

MORE THAN REPRESENT

LGBT ELECTED OFFICIALS DRIVE EQUALITY IN THE STATES

Victory's Impact on
State-Level LGBT Equality

APRIL 2016



INTRODUCTION

The movement for LGBT equality has made advances in the last decade that at one time seemed unlikely for generations to come. Countless LGBT individuals and organizations, ally groups, and friends and family came together and fought hard to secure these wins. Victory Fund and Institute contributes to this fight by recruiting, training, and supporting hundreds of LGBT people to run for office and serve at all levels of government. Victory has worked strategically for the past 25 years to ensure LGBT people have political power and a direct voice at the tables where decisions that determine our equality are made. This issue brief will show the impact of this work.

As last month's loss in North Carolina shows, Victory's role is more important than ever. Naked bigotry won out there when state lawmakers voted to roll back a pro-LGBT law in Charlotte. Our opponents outdid themselves by calling a special session and standing on lies about transgender people and public safety. It was an ugly fight that showed just how much hate and ignorance the LGBT movement still must overcome to secure full equality. We unfortunately saw a similar result in Mississippi in early April. But we also had a win in Georgia, when the governor there vetoed an anti-equality bill. Not surprisingly, there are no openly LGBT people serving in the Mississippi or North Carolina legislatures, but there are in Georgia. Representation matters.

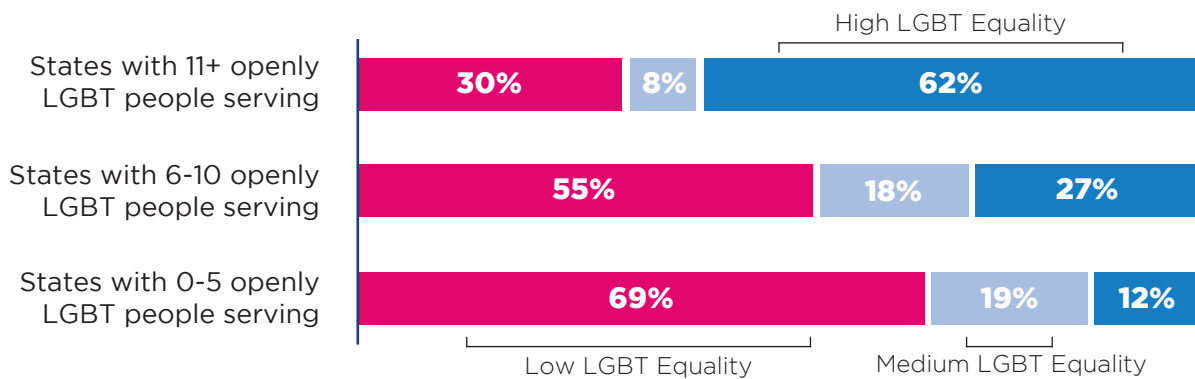
This brief is the first in a series from Victory that will show the impact openly LGBT public officials have on LGBT equality in the states. In this brief we examine the relationship between the current level of LGBT equality in the states and the number of openly LGBT public officials. Forthcoming briefs will look at the impact that openly LGBT state legislators have on thwarting anti-equality legislation our opponents are right now pushing in the states, and how openly LGBT state legislators influenced their non-LGBT colleagues to vote for marriage equality.

The more openly LGBT public officials a state has, the higher its level of LGBT legal equality.

The Current Landscape

The “Equality Maps” series at the [Movement Advancement Project](#) (MAP) analyzes the LGBT policy landscape in each of the 50 states and then assigns them a rating of [High, Medium, Low, or Very Low levels](#) of LGBT equality. We took MAP’s analysis and overlaid the number of openly LGBT public officials currently serving in each state. This analysis showed that states with no or few openly LGBT officials had low levels of LGBT equality. As a state’s number of openly LGBT officials increases, so does its level of LGBT equality. Figure 1 shows these results.

Figure 1: Relationship between the number of openly LGBT public officials and overall LGBT equality.



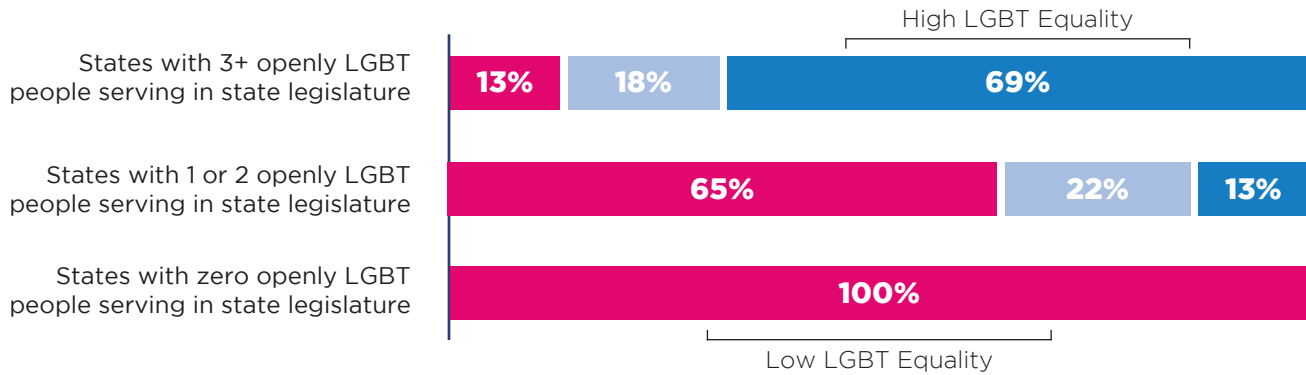
Nearly 70 percent of the states that have five or fewer openly LGBT public officials are rated as having low levels of LGBT equality by MAP. On the plus side, nearly two-thirds of states with 11 or more openly LGBT public officials are rated by MAP as having high levels of LGBT equality.

The relationship between openly LGBT public officials and a state’s overall level of LGBT equality is even starker when we narrow the analysis to openly LGBT state legislators. Figure 2, for example, shows that 100 percent of states with no openly LGBT legislators are rated as having low levels of LGBT equality. At the other (positive) extreme, nearly 70 percent of the states with high levels of LGBT equality have three or more openly LGBT people serving in their state legislatures.

Nearly 70% of the states with 5 or fewer openly LGBT public officials have low levels of LGBT equality.

¹ Because only two states—Alabama and Tennessee—are rated Very Low by MAP, we combined them with the Low group.

Figure 2: Relationship between the number of openly LGBT state legislators and overall LGBT equality.



About two-thirds of states with 11 or more openly LGBT public officials have high levels of equality.

Of course, one could argue that states with high levels of LGBT equality have more openly LGBT public officials simply because those states are more progressive. In other words, if a majority of a state’s population supports LGBT equality and the lawmakers who would pass related legislation, then it stands to reason that that same population would be open to voting for openly LGBT candidates for public office. But a forthcoming analysis from Victory will demonstrate that openly LGBT lawmakers have a definitive impact on how their colleagues vote. The outcomes aren’t simply pre-ordained by a state’s overall political climate.

Looking Ahead

Our movement won many of its victories because LGBT people were serving in office and had the power to make change happen. To continue the fight and make sure that we win true and meaningful LGBT equality for all people everywhere, we must not forget that lesson of the past. Quite simply, we must double down on our efforts to build political power because many of the fights we now face are in places that have the highest levels of anti-LGBT animus. The recent victory in Georgia shows this reality clearly.

We need to educate our allies – and yes, even our own community—that there is no explicit federal law that provides nondiscrimination protections at work, in housing, or in public accommodations, and that many states in the U.S. lack these important laws as well. The recent losses in North Carolina and Mississippi last month put this reality in stark relief.

We must grow Victory’s strategy that has served the LGBT movement so well for the past 25 years, and bring our voices into the conversations that right now are determining whether or not we’ll truly have full legal equality in all corners of the United States in our lifetimes. That means zeroing in on some of the toughest states for our community, and making sure we win for everyone, everywhere.

100 percent of the states with no openly LGBT legislators have low levels of LGBT equality.



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