

RHETORIC VS. REALITY: DEMOCRACY, HUMAN DIGNITY, AND WHY MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

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A Comparison of the UN LGBTI Core Group and the Geneva Consensus Declaration Coalition

Governments join intergovernmental bodies, multilateral initiatives, and state-led coalitions to amplify their influence, coordinate policy, and signal alignment with particular norms and values on the global scale. This analysis compares the UN LGBTI Core Group countries and countries in the Geneva Consensus Declaration Coalition (GCD). While both groups claim to promote freedom, equality, and human dignity, empirical evidence reveals a significant difference in the extent to which these ideals are realized and implemented.

The UN LGBTI Core Group **consistently outperforms** the GCD across indicators of democracy, civic space, gender equality, and the human rights of LGBTI individuals.

Background

Established in 2008, the United Nations LGBTI Core Group is a cross-regional group of **41** United Nations member states. Currently co-chaired by Chile and The Netherlands, the group operates within the United Nations framework to promote universal respect for the human rights and freedoms for all, with a focus on the human rights of LGBTI people. The UN LGBTI Core Group raises awareness of LGBTI issues; participates in multilateral work at the United Nations; and engages in cooperative dialogue with other UN member states and stakeholders outside the LGBTI Core Group.

Launched in 2020 by Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, Uganda, and the United States, the Geneva Consensus Declaration Coalition now comprises **40** affiliated states and is guided by the Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women's Health and Strengthening the Family. The GCD's core tenets emphasize equality before the law; the rights of women and the traditional family; and state sovereignty. GCD countries often are associated with limited recognition of and provision for the human rights of LGBTI individuals as well as sexual and reproductive rights, indicating differences in approaches to equality and human dignity in practice.

Key points

- ⊕ While 88 percent of UN LGBTI Core Group member states are home to some form of democratic government (Full or Flawed), 90 percent of GCD Coalition countries are designated Hybrid or Authoritarian regimes in 2024.
- ⊕ The majority of UN LGBTI Core Group countries had Open or Narrowed civic spaces, but the majority of GCD Coalition countries' civic space was Closed or Repressed in 2024.
- ⊕ UN LGBTI Core Group countries' average Gender Inequality Index score was nearly three-and-a-half times better compared to GCD Coalition countries' score.
- ⊕ LGBTI people from UN LGBTI Core Group countries report overwhelmingly positive human rights experiences compared to LGBTI people from GCD Coalition countries.

Methodology

This analysis of UN LGBTI Core Group and GCD member states divides the basis for comparison into four dimensions: democracy, civic space, gender equality, and the human rights of LGBTI persons.

Table 1. Dimensions of Comparative Analysis

Dimension	Index	Source
Democracy	EIU Democracy Index	Economist Intelligence Unit (The Economist)
Civic Space	CIVICUS Monitor	CIVICUS
Gender equality	Gender Inequality Index (GII)	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Human rights of LGBTI persons	F&M Global Barometer of Unified LGBT Rights (GBUR); F&M Global Barometers LGBTIQ+ Perception Index (GBPI)	F&M Global Barometers (FMGB)

Democracy

Democracy levels and associated government types are analyzed using the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, which labels countries according to their levels of democracy, scaled from zero to 10: Authoritarian Regime (0–4); Hybrid Regime (4–6); Flawed Democracy (6–8), and Full Democracy (8–10).

Civic Space

Civic space is measured by the CIVICUS Monitor, which assesses the conditions enabling civil society to function within countries. This value is defined by the respect for freedoms of association and peaceful assembly found in law and policy, and the

extent to which states protect these rights in practice.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is measured through the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII), a metric scaled from zero to one, in which zero represents total equality and one represents complete inequality. The GI considers reproductive health (maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates); empowerment (gendered distribution of parliamentary seats and higher education attained by women); and women's labor market participation.

Human Rights of LGBTI Persons

To compare the human rights of LGBTI persons, this analysis utilizes the F&M Global Barometer of Unified LGBT Rights (GBUR) and F&M Global Barometers LGBTIQ+ Perception Index (GBPI). The GBUR draws from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Yogyakarta Principles to measure 41 items holistically assessing the extent to which countries protect or persecute sexual orientation and gender identity minorities.

The GBPI captures the lived human rights experiences of LGBTI people through a six-question survey with additional demographic questions. Questions pertain to experiences with safety, safety in gathering with other LGBTI people, acceptance, discrimination, fear of security forces, and violence.

The GBUR and GBPI utilize the same grading scale of zero to 100 percent. A country's percentage score correlates to a letter grade (A–F). The F&M Global Barometers' grading scale is illustrated below (see **Figure 1**).

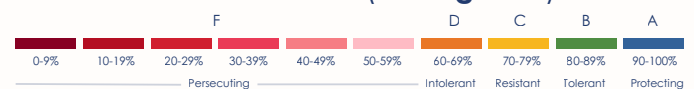


Figure 1. GBUR and GBPI Grading Scale

I. Democracy

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index uses 60 indicators to measure countries' levels of democracy and classify them into four regime types: Full Democracy, Flawed Democracy, Hybrid Regime, or Authoritarian Regime. **Figure 2**, below, shows the distribution of regime types between UN LGBTI Core Group and GCD countries.

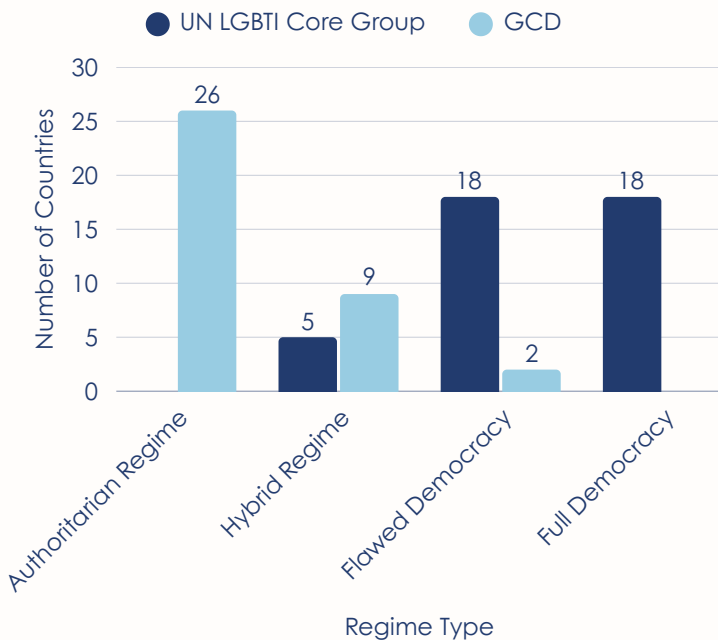


Figure 2. Distribution of 2024 EIU Democracy Scores by Type

While 88 percent of UN LGBTI Core Group member states are Flawed or Full Democracies, approximately the same proportion of GCD coalition countries have Authoritarian or Hybrid regimes. Furthermore, average UN LGBTI Core Group scores generally trend in a stable trajectory from 2011–2024, while the GCD's average democracy scores markedly trend downward beginning 2018, shown in **Figure 3**.

This distribution casts doubt upon the GCD's stated commitment to self-determination, a disparity further highlighted by measures of civic space between affiliations.

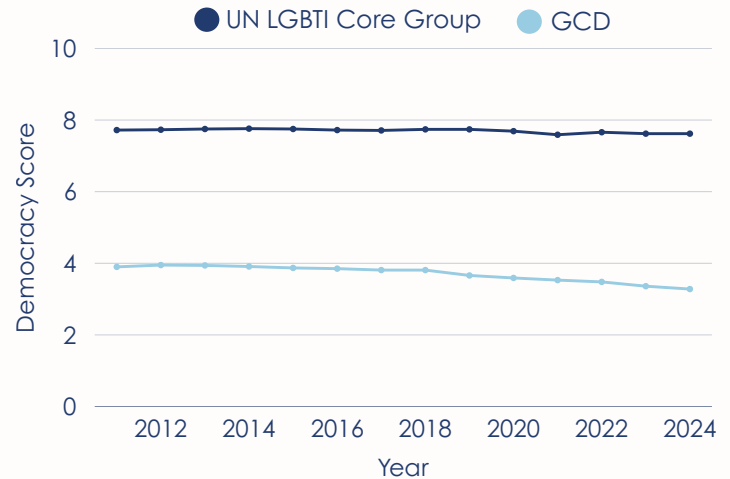


Figure 3. EIU Democracy Index Scores by Affiliation, 2011–2024

II. Civic Space

Comparing civic space conditions between UN LGBTI Core Group and GCD Coalition countries reveals that, on average, civil society groups in UN LGBTI Core Group member states enjoy greater freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression. **Figure 4**, below, shows the distribution of examined countries by CIVICUS Monitor category.

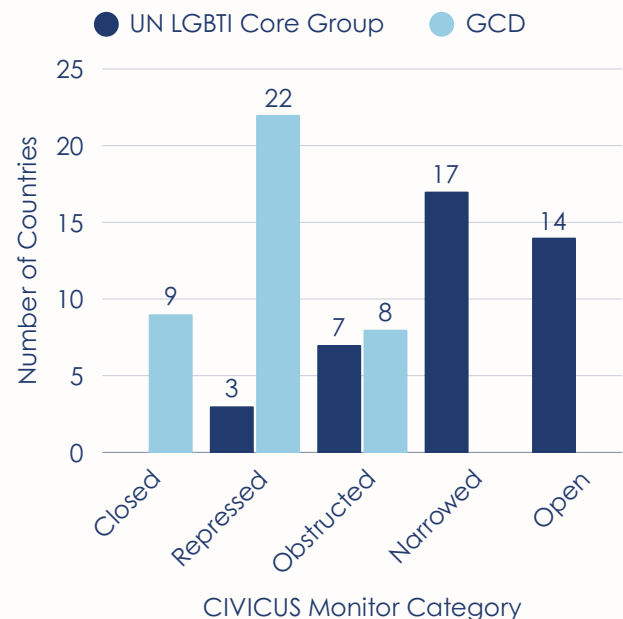


Figure 4. Distribution of 2024 CIVICUS Monitor Categories by Affiliation

While most UN LGBTI Core Group countries earn Narrowed or Open status, similar numbers of GCD Coalition countries receive Closed or Repressed status, indicating comparative lack of freedoms and protections for civil society in these countries.

III. Gender Equality

The Gender Inequality Index shows consistently higher levels of inequality among GCD Coalition countries compared to UN LGBTI Core Group members states. While all countries' GII scores improved from 2011–2023, GCD countries consistently displayed higher levels of gender inequality compared to UN LGBTI Core Group members. Therefore, on average, women, girls, and gender identity minorities fare significantly better in UN LGBTI Core Group countries compared to GCD countries.

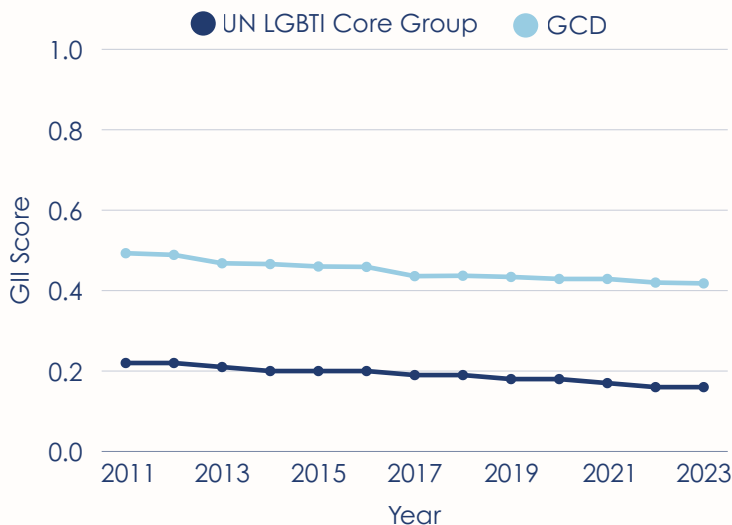


Figure 5. GII Scores by Affiliation, 2011–2023

IV. Human Rights of LGBTI Persons

This analysis of the human rights of LGBTI persons among UN LGBTI Core Group and GCD Coalition countries considers the state and societal protections depicted by the F&M Global Barometer of Unified Rights (GBUR) from 2011–2024, in addition to the lived experiences of LGBTI persons reported in the 2024 F&M

Global Barometers LGBTQI+ Perception Index (GBPI) survey.

A. State and Societal Protections

The GBUR data reveal that UN LGBTI Core Group member states offer substantially more state and societal protections to sexual orientation and gender identity minorities. A comparison of score distribution shows that many UN LGBTI Core Group states received a grade of A-Protecting on the 2024 GBUR, whereas 97% of GCD Coalition countries scored an F-Persecuting (see **Figure 6**, below).

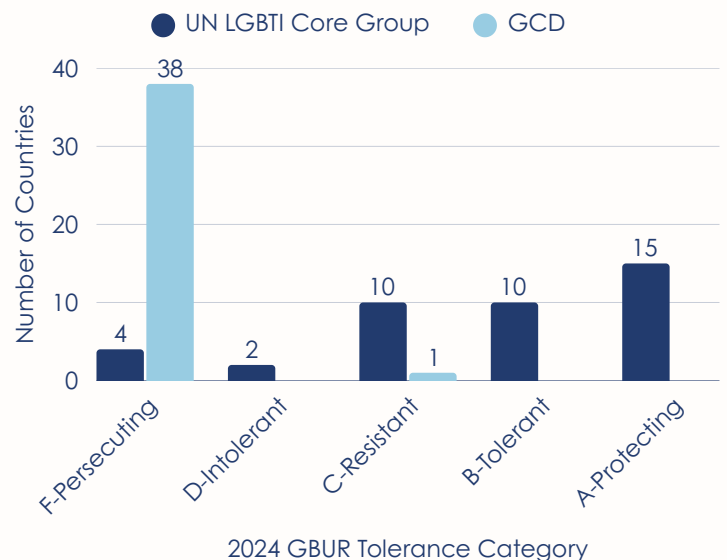


Figure 6. Distribution of 2024 GBUR Scores by Affiliation

These scores reflect identity-based protections for sexual orientation and gender identity/expression: For example, as of 2024, all 41 UN LGBTI Core Group member states decriminalized homosexuality; the same was true for only 21 GCD member states. Similarly, legal gender recognition was available in 37 UN LGBTI Core Group countries but in only five GCD Coalition countries. Scores from the 2024 GBUR show unequal distributions between UN LGBTI Core Group and GCD Coalition countries in state and societal treatment, which is further supported by scores on the 2024 GBPI.

B. Lived Experiences

Where the GBUR provides insight into the state and society's treatment of gender identity and sexual orientation minorities, the GBPI reflects how LGBTI people actually perceive and experience those identity-based human rights. Scores from the 2022 and 2024 surveys reveal staggering disparities between the experiences of LGBTI individuals from UN LGBTI Core Group and GCD Coalition countries (see **Figure 7**, below).

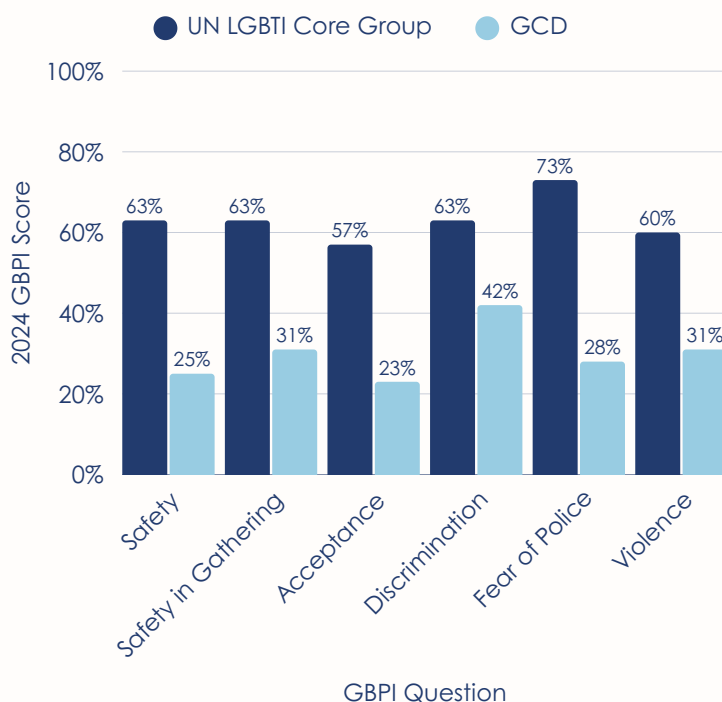


Figure 7. 2024 GBPI Scores by Question and Affiliation

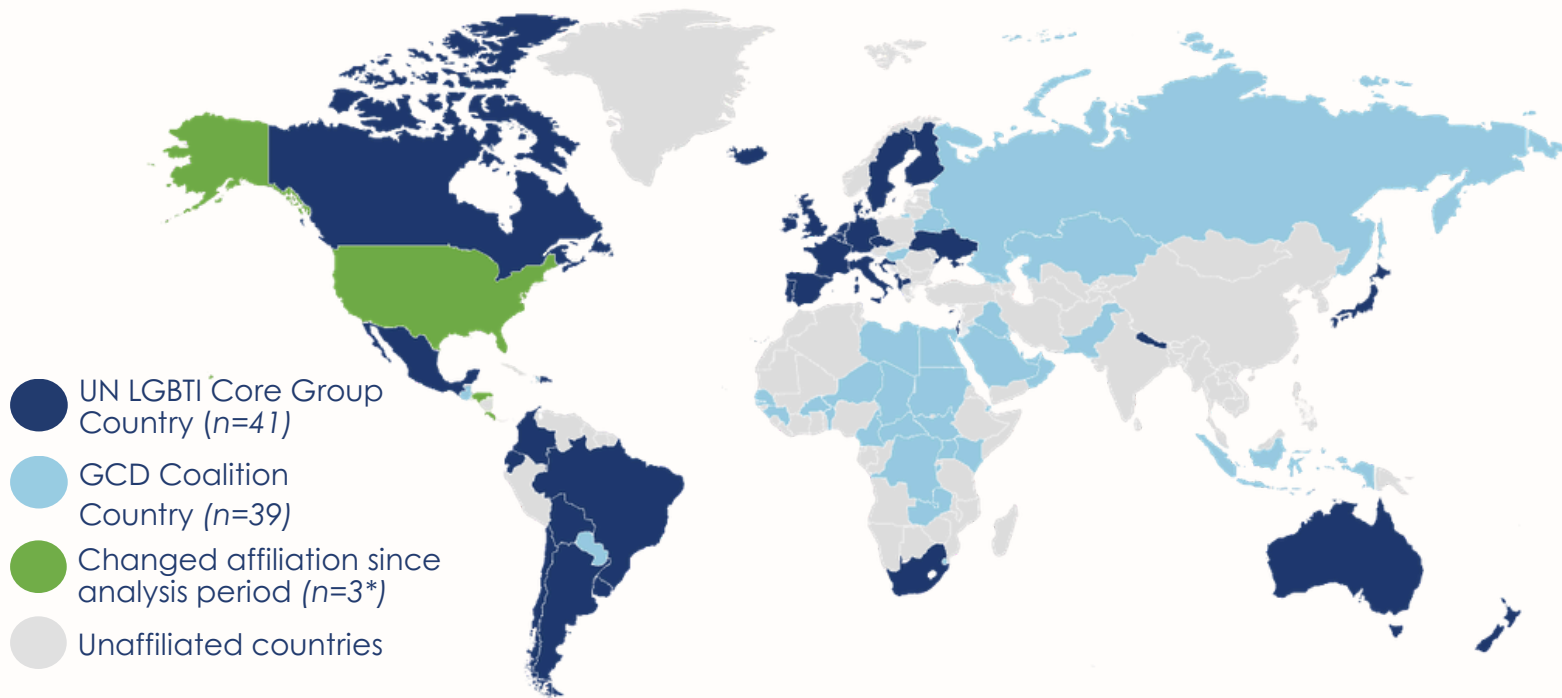
Question five (fear of police and other security forces) shows the greatest disparity: UN LGBTI Core Group members scored over 2.5 times higher on average, with significantly less fear of violence or persecution from police and security forces. However, average composite GBPI scores for UN LGBTI Core Group and GCD Coalition states lowered by one and two percent, respectively, between 2022 and 2024. This drop in scores indicates worsening conditions for LGBTI people worldwide.

Conclusion

A comparison of data between member states of the UN LGBTI Core Group and Geneva Consensus Declaration Coalition countries reveals starkly different outcomes across indicators of democracy, civic space, gender equality, and the human rights of LGBTI people. While both groups claim to elevate equality and human dignity, empirical data demonstrate that UN LGBTI Core Group member states actually achieve these aspirations to a far greater degree.

These disparate outcomes indicate varied commitments to realizing human rights. A lack of implementation of protections for LGBTI people in many countries highlights the importance of considering multilateral commitments based not only on the groups' stated aims, but also by measuring the extent to which they produce positive outcomes for democratic and human rights conditions for their populations.

UN LGBTI Core Group and GCD Coalition Membership



*Costa Rica, Honduras, and the United States

Members of the UN LGBTI Core Group (as of June 2026):

Albania	Germany	Sweden
Argentina	Iceland	Timor-Leste
Australia	Ireland	United Kingdom
Belgium	Israel	Uruguay
Bolivia	Italy	
Brazil	Japan	
Cabo Verde	Luxembourg	
Canada	Malta	
Chile	Mexico	
Colombia	Montenegro	
Croatia	Nepal	
Cyprus	Netherlands	
Czechia	New Zealand	
Denmark	North Macedonia	
Dominican Republic	Norway	
Ecuador	Peru	
Finland	Portugal	
France	South Africa	
	Spain	

Members of the GCD Coalition (as of June 2026):

Bahrain	Haiti	Sudan
Belarus	Hungary	Uganda
Benin	Indonesia	United Arab Emirates
Burkina Faso	Iraq	United States
Burundi	Kazakhstan	Zambia
Cameroon	Kenya	
Central African Republic	Kuwait	
Chad	Libya	
Congo (Rep.)	Nauru	
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	Niger	
Djibouti	Oman	
Egypt	Pakistan	
Eswatini	Paraguay	
The Gambia	Qatar	
Georgia	Russia	
Guatemala	Saudi Arabia	
Guinea	Senegal	
	South Sudan	