

A dark silhouette of a hand holding a ballot, positioned above a ballot box. The background is a dark gradient.

VOTING HABITS AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES AMONG TRANSGENDER & GENDER NONCONFORMING PERSONS IN JAMAICA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from a mixed-methods study commissioned by TransWave Jamaica, aimed at examining political trust, voting behavior, and barriers to civic engagement among transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) youth in Jamaica.

KEY FINDINGS

TGNC individuals overwhelmingly lack trust in political institutions.

Only 33% of respondents expressed any level of trust in the government. This reflects widespread skepticism rooted in years of political neglect, with many participants describing a total absence of TGNC advocacy in governance. The lack of visible representation continues to fuel disengagement.

Safety concerns significantly deter political participation.

More than half of respondents (53%) reported feeling unsafe or experiencing discrimination while voting. Focus group participants described polling stations as hostile and emotionally distressing environments. These safety fears are tied directly to broader public stigma and inadequate legal protections.

Civic disengagement is driven by perceived futility.

67% of TGNC youth surveyed had never voted in an election. Many felt their votes would not matter or that politicians were indifferent to TGNC needs. This disengagement is not apathy—it is a rational response to exclusion and invisibility.

Documentation issues prevent full civic inclusion.

30% reported documentation issues due to not matching their identification at the polls or for other civic activities. This lack of access to affirming documents causes humiliation, delays, and legal uncertainty—making it difficult to participate in national processes.

Political parties are widely seen as non-inclusive and performative.

60% of respondents believed that no political party addressed TGNC concerns. Many viewed party involvement in LGBTQ+ spaces as symbolic and lacking substance. This perception further distances TGNC communities from structured political engagement.

Many TGNC youth are willing to engage—if conditions are right.

53% of respondents indicated that more inclusive political representation would encourage greater political participation, while 47% identified greater civic awareness and education as key motivators. This reflects a conditional hope: TGNC youth are not apathetic, but their engagement is contingent upon dignity, safety, and meaningful representation.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Enhance Political Literacy:** Develop civic education campaigns tailored for TGNC youth to increase awareness of voting rights and participation.
- 2. Advocate for Gender-Affirming Identification:** Push for the availability of gender-affirming IDs to remove critical barriers to voting.
- 3. Create Safe Voting Spaces:** Collaborate with security forces to ensure polling stations are safe and free from intimidation.
- 4. Foster Inclusive Representation:** Lobby political parties to adopt inclusive policies and directly engage TGNC communities.

INTRODUCTION

TransWave Jamaica is an advocacy organization committed to advancing the rights and wellbeing of transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) individuals within Jamaica. As part of its mission to center TGNC voices in national discourse, TransWave has undertaken a critical study exploring civic attitudes, voting behaviors, and political participation among TGNC youth in Jamaica. The research seeks to highlight systemic barriers, document lived realities and support ongoing efforts toward inclusive governance.

Jamaica's political culture is historically shaped by strong party loyalty, grassroots organizing, and highly visible expressions of political affiliation—often through party colors, slogans, and territorial divisions. While this tradition fuels democratic engagement for many, it also creates an atmosphere of political polarization, social pressure, and, in some cases, violence. These risks are further amplified for TGNC Jamaicans, who often face stigma, harassment, or marginalization in public spaces. Participating in elections—whether through registration or in-person voting—can expose TGNC individuals to misgendering, outing, or even physical harm, particularly in politically tense or highly surveilled communities.

In addition to safety concerns, legal and institutional challenges prevent many TGNC youth from participating fully in Jamaica's democratic processes. The country lacks legislation allowing gender marker changes on identification documents, which poses barriers to voting and other civic activities that require formal ID. Furthermore, the absence of anti-discrimination protections often results in TGNC individuals being excluded from the very institutions designed to represent and protect them.

This study is designed to better understand these intersecting challenges and uncover what structural, legal, and cultural changes would allow TGNC youth to participate more freely and safely in national civic life. By capturing both attitudes and experiences, the report offers insight into how Jamaica's democratic systems can evolve to be more inclusive, equitable, and representative of all its people.



METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of the political engagement and civic experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) youth in Jamaica. The decision to use both quantitative and qualitative methods was based on the need to explore measurable patterns across the TGNC community while capturing the nuanced, lived experiences that shape civic behavior and attitudes.

Quantitative Phase – Online Survey

The first phase of the study involved the administration of an anonymous online survey. The survey was designed to explore key themes such as political trust, voting behavior, safety and discrimination, documentation challenges, and the conditions under which TGNC individuals would be more inclined to participate in political life.

The survey was live between March 20 and March 25, 2025, and promoted primarily through TransWave Jamaica's Instagram platform, supplemented by community-based snowball sampling. In total, 30 complete responses were collected from TGNC individuals across various parishes in Jamaica.

Qualitative Phase – Focus Group Discussion

To complement the survey data, a semi-structured focus group discussion was conducted on March 27, 2025, with 14 participants. Participants were drawn from the pool of survey respondents who had indicated a willingness to participate in follow-up activities. The session was conducted in person to allow for deeper engagement and group interaction, while maintaining a safe and confidential environment.

The focus group explored TGNC persons' lived experiences with political participation, safety concerns, institutional exclusion, and feelings toward government and party representation. The discussion was guided by a trained moderator and followed a thematic protocol that encouraged open dialogue. Notes were taken in real time and later reviewed to extract key themes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Key trends were visualized using graphs to aid interpretation. Qualitative data from the focus group were coded and analyzed thematically, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, contradictions, and insight-rich narratives.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

GENDER

Transgender Woman	63%
Transgender Man	7%
Non-Binary/ Gender Queer	30%

AGE

Under 18 years	3%
18 – 25 years	27%
26 – 35 years	53%
36 – 45 years	17%

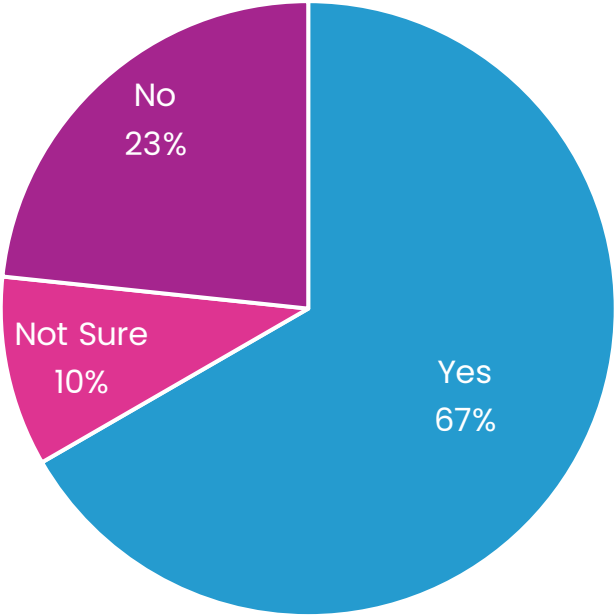
EDUCATION

Primary Education	7%
Secondary (High School)	47%
Vocational / Technical Training	13%
Tertiary (College/ University)	33%

PARISH

Kingston	50%
St. Andrew	2%
St. Catherine	1%
St. Ann	3%
St. James	3%
Manchester	4%
Clarendon	4%

VOTER REGISTRATION



THE FINDINGS

POLITICAL DISTRUST AND ALIENATION

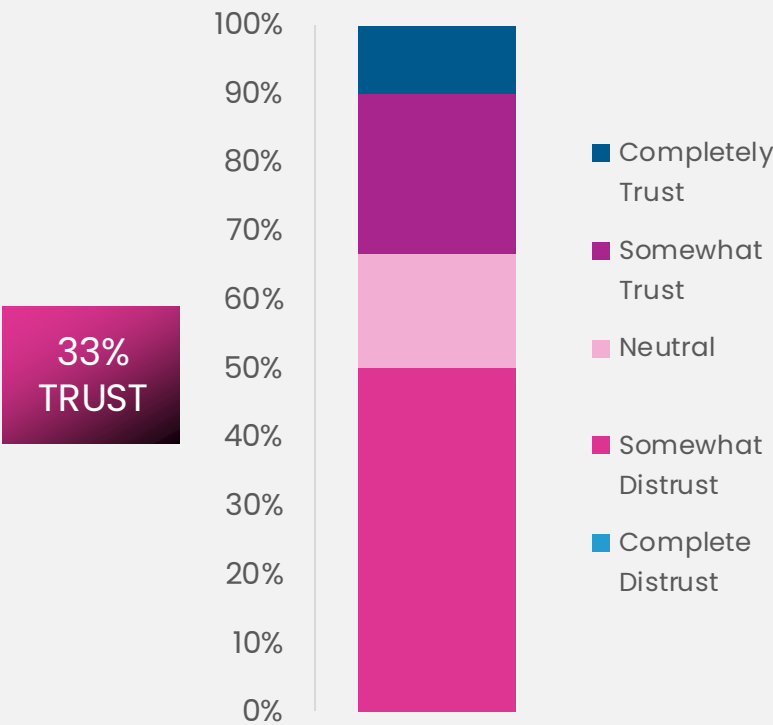
Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in Jamaica overwhelmingly lack trust in political institutions and feel systematically excluded from civic discourse.

Political distrust was one of the most pronounced insights across both the survey data and the focus group discussion. When asked about their confidence in the government to represent the interests of the TGNC community, half of the respondents admitted to feeling complete distrust. While 17% felt neutrally only 33% expressed any trust at all (10% complete trust, 23% somewhat trust).

This finding is consistent with decades of anecdotal and organizational reporting that highlights how LGBTQ+ populations in Jamaica are routinely disregarded in policy conversations. Focus group participants described an enduring sense of being talked about—usually in negative terms—but never genuinely spoken to or consulted. One participant noted that politicians only occasionally foster interactions with queer persons “to perform” or “win votes,” but not to advocate meaningfully for systemic change.

Distrust in political parties was further compounded by perceptions of opportunism and dishonesty. Political parties were described as self-serving, exclusionary, and completely disconnected from TGNC realities. Survey data corroborated this, with 77% of participants stating that no political party in Jamaica addresses the concerns of the TGNC community. Among those who had voted, very few felt that their vote made any tangible difference to their community’s well-being.

The erosion of trust was not limited to politicians, but extended to entire systems—electoral, legal, and governmental. Several participants linked this mistrust to a broader sense of political futility, a feeling that even active engagement would yield no benefit. These feelings of alienation were especially common among younger TGNC respondents aged 18–25, who also had the lowest reported rates of voting or political news consumption.



Rather than revealing apathy, these insights point to a deeper issue: the lack of meaningful representation. Respondents were not indifferent to political change—they simply saw no pathways for inclusion. They expressed a desire to engage with politics, but only in a system where their humanity, identity, and needs are respected.

SAFETY CONCERNS AND VOTER INTIMIDATION

Concerns about discrimination, outing, and violence continue to suppress TGNC youth participation in Jamaican elections.

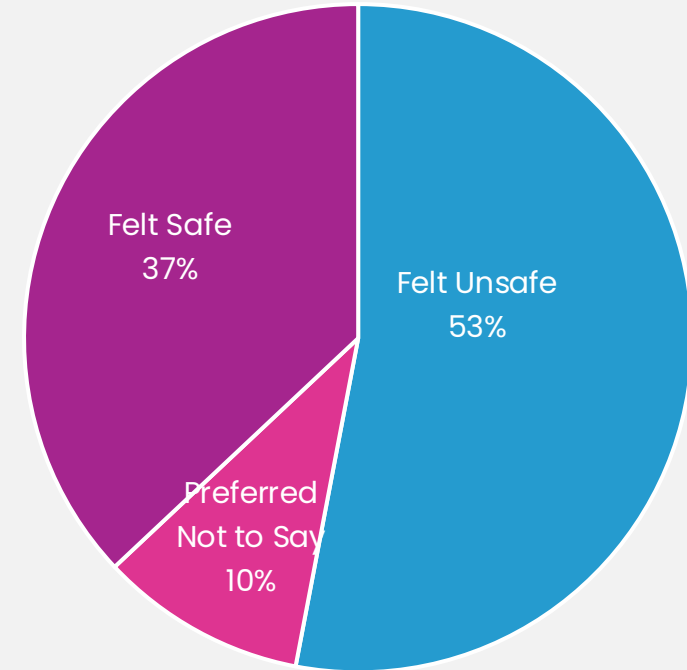
Safety emerged as one of the most immediate and deeply felt barriers to voting among TGNC youth. When asked directly, 53% of survey respondents reported having felt unsafe or discriminated against while voting due to their gender identity. An additional 10% preferred not to say, indicating possible discomfort even in anonymous disclosure.

Among those who had not voted, security risks were cited repeatedly. The most frequently selected reasons for not voting included: “Concerns about safety or discrimination” (included in at least 27% of all responses to the multi-select question), “Fear of being outed at the polls”, and “Lack of protection from harassment in public spaces.”

Open-ended responses and focus group discussions revealed the weight of these fears. Participants shared that the visibility of political affiliation—particularly through party colors—exposes individuals to the threat of violence in many communities. TGNC persons are at even greater risk due to pervasive stigma around gender non-conformity. One participant reflected on their decision not to vote, stating: *“I live in a garrison community where I can’t wear certain colors. I don’t need the stress or danger.”*

A significant number of survey respondents (especially those under 35) expressed concern about being misgendered, questioned, or publicly identified during the voting process. While only a few participants had attempted to vote using identification that mismatched their gender presentation, the psychological impact of this barrier was noted by several. For instance, one respondent wrote: “I don’t want to explain myself to polling staff. It’s not worth it.”

Moreover, safety concerns extended beyond election day. When asked to identify the single biggest barrier preventing TGNC people from voting in Jamaica, over 40% of respondents cited “safety,” “security,” or “fear of violence.” These were the most common responses—surpassing documentation, knowledge gaps, or disinterest.



The qualitative data further showed that even those who want to vote often weigh the risks and opt out of participation to avoid being harmed, harassed, or publicly outed. These fears are especially pronounced in urban “garrison” communities or rural areas where LGBTQ+ rights are not openly acknowledged.

CIVIC DISENGAGEMENT

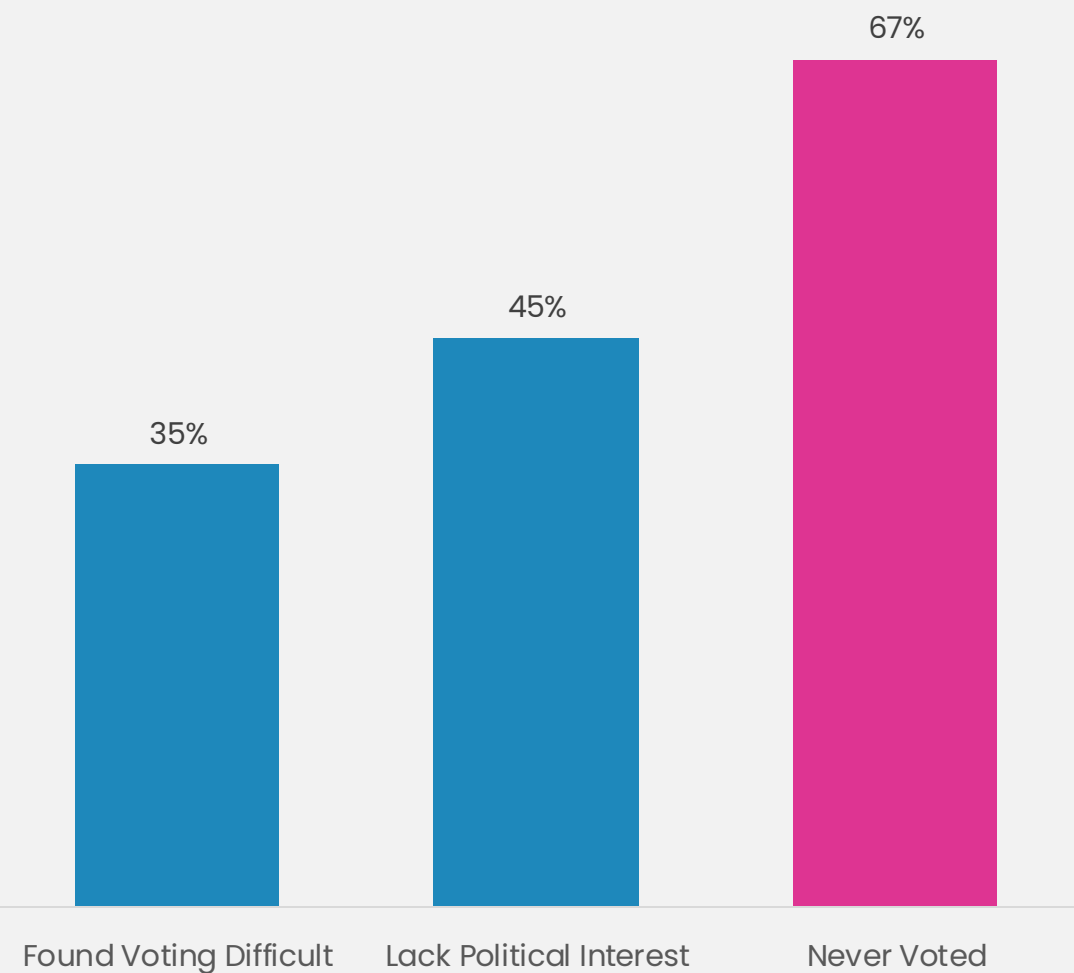
TGNC youth often perceive politics as performative and ineffective, contributing to a lack of engagement and voter participation.

The sense that political processes offer little in return was a major deterrent to TGNC civic engagement. In the survey, only 33% reported ever voting in an election. When asked why they had not voted or did not plan to, a significant portion cited “feeling that their vote wouldn’t make a difference.” A number also selected “lack of interest in politics,” “distrust in politicians,” and “no faith in any party” as core reasons.

When respondents were asked about ease of participation in elections, 35% stated that voting was either “Somewhat Difficult” (10%) or “Very Difficult” (25%), while 45% reported finding it “Very Easy.” An additional 20% found it “Somewhat Easy.” These figures point to a fragmented experience of civic engagement, where nearly half of TGNC respondents report ease, but over one-third still face notable difficulty. This tension underscores a broader climate of exclusion, where civic participation may feel inaccessible or emotionally burdensome, particularly for younger participants aged 18–25, who consistently reported lower levels of political engagement and awareness.

In the focus group, participants described political participation as an elite game, disconnected from everyday struggles. One participant stated that “politics in Jamaica is not for people like us”, while another described party politics as a form of theater that never results in meaningful reform. These sentiments illustrate that disengagement is not the result of apathy but a survival strategy—one informed by history, exclusion, and repeated disillusionment.

The combined data suggests that restoring trust and encouraging participation among TGNC youth requires more than civic education; it demands visible political commitment to structural change, equitable policies, and representative governance.



DOCUMENTATION MISMATCH

A lack of government-issued ID that reflects gender identity continues to discourage TGNC youth from voting or participating in civic life, reinforcing systemic exclusion.

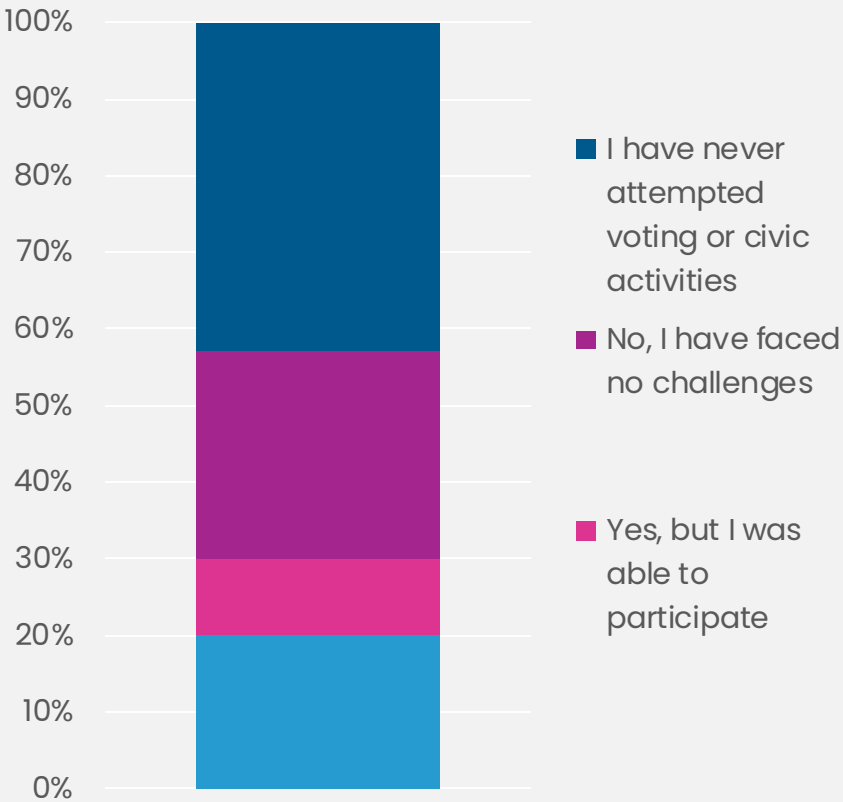
A major yet under-discussed barrier for TGNC individuals is the absence of legal documentation that reflects their gender identity or presentation.. A striking 30% reported having faced challenges related to ID when attempting to vote or engage in civic activities. These challenges were not just technical but deeply personal—linked to misgendering, exposure, and feelings of invalidation.

Among those who had never voted, several noted their avoidance was due in part to anticipated embarrassment or emotional distress when presenting mismatched ID. This was particularly common among participants under the age of 35. Compounding this is the fact that 33% of participants are not registered to vote, and several stated it was because the process itself felt unwelcoming or unsafe.

In the focus group, participants confirmed that polling stations can be high-risk environments. One participant noted that simply handing over their ID meant preparing to be questioned, judged, or misidentified. Another explained that they had skipped elections entirely because they did not want to be “outed” by a name or photo that no longer reflected their identity.

This sense of ID-based erasure is further intensified by the fact that Jamaica currently has no legal provisions for gender marker changes. As a result, even those who are socially affirmed and consistently living in their identified gender are forced to navigate public institutions through outdated or inaccurate documents. This contributes to a broader atmosphere of invisibility within state systems.

To meaningfully increase TGNC participation in elections and civic life, it is not enough to encourage voter registration or create PSAs. Reforming how ID systems recognize gender identity is a fundamental step toward equity. Without it, TGNC people are consistently asked to choose between dignity and democratic engagement.



While 67% of respondents have never voted, only 43.3% reported never attempting to vote or engage in civic activities. This suggests that some TGNC individuals may participate in other civic actions despite not voting. Notably, 30% experienced ID-related challenges, with 20% prevented from voting entirely.

PERCIEVED POLITICAL EXCLUSION

The vast majority of TGNC youth believe Jamaican political parties lack genuine interest in their concerns, reinforcing long-standing disengagement.

In assessing the attitudes of TGNC youth toward political parties, the findings were unambiguous. Only 23% of participants reported believing that any political party in Jamaica seriously addresses the needs of TGNC individuals while full 60% felt no party did so at all, while 10% stated that they do not engage with politics, a signal of how disengagement and exclusion often operate hand-in-hand.

Participants shared that political leaders rarely speak on issues affecting the TGNC community, and when they do, their comments are either dismissive or tokenistic. Focus group respondents noted that promises to protect or support LGBTQ+ persons are often made in broad strokes and are never followed up with policy. One participant described party outreach as “surface-level PR,” explaining that “they come for the pictures, but never stay for the work.”

This perception is reinforced by the near-total absence of TGNC representation within party leadership structures. Respondents said they had never seen someone openly trans or non-binary in political office or speaking on national policy panels. For many, this invisibility is proof that TGNC lives are not considered politically valuable.

Moreover, participants were critical of performative inclusion. Some noted that political parties were quick to involve queer creatives for branding or “cultural relevance,” but rarely acknowledged those same individuals as constituents with rights or needs. This trend was identified not only as tokenism but as a kind of political exploitation.

These insights reveal that disillusionment with political parties is not merely based on inaction—it is rooted in a pattern of erasure, false promises, and superficial gestures. Without meaningful representation, consultation, and inclusion in policy development, political parties will continue to alienate TGNC youth and reinforce voter apathy.

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
I believe political parties address TGNC concerns	23%
I believe political parties somewhat address TGNC concerns	7%
I believe political parties do not address TGNC concerns	60%
I do not engage with politics	10%

DESIRE FOR INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

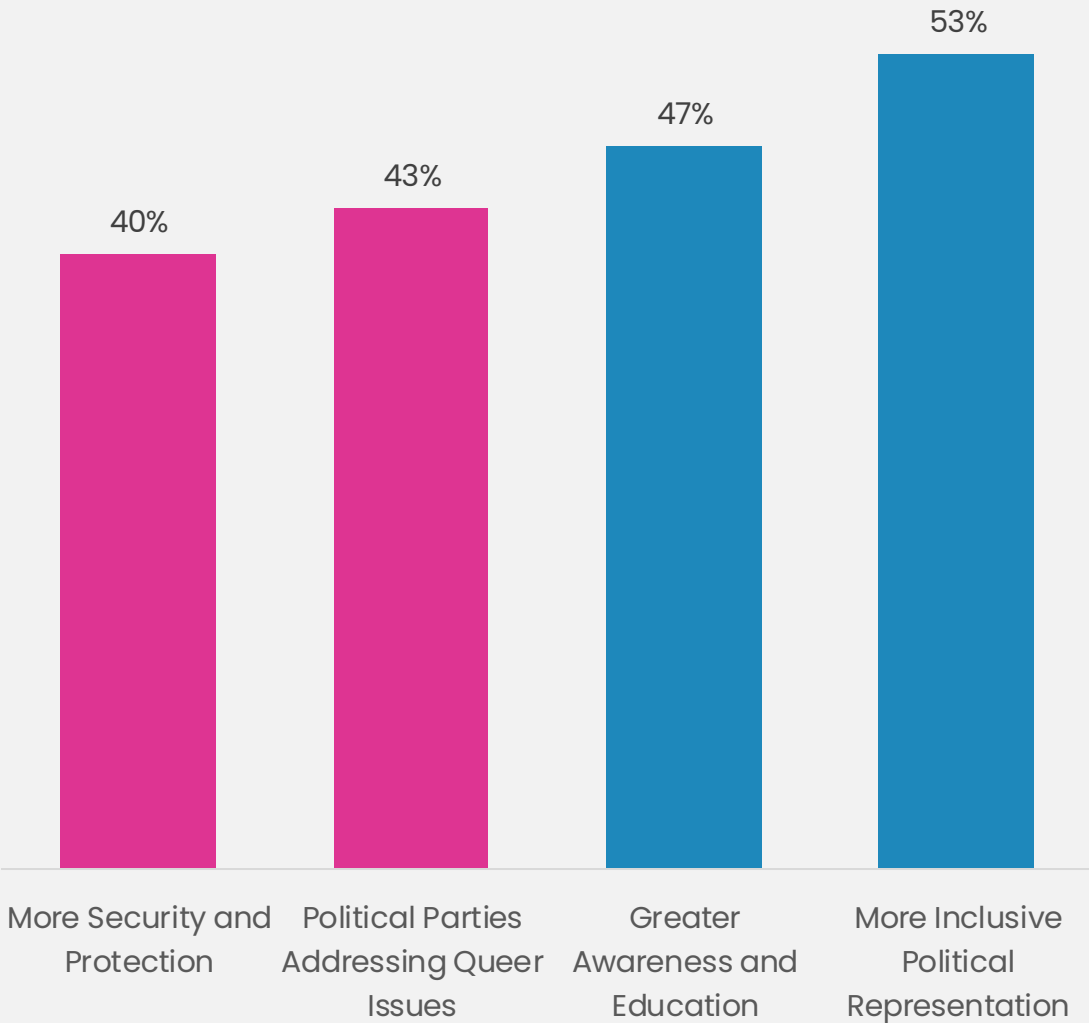
Political engagement among TGNC youth is not absent—it is conditional on meaningful inclusion, protection, and structural recognition.

Despite historically low voter turnout and clear barriers to participation, the data reveal a strong willingness among TGNC individuals to engage in national political discourse—if the conditions are affirming and equitable. When asked what would encourage greater participation, 53% of respondents chose “more inclusive political representation,” 47% selected “greater awareness and education on voting rights,” and 40% emphasized the need for “more security and protection.” These responses underscore a desire for visibility, respect, and safety—not simply symbolic gestures.

Focus group participants echoed this sentiment, expressing dissatisfaction with being tokenized. One participant shared, “Even the Ministry of Culture and Gender doesn't talk about us. They pick queer people for events, but never support us after.” This illustrates a recurring pattern where TGNC individuals feel recognized only when politically convenient, not when real decisions are being made.

Participants also noted that political outreach often bypasses their communities entirely. They stressed the importance of targeted education, culturally competent messaging, and being approached in ways that reflect their realities. True representation, they argued, must include policy accountability and equitable access—not just inclusion in name.

Ultimately, TGNC youth are not disengaged; they are wary. Their political participation is contingent on dignity, safety, and systemic reform. For inclusion to be meaningful, institutions must engage TGNC people not as tokens but as full political actors deserving of power, policy input, and protection.



CONCLUSION

This research provides a critical window into the civic lives and political perspectives of transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) youth in Jamaica. Through the use of a mixed-methods approach—combining the breadth of survey data with the depth of focus group narratives—the study highlights the persistent exclusion, structural barriers, and deeply rooted distrust that continue to shape how TGNC individuals relate to politics and public institutions.

The findings illustrate that TGNC youth in Jamaica are not indifferent to governance. On the contrary, many possess a clear understanding of their rights, articulate political critiques, and express a desire for change. What they lack is not interest—it is opportunity, safety, and recognition. Their disengagement is a direct response to a system that has historically denied their existence, dismissed their needs, and endangered their lives.

Themes such as political distrust, voter intimidation, documentation challenges, and lack of representation emerged not as isolated concerns, but as interconnected aspects of a broader ecosystem of exclusion. Many TGNC youth do not participate in elections not because they are uninformed, but because they have weighed the risks—physical, emotional, and social—and concluded that their participation is neither safe nor impactful under the current conditions.

And yet, beneath this exclusion is a resilient, motivated community. The overwhelming majority of survey participants indicated that they would be more inclined to engage politically if there were inclusive education, meaningful representation, and policy protections in place. This insight presents a profound opportunity: if institutions are willing to listen, and if inclusion is pursued with sincerity and urgency, then TGNC participation in Jamaica's democratic processes can be transformed.

This report calls on stakeholders—policy makers, civil society, electoral bodies, and advocacy organizations—to act on the evidence presented. TGNC Jamaicans are not simply asking for visibility. They are demanding the right to exist fully within the civic fabric of the country: to vote without fear, to be acknowledged in policy, and to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

Political participation is not a privilege granted to the few—it is a right. Ensuring that TGNC youth can exercise that right safely and meaningfully is not just a matter of justice; it is a measure of Jamaica's democratic maturity.

RECOMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings of this report, it is recommended that TransWave Jamaica, along with its advocacy and civil society partners, take the following steps to support greater political inclusion and civic engagement among TGNC youth.

Enhance Political Literacy Through Community-Based Education

Develop civic education campaigns tailored for TGNC communities, focused on voting rights, the structure of government, and the importance of participation. These sessions can be delivered in safe spaces or virtually and should include accessible language and visuals.

Advocate for Legal Recognition and Gender-Affirming Identification

Partner with legal advocacy organizations to push for the availability of gender-affirming IDs. Many participants noted challenges related to identification, which can be a barrier to both voting and broader civic engagement.

Foster Inclusive Political Representation

Lobby political parties and local representatives to adopt inclusive language, develop TGNC-specific policy agendas, and engage directly with TGNC groups. Visibility in manifestos and political consultations is essential for trust-building.

Train Electoral Officials and Polling Staff in Gender Sensitivity

Work with the Electoral Office of Jamaica to implement mandatory training for polling station workers on handling trans and gender non-conforming voters with dignity and respect.

Create and Promote Safe Voting Spaces

Collaborate with security forces and election monitors to ensure polling stations are safe, welcoming, and free from intimidation,

especially in inner-city communities where voter intimidation was cited.

Encourage Youth Political Engagement Through Digital Campaigns

Design online engagement strategies targeting TGNC youth, including Q&A sessions, digital storytelling, and forums with candidates willing to discuss LGBTQ+ issues.

Engage Cultural and Creative Industries to Shift Narratives

Given that queer creatives may often feel or be tokenized, use media and the arts not just to represent TGNC lives, but to challenge stereotypes and foster more inclusive political discourse.

Build Coalitions Across Marginalized Groups

Align TGNC advocacy efforts with other movements (e.g., women's rights, disability rights, youth) to amplify demands for inclusive democratic processes and shared equity goals.

Monitor and Publicly Report on Political Party Inclusivity

Develop a "transparency tracker" that evaluates political parties on their engagement with TGNC communities — whether they meet, represent, and create policy for TGNC people — and make these findings public during election cycles.

