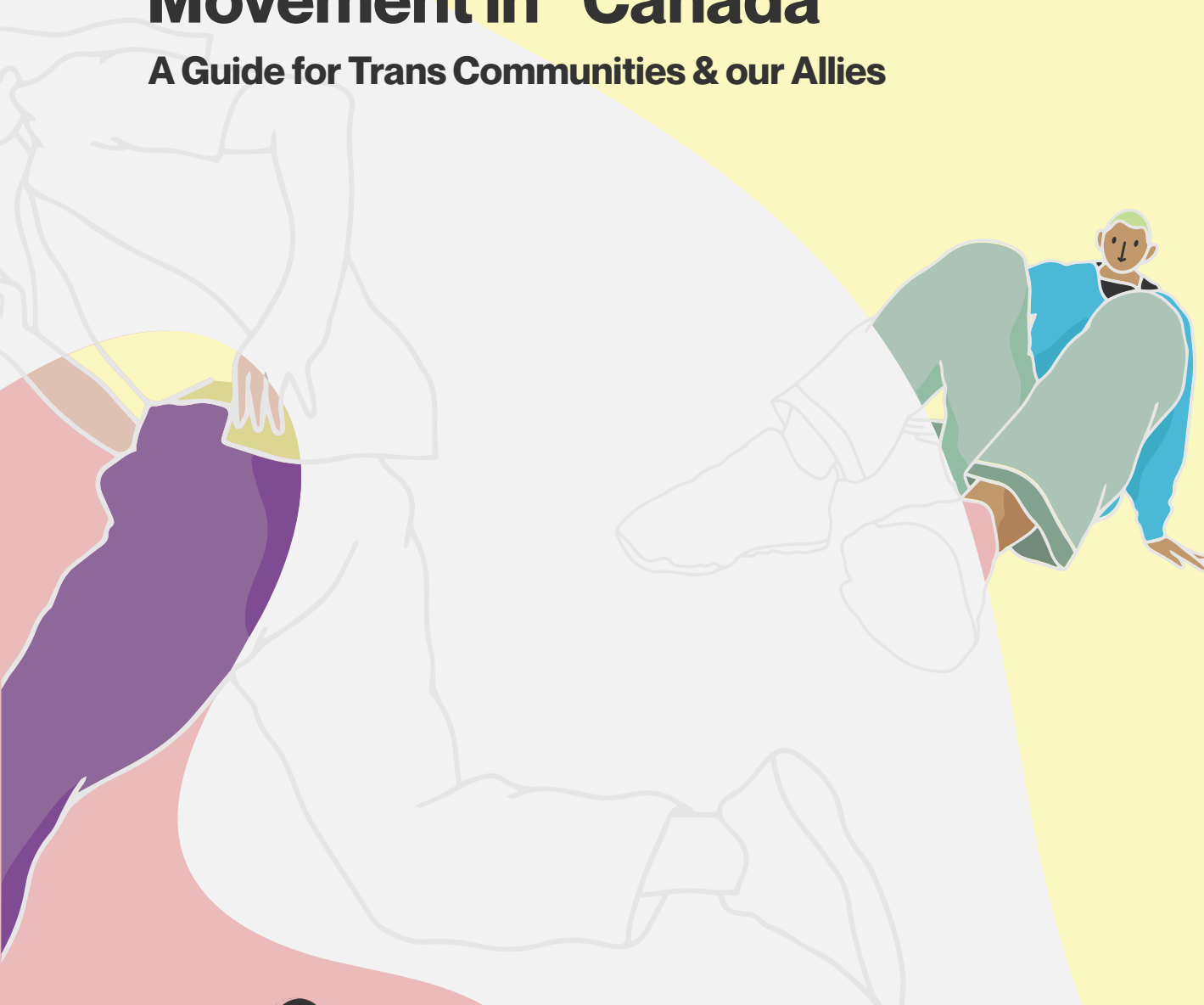


# Understanding & Fighting Back against the Anti-Trans Movement in “Canada”

A Guide for Trans Communities & our Allies



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada




# Acknowledgements & accountability

JusticeTrans was founded in Tkaronto, now known as Toronto, on Treaty 13 and Williams Treaty territory. Tkaronto means “where there are trees standing in the water” in Kanien’Kéha. This is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. We acknowledge these nations as the stewards of these lands and waters and thank them for their care. As a national organization, our staff and board lives, works, and plays across Turtle Island in what is colonially known as Canada. We recognize that over 600 Indigenous nations have tended to these lands and waters as their home fires and their traditional territories. These nations have made it possible for us to do our work, and they deserve our respect. At JusticeTrans, we are committed to having a collaborative and empowering relationship with the 2Spirit and Indigenous trans, non-binary and gender diverse communities we serve. We also commit to dismantling the forms that settler colonialism inherently takes in our work.

We stand in solidarity with Indigenous nations across Turtle Island, and we bear witness and hold ourselves and others accountable to the atrocities of the past and the ongoing violence and oppression that are inherent to settler colonial systems, socialization, and practices.


For more interactive maps of Indigenous territories and data visit:

[native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca)  
[The Map Room](#)  
[The Geo Viewer](#)  
[Residential Schools](#)





# Acknowledgements & accountability



This research would not have been possible without the participants who trusted us with their experiences and stories. Thank you!

The research team was comprised of six trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people. Due to safety concerns in the current context, we have chosen to remain anonymous. All of us are queer and university-educated, most are disabled and four are racialized. These intersections affect the ways we experience the world and how we did this work. Additionally, the project was developed and led by white settlers.

The project also operated within two frameworks that are rooted in white supremacy and colonialism: research and the non-profit sector. Although this team did radical work in many respects, we could have gone further to subvert oppressive systems. We have learned from this and intend to adapt future projects!

This work was possible thanks to the support of JusticeTrans staff, and our advisory committee, which comprised seven 2Spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse individuals from coast to coast. We would like to acknowledge our community partners on this project:

- Hamilton Trans Health Coalition
- Community-Based Research Centre
- Egale Canada
- Community members with experience as practitioners, researchers, and activists involved in Indigenous, anti-racist, disabled, youth-led, and feminist movements

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# Introduction

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in anti-trans organizing worldwide and in the country colonially known as Canada. This has especially been the case since 2023. Egale Canada identified “nearly 6,500 instances of online hate and protests against the 2S/LGBTQIA+ community in Canada within the first three months of 2023”<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this project was to study this worrying trend so trans communities and our allies may better understand the anti-trans movement and fight back more effectively.

## What do we mean by trans?

“Trans” is used here to include many distinct identities including 2Spirit as well as trans, non-binary, and gender diverse identities. This usage does not indicate that 2Spirit peoples are defined as part of the trans umbrella: these Indigenous identities are beyond the scope of non-Indigenous understandings of sexuality and gender. Nor does it aim to conflate these identities as one.

This guide uses the word “trans” throughout instead of 2S/TNBGD because that makes text more accessible, especially since this acronym is not well known. Please note we still think intentional language is important.

We also use trans instead of 2S/TNBGD because, unfortunately, the anti-trans movement is targeting anyone and anything it perceives as trans or trans-affirming.

**Please be advised** that the topic covered in this guide is violent and may be triggering. Many participants described their experiences as traumatic. Please prepare yourself mentally and think of self-care you can do while during and after you read.

# Methodology: How we got to these results

## Reading tip:

Explaining how we got results is part of good science. However, feel free to skip this section and go straight to results!

These results come from JusticeTrans' project, *Tracking Transphobia: Identifying and Countering Anti-Trans Organizing in Canada*. The project goals were to:

1. Define what the anti-trans movement is
2. Identify the rhetoric and tactics used by the anti-trans movement to attack trans activists and trans-affirming organizations
3. Identify the effects of anti-trans attacks on organizations and individuals and how they reacted and protected themselves
4. Develop a guide to help organizations and individuals respond to anti-trans attacks

To achieve these goals, we conducted a review of the literature, a media scan, and research interviews

## Our approach to science

This project is firmly trans-for-trans (t4t). This means that, as an all-trans research team, supported by an all-trans staff and project committee, we tried to create a safer space for trans participants to “express the full complexities of their realities”<sup>2</sup>. A lot of care was put into helping interviewees feel as safe as possible.

We also took measures to create a safer space for the research team because doing this kind of research while also experiencing the same types of marginalization and violence is extremely emotionally demanding<sup>3</sup>. However, the project's time constraints made it impossible to spread out the work, which is essential when doing emotionally demanding research<sup>3</sup>. As a result, some team members are feeling the devastating impacts of vicarious trauma. This is the specific trauma that comes from long-term exposure to traumatic materials at work<sup>3</sup>.

Research that is done by and for marginalized communities is often perceived as driven by a social justice agenda and as subjective instead of good, objective science<sup>3</sup>. We believe that leaning into our subjectivity as researchers, and into our participants' subjectivity, is a resource for objectivity because we are upfront about our biases.

*Yes, this research is absolutely driven by a social justice agenda: fighting back against the anti-trans movement.*

## Literature review & media scan

The literature review and media scan used a bilingual search strategy with keywords for identity, actions, groups, and organizations. The literature review included academic databases and Google Scholar and had no time limit. We identified 32 relevant documents through this search and our networks. The media scan relied on the Eurêka.cc database, using the search strategy in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
**Media scan search strategy**

LEAD= (“anti-trans “ | “anti trans “ | “anti-transgender\*” | “pronoun\*” | “drag queen” | pronom\*)& LEAD= (protest\* | demonstration\* | boycott\* | manifestation\* | lobby\* | lobbies | policy | policies “gender critical” | TERF\* | “trans-exclusionary radical feminis\*” | “trans\* exclusionary radical feminis\*” )

Filters: Canada (ENG + FR), January 1st 2023 – November 8th 2023

Results: 1134

PDFs we extracted: 926 pages (we tried not to extract duplicates, but the database made it difficult)

## Research interviews

Participant recruitment began mid-November 2023. We were looking for two groups:

1. 2Spirit and trans, non-binary, gender diverse adults who were targeted by anti-trans attacks in so-called Canada
2. Adults who worked at women’s organizations, queer organizations, schoolboards, or trans-affirming service providers that were targeted in so-called Canada.

We prioritized racialized applicants, people from the four organization types, and applicants outside of Ontario. We conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 22 people between November 2023 and February 2024. The research director conducted thematic analysis of the interview transcripts from January to February.

# Results: our participants

Participant demographics are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Participant demographics (n=22)**

Characteristic	Details	Number	%
Gender	Non-binary	6	27.3
	Trans woman or transfeminine	4	18.2
	Trans man or transmasculine	5	22.7
	Culturally specific identity	1	4.5
	Trans, unspecified	2	9.1
	Cis woman	4	18.2
Race	Racialized (details in text)	5	22.7
	White	17	77.3
Social Class	Working class	10	47.6
	Middle class	9	42.9
	Upper class	2	9.5
Education	High school	1	4.5
	College	3	13.6
	Undergraduate	5	22.7
	Graduate	13	59.1
Disabled		18	81.8
Queer		20	90.9
Parent		6	27.3
Affiliation	Activist	5	22.7
	Schoolboard	2	9.1
	Queer organization	8	36.4
	Service provider	5	22.7
	Women's organization	2	9.1
Location	Prairies	3	13.6
	Québec	1	4.5
	Territory	1	4.5
	British-Columbia	5	22.7
	Maritimes	2	9.1
	Ontario	10	45.5
Setting	Urban	14	63.6
	Suburban	4	18.2
	Rural	3	13.6
	Northern	1	4.5
Targeted as	Individual	5	22.7
	Organization	7	31.8
	Both	10	45.5



Most participants were disabled, queer, very educated, and white. Ontarians are also overrepresented in the sample. As in JusticeTrans' previous project<sup>2</sup>, we struggled with recruiting and retaining participants from Québec (despite community ties within the team and bilingual recruitment efforts) and from Northern territories.

Participants were aged 22 to 51, with an average age of 32.7 years old. The standard deviation was 8.8, meaning most participants were aged 23.9 to 41.5. Almost half of participants had been targeted both as individuals and at their organization. Participants started experiencing anti-trans attacks between 2011 and 2023, and over 50% were first attacked in 2022 (median). We asked participants when anti-trans attacks ended for them. 81% of participants stopped being attacked in 2023 or were still experiencing attacks as of the interview.

### **Major limitation: racial diversity among participants**

The majority (77%) of participants were white. Racialized participants disclosed they were: Chinese; Indian immigrant; South Asian and Southwest Asian North African mixed; mixed race Persian and white, second-generation immigrant; and a Person of Colour. None of the participants were Black nor Indigenous.

This is a major limitation of this project because as the following pages will show, racialized people get targeted differently by the anti-trans movement and have different safety concerns. Although racialized applicants to the project were prioritized, we struggled with retaining those who were eligible to participate. We suspect this may be due to:

- Very short timelines for this project, as there was no time to continue recruitment
- Exhaustion in populations that are under attack on multiple fronts
- Added safety concerns compared to white participants
- Fatigue among small, overly-researched populations<sup>4</sup>
- Distrust of JusticeTrans as a historically predominantly white organization
- Format of this research being rooted in white ways of doing things (ex. one-on-one interviews instead of community-driven focus groups)
- Hiring patterns in organizations in general, where racialized workers are often frontline or contractual workers rather than core staff
- Insufficient honorarium amount offered (\$100) given the emotional labor involved



# Understanding the anti-trans movement in Canada

## What it is

The anti-trans movement relies on a set of diverse tactics that seek to restrict the rights of trans people, including those related to bodily autonomy and participation in public life<sup>5</sup>. This movement exists within a political and media culture that promotes transphobia, which may refer both to individual and systemic discrimination and oppression of trans people<sup>6,7</sup>. Rather than focusing on an anti-trans movement, existing research often focuses on anti-trans hate, a vague term which includes hate crimes. However, as this guide will show, the anti-trans movement is about much more than hate.

The anti-trans movement targets trans people and other people who transgress the gender binary, like drag artists<sup>5</sup>. The anti-trans movement does not include research on detransition<sup>8</sup>.

## Who is involved

This research revealed that people involved in the anti-trans movement have a broad range of affiliations and form an unstable coalition with important ideological divides<sup>9-10-11</sup>. Although their attackers' affiliations were not always obvious to interviewees, in other cases these were quite clear. Additionally, an unpublished report<sup>10</sup> identified 250 actors including individuals, organizations, and media sharing over 650 relationships. This guide identifies three main categories of anti-trans actors: trans-exclusionary radical feminists, religious groups, and right to far-right groups.

Trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs), or gender-critical groups as they like to be named, are part of this movement under the pretense of protecting cis women and girls. Some examples include Vancouver Rape Relief and Pour les droits des femmes du Québec<sup>6,12</sup>. Eight interviewees identified TERFs as involved in what they experienced. Importantly, although feminism is often framed as a leftist movement, prior research identified a strong overlap between TERFs and right-wing media<sup>10</sup>.

Religious public figures, people, and organizations were also identified as part of the anti-trans movement<sup>10</sup>. Some Christian nationalist and Muslim community members formed Hands Off Our Kids and instigated the 1 Million March 4 Children<sup>11</sup>, while Christian groups like Save Canada and some chapters of the Salvation Army were also identified by interviewees.

The third category includes right-wing, far-right and alt-right activists, groups, and politicians, as discussed by half (11) of the interviewees and as shown in the media scan. The media scan showed that right-wing political parties in New-Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, Québec, and federally have latched onto the anti-trans movement. They do this to promote their platform and introduce anti-trans legislation and policy. These parties' electoral bases are also involved by voting to introduce anti-trans elements to their parties' platforms. American neoliberal and conservative groups also provide strategy, resources, and infrastructure to Canadian groups<sup>10</sup>.

According to interviewees and prior research<sup>10,13</sup>, far-right groups involved in anti-trans organizing include:

- Libertarians
- White supremacists
- Men's rights activists
- Conspiracy theorists such as QAnon followers, anti-mask and anti-vaxxers, sovereign citizens, and freedom convoy supporters.

## Why this movement has risen

Factors explaining the anti-trans movement's rise include an international backlash against increased trans visibility and recognition<sup>1</sup>. Researchers<sup>14</sup> found that between 2011 and 2019, Canadian media coverage of trans youth has become "increasingly affirming of transgender identities, experiences, and needs". Additionally, over the past decade or so, more human rights and legal protections have been secured for trans Canadians. Unfortunately, increased trans visibility and recognition go hand in hand with increased violence towards the trans community<sup>15</sup>. As an example, the banning of trans conversion therapy could have redirected the anti-trans movement towards a backlash against schools<sup>16</sup>.

The anti-trans backlash is part of a broader, international anti-gender conservative backlash which targets feminism, women's rights, and queer rights<sup>17</sup>. The anti-gender backlash emerged in Europe in the mid-2000s, only to expand to other parts of the world and to increasingly target trans rights in recent years<sup>17</sup>.

### What is a moral panic?:

A moral panic happens when a group of people gets identified as a threat to society. It comes from widespread and exaggerated fear.

A convergence of moral panics has also been observed since 2018 and has contributed to the anti-trans movement<sup>13</sup>. By analyzing 231 instances of hate mail they received, one researcher<sup>13</sup> identified three converging moral panics. These moral panics are the fear that transness is contagious; of pedophilia and child abuse; and of educators and other professionals who have access to children and youth. All three moral panics tap into anxieties around protecting children and youth.

The last factor potentially explaining the rising anti-trans movement is an emboldened right wing. This right wing has been emboldened by Donald Trump's election and has seeped beyond U.S. borders to target everything accused of being woke, from critical race theory to trans rights<sup>1,9,10,13</sup>. As Sarah notes, "I've been in this role for 10 years. This did not happen before the rise of the alt right machine."

## What this movement is saying

Just as there are many types of people involved in the anti-trans movement, these people have many talking points (rhetoric) about trans people, about why they're involved in this movement, and to justify anti-trans tactics.


To some, trans folks are unnatural, less than human, deceptive, shameful, or mentally ill<sup>13,18,19,20</sup>. The biggest talking point, however, is the idea that trans people are dangerous sexual predators<sup>5,12,13</sup>. Transfeminine folks are discussed as if they were violent men who want to invade women's spaces and hurt cis women and girls. Similarly, trans folks and drag artists are presented as groomers or pedophiles who want to harm children.

Nearly half (10) of our interviewees spoke to this second theme, especially as they or their organization had been accused of grooming children. One states:

**"It was just your typical kind of vitriol. Calling me a groomer and things like that." - Joe**

This comment shows just how normal this accusation has become. A recent decision by the Ontario Superior Court of Justice even addressed the use of groomer as an anti-queer slur<sup>21</sup>. For Levi, this rhetoric is connected to a broader distrust of queer folks who were assigned male at birth. This shows that the moral panic which was directed towards gay men a few decades ago has been reimagined, with trans folks as the main villains<sup>13</sup>.

A key justification used by the anti-trans movement is that they are simply protecting children and youth, which <sup>13</sup> interviewees brought up and which was shown to be quite influential in prior research<sup>10</sup>. According to three interviewees, the anti-trans movement claims to protect children from gender-affirming care. This care is presented as harmful as it would supposedly confuse kids and lead to permanent mutilation.



This movement claims to protect children from groomers and pedophiles, but also from indoctrination into “gender ideology”, “radical leftism”, and “wokeism” as we learned from the media scan. One third of interviewees (eight) discussed this concern over indoctrination. The anti-trans movement believes indoctrination happens through primary, secondary, and university curricula covering topics like gender identity and sexual education. It also believes trans-affirming professionals and organizations are trying to indoctrinate children and youth<sup>10</sup>. Indoctrination is connected to the broader claim of social contagion<sup>10,13</sup>, or as Juno puts it “the idea that one transgender youth [...] is going to infect all these other children by their mere existence”.

Due to these concerns, the anti-trans movement emphasizes parental rights to protect their children from sexualization, indoctrination, gender-affirming care, and social contagion. Parents claim to have a right to be informed by schools when children question their identity or use a new name or pronoun; they also want to have a say in what their kids are taught (media scan and five interviews). The underlying assumption is that children are their parents’ property and have no rights of their own. Other legal rhetoric was also identified. The protection of religious freedoms to raise children as they see fit came up in the media scan. Cis women’s right to not be victimized also came up.

Prior research<sup>13</sup> and five interviewees mentioned moral rhetoric such as being told they were going to hell. This comes from the idea that transness is sinful or wrong. This also came through in the media scan, in claims that society is experiencing a moral slippery slope and that drag story hours are destructive to children, families, and the nation as they normalize transness. These ideas come from social conservatism<sup>22</sup>.


Lastly, two interviewees brought up economic rhetoric. Indeed, some people associated with the anti-trans movement ask how the “transgender agenda” is funded or claim public funds are misspent when Pride crosswalks are painted.



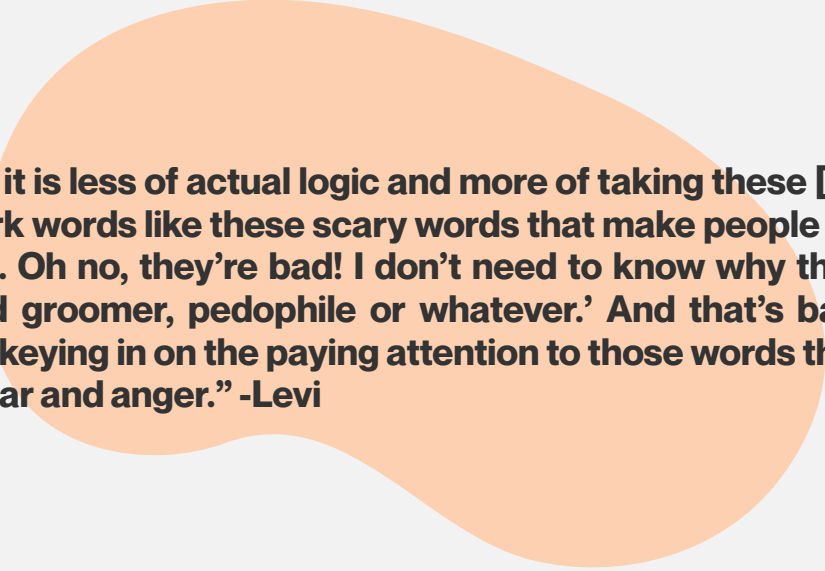
## What this movement is doing

Across affiliations and rhetoric, the anti-trans movement relies on a diversity of tactics deployed on- and offline. As Jojo put it, “That’s a lot of work. To Hate.” A general tactic used by the anti-trans movement is to select and attack visible targets, which 16 interviewees spoke to. Visible targets include:

- visible individuals, to which transfeminine activists, racialized trans activists, and drag artists are especially vulnerable
- visible queer or trans-affirming organizations, especially in smaller towns
- visible locations, such as trans-affirming organizations’ buildings and spaces with Pride-themed decorations;
- visible trans-affirming events.



Relatedly, invading safer spaces such as on- and offline events and attempting to cancel trans-affirming events came up as tactics in six interviews.



**“A lot of it is less of actual logic and more of taking these [...] like spark words like these scary words that make people go like, ‘Oh. Oh no, they’re bad! I don’t need to know why they just said groomer, pedophile or whatever.’ And that’s bad. They’re keying in on the paying attention to those words that spark fear and anger.” -Levi**

Nine interviewees also spoke to a tactic of stoking division by radicalizing the public, especially through fearmongering<sup>5</sup>. As one participant explains:

**“There was again so many children [at the anti-trans protest] that were also verbalizing these things and that was, you know, I find that to be a little bit extra hard.” -Anric**

Sarah was worried about how susceptible people were to this radicalization, especially in her small town. Especially concerning is the radicalization of children and youth by the anti-trans movement. Three interviewees had specifically been targeted by teenagers and young adults in offline settings.

These examples of radicalization fit within “culture warfare”<sup>9</sup>. Culture warfare includes:

- Polarization, which means groups are built up and pitted against other groups
- Framing issues in a moral way to then argue that one side is right and the other is wrong
- Using an us versus them mentality, where the other side is demonized
- Using emotionally charged symbols and issues to represent broader ideological conflicts.



## Media & information

The anti-trans movement leverages media and communications in a variety of ways to wage cultural warfare<sup>9</sup>. The anti-trans movement uses social media to achieve its goals through coordinated and uncoordinated attacks<sup>9</sup>. The majority (19) of our interviewees reported on this, and we identified more cases in the media scan. Some specific tactics include:

- Maliciously reporting social media content (related or unrelated to trans issues) or attempting to get a trans-affirming social media account shut down
- Dogpiling, which means flooding social media with critical or hateful comments
- Doxing, which is exposing identifying information about an activist or trans affirming professional
- Malicious cross-posting, for example sharing trans-affirming TikTok videos to Twitter with the intention to engage in hate
- Bigger accounts riling up their social media followers
- Phishing, so attempting to deceive people and organizations into revealing sensitive information.

The anti-trans movement also uses traditional media, as reported by nine interviewees and prior research<sup>9,10</sup>. This includes articles, opinion pieces, and news broadcasts appearing in right-wing media spaces such as Rebel News, True North, and Fox News. However, this also includes pushing anti-trans rhetoric, misinformation, and disinformation in more mainstream media outlets, such as click-bait investigations into detransition or sensationalist op-eds about trans women incarcerated in women's prisons.

Ten interviewees discussed the spreading of misinformation and disinformation. Coordinated disinformation campaigns rely on algorithms to spread through social media, print media, online forums, and news broadcasts<sup>6</sup>. Popular topics include disinformation about trans identities, rights, and healthcare<sup>6</sup>. Also, "propagandists use grains of truth and polarization to manipulate public opinion"<sup>9</sup>. Two interviewees identified specific cases of disinformation through flyers, such as one promoting a fake BDSM story hour for children. Service Provider F was targeted under the pretense that they sold sex toys to children. The media scan also revealed that a right-wing outlet repeatedly misrepresented results from a poll to legitimize its stance.

Unfortunately, disinformation has real consequences: it increases distrust of traditional sources of information while also helping anti-trans individuals feel a sense of community towards each other<sup>9</sup>. As interviewees pointed out, misinformation and disinformation are also changing laws and affecting sexual health education in schools.

A tactic related to disinformation is to limit accurate information on queer and trans issues, like banning books from schools and libraries or limiting gender and sexual education in schools<sup>5</sup>. For example, third-party sexual education providers like Planned Parenthood were banned from schools in Saskatchewan in 2023. From now on, only teachers can provide education on these topics.

**Misinformation:**  
spreading wrong information

**Disinformation:**  
intentionally spreading wrong information



## Institutional tactics

### What is Policy 713?

Policy 713 set out standards over how schools would create a safer environment for 2S/ LGBTQIA students in New-Brunswick. It was adopted in 2020. However, in May 2023, an ad promoting this policy caught the public's attention and sparked outrage.

This backlash led to the policy being changed in August 2023, in a way that compromises trans youths' safety and autonomy. Now, schools will seek parental consent before respecting youth's new name or pronouns, if they are younger than 16<sup>23</sup>.

A range of institutional tactics were identified by half (11) the interviewees and in the media scan. The first type is regular people using institutional channels. For example, a flood of grievances was filed against the New Brunswick Ministry of Education over Policy 713. A journalistic investigation identified over 600 pages of letters, phone recordings, and emails filed against the Ministry; only four of these pages were filed before this policy sparked widespread outrage<sup>23</sup>.

Other ways regular people use institutional channels as part of the anti-trans movement is by writing to their elected officials and petitioning<sup>22</sup>. In Quebec, one petition against public funds going towards drag story hours got over 23,000 signatures. Four interviewees also spoke of citizens co-opting assemblies like schoolboard meetings, parent-teacher events, and townhalls to bring up anti-trans talking points, and even running for a schoolboard position by using an anti-trans platform. Some complaints were also filed directly against five interviewees for their activism or work. Some anti-trans activists also contacted a funding agency to try to cancel an organization's funding.

Some of these tactics fall under anti-trans lobbying, which means trying to change public policy to reduce trans people's rights<sup>6</sup>. For example, lobbying against anti-discrimination legislation, against legislation that provides healthcare to trans youth, or against legislation that protects trans folks who wish to participate in sports in a way that matches their identity<sup>24</sup>.

Another type of tactic is professionals using their institutions to harm trans people. Because her organization advocated for trans-affirming policy changes at her university, Hale was repeatedly targeted by professionals within the university setting. These professionals retaliated against her activism by using institutional means: she was sent a formal warning letter, was investigated, and was even discriminated against while applying for a paid position. Hiring anti-trans academics for speaking engagements or long term positions<sup>12</sup> is another way this tactic is deployed.

The last type of institutional tactic is big and small institutions pulling their weight to support of the anti-trans movement. On a small scale, it can be an organization writing an anti-trans public statement:

**“And then [local church] put out a huge statement. Like saying like they do not support the trans community, don't support the 2S/LGBT none of it.” -Mia**





## What is the notwithstanding clause?

In Canada, federal and provincial governments have a responsibility to uphold human rights. However, they can sometimes override this responsibility by using the “notwithstanding clause”. This clause allows governments to do things that violate human rights, for up to five years, without getting challenged in court<sup>33</sup>.

## Protests

Another example is schools obtaining “Family Friendly” certification to state they are anti-choice and protecting children from indoctrination<sup>22</sup>.

On a big scale, governments have been pulling their weight in support of the anti-trans movement. For example, the Quebec government has been funding a known TERF organization since 2019, to the tune of \$143,000 in 2022-2023 alone<sup>25</sup>. In December 2023, the same government allocated \$800,000 to a “wise persons committee” tasked with reflecting on gender identity. The three wise persons are cis people, some with TERF ties<sup>26</sup>.

Another example is governments changing policy and laws in ways that expose trans people to harm, for example with bathroom bills<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, the backlash against and change to Policy 713 inspired provincial governments across the country to follow suit. Similar changes became an election issue in Manitoba in September; Saskatchewan passed its Parents Bill of Rights in October; while Alberta announced upcoming policy changes in January 2024. The use of the notwithstanding clause is an especially harmful way the Saskatchewan government pulled its weight in support of the anti-trans movement.

Protests are a common tactic used by the anti-trans movement, as discussed by almost two thirds (14) of our participants. These protests range from a handful of anti-trans protestors to thousands, the most notable being the nation-wide 1 Million March 4 Children which happened in Fall 2023.

Participants identified several rallying points for anti-trans protestors:

- Against Pride and Pride events
- Against the inclusion of trans women and transfeminine people in gendered spaces
- Against drag story hours
- Against professionals supporting trans youth
- Against teaching or sharing information about gender or sexuality
- In support of school policies protecting parental rights.

Anti-trans protests discussed by participants happened in many locations, including:

- Schools and schoolboards
- Government buildings like city hall and the provincial legislature
- Elected officials’ houses
- Highway overpasses
- Public libraries
- Civic centers and sports events
- Galas
- Queer-owned businesses
- In theirs or their organization’s neighborhood, including queer neighborhoods

Specific tactics are used during anti-trans protests. These include interfering with people’s access to trans- or queer-affirming events; promoting hateful messages; and filming themselves as propaganda<sup>27</sup>.




## Violence

Anti-trans protestors will also specifically use intimidation tactics, like trying to scare people into not attending a trans- or queer-affirming event, filming interactions with pro-trans protestors, and trying to provoke attendees into confrontation<sup>27</sup>. Three participants identified additional intimidation tactics like “shouting obscenities” and slurs, getting “in your face very close, a lot of screaming, like a lot of anger” and forming groups to follow counter-protestors as they leave (Ken, Anric, and Z).

The anti-trans movement also relies on violence, which more than half (13) of our interviewees reported. It would make sense that the anti-trans movement would use violence against trans people and trans-affirming organizations to advance their own goals.

Vandalism targeting their organizations, local trans-affirming businesses, Pride crosswalks, and individuals’ own homes came up in 5 interviews. This included hateful graffiti, wrecking Pride decorations, breaking windows, and in two cases leaving dead animals’ remains.

Trans people are especially at risk of harassment. In the Trans PULSE study<sup>28</sup>, 34% of participants reported having been verbally threatened or harassed (n=433). The majority (19) of our interviewees experienced at least one form of hateful communication and half (11) reported verbal harassment: Hateful communication and verbal harassment include:


- 
- Malicious questions and debating transness
  - Hateful messages, emails, letters, phone calls, and face-to-face rants or even yelling
  - Use of slurs and hate speech<sup>13</sup>
  - Invalidating trans people’s gender, including through misgendering
  - Weaponizing people’s image by filming them or taking their picture without consent
  - Sharing videos of gore
  - Encouraging individuals to commit suicide<sup>13</sup>

Threats were made against ten participants, their children, and their organizations, including:

- Death threats
- Invitations to put their kids up for adoption and threats to call in child protective services
- Rape threats
- Gun threats

Vaguer threats also came up in the media scan, such as anti-trans attackers stating they know where the person lives and when they’re home.

Five participants also reported physical harassment like getting followed or street harassed by anti-trans individuals (experienced by two), trans students getting harassed at school (reported by two), and protestors showing up at an elected official’s house (reported by one). Street harassment also came up in the media scan.



Assault is unfortunately used as a tactic by the anti-trans movement. In the Trans PULSE project, 20% of participants reported being physically or sexually assaulted for being trans<sup>28</sup>. Four of our participants reported experiencing or witnessing assault especially at protests, such as grabbing, punching, pushing, or hitting. Assault, armed assault, and assault against police officers in the context of protests were also reported in the media scan. The most brutal case of assault we identified was the stabbing of a gender studies professor and two students at the University of Waterloo in June 2023.

Lastly, murder of trans people may be used as an anti-trans tactic. One recent study<sup>5</sup> investigated patterns of anti-trans rhetoric, anti-trans legislation, and fatal violence against trans people in the United States, from 2015 to 2022. The authors found that all three aspects increased over this period and were correlated with each other. This means we can't (yet) prove that anti-trans rhetoric and laws cause anti-trans people to murder trans folks, but there is highly concerning evidence.

## Intersectional tactics

The anti-trans movement relies on other forms of hate to inform its tactics. One way is by using transmisogyny. For example, deliberately excluding trans women and transfeminine people from women-only spaces<sup>29</sup>. Another example is last year's boycott of Hershey chocolate bars, after a Canadian trans woman was featured in the campaign<sup>30</sup>.

The intersection between transphobia and racism also came up in seven interviews. Four participants reported that anti-trans attackers had used Nazi language and imagery. Racist and antisemitic slurs and language were also used against or witnessed by two participants, as well as one researcher<sup>13</sup>. Three racialized trans activists suspected they were specifically targeted based on the intersection of transphobia and racism:

**“I was being harassed as a trans woman, I was being harassed as a person of color, like, you know.” -Hale**

The above quote from Hale also highlights the intersection of transmisogyny and racism. This is unfortunately unsurprising as one study<sup>31</sup> found that 45.8% of trans women reported having experienced transphobic hate crimes, and participants' race or ethnicity affected the type of hate crime experienced (n=629). In that study, Black and Latina trans women were at the highest risk of experiencing battery with a weapon.





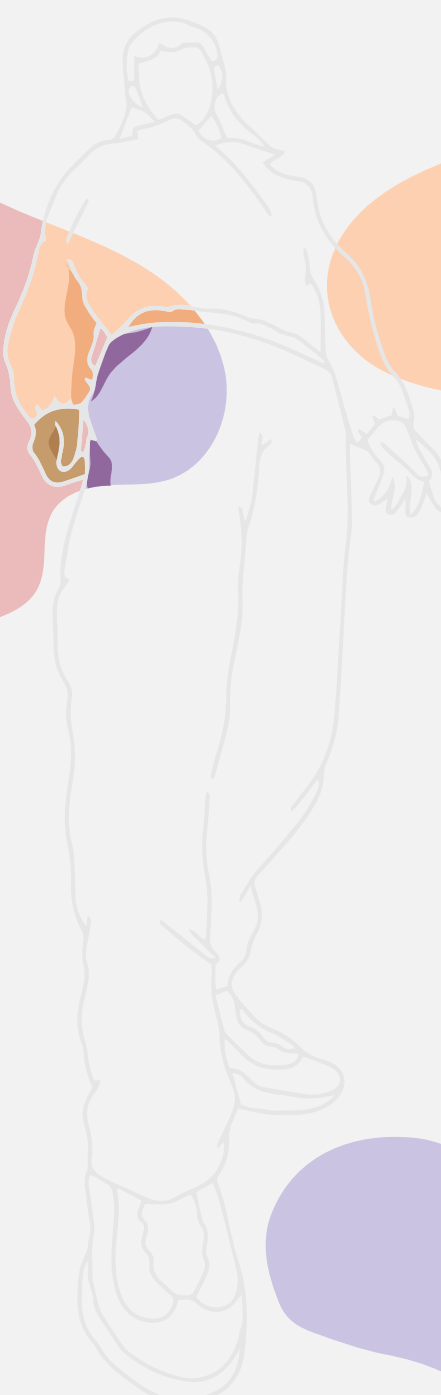
## How the anti-trans movement is affecting us

### Effects on individuals

The majority (19) of interviewees experienced emotional effects from being targeted by the anti-trans movement, either as individuals or as members of trans-affirming organizations. The most common emotional effect was fear (nine). This included the fear of losing their job and of child protective services intervening. One in three participants (eight) also reported PTSD-like symptoms like feeling traumatized, triggered, hypervigilant, and agoraphobic. Five participants felt angry or frustrated. Four participants reported anxiety and panic attacks, while four felt discouraged or disappointed. These experiences also made four participants either feel a sense a responsibility towards the trans community or question the responsibility they'd taken on. Other emotions that came up in three interviews or less were: complicated emotions, feeling upset and unsafe, distrust, guilt, helplessness, hurt, and worry. These negative experiences also increased one participant's internalized transphobia:

**“I would say it definitely impacted me a lot on my mental health and like the saddest thing I feel about it is the internalized transphobia, just because all people reacted to trans people and how they, they are treating trans people, then like I intentionally I felt like if I come out as trans I would be perceived as othered and I would never be loved. [...] It's definitely, it made it worse. Like how yeah, just because the environment is like that. So. How I see myself and my self-worth and my, my confidence has definitely been impacted because of how the world is treating trans people.” -JoJo**

Some (six) participants experienced physical and material effects of anti-trans organizing. Two participants became a lot more visible suddenly. Two racialized trans activists experienced blowback at their job or while seeking employment, compromising their material safety. One participant's insomnia got bad enough that they sought out medication. It also made access to healthcare harder for one disabled racialized trans participant and their trans child, especially since they got harassed and assaulted in the context of seeking gender-affirming care:



**“A lot of this anti-trans organizing and the rise of anti-trans sentiment is like it’s really hard to know how far your doctor is going to go for you. You know, it’s things like the gender clinic, even at [hospital] being absolute shit.” -Natasha**

Five participants also identified effects on their relationships and community. This included negative impacts on relationships with romantic partners and family, losing friends, and isolation from community. As a Chinese transmasculine person, Jojo felt isolated from the Chinese community where some anti-trans attacks they experienced originated, as well as from the trans community which is predominantly white. As a Christian non-binary person, Mia felt isolated both from the religious community which is often anti-queer and from the queer community which is often suspicious of organized religion. One participant felt like the community at large was betraying trans folks, children, and teachers by engaging in the anti-trans movement:

**“This is the community betraying the service providers, the children in the community, teachers in the schools... gender diverse people are everywhere.” -Juno**

Some racialized and disabled trans participants experienced intersectional effects, which were discussed in previous paragraphs. Two participants also discussed how navigating the anti-trans movement as someone with more or less privilege had vastly different consequences:

**“The way in which we’re antagonized, the way in which advocating as like a POC trans person and as a transfeminine person. It’s like, significantly more dangerous than for folks with like, fewer intersections.” -Hale**

Pugicorn also discussed her family's economic and educational privilege in navigating the effects of the anti-trans movement. She added that her two trans children have vastly different experiences of transness and of the anti-trans movement because one passes as cis, while the other does not.

## Effects on organizations

Most participants (17) were affiliated with trans-affirming organizations that had been targeted by the anti-trans movement, and 14 participants identified effects on their organizations.

Five participants reported effects on populations served by these trans-affirming organizations. Women's Organization A and Schoolboard A identified reduced reach on social media and reduced attendance at their events. Service Provider F's educational events were canceled by their local schoolboard. On a more positive note, Service Provider D and Queer Organization A noticed a growth in people using their services, to the tune of 400 new people for the latter. However, Wren noted frustration among clients of Service Provider D as a growth in demand for trans-affirming mental health services created longer waitlists.

There were also effects on staff. Twelve participants discussed emotional effects specific to staff like struggling to do their work and to remain professional towards attackers. As Norah noted, "it's hard because not only is it your identity, it's what you do for work, you know, like this means so much to me." Four participants also noted physical and emotional effects on staff, who are drowning and exhausted. As one person put it:

**"Every time I sit down to read about the [anti-trans] bill in order to best speak about it. It feels like it takes like a year off my life. It is exhausting. To have to be the expert on transphobia because you are a trans person." -Levi**

These effects were so detrimental that Alex resigned from Schoolboard A, while board members resigned from Queer Organization A.

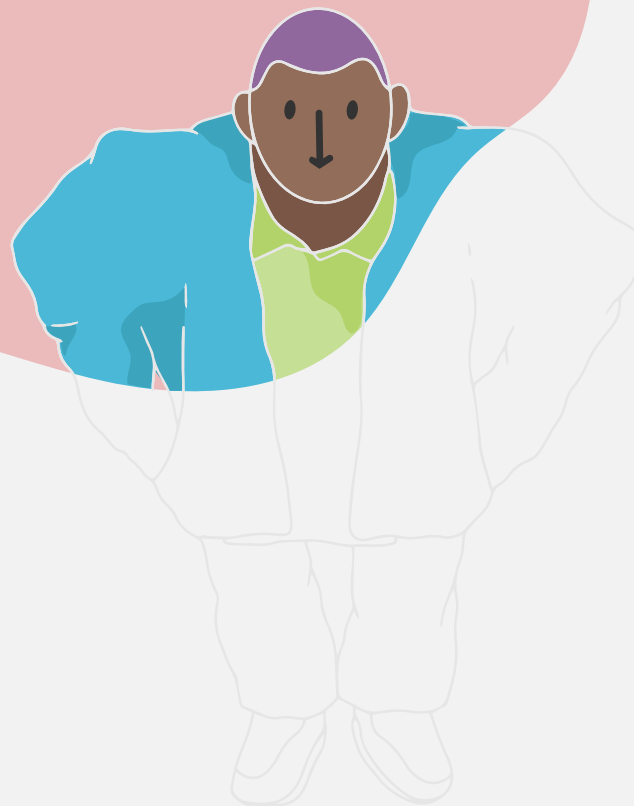
Anti-trans attacks also affected organizational capacity due to resignations, and because experiencing and responding to these attacks pulled significant time and energy away from regular tasks.

## Effects on the broader community

Anti-trans attacks affected the broader community including trans people, students, and teachers, as ten participants discussed. Eight participants reported emotional effects on community: fear (six), frustration (one), and hypervigilance (one). Emotional effects on community also came up in the media scan and prior research, particularly how constant discrimination and dehumanization may be particularly detrimental to trans youth and lead to suicidal thoughts and behaviors<sup>28</sup>.

Two participants discussed effects on accurate knowledge development and transmission within the community such as poor sexual education. Joe also discussed the risks of doing trans-affirming research and learning more about the trans community's needs, when researchers and practitioners are getting attacked for doing this work.

However, Bryn did identify a positive effect, as she had noticed a growth in organizing in her network, including teachers, educators, and parents getting more involved.



## Responding to the anti-trans movement & fighting back

### Keep fighting the good fight

Most participants (17) highlighted how they, their organization, and their community responded to anti-trans attacks by keeping up the good fight. Individuals responded by:

- Self-advocating and pushing back against complaints that were made against them
- Building up other people's hope
- Staying visible
- Coping through humor
- Experiencing growth in the way they responded to attacks

Organizations kept up the good fight in many ways:

- Maintaining and expanding services and events
- Using existing policy and reviewing policy
- Becoming more explicitly political

Five participants noted that trans staff at organizations often led the fight against and response to anti-trans attacks. However, this often involved taking on extra and even unpaid labor, like waking up early to handle social media before events. Alex and their trans colleagues were at the forefront and had to ask Schoolboard A, "Hey you know, what is this organization going to do about this to keep us safe, to keep trans people attending safe?"

Communities kept up the good fight by organizing, which half (11) of our participants discussed. This included restoring vandalized Pride crosswalks, fundraising to restore organization buildings, and canvassing campus to get people involved in mobilizations. One group of children and their parents even covered a local skating rink in chalk drawings and affirming messages the night before a counter-protest. One queer neighborhood created an art installation made from anti-drag posters to show support for drag artists.



## Mirroring anti-trans tactics

The media scan and participants highlighted fighting back against anti-trans attacks by mirroring their tactics. For example, 13 participants reported countering disinformation on an individual level, at an organization, and in the community. This tactic also came up in the media scan. This included:

- Holding a teach-in
- Developing infographics, social media content, and campaigns backed by science
- Unpacking misinformation and disinformation in conversations
- Educating students and teachers about anti-trans laws, policies, and loopholes
- Using pre-existing guides and tools
- Getting interviewed in traditional media and publishing op-eds

Eight participants also reported using institutional tactics, which also came up in the media scan. Some individual and grassroots institutional tactics were:

- Filing complaints
- Showing up to assemblies and meetings
- Engaging in letter-writing campaigns and petitions

Institutional tactics used by trans-affirming and ally organizations were:

- Issuing public statements, such as 200 women's organizations affirming their solidarity with trans women
- Challenging anti-trans policy and law through court proceedings
- Local schoolboards creating their own policy to resist anti-trans directives coming from the Ministry of Education
- Ombudspersons submitting reports condemning anti-trans policies

Institutional tactics used by governments were:

- Issuing motions condemning the anti-trans movement
- Elected officials voting against their own party to protest anti-trans decisions

Individuals and organizations were involved in planning, amplifying information about, and attending pro-trans counter-protests. This tactic came up in ten interviews and in the media scan. In some cases, there were more counter protesters than anti-trans protesters:

**“What was reported in the media then was that about 200 people showed up to counter protest. In comparison to maybe like 20-25 protesters. So they were vastly outnumbered by supporters.” -Ken**

Some tactics used by pro-trans counter-protesters included:

- Making noise to drown out anti-trans chants and speeches, ex. using instruments, pots and pans, and speaker systems
- Blocking hateful signs and creating blockades with huge fabric panels
- Having some physical altercations with protesters



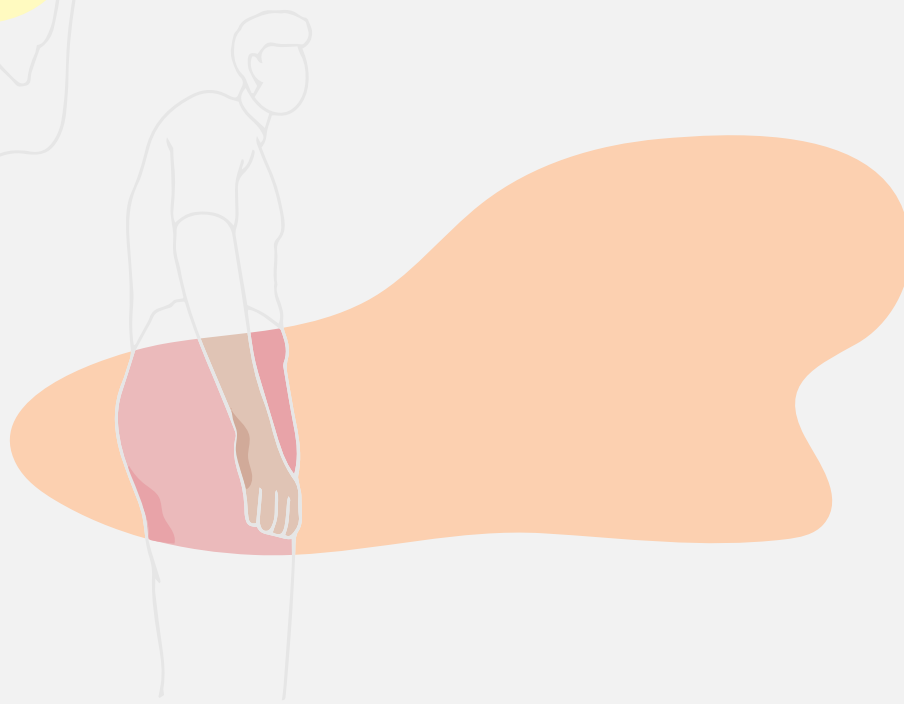
## Allies showing up

Allies fighting back against anti-trans attacks came up in six interviews. This included cis queer community members, parents, town members, religious figures, youth and labor organizations, and elected officials. This also included a city council refusing to change policy when anti-trans people invaded a meeting. One participant also reported that their white woman boss used her privilege to get legal and financial support for their Indigenous coworker who got assaulted by police at a counter-protest. Even within the trans community, people with more privilege showed up for a trans woman participant:

**“I had like a bunch of trans men standing around the rest of the day just like making sure nobody was coming back and if they did, they were gonna be mobbed by a bunch of people.”**  
-Charlotte

Levi also reported some frustration over misguided allyship. Sometimes school employees came to them to ask for guidance in responding to parents who were concerned about protecting their children. And other times, school employees came to Levi to commiserate over complaints that had been made about Levi. They concluded that allies needed to put in the work to learn some of these things on their own.

Four participants also reported ways allies failed them. For example, schoolboards and teacher unions stating they were pro-trans in private, yet never physically showing up or publicly stating this support. Another example is universities and social media platforms either not showing up, or actively harming trans people and trans-affirming organizations.





## Ensuring safety and wellbeing

### Divesting from police

Eight participants reported that they or trans-affirming organizations they'd been involved with had sought out police as a response to anti-trans attacks. Four reported police had made arrests, and in one case the attacker was even convicted of a hate crime. However, nine participants discussed how police were unhelpful in responding to anti-trans protests and violence, and this also came up in the media scan. The media scan indicated that police made arrests at protests for assault, armed assault, assault on police officers, mischief, disturbing the peace, and hateful materials. However, some of these interventions may have been aimed at pro-trans counter-protesters. Indeed, one participant noted that police response in their area was to ban both protests and counter-protests, while another reported at least one of three arrests at a recent event was against a pro-trans counter-protestor. It is especially telling that the only participant who mentioned police response in an overall positive way was a cis, straight ally whose organization did not primarily work with trans people.

In addition to being unhelpful, police are unsafe to trans communities. In the Trans Access to Justice project<sup>2</sup>, over one in five respondents experienced police harassment and violence (n=703), while this statistic came up to one in four in the Trans PULSE project<sup>28</sup> (24%). Racialized trans people and sex workers are at even higher risk of experiencing police violence. Almost half (46%) of the sex workers in the Access to Justice project had experienced police violence, as opposed to 16% among non-sex workers (19% of participants were sex workers). More than one in three (35%) Indigenous participants had experienced police violence and harassment, as opposed to 22% of non-Indigenous participants (8.7% of participants were Indigenous)<sup>2</sup>.

In the current study, six participants indicated police are unsafe to trans communities. Two participants reported witnessing police use force on pro-trans counter-protestors. One participant's Indigenous coworker, who showed up in support of a drag story time, was physically assaulted by the police. Two participants viewed the police as affiliated with the anti-trans movement. One of these expressed how unsafe that made police to racialized trans folks:

**“And there’s nothing you can do here in [city] really, if you’re racialized, and like calling the cops when you know that the cops are also in the [freedom] convoy’s pocket. And especially with a trans child in the house, like that’s just not going to happen.” -Natasha**

Because police are unsafe to trans people, Queer Organizations E and F had policies to avoid seeking out police, including by not inviting them to Pride events. Alex pushed for similar changes at Schoolboard A. At Queer Organization F, police were a last resort in pre-determined situations like gun threats, and otherwise were contacted through the non-emergency line for example when Pride crosswalks got vandalized.

Six participants instead emphasized alternatives to involving police which were used within organizations and the community:

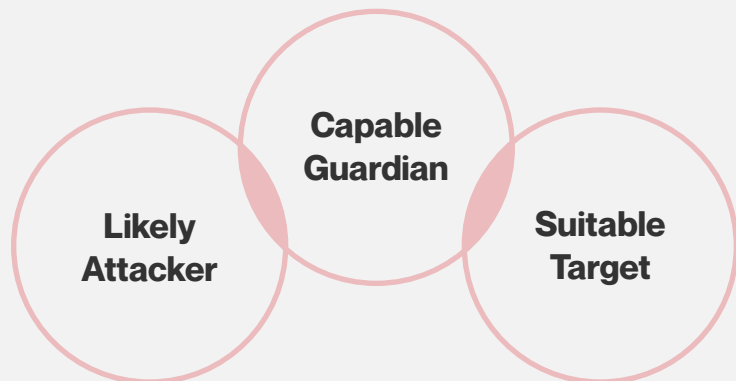
- Having people trained in de-escalation tactics circulate
- Having community members screen a building before an event
- Having more privileged people use their bodies as buffers at counter-protests
- Implementing a neighborhood watch and cop watch
- Documenting and tracking bad actors
- Advocating for the reallocation of police funds to social services
- Engaging in mutual aid and community care

## Implementing safety measures

Participants reported many means of situational prevention to ensure the safety of individuals, organizations, and the broader community.

## What is situational prevention?

Situational prevention is a concept that comes from criminology. It means states that opportunities for crimes happen in an environment where a likely attacker and a suitable target come together, in the absence of a capable guardian<sup>32</sup>.



Based on this concept, opportunities for anti-trans attacks can be reduced by changing parameters in the environment:

- Making potential targets less visible or attractive to attackers
- Discouraging potential attackers
- Having capable guardians, which often means having potential witnesses around<sup>32</sup>

Situational prevention can come across as victim-blaming when people are expected to take on the responsibility of protecting themselves from crimes and other attacks. To be clear, being attacked is never a victim's fault. However, using prevention measures can help community members feel a lot safer and reduce the harms they experience if attacked.

As part of situational prevention, activists, organizations, and the broader community made potential targets less attractive to attackers by being strategic about visibility. Half (11) of our participants reported ways they were intentional about visibility, for example:

- Avoiding public transit
- Pulling their trans kid out of school
- Censoring theirs or their kid's online presence
- Limiting their organization's visibility on social media
- Having boundaries around privacy
- Removing themselves from harmful situations

Four participants reported implementing measures to protect staff's identity and personal information at their organizations. Two participants also discussed the importance of protecting theirs and their peers' identities at counter-protests.

Similarly, participants made themselves into unattractive targets by being strategic about language. Individuals and organizations were very strategic about the terminology they used to make sure they weren't attracting unwanted attention. For example, Queer Organization E pushed to remove the mention of vaginal dilators from a health insurance policy change. Women's Organization A also chose to be strategic about language by saying "Pride" instead of 2S/LGBTQIA because this term is less politically charged.

Others means of situational prevention are summarized in table 3.



**Table 3**  
**Ways to improve safety through situational prevention**

Where	Reported by	How
At home	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting a big dog</li> <li>• Using a home camera</li> <li>• Carrying non-lethal weapons for self-defence</li> <li>• No longer hosting events</li> </ul>
At the organization	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlling access to services, staff, events, and social media               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Letting calls go to voicemail</li> <li>- Being an appointment-only service</li> <li>- Being strategic about publicizing events</li> <li>- Having a receptionist</li> <li>- Registering and screening attendees or members</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Improving tech               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving cybersecurity and the security system</li> <li>- Installing a video-recording doorbell</li> <li>- Staff having work phones</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In buildings               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Installing a shatterproof window</li> <li>- Entering through the back entrance</li> <li>- Using the buddy system</li> <li>- Keeping the door locked</li> <li>- Removing anti-trans people from the premises</li> <li>- Strategically choosing organization and event locations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Being prepared               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Doing safety planning before events</li> <li>- Following safety training</li> <li>- Designating someone to get children away from harmful situations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
In the community	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At counter-protests               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having safety teams</li> <li>- Using the buddy system</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In general               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cancelling their own events when the risk is too high</li> <li>- Removing anti-trans people from protests and pushing them out of town</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Outside of situational prevention, two in three participants (15) discussed the importance of being strategic about engaging with anti-trans individuals. This was the case in person but especially online, both for individuals and organizations. Participants agreed that engaging was only worthwhile when questions or comments that seemed inappropriate or offensive at first glance were made in good faith. Otherwise, they reported and screenshotted comments and blocked attackers on social media; hung up the phone; and ignored hate mail. One reason for this was to not give legitimacy to harmful rhetoric, but also to protect community members who might see hateful comments online.

## Care and support

Half (11) of our participants responded to anti-trans attacks by practicing self-care and leaning on community. This included taking breaks, remembering these attacks are not our fault, and knowing and setting boundaries. Self-care includes leaning on others such as seeking support from friends, loved ones, and mental health professionals. As the single employee at her organization, Sarah also sought support from colleagues in other organizations.

Twelve participants discussed how their organizations implemented ways to ensure staff safety and support. This included:

- Removing staff from harmful situations
- Allowing for flexibility and improving benefits
- Removing ineffective board members
- Setting clear work/life boundaries
- Giving the impression there is more staff
- Making space for emotional processing, care, and support
- Leadership protecting other staff from complaints

Unfortunately, Norah and Levi were not supported by their trans-affirming organizations and this lack of support severely affected them.


Ten participants also reported ways their organizations ensure the wellbeing of the population they served; these were covered in the previous section.

One last way community ensured wellbeing was to engage in community debriefing after counter-protests:

**“Situations where we got together and talked about things and while that doesn’t necessarily make you feel safe in the moment, once you’re together and you are all talking about it, I did feel a sense of safety there. Knowing that you know we’re all experiencing it and like oh like what did you do, this is what I did, and I didn’t find it helpful you know. And then just knowing that people were wanting to follow up. I found to make me feel a little bit safer.” -Anric**

# Recommendations

1. Participants emphasized the importance of keeping up the good fight and not backing down. They also highlighted the importance of allies and ally organizations joining the fight.
  - a. We ask systems and institutions to join us as allies in this fight, and to obtain meaningful and ongoing training to ensure accountability in interactions with our community.
2. As a research team, we wish to reiterate the importance of divesting from police in responding to anti-trans attacks. Police are unsafe to trans people, especially to those of us who experience multiple intersections. We strongly encourage trans-affirming organizations to review their policies accordingly.
  - a. We recommend that governments intentionally (re)direct meaningful funding to community organizations that work with 2Spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse communities, including organizations that provide mental health services and material support.
3. All would benefit from implementing prevention measures to protect themselves and others against anti-trans attacks. By being prepared, we can minimize the consequences of these attacks on people, organizations, and community members.
4. Organizations need to step up to protect staff who are targeted.
5. We encourage relying on a diversity of tactics to effectively fight back against the anti-trans movement.
6. Future research on the anti-trans movement needs to focus on the experiences of 2Spirit and trans, non-binary, gender diverse folks who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). This research should be developed and conducted by trans BIPOC, according to decolonial and anti-racist research methodologies and principles.



“I’ve actually also been [...] deeply moved by both how much people have come together and I think the creativity and the breadth of strategies I think has been yeah, really moving but also really inspiring and that I think that’s one thing maybe I haven’t seen in other forms of activism that I’ve been a part of before.” - Bryn

As final thoughts, we’d like to remind trans people and our allies that **the anti-trans movement is an unstable coalition**. Its factions have incompatible values, which is likely to lead to in-fighting and ultimately, to this coalition’s collapse.

Similarly, we need to keep **building our own coalitions** with leftist, anti-racist, and intersectional feminist groups. These groups make us stronger as we have compatible ideologies: we all aim to improve the material conditions of oppressed groups.

**Together, we are stronger than the anti-trans movement.**



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