School book bans in 2025–26: a state analysis

Where PEN recorded bans, and at what rate

Political association, model fit and its limits

District records needed to answer RQ3

Research presentation | November 2026

What this presentation answers

Where did PEN record school book bans in 2025–26, and how concentrated were they?

How do recorded rates relate to how states voted in 2024?

How well does a count model predict a state left out of the fit?

Which district records are needed to answer RQ3?

What PEN counted in 2025–26

11,982

recorded instances: one title restricted in one school district

7,370

unique titles among those instances

114

school districts with at least one recorded ban

23

states with a count on PEN's map (27 with none)

PEN reports "nearly 12,000"; 11,982 is the exact figure on the same page and the map total used here.

PEN and ALA count different things

PEN America index

School year 2025–26 (July to June)

Public school districts only

Bans: books restricted or removed

11,982 instances · 7,370 titles · 114 districts

ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom

Calendar year 2025 (January to December)

Public, school and academic libraries

Challenges reported to ALA, and their outcomes

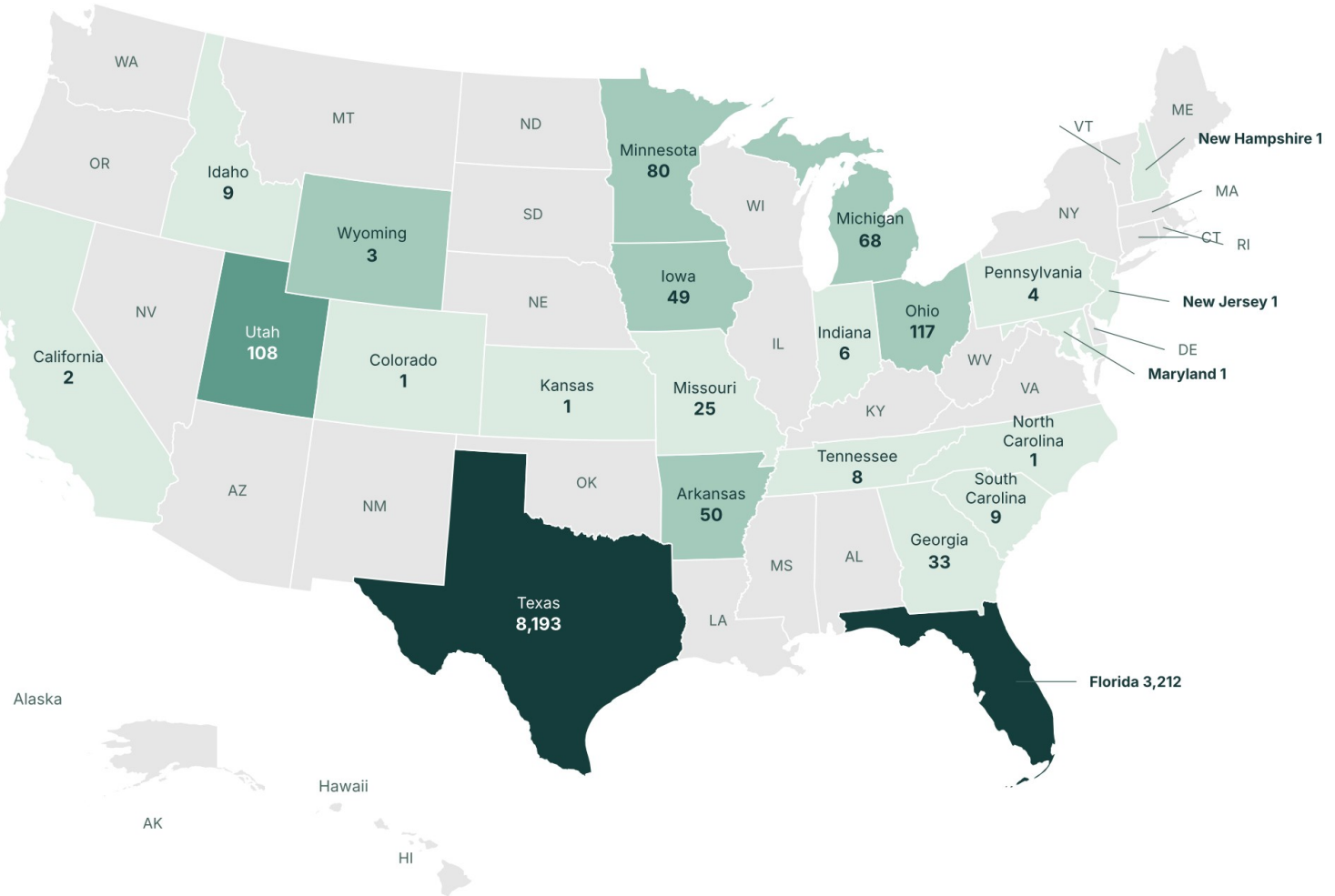
4,235 titles challenged · 713 attempts · 5,668 books banned

How the 2025–26 analysis was built

1. Save PEN’s 2025–26 state map and record each state’s count and status.
2. Join Census July 2025 population and FEC 2024 presidential results.
3. Calculate recorded instances per million residents.
4. Fit Poisson and negative binomial count models with a population offset.
5. Test each model by leaving one state out at a time; check influential states.

Where PEN recorded school book bans, 2025–26

11,982 recorded instances in 23 states · 27 states with no count on PEN's map · highlighted states: name and number of recorded instances · colour: instances per million residents

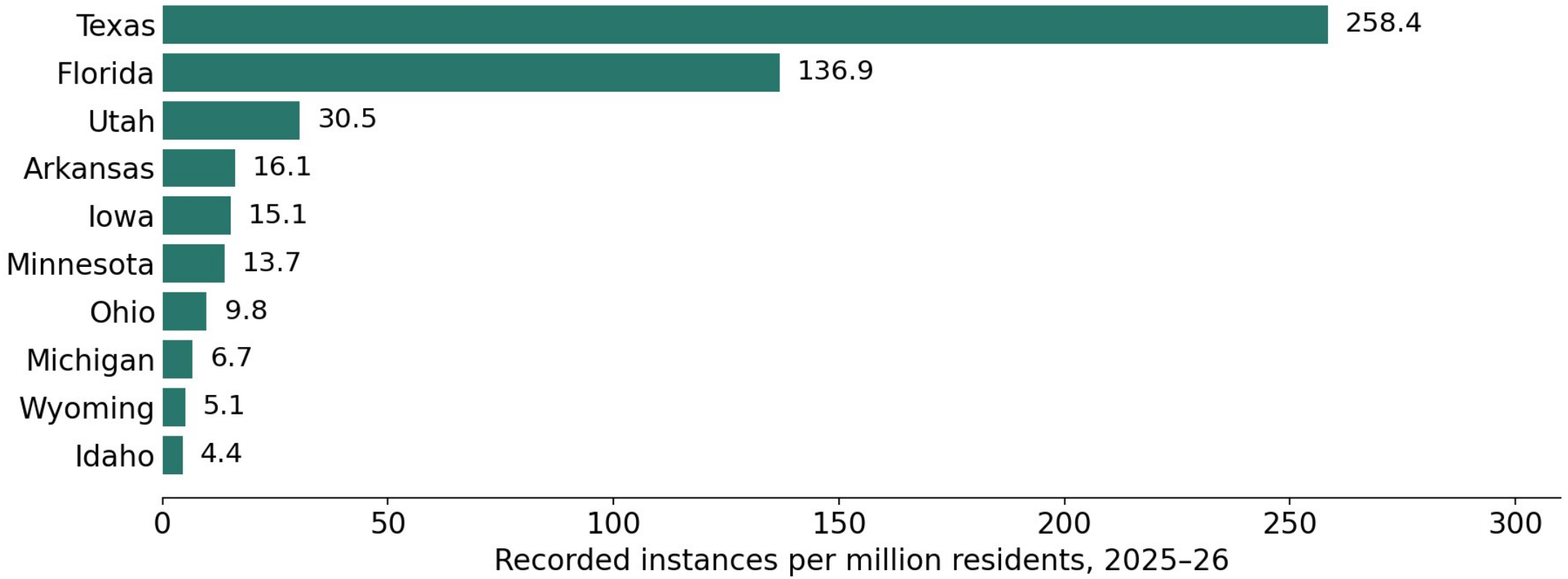


Recorded instances per million residents: under 5 · 5 to under 20 · 20 to under 50 · 50 to under 100 · 100 or more · no count on PEN's map

Grey means PEN's map shows no count for the state, not that no bans occurred. An instance is one title restricted in one district; the same bans cover 7,370 unique titles in 114 districts.

Sources: PEN America, "A Spotlight on School Book Bans" (5 Oct 2026), state map saved 31 Oct 2026 · U.S. Census Bureau, July 2025 resident population estimates

Texas and Florida lead the recorded rates



Rates per million residents; 27 states have no count and are not shown.

Recorded bans are highly concentrated

95.2%

of instances in Texas and Florida (11,405 of 11,982)

258

highest rate per million residents (Texas)

27

states with no count on PEN's map

0

median instances per state

High-rate states mostly voted Republican in 2024

9 of 10

highest-rate states voted Republican (Minnesota did not)

+18.3 vs +3.8

mean Republican margin, top ten vs other 40 (points)

0.10 / 0.23

Pearson / Spearman correlation, margin vs rate, all 50 states

14 of 27

states with no count also voted Republican

Coding: the 2025–26 state table

```
df = maps.merge(pop, on='state',
                validate='one_to_one')
df = df.merge(votes, on='abbreviation',
              validate='one_to_one')
assert len(df) == 50
assert df.population_2025.gt(0).all()
df['instances_per_million'] = (
    df.instances / df.population_2025 * 1e6
)
```

Code explanation and source details are in the speaker notes.

Why compare Poisson and negative binomial?

Counts cannot be negative.

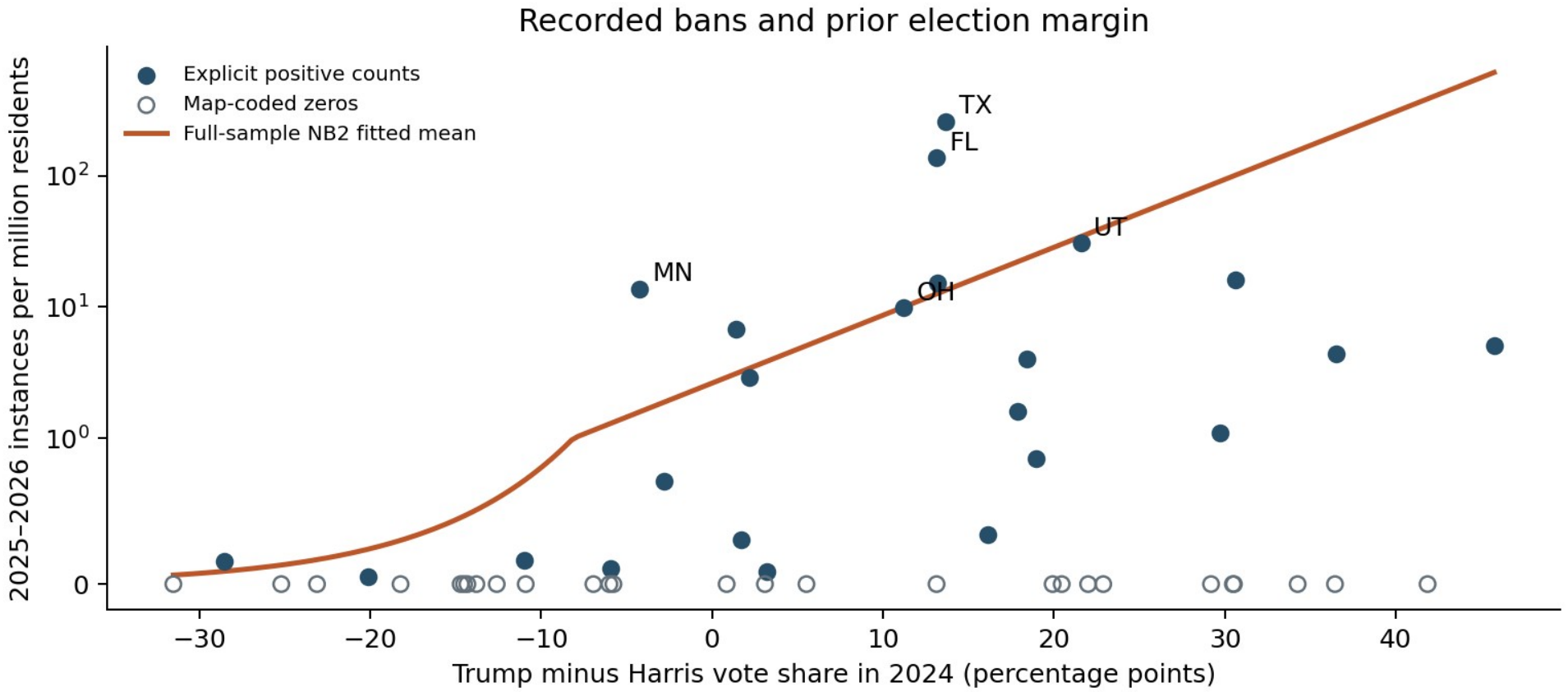
The coded distribution has a median of zero and a long upper tail.

Population enters as an exposure offset.

Models compare an intercept alone with an added election margin.

Negative binomial allows more variation than Poisson.

The fitted association depends on the data



The fitted curve describes the saved 50-state count model.

Validation gives a mixed result

NB model: population only

Held-out mean log loss: 2.934

Mean absolute error: 274 instances

RMSE: 1,217 instances

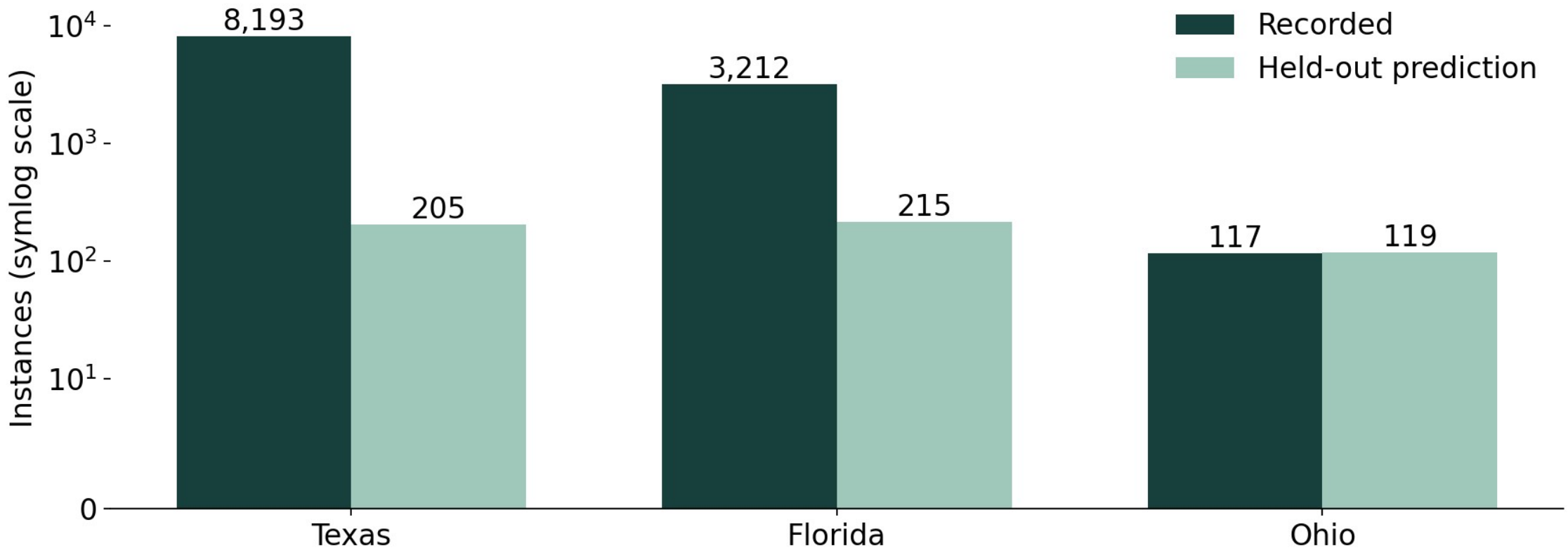
NB model: add election margin

Held-out mean log loss: 2.889

Mean absolute error: 343 instances

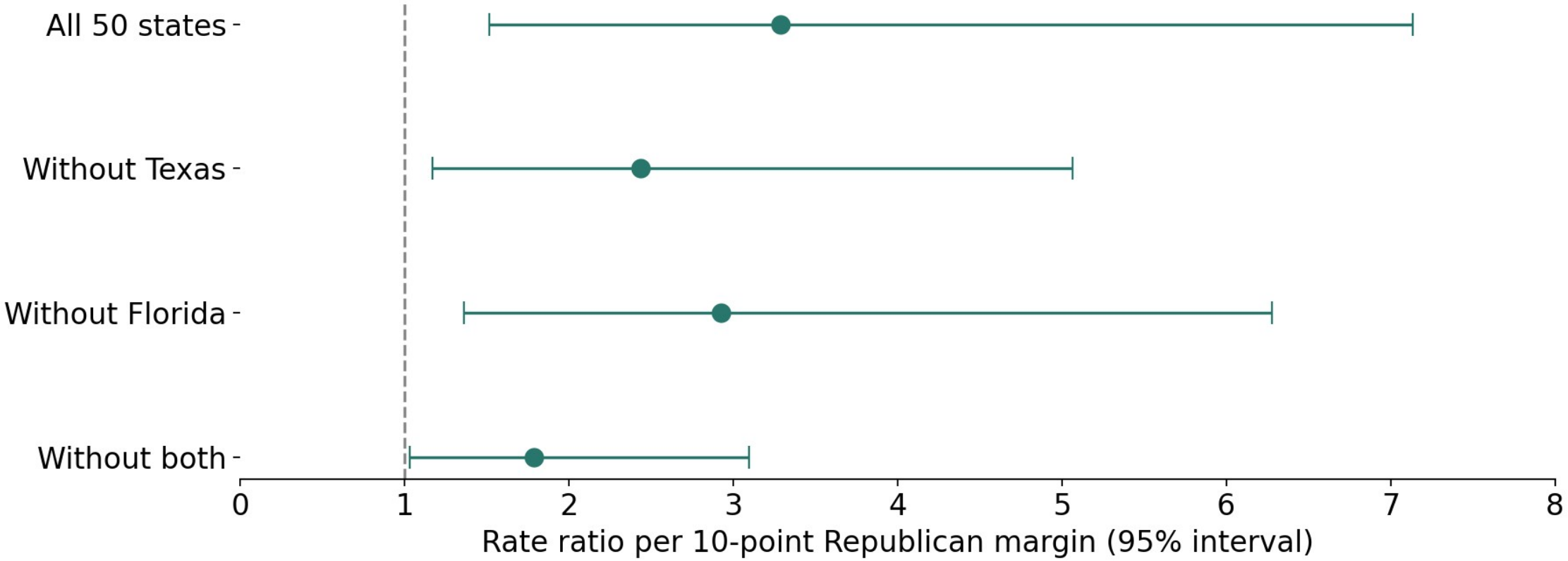
RMSE: 1,232 instances

Texas and Florida remain badly underpredicted



These are excluded-state predictions within one year, not future forecasts.

Two states strongly affect the model estimate



The rate ratio falls from 3.29 to 1.79 when both states are excluded.

RQ3 asks about review cases

What happened when a district reviewed a challenged book

with input from librarians and local residents?

Unit of analysis: an individual review case.

State totals cannot identify participants or review outcomes.

RQ3 needs records beyond restricted books

Challenge logs, including books retained throughout review.

Review dates and any change in access during review.

Committee membership and librarian or media-specialist roles.

Resident or parent input, dated relative to the decision.

Final decisions, appeals and the policy in force at the time.

What the available evidence cannot establish

No recorded count does not establish that no bans occurred.

PEN’s state map gives instances, not titles or districts by state.

State voting patterns cannot identify individual challengers.

A within-year validation does not test a future year.

State totals cannot show how districts reviewed challenged books.

What the analysis supports

Recorded bans in 2025–26 are concentrated: two states hold 95%.

The highest-rate states mostly voted Republican in 2024.

The fitted model's election-margin estimate is sensitive to Texas and Florida.

The saved rate correlations remain weak after excluding both states: Pearson 0.223, Spearman 0.234.

Count models fail on the largest totals; this is not a forecast.

RQ3 needs district case records; collection is under way (Appendix B).

The next analysis has explicit completion tests

Code participation timing and review outcomes consistently.

Keep retained cases and report unresolved outcomes.

Request committee rosters or minutes to identify roles.

Train forecasting models using only pre-cutoff information.

Evaluate later-year accuracy against a simple baseline.

Sources and reproducibility

PEN America: 2025–26 state map and report, saved October 31, 2026.

Census: July 2025 resident population estimates.

FEC: 2024 presidential votes, all candidates in the denominator.

ALA: 2025 censorship data, released April 2026 (context only).

The package retains chart inputs, analysis scripts and the deck builder.

Appendix A

Coding for the 2025–26 analysis

Coding appendix: the count-model design

```
def design(df, with_margin):
    x = np.ones((len(df), 2 if with_margin else 1))
    if with_margin:
        x[:, 1] = df.republican_margin_pp.to_numpy()/10
    offset = np.log(df.population_2025.to_numpy()/1e6)
    y = df.instances.to_numpy(dtype=float)
    return x, offset, y

# Mean count = exp(offset + x @ coefficients)
```

Code explanation and source details are in the speaker notes.

Coding appendix: leaving one state out

```
for i in range(len(df)):
    train = df.drop(index=i)
    test = df.iloc[[i]]
    fitted = fit(train, 'NB2', True)
    x, offset, y = design(test, True)
    mean = np.exp(offset +
                  x @ fitted['theta'][:x.shape[1]])
    # Save the held-out mean and probability score.
    # Repeat for every state and every model.
```

Code explanation and source details are in the speaker notes.

Appendix B

RQ3 records requests: progress

Study period 2022–23: a different period from the main analysis

RQ3 records requests: status at 6 November 2026

Ten districts were asked on November 2 for records of 2022–23 review cases.

Records supplied: Clay County (FL) list, procedures and committee ballots; Granite (UT) review tracker.

Cost estimates: Marion (FL) $185.06, revised; Canby (OR) $200.

Acknowledged: Pender (NC). PENNCREST (PA) holds no specific document; Beaufort (SC) publishes case outcomes.

No reply recorded from Wentzville (MO), Escambia (FL) or Texarkana (TX).

Status as of November 6, 2026.

Clay County: committee recommendations vs the list’s status

429

ballots associated with titles on the district’s 2022–23 list (of 545 supplied)

87

ballot groups (one title’s pages), including 4 with the edition unresolved

9

groups where a strict majority’s recommendation differs from the list status

0

ballots recording the member’s name, role or date

Review dates and corresponding decision dates remain unverified.

Appendix C

Verification of the earlier report (2022–23)

Reference only: not part of the 2025–26 analysis

Why the two years are not compared

2022–23	2025–26
3,362 title-level entries	11,982 recorded instances
Retained PEN workbook	Published PEN state-map totals
33 states with entries	23 states with positive counts
Census July 2022 population	Census July 2025 population

The workbook check prevents double counting

The workbook provides two sorted views of the records.

Compare all event fields and how often each row occurs.

Count one matching view, rather than append both sheets.

Keep the blank-title row in the event total.

Retain source sheet and row references for auditing.

Coding: counts become rates

```
counts = events.groupby('state').size()

states = population.merge(
    counts.rename('event_rows'),
    left_on='state', right_index=True, how='left'
)
states['event_rows'] = states.event_rows.fillna(0)
states['rate'] = (states.event_rows /
                  states.population_2022 * 1_000_000)
```

Code explanation and source details are in the speaker notes.

The historical audit gives a traceable baseline

3,362

Recorded event rows

1,556

Distinct nonblank titles

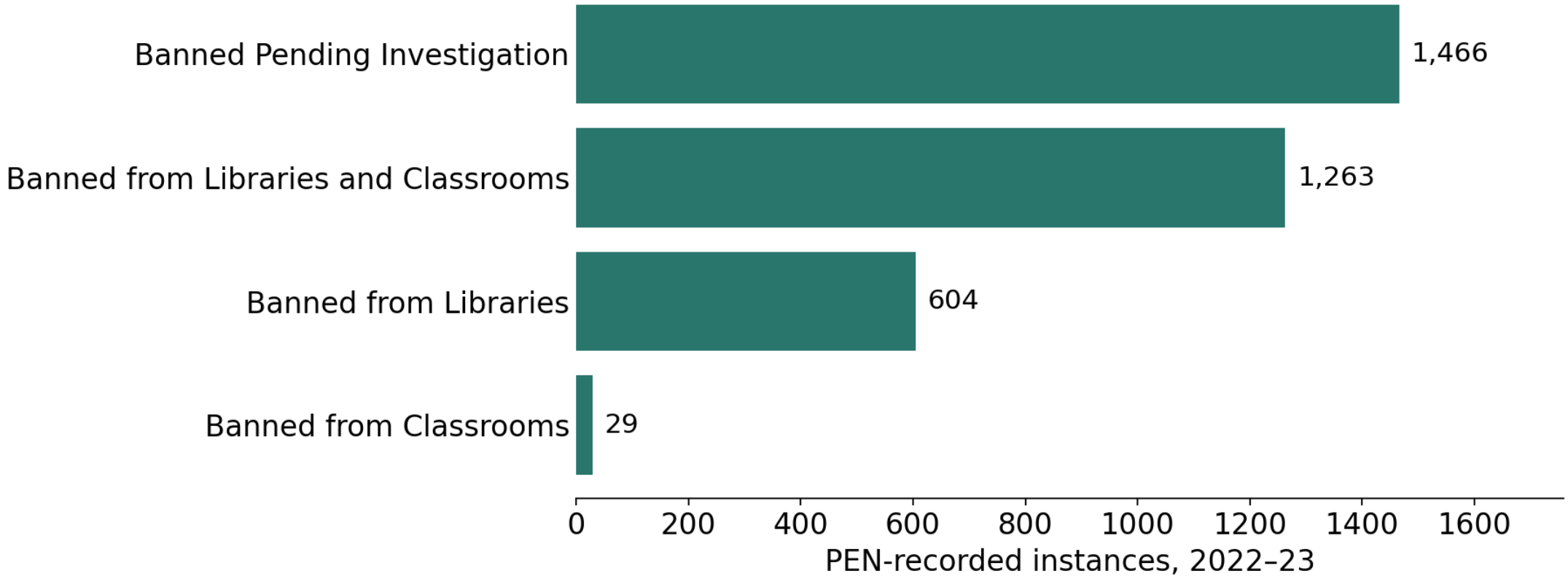
2,778

Rows with a recorded month

584

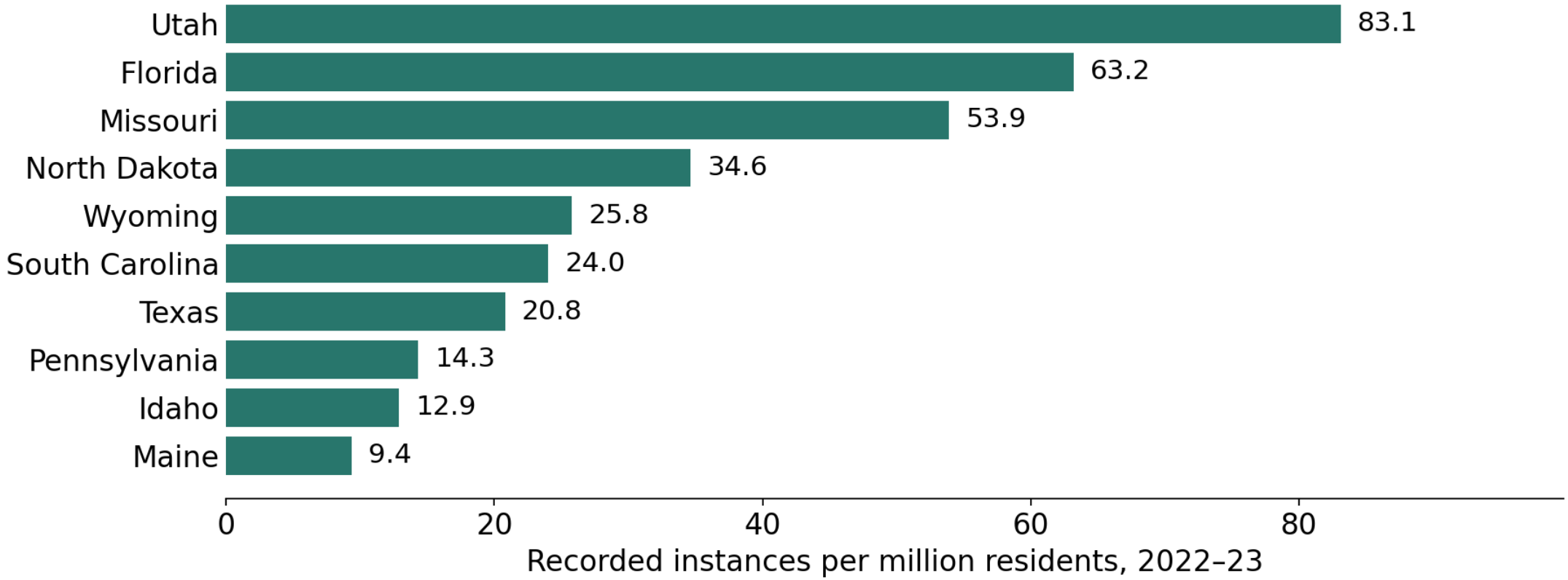
Rows without a recorded month

Pending investigation is an access status



1,466 instances (43.6%) were pending investigation when recorded.

2022–23: Utah had the highest recorded rate



Population adjustment changes the ranking compared with raw counts.

2022–23: party identification and recorded rates

0.389

Pearson correlation with ban rates

0.417

Spearman rank correlation

6 of 10

Top-rate states classified Republican

2017

Year of Gallup party identification

2022–23: high-rate states and the 2024 vote

9 of the 10 highest-rate states in 2022–23 voted Republican in 2024.

Mean Trump–Harris margin: +19.8 points; other 40 states: +3.4.

The 2024 vote came after 2022–23, so this is retrospective only.

2022–23: religion shows no clear distinction

Top ten states in 2022–23

Catholic share: 17.0% average

Protestant categories: about 45%

Utah: 55% Latter-day Saint

Other forty states

Catholic share: 19.5% average

Protestant categories: about 49%

Pew measured affiliation in 2014

The earlier Ohio estimate was not validated

The earlier model used Moms for Liberty chapter counts.

Its prediction inputs were dated April 28, 2023, inside the outcome year.

The printed Ohio estimate was 131.8 for 2022–23.

The retained PEN index recorded no Ohio entries that year.

The original model could not be rerun without its input table.

GDELT adds news context, with validation pending

36

News records in the review sample

13

Support school-book coverage

4

Other topics or library settings

19

Remain unresolved

Coding: comparing 2022–23 state characteristics

```
top = states.nlargest(10, 'entries_per_million')
other = states[~states.state.isin(top.state)]

comparison = top.merge(election, on='state',
                       validate='one_to_one')
winners = (comparison.republican_margin_pp > 0).sum()
mean_margin = comparison.republican_margin_pp.mean()

# Compare state averages, not pooled populations.
# Keep survey years and missing/small-cell flags.
```

Code explanation and source details are in the speaker notes.

What is included in this delivery

PowerPoint with speaker notes, and the same slides as PDF.

The labelled 2025–26 map and every chart image.

Saved input tables and analysis scripts; the Clay ballot coding package.

slides_v2.json and the builder that produced this deck.

Appendix B reports RQ3 progress; Appendix C the earlier verification.