

**I Am Your Constituency:
Voices and Perspectives of LGBTQ+ Tennesseans
on Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation**

by
Elliot Certain

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Roberta Chevrette, Thesis Director

Dr. Mary Evins, Thesis Committee Chair

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APPROVED:

Dr. Roberta Chevrette, Thesis Director
Professor, Communications

Dr. Mary Evins, Thesis Committee Chair
Research Professor of History, University Honors
College

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Dedication

I dedicate this research and thesis to every transgender or gender non-conforming person in the state of Tennessee and beyond. You are not alone; you have not been given up on.

Abstract

Despite both national and state level Supreme Court decisions such as *Obergefell v. Hodges* and *Campbell v. Sundquist* expanding the scope of LGBTQ+ rights, LGBTQ+ individuals still face ongoing discrimination and legal challenges. In addition, LGBTQ+ individuals struggle with mental health challenges at a disproportionate rate when compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers. The purpose of this study was to examine and understand the relationship between LGBTQ+ identifying individuals and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Qualitative open-ended surveys were distributed to and answered by 49 of LGBTQ+ self-identifying higher education students in Rutherford County, Tennessee. The survey questions aimed to collect participant perspectives on anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. The data indicated a complex, highly individualized perspective from each participant, with all disagreeing with anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, but responding to it in their own way. The centering of LGBTQ+ voices in a study such as this is especially important because oftentimes anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is created and considered without input from a legislator's LGBTQ+ constituents. Through this study, the participants were empowered to be heard in their own words on the legislation that dictates their lives.

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List of Terms

Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation: While there is no formal definition, anti-LGBTQ+ is consistently used to describe bills, policies, and laws that are used to systematically disadvantage members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Cisgender: a term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

HB/SB: Stands for House Bill or Senate Bill, followed by a number to differentiate between bills.

LGBTQ+: an acronym encompassing individuals who self-describe as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. Sexuality or gender diverse persons not encompassed by these specific labels are still included through the addition of the plus sign at the end of the acronym.

CHAPTER I Introduction

Historic Overview: Anti-LGBTQ+ Laws Nationally and in Tennessee

LGBTQ+ people have been living and participating as citizens in the United States since its settler colonial inception. Unfortunately, the attacks on LGBTQ+ people via the legislative and judicial system have been around just as long, if not longer. In 1624, a colonist named Richard Cornish was tried and hanged for sodomy, an archaic term used to describe homosexual sex (Godbeer, 2018). Cornish's death is considered the first time someone was formally punished for being LGBTQ+ in the New World. Since Cornish's death, the number of targeted attacks on LGBTQ+ individuals via the United States legislative and legal system have only risen. In the state of Tennessee, where this thesis is written and primarily focused, the first anti-LGBTQ+ law was enacted in 1829. This law made sodomy a crime punishable of up to fifteen years (Lamber & Rubenfeld, 2016), criminalizing acts associated with being LGBTQ+. Although the law was finally overturned in a 1995 Tennessee Court of Appeals decision, since that time, anti-LGBTQ+ laws within Tennessee have continued to criminalize LGBTQ+ activities (Campbell v. Sundquist, 1995). Recently, Tennessee bills have expanded from outlawing activities that are associated with being LGBTQ+ to disallowing LGBTQ+ people to go about their lives in the same ways as their cisgender and heterosexual peers. In the 2023 session, Tennessee legislators introduced bills that seek to outlaw gender affirming care if someone receives their insurance funding from the state, to disallow one's chosen gender identity to be shown on state identification, to outlaw public drag performances, and to ban transgender students in higher education from participating in sports that align with their gender

identity (H.B. 1414, 2023; H.B. 1378, 2023; S.B. 1237, 2023; S.B. 1440, 2023). This is not out of the ordinary for the Tennessee State Legislature, as 81% of the Tennessee Senate and 75% of the Tennessee House are legislators with a history of passing or supporting similar laws (Tennessee General Assembly, 2024).

Beyond the state of Tennessee, the number of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation introduced across the United States grows each year by a substantial amount. From 2022 to 2023, the number of bills increased from 107 to 296. (ACLU, 2022; ACLU, 2023a). From 2023 to 2024, the number of bills increased from 296 to 423 (ALCU, 2023a, ACLU 2024a). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is currently tracking 34 of these bills in the Tennessee State Legislature and cites that these bills are not only dangerous for LGBTQ+ people's rights but also to their mental health (ACLU, 2024b). Because of the rapidly increasing rate of introduction and passage of anti-LGBTQ+ bills, continuous research must be conducted to determine how anti-LGBTQ+ legislation impacts the American citizens it targets, and whose lives it threatens.

To understand the impact that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has had, Trevor Project conducts a year-end national quantitative closed-response survey. In their 2023 year-end report, the project found that 41% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, with 14% taking concrete steps to end their life. Additionally, one in three LGBTQ+ young people stated that their mental health was poor most of the time or all of the time due to anti-LGBTQ+ policies and legislation (The Trevor Project, 2023). Further, a study that compared the use of a crisis text line in comparison to the weeks prior to and following the introduction of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation found that there was a significant increase in crisis text line use from LGBTQ+ youth (Parris et al., 2021). Using

the information from these studies, one can logically determine that LGBTQ+ youth mental health is poor and can be worsened as a result of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation.

The growing number of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation being introduced in the Tennessee General Assembly is not only concerning for LGBTQ+ people's access to the same rights as their cisgender and heterosexual peers, but it is also concerning in terms of its impacts on LGBTQ+ individuals' mental health. In 2022 in Tennessee, 48% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide, with 17% attempting suicide. Furthermore, 77% of LGBTQ+ youth surveyed reported symptoms of anxiety and 61% reported symptoms of depression (The Trevor Project, 2022). Importantly, the Trevor Project also reports that 85% of transgender and non-binary youth in Tennessee identify recent debates around anti-trans bills as having negatively impacted their mental health, with 71% of transgender and nonbinary youth feeling scared about their future (2022). The impact of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is thus not only the real potential of loss of human rights for LGBTQ+ persons, but also damages to targeted individuals' mental health including an increased risk for attempted and successful suicides.

Information regarding impacts of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation must be shared with legislators to inform them of the impacts of their actions in office. Moreover, LGBTQ+ perspectives are essential for impacting the ongoing conversation surrounding anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and the legislators involved in these decisions. The dual goals of this study are therefore to create space for LGBTQ+ individuals to discuss how recent legislation has impacted them. And to provide Rutherford County, Tennessee, legislators with the perspectives of their constituency and a deeper awareness of the harms their actions are causing. Existing statistics indicate harmful impacts on LGBTQ+ Tennesseans

in the form of numbers, trends, and percentages; presenting this along with collected qualitative responses to legislators will allow LGBTQ+ individuals in Middle Tennessee to share their perspectives with legislators in a direct way. This research is important because legislators are often unable or unwilling to listen to their political opposition or standalone opinions that contradict their beliefs. The next chapter further elaborates the methodology and procedures for collecting and analyzing the qualitative data.

To be as informative as possible, this study was broken down into the following components. First, information on existing anti-LGBTQ+ bills was collected. Then, existing statistical data were collected on LGBTQ+ people's general well-being, including information about their mental health and relationship to anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. To support and personalize the existing statistical data, a qualitative open-ended survey was distributed to LGBTQ+ higher education students in Rutherford County, Tennessee. These findings were analyzed and compiled into a format useful for queer advocacy groups that regularly interface with the Tennessee State Legislature. The next chapter further elaborates the methodology and procedures for collecting and analyzing the qualitative data.

CHAPTER II

Methodology:

Survey of Local LGBTQ+ Community on Tennessee Legislation

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between LGBTQ+ individuals attending higher education institutions in Rutherford County, Tennessee, and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, further expanding to examine their relationship with the legislators that write, sponsor, and support such legislation. Much existing research used by advocacy groups and organizations focuses on quantitative measures to determine impacts of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation on the individuals it targets (Horne et al., 2022; White et al., 2022; The Trevor Project, 2022, 2023). These studies are helpful in determining how many LGBTQ+ individuals are impacted by anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. This qualitative study adds to existing quantitative research by collecting local LGBTQ+ college student perspectives regarding recent anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and examining the impacts participants perceive the legislation is having on their daily lives and well-being.

Qualitative methodology has three general advantages that led to its selection for this study. First, qualitative methods allow the intended audience, in this case Rutherford County legislators, to understand groups, communities, and cultures with which they are unfamiliar with (Tracy, 2013). Second, reductionism, or the loss of meaning when data are presented using quantitative methods, will be avoided by using qualitative methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Third, qualitative data can support statistical data by allowing the participants to describe their perspectives in their own words (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

Along with these general benefits to using qualitative measures, there are further benefits to using qualitative measures for this specific study. First, the LGBT+ community is not a monolith. Analyzing the data qualitatively allows for the researcher to not only explore the major, glaring differences between each participant's perspective, but the iterative, back-and forth-analytic approach allows for an exploration of the nuanced differences between two similar perspectives that may have been otherwise lost in quantitative analysis. This way, participants' voices are not overshadowed by that of the researcher, and instead, their unique perspectives can be heard (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Also, a qualitative study design (through open-ended questions) allowed participants to expand on the ideas and topics covered in the survey rather than be restricted to one topic or answer choice. In this manner, participants were able to discuss their own experiences, providing additional information beyond what was asked. In addition to this, qualitative measures allow for a contextual understanding of any given participant's response. This 'person-in-environment' perspective is especially important to avoid homogenization and instead focus on each participant's unique voice (Kondrat, 2011). This is especially important when researching populations like the LGBT+ community, a group that has been systemically disadvantaged and neglected in the past.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do LGBTQ+ individuals view anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in their home state?

RQ 2: Do LGBTQ+ people in Rutherford County, Tennessee, feel represented by their state legislators?

RQ 3: What impacts does anti-LGBTQ+ legislation have on LGBTQ+ youth in Rutherford County, Tennessee?

Study Design and Recruitment

The study design featured an open-ended survey comprised of six demographic questions and 11 questions that sought to determine LGBTQ+ perspectives on anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. The demographic questions addressed participants' gender, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, college they attend, and their current voter registration status. The 11 survey questions addressed participants' perspectives on anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, if they felt comfortable being outwardly LGBTQ+ in Tennessee, and whether they would be likely to reelect their current representatives. The complete survey administered to participants can be found in Appendix A.

The intended population for the study was college aged LGBTQ+ individuals in Tennessee because most of the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation being introduced targets LGBTQ+ youth. The scope was further narrowed to recruit participants attending college in Rutherford County in order to have the results be most meaningful for Rutherford County legislators. After receiving approval from the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B), recruitment materials were distributed to students attending either Middle Tennessee State University or Motlow State Community College in Smyrna. Purposive sampling techniques were used by distributing recruitment information through campus LGBTQ+ organizations, meaning their selection as participants was dependent on their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals. Snowball sampling was also used, as LGBTQ+ individuals tended to gather in small groups or

communities. Snowball sampling is a method of participant recruitment that relies on word of mouth and referrals from participants to expand the participant pool.

Before participants could access the anonymous online survey, they had to complete an online informed consent form that disclosed the study's purpose and how answers would be stored and presented. Exclusion criteria included being under the age of 18, not identifying as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, or not attending either Middle Tennessee State University or Motlow State Community College in Smyrna.

For debriefing at the close of the survey, participants were provided with phone numbers and links to LGBTQ+ crisis lines as well as more information about how they could contact their legislators directly if they desired to. It was specified that contacting one's representative was optional and not required for the survey.

Participants

49 participants responded to the survey. Of these, ten identified as male, 23 female, 13 non-binary, and three as other. Participant ages ranged from age 18 to 24+, with the highest percentage of participants being 18-20 ($n= 36$). Most participants identified as White ($n= 40$), with other racial identities including mixed race, Middle Eastern, Latinx, Black, and Asian. Self-described sexual orientations included straight, asexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, with several participants describing themselves using multiple terms. Finally, the majority of participants attended MTSU ($n= 46$) and were registered to vote in Rutherford County ($n= 44$). Table 1 contains a full breakdown of the results.

Table 1

Demographic results from survey participants

| Gender | Age | Race/Ethnicity | Sexual Orientation | University Attended | Registered to vote in Rutherford County, TN |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Male (10, 20%) | 18-20 (36, 74%) | White (40, 82%) | Straight (2, 4%) | MTSU (46, 94%) | Yes (44, 90%) |
| Female (23, 47%) | 21-23 (10, 20%) | Mixed Race (5, 10%) | Asexual (5, 10%) | MSCC (3, 6%) | No (5, 10%) |
| Non-Binary (13, 27%) | 24+ (3, 6%) | Middle Eastern (1, 2%) | Gay (3, 6%) | | |
| Other (3, 6%) | | Latinx (1, 2%) | Lesbian (4, 8%) | | |
| | | Black (1, 2%) | Bisexual (20, 41%) | | |
| | | Asian (1, 2%) | Other/More than one (15, 31%) | | |

Data Analysis

The data from the participant surveys were reviewed first to gain a general understanding of the responses. Then, survey data were coded individually. The responses were coded using color highlighting directly on a printout of the responses. Initial codes were broad, with each being assigned a distinct color. Each initial code was then further categorized into subcategories that further described the theme of the participant's response. These subcategories were memoed by writing next to the highlighted response in pen.

Upon completion of the collection and analysis of the data, the findings were compiled in a pamphlet meant to be used for state queer advocacy groups. This pamphlet

contains both statistical information about the participants as well as some selected quotes. The pamphlet can be found in Appendix C.

The results are provided in the next chapter, beginning with a summary of quantifiable data from the survey responses followed by discussion of the qualitative themes and subthemes that were developed. The results chapter concludes with additional information regarding the advocacy tool that was constructed.

CHAPTER III

Quantitative and Qualitative Results:

Data and Voices

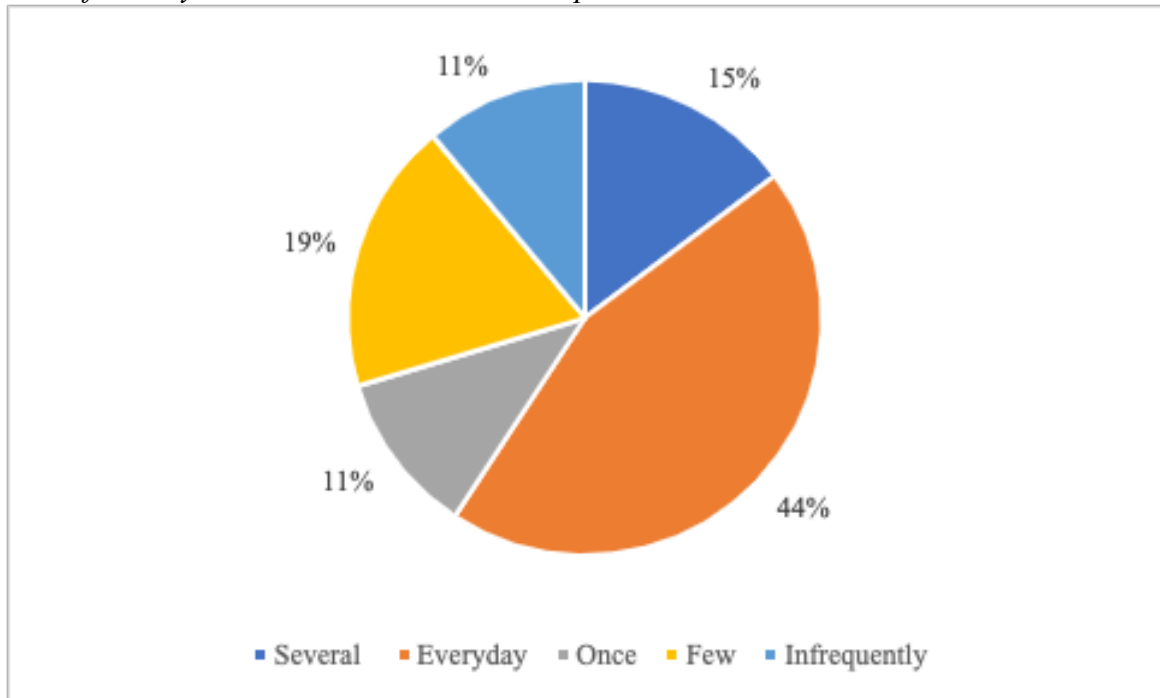
The results from the open-ended survey questions illustrated the impacts of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation on participants. Before turning into a longer discussion of qualitative data, statistical data are first presented below to illustrate general trends in responses given. These summaries of trends in participants' responses and the accompanying visuals were created to quickly describe to legislators some of the responses from their LGBTQ+ voter base.

Overall Quantitative Trends Reported by Participants

First, participants were asked how often they view news related to state politics. This was done to better understand how the participants' exposure to state politics news affects their perspective of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. A visual representation of their responses appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1

How often do you view news related to state politics?

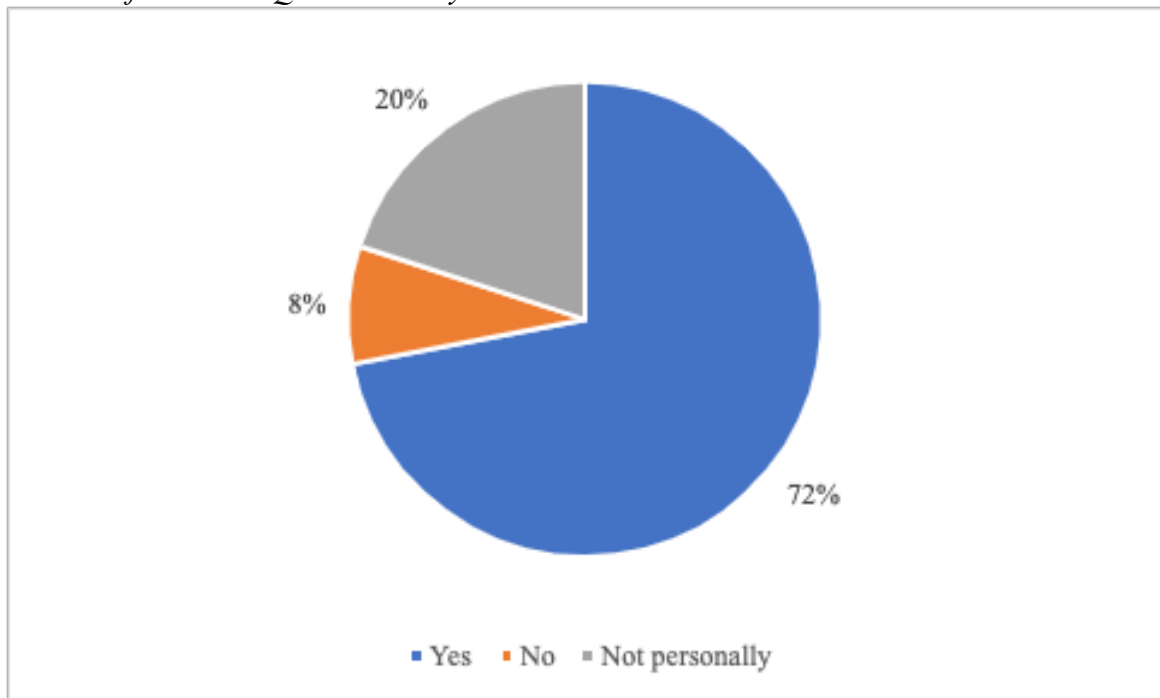


Responses fell into five categories: every day, several times per week, a few times per week, once per week, and infrequently. The largest number of participants (44%) responded that they view news related to state politics every day. Participants who reported viewing state politics news a few times per week make up 19% of the respondent pool. Participants who responded that they view state politics news several times per week make up the third largest percentage (15%). Lastly, participants who view state politics news once per week and infrequently make up the remaining 22% of the respondent pool, each representing 11% of the responses.

Next, participants were asked whether they had felt targeted by legislation because of their LGBTQ+ identity. A visual representation of their responses appears in Figure 2.

Figure 2

In the past year, have you ever felt targeted by state legislation because of your status as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

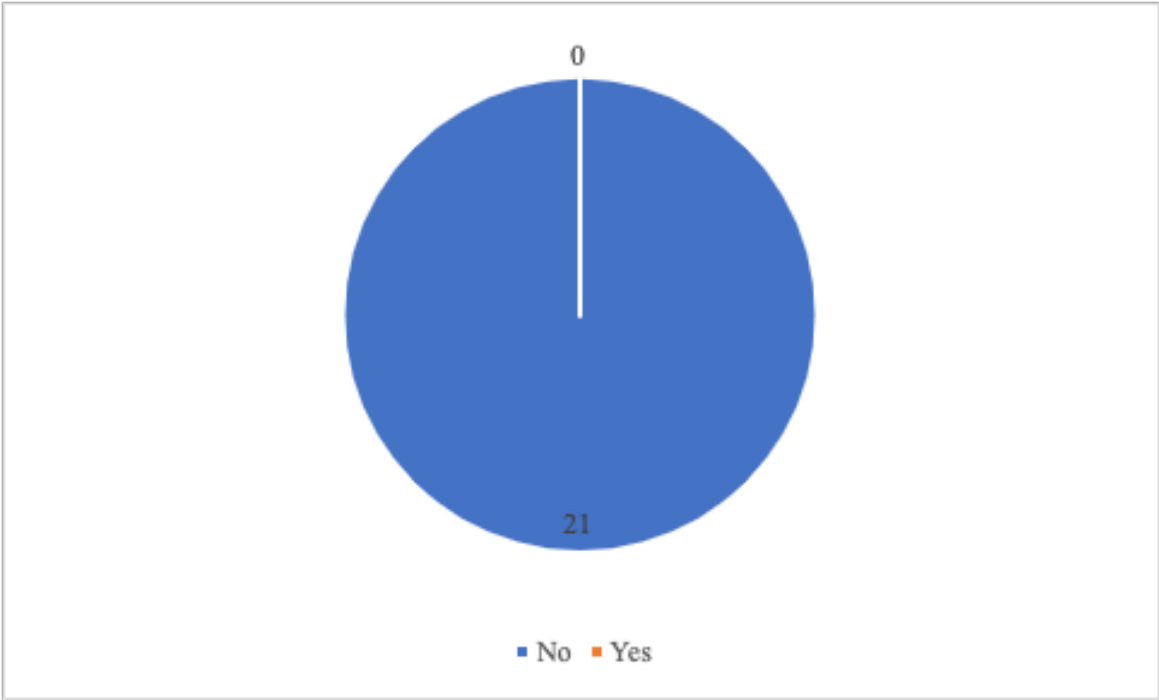


In response to the question of feeling targeted by legislation, the overwhelming majority of participants (72%) responded “Yes”. Only 8% responded that they had not felt targeted by state legislation in the past year. The remaining 20% conveyed that they personally had not felt targeted, but had witnessed their peers, friends, significant others, or members of their community be targeted by state legislation because of their status as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, some respondents who answered “No” elaborated that they did not feel targeted because of their ability to remain undetected as a member of the LGBTQ+ community due to being able to pass as straight or as their assigned gender at birth.

Participants were then provided with a list of legislators in their district that voted for HB0001 in 2023, a bill that criminalized gender affirming care for minors, and then asked if they felt if those legislators were representing them when they voted for/sponsored that bill. The results are visually represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

Do you feel represented by the legislators who sponsored and voted for HB0001?

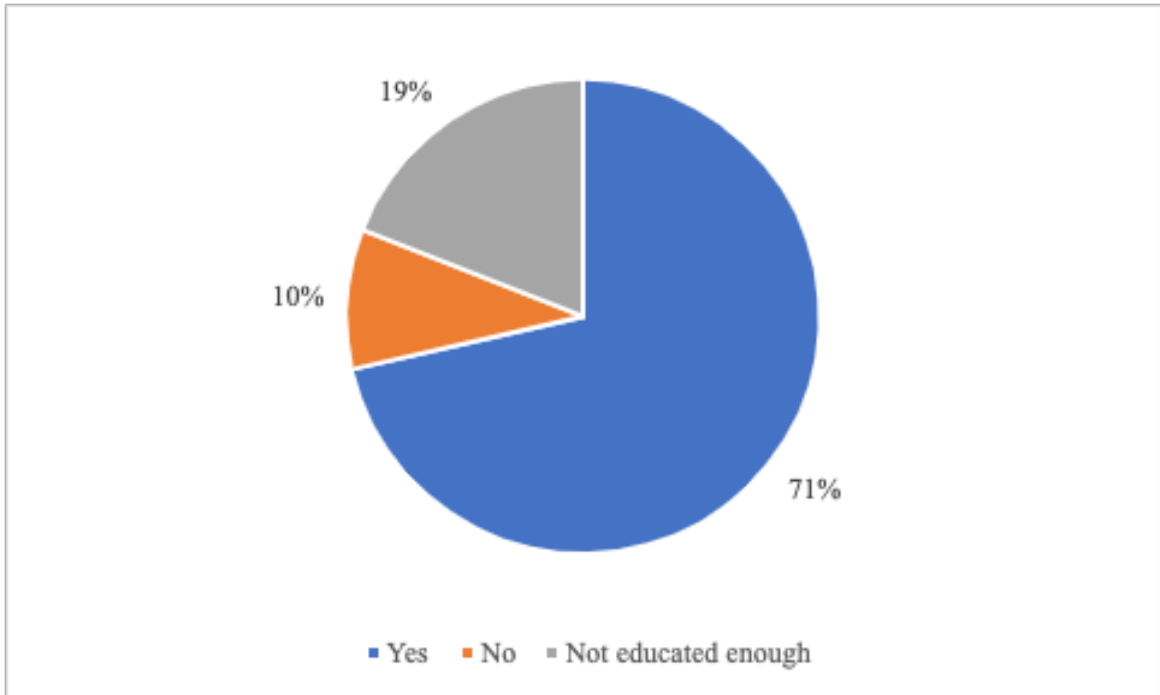


For this question of feeling represented by legislators who had sponsored or had voted in favor of HB0001, one hundred percent of the participants answered “no”.

To better understand their existing knowledge, participants were asked about their awareness of other anti-LGBT legislation. A visual representation of their responses appears in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Is there any other anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that you are aware of and/or concerned about?

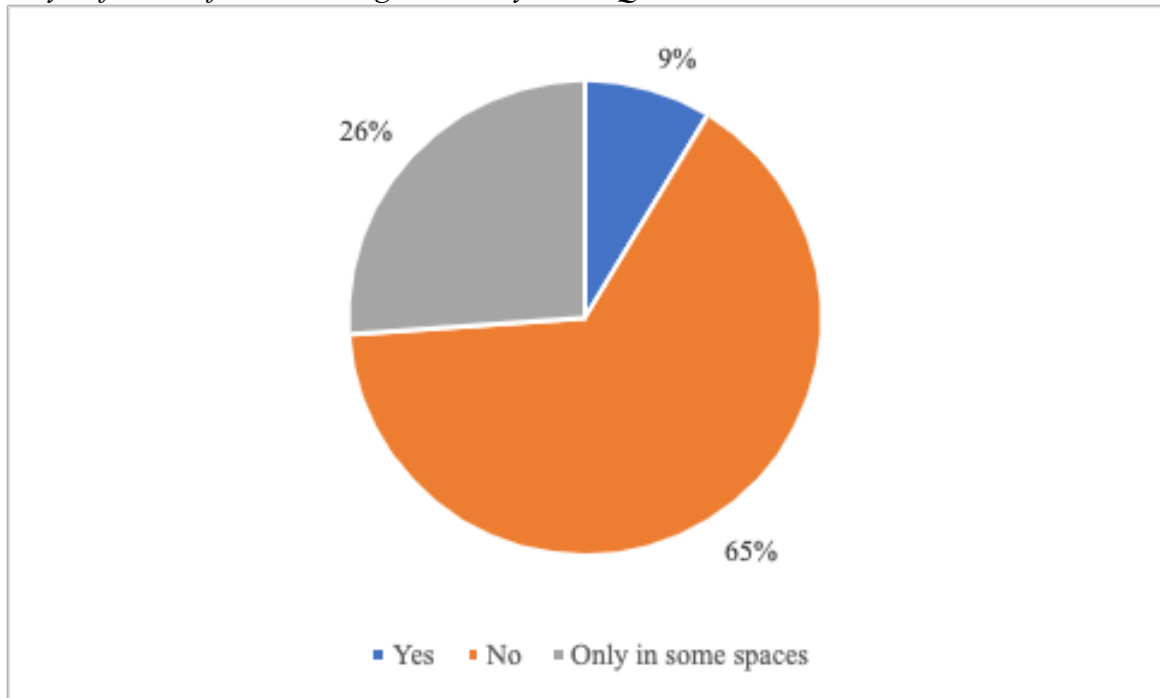


As seen in the visual, when asked about their awareness of other anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, a vast majority of participants (71%) answered yes. Only 19% of participants stated that they felt too uneducated on the subject matter, and only 10% stated that they were not concerned about any other bills.

Next, participants were asked whether they felt comfortable being outwardly LGBTQ+ in the state of Tennessee. A visual representation of their responses appears in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Do you feel comfortable being outwardly LGBTQ+ in Tennessee?

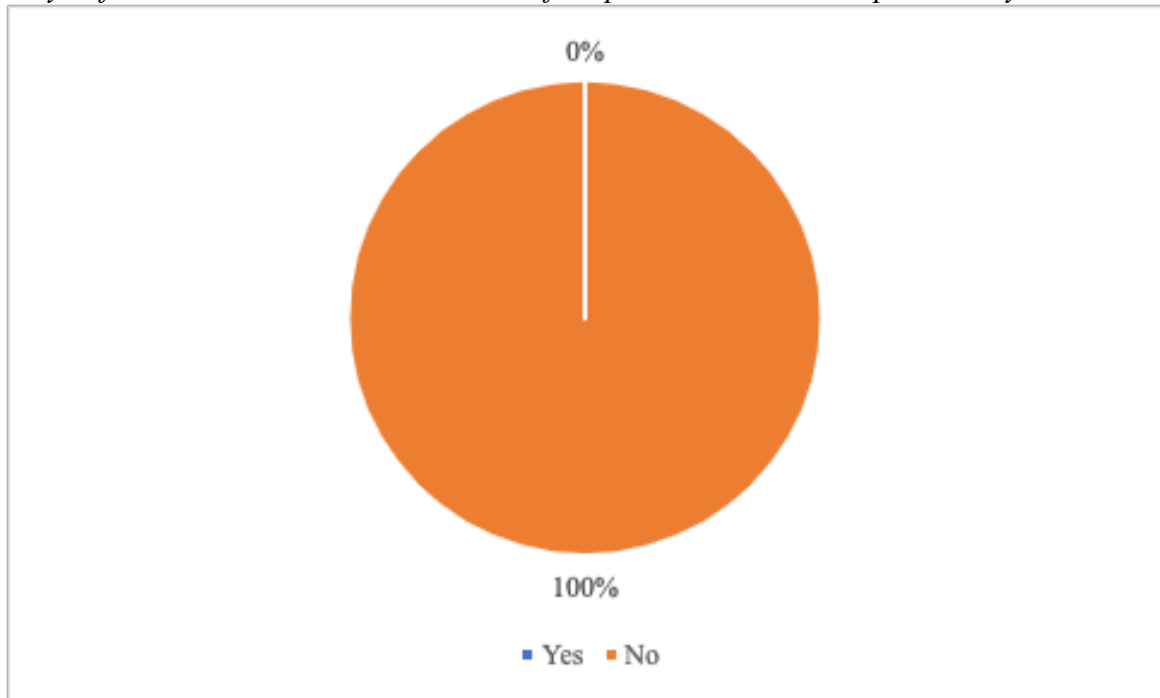


In response to this question regarding their comfort, the responses were overwhelmingly “No” at 65% of the responses. 26% of participants only felt comfortable in certain spaces or contexts, and only 9% stated that they did feel comfortable being outwardly LGBTQ+ in Tennessee in any context.

The final questions that were quantified into charts regarded participants’ attitudes toward lawmakers. For one of these questions, participants were provided with a list of legislators in their district who voted for HB0001 in 2023, a bill that criminalized gender affirming care for minors, and then asked if they felt is those legislators were representing them when they sponsored/voted for that bill. A visual representation of their responses appears in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Do you feel that the lawmakers who voted for/sponsored HB0001 represented you?



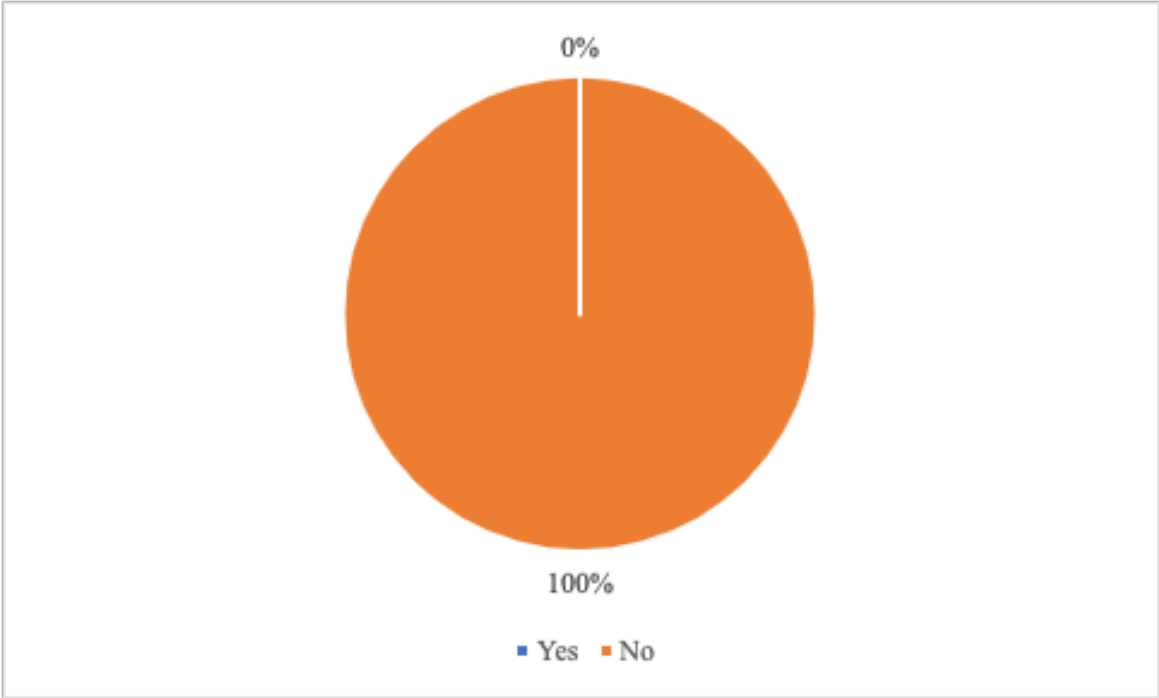
As indicated in the chart, one hundred percent of participants answered “No.”

Next, participants were presented with a three-part prompt to answer: “Do you feel that the majority of Tennessee lawmakers represent your values? Why or why not? If the answer is no, please explain what changes would make you feel more represented.”

Responses to the open-ended portions of this prompt were incorporated into the discussion of qualitative themes, but the response to the first part of the prompt was unanimous. Zero of the responses indicated that the respondents felt represented by their state legislators. A visual representation of their responses appears in Figure 7.

Figure 7

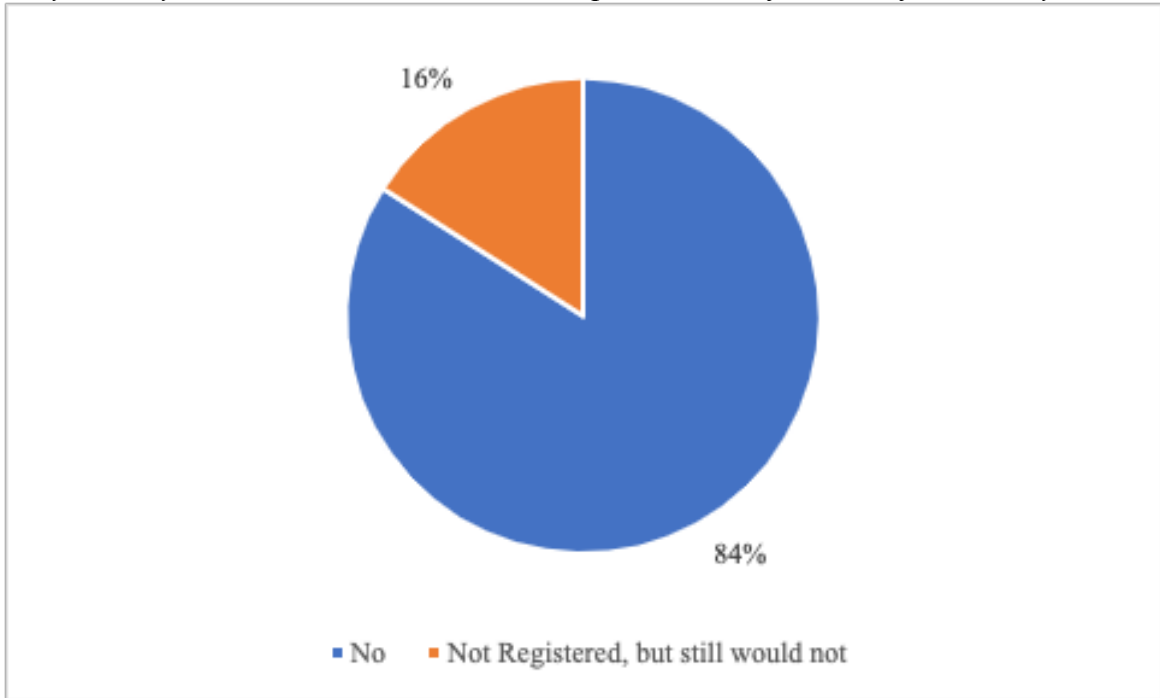
Do you feel that the majority of Tennessee lawmakers represent your values?



The last question addressed quantitatively is whether participants were likely to re-elect their current state legislators in future elections. A visual representation of their responses appears in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Are you likely to vote to re-elect the current representatives for Rutherford County, TN?



All respondents answered that they would not be likely to vote to reelect their current representatives, but some (16%) stated that they were not registered to vote in Rutherford County, Tennessee. Even still, those participants stated that they are not likely to vote to re-elect Rutherford County, Tennessee’s legislators, even if they were able.

Findings and Analysis of Qualitative Data from Participant Responses

The following is a report on the qualitative data incorporating quotes from participants to highlight individual experiences, expanding on the statistical data above. Five main themes are discussed: emotional responses, family strife, mental health concerns, coping techniques, and relationship to legislators. It is important to note that participant responses are presented as they were submitted by the participant in an effort to preserve each participant's voice.

Emotional Responses

This study sought, among other things, to understand participants' mental health and their perception of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. To accomplish this, the one survey question asked participants to describe their first emotional reaction when they first learned about the introduction or passage of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and to elaborate as best they could as to why they reacted that way. Responses were categorized into three subthemes: fear; anger, frustration, and disgust; and disappointment and defeat.

Fear for the self, for others, and for the future

A startling number of participants stated that the existence of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in their home state led to feelings of fear and worry, be it for themselves as people or for others in their community. Concerning their fears for self, many participants stated that they felt uncomfortable being outwardly LGBTQ+ due to their concerns about harassment, discrimination, or violence. This is evident in the following exemplars.

Being openly LGBTQ+ feels like having a target on my back.

I'm also terrified that my existence might become illegal.

I'm afraid people will harass my partner and I.

It makes me incredibly sad. I may never come out, but I have empathy for those who are out and fear of being discriminated against.

I fear physical and verbal violence.

These responses paint a picture of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation striking fear into these participants. Of those that responded that they felt fearful, many indicated that their fears were centered around the possibility of less rights being afforded to them because of their LGBTQ+ identity. One participant noted how ever-changing policies and perspectives surrounding LGBTQ+ people in Tennessee were the source of their fear: “Sentiments have shifted so fast.” The weight created by the combined fear and uncertainty of what policy could come next is evident in the words of one participant, who stated, “I am always terrified that the next bill will be the one that kills me for some reason or another.”

Participants’ fears also extended to their LGBTQ+ peers, and many expressed concerns for those close to them, and others in their community. Some participants stated that there was no direct impact to themselves caused by new legislation, but they were fearful for their outwardly LGBTQ+ friends. One participant described how “most of my friends are incredibly stressed.” Another stated, “Not a lot [of change] in MY everyday life, but definitely a lot in the lives of my friends who identify as trans.” This was echoed by a similar response: “I have felt disappointed and scared for all the transgender members of my community”.

This concern for transgender friends and community members was further seen as participants expanded on issues relating to transgender well-being both current and future.

Many worried that without gender affirming care, transgender youth would experience an increase in depression, suicidal ideation, or suicide attempts. This is illustrated by the following exemplars:

Gender affirming healthcare is not optional. So many queer people choose death over living without a sense of self. Suicide rates are rising because people feel ashamed.

Trans youth have shown discomfort with their gender assigned at birth as early as five years old. I was close to a transgender boy, and I remember him telling me of how his discomfort led to him engaging in self-harm. These bills are not protecting trans people. They are only putting them at risk.

Criminalizing trans healthcare for anyone, minors or otherwise, only serves to lower their standard of living and increase the suicide rate.

Participants also expressed fear relating to the broader existence of anti-LGBTQ+ bills. When asked about their awareness of other anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, a vast majority of participants answered yes, often elaborating that the bills they were concerned about included a public drag ban or the possibility of gay marriage being threatened. Several others stated that they were concerned about so many bills in the state legislature that they were unable to mention them all, and many worried that the legislation would continue to be further restrictive and ever more damaging. It is worth noting that several of the respondents stated that they not only felt targeted and fearful for their future because of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, but also legislation that concerns book bans, reproductive rights, and abortion access.

Anger, frustration, and disgust

In addition to fear, another emotional theme evidenced in the responses was that of anger. Many participants stated this was their first reaction to the legislation and expressed

anger in response to the mere existence of the legislation itself, while others were specifically angry and frustrated at a government that allows and promotes such policies. One participant described their initial reaction as “typically anger, as it reminds me of all the people who came together in their bigoted ideologies and chose to send forth representatives who share these same ideologies for the sole purpose of reducing the rights of others, and attacking them for simply wanting to live their authentic lives.” Similar sentiments are echoed in the following exemplars:

I share concern and anger with the entire LGBTQ+ community at the continued targeting of the community by the Tennessee State Government.

I'm angry all the time. I've learned to stop trying to teach bigots to be good people.

I'm afraid. I'm angry. I'm limited in the types of things I can do.

For many participants, anger also compounded into frustration and disgust. Many participants felt frustrated with the seemingly endless attention that LGBTQ+ people have been receiving in the state legislature rather than legislators using their power and influence to attend to other matters that participants viewed as more important. One response stated, “The government has much more important things they should be putting their time/resources into, like the fact that nearly half of third graders failed the TCAP. Instead they would rather control people.” Other participants were disgusted at what kind of message anti-LGBTQ+ legislation the state legislature was sending. One stated they felt, “Disgust because it [the legislation] represents a more widespread bigotry and hatred.” Another added, “It’s kind of horrifying to know that people are still trying to oppress each other.”

Disappointment and defeat

The last common emotional theme was disappointment at the introduction and passage of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. One participant stated, “I don’t understand how we’re going so far backwards.” Few stated that they had higher hopes for their representatives and were disappointed when they hear about the introduction and passage of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Some participants have seemed to move past both fear, anger, and even disappointment, settling instead into a state of defeat or hopelessness, even expecting nothing more from their own government. One participant described themselves as “genuinely too tired at this point.” Another participant echoed a very similar sentiment, succinctly combining feelings of anger, frustration, and defeat in one sentence: “They want us fucking dead.”

Family Strife

As part of the open-ended survey, participants were asked to describe how anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has impacted their everyday life. Many reported an increase in familial strain in recent years, especially when their family members believed in a conservative ideology. It is important to understand that most of these participants reside within the “bible belt” of the United States, where many older adults hold a less than favorable view of the LGBTQ+ community. In the following exemplar, participants discuss how anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has impacted their home and family life:

It causes feelings of discomfort or arguments between me and members of my family, who tend to have conservative views.

Whenever I come back home it feels like my family is much more hostile/unwelcoming towards LGBTQ+ people behind closed doors.

I can't even be comfortable in my own home.

I am still closeted because I currently still live with my family who I fear will take violent action against me if I were to ever come out.

While this negative attitude towards LGBTQ+ individuals is not true for all members of older generations, many participants stated that they were not comfortable in being outwardly LGBTQ+ or physically presenting in a manner that is associated with being LGBTQ+ is often avoided when interacting with these older populations, especially if a familial bond is shared.

Mental Health Concerns

While discussing the emotional impact that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has, some participants elaborated on how damaging anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is, and its impact on their internal and external environments. Many alluded to negative impacts on their mental health in addition to feeling increasingly uncomfortable with being outwardly LGBTQ+. Similarly, many participants stated that they felt worse about themselves because of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation.

I've genuinely started feeling so much more suicidal.

I am very closeted but it has mostly caused mental distress.

[There is a] negative stigma surrounding the whole community because of the vocabulary used to describe trans people.

It has made me feel worse about myself.

It has made me feel out of place.

I believe it promotes an environment of shame.

These participant responses are especially important in understanding that the impact of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is not simply as minor as hurt feelings, but is a legitimate threat to LGBTQ+ individuals' mental state.

Coping Techniques

Now that we have an understanding of how LGBTQ+ people in Tennessee have been impacted emotionally and mentally, it is important to understand how these impacts effect how the participant goes about their everyday life and their plans for the future. More specifically, participant responses revealed a number of ways in which participants cope with the negative emotions and mental health impacts sparked by anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. The majority of the responses fall into the following four categories of coping: relocating, preparing to defend, retreating, and an increase on the emphasis of pride in being LGBTQ+.

Relocating

As a method of coping, perhaps the simplest reaction is to leave the situation entirely. As stated earlier, all the participants stated that they wished Tennessee would not continually support and pass anti-LGBT legislation. Many do not feel a sense of hatred from the state itself but nonetheless feel that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is driving them away.

I will be moving out of state for grad school not because I want to, but because I'm in danger here.

It [anti-LGBTQ+ legislation] has made me reconsider living in TN after college. It has caused me to have many conversations about safety and future living in TN with my friends and partner.

I love Tennessee so much and I want to save it but I face the fact that I will most likely have to leave to protect myself and my partner.

Many of my friends and I have been discussing emergency plans, plans to move, and similar topics.

My first reaction [to anti-LGBTQ+ legislation] was despair and a need to leave Tennessee for Illinois as soon as I graduate.

I plan on graduating and moving somewhere more liberal.

I have many friends leaving TN because of the hostile environment.

It is important to note that, in these responses, participants do not hold an inherent hatred for Tennessee. In fact, there is an air of reluctance and hesitancy in their responses.

Tennessee's allure, whether it be a close proximity to school, friends, or other places of interest, is overshadowed by the threat of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, pushing participants to plan to move to historically more LGBTQ+ tolerant locations. Some have a specific place in mind, such as the participant that planned to move to Illinois, while some have a general sense of 'anywhere but here'.

Preparing to defend

Many individuals may not have the financial or emotional means or freedom to move states because of the threat that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation poses. Instead, they choose to protect themselves against potential physical or mental threats.

I carry a knife on me wherever it is legal so I can protect myself.

I have joined the SRA [Socialist Rifle Association] to be a part of a community and learn how to use firearms for personal safety.

I've genuinely started feeling so much more suicidal, and I enrolled in therapy to get help.

These participants, when met with a barrage of threats to their mental and physical health, have decided to arm themselves with firearms, knives, or have contacted mental health professionals in hopes of gaining a mental defense strategy.

Retreating

There are many ways that one may choose to retreat from having to deal with the effects of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Strategies of retreat have to do with various components that influence how anti-LGBTQ+ legislation impacts constituents. First, is the very existence of the legislation, and whether individuals physically reside within its jurisdiction. Second, is whether persons outwardly present as LGBTQ+ to their family, their peers, and their community, or whether they are straight or cisgender passing. Third, is whether an individual's family, peers, or community use the previous two conditions to discriminate against, be violent towards, or otherwise disadvantage the person. By retreating in how they present and identify themselves, some participants keep themselves from being recognized as LGBTQ+ people and therefore avoid any negative impacts associated with being LGBTQ+. This is illustrated, for example, by a participant who identifies as LGBTQ+ but does not disclose their sexuality/gender identity stated, "I'm still closeted, so it [anti-LGBTQ+ legislation] hasn't directly affected me yet." Another stated "I am very closeted, but it has mostly caused mental distress and fear to be more open in public about my queer identity." The following exemplars contain the voices of several other participants who choose to cope with the negative impacts of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation by retreating back into the closet around families as well as strangers.

I am out to my family (except for my dad) and I will never come out to my grandparents.

I am careful of who I share my personal details with in TN. I am often hesitant to.

It has pushed me further into hiding these aspects of myself, making me even more hesitant to publicly express myself, experiment, and makes me even more selective of who I inform of my identity.

It's not like I'm gonna come right out and tell people that I'm Bi. I don't know what kind of response I'm going to get.

I remain uncomfortable outwardly identifying as bisexual, even waiting months to even give the slightest mention to my friend who themselves very openly identify as LGBTQIA+.

As can be seen in these exemplars, several elements cause participants to feel the need to retreat back into the closet. One participant described delaying informing their family of their status as a member of the LGBTQ+ community due to fearing their reaction. They stated “It [anti-LGBTQ+ legislation] has made me worried for my future and holding off on coming out to my parents. I wanted to come out two years ago.” Echoing the emotional theme of defeat discussed previously, they added, “I’ve given up.” Another participant noted “I already do not very openly and publicly identify as bisexual, however in that same vein, it has pushed me further into hiding these aspects of myself, making me more hesitant to more publicly express myself, experiment, and makes me even more selective of who I inform of my identity.”

Resilience, community, and pride

Some participants chose to not relocate, defend, or retreat as a response to anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Instead, several participants chose to turn to their community to cope with the impacts of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Among these, some participants demonstrated a surprising resilience, stating that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation had no effect

on their everyday life, mental health, and/or self perception. Those who responded in this manner clarified that although the legislation is still negative, it is the fault of the state legislature for producing such policies. A participant described this as a “them issue” in reference to the state legislature. Another added “Although all the legislators calling us groomers for wanting children to have the same rights we have has made me angry, it hasn’t made me think any less of myself because I know it isn’t true.”

Another subset of those who stated anti-LGBTQ+ legislation had no effect on them said that it was because they surrounded themselves with an accepting community. Through this, they had not felt a change in their immediate social lives as a result of legislation being introduced. Moreover, the majority of participants that were not fortunate enough to surround themselves with a social environment of accepting individuals were still able to find opportunities for connection in the wake of these policies, demonstrating a surprising resilience despite the clear negative emotional impact.

It makes me want to be more “out” than I am in order to affirm others who may be feeling lonely.

It has amplified the importance I put on my membership to the queer community.

I know who I am. And despite how I am or look it doesn’t stop country folk from liking me because I’m country just like them.

Some old men in a meeting room aren’t going to change how I present, and the state of Tennessee has to know that we exist.

I know who I am and the legislators will not stop me from being a hillbilly from Tennessee AND a trans person.

As can be seen in the above exemplars, some participants stated that the impact of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has made them intentionally present as outwardly LGBTQ+ in response, placing more importance on their identity as a means of connecting with and

affirming others. Further exemplified in these responses is a feeling of inherent responsibility, as those who are out of the closet feel a need to express or exaggerate their queer qualities in order to demonstrate both that the legislation will not have its perceived intended effect, and to signal to other closeted LGBTQ+ community members that they are not alone. These participants seem to be emboldened to be more outwardly LGBTQ+. Only one participant stated that they felt comfortable being outwardly LGBTQ+ in Tennessee regardless of context. Their response exemplifies this sense of duty to being known to the state of Tennessee and the legislators that create the law of the land: “Some old men in a meeting room aren’t going to change how I present, and the state of Tennessee has to know that we exist. How will they know we exist if we run and hide?” Their response exemplifies a sense of duty to being known to the state of Tennessee and the legislators that create the law of the land. A handful of participants even stated that the rise of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation made them feel better about themselves, citing a feeling of superiority to legislators as seen in the following response: Made me feel better about myself knowing that I’m a good person in comparison to these hateful lawmakers.”

Relationship with Legislators

As is evident in the preceding discussion, the emotions and experiences reported by participants present a complex relationship to anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Some participants struggle with feelings of fear, anger, and hopelessness, and coped by retreating or planning to relocate, while others find the existence of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation as an opportunity to resist by emphasizing their identity as an LGBTQ+ person and seeking community with others. Clearly, the legislation influenced participants’

opinions about the legislators who write and support anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. For this final qualitative theme, responses were organized into the subthemes of affirming hatred and intolerance, government overreach, underrepresentation, and how they can do better.

Affirming hatred and intolerance

An important feeling that the participants described when relating to their relationship with Tennessee state legislators was a perception that legislators were not serving their intended purpose, which is to represent their constituency. Instead, participants saw lawmakers as choosing to affirm existing hatred and promote intolerance with their power as lawmakers. There were several reasons as to why the participants felt unrepresented by their legislators. These feelings are reflected in participant responses listed in the exemplars below:

Not only are state lawmakers unsupportive of their LGBTQ+ community but they are outwardly hostile towards it. Despite the growing size of this community, they continue to be either ignored or treated as enemies by their own lawmakers.

I have found that the laws and regulations promoted by the state legislature put the rights and lives of their own citizens at stake by promoting an environment of intolerance and hatred.

The constant social wars created by republicans and conservatives are exhausting.

These lawmakers are enemies of the LGBTQ+ community in Tennessee and therefore enemies of their constituents. It seems like every law involving the community is something against it. It feels like we're moving backwards.

People unaffected by these policies are making it harder for my community to be happy.

Legislation does not exist in a vacuum, nor is it intended to do so. For this reason, participants note that their legislators' actions through the passage of anti-LGBTQ+

legislation not only affirm their perceived hatred of the LGBTQ+ community, but also embolden the participants' peers, families, and communities to be more outward with their hatred and intolerance of the LGBTQ+ community.

Government overreach

A legislator's purpose is to represent their constituents while still working within reasonable limitations. In short, protect, but do not limit. The following responses are from participants who believe that their legislators have failed to limit their powers, creating policies that overreach their personal freedoms. The following exemplars expand upon the previous responses concerning Tennessee lawmakers' actions affirming hatred and intolerance towards the LGBTQ+ community:

These bills are NOT protecting trans people, they are only putting them more at risk.

Even from a republican stand point it [bill criminalizing gender affirming care for minors] is a massive government overreach and violates a parent's right to choose the healthcare and education for their children. The same right that republicans value they have violated.

This legislation regresses upon freedoms that were already in place.

Why is government intervention in healthcare decisions inappropriate in the case of a covid vaccine but appropriate in the case of affirming care.

The bill is ridiculous and based on fearmongering, and those representatives don't know enough about trans people or medicine to take those decisions away from trans people, their parents, or their doctors.

Here, the participants point out how hypocritical it is for legislators to create limiting legislation that infringes on doctor's treatment options and parent choice,

especially when all of these legislators belong to a party that holds personal freedoms and limited government in high regard.

Underrepresentation

In the same vein as hypocrisy, all participants stated that they do not feel represented by those who were elected to do so on the state level. These feelings of being unrepresented stem primarily from how they vote, which is seen by the participants as a misuse of power.

No, they never do [represent me]. Healthcare shouldn't be how it is and criminalizing healthcare is absurd.

I do not feel represented.

They did not vote according to my views.

My generation overwhelmingly disapproves of this legislation.

I am ashamed of my legislators and they in no way represent my interests or the interests of much of their constituents.

They didn't represent us.

I want my state representatives to care for people, not platforms or corporations.

Further investigation into these results not only points to respondents feeling unrepresented, but also feeling actively targeted by their legislators. Many of these participants, as reflected in the exemplar above, feel that their legislators want to cause them harm, which ties back to the emotions discussed previously, including fear, anger, and defeat.

How they can do better

It is clear that there are many issues associated with the relationship between LGBTQ+ citizens in Tennessee and their state legislative counterparts. As seen in the above subthemes, respondents had much to say about what their state legislators were doing wrong; however, some also made suggestions on how they could do better. Several topics were brought up by participants as recommendations for how representatives could improve to better represent their LGBTQ+ constituency. Some of these recommendations are possible for legislators to implement into their everyday work immediately, while other recommendations would require different individuals to take office.

There needs to be respect. There needs to be understanding.

I wish that more lawmakers represented my values and ideals concerning gender affirming care, reproductive health, and other “divisive issues”

I want more women, POC, and young people to hold lawmaking positions.

I really wish they wouldn't criminalize my existence.

It is important to note that the complaints that participants make in their responses specifically concern their legislator's behavior rather than who the legislators are at a fundamental level.

Constructing the Advocacy Tool

Because this thesis project was designed with showcasing LGBTQ+ voices in mind, an advocacy tool to present participant perspectives to legislators was created. The length of the full thesis project precludes it from being shared in a short amount of time if it were to be verbally presented to legislators and lessens the likelihood the likelihood of their engagement if receiving it by mail or electronically. To remedy this, information

about the respondent pool, several of the charts illustrating trends, and numerous quotes from the qualitative analysis of participant responses were compiled into a pamphlet. Selected quotes were chosen for their inclusion in the pamphlet based on the likelihood that legislators would connect with and be impacted by them. Also, similar quotes with repeating themes were omitted and the most impactful responses were included on the final draft. Six columns make up the pamphlet: one title page, one informational page about the problem, one informational page about the legislator's constituency, three pages of quotes from respondents, and a call to action to allow the legislator to respond. The pamphlet can be found in Appendix C.

Queer advocacy groups that regularly interface with the state legislature such as Inclusion TN and the Tennessee Equality Project may find both the pamphlet and this thesis advantageous to include in their advocacy endeavors. Representatives of the two groups above have already been contacted and have expressed interest in the results. The concluding chapters will answer the research questions, discuss implications and limitations of the study, and reflect on the meanings of this projects for the researcher and the LGBTQ+ participants living in the state of Tennessee.

CHAPTER IV, Conclusions

Respondents' Thoughts, Reactions, Actions: Unified yet Unique

When listening to the voices and perspectives of LGBTQ+ people in Rutherford County, Tennessee, it is clear that they hold an overall negative opinion of state legislators that decide to write and support anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, and the legislation itself has had negative impacts on them. Careful examinations of the responses indicates that for the participants in this study this is a result of many factors, including shifts in cultural climate, restricted healthcare access, and the normalization of discriminatory practices fueled by anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. As it relates to LGBTQ+ youth's mental health, some of the responses were expected, as they aligned with other literature that has been reviewed. Logic suggests that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation would spur fear, confusion, and disappointment in their targeted demographics. Other responses, however, were less expected and/or not well captured by quantitative trends, such as the way some participants described the effects of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation as empowering and described feeling a stronger need to present as overtly LGBTQ+ in retaliation or to show resilience.

The survey results thus returned answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the study and more. The first research question can be answered quite simply, as all participants answered the same. The LGBTQ+ individuals surveyed view anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in their home state with overwhelming disapproval and negativity. The second research question can be answered similarly simply. Overwhelmingly, the LGBTQ+ individuals surveyed in Rutherford County, Tennessee do

not feel represented by their elected state legislators, with all participants stating that they would not vote to reelect their current representatives. The third research question requires more nuance to answer. Many, but not all, LGBTQ+ individuals surveyed were impacted negatively by anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Respondents coped with the legislation in various ways, ranging from retreating back into the closet to overexaggerating their authentic selves in an attempt to connect with community members and to resist against the legislation that they perceive that seeks to erase them.

While the results of this study produced useful results as an advocacy tool, there are some limitations. The study design used was an online open-ended survey, which resulted in a range in the length of participants' responses. If interviews were used to conduct this survey instead, the participants' voices could have a greater chance of being expanded upon through the researcher's prompting. Additionally, interviews may create a sense of trust between the researcher and respondents. Although the number of participants ($n= 49$) met the scope established for this project, a study containing a larger number of participants would also provide further saturation of qualitative themes as well as racial diversity. Finally, the data collection across two universities was less successful than desired, with the majority of responses coming from MTSU rather than Motlow. This is likely due the difficulties getting the survey distributed electronically at Motlow, which may have been related to institutional concerns about the subject matter.

Overall, the study was successful in collecting the voices and perspectives of LGBTQ+ students in Rutherford County, Tennessee. By collecting together personal, vivid responses from individuals describing the impacts of legislation, this study may prove beneficial to advocacy groups aiming to deter the creation of anti-LGBTQ+

legislation when meeting with legislators. In such meetings, a combination of statistical data and personal stories are often used to maximize the amount of impact that the advocates have on the legislator. Since this survey and wider study includes the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods and data, it would be prudent for any local advocates to include in their meetings with legislators.

CHAPTER V

Personal Reflections on the Project

The writing of this thesis was perhaps one of the most difficult academic pursuits I have undertaken. When I first joined the Honors College, I knew that I would have to write a thesis, but I had no earthly idea what I wanted to write about. As I matriculated through my classes, I became increasingly drawn to the topic of LGBTQ+ rights and advocacy, especially on the state level. I had previous experience working with a state level queer advocacy organization by creating a panel of transgender voices to be presented to my community college, and I was hooked. It was working on that project that I knew I was going to dedicate as much of my time and effort as possible to highlighting LGBTQ+ voices to anyone that would listen to me.

Being a transgender bisexual man myself, this topic hits especially close to home. My experiences as a queer individual in the deep south are not dissimilar to what was reported in the participants' responses. I have faced family disownment, homelessness, academic discrimination, verbal and physical abuse, and much more, simply because I choose to present my most authentic self to the world and refuse to be judged and treated differently simply for who I am. Each time I spoke up about what I was experiencing, it felt like I was screaming out into the void. It felt as if no one cared. It was this feeling that led to my selection of this topic. I knew others had to be going through the same experiences I was, and I knew that they were not being heard by the very people that were making it harder for us to live. I was determined to change that. So, I set forth collecting my peers' voices and perspectives on perhaps one of the most difficult topics for a queer person to discuss. I never knew, nor will I ever know, their names or their faces, but I feel

a sense of camaraderie with the participants of this study. Even greater, I feel a sense of responsibility to them to carry their voices to the ears in charge. I feel a duty to try my best in ensuring that they never feel like no one ever cared to listen.

This thesis is not meant to stand alone as a publication, collecting dust on a shelf or sitting as a line in my r_esum_e. It is meant to be, and will be used as, a tool to make my state representatives face the consequences of their voting actions. Living in a state as steadfast in their hateful policy-making ways as Tennessee does not guarantee that I will change laws or reverse the decades of hurt that LGBTQ+ Tennesseans have been grappling with, merely armed with an undergraduate thesis. However, it ensures that the voices collected within this document will echo within the halls of the state legislature and within the minds of those sworn to represent us. It ensures that someone will have listened.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
4. What is your sexual orientation?
5. Do you attend MTSU or MSCC?
6. Are you registered to vote in Rutherford County, or do you have plans to register to vote before the next election?

Open-Ended Survey Questions

1. How often do you view news related to state politics? (Every day, once a week, etc.)
2. In the past year, have you ever felt personally targeted by state legislation because of your status as a member of the LGBTQ+ community? Please describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.
3. The following state legislators in your district either sponsored or voted for HB0001: Baum, Reeves, Rudd, Sexton, Stevens, Terry, and White. HB0001 criminalizes gender affirming healthcare for minors. Do you feel that your representatives best represented you when they sponsored and voted in favor of this bill?
4. The following state representatives voted in favor of SB0001: Baum, McNally, Reeves, Rudd, Sexton, Stevens, Terry, and White. This bill criminalizes “adult

cabaret performances” and “male or female impersonators” Do you feel that your representatives best represented you when they sponsored and voted for this bill?

Why or why not?

5. Do you feel that the majority of Tennessee lawmakers (state representatives, state senators) represent your values? Why or why not?
6. How has the rise of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation affected your own self-perception? (Ex. Made me feel worse about myself, no effect, made me feel better about myself, etc.)
7. To the best of your ability, please describe how the introduction and passage of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has impacted your everyday life.
8. When you first learn about the introduction and passage of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, what is your first emotional reaction? Why do you think that is?
9. Do you feel comfortable being outwardly LGBTQ+ in Tennessee? Why or why not?
10. Are you likely to vote to reelect Baum, McNally, Reeves, Rudd, Sexton, Stevens, Terry, or White in the next election?

Appendix B

Date: 8-31-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY2023-154

Title: I Am Your Constituency: Voices and Perspectives of LGBTQ+ Tennesseans on Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation

Creation Date: 4-3-2023

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Sarah Certain

Review Board: MTSU Institutional Review Board

Sponsor:

Study History

| Submission Type | Initial | Review Type | Exempt | Decision | Exempt |
|-----------------|---------|-------------|--------|----------|--------|
|-----------------|---------|-------------|--------|----------|--------|

Key Study Contacts

| Member | Role | Contact |
|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Roberta Chevrette | Co-Principal Investigator | roberta.chevrette@mtsu.edu |
| Sarah Certain | Principal Investigator | sec8e@mtmail.mtsu.edu |
| Sarah Certain | Primary Contact | sec8e@mtmail.mtsu.edu |

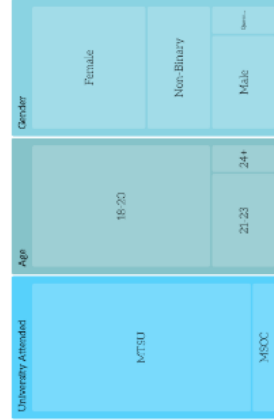
YOUR VOICE MATTERS

The purpose of this study was to inform representatives of how their voting history affects their LGBTQ+ constituency. Oftentimes the conversation stops at informing the representative of public opinion. This is an opportunity for you as a lawmaker to make your voice heard as well. If you would like to have your voice included in the ongoing dialogue, scan the QR code below and fill out the response form. Responses are de-identified unless you specifically consent to be identified.



YOUR CONSTITUENCY

All respondents are either students at Middle Tennessee State University or Motlow State Community College's Smyrna Campus. A large majority of the respondents (90%) are registered to vote in your district. The remaining respondents (10%) are planning to register to vote or vote elsewhere in Tennessee. All respondents self-identified as LGBTQ+. The respondents have participated in this study knowing that their responses would be shown to their representatives.



I AM YOUR CONSTITUENCY: VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES OF LGBTQ+ TENNESSEANS ON ANTI-LGBTQ+ LEGISLATION

Survey Results from a Middle Tennessee State University Honors College Student's Thesis Research

THE PROBLEM

In years past, the State Legislature has introduced and voted favorably on bills that seek to criminalize gender affirming healthcare for transgender people. In a survey, your constituents anonymously answered questions about what they thought of such legislation, how they feel about their representatives, and their experiences as LGBTQ+ Tennesseans.

Tennessee is home to approximately 225,000 LGBTQ+ people, which means that you can, at any given time, be representing nearly a quarter million LGBTQ+ people with your voting practices in the statehouse. This pamphlet includes feedback from constituents in **your** district. At the end, you will be given the opportunity to respond.

QUOTES FROM CONSTITUENTS

Q: Do you feel comfortable being outwardly LGBTQ+ in Tennessee?

"Only in certain spaces. I fear physical and verbal violence."

"No. Being openly LGBTQ+ feels like having a target on my back in Tennessee"

Q: Do you feel that the majority of Tennessee lawmakers represent your values?

"Very very few"

"No. I don't. There needs to be respect. There needs to be understanding."

"No. I want them to vote to be more supportive of minority communities"

QUOTES FROM CONSTITUENTS

Q: In the past year, have you ever felt targeted by state legislation because of your status as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

"Yes. Especially as a trans individual"

"Yes. Usually most state legislation does not affect me, but I have been noticing major changes to my day-to-day lifestyle due to recent legislation"

"Yes. I am constantly afraid."

Q: Do you feel represented by your representatives based on their voting history?

"I do not feel represented"

"My generation overwhelmingly disapproves of this legislation"

"No. I do not feel represented by the legislation being passed in this state as a queer person"

Q: What is your first emotional reaction to the introduction/passage of anti-LGBTB legislation?

"Angry. The government has much more important things they should be putting their time/resources into."

"Horror about what will be next"

"Sorrow"

"I'm terrified my existence might become illegal."

How often do you view news related to state politics?

