

Impact of Anti-Gender Opposition on TGD and LGBTQI Movements

North America 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 North America region.

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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

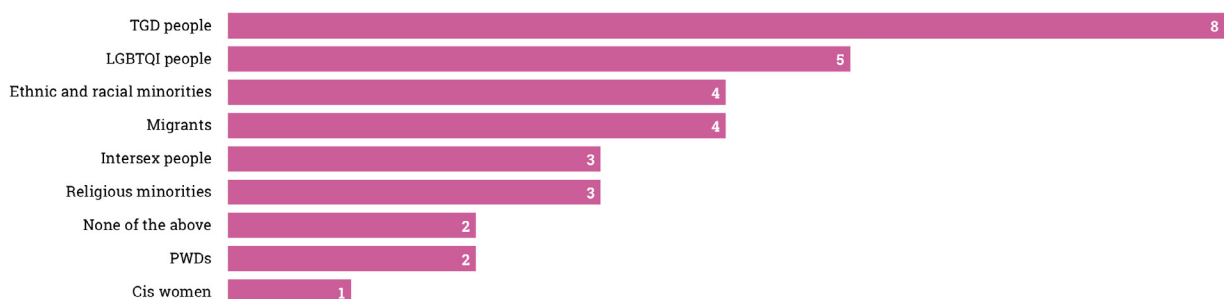
For a general introduction to the Survey completed by respondents, including positionality, data collection methods, and who took part in the Survey, please refer to the [Global Report](#).

The next few pages provide an analysis of the Survey data for the North America region, followed by a breakdown of the data by country.

AG Actors

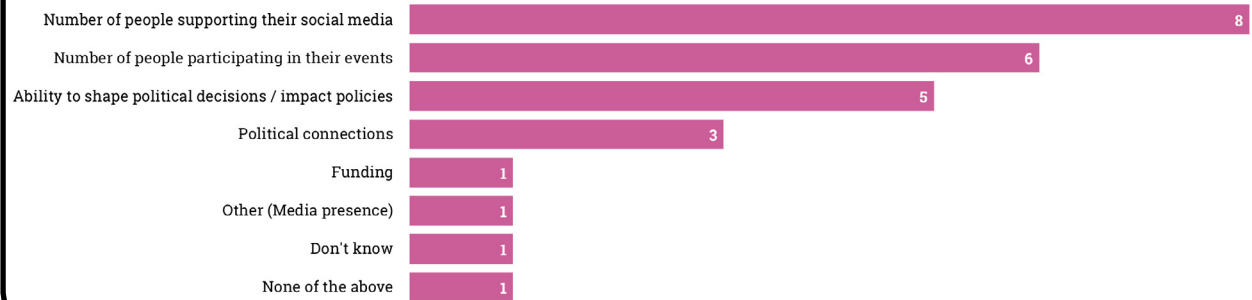
Respondents indicate that some AG groups are in the government, and some are represented as political parties and have seats in electable bodies (parliaments). Most of them are categorized as right-wing on the political ideology spectrum, but some are mixed in their ideological stances. Respondents report that the lack of proper investigation of alleged crimes committed by AG actors is a huge challenge.

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



AG actors focus on racism, abortion, freedom of expression, “gender ideology”, sex education, and “family values” in public communication to spread and gain support for their agenda. Respondents indicate that various AG actors mostly coordinate with each other and sometimes engage in physical violence directed at vulnerable groups.

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



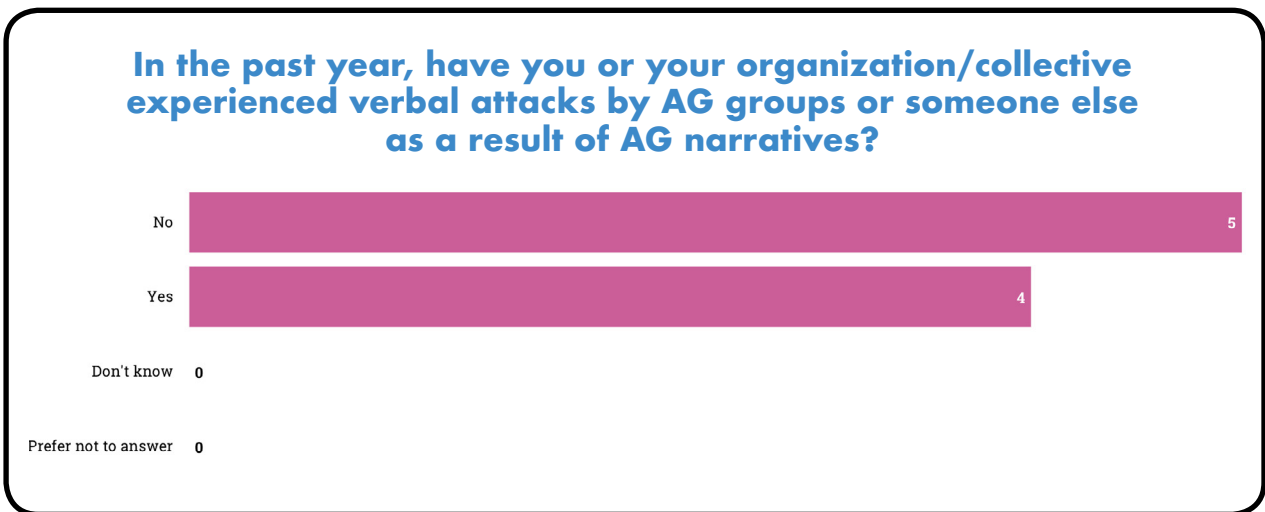
Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

In this environment, the majority of the respondents believe that the human rights situation for TGD communities has worsened in the past year.

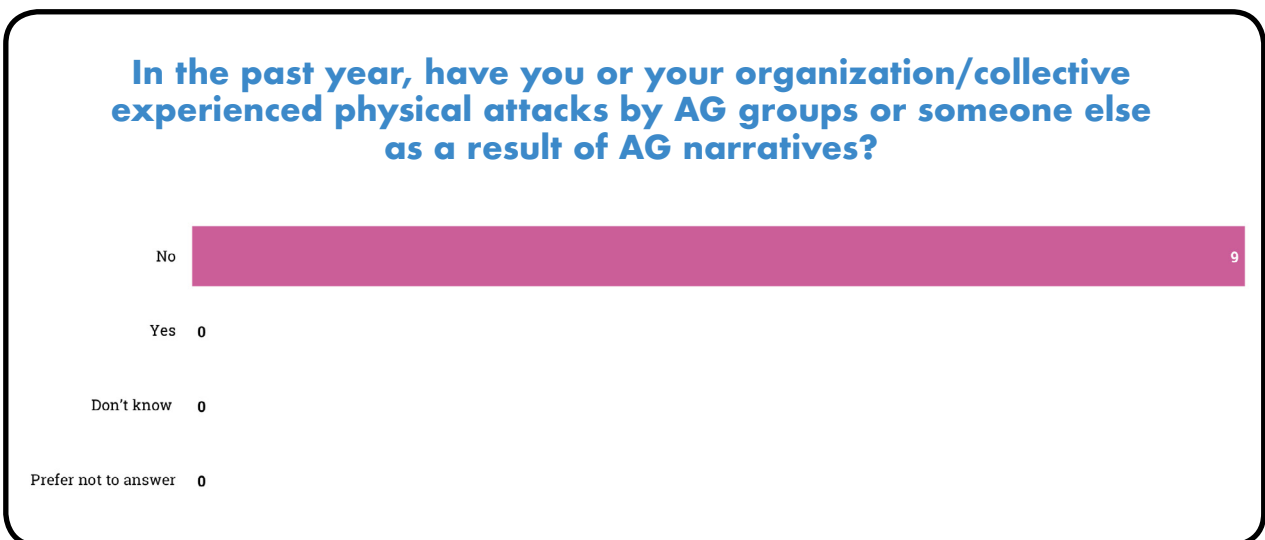
In the past year, the situation for TGD groups has:



Respondents and their organizations/collectives sometimes receive verbal abuse.



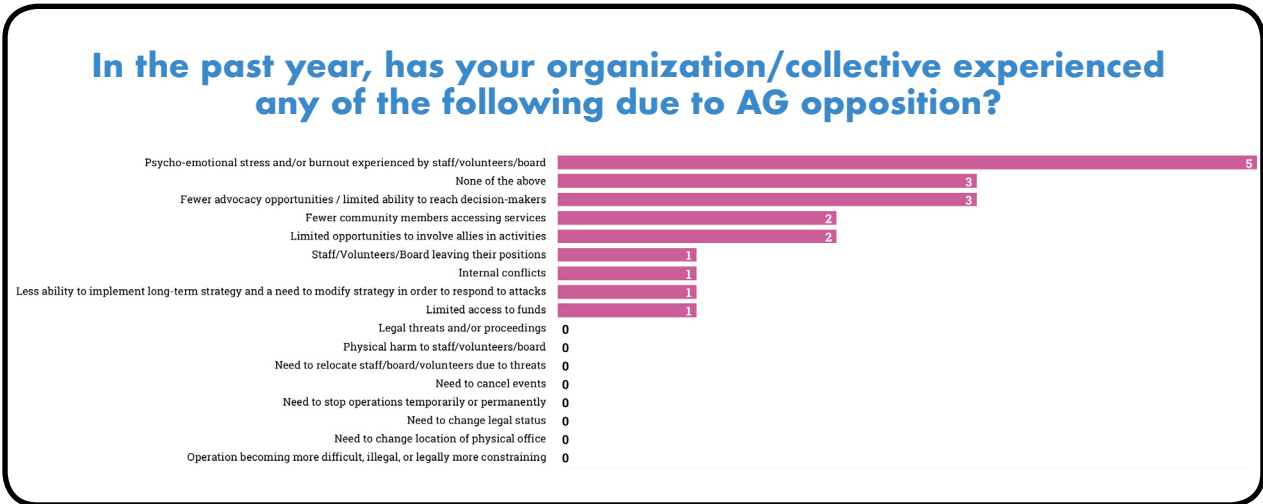
Physical abuse appears to be extremely rare as it has not been reported by any of the respondents in the Survey.



Respondents report that various AG actors usually don't coordinate with each other.

According to respondents, threats are not common and take place mostly on social networks.

Respondents indicate that AG opposition results in serious challenges to TGD/LGBTQI and wider human rights activism, with psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout being the leading issue experienced. Besides stress, the most significant problem respondents report is fewer advocacy opportunities, which put constraints on their ability to carry out their advocacy work. Some respondents report that AG opposition has not translated into any significant challenges for their organizations/collectives.



In a significant number of contexts, AG actors managed to influence policies and legal developments impacting TGD communities in the past year.

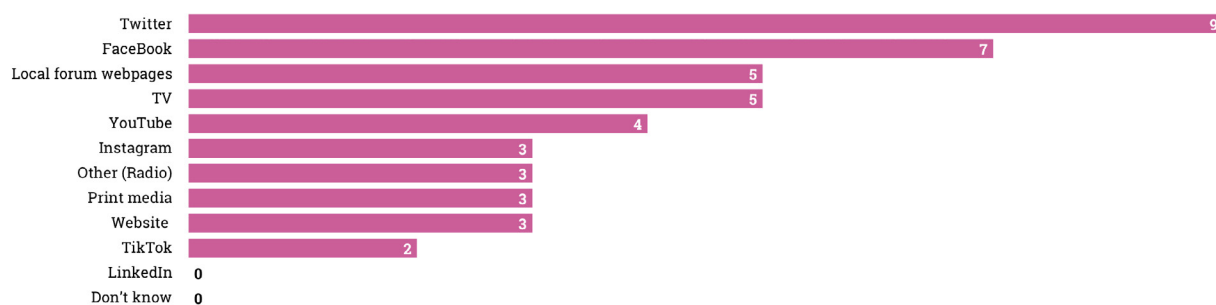
Respondents report the following main barriers to countering AG opposition: lack of political will, criminalization of trans/non-cisnormative and non-heteronormative identities (or aspects of their identities), and governments siding with AG actors. This can be explained by the respondents indicating the fact that in many contexts, powerful AG actors are in governments.



Role of the Media

AG groups engage in the creation and spread of fake news relating to TGD communities, using FaceBook, local forum webpages, TV, and YouTube to communicate with their audience.

Media channels used most by AG groups in the past year



In most cases, AG groups'/actors' social media posts get reported to social media platforms, but when they are, the reports are mostly ignored, and content rarely gets taken down. Respondents' experiences show that 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 false and misleading information or other activities from their platforms.

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



Human rights-related posts on TGD communities don't get blocked most of the time, except for one case when FaceBook blocked the content, labeling it as "political".

What follows is a breakdown of data from the North America region by country.

Canada

AG Actors

Respondents report that some members of AG groups are in the government and alleged crimes committed by AG groups sometimes go uninvestigated. But overall, the respondents agree that the Canadian government is supportive of trans issues. AG actors receive funding, with this information being publicly unavailable or hidden. 1 Respondent states that AG actors don't receive any funding. Respondents categorize AG groups as right-wing, and mixed on the political ideology spectrum.

AG actors mostly target TGD/LGBTQI communities, followed by ethnic and racial minorities, religious minorities, migrants, PWDs, and intersex groups, and they use "family values", freedom of expression, "sex-based rights", trans women in women prisons, conversion therapy, and trans-affirming healthcare as their main discursive topics in spreading and gaining support for their agenda.

Some AG actors coordinate with each other. 1 Respondent reports that

"CAWSBAR, Gender Dissent, Women's Human Rights Campaign and countless others. Connected to far-right media (Rebel News, the Post Millennial, Quillette)."

According to respondents, some AG actors engaged in public harassment and prevented certain people from entering stores/businesses in the past year. 1 Respondent states that AG groups have not been becoming stronger in the past year, while 2 respondents pointed to the growth in AG groups due to the increase in the number of people supporting their social media and participating in their events, as well as their increased ability to shape political decisions, and impact policies.

Respondents report that the main challenges in counteracting AG opposition are lack of political will, and a general failure to hold perpetrators accountable / lack of police effectiveness.

Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

2 Respondents believe that the situation has worsened for TGD communities in the country, with 1 respondent reporting that it has not changed. While respondents did not report any serious incidents of AG attack or threats, some mention that as a result of AG opposition they had experienced fewer advocacy opportunities / limited ability to reach decision-makers, psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout experienced by staff/volunteers/board, and limited or no opportunities to involve allies in activities. Respondents report that AG actors have not been able to impact any policy related to TGD communities in the past year, other than sex education curriculums, which was mentioned by 1 respondent.

Role of the Media

AG groups engage in the creation and spread of false information on TGD communities and tend to use Twitter, local forum websites, FaceBook, TV, print media, and YouTube to communicate with audiences. Their posts get reported to social media platforms and content is sometimes taken down. 2 Out of 3 respondents fully agree that social media platforms are the primary means for AG mobilization, and 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.

United States of America (USA)

AG Actors

Respondents report that AG actors are present in the country, with some AG actors being in the government. Some members of the government and AG groups have coordinated communication, and some parts of the government rarely investigate alleged crimes committed by AG groups. It is also reported that some parts of the government support AG actors financially. Certain groups within the Republican party (GOP), and the party itself, were named as one of the AG actors.

Respondents indicate that AG actors target ethnic and racial minorities, cis women, religious minorities, migrants, PWDs, LGBTQI groups, and TGDI people. Their main points in spreading and gathering support for their agenda are abortion, LGBTQI issues, race, “wokeness”, social justice, bathroom policies, family values, migration, and sex education. Respondents categorize these actors as mostly right-wing on the political ideology spectrum.

According to respondents, various AG actors coordinate with each other. For example, the Texas GOP coordinates with TERF groups, and there is also collaboration with fundamentalist Christian groups. Respondents indicate that AG actors are growing in terms of the number of people supporting their social media, the number of people participating in their events, and their ability to shape political decisions / impact policies.

According to respondents, AG actors have been effective in initiating AG policies in the last year. There has been an avalanche of anti-rights/anti-TGD measures in various states in the USA:

“Criminalization of gender-affirming care for minors. Families of trans people who can afford to leave the state are leaving, including many of our high-profile activists, leaving a vacuum in state and local activism.”

The biggest barriers to counteracting AG opposition are a lack of political will and the government siding with AG movements. This is followed by a lack of proper legislation, powerful AG actors being in the government, and a lack of interest/actions from international organizations.

Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

Out of 6 respondents, 5 believe that the human rights situation for the TGD community has worsened in the USA for the past year, while 1 believes that it has improved. 3 Respondents report having experienced verbal attacks from AG actors or by others as the result of AG narratives:

“When doing testimony at the state capitol, we were called ‘groomers,’ ‘child abusers,’ ‘pedophiles,’ etc.”

Another respondent mentions that in-person events were a matter of concern for them due to the high possibility of protestors obstructing the event. These incidents were not reported to authorities. Physical attacks were not reported in the Survey.

Respondents report psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout experienced by staff/volunteers/board as the most significant impact resulting from AG opposition, followed by fewer advocacy opportunities / limited ability to reach decision-makers, and fewer community members accessing services.

Internal conflicts and staff/volunteers/board leaving their positions was also an issue encountered by respondents:

“Our executive director moved out of state not due to threats but partially due to the anti-trans climate here.”

Another respondent says,

“I feel an immense amount of stress at the thought of what we will do when we resume in person events. I do not want to involve law enforcement, which is more likely to victimize our community than protect it, but I am 100% sure we will face harassment and perhaps violence. The events we have are very important to the community and to myself personally, but Don’t know how we are going to ensure that events are safe. We have considered closing down the organization but that feels cowardly and like we are taking a resource away from the community. I just don’t know what to do. I am also considering moving out of state due to the anti-trans climate here which would mean I would need to step down from the org, and I’m not sure the org would survive further losses of organizers/staff. (This is unpaid part time work; I have a day job elsewhere.)”

Role of the Media

AG actors create and spread false news about TGD communities and primarily use Twitter, TV, and FaceBook to communicate with their audiences, followed by local forum websites, Instagram, YouTube, and websites, and then print media, TikTok, and in-person events.

All respondents report false/harmful content to the social media platforms, but content is rarely taken down. Respondents (3) fully agree and somewhat agree (2) with the statement that social media platforms are the primary means for AG mobilization. Respondents (4) fully agree and fully disagree (1) 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. Apart from 1 respondent’s case, human rights posts don’t get blocked. This respondent says,

“We had ads for our events blocked on FaceBook/Instagram due to being ‘political.’ We are not a political organization. Appeals were ignored.”

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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