If Nowhere Feels Safe, Where Do We Go?  
A Safety Index for Trans People in the Northeastern US

INTRO

Trans people constantly experience microaggressions: misgendering, deadnaming, invasive questions, or uncomfortable stares and posturing. These small forms of daily violence, encouraged by an apathetic society (save for when it comes to trans peoples’ genitals and hormonal status) that is rife with anti-transness and transmisogyny, make way for greater forms of violence. As of November, 26 trans people have been brutally, violently murdered in 2018 for no reason other than their gender identities or expression. According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, 10% of trans people have experienced violence within their homes after coming out and 8% were kicked out. 54% of trans people who were openly trans in school (K-12) experienced harassment (violent or verbal) and 27% experienced such severe mistreatment that they had to leave school. 30% of trans people have reported workplace abuses such as sexual, physical, and verbal harassment, the denial of promotions, and firings. Nearly half of all 27,775 respondents had been sexually assaulted in their lifetime and nearly half had been harassed or assaulted on the street within that year. The study also found that trans people are nine times more likely to have attempted suicide at some point in their lifetime compared to the average US population (40% vs 4.6%) and nearly eight times more likely to experience mental distress in the last month (39% vs. 5%). All of these statistics do not come close to reflecting the issues that trans people face, particularly trans people with intersecting identities. The majority of homicides of trans people are of trans femmes of color. Trans people of color, who are more likely to be poorer, and therefore have greater accessibility needs, trans people with positive HIV status, and trans people of undocumented status are more likely to experience hardship, homelessness, violence, and discrimination. However, despite the atrocity of these figures, things are changing. The study found that one state is safer for trans people than any other as any ranking lowest.

Overall, New York and D.C. ranked highest, while Delaware ranked lowest—a surprise to me. However, it is hard to conclusively say that one state is safer for trans people than any other as any index inherently treats the trans experience as monolithic, when it is not. The data gathered is unlikely comprehensive because there is no centralized data source on trans resources and experiences. Furthermore, in creating this index it was hard to prioritize one value over another. The index reflects my beliefs for what constitutes safety, but may not reflect others’. Further studies could spend more time gathering data on each state and add fields to the Index that represent other struggles trans people encounter, such as ease of adopting. It would also use multiple sources per dataset (where applicable) and would evaluate the entirety of the US. Lastly, I believe it’s important to recognize that even in states where there are legal protections for trans people and many resource centers, the constant threat of violence remains and trans people are only marginally safer in blue states than pink ones.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the lab assistants, to Carolyn, to Cris and Emily, and lastly, to all my classmates for all of your help and support throughout the semester.

CONCLUSIONS

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The criteria for this index were inspired by the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, and all of the data was gathered online. After preliminary research, the eight features I used were: ease of changing name, ease of changing driver’s license, ease of changing birth certificate, bathroom protections, access to state healthcare, number of high-ranking hospitals on the HRC’s healthcare equality index, number of LGBT homeless shelters and resource centers, and state recognition of a third gender. I created an excel spreadsheet for each feature and upon adding all my data to the spreadsheets, each variable was assigned a value from 0-5, 0 being the least safe and 5 being the most. I imported the final excel spreadsheets into ArcMap and then joined the tables to a shapefile of the states in the Northeast. Once I had all the spreadsheets joined, I added a field in my attribute table and used the field calculator to average the scores (with equal weights). To visualize the homeless shelters and resource centers I used their addresses and a geocoder. To visualize the homicides, I joined the table containing the city name and number of homicides to a pointfile of all major US cities. Lastly, after testing many projections, I chose one which left the states the least crooked.

Tufts University  
Intro to GIS  
Fall 2018

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Emily, and lastly, to all my classmates for all of your help and support throughout the semester.

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