



POLICY BRIEF

FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS:

***INTERROGATING
RELIGION-BASED STIGMA
AND DISCRIMINATION
TOWARDS THE LGBTQ+
COMMUNITY IN UGANDA***

Introduction

Uganda's population of 45,905,417 persons is dominated by Christians (81.7%), of whom Roman Catholics account for 16.6 million and Anglicans/Church of Uganda 13.3 million. Pentecostal/Evangelicals are 6.5 million persons, while Muslims are 6.05 million. Religious affiliation remains a central aspect of Uganda's population, with 85,559 persons identifying as having no religion.¹ Religions play a major role in influencing attitudes, behaviors, and policies in Uganda. Religious teachings often guide domestic and public conduct, including dispute resolution and national policies such as laws.

Executive Summary:

Opponents of same-sex relationships contend that homosexuality is a foreign behavior that is unacceptable in Uganda and the broader African culture, and it is also condemned by religion.²

A survey conducted in 2023 revealed that Uganda is a continental extreme in rejecting people in same-sex relationships.³

Perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community are reflected in social attitudes and policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons in Uganda. These reinforce human rights violations and hinder access to essential services, including education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. However, there have been few efforts to interrogate the nexus between religion, policy, and culture as they relate to social attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community.

It is against this background that the Universal Coalition for Affirming Africans - Uganda (UCAA-UG) conducted a study titled "The Root Causes, Manifestations, and Impact of Religious, Policy and Culturally Based Stigma and Discrimination Towards the LGBTQ+ Community in Uganda". This study sought to understand

¹ Government of Uganda, 'National Population and Housing Census 2024 Final Report Volume 1', 2024.

² Makanga Ronald Kakumba, 'Uganda a continental extreme in rejection of people in same-sex relationships', Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 639, 2023.

³ Ibid.

the foundations of homophobia and its impact on the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda. It interrogated the influence of religion on Uganda's culture and policies. It further aimed at identifying the common attitudes, beliefs, and myths regarding homosexuality, among other issues. This study conducted a desk review of the related publications. Also, 151 respondents, including religious and cultural leaders, LGBTQ+ individuals, policymakers and enforcers, influencers or opinion leaders, civil society workers, and other members of the general public, were interviewed. These respondents were recruited from across the country to reflect the diverse nature of Uganda's community. The report from this study is available at <https://ucaaug.org/>.

This policy brief contains some of the extracts from the interviews with the respondents. It summarizes the findings and recommendations from this study. The aim is to guide religious advocacy to confront stigma and discrimination towards Uganda's LGBTQ+ community.

Key Findings

An Anglican Policymaker of the Langi tribe stated that: **"Because my Religion Does not Accept Them, I support the law; it is going to protect our religious and cultural values"**.

- 1) **The majority of respondents cited religion as their basis for not accepting the LGBTQ+ community. They also support policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals because they protect religion and culture.**

An Islamic cleric and Buganda cultural leader reported that: **"The Quran emphasizes marriage between man and woman. I haven't come across any religious leader in Islam who has blessed same sex marriage. Islam believes that sex is for procreation. It condemns same -sex relationships because they do not lead to procreation."**

- 2) **The main reason for ostracizing same sex relationships is that they do not lead to the growth of the human population. Population. Religion relies on human multiplication for its sustenance.**

LGBTQ+ individual, a Mukiga of the Anglican Faith, stated: **"I would say religious leaders, followed by policy makers, policy enforcers, cultural leaders, and influencers are the main cause of stigma and discrimination against us"**.

- 3) Religion is the number one driver of stigma and discrimination.
- 4) Religions influence Uganda's culture and policies that ostracize the LGBTQ+ community.
- 5) Religious attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals

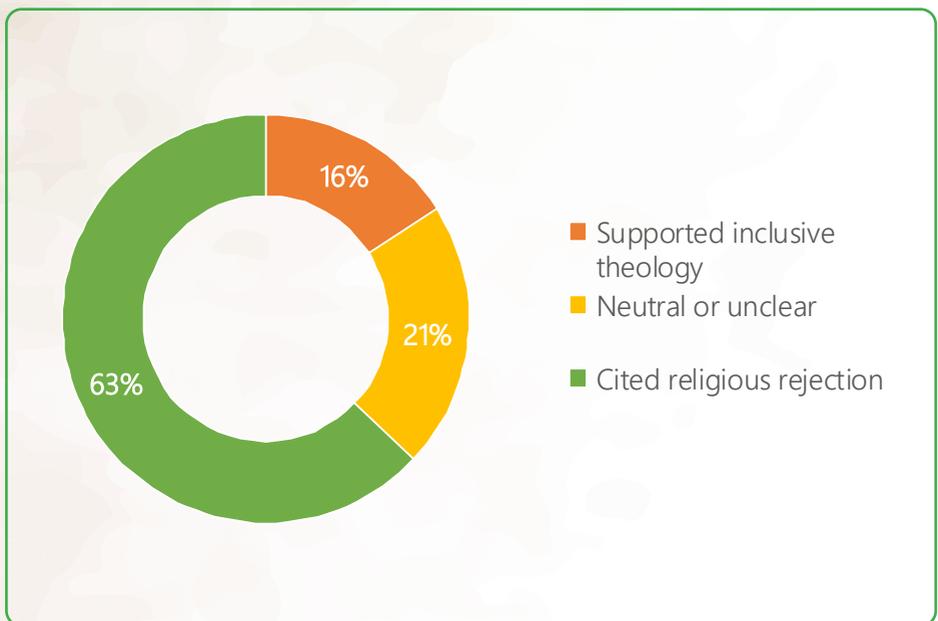


Figure 1: The majority of respondents cited religion as their basis for not accepting the LGBTQ+ community

Detailed Interpretation

Only less than 0.2% of Ugandans do not belong to any religion.⁴ Religion is also the first form of identity among Ugandans; the other is tribe. Most Ugandans identify by two names. One represents their tribe, and the other their religion. The religious name is the first name. For Uganda's dominant religious community, secularism that is associated with sexual orientation is perceived as a threat to religion that calls for procreation. The main reason for ostracizing the LGBTQ+ community is that same-sex relationships do not allow for population growth, which is necessary for the sustenance of religions. Related, homosexuality challenges the belief that gender identity is a divine allocation. Respondents stated that LGBTQ+ persons need divine intervention to guide them back on the religious path; failure of which they should be punished by the law. If this does not change them, they should be excommunicated from society. Religious conservatives depict sexual orientation as a perversion of the highest order, inherently unnatural, ridden with diseases, and ungodly. Uganda's religious majority also claims that same-sex relations are a human vice and not a human right. The majority of respondents endorsed these religious views. They lauded AHA, 2023, as in line with religious teachings that aim to curb homosexuality. They also reported that religion largely influences their culture. It is not possible to tell from this study which one of Uganda's main religions is the most accepting or inclusive. The inclusive religious minority group cannot reconcile their interpretation of inclusive religious teachings and respect for humanity with unaccepting religious teachings that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals. They interpret religious texts as embracing humanity, including LGBTQ+ persons. Religious leaders are reported as the highest-ranked drivers of stigma and discrimination toward persons in same-sex relationships. While the interpretation of religious teaching in relation to homosexuality differs, religious policy statements issued by religious movements such as GAFCON and high-level religious leaders seek to address theological disputes as far as they condemn the LGBTQ+ community. These policy statements are considered authoritative by religious conservatives

⁴ Government of Uganda, 'National Population and Housing Census 2024 Final Report Volume 1', 2024.

6) Community attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community

Grouping Community Attitudes Towards the LGBTQ+ Community

Uganda's community attitudes toward LGBTQ+ community



RELUCTANTLY ACCEPTING

A larger minority tolerates LGBTQ+ individuals, emphasizing personal beliefs, while still influenced by cultural and religious norms.

INCLUSIVE

A smaller segment openly supports LGBTQ+ rights, motivated by personal conviction, love for humanity and respect for individual dignity.



Figure 2: Uganda's Community attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community can be divided into the unaccepting. Reluctantly accepting and accepting.

Detailed Interpretation

Uganda's community attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community may be grouped into three broad categories. The first category is the majority that are unaccepting. They cite religion, culture, and the law in this hierarchy as the basis for this position. The second and third categories are the minorities in Uganda. The second category comprises the larger minority group who don't mind the LGBTQ+ individual,s provided they do not display their sexual orientation in their presence. We can refer to this group as the reluctantly accepting minorities. It also represents a community that is evolving towards accepting the LGBTQ+ community. This group also references religion, culture, the law, and personal conviction in this grading as the basis for their persuasion. The third category is the second smallest group among the minorities, the accepting minority. For this latter group, personal conviction, love for humanity, and respect for the dignity of individuals in this order are the basis for their persuasion.

7) Impact of religious stigma and discrimination on LGBTQ+ individuals

As a result of religious stigma and discrimination, the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda has suffered the following:

- 1) Some have been disowned by their families.
- 2) Policies have been passed that stigmatize and discriminate against persons in same sex relationships.
- 3) Some face harassment, intimidation, extortion, blackmail, and imprisonment, which have affected their mental health
- 4) Some have been excluded from places of worship, schools, and dismissed from work.
- 5) Some have engaged in heterosexual relationships to hide their sexual orientation.
- 6) Feel alienated from the broader Uganda community.
- 7) Some are reluctant to access sexual health services, thus leading to an increase in the number of persons in the community suffering from sexually transmitted diseases.
- 8) Survive in a broader Ugandan community in which the majority demonizes and ostracizes them.
- 9) Some have denounced their religion.

- 10) Face persecution.
- 11) Are misrepresented, misunderstood, and villainized by myths and stereotypes.
- 12) Are not protected by the law against discrimination, and the law does not allow them to form consensual relationships.
- 13) Are not included in development and planning policies.
- 14) Are not reflected in national policies.

Common Myths, Stereotypes, Misinformation, and Disinformation about the LGBTQ+ Community

Uganda's community opinions about the LGBTQ+ community are influenced by myths, stereotypes, misinformation, and disinformation. The main ones include:

Myth(a): Homosexuality is a foreign behavior.

Reality: Same-sex relationships existed in Uganda before foreigners came to Uganda.

Myth (b): Uganda's culture condemns homosexuality.

Reality: It is Uganda's religions that ostracize homosexuality. The various tribes of Uganda were both unaccepting and reluctantly accepting of homosexual relationships before religion was introduced.

Myth (c): Gender is assigned at birth. It is also how other people perceive one's gender.

Reality: Gender identity is personal; it is how one experiences gender internally and thinks about oneself. Biological gender is a social construct.

Myth (d): LGBTQ+ individuals have strayed. They need either divine intervention, counseling/therapy, or to be punished by the law to return to the correct normal way of life.

Reality: Homosexuality is not a deviant behavior; it is how one was born. Prayers, therapy, or legal punishment cannot change a person's sexuality.

Myth (e): Homosexuality is funded by Western societies to curb the growth of populations.

Reality: Like any funding for noble causes, such as ending poverty and gender-based violence, funding for the LGBTQ+ community seeks to protect this group from harm that includes discrimination, stigma, and marginalization.

Myth (f): Gay men love to dress like women because they secretly wish that they were women.

Reality: Being gay does not mean that the person identifies as a member of the opposite gender. Sexuality is different from gender identity, and they do not correlate with each other.

Myth (g): LGBTQ+ persons spread HIV/AIDS.

Reality: HIV is transmitted through specific contact with body fluids. This includes unprotected sex among homosexuals and heterosexuals, blood contact, sharing needles, and mother-to-child transmissions.

Myth (h): A person whose biological sex is female but feels male inside is still female.

Reality: Someone's experiences of their gender identity should be accepted and respected without judgment or stereotype. Regardless of what genders they were assigned at birth.

Recommendations and Future Actions

Challenges to LGBTQ+ equality are deeply rooted in religious, cultural, and policy stigmatism and discrimination. The following recommendations to religious leaders are aimed at guiding religious, policy-based advocacy to confront stigma and discrimination towards Uganda's LGBTQ+ community

- 1) Emphasize compassion and inclusivity as the foundations of religion.

- 2) Use the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda to support policy reforms that protect all citizens equally, regardless of orientation or identity.
- 3) Use religious teachings in the context of the modern world.
- 4) Through the Interreligious Council of Uganda, create a platform for engaging with minority groups on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This will promote a better understanding of different perspectives related to social justice.
- 5) Raise awareness about discrimination and promote inclusivity through religious teachings.

About the Universal Coalition of Affirming Africans -Uganda

Established in 2017, UCAAA-UG was the first faith-based organization that advocates for the inclusion of the most marginalized groups of people in Uganda using faith-based approaches. This was after the realization that marginalized groups are deprived of their human rights.



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