Affirming Trans Rights: Oppression and Resiliency in LGBTQ Digital Activism

The Influence of Social Media Moderation on Trans Activists
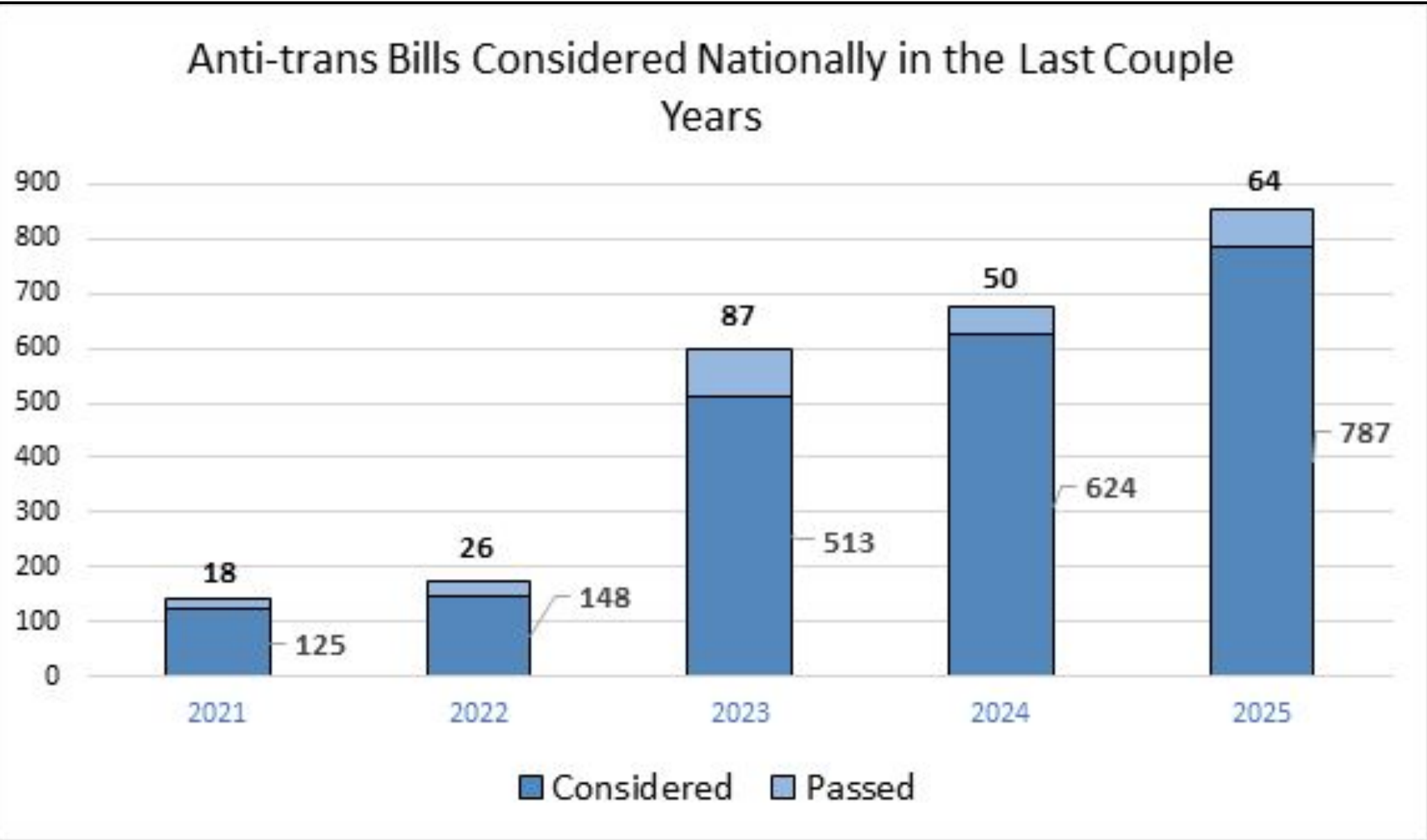
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Works Cited

Methodology

- Analysis of Project 2025
  - Defunding programs promoting "gender ideology"
  - "Divisive concepts" legislation
- Executive Orders (EO) in U.S
  - EO 14168: Only recognizing two sexes
  - EO 13985: "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling"
  - EO 14187: "Protecting Children From Chemical and Surgical Mutilation"
- Court cases in the U.S.
  - Bridge v. Oklahoma State Department of Education
- Close Reading of Scholarly Works and Case Studies

Anti-trans Bills Considered Nationally in the Last Couple Years

Year	Passed	Considered
2021	18	125
2022	26	148
2023	87	513
2024	50	624
2025	64	787

"2025 Anti-Trans Bills: Trans Legislation Tracker."

Social Media's Role in Community

Social media allows marginalized groups to challenge the status quo

- Promote artists with intersectional messages
- Destigmatize mental and physical health and economic inequalities
- Create community across age groups
- Acceptance through visibility and platforms
- Social media can sometimes lead to a deeper involvement with politics, depending on use

What makes social media different?

- Disrupts the role of traditional media
- Connects general population with politicians, potential influence on government
- Attracts attention rather than achieving specific goals
- Risks excluding less represented members
- Opportunity for less represented to find their voice

Open Source v.s. Corporately Owned Platforms

Decentralized Online Social Networks (DOSN's)
Ex. Mastodon, Fediverse

- Individuals can join a server or set up their own
- Individuals can communicate across networks
- More control on personal data than OSN
- New challenges arise
  - Management of data and comments
  - efficient updates
  - trusted methods of hosting user profiles
  - Code of conduct and hate speech tolerance vary by server
- IFTAS, a nonprofit to support volunteer moderators for the Fediverse set up codes of conduct to apply across DOSN's
  - Active moderaction of LGBTQ+ hate speech
  - Intention to create safe spaces

Online Service Networks (OSN's)
Ex. Facebook, Instagram, Meta

- Sharing of information within groups of users
- Stored in centralized servers
- Concerns include cost and maintenance as well as privacy
  - Terms of use, commercial goals, policy changes
- Allows targeted messages and political ads (Carter)
- Requires individuals to report
- GLAAD shows that across Meta platforms there are many examples of posts violating their regulations
  - When flagged, many were not taken down, despite dehumanization or use of slurs

Impacts of Moderation on trans activism

Moderation as weaponized incompetence
- OSN policies on hate speech have become increasingly less enforced
- X first enacted explicit policy against misgendering in 2018 then removed it april 2023, under Elon Musk
- Meta policy listing "social topics that affect a group of people" as "political content"

Moderation as a tool for discrimination
- anti-LGBTQ labeling a variety of LGBTQ content as "grooming" 40% of anti LGBTQ incidents in 2023 specifically targeted drag performers
- buzz words like "transgenderism" and "gender ideology"
- Sensationalism alienates and inspires violence
  - 6% of all anti-LGBTQ incidents nationwide focused on health care providers offering gender-affirming care
  - Bomb threats in Boston Children's Hospital

How do open-source vs corporately owned platforms influence the agency of digital trans and LGBTQ activists in the U.S.?

Legal Framework
Official Erasure of Trans People

- Misunderstood identities are criminalized
  - Social anxieties about gender and sexuality reinforces *"hierarchical power structures and dominant notions of masculinity and femininity"* (Quinan)
- Marriage Equality Act brought new anti-LGBTQ policies
  - increase in anti-trans legislation
  - religious discrimination codified by law
  - restricting LGBTQ identities
- Anti-trans advertising and political campaigns
- K-12 curriculum
  - House File 802 and Senate File 496 in Iowa put restrictions on curriculum and limit support from staff related to sexual orientation and gender identity (Coleman)
- Prohibit gender-affirming care for both children and adults
- Public restroom restrictions
  - *"Approximately 100 measures have been introduced to restrict public restroom use for trans individuals since 2017"* (Quinan)
  - Oklahoma SB 615, passed in May 2022, mandate all public schools must designate bathrooms exclusively for the male or female sex (designated by individuals original birth certificates)

Current trans and LGBTQ Digital Activism

Important Stakeholders

Organizations
- Legal support
  - American Civil Liberties Association (ACLU)
  - Lambda Legal
  - Advocates for Trans Equality (A4TE)
- Resources and Research
  - Trevor Project
  - GLAAD

Individuals
- Erin Reed (Journalist- Erin In The Morning)
- Taylor Alxndr (founder of a grassroots org)
- Blair Imani (Author, Educator, Historian, Smarter in Seconds)
  - *"Be an active participant in making the world less terrible"*
- Toni-Minchelle (Executive Director of SnapCo.)
  - *"I don't need everyone to see me. I need people to have the resources they need to survive"* ("Trans")

Needs of Digital Activists

- More money from tech companies into regulations by people, not AI
- Decrease over moderation of LGBTQ expression
- Transparent reports from social media companies about their algorithms and privacy practices
  - encryption on private messaging to protect from stalking and violence
- Enforcing policies against misinformation and hate
  - Recognizing the real danger that social media can pose

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Conclusion

- Trans people are facing legal erasure
- Social media is a tool for activists
  - Organizing, Visibility
  - Support and Community
- Networks and Moderation influence efficacy of activism
- *Visibility is a double-edged sword,"representation (is) correlated with heightened violence towards trans individuals"* (Quinan)