

Political homophobia is a 21st century curse | Column

Homophobia and hostility to LGBTQ+ individuals too often remain a winning political strategy.



South African Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu likened the fight against gay prejudice to the anti-apartheid struggle and said that he would rather go to hell than worship a homophobic God. (Joanna Jhanda/Contra Costa Times/MCT) [JOANNA JHANDA | Getty Images]

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This new century brought advances and protections for LGBT rights that, as a gay American, I never thought I would see in my lifetime. In the span of just a few years, the United States experienced enormous progress toward equality in civil society, in marriage and in the military. Furthermore, gender roles defined solely through a binary lens of male/female are now challenged.

Yet, while significant progress on gay rights has been made in the United States and in other countries, overall homophobia and hostility to LGBTQ+ individuals too often remain a winning political strategy. For example, in the United States, 29 states (including Florida) still lack comprehensive laws that would protect gay and transgender Americans. In rich and poor countries around the world, the gay community continues to be a political target to be exploited by ambitious politicians.

Political homophobia (which is homophobia as a political strategy) succeeds by framing LGBT people as a “cultural” or “religious” issue, rather than viewing us as human beings deserving fundamental human rights protections. Here are some examples of how political homophobia consolidates power.



William Felice [UNKNOWN | Photo: Courtesy]

Promoting male “macho” stereotypes —

condemning “sissy boys”: In September 2021 the Chinese government ordered a boycott of “sissy pants” celebrities and directed entertainment programs to reject programming featuring effeminate men. “Sissy men” were labelled a cultural import from the capitalist West threatening China’s national strength. Officials expressed fears that these “less macho” men on TV would cause young men to lose their masculinity.

Promoting cultural and religious prejudice — okay to discriminate

against gays: Poland’s president Andrzej Duda has led the charge against same-sex marriage, adoption rights and comprehensive sexuality education in schools in order to protect religious values and the “traditional family.” Duda proclaimed “LGBT is not people, it’s an ideology.” As Graeme Reid from *Human Rights Watch* notes, this statement “dehumanizes LGBT people, and relegates them to a threatening ideology.”

Promoting a nationalist heterosexual history — gays are foreign:

Hungary’s prime minister Viktor Orbán attacks LGBT people in the name of protecting the country from foreign cultures. A Hungarian law has been approved equating pedophilia with homosexuality and bans the “portrayal or promotion of homosexuality” or gender variance in the presence of children. The law bans LGBT people from appearing in school materials or on TV shows for people under 18.

Practicing hypocrisy — public support covering-up private insidious

actions: While former President Donald Trump made a symbolic wave of a rainbow flag during the 2016 election, he quickly acted to implement the Republican Party platform dedicated to undermining basic LGBT protections. He pledged to appoint Supreme Court judges who would reverse the legalization of same-sex marriage. He rescinded protections for transgender students and employees, and tweeted a ban on transgender service members. He directed his attorney general to support laws which allow for discrimination against LGBT people. Furthermore, the Trump administration argued in court that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not protect people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation asserting that such discrimination was legal.

Human Rights Watch and *Amnesty International* document vicious acts of political homophobia in all continents where political leaders seek to roll-back progress on women’s rights, LGBT inclusion and gender rights for trans people.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is leading a “Free & Equal” global public education campaign for LGBT equality. The former high commissioner for human rights, Navi Pillay, stated that basic human rights protections remain a “hollow promise for many millions of LGBT people forced to confront hatred, intolerance, violence and discrimination on a daily basis.”

South African Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu likened the fight against gay prejudice to the anti-apartheid struggle and said that he would rather go to hell than worship a homophobic God. All individuals who believe in human rights have a duty to actively support the local, national and global efforts to promote and protect all LGBT human rights.

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