Landscape Analysis Executive Summary

Global LGBTQI+ Inclusive Democracy and Empowerment Initiative (GLIDE)

synergia

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The global decline in democracy parallels increasing restrictions on LGBTQI+ advocacy and rights. Anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and policies often serve as a warning sign of further democratic backsliding and lay the groundwork for laws that infringe on all citizens' rights. LGBTQI+ individuals and communities are often the first to experience the negative impact of eroding democracies and are often the first line of defense. Despite the vital role democratic systems play in the protection and promotion of LGBTQI+ rights, in too many countries, LGBTQI+ people face significant barriers to democratic engagement. The lack of resources and capacity of many LGBTQI+ organizations undermine the movement's ability to push back on shrinking civic space and effectively advocate for inclusive democracy. In response, Outright International, Synergía – Initiatives for Human Rights, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), is implementing the Global LGBTQI+ Inclusive Democracy and Empowerment (GLIDE) Initiative which seeks to fill these resource and capacity gaps and disrupt democratic backsliding and attacks on human rights by putting LGBTQI+ communities at the helm of democratic initiatives.

To inform the funding and partnership priorities of the GLIDE Initiative, IFES, with support from Outright and Synergía, conducted a landscape analysis. This executive summary provides an overview of the key findings and recommendations from the analysis, including the state of LGBTQI+ people's involvement in political, civic, and democratic governance and the barriers and opportunities to increase the LGBTQI+ community's participation and engagement in governance bodies. Data collection for the landscape analysis took place between early February and mid-May 2023 and consisted of a desk review, an online survey, which yielded 168 responses, and 25 semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs).

LGBTQI+ rights and the status of democracy

The story of LGBTQI+ rights over the last two decades has generally been positive. Approximately 20 countries decriminalized same-sex conduct in the last 20[1] years, 33 countries across the Americas, Europe, and Asia institutionalized the recognition of same-sex marriage,[2] and in 2022 at least 105 countries held Pride events.[3] The levels of acceptance of LGBTQI+ people have steadily increased since 1980,[4] while the number of LGBTQI+ rights protecting countries continues to increase, albeit slowly.[5]

This progress stands in stark contrast to the broader downward trend for democracy, documented most recently in the 2023 Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM) report, which noted, among other dire findings, that "[a]dvances in global levels of democracy made over the last 35 years have been wiped out"; 72 percent of the world's population lived in autocracies in 2022; and the "level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen is down to 1986 levels."[6] Despite the progress noted above, some 62 countries continue to criminalize same-sex conduct between consenting adults.[7] Within this broader trend are patterns in the ways that governments, at different points on the autocracy-to-democracy continuum, engage on LGBTQI+ issues.

- **Countries that are increasingly autocratic** – In the last two years, governments introduced or passed laws targeting or disproportionately impacting the LGBTQI+ community in Ghana, Hungary, Indonesia, Russia, Tanzania, and Uganda.[8] Many of these laws target the LGBTQI+ community, but have freedom of expression, assembly, and association implications for all citizens, as in Russia, Hungary, and

[1] https://database.ilga.org/criminalisation-consensual-same-sex-sexual-acts

[2] https://features.hrw.org/features/features/marriage_equality/index.html

[3] https://outrightinternational.org/2023-pride-around-world-report

[4] https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/projects/gai/

[5] https://www.fandmglobalbarometers.org/

[6] https://www.v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf

[7] https://internap.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt_laws/#type-of-laws

[8] https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/05/europe/russia-lgbtq-propaganda-law-signed-by-putin-intl/index.html

Indonesia, where a new Penal Code has been deemed to "violate the rights of women, religious minorities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, and undermine rights to freedom of speech and association."[9]

- **Countries that are at least partially democratic** – In Poland, which remains an electoral democracy but experienced one of the steepest declines in democracy in the last decade, the LGBTQI+ community and their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly have been under threat as part of a broader crackdown on civil society, media freedom, and the judiciary since the Law and Justice party came to power in 2015.[10] The LGBTQI+ community has experienced "pressure and interference from the authorities over their peaceful activism, including arrests and criminal prosecutions, some under blasphemy laws."[11]
- **Democratic systems** – In Taiwan, the LGBTQI+ movement secured the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2019 and, in May 2023, the legislature amended the same-sex marriage law to allow same-sex couples to adopt children.[12] At the end of 2022 Barbados took a critical step to uphold its status as a liberal democracy by decriminalizing consensual same-sex conduct, the result of a years-long concerted effort by civil society to address criminalization in the Eastern Caribbean.[13]

Lack of representation and lack of data

The politicization of the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons, including vitriolic language on the part of legislators, candidates, and elected leaders, impacts LGBTQI+ individuals' ability to engage in political and democratic processes. Outright hostility and scapegoating of the LGBTQI+ community that is increasingly a feature of elections mean limited numbers of open LGBTQI+ candidates on the ballot and serving in elected and appointed office at all levels of government.[14] In addition, a significant challenge in this space is a lack of verifiable and accurate data on the number of elected officials who openly identify as members of the LGBTQI+ community.[15]

One thing is certain: leaders around the world do not reflect the full diversity of the people they represent. Only 26.5% of parliamentarians are women and only 59 countries have ever had a woman head of state or government.[16] The consistent pattern of cisgender men serving in elected office sends a powerful message regarding what leadership looks like and reflects an underlying system designed to perpetuate their hold on positions of power. In many places, particularly those where democracy is losing ground, a "patriarchal authoritarian" world view is taking over.[17] As a result, those that attempt to break into leadership roles face an uphill climb, in terms of clientelism and corruption as well as real threats to their safety and well-being.

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[9] https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/08/indonesia-new-criminal-code-disastrous-rights

[10] https://www.v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf

[11] https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/15/poland-rule-law-erosion-harms-women-lgbt-people

[12] https://www.npr.org/2023/05/16/1176433353/taiwan-same-sex-adoption-rights

[13] https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/13/barbados-high-court-decriminalizes-gay-sex

[14]
https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/11/118th-congress-breaks-record-for-lesbian-gay-and-bisexual-representation/#:
https://www.voanews.com/a/middle-east_israel-reaches-record-number-openly-gay-lawmakers/6191537.html;
https://victoryinstitute.org/news/lgbtq-history-made-in-brazil-first-trans-people-elected-to-the-brazilian-congress/

[15] The Queer Politics at Princeton website offers a promising map and downloadable database with information on more than 1,000 LGBTQI+ Members of Parliament from around the world, but the resource does not appear to be operational.

[16] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/03/28/women-leaders-around-the-world/#:~:text=March%2028%2C%202023-,Fewer%20than%20a%20third%20of%20UN%20member,ever%20had%20a%20woman%20leader&text=Women%20currently%20serve%20as%20the,states%20of%20the%20United%20Nations.

[17] https://msmagazine.com/2023/05/15/patriarchy-war-on-women-lgbtq-reproductive-rights/

It is not clear what percentage of voters identify as LGBTQI+ as many electoral management bodies do not collect and/or make publicly available even gender-disaggregated voter registration and participation data.[18] In countries where voters can change their gender marker on their voter ID to their affirmed gender or to a third gender, there is some data available, but historically the numbers represent a significant undercount of the actual transgender population.[19] Of the LGBTQI+ community, transgender people face challenges when voting. In many countries in Latin American, Europe, and Asia, the sex marker on one's official identification dictates the gender-segregated lines or polling stations people must report to on election day. Transgender people who present according to their gender identity may not be willing to queue based on the gender marker on their ID, resulting in cases of people being denied the opportunity to vote due to a mismatch between their gender identity and identification.[20] In countries where people can change the gender marker on their ID, the lack of training and discrimination on the part of election officials and voter registrars has resulted in transgender people illegally being denied their right to vote.

"What does participation mean when your very personhood is put into question and is not recognized at the most basic level?"

Survey Findings

Voting

The survey asked questions about voting and participating in elections, including whether individuals had the identification they needed to vote under their affirmed gender identity.

- 93% of respondents indicated they did have a voter ID card but only 65% indicated having a voter ID that matched their gender identity.
- 80% of respondents reported having voted in an election (national, regional, or local) in the last five years.
- 61% of respondents noted no difficulties with voting, while 32% had some difficulties. With respect to the type of difficulties experienced, 40% noted that voting took too long, 37% indicated they faced violence or harassment from other voters, 33% faced violence or harassment from poll workers, 27% indicated the poll worker would not accept their ID, and 27% indicated they did not know which gender line to stand in.
- 81% of respondents reported that LGBTQI+ people face barriers to voting in their country with 36% characterizing those barriers as significant. Difficulties identified were discrimination (70%), lack of identification that matches their gender identity (68%), violence or fear of violence (66%) and lack of knowledge on their right to vote (48%).

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[18] IFES' ElectionsGuide, the most comprehensive verified election database available online does post gender-disaggregated data by election whenever that information is available: https://www.electionguide.org/

[19] "NADRA Launches Registration Campaign for Transgender-persons" 2021. NADRA. https://www.nadra.gov.pk/nadra-launches-registration-campaign-for-transgender-persons/

[20] https://observaigualdad.jne.gob.pe/documentos/recursos/reportes/VotoTransEleccionesG2016.pdf; https://kathmandupost.com/national/2022/05/12/transgender-people-s-qualms-regarding-the-upcoming-election

Citizen Participation in Democratic Processes

Understanding that citizen engagement and participation in democracy extends well beyond voting in elections, IFES sought information on how LGBTQI+ people around the world view citizen participation.[21]

- 58% respondents stated that citizen participation among LGBTQI+ people is very important while 19% stated it is somewhat important.
- 41% of respondents participate to a great extent, with 29% participating to some extent. Respondents were more likely to carry out formal activities like signing a petition or contacting a public official. Other forms of participation included volunteering for a community project, participating in local public hearing, or taking part in neighborhood or community discussions.
- The data also pointed to an increased emphasis being placed on engagement of LGBTQI+ individuals in local political processes given they already engage in local issues, even in cases where citizen participation is considered not as important.

Political Participation

Respondents were also asked for their views and experiences on more direct political participation.

- 64% of respondents reported they were aware of LGBTQI+ people who had run for office in their country.
- 35% of respondents indicated they would be very willing to run for elected office in their country while 21% chose somewhat willing, 20% chose not very willing, and 23% chose not willing at all.
- With respect to barriers to political participation for LGBTQI+ people – defined broadly as running for office, joining a political party, volunteering for a campaign, or participating in an advocacy campaign – 88% of respondents reported that LGBTQI+ people face significant barriers. Main barriers include discrimination (87%), violence or fear of violence (75%), lack of support from a political party (72%), lack of time and resources (67%), lack of support from friends/family (61%), and lack of information on the process (51%).

Rule of Law

Rule of law is fundamental to democracy and directly impacts people's ability and willingness to participate in their communities and in political and democratic processes. Therefore, the survey asked respondents how they felt about safety and availability of remedy through law enforcement and justice systems. Most of the respondents (73%) strongly or somewhat agreed that they knew where to go for support if they were a victim of crime or harassment, but the majority also reported that they would not go to law enforcement or the courts.

Finally, IFES asked respondents for their views on which initiatives might be most effective to increase LGBTQI+ persons' access to and participation in political processes. While all the options were determined to encourage increased participation "to a great extent" or "to some extent" by at least 80% of respondents, the following were identified as the most useful:

- Increased financial and capacity building support for LGBTQI+ organizations and activists
- A safer environment for LGBTQI+ people to organize

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[21] Citizen participation was described for survey respondents as "Citizen participation is about getting citizens actively involved in public decision-making processes that affect their lives."

- Support from organizations and activists that represent other marginalized groups (women's organizations, organizations for people with disabilities, youth organizations)
- Increased societal acceptance of the LGBTQI+ community
- Increased acceptance of the LGBTQI+ community from friends, family, and community members
- Training for LGBTQI+ people on how to get involved
- Political parties/candidates including initiatives that benefit the LGBTQI+ community in their platforms, speeches, and campaign materials

"The thing that makes queer populations distinct is that there is a fundamental question about whether or not they even exist in the first place...

...The level of the conversation is around whether or not this is even a proper way to exist. Even in democracies, needing to get other people to acknowledge that you exist is the typical tenor of debate."

Key Informant Interview Findings

What is democracy?

The definition and concepts of democracy and democratic governance vary around the world. When asked what democracy means to them, interviewees stated the following:

- The people's ability to choose their representatives/ownership of the political process, governance by the people for the people, the ability to express themselves through elections, tools to work towards nation building

- A system that guarantees personal freedoms, recognition of human rights, the same space and right to speak and exist for all persons/The freedom to just be
- Balance/distribution of power; checks and balances/Rule of law
- Non-discrimination in the distribution of services; Freedom for everyone to be actively engaged and heard without discrimination/ equal and inclusive participation
- Citizens can organize/NGOs can do their work without fear of surveillance
- Listening to minorities and meeting their needs
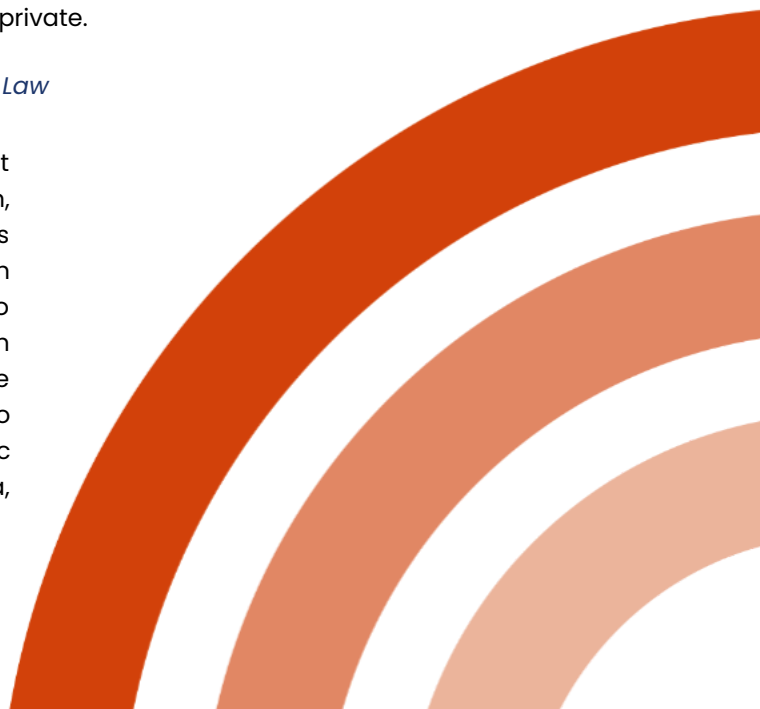- Media freedom, freedom of movement

Interviewees also identified several challenges and barriers to participation, including fear and apathy, particularly in the face of more pressing concerns, such as meeting basic needs. For example, interviewees from Kenya and Tanzania noted that some activism has been done in the past around LGBTQI+ engagement in democratic systems but there is a sense of apathy when it comes to feeling like their vote makes a difference. An interviewee from India noted that LGBTQI+ people don't vote because they have no faith in political parties to represent them. Similar sentiments were shared by interviewees from Cambodia who noted that while they might vote out of a sense of civic obligation, they were hesitant to get involved in anything that might be perceived as political and risk running afoul of the ruling party.

An interviewee from Lebanon noted that voting can be dangerous for members of the LGBTQI+ community, particularly for those facing other forms of marginalization. In Lebanon people must travel to their home village to vote, presenting a barrier for LGBTQI+ people in terms of safety and running up against gender norms where it is inappropriate for women to travel alone. Other barriers include documentation, where, as in Serbia, changing one's documents requires a lengthy court process, medical documentation and, in many cases, encountering transphobic judges.

Other interviewees described their political work as a duty rather than an interest due to situations in which they were essentially forced to take on political work to defend themselves and their community (or, as in the case of education advocates in Hungary, because their work is politicized by others). One interviewee noted that the marriage equality movement in Taiwan brought them and other LGBTQI+ people into politics, and once they saw how a political decision could impact their lives, were more likely to want to participate. In Hungary, more and more LGBTQI+ people are turning away from politics entirely, including voting, and even leaving the country, as the government increasingly targets them with abusive rhetoric. An interviewee from Albania expressed similar discouragement describing the political landscape as "toxic, corrupt, and sometimes violent." For most interviewees, engagement from the government on LGBTQI+ issues are almost exclusively negative, and any support is generally expressed in private.

Attacks on Fundamental Freedoms and Absence of the Rule of Law

Interviews with activists from East Africa highlighted the impact of crackdowns on freedom of assembly and association, including targeting LGBTQI+ individuals and organizations, as fundamental challenges to engaging on LGBTQI+ issues. In both Kenya and Tanzania, LGBTQI+ organizations have had to register as women's empowerment organizations or health organizations to obtain registration. Challenges with the police and the absence of the rule of law, at least as applied to LGBTQI+ persons, is a fundamental barrier to democratic participation and governance. Interviewees from Serbia, Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, Lebanon, Egypt, and Thailand all

noted that the police are a source of harassment and that LGBTQI+ victims who report crimes run the risk of being arrested themselves, outed or blackmailed by the police.

Several interviewees identified judges and the court system as an opportunity for accountability and justice for LGBTQI+ people. However, while court cases have been successful, they are expensive and time consuming. There is a lack of awareness among LGBTQI+ people of their rights, so people may not be aware of their options when they are victims of a crime or experience discrimination. In other countries, lack of training for judges on how to handle bias-motivated violence against LGBTQI+ persons interfere with the court's ability to uphold the rule of law.

Political Transitions Create Both Challenges and Opportunities

Given several recent political transitions and other shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, interviewees noted that disruptive events create both opportunities and risks for increased LGBTQI+ involvement. During the revolution in Lebanon, LGBTQI+ individuals joined the protest movement and took advantage of the opportunity to interact with the new political parties in the increasingly secular space. In Myanmar, one interviewee noted that LGBTQI+ people were at the forefront of coordinating and leading pro-democracy protests and continue to stay engaged and involved in the National Unity Government (NUG), helping to develop a pro-LGBTQI+ platform. At the same time these moments are fleeting and risky. Research shows that after a dramatic regime change such as a revolution, when any new regime is the weakest, those that emerge as the most stable are the ones who employ homophobia the best. Anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment is a powerful way to distract the population, legitimize extralegal actions, and consolidate power.

Needs, Gaps, Challenges, and Opportunities for Investment

Support the development of coordinated strategies to counter the anti-gender movement

The "anti-gender agenda" and its opportunistic use by politicians has spread rapidly around the world. A Hungarian activist noted the infiltration of far-right narratives into women's movements, particularly around transgender issues. Anti-LGBTQI+ leaders are borrowing tactics, rhetoric, and legislative language and collaborating to make their hateful campaigns as successful as possible. Funders, including the GLIDE Initiative, can help provide the space and resources for LGBTQI+ leaders and allies from across sectors (including politicians, academics, religious leaders, members of the media) to collaboratively work to address this common challenge. Practically, this means providing funding and spaces for organizations to convene nationally, regionally, and globally to share experiences, workshop counter-messages, identify allies and test cases, and dedicate time and safe space to attend to this amorphous but existential threat.

Invest in online spaces and prepare activists to effectively leverage technology

Funders, including the GLIDE Initiative, should prioritize support for training and capacity strengthening so LGBTQI+ people and organizations are better equipped to safely engage online; able to identify, track, and counter-message against mis- and disinformation; and prepared to leverage social media and other technology tools to promote democratic and civic engagement. Initiatives may include hackathons to develop cybersecurity tools to protect LGBTQI+ candidates online, social media campaigns to promote the voter registration process, or develop and highlight LGBTQI+ positions of various candidates for elected office. GLIDE should target tech conferences such as RightsCon or partnerships with coalitions such as Design 4 Democracy, to raise the profile of LGBTQI+ related democratic engagement with a tech audience and provide opportunities for LGBTQI+ activists to connect with technology leaders.

Address the lack of national, regional, and global data on LGBTQI+ participation

There is a dearth of quantitative and qualitative data on issues related to LGBTQI+ persons in general, as well as LGBTQI+ participation more broadly. Many country datasets on voter registration and any number of issues do not collect data related to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. In addition, with respect to LGBTQI+ people in particular, their vulnerability to corrupt officials, including police, directly impacts their ability to participate in political and public life and thus this link is ripe for further research. To start, GLIDE partners should seek to connect with researchers working on democracy issues, rule of law, and LGBTQI+ issues to identify opportunities to build the research base on democratic engagement and LGBTQI+ participation, including the presence of openly LGBTQI+ politicians at all levels of government.

Support public opinion research

Interviewees emphasized the value of public opinion research. Attitudinal data makes it possible for LGBTQI+ activists to engage with political parties and decision-makers directly and provides them with evidence for policy recommendations. Public opinion research can also provide powerful data to inform public engagement efforts and campaigns by LGBTQI+ movements and their allies. Sensitization efforts based on public opinion research help the development of targeted and compelling campaigns, those that play to the audience's better instincts and anticipate and address the arguments of the opposition (a la "myth-busting"). Both the Franklin and Marshall University Global Barometers LGBTQI+ Perceptions Index and the Global Acceptance Index (GAI) from the Williams Institute at UCLA are valuable tools on the global scale. GLIDE could look to bring those indices together to consolidate global data, add a measure of the connection between corruption, democratic engagement, and LGBTQI+ identity, and support complementary local efforts.

Target key elections and other political opportunities

GLIDE should identify a small number of upcoming elections and prioritize them for longer-term strategy development (across a full election cycle) while reserving a pool of rapid response funds to swiftly counter negative developments or maximize unexpected openings. Specific targets could be selected from "Countries on the Cusp" - those successfully countering autocratization, those at-risk of moving from democracy to autocracy, or those that have regional implications. Specific elections could be targeted based on timing (from Electionguide.org) and the country's trajectory as identified in the democracy trends literature (V-DEM, Freedom House, etc.) as well as consultations with local partners and considering regional dynamics.

Increase democratic and political engagement at the local government level

Interviewees noted that the space most available for successful elections of LGBTQI+ candidates and engagement with elected officials on LGBTQI+ issues is at the local level. Local government is also where people are more likely to know and have existing relationships with their potential constituents and are more likely to be able to enact policies and programs that have a direct impact on LGBTQI+ people. LGBTQI+ people are already engaging in local community-level projects, regardless of whether they participate in more formal political activities. This indicates that not only is it possible to make progress in terms of identifying allies and electing LGBTQI+ candidates at the local level but it may also be easier to engage the LGBTQI+ community to get involved in community-based and local efforts. GLIDE Initiative investments could include partnering with the Victory Institute or other political leadership academies[22] to expand training for potential LGBTQI+ candidates at the local level. In other instances, local level programming could help LGBTQI+ people understand how to get involved in political and democratic processes in their locality in ways that feel safe or less risky.

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[22] https://apolitical.foundation/apolitical-academy-global

Invest in civic and human rights education with a focus on democratic engagement

Many people simply do not know their rights and the barriers to entry for members of marginalized communities, especially LGBTQI+ people, are unnecessarily high as a result. By supporting creative and targeted training on civic education, democratic engagement, and human rights specifically targeted to LGBTQI+ people, especially in more rural communities or communities not typically reached by such efforts, the GLIDE Initiative can help people to better understand their rights and responsibilities. This includes, but is not limited to, the importance of exercising their right to vote, to participate in protests and demonstrations, to organize citizen movements, and to engage elected officials.

Fund local/Indigenous organizations

Approximately 120 countries have restrictions on foreign funding to domestic NGOs and some countries are taking steps to make it difficult for international organizations to register. This is both part and parcel of the broader context of democratic backsliding[23] and justified by governments on the basis that certain causes are foreign impositions, further feeding a false (and dangerous) narrative that homosexuality is a Western import and inconsistent with a country's "traditional values." Therefore, local activists should receive GLIDE Initiative funding wherever possible and will require creativity and flexibility with respect to local organizations that are not able to register, open bank accounts, and access foreign funding due to their work. Where possible, registered organizations in the country working on related issues should be encouraged to collaborate with LGBTQI+ organizations to make increased funding available for programs that will benefit both groups. This would have the benefit of deepening local cross-sector collaboration and provide organic opportunities for established NGOs to support and share knowledge with LGBTQI+ organizations and activists.

For more information or questions contact glide@outrightinternational.org

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[23] Dupuy, K., & Prakash, A. (2022). Why Restrictive NGO Foreign Funding Laws Reduce Voter Turnout in Africa's National Elections. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 51(1), 170–189; Weinstein, Jeremy, and Darin Christensen. "Defunding Dissent: Restrictions on Aid to NGOs". Journal of Democracy, vol. 24, no. 2, Apr. 2013, pp. 77-91.