

# POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF LGBTIQ PERSONS



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# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>LGBTIQ POLITICAL PARTICIPATION 1994 – 2017: THE BENCHMARKS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>POLITICAL PARTY BEST PRACTICE</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	<b>POLICY AND STRUCTURAL MECHANISMS</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1.1	Representation quotas and promoting LGBTIQ leaders	6
3.1.2	Gender policies that go beyond the binaries	6
3.1.3	Manifestos and constitutions	7
3.1.4	Internal party education	7
3.1.5	Clarifying political participation opportunities	7
3.2	<b>VOCALLY SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS FOR LGBTIQ PERSONS</b>	<b>8</b>
3.2.1	Issuing statements in support of LGBTIQ issues	9
3.2.2	Host events on commemorative days	9
3.2.3	Holding party members accountable when they do not support human rights for LGBTIQ persons	9
3.2.4	Be an ally to LGBTIQ organisations and constituents	10
<b>4</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>11</b>



In early 2017 Triangle Project (Triangle) and the LGBTQ Victory Institute (Victory Institute) commissioned a research report into the political participation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) persons in South Africa.

This guide reflects the process and results of that study, conducted between April and September 2017.

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The guide forms part of the broader work of Triangle and the Victory Institute towards increasing the participation of LGBTIQ people in democratic processes in South Africa, and achieving equality for LGBTIQ people. Additional elements of this work include training LGBTIQ activists and advocates who are interested in democratic processes to get more involved in political spaces and civil society forums to create a platform for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practice around the political participation of LGBTIQ people.

Two of the project's objectives were to identify best practices to encourage political participation from black LGBTIQ persons, and to identify opportunities to increase the number of LGBTIQ people who are part of political parties' structures. This best practice guide seeks to address those objectives, based on recent research by Triangle and the Victory Institute.

## LGBTIQ POLITICAL PARTICIPATION 1994 - 2017: THE BENCHMARKS

Between April and September 2017 Triangle and the Victory Institute conducted research in South Africa regarding the history of LGBTIQ political participation in South Africa since 1994.

This involved interviews with political parties and with civil society, and an online survey for LGBTIQ persons to self-report on the obstacles to, and opportunities for, political participation.

### SOME KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>



1

There are an estimated 530 000 LGBTIQ persons in South Africa. If all of these South Africans were to vote for the same political party, it could win that party between 10 and 17 seats in Parliament, depending on voter turnout.

2

Political parties displayed an openness and willingness to include LGBTIQ members within their parties and to support human rights for LGBTIQ persons in South Africa.

3

To date, there had only been nine elected/appointed LGBTIQ officials within South Africa, and the perception of their impact was that they had not necessarily been LGBTIQ activists. However, their presence was important for the representation and acceptance of LGBTIQ political figures.

4

South Africa has incredibly progressive legislation related to human rights for LGBTIQ persons, but activism and political participation around these rights had slowed since 1994 for several reasons, including:

- Fragmentation of the LGBTIQ sector, challenges in access to funding and resources.
- The perceived closure of political spaces to meaningful engagement.

5

LGBTIQ respondents to the survey exhibited enthusiasm for political participation, and were likely to have voted in the past three elections, however they were unlikely to be members or volunteers of political parties.

6

LGBTIQ respondents, like South Africans surveyed in similar surveys, were most concerned with the issues of education, basic services and jobs when voting though this varied slightly by race.

For white respondents leadership, basic services and jobs were listed as the most important.

For black respondents education, basic services and jobs were the most important issues. However, black respondents were most likely to highlight LGBTIQ issues as amongst the issues important to them. This indicates that the black LGBTIQ community is interested in parties' stance on these issues when going to the polls.

7

Political parties were not likely to have any specific policies addressing human rights for LGBTIQ persons, or to have considered them as a constituency.

8

Most participants did not feel that political parties were performing well with regards to LGBTIQ issues, and a significant number were not sure of the party's performance, perhaps speaking to a lack of awareness of political party decisions and performance.

9

Despite low levels of interaction with local government, when respondents were asked whether they would like to participate further in politics, 45.33% indicated that they would. In addition, 58.29% of respondents felt that more representation of LGBTIQ politicians within parties would mean that their needs would be addressed better. This points to an opportunity for political parties to encourage LGBTIQ members within their parties to take up leadership positions, in order to encourage party support by LGBTIQ voters.

Given these findings, interview candidates were provided with an opportunity to make recommendations regarding increasing access to political participation opportunities and spaces for LGBTIQ persons.

These recommendations are detailed in Section 3.

<sup>1</sup> Thorpe, J on behalf of the Triangle Project and the Gay & Lesbian Victory Institute (forthcoming) *LGBTIQ political participation in South Africa since 1994*

# 3

## POLITICAL PARTY BEST PRACTICE

As noted in Section 2, there are a number of obstacles for LGBTIQ persons to participate politically. Some of these are:

- Physical obstacles (lack of safety)
- Political education (lack of awareness of opportunities)
- Fragmentation within the sector and the lack of a cohesive strategy
- Disinterest and disillusionment

As the survey data shows, very few respondents were active members or volunteers of political parties, and are thus a constituency group that political parties can reach out to in order to grow their membership and enhance their commitment to promoting SOGI rights and human rights for LGBTIQ persons.

Several recommendations can be derived from both civil society and political party interviews that could enhance their accessibility LGBTIQ persons and promote LGBTIQ political participation.

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### 3.1 POLICY AND STRUCTURAL MECHANISMS

The table opposite provides a summary of some of the key recommendations for using internal party strategies to promote LGBTIQ involvement.



TABLE 1: INTERNAL POLITICAL PARTY STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE LGBTIQ INVOLVEMENT

PROMOTING PARTY ACCESSIBILITY AND SUPPORT FOR LGBTIQ PERSONS	
Introduce a deliberate policy to encourage LGBTIQ persons' participation, or mainstream LGBTIQ interests throughout existing policy and promote LGBTIQ leaders.	<p>When LGBTIQ issues are not considered independently of the issues of vulnerable groups gaps can develop. All policies should consider their impact on LGBTIQ persons, and a specific policy on LGBTIQ issues will indicate to LGBTIQ voters that your party cares about and will promote their needs.</p> <p>Promoting LGBTIQ leaders gives credibility to your party when speaking on these issues.</p>
Incorporating respect for human rights for LGBTIQ persons in party manifestos and constitutions.	<p>Making over statements of support will make it clear to LGBTIQ persons that your party supports their human rights, and will support them.</p> <p>Manifestos should explicitly mention LGBTIQ persons as an interest group and constituency. One way to do this is to invite LGBTIQ organisations to do sensitivity training with your organisation, so that you can incorporate these perspectives.</p>
When considering a 'gender balance' in party structures, parties should take into account the need to be inclusive of gender diversity.	<p>Most mentions of 'gender' within political party structures actually relate to cisgender women.</p> <p>This ignores the experience of LGBTIQ persons, and can lead to marginalisation. To be more inclusive, representation targets should take into account the need to represent diverse sexual orientations and genders.</p>
Invite LGBTIQ constituents and interest groups to make presentations to the party.	<p>This will ensure that your policies and strategies to support constitutional values and LGBTIQ persons are suitable to address the needs of LGBTIQ persons in your constituencies and in the country more broadly.</p> <p>This can help the party to appeal to LGBTIQ voters, thus helping them to promote LGBTIQ leaders.</p>
Pursue political education of party members.	<p>It is not safe to assume that all members of a party are equally aware of human rights for LGBTIQ persons. Hold regular discussions within all levels of the party to promote awareness for these rights, and the challenges LGBTIQ persons face.</p>
Hold party members who discriminate accountable.	<p>There is the perception that at some levels of government it is safe to be homophobic or transphobic.</p> <p>This perception should be addressed through holding party leaders and office bearers accountable at all levels, and ensuring that the public is made aware that your party takes these matters seriously.</p>

### 3.1.1

## REPRESENTATION QUOTAS AND PROMOTING LGBTIQ LEADERS

Most mentions of 'gender' within political party structures actually relate to the representation of cisgender women. This ignores the experience of LGBTIQ persons and can lead to marginalisation. To be more inclusive, representation targets should take into account the need to represent diverse sexual orientations and genders.

One mechanism to promote the membership and leadership of LGBTIQ persons is the introduction of quotas for LGBTIQ persons, or the creation of positions or portfolios specifically to deal with LGBTIQ issues (as many parties have to deal with youth, women, or disability issues for example).

Promoting LGBTIQ leaders within your party gives the party more credibility when speaking on these issues<sup>2</sup>. There is also the need to ensure that where LGBTIQ persons are represented at a local government level, they do not encounter a 'glass ceiling' to their progress onto provincial or national structures.

### 3.1.2

## GENDER POLICIES THAT GO BEYOND THE BINARIES

When LGBTIQ issues are not considered independently of the issues of vulnerable groups, gaps in services and planning can develop. All policies should consider their impact on LGBTIQ persons, and a specific policy addressing LGBTIQ issues would indicate your party's commitment to LGBTIQ voters.

A gender balance should not be seen as being only 'women friendly,' and space should be provided for representation for LGBTIQ members within parties. Many of the current electoral manifestos only mention gender with regards to women, and none specifically speak to human rights for LGBTIQ people. Whilst these are not always different from other community members' interest (for example securing basic services) there are particular vulnerabilities and needs that LGBTIQ persons have.

Political parties should reach out to LGBTIQ organisations within their constituencies to ensure that these issues are

<sup>2</sup> Durso, LE and Krehely, J (2017) *Out Diplomacy: Reflections on LGBT service in the diplomatic bureaucracy*

raised and addressed in manifestos, and policy documents. In addition, human rights for LGBTIQ persons should be mainstreamed throughout all other policy documents within parties.

### 3.1.3

## MANIFESTOS AND CONSTITUTIONS

Although many political parties include commitments to address women's or gender issues in their manifestos and constitutions, none of the parties analysed in recent research explicitly stated their commitments to promote human rights for LGBTIQ persons.<sup>3</sup> When interviewed, parties suggested their commitment to Constitutional values, however, an explicit statement supporting SOGI rights makes it clear to all party members, and potential party members, that the party is a safe place to be openly out.

### 3.1.4

## INTERNAL PARTY EDUCATION

It is not safe to assume that all members of a party are equally aware of human rights for LGBTIQ persons. Hold regular discussions within all levels of the party to promote awareness for these rights, and the challenges LGBTIQ persons face.

Invite LGBTIQ constituents and interest groups to make presentations to the party. This will ensure that your policies and strategies to support constitutional values and LGBTIQ persons is suitable to address the needs of LGBTIQ persons in your constituencies and in the country more broadly.

### 3.1.5

## CLARIFYING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

The best way to approach political parties to engage on LGBTIQ issues is not always clear for outsiders. Parties should make these channels clear on their websites and branch communications. Parties should also invite specific feedback and input on human rights for LGBTIQ persons to encourage participation.

<sup>3</sup> Thorpe, J on behalf of the Triangle Project and the Gay & Lesbian Victory Institute (forthcoming) *LGBTIQ political participation in South Africa since 1994*

## 3.2 VOCALLY SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS FOR LGBTIQ PERSONS

The table below provides a summary of some of the key recommendations for supporting LGBTIQ political participation through external activity.

TABLE 2: HOW POLITICAL PARTIES CAN PROMOTE LGBTIQ POLITICAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH EXTERNAL ACTIVITY

PROMOTING PARTY ACCESSIBILITY AND SUPPORT FOR LGBTIQ PERSONS	
Make statements to support LGBTIQ persons at all levels (community, local government, provincial and national level).	Statements of support are important in making your party accessible to LGBTIQ persons, and raising awareness of the opportunities for political participation.
Be an ally to LGBTIQ organisations: for example attend events hosted by LGBTIQ organisations, be part of marches against homophobia or transphobia.	Showing solidarity via attending LGBTIQ events is a good way to build working relationships with the LGBTIQ community, and to increase their awareness of your political party.
Promote community openness and accessibility.	The best way to approach political parties to engage on LGBTIQ issues is not always clear for outsiders. Parties should make these channels clear on their websites, and branch communications. Parties should also invite specific feedback and input on human rights for LGBTIQ persons.
Host events on commemorative days.	Political parties often have events on Youth Day and Women's Day. There are a number of opportunities to hold similar events during Pride month – for example, an LGBTIQ Parliament, an Imbizo or a march. This sends a signal to your constituents that human rights for LGBTIQ persons are a party priority.
Within your constituencies address the barriers that LGBTIQ persons face in participating politically.	Engage with service providers, community members, religious organisations, and civic organisations within your community to ensure that they are supportive of and informed about human rights for LGBTIQ persons.

### 3.2.1

## ISSUING STATEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF LGBTIQ ISSUES

Political parties should put out statements during important LGBTIQ months/events to show their support of human rights for LGBTIQ persons. Using existing political platforms to introduce conversations around LGBTIQ issues is one way for political parties to promote human rights for LGBTIQ persons.

### 3.2.2

## HOST EVENTS ON COMMEMORATIVE DAYS

Political parties often have events on Youth Day and Women's Day, where specific groups of people are invited to give feedback on how government policies and programmes are affecting their lives. In addition, there is an annual youth and women's parliament. Political parties could hold similar events during Pride month, for example an LGBTIQ Parliament, an Imbizo or a march. This sends a signal to your constituents that human rights for LGBTIQ persons are a party priority.

### 3.2.3

## HOLDING PARTY MEMBERS ACCOUNTABLE WHEN THEY DO NOT SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS FOR LGBTIQ PERSONS

There is the perception that at some levels of government it is safe to be homophobic or transphobic. This perception should be addressed through holding party leaders and office bearers accountable at all levels, and ensuring that the public is made aware that your party takes these matters seriously.

Holding party members accountable to policies and manifestos that promote human rights for LGBTIQ persons sends a clear message to supporters and constituents that your party supports LGBTIQ persons. In particular, mention was made during interviews of ensuring that local government councillors and traditional leaders are held accountable for homophobic statements or practices.

Be an ally to LGBTIQ organisations: for example attend events hosted by LGBTIQ organisations, be part of marches against homophobia or transphobia. Speak to LGBTIQ constituents within your communities about what challenges they face. Showing solidarity via attending LGBTIQ events is a good way to build working relationships with the LGBTIQ community, and to increase their awareness of your political party.

Part of being an ally means engaging other groups in your party constituencies to promote human rights for LGBTIQ persons. Engage with service providers, community members, religious organisations, and civic organisations within your community to ensure that they are supportive of and informed about human rights for LGBTIQ persons.

# 4

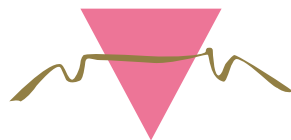
## CONCLUSION

The political participation of LGBTIQ South Africans is important to ensure that law and policy that promotes human rights for LGBTIQ persons takes their voices, needs, and concerns into consideration.

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However, law and policy is not sufficient to create an equal society. This requires the constant reinforcement of constitutional values by political parties and government, and the promotion of opportunities for engagement for LGBTIQ persons.

This guide provides recommendations for political parties on how to ensure that the constitutional commitment to equality is realised.



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