

# [***Political Debates Are Exacerbating the Mental Health Crisis Among LGBTQ Youth | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C2P-DCH1-JBR6-94YH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 917 words

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**Highlight:** New data show 90 percent of LGBTQ young people in the U.S. reported that recent ***politics*** have negatively impacted their mental health.

**Body**

It's no longer breaking news that the LGBTQ community suffers from higher rates of suicide than non-LGBTQ folks. What we're talking about is a marginalized community that, despite marked progress in some areas, continues to face ruthless stigmatization across the U.S.—and the world. When you compound that reality with a youth demographic, a population [*gravely impacted*](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/07/psychologists-preventing-teen-suicide) by suicide, this public health crisis magnifies. And when you layer on other marginalized identities that an LGBTQ young person may hold—be it socioeconomic, racial, regional, or cultural—the crisis intensifies even further.

As a scientist who's steeped in daily research to identify both protective and risk factors contributing to increased suicidality among LGBTQ youth, I'm unsettled by a few things.

One, that this public health crisis continues to show unabated consequences. Two, that some recent media reporting has recklessly ignored evidence that societal rejection directly impacts the mental health and potential suicide risk of LGBTQ young people—particularly trans and nonbinary youth. And three, despite the grave consequences illuminated by this research, we still are seeing relentless attacks from lawmakers, policymakers, and other high-powered adults that victimize LGBTQ young people, and in some cases, risk their lives.

My team at The Trevor Project, the nation's leading provider of suicide prevention and crisis intervention services for LGBTQ youth, released our [*2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health and Well-being of LGBTQ+ Young People*](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/). Commensurate to previous years' findings, we see that LGBTQ young people have much higher rates of considering or attempting suicide than their straight and cisgender peers; 39 percent of LGBTQ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year—including 46 percent of transgender and nonbinary young people. LGBTQ youth of color reported higher rates than white peers. More than 1 in 10 (12 percent) LGBTQ young people attempted suicide in the past year.

Most alarming about this year's findings are the direct correlation we're seeing between the tense political landscape and LGBTQ young people's mental welfare. So far, more than 500 anti-LGBTQ bills have been considered in states across the country, and most target transgender and nonbinary young people specifically. An astounding 90 percent of LGBTQ young people said their well-being was negatively impacted by recent ***politics***. And nearly half (45 percent) of transgender and nonbinary young people said their families have considered moving to a different state because of the anti-LGBTQ ***politics*** and laws. These numbers paint a dire reality.

The current political landscape and our research demonstrate the problem on a macro scale, but we've also witnessed anecdotal evidence of these distressing trends. Just a couple months ago, the [*death*](https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2024/03/16/nex-benedict-death-trans-nonbinary-youth-support/72991840007/) of nonbinary student Nex Benedict was widely publicized, stirring outrage among LGBTQ activists and a large swath of the general public. While it would be clinically irresponsible to conclude that Nex's untimely passing was unequivocally a result of the bullying that we know they faced, Nex's story mirrors many stories that we hear across our direct-services lifelines.

Every hour of every day, our 24/7 crisis counselors speak with young people who are regularly bullied and rejected on the basis of their LGBTQ identity—by the time they contact The Trevor Project's services, they are often experiencing their darkest moments and wondering if their existence will ever get easier. Our findings show that nearly half (49 percent) of LGBTQ young people ages 13-17 reported being bullied in-person within the past year; those who experienced bullying (either in-person or electronically) reported three times the rate of attempting suicide in the past year compared to those who were not bullied.

On the precipice of a general election that promises to surface much of the hateful anti-LGBTQ rhetoric that we've seen in recent years, our research yet again offers a wake-up call. When the zeitgeist centers an anti-LGBTQ sentiment, LGBTQ young people suffer. Whether explicit or insidious, the toll is dramatic. Many of you reading may have even experienced tragic loss like Nex's in your family or community: a young person, already struggling to accept themselves and their identity, feeling extinguished by unyielding attacks and bullying to the point where they lose hope for their future. And if you're lucky to have not experienced this on a personal level, I sincerely hope you never have to face that unfathomable tragedy.

I urge those in positions of power and bystanders alike to listen to the data. Stop using LGBTQ young people as pawns. Open your mind to understanding something that might be unfamiliar or uncomfortable to you. Educate yourself and speak to people in the community to better grasp their day-to-day experiences. Join the movement to protect and fight for LGBTQ young people in whatever way that makes sense for you. Exercise your power as an adult to support and affirm young people in your life who are only trying to exist peacefully.

Despite the deep polarization of our country, no one wants our young people to kill themselves. I hope that in the near future, our research will show more positive outcomes. All young people deserve to see a bright future for themselves.

*Dr. Ronita Nath is vice president of research at* [*The Trevor Project*](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/)*.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2395066/demonstrator-waves-intersex-inclusive-pride-flag.jpg)

**Graphic**

A demonstrator waves the intersex-inclusive Pride flag

Mario Tama/Getty Images

A demonstrator waves the intersex-inclusive Pride flag outside City Hall during the We The People March in protest of the hundreds of bills being introduced which are directed toward LGTBQ people, people of color, and women on July 2, 2023, in Los Angeles, Calif.

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