


## The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ people in spaces of power: challenges and representation strategies

### ARTICLE


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### Abstract

This article aims to investigate the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in their pursuit of representation and the strategies that have been implemented to reverse this scenario. The research is based on a qualitative, bibliographic approach, drawing on authors such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Guacira Lopes Louro, and Berenice Bento, among others, who contribute to understanding the structural dimensions of exclusion and the possibilities for subverting social norms. The study highlights how stigmas, historical inequalities, and the absence of inclusive public policies contribute to the invisibility of LGBTQIA+ identities. On the other hand, it emphasizes the role of political activism, intersectionality, and visibility as pathways to building a more just and democratic society. The results indicate that, although advances have been made, significant obstacles to full inclusion and representation of these populations still persist.

**Keywords:** Invisibility. Representation. Power. LGBTQIA+.

### A invisibilidade de pessoas LGBTQIA+ em espaços de poder: desafios e estratégias de representação

### Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo investigar os desafios enfrentados por pessoas LGBTQIA+ em busca de representatividade e as estratégias que têm sido implementadas para reverter esse cenário. A investigação fundamenta-se em uma abordagem qualitativa, de caráter bibliográfico, com base em autores como Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Guacira Lopes Louro e Berenice Bento, entre outros, que contribuem para compreender as dimensões estruturais da exclusão e as possibilidades de subversão das normas sociais. O estudo destaca como estigmas, desigualdades históricas e ausência de políticas públicas inclusivas contribuem para a invisibilidade de identidades LGBTQIA+. Por outro lado, evidencia-se o papel da atuação política, da interseccionalidade e da visibilidade como caminhos para a construção de uma sociedade mais justa e

democrática. Os resultados apontam que, embora avanços tenham sido conquistados, ainda persistem obstáculos significativos à plena inclusão e representatividade dessas populações.

**Palavras-chave:** Invisibilidade. Representação. Poder. LGBTQIA+.

## 1 Introduction

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The visibility of LGBTQIA+ individuals in spaces of power is a crucial issue in the contemporary context, in which the struggle for rights and social recognition continues to challenge established norms and structures of oppression. Despite significant advances in recent decades, such as the legalization of same-sex marriage and the inclusion of gender rights in legislation in various parts of the world, the reality is that many LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities still face persistent invisibility in decision-making spheres. This invisibility is not only a matter of representation but also a reflection of historical and social inequalities that relegate these identities to a marginal space.

The marginalization of LGBTQIA+ people is fueled by a combination of prejudice, social stigma, and the absence of public policies that acknowledge and address their specificities. This becomes evident in different areas, such as politics, where the underrepresentation of LGBTQIA+ voices results in decisions that fail to reflect their needs and demands, and in the labor market, where discrimination can limit access to opportunities and resources. Thus, the invisibility of LGBTQIA+ individuals in spaces of power perpetuates a cycle of exclusion and vulnerability, becoming a significant barrier to the construction of a truly inclusive and equitable society.

In this context, the present article aims to investigate the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ people in their pursuit of representativeness and the strategies that have been implemented to reverse this scenario. By reflecting on issues of resistance and mobilization, the study seeks to highlight how the struggle for visibility and inclusion can not only impact the lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals but also contribute to broader social change that challenges oppressive norms and promotes diversity in all its forms. Through this study, the goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of power

that shape the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people and to propose pathways for building more just and representative spaces.

The study is based on a qualitative and bibliographic approach, grounded in a theoretical framework composed of authors such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Michel Foucault (1978, 1982), Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2015), whose contributions are fundamental to understanding structures of power, identity, gender, and resistance. In addition, documents from international organizations, such as UNESCO (2012) and Human Rights Campaign (2018), provide data and analyses on the situation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in different contexts. The choice of these works seeks to highlight the structural challenges faced by this population, engaging with critical perspectives that help reflect on marginalization and the possibilities of social transformation through visibility and representativeness in decision-making spaces.

## **2 Historical invisibility of LGBTQIA+ people**

The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ individuals is a historical phenomenon marked by processes of social, cultural, and political marginalization that date back to Antiquity. Although there are records of homoaffective practices in civilizations such as Greece and Rome—where such relationships were, in certain contexts, tolerated or even institutionalized—this acceptance was restricted to specific social roles and did not signify full recognition of non-heteronormative identities (Bento, 2006).

With the consolidation of Christianity and the growing influence of religious morality on Western power structures from the Middle Ages onward, sexuality came to be strictly controlled. Homoaffective practices were progressively associated with sin, moral disorder, and heresy, resulting in institutional persecution and severe punishment (Foucault, 1982). This process consolidated a repressive logic over dissident bodies and desires, rendering LGBTQIA+ experiences invisible and restricting their public expression.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, with the emergence of medical and psychological sciences, homosexuality came to be categorized within a pathologizing framework. Terms

such as “sexual inversion” and “deviation” were employed by authors of the time to classify these experiences as psychic or biological anomalies. Although Freud acknowledged homosexuality as a manifestation of human sexuality, his perspective still regarded it as a developmental deviation (Parker, 2000; Louro, 2004). In Brazil, this process was reflected in medical and legal production, which, for decades, legitimized practices of social and institutional exclusion.

From the second half of the 20th century onward, social movements began to question this historical invisibility. The Stonewall uprising in 1969, in the United States, became a symbol of resistance against police and institutional repression and propelled the struggle for civil rights of LGBTQIA+ populations in various countries. In Brazil, the organization of the group SOMOS in 1978 represented a political milestone in the visibility of dissident identities amid the repression of the military dictatorship (Facchini, 2005).

The 1990s brought significant advances, such as the removal of homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) by the World Health Organization in 1990. Nevertheless, even with recent legal and social achievements—such as the criminalization of homophobia in Brazil in 2019—structures of exclusion remain active. The underrepresentation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in positions of power, violence motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity, and historical erasure continue to be central challenges (Miskolci, 2012).

Understanding this historical background is not merely an exercise in memory, but a way of highlighting the mechanisms through which silencing was produced and continues to be maintained. Recovering these trajectories is essential to destabilize hegemonic narratives and to build a society where sexual and gender diversity is respected and promoted.

## 3 Structural challenges to LGBTQIA+ representation

The underrepresentation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in spaces of power is not merely the result of individual prejudice or isolated discrimination, but rather of structural challenges deeply rooted in institutions and social systems. Such challenges manifest as historical, political, economic, and symbolic barriers that limit these populations' access to decision-making processes, full citizenship, and social recognition.

Foucault (1982), in investigating the relationship between power and knowledge, argues that power is not concentrated only in formal institutions but permeates discourses, social norms, and everyday practices. For him, “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1982, p. 89). This conception makes it possible to understand how certain groups are systematically excluded from the public sphere and from spaces of power, not only through explicit laws but also through a network of social mechanisms that regulate who can or cannot be visible, audible, and legitimate. Although Foucault did not write directly about the LGBTQIA+ population as we name it today, his theory provides a basis for analyzing how heteronormative norms are institutionally reproduced, contributing to the invisibility and marginalization of these identities.

Philosopher Butler (2019), in turn, by introducing the concept of gender performativity, questions the naturalization of sexual and gender identities. She proposes that gender is not something one *is*, but rather something one *does* repeatedly, according to cultural norms. This conception is essential to understanding why certain expressions of gender identity are viewed as “legitimate” while others are excluded from spaces of power. Butler (2019) argues that breaking with these norms—through visibility and the public affirmation of LGBTQIA+ identities—is a political act of resistance that challenges the normative structures of society.

Beyond questions of gender and sexuality, Crenshaw's (1989a, 1989b) theory of intersectionality reveals that the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ people becomes even more complex when intersected with other dimensions of identity, such as race, class, territory,

and disability. The author demonstrates that public policies and legal structures often fail to take these intersections into account, resulting in multiple forms of invisibility. In the Brazilian context, for example, Black and peripheral trans people face additional barriers of exclusion, both in access to education and in professional and political participation.

It is important to highlight that the acronym LGBTQIA+—encompassing lesbians, gays, bisexuals, travestis, trans people, queer, intersex, asexuals, and other identities—began to be more widely used in Brazil from the 2010s onward as a way of making the different identities within the movement more visible. Its consolidation is linked to the strengthening of diversity and inclusion agendas, especially in academic, activist, and institutional environments.

Thus, the structural challenges to LGBTQIA+ representation manifest not only in the formal exclusion of these individuals from decision-making bodies, but also in the persistence of a societal model that privileges certain bodies and subjectivities over others. Overcoming this reality requires transforming the institutional and symbolic structures that sustain inequality and building public policies that account for the multiple dimensions of LGBTQIA+ existence.

#### **4 Strategies of mobilization and resistance**

Strategies of mobilization and resistance play a crucial role in the struggle for representation and visibility of LGBTQIA+ individuals in spaces of power. These actions are essential for confronting discrimination, challenging oppressive norms, and fostering social change. Several authors and theorists have contributed to the understanding of these strategies and their implications.

One of the theoretical approaches that underpins this discussion is the theory of performativity, proposed by Butler (1993). The author suggests that resistance is a form of subversion of gender and sexuality norms, emphasizing that identities are constructed through social practices. The repetition of such practices can, therefore, be transformative. In this context, LGBTQIA+ pride demonstrations, pride parades, and other visibility events



function as forms of performativity that challenge traditional norms and promote acceptance and recognition.

Collective mobilization is another fundamental strategy in the struggle for LGBTQIA+ rights. Organized groups, such as the National LGBTQ Task Force and the Human Rights Campaign in the United States, exemplify how the formation of support networks can lead to significant change. These groups employ awareness campaigns, political lobbying, and community mobilization to promote inclusive policies and support LGBTQIA+ individuals in their personal struggles. Tilly and Tarrow (2015) argue that collective mobilization is a response to situations of injustice, uniting individuals around a common cause.

In addition, the media plays a crucial role in promoting LGBTQIA+ visibility. David Marshall (1997) argues that representation in media can influence public perception and shape social norms. The presence of LGBTQIA+ characters in films, television series, and programs contributes to the demystification of stereotypes and to the acceptance of diversity. Advertising campaigns that include LGBTQIA+ people and real-life stories help normalize sexual and gender diversity, reinforcing the need for more inclusive representation.

Finally, advocacy for the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals in public policies is a significant strategy of resistance. Organizations such as GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) and ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) work to promote legislation that protects LGBTQIA+ rights, confronting discrimination and seeking to guarantee equality in various spheres such as health, education, and labor. This work is vital to ensuring that LGBTQIA+ voices are heard in spaces where crucial decisions are made.

## **5 Impact of invisibility on public policies**

The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ individuals in spaces of power has a significant impact on public policies, directly affecting the formulation, implementation, and effectiveness of

policies intended to serve this population. This phenomenon is multidimensional, manifesting in various spheres, including health, education, security, and civil rights.

One of the most direct effects of invisibility is the lack of representation in political discussions and in the drafting of laws aimed at protecting rights and promoting equal opportunities for LGBTQIA+ people. According to the Human Rights Campaign (2018), the absence of LGBTQIA+ voices at decision-making tables often results in policies that fail to consider the specific needs and challenges of this community. This creates a cycle of exclusion in which policies are not designed to address the realities faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals, thereby perpetuating discrimination and marginalization.

Invisibility also contributes to the lack of data and research addressing LGBTQIA+ issues. According to the American Psychological Association (2012), the absence of disaggregated data on sexuality and gender identity in national and state surveys hinders the identification of specific needs and the assessment of existing policies' effectiveness. Without concrete evidence, it is difficult to create interventions based on real needs, which results in generic policies that do not address the complexity of LGBTQIA+ lived experiences.

Furthermore, invisibility can impact the implementation of public policies, especially in areas such as health and education. A study by McBride *et al.* (2018) highlights that, in many health systems, the lack of specific training for professionals regarding the health needs of LGBTQIA+ populations leads to inadequate service provision. This can result in barriers to accessing essential health care, exacerbating mental and physical health issues among LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Finally, invisibility in public policies is also reflected in social and cultural representations. Foucault (1978) discusses how power and knowledge are intertwined, and the lack of visibility contributes to the stigmatization and dehumanization of LGBTQIA+ people. The absence of policies addressing education on sexual and gender diversity in schools perpetuates harmful stereotypes and limits children's and young people's understanding of human diversity.



In summary, the impact of invisibility on public policies is profound and far-reaching, resulting in a series of challenges that affect the daily lives of LGBTQIA+ people. For public policies to be effective and inclusive, the visibility and representation of this population must be prioritized in political, social, and cultural spheres.

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## 6 Advances and challenges: the participation of LGBTQIA+ people in the Brazilian political arena

The participation of LGBTQIA+ people in the Brazilian political arena has evolved significantly in recent decades, reflecting a continuous struggle for rights and recognition. Historically, the invisibility and marginalization of this group manifested in the scarcity of representatives in positions of power and the absence of public policies addressing their specific needs. With the growing social mobilization and strengthening of the LGBTQIA+ movement, especially from the 2000s onwards, progress was made in securing institutional spaces and developing equity-oriented policies (Miskolci, 2012; Facchini; França, 2009).

An important milestone in the process of political visibility for the LGBTQIA+ population was the founding of the *Grupo Gay da Bahia* – GGB (Bahia's Gay Group) in 1980 by Luiz Mott. This is the oldest LGBTQIA+ rights organization in Brazil. The GGB became nationally known for systematizing and disseminating data on violence against this population, influencing public debate and policy formulation (GGB, 2023). This pioneering work was essential to inserting LGBTQIA+ issues into the national political agenda and drawing attention to the urgency of rights protection.

The election of Jean Wyllys in 2010, representing PSOL-RJ, as the first openly gay federal congressman in Brazil, marked a historic moment in LGBTQIA+ political representation. Wyllys stood out not only for his visibility but also for his legislative work in defense of human rights, combating homophobia, and promoting diversity policies (Wyllys, 2016). His performance represented a symbolic rupture with the historical exclusion of these identities from institutional spaces of power.

From a normative standpoint, although it was not designed specifically for the LGBTQIA+ population, the *Maria da Penha Law* (Law No. 11,340/2006) was a landmark in the fight against gender-based violence. By recognizing that domestic violence is not limited to the heteronormative conjugal sphere, this legislation contributed to broader discussions about violence against LGBTQIA+ people in family and affective contexts (Brazil, 2006).

Another significant advance was the decision of the Federal Supreme Court in 2011, which recognized same-sex civil unions with the same rights as heterosexual couples (Brazil, 2011). Subsequently, the National Justice Council (CNJ), through Resolution No. 175/2013, established that registry offices could not refuse to perform same-sex marriages. These legal milestones consolidated the right to equal marriage and signaled the recognition of sexual and gender diversity in Brazilian law.

In the field of public policy, the implementation of the *National Policy for Comprehensive LGBTQIA+ Health*, established by Ordinance No. 2,836/2011 of the Ministry of Health, stands out. This policy sets guidelines for humanized care, respect for gender identity, combating institutional discrimination, and expanding access to health services, especially for trans people (Brazil, 2011b).

In recent years, the election of figures such as Erika Hilton in 2020, the first trans woman elected as city councilor in São Paulo and later as federal deputy, represents both a symbolic and concrete achievement. Her work has focused on proposals addressing violence, access to health and education, and the defense of human rights. Another relevant example was David Miranda, elected as a federal deputy in 2018, who carried on the struggle for social justice and inclusive policies in the National Congress (PSOL, 2023).

Despite these advances, structural challenges remain. LGBTQIA+phobia, gender-based political violence, discursive attacks, and the fragility of institutional guarantees demonstrate that the process of inclusion is still unequal and unstable. The struggle for visibility and equality in the political arena requires not only the election of LGBTQIA+ representatives but also the construction of a democratic culture that recognizes and embraces diversity as a fundamental value of Brazilian society.

## 7 Perspectives on inclusion and future directions

The inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in spaces of power and public policy is a topic of growing relevance and complexity in contemporary discussions on human rights and social equality. Understanding the perspectives of inclusion requires analyzing the social, cultural, and political dynamics that shape the visibility and representation of this population, as well as identifying future directions for promoting a more equitable society.

One of the main paths toward inclusion is the strengthening of LGBTQIA+ political representation. Authors such as Crenshaw (1989) emphasize the importance of intersectionality, which recognizes that people's experiences are shaped by multiple identities and forms of oppression. To foster effective inclusion, it is crucial that public policies take these intersectionalities into account and create spaces for the active participation of LGBTQIA+ voices. This can be achieved through the creation of advisory councils or committees that include representatives from the LGBTQIA+ community, ensuring that their needs and concerns are heard and addressed.

Education is another fundamental pillar of inclusion. Investing in training programs that address sexual and gender diversity in schools and public institutions can help combat discrimination and foster a more inclusive environment. According to UNESCO (2012), inclusive education not only benefits LGBTQIA+ people but also promotes tolerance and respect among all students, contributing to the construction of a more just society. It is essential that school curricula integrate diversity-related themes and that educators receive training to address issues related to sexuality and gender identity.

In addition, public policies must be supported by empirical data that reflect the realities lived by LGBTQIA+ people. The collection of disaggregated data on sexuality and gender identity in censuses and social surveys is crucial for understanding the specific needs of this population. Studies such as Berenstein (2018) demonstrate that evidence-based policies are more likely to be effective and promote equity. Therefore, fostering a research culture that includes LGBTQIA+ issues is vital for the development of more informed and sensitive policy interventions.

Finally, collaboration among different sectors of civil society, government, and non-governmental organizations can drive innovative initiatives aimed at LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Projects that promote economic empowerment, mental health, and the well-being of the LGBTQIA+ population have shown positive results in various communities. Joint work can result in awareness campaigns, affirmative actions, and support programs that address the inequalities faced by this population.

In conclusion, the perspectives for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in spaces of power and public policy require a collective and multifaceted commitment. By prioritizing representation, education, research, and collaboration, it is possible to build a future in which diversity is celebrated and the voices of all are heard and respected.

## 8 Final considerations

This article explored the invisibility of LGBTQIA+ people in spaces of power, highlighting the challenges faced by this population and the strategies of resistance and mobilization that have been implemented over time. The analysis of how this invisibility impacts public policy and the future directions for inclusion reveals the urgent need for a collective commitment to promoting diversity and equity at all levels of society.

The discussions throughout the text emphasize that invisibility is not only a matter of representation but is deeply rooted in social, cultural, and political structures that perpetuate marginalization. The struggle for visibility and inclusion must be a priority on political, educational, and social agendas. For this to happen, it is imperative that LGBTQIA+ people actively participate in the formulation of policies that affect their lives, ensuring that their voices are heard and respected.

Furthermore, educational institutions play a fundamental role in building a culture of respect and acceptance. The inclusion of issues related to sexual and gender diversity in curricula not only educates but also prepares future generations for more harmonious and respectful coexistence. Education must be a safe space where all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can freely express themselves.

In addition, the collection of disaggregated data and the development of research addressing LGBTQIA+ issues are essential to understanding the realities and needs of this population. Evidence-based public policies are more likely to be effective and to meet the specific demands of marginalized individuals.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in spaces of power and in society as a whole is a shared responsibility. Collaboration among government, civil society organizations, academia, and LGBTQIA+ communities themselves is fundamental to the development of initiatives that truly promote equality and social justice. Only through joint and continuous efforts will it be possible to overcome the barriers of invisibility and build a future in which diversity is valued and celebrated.

The reflections and proposals presented in this article aim to contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable path, reinforcing that the struggle for LGBTQIA+ visibility and rights is, ultimately, a struggle for human dignity and social justice.

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E-mail: belimare.pb@gmail.com

**Responsible publisher:** Genifer Andrade

**Ad hoc specialist:** André Ricardo Lucas Vieira and Manoel Messias de Oliveira.

## How to cite this article (ABNT):

BATISTA, Maria Thaís de Oliveira.; BRAZIL, Priscila Nunes.; FEITOSA, Belijane Marques. A invisibilidade de pessoas LGBTQIA+ em espaços de poder: desafios e estratégias de representação. **Rev. Pemo**, Fortaleza, v. 7, e15239, 2025. Available in: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/revpemo/article/view/15239>

Received on March 18, 2025.

Accepted on May 16, 2025.

Published on September 01, 2025.