

Impact of Anti-Gender Opposition on TGD and LGBTQI Movements

**Aotearoa
(New Zealand)
and Australia Report**

2023



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This publication is a regional report that is part of a larger report entitled "[Global Report on the Impact of Anti-Gender Opposition on TGD and LGBTQI Movements](#)". The Global Report is a comprehensive study on the impact of anti-gender (AG) opposition on the human rights of trans, gender-diverse, and LGBTQI individuals worldwide. This regional report focuses specifically on the impact of AG opposition in the Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Australia region.

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Author: GATE

Editing, design and layout: Gabriel de Larch

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About GATE

GATE is an international advocacy organization working towards justice and equality for trans, gender diverse and intersex communities. Rooted in our movements, we work collaboratively with strategic partners at the global level to provide knowledge, resources and access to international institutions and processes. Our vision is a world free from human rights violations based on gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. Our strategy is to transform the landscape of global advocacy, knowledge creation and resource distribution through critical inclusion of trans, gender diverse and intersex movements at all levels of political, legal, and socio-economic processes.

Find out more about GATE by visiting www.gate.ngo

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Glossary

AG

Anti-gender: The anti-gender movement is an international movement which opposes what it refers to as “gender ideology”, “gender theory”, or “genderism” (Kováts, Eszter, 2016)

BIPOC

Black, Indigenous and People of Color

Centrist

Someone who supports the center of the range of political opinions

Far-Right

Includes “persons or groups who hold extreme nationalist, xenophobic, racist, religious fundamentalist, or other reactionary views”

Gender-Critical

Believing that sex is a fact of biology that cannot be changed, and doubting the idea of gender identity (a person’s feeling of being male, female, or another identity, especially when this is different from the sex they were assigned at birth)

Left-Wing

Political parties, groups or people who believe that wealth and power should be shared among all parts of society

LGBTQI

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Intersex

LGR

Legal gender recognition

Mixed

The group's ideological stances are not homogenous; they are mixed between left-wing and right-wing stances

PWDs

Persons with disabilities

Right-Wing

Political parties, groups or people that have traditional opinions, and who believe in low taxes, the private ownership of property and industry, and less aid to the poor

TGD

Trans and gender diverse

TGDI

Trans, gender diverse, and intersex

Trans-Exclusionary Radical "Feminists" / TERFs

A radical wing of feminism that rejects the assertion that trans women are women, the inclusion of trans women in women's spaces, and trans rights. (The word "Feminists" has been placed in quotation marks to highlight how the TERF movement does not subscribe to the generally accepted definition of feminism, which is a movement primarily about gender equality).

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Analysis of Survey Data

Introduction

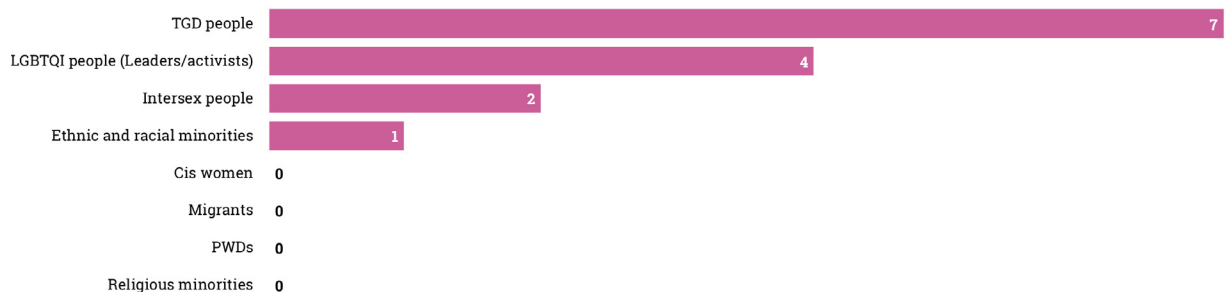
For a general introduction to the Survey completed by respondents, including positionality, data collection methods, and who took part in the Survey, please refer to the [Global Report](#).

The next few pages provide an analysis of the Survey data for the Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Australia region, followed by a breakdown of the data by country.

AG Actors

In the Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Australia region, respondents report that some members of AG groups are in the government, while other AG actors are represented as opposition parties, and some of them have seats in the parliaments or other national legislative institutions. In most cases, they are categorized as right-wing or mixed on the political ideology spectrum.

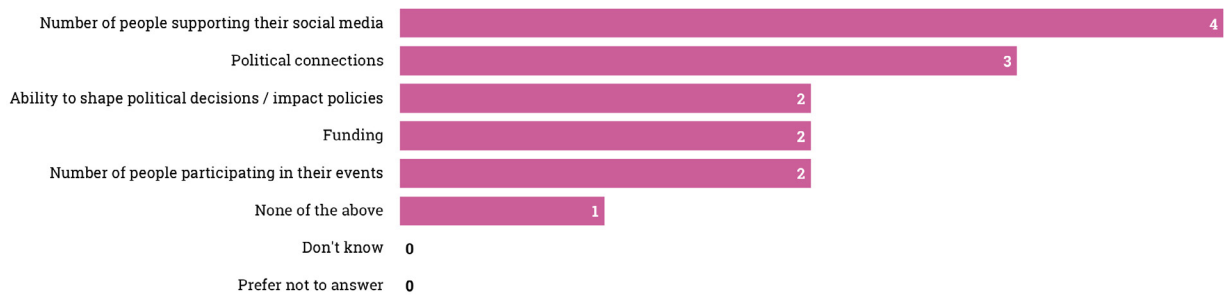
AG groups have targeted the following groups in the past year:



Respondents indicate that AG groups focus on self-identification, conversion therapies, sport, free speech, political correctness, “western ideas”, “traditional family values”, and sex-based rights/single sex spaces in public communication to push for their agenda.

Respondents report that various AG actors tend to coordinate with each other and rarely engage in violence directed at vulnerable groups.

In the past year, have these groups been growing stronger in terms of the following?



Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

In this environment, respondents have a mixed assessment of whether the human rights situation is improving or worsening for TGD communities.

In the past year, the situation for TGD groups has:



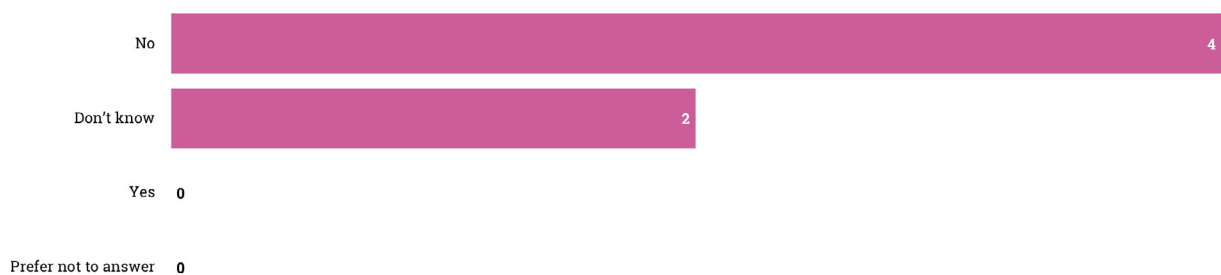
Respondents report that verbal attacks by AG actors against activists are common and are usually coordinated among various AG actors. Threats also take place, mostly on social media.

In the past year, have you or your organization/collective experienced verbal attacks by AG groups or someone else as a result of AG narratives?



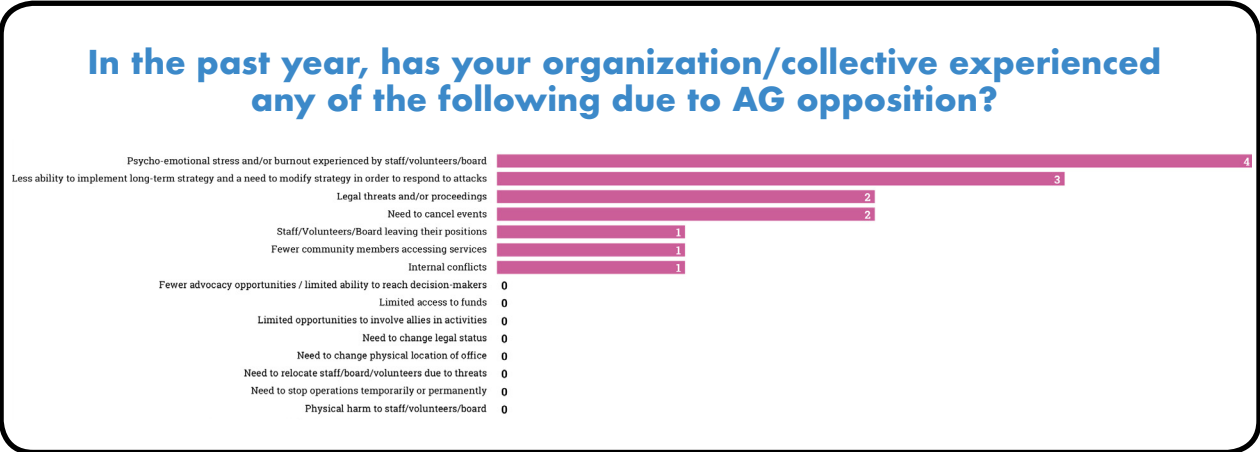
Physical violence by AG groups appears to be extremely low or non-existent, as no incidents were reported by respondents in the Survey.

In the past year, have you or your organization/collective experienced physical attacks by AG groups or someone else as a result of AG narratives?

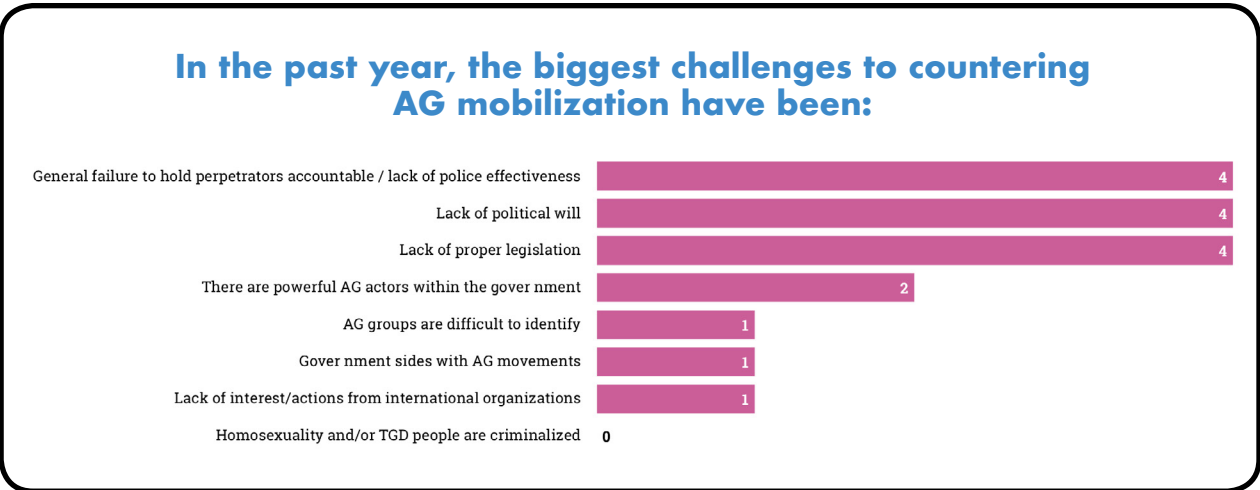


According to respondents, AG opposition negatively impacts pro-TGD/LGBTQI rights groups' ability to operate and advocate for positive changes, with psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout among staff being the leading challenge. Due to AG opposition, pro-TGD organizations are less able to implement long-term strategy, and need to modify the strategy in order to respond to attacks.

The full picture of the problems experienced by pro-TGD human rights organizations and/or collective is as follows:



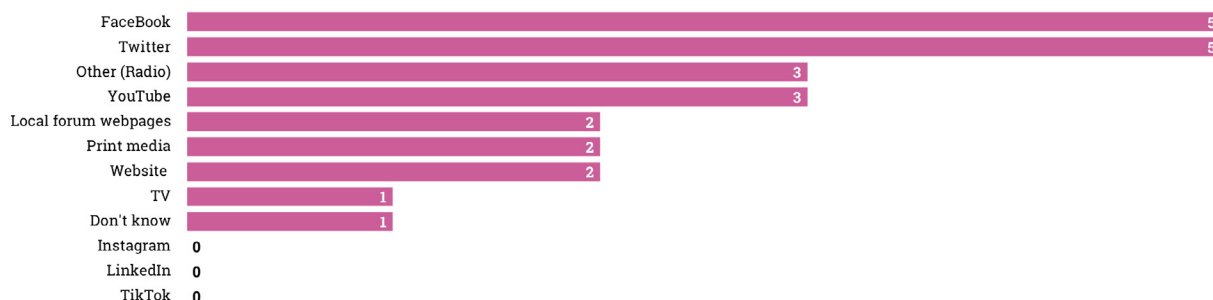
In several cases, AG actors managed to influence policy or legal developments impacting TGD communities in the past year.



Role of the Media

Respondents report that AG groups actively engage in the creation and spread of fake news relating to TGD communities.

Media channels used most by AG groups in the past year



Respondents report that, in most cases, the harmful social media posts by AG actors are reported to the social media platforms, but most of the time reports are ignored and harmful content rarely gets taken down.

In my experience, social media platforms are the primary means for AG mobilization



In my experience, social media platforms are not sufficiently enforcing their rules to prevent harmful and/or fake news from spreading and/or violent actions from being planned



Respondents' experiences show that the social media platforms are the main sources of AG opposition, including mobilization, and these platforms enable transphobic hate to spread by not sufficiently implementing rules and removing the false and misleading information or other activities from their platforms. On the other hand, TGD-related human rights posts sometimes get blocked on the basis of being labeled as "political".

The pages that follow provide a breakdown of the data from the Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Australia region by country.

Aotearoa (New Zealand)

AG Actors

Some AG actors are in the political arena in Aotearoa. As one respondent says,

“I do not believe that these groups are well-connected with the current government, however, members of major opposition parties have hired staff and had close relationships with members of anti-gender groups.”

Another respondent adds,

“Some anti-gender activists have worked for Opposition Members of Parliament and some officials in a few agencies are known to be personally anti-trans. The official government view is supportive in theory.”

One respondent states that

“There are several far-right minor parties without seats with explicitly anti-trans and anti-LGBTQI policies, New Conservatives have promoted Speak Up for Women.”

Some AG actors have seats in the parliament. A respondent indicates that

“8 National (conservative) MPs of 120 MPs in NZ Parliament voted against a ban of Conversion Practices Prohibition Bill and spoke against gender-affirming health practices.”

AG actors receive funding, but this information is not available, or is hidden from the public. They target ethnic and racial minorities, as well as TGD and LGBTQI organizations and leaders. Various AG actors coordinate with each other. A respondent states:

“There is some connection between whites’ rights activists in a right-wing and ‘free speech’ lobby group, and groups fueling anti-trans media. This is shown by individuals on the board of one lobby group being prominent in other groups. There seems to be an overlap of funding and use of the same lawyers or media agencies.”

Another respondent says,

“Speak Up for Women NZ, LAVA – Lesbian Action for Visibility Aotearoa, FOWL LRAA Suffragettes Education Aotearoa, Mana Wahine Korero, LGB Alliance Aotearoa, Broadsheet Magazine NZ, Resist Gender Education NZ, Women’s Liberation Aotearoa, Save Women’s Sport Australasia, Stand Up for Gays and Lesbians Aotearoa – These groups and Christian Church Coalition and City Impact Church did big anti-trans campaign to oppose laws from passing. They made thousands of written and oral submissions against BDMRR – Births Deaths Marriages and Relationships Registration Bill amendment to allow self-identification on birth certificates, and CPP Conversion Practices Prohibition Bill to outlaw conversion therapy on grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation. Spurious grounds like age of access to puberty blockers were used in both groups. Groups connected with overseas “experts” and submissions were also received from UK and USA, including from AG groups like GenSpect and conversion practitioners. Free Speech Union NZ – aligned with Free Speech Union UK and Taxpayers Union NZ also opposed the Bills on the grounds of denial of free speech rights. Mana Wahine Korero, a group of indigenous /Maori women declared that gender transition was colonisation and opposed it. They yelled down other indigenous /Maori women who pointed out diverse history.”

Another says,

“Here in Aotearoa, there seem to be multiple groups, but the majority are puppet organisations that are run by the same handful of people, and they have primarily overseas support/followers (namely UK based).”

The main topics and phrases used by AG actors in public communication to push for and gain support for their agenda are: gender self-identification, conversion practices (fighting a conversion practices ban that includes trans people), inclusive education in schools/children, trans people in prisons, trans people in sports, free speech/political correctness, gender-affirming healthcare, parents' rights, women's "sex-based" rights, free speech, freedom to practice religion, "fairness" / fair share / no special treatment, and the opposition to the government "telling them how to live their lives".

Respondents categorize AG actors as mixed on the political ideology spectrum.

According to respondents, AG actors have been growing in the past year in terms of the number of people supporting their social media and participating in their events, funding, political connections, and their ability to shape political decisions / impact policies in the past year. A respondent says,

"Because of political leadership changes in New Zealand and legislation passing with a strong majority, connections inside Parliament have decreased. Elements are still there and connections to unelected politicians and new political parties are growing. These elements tag in with anti-government feelings connected with 'special treatment' (equity) for indigenous people and with anti-vax, anti-mandate groups. The groups are different, but they often combine numbers for antigovernment protests under Freedoms and Rights banners."

Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

Respondents have mixed assessments on whether the human rights situation has been improving or worsening for TGD communities in the past year. 1 Respondent's opinion is that it is worsening, while 1 respondent believes that it has been improving, and 2 indicate that they don't know.

2 Out of 4 respondents report experiencing verbal attacks resulting from AG opposition:

"Verbal abuse at street protests, mainly by lesbians in their 70s with a history of 2nd wave feminist protest. Abuse was threatening but no assaults."

Another respondent says,

“I believe there have been some instances of physical intimidation at protests. Also graffiti of a queer church <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/128910438/an-act-of-hate-pink-church-vandalised-with-homophobic-antisemitic-slurs> and arson attack on a community centre shared by an LGBTQI and a trans org <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/300631295/turpentine-rubbish-bin-allegedly-used-in-rainbow-youth-arson> in past couple of months.”

A respondent indicates that

“Anti-trans groups involved in low level violence against young gender diverse people at street protests on legislation mentioned in 17 above. No one hospitalized, no-one arrested. Some people spoken to. Verbal abuse. Police received complaint about vandalism of MPs’ offices. MPs were known to publicly support trans inclusive laws.”

Another respondent states that

“We have been subjected to multiple calls by anti-trans individuals and groups to be defunded. This is because a lot of our work is supporting young people in schools. We have been called homophobic on right-wing news platforms because of our support for trans communities, and they have also harassed schools with OIAs about our involvement with them.”

Respondents believe that these incidents were coordinated with other AG actors. Authorities were not notified.

Respondents have received threats on social media. According to a respondent,

“Threats on social media. Too vague to take action other than reporting them on Community Standards grounds and blocking them.”

As a result of AG opposition, respondents report having to cancel events, having less ability to implement long-term strategy and a need to modify strategy in order to respond to attacks, fewer community members accessing services, psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout experienced by staff/volunteers/board, internal conflicts, staff/volunteers/board leaving their positions, and legal threats and/or proceedings.

A respondent says,

“Disengagement by volunteers and group members to avoid unpleasantness. The tension between group members on how to respond and also tension between trans and nonbinary members of the group and LGB cisgender members of the group over language. Sensitivities increased.”

According to respondents, AG groups have been able to impact TGD policy developments in Aotearoa:

“While unsuccessful in the end, anti-trans lobbyists managed to stall self-ID legislation by applying pressure on the relevant Minister.”

Respondents indicate that the biggest barriers to counteract AG opposition are lack of proper legislation, lack of political will, general failure to hold perpetrators accountable / lack of police effectiveness, AG groups being difficult to identify, as well as

“platforming of anti-gender views by mainstream media; support by opposition parties (who may end up in government at the next election); insufficient resources of LGBTIQ/trans organisations.”

Another respondent says,

“We need robust hate speech legislation in order to better circumvent the spread of fear-mongering misinformation, and national infrastructure for deradicalization programmes.”

Role of the Media

Respondents indicate that AG actors engage in the creation and spread of false and harmful information relating to TGD communities, using FaceBook, local forum webpages, Twitter, YouTube, print media, and websites as their main communication channels. AG actors also use live events for communication and lobbying. While their harmful content has been reported to social media platforms, the content rarely gets taken down. Respondents (2) somewhat agree and fully agree (1) with the statement that social media platforms are the primary means for AG mobilization. All respondents fully agree that social media platforms are not sufficiently enforcing their rules to prevent harmful and/or fake news from spreading and/or violent actions from being planned:

“Comments on some social media sites like FaceBook get overwhelmed by numbers. Its hard to challenge lies as attempts get amplification of rebuttals and then unpleasant and personal abuse that FaceBook won’t act on.”

Australia

AG Actors

According to respondents, AG actors are present in Australia, with some members being in the government. The Liberal Party, Liberal National Party, and other fringe religious right parties were named as AG actors. The information about their funding sources is not known to respondents. The LGBTQI community was named to be the main target of AG actors who use women's sports, religious freedom, "traditional family values", and the "mutilation of trans youth" as topics to spread and gain support for their agenda. They are categorized as right-wing on the political ideology spectrum.

Respondents point out that AG actors sometimes have coordinated actions, and Save Women's Sports Australasia, Genspect, and Heritage Foundation were named as examples. Moreover, respondents indicate that LGB Alliance Australia supported religious right groups, and TERFs in Australia support far-right anti-abortion politicians. It is not known to the respondents if these groups engage in violence.

Respondents indicate that AG actors are growing in terms of the number of people supporting their social media, political connections, and ability to shape political decisions and impact policies.

Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

Respondents report that the human rights situation for TGD communities has not changed or is worsening. Respondents (2) state that they experienced verbal attacks in the past year resulting from AG opposition, which was coordinated between various AG actors:

“Prolonged social media harassment, being doxed, having FaceBook pages made to harass me, Reclaim The Night Perth went so far as to make a half-hour video on how I was a threat to women.”

In one case, the incident was reported to the police in New South Wales and Victoria, but the case was never opened. The respondents believe that the case was not opened due to a lack of political will. No physical attacks were reported in the Survey. 1 Respondent also recalled receiving threats through social media. The incident was not reported to the social media platform.

Challenges due to AG opposition were reported as being the need to cancel events, psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout experienced by staff/volunteers/board, and legal threats and/or proceedings. Respondents report that AG actors have managed to push the *Religious Discrimination Bill*, which preserves the right of religious schools to expel students and staff based on their gender identity, despite the Australian constitution providing protection for gay staff and students.

Respondents report the biggest challenges in counteracting AG opposition to be powerful AG actors within the government, the lack of proper legislation, lack of political will, and the general failure to hold perpetrators accountable / lack of police effectiveness.

Role of the Media

Respondents report that AG actors engage in the creation and spread of fake news relating to TGD communities using Twitter and FaceBook as their main ways to communicate with their support base. Other platforms are TV, print media, YouTube, and websites. While their content on social media has been reported to the social media platforms, the content rarely gets taken down. Respondents fully agree or somewhat agree that social media platforms are the primary means for AG mobilization, and fully agree that social media platforms are not sufficiently enforcing their rules to prevent harmful and/or fake news from spreading and/or violent actions from being planned.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations are based on the most common global trends revealed by the Survey.

The assessment from the majority of respondents that the human rights situation for TGD communities has worsened in the past year should be a cause for alarm for activists, policy-makers, and donors. This alarming reality that the Survey brings to light demands that there should be more of an investment in TGD activism in terms of creating more awareness and more critical knowledge about AG opposition.

Building on this knowledge, analyzing existing activist approaches would help to critically rethink activist strategies in order for them to be more effective. The efficacy of activist approaches and strategies ideally need to include other parties: there need to be more discussions and collaborations between donors, policy-makers, TGD activists, and other socially progressive actors in order to understand the factors contributing to the success of AG actors, and to develop joint strategies to counteract the growth and impact of the AG movement. For example, as AG actors are globally weaponizing concepts like “family values”, sex education, abortion, children’s protection, and “Western ideas”, more critical knowledge is needed to understand how these concepts can be reclaimed through redefining them outside of a cis-heteronormative lens. and how the public communication coming out of activist circles can be improved upon in order to counteract the skewed perceptions that these AG narratives create and foster.

Moreover, as AG actors have successfully managed to position TGD communities and their rights against the women’s/feminist agenda in several contexts, further specific knowledge needs to be created around this topic and more discussions between TGD and feminist movements need to take place in order to clarify that this is a false dichotomy manufactured by the AG movement, and that the principles, values, aims and goals that govern the TGD human rights movement are the same as those that underpin the feminist/women’s movement.

Another aspect that the Survey highlights is the leading challenge experienced by activists resulting from the AG opposition – that of the psycho-emotional well-being of activists. Political discussions at the highest level need to include an awareness of this challenge, as well as ways to prevent and/or mitigate it. Undoubtedly, donors need to invest more in the safety, security, and psycho-emotional well-being of activists. Without this investment, the tendency of activists to leave activism may grow, which would pose a serious threat to the TGD movements, and human rights activism in general.

Pursuant to this, the security and safety of activists and organizations need to be prioritized in funding models as well as in high-political discussions because, otherwise, a growing number of community members may no longer be able to access the services provided by TGD/LGBTQI organizations, which would leave these members in even more vulnerable situations, especially when it comes to life-saving services related to HIV, psycho-emotional support, and other medical, social, and legal assistances. For many, lack of access to these services means vulnerability and exposure to HIV and other health-related issues, homelessness, violence, incarceration, and even death.

Another issue highlighted by the Survey is that due to AG opposition, advocacy opportunities for TGD activists are becoming increasingly limited, and activists have less capacity to reach decision-makers themselves. Therefore, beyond the financial investment in advocacy, donor institutions themselves need to proactively invest in enabling and facilitating discussions between activists and decision-makers, as donors and other institutions have relatively more power to reach decision-makers.

Activists, donors, and policy-makers also need to invest more political attention and resources into international and national policies and legislation that tackle the disinformation and radicalization of the AG movement, as the Survey revealed the main barriers to counteracting AG opposition to be the lack of political will, lack of proper legislation, and general failure to hold perpetrators accountable / lack of police effectiveness,

Finally, as the Survey showed, social media is the main domain enabling AG discourses to flourish and mobilization to take place. Donors need to support activist communication efforts more and activists need to be more invested in effective public communication. This requires more knowledge and resources for effective messaging (including message testing), understanding social opinions and factors contributing to radicalization, and utilization of more diverse

communication channels. Most importantly, social media platforms need to be held accountable. More and more effective regulations and policies are needed to force social media platforms to enforce higher safety and ethics standards on their platforms, ensuring that they do not enable disinformation that leads to social conflict and violence. Due to the transnational nature of social media platforms, discussions and policy efforts targeted at them are needed at the international level.

Summary of Recommendations

Donors

1. In funding portfolios, prioritize projects aimed at:
 - a. producing more critical knowledge on AG opposition, factors contributing to radicalization, and effective strategies for counteracting it,
 - b. increasing the capacity of activists and organizations, as well as their safety, security, and well-being,
 - c. producing effective and wide-reaching communication,
 - d. building intersectional cross-movement alliances, and
 - e. tackling disinformation and radicalization.
2. Beyond funding advocacy projects, proactively leverage positions of power to facilitate discussions between activists and decision-makers.
3. Provide flexible funding to adequately respond to emerging issues and increase core funding opportunities.

Decision-makers

1. Increase the participation of TGD communities in consultations for policy making – not only on issues that specifically impact TGD communities, but on all social issues.
2. Invest in understanding the factors contributing to anti-democratic radicalization, and conflicts operating in local contexts.
3. In consultation with various progressive/emancipatory and socially vulnerable groups, create or improve policies that address disinformation and anti-democratic radicalization.

Activists

1. Mobilize new resources and invest the existing ones in improving the understanding of the factors contributing to radicalization, the nature of AG opposition, and strategies on how to effectively counteract it.
2. Mobilize new resources and invest the existing ones in effective communication, both in terms of the content and the channels to reach as many audiences as possible.
3. Mobilize new resources and invest the existing ones in the safety, security, and well-being of the staff, board, and volunteers of the organization.
4. Liaise with social media platforms or organizations who can provide support in reaching out to social media to address disinformation.
5. Focus energies on building alliances and solidarity with other socially progressive and emancipatory movements, especially among feminist groups.



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