



UT

**FOR AMERICA**

**Why We Must Elect More LGBTQ Elected Officials**



**VICTORY  
INSTITUTE**





## About Victory Institute

Victory Institute works to increase the number of LGBTQ people in public office by providing leadership development, trainings and a professional network for LGBTQ leaders who pursue careers in the public sector.

Its signature Candidate & Campaign Trainings have helped hundreds of LGBTQ elected officials develop the skills to run for office, including U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, U.S. Representative Jared Polis, former Houston Mayor Annise Parker and Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia. Its David Bohnett Leaders Fellowship provides outstanding LGBTQ elected and appointed officials with executive leadership training at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Previous fellows include U.S. Representative Kyrsten Sinema, California state Senator Ricardo Lara and Colorado state Representative Leslie Herod.

Victory Institute also provides fellowships and internships on Capitol Hill for LGBTQ young people seeking careers in policy or politics, and a fellowship for LGBTQ people of color and transgender leaders interested in running for office.

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# Representation is POWER

Most Americans are surprised to learn there are nearly 520,000 elected officials across the United States—from members of Congress to state legislators to commissioners representing just a few blocks of a major city. The impact these elected officials have on our lives is enormous. They determine where our children go to school, who qualifies for various healthcare plans, and whether we work toward preventing climate change. These elected leaders—at the local, state and federal levels—also determine which communities receive the rights and protections that are fundamental for an equitable society. They determine the laws and policies that protect (or suppress) LGBTQ people, people of color, religious minorities, immigrants and people with disabilities.

Equitable representation is essential to a democracy that functions on behalf of all its people. Yet the LGBTQ community remains severely underrepresented at all levels of government, accounting for just 0.1 percent of all elected officials nationwide, despite being 4.1 percent of the U.S. population. The low-levels of representation are attributable to a legacy of discrimination and hostility toward openly LGBTQ people and candidates.

***“When we’re not at the table, we’re on the menu.”***

—BARNEY FRANK  
FORMER CONGRESSMAN

Consequently, in 28 states LGBTQ people still lack the basic civil rights protections their neighbors enjoy.<sup>1</sup> What’s more, lawmakers continue to legislate against LGBTQ people, pushing hundreds of laws and policies that aim to limit our rights and negate the well-being of the community.



LGBTQ representation matters, and our leaders are the antidote to these policy attacks. Previous Victory Institute research highlights the direct correlation between the number of out elected officials in a state and that state's level of equality. States with few LGBTQ elected officials are more likely to enact anti-LGBTQ policies, and those with high numbers of LGBTQ elected officials are more likely to be inclusive and equitable.<sup>2</sup>

This report documents the current landscape of LGBTQ elected officials in America, based on Victory Institute's LGBTQ elected officials database—the largest and most comprehensive listing available. It outlines the tremendous gap in representation, and is an urgent call to arms for LGBTQ leaders to run for office and be our voice in the halls of power.

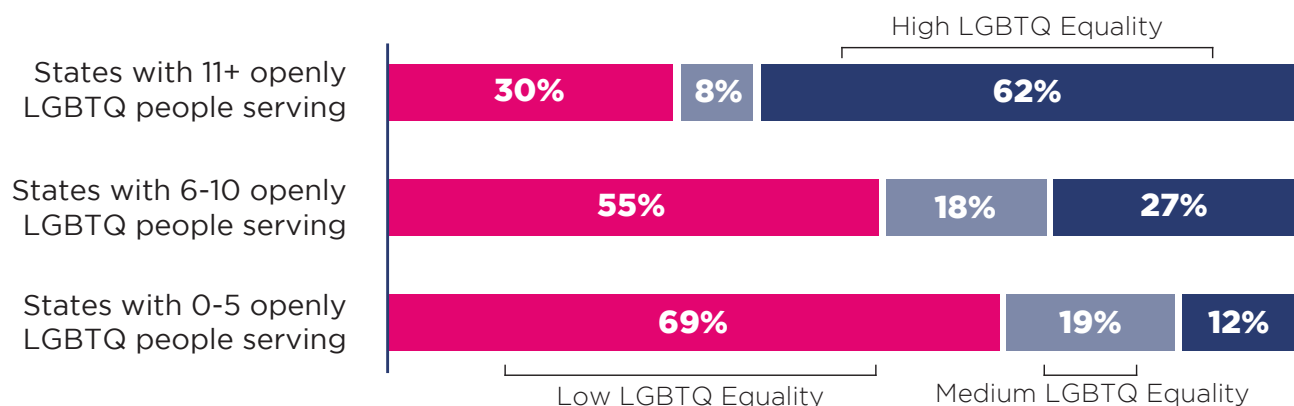
Politics is a tough business—and the 2016 presidential election proved it is not getting easier. But it remains a noble and impactful profession, one that provides endless opportunities to bring real and lasting change to people's lives. **Representation is power**—which is why we need more of our people in elected office, and why we must encourage our community members to run for office and win.

<sup>1</sup> Equality Maps: Non-Discrimination Laws, Movement Advancement Project: [http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non\\_discrimination\\_laws](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non_discrimination_laws)

<sup>2</sup> More Than Represent: LGBTQ Elected Officials Drive Equality in the States, Victory Institute: <https://victoryinstitute.org/resource/lgbt-elected-officials-drive-equality-in-the-states/>

## More LGBTQ officials means more LGBTQ equality.

A look at the relationship between the number of openly LGBTQ public officials and overall LGBTQ equality:



# LGBTQ Representation Nationwide



**4.1%**

OF U.S. ADULTS IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ  
(10.1 MILLION LGBTQ ADULTS<sup>3</sup>)



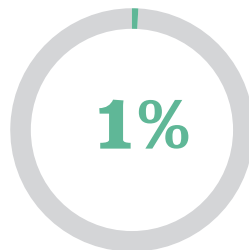
**0.1%**

OF U.S. ELECTED OFFICIALS IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ  
(448 OF 519,682<sup>4</sup>)



## U.S. SENATORS

**1**  
OF  
**100**



## U.S. REPRESENTATIVES

**6**  
OF  
**435**



## STATE LEGISLATORS

**109**  
OF  
**7,383<sup>5</sup>**



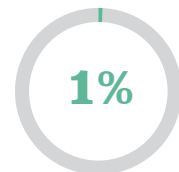
## STATE EXECUTIVES

**2**  
OF  
**346<sup>6</sup>**



## MAYORS OF 100 LARGEST CITIES

**1**  
OF  
**100**



\*Elected officials count as of November 1, 2017

<sup>3</sup> In US, More Adults Identifying as LGBT, Gallup News: <http://news.gallup.com/poll/201731/lgbt-identification-rises.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> Becoming a Candidate, Jennifer L. Lawless. Sources include information from: National League of Cities, National Association of School Boards, National Conference of State Legislatures, and the Bureau of the Census.

<sup>5</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/number-of-legislators-and-length-of-terms.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Building Black Political Power, The Collective PAC.





# Securing Equitable Representation

AMERICA NEEDS TO ELECT

21,307

MORE LGBTQ ELECTED OFFICIALS TO ACHIEVE  
EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNMENT.

To achieve equitable representation in key positions, America would need to elect:

3

MORE U.S.  
SENATORS  
(4 TOTAL)

12

MORE U.S.  
REPRESENTATIVES  
(18 TOTAL)

194

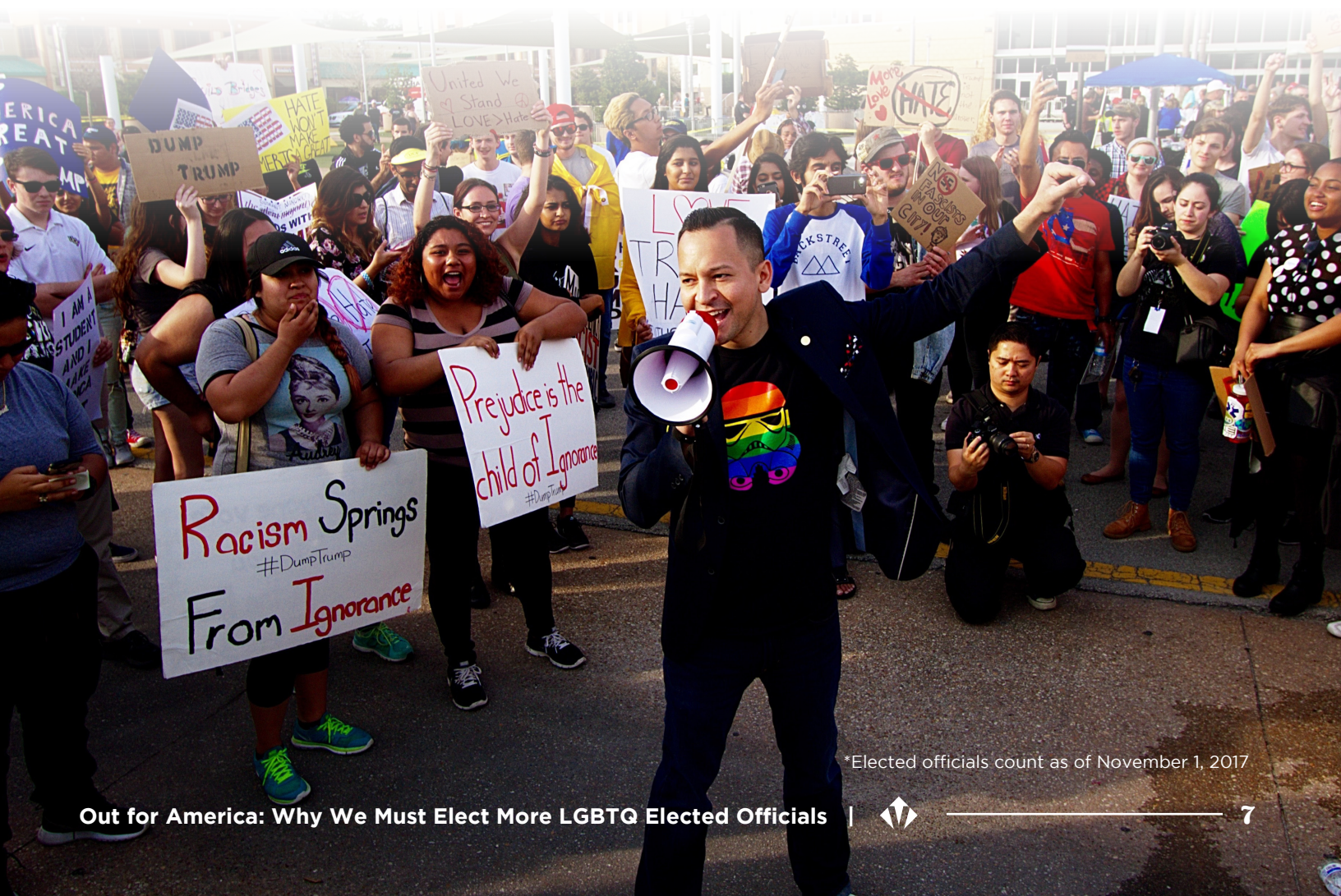
MORE STATE  
LEGISLATORS  
(303 TOTAL)

12

MORE STATEWIDE  
EXECUTIVES  
(14 TOTAL)

3

MORE MAYORS OF  
100 LARGEST CITIES  
(4 TOTAL)



\*Elected officials count as of November 1, 2017



# Low Representation = Low Equality

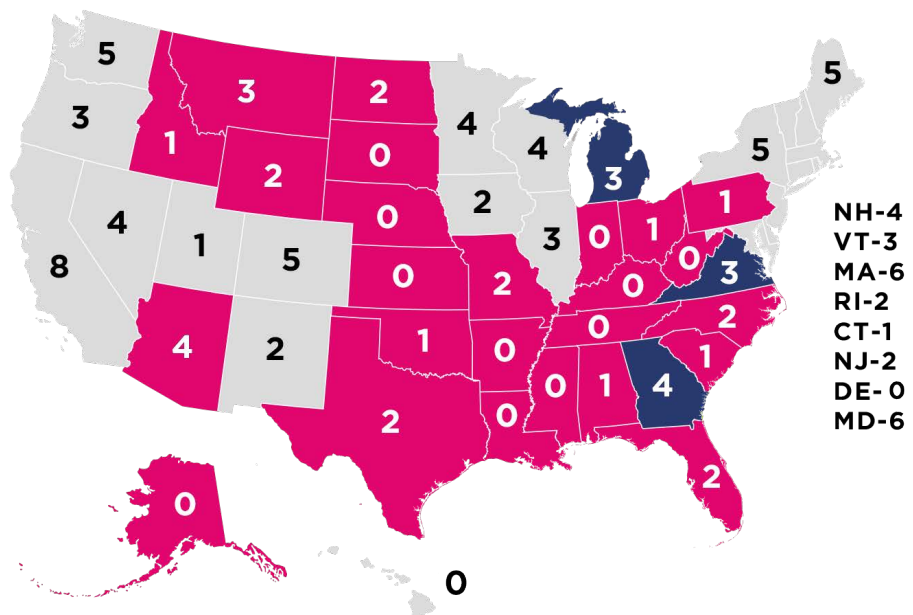
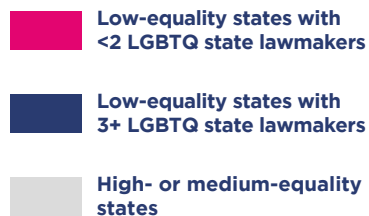
State legislators have introduced hundreds of anti-LGBTQ bills in the last two years, making state legislatures the frontlines for defending or advancing LGBTQ rights.

Yet 13 states have zero LGBTQ representation in their state legislatures—leaving LGBTQ voices entirely absent from legislative debates on equality. This matters, because there exists a strong correlation between having no or few openly LGBTQ state legislators and a state having anti-LGBTQ laws or a lack of discrimination protections.



## Representation matters: LGBTQ lawmakers are an army of influence.

Figures represent number of out LGBTQ lawmakers in state legislatures.



### States with few or no LGBTQ state legislators tend to have lower levels of equality.

This map shows that most states with two or fewer LGBTQ state legislators are also states with anti-LGBTQ laws or few protections for LGBTQ people. All but four states with three or more LGBTQ state legislators are states with higher levels of equality for LGBTQ people.

\*Elected officials count as of November 1, 2017



## LOUISIANA AT A GLANCE

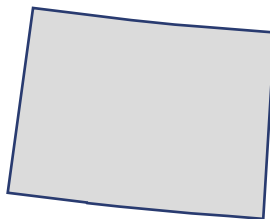


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**LGBTQ State Legislators**

- Anti-LGBTQ discrimination is legal
- Law bans teachers from discussing LGBTQ issues
- Broad “religious exemption” laws
- No hate crime law covering trans people

## COLORADO AT A GLANCE



6

**LGBTQ State Legislators**

- Anti-LGBTQ discrimination is illegal
- Anti-bullying laws protect LGBTQ students
- No “religious exemption” laws
- Hate crime law covers LGBTQ people

Source: Equality Maps, Movement Advancement Project: <http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps>

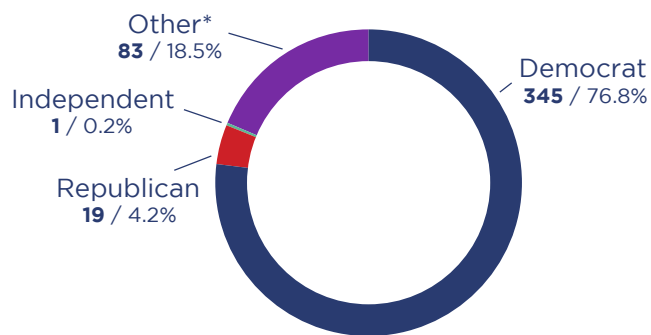




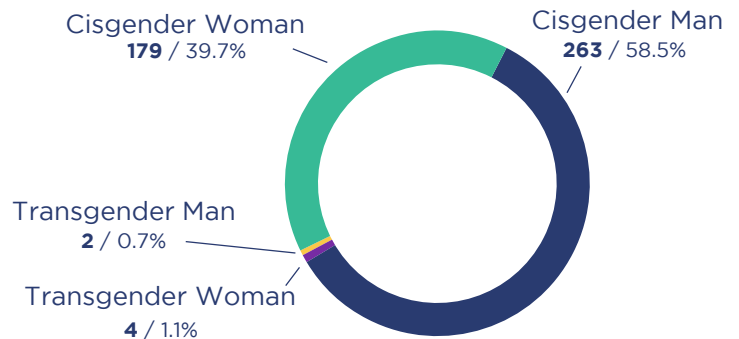
# Demographics at a Glance

A majority of the 448 LGBTQ elected officials nationwide are white cisgender gay men, underscoring the continued need to diversify the pipeline of LGBTQ leaders who run for office. Most are also Democrats, demonstrating the failure of the Republican party to attract viable LGBTQ candidates and continued concern over its positions on equality.

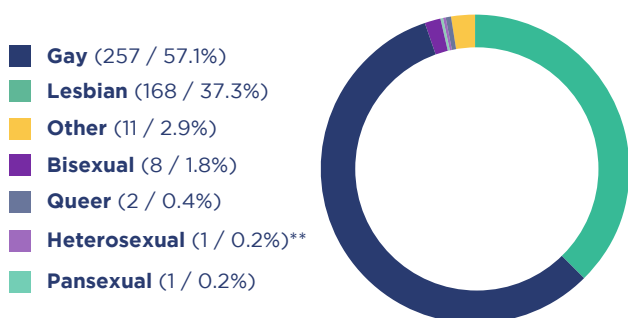
**Party Affiliation**



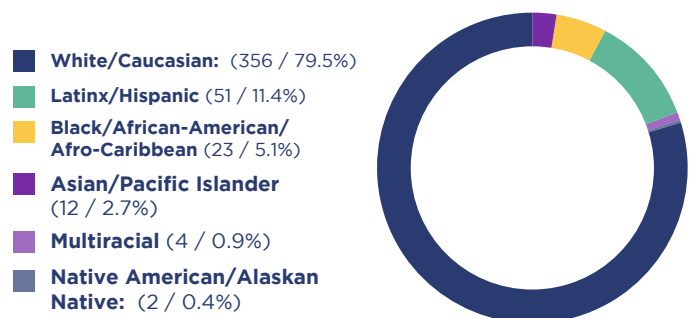
**Gender/Gender Identity**



**Sexual Orientation**



**Race/Ethnicity**



\*Elected officials count as of November 1, 2017

\* LGBTQ elected officials who are nonpartisan or not identified with the Democratic, Republican or Independent parties. Most judicial positions are nonpartisan.  
 \*\* A heterosexual transgender elected official.



# Moving Forward

Despite their small number, LGBTQ elected officials punch above their weight, and are often the most outspoken voices on issues related to social justice and equality for all people. Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey is leading the fight against President Donald Trump's ban on transgender troops, Mayor Jackie Biskupski was one of the first to declare Salt Lake City a "sanctuary city" safe for immigrants, and state Senator Ricardo Lara is championing single-payer healthcare legislation in California. LGBTQ elected officials are leading voices on many of the most pressing issues affecting America.

But the severe underrepresentation at all levels of government continues to hinder progress on LGBTQ rights, evidenced by the flood of anti-LGBTQ bills introduced in legislatures with few or no openly LGBTQ officials. This phenomenon is especially evident in the South, where the lack of LGBTQ representation has resulted in an entire region where LGBTQ people are second-class citizens under law.

When LGBTQ elected officials are in the room, it humanizes LGBTQ lives, changes the debate and leads to more inclusive policies and legislation. Building a diverse pipeline of LGBTQ leaders to run for office is critical to advancing equality in areas where legal discrimination remains. Victory Institute is committed to recruiting and training the next generation of LGBTQ leaders, and to support them once elected to public office.

## Out for America Census Project

Victory Institute launched its Out for America Census Project in December 2017 to grow what is already the most comprehensive database of LGBTQ elected officials in America. The project will capture and document LGBTQ elected officials in down-ballot positions that are often overlooked by media outlets and advocacy organizations, and provide the information to the public.

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**The expanded database will be used to connect and empower a national network of LGBTQ elected officials that can coordinate strategies and provide support with a goal of furthering LGBTQ equality nationwide.**

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The Out for America elected officials map, Census Project and additional information about Victory Institute's elected officials engagement efforts are available at:

**[VICTORYINSTITUTE.ORG/OUTFORAMERICA](https://victoryinstitute.org/outforamerica)**





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