

GLIDE 2024

Landscape

Analysis –

Executive Summary



OUTRIGHT
INTERNATIONAL



Executive Summary

The Global LGBTQI+ Inclusive Democracy and Empowerment (GLIDE) Initiative – a partnership between Outright International, Synergía Initiative for Human Rights, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) – aims to support and increase the LGBTQI+ community’s participation in, and use of, democratic spaces and mechanisms through funding support for capacity and institutional strengthening of LGBTQI+ organizations and their leaders. This landscape analysis provides a snapshot of the status of LGBTQI+ rights and civic and democratic participation around the world, including those factors that impact the ability and willingness of LGBTQI+ people to engage in democratic and political processes. This overview is followed by a discussion of the results of the original research – in the form of an online survey and key informant interviews – and concludes with an analysis of the needs and gaps in the global LGBTQI+ movement and opportunities for future work.

The survey asked questions related to: individuals’ experiences with voting; the experiences of LGBTQI+ people when trying to participate in democratic processes in their country; their interest in or experiences with civic and democratic engagement, including running for elected office; their feelings of safety as an LGBTQI+ person in their country and thoughts on the rule of law and corruption; and specific initiatives they thought would support increased LGBTQI+ participation and engagement. The survey also collected basic demographic information related to age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status. The GLIDE team also conducted semi-structured interviews with 45 academics, religious leaders, leaders of international LGBTQI+ and human rights organizations, leaders of national and local LGBTQI+ organizations, and LGBTQI+ individuals.

As is well documented in the literature, for the last several years, concerns around democratic backsliding and increasing authoritarianism have dominated the democracy and governance space. This trend is somewhat in juxtaposition with the progress made with respect to LGBTQI+ rights, with, for example, approximately 20 countries decriminalizing same-sex conduct in the last 20 years. While the democracy and governance community has been particularly focused on elections in 2024, the experiences of people of diverse SOGIESC, although included in these assessments of democracy and free and fair elections, are much less rigorously covered.

In fact, a review of reporting on LGBTQI+ issues reveals that the rise in authoritarianism, trampling on the rule of law, shrinking civic space, and crackdowns on freedom of expression, association, and assembly have particularly negative consequences for LGBTQI+ people and organizations. There is an overall trend of autocratizing states reducing or overturning LGBTQI+ protections, wielding anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric (a particular problem during election campaigns), reducing media freedom, and repressing civil society organizations (CSOs). As autocrats consolidate power, reducing the power and/or independence of the legislature and judiciary while restricting fundamental freedoms for all citizens, many do so by targeting the LGBTQI+ community in the name of protecting national identity, traditional gender roles, children, and family values.

These opposition forces erode long-held universal human rights standards, diluting fundamental safeguards that bolster efforts to advance the rights of minority groups, including LGBTQI+ people. The lack of resources and capacity of many local and national LGBTQI+ organizations undermine the movement's ability to push back on shrinking civic space and effectively advocate for inclusive democracy at national, regional and international levels. As a result, LGBTQI+ people in countries around the world struggle to see the link between democratic engagement and participation and positive change in their lives or the lives of their communities, especially in cases where such engagement carries significant risk of harm.

While many countries have made changes to their legal frameworks to advance protections for the LGBTQI+ community, evidence abounds that this alone is insufficient to improve the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ people. As interviewees noted, LGBTQI+ people face hostility in their homes, communities, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. Some traditional and religious leaders use their positions to ignite anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment and violence, and those attitudes are further exploited by elected leaders and political candidates in too many places around the world.

Despite these challenges, many LGBTQI+ individuals, activists, and organizations remain committed to leveraging political, civic, and democratic processes to drive improvements in their countries and communities. As documented in the survey and interview responses detailed in this report, members of the LGBTQI+ community are regularly engaged in democratic processes. This includes voting in elections, campaigning for candidates, engaging in lobbying and demonstrations, and working with elected and appointed officials to sensitize them to the needs of LGBTQI+ communities and encouraging them to support and advance LGBTQI+-friendly laws and policies.

This work does not come without risk, and LGBTQI+ people around the world reported significant barriers when it comes to engaging in political and democratic processes. This includes challenges with obtaining identification that matches their gender identity; significant concerns about their safety as voters, candidates, and elected officials; the misuse of election season to deploy hateful rhetoric to scapegoat the LGBTQI+ community; and a sense that, given the corruption, inefficiency, and lack of accountability for elected officials, their vote will not make a difference in the direction in which their country moves. Furthermore, many LGBTQI+ people do not see themselves represented in their elected leaders, and often find that campaign promises in support of the community evaporate once candidates are elected.

Lack of safety, lack of access to justice, and lack of trust in public officials are also significant issues for LGBTQI+ people. Two-thirds of survey respondents reported that they do not feel safe as an LGBTQI+ person in their country, and fewer than 20% said that they would go to the police or rely on the justice system if they were the victim of a crime. In many cases, interviewees pointed to the police as specific sources of danger and harassment. In addition, the lack of specific protections for LGBTQI+ people, in the form of anti-discrimination and hate crime laws, was an issue for more than half of survey respondents. Interviewees noted that even if courts are inclined to support LGBTQI+ rights, they need relevant laws to apply and enforce. Corruption amongst public officials is also a significant issue for survey respondents and interviewees across the board. While this was generally identified as a challenge for all citizens, the impacts on LGBTQI+ people, the degree to which corrupt actors – the police in particular – specifically targeted LGBTQI+ people, was seen as especially severe.

The challenges that government officials pose to LGBTQI+ individuals extend to LGBTQI+ organizations. These include specific restrictions on registration for LGBTQI+ organizations, and broader crackdowns on civil society generally, impacting their ability to operate openly or to engage on issues outside of narrowly approved lanes, such as health or social services. In some places, this pressure has resulted in activists having to leave the country to avoid violence or arrest, and public attempts to rally for human rights, including around key LGBTQI+ events, like Pride and IDAHOBIT, are met with vigilante violence. Attacks, online violence and harassment – including doxing and catfishing – are significant problems for the LGBTQI+ community. In addition, at least for the LGBTQI+ organizations represented in this study, funding is insufficient to both support the need in the community and the livelihoods of the people working tirelessly to keep the organizations afloat. As a result, too many LGBTQI+ activists work on a voluntary basis.

Nonetheless, the LGBTQI+ movement remains dynamic, resilient, and determined to fight for the rights of the community. This report details a variety of creative ways interviewees engage political candidates and elected officials, provide sensitization training for police and election management body staff, support civic and voter education efforts to increase the political awareness of the community, campaign for political candidates and even contest for elected office themselves. These activities involve partnerships and alliances with government officials, political parties, religious leaders, and broader human rights and democracy actors.

This report also details a variety of needs and opportunities to deepen the work of LGBTQI+ activists around the world on issues of democracy and governance and identifies areas where future research and collaboration are needed to drive progress. Key initiatives that could encourage the political participation of LGBTQI+ people include specific outreach from political parties and the incorporation of LGBTQI+ priorities on their platforms, increased information and training for LGBTQI+ people on how to get involved; and increased financial and capacity building support for LGBTQI+ organizations and activists.

Interviewees also identified areas that could use additional work, resources, and attention, for example, increasing efforts to address legal gender recognition and increased support for lesbian, trans, and intersex communities, including campaign skills for aspiring political candidates. Other needs include training and information on how to work with political candidates, how to sensitize lawmakers and government officials, and efforts to build collaborations and develop messages to increase support and LGBTQI+ allyship, with a specific focus on traditional and religious leaders. LGBTQI+ organization leaders requested specific support for fundraising, psychosocial support, safety and security training, and specific support to protect themselves when engaging online.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations:

- **Safety is paramount and largely unavailable.** The atmosphere of violence and intimidation – and the total lack of access to justice for too many – shapes LGBTQI+ people's decision to participate in political and public life and fully exercise their human rights.
- **The prevalence of corruption and ineffective government drives a sense of apathy** among LGBTQI+ people and additional outreach and education are needed for the community to understand how their voices can make a difference in civic and democratic processes.

- **The LGBTQI+ community is dynamic, resilient, flexible, and under-resourced.** LGBTQI+ rights activists and organizations have proven exceptionally adept at adapting in cases of emergency, closed and closing space, and providing mutual aid when formal resources are too slow or unavailable. There are important lessons to learn about how to leverage and better support these innovative and informal structures so that flexible assistance can remain available and so that the community has the resources and infrastructure to plan and execute more long-term, holistic, and cross-cutting civic and democratic engagement strategies. Additional support is also needed for coalition-building through an intersectional and solidarity-focused approach, where the full diversity of LGBTQI+ communities is leveraged to develop and execute strategies advancing areas of mutual interest.
- **The anti-rights and anti-gender movement are increasingly using the language and spaces of human rights activists, complicating attempts to develop compelling counter-narratives.** Support for strong electoral and democratic institutions cannot come without protections for minority rights. Too often, those most impacted by these narratives have been excluded from the conversation. As an added challenge, the restriction of LGBTQI+ organizations to the health sector in too many places has limited the ability of advocates to leverage human rights language and mechanisms and to connect and collaborate with the broader human rights, democracy, and governance movement.
- **The messenger matters.** Investing in local and indigenous activists, leaders, and allies is essential to crafting and delivering messages that reach and resonate with the intended audience. This includes gathering information on where and how anti-LGBTQI+ messages were initiated and how and why they have spread. Why do anti-LGBTQI+ messages come to dominate some campaigns and countries and not others? How can the community reduce the salience of anti-LGBTQI+ messages, including by working with traditional and social media?
- **Lack of legal gender recognition is a huge barrier for trans, intersex, and nonbinary people's participation.** Without identification that accurately represents each person, trans, intersex, and nonbinary people will remain at increased risk for discrimination and violence in many aspects of life, including the ability to register to vote, get a job, claim benefits and other essential services, and participate as political candidates and leaders.
- **Data gaps persist and limit the movement's ability to increase democratic and civic participation.** Despite increased research efforts on this topic over the last several years, there remain persistent gaps in information, including basic data related to LGBTQI+ voters, candidates, and elected officials. Without this information it will be difficult to determine where to invest limited resources to support potential openings. This lack of data continues with respect to funding itself – where is it going, to which groups, how effective it is, and how partners can find one another and better coordinate their programs and activities.

Finally, in addition to addressing the data gaps above, additional research is needed on how to best operate, and effect change within political systems at varying stages of the democratic spectrum. This may include conducting political economy analysis that specifically centers on the needs and experiences of LGBTQI+ people and seeks to understand how existing power dynamics can be transformed to increase LGBTQI+ people's access to leadership. This may also include a framework for analyzing how to drive political change and where change is most likely to happen, including best practices

for engaging from the local government level to national systems analysis of political finance laws, candidate nomination procedures, and political party regulations that can best support increased LGBTQI+ participation and leadership.

