate/false information, with 83.3% of challenges ( $n = 15$ ) originating from high-education ADAs (17.4 percentage points above expectations). Medium-education ADAs produced 11.1% of challenges of this type ( $n = 2$ ) for a variance of -7.9 percentage points from expectations. Low-education ADAs produced 5.6% of inaccurate information challenges ( $n = 1$ ), 9.5 percentage points below expectations. Challenges to violent content were also unevenly distributed among education levels. High-education ADAs produced 66.7% of challenges of this type ( $n = 10$ ), very close to the expected distribution of 65.9%, but medium-education ADAs overproduced in this category by a margin of 14.3 percentage points with 33.3% of total challenges ( $n = 5$ ). Not a single challenge to violent content originated from low-education ADAs.

## Results by income level

**Table 8**

*Incidence and rates of challenges among income level groupings*

	Income Level		
	1	2	3
Total challenges	72	185	48
Percentage share	23.6%	60.7%	15.7%
Conservative challenges	25	59	12
Neutral challenges	18	66	15
Progressive challenges	29	60	21
Conservative percentage share within grouping	34.7%	54.1%	25.0%
Neutral percentage share within grouping	25.0%	60.6%	31.3%

Progressive percentage share within grouping	40.3%	55.0%	43.8%
Progressive to conservative ratio	1.16:1	1.02:1	1.75:1

Challenge distribution among income levels was also very uneven, with just over 60% of challenges ( $n = 185$ ) occurring in income level 2 ADAs. Income level 1 ADAs accounted for 23.6% of the sample ( $n = 72$ ) while income level 3 ADAs accounted for a mere 15.7% of the sample ( $n = 48$ ). Of all the demographic fields, income level saw the least variance in challenge behaviour. Ideologically speaking, income-level 3 ADAs did lean more progressive, as predicted in the hypothesis. But although the 1.75 to 1 progressive-to-conservative ratio among challenges in income level 3 ADAs was notable, income level 1 and 2 ADAs were ideologically ambivalent, producing progressive-to-conservative ratios of 1.02 to 1 and 1.12 to 1, respectively. No income level leaned conservative. The difference in ratios between the most progressive (income level 3) and least progressive (income level 2) grouping is the smallest among all demographic criteria.

**Table 9**

*Incidence and rates of high-frequency challenge types within income level groupings. Numbers in italics indicate percentage point change from expected distribution.*

Challenge Type	Total	1	2	3	1%	2%	3%
Depictions of Homosexuality/ LGBTQIA+ Content	<b>22</b>	7	11	4	31.8% <i>+8.2</i>	50.0% <i>-10.7</i>	18.2% <i>+2.5</i>
Hate Speech (general)	<b>16</b>	6	7	3	37.5% <i>+13.9</i>	43.8% <i>-16.9</i>	18.8% <i>+3.1</i>
Homophobic/Transphobic Content	<b>24</b>	4	15	5	16.7% <i>-6.9</i>	62.5% <i>+1.8</i>	20.8% <i>+5.1</i>
Inaccurate/False Information	<b>18</b>	4	10	4	22.2% <i>-1.4</i>	55.6% <i>-5.1</i>	22.2% <i>+6.5</i>
Inappropriate for Target Audience	<b>24</b>	4	17	3	16.7% <i>-6.9</i>	70.8% <i>+10.1</i>	12.5% <i>-3.2</i>
Racist Content	<b>51</b>	13	25	13	25.5% <i>+1.9</i>	49.0% <i>-11.7</i>	25.5% <i>+9.8</i>
Sexual Content	<b>48</b>	13	30	5	27.1% <i>+3.5</i>	62.5% <i>+1.8</i>	10.4% <i>-5.3</i>
Violent Content	<b>15</b>	1	11	3	6.7% <i>-16.9</i>	73.3% <i>+12.6</i>	20.0% <i>+4.3</i>

Among specific challenge categories, the greatest discrepancies among income levels were found in challenges to violent content and general hate speech. Income level 1 ADAs produced only one challenge to violent content, to 6.7% of total challenges of this type and a variance of -16.9 points from expected distribution. Income level 2 ADAs, on the other hand, produced 73.3% of violent content challenges ( $n = 11$ ), overproducing by a margin of 12.6 percentage points. Income level 3 ADAs produced fairly close to expectations with a margin of +4.3 percentage points. While the income level 3 ADAs were not far from the expected distribution in the hate speech category (a variance of +3.1 points), income level 1 ADAs overproduced by 13.9 percentage points and income level 2 ADAs underproduced by 16.9 percentage points. However, with only 15 total challenges recorded in each of these categories, variances of this size cannot reasonably point to any definite trends. Among the most common challenge types, the income level 2 grouping underproduced challenges to racist content by a margin of 11.7 percentage points and the income level 3 grouping overproduced by 9.8 percentage points. The income level 1 grouping fell very close to expectations with a variance of +1.9 points. Very little variance in rates of challenges to sexual content can be seen among groupings.

### Results by political representation

**Table 10**

*Incidence and rates of challenges among representation groupings*

	Representation		
	LPC	CPC	NDP
Total challenges	216	47	42
Percentage share	70.8%	15.4%	13.8%
Conservative challenges	54	23	19
Neutral challenges	77	12	10
Progressive challenges	85	12	13
Conservative percentage share within grouping	25.0%	48.9%	45.2%
Neutral percentage share within grouping	35.6%	25.5%	23.8%
Progressive percentage share within grouping	39.4%	25.5%	31.0%
Progressive to conservative ratio	1.57:1	0.52:1	0.68:1

LPC-represented ADAs generated the majority of challenges at 70.8% of the total sample ( $n = 216$ ), with the CPC and NDP trailing behind at 15.4% ( $n = 47$ ) and 13.8% ( $n = 42$ ), respectively. But even with such a lopsided sample, some interesting trends are apparent among political representation groupings.

The initial hypothesis held that communities with left-of-centre representation would be more likely to produce progressive challenges. While this held true for ADAs with LPC representation, it was surprisingly not entirely the case for ADAs with NDP representation. While LPC-represented ADAs certainly were the most progressive of the three representation groupings with a 1.57 to 1 progressive-to-conservative challenge ratio, both CPC- and NDP-represented ADAs leaned conservative in their challenge behaviour. NDP-represented ADAs were only marginally more progressive with a 0.68 to 1 progressive-to-conservative ratio compared to the 0.52 to 1 ratio among CPC-represented ADAs.

**Table 11**

*Incidence and rates of high-frequency challenge types within representation groupings. Numbers in italics indicate percentage point change from expected distribution.*

Challenge Type	Total	LPC	CPC	NDP	LPC%	CPC%	NDP%
Depictions of Homosexuality/ LGBTQIA+ Content	<b>22</b>	9	10	3	40.9% <i>-29.9</i>	45.5% <i>+30.1</i>	13.6% <i>-0.2</i>
Hate Speech (general)	<b>16</b>	12	2	2	75.0% <i>+4.2</i>	12.5% <i>-2.9</i>	12.5% <i>-1.3</i>
Homophobic/Transphobic Content	<b>24</b>	22	1	1	91.7% <i>+20.9</i>	4.2% <i>-11.2</i>	4.2% <i>-9.6</i>
Inaccurate/False Information	<b>18</b>	15	1	2	83.3% <i>+12.5</i>	5.6% <i>-9.8</i>	11.1% <i>-2.7</i>
Inappropriate for Target Audience	<b>24</b>	15	6	3	62.5% <i>-8.3</i>	25.0% <i>+9.6</i>	12.5% <i>-1.3</i>
Racist Content	<b>51</b>	36	9	6	70.6% <i>-0.2</i>	17.6% <i>+2.2</i>	11.8% <i>-2</i>
Sexual Content	<b>48</b>	31	7	10	64.6% <i>-6.2</i>	14.6% <i>-0.8</i>	20.8% <i>+7</i>
Violent Content	<b>15</b>	14	0	1	93.3% <i>+22.5</i>	0.0% <i>-15.4</i>	6.7% <i>-7.1</i>

Once again, challenges to racist content saw very little variance from the expected distribution. No representation grouping varied more than 2.2 percentage points from expectations. However, large variances were again seen in challenges to homophobic/transphobic content and depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ themes. Of the 24 challenges to homophobic/transphobic content, 22 of them occurred in LPC-represented ADAs, accounting for 91.7% of the challenge category, or 21.1 percentage points above over expectations. CPC- and NDP-represented ADAs each generated a single challenge from this category, each accounting for 4.2% of the category, translating to a variance from expectations of -11.2 for CPC and -9.6 percentage points for NDP. CPC-represented ADAs led the way both in proportional share and raw numbers of challenges to depictions of homosexuality/LGBTQIA+ themes, accounting for 45.5% of the total ( $n = 10$ ), or 30.1 percentage points over expected distribution. LPC-represented ADAs fell below expectations in this category by 29.9 percentage points with 40.9% of challenges ( $n = 9$ ) while NDP-represented ADAs fell very close to the expected distribution with 17.4% of challenges ( $n = 3$ ), a variance of a mere -0.2 percentage points.

Two non-ideological challenge types, violent content and inaccurate/false information, saw notable variance among representation groupings. Of the 15 challenges to violent content, 14 (93.3% of the total) were generated by LPC-represented ADAs and only one (6.7% of the total) by NDP-represented ADAs. This translates to an overproduction by a margin of +22.6 points for LPC-represented ADAs and an underproduction by a margin of -7.1 percentage points for NDP-represented ADAs. Not a single challenge of this category originated from CPC-represented ADAs. LPC-represented ADAs also overproduced challenges to inaccurate/false information, though not to the same extent. With 83.3% of the total ( $n = 14$ ), LPC-represented ADAs showed a variance from expectations of +12.5 percentage points. NDP-represented ADAs produced 11.1% of the total in this category ( $n = 2$ ), a variance of -2.7 percentage points from expectations. CPC-represented ADAs underperformed in this category, accounting for a single challenge or 5.6% of the total, a variance of -9.8 percentage points.

## **Discussion**

The most immediate takeaway is the remarkable consistency in rates of challenges to racist content and sexual content—the two most common challenge types—across nearly all demographic criteria. As challenges to racist content were considered progressive, the relatively equal distribution of these challenges among both conservative- and progressive-leaning demographic groupings was surprising. In fact, among the most conservative-leaning demographic groupings (small cities, low-education ADAs, and CPC-represented ADAs), no group underperformed expectations by more than 3.6 percentage points. Small cities, the second-most conservative leaning demographic grouping in the study, actually overproduced challenges to racist content by 5.8 percentage points. Among the most progressive-leaning groupings, no grouping fell more than 1.7 percentage points below expectations. Interestingly, the largest variances occurred in groupings with relatively even progressive-to-conservative ratios. The two largest variances were -12.2 points in medium cities (0.86 to 1 progressive-to-



conservative ratio) and -11.6 points in income level 2 ADAs (1.1 to 1 progressive-to conservative ratio).

Challenges to sexual content saw a similar equilibrium across demographic criteria, though three outliers appeared in the data. The largest variances were seen among median age groupings. The youngest ADAs underproduced sexual content challenges by 10.7 percentage points while the oldest ADAs overproduced by 12.5 percentage points. One may intuitively conjecture that this may be due to the increased likelihood of children in older-ADA households, but the data does not support this hypothesis. According to the census, the average household size among the sample's youngest grouping is 2.12, while the oldest grouping's average household size is 2.16 (Statistics Canada, 2017). The wide disparity between the two groups certainly cannot be attributed to such a miniscule difference in household size. It may be more reasonable to attribute the disparity to generational differences in cultural values. High-education ADAs were the only other demographic grouping to see more than a 10-point variance from expectations in sexual content challenges, with a variance of +11.7. Once again, the presence of more households with children cannot explain this tendency. The average household size among high-education ADAs was only 2.06, the smallest average household size among education level groupings. Realistically, the high probability of statistical noise in such a limited sample may be the best explanation for the outliers.

The presence of more families with children would be a convenient explanation for outliers in other challenge types as well, particularly the "inappropriate for target audience" category. However, the data seems to counter this supposition. The average household size of all ADAs reporting inappropriate-for-target-audience challenges was 2.08, under both the national average of 2.4 and the sample average of 2.17.

Challenges to overtly progressive political content were reported from ADAs with an average household size of 2.53, making it the only challenge type in which the average household size of reporting ADAs was above the national average. That said, only four total challenges to overtly progressive political content were reported, so this statistic is likely meaningless. Although Jenkinson (1986) found that parents are the most common challengers and Knox (2014b) found parenting to be one of the most common themes in challenge discourse, the data does not appear to support the conjecture that, at least in Canada, communities with larger household sizes (indicating the presence of more parents) are more likely to produce these types of challenges.

The stark difference in ideological challenges between LPC- and NDP-represented ADAs was the most counterintuitive finding. As the New Democratic Party ostensibly sits both economically and socially further to the left on the political spectrum than the Liberals (CBC, 2021), one would expect to find challenge behaviour in NDP-represented communities to be at least as socially progressive as that in LPC-represented communities. On the contrary, NDP-represented ADAs in the study displayed challenge behaviour nearly as conservative as CPC-represented ADAs. Perhaps this is due to the NDP's deep roots in the labour movement. Although the NDP

has significant support in many progressive urban centres, many of the areas with enough support to elect NDP members of parliament are historically working-class communities with economic roots in manufacturing and resource extraction. Voters in these communities are likely to hold more conservative cultural values than their counterparts in major metropolitan centres (Polacko, Kiss, & Graefe, 2022).

The overabundance of challenges to inaccurate/false information in a number of progressive-leaning demographic groupings was another unexpected finding. Large cities, the second most progressive-leaning grouping in the study, were the biggest outlier at a variance +25.3 percentage points. High-education and LPC-represented ADAs were also significant outliers at variances of +17.4 and +12.5 percentage points respectively. Conversely, the most significant underproductions of inaccurate/false information challenges all occurred in conservative-leaning groupings. Medium cities, a grouping that leaned conservative with a 0.86 to 1 progressive-to-conservative ratio, were the most significant underproducer with a variance of -19.1 percentage points, followed by CPC-represented ADAs (0.52 to 1 progressive-to-conservative ratio) at -9.9 percentage points and low-education ADAs (0.48 to 1 progressive-to-conservative ratio) at -9.5 percentage points. Though no political ideology was assigned to inaccurate/false information challenges, it is notable that they disproportionately occurred in communities with more progressive tendencies. One can make conjectures that certain political ideologies are more vulnerable to misinformation than others, but that is far outside the scope of this paper.

## ***Conclusion***

This study is a first attempt at a broad quantification and categorization of Canadian materials challenges based on the best data available. However, it must once again be stated that the data is too sparse for any of the findings to be conclusive. Although some of the study's unexpected findings may be interesting, ultimately the results only indicate that certain trends exist within the subset of challenges that are contained within the reported data. Without greater diligence in data collection, no quantitative study on challenges can claim any truly convincing findings. It is my hope that the dissemination of this study may lead to greater interest in Canadian challenge research as well as greater interest in challenge reporting among Canadian libraries. As efforts to create a more complete database of challenges continue, future research utilizing the Canadian 2021 Census of Population data (which was made available shortly after the completion of this study) may allow for possible longitudinal research that takes the country's shifting demographics into account. Library materials challenges provide a fascinating bellwether of public sentiment and sociocultural trends. With a richer, more comprehensive dataset, the research possibilities are myriad.

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