

EXTREMISM FACT SHEET

Anti-Trans Extremism:
The Far Right's New Strategy
to Spread Hate



Mainstream far-right actors are escalating a nationwide campaign to eliminate the trans community from American society – a dangerous threat to trans people and one that portends broader attacks on the LGBTQ+ community, other minorities, and our democracy.

WHAT IS ANTI-TRANS EXTREMISM?

Today's far-right extremist campaign against trans rights, and LGBTQ+ rights more broadly, seeks to remove trans people from public spaces. Throughout history, attacks on the trans community served as a harbinger of extremist efforts to control, limit, and erase other minority communities from society.

The current campaign uses state and local legislation to limit trans rights and even criminalize members of the trans community. As of June 2023, over 80 anti-trans bills had passed in the U.S., up significantly from 26 in 2022.¹

Anti-trans policies also harm other minority groups. For instance, book bans and educational policies that target LGBTQ+ content often incorporate attacks on materials that discuss racism and the history of Black and Brown communities in the United States.

Anti-trans extremism spans time and space. Nazi Germany targeted trans people, derailing the progress of gender affirmation surgery and destroying a vibrant social community. In 1933, Nazis set fire to the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft,² destroying an LGBTQ+ library that included pioneering trans medical research.

Far-right mainstream leaders are spearheading this campaign, including politicians like Governor Ron DeSantis, Senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz; media pundits like Matt Walsh and Ben Shapiro; and organizations like Moms for Liberty and the Family Research Council.



A social media post sharing a cartoon depicting Democrats and trans people as "groomers" and sexual predators.



A social media post sharing a pride flag that conflates LGBTQ+ with "groomers."

HOW ANTI-TRANS EXTREMISM IS NORMALIZED: KEY MAINSTREAM NARRATIVES YOU MAY HAVE HEARD

The anti-trans campaign mainstreams disinformation about the trans community to fearmonger, increase anti-trans hate, and normalize other bigoted views. It deploys four specific narratives to promote anti-trans hate, including: 1) the idea that trans people are “groomers” or “pedophiles,” 2) that “gender identity” is a false construct, 3) that trans women harm “real” girls and women, and 4) that gender affirming care and education harms children.

01

Narrative 1: Trans People are “Groomers” and “Pedophiles”: This narrative promotes the idea that trans people are “grooming” children for sexual exploitation through exposure to illicit or inappropriate content. Purveyors deliberately conflate drag performance and trans identities with sexual deviance and pedophilia as a political tactic to rebut and silence opposition.³ For example, Moms for Liberty regularly uses the term “groomer” to smear LGBTQ+ advocates and politicians.

02

Narrative 2: “Gender Identity” is Fake: Gender identity refers to a person’s own sense of their gender. Anti-trans actors use this term and “gender ideology” to dismiss trans and nonbinary persons’ identities to suggest it is a concocted political strategy. For example, in 2022 six senators wrote a letter to the Department of Education (ED) criticizing ED’s use of “gender identity” as part of updates to LGBTQ+ protections in schools. They suggested ED was forcing “radical gender ideology” on students.

03

Narrative 3: Transwomen Harm “Real” Women and Girls: This narrative claims trans-inclusive policies, such as allowing trans girls to use the girls’ bathroom, put cisgendered girls at risk of sexual assault.⁴ For example, in 2023, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene claimed that trans women were “men, who are really a bunch of perverts,” who were “in your locker room and your bathroom because....they want to have sex with you.” In reality, research shows that allowing bathroom access based on gender identity poses no risk to public safety but denying this access harms trans and non-binary individuals.

04

Narrative 4: Gender Affirming Care and Education Harms Children: These narratives claim gender-affirming care is exploitative and dangerous, and LGBTQ+ support in school indoctrinates and sexualizes children. For example, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis ginned up support for a law banning gender-affirming care for minors by referring to it as child “mutilation.”



A tweet by Representative Dan Crenshaw that showcases an example of anti-trans legislation being proposed by members of Congress.

A MULTI-PRONGED CAMPAIGN: FEDERAL, STATE, & LOCAL ATTACKS ON TRANS RIGHTS

The anti-trans campaign is a coordinated assault on trans' rights and participation in society at the federal, state, and local levels. It successfully institutionalizes discrimination against trans individuals in education, healthcare, and government, and often disingenuously claims to "protect children" to garner both mainstream and fringe support.

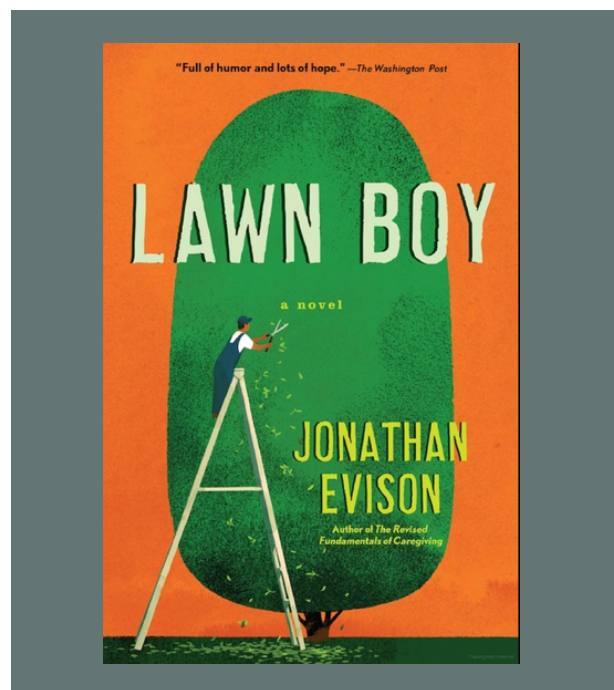
Federal: Far-right members of the 118th Congress have introduced multiple bills that exclude trans individuals from society, including in the military and in school sports. Bills are often misleadingly framed under the guise of "parental rights," like the Parents Bill of Rights Act.

State: As of late June 2023, 560 anti-trans bills have been proposed in 49 states with 83 becoming law and nearly 363 still active. Anti-LGBTQ+ laws, like Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill, directly harm trans individuals, causing some LGBTQ+ individuals to flee the state. These laws prevent trans children from receiving critical and often lifesaving medical care, and criminalize parents and educators who support trans children.

Local: At the local level, the anti-trans campaign—and broader campaign against inclusion—focuses on school boards and classrooms, and leverages claims of "parental rights." For instance, California Assembly Bill 1314, Gender Identity Parental Notification would allow parents to sue schools if they fail to disclose that a student identifies as trans. This practice, called 'forced-outing' can harm the child's safety and increase suicide.



A tweet by Moms for Liberty depicting a librarian and advocate against book bans as a "groomer."



The book "Lawn Boy," a story about racism in America, is frequently banned because of its LGBTQ+ sexual content.

THE DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT OF EXTREMIST ATTACKS ON THE TRANS AND LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

The rapid growth and normalization of anti-trans extremism in the United States threatens the trans and broader LGBTQ+ community, while also creating inroads for attacks on other targeted communities. It amplifies bigotry, regularly inspires harassment and hate-fueled attacks, creates inequitable and unsafe environments for LGBTQ+ individuals and their families, and ultimately undermines democracy.

Amplifies Other Forms of Bigotry: Anti-trans rhetoric and legislation amplifies misogyny, antisemitism, and white supremacy, adversely impacting many minority communities. For example, state bills that seek to erase trans students by redefining and limiting education around gender and sex also roll back critical advances in sexual education and health generally. Similarly, state bills that seek to erase trans individuals from society by targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts also threaten hard-won civil rights gains by Black and Brown communities.

Inspires Harassment and Hate-Fueled Attacks: Far-right extremists continue to target and harass LGBTQ+ communities, including drag performances. Earlier this year an alleged member of the white supremacist group White Lives Matter attempted to burn down a church in Ohio to prevent a scheduled drag performance. In 2022, an individual motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ hate attacked Club Q, a LGBTQ+ nightclub in Colorado, killing five. The FBI's 2021 hate crimes report revealed that over 20 percent of all single-bias hate crimes were motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ hate.

Creates Inequitable and Unsafe Environments for Trans Children and Families: Anti-trans policies deny trans children equal participation in schools, sports, and other parts of their community, directly impacting their ability to learn, grow, and live safely in communities across the country. Furthermore, denying trans children necessary life-saving medical care will lead to increased suicide among trans children.

Undermines Democracy: Throughout history, authoritarian leaders have used attacks on trans and LGBTQ+ communities to garner support for and normalize anti-democratic measures. Targeting LGBTQ+ rights in society is a marker of democratic backsliding and a dire warning for democracies; research suggests the presence of inclusive LGBTQ+ laws correlates to higher levels of democracy.

LGBTQ+ Community: Understanding Key Terms and Concepts

TRANSGENDER: An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender expression is different from the gender they were assigned at birth. Often shorthanded as "trans."

GENDER IDENTITY: A term used to describe a person's internal sense of their gender. Recently, this term, and similar terms like "gender ideology" have been adopted by the far right to disparage the legitimacy of trans and nonbinary identities.

CISGENDER: A term used to denote a person whose gender corresponds with the gender that was assigned to them at birth.

NONBINARY: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity does not fit into binary categories of "male" or "female," and who rejects the notion that gender is binary. Nonbinary is often conflated with other terms like genderqueer, genderfluid, or agender; these terms have slightly different meanings, but all speak to the broader concept of rejecting gender binaries.

LGBTQ+: The acronym is used to refer to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer community.⁵

DRAG QUEEN OR KING AND DRAG PERFORMANCE: Drag describes a type of theatrical entertainment that uses gender performance to present an exaggerated form of masculinity (drag king) or femininity (drag queen) through stylized dress, often accompanied by song and dance. The performer's sexuality or gender are not intrinsically linked to their gendered performance.

TAKE ACTION: HOW YOU CAN RESPOND TO ANTI-LGBTQ+ EXTREMISM

Reject Extremist Narratives: We must name hate when we see it and refuse to let its purveyors whitewash extremism and monopolize public discourse. Narratives like “trans people are groomers” represent dangerous disinformation. Whether you see it online, in your community, or among elected officials, call this rhetoric out for what it is: deliberate fearmongering and disinformation. For specific ideas about how to intervene online and in-person, check out this [resource](#) by Right to Be and this [trans justice initiative](#) by the Human Rights Campaign.

Get Involved in Your Community: A vibrant democracy represents all its citizens and requires your participation. Get involved with your local school boards, city councils, and town halls. Express solidarity with communities that are under attack and join efforts that uplift their voices. For more ideas on how to ensure our communities remain open and affirming to the LGBTQ+ community, look at this [resource](#) by Western States Center.

Support Inclusive Policies and Reject Discriminatory Policies: Advocate for policies that support trans and LGBTQ+ people. At the state and federal level, that means making your voice heard in support of inclusionary legislation like the [Transgender Bill of Rights](#). Likewise, stay informed about the flood of anti-trans legislation in the U.S. with this [tracker](#).

[ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST](#)

We work to create a just world in which every person's intrinsic human rights are respected and protected, to build societies that value and invest in all their people. To reach that goal demands assisting victims of injustice, bringing perpetrators of abuse to justice, and building institutions that ensure universal rights.

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To learn more about our work, please visit humanrightsfirst.org or email us: ExtremismInfo@humanrightsfirst.org.

ENDNOTES

1. The [majority of Americans support](#) protecting trans individuals from discrimination, however, a decreasing number support gender affirming medical care, a testament to the effectiveness of anti-trans far-right messaging.
2. Roughly translated this means Institute of Sexology. The center was run by a gay Jewish man who was a pioneer in advocating for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. The Institute founded one the world's first gender-affirming medical facilities.
3. Anti-trans rhetoric intentionally obscures distinctions between different LGBTQ+ identities, [conflating drag performers, nonbinary persons](#), and others, to discriminate against minorities more broadly.
4. The focus on trans women is derived from the male supremacist and transphobic belief that trans women are simply men in disguise who desire to attack girls and women in female-gendered spaces.
5. Human Rights First recognizes that additions to this acronym such as LGBTQIA+ are a valuable contribution to the ongoing effort to include all voices in discussions of this community, and likewise recognize the evolving nature of gender and sexual identity and performance.