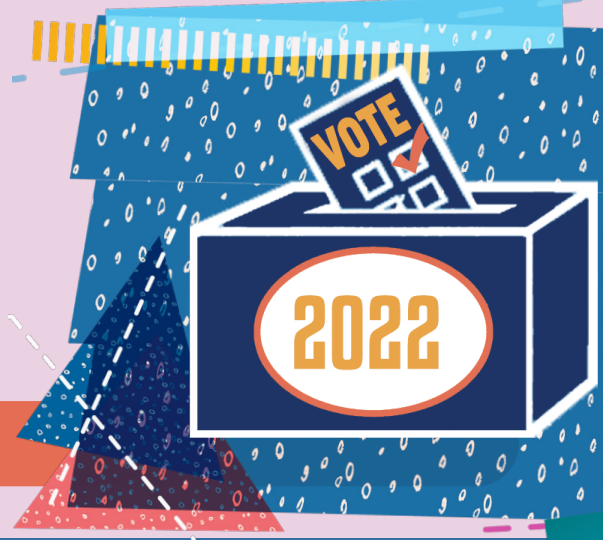


# Political Engagement Among LGBTQ Southerners

Nov. 2022



The Survey of Southern LGBTQ Experiences is a project of the Southern Equality Research & Policy Center and Campus Pride. The survey, conducted in 2021, highlights the experiences of more than 4,000 LGBTQ adults across 13 states in the US Southeast. To learn more about the survey, including our methodology, visit [www.southernequality.org/comingofagesurvey](http://www.southernequality.org/comingofagesurvey)

**This special report focuses on measures from the 2021 Survey of Southern LGBTQ Experiences related to Political Engagement Among LGBTQ Southerners.**

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### Recommended Citation

Johnson, A.H. (2022). "Political Engagement Among LGBTQ Southerners." Campaign for Southern Equality: Asheville, NC.

### Campaign for Southern Equality

works across the South to promote full LGBTQ equality – both legal and lived. Our work is rooted in commitments to empathy and to equity in race, class, and gender. [www.southernequality.org](http://www.southernequality.org)

### Campus Pride

Campus Pride is the leading national nonprofit organization dedicated to building future leaders and creating safer, more inclusive communities for LGBTQ people and allies at colleges and universities. [www.campuspride.org](http://www.campuspride.org)

[www.southernequality.org/ComingofAge](http://www.southernequality.org/ComingofAge)



# Coming of Age as an LGBTQ Southerner

## Breakout: Political Engagement Among LGBTQ Southerners

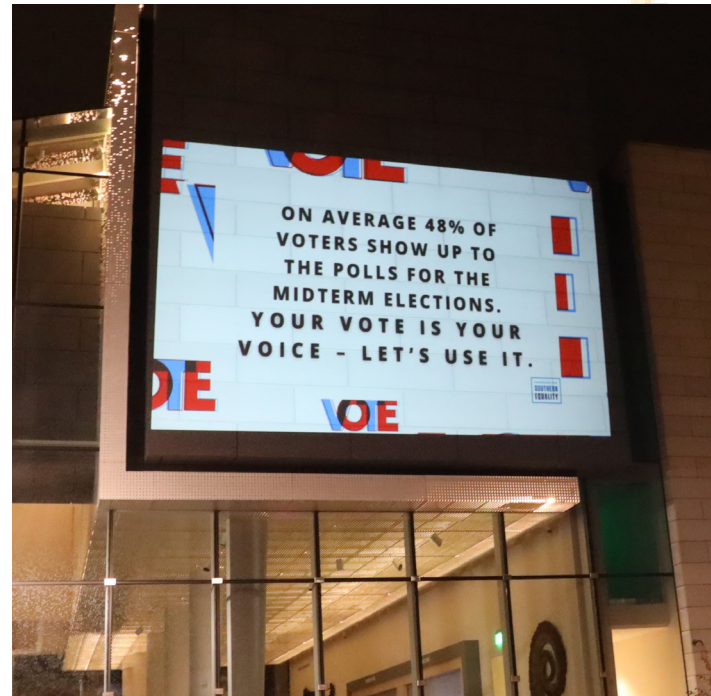
### LGBTQ Southerners

A recent Gallup Poll Social Survey<sup>1</sup> found that LGBTQ people represent nearly 7.1% of US adults, an increase from 5.6% in just two years. Population estimates suggest more than one-third of the LGBTQ community in the US resides in the Southeast (Williams Institute 2019), where they are likely to have fewer legal protections and face more anti-LGBTQ policies than their peers in other parts of the country (Harless et al. 2019; Johnson et al. 2020; Movement Advancement Project 2022). It is important to consider LGBTQ Southerner's voter registration and voting behavior, their perception of and reaction to the political climate, and their engagement with the political process beyond the ballot box.

### The LGBTQ Voting Bloc

In 2020, nearly 9 million US adults were registered and eligible to vote.<sup>2</sup> In the 2022 report, Equality Electorate,<sup>3</sup> Shoshana Goldberg and colleagues at the Human Rights Campaign and Bowling Green State University write: "LGBTQ+ Americans are projected to become one of the fastest growing voting blocs in the country, growing at a scale, scope and speed that will see LGBTQ+ voters wield significantly increased influence over electoral outcomes." Goldberg and colleagues report that LGBTQ+ voters currently account for approximately 11% of the voting eligible population in the United States. And, the authors predict that LGBTQ+ voters will represent nearly 15% of all voters by the year 2030, growing to nearly 20% by the year 2040.

Prior research from the Williams Institute suggests this voting bloc is diverse in political affiliation, race and ethnicity, age, region, and educational attainment,<sup>4</sup> yet most LGBTQ voters are motivated to vote by issues affecting social justice and human rights,<sup>5</sup> representing a powerful voting bloc for pro-equality candidates.



1 Jones, J.M. 2022. "LGBT Identification in the U.S. Ticks up to 7.1%." Gallup.com 2/17/2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>

2 Mallory, C. 2019. "The 2020 LGBT Vote: Preferences and Characteristics of LGBT Voters." UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020-LGBT-Vote-Oct-2019.pdf>.

3 Goldberg, S.K., Julian, C.A., Manning, W.D., Westrick-Payne, K.K., Wetrosky, G. 2022. Equality Electorate: The Projected Growth of the LGBTQ+ Voters in Coming Decades. Human Rights Campaign, <https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/LGBTQ-VEP-Oct-2022.pdf>

4 Mallory, *ibid.*

5 Davis, G. 2020. "GLAAD 2020 Post-Election Poll." GLAAD, 11/20/2020, <https://www.glaad.org/blog/glaad-2020-post-election-poll-81-lgbtq-voters-went-president-elect-biden-covid-19-healthcare>

# Coming of Age as an LGBTQ Southerner

## Breakout: Political Engagement Among LGBTQ Southerners

LGBTQ voters were instrumental in shifting the balance of power in key swing states where LGBTQ equality had been a point of concern, and exit polls suggest that the LGBTQ vote was decisive in key midterm elections in 2014<sup>6</sup> and in the presidential elections of Joe Biden in 2020<sup>7</sup> and of Barack Obama in 2012.<sup>8</sup> Writing for Politico, Madison Fernandez reports that the LGBTQ voting bloc may see its power increasing with the launch of Agenda PAC,<sup>9</sup> a national political action committee launched to defeat anti-LGBTQ politicians, hold elected officials accountable, and defend pro-equality officials who become targets for supporting LGBTQ rights.

### Voter ID Laws

Voter ID laws disproportionately affect transgender people who are more likely to possess identification with an incorrect photo, name or gender marker due to socioeconomic or policy-related barriers to correcting these documents.<sup>10</sup> Elderly LGBTQ people, LGBTQ people of color, and low-income LGBTQ people are also disproportionately affected by restrictive voter ID laws.<sup>11</sup> LGBTQ Southerners are more likely to live in states with strict photo identification laws that restrict access to the ballot for registered and eligible voters who do not have a driver's license, passport, or student ID card.<sup>12</sup> Of the eight states in the US with strict photo ID laws, five are located in the South: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Four other Southern states have non-strict photo ID laws, including Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas.

6 Flores, A.R. and Gates, G.J. 2014. "LGB Vote 2014." *UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute*, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zc8h-3qg>.

7 Goldberg, et al. *Ibid*.

8 Cohen, M. 2012. "Gay Vote Proved a Boon for Obama." *The New York Times*, 11/15/2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/16/us/politics/gay-vote-seen-as-crucial-in-obamas-victory.html>

9 Fernandez, M. 2022. "Report projects major growth in LGBTQ voters in coming decades." *Politico*, 10/13/22, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/13/report-projects-major-growth-in-lgbtq-voters-in-coming-decades-00061553>

10 O'Neill, K.K., Cisneros, N., Tentindo, W., Herman, J.L. 2022. "The Potential Impact of Voter Identification Law on Transgender Voters in the 2022 General Election." *UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute*, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Voter-ID-Sep-2022.pdf>.

11 Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. 2006. "Citizens Without Proof: A Survey of Americans' Possession of Documentary Proof of Citizenship and Photo Identification." [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/d/download\\_file\\_39242.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/d/download_file_39242.pdf)

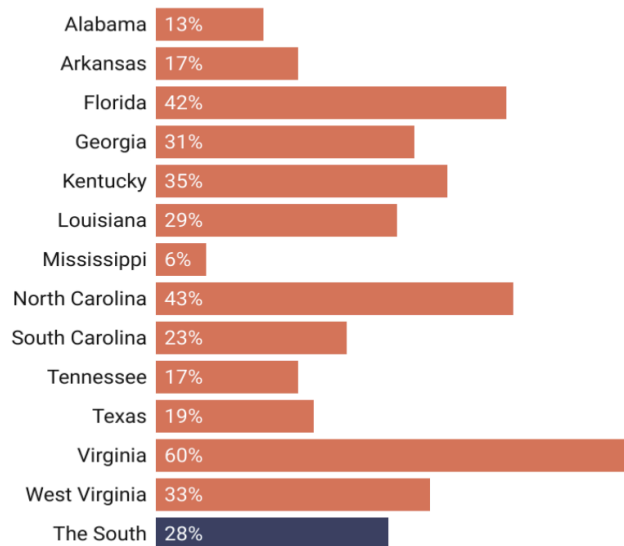
12 National Conference of State Legislatures. 2022. *Voter ID Laws*. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id.aspx>

# Voter Registration & Participation

State lawmakers continue to put forth restrictive laws and policies that determine who has access to the ballot and when, how, and where they vote. These decisions impact LGBTQ Southerners throughout the region.

Most states in the South received a low Democracy Tally from the Movement Advancement Project.<sup>13</sup> This rating is determined by a state's rates of voter registration, voter participation, election security, and other measures of participation and integrity in the electoral process. Mississippi received the lowest overall Democracy Tally of all states in the country (2.00). The highest possible Democracy Tally was 32.5. Using data from the Movement Advancement Project's Democracy Ratings by State Data Table,<sup>14</sup> we present the South's scores as percentages of the highest possible score in the figure to the right.

**Fig. PE-1. Southern states' Democracy Rating scores from the Movement Advancement Project, as percentages of the highest possible score.**



Approximately 86% of the people who participated in the Southern LGBTQ Experiences Survey are registered to vote, compared to 87% of Southerners registered to vote overall.<sup>15</sup>

In individual states across the region, the percentage of residents that indicated that they are registered to vote ranged from a low of 83% – AL, LA, MS, and VA – to a high of 89% – AR and TX.

**Fig. PE-2. “Are you currently registered to vote?” segmented by state**



<sup>13</sup> [https://www.mapresearch.org/democracy-maps/ratings\\_by\\_state](https://www.mapresearch.org/democracy-maps/ratings_by_state)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.mapresearch.org/democracy-maps/ratings\\_by\\_state/data\\_table?sortdir=asc&sort1=overall](https://www.mapresearch.org/democracy-maps/ratings_by_state/data_table?sortdir=asc&sort1=overall)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.mapresearch.org/img/maps/citations-voter-registration-rate.pdf>

# Voter Registration & Participation

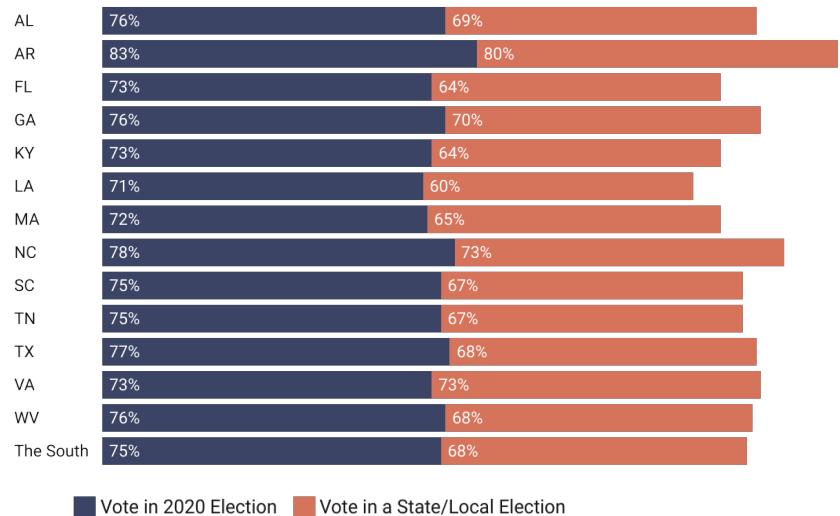
While 86% of participants indicated that they were registered to vote, 75% indicated that they voted in the 2020 election, compared to 64% of the Southerners overall turning out to vote in 2020.<sup>16</sup> LGBTQ Southerners and the general Southern electorate are registered at approximately the same rate, yet LGBTQ people appear to vote more than their heterosexual, cisgender peers in the region. Researchers from the Human Rights Campaign<sup>17</sup> report that “the 2020 General Election saw the highest proportion of voters identifying as LGBTQ+ recorded since tracking began in 1992.”

Additionally, 68% of the LGBTQ Southerners who participated in our survey indicated that they voted in a state/local election in the last four years. In the 2022 midterm election, LGBTQ+ people account for approximately 11% of the voting eligible population.<sup>18</sup>

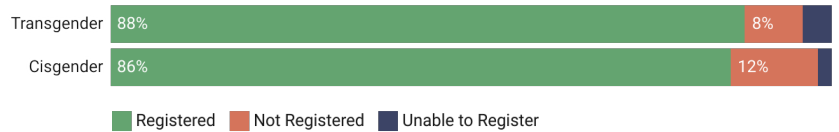
Voting behavior also varied by state, ranging from a low of 71% (LA) to a high of 83% (AR) for voting in the 2020 general election, and a low of 60% (LA) to a high of 80% (AR) for voting in a recent state/local election. In every state, except Virginia, which has the only state level Voting Rights Act in the region,<sup>19</sup> participants were less likely to indicate voting in a state/local election than in the 2020 general election.

Transgender participants were more likely than cisgender participants to be registered to vote (transgender, 88%; cisgender, 86%), to report that they were unable to register to vote (Transgender, 4%; Cisgender 2%), and to indicate voting in the 2020 general election (Trans 77%; Cis 75%) and in a recent state or local election (Trans 71%; Cis 67%).

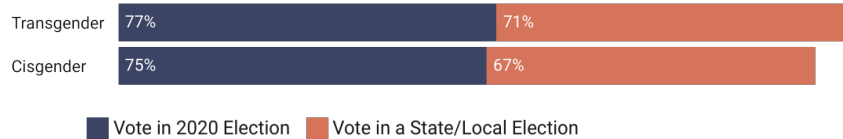
**Fig. PE-3. “Many people do not engage in political activities. In the last four years, did you (select all that apply)” – segmented by state**



**Fig. PE-4. “Are you currently registered to vote?” – segmented by cis / trans identity**



**Fig. PE-5. “Many people do not engage in political activities. In the last four years, did you (select all that apply)” – segmented by cis / trans identity**



<sup>16</sup> <https://www.mapresearch.org/img/maps/citations-voter-turnout-percentage.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Goldberg, et al. *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Goldberg, et al. *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.mapresearch.org/img/maps/citations-state-level-voting-rights-acts.pdf>

# The Political Climate

As we approach Election Day on November 8, 2022, it is important to consider some of the political and legal issues that are facing the LGBTQ community. According to the Movement Advancement Project, “the South is the most hostile LGBTQ policy landscape in the country.”<sup>20</sup> In recent years, legislators across the South have led the country in their attempts to block LGBTQ people’s access to vital resources. In many states throughout the region, lawmakers have specifically targeted LGBTQ youth, limiting their access to social support, healthcare, education, and recreation. These laws are meant to silence, stigmatize, and socially isolate a population of young people who are already disproportionately disadvantaged. In both the 2021 and 2022 legislative sessions, state lawmakers in the region set records for the most anti-LGBTQ legislation proposed in a legislative session in recorded political history.

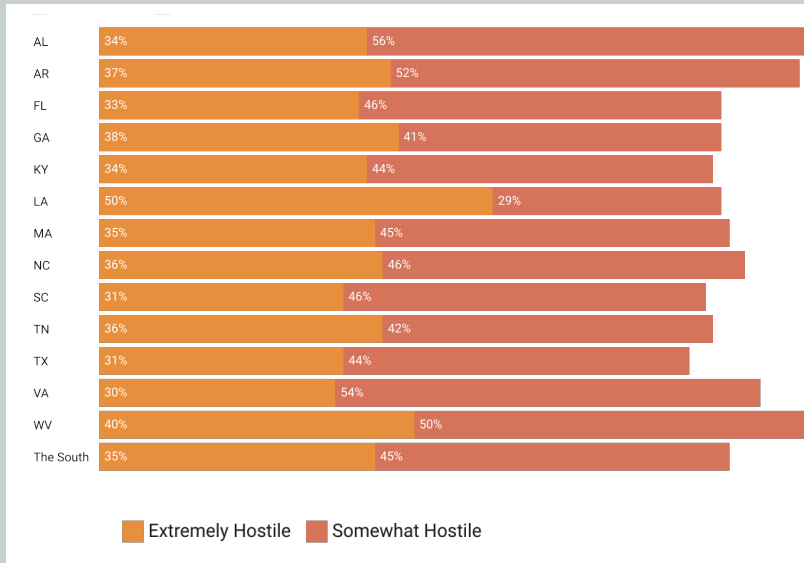
We asked participants to describe their state’s political climate toward the LGBTQ community on a scale from Extremely Supportive to Extremely Hostile. Approximately 80% of survey respondents described their state’s political climate as hostile toward the LGBTQ community, with 35% describing their state as extremely hostile and 45% describing their state as somewhat hostile.

Approximately 90% of all of the participants from West Virginia and Alabama rated their state’s local political climate as hostile toward the LGBTQ community. The state with the fewest number of participants to describe their state’s political climate as hostile toward LGBTQ community was Texas, where 75% of participants rated the state’s political climate as hostile.

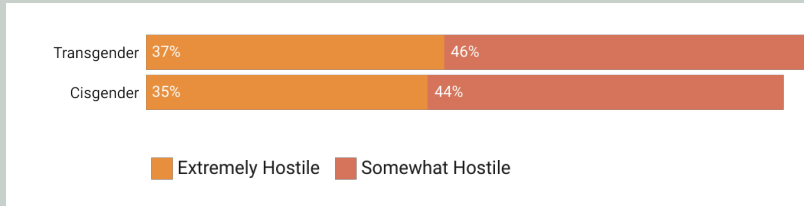
Transgender participants were more likely to describe their state’s political climate as hostile (83%) than cisgender participants (79%), but not by much.

*20 Movement Advancement Project. May 2020. LGBTQ Policy Spotlight: Mapping LGBTQ Equality in the U.S. South. [www.lgbtmap.org/regional-south-tally](http://www.lgbtmap.org/regional-south-tally)*

**Fig. PE-6. “How would you describe the political climate in your state toward the LGBTQ+ community?” – segmented by state**



**Fig. PE-7. “How would you describe the political climate in your state toward the LGBTQ+ community?” – segmented by cis / trans identity**

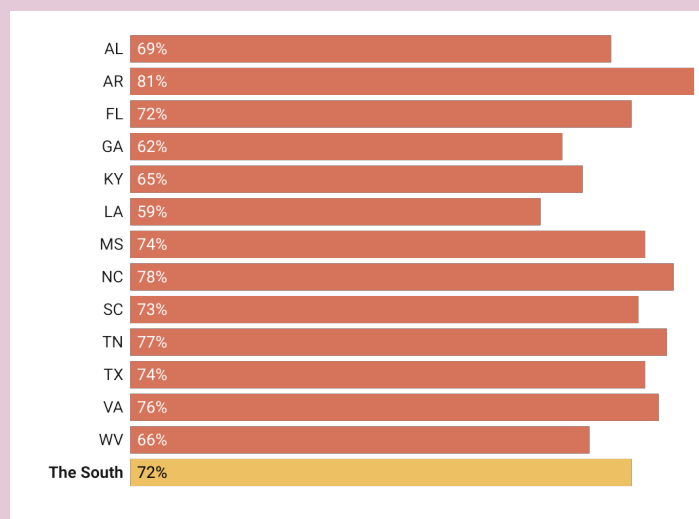


# Impact of the Political Climate

As discussed above, conservative majority state legislatures in the region have pushed through numerous anti-LGBTQ policies in recent years. Survey participants indicated a high awareness of these legislative attacks. Approximately 72% of the people who participated in the survey indicated that they were aware of legislation or other policies proposed at the state and local level that would impact the LGBTQ+ community. The percentage of participants who indicated an awareness of these policies differed by state, ranging from a low of 59% (LA) to a high of 81% (AR).

Transgender participants were more likely than cisgender participants to indicate an awareness of these policies (Trans 78%; Cis 69%). This is likely related to the content of the bills, as the bills disproportionately target trans youth and young adults.

**Fig. PE-8. Percentage of respondents who responded “yes” to “Are you aware of legislation and other policies proposed at the state and local level that would impact the LGBTQ+ community?” – segmented by state**



**Fig. PE-9. Percentage of respondents who responded “yes” to “Are you aware of legislation and other policies proposed at the state and local level that would impact the LGBTQ+ community?” – segmented by cis / trans identity**

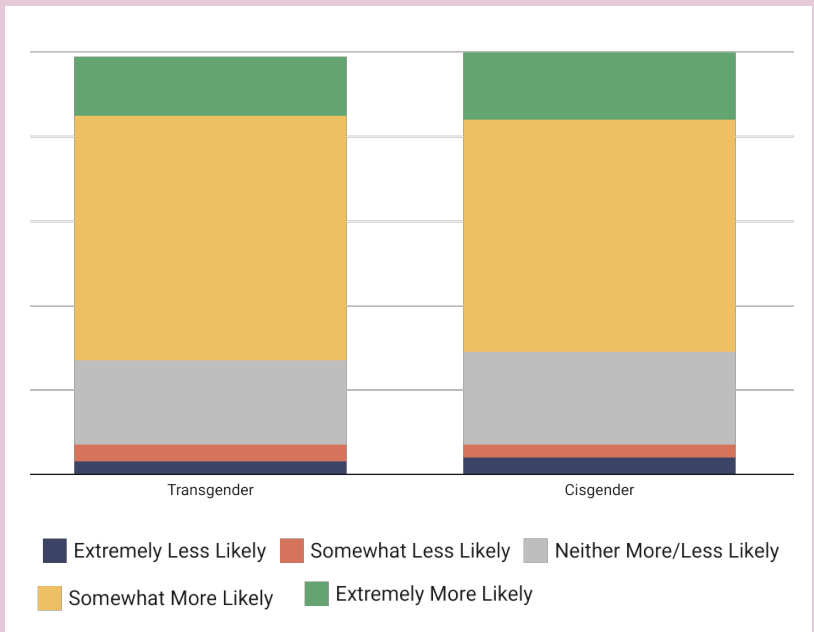


# Impact of the Political Climate

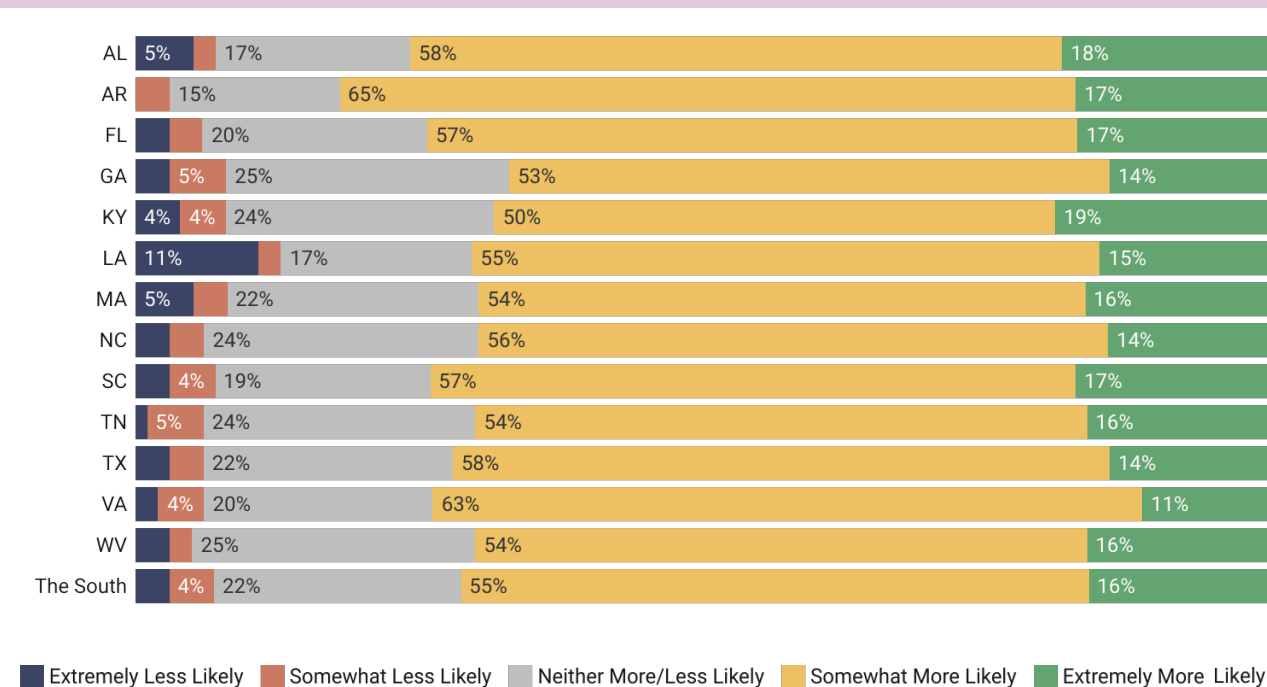
For 72% of participants, the proposal of policies and other legislation impacting the LGBTQ+ community makes them more likely to vote in state and local elections. Of all participants, 56% indicated that these proposals make them somewhat more likely to vote, and 16% indicated that these proposals make them extremely more likely to vote. While there was some variation across states, 67% of participants from GA (the state with the indicated impact) reported that these policies made them more likely to vote. The state with the highest indicated impact was AR, where 82% of participants indicated that these policies increased their likelihood of voting.

Transgender and cisgender respondents reported that these proposals make them more likely to vote at about the same rate (Trans 72%; Cis 71%).

**Fig. PE-9. Do proposed policies and other legislation impacting the LGBTQ+ community make you more or less likely to vote in state and local elections? – segmented by cis / trans identity**



**Fig. PE-9. Do proposed policies and other legislation impacting the LGBTQ+ community make you more or less likely to vote in state and local elections?**





# Political Efficacy

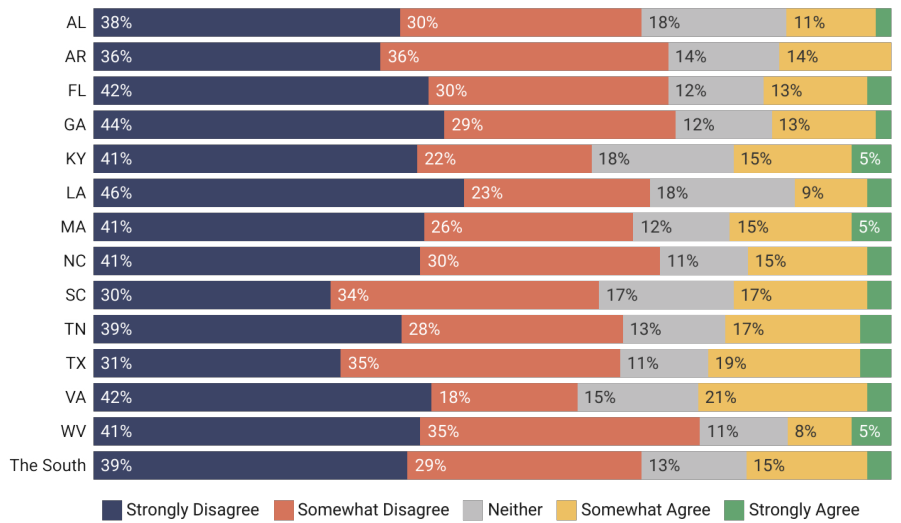
Political efficacy refers to the feeling that you are able to influence politics. To measure political efficacy, we asked participants two questions.

We first asked, do you agree that public officials care what people like you think? Approximately 68% of all participants disagreed, with 39% strongly disagreeing and 29% somewhat disagreeing. Participants from West Virginia (76%) were most likely to disagree with this statement.

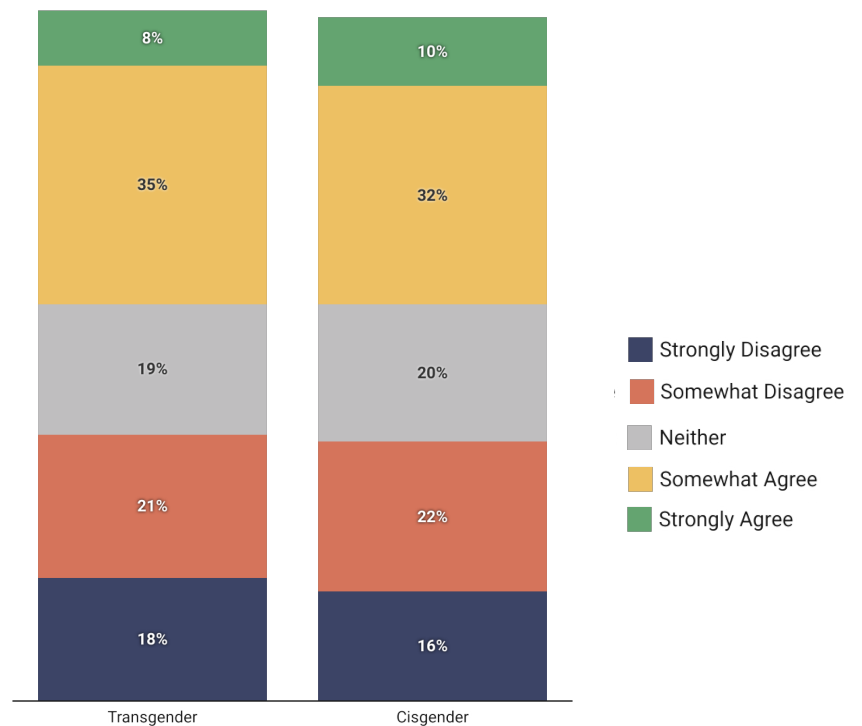
We then asked, do you agree that people like you affect what the government does? Of all participants, only 43% agreed that people like them affect what the government does, with 10% indicating that they strongly agree and 33% indicating that they somewhat agree.

Transgender and cisgender respondents disagreed that public officials care what people like them think at similar rates. Like their responses to the first measure of political efficacy, transgender and cisgender respondents gave similar responses to this question. Interestingly, participants from West Virginia (46%), alongside TN (46%) and AR (46%) were also the most likely to indicate that they agree that people like them affect what the government does.

**Fig. PE-6. “Do you agree that public officials care what people like you think?” – segmented by state**



**Fig. PE-7. “Do you agree that people like you affect what the government does?” – segmented by cis / trans identity**



# Participation Beyond the Ballot Box

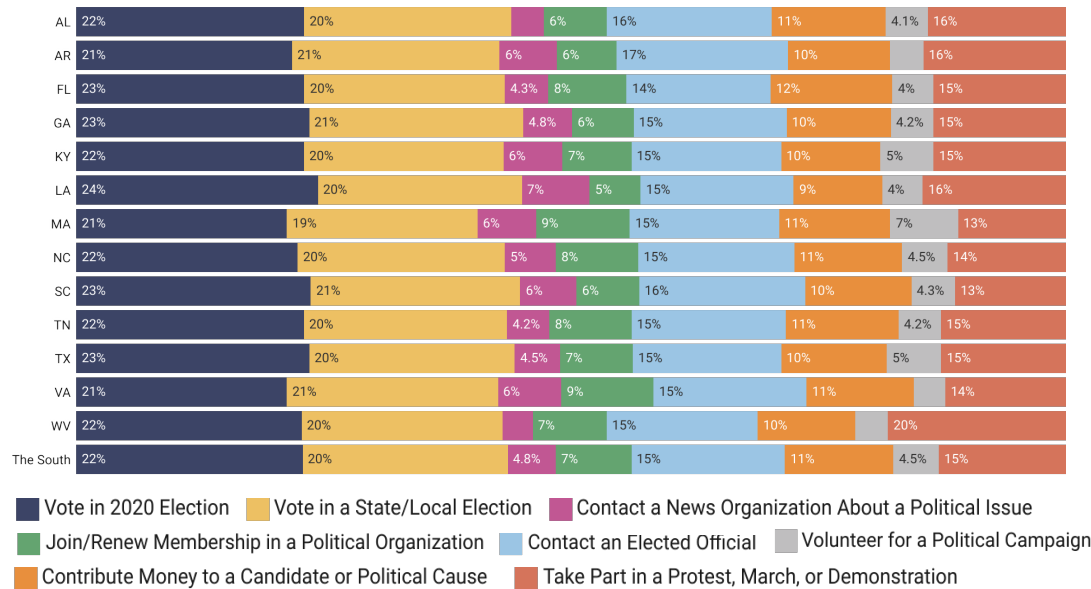
LGBTQ Southerners are politically active well beyond the ballot box. To measure political activity, we asked participants if they had engaged in a variety of political activities over the last four years. Responses to the survey indicate a high turnout for LGBTQ Southerners in the 2020 election, as well as in state and local elections (as discussed above).

The results also indicate that LGBTQ Southerners are making sure their voices are heard on political issues by contacting news organizations about political issues (16%), contacting their elected officials (51%), and participating in protests, marches, or demonstrations (50%).

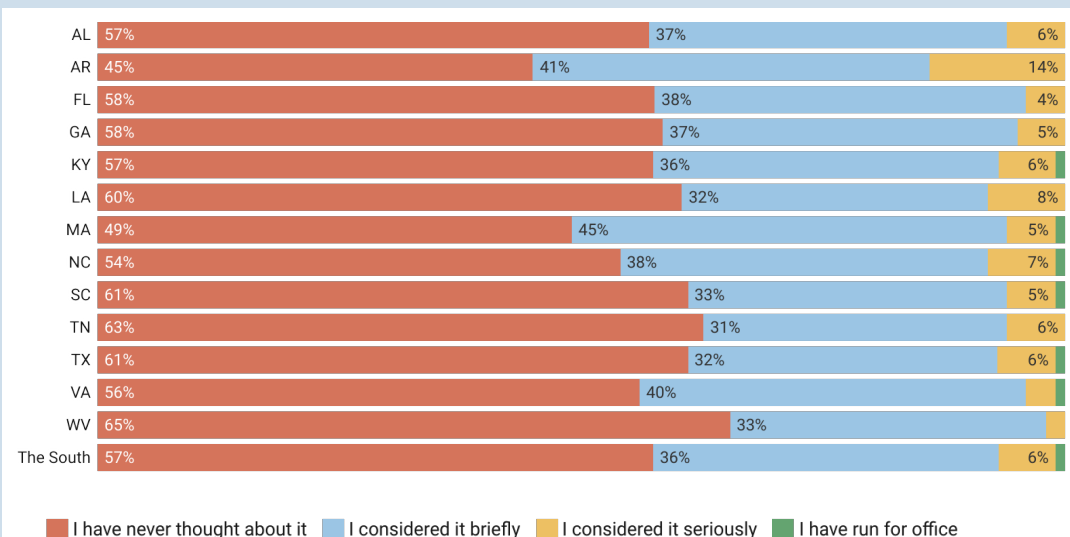
Among the LGBTQ Southerners who responded to our survey, 25% indicated that they had joined or renewed membership in a political organization, 36% indicated that they had contributed money to a candidate or political cause, and 15% indicated that they had volunteered for a political campaign.

Of the LGBTQ Southerners who responded to our survey, 42% indicated that they have considered running for office themselves. In Arkansas (55%) and Mississippi (50%), respondents were mostly likely to consider running for office. Participants from West Virginia (35%) were least likely to consider seeking an elected position.

**Fig. PE-6. “Many people do not engage in political activities. In the last four years, did you (select all that apply)” – segmented by state**



**Fig. PE-7. “Have you ever thought about running for elected office?” – segmented by state**



# Recommendations

## on Political Engagement for LGBTQ Southerners

Political engagement from LGBTQ Southerners and their allies is essential to ensuring that our community's concerns are represented at every level of government, and that our community is able to organize an effective voting bloc, thus maximizing our political will in order to achieve full legal equality. We must exercise our right to vote, select candidates who will stand up for us in state and national legislatures, and fight to eradicate anti-LGBTQ bias in our laws and policies.

**Let's maximize the political power of LGBTQ Southerners. Here are some recommendations:**

- ▶ **Vote in every single election** – primaries as well as local, state, and federal. Your vote counts regardless of your age, income, education, race, gender, or sexual orientation.
- ▶ **Encourage your friends, family members, and neighbors to vote in every single election.** You can help them get registered, find their polling place, and make sure their vote counts by visiting: <https://whenweallvote.org>.
- ▶ **Use social media to follow and share information** about politicians, political organizations, advocacy groups, and issues you care about, including officials' public stances on LGBTQ issues, national and state legislation impacting the LGBTQ community, and LGBTQ-related legal cases.
- ▶ **Reach out to your state, local, and national legislators** to ask where they stand on issues impacting the LGBTQ community. You can find their phone numbers and emails on their websites.
- ▶ **Find ways to get engaged in the political system.** Support LGBTQ politicians and leaders who will fight for LGBTQ political empowerment. Many political campaigns use volunteers to help register voters, contact potential voters, and host campaign events.
- ▶ **Discuss out LGBTQ politicians with friends and family** to raise awareness for their campaigns and to normalize LGBTQ political representation.
- ▶ **Recognize historical and ongoing anti-LGBTQ discrimination in politics.** Acknowledge how this discrimination disenfranchises citizens and reduces trust in the government.
- ▶ **Attend town hall and city council meetings.** Get active in local politics. And, make sure you and your neighbors are informed on the issues affecting your communities.
- ▶ **Write and sign petitions** regarding the protection and empowerment of the LGBTQ community. Activate stakeholders in your local communities.
- ▶ **Vote with your dollar.** Be conscious of where you spend your money. Some companies and corporations donate to anti-LGBTQ politicians, others contribute to initiatives that benefit the LGBTQ community.



# Other Resources

## **DEMOCRACY MAPS • MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT**

Get to know the south's political landscape, state by state, so that you can stay up to date on issues that affect the impact of LGBTQ voters.

[https://www.mapresearch.org/democracy-maps/ratings\\_by\\_state](https://www.mapresearch.org/democracy-maps/ratings_by_state)

## **LGBTQ LEGISLATIVE TRACKER • FREEDOM FOR ALL AMERICANS**

Stay up to date on all legislation related to LGBTQ discrimination

<https://freedomforallamericans.org/legislative-tracker/>

## **LGBTQ POLITICAL CANDIDATES • LGBTQ VICTORY FUND**

Get to know the LGBTQ leaders who are running for office in your district and in districts around the country.

<https://victoryfund.org/our-candidates/>

## **FIND YOUR BALLOT • HEADCOUNT**

Use your address to find out who is running and where they stand on the issues, and to read about the measures you will be voting for or against on election day.

<https://www.headcount.org/your-ballot/>

## **QUEER THE VOTE • NATIONAL LGBTQ TASK FORCE**

Connect with other LGBTQ voters and volunteers to promote participation in the 2022 midterms and encourage mobilization for pro-equality candidates.

<https://www.thetaskforce.org/queerthevote>

## **TRANSFORM THE VOTE • NATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSGENDER EQUALITY**

Access resources related to voting while trans in the US so that you have all of the information you need on election day.

<https://transformthevote.org/voting>

## **VOTE WITH PRIDE • GLAAD**

Add your name to the list of LGBTQ people who have taken the pledge to vote in the 2022 midterms, and access resources to make sure you are prepared to cast your ballot.

<https://www.glaad.org/vote>