

# Beyond the Rainbows and Glitter:

## Pride Around the World in 2023

June 2024



# About Outright

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## **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.

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# **BALENCIAGA**

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# Introduction

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Pride today is a vital expression of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) populations use Pride as an opportunity to protest unjust laws, celebrate progress, and enhance visibility.

Outright International found that in 101 of 193 United Nations (UN) member states, LGBTIQ Pride marches or other public-facing LGBTIQ visibility events were held in 2023, with at least 61 of those countries holding Pride events in more than one city. In 92 states, no public Pride or visibility events were held, although LGBTIQ activists in these countries often organized events within private and safe spaces to commemorate Pride, the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), or other key dates for LGBTIQ communities.

In a global context marked by extreme highs and lows, with some countries granting LGBTIQ people, families, and identities full protection under the law and others seeking to eradicate sexual and gender diversity, many activists view Pride as pivotal for reinforcing advocacy, sustaining resistance against anti-rights actors, and being the change they want to see in the world. As a Brazilian activist put it, “Pride means my foundation, my life.”<sup>1</sup> Where Pride cannot be held, this lacuna limits platforms for advocacy and enforces invisibility.

This report includes 11 case studies and three shorter “snapshots,” zooming in on emblematic Pride events and those that offer lessons learned. While politicians in **Argentina** and **El Salvador** wax nostalgic for dictatorship and condemn gender liberation, Pride remains an avenue for democratic engagement by the populace. From **Bangladesh** to the US state of **Florida**, LGBTIQ movements are resisting an onslaught of repressive laws, and events like My Hollywood Pride and the online Dhaka Pride restate inclusive values and reframe narratives. Activists in **Italy** held at least fifty events in different regions, defying ongoing efforts by far-right politicians to curtail sexual and gender minorities’ rights.

In **South Africa**, Black LGBTIQ people have created alternative Prides that focus on intersectionality within the movement, building alliances at the grassroots level and decrying hate crimes, femicide, racism, and homophobia. **Mauritius’** decriminalization of same-sex intimacy in 2023 was commemorated with a celebratory march in a suburb of Port Louis, but activists have not been able to sustain Pride in the capital city due to attacks from religious extremists. In **India**, discourse around national legal developments takes center stage in many urban Pride events, while small town Prides focus more on community-building and local agendas.

In **Belize**, support from foreign diplomatic missions helps to amplify Pride events, shed a positive light in the media, and garner political support. But activists also center community-building, with one Belizean activist explaining, “Pride creates a sense of belonging...it allows us to be a collective and understand our mandates and collective struggles beyond the rainbow balloons and glitter.”<sup>2</sup> In **Kosovo**, Pride organizers have enjoyed increasing support from their government, demonstrating that “we are not disposable.”

The report also demonstrates how **intersex** activists in Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela are striving for inclusion within Pride events. Outright further documented the need for **disability inclusion** in Pride, how LGBTIQ **migrants and refugees** experience Pride in various settings, and how broad civil society crackdowns imperil Pride, as in **Hong Kong**.

Outright has monitored the number of countries holding Pride and other public-facing LGBTIQ visibility events since 2021, although it is an imperfect science: several years after the apex of the COVID-19 pandemic, does a fully online visibility event still “count?” What about a small protest convening a handful of individuals? Despite these methodological questions, it is clear that even as Pride events spread in some parts of the world, the global rise of anti-LGBTIQ legislation and rhetoric as well as continued humanitarian crises have impacted queer activism and advocacy.

In 2023, these challenges appear to manifest in a slight reduction in countries holding public Pride events compared to 2021 and 2022. In 2021, our first Pride report, *Pride Around the World*, identified 102 countries that had held any kind of public Pride event in recent years and highlighted new and notable Prides. The 2022 report, *Visible: Pride Around the World in 2021* found that in 2021 alone, 107 countries had held visibility events. The 2023 report, *We Remain Resilient: Pride Around the World in 2022*, found that public Pride events were held in 105 countries, and in 63 of these, Pride was held in multiple locations, including outside capital cities. We hoped to document a steady increase in the countries where Pride takes place, but several factors contributed to the still lower number in 2023, ranging from increased anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric, to funding and organizational challenges, to changing priorities within local movements.<sup>3</sup>

Still, LGBTIQ activists demonstrated resilience. In Ukraine, visible queer resistance has continued despite Russian aggression and amidst airstrikes. In Venezuela, despite a challenging organizing environment, embassies of European Union (EU) member states helped organize and finance some Pride events. In a year in which anti-rights, anti-gender actors enacted legislative attacks on LGBTIQ people from all sides, LGBTIQ movements sometimes strategically retreated and regrouped, and sometimes pushed forward with full force in their efforts to balance the safety and well-being of communities with the urgency of being seen, heard, and recognized. As one Vietnamese activist eloquently expressed, “Wiggling in an assigned shrinking space is Pride.”<sup>4</sup>

# Methodology

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The 2024 report is the result of an online survey in seven languages, semi-structured interviews, and a literature review of news reports, social media posts, and reports by non-governmental organizations and institutions. Our online survey was distributed on social media and across Outright's network of activists and organizations globally, focusing on Prides and other LGBTIQ visibility events of 2023. The survey was distributed in English, Chinese, French, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish and allowed for responses in any language. In the survey, we defined Pride in this manner: "public-facing, open, and visible events with the purpose of affirming the existence of LGBTIQ people, demanding recognition and protection of our rights, and/or celebrating progress. This may include not only events labeled as 'Pride' but also IDAHOBIT, Trans Visibility Day, and other similar events if they are public-facing."

Our survey also asked about locations of Pride events within and outside capital cities, the existence of new Prides in 2023, corporate, institutional, and government participation in Prides, the evolution of Pride, and personal perspectives and experiences related to Pride. We received 152 responses from 70 countries.

Based on survey responses, our literature review, and Outright's institutional knowledge of movements and Prides worldwide, we selected countries and themes to zoom in on for case studies or shorter "snapshots:" Argentina, Bangladesh, Belize, El Salvador, the US state of Florida, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Kosovo, Mauritius, South Africa, intersex inclusion in Prides in Latin America, and the inclusion of queer migrants and people with disabilities in Prides.

Outright's research team also conducted 50 in-depth, individual, semi-structured interviews remotely via video link with activists from Argentina, Bangladesh, Belize, Brazil, Chile, China, Denmark, El Salvador, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Kosovo, Mauritius, Norway, South Africa, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the US, and Venezuela. These interviews aimed to aid in understanding the legal, political, historical, and social contexts in these countries and movements, how Pride has evolved in each country, and the challenges, successes, and objectives of Pride across different countries. In our interviews, we also sought to better understand the inclusion of specific populations—namely intersex people, disabled people, and migrants—in Pride and LGBTIQ visibility events and movements. For countries from which we did not receive firsthand information through survey responses or semi-structured interviews, or where those responses conflicted as to the existence of Pride and visibility events, Outright conducted online research to confirm the existence of Pride in certain countries via news reports and social media posts. In other cases, we emailed activists to confirm whether Pride or other events had taken place in their countries.

In terms of limitations, Outright recognizes that interviewees' and survey respondents' perspectives on Pride are not necessarily representative of their entire communities. Every participant in a Pride event anywhere in the world has a unique experience and perspective, and beyond this report there are many more stories to be told.

Two notes on language and terminology: first, Outright typically refers to interviewees by their full names on first usage and subsequently by their surname, if they consent and can safely be cited publicly, and by pseudonyms, including a first name and last initial, if preferred by an interviewee for reasons of safety and privacy. In conducting the research for this report, several interviewees expressed other preferences, such as being referred to by their given name rather than surname, which in some cases can carry caste or ethnic baggage. Outright has respected those preferences.

Second, Outright typically uses the acronym LGBTIQ when referring to movements, laws, or events that are truly relevant to and inclusive of the range of identities included in the acronym. In some cases in this report, we report on events that, to our knowledge, did not include intersex people, or on laws that only target people based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and not based on sex characteristics. In these cases, we use the acronym "LGBTQ," omitting the "I" for "intersex." We sometimes also use "queer" as an inclusive catch-all. We recognize our choice of terms and acronyms may be at times inconsistent and imperfect as a result of gaps in our knowledge, complexity and fluidity in our communities, and identities that no term or acronym can perfectly capture.



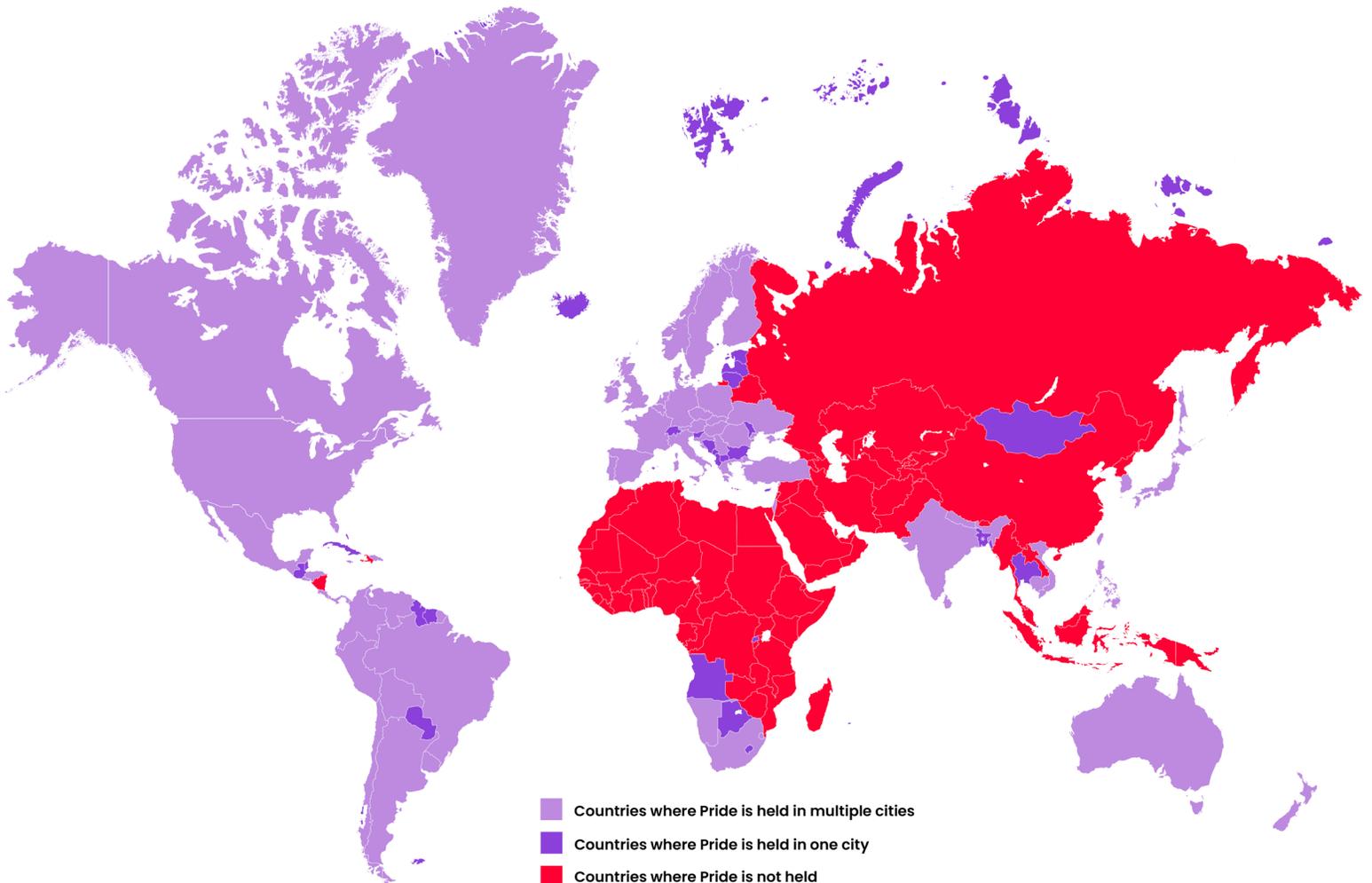
Right: A family attends My Hollywood Pride, 2023. Credit: My Hollywood Pride.

# Pride by the Numbers

Our findings show that LGBTIQ activists in at least 101 UN member states held public-facing Prides or other LGBTIQ visibility events in 2023, including parades, marches, festivals, art exhibitions, workshops, panel discussions, fairs, drag shows, musical shows, film screenings, book readings, and sporting events.

In at least 61 countries in 2023, Pride events were celebrated both within and outside their capital cities.<sup>5</sup> Expanding Pride beyond capital cities is significant, as it often indicates the spread of acceptance, visibility, and recognition, more deeply rooting Pride in the fabric of a country.

In 92 countries, there were no public-facing Prides or other LGBTIQ-visibility events, exemplifying yet again the struggles LGBTIQ activists and individuals in many parts of the world face in existing and striving for rights recognition.



<sup>5</sup>Bangladesh pride was a public online event.

# Overview: Pride Around the World in Many Ways

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Globally, in 2023, LGBTIQ people experienced encroachment on the right to be visible, assemble, and exist freely through increasingly hostile laws and anti-rights rhetoric rife across political and media platforms. Unlike previous years, Outright did not identify any country holding Pride for the first time in 2023.

2023 was marked by efforts from national legislatures and courts to introduce or advance laws restricting LGBTIQ people’s rights, including the right to freedom of assembly, association, and expression, all essential rights to protect in the context of Pride. In the first half of 2024 these relentless attacks have continued.

In May 2023, Uganda’s government enacted the world’s harshest anti-LGBTQ law, which includes a death sentence for so-called aggravated homosexuality and prohibits pro-LGBTQ advocacy and visibility, punishable with prison sentences.<sup>6</sup> Queerphobic laws that would limit the right to publicly support LGBTIQ people’s rights were on the table in Ghana and in Kenya, including a bill in Ghana—subsequently passed by parliament in 2024— that makes it illegal to be an “ally.”<sup>7</sup>

Russia’s Supreme Court declared LGBTIQ activism “extremist,” following the expansion of its “gay propaganda” law in 2022 and the passage of anti-trans legislation in 2023.<sup>8</sup> Georgia’s ruling party proposed legislation that would ban educational and public gatherings that popularize “same-sex family or intimate relationships.”<sup>9</sup> In the United States, lawmakers introduced 650 bills seeking to clamp down on sexual and gender minorities, with 75 of these becoming laws, including 11 state laws that restrict “what teachers can say about LGBTIQ issues and how they can show up at work.”<sup>10</sup>

In Lebanon, LGBTIQ people face continued crackdowns through proposed legislation, a ministerial ban on LGBTIQ events, and by an attack on LGBTIQ people by a hostile group in a bar in August 2023.<sup>11</sup> Iraq’s Parliament in April 2024 amended its laws to punish homosexuality with up to 15 years imprisonment, along with “promoting” homosexuality with seven years imprisonment and a fine, and undergoing or performing sex reassignment surgeries with up to three years imprisonment.<sup>12</sup>

Legislative attacks on LGBTIQ people were accompanied by violence, hate speech, and arrests. In Europe, ILGA-Europe reported that anti-trans hate speech surged in 2023.<sup>13</sup> In Malawi, religious groups and actors marched to protest LGBTIQ rights ahead of a court hearing involving an appeal by a transgender woman earlier convicted of “unnatural” behavior, contributing to an unsafe environment for LGBTIQ individuals and activists in the country.<sup>14</sup> In Nigeria, public Pride events do not take place due to widespread homophobia evident in laws and societal attitudes, and law enforcement perpetuated mass arrests of LGBTIQ people in 2023.<sup>15</sup> Jordan’s law enforcement agencies have continued to target and harass LGBTIQ activists, obstructing the ability of activists to organize.<sup>16</sup>

## Attacks and Bans on Pride Events in 2023

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Pride events in various locations have been the targets of attacks and violence, interfering with the rights and freedoms of LGBTIQ people. Responses to our Pride survey detailed police bans, judicial bans, and violent counter-protests by far-right groups, religious actors, and anti-trans rights actors, among others.<sup>17</sup>

In Mongolia in 2023, the LGBT Center’s request to hold a peaceful demonstration for Pride was refused and the refusal was affirmed on appeal in court.<sup>18</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2023, local police banned the planned Pride event in the city Banja Luka, and “a few dozen men” physically and verbally attacked activists.<sup>19</sup> The attackers destroyed the location where Pride was to take place and contributed to a hostile environment for all queer people in the country.<sup>20</sup> The Pride march in Sarajevo, the capital city, took place with no incidents, and organizers seized the opportunity to demand that the authorities investigate and sanction the Banja Luka attackers.<sup>21</sup>

In 2023, Tbilisi Pride in Georgia was attacked by about 2,000 anti-rights protesters, including Orthodox Christian clergy, leading to its cancellation.<sup>22</sup> Pride organizer Mariam Kvaratskhelia reported that the attack was a result of mass mobilization among far-right groups, in coordination with the government.<sup>23</sup>

Outright has documented bans, attacks, and escalating violent reprisals at Pride in Türkiye beginning with the first attempt in 1993 and resuming in 2015 with crackdowns every year since.<sup>24</sup> In 2023, police blocked Istanbul’s Trans Pride, arresting and detaining marchers. They also detained students marching peacefully at a university in Ankara.<sup>25</sup> A response to Outright’s survey reported that all Pride events and marches in six provinces “were attacked by law enforcement officers who detained the participants.”<sup>26</sup> Umut Rodja Yildirim, a lawyer and activist with the Social Policy Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPoD), restated that Pride in Türkiye faces “more and more violence each year since 2015.”<sup>27</sup>

In the US, the organization GLAAD documented 145 queerphobic incidents during Pride month in 2023, including murder, harassment, assaults, and vandalism.<sup>28</sup> People vandalized multiple Pride flags outside the Stonewall National Monument in New York, while in Washington state, vandals stole Pride and Black Lives Matter flags from a church and sprayed diesel fuel on the lawn to spell out a Biblical reference used to condemn LGBTQ people.<sup>29</sup>

Amid these crackdowns, Pride and LGBTIQ visibility events persist, with many signs of hope. South African LGBTIQ people hold Pride in all nine provinces and have expanded into underserved townships, with the Eastern Cape's Buffalo City holding its inaugural Pride March in 2023.<sup>30</sup> Pride was held in every Latin American country except Nicaragua, where state crackdowns on all civic organizing have made it impossible to do so.<sup>31</sup> Pride in Mexico was held for the 45th year in 2023, marking the first Pride after marriage equality was achieved across the country.<sup>32</sup> In the Caribbean, Jamaica and Guyana continued Pride events despite the persistence of colonial-era laws that criminalize same-sex sexual acts.<sup>33</sup>

Singaporean activists continued the Pink Dot Pride events, acknowledging progress through a repeal of the law criminalizing sex between men and demanding further progress in the form of recognizing diverse families and marriage equality.<sup>34</sup> In Japan, where activists are pushing for marriage equality and comprehensive non-discrimination protections, Tokyo Rainbow Pride returned in full bloom, drawing over 200,000 participants with the slogan "Press on Till Japan Changes."<sup>35</sup> In Florida, queer activists resisted the state government crackdown through protests at the Capitol building, organized strategic advocacy against these bills, and continued Pride events across the state, as discussed in detail in our Florida case study.<sup>36</sup>

In some countries, foreign diplomats constituted "a strong network of allies" and lent their support to Pride in meaningful ways in 2023.<sup>37</sup> Anti-rights groups in some countries promote the falsehood that LGBTIQ identities are "Western" ideas, and when foreign embassies in these countries celebrate Pride without sufficient community consultation, it can inadvertently reinforce this dangerous narrative. However, embassies also provide safe spaces where local LGBTIQ individuals can discuss promoting their rights within their own communities, not as foreign concepts but as initiatives from within. In places where laws and attitudes are unfriendly, embassies do not usually openly support events, but they do offer safe spaces for LGBTIQ gatherings. This has happened in countries including the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Türkiye, and Zambia.<sup>38</sup> In other cases, such as Botswana, the diplomatic community's support is more overt, helping to increase visibility given that "their presence guarantees media presence."<sup>39</sup>

In Hungary, where conservative ideals have led to the repression of LGBTIQ rights, several countries' embassies and cultural institutions made a statement in 2023 urging for the protection of LGBTIQ rights ahead of the Budapest Pride march.<sup>40</sup> As a respondent stated regarding Hungary, "ambassadors also make it safer for participants to join as the police are more focused on securing the events."<sup>41</sup> For Paraguay, however, one respondent sounded a note of caution that while the participation of UK and US embassies is welcomed by LGBTIQ people, it is "highlighted negatively by the press."<sup>42</sup>

In general, the onslaught of attacks on LGBTIQ rights and on Pride can deter the growth and spread of Pride events and other efforts to create awareness of LGBTIQ people's rights. Just as we found in our previous year's Pride report, there was no notable growth in the number of countries holding Pride events in 2023 compared with 2022. Instead, there were some signs of contraction. For instance, activists in Laos and Malawi held Pride in 2022 but not in 2023. Where Pride cannot take place, it has extensive impacts on LGBTIQ individuals, activists, and organizations. An activist from Nigeria described the situation in this manner:

Pride events offer an opportunity for LGBTQ+ individuals and allies to express their identities and advocate for their rights publicly. Without these events, LGBTQ+ visibility and awareness may be limited, making it harder to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes.<sup>43</sup>

Still, Pride keeps evolving, and the signs of progress in one country may at times provide hope for the future of others. Sarita KC, the executive director of Mitini Nepal, an organization that works with lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, relayed to Outright that over time,

There has been an increase in visibility and acceptance, with Pride events gaining mainstream recognition. Diverse participation has become a key characteristic, extending beyond the LGBTQ+ community to include allies and supporters. Geographically, Pride has expanded beyond urban centers, reaching smaller towns and regions to foster inclusivity on a broader scale. In addition to celebrations, Pride events in Nepal have become platforms for advocacy and activism, addressing LGBTQ+ rights, anti-discrimination laws, and healthcare access... The visibility and celebration during Pride Month contribute to a broader cultural shift, fostering understanding and support for the rights of sexual and gender minorities.<sup>44</sup>

For a Pride march attendee in Brazil, put simply: "Pride means my foundation, my life."<sup>45</sup>

### **Pride as Celebration and Resistance**

Despite the significant opposition facing LGBTIQ rights globally, activists continue to work tirelessly to safeguard these rights, with Pride events serving as a crucial means of commemorating progress. Pride, on a global scale, also retains its powerful significance as a form of protest against oppressive regimes and those who oppose human rights. Omar van Reenen from Equal Namibia aptly linked Pride to the broader struggle for decolonization:

Pride [is] a contemporary battleground for civil rights. Much like the liberation struggle, Pride Marches challenge the status quo and demand that the constitutional promises of equality be extended to all, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. They serve as a collective assertion that the LGBTIQ+ community will not accept being relegated to the margins or denied their fundamental rights. The visibility and activism inherent in Pride events symbolize a continuation of the legacy of those who fought for justice and equality during the apartheid era.<sup>46</sup>



**Right:** Pride March in Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 2023.  
Credit: Asociación Familias Diversas de Argentina (AFDA).

Ryan Hurst of the US-based National LGBTQ Task Force speaking from Florida, where queer rights are under attack, affirmed that:

For me individually, celebrating Pride is a celebration of my liberation and my ability to love. I give out love, and I accept love when I attend pride, not only for myself but for my friends and my community. And to be honest, I feel like celebrating queer joy in a space like Pride is an act of resistance. And it's an act of healing.<sup>47</sup>

In Croatia, Ivan A. Šestan of Zagreb Pride explained to Outright:

Pride to me means that I'm fighting for the rights of my fellow LGBTIQ members; it means that I can make demands of my government. It has made the community more visible and accepted and helped facilitate some pro-LGBTIQ laws.<sup>48</sup>

An activist in Taiwan, reflecting on Taiwan's progressive stance as the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage, told Outright, "Pride symbolizes the importance of respecting and treating every gender kindly."<sup>49</sup>

### Pride as Visibility and Affirmation of Diversity

In places where politicians or religious leaders claim LGBTIQ identities are foreign, local activism like homegrown Pride events can show communities that diversity exists everywhere. An activist from Bangladesh, who co-organizes an online Pride event, said:

Our Pride event changes the narrative of 'there are no LGBTIQ+ people in Bangladesh.' It also strives to highlight the LGBTIQ+ community's identity, survival, and existence within the conservative Bangladeshi society.<sup>50</sup>

From Ukraine, where Russia began an aggressive invasion in 2022, Anna Sharyhina, Coordinator of Kharkiv Pride, described Pride as a testament to our collective resilience:

Pride, to me, is more than a celebration of identity; it is a powerful tool for advocacy. It serves as a beacon of visibility and unity, empowering us to affirm our rights and presence not only as LGBTIQ+ community members but also as citizens of a free, democratic Ukraine.<sup>51</sup>

In India, one survey respondent wrote, "Pride shows to the society that we are as Indian as anyone else and this is not a concept of Western imposition."<sup>52</sup> Another Indian LGBTIQ activist, Maninderjit Singh of Saksham Prakriti Welfare Society, shared that Pride "gives members of the community the opportunity to voice their pain and oppression so that others and the wider society can know as well."<sup>53</sup>



An individual who participated in Bangkok Pride in Thailand said,

It was meaningful because it was a celebration of how we've come in our fight for visibility and rights... [W]e had a lot of political leaders who also joined in that shaped the political environment around legal recognition of marriage equality.<sup>54</sup>

### Community Through Pride

Affirming the inclusive community spirit for people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions, and characteristics should be the primary focus of Pride. Many attendees find a sense of belonging, especially in light of increasing anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric and laws. A respondent from the United Kingdom shared the following with Outright: I went to three Pride parades/events. It was meaningful to me to feel accepted in a community and to have fun with people who understand me. Pride means being able to accept myself for who I am and be happy about being able to share my identity with others.<sup>55</sup>

LGBTIQ people in China cannot hold public events safely. A Chinese respondent who lives in Europe told Outright that they participated in Pride outside China, providing the opportunity to be with a community and reaffirm the self: I have participated in Helsinki Pride multiple times, and Amsterdam Canal Parade once, and I could feel what democracy and freedom mean to a society. I saw many people flying rainbow flags and showing their support for the LGBTIQ community. I was very touched, and it made me less ashamed of my sexual orientation.<sup>56</sup>

In Hanoi, Vietnam, where LGBTIQ individuals and activists march each year, Quang Tran of Hanoi Pride described Pride as a feeling shared across generations:

To me, holding hands on the street, despite inner anxieties, is Pride. Wearing clothes that society doesn't expect you to wear, is Pride. Wiggling in an assigned shrinking space is Pride. Each of those Pride streams flows within you, then out of you, then into one another to bind generations. Pride is not an event, but rather a feeling that we choose to protect so that it can protect us...Pride is a warm reminder that I was never alone because we were fighting the same battles.<sup>57</sup>

In Jamaica, where laws criminalizing same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults still exist, Pride goes on every year during the political independence week "Emancipence." Nicolette Bryan, Chief Organizer of Community Fest Pride in Kingston, stated that:

Pride means liberation and self-acceptance. It's a call to action to remember why we fight and pursue better lives for ourselves. Pride impacts the movement by broadening our support base and allowing other queer people to feel emboldened and in the community.<sup>58</sup>



Right: Hridoye Somo in Alipurduar, India, 2023. Credit: Maitrisanjog Society Alipurduar

# Case Study **Argentina:** **Voting with** **Pride, Memory,** **and Joy**

*Pride in first person, by guest contributor Andre Rivas*

## Legal and Social Context

Argentina is recognized for its avant-garde stance on LGBTIQ rights with pioneering laws on self-perceived gender identity, non-binary identity documents, a transgender employment quota, and marriage equality.<sup>59</sup> 2023 was a presidential election year in the context of a severe economic crisis. During President Alberto Fernández’s term (2019–2023), policies on gender and diversity were promoted, but the country failed to overcome problems of high inflation and poverty. The elections at the end of October did not result in a winner, leading to a runoff just two weeks before the Pride event on 4 November. The presidential candidates were Sergio Massa of the ruling party and Javier Milei, a far-right candidate who mobilized voters with his electoral promise to pull the country out of high inflation.

In this context, 2023 had two political events of relevance for Argentinian LGBTIQ communities as subjects of political participation and grassroots movements: the Pride event was held two weeks before the election runoff, and it marked 40 years since the return to democracy in Argentina.<sup>60</sup> From 1976 to 1983, Argentina was governed by a civic-military dictatorship that kidnapped, tortured, and disappeared people—including transgender women—in clandestine detention centers.<sup>61</sup> The 2023 Pride event called upon generations of activists who had lived through that era, as well as generations born in democracy that possibly took LGBTIQ rights for granted.

In the electoral campaign for the runoff, the candidate Javier Milei deployed a violent discourse, denied the state terrorism of the dictatorship<sup>62</sup> and the existence of a gender gap between men and women.<sup>63</sup> He articulated a position against abortion and comprehensive sexual education and asserted that so-called gender ideology “destroys social values.”<sup>64</sup>

## Buenos Aires, the Epicenter of Pride

On Saturday, 4 November, starting at 10 a.m., the Pride March took place at 30 locations across the country, with Buenos Aires serving as the epicenter. Other participating cities included Villa Gesell, Viedma, Olavarría, Bahía Blanca, Tandil, Junín, Mar del Plata, Florencio Varela, Lomas de Zamora, Luján, and Adrogué.

The slogans chosen for Pride were: “Not one more adjustment, not one less right,” “Rights Yes, Right No” (in reference to the political right-wing), and “Pride is Democracy.” The march also articulated a demand for reparations for trans people by the Argentine State and justice for Tehuel de La Torre, a 22-year-old trans man who disappeared on 11 March 2021 when he went to a job interview.<sup>65</sup>

Beginning at noon in Buenos Aires, thousands of people congregated near the floats poised to embark on the traditional parade route established during Argentina’s first Pride parade in 1992.<sup>66</sup> The route starts at Plaza de Mayo—a focal point for social movements, located adjacent to the president’s offices—and proceeds toward the National Congress, symbolizing a trajectory from the seat of political power to the legislative realm. This path underscores the foundational demands of the Argentine LGBTIQ movement: to advocate for essential legislative changes needed to ensure equality.

María Laura Oliva, a lesbian activist from the organization Argentine Homosexual Community, has participated since the first Pride in 1992 and told us that for her Pride has always been "a struggle, a visibility of the identities of our community against the state power and the police that persecuted us even in democracy. Going out to the streets was a challenge to that authority in defense of our rights."<sup>67</sup> She remembered that the first Pride also took place in a very critical socio-economic situation and the "need to make our community visible in the street with that reality."<sup>68</sup> For Oliva, the 2023 Pride was about demonstrating against the far-right as a political and social positioning of our movement.

At noon, before starting the parade, Taty Almeida, one of the Founding Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, came to one of the stages to participate in one of the political acts that started Pride: a massive scarf-waving. Thousands of people raised their white scarves, using the symbol of struggle of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo when they were searching for their disappeared children. Almeida said, "I am very grateful that you have invited me to participate with all of you on this very special day. It is very moving to see everyone with the white scarves." She added, "There are reprehensible characters who want to tarnish it, but they will not succeed."<sup>69</sup> Almeida called for unity and cautioned against taking rights for granted. She invited the crowd to vote with historical memory in mind, but also with joy, because 40 years ago it was not possible to vote at all. The audience responded with "Rights Yes, Right No" and "30,000 disappeared comrades, present! Now and forever!"<sup>70</sup>

Luana Salvá is the national representative of The Historics of Argentina. Her organization is composed of trans people from all over the country who demand a law to obtain a reparatory pension for trans people aged 40 and older, some of whom are survivors of state terrorism during the dictatorship. Salvá told Outright that she learned from Lohana Berkins, a historic trans leader, that Pride was a place to claim space and challenge political decisions:

Pride for me is to be able to vindicate those rights that gave us the freedom to walk and move through the streets freely, and for me as a survivor of many exclusions and having a name that was never respected unlike the new generations that have the gender identity law, I feel that there is something for which I have to celebrate and at the same time leave a message: the policies of our bodies are the ones that express the lack of equality and the rights that are yet to be conquered.<sup>71</sup>

Salvá also highlighted the importance of Pride as an opportunity to call on "not only our identities but also families to be part of this political construction that is Pride."<sup>72</sup>

Families participated extensively in Pride. Mónica Galvan, representative of the Friends and Family of Tehuel de La Torre, told us:

Participating in this Pride where the flag is the demand for Justice for Tehuel, not only comforts us in terms of feeling accompanied and supported but also gives us a place to express that need we have from the struggle to continue enhancing and strengthening the search for Tehuel. All demonstrations always end up being a loving encounter and when they see us with the Tehuel shirt, see him on our posters, and see Norma, Tehuel's mother, there is a very beautiful and affectionate gesture towards her, towards a mother who is searching for her son, a mother who needs an answer, who needs justice to say what happened to Tehuel.<sup>73</sup>

Galvan was categorical regarding state responsibility:

The State is responsible because Tehuel disappears under a democratic government, going to look for work. He was precarious, vulnerable, lacking rights that belong to any citizen, which are the right to housing, education, health, and work.<sup>74</sup>

From noon until past midnight, columns of organizations marched and trucks full of people with protest signs danced their way through, creating a colorful, visible procession, like rolling discos of resistance and visibility, followed by thousands of people in the streets dancing and demanding rights and justice with more signs:

"No Milei!"

"Tehuel is Missing"

"Pride is Democracy"

"Comprehensive Sexual Education to Decide"

The people and their demands made their way along the historic route and reached Congress, and nobody wanted to leave. That day, no one was tired of demanding.

### After the March and Elections: A New Scenario

Election day came, and as Taty Almeida had called for, many LGBTIQ people voted with joy and pride. However, the popular vote at the ballot box declared Javier Milei the winner. A few days after taking office as president on 10 December 2023, Milei initiated austerity measures and rights reduction. In his first week in office, Milei eliminated the Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity. His administration has also eliminated the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Labor, among others. The functions of all these ministries will be assumed by the new Ministry of Human Capital.

Milei sent an "omnibus bill" to Congress containing reforms that would cut many social programs that his administration perceived as wasteful.<sup>75</sup> These reforms would weaken regulations protecting the rights of workers and vulnerable groups, such as mental health patients. Several human rights organizations and labor unions protested in the streets. Some LGBTIQ activists used the phrase "Where our Pride had ended, our resistance began." The omnibus bill failed to gain sufficient support in Congress, and Milei withdrew it before it could be voted on.



When talking about the advance of the far-right and reflecting on participation in Pride, Luana Salvá told us she felt confident in the movement's ability to withstand the political setback.

She explained,

The laws and victories are tools that empower us to sustain what has been achieved. We do not want the new generations to repeat everything we have gone through as survivors; we do not want young people to live through exclusion and persecution.<sup>76</sup>

On 16 March 2024, the Friends and Family of Tehuel organized a protest demanding justice for Tehuel. Mónica Galvan told us:

We need our collective struggles, like the LGBTI+ movement, because we have a government that will not listen to us and is not interested in providing answers, but in systematically violating each of the struggles and victories we have had over time...we must continue asking for justice for Tehuel and hopefully, it will be the last protest and next year we can already be thinking about festivals for Tehuel and not demonstrations to demand justice.<sup>77</sup>

On 24 March 2024, Argentina's National Day of Memory, activists held a demonstration to commemorate the victims of state terrorism during the civic-military dictatorship. The Milei government released an official video discussing this period of Argentine history, giving voice to those who question the number of people disappeared by the dictatorship and implying that the number is lower than indicated by previous governments and human rights organizations.<sup>78</sup> Two days later, a court in the Province of Buenos Aires sentenced 10 former dictatorial enforcers to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity in the framework of a genocide. Notably, this marked the first time in Argentine history that military personnel were convicted for crimes committed against transgender individuals.<sup>79</sup>

A common sentiment expressed by LGBTIQ activists is fear of possible new government measures and the escalation of anti-gender narratives that endanger LGBTIQ people. But that fear is accompanied by a firm conviction to fight for and defend the rights won in recent decades and to continue advancing along the path of true freedom and equality.



Right: Pride March in Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 2023.  
Credit: Asociación Familias Diversas de Argentina (AFDA).

# Case Study **Bangladesh:** **Visibility** **and Violence**

## Background

Over the past decade, Bangladesh has made some of the biggest strides in Human and Gender Development Indices, such as in female secondary school enrollments and life expectancy at birth, outstripping South Asian neighbors India and Pakistan.<sup>80</sup> However, same-sex sexual conduct remains criminalized under the colonial era penal code section 377, as in many other former British colonies. Hijra and transfemme activists have successfully advocated for some rights since the hijra community was recognized in 2013 as a third gender category.<sup>81</sup> While some have argued that the authorities' acknowledgment of rights for hijras has been tokenistic and has not translated into meaningful access, the acknowledgment of hijras in itself remains a significant gain for the community and for the increasingly visible transfemme spectrum of activism in Bangladesh.

### Anti-Rights and Queerphobia: Prejudice in Times of Shrinking Democracies

"Inclusion of transgender rights chapter in Bangladesh school textbooks sparks debate" blared a headline in an English daily from Dhaka in late January 2024.<sup>82</sup> It was referring to the so-called controversy created by the inclusion of the coming out story of a transfemme individual in a textbook that led to widespread and organized anti-trans and queerphobic mobilizations that overtook the nation, soon after a general election mired with charges of corruption and suppression of democratic dissent.<sup>83</sup> The protests led by anti-rights actors and self-proclaimed guardians of cultural and religious propriety had far-reaching consequences: many well-known trans and queer activists faced serious threats and had to go into hiding or even leave the country. Hostility toward LGBTQ people has become so pronounced in recent months that lives are at stake: in April 2024 a 19-year-old trans woman student died of suicide, reportedly as a result of "depression, social ostracisation, and the recent hostility towards transgender individuals."<sup>84</sup> One young queer activist told Outright:

What took us by surprise is how well-organized these actors are: there are homophobic pamphlets published for distribution across the country, there are announcements from mosques in smaller towns and even villages. We cannot really begin to take on this level of misinformation and this is undoing years of work.<sup>85</sup>

This is not the first time queer people in Bangladesh have come under violent attack from fundamentalist anti-rights actors. In 2016, the founder of the groundbreaking LGBTQ magazine *Roopbaan*, Xulhaz Mannan, and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy were hacked to death by unknown assailants.<sup>86</sup> Their murder came after a spate of attacks on and murders of atheist bloggers in the country, for which the country and the government led by Sheikh Hasina came under heavy international criticism. In 2021, a court convicted six members of a banned domestic organization, Ansar al-Islam for the murder of the gay activists, sentencing them to death. The verdict is currently under appeal.<sup>87</sup>

Tanveer Anoy, a non-binary queer academic who has worked with many queer collectives, recalls how the entire movement went underground after the incident:

There was a complete stagnation in the movement from the highest public visibility of the community in 2014 and 2015 after Xulhaz's murder. It was almost like a pin-drop silence—those who were actively and visibly working for the community's rights, many of them left the country. *Roopbaan* also shut down...we realized that we did not have the allyship of the general populace.<sup>88</sup>

## **Pride(?): From Roopbaan's Rainbow Rallies to the Pandemic TikTok Generation**

Anoy recalls that the movement, particularly the *Hijra-apas*<sup>89</sup> as well as the groups focused on men who have sex with men including Boys of Bangladesh (BoB, founded in 2002), had gradually started organizing, often under the HIV umbrella, since the late nineties. In fact, the Daily Star, a leading English language newspaper in the country, published a letter from Boys of Bangladesh in May 2008 on the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia.<sup>90</sup> While the letter's publication was followed by the publication of a homophobic response, it did not garner the widespread attention that the launch of *Roopbaan* received in January 2014. Exiled Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen tweeted about *Roopbaan*, and the post was picked up by various media outlets.<sup>91</sup> This momentum culminated in the first Rainbow Rally, organized by *Roopbaan* to take place as part of the Poila Boishakh Shobhajatra (Bengali new year rally) in Dhaka in mid-April.<sup>92</sup> Anoy explained:

This was not necessarily meant as a Pride March but as an attempt for greater visibility of the community. The idea was that the participants of the Rainbow Walk section at the new year rally will dress in six different colors, each representing one of the six seasons of Bangladesh.<sup>93</sup>

Against a backdrop of growing internet and smartphone access, the community staged multiple public events, buoyed by hope despite the rising spate of horrific murders of atheist bloggers and publishers. Not stymied by the vocal opposition from religious fundamentalists and a section of the public, *Roopbaan* published a collection of queer poetry in February 2015 at the Dhaka International Book Fair. The event took place just a day after the shocking murder of Avijit Bose, a Bangladeshi-American activist and blogger. Later that year, the Boys of Bangladesh launched Dhee, the first Bangladeshi lesbian comic character, at an event hosted by the British Council.<sup>94</sup> A number of these public events had support from foreign embassies in Dhaka. In fact, Xulhaz himself worked for the US Agency for International Development (USAID).<sup>95</sup>

But the tides were fast turning. In 2015, religious extremist groups published a charter of demands from the government. The charter named LGBTIQ groups and called for the government to take action against them under Section 377.<sup>96</sup> This resulted in the government canceling the Rainbow Rally scheduled alongside the Pohela Boishakh Mongol Shovajatra in April 2016,<sup>97</sup> citing security concerns.<sup>98</sup> Despite the cancellation, four queer activists including Mannan were arrested when they tried to join the Mongol Shovajatra.<sup>99</sup> Within 10 days, Xulhaz and Tony would be murdered in Xulhaz's apartment. The sole survivor of the ordeal was the apartment security guard, who also got stabbed in the encounter and who described six young men armed with cleavers and guns who attacked the gay activists. "There were credible threats against [Xulhaz's] life. I don't know why he didn't leave for a different place," Anoy, a former sub-editor at *Roopbaan*, told Outright.

Tushar Kanti Baidya, the founder and program director of Inclusive Bangladesh, says that the fact that Xulhaz Mannan sought to align the Rainbow Rally with an existing cultural initiative, when "others think it is not ours," may have contributed to the violent backlash. By 2021, however, when the global organization Interpride approached Inclusive Bangladesh to organize an online Pride event, Tushar felt that the timing was right. The COVID-19 pandemic had seen the flourishing of young LGBTIQ TikTok influencers and online engagement had increased. Inclusive Bangladesh seized on this momentum. Starting in 2021, the group has organized an online Pride event each year that features acts by queer and trans people ranging from dance performances to the tune of Tagore songs, to comedic skits and poetry performances by Bangladeshis based across the country and abroad. The first Pride during the pandemic was viewed by over 25,000 people, while the latest edition in 2023 had 9,924 views.<sup>100</sup>

As with any initiative, LGBTIQ Bangladeshis are not fully united around the strategic value of Dhaka Pride. Tushar, who is based in Australia, acknowledges that some parts of the community are concerned that Dhaka Pride will jeopardize their security. Pride month always attracts high visibility of any LGBTIQ pages online, moreso if a national Pride event is held. Another Bangladeshi activist told Outright that their organization's page has to be taken down during June because it attracts a lot of negative attention and homophobic comments.<sup>101</sup> For Tushar, however, Pride is a way to combat hostile views, changing hearts and minds:

Often in people's minds, they think of Pride as something obscene, people dressed provocatively. But we have ensured that our videos are those that you can watch with families. In fact, parents who are non-LGBTIQ have often praised the events and said how much they enjoyed watching the videos.<sup>102</sup>

Dhaka Pride has other shortcomings: for instance, it has minimal, if any, participation from lesbian, bisexual, and queer women and trans men. Outright asked Tushar about the absence of LBQ women, transmasculine, and nonbinary participants assigned female at birth in the Pride program. He responded, "We have tried to incorporate cis queer women, however, due to safety concerns many of them did not wish to participate as a performer but they remain as team members of Dhaka Pride and assist to organize the event successfully."<sup>103</sup>

Outright spoke to two activists, under the condition of anonymity, who were assigned female at birth. Both activists attested that visibility of cisgender LBQ persons in Bangladesh continues to be very low, partly due to security concerns and lack of numerical strength, but also because there is no substantive support for these advocates beyond the tokenistic inclusion in larger queer rights collectives. The advocates also told Outright that feminist and gender justice collectives and organizations have also not been supportive publicly for fear of backlash, even when LBQ persons continue to face a lack of representation and strong organizational backing to be able to advocate for themselves.

## The Politics of Visibility

Tushar feels that TikTok has helped increase LGBTQ visibility and weaken efforts to target individuals in Bangladesh, as thousands of young transgender and LGBTIQ people openly discuss their identities, orientations, and experiences on TikTok. He explained, “Xulhaz was easy to target as he was the most prominent face of the movement in 2016.”<sup>104</sup> Now, numerous young community members have created “alternative narratives” through comedy and self-expression that challenge stigma and taboos. This newfound openness on TikTok has empowered more people to come out and assert themselves despite facing backlash from conservative groups in the country.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to producing Dhaka Pride, organizers have also attended various European and North American Prides as well as the Sydney World Pride last year. Tushar said, “Until we can have a physical pride event, this is our way of taking the community with us.”<sup>106</sup>

But another activist told Outright:

Anyone who has been part of queer organizing or movement in Bangladesh for any amount of time, has learnt that visibility has never worked in our favor...Recently there has been a spate of [fundamentalist] vloggers who are always on the lookout for sensationalizing ‘anti-Islamic’ content...Visibility [comes] without any social protection.<sup>107</sup>

Anoy, too, expressed doubt that visibility politics will achieve a lot for Bangladesh in the current context. For several of the activists interviewed by Outright, the public empathy garnered in mainstream audiences around 2021, particularly for trans women, has been reversed. They feel that the present moment of religious fundamentalist organizing in the country since January—the rhetoric around “Western” influence and the “un-Islamic” nature of queer communities, attacks on individual activists, and threats to the safety of many—is too close to previously seen patterns. For many activists, the current moment is dispiriting and the resilience of the movement itself is challenged. The priority, for these activists, is weathering the storm—ensuring that people across the LGBTIQ spectrum feel connected, support each other, and can keep each other safe.

# Case Study **Belize:** **Pride as an** **Entry Point**

## Legal and Social Context

In 2016, the Belizean Supreme Court struck down section 53 of the criminal code, a colonial-era law criminalizing “carnal knowledge against the order of nature.”<sup>108</sup> This ruling made Belize the first Caribbean nation in which a court found the prohibition of consensual same-sex acts unconstitutional.<sup>109</sup>

Activists in Belize are now pushing for laws that specifically safeguard the rights of LGBTQ populations.<sup>110</sup> Beginning in 2018, civil society activists together with the National AIDS Commission began drafting an Equal Opportunities Bill that would prohibit discrimination in employment, education, housing, and other sectors on various grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity, age, disability, race, and other protected characteristics.<sup>111</sup> But in September 2020 the Cabinet declined to table the bill before parliament, withdrawing it from consideration.<sup>112</sup> Belizean LGBTQ activists are still determined to work for its passage and, according to activist Charrice Talbert, will see this through even if it means “re-educating, re-lobbying and advocating.”<sup>113</sup>

The absence of legal protections does not mean that all LGBTQ Belizeans live in hiding. Talbert told Outright:

We don’t necessarily have to hide. And when I say that, I don’t want to make it seem that people are not being abused, harassed, or getting harmed. The atmosphere changes and there is no legislation that will protect you if something does happen to you.<sup>114</sup>

In this context of risk and resilience, LGBTQ activists have prioritized celebrating Pride in some form every year since August 2017, a year after same-sex acts were decriminalized, to keep its spirit alive.<sup>115</sup> Talbert’s organization, Promoting Empowerment Through Awareness for Lesbian and Bisexual Women (PETAL), organizes its main Pride activists around 10 August, the anniversary of the 2016 legal win, to encourage recognition of the victory within the LGBTQ community.<sup>116</sup>

Pride in Belize takes two main forms: an event in collaboration with the United Kingdom High Commission and a celebration organized by and for LGBTQ activists, individuals, and organizations.

### Belizean LGBTIQ Community Pride Celebrations

Pride Week in Belize, organized by Our Circle and PETAL, includes beach parties, market fairs featuring LGBTQ small businesses, workshops, seminars, and more.<sup>117</sup> According to Derricia “Jael” Castillo-Salazar of Our Circle, while “we’re not yet at the stage of marching,” Pride was more visible in 2023 compared to previous years, with increased public discussions about its significance.<sup>118</sup>

Belizean LGBTQ groups do not hold Pride parades not because they would not get permits but because they want to minimize the risk of harm: “We wouldn’t want to have people in the open and harm come to them. If something goes horribly wrong, we will not get the support and protection we would like.”<sup>119</sup> But they continue to push for the space to exist publicly, as Jael explained:

Our Pride events are publicly advertised with media engagements and shared on social media pages...We have public engagements with the media about what we're celebrating and why we have Pride. It's not that the community is targeted or ostracized to the point that we can't publicly announce we're having Pride; it's just not supported.

Although there is resistance stemming from fundamentalist religious groups, there is still some backing for Pride events and LGBTIQ rights from various civil groups and government entities, including mainstream human rights movements, the health department, the National AIDS Commission, and numerous youth-led organizations.<sup>120</sup>

Activists and organizations encounter various challenges in planning, from limited funds and personnel to ensuring safety. Our Circle initially led Pride celebrations with support from Caleb Orozco of United Belize Advocacy Movement (UNIBAM) until 2023 when PETAL took over.<sup>121</sup> Jael told Outright that Our Circle and the wider LGBTQ movement in Belize have been resourceful, using creative methods like raffle draws to raise funds. However, with only three full-time staff members, Our Circle found that organizing Pride nationally was extremely demanding:

We don't have the resources to plan, whether financial or human resources. So much of Pride is being planned by volunteers, by persons who want to see something done. Our most significant barrier to executing Pride would be the lack of human resources. People keep working their nine-to-five jobs because they have to.<sup>122</sup>

As a result, Our Circle's staff and volunteers were exhausted and relieved when PETAL took charge of the community's Pride celebration in 2023. It remains a tough job for PETAL as well. Talbert said: "Planning Pride is stressful because you aim to provide a safe space for everyone, yet it's only as secure as people feel within it." She expressed that there is pressure to avoid drawing unnecessary attention and ensure comfort, and that organizers must consider potential risks while planning, so as to not choose risky locations for activities and put people in danger.<sup>123</sup>

PETAL strives to establish safe spaces by deploying police familiar with the community to mitigate risks. Some officers, often allies, have worked closely with PETAL, fostering trust within the community. Enclosed venues are chosen to further enhance safety.<sup>124</sup> Remarkably, Pride events in Belize have largely been free from serious threats or safety concerns, as noted by Jael:

We've never had a large boycott. I know that the first year we celebrated the Pride festival [in 2017], five or six church members protested. We had a flag-raising ceremony at the US embassy, and the same five or six people came and protested outside. Lately, it hasn't been that much of an issue that people take time to protest our activities...or so much to pressure the state not to support or shut down Pride.<sup>125</sup>

## National Buy-in Through Diplomatic Backing

Although some foreign diplomats usually stand in solidarity with LGBTIQ visibility events and rights, local activists from Belize have voiced concerns about the limited national support. As Jael of Our Circle Belize told Outright,

In recent years, foreign ambassadors have supported flag-raising ceremonies or public displays of support to the community, but we still don’t have local or national support. And we haven’t seen any government agencies flying a Pride flag.<sup>126</sup>

Activists observed that state officials do not take the lead in organizing Pride events and do not typically participate in events hosted by Belizean organizations.<sup>127</sup> However, Jael reported: “While state representatives will not raise the flag or host an LGBTIQ or Pride event, they attend when invited by the embassies. For us at Our Circle, that was our initial strategy.”<sup>128</sup> Our Circle collaborated with embassies from countries such as the United Kingdom to extend invitations to select government officials, ensuring that the initiative did not solely originate from the organization itself.<sup>129</sup> Jael said this approach is “why we eventually could publicly advertise Pride events because there hasn’t been objection from the space. They [public officials] have been very much part of the process, but we understand that they’re not yet at the point of leading a Pride initiative.”<sup>130</sup>

In these settings, public officials attend events by foreign diplomatic missions such as the British High Commission in Belize: “We’ve had both dominant political parties attend our events, whether in government or as opposition.”<sup>131</sup> In 2023, for instance, the Pride reception by the British High Commission saw the attendance of a general, a Cabinet minister, and the speaker of the House.<sup>132</sup>

Pride events hosted by the British High Commission provide a platform for activists such as Caleb Orozco from UNIBAM to engage with officials and advocate for the human rights concerns of sexual and gender minorities in Belize. Orozco utilizes these events to “monitor the progress of the government’s action around the development of human rights,” and directly engage with stakeholders like the attorney-general on the Equal Opportunities Bill and a proposed hate crime legislation.<sup>133</sup> Through engagement at Pride, UNIBAM also organized a sensitization session for the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs in which ministry officials addressed LGBTIQ issues for the first time.<sup>134</sup> Orozco emphasized the importance of using Pride to assess political attitudes, identify opposition, and lobby for support.<sup>135</sup>



Right: Community Pride Celebration in Belize, 2023. Credit: Promoting Empowerment Through Awareness for Lesbian and Bisexual Women (PETAL).

Orozco highlights the fundamental need for this form of Pride as "the entry point" for government advocacy.<sup>136</sup> But the actual follow-up is after the Pride event.<sup>137</sup> Orozco is also a member of the Belizean People's Constitution Commission, launched in 2022 by an Act to guide the constitutional amendment process, a position gained through his advocacy work during and outside Pride.<sup>138</sup> Having a gender expansive and diverse sexuality-inclusive voice during a constitutional amendment process can help to facilitate broader legislative recognition and acceptance of LGBTIQ rights. Similarly, Charrice Talbert of PETAL sits on national bodies including the National Commission for Families and Children, the National Women's Commission, the Network of NGOs, and the National AIDS Commission to drive law and policy reform.<sup>139</sup> Talbert's advocacy includes efforts to amend the Social Security Act to recognize people in same-sex unions.<sup>140</sup>

Improving the recognition and protection of LGBTIQ rights requires sustained effort in addition to Pride events. For Jael, whose focus is on "LGBT-formed families,"

Pride creates a sense of belonging because it's a time where, while we may not have the full support of the state, we can bring forward our issues to celebrate and discuss our concerns. At Pride, throughout August, people are listening, allowing us to discuss how to get our problems out there and do what needs to be done. It allows us to be a collective and understand our mandates and collective struggles beyond the rainbow balloons and glitter. It provides a platform to be visible, support, and understand one another.<sup>141</sup>



Right: Community Pride Celebration in Belize, 2023. Credit: PETAL.

# Case Study **El Salvador:** **Pride at a** **Tipping Point**

## Political and Social Context

Since 2022, El Salvador has witnessed a significant transformation in its political landscape, largely driven by the policies of President Nayib Bukele. Elected in 2019 on a platform of breaking away from the traditional bipartisan dynamics that had dominated Salvadoran politics, Bukele has focused on assertive measures against crime, particularly targeting gang violence, which has plagued the country for decades.<sup>142</sup>

Internally, the social impacts of these policies have been profound. While the security-driven agenda has led to a notable decrease in crime rates, fulfilling a key campaign promise and garnering domestic support, it has also led to overcrowded prisons and numerous allegations of human rights abuses. Bukele initiated a controversial “state of exception” in March 2022 which suspended certain constitutional guarantees in order to fight gangs. The regime of exception, initially set for a month, has been repeatedly extended, resulting in the detention of thousands alleged to be gang affiliates without due process. The government’s stance is supported by a sizable portion of the Salvadoran population, appreciative of the increased sense of security and a reduction in gang extortion activities. But it has sparked criticism from human rights groups, which document instances of torture and arbitrary detentions under the current regime and argue that such measures undermine the rule of law and could have long-term detrimental effects on civil liberties in El Salvador.<sup>143</sup>

The political ramifications of Bukele’s governance style have been equally contentious. The increasing centralization of power in the executive branch has led to accusations of authoritarian tendencies. In 2021, the firing of constitutional court judges and the attorney general, actions that were widely criticized as maneuvers to consolidate power, exemplified this shift. In a pivotal decision in 2021, the newly appointed judges to the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled that the president could run for a consecutive second term, overturning a longstanding interpretation of the constitution that prohibited immediate re-election. Critics argue that this decision, which effectively altered the rules of the game and paved the way for his re-election campaign, was influenced by Bukele’s control over the judiciary.

Bukele’s reelection and his substantial parliamentary majority have enabled a deeper concentration of power in El Salvador. This alignment allows for institutional and legal changes to be implemented with minimal opposition, strengthening control over all branches of government. These developments have alarmed democratic institutions and international observers, raising fears of a systematic erosion of checks and balances within the Salvadoran political system.



## LGBTIQ Human Rights in El Salvador

El Salvador faces significant challenges concerning the rights of LGBTIQ communities, an issue that continues to raise concerns among Salvadoran activists and international observers. Discrimination against LGBTIQ individuals is prevalent, and the legal framework provides limited protections against such abuses, leaving many vulnerable to injustices in their daily lives, from the workplace to access to healthcare.<sup>144</sup> Same-sex partnerships are not legally recognized, further marginalizing queer individuals and denying them the same rights and protections afforded to heterosexual couples.<sup>145</sup> Reports indicate that hate crimes are common and that perpetrators often remain unpunished. This situation is exacerbated by a general lack of trust in justice institutions, perceived as ineffective or, in some cases, complicit in discrimination. Among those who have been arbitrarily detained by the police as a result of the state of emergency are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, who are in a particularly vulnerable situation while in detention.<sup>146</sup>

Activist Bianka Rodríguez, executive director of COMCAVIS TRANS, explains the complex situation that many trans women go through in this context:

In El Salvador, precarity, poverty, and social exclusion force many trans women to engage in sex work, to be in circles where they are at the center of structural violence, where the gangs have control of the territories. These women have to pay bribes or must collaborate with the gangs to be allowed to do sex work in those areas. They are victims of these networks, where they end up being instrumentalized by the gangs, forced to sell drugs, to warn the gang when the police arrive, to collect extortion money. The police consider them collaborators of the gangs and threaten, persecute, and violently target them.<sup>147</sup>

During the first years of the Bukele administration, the lack of support for sexual diversity issues was evident. None of the bills promoted by LGBTIQ organizations advanced in Congress, where the ruling party Nuevas Ideas (New Ideas) had a majority. Bukele, in the first months of his first term, eliminated the Secretariat of Social Inclusion, where the Directorate of Sexual Diversity, which worked closely with LGBTIQ civil society organizations, was housed.<sup>148</sup> Now, this position of indifference toward LGBTIQ human rights agendas may be shifting towards a stance of open opposition.

In September 2022, the Supreme Court of El Salvador issued a significant ruling recognizing the right to gender identity, which mandates that the National Registry Office allows people to change their names on official documents according to their gender identity. The court ordered the legislature to create, within one year, a procedure that would allow transgender individuals to change the names on their identity documents. However, to date, this decision has not prompted any legislative action by the Salvadoran Congress.<sup>149</sup>

Bianka Rodríguez explained to Outright that this inaction by the Legislative Assembly forces trans people to continue going to court to try to change their identity document:

Going to the court system involves getting a lawyer to represent you, who can charge between \$3,000 and \$5,000 dollars for the sponsorship. The process can take from nine months to two years, and it depends on the judge you get. There are judges who refuse to rule in favor of trans people, despite the Supreme Court ruling and the advisory opinion of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.<sup>150</sup>

LGBTIQ communities in El Salvador still face significant hurdles in terms of representation and voice in both the political and social spheres. While there are organizations fighting for LGBTIQ people’s rights, their influence on public policy remains limited. The lack of political and social support for openly addressing issues of sexual and gender diversity perpetuates an environment where stigma and rejection are commonplace.

One thing the activists interviewed agree on is that despite the state of emergency, feminist collectives and LGBTIQ organizations have continued to mobilize in the streets. And the main mobilization every year is the Pride March.

### **Marching for the Right to Identity**

El Salvador has the longest-running Pride march in Central America.<sup>151</sup> Its first Pride march was held in San Salvador in June 1997 with an estimated 200 attendees. Its route was from Cuscatlán Park to Plaza Francisco Morazán. It was organized by the LGBTIQ association *Entre Amigos*, and had as its central message the memory of the army’s massacre of about a dozen *travestis* in 1984, which coincidentally also occurred in June. This massacre was denounced, but the case remained in impunity.<sup>152</sup>

*Entre Amigos* was the organizer of the march until 2009, when this role was assumed by the Alliance for Sexual Diversity, a collective that brought together various LGBT organizations and activists. Under the new organization, its name was changed from “Gay Pride” to the more inclusive March for Sexual Diversity. The following year, in 2010, the June 28 Committee was created, a platform made up of LGBT organizations and activists and allied merchants, which was responsible for planning the event.<sup>153</sup> In 2009, it was estimated that 2,000 people participated.<sup>154</sup> By 2015, the number of attendees had grown to 6,000.<sup>155</sup> By 2022, it had surged to 22,000.<sup>156</sup>

Although there is a committee responsible for the organization, the Pride march relies heavily on the self-organization of the participants. Karla Guevara, from *Colectivo Alejandría* and secretary of the Salvadoran LGBTI Federation, explained:

We say that the march organizes itself. Obviously it is not self-organized, there is a team behind it, but it relies a lot on the initiative of the participants. Even though we don’t have the money to put buses and transport people from the interior of the country, people still mobilize. People organize themselves from their blocks, they put together their floats, their signs, they invest a lot to participate.<sup>157</sup>

The Pride march maintains its initial political spirit, fighting for the human rights of LGBTIQ people. As *Bianca Rodríguez* pointed out: “The meaning of the march is more political. It is to make us more visible, to demand more protection from the state and recognition of fundamental rights.” This goes hand in hand with the joy and colorfulness that characterizes this type of queer manifestation. At the end of the march, a series of outdoor concerts begin as part of the closing party of the day.

In 2023, the Pride march, which started at Mercado Las Pulgas and ended at Plaza Salvador del Mundo, was attended by 26,000 people.<sup>158</sup> The activists interviewed agreed that it was the largest and most important political and citizen demonstration in the country that year. The march had as its slogan “The fight for equality begins with your identity,” in reference to the demand for a gender identity law.<sup>159</sup> Notably, no authorities or public institutions took part in the march.<sup>160</sup> Regarding police presence, Rodríguez told Outright that rather than contributing to a sense of safety, the police presence was experienced by participants as threatening because police officers were taking pictures of the people attending the march.<sup>161</sup>

Karla Guevara first participated in a Pride march in El Salvador in 2010, and has not stopped doing so since. When Outright asked what had changed in the march and what had stayed the same, Guevara said:

Something that has changed is that every year more people join the pride march. Another change is that before there were five LGBTIQ organizations in El Salvador, now there are 35 or 40. The context has also changed: in 2010 we had a leftist government, which although it did not directly support the March, there was a direction of diversity within the government, now there is no such thing. The sense of the march has also changed: although it has always been political, now it is more so, due to the context in which we live. But what remains the same is pride, for me it is pride. People recognize that although it is a celebration, they also recognize that it is a necessity to march year after year for our rights.<sup>162</sup>

## El Salvador at a Tipping Point

Until last year, the Bukele government’s stance could be considered conservative, ignoring the rights agenda of LGBTIQ people and the government’s need to address the demands of this population. Since his re-election in February of 2024, the stance seems to have shifted to a harsher and more confrontational one against what he has called “gender ideology.” Activist Erick Ivan Ortiz of Colectivo Normal explained: “The strategy during the first government was of invisibilization, [whereas] in this second government, in the context of his unconstitutional reelection, he seeks to build a new communication axis of confrontation.”<sup>163</sup>

This hardening of Bukele’s conservative stance was expressed publicly at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), organized by the American Conservative Union. In the framework of that event, in an informal interview conducted by Catalina Stubbe, director of Moms for Liberty, a far-right organization that has as one of its objectives the exclusion of “gender ideology” from schools, Bukele expressed his firm conviction to prevent the inclusion of these “ideologies” in the educational system.<sup>164</sup> He stated: “I think it is important to bring back God in schools, to bring back morality, civics, to learn traditional things—such as mathematics and history. ... Nobody is against modernization, what we are against is the introduction of unnatural ideologies, anti-god, anti-family, that does not fit in our schools.”<sup>165</sup> Immediately, Bukele’s Minister of Education shared on the social network X, formerly known as Twitter, a message stating: “CONFIRMED: all use or any trace of gender ideology has been removed from public schools.”<sup>166</sup>

Karla Guevara describes the concrete consequences of Bukele's statements:

All information on gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression has been removed from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. The health care guidelines for LGBTIQ+ people were eliminated. All mention of LGBTIQ+ people was eliminated from the curriculum, which was little, but there was mention, for example, of diverse families, same-sex couples. All of that was eliminated.<sup>167</sup>

Guevara points out that these changes have been accompanied by a strengthening of the anti-gender narrative of Bukele's supporters on social networks and in the media.

Ricardo Valencia, a columnist for *El Faro*, the main opposition media outlet to the Bukele regime, explains this change critically:

In five years, President Nayib Bukele went from criticizing the Salvadoran left for not being "left enough" to becoming one of the keynote speakers at the Conservative Political Action Convention (CPAC) in Washington, D.C., where the Salvadoran head of state attacked globalism and called on Americans to vote in the upcoming November presidential elections. ... Bukele is an ideological chameleon that conveniently changes costumes and loyalties. He currently repeats conspiracy theories linked with the far-right in the United States, which coincide with those replicated by Russia's disinformation machine.<sup>168</sup>

What is happening in El Salvador cannot be understood as an isolated event. Around the world, a notable trend among populist governments is to adopt the agendas and narratives of anti-gender and anti-LGBTIQ groups. This shift often involves framing such movements as a defense of traditional values against what they label as "gender ideology." This approach not only appeals to conservative bases but also serves to consolidate power by rallying public sentiment against a constructed common "enemy." The tactic aligns with broader populist strategies of emphasizing national, cultural, or religious identities, and often results in legislative actions aimed at restricting the rights of LGBTIQ communities.

For Erick Ivan Ortiz, the change in attitude on the part of Bukele and his government must be understood in a broader sense. The international community has been questioning the government for human rights violations and, recently, for its anti-democratic drift. In the face of this, Bukele seeks to make his discourse against gender ideology part of an anti-globalist position that allows him to go against those who question him at the international level.<sup>169</sup>

"I anticipate a pretty tough year for the march. It looks like this is going to be the first march with the government as an adversary," Ortiz pointed out.<sup>170</sup> All the activists interviewed by Outright agreed that they will not abandon the streets and will continue the fight for their rights.

Snapshot:

# Disability Inclusion, Access, and Visibility at Pride

There is a scarcity of comprehensive research exploring the intersection of disability and queer lives.

In a 2019 report, the Independent Expert on Protection Against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) noted that LGBT persons living with disabilities "face intersectional discrimination, greater social exclusion and violence, isolation and barriers to, inter alia, education, housing, employment and health, in particular sexual and reproductive rights."<sup>171</sup> Of particular concern, "persons with disabilities can often be denied sexual expression" as well as routinely "face discrimination in the form of denial of supports and the right to form relationships, and increased instances of forced medical interventions and treatments," including but not limited to the egregious instances of forced sterilizations of women with disability.<sup>172</sup> In a subsequent statement issued in October 2023 on the rights of LGBT persons with disabilities, the Independent Expert on SOGI and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended the collection of "disaggregated data on disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity to better understand the intersectional challenges faced by these individuals and to inform policy design and to evaluate progress in policy implementation."<sup>173</sup>

Despite these barriers, queer disability activists are speaking up and challenging stigma to draw attention to discriminatory societal attitudes through their advocacy. One area that demands advocacy is the inclusion of people with disabilities in Pride marches and other visibility events. Outright interviewed three activists with disabilities from Thailand and Norway; spoke with the Accessibility Manager from the 2023 Sydney World Pride in Australia; and heard from two survey respondents from Germany and Nepal, which helped us to capture a snapshot of the level of disability accessibility at Prides in 2023.

We heard from interviewees and respondents that Pride events often involve walking long distances, squeezing through crowds, and standing and waiting under the hot sun. Sign language interpretation of events or adequate street safety measures for visually impaired persons may be an afterthought. As one respondent based in Germany told Outright in response to our Pride survey,

No, I did not participate personally, as most Pride events are not accessible for me and others like me who are still avoiding large public gatherings out of concern for our physical health. I miss pride and being around other queer people, but the lack of inclusion for disabled and high-risk queer people has been very starkly highlighted since COVID-19 began to spread. I hope that in the future, Pride and other queer celebrations will remember those who are stuck at home, and provide more virtual spaces and safer gatherings (such as small groups in a well-ventilated outdoor setting).<sup>174</sup>

**Right:** Michelle Moland, queer and disability rights activist at Grenland Pride, 2023.  
Credit: Fredrik Nordahl



Michelle Moland, a queer disabled activist from Norway, expressed similar challenges:

As disabled people are very varied there's also a lot of different barriers. For me, I have chronic fatigue so that means that I do not have the same energy as most people. I need to always pick and choose what I do that goes both in how much I can do in organizing and how many events that I can participate in. If the Pride Parade route is too long, I cannot participate because my body physically cannot walk that long. For somebody who is, for example, blind, it can be very hard to even find information about their local Pride online. Because maybe the website isn't universally inclusive. Maybe a lot of the information about Pride is only posted in photos on Instagram, which a screen reader cannot read. For a deaf person, there might not be a sign language interpreter available on stage when people are holding speeches or to understand what entertainment is happening. And of course, for everybody who uses a mobility aid, there are cobblestones, tram lines, all of these kinds of things that make navigating a city very difficult. So if you don't know in advance the parade route, then maybe you discover when you're halfway that 'This is going through an area where my wheelchair cannot physically go.'<sup>175</sup>

Pride participants in Bangkok, Thailand, told Outright they faced similar barriers. Harper Y., a nonbinary trans masc disability activist from Bangkok, described the barriers they faced:

It was my first time using my wheelchair at a Pride. I think the setup in terms of accessibility was not the best...There were cars driving past us on the main road. If any crisis were to happen, people with wheelchairs or mobility aids are the last thought of, we bear the brunt in case of events like stampede.<sup>176</sup>

Both Harper Y. and Molly A., a disabled queer trans activist from Bangkok, said that as wheelchair users, they had to ask for help from friends to push them. Molly A. added, "My friends had to take turns pushing me. It was hard even for them because of how slanted the road was."<sup>177</sup>

Accessibility was a challenge at Bangkok Pride not only during the march, but in other associated advocacy and social events. For Molly A., it felt as if organizers considered accessibility the "cherry on top instead of the ingredients." For example:

I was part of the press conference after Pride. It was located far away from where the Pride march ended. As an ambulatory wheelchair user, I took my wheelchair, but traveling was not easy at all. I had to take the BTS [Bangkok Sky Train mass transit system] and ask for help from staff at the station to board the train.<sup>178</sup>



Pride and the press conference were "worth it for the long run" despite the challenges, Molly A. added. She noted that organizers have made some efforts to improve accessibility, but much more could be done, particularly in terms of information sharing:

There should be information available upfront that if you have any kind of disability and need any sort of support, this is the designated place you can go to, to seek help or if you need someone to accompany you. In the past years, volunteers have been assigned to help participants with disability at the Bangkok Pride events, but these volunteers are university kids without any experience or comfort [with disability issues]. In 2022 I got assigned to this young person who was very shy and very timid. She was very sweet, but I couldn't get the help I needed such as information on how far the nearest restroom is and practical things like that.<sup>179</sup>

Moland is among those who have sought to make Grenland Pride, in her district in southeast Norway, more accessible. She explained, "Since I am a disabled person I have pushed for inclusivity from when I joined. And I feel especially since I'm also a board member for an organization for queer disabled people, then I feel like my pride really has to be on the forefront of disability inclusion." Grenland Pride organizers ensure that there is easy access to information (such as about the Pride route), digital accessibility for visually impaired persons, and a variety of events.<sup>180</sup>

The impact of inclusion on queer disabled people that attend Grenland Pride is positive, Moland told Outright: "The feedback that I've gotten from other queer disabled people is that the focus on accessibility is very much needed...There are many, many levels of accessibility that most people don't think about. And we have been told from our community that they really appreciate that we have a focus on that."<sup>181</sup>

In Kathmandu, Nepal, Outright heard from Rukshana Kapali, a transfemme activist and the founder of Queer Youth Group, about some accessibility steps that her collective has taken:

We use multiple languages in all aspects of Pride, including the pre-information shared for Pride, during the Pride itself, and the post-activities. This includes use of wide ranges of indigenous languages and local languages, including Nepali Sign Language. We ensure use of alt-text or captioning in all our social media posts. We ensure that the venue is an accessible space.<sup>182</sup>

Where the needs of disabled people are not considered, the effect is to exclude people who rightly belong in all aspects of Pride—as protest, as celebration, as visibility events, and as community-building. According to Moland, "If [accessibility needs] are not considered, then it feels doubly hurtful as in regular society. Because like, oh, even my queer siblings can't be bothered to include me."<sup>183</sup>

Both Moland in Norway and Molly A. in Thailand mentioned that beyond Pride, queer community social events have a long way to go in terms of accessibility. Even outside of Pride, Molly A. said,

I have never been to an accessible queer event or party. I always have to have someone with me for me to participate. And even in terms of financial accessibility, the tickets cost money and they mean nothing but entry for a person like me who is on a lot of medication and doesn't drink alcohol.<sup>184</sup>

For Moland,

It feels like a lot of queer community is very focused on fun when we are together and your disability isn't fun. The fact that we need to find a place to have a party where you can...get in with your wheelchair, that's not fun. We just want to pick the coolest spot. And imagine how you [would feel] if somebody said that, no, a very vital part of your identity is not fun enough for us. That would be very hurtful.<sup>185</sup>

### Sydney WorldPride: Resourcing Accessibility

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Outright heard from both Bangkok-based interviewees that one Pride event that largely got it right in terms of disability accessibility was Sydney WorldPride, held from 17 February to 5 March 2023 in Sydney, Australia. We reached out to Akii Ngo, an accessibility and inclusion educator, trainer, survivor advocate, and activist who served as the Accessibility Manager for Sydney WorldPride about what lessons could be learned for future Pride event.

Ngo said that the success of Sydney Pride's accessibility arrangement was because there was oversight into every aspect of the organizing team's work. Ngo developed a minutely detailed accessibility plan. They were provided with dedicated funding, charged with training event managers who had no previous experience with accessibility, and had oversight into all aspects of the event organization, from the social media to the logistics of each event.<sup>186</sup>

Sydney offered "23 types of accessibility offerings that ranged from online accessibility features to physical accessibility and sensory/wellbeing spaces."<sup>187</sup> Ngo told Outright, "Accessibility goes so much deeper than physical access."<sup>188</sup>

Not everything went according to plan. At the opening night ceremony, Ngo said that the stage did not have enough space for the sign language interpreters. As a result, as evening fell, the interpreters were not fully visible from the audience area. By the time the team recognized this, there was no time to book an alternate venue for the event. Ngo noted that there is always room for improvement: "I only had 10 months to work with the Pride, whereas the organizational process had started much before that." If they had been involved in the budget planning process and had oversight from the very beginning of planning the event, they might have been able to further improve on some aspects.

Despite hiccups, Ngo told Outright that the accessibility arrangements at Sydney World Pride were nearly universally acknowledged as some of the best and got some of the highest ratings in feedback from participants. Ngo is proud of their achievements, particularly in terms of training event managers and staff who had no previous experience working on accessibility. They also created training materials to pass on to the next World Pride organizing committee, including legacy videos documenting their experience. Ngo hopes their strategies will be implemented, and improved upon, in all future events.

One additional concern mentioned by both Thai queer disability activists related to the paradoxes around visibility as people with disabilities at Pride. Harper Y. described a sense of infantilization during the march:

People came up to me during the Pride and said things like 'Oh, you're so brave!' It is literally not about bravery, but showing up and being visible...Last year I was not using a wheelchair, but I was with a friend who was, and a photographer came up to me and asked me if it was okay to take their photo. And I was like why don't you ask them, they are right here.<sup>189</sup>

As a parting message on Pride and disability in Thailand, Molly A. called on global audiences to read beyond the queer-friendly image Thailand broadcasts and start to interrogate their assumptions about who is included and who remains excluded. Molly A. also expressed a desire for Pride to be a platform where queer and queer disabled activists of all socioeconomic strata "could come together and work together towards something [through] negotiations and sharing their points of view. I am so sure that right now we are lacking a lot in terms of inclusion of different perspectives."<sup>190</sup>



# Case Study

## Florida, United States:

# Let Us Live

## Legal and Social Context

In the United States, same-sex activity between consenting adults has been legal in all states since the *Lawrence v. Texas Supreme Court* case in 2003, and activists successfully achieved marriage equality nationwide through the *Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court* case in 2015.<sup>191</sup> But recent efforts have emerged to limit the rights of LGBTQ individuals and other minority groups. Across the United States, lawmakers introduced approximately 650 bills in 2023 aiming to restrict LGBTQ rights, alongside a surge in anti-rights rhetoric in the media.<sup>192</sup>

The state of Florida is known for its vibrant LGBTQ communities, but state politics have never been strongly queer-friendly: Florida only achieved marriage equality in 2014, after 38 other US states, and its now-dormant sodomy law was never removed from the books.<sup>193</sup> Since the arrival in power of far-right governor Ron DeSantis in 2019, Floridian Republican lawmakers have introduced a slew of bills targeting LGBTQ people, especially transgender, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary individuals, including youth.<sup>194</sup>

In 2022, DeSantis signed into law the Parental Rights in Education Act of 2022, commonly known as the “Don’t Say Gay” law, prohibiting classroom discussions about sexual orientation or gender identity in certain grades.<sup>195</sup> In 2023, proposed legislation extended these restrictions to public and private workplaces (the “Don’t Say Gay or Trans at Work” law), but it faced significant opposition and did not progress to committee hearings.<sup>196</sup> However, four anti-LGBTIQ Bills were passed in 2023, including House Bill 1069 expanding “Don’t Say Gay” in schools, restricting how teachers and students can use their correct pronouns in schools and facilitating book bans.<sup>197</sup> Senate Bill 254 penalizes healthcare workers for providing gender-affirming care, prohibits medical insurance from covering gender-affirming care, and in some cases strips parents of custody if they allow minors to have such care.<sup>198</sup> House Bill 1521 requires people to use bathrooms based on sex assigned at birth, putting transgender and gender diverse people at risk of harm.<sup>199</sup> Another 2023 law, Senate Bill 1438/House Bill 1423, aimed at regulating drag performances, was challenged in the Supreme Court which restricted its enforcement.<sup>200</sup>

Within this anti-LGBTIQ climate, activists are engaging in collective and individual advocacy efforts against discriminatory laws, policies, and rhetoric through strategic litigation and mass sensitization campaigns. For instance, on 28 February 2024, “hundreds of transgender Floridians and allies” convened at the Florida Capitol building in Tallahassee for the “Let Us Live” march, protesting the Transgender Erasure Bill, House Bill 1639.<sup>201</sup> This bill aimed to compel individuals to identify based on their sex assigned at birth rather than their gender on their identity documents, and mandated health insurance coverage for anti-trans conversion practices.<sup>202</sup> Although passed by the House of Representatives, the Senate President Kathleen Passidomo announced during the Let Us Live March that the Senate would not consider the bill, effectively halting it for the legislative session.<sup>203</sup> This same year, Equality Florida advocated against “22 of the most extreme, anti-LGBTQ bills” ever proposed in Florida within a 60-day legislative session.<sup>204</sup> Specifically, at committee level the group stopped a Pride Flag Ban bill that sought to ban “public buildings from raising or displaying pride flags or any flag representing a political viewpoint.”<sup>205</sup>

## Pride in Florida: Exploring My Hollywood Pride

LGBTIQ visibility events, such as Pride, are abundant across the state of Florida. From Miami Beach Pride to Pride Fort Lauderdale, and many more in between, Prides are held throughout the year, starting with My Hollywood Pride in January and culminating with Orlando Pride in October, and new Prides continuously crop up.<sup>206</sup> Expansion of Pride in Florida cannot be taken for granted, though: St. Cloud Pride, first held in a suburb of Orlando in 2022, was canceled by organizers in May 2023 due to stringent anti-LGBTQ laws and increasing queerphobia in the state, including death threats.<sup>207</sup>

Hollywood, a town outside Fort Lauderdale, also held its first Pride in 2022.<sup>208</sup> Outright interviewed Todd Delmay, event chair of My Hollywood Pride, who, with his husband Jeff Delmay, was among the six couples that had successfully sued for marriage equality in Florida.<sup>209</sup>

My Hollywood Pride originated from the desire to foster a sense of community in an area with a limited openly-LGBTQ population and began with the establishment of the Hollywood LGBTQ+ Council.<sup>210</sup> Concerned by the city’s low score of 49 out of 100 on the Human Rights Campaign municipality index, the LGBTQ+ Council collaborated with the city council in calling on the mayor to prioritize addressing LGBTQ issues, including improving healthcare access and ensuring hate crimes were reported to the FBI by the police department.<sup>211</sup> In 2020, the council raised the Progress Pride flag, making Hollywood the first city in Florida to do so.<sup>212</sup>

My Hollywood Pride organizers prioritized creating activities suitable for all ages while emphasizing the visibility and inclusion of queer youth and trans individuals. In 2022, the Pride’s theme “Welcome Home” aimed to convey a sense of belonging. The inaugural My Hollywood Pride in 2022 offered family-friendly entertainment and features like the Youth Zone and Teen Lounge/Zone.<sup>213</sup>

In 2023, organizers of Hollywood’s second Pride—titled “Pride Starts Here” to highlight Hollywood’s distinction as home to the first Florida Pride event of the year, held in January—faced a shifting legal and political landscape marked by increasing hostility to LGBTQ rights. Delmay told Outright: “Given the climate, we had to be careful about [everything]...even just having a drag queen was potentially an issue.”<sup>214</sup> The inclusion of drag performers at Pride events posed a challenge due to Florida’s laws, prompting organizers to find ways to have people in drag at Pride without flouting the law.<sup>215</sup>

Despite the abundance of caution, the event still got backlash. The Daily Caller, a website run by Tucker Carlson, an American conservative political commentator, published a story on the My Hollywood Pride event, sparking significant controversy. Delmay recounted:

It blew up on TikTok, and everybody came after us. They were trying to claim that we were grooming children. But the thing is, though they sent people to our Pride to try and get video footage to create a scandal, there was nothing scandalous. So, they didn’t even show footage from our Pride. They [commenters and conservative accounts] showed other pictures from other events to make it seem like we had done something terrible.<sup>216</sup>

My Hollywood Pride sought institutional support, which the city council provided steadfastly despite concerns about potential funding cuts by the state government.<sup>217</sup> The fear of state reprisals was valid: the Florida Governor had twice removed city council elected officials for political reasons.<sup>218</sup>

Amidst ongoing attacks on LGBTQ rights, Delmay believes that centering queer youth and trans individuals in Pride is radically inclusive and essential. By prioritizing youth, families, and marginalized groups, Pride can confront opposition more effectively.<sup>219</sup>

For the Delmays, ensuring the safety and rights of LGBTIQ families is paramount, along with promoting inclusivity for young people to form their own chosen families. They envision family-inclusive events where everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can enjoy and support each other in an environment that is "fun, festive, light-hearted and completely accepting."<sup>220</sup>

### **"The Work That We Need to Do": Pride as Resistance Throughout Florida**

In Florida, the National LGBTQ Task Force is also working at the grassroots level to build allyship and community through Pride and visibility events, providing safety trainings and raising awareness to advance LGBTQ issues at all levels.<sup>221</sup> Ryan Hurst of the National LGBTQ Task Force believes that in the context of anti-rights action,

Pride in and of itself is a political statement...our way of showing communal love and resistance against those who would silence us and want to force us into the proverbial closet or would like to erase our existence. Merely having a Pride, especially in this political climate, is a political statement. It's a form of resistance.<sup>222</sup>

Pride also remains a pivotal space to restate what values LGBTIQ people and allies hold dear. Hurst opined to Outright that:

Our job as a movement and as activists is to make our Pride celebrations what we want them to be. We need to take the opportunity of Pride to make sure that we are doing the right kinds of work and trainings, organizing ourselves from within, organizing ourselves as activists to do the work that we need to do, whether that be registering people to vote, whether that be going and providing public testimony at a school board so that we can fight back against the banning of books that feature LGBTQ characters or authors or seeing whatever that work needs to be. It's incumbent upon us to go out and do it. We've got to go do it.<sup>223</sup>



**Right:** Drag Queen at a Storytime session, My Hollywood Pride, 2023.  
Credit: My Hollywood Pride.

# Snapshot Hong Kong: When Authoritarianism Throttles Pride

Hong Kong's Pride March, which began in 2008, once enjoyed significant support from the government. Even during the Umbrella Movement, a significant political protest in 2014 where thousands of people occupied central Hong Kong to demand a more democratic election system, the Pride Parade was warmly embraced by the crowds despite tensions between pro-democracy protesters and the police.<sup>224</sup> But now it faces increasingly serious challenges due to government pressures on civil society.

Restrictions on Pride began in 2019, when a series of protests began with two million people marching peacefully to protest against a bill that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China; when police cracked down on the protests, the protest movement only expanded, with further democratic demands.<sup>225</sup> Using the pro-democracy protests as a pretext, the authorities banned the traditional, peaceful Pride march through the territory.<sup>226</sup>

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the government has tightened its grip on Hong Kong's civil society in the name of a "Zero-COVID Policy." In 2020, Pride was held online; over the next two years, Pride was held in person, but only in the form of indoor pop-up exhibitions. In March 2023, the Hong Kong government lifted all mask-wearing requirements, but it did not bring the Pride Parade back and it capped other authorized demonstrations at 100 participants, even though the law does not clearly provide this restriction.<sup>227</sup>

In December 2023, the Pink Dot festival, a queer cultural event that had been held annually from 2014 to 2018, took place outdoors for the first time since the 2019 crackdown, but police surveilled the event and ordered it to be shortened, leading organizers to cancel speeches scheduled to close out the festival.<sup>228</sup>

Under government pressures, many pro-democracy activists have left Hong Kong, leaving others to explore ways to coexist with the pro-China government.<sup>229</sup> Some groups have even invited pro-China legislators to support their events, stirring up mixed emotions within the community. In 2023, Hong Kong Gay Games invited Regina Ip, the pro-Beijing lawmaker and former security minister to open the event.<sup>230</sup> One Hong Kong-based activist whom Outright interviewed said that the Hong Kong government aims to use pinkwashing to divert attention from other human rights violations.



Right: Pride in Hong Kong

In 2024, the crackdown on civil society organizing has been aggravated by the introduction of Article 23, under which any criticism of the Hong Kong or Chinese government can lead to a maximum jail sentence of up to 10 years.<sup>231</sup> The invisible "red line" has suffocated many activists across the spectrum, threatening not only just LGBTIQ rights but also the wider scope of human rights.<sup>232</sup> In response, several organizations have sought to depoliticize themselves, refraining from criticizing policymakers as they navigate the draconian National Security Law.<sup>233</sup> Activists who maintain a critical distance from the government state that, due to arbitrary acts by law enforcement, "We don't know what we can do and what we can't do."<sup>234</sup> While Pride once enjoyed the support of statutory bodies like the Equal Opportunities Commission, today seeking any government support seems unrealistic. For those planning events, "No response is a good response," as local LGBTIQ NGOs prefer to avoid government attention by all means.<sup>235</sup> In this draconian context, it is unclear what the future holds for Pride in Hong Kong.



Case Study India:  
**Outside the  
Metropolis:  
"Same Hearts,"  
Different  
Priorities**

## Background

In the past 15 years, India has seen significant advances in LGBTIQ rights from both the courts and the legislature.

The path to decriminalization was not linear. A 2009 Delhi High Court decision struck down India’s colonial-era prohibition on “carnal knowledge against the order of nature,” but the Supreme Court overturned the ruling four years later.<sup>236</sup> Ultimately though, in 2018, the Supreme Court reconsidered its decision, retaining section 377 of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code (IPC) but decriminalizing consensual same-sex sexuality.<sup>237</sup> In July 2024, a new criminal code, the Bharatiya Nyay Samhita, will replace the IPC and remove the section entirely.<sup>238</sup>

Meanwhile, a 2014 Supreme Court judgment established transgender persons’ rights to legal gender recognition, and the same year, the state of Tamil Nadu issued a government order banning medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children.<sup>239</sup>

More recently, in 2023 the Supreme Court turned down the petition to recognize marriages or civil unions between same-sex couples as a right.<sup>240</sup>

India’s first Pride event took place in 1999 in Kolkata as a “rainbow walk,” significantly predating these legal battles. Prides have subsequently proliferated across the country in bigger metropolises as well as smaller towns. Given this history, we may ask what the relationship has been between legal wins and visibility. In order to explore this question, Outright interviewed six activists working on Pride events in three states with a focus on small cities and towns.

## Assam

### Guwahati

Guwahati Pride came together when the Supreme Court reinstated the criminalization provision in Indian Penal Code 377. A protest was organized in December 2013, one day after the judgment was delivered. This spontaneous street activism saw the first public gathering of queer people in the city and ultimately culminated in the first Queer Pride in Guwahati, the capital of Assam state, in February 2014. It was a small gathering of about 80 people. Teteli Bhanu, a nonbinary Assamese activist and student, recalled that they wore a mask to hide their identity at that first event:

The first Pride was very unstructured and impromptu. A lot of us, mostly students in colleges and even high schools had come together...[After the first Pride] the newspaper headlines screamed things like ‘suddenly there are homosexuals on the streets!’<sup>241</sup>

Shivalal Gautam, a queer, ethnically Nepali Assamese activist has been part of the Guwahati Pride organizing committee since 2015. Shivalal recalled that the issue of visibility divided the community in the initial year: “The discreet population of the community, those who were not ‘out,’ were against Pride and feared that visibility [would] bring backlash.”<sup>242</sup> Because Guwahati is a small city, both Teteli and Shivalal said, Pride participants could not expect the anonymity that participants of Pride marches may experience in a large city. In fact, perhaps because some queer people feared exposure, Shivalal said the first Guwahati Pride saw the participation of allies in greater numbers than LGBTIQ people.<sup>243</sup>

Talking about decriminalization, Teteli added:

2018 has been a huge landmark. The visibility shot up like crazy. The number of collectives also started increasing. In fact, in Assam itself, there are Prides happening in various districts now like Jorhat...Sometimes I talk to my friends and we [discuss] how you now see so many young people who are very confident and very outgoing and [they are] putting themselves out there just as they are. And it is very inspiring to see and very motivating but also sometimes I feel very jealous. If only I was also confident like that!<sup>244</sup>

The debate around marriage equality, Teteli said, was more muted in Guwahati: few of her queer contemporaries were focused on marriage equality as a goal, and the Supreme Court marriage ruling in 2023 was not a galvanizing moment for their community or for the Pride march.

Meanwhile, other political tensions have been reflected in the Guwahati Queer Pride. Assam, which is notable for its mixed population across ethnolinguistic and religious communities, was the first state in India to demand and implement the controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) between 2013 and 2019. This project has threatened to make members of certain communities stateless, including on the basis of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and gender identity.<sup>245</sup> It also significantly affected trans persons in the state who had a hard time with national identity documents in their deadnames or that mention only their sex assigned at birth.<sup>246</sup> Further complicating this political contestation is the very real threat of being charged with sedition. At the 2020 Mumbai Pride, some participants were arrested on sedition charges because of their criticism of the government's policies on citizenship.<sup>247</sup>

In 2023, Pride was organized by a new group of individuals who had disagreements with the previous organizing committee. It was also the first year that the Pride saw pro-Hindu nationalist slogans being raised. Teteli B. told Outright that she has observed active co-opting of the LGBTIQ movement in Guwahati by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, a wooing of a small community in a small city within a politically charged and polarized context that mirrors strategies adopted in the larger national context.

Given this reality, some Assamese activists have felt that certain political messages should be kept out of Pride for safety and security. "Previously I also used to chant for Azaadi. But now I am always anxious that there will be too much of the wrong kind of attention, maybe someone will be charged with sedition [like in Mumbai]. We have to be very careful now," a queer activist added.<sup>248</sup>



Right: Dibrugarh Pride, India, October 2023. Credit: Rituparna Neog

Rituparna Neog, transfemme activist and Associate Vice Chairperson of the State Transgender Welfare Board and northeast member representative to the National Council for Transgender Persons, told Outright that growing up in a village 12 kilometers from Jorhat city, she did not have access to the vocabulary around gender and sexuality. "Till my 10th standard there was no electricity in the village," she added. She came to Guwahati for her undergraduate studies in 2012 and when the first pride happened in the city two years later, she said, "I saw a colorful rally with people in the street and I wondered what was happening!"<sup>249</sup> She learned more about the Pride and the local LGBTQ community through private Facebook groups and began volunteering for Guwahati Queer Pride in 2016.

When the COVID-19 lockdown happened, Rituparna started an online support group with psychiatric and psychology professionals. She also realized that such initiatives, while sorely needed in small towns and rural contexts, were not available in parts of Assam outside Guwahati.

There was no community as such that existed in small towns or rural Assam...So my whole work in Upper Assam started with building that community and mobilizing more people through WhatsApp groups and Google Meets. We used to chit-chat, we used to recite poems, sing, and crack jokes.<sup>250</sup>

In April 2021 during *Bihu*, the festival that marks the beginning of the Assamese New Year, Assam's first public LGBTQ event outside Guwahati was organized in Jorhat city with about a hundred attendees. Soon after, the Drishti Queer Collective was founded as a space for queer people in smaller towns and districts to come together and mobilize as a community.

In April 2022 the first Pride Walk was organized in Jorhat followed by the Dibrugarh Pride. Rituparna told Outright: "The aspiration came from the community, it was never my agenda to organize a Pride rally. But people would see the events in Delhi, Guwahati, Mumbai and they would often say we also want to attend Pride."

Both towns now have Pride organizing committees. Lipi B., a 22-year-old postgraduate student and nonbinary activist who is a co-founder of the Drishti Queer Collective and the Jorhat Pride committee, says of his first Pride:

The day we walked on the street I felt liberated wearing my dhoti and kurta.<sup>251</sup> A lot of people know me for my work with Drishti and Jorhat Pride Committee. It is a nice feeling.

People from the hijra community, allies, and all other gender identities danced their hearts out to Bihu songs. That was the best moment.<sup>252</sup>

Since 2022, many smaller towns across Assam have been inspired to organize their own Pride events. “[The Pride in Jorhat] created momentum and a great boost to the queer movement space in Assam. Not all of the small towns have succeeded in continuing to organize annually, but it’s great that the initiatives have taken place,” Rituparna said.

In 2023, Dibrugarh Pride took place in October, and Jorhat Pride in December. At the Jorhat Pride, Rituparna said, “Overall, there were about 250 people. My mother also joined.” The collective hopes to organize additional Pride events in five districts of Upper Assam in the next year.

Rituparna offered several observations regarding unique aspects of the smaller Prides in Assam. For one, she said, within the queer organizing spaces in Jorhat and Dibrugarh, most of the leadership comprises queer women and trans and nonbinary persons. Gay or bisexual cis men are less visible. Rituparna suggested that in small towns, they fear that coming out might mean losing social privilege:

In the context of small towns, cis men still hold power, but it’s also limited power. And they think that they have more to lose because their families are out here. That is my interpretation and my observation—it’s more to do with their masculinity.

Rituparna also remarked that bigger cities suffered from excess corporatization of Prides, and that money can come with conditionality. For instance, Rituparna recalls branded t-shirts from a corporate sponsor in a bigger city pride as well as restrictions on the kinds of slogans people could raise. “I am very clear that if corporatization happens, I have to move away from the space,” Rituparna concludes. “I never feel I belong in queer spaces in big cities. Coming from a village, and presently living in a small town, I feel suffocated.”<sup>253</sup>

## West Bengal

### Kalyani

Pride does not always need to prioritize visibility. Outright interviewed Aniruddha Dutta, an associate professor in Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies and Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Iowa, about Pride in her hometown of Kalyani, a town of an estimated 140,000 people, located 56 kilometers outside Kolkata, where Dutta continues to live for part of each year.

Dutta pointed out that, on the one hand, less elite, non-dominant caste kothi and hijra communities have long been visible in West Bengal.<sup>254</sup> On the other hand, some LGBTIQ people in small towns in West Bengal do not feel comfortable with the high level of visibility that might come from a march winding through the streets of a small town. In this context, other Pride events are prioritized. Dutta explained:

Going out of the metropolitan centers, we have to think about pride in a more non-literal sense. While there have actually been some Pride walks...the format of the Pride walk doesn't always lend itself very organically to a lot of these spaces. There's a particular route for which you have to take permission and there are definite start and end points. [I]f you're walking through a small town, there are areas where some people might not feel very comfortable, most of the neighborhoods are residential and the lanes are very narrow...[It is also] easier to get permission from the police and administration for a fixed venue event.<sup>255</sup>

Ranaghat Sampriti, a community-based organization led by Kothis, organizes a winter picnic in a popular public park in Kalyani. Dutta, who has participated in the event, told Outright:

We invite the local administrative officials, and sometimes a cake is cut. It is an all-day event and lasts much longer than a Pride walk. It is a high-visibility event because a lot of families and people from outside the community frequent this spot. For the last two or three years, the picnic has attracted about a hundred people.<sup>256</sup>

Ranaghat Sampriti holds another public event accompanied by cultural programs during the Basanta Utsav, or Spring Festival. These events in smaller towns, Aniruddha Dutta asserts, are a way to also build rapport with the local administration.

Dutta, who identifies as kothi, nonbinary, and transfemme, recalled the discomfort and eventual disillusionment she felt in queer spaces in bigger cities. Growing up in Kalyani, she initially felt very attracted to the LGBTIQ community spaces in Delhi and Kolkata for providing space for exploration that she did not have in her sheltered, middle-class childhood. But in the urban movements, a Dutta sensed the invisible barriers of class. Before decriminalization in 2018, she recalled participating in the Kolkata pride and hearing a constant lament that transfemme and kothi people putting on their *bhelki* somehow detracted from the serious message of the need for decriminalization. In the quest to be taken seriously, there were also considerations of banning the *thikri*, a ubiquitous clap that kothi and hijra people perform.<sup>257</sup>

Previously, in the context of the decriminalization campaign, Dutta has written about the "synecdochic symbolism" wherein a single provision of the penal code is a stand-in for "various broad and complex forms of discrimination which are collapsed under its name, even if they are unrelated to the law."<sup>258</sup> Decriminalization did not particularly impact the movement in West Bengal small towns, she felt. The debate around equal marriage also did not center in Pride: in smaller towns and rural India, even many heterosexual couples never get their marriages registered, while kothis often freely live with their partners if they are able to find long term partners that are socially accepted within their community. On the other hand, the Transgender Persons Act, 2019 did hold some interest in the working-class rural kothi community because it led to entitlements through government schemes for jobs or access to the public distribution system.

## Alipurduar

In Alipurduar, a small town in Cooch Behar district in northern West Bengal, Sumi Das, founder of Maitrisanjog Society, agreed with Dutta that national legal machinations have had little direct impact on local movements. Most of the kothi community in Cooch Behar, she told Outright, were not even aware of these judgments.<sup>259</sup>

Maitrisanjog organizes an annual rally in Alipurduar called "Hridoye Somo," which means "same hearts." The rally focuses on equal rights and the rights of young people in order to make it more broadly acceptable. The event is not called "Pride" and is not pitched as an LGBTIQ event, Das said, to ensure that participants do not face stigma from their families. The term LGBT has even created barriers in getting permission from the police to hold the rally. "Nowadays we represent it as a youth rally for equal rights and peace."<sup>260</sup> And for a small town like Alipurduar, this strategy has worked. "We see a lot of allies coming, parents, students from outside the LGBT community, and so on. And I see this as a positive effect."<sup>261</sup>

Das said that visibility is increasingly important in smaller towns because Kolkata Pride, which used to attract kothis from across the districts, has become an increasingly exclusionary and elitist space. For example, "All the information and registration forms are now in English. It's a way of neatly excluding a lot of us from the districts [who are not Anglophone]. So even if we want to participate, a lot of us are excluded."<sup>262</sup>

## Chhattisgarh

### Raipur

The inception of the Pride in Raipur was the birthday party of one of the young founders of a queer collective called Queergarh.

Ankit Das is a queer activist from the neighboring state of Madhya Pradesh, who came to Raipur for his undergraduate degree. Not having an open queer space, he and some of his queer friends would meet regularly at cafes for "queer hangouts" with about 10 to 15 attendees. "We did a small celebration when the Supreme Court decriminalized consensual same-sex relationships in 2018. At this meeting there were so many queer faces," Ankit told Outright.<sup>263</sup> Around the same time, the group of friends decided to found Queergarh with the support of a trans organization called Mitwa Sanklap Samitee, which has been operating in the state for over a decade. Queergarh initially started by doing sensitization on college campuses across Raipur.

One of the founding members of Queergarh decided to make his birthday event open to queer people in the city through a public invite. "About 50 to 60 people turned up...There were so many new queer faces, we never expected that. It was an emotional moment for us," Ankit said. The response to the queer birthday party convinced them that they had to organize a Pride event.

The first Chhattisgarh Queer Pride was held in the state capital, Raipur, on 29 September 2019. “It was a historical moment,” Ankit said with emotion. The core team for organizing the Pride was only about 10 people. In the run-up to Pride, the “first event we did was a flash mob to make people aware that Pride will happen and also why we celebrate Pride. We also followed this by doing a musical dance drama about educating the general public about LGBTQ lives and struggles.”<sup>264</sup>

Ankit recalls that the Queergarh core committee managed to organize 13 flash mobs across the city and people were largely supportive. “We faced some backlash. Some people called us homophobic slurs but, by and large, it was supportive.”<sup>265</sup>

The first Chhattisgarh Pride was nearly drowned out by heavy monsoon downpour. But despite the rains, an unprecedented 700 people attended. “We wanted to [enter] the world record for the world’s largest pride flag—2.5 kilometers long. We had more than 400 individuals holding the flag and walking. No one was [dropping] the flag [even as it got] very wet and heavy in the rains. We were so emotional and crying because we had thought the rain was going to spoil the event,” Ankit enthused.<sup>266</sup>

Since then, the Pride participation and Queergarh’s efforts to sensitize the public and government officials have only increased. The 2023 Pride saw a footfall of about 4,000 people, the largest yet. This was the first time that Queergarh was able to financially compensate its volunteers. When asked about fundraising strategy, Ankit says that before the Pride the group publishes calls for collaboration.

Ankit also acknowledged that the visibility of assigned-female-at-birth persons in Raipur is lower, though not entirely absent, as the video from 2023 Pride shows.<sup>267</sup> This is largely due to social conservatism and greater restrictions placed on women. There are queer women, Ankit added, but some of them are not publicly out, so visibility remains an issue. Unfortunately, the 10-member core committee of Queergarh does not include any queer women.

### **There Is No One-Size-Fits-All Approach**

Given India’s immense diversity, it is only natural that queer activism, visibility, and Prides have multiple narratives and trajectories. For instance, in state capitals like Guwahati and Raipur, the decriminalization wins and losses had a deep impact in bringing together queer people and culminated in Prides. In smaller suburban towns, LGBTIQ people formed community collectives to access support and community before deciding to have visibility events like Prides.

This plurality of Prides is something to be celebrated and nurtured, with lessons that can be learned from this diversity—from Prides as Bihu celebrations to Prides as picnics, and even Prides as marches with world-record-setting rainbow flags.

Case Study:

# Intersex Inclusion in Latin American Prides

Intersex people sometimes experience marginalization even within LGBTIQ movements and populations. Outright began documenting intersex visibility and inclusion in Pride in our 2023 report. Our 2024 report continues to highlight intersex visibility, focusing on the experiences of activists from Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela as they seek to be visible and included.

## Argentina

The country has intersex rights organizations working to promote visibility and push for the recognition and rights of intersex people, such as Argentina Intersex and Potencia Intersex.<sup>268</sup> Outright spoke with Pauli Sosa of Potencia Intersex, who explained that through the guidance of Argentina Intersex, they created educational materials on intersex people’s realities during the big Pride event in Buenos Aires, the capital city.<sup>269</sup> The organization distributed these materials during Pride events, engaging LGBTQ people and pride attendees to create awareness about the existence of intersex people, their experiences, and challenges.<sup>270</sup> Potencia Intersex occupies different advocacy spaces with groups on transgender, disability, and intersex rights and uses these opportunities for dialogue, “but there is a lack of knowledge about our realities.”<sup>271</sup>

There is more space to participate in Pride in smaller events in Buenos Aires and smaller cities, and Potencia Intersex does so. Overall, however, Sosa said that intersex people are generally “displaced” from the political process. The national human rights institutions under the previous government focused on “lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people,” Sosa said, and “even though we could try to make space for organization, this body is no longer functional with the new government...Argentina is on fire.”<sup>272</sup> Nonetheless, the work of striving to make intersex voices audible within and outside Pride continues for Sosa and the intersex groups in Argentina.

## Brazil

São Paulo LGBTIQ Pride Parade is the largest Pride parade in Latin America and one of the largest in the world.<sup>273</sup> This Pride draws marchers in the millions, but according to Emília Thaís of the Brazilian Intersex Association (Associação Brasileira Intersexo, ABRAI), “intersex people and the intersex movement is not very visible.”<sup>274</sup> 2023 was the first time in Brazil that intersex people marched, using the intersex flag during the parade.<sup>275</sup> As Thaís, the parent of an intersex child, explained,

There is a caucus for each group during the Pride parade—for gays, lesbians, trans, and bisexual people. The bisexual group sought to include every [other] group that was not represented in the Pride. This caused a bit of conflict with some of the other groups, but the intersex group went with the bisexual caucus and was visible during the 2023 Pride Parade.<sup>276</sup>

However, the LGBTQ associations are usually open to intersex people in other events without any conflicts, such as the Pride fair, which takes place a day or two before the parade:

ABRAI is always present in that fair. We were invited to have a stand to talk about intersex people, our rights, the importance of our cause and so on. But unfortunately, this event has very little visibility, including in the media, and the intersex cause does not fly so high at the fairs.<sup>277</sup>

Another challenge preventing the complete visibility of intersex people during the São Paulo parade is linked to funding. According to Thaís, most of the intersex activists do not live in São Paulo and "a big problem is the cost of travel to and accommodation during Pride."<sup>278</sup>

Raising the intersex flag at Pride, Thaís said, provoked conversations that were both uncomfortable and constructive:

We had a lot of visibility when the intersex flag was in the opening ceremony of the Pride parade before the actual movement started. A lot of people asked, 'What is that Pride flag? What is the meaning of the flag?' There was a little bit of mixed reception as many people didn't understand what intersex means, and some people made crude jokes. But there were a few others who knew a little about intersex people, and this gave us the opportunity to share knowledge about being intersex.<sup>279</sup>

Notably, the opening event was an excellent opportunity for intersex visibility in the community.<sup>280</sup> In addition, Thaís stressed that notwithstanding any conflicts, there are a lot of openings for people to listen to the intersex movement, especially in the last few years, and "the intersex cause has opened up some spaces within conservative and religious groups who now support the end of child intersex genital mutilation, even in rural areas."<sup>281</sup>

For future Pride events, ABRAI hopes to get more financial support to bring at least 10 intersex people from around the country to participate in the Parade and the fair "because this is a big opportunity to create awareness and be visible."<sup>282</sup> Thaís also cites the limited space for intersex people to participate in the 2025 national conference for LGBTIQ organizations in the country: "We have space for only a few people, but we plan to mobilize the attendees to be present and active and have more space in coming conferences."<sup>283</sup>

Personally, for Thaís, being visible during the parade was a momentous occasion:

The day before, I couldn't even sleep, knowing that I would be there at the opening of the parade with the flag. It was a very significant moment for us, and I was ecstatic seeing the flag fly. It felt like a dream, and I cried thinking about how difficult it was to get here.<sup>284</sup>



Right: Brazilian Intersex Association's (Associação Brasileira Intersexo, ABRAI) informational materials at the São Paulo Pride Fair, 2023. Credit: ABRAI.

## Venezuela

In Venezuela, the legal and social context has become increasingly restrictive regarding LGBTIQ rights advocacy, in addition to the country's economic crisis.<sup>285</sup> Outright spoke with Julián Parra, a Venezuelan intersex activist forced into exile as a refugee in Spain.<sup>286</sup> Parra, who co-founded Intersex Venezuela, built the organization in collaboration with other intersex people, with lessons learned from convening in Costa Rica where the 2018 San José statement on intersex rights was issued.<sup>287</sup>

Parra and his colleagues started their advocacy in what he describes as a roundabout way, first collaborating and gaining allyship with health organizations, universities, and research institutions, not LGBTQ organizations. Eventually, Intersex Venezuela began to be known by LGBTQ groups in the country, even working with the country's Ministry for Gender Equality and "creating space to talk about intersex rights."<sup>288</sup> Julián Parra described working within government spaces as "scary," noting that the government would permit Pride to be held but also permit protests by religious fundamentalists on the same day.<sup>289</sup> In 2020, Parra told Outright,

...we were invited to be in the virtual Pride March, but there was limited space to be visible and discuss intersex rights. In addition, we were afraid of repression and any repercussions [to our advocacy]. We stayed in the space, trying to work but with fear, wary of backlash.<sup>290</sup>

When Pride resumed physically in 2021, Intersex Venezuela participated in the march and found that its activism through Pride was gaining ground. Intersex activists were experiencing more allyship from LGBTQ organizations and spreading more awareness among LGBTQ individuals, controlling their own narrative:

People wanted to submerge the intersex experience into the different spaces, but we wanted our own space to educate and inform. Within Pride, we intentionally and strategically use the intersex flag, which creates awareness and allows people to access our resources. Through these experiences, we have learned to take space and be visible.<sup>291</sup>

Things took a dangerous turn when Parra and a group of other LGBTIQ activists demonstrated in front of the National Assembly to advocate for the right to legal name change for intersex and transgender people in 2022.<sup>292</sup> State agents physically invaded the activists' houses and took pictures, verbally harassed the activists, and opened an investigation for cybercrime and treason.<sup>293</sup> National Guard officials physically attacked Parra when they came to his house, he told Outright. In addition, activists' "social networks, emails and mobile phones were tapped," and Parra received death threats.<sup>294</sup> All six activists involved in the protest had to flee, as the risk to their lives and safety only worsened. Parra describes this period, along with his current status as a refugee in Spain, as "very painful and very heavy to bear."<sup>295</sup>

# Case Study **Pride in Italy:** **A Pride of** **Many Firsts**

*Guest article by Angelica Polmonari*

## Legal, Political, and Social Context

Italy legalized same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults in 1890, but its progress in providing full rights to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people has been halting.<sup>296</sup> Marriage between couples of the same sex is not legal, although since 2016 Italy has recognized same-sex civil unions which confer fewer benefits, rights, and duties than marriage, including with regard to adoption.<sup>297</sup> Parliament has passed two laws, in 2003 and 2010, to allow for equal treatment of LGBTQ people in employment, but LGBTIQ people still report frequent employment discrimination and there is no comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.<sup>298</sup> Homophobic and transphobic social views are widespread, and bias-motivated violence has escalated.<sup>299</sup> Italy ranked 35th place out of 49 European countries and 23rd out of 27 EU member states in ILGA-Europe's 2024 Rainbow Map.<sup>300</sup>

Since the government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni came into power in 2022, gender and sexually diverse people are coming under increased attack.<sup>301</sup> A group of lawmakers brought forward a draft law aiming to prohibit the granting of protection to asylum seekers based on their sexual orientation or gender identity in October 2022.<sup>302</sup> In January 2023, Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi issued a circular "ordering all Italian Mayors to stop automatically registering the births of children born or conceived abroad via assisted reproductive technologies."<sup>303</sup> Based on the circular, several Italian cities withdrew parental rights from lesbian mothers.<sup>304</sup> The Meloni government aims to criminalize surrogacy arrangements through a draft July 2023 law which may disproportionately impact LGBTIQ families.<sup>305</sup> The Ministry of Health ordered an investigation of Careggi public hospital in an attempt to prevent transgender individuals, especially minors, from accessing gender-affirming care and related services.<sup>306</sup>

Queerphobic hate speech, especially from national politicians, has grown rapidly, primarily to the detriment of transgender and non-binary people.<sup>307</sup> Non-governmental anti-rights and anti-gender groups have been empowered by the government's stance: in 2023, anti-rights group Pro Vita & Famiglia Onlus launched a national campaign demanding that 150 Italian schools no longer accept the self-affirmed gender identity of transgender students.<sup>308</sup>

This socio-political context has impacted Pride events in Italy. According to Mario Colamarino, an LGBTIQ rights activist and president of the organization Circolo Mario Mieli:

Since the appointment of the current Prime Minister, the true grassroots resistance to the rising far-right anti-minority rights policies has turned the squares of the Italian Pride events into the most crowded 'resistant squares' in the recent history of the country.<sup>309</sup>



## A History of Pride in Italy

Queer visibility emerged in Italy in Sanremo in 1972 when around 40 demonstrators protested the International Congress on Sexology, which labeled homosexuality a disease.<sup>310</sup> Following this protest, Italian LGBTIQ activists and allies within Europe published a statement to the effect that homosexuality is not a disease, 18 years before the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the official list of mental diseases in 1990.<sup>311</sup> There were no further LGBTIQ demonstrations until Pisa79, a city march gathering about 500 people protesting anti-gay violence.<sup>312</sup> The 1972 Sanremo and the 1979 Pisa events were the precursors of the modern Italian Prides that feature highly structured political marches and entertainment events.<sup>313</sup>

1994 was a key year for Italian modern Pride celebrations: in Catania, on 26 June, hundreds of people gathered for an LGBTIQ celebration in a public city square.<sup>314</sup> A few weeks later, 10,000 people marched in Rome in what is widely considered Italy’s first Pride parade.<sup>315</sup> Given the lack of visibility of LGBTIQ issues, limited cohesion within the movement, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic and stigma, the 1994 demonstrations were revolutionary for Italy.<sup>316</sup>

More than 10,000 people marched in Bologna in 1995 and in Naples in 1996 in Pride marches organized by Arcigay, the Italian federation of LGBTIQ associations.<sup>317</sup> Smaller Pride marches were held between 1997 and 1999 because of differences of opinion within the movement that inhibited organizing and mobilization.<sup>318</sup>

In 2000, the first World Pride took place in Rome with about 500,000 participants, despite fierce opposition from the Vatican and government officials.<sup>319</sup> This event promoted the establishment of the international organization InterPride, aiming to empower Pride organizers and organizations worldwide.<sup>320</sup>

Pride events continued to spread throughout Italy over the next decade, reaching even smaller towns: for instance, the first Padua Pride in 2002 was symbolic of grassroots communities pushing back against enforced silence on homosexuality in the region.<sup>321</sup> In 2013, five Prides—Milan, Bologna, Catania, Naples, and Cagliari—coordinated the first nationwide “Pride Wave,” aiming to replace the experience of yearly single national Pride events with multiple events all over the country.<sup>322</sup> Since then, the number of Pride events has risen from 13 events registered in 2014 to 50 Pride events in 2023, the highest number of local Pride events to occur over the same year in the country’s history.<sup>323</sup>

## Challenges Against Pride in 2023

The 2023 Pride Season in Italy is describable as a 1,200 kilometers long rainbow covering the nation, with marches of tens of thousands of participants apiece in cities from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia to Sicily.<sup>324</sup> Twenty-three years after the first-ever World Pride event, almost one million people crossed the city center of Rome at Rome Pride, the highest number of Pride participants in Italian history.<sup>325</sup>

In a country where hostile policies have been increasingly testing the resilience of the LGBTQ people with direct attacks on LGBTIQ+ families and a surge in hate speech, Pride in Italy in 2023 was more than a square and street demonstration: it was a key moment of reaffirmation of communal identity and legitimacy.<sup>326</sup> Each of the 50 Pride events of 2023, regardless of the location and size, indicated the spread of progressive ideals despite government pushback.<sup>327</sup>

The spike in anti-LGBTQ rhetoric posed some challenges to Pride celebrations in 2023, especially in regions where politicians want to curtail rights. In some cases, Pride organizers avoided seeking local authorities’ official endorsements in order to avoid refusals.<sup>328</sup> In Scafati, after the mayor had publicly expressed his support for the organization of the event, he issued a formal notice for the preservation of “public decorum” in the city, aimed at preventing “obscenity” and shirtless participation in the Pride parade, citing a pilgrimage to Pompeii on the same day. After deliberations between Pride organizers and the mayor’s office, the Scafati Pride was allowed to be held as planned.<sup>329</sup>

For Lazio Pride hosted in the city of Latina, the city’s mayor, a member of the Italian far-right party Fratelli d’Italia, first supported the event and then backed off due to party conflicts and threats from Pro Vita Italy, the Italian chapter of the international pro-life movement. Lazio Pride went ahead without official endorsement from the city.<sup>330</sup> In Rome and Milan, regional governments also declined to officially endorse Pride in 2023.<sup>331</sup> In the south of Italy, police disrupted the closing event of the 2023 Catania Pride by ordering organizers to stop the amplified music.<sup>332</sup>

Not all of the resistance is new. In Catania, Pride has been held for 20 years in a row, despite not receiving a formal endorsement from the Municipality of Catania or regional offices in Sicily from 2019 onwards.<sup>333</sup> Organizer Vera Navarria stated:

The impact of such a multi-level refusal on the local LGBTIQ+ population is negative. The LGBTIQ+ people and the whole local community feel ‘institutionally abandoned’ at all levels by both local and regional authorities.<sup>334</sup>

While government engagement declined, activist Mario Colamarino said Rome Pride enjoyed more corporate sponsorship in 2023 compared to the 2022 event, lightening the financial burden on organizers and allowing them to obtain necessary licenses, provide dedicated gathering spaces, and pay salaries for the 150 diverse staff of the organizing association.<sup>335</sup>

## Milan Pride

Compared to the rest of Italy, Milan, with its LGBTIQ-friendly neighborhoods, clubs, and stores, has protected and promoted LGBTIQ people’s rights both institutionally and societally more than elsewhere in Italy over the last decades.<sup>336</sup> CIG Arcigay Milano, the organization which leads the city’s Rainbow Coordination Group, organized more than 147 Pride public events in Milan in 2023, a record in the history of Italian city Prides.<sup>337</sup> According to Alice Redaelli,

Among these were 37 debates and talks held during Pride Square festival in the neighborhood Porta Venezia: 19 events on the 2023 legal, political and social issues affecting LGBTIQ people; 11 on cultural matters; five on arts and entertainment; three on LGBTQIA-related health issues.<sup>338</sup>

The events featured LGBTIQ activists, politicians, diplomats, and other allies, including Members of the European Parliament, the current Secretary of the Italian Democratic Party, and local City Counselors.<sup>339</sup> The inclusion of allies aimed to bridge the gap between the local LGBTIQ movement community and mainstream civil society.<sup>340</sup> The 2023 edition of the Milan Pride Square festival also had more grassroots participants than previous editions.<sup>341</sup>

## Turin Pride

Turin Pride is organized by Coordinamento Turin Pride. The group currently has 20 members, including non-LGBTIQ+ cultural and sports organizations to ensure broad-based participation.<sup>342</sup> According to Luca Minici, the group's coordinator, including non-LGBTIQ groups within the organizing committee has been well received by the local LGBTIQ individuals due to the fact that the Organizational Coordination Group of Turin Pride has invested in building intercommunity and cross-movement alliances since its establishment.<sup>343</sup> As Minici stated, "The Pride event has never been publicly named as the Turin Gay Pride but only as the Turin Pride, the city's Pride, since its first national edition, dating back to 2006."<sup>344</sup>

Working to include even more diverse groups, Turin Pride changed its routes to include other locations in 2023:

In 2023, for the very first time, the parade kicked off in one of the most multicultural suburbs of Turin, Aurora, and not in the core of the city center. Such a political and not merely logistical change in the conventional parade route decentralized the Pride, and opened its participation to further minority groups by making the event cross unexplored city landscapes.<sup>345</sup>

Turin Pride remains critical of the government, including the regional government, citing its failure to deal with critical issues that include welfare and climate change.<sup>346</sup>

## Accessibility and Inclusion in 2023 Italian Pride Events

Accessibility is key to inclusivity. People with disabilities, left behind for three decades, were more included in the 2023 Italian Pride.<sup>347</sup> Catania Pride organizers provided Italian Sign Language translators for the final Pride speeches and insulating ear plugs for participants throughout the parade and events.<sup>348</sup> The organizers also established an accessibility team to improve measures for Catania Pride in 2024.<sup>349</sup>

Similarly, Milan Pride provided interpretation services from and into spoken and signed languages during the 39 pre-Parade events, during the Pride Square Festival, and the grand finale on 24 June 2023. Organizers of Milan Pride also guaranteed visibility of the finale via live online streaming and provided a wheelchair-accessible parade route with several adjacent quiet areas.<sup>350</sup>



Right: Turin Pride, 2023. Credit: Coordinamento Torino Pride

Both Rome and Turin Pride organizations collaborated with the Italian Disability Pride Network, an informal national anti-ableism network comprising individuals and organizations, in June 2023.<sup>351</sup> Turin Pride endorsed the first-ever Turin Disability Pride, attended by hundreds of people in April 2023, before the main edition of Turin Pride.<sup>352</sup> In addition, the 2023 Milan Disability Pride, held on 10 June, provided room for visibility and discussions on intersections between disability and LGBTIQ identities.<sup>353</sup>

### Next Steps for Prides in Italy

One concern for Milan Pride in the coming years is to remain ecological, even more so than in previous years.<sup>354</sup> Conscientious about energy use, waste reduction, and procurement, Milan Pride organizers are striving to create an event with a minimal carbon footprint through energy efficiency.<sup>355</sup> Milan Pride provided sustainable electricity generation for the stage and provided free water refills along the parade route.<sup>356</sup> In addition, for the second year in a row, the Pride created an environmental sustainability contest to publicly reward the participants with the most eco-friendly parade float.<sup>357</sup>

Other Prides hope to expand geographically and in numbers as well as gain political recognition. Turin Pride aims to include social issues like climate justice, anti-racism, and disability rights in its mission.<sup>358</sup> Turin Pride also hopes to host EuroPride 2027, while Roman activists have their sights set on another World Pride in 2030.<sup>360</sup> Vera Navarra, the organizer of Catania Pride, aspires towards devolving a city-only Pride event into a series of events across the whole province of Catania.<sup>360</sup>

In the face of government intransigence, Italian activists remain undeterred: a rainbow will continue to run through Italy.



Right: Catania Pride, 2023. Credit: Arcigay Pegaso Catania.

# Case Study **Kosovo:** **"We Are Not Disposable"**

Kosovo—a former autonomous province of Serbia which has asserted its independence but has not been recognized as a UN member state—has taken significant steps to enshrine the legal rights of people with diverse sexualities and gender expression. In 1994, when Kosovo was still part of Serbia, the Parliament decriminalized consensual same-sex relationships between men. Kosovo's new constitution, after it declared independence from Serbia in 2008, included provisions for protection from discrimination including on the basis of gender and sexual orientation, among others.<sup>361</sup> These provisions were enacted into law in 2015 with the passage of the Law on the Protection from Discrimination, which sets out to prevent and combat discrimination, again explicitly including gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>362</sup> A new criminal code was enacted in 2019 that includes aggravated sentencing for "hate acts," including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>363</sup>

Kosovo has made halting progress toward marriage equality. In 2014 the president of the Constitutional Court, responding to a question from a student, stated that Kosovo *de jure* allows same-sex marriage.<sup>364</sup> However, Article 14 of the Family Law of Kosovo defines marriage as between two individuals of the "opposite sex."<sup>365</sup> In 2020, the Ministry of Justice introduced a draft Civil Code, in the works since 2014, that promised civil partnerships for same-sex couples. But Parliament voted it down in 2022 based on the one provision guaranteeing marriage equality.<sup>366</sup>

The Pristina Pride, one of the newest Pride events in the Balkans, has become a vehicle to drive activism around LGBTIQ people's visibility and rights. The first public queer visibility event in Kosovo took place in 2014 on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) in the form of a colorful march with rainbow flags.<sup>367</sup> Diplomats, including the British ambassador, participated in the event. This was followed by the first Pristina Pride event in 2017. Since 2017, a coalition of civil society organizations have come together to organize Pristina Pride Week, some of whom were also part of organizing IDAHOT between 2014 and 2016.<sup>368</sup> The 2023 Pride Week was organized by the Center for Equality and Liberty Kosova, the Center for Social Group Development, the Civil Rights Defenders, and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights Kosovo.

The theme of the first pride was "In the Name of Love." Kristian Rrasaj, Legal Advisor at Centre for Equality and Liberty Kosova (CEL), says that the aim of the first pride was just to bring visibility to the community, but its impacts went further, spurring action to tackle hate crimes:

There was a big conception that queer people do not exist in our society. The first Pride was very impactful...and also there was this very strong campaign [around] reporting hate crimes against the LGBTI community. I think it served as a platform to convince queer people to report their cases of discrimination or assault, because [it was stigmatized], like it is shameful to even report such cases.<sup>369</sup>

Subsequent Prides have at times taken on explicit advocacy messages. For example, Pristina Pride Week in 2020, organized as a car rally in deference to preventative measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, was themed "I Do" in reference to the then-newly introduced draft Civil Code with its promise of marriage equality.<sup>370</sup>

In 2023, the Pristina Pride Week theme was related to mental health, with the slogan "I love you as you are." Organizers sought to highlight systemic discrimination and stigmatization as stressors that contribute to mental health issues among queer people. The week-long celebration focused on bringing together artists, activists, and queer people as well as decision-makers and other stakeholders through a range of events. Panel discussions with parliamentarians on the stalled Civil Code, a queer feminist discussion of queer and trans women's marginalization within the movement, parties, drag shows, cultural performances, and art exhibitions all had their place at the Pristina Pride Week.

Sula W., a pansexual artist and LBQ activist who was also part of organizing events at the Pride week, said that Pride is often seen purely as celebratory, but a lot of planning goes into it. Discussions and panels on issues facing LGBTIQ people in Kosovo were carefully curated to include key stakeholders and decision-makers. While these panels took place during the day, "the evenings were for dancing and parties," she added.<sup>371</sup>

The fourth day of the 2023 Pride Week was dedicated to focusing on lesbian, bisexual, queer, and trans women, starting with a discussion on feminism, intersectionality, and the LGBTIQ movement followed by the publication of a poetry collection by Uresa Ahmeti titled "woman warmth, woman wrath," on love, sex, and intimacy among queer women. Sula W. told Outright that the initial discussion, held at the only queer pub in Pristina, was "an intimate gathering of about 15 to 20 people. It was focused on where feminist and LGBTIQ movements stand: on what points they are working together and at what points are they running parallel [as] separate movements." For Sula W., there is a long way to go in integrating feminist and LGBTIQ priorities. She recalled that as part of a sit-in protest on gender-based violence after the sexual assault of a minor,

Someone told me don't mention queer rights now, this is not the place. It was shocking to hear that: as a feminist, as a queer woman...we have to pick and choose what we want to present and what identity is welcomed...The feminist movement wants to generalize us as women. But queerness is part of the reason why we are oppressed.<sup>372</sup>

She added: "This is how oppression works: it silences you without giving you enough space so that you fight with each other for the limited space you have."<sup>373</sup>

So far, Pride events in Kosovo are concentrated in Pristina. Sula W. told Outright that she hails from a small town outside Pristina and that "Most [queer people] in Kosovo live in a bubble." In contrast, Kristian Rrasaj said many of the cases referred to him involving queerphobic hate crimes come from outside Pristina. There are plans to hold Pride events in other cities in the future, but Rrasaj expects more attacks and backlash in these spaces. "People from LGBTIQ+ communities are more concentrated in Pristina because they feel freer and safer to live here and do their jobs here and be who they are."<sup>374</sup>

That is not to say attacks on the Pristina Pride have not happened. In fact, the police foiled an attempted attack on the very first Pride event in 2017, arresting the attackers.<sup>375</sup> Rrasaj said, "So far, our cooperation with the carceral state agencies has been very good and fortunately, from our governments that we've had in power, they were all to some extent socially liberal."<sup>376</sup>

Rasaj said LGBTQ rights have progressed by leaps and bounds since 2017, in part as a result of Pride. For instance, he said, the visibility of Pristina Pride helps people who experience queerphobic attacks to feel more comfortable about coming forward.<sup>377</sup> In contrast, Sula W. said she did not think she would be treated without prejudice if she went to lodge a complaint about discrimination based on her queer identity: "In Kosovo we have laws that protect queer people. However, implementation is lacking. If I go to the police I will not be treated fairly."<sup>380</sup> Sula W. added that trans women in particular "remain unsafe in their houses, in the streets, and do not have stable income."<sup>379</sup>

Rasaj acknowledged that despite progress, Kosovo remains "quite a patriarchal society where gender roles dominate the landscape of the country. Our aim is to provide for and to fight for persons who do not conform and identify with binary and dominant social roles." He added that some of the worst backlash against the community came during the parliamentary debate around the draft Civil Code, with "horrible homophobic language used in parliament for the first time."<sup>380</sup> The silver lining, perhaps, is that activists see an opportunity for redress within state institutions. In March 2024, five organizations filed a lawsuit against the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo and a member of the Parliament for having "violated the dignity of LGBTQ+ persons, as well as [having] a humiliating and discriminatory effect on them" during the March 2022 debate over the Civil Code.<sup>381</sup>

Ultimately, does Pride in Pristina serve to bring together the LGBTQ movement and people of Kosovo and propel change? For Sula W., although Pride and the movement are far from perfect, the answer is a resounding yes. "I have heard from older activists how steeped in fear the earliest marches on IDAHOBIT were. Pristina Pride is carrying that legacy. It's a celebration but also a protest...We are taking up space, we remain, and are resilient." Sula W. added that activists' efforts have paid off in terms of increasingly visible high-level support: "When the prime minister showed up at the Pride, everyone [saw] that across Kosovo. It sends a message: that We Are Not Disposable."<sup>382</sup>



# Case Study Mauritius: "Do You Hear Me?"

## Legal and Social Context

In October 2023, the Mauritian Supreme Court declared section 250 of the Criminal Code, which criminalized sodomy, unconstitutional and discriminatory.<sup>383</sup> This ruling joined Mauritius with the select few African countries that no longer criminalize same-sex acts between consenting adults.<sup>384</sup> In practice, while the law existed, there were barely any instances of enforcement, but its existence could spur acts of bias and stigma.<sup>385</sup> Mauritius already has in place the Equal Opportunities Act of 2008 and the Workers’ Rights Act of 2019, both of which protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation.<sup>386</sup> However, the social perception of LGBTQ people is not always positive, and there have been instances of physical attacks and hate speech from religious and traditional groups against LGBTQ people.<sup>387</sup>

### Pride in Mauritius: Marching Toward Legal Reform

After a one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic and general restrictions on public gatherings, the Pride march in Mauritius returned in a significant moment for the movement in October 2023.<sup>388</sup> In 2020, about 500 marchers had walked to the theme of “Eski to tann mwa?” (“Do you hear me?”) seeking decriminalization of same-sex acts and equal rights for LGBTQ people.<sup>389</sup> And in 2023, activists were able to celebrate that they had been heard.

Pride has been celebrated in Mauritius since 2005, beginning with a march in a suburb, Rose Hill, in which about 100 people participated. Organizer Carou Labonne told Outright that in 2016, activists moved the event to the capital, Port Louis, in order to “create more awareness, given that it is the power seat where all the prominent manifestations go on.”<sup>390</sup>

But more awareness among potential supporters also meant more awareness among detractors. At the 2016 march, Labonne recounted, there were counter-protesters “throwing rocks, but they were far from us.” In 2017, the counter-protesters, numbering about 20, became “quite violent. They tried to attack us, but we had the police to protect us.”<sup>391</sup>

In 2018, these protesters increased even higher to about 500 hundred people.<sup>392</sup> Activist Tanya Lallmon described to Outright how the counter-protestors “assembled to obstruct the parade, brandishing signs with anti-gay messages.”<sup>393</sup> Organizers canceled the march due to the risk of violence, opting to hold a sit-in instead. Carou Labonne told Outright, “It was the first time we didn’t walk. They had weapons and were willing to hurt us.”<sup>394</sup> In the lead-up to the event, the organization Collectif Arc-en-Ciel and its members had received a total of 126 death threats, along with the spread of disinformation on social media.<sup>395</sup> The attack was a massive blow to queer Mauritians, causing legitimate and lasting feelings of insecurity. As Lallmon said, it “brought to light the tensions between conservative interpretations of Islamic teachings concerning homosexuality and transgender identities and the push for LGBTQI+ rights in Mauritian society.”<sup>396</sup>

But the event also produced some unlikely allies. In response to organizers canceling the march, Lallmon said, “Cardinal Maurice Piat, the Bishop of Port Louis, issued a statement expressing dismay at the obstruction of the Pride parade. He emphasized the importance of upholding the rights of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.”<sup>397</sup>

On the other hand, Lallmon said Mauritian political leaders neither openly condemn nor endorse Pride:

There is a notable absence of open condemnation or endorsement of the Pride movement by political parties in Mauritius. This cautious stance stems from the topic's sensitivity and potential impact on voter support. As a result, political leaders tend to refrain from openly aligning themselves with the LGBTQI+ movement. In contrast, international agencies such as the US Embassy and the EU delegation in Mauritius openly express their support for the Pride march, often sending representatives to participate in the event.<sup>398</sup>

In 2019, Pride organizers faced the tough decision of whether to go ahead with Pride, given the events of 2018, and whether to hold it in Port Louis, where activists saw the religious extremism of some residents as posing a particular risk.<sup>399</sup> Labonne said, "We decided that if we didn't [march], it was like backing up, regressing without moving forward. Instead, we had a big police presence, with police officers everywhere during Pride to protect us. The 2018 Pride had up to 800 participants, but in 2019, people were still afraid. The numbers dropped to around 600."<sup>400</sup>

After the 2020 Pride "Eski to tann mwa?" march, Pride was suspended in 2021 due to COVID-19 protocols. About 50 people participated in a 2022 Pride event on a train ride.<sup>401</sup>

In 2023, organizers moved Pride back to Rose Hill, seen as a safer space to hold Pride than Port Louis. The Pride march, themed "Together Always: United in Diversity," was held without any significant incidents, and the police blocked the six people who were counter-protesting.<sup>402</sup> Importantly, Pride took place in October, rather than in June, and "this deliberate shift to October was a poignant choice, aligning with the celebration of the Supreme Court judgment. It added an extra layer of significance to the festivities, marking a milestone in our ongoing fight for equality."<sup>403</sup>

Reflecting on her first Pride after decriminalization, Tanya Lallmon shared that:

There was a definite sense of increased freedom. Visibility seemed to be at an all-time high, with individuals feeling less pressure to hide their true selves. This newfound openness was incredibly liberating and contributed to a more vibrant and inclusive Pride experience.<sup>404</sup>

Lallmon added that the 2023 Pride event"

...drew participation from various sectors, including business leaders, diplomatic representatives, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community...While there might not have been a noticeable surge in the number of people supporting LGBTQIA+ rights, there was a distinct change in how allies expressed their support. Many felt emboldened to show their solidarity openly [during the event], rather than in secret or on social media.<sup>405</sup>

## "The Opportunity to Stand Up and Say I'm Queer"

Labonne hopes that the Pride march can return safely to the capital city because "that's where we gain visibility, and where politicians take steps" to advance rights.<sup>406</sup>

Despite the challenges, Pride in Mauritius has amplified the visibility of LGBTIQ Mauritian. As Lallmon said, "Many LGBTIQ+ individuals lead closeted lives, and the march plays a crucial role in challenging this silence and stigmatization by normalizing their presence in society."<sup>407</sup> In general, she said, people in Mauritius are becoming gradually more accepting of sexual and gender diversity:

[Pride has] played a role in reducing hostility and portraying LGBTIQ+ individuals as integral members of Mauritian society... [leading to] a noticeable decrease in ridicule surrounding the event, indicating a growing level of tolerance among the general public towards LGBTIQ+ rights. However, open demonstrations of support remain uncommon.<sup>408</sup>

Pride marches in Mauritius have also created allyship among mainstream civil society organizations. As Lallmon told Outright,

Organizations focusing on diverse causes, such as drug users' rights, gender equality, and broader human rights, have increasingly participated in the event. This growing involvement reflects a trend toward greater inclusivity and intersectionality within the advocacy landscape in Mauritius.<sup>409</sup>

Lallmon added that positive media coverage has been a key outcome of Pride:

Over time, there has been a noticeable increase in media attention, casting the event in a favorable light. This heightened visibility brings attention to LGBTIQ+ issues and helps integrate discussions on LGBTIQ+ rights into broader human rights discourse.<sup>410</sup>

Labonne acknowledges the strides that Mauritius has made, including, most recently, decriminalization:

I'm kind of lucky. I'm able to voice out and show that we exist and work towards removing the misconceptions society has about queer people. I'm lucky to have the opportunity to stand up and say I'm queer without being sentenced to prison.<sup>411</sup>



# Case Study **South Africa:** **Until We Are** **All Free**

## Legal and Social Context

South Africa has established one of the most robust sets of legal protections for LGBTQ people in the world, but there remains a significant gap between the laws as written and the state of the country's queer communities. Today in South Africa, same-sex relations are legal, and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited at the constitutional level.<sup>412</sup> The country was the fifth in the world and first in Africa to achieve marriage equality.<sup>413</sup> The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act explicitly includes intersex people.<sup>414</sup> Since 2003, transgender individuals in South Africa have been able to change their legal gender under the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act, although barriers exist in practice.<sup>415</sup>

LGBTIQ activism in the country has been effective in achieving these milestones. But despite strong legal protections, violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ people continue to plague the country.<sup>416</sup> These violations include murders, harassment, bullying, and denial of access to services like education and health care.<sup>417</sup>

It is within this complex context that South African LGBTIQ activists design Pride events.

## History of Pride in South Africa

The LGBTIQ movement in South Africa has roots in the anti-apartheid struggle, with many activists pursuing both Black and queer liberation.<sup>418</sup> Pride began with the Gay and Lesbian Organization of The Witwatersrand (GLOW).<sup>419</sup> GLOW organized the first Pride march in South Africa—and the first in all of Africa—on 13 October 1990, drawing 800 protesters for LGBTQ equality and freedom.<sup>420</sup>

Today, Pride events span all nine provinces, yet debates rage over both the purpose and form Pride should take.<sup>421</sup> Pharie Sefali, community engagement and empowerment manager at the Triangle Project, emphasized that the historical purpose of Pride in South Africa was to bring the voices of Black queer individuals into the political sphere and address community issues.<sup>422</sup> As Sefali told Outright,

Pride differs depending on where you are in South Africa. There are two types of Pride. There is Pride for celebration—having fun, meeting people, and being flamboyant. Then, the other kind of Pride is on protest and resistance—more focused on remembering those who passed on due to hate crimes and highlighting the injustices that happen in Black communities around queer people being murdered [and discriminated against] for who they are.<sup>423</sup> However, there have been a lot of divisions based on class and race.<sup>424</sup>



**Right:** Participants attending the Port Elizabeth All-Gender Netball Game in 2023, South Africa. Credit: Sicebise Social Inclusion.

## The Big Prides: Cape Town Pride and Johannesburg Pride

The two largest Pride events in South Africa are held annually in Johannesburg and Cape Town. In 2023, Johannesburg Pride, known as “The Pride of Africa,” drew over 20,000 marchers, celebrating progress and marching in support of the LGBTIQ movements elsewhere on the continent, such as Uganda.<sup>425</sup> In its 34th year, the event seeks to symbolize “the progress we’ve made, the challenges we’ve overcome, and the work that lies ahead to ensure equality and acceptance for all.”<sup>426</sup> According to Sibonelo Ncanana-Trower, an activist who has worked on Pride events including Nelson Mandela Bay Pride and Buffalo City Pride in the Eastern Cape,

My experience with Johannesburg Pride was very disconnected. As a Black queer Person in South Africa, it didn’t resonate with me. There was nothing that spoke to me. It didn’t touch me. I haven’t attended Cape Town Pride for the same reasons I’ve stopped attending Johannesburg Pride. I’m not saying they’re bad. I’m just saying they don’t speak to me.<sup>427</sup>

Cape Town Pride has hosted an annual parade in the city’s Central Business District since 2014, aiming to provide a platform for all LGBTIQ people to raise awareness and advocate for equal rights.<sup>428</sup> Nonetheless, some view it as prioritizing celebrations, centering whiteness, and failing to achieve accessibility for individuals of lower-class backgrounds.<sup>429</sup> Sefali argues that this approach distances itself from issues faced by Black queer people, including those living in townships.<sup>430</sup> For Ncanana-Trower, city Prides are more euphoric events, not “Pride the way I understand Pride.”<sup>431</sup> Consequently, several “alternative Prides” have emerged to address specific community needs.<sup>432</sup>

## The Pride Fund

To support alternative Pride events in South Africa, Access Chapter 2 partnered with UK Black Pride to establish the Pride Fund.<sup>433</sup> This initiative aims to expand Pride celebrations into underserved townships in South Africa. In 2023, the Pride Fund supported 10 Pride events in various townships: Vaal Pride, Ekurhuleni Pride, Hammanskraal Pride, Soweto Pride, Matlosana Pride, Brits Pride, Christiana Pride, the West Queer Carnival, Eersterust Pride, and the Simon Nkoli Memorial Lecture. These Prides had a range of different activities: parades, marches, week-long and month-long programs and sensitization workshops, carnivals, and more.

Shaun Makweya, representing Access Chapter 2, highlighted the importance of empowering grassroots organizations and amplifying community voices.<sup>434</sup> The goal was to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity among LGBTIQ individuals in these communities, catering to the barriers that prevent participation in mainstream Pride events.<sup>435</sup> In choosing the Prides to fund,

We wanted to see if your Pride would engage and empower community members [across populations]—we wanted community impact. We examined: will your programming reflect the unique needs and challenges of your community, not only queer people, but in general, because this is a Pride in the township with people facing similar challenges—intimate partner violence, femicide, HIV/AIDS, and so on. We needed the impact to revolve around issues that can bring us together as a township.<sup>436</sup>

The initiative received positive reception and engagement from local residents, who expressed a desire for education and long-term support beyond Pride events: “Most of the people in the communities wanted to be educated more than anything else.”<sup>437</sup>

## Alternative Prides

### Soweto Pride

The 2023 Soweto Pride March marked its 19th iteration, aligning with other alternative Prides in South Africa to promote inclusion and diversity, centering perspectives of Black queer people.<sup>438</sup> According to Matuba Mahlatjie, Outright’s communications and media relations manager, the 2024 Soweto “Pride event was very diverse and inclusive with the presence of most Johannesburg-based organizations that focus on different populations within the community—trans and intersex-focused organizations, historically lesbian groups.”<sup>439</sup> Mahlatjie also noted the support of other social movements—gender-based violence prevention groups, sex workers’ rights associations, trade unions, and even members of the Economic Freedom Fighters political party.<sup>440</sup>

Nyasha “Masi” Zhakata, a queer and migrant rights activist who emigrated from Zimbabwe, told Outright she felt comfortable at Soweto Pride as “the organizations made it safe and embraced me. I didn’t feel out of place. But it’s difficult for this to happen with city Prides...You can take pictures, but you won’t be included in the system and Pride itself.”<sup>441</sup>

### Khumbulani Pride

Khumbulani Pride was created by Free Gender with support from the Triangle Project to address gaps in representation at Pride: “We didn’t feel we fit into Cape Town Pride, and we live in a Black township with very harsh experiences. Khumbulani Pride speaks to the community.”<sup>442</sup>

The 10th edition in 2023 saw increased community participation, including by allies, which reflected growing solidarity: “There were more parents than usual, allies, and people in the community.”<sup>443</sup> Khumbulani Pride includes community workshops, dialogues, and screenings, all of which lead up to the day of the march: “When people are informed, they know why they’re marching, why they’re in solidarity.”<sup>444</sup> Organizers also engage traditional, cultural, and faith leaders for support against potential backlash, fostering awareness and utilizing every opportunity to “engage and educate more people.”<sup>445</sup> The impact has been a reduction in the rate of violent hate crimes, including murders, with an increase in awareness: “People in these townships now speak up against homophobia and demand justice, including taking the initiative to engage with the police.”<sup>446</sup>

One of the most significant challenges the organizers of Khumbulani Pride face is funding. Sefali states, “Because it’s not a marketing Pride where people showcase their brands and it has a different audience, it is difficult to get funding for and sustain the Pride.”<sup>447</sup>

Khumbulani Pride also includes migrant communities and addresses women’s rights and broader forms of gender-based violence.<sup>448</sup> Zhakata, who lived as a refugee and works to protect migrant rights, told Outright that Khumbulani Pride allows refugees and migrants to be seen and active in Pride.<sup>449</sup>

### Pride in Port Elizabeth: An All-Gender Sports Game

In Port Elizabeth, Vee Twalo and her team aimed to honor queer South African history, advocate for inclusivity, and combat hate crimes through community events. In 2023, they organized an all-gender netball match, promoting unity and challenging stereotypes:

There's a history behind our Pride, where we come from. We had a lot of queer community members that were violated, killed. And while we need to celebrate our progress, we must ensure we're inclusive first. We want to reduce hate crimes; we want to create awareness that there are people who are gay, lesbian, intersex, and transgender, and they're not going anywhere. They are part of our families, part of our churches, part of our society.<sup>450</sup>

The organization chose a sports event for Pride because they believe in its power to bring people within the community together. Twalo decided to make it all-gender because "everyone plays sports," and they wanted to dismantle stereotypes at the grassroots level.<sup>451</sup> Despite initial resistance, the first-of-its-kind community event was successful and well-received locally.

We took the event to the heart of the community where there's a lot of crime and violence, yet it was very safe, with community engagement and the people asking us to hold such events again the following year. We had a great, great time."<sup>452</sup>

Twalo and her team at the Sicebise Social Inclusion organization plan to continue hosting inclusive events like this, catering to youth, families and the elderly, as funding allows.

Alternative Prides create more accessible spaces for marginalized communities by removing financial barriers. As Zhakata points out, "Local township Prides are free. You are free to come in and be there."<sup>453</sup>

## Moving Forward

Most of the activists we spoke with agree with the need for community ownership in designing Pride in order to ensure an inclusive future for queer people in South Africa. Ncanana-Trower advocates for a Pride that reflects the struggles of Black queer individuals, envisioning Pride as a grassroots movement centered around the ongoing struggle for freedom:

Not where we have to fly to Cape Town or Johannesburg, but [where] people from [major cities] fly to a small town to celebrate, not with fancy things, but as a struggle and as a reminder that we can't say we are free until we are all free. So that all queer people, including Black queer people, are also free. I hope Pride grows to have this culture.<sup>454</sup>



Right: Some players at the Port Elizabeth All-Gender Netball Game in 2023, South Africa. Credit: Sicebise Social Inclusion

First Person:

# Motherland, When Will I Find Pride in Your Embrace?

*First-person piece by Daniel M. (pseudonym), a Chinese queer diaspora activist*

I had often imagined what Pride celebrations looked like when I was still in China, where my greatest Pride moment was walking into that giant skyscraper, where one tiny office of a grassroots LGBTIQ organization resided, where my life was changed forever by other “freaks” like me. I still recall the sensation of my sweating palms that day, a mixture of nervousness and excitement. Bearing that same mood, on the chilly morning of 20 May 2023, I hopped onto the bus to Brussels, anticipating my first-ever Pride march.

Stepping off the bus, I was immediately swept into a world where rainbows weren't just symbols; they were declarations of freedom, draped across every corner of the city. Government buildings, bars, schools—everywhere I looked, colors danced, signaling a celebration of identity and love that was both overwhelming and deeply inspiring. This open display of pride and support was unlike anything I'd ever experienced, even in Paris, where I had felt supported but in a more understated manner.

Among the sea of memories from Brussels Pride, two moments stand out vividly. The first was witnessing someone climbing onto a truck, waving a rainbow flag with passion and freedom. They stood fearless, their energy infectious, making me yearn for a day when I could stand as boldly for my truth back home. The second unforgettable scene was a drum squad, middle-aged yet bursting with youthful vigor, defying every stereotype with their proud beats and open hearts. These moments weren't just acts of celebration; they were powerful declarations of existence and resistance, inscribing themselves in my memory.

An unexpected moment occurred during the parade when I bumped into a straight friend who I had known since middle school. She persuaded her Chinese friends from her university to support the parade. Their presence, a delightful surprise, was a heartwarming reminder that true allyship transcends sexual orientation.

As I danced to the vibrant beats of the parade, a sudden surge of emotions enveloped me. Memories of home, where being queer is often branded as embracing “Western ideology,” weighed heavily on my heart. The stark contrast between the joy in Brussels and the suffocating silence in China was painful. Surrounded by joy, my tears mingled with the music, each striking a chord—a mix of the liberation I was experiencing and guilt for those I had left behind in a less tolerant world. I longed for my friends and colleagues in China to join me under a sky adorned with rainbows, to feel the same joy and freedom, a wish that felt achingly out of reach.

The bustling streets of Brussels reflected a universal desire for acceptance and love. I dreamt of a day when Pride celebrations could illuminate the streets of my homeland, a dream I'm committed to turning into reality. The journey at Brussels Pride was not merely a celebration; it was a call to action, a bittersweet reminder of the work that lies ahead.

After the dazzling immersion into Brussels Pride, there was no way I could miss the celebration in Paris—the city I now call home. Despite the initial shock wearing off, the thrill of participating in another Pride event struck me with undiminished intensity. I had to admit that my previous political engagements in Paris, hindered by language barriers and limited to smaller gatherings, did little to prepare me for the sheer magnitude of the event at Place de la Nation.

Paris Pride had chosen to eschew the traditional floats to minimize environmental impact. It emphasized the intersectionality between LGBTIQ human rights and environmental justice, serving as a powerful reminder that our fight for visibility and equality is inextricably linked with broader global challenges. The sea of political chants and slogans in Paris set this Pride apart from my experience in Brussels. “Depuis dix ans, mariage pour tous; Depuis toujours, violences pour tous” (“For 10 years, marriage for all; for always, violence for all”). The air reflected the city’s rich history of political activism. This blend of celebration and advocacy offered a fresh lens through which to view Pride—not merely as a festive gathering, but as a potent call for equality and justice and an alarm bell ringing out the ongoing struggles for rights and recognition.

The Amsterdam Canal Pride was a different experience since I joined with a group of activists. For me, this Pride was more than a celebration; it was a rallying point for the diaspora, as we shared our struggle for equality and visibility. With my face painted rainbow colors, I stepped into the light drizzle of the Amsterdam day, ready to embrace the energy and passion of the crowd. The drizzle seemed to only enhance our spirits, as if the rain itself was joining in our celebration.

Some of our friends, through a partnership, boarded floats belonging to other organizations for the Pride journey along Amsterdam’s canals. From these floating platforms, they proudly showcased the visibility of East Asian queers, met with enthusiastic chants and cheers of support from the viewers on the sidelines. This act of visibility was more than just a moment in the parade; it was a powerful statement of our existence and the global community’s support, reinforcing the message that our voices were not only heard but also celebrated.

What distinguished Amsterdam’s Pride from my experiences in Brussels and Paris was the comprehensive involvement of human rights organizations and the solidarity across various causes and communities. Movements are often messy, but on that day what I saw was a united front for equality and justice, a clarion call that our struggle is interconnected with the broader fight for human dignity and respect.

This journey through the Brussels, Paris, and Amsterdam Pride celebrations was transformative, enriching my understanding of the global LGBTIQ community and deepening my commitment to activism. My first Pride experience has been a journey of discovery, learning, and reaffirmation of my values and aspirations. Reflecting on these experiences, I am reminded of the power of Pride—not just as a series of unique events but as a global movement that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. It is a movement that unites us in our diversity and inspires us to work tirelessly for a future where everyone, regardless of who they love or how they identify, can live with dignity, respect, and joy.

Snapshot:

# Pride Away from Home

Movement of people around the globe has been on the rise over the last several decades, with the International Organization for Migration reporting that one in 30 people lived outside their country of origin in 2020.<sup>455</sup> Among the world’s migrants and refugees are many LGBTIQ people, who leave their homes for many reasons ranging from economic opportunity, to love, to persecution at home. When they travel from countries with intense restrictions on LGBTIQ organizing to countries where Pride is given the status of a national celebration, how do they experience Pride? Outright spoke to a queer woman from mainland China now living in the US, a trans woman from Uganda now living in the UK, a gay Russian student in Italy, and a staffer at a center for queer asylum seekers in Denmark to get a snapshot of asylum seekers’ experiences of Pride, while recognizing that every experience is unique. There is no single story of migrant Pride.

For Amanda, from Uganda,

It was my first time attending an open and visible Pride in July 2022 at the London Pride. [There were] people from all over the country and colors, marching, dancing...It felt like a sort of a festival that I had never seen...There’s a lot of alienation that happens in countries where you are criminalized and you feel like you are the only one and there’s no one just like you. But when you come to the Pride you see [all sorts of people] the elderly, the young. It was wow! It gives a group [vibe].<sup>456</sup>

What impressed Amanda the most was the official support—the Mayor of London officially launched the Pride. She also recalls the support from large corporations with employees wearing company logos and marching. “The freedom of the people—in their makeup, their dress, dancing—was mesmerizing. In my country, to do that you would have to do it in fear because someone will undress you or you get beaten,” she added.

But not everything was roses and rainbows. Amanda came away with the impression that London Pride lacked both racial and economic diversity, and she commented to Outright that many trans migrants in the UK are much more preoccupied with their basic daily needs than with Pride. She expressed hope that Pride could be a vehicle for achieving concrete change in the material conditions of LGBTIQ migrants and refugees:

It’s one thing for people to march and have rainbows out there. But it’s also [important] to use the space as productively as we can, to organize more things that [are more] impactful... Even in terms of raising funds [for more causes]... There’s a lot of money being injected into the Pride celebrations, so how do we get the community to give back to people out there in terms of making their lives better?<sup>457</sup>



Dola R., a 28-year-old queer feminist from mainland China who has lived abroad since age 16, had a different experience of Pride.<sup>458</sup> After growing up in China, she completed six years of secondary, undergraduate, and postgraduate education in Europe. There, she never attended Prides because these seemed very "white and corporatized" events.<sup>459</sup> On the other hand, Dola R. attended feminist marches, in which many young lesbian and queer Chinese students participated. Her conversations with fellow Chinese queer women sparked her interest in activism. She told Outright, "Modern mainstream Chinese culture considers activism a form of 'complaining.' They don't see the power or don't dare imagine the power [in collective activism and movements]."<sup>460</sup> But feminist discussion circles and Women's Day Marches in Europe helped her see the strength in collective organizing.

An introduction to activism through a feminist lens, though, only made her more skeptical of the overwhelming focus of visibility at many Prides: "Visibility as an end goal never appealed to me." After she moved to North America, she volunteered at a Pride event in a conservative region and found it to be apolitical, distant, and corporatized. By contrast, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) queer and trans community spaces away from the limelight of Pride have been a haven for her in her new home: "Queer community spaces I have been to are critical and welcoming. There is intentionality behind creating a sense of safety and belonging...I didn't know how much I needed them."<sup>461</sup>

Dmitrii Litvin, a student from Russia studying in Italy, attended Pride for the first time in Padua and told Outright he found joy, community, and support. According to Litvin, it was as though the entire city of about 260,000 people was queer or queer-aligning. A lot of families were part of the parade, elderly people lined the street and looked out their windows, waving and sending kisses to marchers: "There was support in the air." Litvin described seeing an older woman standing at her window, watching the parade. "We waved to her. She waved back and sent kisses and we just melted."<sup>462</sup>

Eva Sainz, the head of community and volunteers at LGBT Asylum in Denmark, told Outright that queer asylum seekers in Denmark have relationships with Pride that fall along a spectrum. For many members, Sainz said, participating in Pride is the "first time they are visible as queer, participating in a public event and marching together with other queer people and feeling the support from the majority of society."<sup>463</sup> On the other hand, some asylum seekers "do not feel safe attending high visibility events, even when wearing masks to hide their identity."<sup>464</sup> LGBT Asylum intentionally creates opportunities for asylum seekers to participate in community-oriented LGBT events without having to take part in large public pride celebrations, which some may not feel safe attending openly.

As for Pride marches, Copenhagen has two Pride events on the same day: the larger, more commercial Copenhagen Pride, with greater public visibility and heavy participation from larger LGBTIQ organizations, and the more political, alternative Norrebro Pride, which was organized as a space to reclaim Pride from commercialization and attracts many queer people of color. Some LGBT refugees feel more seen and represented in the Norrebro event, said Sainz, adding:

For us, it's a big dilemma. So at the moment, we are attending both Prides. [We need to attend] the commercial Pride because we need the support of the majority of society, we need the support of the politicians in order to get rights. So we need to create that visibility of the organization at that level.<sup>465</sup>

Critics have long pointed out how Pride is increasingly becoming depoliticized and corporatized into a "branded holiday."<sup>466</sup> And yet, Pride can often be meaningful for those from difficult contexts where their identity and existence have been stigmatized if not outright criminalized. It is incumbent on Pride organizers in the Global North and other LGBTIQ migrant and refugee destinations to adequately make space for the most marginalized sections of the LGBTIQ population, ensuring the inclusion and visibility of LGBTIQ people of color, asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees, or Pride fails to live up to its legacy of radical inclusion.



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Outright is deeply grateful to the LGBTIQ activists and people interviewed for this report, as well as the respondents to our online surveys. We extend our appreciation to organizers of Prides and other LGBTIQ visibility events worldwide, in different challenging contexts. As always, we work in solidarity with you to build a world in which all LGBTIQ people are free, safe and able to be visible.



# Annex: Status of Pride Around the World in 2023

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**In 2023, activists in the following 101 UN member states around the world held at least one public Pride or LGBTIQ visibility event:** Albania, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh\*, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eswatini, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kiribati, Latvia, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam.

**Among these 101 UN member states where Pride was held in 2023, activists in at least 62 states were able to hold Pride events in more than one city:** Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eswatini, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela, Vietnam.

**In the following 92 UN member states, Outright did not identify any public Pride or LGBTIQ visibility events in 2023:** Afghanistan, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Barbados, Belarus, Benin, Bhutan\*\*, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Comoros, Congo (Republic of the), Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Micronesia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nauru, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Vincent & The Grenadines, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tanzania, The Comoros, The United Arab Emirates, Togo, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

\* In Bangladesh, Pride in 2023 was held online and open to the general public.

\*\* In Bhutan, activists organized several Pride events for which members of the general public could RSVP and attend. These events did not neatly fit into Outright's categorization of public or private Pride events.

# End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Response 3, Portuguese survey. This response was given in Portuguese and translated into English for this report.

<sup>2</sup>Outright interview with Derricia Jael Castillo-Salazar, Managing Director of Our Circle Belize, virtual, February 2024.

<sup>3</sup>Outright interview with Sula W. (pseudonym), virtual, 14 May 2024.

<sup>4</sup>This year, Outright has also relied on a quantitative methodology that only keeps count of Pride events in the 193 UN member states. Previous reports counted countries that do not have UN member state status, such as Kosovo or Taiwan. While we continue to conduct qualitative research in these countries, including in our case studies, we are using UN member state status for determining how to count Prides. This has resulted in a slight reduction in the number of Prides counted compared to previous years.

<sup>5</sup>Response 92, English survey.

<sup>6</sup>In this report, when referring to quantitative information, the word “country” refers to UN member states. However, we also use the word “country” in qualitative sections of the report to refer to non-UN member state countries such as Kosovo.

<sup>7</sup>Outright International, “Country Overview: Uganda,” <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/sub-saharan-africa/uganda>.

<sup>8</sup>Outright, “Queer Lives Under Threat as Ghana’s Parliament Passes Anti-LGBTQ Bill,” 28 February 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/press-release/queer-lives-under-threat-ghanas-parliament-passes-anti-lgbtq-bill>; Amelia Hansford, “Kenya Set to Introduce Cruel Anti-Homosexuality Law,” PinkNews, 20 July 2023, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/07/20/kenya-anti-homosexuality-law-africa/>.

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<sup>12</sup>Amnesty International, “Lebanon: Attack on Freedoms Targets LGBTI People – Repressive Legislation; Unlawful Crackdown,” 5 September 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/lebanon-attack-on-freedoms-targets-lgbti-people-repressive-legislation-unlawful-crackdown/>.

<sup>13</sup>Chenar Chalak, “Iraqi Parliament Passes Controversial Anti-LGBT+ Amendments,” Rudaw, 27 April 2024, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/270420243>.

<sup>14</sup>ILGA-Europe, “Alarming Surge in Transphobic Speech Across Europe Sparks Concern for EU Elections,” 29 February 2024, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/alarming-surge-in-transphobic-speech-across-europe-sparks-concern-for-eu-elections/>; Paul Tugwell, “Anti-Trans Hate Speech Surged in Europe in 2023, Report Says,” Bloomberg, 9 February 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-29/anti-trans-hate-speech-surged-in-europe-in-2023-report-says>.

<sup>15</sup>Leonard Masauli, “Religious Groups March in Malawi Before Court Case on LGBTQ+ Rights,” *Guardian*, 14 July 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jul/14/religious-groups-march-in-malawi-before-court-case-on-lgbtq-rights>; AFP, “Thousands Rally in Anti-LGBTQ Protest in Malawi,” *France 24*, 13 August 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230713-thousands-rally-in-anti-lgbtq-protest-in-malawi>.

<sup>16</sup>Africanews and Associated Press (AP), “LGBTQ+ Individuals Face Mass Arrests in Nigeria, As Activists Decry Ignored Abuses,” *Africanews*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/10/27/lgbtq-individuals-face-mass-arrests-in-nigeria-as-activists-decry-ignored-abuses/>; Muhammed Akinyemi, “LGBTQ+ Nigerians Targeted at Parties in ‘Wedding’ Arrests – Lawyer,” *Openly*, 17 November 2023, [https://www.openlynews.com/i/?id=74919ebc-b97a-4957-a53a-553f36cd8c1e&utm\\_source=news-trust&utm\\_medium=redirect&utm\\_campaign=context&utm\\_content=article](https://www.openlynews.com/i/?id=74919ebc-b97a-4957-a53a-553f36cd8c1e&utm_source=news-trust&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=context&utm_content=article).

<sup>17</sup>Human Rights Watch, “Jordan: Security Forces Target LGBT Activists – Systematic Crackdown on Organizing; Official Intimidation, Interrogations,” 4 December 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/04/jordan-security-forces-target-lgbt-activists>.

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<sup>19</sup>US Department of State, “2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Mongolia,” Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/mongolia/>.

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- <sup>44</sup>Response 56, English survey.
- <sup>45</sup>Response 3, Portuguese survey. This response was given in Portuguese and translated into English for this report.
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- <sup>187</sup>Sydney WorldPride, “2023 Festival Report,” 7 July 2023, accessed 22 May 2024, <https://www.mardigras.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Sydney-WorldPride-Festival-Report-Accessible-Plain-Text.docx>.
- <sup>188</sup>Ngo interview.
- <sup>189</sup>Harper Y. interview. N.B.: An Outright researcher was part of the group of friends who walked with Harper and helped push their wheelchair. It was particularly noticeable that Thai national newspapers and magazines published photos of the group that featured Harper front and center; the photographers were eager to take photos of a wheelchair user, as if it were a novelty or spectacle. In the midst of some of the most colorful, flamboyant, and creatively outfitted queer people, the fact that a person in a wheelchair still stood out to photographers illustrates the visibility fetishization that disabled queer people face.
- <sup>190</sup>Molly A. interview.
- <sup>191</sup>Same-sex sexual acts were legalized through the 2003 Lawrence v. Texas Supreme Court case. Lawrence v. Texas, 539 U.S. 558 (2003), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/02-102.ZS.html>; GLAD, “Obergefell v. Hodges: Marriage Equality at the Supreme Court,” 26 June 2015, [https://www.glad.org/cases/deboer-v-snyder; Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 U.S. 644 \(2015\), https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/576/644/](https://www.glad.org/cases/deboer-v-snyder; Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 U.S. 644 (2015), https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/576/644/).
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- <sup>249</sup>Outright Interview with Rituparna Neog, virtual, 17 April 2024.
- <sup>250</sup>Rituparna interview.
- <sup>251</sup>He is referring to traditional formal masculine attire worn in some parts of India.
- <sup>252</sup>Outright interview with Lipi B, co-founder of the Drishti Queer Collective and the Jorhat Pride committee, virtual, 8 May 2024.
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- <sup>254</sup>Aniruddha Dutta describes Kothi/Koti/Dhurani/Hijra as “multivalent, loosely overlapping terms used across various South Asian regions that indicate a diverse spectrum of people, usually assigned male at birth, who variously describe themselves as women or like women, as feminine males, as a separate gender, or as a fluid combination of such subject positions. While kothi, dhurani, and hijra are not necessarily rigid or singular identities and may be flexibly adopted alongside other LGBTQ terminology, people who enter these communities generally share some sort of identification with variably interpreted ideas of femininity and also, often, desire men.” Aniruddha Dutta, *Through the Vernacular: Kothis, Hijras and the Making of Queer and Trans Identities in India* (Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming).
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- <sup>256</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>257</sup>Dutta recognized that in different ways, both suburban or small-town and metropolitan movements can lack inclusivity. For example, she said that in the smaller towns in West Bengal, queer and trans people assigned female at birth were less visible and less involved in events like Pride than those assigned male at birth. She pointed to the lack of LBQ and transmasculine-led organizations in West Bengal outside of major cities, in part a result of the fact that much movement funding is related to HIV prevention. She further observed that transmasculine people in small towns have limited options for work, raising the risk associated with visibility. Dutta interview.
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- <sup>269</sup>Outright interview with Pauli Sosa, biologist and intersex activist, virtual, April 2024.
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