

# Queering Democracy

**The Global Elections in 2024  
and How LGBTIQ People Fared**

September 2025



**OUTRIGHT  
INTERNATIONAL**

# About Outright International

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## Outright International works together for better LGBTIQ lives.

Outright International works with partners around the globe to strengthen the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality.

Founded in 1990, Outright works with civil society organizations, the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies, governments, humanitarian and development institutions, and philanthropic and corporate partners to create lasting change. With staff in 20 countries, Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

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**Cover photo:** VoteLGBT campaign in Brazil encouraging people to vote for LGBTIQ candidates, São Paulo Pride 2024. Credit: Fernando Galacine.

**Right:** Rainbow flag waving in front of the U.S. Capitol Building. Credit: Andrea Izzotti/Adobe Stock.





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# Glossary

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**Anti-Gender Movements:** These are transnational networks composed of diverse actors that oppose “gender ideology,” which they use as a blanket term for social, political, and cultural developments that they perceive as threats to cisheteronormative structures, such as legal gender recognition, gender-affirming care, marriage equality, and sexual and reproductive justice.

**Asexual:** The word asexual often describes people who experience little to no sexual attraction.

**Bisexual:** The word bisexual often refers to people who are attracted to women and men and/or to people who are attracted to more than one gender.

**Bissu:** In Indonesia, bissus are the fifth gender of Bugis society. They are thought to encompass the entire gender spectrum and play an important spiritual role in their communities.

**Cisgender:** Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their sex assigned at birth.

**Cisheteronormativity:** A pervasive belief system that centers and naturalizes heterosexuality and the gender binary to the extent that it is assumed that the only two “normal” ways of being are cisgender heterosexual masculine men and cisgender heterosexual feminine women.

**Conversion Practices:** Practices intended to suppress or change a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression based on cisgender, heteronormative indoctrination and/or the incorrect assumption that such persons’ orientation, identity, or expression is not normal. Conversion practices have more often been referred to as “conversion therapy,” a term that incorrectly suggests that treatment is needed for a disorder and that people can be converted to cisgender heterosexuality through such “treatment.”

**Gay:** A synonym for homosexual in many parts of the world. In this report, gay is used specifically to refer to the sexual orientation of a man whose primary sexual and/or romantic attraction is toward other men.

**Gender:** The social and cultural codes (linked to but not congruent with ideas about biological sex) used to distinguish between society’s conceptions of “femininity” and “masculinity.”

**Gender-Affirming Health Care:** Health care that may involve psychological, behavioral, medical, and surgical interventions aimed at positively acknowledging an individual’s gender identity when it is not in alignment with the assigned sex or gender at birth. Gender-affirming health care is used interchangeably with “trans-affirming health care” or “trans-specific health care.” It refers to a broad range of physical and mental health services, including but not limited to hormone therapy, voice therapy, surgeries, and puberty blockers. For more detail on this and a citation to the definition of trans-affirming health care, refer to The World Professional Association for Transgender Health, Standards of Care.

**Gender-Based Violence:** Any type of violence that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, or any perceived violation of gender norms.

**Gender Expression:** Gender expression is how we express our gender through actions and appearance, including attire, speech, and movement. Gender expression is on a spectrum. It can align with social constructs of what it means to be feminine, masculine, androgynous, or any combination thereof. It can also be fluid. For a lot of people, their gender expression aligns with characteristics that our societies deem to be appropriate for their gender or their sex assigned at birth. For other people, it does not. A person's gender expression is not always linked to the person's biological sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

**Gender Identity:** A person's internal, deeply felt sense of being a woman or girl, man or boy, a combination of these, neither, or something else.

**Gender Nonconforming:** Behaving or appearing in ways that do not fully conform to social expectations based on one's assigned sex.

**Gender-Fluid:** A term that speaks to an experience of gender that is not fixed as one gender or another.

**Heteronormativity:** A pervasive belief system that centers and naturalizes heterosexuality to the extent that it is assumed that the only two "normal" ways of being are heterosexual men and heterosexual women.

**Heterosexual:** The sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and/or romantic attraction is toward men, if they are women, and toward women, if they are men.

**Hijra:** In South Asia, "hijra" refers to an identity category for people assigned male at birth who develop a feminine gender identity. Hijras are often considered a third gender. Some hijras identify as transgender, but many do not.

**Homophobia:** Fear of, contempt of, and/or discrimination against homosexuals or homosexuality, usually based on negative stereotypes of homosexuality. Homophobia can be both individual and institutional. Entrenched damaging opinions about same-sex attraction may influence the enactment of discriminatory laws and policies and how individuals, the government, organizations, the media, and society in general behave towards people perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer.

**Homosexual:** The sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and/or romantic attractions are toward people of the same sex.

**Intersex:** An umbrella term that refers to a range of traits and conditions that cause individuals to be born with chromosomes, gonads, and/or genitals that vary from what is considered typical for female or male bodies.

**Khawaja Sira:** In Pakistan, Khawaja Sira (also spelled Khwaja Sira and Khawaja Sara) refers to an identity category for people assigned male at birth who develop a feminine gender identity. Khawaja Sira are often considered a third gender. Some Khawaja Sira identify as transgender, and some do not.

**LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer):** An inclusive term used to categorize people whose identities, desires, or bodies do not meet cultural expectations of endosex (non-intersex), cisgender heteronormativity. Outright uses the term LGBTIQ as an umbrella term that includes people who may not themselves identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer. Other variants such as LGBTQIA, which include asexual and aromantic people, LGBTQIA+, where the plus sign emphasizes the broad diversity of sexual and gender identities, are also used in this report.

**Nonbinary:** A term to describe the gender identity of someone who does not identify exclusively as a woman or girl or as a man or boy. This term is sometimes used interchangeably with the term "genderqueer."



**Pansexual:** A term to describe people who are attracted to people irrespective of gender.

**Queer:** An inclusive umbrella term covering multiple identities, sometimes used interchangeably with “LGBTIQ.” It is also used to describe divergence from heterosexual and cisgender norms without specifying new identity categories. In this report, “queer men” is used to cover gay men, bisexual men, and other men of non-heterosexual sexual orientations, and “queer women” is used to cover lesbian women, bisexual women, and other women of non-heterosexual sexual orientations.

**Sexual and Gender Minorities:** A category of individuals whose sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics differ from those in most of the population.

**Sexual Orientation:** The sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction that one has the capacity to feel for others. An individual’s sexual orientation is indicated by one or more of the following: how a person self-identifies their sexual orientation, a person’s capacity for experiencing sexual and/or affectional attraction to people of the same and/or different gender, and/or a person’s sexual behavior with people of the same and/or different gender.

**Sexual Violence:** Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion by any person, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting.

**Transgender:** A term to describe people whose sex assigned at birth does not conform to their gender identity. A transgender person usually adopts, or would prefer to adopt, a gender expression in accordance with their gender identity but may or may not desire to alter their physical characteristics to conform to their gender identity.

**Transgender Men:** People designated female at birth but who identify and may present themselves as men. Transgender men are generally referred to with male pronouns.

**Transgender Women:** People designated male at birth but who identify and may present themselves as women. Transgender women are generally referred to with female pronouns.

**Transphobia:** Fear of, contempt of, and/or discrimination against transgender, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming people, usually based on negative stereotypes. Transphobia can be both individual and institutional: entrenched damaging opinions about transgender identities may influence the enactment of discriminatory laws and policies and how individuals, the government, organizations, the media, and society in general behave toward people whose identities do not conform to mainstream gender roles.

# Executive Summary

**“There’s nothing wrong with me wanting to participate in this democracy.”**

**— Dumiso “Dumi” Gatsha**

34-year-old nonbinary activist and  
parliamentary candidate in Botswana in 2024<sup>1</sup>

The super election year of 2024 presented a unique opportunity to look into the state of LGBTIQ inclusion in democracies around the world. More than one and a half billion votes were cast in at least 89 countries, home to almost half of the world’s population. Elections of varying degrees of integrity were held in countries across the world, including the five largest democracies—India, the European Union, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil. This unprecedented electoral cycle took place within the context of democratic backsliding, where LGBTIQ communities and other marginalized groups were among the first casualties of attacks against democracy.

## Queering Democracy: The Global Elections in 2024 and How LGBTIQ People Fared

is the most detailed contribution to date to a growing body of research focusing on LGBTIQ people and elections. It builds on the GLIDE 2024 Landscape Analysis, which looked into barriers faced by LGBTIQ people in civic and political participation, from discriminatory laws to anti-LGBTIQ political rhetoric, and on research published in the last two years by the UN Development Program

(UNDP) and the UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>2</sup> Covering 61 jurisdictions, including 60 countries and the European Union, this report investigates how diverse political, electoral, legal, and social contexts enabled or restricted LGBTIQ people’s participation in the 2024 electoral cycle. This information is presented in 11 in-depth case studies, 12 shorter “snapshots,” and 38 general compendium entries covering the 61 elections.

## LGBTIQ people actively participated in elections despite significant barriers.

Queer candidates made history in LGBTIQ political representation from Brazil to Botswana, while LGBTIQ groups worked to raise political awareness and ensure electoral inclusion and integrity. While there were no specific voting restrictions for LGBTIQ people, numerous obstacles impacted their right to register and vote, including the absence of legal gender recognition, the existence of criminalizing laws, the risk of violence, gendered electoral practices, and individual histories of family rejection and forced displacement that impacted the ability to obtain identification documents or travel to one’s home region to vote.

<sup>1</sup> Outright International interview with Dumiso “Dumi” Gatsha, virtual, April 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Outright International, Synergía Initiative for Human Rights, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, The Global LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Democracy and Empowerment (GLIDE) Initiative’s 2024 Landscape Analysis, July 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/global-lgbtqi-inclusive-democracy-and-empowerment-glide-initiatives>; UNDP, Building inclusive democracies: A guide to strengthening the participation of LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral processes, 2023, <https://www.undp.org/publications/building-inclusive-democracies-guide-strengthening-participation-lgbti-persons-political-and-electoral-processes>; United Nations General Assembly, Electoral participation and protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, UN Doc. A/79/151, July 15, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/151>.



## Politicians and their supporters put hate on the ballot.

LGBTIQ issues became a political football, instrumentalized by politicians to pander to voters. In at least 51 of the 60 countries covered in the report, political candidates, parties, and groups negatively used LGBTIQ issues in political speech and campaigning, which, in some cases, amounted to hate speech and incitement to violence. Political candidates demonized “gender ideology” and “wokism,” depicted LGBTIQ people as “foreign agents” and “Western” threats to national sovereignty, and scapegoated sexual and gender diversity to deflect responsibility for real issues. In some contexts, elections became a race to the bottom, “a competition of who was the most homophobic.”<sup>3</sup>

## Queer people showed up to defend democracy.

In the face of organized attacks on democracy and gender equality, LGBTIQ people in several countries showed up to assert their place in the body politic—from the July revolution in Bangladesh to anti-authoritarian protests in Türkiye. Queer people mobilized to counter anti-rights movements and stand in solidarity with other marginalized groups, even when increased visibility came at a price.

LGBTIQ communities continue to organize, campaign, vote, run for office, safeguard electoral integrity, and mobilize for inclusive democracies both through and beyond the ballot box. While this report documents positive steps taken by authorities to protect and promote LGBTIQ people’s political rights, it concludes that governments need to do more to fulfill their duty to ensure the full democratic inclusion of all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.



<sup>3</sup> Outright interview with Ebenezer Peegah, founder and executive director of Rightify Ghana, virtual, February 2025.

# Recommendations

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## To Electoral Management Bodies

- **Voter outreach.** Conduct inclusive voter outreach and education programs, including initiatives targeted to LGBTIQ communities and other marginalized groups, in order to facilitate the exercise of their rights to vote and stand for elections.
- **Training.** Train returning officers, polling station staff, and other personnel involved in the preparation, management, and conduct of elections to facilitate the full electoral participation of marginalized groups, including LGBTIQ people.
- **Hate speech.** Hold political parties and candidates accountable for anti-LGBTIQ hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation. Electoral management bodies should address complaints in a prompt, impartial, and effective manner and work with relevant stakeholders, including traditional and social media companies and government bodies, to enforce applicable regulations.
- **Collaboration.** Work with LGBTIQ groups to identify and remedy electoral policies and practices that may directly or indirectly discriminate against LGBTIQ people—especially trans, gender-diverse, and intersex people—or serve as a barrier to their full participation in the elections.
- **Trans, gender-diverse and intersex voters.** Ensure that trans, gender-diverse, and intersex people can register and vote free from discrimination, harassment, and violence, including through the enactment of temporary special measures. These may include measures such as targeted outreach and support in voter and candidate registration procedures, and dedicated mechanisms to document and respond to

discrimination, harassment, and violence. The choice of measures will depend on the specific national or local context and the specific goal to be achieved, and should be developed and implemented in consultation with trans, gender-diverse, and intersex groups, and involve the necessary human rights impact assessment.

- **Privacy.** Protect voters' right to privacy by eliminating practices that publicly reveal the private details of voters that are irrelevant to the voting process and indirectly put LGBTIQ voters at risk. Practices that obstruct the right to privacy may include, for example, publicly announcing the legal names of voters, and segregating queues and polling stations into "male" and "female."

## To Election Monitoring and Observation Organizations

- **Gender-responsiveness.** Adopt a gender-responsive and intersectional approach to election monitoring in order to recognize the particular vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ persons and other marginalized groups during the election cycle.
- **Training and collaboration.** Work with LGBTIQ groups to mainstream LGBTIQ inclusion in election monitoring and train election observers on sexual and gender diversity.
- **Data collection.** Collect data on barriers that directly or indirectly undermine LGBTIQ people's ability to participate in elections, including gender-based electoral violence, political hate speech and misinformation, and discriminatory laws and policies.

## To National Governments and Legislators

- **Enabling policy.** Develop and implement laws and policies to protect and promote the rights to vote and stand for elections without discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics, or explicitly incorporate LGBTIQ people into existing electoral policies on gender and inclusion. These policies must uphold state obligations under international human rights law, including those outlined by the United Nations Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in his report on electoral participation in 2024.<sup>1</sup>
- **Political participation.** Work with LGBTIQ groups to identify and remedy barriers to the full political participation of LGBTIQ people, including by enacting temporary special measures with a view to achieving substantive inclusion. These may include tools ranging from incentives encouraging LGBTIQ inclusion in electoral lists to LGBTIQ-inclusive electoral quotas. Recognize and address any gendered practices that may particularly limit the participation of trans, nonbinary, and intersex voters, candidates, and campaigners.
- **Political hate speech.** Explicitly prohibit political speech and campaigning that incites violence against LGBTIQ people, while ensuring the protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Work with traditional and social media companies in the development and implementation of regulations on political hate speech.
- **Misinformation and disinformation.** Proactively combat misinformation and disinformation in political campaigns, while guaranteeing the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- **Political violence.** Identify the specific vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ people to gendered political violence, and consider enacting temporary special measures to protect LGBTIQ candidates, voters, and campaigners

from violence throughout the electoral cycle. Such special measures might include, for example, public awareness campaigns, state provision of security for events or high-profile individuals facing risk, and dedicated violence and harassment monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

- **Disenfranchisement.** Repeal discriminatory laws criminalizing same-sex sexual acts and diverse gender expressions and other laws used to target LGBTIQ persons, such as those regulating freedom of opinion and expression on LGBTIQ issues, and restricting LGBTIQ people's freedom of association and assembly. These laws disenfranchise LGBTIQ persons and their allies in jurisdictions that disenfranchise based on criminal conviction, and create an atmosphere of fear that lead LGBTIQ people to inhibit or abstain from political participation. Ensure that trans, nonbinary, and intersex voters are not disenfranchised by discriminatory election policies, such as restrictive voter ID laws and gender segregation in polling stations.
- **Legal gender recognition.** Establish a quick, transparent, and accessible procedure—based on self-determination—to update legal names and gender markers on identity documents. Among other benefits, this will improve access to voting and reduce the risk of disenfranchisement.<sup>2</sup>

## To Political Candidates and Parties

- **LGBTIQ inclusion.** Proactively engage LGBTIQ groups in the development of political platforms, and propose legal and policy measures that will advance inclusive development and fulfill the government's duty to respect, protect, and promote human rights without discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics. Include LGBTIQ party members, along with representatives of other marginalized groups, in political parties' governing bodies, where they can contribute to the development of party platforms and priorities.
- **Queer candidacies.** Support LGBTIQ candidates

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Electoral participation and protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

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<sup>2</sup> Outright International, Empowering Identity: The Case for Self-Determined Legal Gender Recognition, November 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/empowering-identity-case-self-determined-legal-gender-recognition>.

through sustainable campaign funding and infrastructure and protection from discrimination and violence.

- **Political speech and campaigning.** Ensure that political speech and campaigning do not incite discrimination, hostility, and violence against LGBTIQ people, or instrumentalize LGBTIQ issues for political gain. This includes working with LGBTIQ groups to strategize whether or not explicit engagement with LGBTIQ issues during the campaign, even if positive, would provoke or exacerbate violence against LGBTIQ people.
- **Commitment.** Participate in civil society efforts to consolidate political commitment to LGBTIQ equality during and beyond the election period, and publicly affirm support for human rights, gender equality, and inclusive development.

## To LGBTIQ Organizations

- **Election monitoring.** Collect data on anti-LGBTIQ political speech and violence and other barriers undermining LGBTIQ people's ability to participate in elections, and on measures that effectively protect and promote LGBTIQ people's ability to participate in elections.
- **Electoral engagement.** Engage with a diverse range of actors, including electoral management bodies, election monitors, and political parties, to ensure the meaningful inclusion of LGBTIQ issues in political campaigns and facilitate LGBTIQ people's right to vote and stand for elections.
- **Political demands.** Work in solidarity with other LGBTIQ, feminist, and human rights organizations to articulate comprehensive and intersectional demands for political parties and candidates during the elections.
- **Queer mobilization.** Conduct targeted voter registration, outreach, and education campaigns in order to mobilize LGBTIQ people and their allies, and support LGBTIQ people in legally registering to vote, voting, and running for office.

## To Civil Society Organizations, Think Tanks, Research Institutions, and Other Entities Working on Democracy and Elections

- **Data collection.** Advance the knowledge base on LGBTIQ people in elections and other political processes by collecting data on anti-gender political speech and violence; laws, policies and practices that directly or indirectly hinder LGBTIQ people's participation in elections; and LGBTIQ people's experiences in elections.
- **LGBTIQ mainstreaming.** Mainstream LGBTIQ issues into broader efforts on strengthening democracy, including by raising awareness on the links between anti-LGBTIQ movements and democratic backsliding.

## To Donors

- **Civil society strengthening.** Address the critical funding gap for LGBTIQ organizations, which are key to advancing rights and inclusion – including in democracy and electoral processes. Multi-year, flexible core support is the most effective way to sustain essential work.
- **LGBTIQ election initiatives.** Support LGBTIQ civil society initiatives for voter outreach and education, political engagement, and election monitoring and observation, and other efforts to advance the political participation and democratic inclusion of LGBTIQ people.
- **Inclusive election infrastructure.** Support efforts by election monitoring bodies, national human rights institutions, and other government bodies to advance the political participation of LGBTIQ people.

# Methodology

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This is Outright’s first report focusing entirely on LGBTIQ people and elections. It builds on the GLIDE 2024 Landscape Analysis, discussed further below, and is based on data from desk research, semi-structured interviews with LGBTIQ voters, candidates, and activists, and targeted email questionnaires sent to LGBTIQ organizations.

At least 89 countries held national, local, or indirect elections in 2024. Outright initiated **research into LGBTIQ experiences in elections in 77 countries**, focusing primarily but not exclusively on countries that held major elections in 2024. By “major elections” we refer to elections that involve the entire voting population, such as presidential elections, parliamentary elections, and nationwide regional or municipal elections. In addition, we conducted research on elections in some countries where several but not all subnational jurisdictions held elections in 2024, and those where indirect elections took place.<sup>1</sup> Through a combination of primary and secondary research, we obtained sufficient information to report on how LGBTIQ people fared in **60 countries and the European Union**.

Between August 2024 and August 2025, Outright staff conducted **64 semi-structured interviews with LGBTIQ activists, candidates, and voters in 23 countries**. We conducted interviews in person in Bangladesh and Indonesia, and remotely via video link with interviewees in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Botswana, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Ghana, India, Jordan, Lebanon, the Marshall Islands, Mexico, Moldova, Namibia, Panama, Senegal, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Türkiye, and Venezuela.

Between January and July 2025, Outright’s research team also reached out via email to LGBTIQ organizations in countries that held elections in 2024, requesting their responses to a standard questionnaire on three main themes: the participation of LGBTIQ persons in the elections, the presence of openly LGBTIQ candidates, and the positive or negative inclusion of LGBTIQ issues in campaigns. We received **email responses from representatives of LGBTIQ organizations in 27 countries** that were eventually referenced in the report. These countries include Austria, Belgium, Bhutan Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Kiribati, Mauritius, Moldova, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay.

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<sup>1</sup> Outright did not investigate elections in 12 countries, many of which only held local elections in some but not all subnational jurisdictions. These countries include Belize, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Nigeria, Serbia, Spain, Tanzania, Thailand, and Uzbekistan. The report includes information on the European Parliament elections in Germany, Hungary, and Spain.



Outright also received email responses from organizations in Cambodia, Costa Rica, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Mongolia, Rwanda, and Togo. However, these countries were eventually not included in the report, as Outright could not find enough relevant information on LGBTIQ people and the 2024 elections in these countries during the research period.<sup>2</sup>

We supplemented and verified the information shared during these semi-structured interviews and the email questionnaire responses with online desk research of news reports, campaign materials, election monitoring reports, human rights reports, and social media posts. Based on our research, we prepared 11 in-depth case studies, 12 shorter “snapshots,” and 38 general compendium entries covering 61 elections.

In terms of limitations, Outright recognizes that interviewees’ and questionnaire respondents’ perspectives do not necessarily represent their entire countries’ movements or communities. In addition, while this report aims to provide a comprehensive global overview of LGBTIQ people in the 2024 electoral cycle, limitations of time, staff knowledge, contacts, and resources mean that the report does not cover all relevant data on the subject.

On the language and terminology in this report: First, Outright typically refers to interviewees by their full names on first usage and subsequently by their surname, if they consent and can safely be cited publicly, and by pseudonyms, typically including a first name and last initial, if preferred by an interviewee for safety and privacy reasons. Second, Outright typically uses the acronym LGBTIQ when referring to movements, laws, or events that are truly relevant to and inclusive of the range of identities included in the acronym. In some cases in this report, we report on events that, to our knowledge, did not include intersex people, or on laws that only target people based on sexual orientation or gender identity and not based on sex characteristics. In these cases, we use the acronym “LGBTQ,” omitting the “I” for “intersex.” We sometimes also use “queer” as an inclusive catch-all. We recognize our choice of terms and acronyms may be at times inconsistent and imperfect as a result of gaps in our knowledge, the complexity and fluidity of our communities, and identities that no term or acronym can perfectly capture.

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<sup>2</sup> Aside from the 12 countries listed above that Outright did not investigate, Outright did not receive information from activists or find enough data online on the 2024 elections in Algeria, Chad, Comoros, Iran, Kuwait, Maldives, Mauritania, Palau, and Tuvalu to include them in this report.

I.

# Introduction

# Introduction

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LGBTIQ people face significant barriers to democratic and political participation. The GLIDE 2024 Landscape Analysis, developed in partnership between Outright, Synergía Initiative for Human Rights, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), identified several factors that affect LGBTIQ people's willingness and ability to participate in democratic and political life, based on a global online survey and interviews with experts, academics, and LGBTIQ activists.<sup>1</sup> These factors include difficulties accessing legal recognition, discriminatory laws restricting their public life, concerns about safety as voters, candidates, and elected officials, and the growing instrumentalization of anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric for political gain.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, LGBTIQ individuals and communities continue to organize, campaign, vote, run for office, safeguard electoral integrity, and mobilize for inclusive democracies both through and beyond the ballot box.

The super election year of 2024 presented a rare opportunity to look into the state of democratic inclusion around the world. More than one and a half billion votes were cast in at least 89 countries, home to almost half of the world's population.<sup>3</sup> Elections of varying degrees of integrity were held in countries across the world, including the five largest democracies—India, the European Union, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil.

Despite the unprecedented scale of this election cycle, the year was also marked by democratic backsliding, with the Economist Intelligence Unit's global Democracy Index score falling from 5.52 on a 10-point scale, when the Index began gathering data in 2006, "to an historic low of 5.17 in 2024."<sup>4</sup> The rise of authoritarianism, disinformation, voter disenfranchisement, foreign interference, and political repression undermined the integrity of elections and further eroded trust in democratic institutions.<sup>5</sup> In 2024, as in previous years, LGBTIQ communities and other marginalized groups were among the first casualties of these anti-democratic attacks, undermining a core principle of democracy to protect the rights of minorities.<sup>6</sup>

**Queering Democracy: The Global Elections in 2024 and How LGBTIQ People Fared** comprehensively documents the experiences of LGBTIQ people around the world during elections, and is the most detailed, significant contribution to date to a growing body of research focusing on LGBTIQ people and elections. This global compendium builds on the GLIDE 2024 Landscape Analysis, which looked into barriers faced by LGBTIQ people in civic and political participation, and on research published in the last two years by the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Outright International, Synergía Initiative for Human Rights, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, *The Global LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Democracy and Empowerment (GLIDE) Initiative's 2024 Landscape Analysis*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> John Burn-Murdoch, "What the 'year of democracy' taught us, in 6 charts," *Financial Times*, December 30, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/350ba985-bb07-4aa3-aa5e-38eda7c525dd>; Jill Lawless, "Lessons from the elections held in 70 countries in 2024," *Associated Press*, December 30, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/global-elections-2024-year-end-in-cumbents-c777b658661e61e2533091e1d625c0b8>.

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<sup>4</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, *2024 Democracy Index*, February 2025, <https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-2024>.

<sup>5</sup> Electoral Integrity Project and International IDEA, *Review of the 2024 Super-Cycle Year of Elections: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities*, July 2025, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2025-06/review-of-the-2024-super-cycle-year-of-elections.pdf>; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025*, February 2025, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/FITW\\_World2025digitalIN.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/FITW_World2025digitalIN.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Outright International et al., *GLIDE 2024 Landscape Analysis*.

Covering **61 jurisdictions**, including 60 countries and the European Union, the report offers a panoramic overview of two primary themes: LGBTIQ people's electoral participation as voters, campaigners, and candidates, and the positive or negative inclusion of LGBTIQ issues in election campaigns around the world in 2024. Spanning all regions, it presents **11 case studies, 12 snapshots, and 38 brief overviews** based on desk research and information from LGBTIQ individuals and organizations. It also identifies best practices by election authorities and other political bodies for LGBTIQ people's electoral inclusion and the creative and dynamic strategies that LGBTIQ people employed to raise awareness, mobilize LGBTIQ voters, consolidate political commitment, and safeguard electoral integrity.



**Right:** A drag queen raising a placard saying "Gay Rights" in Bucharest Pride, with the Romanian Palace of Parliament seen behind. Credit: Claudiu Popescu.

# II.

# Overview



# LGBTIQ People's Electoral Participation in 2024

LGBTIQ people operated in diverse political, electoral, and legal contexts that enabled or restricted their participation in the 2024 electoral cycle as candidates, political campaigners, electoral observers, and voters

## Openly LGBTIQ Candidates

LGBTIQ political representation reached new heights in 2024. We found evidence of out queer people running for office in **36 countries** in 2024.<sup>1</sup> More significantly, LGBTIQ people ran for the first time in at least three countries: **Botswana, Namibia, and Romania**. While the five trailblazers contesting elections in these countries did not win their races, they paved the way for future queer candidacies.

- In **Botswana**, the historic candidacies of two independent queer candidates, including a nonbinary activist, reflect recent progress on LGBTIQ people's rights.<sup>2</sup> The High Court ordered the decriminalization of same-sex sexual acts in 2019, trans activists have made progress in advocating for a pathway to legal gender recognition, and President Duma Boko's government introduced a constitutional amendment

in June 2024 to protect intersex people from discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

- In **Romania**, LGBTIQ activist Florin Buhuceanu ran for parliament to counter anti-gender movements in an election cycle that saw populist Călin Georgescu winning the first round of presidential elections through anti-LGBTIQ and anti-rights misinformation.<sup>4</sup> The



<sup>1</sup> These countries include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Finland, France, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Lithuania, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

<sup>2</sup> Dumi Gatsha, "Independent Parliamentary Candidate Campaign Fulfilled My Right as a Queer Motswana," Washington Blade, November 5, 2024, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2024/11/05/independent-parliamentary-candidate-campaign-fulfilled-my-right-as-a-queer-motswana>; Theo Mailakgotla, "Independent Candidate Advocates for Community-Driven Development," Guardian Sun, August 30, 2024, <https://guardiansun.co.bw/news/politics/independent-candidate-advocates-for-community-driven-development>.

**Right:** Collette Spinetti, the first trans woman in government in Uruguay, with LGBTIQ advocates. Credit: Union Binacional Trans.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/8515/2025/en>, 102.

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Middleton, "Romania's first openly gay candidate seeks power to win change," Context, November 13, 2024, <https://www.context.news/>

election was later annulled by the Constitutional Court, citing Russian foreign interference in Georgescu's favor.<sup>5</sup>

- **Namibia** marked the candidacies of queer people for the first time when two openly queer men ran for parliament.<sup>6</sup> This feat was an important milestone in the country, which had decriminalized same-sex sexual conduct in June 2024, only five months before the general election of November 2024.<sup>7</sup>

Trans people, especially trans women, made history as candidates—including in countries undergoing an authoritarian turn—demonstrating their persistence to assert their place in democracy and counter anti-gender currents.

- In **Venezuela**, where the election was marked by state repression against citizens and political opponents, LGBTIQ activist Tamara Adrián, the country's first openly trans lawmaker, also became the first trans pre-candidate for president, although she did not secure the opposition's nomination.<sup>8</sup>
- In **El Salvador**, as President Nayib Bukele increasingly embraced authoritarianism and anti-gender ideology, Brenda Rosales, a member of his Nuevas Ideas party,

became the first openly trans person to stand as a pre-candidate for deputy. She reportedly endured "hate attacks," even from members of her own party, and did not secure the nomination.<sup>9</sup>

- In **Sri Lanka**, where same-sex sexual conduct is still criminalized under a colonial-era law, Chanu Nimesha made history as the first transgender candidate to contest a general election. Her bid for parliament was not successful.<sup>10</sup>
- Despite the onslaught of hostile anti-LGBTIQ local ordinances in **Indonesia**, trans organizer Mami Vera became the first openly trans candidate for the regional legislature. She did not win a seat but notably ran a campaign that was positively received by the community.<sup>11</sup>
- In an election cycle marked by a unprecedented widespread anti-trans messaging, Sarah McBride became the first openly trans member of the **United States** House of Representatives.<sup>12</sup>

socioeconomic-inclusion/romania-first-openly-gay-candidate-seeks-power-to-win-change; Adam Parsons, "Calin Georgescu: The ex-soil scientist who rose to prominence on TikTok and is on course to be Romania's next president," Sky News, December 5, 2024, <https://news.sky.com/story/calin-georgescu-the-ex-soil-scientist-who-rose-to-prominence-on-tiktok-and-is-on-course-to-be-romania-next-president-13267482>; "Călin Georgescu, mesaj de ură la adresa minorităților sexuale: Sunt împotriva LGBTIQ," G4 Media, February 24, 2025, <https://www.g4media.ro/calin-georgescu-mesaj-de-ura-la-adresa-minoritatilor-sexuale-sunt-impotriva-lgbtq.html>.

5 Maddalin Necsutu and Anthony Faiola, "Romanian court annuls presidential vote after Russian interference claims," The Washington Post, December 6, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/12/06/romania-court-annuls-presidential-election/>.

6 Enrique Anarte Lazo, "Namibia's First Out LGBTQ+ Candidates Aim to Change Laws and Minds," Context, November 21, 2024, <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/namibias-first-out-lgbtq-candidates-aim-to-change-laws-and-minds>; Equal Namibia, "Representation Matters," November 21, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/equalnamibia/p/DCo-lAZlckm/?api=slot%2Bthailand%2Bgacor%E3%80%90GB77.CC%E3%80%91dfxv&hl=ne>.

7 Michelle Yesudas, Thiruna Naidoo, and Neela Ghoshal, "Break-throughs and the Bench: What We Can Learn From Last Year's Rulings on Queer Rights in Ghana, Malawi, and Namibia," Outright International, January 23, 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/insights/breakthroughs-and-bench-what-we-can-learn-last-years-rulings-queer-rights-ghana-malawi-and>.

8 Esteban Guzmán, "Transgender woman running to become Venezuela's next president," Los Angeles Blade, July 1, 2023, <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2023/07/01/tamara-adrian-running-to-become-venezuelas-next-president>.

**Right:** Guillermo Saviñón, LGBTIQ activist and candidate for councilor in Hermosillo, Sonora, signing the LGBTTIQ+ Sonora Coalition's political agenda. Credit:

9 Ernesto Valle, "Activistas LGBTQ se preparan para elecciones en El Salvador," Washington Blade, January 31, 2024, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2024/01/31/activistas-lgbtq-se-preparan-para-elecciones-en-el-salvador>.

10 Uditha Jayasinghe, "Sri Lanka's first transgender candidate hopes to break political, social barriers," Reuters, November 13, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sri-lankas-first-transgender-candidate-hopes-break-political-social-barriers-2024-11-13>.

11 Tri Wahyuni, "Perjalanan Mami Vera, dari ditolak masyarakat hingga jadi caleg transpuan pertama di NTT," BBC News Indonesia, February 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/cw4q718w39zo>.

12 Jo Yurcaba, "Sarah McBride becomes the first out transgender per-



In countries where laws recognize and respond to the barriers faced by LGBTIQ people, queer political representation was the most advanced.

- In **Brazil**, the Superior Electoral Court collected data on the self-declared sexual orientation and gender identity of candidates for the first time in 2024, and the civil society organization VoteLGBT collected its own data and analyzed it together with the Superior Electoral Court's data.<sup>13</sup> VoteLGBT identified 3,524 LGBTIQ candidates, 19.5 percent of whom were trans, out of a total of 463,367 registered candidates.<sup>14</sup> Trans women in the country are explicitly covered by laws prohibiting gender-based political violence and sexist electoral campaigning, and are included in the 30 percent electoral quota for women.<sup>15</sup> The 2024 municipal election more than doubled the number of openly queer elected officials since 2020, bringing it to at least 233.<sup>16</sup>
- In **Mexico**, affirmative action in elections was extended to LGBTIQ people in 2020 through cuotas arcoíris ("rainbow quotas"). This contributed to the record-setting registration of 1,212 LGBTIQ candidates across federal and local elections in 2024, representing 2.79 percent of all candidates.<sup>17</sup>

Queer people also seized opportunities to run in countries with a strong track record on LGBTIQ equality or where

recent advancements have been made for gender and sexual diversity.

- In **Iceland**, where legal protections for LGBTIQ people are among the most robust in Europe, Baldur Þórhallsson became the first openly gay presidential candidate in the nation's history.<sup>18</sup>
- In **Nepal**, two transgender women ran for office in the municipality of Kirtipur, making history as the country's first openly trans candidates 16 years after the election of the country's first openly gay member of parliament.<sup>19</sup>
- In **Poland**, the Civic Coalition overtook the right-wing Law and Justice party that oversaw the creation of so-called anti-LGBTIQ zones. While LGBTQ people had already been elected to parliament and various local governments in previous elections, in 2024, voters elected the country's first two openly lesbian city councillors, both from the Civic Coalition, and the first openly bisexual city councilor, from the Razem Party.<sup>20</sup>

**Intersex people** are still widely invisible in electoral politics. Few openly intersex candidates ran for office anywhere in the world, highlighting the persistent stigma and discrimination impacting intersex people and the widespread taboos around public discussion of diversity in sex characteristics. Out of the 61 jurisdictions covered in this report, Outright has only found data on intersex candidates in two countries, where none of them were elected in 2024.

- In **Brazil**, according to VoteLGBT, only 20 openly intersex people ran for office—a small fraction of all 3,524 LGBTIQ candidacies recorded in 2024. However, none of them won. The Superior Electoral Court did not collect data on intersex candidates, despite giving the option to candidates to self-declare their sexual orientation

son elected to Congress," NBC News, November 6, 2024, <https://www.nbc-news.com/nbc-out/out-politics-and-policy/sarah-mcbride-first-trans-gender-congress-delaware-rcna177878>.

13 Caio Cesar, "Brasil bate recorde com 225 candidaturas LGBT+ eleitas nas municipais de 2024," CartaCapital, October 7, 2024, <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/brasil-bate-recorde-com-225-candidaturas-lgbt-eleitas-nas-municipais-de-2024>.

14 VoteLGBT, "Intersectionality in Politics: how Brazil doubled the amount of LGBTQ elected officials in 2024," video animation, October 31, 2024, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3Pif-2B-Yg>; Outright email exchange with Alciana Paulino, VoteLGBT, July 15, 2025.

15 "TSE aprova uso do nome social de candidatos na urna," Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, March 1, 2018, <https://www.tse.jus.br/comunicacao/noticias/2018/Marco/tse-aprova-uso-do-nome-social-de-candidatos-na-urna>; Federative Republic of Brazil, Lei de combate à Violência Política Contra Mulher, Lei Nº 14.192, de 4 de Agosto de 2021, [https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2019-2022/2021/lei/L14192.htm](https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2021/lei/L14192.htm). This law amends the Electoral Code to prohibit advertising that discriminates against women based on their gender, color, race or ethnicity (Art 243.X), sexist disinformation in electoral propaganda (Art. 323), and political violence against women (Art. 326).

16 Outright email exchange with Alciana Paulino, VoteLGBT, July 15, 2025.

17 Voto por la Igualdad MX, Informe Pre-electoral de las candidaturas LGBTTTIQ+ en México 2024, May 2024, <https://mx.boell.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/informe-pre-electoral-voto-por-la-igualdad-mx-2024.pdf>, 6.

18 Jonathan Duffy, "From a Sheep Farm to Bessastaðir: Iceland's First Openly Gay Presidential Candidate," Gay Iceland, May 13, 2024, <https://gayiceland.is/2024/from-a-sheep-farm-to-bessastadir-icelands-first-openly-gay-presidential-candidate>.

19 Ankush Kumar, "Two transgender women make history in Nepal," Washington Blade, December 18, 2024, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2024/12/18/two-transgender-women-make-history-in-nepal>.

20 Anna Radosińska, "Tęczowe wybory samorządowe," Replika Online, March 22, 2024, <https://replika-online.pl/teczowe-wybory-samorzadowe>; Tomasz Nyczka, "Poznań znów jest tęczy. Działaczka LGBT+ robi niespodziankę i zostaje radną," April 8, 2024, Gazeta Wyborcza, <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,36001,30869414,poznan-znow-jest-teczowy-dzialaczka-lgbt-robi-niespodzianke.html>.



and gender identity.<sup>21</sup>

- In the **United Kingdom**, voters have still not elected an intersex person at the national level. Holly Greenberry-Pullen, a local elected councilor of the Liberal Democrats, made her second run for a seat in parliament in 2024. Greenberry-Pullen, who co-founded Intersex UK, was the only openly intersex contender in the UK elections in 2024.<sup>22</sup>

Queer candidates faced specific challenges as the public spotlight made them more vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and violence. Despite the historic feat in LGBTIQ representation, trans and queer candidates were murdered in **Brazil** and **Mexico**, creating a hostile environment that hampered the full realization of positive measures.<sup>23</sup> LGBTIQ candidates were on the receiving end of homophobic and transphobic hate speech on social media by political opponents and their supporters in **El Salvador**, **Finland**, **Pakistan**, and the **United States**.<sup>24</sup> In **Finland** and **South Korea**, the sexual orientation of openly gay candidates likely cost them the elections.<sup>25</sup> In **Mexico**, LGBTIQ candidates reported difficulties securing campaign funding, and lack of institutional support from their parties.<sup>26</sup> LGBTIQ people therefore face the impossible choice between exercising their civil and political rights and protecting themselves from public

scrutiny and attacks, which have been proven fatal in some countries.

## Engagement with Political Actors and Election Authorities

Throughout the election cycle, LGBTIQ groups engaged political candidates and parties, as well as election authorities, to put LGBTIQ equality on the agenda and ensure LGBTIQ people's safe and equal participation in the electoral process.



21 VotelGBT, "Intersectionality in Politics: how Brazil doubled the amount of LGBTQ elected officials in 2024," video animation, YouTube, October 31, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3Pif-2B-Yg>; Paulino email exchange.

22 Amelia Hansford, "Lib Dem election candidate is proud to be 'a mum, a woman and intersex,'" Pink News, August 7, 2024, <https://www.thepink-news.com/2024/08/07/intersex-political-candidate-uk-general-election>.

23 See, for example: Madu Toledo, "Suplente trans decapitada em MT: PSDB pede investigação de facções," Metrôpoles, November 11, 2024, <https://www.metropoles.com/brasil/suplente-trans-decapitada-em-mt-psdb-pede-investigacao-de-faccoes>.

24 See, for example: Gabriela Villarroel, "El Único que viola la Constitución es el que se quiere reelegir," Erick Ortiz, candidato a diputado por Nuestro Tiempo," La Prensa Gráfica, September 12, 2023, <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Indistintamente-de-los-resultados-hay-una-base-para-un-proyecto-alternativo-Erick-Ortiz-de-Nuestro-Tiempo-20230911-0092.html>.

25 Saaga Leppänen, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Finland's Continuing Battle for LGBTI Equality," LSE Blogs, May 17, 2024, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/inequalities/2024/05/17/finlands-battle-for-lgbti-equality/>. Data from: Teija Sutinen, "Stubbia äänestävistä 40 prosentille seksuaalinen suuntautuminen on syy olla äänestämättä Haavistoa," Helsingin Sanomat, February 5, 2024, <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000010201277.html>; "Is It Possible for LGBTQ+ Individuals to Serve in the South Korean National Assembly?" LGBT News Korea, May 1, 2024, <https://www.lgbtnewskorea.com/en/post/elections2024-4>.

26 Voto por la Igualdad MX, Informe Pre-electoral de las candidaturas LGBTTIQ+ en México 2024, May 2024, <https://mx.boell.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/informe-pre-electoral-voto-por-la-igualdad-mx-2024.pdf>.

LGBTIQ communities saw the election period as an opportunity to position their human rights and inclusion as valid political demands. To this end, LGBTIQ organizations in **Belgium** and **Ireland** came together to develop their respective community agendas, outlining key policy demands for candidates in their countries, while a survey in **Venezuela** captured LGBTIQ voters' priorities.<sup>27</sup> In **Chile**, the **Dominican Republic**, **Panama**,

27 RainbowHouse, 2024 Memorandum: Aucune minorité n'est négligeable, November 2023, [http://rainbowhouse.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/memorandum2024\\_fr.pdf](http://rainbowhouse.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/memorandum2024_fr.pdf); Sarah Creighton Keogh, "Irish LGBTQ+ organisations launch first-of-its-kind manifesto ahead of general election," GCN, November 6, 2024, <https://gcn.ie/irish-lgbtq-organisa>

**Taiwan**, the state of Victoria in **Australia**, and in the context of the **European Parliament** elections, LGBTIQ organizations urged candidates to sign a pledge for LGBTIQ people's rights, to make it easier to hold politicians accountable for their promises.<sup>28</sup> In some countries, many candidates were eager to put their support for LGBTIQ equality on the public record, while other candidates were less willing to take a public stance or were vocally opposed to LGBTIQ people's rights.

In an effort to influence like-minded voters' choices, LGBTIQ organizations raised awareness about candidates' positions on LGBTIQ and other human rights issues. In **Ghana**, where same-sex intimacy is criminalized, activists conducted grassroots campaigns to inform LGBTIQ voters on candidates' positions. In **Japan**, LGBTIQ groups created Pride Vision, an innovative application that identified candidates supporting marriage equality through an augmented reality (AR) camera that scanned election posters.<sup>29</sup> In **Australia**, **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, **Panama**, and **Taiwan**, LGBTIQ organizations published reports and set up online platforms to shed light on candidates' position on marriage equality, non-discrimination, and other LGBTIQ issues.<sup>30</sup> However,

political parties did not always positively receive these efforts. While initiatives in **Japan** and **Taiwan** managed to broadly cover the positions of various parties, in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, only two out of the 90 political parties contacted by Sarajevo Open Center actually responded to a survey about their positions, an outcome that demonstrates broad disregard for LGBTIQ people's political demands.



tions-launch-manifesto; Isabella González, "Voto diverso: población lgbti exige al nuevo gobierno políticas contra la discriminación," TalCual, July 26, 2024, <https://talcualdigital.com/voto-diverso-poblacion-lgbti-exige-al-nuevo-gobierno-politicas-contr-la-discriminacion>.

<sup>28</sup> Movilh, "Listado de candidatxs que firmaron compromiso con los derechos LGBTIQ+ y la democracia," Instagram, October 23, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/DBeH26jRVtI/?img\\_index=5](https://www.instagram.com/p/DBeH26jRVtI/?img_index=5); "Compromiso de candidatos," Movilh, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.movilh.cl/comunadiversa/compromiso>; Diversidad Dominicana (@DiversidaDom), "Candidate, ¿Quién eres tú?," X, May 19, 2024, <https://x.com/DiversidaDom/status/1791954834788106723>; "VOTO X LA IGUALDAD," Diversidad Dominicana, accessed February 13, 2025, <https://votoporlaigualdad.com.do>; Ethical Electoral Pact for the Human Rights of the LGBTIQ+ Population in Panama, [https://www.laestrella.com.pa/binrepositary/pacto-etico-electoral-lgbtiq\\_181-6604890\\_20240402085216.pdf](https://www.laestrella.com.pa/binrepositary/pacto-etico-electoral-lgbtiq_181-6604890_20240402085216.pdf), May, 2024; "Find records of candidate friendly statements," Pride Watch, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://pridewatch.tw/candidate-2024>; Victorian Pride Lobby, "Rainbow Local Government: LGBTIQ+ Priorities for the 2024 Victorian Local Council Elections," accessed February 28, 2025, <https://rainbowvotes.com.au>; "Breaking down the Come Out 4 Europe campaign," ILGA-Europe, September 23, 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/campaign/come-out-4-europe>.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Burgos, "'Pride vision' AR camera detects candidates who support marriage equality in japan elections," designboom, October 25, 2024, <https://www.designboom.com/technology/pride-vision-ar-camera-candidates-support-marriage-equality-japan-elections-tb-wa-hakuhodo-10-25-2024>.

<sup>30</sup> Victorian Pride Lobby, "Rainbow Local Government;" Sarajevo Open Center, Istraživanje stavova političkih partija o ljudskim pravima LGBTI osoba u Bosni i Hercegovini, June 2024, <https://soc.ba/istrazivanje-stavova-politickih-partija-o-ljudskim-pravima-lgbti-osoba-u-bosni-i-hercegovini>; CELGAG and ILGALAC, "Elecciones presidenciales Panamá 2024," <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PsTMjyRLpf8-q3zMVZs2krbcQ8IXVoaZ/>

In other countries, LGBTIQ groups endorsed or opposed certain political candidates and parties. In **Lithuania**, a coalition of LGBTIQ organizations endorsed 30 candidates based on their track record and public statements, emphasizing that "it is important to unite and support those politicians whose votes can change the situation."<sup>31</sup> In June 2024, the main LGBTIQ organizations and Pride organizers in **France** called on LGBTIQ people and their allies to march in the 2024 Pride March against the far-

view, Electoral Observatory for LGBTIQ+ Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean; "Find records of candidate friendly statements," Pride Watch, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://pridewatch.tw/candidate-2024>.

<sup>31</sup> Nacionalinė LGBT teisių organizacija LGL, "Iniciatyvinė grupė „LGBT+ balsas“ skelbia rekomendacijas Seimo rinkimams," September 26, 2024, <https://www.lgl.lt/naujienos/iniciatyvine-grupe-lgbt-balsas-skelbia-rekomendacijas-seimo-rinkimams>.

**Right:** Rainbow Action Korea's policy agreement ceremony with the Progressive Party ahead of the election. Credit: Rainbow Action Korea.



right, ahead of a consequential legislative election that was prematurely called by the president following a far-right party's victory in the 2024 European Parliament elections.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond their role as advocates, LGBTIQ groups directly worked to ensure electoral integrity and inclusive participation. In **Azerbaijan**, an all-queer observer group deployed in the capital exposed irregularities, despite attempts by polling staff and police to obstruct their work.<sup>33</sup> In **Romania**, where there is no established framework for legal gender recognition, LGBTIQ group ACCEPT set up a call center to respond to trans and queer voters' concerns on election day.<sup>34</sup>

## Barriers to Voting

While Outright did not find evidence of laws or policies restricting LGBTIQ people from the rights to register, vote, or stand as a candidate for elections in 2024, several barriers undermined LGBTIQ people's full exercise of civil and political rights.

### Absence of Legal Gender Recognition

The lack of legal gender recognition was an obstacle for trans and gender-diverse people in some countries, which, in some cases, led to harassment in polling stations or abstention to avoid these interactions. Among the 60 states covered in this report, only 28 have established a procedure for trans and gender-diverse persons to change their legal gender markers.<sup>35</sup> Only seven of these countries—Belgium, Brazil, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Portugal, and Uruguay—allow this change based

on self-determination of gender identity.<sup>36</sup>

In countries without any form of legal gender recognition,



voting became a difficult exercise for trans people. In **Bulgaria, Hungary, and Indonesia**, activists told Outright that some trans people avoided voting in 2024 out of fear of discrimination or due to previous negative experiences. In **Indonesia**, queer people interviewed by Outright said that polling staff initially refused to allow some trans people to vote due to the mismatch between their appearance and their legal name and gender marker.<sup>37</sup> In **Botswana**, where a handful of trans people have successfully changed their gender marker through court petitions, a trans activist told Outright that misgendering in polling stations persists, leading some trans people to abstain.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in **Namibia**, a trans voter told us she was misgendered by polling staff and harassed by other voters. Nevertheless, she proceeded to vote, saying to

32 SOS homophobie, "Le 29 juin 2024, marchons sur l'extrême-droite!," press release, June 28, 2024, <https://www.sos-homophobie.org/nos-articles/le-29-juin-2024-marchons-sur-l-extreme-droit>; SOS homophobie, "Elections législatives 2024 : Nos peurs ne sont pas des chimères," press release, June 17, 2024, <https://www.sos-homophobie.org/nos-articles/elections-legislatives-2024-nos-peurs-ne-sont-pas-des-chimeres>; Federation LGBTI+, "Battre le RN, voter contre la haine et pour nos droits LGBTI+," press release, June 27, 2024, <https://federation-lgbti.org/actualite/battre-le-rn-voter-contre-la-haine-et-pour-nos-droits-lgbti>.

33 "Courage in Action: Queer Eye on Azerbaijan's 2024 Presidential Election," Nafas LGBTI, October 1, 2024, <https://nafaslgbti.org/courage-in-action-queer-eye-on-azerbajans-2024-presidential-election>.

34 Outright email exchange with Anca Baltac, ACCEPT, July 22, 2025.

35 These countries include Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Namibia, Pakistan, Portugal, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Türkiye, United Kingdom, and Uruguay. Some states in the United States also allow this change.

36 ILGA World Database.

37 Outright interview with a 29-year-old trans woman, Palu, Indonesia, September 24, 2024; Outright interview with a 33-year-old trans man, Bali, Indonesia, September 26, 2024; Outright interview with a 52-year-old lesbian woman, South Jakarta, Indonesia, September 25, 2024.

38 Outright interview with Nelly Thobega, trans woman and co-founder of the Botswana Trans Initiative Trust (BTI), virtual, April 2025.

herself, “I want to exercise my right to vote, so let me just get it done. I can deal with all of this trauma later.”<sup>39</sup>

These problems also persisted in countries with some form of legal gender recognition, demonstrating the need for timely, efficient, and consistent processes. In **South Africa**, the long processing time to legally change one’s name and gender marker led some people to vote with identification documents reflecting their name and sex as assigned at birth.<sup>40</sup> In **Spain**, a country which offers legal gender recognition based on self-determination, a trans man who attempted to vote in the European Parliament elections reported that he was accused of committing fraud and was denied the right to vote.<sup>41</sup> In **Uruguay**, which also uses the self-determination model, problems in implementation led some trans people whose identity documents were still not updated to abstain from voting.<sup>42</sup> In **Bolivia**, activists told Outright that changes to names and gender markers may not always be updated in the electoral roll, potentially creating problems for trans voters.<sup>43</sup>

## Criminalization and Risk of Violence

The existence of laws criminalizing sexual and gender diversity and the possibility of enforcement create an environment of fear for LGBTIQ persons, hampering their ability to fully participate in political life. Among the 60 states surveyed in the report, same-sex sexual conduct is criminalized in 10 countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, Indonesia, Kiribati, Pakistan, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Tunisia. In **Senegal**, several LGBTIQ individuals chose not to vote out of fear of intimidation or harassment from other members in their communities.<sup>44</sup> In Indonesia, a lesbian woman told Outright she was discouraged by the rise of local anti-LGBTIQ resolutions

and decided not to vote.<sup>45</sup>

LGBTIQ voters may have also experienced challenges in countries that have cracked down on the freedom of expression and association of LGBTIQ people. In Tunisia, before and after the elections, as part of the broader crackdown on civil society, at least 84 queer persons were arrested for “sodomy and lesbianism” and other charges.<sup>46</sup> Police resorted to harassment and blackmail of LGBTIQ people seen to be participating in protests against the regime.<sup>47</sup> In Russia, most LGBTIQ respondents to an online poll believed it is unsafe to be queer in the country, and an activist told Outright that “it is difficult to say to what extent queer individuals who took part in the voting were able to openly express their identity.”<sup>48</sup>

## Abstention Due to Disillusionment

Some LGBTIQ people felt disillusioned with political actors and systems that continued to disregard their rights and made the decision to abstain from voting. In **Ghana**, where anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric dominated the elections, a prominent LGBTIQ activist told Outright they did not vote in 2024 despite voting in previous elections, admitting “I thought it didn’t really matter because my voice wouldn’t matter even if I voted.”<sup>49</sup> In **Bulgaria**, an activist told Outright that the declining voter turnout among the general population was especially pronounced for LGBTIQ people as anti-rights forces gained ground and parties that were previously seen as allies turned their backs on them. This “created a general feeling amongst them that nothing will change as regardless of which parties win, it seems not to be in the best interest of any political party to support LGBTIQ persons.”<sup>50</sup>

39 Outright interview with Jholerina Timbo, founder of transgender people’s rights organization, Wings to Transcend Namibia, virtual, March 2025.

40 Outright interview with Ntuthuzo Ndzomo, virtual, May 30, 2025.

41 Lydia Hernández Téllez, “Los problemas que enfrentaron las personas trans para votar en las europeas: ‘Pensó que estaba cometiendo fraude de ley,’” Infobae, June 11, 2024, <https://www.infobae.com/espana/2024/06/12/los-problemas-que-enfrentaron-las-personas-trans-para-votar-en-las-europeas-penso-que-estaba-cometiendo-fraude-de-ley/>.

42 Outright email exchange with a representative of Union Binacional Trans, January 31, 2025.

43 Outright email exchange with Colectivo TLGB Bolivia, February 6, 2025.

44 Outright interview with Oumou D. (pseudonym), virtual, March 12, 2025; Outright interview with Sokhna D. (pseudonym), virtual, March 12, 2025.

45 Outright interview with a 28-year-old lesbian, name withheld, Bandung, Indonesia, October 27, 2024.

46 Amnesty International, “Tunisie. Les autorités intensifient la répression contre les personnes LGBTI,” February 6, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.be/infos/actualites/article/tunisie-autorites-intensifient-repression-lgbti>.

47 Ibid.

48 Outright email exchange with a representative of a Russian LGBTIQ organization, name withheld, February 5, 2025.

49 Outright interview with Gloria Quayle, virtual, February 3, 2025.

50 Outright interview with Elena P. (pseudonym), a queer activist from Single Step, virtual, March 12, 2025.

## Indirect Barriers

Some election rules that may not have discriminatory intent nevertheless had a negative impact on LGBTIQ voters in some countries. In **Sri Lanka**, voters are required to vote in the district where their family is registered. Aside from being costly, the requirement of going back to places where abusive family members or neighbors reside could discourage queer voters from voting, an activist told Outright.<sup>51</sup> In **Bhutan**, activists told Outright that polling queues and booths are segregated by sex, which could be problematic for trans individuals. The certification of a psychiatrist is required to change legal gender markers, and trans people who have not yet done so had to “join the queue based on their registered sex on their national identity card.”<sup>52</sup>

## LGBTIQ People in Extra-Electoral Processes

While it is not the focus of this report, our research also covered extraelectoral democratic movements in some countries. In 2024, Bangladesh and South Korea held elections that maintained the previous regimes but shortly thereafter led to uprisings that toppled them. While LGBTIQ people took part in these democratic movements, the spirit of unity and inclusion that was alive in the uprisings did not translate to substantial gains for LGBTIQ people after the regime change.

In **Bangladesh**, the general elections in January 2024 were marked by allegations of fraud, fanning the flames of a series of mass protests across the country that became known as the July revolution. LGBTIQ people participated actively in the July revolution, which became a space for dialogue and unity for all, and culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024. However, since the appointment of an interim government, LGBTIQ people have faced an “atmosphere of fear” brought about by rising religious fundamentalism threatens the rights of women and minorities.<sup>53</sup>

In **South Korea**, eight months after the April 2024 legislative elections, then-president Yoon Suk Yeol

declared martial law, which sparked protests across the country that led to his impeachment and eventual arrest. Queer people actively mobilized against martial law and forged solidarities with other movements, resulting in a “Pledge for Equality at the Square,” which outlined rules for non-discrimination and inclusion in the protests.<sup>54</sup> However, before, during, and after the snap presidential election in June 2025, LGBTIQ people were sidelined by politicians. LGBTIQ groups publicly called out the ruling Democratic Party of Korea for excluding LGBTIQ issues in its manifesto and criticized President Lee Jae-Myung for dismissing the urgency of LGBTIQ people’s rights in a televised debate during the campaign.<sup>55</sup>

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51 Outright interview with Thiyagaraja Waradas, April 8, 2025, virtual.

52 Outright email exchange with Queer Voices of Bhutan, March 10, 2025.

53 Outright Interview with Oindrojal (pseudonym), November 20, 2024, Dhaka.

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54 권태, “Queer People in the Square and the 21st Presidential Election,” LGBT News Korea, July 8, 2025, <https://www.lgbtnewskorea.com/en/post/21stelection-2>.

55 Ibid.



# Anti-LGBTIQ Political Speech and Campaigning

In the 2024 electoral cycle, LGBTIQ issues became a political football in several countries, instrumentalized by politicians to pander to voters. In **51** countries surveyed in this report, Outright found evidence that political candidates, parties, and groups negatively used LGBTIQ issues in political speech and campaigning, in some cases amounting to hate speech and incitement to violence.<sup>56</sup>

## Scapegoating LGBTIQ People as a Diversionary Tactic

Facing genuine socioeconomic problems in their countries, politicians sought to divert attention from governance failures by rallying their bases against the threat that sexual and gender diversity supposedly presented to people's daily lives. Political leaders in **Jordan** generally "decide[d] to talk [negatively] on LGBTIQ issues" to divert the public's attention away from unpopular policies.<sup>57</sup> In **Czechia**, the Freedom and Direct Democracy Party promised to "take money [away] from LGBT activists," asserting that funding for LGBTIQ human rights gets in the way of decent

wages, housing, and economic opportunities.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in **Portugal**, the far-right party Chega claimed that young people were "denied the chance to take a financial literacy course that is decisive for their future" and were instead forced to take citizenship classes imposing

<sup>58</sup> Karolina Brodníčková, "Nejvíce přibýlo členů SPD, padá ODS," Novinky, June 27, 2023, <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-nejvic-pribylo-cle-nu-spd-pada-ods-40435925>; Filip Titlbach (@FilipTitlbach), "SPD označuje LGBTIQ lidi za úchyly, Motoristě za psychickou poruchu," X, September 8, 2024, <https://x.com/FilipTitlbach/status/183287338187747748>.

<sup>56</sup> These countries include Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czechia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Finland, France, Georgia, Ghana, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lithuania, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Namibia, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, Tunisia, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

<sup>57</sup> Outright interview with Hasan Kilani, virtual, March 17, 2025.

**Right:** Over 150 international elected parliamentarians and their delegations in Budapest Pride 2025, June 28, 2025. Credit: "For a Diverse Hungary" Hungarian Parliamentary LGBTQ Intergroup.



“gender ideology.”<sup>59</sup>

In **Namibia**, recent legal advances, including the court-ordered decriminalization of same-sex intimacy and recognition of same-sex marriages abroad, have triggered political backlash. An activist told Outright that “anxiety that hangs over the community because of politicians using LGBTIQ people as a scapegoat, because they want to secure seats and make us targets of violence.”<sup>60</sup>

Some politicians claimed that their party’s support for LGBTIQ equality cost them the elections, framing human rights as a bargaining chip that could be abandoned after losing political utility. Post-elections, several members of the Democratic Party in the **United States** blamed the party’s crushing defeat on the party’s perceived support for trans people’s rights, despite surveys showing that these issues were not a primary concern for voters.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, in **Greece**, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, whose party New Democracy finished first in the European Parliament elections even after losing one seat, said the party “certainly suffered political damage” from its support for marriage equality.<sup>62</sup>

## Targeting “Gender Ideology” and So-Called Wokism

The specter of “gender ideology” haunted several elections in 2024. The report covers cases wherein “gender ideology,” “gender madness,” “indoctrination” or “wokism” were explicitly used by politicians to demonize equal rights for LGBTIQ people, especially trans people, in **27** countries.<sup>63</sup> This included the adoption of the term

“wokism” by right-wing groups in non-English-speaking countries such as France and Italy, where there is no cultural frame of reference for the concept of “woke,” developed by Black Americans.<sup>64</sup> References to “woke,” LGBT, or gender “propaganda” were made by politicians in at least **11** countries.<sup>65</sup>

In **Uruguay**, for example, while the two leading presidential candidates did not engage in anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric, a minor presidential candidate fixated on “gender ideology,” which he described as endangering children and legitimizing pedophilia.<sup>66</sup> In **Panama**, a presidential candidate who was then-vice president repeatedly spoke out against “gender ideology” in his campaign speeches.<sup>67</sup> Political rhetoric amplified at the highest level of public office helped legitimize discourse on “gender ideology” on social media, which, Panamanian LGBTIQ group Fundación Iguales said, creates “a state of fear and distorts the debate on LGBTIQ+ rights.”<sup>68</sup>

Instead of addressing legitimate problems in education, such as underfunding, teacher shortages, or bullying, politicians manufactured threats to children in school in the form of “gender ideology.” This was a common right-wing and far-right tactic in countries where individual schools, school districts, or education ministries have institutionalized curricula or policies that affirm sexual

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Panama, Portugal, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Uruguay.

64 Georgios Samaras, “Battleground Europe: the rise of anti-woke movements and their threat to democracy,” *Frontiers in Political Science*, Vol. 7, May 8, 2025, <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/political-science/articles/10.3389/fpos.2025.1568816/full>.

65 These countries include Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova, Portugal, and Romania.

66 “Líder de Identidad Soberana celebra ‘proeza electoral’ de partido uruguayo ‘antiagendista,’” *Swiss Info*, October 29, 2024, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/%c3%a4der-de-identidad-soberana-celebra-%22proeza-electoral%22-de-partido-uruguayo-%22antiagendista%22/87861987>; Canal 3 Colonia, “GUSTAVO SALLE CRITICÓ LA IDEOLOGÍA DE GÉNERO,” Facebook, May 22, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=251388751365797>; Canal 5 Noticias, “Gustavo Salle, candidato de #IdentidadSoberana, a quien varias encuestas dan una intención de voto que lo llevaría al Senado, dijo que fiscalizará el trabajo de los políticos,” Facebook, October 21, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=990290062864811>.

67 MiDiario, “Carrizo: ‘En mi gobierno el que nace hombre es hombre y que nace mujer es mujer,’” May 2, 2024, <https://www.midiario.com/nacionales/carrizo-en-mi-gobierno-el-que-nace-hombre-es-hombre-y-que-nace-mujer-es-mujer>.

68 Fundación Iguales, “Monitoreo del discurso LGBTIQ+ en el entorno digital de Panamá. Odio y LGBTIfobia durante las elecciones generales y el mes del orgullo 2024,” September 2024, <https://www.fundacioniguales.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/draft-Monitoreo-del-discurso-LGBTIQ-en-el-entorno-digital-en-Panam%C3%A1.pdf>, 21.

59 Chegal, “Programa Eleitoral: Limpar Portugal,” 2024, <https://acrobatis.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:137d87f0-7541-44de-8be3-818c14d-1811f?viewer%2ImegaVerb=group-discover>, 63.

60 Outright interview with Jholerina Timbo, founder of transgender people’s rights organization, Wings to Transcend Namibia, virtual, March 2025.

61 Samantha Riedel, “These Democratic Lawmakers Are Already Blaming Trans People for Trump’s Win,” <https://www.them.us/story/tom-suozzi-seth-moulton-new-york-times-trans-people-blame-election-2024>, *Them*, November 8, 2024.

62 Greg Owen, “Greece’s Prime Minister faces fierce opposition over his pledge to legalize gay marriage,” *LGBTQ Nation*, January 13, 2024, <https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2024/01/greeces-prime-minister-faces-fierce-opposition-over-his-pledge-to-legalize-gay-marriage/>; Kyriakos Mitsotakis, “Συνέντευξη του Πρωθυπουργού Κυριάκου Μητσοτάκη στο κεντρικό δελτίο ειδήσεων του Alpha και στον δημοσιογράφο Αντώνη Σρόιτερ,” interview by Antonis Schroeter, *Alpha*, June 11, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.gr/2024/06/11/34449>.

63 These countries include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Moldova, North Macedonia, Pakistan,

and gender diversity. In the **United Kingdom**, for example, Reform UK, a far-right party which made an impressive electoral run in 2024, promised to ban “transgender ideology” in primary and secondary schools.<sup>69</sup> In **Australia**, the Australian Christian Lobby set up websites to demonstrate candidates’ positions on LGBTIQ-inclusive curricula, which functioned as a blacklist for candidates who support “LGBTIQ+ gender-fluid ideology” in schools.<sup>70</sup> During the campaign for the October 2024 presidential election in **Moldova**, several politicians promised to ban “LGBT propaganda” in schools, “following the example of Georgia,” a country which had passed its Law on Family Values and Protection of Minors in September 2024.<sup>71</sup>

## Gender and Sexual Diversity as a Foreign Influence

Anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric converged with xenophobic and ultranationalist narratives, taking advantage of already existing skepticism among voters toward the influence of other countries or multilateral institutions. Politicians framed LGBTIQ equality as a foreign imposition and LGBTIQ people as the “other,” justifying anti-gender policies as necessary to free their countries from a supposed yoke of foreign influence.

In some countries, politicians were selective about which foreign influence was acceptable, and opposition to LGBTIQ people’s human rights became part of a broader pivot from the “West” toward other foreign powers such as China or Russia. In Solomon Islands, then-Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, who engineered his country’s turn to China, criticized same-sex marriage and democracy, blaming them for what he perceived as moral decline in the United States while commending China’s political system as superior.<sup>72</sup> Pro-Russia political

candidates and parties in Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Moldova, and Romania rallied their bases by opposing LGBTIQ people’s rights, depicted as “Western,” and advocating for Russian-style “LGBT propaganda” laws.<sup>73</sup> Elections in these countries were often portrayed as national referendums on Russia versus the European Union, with LGBTIQ people caught in the crossfire as convenient scapegoats.

Even at a time when some governments in the “West” are cracking down on LGBTIQ people’s rights, some politicians, most notably in Africa, continued to assert that gender and sexual diversity is a Western imposition, foreign to their “traditional” customs and values. In some African countries, this narrative persisted despite extensive evidence of sexual and gender diversity prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries and European colonizers, who imposed Africa’s first laws criminalizing same-sex intimacy.<sup>74</sup> In **Ghana**, during a campaign event with Christian clergy, President Mahama described LGBTIQ identities as a Western influence, claiming that Western countries pressure African countries to engage in “indoctrination.”<sup>75</sup> An opposition candidate in **Mauritius** called LGBTQ identities a “Western deviation” in a campaign speech, while anti-gender movements in **Senegal** have been urging politicians to enact stricter laws against sexual and gender diversity, which they describe as “imported Western values.”<sup>76</sup>

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ernance,” ABC News, March 19, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-03-20/solomon-islands-prime-minister-defends-chinese-governance-style/103606172>. While he made the speech in March 2024, months before the beginning of U.S. President Donald Trump’s second term in January 2025, by that time the United States had undergone four years under Trump’s first presidency, which saw a regression in LGBTIQ people’s rights.

73 See, for example, in Moldova: Alexaner Tanas, “Moldova authorities throw out registration of pro-Russian election bloc,” Reuters, August 7, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moldova-authorities-throw-out-registration-pro-russian-election-bloc-2024-08-07/>; Ilya Taksyur, “Moldovan Opposition Leader Promises Ban on LGBT Propaganda if European Integration Rejected,” Lenta, September 23, 2024, <https://lenta.ru/news/2024/09/23/glava-oppozitsii-moldavii-poobeschal-zapret-propagandy-lgbt-pri-otkaze-ot-evrointegratsii>.

74 United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, UN Doc. A/78/227, July 25, 2023, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/227>.

75 Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “John Mahama Speaks Out Against LGBTQ+ Rights, Warns Anti-LGBTQ Bill Could Expire if Delayed Further,” X, video in Twi, November 12, 2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1856286099468882041?t=niH4PsvN6Ivw-82mkg7YVA&s=19>.

76 Eshan Juman, untitled video, Facebook, November 1, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/eshanjumanofficial/videos/1018058570331862>; Cuordifede, Céla. “Au Sénégal, Le Retour D’un Projet De Loi Pour Durcir Le Délit D’homosexualité Et « Contre Les Valeurs Immorales De L’Occident »,” Le Monde, June 26, 2024, <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/>

69 Reform UK, Our contract with you, June 2024, [https://assets.nation-builder.com/reformuk/pages/253/attachments/original/1708781032/Reform\\_UK\\_Contract\\_With\\_The\\_People.pdf?1708781032](https://assets.nation-builder.com/reformuk/pages/253/attachments/original/1708781032/Reform_UK_Contract_With_The_People.pdf?1708781032).

70 Australian Christian Lobby, “QLD Votes,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.acl.org.au/qldvotes>; Australian Christian Lobby, “TAS Votes,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.acl.org.au/tasvotes>; Australian Christian Lobby, “ACT Votes,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.acl.org.au/actvotes>; Australian Christian Lobby, “NT Votes,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.acl.org.au/ntvotes>.

71 Olga Scripnic, “De la dreptul de veto, la legi similare cu cele georgiene. Promisiunile electorale ale Victoriei Furtună,” Agora, September 27, 2024, <https://agora.md/2024/09/27/de-la-dreptul-de-veto-la-legi-similare-cu-cele-georgiene-promisiunile-electorale-ale-victoriei-furtuna>.

72 Nick Sas, Stephen Dziedzic and Chrisnrita Aumanu-Leong, “Solomon Islands prime minister critical of democracy, praises ‘Chinese-style’ gov-



Once LGBTIQ identities have been constructed as “foreign,” then LGBTIQ activists and their allies are portrayed as serving the interests of a foreign power. For example, President Kaïs Saïed of **Tunisia** described groups advocating for democracy and the rights of migrants and LGBTIQ people as “traitors” and “[foreign] agents.”<sup>77</sup> In **Azerbaijan**, state and allied media falsely accused a queer election observation group of being part of “networks connected to the West in Azerbaijan” that are “planning to sabotage the election day.”<sup>78</sup> In **Uruguay**, a country that has made progressive advances in LGBTIQ equality, a conservative senator publicly accused the three major parties of promoting a foreign agenda.<sup>79</sup> The campaign of Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz party in **Hungary** for the European Parliament elections best demonstrates this tactic of demonizing LGBTIQ activism. In a campaign manifesto with the headline “no migration, no gender, no war,” the Fidesz-KDNP coalition warned that the “Brussels elite and the Soros network, fattened up with EU money, are waging an ideological war: reeducating our children with gender propaganda” that will “ruin the future of our children.”<sup>80</sup> In **Hungary** and other countries like **Georgia**, **Slovakia**, and **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, this narrative has been given institutional legitimacy and legal weight through the introduction of “foreign agent” laws, which disproportionately impact LGBTIQ activists and groups.<sup>81</sup>

In other contexts, it was clear that anti-gender tactics were imported from the U.S., as politicians attempted to

replicate culture wars waged against trans and queer people as part of a backlash against gains in equality. In **Mexico**, an activist told Outright that this did not work:

There were efforts to push this U.S.-style culture war, very Republican: the trans panic, pronouns as a terrifying concept. But fortunately, no media outlets picked it up. What we’ve seen is that this very gringo narrative wasn’t embraced by society or the media.<sup>82</sup>

The transnational nature of anti-rights movements reveals itself in elections. For example, billionaire Elon Musk, the largest individual donor to Donald Trump’s election campaign in the United States in 2024, has backed European far-right groups that are among the most vocal opponents of LGBTIQ people’s rights, such as Germany’s Alternative for Germany (AfD), Spain’s VOX, France’s Rassemblement National, and Romanian pro-Russia populist Călin Georgescu.<sup>83</sup> In the **European Union**, the June 2024 elections for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) became an opportunity for anti-rights political parties to forge solidarities based on their opposition to the rights of LGBTIQ communities, migrants, and racialized groups. Two far-right political groups, Patriots of Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) Group were formed, counting 109 MEPs from various political parties who campaigned on racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-LGBTIQ campaigns.<sup>84</sup> Anti-LGBTIQ MEPs also joined the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, whose political orientation ranges from right-wing to far-right.<sup>85</sup> Patriots for Europe

article/2024/06/26/au-senegal-le-retour-d-un-projet-de-loi-pour-durcir-le-delit-d-homosexualite-et-contre-les-valeurs-immorales-de-l-occident\_6243998\_3212.html.

77 Intersection, Rima Sghaier, Digital Action, and I Watch, “Tunisia’s October 2024 elections: Context and key facts,” Digital Action, October 30, 2024, <https://digitalaction.co/tunisia-country-briefing>.

78 “Seçki günü bu qruplar təxribat törəedəcək – Şok məlumat,” Axar, February 7, 2024, <https://axar.az/news/gundem/829900.html>.

79 “¡iDegenerados!': Domenech contra la comunidad LGBT y educadores sexuales,” Caras y Caretas, June 27, 2024, <https://www.carasycaretas.com.uy/politica/degenerados-domenech-contra-la-comunidad-lgbt-y-educadores-sexuales-n74982>.

80 “Elérhetővé tette Választási Manifesztumát a Fidesz,” Fidesz, April 20, 2024, <https://fidesz.hu/hirek/elerhetove-tette-valasztasi-manifesztumat-a-fidesz>. George Soros is a billionaire philanthropist whose Open Society Foundations is the largest private human rights funder in the world. See also: Adam Geller, “Soros, the far right’s boogeyman, is again a target,” AP News, October 27, 2018, <https://apnews.com/general-news-8efaa4870f184b448847f0300959750a>.

81 International Service for Human Rights, “Spread of ‘foreign agent’ laws in Central, Eastern Europe a growing threat to civil society,” February 26, 2025, <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/spread-of-foreign-agent-laws-in-eastern-europe-pose-increasing-threats-to-civil-society>; ILGA-Europe, “The fight against Georgia’s foreign agent law and anti-LGBTI legislation,” July 12, 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/blog/the-fight-against-georgias-foreign-agent-law-and-anti-lgbti-legislation>.

82 Outright interview with Danielle Cruz conducted virtually on January 6, 2025.

83 Enrique Anarte Lazo, “LGBTQ+ Germans fear Elon Musk-backed AfD could reverse rights,” Context, January 8, 2025, <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/lgbtq-germans-fear-elon-musk-backed-afd-could-reverse-rights>; Morgane Tual, “Grok, l’IA d’Elon Musk, encourage à voter Marine Le Pen et salue « l’efficacité » d’Adolf Hitler,” Le Monde, July 9, 2025, [https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2025/07/09/grok-l-ia-d-elon-musk-encourage-a-voter-marine-le-pen-et-salue-l-efficacite-d-adolf-hitler\\_6620180\\_4408996.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2025/07/09/grok-l-ia-d-elon-musk-encourage-a-voter-marine-le-pen-et-salue-l-efficacite-d-adolf-hitler_6620180_4408996.html); Fernando Heller, “Musk predicts Vox win in next Spanish election,” EURACTIV.es, February 24, 2025, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/musk-predicts-vox-win-in-next-spanish-election>.

84 Fédération LGBTI+, “Au Parlement européen, Jordan Bardella et ses alliés soutiennent l’homophobie,” Mediabask, June 7, 2024, [https://www.mediabask.eu/fr/info\\_mbsk/20240607/au-parlement-europeen-jordan-bardella-et-ses-allies-soutiennent-l-homophobie](https://www.mediabask.eu/fr/info_mbsk/20240607/au-parlement-europeen-jordan-bardella-et-ses-allies-soutiennent-l-homophobie); Alternative für Deutschland, Europawahl Programm 2024, August 2023, [https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-11-16\\_-\\_AfD-Europawahlprogramm-2024\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-11-16_-_AfD-Europawahlprogramm-2024_-_web.pdf); Svetoslav Todorov, “Bulgaria’s Parliament Unexpectedly Outlaws ‘LGBT Propaganda’ in Schools,” Balkan Insight, August 7, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/08/07/bulgarias-parliament-unexpectedly-outlaws-lgbt-propaganda-in-schools>.

85 Valentine Hullin, “Où est la maman?” après la naissance des

and ECR are now the third and fourth biggest political groups in the European Parliament, and, along with the smaller ESN, they give an institutional voice and legitimacy to anti-gender movements across the EU.

## Pledging Prejudice: Anti-Gender Campaign Promises

Politicians did not just engage in transphobic rhetoric as a political tactic. Anti-trans and anti-gender narratives were concretized in the form of key policy proposals in electoral manifestos and political platforms, demonstrating a worrying regression in political support for trans people's rights.

In the **United States**, President Donald Trump outlined a "Plan to Protect Children from Left-Wing Gender Insanity" and spent approximately US\$17 million on advertisements critical of his opponent Kamala Harris' position on access to gender-affirming health care.<sup>86</sup> Other members of the Republican Party also fueled and weaponized anti-trans moral panics, pouring resources and unprecedented attention into efforts to scapegoat this minority.<sup>87</sup> Altogether, Republican campaigns spent over US\$200 million attacking trans people in televised campaign ads during the 2024 election cycle.<sup>88</sup>

In **Canada**, trans youth were on the agenda in two

provincial elections, with politicians debating policies that affirm students' gender identities in schools. In Saskatchewan, the leader of the ruling Sask party, in a last-minute attempt to garner support 11 days before the election, declared that his "first order of business" would be to ban trans students from using single-sex school facilities that affirm their gender identity.<sup>89</sup> He later backtracked after winning the election, claiming he "misspoke."<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, in New Brunswick, the Liberal Party overtook the ruling party, even after conservative groups organized a massive campaign against the Liberals' promise to end a policy requiring parental consent for teachers to use students' lived names and pronouns.<sup>91</sup>

Comprehensive sexuality education was under attack in other countries, with politicians promising to crack down on curricula positively depicting LGBTIQ people. In **North Macedonia**, the far-right VMRO-DPMNE party, which won a majority in parliament in 2024 after being in the opposition from 2016 to 2024, accused LGBTIQ activists of "indoctrination" and imposing "gender ideology" through comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>92</sup> The party also accused opponents of receiving funding from the "Soros Foundation" to teach youth about "gender ideology" in schools.<sup>93</sup> Even when LGBTIQ issues have not been integrated into school curricula, politicians did not hesitate to use this tactic. In **Ghana**, Sam George, a member of the then-opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), architect of Ghana's notorious anti-LGBTIQ bill, stated in a rally that a vote for the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) "is a vote for homosexuality, is a vote for comprehensive sexuality education."<sup>94</sup> A member of

89 Alexander Quon, "Sask. Party's '1st order of business' to be gendered change room policy in schools: Scott Moe," CBC News, October 17, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/sask-change-room-policy-1.7355068>.

90 David Prisciak, "Change-room ban policy no longer top priority for Sask. gov't, premier says," CTV News, November 7, 2024, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/regina/article/change-room-ban-policy-no-longer-top-priority-for-sask-govt-premier-says/>.

91 Hina Alam, "New Brunswick election: Liberals promise safeguards for LGBTQ+ students," Global News October 3, 2024, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10792921/nb-election-2024-lgbtq-students/>; Andrew Waugh and John Chilibeck, "N.B. premier prepared to call election over LGBTQ schools policy," National Post, June 8, 2023, <https://nationalpost.com/news/n-b-premier-prepared-to-call-election-over-lgbtq-schools-policy>.

92 "Николоски: За ВМРО-ДПМНЕ мажите се мажи, жените се жени," Kajgana, April 11, 2024, <https://kajgana.com/nikoloski-za-vmro-dpmne-mazhite-se-mazhi-zhenite-se-zheni>.

93 Ibid.

94 Rightify Ghana, "'Vote for Mahama to Sign Anti-LGBTQ Bill': Sam George's Homophobic Rallying Cry at NDC Final Campaign Rally in

jumeaux de Jacquemus, Marion Maréchal accusée d'homophobie," Huffington Post, April 24, 2024, [https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/politique/article/ou-est-la-maman-apres-la-naissance-des-jumeaux-de-jacquemus-marion-marechal-accusee-d-homophobie\\_233056.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/politique/article/ou-est-la-maman-apres-la-naissance-des-jumeaux-de-jacquemus-marion-marechal-accusee-d-homophobie_233056.html); "Festival de Cannes : six associations portent plainte contre Marion Maréchal pour injure transphobe envers Karla Sofia Gascon," Le Monde, May 27, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2024/05/27/festival-de-cannes-six-associations-portent-plainte-contre-marion-marechal-pour-injure-transphobe-envers-karla-sofia-gascon\\_6235907\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2024/05/27/festival-de-cannes-six-associations-portent-plainte-contre-marion-marechal-pour-injure-transphobe-envers-karla-sofia-gascon_6235907_3224.html); "Elections européennes 2024 : Un jeune homme effaré par les propos de Marion Maréchal, sa réaction fait le buzz," 20 Minutes, May 29, 2024, <https://www.20minutes.fr/arts-stars/insolite/4093526-20240529-elections-europeennes-2024-jeune-homme-effare-propos-marion-marechal-reaction-fait-buzz>.

86 Trump-Vance campaign site, "President Trump's Plan to Protect Children from Left-Wing Gender Insanity," February 1, 2023, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/agenda47/president-trumps-plan-to-protect-children-from-left-wing-gender-insanity>; Susan Davis, "GOP ads on transgender rights are dominating airwaves in the election's closing days," <https://www.npr.org/2024/10/19/g-si-28932/donald-trump-transgender-ads-kamala-harris>, NPR, October 19, 2024.

87 Abby Monteil, "Ted Cruz's Democratic Opponent Responds to Anti-Trans Ad With Confusing Centrist Statement," Them, October 15, 2024, <https://www.them.us/story/colin-allred-ted-cruz-texas-senate-anti-trans-ads>.

88 Zane McNeill, "Republicans Spent Nearly \$215M on TV Ads Attacking Trans Rights This Election," Truthout, November 5, 2024, <https://truthout.org/articles/republicans-spent-nearly-215m-on-tv-ads-attacking-trans-rights-this-election/>.

the NPP, however, accused the NDC of accepting funding to introduce comprehensive sexuality education in order to “teach how the same sexual activities can be done in schools.”<sup>95</sup>

## Race to the Bottom

Politicians in some countries tried to outdo each other in queerphobia, accusing one another of supporting LGBTIQ people’s rights. This has turned equality into a radioactive issue, making it more difficult for politicians to come out in support of LGBTIQ equality or even stay silent about it, at the risk of being seen as too lenient on sexual and gender diversity. This was the case in **Ghana**, where the election became “a competition of who was the most homophobic,” as Rightify Ghana’s director Ebenezer Peegah described it. The opposing parties accused each other of being pro-LGBTIQ, campaigned on moral values, and called on voters to vote for the party that would gut comprehensive sexuality education and pass the draconian anti-LGBTIQ bill into law.<sup>96</sup> In **Mauritius**, the then-incumbent government accused the opposition party Alliance du Changement of being pro-LGBTIQ, after media reported on a group carrying a rainbow flag that attended an Alliance du Changement campaign rally. As noted above, this prompted an opposition candidate to set the record straight and call LGBTIQ people’s rights a “Western deviation.”<sup>97</sup>

Madina,” Facebook, December 6, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=7486552561469881>.

95 Juliana Odame Asare, “NAPO: Mahama govt introduced CSE into School curriculum,” CNR Citi Newsroom, October 16, 2024, [https://citinewsroom.com/2024/10/napo-mahama-govt-introduced-cse-in-to-school-curriculum/#google\\_vignette](https://citinewsroom.com/2024/10/napo-mahama-govt-introduced-cse-in-to-school-curriculum/#google_vignette).

96 See, for example: “‘I Will Tag President Akufo-Addo as Gay if He Refuses to Sign Anti-Gay Bill’ – Kyiri Abosom,” Ghana Web, March 5, 2024, <https://mobile.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/I-will-tag-President-Akufo-Addo-as-gay-if-he-refuses-to-sign-anti-gay-bill-Kyiri-Abosom-1920072>; “Ablakwa dares NAPO to prove LGBTQ curriculum claims,” My Joy, October 7, 2024, <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ablakwa-dares-napo-to-prove-lgbtq-curriculum-claims>; National Democratic Congress (@OfficialNDCGh), “The choice you make on December 7 will have serious consequences for your children’s future. Say no to ‘trumu trumu,’” X, video, November 25, 2024, <https://x.com/OfficialNDCGh/status/1860959708124713411?t=4QoKsHieEarLXVmetTiGQ&s=19>. The voiceover also states that “the NPP will allow gayism and the NDC will prevent it.” The video is also available in languages Twi [<https://x.com/OfficialNDCGh/status/1861052458979496422?t=AG9Ybrt5afe2bceFUB-xUg&s=19>] and Hausa [<https://x.com/OfficialNDCGh/status/1861318779432563049?t=WaLlLY-Wka09vWj0SMOFJg&s=19>].

97 “Meeting de l’Alliance du Changement à Phoenix : des membres de la communauté LGBT apportent leur soutien à Joanna Bérenger,” Defimedia, October 27, 2024, <https://defimedia.info/meeting-de-lalliance-du-changement-phoenix-des-membres-de-la-communaute-lgbt-apportent-leur-soutien-joanna-berenger>; Eshan Juman, untitled video, Facebook, November 1, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/eshanjumanofficial/videos/1018058570331862>.

In **Romania**, presidential candidate Elena Lasconi of the liberal Save Romania Union (USR) was perceived as the most supportive of same-sex civil partnerships, prompting attacks by political opponents, which grew into a broader anti-LGBTIQ campaign.<sup>98</sup> In **Moldova**, ahead of an election seen as a “tug of war” between Russia and the EU, pro-Russia political groups engaged in disinformation, creating deepfake videos showing pro-EU incumbent Maia Sandu of the Party of Action and Solidarity expressing support for LGBTIQ people.<sup>99</sup> They falsely claimed that she supported an LGBTIQ event in Chisinau, which was cancelled following two bomb alerts.<sup>100</sup> An LGBTIQ activist told Outright that Sandu’s party “does not want to be perceived as the gay party” and was actively distancing itself from this LGBTIQ-inclusive image to minimize the anticipated political damage.<sup>101</sup>

Political mudslinging also manifested in malicious insinuations and rumors about the sexuality of politicians. In **Slovakia**, presidential candidate Peter Pellegrini’s opponents publicly insinuated that he was gay.<sup>102</sup> His main opponent, Ivan Korčok, was not safe either, as members of Pellegrini’s party, Hlas, criticized Korčok for meeting with a “pro-LGBT priest” before the election.<sup>103</sup> In **Moldova**, opponents also falsely claimed that Maia Sandu was a lesbian, an allegation she publicly denied.<sup>104</sup>

## Political Incitement to Violence

In the most extreme cases, anti-LGBTIQ political rhetoric translated to severe reprisals and violent threats. In **Tunisia**, the police crackdown against LGBTIQ individuals followed the coordinated online hate campaign against

98 Outright email exchange with Anca Baltac, ACCEPT, July 21, 2025.

99 Ani Sandu, “Russia Stirs Up Anti-LGBTQ Prejudice In Moldova ‘Information War,’” Barron’s, October 31, 2024, <https://www.barrons.com/news/russia-stirs-up-anti-lgbtq-prejudice-in-moldova-information-war-b0e834a3>.

100 Ibid.

101 Outright interview with Nicholas Turcan, virtual, March 11, 2025.

102 “Prezident Danko? Přiznej orientaci, vyzývá Pellegriniho a nabourává koalici,” iDNES, January 5, 2024, [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/slovensko-prezidentske-volby-kandidatura-andrej-dansko-vlada-fi-co-pellegrini.A240105\\_100119\\_zahranicni\\_kha](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/slovensko-prezidentske-volby-kandidatura-andrej-dansko-vlada-fi-co-pellegrini.A240105_100119_zahranicni_kha).

103 Ivan Brožík, “Korčok sa riadne vyfarbil – navštívil ‘proLGBT’ farárku,” Hlavný Denník, April 2, 2024, <https://www.hlavnydennik.sk/2024/04/02/korcok-sa-riadne-vyfarbil-navstivil-pro-lgbt-fararku>.

104 “Maia Sandu: After trolls were exposed, PDM switched to primitive methods,” IPN, February 15, 2019, [https://www.ipn.md/en/maia-sandu-after-trolls-were-exposed-pdm-switched-to-primitive-methods-7965\\_1047050.html](https://www.ipn.md/en/maia-sandu-after-trolls-were-exposed-pdm-switched-to-primitive-methods-7965_1047050.html).

LGBTIQ people by hundreds of social media accounts, including prominent supporters of President Kaïs Saïed.<sup>105</sup> During and after the elections, from September 2024 to January 2025, Tunisian state authorities arbitrarily arrested at least 84 persons for “sodomy and lesbianism” and other related charges and harassed LGBTIQ activists and groups for their work on sexual and gender diversity.<sup>106</sup> In **Romania**, politically sanctioned hate has enabled social media posts calling for violence against LGBTIQ people and the destruction of the offices of LGBTIQ groups, pushing two LGBTIQ groups to file complaints against two political parties in an effort to seek accountability.<sup>107</sup>

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105 Amnesty International, “Tunisie.”

106 Ibid.

107 Outright email exchange with Anca Baltac, ACCEPT, July 21, 2025; ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2025>, 117, 120; Andreea Tudor, “Asociația MozaiQ reclamă indemnuri la distrugerea sediului din București, difuzate online. Proiect de lege anti-LGBTQ depus de un parlamentar din Ilfov,” Buletin de București, November 26, 2024, <https://buletin.de/bucuresti/asociatia-mozaiq-reclama-indemnuri-la-distrugerea-sediului-din-bucuresti-difuzate-online-proiect-de-lege-anti-lgbtq-depus-de-un-parlamentar-din-ilfov>.

# Accountability and Inclusion

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Election authorities and other duty-bearers have an obligation to ensure that electoral processes are fully inclusive and non-discriminatory, enabling everyone to fully participate. Due to the lack of protective policies and the risk of discrimination, harassment, and violence, LGBTIQ people also face specific barriers in exercising their political rights, which could be addressed through targeted positive measures. Our research found examples, described below, in which authorities took positive steps toward LGBTIQ inclusion and ensured accountability for anti-LGBTIQ political rhetoric.

## Regulating Political Hate Speech

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the LGBTIQ group Sarajevo Open Centre recorded four instances of election-related anti-LGBTIQ hate speech.<sup>108</sup> On September 27, 2024, a few days before the October 2024 municipal elections, the president of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, and Ljubo Ninković, a candidate from Dodik's party, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNS), were fined 12,000 Bosnia-Herzegovina convertible marks (BAM) [US\$7,000] by the Central Election Commission for using homophobic language at one of their political rallies.<sup>109</sup> The country's election law explicitly prohibits hate speech and political advertisement that humiliates, intimidates, or incites hatred, violence, or discrimination based on sexual orientation.<sup>110</sup>

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108 ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2025>, 43.

109 The Republika Srpska is one of the two entities comprising the country, the other being the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. See more: "Dodik kažnjen zbog vrijeđanja LGBT populacije na predizbornom skupu," Life, September 27, 2024, [https://life.ba/dodik-kaznjen-zbog-vrijedjanja-lgbt-populacije-na-predizbornom-skupu/#google\\_vignette](https://life.ba/dodik-kaznjen-zbog-vrijedjanja-lgbt-populacije-na-predizbornom-skupu/#google_vignette).

110 This is based on the unofficial translation of the technically consolidated text of the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, published by the Central Electoral Commission: [https://www.izbori.ba/Documents/documents/ZAKONI/BiH\\_Election\\_Law\\_last\\_consolidated\\_version.pdf?v=4](https://www.izbori.ba/Documents/documents/ZAKONI/BiH_Election_Law_last_consolidated_version.pdf?v=4).

## Engaging Candidates on LGBTIQ Issues

**Bolivia** is one of the only two countries to hold nationwide, direct elections for top judicial positions. While candidates are prohibited from campaigning, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal organized public events enabling the public to know their positions on relevant issues leading up to the vote on December 15, 2024. To consult a wide range of stakeholders, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal reached out to Colectivo TLGB Bolivia, a Bolivian LGBT organization, to request questions that could be addressed to candidates during these public hearings.<sup>111</sup> While the questions were eventually chosen at random and it is uncertain if the LGBTIQ-focused questions were asked at all, this was nevertheless an important step, showing the willingness of election authorities to involve LGBTIQ groups in their work.<sup>112</sup>

## Protecting Trans and Gender-Diverse Voters

Building on the historic Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018, a court in **Pakistan** ordered positive measures in February 2024 to protect and promote trans people's rights to vote and hold public office. In response to a petition by Sobia Khan, a local trans candidate, the Peshawar High Court (PHC) directed provincial authorities to establish a separate queue for voters with the "X" legal gender marker in PK-81, a constituency in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.<sup>113</sup> Recognizing the vulnerability of trans candidates to gender-based violence, the court also ordered special security

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111 Outright email exchange with Colectivo TLGB Bolivia, July 16, 2025.

112 Outright email exchange with Colectivo TLGB Bolivia, March 31, 2025.

113 "PHC orders separate queues at PK-81 polling stations for transgender," Dawn, February 2, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1810455/phc-orders-separate-queues-at-pk-81-polling-stations-for-transgenders>.



protection for Khan throughout the election period.<sup>114</sup> While the decision was a significant step toward trans inclusion, it did not address Khan's plea for reserved seats and was only applicable to her constituency. In addition, authorities did not implement the ruling, and some trans people were unable to vote.<sup>115</sup> The court later ruled that, since the 2018 trans law does not mandate these measures, legislative changes are necessary to require executive action.<sup>116</sup>

In **Sri Lanka**, following the Community Welfare and Development Fund's engagement with the Election Commission of Sri Lanka on trans inclusion, gender-neutral polling queues were created, and the Election Commission trained polling booth staff on facilitating voting for trans citizens.<sup>117</sup>

In **Romania**, despite public backlash, the Central Electoral Bureau released and implemented guidelines for polling staff "on how to interact with transgender people when they go to the polling station."<sup>118</sup> While it is possible to legally change gender markers in the country, there is no established framework that clearly sets out the requirements, leading to conflicting interpretations among courts, with some requiring surgeries and other medical interventions.<sup>119</sup> Developed by LGBTIQ group ACCEPT, the circular issued by the Central Electoral Bureau marks a historic first for trans inclusion in electoral processes in the country.<sup>120</sup> First used in the local elections on June 9, 2024, the guidelines are a practical remedy in the absence of full legal gender recognition:

In many cases, regarding transgender people, the data found in the identity documents do not

correspond or do not fully correspond with the person's appearance. Thus, there may be situations in which the first name and gender statements differ from the way the person presents themselves to the world, as a man or a woman. There may also be differences regarding the photo in the identity card... We ask you to tactfully handle the issues concerning the person in question, in order to protect their right to privacy, to avoid uncomfortable situations or other behaviors that could incite hatred and/or the commission of crimes motivated by it, such as harassment, physical and/or verbal aggression.<sup>121</sup>

In some contexts, while trans inclusion may not necessarily have been the intention, data privacy protocols minimized the possibility of negative voting experiences for trans people. In **Indonesia**, a trans woman from Jakarta who voted in the 2024 national elections told Outright that she appreciated that her polling station called voters by number, not names, which meant she did not have to be called by her legal name in public.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup> ALK, "BEC a transmis."

<sup>122</sup> Outright interview with a 29-year-old trans woman, Jakarta, Indone-



<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> UNDP Pakistan, Journey-Mapping of Transgender Political Candidates, June 2024, <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/journey-mapping-transgender-political-candidates>, 11.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Outright interview with Thiyagaraja Waradas, virtual, April 8, 2025.

<sup>118</sup> ALK, "BEC a transmis un îndrumar pentru persoanele transgender care vor vota," Jurnalul de Satu Mare, May 28, 2024, <https://www.jurnaluldesatutare.ro/bec-a-transmis-un-indrumar-pentru-persoanele-transgender-care-vor-vota>.

<sup>119</sup> ILGA-Europe, "LGBTI rights groups welcome judgement finding Romania in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights because of a lack of proper legal framework for legal gender recognition," January 17, 2021, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/lgbti-welcome-judgement-finding-romania-violation-european-convention-human-rights-lack-legal-framework-legal-gender-recognition>.

<sup>120</sup> Outright email exchange with Anca Baltac, ACCEPT, July 15, 2025.

# Queer People as Defenders of Democracy

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In the face of organized attacks on democracy, LGBTIQ people in several countries showed up to assert their place in the body politic, counter anti-rights movements, and stand in solidarity with other marginalized groups even when it came at a price.

In **Bangladesh**, queer people took an active part in the July Revolution that ousted Sheikh Hasina, the long-serving prime minister who was reelected in early 2024 in an election marked by claims of fraud and who was accused of corruption and authoritarianism. The “July Revolution” refers to a student-led mass uprising that began in June 2024 over civil-service quota reforms and expanded after lethal crackdowns on protesters. Trans people had seen some uneven advances in their legal rights under Sheikh Hasina’s government, but as one trans organization put it in a statement:

We have long lived and worked by the slogan “None of us are free till all of us are free,” and today, it is truer than it has ever been for us before. No longer can anyone, in good faith, put up with or apologize for the state-sanctioned violence that has only amounted to mass murders, mass arrests, false charges, and forced disappearances, and still pretend to stand for the good of the people...And to our fellow transgender and gender diverse community members, students, protestors, and friends, we will meet on the protest grounds. Falgun (Spring) is arrived.<sup>123</sup>

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sia, October 31, 2024.

123 TransEnd (@transend.bd), untitled post, Instagram, August 2, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/C-LLQP0yO0H/?img\\_index=2&igsh=eW10dHfKdmQyZzFq](https://www.instagram.com/p/C-LLQP0yO0H/?img_index=2&igsh=eW10dHfKdmQyZzFq).

LGBTIQ activists in **Türkiye** are not unaccustomed to repression, as Pride marches have been unlawfully banned and violently dispersed over the past decade.<sup>124</sup> However, they continued to be a vital part of anti-authoritarian and pro-democracy protests even as they could stand to lose more with more visibility. LGBTIQ groups have come out against the government’s xenophobic targeting of Syrian refugees, demonstrating solidarity with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s other scapegoats.<sup>125</sup>

In **Georgia**, LGBTIQ activists, particularly lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, were at the frontlines of demonstrations opposing the regime’s anti-democratic actions. LGBTIQ activists provided first aid kits, food, and drinks to demonstrators injured by police and led groups offering psychosocial support and resting and healing spaces to queer democracy activists.<sup>126</sup> They showed up even when “the domestic response to the passage of legislation restricting LGBT+ rights has not been as vocal” as opposition and social justice movements did not unite to oppose anti-queer laws as they did against the “foreign agent” law.<sup>127</sup>

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124 Outright International, Show Up With No Shame: Pride Around the World in 2024, June 2025, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Pride\\_2025\\_Report\\_0.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Pride_2025_Report_0.pdf), 19–20.

125 Kaos GL, “Borders do not stop life, LGBTI+ hostility cannot overshadow the right to live,” June 20, 2025, <https://kaosgl.org/en/single-news/kaos-gl-issues-world-refugee-day-statement-borders-do-not-stop-life-lgbti-hostility-cannot-overshadow-the-right-to-live>.

126 Outright interview with Tamar V. (pseudonym), virtual, January 2025.

127 Claire Mills, “The impact of Georgia’s ‘foreign influence’ law,” House of Commons Library, briefing paper, October 16, 2024, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10047/CBP-10047.pdf>.

In fragile or backsliding democracies, LGBTIQ communities become the low-hanging fruit of authoritarian resurgence—a convenient scapegoat to construct as an enemy, and against which to rally their bases. Despite, or precisely because of, the political instrumentalization of queerphobia, LGBTIQ people showed up to defend democracy, even when it increased their exposure to violence. LGBTIQ communities understand that attacks rarely stop with the most marginalized and often expand into broader repression; holding the line is critical in fragile contexts. The rise of authoritarian politics across regions in 2024 calls for a coordinated and sustained response. Those who believe in freedom should demonstrate renewed solidarity to defend democracy—without discrimination—and enable LGBTIQ communities and other marginalized groups to lead through and beyond the ballot box.



**Right:** Collette Spinnetti, trans activist newly elected deputy in Uruguay, in a campaign rally for Frente Amplio. Credit: Union Binacional Trans.



# III.

# Case Studies & Snapshots



# CASE STUDY BANGLADESH:

## “A Moment of Unity That We Haven’t Seen Since”

Election: General (January 7, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>1</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

### Background

Bangladesh held general elections on January 7, 2024. The preelection period was marked by police efforts to violently quell demonstrations by opposition political party supporters, with over 10,000 opposition activists being arrested in the months before elections, and 14 civilians being killed and over 5,000 injured.<sup>2</sup> Opposition parties, such as the Bangladesh National Party, the Bangladesh Communist Party, and the right-wing Islami Andolan Bangladesh, boycotted the election, expecting that it would not be free and fair.<sup>3</sup>

Sheikh Hasina of the ruling Awami League was announced the winner, marking her fourth consecutive

and fifth-ever term as prime minister amid widespread allegations of election fraud. Voter turnout, initially reported at 28 percent, was revised upward to 40 percent within an hour by the Electoral Commission, raising suspicion of fraudulent numbers, and journalists reported observing the stuffing of ballot boxes.<sup>4</sup> The U.K. and U.S. governments, as well as election observers like Transparency International Bangladesh, did not recognize the elections as free and fair.<sup>5</sup>

Widespread public disaffection with the ruling Awami League only grew post-elections, boiling over into a mass student protest in June 2024 after a High Court judgment in early June reestablished reservation quotas for children and grandchildren of the freedom fighters from Bangladesh’s Liberation War. By July, the protests grew into a full-blown, student-led anti-incumbency movement against the authoritarianism and corruption of the Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina.<sup>6</sup>

1 Kanishka Singh, “US says Bangladesh elections were not free and fair,” Reuters, January 9, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-says-bangladesh-elections-were-not-free-fair-2024-01-08/>; Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), “Bangladesh January 2024 election: FCDO statement,” January 8, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fcdo-statement-on-bangladesh-election-january-2024>; Transparency International Bangladesh, 12th National Parliament Election Process Tracking: Executive Summary, May 29, 2024, <https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2024/report/ept/Executive-Summary-Election-Process-Tracking-English.pdf?v=1.4>, 23.

2 Human Rights Watch, “Bangladesh: Violent Autocratic Crackdown Ahead of Elections,” November 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/bangladesh-violent-autocratic-crackdown-ahead-elections>.

3 Mubashar Hasan, “BNP Boycotts Elections in Bangladesh Again,” The Diplomat, April 29, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/bnp-boycotts-elections-in-bangladesh-again>.

4 Faisal Mahmud, “Sheikh Hasina wins fifth term in Bangladesh amid turnout controversy,” Al Jazeera, January 8, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/8/sheikh-hasina-wins-fifth-term-in-bangladesh-amid-turnout-controversy>; Antonio Spinelli, “Overcoming Bangladesh’s electoral integrity deficit: time for political compromise and dialogue,” International IDEA, February 5, 2024, <https://www.idea.int/news/overcoming-bangladeshs-electoral-integrity-deficit-time-political-compromise-and-dialogue>.

5 Singh, “US says Bangladesh elections were not free and fair”; Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), “Bangladesh January 2024 election: FCDO statement”; Transparency International Bangladesh, 12th National Parliament Election Process Tracking: Executive Summary, 23.

6 “What’s behind Bangladesh’s violent quota protests?,” Al Jazeera, July 16, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/16/whats-behind-bangladeshs-violent-quota-protests>; Faisal Mahmud, “Bangladesh’s ‘missing billionaires’: A wealth boom and stark inequality,” Al Jazeera, June 11, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2024/6/11/bangladeshs-missing-billionaires-a-wealth-boom-and-stark-inequality>; Alena Koroleva, “Bangladesh Opens Corruption Trial for Sheikh Hasina,” Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, August 11, 2025, <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/bangladesh-opens-corruption-trial-for-sheikh-hasina>; Rejaul Karim Byron and Asifur Rahman, “\$234 billion siphoned off during AL rule,” The Daily Star, December 2, 2024, <https://www.thedai->

On July 16, the police and armed Awami League supporters violently attacked students, further fueling dissent.<sup>7</sup>

Popularly termed the “July Revolution,” the protests spread to all parts of Bangladesh. Students from state-affiliated and private schools and universities, lawyers, and civil society activists all took part in the most significant mass movement since independence from Pakistan in 1971.<sup>8</sup>

On August 5, Sheikh Hasina resigned, and as vast crowds converged on the governmental residence under fire from police, she absconded to India, where she remains.<sup>9</sup> A preliminary UN investigation revealed that security and intelligence forces killed over 1,400 people, mostly students, including minors, as well as journalists. The UN report also identified instances of enforced disappearances, torture, obstruction of medical intervention, and arbitrary detention.<sup>10</sup> An investigation by Al Jazeera has since confirmed that the former prime minister and her close political and ministerial collaborators were complicit in orders to use “lethal force” and “any means necessary” to stop student protestors.<sup>11</sup>

After Sheikh Hasina’s resignation, the army chief announced plans to form an interim government.<sup>12</sup> Student leaders held talks with the army and the

president, demanding the dissolution of parliament and the formation of an interim government.<sup>13</sup> On August 6, President Mohammed Shahabuddin named economist and Nobel Laureate Mohammad Yunus as the chief advisor of the interim government, mandating him to oversee major reforms, including transitional justice and institutional restructuring, ahead of a general election by February 2026.<sup>14</sup> Yunus confidently proclaimed that reforms would usher in a new “Bangladesh 2.0,” free from autocracy and corruption.<sup>15</sup>

LGBTIQ activists whom Outright interviewed, although they were at the forefront of the three-week-long July Revolution, are concerned by a right-wing turn in the country and increasingly visible misogyny since the establishment of the interim government. Some now feel betrayed by those whom they helped usher into power.<sup>16</sup>

## LGBTIQ People’s Lives Under the Awami League Government and Their Participation in the 2024 Elections

The seven LGBTIQ activists whom Outright interviewed in Bangladesh presented a range of views on the Awami League government’s treatment of queer and trans people over its fifteen years in power. Only one of them told Outright that they voted in the 2024 elections.

Consensual same-sex conduct is illegal under an 1860 colonial-era law, with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. In January 2014, the government issued a cabinet directive to legally recognize hijras, people assigned male at birth who adopt a third gender identity that is often conflated with a Global North understanding of trans femme identities. But in the absence of clear

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lystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/234-billion-siphoned-during-al-rule-3766246.

7 Anbarasan Ethirajan and Shruti Menon, “Videos reveal brutality that left scores dead in Bangladesh protests,” BBC, July 30, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c720lzejzwp0>.

8 Tithi Bhattacharya, “Bangladesh’s Protests Have Been Decades in the Making,” Time, September 4, 2024, <https://time.com/7015595/bangladesh-protests-austerity>.

9 Isaac Yee and Tanbirul Miraj Ripon, “Bangladesh prime minister flees to India as anti-government protesters storm her residence,” CNN, August 6, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/05/asia/bangladesh-prime-minister-residence-stormed-intl>.

10 UN OHCHR, “UN Human Rights investigation may support accountability for Bangladeshi student protests repression,” February 12, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2025/02/un-human-rights-investigation-may-support-accountability-bangladeshi-student>; UN OHCHR, Fact-Finding Report Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, February 12, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/bangladesh/ohchr-fftb-hr-violations-bd.pdf>.

11 Al Jazeera Investigative Unit and Will Thorne, “Shoot them: Sheikh Hasina ordered firing on Bangladesh protesters in 2024,” Al Jazeera, July 24, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/24/shoot-them-sheikh-hasina-ordered-firing-on-bangladesh-protesters-in-2024>.

12 “Bangladesh army announces interim government after PM Sheikh Hasina flees,” Al Jazeera, August 6, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/6/bangladesh-pm-hasina-quits-and-flees-as-protestors-storm-palace-reports>.

13 “Bangladesh protesters want Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus to lead government,” Al Jazeera, August 6, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/6/bangladesh-protesters-want-nobel-laureate-muhammad-yunus-to-lead-government>.

14 Ruma Paul, “Bangladesh Nobel laureate Yunus named chief adviser of interim government,” Reuters, August 7, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladesh-awaits-interim-government-army-chief-meet-protesters-2024-08-06>.

15 Charlie Campbell, “Muhammad Yunus on the Race to Build Bangladesh 2.0,” Time, November 21, 2024, <https://time.com/7177775/bangladesh-muhammad-yunus-interview-interim-government-reforms-challenges>.

16 Tanveer Anoy, “We Survive So Quietly, You Forget We Are Still Here,” Bangladesh Feminist Archives, July 6, 2025, <https://bdfeministarchives.org/2025/07/06/we-survive-so-quietly-you-forget-we-are-still-here>.

legal definitions, stigma and discrimination against hijras persist, and legal gender recognition has never been fully institutionalized.<sup>17</sup>

Oindrojal, a 24-year-old queer activist from Dhaka, said that while the government might have provided minimal recognition to the hijra community, it was largely unsympathetic to LGBTIQ people's rights:

The government never really listened to us. When they tried to push through different development or different laws for trans people, they never acknowledged queer people. During 2016 and before that, whenever queer people were mentioned in, like, different government spaces, it was always like "Such obscene activities will not be allowed in Bangladesh"... [Under the Hasina regime] we were all subjected to surveillance as queer people.

It wasn't unheard of that queer activists were called by the [detective branch], the police, to come up and [be interrogated about various incidents]. Blackmailing was happening. These raids were happening...

The police...never took complaints from queer people seriously...[W]e had multiple cases of trans women and trans sex workers going to them when they were faced with sexual assault or rape...[a]nd they never did anything about it. Instead, they would harass these trans people and assault sex workers. They were paying customers of these communities. Or sometimes not even paying customers. They were like kind of touting their authority over them to do it.<sup>18</sup>

In 2016, gay activists Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy were killed, following a spate of attacks on and murders of atheist bloggers, for which the government had come under heavy international criticism.<sup>19</sup> In 2021, a

court convicted and sentenced six members of a banned domestic organization, Ansar al-Islam, to death for the murder.<sup>20</sup>

Oindrojal found the government response to the murders inadequate: they did not perceive a sincere commitment to justice, and noted that the authorities' treatment of LGBTIQ people didn't change.<sup>21</sup> "We were under an authoritarian regime that preferred to use the community as a pawn," they said. Referring to a proposed Transgender Protection Act that the government had been drafting but failed to pass, they added, "We couldn't even get the trans bill through. It led to this full anti-trans backlash that happened during the [Hasina] regime."<sup>22</sup>

Skye, an indigenous bisexual woman from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), has a different perspective on the Awami League government's tenure: "For the minorities in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina was dependable. They had some trust in her government."<sup>23</sup> For Skye, the previous government, despite its faults, was still better for minoritized groups in Bangladesh—whether ethnic, religious, or indigenous minorities or LGBTIQ people.

Jarif, a trans man and activist in Dhaka, also felt that LGBTIQ people were safer and able to access substantive entitlements under the previous regime.

I have friends who are also trans men who have managed to get their identity documents changed—name and gender marker change. Sure, they had to pay bribes, there was corruption, but at least it was possible. While a lot of policies were not changed publicly, some of these things could still be done in a discreet fashion...Even though the only acceptance publicly in policy was for hijra, it was possible for others [in the community] to get access to some

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17 Human Rights Watch, "Bangladesh: Gender Recognition Process Spurs Abuse," December 23, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/23/bangladesh-gender-recognition-process-spurs-abuse>.

18 Outright Interview with Oindrojal (pseudonym), Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 20, 2024, Dhaka. See also Kyle Knight, "Bangladesh 'Gay Party' Raid Flouts Privacy Rights," Human Rights Watch, May 25, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/25/bangladesh-gay-party-raid-flouts-privacy-rights>; Colin Stewart, "Report: Attacks on queer Bangladeshis have skyrocketed," Erasing 76 Crimes, May 27, 2025, <https://76crimes.com/2025/05/27/report-attacks-on-queer-bangladeshis-have-skyrocketed>.

19 "Two Gay Rights Activists Hacked to Death in Bangladesh," Al Jazeera, April 26, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/4/26/two-gay-rights-activists-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh>.

20 Faisal Mahmud, "Six sentenced to death in Bangladesh for killing LGBTIQ activists," Al Jazeera, August 31, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/31/six-death-penalty-bangladesh-lgbtq-gay-rights-activists-murder>.

21 Oindrojal interview.

22 Ibid. See also "Hijra Protection Act is being drafted: NHRC chairman," Prothom Alo, March 23, 2021, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/hijra-protection-act-is-being-drafted-nhrc-chairman>; Rutgers International, The Heart of the Matter: Embrace the reality of young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights today ICPD+30 Shadow Report, November 2023, <https://rutgers.international/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-Heart-of-the-Matter.pdf>, 104.

23 Outright interview with Skye (pseudonym), Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 21, 2024.

rights through that one banner. Even the media reports used to be more sympathetic, and the general public had more of a soft corner for us.<sup>24</sup>

Lalita, a 28-year-old nonbinary activist who grew up in the rural and urban parts of the Jessore district, away from the capital, described a split within Bangladesh's LGBTIQ movements regarding support for the Hasina regime.

Generally speaking, hijra-trans people supported the [Sheikh Hasina] government, and as a result, they also got some benefits in [the] form of handouts...At the same time, while some hijra-trans leaders could openly liaise with authorities, [the] overall condition of the community did not improve as much as it should have, given that the Hasina government tried to paint itself as a liberal government...At the same time, the urban lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and other parts of the community, other than hijras, were not for the government. Now people might have individual beliefs, but the collective voice was anti-government...There was always the fear of arrests; we would always self-censor. Anything critical of the government could get you arrested, and getting arrested as a queer—it's the worst.<sup>25</sup>

Despite acknowledging the role of the government in recognizing a minoritized identity for hijras, Lalita was skeptical of the government's liberal image:

The government created these minoritized groups as a means to use them and pose as saviours. But ultimately, no one was better than the Awami League in promoting Islamist fundamentalists to positions of power—in order to suppress the political ascendancy of Jamat[-e-Islami] they brought in even more fundamentalist extremist groups like Hefajat[-e-Islami]...The fact that fundamentalist religious actors got consolidated positions within all public universities was due to the endorsement and actions of the Awami League government.<sup>26</sup>

Lalita added that they had never voted in an election, local or national, and that they didn't know any other person their age, including queer activists, who had voted in their lifetime.

I have never been able to cast a vote. I have been registered as a voter for nearly 10 years now...So this last election, I was in Dhaka and my vote is [registered] in Jessore. I couldn't go. But my parents, my brother, none of them could cast their votes. My brother went to the polling station to vote, and he was told, "Your vote has already been cast."<sup>27</sup>

Jarif, too, despite a somewhat positive impression of the government, did not consider it legitimate:

During these 16 years that Awami League government was in power, only the first election, in 2008, was free and fair. The rest are all fake; it's an open secret. I will tell you my personal experience: I have never been able to cast a vote ever. This time, I really wanted to go and cast a vote. I had a friend who was part of this [ruling] party. I called him, saying I want to come vote. He said, "Why go into the trouble of travelling? We have already cast your vote." So, the election was a dummy. I felt it was just a staged production. I am sure 90 percent of the citizens of the country will say the same thing.<sup>28</sup>

## The Election Aftermath: Anti-Trans Moral Panic

The immediate post-election period coincided with a wave of anti-trans protests, which were led by right-wing and fundamentalist factions, with huge popular support.<sup>29</sup> The inception was the controversial act by Asif Mahtab Utsha, a part-time philosophy lecturer at BRAC University, who, at a seminar on a newly introduced school curriculum in mid-January 2024, dramatically tore up two pages of the seventh-grade textbook that contained the story of a transgender woman called Sharifa.<sup>30</sup> The

<sup>27</sup> Lalita interview.

<sup>28</sup> Jarif interview.

<sup>29</sup> Ahammad Foyez, "Inclusion of transgender rights chapter in Bangladesh school textbooks sparks debate," Benar News, January 22, 2024, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/univ-fires-teacher-opposing-transgender-in-textbook-01222024152402.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid; Sadman Sakib, "Two pages ripped, an entire nation torn apart," The Daily Star, January 24, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/two-pages-ripped-entire-nation-torn-apart-3527246>.

<sup>24</sup> Outright interview with Jarif (pseudonym), Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 14, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Outright interview with Lalita (pseudonym), Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 18, 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



video of this incident, posted on social media by Mahtab himself, went viral, and the university dismissed the part-time lecturer.<sup>31</sup>

Anti-gender actors and self-proclaimed guardians of cultural and religious propriety called for protests demanding the withdrawal of the story from textbooks and the reinstatement of Mahtab as a lecturer at BRAC University.<sup>32</sup> The protests were religious in flavor, with anti-trans activities being organized in and from mosques. Anti-queer and anti-trans pamphlets were published and widely distributed under the guise of educating parents about the “danger” that so-called Western LGBTIQ propaganda posed to their children. Social media posts attacked specific activists and organizations and decried the decline of morality brought about by “perversions” of sexuality and gender.<sup>33</sup>

On February 19, 2024, Mahtab called on his followers on social media to protest the initiatives of Bandhu Social Welfare Society, an organization working on sexual and reproductive health, for its role in promoting the inclusion of gender diversity in education curricula.<sup>34</sup> The next day, he led a protest outside Bandhu Social Welfare Society’s office, trapping its members inside until the arrival of the police led protesters to leave the area.<sup>35</sup> The protest unleashed a barrage of hate; a representative of Bandhu Social Welfare Society said that protestors went online to share the office’s location through Google Maps and “asked people to attack the office as ‘enemies of the

country.”<sup>36</sup>

Oindrojal told Outright, regarding the backlash:

What took us by surprise is how well-organized these actors are: there are homophobic pamphlets published for distribution across the country, there are announcements from mosques in smaller towns and even villages. We cannot really begin to take on this level of misinformation, and this is undoing years of work.<sup>37</sup>

The protests had far-reaching consequences. Many well-known trans and queer activists went into hiding and even left the country due to threats of violence and the targeting of groups working on sexual and gender diversity.<sup>38</sup> In April 2024, a 19-year-old trans student and model died by suicide; another student in her hostel said the suicide may have been a result of “depression, social ostracisation, and the recent hostility towards transgender individuals.”<sup>39</sup>

Tipu, a gay university student, told Outright how he faced taunts and threats:

You know I control how I walk and everything nowadays, like try to walk “straight” as much as I can. But when the Sharif-Sharifa incident was publicised, I received a message from a classmate: “Oh, you must be in trouble now.” I was like, “What kind of trouble?” And they said, “Why, this Sharif-Sharifa case. Aren’t you also like that?” I said, “What do you mean? What are you implying? I have been created like this by God. Who are you to judge me?” And this person said, “Wait and see, maybe they will set people like you on fire.” I replied, “Okay, you try and set me on fire, I will see how you can do that.” This classmate actually is part of the Chhatra League [Awami League student body] and

31 Shamima Rita, “Now activists are targeted over ‘Sharifa’s Story,’” Dhaka Tribune, February 22, 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/340054/now-activists-targeted-over-sharifa%E2%80%99s-story>.

32 “Jamaat praises dismissed Bracu teacher Asif, criticizes govt education policy,” Dhaka Tribune, January 24, 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/337616/jamaat-praises-dismissed-bracu-teacher-asif>.

33 Al Khidmah Organization, “ট্রান্সজেন্ডার মতবাদ বয়স্ক দশবর্ষাপী সচনেনতা ক্যাম্পেইন ২০২৪” (Nationwide Awareness Campaign on Transgender Ideology 2024), Facebook, January 20, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=380499998063893&set=a.135474625899766&type=3&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=380499998063893&set=a.135474625899766&type=3&_rdr); “Thousands in Bangladesh protest transgender recognition,” Indo Premier Sekuritas, January 26, 2024, [https://www.indopremier.com/ipotnews/newsDetail.php?jdl=Thousands\\_in\\_Bangladesh\\_protest\\_transgender\\_recognition&news\\_id=1627314&group\\_news=ALLNEWS&news\\_date=&tagging\\_subtype=P-G002&name=&search=y\\_general&q=&halaman=1](https://www.indopremier.com/ipotnews/newsDetail.php?jdl=Thousands_in_Bangladesh_protest_transgender_recognition&news_id=1627314&group_news=ALLNEWS&news_date=&tagging_subtype=P-G002&name=&search=y_general&q=&halaman=1); Rezwan Ahmed, “The fight for ‘The Story of Sharifa,’” The Daily Star, January 30, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/the-fight-the-story-sharifa-3531581>.

34 Rita, “Now activists are targeted over ‘Sharifa’s Story.”

35 Ibid; “Protesters surround Bandhu office,” The Daily Star, February 20, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/protesters-surround-bandhu-office-3549021>.

36 Rita, “Now activists are targeted over ‘Sharifa’s Story.”

37 Oindrojal interview.

38 Rita, “Now activists are targeted over ‘Sharifa’s Story”; Reuters, “Social media ‘a precarious place’ for LGBTQ people in Bangladesh, activists say,” South China Morning Post, March 29, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3257146/social-media-precarious-place-lgbtq-people-bangladesh-activists-say>.

39 “Trans woman dies allegedly by suicide,” The Daily Star, April 24, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/trans-woman-dies-allegedly-suicide-3594101>; JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France, “JMBF deeply mourns the recent tragic suicidal death of transgender model Radia Teherin Utsha in Dhaka,” April 23, 2024, <https://www.jmbf.org/2024/04/jmbf-deeply-mourns-recent-tragic.html>.

nowadays [post-revolution] he has shut up.<sup>40</sup>

Tipu added that Asif Mahtab's assertion that trans women are gay men, and the fueling of misinformation on and offline regarding trans and hijra identities—including a belief that "real" hijras are intersex—made things worse for all LGBTIQ people.<sup>41</sup> He affirmed:

Previously, when people heard the word "trans," they would think it refers to hijra. Nowadays, they think that hijras are almost in a disabled category, and trans women, they are homosexuals.<sup>42</sup>

In June, Sheikh Hasina's government announced that it would remove the chapter containing the Sharifa story from textbooks.<sup>43</sup>

## Participation in the July Revolution: From the Margins to the Margins

Oindrojal described the three weeks of protests in July 2024 as unique in how they brought together diverse groups and created a hitherto unforeseen space for dialogue and unity:

It was such a public movement, such a mass movement [that] you had...people from all kinds of spheres of life colliding in various spaces around Dhaka...I have friends, trans friends, who were going to [many of the protest spaces]. They were saying, "You know, [the protestors] were calling different people in charge 'hijra' and things like that in slogans." So my trans friends went up to them and said, "Don't use these slogans, these [trans] people are also united with you." So the [protestors] were receptive to that.

A lot of people were receptive to that, and they actually heard them out. They made sure to change their slogans accordingly. And this was a moment of

unity that we haven't seen since.<sup>44</sup>

Alo, a lesbian activist in Dhaka, said:

We were all there on August 3 at the Shaheed Minar [national monument]. It had thousands of people. But despite being so crowded, I have never felt safer in a public gathering in my life. As women, we are always wary of sexual harassment during gatherings, even the ones around the Bengali New Year celebration. But everyone I spoke to shared the same sentiment—we all felt safe, we felt united.<sup>45</sup>

Tipu was part of the protests throughout as an undergraduate university student himself. "I was there every day, except the day of independence—August 5. I couldn't go because tear gas affected my eyesight."<sup>46</sup> Jarif, a trans man, also felt compelled to participate:

Yes, a lot of LGBTIQ students were part of the student protest—I personally was there. The fact they were using police to indiscriminately kill students, I couldn't stomach it. My cousin got shot on his arm and leg. I have friends who died during the protests. Me and my other trans man friend went to the protests in Dhaka. Many people from the community, they would go together.

There was also this footage of a binder-wearing trans man who was shot. People who came to help him, probably thought he was a young boy and were trying to take off his t-shirt to massage his chest, and while being semi-conscious, he was still trying to pull his t-shirt down.

And the call to gather in Shaheed Minar [August 3], I also went there, and there were so many people from the [LGBTIQ] community.<sup>47</sup>

TransEnd, a trans collective, issued a statement expressing solidarity with the people's movement:

40 Outright interview with Tipu (pseudonym), Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 19, 2024.

41 Tanvir Alim, Md Shahid, and Adnan Hossein, "Experiences of intersex individuals in Bangladesh: some reflections," *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*, 29 (2022): <https://doi.org/10.1080/26410397.2022.2149054>.

42 Tipu interview.

43 "Decision to remove Sharifa's Tale submissive," *The Daily Star*, June 29, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/decision-remove-sharifas-tale-submissive-3644431>; Amreeta Lethe, "The Story of Sharifa: One step forward, many steps backward?," *The Daily Star*, July 12, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/the-story-sharifa-one-step-forward-many-steps-backward-3654506>.

44 Oindrojal interview.

45 Outright interview with Alo (pseudonym), Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 15, 2024. Shaheed Minar near Dhaka is a national monument commemorating the martyrs of the 1971 War of Liberation through which Bangladesh gained its independence from Pakistan.

46 Tipu interview.

47 Rashid, another trans man who participated in the protests, described seeing footage of the same trans man with a binder who had been shot. Outright interviews with Jarid (pseudonym) and with Rashid (pseudonym), Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 17, 2024.

We have long lived and worked by the slogan “None of us are free till all of us are free,” and today, it is truer than it has ever been for us before. No longer can anyone, in good faith, put up with or apologize for the state-sanctioned violence that has only amounted to mass murders, mass arrests, false charges, and forced disappearances, and still pretend to stand for the good of the people...And to our fellow transgender and gender-diverse community members, students, protestors, and friends, we will meet on the protest grounds. Falgun (Spring) has arrived.<sup>48</sup>

Along with the participation of young LGBTIQ people, women’s participation and leadership were also seen front and center.<sup>49</sup> Women leaders of the student movement were arrested and tortured.<sup>50</sup> Women’s participation made the protests a “people’s revolution,” but the movement soon became “toxic,” especially for women and other minorities, leading to the decline of women’s leadership.<sup>51</sup> This presaged the squandered potential of the immediate post-revolutionary period—a “Bangladesh 2.0” that has failed to include everyone.

## Squandered Potential in a Post-Revolution Bangladesh

Euphoria swept the country immediately after Sheikh Hasina’s resignation and her fleeing the country. Citizens ransacked her lavish residence and demanded trials of Awami League leaders for their crimes.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, the period following Hasina’s resignation was marked by increased violence. Among the most visible victims were

ethnic and religious minorities.<sup>53</sup> The deposed regime was perceived to be more tolerant toward minorities and Adivasis or indigenous peoples, although violence against minorities under Hasina largely went unpunished.<sup>54</sup> Existing hostilities toward minorities were exacerbated by the perceived association of Hindus and other minorities with the Awami League.<sup>55</sup> Immediately following Hasina’s ouster, the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC), an organization advocating for minority rights, recorded approximately 2,000 cases of “communal violence” between August 4 and August 20, including attacks on places of worship and the homes and businesses of minorities.<sup>56</sup>

In CHT, a region bordering Myanmar, tensions between ethnic Bengali settlers and the Adivasis (indigenous peoples) erupted over the killing of a Bengali settler in August 2024. In September, mobs of Bengali settlers set fire to over 100 homes and businesses owned by indigenous people.<sup>57</sup> Skye, a bisexual indigenous woman from the CHT region, said that indigenous people who were associated with Hasina’s regime were targeted as part of this broader pattern of ethnic violence:

I think it was a mistake [deposing the Awami League government], not just for us [indigenous people] but for all. And there are many who are now regretting...On the fifth of August, the day that Hasina left, our house [in the Chittagong Hill Tracts] was set on fire. Many others also faced the same fate if they were political leaders [associated with Hasina’s Awami League] like my father...And yes, there were incidents even during

48 TransEnd (@transend.bd), untitled post, Instagram, August 2, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/C-LQP0yO0H/?img\\_index=2&igsh=eWl0dHFkdmQyZzFq](https://www.instagram.com/p/C-LQP0yO0H/?img_index=2&igsh=eWl0dHFkdmQyZzFq).

49 Thaslima Begum, “‘Because of women, it became a people’s revolution’: what has changed one year on from Bangladesh’s student uprising?,” *The Guardian*, August 1, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/aug/01/women-bangladesh-uprising-female-activists-rights-students-protest-sheikh-hasina>.

50 Rebecca Wright, Anna Coren, Salman Saeed and Mark Phillips, “Student leaders reveal prison ‘nightmare’ after Gen Z revolution sets them free,” *CNN*, September 3, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/09/03/asia/bangladesh-house-mirrors-detention-center-intl-hnk-dst>.

51 Begum, “‘Because of women, it became a people’s revolution’”; UN OHCHR, “Bangladesh: UN report finds brutal, systematic repression of protests, calls for justice for serious rights violations,” February 12, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/bangladesh-un-report-finds-brutal-systematic-repression-protests-calls>.

52 “Photos: Celebrations after PM Sheikh Hasina resigns, flees Bangladesh,” *Al Jazeera*, August 5, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/8/5/photos-celebrations-after-pm-sheikh-hasina-resigns-flees-bangladesh>.

53 Ruma Paul, “Fears grip ethnic minorities after deadly violence in Bangladesh,” *Reuters*, September 21, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/fears-grip-ethnic-minorities-after-deadly-violence-bangladesh-2024-09-21>.

54 Mehedi Hasan Marof, “‘Our lives don’t matter’: Bangladeshi Hindus under attack after Hasina exit,” *Al Jazeera*, December 12, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/12/12/our-lives-dont-matter-in-post-hasina-bangladesh-hindus-fear-future>.

55 “Minorities fear targeted attacks in post-revolution Bangladesh,” *France 24*, December 22, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241222-minorities-fear-targeted-attacks-in-post-revolution-bangladesh>; Krutika Pathi, Al Emrun Garjon, and Shonal Ganguly, “Violence in Bangladesh After Hasina’s Ouster Stirs Fear Among Hindu Minority,” *The Diplomat*, August 13, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/violence-in-bangladesh-after-hasinas-ouster-stirs-fear-among-hindu-minority>.

56 Marof, “‘Our lives don’t matter’: Bangladeshi Hindus under attack.”

57 Dev Kumar Sunuwar, “Renewed Violence in Chittagong Hill Tracts: Bengali Settlers Target Indigenous Jumma Communities,” *Cultural Survival*, September 24, 2024, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/renewed-violence-chittagong-hill-tracts-bengali-settlers-target-indigenous-jumma-communities>.

the last 16 years, but the quantum of violence and impunity is altogether different.<sup>58</sup>

Lalita shared disappointment with the interim government's inability to prevent such acts.

But this was not expected from the interim government. We thought this [since] is our, the people's, government, at least they will be vigilant on human rights...There is a Hefajat-e-Islam leader who is serving as a religious affairs advisor on the interim government, and we can see that all liberal voices are now completely silenced, people in the government... who could speak on gender equality, women's rights—all have been silenced. Instead, there are conservative and fundamentalist actors who are now [dismissing the] rights of indigenous people, saying things like "Only Bengalis are indigenous to the nation, and others don't belong."<sup>59</sup>

As political analysts have noted, the attacks on minorities like Hindus and Adivasis are not just simply fuelled by ethnic hatred but also by opportunism to usurp property and land, and a belief that minorities support the Awami League government and must bear the brunt of public ire against the deposed government.<sup>60</sup>

Aside from Adivasis and ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTIQ people and women also find themselves excluded from "Bangladesh 2.0."<sup>61</sup> As of writing, the interim government has not publicly positioned itself on LGBTIQ equality. Shahanur Islam, a Bangladeshi human rights lawyer who heads JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France (JMBF), told Outright that the interim government is

even "worse" on LGBTIQ people's rights than the previous regime.<sup>62</sup> It depends on the backing of Islamist groups, which is why "they cannot take positive initiatives for LGBTIQ people."<sup>63</sup> With an election coming up in February 2026, Shahanur is not optimistic:

I do not see any hopeful scenario for LGBTIQ people in the next elections...I think after the elections, the next [elected] government cannot overcome the influence of these Islamist groups, which are becoming more powerful...The international community must know the actual situation of LGBTIQ people after the revolution. It must act more proactively to support LGBTIQ people in Bangladesh.<sup>64</sup>

Oindrojal noted that when they and colleagues went out to paint murals commemorating the participation of hijras and LGBTIQ people in the days following Hasina's resignation, they were already hearing negative comments from passersby to the effect that they would come and paint over these messages. Oindrojal added that for some movement leaders, Asif Mahtab, who had initiated the 2024 anti-trans moral panic, had become "one of the revolution's heroes." He was among those arrested by police during the protests, "so his following increased among young students and coordinators."<sup>65</sup>

JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France (JMBF), which has been reporting on the human rights situation of LGBTIQ people in Bangladesh since 2022, documented 70 incidents of anti-LGBTIQ discrimination and violence in 2024, including the murders of five trans women—an uptick in 2024 from 51 cases in 2022 and 56 cases in 2023.<sup>66</sup> JMBF attributed the increase in violence to "political instability, the rise of religious fundamentalist

58 Skye interview. For details about the incident in Khagrachhori, where a teacher accused of sexual assault was allegedly beaten to death by a mob of indigenous men leading to clashes between the indigenous and Bengali residents in the town, see "Khagrachhari: Section 144 withdrawn as tensions ease," The Daily Star, October 3, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/khagrachhari-section-144-withdrawn-tensions-ease-3717816>.

59 Lalita interview.

60 Niladri Chatterjee, Muhammad Asiful Basar and Arild Engelsen Ruud, "Bangladesh: How safe were Hindus under the Awami League?," Scroll.in, August 8, 2024, <https://scroll.in/article/1071761/bangladesh-why-there-must-be-caution-in-understanding-the-violence-against-hindus>.

61 Ankush Kumar, "LGBTQ Bangladeshis increasingly vulnerable a year after government toppled," Washington Blade, August 5, 2025, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2025/08/05/lgbtq-bangladeshis-increasingly-vulnerable-a-year-after-government-toppled/>; Abhimanyu Bandyopadhyay, "Silenced, transferred, threatened: Women are still speaking out in post-uprising Bangladesh," Global Voices, July 2, 2025, <https://globalvoices.org/2025/07/02/silenced-transferred-threatened-women-are-still-speaking-out-in-post-uprising-bangladesh/>.

62 Outright interview with Shahanur Islam, Executive Director of JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France, phone call, August 22, 2025.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Oindrojal interview. See "Asif Mahtab, Arif Sohel remanded for 6 days in Setu Bhaban vandalism case," Bdnews24, July 29, 2024, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/692fb308588d>; Daniel Haq, "Reports are coming out that Prof. Asif Mahtab Utsha has been arrested by Bangladesh police due to the gov crackdown on protesters," Facebook, July 28, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/haqiqatjou/posts/reports-are-coming-out-that-prof-asif-mahtab-utsha-has-been-arrested-by-bangladesh/1035794094571317>. Several posts on social media called for authorities to #FreeAsifMahtab. See Instagram, "#freeasifmahtab," accessed August 22, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/explore/search/keyword/?q=%23freeasifmahtab>.

66 JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France, "An Updated State of LGBTIQ+ Rights in Bangladesh 2024, May 2025, <https://www.jmbf.org/2025/05/press-release-jmbf-releases-2024-annual.html#more>, 16–17.



groups, and administrative inaction,” which have “severely threatened the safety and fundamental rights of this community.”<sup>67</sup>

Tipu said that he had no hope of support from the student leaders, many of whom have advisory positions within the interim government and have drifted closer to conservative Islamic groups:

I commented on [a student leader’s] public social media posts when he commented on how trans women are gay and hijras are born with some “problem.” Following that comment, I was blackmailed and trolled by almost 200 people. They sent me friend requests and abused me over messages. I deleted all of the messages. I felt that answering would only invite trouble for the entire community...Under Sheikh Hasina, maybe our rights would have been consolidated, but now these advisors keep saying this is Western culture. Brother, we are born this way! I do feel that we are more at risk. We were more free under the previous regime. Now we have to think when we go out in public. And if this is the situation under the interim government, if a more conservative government, who is anti-LGBTIQ, come into power, we would be the most marginalized, most in danger.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast, Lalita said they are less fearful than under the previous government:

[Under the previous regime], there was always this fear that saying anything critical of the government can get me arrested. And getting arrested as a queer person is [the worst]...I was also one of the authors of the draft Trans Rights Bill and, therefore, was under the government’s radar. So this fear was always present.<sup>69</sup>

Oindrojal added that male student movement leaders, now well-connected with the new government, also began to sideline women, a perception shared by women

activists.<sup>70</sup> Oindrojal emphasized:

Forget acknowledging queer people; even women’s participation is being dismissed. There is a very common argument you will see on social media. How many women died?...And I think gradually what happened was that the student [leaders, who are now in advisory positions in the government] then started having meetings with fundamentalists, with religious leaders who have very outspoken negative views towards women....<sup>71</sup>

As for queer people, said Oindrojal, “We cannot say queer people were sidelined after the movement because their participation was not even acknowledged in the first place.”

Violence against women and girls, including public assaults, rapes, and murders, has increased in 2025.<sup>72</sup> In November 2024, the interim government set up the Women’s Affairs Reform Commission to look into gender inequalities, one of the 11 reform commissions it established on various issues from the electoral framework to media and labour.<sup>73</sup> Aside from this laudable step toward legal reform, however, civil society groups have accused the government of failing to protect women from violence.<sup>74</sup> Public opposition to proposed reforms for gender equality also threatens to derail their implementation. Tens of thousands joined a rally organized by fundamentalist Islamist group Hefajat-e-Islam on May 3, 2025, to protest against measures

70 Muktedir Rashid and Maher Sattar, “Bangladeshi Women Turned a Movement Into a Revolution. Then They Disappeared,” The Fuller Project, January 16, 2025, <https://fullerproject.org/story/bangladeshi-women-turned-a-movement-into-a-revolution-then-they-disappeared>; Rafia Tamanna, “BREAKING THE CYCLE: Change means women leading, not only bleeding,” New Age Bangladesh, March 8, 2025, <https://www.newagebd.net/print/post/259547>; Bandyopadhyay, “Silenced, transferred, threatened”; Begum, “Because of women, it became a people’s revolution.”

71 Oindrojal interview.

72 “Violence against women in first half of 2025 shows sharp increase over previous 2 years,” The Business Standard, July 17, 2025, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/crime/violence-against-women-first-half-2025-shows-sharp-increase-over-previous-2-years>; “Rape cases already near last year’s total count,” The Daily Star, July 9, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/rape-cases-already-near-last-years-total-count-3935301>; Rumman Turjo, “Public humiliation of women, misogyny go unchallenged in Bangladesh as violence spikes,” Bdnnews24, March 8, 2025, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/12ab33c4f5a6>.

73 “Tenures of five reform commissions extended until April 30,” Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, March 28, 2025, <https://www.bssnews.net/others/258843>.

74 “Prioritise women’s safety,” The Daily Star, February 25, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/rights/news/prioritise-womens-safety-3832716>.

67 JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France, “JMBF Releases 2024 Annual Report on the State of LGBTIQ+ Rights in Bangladesh,” May 17, 2025, <https://www.jmbf.org/2025/05/press-release-jmbf-releases-2024-annual.html#more>.

68 Tipu interview. See also Reuters, “Students leaders sworn in as part of Bangladesh’s interim government,” Dekoder, August 9, 2024, <https://www.dekoder.com/article/students-leaders-sworn-in-as-part-of-bangladeshs-interim-government>.

69 Lalita interview.

that the Women's Affairs Reform Commission had recommended to grant women equal rights.<sup>75</sup> However, the Commission did not touch upon the criminalization of same-sex intimacy or address other issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.

An atmosphere of insecurity persists in the immediate post-revolutionary period due to continued violence and lawlessness, including "revenge attacks on political opponents, robbery and intimidation of religious minorities."<sup>76</sup> The interim government also inherited a fragile economy, marked by rising inflation, that suffered as part of the global economic downturn in 2022 and was further disrupted during the revolution.<sup>77</sup> For Jarif, heightened insecurity stems from a general lack of administrative control and an absence of policing:

I feel like the Yunus government is like a puppet show. The economy, nor the administration or justice systems are functioning in Bangladesh...The inflation has worsened even compared to what prices were under Hasina's regime. One main hope was that when the new government came, at least the poor would not starve. But nothing like that has happened. Now it's like a game: whoever wants to, on whatever issue, they are just blocking roads and striking with random demands. If you go out in Dhaka, there will be some strikes somewhere or the other—multiple strikes at times...When the high school students met with the education advisor, part of the

interim government, with their demand, they demanded the cancellation of all exams. And they succeeded; this demand was conceded. They all passed without sitting their school-leaving exams...There's a general environment of lawlessness.<sup>78</sup>

Oindrojal acknowledged that expecting immediate positive change from the interim government would be unrealistic: reconstruction after authoritarianism takes time and effort. They added, "[We cannot] disregard that this was a fight for liberation, and only now we are in a position of reforming things."<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite having much to lose from the instability that accompanies rapid political change, LGBTIQ activists were among the champions of the July Revolution, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with their co-revolutionaries in support of justice and democracy. However, the interim government and most of the student leaders who are active in the political arena have betrayed the promise of inclusion. Today, minoritized people in Bangladesh, whether LGBTIQ people, workers, women, girls, indigenous peoples, or ethno-religious minorities, are unsafe and have not been sufficiently protected by the interim caretaker government.

If the upcoming election winners in Bangladesh continue to allow themselves to succumb to the pressure of right-wing and fundamentalist populism, then the future is bleak. However, the commitment of activists to justice, to standing up for their rights and those of other minoritized people, is a source of inspiration.

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<sup>75</sup> These proposals include the repeal of discriminatory laws in marriage, citizenship, inheritance and other areas, measures against gender-based violence, and the introduction of comprehensive sex education, among others. Nilima Jahan, "Eliminate gender disparities in laws," *The Daily Star*, April 20, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/eliminate-gender-disparities-laws-3875296>; "Reforms are crucial to ensure women's rights," *The Daily Star*, May 9, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/editorial/news/reforms-are-crucial-ensure-womens-rights-3887561>;

"Women affairs reform: 67 rights groups condemn backlash," *The Daily Star*, May 6, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/women-affairs-reform-67-rights-groups-condemn-backlash-3887341>; Subhajit Saha, "Bangladeshi Women's Rights Opposed by Hardline Religious Groups," *Human Rights Watch*, May 5, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/05/bangladeshi-womens-rights-opposed-hardline-religious-groups>.

<sup>76</sup> Saif Hasnat, "After a Revolution, a Move Toward Politics as Usual in Bangladesh," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/28/world/asia/bangladesh-politics-party.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Fahmida Khatun, "A bumpy road ahead for the economy amid risks and reform," *The Daily Star*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/bumpy-road-ahead-the-economy-amid-risks-and-reform-3727251>; Stefan Liller and Owais Parray, "Taming inflation in Bangladesh," *The Daily Star*, March 23, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/taming-inflation-bangladesh-3854146>.

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<sup>78</sup> Jarif interview.

<sup>79</sup> Oindrojal interview.

# CASE STUDY BOTSWANA:

# “It’s Important That I’m in That Room.”

Election: Presidential (October 6, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>80</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

## Background and Context

As with most former British colonies, Botswana criminalized “unnatural offenses” during the colonial era and for decades after decolonization. In 2019, the High Court unanimously decriminalized consensual same-sex sexual acts by declaring sections 164(a), 164(c), and 165 of the Penal Code of Botswana unconstitutional.<sup>81</sup> In other aspects, LGBTIQ people’s human rights have seen some progress in the country, although opposition remains strong, primarily influenced by religion. The Botswana High Court ruled in 2017 that a transgender man should be allowed identity documents reflecting his gender identity, but no laws or policies have been formulated to protect this constitutional right for other trans people.<sup>82</sup> Thus, transgender and gender-diverse people seeking legal gender recognition need

to approach the court to do so individually.<sup>83</sup> Limited protections against discrimination exist. Parliament amended the Employment Act in 2010 to include sexual orientation as a protected ground against discrimination in employment.<sup>84</sup>

83 Outright interview with Bonolo Selelo, attorney and notary public and founder of BW Thinking Law, virtual, February 2025.

84 See the text of the law here: Republic of Botswana, Employment Act, Chapter 47:01, <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/91528/BWA842%202010.pdf>; International Human Rights Program, University of Toronto, Faculty of Law, “Botswana – SOGI Legislation Country Report,” December 2012, <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Botswana-SOGI-Legislation-Country-Report-2013-eng.pdf>.

80 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025: Botswana,” accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/botswana/freedom-world/2025>.

81 Human Rights Watch, “Botswana: High Court Strikes Down Sodomy Laws – New Momentum for African LGBT Movements,” June 11, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/11/botswana-high-court-strikes-down-sodomy-laws>.

82 Graeme Reid, “Victory for Gender Identity in Botswana – Country’s High Court Rules in Favor of Transgender Man,” Human Rights Watch, October 3, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/03/victory-gender-identity-botswana>; Roberto Igual, “‘Sweet Closure’ as Botswana Finally Agrees to Recognize Trans Man,” Mamba Online, December 6, 2017, <https://www.mambaonline.com/2017/12/06/sweet-closure-botswana-agrees-recognise-trans-man>.



**Right:** Dumiso “Dumi” Gatsha, a 34-year-old nonbinary activist and candidate for parliament, in a campaign event. Credit: Dumiso Gatsha.



In 2023, Parliament introduced a bill to formally legalize same-sex relations in compliance with the 2019 High Court ruling. However, it withdrew this from consideration to “a later date” after much controversy, including rallies and protests organized by the Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana.<sup>85</sup> Marchers, backed by Christian fundamentalist churches, demonstrated with signs bearing slogans like “Protect Our Children” and “We Say No Homosexuality.”<sup>86</sup>

In April 2024, as part of a broad constitutional amendment process initiated by the executive, the government introduced language in the constitutional amendment bill that would prohibit discrimination against intersex people and people with disabilities.<sup>87</sup> It would have added disability and intersex status to section 15(3) of the Botswana Constitution, which prohibits discrimination based on race, tribe, sex, and creed, among others.<sup>88</sup> Christian religious leaders vocally opposed the bill—which even the U.S.-funded Voice of America media outlet erroneously described as a “gay rights bill”—claiming it would “destroy the cardinal structure of the family life at the heart of Botswana’s cherished Christian way of life.”<sup>89</sup> The constitutional amendment process faced opposition on other grounds from civil society actors and bodies like the Law Society of Botswana, which alleged that the reform process did not sufficiently include public participation, was partisan, and did not address significant national issues.<sup>90</sup>

85 Mqondisi Dube, “Botswana Parliament Defers Debate on Controversial Homosexuality Bill,” Voice of America, August 1, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/botswana-parliament-defers-debate-on-controversial-homosexuality-bill/7207181.html>; Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2024 – Botswana,” accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/botswana/freedom-world/2024#:~:text=Key%20Developments%20in%202023&text=In%20August%2C%20Parliament%20deferred%20consideration,with%20a%202019%20court%20ruling>.

86 “Protest Held in Botswana Against Bill Legalizing Same-Sex Relationships,” RFI, July 22, 2023, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20230722-protest-held-in-botswana-against-bill-legalizing-same-sex-relationships>.

87 Republic of Botswana, Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Bill No. 4 of 2024, <https://altadvisory.africa/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Extraordinary-Gazette-Constitution-Bill-12-3-2024.pdf>; S’lindile Khumalo, “Botswana: Draft Constitutional Changes Include Intersex Rights – But Other Challenges Remain,” ALT Advisory, June 18, 2024, <https://altadvisory.africa/2024/06/18/botswana-proposed-constitutional-change-would-protect-intersex-rights>.

88 Ibid.

89 Mqondisi Dube, “Botswana Churches.”

90 Mona-Lisa Danieli Mungure, “Democracy in Action: The Role of Civil Society in Botswana’s Failed Constitutional Amendment Bill,” Constitution-Net, October 9, 2024, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/civil-society-botswanas-failed-constitutional-amendment-bill/>; Council of the Law Society of Botswana, “Position Paper on the Constitutional Review Process,” October 31, 2023, <https://lawsociety.org.bw/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/>

2024 was also an election year in Botswana. Leading up to the elections, most political parties did not discuss LGBTIQ issues. One presidential candidate, Movement for Democracy political party leader Reverend Thuso Tiego, voiced his intent to lead according to Christianity and described homosexuality as “a shameful thing” that “should not be allowed.”<sup>91</sup> However, Bradley Fortuin, a human rights expert with the Southern Africa Litigation Center (SALC), told Outright that most of the discourse focused on pressing issues like job creation, and access to water, electricity, and other basic needs, in addition to women’s and other minority groups’ rights.<sup>92</sup> Most parties made promises to develop the economy, achieve prosperity, create thousands of jobs, and increase wages.<sup>93</sup>

The victorious presidential candidate, Duma Boko of The Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) party, is a lawyer who previously represented Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals of Botswana (LEGABIBO), a leading LGBTQ human rights organization, in its early attempts to legally register as a non-governmental organization in 2007.<sup>94</sup> He has more recently expressed his support for decriminalization.<sup>95</sup>

law-society-of-botswana-position-paper-on-constitutional-review-process.pdf.

91 Portia Mililo, “Pastors Say No to Homosexuality,” The Voice Botswana, July 11, 2023, <https://thevoicebw.com/pastors-say-no-to-homosexuality/>; “Tiego Takes on BMD Charge,” Mmegi Online, September 11, 2023, <https://www.mmegi.com/news/tiego-takes-on-bmd-charge/news/>; Outright interview with Bradley Fortuin, Program Officer, LGBTI, Sex Work and Disability of the Southern Africa Litigation Center, virtual, February 2025.

92 Fortuin interview.

93 See for instance, President Duma Boko’s campaign promises here: Duma Boko, “Duma Boko | Botswana’s Opposition Leader | Duma Boko For President,” accessed July 29, 2025, <https://dumaboko.com>. See also former President Mokgweetsi Masisi of the Botswana Democratic Party’s 2024 Election Manifesto here: “Changing Together; Building Prosperity,” August 20, 2024, <https://bdp.org.bw/download/Botswana%20Democratic%20Party%202024%20Manifesto.pdf>. See also The Botswana Gazette, “Botswana Congress Party (BCP) Manifesto Highlights,” October 25, 2024, <https://www.thegazette.news/features/botswana-congress-party-bcp-manifesto-to-highlights>.

94 Oliver Modise, “Lesbians, Homosexuals Threaten Suit Against Govt,” Mmegi Online, December 6, 2007, <https://www.mmegi.com/news/lesbians-homosexuals-threaten-suit-against-govt/news/>. LEGABIBO eventually won its court case seeking registration as a nongovernmental organization under the Botswana Societies Act. See Human Rights Watch, “Botswana: High Court Upholds Basic Freedoms – LGBT Group Allowed to Register,” November 14, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/11/14/botswana-high-court-upholds-basic-freedoms>.

95 Roberto Igual, “LGBTIQ+ Ally Duma Boko to Lead Botswana as New President,” Mamba Online, November 3, 2024, <https://www.mambaonline.com/2024/11/03/lgbtiq-ally-duma-boko-to-lead-botswana-as-new-president>. A few activists have expressed hope in the president being a human rights lawyer. Phopho L. (pseudonym), an activist with Healthy Empowerment Rights, an LGBTIQ rights organization in Botswana, shared that: “The nice thing about our new President is that he’s a lawyer and we as activists appreciate that he is a human rights lawyer so I think he’s



## Voting Wisely on Critical Issues

The 2024 elections marked a historic turn in Botswana. The ruling party that had dominated for 58 years, since independence from the British, lost to its opposition.<sup>96</sup> Issues driving over one million registered voters, including young people, to the polls included the stagnating economy and rising unemployment.<sup>97</sup>

Bradley Fortuin of SALC said that the elections were “a pivotal moment where everyone just knew what to do because I think we were all fed up with the former party.”<sup>98</sup> As Fortuin shared:

We are tired. We’ve been through daily news reports about corruption, about how ministers would sexually abuse young women and get away with it. And when you call for accountability, no one would say anything. They would brush off calls for transparency. So, it [the elections] was to say, “We deserve better.”<sup>99</sup>

Bonolo Selelo, a human rights attorney in Botswana, told Outright that in casting her vote, she was interested in both these bread-and-butter economic issues and parties’ responses to concerns of gender-based violence and protecting LGBTIQ people’s rights:

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open-minded. He comes with a very open mind...We are hoping for the best.” Outright interview with Phopho L. (pseudonym), virtual, April 2025. See also Nnasaretha Kgamanyane, “New Hope for Human Rights Activists Despite Staunch Opposition,” Mmegi Botswana, February 21, 2025, <https://www.mmegi.bw/features/new-hope-for-human-rights-activists-despite-staunch-opposition/news>.

96 “Botswana Opposition Wins Election; BDP Ousted from Power After 58 Years,” Al Jazeera, November 1, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/1/botswanas-ruling-party-loses-power-after-six-decades-early-results-show>; “Botswana’s Ruling Party Loses Election, Ending 58-Year Rule,” CNN World, November 1, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/11/01/africa/botswana-party-loses-election-masisi-boko-in-ti/index.html>; Yana Gorokhovskaia and Cathryn Grothe, “Freedom in the World 2025 – The Uphill Battle to Safeguard Rights,” Freedom House, accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2025/uphill-battle-to-safeguard-rights>.

97 “Botswana Opposition Wins Election”; Wycliffe Muia and Damina Zane, “Botswana Ruling Party Rejected After 58 Years in Power,” BBC, November 1, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c238n5zr5lyo>; Shola Lawal, “Botswana Election: Who Is In the Running and What’s At Stake?” Al Jazeera, October 30, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/30/botswana-election-who-is-in-the-running-and-whats-at-stake>.

98 Fortuin interview.

99 Selelo interview. For instance, in 2019, Botswana’s minister for infrastructure and housing development, Vincent Seretse, was accused of sexual harassment by a former employee. See Ngwako Malatji, “Botswana Minister in Sexual Harassment Scandal,” Sowetan Live, August 12, 2019 <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/sundayworld/news/2019-08-12-botswana-minister-in-sexual-harassment-scandal>.

The most critical issues for me were the constitutional amendment process, unemployment, how a party deals with gender-based violence, and issues concerning LGBTQIA+ people, [especially] the fact that our trans siblings had a very difficult time [registering and voting]. This is because a lot of them wouldn’t have changed their gender markers and have identity cards not in line with their gender. It’s triggering. [I was concerned about] everything about the LGBTQIA+ community’s rights and freedoms.<sup>100</sup>

But few parties treated gender-based violence and other human rights topics as priority areas, Selelo noted: “It wasn’t one of the cornerstones of their manifestos. [Also], none of them touched on LGBTQIA+ issues at all.”<sup>101</sup>

Still, LGBTIQ people sought to have their voices heard and represented. Two openly queer candidates vied for office for the first time in Botswana, with the candidacies of Dumiso “Dumi” Gatsha, a nonbinary person, and Anthony Sedibo, a cisgender gay man, although they were not elected.<sup>102</sup>

## Queer Candidacies

Dumiso “Dumi” Gatsha, a 34-year-old nonbinary activist, and Anthony Sedibo, a 33-year-old journalist, ran for office as independent candidates.<sup>103</sup> Anthony Sedibo ran in the Diagane Ward Community, and Dumi Gatsha ran to represent Mogoditshane West, both for parliamentary seats.<sup>104</sup>

Gatsha told Outright that among the salient issues that drove them to run for office were the lack of legal

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100 Selelo interview.

101 Selelo interview.

102 Dumi Gatsha, “Independent Parliamentary Candidate Campaign Fulfilled My Right as a Queer Motswana,” Washington Blade, November 5, 2024, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2024/11/05/independent-parliamentary-candidate-campaign-fulfilled-my-right-as-a-queer-motswana>.

103 Ibid.

104 See a video of Anthony Sedibo canvassing for votes in Diagane: Mogoditshane News Online (@mogoditshanenewsonline), “Another day of house to house canvassing for votes,” TikTok, April 30, 2024, [https://www.tiktok.com/@mogoditshanenewsonline/video/7363748451915533574?is\\_from\\_webapp=1&sender\\_device=pc&web\\_id=7484247222517007927](https://www.tiktok.com/@mogoditshanenewsonline/video/7363748451915533574?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7484247222517007927); Theo Mailakgotla, “Independent Candidate Advocates for Community-Driven Development,” Guardian Sun, August 30, 2024, <https://guardiansun.co.bw/news/politics/independent-candidate-advocates-for-community-driven-development>; Dumiso Gatsha, “Activism at the Ballot,” Medium, November 20, 2024, <https://medium.com/@dumiat-work/activism-at-the-ballot-a3a7293a93b3>.

recognition of transgender and gender-diverse people in Botswana and the pushback against LGBTIQ people's rights during the nationwide consultations on the constitutional review.<sup>105</sup> Gatsha said that, on the one hand, the months leading up to the elections were marked by people "being a lot more homophobic and transphobic." On the other hand, there were:

a lot of queer people exercising agency and autonomy, expressing themselves freely, regardless of what was happening on the anti-rights front or in the courts. This led me to recognize that "there's nothing wrong with me wanting to participate in this democracy." Seeing how one of the anti-LGBTIQ protests was triggered by a member of parliament, I wanted to run for parliament.<sup>106</sup>

Registering as a candidate was difficult for Gatsha due to the country's lack of legal recognition of gender diversity: "There are only two categories to select [on the forms]—female and male. And I think it was very problematic, not just as a voter but also as a political candidate."<sup>107</sup> Gatsha ultimately had to select a gender with which they did not identify.

Other barriers Gatsha faced, including fundraising challenges, were related to their status as an independent candidate. Gatsha explained, "There is a lot of poverty [in Botswana], particularly in the constituency that I was running...the constituency that I grew up in, where people are not connected to basic amenities."<sup>108</sup> They ultimately funded their campaign wholly on personal income. In contrast, people vying for the same office as members of political parties had a lot of funding,

with "billboards and convoys of cars."<sup>109</sup>

Running for office was eye-opening, Gatsha said, enabling them to recognize the existence of structural barriers that prevent minority communities from participating in society equitably:

The political architecture is not built for independent candidates or alternative solutions, and there were significant gaps...[which explain] why there's such a low representation of women, young people, and diverse people, including LGBTIQ individuals [in politics].<sup>110</sup>

Gatsha said that as an independent candidate they faced second-tier treatment from the electoral commission, which was slow to certify their candidacy and, Gatsha said, "did not have my political logo represented" on the ballot papers.<sup>111</sup> In addition:

I was only invited to a public debate the night before, which really irked me. It didn't make sense. I was heartbroken. And there were a lot of security issues in the public debates in my constituency. My constituency is not the safest, and many of these debates did not have security or even police. And so I realized it wouldn't be helpful for me to attend, strategically.<sup>112</sup>

As a result, instead of participating in events where they felt unsafe, Gatsha engaged with registered voters in campaign meetings "under trees," in people's yards, where supporters volunteered their own spaces. This approach diminished their visibility as a candidate. For instance, Phopho L. (pseudonym), a pansexual activist interviewed by Outright, said that she and people in her circle were not aware that Gatsha was running for office until the last minute, and then had to scramble to

105 Outright interview with Dumiso "Dumi" Gatsha, virtual, April 2025. See also Dumi Gatsha, "Independent Parliamentary Candidate."

106 Gatsha interview. Gatsha was referring to a protest against a bill seeking to decriminalize same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults held in July 2023. MP Wynter Mmolotsi had stated that "...Christians clearly do not agree with this. And therefore they are giving us a guideline of how we should debate the law." See Philip Andrew Churm, "Anti-Gay Protests Held Against Botswana LGBTQ Bill," Africa News, July 23, 2023, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/07/23/anti-gay-protests-held-against-botswana-lgbtq-bill/>. See also Africa News, "Anti-Gay Protests Held Against Botswana LGBTQ Bill," published on July 23, 2023, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9K4bCjDHrsI>; Lane Lucas, "LGBTIQ+ Community Warns Against Dirty Electioneering," The Midweek Sun, reposted by the Southern Africa Litigation Center on Facebook, January 22, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=822220619950403&set=pb.100064874163447.-2207520000&type=3>.

107 Gatsha interview.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid. Gatsha has described their challenges in running for office elsewhere: Dumiso Gatsha, "This Election Showed the Strength of the People's Voice When They Refuse to Serve the Interests of a Few," Civicus Lens, November 19, 2024, <https://lens.civicus.org/interview/this-election-showed-the-strength-of-peoples-voice-when-they-refuse-to-serve-the-interests-of-a-few>.

110 Gatsha interview.

111 Ibid. Gatsha has also stated that the political debates were structured to "potentially [leave] out rural, underserved, under-resourced and excluded communities that are supported by grassroots organizations." See Dumiso Gatsha, "This Election Showed."

112 Gatsha interview.

canvass for votes for them.<sup>113</sup> But the approach also had its upsides, Gatsha said: “It was a campaign rooted in by and for the people.”<sup>114</sup>

## Barriers for Trans and Gender-Diverse People

For trans people in Botswana, identity documents pose a serious barrier to accessing essential services, including employment and participation in elections. Describing going to the polls with identity documents that do not reflect one’s accurate gender identity, Nelly Thobega, a trans woman and co-founder of the Botswana Trans Initiative Trust (BTI), told Outright, “The entire experience is really horrible.... [it] “is triggering because you carry this identity with you wherever you go.”<sup>115</sup> She explained further:

The national ID in Botswana is called “omang,” which means “Who are you?” You carry it wherever you go, so that people are able to identify you in case of any kind of emergency, including when you interact with officials.<sup>116</sup>

Bradley Fortuin of SALC added:

You need your national documents to reflect how you express yourself, identify yourself, get a job, apply for a loan, and even drive around. And with that not happening, there is exclusion socially, economically, and politically.

Some trans people have been able to change their gender markers through individual court petitions. As Fortuin explained, the 2017 High Court ruling on gender recognition, in response to a petition from a trans man, advised the government to “create an inclusive administrative procedure to allow transgender people to change their gender markers so that trans folk don’t have to go to court every single time, bearing in mind how long and expensive court processes are” and that court cases come with “a level of public outing.” But trans people in Botswana are still awaiting implementation, despite

continuous attempts by LGBTIQ civil society actors engaging with the government.<sup>117</sup>

Nelly Thobega stressed how difficult it is to secure gender recognition individually, stating that there is an undue burden on trans and gender-diverse folks:

It is on me to build evidence for myself [of transitioning] and take it to court. The court wants to see that someone has transitioned and has been signed off by doctors. Then they will make a court order for me to change my gender marker. It is a tedious process.<sup>118</sup>

Bonolo Selelo noted that for trans people who hope to change their gender markers in advance of an election:

a lot of people cannot afford to go to court. And if they did go to court, because of the time it takes for their matters to be heard, they wouldn’t be able to get their identity cards in enough time to register to vote.<sup>119</sup>

Activists and organizations, including Thobega’s Botswana Trans Initiative Trust (BTI), as well as Health Empowerment Rights (HER), have been conducting legal and policy advocacy work geared toward legal gender recognition for transgender and gender-diverse people in Botswana.<sup>120</sup>

## Voting While Trans

Nelly Thobega of BTI registered to vote and voted for the first time in 2024, driven by the same desire for economic development shared by most people in Botswana and the fact that for trans people, economic precarity is compounded by gender-based discrimination:

A handful of trans people registered because they wanted to see a different party win. I felt I needed to register, looking at the fact that most of the people in the trans community are unemployed and are living from hand to mouth. The majority of the people in my community don’t have access to employment due to [exclusionary] laws and policies.<sup>121</sup>

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113 Phopho L. interview.

114 Gatsha interview.

115 Outright interview with Nelly Thobega, trans woman and co-founder of the Botswana Trans Initiative Trust (BTI), virtual, April 2025.

116 Ibid.

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117 Fortuin interview.

118 Thobega interview.

119 Selelo interview.

120 Thobega interview; Phopho L. interview.

121 Thobega interview.

Her experience in registering to vote in 2024, however, exposed her to misgendering and discomfort:

At first, the lady registering me used the correct pronouns to refer to me, like “Hi ma, how are you doing?” The pronouns were affirming, and I felt comfortable. Then, she saw my ID and started addressing me with the other pronouns and apologizing. I tried to explain my identity to her, but she still insisted it’s a due diligence process, and they cannot register me under a different identity marker. I went ahead and registered to vote, but I was not comfortable. And I felt that I was part of the problem in enabling a system that doesn’t recognize me, that does not include me, that excludes people who identify like myself.<sup>122</sup>

Thobega told Outright that a friend of hers, a trans woman, did not vote because after she presented her ID at the polling station, she was misgendered several times:

She chose not to vote, and that was valid to me. People from the trans community, especially trans women whom I know, including myself, were misgendered after presenting IDs. Some chose not to vote, and these were their valid reasons. I will not come up against them, because I have, in previous years, not voted due to the same reason.<sup>123</sup>

Phopho L., a cisgender woman who works with Health Empowerment Rights (HER) in Botswana, an organization supporting transgender, gender-diverse, and intersex people, recounted the story of one trans man who stayed away from the polls:

For example, [name], a trans man whom I work with, didn’t go and vote because he has issues with his identity card. His identity card, his physical look, and his gender marker don’t match, and this is a problem for him in his daily life. He said he is already facing stigma as a trans man living in the rural areas, and registering or voting will expose him to stigma, mockery, and raised eyebrows. He didn’t want government workers to mock him about his identity and physical look.<sup>124</sup>

Phopho L. added that in the organization’s group chat discussing the elections, most trans folks articulated that they would not go out to vote:

...because of the discrimination we face, especially in government offices as trans people...We wish to go and vote, but in the end, it’s about how you are going to feel when you’re doing something important for your country.<sup>125</sup>

This apathy results from what Fortuin, who is cisgender, describes as a breach of voters’ trust in the government. Transgender and gender-diverse people do not feel like a priority when they face these barriers:

You have to register to vote, and people look at you up and down and ask, ‘Why is your name this when you are presented in the opposite way?’ And you have to explain, go back and forth, and there’s an erasure of these identities.<sup>126</sup>

People affected by the lack of government attention to their causes can also be reluctant to vote if they perceive that their votes do not translate into the protection of their rights. Selelo affirmed:

There was apathy [among LGBTIQ populations], but this apathy, for trans and gender-diverse persons, was mostly to say, “You know what? These people don’t care about us, and therefore, we’re not going to take steps to go and vote.”<sup>127</sup>

Dumiso Gatsha said that political apathy in the queer community extended beyond trans and gender-diverse people:

A lot of people in the queer community, especially young people—because we predominantly work with young people under the age of 30—did not register to vote. It was a little bit disheartening, and it’s also respecting that there must be a wall between wanting to run as an independent candidate and, on the other end, recognizing that our community does not actively participate in public participation mechanisms, and

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122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Phopho L. interview.

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125 Ibid.

126 Fortuin interview.

127 Selelo interview.



that was really unfortunate.<sup>128</sup>

Thobega shared that she insisted on voting in the 2024 elections because she felt that:

It is important that I'm in that room. My vote will make a difference, and I am happy that my vote did make a difference because now we have an option of a 'human rights government.'<sup>129</sup>

## Conclusion

Botswana's 2024 elections marked political change but spotlighted ongoing challenges for LGBTIQ people's rights. While some legal progress has been made, transgender and gender-diverse individuals still face systemic exclusion due to restrictive identity document policies. Religious opposition and political hesitation continue to stall legal protections, reinforcing voter apathy among marginalized communities. To ensure true equality, sustained advocacy and legal reforms remain crucial for full democratic participation and the protection of all citizens.

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<sup>128</sup> Gatsha interview.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

# CASE STUDY BULGARIA:

## “Excluded and Unwelcome in the Political Discourse”

Election: Parliamentary (June 9 and October 27)

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were the Elections Free and Fair: Yes<sup>130</sup>

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

Can LGBTIQ people vote openly? Yes, though transgender people may have had issues voting

Bulgarian parliamentary elections were conducted twice in 2024, once on June 9 and again on October 27, after three attempts by the center-right Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria and Union of Democratic Forces (GERB-SDS) to form a new government failed.<sup>131</sup> The GERB-SDS Party secured the most seats in Parliament, but won only 65 of the 120 seats required for a majority.<sup>132</sup> In January 2025, the party finally succeeded in forming a coalition government with the pro-Russia Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and There Is Such a People (ITN), a populist party founded by a singer and TV host, with support from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms Party (MRF, or DPS for its initials in Bulgarian). Both

BSP and TSP have adopted positions hostile to LGBTIQ equality.<sup>133</sup>

Allegations of electoral fraud after the October poll were confirmed by the Constitutional Court, which ordered a recount of the votes in 2,204 precincts, representing about 17 percent of all precincts.<sup>134</sup> The recount took place in March 2025, resulting in the pro-Russia Velichie party gaining the necessary votes to enter parliament, with ten seats.<sup>135</sup> This has endangered the coalition government's majority: it now holds only 121 of all 240 seats, down from 126 seats before the recount.<sup>136</sup> Revival (Vuzrazhdane), a pro-Russia far-right nationalist party that is not part of the ruling coalition, holds the third largest bloc in parliament, with 33 seats.

### Restrictions on LGBTIQ Equality in Bulgaria

Attitudes toward LGBTIQ people in Bulgaria are generally

<sup>130</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Election Expert Team Final Report: Republic of Bulgaria Early Parliamentary Elections of 9 June 2024, September 5, 2024, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/4/575719.pdf>; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, “Well-organised but ineffective elections maintain the status quo in Bulgaria, say PACE observers,” October 28, 2024, <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9659/well-organised-but-ineffective-elections-maintain-the-status-quo-in-bulgaria-say-pace-observers>.

<sup>131</sup> “Bulgaria: Glavchev to Lead Interim Government Again, October Elections Confirmed,” Novinite, August 22, 2024, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/227900/Bulgaria:+Glavchev+to+Lead+Interim+Government+Again,+October+Elections+Confirmed>.

<sup>132</sup> Bulgarian Central Electoral Commission, “Избори за народни представители 27 октомври 2024” (Parliamentary elections October 27, 2024), October 27, 2024, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://results.cik.bg/pe202410/rezultati/index.html>.

<sup>133</sup> “Bulgaria’s parliament approves new coalition government led by centre-right’s Rosen Zhelyazkov,” AP News, January 16, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/bulgaria-parliament-government-prime-minister-zhelyazkov-borissov-6d053e278ddffeacc522c2313aea4006>; “Bulgarian Socialist Party submits more than 200,000 signatures for a referendum against gender ideology at schools,” Bulgarian National Television, July 26, 2023, <https://bnt.bg/news/bulgarian-socialist-party-submits-more-than-200000-signatures-for-a-referendum-against-gender-ideology-at-schools-320104news.html>; “Council of Europe urges Bulgaria to scrap LGBTQ ‘promotion’ ban,” Euractiv, August 13, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/council-of-europe-urges-bulgaria-to-scrap-lgbtq-promotion-ban>.

<sup>134</sup> Sofia Globe, “Bulgaria’s Constitutional Court orders adjustment of October 2024 election results,” Sofia Globe, February 27, 2025, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2025/02/27/bulgarias-constitutional-court-orders-adjustment-of-october-2024-election-results>.

<sup>135</sup> Sertac Aktan, “Velichie party joins Bulgarian parliament, coalition majority now at risk,” Euronews, March 14, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/03/14/vote-recount-changes-political-landscape-in-bulgaria>.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

negative. In 2024, only 22 percent of respondents surveyed said that the country is a “good place” for gay and lesbian people, while only 26 percent of respondents in another survey in 2023 agreed with the statement, “The rights of LGBTI+ people, including the right to marry, should be guaranteed.”<sup>137</sup> Legal protections for LGBTIQ people are limited to protections from discrimination based on “sexual orientation” and “sex change.” Conversion practices are common, with 31 percent of LGBTIQ respondents reporting in 2023 that they had experienced conversion practices in their lifetime, higher than the 24 percent European Union average.<sup>138</sup> Gender-affirming care is difficult to access, and intersex infants and children are not protected from harmful non-consensual medical interventions.

In recent years, anti-rights actors have weaponized conservative attitudes toward gender and sexuality to take away limited gains in LGBTIQ people’s rights. In a sharply divided opinion issued in 2023, the Supreme Court of Cassation effectively outlawed legal gender recognition through a binding interpretative decision that asserted that “the constitution and Bulgarian legislation are built on the understanding of the binary existence of the human species.”<sup>139</sup> In August 2024, the parliament adopted the Law on Amending the Pre-school and School Education Act, a Russian-style anti-LGBT propaganda law, which bans education on “non-traditional homosexual orientation and/or the determination of gender identity other than biological.”<sup>140</sup>

In April 2025, ITN introduced a bill to further restrict LGBTIQ people’s presence in public life by banning “displays of LGBTIQ content” in public. Revival (Vuzrazhdane), a pro-Russia far-right nationalist party that is not part of the ruling coalition and that holds the third largest bloc in

parliament, with 33 seats, proposed a bill to criminalize the provision of gender-affirming care for trans youth.<sup>141</sup>

## LGBTIQ People’s Participation in the Elections

In the run-up to both elections, Sofia Pride, an LGBTIQ organization, asked candidates to sign a declaration on the fulfillment of the rights of LGBTIQ persons. Only twenty-eight of over 6,000 candidates signed the declaration before the June 2024 elections, while a mere 13 of nearly 5,000 candidates signed it ahead of the October 2024 elections.<sup>142</sup> No openly LGBTIQ candidates participated in the election, and Bulgaria has not had any openly LGBTIQ elected officials to date.<sup>143</sup>

Joy N., a queer activist from Single Step, told Outright that Bulgarians’ growing disillusionment, after six snap elections since 2021, was particularly pronounced among LGBTIQ voters:

The general rate of voter turnout—due to the many snap elections—is going lower, especially for LGBTIQ people because, in the past, there were politicians who engaged in the Sofia Pride declaration but did not follow through, which has created a general feeling among them that nothing will change as regardless of which parties win, it seems not to be in the best interest of any political party to support LGBTIQ persons....Even the more liberal parties are not engaging in this topic [LGBTIQ inclusion] enough.<sup>144</sup>

Joy N. expressed concern, although she was not aware of specific cases, that transgender and gender-diverse

137 Benedict Vigers, “World Split on Treatment of Gay and Lesbian People,” Gallup, June 11, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/691457/world-split-treatment-gay-lesbian-people/>; GLOBSEC, GLOBSEC Trends 2024: CEE: A Brave New Region?, May 30, 2024, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/GLOBSEC%20TRENDS%202024.pdf>, 13, 90.

138 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, LGBTIQ equality at a crossroads: Progress and challenges, 2024, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2024-lgbtq-equality\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2024-lgbtq-equality_en.pdf), 93.

139 Svetoslav Todorov, “Bulgarian Supreme Court Rules Against Transgender People’s Rights,” Balkan Insight, February 21, 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/21/bulgarian-supreme-court-rules-against-transgender-peoples-rights/>.

140 ILGA-Europe, “Bulgaria Passes Anti-LGBTI Propaganda Law,” August 7, 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/bulgaria-passes-anti-lgbti-propaganda-law>.

141 Michelle Yesudas, Alberto de Belaunde and Neela Ghoshal, “Rights in Retrograde? The Legal Codification of Gender Panic,” Outright International, April 7, 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/insights/rights-retrograde-legal-codification-gender-panic>.

142 Sofia Pride, “Предизборна декларация на София прайд за изборите за 51-ото Народно събрание” (Sofia Pride’s election declaration for the 51st National Assembly elections), accessed August 1, 2025, <https://sofiapride.org/izbori-2024-2>; Sofia Pride, “Предизборна декларация на София прайд за изборите за 50-о Народно събрание” (Sofia Pride’s election declaration for the elections for the 50th National Assembly), accessed August 1, 2025, <https://sofiapride.org/izbori-2024-1>; Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Bulgaria, National Assembly,” accessed August 1, 2025, <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/BG/BG-LC01/election/BG-LC01-E20240609>, <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/BG/BG-LC01/election/BG-LC01-E20241027>.

143 Outright Interview with Joy N. (pseudonym), a queer activist working at Single Step, virtual, March 12, 2025. Single Step is a Bulgarian organization dedicated to support LGBTI youth, mostly between 13–25 years old, and their families, friends, and allies.

144 Ibid.

persons in Bulgaria may have experienced significant barriers to voting due to the 2023 Supreme Court of Cassation ruling that outlawed legal gender recognition.<sup>145</sup>

To counteract LGBTIQ people's disillusionment related to the elections, LGBTIQ organizations organized a livestreamed community discussion in October 2024 with five supportive politicians, including four candidates from the "We Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria" (PP-DB) coalition and one candidate from DPS.<sup>146</sup> The participating candidates generally agreed on the need to counter other parties' anti-gender policies. MP Elisaveta Belogradova of the center-right liberal "Yes, Bulgaria" party, part of the PP-DB coalition, asserted that the coalition should prioritize "fix[ing] what happened with the pre-school and school education act" and reverse the enactment of the so-called "LGBT propaganda" law, which she described as addressing a "made-up" problem.<sup>147</sup> Referring to attacks on minority groups, Stanislav Anastasov of the Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS) warned, "There is a clear ideological enemy who wants to destroy all the achievements of recent years and stop what needs to happen."<sup>148</sup>

In early 2025, PP-DB withdrew from talks to join the ruling coalition over the latter's supposed failure to address corruption and guarantee reforms of the judiciary, while DPS gave the ruling coalition the majority vote it needed to form a government, but did not join it.<sup>149</sup>

## Mobilization of Anti-Gender Rhetoric: Passage of the Law Banning "LGBT Propaganda" in Schools

In the lead-up to elections, the Revival Party introduced the Law on Amending the Pre-school and School

Education Act, which had previously been voted down, but was passed into law on August 7, 2024.<sup>150</sup> During the parliamentary debate on the law, MPs made derogatory comments regarding LGBTIQ persons. Kornelia Ninova of the Bulgarian Socialist Party claimed that "gender ideology" was a tool of the elite, while Zvezdelina Karavelova, an MP from the Revival Party, said she hoped that her one-year-old son would not bring a husband home.<sup>151</sup>

Joy N. told Outright she believed the law was only adopted "because it was passed in the summer when the Parliament and the watchdogs are not working at full capacity," an assessment shared by ILGA-Europe.<sup>152</sup> This did not prevent the authorities from immediately implementing the law, with multiple government agencies launching investigations of Single Step "at lightning speed" just as the anti-LGBTIQ "propaganda" law was passed.<sup>153</sup> On August 14, one week after the bill's passage, a Revival Party MP announced during a parliamentary meeting that the party would seek the revocation of Single Step's license to work with minors and that it had notified the prosecutor's office of the organization's supposed violations of the LGBT propaganda law.<sup>154</sup> Seven complaints from far-right and other groups, some with connections to the Revival Party, were filed against the organization. A representative of Single Step told Outright that the complaints were "thoroughly investigated by government agencies and found to be baseless." As of writing, Single Step continues

<sup>150</sup> ILGA-Europe, "Bulgaria Passes anti-LGBTI Propaganda Law" August 7, 2024 <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/bulgaria-passes-anti-lgbti-propaganda-law>.

<sup>151</sup> Svetoslav Todorov, "Bulgaria's Parliament Unexpectedly Outlaws 'LGBT Propaganda' in Schools," Balkan Insight, August 7, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/08/07/bulgarias-parliament-unexpectedly-out-laws-lgbt-propaganda-in-schools>.

<sup>152</sup> Joy N. interview; ILGA-Europe, "Bulgaria passes anti-LGBTI propaganda law."

<sup>153</sup> Single Step (@singlestepbg), "i□ През последните три седмици, в разгара на лятото, по сигнали на различни организации, свързани с ПП 'Възраждане' (i□ Over the past three weeks, in the midst of summer, following signals from various organizations related to the Vazrazhdane Nature Reserve), Instagram, August 29, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/C\\_QXA0Cied5/](https://www.instagram.com/p/C_QXA0Cied5/).

<sup>154</sup> Борислав Кръстев, "Костадинов прекара часове в атаки срещу ЛГБТ, подкрепящите го искат да се забранят 'чуждестранни агенти,'" (Kostadinov spent hours attacking LGBT, his supporters want to ban "foreign agents"), К л у б ' Z', August 14, 2024, <https://clubz.bg/152755>. Single Step is "fully licensed by the National Agency for Child Protection and the Agency for Social Assistance, to provide social services to youth." See "Bulgarian Organization 'Single Step' Launches a Hotline In Support of LGBTI People," Novinite, March 10, 2018, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/188592/Bulgarian+Organization+%27%27Single+Step+%27%27+Launches+a+Hotline+In+Support+of+LGBTI+People>.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. See also discussion on the Bulgarian Supreme Court decision in Teodora Petrova, "Barring Legal Gender Reassignment in Bulgaria," Verfassungsblog, March 2, 2023, <https://verfassungsblog.de/barring-legal-gender-reassignment-in-bulgaria>.

<sup>146</sup> Single Step, "Statement Regarding the Bulgarian Elections," 2025, on file with Outright International.

<sup>147</sup> Single Step, "Общностна дискусия с кандидати на народни представители" (Community discussion with candidates for parliamentarians), Facebook video, October 17, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/100069996106701/videos/558511816857356>.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Łukasz Kobeszko, "Bulgaria: a 'grand coalition' government," Centre for Eastern Studies, January 17, 2025, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-01-17/bulgaria-a-grand-coalition-government>.



to have a license for working with minors.<sup>155</sup>

Leading up to the October elections, the Revival Party also targeted teachers whom it deemed were violating the “propaganda” law, with a local party branch in the city of Varna publishing a “black list” of local educators who had supported a petition against the law.<sup>156</sup> Revival’s efforts to put this issue on the political agenda came to a head with a highly sensationalized incident of a high school boy who received a B mark on his geography exam.<sup>157</sup> Revival and the student’s mother alleged that he got this grade because he refused to complete an individual voluntary assignment on the Istanbul Convention, which the mother and Revival referred to as promoting “LGBT propaganda.”<sup>158</sup>

“LGBTIQ persons are always brought up before the elections and used as scapegoats and for propaganda... though this election year has been the worst and most violent,” noted Joy N.<sup>159</sup> She stressed that anti-gender rhetoric is mobilized mainly by Revival and the BSP, recalling that:

The Istanbul Convention was not accepted in Bulgaria because the Convention was positioned by the BSP as promoting “gender ideology.” Every time legislation that has to do with domestic violence is brought up at a national level, “gender ideology” is brought up as well.<sup>160</sup>

Following the tactics of anti-LGBTIQ actors in other countries, these populist parties targeted civil society actors, specifically those that receive foreign funding. This discourse, said Joy, aims to portray NGO work as “turning children gay” with the funding they receive from billionaire philanthropist George Soros, who is the subject of far-right conspiracy theories.<sup>161</sup> In September 2024, yet another move seen to target LGBTIQ organizing before the elections was the introduction of a Georgian and

Russian-inspired Foreign Agents Law, which is yet to be passed as of July 2025.<sup>162</sup>

Polls before the elections showed an increase in Revival’s popularity after the “propaganda” law was passed.<sup>163</sup> However, this popularity did not translate to votes during the elections, as Revival gained three fewer seats in October compared to the June 2024 election results.<sup>164</sup>

## Impact of Electoral Discourse

Hateful political rhetoric and hostile legislation have severely impacted LGBTIQ people, especially young people, Joy N. said:

The local context has created a sense of being excluded and unwelcome in the broader political discourse, with young people feeling that political parties and institutions do not represent their interests or care about their well-being.<sup>165</sup>

For Single Step, this critical moment calls for the promotion of a “broader human rights agenda”:

The deliberate targeting of the LGBTI+ community for political gain has resulted in a noticeable erosion of rights and an alarming rise in discriminatory rhetoric... Thus, it is important for the local community to monitor any attempts to introduce new discriminatory legislation or policies, and continue with the advocacy efforts to promote a broader human rights agenda.<sup>166</sup>

155 Outright email exchange with a representative of Single Step, August 21, 2025.

156 Katerina Vasileva, “Bulgarian Teachers Say They Face Threats For Opposing Anti-LGBT ‘Propaganda In School’ Law,” Radio Free Europe, August 24, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/anti-lgbt-law-bulgaria-/33089991.html>.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid.

159 Joy N. interview.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid.

162 Vidka Atanasova, “Bulgaria’s Far-Right Revival Party Pushes For ‘Foreign Agent’ Law, Despite Members Receiving Foreign Grants,” Radio Free Liberty, September 8, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/bugaria-for-eign-agent-law-far-right-revival-kostadinov/33107205.html>.

163 Euractiv and AFP, “Far right tipped to gain ground as jaded Bulgarians vote again,” EURACTIV, October 27, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/far-right-tipped-to-gain-ground-as-jaded-bulgarians-vote-again>.

164 Bulgarian Central Electoral Commission, “Избори за народни представители 27 октомври 2024” (Parliamentary elections October 27, 2024).

165 Joy N. interview.

166 Single Step, “Statement Regarding the Bulgarian Elections.”

## SNAPSHOT CROATIA:

# Emerging Political Support Amid Anti-Gender Backlash

Election: Parliamentary (April 17) and Presidential (December 29)

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were the Elections Free and Fair: Yes<sup>167</sup>

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Can LGBTIQ people vote openly? Yes, though transgender people may have had issues voting

Croatia held a general election on April 17, 2024, to elect the 151 members of the 11th Sabor, the country's unicameral parliament. The center-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won the most votes, securing 61 seats and retaining control of the government after forming a coalition with the right-wing populist Homeland Movement, which came in third with 14 seats.<sup>168</sup> The center-left Rivers of Justice coalition, formed by the Social Democratic Party (SDP), came in second with 42 seats.

Later that year, the presidential election was held on December 29, 2024, with a run-off on January 12, 2025, after no candidate secured a majority vote in the first round. SDP's Zoran Milanović was reelected president with a record 75 percent of the vote, beating HDZ's Dragan Primorac.

<sup>167</sup> OCSE, Croatia, Early Parliamentary Elections, 17 April 2024: Final Report, November 25, 2024 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/9/581524.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> Jon Henley, "Political uncertainty in Croatia as ruling party wins most seats but no majority." The Guardian, April 18, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/18/croatia-election-results-hdz-democratic-union-pm-andrej-plenkovic-without-majority-sdp-homeland-movement>; Darko Bandic, "Croatia gets new government with a far-right party included ahead of European parliamentary vote," AP News, May 17, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/croatia-government-far-right-european-election-240941791de21a8c8a35acb2b2082cde>.

## "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back": LGBTIQ People's Rights in Croatia

"We have decent legal frameworks, but the country does little to promote them," affirmed Antonija Stovanovic, a member of the feminist group LORI, in an interview with Outright.<sup>169</sup> Croatian law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in access to health, employment, housing, education, and the provision of goods and services. Same-sex couples may enter into civil unions and adopt jointly. However, gaps remain toward full equality. Legal

<sup>169</sup> Outright interview with Antonija Stojanovic, virtual, March 25, 2025.



**Right:** LORI staff member speaking at an event by the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community ahead of the 2024 EU elections. Credit: LORI.

gender recognition is possible, but it requires expert opinions from a psychologist and a psychiatrist, as well as a report on personal and family circumstances.<sup>170</sup> Intersex persons remain unprotected from discrimination and non-consensual medical interventions.<sup>171</sup> An Ombuds report found that negative public sentiments toward LGBTIQ people have been generally decreasing in the last 15 years, but there has also been marked backlash in the form of rising anti-LGBTIQ speech in the past five years.<sup>172</sup> According to the report:

Currently, there is a particularly noticeable amount of hate speech, especially on social networks, which indicates how some people think, but also feeds and encourages others to express such things, and such political messages, and such speech, in addition to being increasingly normalized and lowering the level of acceptability to proportions not yet imagined, also encourages acts, discrimination, and hate crimes.<sup>173</sup>

This situation is captured by the title of Zagreb Pride's 2023 report, "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back," which tackles the steady rise of hate speech against LGBTIQ people, especially trans people, since 2018.<sup>174</sup> Hateful political rhetoric is particularly on the rise, with transgender, racialized, and immigrant populations being targeted the most.<sup>175</sup> This is enabled by the media, which, as the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality highlighted, continues to perpetuate harmful stereotypes, amplifying

hostility.<sup>176</sup> Seventy-seven percent of LGBTIQ high school students surveyed by LORI reported being exposed to homophobic and transphobic speech by their peers in 2022.<sup>177</sup> A study by Rainbow Family Association published in 2023, the first-ever report on LGBTIQ people's mental health in Croatia, shows that 75 percent of surveyed LGBTIQ people contemplated suicide, while 15 percent attempted it.<sup>178</sup>

## LGBTIQ People's Participation in the 2024 Elections

LGBTIQ activists told Outright that, to the best of their knowledge, LGBTIQ persons did not experience any specific restrictions to voting in 2024.<sup>179</sup>

During the 2024 parliamentary elections, several lesbian, gay, and bisexual candidates ran for office. Three candidates, for instance, from Mozemo! (We Can!), a green left-wing party, were active in LGBTIQ civil society before they entered politics. Stovanovic noted that transgender people, especially trans women, rarely participate in the political process as candidates owing to the cisnormative and male-dominant structure of Croatian politics.<sup>180</sup> This was echoed by Franko Dota of Zagreb Pride, a Croatian LGBTIQ activist who also vied for a position in the election:

LGBTIQ candidates are rarely out, as before the green Mozemo Party, there were no parties with specific agendas on LGBTIQ persons...Some [LGBTIQ candidates], especially those who have expertise in certain areas, would not want to be out and be reduced to only being an LGBTIQ candidate, even

170 Republic of Croatia, Pravilnik o načinu prikupljanja medicinske dokumentacije te utvrđivanju uvjeta i pretpostavki za promjenu spola ili o životu u drugom rodnom identitetu, Ordinance No. 2,550, Official Gazette No. 132, 2014, [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2014\\_11\\_132\\_2487.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2014_11_132_2487.html), art. 4.2.

171 Outright International, "Country Overview: Croatia," accessed July 10, 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/europe-and-central-asia/croatia>.

172 Pučka pravobraniteljica, Diskriminacija i zaštita od diskriminacije u Hrvatskoj Osvrt na 15 godina primjene Zakona o suzbijanju diskriminacije (Discrimination and protection against discrimination in Croatia Review of 15 years of application of the Law on Suppression of Discrimination), February 28, 2025, <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/download/diskriminacija-i-za-tita-od-diskriminacije-u-hrvatskoj-osvrt-na-15-godina-primjene-zakona-o-suzbijanju-diskriminacije>.

173 Ibid, 32, translated from Croatian by Outright.

174 Enis Zebić, "Poštivanje prava LGBTIQ zajednice u Hrvatskoj zavisi od pojedinaca" (Respect for the rights of the LGBTIQ community in Croatia depends on individuals), Radio Slobodna Evropa, February 15, 2023, [https://www.slobodnaevropa-org.translate.goog/a/prava-lgbtiq-u-hrvatskoj/32272909.html?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=auto&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=it](https://www.slobodnaevropa-org.translate.goog/a/prava-lgbtiq-u-hrvatskoj/32272909.html?_x_tr_sl=auto&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=it).

175 Tamara Opačić, "Protiv kampanje mržnje" (Against hate campaign), Novosti, June 11, 2023, [https://www.portalnovosti.com/protiv-kampanje-mrznje/?fbclid=IwAR0qVtg0qJm86FVaU9bnr9rVd\\_t5RqZ8op0\\_Cx-8851TYZIEFzlpQ\\_9jFXc](https://www.portalnovosti.com/protiv-kampanje-mrznje/?fbclid=IwAR0qVtg0qJm86FVaU9bnr9rVd_t5RqZ8op0_Cx-8851TYZIEFzlpQ_9jFXc).

176 Pravobraniteljica za ravnopravnost spolova, Izvješće o radu za 2023 (Work report for 2023), October 2024, [https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2024-05-23/093702/IZVJ\\_PRAVOBR\\_RAVNOPRAVNOST\\_SPOLOVA\\_2023\\_SAZETAK.pdf](https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2024-05-23/093702/IZVJ_PRAVOBR_RAVNOPRAVNOST_SPOLOVA_2023_SAZETAK.pdf).

177 LORI, Iskustva i potrebe mladih LGBTIQ osoba u Hrvatskoj Izveštaj o rezultatima istraživanja (Experiences and needs of young LGBTIQ people in Croatia: Research results report), 2022 [https://lori.hr/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/iskustva\\_potrebe\\_mladih\\_LGBTIQ\\_osoba\\_Hrvatska.pdf](https://lori.hr/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/iskustva_potrebe_mladih_LGBTIQ_osoba_Hrvatska.pdf), 33.

178 Enis Zebić, "LGBTIQ+ u Hrvatskoj: Život u strahu kada će nešto krenuti po krivu" (LGBTIQ+ in Croatia: Living in fear of something going wrong), Radio Slobodna Evropa, March 15, 2023, [https://www.slobodnaevropa-org.translate.goog/a/lgbtq-istrizivanje-hrvatska/32319726.html?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=auto&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=it](https://www.slobodnaevropa-org.translate.goog/a/lgbtq-istrizivanje-hrvatska/32319726.html?_x_tr_sl=auto&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=it).

179 Outright interview with Daniel Martinovic, Rainbow Family Association, virtual, March 18, 2024; Stojanovic interview.

180 Stojanovic interview.

though Croatia is quite progressive.<sup>181</sup>

Dota, who ran for MP as an independent under the SDP-led Rivers of Justice coalition, added that he ran “as an activist... to spur some controversies and to put some LGBT topics in the public eye in the debate.”<sup>182</sup>

In the lead-up to the elections, Zagreb Pride published an “LGB Compass,” a list of 11 candidates who allegedly identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Gordan Bosanac of Možemo, who is openly gay and was included in the list, and Peda Grbin, then-president of the Social Democratic Party, spoke against the publication, citing that it was published without the consent of all candidates listed.<sup>183</sup> Other LGBTIQ organizations similarly condemned this “outing” incident. Zagreb Pride stood firm, claiming “no one was outed without consent” and that “no one can be in the closet and be a member of parliament.”<sup>184</sup> This followed a more high-profile outing incident, when the President of Croatia, on January 29, 2024, had alleged that the then-Minister for Economy, Damir Habijan, was gay, drawing condemnation from the Ombudperson for Gender Equality.<sup>185</sup>

Antonija Stovanovic expressed disappointment with media and political leaders for not further discussing LGBTIQ people’s rights, save for the dramatization of the outing incidents.<sup>186</sup> Daniel Martinovic of Rainbow Family Association agreed:

There was no talk on the rights of LGBTIQ persons. There was no talk about housing, no talk about social life, no talk about family life, adoption, second parenting, or foster care. It was only about who is gay and who is not gay. There was no talk of any other

identities...It was only about which male candidates were gay.<sup>187</sup>

## LGBTIQ Issues on the Electoral Agenda

The ruling party, HDZ, failed to address LGBTIQ issues in its platform, consistent with the party’s refusal to publicly position itself on LGBTIQ equality.<sup>188</sup> Možemo! and the Rivers of Justice coalition, on the other hand, proposed concrete reforms for LGBTIQ equality.<sup>189</sup> Možemo! devoted a comprehensive section in its platform to LGBTIQ communities, supporting the provision of “comprehensive health care” to transgender people, the prohibition of conversion practices, and the expansion of anti-discrimination protections to include sex characteristics, among others.<sup>190</sup> The Social Democratic Party established an LGBTIQ working group for young people following the elections.<sup>191</sup>

LGBTIQ youth, according to Stojanovic, rarely feel represented in political processes as they perceive even the more liberal parties as not doing enough.<sup>192</sup> The comprehensive inclusion of LGBTIQ issues in manifestos in 2024, especially that of Možemo!, and the presence of openly queer candidates, gave queer people something to vote for, not just against, said Stojanovic:

Since I started voting, it is only [in] the last five years [since Možemo was formed] that I have felt that there is a party that aligns with my values. Before, I would only vote against conservative parties rather than parties whose values I felt aligned with mine.<sup>193</sup>

Martinovic added, “For the first time there, was open support for LGBTIQ issues...not just veiled in ‘minority’ or

<sup>181</sup> Outright Interview with Franko Dota, virtual, March 13, 2025.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> “Zagreb Pride: These are the 11 gay candidates on the lists. Three are from HDZ,” IndexHR, April 13, 2024, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/zagreb-pride-ovo-je-11-gej-kandidata-na-listama-trojica-su-iz-hd-za/2556118.aspx>.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Agence France-Presse, “Croatia watchdog criticises president over ‘gay minister’ remarks,” South China Morning Post, January 16, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/europe/article/3248551/croatia-watchdog-criticises-president-over-gay-minister-remarks>; Martina Pauček Šljivak, “Dugine obitelji: ‘Bilo bi dobro da se više političara u Hrvatskoj outa, no to je osobna stvar svih’” (Dugine’s family: ‘It would be good if more politicians in Croatia came out, but that’s everyone’s personal matter’), 24 Sata, January 1, 2024, <https://www.24sata.hr/news/dugine-obitelji-bilo-bi-dobro-da-se-vise-politicara-u-hrvatskoj-outa-no-to-je-osobna-stvar-svih-958259>.

<sup>186</sup> Stojanovic interview.

<sup>187</sup> Martinovic interview.

<sup>188</sup> Dota interview.

<sup>189</sup> Rivers of Justice Coalition, “Rijeke Pravde: Izborni Program 2024” (Rivers of Justice: Election Program 2024), 2024, [https://www.sdp.hr/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/sdp\\_program\\_2024.pdf](https://www.sdp.hr/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/sdp_program_2024.pdf), 16, 19, 20.

<sup>190</sup> There was quite an elaborate discussion of LGBTIQ issues in Možemo’s manifesto, including on family recognition, legal gender recognition, and comprehensive non-discrimination. See Možemo, “Program Možemo! za nacionalne izbore 2024” (We Can! program for the 2024 national elections), <https://mozemo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/A4-program-2024b.pdf>, 81–83.

<sup>191</sup> Martinovic interview; Dota interview.

<sup>192</sup> Stojanovic interview.

<sup>193</sup> Stojanovic interview.



‘human rights’ language.”<sup>194</sup>

While it only finished fourth, behind Rivers of Justice and the Homeland Movement, Mozemo! got the biggest boost in 2024, securing ten seats, double the number of seats it won in the 2020 general election.

The Homeland Movement, which joined the ruling coalition, positioned itself against LGBTIQ equality, committing to end “gender ideology” in its platform.<sup>195</sup> It vowed to roll back protections on legal gender recognition, same-sex unions, and fostering or adoption by same-sex couples.<sup>196</sup> In June 2024, the party also opposed the adoption of a report by the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, claiming it promoted “WHO’s position on gender ideology” and pursued a “more globalist and less sovereign policy.”<sup>197</sup>

Other far-right and conservative parties hit back against LGBTIQ-inclusive education ahead of the 2024 elections. MP Nikola Grmoja of The Bridge (Most), a conservative party, opposed the new gender studies program at the Zagreb Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, claiming it would introduce “gender ideology” into the education system.<sup>198</sup> MP Marijan Pavliček of the Croatian Sovereignists, a Christian right-wing party, submitted a motion to parliament in July 2024 to withdraw Croatia from the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty on violence against women and domestic violence, on the basis that it promoted “gender ideology.”<sup>199</sup> Both parties performed poorly in the 2024 elections. Most won eleven seats in 2024, which is one seat lower than in 2020. The Croatian Sovereignists lost half its seats, now only having two MPs in parliament.

The political mobilization of anti-gender rhetoric in Croatia has helped normalize queerphobia, going beyond the political sphere and impacting LGBTIQ people’s daily lives. Stovanovic said she and a colleague were physically threatened by students at a school they visited in 2024 to raise awareness about LGBTIQ issues, despite having been invited by the school and having previously worked with them.<sup>200</sup> Similarly, LORI observed an increase in cases of hate speech and in the number of LGBTIQ students seeking psychological support owing to bullying and harassment in school.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Martinovic interview.

<sup>195</sup> Homeland Movement, “POLITIČKI PROGRAM,” 2024, <https://dp.hr/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Politicki-program-Domovinskog-pokreta.pdf>, 10–11.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> “DP does not want to support Pupovac’s appointment, Gender Equality Ombudswoman’s report,” NI Zagreb, June 20, 2024, <https://ninfo.hr/english/news/dp-does-not-want-to-support-pupovacs-appointment-gender-equality-ombudswomans-report>.

<sup>198</sup> “Grmoja želi zabraniti Rodne studije na Filozofskom: To je sulu-do,” (Grmoja wants to ban Gender Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy: That’s insane), IndexHR, July 4, 2024, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/grmoja-zeli-zabraniti-rodne-studije-na-filozofskom-zele-unistiti-obitelj/2579573.aspx>.

<sup>199</sup> Nikola Badovinac, “MP up in arms over gender ideology,” Glas Hrvatske, July 4, 2024, <https://glashrvatske.hrt.hr/en/politics/mp-up-in-arms-over-gender-ideology-11643802>.

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<sup>200</sup> Stojanovic interview.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

# SNAPSHOT EUROPEAN UNION:

# Rise of European Far-Right Threatens Equality

Election: European Parliament (June 6 and 9, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>202</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Between June 6 and 9, 2024, the world's biggest multi-country election took place as voters in the European Union (EU) went to the polls in all 27 EU countries to select the members of the European Parliament, one of the two EU legislative bodies.<sup>203</sup> Around 18,400 candidates participated in the elections altogether, with elections taking place in each country to select that country's allotted number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).<sup>204</sup>

## Sustained Political Support for Equality

Around 1,100 candidates, from every EU country, signed a six-point "Come Out 4 Europe" pledge developed by the advocacy organization ILGA-Europe. In signing, they committed to advocating for LGBTIQ-responsive

<sup>202</sup> ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission, European Parliament Elections 6–9 June 2024 Final Report, November 2024, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/eu/581848>.

<sup>203</sup> Luke McGee, "European Parliament elections: What's at stake in the world's biggest multi-country vote," CNN, June 6, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/06/europe/european-parliament-elections-2024-explained-intl/index.html>. The other EU legislative body is the Council of the European Union, also known as the Council of Ministers, through which national ministers from each government meet to adopt laws and coordinate policies.

<sup>204</sup> European Commission, Report on the 2024 elections to the European Parliament, June 6, 2025, [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/dd2ddea7-d145-4055-b60c-a32941dc0e84\\_en?filename=SWD+-+Report+on+the+2024+elections+to+the+European+Parliament.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/dd2ddea7-d145-4055-b60c-a32941dc0e84_en?filename=SWD+-+Report+on+the+2024+elections+to+the+European+Parliament.pdf), 2.

**Right:** Joint event of LGBTIQ Intergroup of the European Parliament and the Hungarian Parliamentary LGBTIQ Intergroup, June 30, 2025. Credit: "For a Diverse Hungary" Hungarian Parliamentary LGBTIQ Intergroup.

policies, combatting violations of LGBTIQ people's human rights, defending LGBTIQ organizations and activists, and building alliances for equality.<sup>205</sup> Of these 1,100 candidates, 164 were elected as MEPs, forming 24 percent of the 720-member body. One of them, Romanian MEP Nicolae Ștefănuță, who ran an LGBTIQ-supportive platform as a self-proclaimed voice of the "Equality Generation," became one of the 14 vice presidents of the European Parliament.<sup>206</sup>

<sup>205</sup> ILGA-Europe, "Breaking down the Come Out 4 Europe campaign," September 23, 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/campaign/come-out-4-europe>.

<sup>206</sup> European Parliament, "Nicolae ȘTEFĂNUȚĂ," accessed February 28,



The EU's two largest political groups explicitly included LGBTIQ communities in their platforms. The manifesto of the European People's Party, which remained the dominant political group after gaining nine more seats from its 2019–2024 term, included a perfunctory one-liner affirming the party's commitment to "protecting LGBTQ+ rights."<sup>207</sup> The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats offered more comprehensive proposals: pledging to fight the far-right's attacks on LGBTIQ communities, reinforce existing policies on gender and LGBTIQ equality, and push for the adoption of the European Anti-Discrimination Directive.<sup>208</sup>

## Rise of Far-Right Parties

Despite these positive developments, the lead-up to the election was marked by a sharp increase in transphobic and other anti-LGBTIQ political rhetoric, as certain political actors instrumentalized polarizing debates on gender identity to garner support.<sup>209</sup>

Following the election and entry of 109 MEPs from various political formations who led racist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-LGBTIQ campaigns, two far-right political groups were created within the European Parliament. Patriots for Europe, founded by Hungary's Viktor Orbán, is now the third-largest political group in the European Parliament, with 86 MEPs, holding 12 percent of all seats. Orbán's Fidesz-KDNP coalition in Hungary campaigned for "no migration, no gender, no war" and

warned that the "Brussels elite and the Soros network, fattened up with EU money, are waging an ideological war: re-educating our children with gender propaganda" that will "ruin the future of our children."<sup>210</sup> The biggest national bloc within Patriots for Europe, with 30 MEPs, is France's Rassemblement National (RN) or National Rally. RN's members had previously voted against five resolutions on LGBTIQ equality at the European Parliament and were marked absent or abstained from voting for three other resolutions.<sup>211</sup>

Even further to the right, the Europe of Sovereign Nations Group (ESN) is composed of 26 MEPs, 14 of whom are from the ultranationalist Alternative for Germany (AfD). In its election manifesto, AfD opposed gender-affirming care for youth, rejected equal treatment for "other forms of cohabitation than marriage between a man and a woman," and vowed to stop the EU's purported promotion of so-called gender ideology, which AfD considers to be causing the "greatest damage" to children.<sup>212</sup> ESN's member party from Bulgaria, the Revival party, which won three seats, was key to the August 2024 passage of a Bulgarian law prohibiting "propaganda, popularisation and encouragement, directly or indirectly, of ideas and views connected to nontraditional sexual orientation or to gender-identifying different from the biological" in schools.<sup>213</sup>

Other far-right MEPs joined the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, the fourth-biggest in the European Parliament with 78 MEPs. One of the group's French MEPs, who has repeatedly made homophobic and transphobic remarks, declared in a televised debate ahead of the election that their party fights "against woke propaganda and LGBT activism that destroys our

2025, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/58766/NICOLAE\\_STEFA-NUTA/home](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/58766/NICOLAE_STEFA-NUTA/home); Florin Marinescu, "Cine este Nicu Ștefănuță, singurul independent care a câștigat un mandat de europarlamentar / Și-a asumat deschis temele progresiștilor și se definește ca fiind un aliat al 'comunității LGBTQIA+'", G4 Media, June 11, 2024, <https://www.g4media.ro/cine-este-nicu-stefanuta-singurul-independent-care-a-castigat-un-mandat-de-europarlamentar-si-a-asumat-deschis-temele-progresistilor-si-se-defineste-ca-fiind-un-aliat-al-comunitatii-lgbtqi.html>.

207 European People's Party, "EPP 2024 Manifesto," accessed February 28, 2025, [https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2024/03/Manifesto\\_2024.pdf](https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2024/03/Manifesto_2024.pdf).

208 The European Commission first proposed a "Council directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment outside the labour market, irrespective of age, disability, sexual orientation or religious belief." It has remained blocked since. See Ionel Zamfir, "Anti-discrimination directive," European Parliament Legislative Train, March 20, 2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-area-of-justice-and-fundamental-rights/file-anti-discrimination-directive>; Party of European Socialists, "PES manifesto for the 2024 European elections," March 2024, [https://pes.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024\\_PES\\_Manifesto\\_EN.pdf](https://pes.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024_PES_Manifesto_EN.pdf).

209 ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2024>, 7; ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2025>, 7.

210 Fidesz, "Elérhetővé tette Választási Manifesztumát a Fidesz," April 20, 2024, <https://fidesz.hu/hirek/elerhetove-tette-valasztasi-manifesztumat-a-fidesz>. George Soros is a billionaire philanthropist whose Open Society Foundations is the largest private human rights funder in the world. See Adam Geller, "Soros, the far right's boogeyman, is again a target," AP News, October 27, 2018, <https://apnews.com/general-news-8efaa4870f184b448847f0300959750a>.

211 Fédération LGBTI+, "Au Parlement européen, Jordan Bardella et ses alliés soutiennent l'homophobie," Mediabask, June 7, 2024, [https://www.mediabask.eus/fr/info\\_mbsk/20240607/au-parlement-europeen-jordan-bardella-et-ses-allies-soutiennent-l-homophobie](https://www.mediabask.eus/fr/info_mbsk/20240607/au-parlement-europeen-jordan-bardella-et-ses-allies-soutiennent-l-homophobie).

212 Alternative für Deutschland, "Europawahl Programm 2024," August 2023, [https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-11-16\\_-\\_AfD-Europawahlprogramm-2024\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-11-16_-_AfD-Europawahlprogramm-2024_-_web.pdf).

213 Svetoslav Todorov, "Bulgaria's Parliament Unexpectedly Outlaws 'LGBT Propaganda' in Schools," Balkan Insight, August 7, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/08/07/bulgarias-parliament-unexpectedly-outlaws-lgbt-propaganda-in-schools>.

universities.”<sup>214</sup>

This alarming pivot to the right and the far right has already swayed some political actors who previously supported equal rights for LGBTIQ people. In Greece, for instance, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who had previously backed the marriage equality bill despite opposition from his own party, later said that his party, New Democracy, “certainly suffered political damage from this legislative initiative.”<sup>215</sup> While his party still finished first, it lost one seat in 2024. He later stated that his government would shift its focus from legal reform to changing attitudes.<sup>216</sup>

## Trans Voters in the EU

In some member states, trans and gender-diverse persons encountered challenges in exercising their right to vote during the European Parliament elections, especially in Hungary and Bulgaria, the only two EU countries where trans people cannot legally change their gender markers.<sup>217</sup> In 15 other EU countries, trans people must undergo judicial proceedings or comply

with medical requirements in order to access legal gender recognition.<sup>218</sup> In Hungary, an activist informed Outright that some trans people did not vote out of fear of rejection or humiliation for having to use identity documents that do not reflect their gender identities.<sup>219</sup> In Bulgaria, an activist who spoke with Outright said it was possible that some trans and gender-diverse persons may have avoided voting.<sup>220</sup>

In Spain, despite the country being one of the nine EU countries with legal gender recognition based on self-determination, a popular trans content creator claimed that he was “denied the right to vote for being trans” and that a polling official for the 2024 European Parliament elections accused him of committing legal fraud. While he had already changed his name, the administrative delay in obtaining new documents caused a mismatch between the name on his updated ID and the one on the voter rolls.<sup>221</sup>

## Hungary in the 2024 European Parliament Elections

Amid mounting anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric instrumentalized by Orban’s ruling party, political parties supportive of equal rights suffered losses in the 2024 European Parliament election, ceding more space to unchecked hate in the political sphere.

The center-left DK-MSZP-Dialogue Alliance, which explicitly stood against discrimination based on sexual orientation in its electoral program, only won two seats, losing three from 2019. The centrist Momentum Movement devoted a section to LGBTIQ persons in its program, promising to enact protections for LGBTIQ families and revoke the anti-LGBTIQ “child protection” law, and released several campaign videos on their LGBTIQ-

214 Valentine Hullin, “Où est la maman?” après la naissance des jumeaux de Jacquemus, Marion Maréchal accusée d’homophobie,” *Huffington Post*, April 24, 2024, [https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/politique/article/ou-est-la-maman-apres-la-naissance-des-jumeaux-de-jacquemus-marion-marchal-accusee-d-homophobie\\_233056.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/politique/article/ou-est-la-maman-apres-la-naissance-des-jumeaux-de-jacquemus-marion-marchal-accusee-d-homophobie_233056.html); “Festival de Cannes : six associations portent plainte contre Marion Maréchal pour injure transphobe envers Karla Sofia Gascon,” *Le Monde*, May 27, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2024/05/27/festival-de-cannes-six-associations-portent-plainte-contre-marion-marchal-pour-injure-transphobe-envers-karla-sofia-gascon\\_6235907\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2024/05/27/festival-de-cannes-six-associations-portent-plainte-contre-marion-marchal-pour-injure-transphobe-envers-karla-sofia-gascon_6235907_3224.html); “Elections européennes 2024 : Un jeune homme effaré par les propos de Marion Maréchal, sa réaction fait le buzz,” *20 Minutes*, May 29, 2024, <https://www.20minutes.fr/arts-stars/insolite/4093526-20240529-elections-europeennes-2024-jeune-homme-effare-propos-marion-marchal-reaction-fait-buzz>.

215 Greg Owen, “Greece’s Prime Minister faces fierce opposition over his pledge to legalize gay marriage,” *LGBTQ Nation*, January 13, 2024, <https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2024/01/greeces-prime-minister-faces-fierce-opposition-over-his-pledge-to-legalize-gay-marriage/>; Kyriakos Mitsotakis, “Συνέντευξη του Πρωθυπουργού Κυριάκου Μητσοτάκη στο κεντρικό δελτίο ειδήσεων του Alpha και στον δημοσιογράφο Αντώνη Σρόιτερ,” interview by Antonis Schroeter, *Alpha*, June 11, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.gr/2024/06/11/34449>.

216 Paul Tugwell and Eleni Chrepa, “Greek PM Says LGBTQ Legal Reform Paused With Marriage Equality,” *Bloomberg*, June 13, 2024, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/greek-pm-says-lgbtq-legal-040000379.html>.

217 2020, Hungary passed a bill in 2020 that makes it impossible for Hungarian transgender and intersex people to change their legal gender markers, and in 2023, the Bulgarian Supreme Court of Cassation prohibited the change of legal gender markers, affirming that “the [Bulgarian] Constitution and the entire legal system are based on the binary existence of humankind.” Outright International, *Country Overviews*, “Hungary,” <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/europe-and-central-asia/hungary>; Decision No. 2/2020, Supreme Court of Cassation of the Republic of Bulgaria, General Assembly of the Civil Division, February 20, 2023, <https://www.vks.bg/talkuvatelni-dela-osgk/vks-osgk-tdelo-2020-2-reshenie.pdf>.

218 “Area I: Legal Frameworks | Legal Gender Recognition,” ILGA World Database, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://database.ilga.org/legal-gender-recognition>. The countries are Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden.

219 Outright email exchange with a representative of Hättér Society, February 4, 2025.

220 Outright Interview with a queer activist from Single Step, virtual, March 12, 2025.

221 Lydia Hernández Téllez, “Los problemas que enfrentaron las personas trans para votar en las europeas: ‘Pensó que estaba cometiendo fraude de ley,’” *Infobae*, June 11, 2024, <https://www.infobae.com/espana/2024/06/12/los-problemas-que-enfrentaron-las-personas-trans-para-votar-en-las-europeas-penso-que-estaba-cometiendo-fraude-de-ley>.



inclusive stances. The party did not win any seats in 2024, losing two seats from 2019. Similarly, while there were at least five openly LGBTIQ persons on the electoral list of green and left-wing parties, none of them obtained seats.



**Right:** The European Parliament's LGBTQ Intergroup urging the European Commission to act on Hungary's Pride ban, May 23, 2025. Credit: "For a Diverse Hungary" Hungarian Parliamentary LGBTQ Intergroup.

## CASE STUDY FRANCE:

# Queer Alliance-Building Amid the Normalization of the Far-Right

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Election: Legislative (June 30 and July 7, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>222</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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In the 2024 European Parliament election, France's far-right party Rassemblement National (RN) or National Rally finished first with 30 out of 81 seats, while President Emmanuel Macron's centrist Besoin d'Europe or Need for Europe alliance lost ten of its 23 seats. On the same day, on June 9, 2024, the president dissolved the National Assembly, triggering snap legislative elections, which took place on June 30 and July 7, 2024.

### Normalization of Political Queerphobia

Since the 2022 presidential election, which resulted in the reelection of President Macron despite record gains for the RN, the rise of the far-right has been accompanied by a sharp increase in anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric and violence.<sup>223</sup>

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222 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - France," accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/france/freedom-world/2025>.

223 Edwige Reaux, "Législatives 2024 : 'la parole homophobe est désinhibée, imaginez ce que ça sera si le RN passe', l'inquiétude de militants LGBT," France 3 Regions, June 22, 2024, <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/grand-est/marne/reims/legislatives-2024-la-parole-homophobe-est-desinhibee-imaginez-ce-que-ca-sera-si-le-rn-passe-l-inquietude-de-militants-lgbt-2991284.html>.

This is best demonstrated by an incident that took place a few hours after RN's victory in the European Parliament election and the announcement of snap legislative elections. Four far-right activists were held by police after physically assaulting a 19-year-old person and making homophobic and transphobic remarks. They were later charged with "violence committed based on sexual orientation." While in police custody, one of the aggressors reportedly told investigators, "In three weeks' time, we'll be able to smash PD [an anti-queer slur] all we want," referring to the potential win of the RN in the legislative elections.<sup>224</sup>

LGBTIQ activists in France believe that the normalization or "de-demonization" of the far-right has amplified anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric in the political sphere. In April 2023, the RN launched an anti-LGBTIQ group in the French National Assembly to oppose the "poisons of wokism," referring to gender-inclusive writing, so-called LGBTIQ propaganda in schools, and the participation of trans women in women's sports.<sup>225</sup> "Anti-LGBTIQ politicians are

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224 "PD" is a derogatory term against queer people in French in reference to the practice of pederasty in Ancient Greece and Rome, which involved older men engaging in pedophilic sexual relationships with underage boys. SOS homophobie, "PD," accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.sos-homophobie.org/informer/definitions/pd>; Mathieu Molard et al., "Au soir de la victoire de Bardella, le Gud sort 'casser du PD'," StreetPress, June 12, 2024, <https://www.streetpress.com/sujet/1718206741-victoire-bardella-election-gud-agression-homophobe-rassemblement-national-paris-extreme-droite-rn>.

225 Élodie Forêt, "Le RN lance une association pour combattre 'le poison wokiste' qui met en 'danger la civilisation'," Radio France, April 12, 2023, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/le-rn-lance-une-association-pour-combattre-le-poison-wokiste-qui-met-en-danger-la-civilisation-5323822>. French is a highly gendered language and adopts the

becoming more unapologetic about their positions,” a volunteer for SOS homophobie, a leading French LGBTIQ group, told Outright. The far-right specifically engages in the “constant instrumentalization” of LGBTIQ people in multiple, often contradictory ways to criticize the Macron government and the French left. According to another volunteer, “On the one hand, [they say] LGBTI activists are Islamo-gauchist [Islamist-leftist], but the next day, LGBTI people are victims of Muslims, so in fact, they are also victims of immigration. And the day after that, [they] don’t like Brigitte Macron, so [they] say that she’s trans.”<sup>226</sup> As another volunteer affirmed, “There is, in fact, an LGBT-phobia among the right and the far-right, but at the same time, there is a kind of homonationalism.”<sup>227</sup>

President Macron, who was perceived by voters in the 2022 presidential election as the most LGBTIQ-inclusive candidate, has himself leveraged transphobia for political gain and been accused of transphobia by SOS homophobie ahead of the 2024 snap legislative elections.<sup>228</sup> “There are some completely grotesque things, such as, for example, going to the town hall to change sex,” Macron said in June 2024, referring to the left-wing coalition Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP)’s proposal to simplify existing gender recognition procedures.<sup>229</sup>

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masculine form as the neutral form. Inclusive writing attempts to correct that by adding feminine endings to words. See Katy Dartford, “France moves closer to banning gender-inclusive language,” Euronews, November 11, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2023/11/01/france-moves-closer-to-banning-gender-inclusive-language>.

226 Outright interview with three members of SOS homophobie, virtual, February 3, 2025.

227 Ibid. Homonationalism is a concept developed by academic Jasbir Puar to refer to the instrumentalization of support for LGBTIQ people’s rights by Western nations in order to promote a nationalist ideology. See IGLYO, “Pinkwashing & Homonationalism: Hiding Violence behind a Rainbow Veil,” December 20, 2023, <https://www.iglyo.org/resources/pinkwashing-and-homonationalism-article>.

228 Clarisse Martin, “Droits des personnes LGBT: Macron perçu comme le candidat le plus favorable aux réformes,” BFM TV, March 10, 2022, [https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/elections/presidentielle/droits-des-personnes-lgbt-macron-percu-comme-le-candidat-le-plus-favorable-aux-reformes\\_AN-202203100680.html](https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/elections/presidentielle/droits-des-personnes-lgbt-macron-percu-comme-le-candidat-le-plus-favorable-aux-reformes_AN-202203100680.html); “Changer de sexe en mairie”: SOS Homophobie dénonce la ‘prise de parole extrêmement transphobe’ d’Emmanuel Macron,” France Info, June 19, 2024, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/changer-de-sexe-en-mairie-sos-homophobie-denonce-la-prise-de-parole-extremement-transphobe-d-emmanuel-macron\\_6613614.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/changer-de-sexe-en-mairie-sos-homophobie-denonce-la-prise-de-parole-extremement-transphobe-d-emmanuel-macron_6613614.html).

229 “Législatives 2024 : Emmanuel Macron fustige ‘des choses ubuesques’ comme ‘aller changer de sexe en mairie’ et suscite l’indignation à gauche,” France Info, June 18, 2024, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/legislatives/legislatives-2024-emmanuel-macron-fustige-des-choses-ubuesques-comme-allez-changer-de-sexe-en-mairie-et-suscite-l-indignation-a-gauche\\_6612267.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/legislatives/legislatives-2024-emmanuel-macron-fustige-des-choses-ubuesques-comme-allez-changer-de-sexe-en-mairie-et-suscite-l-indignation-a-gauche_6612267.html).

“These actions foster an environment where LGBTIphobic individuals feel justified and repeat their LGBTIphobic comments—or even physically attack LGBTI people,” SOS homophobie argued in its report on anti-LGBTI violence in 2024.<sup>230</sup> Aside from the assault after RN’s European Parliament victory, discussed above, SOS homophobie received additional reports of queerphobic harassment during the electoral period through its helpline for cases of anti-LGBTI violence.<sup>231</sup> One case involved Philippe, who reported being called a homophobic slur “in front of the polling station” in Northern France in June. “I don’t dare leave my house anymore. And now I’m scared about the elections,” Philippe told the organization.<sup>232</sup>

Openly LGBTIQ candidates have also been subjected to queerphobia.<sup>233</sup> The most prominent example is Gabriel Attal, an openly gay politician who was named prime minister in January 2024 and headed the presidential coalition during the 2024 legislative elections.<sup>234</sup> Similarly, a commentator on national television referred to Lucie Castets, NFP’s openly lesbian candidate for prime minister, as “sexually incorrect.”<sup>235</sup>

## Queer Pushback Against the Far Right

Nevertheless, the threat of an RN-led government has mobilized LGBTIQ movements and allies and sparked inter-movement solidarities against the far-right.<sup>236</sup> On June 29, 2024, one day before the first round of the snap legislative elections, 110,000 people joined the annual Pride March, with many seizing it as an opportunity

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230 SOS homophobie, Rapport sur les LGBTIphobies 2025, May 2025, <https://www.sos-homophobie.org/informer/rapport-annuel-lgbtiphobies>, 127.

231 Ibid, 101, 124.

232 Ibid, 101.

233 Ibid, 128.

234 Olivier Faye, “L’homophobie envers les élus ne connaît pas l’abstention,” Le Monde, October 5, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2024/10/05/l-homophobie-envers-les-elus-ne-connaît-pas-l-abstention\\_6344042\\_4500055.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2024/10/05/l-homophobie-envers-les-elus-ne-connaît-pas-l-abstention_6344042_4500055.html).

235 HB, “Sexuellement incorrecte’... Lucie Castets victime de propos homophobes sur CNews,” 20 Minutes, August 31, 2024, <https://www.20minutes.fr/arts-stars-medias/4107793-20240831-sexuellement-incorrec-te-lucie-castets-victime-propos-homophobes-cnews>.

236 Maxime Dhuin, “‘Quoi que le RN fasse, les trans, les migrants et les putes continueront à exister’: avant les législatives, les associations pro-LGBT inquiètes mais combatives,” Le Nouvel Obs, July 5, 2024, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/societe/20240705.OBS90714/quoi-que-le-rn-fasse-les-trans-les-migrants-et-les-putes-continueront-a-exister-avant-les-legislatives-les-associations-pro-lgbt-inquietes-mais-combatives.html>.



to march against the far-right.<sup>237</sup> Leading LGBTIQ organizations and coalitions called on supporters to vote against the far-right in the legislative elections.<sup>238</sup> As the president of Inter-LGBT, the coalition that organized the march, affirmed:

This will be the moment for all LGBTIQ + people to say we don't want a government hostile to our gender identities and our lives in power. To say we don't want the Rassemblement National (RN). We'll be more mobilized than any other year: it's not just about demanding new rights but making sure that the ones we've got aren't taken away.<sup>239</sup>

While the far right won the first round of the snap legislative elections, the left-wing coalition NFP and the presidential coalition Ensemble successfully blocked RN from winning the elections in the second round. While NFP came in first, with 193 of 577 seats or 33 percent of the National Assembly, it fell short of an absolute majority and therefore did not take control of the government.<sup>240</sup> In its electoral program, it devoted a section to the rights of women and LGBTIQ persons, proposing to implement a plan to end anti-LGBTIQ violence, fight the rise of transphobia, extend access to assisted reproductive technologies to trans people, and increase public funding for gender-affirming health care.<sup>241</sup> The RN was relegated to third place in the list of electoral victors.

237 Natacha Marbot, "Marche des fiertés : 'Que ce soit au RN ou à Reconquête, la ligne rouge, c'est le genre,'" *Telerama*, June 29, 2024, <https://www.telerama.fr/debats-reportages/marche-des-fiertes-que-ce-soit-au-rn-ou-a-reconquete-la-ligne-rouge-c-est-le-genre-7021077.php>.

238 SOS homophobie, "Le 29 juin 2024, marchons sur l'extrême-droite," press release, June 28, 2024, <https://www.sos-homophobie.org/nos-articles/le-29-juin-2024-marchons-sur-lextreme-droit>; SOS homophobie, "Elections législatives 2024 : Nos peurs ne sont pas des chimères," press release, June 17, 2024, <https://www.sos-homophobie.org/nos-articles/elections-legislatives-2024-nos-peurs-ne-sont-pas-des-chimeres>; Federation LGBTI+, "Battre le RN, voter contre la haine et pour nos droits LGBTI+," press release, June 27, 2024, <https://federation-lgbti.org/actualite/battre-le-rn-voter-contre-la-haine-et-pour-nos-droits-lgbti>.

239 Cassandre Leray, "'Contre la transphobie : transolidarités !' : le mot d'ordre de la marche des fiertés face à l'extrême droite," *Liberation*, June 19, 2024, [https://www.liberation.fr/societe/sexualite-et-genres/contre-la-transphobie-transolidarites-le-mot-dordre-de-la-marche-des-fiertes-face-a-lextreme-droite-20240619\\_RNNEJBCXRBBJDNIQGO5MWZUMGE](https://www.liberation.fr/societe/sexualite-et-genres/contre-la-transphobie-transolidarites-le-mot-dordre-de-la-marche-des-fiertes-face-a-lextreme-droite-20240619_RNNEJBCXRBBJDNIQGO5MWZUMGE).

240 Maxence Kagni, "Législatives 2024 : le RN en tête, le NFP appelle au barrage, Gabriel Attal veut 'empêcher' Jordan Bardella d'obtenir une majorité absolue," *LCP - Assemblée nationale*, July 1, 2024, <https://lcp.fr/actualites/legislatives-2024-le-rn-en-tete-le-nfp-appelle-au-barrage-gabriel-attal-veut-empêcher>.

241 Nouveau Front Populaire, "Contrat de législature," June 2024, [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nouveaufrontpopulaire/pages/1/attachments/original/1719575111/PROGRAMME\\_FRONT\\_POPULAIRE\\_2806.pdf?1719575111](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nouveaufrontpopulaire/pages/1/attachments/original/1719575111/PROGRAMME_FRONT_POPULAIRE_2806.pdf?1719575111), 21.

During the campaign, the presidential coalition, which was headed by then-prime minister Gabriel Attal, who is openly gay, only mentioned the importance of fighting sexism and homophobia in a bullet point affirming its position against various forms of hate.<sup>242</sup> For volunteers at SOS homophobie, this was in line with how the presidential coalition views LGBTIQ issues—as political bargaining chips. "Even if they [Macron's party] openly present themselves as pro-LGBT, if we look at what they do, we see that it's more that they do what they think will win them the most votes." The volunteer described Macron's positioning in this manner: "I'm going to try and get people on the right to vote for me. So I'm going to throw trans people under the bus and see what happens."<sup>243</sup>



242 Ensemble pour la république, "Notre projet," June 2024, <https://doc.ensemble-2024.fr/programme-legislatives-24.pdf>, 7.

243 SOS homophobie interview.



# CASE STUDY GEORGIA: An Existential Battle

Election: Parliamentary (October 26, 2024) and Presidential (December 14, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>244</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

## Background

Since October 2024, protests have taken place daily in Tbilisi as part of a popular movement against parliamentary election results that saw the ruling Georgian Dream party remain in power.<sup>245</sup> Protestors and the political opposition accused the ruling party of election fraud, and independent election observers have noted that the elections were not fair, with undue pressure on voters to support the ruling party and evidence of vote buying and “ballot stuffing.”<sup>246</sup> The ruling party has assumed power and operates the parliament without any presence of the opposition, which is boycotting parliamentary processes in protest.<sup>247</sup>

Both the European Union (EU) and the U.S. government

244 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Georgia,” accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-world/2025>.

245 “Georgia marks 100 days of nationwide anti-government protests,” TVP World, March, 7, 2025, <https://tvpworld.com/85446449/georgia-marks-100-days-of-nationwide-anti-government-protests>.

246 International IDEA, “Georgia: The Global State of Democracy Initiative,” <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/georgia>. See also OSCE, “International Election Observation Mission: Georgia, Parliamentary Elections: Statement Of Preliminary Findings And Conclusions,” October, 26, 2024, <https://perma.cc/K78D-26WB>.

247 “Georgia marks 100 days of nationwide anti-government protests,” TVP World, March, 7, 2025, <https://tvpworld.com/85446449/georgia-marks-100-days-of-nationwide-anti-government-protests>.

have imposed sanctions on party members, police authorities, and judges loyal to the regime.<sup>248</sup> Beyond electoral fraud, the incumbent Georgian Dream, in power for over a decade, has grown increasingly more autocratic and ideologically aligned with the Russian Federation. In 2023, the party introduced a Foreign Agents bill, in imitation of existing laws in Russia, which was enacted into law in 2025. While Georgia at one point seemed close to accession to the EU—polls consistently show an overwhelming majority of Georgians want to join the EU, and the regional institution granted Georgia candidate status in 2023—Georgia Dream has, since the elections, suspended membership discussions with the EU, deferring them to 2028.<sup>249</sup>

In June 2024, the government introduced an anti-LGBTIQ package of laws called “On the Protection of Family Values and Minors,” which was passed by Parliament in September and came into effect in December.<sup>250</sup> Among other provisions, the law imposes fines of up to US\$270 for

248 “EP Adopts Resolution on Georgia, Calls to Sanction Ivanishvili and his “Network of Enablers,” Civil Georgia, February, 13, 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/662182>.

249 Polls from March 2024 show 60% of Georgians had a positive image of the EU and 81% revealed that they would vote to join the EU if a referendum was held. “More Georgians than ever trust the EU, according to latest opinion poll,” EU Neighbours East, November, 11, 2024, <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/opinion-polls/more-georgians-than-ever-trust-the-eu-according-to-latest-opinion-poll>. See also Vasil Sikharulidze, “Russian Influence Operations in Georgia: A Threat to Democracy and Regional Stability,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, March, 13, 2025, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/03/russian-influence-operations-in-georgia-a-threat-to-democracy-and-regional-stability>; Melissa B. Mahle, “Georgian Dream Puts Breaks on EU Accession, Escalating Geopolitical Risks,” Steptoe, December, 5, 2024, <https://www.steptoelaw.com/en/news-publications/stepwise-risk-outlook/georgian-dream-puts-breaks-on-eu-accession-escalating-geopolitical-risks.html>.

250 Nini Gabritchidze, “Georgian Dream’s Oppressive Anti-LGBT Law Comes into Effect,” Civil Georgia, December 2, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/640509>.

vaguely defined “LGBT propaganda.” Repeated violations can result in up to a three-year prison sentence. The law also censors queer-themed literature, movies, and handbooks, and bans providing or undergoing any kind of gender transition procedure.<sup>251</sup> It takes a targeted dig at the global LGBTIQ movement by declaring May 17—globally celebrated as the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), in commemoration of the World Health Organization’s declassification of “homosexuality” as a mental disorder—as a public holiday to celebrate “family sanctity and respect for parents.”<sup>252</sup>

These legislative measures set the tone for intensely homophobic, transphobic, and anti-rights election campaigns, characterized by all-out attacks on civil society—particularly queer and trans activists, whom Georgia Dream dubbed as “foreign agents” acting against Georgia’s national interests.<sup>253</sup> The increasingly restrictive legal environment contributed, along with the accusations regarding election fraud, to massive anti-government protests and civil society mobilization against the ruling party both during the preelection period and in the aftermath of elections, with waves of protests building on each other despite mounting state violence against protestors.<sup>254</sup>

## Political Homophobia in Election Campaigns

The specter of the corrupting queer individual, a “Western agent” out to destroy Georgia’s “traditional values,” loomed large over the ruling coalition’s political campaign and, in fact, was a main pillar.<sup>255</sup> Outright interviews with LGBTQ activists from Georgia revealed the intensity of hate and the wide-reaching effects that

both the hostile new laws and the electoral campaigning have had on society at large. As an activist pointed out, 13 years ago, when the Georgian Dream first came into power, it was with a promise of rights for everyone, including LGBTIQ people.<sup>256</sup> For years, Georgia became a refuge for queer and trans activists fleeing surrounding countries with repressive regimes, such as Iran, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia, and Central Asia. Now, LGBTQ Georgians themselves are considering the option of exile.

Mariam Kvaratskhelia, a 31-year-old lesbian activist and co-founder of Tbilisi Pride, noted that prior to 2023, the senior leadership of Georgian Dream did not issue extreme statements against LGBTQ people. Such rhetoric had primarily been propagated by the Georgian Orthodox Church and the alt-right media source Alt-Info. This all changed before the annual Pride Festival in July 2023, when Kvaratskhelia observed that high-ranking officials affiliated with the ruling coalition, such as the speaker of Parliament, began to proactively capitalize on this homophobic and transphobic discourse by seeding moral panic around “gender ideology”:

Right before the Pride festival that was supposed to be organized on July 8 in 2023, they started to talk almost out of the blue...about so-called LGBT propaganda and how damaging it is for the children, for family values, for national interest, so on. I will call it like preelection campaigning, and they chose homophobia and transphobia as their main line, one of the main key topics of their campaign. [They started saying] in France, in the US, there are studies that show that like LGBT propaganda is actually causing the increase in the number of homosexual people in the country, and more and more young people are saying that they are LGBTQI, and this is a threat, and we should fight it. And also they had this interesting narrative, saying that we are not against the human rights of [any] group. Every person should be protected, including the sexual minorities. But what we are saying is that the propaganda should be banned.

But basically everything we do is propaganda—our visibility, that we are out, that we talk about it publicly.

<sup>251</sup> Article 19, “Georgia: Family Values Bill imposes censorship on media,” September 30, 2024, <https://www.article19.org/resources/georgia-family-values-bill-imposes-censorship-on-media/>; European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), “Urgent Opinion on the Law on Transparency of foreign Influence,” May 21, 2024, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI\(2024\)013-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI(2024)013-e).

<sup>252</sup> Nini Gabritchidze, “Georgian Dream’s Oppressive Anti-LGBT Law.”

<sup>253</sup> Gigi Kobakhidze, “Ruling Majority Tests Homophobia as Campaign Pillar,” Civil Georgia, March 6, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/585551>.

<sup>254</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Georgia: Brutal Police Violence Against Protesters,” December 23, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/23/georgia-brutal-police-violence-against-protesters>.

<sup>255</sup> Nukri Tabidze and K. Murghulia, “Gender and Identity-based Disinformation on Media in Preelection Period in Georgia,” Women’s Fund in Georgia, 2025.

<sup>256</sup> In 2011 a law on elimination on discrimination was enacted with sexual orientation and gender identity and expression as protected categories. Georgia, Law of Georgia on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, 2011, <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2022062813244988514.pdf>, art. 1.

Our human rights-based work that we try to defend and promote the human rights and equality of LGBTIQ people—they call this propaganda, of course. So basically, our freedom of expression, freedom of speech, our presence, our human rights work, everything—all of this is labeled as propaganda. And the NGOs, the human rights defenders and activists such as me, we are labeled as propagandists, as the enemies of Georgia, enemies of the Georgian Church, the foreign influence agents funded by the West, and so on.<sup>257</sup>

Kvaratskhelia suggested that Georgian Dream intentionally and strategically launched a campaign of political homophobia in 2023 to set the stage for an election campaign the following year that would focus on anti-LGBTIQ moral panic in persuading people to vote the party into power again as the protector of “Georgian values.”<sup>258</sup>

When the Foreign Agents Bill was introduced in October 2023, signaling a closeness with a Russian-style crackdown on civil society, activists said the tone of the electoral campaigns worsened. The bill, which was passed into law in May 2024, increases scrutiny on civil society organizations under the guise of preventing foreign-funded agents from acting against national interest.<sup>259</sup> Locally organized protests erupted across Georgia in 2023 in response to the bill, which activists referred to colloquially as the “Russian law.” LGBTIQ people were among those who took great risks to express their dissent. Nika B., a 27-year-old nonbinary activist, said:

They went all out with the propaganda machine after the Russian law was implemented. So they not only went all in in a propaganda kind of way, but also with using physical force and using the police [and young hooligans] full on. The protest [of 2023] began, and it was crazy. People were just inhaling tear gas and all the toxic chemicals there—so much that the different medical institutions, like hospitals, private clinics, had to announce that [they] would help protesters who

were harmed with these chemicals. People were also beaten up, often by these thugs, not even police. And so many beatings and more and more arrests.<sup>260</sup>

Nika, who was working as a personal trainer in a gym, said they were fired after they started attending the protests in 2023:

[My employer] saw me at the protest, and he was like, “You know, you will lose your job.” And then I had a text [from him saying], “Don’t come to work tomorrow,” basically. Later, I found out that it was not only just about that, it was [also] about my sexual identity...But the reason for me to go to the protest was basically... well, I’m queer first and second, I’m a person, and I’m living here. I am, directly or indirectly affected, if not me, my friend, or any other person. I was just like, you know, enough—at one point not going there just becomes impossible. I know where all of this is going. It’s very easy to see. I mean, I just went there, you know, and I don’t regret it.<sup>261</sup>

The enactment of the Foreign Agents Law was followed almost immediately by the introduction of the “Family Values” bill and a slew of attacks on LGBTIQ people, in both mainstream and social media. The Media Development Foundation (MDF), a Georgian NGO, conducted research between July and October 2024 on “anti-Western propaganda” disseminated through traditional and social media platforms in Georgia in the lead-up to the elections. It found that one of the predominant themes was that “the West is imposing homosexuality/unacceptable values” and “attacking traditional identity.”<sup>262</sup>

LGBTQ activists, encountering relentless hate speech and propaganda from Georgian Dream political campaigners and state-favored media, had a choice: to keep countering such statements and meet the politicians on the same ground or to ignore the provocation. Civil

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257 Outright interview with Mariam Kvaratskhelia, virtual, January 15, 2025.

258 Ibid.

259 International Center For Not-For-Profit Law, “Georgia: Overview of the Foreign Influence Law,” May 24, 2024, <https://ecnl.org/news/georgia-overview-foreign-influence-law>.

260 Outright Interview with Nika B. (pseudonym), virtual, January 22, 2025. See also GYLA, “Informal punitive groups operate with the tacit support or direct consent of state institutions and high-ranking officials,” December 8, 2024, accessed May 20, 2025, <https://gyla.ge/en/post/araformaluri-sad-amsjelo-jgufebi-gyla-ganckhadeba>.

261 Nika B. interview.

262 European Digital Media Observatory, “Anti-Western Propaganda and Disinformation Amid the 2024 Georgian Parliamentary Elections” November 27, 2024, <https://edmo.eu/publications/anti-western-propaganda-and-disinformation-amid-the-2024-georgian-parliamentary-elections>.

society organizations and opposition media convened groups across the political spectrum, including queer organizations, left-leaning groups, and even right-leaning libertarian groups, to strategize a response. All came together, despite their differences and disagreements, in a series of meetings. Mariam Kvaratskhelia, who was among the organizers, told Outright:

All of us agreed that fighting this LGBT propaganda law and having this huge, you know, public debate and discourse on this would not be effective and it would be counterproductive, and that was what Georgian Dream wanted. They were desperately trying to drag us into this debate, and actually, when we did not do so, we observed how they were really upset and even demanding [that we go on] the TV and debate [them] on this issue. I believe that this kind of topic failed because of our strategy, that we did not engage with it and [maintained strategic silence].<sup>263</sup>

While in the preelection context, such strategic silence was successful, later, this strategy resulted in the total disappearance of LGBTIQ-related topics from public discourse, as opposition and media critical of the Georgian Dream maintained silence on LGBTIQ issues:

[I]t was like we had completely disappeared...LGBT organizations and queer activist groups, we stopped, like being, you know, discreet about this, and now we are very active, but still, the opposition parties or media or [non-LGBTIQ] NGOs are not touching this issue at all.<sup>264</sup>

Meanwhile, the Family Values bill was passed into law, with the objective of enforcing queer silence.

## Queer Activism in the Preelection Period

During the election campaign period, queer activists mobilized to educate, inform, and encourage queer and women voters to exercise their right to choose their government and to protest the anti-LGBTQ legislation. Virtual campaigns and in-person meetings reached queer voters across the country. Activists collaborated with the gay dating app Grindr to reach users with key

information about registration and voting:

We prepared the banners and different designs, and also copied the texts about elections and about voting. And Grindr sent this to every Georgian user in the country. And we are talking about thousands of people. They received information through messages in their inbox, messages that encouraged them to go and vote and also included some links and resources. For instance, how to find out if they are registered for the elections or not. So we provided like, motivational encouraging messaging through the Grindr app.<sup>265</sup>

Kvaratskhelia and other activists organized visits to five nightclubs and set up booths with flags and campaign materials to encourage voting among queer voters. They distributed materials that detailed which opposition parties, despite their silence on LGBTIQ issues, took a stance for gender equality, had the highest numbers of women candidates, and had made positive statements about LGBTIQ people in the past. The outreach to nightclubs reached hundreds of young queer voters, many of whom were not very well informed about their electoral rights.

Kvaratskhelia was also among the organizers behind voter mobilization bike rallies and three queer performances. At the end of the performances, which were well-attended, the performers exhorted audience members to exercise their right to vote and counter anti-LGBTIQ propaganda laws. Since this was the first election in which electronic voting was introduced, informational campaigns were created online to inform queer voters about the new system.

While open campaigns with queer voters were easily done in Tbilisi and surrounding areas, remote provinces needed different tactics. In a politically conservative remote town in Georgia, Nini X. is well known as a local activist but has not come out publicly as queer. She revealed that the homophobia and transphobia in the region were also reinforced by the Church:

Georgian Dream capitalized on the two main fears people have in this region: women fear the return of wars with Russia. And men fear that they will be forced to marry men. And these fears were fully capitalized

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263 Kvaratskhelia interview.

264 Ibid.

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265 Ibid.



by the ruling party...Additionally, in my region, most people are government employees, as employment opportunities are rare. And therefore they are already afraid to shake the boat lest they lose their livelihood.<sup>266</sup>

Nini's strategy was to try to consolidate the women's vote in her region by discussing issues of gender equality. She also created flyers on pro-EU political parties and spread this information among local women.<sup>267</sup>

Tbilisi Pride decided not to hold an in-person Pride event in 2024, fearing that the electoral context significantly increased the risk of retaliation and attacks, and instead decided to focus on efforts to link queer rights with the protection of democracy.<sup>268</sup> The statement issued by Tbilisi Pride poignantly concludes:

We are demonstrating the highest civic responsibility and recognize that the fight for queer rights today is inseparable from the broader people's struggle against the Russian-style regime. This fight will inevitably end in favor of the people on October 26! We will use the coming months to bring the message of queer people to more hearts than ever before! We will explain to everyone that homophobia is a Russian political weapon against Georgian society, against the statehood of Georgia!<sup>269</sup>

## Electoral Fraud

Soon after the elections were concluded, there were widespread accusations of irregularities.

Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) noted 589 violations or bad practices on the day of elections and filed for annulment in 2,263 precincts where the ballots were scanned electronically and in which the group observed cases of election fraud.<sup>270</sup> These cases included

the violation of the principle of secrecy of the ballot through the introduction of a new form of electronic voting, and instances in which individuals voted multiple times with different people's IDs. At the domestic level, GYLA's lawsuit was only upheld by the Tetrtskaro District Court.<sup>271</sup> The court checked the ballot papers randomly from several polling stations in Tsalka and Tetrtskaro districts, where it was confirmed that marker traces were visible on the back of the ballot papers.<sup>272</sup>

Nika B. volunteered as an election observer with GYLA in a province outside the capital. While they could not enter the polling booth, they observed the atmosphere and recounted numerous discrepancies:

I was a non-traditional observer. I was not able to be registered to enter the building. So I was going from place to place. I was directly seeing what was going on, and I saw with my own eyes. For instance, I saw a [food] delivery driver calling someone, and he had a list. On the phone, he was like, "Yeah, this guy came, yes, check. This guy came, check."...Everywhere I went, there were representatives of Georgian Dream. And they were like, "Hey, we are going to win, right? Yeah!" And some people were shouting "Fuck the natsebi [United National Movement opposition party]." I could see that [Georgian Dream] had mobilized all these men from the neighborhoods to stay outside the booth for hours, observing who came in and voted... At some point, I had a sense of unsafety. I was alone trying to record photos and videos outside [in the presence of these men].<sup>273</sup>

The European Parliament voted on a motion, passed 444–72 in favor, to declare the election results invalid and call for a new election within a year. The motion asserted that "[the results] do not serve as a reliable representation of the will of the Georgian people."<sup>274</sup>

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ters/georgia#b87439.

271 GYLA, "GYLA was provided with the decision of Tetrtskaro District Court Magistrate Judge Vladimer Khuchua, by which the court satisfied GYLA's lawsuit regarding the violation of the secrecy of the vote," November 5, 2024, <https://www.gyla.ge/post/vladimer-chukhuas-gadatskvatile-ba>.

272 GYLA, "GYLA has lodged an application to the European Court of Human Rights in regards to the mass violation of the secrecy of the ballot during the 2024 Parliamentary Elections," March 20, 2025, <https://gyla.ge/en/post/evropuli-sasamartlo-archevnebi>.

273 Nika B. interview. Natsebi stands for United National Party, the ruling political party before Georgian Dream came into power.

274 Gabriel Gavin, "Georgia election was not fair and must be re-run,

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266 Outright interview with Nini X. (pseudonym), virtual, December 24, 2024.

267 Ibid.

268 Kvaratskhelia interview.

269 Tbilisi Pride, "We Stand in Solidarity with All Those Fighting for Equality and Human Rights," Facebook, December 10, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/TiflisPride/posts/pfbid02JAPNYDnbBPo5RLGxxTIQ6rb4Nd3bfzASjs-rc5hf5Bxdv99h7W5Fgzft6DEUhZqayl?rddid=TrBbkepQ5KQKy8Qq>.

270 "GYLA files for annulment," Civil Georgia, October 30, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/632572>.

See also Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2025: Georgia," accessed March 10, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chap->

The European Parliament also called on EU states to impose sanctions on Georgian Dream functionaries and members, including the Prime Minister and others “who are responsible for democratic backsliding, violations of electoral laws and standards, and the misuse of state institutions.”<sup>275</sup>

## Obstruction of Diaspora Voting

Georgia is one of the 41 countries in Europe that allows “external voting.”<sup>276</sup> However, Georgian expatriates, living outside the country, also faced specific challenges in voting. Votes outside the country must be cast in person at Georgian embassies, with no provisions for postal ballots, in both legislative and presidential elections.<sup>277</sup>

Georgian expatriates complained that Georgian Dream, well aware that migrants in Europe and the U.S. largely support the opposition, seemingly created obstacles for them to vote in their countries of residence.<sup>278</sup> According to Georgian queer migrants from Brussels, New York City, and Berlin, they had to wait long hours to vote in 2024, since there were not enough voting stations.<sup>279</sup>

Outright interviewed one gay Georgian living outside the country who pointed out that LGBTIQ people are overrepresented among Georgian migrants, given the increasing numbers of queer Georgians who decide to migrate or seek refugee status. While queer migrants and refugees were not specifically prevented from voting, due to their large share among migrants, the delays may have resulted in a significant number of lost queer votes.<sup>280</sup>

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European Parliament concludes,” Politico, 28 November 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/georgia-election-was-not-fair-must-be-re-run-european-parliament-statement-membership-candidacy-eu>.

275 European Parliament, “Parliament calls for new elections in Georgia,” November 28, 2024, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20241121IPR25549/parliament-calls-for-new-elections-in-georgia>.

276 International IDEA, *Voting from Abroad: The International IDEA Handbook*, 2007, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/voting-from-abroad-the-international-idea-handbook.pdf> 17.

277 Ibid, 23, 238.

278 Irakli Machaidze, “Georgian expats complain about obstacles to voting in upcoming parliamentary elections,” Eurasianet, October 18, 2024, <https://eurasianet.org/georgian-expats-complain-about-obstacles-to-voting-in-upcoming-parliamentary-elections>.

279 Outright interviews with Gio P, Irakli and Lasha (pseudonyms), virtual, January 20, 2025.

280 Gio P. interview.

## Violence Against LGBTIQ Activists Before and After Elections

The election results were met with daily protests that continued for months. In November, some of the largest protests took place, with hundreds of thousands of people protesting against Georgian Dream’s announcement that it would pause the EU integration process. LGBTIQ people have often been at the forefront of the protests.

The brutality against protestors has been virtually unprecedented.<sup>281</sup> A joint civil society report by 11 Georgian rights organizations on human rights violations in the protests documents detailed instances of how tear gas, pepper spray, water cannons, and rubber bullets were often deployed, with the apparent intent to cause excessive injury.<sup>282</sup> Tear gas poisoning was frequent, due to protestors not being allowed to leave areas where tear gas canisters were fired or due to repeated exposures. Protestors believed that even the water from water cannons may have been corrosive to the skin, possibly due to a mixture of chemical agents.<sup>283</sup> Doctors and medical workers reported instances of people visiting medical facilities with acute symptoms as a result of exposure to toxic chemical agents.<sup>284</sup>

Transparency International Georgia reported that more than 460 people were detained around the country between November 28 and December 10, 2024, on election protest-related charges, most of them administrative charges.<sup>285</sup> A detailed briefing from Amnesty International in December 2024 concludes:

Reports indicate that more than 300 protesters, i.e., the majority of those detained, have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment by special police forces—with many cases amounting to torture. More

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281 Human Rights Watch, “Georgia: Brutal Police Violence Against Protesters,” December, 23, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/23/georgia-brutal-police-violence-against-protesters>.

282 GYLA et al., *Human Rights Crisis in Georgia Following the 2024 Parliamentary Elections*, 2025, [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20CRISIS%20IN%20GEORGIA%20-%20final.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20CRISIS%20IN%20GEORGIA%20-%20final.pdf), 34–40, 56–59.

283 Ibid, 56–59.

284 Ibid, 39.

285 “CSOs Joint Statement Condemning Arrests, Torture, and Repression in Georgia,” Civil Georgia, December 10, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/643477>.

than 80 persons have been reported hospitalized with severe injuries including fractured facial and other bones, and head injuries including concussions...The courts have largely ignored mounting evidence of torture and violations of fair trial rights. More than 160 people have been fined and held in administrative detention. The police and entire criminal justice system appear weaponized to intimidate, harass and crackdown on protestors and silence peaceful dissent, reflecting institutionalized repression.<sup>286</sup>

Speaking at Outright's annual OutSummit in December 2024, Nukri, a 34-year-old queer activist from Tbilisi, said that queer people have been at the forefront of the protests for democracy and equal rights for the last decade:

When law abandons you, the government abandons you, and the international community also cannot really do much—you turn to each other...The present protests are a vivid example of trust-based organizing...The LGBTQ community has been, like, one of the leading forces of this protest for the last 12 years. Therefore, the attack on LGBTIQ people was so strong in the preelection campaigns, that's why they passed the anti-LGBTI propaganda laws. The law [ironically] is named protection of children. But then they started shooting children with rubber bullets and gas canisters—the children who are now protesting... Our state has turned into a criminal gang that uses the police forces and some shady hired young men to intimidate, beat, and disfigure. We have seen this tactic all around us in Belarus, Azerbaijan, Russia. We did not somehow think this would happen to us...We staked all on the elections. In previous elections, we had some fairness, [but] this election was stolen with the help of criminal authorities in [smaller] provinces.

...If the protests do not succeed in initiating a reelection, we will have to leave, go to prison, or go silent.<sup>287</sup>

Beyond arrests and violent attacks on the protests, there have been numerous tactics to discredit activists, particularly women. Kvaratskhelia, the co-founder of Tbilisi Pride, was personally targeted. She and her girlfriend are among a few queer people and couples who are out in the public sphere and have been specifically singled out by Georgian Dream-favored media and alt-right groups alike:

The propaganda media, the TV, they've been targeting us personally, and they've made this video collage of us fully demonizing us and calling us the enemies of the Georgian nation and families, and LGBT propagandists. And to see this on major pro-government media—our videos, photos, names...it has been extremely stressful and hostile for us.

They've come to my home, apartment building, and on several floors, they put up posters with my photo, with my name, and some insulting and degrading writings on it. For example, saying that I'm an LGBT propagandist, that I'm [a foreign] agent sold on money, and the enemy of the church...And also, some insulting symbols such as penises...Our organization's office space has been vandalized, I don't know, maybe 15 times, including in 2024...It has been super difficult in Georgia, during 2024. It has been a full-on nightmare.<sup>288</sup>

Assailants have targeted and beaten several young male activists outside their homes.<sup>289</sup> 18-year-old activist and queer movement supporter Sandro Kinkladze was detained by police, charged under Article 173 of the Administrative Offenses Code for disobedience to a police order, and sentenced to the maximum prison sentence of 12 days in December 2024. As a result of consistent intimidation by the authorities, including surveillance of his family members, he had to leave the country.<sup>290</sup> Kvaratskhelia said that another tactic to intimidate and discourage activists is reaching out to their family members:

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286 Amnesty International, Brutal Crackdown on Protestors and Journalists in Georgia: "They May Have Broken Our Bones, but They Won't Break Our Spirits," December 2024, <https://eurasia.amnesty.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/brutal-crackdown-on-protestors-and-journalists-in-georgia-briefing.pdf>

287 Nukri, speaking at Outsummit 2024 in a panel discussion on "2024 as the Year of Elections: How Did LGBTIQ People Fare?," Outright International, December 10, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=176K7ylqpyM>.

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288 Kvaratskhelia interview.

289 GYLA, "Informal punitive groups operate with the tacit support or direct consent of state institutions and high-ranking officials," December 8, 2024, accessed May 20, 2025, <https://gyla.ge/en/post/araformaluri-sad-amsjelo-jgufebi-gyla-ganckhadeba>.

290 "Activist Sandro Kinkladze leaves Georgia citing safety concerns," Front News Georgia, August 3, 2025, <https://frontnews.ge/en/news/activist-sandro-kinkladze-leaves-georgia-citing-safety-concerns>.

[Georgian Dream supporters] have called my elderly, 73-year-old father twice...to intimidate him and to tell him, like, why is your daughter going to demonstrations, she should stop fighting, and so on and so forth.<sup>291</sup>

Nini, the activist from a small town in Georgia, has been threatened and harassed by local officials and Georgian Dream supporter gangs both online and in real life. Since intimidation did not work, perpetrators have taken the more indirect form of approaching her father and counseling him to keep his daughter at home. Nini explained:

It's quite a common way of threatening women activists: approaching the male members of the family and telling them that the women should be at home, not going outside so much, and so on.<sup>292</sup>

When this tactic still did not deter Nini from her activism, she said, Georgian Dream-affiliated gangs had physically attacked her brother.<sup>293</sup>

## Well-Being of Queer Democracy Activists

The four activists whom Outright interviewed all talked about mental health challenges. Nini took on a caregiver position by opening her house to create a space of rest and recuperation for LGBTQ activists from all over Georgia:

The fact that people are coming to me, to my house, and I am not alone is very important and supportive. Otherwise, it is quite isolating to be here. It's a house in the mountains—now it's all covered in snow. Being able to serve other LGBTQ people is a form of solidarity. I plan to make [the house] into some kind of space for meeting and co-working, resting, healing, and so on.<sup>294</sup>

Practices of collective care are prominent among younger generations of activists in Georgia. At demonstrations, lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women activists were actively providing first aid kits,

tea, and food to demonstrators who were injured and poisoned by tear gas and pepper spray. As noted above, many protestors experienced serious injuries, as well as trauma stemming from the scale of the violent state crackdown. LGBTQ organizations supported the community with psychosocial consultations and medical visits.

Giorgi L., a queer activist with an organization that provides mental health services, told Outright:

There has been an unprecedented increase in the demand for services compared to previous years. People are traumatized physically and mentally, impoverished, and under higher threat of violence. Our team is also burnt out. Our job is becoming more dangerous, and it gets harder to find both financial and human resources.<sup>295</sup>

## Strategies of Resistance and Resilience

The 2024 "Family Values" law prescribes a fine that ranges between US\$290 and US\$1,450 for the first offense, and up to three years in prison for a second violation. These penalties have not resulted in the demotivation of queer and queer-supporting activists, scholars, artists, lecturers, and businesses. On December 2, when the law came into effect, numerous LGBTQ organizations and supporters united and organized a small demonstration in front of the Georgian Dream office.<sup>296</sup> Nightclubs announced that they would commit insubordination to the law, and several prominent professors also persist in teaching "censored" literature, while artist collectives and creative spaces left their doors open to queer people. LGBTQ organisations also announced that they will continue providing services and will not comply with the law.

Along with insubordination, community care has been at the center of resistance. Collective care practices have been passed down through generations, and the increasing political engagement of youth has contributed to new practices of self-organizing and resistance. An

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291 Kvaratskhelia interview.

292 Nini Interview.

293 Ibid.

294 Ibid.

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295 Outright interview with Giorgi L. (pseudonym), virtual, January 24, 2025.

296 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (@tavisupleba), "Protesters Gather in Tbilisi to Demand EU Integration," Instagram, December 10, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/tavisupleba/reel/DDFWjgYvD1o>.



activist in her twenties said:

I have not personally witnessed the protests of our parents, but what I heard and remember as a child in the 90s, people were supporting each other, and that is how they survived the hard socio-economic crisis and wars. With time, activism evolved. It was very sentimental to see how people were taking care of each other and resisting police violence at [election] protests. Some were in the frontline, putting out gas cannons. Others were in the back supporting those injured, pepper-sprayed, and gassed activists with first aid kits, food, tea. It was all coordinated, without leader[s]. Through practice, people found their roles in this process.<sup>297</sup>

Now more than ever, we must step out of our comfort zones, unite, build strong alliances, strategize, and turn the impossible into reality.<sup>299</sup>

All LGBTQ activists interviewed felt strongly about continuing to participate in the pro-democracy protests, seeing them as serving dual purposes: contesting election fraud and consolidating an alternative narrative according to which LGBTQ people are an integral part of Georgia's body politic. Tamar V. said:

I feel as a queer person, as LGBTQI people, we feel safe at these demonstrations, mostly, and we feel that these are our people. They [protestors], of course, like not all of them, will be fully sensitive and friendly, but we feel that more and more people understand that this homophobia and transphobia is a Georgian Dream and Russian-style thing, and that it's bad. And I'm sure if we win this war, and if the resistance movement will win this war, we will abandon political homophobia because it will be associated with this current regime.<sup>298</sup>

Despite the dream of using the election as an ultimate democratic tool in the hands of citizens having turned to ashes, LGBTQ activists in Georgia are upholding their end of the democratic bargain—peacefully showing up for protests continuously for months, demanding their rights, and building a community that cares for each other and for justice. As Mariam Kvaratskhelia said:

If we want to survive—and not just survive, but remain effective—we cannot continue with business as usual. The world, including us, is facing an existential battle.

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297 Outright interview with Tamar V. (pseudonym), virtual, January 2025.

298 Ibid.

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299 Kvaratskhelia interview.

# CASE STUDY GHANA:

## “A Competition of Who Was the Most Homophobic”

Election: General (December 7, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>300</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

### Background and Context

Ghana’s 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections were highly competitive, with two major political parties contending for Ghana’s 18 million votes.<sup>301</sup> The main issues driving voter participation were the economy, unemployment, corruption, illegal mining, and pollution.<sup>302</sup> In addition, LGBTIQ people’s rights have been the subject of public discourse, increasingly so since 2018.<sup>303</sup>

Ghana’s leadership has articulated a steady stream of queerphobic views, especially since 2018, when then-President Nana Akufo-Addo declared that he would never legalize same-sex marriage.<sup>304</sup> The rhetoric continued and was matched by a new intensification of queerphobic public policy when the Ghana Police Service raided and closed down a community center run by the

organization LGBT+ Rights Ghana in February 2021.<sup>305</sup> In May 2021, the police in Ho, Volta region, raided a human rights workshop focusing on rights abuses against LGBTIQ people, arresting and detaining 21 people for 22 days.<sup>306</sup>

The following month, eight MPs introduced the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill.<sup>307</sup> The first version of the sweeping bill targeted people who are, by its definition, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Ally, Asexual, and Pansexual.”<sup>308</sup> In 2022, Outright documented the extensive, harmful impacts of the mere introduction of the bill in parliament, in the form of severe human rights violations such as mob attacks, physical violence, arbitrary arrests, blackmail and online harassment, verbal harassment, gang rape and other acts of sexual violence, conversion practices, forced evictions and homelessness, employment discrimination, and robbery.<sup>309</sup>

300 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Ghana,” accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-world/2025>.

301 Shola Lawal, “Ghana’s Elections: Who is Running and What’s at Stake?” Al Jazeera, December 7, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/7/ghana-elections-who-is-running-and-whats-at-stake>; H. Kwasi Prempeh, “Ghana’s December 2024 Elections Put the Resilience of the Country’s Vaunted Democracy to the Test,” Africa Policy Research Institute, November 29, 2024, <https://afripoli.org/ghanas-december-2024-elections-put-the-resilience-of-the-countrys-vaunted-democracy-to-the-test>.

302 Shola Lawal, “Ghana’s Elections.”

303 Ibid.

304 Ibid.

305 “Ghana Security Forces Shut Down LGBTQ Office: Rights Group,” Al Jazeera, February 24, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/24/ghana-shuts-down-lgbt-office-rights-group>. See LGBT+ Rights Ghana (@LGBTRightsGhana), “This morning, our office was raided by National Security. A few days ago, traditional leaders threatened to burn down our office but the police did not help,” X, February 24, 2021, <https://x.com/LGB-TRightsGhana/status/1364535380071092224>.

306 Ibid.

307 Jonas Nyabor, “Sam George; 7 Other MPs Sponsor Bill for Criminalization of LGBTIQ+ Activities,” Citi Newsroom, June 29, 2021, <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/06/sam-george-7-other-mps-sponsor-bill-for-criminalization-lgbtqi-activities>.

308 See the first version of the bill as introduced here: Republic of Ghana, Promotion of Proper Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, 2021, <https://cdn.modernghana.com/files/722202192224-0h830n4ayt-lgbt-bill.pdf>.

309 Outright International, “We Deserve Protection”: Anti-LGBTIQ Legislation and Violence in Ghana, August 29, 2022, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/we-deserve-protection-anti-lgbtqi-legislation-and-violence-ghana>

Parliament amended the bill during review into the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Act, 2024, criminalizing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Ghanaians and their allies (in its terms, “LGBTQAP+”) and passed the bill on February 28, 2024.<sup>310</sup> On December 18, 2024, Ghana’s Supreme Court dismissed a petition to declare the bill unconstitutional, “clearing the way for its transmission to then President Akufo-Addo.”<sup>311</sup> Akufo-Addo did not sign the bill in his last three weeks in office, and it lapsed after the last parliament’s dissolution in January 2025. According to parliamentary procedure, bills that have not completed the legislative process lapse with the Parliament being dissolved.<sup>312</sup> In March 2025, ten MPs reintroduced a version of the bill, the contents of which have not been made public.<sup>313</sup>

Ghana already has in place a colonial-era law criminalizing homosexuality in section 104 of the Criminal Offences Act, which dates back to 1892.<sup>314</sup> In 2024, in a case distinct from the abovementioned challenge to the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Act, the Supreme Court dismissed a challenge against this “unnatural offenses” provision, stating that it was not discriminatory nor “inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the 1992 Constitution.”<sup>315</sup>

310 Outright International, *Queer Lives Under Threat as Ghana’s Parliament Passes Anti-LGBTQ Bill*, February 28, 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/press-release/queer-lives-under-threat-ghanas-parliament-passes-anti-lgbtq-bill>; See also Outright International, “Addressing Ghana’s Movement Towards Passage of the Anti-LGBTQ Bill,” July 31, 2023, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/Brief\\_Ghana%27s%20Anti-LGBTQ%20Bill\\_31%20July%202023.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/Brief_Ghana%27s%20Anti-LGBTQ%20Bill_31%20July%202023.pdf). See text of the bill here: Republic of Ghana, *Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Act, 2024*, <https://www.accessnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Anti-LGBTQ-Bill-Human-Sexual-Rights-and-Family-Values-Bill-2024.pdf>.

311 Outright interview with Solomon Atsuvia, lawyer and human rights defender, Programs and Advocacy Manager, Rightify Ghana, virtual, February 2025; Outright International, “Ghana’s Anti-LGBTQ Bill Clears Supreme Court Hurdle, Threatening Lives,” December 18, 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/press-release/ghanas-anti-lgbtq-bill-clears-supreme-court-hurdle-threatening-lives>.

312 Ibid; Isaac Donkor Distinguished, “Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill Expired With Last Parliament; I’ll Reintroduce it as Government-Sponsored – Mahama,” *Modern Ghana*, January 14, 2025, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1371658/anti-lgbtq-bill-expired-withlast-parliament.html>.

313 Thomas Naadi, “Ghanaian MPs Reintroduce Controversial Anti-LGBT Bill,” *BBC News*, March 3, 2025, [https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd-jy91gr48lo.amp?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd-jy91gr48lo.amp?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email); Nii Ayikwei Okine, “Anti-Gay Bill Reintroduced to Parliament for Consideration,” *Citi Newsroom*, February 27, 2025, <https://citinewsroom.com/2025/02/anti-gay-bill-reintroduced-to-parliament-for-consideration>.

314 Section 104 of Ghana’s Criminal Offences Act, 1960, criminalizes “unnatural carnal knowledge” used to target same-sex sexual acts and lumps this with bestiality. See here: Republic of Ghana, *Criminal Offences Act of 1960*, Act 29, <https://repository.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/2434/ACT%2029.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

315 Case of Dr. Prince Obiri-Korang vs. Attorney General, Superior Court

Given the escalating anti-LGBTIQ developments of the last five years, anti-rights actors used the 2024 elections as an opportunity to fuel division and queerphobia. According to Solomon Atsuvia, a lawyer and LGBTIQ human rights defender from Kumasi, Ghana, “Both [major] parties used homophobic rhetoric to sway the electorate...The [anti-LGBTQ] Bill became central to their campaigns.”<sup>316</sup> He added that both parties used “the weaponization of public morality through anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric,” each attempting to frame the election as “a choice between defending family values and supporting homosexuality.”<sup>317</sup>

## Using Anti-LGBTQ Sentiments and Misinformation for Political Gain

The 2024 election pitted the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP) and its presidential candidate, Mahamadu Bawumia, Akufo-Addo’s vice president, against the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and its presidential candidate, John Mahama. Elections in recent history have been competitive between the two parties, with each party taking turns at the presidency: the NDC ruled from 2009 to 2017, with Mahama at the helm for the last four years; the NPP took over until 2024; and now the NDC is back in power.<sup>318</sup> The parties’ 2024 election manifestos aimed to address key issues in areas such as education, economic growth, agriculture, health care, and gender equality from different perspectives.<sup>319</sup>

of Judicature in the Supreme Court, Judgment of July 24, 2024, <https://ghalii.org/akn/gh/judgment/ghasc/2024/21/eng@2024-07-24/source>. See also Michelle Yesudas, Thiruna Naidoo and Neela Ghoshal, “Breakthroughs and the Bench: What We Can Learn From Last Year’s Rulings on Queer Rights in Ghana, Malawi, and Namibia,” Outright International, January 23, 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/insights/breakthroughs-and-bench-what-we-can-learn-last-years-rulings-queer-rights-ghana-malawi-and>.

316 Atsuvia interview.

317 Ibid.

318 “Break the 8 is More Than NPP Slogan – Dr. Bawumia,” *Modern Ghana*, November 7, 2023 <https://www.modernghana.com/video/news/tv3/6/377994>; John Osae-Kwapong, “Ghana’s Election 2024: Technology and the Changing Nature of Political Competition,” *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, December 5, 2024, <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/ghanas-election-2024-technology-and-the-changing-nature-of-political-competition>.

319 Kent Mensah, “Ghana: What is in the NPP and NDC Manifestos?,” *The Africa Report*, August 29, 2024, [https://www.theafricareport.com/360001/ghana-we-read-the-npp-and-ndc-manifestos-so-you-dont-have-to/?\\_\\_cf\\_chl\\_tk=d\\_unPyWREny9UdySRRNwgnNb\\_zEI0vi6PTI.nfos-8cfcg-1742982361-1.0.1.1-uby6qjXXXBjRpm0X6p4ADB.Y5Crr6ExtUvtfTD5Lcm0](https://www.theafricareport.com/360001/ghana-we-read-the-npp-and-ndc-manifestos-so-you-dont-have-to/?__cf_chl_tk=d_unPyWREny9UdySRRNwgnNb_zEI0vi6PTI.nfos-8cfcg-1742982361-1.0.1.1-uby6qjXXXBjRpm0X6p4ADB.Y5Crr6ExtUvtfTD5Lcm0).

Both parties, however, accused each other of being pro-LGBTQ and campaigned on the platform of protecting so-called family values, with the campaign often devolving into, as Rightify Ghana's director Ebenezer Peegah described it, "a competition of who was the most homophobic."<sup>320</sup> Solomon Atsuvia told Outright:

The National Democratic Congress (NDC) itself benefited largely from anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, though these issues were not directly on the ballot. The broader discourse surrounding family values and social morality frequently turned the election into some sort of referendum on LGBTQ+ rights. So, the political battle revolved around the anti-LGBTQ+ Bill—both the [NPP] and the [NDC] leaned into this rhetoric. Basically, they were aiming to gain support from the mass of Ghanaian conservative voters.<sup>321</sup>

Atsuvia added that, while "the NDC promised that John Mahama would sign the bill into law if elected, the NPP brought up Mahama's past comments against him to the effect that he is 'very pro-LGBTQ and supportive of LGBTQ people.'"<sup>322</sup> Atsuvia described this situation as the "politicization of LGBTQ people as issues, framed through homophobic rhetoric, placing LGBTQ people in a very vulnerable position."<sup>323</sup>

This perception was not only shared among civil society activists. In an op-ed published in March 2024, former politician and lawyer Martin Alamisi Burnes Kaizer Amidu, who was Attorney General of Ghana from 2011 to 2012 under then-president John Atta Mills and Special Prosecutor from 2018 until 2020 under Nana Akufo-Addo, wrote:

The NDC and the NPP appear to be so invested in their opposing positions and the desire to use the dynamics of gay rights to win political power that they have not stopped to think about the consequences of their actions to the sustenance of constitutionalism, democracy and the rule of law.<sup>324</sup>

Amidu argued that the 2021 bill was drafted "for purely electioneering purposes," describing the history of using LGBTQ issues as political fodder:

Anti-homosexuality or anti-gay rights appear to have become the main campaign tool designed by the NDC and its associates as the moral and emotional vehicle for winning over the electorate come 7 December 2024. The NPP, on the other hand, while not opposed to the criminalization of homosexuality, is more inclined to maintaining the status quo ante of allowing the Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29) to be the main instrument for dealing with any moral and legal issues relating to homosexuality.<sup>325</sup>

John Osae-Kwapong, a Ghanaian academic and democracy expert, described how this campaigning played out on social media:

While browsing Facebook on November 25 and 26, I chanced upon two campaign ads. One depicted the NPP as pro-LGBTQ+ rights and ended with a call on voters to vote for the NDC. The second portrayed the NDC's presidential candidate as pro-LGBTQ+ rights and urged Ghanaians to vote for the NPP to protect family values.<sup>326</sup>

Political parties in Ghana relied on extremist anti-LGBTQ sentiments to curry favor from the public and influential institutions like the Catholic Bishops' Conference and other religious bodies.<sup>327</sup> Not only were LGBTQ people's rights subject to debate and derogation, but political parties also spread misinformation in local languages, "suggesting that queer people have sex with or marry animals."<sup>328</sup>

Politicians like Sam George, the lead proponent of the anti-LGBTQ bill and, at the time, a member of the opposition, persistently demanded that then-President Nana Akufo-Addo sign the bill before his term ended. During NDC's final rally on December 5, 2025, George

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amp.

325 Martin A.B.K. Amidu, "LGBTQ+ As an Instrument of Political Engineering in Ghana."

326 John Osae-Kwapong, "Ghana's Election 2024."

327 Thomson Reuters Foundation, "Ghana Parties Stoke Anti-LGBTQ+ Sentiment Ahead of Election," Voice of America, November 30, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/ghana-parties-stoke-anti-lgbtq-sentiment-ahead-of-election/7881015.htm>.

328 Peegah interview.

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320 Outright interview with Ebenezer Peegah, founder and Executive Director of Rightify Ghana, virtual, February 2025.

321 Atsuvia interview.

322 Ibid.

323 Ibid.

324 Martin A.B.K. Amidu, "LGBTQ+ As An Instrument of Political Engineering in Ghana," Modern Ghana, March 25, 2024, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1301471/lgbtq-as-an-instrument-of-political-electioneerin>.



called on the public to “Vote for Candidate Mahama to sign the anti-LGBTQ bill.”<sup>329</sup> He added:

A vote for John Mahama is a vote to protect our culture, to protect our family values. A vote for Bawumia and Napo is a vote for homosexuality, is a vote for comprehensive sexuality education, and Ghanaians say no to trumu-trumu [a slur used to refer to gay people in Ghana].<sup>330</sup>

Religious institutions also wielded their influence against politicians, using LGBTQ people’s rights as fodder. The Ghanaian Catholic Bishops Conference warned the then-ruling NPP that it would lose at the polls if Akufo-Addo did not sign the bill:

If the president refuses to sign, and you know the implication for him [Nana Akufo-Addo] and his party. [I’m referring to] elections, voting...these things must not be hidden. We work in the villages, people are listening.<sup>331</sup>

According to Gloria Quaye, a human rights defender based in Accra, the NDC intentionally misled voters into believing that the party legally could, and would, enact the bill immediately upon assuming power.<sup>332</sup> Quaye explained:

The media and the public had no idea that the bill was expiring with Parliament being dissolved. [Politicians] were not telling them the truth because they knew they would not get the power if they told them. People would not vote for them. So, [the plan was] “we’re telling that the moment we come, that’s the first thing

we will do.” Even the current President [Mahama] used it on his campaign grounds...he has made different statements within religious settings and wider societal settings. He made those comments because he knew that people would vote for him...But then, when he came into power, in less than three weeks, he said that the bill no longer stands because there’s been a change in Parliament.<sup>333</sup>

According to Solomon Atsuvia, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, former Vice President and 2024 presidential candidate for the NPP, “made the most [vehement] anti-LGBTQ comments during the campaigns. I think we counted not less than ten comments coming from him, one person.”<sup>334</sup>

In one instance, an independent presidential candidate, Nana Kwame Bediako, did not express overt support for the anti-LGBTQ Bill.<sup>335</sup> Gloria Quaye described the backlash that Bediako received: “People started coming at him to be clear on his stand...‘Are you sure you’re not part of the community?’ Because the moment you are against [the Bill], you’re part of them.”<sup>336</sup>

## Participating in Elections as Queer Individuals and Human Rights Defenders

Generally, people who voted in Ghana’s elections and wanted full human rights protections had to make difficult choices. Outright interviewed three LGBTQ advocates for this report, and they shared differing perspectives on voter participation in the elections.

For Solomon Atsuvia:

329 This was quoted during the vetting. See TV3 Ghana, “Ministerial Vetting: Parliament Vets Sam George Minister-designate for Communication & Innovation,” YouTube video, 42:25 to 43:30, January 31, 2025, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFWst\\_H6w8w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFWst_H6w8w).

330 Rightify Ghana (@rightifyghana), “Vote for Mahama to Sign Anti-LGBTQ Bill,” Instagram, December 6, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDPisgAxKjv/?igsh=MWRsZ2Z6bmNyczhoMg%3D%3D>. “Napo” is a popular nickname for the NPP’s 2024 vice presidential candidate, Dr. Mathew Opoku Prempeh. See also John-Baptist Naah, “Bawumia-NAPO Pair is Not a Winnable Presidential Ticket. Here is Why,” Ghana Web, November 14, 2024, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Bawumia-NAPO-pair-is-not-a-winnable-presidential-ticket-Here-is-why-1959938>.

331 Joy News, “Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill: Sign it or Risk Elections – Catholic Bishops Conference Tells Akufo-Addo,” March 5, 2024, Joy News, <https://www.myjoyonline.com/anti-lgbtq-bill-sign-it-or-risk-elections-catholic-bishops-conference-tells-akufo-addo>.

332 Outright interview with Gloria Quaye, human rights defender and feminist working with sexual and gender minority women and the Africa Queer Youth Initiative, virtual, February 2025.

333 Quaye interview.

334 Atsuvia interview; Peegah interview. See ad by NPP here using comments made by NDC’s John Mahama and Sam George: NPP Projects Bureau, “JOHN MAHAMA ON LGBTQ+ ‘We need to remove stigma and allow LGBTQ+ people come out and declare their sexual orientation,’” Facebook, November 26, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/NPPProjectsBureau/videos/1836764693446173074?t=Jd6fzgw0VBbXzhTi5mvSyA&s=19>. In September 2024, Bediako however said that the U.S. is seeking same-sex marriage in Ghana and that it is against Ghanaian cultural values. See Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “Subtle homophobia is still homophobia,” X, September 19, 2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1836764693446173074?t=Jd6fzgw0VBbXzhTi5mvSyA&s=19>. The video’s translation to English is on file with Outright.

335 Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “I don’t know the main objectives of the anti-LGBTQ Bill,” X, January 16, 2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1747358346988941786?t=O--gMYseo6CrMnnTxlXxg&s=19>. In September 2024, Bediako however said that the U.S. is seeking same-sex marriage in Ghana and that it is against Ghanaian cultural values. See Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “Subtle homophobia is still homophobia,” X, September 19, 2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1836764693446173074?t=Jd6fzgw0VBbXzhTi5mvSyA&s=19>. The video’s translation to English is on file with Outright.

336 Quaye interview.

I participated in the elections, and I also encouraged other queer Ghanaians to participate, to weigh their options, and then support progressive candidates whom they think can champion inclusive policies. Despite the broader political discourse, my involvement was grounded in the belief that LGBTIQ communities should not be silenced by political discourse that exploits their rights or votes.<sup>337</sup>

Atsuvia said that during the parliamentary elections, he voted for an NDC candidate, notwithstanding that the party was generally anti-LGBTQ, noting, “I think he [the MP] refrained from leveraging the anti-LGBTQ+ campaign.”<sup>338</sup>

Atsuvia also participated in grassroots activities to educate LGBTIQ people on issues arising in the elections and civic participation for LGBTIQ people, and so did Ebenezer Peegah of the LGBTIQ advocacy organization Rightify Ghana.<sup>339</sup> Although Peegah could not vote because he was out of the country on election day, he actively monitored the narratives by politicians and the media and shared reports in order to guide LGBTIQ individuals on the position of those vying for elected positions.<sup>340</sup>

Human rights activist Gloria Quaye decided not to vote, even though she had voted in previous elections.<sup>341</sup> She explained:

I didn’t vote because I didn’t know who to vote for, considering three things: economic issues, the marginalized community [of LGBTIQ people] and the bill, and the [political] system itself...I thought it didn’t really matter because my voice wouldn’t matter even if I voted.<sup>342</sup>

Quaye said that many other LGBTIQ individuals and activists felt similarly disenfranchised. However, she also noted that:

During election years, people get gigs, mini contracts that they get money from for carrying out political

advocacy campaigns on social media and wearing party colors...[And] we had some LGBTIQ people supporting the opposition party, now the current party voted into power...they didn’t understand that the opposition introduced the bill [in 2021].<sup>343</sup>

Despite her own decision to sit out the election, Quaye was involved in initiatives to educate LGBTIQ voters that “their voice and their votes matter.”<sup>344</sup> However, given most Ghanaians’ economic precarity, many voters had other priorities. Quaye described how political parties distributed “bags of rice, sewing machines, and hair dryers” and gave out cash stipends, usually ranging from 1,000 to 2,000 cedis [US\$64 to 128] for gigs during elections. These gigs include mobilizing people to join political rallies, attending rallies, and setting up locations for campaigns to take place.<sup>345</sup> LGBTIQ people were among the recipients:

At the end of the day, they tell you that “I’m hungry. None of you activists give me money when I call you because you’re also struggling. We are all struggling. This is where I can get some little to support myself...If the government will make my life a living hell [when they come into power], let me vote for them and get [the stipend]. If they pass the Bill, I will know how to live my life.” Poverty has a bigger influence in these settings.<sup>346</sup>

Some LGBTIQ people did participate in political rallies—a fact that was then abused by opportunistic politicians. For instance, NDC aired campaign ads containing video footage of people presumed to be queer at NPP rallies, claiming that NPP would “allow gayism” and cause harm to children. In the videos, NPP supporters were shown at different campaign locations, waving flags, wearing party paraphernalia, and dancing, as is normal during political campaigns.<sup>347</sup> Ebenezer Peegah said:

It was unprecedented, politically-motivated homophobia where queer people who attended

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343 Ibid.

344 Ibid.

345 Ibid.

346 Ibid.

347 See video: National Democratic Congress (@OfficialINDCGh), “THE CHOICE YOU MAKE ON DECEMBER 7, WILL HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR YOUR CHILDREN’S FUTURE,” X, video, 0:13 to 0:25, <https://x.com/OfficialINDCGh/status/1860959708124713411?t=4Oq0KsHieEarLXVmetTiGQ&s=19>.

337 Atsuvia interview.

338 Ibid.

339 Ibid.

340 Peegah interview.

341 Quaye interview.

342 Ibid.

campaign rallies had videos taken of them, of the way they were dressed, the way they were dancing. They used these videos to say, “You see, these people belong to that political party [NPP]. That party supports LGBTQ people.”...It was the first time that we [in Ghana] were seeing [such a] homophobic political campaign, aired on TV, radio, and information bans going around rural communities in local languages, the streets, cities everywhere, and social media—Facebook accounts with more than 1 million followers. We saw threats online, and people could easily identify the people in these videos and harass them, or landlords could also evict them.<sup>348</sup>

Rightify Ghana reported these videos to social media companies and succeeded in convincing Meta to take down some of the videos based on Meta’s now-defunct hate speech policies.<sup>349</sup>

Peegah opined that despite the risks, it was encouraging to see queer and gender nonconforming people freely participating in political campaigns:

Their being outed was a dangerous thing. But the fact that they were participating and dancing brought me hope about [queer people’s] resilience because these politicians they were campaigning for have not told them they would come and protect their rights...It gave me hope that they cannot erase us; we will keep fighting for spaces.<sup>350</sup>

348 Peegah interview; *Ibid*. The voiceover also states that “the NPP will allow gayism and the NDC will prevent it.” The video is also available in languages Twi [<https://x.com/OfficialNDCGh/status/1861052458979496422?t=AG9Ybrt5afe2bceFUB-xUg&s=19>] and Hausa [<https://x.com/OfficialNDCGh/status/1861318779432563049?t=WaLlILY-Wka09vWj0SMOFJg&s=19>].

349 Peegah interview. Meta has now rolled back some of these protections to “allow more speech by lifting restrictions” that protected minority populations like LGBTIQ people. See Joel Kaplan, “More Speech and Fewer Mistakes,” Meta, January 7, 2025, <https://about.fb.com/news/2025/01/meta-more-speech-fewer-mistakes>. This new approach can contribute to online violence and “gross human rights abuses.” See Pat de Brún and Maung Sawyeddollah, “Meta’s New Content Policies Risk Fueling More Mass Violence and Genocide,” Amnesty International, February 17, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/meta-new-policy-changes>.

350 Ebenezer Peegah interview. Generally, political parties provide incentives to people participating in rallies. See Sarah Brierley and Eric Kramon, “Party Campaign Strategies in Ghana: Rallies, Canvassing and Handouts,” *African Affairs* 119, no. 477 (2020): 587–603, <https://academic.oup.com/afaf/article/119/477/587/5974813>. Gloria Quaye indicated that she was aware of some queer people getting small gigs during the elections. We cannot confirm whether or not the people in the videos were paid to attend the rallies.

## Media Portrayal of LGBTQ Issues During Elections

The Ghanaian media played a mixed role in the elections. Modern Ghana, a leading online platform, reflected diverse perspectives, including former Attorney-General and Minister of Justice Martin Amidu’s argument against the hostile legislation on the grounds that Ghana’s existing anti-homosexuality legislation is a British relic, not from the people. According to Solomon Atsuvia, other media outlets, such as Joy News, also produced information that was “largely neutral and meant to humanize LGBTQ people.” However, he said, “traditional and local media kept hammering on the allegation that ‘some people have taken money to promote trumu-trumu’ in Ghana.”<sup>351</sup>

## Conclusion: Post-Election Outcomes

As in 2016 and 2008, the outcome of the December 7, 2024 election was a peaceful transfer of power. Mahama was named the winner, with 56.6 percent of the vote, and Bawumia conceded defeat.

Despite both parties mobilizing queerphobia during the campaign, Solomon Atsuvia found solace in the view that Mahama, the victorious candidate, was more “progressive and positive” and had a “deeper understanding of human rights and gender issues” than his opponents.<sup>352</sup> He added that when Mahama was previously Ghana’s president from 2012 to 2017, “he made comments suggesting that when queer people and communities are marginalized, it will affect Ghana’s progress in the fight against HIV. So, he has that understanding from the point of public health.”<sup>353</sup> However, in addition to running a queerphobic campaign, Mahama has made clear his opposition to same-sex marriage and trans liberation, stating early in the 2024 campaign, “I don’t believe that anybody can get up and say, ‘I feel like a man although I was born a woman, and

351 Atsuvia interview. In 2021, Joy News published “The Gay Next Door” to share “stories of gays & lesbians forced to live their lives in the shadow.” One of the interviewees described sexual coercion when they were a child. See Joy News, “The Gay Next Door: JoyNews tells stories of gays & lesbians – AM Show on Joy News,” YouTube, aired on March 3, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niWqInClzt4>.

352 Atsuvia interview.

353 Atsuvia interview.

so I will change and become a man.”<sup>354</sup>

Perhaps this is why President Mahama has articulated seemingly contradictory positions regarding the bill. In January 2025, after the elections, Mahama said that he did not see why Ghana should legislate on these issues, which could be appropriately dealt with within the educational system to train children on “family values.”<sup>355</sup>

With the anti-LGBTQ bill being reintroduced in Parliament, MPs will decide whether to consider its provisions yet again, as it must begin the entire legislative process anew.<sup>356</sup>

Ghana’s 2024 elections exemplify the deep entanglement of politics with human rights and the trend of commodifying LGBTQ lives and issues for political gain. There is a continued lack of genuine commitment to human rights, and elections have become a tool for political narratives to spread disinformation and anti-rights ideals rather than for leaders to promote causes that will lead toward equality and advance society.

Anti-LGBTQ politicking is not, with the conclusion of the electoral period, a thing of the past. In March 2025, ten MPs reintroduced the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, which expands the criminalization of same-sex conduct and even allyship.<sup>357</sup> Ebenezer Peegah told Outright that there is much uncertainty about how things will proceed with the proposed legislation—the actual bill introduced has not been made available to the public.<sup>358</sup>

One might predict that President Mahama’s human rights background and his apparent ambivalence about the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values bill would lead him to sideline his party’s most prominent homophobes, such as Sam George. Instead, Mahama has appointed Sam George as Minister for Communication, Digital

Technology, and Innovation, where he has control over media outlets, including the ability to unilaterally shut them down.<sup>359</sup> There is a risk that George may use his position to influence media outlets to promote anti-rights positions. It will be incumbent on Ghana’s leadership to prioritize human rights values and uphold its democratic legacy.

## Timeline: A Year of Political Queerphobia in Ghana

Rightify Ghana tracked queerphobic speech by politicians in the media leading up to the elections.

**January 31:** NDC presidential candidate John Mahama shared his belief that “a woman is a woman and a man is a man...Nature created us one and one...My personal faith is against it [acceptance of LGBTQ people].”<sup>360</sup>

**March 5:** Christian Kwabena Andrews, popularly known as Osofo Kyiri Abosom, presidential candidate for the Ghana Union Movement (GUM), vowed to label President Akufo-Addo as “gay” if he did not sign the bill: “The first thing I want to say is that if President Akufo-Addo does not assent to the anti-gay bill, then I will tag him as gay. He is a member of the LGBTQI+ community if he does not sign. Our cultural values do not allow us to entertain same-sex relationships...We do not accept LGBTQI+ activities. It is evil, it is against our laws, and it should not be entertained.”<sup>361</sup>

**March 10:** Hassan Ayariga, founder and flag bearer of the All People’s Congress (APC), told Akufo-Addo to waste no time in signing the anti-LGBTQ Bill into law, emphasizing the importance of affirming so-called Ghana’s cultural

354 “Ghana’s Opposition Leader Expresses Anti-LGBTQ Stance Ahead of Dec. Elections,” Reuters, January 31, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ghanas-opposition-leader-expresses-anti-lgbtq-stance-ahead-dec-elections-2024-01-31>.

355 Atsuvia interview; “Has President Mahama Made U-Turn on Anti-LGBTQ Law?,” Our Homeland Ghana, January 14, 2025, <https://www.ourhomelandghana.com/general/has-president-mahama-made-u-turn-on-anti-lgbtq-law>.

356 See Thomas Naasi, “Ghanaian MPs Reintroduce Controversial Anti-LGBT Bill,” BBC News, March 3, 2025, [https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdjy91gr48lo.amp?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdjy91gr48lo.amp?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email).

357 Ibid.

358 Peegah interview

359 “GDNR Congratulates Samuel Nartey George on Appointment as Minister for Communications, Digital Technology and Innovation,” Tech Review Africa, February 12, 2025, <https://techreviewafrica.com/news/2048/gdnr-congratulates-samuel-nartey-george-on-appointment-as-minister-for-communications-digital-technology-and-innovations>; Sam George (@samgeorgegh), “Today, in two separate cases, I have directed the National Communications Authority Ghana to suspend and enforce a prohibition of broadcast on seven (7) radio stations in total,” Instagram, February 18, 2025, [https://www.instagram.com/samgeorgegh/p/DGOKeKYxc5f/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/samgeorgegh/p/DGOKeKYxc5f/?img_index=1).

360 “My Assemblies of God Faith is Against LGBTQ – Mahama,” Modern Ghana, January 31, 2024, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1289421/my-assemblies-of-god-faith-is-against-lgbtq-maha.html>.

361 “I Will Tag President Akufo-Addo as Gay if He Refuses to Sign Anti-Gay Bill” – Kyiri Abosom,” Ghana Web, March 5, 2024, <https://mobile.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/I-will-tag-President-Akufo-Addo-as-gay-if-he-refuses-to-sign-anti-gay-bill-Kyiri-Abosom-1920072>.



values. “The LGBT+ denies the human right to reproduce, which defies the natural order by encouraging human marriage to animals and non-living things. That’s the unfortunate purpose for the LGBT+ advocacy. So, for me, President Nana Akufo-Addo should not waste the time of Ghanaians on LGBT+. He should sign this bill into law to give us peace straight away.” Hassan also stated, “Ghanaians will not allow [the President] to change our traditions.”

<sup>362</sup> **March 12:** NDC candidate Mahama criticized Akufo-Addo for not signing the anti-LGBTQ bill into law, suggesting that the delay was influenced by concerns about foreign aid: “This is just the reason for being self-reliant. If you are not self-reliant, that is when people can dictate to you. If we were self-reliant, nobody would come ask us to do this or do that, and so one of the key economic policies we must pursue is one of self-reliance.”<sup>363</sup>

**April 11:** Then-Vice President and flagbearer of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, strongly rejected rights for LGBTQ people in Ghana during his Eid message to Muslims in Kumasi. He emphasized that both Christianity and Islam, along with “our cultural and societal norms and values as Ghanaians,” oppose homosexuality, adding: “My faith is therefore very strictly against the practice of homosexuality, no ‘ifs’ or ‘buts.’ No shades of grey.”<sup>364</sup>

**May 16:** Bawumia doubled down on his homophobic stance during his campaign tour in the Northern Region: “On this matter of LGBTQ, I want to say again without any equivocation that we will not allow it in Ghana. It is not going to be allowed. Our Bible says no, our Quran says no, and our people say no. So no. That is the answer.”<sup>365</sup> He

also said, “No man will be marrying a man, no woman will be marrying a woman. It is not our value. And I will stand firm no matter the consequences.”<sup>366</sup>

**June 3:** During Bawumia’s tour of the Central Region, he restated his speech given in the Northern Region: “We would stand firm and defend our values. We will stand firm. No matter the consequences. We are not going to back down.”<sup>367</sup>

**July 11:** The NDC Northern Regional Vice Chairman accused Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh (“Napo”), NPP’s vice presidential candidate, of “LGBTQ advocacy” through efforts to introduce comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>368</sup>

**July 15:** NPP spokesperson Akwasi Owusu Afrifa-Mensa, an MP, “defended” Opoku Prempeh from allegations of supporting the rights of LGBTQ people, calling them a political maneuver by the NDC. He stated that Opoku Prempeh “does not promote trumu-trumu” [a derogatory term for anal sex, used against LGBTQ people broadly] and criticized the NDC for what he called their baseless attacks.<sup>369</sup>

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my presidency – Bawumia re-assures” 3 News, May 16, 2024 [https://3news.com/news/lgbtq-will-not-be-allowed-to-happen-in-ghana-under-my-presidency-bawumia-re-assures/#google\\_vignette](https://3news.com/news/lgbtq-will-not-be-allowed-to-happen-in-ghana-under-my-presidency-bawumia-re-assures/#google_vignette); Ernest K Arhinful, “I’ll not allow LGBTQ activities in Ghana” – Bawumia,” My Joy Online, May 16, 2024 <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ill-not-allow-lgbtq-activities-in-ghana-bawumia/>; Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “Anti-LGBTQ: Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia Doubled Down His Homophobic Stance During Northern Region Tour,” X, May 16, 2024 <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/179117191534064050?t=OpwGkxRUH2tg7v5rNqjtg&s=19>; Abigail Arthur, “I won’t allow LGBTQ activities in Ghana, no matter the consequences – Bawumia” Citi Newsroom, May 16, 2024 <https://citinewsroom.com/2024/05/i-wont-allow-lgbtq-activities-in-ghana-no-matter-the-consequences-bawumia>.

<sup>366</sup> Emmanuel Kwarteng, “No man will be marrying a man in Ghana – Bawumia reaffirms LGBTQ stance” 3 News, May 16, 2024, [https://3news.com/news/politics/no-man-will-be-marrying-a-man-in-ghana-bawumia-reaffirms-lgbtq-stance/#google\\_vignette](https://3news.com/news/politics/no-man-will-be-marrying-a-man-in-ghana-bawumia-reaffirms-lgbtq-stance/#google_vignette); “I will stand firm against LGBTQ activities in Ghana no matter the consequences – Bawumia,” Modern Ghana, May 17, 2024, [https://www.modernghana.com/news/1312899/i-will-stand-firm-against-lgbtq-activities-in-ghan.html#google\\_vignette](https://www.modernghana.com/news/1312899/i-will-stand-firm-against-lgbtq-activities-in-ghan.html#google_vignette).

<sup>367</sup> Shirley Asiedu-Addo and Joana Kumi, “I’ll firmly protect Ghana’s family, cultural values against LGBTQ – Bawumia” Graphic Online, June 3, 2024, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/ill-firmly-protect-ghanas-family-and-cultural-values-against-lgbtq-bawumia.html>.

<sup>368</sup> “Dr Opoku Perempeh is LGBTQ Ambassador– NDC Vice Chairman Alleges,” Radio Tamale, July 11, 2024 (as archived), [https://web.archive.org/web/20240711171117/https://www.radiotamaleonline.com/dr-opoku-prempeh-is-lgbtq-ambassador-ndc-vice-chairman-alleges/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR157xDfP7IlyqkIhX9JACr8t3nWfGGOwoxl20xyZL6G-9B8O-4HD52MDd4\\_aem\\_1BR\\_qHi2BYNGokl\\_8tcNpQ](https://web.archive.org/web/20240711171117/https://www.radiotamaleonline.com/dr-opoku-prempeh-is-lgbtq-ambassador-ndc-vice-chairman-alleges/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR157xDfP7IlyqkIhX9JACr8t3nWfGGOwoxl20xyZL6G-9B8O-4HD52MDd4_aem_1BR_qHi2BYNGokl_8tcNpQ).

<sup>369</sup> Gideon Afful Amoako, “NAPo doesn’t promote LGBTQ; ignore NDC agenda – Akwasi Owusu Afrifa-Mensa,” Modern Ghana, July 15, 2024, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1327303/napo-doesnt-promote-lgbtq-ignore-ndc-agenda.html>.

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<sup>362</sup> “Walk Your Talk and Sign the Anti-Gay Bill into Law” – Hassan Ayariga Tells Akufo-Addo,” Onua Online, March 10, 2024, [https://onuaonline.com/walk-your-talk-and-sign-the-anti-gay-bill-into-law-hassan-ayariga-tells-akufo-addo/#google\\_vignette](https://onuaonline.com/walk-your-talk-and-sign-the-anti-gay-bill-into-law-hassan-ayariga-tells-akufo-addo/#google_vignette); “Waste No Time, Sign Anti-LGBT+ Bill Into Law – Ayariga to Akufo-Addo,” Ghana Web, March 10, 2024, <https://mobile.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Waste-no-time-sign-Anti-LGBT-Bill-into-law-Ayariga-to-Akufo-Addo-1920888>.

<sup>363</sup> Fauzu Masawudu, “Akufo-Addo Refusing to Sign Anti-Gay Bill Due to Foreign Aid – Mahama,” Citi Newsroom, March 12, 2024, <https://citinewsroom.com/2024/03/akufo-addo-refusing-to-sign-anti-gay-bill-due-to-foreign-aid-mahama>.

<sup>364</sup> “Bawumia rejects LGBTQ in emphatic Eid Message: Says ;no ifs or buts. No shades of grey,” My Joy Online, April 11, 2024 <https://www.myjoyonline.com/bawumia-rejects-lgbtq-in-emphatic-eid-message-says-no-ifs-or-buts-no-shades-of-grey>.

<sup>365</sup> Laud Nartey, “LGBTQ+ will not be allowed to happen in Ghana under

**August 31:** The NPP manifesto included the promotion of Ghanaian “cultural and family values” as part of its objectives to provide “good governance.”<sup>370</sup>

**October 1:** In a speech, Mahama articulated plans to pass stricter anti-LGBTQ legislation if elected. He promised to prevent the promotion of LGBTQ activities in schools and communities, ensuring that the rights of LGBTQ people are not advanced under his leadership: “I’m a proud member of the Assemblies of God church, and my faith does not permit same-sex marriages or relationships nor does it endorse human-animal relationships nor does it allow people to change their gender as they wish. This is a fundamental belief that I hold and is grounded in my faith.”<sup>371</sup>

**October 1:** Alan Kyerematen, presidential candidate for the Movement for Change, reiterated his strong opposition to inclusion for LGBTQ people at an appearance at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in Accra: “I am opposed to the extent possible to LGBTQ+ or whatever...I have made this pronouncement right from when the [political] debates started...[I am opposed] for a number of reasons: It is against my faith, I am fully bred Anglican. Our Christian faith does not support this kind of position. Secondly...LGBTQ+ is against our societal norms...We have different societal values [in Ghana]...”<sup>372</sup> Kyerematen urged President Akufo-Addo to sign the bill into law.<sup>373</sup>

**October 2:** Christian Kwabena Andrews, popularly known as Osofo Kyiri Abosom, presidential candidate for the Ghana Union Movement (GUM), urged the passage of the anti-LGBTQ bill, adding that he would advocate for all men to marry at least five wives under his leadership.<sup>374</sup>

370 New Patriotic Party (NPP), “Selfless Leadership, Bold Solutions for Jobs and Business: Manifesto for Election 2024,” August 2024, [https://npp-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2024\\_NPP\\_Manifesto\\_Full.pdf](https://npp-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2024_NPP_Manifesto_Full.pdf), 29, 112–113.

371 Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “John Dramani Mahama, the NDC’s presidential candidate, has vowed to strengthen laws against LGBTQ+ activities if elected,” X, October 1, 2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1841192915282116766?t=hwEBvrkpVdYhLhgCW8mtHA&s=19>.

372 Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “Alan Kwadwo Kyerematen, presidential candidate for the Movement for Change, has voiced his opposition to LGBTQ+ rights,” X, October 6, 2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1842843116711100733?t=dx3FJWPqP3QeiGAji9iMXA&s=19>.

373 See also Prince Antwi, “LGBTQ+ is Against My Faith and Our Social Values – Alan Kyerematen,” Ghana Guardian, October 2024, [https://ghanaguardian.com/lgbtq-is-against-my-faith-and-our-social-values-alan-kyerematen?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](https://ghanaguardian.com/lgbtq-is-against-my-faith-and-our-social-values-alan-kyerematen?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter).

374 Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “Kyiri Abosom Vows to Promote Polygamy, Doubts Passage of Anti-LGBTQ Bill,” X, video in Twi, October 6,

**October 5:** NPP vice presidential candidate Opoku Prempeh claimed that his predecessor in the Ministry of Education, MP Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa of NDC, introduced “LGBTQ advocacy” in the form of comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>375</sup>

**October 7:** Ablakwa challenged Opoku Prempeh’s claims, labeling them “desperate concoctions and outright fabrications.” Ablakwa demanded that Opoku Prempeh provide evidence of the LGBTQ curriculum and the supposed involvement of pastors and imams.<sup>376</sup>

**October 12:** Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang, NDC’s vice presidential candidate, also challenged Opoku Prempeh’s claims and demanded proof.<sup>377</sup>

**October 16:** Opoku Prempeh, on a radio show, restated that the NDC accepted funding to introduce CSE in schools to “teach how the same sexual activities can be done in schools.”<sup>378</sup>

**November 11:** During a campaign event with clergy, Mahama described LGBTQ issues, in Twi, as a Western import and contended that Western countries exert pressure on African nations like Ghana to support LGBTQ people, despite religious and cultural opposition. He urged Ghanaians to protect children from what he called “indoctrination” into “LGBTQ++” practices.<sup>379</sup>

2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1842861663264899200?t=Ne-6h5V8Os67Ewv2hVCkaGg&s=19>; “I Will Advocate for All Men to Marry at Least Five Wives – Osofo Kyiri Abosom,” Ghana Web, October 5, 2024, <https://mobile.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/i-will-advocate-for-all-men-to-marry-at-least-five-wives-Osofo-Kyiri-Abosom-1953963>.

375 “Ablakwa dares NAPO to prove LGBTQ curriculum claims,” My Joy, October 7, 2024, <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ablakwa-dares-napo-to-prove-lgbtq-curriculum-claims>.

376 Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “Okudzeto Ablakwa Challenges NAPO’s LGBTQ Curriculum Claims as Desperate Fabrications,” X, photo, October 7, 2024, [https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1843348665810989444?t=TaJlYyruzEHL\\_KC8pxreUQ&s=19](https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1843348665810989444?t=TaJlYyruzEHL_KC8pxreUQ&s=19).

377 Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang Questions NAPO’s LGBTQ Curriculum Allegations: ‘Let Him Prove It,’” X, video, 0:34–1:18, October 12, 2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1845086033647431729?t=4LnVCllqyLZiKdMExe32Mg&s=19>.

378 “LGBTQ+: NDC collected money and introduced Comprehensive Sexual Education into school curriculum; I’ve all documents to prove – NAPO,” Modern Ghana, October 16, 2024, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1349477/lgbtq-ndc-collected-money-and-introduced-compreh.html>.

379 Rightify Ghana (@RightifyGhana), “John Mahama Speaks Out Against LGBTQ+ Rights, Warns Anti-LGBTQ Bill Could Expire if Delayed Further,” X, video in Twi, November 12, 2024, <https://x.com/RightifyGhana/status/1856286099468882041?t=niH4PsvN6Ivw-82mkg7YVA&s=19>.

**November 8:** Hassan Ayariga, founder and flag bearer of the All People's Congress (APC) admonished Akufo-Addo for not yet signing the bill because "there are some forces controlling him," alluding to alleged external influences. He added, "We are a country of tradition. Why is he delaying in signing something he should have done two years ago? It means he is benefiting from something on it somewhere."<sup>380</sup>

**November 25–26:** The NDC launched advertisements on the X social media platform in Twi, English, and Hausa, bolstering anti-LGBTQ rhetoric.<sup>381</sup> The ads targeted Akufo-Addo and Bawumia, accusing Akufo-Addo of being pro-LGBTQ for not signing the anti-LGBTQ bill into law. The ads included disinformation that LGBTQ individuals marry animals. The video included images of men attending NPP rallies and labeled them as queer, with the potential to incite violence and discrimination. The NDC's message was clear: vote for Mahama, and he will assent to the anti-LGBTQ bill.

**November 30:** The NPP countered with an anti-LGBTQ campaign ad, titled "Mahama Can't Be Trusted – Mahama & NDC Support LGBTQ++ 🏳️" which included decade-old interviews with John Mahama and with MP Sam George decrying the amount of airtime wasted on discussing "gay" issues.<sup>382</sup> In Mahama's interview, he discussed the challenges faced by men who have sex with men in accessing health care, including cultural hostility. The NPP juxtaposed this clip with a video of Mahama at a rally with a person audiences might perceive as an effeminate man, to further the narrative that Mahama was pro-LGBTQ. The ad concluded with a clip of Dr. Bawumia captioned "Trust Bawumia to Protect

Our Cultural & Religious Values." Bawumia claimed in the video that he would oppose LGBTQ+ rights at all costs, to defend so-called Ghanaian traditions, values, and religion.

**December 7:** The general elections were held. Bawumia conceded on December 8, and on December 9, Mahama was officially announced the winner.

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380 Felix Anim-Appau, "Ayariga explains why Akufo-Addo is not signing anti-gay bill," NUA Online, November 8, 2024, <https://onuaonline.com/ayariga-explains-why-akufo-addo-is-not-signing-anti-gay-bill>.

381 National Democratic Congress (@OfficialNDCGh), "The choice you make on December 7 will have serious consequences for your children's future. Say no to 'trumu trumu'" X, video, November 25, 2024, <https://x.com/OfficialNDCGh/status/1860959708124713411?t=4Oq0KsHieEarLX-VmetTiGQ&s=19>. The voiceover also states that "the NPP will allow gayism and the NDC will prevent it." The video is also available in languages Twi [<https://x.com/OfficialNDCGh/status/1861052458979496422?t=AG9Y-brt5afe2bceFUB-xUg&s=19>] and Hausa [<https://x.com/OfficialNDCGh/status/1861318779432563049?t=WaLIILYWka09vWj0SMOFJg&s=19>].

382 NPP Projects Bureau, "We need to remove stigma and allow LGBTQ+ people come out and declare their sexual orientation" – John Mahama," Facebook, video, November 26, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/NPPProjectsBureau/videos/john-mahama-on-lgbtq-we-need-to-remove-stigma-and-allow-lgbtq-people-come-out-an/2693563594185291/?\\_rdc=2&\\_rdr#](https://www.facebook.com/NPPProjectsBureau/videos/john-mahama-on-lgbtq-we-need-to-remove-stigma-and-allow-lgbtq-people-come-out-an/2693563594185291/?_rdc=2&_rdr#). The emoji in devil characters generally depicts mischief and trouble.

## CASE STUDY INDONESIA:

# Local Glimmers of Hope in a Weakening Democracy

Election: General (February 14, 2024) and Local (November 27, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>383</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

### Political and Social Context

When President Suharto's authoritarian regime collapsed in 1998, Indonesia began to make democratic gains. The world's fourth-largest country, it is a unitary republic that has regularly held elections since 1999, generally characterized as free and fair and marked by "significant political and media pluralism."<sup>384</sup> However, it has also been plagued by allegations of systemic corruption, persistent violations of the human rights of Indigenous Papuans and other ethnic and religious minorities, and restrictions on the freedom of assembly of civil society organizations, among other challenges.<sup>385</sup>

On February 14, 2024, Indonesia held general elections to choose the president and vice president against the backdrop of democratic backsliding.<sup>386</sup> President Joko Widodo had reached the constitutional limit of two five-year terms and was therefore ineligible to run.

Widodo, once seen as a champion of democracy, used his executive power to weaken democratic institutions that served to root out corruption and check executive power.<sup>387</sup> Ultimately, voters elected Prabowo Subianto—a retired general accused of war crimes and the son-in-law of former President Suharto—to succeed Widodo as president. Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Widodo's eldest son, was elected vice president, tightening the hold of political dynasties in Indonesia.<sup>388</sup>



383 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - Indonesia," accessed April 3, 2025, [freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2025](https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2025).

384 Ibid.

385 Ibid.

386 Edward Aspinall, "Jokowi was once seen as Indonesia's 'new hope'. Instead, he leaves a legacy of democratic backsliding," The Conversation, October 16, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/jokowi-was-once-seen-as-indonesias-new-hope-instead-he-leaves-a-legacy-of-democratic-backsliding-237319>.

**Right:** Trans candidate Mami Vera posing in front of her campaign poster. Credit: Tri Wahyuni/BBC Indonesia.

387 Pizaro Gozali Idrus, "Analysts: With Jokowi's maneuvering, Indonesian democracy faces gravest threat since Suharto's fall," Benar News, August 27, 2024, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/gravest-threat-to-democracy-since-suharto-fall-08272024151353.html>.

388 Yoes Kenawas, "It takes two to tango: Why dynastic politics is on the rise



During the general elections, voters also elected the members of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), the national legislature that consists of the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR) or the House of Representatives, and the Dewan Perwakilan Daerah (DPD) or the Regional Representative Council. At the provincial (DPRD Provinsi) and regency or city (DPRD Kota/Kabupaten) levels, voters elected new members of the Regional House of Representatives.

Later that year, on November 27, 2024, local executive elections were held to elect governors, mayors, and regents in all provinces, regencies, and cities of Indonesia, except the Yogyakarta Special Region. In August 2024, ahead of the local elections, protests erupted throughout Indonesia against the ruling coalition's attempts to amend the election law to allow candidates under 30 to run for office, branding it an attempt to cement nepotism. Kaesang Pangareb, President Widodo's 29-year-old son, was the only candidate under 30.<sup>389</sup>

Despite the quota for 30 percent of candidates to be women, female politicians faced significant barriers to equal political participation in 2024, such as higher rates of violence compared to previous elections, the lack of support from political parties, and sexist attitudes among voters and political parties.<sup>390</sup> These barriers shaped women's representation in politics and made it harder for women without existing political leverage to equally participate, with 45.7 percent of all women elected to the House of Representatives belonging to political dynasties.<sup>391</sup> In contrast, approximately 24 percent or 138 out of 580 new members of the House of Representatives belong to political dynasties.<sup>392</sup>

in Indonesia," Indonesia At Melbourne, October 21, 2024, <https://indonesiaat-melbourne.unimelb.edu.au/it-takes-two-to-tango-why-dynastic-politics-is-on-the-rise-in-indonesia>.

389 Andreas Harsono, "Indonesian Police Crack Down on Anti-Corruption Protests," Human Rights Watch, August 29, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/29/indonesian-police-crack-down-anti-corruption-protests>.

390 Women Research Institute, Violence against Women in Indonesia's 2024 Elections, February 2025, <https://www.wfi.org/what-we-do/resources/violence-against-women-indonesias-2024-elections>; Sally White, "Even with a 30% quota in place, Indonesian women face an uphill battle running for office," The Conversation, February 8, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/even-with-a-30-quota-in-place-indonesian-women-face-an-uphill-battle-running-for-office-222387>.

391 "Women's Representation In Legislative Institutions Often Utilized By Political Dynasty," VOI, July 15, 2024, <https://voi.id/en/bernas/398614>.

392 Fitria Chusna Farisa, "CSIS: Caleg Terpilih yang Terindikasi Dinasti Politik Terbanyak dari Nasdem, Disusul PDI-P," Kompas, April 26, 2024, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/04/26/05300001/csis--ca>

These democratic shortcomings may not have been a primary concern for voters, as a 2023 Pew Research survey showed that while the majority of Indonesians supported representative democracy, most also favorably viewed being led by strongmen, technocrats, or "religious people," highlighting the persisting influence of religious conservatism and anti-democratic forces.<sup>393</sup> According to another 2023 survey, Indonesians favored continuity with Widodo's government, with 41 percent of respondents expressing a preference for a presidential candidate who would maintain and enhance programs initiated under Widodo, and only 28 percent supporting a candidate who would implement significant changes.<sup>394</sup>

## Situation of LGBTIQ People's Human Rights

While consensual same-sex sexual acts are not prohibited at the national level, they are criminalized in several subnational jurisdictions in Indonesia. In Aceh province, which implements Shariah, same-sex sexual activity between men and between women can be punished with 100 lashes and/or a maximum of eight years imprisonment, with several reports of enforcement in recent years.<sup>395</sup> Local ordinances that criminalize sexual and gender minorities by banning same-sex intimacy, "immoral behavior," sexual relations outside marriage, and public indecency also exist in the provinces of Aceh and South Sumatra and the cities of Bukit Tinggi, Bogor, Garut, Pariaman, Padang Panjang, and Cianjur.<sup>396</sup>

leg-terpilih-yang-terindikasi-dinasti-politik-terbanyak-dari-nasdem.

393 David Hutt, "What on Earth Do Indonesians Think About Democracy?," The Diplomat, March 7, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/what-on-earth-do-indonesians-think-about-democracy>.

394 Voxpol, "40.8 Percent of Voters Want Presidential Candidates to Continue and Improve Government Programs," September 22, 2023, <https://voi.id/en/news/313453>.

395 Amnesty International, "Indonesia: Flogging of gay men a horrifying act of discrimination," February 27, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/indonesia-flogging-of-gay-men-a-horrifying-act-of-discrimination>.

396 ASEAN SOGIE Caucus et al., "Regional Statement on the Criminalization of LGBTQ Persons in Indonesia," 2019, <https://www.asiapacificalliance.org/our-publications/regional-statement-criminalization-lgbtq-persons-indonesia>; UNDP and USAID, Being LGBT in Asia: Indonesia Country Report, 2014, <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/being-lgbt-asia-indonesia-country-report-2014.pdf>, 22-23; Jamison Liang, "Morality and LGBT rights in Indonesia," New Mandala, March 16, 2016, <https://www.newmandala.org/morality-and-lgbt-rights-in-indonesia>; Human Dignity Trust, "Indonesia," accessed May 13, 2025, <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/indonesia>; Outright International, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women Online: An Overview of Emerging Security Threats from Asia, March 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/lesbian-bisexual-and-queer-women-online-overview-emerging-security>, 22.

In the past five years, this pattern of criminalization at the sub-national level has been growing, with authorities in several cities, regencies, and provinces enacting or proposing new criminalizing laws, contributing to an increasingly hostile environment for LGBTIQ people.<sup>397</sup>

Authorities can also target LGBTIQ people through other laws. The vaguely worded 2016 National Pornography Act has been used by authorities and internet service providers to block online LGBTIQ content, leading some LGBTIQ internet users to resort to self-censorship.<sup>398</sup> At the beginning of 2026, a new criminal code that further undermines LGBTIQ people's rights will take effect. Articles 411 and 412, which criminalize extramarital sex and cohabitation outside marriage, will disproportionately impact same-sex couples, who cannot legally marry in Indonesia.<sup>399</sup> In addition, Article 2 recognizes "any living law" in Indonesia, which could strengthen discriminatory Shariah-based ordinances.<sup>400</sup>

Public acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in Indonesia is among the lowest in Asia. Recent surveys show that an overwhelming majority of Indonesians do not believe that the country is a "good place" for gay and lesbian people, reject same-sex marriage, and disapprove of having "homosexuals" as neighbors.<sup>401</sup>

397 Since 2023, several local authorities, including officials in Bandung City and Garut regency in West Java, Medan City in North Sumatra, the province of West Sumatra, and Pekanbaru City in Riau, among others, have been proposing ordinances targeting "sexual deviance" or same-sex intimacy. See Andra Nasrie, "Weaponizing Discrimination: Indonesia's politicians exploit LGBTQ+ issues ahead of 2024 elections," Coconuts Jakarta, March 16, 2023, <https://coconuts.co/jakarta/features/weaponizing-discrimination-indonesias-politicians-exploit-lgbtq-issues-ahead-of-2024-elections>; Hammam Izzuddin, "DPRD Sumatera Barat Kaji Pembentukan Raperda soal LGBT," Tempo, January 6, 2025, <https://www.tempo.co/politik/dprd-sumatera-barat-kaji-pembentukan-raperda-soal-lgbt-1190595>; Hakim Ghani, "Usulan Perda Anti-LGBT Diprotes, Bupati: Ini Urusan Orang Garuti," detikJabar, January 30, 2023, <https://www.detik.com/jabar/berita/d-6541625/usulan-perda-anti-lgbt-diprotes-bupati-ini-urusan-orang-garut>.

398 Human Rights Watch, "Scared in Public and Now No Privacy" Human Rights and Public Health Impacts of Indonesia's Anti-LGBT Moral Panic, July 1, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/02/scared-public-and-now-no-privacy/human-rights-and-public-health-impacts>; Outright International, The Citizen Lab and OONI, No Access: LGBTIQ Website Censorship in Six Countries, 2022, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/NoAccess\\_abridged\\_1.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/NoAccess_abridged_1.pdf), 14–23.

399 Human Rights Watch, "Indonesia: New Criminal Code Disastrous for Rights," December 8, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/08/indonesia-new-criminal-code-disastrous-rights>.

400 Ibid.

401 Justin McCarthy, "Majority Worldwide Now Say Their Area Is Good for Gay People," Gallup, June 21, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/507518/majority-worldwide-say-area-good-gay-people.aspx>; Sneha Gubbala, Jacob Poushter and Christine Huang, "How people around the world view same-sex marriage," Pew Research Center, November 27, 2023, <https://>

These attitudes contribute to widespread discrimination and hostility toward LGBTIQ people. Families subject LGBTIQ people to conversion practices or pressure them to marry people of a different gender.<sup>402</sup> Gender nonconforming lesbian, gay, and bisexual people experience bullying in school and discrimination at the workplace, forcing them to conform to gender norms and "hide" their sexual orientation.<sup>403</sup> Police have conducted "surveillance raids" on gatherings of LGBTIQ people and frequently subject them to arbitrary arrests and detention under the guise of public order.<sup>404</sup> While several LGBTIQ advocacy groups exist in the country, they face barriers to explicitly registering as such, and police routinely deny them permits to hold public events.<sup>405</sup> Several LGBTIQ-related events in Indonesia have been cancelled due to security threats and opposition by conservative groups, including a regional LGBTIQ convening planned to be held in July 2023 by ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, a regional LGBTIQ human rights network.<sup>406</sup>

While there is no comprehensive data on the acceptance of trans, gender-diverse, and intersex people in the country, trans people may be more generally tolerated due to the historical recognition and visibility of third-gender waria communities.<sup>407</sup> The Bugis people, the biggest of the three major ethnic groups of South Sulawesi, recognize five genders, including the bissu, a metagender identity encompassing the masculine and the feminine, manifesting through a "close connection with the spiritual world" or an intersex characteristic

[www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/27/how-people-around-the-world-view-same-sex-marriage](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/27/how-people-around-the-world-view-same-sex-marriage).

402 United States. Department of State, Indonesia 2023 Human Rights Report, 2024, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267\\_INDONESIA-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267_INDONESIA-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf), 54.

403 UNDP and USAID, Being LGBT in Asia: Indonesia Country Report, 2014, <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/being-lgbt-asia-indonesia-country-report-2014.pdf>, 12–34.

404 Human Rights Watch, "Indonesia: Fresh Wave of Anti-LGBT Rhetoric, Arrests," October 29, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/29/indonesia-fresh-wave-anti-lgbt-rhetoric-arrests>; Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024: Events of 2023, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024>, 307.

405 United States Department of State, Indonesia 2023 Human Rights Report, 2024, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267\\_INDONESIA-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267_INDONESIA-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf), 55.

406 "LGBT event in Indonesia scrapped after security threats," Reuters, July 12, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/lgbt-event-in-indonesia-scrapped-after-security-threats-2023-07-12>.

407 Johannes Koraag, "Lived Religion: Waria Religious Experiences in Eastern Indonesia," Indonesia Consortium for Religious Studies, September 27, 2023, [https://www.icrs.or.id/news/lived-religion-waria-religious-experiences-in-eastern-indonesia\\_1486](https://www.icrs.or.id/news/lived-religion-waria-religious-experiences-in-eastern-indonesia_1486).

such as ambiguous genitalia.<sup>408</sup> However, in recent years, waria, trans, and other gender-diverse persons in Indonesia have been subjected to arbitrary arrests, police harassment, and violence.<sup>409</sup> In addition, gender-diverse people disproportionately experience school bullying, family rejection, and employment discrimination, and often resort to high-risk and low-paying jobs, including sex work, trapping them in a cycle of poverty.<sup>410</sup> Trans people face discrimination in access to public services and health care, and have been subjected to conversion practices, including exorcism attempts and religious camps.<sup>411</sup> Despite the historical role of the fifth-gender bissu, some of whom are born with intersex characteristics, as spiritual and cultural leaders in South Sulawesi, the rise of broader anti-LGBTIQ and anti-gender hostility enables discrimination and violence against intersex people in the country.<sup>412</sup> Intersex babies and children are not protected from non-consensual medical interventions seeking to “normalize” their bodies.<sup>413</sup> In addition, intersex people face barriers to legal recognition and a lack of access to information, state support, and resources, exposing them to exclusion from and discrimination in accessing basic social services.<sup>414</sup> In 2024, Indonesia abstained from voting on a landmark UN Human Rights Council resolution on intersex people’s rights, citing that the category of “sex characteristics” does not enjoy universal recognition.<sup>415</sup>

408 Sharyn Graham, “Sex, Gender, and Priests in South Sulawesi, Indonesia,” IAS Newsletter 29 (2002): [https://www.ias.asia/sites/default/files/2020-10/IAS\\_NL29\\_27.pdf](https://www.ias.asia/sites/default/files/2020-10/IAS_NL29_27.pdf), 27; Petsy Jessy Ismoyo, “Decolonizing Gender Identities in Indonesia: A Study of Bissu ‘The Trans-Religious Leader’ in Bugis People Trans-Religious Leader” in Bugis People, Paradigma: Jurnal Kajian Budaya 10, no. 3 (2020): <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=paradigma>.

409 Human Rights Watch, “Scared in Public and Now No Privacy.”

410 Randi Julian Miranda, “Discriminated and Poor: The Plight of ‘Waria’ in Indonesia,” *Magdalene*, January 2, 2018, <https://magdalene.co/story/discriminated-and-poor-the-plight-of-waria-in-indonesia>; M.V. Lee Badgett, Amira Hasenbush and Winston Ekaprasetya Luhur, “LGBT Exclusion in Indonesia and Its Economic Effects,” *The Williams Institute*, March 2017, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-exclusion-indonesia>.

411 United States Department of State, *Indonesia 2023 Human Rights Report*, 54.

412 Farid Ibrahim, “Homophobia and rising Islamic intolerance push Indonesia’s intersex bissu priests to the brink,” *ABC News*, February 27, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-27/indonesia-fifth-gender-might-soon-disappear/10846570>.

413 Outright International, “Country Overview: Indonesia,” accessed June 16, 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/asia/indonesia>.

414 Robertus Robet, Adiba Ciptaningr and Meila Riskia Fitri, “Justice, intersexuals and epistemic authority in Indonesia,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2024): <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2416099>.

415 ILGA World et al., *Intersex Human Rights A report on the Human Rights Council Resolution 55/14 – Combating discrimination, violence and*

In 2023, as part of the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council, Indonesia accepted eight out of 13 LGBTIQ-related recommendations, committing to repeal discriminatory laws against LGBTIQ people and enact non-discrimination legislation.<sup>416</sup> However, since then, while anti-LGBTIQ laws have constantly been proposed by legislators at the local and national levels, legal protections for LGBTIQ people have not been on public officials’ agenda, with no bill to that effect pending in parliament as of writing.

## Political Positioning on LGBTIQ Equality

While several political candidates affirmed non-discrimination and equality for LGBTIQ persons, the 2024 Indonesian general elections were marked by the weaponization of anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric, a perceived decline in public political support for LGBTIQ equality, and difficulties for trans and gender-diverse people to vote in particular areas.

Ahead of the 2024 presidential elections, the candidates leading two of the three presidential and vice presidential tickets responded to a questionnaire by Human Rights Watch on various human rights issues. One of the questions was: “What is your policy on the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Indonesia? What should be done about legal and regulatory measures that discriminate against LGBT people that previous governments have put in place?” Both Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar of the big-tent Coalition of Change for Unity, and Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, then the ruling party, asserted that LGBT people should not be subjected to discrimination, but did not articulate support for any specific reforms.<sup>417</sup> In a public forum in December 2023, Baswedan, Change for

harmful practices against intersex persons, 2024, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/intersex\\_resolution\\_55\\_14\\_report.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/intersex_resolution_55_14_report.pdf), 34–36.

416 Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Indonesia, UN Doc. A/HRC/52/8, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/52/8>; ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, “UPR Outcome Document: Indonesia Steps Forward, Philippines Steps Back,” March 27, 2023, [https://aseansogiecaucus.org/images/2023/Press\\_Statement\\_UPR\\_Outcome\\_Document\\_Indonesia\\_Steps\\_Forward\\_Philippines\\_Steps\\_Back.pdf](https://aseansogiecaucus.org/images/2023/Press_Statement_UPR_Outcome_Document_Indonesia_Steps_Forward_Philippines_Steps_Back.pdf).

417 Human Rights Watch, “Indonesia: Candidates Speak Out on Human Rights,” February 8, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/08/indonesia-candidates-speak-out-human-rights>.

Unity's presidential candidate, had announced that he "personally disagrees with LGBT" and believes that gender and sexual diversity is "not in line with our religious principles."<sup>418</sup> He added that, "As long as the six religions recognized in Indonesia do not accept LGBT, then the state cannot recognize it either."<sup>419</sup> Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who won the elections, did not respond to the Human Rights Watch questionnaire or publicly outline their positions on LGBTIQ people's rights, except to emphasize that they are "not pro-LGBT" in response to a manipulated image circulating on social media that depicted them wearing rainbow ties and pins.<sup>420</sup>

Some candidates instrumentalized LGBTIQ issues to rally their base. Based on its preelectoral monitoring between April and May 2023, the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) expressed concerns that LGBT issues were being politicized, warning that anti-LGBT calls could be used to garner votes.<sup>421</sup> Commissioners cited reports of legislative candidates and political parties vowing to "eradicate LGBT." They condemned the January 2023 claim by Bobby Nasution, the mayor of the North Sumatra city of Medan, that the city was "LGBT free."<sup>422</sup> While Nasution later claimed it was a joke, these statements remain worrying, particularly in the context of a broader pattern of anti-LGBTIQ political rhetoric.<sup>423</sup>

In Jakarta, independent gubernatorial candidate Dharma Pongrekun suggested that female kindergarten teachers were strategically placed to indoctrinate children to become LGBT from an early age.<sup>424</sup> A lesbian woman

from Jakarta also shared with Outright that senatorial candidates in Jakarta and Surabaya publicly stated that LGBTIQ people's lifestyles were against religious values.<sup>425</sup> In Ambon, Eastern Indonesia, a trans woman told Outright that a local candidate for parliament engaged in fearmongering, claiming that a lot of men who have sex with men and trans women in the region had recently contracted HIV.<sup>426</sup> In Palu, the capital of Central Sulawesi Province, a trans woman interviewee told Outright that while local candidates themselves did not weaponize LGBTIQ issues, their supporters did.<sup>427</sup>

Some politicians took their hostilities even further, in effect advocating for discrimination and violence. In the province of Aceh—where same-sex intimacy is already punishable by caning, fines, and/or imprisonment—a representative of a local trans group told Outright that local candidates vowed to eradicate LGBT people from the region.<sup>428</sup> In the town of Pandeglang, Aap Aptadi, a candidate for head of the regency, urged the government not to "hesitate to take firm action involving all components of society" against same-sex relationships.<sup>429</sup>

As public officials and other political actors intensified anti-LGBTIQ attacks, open political support for LGBTIQ equality declined.<sup>430</sup> A lesbian woman from Jakarta told Outright they could not find any supportive statements from local candidates, unlike in previous elections, when candidates offered blanket statements in support of

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ual-violence-around-regional-elections-regional-head-candidates-alleged-as-the-perpetrators.

425 Outright interview with a 52-year-old lesbian woman, South Jakarta, Indonesia, September 25, 2024.

426 Outright interview with a trans woman, Ambon, East Indonesia, September 27, 2024.

427 Outright interview with a 29-year-old trans woman, Palu, Indonesia, September 24, 2024.

428 Outright interview with a 36-year-old trans woman, Aceh, Indonesia, October 13, 2024; ILGA Asia, "Indonesia: Public flogging of gay men in Aceh highlights a larger trend of surveillance into and criminalization of LGBTIQ lives," April 22, 2025, <https://ilgaasia.org/news/indonesiaapril2025>.

429 Anita Dhewy and Luviana dan Verolyn Sintya, "Sexual Violence Around Regional Elections, Regional Head Candidates Alleged as the Perpetrators," Konde, November 29, 2024, <https://www.konde.co/2024/11/sexual-violence-around-regional-elections-regional-head-candidates-alleged-as-the-perpetrators>.

430 See, for example Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024: Events of 2023, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024>, 307. "Officials continued to target LGBT people. In July, advocates canceled a regional gathering of LGBT activists in Jakarta in response to harassment and death threats from Muslim conservatives...On May 28, Pekanbaru police and public security officials arrested 29 women and 28 men in several raided houses in Sukajadi area, accusing them of being 'LGBT couples.'"

418 "Anies Baswedan Tolak LGBT tapi Janji Tak akan Diskriminatif," Tempo, December 24, 2023, <https://www.tempo.co/arsip/anies-baswedan-tolak-lgbt-tapi-janji-tak-akan-diskriminatif-104903>.

419 Ibid.

420 Ria Rizki Nirmala and Sari Faqih Fathurrahman, "Ramai Isu Prabowo-Gibran Dukung LGBT, Relawan Sekjen For Gibran: Hoaks!," Suara, December 6, 2023, <https://www.suara.com/kotaksuara/2023/12/06/071819/ramai-isu-prabowo-gibran-dukung-lgbt-relawan-sekjen-for-gibran-hoaks>.

421 "Komnas HAM Nilai LGBT Rentan Dipolitisasi saat Pemilu 2024," CNN Indonesia, May 13, 2023, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasion-al/20230512142133-12-948781/komnas-ham-nilai-lgbt-rentan-dipolitisasi-saat-pemilu-2024>.

422 Ibid.

423 Ary Hermawan, "Medan mayor's Duterte-style populism is a stark warning for all," The Jakarta Post, July 17, 2023, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/paper/2023/07/17/medan-mayors-duterte-style-populism-is-a-stark-warning-for-all.html>.

424 Anita Dhewy and Luviana dan Verolyn Sintya, "Sexual Violence Around Regional Elections, Regional Head Candidates Alleged as the Perpetrators," Konde, November 29, 2024, <https://www.konde.co/2024/11/sexual-violence-around-regional-elections-regional-head-candidates-alleged-as-the-perpetrators>.



diversity and equality.<sup>431</sup> LGBTIQ activists who spoke to BBC News Indonesia also echoed this sentiment, noting that until the 2019 elections, some parties approached LGBTIQ groups for electoral support, “even involving communities in certain campaign activities,” which they did not observe in 2024.<sup>432</sup> While they could not pinpoint an exact reason, an activist thought that this could be due to LGBTIQ communities no longer willing to “fall for the false promises of politicians or parties who only want to exploit the community to gain votes for them.”<sup>433</sup>

Nevertheless, some political figures displayed allyship during the campaign. Two interviewees from Jakarta expressed hope about Partai Buruh, a small political party that focuses on labor issues and has shown signs of support for equality and inclusion.<sup>434</sup> For example, in an interview, Anindya Shabrina, Partai Buruh’s candidate for the East Java Regional House of Representatives, vowed to fight for the inclusion of everyone “regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity” and urged the government to take concrete steps to end workplace discrimination and prevent exploitative and biased media coverage against LGBTIQ people.<sup>435</sup> With only 0.64 percent of the national vote, the Partai Buruh party did not reach the four percent threshold necessary to obtain seats in the House of Representatives, but it was able to secure 11 seats in local parliaments.<sup>436</sup> In one city, a 37-year-old gay man mentioned his hope that a recently elected local senator, known for her work on gender-based violence, might be an ally on LGBTIQ issues.<sup>437</sup> The 37-year-old gay man mentioned that he supported the candidate for her work on gender-based violence.<sup>438</sup>

Some interviewees perceived Prabowo Subianto’s

accession to the presidency as a positive development. They expressed hope that the president would not take actions to exacerbate discrimination or criminalize LGBTIQ people, noting the persistent and unconfirmed public speculation about the sexual orientation of one of his close family members.<sup>439</sup> Other interviewees were more critical, emphasizing his worrisome track record on human rights. A trans woman from Jakarta said one of her biggest concerns was the fact that Subianto committed grave human rights violations in the past, including his alleged role in enforced disappearances as a former commander of the army’s special forces in the late 1990s.<sup>440</sup> Some also perceived him as disconnected from the grassroots, doubting that he would take action in support of LGBTIQ people’s rights.<sup>441</sup>

Ahead of the elections, online media coverage of the politicization of LGBT issues amplified hateful rhetoric, according to the Alliance of Indonesian Independent Journalists (AJI), the Union of Journalists for Diversity (SEJUK), and the LGBT group Arus Pelangi in a joint statement.<sup>442</sup> Their analysis of 113 digital local and national media reports shows that media outlets used “a great deal of stigmatizing language” and disproportionately covered “discriminatory statements” from civil society figures and national and local politicians, with only five covering LGBT groups.<sup>443</sup> They also observed “an increasing tendency to politicize identity as the 2024 election approaches,” with “political parties [encouraging] candidates to fight for voter support through the use of the most approachable issue, namely LGBT.”<sup>444</sup>

At the same time, however, some interviewees said

431 Jakarta lesbian interview.

432 “Kami tidak akan lagi mau termakan janji palsu politisi” – Suara kelompok LGBT di tengah sentimen anti-LGBT demi dongkrak suara di Pemilu 2024,” BBC News Indonesia, January 22, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/cw4k4yd5pnlo>.

433 Ibid.

434 Jakarta nonbinary interview; Jakarta 29-year-old trans woman interview.

435 Fajar Zakri, “[Liputan] Caleg DPRD Jawa Timur, Anindya Shabrina: Harus Ada Kebijakan Melindungi Minoritas Gender dan Seksual di Indonesia,” Suara Kita, January 23, 2024, <https://suarakita.org/2024/01/liputan-caleg-dprd-jawa-timur-anindya-shabrina-harus-ada-kebijakan-melindungi-minoritas-gender-dan-seksual-di-indonesia>.

436 Max Lane, “Indonesia’s Labour Party After the Elections: Ambiguities Continue,” Fulcrum, July 1, 2024, <https://fulcrum.sg/indonesias-labour-party-after-the-elections-ambiguities-continue>.

437 Kupang interview.

438 Ibid.

439 Palu interview; Rian Alfianto, “Kronologi Trending Topik Fufufafa yang Diduga Ditulis oleh Gibran Rakabuming Raka: Sebut Prabowo Subianto Punya Anak H\*mo dan Pecatan TNI,” Jawa Pos, September 1, 2024, <https://www.jawapos.com/nasional/015042314/kronologi-trending-topik-fufufafa-yang-diduga-ditulis-oleh-gibran-rakabuming-raka-sebut-prabowo-subianto-punya-anak-hmo-dan-pecatan-tni>.

440 Amnesty International USA, “U.S. must rescind invite to Prabowo Subianto, implicated in crimes against humanity,” press release, October 13, 2020, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/prabowo-subianto>.

441 Jakarta 29-year-old trans woman interview; Bandung interview.

442 Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia, Union of Journalists for Diversity (SEJUK) and Arus Pelangi, “According to the Political Year, Online Media Coverage is Discriminatory Against LGBT Individuals,” joint statement, March 20, 2023, <https://aji.or.id/informasi/according-political-year-online-media-coverage-discriminatory-against-lgbt-individuals>.

443 Ibid.

444 Ibid.

they noted a decline in harmful political rhetoric and negative media coverage of LGBTIQ issues compared to previous elections. A gay man from Kupang said that activists' efforts to sensitize media workers on the impact of negative coverage of LGBTIQ issues may have contributed to this trend.<sup>445</sup>

## LGBTIQ Political Participation

Hostile rhetoric has a direct impact on LGBTIQ people's political participation. Commissioners of the National Human Rights Commission warned that hateful political declarations would make "our LGBT friends" feel more insecure and discourage them from going to vote, even if they were registered.<sup>446</sup> Indeed, a lesbian woman from Bandung told Outright that she did not register to vote: she did not see promising candidates and was further discouraged by the rise of anti-LGBTIQ policies in various areas in the country.<sup>447</sup> Another interviewee said the lack of openly LGBTIQ political figures in Indonesia made them feel hopeless.<sup>448</sup>

Interviewees highlighted some positive developments in political representation.<sup>449</sup> In the Catholic-majority Sikka Regency in East Nusa Tenggara, Mami Vera, who heads a local trans group, became the first trans candidate for the regional legislature.<sup>450</sup> Her candidacy was supported by the National Mandate Party, which is described as a nationalist Muslim party.<sup>451</sup> While she did not win a seat, a trans interviewee from the town of Maumere, the capital of the Sikka regency, said that Mami Vera's candidacy did not generate public backlash and was positively covered by local media.<sup>452</sup> An article published by a national

news outlet highlighted the local community's positive reception to her candidacy, even claiming that "not a single person questioned her identity as a transgender woman" and that "there were no teasing calls or derogatory words uttered from anyone's mouth."<sup>453</sup>

Residents interviewed in the article pointed out that this could be due to trans people's active contributions to the local community as makeup artists, service workers, and community volunteers, with one resident remarking that they have "good manners" and always "greet" other community members, making Mami Vera's candidacy "easily accepted."<sup>454</sup> Mami Vera's candidacy follows the election in 2019 of Hendrika Kelan (Bunda Mayora), who made history as the first openly transgender woman in public office in Indonesia after being elected as the head of the consultative body in Habi Village of the Sikka Regency.<sup>455</sup> In the city of Palu, an interviewee also shared that Mimi, the founder of Pompegaya Sulteng (Minority Group of Gays and Warias in Central Sulawesi), ran unsuccessfully for the local parliament, advocating for inclusion and welfare for all.<sup>456</sup>

453 Tri Wahyuni, "Perjalanan Mami Vera, dari ditolak masyarakat hingga jadi caleg transpuan pertama di NTT," BBC News Indonesia, February 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/cw4q718w39zo>.

454 Ibid.

455 Ayu Purwaningsih, "Indonesian village elects country's first transgender mayor," DW, August 12, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/indonesias-first-transgender-public-official-breaks-conservative-mold/a-54540510>.

456 Palu interview. The full name of the organization in Indonesian is Pompegaya Sulteng (Kelompok Minoritas Peduli Gay dan Waria Sulawesi Tengah).

445 Outright interview with a 37-year-old gay man, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, September 25, 2024.

446 "Komnas HAM Nilai LGBT Rentan Dipolitisasi saat Pemilu 2024," CNN Indonesia, May 13, 2023, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasion-al/20230512142133-12-948781/komnas-ham-nilai-lgbt-rentan-dipolitisasi-saat-pemilu-2024>.

447 Outright interview with a 28-year-old lesbian, Bandung, Indonesia, October 27, 2024.

448 Jakarta lesbian interview.

449 Outright interview with a 29-year-old trans woman, Jakarta, Indonesia, October 31, 2024; Outright interview with a 40-year-old nonbinary person, Jakarta, Indonesia, October 2, 2024; Outright interview with a 40-year-old trans woman, Maumere, Indonesia, September 24, 2024.

450 Tri Wahyuni, "Perjalanan Mami Vera, dari ditolak masyarakat hingga jadi caleg transpuan pertama di NTT," BBC News Indonesia, February 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/cw4q718w39zo>.

451 Ibid.

452 Maumere interview.

**Right:** A campaign leaflet of Mami Vera along with other candidates from the same political party. Credit: Fajar Sikka.



## Voting While Trans in Indonesia

Some trans and gender-diverse people reported experiencing difficulties in exercising their right to vote. In Indonesia, some trans people face challenges in obtaining a national identity card, much less one that accurately reflects their lived name and gender identity.<sup>457</sup> Gender-affirming surgery and a court order are required to change names and gender markers legally. Further, some trans people in Indonesia have never had an identity document at all, or had lost them when they were leaving their hometowns and families due to rejection and discrimination.<sup>458</sup> Since 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs has been supporting waria and trans people in at least nine provinces in obtaining legal identity documents.<sup>459</sup> However, as of writing, Indonesia has not yet established a clear administrative process for legal gender recognition.

The mismatch between trans people's lived names and gender identities on the one hand and their legal identities on the other creates problems when voting. A trans woman from Aceh who spoke with Outright faced verbal harassment in the 2019 elections from other voters when her name was called in the voting area, leading to her decision not to vote in 2024.<sup>460</sup> Similarly, a trans woman from Jakarta stopped participating in elections after she started transitioning due to the fear that she would endure bullying in the voting area.<sup>461</sup> A trans woman from the city of Palu, Sulawesi district, told Outright that she had to convince the election committee members to let her vote after they initially refused due to the mismatch between her gender expression and legal identity.<sup>462</sup> Two interviewees also stated that they heard

about other cases of trans people being initially rejected from the polling station due to the mismatch between their appearance and legal name, but were eventually allowed to vote after a dialogue with election workers.<sup>463</sup> In the town of Maumere of East Nusa Tenggara province, a trans woman told Outright that her trans friend got polling officers to address her by her lived name, after she refused to come forward when her legal name was called repeatedly.<sup>464</sup>

Specific good practices made the voting experience easier in some areas. A trans woman in Jakarta was surprised not to experience negative treatment during the 2024 election, noting that she appreciates that her polling station calls voters by number, not name, minimizing the possibility of undesired interactions.<sup>465</sup> A gay man from Kupang also recognized the local election committee's efforts to sensitize election workers on LGBTIQ people.<sup>466</sup>

## Conclusion

Looking to the future, hope was unevenly shared among interviewees. A trans woman in Ambon expressed hope that local leaders in her city would promote human rights and engage LGBTIQ people in democratization, but she was pessimistic about the situation of LGBTIQ people in the country at large.<sup>467</sup> She voted for a local parliamentary candidate who, she said, supported the activities of LGBTIQ civil society groups and engaged them in dialogue.<sup>468</sup> Calling on LGBTIQ people to run for local or national positions in the future, a nonbinary person from Jakarta similarly shared hopes that a few good politicians could become potential allies.<sup>469</sup> Inspired by the courage of trans people running for local office in eastern Indonesia, they affirmed that it's high time that Indonesian society allowed LGBTIQ communities to fully participate in democracy, starting at the local level.<sup>470</sup>

457 Suara Kita, The State Presence for Transgender Basic Rights: A report of ID Card advocacy for Transgender Communities in Indonesia, 2022, <https://suarakita.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/A-report-of-ID-Card-advocacy-for-Transgender-Communities-in-Indonesia>, 13.

458 Ibid; Yosef Riadi and Leo Galuh, "Long-sought IDs give trans Indonesians the right to vote," The Jakarta Post, February 1, 2024, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/indonesia/2024/02/01/long-sought-ids-give-trans-indonesians-the-right-to-vote.html>.

459 Gerin Rio Pranata, "9 Provinsi Sudah Layani KTP Elektronik untuk Transgender, Daerah Mana Saja?," Tempo, June 11, 2021, <https://www.tempo.co/politik/9-provinsi-sudah-layani-ktp-elektronik-untuk-transgender-daerah-mana-saja--505015>.

460 Aceh interview.

461 Outright interview with a 35-year-old trans woman, West Jakarta, Indonesia, October 31, 2024.

462 Palu interview.

463 Jakarta lesbian interview; Outright interview with a 33-year-old trans man, Bali, Indonesia, September 26, 2024.

464 Maumere interview.

465 Jakarta 29-year-old trans woman interview.

466 Kupang interview.

467 Ambon interview.

468 Ibid.

469 Jakarta nonbinary interview.

470 Ibid.



# CASE STUDY Mexico:

# LGBTIQ Political Participation

# in the Shadow of Violence

Election: General (June 2, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>471</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

## Political and Social Context

Mexico is a federal republic composed of 32 states, with a democratic system of government based on the separation of powers. The president serves as both the head of state and government, elected for a single six-year term without the possibility of reelection. The 2024 elections were comprehensive, involving the selection of the president, all 500 members of the Chamber of Deputies, all 128 senators, and various local offices, including governorships and municipal authorities across the country.

Mexico's 2024 general elections unfolded against a backdrop of extreme violence and pervasive political instability, highlighting the challenges of holding democratic processes in a country plagued by organized crime and systemic corruption.<sup>472</sup> This election cycle, one of the most violent in Mexico's history, saw more than 170 attacks against politicians, including at least 30 candidates assassinated, 77 threatened, and 11 kidnapped.<sup>473</sup> Such acts of violence are not isolated

incidents but symptomatic of a deeper structural crisis that has gripped the nation for decades.

The interplay between politics and organized crime is at the core of this crisis. Criminal groups, whose power has expanded through diversification into new illegal markets, use violence to influence electoral outcomes and maintain territorial control.<sup>474</sup> Local elections are



471 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 – Mexico," accessed July 29, 2025, [freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-world/2025](https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-world/2025).

472 María Calderón, "Political Violence in Mexico's 2024 Election. II Organized Crime Involvement," Wilson Center, March 2024, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Organized\\_Crime\\_Involvement\\_Mari%CC%81a%20Caldero%CC%81n.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Organized_Crime_Involvement_Mari%CC%81a%20Caldero%CC%81n.pdf).

473 Elías Camhaji, "Mexico is heading towards its most violent election

ever, with 30 candidates murdered, 77 threatened and 11 kidnapped," El País, April 27, 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-04-27/mexico-is-heading-towards-its-most-violent-election-ever-with-30-candidates-murdered-77-threatened-and-11-kidnapped.htm>.

474 "El mapa que revela la expansión y diversificación de los cárteles



particularly vulnerable, as municipal presidencies often serve as key points of access to public resources and influence over law enforcement. These dynamics explain the surge in targeted attacks during the 2024 elections, when over 560 candidates required government-provided security.<sup>475</sup>

This violence does more than threaten individual candidates; it undermines the legitimacy of the democratic process. The assassination of candidates, intimidation of voters, and coercion of local officials create an atmosphere of fear and erode public trust in electoral integrity. Civil society organizations have warned that political violence discourages both voters and potential candidates from participating, deepens polarization, and perpetuates cycles of impunity.<sup>476</sup> Journalist Danielle Cruz told Outright:

For six elections now, we've seen how the most recent election became the most violent in history. Six elections where the number of candidates murdered by criminal groups kept increasing, and 2024 was no exception. Many races remain uncontested because no one dares to run, as a threat has already been signed and delivered. This becomes even more complicated when it comes to LGBT candidacies. Being an LGBT candidate in some states means fighting against deeply rooted societal prejudices, poor media coverage, and, on top of that, cartel threats.<sup>477</sup>

Despite government efforts to guarantee the security of the elections—such as the deployment of 27,000 personnel from the Armed Forces and National Guard—violence persisted, showcasing the limits of a militarized approach.<sup>478</sup> Critics argue that, while short-term

security measures are necessary, they fail to address the structural roots of the crisis, including corruption within law enforcement and the judiciary. Transparency International has pointed out that systemic corruption not only facilitates organized crime but also weakens the capacity of the state to protect its citizens and enforce the rule of law.<sup>479</sup>

## The Situation of LGBTIQ Human Rights in Mexico

Mexico has emerged as a regional leader in recognizing the rights of LGBTIQ individuals in Latin America.<sup>480</sup> Marriage equality is now universally recognized across all 32 states, a milestone achieved through years of advocacy and legal battles. Federal legislation prohibits conversion practices, protecting individuals from harmful interventions disguised as therapy. Formal recognition of the rights of trans people has progressed in recent years, with 22 of the 32 states offering legal gender recognition processes that allow individuals to update their official documents without requiring invasive medical or psychological evaluations.<sup>481</sup>

Intersex people's rights have gained visibility primarily through the efforts of organizations like Brújula Intersexual. Founded in 2013, it has become a hub for Spanish-speaking intersex advocacy, focusing on transforming harmful medical practices and raising awareness. Collaborations with government institutions, such as the National Council to Prevent Discrimination, have led to advances like Mexico City's constitutional prohibition of discrimination based on sex characteristics and a 2017 Ministry of Health recommendation against unnecessary surgeries on intersex children. Despite these strides, challenges remain, with many intersex individuals

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mexicanos en América Latina y el mundo," Infobae, January 23, 2025, <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2025/01/23/el-mapa-que-revela-la-expansion-y-diversificacion-de-los-carteles-mexicanos-en-america-latina-y-el-mundo>.

475 Isabel González, "560 candidatos, con protección especial," Excelsior, May 25, 2024, <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/560-candidatos-con-proteccion-especial/1654567>.

476 Animal Político, Data Cívica and México Evalúa, Votar Entre Balas: Democracia vulnerable: El crimen organizado en las elecciones y la administración pública en México, 2024, <https://votar-entre-balas.datacivica.org/homeassets/REPORTEANALITICO-VOTARENTREBALAS2024.pdf>.

477 Outright interview with Danielle Cruz, virtual, January 6, 2025.

478 "Gobierno despliega 27 mil 245 agentes de seguridad en el país rumbo a las elecciones del 2 de junio," LatinUS, May 21, 2024, <https://latinus.us/eleccion-2024/2024/5/21/gobierno-despliega-27-mil-245-agentes-de-seguridad-en-el-pais-rumbo-las-elecciones-del-de-junio>.

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nio-115540.html.

479 Roberto Martínez Kukutschka, "CPI 2022: Corruption as a fundamental threat to peace and security," Transparency International, January 31, 2023, <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2022-corruption-fundamental-threat-peace-security>.

480 Outright International, "Country Overviews: Mexico," accessed July 1, 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/americas/mexico>.

481 The first major milestone on legal gender recognition was achieved in 2015 when Mexico City implemented a simple administrative procedure, which has since inspired other states to adopt similar measures. However, the situation is not uniform across the country; in states without these processes, individuals often face lengthy and costly legal battles to obtain recognition. "Estados que reconocen identidad de género trans en México," Homosensual, September 23, 2024, <https://www.homosensual.com/lgbt/trans/ley-identidad-genero-estados-reconocen-trans>.

reporting the persistence of non-consensual surgeries and a lack of access to affirming medical care.<sup>482</sup>

In 2021, Mexico conducted the National Survey on Sexual and Gender Diversity, led by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). This survey aimed to provide statistical data on the LGBTIQ+ population aged 15 and older, using face-to-face household interviews and strict confidentiality measures to ensure respondents' safety. Among its findings, it reported that approximately five million people, or 5.1 percent of the population aged 15 and older, identify as LGBTIQ+. The survey represents a significant step in gathering official data on sexual orientation and gender identity in the region.<sup>483</sup>

One cultural challenge facing LGBTIQ communities in Mexico is the persistence of machismo, a social construct akin to toxic masculinity, which enforces rigid gender roles and often marginalizes those who defy them. One of the most violent expressions of machismo is femicide—the killing of a woman because of her gender, usually in the context of structural violence and discrimination—and the culture of impunity that is woven around it. The famous Mexican writer Cristina Rivera Garza won the 2024 Pulitzer Prize for *Liliana's Invincible Summer*, a book in which she narrates the femicide of her sister and the social context in which it occurred:

My sister was killed by a healthy son of the patriarchy, a controller, a macho man who did not accept no as an answer. She was also killed by a society that refused, endorses, and still refuses, to say things by their name...It is very clear to me that there are femicides because there is impunity. Perpetrators of femicides know, they have proven, that they can get away with it. In a world governed, moreover, by principles that privilege the lives of men over those of women, this impunity translates into more and more violent deaths.<sup>484</sup>

The machista cultural framework has been particularly harmful to trans and gender nonconforming individuals,

who frequently face heightened levels of violence and discrimination. According to Transgender Europe (TGEU)'s Trans Murder Monitoring, Mexico is the country with the second highest number of reported transfemicides in the period 2008–2024, with many hate crimes going unpunished due to systemic impunity and a lack of sensitivity within law enforcement.<sup>485</sup> Journalist Geo Gonzalez delves deeper into the numbers:

In 2024, activists recorded at least 59 violent deaths of trans women. This marks one of the most violent years for trans women in Mexico, and this wave of violence was condemned by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which called on the Mexican state to investigate with due diligence, incorporating a gender and human rights perspective...To put this into perspective, in 2023, the organization Letra S documented 43 transfemicides, accounting for 65 percent of all violent deaths of LGBT people in Mexico that year...Most victims are trans women living in precarious conditions and engaged in sex work.<sup>486</sup>

While urban centers like Mexico City, Monterrey, and Guadalajara have become hubs for LGBTIQ visibility and inclusion, the reality in rural areas is markedly different. Many LGBTIQ individuals in these regions face social ostracism, discrimination, and violence, often without access to support networks. Bridging this divide requires a coordinated national strategy, including public awareness campaigns and community-based initiatives to foster acceptance.

Mental health continues to be a pressing issue for LGBTIQ individuals, especially youth. A study published in 2024 reveals that over half of LGBTIQ+ youth in Mexico aged 13 to 24 seriously considered suicide in 2023.<sup>487</sup> This includes two out of three trans and nonbinary youth and nearly half of cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. Notably, 57 percent of LGBTIQ+ adolescents aged 13 to

482 Outright International, 'I Am' Intersex: Global Voices for Intersex Justice, December 2024, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/IAmIntersex\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/IAmIntersex_Report_FINAL.pdf).

483 INEGI, Encuesta Nacional sobre Diversidad Sexual y de Género, 2022, <https://www.inegi.org.mx/investigacion/endiseg/2022>.

484 Nuria Escur, "A mi hermana la mató un macho que no aceptó un no como respuesta y la sociedad que lo avaló," <https://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20210617/7527506/aea.html>, La Vanguardia, June 17, 2021.

485 TGEU, "Trans Murder Monitoring," accessed July 1, 2025, <https://transrespect.org/en/map/trans-murder-monitoring>; Mariana Domínguez Batis, "Impunidad, el gran desafío de la nueva ley contra el transfeminicidio," *Ibero*, August 23, 2024, <https://ibero.mx/prensa/impunidad-el-gran-desafio-de-la-nueva-ley-contra-el-transfeminicidio>.

486 Geo González, "México 2024: La despenalización del aborto avanza y la violencia transfeminicida no cesa," *Agencia Presentes*, December 18, 2024, <https://agenciapresentes.org/2024/12/18/mexico-2024-la-despenalizacion-del-aborto-avanza-y-la-violencia-transfeminicida-no-cesa>.

487 The Trevor Project, 2024 Encuesta Nacional sobre la Salud Mental de las Juventudes LGBTIQ+, 2024, [https://www.thetrevorproject.mx/encuesta/assets/static/2024\\_M%C3%A9xico\\_National\\_Survey\\_ES\\_Final.pdf](https://www.thetrevorproject.mx/encuesta/assets/static/2024_M%C3%A9xico_National_Survey_ES_Final.pdf), 6.

17 reported considering suicide last year, compared to 46 percent of youth aged 18 to 24.<sup>488</sup> Family and school environments were identified as the main contributing factors to this distress.<sup>489</sup> Organizations like It Gets Better México and The Trevor Project have expanded their outreach, offering crisis support and resources for families. However, addressing the mental health crisis requires systemic action, including accessible psychological services and broader efforts to create safe and affirming environments for young people.

## LGBTIQ Political Participation in Mexico's 2024 Elections: Progress and Challenges

The 2024 elections in Mexico marked a watershed moment for the political inclusion of LGBTIQ individuals. This analysis draws mainly on two key reports, the Voto por la Igualdad MX 2024 preelectoral and post-electoral reports, produced by Yaaj México and the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute, with support from several international organizations.<sup>490</sup> These reports provide a comprehensive examination of the representation of LGBTIQ candidates, the effectiveness of affirmative action measures, and the challenges faced by both candidates and voters during the electoral process. Through a detailed exploration of these findings, this text seeks to recognize the strides made toward political inclusion while underscoring the persistent structural barriers that need to be addressed.

One of the most significant outcomes of the 2024 elections was the unprecedented level of LGBTIQ participation, promoted by affirmative action policies known as “rainbow quotas” (cuotas arcoíris), an initiative without precedent in Latin America. The history of these quotas in Mexican elections is recent. On December 29, 2020, the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary issued a ruling directing the National Electoral Institute to establish affirmative measures to ensure the political participation of people with disabilities, Afro-Mexican populations, and members of the LGBTI+ community. The Tribunal’s ruling states that, according to the Federal Political Constitution:

...there is a strong commitment from all Mexican state authorities—including administrative and electoral jurisdictional bodies, both federal and local—to promote, respect, protect, and guarantee human rights. This commitment makes it appropriate to uphold the human right to equal opportunities for individuals belonging to the LGBTI+ community, those with disabilities, people over sixty years old, and Indigenous peoples, enabling their participation in the district and municipal councils of the IEEA through the implementation of affirmative actions.<sup>491</sup>

Until that time, affirmative quotas existed only for women and Indigenous peoples.<sup>492</sup> It is important to note that this ruling is only binding for elections at the national level.

In the 2021 elections, four LGBTIQ candidates were elected to Congress. Among them were the first two transgender deputies in Mexico’s history: María Clemente García Moreno and Salma Luévano. Openly lesbian deputies Celeste Ascencio and Wendy Briceño were reelected. On November 25, 2023, the INE approved the implementation of ruling INE/CG625/2023 by the Electoral Tribunal, reinstating the 2020–2021 affirmative action measures for the 2023–2024 electoral period.<sup>493</sup> Six states and Mexico City have implemented similar measures for their state and local elections.

According to Voto por la Igualdad MX, in 2024, the “rainbow quotas” policy resulted in the registration of 1,212 LGBTIQ candidates across federal and local elections, representing 2.79 percent of all candidates.<sup>494</sup> These measures enabled greater visibility for a historically marginalized community, paving the way for meaningful political representation.

The rainbow quota was key to Mafer Arceo’s candidacy

491 Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, SUP-REC-277/2020, December 29, 2020, <https://www.te.gob.mx/sentenciasHTML/convertir/expediente/SUP-REC-0277-2020>.

492 Edgar Ulises, “Cuotas arcoíris: qué son y para qué sirven,” *Homosensual*, December 23, 2021, <https://www.homosensual.com/lgbt/cuotas-arcoiris-candidatos-lgbt-que-son-para-que-sirven>.

493 Geo González, “México: ¿cómo funcionan las cuotas de poblaciones vulneradas en las elecciones de 2024?,” *Agencia Presentes*, May 7, 2024, <https://agenciapresentes.org/2024/05/07/elecciones-mexico-2024-denuncian-usurpacion-de-candidaturas-a-poblaciones-diversas-en-oaxaca>.

494 Voto por la Igualdad MX, Informe Pre-electoral de las candidaturas LGBTTIQ+ en México 2024, May 2024, <https://mx.boell.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/informe-pre-electoral-voto-por-la-igualdad-mx-2024.pdf>, 6.

488 Ibid, 26.

489 Ibid, 27.

490 See Voto por la Igualdad México, “Guías y documentos oficiales,” accessed July 29, 2025, <https://votoporlaigualdadmexico.org/materiales>.

as a federal deputy in the state of Yucatán. At just 22 years old, Arceo was the youngest candidate in the state. A law student, feminist, and human rights specialist, she ran as an openly lesbian candidate.<sup>495</sup> “My political causes are feminism, sexual diversity rights, and environmental protection,” she explained. Her candidacy was rooted in years of activism: “As an activist and an openly LGBTIQ individual, I was always involved in the diversity rights agenda.”<sup>496</sup>

Despite her commitment and activist background, Arceo faced initial concerns about how her candidacy would be received. “I had fears at the beginning about how my candidacy would be taken. I was young, openly LGBTIQ, and new to electoral politics.” She also noted stark differences in awareness and sensitivity across the state. While Mérida, the capital, showed a higher degree of understanding, remote areas still reflected the conservatism Yucatán is known for. In 2021, Yucatán became the 22nd of Mexico’s 32 states to legalize marriage equality, twelve years after Mexico City.

Reflecting on her entry into politics, Arceo explained how her activism aligned with the affirmative action measure:

The rainbow quota helped me get there. I had been pushing for a legislative agenda in favor of equality through my activism, and then I was invited to run. They [the party] told me, “We have this quota for historically vulnerable groups, and we believe your work aligns with its principles. We invite you to be part of this.”

For Arceo, the quota was not just a chance—it was a responsibility:

The quota is a flag. Do you want to carry this flag, or do you want to run without it? If you’re going to carry the flag, you need to have prior experience, a clear agenda, and concrete proposals for the group you want to represent.

Guillermo Saviñón, an LGBTIQ activist, also attributed his candidacy to the rainbow quota policy.<sup>497</sup> He ran for councilor in Hermosillo, Sonora, a state he describes

as “conservative, deeply rooted in its own culture, and geographically distant from Mexico City.” Sonora was the 24th of Mexico’s 32 states to legalize marriage equality in 2021, a process achieved through sustained advocacy efforts. Saviñón highlighted the collective work of LGBTIQ organizations in Sonora to push for the implementation of the rainbow quotas. “The reason I was a candidate was thanks to affirmative action,” he explained. “For the elections, ten of Sonora’s municipalities were required to include LGBTIQ individuals on their slates as part of these measures. This achievement was the result of persistent efforts by local LGBTIQ activism.”<sup>498</sup>

His campaign centered on human rights and inclusion, aiming to make Hermosillo an inclusive city in every aspect. For Saviñón, his LGBTIQ identity was central to his platform. “I was able to address the discrimination faced by our community,” he noted, adding that he received strong support from activists due to his visibility and clear human rights agenda. Although he encountered no direct hostility from traditional media, discriminatory remarks proliferated on social media, particularly in the paid advertisements on Facebook. “It didn’t deter my message,” he reflects, “but it revealed how much work remains in education.”<sup>499</sup>

Reflecting on the rainbow quotas, Saviñón views them as a vital yet imperfect mechanism for advancing representation. “They offer a pathway for those without access to power to be closer to decision-making,” he asserted. However, he acknowledged the limitations. “Quotas don’t guarantee presence. They’ve been contentious because political parties feel constrained, when they should instead see this as an opportunity to embrace diversity in their ranks. Instead, this resistance leads to [impersonation] and tokenism.”<sup>500</sup>

While affirmative action measures represent a critical step forward, their implementation revealed significant flaws. In order for there to be candidacies of people who are part of a historically vulnerable group, political parties are obliged to nominate them through the principle of self-identification. That is the voluntary act of people who claim to belong to a specific group. The Voto por la Igualdad MX report documents the misuse of rainbow

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495 Outright interview with Mafer Arceo, virtual, January 21, 2025.

496 Ibid.

497 Outright interview with Guillermo Saviñón, virtual, January 3, 2025.

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498 Ibid.

499 Ibid.

500 Ibid.



quotas, with numerous cases of individuals falsely claiming LGBTIQ identities to meet quota requirements.<sup>501</sup> Alleged misuse of quotas had also been reported in 2021.<sup>502</sup> Electoral authorities have not yet proposed effective measures to prevent such abuses.

Guillermo Saviñón, reflecting on the challenges of implementing affirmative action measures, emphasized the systemic barriers within political parties that persist despite these policies:

The solution is for political parties to open their doors. There's still a lot of segregation and rejection. Before affirmative action, I fought hard to become a candidate. If opportunities aren't even given to women, imagine how much harder it is for LGBTIQ individuals or people with disabilities. How do you get a political party to give you a chance? Many times, they'll tell you, "You're LGBTIQ; vulnerable populations won't vote for you." Parties need to invest more in developing talent.<sup>503</sup>

Saviñón also acknowledged the potential for quotas to be misused. "There's a danger of quotas being misused or implemented in a tokenistic way." Juan Pablo Delgado ran for mayor of León, Guanajuato, as an openly gay person. On the criticisms regarding the implementation of the rainbow quota, Delgado stated:

The results have been uneven because there are no uniform criteria for [the quota's] implementation. The greatest challenge for affirmative action measures is to legislate them, to enshrine them in law, so they are not left to the discretion of electoral courts. This would provide greater predictability in their application and give political parties more time to prepare. Some affirmative actions are imposed by the courts when parties have already selected their candidates, which creates problems. If these measures were included in a law, the alignment would already account for affirmative actions, and parties would know they must comply. However, even with these challenges,

the positive outcomes of affirmative action are undeniable.<sup>504</sup>

Unlike Mafer Arceo and Guillermo Saviñón, who were first-time candidates in this electoral process, Juan Pablo Delgado ran for the second time in 2024. Reflecting on his journey, Delgado explained:

This electoral process was very different from my first campaign. In my first campaign, I was approached just a month before it began. They invited me in recognition of my work as a human rights defender and because, at the time, the party was smaller. They thought a candidacy like mine could attract attention—it was the first time an openly gay candidate was running for mayor in León.<sup>505</sup>

Delgado considered that his candidacy was the most visible LGBTIQ candidacy in the country during that election due to the conservative context of León, the third most populated city in Mexico.

During the municipal debate in that first campaign in 2021, there was a section for open questions. "The other candidates were asked serious questions, but I was asked whether my entire cabinet would be LGBT. That has an impact on the candidacy because it undermines its seriousness as if it were a joke," Delgado reflected.<sup>506</sup>

Despite the challenges and the limited preparation time, Delgado's campaign led to a historic milestone: his party secured its first-ever council seat. This increased his visibility within the party and gave him a platform he took seriously over the following four years. "I focused on being a strong opposition voice to the mayor, addressing issues like natural spaces, public transportation, and access to water. By the time the 2024 elections came around, my presence in the city and within the party had taken on a different significance."<sup>507</sup> If his first candidacy highlighted his leadership as an openly LGBTIQ figure, his second campaign showcased his established political leadership on municipal issues, demonstrating his broader commitment to public service and community advocacy.

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501 Yaaj México and LGBTQ Victory Institute, Voto por la Igualdad. Informe post-electoral de las candidaturas LGTTTI+ en México 2024, October 15, 2024, <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14Ws2KyUbiMOI-UeBaQpGAIXATIEdeIFdc>.

502 Carmen Morán Breña, "Paridad electoral con falsas trans en México," *El País*, May 16, 2021, <https://elpais.com/mexico/2021-05-16/paridad-electoral-con-falsas-trans-en-mexico.html>.

503 Saviñón interview.

504 Outright interview with Juan Pablo Delgado, virtual, January 14, 2025.

505 Ibid.

506 Ibid.

507 Ibid.

Both campaigns, however, were met with aggressive homophobic messages on social media, particularly on X, with the intensity increasing during his second run. “This second campaign became more dangerous due to the general context. On the day we launched the campaign, another candidate was murdered in a nearby district. That led to us having public security from the very beginning,” Delgado recalled.<sup>508</sup>

He identifies his greatest vulnerability in this election not as an openly gay candidate, but as a politician challenging entrenched interests through his work:

When you try to bring water to marginalized neighborhoods, you disrupt the profits of the water truck mafias. When you protect natural areas, you clash with real estate mafias who can’t build there. When you push for more investment in public transportation and less in-vehicle bridges, you face the opposition of a powerful automotive lobby. In a state like Guanajuato, one of the most violent in Mexico, life loses value, and in a context of violence, harming someone physically becomes more accessible when you go against economic and political interests.<sup>509</sup>

As a result, Delgado held his campaign under the protection of municipal security and the National Guard, a stark reflection of the risks involved in defending public interests in such a challenging environment.

On violence in the country, Saviñón reflected:

We are living in a very violent time. Unfortunately, organized crime and drug trafficking are deeply tied to all levels of government and political campaigns. It’s a cancer that has strongly embedded itself not only in Mexico but in many Latin American countries. We see it every day.<sup>510</sup>

Delgado believes that the context of violence discourages the political participation of LGBTIQ people in Mexico. “Ociel’s case was a moment that alerted the LGBTIQ community.” Ociel Baena was a prominent figure in Mexican politics and the defense of LGBTIQ

people’s human rights. As a magistrate of the Electoral Tribunal of the State of Aguascalientes, they became the first nonbinary person to hold such a high-ranking judicial position in Latin America. Their presence in such a significant public office represented a milestone for the visibility of LGBTIQ individuals within the political and electoral landscape of the country. Tragically, in November 2023, Baena was found dead alongside their partner in their residence. Despite ongoing investigations, the case remains unsatisfactorily resolved, raising concerns and distrust within the community. Delgado reflected, “Ociel was the LGBTIQ person holding the most important public office. I know people who decided not to participate because of their assassination.”<sup>511</sup>

In addition to establishing affirmative actions, electoral authorities in Mexico have demonstrated leadership on other issues related to the political rights of LGBTIQ individuals. For example, the Trans Electoral Protocol, approved by the National Electoral Institute in December 2017, seeks to ensure that transgender individuals can exercise their right to vote under equal conditions and without discrimination. Implemented during the 2018-

<sup>511</sup> Delgado interview.



<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Saviñón interview.

2019 electoral process, the protocol provides training for electoral authorities and establishes guidelines for election day, such as instructing poll workers not to question or challenge a voter's gender expression or appearance in relation to their official ID.<sup>512</sup>

The elections also marked a historic moment when all main national political parties included LGBTIQ issues on their platforms. MORENA, Movimiento Ciudadano, and the National Action Party (PAN) were notable for their detailed policy proposals addressing the legal recognition of gender identity, the fight against hate crimes, and improved health care for LGBTIQ communities. Despite these advancements, the Voto por la Igualdad MX report reveals that only 1.76 percent of campaign proposals from all federal and local candidates explicitly referenced LGBTIQ issues, indicating the need for deeper integration of these topics into political agendas.<sup>513</sup>

Of the 1,389 identified LGBTIQ candidates, 248 were elected, constituting 17.9 percent of this group. The MORENA political party secured the highest number of successful LGBTIQ candidacies, followed by Movimiento Ciudadano and PAN.<sup>514</sup>

The reports of Voto por la Igualdad MX also shed light on the pervasive violence and discrimination faced by LGBTIQ candidates. Nine violent incidents were documented during the preelectoral period, including two fatal attacks: Samantha Gomes Fonseca, a trans activist and pre-candidate for the Senate of the Republic, and Miguel Ángel Zavala, an openly gay pre-candidate for the municipal presidency of Maravatío, Michoacán.<sup>515</sup> Beyond physical violence, candidates encountered significant identity-based discrimination. Nearly half of surveyed LGBTIQ candidates reported challenges directly related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, such as identity-based scrutiny, difficulties securing campaign funding, and lack of institutional support from their parties.

These experiences are reflective of broader societal biases that persist despite legal advancements. Hate speech, often directed at LGBTIQ candidates and voters, was a recurring issue during the elections. The reports note that 52.8 percent of surveyed LGBTIQ voters encountered hate speech in campaign propaganda. For trans and nonbinary voters, the electoral process was particularly fraught: nearly 19 percent reported intimidation or unequal treatment at polling stations.<sup>516</sup>

On the role of the media in this election process, Danielle Cruz, a Mexican nonbinary journalist, media critic, and activist, observed a glaring lack of reporting on issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity during the recent elections:

LGBT issues were largely ignored by the media during these elections, even in cases of misuse of the rainbow quotas. It was mentioned a couple of times—either because a candidacy was taken away from someone or when the electoral process was already over—but there was no substantial LGBT coverage.<sup>517</sup>

Cruz also highlighted the failed attempts by far-right candidates to introduce anti-LGBTIQ narratives:

There were efforts to push this U.S.-style culture war, very Republican: the trans panic, pronouns as a terrifying concept. But fortunately, no media outlets picked it up. What we've seen is that this very gringo narrative wasn't embraced by society or the media.<sup>518</sup>

Analyzing the broader media landscape, Cruz noted systemic issues that shape how information is reported in Mexico:

The problem I see is that we're dealing with media increasingly focused on building and creating audiences through digital platforms—whether it's Google or social networks—and moving further away from those audiences' informational and critical needs. When we talk about journalism in Mexico, we're talking about incredible people doing very important investigative work, but the day-to-day news is increasingly handled by writers who don't have time

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512 Geo González, "Elecciones en México: ¿Cómo funciona el protocolo trans electoral?", <https://agenciapresentes.org/2024/03/12/elecciones-en-mexico-como-funciona-el-protocolo-trans-electoral/>, Agencia Presentes, March 12, 2024.

513 Yaaj México and LGBTQ Victory Institute, Voto por la Igualdad. Informe post-electoral de las candidaturas LGBTTTI+ en México 2024.

514 Ibid.

515 Ibid.

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516 Ibid.

517 Cruz interview.

518 Ibid.

to fact-check, investigate, or confirm the information they're seeing. What I observed during these elections was uncritical coverage of what was being said about the candidates, authorities, or the opinions being expressed.<sup>519</sup>

Cruz added that the way LGBT topics are covered reflects these trends:

The approach to covering LGBT issues is anchored in what's most effective for social media. If there's a trans candidacy, the story immediately centers on the person's trans identity as the most important element, sidelining their qualities, capabilities, and history. The focus is on how "different" this type of candidacy is.

Cruz expressed concern that anti-gender politics could gain traction in the country in the lead-up to the next electoral cycle, following the political trends emerging in other parts of the world, like the United States. In this context, Yaaj México issued a statement during the early days of Trump's administration, warning that,

The potential future support and funding from the Trump administration for ultraconservative movements in Mexico is one of the main concerns of organizations protecting the rights of LGBTI+ people in our country and the region, as it would expand the influence and ideology against LGBTI+ people worldwide.<sup>520</sup>

In the face of that possibility, Mafer Arceo emphasized the transformative potential of LGBTIQ candidates' political participation:

One of the key takeaways from this electoral process is the importance of authenticity in the new kind of politics we need. Embracing who you are—your colors, showing yourself as you truly are, even being vulnerable—creates a sense of closeness. It's the opposite of playing a role. What bothers me about politics and politicians is how they always act like characters, never showing who they really are. This is an opportunity to change the way things are done.

Don't be afraid to be yourself—there will be people who support you and see themselves reflected in you. That's the energy that drove my campaign. From the moment I accepted the candidacy, I knew I wasn't doing it for myself. If it had been just for me, I would've quit on the third day. I knew the challenge was bigger than me—the purpose was visibility. Winning wasn't the goal; it was about carrying the flag to inspire more LGBTIQ people to participate, just as they are. Let this new kind of politics be born from love and authenticity.<sup>521</sup>



<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Yaaj Mexico, "La Llegada de la Ultraderecha en la región: Un reto Global para los derechos humanos," January 24, 2025, <https://www.yaaj-mexico.org/blog/articulos/llegada-de-ultraderecha-en-la-region>.

<sup>521</sup> Arceo interview.



# SNAPSHOT MOLDOVA:

## “Will We Be Persecuted with Our Own Money?”

Election: Presidential (October 20 and November 3, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>522</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

The recent high-stakes Moldovan presidential election was described by some as a “tug-of-war between Russia and the West.”<sup>523</sup> Not only was pro-EU president Maia Sandu seeking a second term, but the country was also voting in a referendum to affirm Moldova’s commitment to joining the EU in the constitution.<sup>524</sup> In the second round, Sandu won 55 percent of the vote against Alexandr Stoianoglo, who was backed by the pro-Russia Party of Socialists.<sup>525</sup> A narrower majority of 50.35 percent voted for EU membership.<sup>526</sup>

While the OSCE international election observation mission described the elections as “well-managed” and “efficient,” it also noted an “increase in negative rhetoric from across the political spectrum” and “challenges posed by foreign

interference,” primarily from Russia.<sup>527</sup> The campaign period was also marked by a “trend of escalating hate speech,” with LGBTIQ people among the groups most often targeted.<sup>528</sup>



522 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights International Election Observation Mission, “Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions,” statement, November 4, 2024, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/moldova/579775>.

523 Pjotr Sauer, “Moldovans go to polls to decide whether future lies with Russia or the west,” The Guardian, October 20, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/19/moldova-presidential-election-eu-referendum-future-russia-west>.

524 Ibid.

525 Stephen McGrath and Vadim Ghirda, “Moldova’s pro-Western president wins second term in runoff overshadowed by Russian meddling claims,” Associated Press, November 4, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/moldova-presidential-election-russia-corruption-fraud-5886447779a4a818e9f30fdadcb8bbe5>.

526 Ibid.

527 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights International Election Observation Mission, “Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions,” statement, November 4, 2024, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/moldova/579775>.

528 Promo-LEX, Hate speech and incitement to discrimination – 2024 elections, February 2025, <https://promolex.md/raport-discurs-de-ura-si-instigare-la-discriminare-alegeri-2024>, 5.

## Weaponizing Euroscepticism and “Tradition” Against Equality

Political actors close to Russia took the election and referendum as an opportunity to instrumentalize anti-LGBTIQ and anti-EU sentiments. In September, after then-MP Marina Tauber attended the Eurasian Women’s Forum in St. Petersburg, Russia, she reported on social media that she had spoken with Russian officials about how “European integration will destroy the national identity of Moldovans” as “they want to impose LGBT on us.”<sup>529</sup> The head of a pro-Russia bloc, whose party’s candidacy for the elections was nevertheless rejected, had promised to ban so-called LGBT propaganda if the country voted against the pro-EU constitutional amendments.<sup>530</sup>

Most presidential candidates portrayed LGBTIQ equality, especially trans people’s rights, as a threat to Moldovan society. According to GENDERDOC-M, a Moldovan LGBTIQ organization, five out of all 11 presidential candidates publicly engaged in explicitly anti-LGBTIQ hate speech, while four other candidates weaponized “traditional values” and other anti-rights narratives.<sup>531</sup> The organization also noted that no presidential candidate publicly expressed support for LGBTIQ equality.<sup>532</sup> Our Party, whose presidential candidate placed third in the first round, and the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) produced election ads that promoted “banning LGBT propaganda in schools,” but the public audiovisual media institution declined to broadcast the ads.<sup>533</sup> Victoria Furtună, who came in fifth, also promised

“to ban LGBT propaganda, following the example of Georgia.”<sup>534</sup> The campaign slogan of Tudor Ulianoschi, a candidate who got the fewest votes, was, “You are the normal Moldova.”<sup>535</sup> He affirmed that “a normal Moldova is one of the traditional family, of the mother and the father,” and opposed so-called gender propaganda in schools and in public spaces.<sup>536</sup>

Ahead of the elections, the Party of Socialists organized a march “in defense of traditional values,” falsely claiming that Moldova is “besieged by LGBT propaganda.”<sup>537</sup> However, for GENDERDOC-M, “in reality, the march was an electoral exercise designed to attract the votes of a conservative part of the population.”<sup>538</sup> Several politicians also spread disinformation about “indoctrination” in schools, with far-right MPs filing bills intending to impose a “total ban on LGBT propaganda.”<sup>539</sup>

Two weeks before the elections, amid anti-LGBTIQ political backlash, GENDERDOC-M issued a powerful statement asserting LGBTIQ people’s place in a democracy riddled with foreign interference:

We, LGBT people, are citizens of this country, taxpayers, including those who pay the salary of the president. Will we be persecuted with our own money? Is that what we are being promised? What is more, these messages are inspired by the propaganda of the current Russian government, a state that has invaded its neighbor Ukraine and poses a direct threat to democracy in the region.<sup>540</sup>

529 Oxana Bodnar, “Politiciene din Republica Moldova, alături de propagandiste ale Kremlinului: „Am vorbit despre cum integrarea europeană va distruge identitatea națională”,” HotNews.ro, September 19, 2024, <https://hotnews.ro/politiciene-din-republica-moldova-alaturi-de-propagandiste-ale-kremlinului-am-vorbit-despre-cum-integrarea-europeana-va-distruge-identitatea-nationala-1794873>.

530 Alexaner Tanas, “Moldova authorities throw out registration of pro-Russian election bloc,” Reuters, August 7, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moldova-authorities-throw-out-registration-pro-russian-election-bloc-2024-08-07/>; Ilya Taksyur, “Moldovan Opposition Leader Promises Ban on LGBT Propaganda if European Integration Rejected,” Lenta, September 23, 2024, <https://lenta.ru/news/2024/09/23/glava-oppozitsii-moldavii-poobeschal-zapret-propagandy-lgbt-pri-otkaze-ot-evrointegratsii>.

531 Outright email exchange with a representative of GENDERDOC-M, March 11, 2025. See also Promo-LEX, Hate speech and incitement to discrimination – 2024 elections; GENDERDOC-M, Report on the situation of LGBT+ rights in the Republic of Moldova: Year 2024, 2025, [https://gdm.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Report\\_GENDERDOC-M\\_2024\\_english-1.pdf](https://gdm.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Report_GENDERDOC-M_2024_english-1.pdf).

532 GENDERDOC-M email exchange.

533 “The CA rejected the appeals of two parties that complained that Teleradio-Moldova refused to broadcast their electoral programs. Usatii

had stated that he was ‘in favor of banning LGBT propaganda in schools’,” Zdg, October 2, 2024, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/politic/ca-a-respins-contestatiile-a-doua-partide-care-s-au-plans-ca-teleradio-moldova-refuza-sa-le-difuzeze-programele-electorale-usatii-declarase-ca-este-pentru-interzicerea-propagandei-lgbt-in-sc>.

534 Olga Scripnic, “De la dreptul de veto, la legi similare cu cele georgiene. Promisiunile electorale ale Victoriei Furtună,” Agora, September 27, 2024, <https://agora.md/2024/09/27/de-la-dreptul-de-veto-la-legi-similare-cu-cele-georgiene-promisiunile-electorale-ale-victoriei-furtuna>.

535 Olga Scripnic, “Tudor Ulianoschi s-a lansat oficial, în campania electorală pentru șefia statului: ‘Moldova normală ești tu’,” Agora, September 29, 2024, <https://agora.md/2024/09/29/tudor-ulianovschi-s-a-lansat-oficial-in-campania-electoral-a-pentru-sefia-statului-moldova-normala-esti-tu>.

536 Ibid.

537 GENDERDOC-M (@centrul\_gdm), “Top 10 cele mai homofobe si absurde declaratii ale politicianilor moldoveni din 2024,” Instagram, February 10, 2025, [https://www.instagram.com/p/DF50zghNO3T/?img\\_index=14](https://www.instagram.com/p/DF50zghNO3T/?img_index=14).

538 Ibid.

539 Ibid.

540 Irina Soltan, “GENDERDOC-M, după declarațiile unor candidați la prezidențiale: ‘Mesaje pline de ură față de o minoritate din țara pe care vor să o conducă’,” Agora, October 1, 2024, <https://agora.md/2024/10/01/>

## Rightward Turn Hampers Political Support for Inclusion

While the pro-EU incumbent Maia Sandu did not put LGBTIQ issues at the center of her agenda, political opponents weaponized queerphobia against her. In 2019, a disinformation campaign maliciously portrayed her as a lesbian, a claim which she denied at a press conference.<sup>541</sup> In the recent elections, “pro-Russian forces connected to fugitive oligarchs” spread deepfake videos showing Sandu expressing support for LGBTIQ communities.<sup>542</sup> In September 2024, they falsely claimed that Sandu supported the LGBTIQ festival in the capital city of Chisinau, saying that an “LGBT-fest in an Orthodox country on the eve of elections is the best anti-advertising for Sandu.” A month later, days before polls opened, two false bomb alerts targeted the same event.<sup>543</sup>

Ultimately, LGBTIQ people are doubly under attack as hate speech and violence increase in an environment where there is insufficient political commitment to LGBTIQ equality.

The rightward turn in politics has led moderates to harden their stance against LGBTIQ people. The narrative that the pro-EU forces in Moldova are LGBTIQ-inclusive while the pro-Russia camp is queerphobic does not correspond to the realities on the ground. For Nicholas Turcan of Felis Advocacy Initiative, a member organization of Transgender Europe, “it’s not that black and white” because the pro-EU Party of Action and Solidarity also “does not want to be perceived as the gay party” and is actively distancing itself from this LGBTIQ-inclusive image to minimize the anticipated political damage.<sup>544</sup> Some members of the party have expressed anti-LGBTIQ views themselves. Turcan observed that pro-EU political forces are becoming “even more careful” leading up to the more consequential parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2025.<sup>545</sup>

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genderdoc-m-dupa-declaratiile-unor-candidati-la-prezidentiale-mesaje-pline-de-ura-fata-de-o-minoritate-din-tara-pe-care-vor-sa-o-conduca.

541 “Maia Sandu: After trolls were exposed, PDM switched to primitive methods,” IPN, February 15, 2019, [https://www.ipn.md/en/maia-sandu-after-trolls-were-exposed-pdm-switched-to-primitive-methods-7965\\_1047050.html](https://www.ipn.md/en/maia-sandu-after-trolls-were-exposed-pdm-switched-to-primitive-methods-7965_1047050.html).

542 Ani Sandu, “Russia Stirs Up Anti-LGBTQ Prejudice In Moldova ‘Information War,’” Barron’s, October 31, 2024, <https://www.barrons.com/news/russia-stirs-up-anti-lgbtq-prejudice-in-moldova-information-war-b0e834a3>.

543 Ibid.

544 Outright interview with Nicholas Turcan, virtual, March 11, 2025.

545 Ibid.



# CASE STUDY NAMIBIA:

# Historic Queer

# Candidacies Build On

# Legal Progress

Election: General (November 27–30, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>546</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

by ballot paper shortages, severe technical malfunctions, and staffing issues, prompting the president to extend voting at select polling stations,” and further reported that “The African Union’s election observers assigned the Electoral Commission of Namibia a transparency score of just 50 percent.”<sup>549</sup>

## Background and Context

Namibia’s ruling party and former liberation movement, the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO), has been in power since independence in 1990.<sup>547</sup> In November 2024, SWAPO won its eighth successive presidential election. The elections brought in Namibia’s first female president, former vice president Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, who was elected with 57 percent of the vote.<sup>548</sup> A preliminary assessment of the African Union found that the elections “were conducted in an environment that is generally peaceful and in compliance with the legal framework for the elections in the country.” However, Freedom House noted that the elections were “marred

<sup>549</sup> Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Namibia,” accessed July 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/namibia/free->

<sup>546</sup> Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Namibia,” accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/namibia/freedom-world/2025>.

<sup>547</sup> Shola Lawal, “Namibia Elections 2024: Who’s in the Running and What’s at Stake?” Al Jazeera, November 27, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/27/namibia-elections-2024-whos-in-the-running-and-whats-at-stake>.

<sup>548</sup> Rachel Savage, “Namibia Elects Its First Female President in Disputed Elections,” The Guardian, December 3, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/03/namibia-elects-its-first-female-president-in-disputed-elections>.

**Right:** LGBTIQ activists from Equal Namibia after they registered to vote. Credit: Equal Namibia.





A South African Development Community (SADC) mission conducted election observation, but was unable to draw conclusions on the counting of votes and management of results because the voting period was extended beyond its stay.<sup>550</sup>

Opposition voices and citizens have claimed that the election was fraught with problems, ranging from ballot paper shortages to delays, leading to the disenfranchisement of voters.<sup>551</sup> Two opposition parties, the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) and the Landless People's Movement, contested the election results in Namibian courts, but the Supreme Court dismissed the cases in February 2025 and found that the factors highlighted in the complaints were not material enough to affect the outcome.<sup>552</sup>

Voters in the 2024 election were seeking economic inclusion, land reform, an end to corruption, and solutions to unemployment and the housing shortage in a country with high poverty and inequality levels, linked to a history of apartheid and colonialism.<sup>553</sup> Although LGBTIQ human rights issues have been a contentious subject in Namibia in recent years, they did not appear to play a major role in the election.

For LGBTIQ voters, however, the role that elected officials might play in advancing or repressing their human rights was often at the front of mind. In 2023, the country's Supreme Court legally recognized same-sex marriages conducted abroad, urging Parliament to enact legislation

recognizing same-sex marriages.<sup>554</sup> The ruling, however, provoked hostile responses from both religious extremists and the legislature, and in December 2024, Parliament passed the Civil Registration Act and the Marriage Act in December 2024, contradicting the Supreme Court ruling and preventing Namibians in same-sex marriages conducted abroad from registering their marriages in the country.<sup>555</sup> Further, on June 21, 2024, Namibia's High Court declared the offense of "sodomy" unconstitutional, finding that the criminalization of same-sex conduct amounted to a breach of the right to equality and freedom from discrimination.<sup>556</sup> The ruling was consistent with a 2013 recommendation from Namibia's Law Reform and Development Commission, but the government appealed the decision, and the case is still pending.<sup>557</sup> In addition, the newly enacted Civil Registration Act removed provisions allowing transgender people who had medically transitioned to change their sex markers, now restricting this to only intersex people.<sup>558</sup>

554 Ryan Thoreson, "Namibian Court Recognizes Foreign Same-Sex Marriages – Ruling Protects Rights of Binational Couples," Human Rights Watch, May 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/26/namibian-court-recognizes-foreign-same-sex-marriages>.

555 According to the Civil Registration and Identification Act, 2024 and the Explanatory Memorandum of the Act, "marriage" means a marriage – (a) concluded and registered in Namibia in terms of the Marriage Act; (b) recognised in terms of the Recognition of Certain Marriages Act, 1991 (Act No. 18 of 1991); or (c) concluded in a foreign jurisdiction and required to be registered in terms of this Act, but excludes same sex marriage and a union concluded outside Namibia which is not capable of being concluded in Namibia in terms of the laws governing marriages in Namibia." See Republic of Namibia, Explanatory Memorandum to the Civil Registration and Identification Act, 2024, [https://www.parliament.na/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Explanatory\\_Memorandum\\_Civil\\_Registration\\_and\\_Identification\\_Bill.pdf](https://www.parliament.na/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Explanatory_Memorandum_Civil_Registration_and_Identification_Bill.pdf), 4. It also excludes same-sex partners parenting a child, and "references to marriage, divorce or marital severance do not include same sex marriage or divorce by spouses in a same sex marriage or marital severance relating to spouses in a same sex marriage." See Republic of Namibia, Civil Registration and Identification Act, 2024, [https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/2024/13/eng@2024-12-30#part\\_7](https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/2024/13/eng@2024-12-30#part_7). See Republic of Namibia, Marriage Act, 2024, <https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/2024/14/eng@2024-12-30>. See also Equal Namibia (@equalnamibia), "Democracy in Jeopardy: President Assents to State-Sanctioned Homophobia," Instagram, January 20, 2025, [https://www.instagram.com/equalnamibia/p/DFEuTGlygt/?hl=en&img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/equalnamibia/p/DFEuTGlygt/?hl=en&img_index=1).

556 See Dausab v Minister of Justice, High Court of Namibia, Case number HC-MD-CIV-MOT-GEN- 2022/00279, Judgment of June 21, 2024, <https://namiblii.org/akn/na/judgment/nahc/2024/331/eng@2024-06-21>.

557 Outright International, "Country Overview – Namibia," May 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/sub-saharan-africa/namibia>.

558 Section 21(2) of the Civil Registration Act, 2024: "Subject to subsection (5), the Registrar-General may, of his or her own accord or on application from any person who can show a legitimate interest in the particulars recorded in the birth record kept by the Ministry or on a birth certificate, alter the particulars captured in respect of any birth registered in the birth record kept by the Ministry and must issue a new birth certificate or a new citizenship certificate or cause a new birth or citizenship certificate to be issued, if necessary- (g) in respect of a person who was born intersex, in order to change the description of that person's sex, or to add such a description where this was left blank, subsequent to a medical procedure or medical treatment undertaken for the purpose of modifying

dom-world/2025. Outright has not accessed the original African Union report, which was not yet available online at the time of writing.

550 Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries, "Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries Election Observation Mission Report on the Presidential and Parliamentary Assembly Elections Held in the Republic of Namibia on 27 November 2024," April 28, 2025, on file with Outright International.

551 Rachel Savage, "Namibia Elects Its First Female President in Disputed Elections," The Guardian, December 3, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/03/namibia-elects-its-first-female-president-in-disputed-elections>; Outright interview with Omar van Reenen, co-founder of the Namibia Equal Rights Movement (Equal Namibia), virtual, February 2025.

552 Nyasha Nyaungwa, "Namibia's Top Court Dismisses Opposition Election Challenge," Reuters, February 28, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/namibias-top-court-dismisses-opposition-election-challenge-2025-02-28>; Eagle FM Namibia, "Watch: The Supreme Court Delivered a Significant Decision Regarding the Election Results Challenge Earlier This Morning, Dismissing the Case IPM and LPM Had Brought Forth," video, Facebook, February 28, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/EagleFMNam/videos/watch-the-supreme-court-delivered-a-significant-decision-regarding-the-2024-elec/3871525683161446>.

553 Shola Lawal, "Namibia Elections 2024."

## LGBTIQ Participation in Namibia's 2024 Elections

In advance of the November elections, the Namibia Equal Rights Movement (Equal Namibia) conducted sensitization efforts for LGBTIQ populations to drive registration and voting, including providing queer-focused analyses on the political parties and candidates.<sup>559</sup>

Activists noted that there were few concerted efforts by political parties to use anti-LGBTQ sentiments in their campaigns. Omar van Reenen stated that “not even the ruling party had anti-LGBTQ statements in the manifesto...There wasn't a crafted professional campaign based on anti-LGBTQ sentiments like there is in Ghana, Uganda, and Nigeria.”<sup>560</sup> A Namibian media outlet did report in September 2024 that SWAPO's Youth League spokesperson Moses Shikerete “says the party does not support the recognition of” LGBTIQ people on the basis that Namibia is “a nation dominated by Christianity.” Several smaller parties more vocally opposed LGBTIQ equality, including one that openly promoted conversion practices.<sup>561</sup>

Activists, as well as media outlets, also critically noted the absence of overtly pro-LGBTIQ or LGBTIQ-inclusive objectives in political parties' manifestos.<sup>562</sup> New Era, a

Namibian news outlet, reported that:

A study of the parties' manifestos and pronouncements of party officials shows that although some political parties include commitments to address women's or gender issues in their manifestos and constitutions, none of the parties explicitly stated their commitment to promote human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual (sic), queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons.<sup>563</sup>

Activist Linda Baumann told The Namibian:

It's disheartening to see political platforms continue to neglect issues that affect the lives and dignity of LGBTQI+ individuals, despite years of advocacy for equality and inclusion...When marginalised groups see no reflection of their struggles or aspirations in the political discourse, it not only erodes trust but also contributes to a deeper sense of vulnerability.<sup>564</sup>

## Lack of Inclusive Gender Recognition in the Electoral Process

The lack of access to legal gender recognition for trans people in Namibia can be an impediment to the right to vote. According to the Civil Registration and Identification Act, 2024, the possibility of changing one's sex marker in identity documents only applies to intersex people, excluding trans and other gender-diverse people.<sup>565</sup>

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sexual characteristics if evidence to this effect is provided by the Executive Director of the Ministry responsible for health to the Executive Director of the Ministry, along with a recommendation by a medical practitioner in the employment of the State based on the medical evidence that the change will be an appropriate reflection of the person's current sex.” See Republic of Namibia, Civil Registration Act, 2024, [https://namibii.org/akn/na/act/2024/13/eng@2024-12-30#part\\_7](https://namibii.org/akn/na/act/2024/13/eng@2024-12-30#part_7). The previous law in section 7B provided that: “The Secretary may on the recommendation of the Secretary of Health, alter in the birth register of any person who has undergone a change of sex, the description of the sex of such person and may for this purpose call for such medical reports and institute such investigations as he may deem necessary.” See Southern Africa Litigation Center, Laws and Policies Affecting Transgender Persons in Southern Africa: Transgender Rights in Namibia, August 2018, <https://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Transgender-rights-in-Namibia.pdf>.

559 For a queer-focused lens on the parties and candidates, see Equal Namibia (@equalnamibia), “Where do Parties Stand on LGBTQI+ Rights? Namibia General Election 2024,” Instagram, November 26, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/equalnamibia/p/DC1JJKG1-rN/?hl=en&img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/equalnamibia/p/DC1JJKG1-rN/?hl=en&img_index=1). See also Equal Namibia, “Equality is on the Ballot – 7 Days Left to Register to Vote,” Instagram, video, July 25, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/equalnamibia/reel/C9ldhxcoNhs/?hl=en>.

560 van Reenen interview.

561 Envaalde Matheus and Eliaser Ndeyanale, “Political parties disregard LGBTQI+ rights ahead of November elections.” The Namibian, September 21, 2024, <https://www.namibian.com.na/parties-shun-gay-rights-but-want-gay-vote>.

562 “The obvious problem these manifestos frequently fail to address

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is the defence of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and others (LGBTQI+) community's rights.” Shonena Nathanael, “Manifestos Fail LGBTQI+ and Social Equity Test,” All Namibian News, September 22, 2024, <https://www.namibian.com.na/manifestos-fail-lgbtqi-and-social-equity-test>.

563 Lahja Nashuuta, “LGBTQI+ Rights: Political Parties Remain Mum,” New Era, May 31, 2024, <https://neweralive.na/lgbtqi-rights-political-parties-re-main-mum>.

564 Envaalde Matheus and Eliaser Ndeyanale, “Political parties disregard.”

565 Section 21(2): “Subject to subsection (5), the Registrar-General may, of his or her own accord or on application from any person who can show a legitimate interest in the particulars recorded in the birth record kept by the Ministry or on a birth certificate, alter the particulars captured in respect of any birth registered in the birth record kept by the Ministry and must issue a new birth certificate or a new citizenship certificate or cause a new birth or citizenship certificate to be issued, if necessary- (g) in respect of a person who was born intersex, in order to change the description of that person's sex, or to add such a description where this was left blank, subsequent to a medical procedure or medical treatment undertaken for the purpose of modifying sexual characteristics if evidence to this effect is provided by the Executive Director of the Ministry responsible for health to the Executive Director of the Ministry, along with a recommendation by a medical practitioner in the employment of the State based on the medical evidence that the change will be an appropriate reflection of the person's current sex.” See Republic of Namibia, Civil Regis-

Jholerina Timbo, a trans woman and human rights defender, registered to vote at a registration site set up for farmers in a rural part of Namibia, close to a military base. As she narrated to Outright:

When we arrived at the site for farmers, many military personnel were present, as the officials had cancelled their registration station. I, as a trans-identifying person who is visible, already tensed up. You could pick up the derogatory terms that they use towards queer people in their conversations. But I was with my mom and siblings, and farmers around the area also know me, so I felt a small sense of security. The point of frustration was when the officials were to take my information, that's where my whole anxiety picked up. Because my identity documents refer to me as male, they did not care how I identify, whether I had earrings on, makeup, or whatnot. They kept referring to me with pronouns per my documentation and asked me to remove my earrings. It was an open space; everybody standing and hearing could see my facial reaction and tension, and people were laughing and using derogatory terms. I felt like I just needed to get the process done. I thought, "I want to exercise my right to vote, so let me just get it done. I can deal with all of this trauma later."<sup>566</sup>

## Other Impediments to the Right to Vote

For Timbo, the traumatizing experience at the polls was an example of the daily realities that impede transgender and gender-diverse people's civic participation, as they face the constant burden of having "to psychologically prepare yourself when you step out of your house every day."<sup>567</sup> These risks do not always bear fruit. Despite Timbo's courageous efforts, the flaws in Namibia's electoral process impeded her ability to vote. Timbo stood in the queues until about 11 p.m.:

The queue was not moving. Other people started leaving, even before me. We were not getting an explanation as to why the queue was not moving. We

didn't know what was happening. I got so hungry that I decided to leave eventually. I only understood the gravity of things after the elections, and the reports from the different regions and sites came in on ballot papers running out and the computer systems heating up and needing time to cool down. But while we were in the queues, the people managing the site didn't come out to explain. A lot of people had to leave and not vote, eventually.<sup>568</sup>

Her experience at the polls, combined with her awareness of significant levels of support for the opposition, led Timbo to mistrust the process and the results:

There was an uproar in the country, particularly among the youth, around unemployment rates and the government's lack of action. People have lost trust that the ruling party would address the needs and current issues. A lot of people were saying, "We are voting these people out." So, I think [the problems with voting] were intentional.<sup>569</sup>

Other LGBTIQ people in Namibia also found general election failings to be the biggest obstacle to their democratic participation, leaving them feeling disenfranchised. Omar van Reenen, a queer activist and founder of Equal Namibia, believed many young people showed up at the polls intending to vote out the ruling party, in response to economic woes and in opposition to the government's anti-LGBTIQ drive.<sup>570</sup> Equal Namibia aimed to conduct surveys on whether the anti-LGBTQ bills drove people to vote in the elections, but was hampered by funding constraints.<sup>571</sup> From van Reenen's personal observations, they concluded:

<sup>568</sup> Timbo interview; Ernst Calitz, "Namibia's Election Chaos: Technical Failures and Ballot Shortages Spark Outrage Among Voters and Parties," Daily Maverick, November 28, 2024, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-11-28-namibia-poll-slammed-after-after-delays-ballot-short-ages-questions-over-id-cards>.

<sup>569</sup> Timbo interview; Ernst Calitz, "Namibia's Election Chaos"; "Namibia Votes and Could Have Its First Female Leader. But Election Upsets Have Shaken the Region," AP News Africa, November 27, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/namibia-election-vote-woman-swapo-da175a3b3021b-c19eb1db85d548a0fe0>.

<sup>570</sup> According to The Guardian, "high unemployment and younger generations with no memory of Swapo's [the ruling party's] fight against South Africa's apartheid regime have eroded the party's support..." See Rachel Savage, "Namibia Goes to Polls Amid Anger at High Unemployment Rate," The Guardian, November 27, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/27/namibia-goes-to-polls-amid-anger-at-high-unemployment-rate>.

<sup>571</sup> van Reenen interview.

tration Act, 2024, [https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/2024/13/eng@2024-12-30#part\\_7](https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/2024/13/eng@2024-12-30#part_7).

<sup>566</sup> Outright interview with Jholerina Timbo, founder of transgender people's rights organization, Wings to Transcend Namibia, virtual, March 2025.

<sup>567</sup> Timbo interview.

I think that the number of young people who showed up has changed, and a lot of people also went to vote because of the government's constant wasting of time on anti-LGBTQ legislation, instead of bread-and-butter issues.<sup>572</sup>

Van Reenen was able to vote, but said that many voters were not, in what they described as "an absolute sham election":

There were polling stations where people stood from 7 a.m. when it opened, and some could only vote at 8 p.m. because the machines overheated. There wasn't enough staff. People started closing polling stations earlier than the cut-off time. And then, there was so much outcry from people. The government decided to extend voting by two more days after the elections, but only in certain regions...And while they extended elections for these two extra days, they counted the results and made them public. This influenced people as well.<sup>573</sup>

Like Timbo, van Reenen concluded, "I don't trust the results."<sup>574</sup>

Kevin Wessels, a 29-year-old pansexual cis man who ran for Parliament with Namibia's Republican Party, found the 2024 elections the most "cumbersome" elections he had experienced since his first time voting in Namibia at age 18:

...[W]e had very long queues, queues that were not moving as fast as they should. People stood until 3 a.m. the next day, trying to cast their votes. A lot of people gave up along the way and decided to go home, which made the electoral procedure cumbersome and defeated the purpose of young people going out to vote.<sup>575</sup>

## Referring to the Supreme Court's dismissal of a challenge

<sup>572</sup> van Reenen interview.

<sup>573</sup> van Reenen interview; "Namibia's Decision to Extend Voting Due to Technical Issues Draws Opposition Complaints," The Associated Press, November 29, 2024, <https://halifax.citynews.ca/2024/11/29/namibias-decision-to-extend-election-voting-due-to-technical-issues-draws-opposition-complaints>. See also Damian Zane, "Namibia Opposition Refuses to Recognise Poll Result," BBC, December 1, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjdlld7xllk7o>.

<sup>574</sup> van Reenen interview; "Namibia's Decision to Extend Voting."

<sup>575</sup> Outright interview with Kevin Wessels, parliamentary candidate and interim youth leader of Namibia's Republican Party, virtual, May 2025.

to the results filed by opposition parties, he opined that the factors highlighted by the opposition were not "immaterial," because "if 10,000 people go home and cannot vote, it means their democratic and constitutional rights have been affected."<sup>576</sup>

## Openly Queer Candidacies

For the first time in Namibia, two openly queer individuals, both young, pansexual cisgender men, ran for office with two political parties. Kevin Wessels, who is 28 years old, ran with Namibia's Republican party, and 22-year-old Williams Minnie ran with the Landless People's Movement (LPM).<sup>577</sup> Neither candidate was elected as the Republican Party only won one parliamentary seat, occupied by MP Mbundu Mathias Sipipa, and the Landless People's Movement obtained five seats, occupied by other MPs.<sup>578</sup>

Jholerina Timbo told Outright that the reason she wanted to vote for one of these two parties is "to ensure that at least one of the openly queer candidates gets into parliament to address issues" affecting marginalized populations:

It was my drive to ensure that there is a voice for us in the house because in previous years, Parliamentarians made homophobic statements in Parliament, and other MPs just sat there, laughing and clapping. Nobody is holding them accountable. I wanted someone to represent our rights as Namibian citizens that are queer, because we are first and foremost taxpaying citizens. I felt someone from our community would be able to carry the message that queer people are holistic beings contributing to the economy of the country.<sup>579</sup>

<sup>576</sup> Wessels interview.

<sup>577</sup> Enrique Anarte Lazo, "Namibia's First Out LGBTQ+ Candidates Aim to Change Laws and Minds," Context, November 21, 2024, <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/namibias-first-out-lgbtq-candidates-aim-to-change-laws-and-minds>; Equal Namibia (@equalnamibia), "Representation Matters," Instagram, November 21, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/equalnamibia/p/DCo-lAZlckM/?api=slot%2Bthailand%2Bgacor%E3%80%90GB77.CC%E3%80%91dfxv&hl=ne>.

<sup>578</sup> Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, "Political Parties," accessed July 29, 2025, <https://www.parliament.na/political-parties/#1615545042097-3f6ca395-64ad>.

<sup>579</sup> Timbo interview. In 2005, for instance, then Deputy Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration, Theopolina Mushelenga, dehumanized LGBTQ people in a speech, leading human rights organizations to call for her impeachment. See The New Humanitarian, "Rights NGOs Call for Official's Resignation Over Homophobic Remarks," September 15, 2005, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2005/09/15/rights-ngos-call-officials-resignation-over-homophobic-remarks>. See also Civic 264, "Press



Kevin Wessels' party, the Republican Party of Namibia, nominated him as the youngest and one of their top ten parliamentary candidates: "I gladly accepted it [the nomination] because I've always been passionate about Namibia, and I've always been involved in various social justice projects. I saw this as a step forward to have a platform and serve the broader nation."<sup>580</sup> Wessels faced backlash from party members and on social media after the party announced his candidacy:

There was a bit of internal backlash from the party, which I did expect at some point. However, I don't think I was prepared for the scale of the backlash. It also came in the form of people trying to discredit my work and my person. I had a lot of trolling on social media, and we know what that can do to LGBTIQ individuals, the psychology around that...because people can be very mean on social media.

There was also dismay from people within the community who are loyal to the ruling party. Backlash came from them as well. And then you sit and wonder—but are we not fighting for the same cause? Is the ultimate goal not to have a better, just, and equal Namibia?<sup>581</sup>

The Republican Party, which is Christian-affiliated, opposes same-sex marriage and comprehensive sexuality education, but Wessels said party leadership was aware of his identity and commitment to promoting the rights of LGBTIQ people.<sup>582</sup> He also pointed out that no political party in Namibia is sufficiently pro-LGBTIQ rights:

And we don't even need to look at it only in their manifestos or what their policies say. We need to look at the fact that no party voted against the anti-LGBTQ bills passed through Parliament. One MP from the

ruling party spoke against it, but nobody voted against it, which then gave the impression that, as much as parties say they are pro-LGBTQ, are they really? This is how the system is, and we have to go through these parties [to run for office]. The idea is to take up space and create change within.<sup>583</sup>

Wessels added that he believes:

The system needs to change to allow individuals to run independently for Parliament. I was running as a proudly out queer individual, yet my affiliation to a party made it very difficult for queer individuals to vote for me. The question always came up whenever I would go to public discussions, whenever I would go to Drag Night Namibia, because a lot of the queer organizations conducted massive campaigning on the importance of voting and what it means for us as a queer community. But the question always came up as to "who do we vote for?" because none of them support LGBTIQ rights.<sup>584</sup>

Overall, Wessels described his experience as positive:

I hope there was some sort of inspiration [for others] and a shift in perspective. This experience was good for me, even though I had a bit of backlash and setbacks.<sup>585</sup>

## Conclusion

There is much room for progress to benefit LGBTIQ and other marginalized populations in Namibia. Activists and organizations are taking up more space and driving visible change, including public acceptance. But the backlash resulting from legal progress, and an apparent uptick in anti-LGBTIQ violence, leaves some activists

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Statement: Joint Namibian Civil Society Organizations Statement Condemning the Homophobic Statement Issued by the SWAPO Party Youth League," May 26, 2021, <https://www.civic264.org.na/news/general-news/press-statement-joint-namibian-civil-society-organisations-statement-condemning-the-homophobic-statement-issued-by-the-swapo-party-youth-league>.

580 Wessels interview. Parties intending to participate in the election of National Assembly members are to submit their list of candidates, in compliance with the Electoral Act. See Republic of Namibia, Electoral Act 5 of 2014, <https://www.lac.org.na/laws/annoSTAT/Electoral%20Act%205%20of%202014.pdf>, Section 77.

581 Wessels interview.

582 See Republican Party of Namibia, "Our Vision," accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.rpnamibia.com/about-us/mission.html>; "2024 Manifesto," <https://www.rpnamibia.com/about-us/manifesto.html>.

583 Wessels interview. According to Reuters, "Only one party openly supports LGBTQ+ rights – the All People's Party – but it only has two seats in the 104-strong National Assembly and has never gained more than 3% of the vote." Enrique Anarte, "Namibia's first out LGBTQ+ candidates aim to change laws and minds," CNBC Africa, November 21, 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/africa/wire/653821>. In the 2024 elections, the All People's Party received only one percent of the vote. IPU Parline, "Namibia," accessed July 2, 2025, <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/NA/NA-LC01/election/NA-LC01-E2024I127>.

584 Wessels interview. Namibia's Electoral Act provides opportunities for individuals to run as independent candidates in regional and presidential elections, but National Assembly members must represent political parties. See Republic of Namibia, Electoral Act 5 of 2014, <https://www.lac.org.na/laws/annoSTAT/Electoral%20Act%205%20of%202014.pdf>, sections 72–81.

585 Wessels interview.

deeply questioning the institutions that force them into the position of second-class citizenship. Jholerina Timbo asserted that since 2023, the social situation has shifted to be more unsafe for queer and trans folks, with rising queerphobic rhetoric and cases of violence. As a result:

there are places we used to go to that we don't go to anymore. We don't go walking alone or even to shopping malls alone. It's an anxiety that hangs over the community because of politicians using LGBTQ people as a scapegoat, because they want to secure seats and make us targets of violence...I don't use public bathrooms because of the stigma and discrimination. And so, when I'm in the middle of a mall and have to use the bathroom, I have to stop doing what I'm doing to go home where I feel safe enough to use my bathroom. Why am I contributing to the economy of this country if I'm not being accommodated as well, just like everybody else? Why am I giving money to the government to take care of health care, if whenever I go to a public clinic, I'm being vilified and dehumanized? Why am I contributing to the salaries of this politician sitting in Parliament, talking about me [derogatorily]?<sup>586</sup>

Namibia's elected officials should keep in mind that they were voted into power to serve all Namibians. Instead of seeking to undermine the hard-won progress LGBTIQ people have made in the court, the government should align itself with the tides of change and promote economic inclusion, social inclusion, human rights, and equality for all Namibians.



<sup>586</sup> Timbo interview.

# SNAPSHOT PAKISTAN:

# Trans Candidates Challenge Stereotypes

Election: General (February 8, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>587</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

## An Election Marred by Discrepancies

Originally scheduled for 2023, Pakistan's general elections were held in February 2024. The delay was due to the two years of political instability and unrest after Pakistan's parliament deposed then-Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI) through a no-confidence motion in April 2022.

The Election Commission of Pakistan made a series of decisions that effectively excluded the PTI from the race. Independent candidates won 103 seats in the National Assembly, of which 93 were aligned with PTI since the party itself was banned from taking part in the elections. The PML-N secured 75 seats, while the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) obtained 54 seats.

The PTI accused the military establishment of rigging the election in favor of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).<sup>588</sup> International observer bodies and diplomatic actors including the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union raised pointed concerns regarding

587 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - Pakistan," accessed August 5, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan/freedom-world/2025>.

588 Ibid; Abid Hussain, "Why Nawaz Sharif failed to win Pakistan election despite tacit army support," Al Jazeera, February 12, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/12/army-backed-nawaz-sharif-fails-to-win-pakistan-election-what-went-wrong>.

irregularities, reporting undue restrictions and a lack of a level playing field.<sup>589</sup>

## Growing Politicization of Trans Lives

Queer people are largely invisible in Pakistan, where consensual same-sex sexual conduct between men is punishable by up to ten years' imprisonment and a fine.<sup>590</sup> Pakistan has historically recognized khawaja sira, which refers to people assigned male at birth who develop a feminine gender identity.<sup>591</sup> This transfeminine category, which some view as a third gender, may also include people who identify as trans women, and some use "khawaja sira" and "trans women" interchangeably. In contrast to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in Pakistan, those who identify as trans and/or khawaja sira have been more visible and vocal, and took part in the 2024 elections as candidates.

The path has not been easy. Pakistan's groundbreaking Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was passed in 2018, recognizing that trans people "have the right to be recognized as per his or her self-perceived

589 Kanishka Singh, "US, UK and EU urge probe into Pakistan election, express concerns," Reuters, February 10, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-uk-eu-urge-probe-into-pakistan-election-express-concerns-2024-02-09>;

"Pakistan election results: Thousands of Imran Khan supporters protest," AP News, February 12, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-election-protests-imran-khan-7cedd1123c222834ce73ae8c647b9297>;  
"How Is the World Reacting to Pakistan General Election? US, UK, Iran, Australia," Dawn, February 10, 2024, [www.dawn.com/news/1813085/how-is-the-world-reacting-to-pakistan-general-election-us-uk-iran-australia-dawn-news-english](https://www.dawn.com/news/1813085/how-is-the-world-reacting-to-pakistan-general-election-us-uk-iran-australia-dawn-news-english).

590 Human Dignity Trust, "Pakistan," accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/pakistan>.

591 Faris Khan, "Translucent Citizenship: Khwaja Sira Activism and Alternatives to Dissent in Pakistan," *Sedition, Sexuality, Gender, and Gender Identity in South Asia* 20 (2019): <https://journals.openedition.org/sam-aj/5034>.

gender identity” and affirming trans people’s right to vote and hold public office.<sup>592</sup> In 2022, Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan of Jamat-e-Islami, an Islamist political party, challenged the law before the Federal Shariat Court, and in 2023 the court ruled that the provisions on the right to self-perceived gender identity and the right of inheritance for transgender people were “un-Islamic.”<sup>593</sup> The law, however, remains in effect while an appeal is pending. Conservative Islamist groups also launched a targeted misinformation campaign against trans people in 2022 that gained widespread public support, with social media flooded with demands to amend the Transgender Persons Act.<sup>594</sup> The misinformation campaign, ironically borrowing from Christian evangelical rhetoric against trans people, has sought to sow division between intersex people, trans people, and the traditional khawaja sira community.<sup>595</sup>

While no major party’s campaign platform addressed discrimination and criminalization based on sexual orientation, all three major parties promised to protect trans people’s rights in their manifestos. The center-left PPP vowed to advance trans people’s political participation at all levels and “ensure implementation in letter and spirit of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018.”<sup>596</sup> PTI, characterized as a populist party, was more specific, committing to training legal professionals on transgender people’s rights and improving trans people’s access to higher education.<sup>597</sup>

592 Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, The Gazette of Pakistan, Act No. XIII of 2018, <https://translaw.cipr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Transgender-Persons-Protection-of-Rights-Act-2018.pdf>, Art. 3, 10, 11.

593 Haroon Janjua, “Trans rights in focus amid Pakistan legal battle,” DW, September 25, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-transgender-rights-in-focus-amid-religious-complaints/a-63220427>; Outright International, “Pakistan Rolls Back on Transgender Rights,” May 22, 2023, <https://outrightinternational.org/Pakistan-Trans-Ruling..>

594 Ibid; Sheharyar Rizwan, “Transgender rights law: Activists, religious leaders come face to face,” Dawn, October 24, 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1716553>; Sarah Zaman, “Pakistan’s Progressive Transgender Law Faces Opposition 4 Years Later,” VOA News, September 28, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-s-progressive-transgender-law-faces-opposition-4-years-later-/6768168.html>.

595 Dr. Mehrub Awan, Director of the Gender Interactive Alliance of Pakistan, argues that Christian evangelical anti-trans narratives were replicated by Pakistani conservatives and imported into Pakistan to further the conservative agenda by changing the Christian angle to “un-Islamic.” See The Black Hole, “Advancing Political Participation: Transgender Rights Movements in South Asia | Dr. Mehrub Awan,” livestreamed event on May 12, 2024, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmdhuR3dLac>.

596 Pakistan People’s Party, “Manifesto 2024: Chuno Nai Soch Ko,” 2024, <https://pppp.org.pk/website/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Manifesto-2024.pdf>, 32.

597 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), “Manifesto: Empowering Pakistan for

The manifesto of PML-N, a self-described conservative party, was the most comprehensive, vowing to ensure equal opportunities for trans people in all areas, penalize discrimination and “degradation,” and ensure the “seamless and dignified provision” of identity documents.<sup>598</sup>

Only one major party tackled the rights of intersex people. Muttahida Qaumi Movement – Pakistan (MQM-P), the fourth biggest party in parliament, did not address transgender people’s rights, but devoted a section to intersex people, referring to them as khawaja saras (an alternative spelling of khawaja sira). It proposed, among other things, legal recognition of intersex people’s rights, a one percent quota for intersex people in all levels of government, and collaboration with intersex-led groups to ensure inclusion in decision-making.<sup>599</sup>

## Trans Candidates in 2024

Pakistan has not yet elected an openly trans official at the national level, a gap that Nayyab Ali wanted to fill in 2024 through her candidacy for the National Assembly. As Nayyab Ali puts it, “The people have seen Khawaja Sira begging for money, as sex workers, dancing at weddings and blessing babies. What they have not seen is a Khawaja Sira politician.”<sup>600</sup> Two trans women, Sobia Khan and Saima Shaukat, also contested seats in the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where seven trans persons were killed from January to April 2024.<sup>601</sup>

The three ran as independent candidates as no political party gave tickets to any trans candidates, revealing a disconnect between campaign rhetoric and action.<sup>602</sup>

a Just, Progressive, and Inclusive Future,” 2024, <https://insaf.pk/sites/default/files/PTI%20Election%20Manifesto%202024.pdf>, 7, 99.

598 Pakistan Muslim League N (PML-N), Manifesto 2024, <https://pmln.org/delivery/manifesto>.

599 “MQM-P manifesto for General Elections 2024,” ARY News, January 24, 2024, <https://arynews.tv/mqm-p-manifesto-for-general-elections-2024>.

600 Sarah Zaman, “Transgender Candidate Hopes to Make History at Pakistani Polls,” Voice of America, February 3, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSIIDR-OUTc>.

601 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Events of 2024, January 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025>, 357; Aihatesham Khan, “Trans persons continue to face ostracisation after death,” The Express Tribune, April 21, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2463408/trans-persons-continue-to-face-ostracisation-after-death>.

602 Hamna Baig, “Pakistan elections 2024: Widespread exclusion of the Trans community,” The Daily Star, February 7, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/geopolitical-insights/news/pakistan-elections-2024-widespread-exclusion-the-trans-community-3538386>.



Ultimately, none of them succeeded.

Sobia Khan who ran “to dispel the general impression about the capabilities of the trans community,” also sought to ensure transgender representation through a court case.<sup>603</sup> In December 2023, Sobia Khan petitioned the Peshawar High Court for dedicated representation for transgender individuals through reserved seats.<sup>604</sup> In 2023, the province of Sindh approved reserved seats for trans persons in local councils, where trans councilors are currently in office according to Gender Interactive Alliance, a Pakistan-based organization advocating for trans people’s rights.<sup>605</sup> However, this policy has not been replicated throughout the country.<sup>606</sup> The Peshawar High Court found that the existing electoral system did not make any provision for transgender quotas, but its ruling, issued in February 2024, directed election authorities to establish voting queues for trans voters in addition to the queues for men and women in the PK-81 constituency, where Sobia Khan was running.<sup>607</sup> In addition, the court ruled that security arrangements should be made for her throughout the campaign and on election day.<sup>608</sup> However, these special measures were not implemented.<sup>609</sup> The court later clarified that the Transgender Persons Act does not mandate these positive measures, and implementing the court order would require legislative amendments.<sup>610</sup>

Visibility came at a price, as trans candidates and public figures suffered attacks on the campaign trail. An assailant affiliated with Jamaat-e-Islami physically

attacked Nayyab Ali and her team in one incident, and her campaign volunteers were verbally harassed.<sup>611</sup> The Digital Rights Foundation of Pakistan documented numerous online anti-trans attacks in the context of the campaign, including attacks against Nayyab Ali and Dr. Mehrub Moiz Awan, a transgender activist who expressed support for the Awami National Party.<sup>612</sup> Online attacks also targeted at least one male candidate, who was maliciously accused of being effeminate or transgender.<sup>613</sup>

## Exclusion of Trans Voters

Six years after the enactment of the historic Transgender Persons Act of 2018, some trans people were not able to exercise their right to vote. To vote, adult Pakistani citizens must possess valid computerized national identity cards (CNIC) and be registered on the voter list in their constituency based on the address reflected on their CNIC. Due to barriers in obtaining CNICs that reflect their gender markers, the number of registered trans voters remains low compared to the estimated size of the trans population.<sup>614</sup> For example, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan’s fourth largest province, TransAction Alliance estimates the number of trans residents at 9,000 to 10,000, but “only around 400 are registered by NADRA, and even fewer possess NICs.”<sup>615</sup>

In May 2023, after the Federal Shariat Court struck down some provisions of the Transgender Persons Act, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA)

603 “Transgender person contesting polls to ‘challenge stereotypes,’” Dawn, January 4, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1803055/transgender-person-contesting-polls-to-challenge-stereotypes>.

604 Ibid; “PHC petitioned to seek assembly seats for transgender persons,” Dawn, December 24, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1800282>.

605 Outright email exchange with Zehrish Khanzadi, program manager at Gender Interactive Alliance, August 28, 2025.

606 “Sindh cabinet approves reserved seats for transgender persons in local councils,” The Express Tribune, January 6, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2394555/sindh-cabinet-approves-reserved-seats-for-transgender-persons-in-local-councils>; “Trans people call for voting rights,” The Express Tribune, January 3, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2451999/trans-people-call-for-voting-rights>.

607 “Peshawar High Court Mandates Separate Queue for Transgender Voters in Landmark Decision,” Tribal News Network, February 1, 2024, <https://tnnenglish.com/peshawar-high-court-mandates-separate-queue-for-transgender-voters-in-landmark-decision>.

608 “PHC orders separate queues at PK-81 polling stations for transgender,” Dawn, February 2, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1810455>.

609 UNDP Pakistan, Journey-Mapping of Transgender Political Candidates, June 2024, <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/journey-mapping-transgender-political-candidates>, 10.

610 Ibid.

611 Nayyab Ali (@nayyabalipk), “During my election campaign, my team and I were attacked,” Instagram, November 11, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DCOSjETC5NS>; Aleezeh Fatimah, “Nayyab Ali — vying to change attitude and laws,” Dawn, January 21, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1807449>.

612 Digital Rights Foundation of Pakistan, Gendered Disinformation During Elections in Pakistan, March 2025, <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Gendered-Disinformation-During-Elections-in-Pakistan.pdf>, 14.

613 Ibid, 11.

614 Several news articles provide conflicting numbers of registered trans voters in the country. However, the number is consistently described as low, compared to the estimated size of the trans population. See “Transgender Persons’ Registration Remains Dismal As Elections Draw Close,” The Friday Times, June 7, 2023, <https://thefridaytimes.com/07-Jun-2023/transgender-persons-registration-remains-dismal-as-elections-draw-close>; Arshad Ali, “Number of registered transgender voters increases,” Samaa, October 4, 2023, <https://www.samaa.tv/208732082-number-of-registered-transgender-voters-increases>.

615 Asad Zia, “Unregistered, unheard: elections and transgender exclusion,” The Express Tribune, December 24, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2450962/unregistered-unheard-elections-and-transgender-exclusion>.

stopped issuing CNICs with an “X” gender marker.<sup>616</sup> It only resumed after four months, in September 2023, while an appeal is pending before the court.<sup>617</sup> However, trans people have reported that in some cases, NADRA refused to renew CNICs with “X” gender markers without a medical certificate, despite the Transgender Persons Act affirming self-determination of gender identity.<sup>618</sup>

Many trans people also remain unregistered due to fear of harassment.<sup>619</sup> In addition, as voters can only cast their votes in the constituencies based on their registered address, trans people who flee their homes due to family rejection are left with difficult choices. They must either undergo the arduous process to change their registered address, at the risk of losing the “X” marker, abstain from voting, or embark on a long journey to their potentially unsafe hometowns.<sup>620</sup> This is the case in Karachi, the country’s most populous city, where activists say the majority of trans persons have CNICs bearing their original address, and are therefore unable to vote in Karachi.<sup>621</sup>

The Electoral Commission of Pakistan (ECP) plays a crucial role in protecting trans people’s right to vote. Its Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework (GMSIF), applying to the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, seeks to facilitate, among other things, voter registration for trans people.<sup>622</sup> The body also collaborates with a Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group led by civil society groups and claims to provide special arrangements in polling stations for trans people.<sup>623</sup> However, leading up to the elections, trans activists said the body had not adequately addressed the “widespread exclusion” of trans voters.<sup>624</sup> As Zehrish Khanzadi, a program manager at Gender Interactive Alliance, told Outright:

While Pakistan’s legal framework does not explicitly restrict LGBTIQ persons from registering as voters, in

practice, many transgender people were excluded. Based on community monitoring, around 1,000 transgender persons were unable to vote in 2024, primarily due to mismatches between their CNIC (National ID) gender marker and outward gender expression, harassment at polling stations, and challenges with NADRA in updating records.<sup>625</sup>

The failure of authorities to fully implement the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act will only further disenfranchise this marginalized group amid growing conservative backlash. As Naina, a trans person living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, told The Express Tribune, “What do I have to do with elections? It’s not our business.”<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> Hamna Baig, “Pakistan elections 2024.”

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Asad Zia, “Unregistered, unheard.”

<sup>620</sup> Hamna Baig, “Pakistan elections 2024.”

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

<sup>622</sup> Asad Zia, “Unregistered, unheard.”

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> Hamna Baig, “Pakistan elections 2024”; “Trans people call for voting rights.”

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<sup>625</sup> Zehrish Khanzadi email exchange.

<sup>626</sup> Asad Zia, “Unregistered, unheard.”

## CASE STUDY PANAMA:

# Political Indifference Toward LGBTIQ Equality

Election: General (May 5, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>627</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

### Political and Social Context

Panama is a unitary constitutional democracy in which the president serves as both head of state and head of government, elected for a single five-year term without the possibility of immediate reelection. The 2024 general elections—the seventh since the return to democracy in 1989—were comprehensive, encompassing the selection of the president, 71 members of the National Assembly, and numerous local positions, including mayors and municipal council representatives.

Panama's 2024 general elections took place in a highly uncertain political and social context.<sup>628</sup> These were the first elections held after the COVID-19 pandemic, during a period marked by significant public discontent, large-scale protests, and widespread dissatisfaction with political institutions. According to some experts, these elections represented “the most uncertain and convulsive electoral process in Panama's recent history.”<sup>629</sup> Protests

in 2022 and 2023 mobilized broad sectors of society, fueled by growing frustration over corruption scandals and economic inequality. Despite these tensions, Panama maintained its tradition of high voter participation, with “the highest turnout in the country's democratic history,” demonstrating the electorate's continued commitment to the political process.<sup>630</sup>

Economic issues played a central role in shaping electoral debates, particularly concerns over inequality,

<sup>630</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>627</sup> Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS/EOM), Preliminary Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Panama, May 7, 2024, <https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/PRELIMINARY-REPORT---Preliminary-Report-OAS-Electoral-Observation-Mission-in-Panama-2024.pdf>.

<sup>628</sup> IDEA Internacional, Informe general de las elecciones: Panamá 2024, [https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-12/informe-general-de-las-elecciones-panama-2024\\_0.pdf](https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-12/informe-general-de-las-elecciones-panama-2024_0.pdf).

<sup>629</sup> Ibid, 1.

**Right:** The sign reads: “Today in the streets but tomorrow in the National Assembly.” Panama Pride March 2024. Credit: Fundación Iguales.



corruption, and access to essential services.<sup>631</sup> Additionally, discussions on security and governance gained prominence, as the country faced increasing pressure to combat organized crime and migration, particularly in the Darién region, which borders Colombia.

## LGBTIQ People's Human Rights in Panama

Panama is one of the few countries in Latin America in which LGBTIQ people continue to face both legal exclusion and a notable absence of explicit protection from discrimination, reflecting politicians' reluctance to embrace pro-equality legislative reforms. Neither same-sex marriage nor civil unions is legally recognized, excluding same-sex couples from rights related to inheritance, health care, and parental recognition. While neighboring countries have made significant strides in recognizing marriage equality, Panama continues to lag behind, often citing strong opposition from conservative sectors as a barrier to progress.

In July 2024, LGBTIQ organizations directly presented a legislative initiative to the National Assembly that would modify the anti-discrimination law to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The legislative initiative was not debated because, in November, the National Assembly's legal office declared that the proposal was not viable because "discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation and gender expression necessarily implies discrimination based on sex, since the former cannot occur without the latter." Ricardo Beteta, an activist promoting the initiative, pointed out that the absence of clear legal frameworks creates a vacuum that causes discrimination, violence, and impunity, as perpetrators can act without fear of significant legal consequences.<sup>632</sup>

The struggle for marriage equality faced a significant setback in February 2023 when Panama's Supreme Court ruled against recognizing same-sex unions. The decision marked a major blow to activists who fought

for years to challenge the legal framework that excludes same-sex couples from marital protections. The court argued that marriage is defined in the Constitution as a union between a man and a woman, further cementing the status quo and leaving little room for immediate legislative or judicial change. This ruling not only halted momentum for legal recognition but also underscored the challenges of navigating deeply ingrained societal and institutional resistance to LGBTIQ equality. Moreover, it contravenes the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' Advisory Opinion No. 24/17, which established that states' obligations under the American Convention on Human Rights require them to recognize same-sex marriages.

Transgender people in Panama face significant legal and social challenges, exacerbated by restrictive policies on legal gender recognition. While name changes have been possible since 2006 under Law 31, and the 2016 Resolution 221 of the National Civil Registry streamlined some aspects of the process, changing one's sex marker on official documents remains highly restrictive. Current regulations require a forensic medical certification stating that a person's sex aligns with the requested correction, effectively making sex marker changes contingent on genital surgery. This requirement not only excludes many trans individuals from obtaining accurate identity documents but also exposes them to systemic discrimination in health care, education, and employment. In emergency situations, trans people's vulnerability is further heightened. According to Pau González, Director of Hombres Trans Panamá, "We saw it during the pandemic. In Panama, mobility restrictions were enforced based on a binary system—certain days for men, others for women. This left trans people in a vulnerable position, facing widespread discrimination. Despite our efforts to raise awareness and advocate for change through letters and public appeals, the policy remained in place for many months."<sup>633</sup>

The situation of intersex people's human rights in Panama remains largely unaddressed by the state, with no specific legal protections or policies in place to safeguard their rights. There is no legislation prohibiting medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex infants and children, leaving them vulnerable to non-consensual and irreversible medical interventions.

631 Centro Internacional de Estudios Políticos y Sociales, III Encuesta de Ciudadanía y Derechos, 2023, [https://cieps.org.pa/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/informe\\_ECD\\_CIEPS\\_2023.pdf](https://cieps.org.pa/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/informe_ECD_CIEPS_2023.pdf), 17, 28.

632 Aleida Samaniego, "Iniciativa Lgbtiq+ es desestimada: Asamblea Nacional frena modificación a la Ley 7", <https://www.prensa.com/sociedad/iniciativa-lgbtiq-es-desestimada-asamblea-nacional-frena-modificacion-a-la-ley-7/>, La Prensa, November 19, 2024.

633 Outright interview with Pau González, virtual, January 17, 2025.



Although the majority of Panamanians oppose same-sex marriage, a professional survey commissioned by Fundación Iguales in May 2023 revealed that 78 percent of Panamanians agree with the legal recognition of some rights for same-sex couples. The same survey indicates that 63 percent of Panamanians agree that transgender people should be able to update their identity documents to reflect the gender with which they identify.<sup>634</sup>

Iván Chanis, founder of Fundación Iguales, reflected in an interview with Outright:

How is Panama regarding the human rights of LGBT people? You can make a very negative analysis on the one hand and a positive one on the other. In terms of the State's response, we have taken a step backwards, but civil society has managed to strengthen itself, to be more resilient and creative, and has managed to mobilize more people who support LGBT rights.<sup>635</sup>

Pau Gonzalez shared Chanis' optimism regarding momentum for social change: "I was at the first LGBT march. From that date until now, I see much more participation. In addition, there are more groups, and we are more empowered."<sup>636</sup> The first Pride march took place in 2005, and an estimated 60 people took part; for the 2023 march, it was estimated that 15,000 people participated.<sup>637</sup>

## LGBTIQ Political Participation in Panama's 2024 Elections

The participation of LGBTIQ people in Panama's 2024 elections occurred in a context of political exclusion and, for the most part, invisibility. According to the Electoral Observatory for LGBTI+ Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is composed of CELAG (Centro

Estratégico Latinoamericano de Geopolítica) and ILGA LAC, most presidential candidates avoided addressing LGBTIQ issues in their platforms, and some opposed key rights such as marriage equality. The observatory's report warns that in the coming years, "LGBTI+ people will continue to face limitations in fully exercising their rights, with a government unlikely to develop policies for equality, inclusion, and the fight against discrimination."<sup>638</sup> This reflects a longstanding pattern in Panamanian politics, where sexual and gender diversity remains largely ignored in electoral debates.

There were no openly LGBTIQ candidates in the national election. The sole openly gay candidate in the local elections was television producer and Pride March organizer Franklyn Robinson, who ran unsuccessfully for council member of the city of Rio Abajo. When asked why there were not more openly LGBTIQ candidates, Pau González replied:

Many LGBTIQ people fear the consequences of running for political office. There is a fear of violence and discrimination. If there were an explicit legal framework to protect us, perhaps more people would be encouraged to participate.<sup>639</sup>

Chanis said that the only time LGBTIQ issues emerged in media reporting on the electoral campaign was when media outlets sought to measure how liberal the candidates were by asking about marriage equality, which the Supreme Court had ruled against a year earlier. Chanis critiqued this limited approach: "Instead of talking about non-discrimination, about the social rights of LGBTIQ people, in the media, everything revolved around marriage equality."<sup>640</sup>

Additionally, discriminatory narratives were present throughout the electoral process, reinforcing stereotypes and fostering an environment where the rights of LGBTIQ people are seen as secondary or politically inconvenient. One of the most striking examples was that of José Carrizo, the then vice president of Panama and presidential candidate, who at various points during

634 Sumarse, "Estudio muestra resultados contundentes: Aumenta la percepción positiva hacia los derechos de las parejas del mismo sexo en Panamá," September 2023, <https://ilbertisaac.com/estudio-muestra-resultados-contundentes-aumenta-la-percepcion-positiva-hacia-los-derechos-de-las-parejas-del-mismo-sexo-en-panama>.

635 Outright interview with Iván Chanis, virtual, January 16, 2025.

636 Gonzalez interview.

637 "Tras 20 años, pioneros LGBTIQ+ vuelven a las calles de Panamá," Metro Libre, May 24, 2024, <https://www.metrolibre.com/nacionales/tras-20-anos-pioneros-lgbtqi-vuelven-a-las-calles-en-panama-IH7458318>; "Más de 15 mil personas marcharon por el Orgullo y la igualdad de derechos en Panamá," TVN Noticias, July 1, 2023, [https://www.tvn-2.com/videos/noticias/video-15-mil-personas-marcharon-orgullo\\_8\\_2062845.html](https://www.tvn-2.com/videos/noticias/video-15-mil-personas-marcharon-orgullo_8_2062845.html).

638 CELGAG and ILGALAC, Elecciones presidenciales Panamá 2024, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PsTMjyRLpf8-q3zMVZs2krbcQ81XVoaz/view>, 1.

639 González interview.

640 Chanis interview.

the campaign came out against “gender ideology” and equal marriage. In one of his last speeches in the election campaign, he said: “I will govern with the fear of God because I am very aware that in his eyes there is nothing hidden on Earth...I am going to defend the family: in my Government, those born male are male and those born female are female.”<sup>641</sup>

In response to this political context, LGBTIQ organizations sent a public letter to the president of the Electoral Tribunal to express their concern about attacks directed toward groups protected by the American Convention on Human Rights. The letter stressed that no group deserves to be the target of attacks that compromise their physical or mental integrity. It also stated that history has shown that such attacks, if not stopped in time, can trigger tragic events that profoundly affect social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, leaving serious consequences on the social fabric and human dignity.<sup>642</sup> The letter received no response, but González highlighted the Tribunal’s leadership regarding trans people’s right to vote:

They have tried to ensure that we can vote without problems or discrimination. I remember that the Electoral Tribunal sent letters to the polling stations where trans people who had recently changed their name were going to vote to make sure they didn’t have any problems on voting day.<sup>643</sup>

Fundación Iguales monitored anti-LGBTIQ discourse in Panama on the social network X: “The increase in hate speech at key moments, such as elections and LGBTIQ+ Pride Month, demonstrates how these events catalyze the proliferation of hostile, discriminatory and misinformation-laden narratives.”<sup>644</sup> According to a report by Fundación Iguales, hate speech exacerbates social division and creates a hostile environment for

LGBTIQ individuals both online and offline:

The findings show that the hate narrative manifests itself in a variety of forms, from direct attacks to comments that, while less explicit, perpetuate stereotypes and demean the dignity of individuals. Likewise, the use of concepts such as “gender ideology” and scaremongering around policies such as [the UN’s] Agenda 2030 were identified. These narratives, laden with conspiracy theories that can influence public opinion, not only contribute to creating a state of fear and distort the debate on LGBTIQ+ rights but also sow distrust towards international institutions and efforts to promote inclusive and sustainable development.<sup>645</sup>

In response to this ongoing exclusion, activists mobilized to demand greater recognition and protection. LGBTIQ organizations introduced an “Ethical Electoral Pact for the Human Rights of the LGBTIQ+ Population in Panama” aimed at ensuring a discrimination-free electoral process and society.<sup>646</sup> The pact aimed to “ensure that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can fully exercise their right to vote and actively participate in the political and democratic life of the country, without fear of being discriminated against or excluded” and to “promote the inclusion and respect for the human rights of the LGBTIQ+ population in public policies, mainly in the area of anti-discrimination in Panama, thus contributing to the construction of a more just and equitable society for all.”

The pact included specific commitments for the candidates, such as “to develop political campaigns without messages that stigmatize any human group, especially the LGBTIQ+ population, based on national democratic principles and inter-American commitments to human rights.” It also asked those who emerged victorious to commit to actions when in office, such as supporting laws on hate crimes, equal marriage, and gender identity, and explicit inclusion of LGBTIQ people in the national census.

Despite the initiative’s significance, it received minimal

641 “Carrizo: ‘En mi gobierno el que nace hombre es hombre y que nace mujer es mujer,’” *MiDiario*, May 2, 2024, <https://www.midiario.com/nacionales/carrizo-en-mi-gobierno-el-que-nace-hombre-es-hombre-y-que-nace-mujer-es-mujer>.

642 Aleida Samaniego, “Elecciones 2024: personas Lgtbiq+ enfrentan la discriminación,” *La Prensa*, May 3, 2024, <https://www.prensa.com/sociedad/elecciones-2024-personas-lgtbiq-enfrentan-la-discriminacion>.

643 González interview.

644 Fundación Iguales, *Monitoreo del discurso LGBTIQ+ en el entorno digital de Panamá. Odio y LGBTIfobia durante las elecciones generales y el mes del orgullo 2024*, September 2024, <https://www.fundacioniguales.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/draft-Monitoreo-del-discurso-LGBTIQ-en-el-entorno-digital-en-Panamá.pdf>, 21.

645 *Ibid*, 21.

646 Ethical Electoral Pact for the Human Rights of the LGBTIQ+ Population in Panama, May 2024, [https://www.laestrella.com.pa/binrepository/pacto-etico-electoral-lgtbiq\\_181-6604890\\_20240402085216.pdf](https://www.laestrella.com.pa/binrepository/pacto-etico-electoral-lgtbiq_181-6604890_20240402085216.pdf).

support from presidential candidates. At the pact's presentation, only a vice presidential candidate from a ticket with limited electoral support attended the event, and other candidates did not subsequently sign on. The absence of other candidates highlighted a reluctance to publicly associate with LGBTIQ advocacy during the electoral period. Activists interpreted this lack of engagement as a reflection of the pervasive fear and homophobia within Panamanian society, which extends even to heterosexual allies concerned about potential social repercussions.

Iván Chanis told Outright that one takeaway from the election was that even if progress remained insufficient, "Panama has already changed. Not enough, but it has changed." He highlighted the fact that no mayoral, congressional, or presidential candidate who openly sought to capitalize on anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric was elected. He expressed hope that this shift will be reflected in the next electoral cycle, both in the strategies of political parties and in the emergence of LGBTIQ leaders willing to run for office. "It's important that this is reflected in the next electoral cycle, both for political parties and for LGBT leaders who want to run."<sup>647</sup>



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<sup>647</sup> Chanis interview.

## SNAPSHOT PORTUGAL:

# Holding the Line Against the Rise of the Far Right

Election: Legislative (March 10, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>648</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Portugal held snap elections on March 10, 2024, after then-Prime Minister Antonio Costa of the Socialist Party resigned following a corruption scandal.<sup>649</sup> All 230 legislative seats were contested. The center-right Democratic Alliance coalition, comprised of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the CDS–People’s Party, and the People’s Monarchist Party, won 80 seats of the required majority of 116, with a 28.8 percent share of the votes, while the Socialists became the main opposition in Parliament.<sup>650</sup>

## Political Engagement with LGBTIQ Issues

In the preelection period, Portuguese LGBTIQ activists compiled a list of candidates who had supported LGBTIQ inclusion while acting in their official capacity as parliamentarians, including several openly LGBTIQ politicians.<sup>651</sup> Activists also reviewed nine

parties’ platforms and found that only four parties comprehensively tackled legislative protections and other issues, such as LGBTIQ people’s health, education, housing, and employment, in their manifestos.<sup>652</sup> Three parties briefly mentioned some of these issues, and one party, the far-right populist Chega party, advanced anti-LGBTIQ proposals, discussed below, while the victorious Democratic Alliance failed to explicitly tackle LGBTIQ issues.<sup>653</sup> Pedro Carreira, a representative of ILGA Portugal who spoke to Outright, said of the Democratic Alliance:

AD’s electoral program presents proposals for gender equality but completely fails to mention the LGBTI+ issue. Also, the context of the tripartite leadership weakens the alliance when it comes to defending the rights of LGBTI+ people.<sup>654</sup>

ILGA Portugal encouraged LGBTIQ people to vote and hosted a video debate in February with representatives from the AD and the Socialist Party, along with the PAN (People–Animals, Nature), LIVRE (FREE/Time to Move Forward), IL (Liberal Initiative), CDU (United Democratic Coalition), and Left Block (BE).<sup>655</sup> The debate covered the inclusion of LGBTIQ people in health care, asylum and migration, education, and continued protections for existing self-determined legal gender recognition. During the debate, some political leaders admonished the weaponization of anti-gender rhetoric for political

648 OSCE, “Portugal, Early Parliamentary Elections, 10 March 2024: Needs Assessment Mission Report,” February 16, 2024, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/c/562773.pdf>.

649 Ana Nicolaci da Costa, “Portuguese PM António Costa resigns over lithium deal probe,” BBC News, November 7, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67346780>.

650 “Mapa oficial com o resultado da eleição e a relação dos deputados eleitos para a Assembleia da República realizada em 10 de março de 2024,” Diário La Republica, March 23, 2024 [https://www.cne.pt/sites/default/files/dl/2024\\_ar\\_mapa\\_oficial\\_dr.pdf](https://www.cne.pt/sites/default/files/dl/2024_ar_mapa_oficial_dr.pdf).

651 Ibid.

652 “Eleições Legislativas 2024: os programas políticos e as pessoas LGBTI+,” Dezanove, February 29, 2024, <https://dezanove.pt/eleicoes-legislativas-2024-os-programas-2078599>.

653 Ibid.

654 Outright email exchange with Pedro Carreira, March 21, 2025.

655 ILGA Portugal, “Legislativas 2024 – Debate com Foco na Diversidade e Inclusão,” YouTube February 26, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTyshcEnJns&t=3s>.



gain.<sup>656</sup> Isabel Moreira of the Socialist Party pointed out that, while anti-gender rhetoric had already permeated politics way before Chega entered parliament in 2019, the latter “broke all records” in hate speech, with devastating consequences for trans and queer youth.<sup>657</sup> Paulo Muacho of LIVRE, an ecosocialist party, criticized the inaction of mainstream political parties on the far-right’s online transphobic and racist speech, warning that the “PSD using the expression ‘gender ideology’ is the center-right adopting the language of the far-right.”<sup>658</sup> Both Moreira and Muacho asserted that the media cannot remain complicit in hateful rhetoric against LGBTIQ people.

The elections brought into power both queer people and their opponents. Mariana Mortagua, a lesbian and the national coordinator of the Left Bloc party, was reelected to parliament.<sup>659</sup> Paulo Rangel, an AD candidate and now the Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, is an out gay man—a significant feat for LGBTIQ political representation, given his key cabinet position.<sup>660</sup>

## Anti-LGBTIQ Political Rhetoric

However, several parties and political leaders involved in the coalition government engaged in exclusionary speech, according to Carreira of ILGA Portugal. Defense Minister João Nuno de Lacerda Teixeira de Melo, also known as Nuno Mel, of the CDS–People’s Party, criticized the discussion of LGBTIQ topics in schools and accused Radio and Television of Portugal of “promoting left-wing ideology through a youth series addressing gender,” while Gonçalo da Câmara Pereira of the People’s Monarchist Party “has been accused of sexist remarks, including justifying violence against women.”<sup>661</sup>

Carreira noted that Prime Minister Luis Montenegro of the Social Democratic Party “distanced himself from these statements in a 2024 debate,” but that he also had a checkered past.<sup>662</sup> Montenegro signed a 2004 statement that “linked sexual orientation to child abuse” in opposing the inclusion of sexual orientation in a comprehensive non-discrimination law, and proposed a 2014 referendum on adoption by same-sex couples, which controversially sought to subject human rights to a popular vote.<sup>663</sup>

The far-right party, Chega, dramatically increased its representation in Parliament from 12 to 50 seats on a platform that mobilized anti-gender tropes: combating “gender ideology propaganda,” protecting “traditional families,” and requiring trans people to use bathrooms according to their assigned sex at birth.<sup>664</sup> Chega attempted to scapegoat “gender ideology” for the exclusion of young people from economic and social opportunities:

[Young people] have a citizenship course that imposes gender ideology, but they are denied the chance to take a financial literacy course that is decisive for their future.<sup>665</sup>

Chega has also attempted to divide the population by

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ual-de-menores; Rita Dinis, “PSD admite incluir referendo à adoção por casais gay no programa eleitoral,” *Observador*, January 15, 2015, <https://observador.pt/2015/01/15/psd-admite-incluir-referendo-adoacao-por-casais-gay-no-programa-eleitoral>; Nuno Melo (@NunoMeloMDN), “RTPS & C.º não,” X, June 27, 2020, <https://x.com/NunoMeloMDN/status/1276948844547366919>; “Inês Sousa Real acusa AD de desvalorizar direitos das mulheres. Montenegro demarca-se,” *Negócios*, February 11, 2024, <https://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/economia/detalhe/ines-sousa-real-acusa-ad-de-desvalorizar-direitos-das-mulheres-montenegro-demarca-se>; Parliament of Portugal, “Votes Cast on December 23, 2021,” December 23, 2021, [https://www.publico.pt/2023/12/15/p3/noticia/parlamento-aprova-direito-autodeterminacao-genero-escolas-casas-banho-neutras-2073886](https://app.parlamento.pt/WebUtils/docs/doc.pdf?Path=2uHUFdkzhC1qLitVRJRZoqs6SylqEJZlCw8IKXjIClyu-73vCvbcNsGLACHlivKhb2zXsSNTs%2bzYleRdKHwGj00YU5vKELuOpigpX-SXUvEuKI6U4z0nlRAiaWjyxpMSwYNIQGrGgLDpKWDW%2fwelRMwJpYy-CLdbTfnf9ZBY8QEOW559pOWvPDcZeB8G4S6O03hB8DLUVK4%2biYKY-FBdLhmOq%2fcGypQqI%2fzLL2m2f%2bgnyLaqV0ze57bPEyFDTF0Y8jwxy-HLpR4FhNC0dUWz5%2bq4Dg%2f4lI3FdKTE5eohUZ%2bienjqTFDUso-0q7ZVXyDQNZDwPDVwjlRemRTrJHn80Hkcai%2fHRbecVLrlsCvpC9%2fhlIenx4TswHwCD52BZRzoxHZKIRuAgk8OHVq4hoKXQXi%2bldc5U18MaQsU-zhX7HMQ%3d&Fich=XV_2_33_2023-12-21_ResultadoVotacoes_2023-12-21.pdf&Inline=true; “Parlamento aprova direito à autodeterminação de género nas escolas,” <i>Público</i>, December 15, 2023 <a href=).

662 Carreira email exchange.

663 “Portuguese may vote on gay adoptions in a proposed referendum,” *El País*, January 17, 2014, [https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2014/01/17/inenglish/1389984248\\_663756.html](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2014/01/17/inenglish/1389984248_663756.html).

664 Chegal, “Programa Eleitoral: Limpar Portugal,” 2024, <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:137d87f0-7541-44de-8be3-818c14d-181lf?viewer%2lmegaVerb=group-discover, 42, 63, 64, 90>.

665 Ibid, 63.

656 Ibid.

657 Ibid, 1:19:13–1:23:21.

658 Ibid, 1:33:01–1:37:03.

659 “Candidatos e candidatas que lutam ao nosso lado pelos Direitos LGBTI+,” *Dezanove*, March 5, 2024 <https://dezanove.pt/candidatos-que-lutam-ao-nosso-lado-2095934>.

660 Sonia Sapage, “Paulo Rangel fala sobre a sua homossexualidade: ‘Foi uma coisa que nunca escondi,’” *Público*, September 4, 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2021/09/04/politica/noticia/paulo-rangel-fala-homossexualidade-escondi-1976298>; *Republica Portuguesa*, “Biography: Paulo Rangel–Minister of State and Foreign Affairs,” accessed April 1, 2025, <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/en/gc24/ministries/foreign-affairs>.

661 Carreira email exchange. See also Salome Leal, “Luís Montenegro já assinou declaração de voto que associava a homossexualidade ao abuso sexual de menores?,” *Polígrafo*, December 16, 2023, <https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/fact-check/luís-montenegro-ja-assinou-declaracao-de-voto-que-associava-a-homossexualidade-ao-abuso-sex>.

promising to cut government subsidies for organizations that promote “gender ideology,” an amount Chega’s president baselessly estimated at 400 million euros, and redirect it to military personnel and veterans.<sup>666</sup>

Due to allegations that Prime Minister Montenegro had conflicts of interest due to his business ventures, a confidence vote was called for, which he lost. As a result, snap elections were held again in May 2025.<sup>667</sup> While Montenegro maintained his position as Prime Minister, Chega gained even more seats than in 2024, overtaking the Socialist Party as the second largest party in parliament.<sup>668</sup> Carreira from ILGA Portugal said LGBTIQ people in Portugal felt “disappointment” at the growth of Chega, “a party that from the beginning has exploited the issue of human rights of minorities, namely LGBTIQ, for political gain.”<sup>669</sup>

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666 “Ventura promete cortar todos os subsídios às associações da igualdade de género,” dnoticias.pt, January 13, 2024, <https://www.dnoticias.pt/2024/1/13/389963-ventura-promete-cortar-todos-os-subsidios-as-associacoes-da-igualdade-de-genero>.

667 “Portugal’s government loses confidence vote, setting stage for new election,” Al Jazeera, March 12, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/12/portugals-government-loses-confidence-vote-setting-stage-for-new-election>.

668 Eunice Lourenço, “Deputados da emigração divididos entre Chega e AD, PS não eleger: Ventura confirmado como líder do maior partido da oposição,” Expresso, May 28, 2025.

669 Carreira email exchange.

**Right:** Activists from ILGA Portugal with a banner saying, “For an LGBTI+ Friendly National Health Service” during the 25th Lisbon Pride March, July 6, 2024. Credit: ILGA Portugal.



# SNAPSHOT ROMANIA:

## “A Referendum on the Acceptance of LGBTIQ People”

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Elections: Local (June 9), presidential (November 24), and parliamentary (December 1)

Was the election considered free and fair? Partly free<sup>670</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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In 2021, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) described Romania’s requirement for trans people to undergo surgery to attain legal gender recognition as an “impossible dilemma,” forcing them to undergo surgery they may not want or sacrifice equal recognition before the law.<sup>671</sup> Public life for LGBTIQ people in the country is also an impossible dilemma. Romania banned discrimination based on sexual orientation in 2000 and decriminalized consensual same-sex sexual relations in 2001, but in recent years, LGBTIQ equality has been backsliding.<sup>672</sup>

Romania has one of the lowest scores in the European

Union for LGBTIQ people’s openness about their gender or sexuality.<sup>673</sup> It also scores higher than the EU average on discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ people.<sup>674</sup> There are no discrimination protections based on gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics. Romanian law does not explicitly regulate conversion practices or non-consensual medical interventions on intersex minors. Same-sex relationships remain unrecognized, despite a ruling from the ECtHR in 2023 condemning Romania for this violation of the right to privacy and family life.<sup>675</sup>

As discussed below, politicians have been weaponizing hate and introducing so-called LGBT propaganda laws and other hostile legislation.<sup>676</sup>

### A Year of Elections in Romania

2024 was a busy year for elections in Romania, with three internal elections and the European Parliament polls. The

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670 International Foundation for Electoral Systems, The Romanian 2024 Election Annulment: Addressing Emerging Threats to Electoral Integrity, December 20, 2024, <https://www.ifes.org/publications/romanian-2024-election-annulment-addressing-emerging-threats-electoral-integrity>.

671 X and Y v. Romania, European Court of Human Rights, Cases 2145/16 and 20607/16, Judgment of January 19, 2021, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%222002-13101%22%7D>.

672 Alison Mutler, “Romanian Same-Sex Couples Become Talking Point Ahead Of Key Elections,” Radio Free Europe, December 7, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/romania-same-sex-couples-talking-point-elections/32719860.html>.

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673 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “EU LGBTIQ survey III LGBTIQ Equality at a Crossroads: Progress and Challenges Country Data – Romania,” 2024, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/lgbtiq-survey-2024-country-sheet-romania.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/lgbtiq-survey-2024-country-sheet-romania.pdf). See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, EU LGBTIQ Survey III, 2024, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/2024/eu-lgbtiq-survey-iii>.

674 Ibid.

675 Case of Buhuceanu and others v. Romania, European Court of Human Rights, Judgment of May 23, 2023, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%222001-224774%22%7D>.

676 Alison Mutler, “First Russia, Then Hungary, Now Romania Is Considering A ‘Gay Propaganda’ Law,” Radio Free Europe, June 26, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/romania-lgbtq-rights-bill-gay-propaganda-law/31915661.html>.

center-left Social Democratic Party (PSD) led local polls held in June, securing the most mayorships and county and local council positions, followed by the National Liberal Party (PNL), a Christian Democratic political party. Parliamentary elections in December resulted in the PSD losing 25 seats but remaining the biggest party in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The right-wing populist Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), winning 30 new seats in the Chamber of Deputies, secured the biggest gains and became the second biggest party in parliament.

The presidential election complicated PSD's dominance in local governments and parliament. The first round on November 24 resulted in the surprise win of populist Călin Georgescu, who ran as an independent but was affiliated with the AUR until 2022. As he did not secure a majority, he qualified for a second round, against Elena Lasconi of the liberal Save Romania Union (USR). However, the Constitutional Court then annulled the election, citing declassified intelligence on coordinated Russian interference in Georgescu's favor.<sup>677</sup>

New presidential elections were held in May 2025, with Georgescu being barred from running as he faces several criminal investigations.<sup>678</sup> Analysts believe that many of those who had voted for Georgescu in November shifted their support to AUR candidate George Simion, who won the first round of the vote on May 4, 2025.<sup>679</sup> He lost in the second round to former Bucharest mayor Nicușor Daniel Dan, who ran as an independent and won thanks to a higher turnout of voters who "wanted a middle path between bitterly polarized political camps," as The New York Times put it.<sup>680</sup>

## Campaigning with Hate

Leading up to the first round of the presidential election,

"the vote had effectively become a referendum on the social acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people," Anca Baltac of Romanian LGBTIQ organization Asociația Accept told Outright. "Far-right actors placed LGBTIQ+ rights at the center of their campaigns, using them as a tool for polarization."<sup>681</sup>

An analysis of social media and blog posts during the 2024 campaign period demonstrates an increase in anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric, especially after Georgescu's win in November.<sup>682</sup> Georgescu, who notably ran his campaign through TikTok and other social media platforms, said he was "against LGBT+" and vowed to pursue laws prohibiting so-called LGBT propaganda.<sup>683</sup> On TikTok, his supporters and paid influencers amplified anti-LGBTIQ narratives, arguing that his defeat would lead to the further "colonization" of Romania by the EU, a future where "men will hold hands and dress in skirts."<sup>684</sup> MEP candidates from far-right parties, like the Romanian National Conservative Party and SOS Romania, resorted to misinformation around gender identity on TikTok, painting trans people as a threat to women.<sup>685</sup>

Both PSD and AUR "amplified [hateful] messages, further mainstreaming discriminatory rhetoric" on their official social media pages, prompting Asociația Accept to file parallel complaints with election authorities and the police.<sup>686</sup> While politicians put a target on LGBTIQ people's backs, Baltac said, "state institutions failed to intervene. Complaints filed under electoral and anti-discrimination

681 Outright email exchange with Anca Baltac, Asociația Accept, July 21, 2025.

682 ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2025>, 117.

683 Adam Parsons, "Calin Georgescu: The ex-soil scientist who rose to prominence on TikTok and is on course to be Romania's next president," Sky News, December 5, 2024, <https://news.sky.com/story/cal-in-georgescu-the-ex-soil-scientist-who-rose-to-prominence-on-tiktok-and-is-on-course-to-be-romania-s-next-president-13267482>; "Călin Georgescu, mesaj de ură la adresa minorităților sexuale: Sunt împotriva LGBTQ," G4 Media, February 24, 2025, <https://www.g4media.ro/cal-in-georgescu-mesaj-de-ura-la-adresa-minoritatilor-sexuale-sunt-impotriva-lgbtq.html>.

684 Ludmila Țurcanu, "Russian narratives promoted by pro-Georgescu influencers on Instagram and TikTok," Verifica, December 4, 2024, <https://www.veridica.ro/en/2024-year-of-the-great-reset/russian-narratives-promoted-by-pro-georgescu-influencers-on-instagram-and-tiktok>.

685 Julia Stanoiu, "The Network of Lies on TikTok: Romanian MEPs spread disinformation, conspiracies, Russian propaganda and incite hatred," Context, June 20, 2024, <https://context.ro/reteaua-minciunilor-pe-tiktok-europarlamentari-romani-rostogolesc-dezinformari-conspiratii-propaganda-rusa-si-incita-la-ura>.

686 Baltac email exchange. See also ILGA-Europe, Annual Review 2025, 117, 120.

677 Madalin Necsutu and Anthony Faiola, "Romanian court annuls presidential vote after Russian interference claims," The Washington Post, December 6, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/12/06/romania-court-annuls-presidential-election/>.

678 Sarah Rainsford and Laura Gozzi, "Final ruling bars far-right Georgescu from Romanian vote," BBC, March 11, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj679nk6endo>.

679 Nick Thorpe, "Nationalist Simion wins first round of Romanian election rerun," BBC, May 5, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj-0zll702ego>.

680 Andrew Higgins, "In Upset, Centrist Wins Romania's Presidential Election," The New York Times, May 18, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/18/world/europe/nicutor-dan-romania-election.html>.



laws were either redirected between institutions or left unresolved.”<sup>687</sup> Asociația Accept filed a criminal complaint regarding a TikTok video of an interview clip of an individual speaking in support of marriage equality that was modified to add “a brutal montage of intense blows to the head, designed to dehumanize and incite violence against LGBT+ individuals.”<sup>688</sup> Six months after the group submitted the complaint, according to Baltac, “the victim has not been summoned for questioning, and no investigative steps have been communicated.”<sup>689</sup> As for election authorities, Baltac said they declined jurisdiction for one complaint and did not respond to another. The hateful posts remained online as of writing.<sup>690</sup>

MozaiQ, another Romanian LGBTIQ group, decried the “outpouring of hatred of anti-Semitic, racist, homophobic and transphobic or sexist and misogynistic origins in which minorities become targets of hatred” in “various platforms and even in the mainstream press.” The organization filed a criminal complaint regarding online posts urging the destruction of MozaiQ’s headquarters.<sup>691</sup>

LGBTIQ issues came up formally in a televised debate between four presidential candidates on November 18. While several candidates backed “some form of civil partnership” for same-sex couples, only Elena Lasconi of the liberal Save Romania Union (USR) “fully embrace[d] the need” for recognition of same-sex partnerships as part of a democracy’s obligation to ensure the rights of minorities. George Simion of the AUR rejected the concept of civil unions, instead proposing unspecified “legal solutions without inventing a replacement for marriage, which is the basis of society.”<sup>692</sup>

Political opponents quickly jumped on Lasconi’s rights-based stance to “launch a wave of hostile rhetoric,” Baltac recounted. “What began as a political position quickly escalated into a large-scale digital campaign

that portrayed LGBTIQ+ people as a threat to ‘faith,’ ‘family,’ and ‘national values.’”<sup>693</sup>

## Hostile Legislation Leading up to Polls

Leading up to the elections, politicians seized the opportunity to file anti-LGBTIQ laws. In February 2024, AUR launched an initiative to revise the Constitution to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman, but it was not successful.<sup>694</sup> While the Constitution defines marriage in gender-neutral terms, Romania does not offer any form of legal recognition to same-sex couples, for which Romania was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights in May 2023.<sup>695</sup>

On June 1, 2024, on Children’s Day in Romania, and eight days before the June 9 local elections, AUR issued a statement calling on all political parties to support a “National Pact for Saving the Innocence of Children” that would prohibit young people’s participation in LGBTQ events without parental consent.<sup>696</sup> For Baltac, this was merely a “form of campaign posturing,” and to the best of their knowledge, no political party responded to AUR’s call.<sup>697</sup> This attempted pact echoes the failed 2023 legislative proposal from two former AUR members to ban information related to LGBTIQ identities under the guise of protecting children from pornography.<sup>698</sup> In November 2024, two independent MPs proposed a law banning public demonstrations for LGBTIQ people in

693 Baltac email exchange.

694 “VIDEO Protest LGBT în fața sediului partidului extremist AUR, după ce așa numita Coaliție pentru Constituție a lansat o inițiativă pentru redefinirea familiei în legea fundamentală / Manifestanții acuză că au fost agresați,” G4 Media, February 2, 2024, <https://www.g4media.ro/foto-protest-lgbt-in-fata-sediului-partidului-extremist-aur-dupa-ce-asa-nu-mita-coalitie-pentru-constitutie-a-lansat-o-iniiativa-pentru-redefinirea-familiei-in-legea-fundamentala.html>.

695 International Federation for Human Rights, “Romania condemned by European Court of Human Rights for the lack of legal recognition for same-sex couples,” June 9, 2023, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/lgbtqi-rights/romania-condemned-by-european-court-of-human-rights-for-the-lack-of>.

696 Chronicler, “AUR cere interzicerea propagandei LGBTQ în școli,” Active News, June 1, 2024, [https://www.activenews-ro.translate.google.com/stiri/AUR-cere-interzicerea-propagandei-LGBTQ-in-scoli-189711?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=auto&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=fr](https://www.activenews-ro.translate.google.com/stiri/AUR-cere-interzicerea-propagandei-LGBTQ-in-scoli-189711?_x_tr_sl=auto&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=fr).

697 Baltac email exchange, August 14, 2025.

698 “Evdochia Aelenei a depus la Senat proiectul „Copilarie Fără Pornografie”: s-au strâns 100.000 de semnături de la cetățeni” (Evdochia Aelenei submitted the “Childhood Without Pornography” project to the Senate: 100,000 signatures were collected from citizens), Focus Press, February 17, 2023, <https://focuspress.ro/evdochia-aelenei-a-depus-la-senat-proiectul-copilarie-fara-pornografie-s-au-strans-100-000-de-semnat-uri-de-la-cetateni>.

687 Baltac email exchange.

688 Ibid.

689 Ibid.

690 Ibid.

691 Andreea Tudor, “Asociația MozaiQ reclamă indemnuri la distrugerea sediului din București, difuzate online. Proiect de lege anti-LGBTQ depus de un parlamentar din Ilfov,” Buletin de București, November 26, 2024, <https://buletin.de/bucuresti/asociatia-mozaiq-reclama-indemnuri-la-distrugerea-sediului-din-bucuresti-difuzate-online-proiect-de-lege-anti-lgbtq-depus-de-un-parlamentar-din-ilfov>.

692 Carmen Paun, “4 takeaways from Romania’s presidential debate,” Politico, November 19, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/takeaways-from-romanas-presidential-debate>.

spaces accessible to minors, similar to the Hungarian law that has been used as a pretext to ban Pride.<sup>699</sup> As of writing, these bills have not been passed into law.

## Political Wins for Equality

This election year was marked by some advances in LGBTIQ political participation. Activist Florin Buhuceanu became the first openly gay candidate in Romania's history. Buhuceanu ran for MP to counter anti-gender movement and extremist parties, who, he said, fill the vacuum left by the lack of LGBTIQ political representation in the country.<sup>700</sup> Buhuceanu's candidacy, symbolically important but ultimately unsuccessful, was complemented by the victory of Romanian MEP Nicolae Ștefănuță, who openly supported LGBTIQ equality during the campaign.<sup>701</sup>

The Central Electoral Bureau issued a circular on respectful interaction with trans persons in the electoral context to all county-level electoral bureaus ahead of the 2024 local and EU elections. The circular was developed by Asociația Accept to address restrictions that trans people faced in previous elections, in part as a result of difficulties in obtaining legal gender recognition.<sup>702</sup> This triggered anti-LGBTIQ backlash and a wave of misinformation from far-right groups and politicians.<sup>703</sup>

699 Andreea Tudor, "Asociația MozaiQ reclamă indemnuri la distrugerea sediului din București, difuzate online. Proiect de lege anti-LGBTQ depus de un parlamentar din Ilfov," Buletin de București, November 26, 2024, <https://buletin.de/bucuresti/asociatia-mozaiq-reclama-indemnuri-la-distrugerea-sediului-din-bucuresti-difuzate-online-proiect-de-lege-anti-lgbtq-depus-de-un-parlamentar-din-ilfov>.

700 Lucy Middleton, "Romania's first openly gay candidate seeks power to win change," Context, November 13, 2024, <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/romania-s-first-openly-gay-candidate-seeks-power-to-win-change>.

701 Florin Marinescu, "Cine este Nicu Ștefănuță, singurul independent care a câștigat un mandat de europarlamentar / Și-a asumat deschis temele progresiștilor și se definește ca fiind un aliat al 'comunității LGBTQIA+'," G4 Media, June 11, 2024, <https://www.g4media.ro/cine-este-nicu-stefanuta-singurul-independent-care-a-castigat-un-mandat-de-europarlamentar-si-a-asumat-deschis-temele-progresisti-lor-si-se-defineste-ca-fiind-un-aliat-al-comunitatii-lgbtqi.html>.

702 Romania has been condemned by both the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) for not establishing a clear procedure for legal gender recognition. See Case of X. and T. v. Romania, European Court of Human Rights, Apps. No. 2145/16 and 20607/16, April 19, 2021, [https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?jsessionid=17A8B884B-DC3AB8162DF1AB8BD4C2B17?text=&docid=290695&pageIndex=0&doclang=FR&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=4057740](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-207364; Case C-4/23 [Mirin], Court of Justice of the European Union, Judgment of the Grand Chamber of October 4, 2024, <a href=).

703 OCDL, "OCDL solicită retragerea circularei BEC ce promovează

Mihai Enache, a candidate for Mayor of Bucharest representing the far-right AUR party, condemned the move, claiming that "these people are destroying Romanian society step by step, and the only way to stop them is through voting!"<sup>704</sup>

Despite the backlash, the Central Electoral Bureau stood by its decision and ordered its full implementation by local election authorities. It has fully integrated ACCEPT's recommendations into its procedures, marking "the first formal inclusion of transgender protections in Romanian electoral procedures."<sup>705</sup> ACCEPT, which set up a call center to respond to the concerns of LGBTIQ voters on election day, did not receive reports of severe difficulties faced by trans people.<sup>706</sup> While there were some trans people whose recent updates to their names and gender



identitatea de gen," May 29, 2024, <https://www.ocdl.ro/ocdl-solicita-retragerea-circularei-bec-ce-promoveaza-identitatea-de-gen>.

704 Baltac email exchange. See also ILGA-Europe, Annual Review 2025, 117; "Mihai Enache, AUR candidate for Mayor of the Capital in 2024, complained about by LGBT activists after he spoke about protecting children from 'deviant ideologies'," Rost Online, August 20, 2024, <https://www.ros-tonline.ro/2024/08/mihai-enache-candidatul-aur-la-primaria-capital-ei-in-2024-reclamat-de-activisti-lgbt-dupa-ce-a-vorbit-despre-protejarea-copiiilor-de-ideologiile-deviante>.

705 Baltac email exchange.

706 Ibid.

**Right:** Panel discussion on LGBTIQ issues and the 2024 Romanian presidential election with NGO representatives and political analysts.  
Credit: Claudiu Popescu.

markers had not been reflected on the electronic voter registration system, issues were resolved on site.<sup>707</sup>

This year of elections in Romania was “unlike any other,” Baltac emphasized, for the “unprecedented level of public discourse around LGBTIQ+ rights.” Despite facing hostility, LGBTIQ people showed up and asserted their place in democracy:

LGBTIQ+ individuals across the country mobilized. Many of them contacted our support services, submitted complaints, monitored polling stations, and participated in the electoral process. Many voted for the first time, driven by a sense of urgency and determination to be seen and respected as equal citizens. The 2024 elections revealed both the structural gaps in Romania’s legal and institutional responses to hate and the resilience of our communities. While the threats were real and damaging, the momentum generated by civic participation offers a path forward.<sup>708</sup>

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707 Ibid. See also Laura Popa, “Reportaj: La vot cu Flo, un bărbat trans-gender. ‘Noi existăm doar dacă putem fi țapi ispășitori,’” Press One, June 10, 2024, <https://pressone.ro/reportaj-la-vot-cu-flo-un-barbat-transgender-noi-existam-doar-daca-putem-fi-tapi-ispasitori>.

708 Baltac email exchange.

# CASE STUDY SENEGAL:

# Progress and Peril

# at the Polls

Election: Presidential (March 24, 2024) and Parliamentary (November 17, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>709</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

## Background

The 2024 presidential and legislative elections in Senegal took place amid a volatile political climate marked by deep polarization and escalating unrest. After two terms in office, President Macky Sall announced he would not seek a controversial third term, opening the field to new contenders.<sup>710</sup> However, a chaotic parliamentary session in early February led to a postponement of the election, initially scheduled for February 25, to late 2024, sparking protests that the security forces violently repressed. Police killed at least three people, injured dozens, and arrested over 270.<sup>711</sup>

This turmoil followed several years of democratic backsliding, including the jailing of opposition figures and suppression of dissent. Notably, a survey carried out by a group of journalists, cartographers, and scientists, relayed by several media, revealed that 65 people were

shot dead, mainly by security forces, between 2021 and 2024 during widespread demonstrations against the government's policies.<sup>712</sup> These deaths are highlighted to underscore the human cost of political repression during Sall's second term and the urgent need for democratic reform.

Ultimately, the presidential election was held on March 24, 2024, with 20 candidates from traditional political parties and coalitions as well as independent candidates.<sup>713</sup> The presidential election resulted in a historic transfer of power: opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye of the party Patriotes Africains du Sénégal pour le Travail, l'Éthique et la Fraternité (PASTEF) was elected President, ending the 12-year rule of the incumbent Macky Sall. Diomaye Faye, a 43-year-old tax inspector running in place of the barred opposition leader Ousmane Sonko—who, despite substantial popular support, was rendered ineligible due to politically motivated legal troubles—became the first new Senegalese head of state in over a decade.<sup>714</sup> The new government formally assumed duty on April 8, 2024.<sup>715</sup> In September 2024, the

709 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - Senegal," accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/senegal/freedom-world/2025>.

710 "Senegal President Macky Sall says he won't run for third term," BBC, July 3, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66093983>.

711 Human Rights Watch, "Senegal: Delayed Elections Spark Violence, Repression," February 14, 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/12/senegal-delayed-elections-spark-violence-repression-0#:~:text=Demonstrations%20broke%20out%20in%20Dakar%2C,injured%20and%20arrested%20during%20protests.>

712 "Violences Au Sénégal De 2021 À 2024: 65 Morts, Dont 51 Jeunes Tués Par Balles," AFP, March 4, 2025, <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/violences-au-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-de-2021-%C3%A0-2024-65-morts-surtout-des-jeunes-tu%C3%A9s-par-balles/7997384.html>; CartograFreeSenegal, "CartograFreeSenegal - Mémorial Des Victimes Des Manifestations Au Sénégal," accessed July 29, 2025, <https://www.cartografree.sn>.

713 Direction Générale des Élections, Commission Électorale Nationale Autonome - CENA, "RAPPORT SUR L'ÉLECTION PRÉSIDENTIELLE DU 24 MARS 2024," 2024, <https://dge.sn/rapports-et-seminaires>.

714 "Bassirou Diomaye Faye Wins Senegalese Presidential Election With 54.28% of Votes," Africanews, March 27, 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2024/03/27/bassirou-diomaye-faye-wins-senegalese-presidential-election-with-5428-of-votes>; Deutsche Welle, "Senegal Election: Opposition Leader Sonko Excluded From Vote," DW, January 21, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/senegal-election-opposition-leader-sonko-excluded-from-vote/a-68043961>.

715 "Sénégal: Sobre Passation De Pouvoir Entre Sidiki Kaba Et Le Premier Ministre Ousmane Sonko," RFI, April 8, 2024, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/>



new government dissolved the National Assembly, which was dominated by the former president's coalition, and organized anticipated legislative elections on November 17, following the constitutional council's confirmation of the legality of the action. Forty-one political parties and coalitions contested the election, which resulted in a parliamentary majority for PASTEF.<sup>716</sup>

International election observers—including from the African Union and the European Union—concluded that, overall, the elections were free and fair.<sup>717</sup>

## LGBTQ People in Senegal: Stigma, Discrimination, and Violence Before Elections

For LGBTQ people in Senegal, the political context described above intersects with a longstanding climate of institutional discrimination and social exclusion. Pervasive social homophobia, conservative interpretations of Islam, and legal restrictions, including the criminalization of same-sex sexual relations under Article 319 of the Penal Code, contribute to the ongoing marginalization of LGBTQ people.<sup>718</sup>

Homosexuality and non-conforming gender expressions are widely viewed as contrary to Senegalese cultural and religious values. Many religious leaders preach against homosexuality. A telling example came in May 2021, when a coalition of religious associations, including the influential NGO Jamra and the collective And Samm Jikko Yi, organized a mass rally in Dakar to denounce homosexuality, under slogans like “No to Homosexuality”

and “No to Western Immoral Values.”<sup>719</sup> This was followed by a second rally in February 2022.<sup>720</sup> Thousands attended, and politicians took note. And Samm Jikko Yi (ASJY) is an umbrella group of conservative Islamic NGOs leading an anti-gender movement in Senegal; the group had been lobbying for years for stricter laws against homosexuality.<sup>721</sup>

Amadou A., a 37-year-old gay man, told us that “violence and attacks [against LGBTQ people] are frequent in Senegal.”<sup>722</sup> Indeed, human rights organizations and the media have documented numerous cases of violence against LGBTQ people, including public assaults that have been filmed and posted on social media.<sup>723</sup>

Senegal's political class has consistently used anti-LGBTQ rhetoric as a populist tool, knowing that it resonates with the conservative majority.<sup>724</sup> Supporting the human rights of LGBTQ people is essentially a political taboo; no major party or leader has ever campaigned on a platform of decriminalization or anti-discrimination protections. At best, a few leaders have occasionally urged moderation; for instance, President Sall stated in 2013 that Senegal was “not ready” to decriminalize homosexuality but implied the law was sufficient as is, resisting calls to make it harsher.<sup>725</sup> More often, politicians seek to outdo each other in signaling opposition to homosexuality. In late 2021, in part as a result of religious coalitions' advocacy, a group of MPs introduced a draft law to increase the maximum sentence for same-sex acts to 10 years, explicitly aiming to “toughen” the existing law, though this

[afrique/20240408-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-passation-de-pouvoir-sobre-entre-sidiki-kaba-et-le-premier-ministre-ousmane-sonko](https://www.afrique/20240408-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-passation-de-pouvoir-sobre-entre-sidiki-kaba-et-le-premier-ministre-ousmane-sonko).

716 Direction Générale des Élections, “Déclarations De Candidatures Reçues En Vue Des Élections Législatives Anticipées du 17 Novembre 2024,” accessed July 1, 2025, <https://dge.sn/declarations-de-candidatures-re-cues-en-vue-des-elections-legislatives-anticipees-du-17-novembre-2024/>; Rukanga, Nicolas Negoce and Basillioh. “Senegal Election: Pastef Claims Large Victory in Legislative Polls,” BBC, November 18, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clwj4dwjlp>.

717 Mission d'observation électorale de l'Union européenne au Sénégal, “Déclaration Préliminaire De La MOE UE Sénégal 2024,” accessed July 29, 2025, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-2024/d%C3%A9claration-pr%C3%A9liminaire-de-la-moe-ue-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-2024\\_fr](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-2024/d%C3%A9claration-pr%C3%A9liminaire-de-la-moe-ue-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-2024_fr).

718 In Senegal, this provision is regularly used to prosecute and often charge individuals, unlike many other countries with similar provisions. See Human Rights Watch, “Senegal: Quash Conviction of 7 for ‘Acts Against Nature’,” August, 28, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/08/28/senegal-quash-conviction-7-acts-against-nature>.

719 Ibrahima Diallo, “LA RUE CRIMINALISE L'HOMOSEXUALITÉ,” SenePlus, May 25, 2021, <https://www.senepus.com/societe/la-rue-criminalise-lhomosexualite-au-senegal>.

720 Zeenat Hansrod, “Demonstrators in Senegal Call for Tougher Laws Against Homosexuals,” RFI, February 22, 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20220222-demonstrators-in-senegal-call-for-tougher-laws-against-homosexuals>.

721 Ousmane Goudiaby, “RASSEMBLEMENT CONTRE L'HOMOSEXUALITÉ A LA PLACE DE LA NATION,” SenePlus, February 21, 2022, <https://www.senepus.com/societe/rassemblement-contre-lhomosexualite-la-place-de-la-nation-and>.

722 Outright interview with Amadou A. (pseudonym), virtual, March 12, 2025.

723 “Terror sweeps Senegal's gay community after a series of assaults,” The Observers/France 24, June 15, 2021, <https://observers.france24.com/en/africa/20210615-senegal-gay-community-homophobia-assaults>.

724 Bertolt, Boris, and Lea Massé, “Mapping Political Homophobia in Senegal,” African Studies Quarterly 18, no. 4 (2019): 21–39. <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/122028>.

725 Anne Look, “Senegal Rejects Obama's Push for Gay Rights,” Voice of America, June 28, 2013, <https://www.voanews.com/a/senegal-rejects-obamas-push-for-gay-rights/1691260.html>.

bill was ultimately shelved during Sall's tenure.<sup>726</sup>

The 2024 elections had heightened stakes for LGBTQ Senegalese. Many feared that if vehemently homophobic politicians came to power, the bill proposing harsher punitive measures would be enacted, further stripping them of rights and increasing persecution. On the other hand, some held cautious optimism that a change in leadership might at least maintain the status quo, especially if international scrutiny on the new government was high.

A consistent theme in our interviews was that participants approached the election with a defensive mindset: the priority was preventing a more aggressively homophobic regime from taking power. When asked about the most important issues in the election, all five interviewees immediately brought up LGBTQ people's safety and the looming threat of a new anti-homosexuality law. For example, Oumou D., a 30-year-old lesbian, explained that her top concern was:

[To] prevent certain politicians from tightening the law on LGBT people. I'd heard about the possibility of proposing a law to criminalize homosexuality...to change the sentence from five years to 10 years or more. That really upset me.<sup>727</sup>

Similarly, Lamarquise, a 29-year-old trans woman, said she had decided to vote for the ruling party's candidate, Amadou Ba, precisely because he was aligned with the incumbent president Macky Sall:

I think we would have had more tolerance with this president than with the PASTEF candidate. We've seen what Macky Sall has done. He was more fluid regarding [our] community. During the campaign, the current opposition had a clearly homophobic stance...

Lamarquise added that she had refused to vote in the subsequent legislative elections "because there was a threat of a law criminalizing homosexuality, and neither [the PASTEF or the Sall's] party seemed like a safe bet at

that point" and because she was convinced there would be a PASTEF victory.<sup>728</sup>

## Political Campaigns and Anti-Gender Rhetoric in the Preelection Period

Contentious circumstances surrounded the organization of the elections. PASTEF party leader Ousmane Sonko had been convicted in August 2023 for "immoral behavior toward youth under 21 years," while its presidential candidate, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, was placed in pretrial detention in April 2023 for "spreading false news, contempt of court, and defamation of an official body."<sup>729</sup> Both were released from prison on March 15, 2024, giving them less than ten days to mobilize voters.<sup>730</sup> During this intense period, their campaign messages predominantly emphasized the need for a transformative political change for the greater good of the Senegalese people. Nonetheless, the longstanding anti-LGBTQ positions and declarations advanced by Ousmane Sonko, his PASTEF party, and his affiliated political coalition since 2021 continued to permeate the public discourse. These positions, which had been reinforced during the legislative elections of 2022 and by promises made in 2023, have significantly influenced popular sentiment and dominated debates among religious leaders and on social media platforms throughout the campaign.

Indeed, during the 2022 legislative elections campaign, Ousmane Sonko declared:

Our culture forbids homosexuality. We will not accept it in Senegal. We will vote for the law criminalizing the LGBTQ+ agenda.<sup>731</sup>

728 Outright interview with Lamarquise (pseudonym), virtual, March 12, 2025.

729 Papa Atou Diaw & Cecilia Macaulay, "Ousmane Sonko Trial: Senegal Opposition Leader Sentenced for 'corrupting youth,'" BBC, June 1, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65775987>.

730 "Sénégal : Les Opposants Ousmane Sonko Et Bassirou Diomaye Faye Ont Été Libérés," France 24, March 15, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20240315-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-les-opposants-ousmane-sonko-et-bassirou-diomaye-faye-ont-%C3%A9t%C3%A9lib%C3%A9r%C3%A9s>.

731 "Législatives 2022 / Ousmane Sonko À Bakel : 'Notre Culture Bannit L'homosexualité. Nous Ne L'accepterons Pas Au Sénégal. Nous Voterons La Loi Criminalisant L'agenda LGBTQ+'," Dakaractu, accessed July 29, 2025, [https://www.dakaractu.com/Legislatives-2022-Ousmane-Sonko-a-Bakel-Notre-culture-bannit-l-homosexualite-Nous-ne-l-accepterons-pas-au-Senegal-Nous\\_a221931.html](https://www.dakaractu.com/Legislatives-2022-Ousmane-Sonko-a-Bakel-Notre-culture-bannit-l-homosexualite-Nous-ne-l-accepterons-pas-au-Senegal-Nous_a221931.html).

726 Boko, Mawunyo Hermann, "Sénégal : Pourquoi L'opposition Veut Durcir La Loi Contre L'homosexualité," Jeune Afrique, December 28, 2021, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1287490/politique/senegal-pourquoi-l-opposition-veut-durcir-la-loi-contre-l-homosexualite>.

727 Outright interview with Oumou D. (pseudonym), virtual, March 12, 2025.

Subsequently, he also tweeted in March 2022 that one of the first laws he would push forward as president, referring to the 2024 elections, would be to further criminalize homosexuality.<sup>732</sup> PASTEF consistently promoted a hardline view by declaring that “All good men say NO to homosexuality in Senegal. President Ousmane SONKO also says NO to homosexuality in Senegal,” a message that resonated with conservative voters.<sup>733</sup> The party’s spokesperson, Maître Abdoulaye Tall, declared in May 2024 that, “In Senegal, we [PASTEF] will never allow Gay Pride,” confirming the party’s position.<sup>734</sup> In tandem, the Yewwi Askan Wi coalition—comprising 23 political parties that opposed Macky Sall’s Benno Bokk Yaakaar coalition—aligned itself with Sonko’s ideology, further magnifying the anti-queer narrative, in collaboration with And Samm Djikko Yi.<sup>735</sup>

From interviewees’ perspectives, no candidate engaged in pro-LGBTQ rhetoric. On the contrary, hate speech and promises to crack down on homosexuality featured prominently in campaign discourse. The primary culprit was identified as Ousmane Sonko’s PASTEF party. Dominique A., a 33-year-old trans man, recounted:

The PASTEF party had become categorically homophobic before the campaigns. During the campaign, when candidates talked about the [LGBTQ] community, they scored points with the population. Because Senegal is...94 percent Muslim and [a] radically homophobic Muslim [country]. So in this campaign, candidates who said they wouldn’t let [LGBTQ people] stay in Senegal were at the top of their game.<sup>736</sup>

Another frequently mentioned figure was Cheikh Mouhamadou Moustapha Sy, a prominent Islamist leader who heads the Party of Unity and Rally (PUR), a member party of the Yewwi Askan Wi coalition. According to Oumou D.:

Cheikh Moustapha Sy...is an Islamist with a very homophobic discourse. The religious collective And Samm Jikko Yi also made very homophobic speeches, as usual.<sup>737</sup>

On the other hand, a few participants found alternatives they deemed less hostile. Notably, then-Prime Minister and presidential candidate Amadou Ba remained relatively quiet on the issue, aligning with Sall’s stance that the existing law was sufficient. On the basis of the same logic, Oumou D. decided to vote for Anta Babacar Ngom, an independent female candidate, noting, “She’s not homophobic. I didn’t hear a homophobic program or rhetoric in her campaign.”<sup>738</sup>

Oumou D. perceived Ngom’s platform as progressive on women’s rights and, by extension, possibly tolerant of sexual minorities. However, Ngom was a long-shot candidate; indeed, she ultimately received only a small share of the votes. Most LGBTQ Senegalese we spoke to felt the real contest—and threat—lay between the incumbent ruling party and PASTEF.

## Role of Traditional and Social Media in Amplifying Anti-LGBTQ Rhetoric in the Preelection Period

Throughout the preelection period in 2024, media

732 “Sénégal: Un Opposant Promet De Durcir La Loi Contre L’homosexualité S’il Est Président,” Le Figaro, March 12, 2022, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/senegal-un-opposant-promet-de-durcir-la-loi-contre-l-homosexualite-s-il-est-president-20220312>. See also these posts on social media platform X: Ousmane Sonko (@SonkoOfficiel), “Si je suis élu président du Sénégal, la loi criminalisant l’homosexualité sera l’une des premières que je ferai voter. #Burok,” X, March 12, 2022, <https://x.com/sonkoofficiel/status/1502505118490669060>; “Même une manifestation pour la criminalisation de l’homosexualité sera ciblée par cette loi,” X, July 2, 2021, <https://x.com/SonkoOfficiel/status/141099388221924355>.

733 See this post by the PASTEF Touba branch’s official Facebook page: Pastef Touba Officiel, “Tous les hommes de valeur disent NON à l’homosexualité au Sénégal,” Facebook, May 10, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=986615871941287&set=a.363714207564793>.

734 “Maître Abdoulaye Tall Pastef : ‘Pourquoi Il N’y Aura Pas De Gay Pride Au Sénégal,’” EMedia, May 27, 2024, <https://emediasn.com/maître-abdoulaye-tall-pastef-pourquoi-il-ny-aura-pas-de-gay-pride-au-senegal>.

735 Yewwi Askan Wi, which means “free the people,” and Benno Bokk Yaakaar, which means “united by hope,” were the main political coalitions respectively led by Ousmane Sonko and Macky Sall. See Ousseynou Wade, “Assemblée Nationale: Le Groupe De Yewwi Askan Wii Annonce Des Propositions De Lois Et Des Commissions D’enquête,” Leral.net – Sénégal, accessed July 29, 2025, [https://www.leral.net/Assemblee-nationale-Le-groupe-de-Yewwi-Askan-Wii-annonce-des-propositions-de-lois-et-des-commissions-d-enquete\\_a337273.html](https://www.leral.net/Assemblee-nationale-Le-groupe-de-Yewwi-Askan-Wii-annonce-des-propositions-de-lois-et-des-commissions-d-enquete_a337273.html); El Maestro, “Pour Barrer La Route Aux LGBT –” and Sàmm Jikko Yi” Rend Visite À Ousmane Sonko (Photos),” S’informer pour informer, March 28, 2021, <https://sanslimites.sn.com/pour-barrer-la-route-aux-lgbt-and-samm-jikko-yi-rend-visite-a-ousmane-sonko-photos>; “Législatives Du 31 Juillet : And Samm Jikko Yi Présente Un Mémoire Aux 8 Coalitions En Lice,” Leral.net – Sénégal, accessed July 29, 2025, [https://www.leral.net/Legislatives-du-31-juillet-And-Samm-Jikko-yi-presente-un-Memoire-aux-8-coalitions-en-lice\\_a334575.html](https://www.leral.net/Legislatives-du-31-juillet-And-Samm-Jikko-yi-presente-un-Memoire-aux-8-coalitions-en-lice_a334575.html).

736 Outright interview with Dominique A. (pseudonym), virtual, March 12, 2025.

737 Oumou D. interview.

738 Oumou D. interview.

coverage and social media trends heightened anxiety among LGBTIQ people. Interviews with LGBTIQ individuals further attest to the impact of this rhetoric. Sokhna D., a 31-year-old lesbian, recalled hearing repeated promises from politicians to “tighten laws so harshly” that many young people in her community feared violent reprisals at the polls.<sup>739</sup> Dominique A. noted that overt homophobic messaging was pervasive in campaign rallies, leaving little doubt that such language was intended to silence queer voices.<sup>740</sup> Mainstream media in Senegal generally did not counter the homophobic narratives; if anything, they sometimes amplified them. Oumou D. observed that:

the media accentuated this hate speech by politicians...the media treatment was not in favor of the community, that’s clear.<sup>741</sup>

Meanwhile, the authorities issued no sanctions or rebukes to media or figures spreading anti-LGBTQ hate, signaling tacit approval. In addition, social media became a hotbed of queerphobic content. Lamarquise recounted how:

During the elections, there were several TikTok accounts that broadcast a lot of hate and homophobic messages...One of them even created an anti-LGBT association, urging people to join or buy membership cards. He does live videos calling for hatred and violence, showing images of androgynous or effeminate people to ridicule them.<sup>742</sup>

When asked if any institution, such as the electoral commission, police, or the human rights commission, took steps to mitigate anti-LGBTQ campaigns, all interviewees said they were not aware of any response. Officials issued calls for peaceful voting and respect among all Senegalese, but given the societal context, this generic messaging did not specifically address the specific vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ persons. In effect, LGBTIQ voters were left to their own devices to blend in and stay safe during the campaign period and on election day. The net effect was an atmosphere where LGBTIQ individuals felt demonized and fearful even before a

single ballot was cast.

## Voting and Election Day Experiences

Despite these hostile currents, interviews with LGBTIQ activists in Senegal suggest that many LGBTIQ people were determined to exercise their right to vote—quietly, and with caution. All five people we interviewed were registered voters and indicated they voted in 2024. None reported insurmountable administrative barriers to registering, thanks to Senegal’s system of automatic voter enrollment when one obtains or renews a national ID card. For example, Dominique A., a trans man, noted, “No difficulty, because when you renew your identity card... you are automatically enrolled on the electoral list.”<sup>743</sup> Lamarquise, a trans woman, also said she “didn’t have any trouble registering and voting,” but crucially added that this was because she took precautions to hide her transgender identity:

I make an effort to look very masculine when I’m out and about. I’m sure I’d have had trouble if I’d tried to register as a transgender woman or let my gender expression show.<sup>744</sup>

This statement highlights the extra burden on transgender voters, who often must conform to gender norms in public spaces to avoid harassment. In Lamarquise’s case, passing as a cisgender man was a strategy to safely navigate bureaucratic offices and the polling booth.

While registering was straightforward on paper, fear was a significant barrier for some in the community. Both Oumou D. and Dominique A. recounted that they knew other LGBTIQ individuals who chose not to vote or struggled to vote due to intimidation in their neighborhoods. Oumou D. observed:

[There were] a lot of young people who couldn’t vote because of their gender identity, or because of rumors in their neighborhood about their sexual orientation... they thought they’d be beaten up [if they showed up to vote].<sup>745</sup>

<sup>739</sup> Outright interview with Sokhna D. (pseudonym), virtual, March 12, 2025.

<sup>740</sup> Dominique A. interview.

<sup>741</sup> Oumou D. interview.

<sup>742</sup> Lamarquise interview.

<sup>743</sup> Dominique A. interview.

<sup>744</sup> Lamarquise interview.

<sup>745</sup> Oumou D. interview.



In other words, in some locales, someone who is known or suspected to be lesbian, gay, bi, trans, or queer could face mob harassment when approaching a polling station. In a similar vein, Sokhna D. described an incident involving two members of her organization who are masculine-presenting lesbians. When they went to their polling station:

Some supporters of other parties told them, ‘you’re going to jinx us, I hope you’re not going to vote for us.’ But since there were police around, even if sometimes the police are unfair, it remained just verbal abuse.<sup>746</sup>

Being accused of “jinxing” or bringing bad luck is a reflection of the superstitions and stigma attached to queer individuals in these communities—the idea that their mere presence could taint the sanctity of the vote. In this specific case, police presence prevented escalation, but the experience was intimidating nonetheless.

The preelection period for LGBTQ Senegalese was characterized by anxiety and strategic calculation. Interviewees weighed the risks of visibility against the need to support what they saw as the only viable political outcome for their safety. Many effectively engaged in what we might call defensive voting—casting ballots less to advance their rights and more to avert a worse scenario. “The goal was to stop the homophobic party PASTEF,” Amadou A., a 37-year-old gay man, bluntly said.<sup>747</sup>

This sentiment captures how, for these voters, the election’s importance lies in its potential to either unleash or contain a wave of homophobic repression. Their expectations were accordingly limited: none believed the new president would actively improve the human rights of LGBTQ people, but they desperately hoped to avoid an administration that would actively worsen them.

## Post-Election Outcomes and Community Reflections

After voting, many Senegalese stayed glued to news updates as results came in. It became clear by the next day that Bassirou Diomaye Faye was headed for victory, which was confirmed when rival candidates

conceded without a runoff. For LGBTQ activists and voters, this outcome was bittersweet. On the one hand, it represented a peaceful transfer of power, preserving Senegal’s democratic reputation—a point of pride for all citizens, including queer ones. On the other hand, it meant the country’s leadership would now include those who had vowed to fulfill the anti-LGBTQ agenda—essentially, the community’s worst political fears might soon be tested.

The months following the March 2024 election brought a mix of political change and continuity in Senegal. Bassirou Diomaye Faye was sworn in as president, and in a striking move, Ousmane Sonko was appointed prime minister of the new government.<sup>748</sup> PASTEF also won a plurality in the National Assembly. For LGBTQ observers, this development was concerning. Sonko being in a top executive role meant that a chief proponent of the anti-LGBTQ campaign promise was now in a position to influence legislation. Indeed, as Sokhna D. noted, “PASTEF now has the parliamentary majority and if they really want to change or pass a [homophobic] law, they have full power.”<sup>749</sup>

Early post-election signals were conflicting. On the one hand, the new regime initially prioritized other issues—dealing with the economic situation and youth employment, and attempting to heal political divisions. The promised anti-LGBTQ law was not immediately introduced in the first parliamentary session after the election. This delay possibly indicated that it was not the very first item on the agenda, despite the campaign rhetoric. Sokhna D. speculated that they’re not going to pass the law just yet, as “not only is there international pressure, but Senegal has other priorities at the moment.”<sup>750</sup>

However, the push did not disappear: by June 2024, MP Cheikh Abdou Bara Dolly Mbacké, an Islamist opposition figure allied with Faye’s coalition, submitted a new bill to Parliament proposing 10 to 15 years’ imprisonment and extending criminalization to acts such as “lesbianism, homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, zoophilia and

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748 “Sénégal: Sobre Passation De Pouvoir Entre Sidiki Kaba Et Le Premier Ministre Ousmane Sonko,” RFI, April 8, 2024, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240408-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-passation-de-pouvoir-sobre-entre-sidiki-kaba-et-le-premier-ministre-ousmane-sonko>.

749 Sokhna D. interview.

750 Sokhna D. interview.

746 Sokhna D. interview.

747 Amadou A. interview.

necrophilia.”<sup>751</sup> MP Mbacké justified the bill as a defense against “the perversion of our society” and “immoral values imported from the West.”<sup>752</sup> The bill remains before the parliament at the time of writing.

Prime Minister Sonko himself sent mixed messages. In May 2024—just a couple of months after taking office—Sonko made remarks that startled both his supporters and critics. During a visit by French left-wing politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon to Dakar, Sonko struck a notably moderate tone on LGBTQ issues. He warned that Western insistence on LGBTQ people’s rights could trigger anti-Western backlash in Senegal, effectively telling Western nations to “respect our culture.”<sup>753</sup> Crucially, Sonko also claimed that Senegal has “never seen any persecution” of LGBTQ people and that while homosexuality is “not accepted, [it is] tolerated” in the country. These comments, implying a form of tolerance and denying persecution, outraged Sonko’s conservative base. To them, it sounded as if the prime minister was backpedaling on his hardline stance.

The reaction was swift and dramatic. Religious figures and activists lambasted Sonko for showing perceived leniency, and some took to social media to accuse him of being influenced by Mélenchon’s left-wing views. Within days, two prominent individuals—activist Bah Diakhaté and Imam Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Ndao—who had publicly criticized Sonko’s “complacency” toward LGBTQ issues were arrested by the police.<sup>754</sup> They were charged with “spreading false news” and offending the head of government for alleging that Sonko was secretly supportive of LGBTQ people’s rights.<sup>755</sup> In June 2024, a

Senegalese court sentenced both men to three months in prison for these statements.<sup>756</sup> This episode shows the new government’s sensitivity to the issue and its attempt to balance extremes. Sonko’s initial remarks could be seen as an attempt to placate international opinion by denying the active persecution of LGBTQ people. But the backlash from his base forced a course correction—the arrests of Diakhaté and Ndao sent a message that the government was not abandoning its anti-LGBTQ stance and that accusing Sonko of being “soft” on homosexuality was defamatory.

On the other hand, domestic pressure to fulfill the anti-LGBTQ promises did not relent. The religious collective And Samm Jikko Yi, alongside other conservative groups, quickly reminded the Faye-Sonko government of what they saw as an electoral mandate. In February 2025, And Samm Jikko Yi held a press conference urging the regime to take swift action on the law on homosexuality. The collective revealed that it had met with the new Speaker of Parliament, who “gave assurances” that the law would be adopted. It also explicitly cited Sonko’s campaign pledge, stating that Sonko had “promised, when he was in opposition, to make [further criminalizing homosexuality] a priority once in power.” The collective complained that the wait had become “too long” and insisted that the government “hold to their promise.”<sup>757</sup>

From the perspective of LGBTQ people, the post-election period thus oscillated between hope and fear. On the one hand, some interviewees expressed relief that the worst-case scenario—the immediate passage of the new law—had not yet happened. There was also a sense of validation in seeing democratic norms upheld. As Lamarquise put it, “Senegalese do respect the democratic process. We trust it.”<sup>758</sup> On the other hand, anxiety remained high about the looming law and societal hostility. Oumou D. predicted that:

751 “CRIMINALISATION DE L’HOMOSEXUALITÉ, LA PROPOSITION DE LOI SUR LA TABLE DE L’ASSEMBLÉE,” SenePlus, June 24, 2024, <https://mail.senepius.com/politique/criminalisation-de-lhomosexualite-la-proposition-de-loi-sur-la>.

752 Célia Cuordifede, “Au Sénégal, Le Retour D’un Projet De Loi Pour Durcir Le Délit D’homosexualité Et ‘Contre Les Valeurs Immorales De L’Occident,’” Le Monde, June 26, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/06/26/au-senegal-le-retour-d-un-projet-de-loi-pour-durcir-le-delit-d-homosexualite-et-contre-les-valeurs-immorales-de-l-occident\\_6243998\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/06/26/au-senegal-le-retour-d-un-projet-de-loi-pour-durcir-le-delit-d-homosexualite-et-contre-les-valeurs-immorales-de-l-occident_6243998_3212.html).

753 “Débat De L’homosexualité: Risque De ‘Casus Belli’ Avec L’Occident Selon Le Sénégalais Ousmane Sonko,” Voice of America, May 17, 2024, <https://www.voafrique.com/a/d%C3%A9bat-de-l-homosexualit%C3%A9-risque-de-casus-belli-avec-l-occident-selon-le-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9galais-ousmane-sonko/7615952.html>.

754 Moustapha Diakhaté, “‘L’homosexualité Est Tolérée Au Sénégal’: Ousmane Sonko Immoie Encore La Vérité,” Dakaractu, accessed July 29, 2025, [https://www.dakaractu.com/l-homosexualite-est-toleree-au-senegal-Ousmane-Sonko-immole-encore-la-verite-Par-Moustapha-Diakhaté\\_a248571.html](https://www.dakaractu.com/l-homosexualite-est-toleree-au-senegal-Ousmane-Sonko-immole-encore-la-verite-Par-Moustapha-Diakhaté_a248571.html).

755 “Two Arrested in Senegal for Criticizing Prime Minister’s Stance on

LGBTQ Rights,” Voice of America, May 22, 2024, <https://www.voafrique.com/a/two-arrested-in-senegal-for-supporting-lgbtq-rights/7622211.html>.

756 Basillioh Rukanga, “Senegal Gay Rights: Two Jailed for Criticising Ousmane Sonko,” BBC, June 4, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2eezj6q2qmo>.

757 Mouhamed Diouf, “Criminalisation de l’homosexualité : Las d’attendre, And Samm Jikko Yi interpelle le gouvernement,” Senego, February 24, 2025, [https://senego.com/criminalisation-de-lhomo-sexualite-and-samm-jikko-exige-une-action-rapide-du-gouvernement\\_1808782.html](https://senego.com/criminalisation-de-lhomo-sexualite-and-samm-jikko-exige-une-action-rapide-du-gouvernement_1808782.html).

758 Lamarquise interview.

Perhaps in the near future, the threat of the law will materialize...People will get fed up. Those [in the public] who haven't reacted yet, they will eventually.<sup>759</sup>

She predicted that “in the long term, even [Sonko’s] own supporters will cause problems” if they feel betrayed on this issue. In her view, delaying the law might only defer a backlash from hardliners.<sup>760</sup>

Facing the possibility of harsher repression, LGBTQ activists in Senegal are redoubling their efforts to build stronger solidarity networks and adapt their strategies. Based on interviews with activists such as Oumou D. and Dominique A., they are planning to establish robust local support systems that include legal assistance and secure digital communication channels for confidential information sharing and abuse documentation. In addition, they are focusing on increased awareness-raising among young people and strengthening partnerships with both local and international organizations to anticipate and counter potential violence. This collective approach not only aims to protect the rights and safety of LGBTQ individuals but also seeks to transform adversity into a mobilized and informed response in a context where anti-queer sentiment pervades political and social discourse.

The 2024 elections in Senegal exposed both progress and peril for the LGBTQ community: queer Senegalese employed defensive voting to counter homophobic rhetoric, yet fear and sporadic violence deterred some from fully participating. Although a peaceful power transfer reinforced democratic institutions, it also ushered in leaders who threatened harsher penalties for homosexuality. Post-election, the government has been cautious—hesitating to enforce tougher laws while penalizing critics of its anti-LGBTQ rhetoric—which leaves the future uncertain. These developments highlight how dominant cultural and religious sentiments can exacerbate the vulnerability of marginalized groups; however, the resilience and civic engagement of LGBTQ communities continue to inspire hope for meaningful change, urging civil society and international partners to protect minority rights.

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<sup>759</sup> Oumou D. interview.

<sup>760</sup> Oumou D. interview.

# SNAPSHOT SOUTH AFRICA:

## ANC's Decline a Boon or Bane for Equality?

Snapshot. South Africa: ANC's Decline a Boon or Bane for Equality?

Election: General (May 29, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>761</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

### Queer Perspectives on the ANC's Historic Setback

South Africa's seventh general election since the end of apartheid in 1994 saw the African National Congress (ANC) narrowly remain the largest party in parliament, but lose the majority it held for three decades.<sup>762</sup> Some LGBTIQ activists raised fears that the election results could compromise gains in LGBTIQ equality won under the ANC, such as constitutional and legal protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation and marriage equality, because "we [LGBTIQ people] are the easiest target."<sup>763</sup> Other queer voters, however, shared in the disillusionment that led to the ANC's declining popularity as a result of corruption, inequalities, and the failure to provide basic social services.<sup>764</sup> Longtime

queer rights and HIV/AIDS activist Zackie Achmat, whose activism began with the ANC during the anti-apartheid struggle, left the ruling party in 2004 and in 2024 became the country's first openly queer independent candidate for MP. He ran an ultimately unsuccessful campaign on a platform of combating government corruption, and argued that "the ANC has failed all the people of the country."<sup>765</sup>

While several political parties explicitly reaffirmed their support for LGBTIQ people's human rights in party manifestos, anti-LGBTIQ actors also gained significant ground.<sup>766</sup> The uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) Party of former president Jacob Zuma is now the third largest political party in parliament after winning almost 15 percent of the vote, although it was excluded from the coalition government that the ANC formed with smaller parties and the former opposition group Democratic Alliance (DA).<sup>767</sup> In a campaign rally in February 2024, Zuma asked rhetorically, "Who made the law that a man can date another man? Who will women be left with?" He promised that MK would repeal "laws people never supported," implying that same-sex intimacy should be recriminalized.<sup>768</sup> For its part, the DA has signaled general

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southern-africa-elections-2024-liberation-parties-decline-7f9c7f-660d3551585a8dd625f39e0cbe.

765 Luiz De Barros, "Zackie Achmat Concedes Defeat, Warns of Anti-Democratic Forces," Mamba Online, June 2, 2024, <https://www.mam-baonline.com/2024/06/02/zackie-achmat-admits-defeat-warns-of-an-ti-democratic-forces>.

766 Roberto Igual, "SA Election Guide Highlights Political Parties' Stance on LGBTIQ+ Rights," Mamba Online, February 5, 2024, <https://www.mam-baonline.com/2024/02/05/sa-election-guide-highlights-political-parties-stance-on-lgbtika-rights>.

767 Nomsa Maseko and Barbara Plett Usher, "Zuma's MK party to join South Africa's opposition alliance," BBC, June 17, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz779ylewd4o>.

768 Bulelani Nonyukela, "Jacob Zuma makes homophobic remarks at MK rally," Business Day, February 26, 2024, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/>

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761 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 – South Africa," accessed March 31, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-africa/freedom-world/2025>.

762 Mohammed Haddad, "South Africa elections final results: What happens next?," Al Jazeera, June 2, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/2/south-africa-elections-results-what-happens-next>.

763 Outright International, International Foundation for Electoral Systems and Synergia – Initiative for Human Rights, GLIDE 2024 Landscape Analysis, July 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/GLIDE%20Landscape%20Analysis%20Final.pdf>, 41.

764 Farai Mutsaka, "Southern Africa elections brought big changes in 2024," AP News, December 24, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/>



support for LGBTIQ equality and has several openly LGBTIQ MPs.<sup>769</sup> However, there are concerns that fractures are emerging, with DA party leader Helen Zille welcoming the United Kingdom Supreme Court decision ruling that the definition of “woman” is based on biological sex.<sup>770</sup>

## LGBTIQ Political Participation and Representation in 2024

The human rights organization Iranti organized #AmINotAllowedToVote, a campaign aiming to shed light on the challenges that trans, nonbinary, and intersex people in South Africa, as well as Botswana, Namibia, Mauritius, and Mozambique, can experience in exercising their right to vote.<sup>771</sup> While the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act allows for the change of legal names and gender markers, barriers remain, such as the requirement of a psychologist’s or medical doctor’s report, the exclusion of gender-neutral markers, and the long processing period.<sup>772</sup> Iranti told Outright that, while the process was streamlined in 2023 to reduce the wait time, processing still takes a few months, leaving some trans people with no choice but to vote using their dead name and assigned sex at birth.<sup>773</sup> One person who was still in the process of changing their legal gender markers told Iranti that they had “disappeared” from the system during this process and were therefore unable to vote in May 2024.<sup>774</sup>

Nevertheless, LGBTIQ representation in politics reached new heights in 2024. Steve Letsike, an out lesbian and prominent activist working on HIV/AIDS and LGBTIQ equality, was elected as a member of the National Assembly as part of the ANC, and was subsequently

appointed Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. In her first interview as deputy minister, she shared her hopes for LGBTIQ representation with Outright:

Inclusivity is something that we’re going to still navigate, but we have come a long way, and we are here. And if you then see how many LGBTI persons within the ANC, within the Women’s League, within the Youth League, you can see very young, vibrant young people that are coming out and saying that we are here, and prepared to serve and use our skills and expertise. So we have some way to go, but we can do better as a country.<sup>775</sup>

Speaking to Outright, Liberty Matthyse of Gender Dynamix, a leading South African organization focused on trans and gender-diverse communities in Southern Africa, described the 2024 elections as “a turning point in South Africa politics” and affirmed the need to continue fighting:

As an organisation, and as a movement, we now need to reconsider and rework our law reform advocacy strategies as centre-right and right-wing parties have gained more influence and power over decision-making. As a last resort, we will continue to turn to and rely on our Constitution and court system to vindicate the rights of LGBTIQ+ people where the executive and parliament fail to do so.<sup>776</sup>

775 Steve Letsike, interview with Matuba Mahlatjhe, Outright Proud Podcast, podcast audio, July 16, 2024, <https://podcasts.apple.com/zw/podcast/steve-letsikes-first-interview-as-deputy-minister/id1724774512?i=1000662448568>.

776 Ibid.

politics/2024-02-26-jacob-zuma-makes-homophobic-remarks-at-mk-rally.

769 Democratic Alliance, “LGBTIQ,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.da.org.za/lgbtiq>.

770 “Helen Zille’s Transphobia: Hate Dressed up as ‘Common sense,’” Mamba Online, April 23, 2025, <https://www.mambaonline.com/2025/04/23/helen-zilles-transphobia-hate-dressed-up-as-common-sense>.

771 Iranti (@irantiorg), “We are at Rock the City Queer Festival getting ready to read through manifestos of parties that are running for general elections! Find our stall to join us!,” X, May 11, 2024, <https://x.com/irantiorg/status/1789224318049624081>; Iranti, “Transgender, intersex and gender-diverse people often face challenges when trying to access basic services,” Facebook, May 27, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=399940453035335>.

772 Outright email exchange with Liberty Matthyse, March 24, 2025.

773 Outright interview with Ntuthuzo Ndzomo, virtual, May 30, 2025.

774 Ibid.

**Right:** Pre-election Pride & Politics Town Hall Debate organized by Iranti, May 17, 2024, Johannesburg, South Africa. Credit: Iranti.



# SNAPSHOT SOUTH KOREA:

## Cautious Hope Amid the Continued Political Sidelining of LGBTIQ People

Election: Legislative (April 10, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>777</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

The 2024 South Korean legislative election was largely a contest between the People Power Party, which had held the presidency since 2022, and the opposition Democratic Party of Korea, which held a legislative majority. President Yoon Suk Yeol's low popularity ratings contributed to DPK maintaining its majority in parliament. Six smaller parties also won a handful of seats.

### LGBTIQ Political Participation in 2024

The election was not contested by any openly queer candidate, despite public support for the nomination of gay activist Lim Tae-hoon. Civil society groups nominated Lim as a parliamentary candidate for the Democratic Alliance of Korea (DAK). DAK is a satellite party for proportional representation candidates of the Democratic Party of Korea (DPK), the country's main liberal opposition party. Lim, who was the first head of Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea, garnered

significant support, but the Democratic Alliance of Korea ultimately excluded him from the candidate list, officially due to his 2004 arrest and conviction for refusing military conscription as a conscientious objector.<sup>778</sup> However,



<sup>777</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 – South Korea," accessed August 5, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-korea/freedom-world/2025>.

**Right:** Rainbow Action Korea's policy agreement ceremony with the Labor Party ahead of the elections. Credit: Rainbow Action Korea.

<sup>778</sup> Tak Ji-young, "Democratic Alliance for Korea rejects nomination of Lim Tae-hoon," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, March 14, 2024, <https://www.khan.co.kr/article/202403141716307>.

some observers believe that his sexual orientation was the real reason for exclusion, noting that he had already been pardoned.<sup>779</sup>

Lim's nomination came four years after Kim Ki-hong, the first trans candidate in the country, withdrew her candidacy just four days before the 2020 legislative elections.<sup>780</sup> The Green Party candidate was targeted by a barrage of online hate, and died by suicide in 2021.<sup>781</sup> To date, the country has still not elected an openly queer official at the national level.

Rainbow Action did not receive complaints of LGBTIQ people experiencing challenges in polling stations in 2024, compared to previous elections.<sup>782</sup> However, some trans people who do not possess identity documents that match their lived names and gender markers may have experienced challenges in voting.<sup>783</sup> South Korea continues to enforce stringent requirements for trans people to change names and legal gender markers, including forced sterilization and genital surgery. In 2020, a post-election survey by Rainbow Action found that nine percent of all trans survey respondents did not vote in the April 2020 legislative elections due to fears associated with the mismatch between their legal identity and outward appearance.<sup>784</sup>

## Political Campaigning on LGBTIQ Equality

Rainbow Action, a coalition of LGBTIQ groups, issued a list of ten demands from the LGBTIQ movement, including the enactment of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, marriage equality, and legal gender recognition based on self-determination.<sup>785</sup> Only four out of the nine political

parties contacted by Rainbow Action fully endorsed the list: the Green Justice Party, the Progressive Party, the Labor Party, and the New Progressive Alliance.<sup>786</sup> While these parties collectively represent only five out of the 300 members of the National Assembly elected for the 2024 to 2028 legislative term, Horim Yi of Rainbow Action told Outright that they are critical voices for LGBTIQ equality in government, having entered into a "policy agreement" with LGBTIQ groups to uphold their demands.<sup>787</sup>

South Korea's two biggest parties, the DPK and the People Power Party (PPP), which won 171 and 108 seats, respectively, did not respond to the survey and have not publicly supported LGBTIQ equality.<sup>788</sup> Despite strong public support for an anti-discrimination law, both parties have blocked the passage of several draft bills.<sup>789</sup> Members of the DPK have claimed protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity are distractions from priorities like "the people's livelihoods" and that they conflict with freedom of religion.<sup>790</sup> Similarly, the PPP told newspaper *Kyunghyang Shinmun* that, "If the scope of anti-discrimination is overly broad, there are concerns that it could have negative effects in various fields."<sup>791</sup>

Anti-LGBTIQ political campaigning has been a mainstay in South Korean politics, Horim Yi contended, although she said she had observed a decrease in queerphobic political rhetoric in the 2024 elections compared to

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of LGBTIQ+ people, the collection of data on the current status of LGBTIQ+ people in national surveys such as the Population and Housing Census, the prohibition of conversion practices, and other "legislative activities in accordance with the principle of separation of church and state as stipulated in the Constitution." See 무지개행동 (@rainbowactionkr), "성소수자가 22대 국회에 요구한다! 성소수자 10대 인권과제 정당별 정책질의 결과" (LGBTQ+ individuals demand action from the 22nd National Assembly! Results of policy inquiries on the 10 key human rights issues for LGBTQ+ individuals by political party), X, March 27, 2024, <https://x.com/rainbowactionkr/status/1772907680090521661>.

786 Ibid.

787 Outright interview with Horim Yi, Rainbow Action, virtual, August 11, 2025.

788 Ibid.

789 Kim Sang-beom, Tak Ji-young, Jeong Dae-yeon and Jo Moon-hee, "Let's check your policy compatibility before going to the polls," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, April 9, 2024, <https://n.news.naver.com/article/032/0003289687>; Shin Ji-hye, "Debate on anti-discrimination law gains momentum," *The Korea Herald*, June 20, 2021, <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/2636980>.

790 Yoo Kyung-jin, "Rep. Lee Un-ju: 'The Democratic Party will not propose a loan-backed securities law,'" *Kookmin Ilbo*, November 15, 2024, <https://n.news.naver.com/article/005/0001738912?sid=103>; Song Chang-han, "Following Oh Se-hoon and Go Min-jung, Lee Dong-seop and Woo Won-sik also made homophobic remarks," *Mediaus*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.mediaus.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=180470>.

791 Kim Sang-beom et al., "Let's check your policy compatibility."

779 "Is It Possible for LGBTIQ+ Individuals to Serve in the South Korean National Assembly?" *LGBT News Korea*, May 1, 2024, <https://www.lgbtnews-korea.com/en/post/elections2024-4>.

780 Oh Gyeong-min, "Oh Gyeong-min," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.khan.co.kr/article/202103051712002>.

781 Ibid.

782 Horim Yi interview.

783 Ibid.

784 Ibid.

785 The list also includes the abolition of Article 92-6 of the Military Criminal Code, which criminalizes consensual same-sex relations, the revision of the "Prevention of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome Act" to include the abolition of provisions prohibiting the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, the creation of an education environment and elementary, middle, and high school curricula that are friendly to LGBTIQ+ youth, the improvement of administrative practices of state agencies that infringe upon the freedom of expression, assembly, and association

2020.<sup>792</sup> In its 2024 campaign platform, the Liberty Unification Party, a far-right Christian evangelical party, vowed to obstruct access to legal gender recognition and “prevent the legalization of homosexuality” by blocking the anti-discrimination bill, abolishing the National Human Rights Commission, and repealing policies on “gender equality.”<sup>793</sup> It finished fifth in the 2024 elections, up from seventh place in 2020, but did not win any seats in parliament. In contrast, ahead of the 2020 general elections, several key figures from a major party—the Liberty Party of Korea, predecessor of the PPP—opposed the Seoul Queer Culture Festival, calling it “exhibitionistic” and proclaiming that “we should not accept homosexuality.”<sup>794</sup>

## Queer Mobilization Against Martial Law

In December 2024, when then-President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law, LGBTIQ people actively mobilized as part of mass protests against Yoon.<sup>795</sup> The rally organizers set up a “Pledge for Equality at the Square,” which outlined rules for non-discrimination and inclusion in the protests.<sup>796</sup> A joint statement signed by 216 organizations and over 4,000 individuals also affirmed that:

Since the LGBTQ+ rights movement began in 1993, whenever democracy has been threatened, LGBTQ+ individuals have taken to the streets, proudly displaying rainbow flags...In our resistance to discrimination and hate, we have gained the power to affirm our identities, care for those around us, and foster solidarity with other marginalized groups, tirelessly advocating for a society where everyone’s fundamental rights are upheld equally...Thus, queer individuals raise our voices once more.<sup>797</sup>

Yoon’s impeachment on December 14 triggered a snap presidential election, held in June 2025, where LGBTIQ issues were once again sidelined by major parties. LGBTIQ groups publicly called out the Democratic Party of Korea for excluding LGBTIQ issues in its manifesto and criticized Lee Jae-myung, the DPK candidate, for dismissing the urgency of LGBTIQ people’s rights in a televised debate during the campaign.<sup>798</sup> Nevertheless, the election of Lee, representing a liberal party, has inspired cautious hope among LGBTIQ people. While the DPK “avoids any engagement with the LGBT movement,” Horim Yi believes that there will be more opportunities under this government to advance LGBTIQ equality. “I always remain positive, but still, the overall situation of the stance of the Democratic Party hasn’t really changed.”<sup>799</sup>

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792 Horim Yi interview.

793 Liberty Unification Party, 2024년 총선 정책 공약, 2024, <https://jayuparty.kr/pledge>.

794 Park Ji-won, “Will LGBTQ issue become visible in 2020 general election?,” The Korea Times, June 9, 2019, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/politics/20190609/will-lgbtq-issue-become-visible-in-2020-general-election>.

795 “LGBTQ+ Voices Amid the Crisis of Human Rights and Democracy in the Face of a Military Coup,” LGBT News Korea, January 3, 2025, <https://www.lgbtnewskorea.com/en/post/yoounout-2>.

796 권태, “Queer People in the Square and the 21st Presidential Election,” LGBT News Korea, July 8, 2025, <https://www.lgbtnewskorea.com/en/post/21stelection-2>.

797 “LGBTQ+ Voices Amid the Crisis of Human Rights and Democracy in the Face of a Military Coup,” LGBT News Korea, January 3, 2025, <https://www.lgbtnewskorea.com/en/post/yoounout-2>.

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[www.lgbtnewskorea.com/en/post/yoounout-2](https://www.lgbtnewskorea.com/en/post/yoounout-2).

798 권태, “Queer People in the Square.”

799 Horim Yi interview.



# CASE STUDY SRI LANKA:

## End of Rajapaksa Era Brings New Hope for LGBTIQ People's Rights

Election: Presidential (September 21, 2024) and Legislative (November 14, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>800</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

The 2024 elections saw the National People's Power (NPP) alliance secure both the presidency and the parliamentary majority for the first time. The economic collapse in 2022 spawned political unrest against the Rajapaksa political dynasty, which had ruled the country since 2004.<sup>801</sup> In September 2024, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, leader of the NPP alliance and a Marxist political party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front), became president with over 55 percent of the vote. The parliamentary elections followed in November 2024, with NPP winning a landslide majority with 156 seats out of 225 seats.<sup>802</sup>

800 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - Sri Lanka," accessed August 5, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/sri-lanka/freedom-world/2025>.

801 Aparna Ramamurthy, "The rise and fall of Sri Lanka's powerful Rajapaksa dynasty," DW, July 13, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/rajapaksa-the-rise-and-fall-of-sri-lankas-powerful-political-dynasty/a-62458780>; Bharaha Mallawarachi, "Who is Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Sri Lanka's new Marxist president?," Associated Press, September 23, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/sri-lanka-dissanayake-marxist-president-b451271b4bd9bf4318a76b599fe9d0b0>.

802 "Landslide win for Sri Lanka's leftist coalition in snap general elections," Al Jazeera, November 15, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/15/sri-lankas-leftist-ruling-coalition-headed-for-landslide-election-win>.

### Watershed Moments for Queer Political Representation

Chanu Nimesha made history as the first transgender person in the country to contest a general election, running in the Kegalle District on behalf of the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka. While she did not win, the 49-year-old activist's candidacy received significant media coverage and helped elevate the visibility of trans people in the country.<sup>803</sup> Asked by Reuters about her hopes, Nimesha responded, "I'm not concerned about winning or losing... But it is important for me to be present in this space, to be seen, to inspire others like me."<sup>804</sup>

President Dissanayake and the NPP ran on an explicitly pro-LGBTIQ platform. The party's campaign manifesto proposed to repeal Sections 365 and 365A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code, outdated colonial remnants that criminalize same-sex sexual acts.<sup>805</sup> This is the first time that a political party committed to decriminalization in its election manifesto and won. The party also vowed to extend constitutional non-discrimination protections to sexual orientation and gender identity, improve public authorities' engagement with "gender identity groups,"

803 Uditha Jayasinghe, "Sri Lanka's first transgender candidate hopes to break political, social barriers," Reuters, November 13, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sri-lankas-first-transgender-candidate-hopes-break-political-social-barriers-2024-11-13>.

804 Ibid.

805 Jathika Jana Balawegaya (NPP Sri Lanka), "A Thriving Nation, A Beautiful Life," August 2024, <https://www.npp.lk/en/policies/npppolicystatement>, 45.

enact comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services, and increase access to state services for LGBTIQ people.<sup>806</sup> “The agenda goes beyond decriminalization, it’s something radical in the context of Sri Lanka, including the inclusion in health care, education, and decision-making bodies,” Sri Lankan academic and activist Thiagaraja Waradas told Outright.<sup>807</sup>

Other political parties did not publicly engage with LGBTIQ issues in their campaign platforms. In February 2023, the government under the Sri Lanka People’s Front (SLPP), which ruled the country from 2020 to 2024, endorsed a Private Member’s bill presented by SLPP MP Premnath C. Dolawatte that sought to repeal Sections 365 and 365A.<sup>808</sup> Thiagaraja, who works with the LGBTIQ-focused group Community Welfare and Development Fund (CWDF), described this to Outright as an attempt by the SLPP to claw back popularity with younger, queer voters:

SLPP members continued to make queerphobic statements despite [some SLPP members’] effort[s for decriminalization]. This is due to that fact that there is no party position to support queer rights, which is exactly why Dolawatte had to bring it as a Private Member’s bill.<sup>809</sup>

## Interreligious Backlash Against Equality

While political support soared, leaders from various religious groups used inflammatory rhetoric to oppose gender equality and LGBTIQ people’s rights ahead of the elections.<sup>810</sup> In July 2024, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim leaders joined forces in a press conference to urge candidates not to support “degenerate and immoral LGBTQ Laws” that “destroy Civilized Society.”<sup>811</sup> The bills in question, the Gender Equality Bill, the Women Empowerment Bill, and the Penal Code Amendment Bill,

seek to advance equality “irrespective of differences in sex or gender identity,” establish a National Commission on Women (NCW), and decriminalize same-sex sexual acts, respectively.<sup>812</sup> Buddhist monk Venerable Agulugalle Ginananda Thera warned candidates against supporting these bills, saying, “If you want to win the election, don’t support these bills. As religious leaders, we will initiate efforts to defeat all the political parties who support the bills.”<sup>813</sup> Religious leaders also called on the NPP to remove references to LGBTIQ people in their manifesto.<sup>814</sup> However, Thiagaraja pointed out that the interreligious anti-LGBTIQ campaign in 2024 was “less strong” than the one in the previous election.<sup>815</sup>

## Barriers to Voting

LGBTIQ voters may have encountered some challenges in voting.<sup>816</sup> In Sri Lanka, “voter registration begins from the family,” as the “chief occupant” is responsible for registering each member of the household in the voter list.<sup>817</sup> This process risks the exclusion of LGBTIQ family members, with the persistence of domestic violence against LGBTIQ people, some of whom are forced to flee their homes.<sup>818</sup> Those who fled their homes and have left their voter registration cards behind or have not yet changed their legal address face a dilemma. “You still have to go back to your home, which is also a queerphobic place, and you don’t want to expose yourself to that even if you have the right to vote,” Thiagaraja argued.<sup>819</sup> The burdensome administrative process of

812 Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Gender Equality Bill, Bill No. 256, 2024, <https://parliament.lk/uploads/bills/gbills/english/6345.pdf>; Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Women Empowerment Act, Act No. 37 of 2024, <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/acts/gbills/english/6348.pdf>; Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, “Press Notice Follow up on Recommendation on Sections 365 and 365A of the Penal Code,” Press Notice No: HRC/P/i/E/15/08/24, August 15, 2024, <https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/HRCSL-Press-Notice-15-08-2024.pdf>.

813 “Faith leaders oppose bills promoting homosexuality in Sri Lanka,” Union of Catholic Asian News, July 26, 2024, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/faith-leaders-oppose-bills-promoting-homosexuality-in-sri-lanka/105856>.

814 Thiagaraja interview.

815 Ibid.

816 Ibid.

817 Ibid; Election Commission of Sri Lanka, “FAQ: FOR VOTERS,” accessed August 5, 2025, [https://elections.gov.lk/en/voters/faq\\_voters\\_E.html](https://elections.gov.lk/en/voters/faq_voters_E.html).

818 Équité Sri Lanka, Bridge for Equality, and Rajarata Gemi Pahan, “Situation of LGBTI+ persons in Sri Lanka Joint NGO Submission to the Universal Periodic Review by Coalition of Civil Society Organizations with Équité Sri Lanka,” March 2023, [https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2023-03/JS24\\_UPR42\\_LKA\\_E\\_Main.pdf](https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2023-03/JS24_UPR42_LKA_E_Main.pdf).

819 Thiagaraja interview.

806 Ibid.

807 Outright interview with Thiagaraja Waradas, virtual, April 8, 2025.

808 Private Members’ bills are bills introduced by members of parliament who are not government ministers.

809 Outright email exchange with Thiagaraja Waradas, August 24, 2025.

810 “Extremist groups rally against LGBT+ community committing contempt of court,” Lanka News Web, July 22, 2024, <https://lankanewsweb.net/archives/59479/extremist-groups-rally-against-lgbt-community-committing-contempt-of-court>.

811 Yohan Perera, “Religious leaders call for withdrawal of three Bills,” Daily Mirror Online, July 26, 2024, <https://www.dailymirror.lk/front-page/Religious-leaders-call-for-withdrawal-of-three-Bills/238-288110>.

transferring legal residence can also be made more difficult by landlords, EQUAL GROUND, an LGBTIQ advocacy group in Sri Lanka, told Outright:

Many members of the community reside away from their places of origin, often living in rented accommodation due to stigma or lack of acceptance in their family homes. In such cases, permission to be registered in the Grama Niladhari (village leader) division where they currently reside is frequently denied by landlords. As a result, their names are not included in the local electoral register, and they are effectively denied the right to vote.<sup>820</sup>

and many promises by many political parties and individuals. However, this time the party that won the election was very much in favour of equality for all citizens including the LGBTIQ community. This was refreshing to see, however almost a year later, they have yet to fulfill this promise. It is rather concerning that a government with a 2/3 majority in the house is backpedaling just like others before them. It is difficult to actually see this 'political support' right now as words have not been put into action. It doesn't sit well as it seems like the same old, same old!<sup>823</sup>

Trans people experienced specific barriers due to inaccessible legal gender recognition procedures in Sri Lanka, which require trans people to undergo assessment and counseling from a state psychiatrist. EQUAL GROUND reported that "a considerable number of transgender individuals claimed they experienced anxiety and fear due to discrepancies between their physical appearance and their identification documents. As a result, many who wished to vote were prevented from voting during the 2024 election."<sup>821</sup> Nevertheless, the engagement of CWDF and other actors with the Election Commission has borne fruit. The Commission introduced gender-neutral queues in polling stations, and trained returning officers in all 22 electoral districts on facilitating trans voters' inclusion.<sup>822</sup> These positive measures are critical, especially with the absence of a quick, transparent, and accessible administrative procedure for legal gender recognition based on self-determination.

## New Hope for Equality

The end of the Rajapaksa dynasty and the landslide victory of a pro-LGBTIQ political party has brought new hope for LGBTIQ equality in the country. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that the NPP delivers on its promises. As Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, a prominent LGBTIQ rights activist who heads EQUAL GROUND, told Outright in an email message:

I personally have seen many elections come and go

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<sup>820</sup> Outright email exchange with Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, EQUAL GROUND, August 13, 2025.

<sup>821</sup> Ibid.

<sup>822</sup> Thiagaraja interview.

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<sup>823</sup> Flamer-Caldera email exchange.

# SNAPSHOT SYRIA:

# Manufacturing Moral Panics

Election: Parliamentary (July 15, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>824</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

## Fraudulent Election under a Dictatorship

On July 15, 2024, the Syrian Arab Republic, then headed by former President Bashar al-Assad, held parliamentary elections in government-controlled regions, excluding areas held by resistance forces.<sup>825</sup> The election process “did not meet fundamental standards for impartial management of elections nor the standards of transparency.”<sup>826</sup> Assad’s Ba’ath Party, which had retained the majority since 1963, had made nominations or sponsored allied parties for 185 seats out of 250, all of which they clinched in the election.<sup>827</sup> Ballot papers provided during the elections were pre-filled with nominees of the Ba’ath Party; anyone who wished to vote differently would have to request a different ballot paper to input the name of their preferred

candidate manually.<sup>828</sup> Many Syrians felt that the election results were predetermined, and some boycotted the elections.<sup>829</sup>

During Assad’s 24-year regime, internal violence led to the loss of many lives, with estimates of 306,887 civilian deaths by 2022—many of them killed by the Assad regime.<sup>830</sup> Fourteen million people have been forcibly displaced since 2011, and 17 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2024.<sup>831</sup>

## Hostility to Equality under the Assad Regime

LGBTIQ people and their rights did not necessarily feature as part of election rhetoric, but have been politicized under the Bashar al-Assad regime. In 2023, Asmaa al-Assad, then-first lady of Syria, demonized LGBTIQ rights activism, labelling sexual and gender minorities as tools of the West and “modern liberalism” geared toward “tampering with human beings.”<sup>832</sup> Similarly,

828 Ibid.

829 Enab Baladi, “Protesters in As-Suwayda Call for Boycott of People’s Assembly Election,” Enab Baladi, July 5, 2024, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2024/07/protesters-in-as-suwayda-call-for-boycott-of-peoples-assembly-elections>.

830 Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), “Syrian Arab Republic– Behind the data: Recording civilian casualties in Syria,” May 11, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/05/behind-data-recording-civilian-casualties-syria>.

831 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “Syrian Arab Republic,” accessed July 1, 2025, <https://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic>; Sevil Omer, “Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help,” World Vision, March 10, 2025, <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>.

832 Guardians of Equality Movement, “Systemic Homophobia: What Are Asmaa Al-Asaad Messages from Attacking Homosexuality,” October 10, 2023, <https://guardiansgem.org/modern-liberalism-assads-approach-to-attacking-freedoms-how-did-asma-al-assad-involve-the-issue-of-homosexuality-in-her-visit-to-china>.

824 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World Report 2024 – Syria,” accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/syria/freedom-world/2024>.

825 Areas held by resistance forces included Northeastern Syria, held by the Syria Democratic Forces, and Idlib and Aleppo, held by the Hayat Tahrir Al Sham and the Syrian National Army.

826 Vladimir Pran and Maroun Sfeir, “Syrian Elections Ended. What Have We Learned From the Results?,” Atlantic Council, August 16, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/syrian-peoples-assembly-elections-parliament-5>. See also Albert Aji and Abby Sewell, “Syrians Vote for Their Next Parliament, Which May Pave the Way for Assad to Extend His Rule,” AP News, July 16, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/syria-parliament-election-66d54cf9397c02cd8afbe5aa739ba569>.

827 Ibid.



then-Minister of Endowments Mohammed Abdul-Sattar Al-Sayyed, during a joint religious session with Orthodox and Muslim religious leaders, asserted that the “liberal Western” approach disintegrates society with widespread “moral deviation,” and strongly encouraged adherence to religious and so-called family values.<sup>833</sup>

## LGBTIQ People and the Fall of the Assad Regime

On December 8, 2024, following the launch of “a major offensive against pro-government forces” that began on November 27, Syrian opposition forces seized the capital city, Damascus, forcing Bashar al-Assad to flee into exile and ending an almost 14-year civil war in the country.<sup>834</sup> Syrians celebrated in the streets as opposition fighters freed prisoners of conscience held in regime prisons.<sup>835</sup> Syrian LGBTIQ activists, too, celebrated the fall of Assad, whom they described as “one of the greatest sources of violence and terror from Syria.”<sup>836</sup>

Many LGBTIQ Syrians had fled the country during Assad’s regime for numerous reasons.<sup>837</sup> Tarek Zeidan, a Lebanese LGBTIQ activist who works closely with activists in and from Syria, explained:

Queer people have been leaving Syria for many reasons, for the war, for persecution, for their political views, and not necessarily [only] for their sexual and

gender identities but many do see this as a reason to leave. They leave because of persecution against them and because they want to live in a place where they’re more openly free. They also leave because of economic destitution. They leave because of family issues.<sup>838</sup>

After the fall of Assad, the Guardians of Equality Movement, an organization working to improve the lives of LGBTIQ people in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, expressed hope that the regime’s breakdown would lead to the reduction of human rights violations against LGBTIQ and marginalized groups.<sup>839</sup>

## An Uncertain Future in a Post-Assad Syria

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the resistance force that led the toppling of Assad, established a transitional government, currently led by interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa.<sup>840</sup> The government’s position on LGBTIQ equality remains unclear.<sup>841</sup> A regional news source reported ambiguously that “the status of the LGBT community, regulations regarding women’s attire, and the consumption of alcohol” will be deliberated upon by the transitional government.<sup>842</sup>

Francois Zankih, a gay Syrian man who fled to Canada, founded the Guardians of Equality Movement after being tortured by HTS in 2018 and threatened with execution

833 Imad Al-Daghli, “مهمه لوج قشمد ي في رايوح في لاف مقيت فاقوالا، عتجم لاو رسالا ني صحت في نيدلا” (“Awqaf Holds a Dialogue Event in Damascus on the Importance of Religion in Fortifying the Family and Society”), Sana, February 6, 2024, <https://sana.sy/?p=2040904>.

834 “What Happened in Syria? How did al-Assad Fall?,” Al Jazeera, December 8, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/8/what-happened-in-syria-has-al-assad-really-fallen>; Maya Gebeily and Timour Azhari, “Syrian Rebels Topple Assad who Flees to Russia in Mideast Shakeup,” Reuters, December 8, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syria-rebels-celebrate-captured-homs-set-sights-damascus-2024-12-07>.

835 Ibid.

836 Guardians of Equality Movement, “Statement on the Fall of the Assad Regime and The Syrian LGBTQIA+ Post-Assad Regime,” December 29, 2024, <https://guardiansgem.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Statement-on-the-Fall-of-the-Assad-Regime-and-The-Syrian-LGBTQIA-Post-Assad-Regime.pdf>.

837 Johanna Chisholm and Nadine Yousif, “A decade since Canada opened its doors, Syrians reflect on home away from home,” BBC News, December 15, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1kev3k49g-w0>; Isabella McRae, “I Faced Oppression as an LGBTQ+ Man in Syria. We Need to Keep Fighting for a Brighter Future,” Big Issue, December 17, 2024, <https://www.bigissue.com/news/social-justice/syria-revolution-al-assad-lgbtq-rights>; Center For Operational Analysis and Research, “LGBTQ+ Syria: Experiences, Challenges, and Priorities for the Aid Sector,” June 22, 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2055081.html>.

838 Outright interview with Tarek Zeidan, founder and former president of Helem and activist from Lebanon advocating for LGBTIQ people’s rights in the SWANA region, virtual, February 2025. See also Jasmin Lilian Diab and Bechara Samneh, “On the Margins of Refuge: Queer Syrian Refugees and the Politics of Belonging and Mobility in Post-2019 Lebanon,” International Journal of Discrimination and the Law 24, no. 3 (2024): 169–193, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13582291241263802>.

839 Guardians of Equality Movement, “Statement on the Fall of the Assad Regime and The Syrian LGBTQIA+ Post-Assad Regime,” December 29, 2024, <https://guardiansgem.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/S>.

840 “Syria’s De Facto Leader Says Holding Elections Could Take Up to Four Years,” Al Jazeera, December 29, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/29/syrias-de-facto-leader-says-holding-elections-could-take-up-to-four-years>.

841 One LGBTIQ news website reported that Hind Kabawat, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and the only woman in the new cabinet, “publicly displayed solidarity by changing her Facebook profile picture to a Pride-themed format” in 2015. Pink News (@pinknews), “Syria’s First and Only Female Minister Supports LGBTQ+ Rights,” TikTok, April 1, 2025, [https://www.tiktok.com/@pinknews/video/7488285361387375894?is\\_from\\_webapp-p=1&sender\\_device=pc&web\\_id=7484247222517007927](https://www.tiktok.com/@pinknews/video/7488285361387375894?is_from_webapp-p=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7484247222517007927).

842 “Syria’s New Government Priorities: Address LGBT, Alcohol and Women’s Dress Code,” Modern Diplomacy, December 24, 2024, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/12/24/syrias-new-government-priorities-address-lgbt-alcohol-and-womens-dress-code>.

in 2020.<sup>843</sup> Zankih, now based in Canada, told the media in December 2024: “There is a behavior change, but maybe tomorrow someone will be killed by HTS because he is gay...We cannot trust them enough because their behavior is bad. It is too early to judge.”<sup>844</sup> Indeed, by June, activists were accusing police and armed groups linked to the new government of a wide range of serious abuses against LGBTIQ people, including “entrapment through dating apps, home raids, abductions, arbitrary arrests, torture, humiliation, threats of physical violence and disfigurement, as well as other dangerous practices such as forced filming and public shaming.”<sup>845</sup>

Tarek Zeidan told Outright that trans people were a particular target, which fits into the autocratic model of suppressing marginalized groups as a “national public enemy”:

In the last few weeks, there have been a series of attacks against visibly trans people, in parts of Syria more closely related to the old regime...We’ve seen this happen multiple times throughout the region when many of these countries were dealing with economic and political scandals and crises, and would, all of a sudden, start manufacturing moral panics and stating [that] queer people are the enemy. Trans people have become the main target. When regime changes happen, they crack down by targeting a common enemy. As soon as this new faction took over, trans people were immediately targeted, as this way of proving once and again to the populace that this new regime is a strong protector of families, of values, of order.<sup>846</sup>

In March 2025, the interim government issued a

Constitutional Declaration, which will serve as an interim constitution.<sup>847</sup> While it commits to equality, including on the grounds of gender, feminist and human rights groups have expressed concern that the “government’s approach...restricts individual freedoms and contradicts the principles of democracy and pluralism.”<sup>848</sup> The impact on LGBTIQ people is yet to be seen.

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843 Luke Alsford, “I was Tortured in Syria for Being Gay — Now I’m Terrified What the Future Will Bring,” Metro, December 22, 2024, <https://metro.co.uk/2024/12/22/i-tortured-syria-gay-now-im-terrified-future-will-bring-22214880>.

844 Ibid.

845 Maysaa Ajjan, “Syrian authorities ramp up LGBTQ+ crackdowns under al-Sharaa rule,” Media Diversity Institute, June 13, 2025, <https://www.media-diversity.org/syrian-authorities-ramp-up-lgbtq-crackdowns-under-al-sharaa-rule>.

846 Zeidan interview. Videos of harassment against queer people in Syria have been shared on social media. See DW News (@dwnews), “Videos have been coming out of Syria that show LGBTQ+ people getting insulted, abused and threatened. The clips have caused outrage among Syrians abroad,” Instagram, March 4, 2025, [https://www.instagram.com/dwnews/reel/DGyLbNfBAYj/?locale=ne\\_np&hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/dwnews/reel/DGyLbNfBAYj/?locale=ne_np&hl=en). Original video posted by Iman Le Caire (@imanlecaire), “Trigger Warning: Extreme Violence Against Trans People,” Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/imanlecaire/reel/DGE9yfrupjJ>, February 14, 2025.

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847 Syrian Arab Republic, Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, March 2025, <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025.03.13%20-%20Constitutional%20declaration%20%28English%29.pdf>.

848 Rula Asad, “End of al-Assad’s 54-Year Rule: Syrian Feminist Views on the Transitional Phase,” Heinrich Böll Stiftung, June 10, 2025, <https://www.boell.de/en/2025/06/10/end-of-al-assads-54-year-rule-syrian-feminist-views-on-the-transitional-phase>.

# CASE STUDY TÜRKİYE:

## “Elections Still Matter”: LGBTIQ Political Participation Under Repression

Election: Local (March 31, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>849</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Not clear

### Background

The 2024 Turkish local and municipal elections, held in March, dealt a surprisingly strong blow to the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP), a party that has ruled over LGBTIQ people with an iron fist and has slowly worked to dismantle democracy.<sup>850</sup>

For the first time in two decades, since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s rise to power, the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) made major gains, including retaining the Istanbul and Ankara municipalities and gaining over 37 percent of the vote nationally, two percentage points above the AKP’s 35 percent.<sup>851</sup>

849 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Turkey,” accessed August 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2025>.

850 Bahram P. Kalviri, “Opinion – Turkey’s Continuing Autocratic Turn,” E-International Relations, May 4, 2025, <https://www.e-ir.info/2025/05/04/opinion-turkeys-continuing-autocratic-turn/>; Barış Özkul, “Turkey’s autocratic descent has lessons for the US,” openDemocracy, March 22, 2025, [https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/turkey-protest-mayor-arrest-autocratic-descent/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/turkey-protest-mayor-arrest-autocratic-descent/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

851 Human Rights Watch, “Türkiye: Events of 2024,” accessed August 1, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/Türkiye#ea21f>.

With wins in 14 metropolitan municipalities out of 30, the opposition now controls the “most populous and economically significant municipalities, responsible for roughly 80 percent of the country’s revenue generation,” including Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Bursa, and Adana.<sup>852</sup> The elections were also notable in terms of an increase in women’s representation across all electoral positions:

Women are now mayors in 61 districts, 6 provinces, and 5 metropolitan areas... In neighborhood head or muhtar races, the number of women elected nearly doubled from 1,134 to 2,150 since the last local elections in 2019. The increase in women’s political representation is a major development happening not only in big cities but also in smaller cities and provincial towns across the country.<sup>853</sup>

Held across 81 provinces of the country, the elections saw 78 percent voter turnout, down six percent from the last elections in 2019.<sup>854</sup> The elections were generally certified as free and fair.<sup>855</sup>

852 Evren Balta and Zeynep Kadirbeyoğlu, interview with Ramyar D. Rossoukh, “Beyond Erdoğan: Lessons from Turkey’s 2024 Local Elections,” Brandeis University Crown Center for Middle East Studies, May 1, 2024, <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/crown-conversations/cc-21.html>.

853 Ibid.

854 “CHP wins 35 provincial municipalities in Turkey’s local elections, AKP takes 24, says election council president,” Duvar English, April 1, 2024, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/chp-wins-35-provincial-municipalities-in-turkeys-local-elections-akp-takes-24-says-election-council-president-news-64115>.

855 Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, “Local elections in Türkiye (31 March 2024),” Report CG(2024)47-16, October 17,

The results came as a surprise to all four LGBTIQ activists whom Outright interviewed in Türkiye. Oğulcan, a queer activist working with the organization SPoD, characterized Türkiye as a “competitive authoritarian regime” where free elections coexist with repression:

Civil society [and] media are oppressed, and [the judiciary] and security, and other powers are handled by one person, but also, at the same time, there are free elections. So it's not like Russia or any other similar authoritarian countries, and that's why elections still matter for many people, and that's why we believe that, yes, there might be change peacefully with the elections. We experienced that in 2019 when the main opposition took over metropolitan cities like Istanbul, Ankara, and other big cities. Yes, people have that kind of hope, and the turnout is extremely high in Türkiye, like 86 percent of the nation goes to the polls and votes, which is also extraordinary, compared to other countries at the same level [of authoritarianism].<sup>856</sup>

The political stakes of elections are high for LGBTIQ people in Türkiye, whom Erdogan has consistently demonized and scapegoated, and who have, in turn, been at the center of civil society activism resisting the AKP's creeping authoritarianism. When massive protests erupted over the authorities' efforts to redevelop Gezi Park in Istanbul in 2013, queer people were a visible and vocal contingent of protestors. One commentator wrote:

Since the beginning of the movement in May 2013, the LGBTI movement had a tent in the center of the park on which 'LGBT Block' was written. LGBTI individuals painted captured bulldozers in pink. They displayed the LGBTI flag on their tent and barricades. They frequently organized drag queen dances and small parade groups with slogans and songs. We could say that what we call the 'Gezi spirit' by referring to the festivity and humor of the movement was particularly present around the LGBTI Blocks' [sic] tent.<sup>857</sup>

In the aftermath of the Gezi movement, LGBTIQ activists

in Turkey became a key part of anti-authoritarian civic action, forging solidarities with other social justice movements.<sup>858</sup> They also become an increasing focus of government repression. Since 2015, AKP provincial authorities have banned Pride parades in Istanbul and then Ankara, and other municipal bans on LGBTIQ-themed public events have followed throughout the country.<sup>859</sup> When activists have disregarded the illegal bans, security officials have carried out mass arrests.<sup>860</sup>

In 2021, Türkiye withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, a treaty aimed at combating gender-based violence, claiming the convention had been “hijacked by a group of people attempting to normalize homosexuality.”<sup>861</sup> The following year, Türkiye's crackdown on Pride was the most vicious to date, with security officials detaining “up to 526 LGBTIQ+ persons, including many LGBTIQ+ rights defenders...in a period of 37 days.”<sup>862</sup>

Activists have found it increasingly unsafe to advocate for LGBTIQ people's rights publicly. N, a queer feminist activist based in a smaller Mediterranean town, told Outright that she has seen the discourse on LGBTIQ issues change fast and for the worse.

Even four to five years ago, the municipality would have Pride flags flying from the municipal building during June. We could openly publicize screenings of

858 “The year 2013 was not only a turning point for queer groups but also for other social movements and for broad segments of society. The Gezi protests developed into one of the largest political demonstrations in Turkish history, bringing together diverse groups from different movements. Queers played a particularly active role in resisting neoliberal urban policies. During the protests they formed an LGBTI section that organized demonstrations, rallies and discussions...Queers increasingly staged political interventions in the course of discussions on constitutional reform and during and after the Gezi protests; they also strengthened their collaboration with feminist, anti-military, ecological and Kurdish organizations, while engaging more intensively with political parties.” See Zülfükar Çetin, “The Dynamics of the Queer Movement in Turkey,” Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, September 28, 2015, <https://www.boell.de/en/2015/09/28/die-dynamik-der-queer-bewegung-der-turkei>.

859 Outright International, Show Up With No Shame: Pride Around the World in 2024, June 2025, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Pride\\_2025\\_Report\\_0.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Pride_2025_Report_0.pdf), 19–20.

860 Outright International, We Remain Resilient: Pride Around the World in 2022, June 2023, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Outright\\_PrideReport\\_2023.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Outright_PrideReport_2023.pdf), 7, 35–38.

861 Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, “Statement regarding Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention,” March 22, 2021, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/statement-regarding-turkeys-withdrawal-from-the-istanbul-convention>.

862 International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), “Turkey: 373 LGBTIQ+ defenders detained during Istanbul Pride March,” July 6, 2022, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/turkey/turkey-373-lgbtqi-defenders-detained-during-istanbul-pride-march>.

2024, <https://rm.coe.int/local-elections-in-turkiye-31-march-2024-co-rapporteurs-david-eray-swi/1680b1c01c>.

856 Outright Interview with Oğulcan (pseudonym), member of SPoD, virtual, August 12, 2024.

857 Zeynep Uğur, “Queering the Public Sphere: the LGBTI Movement in Gezi,” *Politika*, March 11, 2019, <https://www.politika.io/fr/article/queering-the-public-sphere-the-lgbti-movement-in-gezi>.



queer films and events. But not anymore.<sup>863</sup>

In 2023, Erdogan and the AKP prevailed in a presidential election, marking the twelfth consecutive election in which Erdogan won a political mandate, starting from his Istanbul mayoral win in 1994. The 2023 preelectoral period was marked by homophobic discourse that rights advocates in Türkiye described as hate speech.<sup>864</sup> The AKP and Erdogan's anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric reached new nadirs, with the AKP finding a convenient scapegoat in LGBTIQ people and painting the opposition as pro-LGBTIQ.<sup>865</sup>

## The Election Campaign: LGBTIQ Engagement Amid an Easing of Hostility

Following the AKP's 2023 election win, some political scapegoating of LGBTIQ people continued. Pride events, held a month after the elections in June, were once again met with bans and brutality.<sup>866</sup> In an address to the UN General Assembly in September 2023, Erdogan emphasized the importance of the institution of the cisheteronormative family and defended the rights of "those against LGBT." He also criticized the color scheme to promote the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, dismissing them as "LGBT colors."<sup>867</sup>

But in the months leading up to the March 2024 municipal elections, said Marsel, a bisexual activist and human rights defender from Istanbul, who works with the LGBTIQ human rights organization SPoD, "the AKP wasn't

adopting anti-LGBTI discourse so much."<sup>868</sup> Council of Europe election observers noted, too, that the campaign was

...relatively silent compared to the ones in 2019 and 2023...[and] the level of activities and the level of political tensions were lower..Only one interlocutor regretted peaks of hate speech against Kurdish, Armenian, and LGBT+ minorities during electoral campaigns.<sup>869</sup>

In contrast, coalition partners such as the far-right Islamist New Welfare Party (YRP) – a small party that won five parliamentary seats in the 2023 elections as part of an AKP-led alliance – continued with discourse targeting LGBTIQ people during the campaign period.<sup>870</sup>

Marsel and his colleague Oğulcan, also from SPoD, speculated on several reasons that anti-LGBTIQ discourse might have diminished for a time in late 2023 and early 2024. One possibility is that recovery from the February 2023 earthquake necessitated urgent action. In addition, said Oğulcan, to address Türkiye's deepening economic crisis,

In September 2023, the government [sat at] the table with the World Bank and other interstate institutions for economic investment plans, and such a coincidence during that time, they didn't prefer targeting LGBTI people, because all of these donors and interstate institutions. [The] World Bank has concrete anti-discrimination policies... of course, it doesn't explain the full story, but this is what we know from the surface, and after all the agreements [were] done and [the government] received money from them, they try to continue polarizing the society and LGBTI people.<sup>871</sup>

For whatever reason, in this context of an easing of

863 Outright interview with N (pseudonym), virtual, August 2024.

864 Burcu Karakas, "Fear among Turkey's LGBT community after hostile election campaign," Reuters, June 25, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/fear-among-Turkiyes-lgbt-community-after-hostile-election-campaign-2023-06-24>; Damla Umut Uzun, interview with CIVICUS, "TURKEY: 'For the embattled LGBTIQ+ movement, simply persisting in taking to the streets is an achievement'," CIVICUS, July 16, 2023, <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/fr/medias-ressources/112-news/122-interviews/6476-Türkiye-for-the-embattled-lgbtqi-movement-simply-persisting-in-taking-to-the-streets-is-an-achievement>.

865 Elçin Poyrazlar and Christian Oliver, "Erdogan finds a scapegoat in Turkey's election: LGBTQ+ people," Politico, May 13, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-elections-2023-lgbtq-recep-tayyip-erdogan>.

866 Outright International, Beyond the Rainbows and Glitter: Pride Around the World in 2023, June 10, 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/beyond-rainbows-and-glitter-pride-around-world-2023>, 10.

867 Umut Colak, Hilmi Hacaloğlu and Ezel Sahinkaya, "Turkey Targets LGBTQ Community as Erdogan Touts Family Values," Voice of America, September 22, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/türkiye-targets-lgbtq-community-as-erdogan-touts-family-values/7280379.html>.

868 Outright interview with Oğulcan and Marsel, members of SPoD, virtual, August 12, 2024.

869 Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, "Local elections in Türkiye."

870 YRP released a campaign video leading up to the municipal elections targeting LGBTIQ people with statements like: "If there is no morality, there is LGBT" and "We will drive deviant organizations out of our city. Moral municipalism is discernment." See "Turkish gov't ally far-right Islamist party targets LGBTI+ community in municipal election campaign," Duvar English, January 25, 2024, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkish-govt-ally-far-right-islamist-party-targets-lgbti-community-in-municipal-election-campaign-news-63713>.

871 Oğulcan and Marsel interview.

attacks, LGBTIQ people were able to freely organize around the municipal elections. Activists in Istanbul and Ankara advocated with some candidates for municipal posts in advance of the election, a strategy they thought would yield more positive outcomes than trying to engage with parliamentarians. As part of its “The Municipality Got This” campaign, SPoD published an “LGBTI+ Friendly Mayor Protocol,” a list of commitments that the group asked mayoral candidates to sign on to before municipal elections.<sup>872</sup> Thirteen candidates for municipal elections from across Türkiye signed the protocol, including candidates from the main opposition CHP as well as the smaller People’s Equality and Democracy (DEM) Party and the Workers Party.<sup>873</sup>

SPoD’s “The Municipality Got This” campaign was a response to the national government’s inaction and a strategic shift to local advocacy. As Marsel put it:

[A]dvocacy and lobbying efforts at the national level, the parliamentary level, don’t have any impact anymore, but still, we have ties with municipalities, and we can at least fix some urgent problems like accommodation, housing, employment, and financial support for [LGBT] refugees and [citizens].<sup>874</sup>

As far as organizations in Türkiye could ascertain, LGBTIQ citizens were generally able to vote without obstacles in 2024. Despite high levels of political scapegoating of LGBTIQ people in Türkiye, as discussed further below, electoral participation for LGBTIQ citizens is usually not an issue in Türkiye. Umut, a queer activist from Ankara, told Outright, “If you are a citizen, you have the right to vote, and these voting cards are coming to your home. They are sent by the government to your home, and you just go to your [ballot] box and you vote.”<sup>875</sup> SPoD sent up an election hotline in 2023 and addressed one case of discrimination against a trans person attempting to vote.

The organization did not document any such cases in 2024, although Oğulcan said,

Some queer people [fear] bias, that they will be discriminated [against at] the polls, so they don’t participate in the election sometimes because of this fear. But as SPoD, we are trying to encourage queer community as much as possible to go to the polls and vote.<sup>876</sup>

## A Surprising Election Result

The AKP’s win in 2023 dealt a blow to citizens hoping for political change, and many did not believe anything would be different in the local elections. As a result, the 2024 municipal elections were relatively low-key, with a six percent decrease in turnout compared to the last local elections in 2019.<sup>877</sup> LGBTIQ activists had little hope riding on them.

Umut, the activist in Ankara, said that she and many of her LGBTIQ friends had registered to vote in the 2023 presidential election and even got involved in election monitoring. Disillusioned with the results, they were less enthusiastic about voting in 2024:

After last year’s general election, actually, all of us, we lost interest in these election processes because it has never changed in 20 years. We have the same government, we are going backwards in terms of human rights...I was also personally not into the election process.. I just, I was [not] even keen to go vote. But yes, okay, [I did] vote. And we were not even watching the election results after that. I just went to the park with my friends, and we were surprised after the result.<sup>878</sup>

Despite the surprising blow to the AKP in the 2024 elections, however, the outcome had very little immediate impact on LGBTIQ people and other minorities in the

872 See SPoD, “BU İŞİ BELEDİYE ÇÖZER!” (The municipality will solve this!), accessed August 13, 2025, <https://spod.org.tr/bu-isi-belediye-cozer>.

873 DEMParty is a pro-Kurdish political party. Both the DEM Party and the Workers Party are seen as progressive and often supportive of LGBTIQ people. During the 2023 presidential elections, these two parties were the largest political parties in the Labour and Freedom Alliance, which was the only political coalition promising gender equality for women and LGBTIQ people in 2023. See Umut Uras, “Turkey’s elections: What are the key alliances promising?,” Al Jazeera, May 11, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/11/turkeys-elections-what-are-the-key-alliances-promising>.

874 Oğulcan and Marsel interview.

875 Outright interview with Umut, virtual, September 20, 2024.

876 Oğulcan interview. See “Seçim günü LGBTİ+’lar için destek hattı” (Support hotline for LGBTI+ people on election day), Artı Gerçek, May 13, 2023, <https://artigercek.com/guncel/secim-gunu-lgbtilar-icin-destek-hatti-249713h>.

877 “CHP wins 35 provincial municipalities in Turkey’s local elections, AKP takes 24, says election council president,” Duvar English, April 1, 2024, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/chp-wins-35-provincial-municipalities-in-turkeys-local-elections-akp-takes-24-says-election-council-president-news-64115>.

878 Umut interview.

country. Oğulcan, of SPoD, said:

Yeah, it was surprising. I think we can all agree on this. But if you ask me in terms of LGBTI community, nothing changed, because you know, it was municipal elections, and [the] central decision maker process didn't change because of the results of this election. There could be a possibility that municipalities start to support [the] LGBTI committee, but it didn't happen actually, because CHP wants to be in power in [the] next elections. And you know, [the] LGBTI issue is a very polarizing issue at the moment in Türkiye, and they don't want to speak publicly about this issue because they think that it will affect their winning of the next elections.<sup>879</sup>

Marsel agreed:

The voting culture can be changed, and the current political situation can lead to a drastic, dramatic change in Türkiye's political landscape, but in terms of LGBTI rights... nothing has changed positively.

Activists also pointed out that while the opposition's win might portend slightly less hostility for LGBTIQ Turkish citizens, the CHP had not positioned itself as a friend to all marginalized groups. In 2023, CHP presidential candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu said that if elected, "we will say goodbye to our Syrian guests in two years. I will close the border to all kinds of illegal crossings in the first week of my presidency."<sup>880</sup> Umut, the lesbian activist in Ankara, described CHP as "the biggest campaigner in terms of anti-refugee election promises."<sup>881</sup>

Türkiye has historically been a haven for LGBTIQ asylum seekers from Asia and North Africa who are escaping repression and hoping to build a better life in Europe.<sup>882</sup> However, deportations of Syrians, in particular, have dramatically increased since 2020.<sup>883</sup> Although

xenophobia was less pronounced in the 2024 campaign than in 2023, Umut added that the general climate of political hostility made queer refugees, facing double marginalization, feel particularly unsafe in the election period:

Attacks on refugees have become so commonplace. I have a friend. He is a queer Syrian refugee. And he wrote about how he is afraid to go outside during the election period because he fears being attacked more.<sup>884</sup>

In fact, some commentators attribute CHP's victory not so much to a popular electoral revolt against Erdogan's authoritarianism, but to the economic downturn paired with the belief that the AKP was not doing enough to stem the flow of migration into Türkiye. Marsel said that according to recent public opinion polls in Türkiye, respondents said that "the biggest problem [was] the economy, and the second one [was] refugees." For LGBTIQ refugees living in this context, in particular, "it's not a promising situation."<sup>885</sup>

## Post-Election Developments: Political Repression and Minority Scapegoating Intensify

As activists predicted, although the 2024 elections provided some hope regarding the democratic process, little has changed on the ground for LGBTIQ people; in fact, for activists and publicly dissenting voices, some things have gotten worse. Marsel informed Outright, "since the municipal elections. AKP adopts this anti LGBT discourse again, which is not promising for us."<sup>886</sup> When Pride Month was celebrated several months after the elections, AKP-appointed governors, who occupy a superior hierarchical position to elected municipal officials, banned events, and police once again carried out arrests.<sup>887</sup> The same month, Erdogan compared LGBTI issues to fascism and tyrannical regimes, adding that

<sup>879</sup> Oğulcan interview.

<sup>880</sup> "Turkey presidential candidate vows to deport Syrians in two years if he beats Erdogan," The New Arab, March 16, 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/news/turkey-opposition-candidate-vows-expel-syrians-2-years>.

<sup>881</sup> Umut interview.

<sup>882</sup> See Neil Grungras, Rachel Levitan and Amy Slotek. "Unsafe haven: Security challenges facing LGBT asylum seekers and refugees in Türkiye," The Fletcher Journal of Human Security 24 (2009): 41-61, <https://sites.tufts.edu/praxis/files/2020/05/3.-Grungras-et-al.pdf>.

<sup>883</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Hundreds of Refugees Deported to Syria," October 24, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/24/turkey-hundreds-refugees-deported-syria>.

<sup>884</sup> Umut interview. See Nicolas Bourcier, "Syrian refugees attacked in Turkey: The crisis makes us perfect scapegoats," Le Monde, July 20, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/20/syrian-refugees-attacked-in-turkey-the-crisis-makes-us-perfect-scapegoats\\_6691629\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/20/syrian-refugees-attacked-in-turkey-the-crisis-makes-us-perfect-scapegoats_6691629_4.html).

<sup>885</sup> Marsel interview.

<sup>886</sup> Ibid.

<sup>887</sup> Outright International, "Show Up With No Shame," 19-20; Defne Güzel, "2024 Report on Violations Against Pride Month Events and Protests," Kaos GL, July 10, 2024, <https://kaosgl.org/en/single-news/2024-report-on-violations-against-pride-month-events-and-protests>.

the “family institution” has faced “the toughest test of its history and has been subjected to the heaviest attacks.”<sup>888</sup>

The president and his party kicked off 2025 as the “year of the family,” which many saw as a euphemism for anti-LGBTIQ policies – a theory confirmed when the Supreme Radio and Television Council, in March, rebranded 2025 as “the year of combating LGBT.”<sup>889</sup>

Oğulcan revealed that while human rights were never a fully mainstreamed concept in Türkiye, rights-based discourse, which had once been more commonly accepted, has been steadily being eroded under Erdogan’s two-decade-long rule.

At the moment, I think authoritarian tendencies [are] increasing in Türkiye...violating rights of some groups based on their identity, or, you know, social divisions [are] becoming more and more normalized. A perfect example is AKP’s agenda for municipalities to kill street dogs—violence against animals or, in some cases, groups of people are being seen as acceptable.<sup>890</sup>

Marsel added:

Right-wing populist discourse is also becoming more mainstream, especially through social media. There are some groups and movements adopting the exact discourse of the alt-right in the [United] States, for example, and targeting women, Kurdish people, LGBT people, and animal rights activists directly. That’s also another important change in the narrative. It makes violence more acceptable, easily acceptable. Alt-right

discourse is getting more widespread as well.<sup>891</sup>

Unlawful deportations of Syrian refugees in Türkiye continued to increase after the 2024 elections, as Erdogan sought to placate public opinion.<sup>892</sup> Marsel told Outright:

We recently had an awful incident where one trans refugee, a sex worker, was diagnosed with HIV. Her identity was revealed on social media, with the official documents showing her diagnosis, and that person was sent back to her country [in July 2024]. And as far as we learned, that person was murdered by her family. So from the beginning until the end, we saw the attempts, first targeting, then the government sends that person [back], and then finally, of course, she was murdered.<sup>893</sup>

Kaos GL Association issued a statement on World Refugee Day in June 2025, highlighting the resilience of LGBTIQ refugees in the face of these intersecting forms of violence and marginalization:

In the current context of economic crisis, LGBTI+ refugees are among the most insecure and poorest groups; they are condemned to both social exclusion and structural poverty. The declaration of 2025 as the ‘Year of the Family’ is the societal reflection of the systematic targeting of LGBTI+ people as if they were a disease threatening the family/society, resulting in increasing hate attacks day by day. Borders do not stop life, and LGBTI+ hostility cannot overshadow the right to live. Salute to all LGBTI+ refugees who resist with their very existence in the face of all this violence!! This resistance is not only a struggle for survival but also a powerful message that a life of dignity, equality, and freedom is possible. Every existence, every breath, every word is a stance against oppression.<sup>894</sup>

888 “In new hate speech, Turkey’s Erdoğan says ‘imposition of LGBT’ turns into ‘tyranny,’ surpassing ‘even fascism,’” Duvar English, June 5, 2024, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkeys-year-of-family-becomes-year-against-lgbti-news-65764>; “Turkey’s Family Ministry pushes ‘marriage’ agenda for Valentine’s Day,” Duvar English, February 14, 2025, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkeys-family-ministry-pushes-marriage-agenda-for-valentines-day-news-65666>.

889 “Turkey’s year of family becomes ‘year against LGBTI+,’” Duvar English, March 6, 2025, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkeys-year-of-family-becomes-year-against-lgbti-news-65764>; “Turkey’s Family Ministry pushes ‘marriage’ agenda for Valentine’s Day,” Duvar English, February 14, 2025, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkeys-family-ministry-pushes-marriage-agenda-for-valentines-day-news-65666>.

890 Oğulcan and Marsel interview. The Turkish parliament passed a law in July 2024 that allows municipalities to kill any stray dog “showing aggressive behaviour or that have untreatable diseases. See Hamdi Firat Buyuku, “Turkish Parliament Approves Law Allowing Euthanasia for Stray Dogs,” Balkan Insight, July 30, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/07/30/turkish-parliament-approves-law-allowing-euthanasia-for-stray-dogs>.

891 Oğulcan and Marsel interview.

892 Diana Hodali, “Syrians in Turkey face deportation into an unknown future,” Deutsche Welle, June 29, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/syrians-in-turkey-face-deportation-into-an-unknown-future/a-69491855>.

893 Oğulcan and Marsel interview. See also “Refuge trans woman deported by Turkey over HIV status killed in Syria,” Duvar English, July 27, 2024, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/refuge-trans-woman-deported-by-turkey-over-hiv-status-killed-in-syria-news-64720>.

894 Kaos GL, “Borders do not stop life, LGBTI+ hostility cannot overshadow the right to live,” June 20, 2025, <https://kaosgl.org/en/single-news/kaos-gl-issues-world-refugee-day-statement-borders-do-not-stop-life-lgbti-hostility-cannot-overshadow-the-right-to-live>.



Political repression extended beyond marginalized groups, as the AKP tightened its authoritarian leash. Within months of being elected, opposition mayors from multiple municipalities, including Istanbul's mayor and CHP's presidential candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, were arrested on corruption and terrorism charges.<sup>895</sup> This period saw increasing arrests of journalists and activists, including the arrest in February 2025 of Yıldız Tar, the editor-in-chief of KaosGL.org, a news portal that reports on LGBTIQ issues.<sup>896</sup> Tar, along with many other independent journalists who report on human rights issues, was arrested on the pretext of "membership in a terrorist organization" as part of the government's crackdown on the Democratic Congress Party (HDK).<sup>897</sup> In fact, between July 2024 and February 2025, there were 50,000 additional inmates added to the prisons, demonstrating the extent of mass arrests.<sup>898</sup> Even the arrested Istanbul mayor's defense attorney was detained, in a move that prominent rights groups termed "judicial harassment."<sup>899</sup>

In February 2025, activists publicized a leaked draft bill, developed by the Ministry of Justice in alignment with Türkiye's Fourth Judicial Reform Strategy Document (2025–2029), that would criminalize same-sex engagement and wedding ceremonies, restrict legal gender recognition, and punish with up to three years in prison anyone who "who publicly promotes, praises, or encourages behaviors contrary to biological sex and general morality."<sup>900</sup> In April 2025, HÜDA PAR, a far-right

party aligned with the ruling party on certain issues but not part of the ruling coalition, introduced a similar draft "Bill on Amendments to the Turkish Penal Code and Certain Other Laws." The bill's premise is that queer and trans people threaten to "destroy human nature and existence":

Humans are created as female and male, and can only form a marital union with someone of the opposite sex. Thoughts and activities that advocate otherwise aim to distort and destroy human nature and existence, the family, and social order. Considering actions of degenderization or gender denial, it becomes necessary to define as crimes those acts that harm marriage and the institution of family.<sup>901</sup>

Similar to the leaked Ministry of Justice bill and the Kremlin-inspired laws introduced in the last two years in Georgia and Hungary, its provisions would criminalize human rights advocacy, subjecting "[a]nyone who encourages, promotes, disseminates in any way, or propagates sexual relations or sexual behavior between individuals of the same biological sex" to three to five years in prison, with penalties lengthened by half if the alleged promotion "is committed through any written, visual, audio, traditional, or digital means of communication and information." It also provides for the doubling of penalties for "acts of public indecency" or "public sexual intercourse" when they involve two persons of the same sex, as opposed to different sexes. Finally, it leans into anti-trans moral panic, punishing with one to three years in prison "a person who enters into a marriage by concealing their biological sex."<sup>902</sup>

Activists have publicly criticized both bills, and as of writing, neither has been placed on the parliamentary agenda.

<sup>895</sup> Kaos GL, "Let us organize resistance against oppression, peace against repression, and unity against polarization," March 22, 2025, <https://kaosgl.org/en/single-news/34-let-us-organize-resistance-against-oppression-peace-against-repression-and-unity-against-polarization-34>. See Cem Tecimer, "The Arrest of Istanbul's Mayor is Textbook Lawfare," *Verfassungsblog*, March 28, 2025, <https://verfassungsblog.de/the-arrest-of-istanbul-mayor-is-textbook-lawfare>.

<sup>896</sup> Tar was released in May 2025, pending trial, after 98 days of imprisonment. See Kaos GL, "Release order issued for Yıldız Tar, Editor-in-Chief of KaosGL.org," May 30, 2025, <https://kaosgl.org/en/single-news/release-order-issued-for-yildiz-tar-editor-in-chief-of-kaosgl-org>.

<sup>897</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Türkiye: journalists Yıldız Tar, Ender Imrek and RSF Fellow Elif Akgül must be released," February 26, 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/t%C3%BCrkiye-journalists-yildiz-tar-ender-imrek-and-rsf-fellow-elif-akg%C3%BCl-must-be-released>.

<sup>898</sup> "Number of inmates increased by some 50,000 in last 6 months in Turkey," *Duvar English*, February 20, 2025, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/number-of-inmates-increased-by-some-50000-in-last-6-months-in-turkey-news-65685>.

<sup>899</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Türkiye: Jailed Mayor's Lawyer Detained," June 26, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/26/Türkiye-jailed-mayors-lawyer-detained>.

<sup>900</sup> "Gov't proposes law restricting gender transition, criminalizing expression of LGBTQ+ identity," *Turkish Minute*, February 28, 2025, <https://www.turkishminute.com/2025/02/28/govt-proposes-law-restricting-gender-transition-criminalize-expression-of-lgbtq-identity3>.

<sup>901</sup> See Kaos GL, "HÜDA-PAR has submitted a bill of law against LGBTIQ+ individuals to the Parliament," April 21, 2025, <https://kaosgl.org/en/single-news/huda-par-has-submitted-a-bill-of-law-against-lgbti-individuals-to-the-parliament>; Arzu Geybullayeva, "The new anti-LGBTQ+ bill proposed to the Turkish parliament, branded as a 'manifesto of hate,'" *Global Voices*, April 24, 2025, <https://globalvoices.org/2025/04/24/the-new-anti-lgbtq-bill-proposed-to-the-parliament-branded-as-a-manifesto-of-hate>.

<sup>902</sup> ILGA-Europe, "Turkey poised to further roll back LGBTI rights amid ongoing democratic crackdown," June 3, 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/press-release-turkey-poised-to-further-roll-back-lgbti-rights-amid-ongoing-democratic-crackdown>; Kaos GL, "HÜDA-PAR has submitted a bill of law."

## Conclusion

Throughout our interviews, the respondents swung between hope and palpable frustration. Marsel felt that despite the municipal results being a positive change, “there is still a long time until the next election, and it’s really hard to foresee how they will attack and backlash on us.”<sup>903</sup>

The hate directed at a marginalized community can have a profound impact. The two activists from Istanbul said that younger queer people have a lot of anger and that many of them don’t believe in the political establishment, or even in civil society organizing. The activists Outright interviewed suggested that some LGBTIQ individuals, while asking for their own rights, are also moving toward a right-wing nationalist, racist discourse. Umut said that there are sections of the LGBTIQ population, perhaps not very visible sections, that find Erdogan to be a charismatic leader. She added that the polarization is leading to changing dynamics within the community itself:

People are so hateful, people are so sad. People do not feel hopeful..In Türkiye, there is a huge economic crisis. Politics is [a] shithole, and people immediately direct this anger in themselves to each other instead of the government. This is a way of suffering, I guess, a new way of suffering in Türkiye...Polarization is happening... There are transphobic gays, femmephobic gays. I don’t [personally] know lesbians who hate trans lesbians, but this is also happening in Türkiye within our community...a huge part of the community also went out from the country. They migrated, or they seek asylum somehow, especially trans people.<sup>904</sup>

The 2024 municipal elections in Türkiye represented neither a complete defeat nor a decisive victory for LGBTIQ people in Türkiye. The country remains “one of the few Muslim-majority countries in which same-sex sexual acts, counternormative sexual identities, and expressions of gender non-conformism are not illegal, yet are heavily constrained and controlled by state institutions, police

forces, and public prosecutors.”<sup>905</sup>

The community’s response to repression has been characterized by strategic adaptation, grassroots resilience, a pragmatic approach to political engagement, and a fierce fighting spirit. Istanbul’s 2025 Trans March was aptly held under the theme “Revolt,” and the march leaders’ press statement read, “Today, our presence in the streets is a declaration that we will not surrender to your obstacles against our mass mobilization... We have never surrendered to you, and we never will.”<sup>906</sup> While systemic barriers remain, and in the face of threats of arrest and violence, LGBTIQ activists continue to challenge the encroaching grip of authoritarianism.



### Election: Presidential and Legislative (November 5, 2024)

<sup>905</sup> Cenk Özbay and Kerem Öktem, “Turkey’s queer times,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 64 (2021): 117–130, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/new-perspectives-on-turkey/article/turkeys-queer-times/27D0B895D97329D2FE7A6538D4BD3213>.

<sup>906</sup> Kaos GL, “Police attacked the Trans Pride March: We have never surrendered to you, and we never will!,” June 22, 2025, <https://kaosgl.org/en/single-news/police-attacked-the-trans-pride-march-we-have-never-surrendered-to-you-and-we-never-will>.

<sup>903</sup> Marsel interview.

<sup>904</sup> Umut interview.

# CASE STUDY UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: A Multi-Million Dollar Campaign Against Trans Equality

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Was the election considered free and fair? Yes, though disinformation persisted and some states enacted voting restrictions<sup>907</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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## Political Context and Results

The United States operates under a two-party political system, with the Republican and Democratic parties dominating the electoral landscape. In the 2024 presidential election, the Republican candidate was former President Donald Trump, while the Democratic candidate was Vice President Kamala Harris, who stepped in after then-President Joe Biden announced he would not seek reelection.

The 2024 United States presidential election occurred amid heightened political polarization, widespread misinformation, and significant anxiety regarding potential election denial, particularly given former

President Donald Trump's refusal to accept his defeat in the 2020 elections.<sup>908</sup> Trump defeated Harris, securing 312 electoral votes to Harris' 226, narrowly winning the popular vote with 49.91 percent.<sup>909</sup>

While observers broadly viewed the elections as procedurally fair, concerns emerged about systemic voter suppression targeting marginalized communities, including racial minorities and transgender voters. The Brennan Center for Justice highlighted voter suppression through stringent voter ID laws, reduced polling locations, and voter roll purges disproportionately affecting voters in states such as Georgia, Texas, and Florida.<sup>910</sup> One group particularly affected, as detailed in the Brennan Center's analysis, "How Voter ID Laws Threaten Transgender Voters," is transgender individuals.<sup>911</sup> They often face significant barriers when their IDs do not match their gender identity or presentation—putting their right to vote at risk in states with strict identification requirements.

Historically, the Republican Party has opposed major milestones in the advancement of LGBTIQ human rights,

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907 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 – United States," accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-states/freedom-world/2025>; Yash Jain and Trey Walk, "Disinformation About US Elections Targets Communities of Color," Human Rights Watch, August 15, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/15/disinformation-about-us-elections-targets-communities-color>; Brennan Center For Justice, Voting Laws Roundup: 2024 in Review, January 15, 2025, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-2024-review>; Movement Advancement Project, Diverging Democracy: The Battle Over Key State Election Laws Since 2020, June 2024, <https://www.mapresearch.org/2024-press-release-election-trends-report>;

908 Robert Tait, "Most swing state voters believe Trump will not accept defeat if he loses election," The Guardian, October 30, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/30/trump-defeat-voter-swing-state>.

909 "Presidential Election Results: Trump Wins," New York Times, last updated March 4, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/11/05/us/elections/results-president.html>.

910 Brennan Center For Justice, Voting Laws Roundup.

911 Stuart Baum and Izabela Tringali, "How Voter ID Laws Threaten Transgender Voters," Brennan Center For Justice, November 20, 2020, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/how-voter-id-laws-threaten-transgender-voters>.

often framing them as threats to traditional values. During his first term from 2017 to 2021, President Donald Trump reinstated a ban on transgender individuals serving in the military, rescinded Obama-era guidance protecting transgender students under Title IX, and narrowed the definition of gender in federal civil rights protections for health and human services programs.<sup>912</sup>

In contrast, the Democratic Party has, in the last few campaign cycles, generally supported LGBTIQ inclusion. Under the Biden administration, the federal government reversed the transgender military ban, reinstated protections for trans students under Title IX, supported the passage of the Respect for Marriage Act to codify marriage equality, and appointed openly LGBTIQ individuals to high-level positions—including the Secretary of Transportation, the Assistant Secretary for Health, and a Special Envoy for the Advancement of the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons at the Department of State.<sup>913</sup> These efforts reflected an institutional commitment to LGBTIQ people's rights as part of a broader human rights agenda.

## Anti-Trans Narratives

LGBTIQ people's human rights, and particularly rights protections related to gender identity, were central targets in Trump's and other Republican candidates' 2024 campaigns. This harmful rhetoric manifested in political platforms, advertising campaigns, and public statements.

912 Sam Levin, "White House announces ban on transgender people serving in military," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/23/donald-trump-transgender-military-ban-white-house-memo>; Jeremy W. Peters, Jo Becker and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, "Trump Rescinds Rules on Bathrooms for Transgender Students," *New York Times*, February 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/us/politics/devos-sessions-transgender-students-rights.html>; Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, "Trump Administration Erases Civil Rights Protections for Health and Human Services Programs," *Advocates for Trans Equality*, November 1, 2019, <https://transequality.org/news/trump-administration-erases-civil-rights-protections-health-and-human-services-programs-0>.

913 "Biden overturns Trump transgender military ban," *BBC*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55799913>; Collin Binkley, "Biden admin extends Title IX protections to transgender students," *PBS*, January 16, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/biden-admin-extends-title-ix-protections-to-transgender-student>; Michael D. Shear, "Biden Signs Bill to Protect Same-Sex Marriage Rights," *New York Times*, December 13, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/13/us/politics/biden-same-sex-marriage-bill.html>; Brett Samuels, "Here are the history-making LGBTQ officials in the Biden administration," *The Hill*, February 6, 2023, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4030255-here-are-the-history-making-lgbtq-officials-in-the-biden-administration>.

**Political Platforms:** Trump's official presidential campaign website outlined his "Plan to Protect Children from Left-Wing Gender Insanity," explicitly proposing policies to ban gender-affirming medical interventions for minors, restrict transgender participation in sports and public facilities, and penalize health care providers offering gender-affirming treatments.<sup>914</sup>

**Public Statements:** At rallies across the country, Trump repeatedly promised to revoke federal protections for transgender students, describing trans-inclusive policies as dangerous. As an example, in a prominent speech at Madison Square Garden in New York City on November 1, 2024, Trump stated, "We will get transgender insanity the hell out of our schools, and we will keep men out of women's sports," deliberately using inflammatory language to reinforce his false narrative around transgender identities and gender-affirming care.<sup>915</sup>

**Advertising Campaigns:** Trump's campaign and affiliated political action committees spent approximately US\$17 million on advertisements falsely associating gender-affirming medical care with "child abuse" and "mutilation," prominently broadcast in battleground states such as Michigan, Arizona, and Pennsylvania.<sup>916</sup> These ads frequently featured misleading testimonials from detransitioners, inaccurately presenting them as representative cases and ignoring extensive evidence of the benefits and safety of gender-affirming care as endorsed by major medical organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics.<sup>917</sup> One of the most infamous examples was the "Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you." advertisement, which aired over 30,000 times across swing states during National Football League (NFL) and college football games. The ad

914 Trump-Vance campaign, "President Trump's Plan to Protect Children from Left-Wing Gender Insanity," February 1, 2023, <https://www.donald-jtrump.com/agenda47/president-trumps-plan-to-protect-children-from-left-wing-gender-insanity>.

915 Bill Barrow, "Trump and Vance make anti-transgender attacks central to their campaign's closing argument," *LA Times*, November 1, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2024-11-01/trump-and-vance-make-antitransgender-attacks-central-to-their-campaigns-closing-argument>.

916 Susan Davis, "GOP ads on transgender rights are dominating airwaves in the election's closing days," *NPR*, October 19, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/10/19/g-sl-28932/donald-trump-transgender-ads-kamala-harris>.

917 Jason Rafferty and American Academy of Pediatrics, *Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents*. *Pediatrics* 142, no. 4 (2018): e20182162. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2162>.



mocked nonbinary identities and framed Vice President Harris' support for gender-affirming care for incarcerated individuals as radical and out of touch.<sup>918</sup>

Trump was not alone in leveraging anti-trans moral panic to drive his campaign. *Them* magazine compiled a list of over 30 Republican Congressional candidates who adopted similar tactics, with varying results.<sup>919</sup> For instance, Senator Ted Cruz from Texas, who ran an attack ad against his opponent Colin Allred that accused Allred of voting to allow "boys in girls' bathrooms," was reelected to his seat.<sup>920</sup> House of Representatives candidate Mayra Flores, also a Republican from Texas, narrowly lost her race after accusing her Democratic opponent, Vicente Gonzalez, of supporting "sex changes for kids."<sup>921</sup> Other members of the Republican Party also fueled and weaponized anti-trans moral panics, pouring resources and unprecedented attention into efforts to scapegoat this minority.<sup>922</sup> Altogether, Republican campaigns spent over US\$200 million attacking trans people in televised campaign ads during the 2024 election cycle.<sup>923</sup>

Transphobic political campaigning in 2024 both fueled and fed off a broader ecosystem of social media disinformation, creating a feedback loop of anti-trans rhetoric and online hate. GLAAD's 2024 Social Media Safety Index highlights a troubling surge in anti-LGBTQ+ hate and disinformation on major social media platforms

during the 2024 election cycle.<sup>924</sup> The report emphasizes that weaponized anti-LGBTQ+ hate, particularly anti-transgender rhetoric, poses significant harm. GLAAD notes that social media platforms have largely failed to mitigate this harmful content, often not enforcing their own policies regarding hate speech and disinformation.

## LGBTIQ Political Representation and Resilience

Despite an adverse political climate, LGBTIQ political representation in the United States reached historic levels during the 2024 election cycle. According to the LGBTQ+ Victory Fund's "Out on the Trail 2024" report, a record-breaking 1,017 openly LGBTIQ candidates ran for public office across the country. This marked a significant expansion in representation, both in terms of absolute numbers and in the diversity of identities represented. Of those 1,017 candidates, while some lost in their primaries, 668 appeared on general election ballots—an increase of 14 percent compared to the 2020 elections.<sup>925</sup>

While comprehensive data on the total number of openly LGBTIQ candidates elected in 2024 is not fully available, several notable victories highlight the community's growing political influence. Sarah McBride was elected as the first openly transgender member of the U.S. House of Representatives, representing Delaware.<sup>926</sup> Julie Johnson became the first openly LGBTIQ U.S. House member from the South, representing Texas' 32nd congressional district. Keturah Herron was elected as the first out LGBTQ+ person of color to the Kentucky State Senate, bringing her experience as an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) advocate to the legislature. Rashaun Kemp became the first out gay Black man elected to the Georgia State Legislature, emphasizing the increasing diversity within LGBTIQ political representation.

The increased visibility and electoral success of LGBTIQ candidates underscored the resilience, strength, and organizing capacity of LGBTIQ communities in the face of escalating political hostility.

918 Susan Davis, "Republican campaigns have been blanketing the airwaves with anti-trans ads," NPR, October 11, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/10/11/nx-s1-5148774/republican-campaigns-have-been-blanketing-the-airwaves-with-anti-trans-ads>.

919 Samantha Riedel, "These Candidates Ran on Anti-Trans Hate. This Is How They Fared," *Them*, November 6, 2024, <https://www.them.us/story/anti-trans-candidates-ted-cruz-lauren-boebert-mark-robinson-wins-losses>.

920 Abby Monteil, "Ted Cruz's Democratic Opponent Responds to Anti-Trans Ad With Confusing Centrist Statement," *Them*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.them.us/story/colin-allred-ted-cruz-texas-senate-anti-trans-ads>.

921 Berenice Garcia, "Vicente Gonzalez defeats Mayra Flores to hold onto South Texas congressional district," *Texas Tribune*, November 5, 2024, <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/11/05/texas-election-2024-mayra-flores-vicente-gonzalez-district-34>.

922 Abby Monteil, "Ted Cruz's Democratic Opponent Responds to Anti-Trans Ad With Confusing Centrist Statement," *Them*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.them.us/story/colin-allred-ted-cruz-texas-senate-anti-trans-ads>.

923 Zane McNeill, "Republicans Spent Nearly \$215M on TV Ads Attacking Trans Rights This Election," *Truthout*, November 5, 2024, <https://truthout.org/articles/republicans-spent-nearly-215m-on-tv-ads-attacking-trans-rights-this-election/>.

924 GLAAD, Social Media Safety Index, 2024, <https://assets.glaad.org/m/4a1d7323a720f2b9/original/2024-Social-Media-Safety-Index.pdf>.

925 LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, *Out on the Trail 2024*, October 2024. <https://victoryfund.org/out-on-the-trail-2024>.

926 Jo Yurcaba, "Sarah McBride becomes the first out transgender person elected to Congress," *NBC News*, November 6, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-politics-and-policy/sarah-mcbride-first-transgender-congress-delaware-rcna177878>.

## Barriers for Trans and Nonbinary Voters

While legally permitted to vote, transgender and nonbinary individuals encountered significant voting barriers due to restrictive voter ID laws. The Williams Institute estimated that as many as 210,800 voting-eligible transgender people may face barriers to voting due to voter ID laws, including nearly 91,300 potential voters who could face disenfranchisement in states with strict photo ID requirements.<sup>927</sup>

In response, advocacy groups such as the National Center for Transgender Equality expanded voter education and provided legal resources to reduce barriers.<sup>928</sup> Nonetheless, these issues posed substantial obstacles to trans and nonbinary voters.

## The Future of Political Support for Trans People's Human Rights

While the threats posed by a second Trump presidency and a Republican sweep of the House of Representatives and Senate are clear, the aftermath of the 2024 election has also revealed troubling internal dynamics within the Democratic Party. In the days following the vote, a narrative emerged within certain Democratic circles suggesting that the party's support for transgender people's rights contributed to its electoral defeat. Notably, Representative Tom Suozzi of New York stated that Democrats need to "stop pandering to the far left" on issues impacting trans people, specifically criticizing the inclusion of transgender athletes in women's sports. Similarly, Representative Seth Moulton of Massachusetts implied that the party's approach to transgender issues was out of touch with voters' concerns.<sup>929</sup>

This perspective is challenged by polling data indicating that transgender issues were not a primary concern for most voters. A post-election poll by the Human Rights Campaign found that only four percent of voters said opposing transgender surgeries and transgender women's participation in sports motivated their vote, ranking these issues last among voters' priorities.<sup>930</sup> Political analysts argue that economic concerns, rather than cultural issues, were the decisive factors in the election outcome.<sup>931</sup> Others have pointed out that rather than going "too far" on trans people's rights, some Democrats visibly appeared to lack courage in defending them, and may have fared better by demonstrating principled stances. As one journalist observed, "Perhaps one reason trans rights became perceived as a troubling issue for Democrats is because they seemed so uncomfortable defending them."<sup>932</sup> Attributing electoral losses to the party's stance on trans people's rights may be a misinterpretation of voter priorities that could risk marginalizing an already vulnerable community.

## Human Rights Implications and Future Concerns

The proliferation of anti-trans narratives and increased political hostility in the 2024 elections signify significant setbacks for LGBTIQ people's rights. Trump's second term has raised immediate concerns regarding policy reversals on legal gender recognition, non-discrimination protections, and health care access.

The 2024 election cycle highlights the vulnerability of marginalized communities to targeted misinformation, underscoring an urgent need for ongoing vigilance and robust advocacy to protect human rights amid escalating political adversity.

927 Jody Herman, Nathan Cisneros, Lindsay Mahowald and Will Tentindo, The potential impact of voter identification laws on transgender voters in the 2024 general election, UCLA Williams Institute, September 2024, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Voter-ID-Sep-2024.pdf>, 5.

928 National Center for Transgender Equality, "Voting while trans," 2024, <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/voting%20while%20trans.pdf>.

929 Samantha Riedel, "These Democratic Lawmakers Are Already Blaming Trans People for Trump's Win," Them, November 8, 2024, <https://www.them.us/story/tom-suozzi-seth-moulton-new-york-times-trans-people-blame-election-2024>.

930 Human Rights Campaign, "New Post Election Poll: Equality Voters Overwhelmingly Backed Harris-Walz ticket; Anti-Trans Attack Ads Proved Ineffective with Broad Swath of Voters," November 7, 2024, <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/new-post-election-poll-equality-voters-overwhelmingly-backed-harris-walz-ticket-anti-trans-attack-ads-proved-ineffective-with-broad-swath-of-voters>.

931 Dante Chinni, "This Presidential Election, Voters Across Communities Sent a Loud Message of Economic Pain," American Communities Project, November 11, 2024, <https://www.americancommunities.org/this-presidential-election-voters-across-communities-sent-a-loud-message-of-economic-pain>.

932 Sydney Bauer, "Trans People Shouldn't Be Scapegoated for Democrats' Failures," The Nation, November 20, 2024, <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/trans-democrats-election-trump>.

# IV. Compendium

## Australia

Election: Local and State (throughout 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>1</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Ahead of the federal election set to take place by May 17, 2025, various sub-national jurisdictions held elections in Australia throughout 2024. As some political forces start to instrumentalize LGBTIQ issues at the national level, equal rights for LGBTIQ people have also been on the agenda in various state and local elections.<sup>2</sup>

In the state of Victoria, the Victorian Pride Lobby sought commitments for its five-point pledge for equality, which requires politicians to commit to establishing LGBTIQ+ Advisory Committees and renewing action plans on LGBTIQ+ equality, among other measures.<sup>3</sup> Through its Rainbow Local Government campaign, the group published a map identifying LGBTIQ+ local council candidates and supporters of the pledge. Several openly LGBTIQ candidates were elected throughout the country, boosting LGBTIQ political participation. “Visibility is so important, and it’s very hard to be what you can’t see,” affirmed Paige Johnson, who became the first openly trans person to be elected to the Newcastle City Council in New South Wales.<sup>4</sup>

Anti-LGBTIQ movements exploited the elections as an opportunity to advance their agenda against so-called gender ideology. For elections in Queensland, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), and the Northern Territory, the Australian Christian Lobby created live

websites showing where candidates stand on “key issues for people of faith,” such as young people’s access to gender-affirming care and LGBTIQ-inclusive curricula.<sup>5</sup> In Queensland, the ruling Labor government broke its promise to enact reforms to the Anti-Discrimination Act, including ending faith-based exemptions, due to the fears of backlash from churches.<sup>6</sup> Insider sources attributed their move to the party’s reluctance to “pick a fight with the churches, who had vowed to campaign against the overhaul, ahead of the election.”<sup>7</sup>

Family First, a minor conservative political party that fielded candidates in Queensland and ACT, rallied against “LGBTIQ+ gender-fluid ideology” in schools and “drag queen story time in public venues.”<sup>8</sup> Family First did not win any seats, garnering just 1.86 percent of the vote in Queensland.<sup>9</sup> The Liberal National Party of Queensland, which won the majority of seats in Queensland, engaged in fear-mongering by warning that other states have been “captured by transgender ideology.”<sup>10</sup> Voters, however, were far more concerned about other issues, such as the cost of living.<sup>11</sup>

5 Australian Christian Lobby, “QLD Votes,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.acl.org.au/qldvotes>; Australian Christian Lobby, “TAS Votes,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.acl.org.au/tasvotes>; Australian Christian Lobby, “ACT Votes,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.acl.org.au/actvotes>; Australian Christian Lobby, “NT Votes,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.acl.org.au/ntvotes>.

6 Ben Smee, “Queensland government accused of cowing to Christian Lobby on anti-discrimination bill,” *The Guardian*, June 14, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/jun/15/queensland-government-accused-of-cowing-to-christian-lobby-on-anti-discrimination-bill>.

7 Ibid.

8 Family First, “Family First registered in Queensland means values on the ballot,” May 18, 2024, [https://www.familyfirstparty.org.au/media\\_release\\_family\\_first\\_registered\\_in\\_queensland\\_means\\_values\\_on\\_the\\_ballot](https://www.familyfirstparty.org.au/media_release_family_first_registered_in_queensland_means_values_on_the_ballot); ElectionsACT, “Candidate statements – Kurrajong,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.elections.act.gov.au/archives-2024/for-voters-2024/candidates-2024/2024-candidates-and-statements/candidate-statements-kurrajong>.

9 Electoral Commission of Queensland, “2024 State General Election Saturday, 26 October 2024,” accessed May 27, 2025, <https://results.elections.qld.gov.au/SGE2024>.

10 Ben Smee and Andrew Messenger, “David Crisafulli faces questions about LNP’s transgender plans after party official’s email revealed,” *The Guardian*, October 9, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/oct/09/david-crisafulli-lnp-transgender-queensland-state-election>.

11 Freshwater Strategy, “AFR / Freshwater Strategy Queensland Poll I Data Stream Analysis,” September 30, 2024, <https://freshwaterstrategy.com/2024/09/30/afr-freshwater-strategy-queensland-poll-september-2024>.

1 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Australia,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/australia/freedom-world/2025>.

2 Dan Jervis-Bardy, “With a cost-of-living election to fight, Dutton strikes a delicate balance on the ‘trans debate,’” *The Guardian*, February 15, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/feb/16/with-a-cost-of-living-election-to-fight-dutton-strikes-a-delicate-balance-on-the-trans-debate>.

3 Victorian Pride Lobby, “Rainbow Local Government: LGBTIQ+ Priorities for the 2024 Victorian Local Council Elections,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://rainbowvotes.com.au>.

4 Bridget Murphy, “Paige Johnson to become the first openly transgender woman elected to Newcastle Council,” *ABC News*, September 21, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-21/newcastle-council-paige-johnson-first-transgender-councillor/104379968>.



## Austria

Election: Legislative (September 29, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>12</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Two years after the 2022 presidential elections, Austrians voted to elect the 183 members of the National Council, the lower house of the parliament, in September 2024. The far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) secured the most votes, with 29 percent.

Despite its electoral performance, the FPÖ failed to form a coalition and was left out of the coalition government that other parties ultimately formed on March 10, 2025, but its rise to power is a devastating setback for LGBTIQ equality in the country. In its party platform, the far-right party vowed to ensure that schools are not “experimental fields for gender madness and wokism.”<sup>13</sup> In May 2024, the head of the FPÖ told a crowd of 5,000 supporters, “Anyone who has to spend an hour in the morning thinking about which gender they wake up as cannot achieve anything. He won’t get a job. He won’t get involved in politics.”<sup>14</sup> He accused the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) of being a party for “people working as little as possible, achieving as little as possible,” including the “red LGBTQ+ movement” (a reference to the Social Democratic Party’s traditional association with socialism or social democracy).<sup>15</sup> This exclusionary rhetoric is consistent with the party’s hostility toward minorities, as it has significantly contributed to the normalization of anti-Muslim and anti-migrant racism.<sup>16</sup>

The Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) was “notably silent” on LGBTIQ issues on the campaign trail.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, its new coalition partners explicitly positioned themselves in support of LGBTIQ equality. In its 2024 platform, the SPÖ, the ÖVP’s biggest coalition partner, committed to an “active LGBTIQ+ policy” with four components: expanding anti-discrimination protections, banning conversion therapies, protecting intersex children, and enacting a national strategy for LGBTIQ equality.<sup>18</sup> The SPÖ also condemned anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric as part of a broader “right-wing culture war.”<sup>19</sup> The liberal NEOS party, also part of the coalition, promised to “turn Austria from a laggard into a pioneer” by ending discrimination and banning conversion practices that target young people.<sup>20</sup>

## Azerbaijan

Election: Presidential (February 7, 2024) and Parliamentary (September 1, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>21</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

While Azerbaijan’s snap presidential election was boycotted by opposition parties for being “undemocratic,” LGBTIQ activists nevertheless actively engaged in and monitored the process.<sup>22</sup> A team of 14 LGBTIQ election observers was present in seven polling stations in the capital city of Baku.<sup>23</sup>

17 Amanda Previdelli, “How Austria’s election could impact the lives of LGBT+ residents,” The Local, September 27, 2024, <https://www.thelocal.at/20240927/how-austrias-election-could-impact-the-lives-of-lgbt-residents>.

18 SPÖ, “UNSERE IDEEN FÜR EINE AKTIVE LGBTIQ+ POLITIK,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.spoe.at/lgbtiq>.

19 Amanda Previdelli, “How Austria’s election could impact the lives of LGBT+ residents.”

20 NEOS, “Reformen für dein neues Österreich,” August 2024, [https://www.neos.eu/\\_Resources/Persistent/2e07290a086b7a56de6086ab-f83a3fcla28685fc/NEOS\\_REFORMEN%20FUEER%20DEIN%20NEUES%20OESTER-REICH.pdf](https://www.neos.eu/_Resources/Persistent/2e07290a086b7a56de6086ab-f83a3fcla28685fc/NEOS_REFORMEN%20FUEER%20DEIN%20NEUES%20OESTER-REICH.pdf), 39.

21 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Azerbaijan,” accessed March 31, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/azerbaijan/freedom-world/2025>.

22 “Opposition parties reject Azerbaijan’s snap election call as undemocratic,” Reuters, December 18, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/opposition-parties-reject-azerbaijans-snap-election-call-undemocratic-2023-12-18>.

23 Nafas LGBTI, “Courage in Action: Queer Eye on Azerbaijan’s 2024 Presidential Election,” October 1, 2024, <https://nafaslgbti.org/courage-in>

12 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Austria,” accessed April 3, 2025, [freedomhouse.org/country/austria/freedom-world/2025](https://freedomhouse.org/country/austria/freedom-world/2025).

13 “Das Programm der FPÖ,” ORF, September 27, 2024, <https://orf.at/nrwahl24/stories/3370190>.

14 “‘Die leisten nichts’ – FPÖ-Chef beschimpft LGBTQ-Personen,” OE24, May 1, 2024, <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/politik/parteien/die-leisten-nichts-fpoe-chef-beschimpft-lgbtq-personen/593327287>.

15 Ibid.

16 Ashifa Kassam, “This is the normalisation of racism: apprehension at prospect of election success for Austria’s far right,” The Guardian, September 26, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/26/this-is-the-normalisation-of-racism-apprehension-at-prospect-of-election-success-for-austrias-far-right>.

Just a few hours before the election, a national media outlet baselessly claimed that the organization that had mobilized the observers was part of “networks connected to the West in Azerbaijan” that are “planning to sabotage the election day.”<sup>24</sup> On election day, the LGBTIQ observers suffered what they described as “psychological pressure and, in some cases, physical intimidation” at the hands of polling staff and other observers, and police eventually removed some of them from polling stations based on unfounded allegations of obstructing the process.<sup>25</sup> In the aftermath of the elections, state-affiliated media accused the LGBTIQ group of a destabilization plot and revealed members’ personal details, further exposing them to violence.<sup>26</sup>

Despite these obstacles, the all-queer observer group managed to uncover and report “procedural shortcomings and errors” that undermined the integrity of the voting process. The organization affirmed in a write-up of the event:

Queer monitoring of the 2024 presidential elections marked a significant moment in the fight for both electoral transparency and queer representation. Despite the challenges, including systemic violations and backlash, the courage of 14 queer observers cannot be overstated as their critical engagement sent a powerful message: Queers are integral to Azerbaijan’s democratic future.<sup>27</sup>

## Bangladesh

See Case Study in Section III.

## Belarus

Election: Parliamentary (February 25, 2024)

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>28</sup>

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

Belarus is “an authoritarian state,” run by President Alexander Lukashenko since 1994, “in which elections are openly rigged and civil liberties are severely restricted.”<sup>29</sup> During the parliamentary elections on February 25, 2024, all candidates were either members of the four pro-government political parties or independent candidates who were also seen as pro-government.<sup>30</sup> The Belarusian government did not invite independent observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) during the parliamentary elections.<sup>31</sup> As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus, political plurality was nonexistent, as opposition political parties were targeted by a law in 2023 that introduced strenuous conditions for registration.<sup>32</sup> In the same year, a law was passed that restricted the right to vote for Belarusians who were not residing in Belarus at the time of the elections.<sup>33</sup>

Sexual and gender diversity was not particularly featured in the specific context of the elections. One LGBTQ organization has noted that LGBTQ people are often denigrated as part of pro-government propaganda in the media, which paints LGBTQ people as an elite minority

action-queer-eye-on-azerbaijans-2024-presidential-election.

24 “Seçki günü bu qruplar təxribat törədəcek – Şok məlumat,” Axar, February 7, 2024, <https://axar.az/news/gundem/829900.html>.

25 Nafas LGBTI, “Courage in Action”; Amerikanin Sesi (@amerikaninsesi), “13 sayılı seçki məntəqəsində müşahidəçi Cavid Nəbiyev akt tərtib edilərək məntəqədən polis müşayiəti ilə çıxarılır,” Instagram, February 7, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C3Ca666vJ7y/?igsh=MW4zY2JvYTE4ZzI-zYw==>.

26 Lili Nazarov, “From Raids to Wars: Queer Bodies for the Homeland, Azerbaijan,” Heinrich Boell Stiftung, March 28, 2024, [https://feminism-boell.org/en/2024/03/28/raids-wars-queer-bodies-homeland-azerbaijan#\\_ftn49](https://feminism-boell.org/en/2024/03/28/raids-wars-queer-bodies-homeland-azerbaijan#_ftn49).

27 Nafas LGBTI, “Courage in Action.”

28 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Belarus,” accessed March 31, 2025, . <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2025>.

29 Ibid.

30 “Что ждать от парламентских выборов в Белоруссии Это будет первое голосование после президентских выборов 2020 года” (What to expect from the parliamentary elections in Belarus This will be the first vote since the 2020 presidential elections.), RBC.ru, February 24, 2024, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/24/02/2024/65d76a239a794705f0539cb7>.

31 OSCE ODIHR, “Decision not to invite OSCE observers to parliamentary elections contrary to Belarus’ international commitments,” January 8, 2024, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/561463>.

32 UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, “Situation of human rights in Belarus: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin” A/HRC/56/65 19 May 2024 paras 111-113 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/65>

33 UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, “Situation of Human Rights in Belarus,” UN Doc. A/79/201, July 19, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/201>, para 77.

imposing their views on the majority.<sup>34</sup> Notably, during the election period, one user left this comment on an article by the government propaganda website:

For them [the opposition leaders], the main thing is certain Western European values, which say, for example, that we should give up childbearing, promote LGBT, and so on. This is complete stupidity on the part of representatives of our fugitive community.<sup>35</sup>

In February 2024, just before the election, the Prosecutor General introduced a draft law intended to add “LGBT propaganda” in schools to the list of administrative offenses. The law is yet to be passed.<sup>36</sup> In April 2024, the Minister for Culture updated the definition of banned erotic material to add any material that portrays same-sex relationships or depicts transgender and gender-diverse people.<sup>37</sup>

An LGBTQ organization monitoring the situation for LGBTQ people in Belarus noted the following concerning the repression of rights for LGBTQ people in 2024:

2024 was an election year, which many associated with increased repression in all spheres of people’s lives, but we believe that there is no point in expecting a thaw after the elections: repression will continue as long as Alexander Lukashenko is in power.<sup>38</sup>

## Belgium

Election: Local (October 13, 2024), Federal, and Regional (June 9, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>39</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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Belgium held federal and regional elections on June 9, 2024, to choose the 150 members of the Chamber of Representatives, the lower house of the Federal Parliament, as well as the new representatives of the parliaments of the country’s three federated regions—the Flemish Parliament, the Walloon Parliament, and the Brussels Parliament—and the Parliament of the German-speaking Community, one of the three Communities of Belgium.<sup>40</sup>

Ahead of the elections, over 70 LGBTIQ groups came together to publish a comprehensive “memorandum” detailing five key demands and calling on the government to safeguard the gains in LGBTIQ equality.<sup>41</sup> As RainbowHouse Brussels, the umbrella group of LGBTIQ associations based in Brussels, affirmed, “Doing nothing is going backward. With the 2024 elections nearing, we demand that no minority or marginalized group be overlooked.”<sup>42</sup>

Legal protections for LGBTIQ people are far-reaching in Belgium, and the country’s inclusivity score according to the latest ILGA–Europe Rainbow Map increased from 76 percent in 2023 to 78 percent in 2024.<sup>43</sup> All political parties

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34 TG House, “Мониторинг риторики белорусской пропаганды в отношении ЛГБТК+ сообщества в 2024 году” (Monitoring Belarusian propaganda rhetoric towards the LGBTQ+ community in 2024), November 24, 2024, <https://tbelarus.com/post/monitoring-propaganda-2024>.

35 Yuriy Bakerenko, “Глупо пытаться находить какие-то образцы для того, чтобы проводить выборы по ним, – Беляев” (It is foolish to try to find some kind of model to use as a basis for elections, – Belyaev), SB News, February 25, 2024, <https://www.sb.by/articles/glupo-pytatsya-nakhodit-kak-ie-to-obraztsy-dlya-togo-chtoby-provodit-vybory-po-nim-belyaev.html>.

36 “В Беларуси подготовили законопроект о наказании за пропаганду «нетрадиционных отношений,” (Belarus has drafted a bill on punishment for promoting “non-traditional relationships.”), Zerkalo, February 19, 2024, <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/61460.html?tg=4>.

37 Anastasiia Kroupe, “Belarus Calls LGBT Lives ‘Pornography,’” Human Rights Watch, April 12, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/12/belarus-calls-lgbt-lives-pornography>.

38 TG House, “Мониторинг репрессий и дискриминации в отношении ЛГБТК+ сообщества Беларуси в 2024 году” (Monitoring of repression and discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community in Belarus in 2024), January 28, 2025, <https://tbelarus.com/post/the-monitoring-of-repression-2024>.

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39 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Belgium,” accessed April 3, 2025, [www.freedomhouse.org/country/belgium/freedom-world/2025](https://www.freedomhouse.org/country/belgium/freedom-world/2025).

40 The other two Communities of Belgium, the Flemish Community and the French Community, are led by the Flemish Parliament and the Parliament of the French Community, respectively. The Parliament of the French Community does not hold elections as such but is composed of members of Walloon Parliament and 19 members elected by the French linguistic group of the Brussels Parliament.

41 RainbowHouse, “2024 Memorandum: Aucune minorité n’est négligeable,” November 2023, [http://rainbowhouse.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/memorandum2024\\_fr.pdf](http://rainbowhouse.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/memorandum2024_fr.pdf).

42 “‘Doing nothing is going backwards’: Belgium called on to maintain LGBTQ focus,” The Brussels Times, February 2, 2024, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/905267/doing-nothing-is-going-backwards-belgium-called-on-to-maintain-lgbtq-focus>.

43 ILGA–Europe, “2024 Rainbow Map,” accessed April 3, 2025, [www.rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org](https://www.rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org).

except those from the far-right introduced proposals to protect LGBTIQ people and fielded openly LGBTIQ candidates for more senior positions than in the past.<sup>44</sup>

However, the rise of the Flemish separatist party Vlaams Belang in the recent elections is an alarming development that could threaten LGBTIQ equality. On May 26, during a televised debate, the chairperson of the Vlaams Belang, Tom Van Grieken, claimed that “gay rights are acquired rights” and affirmed that his party “does not believe that there are genders” as part of its opposition to “gender madness” and “gender ideology” in schools.<sup>45</sup> Van Grieken has specifically emphasized the party’s opposition to legal gender recognition, gender-affirming health care, and adoption rights for same-sex couples.<sup>46</sup> The party gained two seats and became the second-biggest party in the federal Chamber of Representatives with close to 14 percent of the vote, but was excluded from the coalition government.

Chris Janssens, the openly gay Vlaams Belang leader in the Flemish Parliament, doubled down on the party’s transphobia, calling during the campaign for “a break between LGB and everything after that,” a comment equally dismissive of intersex and gender-diverse people.<sup>47</sup> The party gained eight seats in the Flemish Parliament, tying with the New Flemish Alliance, a nationalist party, as the biggest party in the region.

For Erynn Robert of Prisme, the federation of LGBTIQ groups in the Walloon region, the rise of the far-right has a dual effect:

An important effect of the rise of the far-right ideas is the polarization of the political discourse. The far-right’s strategy often includes framing LGBTIQ rights as part of a “culture war,” forcing other political parties to take a stance. This can result in some mainstream parties becoming stronger allies while others shift their message to a more ambiguous position to avoid alienating

conservative voters. But overall, it results in a divided society, where it’s becoming harder to find a common ground.<sup>48</sup>

## Bhutan

Election: National Assembly (November 30, 2023, and January 9, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>49</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

Bhutan, a country of 750,000 people, has had only limited experience with democracy, having held its first parliamentary elections in 2008. The first penal code of this democratic constitutional monarchy came into effect in 2004 and criminalized “sodomy” and acts “against the order of nature.” Parliament repealed both provisions in 2020.<sup>50</sup>

According to a representative of Queer Voices of Bhutan (QVoB), “political parties tended to briefly reference the LGBTIQ community in their manifestos.” However, “these mentions often focused more on presenting an inclusive image than committing to substantive policy changes.”<sup>51</sup> For example, Druk Thuendrel Tshogpa (DTT), a new party which contested elections for the first time but did not qualify for the second round, proposed “special employment schemes for people with disability and LGBTQ.”<sup>52</sup> For the activist from QVoB, “this approach contrasts with the more comprehensive commitments” for persons with disabilities in the same manifesto:

The limited focus on LGBTIQ issues suggests that, while political parties may acknowledge the importance of

44 Outright email exchange with RainbowHouse, March 12, 2025.

45 Tobias Santens, “Tom Van Grieken: ‘Vlaams Belang gelooft niet dat er genders zijn’, kijker Lucienne (77): ‘Ik ben 2 keer zo oud als u, maar voel me moderner,’” VRT NWS, May 26, 2024, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2024/05/26/vlaams-belang-gender-lucienne-de-zevende-dag>.

46 “Elections 2024: Vlaams Belang faction leader attacks LGBTIQ+ associations,” Belga News Agency, June 3, 2024, <https://www.belganewsagency.eu/elections-2024-vlaams-belang-faction-leader-attacks-lgbtqi-as-sociations>.

47 Ibid.

48 Outright email exchange with Erynn Robert, March 11, 2025.

49 International IDEA, “Bhutan – January 2024,” accessed March 11, 2025, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/report/bhutan/january-2024>.

50 The penal code was based on neighboring India’s colonial-era penal code, despite Bhutan never having been colonized. See Michelle Jana Chan, “Up in a tiny Himalayan kingdom, an LGBTQ revolution is on the climb,” Los Angeles Times, November 10, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-11-10/himalayan-kingdom-bhutan-lgbtq-revolution>.

51 Outright email exchange with a representative of Queer Voices of Bhutan, March 10, 2025.

52 Druk Thuendrel Tshogpa, “Sunomics: Thuendrel Manifesto for National Economic Transformation,” October 2023, [https://www.ecb.bt/wp-content/uploads/PP\\_Manifesto/DTT-Manifesto-03112023.pdf](https://www.ecb.bt/wp-content/uploads/PP_Manifesto/DTT-Manifesto-03112023.pdf).



inclusivity, they may not have prioritized LGBTIQ rights in their policy agendas during the 2024 elections. This raises questions about the depth of commitment to LGBTIQ rights and whether these brief mentions are part of a broader strategy to appeal to a diverse electorate without implementing significant policy changes.<sup>53</sup>

The organization has not documented any instance of anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric from political parties or candidates. Voting in Bhutan takes place in person with voters lining up at the polling station in gendered queues, and trans people who have not yet changed their legal gender markers had to “join the queue based on their registered sex on their national identity card.”<sup>54</sup> Legal gender recognition is possible, but requires the certification of a psychiatrist.<sup>55</sup> While some claim that there is general acceptance of transgender people, a 2023 study on trans men found alarming levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence.<sup>56</sup>

## Bolivia

Election: Judicial (December 15, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>57</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

In 2011, Bolivia became the first country to select its top judges through a popular vote, followed only by Mexico, which held its first judicial elections on June 1, 2025. On December 15, 2024, Bolivia held its third judicial election for positions in four high courts, amid concerns about the integrity of the process. Critics have claimed that judicial elections threaten checks and balances and further entrench the ruling party, which has governed the country since 2006.<sup>58</sup>

53 Queer Voices of Bhutan email exchange.

54 Ibid.

55 ILGA World, “Bhutan,” ILGA World Database, accessed May 19, 2025, <https://database.ilga.org/bhutan-lgbti>.

56 Vinita Saxena et al., “Stigma and discrimination against transgender men in Bhutan,” PLOS One 18, no. 7 (2023): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10358905>.

57 Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States, Preliminary Report: 2024 Judicial Elections in Bolivia, December 17, 2024, [https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/2024\\_MOE\\_Bolivia\\_Judiciales\\_Preliminar\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/2024_MOE_Bolivia_Judiciales_Preliminar_ENG.pdf).

58 “Bolivia holds divisive popular vote for its top judges,” Associated

Candidates for judgeships are forbidden from holding campaigns “under penalty of their being stricken,” according to Article 182.III of the 2009 Bolivian Constitution, but in recent elections, the candidates have nonetheless used print and social media to campaign.<sup>59</sup> The Supreme Electoral Tribunal organizes public hearings to allow voters to get to know judicial candidates’ positions on a range of issues. In 2024, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal directly reached out to Colectivo TLGB Bolivia, a Bolivian LGBT organization, to request that it submit questions on LGBTIQ issues for candidates.<sup>60</sup> The organization sent questions about candidates’ plans for “incorporating a gender and sexual diversity perspective” into their work, but a representative of the organization told Outright they were uncertain whether LGBTIQ-specific questions were ultimately asked in the hearings. The candidates’ responses to specific questions have not been published.<sup>61</sup>

While it has been possible to change one’s name and gender marker on identity documents since August 2016, Colectivo TLGB Bolivia alleged that these changes are not always updated in the electoral roll, which may create obstacles to trans people’s participation in the elections.<sup>62</sup>

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Election: Municipal (October 6, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Partly free<sup>63</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

Press, December 15, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/bolivia-holds-divisive-popular-vote-for-its-top-judges/7902157.html>.

59 Plurinational State of Bolivia, Constitution of 2009, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bolivia\\_2009](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bolivia_2009); Marcelo Blanco and Jesús Vargas Villena, “Casi el 100% de los candidatos hacen campaña encubierta en redes sociales y otros espacios,” Bolivia Verifica Elecciones, December 13, 2024, <https://boliviaverificaelecciones.bo/casi-el-100-de-los-candidatos-hacen-campana-encubierta-en-redes-sociales-y-otros-espacios>.

60 Outright email exchange with Colectivo TLGB Bolivia, July 16, 2025.

61 Ibid, March 31, 2025.

62 Ibid, February 6, 2025.

63 An electoral mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe concluded that extensive legal reforms increased electoral integrity and guaranteed the protection of fundamental freedoms, but “insufficient efforts to generate public engagement, and the limited and biased media coverage reduced voters’ opportunity to make an informed choice.” See more: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA LOCAL ELECTIONS: Election Observation Mission Final Report, February 25, 2025, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bih/586134>.

On October 6, 2024, Bosnia and Herzegovina elected the mayors and members of assemblies in 138 out of all 143 municipalities. Ahead of the elections, the LGBTIQ group Sarajevo Open Center (SOC) published two reports on political parties' positions on LGBTIQ issues and the perceptions of LGBTIQ people toward political parties. Only two out of the 90 political parties contacted, including only one of the "big ten" parties, responded to SOC's survey, leading the organization to conclude that the majority of political parties in the country "remain largely consistent in avoiding making a clear and transparent statement on the human rights of LGBTI persons."<sup>64</sup> In response to this gap, the organization set up an online platform targeting young voters, allowing people to "compare their views on human rights and the position of the LGBTIQ+ community with the views of political parties in BiH."<sup>65</sup>

Political actors weaponized anti-LGBTIQ hate speech before the elections. Out of the 11 cases of anti-LGBTIQ hate speech that SOC recorded in 2024, four were election-related.<sup>66</sup> One of the cases involved the president of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, whose party won 33 percent of all mayoral races in 2024. The Central Election Commission fined Dodik and Ljubo Ninković, a candidate from Dodik's party, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, for using homophobic language at a political rally.<sup>67</sup>

## Botswana

See Case Study in Section III.

## Brazil

Election: Municipal (October 6 and 27, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>68</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

In South America's largest country, LGBTIQ political representation broke new ground in 2024. After the municipal elections of October 6, 2024, the number of openly queer elected officials more than doubled since 2020. A record number of 233 LGBTIQ persons in 197 municipalities in 21 of the 26 states were elected to office, with 84 of them winning reelection.<sup>69</sup> Cumulatively, the winning LGBTIQ candidates received at least 1.8 million votes. Women, including trans women, comprised around 51.8 percent of all LGBTIQ candidates, significantly above the mandated 30 percent quota for political parties.<sup>70</sup> The representation of trans and intersex persons grew, with 19.5 percent of all LGBTIQ candidates being trans and 4.5 percent being trans men. Twenty intersex persons also ran for office, but none of them were successful.<sup>71</sup>

The newly elected LGBTIQ public officials represent less than seven percent of all LGBTIQ people who ran in 2024. Official data from the Superior Electoral Court indicates that 3,232 LGBT candidates ran for office in 2024, while 292 more candidates declared themselves to be LGBTIQ to VoteLGBT, an organization that has been working to increase LGBTIQ political representation in Brazil since 2014.<sup>72</sup>

Comprehensive data on LGBTIQ people's political

64 Sarajevo Open Center, "Istraživanje stavova političkih partija o ljudskim pravima LGBTI osoba u Bosni i Hercegovini, June 2024, <https://soc.ba/istraživanje-stavova-politickih-partija-o-ljudskim-pravima-lgbti-oso-ba-u-bosni-i-hercegovini>, 57.

65 Sarajevo Open Center, "Ima izać' na izbore! Pokrenut online resursni centar koji povezuje izbore, politiku i LGBTIQ+ teme," September 24, 2024, <https://soc.ba/ima-izac-na-izbore-pokrenut-online-resursni-centar-koji-povezuje-izbore-politiku-i-lgbtiq-teme>.

66 ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2025>, 43.

67 The Republika Srpska is one of the two entities comprising the country, the other being the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. See "Dodik kažnjen zbog vrijeđanja LGBT populacije na predizbornom skupu," Life, September 27, 2024, [https://life.ba/dodik-kaznjen-zbog-vrijedjanja-lgbt-populacije-na-predizbornom-skupu/#google\\_vignette](https://life.ba/dodik-kaznjen-zbog-vrijedjanja-lgbt-populacije-na-predizbornom-skupu/#google_vignette).

68 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - Brazil," accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/brazil/freedom-world/2025>.

69 Outright email exchange with Alciana Paulino, VoteLGBT, July 15, 2025.

70 VoteLGBT, "Eleitas LGBT+ 2024," accessed February 28, 2025, <https://lookerstudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/87b74c67-90ba-42f9-ac8e-70ee9944d57f/page/QZF3D>.

71 VoteLGBT, "Intersectionality in Politics: how Brazil doubled the amount of LGBTQ elected officials in 2024," video animation, YouTube, October 31, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3Pif-2B-Yg>; Paulino email exchange.

72 Alciana Paulino, Beta Brandao, Carlla, and Evorah Cardoso, "Brasil é pioneiro em gerar dados oficiais sobre LGBT+ na política," Gênero e Número, November 5, 2024, <https://www.generonumero.media/artigos/brasil-pioneiro-dados-lgbt-politica>; Outright email exchange with Gui Mohallem, February 10, 2025.

participation in 2024 were made possible through independent monitoring by VoteLGBT and as a result of the Superior Electoral Court's decision in 2024 to introduce fields for self-declaration of sexual orientation and gender identity in candidate registration forms.<sup>73</sup> While nonbinary and intersex identities were left out of the options, this initiative made Brazil one of the first countries to collect and produce official data on queer and trans people's political participation. VoteLGBT publicized these findings on social media and presented them to the Senate in November 2024.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, some candidates ran anti-LGBTIQ political campaigns. For example, in the city of São Paulo, transgender activist Amanda Paschoal was elected city councilor after becoming "the most voted left-wing" candidate.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, however, Lucas Pavanato, the candidate who finished first in the councilor race, led a self-described "anti-woke" campaign, advocating to prohibit trans people from competing in sports or accessing facilities corresponding to their gender identity and ban educational materials promoting so-called gender ideology, among other draconian anti-LGBTIQ measures.<sup>76</sup> According to Diadorim, an independent journalism agency working on LGBTIQ issues, in the cities of Belo Horizonte, Recife, and São Paulo, most mayoral candidates either ignored the demands identified by LGBTIQ groups or merely emphasized existing measures for equal rights.<sup>77</sup>

Transgender candidates endured threats of violence and political harassment, emboldened by the far-right, despite existing legal protections of their right to

political participation.<sup>78</sup> Election quotas recognize the gender identity of trans people, enabling trans women to be included in the 30 percent quota for women, as affirmed by the Superior Electoral Court in 2018.<sup>79</sup> In addition, trans women are protected from gender-based political violence and sexist electoral campaigning under Law 14.192/2021.<sup>80</sup> In fact, a court handed down the first conviction under this law in May 2024. The court convicted Rio de Janeiro state deputy Rodrigo Amorim for transphobic speech against fellow deputy Benny Bríolly and for "deny[ing] her the status of women" in a parliamentary speech in May 2022.<sup>81</sup> The importance of protections for trans people in politics is underscored by the brutal murder of Santrosa, a trans woman who ran for the city council of Sinop and was found decapitated on November 10, 2024.<sup>82</sup>

Trans candidates were also on the receiving end of intense digital violence. A barrage of online hate targeted Duda Salabert, the only trans person running for executive office in a state capital in 2024.<sup>83</sup> VoteLGBT identified at least 3,478 transphobic comments on social media platforms X and YouTube against this one candidate alone.<sup>84</sup> Her candidacy for mayor of the city of Belo Horizonte in the state of Minas Gerais was

78 Eléonore Hughes, "Brazil's trailblazing transgender candidates face violence and death threats as they campaign," Associated Press, October 5, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/brazils-trailblazing-transgender-candidates-face-violence-and-death-threats-as-they-campaign>; United Nations, "Political Rights Must Not Be Threatened Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Third Committee Told, as Election-Year Tensions Mount Worldwide," UN Doc. GA/SHC/4424, November 4, 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/gashc4424.doc.htm>.

79 Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, "TSE aprova uso do nome social de candidatos na urna," March 1, 2018, <https://www.tse.jus.br/comunicacao/noticias/2018/Março/tse-aprova-uso-do-nome-social-de-candidatos-na-urna>.

80 Federative Republic of Brazil, Lei de combate à Violência Política Contra Mulher, Lei Nº 14.192, August 4, 2021, [https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2019-2022/2021/lei/L14192.htm](https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2021/lei/L14192.htm). This law amends the Electoral Code to prohibit advertising that discriminates against women based on their gender, color, race or ethnicity (Art 243.X), sexist disinformation in electoral propaganda (Art. 323), and political violence against women (Art. 326).

81 Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, "TRE-RJ condena deputado estadual Rodrigo Amorim por crime de violência política de gênero," May 3, 2024, <https://www.tre-rj.jus.br/comunicacao/noticias/2024/Maio/tre-rj-condena-deputado-estadual-rodrigo-amorim-por-crime-de-violencia-politica-de-genero>.

82 Madu Toledo, "Suplente trans decapitada em MT: PSDB pede investigação de facções," Metrôpoles, November 11, 2024, <https://www.metropoles.com/brasil/suplente-trans-decapitada-em-mt-psdb-pede-investigacao-de-faccoes>.

83 Mohallem email exchange.

84 Ibid.

73 Caio Cesar, "Brasil bate recorde com 225 candidaturas LGBT+ eleitas nas municipais de 2024," CartaCapital, October 7, 2024, <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/brasil-bate-recorde-com-225-candidaturas-lgbt-eleitas-nas-municipais-de-2024>.

74 Comissão de Direitos Humanos, "CDH analisa eleições municipais sob a ótica de gênero e raça," public hearing, YouTube, November 28, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJA8ImCO-xw>.

75 Fabiola Perez, "Amanda Paschoal: 2025 terá mais resistência do que avanço para a esquerda," UOL Notícias, November 2, 2024, <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2024/11/02/entrevista-amanda-paschoal-vereadora-eleita-psol-camara-sao-paulo.htm>.

76 Lucci Laporta, "Eleições 2024: as LGBT+ avançam apesar do desastre da velha esquerda," Brasil de Fato, October 10, 2024, <https://www.brasil-defato.com.br/colonista/lucci-laporta/2024/10/10/eleicoes-2024-as-lgbt-avancam-apesar-do-desastre-da-velha-esquerda>.

77 Camilla Figueiredo, "As propostas dos candidatos à prefeitura de Belo Horizonte, Recife e São Paulo para a população LGBTQIA+," Diadorim, September 30, 2024, <https://adiadorim.org/especial/2024/09/as-propostas-dos-candidatos-a-prefeitura-de-belo-horizonte-recife-e-sao-paulo-para-a-populacao-lgbtqia>.

unsuccessful.<sup>85</sup>

Anti-trans rhetoric is part of a broader pattern of hate speech against LGBTIQ politicians in the country. As Gui Mohallem of VoteLGBT told Outright:

LGBT+ politicians remain highly vulnerable to targeted attacks. Our ongoing research indicates that they face some of the most extreme forms of political violence. Many endure continuous death threats, while lesbians, in particular, are frequently subjected to corrective rape threats...This level of targeted aggression not only endangers individual lives but also threatens the broader participation of LGBT+ people in democratic processes, reinforcing a climate of fear and exclusion.<sup>86</sup>

To combat anti-LGBTIQ political rhetoric, VoteLGBT developed the Sentinela Program, “an AI-powered tool designed to detect and analyze online hate speech and political violence against LGBT+ leaders.”<sup>87</sup> Their website receives complaints against anti-LGBTIQ political violence, which are then forwarded to the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship.<sup>88</sup> In 2024, the organization supported LGBTIQ candidates for the third consecutive electoral period, providing 220 mental health care sessions to these candidates and their teams.<sup>89</sup>

## Bulgaria

See Case Study in Section III.

## Canada

Election: Municipal, Provincial, and Federal By-Elections (throughout 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>90</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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In October 2024, the provinces of British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan held general elections, while municipal, provincial, and federal by-elections took place in other jurisdictions throughout the year. In several elections, LGBTIQ-inclusive reforms were part of the political tug-of-war.<sup>91</sup>

In British Columbia, the BC Conservative Party’s education platform focused on “activist ideology that could send kids down a dangerous path” and promised to remove SOGI 123, an LGBTIQ inclusion initiative that successfully reduced bullying and discrimination.<sup>92</sup>

In New Brunswick, where the Liberal Party defeated the incumbent Progressive Conservative party in the October elections, the Liberals vowed during their campaign to end a policy enacted in 2023 that requires parental consent for teachers to affirm trans students’ lived names and pronouns.<sup>93</sup> In response to the Liberal Party’s pledge to repeal the parental rights policy, the Campaign Life Coalition mailed 160,000 postcards with the message that “pushing transgenderism in schools harms children.”<sup>94</sup> A

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90 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Canada,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/canada/freedom-world/2025>.

91 Dale Smith, “Queer and trans people should be wary of provincial parties’ shift to right,” Xtra Magazine, September 6, 2024, <https://xtramagazine.com/power/politics/queer-trans-provincial-elections-british-columbia-new-brunswick-saskatchewan-267864>.

92 Conservative Party of British Colombia, “Excellence in Education: A Learning-First Approach,” October 13, 2024, [https://www.conservativebc.ca/backgrounder\\_excellence\\_in\\_education\\_a\\_learning\\_first\\_approach](https://www.conservativebc.ca/backgrounder_excellence_in_education_a_learning_first_approach); Elizabeth Saewyc et al., “Students feel safer here, and more included”: Evaluation of SOGI 123 in BC, University of British Columbia: Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, 2024, <https://www.saravyc.ubc.ca/2024/10/09/report-evaluation-of-sogi-123-in-bc,14-17>.

93 Hina Alam, “New Brunswick election: Liberals promise safeguards for LGBTQ+ students,” Global News, October 3, 2024, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10792921/nb-election-2024-lgbtq-students>; Andrew Waugh and John Chilibeck, “N.B. premier prepared to call election over LGBTQ schools policy,” National Post, June 8, 2023, <https://nationalpost.com/news/n-b-premier-prepared-to-call-election-over-lgbtq-schools-policy>.

94 Savannah Awde, “Anti-abortion group sends flyers in support

85 “Eleições 2024 em Minas Gerais,” g1, accessed June 2, 2025, <https://g1.globo.com/mg/minas-gerais/eleicoes/2024/resultado-das-apuracoes/belo-horizonte.ghtml>.

86 Mohallem email exchange.

87 Ibid; See VoteLGBT, “Sentinela,” accessed June 1, 2025, <https://www.votelgbt.org/sentinela>.

88 Ibid.

89 Mohallem email exchange.



candidate of the ruling Progressive Conservatives party compared the former policy allowing teachers to address trans students using their lived names and pronouns to the residential schools system, which the Canadian parliament recognized as genocide in 2022.<sup>95</sup>

In Saskatchewan, the ruling Sask Party's leader, Scott Moe, succumbed to anti-trans fear-mongering and declared on October 17, just eleven days before polls opened, that the party's "first order of business" would be to prohibit trans students from using the facilities that correspond to their gender identity, despite it not being on the party platform.<sup>96</sup> However, on November 7, less than two weeks after winning the election, Premier Scott Moe walked back on his promise and claimed he "misspoke," instead instructing the Ministry of Education to organize a round of consultations first.<sup>97</sup> An opposition lawmaker, Jared Clarke, has since then claimed that Moe's statement was targeting Clarke's two trans children.<sup>98</sup>

## Chile

Election: Regional and Municipal (October 26–27 and November 24, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>99</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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of N.B.'s parental rights policies," CBC News, August 26, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/flyers-anti-abortion-group-1.7304195>.

95 Hina Alam, "N.B. election: Conservative candidate compares LGBTQ policy to residential schools," Global News, October 1, 2024, <https://global-news.ca/news/10787828/nb-election-2024-sherry-wilson-pc-candidate>; Richard Raycraft, "MPs back motion calling on government to recognize residential schools program as genocide," CBC News, October 27, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/house-motion-recognize-genocide-1.6632450>.

96 Alexander Quon, "Sask. Party's '1st order of business' to be gendered change room policy in schools: Scott Moe," CBC News, October 17, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/sask-change-room-policy-1.7355068>.

97 David Prisciak, "Change-room ban policy no longer top priority for Sask. gov't, premier says," CTV News, November 7, 2024, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/regina/article/change-room-ban-policy-no-longer-top-priority-for-sask-govt-premier-says>.

98 Alexander Quon, "Sask. NDP MLA says his trans children were the target of premier's proposed change room policy," CBC News, November 26, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/ndp-mla-acuses-premier-moe-targeting-children-1.7393994>.

99 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 – Chile," accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/chile/freedom-world/2025>.

Several political actors publicly expressed their positions on LGBTIQ equality during Chile's regional and municipal election campaign. Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homosexual (Movilh), an LGBTIQ human rights group, launched its Comuna Diversa campaign, calling on candidates to sign a five-point electoral commitment to advocate for policies and mechanisms for diversity and non-discrimination and contribute to the strengthening of LGBTIQ+ organizations, among others. Candidates in five regions and 24 cities and municipalities, representing at least 10 political parties, signed on.<sup>100</sup>

At the same time, some political actors openly opposed LGBTIQ equality. A representative of OTD Chile, a transgender human rights organization, told Outright:

The existence of LGBTIQ people and their human rights were not necessarily a key point of debate in last year's election campaigns, unlike other countries. Even so, it must be considered that politicians have increasingly expressed a contrary position towards the rights of the LGBTIQ community throughout the year, especially the trans/nonbinary population, so this situation shouldn't be dismissed.<sup>101</sup>

Two candidates from the right-wing coalition Chile Vamos made controversial statements reflecting anti-LGBTIQ positions. Iván Poduje, candidate for mayor of Viña del Mar, initially expressed support in a radio interview for distributing the children's book "Nicolás Has Two Dads" in public schools. However, after backlash from his supporters, he quickly backtracked in a video, claiming he was unfamiliar with the book, labeling it as "gender ideology," and affirming that he only supports marriage between a man and a woman—despite the fact that marriage equality has been legal in the country since March 2022.<sup>102</sup> Meanwhile, Francisco Orrego, Chile Vamos candidate for governor of Santiago, publicly supported

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100 Movilh (@movilh), "Listado de candidatxs que firmaron compromiso con los derechos LGBTIQ+ y la democracia," Instagram, October 23, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/DBeH26jRvTI/?img\\_index=5](https://www.instagram.com/p/DBeH26jRvTI/?img_index=5); Movilh, "Compromiso de candidatos," accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.movilh.cl/comunadiversa/compromiso>.

101 Outright email exchange with a representative of OTD Chile, February 4, 2025.

102 Movilh, Informe Anual de Derechos Humanos. Diversidad sexual y de género en Chile, March 2025, <https://www.movilh.cl/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/XXIII.-Informe-Anual-de-DDHH-Diversidad-Sexual-y-de-Genero-2024-Movilh.pdf>, 173.

parents' right to oppose the inclusion of gender identity in education, and described hormone treatments for trans children and adolescents as "experimental." He stated that the regional government would not fund any such programs.<sup>103</sup>

According to OTD Chile, "there were openly LGBTIQ candidates in most regions, without any institutional prohibition, and they were mostly present [among] both councilors and regional councillors."<sup>104</sup> Election authorities took steps to ensure full inclusion of LGBTIQ voters, as well. SERVEL, the Chilean Electoral Service, implemented protocols guiding polling staff in their interactions with people who had recently changed their legal name or gender marker. For the organization Fundación Iguales, which works to promote sexual and gender diversity, "these protocols will help prevent discrimination and guarantee the right to vote for all people, regardless of their gender identity."<sup>105</sup>

## Croatia

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Czechia

Election: Regional (September 20–21, 2024) and Senate (September 20–21 and 27–28, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>106</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No info

On September 20 and 21, Czechia held regional elections to choose the members of all 13 regional councils. The first round of the Senate elections was also held on the same day, with a second round held on September 27 and 28. The elections gave a "landslide victory" to the right-wing populist ANO party.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> OTD Chile email exchange.

<sup>105</sup> "Servel establece protocolos para personas con discapacidad y diversidad de género en elecciones 2024," El Mostrador Braga, October 26, 2024, <https://www.elmostrador-cl.translate.googleusercontent.com/translate/braga/2024/10/26/servel-establece-protocolos-para-personas-con-discapacidad-y-diversidad-de-genero-en-elecciones-2024>.

<sup>106</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 – Czechia," accessed April 3, 2025, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/country/czechia/freedom-world/2025>.

In 2018, some ANO party members introduced and supported a bill to legalize same-sex marriage, with ANO deputy Barbora Kořánová successfully leading an initiative for an extraordinary session of the Chamber of Deputies to discuss the measure in April 2021.<sup>107</sup> However, in February 2024, ANO deputies rejected marriage equality and instead successfully rallied support in the Chamber of Deputies for a watered-down version that expanded rights for same-sex couples but fell short of providing equal recognition.<sup>108</sup>

Leading up to the elections, anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric became part of political discourse amid the legislative debates on marriage equality.<sup>109</sup> In early September, the Freedom and Direct Democracy Party, which was the fastest-growing political party in 2022, distributed leaflets committing to "take money [away] from LGBT activists so that they do not destroy family values."<sup>110</sup> The party further claimed that funding for "deviants" is a barrier to realizing its vision to ensure that "every worker has decent housing, a decent salary, and better opportunities."<sup>111</sup> It also rejected "LGBT+ and gender propaganda in schools" in defense of a "normal world" and the "traditional natural family."<sup>112</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Ondřej Plevák, "Czech president will veto same-sex marriage bill if lawmakers approve it," EURACTIV, June 8, 2022, [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/czech-president-will-veto-same-sex-marriage-bill-if-lawmakers-approve-it](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/czech-president-will-veto-same-sex-marriage-bill-if-lawmakers-approve-it); Vojtěch Petrů, "Sněmovna bude jednat o stejnopohlavním manželství i ústavní ochraně sňatku muže a ženy" (The Chamber of Deputies will debate same-sex marriage and constitutional protection for marriage between a man and a woman), Studentské listy, April 4, 2021, <https://slisty.cz/snemovna-bude-jednat-o-stejnopohlavnim-manzelstvi-i-ustavni-ochrane-snatku-muze-a-zeny>.

<sup>108</sup> Albin Sybera, "Czech lower house passes watered down legislation enhancing the rights of same sex couples," bne IntelliNews, February 29, 2024, <https://www.intellinews.com/czech-lower-house-passes-watered-down-legislation-enhancing-the-rights-of-same-sex-couples-314709>; ČTK, "A sad day for equality: Czechia grants same-sex couples partnership rights, limited adoption," Expats.cz, February 29, 2024, <https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/a-sad-day-for-equality-czechia-grants-same-sex-couples-partnership-rights-limited-adoption>.

<sup>109</sup> ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2025>, 51.

<sup>110</sup> Karolína Brodničková, "Nejvíce přibýlo členů SPD, padá ODS," Novinky, June 27, 2023, <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-nejvice-pribylo-cle-nu-spd-pada-ods-40435925>; Filip Titlbach (@FilipTitlbach), "SPD označuje LGBTQ lidi za úchyly, Motoristé za psychickou poruchu," X, September 8, 2024, <https://x.com/FilipTitlbach/status/1832873381877747748>.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Radek Rozvoral, "Odmítáme Fialovou vládou vedenou propagandu LGBT+ a gender na školách" (We reject the Purple Government's LGBT+ and gender propaganda in schools), ParlamentníListy.cz, October 15, 2024, <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/profil/Radek-Rozvoral-22025/clanek/Odmitame-Fialovou-vladou-vedenou-propagandu-LGBT-a-gender-na-skolach-137073>.

## Dominican Republic

Election: Municipal (February 18, 2024) and Presidential (May 19, 2024)

Were the elections considered free and fair? Yes<sup>113</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Ahead of the 2024 elections, anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric gained currency among political actors in the Dominican Republic. The conservative Grupo Acción Cristiana, in its anti-LGBTIQ Vota Bien campaign, tracked candidates who promote “ethical, moral, civic and Christian values,” concluding that three out of the eight vice presidential candidates opposed the “promotion of gender ideology and the LGBT agenda.”<sup>114</sup> The Generación de Servidores party, which positioned itself against the so-called LGBT agenda and gender ideology, participated in elections for the first time.<sup>115</sup> While it failed to secure any seat, garnering less than one percent of the votes in the presidential and legislative elections, it outperformed 14 parties at the municipal level, moving its position on the ballot up by eight spots.<sup>116</sup>

At the same time, LGBTIQ political engagement increased, albeit in a muted fashion. According to a representative of Diversidad Dominicana, there were two openly LGBTIQ candidates for councilor positions, but neither was elected. Diversidad Dominicana also noted that some other LGBTIQ individuals ran without publicizing their identity, including candidates for parliament and for

councilor positions, and several of them did win office.<sup>117</sup> The organization attributes this reticence to the general state of LGBTIQ exclusion in Dominican politics, where sexual and gender diversity is not welcome.

There were no reports of challenges experienced by LGBTIQ people in voting in 2024, according to Diversidad Dominicana. The country still does not provide the possibility for trans people to change their legal gender markers, which may have created issues for them in polling stations, but the organization did not receive any complaints in 2024, unlike in previous elections.<sup>118</sup>

Diversidad Dominicana’s VOTO X LA IGUALDAD platform sought to “make visible the different proposals aimed at improving the quality of life and access to the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community” by setting up a database of LGBTIQ-inclusive political platforms and inviting candidates to sign a letter of commitment.<sup>119</sup> However, the call went unnoticed. “There is no real commitment to the human rights of LGBTIQ people among political parties. They do say that they will do this, and they will do that, but they were only words, no real commitment,” a representative of the organization asserted.<sup>120</sup>

## El Salvador

Election: General (February 4 and March 3, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Partly free<sup>121</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

President Nayib Bukele, who had once positioned himself as an LGBTIQ ally but rapidly moved toward right-wing authoritarianism during his first term, was reelected to a second term in February 2024, with his Nuevas Ideas party winning 54 of 60 parliamentary seats. His first term was marked by the regression of human rights of LGBTIQ

113 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2024 – Dominican Republic,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/dominican-republic/freedom-world/2024>

114 Ibid.

115 Generación de Servidores (#GenS) (@gens\_oficial), “Ante cada acto de traición con que Luís Abinader, Miriam Germán y el PRM golpee nuestro país, le responderemos con más patriotismo y nacionalismo,” X, September 9, 2023, [https://x.com/gens\\_oficial/status/1700482847792861360](https://x.com/gens_oficial/status/1700482847792861360); Generación de Servidores (#GenS) (@gens\_oficial), “Gracias por su apoyo en esta primera participación de #GenS en elecciones,” X, May 28, 2024, [https://x.com/gens\\_oficial/status/1795444795592028647](https://x.com/gens_oficial/status/1795444795592028647).

116 Junta Central Electoral, “Resultados Presidenciales y Congresuales 2024,” accessed May 20, 2025, <https://elecciones2024.jce.gob.do/resultados-presidenciales-y-congresuales>; Mabel Rivas, “Partido Generación de Servidores supera 14 partidos en elecciones municipales,” Municipios Al Día, February 28, 2024, <https://do.municipiosaldia.com/nacional/item/44642-partido-generacion-de-servidores-supera-14-partidos-en-elecciones-municipales>.

117 Diversidad Dominicana interview.

118 Diversidad Dominicana interview.

119 Diversidad Dominicana (@DiversidaDom), “Candidate, ¿Quién eres tú?,” X, May 19, 2024, <https://x.com/DiversidaDom/status/1791954834788106723>; Diversidad Dominicana, “VOTO X LA IGUALDAD,” accessed February 13, 2025, <https://votoporlaigualdad.com.do>.

120 Diversidad Dominicana interview.

121 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – El Salvador,” accessed April 3, 2025, [freedomhouse.org/country/el-salvador/freedom-world/2025](https://freedomhouse.org/country/el-salvador/freedom-world/2025).

people in the country.<sup>122</sup> It was also marked by restrictions of civic space and attacks against fundamental freedoms, including “using the state of emergency to criminalize critical voices.”<sup>123</sup> Ahead of the March 2024 municipal elections, he spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Maryland, United States, on February 22, promising to remove so-called gender ideology, which he describes as “unnatural, anti-god, anti-family ideologies,” from public schools.<sup>124</sup>

During the preelection period, politicians repeatedly sought to position LGBTIQ people’s human rights as incompatible with “traditional” Salvadoran values. Felissa Cristales, a parliamentary candidate from Partido Católico Nacional (PCN), portrayed the so-called LGBT agenda as something that “does not go according to what the majority of Salvadorans want for our country.” In an interview on the 2024 elections, she proposed countering this “agenda” by electing “pro-lifers” like herself.<sup>125</sup>

Openly LGBTIQ candidates endured attacks within a hostile environment emboldened by queerphobic political actors. Erick Ortiz, who ran for deputy for the second time after making history as the first openly gay candidate for deputy in 2021, reported that he had been at the receiving end of constant social media attacks.

Ortiz received two death threats in August 2022.<sup>126</sup> Brenda Rosales, a member of the ruling party whose previous government post in the Ministry of Culture had made her El Salvador’s first openly trans government official, also became the first openly trans person to stand as a pre-candidate for deputy. However, she did not pass the internal party elections and reportedly suffered “hate attacks,” even from members of her own party, Nuevas Ideas.<sup>127</sup>

## European Union

See Snapshot in Section III.

### Finland

Election: Presidential (January 28 and February 11, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>128</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Despite Finland’s generally progressive legislation and norms on LGBTIQ issues, the sexual orientation of the country’s first openly gay presidential candidate, three-time contender Pekka Haavisto, most likely cost him the elections. Haavisto is an independent candidate endorsed by the Green League, which supports pro-LGBTIQ policies, such as recognizing a legal third gender and banning non-consensual medical interventions on intersex children.<sup>129</sup> In the second round, Haavisto narrowly lost to Alexander Stubb of the National Coalition Party, with 48.4 percent of the vote to Stubb’s 51.6 percent.

Some voter surveys suggest that Haavisto’s sexual

122 Amaral Arévalo, “Al lado correcto del poder: personas LGBTI+ y los 100 días de Nayib Bukele,” *El Faro*, September 13, 2019, <https://elfaro.net/es/201909/columnas/23648/Al-lado-correcto-del-poder-personas-LGBTI-y-los-100-d%C3%ADas-de-Nayib-Bukele.htm>; Neela Ghoshal, “No Safe Haven for LGBT People in El Salvador,” Human Rights Watch, January 8, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/08/no-safe-haven-lgbt-people-el-salvador>.

123 Amnesty International, *El Salvador: Behind the Veil of Popularity: Repression and Regression in Human Rights in El Salvador*, December 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr29/7423/2023/es/>, 43. The state of emergency was first declared as part of Bukele’s war against gangs in March 2022 and extended 36 times as of March 2025. Learn more: “Extienden por 30 días más el régimen de excepción en El Salvador, que pronto cumplirá 3 años,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, March 4, 2025, <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Extienden-por-30-dias-mas-el-regimen-de-excepcion-en-El-Salvador-que-pronto-cumplira-3-anos-20250304-0066.html>.

124 Carlos Maldonado, “Bukele attacks gender theory and removes it from public schools in El Salvador,” *EL PAÍS*, March 1, 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-03-01/bukele-attacks-gender-theory-and-removes-it-from-public-schools-in-el-salvador.html>; “El Salvador: Gender Ideology Removed From Public Education,” *FSSPX News*, March 7, 2024, <https://fsspx.news/en/news/el-salvador-gender-ideology-removed-public-education-43053>.

125 Pulso Ciudadano, “#PulsoCiudadano🇸🇻, Miércoles 9 de agosto 2023. Sintonízanos por Canal 19 y Canal 21🇸🇻,” interview on August 9, 2023, published on August 10, 2023, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHTYPzX6r8o>.

126 Gabriela Villarroel, “‘El único que viola la Constitución es el que se quiere reelegir’: Erick Ortiz, candidato a diputado por Nuestro Tiempo,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, September 12, 2023, <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Indistintamente-de-los-resultados-hay-una-base-para-un-proyecto-alternativo-Erick-Ortiz-de-Nuestro-Tiempo-20230911-0092.html>.

127 Ernesto Valle, “Activistas LGBTQ se preparan para elecciones en El Salvador,” *Washington Blade*, January 31, 2024, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2024/01/31/activistas-lgbtq-se-preparan-para-elecciones-en-el-salvador>.

128 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Finland,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/finland/freedom-world/2025>.

129 The Green League, “Political Programme of the Greens 2023–2027,” approved May 22, 2022, <https://www.greens.fi/political-programme-of-the-greens-2023-2027>.



orientation played a role in voters' decisions. One survey before the final round found that 40 percent of Stubb's supporters cited Haavisto's being gay as "inappropriate." These voters considered his sexual orientation to be the third main reason why they would not vote for him, behind "having different values" and "supporting a different political party."<sup>130</sup> In another survey, 61 percent of all respondents who voted for Stubb said that Haavisto's sexual orientation had an influence on their vote. Among them, 24 percent said it had a "decisive impact" on their vote.<sup>131</sup>

Anti-LGBTIQ discourse was prevalent during the campaigns. Maarit Levoniemi of Transfeminiinit, a transgender human rights group, told Outright:

The debate focused on his ability to represent Finland in countries where being gay is frowned upon, criminalized, or otherwise controversial. Many discussions on social media and other platforms were discriminatory, homophobic, and could be classified as hate speech.<sup>132</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that Stubb did not publicly weaponize homophobia against his openly gay opponent. In a social media post, Stubb declared that "he had fought for #LGBT rights throughout my life," from being elected as Vice President of the LGBT Intergroup of the European Parliament in 2008 to being prime minister when marriage equality was enacted.<sup>133</sup> His party, the National Coalition Party, does not have a strict party line on LGBTIQ issues, and members have taken opposing positions on legal gender recognition and marriage equality.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Saaga Leppänen, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Finland's Continuing Battle for LGBTI Equality," LSE Blogs, May 17, 2024, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/inequalities/2024/05/17/finlands-battle-for-lgbti-equality>. Data from: Teija Sutinen, "Stubbia äänestävistä 40 prosentille seksuaalinen suuntautuminen on syy olla äänestämättä Haavistoa," Helsingin Sanomat, February 5, 2024, <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000010201277.html>.

<sup>131</sup> Maria Nykänen, "MTV:n kysely: Haaviston seksuaalinen suuntautuminen vaikutti valtaosaan Stubbin äänestäjistä," MTV, February 21, 2024, <https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/mtv-n-kysely-haaviston-seksuaalinen-suuntautuminen-vaikutti-valtaosaan-stubbin-aanestajista/8882690#gs.64yamo>.

<sup>132</sup> Outright email exchange with Maarit Levoniemi, March 25, 2025.

<sup>133</sup> Alexander Stubb (@alexstubb), "I have fought for #LGBT rights throughout my life," X, May 23, 2023, <https://x.com/alexstubb/status/1660906498048897026>.

<sup>134</sup> Ov Cristian Norocel and Katarina Pettersson, "Anti-gender politics in Finland and Romania," European Journal of Politics and Gender 8, no. 1 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510821X16832281009645>.

## France

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Georgia

See Case Study in Section III.

## Ghana

See Case Study in Section III.

## Iceland

Election: Presidential (June 1, 2024) and Parliamentary (November 30, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>135</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

In recent years, Iceland has seen remarkable progress in the legal recognition of LGBTIQ people's rights, ranking second in the latest edition of ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map.<sup>136</sup> Pro-LGBTIQ discourse dominated the presidential field. The victorious candidate, Halla Tómasdóttir, affirmed during the campaign, "I am proud of Iceland's progressive leadership when it comes to gender equality and LGBTQAI+ rights." Other candidates who spoke up for equality included the former Minister of Equality, who led the enactment of several LGBTIQ-inclusive laws, and the former mayor of Reykjavík, who threatened to "terminate the sister city partnership between Reykjavík and Moscow" when the latter banned Pride.<sup>137</sup> Baldur Þórhallsson, one of the co-founders of Reykjavík Pride, became Iceland's first openly gay presidential candidate in 2024.<sup>138</sup> He

<sup>135</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - Iceland," accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iceland/freedom-world/2025>.

<sup>136</sup> ILGA-Europe, "With elections looming, Rainbow Map shows Europe is not equipped against attacks from the far-right," press release, May 15, 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/with-elections-loom-ing-rainbow-map-shows-europe-is-not-equipped-against-attacks-from-the-far-right>.

<sup>137</sup> Röald Viðar Eyvindsson, "This is what Iceland's presidential candidates think of LGBTQAI+ rights," Gay Iceland, May 4, 2024, <https://gayiceland.is/2024/this-is-what-icelands-presidential-candidates-think-of-lgbtqai-rights>.

<sup>138</sup> Jonathan Duffy, "From a Sheep Farm to Bessastaðir: Iceland's First Openly Gay Presidential Candidate," Gay Iceland, May 13, 2024, <https://>

emphasized during the campaign that, “I know that an openly gay president will be a positive role model for LGBTQAI+ youth, as there shouldn’t be any limits for their ambitions and dreams to come true.”<sup>139</sup>

While Baldur only received eight percent of the vote, LGBTIQ political representation reached new heights 14 years after Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir became the first openly gay head of government as prime minister of Iceland.

At the same time, however, anti-LGBTIQ, specifically anti-trans, hate speech has been on the rise.<sup>140</sup> This has extended to the political sphere, with Eldur Smári Kristinsson, a self-described “gender critical gay rights activist,” running for parliament on a platform opposing “the dangers of gender ideology.”<sup>141</sup> He is the chairperson of Samtökin 22, a so-called gay and lesbian advocacy organization that has been criticized as transphobic for advocating against the rights of trans persons.<sup>142</sup> While he was the top candidate in the electoral list of the newly founded Lýðræðisflokkurinn (Democracy Party) in the Northwest constituency, he did not secure a seat in the parliament.<sup>143</sup>

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gayiceland.is/2024/from-a-sheep-farm-to-bessastadir-icelands-first-openly-gay-presidential-candidate.

139 Roald Viðar Eyvindsson, “This is what Iceland’s presidential candidates think of LGBTQAI+ rights.”

140 ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2024>, 79.

141 Eldur SK Isidor, “Legal fund for Eldur,” GoFundMe, December 9, 2024, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/legal-fund-for-eldur>.

142 Sýlvía Hall, “Efast um að „LBG teymið“ eigi upp á pallborðið hjá hinsegin samfélaginu” (Doubts that the “LBG team” is up to the mark in the queer community), Visir, September 21, 2020, <https://www.visir.is/g/20202015024d/efast-um-ad-lbg-teymid-eigi-upp-a-pallbordid-hja-hinsegin-samfelaginu>. See also Samtökin 22, “Commentary on the Bill to Amend the General Penal Code No. 19/1940, as amended (suppression proceedings),” November 7, 2022, <https://www.althingi.is/altext/erin-di/153/153-374.pdf>.

143 Eldur Smári Kristinsson, “Venjulegt fólk á þing – umbætur strax,” Visir, October 24, 2024, <https://www.visir.is/g/20242639637d/venju-legt-folk-a-thing-um-baetur-strax>.

## India

Election: Legislative (April 19–June 1, 2024), Local, and State (throughout 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>144</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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2024 was a big election year for India, the world’s biggest democracy, home to almost a billion registered voters. With a 66 percent turnout, 646 million people came out to vote in the general election to select all 543 members of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Parliament of India. Voting took place in seven phases, based on constituency, from April to June 2024.<sup>145</sup>

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling conservative Hindu nationalist party, won 293 seats, retaining its majority in parliament despite losing 60 seats. The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) remained the biggest opposition political alliance, led by the Indian National Congress (INC), a big-tent political party at the center of the Indian political spectrum. INDIA gained 143 new seats in 2024, bringing its total to 234.<sup>146</sup> Throughout the year, elections were also held for various state legislative assemblies and local governments.

This election year highlighted the challenges that trans people continue to face in political participation. In 2014, a landmark decision by the Indian Supreme Court recognized a third gender and extended affirmative action measures in education and employment to trans people as a “socially and educationally backward class of citizens.”<sup>147</sup> However, it did not grant trans

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144 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – India,” accessed August 14, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2025>.

145 YP Rajesh and Sakshi Dayal, “Indian election commission bats away concerns in record-breaking ballot count,” Reuters, June 3, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-poll-panel-says-642-mln-voters-cast-ballots-general-election-2024-06-03>.

146 Election Commission of India, “General Election to Lok Sabha 2024 – Statistical Reports,” accessed August 14, 2025, <https://www.eci.gov.in/general-election-to-loksabha-2024-statistical-reports>.

147 South Asian Trans Law Database, “NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (NALSA) VS. UNION OF INDIA,” accessed August 14, 2025, <https://translaw.clpr.org.in/case-law/nalsa-third-gender-identity>.

people reserved seats at the national level, which are constitutionally mandated for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). All three transgender candidates who ran for seats in the Lok Sabha in 2024 failed to secure one-sixth of the votes in their constituencies, losing their security deposits in the process.<sup>148</sup> In the recent election, 86 percent of all parliamentary candidates in India in 2024 lost their security deposit, which amounts to 25,000 Indian rupees [US\$285], a sum close to the average monthly income in India.<sup>149</sup>

Voter turnout among trans people was lower than the general voter turnout. Only 48,000 people with a legally registered third gender—25 percent of all registered third gender citizens—were registered to vote in 2024. While this is significantly lower than the 66 percent overall turnout, it is an improvement from the 15 percent turnout in the 2019 elections, demonstrating some progress.<sup>150</sup>

The overwhelming majority of trans people have not changed their legal gender markers on identity documents, which can create obstacles to voting.<sup>151</sup> “It’s traumatic for me to go through the process of getting a voter ID card...and to vote as a man is difficult,” Anjali Siroya, a 26-year-old trans woman activist, told Context News.<sup>152</sup> To remedy these challenges, the Election Commission of India has been taking steps to ensure trans people can vote based on its “no voter left behind”

principle, working with local LGBTIQ groups on voter outreach and mobilization.<sup>153</sup>

Despite these challenges, trans and gender-diverse people continued to assert their place in electoral politics in 2024. Rajan Singh became the first-ever trans candidate for the Lok Sabha in South Delhi, running on a campaign for access to education and employment, as well as gender-inclusive public facilities and the establishment of a National Transgender Commission.<sup>154</sup> While the 26-year-old independent candidate only won 325 votes, she was not disheartened, recognizing that her candidacy was a symbolic win for the community and instead renewing her intention to run again.<sup>155</sup> “We will pressure those political parties who will support the creation of the National Transgender Commission and basic services for the community, we will support them. I will again fight the election,” Singh told the LGBTIQ newspaper Los Angeles Blade.<sup>156</sup>

Mahamandaleshwar Hemangi Sakhi Ma—who made waves in 2019 as the first trans kathawachak (raconteur) of the Hindu sacred text, Bhagavad Gita—ran against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Varanasi constituency, representing the right-wing nationalist Hindu Mahasabha party.<sup>157</sup> “Why is the trans community still begging on the streets, even with our PM in office? When will our lives change?” Hemangi Sakhi Ma demanded in a televised interview.<sup>158</sup> “I will be

148 Abhijeet Kumar, “No queer representation in 2024 Lok Sabha, 108 MPs vocal on LGBTQIA+ issues,” Business Standard, June 12, 2024, [https://www.business-standard.com/politics/no-queer-representation-in-2024-lok-sabha-108-mps-vocal-on-lgbtqia-issues-124061200861\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/politics/no-queer-representation-in-2024-lok-sabha-108-mps-vocal-on-lgbtqia-issues-124061200861_1.html).

149 Sreyashi Dey, “86% Of Candidates Who Contested 2024 Lok Sabha Polls Lost Deposit: Election Body,” NDTV, December 26, 2024, <https://special.ndtv.com/ndtv18kavote-136/news-detail/86-of-candidates-who-contested-2024-lok-sabha-polls-lost-deposit-election-commission-of-india-7336956/3>; “How much an average lower-middle class Indian earns in 2024,” The Economic Times, May 30, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/wealth/earn/how-much-an-average-lower-middle-class-indian-earns-in-2024/income-in-india-in-2024-all-you-need-to-know/slideshow/110570323.cms>.

150 “Third gender voter turnout in 2024 LS poll higher than 2019,” The Indian Express, June 7, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/third-gender-voter-turnout-2024-lok-sabha-poll-higher-9378262>; Press Trust of India, “Over 48,000 Transgenders Eligible To Vote In Lok Sabha Elections,” NDTV, March 16, 2024, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/2024-lok-sabha-polls-over-48-000-transgenders-eligible-to-vote-in-lok-sabha-elections-5250274>.

151 Changing one’s legal gender marker requires a lengthy procedure that involves processing documents sent through parental homes, which can be a hostile place for trans people. See Lucy Middleton and Aniket Narawad, “Stigma, paperwork: Hurdles hit transgender vote in India election,” Context, June 5, 2024, <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/stigma-paperwork-hurdles-hit-transgender-vote-in-india-election>.

152 Lucy Middleton and Aniket Narawad, “Stigma, paperwork.”

153 Ibid; Press Trust of India, “Over 48,000 Transgenders.”

154 Ashna Butani, “Election results 2024: Lok Sabha poll loss is no deterrent for Delhi’s first transgender candidate,” The Hindu, June 5, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha/is-poll-loss-is-no-deterrent-for-delhis-first-transgender-candidate/article68252032.ece>; Idrees Bukhtiyar, “Lok Sabha Elections 2024: ‘Community’s problems must be highlighted,’” The Patriot, May 26, 2024, <https://thepatriot.in/community/lok-sabha-elections-2024-communitys-problems-must-be-highlighted-49665?utm>; Ankush Kumar, “Transgender Indian parliamentary candidate vows to continue fight for equality,” Los Angeles Blade, June 24, 2024, <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2024/06/24/transgender-indian-parliamentary-candidate-vows-to-continue-fight-for-equality>.

155 Ankush Kumar, “Transgender Indian parliamentary candidate”; Third gender candidates celebrate participation despite low vote count,” The New Indian Express, June 6, 2024, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/delhi/2024/Jun/06/third-gender-candidates-celebrate-participation-despite-low-vote-count>.

156 Ankush Kumar, “Transgender Indian parliamentary candidate.”

157 “Lok Sabha Elections 2024: Who is Hemangi Sakhi Ma, world’s first transgender Bhagavad Gita raconteur, taking on PM Modi?,” Mint, April 8, 2024, <https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/lok-sabha-elections-2024-who-is-hemangi-sakhi-ma-first-transgender-bhagavad-gita-raconteur-taking-on-pm-modi-11712555848123.html>.

158 Mirza Shaina Beg, “Queering the Vote: fighting for visibility in India’s election,” Fair Planet, May 14, 2024, <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/queering-the-vote-fighting-for-visibility-in-indias-election>.

contesting against [Modi] to ensure that the attention of the government and political parties is drawn towards kinnars' issues," she asserted, referring to a culturally and socially recognized identity within third gender communities in North India.<sup>159</sup> However, her party later withdrew her candidacy, instead supporting Modi. Hemangi Sakhi Ma's party, Hindu Mahasabha, is an extremist party whose senior members have called for genocide against Muslims and the forced sterilization of Muslims and Christians.<sup>160</sup>

Political representation remains elusive for queer people. India has still not elected openly LGBTIQ people to either chamber of Parliament. The number of MPs who have been publicly vocal in support of LGBTIQ equality decreased from 161 in 2019 to 108 in 2024, according to Pinklist India, which documents politicians' support for LGBTIQ people's rights.<sup>161</sup>

Political support, however, reached new heights. For the first time, major political parties included LGBTIQ people's rights in their manifestos.<sup>162</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) vowed to provide more shelters to trans people, ensure their legal recognition, and extend coverage to "all eligible transgender individuals" under the national public health insurance system.<sup>163</sup> The opposition Indian National Congress promised to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in the constitution and to recognize civil unions "between couples belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community," but only "after wide consultation."<sup>164</sup>

Nevertheless, some LGBTIQ activists and commentators were disappointed with these commitments, which, despite their pioneering nature, do not address the scale of inequalities LGBTIQ persons face in the country.<sup>165</sup> They point out that the BJP did not tackle discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ people or commit to self-determined legal gender recognition, while the INC did not mention violence and stopped short of pushing for marriage equality.<sup>166</sup> BJP also continues to oppose marriage equality.<sup>167</sup> "This is all just lip service...we're a sizable electorate, and this is all they could offer us," Noor Enayat, an LGBTIQ activist in Mumbai, told Context.<sup>168</sup>

The electoral cycle was not marked by the weaponization of anti-LGBTIQ sentiments. It was, however, marked by a hateful campaign by Prime Minister Modi and the BJP against Muslims and other minorities, such as Christians, Dalits, and Sikhs, which has led to violent physical attacks and demolitions of minorities' houses, businesses, and places of worship.<sup>169</sup> Queer Muslims thus faced double marginalization. Speaking to Queerbeat, an independent Indian media project, a dominant caste Muslim trans man described this situation as "aage kuhaan, peeche khai" (caught between a rock and a hard place).<sup>170</sup>

## Indonesia

See Case Study in Section III.

159 Rajeev Sikshit, "Lok Sabha polls: Nirmohi Akhara's transgender face to challenge PM Narendra Modi in Varansi," The Times of India, April 9, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/lok-sabha-polls-nirmohi-akhara-transgender-face-to-challenge-pm-modi/article-show/109143815.cms>.

160 Rhea Mogul and Swati Gupta, "India's Hindu extremists are calling for genocide against Muslims. Why is little being done to stop them?," CNN, January 14, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/14/asia/india-hindu-extremist-groups-intl-hnk-dst>.

161 Abhijeet Kumar, "No queer representation in 2024 Lok Sabha, 108 MPs vocal on LGBTQIA+ issues," Business Standard, June 12, 2024, [https://www.business-standard.com/politics/no-queer-representation-in-2024-lok-sabha-108-mps-vocal-on-lgbtqia-issues-124061200861\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/politics/no-queer-representation-in-2024-lok-sabha-108-mps-vocal-on-lgbtqia-issues-124061200861_1.html).

162 Ankush Kumar, "Indian political parties for the first time include LGBTQ rights in election platforms," Washington Blade, April 16, 2024, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2024/04/16/indian-political-parties-for-the-first-time-include-lgbtq-rights-in-election-platforms>.

163 BJP, "Modi ki Guarantee," 2024, [https://www.bjp.org/pressreleases/bjps-manifesto-general-election-2024-bjp-sankalp-patra-2024\\_34](https://www.bjp.org/pressreleases/bjps-manifesto-general-election-2024-bjp-sankalp-patra-2024_34).

164 Nyay Patra, "Congress Manifesto," 2024, <https://inc.in/media/manifesto>, 10.

165 Renu Naidu Pooja Baghel, "Election 2024: The lack of discussion on LGBTQIA+ rights in campaigns and party manifestos," The Indian Express, June 17, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/election-2024-the-lack-of-discussion-on-lgbtqia-rights-in-campaigns-and-party-manifestos-9397175>; Faisal C.K. and Parth Raman, "What Parties' Election Manifestos Tell Us of the State of LGBTQIA+ Rights," The Wire India, April 16, 2024, <https://thewire.in/politics/election-manifesto-lgbtqia-parties>.

166 Annie Banerji, "India's LGBTQ+ election vows ring hollow for rights activists," Context, April 16, 2024, <https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/indias-lgbtq-election-vows-ring-hollow-for-rights-activists>.

167 "On gay rights, BJP goes with RSS stance," The Tribune, October 18, 2023, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/on-gay-rights-bjp-goes-with-sangh-stance-554154>.

168 Annie Banerji, "India's LGBTQ+ election."

169 Human Rights Watch, "India: Hate Speech Fueled Modi's Election Campaign," August 14, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/14/india-hate-speech-fueled-modis-election-campaign>.

170 Anirudh and Sweta Daga, "Understanding the queer vote in India," Queerbeat, November 8, 2024, <https://www.queerbeat.org/stories/understanding-the-queer-vote-in-india>.



## Ireland

Election: Local (June 7, 2024) and General (November 29, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>171</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

On November 29, 2024, general elections were held for the 34th Dáil Éireann, the lower house of the Irish parliament, where 174 members, known as Teachtaí Dála (TDs), were elected. Irish voters elected eight openly LGBTIQ TDs, the most in the country's history.<sup>172</sup> However, the new Dáil was the worst in Western Europe in terms of women's representation.<sup>173</sup>

For the first time, a coalition of LGBTIQ groups came together to issue a community manifesto calling on candidates to commit to protecting and promoting LGBTIQ people's human rights. Paula Fagan of LGBT Ireland stressed the significance of this initiative:

The recent, very real and tangible increase in hate, misinformation and general LGBTQI+-phobia seen in Ireland has galvanized the sector across the country... That is why we have come together as a collective to advocate for election candidates and public representatives to commit to the asks in this manifesto and to call on voters to keep their LGBTQ+ friends, family, colleagues, and community members in mind when they go to the polls.<sup>174</sup>

The three biggest parties, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, and Fine Gael, generally supported measures such as anti-bullying protections and legislation exonerating men

criminalized for same-sex intimacy. However, their platforms did not address demands for specific legal protections for trans, nonbinary, and intersex individuals and reforms to the Equality Acts, which protect against discrimination based on "gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community," but do not explicitly cover gender identity and expression and sex characteristics.<sup>175</sup> Trans Healthcare Action, a grassroots trans group in Ireland, has noted a significant backsliding in major parties' positions on trans people's rights.<sup>176</sup> The 2024 manifestos of the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties no longer reflect previous commitments to follow international standards for gender-affirming health care and to expand Ireland's Gender Recognition Act by extending its ambit to minors and nonbinary persons.<sup>177</sup>

While debates on trans people's rights that animated the elections of the neighboring United Kingdom did not dominate the electoral agenda, far-right parties doubled down on anti-trans rhetoric. Aontú (Unity), a small party with two seats in the Dáil, vowed to repeal the Gender Recognition Act as part of its broader opposition to "gender ideology" and "transgenderism."<sup>178</sup> Three far-right parties, Ireland First, the National Party, and the Irish People, formed the National Alliance to "defend the right to free speech" in opposition to the hate crime and hate speech laws that the Dáil was considering.<sup>179</sup> They also vowed to cut funding to "subversive NGOs that undermine our national interests," which, according to Trans Healthcare Action, was primarily directed toward LGBTIQ groups.<sup>180</sup> The National Alliance did not win any seats in 2024.

175 Sarah Creighton Keogh, "What political party manifestos say about LGBTQ+ rights," GCN, November 27, 2024, <https://gcn.ie/political-party-manifestos-lgbtq-rights>. The "gender ground" for discrimination, according to the Equal Status Acts, is defined as discrimination based on the fact "that one is male and the other is female." See Republic of Ireland, Equal Status Act, 2000, <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/pdf>, art. 3(2).

176 Outright email exchange with Trans Healthcare Action, March 13, 2025.

177 Ibid.

178 Fiachra Ó Cionnaith, "What is in Aontú's 'common sense' manifesto?," RTE, November 21, 2024, <https://www.rte.ie/news/election-24/2024/1121/1482288-aontu-manifesto-analysis>.

179 Vittorio Bufacchi, "Far-right political parties form alliance to contest general election," Irish Examiner, October 27, 2024, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/commentanalysis/arid-41504135.html>.

180 Trans Healthcare Action email exchange. See also Mike Finnerty, "Far-right alliance to contest general election," Dublin People Group, October 30, 2024, <https://dublinpeople.com/news/community/election-hub-24/articles/2024/10/30/far-right-alliance-ge>.

171 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - Ireland," accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ireland/freedom-world/2025>.

172 ILGA-Europe, Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2025/02/ILGA-Europe-Annual-Review-2025.pdf>, 78.

173 Ashifa Kassam, "Irish parliament has worst gender diversity in western Europe, study finds," The Guardian, December 6, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/06/irish-parliament-has-worst-gender-diversity-in-western-europe-study-finds>.

174 Sarah Creighton Keogh, "Irish LGBTQ+ organisations launch first-of-its-kind manifesto ahead of general election," GCN, November 6, 2024, <https://gcn.ie/irish-lgbtq-organisations-launch-manifesto>.

## Israel

Election: Municipal (February 27, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>181</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Israel held municipal elections on February 27, 2024, just a month after an the International Court of Justice, in an interim ruling, found there was a “risk of irreparable harm to the Palestinian right to be protected from genocide” and ordered Israel to stop restricting and blocking humanitarian aid to Gaza.<sup>182</sup> Human rights organizations and UN bodies have continued to document alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international law by Israeli forces, Hamas, and other armed groups, including Israel’s ongoing bombardment of Gaza. Election turnout was lower than usual in this context.<sup>183</sup>

In 2020, Israel had reached a milestone in LGBTIQ political representation, with openly gay lawmakers forming five percent of the Knesset, Israel’s parliament. In 2024, the town of Kiryat Tiv’on elected the country’s first openly transgender council member.<sup>184</sup> Several openly LGBTIQ municipal politicians within and outside Tel Aviv-Jaffa

also kept their seats.<sup>185</sup>

The recent election also saw gains by the anti-LGBTIQ political party Noam. During the 2019 elections, its failure to reach the required threshold for parties and its decision to withdraw days before the polls led some to believe that Noam’s only intention was to “give maximum exposure to the anti-LGBT agenda.”<sup>186</sup> It then joined Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government in December 2022. Noam Party leader Avi Maoz, who was tasked to head an agency on “Jewish identity,” vowed to ban the Jerusalem Pride Parade in the same month.<sup>187</sup> In the recent municipal elections, a small town elected a mayor affiliated with Noam.<sup>188</sup> The party also gained one seat in Jerusalem’s municipal council, joining the far-right and ultranationalist majority.<sup>189</sup>

## Japan

Election: General (October 27, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>190</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Ahead of the general elections, some political actors put LGBTIQ issues front and center in public discourse. Several political parties, including the Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner Komeito, pledged support for marriage equality and the full implementation of the LGBT Understanding Promotion Act, which stipulates

181 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2024 – Israel,” accessed April 3, 2025, [freedomhouse.org/country/israel/freedom-world/2024](https://freedomhouse.org/country/israel/freedom-world/2024).

182 International Court of Justice, Order of 26 January 2024, Document Number 192-20240126-ORD-01-00-EN, <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447>.

183 UN OHCHR, “UN Commission finds war crimes and crimes against humanity in Israeli attacks on Gaza health facilities and treatment of detainees, hostages,” October 10, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/un-commission-finds-war-crimes-and-crimes-against-humanity-israeli-attacks>; Human Rights Watch, “I Can’t Erase All the Blood from My Mind’: Palestinian Armed Groups’ October 7 Assault on Israel, July 2024,” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/07/17/i-cant-erase-all-blood-my-mind/palestinian-armed-groups-october-7-assault-israel>; Human Rights Watch, “Hopeless, Starving, and Besieged: Israel’s Forced Displacement of Palestinians in Gaza, November 2024,” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/11/14/hopeless-starving-and-besieged/israels-forced-displacement-palestinians-gaza>; Mat Nashed, “Israel holds municipal elections; war on Gaza affects turnout and mood,” AlJazeera, February 27, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/27/israel-holds-municipal-elections-war-on-gaza-affects-turnout-and-mood>.

184 Shibu Thomas, “Israeli Parliament Increasingly Gay,” Star Observer, June 23, 2020, <https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/israeli-parliament-increasingly-gay/196233>; George Avni, “Sheila Weinberg becomes Israel’s first transgender council member,” Washington Blade, March 4, 2024, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2024/03/04/sheila-weinberg-becomes-israels-first-transgender-council-member>.

185 Avni, “Sheila Weinberg.”

186 Danny Zaken, “תשרוף ‘מענ’ תגלפם, תויפלקה חתיפת ינפל עגר: ילמרונו אל, ‘Not normal: Just before the polls open, the ‘Noam’ party withdraws’), Globes, September 15, 2019, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001300730>.

187 “Anti-LGBT incoming Jewish identity czar Avi Maoz vows to nix Jerusalem Pride Parade,” Times of Jerusalem, December 1, 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/anti-lgbt-incoming-jewish-identity-czar-avi-maoz-vows-to-nix-jerusalem-pride-parade>.

188 Peled Arbeli, “העיר הראשונה? מענ תגלפם תיטלשב הנושארה רינה, ‘The first city controlled by the Noam party? The dramatic transformation in Mitzpe Ramon’), Maariv, February 28, 2024, <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/israel/article-1079821>.

189 “Jerusalem’s Municipal Elections Produce a Council Dominated by Religious Jews; the City’s Palestinians Stay Home,” Jerusalem Story, March 12, 2024, <https://www.jerusalemstory.com/en/article/jeruselems-municipal-elections-produce-council-dominated-religious-jews-citys-palestinians>.

190 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Japan,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/japan/freedom-world/2025>.

measures for the strengthened protection of LGBTIQ people's human rights.<sup>191</sup>

In contrast, two parties with anti-LGBTIQ platforms entered the House of Representatives for the first time. The Conservative Party of Japan doubled down on its opposition to LGBTQ-inclusive reforms under the guise of “protecting Japan’s national polity and traditional culture.” Its founder, novelist Kaori Arimoto, had announced on June 12, 2023, that he would start a conservative political party if the LGBT Understanding Promotion Act were to be approved.<sup>192</sup> The Diet enacted the law shortly after on June 16, 2023, and the party was founded on September 1, 2023. It won three seats in October 2024 and became the most followed Japanese political party on X.<sup>193</sup> Sanseitō, another party that says it opposes the LGBT Awareness Promotion Act and same-sex marriage, as they “have not been thoroughly debated and will cause confusion in society,” also gained three seats.<sup>194</sup>

LGBTIQ groups were actively monitoring electoral campaigns. Marriage For All Japan developed Pride Vision, an innovative application that identifies candidates supporting marriage equality through an augmented reality (AR) camera that scans election posters.<sup>195</sup> The LGBT Law Association published the results of its survey on the opinions of political parties and candidates on various LGBT issues, hoping that it would

“serve as a measuring stick for voters in general, including [for] LGBT people when making their voting decisions.”<sup>196</sup>

In 2024, Kanako Otsuji, a pioneering politician who became the country’s first openly gay legislator in 2013, won reelection for their second term.<sup>197</sup>

## Jordan

Election: General (September 10, 2024)

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>198</sup>

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

Jordan held parliamentary elections on September 10, 2024, after King Abdullah II dissolved parliament on July 25. The Islamic Action Front Party secured the most seats, at 31 out of all 138 seats.<sup>199</sup> Jaffar Husein was appointed by King Abdullah II as prime minister following the elections.<sup>200</sup>

Jordanian queer activist Hasan Kilani told Outright that during the election campaign, the Islamic Action Front mobilized anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric to attack secular parties:

The Islamic Action Front, for instance, during a debate with a secular party, criticized them, saying that describing themselves as secular means that the secular party supports inclusion of LGBTIQI persons.<sup>201</sup>

191 “Summary of each party’s election pledges on gender and diversity,” Asahi, October 18, 2024, <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASSBJ1JDKSBJUL-FA018M.html>.

192 “百田尚樹氏が「保守政党」結成を宣言 L G B T法案成立なら「日本が破壊される」 安倍氏の暗殺後に「自民党は音を立てて崩れた」（Naoki Hyakuta declares formation of “conservative political party,” and says LGBT bill would “destroy Japan” and LDP “collapsed with a loud crash” after Abe’s assassination), Zakzak, June 12, 2023, <https://www.zakzak.co.jp/article/20230612-NPYDJVNQRBDHLYNG5XGDSPPVCI>.

193 Makoto Fukatsu, “Will the Japanese Conservative Party “Destroy the LDP”? Opposition to the LGBT law has shaken the bedrock,” Mainichi Shimbun, October 28, 2024, <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20241027/k00/00m/010/038000c>; “圧巻の「自民超え」 日本保守党のXフォロワー数、国内政党で1位に 開設わずか15日で大躍進 百田尚樹氏「歴史的だ」 (The Japanese Conservative Party’s impressive number of followers on Twitter surpasses that of the Liberal Democratic Party, ranking first among domestic political parties. The party made a huge leap forward in just 15 days after its launch. Naoki Hyakuta called it “historic”), Zakzak, September 16, 2023, <https://www.zakzak.co.jp/article/20230916-FFBJUJENZKJLHWZOUQMQLY4>.

194 “Summary of each party’s election pledges on gender and diversity,” Asahi, October 18, 2024, <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASSBJ1JDKSBJUL-FA018M.html>.

195 Matthew Burgos, “‘pride vision’ AR camera detects candidates who support marriage equality in japan elections,” designboom, October 25, 2024, <https://www.designboom.com/technology/pride-vision-ar-camera-candidates-support-marriage-equality-japan-elections-tb-wa-hakuhodo-10-25-2024>.

196 “There were “0” political parties who answered that LGBTQ policies were “unnecessary.” See “What are each party’s thoughts on SOGI, anti-discrimination and gender reassignment? [House of Representatives Election 2024],” Huffington Post Japan, October 26, 2024, [https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/entry/story\\_jp\\_671c858de4b0fdf4fef48203](https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/entry/story_jp_671c858de4b0fdf4fef48203).

197 “比例代表 南関東ブロック” (Proportional representation, South Kanto Block), NHK, accessed March 31, 2025, <https://www.nhk.or.jp/senkyo/database/shugiin/00/hsm04.html>.

198 Freedom House, “Freedom Around the World 2025 – Jordan”, accessed July 29, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2025>. While the ranking for Jordan on civil liberties is quite low, the report notes an improvement in the electoral processes. Its low scores are due to the monarch’s broad executive powers as well as on the way parliament is constituted rather than on the conduct of elections.

199 Jordanian Independent Electoral Commission, [نوع لصفحة](https://www.iec.jo/sites/default/files/Report/FinalReport2024.pdf) ريرقت, 2024, (Detailed report on 2024 parliamentary elections), 2024, <https://www.iec.jo/sites/default/files/Report/FinalReport2024.pdf>.

200 “Jordan’s king appoints new PM after general election,” France24, September 15, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240915-jordan-s-king-appoints-new-pm-after-general-election>.

201 Ibid.

They added that LGBTIQ issues are generally “scapegoated as a distraction” for unpopular government policies:

If the [Jordanian] government, for instance, signs a peace treaty about water with Israel, instead of discussing this issue, which will make people angry, they [the government] decide to talk [negatively] on LGBTIQ issues.<sup>202</sup>

Kilani said that the more progressive parties tend to be neutral on LGBTIQ issues, calling for respect for human rights for all persons without giving specific examples of minorities that need protection. The activist acknowledged that while they voted, it was only to show “distrust with the election process through an empty ballot.”<sup>203</sup> They explained that the structure of the government disenfranchises marginalized communities:

The power of the elections is not felt. There can be communist and socialist parties, and the members of these parties can be chosen. The problem is that even if they are elected as Parliamentary members, the Executive government is appointed. The executive-appointed government is always a neo-liberal government. Within the neo-liberal governments, none of them have ever focused on issues affecting LGBTIQ+ people.<sup>204</sup>

After the 2024 elections, MP Bayan Fakhri Issa Al-Mahasiri of the Islamic Action Front spoke out in parliament against rising “social liberalization.”<sup>205</sup> Addressing a proposal by the Prime Minister to remove Jordan’s reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), she claimed that the concept of gender was, among other things, intended to promote “sex reassignments.”<sup>206</sup> Kilani

explained:

The speech was framed in a way as to say that the government [referring to the executive] wanted to reproduce gays and lesbians, which is something that the populist parties such as the Islamic Action Front and other independent politicians always mention to convince voters that LGBTIQ people are trying to “turn people gay.”<sup>207</sup>

## Kiribati

Election: Parliamentary (August 14–19, 2024) and Presidential (October 25, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>208</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

LGBTIQ issues did not occupy significant space in Kiribati’s electoral discourse in 2024, which instead focused on inflation, climate change, and relations with China.<sup>209</sup> Nevertheless, the manifesto of incumbent president Taneti Maamau, who was seeking reelection, explicitly included promises to secure LGBTIQ persons’ rights. Item 42 in his manifesto commits the government to “increase education, dialogue, and support for women and men to prevent and eliminate violence and discrimination against women, children, and LGBTIQ individuals.”<sup>210</sup> According to BIMBA, an LGBTIQ organization in the country, some candidates also reached out to its members, encouraged them to vote, and requested their support in the electoral campaigns.<sup>211</sup>

Deputy Speaker of Parliament Ruta Baabo-Nemta, a

202 Outright interview with Hasan Kilani, virtual, March 17, 2025.

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid.

205 “موكحل أةجيتارتسا يف ردنجل او ةيلثم الامد: يرسي حم ال بئان ال” “MP Al-Mahasiri: Integrating homosexuality and gender into the government’s strategy threatens the Jordanian family”, FactJo, December 12, 2024 <https://www.factjo.com/news.aspx?id=222940>.

206 Ibid. Jordan does not consider itself bound by several provisions of the CEDAW, including those on women’s equal rights to the nationality of their children, women’s freedom of movement and choice of residence, non-discrimination in women’s rights in marriage and family relations. See also States Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, “Declarations, reservations, objections and notifications of withdrawal of reservations relating to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” UN Doc.

CEDAW/SP/2006/2, April 10, 2006, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n06/309/97/pdf/n0630997.pdf>, 16.

207 Kilani interview,

208 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2024 – Kiribati,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kiribati/freedom-world/2024>.

209 Don Wiseman, “Kiribati elections 2024 – what we know,” Radio New Zealand, August 14, 2024, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/525031/kiribati-elections-2024-what-we-know>.

210 Don Wiseman, “Kiribati presidential candidates release manifestos,” Radio New Zealand, October 10, 2024, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/530382/kiribati-presidential-candidates-release-manifestos>. The original manifesto in Kiribati is available at: <https://www.president.gov.ki/resources/gazettes-instruments.html>.

211 Outright email exchange with BIMBA, January 29, 2025.



key political ally of BIMBA, was invited to two global conferences focused on LGBTIQ equality after the elections, demonstrating political willingness to publicly advocate for equality in global spaces.<sup>212</sup> The explicit support of political actors for LGBTIQ people's human rights signifies a positive step toward equality in a country where consensual same-sex intimacy between men is still criminalized.

## Lithuania

Election: Presidential (May 12 and 26, 2024) and Parliamentary (October 13 and 27, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>213</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Lithuania held both presidential and parliamentary elections in 2024. Gitanas Nausėda, who sought reelection as an independent candidate, received 75 percent of the votes in the second round of elections on May 26, after a first round on May 12 in which no candidate received the majority of votes required to be confirmed as president.

According to ILGA-Europe, Lithuania ranks 34th out of 49 countries in terms of LGBTIQ inclusion. While the law protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in access to employment, goods and services, education, and health care, no legislative protections exist for trans or intersex people, and there is no family recognition for same-sex couples in the form of marriage, civil unions, or adoption rights.<sup>214</sup>

During the presidential campaign, a news outlet asked

all candidates about their views on “thornier issues that never fail to arouse emotion: family, same-sex partnerships, and abortion.”<sup>215</sup> President Nausėda advocated for the legal recognition of same-sex unions, while one of his opponents leaned into heterosexist notions of the “traditional family” and another dismissed sexual and gender diversity as “sexual fantasies” and “LGBT propaganda.”<sup>216</sup>

Parliamentary elections were conducted with a first round on October 13, 2024, and a second round on October 26. The Social Democratic Party of Lithuania prevailed with 52 of 141 parliamentary seats. Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius, Lithuania's only openly LGBTIQ politician, held a parliament seat from 2020 to 2024 as a Freedom Party member, but was not reelected. A coalition of LGBTIQ organizations endorsed 30 candidates from six political parties based on their previous votes and public statements.<sup>217</sup> Artūras Rudomanskis, chairperson of the Tolerant Youth Association, one of the organizations behind the list, said in the coalition's press statement:

The current political situation in Lithuania is unfavorable for LGBT+ people, who remain legally discriminated against, face bullying and violence...The lack of leadership from government representatives disappoints a significant part of society that wants to live in a state that ensures equality. However, before the elections, it is important to unite and support those politicians whose votes can change the situation.<sup>218</sup>

In its manifesto, the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania, which won the most seats in the assembly, promised to fight violence and discrimination against LGBT persons.<sup>219</sup> The manifesto of the Freedom Party, which did not secure any parliamentary seats, had detailed provisions for LGBTIQ inclusion, including provisions for comprehensive

212 Parliamentarians for Global Action had invited Baabo-Nemta to speak at the November 2024 Global Equality Summit, an international convening of legislators working on LGBTIQ equality, but Baabo-Nemta was unable to attend due to a mandatory workshop for new parliamentarians. Baabo-Nemta was also invited to attend the Global Decriminalization Convening 2025 in Bangkok, organized by Human Dignity Trust.

213 See Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), “Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Needs Assessment Mission Report: Lithuania– Presidential Elections,” 2024, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/7/567193.pdf>. While OSCE was unable to observe both elections, an assessment done prior to the elections indicated that there were proper systems in place to allow for free and fair elections.

214 ILGA-Europe, “Rainbow Map 2024: Lithuania,” accessed May 12, 2025 <https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/countries/lithuania>.

215 Milda Vilikanskyte, “Lithuania's presidential election: candidates on family, same-sex unions, and abortion,” LRT.lt, April 17, 2024, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2250994/lithuania-s-presidential-election-candidates-on-family-same-sex-unions-and-abortion>.

216 Ibid.

217 LGL, “Iniciatyvinė grupė „LGBT+ balsas“ skelbia rekomendacijas Seimo rinkimams” (The initiative group “LGBT+ Voice” publishes recommendations for the Seimas elections), September 26, 2024 <https://www.lgl.lt/naujienos/iniciatyvine-grupe-lgbt-balsas-skelbia-rekomendacijas-seimo-rinkimams>.

218 Ibid.

219 Socialdemokratai, “2024 Seimo rinkimų programa” (2024 Seimo rinkimų programa), 2024 [https://www.lsdpl.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/LSDP\\_programa\\_seimas\\_.pdf](https://www.lsdpl.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/LSDP_programa_seimas_.pdf), 34.

sexuality education, family equality, inclusion in health care and education, and self-determined legal gender recognition.<sup>220</sup>

## Marshall Islands

Election: Presidential (January 2, 2024)

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>221</sup>

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

The Nitjela, the 33-member legislative body of the Marshall Islands, elects the country's president. There are no formally organized political parties in the country, though members of the Nitjela form political affiliations with their preferred candidate.<sup>222</sup> On January 2, 2024, the Nitjela elected Hilda Heine through a secret ballot, wherein Heine garnered 17 votes and defeated her opponent, David Kabua, by only one vote.<sup>223</sup>

LGBTIQ issues were not featured prominently in the campaigns. Bujen N., a gay activist in the Marshall Islands, noted that the issues of concern during the election included the country's "nuclear legacy, development, climate change, and equality, though this is majorly on equality between men and women."<sup>224</sup>

220 Laisves Partija, "Turime Nebaigtą Reikalą!– Laisvės partijos 2024 metų Seimo rinkimų programa" (We have unfinished business! – Freedom Party's program for the 2024 parliamentary elections), 2024, <https://laisvespartija.lt/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Programa-1-1.pdf>, 41, 45, 46, 47. CSE is a curriculum-based and rights- and gender-focused approach to sexuality education, whether in school or out of school, that aims to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will enable them to develop a positive view of their sexuality, in the context of their emotional and social development.

221 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Report 2024 – Marshall Islands," accessed June 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/marshall-islands/freedom-world/2024>.

222 Giff Johnson, "Marshall Islands election puts opposition in driver's seat," Radio New Zealand, December 15, 2023, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/504798/marshall-islands-election-puts-opposition-in-driver-s-seat>.

223 "Hilda Heine sworn in as President of the Marshall Islands" Radio New Zealand, January 3, 2024, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/505980/hilda-heine-sworn-in-as-president-of-the-marshall-islands>.

224 Outright interview with Bujen N. (pseudonym), virtual, March 18, 2025; For a discussion on the impact of nuclear testing on the Marshall Islands, see: Lucy Sherriff, "Endless fallout: the Pacific idyll still facing nuclear blight 77 years on," The Guardian, August 25, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/25/endless-fallout-marshall-islands-pacific-idyll-still-facing-nuclear-blight-77-years-on>.

Even without public campaigns for the fulfillment of rights for LGBTIQ persons, Bujen N. affirmed that LGBTIQ persons, including himself, were enthused about Hilda Heine's victory. Among the reasons was her introduction of the 2019 Gender Equality Act, which enacted protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>225</sup> He is hopeful that under Heine's presidency, "there will be inclusion of LGBTIQ persons in all spheres of life, including in the workplace, in education and the curriculums, so that everyone can have awareness on LGBTIQ people, fostering more societal inclusion generally."<sup>226</sup>

On voting in the general 2023 election, Bujen N. affirmed that LGBTIQ people did not generally face restrictions in voting. However, the lack of legal gender recognition meant that trans and gender-diverse persons did not vote with identification documents that affirmed their identities:

There are no legal [processes] which recognize being able to change one's gender on official documents in Marshall Islands....However, during the elections, I was with some transgender women who were able to vote despite having a male gender marker.<sup>227</sup>

## Mauritius

Election: General (November 10, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>228</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

While there are no restrictions on the right to vote for LGBTIQ persons in Mauritius and no case of discrimination and harassment was recorded in the 2024 general elections, political actors did not positively engage with LGBTIQ issues, while a few overtly resorted to anti-LGBTIQ

225 Ibid; See also Republic of the Marshall Islands, Gender Equality Act, 2019, <https://rmicourts.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/P.L.2019-116-GEN-DER-EQUALITY-ACT-2019.pdf>.

226 Bujen N. Interview.

227 Ibid.

228 African Union Election Observation Mission to the Mauritius 10 November National Assembly Elections, "Preliminary Statement," November 12, 2024, <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/preliminary-statement-african-union-election-observation-mission-to-the-mauritius-10-november-national-assembly-elections-port-louis-12-november-2024>.

hate speech.<sup>229</sup>

No political party explicitly included LGBTIQ equality in its electoral agenda or consulted LGBTIQ people in developing its platform.<sup>230</sup> At least two cases of anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric by political actors were documented.

In a public gathering for supporters of the then-opposition Alliance du Changement coalition on November 1, 2024, Ehsan Juman, a candidate for Member of Parliament (MP), sought to portray sexual and gender diversity as a “Western deviation.”<sup>231</sup> This posturing aimed to dispute what he saw as the then-outgoing government’s attempts to “associate [his party] with LGBT,” triggered by the presence of a group with a rainbow flag at an Alliance du Changement rally.<sup>232</sup> “Gay marriage? LGBT? Never! They [the outgoing government] are doing all kinds of machinations. It is a lie. It was never in our electoral manifesto,” Jumain asserted.<sup>233</sup> Juman’s candidacy was successful, as part of the landslide victory of the opposition, which won 60 out of 62 contested seats.<sup>234</sup> While queerphobia does not appear to dominate Juman’s main campaign narrative, a representative of LGBTIQ organization Collectif Arc-en-Ciel affirmed that, “this type of discourse, even if indirect, contributes to stigmatization.”<sup>235</sup>

In another case, an individual wrote to Young Queer Alliance, a youth-led LGBTQIA+ group in Mauritius, to alert the group about a homophobic message seemingly linked to the campaign. They shared a photo indicating that a medical practitioner, who was a candidate for MP from the then-ruling L’alliance Lepep party, had included

a homophobic message—“We stand against LGBT and immoralities”—in a series of medical prescriptions he was issuing in 2023.<sup>236</sup>

The country has made recent strides toward non-discrimination, with the landmark rulings of the Supreme Court in October 2023 that decriminalized same-sex intimacy.<sup>237</sup> However, for Young Queer Alliance, there is insufficient political commitment necessary to promote equality. In an exchange with Outright, a representative of the group expressed that they “[deplore] the continued lack of political zeal by political movements and governments in fully embracing and upholding the human rights of LGBTQIA+ persons.”<sup>238</sup> In May 2025, two UN treaty bodies recommended that Mauritius take action against violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity, but the government has not yet committed to any concrete steps to fulfill these recommendations.<sup>239</sup> In addition to fighting discrimination and violence, a representative of Arc-en-Ciel told Outright that the main advocacy priority of the movement at this stage is the legal recognition of trans people’s gender identity, but they are also working toward the legalization of same-sex civil unions.<sup>240</sup>

## Mexico

See Case Study in Section III.

## Moldova

See Snapshot in Section III.

229 Outright email exchange with Najeeb Ahmad Fokeerbux, President of Young Queer Alliance, April 1, 2025.

230 Ibid.

231 Eshan Juman, untitled video, Facebook, November 1, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/eshanjumanofficial/videos/1018058570331862>.

232 “Meeting de l’Alliance du Changement à Phoenix : des membres de la communauté LGBT apportent leur soutien à Joanna Bérenger,” Defimedia, October 27, 2024, <https://defimedia.info/meeting-de-lalliance-du-changement-phoenix-des-membres-de-la-communaute-lgbt-apportent-leur-soutien-joanna-berenger>.

233 Eshan Juman, untitled video, Facebook, November 1, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/eshanjumanofficial/videos/1018058570331862>. Translation to English shared with Outright by Najeeb Ahmad Fokeerbux, WhatsApp, May 21, 2025.

234 “À Maurice, l’opposition remporte les élections législatives,” Jeune Afrique, November 11, 2024, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1628997/politique/a-maurice-lopposition-remporte-les-elections-legislatives>.

235 Outright email exchange with a representative of Collectif Arc-en-Ciel, May 20, 2025.

236 Photo of the prescription shared with Outright by Young Queer Alliance via email, April 1, 2025. The organization received this report on November 9, 2023.

237 Gloria Aradi and Yasmine Mohabuth, “Mauritius’ Supreme Court decriminalises same-sex relations,” BBC News, October 5, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67015474>.

238 Fokeerbux email exchange.

239 Ibid; Committee Against Torture, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Mauritius, UN Doc. CAT/C/MUS/CO/5, para. 38–39, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2F2FC%2FMUS%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2F2FC%2FMUS%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en). Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding observations on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth periodic reports of Mauritius, UN Doc. CERD/C/MUS/CO/24–25, para. 12, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMUS%2FCO%2F24–25&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMUS%2FCO%2F24–25&Lang=en).

240 Collectif Arc-en-Ciel email exchange.

## Mozambique

Election: General (October 9, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>241</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Not clear

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Not clear

On October 9, 2024, the Southeast African country held general elections to elect the president and members of the national and provincial legislative assemblies. Amid widespread allegations of electoral fraud and the ensuing repression of protests that killed at least 110 civilians, FRELIMO maintained its grip over the executive and legislative branches, which it has held since the country gained independence from Portugal in 1975.<sup>242</sup>

While LGBTIQ issues did not feature prominently in the campaigns, a historic first was achieved during a public speech by presidential candidate Venâncio Mondlane of the opposition party PODEMOS. On August 13, 2024, in a public dialogue held at the Polytechnic University broadcast on national television, Mondlane was asked about the actions he would take to protect the rights of sexual minorities. While he initially dodged the question, he then declared that “the issue of sexual and ethnic minorities, including people with disabilities, will deserve to be addressed in depth in my electoral manifesto.” This marked the first time a presidential candidate explicitly addressed LGBTIQ issues, and it “created high expectations among the LGBTQIA+ community,” according to LGBTIQ group Lambda Mozambique.<sup>243</sup> However, a month later, Lambda Mozambique decried

this “promise without any substance,” noting that the electoral manifesto left out any demand for LGBTIQ equality.<sup>244</sup>

Apart from these public statements by Lambda Mozambique, LGBTIQ organizations also organized election-related activities, including producing a video of LGBTIQ activists raising their calls for the elections and a post-election Café Network event on LGBT+ Voices and Demands in the Mozambique Electoral Context.<sup>245</sup> As an LGBTIQ activist affirmed, “We wish for a Mozambique where the LGBTQ+ community can safely engage in politics.”<sup>246</sup>

Mozambique has made recent advances in LGBTIQ equality, including the decriminalization of same-sex intimacy under the 2015 penal code and a favorable Supreme Court decision in 2017 on the registration of LGBTIQ groups.<sup>247</sup> Attitudes toward LGBTIQ people in Mozambique have become increasingly positive, as 49 percent of persons surveyed in a 2023 poll believed that the country is “a good place for gay people,” one of the highest in Africa.<sup>248</sup>

## Namibia

See Case Study in Section III.

244 LambdaMoz, “NUVENS SEM CHUVA,” Facebook, September 16, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=953485613471533&set=pb.100064303104952.-2207520000&type=3>.

245 Tomás Benedito, “Café Network sobre Vozes e Demandas LGBT+ no Contexto Eleitoral de Moçambique,” Bloco 4 Foundation, November 22, 2024, <https://bloco4foundation.org/cafe-network-sobre-vozes-e-demandas-lgbt-no-contexto-eleitoral-de-mocambique>.

246 Iranti Media, “Does my vote matter? #Mozambique #elections2024,” video campaign, October 9, 2024, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvo425OnK20>.

247 “The decriminalization is part of Mozambique’s sweeping legislation reforms, intended to do away with the colonial legacy in the penal code.” See Freedom House, “Mozambique Hailed for Decriminalizing Homosexuality,” June 28, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/mozambique-hailed-decriminalizing-homosexuality>; “Country Overview: Mozambique,” Outright International, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/sub-saharan-africa/mozambique>.

248 Justin McCarthy, “Almost Half of the World Sees Their Area as Gay-Friendly,” Gallup, June 28, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/646646/almost-half-world-sees-area-gay-friendly.aspx>.

241 Global State of Democracy Indices score on credible elections in 2023: 0.4, with 0 being the lowest, and 1 the highest. See International IDEA, “Global State of Democracy Indices,” accessed March 31, 2025, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/gcod-indices>.

242 Danai Nesta Kupemba and Jose Tembe, “Mozambique’s ruling party wins landslide in disputed poll,” BBC, October 24, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c14lzy75355o>; “Mozambique: More than 30 killed in one week as protest death toll reaches 110,” Amnesty International, December 11, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/mozambique-more-than-30-killed-in-one-week-as-protest-death-toll-reaches-110>.

243 LambdaMoz, “VENÂNCIO MONDLANE ACENA PARA COMUNIDADE LGBTQIA+ “VAMOS APROFUNDAR SOBRE AS MINORIAS SEXUAIS NO NOS-SO MANIFESTO,” Facebook, August 15, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/LambdaMoz/posts/ven%C3%A2ncio-mondlane-acena-para-comunidade-lgbtqia-vamos-aprofundar-sobre-as-minori/931683492318412>.



## Nepal

Election: National Assembly (January 25, 2024) and Local By-Elections (December 1, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>249</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

On January 25, 2024, indirect elections were held to fill 19 of the 20 Class 3 seats in the National Assembly, the upper house of the Federal Parliament of Nepal. Every two years, a class or one-third of the members, who serve six-year terms, retire, and elections are held to fill these vacancies.

The campaigns leading up to the National Assembly election involved worrying pronouncements from anti-LGBTIQ political actors in a country where LGBTIQ movements have been gaining ground.

Following a Supreme Court interim order in June 2023, the government has been recording same-sex marriages, with the first one—between a cis man and a trans woman whose legal gender marker is male—being recognized in November 2023.<sup>250</sup> Same-sex marriages are recorded in a separate register. This temporary mechanism does not grant same-sex couples the same rights that married different-sex couples enjoy, such as equal parental rights, and the government has not yet amended legislation in order to fully recognize same-sex marriages.<sup>251</sup> During the campaign, Aamul Paribartan Nagarik, a minor political party, introduced an anti-LGBTIQ election agenda, promising to act against the implementation of marriage equality, as well as “homosexuality, gender transition, and abortion.”<sup>252</sup> In addition, ahead of the local by-elections, in

June 2024, two People’s Socialist Party MPs called on the government to stop the NGOs and the Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) from providing gender-affirming care, which they falsely claimed was “illegal.”<sup>253</sup>

History was made when two openly transgender persons ran for mayor and ward chair of the municipality of Kirtipur.<sup>254</sup> While both lost, their candidacies marked a significant milestone 16 years after the election of Sunil Babu Pant, the first openly gay legislator of Nepal. Blue Diamond Society, a pioneering LGBTIQ group, did not document any case of violence or harassment against LGBTIQ persons voting in 2024.<sup>255</sup>

## North Macedonia

Election: Presidential (April 24 and May 8, 2024) and Parliamentary (May 8, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>256</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

North Macedonia held parliamentary elections on May 8, 2024. The far-right Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) won a majority in parliament with about 42 percent of the votes. It has since established the government through its “Your Macedonia” coalition.<sup>257</sup> The VMRO-DPMNE-backed candidate for president, Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, was elected, becoming the country’s first woman president with about 65 percent

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Nepal,” The Kathmandu Post, December 26, 2024, <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2024/12/26/what-trump-s-return-means-for-lgbtqia-advocacy-in-nepal>.

253 “Nepal’s lawmakers question gender reassignment, hormone therapy,” Pahichan, June 14, 2024, . <https://pahichan.com/en/?p=13423>.

254 Ankush Kumar, “Two transgender women make history in Nepal,” Washington Blade, December 18, 2024, <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2024/12/18/two-transgender-women-make-history-in-nepal>.

255 Outright email exchange with Blue Diamond Society, February 6, 2025.

256 OCSE, “North Macedonia, Parliamentary Elections and Presidential Election – Second Round, 8 May 2024: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions” May 8, 2024 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/568270.pdf>. See also Alfred Heer, “Observation of the presidential and parliamentary elections in North Macedonia,” Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, June 21, 2024, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33576/html>.

257 Aleksandar Vasovic, “North Macedonia opposition wins big on election night” Reuters, May 9, 2024 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/north-macedonia-votes-elections-crucial-eu-accession-2024-05-07>.

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249 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Nepal,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nepal/freedom-world/2025>.

250 ILGA Asia, “Nepal: Marriage Registration for Same-Sex Couples after seminal court ruling,” July 1, 2024, <https://ilgaasia.org/news/nepal-marriage-registration-for-same-sex-couples-after-seminal-court-ruling>; International Commission of Jurists, “Nepal: International Commission of Jurists welcomes Supreme Court order on registration of marriage between same sex partners,” press release, July 20, 2023, <https://www.icj.org/nepal-international-commission-of-jurists-welcomes-supreme-court-order-on-registration-of-marriage-between-same-sex-partners>.

251 Swechhya Raut, “Nepal: Same-sex couples face hurdles on road to recognition,” DW, July 10, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/nepal-same-sex-couples-face-hurdles-on-road-to-recognition/a-69620274>.

252 Aarati Ray, “What Trump’s return means for LGBTIQ+ advocacy in

of the votes in the second round, in a resounding defeat for the incumbent center-left coalition led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM).<sup>258</sup>

The Left Party (LEVICA), which made gains in the 2024 election but only won six parliamentary seats out of 120, was the only party to explicitly reference LGBTIQ issues in its manifesto, briefly mentioning that it will work to end discrimination against LGBTIQ persons.<sup>259</sup> On the other hand, the VLEN Coalition, which represents the Albanian minority, vowed to prioritize teaching children “traditional family values” as part of its agenda, though there was no explicit mention of anti-queer sentiments.<sup>260</sup>

During the electoral period, political leaders, particularly from VMRO-DPMNE, engaged in virulent speech against LGBTIQ people.<sup>261</sup> Much of it was related to moral panic around a 2021 Ministry of Education pilot program, which provided for optional comprehensive sexuality classes in the ninth grade of primary education.<sup>262</sup> The SDSM government’s efforts to guarantee legal gender recognition for transgender and gender-diverse persons, through amendments to the Law on Civil Registry, also came under attack.<sup>263</sup> Several far-right political parties joined the Coalition for Protection of Children, associated with the Parents’ Front, which has worked to derail efforts to advance rights-based legal gender recognition and has accused LGBTIQ activists of the “indoctrination” of children.<sup>264</sup>

258 Konstantin Testorides, “North Macedonia elects first woman president as center-left incumbents suffer historic losses,” AP News, May 9, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/north-macedonia-election-corruption-european-union-bulgaria-acl218217ed7d46f160feeb469c7aa4>.

259 Tanja Ivanova, “Анализа на политичките програми од родов аспект” (Analysis of political programs from a gender perspective), Reactor, 2024 [https://reactor.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/analiza\\_na\\_politickite\\_partii\\_mk.pdf](https://reactor.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/analiza_na_politickite_partii_mk.pdf), 40.

260 Ibid, 33–34.

261 Venera Gudachi et al., “Online Narratives and Discrimination: Stakes For Minorities In North Macedonian Elections,” Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, 2024 <https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Online-narratives-and-discrimination.pdf>, 16.

262 Irena Cvetkovikj, “Anti-gender mobilizations in North Macedonia: A transnational tool-kit for domestic actors against gender equality and lgbtiq rights,” Heinrich Boll Stiftung Sarajevo, April 19, 2024, <https://ba.boell.org/en/2024/04/19/anti-gender-mobilizations-north-macedonia-transnational-tool-kit-domestic-actors-against>. See also Journalists for Human Rights and Sexual Rights Initiative, “Universal Periodic Review of North Macedonia: Joint stakeholder Submission,” May 2024, <https://www.sexualrightsinitiative.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/2024-04/UPR%2046%20North%20Macedonia%20JS%20JHR%20and%20SRI.pdf>, para. 32–35.

263 Irena Cvetkovikj, “Anti-gender mobilizations in North Macedonia.”

264 Venera Gudachi et al., “Online Narratives and Discrimination,” 18.

VMRO-DPMNE leaders fully leaned into this anti-gender discourse in their campaigns. Antonio Milososki, a prominent VMRO-DPMNE member who is now the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, published a post on the Parents’ Front Facebook page accusing LGBTIQ persons of imposing “gender ideology” on students through comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>265</sup> Another VMRO-DPMNE leader and candidate for MP, Aleksandar Nikolovski, affirmed that VMRO-DPMNE only acknowledges biological sex, denying trans identities, and called for the return of “decent” heteronormative families.<sup>266</sup> He denigrated his opponent from the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) party, MP Jovana Trenčevska, stating that she had been financially supported by the “Soros Foundation” to implement “gender policies” according to which children were taught “that there is no difference between male and female.”<sup>267</sup> After winning as MP in 2024, Nikolovski now serves as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Transport.<sup>268</sup>

## Pakistan

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Panama

See Case Study in Section III.

## Poland

Election: Local (April 7 and 21, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>269</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

265 Ibid, 17. See, for instance: Antonio Milososki, “Коалиција Маргини и европската иднина на СДСМ!” (Coalition Margini and the European future of SDSM!), Facebook, April 29, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/.php?story\\_fbid=8154998114529396&id=100000578651409&mibextid=oFDknk&rid=hhIOSKKeVfmnGKBs](https://www.facebook.com/.php?story_fbid=8154998114529396&id=100000578651409&mibextid=oFDknk&rid=hhIOSKKeVfmnGKBs).

266 “Николоски: За ВМРО-ДПМНЕ мажите се мажи, жените се жени” (Nikoloski: For VMRO-DPMNE, men are men, women are women), Kajgana, April 11, 2024, <https://kajgana.com/nikoloski-za-vmro-dpmne-mazhite-se-mazhi-zhenite-se-zheni>.

267 Ibid.

268 Nevenka Nikolic, “Deputy PM Nikoloski heads gov’t delegation to London over strategic partnership deal,” MIA News Agency, May 21, 2025, <https://mia.mk/en/story/deputy-pm-nikoloski-heads-govt-delegation-to-london-over-strategic-partnership-deal>.

269 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Poland,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/freedom-world/2025>.

On April 7 and 21, 2024, Poland held local elections for all regional assemblies, county, municipal, and district councils, and local government heads. It saw the record-setting election of six openly LGBTIQ councilors, including the first two openly lesbian and first openly bisexual city councilors in the country, and the candidacies of several other openly LGBTIQ persons.<sup>270</sup>

The new generation of LGBTIQ leaders includes Poznań council member Zuzanna Bartel, an LGBTIQ activist whose group Stonewall organizes Pride marches.<sup>271</sup> Her candidacy was encouraged by the previous mayor, Jacek Jaśkowiak. Jaśkowiak called on LGBTIQ activists, including those from Stonewall, to run for city council, declaring, “If we want to change Poznań, we need to get involved in politics.”<sup>272</sup>

Some candidates committed to defending gains in equality that have been slowly secured since the coalition government that was formed in 2023 reversed the anti-LGBTIQ policies of the previous government.<sup>273</sup> The new mayor of Krakow, the second biggest city in the country, promised to become the first local chief executive to attend the Pride march.<sup>274</sup> In the city of Konin, a candidate campaigned against an opponent by highlighting the latter’s anti-LGBTIQ vow to “eradicate” the “rainbow plague.”<sup>275</sup> The city of Kielce, which had been an “LGBT-

free zone,” elected its first woman mayor, Agata Wojda, a vocal supporter of LGBTIQ equality who previously spoke out against anti-LGBTIQ attacks as a councilor.<sup>276</sup>

## Portugal

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Romania

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Russia

Election: Presidential (March 15–17, 2024), Regional, and Municipal (September 6–8, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>277</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

Russia held a presidential election from March 15 to 17, 2024. Election observers widely considered the election to have been fraudulent.<sup>278</sup> The election took place in the context of an ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine and months after the Supreme Court declared the “international LGBT movement” an “extremist organization” as part of the intensifying crackdown on LGBTIQ people’s human rights.<sup>279</sup>

A representative of an LGBTIQ organization told Outright that, as anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric is a mainstay in Putin’s

276 “Three Polish regions revoke anti-LGBT declarations,” Euractiv, September 8, 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/non-discrimination/news/three-polish-regions-revoke-anti-lgbt-declarations>; Jacek Bruchal, “Polish Women Mayors,” Women Mayors, April 2024, <https://www.womenmayors.com/feature/polish-women-mayors>; Miłość nie wyklucza, “Warszawski deszczowy i dość ponury piątek rozświetliła wspaniała wiadomość z Kielc” (A rainy and rather gloomy Friday in Warsaw was brightened up by wonderful news from Kielce), Facebook, April 16, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4294539517233302&id=140982409255721&set=a.153276664692962>.

277 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Russia,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2025>.

278 Benoît Vitkine, “The extent of fraud in Russia’s presidential election begins to emerge,” Le Monde, March 20, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/03/20/the-extent-of-fraud-in-russia-s-presidential-election-begins-to-emerge\\_6638830\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/03/20/the-extent-of-fraud-in-russia-s-presidential-election-begins-to-emerge_6638830_4.html).

279 Dasha Litvinova, “Russia’s LGBTQ+ community is living in fear following new laws and court rulings, activists say,” Associated Press News, December 6, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-lgbtq-crackdown-putin-moscow-aef5650c6fdadbeac13e0d0b9f93f3b>.

270 Tomasz Piotrowski, “Wydarzenia LGBTQIA+ 2024 / POLSKA” (LGBTQIA+ events 2024 / POLAND), Replika Online, December 31, 2024, <https://replika-online.pl/wydarzenia-lgbtqia-2024-polska>; Anna Radosińska, “Tęczowe wybory samorządowe” (Rainbow local elections), Replika Online, March 22, 2024, <https://replika-online.pl/teczowe-wybory-samorzadowe>.

271 Tomasz Nyczka, “Poznań znów jest tęczy. Działaczka LGBT+ robi niespodziankę i zostaje radną” (Poznań is rainbow-colored once again. An LGBT+ activist surprises everyone and becomes a councilor), Gazeta Wyborcza, April 8, 2024, <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,36001,30869414,poznan-znow-jest-teczowy-dzialaczka-lgbt-robi-niespodzianke.html>.

272 “Prezydent Poznania zaprasza działaczy LGBT+ na listy wyborcze” (The mayor of Poznań invites LGBT+ activists to join the electoral lists), Portal Samorządowy, January 19, 2024, [https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/polityka-i-spoleszenstwo/prezydent-poznania-zaprasza-dzialaczy-lgbt-na-listy-wyborcze,518608.html#google\\_vignette](https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/polityka-i-spoleszenstwo/prezydent-poznania-zaprasza-dzialaczy-lgbt-na-listy-wyborcze,518608.html#google_vignette).

273 Graeme Reid, “LGBT rights in Poland: a symbolic shift is important, but not enough,” Gazeta Wyborcza, December 13, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/sexualorientation/statements/2024-12-13-ie-sogi-op-ed-poland-visit.pdf>.

274 “Marsz Równości pod patronatem prezydenta Krakowa” (Marsz Równości pod patronatem prezydenta Krakowa), Magiczny Kraków, May 20, 2024, [https://www.krakow.pl/aktualnosci/282690,26,komunikat,marsz-rownosci\\_pod\\_patronatem\\_prezydenta\\_krakowa.html](https://www.krakow.pl/aktualnosci/282690,26,komunikat,marsz-rownosci_pod_patronatem_prezydenta_krakowa.html).

275 Aleksandra Braciszewska-Benkahla, “Wybory 2024. Sebastian Łukaszewski wspiera Piotra Korytkowskiego” (2024 elections. Sebastian Łukaszewski supports Piotr Korytkowski), Portal LM.pl, April 17, 2024, <https://www.lm.pl/aktualnosci/wybory-2024-sebastian-lukaszewski-wspiera-piotra-korytkowskiego>.

Russia, it did not “play a particularly significant role solely in election campaigns.”<sup>280</sup> The opposition party Yabloko, which authored an anti-discrimination bill in 2021 and was the only party explicitly including support for LGBTIQ people in its program, did not participate in the elections.

Openly LGBTIQ and allied political actors were targeted leading up to the elections. On March 13, 2024, opposition presidential candidate Boris Nadezhdin’s campaign coordinator, Igor Krasnov, was arrested and sentenced to six days in prison for “propagating extremist LGBT” after he sent a rainbow flag emoji to a Telegram group chat with 11 members.<sup>281</sup> The same month, the justice ministry designated opposition politician Boris Vishnevsky—one of the few remaining politicians to vocally oppose state repression of LGBTIQ people in Russia—as a “foreign agent” for his contributions to foreign media outlets and his opposition to the Russian aggression against Ukraine.<sup>282</sup> In 2023, Vishnevsky, who was then a member of the St. Petersburg city council, spoke out against the court ruling designating the LGBTIQ movement as extremist.<sup>283</sup>

The Russian government has been increasingly excluding LGBTIQ people from public life, and 90.6 percent of over 1,700 LGBTQ people in Russia surveyed in an online poll believe it is currently unsafe to be openly queer in the country.<sup>284</sup> In 2024, at least 44 people were convicted for posting rainbow emojis online or displaying symbols related to the “LGBT movement,” while police raided several bars and other establishments believed to cater to LGBTQ people in Moscow.<sup>285</sup> As a Russian activist

told Outright, although they did not record any case of harassment toward LGBTIQ individuals seeking to vote, “it is difficult to say to what extent queer individuals who took part in the voting were able to openly express their identity.”<sup>286</sup>

## San Marino

Election: General (June 9, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>287</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? No

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

San Marino held elections on June 9, 2024, to elect Grand and General Council members. The Democracy and Freedom Coalition, with 26 seats, and the left-wing coalition, comprising Libera San Marino, the Socialist Party (PS), and the Party of Socialists and Democrats (PSD), with 18 seats, entered into a coalition government on July 26, as a majority of 31 seats is required to form a government.<sup>288</sup>

While LGBTIQ issues were not prominently featured in the elections, the Renewal, Equity Transparency, Eco-sustainability Civic Movement (RETE Movement) party committed to the family rights of same-sex couples, including filiation, adoption, and marriage, in its political manifesto.<sup>289</sup> The 2024 elections saw the party lose eight seats, turning it into an opposition party, with only three seats in the Grand and General Council.

In 2022, Paolo Rondelli of the RETE Movement was

280 Outright email exchange with a representative of a Russian LGBTIQ organization, name withheld, February 5, 2025.

281 Nate Ostiller, “RFE/RL: Head of former Russian anti-war presidential candidate’s campaign arrested,” The Kyiv Independent, March 13, 2024, <https://kyivindependent.com/rfe-rl-head-of-former-russian-anti-war-presidential-candidate-nadezhdins-campaign-arrested>.

282 “St. Petersburg Opposition Lawmaker Vishnevsky Resigns Over ‘Foreign Agent’ Ban,” The Moscow Times, October 28, 2024, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/10/28/st-petersburg-opposition-lawmaker-vishnevsky-resigns-over-foreign-agent-ban-a86828>.

283 Fred Weir, “For Kremlin, divide with West isn’t just geopolitical. It’s moral,” The Christian Science Monitor, January 30, 2024, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2024/0130/For-Kremlin-divide-with-West-isn-t-just-geopolitical.-It-s-moral>.

284 Just Got Lucky (just got lucky | просто повезло), “Как российские квиры реагируют на запретительные законы? Тема непростая, но её важно изучать и освещать” (How are Russian queer people responding to restrictive laws? It’s a complex issue, but one that is important to explore and highlight), Telegram, November 20, 2024, <https://t.me/queerography/1396>.

285 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Events of 2024, January 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025>, 384. Niko Vorobyov, “In wartime, focus on ‘traditional values’ imperils Russia’s LGBTQ community,”

Al Jazeera, March 3, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/3/in-wartime-focus-on-traditional-values-imperils-russias-lgbtq-community>.

286 Outright email exchange with a representative of a Russian LGBTIQ organization, name withheld, February 5, 2025.

287 OSCE, “San Marino Early Parliamentary Elections ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report 13–15 May 2024,” June 5, 2024, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/1/570300.pdf>.

288 “Elezioni a San Marino, la coalizione Libera-Ps-Psd si presenta – VIDEO,” Libertas, April 24, 2024 <https://www.libertas.sm/elezioni-a-san-marino-la-coalizione-libera-ps-psd-si-presenta-video>. See election results: Secretary of State for Internal Affairs and Civil Service, “Risultato Generale Elezioni Politiche 2024,” June 9, 2024, <https://www.elezioni.sm/on-line/home/elezioni-politiche/elezioni-del-09062024/risultati.html>.

289 RETE Movement, “Programma Elettorale Del Movimento Rete Per Le Elezioni Del 9 Giugno 2024,” 2024, [https://www.movimentorete.org/wp-content/uploads/Rete\\_ProgrammaCompleto\\_Digital.pdf](https://www.movimentorete.org/wp-content/uploads/Rete_ProgrammaCompleto_Digital.pdf), 34–35.



appointed as one of the two captains regent or heads of state of San Marino, becoming the world's first openly gay head of state.<sup>290</sup>

## Senegal

See Case Study in Section III.

## Slovakia

Election: Presidential (March 23 and April 6, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>291</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes<sup>292</sup>

Presidential elections were held in the Slovak Republic on March 23, with a runoff on April 6. Peter Pellegrini of the social democratic party, Hlas, defeated Ivan Korčok, the independent nominee of various center-right and liberal democratic parties.

Political actors subjected both presidential candidates to gendered attacks. Ahead of the elections, Andrej Danko Zdroj, the head of the ruling "European Christian" Slovak National Party, a Hlas coalition partner, took advantage of rumors surrounding Pellegrini's sexuality, insinuating that the public demands to know who the first lady will be if he wins.<sup>293</sup> On the other hand, a member of Pellegrini's party criticized Korčok for meeting with a "pro-LGBT priest" days before the runoff.<sup>294</sup>

The two leading presidential candidates did not make

their positions on LGBTIQ equality clear in their manifestos. Ivan Korčok—endorsed by outgoing president Zuzana Caputova, who has been publicly seen as supportive of LGBTIQ equality—did not take up this mantle. In 2019, some LGBTIQ people saw Caputova's victory as a spark of hope.<sup>295</sup> In a public debate in February 2019, she expressed her support for the recognition of same-sex couples and adoption rights, although she stated her personal preference for children being brought up by their "biological parents."<sup>296</sup> During her presidency, she condemned anti-LGBTIQ political rhetoric and participated in Pride marches.<sup>297</sup> Zuzana Caputova's Progressive Slovakia did not field a candidate in 2024, instead endorsing Ivan Korčok.

Peter Pellegrini not only failed to include LGBTIQ issues in his platform but was also accused of using trans people's rights as a political bargaining chip. Three days before the crucial runoff, which flipped the results in his favor, health minister Zuzana Dolinková of Pellegrini's party scrapped the standard care procedure on gender-affirming health care.<sup>298</sup> While the decision did not ban gender-affirming health care, it left medical practitioners without clear national guidance on care and created potential hurdles for trans people seeking to change their gender markers, as current laws still require medical certification.<sup>299</sup> Noting the suspect timing of the move, LGBTIQ organizations condemned the decision as a political tradeoff to secure the support of the nationalist Slovak National Party for Pellegrini's candidacy.<sup>300</sup> One day after this decision was announced, Slovak National Party leader Andrej Danko officially endorsed Pellegrini for

290 Eric J Lyman, "San Marino appoints world's first openly gay head of state," *The Guardian*, April 4, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/san-marino-appoints-worlds-first-openly-gay-head-of-state>.

291 International IDEA, "Global State of Democracy Indices," accessed March 31, 2025, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/gsoi-indices>.

292 There were "marginal" candidates, not from the leading parties. Outright email exchange with a representative of Iniciatíva Inakosť, March 6, 2025.

293 "Prezident Danko? Príznej orientaci, vyzývá Pellegriniho a nabouráva koalici," *iDNES*, January 5, 2024, [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/slovensko-prezidentske-volby-kandidatura-andrej-danko-vlada-fi-co-pellegrini.A240105\\_100119\\_zahranicni\\_kha](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/slovensko-prezidentske-volby-kandidatura-andrej-danko-vlada-fi-co-pellegrini.A240105_100119_zahranicni_kha).

294 Ivan Brožík, "Korčok sa riadne vyfarbil – navštívil "proLGBT" farárku" (Korčok showed his true colors – he visited a pro-LGBT pastor), *Hlavný Denník*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.hlavnydennik.sk/2024/04/02/korcok-sa-riadne-vyfarbil-navstivil-pro-lgbt-fararku>.

295 Umberto Bacchi, "No more hate: LGBT+ Slovaks hope election will be turning point for gay community," *Reuters*, March 29, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-slovakia-election-lgbt-idUSKCN1RA1WT>.

296 Lucia Praus, "Čaputová sa nevzdá v prospech Mistríka len preto, ak by mal vyššie preferencie" (Čaputová will not give up in favor of Mistrík just because he has higher preferences), *SME Domov*, February 4, 2019, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22045481/prezidentske-volby-2019-diskusie-caputova-vs-mistrik.html>.

297 James Thomson, "Homophobic Murders Bring Dire Warnings From Slovak President," *CEPA*, November 2, 2022, <https://cepa.org/article/homophobic-murders-bring-dire-warnings-from-slovak-president>; Kamil Selecký, "Čaputová hoistied the LGBTI flag at the presidential palace," *Plenum*, October 14, 2022, <https://plenum.sk/caputova-vyvesila-lgbti-vlajku-na-prezidentskom-palaci>.

298 "Health Ministry praises transgender care guideline, but scraps it in political trade-off," *The Slovak Spectator*, April 4, 2024, <https://spectator.sme.sk/politics-and-society/c/health-ministry-praises-transgender-care-guideline-but-scraps-it-in-political-trade-off>.

299 Ibid.

300 Ibid.

president and remarked that Hilas “gave up on gender ideology standards yesterday,” thanking Pellegrini for his “support with the gender topic.”<sup>301</sup>

## Solomon Islands

Election: National and Provincial (April 17)

Date: April 17, 2024

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>302</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

The Solomon Islands held general elections on April 17, 2024 to elect the 50 members of the 12th parliament. These were the first joint national and provincial elections in the country, following a reform passed in December 2023.<sup>303</sup> The Ownership, Unity and Responsibility (OUR) Party of then-Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare won the most votes, securing 15 of all 50 seats, but, lacking a majority, had to form a coalition government.

While domestic issues such as the cost of living were voters’ main preoccupations, the country’s relations with China also dominated the electoral agenda, which, according to some analysts, was the most important election in the country since independence.<sup>304</sup> Sogavare, who facilitated the country’s pivot toward China, repeatedly praised China’s political system, contrasting it with democracy, which he associated with moral decline.<sup>305</sup> He also painted LGBTIQ equality as a roadblock to progress and as incompatible with Christianity, variants of which are professed by more than 90 percent of the population.<sup>306</sup> Same-sex intimacy is prohibited

in Solomon Islands under laws inherited from British colonial rule, although there have been no known cases of enforcement in recent years.<sup>307</sup> In a campaign rally in February 2024, Sogavare declared, referring to the United States:

The values associated with democracy, for example, you are free to do whatever you want. Men can marry men, women can marry women—[those] are the values associated with the values of democracy...You have to ask yourself, what values are you comfortable with as a Christian country?<sup>308</sup>

This was not the first time Sogavare had spoken out against sexual and gender diversity, having stressed in 2023 that he did not “want the issue of LGBTQIA+ to be weaponised against us and used as a condition for accessing aid” from the United States.<sup>309</sup>

The OUR Party and Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele, who succeeded Sogavare, have not publicly spoken on LGBTIQ issues since Manele’s victory. Manele, who was Sogavare’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, is likely to continue his predecessor’s “looking north” foreign policy to strengthen ties with China.<sup>310</sup>

There is no evidence of other political candidates or local groups speaking out on LGBTIQ issues during the campaigns. The Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, through its Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy, seeks to “enhance inclusiveness and active participation of the electorate, including disadvantaged groups.”<sup>311</sup> The policy defines social inclusion as the “process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged,” including on the basis of “sexual

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Freedom: Solomon Islands, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/solomon-islands>.

307 U.S. Department of State, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Solomon Islands, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/solomon-islands>.

308 Ibid.

309 Nick Sas and Chrisnrita Aumanu-Leong, “Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare mulls country’s future on 45th year of independence,” ABC News, July 7, 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-07/solomon-islands-45-year-independence-/102575528>.

310 Kirsty Needham, “Solomon Islands picks China-friendly Man-ele as new prime minister,” Reuters, May 2, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/solomon-islands-chooses-jeremiah-man-ele-new-prime-minister-2024-05-02>.

311 Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, “Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy 2022–2024,” May 2022, <https://solomons.gov.sb/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GESI-Policy1.pdf>, 8.

301 Ibid.

302 Solomon Islands National University and Australian National University, 2024 Solomon Islands Elections, December 2024, <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/entities/publication/39cad2cb-eb56-401b-bea9-74b198628a14>.

303 Ibid, 103.

304 Erin Hale, “Solomon Islands prepares for ‘most important election since independence,’” Al Jazeera, April 16, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/16/solomon-islands-prepares-for-most-important-election-since-independence>.

305 Nick Sas, Stephen Dziedzic and Chrisnrita Aumanu-Leong, “Solomon Islands prime minister critical of democracy, praises ‘Chinese-style’ governance,” ABC News, March 19, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-03-20/solomon-islands-prime-minister-defends-chinese-governance-style/103606172>.

306 Ibid; U.S. Department of State, 2022 Report on International Religious

orientation and gender identity, among other factors,” but does not outline specific targeted measures to ensure the active participation of LGBTIQ persons, like it does for women and persons with disabilities.<sup>312</sup>

## South Africa

See Snapshot in Section III.

## South Korea

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Sri Lanka

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Syria

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Taiwan

Election: Presidential and Legislative (January 13, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>313</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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The recent Taiwanese elections were marked by the increased participation of LGBTIQ persons amid the rise of anti-LGBTIQ political rhetoric.

Seven openly queer persons ran in this election cycle, with two winning seats in the Legislative Yuan.<sup>314</sup> LGBTIQ individuals can vote freely, and Taiwan Equality

Campaign did not record any cases of anti-LGBTIQ violence during the voting process.<sup>315</sup> Rainbow Equality Platform launched Pride Watch, a national initiative inviting “Rainbow Voters” to monitor candidates’ perspectives on sexual and gender diversity and urging candidates to sign a pledge to promote the human rights of LGBT persons and avoid anti-LGBT rhetoric. A total of 104 candidates, including the ruling Democratic Progressive Party’s candidates for president and vice president, signed the pledge, and at least 20 among them were elected to office.<sup>316</sup>

Other political actors, in their campaign messaging, attempted to pit transgender people’s rights against women’s rights for perceived political gain. Taiwan Solidarity Union, which gained six seats in 2024 after not winning any since 2016, “centered part of its campaign on opposing the right of transgender individuals to change their legal gender without surgery.”<sup>317</sup> In December 2023, it held a press conference with the Taiwan Women Association to claim that the recognition of trans women has “harmed the rights of women and children.”<sup>318</sup>

In another example, during a campaign rally of Taiwan People’s Party legislative candidate Lin Kuo-cheng, former legislator Hsu Kuo-tai made discriminatory remarks suggesting that same-sex marriage, which Taiwan legally recognized in May 2019, would “lead to the extinction of the family line.”<sup>319</sup>

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312 Ibid, 13.

313 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Taiwan,” accessed April 3, 2025, . <https://freedomhouse.org/country/taiwan/freedom-world/2025>.

314 Taiwan Equality Campaign, “你知道這屆立法委員候選人有多少位是同志參政嗎?” (Do you know how many of this year’s legislative candidates are openly gay?), Instagram, December 28, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C1YXQEmBQ07/?igsh=MXNpZjM0OWhvcnZhZQ%3D%3D>. Huang Jie of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) became the first ever openly gay legislator in the country after winning a seat in the Legislative Yuan. See Lily LaMattina, “Taiwan elects 1st openly LGBTQ+ legislator,” Taiwan News, January 14, 2024, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/5078074>. Another legislator came out in September 2024. See Jiang Yiting, “Taiwan legislator Wu Peiyi interview: ‘Tell a complete story’ for lesbian couple Xu Jiabei,” BBC, October 26, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/chinese-news-69441788>.

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315 Outright email exchange with Taiwan Equality Campaign, February 5, 2025.

316 Pride Watch, “Find records of candidate friendly statements,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://pridewatch.tw/candidate-2024>.

317 Taiwan Equality Campaign email exchange.

318 Jason Pan, “Women’s rights advocates criticize gender ID policy,” Taipei Times, December 11, 2023, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/12/11/2003810464>.

319 Taiwan Equality Campaign, “選戰過程中的攻防請停止對同志族群的傷害” (Please stop harming the LGBTQ community during the election campaign), Instagram, January 10, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/C16tL-RxM8\\_0/?igsh=MXdzdnViYzhvcnZpbG%3D%3D](https://www.instagram.com/p/C16tL-RxM8_0/?igsh=MXdzdnViYzhvcnZpbG%3D%3D).

## Tunisia

Election: Presidential (October 6, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>320</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? No

Leading up to the presidential election on October 6, 2024, which saw the disqualification and arrests of several opposition figures, incumbent president Kaïs Saïed and his supporters intensified their anti-rights and anti-LGBTIQ crusade.<sup>321</sup>

The president, in a speech on May 7, 2024, criticized rights groups as “traitors” and “[foreign] agents.” The speech was initially directed toward groups supporting migrant’s rights as part of a campaign Saïed has waged against black migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, which has incited racist attacks by both non-state groups and state authorities.<sup>322</sup> The same approach soon “extended to pro-democracy groups and LGBTIQ+ organisations.”<sup>323</sup> On September 13, hundreds of social media accounts, prominently including Saïed’s supporters, started a hostile anti-LGBTIQ campaign, amplified by mainstream media channels, calling for the repression of LGBTIQ activists.<sup>324</sup> This coincided with the launch of the official campaign period as set by the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE).<sup>325</sup> Two days later, in Saïed’s first electoral manifesto, he proclaimed his candidacy as uniting “supporters of Shariah” against the opposition,

“who [defends] homosexuality.”<sup>326</sup>

Hateful political rhetoric translated to violence and arbitrary arrests both before and after the elections. From September 2024 to January 31, 2025, at least 84 persons, mostly gay men and trans women, were arbitrarily arrested and detained for “sodomy and lesbianism,” “public outrage to modesty,” or acts considered offensive to “public morality.”<sup>327</sup> State forces also resorted to online blackmail, extortion, and even sexual violence.<sup>328</sup> Police harassed LGBTIQ activists and organizations through repeated questioning for their participation in public protests and activism on LGBTIQ issues.<sup>329</sup> In the wake of the elections, civil society organizations condemned the “broader and troubling crackdown on civil society and human rights defenders in Tunisia,” including legal intimidation days before the election and the raids and arrests immediately following the polls.<sup>330</sup>

The opposition boycotted the election, and only 28.8 percent of the eligible electorate voted.<sup>331</sup> According to a Tunisian organization that advocates for LGBTIQ people, the “majority of young people, including the queer community, boycotted [the elections]...these people are not represented in these election [results], but rather rejected and stigmatized.”<sup>332</sup>

## Türkiye

See Case Study in Section III.

320 Human Rights Watch, “Tunisia: Authorities Undermine Election Integrity,” October 3, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/03/tunisia-authorities-undermine-election-integrity>.

321 Rihab Boukhayatia, “Tunisie : Les militants LGBT+ dans le collimateur de Saïed,” Nawaat, September 20, 2024, <https://nawaat.org/2024/09/20/tunisie-les-militants-lgbt-dans-le-collimateur-de-saied>.

322 Amnesty International, “Tunisia: President’s racist speech incites a wave of violence against Black Africans,” March 10, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/tunisia-presidents-racist-speech-incites-a-wave-of-violence-against-black-africans>.

323 Intersection, Rima Sghaier, Digital Action and I Watch, “Tunisia’s October 2024 elections: Context and key facts,” Digital Action, October 30, 2024, <https://digitalaction.co/tunisia-country-briefing>.

324 Amnesty International, “Tunisie. Les autorités intensifient la répression contre les personnes LGBTI,” February 6, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.be/infos/actualites/article/tunisie-autorites-intensifient-repression-lgbti>.

325 Monia Ben Hamadi, “En Tunisie, les LGBT+ aussi sont dans le viseur de la justice,” Le Monde, February 10, 2025, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/02/10/en-tunisie-les-lgbt-aussi-sont-dans-le-viseur-de-la-justice\\_6540614\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/02/10/en-tunisie-les-lgbt-aussi-sont-dans-le-viseur-de-la-justice_6540614_3212.html).

326 Synda Tajine, “Kaïs Saïed s’adresse aux Tunisiens dans son premier manifeste de campagne,” Business News Tunisia, September 15, 2024, <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/kais-saied-sadresse-aux-tunisiens-dans-son-premier-manifeste-de-campagne,519,140945,3>.

327 Amnesty International, “Tunisie. Les autorités intensifient.”

328 Ibid.

329 Ibid.

330 HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement, CALAM, Egyptian Front for Human Rights, EFHR, Innovation for Change – MENA Hub, Organisation Tchadienne Anti-corruption (OTAC), Link – For Tunisian Diaspora, MENA Rights Group and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, “Crackdown on civil society and human rights in Tunisia: arrests and intimidation in the wake of the 2024 presidential elections,” October 22, 2024, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/crackdown-civil-society-and-human-rights-tunisia-arrests-and-intimidation-wake-2024>.

331 Simon Speakman Cordall, “Saïed’s low turnout win in Tunisia election sparks repression concerns,” Al Jazeera, October 7, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/7/saieds-low-turnout-win-in-tunisia-election-sparks-repression-concerns>.

332 Outright email exchange with a Tunisian LGBTIQ+ organization whose identity is not disclosed due to safety concerns, February 4, 2025.



## United Kingdom

Election: General (July 4, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>333</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

The United Kingdom held general elections amid growing polarization regarding transgender people's human rights.<sup>334</sup> As political parties across the ideological spectrum successfully made trans people's lives and rights an electoral issue, many voters declared that it could "sway" their vote.<sup>335</sup>

The two major parties in parliament supported some restrictions on the legal recognition of trans people. In its manifesto, the then-ruling Conservative Party (Tories) promised to introduce legislation "to clarify that the protected characteristic of sex in the Equality Act means biological sex," excluding trans women from critical legal protections.<sup>336</sup> The Labour Party committed to delivering a "trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices," on the one hand, but also vowed, with regard to the Equality Act, to continue "to support the implementation of its single-sex exceptions" and enact a more simplified gender recognition process that nevertheless retains the need for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria.<sup>337</sup>

In an affront to trans citizens, both major parties committed to implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People, mostly known as the Cass Review. The Cass Review was an independent, non-

peer-reviewed study on gender-affirming care for youth commissioned by the National Health Service of England. Experts widely criticized the study for failing to "follow established standards for evaluating evidence and evidence quality."<sup>338</sup>

The Green Party declared support for legal gender recognition based on self-determination, while the Liberal Democrats promised to recognize nonbinary identities.<sup>339</sup> Both parties recorded their strongest electoral performance to date in 2024. The Green Party secured four seats, a far cry from winning just one seat in 2019.<sup>340</sup> The Liberal Party achieved its biggest win in a century and reclaimed its position as the third-biggest party in the House of Commons.<sup>341</sup>

However, the election also saw record gains for Reform UK, a far-right populist party, which promised to ban "transgender ideology" in primary and secondary schools and scrap diversity, equity, and inclusion policies.<sup>342</sup>

Anti-trans political rhetoric increased at a time of high levels of violence against LGBTIQ persons. As a representative of Stonewall, an LGBTQ+ advocacy group in the UK, emphasized in an email to Outright:

The 2024 election came at a time when the UK's LGBTQ+ community faced increased pressures politically. This was coupled with high levels of hate crime (in England and Wales, there were 22,839 instances of sexual orientation hate crime and 4,780 instances of gender identity hate crime in 2023/24) combined with a marked decrease in reported mental health (nearly one in five of those LGBTQ+ youth surveyed attempted suicide in 2024).<sup>343</sup>

333 Meredithe McNamara et al., "An Evidence-Based Critique of 'The Cass Review' on Gender-affirming Care for Adolescent Gender Dysphoria," white paper, July 2024, [https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/documents/integrity-project\\_cass-response.pdf](https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/documents/integrity-project_cass-response.pdf).

339 Green Party UK, "Our 2024 General Election Manifesto," accessed March 18, 2025, <https://greenparty.org.uk/about/our-manifesto/2024-manifesto-downloads>, 34; Josh Parry, "Liberal Democrat manifesto: 11 key policies analysed," BBC News, June 10, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqeevzldj0jo>.

340 Kate Whannel, "Green Party celebrate record four-seat win," BBC News, July 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjr48kjpjk9o>.

341 Ronan McGreevy, "Liberal Democrats record their best result for more than a century," The Irish Times, July 5, 2024, <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2024/07/05/liberal-democrats-record-their-best-result-for-more-than-a-century>.

342 Reform UK, "Our contract with you," June 2024, [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/reformuk/pages/253/attachments/original/1708781032/Reform\\_UK\\_Contract\\_With\\_The\\_People.pdf?1708781032](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/reformuk/pages/253/attachments/original/1708781032/Reform_UK_Contract_With_The_People.pdf?1708781032), 9, 13, 28.

343 Outright email exchange with Klara Wertheim, April 1, 2025. Data

333 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 - United Kingdom," accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-kingdom/freedom-world/2025>.

334 Angelica Dino, "New report reveals sharp decline in LGBTIQ+ rights in the UK," Canadian Lawyer, August 1, 2024, <https://www.canadianlawyermag.com/news/international/new-report-reveals-sharp-decline-in-lgbtqi-rights-in-the-uk/387685>.

335 "Sex and gender policies will sway our vote," BBC, July 2, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6ppplzpn17o>.

336 The Conservative and Unionist Party, "The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2024," June 2024, <https://public.conservatives.com/publicweb/GE2024/Accessible-Manifesto/Accessible-PDF-Conservative-Manifesto-2024.pdf>, 59.

337 Labour Party, "Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024," June 2024, <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Change-Labour-Party-Manifesto-2024-large-print.pdf>, 91.

The election also marked a shift in LGBTIQ political representation. In May 2024, before the UK House of Commons was dissolved for the general elections, 10.3 percent of all its MPs were openly LGBTIQ, by far the biggest share in the world.<sup>344</sup> In the July 2024 elections, both major parties continued to field openly LGBTIQ candidates and support their candidacies through fundraising. However, for the first time, the share of openly LGBTIQ people elected as MPs in 2024 fell slightly to 9.8 percent, primarily due to a decrease in the number of LGBTIQ Tories.<sup>345</sup> This is because of several factors, including the retirement of prominent LGBTIQ Tories and 2024 being the worst electoral year for the party, a defeat that nevertheless impacted LGBTIQ Tories at a higher proportion.<sup>346</sup> Several LGBTIQ Tories have described internal debates on trans women's rights as "toxic," including trans former MP Jamie Wallis and bisexual former MP Dehenna Davison, both of whom did not seek reelection in 2024.<sup>347</sup> For the first time, Labor now has more openly LGBTIQ MPs in parliament than the Tories, constituting 12 percent of all of its MPs.

Regardless of these shifts, as Stonewall told Outright, it is important to note that "more LGBTQ+ MPs have not yet translated into better lived experiences for many LGBTQ+ people since the July 2024 election."<sup>348</sup>

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from Home Office, "Hate crime, England and Wales, year ending March 2024," October 10, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024>; The Trevor Project, 2024 United Kingdom Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTIQ+ Young People, accessed March 20, 2025, [https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-international/assets/static/2024\\_UK\\_National\\_Survey\\_EN.pdf](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-international/assets/static/2024_UK_National_Survey_EN.pdf).

344 Andrew Reynolds, "Election set to bring seismic change to LGBTQ+ representation in House of Commons," PinkNews, July 3, 2024, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/07/03/lgbtq-representation-house-of-commons-general-election>. Although Outright uses the acronym LGBTIQ throughout this report to avoid potentially confusing shifts in acronyms, none of the UK MPs were intersex and only one, Jamie Wallis, who came out in 2022 after being elected, was trans.

345 Andrew Reynolds, "Number of out LGBTQ+ MPs falls following election – but Labour has a reason to be proud," PinkNews, July 5, 2024, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/07/05/lgbtq-mps-general-election/#page/3>.

346 Ibid.

347 Tobi Thomas, "Conservative debates on LGBTQ+ rights 'toxic,' says Tory MP," The Guardian, July 17, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/17/conservative-party-debates-on-lgbtq-rights-toxic-says-tory-mp>; Nadeem Badshah, "Jamie Wallis accuses fellow Tory MPs of exploiting trans issues during contest for PM," The Guardian, October 16, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/oct/16/jamie-wallis-accuses-fellow-tory-mps-of-exploiting-trans-issues-during-contest-for-pm>; Chantelle Billson and Amelia Hansford, "All the LGBTQ+ MPs standing down at the 2024 general election," PinkNews, July 3, 2024, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/07/03/lgbtq-mps-standing-down-2024-general-election>.

348 Wertheim email exchange.

Intersex people have yet to achieve representation in the UK's parliament. Holly Greenberry-Pullen, a local elected councillor and Liberal Democrat, made her second run for a seat in parliament, standing out as the only openly intersex contender in the UK elections, and one of the only openly intersex candidates in an election anywhere in the world in 2024. Greenberry-Pullen, the co-founder of Intersex UK, told the media outlet PinkNews, "There's no shame...it's not something you promote on the campaign leaflet, but neither do you hide yourself under a bushel."<sup>349</sup>

## United States of America

See Snapshot in Section III.

## Uruguay

Election: General (October 27 and November 24, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? Yes<sup>350</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

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In Uruguay, the Frente Amplio party—the only political party that explicitly included LGBTIQ equality in its platform for the elections—won the presidency and the Senate majority.<sup>351</sup> Among the newly elected deputies is transgender activist Collette Spinnetti, who described her party as "committed to defending the rights of the LGBTI+ community."<sup>352</sup> While the center-right Partido Nacional, the second biggest party in the country, did not explicitly include LGBTIQ equality in its platform, it generally committed to "diversity and inclusion," "gender equality," and promised continuity with the incumbent administration, which did not roll back LGBTIQ people's

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349 Amelia Hansford, "Lib Dem election candidate is proud to be 'a mum, a woman and intersex,'" PinkNews, August 7, 2024, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/08/07/intersex-political-candidate-uk-general-election>.

350 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025 – Uruguay," accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uruguay/freedom-world/2025>.

351 CELAG and ILGALAC, Observatorio Electoral por los Derechos LGBTI+: Elecciones presidenciales en la República Oriental del Uruguay, October 2024, <https://www.celag.org/observatorio-electoral-por-los-derechos-lgbti-elecciones-presidenciales-en-la-republica-oriental-del-uruguay>.

352 Lucía Barrios, "Campaña electoral y diversidad: el tema divide a la coalición y enfrenta al Frente Amplio con el Partido Nacional," La Diaria, September 27, 2024, <https://ladiaria.com.uy/feminismos/articulo/2024/9/campana-electoral-y-diversidad-el-tema-divide-a-la-coalicion-y-enfrenta-al-frente-amplio-con-el-partido-nacional>.

rights.<sup>353</sup> Its presidential candidate, Álvaro Delgado, also voted in favor of marriage equality in 2013.<sup>354</sup> Delgado and Frente Amplio's presidential candidate, Yamandú Orsi, did not publicly engage in transphobic, anti-gender, or anti-LGBTIQ speech during the campaign—an exceptional feat in Latin America, where more and more top political figures are instrumentalizing hate for political gain.

Nonetheless, there were instances of political actors engaging in anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric in the lead-up to the elections. Gustavo Salle, the presidential candidate of Identidad Soberana, vowed to fight “gender ideology,” which he described as a Western capitalist import brought to the country by the left to destroy “the family,” endanger children, and legitimize pedophilia.<sup>355</sup> He placed fourth after winning 2.83 percent of the vote. In a radio interview, Guillermo Domenech, a senator, called same-sex intimacy unnatural and denied the existence of trans people, suggesting that being trans is a “psychiatric problem.”<sup>356</sup> The same legislator, in the final hours of campaigning, criticized three major political parties for their support of LGBTIQ people's human rights, accusing them of promoting a foreign agenda.<sup>357</sup> His conservative Cabildo Abierto party is a minority party that only garnered two seats in the Chamber of Representatives and none in the Senate in 2024.

### Transgender and gender-diverse persons faced

353 Partido Nacional, “Programa de Gobierno: 2025/2030,” September 2024, [https://www.gub.uy/corte-electoral/sites/corte-electoral/files/documentos/publicaciones/Partido%20Nacional\\_1.pdf](https://www.gub.uy/corte-electoral/sites/corte-electoral/files/documentos/publicaciones/Partido%20Nacional_1.pdf).

354 El Observador, “Sesión histórica: El matrimonio igualitario ya es ley en Uruguay,” La Otra Voz Digital, April 10, 2013, <https://www.laotrazvozdigital.com/el-matrimonio-igualitario-ya-es-ley-en-uruguay>.

355 “Líder de Identidad Soberana celebra ‘proeza electoral’ de partido uruguayo ‘antiagendista,’” Swiss Info, October 29, 2024, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/%c3%adder-de-identidad-soberana-celebra-%22proeza-electoral%22-de-partido-uruguayo-%22antiagendista%22/87861987>; Canal 3 Colonia, “GUSTAVO SALLE CRITICÓ LA IDEOLOGÍA DE GÉNERO,” video, Facebook, May 22, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=251388751365797>; Canal 5 Noticias, “Gustavo Salle, candidato de #IdentidadSoberana, a quien varias encuestas dan una intención de voto que lo llevaría al Senado, dijo que fiscalizará el trabajo de los políticos,” video, Facebook, October 21, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=990290062864811>.

356 “Domenech on homosexuality: ‘I don’t know if a man’s anus is ready to be penetrated,’” El País, July 19, 2024, <https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/politica/domenech-sobre-la-homosexualidad-yo-no-se-si-el-ano-de-un-hombre-esta-preparado-para-ser-penetrado>.

357 “‘¡Degenerados!’: Domenech contra la comunidad LGBT y educadores sexuales,” Caras y Caretas, June 27, 2024, <https://www.carasycaretas.com.uy/politica/degenerados-domenech-contra-la-comunidad-lgbt-y-educadores-sexuales-n74982>.

difficulties in exercising their right to vote.<sup>358</sup> Although the Comprehensive Trans Law (Law No. 19,684) provides for accessible procedures for changing legal names and gender markers, an activist told Outright that due to “delay and unwillingness of the MIDES [Ministry of Social Development] authorities, some trans people had their civic credentials with assigned name at birth and therefore did not vote.”<sup>359</sup>

## Venezuela

Election: Presidential (July 28, 2024)

Was the election considered free and fair? No<sup>360</sup>

Were LGBTIQ issues used negatively to garner political support? Yes

Were there openly LGBTIQ candidates? Yes

Venezuela held a presidential election on July 28, 2024, within the context of an increasingly regressing democracy marked by “practices of State terrorism aimed at instilling terror among citizens and silencing opponents.”<sup>361</sup> Ahead of the election, the Voto Diverso survey, a civil society initiative, measured the voting intentions of LGBTI people and collected information about their priority issues as voters.<sup>362</sup> Around 91.3 percent of 1,500 LGBTIQ survey respondents expressed their intention to vote, while 53.53 percent identified themselves as politically active. Respondents said their priorities include fighting discrimination against LGBTIQ people, enacting marriage equality, and passing a gender recognition law.<sup>363</sup> The #YLaQueVote campaign

358 Outright email exchange with a representative of Union Binacional Trans, January 31, 2025.

359 Ibid.

360 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2025 – Venezuela,” accessed April 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-world/2025>.

361 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Venezuela: Serious human rights violations in connection with the elections, 2025, <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/2025/report-venezuela-serious-hrr-violations-connections-elections.pdf>, 9.

362 Isabella González, “Voto diverso: población lgbti exige al nuevo gobierno políticas contra la discriminación,” TalCual, July 26, 2024, <https://talcualdigital.com/voto-diverso-poblacion-lgbti-exige-al-nuevo-gobierno-politicas-contra-la-discriminacion>.

363 Ibid. The response pool was overrepresented by gay and bisexual men, likely because Grindr for Equality was a survey partner and distributed the tool through the Grindr mobile application, a dating app primarily catering to gay and bi men. “792 people identified as gay (52.8%), 460 people as bisexual (30.67%), 174 identified as lesbian (11.6%), 57 as pansexual (3.8%); while 15.2% identified as trans people, 9% as intersex people and 17.8% as non-binary people.”

by Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+ further visibilized trans and queer voters by publicizing their testimonies about their experiences in voting and hopes for the next government.<sup>364</sup>

Before the July 2024 elections, the opposition coalition Plataforma Unitaria (Unitary Platform) held primary elections on October 22, 2023. For Movimiento SOMOS, an LGBTIQ+ and feminist group in Venezuela, “primary elections represent a big opportunity for the LGBTQ movement to advocate for LGBTQ rights.”<sup>365</sup> A historic first was achieved when Tamara Adrián, an LGBTIQ human rights activist and member of the National Assembly, became the first trans woman to run as a pre-candidate for president.<sup>366</sup> However, she was not able to win the nomination, finishing ninth out of ten in the primary, with 1,826 votes, representing 0.07 percent of all votes.<sup>367</sup>

LGBTIQ advocates also engaged other pre-candidates during the primaries. According to Movimiento SOMOS, some candidates had talking points on equality and diversity but did not demonstrate a “deep commitment to LGBTQ rights,” failing to meaningfully address LGBTIQ issues in their platforms. For example, opposition presidential candidate María Corina Machado declared in a March 2023 interview that she was “in favor of same-sex marriage,” but did not include it in her platform.<sup>368</sup> She later won the primaries but was barred from running.<sup>369</sup> Other candidates were “friendly” with LGBTIQ communities and welcomed opportunities or created

spaces to discuss and engage with LGBTIQ activists.<sup>370</sup> For Movimiento SOMOS, these gestures are important, as LGBTIQ equality is “still not a popular position. It’s not easy for opposition political leaders to support the LGBTQ community given the context in the country.”<sup>371</sup> However, “the opposition did not have a unified position on LGBTIQ equality,” and some candidates and members of the opposition alliance engaged in anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric in the lead-up to elections.<sup>372</sup>

Incumbent president Nicolás Maduro courted evangelical voters and formed new alliances with anti-LGBTIQ groups.<sup>373</sup> Activists identified these alliances as contributing to “an escalation of the political homophobia and transphobia that already existed,” which took the form of increased state violence against LGBTQ people leading up to the elections.<sup>374</sup>

LGBTIQ activists were also among the first to be targeted by the repression that followed the elections. Within two weeks after votes were cast, Yendri Omar Velásquez, coordinator of the Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+ (Venezuelan Observatory of LGBTIQ+ Violence), was arrested and detained for several hours when attempting to travel to a UN meeting in Geneva.<sup>375</sup> According to media reports, security forces also attempted to kidnap LGBTIQ activist Koddy Campos, potentially for meeting with the opposition presidential candidate before the elections.<sup>376</sup> The Minister of Interior, Justice and Peace denied the claim of an alleged kidnapping and called it an “extremely ridiculous setup,” accusing the opposition of lying.<sup>377</sup>

364 OVV LGBTIQ+, “#YLaQueVote,” accessed February 28, 2025, <https://nomasdiscriminacion.org/?s=%23YLaQueVote>.

365 Outright interview with a representative of Movimiento SOMOS, virtual, April 11, 2025.

366 Esteban Guzmán, “Transgender woman running to become Venezuela’s next president,” *Los Angeles Blade*, July 1, 2023, <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2023/07/01/tamara-adrian-running-to-become-venezuelas-next-president>.

367 Luisa Quintero, “María Corina Machado arrasa en último boletín de primarias con 2,2 millones de votos,” *TalCual*, October 25, 2023, <https://talcualdigital.com/maria-corina-machado-arrasa-en-ultimo-boletin-de-primarias-con-2-2-millones-de-votos>.

368 David Gallardo, “María Corina Machado apoya el aborto con condiciones, el matrimonio igualitario y la marihuana medicinal,” *Alberto News*, April 14, 2025, <https://dossiervenezuela.com/social/maria-corina-machado-apoya-el-aborto-con-condiciones-el-matrimonio-igualitario-y-la-marihuana-medicinal>; María Corina Machado, “Venezuela Land of Grace: Freedom, Democracy and Prosperity, Program of Government,” May 2024, <https://www.ventevenezuela.org/wp-inter/uploads/2024/05/Government-Program-may9-2024.pdf>.

369 Vivian Sequera, Mayela Armas and Deisy Buitrago, “Venezuela court upholds ban on leading opposition presidential candidate Machado,” *Reuters*, January 26, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-arrests-allies-opposition-candidate-conspiracy-accusations-2024-01-26>.

370 Movimiento SOMOS interview.

371 Ibid.

372 Ibid.

373 John Otis, “Venezuela’s leftist leader Maduro makes a play for evangelical voters,” *NPR*, February 7, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/07/1226975641/venezuela-election-maduro-evangelical-vote>.

374 Jacob Kessler, “Mass arrest at LGBTQ club in Venezuela prompts outcry over discrimination,” *Al Jazeera*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/10/mass-arrest-at-lgbtq-club-in-venezuela-prompts-outcry-over-discrimination>.

375 Lucas Goyret, “Discriminación, discursos de odio y persecución: la cruda realidad que vive la comunidad LGBT bajo el régimen chavista en Venezuela,” *Infobae*, November 2, 2024, <https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2024/11/02/discriminacion-discursos-de-odio-y-persecucion-la-cru-da-realidad-que-vive-la-comunidad-lgbt-bajo-el-regimen-chavis-ta-en-venezuela>.

376 Ibid.

377 “Cabello afirma que intento de detención de Koddy Campos fue ‘un montaje ridículo,’” *Versión Final*, August 12, 2024, <https://diarioversionfinal.com/politica-dinero/cabello-afirma-que-intento-de-detencion-de-koddy-campos-fue-un-montaje-ridiculo>.



# Acknowledgments

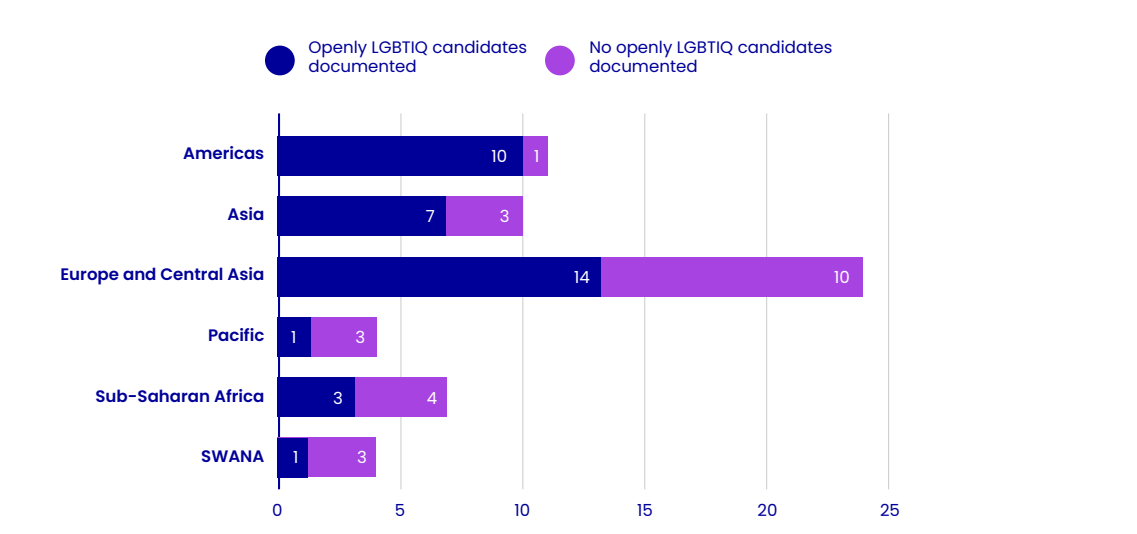
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This report was a collaborative effort, researched and drafted by a core team at Outright International including Venus Aves, Alberto de Belaunde, Madhura Chakraborty, John Ian Mutiro, and Ohotuowo Ogbeche. Whitney Pfeifer, Nazeeha Saeed, and Jonta Saragih also provided input to some entries. Neela Ghoshal and Maria Sjödin reviewed and edited the report. Venus Aves and AJ Jarrett provided copyediting and proofreading, and Desmond Cheung designed the report.

Outright is deeply grateful to the nearly 70 LGBTIQ individuals and 45 organizations around the world—most of them doing courageous work for political equality and inclusive democracies—who shared information with us through surveys or interviews. This is a deeply challenging time for our global LGBTIQ movement, and activists took time out of their days to provide information, in the hopes that it may contribute to change. Outright will continue to work in solidarity with you for a world in which we are free and equal.

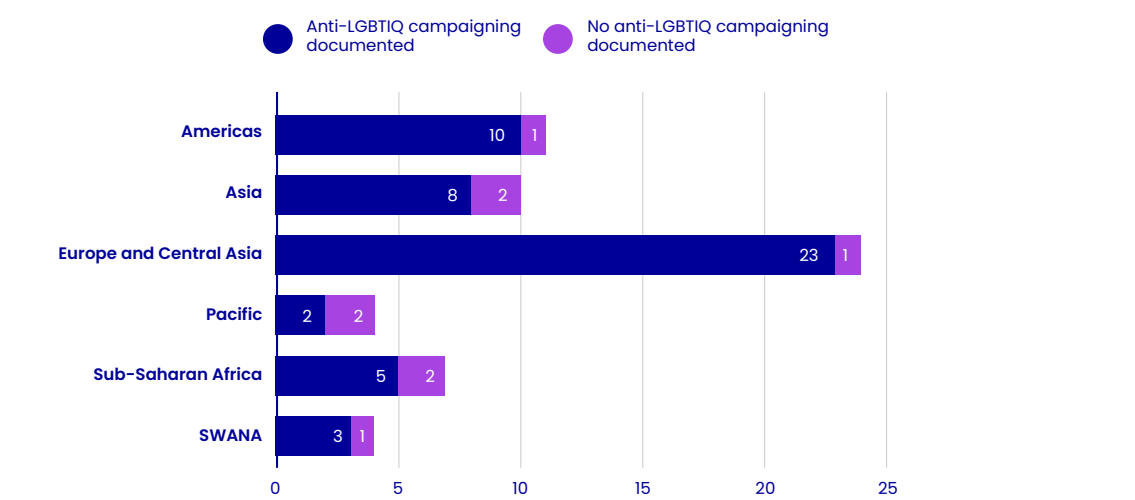
# Annex

## 1) Elections contested by openly LGBTIQ candidates



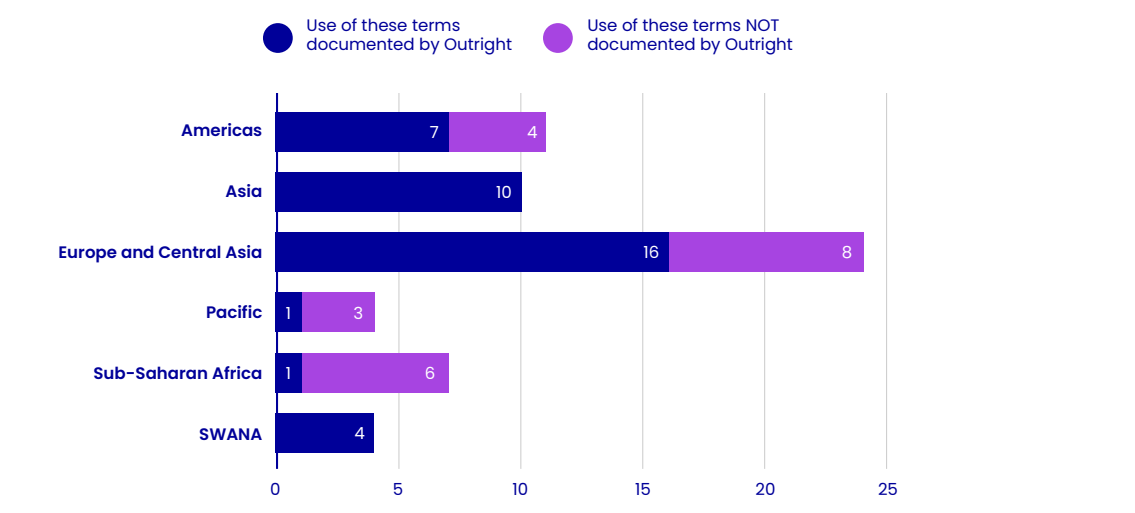
Region	Openly LGBTIQ candidates documented	No openly LGBTIQ candidates documented
Americas	Brazil, Canada, Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela	Bolivia
Asia	India, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan	Bangladesh, Bhutan, South Korea
Europe and Central Asia	Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, United Kingdom	Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czechia, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, San Marino, Türkiye
Pacific	Australia	Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands
Sub-Saharan Africa	Botswana, Namibia, South Africa	Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal
SWANA	Israel	Jordan, Syria, Tunisia

2) Elections in which Outright documented politicians engaging in anti-LGBTIQ campaigning



Region	Anti-LGBTIQ campaigning documented	No anti-LGBTIQ campaigning document
Americas	Brazil, Canada, Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela	Bolivia
Asia	Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, South Korea, Taiwan	Bhutan, Sri Lanka
Europe and Central Asia	Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Georgia, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, United Kingdom, Türkiye	San Marino
Pacific	Australia, Solomon Islands	Kiribati, Marshall Islands
Sub-Saharan Africa	Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa	Botswana, Mozambique
SWANA	Israel, Jordan, Tunisia	Syria

3) Countries in which Outright documented the use of the specific terms “gender ideology,” “woke,” “wokism,” LGBT or gender “propaganda,” “indoctrination,” “gender madness” or “insanity” in the context of the 2024 elections\*



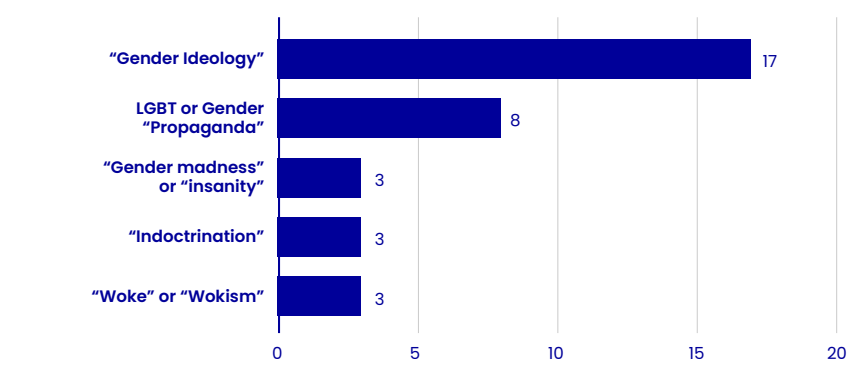
Region	Countries
Americas	Documented in Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Panama, United States of America, and Uruguay Not documented in Bolivia, Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela
Asia	Not documented in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan
Europe and Central Asia	Documented in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Georgia, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom** Not documented in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Poland, Russia, San Marino, and Türkiye
Pacific	Documented in Australia Not documented in Kiribati, Marshall Islands, and Solomon Islands
Sub-Saharan Africa	Documented in Ghana Not documented in Botswana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa
SWANA	Not documented in Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Tunisia

\*Outright did not have the capacity to monitor all political discourse in all languages, and it is highly likely that in some of the other countries listed, similar terminology was used to disparage LGBTIQ people and broader social justice movements in the 2024 election context.

\*\*Outright also documented the use of these terms in Germany and Hungary in the context of the 2024 European Parliament elections. However, these countries were not included in this list, which only covers the use of these terms in national or local elections in 2024.



4) Countries in which Outright documented politicians using the following terms in the context of the 2024 elections\*\*\*



Term	Countries
"Gender ideology"	Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Georgia, Iceland, Ireland, North Macedonia, Panama, Portugal, Slovakia, United Kingdom, Uruguay
LGBT or Gender "Propaganda"	Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova, Portugal, Romania
"Gender madness" or "Insanity"	Austria, Belgium, United States of America
"Indoctrination"	Ghana, Moldova, North Macedonia
"Woke" or "Wokism"	Austria, Brazil, France

\*\*\*Outright also documented the use of these terms in Germany and Hungary in the context of the 2024 European Parliament elections. However, these countries were not included in this list, which only covers the use of these terms in national or local elections in 2024.



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