

Why Trump's attacks on libraries are bad news for everyone

Updated / Friday, 16 May 2025 10:36



Since his inauguration in January 2025 President Trump has signed multiple executive orders relating to education and libraries. Photo: Getty Images

Opinion: Recent events in the US have shown us libraries, and the services and information they provide, must never be taken for granted

Since commencing his second term as president of the United States, the media commentators, allies and the general public have struggled to keep up with the blistering pace of Donald Trump's executive orders, policy changes and social media posts. From renaming geographic features to regulations on shower pressure, the scope of his administration's focus has been both wide-ranging and, at times, bizarre.

While these high-profile, and often odd, actions have received sustained public attention, other, arguably more damaging measures have flown under the radar. It is understandable that sweeping economic decisions, like the imposition of tariffs, capture headlines. However, such actions are at least subject to counter-pressure from bond markets and other economic forces. Consider the speed with which the administration backtracked from some of the more alarming announcements made on "liberation day". The same cannot be said for other sectors where serious damage is being inflicted.

Of particular concern are Trump's actions on education and libraries—issues that have global consequences but no obvious mechanisms akin to the bond markets to moderate their effects.

Worryingly, if successful, the harm done to learning, research and information accessibility could persist far beyond his term of office and impact Ireland and elsewhere.

Library and museum support agency faces massive cuts after Trump order



From PBS News, Library and museum support agency faces massive cuts after Trump order

Education and libraries under attack

Since his inauguration in January 2025 President Trump has signed multiple executive orders relating to education and libraries. Federal funding, admissions processes, student loans, research funding and institutional tax statuses are among the many issues that have been pursued. In many cases libraries have been directly or indirectly targeted. The American Library Association (ALA) is [documenting](#) these attacks which to date have included an executive order calling for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to eliminate "non-statutory components and functions", the deletion of thousands of previously available datasets and websites on a diverse range of subjects from climate change to health, mass dismissals of library and archival workers and the removal of books relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

[Writing](#) in the The Guardian in March 2025, Leo S Lo, president of the Association of College and Research Libraries and a dean and professor at the University of New Mexico, argues that while these actions may not have been surprising that does not make them any less sinister: "I wasn't surprised by Trump's move. Given escalating book bans, rising censorship and growing hostility toward educational and cultural institutions, this crisis has been building for years. Yet the predictability doesn't make it less troubling; it signals clearly that the stakes are higher than ever."

The full impact of these actions will not be seen for some time but there are already disturbing indications of the serious and sustained damage they will do. In a [recent interview](#) on National Public Radio (NPR), Elizabeth Fox, the president of the South Dakota Library Association, and Kate Laughlin, the executive director of the National Association for Rural & Small Libraries, detailed the immediate impact of the cuts on rural American libraries. Already, just over a month since the IMLS order was signed, inter-library loans services, ebook platforms, staff training and services to users with additional needs have been removed or significantly degraded.

What could this mean for Ireland and the rest of the world?

While it may be tempting to watch these events in the USA with a sense of relief that it is happening 'over there' rather than here, such a view would be dangerously wrong and complacent. The loss of US public datasets is already impacting everything from [weather forecasting to health care](#). Librarians across Europe are reporting an increase in the kind of threats and behaviours that preceded the Trump administration's attacks on libraries. Libraries in France and Germany are [reporting](#) increasing attacks by extremists. Librarians in the UK are [reporting](#) a growing number of demands for the removal of books.

Read more: [Why public libraries are ideal spaces to promote media literacy](#)

While Ireland is fortunate to have a thriving library sector, generally held in high regard by the citizens and communities they serve, it is not immune from these kinds of problems. A [report](#) released in late 2024 documented the experiences of Irish public library staff facing reactionary responses to LGBTQ+ resources in libraries. In addition to considering how these dangerous trends and experiences can be countered there is a need to remain vigilant that they do not become the foundations for a more sustained erosion of the contribution of education and libraries to society.

What next?

The full implications of many of the Trump administration's library-related actions are still unclear and most remain the subject of [legal challenges](#) by library organisations and other stakeholders. What is clear is the intent behind them: to remove or significantly degrade the role of libraries in American communities, schools and colleges.

At the same time, libraries have never been more important in the USA and elsewhere. Libraries are one of the last remaining public spaces where people are welcomed with no requirement to spend money. Libraries are a 'third space', between home and work, which people have never needed more. Add to this the ever-increasing demand for access to digital information and it is clear that any damage to them will result in serious harm to society. If

recent events in the USA have taught us anything, it's that libraries, and the services and information they provide, must never be taken for granted

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