



Public Opinion, Toleration and the Rights of **LGBTI** People in Namibia

Evidence from the Afrobarometer Round 10 Survey

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September 2026

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



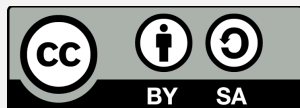
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in Namibian LGBT+ Lives

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Executive summary

Namibia presents a puzzle for anyone who would read the rights of a minority from the mood of the majority. By the standard measure used across Africa, it is one of the continent's more tolerant societies: about half of adults say they would not mind a homosexual neighbour, more than twice the continental average.

Yet clear majorities oppose equal legal rights, same-sex marriage and same-sex parenting, and the country's Parliament has moved to restrict LGBTI rights even as its courts have extended them. This report draws on a nationally representative Afrobarometer survey to explain that combination, and to set out what it means for a public debate in which majority opinion is repeatedly invoked to decide the standing of an unpopular minority.

The report brings together the full descriptive picture of Namibian attitudes with two analytical strands: who is tolerant and why, and whether tolerance translates into support for rights. Its central message is that social acceptance and support for legal equality are different attitudes, that the gap between them is large and found in every part of society, and that the barrier to LGBTI equality in Namibia is political and cultural rather than religious.

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Key messages

- **A tolerant society, thinly.** Namibia is comparatively tolerant but its tolerance is thin. Around 51% would accept a homosexual neighbour, but only about one in five actively welcome the prospect; the rest simply would not object.
- **Acceptance is not rights.** While 51% would accept a gay neighbour, only 26% support equal legal rights, and roughly one in five endorse same-sex marriage or parenting. This 25-point gap between acceptance and rights is the report's central finding.
- **The gap is everywhere.** The gap appears within every age, education, location and gender group. It is widest, not narrowest, among older citizens. It is a feature of the whole population, not of a conservative fringe.
- **Not a religious barrier.** Religiosity does not depress tolerance; if anything the more religiously engaged are slightly more accepting. Opposition to rights runs along partisan and ethnic lines, and is

strongest among ruling-party identifiers. The barrier is political and cultural, not religious.

- **Democracy alone is not enough.** Namibians who most strongly demand democracy are no more supportive of equal rights, and slightly less so. The democracy they support is majoritarian, and the rights of an unpopular minority are a liberal, not a majoritarian, value.
- **A movable middle.** The Namibians most likely to move from acceptance to support for rights are the young, the educated and the urban, not those who simply feel more personal comfort. Expanding rights-support is a different task from expanding tolerance.
- **Implications for the rights debate.** Because a vote on coexistence and a vote on rights would return different answers, social tolerance cannot be read as a mandate for or against legal reform, and the rights of a minority should not be made to depend on majority approval.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronyms and abbreviations

AME	Average marginal effect
CC	Creative Commons
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
LRDC	Law Reform and Development Commission
NAHC	High Court of Namibia (neutral case citation)
NASC	Supreme Court of Namibia (neutral case citation)
n.d.	No date
NDWA	Namibia Diverse Women's Association
NMT	NMT Media Foundation
SE	Standard error
sec.+	Secondary education or higher
Sig.	Statistical significance
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO Party)

Statistical notation

<i>b</i>	Regression coefficient (log-odds)
<i>N</i>	Number of respondents included in an analysis
<i>p</i>	Probability value (p-value)
<i>r</i>	Pearson correlation coefficient
<i>R</i>²	Coefficient of determination (McFadden pseudo- <i>R</i> ² for logistic models)
* ** ***	Statistically significant at <i>p</i> <.05, <i>p</i> <.01 and <i>p</i> <.001 respectively
□	Significant at <i>p</i> ≤.10

1. Introduction

The status of LGBTI rights in Africa has drawn intense attention as governments have moved in strikingly different directions. Some states have tightened prohibitions; others have liberalised. Namibia sits awkwardly within this landscape, and in an unusually revealing way. Its Constitution guarantees dignity and equality; its courts have decriminalised consensual same-sex conduct and required the recognition of foreign same-sex marriages; and its Parliament has legislated in the opposite direction. Public opinion has been invoked at every turn, by those who would expand rights and by those who would restrict them, and several actors have called for the question to be settled by referendum.

This report examines what Namibians actually think, which Namibians think it, and whether social tolerance implies support for legal equality. It approaches these questions from a human-rights standpoint, in which dignity, equality and non-discrimination are entitlements rather than privileges granted by majority consent. That standpoint does not presume the answer to any empirical question; it clarifies why the answers matter. If tolerance and support for rights are the same thing, then a tolerant public is a public ready for reform, and majority opinion is a reasonable guide. If they are different things, then appeals to public opinion can point in opposite directions depending on which attitude is measured, and the distinction becomes decisive for how the rights of a minority should be decided.

... dignity, equality and
non-discrimination are
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depend on majority approval

The report proceeds as follows. Section 2 sets out the legal, political and social context. Section 3 places Namibia in comparative African perspective. Section 4 develops a conceptual framework for the findings. Section 5 describes the data and methods. Section 6 presents the full descriptive picture of attitudes across every item in the survey. Section 7 asks who is tolerant and why. Section 8 turns to the report's central question, whether tolerance is the same as support for rights. Section 9 discusses the implications, and Section 10 concludes. Technical detail is placed in the annexes so that the body remains readable.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

This report is the comprehensive account of a study whose more focused findings also appear in two companion working papers, on the determinants of toleration and on the gap between acceptance and rights. It is written for a mixed readership: policymakers and legislators, the courts and the legal community, civil-society and rights organisations, the media, and

researchers. Its framing is a human-rights one, in which dignity, equality and non-discrimination are entitlements that do not depend on majority approval. From that standpoint, the study investigates five questions:

- whether Namibians distinguish between tolerating sexual minorities as neighbours and granting them the equal rights their Constitution promises, and how large the gap between social acceptance and legal equality actually is;
- whether the public opinion so often invoked in the rights debate is a single, coherent thing, or fractures into distinct attitudes that yield different answers depending on which is measured;
- which citizens extend social acceptance while withholding rights, and what distinguishes the minority who support full legal equality;
- what the evidence implies for closing the gap between public attitudes and the standard of equality set by the Constitution and international human-rights instruments; and
- how courts, legislators, pollsters and the media should interpret survey evidence on tolerance when it is invoked for or against legal reform.

2. Background: law, politics and society

2.1 Constitutional guarantees and the criminal law

Namibia's Constitution guarantees human dignity (Article 8) and equality and freedom from discrimination (Article 10), and its courts have increasingly read those guarantees to protect sexual minorities. The criminal law long pointed the other way. Consensual same-sex conduct between men was punishable under the common-law offences of sodomy and 'unnatural sexual offences', inherited from Roman-Dutch law rather than enacted by statute, which many mistook for a blanket prohibition on homosexuality (LRDC, 2020). Their practical significance was largely symbolic, since prosecutions were rare, which makes the state's determination to defend them all the more revealing of their expressive function.

2.2 The courts and Parliament, 2001 to 2024

Four lines of litigation frame the current moment (Hubbard, 2024). In the Frank case (2001), the Supreme Court decided a residence dispute involving a same-sex couple on narrow administrative-law grounds, but its remarks emphasising public opinion and construing the protected 'family' as heterosexual cast a long shadow. In the Delgado-Lühl cases (2021 to 2023), the courts found the state's treatment of children born to a gay couple through surrogacy to be 'actuated by discrimination', invoking the Article 10 guarantee of equality for all 'regardless of colour, gender, sexual orientation'. In the Digashu and Seiler-Lilles cases (2023), the Supreme Court required that foreign same-sex spouses be recognised for immigration purposes, and expressly disapproved the reasoning in Frank.

Parliament responded by moving to restrict rights. Following the Digashu ruling, private members' bills were passed in July 2023 to define marriage and 'spouse' as a union of persons of the opposite sex, and their substance was later carried into the Marriage Act of 2024 (Act 14 of 2024), which the President signed in October 2024, although it has not yet been brought into force. The Act defines marriage as a union between persons of the opposite sex and refuses recognition of foreign same-sex marriages, effectively overriding Digashu. Against this legislative tightening, the High Court in *Dausab v Minister of Justice* (June 2024) declared the common-law offences of sodomy and 'unnatural sexual offences' unconstitutional, holding that enforcing the private moral views of the majority does not justify criminalising intimate conduct (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Namibia therefore decriminalised and restricted almost simultaneously, and it enters the period of this survey with the judiciary and the legislature pointing in opposite directions.

2.3 Politicised homophobia

This institutional conflict has a longer political history. From the late 1990s, senior figures in the ruling party denounced homosexuality as un-African and as a colonial imposition. Currier and Gogul (2020) describe this as politicised homophobia: a discourse that frames same-sex sexuality as a Western import and casts LGBTI rights as a continuation of imperialism, thereby reconciling the retention of colonial-era laws with a nationalist narrative. The discourse served the ruling party in several ways, positioning it as the guardian of traditional values and offering

a low-cost way to mobilise moral sentiment. The result is a public conversation in which acceptance of sexual minorities as people can coexist with strong resistance to their claims as rights-bearers, which is precisely the configuration this report sets out to measure.

2.4 Reform proposals and international commitments

Calls for reform predate the recent litigation. The Law Reform and Development Commission recommended the abolition of the common-law sodomy offences (LRDC, 2020), and human-rights bodies have repeatedly flagged the concerns arising from their retention. Namibia is also party to international and regional instruments that bear on the treatment of sexual minorities, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, both of which guarantee equality and non-discrimination, while United Nations human-rights bodies have affirmed the protection of individuals from violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Against this backdrop, the recurring proposal to settle the question of LGBTI rights by national referendum raises a basic tension between majoritarian decision-making and the protection of minority rights. That tension is not merely procedural. It goes to whether rights guaranteed by the Constitution and by international law can properly be made contingent on the approval of the majority, and it is a tension to which this report's evidence speaks directly.

3. Namibia in comparative African perspective

Afrobarometer data decisively challenge the image of a uniformly intolerant continent. The share of adults who would not mind a homosexual neighbour ranges from under 5% to over 80% across the countries surveyed. A small cluster of southern African and island states stands well apart, and Namibia is among them. It has been among the ten most tolerant countries in every round since 2014, averaging about 56% over the period, and it has consistently run roughly 30 percentage points above the continental average (Figure 1).

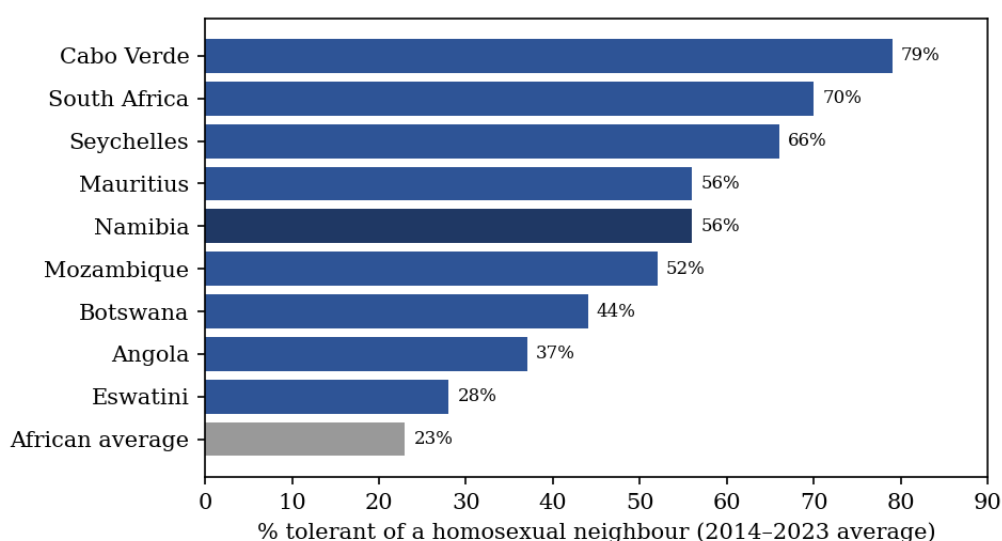


Figure 1. Toleration of homosexual neighbours, selected African countries, average 2014 to 2023 (% who would not mind, somewhat like, or strongly like). Namibia is highlighted. Source: Afrobarometer Rounds 6 to 9.

Namibia's position has not been static. Toleration rose to a high of 64% in the 2019/21 round before receding, and stood at about 51% in the 2024 Round 10 survey on which this report principally draws. Throughout, it has remained well above the African average of roughly a fifth to a quarter (Figure 2). The comparison also unsettles the assumption that public tolerance is the binding constraint on legal reform: several countries with substantially lower toleration than Namibia, including Angola and Botswana, have nonetheless decriminalised or extended recognition, which suggests that factors other than public sentiment, among them elite incentives and litigation, better explain the timing of reform.

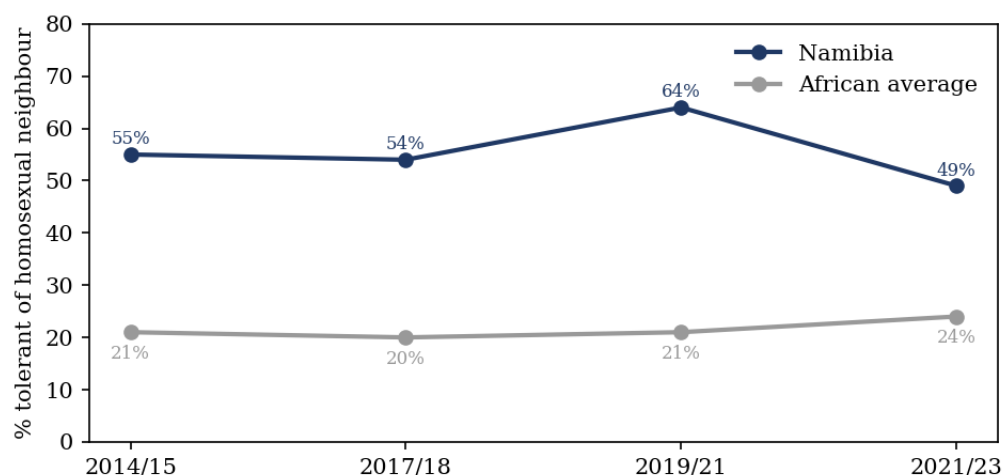


Figure 2. Toleration of homosexual neighbours: Namibia versus the African average, 2014 to 2023. Source: Afrobarometer Rounds 6 to 9.

The point is made sharply by setting toleration against legal status among the continent's more tolerant states (Table 1). Some highly tolerant countries reformed long ago, but several with lower toleration than Namibia reformed too, and Namibia itself decriminalised only in 2024, after decades in which its comparatively high tolerance had not translated into reform. Eswatini, also more tolerant than most of the region, has seen no reform at all. If public tolerance were the decisive factor, the sequence of reform would look very different from this, which reinforces the report's later argument that tolerance and support for legal change are not the same thing.

Country	Toleration	Same-sex conduct	Year reformed
Cabo Verde	82%	Legal	2004
South Africa	71%	Legal	1998
Seychelles	66%	Legal	2016
Mauritius	60%	Legal	2023
Mozambique	52%	Legal	2015
Namibia	49%	Decriminalised 2024	2024
Botswana	45%	Legal	2019
Eswatini	42%	Criminalised	–
Angola	36%	Legal	2021

Table 1. Toleration and legal status of consensual same-sex conduct, most tolerant African countries (Round 9 toleration figures, 2019 to 2023; legal status updated to Namibia's June 2024 decriminalisation). Sources: Afrobarometer Round 9; Human Dignity Trust; Hubbard (2024).

4. A conceptual framework for the findings

The findings in this report answer four different questions, and it helps to hold them together within a single framework (Figure 3). Attitudes toward a stigmatised minority are not one thing but several; the different attitudes are related by a common logic; they are produced by identifiable social and political forces; and they are to be judged, finally, against a standard of rights. The framework therefore has four layers, set out here and revisited as each set of findings is presented.

A conceptual framework: from acceptance to equality

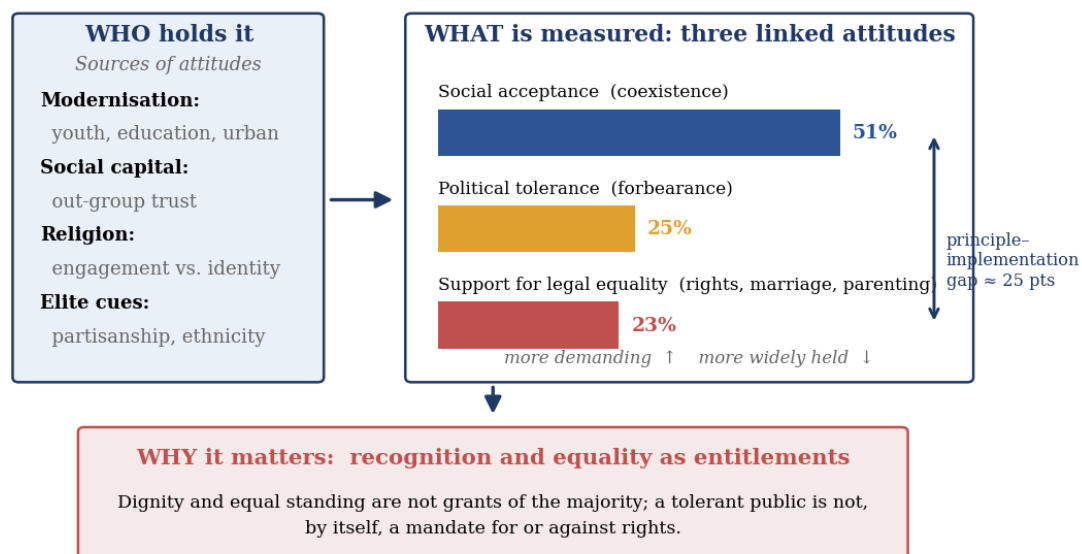


Figure 3. A conceptual framework: the three linked attitudes, the sources that shape them, the principle-implementation gap between acceptance and rights, and the normative standard of recognition and equality.

4.1 What is measured: three linked attitudes

The first layer concerns what is being measured. Everyday language runs together three attitudes that scholarship keeps apart. Social acceptance is a willingness to be socially close, and it is what the familiar survey question about a homosexual neighbour captures, in the tradition of the social-distance scale (Bogardus, 1925, 1933). Political tolerance, in the sense established by Stouffer (1955) and by Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus (1982), is something different: a willingness to extend rights and liberties to a group one dislikes, so that it is defined by forbearance rather than by comfort. Support for legal equality is more demanding still, meaning agreement that the group should hold equal standing in law, including in marriage and family. These attitudes form a ladder of demand, from coexistence at the bottom to legal equality at the top, and they should not be assumed to rise and fall together. The descriptive staircase in Section 6 and the finding of two distinct dimensions of opinion in Section 8 are the evidence for this layer.

4.2 Why acceptance outruns rights: the principle-implementation gap

The second layer explains why the attitudes come apart in a particular direction, with acceptance running ahead of rights. The most developed account comes from the study of racial attitudes, where publics were found to endorse the principle of equality long before they would support the concrete measures that would realise it (Schuman et al., 1997; Bobo & Kluegel, 1993). Accepting a neighbour is the endorsement of a principle of coexistence, at low personal cost; granting rights, recognition and family standing is implementation, and it is resisted for reasons, to do with status, morality and the social order, that personal comfort does not reach.

This principle-implementation logic (Dixon et al., 2017) predicts a gap between acceptance and rights, predicts that the gap will be found across social groups rather than confined to a conservative segment, and predicts that citizens will sort into recognisable types. The size of the gap, its presence in every subgroup, and the three citizen types identified in Section 8 are the evidence for this layer.

4.3 Who holds which attitude: modernisation, social capital and elite cues

The third layer concerns the sources of these attitudes, and it draws several strands of theory together. Value-change theory associates youth, education and urban exposure with a shift toward self-expression values and the acceptance of out-groups (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Accounts of social capital and intergroup contact link generalised and out-group trust to a disposition toward pluralism (Putnam, 2000; Allport, 1954).

Work on religion distinguishes the effect of religious engagement from that of religious identity, and cautions against reading a religious society as an intolerant one (Adamczyk, 2017; Dreier, Long & Winkler, 2020). And accounts of elite cues and politicised homophobia explain how partisanship and group identity carry attitudes where an issue has been mobilised by political leaders (Currier & Gogul, 2020). These processes explain who is more and less tolerant, and, importantly, what moves a citizen from acceptance to support for rights. The determinants analysis in Section 7 and the account of who crosses the gap in Section 8 are the evidence for this layer.

4.4 Why it matters: recognition and the limits of majority rule

The fourth layer is normative, and it is where the framework meets the report's human-rights purpose. To withhold recognition from a group on account of an ascribed attribute is, in the language of political theory, a form of humiliation and exclusion rather than a neutral private preference (Lukes, 1997; Margalit, 1996). And the rights at stake are entitlements guaranteed by the Constitution and by international instruments, which do not become valid only when a majority approves them. This layer supplies the standard against which the empirical findings are judged. It is why the gap between acceptance and rights is not merely an interesting fact but a problem, and it is why the report's central caution follows: a tolerant public is not, by itself, a mandate for or against the rights of a minority. The discussion draws on this layer.

5. Data and methods

The report draws on the Afrobarometer, a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network. Its principal source is the Round 10 survey in Namibia, a nationally representative, face-to-face survey of 1,200 adult citizens conducted in March 2024 under a clustered, stratified, multi-stage probability design, with a margin of error of about plus or minus 2.8 percentage points. The Namibian questionnaire carried a country-specific module on attitudes toward sexual minorities that is not asked elsewhere, covering acceptance of a homosexual neighbour and of a friend or family member, perceived discrimination, and support for equal rights, marriage, parenthood, tolerance and the compatibility of religion with acceptance. Earlier rounds (Rounds 6 to 9, 2014 to 2023) across up to 39 countries provide comparative and over-time context.

All descriptive estimates are weighted to correct for unequal selection probabilities. The report uses three kinds of analysis, described in plain terms here and in full in Annex A. Descriptive analysis reports the share of Namibians holding each attitude, overall and by group. Regression analysis identifies the factors independently associated with toleration and with support for rights. Measurement analysis, using factor analysis and latent class analysis, tests whether acceptance and support for rights are distinct attitudes and sorts citizens into types. Because the data are cross-sectional, the report describes associations rather than causal effects, and it treats all self-reported attitudes on a sensitive topic with appropriate caution.

6. The full picture: attitudes across the board

6.1 Toleration of homosexual neighbours

On the standard measure, 51% of Namibians in 2024 would not mind, or would like, a homosexual neighbour. This headline conceals a telling internal structure. When the three response categories are separated, 49% actively dislike the prospect, 33% would not care, and only 18% affirmatively like it. Toleration in Namibia is thus predominantly of the thin, permissive kind: a large group is willing to coexist without objecting, while active acceptance remains a minority position.

6.2 Perceptions of discrimination

Namibians recognise that sexual minorities face mistreatment, though they see some forms more clearly than others (Figure 4). A majority perceive that people in same-sex relationships face harassment or threats at least occasionally, and more than a quarter believe this happens frequently. Perceptions of job and housing discrimination are lower, and are accompanied by sizeable shares who say they do not know, particularly among the less educated. This uneven awareness is itself notable: the more educated are more likely to recognise harassment, but not uniformly more likely to recognise discrimination in employment or housing, which points to an awareness gap that shapes how the problem is understood.

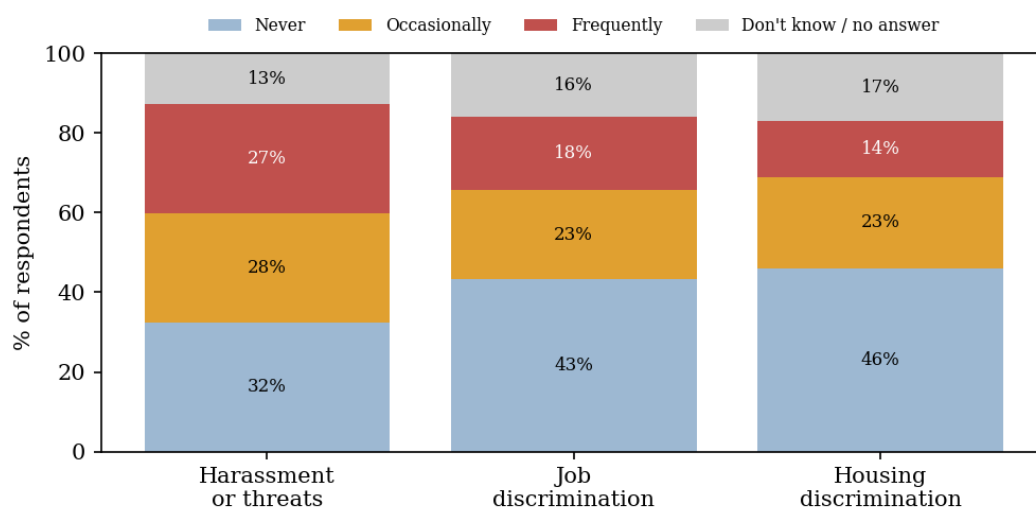


Figure 4. Perceived frequency of discrimination against people in same-sex relationships (weighted %). Source: Afrobarometer Round 10 Namibia (2024).

The pattern of awareness is itself revealing. Harassment and threats are the most widely recognised form of mistreatment, and the least likely to draw a 'don't know' response, which suggests that interpersonal hostility is the most visible face of the problem. Discrimination in employment and housing is both less often perceived and more often met with uncertainty, especially among respondents with less formal education, among whom the 'don't know' shares are largest. Counter-intuitively, higher education is associated with greater acknowledgement of harassment but not uniformly with greater recognition of discrimination in jobs or housing. One reading is that the structural, less visible forms of discrimination are simply harder to observe, so that even attentive citizens underestimate them. Whatever the explanation, the sizeable shares who cannot say how often discrimination occurs are a reminder that the experiences of sexual minorities are, for much of the public, out of sight.

... the more educated are more likely to recognise harassment, but not uniformly more likely to recognise discrimination in employment or housing, which points to an awareness gap that shapes how the problem is understood.

6.3 Acceptance, rights and the more demanding attitudes

Beyond the neighbour question, support falls away sharply for every attitude that involves intimacy or law. Only 23% say they would accept a friend or family member who is attracted to the same sex, while 59% would be rejecting. Only 26% agree that sexual minorities deserve equal legal rights, 25% that Namibians should be tolerant regardless of their morals, 22% that people should be able to marry regardless of a partner's gender, 22% that same-sex couples should have the right to be parents, and 21% that their religion is compatible with acceptance. Arranged from the most to the least widely held, these attitudes form a descending staircase, with the largest single step falling between accepting a neighbour and everything more demanding (Figure 5).

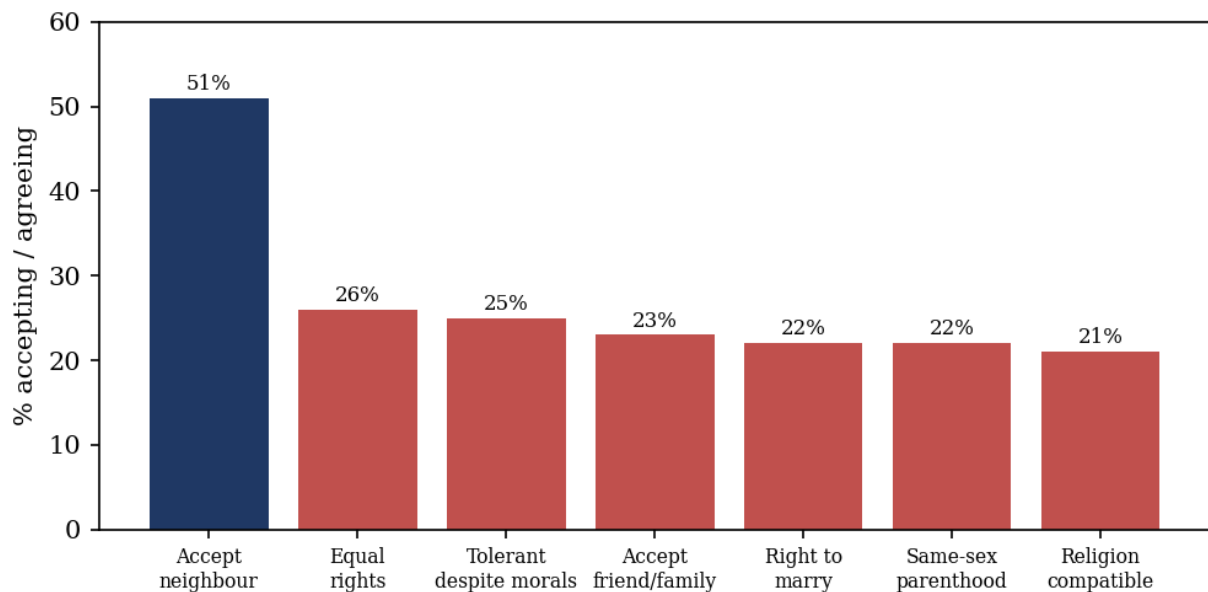


Figure 5. From acceptance to rights: weighted share accepting or agreeing on each item, Round 10 (2024). The neighbour item stands well above the rights and intimacy items.

Each of these attitudes rewards a closer look. On equal legal rights, the most directly rights-relevant item, 26% agree that sexual minorities deserve the same legal rights as everyone else, while 64% disagree. Support is highest among the youngest adults, at about 32% of those aged 18 to 25 against roughly 14% of those over 55, and among urban residents, at about 32% against 19% in rural areas; education raises support only modestly. Even so, no major subgroup reaches majority support, so the item describes a minority position across the board.

On same-sex marriage, 22% agree that people should be able to marry regardless of a partner's gender, while 68% disagree, with opposition heaviest among older Namibians. On same-sex parenthood, support is similar at 22% and opposition slightly higher, making the right to parent among the least-accepted claims in the battery; here too the age gradient is steep. On the more abstract proposition that Namibians should be tolerant of same-sex attraction regardless of their own morals, 25% agree, a figure close to that for equal rights and, like it, well below the neighbour-tolerance measure.

The item on religion asks whether respondents can follow their faith and accept same-sex relationships; 21% agree that they can. It is tempting to read this low figure as evidence that religion is the barrier to acceptance, but Section 7 shows that this reading is mistaken: the more religiously engaged are not less tolerant, and the compatibility item measures a perceived tension rather than the effect of faith on attitudes. Taken together, the five items describe a public that will extend a degree of social coexistence far more readily than it will grant rights, recognise relationships, or admit sexual minorities into the family.

6.4 Differences by age, education and location

These attitudes vary systematically across groups, in patterns that recur throughout the report (Figure 6). Acceptance and support for rights are highest among the youngest adults, among

the post-secondary educated and among urban residents, and lowest among the oldest, the least educated and rural residents. Yet the differences should be read carefully. Even the most accepting subgroups remain, in most cases, majority-unsupportive of rights: younger and urban Namibians are more supportive than their counterparts, but they are not, on balance, supportive. Relative openness should not be mistaken for absolute acceptance.

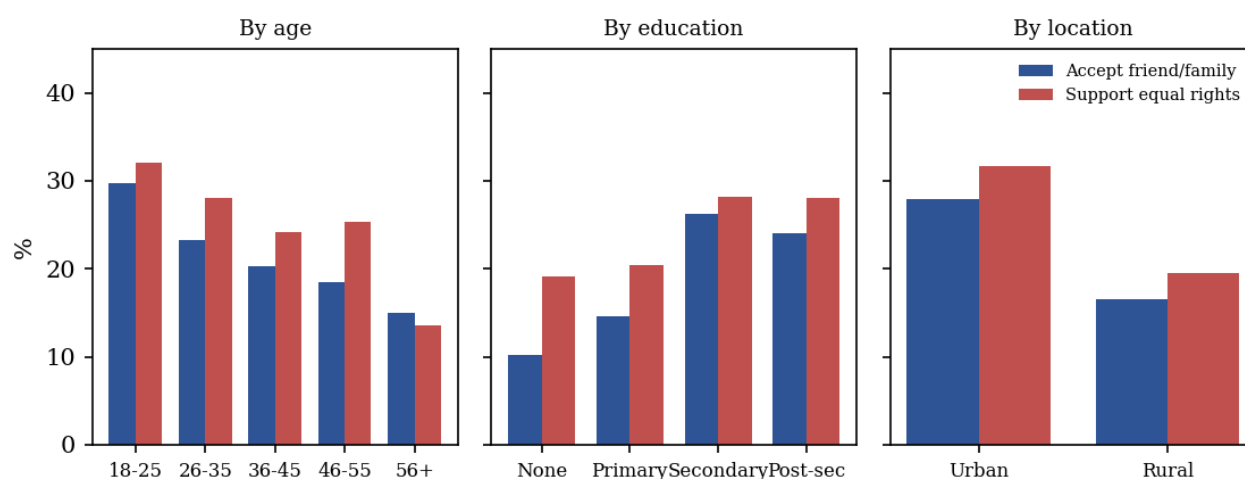


Figure 6. Acceptance of a friend or family member and support for equal rights, by age, education and location (weighted %), Round 10 (2024).

6.5 Differences by gender

Women are consistently a few percentage points more accepting and more supportive than men, across marriage, parenthood, tolerance and equal rights. The differences are modest, and both women and men remain, on balance, unsupportive of the more demanding rights claims. As Section 7 shows, gender is nonetheless one of the more reliable individual-level correlates of toleration once other factors are taken into account.

7. Who is tolerant, and why?

7.1 The correlates of toleration

To move beyond single figures, this section models the individual-level correlates of toleration. Because the neighbour item has three response categories, the primary model is a multinomial analysis that keeps the large 'would not care' group intact rather than discarding it. A comprehensive model then adds social, political and demographic factors. Full results are in Annex C; the substance is summarised here.

Five findings are robust.

Women are significantly more tolerant than men. Trust in people of other religions and ethnicities, a marker of a broader disposition toward pluralism, is positively associated with toleration.

Contrary to a common assumption, religiosity is positively, not negatively, associated with tolerating a gay neighbour, and no Christian denomination is significantly less tolerant than the Lutheran reference; a comparison with Muslims is not possible, because the sample is roughly 97% Christian. Partisanship matters: identifiers of the ruling SWAPO party are significantly less tolerant than non-partisans, consistent with two decades of politicised homophobia, though this association is not evidence that partisanship causes intolerance.

And ethnicity is strongly patterned: relative to Oshiwambo-speakers, the largest group, several minority communities are significantly more tolerant, a result that should be read symmetrically rather than as any single group's deviation.

... the more educated are more likely to recognise harassment, but not uniformly more likely to recognise discrimination in employment or housing, which points to an awareness gap that shapes how the problem is understood.

Predictor	Odds ratio	p-value	Sig.
Woman	1.37	0.019	*
Religiosity	1.19	<0.001	***
Out-group trust	1.31	0.001	**
SWAPO identifier (ref: non-partisan)	0.60	0.001	**
Nama/Damara (ref: Oshiwambo)	2.11	<0.001	***
Kavango (ref: Oshiwambo)	1.95	0.002	**
White/European (ref: Oshiwambo)	4.51	<0.001	***

Predictor	Odds ratio	p-value	Sig.
Age / Education / Rural / Internet use	n.s.		

Table 2. Comprehensive weighted logistic regression of toleration (tolerant vs. intolerant). Odds ratios; N = 1,008; McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.085$. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Full results, and the multinomial model, in Annex C.

The comprehensive model was reached by first examining each block of factors on its own. Among demographic factors, gender and rural residence carry the signal, while age and education do not survive on their own. Trust in out-groups is a weak predictor in isolation but strengthens once other factors are present. Media use, proxied by internet access, is unrelated to toleration. Religiosity and denomination form a religion block in which greater religious engagement is associated with more, not less, toleration. Ethnicity and partisanship form an identity block that carries much of the model's explanatory weight. Combining the blocks yields the comprehensive model in Table 2, whose overall explanatory power is modest, as is usual for individual-level attitude models, and which leaves much of the variation in toleration unexplained.

Notably, age, education, rural residence and internet use are not significant once these political and social factors are included. Education's simple association with tolerance dissolves in the full model, consistent with its effect operating through, or being confounded by, socio-economic position and group membership rather than schooling as such. The determinants of support for rights, modelled separately, are similar in some respects and different in others: ruling-party identification and older age predict lower support, women and several minority groups are more supportive, but religiosity is unrelated. The convergence on partisanship and ethnicity, and the divergence on religiosity, point to the same conclusion. In a society that is overwhelmingly Christian, the obstacles to LGBTI equality are political and cultural rather than religious, a finding that also emerges from Afrobarometer's own dispatch on these data (Visser, 2025) and aligns with recent scholarship tracing African homophobia to political mobilisation and colonial mission history rather than contemporary faith (Ananyev & Poyker, 2021; Dreier, Long & Winkler, 2020).

The convergence on partisanship and ethnicity, and the divergence on religiosity, point to the same conclusion. In a society that is overwhelmingly Christian, the obstacles to LGBTI equality are political and cultural rather than religious.

7.2 Democratic values and the rights of a minority

One might expect Namibians who are more committed to democracy to be more supportive of the rights of minorities, since the protection of minorities is often thought of as a democratic value. The Round 10 survey allows a direct test, because it carries the Afrobarometer's standard measures of democratic commitment: support for democracy, rejection of the authoritarian alternatives of one-party, military and one-man rule, and the combined Demand for Democracy index that adds these together, along with items on the rule of law and presidential term limits.

The expectation is not borne out. In the bivariate data, every democratic attitude correlates only weakly with attitudes toward sexual minorities, with no correlation exceeding 0.11 in absolute value. The multivariate picture, holding the demographic, religious, trust, partisan and ethnic factors constant, is set out in Table 3, and it does not run cleanly in the expected direction. Agreement that democracy is always preferable is weakly and positively associated with tolerating a gay neighbour, but not with support for rights. The broad Demand for Democracy index is unrelated to neighbour tolerance and modestly negatively associated with support for rights, so that stronger demand for democracy goes with slightly lower, not higher, support for the rights of sexual minorities. Support for the rule of law is, if anything, weakly negative rather than positive.

Democratic attitude	Tolerate gay neighbour (odds ratio)	Support for rights (scale, b)
Democracy is always preferable	1.38 *	-0.02
Demand for Democracy index (0–4)	1.05	-0.10 **
Rule of law (president must obey courts)	0.79	-0.15 *

Table 3. Association of democratic attitudes with LGBTI attitudes (weighted; N = 1,040). Neighbour tolerance is a logistic regression (odds ratios above 1 indicate greater tolerance); support for rights is a least-squares regression on the 1–5 rights scale (unstandardised coefficients). Both models control for age, gender, education, urban or rural residence, religiosity, out-group trust, partisanship and ethnicity. ** p<.01, * p<.05; unmarked coefficients are not statistically significant. Bivariate correlations of all democracy measures with the LGBTI items are below 0.11 in absolute value (see Table C3).

The explanation lies in what these measures capture. The Afrobarometer's democracy items are largely majoritarian and procedural. They measure support for democracy as a system, and the rejection of authoritarian rule, rather than a commitment to the liberal, rights-protecting elements of a constitutional order. A majoritarian understanding of democracy is not a commitment to minority rights, and in a setting where the majority opposes those rights it can even work against them, because it locates the authority to decide in the will of the majority. This is why demand for democracy, far from raising support for the rights of sexual minorities, is if anything associated with slightly lower support.

The finding therefore reinforces, from a new direction, the report's central argument (Sections 4.4 and 9). The rights of an unpopular minority are a liberal and constitutional entitlement, not

a majoritarian grant, and support for democracy understood as majority rule is neither the same as, nor a route to, support for those rights. What does connect to accepting a gay neighbour is not democratic ideology but a more general disposition to accept out-groups: the Namibians who would live beside a political opponent are markedly more likely to live beside a homosexual neighbour, and it is this social tolerance, rather than abstract support for democracy, that travels across kinds of difference. These are associations drawn from a single cross-sectional survey, and the effects are small, so they are best read as ruling out the intuitive expectation of a strong positive link rather than as establishing a large negative one.

8. Tolerance is not the same as rights

The report's central question is whether tolerating a gay neighbour is the same attitude as supporting equal rights. The evidence says it is not. The distance is large, it is structural, and it divides citizens into recognisable types.

8.1 The size of the gap

While 51% would accept a homosexual neighbour, only 26% support equal legal rights, a gap of 25 percentage points, and the gap is even larger against marriage and parenting. Crucially, it is not confined to a conservative segment. Decomposing it by group shows that it is present everywhere and never falls below twenty points; it is widest, strikingly, among the oldest citizens, where 53% would accept a neighbour but only 14% support equal rights (Table 4). A gap this pervasive is what one expects if acceptance and rights-support are structurally distinct, rather than two points on a single scale.

Subgroup	Accept neighbour	Support rights	Gap (points)
Age 18–25	53%	32%	21
Age 56+	53%	14%	39
No formal education	48%	19%	29
Post-secondary	51%	28%	23
Urban	55%	32%	23
Rural	47%	20%	27
Women	55%	28%	27
Men	47%	24%	23

Table 4. The acceptance-rights gap within selected subgroups (weighted %). The gap is positive in every group. Source: Afrobarometer Round 10 Namibia (2024).

8.2 Two dimensions, not one

Factor analysis confirms that this pattern reflects genuine dimensionality. A model that separates a personal 'co-existence' dimension (tolerating a neighbour, accepting a relative) from an abstract 'rights and values' dimension (equal rights, marriage, parenthood, religion) fits the data better than a single-dimension model, and the result is robust to an estimator appropriate for the survey's rating scales. The two dimensions are correlated but distinct, and the standard neighbour item is by some distance the weakest indicator of the underlying structure (Figure 7). In other words, the survey measure most widely used to gauge attitudes toward sexual minorities captures personal comfort, not support for legal equality.

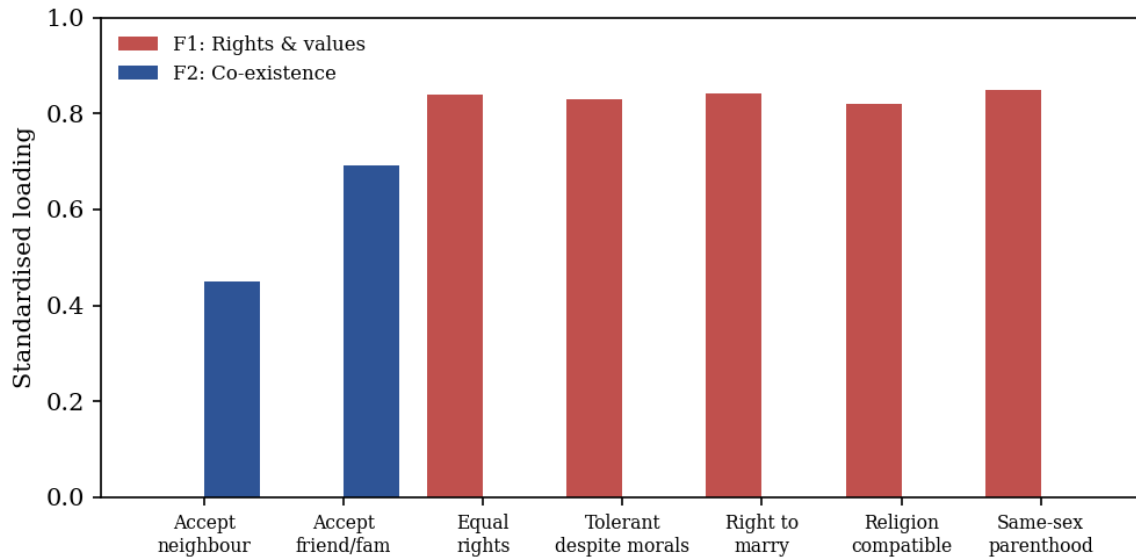


Figure 7. Standardised factor loadings from the two-dimension model. The five agree-disagree items load on the rights dimension; the neighbour and friend-or-family items load on the co-existence dimension; the neighbour item loads weakest of all.

8.3 Three types of citizen

If attitudes are two-dimensional, citizens should fall into recognisable types, and they do (Figure 8). A latent class analysis identifies three groups. The largest, 63% of adults, are rights-rejecters: they grant essentially none of the rights, yet 43% of them would still accept a homosexual neighbour, which is the gap made concrete within a single group. A second group, 25%, is a conflicted middle, endorsing some claims but not others. The smallest group, 12%, are consistent egalitarians who support rights almost across the board. Among the neighbour-tolerant majority, only about a third support equal rights; two-thirds extend coexistence while withholding equality.

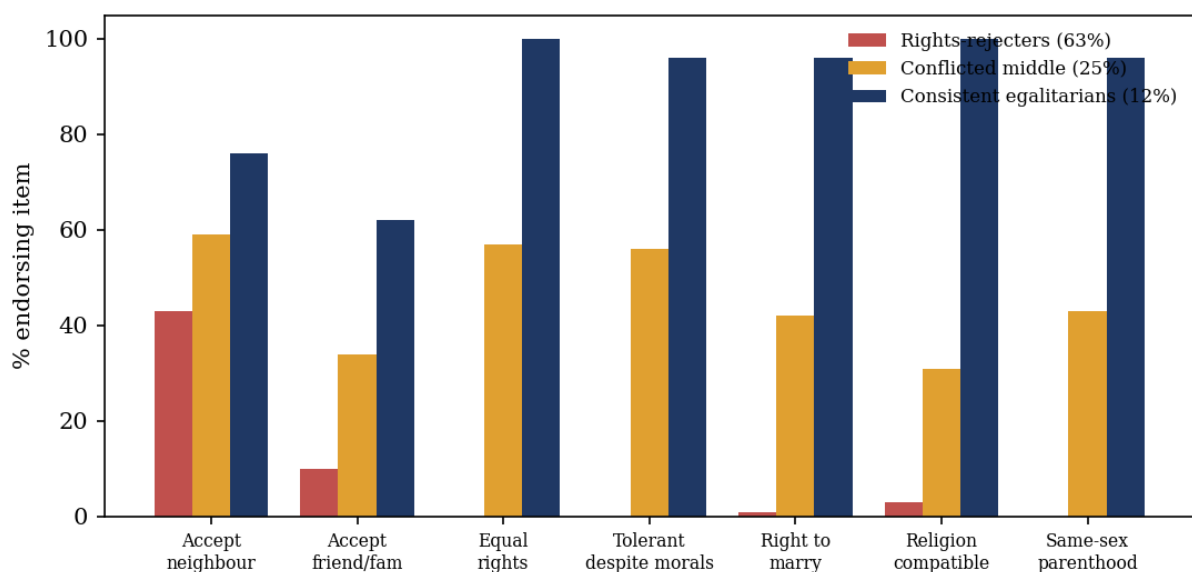


Figure 8. Item-endorsement profiles of the three latent classes across the battery (weighted %). The rights-rejecter class accepts a neighbour at a meaningful rate but grants essentially no rights.

8.4 The conflicted middle, and who crosses

The conflicted middle is the group in play, since the rejecters are for now immovable and the egalitarians need no persuading. Its members are younger and more urban than the rejecters, and, tellingly, much less likely to identify with the ruling party. It also reproduces the gap within itself, endorsing abstract claims more readily than concrete ones. Its demographic profile sets it apart from the rejecters (Table 5): its members are younger, more urban, and much less likely to identify with the ruling party. As to who crosses from acceptance to support for rights, a model estimated among neighbour-accepters points to youth, education and urban residence, and not to gender, out-group trust or partisanship. The step from accepting a person to endorsing their legal equality is a step toward implementation, and it tracks the forces of generational and educational change rather than interpersonal warmth.

Latent class	Mean age	% urban	% sec.+	% women	% SWAPO
Rights-rejecters (63%)	39	46%	73%	47%	37%
Conflicted middle (25%)	36	64%	74%	51%	22%
Consistent egalitarians (12%)	35	69%	88%	54%	25%

Table 5. Weighted demographic profile of the three latent classes. ‘% sec.+’ is the share with at least secondary education. Source: Afrobarometer Round 10 Namibia (2024).

9. Discussion: reading public opinion on minority rights

Three implications follow, and each bears on the way public opinion is used in Namibia's rights debate. The first is a matter of measurement. Because the neighbour item measures social distance rather than support for rights, using it as a proxy for rights-support overstates a public's readiness for reform, in Namibia by about 25 points. Cross-national rankings that array societies by neighbourly tolerance are informative about willingness to coexist, but they are not measures of support for equality and should not be read as such.

The second implication concerns the referendum question. When advocates cite Namibia's comparative tolerance and opponents cite its opposition to same-sex marriage, both describe the data accurately, because they are describing different dimensions of opinion. A vote on coexistence and a vote on rights would return different verdicts, and the choice of question would

decide the result. This is a familiar reason for placing minority rights beyond majority determination, and the present evidence gives it an empirical edge: the majority that accepts is not the majority that would extend equality, and the group whose rights are at issue is unpopular on precisely the dimension that a rights referendum would engage. From a human-rights standpoint, the constitutional guarantees of dignity and equality are entitlements that do not become valid only when a majority approves them.

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The third implication is strategic. The gap is unlikely to close through acceptance alone, because the resistance to rights is not the same as personal discomfort and is not removed by reducing it. The conflicted middle is the movable group, but it is moved by education, generational change and urban exposure, not by appeals to a comfort its members may already feel. Two cautions temper these conclusions. Attitudes on a stigmatised topic are subject to social-desirability bias, which would if anything inflate reported acceptance and widen the true gap; and the distinction between acceptance, tolerance and rights, though supported by the measurement analysis, describes attitudes that are related as well as distinct.

These conclusions arrive at a consequential legal moment. The Marriage Act of 2024, which would restrict recognition of same-sex marriages, has been signed but is not yet in force, and the decriminalisation of consensual same-sex conduct is subject to appeal. In this setting, the evidence in this report cautions against the argument, likely to be pressed in both political and legal fora, that public opinion authorises the restriction of rights. The public is more accepting than that argument's opponents fear and less

supportive of rights than its proponents claim, and a single figure cannot bear the weight that either side would place on it.

The constitutional guarantees of dignity and equality, and Namibia's commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter, apply whatever the distribution of public sentiment, and the courts have already read them to protect sexual minorities. Public opinion is a legitimate input into democratic deliberation; it is not, on the evidence here, a reliable proxy for a settled popular will on rights, and it cannot substitute for the constitutional standard.

10. Conclusion

Namibia is, by African standards, a comparatively tolerant society, but its tolerance is thin, politically structured, and only loosely connected to support for rights. Half of Namibians would accept a gay neighbour; only a quarter would grant that neighbour equal legal standing; and the largest single group of citizens couples partial acceptance with the refusal of rights. These attitudes occupy two distinct dimensions, the gap between them is found in every part of society, and the barrier to equality is political and cultural rather than religious.

Commitment to democracy, at least as most Namibians understand it, does not close the gap. For a public debate that repeatedly asks whether the people support the rights of sexual minorities, the central lesson is to specify the attitude before citing the answer.

Social acceptance is real and comparatively high in Namibia; it is not a mandate for legal equality, and it should not be mistaken for one.

Annex A. Methodology

The data are from the Afrobarometer Round 10 survey in Namibia (fieldwork March 2024), a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult citizens drawn by a clustered, stratified, multi-stage probability design, with a margin of error of about plus or minus 2.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Comparative figures use Rounds 6 to 9 (2014 to 2023) across up to 39 countries.

Descriptive estimates, the latent class analysis and the regression models apply the survey weight; the factor analysis is estimated unweighted, following common practice for measurement models, and is reported with both a maximum-likelihood and an ordinal (diagonally weighted least-squares) estimator.

The toleration outcome is modelled with multinomial and binary logistic regression; support for rights is modelled both as individual items and as an additive scale. The dimensional structure is tested with confirmatory factor analysis, and citizen types are identified with latent class analysis, the number of classes selected by the Bayesian information criterion. All relationships are associational; the cross-sectional design does not license causal claims.

Annex B. Key question wordings

Neighbours:	‘For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: Homosexuals.’
Acceptance:	‘How accepting or rejecting would you be if you found out that a friend or family member is attracted to people of the same gender?’
Equal rights:	‘Same-sex-attracted individuals deserve equal legal rights in Namibia.’
Tolerance:	‘Namibians should be tolerant of same-sex attraction, regardless of personal morals.’
Marriage:	‘Everyone should have the right to marry regardless of their partner’s gender.’
Religion:	‘It is possible to follow my religion and accept same-sex relationships.’
Parenthood:	‘Same-sex couples have the right to be parents like anyone else.’
Discrimination:	‘In your opinion, how often, if at all, do Namibians who are in same-sex relationships face: harassment or threats / job discrimination / housing discrimination?’

Annex C. Selected full model results

Table C1. Multinomial logistic regression of toleration (reference = intolerant); log-odds with standard errors; weighted; N = 1,078.

Predictor	Would-not-care vs intolerant: b (SE)	Like vs intolerant: b (SE)
Woman	0.396 (0.140) **	0.436 (0.168) **
Age	−0.006 (0.005)	−0.011 (0.006)
Education	−0.011 (0.092)	−0.092 (0.110)
Rural residence	−0.283 (0.144) *	−0.372 (0.173) *
Religiosity	0.160 (0.047) **	0.055 (0.054)

Table C2. Support for equal rights among neighbour-accepters (weighted logistic regression; N = 542); average marginal effects.

Predictor	AME	p	Sig.
Age (years)	−0.004	0.004	**
Education (level)	+0.061	0.024	*
Rural residence	−0.084	0.044	*
Oshiwambo-speaker	−0.083	0.050	†
Woman / Religiosity / Out-group trust / SWAPO	n.s.		

Sig.: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, † p≤.10. Further tables (building-block models, the rights-support scale, and factor-analysis loadings) are available on request.

Table C3. Weighted bivariate correlations (Pearson's r) of democratic attitudes with LGBTI attitudes.

Democratic attitude	Tolerate neighbour	Support rights	Rights scale (1–5)
Support for democracy (1–3)	+0.07	+0.05	−0.02
Democracy is always preferable	+0.06	+0.05	−0.05
Demand for Democracy index (0–4)	+0.00	−0.02	−0.11
Rule of law (president obey courts)	−0.06	−0.02	−0.09
Two-term limit	−0.06	−0.04	−0.08
Liberal-constitutional index (0–2)	−0.08	−0.04	−0.11

Table C3. Weighted Pearson correlations; N = 1,040 to 1,180 depending on the item. All associations are weak (none exceeds 0.11 in absolute value). For comparison, demand for democracy correlates with tolerating a political-party opponent at $r = +0.02$, whereas tolerating a political opponent correlates with tolerating a homosexual neighbour at $r = +0.27$, indicating that a general disposition to accept out-groups, rather than democratic commitment, is what connects to neighbour tolerance.

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