

Day of Tolerance: ‘Neighbourliness’ a strength of Ghana’s diverse society

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 58 | Daniel Armah-Attah and Isaac Debrah

Summary

The stability of a society with a diversity of cultural and religious beliefs depends on citizens’ tolerance and desire for peaceful coexistence. As explained by Berns and Fitzduff (2007), peaceful coexistence describes how a society embraces and harnesses the positive potential of its diversities, actively pursues equality and interdependence, and eliminates the use of violence to address differences.

Ghana is a secular and heterogeneous society in which diverse religions and ethnicities (see Table 1) have generally cohabited peacefully. Indeed, in each of the country’s 10 regions, one can identify residents of different religious and ethnic backgrounds, and in some cases, small ethnic groups have their own traditional heads who are well-recognized by the traditional leaders in the host regions.

Table 1: Religious and ethnic demographics of Ghana | 2010

	% of the population		% of the population
Religion		Ethnicity	
Christian	71.2	Akan	47.5
Muslim	17.6	Mole-Dagbani and Mande	17.7
Traditionalist	5.2	Ewe/Anlo	13.9
None	5.3	Ga/Adangme	7.4

Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2010 Population and Housing Census Report (2012)

The Constitution protects religious freedom, and Christian and Islamic groups collaborate on the National Peace Council and other forums. Nonetheless, differences emerge at times. In early 2015, a demonstration by a Muslim group in the Western Region against requiring Muslims in second-cycle schools to participate in Christian worship activities and remove their hijabs drew reactions from Ghana’s president and communication minister, the Ghana Education Service, the Catholic Bishops Conference, an Islamic scholar and security expert, and the National Peace Council.¹

¹ See stories on the following links:

- <http://citifmonline.com/2015/02/20/muslims-in-wester-region-to-demonstrate-over-discrimination/#sthash.YyGyWrL6.lraCIAoC.dpuf>
- <http://citifmonline.com/2015/02/20/call-schools-that-force-muslims-to-attend-church-to-order-muntaka/#sthash.kM1m87wq.dpuf>
- <http://citifmonline.com/2015/02/27/all-students-must-attend-morning-devotion-ges/#sthash.QLFbT6TF.dpuf>
- <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/march-3rd/catholic-bishops-reject-mahama-religious-discrimination-sanctions-threat.php>
- <http://www.starrfmonline.com/1.2017438>

On the ethnic front, according to Boafo-Arthur (2008), the Akans have dominated the political life of the country, whilst the Ewes have had strong representation in the military and civil service. Evidence of Akan-Ewe power struggles can be seen, according to Boafo-Arthur, in the country's series of military takeovers between 1966 and 1981, mostly led by officers of Ewe descent, as well as in voting patterns in the 1969, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 national elections. In addition, pockets of localized conflicts and violence, most often with undertones of chieftaincy and land ownership disputes, have occasionally erupted in the country.² And in recent times, some politicians campaigning for election have played on voters' religious and ethnic identities to win votes. Nonetheless, according to Throup (2011), in a sub-region noted for violent conflicts, Ghana has never suffered major civil strife occasioned by ethnic and religious differences.

As Ghana observes International Day for Tolerance (16 November), this analysis of data from the 2014 Afrobarometer survey shows that Ghanaians are highly tolerant of people of different religious faiths, ethnicities, and nationalities (and to a lesser extent of people living with HIV/AIDS), even though some believe that their ethnic group is at least "sometimes" treated unfairly. This high level of tolerance is a strength that those who would fan ethnic and religious intolerance should respect for the sake of the country's peace and stability.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians between May 24 and June 10, 2014. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

Key findings

- More than nine in 10 Ghanaians would like or not mind having people of different ethnicities (95%) and religious faiths (94%) as neighbours.
- Almost nine in 10 Ghanaians (88%) would like or not mind living next to immigrants or foreign workers.
- More than two-thirds (68%) of Ghanaians would like or not mind having people living with HIV/AIDS as neighbours.
- Tolerance for people of different ethnicities, different religious faiths, different nationalities, and positive HIV/AIDS status is generally widespread across various religious groups, ethnic groups, ages, education levels, and geographic locations.
- Nonetheless, from 2005 to 2014, appreciable percentages (from 31% to 47%) of Ghanaians have expressed the view that their ethnic groups are "sometimes," "often," or "always" treated unfairly.

² In the 2002 Afrobarometer survey, a majority of Ghanaians said conflicts "rarely" or "never" occur within families (79%) and communities (63%). In contrast, 54% believed conflicts "sometimes," "often," or "always" occur within "groups." As to the causes of conflicts in the country, boundary or land disputes came top with 21%, followed by traditional leader (or chieftaincy) disputes (18%) and poor communication or misunderstandings (13%).

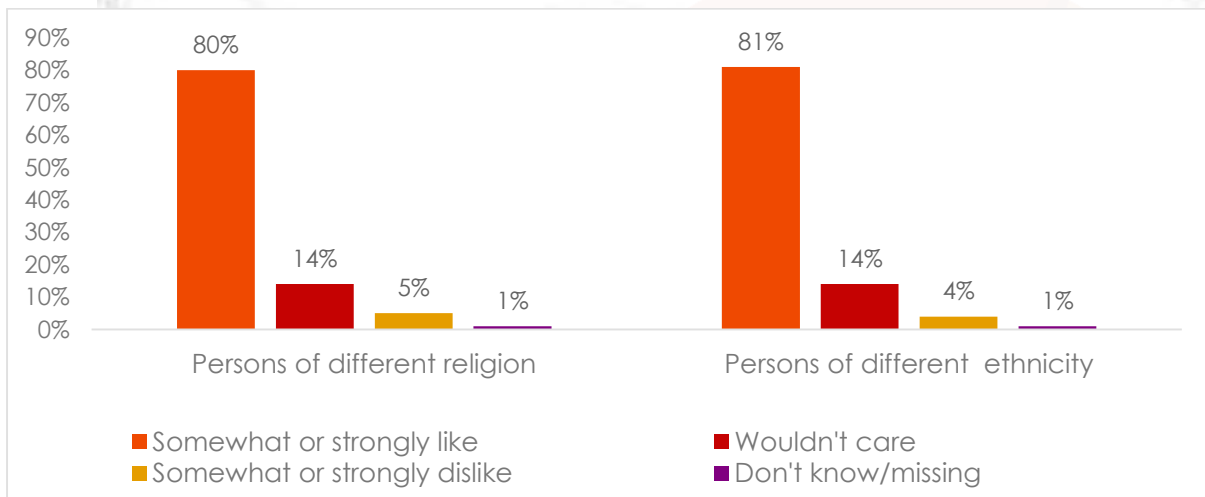
Ghanaians and the principle of good neighbourliness

Ghanaians express high levels of tolerance for people of different religions and ethnicities. Eight in every 10 survey respondents say they would “somewhat” or “strongly” like to have people of different religious faiths (80%) and people of different ethnicities (81%) as neighbours (Figure 1).

In addition, 14% would not care if their neighbours were of a different religion or ethnicity. Only one in 20 (5%) say they would “somewhat” or “strongly” dislike living near people of different religions or ethnicities.

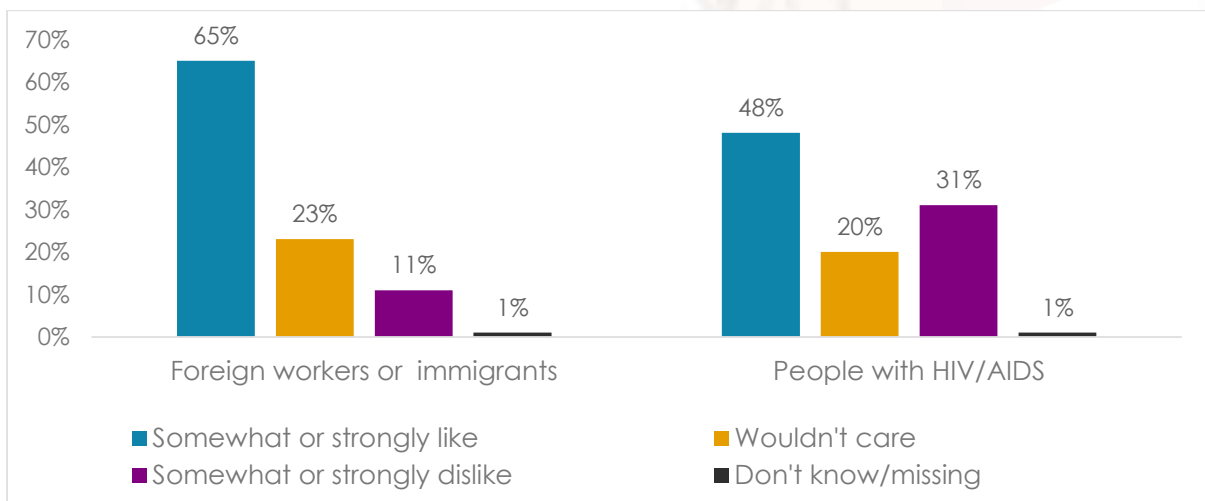
Since the “like” and “wouldn’t care” responses are both indications of an absence of intolerance, in aggregate terms, overwhelming majorities Ghanaians accept people of different ethnicities (95%) and religious faiths (94%) as neighbours.

Figure 1: Tolerance for people of other religions and ethnicities | Ghana | 2014



Respondents were asked: 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: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups?

Figure 2: Tolerance for immigrants and people living with HIV/AIDS | Ghana | 2014



Respondents were asked: 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: Immigrants or foreign workers? People who have HIV/AIDS?

Two-thirds (65%) of Ghanaians would also “somewhat” or “strongly” like having immigrants or foreign workers as neighbours, while one-quarter (23%) would not care about the nationality of their neighbours. About one in nine (11%) would not want to have neighbours who are immigrants or foreign workers (Figure 2).

The willingness to have people living with HIV/AIDS as neighbours is less strong: 48% of respondents say they would “somewhat” or “strongly” like to live next to people living with HIV/AIDS, while 20% say they would not care. But almost one-third (31%) say they would “somewhat” or “strongly” dislike having neighbours who have HIV/AIDS.

Tolerance is widespread across all groups

As shown in Table 2, welcoming attitudes (“somewhat” or “strongly” liking) toward people of different religions, ethnicities, and nationalities are the majority view among Ghanaians of all religious faiths, ethnicities, ages, levels of education, and geographic locations. Tolerance levels are lowest, and vary most substantially by demographic group, with regard to having neighbours with HIV/AIDS. As the detailed breakdown by demographic group in the

Table 2: Tolerance, by demographic group | Ghana | 2014

	Would “somewhat” or “strongly” like having as neighbours			
	Persons of different religion	Persons of different ethnicity	Immigrants or foreign workers	Persons with HIV/AIDS
Religion				
Christians	81%	82%	65%	50%
Muslims	76%	79%	63%	43%
Traditionalists/Hindu	72%	74%	57%	39%
None	83%	83%	64%	41%
Ethnicity				
Akan	81%	81%	63%	50%
Ewe/Anlo	80%	80%	63%	46%
Ga/Adangbe	78%	81%	68%	44%
Dagomba/minor northerly tribes	76%	79%	67%	54%
Age				
18-35 years	82%	82%	67%	50%
36-60 years	79%	80%	64%	49%
61+ years	74%	76%	56%	36%
Education				
None/informal	79%	81%	66%	43%
Primary	81%	81%	57%	36%
Secondary	80%	81%	66%	52%
Tertiary	81%	81%	70%	58%
Sex				
Female	81%	82%	64%	45%
Male	79%	80%	66%	51%
Location				
Rural	79%	80%	62%	43%
Urban	81%	82%	67%	53%

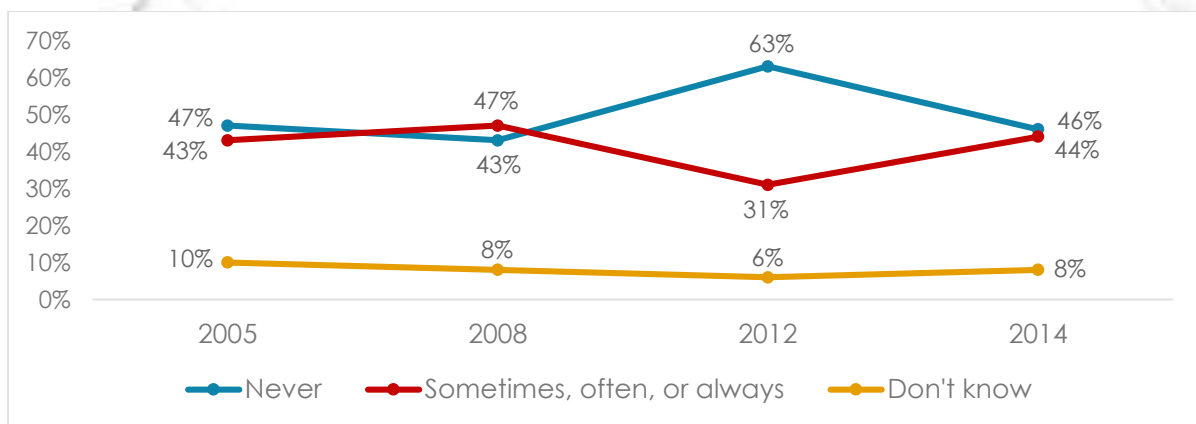
(% who say they would “somewhat like” or “strongly like”)

Appendix shows, the differences between the proportions of acceptance and rejection of people of different religions, ethnicities, and nationalities and of positive HIV/AIDS status are large and for the most part statistically significant.

Feelings of marginalization, unfair treatment, and mistrust

In contrast to these findings reflecting good neighbourliness and the spirit of the 1992 Constitution prohibiting discrimination and prejudice, Afrobarometer surveys have consistently found that a substantial proportion (ranging from 31% to 47%) of Ghanaians believe that their ethnic groups are “sometimes,” “often,” or “always” treated unfairly (Figure 3).

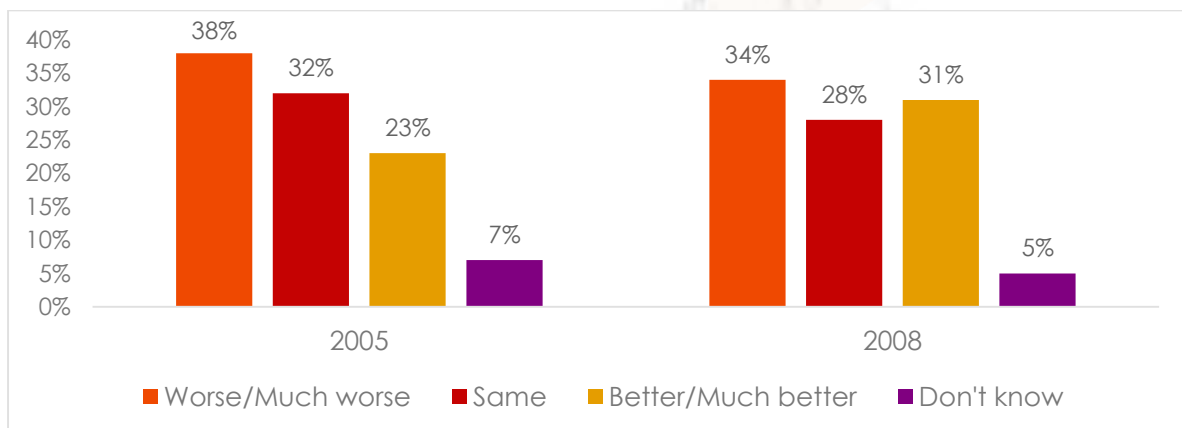
Figure 3: Perceived unfair treatment of ethnic group | Ghana | 2005-2014



Respondents were asked: How often are [respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?

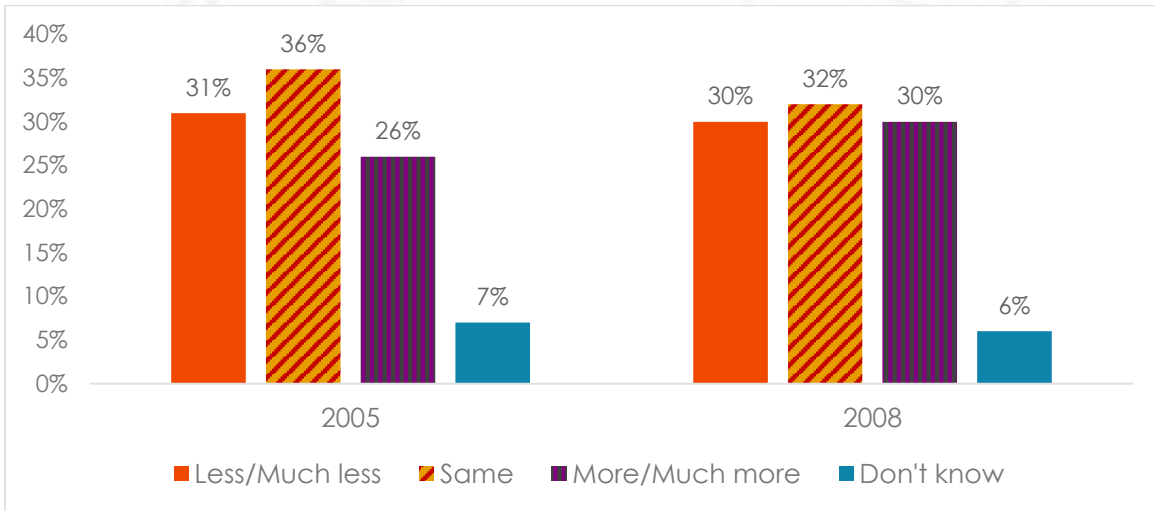
This aligns with earlier survey findings on questions (not asked in later survey rounds) regarding perceptions of economic conditions, political influence, and trust. In 2005 and 2008, more than one-third of Ghanaians saw their ethnic group's economic conditions as “worse” or “much worse” than the economic conditions of other ethnicities (Figure 4), and nearly one-third believed that their ethnic group had “less” or “much less” influence in politics than other groups in the country (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Perceptions of economic conditions compared to other ethnic groups | Ghana | 2005 and 2008



Respondents were asked: Think about the condition of [respondent's ethnic group]: Are their economic conditions worse, the same as, or better than other groups in this country?

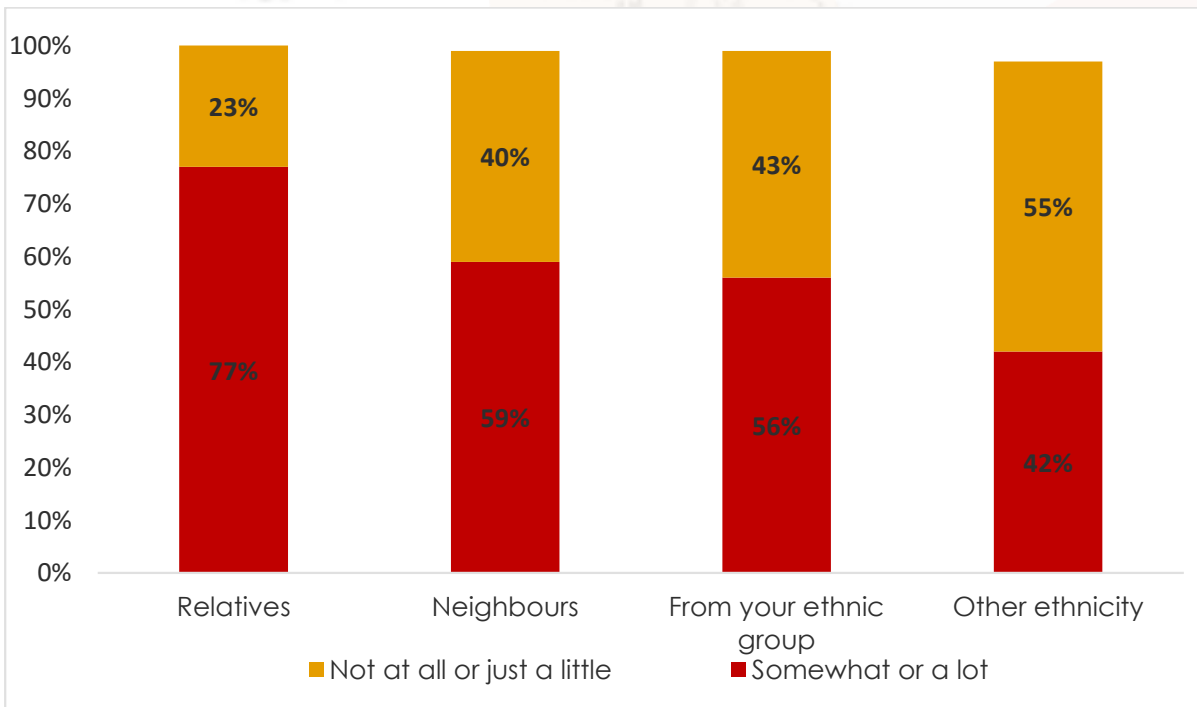
Figure 5: Perceptions of political influence compared to other ethnic groups
 | Ghana | 2005 and 2008



Respondents were asked: Think about the condition of [respondent's ethnic group]: Do they have less, the same, or more influence in politics than other groups in this country?

And while majorities trusted their relatives (77%), neighbours (59%), and persons of the same ethnicity (56%) “somewhat” or “a lot” in 2005, a majority (55%) had “just a little” or “no” trust in people of different ethnic backgrounds (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Trust in persons of different backgrounds | Ghana | 2005



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following types of people: a) Your relatives? b) Your neighbours? c) People from your own ethnic group or tribe? d) Ghanaians from other ethnic groups?

Conclusion

A widespread willingness to coexist with people of different religions, ethnicities, and nationalities suggests that Ghanaians cherish the principle of good neighbourliness – an important asset for forestalling or resolving conflict. The implication is that the peace and stability of Ghana do not stand threatened by conflicts arising from its religious and ethnic diversities. This confirms an earlier study on elections and the management of diversity, which showed that even deeply rooted ethnic cleavages had hardly presented a threat to Ghana's political processes (Ghana for Democratic Development, Ghana, 2013). It also corroborates Ghana's consistently low score (i.e. low risk) on the ethnic and religious violence sub-component of the Fund for Peace Fragile States Index (Fund for Peace, 2014), even when (as in 2015), the overall index classifies Ghana as a “high warning” country.

Nonetheless, considering that substantial minorities of the population see their ethnic group as economically and politically disadvantaged and subject, at least “sometimes,” to unfair treatment, it behoves state and informal institutions (such as political, religious, and traditional groups) to work to promote inclusiveness and tolerance and to avoid politicization of religious and ethnic differences.

The National Peace Council and its regional affiliates should be at the forefront of finding solutions to ethnic and religious disagreements whenever they emerge. Also, the government should conduct conflict analysis and mapping of conflict flashpoints on a regular basis to develop early-warning systems to deal with challenges before they assume conflict dimensions.

Finally, government, religious, and civil-society leaders should continue to work to strengthen efforts to reduce HIV-related stigma.

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Tolerance for people of different religions | by demographic group
| Ghana | 2014

	Like (somewhat or strongly)	Wouldn't care	Dislike (somewhat or strongly)	Difference Like - Dislike	Chi-square value	Chi-square p-value
Religion					100.474	0.000
Christians	81%	14%	4%	77%		
Muslims	76%	14%	10%	66%		
Traditionalists/Hindu	72%	18%	6%	66%		
None	83%	13%	3%	80%		
Ethnicity					33.698	0.028
Akan	81%	13%	5%	76%		
Ewe/Anlo	80%	16%	3%	77%		
Ga/Adangbe	78%	15%	5%	73%		
Dagomba/minor northerly tribes	76%	11%	13%	63%		
Age					61.691	0.000
18-35 years	82%	12%	6%	76%		
36-60 years	79%	16%	4%	75%		
61+ years	74%	19%	5%	69%		
Education					42.442	0.000
None/informal	79%	12%	9%	70%		
Primary	81%	14%	4%	77%		
Secondary	80%	15%	5%	75%		
Tertiary	81%	14%	4%	77%		
Gender					6.294	0.178
Female	81%	13%	6%	75%		
Male	79%	16%	5%	74%		
Residence location					9.165	0.057
Rural	79%	14%	6%	73%		
Urban	81%	14%	5%	76%		

Table A.2: Tolerance for people of different ethnicities | by demographic group
| Ghana | 2014

	Like (somewhat or strongly)	Wouldn't care	Dislike (somewhat or strongly)	Difference Like - Dislike	Chi-square value	Chi-square p-value
Religion					68.158	0.000
Christians	82%	14%	4%	78%		
Muslims	79%	15%	5%	74%		
Traditionalists/Hindu	74%	13%	10%	64%		
None	83%	17%	-	83%		
Ethnicity					18.22	0.573
Akan	81%	14%	4%	77%		
Ewe/Anlo	80%	16%	3%	77%		
Ga/Adangbe	81%	15%	3%	78%		
Dagomba/minor northerly tribes	79%	11%	9%	70%		
Age					52.736	0.000
18-35 years	82%	12%	5%	77%		
36-60 years	80%	16%	3%	77%		
61+ years	76%	21%	2%	74%		
Education					26.922	0.042
None/informal	81%	12%	6%	75%		
Primary	81%	15%	3%	78%		
Secondary	81%	15%	3%	78%		
Tertiary	81%	15%	4%	77%		
Sex					3.608	0.462
Female	82%	14%	4%	78%		
Male	80%	15%	4%	76%		
Residence location					19.307	0.001
Rural	80%	14%	6%	74%		
Urban	82%	15%	3%	79%		

Table A.3: Tolerance for immigrants or foreign workers | by demographic group
| Ghana | 2014

	Like (somewhat or strongly)	Wouldn't care	Dislike (somewhat or strongly)	Difference Like - Dislike	Chi-square value	Chi-square p-value
Religion					68.119	0.000
Christians	65%	24%	10%	55%		
Muslims	63%	19%	17%	46%		
Traditionalists/Hindu	57%	22%	13%	44%		
None	64%	24%	12%	52%		
Ethnicity					51.864	0.000
Akan	63%	24%	12%	51%		
Ewe/Anlo	63%	27%	8%	55%		
Ga/Adangbe	68%	21%	9%	59%		
Dagomba/minor northerly tribes	67%	13%	19%	48%		
Age					47.103	0.000
18-35 years	67%	20%	12%	55%		
36-60 years	64%	25%	10%	54%		
61+ years	56%	31%	11%	45%		
Education					51.008	0.000
None/informal	66%	21%	10%	56%		
Primary	57%	28%	14%	43%		
Secondary	66%	22%	11%	55%		
Tertiary	70%	19%	9%	61%		
Sex					1.536	0.820
Female	64%	23%	12%	52%		
Male	66%	22%	11%	55%		
Residence location					28.049	0.000
Rural	62%	22%	15%	47%		
Urban	67%	24%	8%	59%		

Table A.4: Tolerance for people living with HIV/AIDS | by demographic group
| Ghana | 2014

	Like (somewhat or strongly)	Wouldn't care	Dislike (somewhat or strongly)	Difference Like - Dislike	Chi-square value	Chi-square p-value
Religion					46.738	0.000
Christians	50%	21%	29%	21%		
Muslims	43%	16%	39%	4%		
Traditionalists/Hindu	39%	14%	41%	-2%		
None	41%	22%	36%	5%		
Ethnicity					45.913	0.001
Akan	50%	19%	30%	20%		
Ewe/Anlo	46%	27%	25%	21%		
Ga/Adangbe	44%	19%	34%	10%		
Dagomba/minor northerly tribes	54%	11%	35%	19%		
Age					50.256	0.000
18-35 years	50%	19%	31%	19%		
36-60 years	49%	20%	29%	20%		
61+ years	36%	24%	36%	0%		
Education					88.602	0.000
None/informal	43%	14%	40%	3%		
Primary	36%	23%	39%	-3%		
Secondary	52%	20%	26%	26%		
Tertiary	58%	21%	20%	38%		
Sex					10.689	0.030
Female	45%	20%	34%	11%		
Male	51%	20%	28%	23%		
Residence location					72.393	0.000
Rural	43%	16%	39%	4%		
Urban	53%	23%	24%	29%		

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