# Is Burning Man becoming a queer festival?



The Burning Man Census for 2023 has been released, shedding light on the evolving demographics of the festival's attendees as participants make their annual pilgrimage to the playa for a week of celebration in late August.

The 2023 festival, described as one of the most challenging due to adverse weather conditions, saw a significant proportion of first-time attendees, known as "Burning Man virgins." This group's presence jumped to 44%, the highest since 2013, potentially contributing to lower overall ticket sales this year. The muddy conditions resulted in a delay of the traditional burning of the man from Saturday to Monday, with many attendees and their vehicles trapped in the mud, unable to leave until conditions improved.

For the first time in its history, Burning Man's gender demographics shifted to a majority female population, reversing the male dominance seen a decade ago when the event was nearly 60% male.

Furthermore, the festival saw an increase in diverse sexual orientations among participants. The number of attendees identifying as straight or heterosexual decreased from 68.5% in 2013 to 57.7% in 2023. There was a rise in those identifying as bisexual or pansexual to 17.4%, and those identifying as gay or lesbian increased to 8.7%.

Despite these shifts, Burning Man remains predominantly attended by white individuals, with minority representation still low across all categories of people of colour.

Politically, the event continues to sway towards Democratic ideals. Nearly 65% of attendees identified as Democrats in 2023, up from 43% in 2013. The percentage of Republicans dropped to 4.1% from 6.7% over the same period. The next largest group identified as independents or politically unaffiliated.

The census also demonstrates that a growing portion of attendees are high-income earners, with fewer middle-class individuals earning $99,000 or less making the journey to Black Rock Desert. This trend highlights the expensive nature of attending Burning Man, which may be less feasible for those with limited paid vacation time.

Overall, the population attending Burning Man has declined slightly compared to 2022, mirroring a national decrease in music and cultural festival attendance, possibly influenced by broader economic factors.

For the first time in 14 years, Burning Man tickets did not sell out, an indication of changing dynamics in festival participation.

Burning Man organizers have been conducting the census since 2002, employing a consistent methodology since 2013 to estimate demographics through a combination of random on-site questionnaires and post-event online surveys. While the figures provided are informed estimates rather than precise counts, they offer valuable insights into the festival's community makeup.