



DIGITAL RIGHTS ARE LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

Overview

The internet plays a vital role for LGBTQ+ individuals, offering a space for identity exploration, community building, and access to crucial resources.

- **Safe spaces online:** The internet provides LGBTQ+ individuals, especially those who are not yet out or live in hostile environments, with a space to explore their gender and sexual identity, find supportive communities, and access critical information. When digital rights are compromised, LGBTQ+ individuals are directly harmed.
- **Lifeline for LGBTQ+ youth:** Many LGBTQ+ young people rely on digital platforms to connect with others, learn about their identities, and seek support that they may not have access to offline.
- **Freedom of expression:** Digital spaces allow LGBTQ+ individuals to express themselves, share their stories, and advocate for their rights. Censorship or restrictions on online content stifles these freedoms and undermines LGBTQ+ advocacy.
- **Protection from surveillance:** Digital privacy laws are crucial to preventing harmful surveillance practices, such as monitoring students' online activities or collecting personal data to target LGBTQ+ people for discrimination or legal action.

However, recent legislation and digital policies pose significant threats to LGBTQ+ people's online freedom and safety. Here's a breakdown of the key issues and why digital rights are essential for the LGBTQ+ community:

Rising Threats to Digital Rights

- **Censorship:** Anti-LGBTQ+ bills are on the rise, with over 500 proposed in 2024 alone. These bills often aim to censor LGBTQ+ content in schools, in libraries, and online in order to restrict freedom of expression.
- **Content moderation:** Influenced by these bills, platform moderation disproportionately targets LGBTQ+ individuals and creates a chilling effect on online spaces once seen as safe havens.
- **Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA):** This federal bill is less about protecting kids and more about censoring speech and surveilling users online. KOSA risks harming marginalized youth, especially LGBTQ+ youth, by restricting access to critical online spaces.
 - KOSA empowers state attorneys general to bury companies in litigation over content they believe will be "harmful" to young people—which, in many states, could include content about trans healthcare, abortion medication, banned books and more. This law is also likely unconstitutional for similar reasons.
 - LGBTQ+ youth rely on online resources for education, mental health support, and sense of belonging. Restricting access could have devastating consequences for their well-being.
- **Age-Verification Bills:** States are proposing laws that require age verification to block access to content considered "harmful to minors," including LGBTQ+ resources, abortion and gender-affirming care information, and educational materials.
 - These laws often lack clear definitions of "harm" and could lead to widespread censorship of LGBTQ+ content, further isolating vulnerable youth.
 - Additionally, the legislation often forces covered companies to create barriers to adult users accessing lawful information unless they hand over sensitive documents and identification.

Digital Surveillance and Privacy Concerns

- **Surveillance tools in schools:** Tools like GoGuardian, Gaggle, and Bark have monitored students' online activities, flagging certain keywords (e.g., "am I gay?") and potentially outing students before they are ready. This can be especially dangerous for LGBTQ+ youth with unsupportive parents or school officials, creating harmful environments.
- **Data collection and misuse:** State efforts to track and investigate trans healthcare, including collecting data from digital platforms, pose significant privacy risks for LGBTQ+ individuals. To protect from this misuse, California passed S.B. 107 for example, a trans health data sanctuary bill, aims to protect personal data from being shared with out-of-state entities to target individuals seeking gender-affirming care.

Protecting LGBTQ+ Digital Rights

- **Advocate for privacy protections:** Support legislation that limits how businesses collect, store, and share personal data, ensuring that sensitive information about LGBTQ+ individuals is not exposed to harm.
- **Oppose harmful bills:** Stand against bills that censor LGBTQ+ content or restrict access to vital resources for LGBTQ+ youth. This includes opposing bills like KOSA and age-verification laws that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.
- **Protecting digital identity:** As threats continue to rise, LGBTQ+ individuals need to protect their digital identity online. As part of our [Surveillance Self-Defense](#) project, we offer several guides for safer online communications, including a guide specifically for [LGBTQ+ youth](#).
- **Support safe online environments:** Encourage the development of online spaces that prioritize privacy, inclusivity, and support for LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly youth.

Protecting Digital Rights Is Protecting LGBTQ+ Rights

The fight for digital rights is essential for the LGBTQ+ community. EFF's mission is to ensure that technology supports freedom, justice, and innovation for all people of the world, and that includes LGBTQ+ communities, which all too often face threats, censorship, and other risks when they go online.

Defending digital freedoms is not only about privacy and security—it's about preserving the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals to live authentically.



The Electronic Frontier Foundation is the leading nonprofit defending digital privacy, free speech, and innovation. <https://eff.org>