

UNDER ATTACK: 2022 LGBTQ+ SAFE SPACES NATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



UNDER ATTACK: LGBTQ+ SAFE SPACES NATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT. A REPORT BY THE NEW YORK CITY ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

About AVP: The New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP) began its work more than 40 years ago as a community-led safety initiative of LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected survivors that came together to support each other, advocate for justice and accountability, help educate others about the prevalence of anti-LGBTQ+ violence and the ways to address and prevent it. Today, AVP empowers LGBTQ and HIV-affected communities and allies to end all forms of violence through organizing, public policy advocacy, education, and supporting survivors through direct legal and social services. AVP is the largest LGBTQ-specific anti-violence program in the country.

LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected survivors of violence and those who serve them can access AVP's 24/7 bilingual English/Spanish hotline at 212-714-1141 via voice and text.

To report violence, request a training, support our work, or get more information about the LGBTQ+ Safe Spaces Protection Project, visit our website at avp.org.



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LETTER FROM BEVERLY TILLERY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW YORK CITY ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

Dear reader,

On Saturday, November 19, 2022, a mass shooting occurred at Club Q, an LGBTQ+ nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Five people were killed, and 25 others were injured.

As news of the tragedy spread, in addition to the inevitable mourning that swept through the LGBTQ+ community, there was also a palpable sense of fear among other bar owners, organizational leaders and individuals alike. It was clear that this was not an isolated incident but, instead, part of a national trend of increasing and escalating biased-related violence aimed at many of our country's most marginalized communities, and a particular onslaught against trans and queer people.

The shooting happened during a time of unprecedented hate violence in the United States, targeting LGBTQ+ people,

Black communities, Asian, Jewish, Muslim people, and immigrants. It happened alongside efforts to ban books and gut school curricula in order to erase this country's history of racism and other forms of oppression. And it happened amidst the introduction of hundreds of anti-transgender bills nationwide aimed at criminalizing and denying trans people their basic right to self-determination.

The Club Q shooting reignited a national conversation about attacks on LGBTQ+ safe spaces that began after the Pulse nightclub mass shooting in Florida. At the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP), we began tracking this specific trend in 2019. Through this effort, we began to learn the ways white nationalist and far-right extremist ideologies have taken hold and are being used to promote violence against LGBTQ+ safe spaces and people and how that violence is connected to other forms of hate violence.



Our opponents are organized and utilizing extensive networks to spread misinformation to radicalize and activate groups and individuals. We are seeing how this system works to increase and intensify protests against Drag Story Hour (DSH). The Proud Boys were among the first groups to target DSH and instigate far-right activists to protest DSH events nationwide.

On Monday, November 21, two days after the Club Q shooting, AVP's staff began forming the idea of engaging LGBTQ+ safe spaces across the country in a conversation about what kinds of violence they are seeing and what they need to be safe.

This report is the result of that initial idea. A survey became an opportunity to collect data that could help our community at a very critical time. This is the first-ever survey of anti-LGBTQ+ hate violence threats and attacks targeting LGBTQ+ organizations and businesses, and it begins a larger effort to build a movement to keep our communities safer. This data provides

invaluable insights into what is happening nationwide and what groups need to build safety. It includes recommendations for how government officials, community members, and organizations can help end this violence.

AVP would like to thank our partners who helped this project come together so quickly: Arcus Foundation and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund; key outreach partners CenterLink and Equality Federation; data partner Strength in Numbers Consulting Group; Bryce Celotto, Swarm Strategy, and the hundreds of organizations that took and promoted the survey.

We hope to continue engaging you in this effort because our community and our lives are truly at stake.

Until we are all safe and free,

Bev Tillery



ABOUT THE LGBTQ+ SAFE SPACES NATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The LGBTQ+ Safe Spaces National Needs Assessment, created by the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP) with consultant Strength in Numbers Consulting Group, collected data about anti-LGBTQ+ hate violence incidents that targeted LGBTQ+ spaces during 2022. The survey was available online and completed by 380 LGBTQ+ organizations and businesses, with responses from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. All four census regions in the United States were well-represented in this survey, with the largest percentage of responses from the Northeast. (28.2%).

In addition to demographic information, the survey asked participants about: the types of harassment and violence they experienced (online, via phone, by mail, and in-person); reporting to police and other entities; follow-up after reporting (if any) occurred; and the safety practices and needs of the organizations and businesses. The survey was open from December 13, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

Among the LGBTQ+ organizations and businesses that took the survey, about a quarter (23.5%) of organizations were health care or social service agencies, 22.4% were community centers, 15.9% identified as LGBTQ+ affirming houses of worship, 14.9% were formal or informal LGBTQ+ groups, 12% were LGBTQ+ centers at colleges and universities, 8.9% LGBTQ+ businesses, and 4.6% were cultural institutions with LGBTQ+ programming. The following pages are a summary of the key findings of the National Needs Assessment.



KEY FINDINGS



LGBTQ+ SAFE SPACES EXPERIENCED MULTIPLE INCIDENTS AND MULTIPLE TYPES OF VIOLENCE

The survey results point to a reality for LGBTQ+ safe spaces in which targeted hate violence has become common and relentless. **More than three-fifths (62.1%) of organizations surveyed experienced some type of harassment or violence.**

Half of all organizations AVP surveyed (50.9%) experienced at least one online incident in 2022, and over one-third (35.9%) of all groups experienced harassment posted publicly on social media, making this the most common type of online violence.

Over one-third (37.1%) of organizations surveyed experienced both online and phone or in-person incidents.

Incidents were not one-off occurrences. **Just under one in three (28.8%) LGBTQ+ businesses and organizations that took the survey experienced two or more different types of incidents, and nearly one in ten (8.7%) experienced at least four different forms of harassment.**

Over three-fifths of organizations experienced the most common types of in-person incidents (protests, vandalism or property damage, hate mail or a suspicious package, threats or harassment outside the space, or a harassing phone call) more than once. **More than four-fifths (88.9%) of organizations that had experienced threatening or harassing phone calls received more than one call, the highest rate among all incident types.**



Threats Against Youth-Serving Groups Were Disproportionately High

Groups and organizations surveyed that offered programming to young LGBTQ+ people experienced higher rates of incidents. While 58.6% of groups and organizations that did not have a specific focus on youth experienced some kind of phone or in-person harassment, 77.8% of those that serve youth had this experience. **Youth-serving organizations were also more likely to experience in-person protests at their space or events: 30.3% of youth-serving organizations experienced protests, while 22.7% of LGBTQ+ serving groups experienced protests.**

LGBTQ+ Community Centers are Targets

Nearly nine in ten (86.8%) community centers experienced at least one phone or in-person incident. They were also more likely to be targets of online attacks compared to other organizations who were not community centers (78.3% vs 42.3%). Nearly two in five (39.5%) had experienced at least one protest in the past year.

White Nationalist Instigated Violence

The presence of white nationalist groups in instigating and carrying out protests against LGBTQ+ safe spaces is evident in survey responses. **Nearly half (47.5%) of groups that experienced protests reported that they believed white nationalist groups led these incidents.**

In addition, the belief that police may be connected to or aligned with white nationalists is a significant factor for some organizations. Of the people who run organizations that did not report protests to their local police, 16.7% of these stated they did not report to police because they believed the police were allied with white nationalist groups.

REPORTING, RESPONSE, AND RESOLUTION FOR VIOLENT INCIDENTS WAS INCONSISTENT

Each incident and the circumstances around them vary, as did whether organizations reported those incidents to others. For a majority of incidents, organizations reported the incident somewhere, but not always to the police. **Reporting was much less frequent for incidents that did not pose an immediate physical threat to the community.** For example, while 40.0% of participants who experienced threatening or harassing phone calls reported them to their staff and volunteers, and 28.3% to their board of directors, the number that reported to funders or donors or to community members and potential event participants was too small to analyze. In contrast, protests, which directly affect community members who may access LGBTQ+ spaces, were reported frequently to staff and volunteers (72.3%), board of directors (50.8%), community members and event participants (55.4%) and funders and donors (15.4%).

The survey asked participants whether they reported to the police and how the police responded after the report. Those who indicated they did not report to the police were asked why, and chose from a list of reasons.

The Needs Assessment data paints a complex picture of whether and how LGBTQ+ groups interact with local law enforcement agencies.

Just over half (52.0%) of organizations that experienced at least one phone or in-person incident reported an incident to the police.

Organizations and businesses indicated that after they reported an incident to the police, they frequently felt safer, felt the police were helpful, felt the police were respectful, and considered the police response to be timely. Groups reported slightly more positive reactions to police professionalism (being respectful and timely) compared to a sense of well-being after reporting to police (feeling safer and feeling the police were helpful).

For those groups that chose to engage the police, while reporting to the police may have been reassuring, outcomes of the police interactions were not often concrete. For almost every type of violence reported to the police, less than one-third of groups stated that there was a police investigation, and less than 45% of groups were aware that a police report had been filed.*

For most types of violence, close to 50% of groups that reported to police stated that police neither filed a report nor investigated the incident.

Among the groups that did not report the most recent incident of hate violence to the police, groups cited a range of reasons for why they did not contact the police, including not being sure the incident was a crime, not having enough proof, and feeling the incident was not a big deal. However, most often, the reasons groups gave for not going to the police were directly related to perceptions and experience of police, such as the police wouldn't think it was important, the police would be inefficient or ineffective, police would be biased, harassing or insulting, or because the LGBTQ+ groups believed the police were allied with white nationalist groups.

Most (60.0%) participants said they would be more likely to contact the police after a future incident if they knew they could reach an LGBTQ+-affirming officer.

Aside from reporting incidents internally to inform those directly involved in the organization who may be impacted by violence, many groups are uncertain about what outcomes they hope to see from reporting to the police and other entities. While it is known that data about hate violence is a vital tool to inform policies and programs that support groups and help shape violence prevention strategies, it is likely that communities will not consistently report incidents unless they see some direct benefits.

*Survey respondents indicated that police investigated vandalism, physical violence and swatting at rates higher than one-third.

SAFETY PLANNING AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE: GREAT NEEDS AND LIMITED CAPACITY

One of the most powerful effects of hate violence is that it can instill fear in a community that is already marginalized, causing more trauma and isolation. The current dilemma for LGBTQ+ safe spaces is that the threats and dangers they are facing are challenging their very ability to provide the community with the safety and solidarity that is desperately needed during this time of increased violence. Groups are struggling to figure out how best to keep their doors open while ensuring the protection of community members.

It is clear that the reality of this ever-present violence weighs heavily on the individuals who took the survey and others responsible for the operation of these organizations and businesses. **A majority of the groups surveyed are concerned about future instances of online harassment (67.5%) and threats or harassment outside of their space (54.2%). More than one-third of groups are concerned about future protests (40.9%) and incidents of physical violence (39.0%).**

Knowledge of potential violence and fears can be harnessed into preparedness, but only if the organizations and businesses at risk have the resources, knowledge, skills and support they need to develop and implement sufficient safety strategies. While some groups have begun taking steps to prepare for future attacks, many of the groups surveyed still have unmet needs around security infrastructure, safety planning, and training. **Nearly nine in ten (89.6%) organizations and businesses want at least one security measure that they do not have.**

The security infrastructure that organizations and businesses most commonly have are security cameras, either outdoors (55.6%) or indoors (48.3%). Only 6% of organizations have bulletproof glass, but over half (53.2%) want it. Almost a third (29.7%) have alert buzzers at staffed front desks, and two-fifths (39.7%) want buzzers.



The training and staff security measures organizations most commonly have are safety planning and protocols (53.2%), or an agreement among staff about under what circumstances they will involve the police (53.0%). Nearly a quarter (23.6%) of organizations have active shooter training for staff and volunteers, and over half (53.1%) want active shooter training.

Small organizations (fewer than 10 staff) are the least likely to have established safety planning or protocols. While the overwhelming majority (83.9%) of organizations with 25 or more staff have safety planning or protocols, less than half (49.2%) of groups with 1-10 staff members have them, and only 36.7% of groups with no paid staff have protocols.

Planning, implementing and updating security measures takes financial and human resources, both of which are probably in short supply for many organizations

serving as LGBTQ+ safe spaces. Because most of the groups surveyed have a relatively small staff (58.2% have 1-10 paid staff), their needs may be great, yet their capacity and funding are most likely limited.

CURRENT PROTOCOLS FOR RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS FROM AN LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY CENTER IN THE SOUTH

Threatening phone calls would be reported to the police. Harassing phone calls are not responded to. We do not engage with physical protestors. It gives them attention and distracts them from our purpose. We do create a living barricade with security personnel between us and them. Physical violence is reported immediately to the police department, and any staff or volunteers present are asked to write a statement of what they witnessed. These statements are kept in an "Incident Reports" folder and kept on record electronically as well. Our response is geared towards keeping personal interactions at a minimum while securing the safety of our staff and volunteers.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the LGBTQ+ Safe Spaces National Needs Assessment show that LGBTQ+ spaces and organizations are under attack in ways we have not seen since the pre-Stonewall era. The progress made in securing equal rights for LGBTQ+ people is actively being targeted by white nationalist bad actors and right-wing politicians. This violence is not random. It is organized, funded, strategic and growing. The LGBTQ+ community needs to be just as organized, resourced, and strategic in order to create a more effective response to this growing threat.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

1. Acknowledge that hate violence is on the rise and directly connected to the anti-hateful rhetoric, misinformation, and anti-LGBTQ+ bills and laws sweeping the country.
2. Allocate resources to protect LGBTQ+ community spaces and support survivors.
3. Improve data collection, especially by funding community-led and public health-centered approaches.
4. Develop closer ties to LGBTQ+ safe spaces and community.
5. Center multiply-marginalized LGBTQ+ people.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY SPACES

1. Document and report violence however it makes sense for your organization.
2. Prioritize safety planning and training, lean on the community for support.
3. Connect with other LGBTQ+ and marginalized groups in your area.
4. Demand community-based solutions, policies and programs.
5. Speak out against hateful rhetoric and organize against anti-LGBTQ+ violence.

LGBTQ+ communities have power and when united, can achieve much progress toward creating safer spaces. History shows that LGBTQ+ people can—and have—overcome many odds. LGBTQ+ communities and our allies can develop creative and impactful responses to hate violence that strengthen our communities while also advancing long-term prevention strategies. It is at this moment when forces are mobilized against us that we must come together and take immediate action to ensure that all spaces are safe spaces for our communities, not just today, but in the future.







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For questions about this report, please contact: communications@avp.org