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FOCUS GROUP REPORT

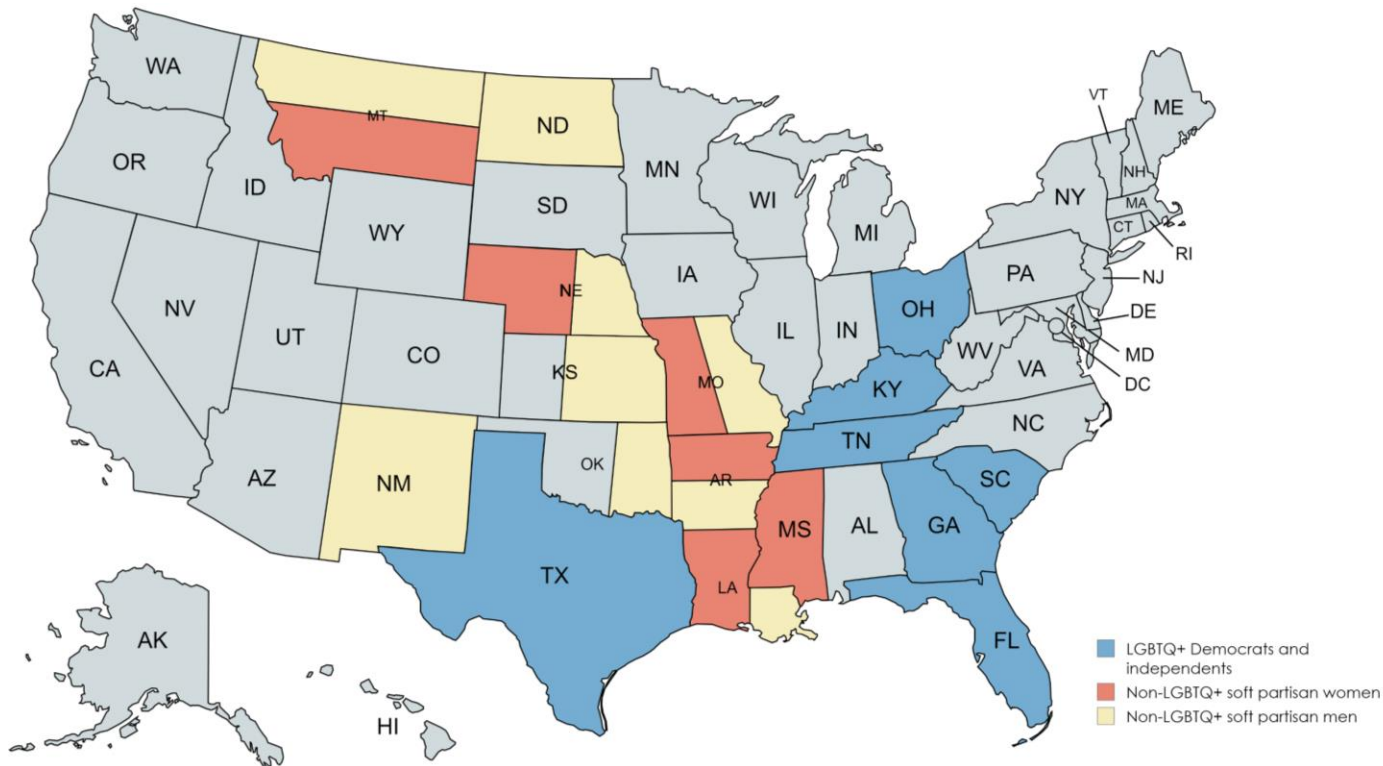
Tuesday, July 2, 2024

LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+
Americans on the Equality Act



Methodology

On June 24, 2024, GBAO conducted three online focus groups with LGBTQ+ Democratic and independent Americans and non-LGBTQ+ soft partisan Americans in states designated by the Human Rights Campaign as “High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality.”



- Group 1: LGBTQ+ Democratic and independent Americans
- Group 2: Non-LGBTQ+ soft partisan women
- Group 3: Non-LGBTQ+ soft partisan men

Key Takeaways

- The mood about the state of the country is sour.
- Abortion rights is a top-tier worry.
- Despite recent progress in LGBTQ+ rights, most see transgender Americans as a targeted group.
- The Equality Act seems like an obvious needed action, even if many are skeptical of adequate enforcement.
- The onslaught of anti-LGBTQ+ laws across the country is surprising and disturbing.
- Candidates mobilized against LGBTQ+ rights are judged harshly.

Some See Positivity in Community Support and Economic Gains

Moderator: Fill in the blank: I feel [BLANK] is going well in the country today.

"Where I am in Florida, we just had some crazy ass tornadoes and our small community people just came out of nowhere... People were just amazing." – FL woman, independent

"I've noticed a couple of my friends have been getting new jobs, so I'm assuming that the job market is getting better because they've gotten more jobs." – KY woman, strong Democrat



"In my local area I know a lot of places in Nebraska after COVID, everybody, we're really going out and supporting farmers' markets, like local food wagons, at home people that do their own crafts and baking stuff, we're all trying to kind of support small businesses." – NE woman, weak Republican

"Living in the reddest state in the country, you think there'd be a lot of division. independent, but we all get along here... Kindness. We're very kind people here." – OK man, independent

"Camaraderie... It's just a word that popped into the top of my head... I think people tend to get along very well together where I'm at, regardless of their political affiliation." – MT man, weak Republican

"There's been a lot of new jobs added. I think the stock market's been doing phenomenally well. Crypto's been doing well. I think everything on the economic side. I know there are different challenges in a lot of places, but where I'm at, we're doing pretty well." – SD man, weak Republican

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Although for Most, the Mood Is Sour

Moderator: What isn't going well in the country today?

"Really just nothing [is going well], I guess really with minimum wage, our minimum wage in Oklahoma is still \$7.25, and I just feel like we can't even live off of that. So, I guess that's really why I said nothing. The economy." – OK woman, weak Democrat

"We don't have too much of law and order in our country. Everybody's just lost their wits." – LA woman, weak Republican

"Politics. and I'd say gun violence, like the mass shootings." – NE woman, weak Republican

"We're struggling in the social justice department." – SC woman, strong Democrat

"Well, I mean women's rights aren't going well. Reproductive rights, the climate, climate... I mean, it's been 98, 99 [degrees] in Atlanta for 10 days in a row, and there's no sign of rain and it's not going to get any better in the next week. So climate's bad, social issues are bad. Climate, crime, guns..." – GA man, strong Democrat

"I would say maybe the racial aspect of society, like race relations [are not going well]." – MO man, independent

"General morale and just you got people talking about just civil war or sometimes or just people not getting along politically or just not seeing eye to eye, I guess." – ND man, independent lean Republican

"People are a lot meaner these days." – LA man, weak Democrat



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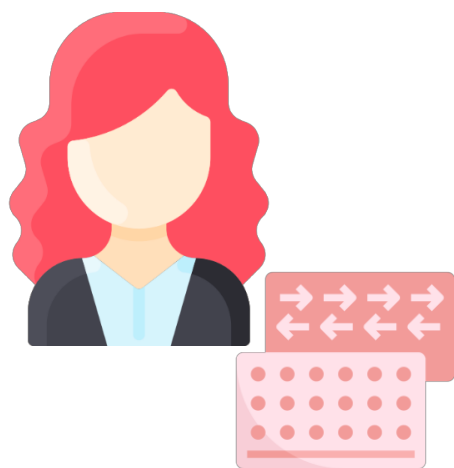
Abortion and “Women’s Rights” Emerge as a Top Worry

Moderator: Do you feel you have the same amount of rights and freedoms as a few years ago or fewer rights and freedoms?

“I’ll say [I have fewer rights] due to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. I have three daughters, and they have less freedom as it affects my family. **They have less rights than their grandma did** with regard to that. And we haven’t had a need for that or whatever, and I’m grateful for that, but it’s something that my wife and I are conscious of.” – SD man, weak Republican

“I feel like I have the same rights, but I’m not a woman who might need [an] abortion for social or medical reasons.” – LA woman, weak Republican

“They like to make it out to sometimes on social media saying there’s more rights for women or for those [who are] LGBT, but then you go, there’s not really, even just locally, **there’s not really much improvement.**” – MO woman, independent lean Democrat



“I am gay, and I know the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* kind of puts a little bit on gay marriage, like they could eventually go away with that too. So that is something to worry about.” – TN man, weak Democrat

“I live in Texas where abortion has been illegal. **Now they’re trying to make birth control illegal as well.** So, it’s just the next thing on top of the next thing. Being a young woman, I’m 24, so I’m in my reproductive time. I just feel so many restrictions put on me that are not my own opinion.” – TX woman, weak Democrat

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“Discrimination” and “Equality” Touch on a Myriad of Identities, With Many Experiencing This Personally and Acutely

What does “equality” mean to you?

“I would say **just making sure everyone has equal rights**, whether your sex or race. And, yeah, just making sure you have the right to be who you are.” – ND man, independent lean Republican

“**Everybody should get a chance**. All these businesses hide behind their statement, ‘We’re an equal opportunity employer,’ but if they don’t like something about you, they’ll just come up with a way to not hire you, and they’ll just lie about it.” – NE woman, weak Republican

“When I hear it just means **we’re on the same level**, as one.” – OK woman, weak Democrat

“Being in Tennessee, I can literally be fired for being gay, so that would definitely not be legal. And then I would like to never have to hear the phrase gay marriage again and just let it be marriage, **not have to hear the term gay rights and just hear human rights**.” – TN man, weak Democrat

“I think **everybody just having an equal opportunity**. Regardless of your age, your color, your sexuality, everybody should be given the same opportunity for everything.” – KY woman, strong Democrat

What does “discrimination” mean to you?

“I think **you’re going against a religion or a race or a culture or a sexual orientation**, that you’re choosing one over the other.” – AR man, independent

“I just think because of social media and all that, we see more things to discriminate against... because **there’s so many more ways to be visible**. We have social media and things like that, so it’s coming at us from all directions.” – MS woman, weak Republican

“**People of color, the LGBT community, women**. Yeah, that pretty much covers it, I think.” – GA man, independent lean Democrat

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Across All Groups, There Is Some Division as to Whether LGBTQ+ Americans Better or Worse Off Than in Recent Years

"This is Pride Month, so I am seeing more of people in the community being brought to light and stuff. I do appreciate that, but **once this month is over, I feel like everybody just kind of forgets about it.**" – TX woman, weak Democrat

"**When I was born in 1958, same-sex relations were illegal in every state but Illinois...** I'm married. We have all the rights that married couples have. I feel like the mainstream community has become more accepting, but then the fringe groups have become more radical, and I think that's because they feel freer now to express their hatred and their bigotry." – GA man, strong Democrat

"I mean, not great. Being in Tennessee, a lot of stuff comes up in politics about anti-LGBT laws. Recently, **I read about one where they were trying to ban all these books, and the majority of them were all somehow LGBT-related.**" – TN man, weak Democrat

"I don't think they're treated with the same level of respect that I am... I think they're discriminated against. They have parades. And **they say, 'You can't have a parade.' Why can't they have a parade? You have a St. Patrick's Day parade. You have whatever parade, Independence Day, July 4th parade. Why can't they have a parade?**" – AR man, independent

"I think **it's gotten worse over the last few years**, and some of the worst places are small towns. I live in a small town in Montana, so discrimination is rife, unfortunately. But **if you go to a bigger city in Montana, like Billings or Missoula, they actually do have parades, and that lifestyle is definitely more accepted.**" – MT man, weak Republican

"I think it has improved for them in terms of... a little bit in healthcare because **we actually have in our city now a LGBTQ Center, a clinic, and then doctors, like LGBT friendly doctors.**" – MO woman, independent lean Democrat

"One of the things that I think is interesting is that you see a lot more LGBT characters on TV, on movies and shows. There's newscasters and sports people are openly have come out... **I think it's good for them to come out.**" – NE woman, weak Republican

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Although Most See Trans Adults and Kids as Being Targeted

"I feel like probably the ones that have it worse off right now are transgender individuals. I feel like they are getting the most hate and the most pushback in the political world, probably than anyone else." – TN man, weak Democrat

"I've watched some trans kids grow up with my kids. **We've lost some because people are just really, really terrible.** You're right. It's getting worse, not better, especially for the trans community... But yeah, I mean, South Carolina is not the best place to be trans, especially to be a kid." – SC woman, strong Democrat



"I guess I feel like [the way trans adults are treated is] unfair. I think everybody should be able to get medical care. So yeah, unfair is what I think." – OK woman, weak Democrat

"A lot of it is our current Governor and our current Secretary of Instruction, Superintendent Ryan Walters. He's working with Moms for Liberty. They're trying to keep trans kids out of school, locking down bathrooms. We just recently had a young trans lady die just here a few months ago in a smaller town. But I know from talking to the gay kids, the trans, lesbians, pansexuals, they're scared. **They've never been this scared in their life.**" – OK man, independent



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The Equality Act Is Mostly Unknown; It Seems Like a “Bare Minimum” That Would Face Enforcement Challenges

“Well, [the Equality Act] sounds great. But in theory, and that's what it is, because people are still going to be discriminated against in person. That might be different if you're applying for a credit card, or a loan, or something, because they can't see you personally. So that bias, it may exist to a lesser extent, but I think if they see people in person, I think there's likely to be more bias.” – MT man, weak Republican

“Yeah, just like everybody else, it sounds good on paper. It sounds like the Civil Rights Act too. But still, that passed, and you still had the same problems. So, I think it'd be more effective to try to do something about the culture. You do something about the culture, I think that would take care of this bill and other bills just like it.” – MO man, independent

“It is long overdue. It has only been that way in the Fair Housing law, and that's been on the books since, well, really more enforced since the '70s, but it's been on the books a long time. Even though Fair Housing, you can get in trouble with that, it's about damn time that this is across the board.” – FL woman, independent

“Yeah, I think it's good for it to exist... There's something still there because say for example you're at the job, and someone LGBT is at the job and they're making fun of him or her about them being that, and they end up going HR and stuff. And if there's not something like that act or a law, they can point to saying, ‘I'm being discriminated in the workplace,’ or, ‘I'm being fired because probably of this reason,’ and the harassment that they got. I think it's good for [it] to exist. **Not that it will always be enforced, but it is good for helping them in the job.**” – MO woman, independent lean Democrat

“I think it sounds like a great thing, but if they're going to discriminate against you, it'd be hard for you to prove. You wouldn't be able to prove it. They're rich corporations and a bunch of rich people against little [people] you just trying to get a job. And it sounds like a great thing in theory if people stand behind it, the people that are in charge of putting it in place, like the employers.” – NE woman, weak Republican

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The Importance of Keeping Government out of Private Decisions Is Compelling

Moderator: What are your thoughts on the following statements?

Some people say these laws have politicians inserting themselves into personal decisions instead of trusting families and doctors to decipher themselves.

"I agree with that. It's the same thing with abortion, there should be a separation. I don't think somebody who has no experience has the right to make that decision." – MS woman, weak Republican

"I think the government should not really have a big role in how a person is raising their kids... They're supposed to be there to help us out and to make sure that things are done well, but I think they're gaining so much control over individuals. But you can't come into my house and tell me how I should raise my kids and the path I want for my kids." – GA man, independent lean Democrat

Some people say that the American Medical Association says gender-affirming care for transgender youth is medically necessary and it's evidence based, and it improves the physical and mental health of transgender youth.

"You have a patient, your therapist and the doctor. A government bureaucrat does not need to be in the visitation room at all... I hope nobody comes in the examination room when I'm in there for anything saying, well, you need to do this or that, and we need to treat it same with any other medical issue." – OK man, independent

Some people say these laws that hurt transgender youth are meant to stir up panic, divide us, and score political points rather than solve other problems people care about.

"I mean, so much of this legislation is based in fear of the other, fear of the immigrant, fear of women, fear LGBTQ folks... All of those kinds of crazy BS trying to just destroy science." – SC woman, strong Democrat

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The Number of Anti-LGBTQ+ Bills Introduced Is Upsetting, and Participants Judge Anti-LGBTQ+ Politicians

Moderator: In the last year, House Republicans introduced more than 50 anti-LGBTQ+ bills, and there have been 523 anti-LGBTQ+ introduced in state legislatures across the country. What do you think about that?

"It's, hey, let's point the finger at LGBTQ because that's the enemy we know. Okay, I'm being facetious, when I say that, but it's still okay to hate fat people kind of thing. And you point the finger at the hot button and then they get away with a bunch of other shit over here. I think a lot of that is bait-and-switch and they just keep pushing the hot button because it gets on people's emotions. And if they get one [bill] through, they're happy." – FL woman, independent

"There's so many more important things to worry about. You know what I mean? There's so many more important pressing issues in this world, and these politicians are worried about these ridiculous things." – GA man, strong Democrat

"Well, it's ridiculously stupid. Why don't those people let the LGBTQ people live their own lives? They do exist. They do coexist with us. They are within the community and everything. And we do not need any politics or the politicians or the loss against them or anything. I mean, just let them live their lives. So, 523 is a huge number, which does not really make a whole lot of sense." – NE man, independent

"I think that the Republicans and extreme right-wing Christians are using that so they can make money and they can pinpoint LGBTQ as the enemy, so they can stir up all kinds of division. I've seen that. We see it all the time in the news." – MT man, weak Republican

"It is really [a dealbreaker] for me because, I have some cousins and friends who are homosexual, and I don't even date guys who have a problem with homosexuals. So I definitely wouldn't support a candidate who didn't support it. Well, not really support... I'm not just saying you have to just love them, but if you really have a problem to where it's like you hate them and you want to do something to them, then no, I don't deal with that." – OK woman, weak Democrat

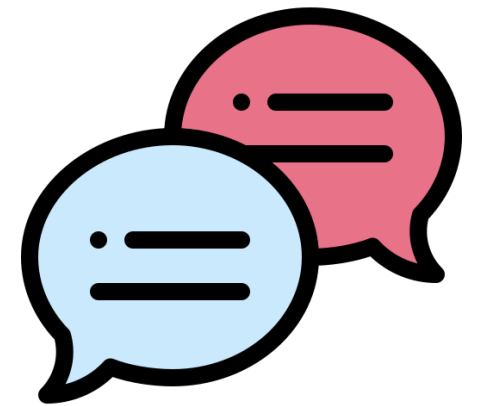
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Some Admit the Discussion Makes Them More Engaged on LGBTQ+ Rights—Even in our LGBTQ+ Group

“I didn't know that the Republicans were doing that. I knew they were really conservative, and it makes me upset. I'd like to see on the ballots, like you get your ballot, now I want to know what are they picking. **Everybody on there, I want to know their views on stuff.**” – NE woman, weak Republican

[Moderator: If you heard about a candidate that introduced and supported anti-LGBTQ+, how would that impact your opinion of them?] “Negatively. **That wouldn't be a candidate that I would be interested in seeing in Congress or House of Representatives** or anything like that or even just local government.” – KS woman, independent

“Yeah, before I started this, I **knew there was always LGBT issues**, but I didn't think it was this bad, I didn't know the specifics of it. I always knew there was backlash on it, and it was always going to be a topic of conversation in the government. But yeah, I didn't realize it was this bad, so it has moved up on what I'm concerned about. So yeah, I am definitely in the next elections going to be looking more into that.” – TX woman, strong Democrat



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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups June 24, 2024 with LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

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