

After Roe's overturn, Republicans target trans rights using extremist rhetoric

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Americans are “frustrated and anxious”, lamented former vice-president Mike Pence. The country is “in a precarious position” assessed North Carolina’s lieutenant governor, Mark Robinson. And Glenn Jacobs, a former professional wrestling star and current mayor of Knox county, Tennessee, declared that “these are hard times”.

What could be the cause of such hardship? To the Republican presidential candidates who spoke in Washington DC on Friday at a major gathering of the religious right, the culprit was American society’s acceptance of transgender people and the broader LGBTQ+ community.

The language and imagery is extreme and full of conspiracy theories.

“We are facing the greatest challenge this country has ever seen, certainly in my lifetime,” the Missouri senator Josh Hawley said to the crowd of hundreds gathered for the Faith & Freedom Coalition’s annual Road to Majority Policy Conference.

He described the challenge as “a new Marxism that is rising in this country”, one that tells Americans, among other things: “That there’s no such thing as male and female, that there are not two genders. There’s 2,000 genders and it tells our children that the way God made them is wrong.

“These new Marxists want to give America a new religion. They want to impose on us the religion of woke. It is the religion of transgenderism, critical race theory and open borders multiculturalism, and they are shoving it down our throats,” Hawley said.

Held in the hotel where Ronald Reagan [survived an assassination attempt](#), the audience of hundreds seated in its ballroom heard from several major Republican presidential candidates, including, the Florida governor, Ron DeSantis, Senator Tim Scott, and the ex-Arkansas governor Asa Hutchinson.

Their appearances came at an inflection point for cultural conservatives. A year ago, they had seen their long-held dream of overturning Roe v Wade become reality when the supreme court struck down the precedent after 49 years, [allowing states to ban abortion](#). But in the realm of LGBTQ+ rights, the movement recently appeared to be on the back foot, with congressional Republicans in 2022 [helping to pass a law](#) that protected same-sex marriage nationwide, building on the supreme court’s establishment of the right in 2015.

In response, groups opposed to rights for the gay, lesbian and transgender communities have orchestrated [a well-funded backlash](#) to the expansion of rights – one that is being fostered by extremists, has seen the erosion of gay rights in many states across the US and includes a growing threat of violence.

“God hates pride. He hates pride in January, February, March, April, May and in the month of June,” conservative preacher John Amanchukwu proclaimed early in the event, in a reference to the LGBTQ+ Pride month that drew laughs and cheers from the crowd in Washington.

The fallout has hit the trans community in America particularly hard. This year so far, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) [says](#) that 15 bans on gender-affirming care for transgender youth have been passed into law, as have seven bills allowing or requiring the misgendering of transgender students, along with a handful of other measures targeting drag performances or school curriculum. All told, more anti-gay bills have been introduced in statehouses in 2023 than in the past five years, according to HRC.

“The purpose of these laws is to facilitate a rise in political extremism by alienating and isolating LGBTQ+ Americans, and the impact of these laws is alarming,” said Kelley Robinson, president of HRC, in a recent statement, calling it a “state of emergency”.

“In every county you represent, in every county your colleagues represent, you will find parents and children, teachers and nurses, community leaders and small business owners who are afraid that the rise in legislative assaults and political extremism has put a target on their backs.”

Earlier this month, the pollster Gallup [reported](#) a drop in public support for same-sex relations, driven mostly by Republicans. The issue’s approval now stands at 64%, compared with 71% last year, with only 41% of Republicans approving – a decline of 15 percentage points from last year.

Last week, rights groups GLAAD and the Anti-Defamation League [found](#) that at least 356 incidences of hate directed at LGBTQ+ Americans occurred between June 2022 and the past April, including [a mass shooting](#) at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs that left five people dead.

At the Faith & Freedom Coalition’s conference, speaker after speaker made clear their resolve to continue the campaign against trans Americans.

“We will end the gender ideology that is running rampant in our schools, and we will ban chemical and surgical gender transition treatment for kids under the age of 18,” said Pence.

As governor of Florida, DeSantis has overseen a campaign against what he calls “woke ideology”, including a bill he signed earlier this year that bans gender-affirming care for minors, restricts its access for adults and allows the state to temporarily remove trans children from their parents.

[Polls show](#) DeSantis in a distant second place to Donald Trump, who has maintained his lead in the Republican primary field by offering voters a familiar mix of conspiracies, charisma and promises to continue the policies he pursued during his first term as president.

DeSantis stayed away from attacking the Republican frontrunner in his speech, instead promising the Faith & Freedom Coalition audience that as president, he would implement his policies in Florida across the United States.

“We will fight the woke in the schools, we will fight the woke in the corporations, we will fight the woke in the halls of government. We will never ever surrender to the woke mob. We are going to leave woke ideology in the dustbin of history where it belongs,” DeSantis said.