

Project Summary

Overview:

This project investigates the changing scales, strategies, and missions of domestic LGBT+ NGOs around the world in response to post-liberal transformations occurring within the international arena. Over the 20th century, LGBT+ NGOs become instrumental in providing social services, advocating for marginalized communities, and working as partners in state governance. Most researchers argue this expansion – both in raw numbers and embeddedness throughout society – was a function of liberalism. But global liberalism is now weakening and LGBT+ NGOs are at the forefront of this transformation. These organizations face new anti-NGO legislation, rising religious nationalism, and decreased access to government resources necessary to support their work. How are these changes within the global arena, then, changing these NGOs and the work they do? The goal of this project is two-fold. The first is to develop and empirically test a theoretical framework for understanding how threats to liberalism are transforming LGBT+ NGOs by drawing on political, economic, cultural, and ecological theories of organizations. This framework will be assessed by quantitatively evaluating changes in scale, strategies, and missions of domestic LGBT+ NGOs from 1980-2022. The second goal is to develop and publish the Global LGBT+ NGO Database –the largest, most comprehensive dataset of over 10,000 LGBT+ NGOs from 172 countries. This dataset has the ability to unlock a variety of insights into the cultures, needs, and operations of LGBT+ NGOs even beyond the current proposal. The contributions of this research, then, will not only advance theoretical understandings of NGOs, generally, and LGBT+ NGOs, specifically, but will provide an invaluable data resource to break through persistent data limitations that hindered worldwide research into LGBT+ communities.

Intellectual Merit:

This research represents an important intervention into the study of LGBT+ NGOs and the future of civil society within a post-liberal international arena. This proposal advances intellectual scholarship in three important manners. First, it develops a robust, cross-national dataset to evaluate core questions regarding LGBT+ NGOs. Current data regarding LGBT+ NGOs are severely limited. Existing datasets used for cross-national research have a dearth of information on LGBT+-focused entities. Thus, this dataset unlocks new opportunities to advance our theoretical understanding of these entities. Second, this project will utilize the longitudinal and causal inference techniques, like difference-in-differences, to evaluate within-country changes in the scale, mission, and strategies of LGBT+ NGOs. And, finally, in an historical moment of rising illiberalism, attacks on LGBT+ organizations are central. This project will give insights into how civil society organizations adapt to these disruptive contexts in order to advance their socially transformative work. Findings, then, can advance theories of state-NGO relations within this fraught period.

Broader Impact:

Around the world, LGBT+ communities are often socially marginalized, experience disproportionately worse quality of life outcomes, and unlikely to have all their rights recognized by the state. Moreover, they typically lack access to traditional forms of social support that rectify these challenges, like family networks or government programs. As such, LGBT+ NGOs have grown dramatically to fill this void. Now, these organizations contribute to the social and political advancement of LGBT+ communities by providing vital social services and advocating on their behalf. Therefore, study results can have tangible effects on the lives of LGBT+ individuals by understanding how global processes are transforming these organizations. By making a comprehensive dataset of LGBT+ NGOs publicly available, with oversight from an advisory board of NGO leaders, this proposal also helps academics, practitioners, and everyday people better access the vital resources being offered. Moreover, this project will boost the training of undergraduate and graduate students who have been traditionally under-represented within the sciences, particularly those who are LGBT+. Additionally, reports and other public information will be provided to LGBT+ NGO leaders themselves so that findings can be disseminated to where they can have the greatest impact.