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OPINION // OPEN FORUM

2024 was the year trans people like me became untouchables

What happens when a winning candidate attacks a minority comprising less than 1% of the population? They become an untouchable caste, with no allies

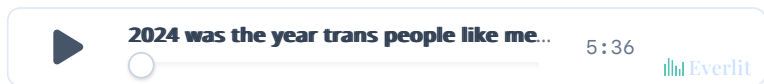
By **Diana Goetsch**

Dec 31, 2024



Antonella Delgado helps hold up a large transgender pride flag at the beginning of the Trans March from Dolores Park to Turk and Taylor streets in downtown San Francisco on June 28, 2024.

Camille Cohen/Special to the Chronicle



Last month, when Speaker Mike Johnson made a [rule banning Rep. Sarah McBride, D-Del., from women’s bathrooms on the House side of the Capitol](#), the first openly transgender member of Congress agreed to obey.

“I’m not here to fight about bathrooms,” she wrote on X.

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The news sent a shudder through the trans community, and prompted journalist Baily Wayne Hundl of [the Meteor](#) to write, “Girl, why?”

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I’ll tell you why: McBride had no choice and no allies. She knew Republicans wanted a fight and a spectacle

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so they could keep trans people (of which I am one) at the center of media attention after an election campaign that scapegoated and demonized us nonstop.

During a two-week period in October, Donald Trump's presidential campaign and its allies spent \$95 million on a TV advertising blitz, 41% of which targeted the trans community, depicting us as menacing, disgusting and a threat to middle America. According to CBS News, these ads were aired nearly 55,000 times in key swing states in the first half of October, particularly during NFL and college football broadcasts.

The ads used clips of the popular Black radio host Charlemagne saying "Hell, no!" to taxpayer dollars going to surgeries for trans prisoners. They photoshopped images of Vice President Kamala Harris beside trans and genderqueer people made to look lurid and grotesque. They showed photos of a large trans woman in a basketball uniform beside much smaller teammates. One commercial lifted an image from the Netflix show "Orange is the New Black," blurred the actors' faces, and superimposed the caption: "Transgender operations on illegal aliens ... TRUE."

When a winning candidate uses 41% of his messaging to attack a group comprising less than 1% of the population, what is the impact on that minority?

I'll tell you: they become an untouchable caste, with no allies.

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The Harris campaign chose not to respond to the Trump ads — not even to point out, as [the Lincoln Project](#) did, that trans health care for prisoners (including surgery) was the policy of Trump's Bureau of Prisons during his first term. In campaign rallies, Harris's litany of "freedoms" invariably ended with gay rights ("The freedom to love who you love openly and with pride"). It never once included trans rights. The same was true for Democratic candidates down the ballot. Before McBride was banned from the Capitol bathrooms, she was excluded from the Democratic National Convention stage.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., called the

Capitol trans bathroom ban dangerous for “all women and girls” because “all it does is allow these Republicans to go around and bully any woman who isn’t wearing a skirt because she might not look woman enough.” That’s a lot like someone in 1955 objecting to Jim Crow laws because some white people might get mistaken for Black people. AOC didn’t mention McBride or civil rights.

Trans people have become untouchables.

Trump has promised on day one of his second presidency to order every federal agency to “cease all programs that promote the concept of sex and gender transition at any age” and has called for Congress to cut off federal funding of gender-affirming health care and outlaw it for minors. That may not be hard. Twenty-six states already have bans on gender-affirming health care, despite overwhelming support for it from every major American medical association as safe, evidence-based and lifesaving.

Two weeks ago, the Supreme Court displayed its appetite for allowing Tennessee to ban health care for trans youth. The House and Senate just passed a defense bill taking away health care for trans kids in military families (and stripping 6,000 to 7,000 of those families of their parental rights. It likely will be signed by President Joe Biden. Last year, the Republicans in the Senate introduced a bill to do the same nationally, legislation they are sure to reintroduce next year.

If it sounds like I’m terrified, I am — as are many trans Americans and their families. In recent years there

has been an escalation in the number of anti-trans bills introduced in Republican state houses ([669 bills in 2024](#)). Most are targeting trans minors, taking away bathrooms, sports, books, forcibly outing them, outlawing “crossdressing,” greenlighting hate speech, criminalizing any mention of gender identity, and [criminalizing their parents, doctors and counselors](#). As Trump has vowed, and as the state of [Oklahoma](#) has done, they’re not going to stop with children.

But what terrifies me most doesn’t just concern trans people. I’ll pose my fear as a question: What percentage of the German population was Jewish at the time of Hitler’s rise? The answer — [0.75%](#) — is lower than most people guess.

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The Nazi party gaslit a nation into thinking that a group comprising 0.75% of its population was a threat that could “poison” its culture, seize its economy and needed to be stopped. During the 1930s, before Germany’s “final solution” to “the Jewish problem,” [more than 400](#) anti-Jewish decrees and regulations were issued by national, regional and municipal officials, gradually eliminating Jews from public life,

employment, education, culture, travel, hospital care and turning them into outcasts.

Sound familiar?

Diana Goetsch is an award-winning poet and nonfiction writer. Her most recent book is [“This Body I Wore,”](#) a memoir chronicling the budding trans communities in New York City in the late 20th century.

Dec 31, 2024

Diana Goetsch

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