



BRIEFING PAPER 1

Key Findings

What Namibians think about
the rights of **LGBTI** people

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

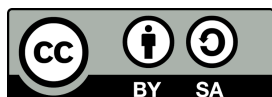
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Opinion & LGBTI Rights in Namibia

Afrobarometer Round 10 (2024) | For policymakers, journalists, partners and the interested public



51%

would accept
a gay neighbour



26%

support equal
legal rights



25pts

the acceptance-
rights gap



In brief

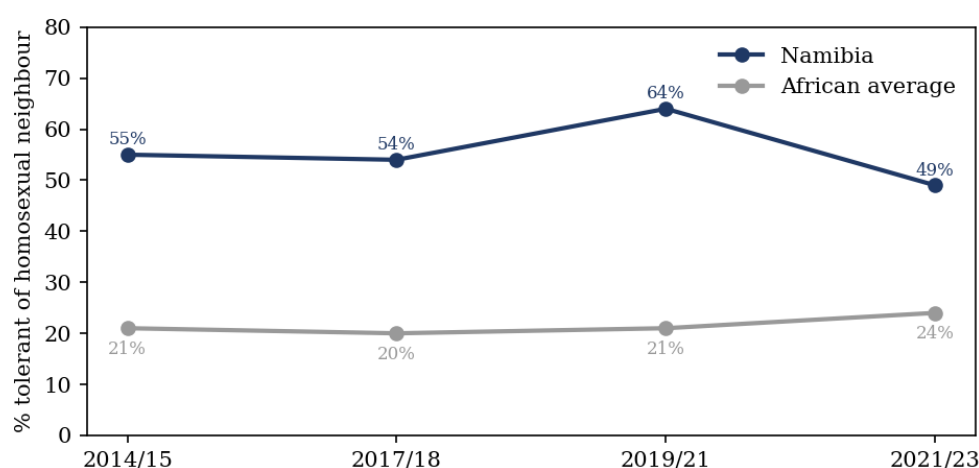
Drawing on a nationally representative Afrobarometer survey of 1,200 Namibian adults (Round 10, March 2024), this briefing sets out the main findings on public attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. The headline is a paradox with a clear explanation: Namibia is comparatively tolerant, yet most Namibians do not support equal rights, and the reasons are political and cultural rather than religious.

The findings matter because public opinion is repeatedly invoked in Namibia's debate over LGBTI rights, and some have called for the question to be settled by referendum. This briefing shows that what the public thinks depends entirely on what it is asked. Namibians will extend everyday tolerance far more readily than they will grant equal legal standing, and treating the first as a proxy for the second badly misreads the country. The sections below trace that gap, show who holds which attitude, and explain why the usual assumptions, that religion is the obstacle and that democrats are natural supporters, do not hold.

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Namibia is comparatively tolerant

By the standard measure used across Africa, willingness to have a homosexual neighbour, Namibia is one of the continent's more tolerant societies. About half of adults would not mind such a neighbour, more than twice the African average, and the country has been among the ten most tolerant in every survey round since 2014.

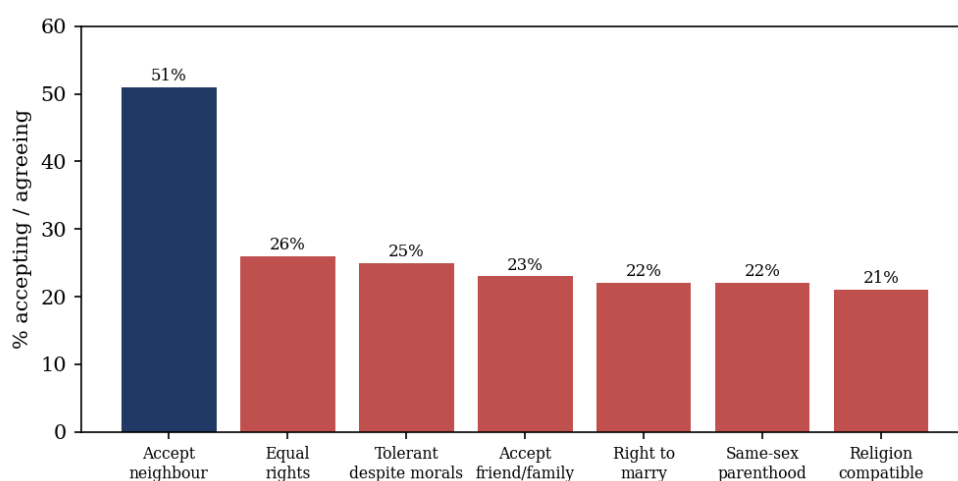


Toleration of a homosexual neighbour: Namibia versus the African average, 2014 to 2023.

But tolerance is thin, and it is not the same as rights

Willingness to co-exist does not carry over into support for rights. Only 26% agree that sexual minorities deserve equal legal rights, about 22% support same-sex marriage or the right to be parents, and 59% would be rejecting if a friend or family member turned out to be attracted to the same sex. The distance between accepting a neighbour (51%) and granting equal rights (26%) is 25 percentage points, the single largest step in the survey.

Even the neighbour figure is thin: taken apart, 49% actively dislike the prospect of a gay neighbour, 33% simply would not care, and only 18% would actively welcome one. Namibian tolerance is mostly a willingness to co-exist, not active acceptance.



From acceptance to rights: the share accepting or agreeing on each item falls sharply once an attitude involves rights or intimacy.

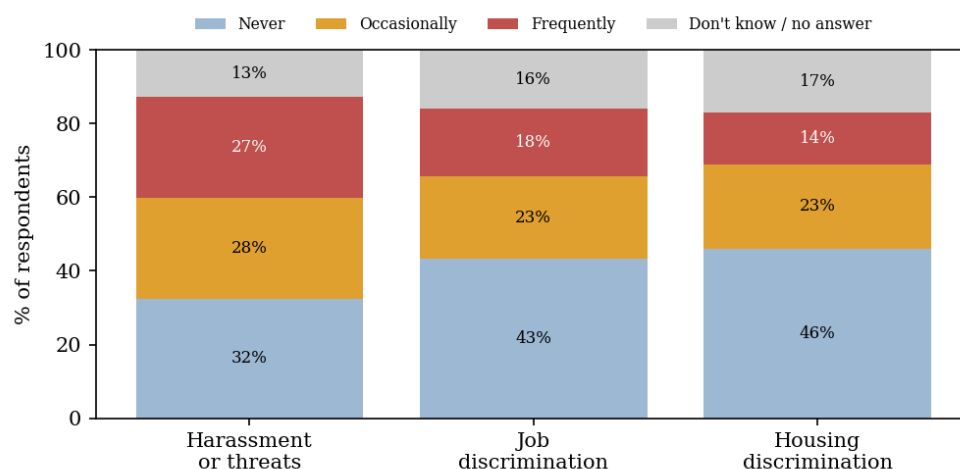
The gap is found in every part of society

The gap between acceptance and rights appears within every age, education, location and gender group, and never falls below twenty points. It is widest, not narrowest, among older Namibians, where 53% would accept a neighbour but only 14% support equal rights. This is what one expects if acceptance and rights are genuinely different attitudes rather than two points on a single scale.

Namibians recognise the discrimination

Namibians are aware that sexual minorities are mistreated, though they see some forms more clearly than others. 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 discrimination in employment and housing are lower, and are accompanied by sizeable shares who say they do not know, especially among the less educated.

This uneven awareness is itself useful to understand: the interpersonal, visible harm of harassment registers widely, while the more structural harms of job and housing discrimination are harder to see and easier to overlook. The recognition that harassment happens is a point of broad agreement that reaches well beyond those who support equal rights.



Perceived frequency of discrimination against people in same-sex relationships.

Attitudes differ by age, education and location

Acceptance and support for rights are highest among the youngest adults, the post-secondary educated and urban residents, and lowest among the oldest, the least educated and rural Namibians. Support for equal rights runs at about 32% among those aged 18 to 25 but only about 14% among those over 55, and at about 32% in urban areas against 19% in rural ones. Women are consistently a few points more accepting than men.

These gradients should be read with care. Even the most accepting subgroups are, in most cases, still majority-unsupportive of rights: younger and urban Namibians are more supportive than their counterparts, but not, on balance, supportive. Relative openness is not the same as acceptance.

Who is tolerant, and the surprises

Modelling the individual-level correlates of toleration yields several findings that cut against common assumptions.

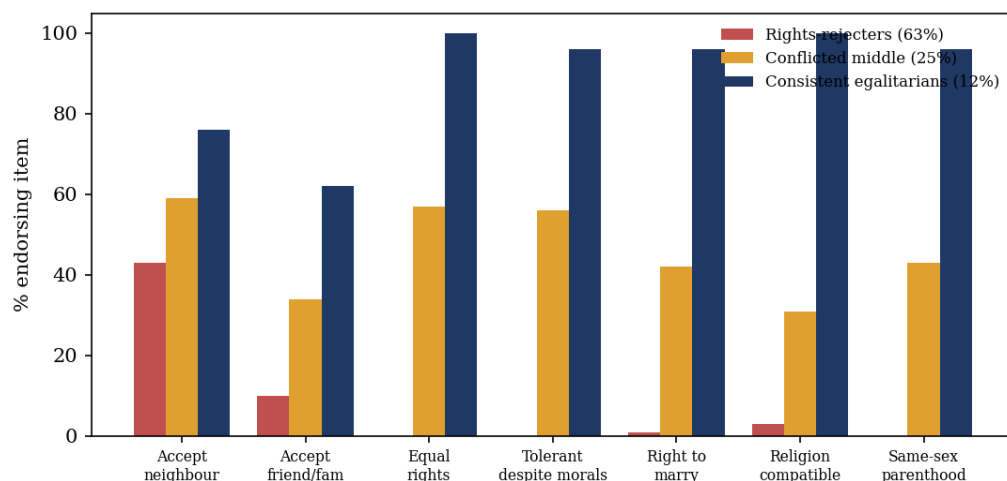
- **Religion is not the barrier.** The more religiously engaged are no less tolerant of gay neighbours, and no Christian denomination is significantly less tolerant than another. In a society that is roughly 97% Christian, the obstacle to LGBTI rights is not faith.
- **Partisanship and ethnicity are.** Identifiers of the ruling party are significantly less tolerant than non-partisans, and toleration varies markedly by ethnic and language group.
- **Women and the more trusting are more tolerant.** Gender and trust in people of other groups are among the more reliable predictors; education's

apparent effect largely disappears once other factors are taken into account.

Three types of citizen

Namibians sort into three groups. The largest, about 63%, reject rights almost entirely, though many will still accept a neighbour. A conflicted middle, about 25%, endorses some claims but not others, and it is younger, more urban and less aligned with the ruling party than the rejecters. A smaller group, about 12%, supports rights consistently.

The middle is the group whose views are genuinely in play. Among all those who would accept a gay neighbour, only about a third support equal rights, so most tolerant Namibians extend co-existence while withholding equality.



Three types of citizen: the rejecter majority accepts a neighbour at a meaningful rate but grants almost no rights.

Commitment to democracy does not close the gap

Namibians who are more strongly committed to democracy are no more supportive of LGBTI rights, and on the fuller measures slightly less so. The reason is that the democracy most Namibians endorse is majoritarian, and the rights of an unpopular minority are a liberal and constitutional matter rather than something a majority grants.

What it means

The central lesson is to specify the attitude before citing the answer. A vote on co-existence and a vote on rights would return very different verdicts, so a single tolerance figure cannot settle the question of rights. Namibia's social acceptance is real and comparatively high; it is not, on this evidence, a mandate for legal equality, and it should not be read as one.

This bears directly on the referendum debate. Because the majority that accepts a neighbour is not the majority that would grant rights, and because the group whose rights are at issue is unpopular on precisely the dimension a rights vote would engage, submitting minority rights to a popular vote would not measure a settled public will so much as manufacture a result. The courts, which have already applied the constitutional guarantees of dignity and equality to sexual minorities, remain the more secure venue for questions of rights.

The evidence also points to where change is possible. Support for rights is not moved by appeals to personal comfort, which many Namibians already feel, but by the slower forces of generational replacement, education and urban exposure. The task, for anyone who would expand it, is to convert acceptance into support among those open to it, without provoking the majority that is not.

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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.