

PRIDE AROUND THE WORLD

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OUTRIGHT
INTERNATIONAL

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About Outright

Outright International works together for better LGBTIQ lives.

Outright is dedicated to working with partners around the globe to strengthen the capacity of the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality.

Founded in 1990, with staff in over a dozen countries, Outright works with the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies and civil society partners. Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

Written by Shaun de Waal

Edited by: Amie Bishop, Daina Ruduša and Maria Sjödin

Designed by: Kathy Mills

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Cover photo: Riot police prevent LGBT rights activists from marching for a pride parade, which was banned by the governorship, in central Istanbul, Turkey, June 30, 2019. Photo by Murad Sezer/Reuters

Left: Turkey. Photo by Cansu Yıldiran © 2016

Introduction: Pride Around the World Today

Pride events are a central element of the global LGBTIQ movement. They are a loud and visible expression of the LGBTIQ community saying to the broader public – this is who we are, we are here, we deserve to be seen, recognized, respected, and protected. Pride is also a moment in time when the spotlight shines on LGBTIQ issues.

Pride as we know it is considered to have been inspired by the aftermath of the 1969 riots that erupted in New York’s Greenwich Village after yet another police raid of the Stonewall Inn, an LGBTIQ bar. There are now Pride events in more than half the countries of the world.

Today, Pride events take different shapes and forms around the world, often being called more locally relevant names. In places where the tradition of Pride is well established, such as the US and across many parts of Europe, it is a celebration of the progress achieved towards LGBTIQ equality to date and a reminder of the challenges ahead, such as banning sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts or achieving transgender equality. In countries where Pride is a newer event, it often serves as a protest, challenging social stigma, violence and discrimination, affirming the existence of LGBTIQ people, and calling for recognition and protection of our human rights. In other places still, Prides are restricted, banned, or cannot take place at all due to restrictive legislation, pervasive intolerance, or state-sponsored persecution.

In this briefing paper, Outright International strives to provide a global snapshot of what Pride looks like and means in different countries – especially places where it is a relatively new phenomenon, bravely struggling to gain traction, and places where Prides are under attack. This briefing paper features chapters on new and emerging Prides, as well as documenting a backlash against Pride events. It includes case studies of ten countries, providing a more detailed view of overarching trends.



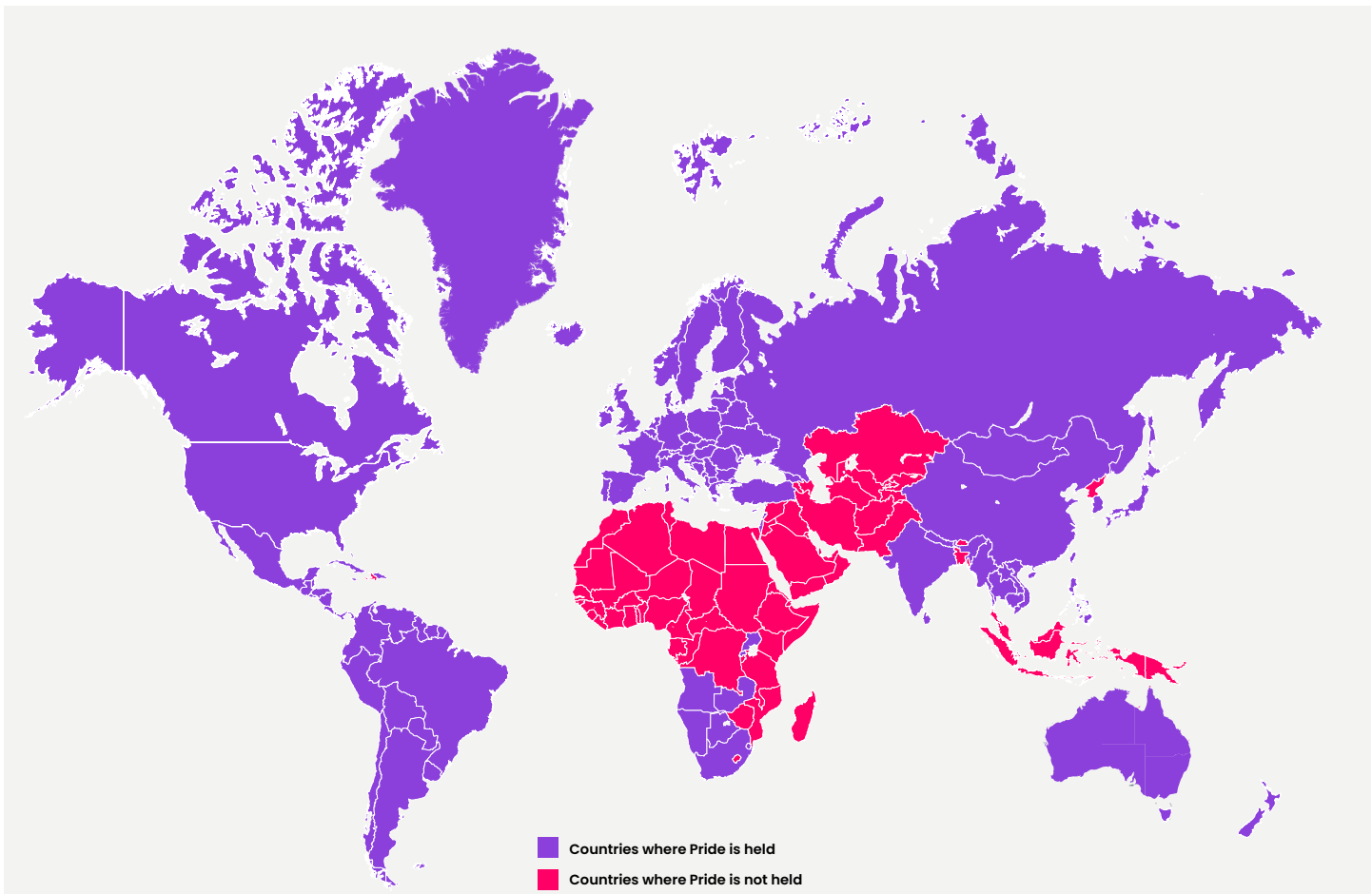
Participants March on a street during Korea Queer Festival 2015 in central Seoul, South Korea, June 28, 2015. Photo by Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

For the purposes of this briefing paper, Outright defines Pride, whether it is officially called that or not, as a public-facing, open and visible event – however many people it attracts – with the purpose of affirming the existence of LGBTIQ people, demanding recognition and protection of our rights, and celebrating progress to date.

This briefing paper is the first of its kind. It documents the state of Prides around the world and the challenges

they face, thus providing our movement with crucial information for continued progress on LGBTIQ equality.

Prides are now held in more than half of the world's countries. According to the Interpride report Pride Radar, last published in 2016, Prides were held in 92 countries. Outright has drawn on InterPride's map and updated it. According to our findings, 102 countries around the world now hold a Pride event (out of a total of 193 United Nations Member States and Taiwan).¹



According to OutRight's findings, the following countries have some form of Pride event: Albania, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Es Salvador, Estonia, Eswatini, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Saint Lucia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, and Taiwan

The Rise of the Right and Repression of Pride

In recent years numerous Prides around the world, even in places with a long history of holding Pride events, have seen an increasing backlash from society and state actors. In Russia, Pride events have been restricted and attacked since the first attempt by activists to organize them. Countries such as Turkey, Poland, Hungary, Georgia, Moldova, and many others, have seen increasing restrictions and even bans, or returning restrictions and bans after several years of progress, despite having held Pride events in the past.

In many places the assault on Pride – and thereby a refusal to countenance full human rights for LGBTIQ people – is linked to the rise of authoritarian governments bringing with them a clampdown on civil society, and civil liberties more broadly. Indeed, in its 2020 report, Freedom House states that the number of “Free” countries in the world dropped to its lowest level in a 15-year period in 2020.² Furthermore the democracy indicator “Freedom of personal expression” has experienced the largest declines of any democracy indicator since 2012. While their report does not specifically cover the situation for LGBTIQ people, it does speak to the general environment where many of the crack-downs on Pride are happening.

Governments and movements are inspired by each other, and unfortunately, this is the case in the rise of nationalist, increasingly authoritarian governments. How the Russian state has attacked LGBTIQ people, including Pride events, has, in many ways, influenced the backlash in Poland, Hungary, Russia, Georgia, Moldova and elsewhere. Under the guise of protecting “traditional family values,” the Russian state has promulgated laws directly affecting the recognition of LGBTIQ equality. In 2012 the city of Moscow passed a 100-year ban on all Pride events.³ A year later the so-called “gay propaganda law” that outlaws the dissemination of information about LGBTIQ people and issues to minors “for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values” was passed.⁴ Although the law targets freedom



of expression, it also has implications on freedom of assembly too, considering that minors can be present and see the manifestation. As such, other public events for or about LGBTIQ people or issues, including single person protests which do not require notification or authorization according to Russian legislation, can be banned in accordance with this law.⁵ Beyond Pride, this law perpetuates an image of LGBTIQ people as somehow threatening to children, thus amplifying hate and giving the green light for harassment, violence and discrimination. Attempts to pass versions of the “gay-propaganda” law have been made in Armenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and elsewhere.⁶

In what appears to be an imitation of the Russian law, Hungary’s ruling party pushed through a law in June 2021 banning any representation of LGBTIQ people in school educational materials (such as sex education classes) or TV shows intended for under-18s; such material – whether a depiction of LGBTIQ characters or even a rainbow flag – may only be shown late at night. This could also impact companies such as Coca-Cola, which came under fire from rightwingers in Hungary in 2019 because of an ad featuring a gay couple. Amnesty International said the law would further stigmatize LGBTIQ people and said the passing of the law was a “dark day for LGBTI rights and for Hungary”.⁷

Although the state has not gone so far in Poland, arguments about “traditional family values” are prevalent among conservative political and religious leaders, and have been used to restrict and attack the rights of LGBTIQ people. While neither country has banned Pride events, an increasing environment of hate speech against LGBTIQ people has contributed to displays of societal hatred, empowering attacks by individuals and fundamentalist groups, while state support for and protection of, for example, Pride events, has dwindled.

Poland is covered in this briefing paper, and it bears marked similarities with the situation in Hungary. A right-wing government came to power in 2015 on a strongly nationalist platform championing the “traditional family”, opposing abortion

and rights of LGBTIQ people, as well as being staunchly anti-migrant and advocating for more autonomy from the European Union. In Turkey, also covered in this briefing paper, the move to the right by a formerly centrist government has also led to state repression of Pride. After over 10 years of progressively growing Pride marches in Istanbul, reaching attendance of up to 100,000 people, the march in 2015 was violently dispersed by police using water cannons and rubber bullets. In subsequent years the march has been banned.

This repression is part of a broader clampdown on any dissent in Turkish society, especially following the coup attempt of 2016, which President Erdogan used to strengthen his grip on power. It also means that, in response to this, the LGBTIQ movement in Turkey has allied itself with other dissenting groups, and sees itself as part of a general resistance to Erdogan’s authoritarian government.

Similarities can be seen in countries in Asia, where social conservatism is deepened by repressive governments who see calls for LGBTIQ equality as a challenge to the state as they challenge respect for human rights across societies more broadly. This briefing paper presents case studies from the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and Sri Lanka, where state repression or, at the least, obstruction can be seen to work against any events promoting LGBTIQ visibility, such as Pride, and any drive towards LGBTIQ equality in law.

In Uganda, also covered in this briefing paper, Pride events were held from 2012 to 2016 but then became impossible to stage. Same-sex relations are criminalized, and the government of President Yoweri Museveni has used widespread social prejudice against LGBTIQ people to maintain his hold on power. As in Poland, where the state is in alliance with Christian traditionalists, this has led to the suppression of Pride and any actions by LGBTIQ activists.

In these aforementioned countries and others, state action against Pride – and social prejudice against LGBTIQ people and refusal of LGBTIQ equality – is a clear sign of the state’s investment in nationalistic aims and conservative mores.



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to be “a socially conservative, Euroseptic and nationalist party” which enjoys significant support from the Catholic church in Poland.¹² While in power most recently, the party has succeeded in passing a near total ban on abortion, undermined independence of the judiciary, and stirred up fears that the country’s perceived “secularist trends” and “gender politics” are undermining the Catholic Church.¹³

Hate speech from members of the ruling party is rife. In 2019, in the run-up to the European Parliament elections, gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and marriage equality came to the fore. European Parliament candidate Kaja Godek even claimed LGBTIQ people want to adopt children “because they want to molest and rape them” and urged: “We must, above all, limit the influence of the homo-lobby.”¹⁴ PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski has called the movement for LGBTIQ equality “a threat to our identity, a threat to our nation and its long-term existence.”¹⁵

Hate speech from religious leaders is also prominent. The Archbishop of Kraków called “LGBTI Ideology” a “plague” in 2019.¹⁶ Such overt hate speech stirs up hate towards LGBTIQ people in society, and gives the green light for violence and harassment by private citizens.

An Attack on Pride

The potent hate speech from ruling politicians, and the growing opposition to LGBTIQ equality more broadly has resulted in increasing challenges to organizing Pride events, both in obtaining relevant permissions, collaborating with law enforcement, and facing backlash from the public.

For example, in 2019, the city of Bialystok held its first Pride. Ahead of the march Tadeusz Wojda, Bialystok’s Archbishop, issued a proclamation to be read in all churches in the province¹⁷ stating that Pride marches are a “blasphemy against God” and should not go ahead. Unsurprisingly, the march was met with violent attacks by right-wing militants. A “counter-Pride” event was organized by PiS and held alongside Bialystok Pride. It was billed as a family event but was heavily militarized. Counter-event participants set off smoke bombs and hurled rotten eggs, bottles, and cobblestones at Pride participants. They also shouted insults such as “Fags out!”, “Fuck you, faggots” and others. A truck with a loudspeaker accompanied the march, loudly announcing that

“gays and lesbians rape children by the dozen.”¹⁸ Many marchers were physically attacked. Police did not prevent the attacks, though their presence may have kept the attacks from being more severe.¹⁹

“Bailystok is not a typical example,” says Miłosz Przepiórkowski of LGBTIQ advocacy group Lambda Warszawa. “It has never happened before at this scale. That was really horrible. Nobody died, thankfully. The neo-Nazis organized themselves, and they went there to have someone to fight with. They came along with their families, and you see 10 or 12 year old children shouting those insults.”²⁰

After the violence in Bialystok, condemnations from politicians and religious leaders were half-hearted. Archbishop Wojda recognized that the violence was “incompatible with the attitude of a Christian,” but he also reasserted his support for “family values” and urged Poles to pray for the preservation of the family. A few days later, about 1,000 people gathered in Warsaw to protest the violence in Bialystok and reaffirm the call for LGBTIQ equality.²¹

The potent hate speech from ruling politicians, and the growing opposition to LGBTIQ equality more broadly has resulted in increasing challenges to organizing Pride events, both in obtaining relevant permissions, collaborating with law enforcement, and facing backlash from the public.

The Current Climate

Beyond challenges to Pride, the overall climate for LGBTIQ people has become increasingly hostile. Between mid-2019 and mid-2020, about 100 municipal and provincial areas in Poland, chiefly in the southeast bloc of the country, declared themselves to be “LGBT-free zones”. These declarations were based on charters supporting the “rights of the family” and opposing so-called “LGBT ideology.” Legally these declarations are meaningless and can not be enforced, however they contribute greatly to the overall backlash and boost LGBTIQ-phobia. The EU condemned the declarations and withdrew funding from

several regions. A Warsaw court also placed a ban on the distribution of “LGBT-free zone” stickers that had been offered by a right-wing magazine.²²

In the presidential elections of June and July 2020, incumbent Andrej Duda, allied to PiS, narrowly won over Rafal Trzaskowski, the liberal mayor of Warsaw. Trzaskowski had signed a declaration pledging to support LGBTIQ rights, including introducing education about LGBTIQ issues in Warsaw schools.²³ In contrast, Duda said during the election that “LGBT ideology” was a greater threat to Poland than communism.²⁴

“The whole situation in Poland is so anti-LGBTI that it actually became funny,” says Przepiórkowski. “Last year, during the presidential campaign, the president said we are not humans, we are an ideology. He said it more than once. People are now more free to harass LGBTIQ people, to attack them. It encourages more and more people to show their hate towards LGBTIQ people, and towards women who are fighting for abortion rights.”²⁵

Despite the backlash some activists believe that societal acceptance of LGBTIQ people in Poland is generally growing, and some progress is being made. The huge protests against the ban on abortion show that many actively oppose the conservative agenda.²⁶ Bartosz Staszewski, who was among the organizers of Lublin’s first Pride event in 2018, highlighted that “ten years ago, it would be unthinkable to arrange a grassroots-led Pride march through the streets of my home town.”²⁷

In June 2021, the Equality Parade was back on the streets of Warsaw in considerable numbers. Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski walked at the head of the march. Mirosława Makuchowska, vice director of the organization Campaign Against Homophobia, said: “We’ve been through a very, very rough time, but at the same time we are going out in the streets and we are saying we are stronger and we are not going to give up.”²⁸

Pride in Turkey Under Fire

Growing Pride Stifled

Same-sex relations are not criminalized in Turkey, but LGBTIQ people enjoy virtually no explicit protections under the law and the climate has been described as “widespread hostility”.²⁹ Despite this, Turkey, in particular Istanbul, has, until recently, had a strong history of large, visible, and well-attended Pride marches.

Pride began in Istanbul in 2003, and grew in size each year up to 2015. Since 2014, Pride events have been held in other cities too, including Ankara, Mersin, Izmir, and Antalya.

In Istanbul, Pride participation steadily increased from 5,000 participants in 2011 to an impressive 100,000 in 2014.³⁰ In 2013, it was joined by protesters resisting development in the Istanbul’s Gezi Park area, and subsequently, it became increasingly intersectional, standing shoulder to shoulder with “the feminist, ecology, environmental and vegan movements.”³¹ In 2015, a year after Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became President of Turkey, the State began clamping down on Pride events. That year the Police dispersed participants with water cannon and rubber bullets. In years since, the march has been banned.

But Pride did not stop; each year activists and participants went ahead with Pride marches, defying bans and facing violent police clampdown. In 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pride was organized as a virtual series of 35 events.³² In 2021, a Pride march was banned again. Police in riot gear used tear gas to disperse protesters who gathered despite the ban. Over 20 people were arrested.³³

Political Repression and Hate Speech

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been in power in Turkey since 2002. Erdoğan himself was elected the President of Turkey in 2014. Since his ascent into this position, human

rights and civil liberties have been under attack in Turkey. Especially after a failed coup in 2016, authorities embarked on a far-reaching crackdown on perceived dissent, including opposition politicians, academics, independent journalists and media, civil society and others. Around 160,000 people have been detained, and nearly the same number of state employees dismissed in the last five years. More than 50,000 have been formally charged and are in jail pending trial.³⁴ Constitutional changes adopted in 2017 further concentrated power in the hands of the president.³⁵

Pride in Istanbul,
Turkey, June 30, 2019.
Photo by Murad
Sezer/Reuters



Pride and the LGBTIQ movement has stood together with various other social groups, forming part of a broad resistance to the present government's increasing authoritarianism and repression. With Pride events being as visible as they are, they formed an easy and obvious target of the state.³⁶

The increasing clamp down on civil society, and LGBTIQ people specifically, and any form of perceived dissent, has been accompanied by mounting hate speech, including against the LGBTIQ community. In 2020, after Istanbul Pride was shut down by police, the public response included tweets approving of the police action. The chair of the Red Crescent Society of Turkey, Kerem Kinik, tweeted that he would "fight against those who violate healthy creation."³⁷ He later claimed he was talking about pedophilia, not consenting adult same-sex relations, but Presidential aide Fahrettin Altun defended Kinik, tweeting: "LGBT propaganda poses a grave threat to freedom of speech."³⁸ President Erdoğan himself said: "some people insidiously attack our national and moral values by normalizing perversions that have been condemned throughout history and aim to poison young minds." Moreover, he openly incited the public to violence by urging the public to confront "any type of perversion forbidden by our God, and those who support them".³⁹

More recently, the hate speech against LGBTIQ people has taken an even darker turn, using human rights language to attack the community. Increasingly, rhetoric about LGBTIQ people has turned into accusations of the community stirring hate or inciting violence, thus justifying persecution.

For example, in February 2021, four students at Istanbul's Bogazici University protested against Erdoğan's appointment of a loyalist with links to the ruling party as the university's Rector. In response, Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu tweeted "four LGBT+ perverts were detained for inciting hatred."⁴⁰ The tweet was flagged by Twitter for "hateful conduct."⁴¹ In the same month, Erdoğan addressed members of the Justice and Development Party, saying: "we'll carry our youth to the future, not as LGBT+ youth, but like the youth from this country's glorious past."⁴²

Increasing Bans

The banning of the Istanbul Pride march in 2015 was the first shot at the LGBTIQ community from the government, but repressive measures have increased since then. At first, the restrictions on Pride events only covered outdoor

activities. Since then, indoor events have come under attack too. Queer short films that were to be screened in conjunction with the British Council and Pera Museum in 2017 were banned by the Beyoğlu District Governorship, and the Queer Olympix sports events, which were to be held for the third time in 2019, were banned by the Kadıköy District Governorship on the second day of the event. Queer Olympix organizers sued the government over these clampdowns, and the court concluded that the government had not complied with the law.⁴³

But forms of state repression continue, especially in smaller cities with less history of Pride. "The obstacles are greater in Pride Weeks held in cities outside of Istanbul," say organizers. In November 2017, all LGBTIQ activities in Ankara, including Pride Week events in the city, were banned indefinitely. The ban was lifted two years later, after the KaosGL association took the case to the Regional Administrative Court. In 2019, Pride events in Antalya, Izmir and Mersin were banned. The bans were later overturned, after court action.⁴⁴

Court rulings against increasing bans show that activists are able to challenge and overturn them, indicating that the independence of the court system is still intact, however, this lays heavy burdens on organizations. Moreover, the persistent bans amplify hate against LGBTIQ people, and create an atmosphere which gives the green light for harassment and attacks against Pride participants by private citizens.

Still Coming Together

Despite the bans and the police violence directed at Pride, the committee organizing Istanbul Pride says it continues to build solidarity and community among LGBTIQ people in other ways. Besides Pride itself, the community is creating more occasions for gathering and activism. "Our coming together at events ... [means] we can strengthen each other." They are tackling "many rights struggles regarding our intersectional identities, from our union rights to trans students' right to housing".

The community organized Pride again in 2021, defying bans and facing police brutality. On the last day of the Istanbul Pride Week, a march aimed for İstiklal Street, "the heart of Istanbul and the country." The march was shut down by riot police using tear gas and violence. At least 20 people were detained.⁴⁵ Still, activists insist: "We are here, we are not going anywhere!"⁴⁶

Pride and Human Rights in the Philippines

Roots of Pride

Pride events in the Philippines started in the early 1990s. Similarly to other places, the first Pride events came as a response to experiences of severe discrimination which gave rise to “multiple spontaneous expressions of resistance.”⁴⁷ In 1994, the national democratic group, Pro-Gay (Progressive Organization of Gays in the Philippines), along with the MCCP (Metropolitan Community Church Philippines), organized the first Pride March in the Philippines – and, in fact, the first in the entire Asia-Pacific region. Other countries have followed suit, with Pride emerging across the region, from Japan (in the same year as the Philippines) to India (1999) and Sri Lanka (2005; see this briefing paper). Since then, a tradition of Pride events has persisted in the Philippines. In 2018, 25,000 people participated in the Metro Manila Pride March. In 2019, the number rose to 75,000, according to activist and Pride organizer Rey Valmores-Salinas, from the organization Bahaghari.⁴⁸

To this day, protest remains a core element of Pride in the Philippines. As Valmores-Salinas puts it, “although it took several years for Pride to be shaped to what it is now, the spirit of resistance by the LGBTIQ community in the Philippines persisted.” The Filipino LGBTIQ community believes that “there is no Pride for some, without liberation for all. Hence – and although this took several years and numerous debates and ideological struggles – Pride has slowly shifted to be an avenue of protest for all, be it LGBTIQ people, women, workers, farmers, indigenous peoples, and more.”⁴⁹

This was also true during the COVID-19 pandemic, when LGBTIQ communities realized that “it is an issue that disastrously affects our entire community, and hence, is a queer issue. Just as poverty, hunger, joblessness, the landlessness of our peasants in the countryside, the lack of self-determination for indigenous peoples, the displacement of urban poor communities in the cities, the denial of dignified opportunities for workers, and the human rights violations against activists, are all queer issues.”⁵⁰

Pride events also take place across the country.



Apart from the Metro Manila Pride March, multiple local Pride marches take place across the Philippines, organized by local communities, including in Baguio and Iloilo.

In the Philippines close coordination with local government and municipalities is necessary for organizing large scale, public events. As such, Pride events are typically organized several months in advance. Most events tend to take place in June.

Progress and Prejudice

Some progress has been made towards LGBTIQ equality, and Pride has undoubtedly played a role in achieving it. For example, a proposed law to counter discrimination – the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression [SOGIE] Bill – is slowly finding its way through Parliament. Meanwhile, the city of Manila and Quezon city have both adopted anti-discrimination ordinances inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity.⁵¹ Quezon City has also trained, expanded and visibly identified services for LGBTIQ victims of family and domestic violence, among other progress.⁵²

However, the increasing visibility of a growing Pride movement has been accompanied by resistance too. According to Valmores-Salinas: “Although it is inspiring to see more and more people’s political consciousness growing and joining the LGBTIQ community in demanding our rights, there continue to be vitriolic attacks against Pride, and against the LGBTIQ community in general.”⁵³

The Pride 20

Some political resistance to LGBTIQ equality and Pride events has also developed since Rodrigo Duterte became President in 2016. With his ascent to power attacks on human rights defenders, activists and opposition politicians, journalists, lawyers and many others have increased. Consequently, the Philippines has been in a state of unrest.⁵⁴ This has had an impact on LGBTIQ people more broadly, and on Pride organizers specifically, as Pride events in the Philippines tend to focus on human rights violations as a whole.

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic engulfed the world, President Duterte took the opportunity to clamp down on dissent and activism even more, under the pretence of public safety.⁵⁵ At Mendiola Pride in 2020, for example,

20 people – who became known as the “Pride 20” – were arrested by police. Besides LGBTIQ concerns, they were protesting an anti-terrorism bill that threatened the rule of law in the Philippines, as well as demanding that the government provide aid for poor workers and drivers displaced by the months-long coronavirus lockdown.⁵⁶ Rey Valmores-Salinas was one of the Pride 20.

According to Valmores-Salinas: “members of the LGBTIQ community demanded not only an end to discrimination but also the junking of the Anti-Terrorism Law, which legitimizes state terror by legalizing wiretapping, the jailing of government critics without warrant, and the proscription of critics as ‘armed terrorists’ for simply holding protests and being critical of the government.”⁵⁷

“The goal is always to inspire, to organize, to animate more people into joining the struggle.” The battle for human rights for LGBTIQ people is undertaken by “standing alongside other oppressed peoples, in a movement from the grassroots.”
– Rey Valmores-Salinas

Mendiola Pride in 2020 ended with “a vicious mass arrest”, violent dispersal and the illegal detention of the 20 people. Yet the arrests “sparked a national conversation led by the LGBTIQ community not only about discrimination, but about state fascism, police brutality, and tyranny.”⁵⁸

Future of Pride

Valmores-Salinas is not letting her experience as one of the Pride 20 deter her from future activism. Looking ahead she says: “The goal is always to inspire, to organize, to animate more people into joining the struggle.” The battle for human rights for LGBTIQ people is undertaken by “standing alongside other oppressed peoples, in a movement from the grassroots.” In future, with the experience of a virtual Pride to lean on, she says the community will lead “events online for our siblings who could only raise their fists from home”.⁵⁹

LGBTIQ people in the Philippines will “continue to organize Pride Marches in keeping with the militant history that has been passed down to us ... In a time of increasing violence against the LGBTIQ community, it is only right that we meet this record violence with record solidarity.”⁶⁰

South Korea's Many Queer Festivals

A Long, Proud Tradition

South Korea has a long tradition of holding Pride events, locally known as Queer Culture Festivals. The festivals date back to 2000, when the first Korea Queer Culture Festival was held in Seoul. Now renamed the Seoul Queer Culture Festival (SQCF), it has been held annually since then.

South Korea's Queer Culture Festivals (QCF) have also taken place elsewhere across the country. There are now nine regular QCFs nationwide. In Daegu the festival has been held since 2009, in Busan and Jeju since 2017, in Jeonju, Incheon and Gwangju since 2018, and Changwon since 2019.

The oldest festival, in Seoul, grew from about 50 participants in 2000 to about 150,000 in 2019, including both LGBTIQ community members and allies. Local QCFs are smaller and range from several hundreds to around 3,000. Considering the size of the places the festivals are organized in, these are significant numbers resulting in notable visibility and awareness in smaller cities.

Today, however, despite the growing Pride tradition across the country, the Queer Culture Festivals of South Korea are coming under fire. Conservative Christian churches have mobilized to oppose the Queer Festivals, encouraging followers to protest them, resulting in festivals attracting counter-protests that have led to violence. Unfortunately, activists also report cases of the police failing to intervene when attacks on the Queer Festivals happen, allowing them to

continue with impunity and making LGBTIQ community members feel unsafe and distrustful of the police.⁶¹

Queer Festivals and Marches

The Queer Festivals in Korea consist of a Pride march, in addition to other activities. Booths usually line a square, and performances and speeches affirming the existence of LGBTIQ people, calling for recognition of rights, and expressing solidarity take place on a stage. The festivals are public, but take place in an enclosed space, providing attendees with protection from possible counter-protesters, while also reducing somewhat the efficacy of the event as a moment of queer visibility.⁶²



A participant holds up a rainbow-coloured fan and a South Korean national flag as they face Christian groups, during Korea Queer Festival 2015 in central Seoul, South Korea, June 28, 2015. Photo by Kim Hong-Ji/ Reuters

Still, activist Cho writes, “once a person clears the gate, colorful LGBTQ+ symbols enter their field of vision from all around, and a space opens up before them in which people with diverse and unimpeded bodily expressions are walking around freely. Because this contrast is so stark, one gets the feeling of stepping into an entirely new world.”⁶³

The booths are used by activists and LGBTIQ groups to build community, get their message out and fundraise. Booths range from LGBTIQ-friendly religious groups, YouTubers and K-Pop fans, LGBTIQ and other organizations, among others. Many organize quizzes, games and photographs. The presence of groups “dealing with religion, women’s rights, labor rights, disability rights, and the environment, express their solidarity, but [also affirm] the existence of LGBTIQ+ workers or students”, and serve as a reminder of the intersectional identities LGBTIQ people have.⁶⁴

The diverse nature of these festivals ensures that messaging about LGBTIQ people, inclusivity, tolerance, diversity and the need for recognition and protection of rights are expressed in a multitude of ways. “Messages like ‘LGBTQ+ people are everywhere’, and ‘Queer people are deserving of recognition and love just for existing’ are most typical,” says one activist.⁶⁵

Under Attack

While the success of the Queer Culture Festivals across South Korea has been notable, the counter-protest movement has also grown in strength and number. Academic and anthropologist Dr Sumi Cho, who has been tracking the growing opposition, highlights a particularly gruesome attack: “the 2018 Incheon QCF was nearly cancelled because of the attack by homophobic Christian protesters. Local conservative churches mobilized thousands of [counter-]protesters to keep the festival from happening. The protesters occupied the Station Square, where the festival was to be held, and physically attacked organizers and festival participants.”⁶⁶

As a result of this attack, QCF participants were surrounded and denied access to bathrooms, water and food for 12 hours. A police line divided the two groups, but activists report that police did not intervene to stop physical attacks, nor did they try to disperse the counter-protesters, instead

suggesting that QCF organizers should close Pride events in order not to provoke counter-protesters. Participants of the festival endured physical and verbal attacks, sexual harassment, cursing and exorcism, and vandalism. The march was also affected, “the parade was blocked and took four hours to proceed about 500 metres.”⁶⁷ Organizers pressed charges against individual attackers and local religious leaders who had mobilized the counter-protesters. Despite submissions of overwhelming photo and video evidence, or the presence of the police at the scene of the attacks, the case is yet to be resolved.⁶⁸

“Local conservative churches mobilized thousands of protesters to keep the queer festival from happening.”
– Dr. Sumi Cho

Elsewhere Pride events have also been prevented from taking place, or severely restricted. The 2019 Busan QCF was cancelled, because the local authority (the Haeundae Ward Office) did not permit the festival to occupy Gunam Street, where it had been planned to be held. The justification provided was that QCF does not promote “public interests”.⁶⁹ Moreover, the Ward Office imposed fines on the Busan QCF organizing committee for holding the 2017 and 2018 events without a permit, “and threatened to forcefully remove installations, equipment and disperse participants if a 2019 QCF were to be held.”⁷⁰

The organizers of the Busan QCF decided to cancel the 2019 festival because they “could not ensure the safety of the participants”. Instead they held a demonstration protesting the Ward Office’s decision at the same space on the same day.⁷¹

The 2019 and 2020 Jeju QCF was cancelled voluntarily, because the organizers were suffering from burnout. “Instead of a festival, they organized small, community-based art and culture events that raised LGBTQ awareness across Jeju throughout the year.”⁷²

In addition to opposition by religious groups organizing counter-protests, state obstruction also plays a role in restricting Queer Festivals in South Korea. There is no explicit repression by the state, but national and local governments hinder the QCFs by not granting permits to use public spaces (squares, streets, etc).⁷³ Longstanding, larger festivals such as those in Seoul and Daegu, have

achieved a certain level of cooperation with the police, but, in other areas it is not so, and in some cases the police refuse to cooperate, making organization of the festivals challenging. Moreover, local government officials and high-ranking police officials are often pressured by local Christian leaders into opposing the festivals.⁷⁴

Social Backlash

There has been some social backlash against the increasingly visible Queer Culture Festivals too, predominantly among Christian groups. According to activist Cho, “in both national and local politics, politicians and authorities fear the pressure from conservative Christians and have tried to avoid accusations that they are somehow friendly to LGBTIQ communities...”

Portrayal of LGBTIQ people in the media can also often be harmful. “Attacks and fake news are especially rampant online, as they often claim that QCFs are ‘orgies’ and ‘obscene’ and are harmful to the general public.”⁷⁵ This, in turn, impacts public opinion and stirs hate among society. Trolling and cyberbullying has also become an issue. “Kim Ki Hong, the former president of Jeju QCF organizing committee, a non-binary transgender person, suffered severe cyber-bullying online and took their own life in February 2021,” recalls Cho.⁷⁶

“...recent polls show that 79% of South Koreans aged 18 to 25 are accepting of LGBTIQ people, compared to 23% for those older than 50.”
– Jacob Poushter and Nicholas O. Kent

Yet recent polls show that 79% of South Koreans aged 18 to 25 are accepting of LGBTIQ people, compared to 23% for those older than 50.⁷⁷ So it can be concluded the Queer Culture Festivals, while inciting a loud backlash among predominantly religious communities, are also showing large parts of the population that LGBTIQ people are here, are not a threat, and deserve to have their rights recognized and protected, thus shifting public opinion.

Fighting For an Anti-Discrimination Law

In addition to enhancing visibility of the LGBTIQ community, and improving awareness among the general population about LGBTIQ issues, the Queer Festivals have very concrete goals. Namely, activists are advocating for an

anti-discrimination law which would explicitly protect people from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Such a law has repeatedly been brought before the South Korean Parliament, but has as yet been unsuccessful in getting passed.

Activists keep trying. In 2020 it was brought to Parliament once more, for the seventh time. Previous attempts to get such a law passed have been thwarted by conservative and Christian political groups that oppose LGBTIQ equality. This time there was no proper discussion and the proposals were again discarded.⁷⁸ As Cho writes in his essay, “The primary bodies of the Protestant church have characterized homosexuality as the greatest crisis facing both the church and South Korean society at large, and they have put their entire weight behind blocking the establishment of anti-discrimination legislation ... There continues to be no institutional mechanism for preventing discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people in South Korea.”⁷⁹

Forward to the Future

In 2020 some QFC’s were forced to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while others organized events online. Looking to the future, 2021 is likely to have virtual events as well, while the pandemic continues. But beyond, physical festivals will resume, and with greater collaboration among them. Each festival has its own organizing committee consisting of local activists, allies and volunteers, and together they form a national assembly – the National Alliance of Queer Culture Festivals. The National Alliance collaborates on supporting each other, and working together on national level goals, such as the anti-discrimination law.

Moreover, increasingly many organizing committees are working with other civil society groups, including those working with women and gender equality issues, youth, disability, peace, and human rights, serving as a reminder that all social justice causes are inextricably linked, and we cannot have sustainable progress for one without the other. Where possible, local committees also collaborate with progressive political parties for promoting local progress.

Uganda Pride Holds Its Breath

Struggle Into Being

Despite a highly restrictive environment of state repression, activists have managed to hold several Pride events in Uganda. The first Pride event was first held in 2012 and continued annually until 2016. Pride in 2014 was particularly celebratory, after a bill strengthening criminalization of same-sex relations – the so-called “kill the gays bill” – was invalidated by the Constitutional Court.⁸⁰

The Pride events of 2012 to 2015 proceeded without incident, except for some heckling from the public. They drew up to 100 participants. In 2016 the Pride event was shut down by police before it could begin. Police were waiting at the beach on Lake Victoria, in Entebbe, where pride participants were gathering ahead of the march, and ordered those present to disperse. Pride participants tried to gather at another location, but the police blocked them again. Uganda’s minister for ethics and integrity, Simon Lokodo, had earlier warned that Pride participants would be arrested and prosecuted. While participants were ordered to disperse, no formal arrests were made that day.⁸¹

“Homosexuality is illegal, so everything we do, whether socially or politically, is deemed illegal.”

– Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera

In 2019, organizers tried to revive the event but were threatened with arrest and violence. Thereafter, Pride organizers felt it would not be safe to hold Pride events in the foreseeable future.⁸² As Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera, founder of Pride Uganda and Executive Director of the Kuchu Times Media Group, puts it: “Homosexuality is illegal, so everything we do, whether socially or politically, is deemed illegal.”⁸³

This is the simple fact of life for LGBTIQ people and their families and allies in Uganda. Ugandan society is socially conservative, and anti-LGBTIQ sentiment is further fueled by some Christian churches, which take a hard anti-LGBTIQ line. Historically, this view has been promoted and even funded by fundamentalist churches in the USA, which have sent missions to Uganda.⁸⁴

Pride vs The Law

Same-sex relations have been criminalized in Uganda since British colonial times, and several attempts have been made to strengthen criminalization. The Anti-Homosexuality Act, which, among other new provisions, prescribed the death penalty for “repeat offenders” engaging in same-sex relations, leading it to be referred to as the “Kill the Gays” bill, was introduced in 2011. It was passed by the parliament of Uganda in 2013 and signed into law by President Museveni, who had openly supported the bill, in early 2014. It was invalidated by the Constitutional Court of Uganda on procedural grounds the same year, possibly due to significant domestic and international pressure.⁸⁵

In May 2021, the Parliament of Uganda passed the Sexual Offences Bill. Purportedly the bill aims to prevent sexual violence, enhance punishment against sexual offenders and provide additional protection for victims, however, it also reinforces the ban on same-sex relations.⁸⁶ Tackling sexual violence, a key issue in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa, is an important step for gender equality, however, the inclusion of same-sex relations in this bill paints LGBTQ people as sexual offenders. As such, it fuels already rampant LGBTQ-phobia, discrimination, and violence.⁸⁷ Jacob Oboth-Oboth, chairperson of the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee, described homosexuality as an “unnatural act” when discussing the bill and the inclusion of same-sex relations in it.⁸⁸ Activists urged President Yoweri Museveni not to sign the Sexual Offences Bill.⁸⁹

Hate Speech

Hate speech from religious leaders, politicians and the media, is prominent in the country. In the run up to elections in January 2021, for example, Uganda experienced devastating political violence. President Museveni blamed the violence on LGBTIQ people: “Some of these groups are being used by outsiders ... homosexuals ... who don’t like the stability of Uganda and the independence of Uganda.”⁹⁰

Hate speech in the media is also prevalent. In April 2009, in the run up to the “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” being proposed in 2011, one local Ugandan newspaper printed the names of suspected LGBTIQ people, another printed tips on how to identify LGBTIQ people. In October 2010, the local newspaper *Rolling Stone* published a story featuring a list of the nation’s 100 “top” LGBTIQ people with their photos and addresses, inviting readers to hang them.⁹¹ This resulted in increasing hate crime, LGBTIQ people living in fear, relocating to new homes, or even leaving the country.

Pride Hopes to Return

Despite the increasingly LGBTIQ-phobic environment, activists hope to continue organizing Pride events. Because of state repression experienced by the community as a whole, due to past experiences of Pride events being targeted by authorities and shut down, as well as surveillance of activists, safety is a key concern. Nabagesera says: “We plan to hold Pride events in future after we have safely identified secure ways to do it to protect participants from persecution. We continue to call for the full equality of and justice for LGBTIQ people. Pride is very essential because it’s a way to celebrate our achievements and also a way to protest against the still ongoing challenges and injustices.”⁹²

People hold rainbow flags as they take part in the Pride event in Entebbe on August 8, 2015. Photo by Isaac Kasamani/AFP via Getty Images



Singapore Pride Persists

Pride Against Criminalization

According to Section 377A of Singapore's Penal Code, same-sex relations between males is illegal, even if it is consensual and takes place in private. A vestige of the British Colonial era, this law has been in force since 1938.

The law was recently challenged in terms of its constitutionality and redundancy, as the law is rarely and arbitrarily applied, in three separate cases – by plaintiffs Johnson Ong Ming, Roy Tan Seng Kee, and Bryan Choong Chee Hoong. All three challenges were dismissed in March 2020 by Justice See Kee Oon who stated that section 377A does not violate the constitution and “continues to serve its purpose of safeguarding public morality by showing societal moral disapproval of male homosexual acts”. Justice Oon noted, in particular, that there is

inconclusive evidence that homosexuality is biological and immutable, that regardless scientific discussions are not a matter for the court to rule on, and that “identity or status is not an element of the offense” therefore applying equally to homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual men.⁹³ Consequently, the law remains in place.

In addition to having been challenged in the courtroom, activists also challenge this colonial relic through Pride-style manifestations. As elsewhere, Pride also serves the purpose of building community, affirming existence, creating visibility as well as pushing for change.⁹⁴

Prides have to take a unique format in Singapore, as public protests are not permitted under the law. As such, Pride marches are not possible. Nevertheless, activists in Singapore organize two Pride-like events that focus on human rights for LGBTIQ people: Pink Dot SG and IndigNation.

Start of Two “Prides”

Scientist and entrepreneur Dr Stuart Koe tested the socio-political boundaries in Singapore by organizing the country's first LGBTIQ Pride event in 2001. It was a private party, but permission was required under the Public Entertainments and Meetings Act of 1958. The government was liberalizing at the time, and granted permission. The party, dubbed “Nation”, was held at the Sentosa island resort and attracted 1,500 revellers. Several iterations of Nation followed in subsequent years, 2002, 2003 and 2004, with ever-increasing numbers

Participants of Pink Dot protesting for the repeal of Section 377A of Singapore's Penal Code, June 29, 2019. Photo by Feline Lim/Reuters



of attendees, many of them flying in from outside Singapore. In 2005, however, the fifth Nation party was not approved by the Singapore police, who declared it “contrary to public interest”.⁹⁵

In response to the banning of Nation, activists from Singapore’s first LGBTIQ advocacy group, People Like Us, organized IndigNation in August 2005.⁹⁶ It was intended to be less of a party and more of a series of serious events. The government’s lifting of restrictions on indoor events in 2004, meaning they no longer required police permission, encouraged IndigNation to go ahead. “2004 was an ideal time to organize talks, workshops, and related events as part of the line-up for IndigNation,” says Jean Chong of the Sanyoni advocacy group.⁹⁷ IndigNation, which still continues, is now an annual month-long series of events for the LGBTIQ community and around LGBTIQ issues. It features workshops, talks, celebratory and cultural events.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, Pink Dot is an annual event held since 2009,⁹⁹ in which attendees gather to form a “pink dot” to show support for inclusivity, diversity and the freedom to love. It followed a further relaxation of the rules governing public activities and took place at Singapore’s Speakers’ Corner at Hong Lim Park. According to the law, though, all participants had to be Singaporean citizens or permanent residents.¹⁰⁰ The first event held by Pink Dot SG took place on May 16, 2009. It was attended by 2,500 people and received international media attention. Chong explains that “Pink Dot events usually feature concert performances and booths sponsored by organizations supporting the LGBT community and [its] cause.”¹⁰¹

As Pink Dot events started taking place in other cities, the name was changed to Pink Dot SG. Attendances at the event reached as high as 28,000 in 2019. In 2020, Pink Dot SG went online because of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a few thousand attending.¹⁰²

Religious and Social Prejudice

Although Section 377A of the penal code criminalizing same-sex relations is hardly ever applied, its continued existence sends a strong message – that gay and bisexual men are not only second class citizens, but also criminals, purely for who they love. The fact that challenges to the law were dismissed amplify that message, legitimizing societal hate, discrimination, and exclusion of LGBTIQ people in Singapore. Indeed, social prejudice against LGBTIQ people persists, with increasing visibility due to the Pride events sparking ever more debate on the matter.¹⁰³

Several religiously based campaigns have been organized in opposition to LGBTIQ equality. For example, in 2014, the Islamic religious teacher Noor Deros launched a campaign urging the public to wear white on the day of the Pink Dot event. The aim of the wear white rally was to promote

“traditional family values.”¹⁰⁴ In 2016, Lawrence Khong, senior



Participants attend Pink Dot in Singapore, June 29, 2019. Photo by Feline Lim/Reuters

pastor at Faith Community Baptist Church, picked up the baton. Khong said: "It is a message to LGBT activists that there is a conservative majority in Singapore who will push back and will not allow them to promote their homosexual lifestyle and liberal ideologies that openly and outrightly contradict our laws, our Government's stated policies, our national core values, and the conservative majority's views on public morality, marriage and family."¹⁰⁵

Still, activists were encouraged by a groundswell of support from younger Singaporeans when decriminalization failed, and note that public opinion is shifting. Some legal progress has also been made. In October 2019, the Religious Harmony Bill listed sexual orientation as grounds to be protected against religiously motivated hate speech, violence, and discrimination. In August 2019, a law protecting against intimate partner violence was changed to include gender neutral wording, thus becoming more inclusive of LGBTIQ people.¹⁰⁶


Pride Against the Odds

Pink Dot, IndigNation and other LGBTIQ events continue despite the continuing criminalization of same-sex relations. Due to strict censorship and public gathering laws they can be "restricted or face surveillance or difficulties with government," says Chong, but are typically allowed to go ahead.¹⁰⁷

Freedom of assembly overall is a primary issue for democracy campaigners in Singapore. Although guaranteed by the Constitution, freedom of assembly can be legally restricted for the

purpose of security and public order. For example, despite the loosening of regulations on public gatherings, police still monitor Pink Dot closely to make sure foreigners are not allowed in, as per the amended 2017 Public Order Act.¹⁰⁸ The 2021 Political Donations Act prohibits foreign funding of any "political association", and outlaws anonymous donations.¹⁰⁹ In these ways, the state tries to keep a lid on protest, seeing it as "against the 'national interest'." LGBTIQ visibility is seen as divisive, and the government's argument is to "let the conservative Singaporeans evolve on this topic."¹¹⁰

Yet Pink Dot and other events continue. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, such events in 2021 will be online. Considering that same-sex relations were not decriminalized last year, but the decision is being appealed, activists will continue to focus on abolishing section 377A of the Penal Code in Pride events this year. "The battle for LGBTI rights will be focused on the 377A constitutional challenge ruling by the courts at the end of this year. There are other initiatives, but, for this year, the limelight will be on 377A."¹¹¹



In August 2019, a law protecting against intimate partner violence was **changed to include gender neutral wording**, thus becoming more inclusive of LGBTIQ people.

Against All Odds New Prides Emerge

Although the first Pride events took place more than 50 years ago, as LGBTIQ communities develop and grow in strength and begin to demand recognition of their rights more publicly, there are new Pride events taking place around the world. According to Outright's findings, at least eight new countries hosted Pride events in the last three years.¹¹² In many cases, they are signs of increased liberalization in the respective societies, as human rights become ever more entrenched, or of the uneven application of those human rights across society. The emergence of Pride events can also be indicative of the growth of a stronger, more resilient LGBTIQ movement that feels it is able to take on the challenge of organizing Pride and demanding the rights of LGBTIQ people to be recognized and protected.

Whether Pride is a success, or not, may be one of the most visible indications of the health of the democracies they are organized in, as they indicate whether or not a state is willing to uphold the right to freedom of assembly and expression of a marginalized, sometimes hated community.

In 2018, Pride was staged for the first time in Eswatini, Guyana,¹¹³ and Antarctica, among other places. In Antarctica ten people working at McMurdo Station planned a small Pride. "We may be thousands of miles away from any major celebration," said one of the participants, "but we can do something."¹¹⁴ Botswana and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) had their first Prides in 2019.

The cases of Eswatini and Botswana in Southern Africa offer an interesting counterpoint in how democracy versus colonial and traditional forms of government can respond to LGBTIQ equality. In Eswatini, which is covered in this briefing paper, an absolute monarchy has made some moves towards establishing a constitutional order that would give full human rights to all citizens, but the monarchy's insistence on maintaining absolute powers has vitiated any moves towards liberalization. Yet Pride was held for the first time in Eswatini in 2018, and, despite social backlash, and despite continuing criminalization of same-sex relations, encountered no state opposition. In Botswana, by contrast, a country that has been a functional democracy since independence in 1966, only decriminalized same-sex relations as a result of a ruling by the High Court



Participants of Pink Dot, Singapore, June 29, 2019. Photo by Feline Lim/ Reuters

in 2019 – a ruling which the State filed an appeal for. The first Pride followed only after decriminalization in 2020.

There may be social reasons for this contrast, as well as geographic and demographic ones. The relationship of each country to South Africa, their largest and most dominant neighbor, with which there are extensive social and economic ties, is also relevant: after the end of apartheid, South Africa liberalized considerably, becoming a constitutional state and, in 1996, delivering legal protection from discrimination for LGBTIQ people. This has had a knock-on effect in both Eswatini, which is entirely surrounded by South Africa, and Botswana, which is off to one side. The new Prides in Europe – those of North Macedonia in 2018 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2019 – show that the space for activism demanding LGBTIQ equality, and a pushback against social prejudice, can come upon the heels of state liberalization. Bosnia and Herzegovina, covered in this briefing paper, emerged splintered from the wars of independence and ethnic rivalry that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. There is still considerable social prejudice against LGBTIQ people, which varies across the different cantons of the federation, but the liberalization of the federal authorities, partly driven by the country's drive to join the European Union, has opened a space for LGBTIQ activists to work for their full human rights. Activists have worked in less visible ways for over a decade, but the Pride staged in 2019 is a visible symbol of progress to date.

Similarly, Pride events became possible in North Macedonia after the defeat of the conservative Christian nationalist party that had ruled the country for 11 years. In a manner not unlike the actions of the state in Russia and Poland, the party “stirred homophobic sentiments as a way to divert public attention from political and economic failures” and presented itself as “defenders of traditional morality”, opposing rights and protections for LGBTIQ people. Irena Cvetkovic of North Macedonia's National Network on Fight Against Homophobia and Transphobia said that “a very difficult period has passed for the LGBT community and we consider that now is the moment for a Pride Parade”.¹¹⁵ Newly elected politicians have been supportive of LGBTIQ initiatives, enabling visible, public Pride events to take place.

The cases of new Prides highlighted in this briefing, with the exception of Eswatini, show that an emphasis on human rights goes hand in hand with increased state liberalization and governments that do not depend on nationalistic ideologies. Eswatini, though still a traditionalist African monarchy, is perhaps liberalizing by stealth – or, at least, is not willing to be seen as repressive in contrast to neighbouring countries that have moved further along the road to full democratization. LGBTIQ activists have taken advantage of the liberalization in their respective contexts to visibly affirm the existence of LGBTIQ people, and push for recognition and protection of LGBTIQ equality.

Pride Born in Eswatini

Human Rights of LGBTIQ People in Eswatini

Eswatini¹¹⁶ is a small, land-locked country in Africa with a population of 1.1 million people. Same-sex relations are criminalized under the criminal code left over from British Colonial rule. Since gaining independence in 1968, Eswatini has been an absolute monarchy, one of the last in the world, with limited powers of the Parliament.

Societal attitudes towards LGBTIQ people are largely negative. Hate speech is also prominent. The King has called LGBTIQ people “satanic,” while Prime Minister Barnabas Dlamini described homosexuality as “an abnormality and sickness.”¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, in 2012, an MP called for a law against the “anti-social” behavior of LGBTIQ people.¹¹⁸

Melusi Simelane, one of the organizers of the first Pride in Eswatini, described the impact of this social attitude as follows: “There is persecution each and every day. We are harassed, we are violently abused, we are emotionally abused.”¹¹⁹

Beginnings of Pride

Despite being faced with an environment of criminalization and negative societal attitudes, local activists, led by civil society group Rock of Hope, organized Eswatini’s first Pride in 2018. This was a challenge; organizers faced resistance from the state in allowing the event to proceed, and struggled to find venues willing to host Pride.¹²⁰

People take part in Eswatini’s (formerly known as Swaziland) first Pride in Mbabane on June 30, 2018. Photo by Mongi Zulu/AFP via Getty Images

There was strong opposition among the public too. One letter to the editor published in the Sunday Observer newspaper accused organizers of the march of promoting “paedophilia and bestiality,” and called on the authorities to “cancel this gay Pride until Emaswati have decided that they will choose this unnatural behaviour.”¹²¹

Despite strong and well-organized opposition, and administrative barriers, the first Pride took place in Mbabane in July 2018. The event included a march in the Prince of Wales Stadium, followed by a picnic, stage entertainment, and an after-party. It was attended by several hundred people. Melusi Simelane, one of the organizers, recalls: “We weren’t expecting so many people. The stadium was so full!”¹²² Considering the



restrictive political environment, strong LGBTIQ-phobia, and active opposition to the organizing of Pride in Eswatini, the fact that the event not only went ahead, but was attended by hundreds of people, was remarkable.

The increased visibility of LGBTIQ people at the first Pride met with disapproval from Christian conservatives. At a dialogue on cultural and religious matters held soon after Pride 2018, attended by more than 20 church ministers, the “pastors made it clear that they cannot allow gay people to ‘flaunt’ their behavior in front of congregants” – referring to LGBTIQ visibility, coming out, and Pride.¹²³

Pride Returns

After the success of the first Pride event, Pride in Eswatini was organized again in 2019 and 2020. As in 2018, organizers found it hard to secure a venue. “This threatened to jeopardize the Public Order Act application for a march because a venue is a prerequisite,” says Dlamini.¹²⁴ In the end, however, with the help of allies, a venue was secured and Pride was approved.

Despite some opposition, the second Pride faced fewer barriers, and participants felt more empowered and safe to be there. “People did not fear holding the banner and being part of the frontline. Moreover, looking at how people came in numbers to celebrate, it just goes to show that they had less concerns and worries.”¹²⁵

During the march, participants strived to show their intersecting identities by singing traditional songs. “This was meant to showcase how we are proud to be queer and proud of being Swati,” says Dlamini. She also commented that there was an almost equal balance of LGBTIQ-identifying participants and allies, showing growing levels of acceptance and inclusivity. Following the march, Pride events continued into the afternoon at a theatre, with poetry sessions and performances by local artists. The evening concluded with Rainbow Awards, which recognised the work of activists.¹²⁶

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, “Pride was a bit different.”¹²⁷ Similarly to other parts of the world, Pride in Eswatini was held online. “We held a virtual Pride and gave people a semi-live experience. Some performances were previously recorded, and some were live.” Despite not being able to gather physically, organizers felt that the event was a success. Earlier Prides had attracted a few hundred people, while the virtual event attracted over 1,800 viewers during the main event.¹²⁸

Future of Pride in Eswatini

Organizers believe that Pride in Eswatini has been incredibly successful. This is especially true considering that the country is an absolute monarchy in which democratic processes such as freedom of expression and assembly are not guaranteed, and that same-sex relations remain criminalized. Three Prides in a row have been allowed to go ahead, with some opposition from the public, religious leaders and politicians, but without major attacks or incidents at the actual events. Consequently, Pride is reaching its goals to achieve “freedom of expression, inclusivity and recognition of the LGBTIQ populace. Pride has played a major role in stimulating the conversation [about LGBTIQ issues] in many corners of the country. With Pride, many other stakeholders started to be aware of the importance of such a discussion.”¹²⁹

To build on this momentum, activists are planning to continue organizing Pride events in Eswatini, though likely again in a virtual format in 2021. Dlamini highlights: “Pride provides a much-needed platform to raise awareness. And awareness serves as the first step towards decriminalization [of same-sex relations].”¹³⁰

Pride Kicks Off in Bosnia & Herzegovina

Pride in the Region

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), held its first Pride in the capital, Sarajevo, in September 2019, making it the last country in the Balkan region to organize a Pride event. North Macedonia had held a Pride weekend the previous year and other Pride events have been taking place in the region for decades. In 2020, for instance, Ljubljana in Slovenia celebrated the 20th anniversary of the first protest action in that city, which led to Pride a year later.¹³¹ Zagreb in Croatia will have its 20th Pride in September 2021.¹³² Bucharest in Romania has had Pride annually since 2004, and Belgrade in Serbia has had Pride since 2001, though throughout the years organizers have experienced interruptions, and even cancellations, due to threats of violence, or even actual violence, such as in 2010.¹³³

Societal Prejudice

The key challenge to organizing Pride events in BiH prior to 2019 is precisely what Pride events aim to combat – deep-seated societal prejudice against LGBTIQ people. When a march was finally able to go ahead in 2019, the lack of acceptance of LGBTIQ people in society was even more palpable. An event purportedly representing the “traditional family” was organized to coincide with Pride. Hate speech was also on the rise during Pride.

Dajana Bakić, from the Organizing Committee of the BiH Pride March, elaborates: “Usually in times of Pride marches, and when LGBTIQ people and issues are most visible in public (in marking LGBTIQ days, festivals, etc), there is more backlash in the form of hate speech and violence. Hate speech and threats are an everyday occurrence on social media. Generally, Bosnian-Herzegovinian society is quite negative towards the LGBTIQ community.”¹³⁴ Moreover, hateful slogans and nationalist symbols were painted on buildings across the city, and hate was also being spouted by public

figures and politicians. The secretary general of a basketball team posted a hateful message to the winners of the female basketball finals, and Adna Pandžić, the Democratic Front mayoral candidate of Novo Sarajevo and the Citizens Alliance called Pride “a shameful march”.¹³⁵

Domestic and Family Violence

Domestic and family violence directed at LGBTIQ people is prevalent in BiH.¹³⁶ Consequently, another reason which prevented Pride from being organized sooner, was a perceived reluctance of community members to attend such a public event for fear of violence, and ostracization. “Invisibility, isolation, lack of recognition, exclusion, and violence, in both the private and the public spheres, are the biggest problems for the LGBTIQ population in BiH,” says Bakić. “Most LGBTIQ people decide against revealing their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics to their families and friends for fear of violence and rejection. The widespread homo/bi/transphobia, patriarchy, sexism, gender inequality and lack of interest on the part of institutions to actively combat violence and inequality are the main reasons for the invisibility of LGBTIQ people.”¹³⁷

Although Pride marches and events aim to challenge these inequalities, affirm the existence of LGBTIQ people, and challenge discrimination and exclusion, it can take time for communities to feel ready to expose themselves to the inevitable backlash that accompanies becoming more visible.

State Obstacles to Pride

Despite fear of violence, reluctance of community members to come out, and pervasive societal prejudice against LGBTIQ people, activists in BiH had attempted to organize Pride in Sarajevo in 2017 and

2018, but encountered administrative obstacles. “Before organizing such an event,” says Dajana Bakić, speaking for the Organizing Committee of the BiH Pride March, “organizers need to request permission(s) from the ministries, and they didn’t answer in the time specified by law, so the organizers couldn’t do it. Instead, the protest was held as a ‘spontaneous’ gathering.”

Other ways that authorities can restrict marches, and have done in other parts of BiH, is through administrative barriers, which reflects levels of discrimination among local authorities. Barriers which activists have faced include demands for additional security to be provided by organizers to protect participants, the costs of which can be high. Authorities “can also decide to deny the use of streets and other public spaces for a march,” said Bakić, indicating a range of bureaucratic obstacles organizers have to overcome.

Covid Difficulties in 2020

Bakić calls BiH’s first Pride “the most important political event in BiH in 2019.” It attracted about 3,000 people. Plans for a second were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A large march was not possible, so organizers took a creative approach and organized many smaller actions and advocacy activities in public spaces. On the day of Pride, they organized

a “Car Pride Ride”. In this “Pride on Four Wheels”, participants drove through Sarajevo, “waving rainbow flags, honking horns and chanting slogans from their cars. The route was secured by the police.”¹³⁸ Smaller actions in public spaces were held in local communities including Tuzla, Banja Luka, Prijedor and Mostar.¹³⁹

Progress and Future of Pride

Pride in BiH, despite being in its infancy, has already led to significant change. It has “definitely opened up space for LGBTIQ visibility”. Concretely, a National Action Plan for the Equality of LGBTIQ people was initiated in the year Pride began in BiH, there is progress in advocating for changes to the laws on public assembly, and, an initiative to introduce partnership legislation in the Federation of BiH has been started.¹⁴⁰ Following a request from civil society organization Sarajevo Open Centre, in 2020 the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees “announced that it plans to include 8 September, the date of the first Pride march in Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the list of important dates related to human rights.”¹⁴¹ Moreover, in early 2020 the canton of Sarajevo adopted a Gender Action Plan that is inclusive of LGBTIQ people. “The plan aims to establish procedures for cooperation between the police and the Prosecutor’s Office on hate crimes, protection in the area of sexual and reproductive health, and measures to make policies trans-inclusive.”¹⁴² The plan should, in theory, provide an avenue for more effective cooperation in organizing Pride events in this canton in the future.

While “the Pride march is among the most important and influential acts of activism that accelerate positive change and advance the quality of life of the LGBTIQ population,” activists firmly believe that activities need to take place year round. In 2021, partly due to the pandemic, activists will do just that – a march will not be held, instead a variety of smaller online and offline events will take place throughout the year.¹⁴³

Participants are seen during the first Pride parade in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina September 8, 2019. Photo by Dado Ruvic/Reuters



Pride in Trinidad & Tobago

Decriminalization of Same-Sex Relations

Trinidad and Tobago used to criminalize same-sex relations under colonial “buggery” laws. In 2018, the High Court of Justice decriminalized same-sex relations, making Trinidad & Tobago one of the first countries in the region to shed this colonial legacy.

The case was brought in 2017 by Jason Jones, a Trinidadian performer who challenged the constitutionality of Sections 13 and 16 in the Sexual Offences Act.¹⁴⁴ Justice Devindra Rampersad ruled in Jones’s favour, saying that the sections of the Sexual Offences Act were not “reasonably justifiable in a society that has a proper respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual.” The judge described the case as being “about the inalienable rights of a citizen” under the country’s constitution, affirming that “human dignity is a basic and inalienable right recognised worldwide in all democratic societies ...”¹⁴⁵

Some public antipathy remains towards LGBTIQ people, and there are no explicit legal protections. However, the LGBTIQ community is enjoying greater visibility, and growing levels of acceptance in society, enabling a Pride event to also be staged in recent years.¹⁴⁶

Pride Kicks Off

Although same-sex relations were criminalized until recently, indirectly serving as a barrier to public events and advocacy for LGBTIQ people, LGBTIQ community events in Trinidad and Tobago “date back at least 30 years”, says Joshua Ryan Min Lee, the director of Pride TT. “They began as community parties and other small outreach events. Event coordinators would have taken on brave risks in coordinating these efforts due to the social atmosphere.” The events were not public, and were aimed specifically at the community, as opposed to advocacy efforts, “but they were wildly successful”, Lee adds.¹⁴⁷

After the High Court ruled to decriminalize same-sex relations, an opening appeared to organize something more public, affirming the existence of LGBTIQ people and pushing, more visibly, for LGBTIQ equality. Lee highlights that “Pride celebrations took on another incarnation, in later years, as a community festival under an organization called IAmOne.”¹⁴⁸

Pride was launched in 2018. “The Pride celebrations, stylized as a festival of cross-sectional events, have taken place annually with a set program. From 2018 to 2020, the festival continued to establish platforms for community visibility and sought to engage national agencies in support of LGBTIQ persons,” says Joshua Ryan Min Lee. The festival is national, with events in different regions in the country, engaging LGBTIQ community members and ensuring visibility across Trinidad and Tobago. “We’d have parties in South Trinidad, Talkshops in the East, and a week of workshops on the island of Tobago. The Pride Parade remains the only event of its kind, in the city of Port of Spain.”¹⁴⁹

At the time of decriminalization, 300 evangelicals marched to support keeping and enforcing the “buggery law”. ...Seeing this “ignited a new fire” in the LGBTIQ community, increasing support for LGBTIQ organizations, activism and Pride.”
– Joshua Ryan Min Lee

Since 2018, a non-profit organization has been responsible for strategizing, managing and executing the festival. In 2019 it was registered as Pride TT.

Although some negative societal attitudes about LGBTIQ people persist, activists also note that acceptance is growing. Some hate speech among politicians is present, and political will for LGBTIQ equality is lacking, but state repression has not been documented. Consequently

Pride events have not only been able to go ahead unhindered, but activists have even experienced effective collaboration with authorities.

“We’ve been able to stage the festival within the country’s legal framework and no one has challenged our right to do so. The Port of Spain City Corporation promptly approves requests for permissions for use of public spaces. The police service is also extremely collaborative. We have had several past ministers, politicians, the Mayor of Port of Spain, ambassadors and other officials attend Pride celebrations, particularly our Fair and Parade,” says Joshua Ryan Min Lee.¹⁵⁰

At the time of decriminalization, 300 evangelicals marched to support keeping and enforcing the “buggery law”. Lee says that seeing this “ignited a new fire” in the LGBTIQ community, increasing support for LGBTIQ organizations, activism and Pride.

The counter-protests witnessed at the time of decriminalization have not followed Pride. Pride events have proceeded without aggression or large counter-protests, beyond a few social media comments and the arrest of two counter-protestors. Some participants have been outed to family and friends due to media presence at events, and photos and videos being captured. “We’ve had reports of a small number of persons who have appeared in festival pictures being victimized by their families or employers, but our LGBTIQ organizations have been on the front lines to support those victims.”¹⁵¹


Pride Goes Hybrid

Like elsewhere in the world, Trinidad and Tobago had strict regulations around the COVID-19 pandemic, and Pride moved to a virtual format. There were Talk Shops for the community, on issues such as health and wellness and youth mentoring, as well as other events. A wide audience was engaged by means of social media.

“We’ve been able to stage the festival within the country’s legal framework and no one has challenged our right to do so.”
– Joshua Ryan Min Lee

Joshua Ryan Min Lee says: “The festival has been a massive success for the community. We engaged over 3,000 persons throughout the events, with our virtual Parade garnering over 500 participants. This is extremely significant in the Trinidad and Tobago context, a country with a population of less than 1,4 million, where a lot of our community still deals with marginalization and fear and is therefore predominantly hidden.”¹⁵²

In future years Pride TT aims to have the Pride festival become a staple in the calendar of Trinidad and Tobago’s cultural events. The group is aiming for “continued development of community visibility” as well as growing networks, and progress towards achieving legal protections for LGBTIQ people. Specifically, the groups is keen on explicitly adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the Equal Opportunity Act, to grant LGBTIQ people protection from discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere.¹⁵³



The first annual Pride Arts Festival takes place in 2018 in the city of Port of Spain. Photo by Sean Drakes/Getty Images

Sri Lanka Pride Takes Big Strides

Pride Grows in Colombo

Despite criminalization of same-sex relations in Sri Lanka, activists in Sri Lanka kicked off a Pride movement with a private precursor event in 2005. It started with a party, says Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, executive director of the non-profit Equal Ground, at a discotheque called My Kind of Place: “We had a drag show as the cabaret for the party! It was so much fun. So much so that the next year we felt we could go a bit further.”¹⁵⁴ Indeed, with every subsequent year activists have gone further. Now Pride includes a queer film festival, a rainbow kite festival on the beach, theatrical performances and workshops for journalists, as well as family and friends of LGBTIQ people, and more. And parties – “You can’t have Pride without parties!” says Flamer-Caldera.¹⁵⁵

Because of restrictive legislation, a Pride march as such is not possible, but, in 2017, activists hired a double decker bus without a roof and drove around the city of Colombo waving flags, playing music, and holding placards... “They wouldn’t let us march but we could make as big a noise on a bus as if we were marching.”¹⁵⁶

An Outdated Law

In Sri Lanka, same-sex relations are criminalized by virtue of Sections 365 and 365A of the Sri Lanka Penal Code left over from British colonial rule. Although these laws are seldom enforced, “they can make life miserable,” says Flamer-Caldera. Not only does the law cast LGBTIQ people as second class citizens and criminals, it also provides legal cover for police harassment of LGBTIQ people.

Such harassment is common. On one occasion the police raided a hotel room with several men inside. They found condoms, and “put two and two together to make 85” claiming that the men had had sex or

were going to have sex. The men were arrested. One of those detained was a Swedish national, but was denied diplomatic counsel.¹⁵⁷

Police are also known to use inhuman treatment when dealing with LGBTIQ people. According to civil society organization Equal Ground, “Sri Lankan authorities have subjected at least seven people to forced anal examinations since 2017 in an attempt to provide proof of homosexual conduct ...”¹⁵⁸ Such examinations are recognized to be tantamount to torture, they constitute sexual abuse, and do nothing to prove a person’s homosexuality.¹⁵⁹ Police also target known activists, including Flamer-Caldera. “We had the criminal investigations department (CID) surveilling me and others.”¹⁶⁰

Police targeting of LGBTIQ people and activists leads to mistrust of the police, impunity for abuse and harassment of LGBTIQ people, and results in LGBTIQ people having no one to turn to when crimes are committed against them.

Activists are working to change the law, but this is challenging. “Because these laws were enacted in 1883, and we have a ‘savings law’ clause in the constitution,” says Flamer-Caldera, “the laws were already in place when we had constitutional change in 1978. So they cannot be changed by challenging them in a court of law. They can only be changed through Parliament, and that’s so difficult. But attitudes have changed, so hopefully...” Two presidential candidates in the last elections in 2019 supported full human rights for LGBTIQ people. Unfortunately “neither of them won,” says Flamer-Caldera, but “they spoke about it”.¹⁶¹

Shifting Societal Attitudes

Despite little to no political will to recognize the rights of LGBTIQ people, and police targeting of the community, societal views are becoming more progressive. In two recent studies activists found that “most people felt LGBTIQ people should be given their rights and shouldn’t be criminalized; that they are people too.”¹⁶²

The shifting public opinion could be the result of increased civil society activity. Since 2015, when the authoritarian regime ended and a more liberal government came to power, LGBTIQ people started organizing more, and being more visible. Flamer-Caldera emphasizes that “there has been a growing number of groups and organizations forming all over the country – whether they are just virtual or meeting physically. This is because a space has been made for them. With virtual opportunities it has become a tidal wave of queer awareness, and that has been absolutely fantastic for us.”¹⁶³

Civil society groups have worked on a number of initiatives, including sensitization of the media and diversity and inclusion programs with businesses. Public campaigns have been positive, as Flamer-Caldera says: “We ran an ‘Allies for Equality’ campaign and we had more than 100 videos of people declaring, in all three languages, ‘I am a proud ally.’ We had one video of an older Tamil gentleman saying, ‘I am a proud ally of my gay son’ (in Tamil), and that video just went viral. That resonated with people.”¹⁶⁴

This increased visibility and activity, including through Pride events, and ever more allies, have resulted in a shift in public opinion.

Covid-19 and the Future

In 2020, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, physical events were not possible, as such, a Pride event was not held in person. However, “we decided to be innovative, and instead held a series of virtual events, including talks, a photo competition, music and dance competitions.”¹⁶⁵ The virtual format had the benefit of reaching more people than a physical event would have done. Whereas physical Pride events in Colombo have historically attracted about 500 to 600 people, virtual Pride reached half a million.¹⁶⁶ In this respect, the virtual nature of Pride in 2020 extended its reach considerably, and Pride in 2021 will be similar, with the involvement of LGBTIQ groups across the country. “It’s going to be virtual, but a collaborative Pride. We will be able to take it island-wide.”¹⁶⁷



People take part in the Rainbow Pride Party in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on June 23, 2019. Akila Jayawardana/NurPhoto via Getty Images

The Impact of COVID-19 on Prides

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had numerous implications for the LGBTIQ community, amplifying vulnerabilities and exclusion experienced by LGBTIQ people on a daily basis, and also impacting efforts to fight for change. Outright's report "Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ people" documented LGBTIQ people experiencing a devastation of livelihoods, higher rates of domestic violence, amplified challenges accessing healthcare, increasing mental health issues, as well as scapegoating for the crisis and a threat to the survival of LGBTIQ organizations.¹⁶⁸ Plans for Pride events around the world also took a toll. Most Prides, and other in person events, had to be cancelled because of pandemic-related restrictions, lockdowns, and for public safety. Prides are the most visible element of the global LGBTIQ movement, so this was a tough loss, because each year Pride events celebrate progress, push for change, and protest ongoing violations of the rights of LGBTIQ people.

However, the LGBTIQ movement is resilient and creative. LGBTIQ communities have plenty of experience in adapting to new circumstances, and demanding recognition of rights in ever new ways. The unprecedented conditions caused by COVID-19 and surrounding containment measures lead to tremendous creativity among Pride organizers. Many Prides went ahead, but virtually – in many cases achieving a wider reach precisely because they were online, accessible from anywhere, and did not require the physical presence of Pride-goers in a public space. Moreover, virtual Prides could take place safely even in countries which criminalize same-sex relations, or restrict the freedom of expression and assembly of LGBTIQ communities.

The following are several examples of Pride events which took place virtually in 2020.

Global Pride

Global Pride aimed to serve as a space for “the LGBTI+ community around the world to come together and celebrate diversity and equality during these challenging times.”¹⁶⁹ The primary organizers, the European Pride Organizers Association and InterPride, wanted to create this space because the Covid-19 pandemic had “had a devastating impact on Pride organizations worldwide with hundreds of marches and events cancelled or postponed.” The organizers certainly succeeded in creating space for the global community – they estimate that more than 57 million viewers from all around the world tuned in at some point during the 24-hour online event.

The participation of organizers of Pride was also significant. More than 500 Pride organizers around the world submitted about 1,000 pieces of content, which were added into the video stream. The event also focused on the pivotal role of black trans people in the Pride movement and called for an end to racism. Speakers included Carlos Alvarado Quesada, the President of Costa Rica, where equal marriage was recently legalized; Erna Solberg, the prime minister of Norway; Xavier Bettel, the Prime Minister of Luxembourg; and First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon.¹⁷⁰

Natalie Thompson, a chair of the Global Pride event, said: “What makes Global Pride very unique is that this is the first Pride of its kind where we are really focused on bringing the entire LGBT global community together.”¹⁷¹



Pride Afrique

Another notable virtual Pride held in August 2020, was a specifically pan-African celebration of Pride – Pride Afrique. The event was aimed at LGBTIQ people and allies all across Africa, a continent in which over half the countries still criminalize same-sex relations. The broadcast was spread across three days, with non-continuous events going out at different times. According to participating organization The Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, it “explor[ed] the diversity of the LGBTIQ+ lived experiences of queer persons in Africa and the diaspora ... Pride Afrique 2020 incorporated multiple levels of storytelling that were structural, relational and personal while creating a multi-dimensional narrative for the LGBTIQ+ community.”¹⁷²

Speakers at the event included Botswana’s former President Festus Mogae and John Amaechi, the first openly LGBTIQ NBA player, as well as artists, performers and activists from Africa. Organizer Kehinde Bademosi, from Nigeria, reflected, “more people are online due to the coronavirus and so we thought it was a good time to reach out virtually

to the LGBTIQ people living in Africa ... We are doing this because right now in Africa, many countries are criminalizing LGBTIQ people and we want to send a strong message to them that they are not alone and show them that there is a community where they belong.”

At the start of the event, Bademosi noted that the broadcast material would continue to be available to viewers after the live event was over, creating a resource for LGBTIQ people: “It’s not just about what is happening over the next three days. I think more people will see it in the days, weeks and months to come – we are leaving the LGBTIQ message in the cloud for all Africans.”¹⁷³



Durban Pride Festival, on June 29, 2019 in Durban. Photo by Rajesh Jantilal/AFP via Getty Images

Global Black Pride

Global Black Pride was set up virtually not only in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the global spotlight on racism and police brutality in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in the US, and the wave of Black Lives Matter protests which swept across cities around the world. The event gave space to black, indigenous and people of color in the LGBTIQ community to come together and celebrate their intersecting identities. “We wanted to create a space for Black Pride and for people across the globe to connect,” says Micheal Ighodaro, an organizer of Global Black Pride.¹⁷⁴

A mix of pre-recorded content and live broadcast, Global Black Pride connected organizations and viewers on four continents. It was held on July 10 2020, just after Pride Month. The organizers got to potential viewers through

organizational contacts and social media: “Right now, because Grindr is one of our sponsors, we use their YouTube page, which has 500,000 subscribers, and we work with our individual host countries, and use social media to promote it. Grand marshals try to get people interested and to tune in.”

Ighodaro says: “What makes this Pride interesting is that we have no corporate sponsorship. It’s more real. It’s just people coming together to create a platform for themselves, to showcase their communities.” Looking forward to the 2021 iteration of Global Black Pride, Ighodaro says “It’s going to be a mixture of entertainment and real life issues.”¹⁷⁵



Pride of Africa, Johannesburg

Johannesburg, South Africa, which was the site of the first Pride march on the African continent in 1990, had to go virtual in 2020 during its 30th anniversary year. Recently rebranded as Pride of Africa, Johannesburg Pride also spread in the form of African Pride Month, using the whole month of October to stage virtual events and reach out to LGBTIQ people all over the region and the continent. Kaye Ally, chairperson of Johannesburg Pride, said that “all of the Pride of Africa events were held, but on a digital platform, throughout the month of October (African Pride Month). The month has gained tremendous momentum over the last few years ... The events throughout the month of October included Gaborone Pride, conferences, award ceremonies and more.”¹⁷⁶

Ally noted that “before Covid-19, we were seeing another trend: an increasing number of visitors from other African countries attending and supporting the [Pride] event [in Johannesburg] in recent years. South Africa is widely praised as a model for Africa (and the rest of the world) in terms of human rights – including the

rights of sexual and gender minorities.”¹⁷⁷ Going virtual in 2020 helped to bring those people to an African Pride event that could have been held in only a very few other countries in Africa. “Pride of Africa developed its own LGBTIQ identity for Queer African people,” said Ally. “We took a look at the flags of 54 African countries ... Common shapes and forms were identified and the rainbow colours were added. The now shapes and forms were used to build the unique brand identity: Pride of Africa.”¹⁷⁸

Many other locations went the virtual route in 2020, as detailed in this briefing paper. Some, despite the ban on public gatherings, found unusual ways to make their presence felt in their cities, such as the “Pride on Four Wheels” in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which participants drove through the city waving rainbow flags and singing from their cars. Many Pride events have already been, and will continue to be held virtually in 2021, depending on the state of the pandemic in individual countries.

Conclusion

Pride events are the most visible element of the global movement for LGBTIQ equality, and a moment in time when the spotlight shines on LGBTIQ issues. They take many forms, and sizes, in some places being more celebratory and marking progress to date, in others taking the shape of protest and demanding recognition and protection of rights. By this point in time, Pride and related events are held in 102 countries – more than half the countries in the world. However, even in places with a history of Pride events, they are under fire in many places. Whether called Pride, or taking names such as Equality Marches (in Poland) or Queer Cultural Festivals (in South Korea), these events give visibility to LGBTIQ people, push against social prejudice and challenge repressive state measures and call for greater equality for LGBTIQ people. They are an absolutely crucial element of the movement.

Further testament to the importance of Pride is the fact that every year a new Pride event is held somewhere. In 2018 North Macedonia held its first Pride weekend, in 2019 Botswana held its first march, in 2020 the first Global Black Pride took place. As opportunities arise due to a liberalization of the respective state, or strengthening of the LGBTIQ movement, activists take the opportunity to affirm the existence of LGBTIQ people, challenge harmful and misleading perceptions about the community, and demand recognition and protection of our rights. According to Outright's findings, eight countries hosted their first Pride events in the last three years.

Unfortunately, in too many places, whether due to laws which continue to criminalize same-sex relations, other repressive legislation, limited capacity of local LGBTIQ communities, or active persecution of LGBTIQ people, Pride events can not take place. This is reflective of the continuing challenges facing the LGBTIQ movement on the road to achieving equality.

Beyond LGBTIQ equality, Pride events serve as a litmus test for democracies. Pride events are a manifestation of the freedom of assembly. This is a basic human right available to all regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. It is not an absolute right, and can be limited for, for example, national security concerns, but not for arbitrary reasons such as public opinion or LGBTIQ-phobia. As such, whether or not a state allows and protects a marginalized, often hated community to hold an event such as Pride is indicative of the health of their democracy.

This briefing paper shows that Pride can take various forms, and that it plays out somewhat differently in different countries. We have noted the countries where Pride is under fire, as well as those in which Pride is emerging as a new social movement, showing that LGBTIQ people are innovative and determined to claim their place as citizens, with full human rights, in the social body.

This briefing aimed to show an overview of trends in the Pride movement for LGBTIQ equality around the world, and to provide insight into Prides facing backlash, and new Prides taking shape. We intend to publish a more comprehensive report covering Prides globally in 2022.

Endnotes

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Outright International
216 East 45th Street, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10017
T +1 212 430 6054 • E comms@outrightinternational.org
outrightinternational.org

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