

LIBRARIES

UNDER PRESSURE

Civic Responsibility and Professional Integrity
in Politically Sensitive Contexts

THE QUESTION WE NEED TO ASK

What happens to a library when the institution itself is under attack?

-
- The democratic role of libraries is not tested in good times.
 - It is tested when professionals begin to calculate the cost of speaking.
 - Not attacked by armies. By consequences. By silence. By slow administrative erosion.

Censorship no longer needs to be explicit.

-
- A programme is cancelled. No explanation given.
 - Funding disappears. A person becomes invisible.
 - People begin to know what should not be said.
 - Self-censorship has already started to work.

**Pressure functions less as
prohibition —
and more as the production
of consequences.**

Non-partisan does not mean silent.

-
- A library can be non-partisan — and still defend freedom of expression.
 - Non-partisan — and still resist censorship.
 - Non-partisan — and still protect professional autonomy.
 - Neutrality must not become a professional language for fear.

153

museum professionals across 31 countries report political pressure · NEMO Barometer, 2025

Galleries · Libraries · Archives · Museums — all contested. All under pressure.

Memory institutions are contested because memory itself is contested.

Who controls what knowledge becomes visible?

-
- Political pressure disciplines speech through consequences.
 - AI systems discipline knowledge through ranking, opacity and invisibility.
 - Different mechanisms. The same question about control.

The question is not whether libraries will use AI. They already do.

- Can libraries translate their values into an AI-mediated knowledge environment?
- Intellectual freedom, privacy, openness, accountability — these are not technical questions.
- A small number of technology companies now shape what knowledge looks like for the entire world.
- The governance of AI-mediated knowledge cannot be left only to private actors.

AI literacy must not become AI obedience.

Libraries must question, contextualise and democratically interpret AI-mediated knowledge.

When speech produces consequences, silence becomes a working condition.

-
- Professional autonomy — the right to exercise judgement, not only technical competence.
 - The right to speak, to read without fear, to search without being profiled.
 - The right to access knowledge outside commercial and political control.
 - The right to participate in the governance of AI-mediated knowledge.

A library under pressure does not defend books.

It defends the conditions under which a society can still remember, verify, interpret, speak and think freely.

In the age of AI, this responsibility does not diminish. It becomes greater.

**Libraries must defend not only access to knowledge —
but the public integrity of knowledge itself.**