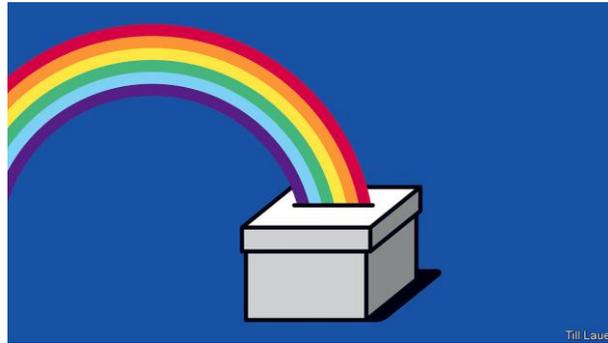


GENDER ISSUE



GLOBAL NEWS READING: The legalization of gay marriage meets resistance in Taiwan

Voters face a series of **confusing referendums** on the **subject** in late November
Nov 1st 2018

Nowhere in Asia celebrates gay pride as **flamboyantly** as Taipei. The **annual parade** in Taiwan's capital draws tens of thousands, *many from overseas*. *If you think near-naked men in **diamanté tiaras** and **white go-go boots** are normal for Asia—not to mention horned devils marching next to real Christian **pastors**—think again.*¹ Only in September did India legalize gay sex. In mainland China gay people are still often regarded as **deviants**. In Afghanistan sex between men is punishable by death.



Some 25 countries around the world allow same-sex marriage—but none of them is in Asia. Last year, however, Taipei's parade-goers really had something to celebrate.

¹ *[If you think...] think again*

Taiwan's highest court had recently **ruled** that **barring** same-sex couples from marrying **violated** the right to be treated equally.² It gave the government of President Tsai Ing-wen two years to write same-sex marriage into law.



*At this year's parade, on October 27th, the **flamboyance** could not **conceal mounting** worries. *Since the court ruling, Ms Tsai and her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have **dithered** over the needed legal changes. Ms Tsai was *once* **outspoken** in favor of marriage **equality**, which **recommended** her to younger voters.**

But she has *since* found the issue to be more **polarizing** than she expected—and Taiwanese society has plenty of **divisions** already. Besides, **municipal** elections **loom** on November 24th. They will be a test of Ms Tsai's leadership, and the DPP wants to avoid **controversy**. Its traditional base in the island's south is older and more **conservative**, *except in wanting Taiwan to **declare** a formal separation from China.*

Anti-gay forces have **seized** their chance. A law passed by the DPP makes it easier to get **referendums** onto the **ballot**: voters face no fewer than ten questions on November 24th. One asks whether discussion of LGBT matters should be **banned** in **primary** and middle schools. It is intended to roll back those parts of the national **curriculum** *that* teach respect and understanding for gay students. The second asks *whether* voters think the **civil code** should define marriage as between a man and a woman. A third asks *whether* the rights of same-sex couples to form a **permanent union** should be **guaranteed** in a form *other than* civil marriage.

² (Taiwan's highest court) (had recently ruled) (that barring same-sex couples from marrying violated the right to be treated equally).

Gay activists have hit back with two **referendums** of their own—one *asking whether the school curriculum should **stipulate** education on LGBT matters*, and the other *asking if same-sex rights should be **enshrined** in the civil code*.

It is not clear how **binding** the results of the referendums are. And the court has made clear *that if the government does not legislate in time*, same-sex couples may go ahead and marry anyway.³ But the conservatives' aim is to change the **climate**: teachers may grow nervous about talking about gay issues, for instance. **Opponents** of gay marriage would also like to get the government to **institute** a **distinct** form of marriage for gay couples, *rather than **amend** existing marriage law*. But for supporters of same-sex marriage, separate legislation for gays would be **discriminatory**. They **liken** it to America's Jim Crow laws *that once **enforced racial segregation***.

Other parts of Asia are watching Taiwan. Hong Kong has a **vibrant** civil society and growing openness to homosexuality. *Since a court ruling in July* the government recognizes marriages of foreign same-sex couples *conducted abroad* for residency and other purposes. The move has the **backing** of businesses and law firms *worried about Hong Kong's ability to **attract international talent***.

After Hong Kong, Japan, *the only G7 country that does not recognize same-sex unions*, may be next. In September five foreign **chambers** of commerce called for marriage **equality**, **backing calls** from influential **multinationals**. A growing number think the Olympic games, *which Tokyo is hosting in 2020*, could be a **cue** for Japan to come out in favor of marriage equality. That would put Japan itself on the **podium**.

³ (the court) (has made) (clear) (that if the government does not legislate in time, same-sex couples may go ahead and marry anyway).