

‘All in this together’: Africans tolerant on ethnic, religious, national, but not sexual differences

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 362 | Brian Howard

Summary

“We’re all in this together” is a mantra of the COVID-19 crisis as leaders and activists argue for global and all-of-society responses to the pandemic (e.g. World Health Organization, 2020; African Union, 2020). At the same time, public fears have highlighted social fissures through acts of intolerance and violence against Chinese people, citizens of Asian descent in many countries, and even Africans in China (e.g. DW, 2020; Guy, 2020; Kandil, 2020; Al Jazeera, 2020).

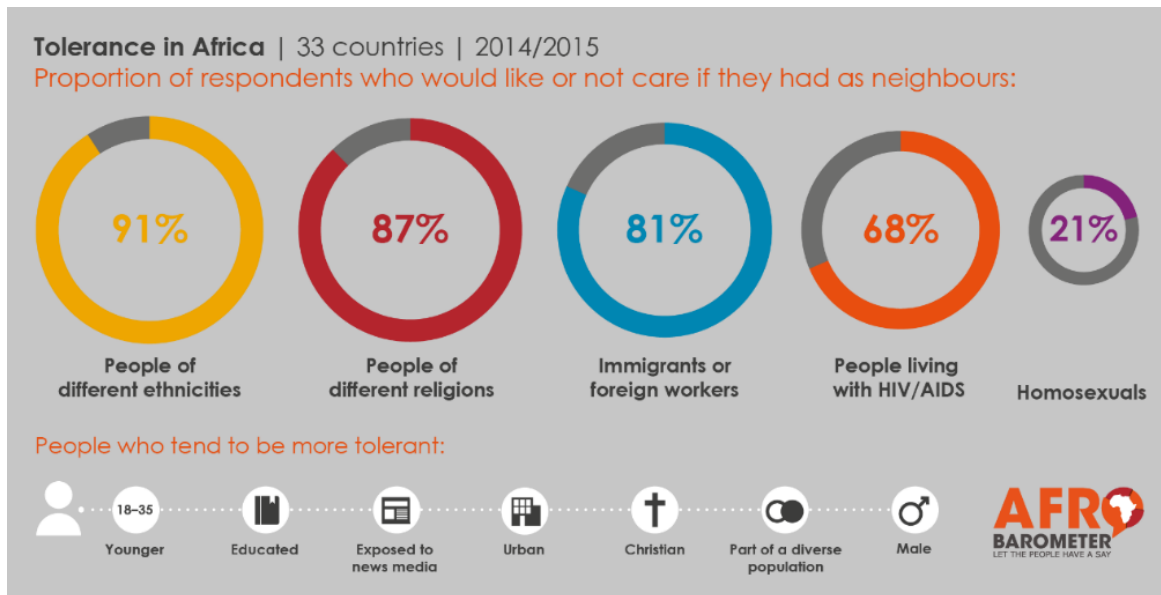


If a pandemic “drives home the essential interconnectedness of our human family,” as UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said (United Nations, 2020), it may also stress-test the social fabric of our societies and democracies.

How “together” are African societies? Afrobarometer data collected in 2016/2018 suggest that Africans have a strong foundation of tolerance toward other ethnicities, religions, and nationalities on which to build in overcoming the pandemic and working toward the “just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world” envisioned by the UN Sustainable

Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). Cabo Verde, Namibia, and São Tomé and Príncipe stand out as particularly tolerant countries in Africa.

But tolerance toward people of different sexual identity or orientation remains remarkably weak, even among younger respondents, despite some progress in certain countries. Minorities still experience discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, gender, or disability, and majorities in some countries report that the government treats their ethnic group unfairly.



Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys are planned in at least 35 countries in 2019/2020. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

This Pan-Africa Profile draws on data from 45,823 interviews completed in 34 countries between September 2016 and September 2018 as part of Afrobarometer Round 7 (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The countries covered are home to almost 80% of the continent's population. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country findings such as regional or Africa-wide averages, each country is weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

Key findings

- On average across 34 countries, more than eight out of 10 Africans express tolerant attitudes toward people of different ethnicities (91%), religions (87%), and nationalities (82%), saying they “would strongly like,” “would somewhat like,” or “would not care” if they lived next door to them. But only one in five (20%) express tolerance toward people of different sexual identities or orientations¹ (Figure 1). These averages remain unchanged from the previous survey round in 2014/2015.
 - Tolerance levels toward these groups are somewhat higher in cities than in rural areas (Figure 2) and increase modestly with respondents’ education level (Figure 3). But younger respondents are not substantially more tolerant than their elders (Figure 4), and differences between men and women are small (Figure 5). Muslims are less likely than Christians and adherents of other religions or no religion to express tolerance toward people from other religious backgrounds and toward LGBTQ persons (Figure 6).
 - By region,² Central Africa scores highest on tolerance toward all of these groups except LGBTQ persons, where it trails Southern Africa. North Africa is the least tolerant region except toward LGBTQ persons, where it outranks East and West Africa (Figure 7).
- Tolerance toward people from other ethnic groups is nearly universal in six West African countries – Gabon (99%), Côte d’Ivoire (99%), Senegal (98%), Benin (97%), Togo (97%), and Liberia (96%). The only country where fewer than three-fourths of adults express tolerance toward other ethnicities is eSwatini (72%) (Figure 8).
- Gabon and Côte d’Ivoire also top the list in religious tolerance (both 98%). Tolerance toward other religions is lowest in a handful of predominantly Muslim countries – Niger (56%), Sudan (65%), Morocco (69%), Guinea (74%), and Tunisia (74%)– along with predominantly Christian eSwatini (69%) (Figure 9).
- Côte d’Ivoire again heads the list, along with Cabo Verde and Benin, when it comes to tolerance toward immigrants (95% each). Sudan (63%) is the only country where fewer than two-thirds of adults agree. In contrast to the previous two measures, on this indicator, eSwatini (84%) ranks slightly above average (82%) (Figure 10).
- In four countries, majorities express tolerance toward people of different sexual identity/orientation: Cabo Verde (80%), South Africa (70%), Mauritius (56%), and Namibia (54%). In half of the 34 countries, no more than one in 10 citizens share this attitude. The lowest levels of tolerance are found in the Gambia (3%), Uganda (3%), Senegal (4%), and Zambia (4%) (Figure 11).

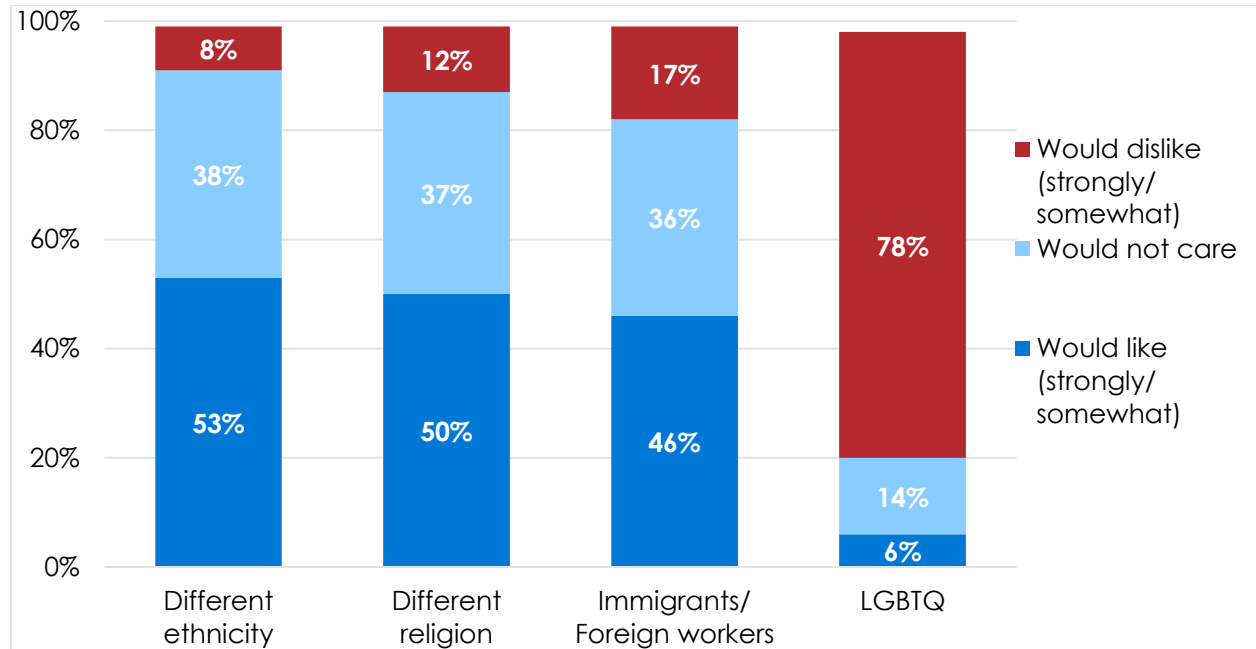
¹ The survey asked about “homosexuals” because this word is widely understood and can be translated into local languages across Africa. In this report, we interpret responses to apply to the broader LGBTQ category, or persons of non-heterosexual identities or orientations.

² Regional groupings are: North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan), Central Africa (Cameroon, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe), East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda), West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo), and Southern Africa (Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe).

- Across 32 countries where this question was also asked in the previous survey round, the average level of tolerance toward people of different sexual identity/orientation has remained stable (20% vs. 21% in 2014/2015). Significant gains (+3 percentage points or more) are reported in nine countries, led by Mauritius (+7 percentage points), Cabo Verde (+6 points), Lesotho (+6 points), and Benin (+4 points). But declines of 3 percentage points or more occurred in 10 countries, led by Liberia and Tanzania (-11 points each) ([Figure 12](#)).
- Tolerance toward sexual differences is significantly higher in cities (25%, vs. 16% in rural areas) and among more educated respondents (ranging from 11% among those with no formal schooling to 27% among those with post-secondary qualifications). Muslims (11%) are far less likely to express tolerance than Christians (24%) or adherents of other religions or no religion (28%) ([Figure 13](#)).
- When we average levels of national tolerance toward all four groups (people of other ethnicities and religions, LGBTQ persons, and foreign workers or immigrants), Cabo Verde (92%) stands out as by far the most tolerant country, followed by Namibia and São Tomé and Príncipe (both 80%) and Mauritius (78%). Also scoring above three-fourths, at 77%, are Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, Gabon, and Benin. At the other extreme, Sudan (54%), Niger (56%), and Morocco (59%) register as least tolerant ([Figure 14](#)).
- **Experience of discrimination:**
 - On average across 34 countries, three out of 10 Africans say members of their ethnic group are “sometimes” (17%) or “often” or “always” (13%) treated unfairly by the government. This perception is highest in Togo (61% at least “sometimes”), Kenya (53%), Gabon (52%), Nigeria (51%), and Cameroon (50%) ([Figure 15](#)).
 - About one in eight respondents (13%) say they personally suffered discrimination based on their ethnicity during the previous year, a proportion that ranged up to about one in four in Nigeria (28%), Namibia (25%), and Gabon (24%) ([Figure 16](#)).
 - About one in 10 respondents (9%) report discrimination based on religion during the previous year, most frequently in Nigeria (22%), Liberia (21%), and Cameroon (18%) (not shown).
 - About one in eight women (12%) say they experienced gender-based discrimination during the previous year, most frequently in Liberia (32%), Malawi (22%), Zambia (20%), and Nigeria (20%) ([Figure 17](#)). About one in 12 men report suffering gender-based discrimination. (For more on survey findings related to gender, see [Alpin Lardies, Drying, & Logan, 2019](#)).
 - About one in six Africans with a disability (16%) say they experienced discrimination based on their disability during the previous 12 months. Togolese (31%), Sierra Leoneans (29%), and Nigerians (28%) are especially likely to report such discrimination ([Figure 18](#)).

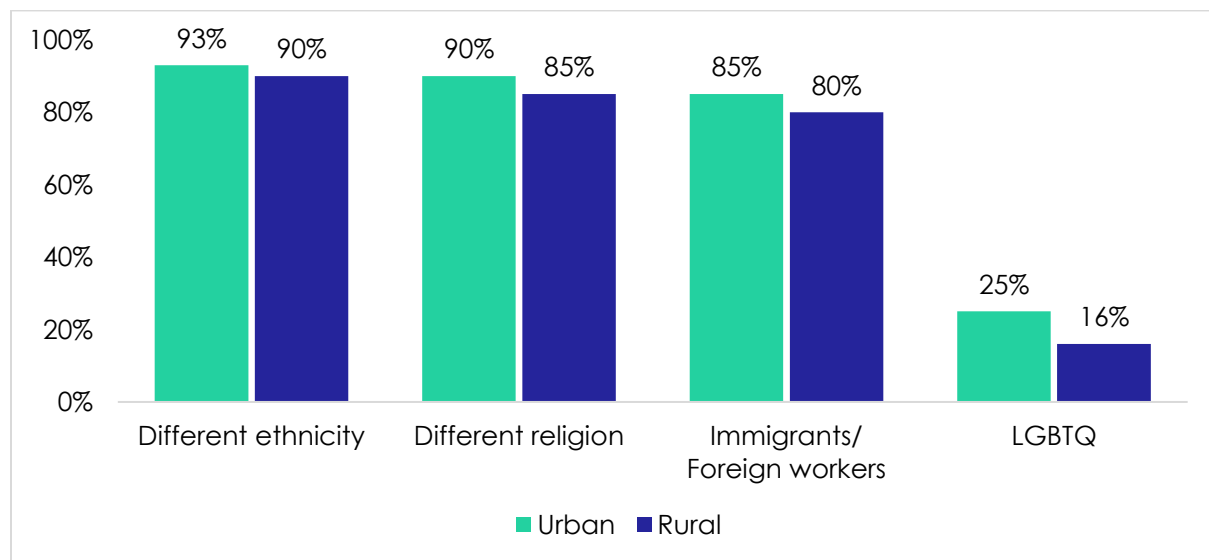
Charts

Figure 1: Tolerance in Africa | 34 countries | 2016/2018



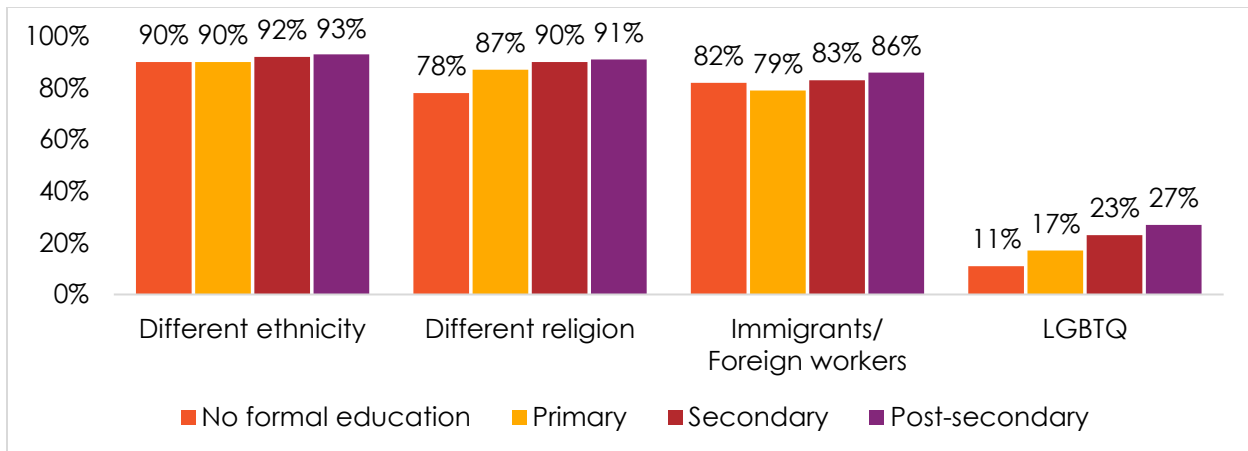
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? Homosexuals? Immigrants or foreign workers?

Figure 2: Urban-rural differences in tolerance levels | 34 countries | 2016/2018



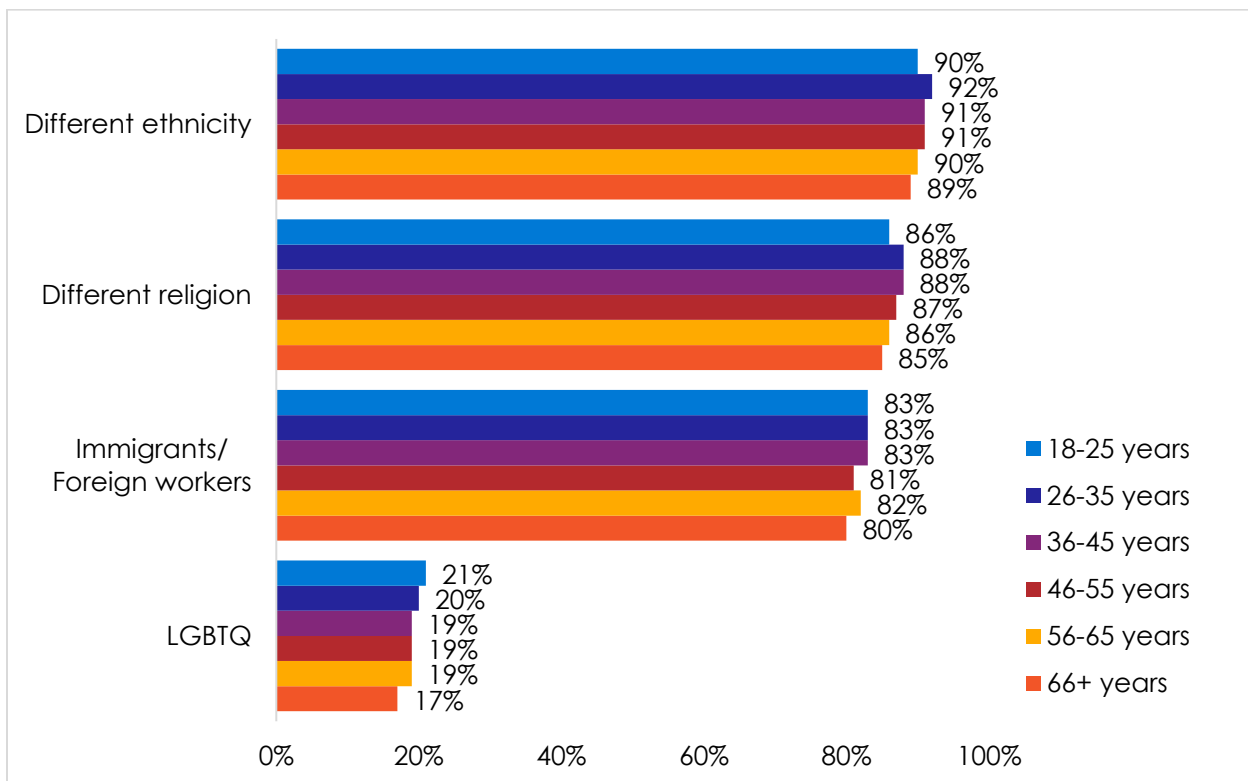
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? Homosexuals? Immigrants or foreign workers? (% who say "would strongly like," "would somewhat like," or "would not care")

Figure 3: Tolerance levels | by education level | 34 countries | 2016/2018



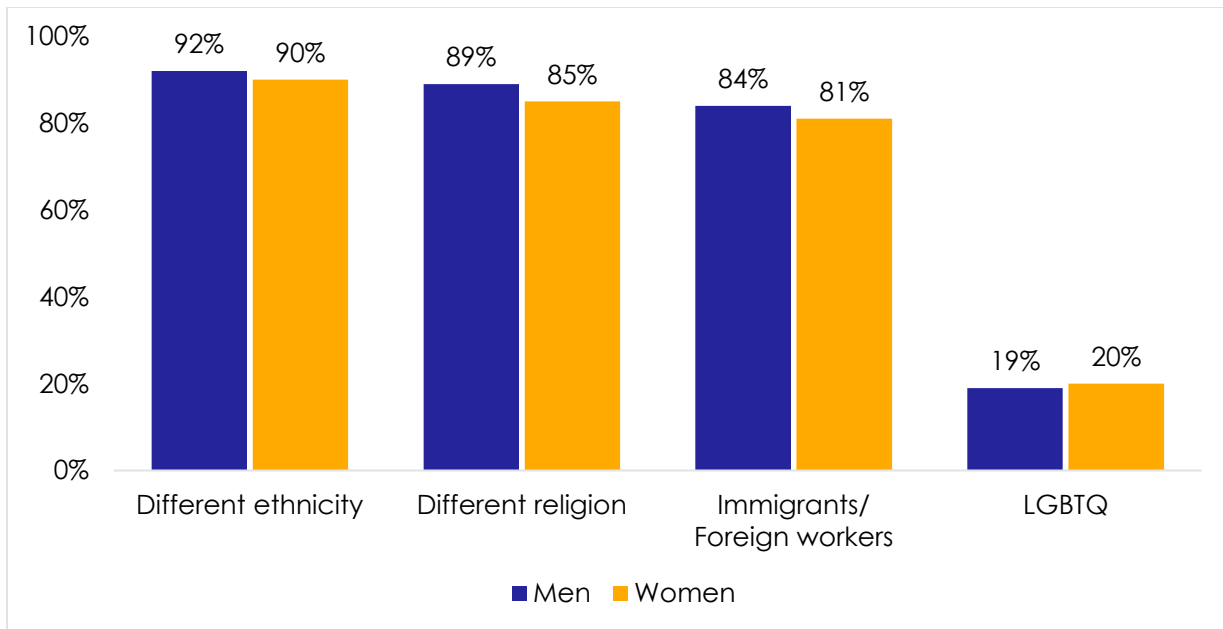
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? Homosexuals? Immigrants or foreign workers? (% who say “would strongly like,” “would somewhat like,” or “would not care”)

Figure 4: Tolerance levels | by age group | 34 countries | 2016/2018



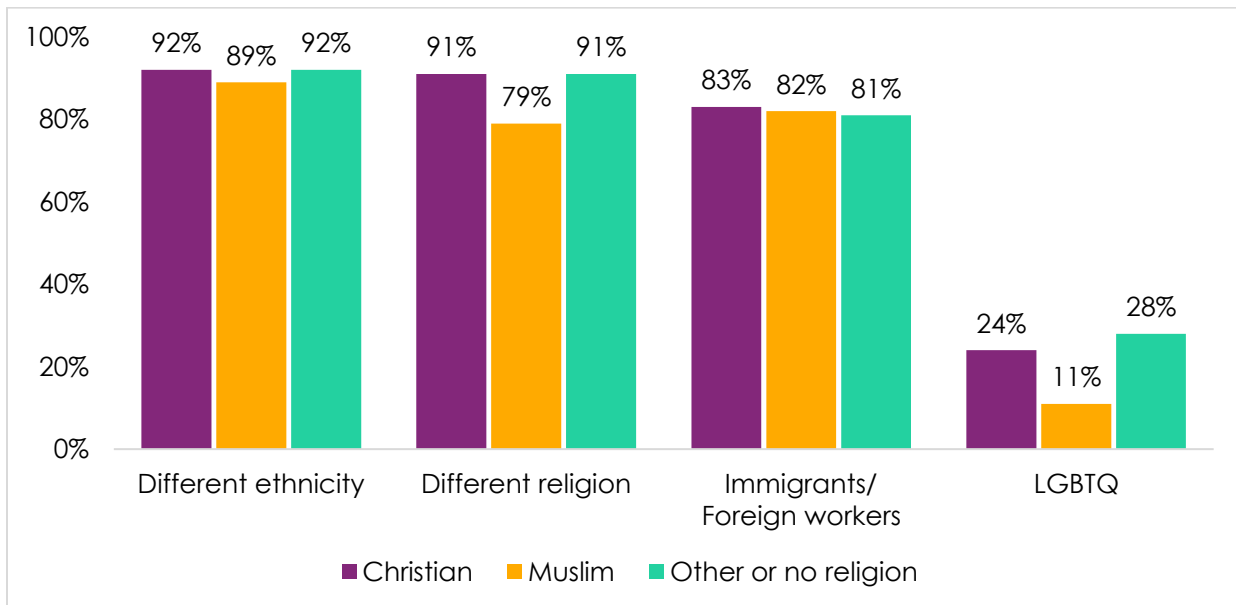
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? Homosexuals? Immigrants or foreign workers? (% who say “would strongly like,” “would somewhat like,” or “would not care”)

Figure 5: Tolerance levels | by gender | 34 countries | 2016/2018



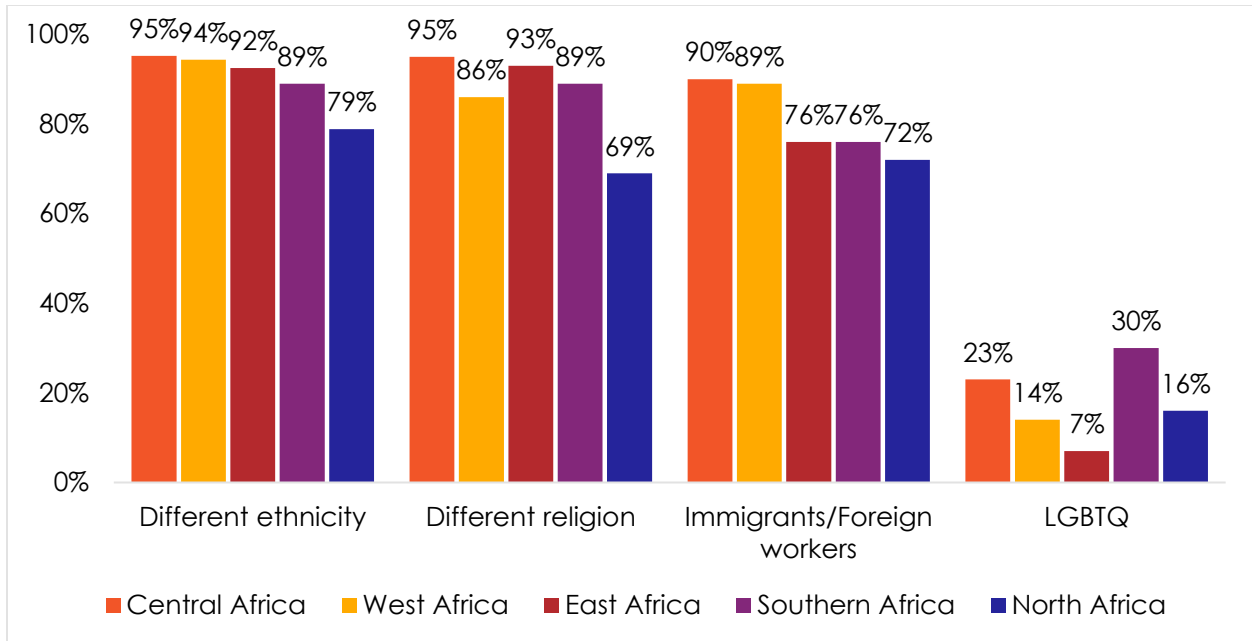
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? Homosexuals? Immigrants or foreign workers? (% who say “would strongly like,” “would somewhat like,” or “would not care”)

Figure 6: Tolerance levels | by religion | 34 countries | 2016/2018



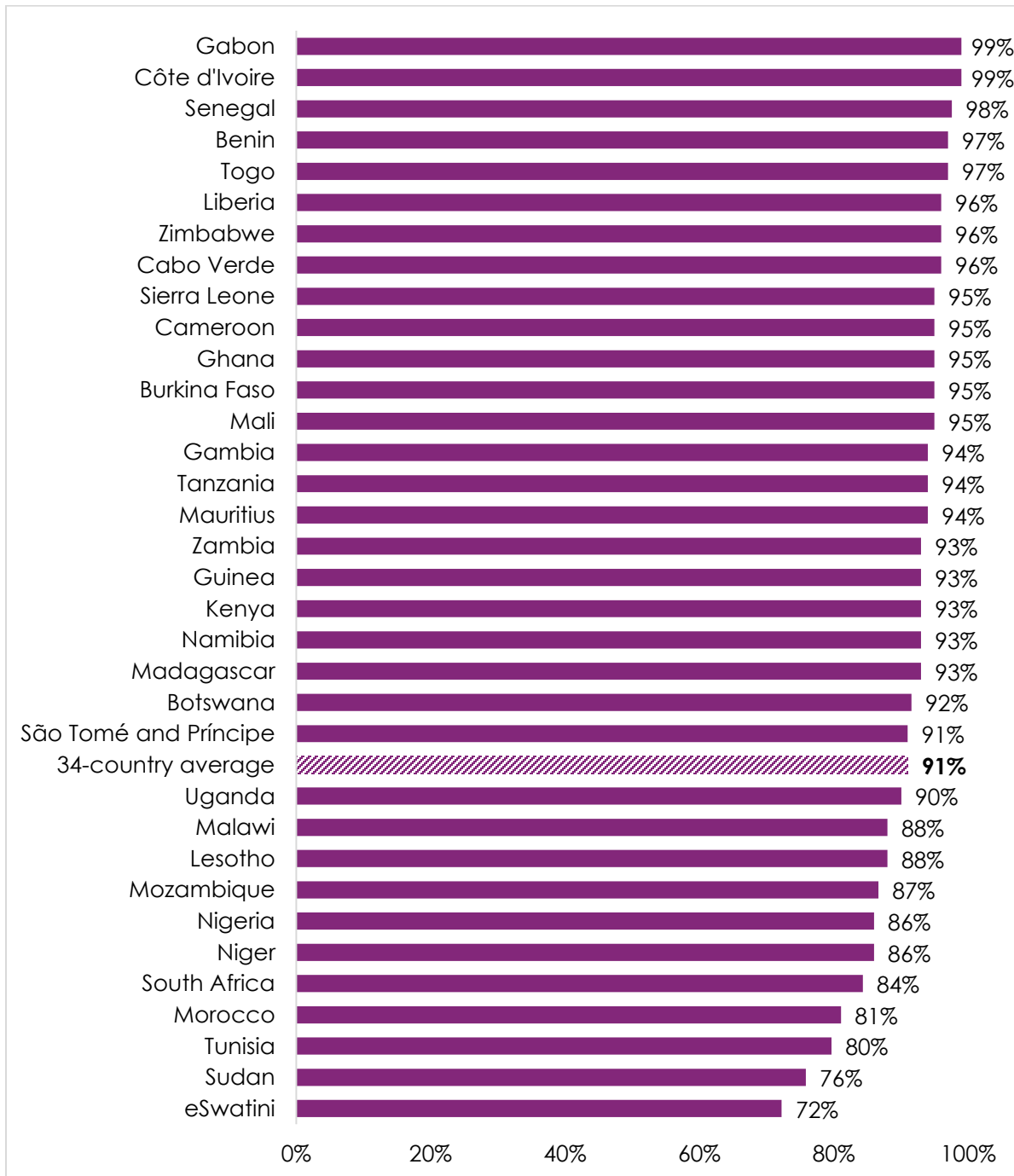
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? Homosexuals? Immigrants or foreign workers? (% who say “would strongly like,” “would somewhat like,” or “would not care”)

Figure 7: Tolerance levels | by region | 34 countries | 2016/2018



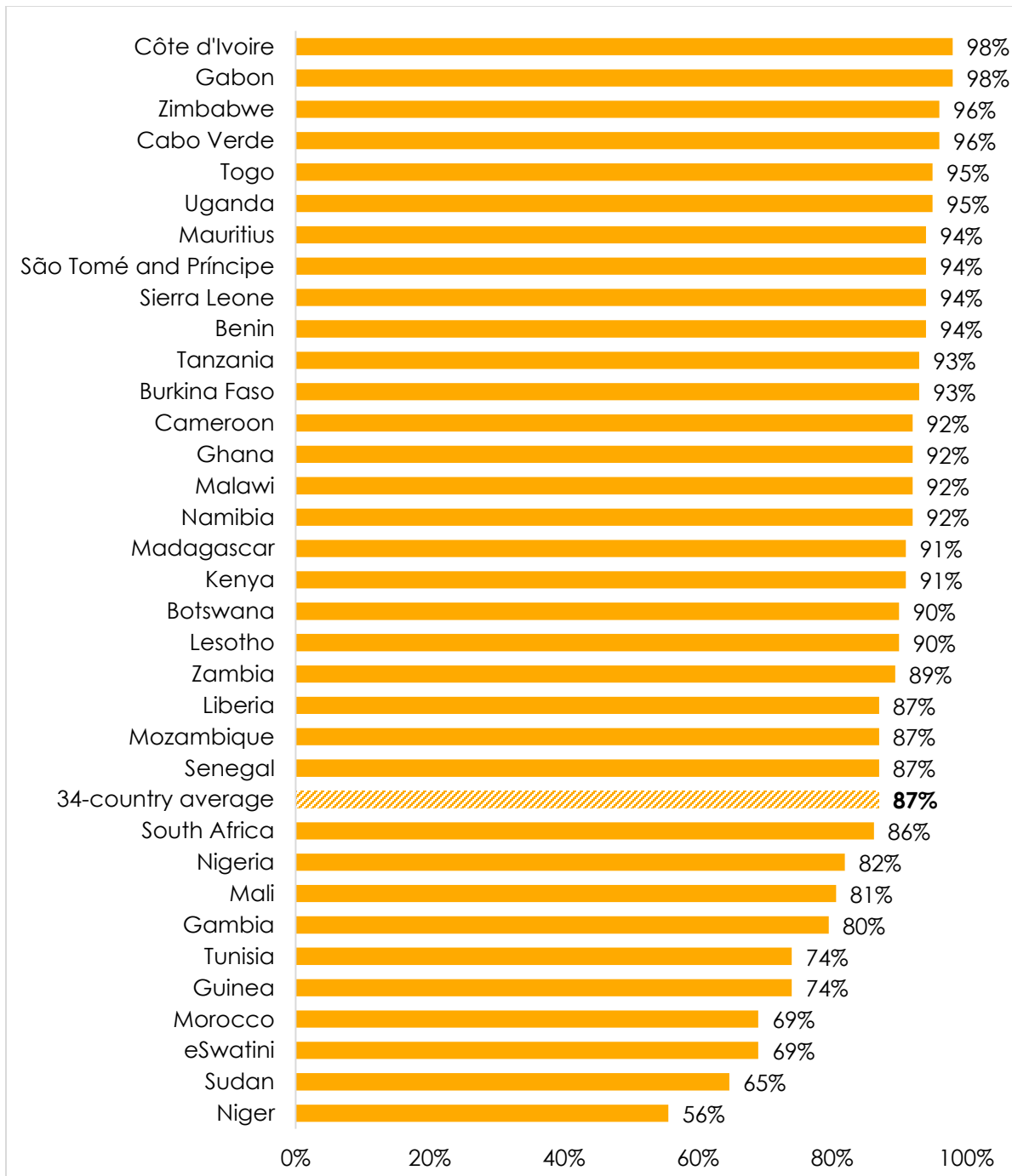
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? Homosexuals? Immigrants or foreign workers? (% who say "would strongly like," "would somewhat like," or "would not care")

Figure 8: Tolerance toward people of other ethnicities | 34 countries | 2016/2018



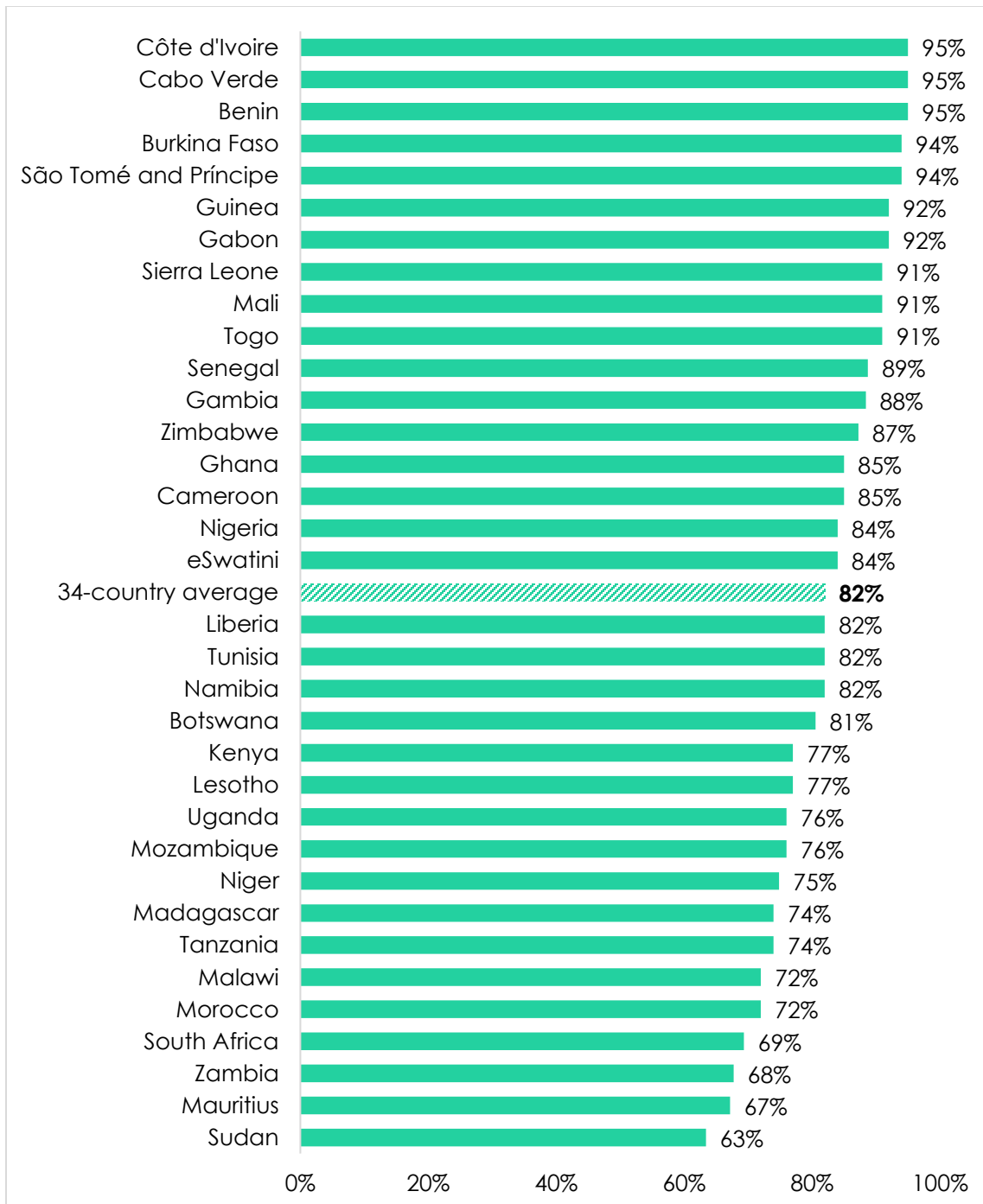
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People from other ethnic groups? (% who say "would strongly like," "would somewhat like," or "would not care")

Figure 9: Tolerance toward people of other religions | 34 countries | 2016/2018



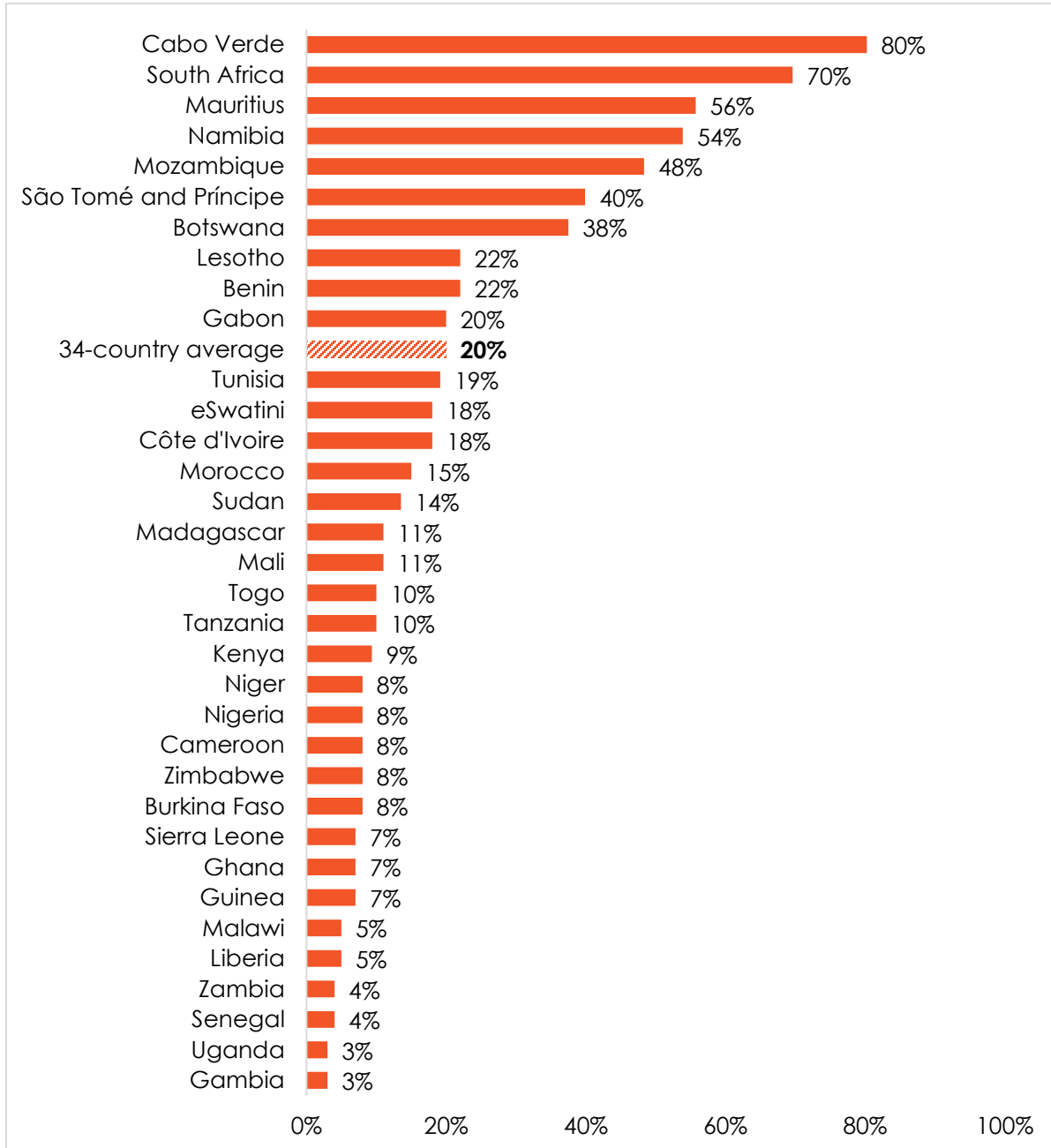
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? (% who say "would strongly like," "would somewhat like," or "would not care")

Figure 10: Tolerance toward immigrants/foreign workers | 34 countries | 2016/2018



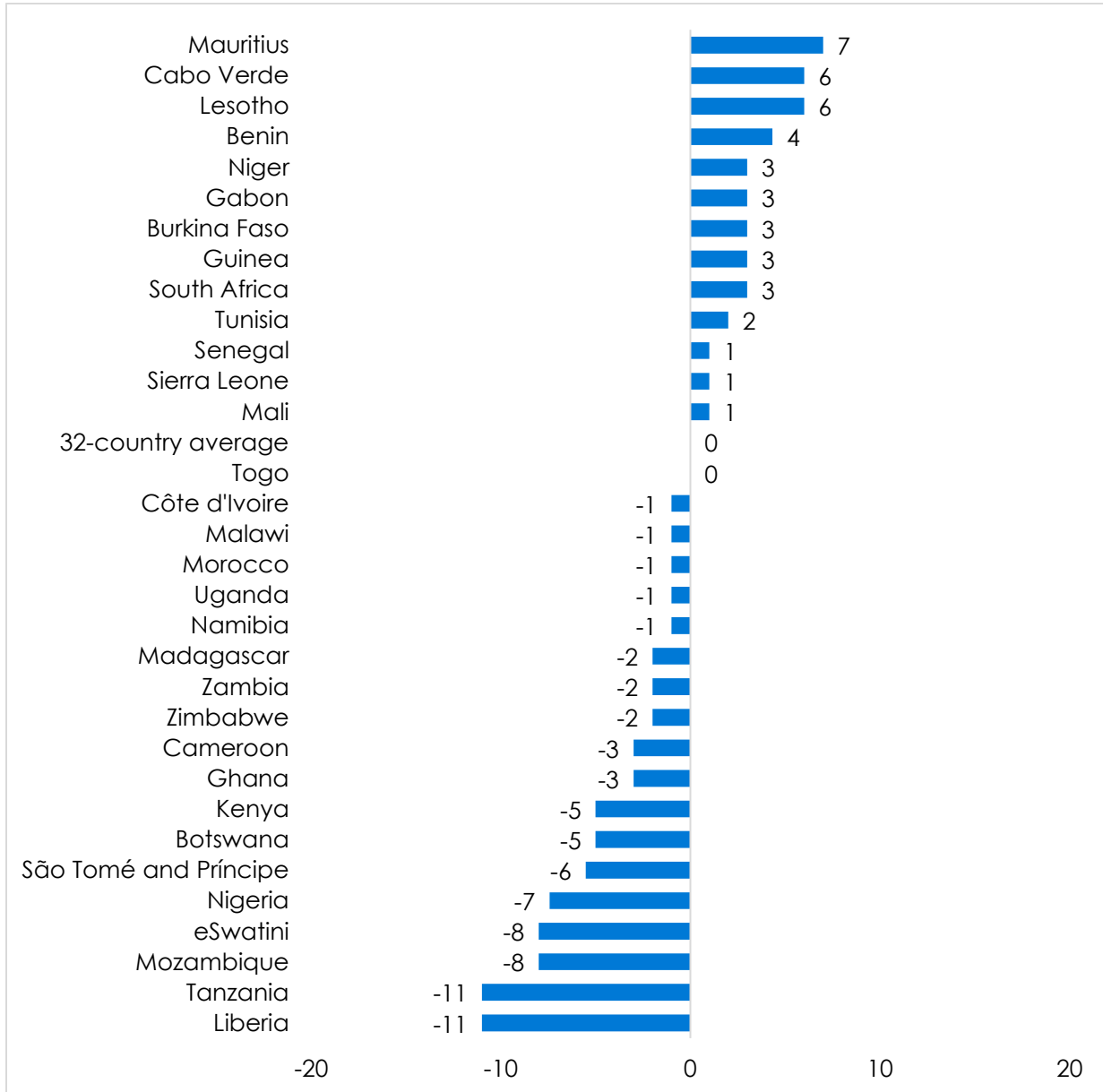
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: Immigrants or foreign workers? (% who say "would strongly like," "would somewhat like," or "would not care")

Figure 11: Tolerance toward people of different sexual identity/orientation | 34 countries
 | 2016/2018



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? (% who say “would strongly like,” “would somewhat like,” or “would not care”)

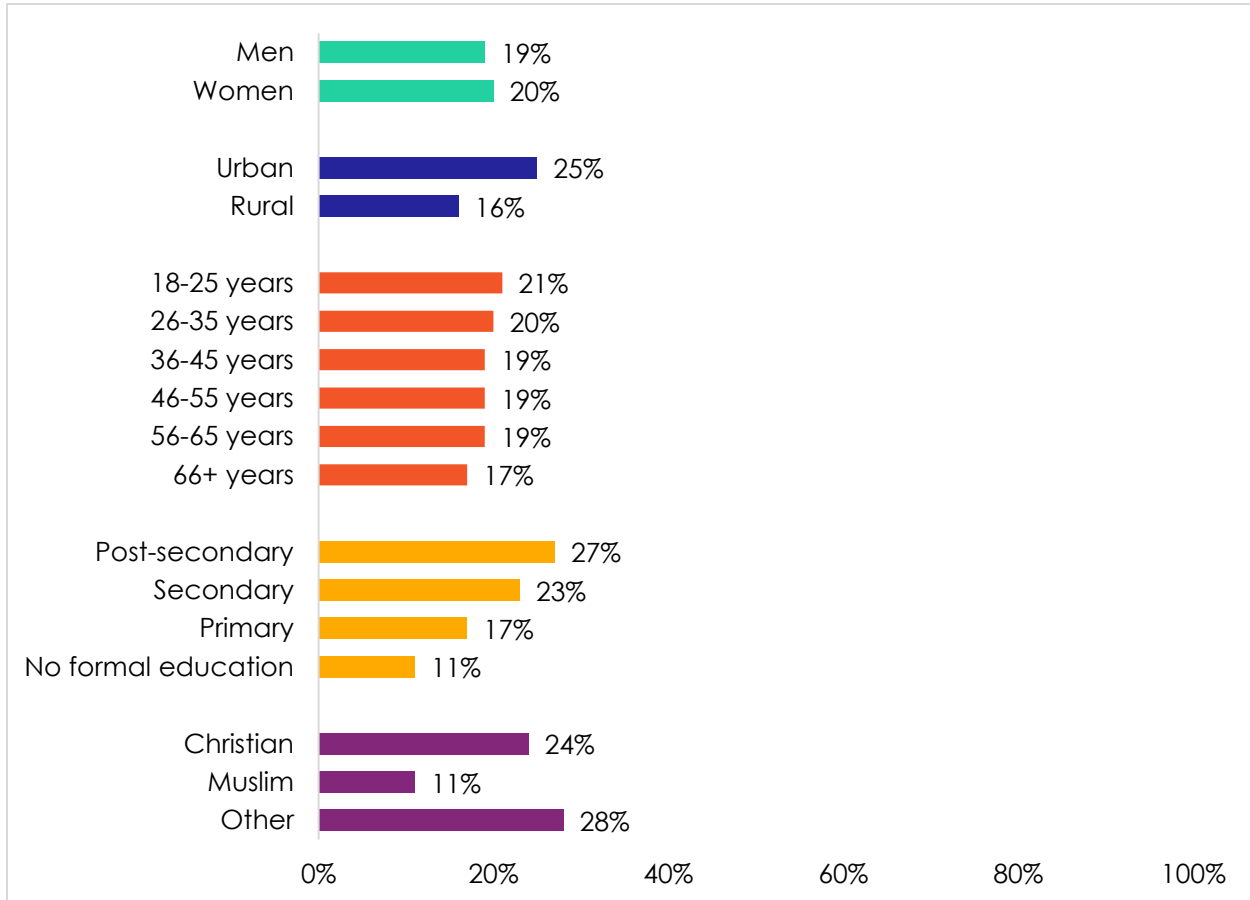
Figure 12: Tolerance toward people of different sexual identity/orientation
 | 32 countries* | 2014-2018



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? (% who say "would strongly like," "would somewhat like," or "would not care") * Question was not asked in Sudan in Round 6.

Note: New data from Botswana collected in July-August 2019, after a ground-breaking High Court ruling decriminalizing same-sex activity, show that 48% expressed tolerance toward people in such relationships, a 10-percentage-point increase.

Figure 13: Tolerance toward people of different sexual identity/orientation | by socio-demographic group | 34 countries | 2016/2018



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? (% who say "would strongly like," "would somewhat like," or "would not care")

Figure 14: Average tolerance levels | 34 countries | 2016/2018

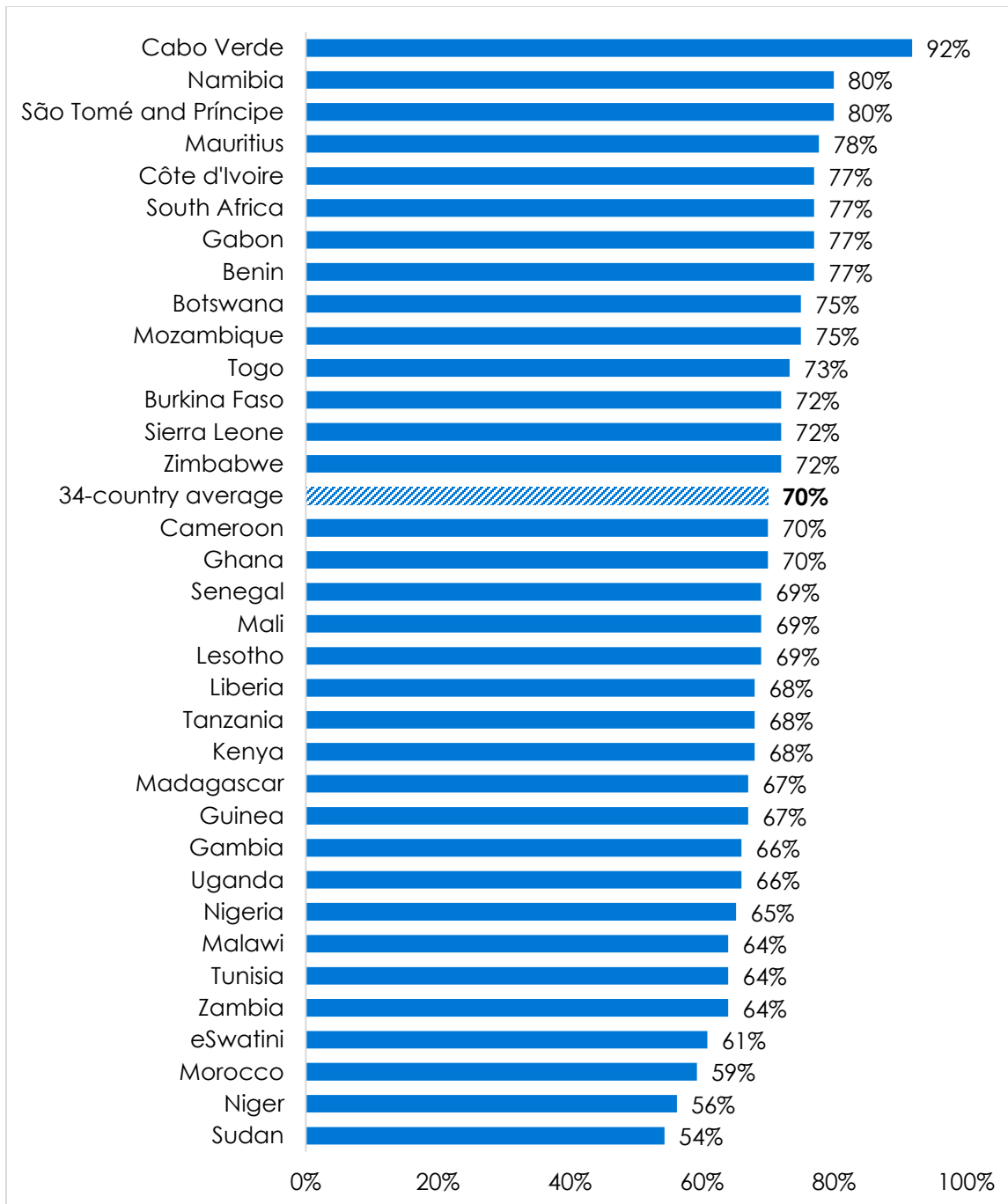
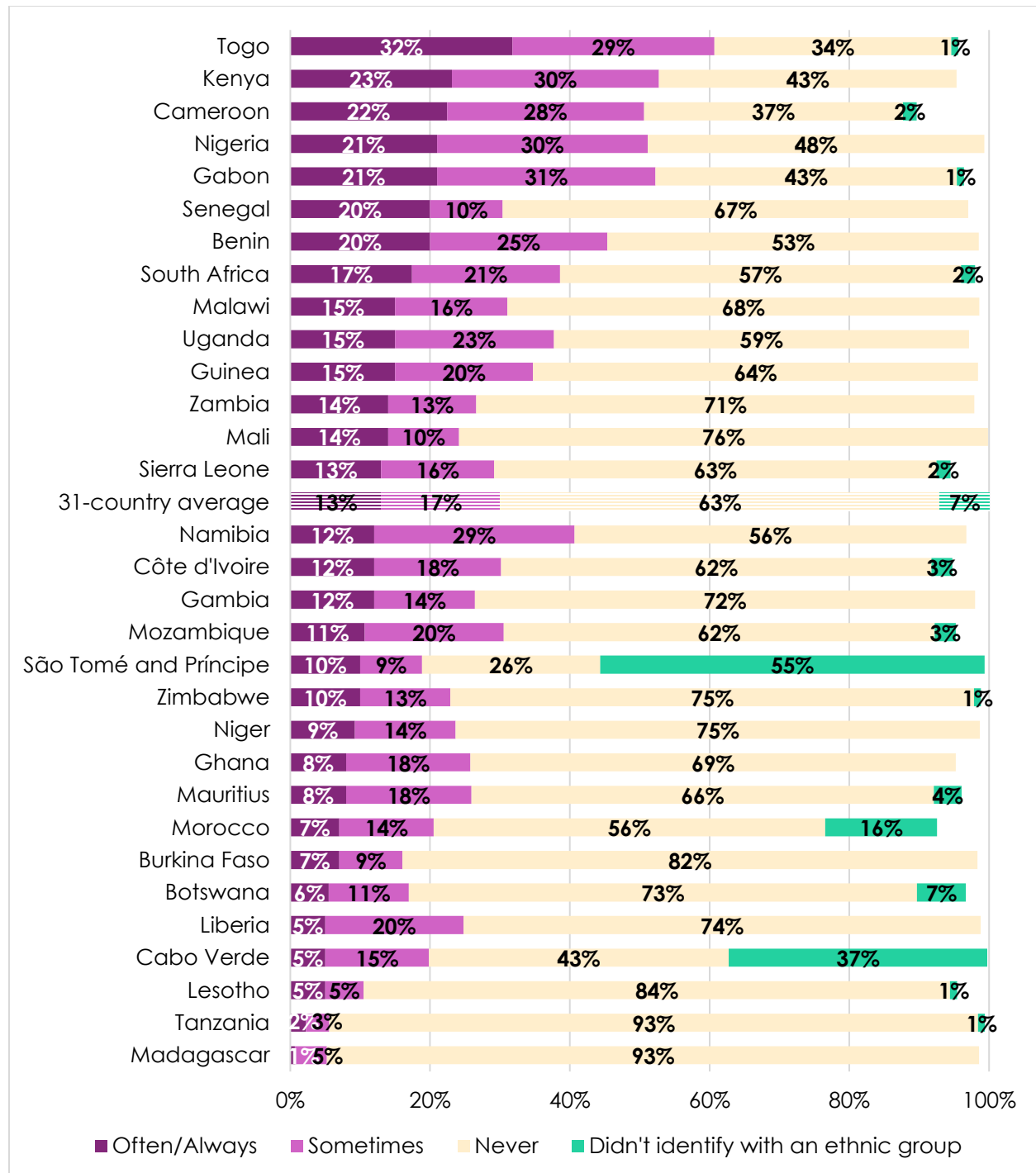


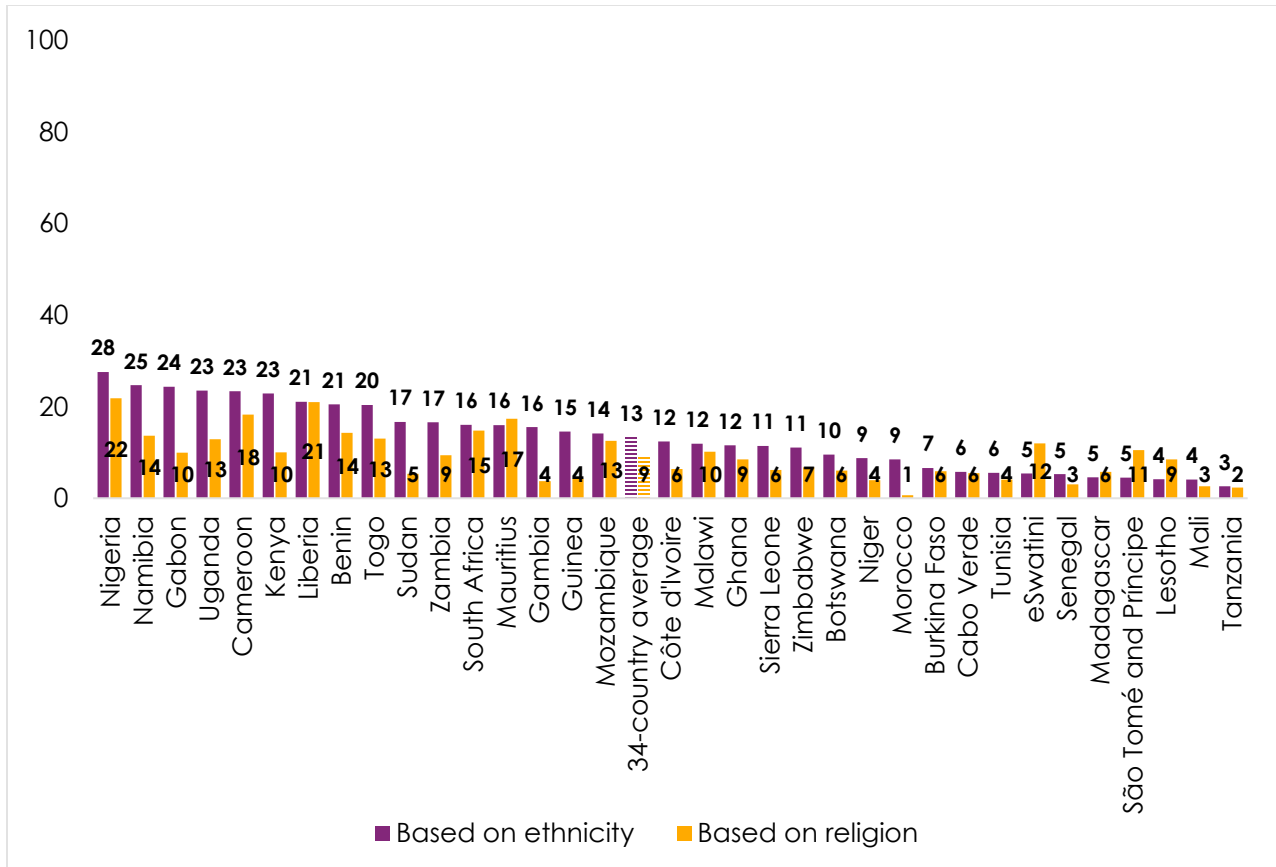
Figure shows the average percentage of respondents who say they “would strongly like,” “would somewhat like,” or “would not care” if they had neighbours who are from a different ethnic group, who have a different religion, who are homosexual, or who are foreign workers/immigrants.

Figure 15: Ethnic group treated unfairly by the government | 31 countries* | 2016/2018



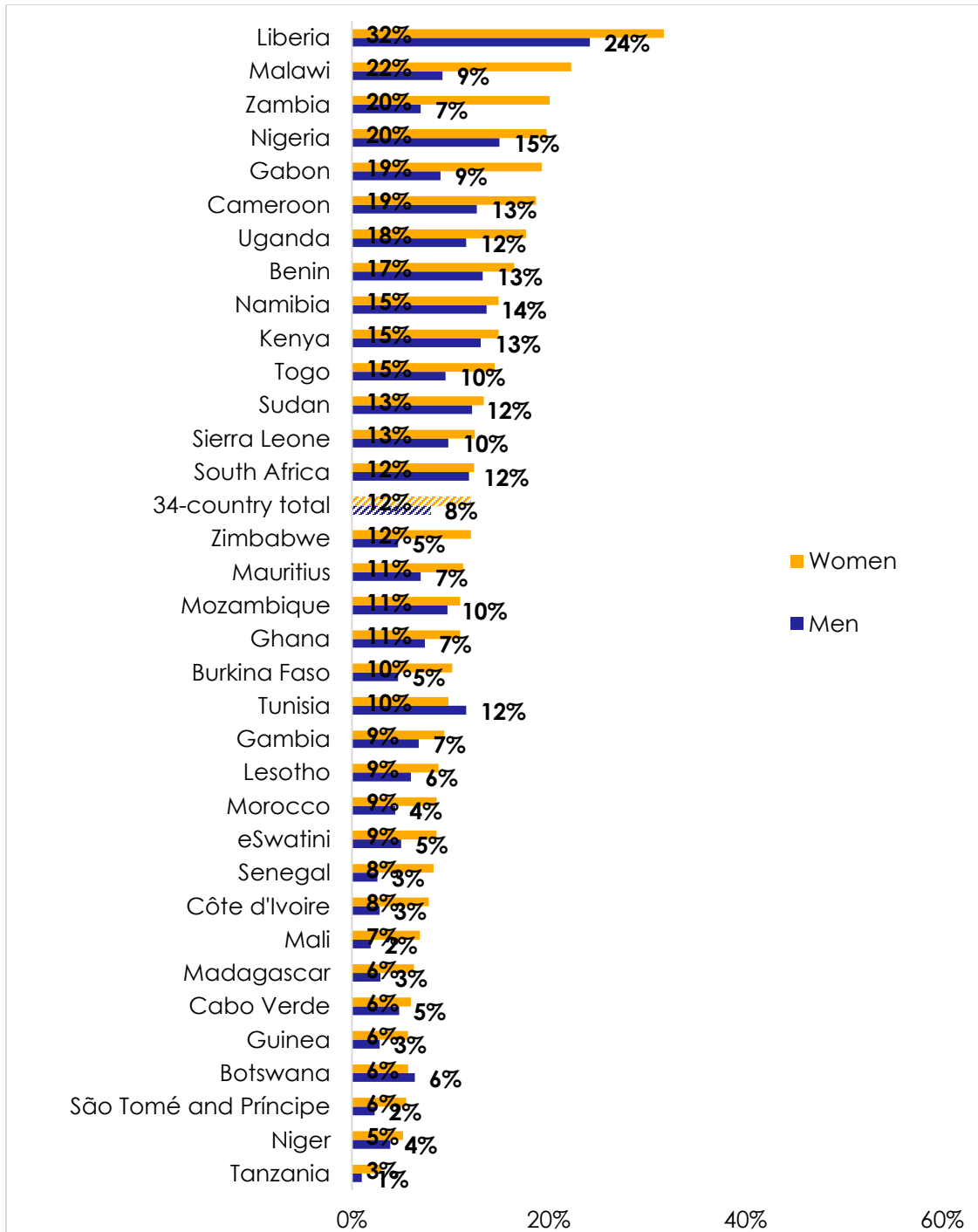
Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, are [members of your ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government? (* Question was not asked in Sudan and Tunisia. ESwatini is not included because the question was only posed to the seven respondents who identified with an ethnic group other than siSwati.)

Figure 16: Discrimination based on ethnicity and religion (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



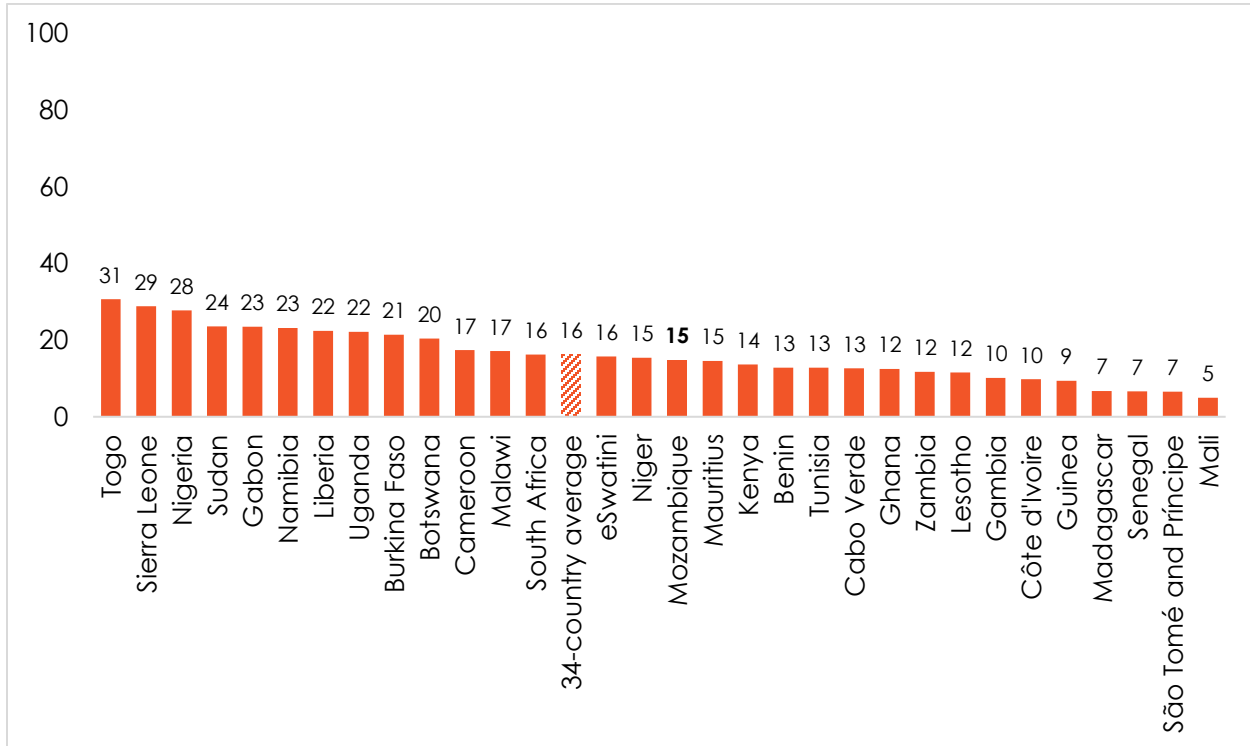
Respondents were asked: In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against based on any of the following: Your ethnicity? Your religion? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "many times")

Figure 17: Discrimination based on gender (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against based on any of the following: Your gender? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "many times")

Figure 18: Discrimination based on disability (% among those with a disability)
 | 34 countries* | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against based on any of the following: Any disability you might have? (Excluding those who say they have no disability, % who say "once or twice," "several times," or "many times")

* While they are included in the 34-country average, Morocco, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe are not shown because small samples of those who self-identify as having a disability result in very large survey margins of error.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It is easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 7 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 7 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Cape Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Côte d'Ivoire	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2013, 2014
eSwatini (Swaziland)	March 2018	2013, 2015
Gabon	Nov 2017	2015
Gambia	July-August 2018	N/A
Ghana	Sept 2017	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Guinea	May 2017	2013, 2015
Kenya	Sept-Oct 2016	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Lesotho	Nov-Dec 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Liberia	June-July 2018	2008, 2012, 2015
Madagascar	Jan-Feb 2018	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
Malawi	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Mali	Feb 2017	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Mauritius	Oct-Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Morocco	May 2018	2013, 2015
Mozambique	July-August 2018	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Namibia	Nov 2017	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014
Niger	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Nigeria	April-May 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
São Tomé and Príncipe	July 2018	2015
Senegal	Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Sierra Leone	July 2018	2012, 2015
South Africa	August-Sept 2018	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015
Sudan	July-August 2018	2013, 2015
Tanzania	April-June 2017	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Togo	Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Tunisia	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Uganda	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Zambia	April 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014
Zimbabwe	Jan-Feb 2017	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014

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Afrobarometer, a non-profit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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