



BRIEFING PAPER 3

Engaging the media

The story to tell about
LGBTI rights in Namibia

For LGBTI spokespeople, communicators and allies

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September 2026

Based on Afrobarometer Round 10 (Namibia, 2024)
and Rounds 6 to 9 comparative data



Unveiling Positive Narratives
in Namibian LGBT+ Lives

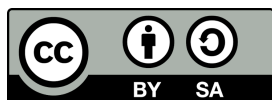
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Opinion & LGBTI Rights in Namibia

Afrobarometer Round 10 (2024) | For: LGBTI spokespeople, communicators and allies



51%

would accept
a gay neighbour



26%

support
equal rights



1 story

dignity, fairness,
the Constitution



The core story

The most useful story is also the truest one the evidence supports: Namibians are more accepting than the country's laws and politics suggest, and the argument for equality is about dignity, fairness and the Constitution, not a foreign agenda. Half of Namibians would accept a gay neighbour, and their religion does not stand in the way. What is missing is not tolerance but the recognition that neighbours deserve equal standing before the law.

Everything below serves that throughline. The aim in media work is to keep returning to it: coexistence is already common, the issue is equal dignity, and the Constitution protects everyone.

This framing is chosen deliberately to persuade without alienating. It builds on the acceptance most Namibians already feel, rather than accusing them of prejudice; it speaks the language of dignity, fairness and safety, which command wide agreement, rather than leading with the claims that divide; and it is grounded in Namibia's own Constitution and courts, which disarms the charge that this is a foreign campaign. The evidence in the report supports every part of it, so spokespeople can hold the line under challenge.

Message pillars

Four pillars carry the story. Each is backed by the survey evidence, so spokespeople can stand behind every claim.

- **Namibians are neighbours, not haters.** Half would happily live next door to a gay person; this is a live-and-let-live country, and the debate is not about whether LGBTI people belong here.
- **This is about dignity, safety and fairness.** LGBTI Namibians face harassment and discrimination that the public itself recognises; no one should be beaten, fired or evicted for who they are.
- **The Constitution protects everyone.** Dignity and equality are guaranteed rights, the courts have applied them to LGBTI people, and rights are not decided by popularity.
- **This is Namibian, not imported.** Equal treatment reflects Namibian values of community and fairness; it is the criminal law, not acceptance, that was inherited from outside.

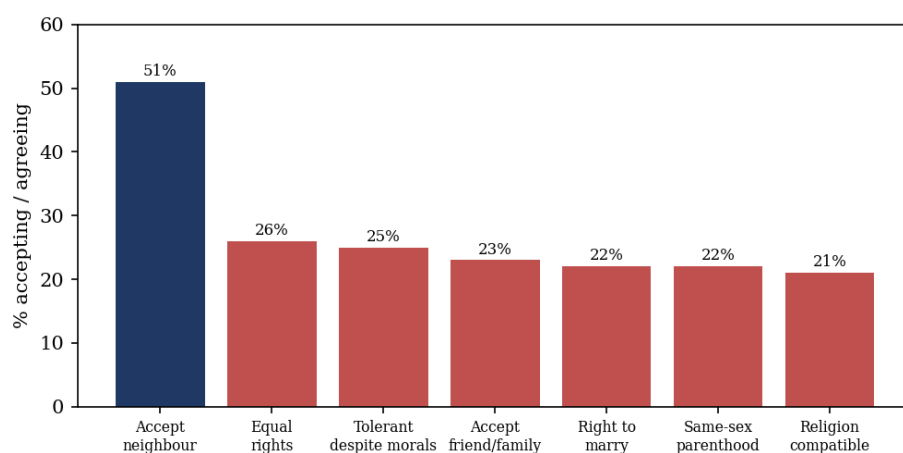
Namibians are more accepting than the country's laws and politics suggest, and the argument for equality is about dignity, fairness and the Constitution, not a foreign agenda.

Each pillar rests on the evidence: the neighbour figure (about half of adults) supports the first; the public's own recognition of harassment supports the second; the courts' rulings on dignity and equality support the third; and the colonial origin of the sodomy law, struck down in 2024, supports the fourth. Lead with whichever pillar best fits the story at hand, but bridge back to dignity.

Numbers that help, and numbers that mislead

Statistics are powerful in the media, but a single figure can distort. Use the two key numbers together, and explain what each means.

- **Use: ‘Half of Namibians would accept a gay neighbour.’** It establishes that acceptance is common and counters the story of a uniformly hostile public.
- **Use: ‘But only a quarter support equal rights, so the job is unfinished.’** It keeps the focus on rights and dignity rather than on whether LGBTI people are tolerated at all.
- **Avoid letting one number stand for ‘the public view.’** Tolerating a neighbour and supporting rights are different attitudes; quoting only the tolerance figure overstates support for reform, and quoting only the opposition figure hides the acceptance that exists.



Why one number misleads: support falls sharply from accepting a neighbour to granting rights. The most persuasive move is to give both numbers and then explain the gap: acceptance is already common, but equal treatment under the law is still missing. That framing is honest, difficult to attack, and keeps the focus on dignity rather than on how many people approve.

Framing: do's and don'ts

Do	Don't
Talk about dignity, fairness and safety	Lead with same-sex marriage
Cite the Constitution and the courts	Argue that the majority should decide
Use Namibian voices and local values	Frame it as a Western or donor cause
Tell human stories of real people	Speak only in the language of rights and law
Note that faith and acceptance can go together	Attack religion or religious Namibians

When they say..., you can say...

When they say...	You can say...
"The majority opposes it, so put it to a referendum."	Rights are not a popularity contest, and our Constitution protects minorities precisely so the majority cannot vote away their dignity. Half of Namibians already accept gay neighbours; the question is equal treatment, not whether people belong.
"Homosexuality is un-African and a Western import."	What was imported was the colonial-era criminal law, now struck down by our own courts. Acceptance and fairness are Namibian values, and this is a Namibian conversation about Namibian citizens.
"It is against our religion."	Many people of faith support treating everyone with dignity, and the evidence shows religious Namibians are no less accepting than others. This is about equal rights under the law, not about anyone's worship.
"This is really about pushing same-sex marriage on us."	It is about ending violence and discrimination and ensuring equal treatment. People are asking to keep their jobs and homes and to be safe, which most Namibians already recognise as only fair.
"Most people don't accept homosexuality, so why change anything?"	In fact half of Namibians say they would happily have a gay neighbour, so acceptance is already widespread. And whatever the numbers, the Constitution guarantees everyone equal dignity; that protection cannot switch on and off with opinion polls.
"This will confuse or harm our children."	Protecting people from violence and discrimination harms no one. This is about adults being safe in their jobs, homes and communities, and about a Constitution that treats every Namibian family with respect.
"There are more important issues, like jobs and poverty."	There are, and LGBTI Namibians face those too, often made worse by discrimination that costs them work and housing. Treating people fairly does not compete with fighting poverty; it is part of it.
"People choose to be this way."	Whatever anyone believes about that, no Namibian should be beaten, sacked or evicted for who they are. Equal protection under the Constitution does not depend on winning that argument.

Lines you can use

- "Namibians are good neighbours. Half of us would happily live next door to a gay person. The law just needs to catch up with that decency."
- "No Namibian should be beaten, fired or evicted for who they love. That is not our way, and our Constitution says so."
- "Rights are not a popularity contest. The Constitution protects everyone, especially those the majority might overlook."

- “This is about dignity and fairness for our own people, not about anyone’s religion or any foreign agenda.”
- “Our courts have already said the Constitution protects every Namibian. Parliament and the rest of us should catch up with that promise.”
- “Young Namibians are showing us the way. The country is changing, and it is changing toward fairness.”

Spokesperson tips and story angles

- **Stay on the throughline.** Bridge every question back to dignity, fairness and the Constitution.
- **Lead with people, not policy.** A real story of harassment survived or a family’s love moves audiences more than statistics.
- **Choose messengers well.** Straight allies, parents, faith leaders and young Namibians broaden the story beyond the movement.
- **Offer journalists angles.** The tolerant-country-with-restrictive-laws paradox, the courts leading where politics lags, and the generational shift among young Namibians are all strong, accurate stories.

Channels and audiences

Match the message to the medium, and aim first at the people who can be moved, the younger, more urban and more educated middle, rather than trying to reach everyone at once.

- **Social and digital media.** The most efficient route to the younger, urban middle; favour short, human, shareable stories over argument.
- **Radio and community media.** The widest national reach, including rural and older audiences; here lead with safety, dignity and everyday neighbourliness rather than rights claims.
- **Print and long-form.** Room for the paradox and the data; ideal for opinion pieces by allies, lawyers and faith leaders.
- **Trusted messengers over paid campaigns.** Ordinary Namibians, parents, professionals and religious voices carry the story further than the movement’s own spokespeople alone.

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A note on tone

Persuasion here is relational, not adversarial. Speak to Namibians as good neighbours who mostly mean well, invite them one step further rather than accusing them of bigotry, and keep the register calm, local and dignified. Anger and condescension harden the very middle the movement needs to win, while warmth, humour and shared values open it. The goal of every media appearance is not to defeat an opponent but to make the undecided listener feel that fairness for LGBTI Namibians is the decent, ordinary, Namibian thing to want.

Before the interview: a checklist

- Know your three numbers: about half accept a gay neighbour, about a quarter support equal rights, and the gap is real and worth explaining.
- Decide your one message for this interview and the story or example that carries it.
- Prepare the bridge back to dignity, fairness and the Constitution for hostile questions.
- Have one rebuttal ready for the referendum, foreign-imposition and religion lines.
- Line up a human voice: a person affected, a parent, an ally or a faith leader, not only an activist.
- Avoid being drawn into a debate about marriage; return to safety and equal treatment.

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Full data, methods and Harvard references are in the research report, Keulder (2026), Public Opinion, Toleration and the Rights of LGBTI People in Namibia.