

Back into the closet: How the rise in anti-DEI is leading to the decline in corporate support for Pride

Motorcycles revved down Market Street in San Francisco, leading the 1982 Pride parade.

Gabrielle Antolovich wore a silver jacket and rode a borrowed Honda CB350. She'd left her own motorcycle back in Los Angeles, but the members of Dykes on Bikes told her she could borrow one of their motorcycles.

"That's how it was," said Antolovich, who is also the board president of the Billy DeFrank LGBTQ+ Community Center in San Jose. "I mean, that in itself tells you how community-oriented it was. Everything was more folksy and more about the community and what we built."

The crowd watching from the sidewalks roared along with the motorcycles. Antolovich said that the procession of lesbians riding motorcycles is a way to signal the beginning of a Pride parade because the motorcycles are loud and it is "visually fantastic."

At the time Antolovich rode in the 1982 SF Pride, corporate sponsorship for LGBTQ+ events was few and far between. [Absolut Vodka](#) began advertising in LGBTQ+ magazines the year before, but it was a company that mostly stood alone.

Now, SF Pride is a million-dollar parade usually [sponsored by large corporations](#), such as Ghirardelli, Levi's and IKEA. However, this year, [it lost \\$300,000](#) in corporate sponsorship in the wake of President Donald Trump's flurry of [executive orders targeting diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives](#). Companies like Anheuser-Busch, Comcast and Diageo are among those that pulled back funding.

"The easiest thing to say is that they're cowards," said Christopher Vasquez, San Francisco resident of almost 17 years. "They've marched in our parades, they've done everything they

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could to make it look like they support LGBTQ people and our families, but they are clearly not anymore.”

Rainbow-themed corporate products and marketing toward the LGBTQ+ community is also known as rainbow capitalism. Many are divided on whether rainbow capitalism is [harmful or beneficial to the community](#).

“It’s historically been helpful,” Vasquez said. “It’s helped bring visibility to the LGBTQ community. When you see ads feature gay couples . . . it really kind of helped push forward this idea that LGBTQ people are accepted.”

Vasquez said that after seeing companies no longer “willing to stand up” and “recoil” from administration pressure, he perceives rainbow capitalism as a “performative” concept.

“They are more afraid of having to face a lawsuit from Donald Trump about their DEI policies than to stand with the community that’s spent our money with them for years because we thought they represented our values,” he said.

This year, companies are also [pulling away from selling rainbow merchandise](#). Target is one of the companies that has scaled back its Pride Month display, and it is already seeing backlash. Its quarterly sales [dropped 2.8%](#).

“That’s a signal,” said Ryan Jones, co-owner and marketing and community engagement director of Hot Cookie, a bakery in the Castro District. “That’s power. That’s saying, ‘We don’t agree with you, and we’re not going to support you. You’re not going to support us.’”

Hot Cookie, an LGBTQ+-owned business, is supporting SF Pride this year by [donating 5%](#) of its sales on Pride-themed cookies to the event. Fabulosa Books, another LGBTQ+-owned business

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in the Castro, is donating \$500 to the San Francisco Dyke March, an event separate from SF Pride.

In 2025, Fortune 500 companies face [high business risks for showing support](#) for DEI and LGBTQ+ equality, compared to 2024. About 60% of surveyed companies report that the Trump administration is the reason for leaving behind DEI initiatives.

“I see it as survival,” Antolovich said. “I don’t believe it’s coming from a homophobic or transphobic space or that they don’t care. They have a whole different world structure that rules them, and they have to do what they have to do.”

Pepsi, Google and Amazon may be [pulling back from DEI policies](#), but small businesses do not seem to be retreating from DEI. Forbes found that [DEI is common](#) in small businesses because it has “proven business results” and helps build community.

Alvin Orloff, owner of Fabulosa Books, said that in a city like San Francisco “you get a little bit of everything” in terms of diversity.

“It’s just common sense that you want to have people from different communities,” Orloff said.

“It’s good business. It’s the right thing to do, and it’s more fun that way.”

A lot of companies pulling back from DEI underestimate the LGBTQ+ community’s “long memories,” said Marc Stein, professor of LGBTQ+ history at San Francisco State University.

“It is not going to be as simple as, say, just turning the page and reversing direction again if there’s a new presidential administration,” Stein said. “I still don’t drink Coors beer. I have never eaten a Chick-fil-A sandwich.”

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Both [Coors](#) and [Chick-fil-A](#) have a controversial history with the LGBTQ+ community that led to the community boycotting the companies. A [2024 study found that 80%](#) of surveyed LGBTQ+ consumers would boycott a company that backpedaled on DEI initiatives. LGBTQ+ consumers have a spending power of \$1.4 trillion, according to the study.

In the [last four years](#), companies that have consistently supported SF Pride every year include Hilton, Alaska Airlines and Safeway. Antolovich said that Pride has become “overkill” with all the corporate support, leading the parade to be about four hours long.

“We relied on these people that come from a different place,” Antolovich said. “We happened to be together for a while, but the world has changed.”

Vasquez’s first Pride celebration was in an alley behind some LGBTQ+-owned stores in Orlando, Florida, in 1999. People danced to a DJ set and watched and participated in drag shows. It was a small affair, and it was sponsored by the local LGBTQ+ community instead of large companies.

“Right now, we’re actually probably more in line with what the spirit of Pride started as in 1978,” Vasquez said. “We’re more at the brick-throwing spirit of Pride than we are at the needing-to-grab-a-pair-beads-from-US-Bank.”