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Handling Attacks around LGBT Youth



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Far-right politicians have made attacks on LGBT people, particularly transgender youth, a cornerstone of their local, state, and national campaigns in 2024. We need to ensure candidates who support LGBT rights are equipped with the tools and messages to parry these attacks. Based on a dozen rounds of public opinion research, here are our recommendations for how to handle four of the right's favorite issues: book bans, forced outing, sports participation, and medical care.

Book Bans

Thousands of books have been banned from public school libraries across the country—including books that discuss race, sexuality, and gender. Proponents of these bans claim they're protecting children from inappropriate material, but they're really trying to control local schools and communities and target people they don't like. Here are some tips for how to talk about book bans:

Dos

- Lean in to values around allowing parents to decide what's appropriate for their child, not politicians or other people's parents. Voters agree that no one parent should have the right to determine what's okay for everyone else's kid to read.
- Note that it's not fair to put the burden on teachers to police books—let alone put librarians in jail as Trump would in Project 2025.

Don'ts

- Don't litigate the nature of the material being banned or broaden out the discussion to a larger censorship movement. These messages were not as convincing.

Best Messages

- “I want to protect young kids from being exposed to inappropriate content, but we should not let a single parent have the power to ban books and veto the decision of every other parent.”
- “Teachers and school administrators already have a lot on their plates. It's not right that they would also have to worry about being charged with a crime for overlooking a book on a shelf.”

Forced Outing

Far-right politicians have introduced legislation in states across the country that would require teachers to inform parents if their child was using different pronouns in school. Some call it “parental notification,” but it's really forced outing, and it could put some transgender young people in danger. Here are some tips for how to talk about forced outing:

Dos

- Lean in on empathy for kids who may not be living in safe, supportive environments and emphasize that these policies could put those kids in danger.
- Note that forcing teachers to report on a student who they know lives in an unsupportive environment places an unfair emotional burden on already overworked teachers.

Don'ts

- Don't use charged language like “transphobic” or “homophobic.”

- Don't make this a bureaucratic argument about additional paperwork or administration for schools and teachers.

Best Messages

- "Of course, every parent wants to be informed, but the sad reality is that in some cases, a young person isn't safe at home, and they need to be able to turn to someone for help. Politicians should not step in now with blanket rules that require teachers to override their judgement about how to keep a child safe."

Sports Participation

As of July 2024, 26 states have made it illegal for transgender young people to play sports on the team consistent with their gender identity. Far-right elected officials are also trying to pass a national sports ban in Congress. Here are some tips for how to talk about transgender youth and sports:

Dos

- Pivot to core principles about how government and politicians should not be making these decisions. Local schools and sports associations are the best equipped to handle these issues.
- Acknowledge there are many kinds of rules around sports participation, and there should be rules here too.
- Let voters know how blanket bans would be bad for all women and girls.
- Hit proponents of bans for having the wrong priorities.

Don'ts

- Don't argue that all transgender athletes should get to play where they want. This message did not test well and led some participants to suggest starting a separate league for transgender kids.
- Don't get caught up in discussions about physical differences and fairness. Opposition messages focusing on these points really resonate with people.
- Don't try to litigate the Lia Thomas case.

Best Messages

- “I trust local schools and sports associations to make the rules and get this right, and the last thing we need is a one-size-fits-all blanket ban from the top down for every age and sport. Congress should be focusing on more pressing issues like lowering costs for families and restoring order at the border.”
- “I want sports to be fair and student athletes to be safe. But the truth is these bans would require young girls to answer invasive personal questions about things like their menstrual cycle to adults they may not even know, or even undergo physical inspections.”

Medical Care

As of July 2024, 26 states have made it illegal to provide medical care to transgender youth, with some going so far as to make it a felony. Far-right politicians are also trying to make medical care for transgender young people illegal nationwide. Here are some tips for how to talk about medical care for transgender youth:

Dos

- Use language that ties back to freedom and reproductive rights: every American family should have the freedom to make personal medical decisions with their doctors, and politicians shouldn't be trying to control them.
- Emphasize the role of parents and remind voters that parents' decisions about what is best for their child shouldn't be overruled by politicians.
- Provide basic education about the lengthy process, collaboration with medical experts, and inclusion of mental health care and counseling. Many voters assume that transition care is easy or fast to get and therefore open to regret or impulse.
- Remind voters that bans on medical care could include bans on mental health resources for youth.
- Use words like “teen” or “adolescent” to reinforce that no medical care is recommended for young children.

Don'ts

- Don't call it “gender-affirming care;” call it medical care or health care.

- Don't talk about medical care as a decision made by a transgender young person, but rather as a conversation between doctors and families.
- Don't talk about surgery, as it is not a part of the standard of care for young people.

Best Messages

- "Medical care for transgender youth includes safe and age-appropriate physical and mental health care. It's a lengthy process that often happens over years. It requires months of screenings, doctor's visits, and counseling sessions. This is not a rushed decision."
- "Politicians should not be making these decisions. These are personal decisions that should be made between doctors, mental health counselors, parents, and their child. Doctors and parents shouldn't face jail time for simply getting their child the medical care they need. Congress should focus on more pressing national issues like lowering costs and keeping our communities safe."