

The Moms for Liberty platform is extreme – and most voters are loudly rejecting it

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The failure of rightwing ideologues to take over local school boards shows that voters simply won't get behind them



Moms for Liberty founders Tiffany Justice and Tina Descovich give opening remarks during its inaugural summit on 15 July 2022 in Tampa, Florida. Photograph: Octavio Jones/Getty Images

Off-year elections, like the ones that took place earlier this month, can fall

under the radar – or at least, that's what far-right reactionary groups like Moms for Liberty and the 1776 Project might have been hoping. Organizations like these spent the better part of this year pushing to elect school board members who would enact a rightwing agenda in the name of "abolishing critical race theory".

But, for the most part, they failed. Per the American Federation of Teachers, groups like these lost [close to 70% of the races](#) where they made endorsements this November. And while conservatives made some inroads in places like the [Houston suburbs](#), they fell short in some of the most high-profile races in swing states, like Pennsylvania – where Democrats [swept several school boards](#) while rejecting the culture war – as well as [Iowa](#), [Ohio](#) and [Virginia](#).

The failure of rightwing ideologues to take over local school boards shows that voters simply don't want to buy what they're selling. As Keenan Crow of LGBTQ+ organization One Iowa Action [said](#): “There is a basic decency left in the electorate that recognizes that every kid deserves a safe, inclusive space to learn.” And as the countdown to 2024 begins in earnest, progressives could benefit from embracing that decency in school board battles and beyond.

Moms for Liberty was formed in 2021 to oppose [Covid-19 restrictions](#) in schools, like mask requirements and vaccine mandates. Supercharged by funding from national conservative organizations like the [Heritage Foundation](#), it has since expanded its mission to include fighting school “wokeness” – otherwise known as “acknowledgment that racism exists” – and touting “parental rights” as their justification for [trying to privatize the public school system](#).

As I [wrote in September](#), they are one of the organizations behind the latest wave of book bans across the United States. The pastor who leads their Philadelphia faith-based outreach was [recently outed as a registered sex offender](#); he has resigned as a city ward leader, but remains a Moms for Liberty member. The Southern Poverty Law Center categorized Moms for Liberty as an [extremist group](#) earlier this year – and that was before an Indiana chapter opened a newsletter by literally [quoting Hitler](#).

The group has generous funding and chapters in [almost every state](#). It has mainstream Republican support; former president Donald Trump, plus four other 2024 GOP also-rans, [spoke at a Moms for Liberty summit](#) in Philadelphia this summer.

So why did they perform so poorly? For one thing, the Moms for Liberty agenda was simply too extreme for most voters outside of the deepest-red districts. [National polling](#) from earlier this year found that the majority of Americans oppose book bans, trust teachers to make curricular decisions, and think schools should teach the history of slavery, racism and segregation.

This dynamic was reflected in the repudiation of figures like Teri Patrick – a school board candidate in West Des Moines, Iowa, who once fought to [criminally charge](#) a school district because its library had two books about LGBTQ+ issues. Patrick was endorsed by Moms for Liberty but crushed in the election, receiving a measly [9% of the vote](#).

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As well-organized as Moms for Liberty may be, teachers unions are organized better. In Iowa, more than [85% of candidates endorsed by the local teachers union](#), the Iowa State Education Association, won a seat in the 7 November school board elections. On the same night, only one of the 13 candidates endorsed by Moms for Liberty was elected. Moms for Liberty founder Tina Descovich herself partially blamed the [strength of teachers unions](#) for their recent losses.

If anything, the intense attention and resources that the right gave to school board races only motivated the labor movement to match those efforts. Last summer, American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten [said](#) that Moms for Liberty has “created more action and more energy” within unions.

When a group of concerned parents in the small suburb of Madeira, Ohio, saw the campaign materials being shared by Moms for Liberty, they formed their own Pac, [Madeira United](#), and communicated a simple message: “No culture wars. No extremism”. On 7 November, their nonpartisan candidates prevailed.

For all the fear-mongering about the woke mind virus infiltrating our schools, millions of parents across the country trust, respect and admire their children’s teachers. This month’s election results ought to be a wake-up call: progressives can still win the education debate, but it will take full-throated support and organizing of teachers and their unions.

Conservatives aren’t giving up this fight any time soon. Shortly after the election, the Leadership Institute hosted a training in Colorado to plot next steps for the rightwing board members who were successfully elected. And just last week, Moms for Liberty’s Oklahoma chapter called for the deplatforming of an institution that they say is “largely focused on indoctrinating youth with radical viewpoints and sexual ideologies”. You guessed it: they’re talking about the Scholastic Book Fair.

But between teachers unions, enterprising parents, progressive leaders across the country, and an enduring majority of voters, there remains a robust national coalition that favors a pluralistic education system. [As Weingarten said shortly after the election](#): “These results underline what families have been telling us for the last two years: They don’t want culture wars; they want safe and welcoming public schools ... They reject division and want to seize the future together.”