

Ghanaians are united and hospitable but intolerant toward same-sex relationships

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 461 | Lionel Ossé

Summary

Tolerance is a pre-condition for stability in a society with a variety of cultural and religious traditions. In Ghana, a secular and heterogeneous society (Armah-Attah & Debrah, 2015), peaceful coexistence of different ethnicities and religions is strengthened by policies that foster internal mobility, such as a national service program that allows youths to spend time outside their home regions, as well as by urbanization connecting different ethnic groups in marriage and daily life (Throup, 2011).

Ghanaian Christians and Muslims host their counterparts for major festivals such as Easter and Eid, and churches and mosques offer social services to people of all faiths (Ross, 2013). Even a political context in which the two leading parties are broadly identified with specific ethnic groups has rarely prevented Ghanaians from living in harmony with each other (Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Throup, 2011).

While unity and peace are pillars of patriotism in Ghana (Asamoah, 2019), armed men demanding independence for Western Togoland blockaded major entry points to the Volta region on 25 September 2020 (Robert Lansing Institute, 2020) – a shock to many Ghanaians that served to refresh awareness of the challenges of constructing a unified nation.

A major exception to Ghanaians' tolerance is their strongly negative attitude toward people in same-sex relationships (Armah-Attah, 2020), as reflected in the recent outcry from church groups, politicians, and anti-gay-rights organizations calling on the government to shut down Ghana's first LGBT+ community center (Bhalla, 2021).

Afrobarometer's most recent survey in Ghana indicates that most Ghanaians value their national identity at least as highly as their ethnic identity, and most think there is more that unites Ghanaians as a single people than divides them.

While unfair treatment based on ethnicity, religion, and economic status are not rare occurrences, most Ghanaians express tolerant attitudes toward their neighbours from different ethnic groups, religions, and nationalities. But very few extend the same level of tolerance to people in same-sex relationships.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and the quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians between 16 September and 3 October 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points

at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

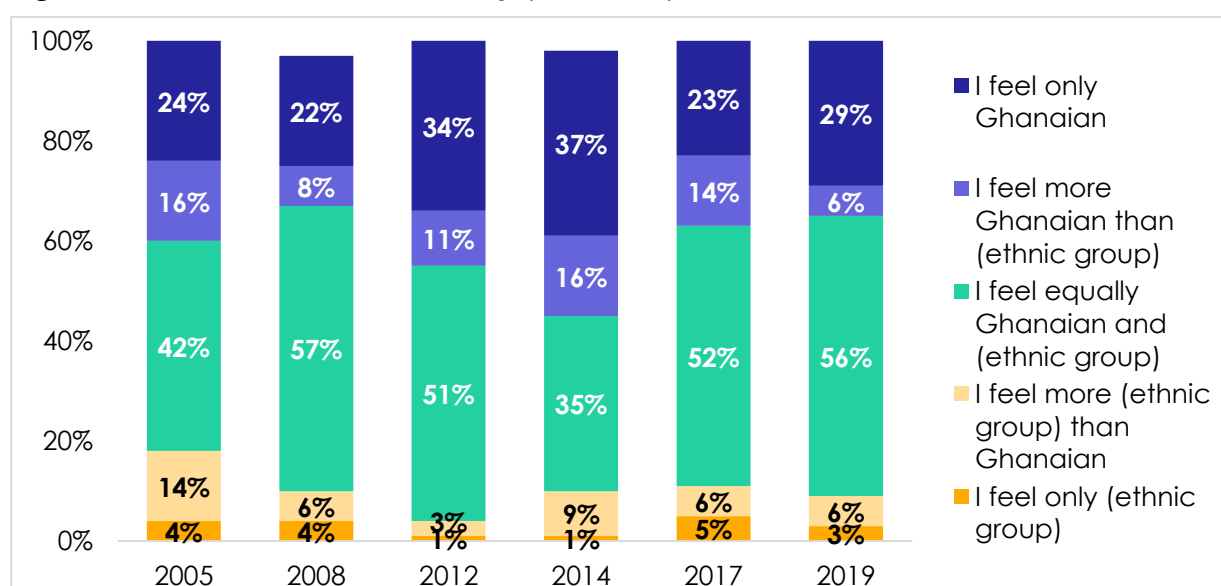
- For nine out of 10 Ghanaians (91%), their national identity is at least as strong as their ethnic identity; very few say they feel “more ethnic” (6%) or “only ethnic” (3%).
- About three-quarters (73%) of citizens believe there is more that unites Ghanaians as a single people than divides them.
- About one in four Ghanaians (25%) say the government treats members of their ethnic group unfairly, a significant improvement compared to 2008 (49%).
- About one in five say other Ghanaians treated them unfairly based on their ethnicity (20%) or their religion (18%) during the year preceding the survey. Almost twice as many (35%) say they suffered discrimination based on their economic status.
- Overwhelming majorities of Ghanaians express tolerant attitudes toward people of different ethnicities (92%), different religions (91%), different political affiliations (90%), and different nationalities (74%). But fewer than one in 10 (7%) are tolerant toward people in same-sex relationships.

Ghanaian identity

In general, when asked whether they identify more strongly with their national or their ethnic identities, the largest share of Ghanaians say they identify equally with both (56% in 2019), followed by the group who identify as “only Ghanaian” (29%) (Figure 1).

Overall, nine out of 10 citizens (91%) identify at least as strongly as “Ghanaian” as they do as members of their ethnic group; fewer than one in 10 say they feel “more ethnic” (6%) or “only ethnic” (3%). These responses have been fairly consistent over time, although surveys in 2012 and 2014 detected a growing identification with the nation that has since retreated.

Figure 1: National vs. ethnic identity | Ghana | 2004-2019

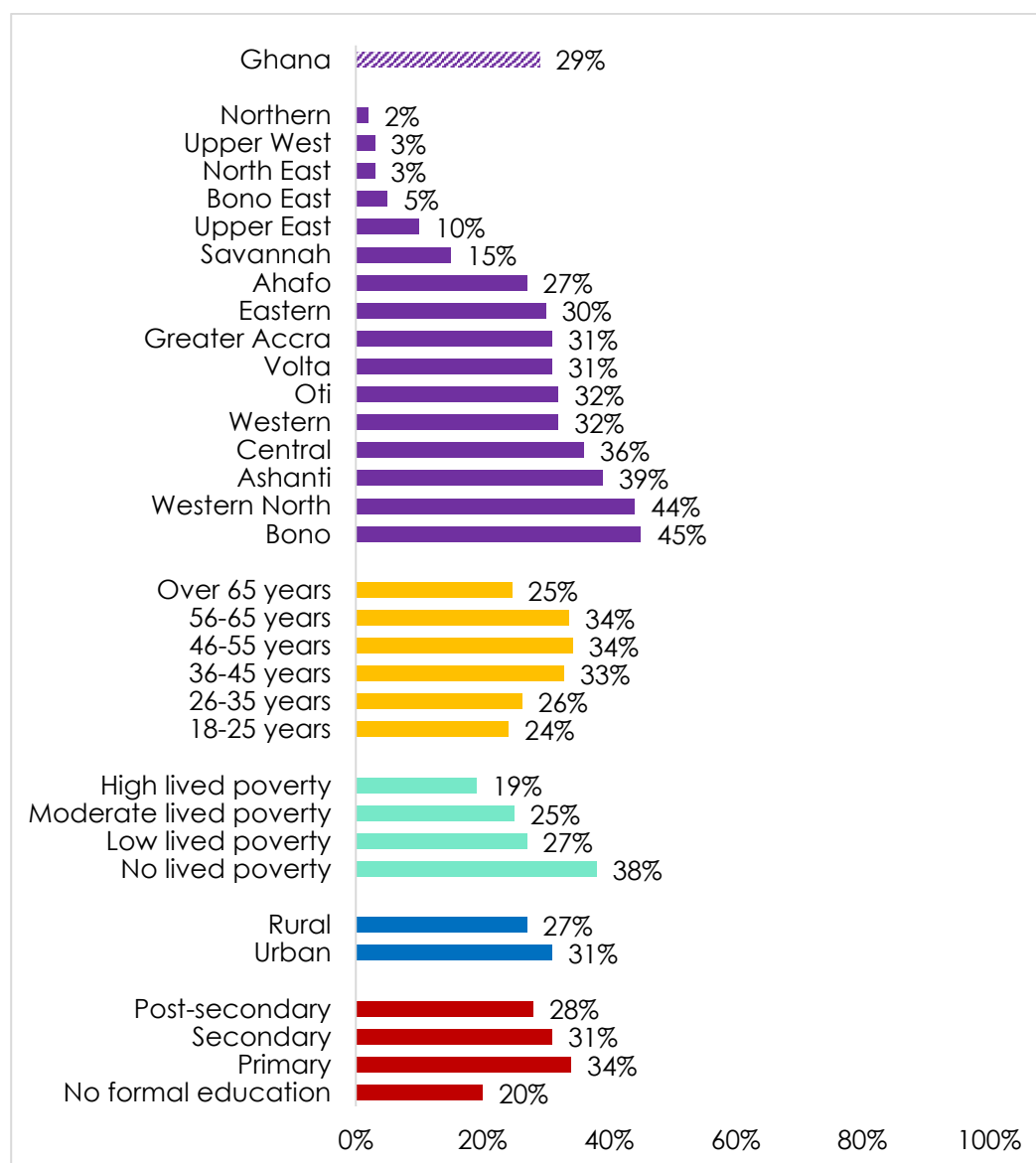


Respondents were asked: Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Ghanaian and being a (member of respondent's ethnic group). Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?

Identification as “only Ghanaian” varies widely by region¹: While almost half of residents in Bono (45%) and Western North (44%) say they feel “only Ghanaian,” the same is true of fewer than one in 10 respondents in Northern (2%), Upper West (3%), and North East (3%) regions (Figure 2).

Poor respondents are less likely to identify as “only Ghanaian” (19% among those experiencing high lived poverty vs. 38% of the economically best-off respondents), as are those with no formal education (20%) compared to their better-educated counterparts (28%-34%).

Figure 2: Feel only Ghanaian | Ghana | 2019

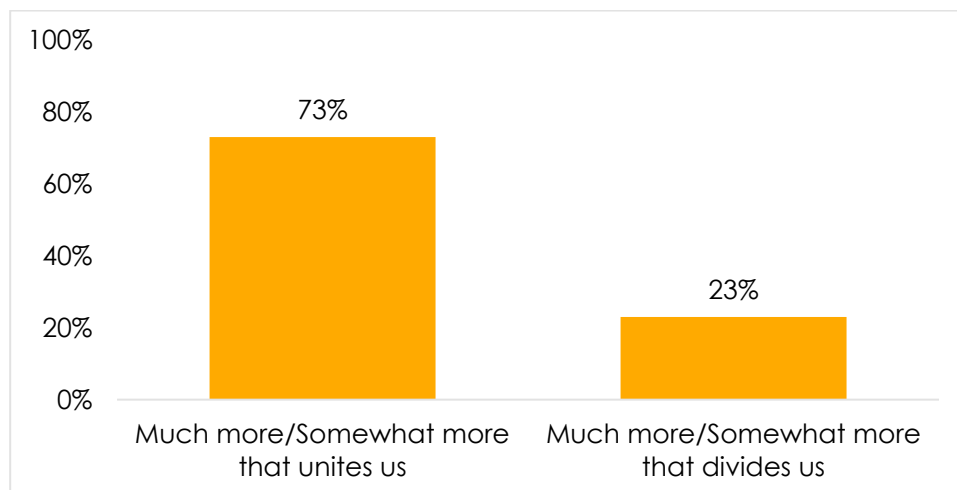


Respondents were asked: Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Ghanaian and being a (member of respondent's ethnic group). Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings? (% who “feel only Ghanaian”)

¹ In accordance with their share of the total population of Ghana, small sample sizes in sparsely populated regions (e.g. North East, Savannah, and Ahafo) produce results with very large margins of error. These results should be interpreted with caution.

In addition to valuing their national identity, most citizens (73%) affirm that there is “somewhat more” or “much more” that unites Ghanaians as a single people than divides them (Figure 3).

Figure 3: More that unites or divides Ghanaians? | Ghana | 2019

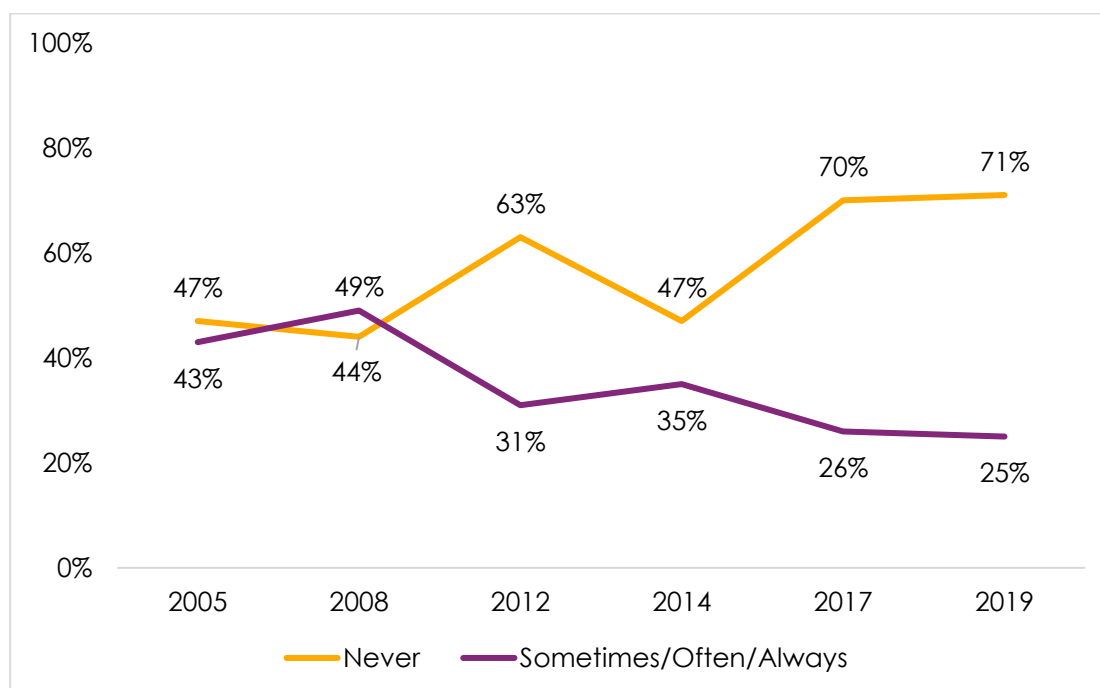


Respondents were asked: *Ghanaians are very diverse. They come from different religions, ethnic groups, political parties, and economic and social backgrounds. Overall, would you say that there is more that unites all Ghanaians as one people, or more that divides them?*

Are Ghanaians treated unfairly based on their ethnicity?

The share of Ghanaians who say the government treats members of their ethnic group unfairly has declined over the past 15 years. In the most recent survey, 25% of respondents say this happens “sometimes,” “often,” or “always,” down from 43% in 2005 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Unfair treatment based on ethnicity | Ghana | 2005-2019

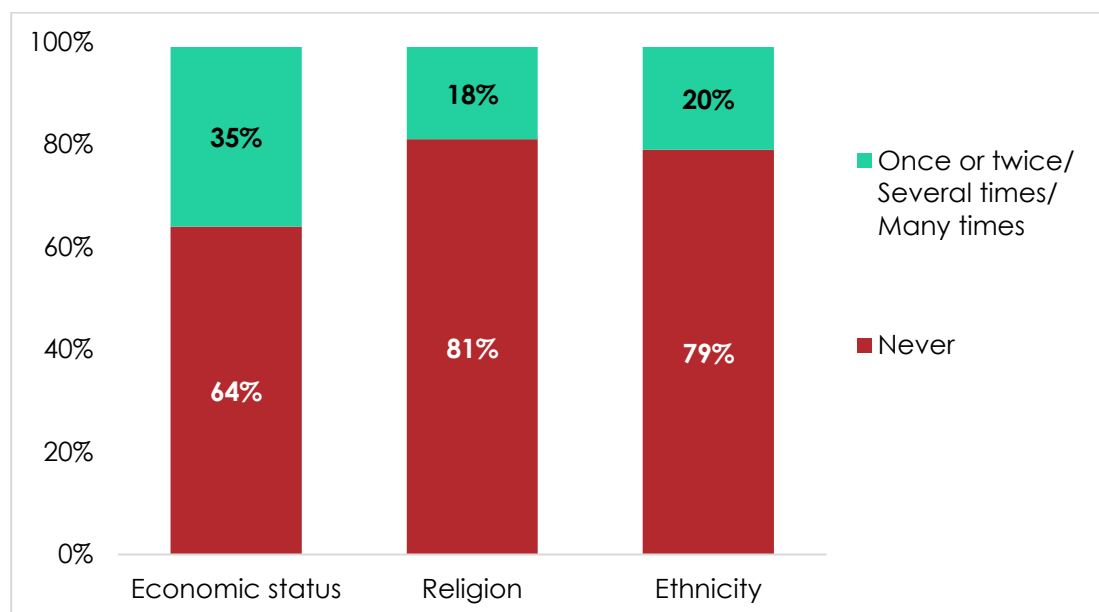


Respondents were asked: *How often, if ever, are [members of the respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?*

More citizens complain that fellow Ghanaians treat them unfairly based on their ethnicity: One in five (20%) say this happened at least “once or twice” during the year preceding the survey.

About the same proportion (18%) report discrimination based on their religion, and about twice as many (35%) experienced unfair treatment by other citizens based on their economic status (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Treated unfairly by other Ghanaians based on economic status, religion, ethnicity | Ghana | 2019



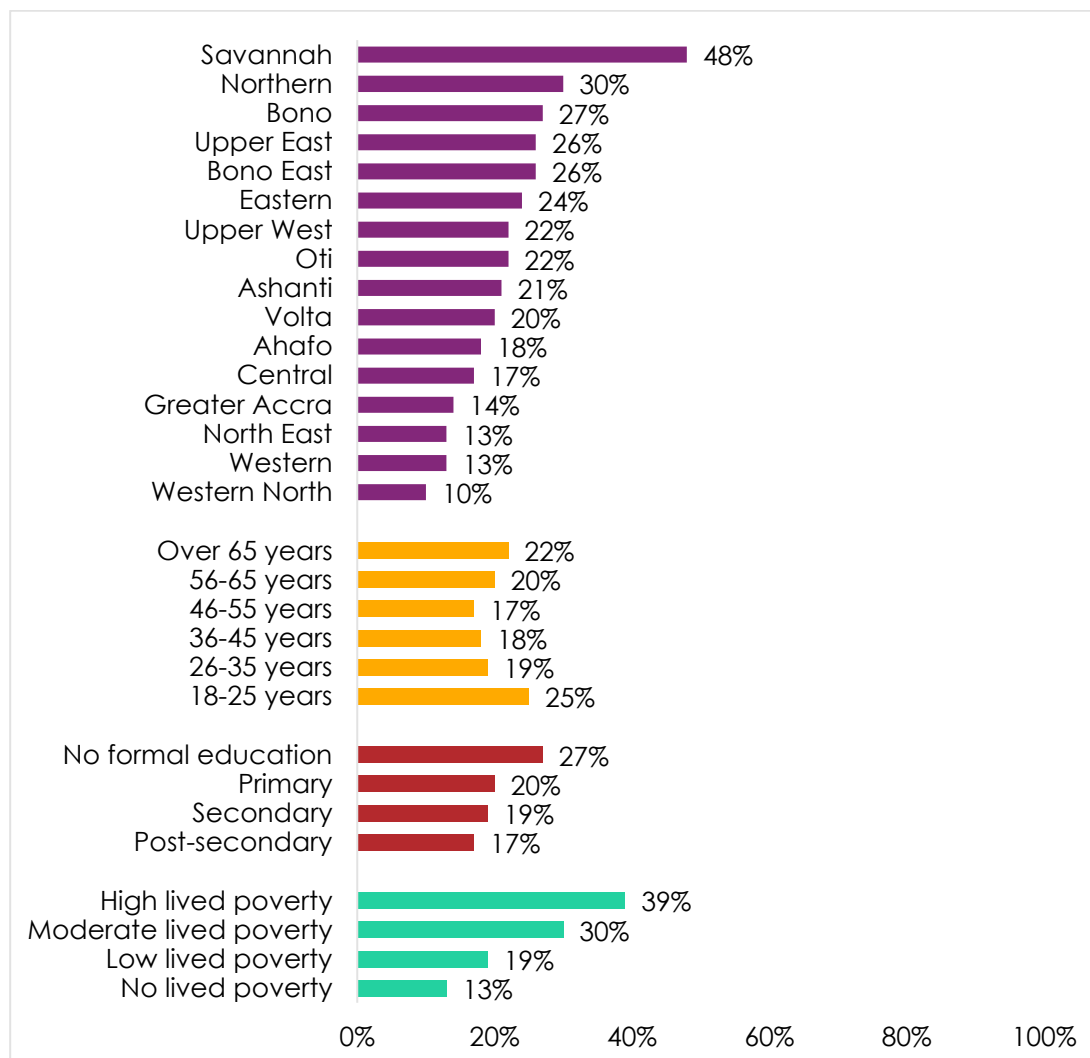
Respondents were asked: *In the past year, how often, if ever, have you personally been treated unfairly by other Ghanaians based on: Your economic status, that is, how rich or poor you are? Your religion? Your ethnicity?*

Discrimination based on ethnicity is reported by almost half (48%) of residents of the Savannah region – a far more frequent occurrence than in other regions (Figure 6).

Poor citizens (39%) are three times as likely to report experiencing ethnicity-based discrimination as those with no lived poverty (13%). And respondents with no formal education (27%) encounter unfair treatment based on ethnicity more often than those with formal schooling (17%-20%). Younger citizens (25%) are also more likely to report ethnicity-based discrimination than their elders (17%-22%).

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Figure 6: Unfair treatment based on ethnicity | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: *In the past year, how often, if ever, have you personally been treated unfairly by other Ghanaians based on: Your ethnicity? (% who say “once or twice,” “several times,” or “many times”)*

Are Ghanaians tolerant enough?

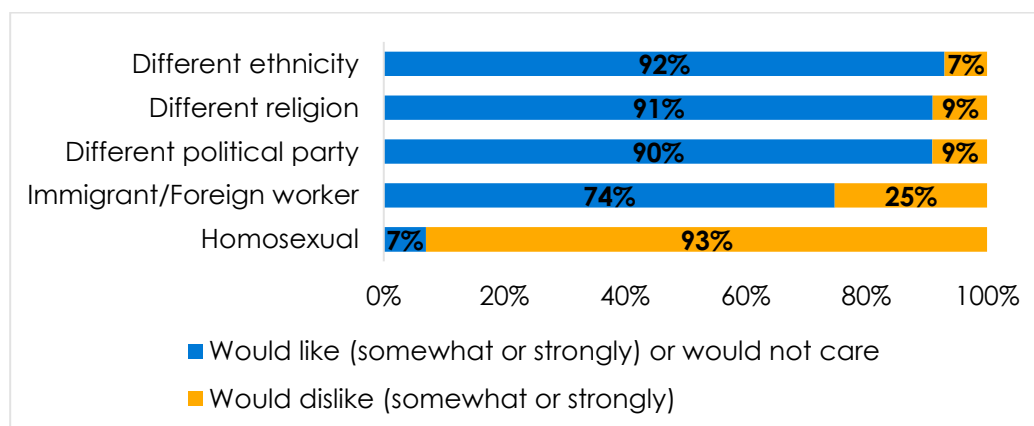
At least nine out of 10 Ghanaians express tolerant attitudes toward people of different ethnicities (92%), different religions (91%), and different political affiliations (90%), saying they would like it or would not care if they had these people as neighbours. Three-fourths (74%) indicate the same tolerance toward immigrants or foreign workers. But fewer than one in 10 (7%) say they wouldn't mind living next door to someone in a same-sex relationship (Figure 7).

The 93% who say they would “somewhat dislike” or “strongly dislike” having homosexual neighbours place Ghana near the top in terms of intolerance across 23 African countries surveyed between late 2019 and early 2021, well above the 80% average (Figure 8).

Intolerance toward people in same-sex relationships is pervasive across age groups, religious affiliations, and urban as well as rural locations. Citizens with no formal education are slightly

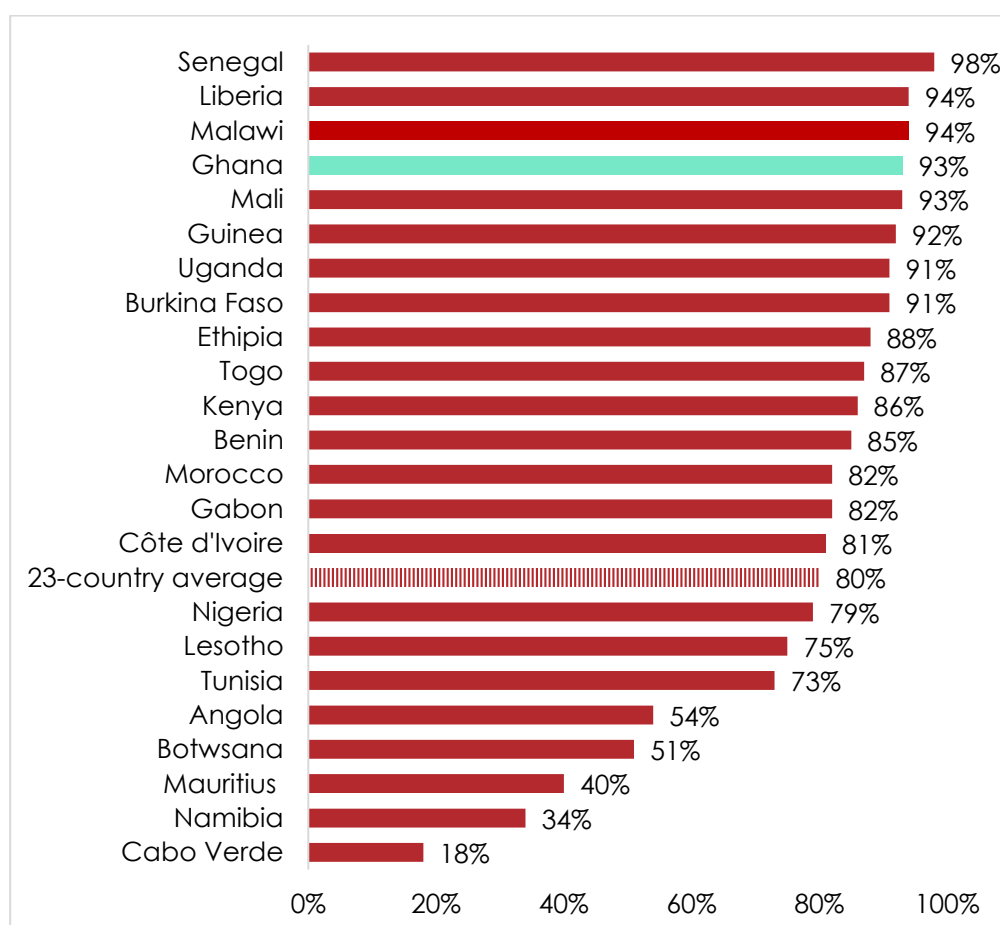
less likely to express intolerance (88%) than their more educated counterparts (91%-95%) (Figure 9).

Figure 7: Social tolerance | Ghana | 2019



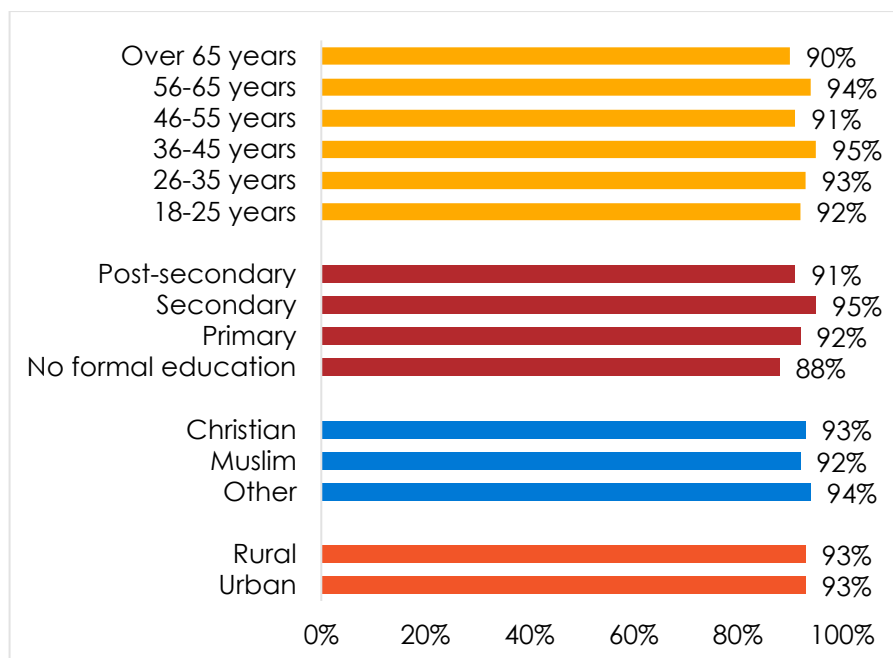
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care?

Figure 8: Intolerance toward people of different sexual identity/orientation
 | 23 countries | 2019/2020



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 dislike" or "would somewhat dislike")

Figure 9: Rejection of people in same-sex relationships as neighbours | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2019



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

Conclusion

Ghanaians generally tend to express more nationalistic than ethnic sentiments, and most think they are more united as a people than divided. Although discrimination is not an uncommon occurrence, Ghanaians express high levels of tolerance toward foreigners and citizens from different ethnic groups or religious faiths, though they are highly intolerant toward people in same-sex relationships.

With regard to both sexual orientation and recent demands for secession by the Western Togoland area, the government, civil society, and the media may identify opportunities for sensitization programs that will strengthen tolerance, national identity, and patriotism.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan 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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