

Batswana affirm their personal freedoms but disapprove of same-sex relationships

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 8 | Mogopodi Lekorwe and Kabelo Moseki

Summary

Botswana is an electoral democracy and has been led by the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) since independence in 1966. The country is recognised for upholding democratic principles and has continuously received high ratings by the Ibrahim Index of African Governance and Freedom House. Botswana's constitution embraces the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. However, some sexual acts, including certain same-sex acts, are illegal.

Homosexual acts are illegal in many African countries, and Uganda and the Gambia recently made headlines with new anti-gay legislation. Despite the fact that the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are supported by the United Nations and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (an African Union body), South Africa is the only country on the continent where the constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and recognises same-sex marriages.

In 2013, a non-governmental organisation called Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals of Botswana (LEGABIBO) filed a court case with the High Court of Botswana challenging the refusal by the Director of National Registration and the Minister of Labour and Home Affairs to register the group. The main objective of this group, according to High Court Justice Terrence Rannowane, is to "carry out political lobbying and decriminalisation of same-sex relationships" and to advocate for legal reforms in the country. The court ruled in favour of LEGABIBO on 15 November 2014, but the government, under pressure from some church groups, may appeal the judgment.

Recent Afrobarometer survey results indicate that while Batswana affirm their freedom to say what they think, associate with any organisation they want, and vote for the candidate of their choice, a majority are not supportive of freedom of sexual orientation.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, 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 Botswana, led by Star Awards (Pty) Ltd, interviewed 1,200 adult Batswana in June and July 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Botswana in 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, and 2012.

Key findings

- Batswana affirm that they enjoy freedom of expression (83%), freedom of association (94%), and the freedom to vote for whomever they choose (95%). Within the Southern

African Development Community (SADC), Botswana rank near the top in their assessment of their freedoms, despite a decline in perceived freedom of expression since 2008.

- While affirming these civil liberties, six in 10 Batswana say they would object to sharing a work environment with a colleague (60%) or supervisor (61%) who is in a same-sex relationship.
- About the same proportion would object to sharing a religious community (62%) or a neighbourhood (56%) with a homosexual person.
- Again, six in 10 Batswana say they would report people involved in same-sex relationships to the police or other authorities, regardless of their relationship to the people involved. Intolerance levels are lower among urban residents and younger Batswana, indicating a potential for increased social acceptance of same-sex relationships in the future.

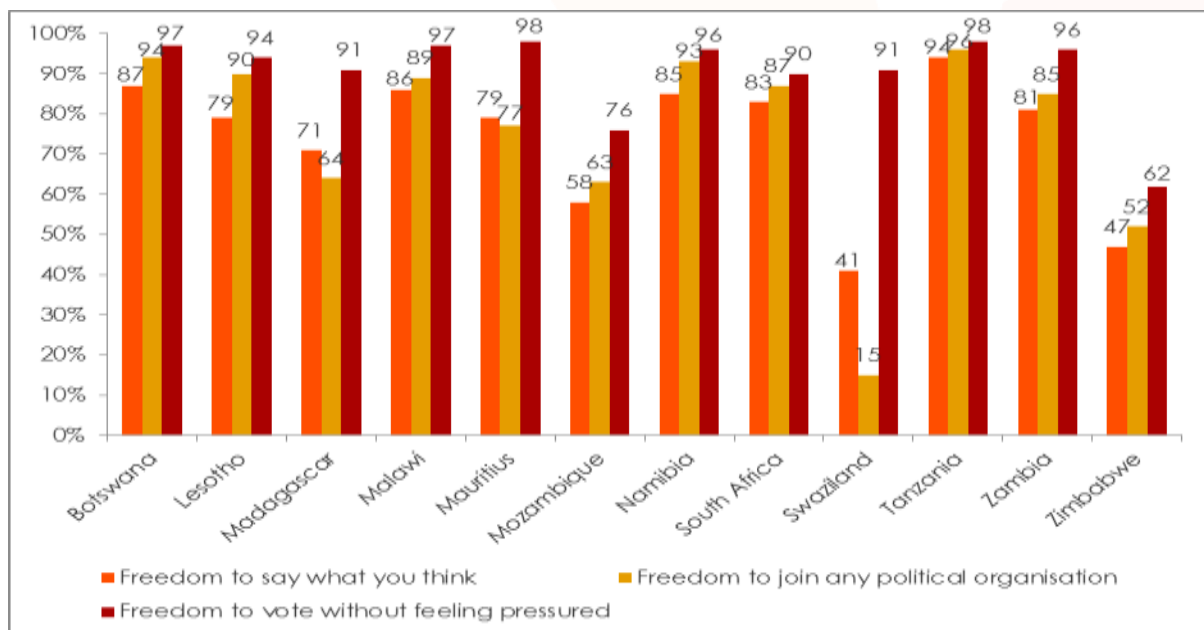
Batswana continue to enjoy personal freedoms

Batswana continue to stand out in their enjoyment of personal freedoms, although there has been a noticeable decline in a measure of freedom of expression since 2008.

Personal freedoms in SADC countries

Among the 12 SADC countries that were included in the 2011-2013 round of Afrobarometer surveys, Botswana ranked near the top in their assessment of their freedom to choose whom to vote for (97%), just 1 percentage point behind Tanzania and Mauritius (98%) (Figure 1). The lowest rating was by Zimbabweans (62%). Botswana also ranked just behind No. 1 Tanzania in their assessment of their freedom of association and expression.

Figure 1: Freedom of expression, association, and electoral choice
 | SADC countries | 2012

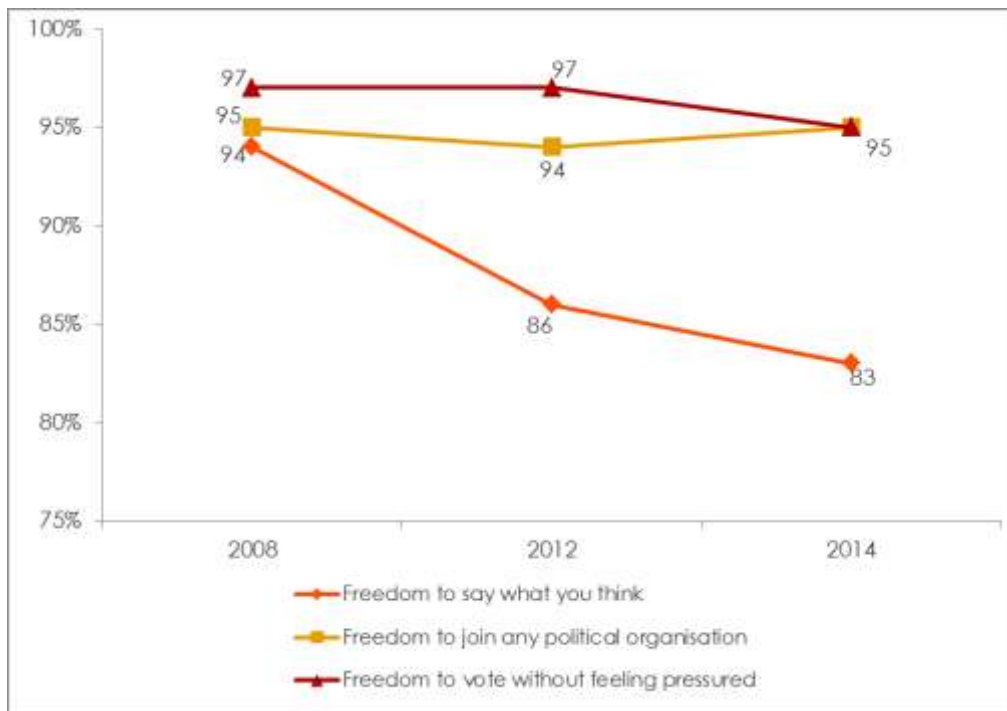


Respondents were asked: In this country, how free are you to: a) say what you think? b) join any political organization you want? c) choose who to vote for without feeling pressured? (% saying "somewhat free" or "completely free")

Level of perceived freedom of expression declining since 2008

While four of five Batswana (83%) say in the 2014 survey that they are free to say what they think, this is a drop of 11 percentage points since 2008 (Figure 2). This decline mirrors deterioration in the country's political-rights rating by Freedom House, which in 2009 downgraded its rating from 2 to 3, citing decreased transparency and accountability under President Lt. Gen. Seretse Khama Ian Khama's administration.

Figure 2: Freedom of expression, association, and electoral choice | Botswana
 | 2008-2014



(% saying "somewhat free" or "completely free")

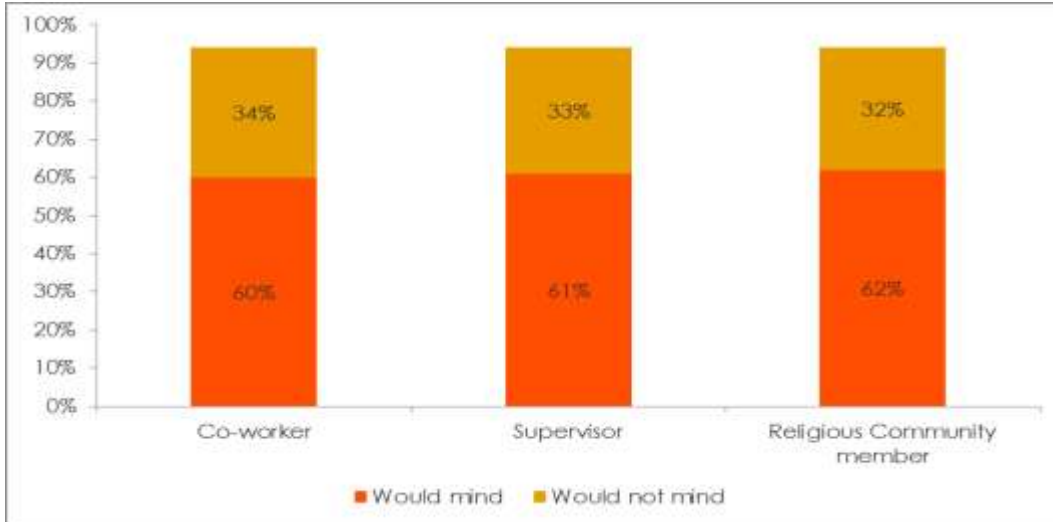
Views on same-sex relationships

While Batswana value their personal freedoms of expression, association, and electoral choice, a majority say they would feel uncomfortable working with colleagues involved in same-sex relationships.

Intolerance in the workplace

Six in 10 respondents say that they would mind having someone who is in a same-sex relationship as a co-worker (60%), a supervisor (61%), or a member of their religious community (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Tolerance of co-worker, supervisor, or religious community member in a same-sex relationship | Botswana | 2014



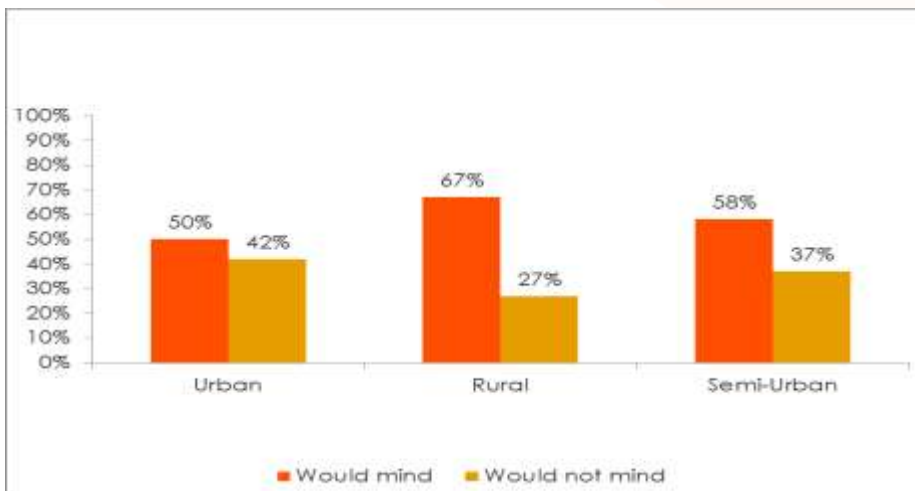
Respondents were asked: For each of the statements below, please tell me whether you disagree or agree.

- a) I would not mind having someone in a same-sex relationship as a co-worker in my workplace.
- b) I would not mind having someone in a same-sex relationship as my supervisor in my workplace.
- c) I would not mind having someone in a same-sex relationship as a member in my religious community.

("Would not mind" = "agree" or "strongly agree" with proposed statement; "Would mind" = "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with proposed statement)

Disapproval of same-sex relationships varies by locality, with urban residents expressing greater tolerance than their counterparts living in semi-rural and rural areas (Figure 4). Proportions are similar on all three questions (co-worker, supervisor, religious community member).

Figure 4: Tolerance of co-worker who is in a same-sex relationship | by residence location | Botswana | 2014

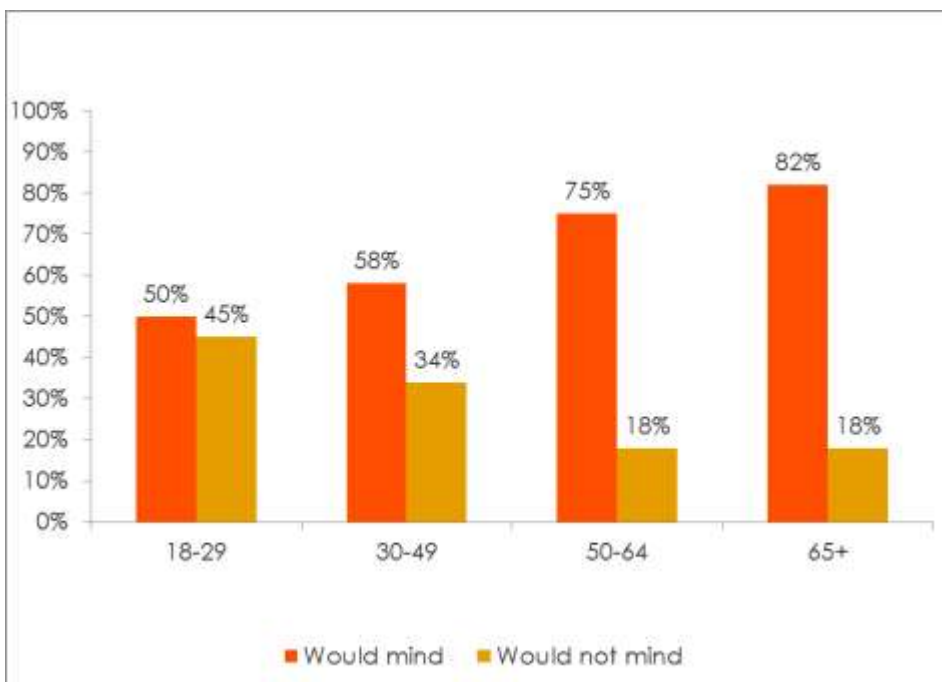


Respondents were asked: For each of the statements below, please tell me whether you disagree or agree. Statement: I would not mind having someone in a same-sex relationship as a co-worker in my workplace. ("Would not mind" = "agree" or "strongly agree" with proposed statement; "Would mind" = "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with proposed statement)

There is also a clear generational pattern, with significantly higher tolerance among younger Batswana. The highest rejection levels are expressed by older Batswana: Three-quarters of respondents aged 50-64 years strongly disagree or disagree with the “would not mind” statements regarding co-workers and supervisors, and 82% of those aged over 65 disapprove (Figure 5).

Respondents aged 18-29 years, by contrast, are far more accepting of working with individuals in same-sex relationships: Approximately half say they would mind working with a colleague (45%) or supervisor (50%) involved in a same-sex relationship. This indicates a potential for increased social acceptance of homosexuality in the future.

Figure 5: Tolerance of co-worker who is in a same-sex relationship
 | by age group | Botswana | 2014



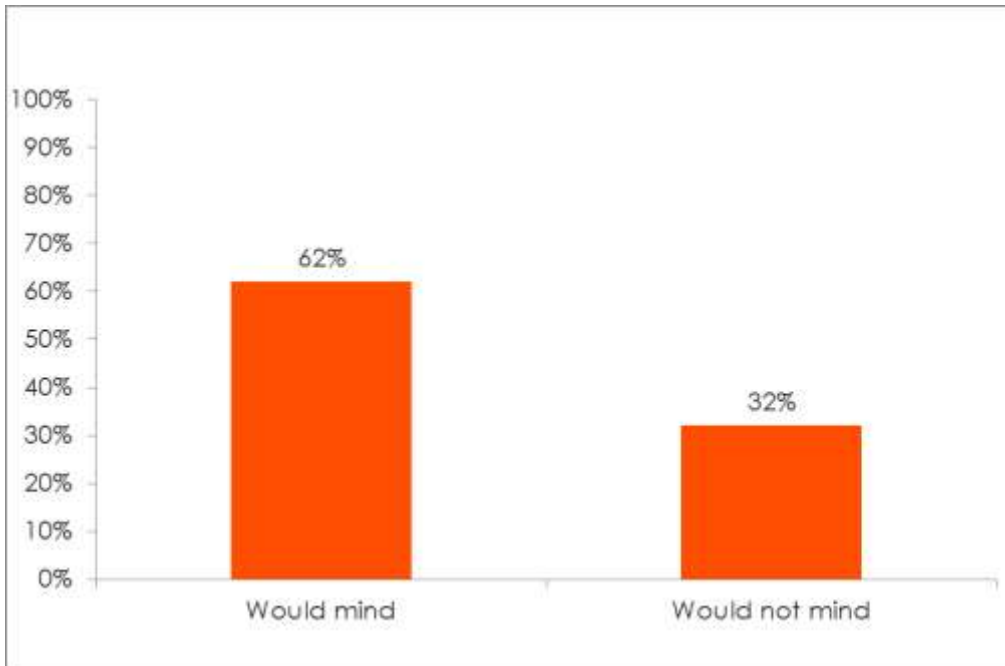
Respondents were asked: For each of the statements below, please tell me whether you disagree or agree. Statement: I would not mind having someone in a same-sex relationship as a co-worker in my workplace. (“Would not mind” = “agree” or “strongly agree” with proposed statement; “Would mind” = “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with proposed statement)

Intolerance in religious communities

In addition to asking about the workplace, the Afrobarometer survey asked respondents about their views on homosexuals in their religious communities and neighbourhoods.

Members of some religious groups in Botswana are known to take positions against same-sex relationships. When survey respondents were asked whether they would mind or not mind having someone in a same-sex relationship as a member of their religious community, 62% stated that they would mind (Figure 6).

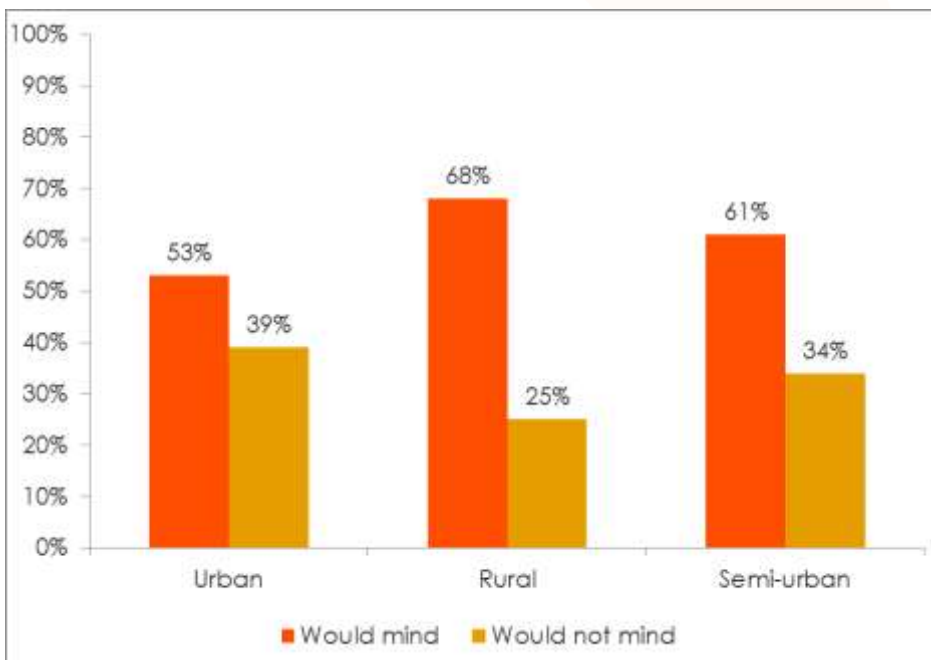
Figure 6: Tolerance in religious communities | Botswana | 2014



Respondents were asked: For each of the statements below, please tell me whether you disagree or agree. Statement: I would not mind having someone in a same-sex relationship as a member in my religious community. (“Would not mind” = “agree” or “strongly agree” with proposed statement; “Would mind” = “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with proposed statement)

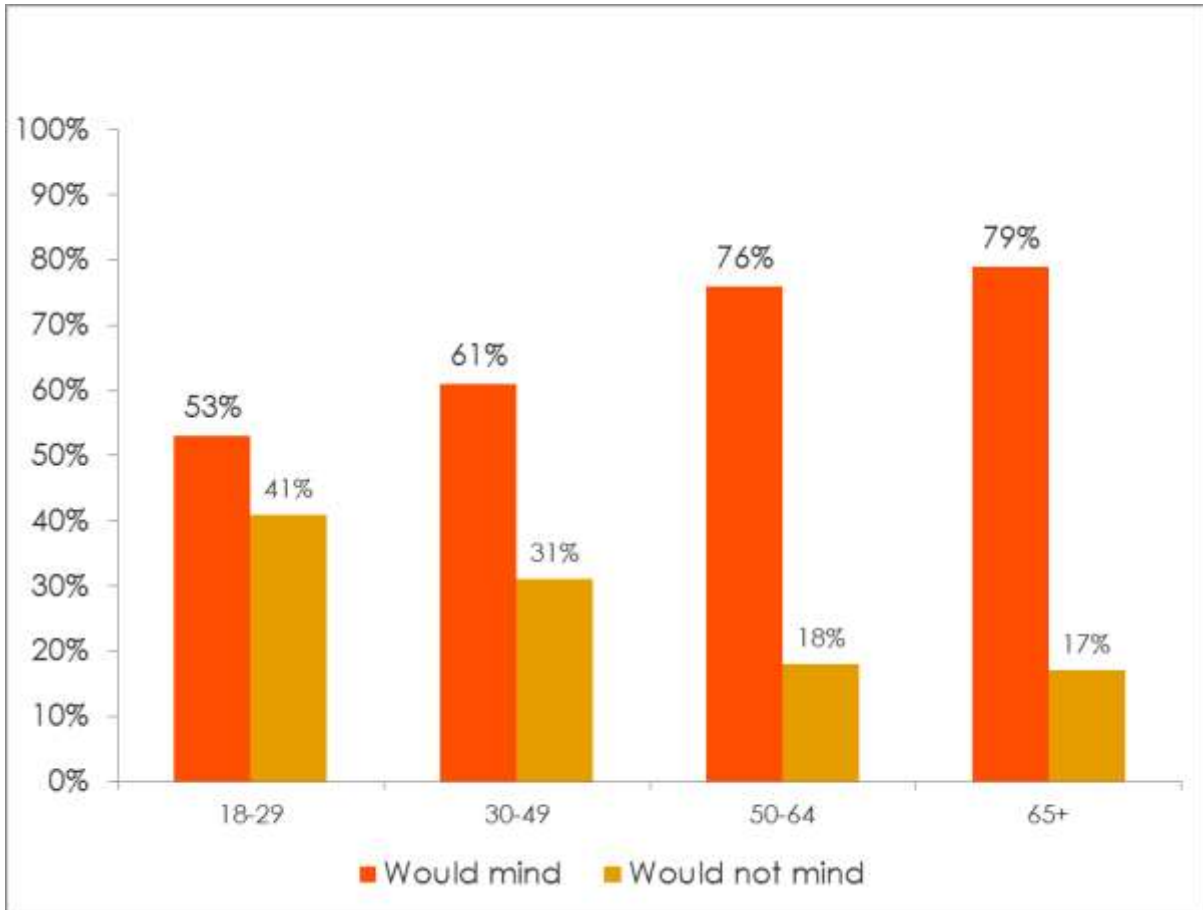
Intolerance of same-sex relationships among one's religious community members is most pronounced in rural areas: 68% of rural residents disapprove, vs. 61% in semi-urban areas and 53% of urban residents (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Tolerance in religious communities | by residence location | Botswana | 2014



Just as for the workplace, intolerance for same-sex relationships among religious community members is higher among older citizens and lower among younger respondents (Figure 8).

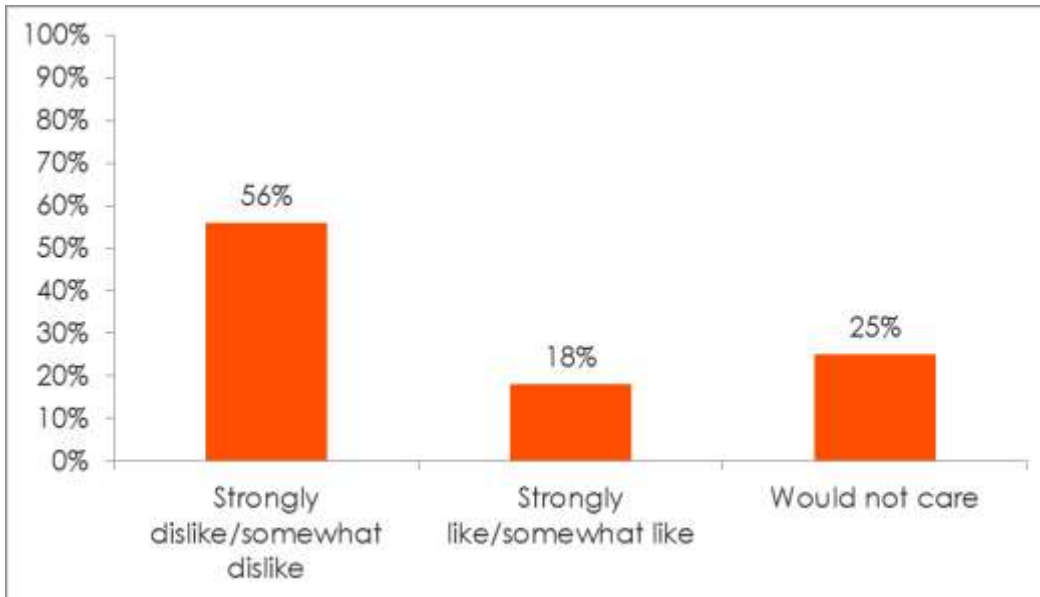
Figure 8: Tolerance in religious communities | by age group | Botswana | 2014



Intolerance in neighbourhoods

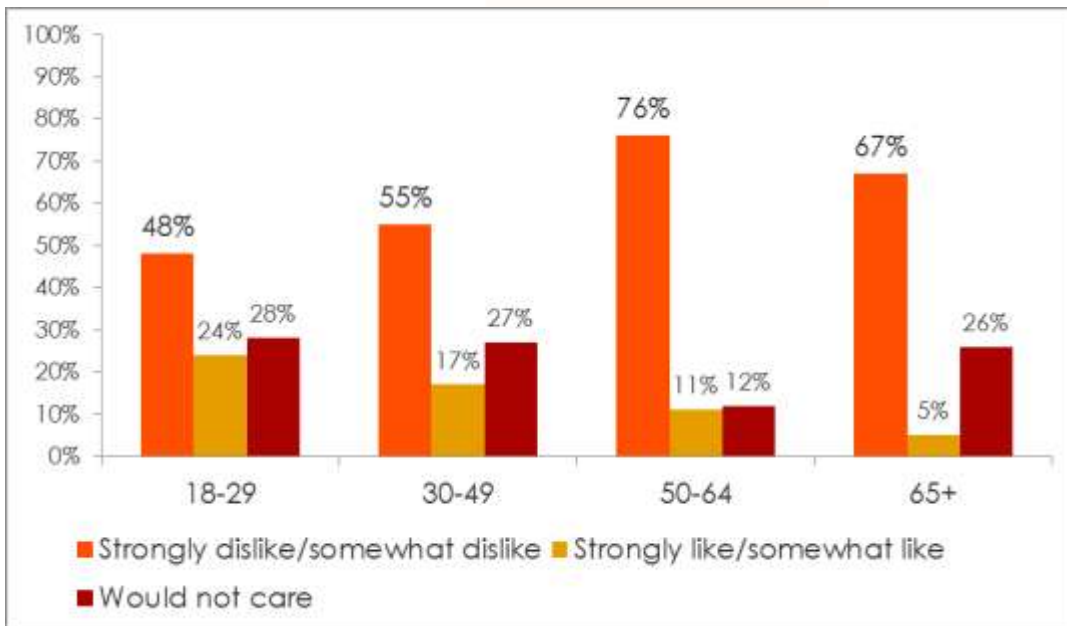
More than half (56%) of Botswana say they would “strongly dislike” or “somewhat dislike” having homosexual people as neighbours (Figure 9). A substantial minority (43%), however, would like it or would not care. Among younger respondents, a majority (52%) would like it or would not care (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Views on having homosexual neighbours | Botswana | 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: Homosexuals?

Figure 10: Views on having homosexual neighbours | by age group | Botswana | 2014

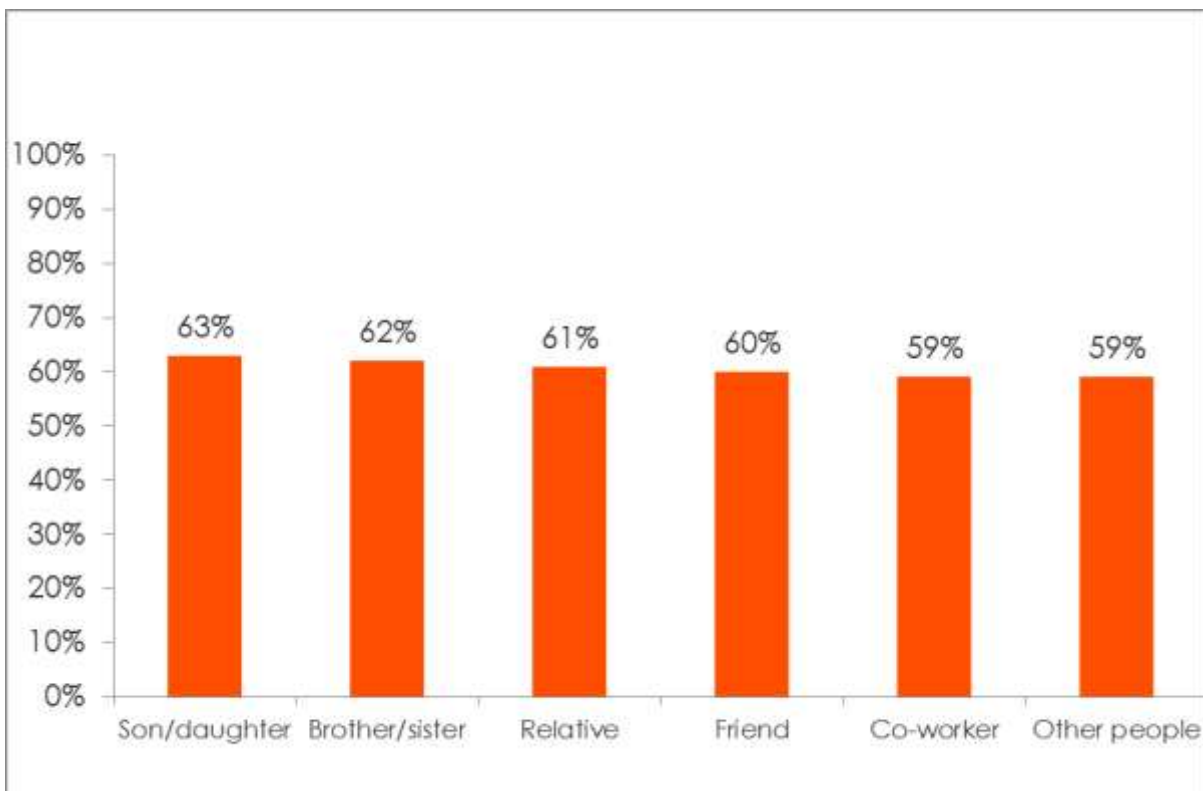


Action against homosexuals

Botswana law does not make reference to “homosexuality” or “same-sex relationships.” The Marriage Act specifies that marriage is between heterosexual persons, and the penal code criminalises “sexual intercourse against the order of nature.” (See the case of Kanane v. the State (2003) BLR on how the courts have treated this matter.)

The 2014 Afrobarometer survey asked respondents whether they would report individuals engaged in same-sex relationships to authorities, such as the police. About six in 10 Batswana say they would do so, regardless of their relationship to the individual (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Would report a same-sex relationship to authorities | Botswana | 2014



Respondents were asked: *Would you be inclined to report to the police or any official if you discover that the following individual is in a same-sex relationship: Your son/daughter? Your brother or sister? Another relative? A close friend? A co-worker? Other people that you know? (% who said “yes”)*

Mogopodi Lekorwe is an associate professor in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Botswana. Email: lekorwem@mopipi.ub.bw

Kabelo Moseki is a lecturer in the Department of Statistics at the University of Botswana. Email: mosekikk@mopipi.ub.bw

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 8 | 17 December 2014

