

WESTERN STATES CENTER

Pride

2024 PRIDE ADVISORY GUIDE



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AS PRIDE MONTH BEGINS, BIGOTED ACTIVITY EVOLVES BUT CONTINUES TO POSE A THREAT

As 2024 Pride celebrations kick off, white nationalist and other bigoted and anti-democracy groups have started engaging in coordinated protests intended to disrupt and shut down these events. This advisory highlights the early signs of targeting by these groups, their evolving strategies, and the implications for future mobilization and resistance efforts. It is crucial for communities and authorities to be aware of these threats and prepare accordingly to ensure the safety and success of Pride events.

This year we expect to see anti-LGBTQ+ groups continue to mobilize against Pride events and LGBTQ+ community spaces. The landscape is evolving, but the following themes are clear:

- Targeting of 2024 Pride events has already begun, so we are unfortunately likely to see harassment, threats, and attacks continue through Pride month and beyond.
- Groups that primarily or exclusively threatened Pride are relying on tactics from last year.
- The rising influence of Christian nationalist movements has crossed over into the white nationalist movement; we see white nationalists using more religious rhetoric against LGBTQ+ people
- Shifts in white nationalist and anti-democracy coalitions open significant questions about what anti-LGBTQ+ activity will look like this Pride season in the Northwest.
- So far this year, many protests are being announced mere days before Pride celebrations. This can add an element of unpredictability for Pride organizers looking to protect their events; however, it can also blunt the organizing power of local anti-democracy actors. After the first weekend of Pride, some protests have been significantly smaller than in previous years.
- Queer community leaders who faced bigoted targeting last year are better prepared this year, and there are promising signs that accountability measures such as civil litigation against bigoted groups are bearing fruit. With new Pride events continuing to be planned, a significant need for community and institutional support remains.

EARLY SIGNS

Some cities in the U.S. host Pride events in advance of June. These celebrations, along with Pride events during the first weekend in June, have served as early test cases making it clear that the anti-LGBTQ+ movement will likely use Pride as a lightning rod to encourage others to engage in bigoted protests. At the same time, many Pride events went smoothly with little opposition. The following examples raise concerns of continued threats to Pride celebrations this year.



In April, the Montana Livingston Pride Coalition hosted their second annual 2024 Livingston Pride event. As happened in 2023, Livingston’s Pride organizers dealt with anti-LGBTQ+ targeting by white nationalist groups, which first spread bigoted fliers ahead of the event, and then protested outside of the drag show. The anti-LGBTQ+ action was led by the Montana White Lives Matter (WLM) group, a white nationalist organization formed in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. However, Pride organizers planned ahead and mobilized significant community support, successfully blunting the impact of the protest. After the event, WLM published a blog attacking the Livingston Pride Coalition and drag performers associated with the coalition. The article detailed WLM’s history protesting such events in Livingston alongside “fellow Nationalist groups.” The article closed by making exaggerated claims about their supposed impact on the 2024 Pride celebration and thanking other white nationalist groups for assisting in their protest, apparently confirming the involvement of several other groups: Patriot Front, Great Plains Active Club, Wyoming Active Club and Big Sky Active Club.

A month later, on May 18, the anti-LGBTQ+ group Gays Against Groomers (GAG) targeted Long Beach Pride in Southern California. Researchers have labeled GAG an anti-LGBTQ+ group for their dissemination of conspiracy theories that often falsely conflate LGBTQ+ identities with “grooming” narratives. The group has also been linked to other organizations like the Proud Boys. On social media, GAG shared an image of one of their trucks displaying graphic anti-trans video content.

That same weekend, in Frisco, Texas, several anti-democracy groups jointly protested an event put on by the Grayson County Pride organization. Grayson County Pride promoted an open mic karaoke and family-friendly drag show, but the event ultimately caught the eye of groups like the New Columbia Movement and Texas Coalition for Kids (TX4Kids), a sister organization to Protect Texas Kids. Anti-LGBTQ+ protesters showed up outside the event and faced pro-LGBTQ+ counter-protestors.

The New Columbia Movement is a national organization with members espousing Christian nationalism, a belief that is rooted in the idea that the U.S. is a Christian nation and that society should adhere to biblical principles. Online, the group decries same-sex relationships, drug use, and pornography. These groups frequently espouse anti-LGBTQ+ talking points and have a history of



EARLY SIGNS, CONT.

protesting Drag Queen events well beyond Pride month. The Texas Coalition for Kids is part of a larger network of Texas based anti-LGBTQ+ astroturf groups, some of which have developed a reputation for doxing drag performers online and perpetuating baseless groomer arguments against performers.

In Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, far-right propagandist Dave Reilly called on his social media followers to join him on June 1 for a "Rosary Rally" to protest the supposed "sins" of Pride. The month-long event appears to have lacked support, managing to attract only a handful of supporters during its first week.

In Tempe, Arizona, Joshua Aschbrenner (aka Dark Shaman) protested Tempe Pride on June 1. This was his second time protesting in Tempe, a follow-up to another anti-LGBTQ+ protest on May 7.

On June 2, Clark County, Washington Pride attendees encountered vocal anti-LGBTQ+ protestors but managed to avoid disruptions through de-escalation tactics.

On June 8, members of the white nationalist group, Patriot Front protested across the street from the LGBTQ+ Pride Festival in Indiana, Pennsylvania. The Pride Alliance Indiana and Authaus organized this event.

At the Indy Gay Pride Festival in Indianapolis, Indiana, protestors with the AbolitionistRising, an abortion abolitionist group, held anti-LGBTQ+ signs and tried to engage with festival goers. At the event, which took place on June 8, the group used religious language to decry LGBTQ+ people and their allies. Individuals with the same group appear to have also taken part in a similar anti-LGBTQ+ protest on June 9 alongside attendees of the 2024 New Christendom conference in Ogden, Utah.

Despite targeting of Pride events, the vast majority of celebrations have continued with minimal disruption and great success. Pride organizers are keeping safety in mind by training volunteer teams, working with legal support organizations, and setting earlier meetings with municipal agencies to ensure better cooperation with local government. They're also evolving their strategies to respond to bigoted rhetoric and counterprotests. For example, this year North Idaho Pride Alliance responded to a local pastor soliciting anti-LGBTQ+ letters to the editor by raising over \$7,000 in the pastor's name and thanking him for his sponsorship.

EVOLVING ANTI-LGBTQ+ STRATEGIES

Western States Center has noted a few ways that anti-LGBTQ+ groups' strategies and tactics have evolved. Overall, as far-right groups rally support against Pride celebrations, it has become common to see bigoted groups latch onto narratives that paint these celebrations as un-American and unpatriotic. The framing aims to portray LGBTQ+ people as threats to Western culture, a xenophobic belief that draws heavily from white nationalist ideology.

Groups that previously targeted Pride events have spent the last year targeting different communities. These groups have relied on threatening behavior and harassment to chill the ability of targeted groups to gather safely. Active Clubs serve as an example of this trend. These far-right cells operate as a loose network of neo-Nazi fight clubs who were committed to targeting Pride celebrations in the Pacific Northwest, even temporarily joining in a coalition with other groups. Active Clubs first materialized around 2021 and drew heavily from the defunct Rise Above Movement (R.A.M.) – a violent white nationalist group that had a history of engaging in violent assault campaigns against opposing political and anti-racist groups. By mid-2023, Active Clubs had appeared across the country in places like [Idaho](#), [Montana](#), [Wyoming](#), [Nevada](#), [Alabama](#), [Ohio](#) and [Virginia](#), with these small groups often engaging in activities with neighboring cells across state lines.

More recently Active Clubs have continued targeting synagogues and organizations that assist immigrants and refugees, and have also attempted to join marches and events that they think they can influence. Big Sky Active Club, for example, was ejected from a Missoula march calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Another Active Club based in Texas joined an anti-immigrant border convoy and passed out fliers to attendees, apparently encountering no notable opposition.

Another trend stems from the rising influence of the Christian nationalist movement and the increasing adoption of religious narratives by white nationalists. Since coming into prominence during the 2020 COVID wave, Christian Nationalist pastor Sean Feucht, has been vocal in spreading hateful rhetoric against transgender people and the LGBTQ+ community. On June 8, Feucht organized a rally at the California State Capitol in Sacramento, just blocks away from Sacramento Pride. The event, which was part of Feucht's Let Us Worship tour, attracted several hundred followers. Although organizers with Feucht's event claimed that it was not intentionally meant to overlap with Pride, on the X platform Feucht shared several anti-LGBTQ+ posts. In a post from June 10, Feucht shared an image of Pride Sacramento and compared it to his event saying "While 7000 gathered to worship Jesus just 3 blocks. The contrast between light and darkness could not be more crystal clear."



EVOLVING ANTI-LGBTQ+ STRATEGIES, CONT.

In the Pacific Northwest, a group on Facebook calling itself the Gods Squad has jumped on the anti-LGBTQ+ bandwagon and issued a call to action. The group, which alleges it planned to host flag waving events on Fridays in Oregon City, Oregon, announced that LGBTQ+ Pride events would be purposely intruding on their event. Using what appears to be Christian Nationalist talking points, a member of the group urged “patriots” to show up and support their “proud Christian American month.” A description that depicted Pride month as “light against darkness, evil versus good” accompanied the advisory and reinforced the idea that their flag waving events would equate to taking a “stand for God and Country as we hold onto June standing strong and steady for our faith and patriotism.”

The increasing acceptability of religious rhetoric against the LGBTQ+ community has created an opening for white nationalists to thinly veil their bigotry against LGBTQ+ people in similar religious claims this year. In Idaho, individuals like Dave Reilly, a white nationalist activist and propagandist, has used Catholicism to disparage LGBTQ+ people. In late May, Reilly announced plans to protest Coeur d’Alene Pride, dubbing his event a “Rosary Rally” to pray for the “sins of Pride.” Activists with the New Columbia Movement, a group that targets Pride events across the country, peddled similar Christian talking points with the goal of promoting anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry. On Telegram, the group warned its members about the upcoming Pride season, encouraging them to “stand against evil” and “prepare themselves socially and spiritually.”

Finally, a number of key instigators of Pride protests last year have shifted organizational affiliations or have had their coalitions collapse, particularly in the Northwest. A prominent example brings us back to the subject of Active Clubs. Last year, some of the main perpetrators of Pride protests identified themselves as affiliates of the Northwest Nationalist Network (3N). The 3N were a loose coalition of white nationalist groups made up of Active Clubs (AC) and other organizations like Patriot Front and White Lives Matter. After last Pride season, however, the 3N network fell apart. The collapse was due to infighting, like many other white nationalist partnerships that have disintegrated for similar reasons. Things may be changing yet again, with the protest at Livingston Pride in April 2024 as one example of some former 3N organizations working together to spew hate against the LGBTQ+ community. Newer groups like the New Columbia Movement are also entering the fray and appear to welcome support from other anti-LGBTQ+ groups. All this leaves open significant questions about how white nationalists as well as different groups within the broader anti-democracy movement will collaborate this year.

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

When looking back at anti-LGBTQ+ demonstrations that have taken place over the last 12 months, the [Bridging Divides Initiative \(BDI\)](#), a non-partisan research initiative based out of Princeton University that tracks political violence in the U.S., found that between May 2023 and May 2024, there were approximately 161 anti-LGBTQ+ demonstrations by Active Clubs and other anti-LGBTQ+ groups. The [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#) compiled the data and BDI provided added coding. ACLED specializes in “disaggregated conflict data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping,” and a review of the points shows the broad move by anti-democracy actors to mobilize during Pride month.

According to the data, between May 2023 and May 2024 active clubs appear to have been most active in the Pacific Northwest and surrounding states. Other anti-LGBTQ+ actors of concern were largely active in the rest of the U.S. with a heavy presence in Eastern half of the country.

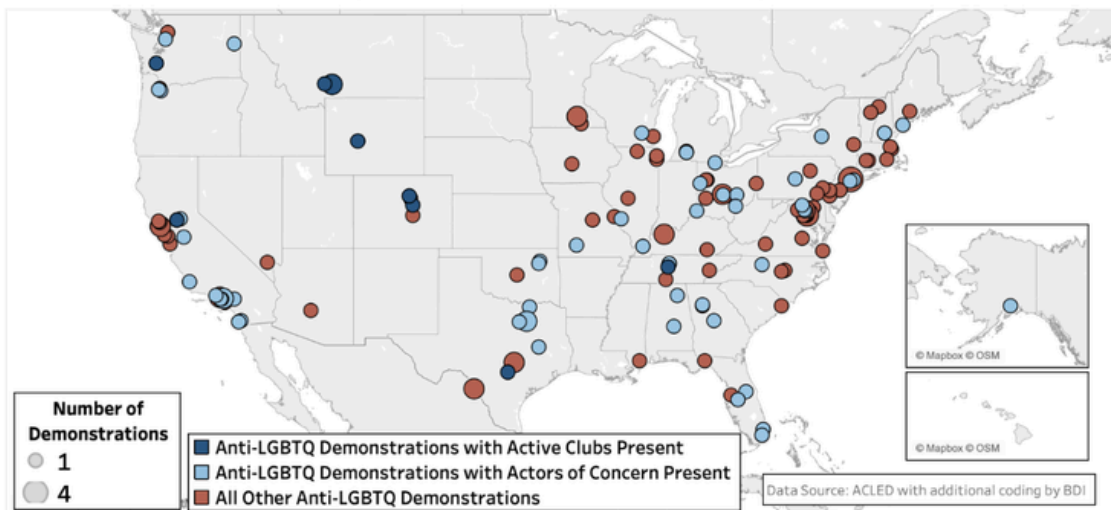
Presence of Actors of Concern & Active Clubs at Anti-LGBTQ+ Demonstrations
(17 May 2023 - 17 May 2024)

State	Active Clubs (Dark Blue Dots)	Other Actors of Concern (Light Blue Dots)	All Other Anti-LGBTQ Demonstrations (Red Dots)	Totals by State
Alabama		2		2
Alaska		1		1
Arizona			1	1
California	1	12	15	28
Colorado	2			4
Connecticut			2	2
District of Columbia			5	5
Florida		4		8
Georgia		2	1	3
Illinois			4	4
Indiana		1		1
Iowa			1	1
Kentucky		1	3	4
Maine		1	1	2
Maryland		3	5	8
Massachusetts			2	2
Michigan		1	2	3
Minnesota			3	3
Mississippi			1	1
Missouri		2	2	4
Montana	3			3
Nevada			1	1
New Hampshire		1	1	2
New Jersey			1	1
New York		3	5	8
North Carolina		1	2	3
Ohio		5	6	11
Oklahoma		2	1	3
Oregon		2	1	3
Pennsylvania		1	5	6
Rhode Island			1	1
South Carolina			1	1
Tennessee	1	1	3	5
Texas	1	5	4	10
Vermont			2	2
Virginia			7	7
Washington	1	2	1	4
Wisconsin		1	1	2
Wyoming	1			1
Grand Total	10	54	97	161

Data Source: ACLED with additional coding by Bridging Divides Initiative

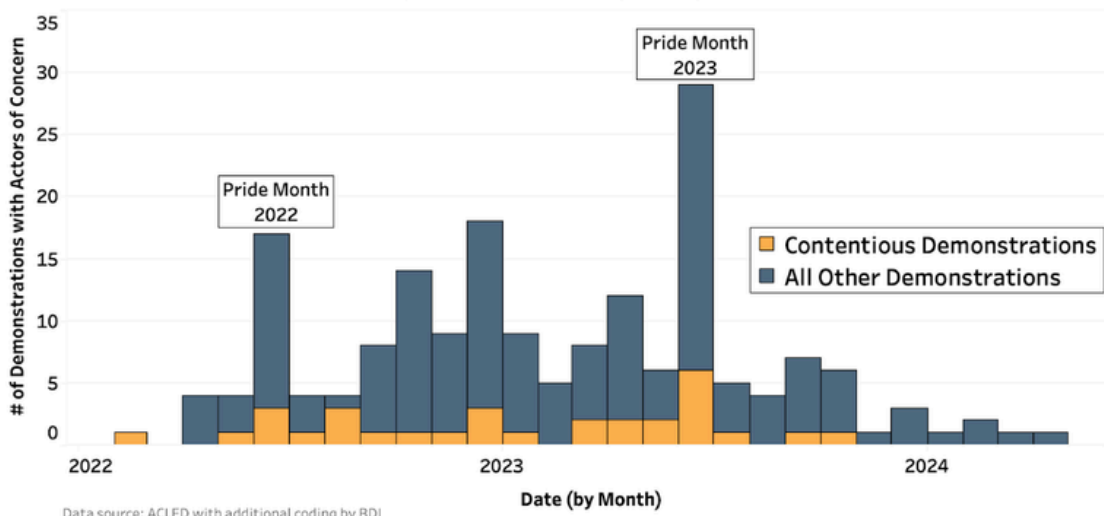
WHAT THE DATA SAYS, CONT.

Presence of Actors of Concern & Active Clubs at Anti-LGBTQ+ Demonstrations (17 May 2023 - 17 May 2024)



Data Source: ACLED with additional coding by Bridging Divides Initiative

Demonstrations with Actors of Concern Present Driven by Anti-LGBTQ+ Mobilization (1 Jan 2022 - 24 May 2024)



Data Source: ACLED with additional coding by Bridging Divides Initiative

In a separate look at data provided by ALCED and reviewed by BDI from Jan. 1, 2022 – May 24, 2024, actors of concern have previously shifted their priorities to anti-LGBTQ+ demonstrations in the month of June.



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE: MOBILIZATION AND RESISTANCE

Pride organizers should work to understand what they're up against and reach out to potential allies. It can be helpful to keep a close eye on social media to understand how a particular community is responding to news stories or event announcements. Additionally, groups known for targeting LGBTQ+ events and venues are now using the same set of tactics against other groups. Organizers should prioritize checking in with other community organizations like humanitarian organizations that support immigrant communities, inclusive faith leaders, supportive local elected officials, or others who may be experiencing targeting to understand some of what Pride organizers can expect. Organizations that monitor bigoted groups, like Western States Center, are also happy to help on request.

Increasing use of anti-LGBTQ+ religious rhetoric brings increasing risks for affirming faith communities. Many LGBTQ+ organizations work together with inclusive faith communities and an increasing number of faith communities either host Pride celebrations or table at them. While this is a very positive trend and a cherished aspect of many Pride celebrations, it's important to note that faith leaders who visibly support Pride Month and local Pride celebrations are dealing with increased targeting. Pride organizers and local leaders should check in proactively with supportive faith communities and ensure that faith leaders are kept in the loop on any negative chatter.

Things are moving quickly; organizers and local government may not have advance notice of a counterprotest. This situation calls for proactive planning on multiple fronts. Pride organizers should create a safety plan for your event that accounts for multiple possibilities, and ensure that vendors, sponsors, performers and partner organizations are informed. Proactive communication with attendees and allies about the possibility of opposing groups showing up can be helpful, especially if it includes concrete advice about how attendees can best alert and support the organizing team if this occurs. It's also key for organizers to check in with local government to gauge support for Pride events, in order to take into account how leaders may respond to a difficult situation.

Accountability measures are an important part of setting boundaries on bigotry. In recent years, an increasing amount of civil litigation against bigoted groups and individuals has borne fruit. Recent court filings show that Patriot Front leader Thomas Rousseau, who led an attempt to riot at Coeur d'Alene Pride in Idaho two years ago, is dealing with mounting legal pressure that is blunting his ability to organize further "flash marches." Just weeks ago, a drag queen in North Idaho won a civil legal suit against a blogger who concocted false accusations of inappropriate behavior in front of

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE, CONT.

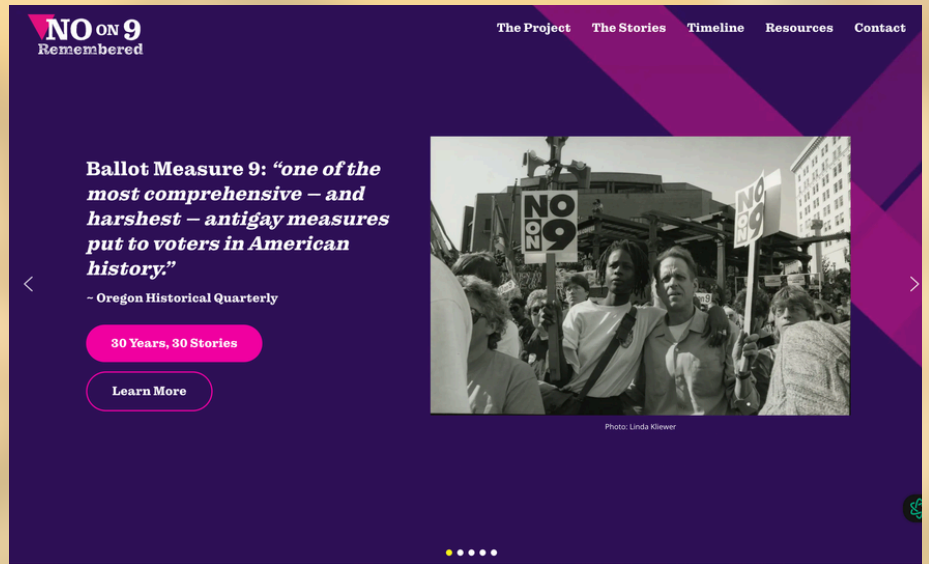
children. Pride organizers and their supporters alike should know that there are options to hold anti-LGBTQ+ actors accountable and consider these options when needed.

Local government, businesses and civic institutions can help by following Pride organizers' lead and being vocal in support. The experiences of the past few years have shown that supportive moves by local government are incredibly important to setting the tone for safe and successful Pride celebrations. Whether local leaders choose to issue Pride proclamations, show up for celebrations or speak out for the freedom to assemble and celebrate, their actions make a difference. Silence, on the other hand, heightens risks and creates an atmosphere in which bigoted groups may feel that they have an opportunity to act against Pride celebrations.



WESTERN STATES CENTER RESOURCES

Here are additional resources developed by Western States Center available through our website:
<https://www.westernstatescenter.org>





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